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CHAPTER

44 Etruscan and Italic Offerings in Greek Sanctuaries

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Abstract

Pre-Roman archaeological materials found in Greek places of worship date from the late Bronze Age to the fifth century BCE. The indigenous peoples of Italy and Sicily encountered Greek colonists on the Italian peninsula and absorbed their culture and their customs, thus becoming aware of the sanctuary tradition on the Greek mainland. Italic elites then began to visit international places of worship. Thus, one can ask whether Italic objects found in Greek sanctuaries were votives offered by Greeks returning home, or by visiting Etruscan and Italic people: both are possibilities since literary sources as well as some Greek and Etruscan inscriptions show that Etruscans also offered votive gifts to Greek divinities. This chapter traces the history of Etruscan and Italic offerings in Greek sanctuaries.

Keywords: [weapons](#), [Etruria](#), [thrones](#), [Olympia](#), [apoikiai](#), [cults](#), [fibulae](#), [Delphi](#), [cultic carts](#), [votives](#)

Subject: [Ancient Roman History](#), [Classical History](#), [Classical Studies](#)

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Christoph Ulf's recent analysis of cultural contacts between various groups was designed to identify characteristic features that can be applied to a reference model; it is an important theoretical basis for the topic in question, since one of the conclusions he reaches is that cultural contacts tend to be reciprocal. The development of cultural contacts assumes that along with the flow of elements from a transmitting group to a receiving group, there is a reciprocal return flow, or response flow, in which the recipient becomes the transmitter (Ulf 2009).

The substantial collection of pre-Roman Italic archaeological materials found in Greece, which includes at least 260 objects in bronze and 150 in ceramics and other materials, dates to the period from the late Bronze Age to the fifth century. Though most of the pieces are from Etruria, the collection includes weapons and personal ornaments associated with other regions of ancient Italy and Sicily. The vast majority come from

places of worship (map 44.1); the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia stands out with at least 149 metal artifacts, or just over half of the collection documented throughout the Greek world (Naso 2016). Although specific numbers should always be treated with caution, these are conservative numbers, certainly rounded down, as is the case for each category of objects found in the sanctuary. During the long history of research in Olympia, the finds have been scattered throughout numerous storage places and collections, and it is often difficult to verify old references regarding past discoveries. This hinders timely identification and the verification of non-contiguous fragments belonging to the same object. Helmets are a case in point: research carried out by Heide Frielinghaus estimated a total of 860 units; however, Thomas Völling had collected only 533 a few years earlier (Völling 2002, 94–96; Frielinghaus 2011).

p. 764

The heterogeneous nature of these artifacts leads us not to consider them in a unified way, but to isolate groups of objects of similar shape and typology within each sanctuary, and then to place them in the context of the cults and peculiarities of each site. In this way, we can obtain information about the environment of origin, and make assumptions about the circumstances of the dedication and the identity of the dedicator. In other words, we can ascertain the object's biography, to borrow a term from Jan Paul Crielaard (2003). It should be stressed that many of the 149 metal artifacts from the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia can be linked to the oracle of Zeus Olympios, whose existence—explicitly attested in passages of Herodotus, Pindar, Xenophon, and Strabo—was made more relevant by Ulrich Sinn, who highlighted the oracle's special expertise concerning colonial expeditions (1991, 38–46).

Map 44.1

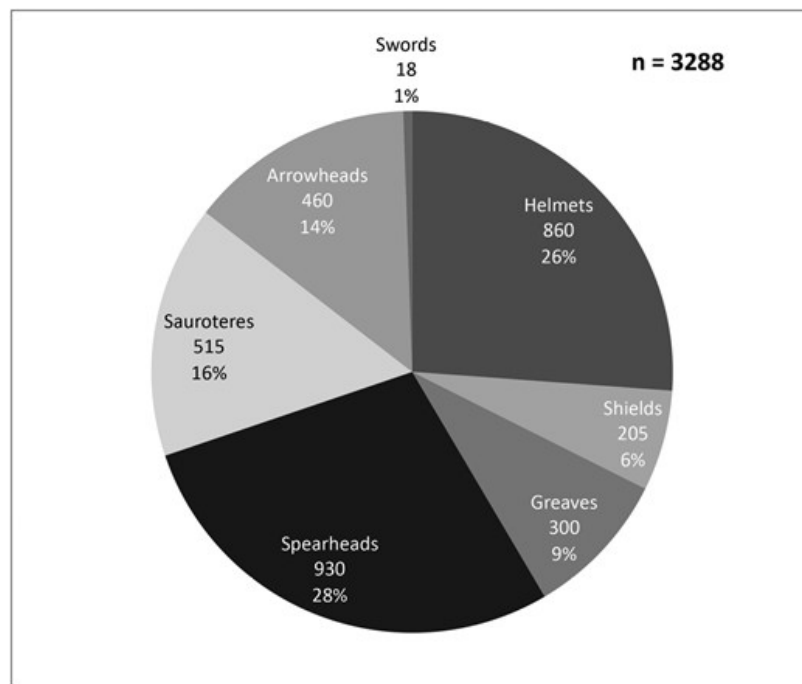


Greek sanctuaries yielding Etruscan and Italic votive offerings.

It therefore seems likely that those who consulted the oracle before their departure, including those who participated in military operations such as the founding of *apoikiai*, made a votive offering upon their return to confirm the mission's success. This fact, often overlooked in research, helps explain the high number of weapons found. In fact, weapons were the most common offering at Olympia from the late eighth to the mid-fifth century: more than 3,200 have been discovered so far. The sheer number of weapons is unparalleled in the Greek world, and it reflects the great importance attached to this oracle and Zeus's specific expertise (fig. 44.1). Among the various types, offensive weapons are the most numerous; among these the lance stands out, with at least 930 spearheads and 515 *sauroteres*. Swords are almost completely

p. 765 absent (Baitinger 2001, 89). ↳ Helmets dominate among defensive weapons, with the number of pieces estimated to be around 860.

Figure 44.1



Weapons from the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, eighth–fifth century (revised from Naso 2016, 276, fig. 1).

Among the bronze weapons whose formal characteristics indicate that they belong to pre-Roman Italy and Sicily, there are at least twenty-two lances, four helmets, seventeen shields, and one greave. The high number of ancient Italic and Sicilian spearheads reflects the general trend observed for the dedication of weapons at Olympia. Ornaments and accessories are the most represented type of Etrusco-Italic artifacts found at this site, including at least fifty-eight pieces (fibulae, pendants, belts, and jewelry), followed by offensive and defensive weapons that total at least forty-four units, in addition to thirty-one bronze vessels, twelve tools, and other objects, even including a cultic cart.

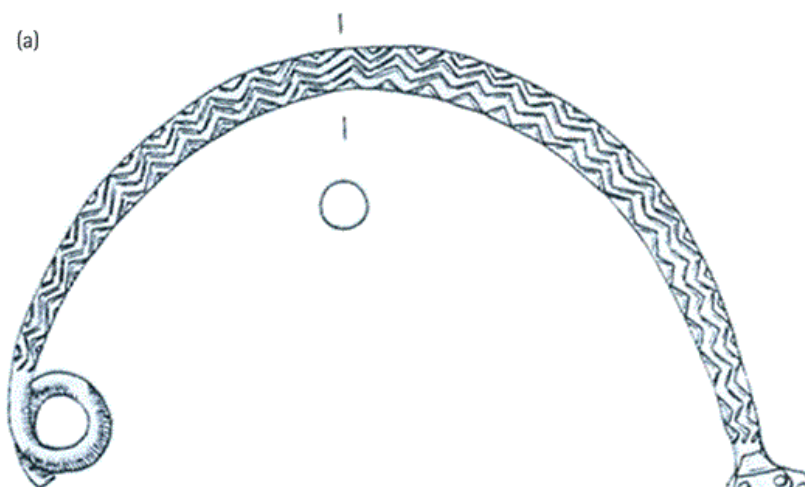
44.1. Chronology: The Earliest Artifacts

p. 766 Among the Etrusco-Italic artifacts found in Greece, some stand out for their great antiquity, indicating that they might predate the period in which the Greek colonies were founded—and thus they may prefigure other relationships than those considered so far. In any case, the conditional “might” is still necessary, because the pieces of certain dating are of uncertain origin, and those whose origin is not in doubt have only a very approximate dating. There is a diverse group of bronze objects preserved in the British Museum that belong to the first group, including an axe with an oval shaft hole and two razors with double-edged blades, purchased on the Athenian antiquities market (Bietti Sestieri and Macnamara 2007, 77 no. 169, 110 no. 259, 110 no. 261). The axe, believed to be from Corinth, is of a shape that was widespread during the final Bronze Age in Apulia and Basilicata, and was also found in Etruria; in fact, an axe with an oval shaft hole but of a slightly superior form was found in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia (see below). Razors, on the other hand, are not documented in the Olympian corpus, which consists mainly of fragments. In addition to the details of typology and conservation, the Athenian origin of the British Museum specimens also arouses skepticism; furthermore, the two razors have different chronological records. Their acquisition in Athens does not guarantee their provenance, since both Emeline Hill Richardson and Dyfri Williams have documented that some objects were discovered in Italy and then purchased in Naples or Rome in the nineteenth century by Greek antiquarians who sought to increase their retail value by reselling them in the Athenian antiquities market as artifacts of local origin (Richardson 1983, 187–188, n. III.B.4.4; Williams 1996, 11–15).

Alongside the finds of uncertain origin, there are a number of objects whose origin has been determined that belong to typologies and forms that may also predate Greek colonization in Italy. I am referring to a number of fibulae from southern Italy and Sicily, among which one with a simple bow arch and a catch-plate, already repaired in antiquity, stands out. It was made in Sicily and dates to the archaic period (Bronzo Finale 3) of the Pantalica II phase (Lo Schiavo 2010, 119, no. 47 = Philipp 1981, no. 988) (fig. 44.2a); it belongs to the D type distinguished by Fulvia Lo Schiavo. And recently identified in Pelopion, a solid disk catch-plate with engraved swastikas is all that remains of a fibula that can be dated at least as far back as the eighth century (see fig. 44.2b); it is comparable to similar objects from southern Campania (Kyrieleis 2006, 138 no. 169; re *comparanda*: Lo Schiavo 2010, nos. 770, 1438, 1463 and nos. 751, 1415, 1426, 1428).

p. 767

Figure 44.2a



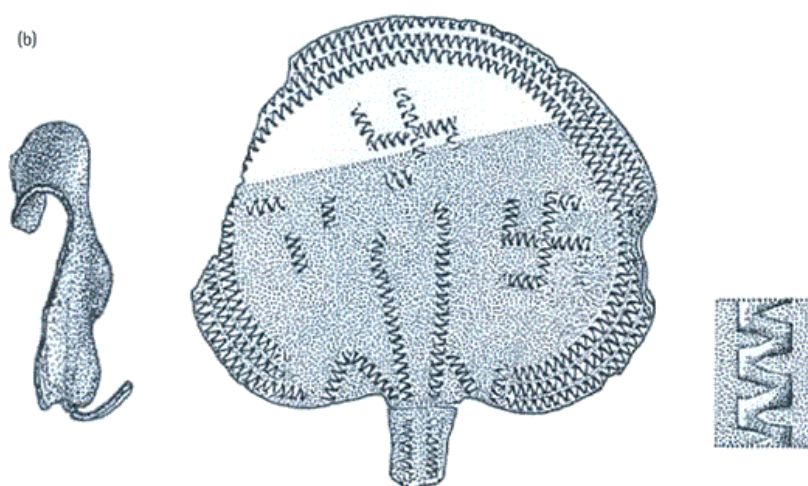
Bronze fibula from Olympia: simple bow arch (revised from Philipp 1981, no. 988, unknown draftsman).

Among the offensive weapons, an antennae sword from the Heraion of Samos is worthy of mention, also dating back to the early Iron Age. The distribution area of antennae swords in Italy has recently included specimens from the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria (Aversa 2011, 499 no. 4.43), leading us to consider this region as one of the possible areas of the Samos sword's origin (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 127 no. 445, pl. 58; von Hase 1997, 298, fig. 11), and enriching the general distribution map of these weapons (de Marinis 1999, 543–547, fig. 19).

The above-mentioned shaft-hole axe of Gianluigi Carancini's Crichi-type from Olympia (Olympia Museum, inv. no. B 841: Baitinger and Völling 2007, 11–13, Tab. 1) corresponds to a shape that was widespread during the early Iron Age in Apulia, Lucania, Calabria, and Campania (Carancini 1984, 218–220, nos. 4367–85). Contrary to Baitinger's contention, in my opinion the comparison with the Cirò-type specimens—also attested in the Mendolito di Adriano hoard—does not invalidate a chronology in the ninth century, since Albanese Procelli considers the shaft-hole axes to be among the oldest objects of this complex, which was later closed (1993, 182, no. M 7). Naturally, the proposed timeline refers to the axe's production and not to when it arrived in Olympia, since we do not have any information regarding the context of its discovery. In any case, we must reiterate the relevance of the styles in vogue in southern Italy prior to colonization. Axes had a multifaceted nature, as weapons, work tools, and representative elements (Iaia 2006, 192–194).

p. 768 We have no clues to identify the people who offered these objects in the Greek sanctuaries, or the history of the objects. While personal ornaments generally reflect the identity of the wearer, it seems preferable to consider weapons as spoils of war. However, this framework needs to be articulated. The two razors, whose contexts are completely unknown, cannot be considered because we do not have similar *comparanda*, and this lack is a further reason for skepticism regarding Greece as their findspot. However, what is certain is that many items of various functions—such as shaft-hole axes, which were very rare throughout the Italian peninsula—are found in significant numbers in hoards.

Figure 44.2b



Bronze fibula from Olympia: solid disc catch-plate (revised from Kyrieleis 2006, 138 no. 169; drawing Sonja Sutt).

In addition to these traditional hypotheses, we should mention the tendency of some researchers to include sanctuary offerings as part of the scrap metal cycle (Baitinger 2016). It should be noted that the Olympian finds under examination are currently in a very fragmentary state: it is not possible to tell whether they were already in fragments at the time of offering, or whether they were broken at a later time.

Although this is a slender thread, with the exception of the Olympian disk catch-plate belonging to the mid- to late eighth century, the above-mentioned artifacts seem to belong to the period when contacts between

the western and eastern Mediterranean (which had come to a standstill at the end of the second millennium BCE) were largely resumed, according to general consensus: around the mid-ninth century. This chronology suggests that relations between the Italian peninsula and Greece may have begun before the founding of the *apoikiai* in southern Italy and Sicily (Boardman 1999, 39–40).

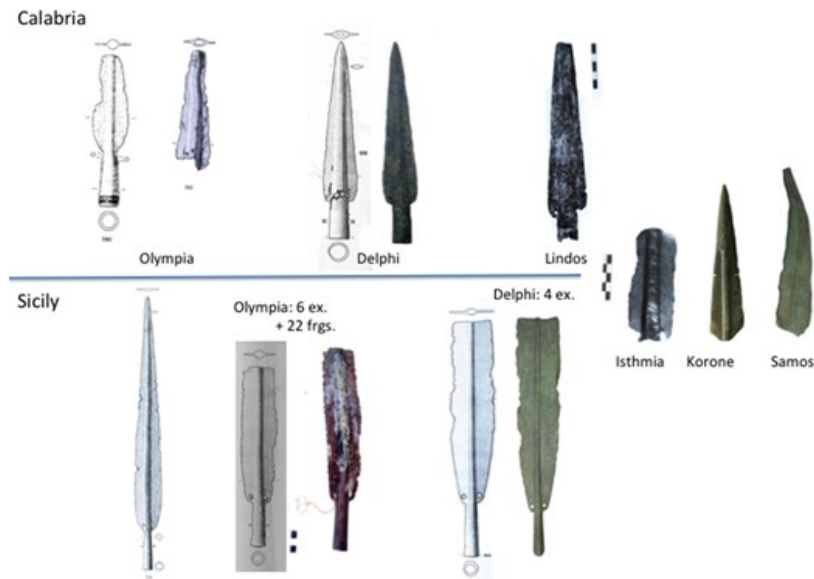
44.2. The Weapons

Several spearheads with two holes in the socket date back to the late eighth or the seventh century. They are similar in design to the type of spearheads found throughout southern Italy (Pacciarelli 1999a, 134–136, fig. 36; 1999b, 37 no. 25, fig. 28 and p. 47, no. 83, fig. 41) and Sicily (Albanese Procelli 1993, 180–181), which can be differentiated from each other based on past significant finds. Purely as an example, I draw attention to the type of spearheads found in the necropolis of Torre Galli in Calabria and in the Mendolito di Adrano hoard from Sicily. It seems reasonable, then, that spearheads of this shape found in Greece can be attributed to certain regions of southern Italy and Sicily.

Seven complete and twenty-two fragments of spearheads with holes in the socket have been found in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia, and at least four in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi (Avila 1983; Baitinger 2001, 38–39 and *passim*). Individual examples dating back to the eighth century have also been identified in the sanctuary of Apollo near Korone in Messenia (Versakis 1916, 90, no. 16, fig. 29, 2; Baitinger 2001, 39), in the cult site in Isthmia that later became the sanctuary of Poseidon (Jackson 1999, 164–165, no. A 3), in the temple of Athena Lindia on Rhodes (Gras 1985, 671), and in the Heraion of Samos (unpublished: Baitinger 2001, 39, n. 380) (see fig. 44.3). ↵

On the basis of significant discoveries made in the western Greek *apoikiai*—such as the great bronze spearhead found by Paolo Orsi under the Athenaion of Syracuse (1918, 576–577), in a context that may be attributed not to the indigenous settlement but to the Greek colony (Albanese Procelli 2003, 142)—similar remains found in Greece were considered spoils of war taken by Greek colonists from Italic peoples during the inevitable clashes provoked by the establishment of settlements on the coasts of southern Italy and Sicily. Remembering Thucydides's explicit information about the clashes over the founding of Syracuse and Leontini (6.3.2–3, ed. Stuart Jones, 1902, Oxford), one can look for similar clashes in other Greek colonies in southern Italy. Archaeological research has revealed the remains of indigenous settlements prior to the Greek colonies, at least in Locri Epizephyrii and in Cumae, respectively on the Ionian coast of Calabria and the Tyrrhenian coast of Campania; according to traditional interpretations, these settlements were abandoned in connection with the founding of the Greek *apoikiai*.

Figure 44.3



Italic spearheads from Olympia and Delphi.

The Italic spearheads found at Delphi and Olympia are the same shapes as those used in Sicily, Calabria, and Campania at the time of the founding of Syracuse, Locri, and Cumae, and could therefore have originated from the territories of these three *apoikiai* prior to being offered to the gods. The topographical distribution in Greece appears to support this interpretation; alongside the large concentration in the two Panhellenic sanctuaries, the isolated occurrences in other sanctuaries mentioned above could be explained as offerings from colonists who later returned to their homeland.

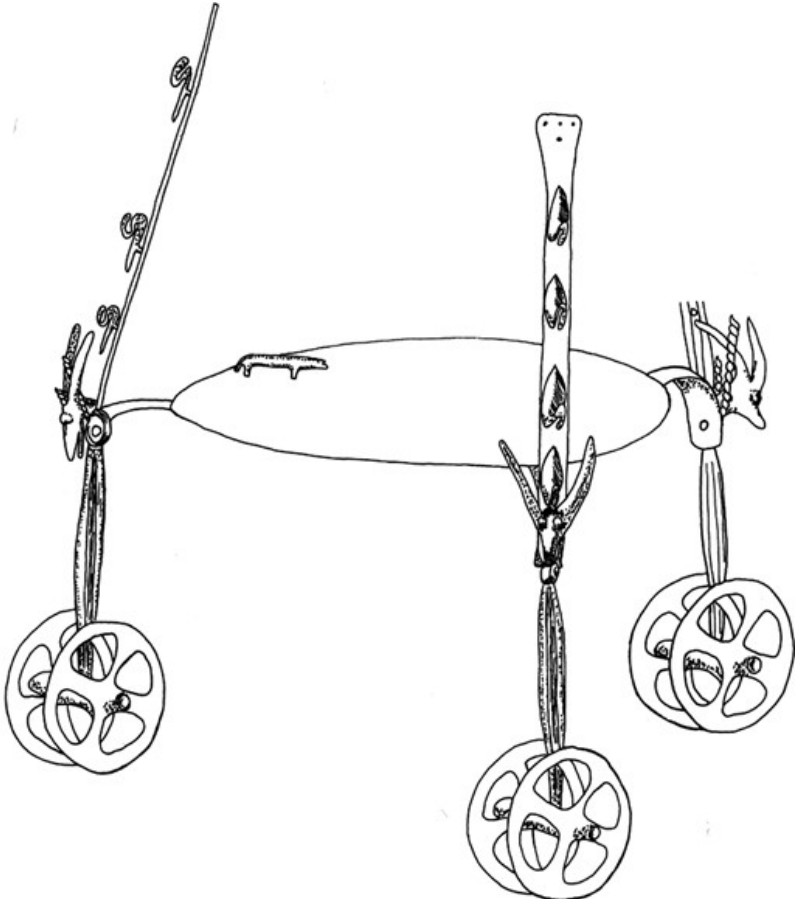
44.3. Other Items

p. 770

Other motivations should be considered regarding the offering of items from the Italian peninsula unrelated to weaponry, most of which are also concentrated in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. In this regard, it seems necessary to recall the international character assumed by numerous places of worship, particularly the Panhellenic sanctuaries of Apollo at Delphi and Zeus at Olympia, also chosen by Near Eastern monarchs for their offerings. This internationalism, acquired through the widespread popularity of oracular consultations, must have been sufficient to convince Etruscan elites to emulate Greeks and non-Greeks by presenting rich votive offerings in the style of Croesus (Dorandi 2006). This dynamic process lasted several generations and culminated in the fifth century with the construction of the *thesauroi* of Caere and Spina in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi (on Spina: Naso 2013).

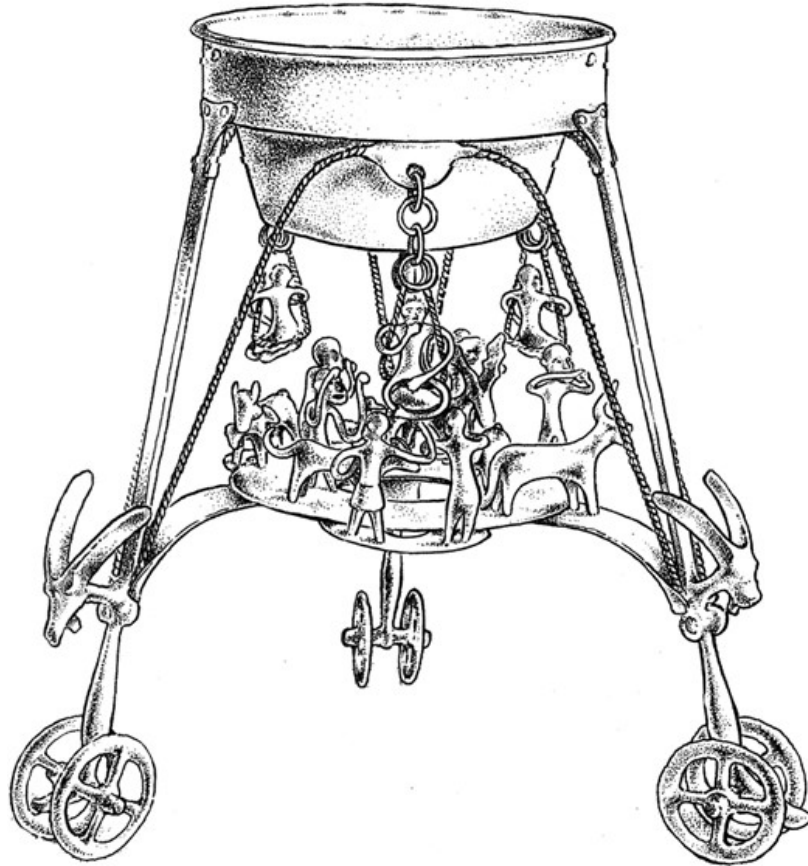
In addition to weapons and personal ornaments, it is useful to mention the highly symbolic objects of a sacred nature that provide eloquent biographical details, such as the remains of a cultic cart, also from Olympia, comparable only to the famous Lucera cart (see figs. 44.4 and 44.5). The remains from Olympia were identified by Magdalene Söldner, who classified them as an offering made by an individual who was presumably from Daunia (1994). Though the identification of the worshipper is not possible, the gift in a Panhellenic sanctuary of an object such as a cult cart, which on the Italian peninsula was used as a burial accoutrement for individuals of very high social rank, may indicate the existence of persons of royal rank in Daunia. An echo of the existence of these people reached Mimnermus—therefore, at least as far back as the first half of the sixth century (Mimn., frag. 22 West = Schol. Lykophr. Alex. 610).

Figure 44.4



Remains of a cart from Olympia (revised from Söldner 1994, Abb. 108) (drawing by Magdalene Söldner).

Figure 44.5



The cart from Lucera (revised from Naso 2016, 281, fig. 5a).

However, the attribution to Daunia must be compared with Bruno d'Agostino's assertion that the Lucera cart belongs to the same Campanian environment as the large ceremonial fibulae from Capua and Suessula. He believes that the cart was made in Campania during the eighth century (2002; Mazzei 2002). Several fibulae of various forms from Olympia and other Greek sanctuaries can be attributed to the Campanian cultural environment, as documented in Lo Schiavo's monumental work (2010). Daunia also leads to at least one other find of probable Greek origin: a personal ornament most likely from the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, preserved in the Carapanos collection at the National Museum in Athens. It resembles the axe pendants with two ornithological busts (Carapanos 1878, 100–101, pl. 54, 6) that are present in many museum collections (Martelli 2004, 9–10, n. 48; Benedettini 2005, 126–127, fig. 63; Nizzo 2007, 335, fig. 7).

p. 771 As an Etruscan counterpart to the Italic cart, we should consider Pausanias's much-cited passage describing the throne of Arimnestus in the pronaos of the temple of Zeus, in which he mentions that: "Arimnestus, king of Etruria, was the first foreigner to present an offering to the Olympic Zeus" (5.12.5). The item raises many questions, and several scholars have expressed opinions about it. It is useful to summarize the points on which the critics agree: a link between the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula and the Etruscans seems to be proved by the root *Arimn-* of the Latin idiom *Arimin-*, as seen in the names of Ariminum and the Ariminus River. The chronology of the throne is of course not mentioned by Pausanias, but there is consensus that it can be dated to the orientalizing period, as suggested in particular by the finds in Verucchio, an Etruscan center near Ariminum. The necropoleis of Verucchio have yielded the highest number of thrones so far discovered in a single site on the Italian peninsula, including at least fifteen made of wood (Mazzoli and Pozzi 2015). The lack of information in Pausanias's remarks regarding the material used for the throne offered by Arimnestus may mean that the material was not as precious as wood. Was it made of wood? How long can a wooden object be preserved?

To counter legitimate doubts about the likelihood of the preservation of wooden objects over many centuries, we can point to another item from Olympia itself: the Cypselus ark of cedar, ivory, and gold, carved in the first half of the sixth century and described by Pausanias in the second century CE, seen in the temple of Hera (Splitter 2000). It is worth noting that Arimnestus's offering should be considered within an articulate and complex framework. On the one hand, we have identified at Olympia two bronze lamina fragments belonging to southern Etruscan thrones (*pace* Verger 2011, 25–26). On the other, a very subtle game of correspondence was established in antiquity between Olympia and Delphi, the two Panhellenic sanctuaries that were in competition with each other. In this case the competition concerns the thrones of Arimnestus and Midas, who dedicated his throne in Delphi (Hdt. 1.14.3). If the proposed dating of the Arimnestus throne to the seventh century is correct, then its original location in the sanctuary of Olympia is unknown to us. In the fifth century it was placed in the pronaos of the temple of Zeus, almost as if it were a prelude to the Phidian statue of enthroned Zeus that was preserved inside the cella.

The custom of offering Etruscan bronze vessels in Greek sanctuaries dates back at least as far as the eighth century. Four bronze vase handles, including one pair and two separate pieces, have been found at Olympia. The characteristic polygonal section and rivets with conical heads are relevant to at least three biconical amphorae (Furtwängler 1890, 95, no. 662; and unpublished finds identified by Beat Schweizer, Tübingen). These three bronze vessels from the sanctuary of Zeus supplement the documentation of more recent bronze Etruscan vases found at Olympia and elsewhere: the large Vetulonian footed basins from Olympia and from the Heraion of Samos (von Hase 1997, figs. 21 and 22.1–2), the ribbed bowls from Olympia and Crete (Sciaccia 2005, 74 and 289, Et 2, fig. 97 and Ol 1, 81 and 292–293, fig. 110, Ol 8, 83 and 292–293), the tripod from Perachora (Verger 2011, 24, fig. 2.2), and the pearl-rimmed basins found in Olympia, Argos, Perachora, Corfu, and Claros (Krausse 1996, 414, integrated by Naso 2016, 282). Bronze handles probably belonging to corded *cistae* from pre-Roman Italy are also found at Olympia (Gauer 1991, 283–284, nos. E 187, E 188, Tab. 102, 1a, 1 c). The Vetulonian bronze basin in Samos appears to be a kind of counterpart to the contemporaneous bronze cauldrons with busts of lions or griffins found at Vetulonia, ascribed by Ulrich Gehrig to a Samian workshop that was within a network of relationships whose reciprocity is becoming increasingly clear (2004, 89–92, and 92–95).

44.4. Epilogue

The thread connecting Etrusco-Italic artifacts to Greek sanctuaries breaks in the fifth century, at which time Etruscan votive offerings are limited to refined toreutic products, such as incense burners (*thymiateria*: Naso 2009) and elaborated funnels (*infundibula*: Naso 2015). These objects reflect the popularity of luxury Tyrrhenian craftsmanship within the Greek aristocracy, as confirmed by several references to *Tyrrhenoi philotéchnoi* in Greek literature of the classical period (Mansuelli 1984). However, this interruption is not coincidental, because in the second half of the fifth century there was a noticeable change in the offerings in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia as weapons became extremely rare (Naso 2011).

The Etruscan and Italic finds in the Greek sanctuaries reflect different historical moments and various types of relationships, particularly for the diachronic perspective and the long chronology (ninth–fifth centuries). Some characteristics are clear: the votive offerings and the literary sources show that the indigenous peoples of Italy and Sicily met Greek colonists and received their culture and their customs. In this way knowledge of the existence of the sanctuaries on the Greek mainland spread and the elite began to visit international places of worship, emulating Greeks and non-Greeks. Attendance at the sanctuaries implies participation in rituals and the consulting of oracles. The sanctuaries of Aphaia at Aegina and Hera at Perachora have in fact yielded Etruscan inscriptions dating to the sixth century (Naso 2017, fig. 87.5). In the fifth century, broad support from the Greeks allowed the Etruscan cities of Caere and Spina, both boasting Greek origins, to have their own buildings (*Thesouroi*) in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi to receive public

and private offerings (Jacquemin 2000, 309, no. 012 and 352 no. 443). The two Etruscan cities were the only non-Greek cities to have had such an honor (Naso 2013, 326–327), and they had to become Greek. Thanks to the close relationship with the Greek world, legends and myths were developed in the sanctuary at Delphi, and Greek origins were created for the two Etruscan cities (Naso, forthcoming).

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