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DEPOSITI VOTIVI E CULTI DELL'ITALIA ANTICA

Ingrid Edlund–Berry and Helen Nagy

The abundance of offerings to deities is an important tool for understanding ancient religious expressions throughout the Mediterranean, and is of no less importance to students of Etruscan culture. The Etruscan practice was to place offerings to deities at temples or at any place that was considered sacred. Most offerings are very modest in nature—small terracotta figurines of worshippers, or occasionally deities, heads or body parts, small votive cups, also of clay, and, particularly in northern Etruria, bronze figurines of worshippers, or occasionally, of deities. Votive offerings have been found at all Etruscan sites, some as scattered surface finds, but the greatest number occurs in specially prepared “deposits” in wells or trenches that received thousands of votive objects in order to make room for more in the sanctuary.

Because of the quantity of votive offerings in the Etrusco-Italic world, it has been difficult to get a sense of distribution, quantity, and chronology. However, thanks to the efforts of Professors Mario Torelli (University of Perugia) and Annamaria Comella (University of Cagliari), a project is now underway to publish the major votive deposits in a series of monographs (CSVI), and a conference was held in Perugia, June 1–4, 2000, to present an update of new discoveries and research. The conference was intended as a workshop at which contributors presented their work-in-progress in ten-minute summaries covering Rome and Lazio, Etruria, southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, eastern Italy, and northern Italy.

In the more than sixty papers presented, it became clear that much intense work is being done to document both the sites of votive deposits and the contents of these deposits. Scholars throughout Italy are faced with the same problems of unexpected rescue operations, clandestine work, or the recovery of deposits found long ago and then stored in museums with incomplete information as to find context and composition.

In order to summarize and elaborate on general problems of studying votives, eight scholars presented longer lectures on broader topics which applied to all regions of ancient Italy. The topics varied from continuity and discontinuity of prehistoric votives (G.L. Carancini, M. Cultraro), the sacred laws pertaining to sanctuaries such as that of Ceres, Liber, and Libera in Rome (A. Mas-

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trocinque), different types of votive deposits (M. Bonghi Jovino), votives with inscriptions (A. Comella), votives representing the social status or rank of the donor on the island of Crete (N. Marinatos), the social context of votive offerings, seen as an individualistic practice, establishing a patron-client relationship (T. Cornell), and the role of coins in votive deposits (M. Crawford).

Of the papers that dealt with specific Etruscan votive deposits, the places covered in the most detail were Veii (M.G. Marzi, F.G. Bartoloni, V. Olivieri, M.P. Baglione), Lucus Feroniae (E.A. Stanco), the Faliscan territory (M.A. De Lucia), San Giuliano (A. Rallo), Gravisca (L. Fiorini), Vulci (A.M. Sgubini Moretti), Lake Bolsena (I. Berlingò and V. Acconcia), Albegna valley (P. Rendini), Chiusi (A. Rastrelli), Ombrone Valley south of Siena (S. Vilucchi), Paganico (F. Fabbri), Vetulonia (M. Cygielman), and the Serchio river and the Valdarno (G. Ciampoltrini).

Two principal topics emerged from the papers as being of current interest to Etruscan scholarship. The relationship of Etruscan votive practices to those of the Romans and other Italic cultures, while not directly addressed in a single paper, was a recurrent topic in a number of presentations, especially those dealing with Rome and Lazio. Second, the interpretation of votive material in the context of religion and ritual was addressed by several speakers, particularly by M. Bonghi Jovino who discussed types of deposits and their function in Etruscan ritual.

In addition to M. Bonghi Jovino's analysis of different types of votive deposits, the paper by G. Bagnasco Gianni dealt with the types of "containers" used for votive deposits in the Archaic period, and the paper by M.D. Gentili, with the social distinction of votive deposits in the Etrusco-Italic and Roman world.

In addition to the papers presented at the *convegno*, 17 sites were presented as posters with photographs, plans, and text. The mass of information presented was overwhelming; the study of votives is becoming a subfield within Italian archaeology. We can look forward to the publication of all the papers and poster sessions.

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