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The Etruscans – a Society of Masters and Servants? A Modern *Topos* and its Origins

Abstract: Ever since early scholarly works on the Etruscans were published, scholars have assumed that their social order was characterised by rigid class divisions and a strong separation between ruling elites and largely subjugated, dependent strata of the population. This article examines the development of this modern two-class *topos* from the nineteenth century – starting with classical works on the Etruscans such as those by Karl Otfried Müller and George Dennis – through important stages of the twentieth century, with the studies by the French Etruscologist Jacques Heurgon among others, to the present day. By doing so, the reasons and arguments for such a reconstruction will be laid out and critically questioned in their actual meaning. It is clear that the various ideas about the ‘origins’ of the Etruscans and their supposed immigration played an important role in early scholarship, supported by only a few, short passages in ancient Graeco-Roman literary sources, which are, however, problematic.

In order to detach the discussion of the (undoubtedly) hierarchical structures of Etruscan societies from these less productive contexts and focus more on the actual Etruscan source material, some further considerations based on the late Etruscan necropolis at Fondo Scataglini in Tarquinia – as one possible example among others – will be briefly presented in the conclusion.

*‘La società etrusca era dominata dalla polarità,
nettamente precisata, di domini da una parte, servi dall'altra.’*
(Santo Mazzarino, 1957)

From early on, scholars have assumed a social order with rigid class divisions for the Etruscans, where ruling elites were strongly separated from largely subjugated, dependent strata of the population. A two-class *topos* emerged, which is still often presented today as a distinctive Etruscan trait, and hardly ever critically questioned or modified in accordance with new research. By tracing the history of this concept, I will provide a brief overview of the views put forward by earlier scholars,¹ discuss their arguments, their central conclusions and the stages of the traditional image of the two-class society,² and finally offer some critical observations that allow a different picture to emerge.

¹ I will not deal with the reception of Etruscan society in modern art and literature.

² For a more detailed overview of the research history on Etruscan society (including also the role of women), see Petra Amann, “Etruskische Sozialgeschichte – von alten Vorurteilen zu neuen Ufern,” in *Gesellschaft und Familie bei Etruskern und Italikern: Akten des 18. Treffens der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Etrusker & Italiker*, Wien, Institut für Alte Geschichte und Altertumskunde, Papyrologie und Epigraphik,

1 The Early Research: The Birth of an Idea

Leaving aside the very early works on the Etruscans,³ let us begin with the nineteenth century and the pioneering work *Die Etrusker* by the German scholar Karl Otfried Müller (1797–1840). Published in 1828, the work deals with the internal structure of Etruscan society. In it, the basic lines of argumentation that would become typical in later periods are already clearly set out; however, Müller is less drastic than many later scholars. In spite of the scantiness of source material in general, Müller believed he could establish that in Etruria ‘the nobility owned large plots of land, which were cultivated by a sort of serfs/bondmen’ (‘Nur soviel, daß der Adel große Grundstücke besaß, welche von einer Art von Leibeignen bebaut wurden’).⁴ In doing so, he drew on ideas that had been developed in the context of Roman history by Barthold Georg Niebuhr, whom Müller admired. In his *Römische Geschichte*, Niebuhr was eager to stress the strong contrast between the Roman state, which was able to gradually integrate the *plebs*, and the allegedly strict feudal system of the urban Etruscan nobility.⁵ In his chapter on the constitutional system, Müller explained his ideas regarding the hierarchical structure of the Etruscans in more detail.⁶ Assuming strict gentilicial rule (‘Geschlechterherrschaft’) and a priestly aristocracy, Müller nevertheless believed in the existence of some kind of free, non-dependent people albeit with completely unclear rights⁷ – an assumption based on Livy’s report of the conflicts between the *gens*

6–7. März 2020, ed. Petra Amann, Raffaella Da Vela and Robinson P. Krämer, Wiener Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte online (WBAgon) 4 (Vienna: n.p., 2022): 9–55, <https://doi.org/10.25365/wbagon-2022-4-1>.

3 On the assessment of Etruscan art since Johann Joachim Winckelmann (especially on the assumed interaction between art and the political system) and Luigi Lanzi taking into consideration also Müller and Niebuhr, see Corinna Riva, “The Freedom of the Etruscans: Etruria Between Hellenization and Orientalization,” *International Journal of Classical Tradition* 25 (2018): 101–26.

4 Karl Otfried Müller, *Die Etrusker*, 2 vols. (I–IV) (Breslau: Josef Max und Komp., 1828): book II, chapter 4, 1–4, 400–406 (“Von dem Familienleben der Etrusker”), esp. 405 [translations are mine]. On Müller’s view of the Etruscans in general see Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, “K.O. Müllers Etrusker,” in *Zwischen Rationalismus und Romantik: Karl Otfried Müller und die antike Kultur*, ed. William Musgrave Calder III and Renate Schlesier (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1998): 239–81.

5 Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Römische Geschichte*, vol. I–III (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung Reimer, 1811–32): esp. I, 79–80 (already with reference to the Thessalian *penéstai* system); 389–90.

6 Müller, *Die Etrusker*: book II, chapter 2, 359–89 (“Von der Verfassung der einzelnen Staaten”), esp. 375–80; cfr. Karl Otfried Müller and Wilhelm Deecke, *Die Etrusker*, 2 vols. (I–IV) (Stuttgart: A. Heitz, 1877, repr.: Graz, 1965): 334–63, esp. 350–51. On the *penéstai*-ideas in Müller, cf. Enrico Benelli, “Slavery and Manumission,” in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2013): 447–48 and Enrico Benelli, “La società etrusca e le utopie postbelliche: Alcune note sulla storiografia etruscologica nell’Italia del dopoguerra,” in *L’etruscologia dans l’Europe d’après-guerre: Actes des journées d’études internationales, 14–16 septembre 2015*, ed. Marie-Laurence Haack and Martin Miller (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2017): 107–8.

7 Müller, *Die Etrusker*: 376: ‘Daß es ein freies, dem Adel nicht persönlich unterthäniges, Volk gab, ist wohl anzunehmen, wie viel Rechte diesem zustanden, völlig ungewiß.’

Cilnia and ‘the people’ in Arezzo, described as ‘*plebs*’ (X.5.13). Hierarchically clearly below this kind of middle class he saw the large mass of the subjugated, indigenous population. Müller, like Niebuhr, followed the descriptions of early Italy in ancient literary sources, and identified this group with the ‘Sicilians and Umbrians’, who he described as living without rights as serfs and clients of the *principes*.⁸ This indigenous population was believed to have been subjugated by the immigrant Tyrrhenians, identified by Müller as ‘Pelasgians’ with eastern origins and old inhabitants of large parts of Greece.⁹ He compared the position of the former with that of the Thessalian *penéstai* and the helots of Laconia and Messenia in Greece – an oppressed pre-population that had been kept as serfs/bondmen (‘*Leibeigne*’). Decisive for this comparison were the Etruscan *πενέσται*, mentioned only briefly by the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (IX.5.4, see below): the passage is about the war of 480 BC between Veii and Rome and mentions auxiliary forces consisting of *δυνατώτατοι* (the powerful) from all Etruria with their *πενέσται*, with the latter being interpreted as some kind of serfs or bondmen. For Müller, author of *Die Dorier* (1824), such a comparison was naturally obvious; but before him, in 1811, Niebuhr had already brought into play the *penéstai*-institution for Etruria. This reconstruction was intended to explain the lack of a strong infantry in Etruria, which was simply assumed as a fact. Müller also identified the *penéstai* with the *agrestium Etruscorum cohortes*, the small emergency units manned by the rural population which the *principes* hastily organised in 310 BC to face an invading Roman army, mentioned by Livy (IX.36.12); and also with the rebels of the revolt of Volsinii veterans in 265/4 BC, even though there was no mention of *penéstai* in these contexts.¹⁰ In addition, Müller assumed the existence of real (chattel) slavery in Etruria (he used the German word ‘*Knechte*’).

Müller thus suggested an immigrant class of masters and a subjugated indigenous population. Dionysius’ *πενέσται* represented the main piece of evidence, despite the fact that it was precisely Dionysius who argued against immigration and for the autochthony of the Etruscans. However, the misconception had entered scholarship and was to remain. Enrico Benelli has already critically examined the *πενέσται* passage and its lack of significance:¹¹ the word does indeed give a pejorative connotation to

⁸ Müller, *Die Etrusker*: 376–77.

⁹ Müller, *Die Etrusker*: “Einleitung,” 2, 1–12, 71–104. Müller believed that the immigrant Tyrrhenians had mixed with the ‘*Ras(e)na*’, who came from the Rhaetian Alps and settled in the northern part of Etruria (Müller thus integrated Niebuhr’s ‘northern theory’), and that together they ruled over the aboriginal population.

¹⁰ Müller, *Die Etrusker*: 378–79. Based on ideas about early patronage in Rome that are no longer current today, Müller compared his alleged Etruscan system of *principes* – *penéstai*/clientes – *plebs* with the supposedly early Roman division into *patricii* – *clientes* – *plebs*.

¹¹ Enrico Benelli, “Sui cosiddetti penesti etruschi,” *Parola del Passato* 51 (1996): esp. 338–44. Cf. also Benelli, “Slavery and Manumission”: 447–48 and, with similar opinion, Petra Amann, “Society, 450–250 BCE,” in *Etruscology*, vol. 2, ed. Alessandro Naso (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): 1106–7. See here below section 4, “Pillar number 1.”

members of subaltern classes that are dependent on an upper class, but does not constitute a precise legal characterisation. Interestingly, Müller assumed the existence of a free class of people between aristocrats and serfs; unlike Niebuhr he thought it likely that this Etruscan ‘*plebs*’ had struggled for its emancipation (drawing a comparison with the Roman Conflict of the Orders).

The revision of Müller’s classic work, published by the linguist Wilhelm Deecke some 50 years later in 1877, brought no changes to the assumptions discussed above.¹² On the contrary, the *penéstai* model with its implied large groups of semi-free people found fertile ground. Some years later, in 1884, it led Deecke to connect the contentious Etruscan word *etera* – the meaning of which was already controversial at the time and still is today – with these *penéstai* in the sense of ‘dependent’.¹³ For anyone eager to find a class of subjugated serfs in Etruria, this interpretation was to become an important support.

Turning to the English-speaking world, the remarks put forward by the British explorer George Dennis (1814–1898) are clearly more extreme, and very revealing of the views circulating in the nineteenth century. As a widely-read reference work that was translated into various languages and reprinted several times, the wide impact of *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (London 1848) should not be underestimated. Dennis gave a brief historical outline in his ‘Introduction.’ He assumed an Eastern-inspired theocracy with an all-dominant hierarchy for the Etruscans:¹⁴ ‘Political freedom was a plant which flourished not in Etruria.’¹⁵ The achievements of the Roman Conflict of the Orders could not have happened in Etruria. Society consisted of ‘the ruling class and their dependents.’ For Dennis, it was a ‘feudal system’ with some traits comparable to the middle ages: ‘the mass of the community was enthralled’ and ‘the commons must have been a conquered people, the descendants of the early inhabitants of the land’.¹⁶ According to the British explorer, these conquerors were mainly Tyrrhenians who had come from the Orient and had quickly become domi-

12 Müller and Deecke, *Die Etrusker*. Actual revisions and progress were confined mainly to the supplements, so for example in *Beilage II*, which treated the onomastic material (“Über die etruskischen Sepulcralinschriften,” 435–509), where Deecke corrected Müller’s old view that the custom of the *tria nomina* was foreign to Etruria.

13 Cf. initially Müller and Deecke, *Die Etrusker*: 505–6: *lautni*, ‘Freigelassener’ (freedperson) and *etera*, ‘Knabe, Slave’ (*puer*, slave); 511: *etera*, *-raia*, ‘Slave, -vin’. Later he changed his opinion: Wilhelm Deecke, *Etruskische Forschungen und Studien*, vol. 6, *Die etruskischen Beamten- und Priester-Titel* (Stuttgart: Heitz, 1884): 35–36: *etera*, ‘Abhängiger’ (dependent person, condition of dependency). For a discussion see below section 4, ‘Pillar number 3.’

14 George Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (London: John Murray, 1848): xxxix.

15 Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*: xlvii.

16 Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*: xlvii.

nant in Etruria.¹⁷ Because of the military duties of the ‘serfs’ in the Etruscan armies, Dennis compared their position with that of the *perioeci* of Laconia ‘to their Dorian lords’. Interestingly, he did not compare them with the helots like Niebuhr and Müller did, but with the free and in terms of personal rights better-positioned *perioeci* of the Spartan *polis*. For the rest, the (meagre) basic arguments for all these speculations on the existence of a large class of serfs in Etruria are the usual ones: the *πενέσται* in Dionysius (IX.5.4), the cohorts of Etruscan peasants in Livy (IX.36.12), and the rebellion at Volsinii veteres in 265/4 BC. In addition to these ‘serfs’, Dennis assumed that the institution of real slavery existed, as well.

Here again we have some sort of immigrants, a subjugated indigenous population, and the strict feudal system proposed by Niebuhr. Summing up, Dennis stated: ‘[I]t is difficult to conceive of a system of government more calculated to enslave both mind and body.’¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, this civilization ‘under despotic rule’ was not progressive: It was purely material and therefore luxury oriented, assimilated to the civilizations of the east, far removed from the free spirit of the Greeks, and without ‘the earnest germ of development.’¹⁹ However, Dennis was able to find some positive features in Etruscan mentality, such as a certain interest in technological progress (for example in the sewer system), and the social role of women, which he considered exceptional and prominent compared to Greek society, albeit of unclear origin.

In general, it is easy to see here and later how the very contentious question of Etruscan origins, and especially the assumption that an indigenous population had been subjugated by a group of immigrants with partly oriental or ‘eastern’ roots, also massively influenced thinking about the Etruscans’ social structures. Views, resentments and clichés of ‘the Orient’ were often simply transferred to Etruria. The famous Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) also pursued this course with his ‘oriental’ Tanaquil and the supposed ‘Mutterrecht’ (‘Mother Right’) of the Etruscans.²⁰ Even though his ideas on ancient matriarchy were quickly rejected by pragmatic research, they clearly contributed to the widespread idea of the ‘otherness’ of the Etruscans, who were subsequently believed to be capable of anything – including a deeply divided civilization of masters and servants.

17 Dennis assumed a society made up of subjugated indigenous peoples, immigrant Greek Pelasgians and Tyrrhenians, the last to immigrate, but culturally and politically dominant: Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*: xxxi, for the ‘oriental’ character of Etruscan culture see esp. xlii.

18 Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*: xlviii.

19 Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*: xlvii–lxix.

20 Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Die Sage von Tanaquil: Eine Untersuchung über den Orientalismus in Rom und Italien* (Heidelberg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1870). For his view of the Etruscans, see Petra Amann, “Johann Jakob Bachofen, il concetto del ‘Mutterrecht’ e gli Etruschi,” *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo Claudio Faina* 24 (2017): 35–53.

2 The Twentieth Century: An Idea Conquers the World

In the early twentieth century, scholars continued to hold on to the ideas developed in the nineteenth century to a certain degree.²¹ There was not much interest in investigating social aspects. Scholarly research was increasingly influenced by current political developments. It seems, however, that there was a general freedom to interpret Etruscan society as one pleased.²² For nationalistic reasons, etruscology in Italy was, at least in part, more interested in an autochthonous, 'Italic' view of the Etruscans.²³

For reasons of space, I can only briefly mention two Italian scholars as representative of this period: Pericle Ducati (1880–1944) devoted a few remarks to the social problem in his *Etruria antica*.²⁴ In earlier times, he wrote, the subjugated 'Umbrian' *πενέσται* ('servi') were completely dependent on the political elite, the 'famiglie lucumoniche'. Like Müller, he considered the development of a 'middle class' ('borghesia') probable, which in his view accompanied the transformation from monarchy to republic, followed by an increasing antagonism between the nobility and the 'borghesia.' Arturo Solari (1874–1951) in his 1931 *Vita pubblica e privata degli Etruschi* gives a similar account, with some modifications.²⁵ The Etruscan *penéstai* (Dion. Hal. IX.5.4) as 'servi della gleba' (serfs) were now considered a fact that could not be disregarded. Following Solari, these agricultural serfs represented the *plebs* who would, 'naturalmente' (*sic*), go on to develop into the middle class ('la classe borghese'). This 'borghesia' gained much authority in the state to the detriment of the old *nobiles*, and after its triumph, Solari's Etruria had republican, rather democratic governments. In his account the 'democratic bourgeois class' ('ceto democratico borghese') was slowly replaced by another, the 'popular class' ('ceto popolare') which had evolved from the same *plebs*.²⁶ In the late Etruscan period, the 'ceto democratico-borghese' and the 'ceto democratico-popolare' fought each other, and Solari saw the revolts of Arezzo and Volsinii as examples of these conflicts between 'borghesia e proletariato'. Pointing to a short passage in Diodorus (V.40.4, see below), he postulated the existence of real

21 For example by Søren Peter Cortsen, *Die etruskischen Standes- und Beamtentitel, durch die Inschriften beleuchtet* (Kopenhagen: Andr. Fred. Høst & Søn, 1925): with the meaning 'dependent' for Etruscan *etera*.

22 I will not go into the romantic-effusive and anti-modern views of the British novelist David H. Lawrence in his work *Etruscan Places* (posthumously published in 1932), nor into the excesses of Fascist and Nazi historical 'research'.

23 For the debate on the Etruscans' origin in early-twentieth-century Italy, see Maurizio Harari, "Etruscologia e fascismo," *Athenaeum* 100 (2012): 405–18, esp. 408–9.

24 Pericle Ducati, *Etruria antica*, vol. I-II (Turin: G.B. Paravia, 1925, 2nd ed. 1927): chapter V ("La vita pubblica e privata degli Etruschi"): 131–74, esp. 140–43.

25 Arturo Solari, *Vita pubblica e privata degli Etruschi* (Florence: Rinascimento Del Libro, 1931): chapter III ("Nazioni e classi"): 27–31, esp. 29–31. He is better known for his *Topografia storica dell'Etruria*.

26 Ducati, *Etruria antica*: 29–30.

(chattel) slavery. Apart from his flawed terminology, which bears strong influences from his own time, it is interesting to note that Solari arrived at some very different conclusions to his predecessors, albeit on the basis of the same scanty literary evidence. An aspect he has in common with the earlier tradition is his lack of concern in making such sweeping generalisations about Etruscan society on such a slender basis.

After these troubled decades, the 1950s and 1960s were an important phase for Etruscan studies as a whole. The Etruscans benefited from the anti-Roman current in postwar popular culture; the great European travelling exhibition on their art and life in 1955 and 1956 put them into the spotlight. It was a formative stage also in our context, and Santo Mazzarino and Jacques Heugon were crucial figures.

In 1957, the important Italian ancient historian (but not Etruscologist) Santo Mazzarino published his views in the very influential paper ‘Sociologia del mondo etrusco e della tarda etruscità.’ To this day, this article is an obligatory text in any discussion about Etruscan society. Mazzarino thus cemented Etruscan ‘two-class society,’ albeit based on information that was already antiquated at that time: ‘Etruscan society was dominated by the clearly defined polarity between *domini* on one side, *servi* on the other.’²⁷ Significantly, there is not a single reference to Solari in the entire article. The study is based on incorrect translations of important Etruscan terms,²⁸ the use of very questionable etymologies and an arbitrary interpretation of literary and epigraphic sources. Mazzarino believed he could subsume various gradations of dependency under one supposedly particular Etruscan ‘concept of *servi*’: for him, Etruscan *lautni* corresponded to Roman *cliens* (with good life conditions), *lautn eteri* to *libertus* and *etera* to *servus*. Such a reconstruction is completely wrong not only from today’s point of view, but even at that time: *lautni* corresponds to *libertus* and the meaning of *etera* (and therefore *lautn etera*) is unclear, but the term refers to free Etruscan individuals (see section 4 below, “Pillar number 3”). The method used is remarkable, however. First, Mazzarino equated Etruscan words with Latin terms, without any real basis (and incorrectly). He then grouped these Etruscan terms under a single ‘concept’. As this association makes no sense from a legal point of view, he then inferred the peculiar nature of the Etruscan system.

Mazzarino was a supporter of the Oriental immigration theory and distinguished between eastern/Asian ‘etruscità tirsenica’ and ‘etruscità d’Italia,’²⁹ which he considered enough to explain the alleged differences from the Roman system.

The Etruscan *penéstai* of Dionysius (whom he mentioned without citation) became ‘coloni etrusco-italici’, peasants who were tied to the soil and therefore classi-

27 Santo Mazzarino, “Sociologia del mondo etrusco e della tarda etruscità,” *Historia* 6 (1957): 113–14: “un ordinamento sociale di tipo arcaico.” On Mazzarino, Heugon and their time see Benelli, “La società etrusca e le utopie postbelliche”: 106–10.

28 Cf. also Mazzarino, “Sociologia del mondo etrusco”: 100, and equally wrong 107: *spur* = ‘publicum, cosa pubblica, *populus*’, *meθlum* = ‘federazione’.

29 Mazzarino, “Sociologia del mondo etrusco”: 114.

fied as belonging to the *servi*.³⁰ They did not play a major role in Mazzarino's concept. However, he put a lot of emphasis on the Latin text of the so-called Prophecy of Ve-goiā, which mentioned *domini* and especially *servi* (whom he identified with Etruscan *etera*) being able to move boundary stones of landholdings at the end of the eighth *saeculum*, something that should confirm Mazzarino's assumptions about a class of semi-free persons who had certain property rights to land.³¹ In fact, this interpretation is highly questionable and not necessary to understand the prophecy, even if later scholars repeated it again and again. In addition, Mazzarino found further evidence in a short passage in Diodorus Siculus (V.40.4) that mentions the houses of θεράποντες (?) in Etruria, already controversial at the time, which he interpreted as houses of the 'servants.' However, the reading of the word θεράποντες in the manuscripts is doubtful (see section 4 below, "Pillar number 2"). Nevertheless, this half-sentence is an important support of the *domini*-and-*servi* theory and for Mazzarino, 'nulla c'è da correggere' in this source.³² He therefore postulated the existence of *servi-clientes* who lived a good life alongside their masters, a kind of 'piccola borghesia etrusca.'

At the same time as this very influential but misleading article, the French Latinist and Etruscologist Jacques Heurgon published his views on the Etruscan state and its structures.³³ As can be seen from a whole series of contributions, Heurgon was one of the first scholars to show real interest in the social and economic structures of the Etruscans, but he, too, was not independent of the current *zeitgeist*. His monograph, *La vie quotidienne chez les Étrusques*, published in 1961 and intended for a general audience, was very successful: reprinted several times and translated into other languages,³⁴ it finally spread the misconception about Etruscan society into the academic and non-academic worlds.

Heurgon was better informed about the facts than Mazzarino (for example the progress made by research in Etruscan onomastics, amongst others concerning the patrilineal transmission of the gentile name), but seems to have been influenced by

30 Mazzarino, "Sociologia del mondo etrusco": 110: 'colonato etrusco', 'contadini'. According to Mazzarino, by the time of the elder Gracchus, they were in part already extinct and had been replaced by 'coloni stranieri'.

31 *Corpus Scriptorum Gromaticorum*, Lachmann I, 350. Mazzarino, "Sociologia del mondo etrusco": 114.

32 Mazzarino, "Sociologia del mondo etrusco": 114–15.

33 Jacques Heurgon, "L'État étrusque," *Historia* 6 (1957): 63–83; Jacques Heurgon, "Les Pénestes étrusques chez Denys d'Halicarnasse (IX, 5, 4)," *Latomus* 18 (1959): 713–23; Jacques Heurgon, "Valeurs féminines et masculines dans la civilisation étrusque," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité* 73 (1961): 139–60; Jacques Heurgon, "Posidonius et les Étrusques," in *Hommage à Albert Grenier*, ed. Marcel Renard, Collection Latomus 58 (Brüssel: Berchem, 1962): 799–808; Jacques Heurgon, "Classes et ordres chez les Étrusques," in *Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'Antiquité Classique* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1970): 29–41.

34 Jacques Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne chez les Étrusques* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1961) (translated into Italian: 1963, English: 1964, German: 1971).

Bachofen's crude ideas. He states that Etruscan society had matriarchal characteristics, speaks of Etruscan feminism and 'mother worship', the Etruscans' inclination towards cruelty, their great freedom of morals, and wonders whether they have remained 'une humanité d'avant la raison et d'avant la sages'.³⁵ The chapter devoted to society (III) is divided into two sub-chapters titled 'La classe des maîtres' and 'La classe des serviteurs', which clearly indicate the direction of his interpretation. Heurgon depicts the Etruscan two-class society as archaic, rigid, conservative, feudal, and composed, until its final disappearance, of only *domini* and *servi*.³⁶ The sub-chapter on 'The class of servants' opens with the statement that in Etruria, below the class of masters there were only slaves ('esclaves'), 'une immense population servile'.³⁷ Heurgon then distinguishes between different levels of dependency among the 'serfs', whom he defines as such based on a rather free interpretation of the extant, sparse source material and a very one-sided interpretation of important Latin terms such as *familia*.³⁸ In his view, the Etruscan peasants ('les paysans') were 'les serfs des campagnes', 'aptly' described by Dionysius (IX.5.4) as *penéstai*. They were free, but treated like slaves, and therefore labelled by him as 'serfs-clients,' in fact, according to Heurgon their status was very close to that of the Thessalian *penéstai*. He described them as having formed an extensive class of semi-free persons without civil rights (as usual, here follows the reference to Liv. IX.36.12). A mass of classic urban slaves, 'la foule des domestiques,' and the group of the freedmen, correctly labelled as *laut(u)ni*,³⁹ are described as having coexisted alongside them. According to Heurgon, the highest level of social advancement possible for the broad 'classe des serviteurs' was as members of a privileged class of dependents associated with the Etruscan term *etera*. It occurs in inscriptions in connection with personal names containing the *nomen gentilicium*. For him, *etera* derived from the Greek ἐταῖρος, and should have been translated as client⁴⁰ (but cf. section 4 below).

The most striking point is that, according to Mazzarino and Heurgon, no free 'middle classes' in an economical and socio-political sense existed in the Etruscan city-states (something Müller had at least assumed and Solari had strongly emphasised).

Subsequent generations of scholars retained these sand castles of Etruscan social hierarchy, and the existence of great masses of semi-free persons with a particular status was generally accepted. At the same time, the discussion of other possible so-

35 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 55. Cf. Heurgon, "Valeurs féminines et masculines": esp. 140, 160. For the similarities with Bachofen see Amann, "Bachofen": 46–47.

36 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 56.

37 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 74.

38 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 74–94, see 83–84 for his incomplete definition of Latin *familia*. For this term cf. Helmut Rix, *Die Termini der Unfreiheit in den Sprachen Alt-Italiens* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994): 41–47.

39 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 82–83.

40 Heurgon, *La vie quotidienne*: 93–94 (*etera*); cf. Heurgon, "L'État étrusque": 96; Heurgon, "Les Pénestes étrusques"; Heurgon, "Posidonius"; Heurgon, "Classes et ordres chez les Étrusques."

cial groups remained completely in the background. Among others, Thérèse Frankfort, Ambros Josef Pfiffig, Alain Hus (who entirely followed Heurgon) and even Attilio Mastrocinque in the 1990s⁴¹ should be mentioned here.

In his important book on *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* published in 1971, the British ancient historian William Vernon Harris devoted a chapter to the Etruscans' social structure and identified a deep divide between 'the ruling classes and slaves or people of slave-like status' in Etruria.⁴² The inevitable *penéstai* were seen as evidence for a social class 'between free and slaves', but these '*servi* are not ordinary *servi* in the Roman sense, for they seem to have some property-rights.'⁴³ Harris thought that some kind of free classes in addition to the upper class were conceivable,⁴⁴ but they ultimately played no part in his discussion of the events.

Even the eminent German linguist Helmut Rix followed the trend. He tried to explain the onomastic phenomenon of what he called 'Vornamengentilizia' (*gentilicia* formally identical with *praenomina* such as *cae* or *tite*) on historic grounds: According to him, they were the result of the social advancement of the unfree serfs (the *penéstai*) in Hellenistic inner Etruria, shown by their legal inclusion among the Etruscan citizen body; thus forming the nucleus of the *plebs*.⁴⁵ The archaeological basis of this conclusion can now be regarded as flawed.

41 Thérèse Frankfort, "Les classes serviles en Étrurie," *Latomus* 18 (1959): 3–22; Ambros Josef Pfiffig, "Die Namen ehemals unfreier Personen bei den Römern und in Etrurien," *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 11 (1960): 256–59; Alain Hus, *Les Étrusques et leur destin* (Paris: Picard, 1980); cf. also Maria Capozza, *Movimenti servili nel mondo romano in età repubblicana*, vol. 1, *Dal 501 a 184 a.C.* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1966): 123–41 (on the conflict in Volsinii). Attilio Mastrocinque, "Servitus publica a Roma e nella società etrusca," *Studi Etruschi* 62 (1996 [1998]): 249–70 on *etera*: 'natura pubblica dei servi Penesti d'Etruria'. *Servus publicus* is a term commonly used in ancient Rome for a (chattel) slave who performed useful activities for the state and thereby held certain privileges, see Walter Eder, *Servitus publica: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Funktion der öffentlichen Sklaverei in Rom* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980).

42 William Vernon Harris, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971): 114 and 119. See esp. chapters IV.1 "The Structure of Etruscan Society" (114–29) and VI.1 "Etruscan Society in 91" (202–12).

43 Harris, *Rome in Etruria*: 119–23. Harris did not want to call them *clientes*, as Heurgon did.

44 See Harris, *Rome in Etruria*: 115 supporting his view with the revolt of the *plebs* in Arezzo, 302 BC, and the *cetera multitudo* in the city of *Troilum*; 116: 'If there was a βουλῆ at Volsinii, as is stated, there may have been some gradations among the freemen [. . .]'.⁴⁵

45 Helmut Rix, *Das etruskische Cognomen: Untersuchungen zu System, Morphologie und Verwendung der Personennamen auf den jüngeren Inschriften Nordetruriens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963): 372–76 and Helmut Rix, "L'apporto dell'onomastica personale alla conoscenza della storia sociale," in *Caratteri dell'ellenismo nelle urne etrusche: Atti dell'incontro di studi, Siena, 28–30 aprile 1976*, ed. Marina Cristofani Martelli and Mauro Cristofani (Florence: Centro Di, 1977): esp. 67–68 (with reference to Dionysius of Hal. IX.5.4). Contra, see already Harris, *Rome in Etruria*: 208–12 and more recently Enrico Benelli, "'Vornamengentilizia': Anatomia di una chimera," in *Corollari: Scritti di antichità etrusche e italiche in omaggio all'opera di Giovanni Colonna*, ed. Daniele F. Maras (Pisa and Rome: Fabrizio Serra

Of course, there were also scholars who adopted a more cautious position, integrating new research findings and generally working much more with actual Etruscan evidence, such as Massimo Pallottino, considered the ‘father of modern Etruscology.’ In his *Etruscologia*, published in several editions and languages, Pallottino reconstructed a quite different and more balanced society. In the chapter on the political-social organisation in the 1955 edition, Pallottino briefly states about the early Villanova period that ‘originally there were no major social inequalities.’ The high number of gentile names in the early period ‘rules out the hypothesis of an original opposition between a narrow oligarchy of members of the *gentes* and a population outside the gentile system.’ Instead, the real lower class was represented by ‘servants, actors and acrobats, foreigners etc.’, bearing only one single name in inscriptions.⁴⁶ He assumed the existence of minor and plebeian *gentes* and ‘classi proletarie e servili’, but regarded them as difficult to define. The important circle of Italian scholars around Pallottino shared these positions, of course, but an explicit and decisive rejection of the old *penéstai*-ideas was not to be found here. It is impossible and beyond the scope of this article to mention all the different positions. In search of a representative example, I consulted the *Dizionario illustrato della civiltà etrusca* published by the highly deserved Etruscologist Mauro Cristofani in 1985. While there is no entry on ‘società, struttura, ordinamento sociale’, ‘ceti, classi sociali’ or the like, the ‘principi’ and the inevitable ‘servi’ feature, each with their own lemma. The latter contains a reference to the semi-free *penéstai* and a description strongly influenced by Heurgon.⁴⁷ In general, when dealing with the topic of social hierarchisation, we often find a strange mixture between the old idea of a feudal two-class society (now described as typical of rural areas) and new scholarly insights, especially with regard to the rapid urbanisation process in Etruria. Its inevitable social consequences had to be taken into account, so that the existence of free intermediate groups within the population had to be discussed. Mauro Cristofani’s comprehensive 1978 work *Etruschi. Cultura e società* is a good example of these difficulties.⁴⁸ Contrary to earlier research, the Etruscan cities of the second half of the sixth century were now given the title of *poleis* without hesitation, and described as having a timocratic order with *census*-based *comitia*, mirroring the Roman model. However, it remained unclear how this could have developed at all against

Editore, 2011): 193–98. Over the course of the discussion, a distinction between ‘Vornamengentilizia’ and ‘Individualnamengentilizia’ became necessary.

⁴⁶ First edition Milan: Hoepli 1942; further revised editions 1947, 1955, 1957, 1963, 1968, 1985. References above are to Massimo Pallottino, *Etruscologia* (Milan: Hoepli, 1955): chapter VI (“L’organizzazione politico-sociale”): 167–97, on society 192–97. On Pallottino and the 1950s, cf. Benelli, “La società etrusca e le utopie postbelliche”: 104–5.

⁴⁷ Mauro Cristofani, *Dizionario illustrato della civiltà etrusca*, ed. Mauro Cristofani (Florence: Giunti Martello, 1985): 232–33, s. v. *principi* (Mauro Cristofani); 270, s. v. *servi* (Mauro Cristofani).

⁴⁸ Mauro Cristofani, *Etruschi: Cultura e società* (Novara: De Agostini, 1978): 27–43, esp. 37–43. The book was published in several editions and languages, interestingly losing the term ‘society’ in its translated title (*The Etruscans: A New Investigation*, 1979; *Die Etrusker: Geschichte, Glaube und Kultur*, 1983).

the background of the pronounced two-class society thought to have reemerged after the so-called crisis of the fifth century BC. In 1986, the edited volume *Rasenna. Storia e civiltà degli Etruschi* appeared, which illustrated the state of research at the time. Cristofani wrote the section on 'Economia e società', in which he focused mainly on the interactions between production methods and social structures in the early stages of Etruscan history. He made interesting remarks, but only briefly repeated the usual *penéstai-servi* hypotheses for the periods from the fifth century onwards.⁴⁹

It was above all Mario Torelli who took up the subject in more detail and left his mark on it to this day. Typical of this period was a conscious distancing from the troublesome issue of 'origin', a subject that became much less important. In *Storia degli Etruschi*, published in 1981, Torelli innovatively adopted a consistent socio-economic perspective in outlining his views of the social system from the beginning to the end of Etruscan history. This was followed by the volume *La società etrusca* in 1987, one of the very few works of Etruscology that focused on social history, even if it was only a compilation of older articles by Torelli (for example 'Per una storia dello schiavismo in Etruria' was first published in 1975).⁵⁰ Following in the footsteps of Müller, Deecke, Heurgon, and Harris, Torelli in turn took up the irresistible *penéstai* label from Dionysius.⁵¹ He described the two-class society based on extensive wage labour, dominated by an aristocracy and characterised by a sharp contrast between *domini* and *servi* as typical of Etruria: '[P]enéstai e tryphé sono i termini che in sostanza vengono a descrivere i caratteri distintivi di un'intera formazione economico-sociale.'⁵² As late as 1987 (1975), he erroneously wanted to recognise these *servi-penéstai* in Etruscan *etera/eteri*.⁵³ He believed that they had resulted from the subordination of local groups of people in the eighth century BC, who had previously lived outside the great Villanovan communities.⁵⁴ As individuals with a status 'tra liberi e schiavi', the *servi* in this

⁴⁹ Mauro Cristofani, "Economia e società," in *Rasenna: Storia e civiltà degli Etruschi*, Collana Antica Madre 9 (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986): 145–46.

⁵⁰ Mario Torelli, *La società etrusca: L'età arcaica, l'età classica* (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1987): 87–95. This chapter has the term 'schiavo/slave' in its title, even though it is mainly about the alleged Etruscan institution of 'serfs' ('classe servile').

⁵¹ Mario Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi* (Bari: Laterza, 1981, repr. 1997): esp. 79–81. On p. 79, the wrong passage is quoted from Dionysius ('II.44.7', cf. also Mario Torelli, "Gesellschaft und Staat: Klassen und Wandlungen der Gesellschaft," in *Die Etrusker: Geheimnisvolle Kultur im antiken Italien*, ed. Mauro Cristofani [Stuttgart: Belser, 1995]: 104); the correct reference is IX.5.4. This is probably a case of confusion with the parallel passage in Livy (II.44.6–8), which, however, is completely neutral in this respect. Less pressure is placed on the Dionysius passage (correctly quoted this time) in Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 89–92, note 35. Cf. more recently Mario Torelli, "La servitus etrusca tra storia e archeologia," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 87 (2014–2015): 169–87.

⁵² Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 83.

⁵³ Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 90.

⁵⁴ Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 55. Cf. also Mario Torelli, "Intorno ai servi d'Etruria," in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2016*, ed. Luciana

model would have made up a large part of the rural population and a good part of the urban one.⁵⁵ The scanty evidence for this alleged ‘class of serfs’ is, as usual, Diodorus V.40.4, the revolt in Volsinii veteres, the *bellum servile* in Arezzo mentioned by one of the *Elogia Tarquiniensa*, and the prophecy of Vegoia. The serfs are tied to the soil, have some civic rights – such as the possibility of owning their own dwellings – but no political rights (and would thus be an easy prey for tyrants):⁵⁶ So far, there is nothing new. New and significant aspects in Torelli’s work were above all a full appreciation of the consequences of the urbanisation process and a generally stronger integration of Etruscan archaeological sources into the discourse. Thus, in his view, urbanisation in the sixth century, especially in the south of Etruria, had produced considerable urban strata, including those independent of the old aristocratic mechanisms of production, and different from the subordinated *penéstai*. To remain true to his ideas, Torelli posited that these new strata were mainly of non-Etruscan, foreign, and especially Italic, origin.⁵⁷ In his account, these new plebeian intermediate groups, active in crafts and trade, served in the urban armies of the southern Etruscan city-states, adopting the hoplite style of fighting. Torelli refers to these city-states quite naturally as *poleis* in an economic and political sense, but assumes different degrees of ‘democratic’ tendencies in the south of Etruria, with ‘ceti urbani e “plebei”’ especially in Veii and Caere.⁵⁸ He argued that the fifth-century economic ‘crisis’ of the south hit the prosperous middle strata especially hard and in turn provoked social changes, including some kind of oligarchical setback (‘involuzione oligarchica’).⁵⁹ Torelli assumed

Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, Phersu. *Etrusko-italische Studien 1* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 299, where he assumes that non-Etruscan populations were enslaved during the Villanovan expansions in the Po Valley and in Campania, and argues that in Etruria proper, dependency came about when the smaller centres were integrated into the emerging central settlements. These seem to be very problematic assumptions to me.

55 Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 80; Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 88–89, 92, 94–95.

56 He argued that only in the southernmost cities, Veii and Caere, could members of the lower strata have achieved a better social position, similar to the Roman *plebs*: Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 91.

57 Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 147–64, esp. 157; Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 50, 52; Mario Torelli, “La società etrusca della crisi: Quali trasformazioni sociali?” in *Crise et transformation des sociétés archaïques de l’Italie antique au Ve siècle av. J.-C.: Actes de la table ronde, Rome, 19–21 novembre 1987* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1990): 194: ‘[C]eti produttivi intermedi, [. . .] in Etruria in vario modo interni e consustanziali alla polis.’ Cf. Torelli, “Gesellschaft und Staat”: 112–13: new foreign elements of Latin, Sabin, Umbrian origin.

58 Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 160, 200–203. Supporting arguments in the case of Veii are the great *thesmophorion* in the heart of the city, the cult of Ceres at the Campetti sanctuary (Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 128–29: ‘la grande dea presidio della plebe’), and the literary tradition of ‘kings’ in the second half of the fifth century; in the case of Caere the *tyrannos* Thefarie Velianas. Tarquinia, Vulci and Volsinii veteres would have remained more oligarchical.

59 Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 184. Cf. Torelli, “La società etrusca della crisi”: 197. Meanwhile, the upper class continued with their ‘conspicuous consumption.’ For the fifth century see *Crise et transformation des sociétés archaïques de l’Italie antique au Ve siècle av. J.-C.: Actes de la table ronde, Rome, 19–21 novembre 1987* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1990).

than from then on, southern and northern Etruria developed differently.⁶⁰ The so-called ‘internal colonisation’ in the south (Tarquinia, Vulci) would have given new economic opportunities to the ‘classe semi-servile’ and remaining marginal groups of the ‘*démos urbano*,’ leading to the end of the archaic *servitus* system and producing a ‘middle class’ of land owners with small to medium-sized properties, which, however, dissolved again in the third century BC under the pressure of the Roman land confiscations. In contrast, the old system of *servitus* of the *penéstai* would have remained active in northern and inner Etruria, leading with some delay to the revolts of Arezzo and Volsinii veteres. Adopting Rix’s ‘Vornamengentilizia’ hypothesis, Torelli also saw a late integration of the formerly unfree *servi-penéstai* in the second century BC, resulting in peasants holding small plots of their own land (for example in Chiusi).⁶¹

Chronologically and geographically, Torelli offers a much more nuanced picture of Etruscan societies than scholars before him. Although he undoubtedly represents an important stage in the development of our ideas (for example by including archaeological evidence such as sanctuaries and their cults in the discussion), he was unwilling to give up the old *penéstai*-model of *domini* and *servi*. He therefore did not pursue any further the idea of the existence of large intermediate groups of ‘genuine’ Etruscans. The later Torelli seems to have become even stricter, accepting only the two dependency relationships of *servitus* and *clientela* below the nobility for the Etruscans.⁶² However, in my opinion the epigraphic material from the sanctuary of Gravisca (Tarquinia) that he used as evidence cannot support this assumption.⁶³

A slightly more sceptical attitude towards the serfs-*penéstai* model seems to be found in the work of Giovanni Colonna, although this is difficult to assess because the information is scattered over many articles, and there is no overview work by him.⁶⁴ His

⁶⁰ Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 217–37. In the production processes in southern Etruria, classical chattel slavery would now have offered a substitute for the ‘serfs’, cf. Torelli, “Gesellschaft und Staat”: 115–16.

⁶¹ Torelli, *La società etrusca*: 93–95; Torelli, “Gesellschaft und Staat”: 118.

⁶² Torelli, “La servitus etrusca”; Torelli, “Intorno ai servi d’Etruria”: 297; Mario Torelli, “Le radici dello sviluppo: Riflessioni sulla nascita delle aristocrazie nel Lazio e nell’Etruria meridionale,” *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo Claudio Faina* 27 (2020): 16–17.

⁶³ Following Torelli, the personal names found in fourteen inscriptions from Gravisca would belong to ‘serfs’, because they all had only a single name. The fragmentary character of many of the Etruscan inscriptions from Gravisca does not allow us to draw this conclusion with certainty, and in some cases alternative interpretations are possible to explain the name structure. For example, *ramθa venatres* (ET² Ta 3.4) could also be a freeborn woman (and not ‘Ramtha, slave/serf of Venatre’). For votive inscriptions by women, see Petra Amann, “Women and Votive Inscriptions in Etruscan Epigraphy,” *Etruscan and Italic Studies: Journal of the Etruscan Foundation* 22 (2019): esp. 11–12.

⁶⁴ I refer to articles such as Giovanni Colonna, “Società e cultura a Volsinii,” *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo Claudio Faina* 2 (1985): 101–31, Giovanni Colonna, “Urbanistica e architettura,” in *Rasenna: Storia e civiltà degli Etruschi*, Collana Antica Madre 9 (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1986): 369–530 and Giovanni Colonna, “Città e territorio nell’Etruria meridionale del V secolo a.C.,” in *Crise e transformation des sociétés archaïques de l’Italie antique au Ve siècle av. J.C.: Actes de la table ronde, Rome, 19–21 novem-*

chapter on 'Urbanistica e architettura' in the volume *Rasenna. Storia e civiltà degli Etruschi* contains many interesting remarks on society. For him, the Etruscan city(-state) became increasingly similar to the Greek *polis* in the first half of the sixth century BC, with growing strata of 'middle class' ('ceto medio') rising from the mass of the free population, who imitated the aristocratic way of life, 'ma in campo politico sono i più strenui garanti del nuovo ordine basato sul censo e sulla isonomia da esso garantita, in contrasto col potere gentilizio fondato sulla clientela e sui legami di sangue.'⁶⁵ Colonna argued that the uniform cube-shaped tombs of the necropolises at Orvieto and their inscriptions testify to the socially intermediate status of their owners, 'privi di qualsiasi logica gentilizia o clientelare.'⁶⁶ He argued that over the course of the fifth century BC, the old *aristoi* had been integrated by the rising fringes of the 'middle class.'⁶⁷ However, between the second half of the fifth and the early fourth century, the economic crisis of southern Etruria and outside military threats pushed these middle classes to the margins of society, which was now again dominated politically by a narrow circle of *principes*, not without social conflicts.⁶⁸ He described the fourth century BC as a prosperous period for the medium-sized and smaller settlements in the hinterland of the large cities (for example Musarna). Less detailed and less integrated into the framework of socio-historical development are the following remarks on the late Etruscan period.⁶⁹ In his article "Città e territorio nell'Etruria meridionale del V secolo a.C.," Colonna accepted the already canonical contrast between *domini* and *servi* and the associated production mode in Etruria for the archaic and hellenistic periods, which in his opinion had soon been mitigated by the development of solid middle classes that 'lived in the shadow of the *domini*.'⁷⁰ Even if Colonna does not address this directly, one gets the impression that his understanding of the socio-historical processes does not depend on the assumption of the existence of large masses of half-free *penéstai* in Etruria, and his focus is clearly more on the (free) middle strata of the society.

bre 1987 (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1990): 7–21. Cf. also the section "Lingua e società," in Giovanni Colonna, *Italia ante Romanum imperium, Scritti di antichità etrusche, italiche e romane*, vol. I–VI (Pisa, Rome: Ist. Editoriali e Poligrafici, 2004–2005 and 2016), esp. vol. III. Still important today is Giovanni Colonna, "Nome gentilizio e società," in *Studi Etruschi* 45 (1977): 175–92, on the beginnings of the gentile name system.

65 Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 431.

66 Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 448. Cf. Colonna, "Società e cultura a Volsinii": esp. 101–10 and, more recently, Giovanni Colonna, "La scrittura e la tomba: Il caso dell'Etruria arcaica," in *L'écriture et l'espace de la mort: Épigraphe et nécropoles à l'époque préromaine*, ed. Marie-Laurence Haack (Rome: École française de Rome, 2015): 136–37. For Caere, see Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 493.

67 Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 461.

68 Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 495.

69 For the late periods see Colonna, "Urbanistica e architettura": 495–526, esp. 495: in the second century BC, the northern part of Etruria saw an increasingly widespread promotion of subaltern classes.

70 Colonna, "Città e territorio": 13–14, see also 17.

Let us take one final look at another very influential Italian ‘grand old man’, Bruno D’Agostino, to whom we owe valuable contributions on Etruscan subjects. My interest here is in showing how far the alleged existence of a large class of semi-free ‘servants’ or ‘serfs’ as a peculiarity of the Etruscan social system more or less directly influenced (and still influences) any attempt to reconstruct their world – I call it ‘the long arm of the *penéstai*.’ In a 1990 analysis of the military structures of the Etruscan city-states,⁷¹ D’Agostino rightly drew attention to a problem that scholars had either not taken into account or explained only vaguely. He took up a ‘perplexità’ raised by the great Arnaldo Momigliano in 1963:⁷² ‘How the Etruscans ever managed to combine an army of hoplites with their social structure founded upon a sharp distinction between nobles and clientes, I cannot imagine.’ The background to this is the discussion of that time about the foundations of the Greek *polis* and the question of how the Etruscans, with their alleged two-class society (and no free farmers), could have formed a community of ‘equals’ in the sense of a community of citizens; that is, whether the term *polis* can be used for Etruria at all. This was a justified question, because the uncritical mainstream research of the time, such as Christiane Saulnier’s in 1980, followed the traditional sharp division of Etruscan society, which did not assume the existence of any intermediate classes and therefore concluded that the hoplite citizen did not exist in Etruria.⁷³ I am aware that modern research on the Greek *polis* and the hoplite warrior has evolved in a variety of ways, and that there is a well-founded modern critique of the supposedly large role that hoplite warfare played in shaping the Greek *polis*. One example is Hans van Wees, who rejects the traditional image of the middle-class hoplite army as composed of a single social group⁷⁴ – it would probably be very fruitful for both sides to include the Etruscan situation in

71 Bruno D’Agostino, “Military Organization and Social Structure in Archaic Etruria,” in *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*, ed. Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 59–82; cf. Bruno D’Agostino, “La non-polis degli Etruschi,” in *Venticinque secoli dopo l’invenzione della democrazia*, ed. Emanuele Greco (Rome: Donzelli, 1998): 125–31.

72 Arnaldo Momigliano, “An Interim Report on the Origins of Rome,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963): 95–121, esp. 119.

73 Christiane Saulnier, *L’armée et la guerre dans le monde étrusco-romain (VIII^e–IV^e s.)* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1980): 119–20: ‘[L]a société étrusque ne semble pas avoir eu une véritable classe intermédiaire.’ Karl-Wilhelm Weeber’s review of her work already critiqued this aspect, see *Gnomon* 54 (1982): 46–50. Cfr. recently David B. George, “Technology, Ideology, Warfare and the Etruscans Before the Roman Conquest,” in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2013): 738–46, who argues for only two classes of fighters (aristocrats and ‘*penéstai*’).

74 For the discussion, see Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, eds., *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013): esp. Donald Kagan and Gregory F. Viggiano, “The Hoplite Debate” (1–56) and Hans van Wees, “Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development” (222–55); Hans van Wees, ed., *War and Violence in Ancient Greece* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000), esp. Hans van Wees, “The Development of the Hoplite Phalanx: Iconography and Reality in the Seventh Century” (125–66); Hans van Wees, “The Myth of the Middle Class Army: Military and Social Status in Ancient Athens,” in *War as a Cultural and Social Force: Essays on*

these considerations. D'Agostino's analysis of the military structure is more complex than Saulnier's and concludes, on the basis of the iconographic evidence, that something similar to the Greek hoplite citizen class, and therefore some sort of Etruscan *polis* structure, had developed in inner and northern Etruria (especially in Orvieto, Chiusi, Fiesole) from the late sixth century onwards.⁷⁵ He argues that the timocratic developments in coastal south Etruria however did not lead to this type of structures, because the strong gentilicial system and the strict social hierarchy had 'restricted these *novi homines* to the condition of *etera*, an Etruscan word which has been thought to convey the same meaning as the Latin *clientes*; it does at least indicate a condition of subjection, even if not so strongly as the Etruscan *lautni*. This social hierarchy bore heavily upon the structure of the army, and prevented the birth of a hoplite *ethos* based on the premiss that everyone had the same political standing [. . .].'⁷⁶ His arguments rest, once again, on Dionysius's *penéstai*, called by their masters to face the Romans and a well equipped and organised 'gentilicial army,' albeit without hoplite warriors. D'Agostino therefore tried to explain his conclusion that the south Etruscan city-states had not been *poleis* with an urbanist and institutional development of the Etruscan city that lacked a political community beyond the gentilicial one (no 'city of citizens').⁷⁷ This reconstruction is in contrast to assumptions put forward by his contemporaries, scholars such as Torelli, Cristofani, and Colonna (see above), and should be regarded with scepticism in view of the undoubtedly progressive role of the economically highly developed Etruscan south. One might also add the somewhat astonishing fact that scholars find it difficult to accept the existence of the Etruscan *polis*, but have no problem in talking about Greek Sparta as a *polis*, even though it was the homeland of a subjected pre- and a discriminated co-population (helots and *perioeci*).

Sure, D'Agostino had more arrows in his quiver. He believed that he could also provide archaeological evidence for the absence of a hoplite ideology in southern Etruria, mainly due to the absence of hoplite depictions and battle scenes in the late

Warfare in Antiquity, ed. Tonnes Bekker-Nielsen and Lise Hannestad, Historisk-filosofiske Skrifter 22 (Copenhagen: Reitzels Forlag, 2001): 33–47.

75 For Fiesole and its territory cf. Petra Amann, "Le 'pietre fiesolane': repertorio iconografico e strutture sociali," in *Cippi, stele, statue-stele e semata: Testimonianze in Etruria, nel mondo italico e in Magna Grecia dalla Prima Età del Ferro fino all'Ellenismo: Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Sutri, 24–25 aprile 2015*, ed. Stephan Steingraber (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2018), esp. 66, where the author of the present paper sees clear evidence for the emergence of a hoplite and landowning free middle class. Cf. also Tina Mitterlechner, "Kriegerbild und Militärorganisation," in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2016*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, *Phersu. Etrusco-italische Studien 1* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 159–73, esp. 166.

76 D'Agostino, "Military Organization and Social Structure": 80–81; cf. also D'Agostino, "La non-polis degli Etruschi": 130.

77 D'Agostino, "Military Organization and Social Structure": 82: 'In comparison with Greek poleis, the Etruscan city remained only partially realized.'

archaic tomb paintings of Tarquinia. But iconographic references to battles and the martial sphere are generally absent in Tarquinian tomb painting in this period,⁷⁸ including any kind of heroic duel, mounted warriors or references to a 'gentilicial army'; it is the softer side of upper class ideology that is clearly the focus in these late archaic funerary images (and even mythological scenes are very rare). It could just as well be argued (as I do) that depictions of warriors did not meet the ideological messages that these paintings were intended to express in the private (!) context of the family tombs of the (now broader) upper class in late sixth-century Tarquinia, perhaps also because hoplite citizen warriors had already become a broader phenomenon.⁷⁹ This does not mean that the military element was unimportant. Most of the chamber tombs have been looted, so that it is difficult to say whether hoplite equipment as part of the grave goods of a male deceased was usually included. The possibility cannot be ruled out given, for example, the relative frequency of fifth-century BC helmet appliques in Tarquinia.⁸⁰ I therefore think that D'Agostino's conclusions regarding the south Etruscan city-states cannot be supported. The warrior motif does not even play a role in the repertoire of painted images of the chamber tombs in Chiusi, where D'Agostino assumed a hoplite ideology (the only exception being, significantly, a depiction of mounted combat with lances in the Tomba Paolozzi).

In general, there is a shortage of recent, systematic studies on Etruscan warfare, military tactics and equipment,⁸¹ which needs to take into account recent debates on the Greek hoplite system, as well as Roman military structures.

⁷⁸ Apart from a few armed dancers, and the fighting warriors in the painted miniature frieze of the 'tent-like pavilion' in the 'Tomba del Cacciatore'.

⁷⁹ Anne-Marie Adam and Agnès Rouveret, "Les cités étrusques et la guerre au V^e siècle avant notre ère," in *Crise e transformation des sociétés archaïques de l'Italie antique au V^e siècle av. J.C.: Actes de la table ronde, Rome, 19–21 novembre 1987* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1990): 327–56, 337 try to explain the absence of references to citizen-soldiers in Tarquinia and Caere with the complete fusion between 'des valeurs aristocratiques et des valeurs civiques', whereby the aristocracy would have referred only indirectly to military values. The use of militarily trained mercenaries must also be included as a possibility in the whole discussion.

⁸⁰ Giacomo Bardelli, "Minima cascológica: A proposito di alcune appliques bronzee figurate di elmi etruschi ed italici," in *Hallstatt und Italien: Festschrift für Markus Egg*, ed. Holger Baitinger and Martin Schönfelder, Monographien des Römisch Germanischen Zentralmuseums 154 (Mainz: Schnell & Steiner, 2019): 505–21, 512.

⁸¹ The 1981 monograph by Peter F. Stary, *Zur eisenzeitlichen Bewaffnung und Kampfesweise in Mittelitalien (ca. 9. bis 6. Jh. v. Chr.)* (Mainz: Zabern, 1981) is fundamental, but outdated. Cf. for the earlier periods, Maurizio Martinelli, *La lancia, la spada, il cavallo* (Florence: Regione Toscana, 2004). Tina Mitterlechner, "Kriegerbild und Militärorganisation" (with older literature).

3 The Last Twenty Years – Mostly More of the Same

The 1990s were the last phase of intense socio-historical discussions in Etruscology; after that, the critical debate on social issues flagged. There are exceptions that try to find new approaches with a declared focus on society, such as the works by Vedia Izzet,⁸² Enrico Benelli⁸³ or my own,⁸⁴ but they are rare. As far as social hierarchisation is concerned, the focus continues to be on the elites,⁸⁵ and, as a rule, the old positions are repeated, accompanied by an apparent lack of interest in systematic approaches. This is particularly evident in recent anthologies and general introductory or overview works on the Etruscans,⁸⁶ which often treat the social subject rather superficially by focusing on partial aspects without giving even a rudimentary overview of the social history and the associated research problems.⁸⁷ There is, however, an interesting article by Geoffrey Kron about the very much underinvestigated demography

82 Vedia Izzet, *The Archaeology of Etruscan Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) discusses several topics based on material culture, for example changes in funerary architecture. Gilda Bartoloni, *Le società dell'Italia primitiva: Lo studio delle necropoli e la nascita delle aristocrazie* (Rome: Carocci, 2003, repr. 2009) focuses on the early periods down to the seventh century.

83 Benelli, “Penesti etruschi”; Enrico Benelli, “Una misconosciuta nota di Gustav Herbig e l’etrusco *etera*,” in *Miscellanea etrusco-italica*, vol. 3, ed. Adriano Maggiani and Enrico Benelli (Rome: Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche, 2003): 209–21; Benelli, “Vornamengentilizia”; Benelli, “Slavery and Manumission”; Benelli, “La società etrusca e le utopie postbelliche”; Enrico Benelli, “La società etrusca: il contributo dell’epigrafia,” in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2016*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, Phersu. Etrusko-italische Studien 1 (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 219–26; Vincenzo Bellelli and Enrico Benelli, *Gli Etruschi. La scrittura, la lingua, la società* (Rome: Carocci, 2018).

84 See Petra Amann, *Die Etruskerin: Geschlechterverhältnis und Stellung der Frau im frühen Etrurien (9.–5. Jh. v. Chr.)* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000) on the role of the female element; Amann, “Bachofen”; Amann, “Le ‘pietre fiesolane’”; Amann, “Women and Votive Inscriptions.” The Viennese conference proceedings edited by Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann address various social-historical topics, see *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker*. For a recent overview of the scholarship on this subject see Amann, “Etruskische Sozialgeschichte – von alten Vorurteilen zu neuen Ufern.”

85 See recently Giuseppe M. Della Fina, ed., *Ascesa e crisi delle aristocrazie arcaiche in Etruria e nell’Italia preromana: Atti del XXVII Convegno Internazionale di Studi sulla Storia e l’Archeologia dell’Etruria, Orvieto, 13–15 December 2019, Annali della Fondazione per il Museo Claudio Faina 27* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020).

86 Welcome exceptions are Dirk Steuernagel, *Die Etrusker: Ursprünge – Geschichte – Zivilisation* (Wiesbaden: marixverlag, 2020) with a short, but critical chapter on Etruscan society (125–144/150), and Enrico Benelli, *Etruschi: breve introduzione storica* (Milan: Idea Libri, 2021).

87 See for example Jean Mac Intosh Turfa, ed., *The Etruscan World* (London: Routledge, 2013), part IV: “Etruscan Society and Economy”; Sinclair Bell and Alexandra A. Carpino, *A Companion to the Etruscans* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), part III: “Etruscan Wealth and Decadence” and part IV: “Art, Society, and Culture.” Even previously the problem of social stratification had not received much attention from Giovannangelo Camporeale, *Gli Etruschi: Storia e Civiltà* (Turin: UTET, 2000).

of Etruria. On the basis of anthropological evidence, he argues that Etruscan society with a significant middle class was much more egalitarian than previously assumed.⁸⁸

In another case, the topic of social hierarchy is briefly dealt within the chapter on economic and political structures.⁸⁹ Here, Luca Cerchiali takes up the positions of Bruno D'Agostino and argues strongly for the alleged 'non-polis' of the Etruscans with all its consequences: 'Non si produce un ceto cittadino di uomini liberi.'⁹⁰ Despite a clear archaeological awareness of the consequences of the urbanisation processes in Etruria and the probable emergence of a class of small landowners, Cerchiali argues elsewhere in more detail that the political system of the two-class society would have produced 'the lack of freedom of an army that – unlike the Roman army – consisted of noncitizens in the service of a limited ruling class.'⁹¹ He writes, 'The achievement of a wider community than that of the *gens*, however, did not produce a citizen class of free men, and a limited number of people with full political rights continued to contrast with a more extended social body that remained excluded.' He describes the result as an 'unsuccessful construction of a political community' that in the fourth century 'continued to sustain itself on the Archaic opposition between *domini* and *servi*', losing its ability to defend itself against external enemies.⁹²

The monumental work *Etruscology*, conceived and edited by Alessandro Naso in 2017, stands in contrast to the previous examples. In addition to a general overview article on society, Naso took care to include a separate contribution on society for each of the major historical phases of the Etruscans, in the clear awareness that a history of about one thousand years is naturally also characterised by social changes.⁹³ In detail, the various articles show divergent views and interpretations, including on

⁸⁸ Geoffrey Kron, "Fleshing Out the Demography of Etruria," in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2013): 56–78, somewhat hidden in part I: "Environment, Background, and the Study of Etruscan Culture."

⁸⁹ Gilda Bartoloni, ed., *Introduzione all'Etruscologia* (Milan: Hoepli, 2012, 4th ed. 2016). The condition and role of women are discussed in a few pages in the chapter on early history (115–18). The chapter on "Romanizzazione" by Paolo Liverani (227–52, esp. 234–37) is very similar to the thinking of Mario Torelli (discussing Arezzo and Orvieto).

⁹⁰ Luca Cerchiali, "La struttura economica e politica," in *Introduzione all'Etruscologia*, ed. Gilda Bartoloni (Milan: Hoepli, 2012, 4th ed. 2016): 127–59, quote at 143. See also esp. 128–33 ("società gentilizia") and 142–51 ("non-polis"). Cf. Luca Cerchiali, "Lo sviluppo dell'immagine oplitica nell'Etruria arcaica," in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2016*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, Phersu. Etrusko-italische Studien 1 (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 145–57, esp. 154: '[S]econdo la straordinaria definizione di Dionigi di Alicarnasso (IX.5.4–5), in Etruria gli opliti restano per sempre penéstai'.

⁹¹ Luca Cerchiali, "Urban Civilization," in *Etruscology*, vol. 2, ed. Alessandro Naso (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): 617–44, 619; and see also 635–40 ("The 'isonomic' city").

⁹² Cerchiali, "Urban Civilization": 635, 640.

⁹³ Alessandro Naso, ed. *Etruscology*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): for a general overview see Petra Amann, "Society" (179–93), then Marco Pacciarelli, "Society, 10th cent.–730 BCE" (759–77); Alessandro Naso, "Society, 730–580 BCE" (869–84); Petra Amann, "Society, 580–450 BCE" (985–99); Petra

the question of the two-class society,⁹⁴ thus illustrating the unsatisfactory research situation concerning socio-historical issues in Etruscology as a whole.

4 An Idea Built on Sand

The old idea of a typical Etruscan system of *domini* and *servi* – i.e. semi-free persons with a special status – already developed by early scholars has prevailed today. This idea is based on an extremely weak foundation, mainly two very short references in Greek historiography and a very unclear Etruscan word. For the sake of clarity, let me summarise my position on these three arguments.

As we have seen, the first central pillar is the passage about *penéstai* in Dionysius of Halicarnassus IX.5.4 (relating to the year 480 BC), which even William Vernon Harris called ‘a merely decorative element.’⁹⁵ It briefly states that the most influential men (δυνατώτατοι) from all Tyrrhenia had joined the army of Veii with their dependents (πενέσται) to support the city-state against Rome. Private armies of clients and subordinates accompanying their nobles are formations that fit well into the context of central Italy in the early fifth century BC, and are certainly not specific to the Etruscans. We may remember the Roman *gens* Fabia with its army of clients in 479/477 BC against Veii, and the inscription on the famous Lapis Satricanus which speaks of *suo-dales*, followers of a (war)lord named Poplios Valesios.⁹⁶ At the same time, of course,

Amann, “Society, 450–250 BCE” (1101–15); Arnaldo Marcone, “Society 250–89 BCE” (1191–1201); cf. also Luca Cerchiali, “Urban Civilization” (617–44).

94 See for example the different positions of Petra Amann and Luca Cerchiali.

95 Harris, *Rome in Etruria*: 115 and 119–21: ‘anachronistic’. Nevertheless, he argued with it at the crucial point, cf. above note 43. For the canonical two-class society interpretation see now George, “Technology, Ideology, Warfare,” who holds the opinion that there never was a true hoplite class. For a discussion, see Benelli, “Penesti etruschi”; Benelli, “Slavery and Manumission”: 447–48 and Benelli, “La società etrusca e le utopie postbelliche”: 107–8.

96 For the episode of the Fabii see Dionysius, who uses the Greek term πελάται to describe the Roman clients: 4000 men went into battle: 306 Fabians with their friends and clients (IX.15.2–3), as well as a regular army under the consul K. Fabius, which then had to leave (Dion. Hal. IX.15.2–18.5; Liv. II.48–50). Less clear is the role of the Fabii in Diod. XI.53.6. On the phenomenon of private armies see Mario Torelli, “*Bellum in privatam curam* (Liv. II.49.1): Eserciti gentilizi, sodalitates e isonomia aristocratica in Etruria e Lazio arcaici,” in *Miti di guerra, riti di pace: La guerra e la pace: Un confronto interdisciplinare: Atti del convegno, 4–6 maggio 2009*, ed. Concetta Masseria and Donato Loscalzo (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011): 225–34; Daniele F. Maras, “Kings and Tablemates: The Political Role of Comrade Associations in Archaic Rome and Etruria,” in *Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Etrusker: Akten der internationalen Tagung, Wien, 8.–10.6.2016*, ed. Luciana Aigner-Foresti and Petra Amann, Phersu. Etrusko-italische Studien 1 (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2018): 91–108; Adriano Maggiani, “Das Helmdepot von Arce, Vetulonia,” in *Waffen für die Götter: Krieger – Trophäen – Heiligtümer*, ed. Wolfgang Meig-hörner (Innsbruck: Tiroler Landesmuseum, 2012): 63–67 (on the famous deposit of bronze helmets at Vetulonia). In general, see Armando Cherici, “Etruria – Roma: per una storia del rapporto tra impegno

there were regular Etruscan city-state troops ready to go to war, in our case the (probably heavily armed) troops of Veii, who, after consultations in the *concilium Etruriae*, had received support from volunteers – neither Dionysius nor the parallel passage in Livy claim the opposite. Livy remains neutral in his account anyway: ‘The [Roman] army then set out for a war with the Veientes, to whose help forces had rallied from every quarter of Etruria’ (Liv. II.44.6–7, translation Benjamin O. Foster). According to Dionysius, the Etruscan army was large, valiant, and harmonious; therefore, it would have met the military equipment requirements of the time. As in other ancient communities, the emergence of some kind of state monopoly on warfare in the Etruscan city-states was probably a long, non-linear process, oscillating between traditional aristocratic family power and new state authority in response to changing interests.

In another passage, Dionysius (II.9.2.) mentions *penéstai* in connection with the introduction of the patronage system in Rome by Romulus, usually employing the Greek word *πελάται* (‘neighbours, dependents’) for Latin *clientes*. He compares this custom with the Thessalians in Greece who called their *pelátai* by the pejorative term *penéstai* or ‘toilers’ (in German ‘Tagelöhner’) and the (early) Athenians who called their clients *thêtes*, meaning ‘hirelings’. This is interesting, because the *thêtes* are Athenian citizens with voting rights in the People’s Assembly (*ekklesia*) – poor and mostly dependent, but legally certainly not a semi-free class. So in my view, the Dionysian passage IX.5.4, written about 450 years after the event it described, can in no way be taken as evidence for the existence of a specific type of servile, semi-free class in Etruria. The word *penéstai* seems to have a rather pejorative connotation here, which might be due to an anti-Etruscan source – but this is pure speculation. And I am just as unimpressed by the hastily assembled emergency contingent of poorly armed farmers, easy prey for the Roman army that Livy (IX.36.12) describes for the year 310 BC (*tumultuariæ agrestium Etruscorum cohortes repente a principibus regionis eius concitatae*).

The second central pillar is a similarly short passage in Diodorus V.40.4, which speaks of the ‘houses of the *θεράπωντες*’ in connection with Etruscan *tryphé*.⁹⁷ We will probably never know for sure whether it actually refers to well-off servant-clients⁹⁸ (in some kind of dependency on the elite) or whether there is simply a transcription

militare e capienza politica nelle comunità antiche,” *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo Claudio Faina* 16 (2009): 155–75.

⁹⁷ In addition to Poseidonius, Felix Jacoby also considered Timaios to be a possible source for Diodorus. For a critique of the assumption of complete traceability back to Poseidonius see Giulio Firpo, “Posidonio, Diodoro e gli Etruschi,” *Aevum* 71, no. 1 (1997): 103–11, esp. 106–7, who notes modifications by Diodorus in V.40.3–4, namely in comparison with Poseidonius *apud* Athen. IV, 153d (FrGrHist 87 F 1). Paragraph 4 seems to reflect an anti-Etruscan tendency.

⁹⁸ Originally, the Greek term *θεράπων* had a more positive meaning as ‘(armour-bearing) companion, assistant, servant, squire’, a subordinate of elevated personal status; cf. Maras, “Kings and Table-mates”: 95. On the word and similar expressions see Pollux, *onomomastikon* III.83 (with reference to the Thessalian *penéstai* as persons between freemen and slaves).

error in the manuscripts. Since Vogel and Jacoby, most editions emend with the word ἄρχοντες for magistrates.⁹⁹

οικήσεις τε παντοδαπὰς ἰδιαζούσας ἔχουσι παρ' αὐτοῖς οὐ μόνον οἱ θεράποντες [or ἄρχοντες?], ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐλευθέρων οἱ πλείους

Their dwellings are of every description and of individuality, those not only of their servant-clients [or magistrates?], but of the majority of the free men as well.

Both versions are possible, so our literary source does not provide a reliable basis to work with. In my opinion, the immediately following remark by Diodorus (and/or Posidonius) is much more interesting, namely that in Etruria the majority of free men (ἐλεύθεροι) also called such individual houses their own, a clear indication of the existence of free intermediate classes in Etruria.¹⁰⁰ But since research was and mostly is busy chasing fantasies of semi-free serf classes, this beautiful evidence of Etruscan middle classes remains little noticed in the discussion.

I will only briefly touch on the long discussion about the Etruscan term *etera*, the third central pillar of the argument. The last two hundred years have seen many different interpretations of it,¹⁰¹ such as *filius minor*, *servus* (Deecke 1875, 1877), *libertus*, *adoptatus* or *heres*, 'dependent' (referring to the Etruscan *penéstai*: Deecke 1884; Cortsén 1925), 'belonging to the mother's family', 'nobile', plebeian (Cortsén 1935), *peregrinus*, *cliens* (Heurgon), *puer*, *iuvēnis*, member of the *iuventus* (Rosenberg, Olzscha, Rix, Maggiani) and, more recently, 'classe inferiore di semiliberi [. . .] dotati di una (seppur limitata) capacità giuridica' (Facchetti¹⁰²). Some of the earlier interpretations have now been rejected (including *filius minor*, *servus*, 'nobile', and *peregrinus*), but the term remains a linguistic problem (even if maybe not a serious one). We know it mainly from late Etruscan funerary inscriptions from Perugia and, rarely, from Chiusi, in combination with male and, occasionally, female names bearing a *nomen gentilicium*, i.e. connected with free persons of probable citizen status. The term

⁹⁹ See for example the Loeb Classical Library Edition (1939). For a critique see also Harris, *Rome in Etruria*: 120, who thought the houses of the 'servants' to be a 'paradoxical statement', a 'quite impossible remark for Diodorus.'

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Yves Liébert, *Regards sur la truphè étrusque* (Limoges: Pulim, 2006): 166–70 who translates *therápontes* as *clientes*, but on p. 170 also speaks of 'classes moyennes ou moyennemet élevées.'

¹⁰¹ All interpretations are collected in Benelli, "L'etrusco *etera*": 211–17. Rix, *Das etruskische Cognomen*: 371, note 165 and 1977: 65–66, considered the term to be problematic. Given the lack of better alternatives, he finally tended towards 'membro della *iuventus*'.

¹⁰² Giulio M. Facchetti, "L'appellativo etrusco *etera*," *Studi Etruschi* 65–68 (2002): 226–27. His list of "plebeo" o "cliente" o "vasallo" o, eventualmente, "servo pubblico" is of little help, because of the legal differences between these categories. Cf. Giulio M. Facchetti, "Note etrusche (II)," *AION* 31 (2009 [2011]): 223–67, esp. 240–52.

seems also to have been used in the titulature of sacral-public (?) offices.¹⁰³ It is currently read either as a reference to a specific age group, indicating a member of the *iuventus*, or, more frequently, as meaning ‘dependent’ or ‘client’, a favoured interpretation. For logical reasons, however, we would in the latter case also expect a mention of the person on whom someone is dependent. In short, we are unable to give a secure translation. It may even be a descriptor of a person that has nothing to do with social status. Yet another interpretation has been suggested by Enrico Benelli, namely that **eter* refers to some sort of sacral status of the grave or burial, and not to the person.¹⁰⁴ The problem is complicated by the occurrence of the term *lautn eteri* attested with variants mainly in Perugia and Chiusi.

5 Towards New Shores

As has hopefully become clear, the traditional reconstructions are based on an extremely and dangerously thin foundation. When discussing Etruscan societies, we should finally leave behind these old patterns of interpretation and stop forcibly searching for and reading ‘Etruscan peculiarities’ into the scattered literary sources. They will not help us. We should concentrate on the various kinds of Etruscan sources (archaeological, iconographic, epigraphic), but in a much more systematic and much less prejudiced way. There can be no doubt that Etruscan civilization was built upon a social hierarchy, that a wide range of dependency relationships existed, that there were powerful family groups, clients, poor persons such as tenants and servants, as well as slaves and, surely, social tensions – my point is that there was *more than a rigid two-class system*. But we need to look for this more complex structure and open our eyes to the free and economically largely independent urban middle classes, the poor but freeborn citizens, and the rural free and landholding population with small or medium-sized farms, in addition to the landowning aristocrats. In short, we should pay more attention to the non-elites. And we should begin to integrate our reflections about the social structures of the Etruscan city-states into the general picture of the Graeco-Roman world, instead of separating them from it with reference to a supposed ‘rigid two-class society.’ The recent hoplite debate, for example, with its hypothesis of a socially non-homogeneous hoplite ‘class,’ offers good opportunities in this direction.

¹⁰³ The inscriptions that feature women are ET² Pe 1.934 and 1.1277. For *zila(t) eter(av)* (ET² Vc 1.56: mentioning a boy of twelve or fourteen years of age) and *camthi eterau* (ET² Ta 1.115: mentioning a girl), see Adriano Maggiani, “Appunti sulle magistrature etrusche,” *Studi Etruschi* 62 (1996 [1998]): 117–23, who interpreted them as hereditary sacred offices.

¹⁰⁴ Benelli, “L’etrusco *etera*”: 220 (‘denominazione di un qualche tipo di spazio consacrato’). As supporting evidence, he lists the inscription *suθi etera* (ET² Pe 1.328), two passages in the *Liber Linteus*, the sometimes discernible spatial or temporal separation of the word *etera* from the rest of the inscription, and the formula *lautn eteri ein senis* with negating character.

It is beyond the scope of this article to mention all the valuable research that has been done over the last decades on Etruscan archaeological contexts of all kinds – large and small urban centres, rural sites, sanctuaries and cult places,¹⁰⁵ necropolises of all phases and sizes – that allow insights into social hierarchisation. To move away from the ‘master and servant’ dichotomy and to give at least one concrete example, I would like to take a (brief) look at the Hellenistic necropolis of Fondo Scataglini in the north-western Monterozzi area at Tarquinia.¹⁰⁶ It is an interesting place to search for urban ‘middle classes,’ even if the poor documentation of the excavations carried out in the 1960s causes problems. After sporadic use in the last quarter of the fourth century BC, the vast majority of the rock-dug tombs were constructed over the course of one or two generations (325–280 BC), and intensely used until the late third to first half of the second century BC. In the following period, until the first century AD, the structures were mostly re-used by persons who were probably not related (at least agnatically) to the former families. The epigraphic material amounts to little more than one hundred inscriptions in Etruscan and Latin.¹⁰⁷ The Etruscan names regularly show a *praenomen* and a *nomen gentile*, as do the later Latin inscriptions of mostly *ingenui*, whose *gentilicia* recall Etruscan ones (not those of the eminent *gentes* of Tarquinia),¹⁰⁸ but also of *liberti*, some of whom have Greek-sounding *cognomina*. Even though a good proportion of the graves had already been looted at the time of excavation, the remaining grave goods (mostly pottery and some metallic objects such as vessels, mirrors and spear or lance heads¹⁰⁹) are instructive, as they often constitute standardized grave assemblages of an average level of wealth.

We know of a total of 175 graves, which differ greatly in type and size (see Fig. 1).¹¹⁰ Inhumation is clearly predominant, but with a significant frequency of cremations.

105 For a systematic study of Etruscan sanctuaries as indicators of socio-political structures and processes, see now Robinson Krämer, *Etruskische Heiligtümer des 8.–5. Jhs. v. Chr. als Wirtschaftsräume und Konsumtionsorte von Keramik*, Italiká 8 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2022).

106 See Richard E. Linington and Francesca R. Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini di Tarquinia: Scavi della Fondazione Ing. Carlo M. Lericì del Politecnico di Milano per la Soprintendenza Archeologica dell'Etruria meridionale*, vol. I–II (Milan: Comune di Milano, 1997); Federica Chiesa, *Tarquinia: Archeologia e Prosopografia tra Ellenismo e Romanizzazione* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 2005): 89–187.

107 Maristella Pandolfini, “Le iscrizioni,” in Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: 165–67. For the cippus inscriptions of the necropolis, see Jorma Kaimio, *The South Etruscan Cippus Inscriptions* (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2017): 152–61 no. 246–91.

108 According to Kaimio, *Cippus Inscriptions*: 31 and 117–18, the *gentilicia* show a considerable continuity between Etruscan and Latin inscriptions in Hellenistic Tarquinia, flanked by Latin *gentilicia* known from other Etruscan cities, from Rome and other areas of Italy.

109 Francesca R. Serra Ridgway, *I Corredi del Fondo Scataglini a Tarquinia: Scavi della Fondazione Ing. Carlo M. Lericì del Politecnico di Milano per la Soprintendenza dell'Etruria Meridionale*, vol. I–II (Milan: Comune di Milano, 1996): 287–99 for the metals (bronze and iron).

110 Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: esp. 133–47 and 174–75 (counting 178, in reality probably 175 graves because graves 158–161 form one single complex).

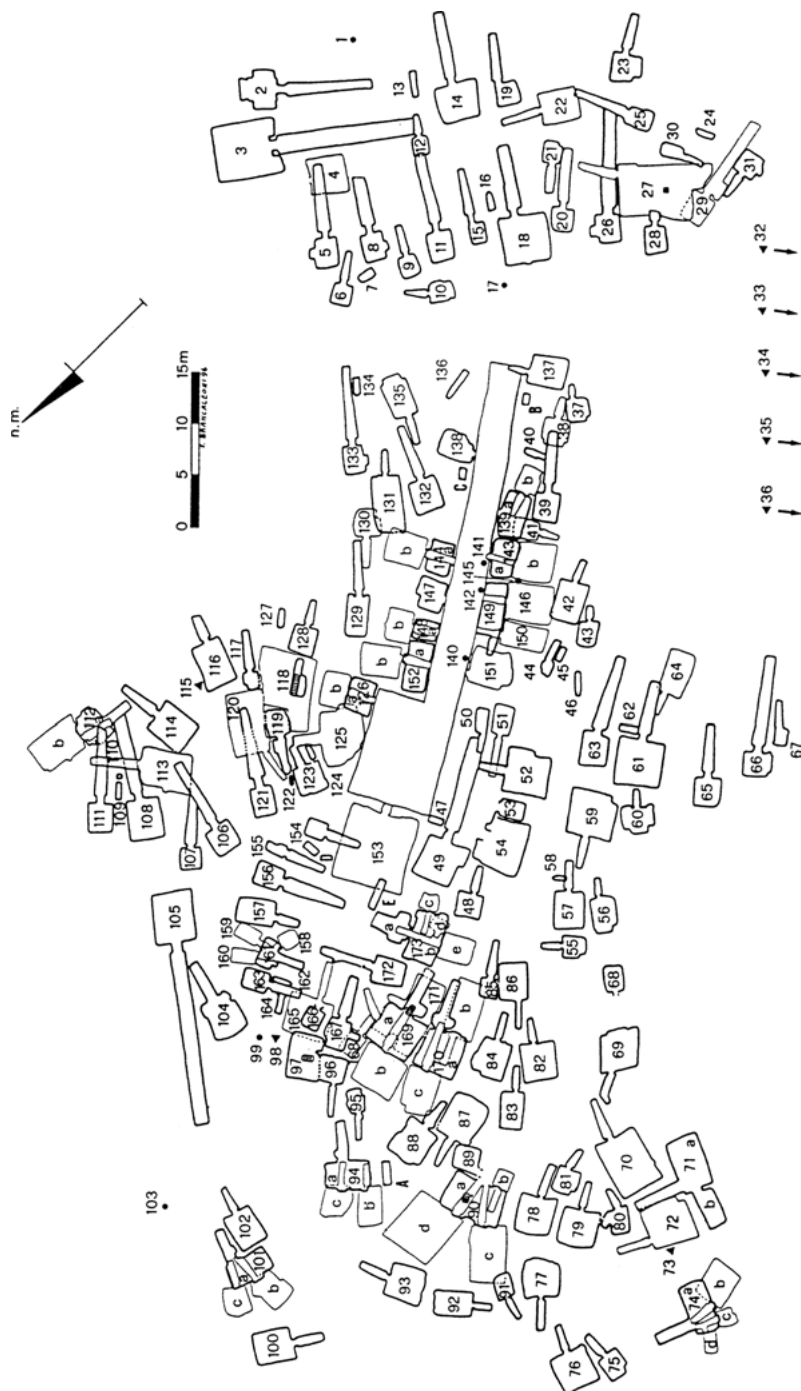


Fig. 1: Tarquinia, Fondo Scataglini necropolis: planimetric distribution of tombs.

There are 125 chamber tombs with only a single chamber which vary greatly in size (containing one, two, three or numerous depositions), and sixteen tombs with between two and four chambers for numerous burials ('camere multiple'). Tomb 153 (5051) in the center of the necropolis has one big chamber: This is the famous painted tomb of the *Anina* family, which was in continuous use for at least three generations, until the first century BC.¹¹¹ It is the largest tomb (7.50 m by 6.80 m), but there are a few others that are not much smaller, especially tomb 27 of the *Paprsina* family (7.00 m by 4.80–5.40 m) in the southeastern sector. Tomb 3 is a little smaller (5.60 m by 5.40 m). The well-to-do *Spitu* family owned two neighbouring tombs, chamber graves 70 (5.50 m by 4.30 m) and 72 (4.40 m by 4.70 m) in the western part of the necropolis. The various Etruscan inscriptions in the tombs testify to different links by marriage with northern Etruria.

Thirty-four simpler tombs were also found in the necropolis, mainly fossa tombs (about twenty), but also the so-called 'dromoi non finiti' (unfinished *dromos* tombs) and three isolated cremations (with ossuaries, and very poorly furnished¹¹²). The small size and presence of miniature ceramics found in some fossa graves suggest that they belonged to children, but others contained adults. Some fossa graves are rather isolated in the cemetery, while others were dug close and parallel to the *dromos* of a chamber tomb.¹¹³ The phenomenon of the intentional spatial proximity between simple and more elaborate tomb types is known from other necropolises in Etruria, such as Orvieto or Caere. There may be various reasons for this, one of which could be a personal dependency relationship (a loyal servant, a wetnurse etc.). Studies of ancient DNA will certainly be helpful in determining possible consanguinity.

The Scataglini necropolis does not appear to be the cemetery of a strict two-class system of masters and servants. On the contrary, it reflects a society with a solid, economically prosperous middle segment with internal levels of wealth in the fourth and third centuries,¹¹⁴ in good part consisting of freeborn persons who were linked by legal marriage to other parts of Etruria, therefore in possession of some kind of *conubium* with other Etruscan city-states. The spear or lance heads, found with a certain but limited frequency, do not refer to hunting activity (as Francesca Serra Ridgway

¹¹¹ Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: 95–104 with at least 23 depositions. For the inscriptions, see ET² Ta 1.151–163, 1.126, 1.282–284.

¹¹² These are graves 141, 142, and 110 (?): Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: 133–34.

¹¹³ For example: fossa grave 45 (1.50 m by 0.50 m, perhaps for a pre-adult person) and the small, unfinished chamber tomb 44; fossa grave 134 (quite large with a cremation burial in an *olla*, probably of an adult female, modest toilet articles, including a much-used bronze mirror) and the small chamber tomb 133; fossa grave 162 (1.90 m by 0.50 m, which contained an adult skeleton with a modest assemblage of pottery, early third century) and the small chamber tomb 163 (with three inhumations and three ossuaries).

¹¹⁴ Cf. Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: 177: 'una classe libera borghese media o medio-alta.'

assumes¹¹⁵) in an urban context, but could instead be read as a sign of the deceased's military duties in the service of the city-state (to fulfill, for example, obligations arising from the *foedus* with Rome) and as a sort of status indicator. Some of the more prosperous families even had the opportunity to rise up the social ladder: The *gens Anina* probably was not a family of old nobility, but of social advancement. It seems to have joined the elite only after a member of the family, Larth Anina, belonging to the third generation, completed his *cursus honorum* and became *zilath* in the late third century (ET² Ta 1.162). This is probably a case of a real *homo novus* in the Roman sense. Military service in a leading position played a role as well, if the *macst(r) zilc* mentioned in his *cursus* was indeed a military office.¹¹⁶ Among other grave goods contained in the *Anina* tomb were two spearheads, one sword blade and a long knife.¹¹⁷

The existence of some sort of patronage system in the cemetery in relation to the *Anina gens* is generally assumed,¹¹⁸ with reference to the spatial organisation of the necropolis, in which smaller graves are arranged around the *Anina* tomb. In reality, this possible cluster is not easy to identify precisely, as the 'central square' and the 'street' in front of the tomb give a false impression today. They never fulfilled a sepulchral function, but are remnants of the earlier quarry on the site. Nevertheless, the assumption of a (legally unclear) patronage system may be correct, but it needs to be more precisely defined, because in addition to a possible *Anina* cluster we have other probable clusters around other chamber tombs, especially in the southeastern sector (around chamber tomb 3), but also in the northern area (Fig. 1). Therefore, if we want to find archaeological hints to some sort of clientage, we need to assume several parallel patronage groups in a predominantly middle-class milieu, revealing, in fact, a socially complex situation and a multi-level society for Hellenistic Etruria.

115 Serra Ridgway, *I Corredi del Fondo Scataglini*: 298, states that there are no pieces of defensive weaponry such as helmets or shields, but a few instances of swords or knives. She links the 'cuspidi di lancia o giavellotto' with 'attività di caccia piuttosto che di guerra.'

116 The inscription was painted onto the sarcophagus and the stone bench below and is badly damaged: Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*: 102 (no. 153–112), 166; Giovanni Colonna, *Rivista di Epigrafia Etrusca* 52 (1984): 284–86, no. 10: 'una determinazione di *zilc* (in senso militare?).' For the family, see Massimo Morandi Tarabella, *Prosopographia etrusca*, vol. I.1, *Etruria meridionale* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2004): 62–67 (esp. no. 6) and Chiesa, *Tarquini*: 254–57.

117 Serra Ridgway, *I Corredi del Fondo Scataglini*, I: 181, no. 126 ('cuspidi di lancia foliata', length 32 cm, width 4 cm), 127–28 (sword), 129.

118 Torelli, *Storia degli Etruschi*: 234. Cf. Vera Zanoni, "Beyond the Graves: Crisis and Continuity in the Hellenistic Funerary Contexts from the Calvario Cemetery (Tarquinia)," in *Collapse or Survival: Micro-Dynamics of Crisis and Endurance in the Ancient Central Mediterranean*, ed. Elisa Perego et al. (Oxford: Oxbow, 2019): 84 and 91.

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Fig.1 Reproduction after Linington and Serra Ridgway, *Lo scavo nel Fondo Scataglini*, vol. II: pl. IV

