

Mesopotamia in the Ancient World

Impact, Continuities, Parallels

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Near Eastern Influences in Etruria and Central Italy between the Orientalizing and the Archaic Period

The Case of Tripod-Stands and Rod Tripods

Giacomo Bardelli

The Orientalizing phenomenon in Etruria and in the Italian peninsula: a general overview¹

Although contacts and trade relations between the Near East and the western regions of the Mediterranean Sea were already established during the late Bronze Age, it is only from the end of the 9th century and during the 8th century BCE that one can observe how this connectivity increased and contributed to a deep change in the societies of the Italian peninsula, and especially in the Etruscan one. In the last three decades of the 8th century BCE, a turning point in the development of the Villanovan society is reached. In fact, the communities of Central Italy were already going through a crucial redefinition of their social settings while notable aristocratic groups were emerging.²

This process is normally called “Orientalizing” by Etruscologists, who use a term once applied only to figurative arts to describe a phenomenon that lasted approximately 150 years (730–580 BCE). It is mostly thanks to Massimo Pallottino, the founder of modern Etruscology, that the term Orientalizing lost its equivocal link to the problem of Etruscan origins and gained a broader and more complex meaning, thus becoming a hermeneutical milestone for the investigation of the Iron Age in the Italian peninsula.³

After the studies of many scholars in the last forty years,⁴ Orientalizing has become far more than a mere art-historical concept. In current research trends it can be interpreted as a complex phenomenon of assimilation and imitation of material, cul-

¹ I would like to thank the organisers of Melammu, Prof. Robert Rollinger and Dr. Erik van Dongen, for having accepted my contribution, and Prof. Alessandro Naso, for having encouraged me to look “eastwards”. I am also grateful to Silvia Balatti and Joachim Weidig for some very useful bibliographical suggestions.

² On the Villanovan culture, see now the synthesis in Bartoloni, 2013.

³ Pallottino, 1939.

⁴ See at least: General subject: Strøm, 1971; Naso, 2000; Étienne, 2010; Sannibale, 2013. Culture contacts and networks: von Hase, 1995; Babbi/Peltz, 2013. Figurative arts: Geppert, 2006. Exhibitions: Bartoloni et al., 2000; Martelli, 2008. Theoretical debate: Riva/Vella, 2006.

tural and ideological features of Near Eastern sources by the Etruscan elites, a true “epochal leap”, as it has recently been described.⁵ The media of this transmission were those seafarers and merchants from the Eastern Mediterranean who sailed westwards looking mainly for mineral reserves from the rich ore deposits of the Colline Metallifere, Tolfa district and Elba island, who are currently identified with Phoenicians, merchants from the Levant and Greeks from Euboea.

The first contacts in the Tyrrhenian Sea between local communities and eastern navigators date back to the second half of the 2nd millennium BCE. The role of Sardinia during this phase was extremely important, since the island from the end of the Bronze Age was already the target of Cypriote merchants, who were looking for raw materials, especially western tin. Sardinian communities interlaced close relationships with the Villanovians as well, as testified by the Nuragic objects found in some of the Middle-Tyrrhenian cemeteries.⁶ Furthermore, the big island was also the target of Easterners and Euboeans, who sailed along different commercial routes in a network that reached the island as well as the Tyrrhenian shores and the western Mediterranean. A pre-colonial phase of sporadic contacts, attested by the first oriental imports in Etruria and *Latium Vetus*, anticipated the more intense and relevant relationships of the 8th century, as the presence of *orientalia*, Greek pottery and Phoenician amphorae in the Tyrrhenian area demonstrates.⁷ Although people and goods were circulating with increasing frequency, Villanovan groups firmly kept control of Tyrrhenian Sea networks, as shown by the fact that Greeks, who had started to colonize the southern regions of Italy, did not settled down north of the Bay of Naples, where they founded Cumae and Pithekoussai.⁸

These earlier contacts show the great vitality of this area during the first phase of the Italian Iron Age, but a considerable increase of the oriental presence can be observed only from the end of the 8th century BCE. Although the conventional chronological boundaries are not in question and the 7th century BCE may still be considered with good reasons as the proper Orientalizing period, recent discussions about this phenomenon have raised the question about the legitimate use of the term Orientalizing.⁹ A critical approach to the problem, especially by Anglo-Saxon scholars, has pointed out both an implicit diffusionist perspective of the word and its vagueness referring to an undefined “Orient”, but also a problematic “relationship between evidence and interpretation” implicit in this period-label.¹⁰ In other words, the “object-oriented notion of the Orientalizing phenomenon” and the study of imported artefacts in relation to local elites have been accused of being the only basis for a more complex historical construction whose validity is debatable.¹¹

⁵ Sannibale, 2013: 99.

⁶ On the relationship between Sardinia and Etruria, see Milletti, 2012.

⁷ Botto, 2012; Pedrazzi, 2012: 57–62.

⁸ Torelli, 2000a: 385–386.

⁹ See the contributions in Riva/Vella, 2006.

¹⁰ Purcell, 2006: 23.

¹¹ Riva, 2006: 111.

Despite this critical approach to the problem, which nevertheless shows the current importance of the topic, the notion of Orientalizing for Etruscology is still essential. If not misunderstood, the definition suits the description of a phenomenon whose characteristics are still under investigation perfectly, especially the nature of the evidence and the actors of cultural contacts and changes. Most of all, Orientalizing in Etruria was not a passive acculturation process determined by external influences, but rather the result of a lively and conscious negotiation stemming from the needs of Etruscan aristocracies. As remarked by Giovanni Colonna and Alessandro Naso, the increasing self-consciousness of some aristocratic groups led to the search for new means to represent the growing importance of their status.¹² These means were offered by the new material and cultural patterns of Near Eastern origin circulating in the Mediterranean area during the final decades of the 8th century BCE. The aristocracy needed a way to express its superiority and did so by appropriating and re-signifying some of the models with a Near Eastern origin. Thus, more than a phenomenon of imitation, Orientalizing was primarily a matter of choice.

In order to understand the consequences of this choice, it is necessary to consider the circumstances that brought the Etruscan aristocracies to introduce such a significant amount of oriental elements in their world at a certain point of their history. The roots of this phenomenon can be recognized in the slow process that conduced to the formation of proto-urban centres, located where the main Etruscan cities would later appear.¹³ Meanwhile, the social differentiation inside local communities led the *aristoi* not only to gain increasing power, but also stimulated their desire to highlight their own status. The adoption in Etruria and *Latium Vetus* of the family name and, still before the end of the 8th century, the introduction of a writing system modelled on the Greek alphabet are clear indicators of the change in action. Therefore, the social complexity and the cultural level gradually reached by the populations of central Italy set the ground for the introduction of external elements of varying nature, helping the development of Etruscan society. While Phoenicians and Euboeans brought precious objects as “gifts” in order to strengthen the relationships with local *principes*,¹⁴ these intentionally chose to emulate the way of life of Near Eastern courts, introducing objects and habits that directly alluded to what Greeks called *tryphé* and *habrosýne*.¹⁵

The material evidence of this process is represented by numerous goods that in many cases soon inspired local productions. In the context of this paper it is impossible to fully describe the different classes of objects which testify to this phenomenon – e.g. jewellery, ivories, metal vessels, glass, pottery, all of them with precise models in the Near Eastern area or in Greece – or more monumental influences, clearly visible in sculpture and funerary architecture.¹⁶ The imports were

¹² Colonna, 2000: 55; Naso, 2012: 433.

¹³ On this process, see Pacciarelli, 2000 and 2012.

¹⁴ Sciacca, 2006–2007.

¹⁵ Naso, 2000: 122.

¹⁶ For detailed literature about specific objects and topics, see Naso, 2010: 195–198, and Naso, 2012.

now associated with craftsmen who settled down in central Italy, thus transmitting knowledge and ideas that deeply influenced the indigenous societies. Basic contributions by many scholars focused on single objects or dedicated to more elaborated expressions of the Orientalizing have appeared in the last years, so that scholars can now better define the interactions between the agents of the transmission and the spreading of the phenomenon through the Italian peninsula, where the Etruscans played the main, but not the only, role. In point of fact, features of Orientalizing in other regions, like northern Italy, *Latium Vetus*, Campania and, on the Adriatic side, Veneto, Picenum and Daunia, call for the same attention. The cultural contact with Greece and the Near Eastern regions also did not go in one single direction, since there is evidence of Etruscan goods found in the Aegean area.¹⁷

An example of cultural transfer: wine drinking and banquet equipment

The Near Eastern contributions to the Orientalizing phenomenon cannot be reduced to the introduction of foreign objects into a receptive milieu. A crucial task for current scholarship is to try to understand what made the assimilation of some new cultural patterns possible, since it is hard to believe that objects connected with the sphere of ritual and power were imported and imitated in large quantities without the transmission of a proper ideological background. In this regard, a research area that has opened up very promising perspectives in recent years is the one connected to the ritual ceremony of consuming meat and wine during banquets and symposia.

In this particular case one can witness towards the end of the 8th century BCE the mature phase of a process that started already with the first contacts between Etruria and the Eastern Mediterranean, although it is not always easy to distinguish the Near Eastern and the Greek components. Already in the first half of the 8th century BCE, geometric bowls from Euboea with pendent semi-circles can be found in some peninsular and insular centres of the Tyrrhenian Sea, soon imitated and produced in the Tyrrhenian area, as a demonstration of their importance for the diffusion of wine consumption.¹⁸ Later on, some elements typical of the oriental banquet influenced the Greek symposium and, at the same time, reached Italy, like the custom of eating in a reclined position or the use of sumptuous furniture, such as the big cauldrons with figural protomes, which were transferred along with the complex ideology linked to the ritual of drinking wine in selected communities.¹⁹

As Mauro Menichetti rightly pointed out, there were probably three different components in wine drinking practices at the beginning of Orientalizing in central Italy: the indigenous one, where the wine is the so-called *temetum* mentioned by the Latin sources; the Greek one, well known through epics and the ceremony of *symposion*; and the oriental one, inspired by a ceremony called *marzeah*, which almost cer-

¹⁷ Naso, 2006.

¹⁸ Naso, 2012: 49.

¹⁹ Bartoloni/Cordano, 2013.

tainly originated in the Levantine area.²⁰ According to Mario Torelli, a later echo of the first component remained probably in some peculiar vessel shapes like *kyathoi* and Nikosthenic amphorae,²¹ while the Greek *symposion* became the common background of Etruscan feasting ceremonies, especially from the late 7th century BCE onwards. However, the difference between local traditions and imported cultural elements is not always clear, since the presence of oriental artefacts does not imply automatically the transmission of their original function. Thus, one cannot but agree with what Annette Rathje has recently argued: “We must make an effort in understanding the function of the objects and phenomena that are considered evidence of acculturation. We have to scrutinize the praxis of consumption.”²² In this direction goes, for example, a recent study of the composition of banquet sets in some selected tombs from the Etruscan cities of Veii, Caere, Tarquinia and Vulci, which outlines the complexity of the ceramic artefacts collected in single tombs according to their functional features.²³

Since I am interested in tracking the elements of oriental tradition, it is worth recalling briefly at least two important acquisitions of the last years based on a thorough re-examination of the archaeological finds related to wine drinking. The first example is that of Syrian and Phoenician tripod-bowls in funerary contexts from southern Etruria and *Latium Vetus*, studied by Massimo Botto.²⁴ The scholar has emphasized the association of these objects with the equipment for the consumption of wine and, due to wear traces on their inner surface, has interpreted them as mortars. According to Botto, these tripod-bowls were used in Central Italy also for grinding spices that were added and mixed with wine, thus recreating what he defined as “a Syrian way” of drinking wine, a habit that also spread to Assyria during the 7th century BCE.²⁵

The second case is that of ribbed bowls, catalogued and studied by Ferdinando Sciacca,²⁶ who was able to identify a few bowls from Urartu and Assyria in Italic tombs, but especially almost 300 ribbed bowls of local production which clearly derive from Near Eastern models. The great popularity of this vessel form, produced in Italy until the middle of the 7th century BCE, is also testified by its presence in selected tombs that certainly belonged to aristocratic individuals and can be explained with its highly symbolic value among Near Eastern courts, where ribbed bowls were representative of royal status.²⁷

Derived from the Near East and connected to a specific way of feasting and wine drinking is also the use of stands and tripods, which encountered increasing favour as elements of banquet sets from the last decades of the 8th century BCE onwards. Unlike the objects previously discussed, a thorough and extensive study of tripods of

²⁰ Menichetti, 2002: 76–81. On the difference between banquet, *marzeah*, *symposion* and symposium see also Nijboer, 2013.

²¹ Torelli, 2000b: 147–148.

²² Rathje, 2010.

²³ Bartoloni et al., 2012: 207–269.

²⁴ Botto, 2000.

²⁵ Botto, 2000: 84, 89.

²⁶ Sciacca, 2005.

²⁷ Sciacca, 2005: 423–440; Sciacca, 2006: 289.

the Orientalizing period is not available, since they have never been grouped together in a catalogue and many of them are still unpublished. Nevertheless, the main features of this class of material can be outlined in a general overview, in order to illustrate a case that represents clearly some of the dynamics mentioned above.

One word, different hues: rod tripods, cast tripods and tripod-stands

First of all, some terminological clarity is due. The term “rod tripods” refers to a class of stands formed by a framework of three rod-shaped legs alternated with three arches, assembled by means of different techniques. Legs and arches support a ring and are often connected in the lower part by means of horizontal inner struts. Beside these basic features, such tripods show a certain variety in the structural solutions and can be also embellished by cast decorations. The expression was chosen by Poul Jørgen Riis in his first study about this class of material, which was normally indicated in the archaeological literature with the German “StabdreifüÙe” and the Italian “tripodi a verghette”.²⁸ Since Riis listed together different groups of tripods, the expression has later become canonical for different types, even though the construction and the chronology of some of these objects show undeniable differences. Therefore it is normal to indicate as “rod tripods” the Cypriot stands of the late Bronze Age (fig. 1) as well as the Etruscan tripods probably produced in the city of Vulci around 500 BCE (fig. 2).

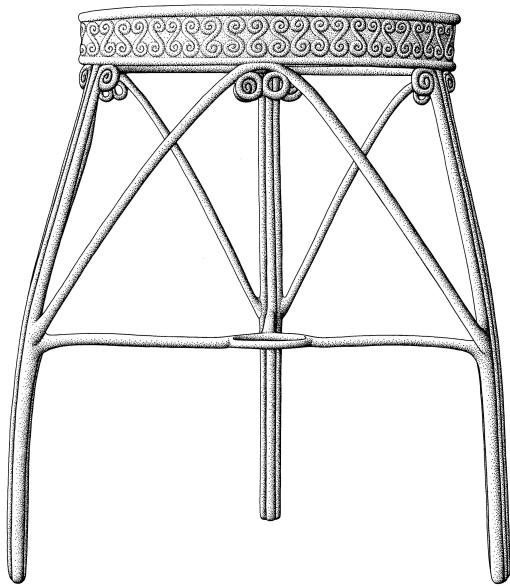


Fig. 1: Cypriot tripod-stand from Kouklia, Skales, tomb 58:31. H. ca. 29 cm (after Matthäus, 1985: pl. 92, fig. 684).

²⁸ Riis, 1939.



Fig. 2: Late-Archaic rod tripod, provenance unknown. Vulcian production.
Metropolitan Museum of Art. H. 66,1 cm (after De Puma, 2013: 75).

This circumstance seems indeed to create some confusion, not only for what concerns the technical aspects, but also for the large chronological *hiatus* between some specific types. Considering the construction of the tripods, I prefer to call “rod tripods” only those specimens composed by three main elements (feet – rods – upper ring) realized separately and joined together, but still clearly distinguishable. These features are typical of decorated tripods of medium-large dimensions (ca. from 30 cm to 60 m), produced in different areas of the Near East, Greece and Italy from the 8th to the mid-5th century BCE.²⁹ The more generic term “tripod-stands” better suits Cypriot tripods of the late Bronze Age and a miscellaneous group of tripods found in Central Italy, dating exclusively to the Orientalizing period, while “cast tripods” indicates a group of Cypriot small tripods and miniature stands with cast legs of the late Bronze Age.³⁰

a) Tripod-stands

With the beginning of the Orientalizing period an high amount of tripod-stands was included among the goods of many tombs concentrated in the area between southern Etruria, *Latium Vetus* and the Faliscan region. They show a considerable typological variety and, in some cases, seem to survive until the 2nd half of the 7th century BCE. From a structural point of view, these stands have often small dimensions and consist basically of a ring or a metal foil, normally of bronze, supported by three hammered legs. A preliminary classification can be based on the structure of the legs, which seems to vary the most, while inner struts are not always present. In addition to a group of stands with crossed bars located between the legs (fig. 3), already identified by Colonna,³¹ it is possible to identify at least three other types of stands whose legs consist each of one, two, or three and more flat metallic bands (fig. 4). Of course problems regarding their chronology and workshop attributions still need to be solved, but a few observations about their models and their function can be made.

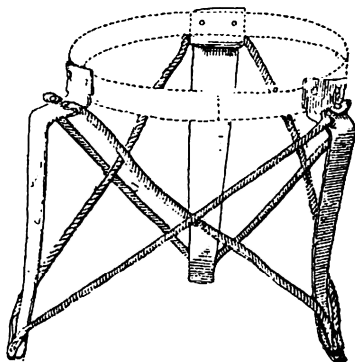


Fig. 3: Tripod-stand from Narce (VT),
Petrina, tomb 2. H. ca. 18 cm
(after Colonna, 1977: 476, fig. 4).

²⁹ For an overview about Near Eastern and Greek rod tripods, see Bieg, 2002: 21–67.

³⁰ The definition was introduced to distinguish them from late Cypriot rod tripods (Catling, 1964: 199–203).

³¹ Colonna, 1977: 475–478.

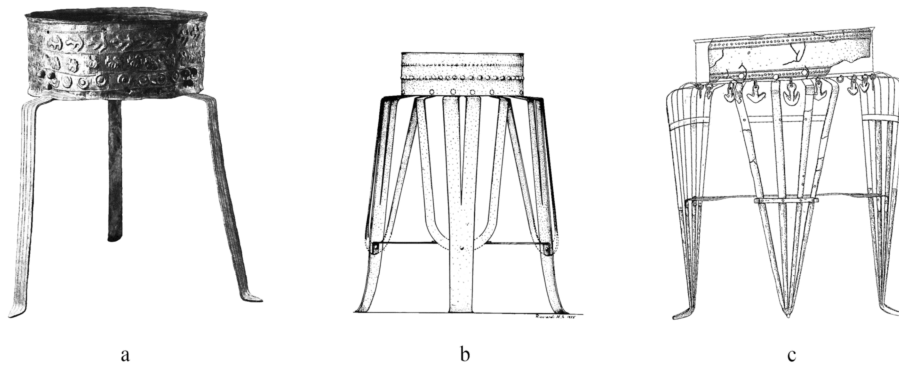


Fig. 4: Different types of tripod-stands: a) Vulci, necropolis Osteria, Tomba del Carro di Bronzo. H. 36,5 cm (after Naso, 2000: 117); b) Castel di Decima, Tomb XV. H. ca. 30 cm (after Colonna / Bartoloni / Colonna di Paolo et al., 1976: pl. LXII; c) Veio, necropolis Casale del Fosso, Tomb 871. H. 50 cm (after Drago Troccoli, 2005: 110, fig. 15).

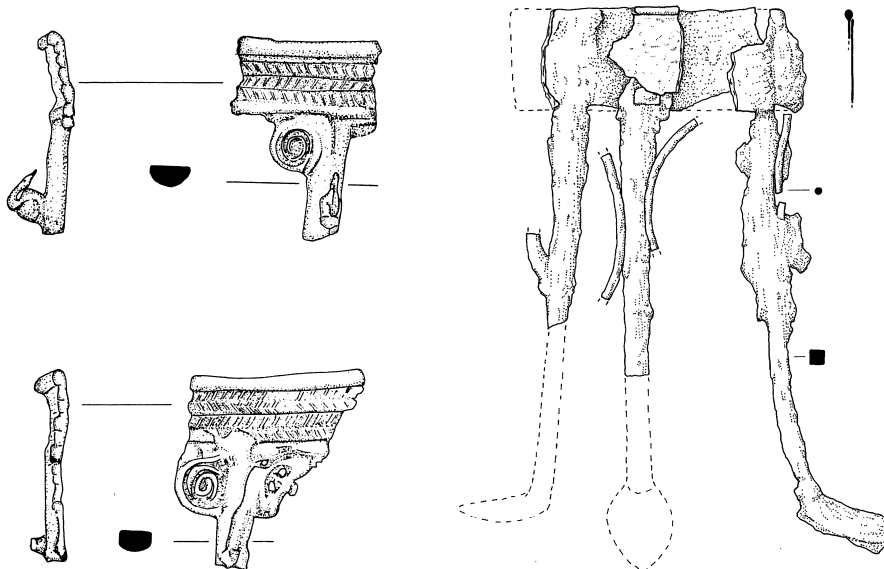


Fig. 5: Fragments of cypriot tripod-stand from the hoard of Piediluco (after Lo Schiavo / Macnamara / Vagnetti, 1985: 37, fig. 14, 4-5).

Fig. 6: Tripod from Veio, necropolis Quattro Fontanili, tomb FF7-8 (after Iaia, 2010: 36, fig. 5, 1).

Even with a basic typological grouping it is easy to notice that some of these tripod-stands seem to recall the form, structure and, in some cases, the decorative patterns of the old Cypriot tripods.³² Unfortunately, these similarities raise some

³² Colonna, 1977: 478-479, fn. 19.

difficulties concerning the possible relationships between Cypriot and Centro-Italic stands, which have so far not received a convincing solution.

Since Cypriot bronze tripod-stands and cast tripods of the late Bronze Age lie outside the chronological limits of the Orientalizing period, I will not discuss issues concerning their production and dating, which have been exhaustively studied by Hector William Catling, Hartmut Matthäus and, in recent years, by Giōrgos Pappasavvas.³³ Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that during the 12th or the 11th century BCE some of these tripods were introduced in Sardinia,³⁴ where they inspired a local production of similar stands. By contrast, they are practically absent from the Italian peninsula, with the exception of three fragments probably belonging to one single stand found in the hoard of Piediluco (TR), in Umbria, and dated to the second half of the 10th century BCE. (fig. 5).³⁵

When the first tripod-stands of local production appeared in Central Italy at the very beginning of the Orientalizing period, almost two hundred years had passed since the deposition of this only exemplar known from the peninsula, so that its presence is not relevant to the whole problem. Little help in this sense is offered by two isolated iron tripods of the first half of the 8th century BCE, found in the necropolis of Quattro Fontanili at Veio, which do not seem to have much in common with the Orientalizing stands, especially from a technical point of view (fig. 6).³⁶ It seems that either we are dealing with a sort of “missing link” in the archaeological evidence, or, more likely, that a direct connection to Cypriot stands was not the source of inspiration for the production of Centro-Italic stands. With the current state of the research, the only hypothesis remains the one proposed by Colonna, who stressed the importance of some clay models from Euboea, where the form of Cypriote stands could have survived until the Geometric period, perhaps thanks to Cretan mediation.³⁷ However, while this explanation could be valid for the stands with crossed bars between the legs, a thorough investigation is still necessary for other types.

Another interesting research path examines the concrete function of Orientalizing stands, i.e. the identification of the objects placed above them.³⁸ Although they were certainly related to banquet sets, their precise purpose before the burial deposition remains unclear, and the possibility that they were placed on the fire cannot be excluded *a priori*. Considering their small dimensions, one would be tempted to infer that they were meant to support small vessels, but this fact might not always be true. In regard to their secondary use, it is worth noting that in a few cases the disposition of these objects inside the tombs is known. There is apparently no stand-

³³ Catling, 1964: 190–199; Matthäus, 1985: 299–340; Matthäus, 1988; Pappasavvas, 2001; Pappasavvas, 2004.

³⁴ Macnamara, 2002: 165. See also the critical discussion about the chronology of the stands found in Sardinia in Pappasavvas, 2004: 48.

³⁵ Lo Schiavo / Macnamara / Vagnetti, 1985: 40–42; Matthäus, 1985: 306.

³⁶ Notizie Scavi, 1972: 223, nr. 23, fig. 19 (badly fragmented); Iaia, 2010: 36, fig. 5, nr. 1.

³⁷ Colonna, 1977: 479–480. See also Colonna, 1980.

³⁸ For some interesting remarks about the role of ancient stands in connection to wine consumption, see Graells/Sardà, 2007: 81–83 and 86–87.

ard rule for the objects found above them or in their vicinity, but the associations could possibly be indications of their primary function or rather represent local burial customs and symbolic rituality.³⁹ Further research will hopefully shed new light on this aspect, but it seems clear that the function of tripod-stands was somehow different from that of rod tripods.

b) Rod tripods

Unlike the problematic case of the other stands, a tangible presence of oriental elements can be demonstrated for the oldest rod tripods found in central Italy. As I have already pointed out, these tripods share common features such as larger dimensions and a structure composed by three different parts, fitted together in various ways. Many of these early rod tripods have been recently commented upon by Ellen Macnamara, who studied the tripod from Trestina (PG) and its Mediterranean background,⁴⁰ and by Gebhard Bieg, who outlined the main features of the forerunners of Greek rod tripods.⁴¹

Even though the material evidence consists of very few objects and their aspect shows considerable differences, it is possible to recognize some common elements due to peculiar traits of structure and decoration. These elements find close parallels in the Near East and disappeared later when the Etruscans developed a local type of rod tripod with well-defined features, depending on Greek models rather than on the old oriental ones. Five rod tripods can be taken into consideration: two from the Bernardini and Barberini Tombs at Praeneste (Palestrina, RM); the previously mentioned tripod from Trestina; a tripod from Falerii Veteres (Civita Castellana, RM); and, finally, one of uncertain provenance in the Museum Leblanc-Duvernoy in Auxerre.

The Bernardini and Barberini tripods

Both the Bernardini and Barberini Tombs are dated to the second quarter of the 7th century BCE and are well-known for their extremely rich grave goods, which include also foreign pieces, like Phoenician silver bowls, cauldrons with protomes and conical stands.⁴² Although they are located in *Latium Vetus*, they belong to a cultural horizon which shares with Etruria the most opulent aspects of the

³⁹ See, for example, the tripod-stand from the so-called “Tomba del Carro di bronzo” in the necropolis Osteria of Vulci (680–670 BCE), associated to a one-handed cup of large dimensions (Moretti Sgubini, 1997: 144; Moretti Sgubini, 2000: 569–570, figs. 15, 36). The same association recurs in Vulci in a tomb in “località Marrucatelto”, where a different type of tripod-stand probably supported another large one-handed cup (Moretti Sgubini / Ricciardi, 2001: 200–203, nrs. III.B.2.9–12). A very different use is attested for another tripod-stand found in Veio, necropolis Casale del Fosso, tomb 871, where a bronze amphora was placed above it (Drago Troccoli, 2005: 105, 110, fig. 15).

⁴⁰ Macnamara, 2009.

⁴¹ Bieg, 2002: 21–27.

⁴² See Canciani / von Hase, 1979 (Bernardini Tomb); Curtis, 1925 (Barberini Tomb). Both tripods are in Rome, Museo nazionale etrusco di Villa Giulia.

Orientalizing, at least in the exhibition of symbols of power and wealth in burial contexts – and it is impossible here not to mention at least the famous Regolini-Galassi Tomb at Cerveteri for Etruria⁴³ and the princely tomb at Rocca di Papa (RM) for *Latium Vetus*.⁴⁴



Fig. 7: Bernardini tripod. H. 56,5 cm (after Canciani / von Hase, 1979: pl. 33, fig. 1).

⁴³ See Pareti, 1947 and, at least, Sannibale, 2008.

⁴⁴ Arietti/Martellotta, 1998.

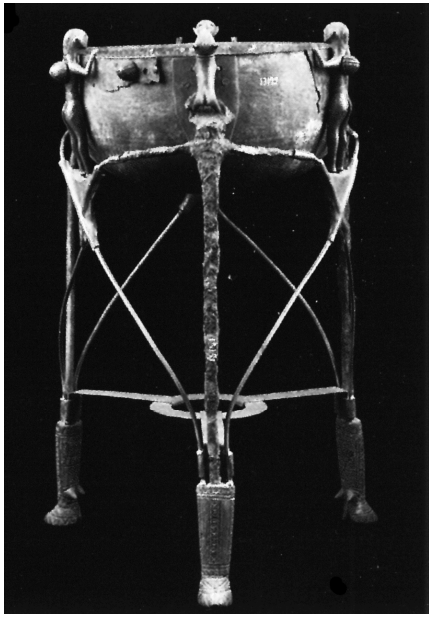


Fig. 8: Barberini tripod. H. 40 cm (after Torelli / Moretti Sgubini, 2008: 227, nr. 83).

The two tripods are almost identical and present the same structure, with an iron framework supported by bronze feet and a cauldron inserted at the top and surrounded by small bronze figures representing animals and human beings (fig. 7–8).⁴⁵ The presence of fixed cauldrons, quite unconventional for rod tripods, does not prevent me from considering it within this category of objects, because their structure follows the same construction principles of other tripods. The mixed nature of their composition has already been acknowledged by many scholars, especially concerning the cauldron with figures, a clear reference to Near Eastern and Greek cauldrons with cast figures attached under the rim (*Kesseltiere*),⁴⁶ and the crossed position of the rods, which recalls some local tripod-stands belonging to the group discussed above.⁴⁷

Little attention has been dedicated to their bronze feet, shaped as bovine hooves with two projecting dew-claws on the rear side (fig. 9). A closer look shows that they reproduce almost exactly the form and dimensions of some feet belonging to a group of rod tripod fragments which were found in Room AB of the North-West Palace of Nimrud (ancient Kalḫu), better known as the “Room of the Bronzes”.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For the tripod Bernardini (h. 56,5 cm), see Canciani / von Hase, 1979: 49, nr. 44, pls. 32, 1–34; for the tripod Barberini (h. 40 cm) see Curtis, 1925: nr. 78, pl. 25, and the reconstruction in Torelli / Moretti Sgubini, 2008: 227, nr. 83.

⁴⁶ Some comparisons for the animal figures are displayed in Herrmann, 1966: 153–158, pls. 62–64.

⁴⁷ Colonna, 1977: 478; Macnamara, 2009: 94. See also Martelli, 2008: 124; Naso, 2012: 439–440.

⁴⁸ Curtis, 2013: 3–6. See also Sciacca, 2005: 400, fn. 782. All the fragments are in the British Museum.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Fig. 9: Foot of the Bernardini tripod (after Canciani / von Hase, 1979: pl. 33, fig. 5).

Fig. 10: Feet from the Room AB of the N-W Palace at Nimrud (after Curtis / Reade, 1995: 145, nr. 108–110).

Three feet in particular offer a direct comparison (fig. 10), since they have the same elongated structure with flat hooves and dew-claws, while the feet of the Praeneste tripods differ from them only for the presence of engraved decorations on the surface.⁴⁹ In his publication about late Assyrian bronzework, John Curtis displayed the 89 fragments of rod tripods found in Nimrud, which allowed him to reconstruct at least 16 different rod-tripods, probably produced in a Syrian workshop.⁵⁰ Although their chronology is not clear, it seems that these objects could be dated to the 8th century BCE and that they were spoils from wars conducted by Assyrian kings.⁵¹ Even if the rod tripods from Praeneste have been considered the work of local craftsmen who were inspired by foreign models,⁵² the strong similarity between their feet and the ones from Nimrud raise the question of a possible direct contribution of a Levantine metalworker to the construction of the two objects. This circumstance would not be surprising, since the presence of oriental craftsmen working in middle-Tyrrhenian workshops has already been suggested.⁵³

⁴⁹ Curtis, 2013: 170, nr. 470.

⁵⁰ Curtis, 2013: 65–67.

⁵¹ David Barnett proposed to interpret the bronzes found in the Room AB as the booty of different campaigns, probably conducted under Tiglath-Pileser III (ca. 740 BCE; see Barnett, 1967: 6) or Sennacherib (ca. 700 BCE; Barnett, 1974: 27), though the objects could have been also tributes delivered to Nimrud during a broader amount of time (see also Curtis, 2013: 3–6).

⁵² Macnamara, 2009: 94, who supposes that a prototype in bronze and iron could have reached Italy.

⁵³ See e.g. Martelli, 1991; Camporeale, 2011 and 2013: 885–893.

The Trestina tripod

The use of casting bronze on iron and the presence of bull's hooves are distinctive features of the Trestina tripod too (fig. 11). This tripod is unparalleled in the whole Mediterranean area and, if its reconstruction is correct, it is with 140 cm the largest known example in bronze and iron from the Orientalizing period. Ellen Macnamara has provided a thorough study of this piece, highlighting its peculiarities and, at the same time, its coherence with the tradition of rod tripods from the Near East, Cyprus and Greece for what concerns its technical and stylistic aspects. The tripod has been dated to the 7th century BCE, but it is still impossible to suggest a more precise chronology, and based on the available evidence, it is unlikely that it was made in the Italian peninsula.⁵⁴

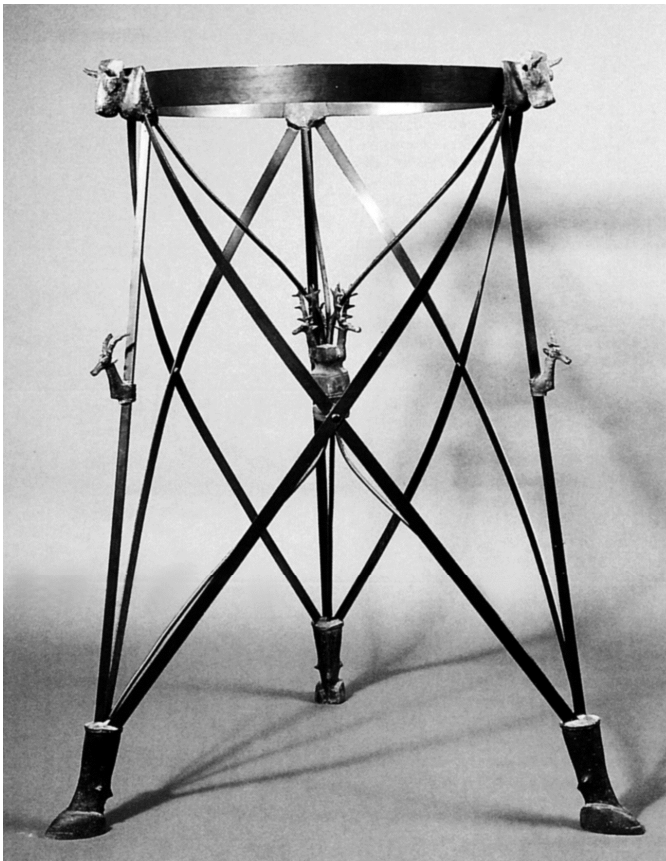


Fig. 11: Trestina tripod. H. 140 cm (after Bartoloni / Delpino / Morigi Govi, 2000: 201).

⁵⁴ See the detailed discussion in Macnamara, 2009: 97–106. For the reconstruction of the casting techniques, see Formigli, 2009.

The Falerii and Auxerre tripods

The tradition and the models attested in Central Italy by these tripods were later replaced by an Etruscan way of casting and assembling tripods, which became distinctive during the 6th century BCE. Two further examples show the gradual introduction, on the one hand, of technical devices that will become typical of late-archaic rod tripods in Etruria, and, on the other hand, the disappearing of oriental features.

The first of these tripods has been found during the 19th century in a tomb from the necropolis of Penna at Falerii Veteres, which is unfortunately still unpublished.⁵⁵ Its structure of bronze and iron and the presence of bulls' heads on the upper ring (like the Trestina tripod) recall some aspects already observed on the other tripods, and it is very likely that this tripod should be dated still in the 7th century BCE, or not too much later. However, judging from the little information available about the context, which includes Attic black figure pottery probably dating to the beginning of the 5th century BCE,⁵⁶ the chronological difference between the tripod and the latest grave goods would be quite considerable. This fact allows me to interpret the tripod as an heirloom, kept for many generations and deposited in the grave only a long time after its construction – a phenomenon that seems to be characteristic also of other rod tripods.⁵⁷

Though the tripod was executed by casting bronze elements on an iron structure, one detail in particular reveals that it was made when the local workshops were already working on a new type of tripod, probably influenced by Greek prototypes: the feet are in the shape of feline paws and, most importantly, they were built with five holes on the surface to allow the insertion of the rods, a technique that can be found almost exclusively in Etruria (apart from an isolated foot from Samos⁵⁸).

As the shape of the feet turned slowly from bovine hooves to feline paws, the combined use of iron and bronze was also replaced by bronze alone, and the casting-on procedure was limited to some parts of the tripods, while it was otherwise replaced by riveting. A good demonstration of this phenomenon is the rod tripod without provenance currently at the Leblanc-Duvernoy Museum of Auxerre (fig. 12), which represents the perfect counterpart of the Falerii tripod just described. Its feet are still in the shape of hooves, but the whole construction is made of bronze, and the rods are partially riveted to the upper ring, which consists of a moulded bronze sheet.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Sciacca / Di Blasi, 2003: 212, fig. 35; 225.

⁵⁶ Savignoni, 1897: 322, fn. 1.

⁵⁷ Guggisberg, 2004.

⁵⁸ For the foot in Samos, see Gehrig, 2004: 299, nr. ST50, pl. 120.

⁵⁹ Rolley, 1962: 476–492.

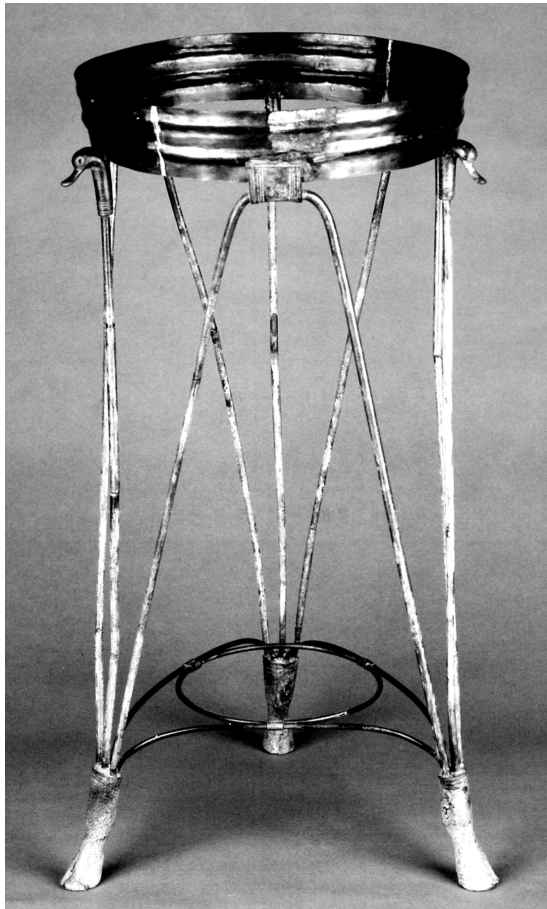


Fig. 12: Rod tripod, provenance unknown. Auxerre, Museum Leblanc-Duvernoy. H. 67,5 cm (after Orgogozo/Lintz, 2007: 160).

An Urartian “anomaly”? The tripod from Numana (AN), Tomb Quagliotti 64

Apart from the problematic case of the Trestina tripod, scholars do not know of any oriental rod tripod found on the Italian peninsula. This is true only if one considers the chronological boundaries of the Orientalizing period, but outside of them there is at least one remarkable exception. I would like to focus on a rod tripod that has never been published before and has consequently never been given the attention it deserves. This tripod was found in 1965 at Numana (AN), an important site of ancient Picenum, inside the tomb n. 64 from the Quagliotti necropolis.⁶⁰ Looking at its

⁶⁰ Landolfi, 1998. I am grateful to the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Marche and especially to Dr. Maurizio Landolfi, who allowed a direct investigation of the tripod.

structure, the feet are shaped as bull's hooves with two dew-claws and are connected to each other by means of three horizontal struts inserted into projecting sockets (two for each foot), while the rods and the arches support a ring (fig. 13). The whole tripod is made of bronze. Based on its features, the tripod is not Etruscan, and it is impossible to find any comparison among any group of rod tripods attested on the Italian peninsula, where this type of tripod never occurs, neither during the Orientalizing nor during the Archaic period.



Fig. 13: Rod tripod from Numana (AN), Tomb Quagliotti 64. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Ancona – Inv. nr. 25027 (Phot. Bardelli).

Nevertheless, the rod tripod from the Quagliotti tomb 64 is not an isolated example. The only existing parallels are represented by few tripods that are traditionally considered as products of Urartian workmanship, made in Anatolia or northern Syria (fig. 14).⁶¹ Their structure, with feet connected by means of three struts, mirrors in

⁶¹ In general, see Bieg, 2002: 25–27. I list as follows the tripods and fragments of Urartian tripods known to me, to which the exemplar from Numana should be added:

– tripod, from Altıntepe (Ankara, Museum of Anatolian Civilization – Inv. Nr. 8823; Barnett/Gökçe, 1953: 123, nr. 2, pl. XIII–XIV; Macnamara, 2001: 294, fig. 1–2);

each detail the one of our tripod, from which they differ only in size, the tripod from Numana being somehow slenderer and taller. The feet in the shape of bovine hooves are normally enriched by decorations, which are not clearly visible on the Numana tripod because of a greenish corrosion patina which covers their surface. Apart from its slender proportions, the Numana tripod matches perfectly the Urartian type of rod tripods.



Fig. 14: Urartian rod tripod with cauldron, provenance unknown. Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum. H. of the tripod 50 cm (after Rehm, 1997: 367, fig. XXXII).

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- tripod, unknown provenance (Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum – Inv. Nr. 80/8; Rehm, 1997: 233–235, nr. U43);
 - tripod, unknown provenance (Munich, Prähistorische Staatsammlung; Kellner, 1976: 74, nr. 99, pl. 4);
 - two feet, unknown provenance (already in a private collection; van Loon, 1989: 263, pl. 50);
 - fragment of one foot, Athens (Athens, National Museum – Inv. Nr. 6988; Macnamara, 2001: 299, fig. 9).

Only one of these three tripods comes from a documented excavation and was found in a tomb in Eastern Anatolia, at Altintepe (another small fragment comes from the Athenian Acropolis, but its context is unknown). The Altintepe tomb dates from the 2nd half of the 8th century BCE, although this chronology is debated.⁶² Nonetheless, it is likely that this type of rod tripod was produced during the 8th century BCE, since similar tripods are represented on the well-known reliefs from the palace of Sargon II at Ḫorsabad with the plunder of the Ḫaldi temple in Muṣaṣir (714 BCE).⁶³

At this point, if the Numana tripod corresponds to an Urartian type, as its structure clearly demonstrates, it should probably be dated still in the 8th century BCE. This fact is astonishing if one considers the chronology of the tomb Quagliotti 64, which can be dated without problems to the end of the 5th century BCE, as indicated by the presence of a black figure *lekanis* from Taranto from 410 BCE.⁶⁴ The tomb belonged to a warrior, who was buried with an incredible amount of rich objects, including numerous pieces related to the symposium, among which a Greek bronze *hydria* of the first half of the 5th century BCE stands out.⁶⁵

The presence of one tripod of Urartian type in a Picene tomb of the end of the 5th century BCE raises many questions. Of course, it is not easy to know how the tripod came in the possession of a Picene warrior who lived almost three centuries after its date of production. It is impossible to say whether we are dealing with an import, kept for a long time before being deposited inside the tomb,⁶⁶ or rather with an object that the deceased purchased somehow during his life (the result of a plunder?).⁶⁷ However, it is necessary to remember that the presence in Picene tombs of artefacts significantly older than the associated grave goods is not uncommon – and it is worth mentioning at least the case of two silver *phiaiai*, one from a Gallic tomb at Filottrano (AN) and another from the so-called Tomb of the Queen at Numana, both produced in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 6th century BCE, but buried in more recent contexts.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, a detailed discussion on the nature and chronology of the tripod's arrival to the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula cannot be conducted here, as this would require to also reconsider the question of the trade

⁶² See the discussion in Bieg, 2002: 26–27.

⁶³ See Radner, 2012: 252, fig. 17.06; Mayer, 2013: 89–93. The tripods on the relief from Ḫorsabad are interpreted as water jug supports in Kubba, 2006: 89–90, fig. 9.19.

⁶⁴ Paribeni, 1991: 60–61, nr. 21.

⁶⁵ Shefton, 2003: 331–332, pl. III, a–e.

⁶⁶ On east Mediterranean presence in the Picenum during the Orientalizing period, see Martelli, 2007.

⁶⁷ Regardless of the questions related to the interpretation of the tripod, it must be noted that this object joins the very small group of documented Urartian (and Assyrian) imports in the Italian peninsula, which includes mostly ribbed bowls, a lion's head-shaped *rhyton*, a fragment of the figural decoration of a cauldron, and other few objects, for which see Sciacca, 2006, 286–288, and Montanaro, 2010.

⁶⁸ For the *phiale* from Filottrano, see Rocco, 1995 (the tomb dates in the second half of the 4th century BCE). For the *phiale* from the Numana “Tomb of the Queen”, see Landolfi, 2001: 357, nr. 125 (date of the tomb: end of the 6th century BCE). See also Shefton, 2003: 317–318.

routes followed by certain imports.⁶⁹ I will leave these and other questions for a more detailed publication of the Numana tripod.⁷⁰

Conclusions

Summing up the evidence presented about these few examples, it is possible to judge the impact of Near Eastern models on the development of this class of tripods in Etruria and central Italy. First of all, there is no clear evidence of any oriental rod tripod found on the Italian peninsula. Even though Ellen Macnamara does not believe that the Trestina tripod could have been the product of an Etruscan or an Italic artisan, which might be true, she leaves open the possibility of the presence of a “master craftsman” working in central Italy.⁷¹ In any case, its isolation hinders all efforts to localize its workshop, at least until a direct and convincing parallel is found (it could also be a unique creation, especially considering its large size). The rod tripod from the tomb Quagliotti 64 at Numana is also completely isolated, but in this case the situation is more complex and, considering its burial context, it is not sure whether this tripod can be interpreted as an evidence of the Orientalizing phenomenon in the Picenum.

More generally, the first rod tripods made in Central Italy were characterized by pronounced experimental features, which combined local and foreign elements. Surely during the whole of the 7th century BCE there did not exist, or at least I do not know of, any kind of rod tripod with typological traits that are entirely independent of external models. This fact and the small number of known examples contrast with what can be stated about tripod-stands. Even at a preliminary state of the investigation, these objects display a wider range of structural features and a considerably higher number of attestations. Thus, if tripod-stands seem to be quite frequent objects among banquet sets, rod tripods are absolutely exceptional.

From a technical point of view, all rod tripods dating to the 7th century BCE are made of iron and bronze, like many of those produced in Near East and in Greece,⁷² while the use of bronze alone seems to be limited to the 6th century BCE.⁷³ The technique of casting-on, attested by the Trestina tripod and by the tripod from Falerii, was often employed by Etruscan craftsmen, although in Etruria this procedure was

⁶⁹ For some general observations, especially concerning the contacts between Picenum and the Greek world, see Shefton, 2003.

⁷⁰ The tripod is currently under restoration in the laboratories of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum Mainz.

⁷¹ Macnamara, 2009: 106.

⁷² On bimetallism in ancient Mesopotamia, see Moorey, 1994: 285–286. The combined use of bronze and iron for rod tripods is probably already attested by a tripod from Hasanlu, which could be dated before 800 BCE (de Schauensee, 2011: 16–17; 25, fig. 1.15a–b, including the discussion on the chronology of the period IVB at Hasanlu at the page XXX of the foreword).

⁷³ See Bieg, 2002: 28–40. The scholar correctly insists on the fact that the poor information from the contexts of Greek tripods does not allow for a detailed chronological study. He also does not exclude that the combination of bronze and iron could have survived until the end of the 6th century BCE.

almost limited to artefacts made exclusively of bronze.⁷⁴ Finally, concerning the plastic decorations of the tripods, only the Trestina tripod recalls the bull's anatomy both in feet and upper fittings, while in the other cases the meaning of the combination of the two parts of the animal was probably not significant enough. Quite indicative in this sense is the abandoning of the hooves, replaced by feline paws, to which also bull's heads could be associated.

As with conic stands, the function of rod tripods as supports for cauldrons is undeniable, and their combination is somehow certified by the Praeneste tripods, which include the cauldrons directly in their construction. It is also worth noting that the majority of rod tripods found in contexts of the Orientalizing period and of the initial phase of the Archaic period were always associated with bronze cauldrons, thus composing the classical equipment for mixing and serving wine and water during banquets. This association seems to disappear around the end of the 6th century BCE, but the lack of reliable contexts suggests that a possible change of their function should be considered with caution, whereas a different way to display the tripods inside the tombs cannot be excluded.

Notwithstanding the very low number of rod tripods of the 7th century BCE currently known from central Italy, it is interesting to note how they mirror the main aspects of the Orientalizing phenomenon described above, especially for what concerns the various components of ritual feasting and banquet. On a background constituted by elaborated banquet sets which already included many forms of tripod-stands, one can see the introduction of extraordinary exemplars in the first decades of the Orientalizing, probably accompanied by oriental craftsmen, as the Praeneste tripods and maybe the Trestina one seem to suggest. The difference between tripod-stands and rod tripods concerning size and function could also recall distinct moments of the banquet, suggesting a difference between personal and collective preparation and consumption of wine – but in this case probably only thorough research on tripod-stands could confirm this hypothesis. Near Eastern and Greek models seem to coexist, the latter also influenced by the first, until they leave place to the elaboration of an Etruscan type of rod tripod that preserves the original inspiration only in the shape. Traditionally connected to the ideology of banquet and drinking as one of the optional instruments, they probably gradually gained a higher symbolic value and were therefore preserved for many years as precious objects before their deposition in tombs among other grave goods. Finally, in the Archaic period rod tripods became in Etruria a medium for complex mythological scenes, but by that time the dynamics of the Orientalizing period were probably just a memory.

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⁷⁴ On joining techniques see the classical work of Drescher, 1958. For the casting-on in Etruria see Formigli, 1981: 53–57; Sannibale, 1999: 280–281, and the remarks on the term in Formigli, 2009: 185.

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