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Re-assemblage and Dispersal: Exploring Etruscan Votive Bronze Figurines in Museum Collections

Riassemblaggio e dispersione: esplorando bronzetti votivi etruschi conservati in collezioni museali

Marianna Negro, Jody Joy

Riassunto: Il contributo analizza il ruolo in evoluzione delle collezioni museali, in particolare attraverso la lente del "riassemblaggio", che implica lo studio della storia e del contesto dei manufatti. La ricerca si concentra sulle statuette votive etrusche in bronzo provenienti dal British Museum e dal Metropolitan Museum of Art e rivela come questi oggetti, pur avendo perso il loro contesto archeologico originale, continuino a possedere un'agency e acquisire nuovi significati man mano che vengono raccolti e dispersi. In definitiva, il documento sottolinea che le collezioni museali rimangono fluide e sono soggette a una costante reinterpretazione e al rinnovamento del valore nel corso del tempo.

Parole chiave: Collezioni museali; "riassemblaggio"; bronzetti votivi; Etruscologia; patrimonio culturale

Abstract: The document investigates the evolving role of museum collections, particularly through the lens of "re-assemblage," which involves studying the histories and contexts of artefacts. Focusing on Etruscan votive bronze figurines from the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the research reveals how these objects, despite losing their original archaeological settings, continue to possess agency and accrue new meanings as they are collected and dispersed. Ultimately, the paper underlines that museum collections remain fluid and are subject to constant reinterpretation and renewal of value over time.

Keywords: Museum collections; Re-assemblage; votive bronze figurines; Etruscan archaeology; Cultural heritage

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Re-assemblage and Dispersal: Exploring Etruscan Votive Bronze Figurines in Museum Collections

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Votive bronze figurines

Etruscan bronze figurines were created through the lost-wax casting technique[1] and vary in size, shape, style, and subject, so it is difficult to individuate a common meaning and function. Most often they are considered to be votive figures both because many represent offering or praying youths, men and women, and because in many cases they were found in large quantities at the same site, considered to be a sanctuary. Colzani[2] argues that often figurines are associated with ritual practices and in the social sphere because of the miniaturisation phenomenon which plays on the feelings provoked by miniatures. An important example of this is the site of Mont Falterona where in 1838 around 600 figurines were found[3]. Assemblages of the figurines were in fact popular in Central Italy during the 5th and 6th Century BC, but particular attention was shown by the collectors to the ones of Etruria[4]. This is reflected in the first museum catalogues[5], which tend to group Roman, Greek and Etruscan bronzes together. For this reason, although Etruscan figurines are very similar to votive bronze figurines from other production centres in Central Italy, and are all part of the same phenomenon, here they will be considered alone, in the same way they were collected and catalogued in the past. Most of the figurines were discovered during the 17th and 18th centuries in Italy. Many were collected by aristocrats or dealers and were soon dispersed

[1] Cristofani – Formigli – Micheli 1985.
[2] Colzani 2023, p. 4.
[3] Walters 1899; Cristofani – Formigli – Micheli 1985; Bruschetti *et Alii* 2014.
[4] Izzet 2007.
[5] Walters 1899; Richter 1915.

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across the globe, creating a general lack of context as the collectors were mostly interested in the objects and not their archaeological and cultural context. This is similar to the way Cycladic[6] and Predynastic Egyptian figurines[7] were also treated by collectors.

As far as style, there is a tendency in catalogues[8] to identify two types, 'schematic' and 'naturalistic.' The figurines categorised as schematic are usually relatively flat, no more than 10 cm high and with an absence of detail. In many catalogues these schematic figurines are referred to as 'primitive'[9], 'geometric'[10] or 'rural'[11]; these are all very judgemental terms and are indicative of the way these figurines are treated from the offset, thus in this paper the term schematic is preferred to others such as 'primitive'. The naturalistic figurines, in contrast, are also highly varied but they are usually seen to be influenced by Greek art and because of this they are more highly favoured and valued. These perspectives have created a dichotomy[12] with the schematic figurines being viewed as inferior to naturalistic examples. This is of course problematic because the figurines are being judged through a traditional Western cultural lens which tends to value the naturalism of the classical world and the Renaissance over other forms of art. As we will see, this perspective has affected the lives of individual figurines and their dispersal around the world.

The 'art' of collecting

The practice of collecting is inherent to all museums[13]. In this sense the institution of the museum can be seen as serving to store and

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[6] RENFREW 2017.
[7] STEVENSON 2017.
[8] WALTERS 1899; RICHTER 1915; RICHARDSON 2015.
[9] WALTERS 1899, pp. 52-60; RICHTER 1915, pp. 3-6, 92-109.
[10] RICHARDSON 1983.
[11] CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985.
[12] WALTERS 1899, p. 52.
[13] MASON – ROBINSON – COFFIELD 2018.

exhibit its collections[14]. The culture of collecting has, in fact, become pervasive as Finlay[15] defines it. This might be because collecting is often seen as a natural, fundamental, and universal human instinct[16] or even as an 'unquenchable thirst'[17]. Evidence of this is the possibility to trace collections practices back to antiquity, such as in Ancient Greece and Rome as shown by Bounia[18]. The culture of collecting which shaped contemporary museums, however, is considered to have started with the cabinets of curiosity of the Renaissance, the purpose of which was to make sense of the world, creating a 'microcosm' through the artefacts collected[19]. In this sense, collecting can be considered as a selective and controlled process[20], where the aim is to create a 'collection' and therefore an assemblage of objects meaningful as a group and not in their individuality[21]. Therefore, collection is ultimately a practice of meaning-making[22]. More specifically, it is one human approach to the material world and it can be regarded as evidence of the human-object relationship[23].

Small-scale objects can provoke a sense of wonder because of their visual and affective properties, making them attractive to collectors[24]. As well as being portable and relatively cheap compared to full size objects, small objects are also very tactile[25], a property connected to healing[26] and accessibility[27]. The bronze of the figurines adds another dimension as it is a material that comes 'alive' with reflections created

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[14] Šola 2004.
[15] Finlay 2016, pp. 179-180.
[16] Macdonald 2006, pp. 81-97.
[17] Muensterberger 2014, p. 3.
[18] Bounia 2004.
[19] Hooper – Greenhill 1992, p. 108.
[20] Were 2012.
[21] Bradley 1990.
[22] Smith 2013.
[23] Macdonald 2006, p. 83.
[24] Stewart 1984; Martin – Langin-Hooper 2018; Elsner 2020; Colzani 2023.
[25] Bailey 2005; Brittenham 2020; Elsner 2020.
[26] Hughes 2018.
[27] Martin – Langin-Hooper 2018; Elsner 2020; Colzani 2023.

by light[28]. These different properties may have prompted a special and closer relationship with the object[29], provoking emotional reactions[30] and endowing the figurines with agency[31]. Collecting is a continuous process and these relationships would have changed over time.

Collections are not static, but on the contrary, they are constantly reshaped and reshaping their environment[32]. Thus, if the collection is a performance of the relationships between humans and objects as explained by Macdonald[33], collections' histories and object biographies can unpack these relationships. The idea of biography as a metaphor to understand the process according to which human and object histories inform each other, has already been theorised in archaeology by Gosden and Marshall[34]; the biographical approach follows the ways in which objects are transformed through time and place[35]. Nevertheless, the biographies of objects, whilst focusing on the agency of the objects in their individuality, drawing on Gell[36], fail to account for the agency of the collectors and the collections as a whole. Furthermore, Joyce[37] criticises the idea of biographies for being anthropocentric, endowing objects with human characteristics such as birth, life and death[38]. Instead, Joyce[39] proposes the idea of object itineraries to understand the lives of artefacts. This concept focuses on tracing the routes by which things move, considering the role of the actively circulating objects in the creation of relations[40]. This approach falls back on the concept of itinerary as relations developed by De

[28] ARBEID – IOZZO 2015.
[29] BAILEY 2005; MARTIN – LANGIN-HOOPER 2018; ELSNER 2020; COLZANI 2023.
[30] COLZANI 2023, p. 5.
[31] BAILEY 2005, 2013; INSOLL 2017; MESKELL 2017.
[32] MOUTU 2007, pp. 92-112.
[33] MACDONALD 2006, pp. 81-97.
[34] GOSDEN – MARSHALL 1999, pp. 169-178; JOY 2009.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] GELL 1998.
[37] JOYCE 2015, pp. 21-38.
[38] COOLE 2013, pp. 451-469.
[39] JOYCE 2015, pp. 21-38.
[40] *Ibid.*

Certeau[41], and the explanation of itineraries of exchange and the kula ring in Melanesia by Malinowski[42]. The concept of itinerary is highly effective for the understanding of the relationships created by 'things in motion'[43], however, it does not adequately account for the complexity and multiplicity of networks of agency. In other words, while it is possible to follow the biographies or itineraries of individual objects within collections, or even chart the biographies of collections, this does not fully account for the wider relations involved.

In particular, Byrne et al.[44] see collections as material and social assemblages which represent connections and continue to have agency in the present. The multiplicity of agency is explained by the incorporation of actor-network theory which accounts for all the different networks of agency implied in museum collections[45]. The histories of collections become fundamental in the uncovering of ongoing social relations which are always mediated by material things[46]. If Byrne et al.[47] view the collection as an assemblage, Wingfield develops the idea of the re-assemblage, which calls attention to the crucial role of "removing objects from their associations and assemblages in contexts of deposition"[48] in order to re-contextualise archaeology. Wingfield[49] started his re-assemblage of the collections of the museum of the London Missionary Society (LMS), which closed in 1910, after which the collection was dispersed, from a single object displayed in the British Museum (BM): an engraved ostrich eggshell in the Sainsbury Africa Galleries. He used this object as representative of the ways in which the ethnographic artefacts of the LMS have been stripped of their identity and the relations of which they were endowed. From this, he started

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[41] DE CERTEAU 1984.
[42] MALINOWSKI 2002.
[43] JOYCE 2015, pp. 21-38.
[44] BYRNE *et Alii* 2011.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] WINGFIELD 2017, p. 597.
[49] WINGFIELD 2011, pp. 119-140.

his analysis of online catalogues of museums holding part of the LMS. Finally, Wingfield[50] drew on paper records, audio recordings of collectors and archival documents as his primary sources of evidence to 're-assemble' the collections of the LMS museum. Using these methods, we will now attempt a re-assemblage of various collections of Etruscan figurines.

Re-assembling the British Museum's collection

Our 're-assemblage' of collections of Etruscan figurines begins at the BM, which can be considered a focal point for the dispersal of the figurines from Italy. The online collections catalogue[51] was first compared with the paper catalogue: *Catalogue of the bronzes, Greek, Roman, and Etruscan: in the Department of Greek and Roman antiquities, British Museum* compiled by Walters[52]. According to the online catalogue there are 178 Etruscan figurines in the BM, whilst the paper record, written in 1899, describes 195 figurines. Of the figurines catalogued by Walters[53], 75 are not in the online collection, whilst two others have recently been reclassified as 'Italic' rather than Etruscan. Therefore, 75 figurines have likely left the BM in the last century, with one now located in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford[54].

The collection of Etruscan bronzes in the BM was began in 1772. The last acquisition was registered in 2001. Within the collection, there are, however, 22 figurines of which the acquisition had not been registered, so the provenance remains unknown. The timeline of the formation of the BM collection based on Walters[55] and the online collection[56] is summarised in Table 1. As shown by the table, the formation of the collection derives mainly from purchases, bequests

[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024.
[52] WALTERS 1899.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] WALTERS 1899.
[56] *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024.

and donations from aristocratic collectors and acquisitions through the dealers Campanari and Castellani. These dealers managed to obtain the figurines after their discovery, such as for the Falterona case or the Vulci excavation, or acted as mediator between the museum and other collectors[57]. Bequests or donations are interesting because there is little agency in the selection of figurines by the museum. This would explain why of the 29 figurines bequeathed by Mr R. Payne Knight in 1824 there are now 17, whilst of the 14 bequeathed by Sir W. Temple in 1856 only 5 now remain. The collections of both Knight and Temple were mainly composed of schematic figurines. Payne Knight developed his collection through years of travel and notably obtained many Greek artefacts from Greek merchants and many other objects including the Etruscan figurines, from many different sources[58]. In contrast, Sir W. Temple formed his collection while British Ambassador in Naples. Another collector and former ambassador, Sir W. Hamilton, collected Campanian artefacts not only by purchase, but also from 'excavations' carried out by himself, so the context is either lost or unreliable[59]. Hamilton's collection is the earliest, and currently biggest group of figurines still present at the BM. To acquire part of this collection the British Museum obtained a parliamentary grant of £8,410[60].

The catalogue produced by Walters[61] is useful to understand how the classification of the figurines has changed through the years. For instance, many (12) had previously been considered Greco-Roman (at least until 1899) and were thus charged with different meanings. Furthermore, Walters divided the catalogue into four main periods, according to the periodisation of the history of art of antiquity[62], in turn based on the flowering and decline of various styles: primitive, archaic, finest period and late bronzes. Waters traced various figurines back, according to their styles, to different Etruscan workshops such

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[57] WALTERS 1899.
[58] EDWARDS 1870; WALTERS 1899.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] WALTERS 1899.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985.

as Chiusi in Etruria[63] and the southern Volscian workshop. The schematic figurines are placed in Waters' primitive period[64] referring to Etruscan bronzes made before Greek contact and influence. Here we can see how from a very early stage how the figurines were assessed based on aesthetic qualities and the value placed on Greek influence. As we will see, these value judgements had a big impact on the lives and dispersal of various figurines and they continue to do so today as these descriptions of figurines in online catalogues show[65]:

"She is trying to be as refined as the Greek girls of the period" (figurine 1838,0317.2, Fig. 1).

"He has a trace of the 'archaic smile' familiar from earlier Greek sculpture. The style of this exquisite statuette shows influence from the Greek cities of Asia Minor and perhaps of Athens. Whatever the inspiration, the dress, proportions and character are very definitely Etruscan" (figurine 1824,0497.1, Fig. 2).

"The stance reflects Greek Sculpture of the late 5th century BC, and the style is related to the bronzes of central and northern Etruria" (figurine 1847,1101.5, Fig. 3).

As these descriptions illustrate, despite replacing the idea of imitation with adaptation, the preferential valuation of Greek influence is still very dominant with descriptions also including allusions to "a well-balanced pose", "symmetrical features" and the "*contrapposto* pose", an art-historical term to describe the 'perfect' pose to render a figure animated while standing and believed to have been developed by the Greek artist Polykleitos[66].

Interestingly, only four figurines from the earliest period, presumably lacking these Greek characteristics, are now listed in the Etruscan collection of the BM; two schematic figures have been

[63] WALTERS 1899.
[64] BRENDEL – BRENDEL – RIDGWAY 1995.
[65] *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024.
[66] VERMEULE 1982.

redefined as Italic in recent years as it became more evident that not all of these figurines from Central Italy are in fact Etruscan, but at the same time it is difficult to discern the provenance because of the general lack of context. The other 51 schematic figurines are no longer listed and could have been transferred elsewhere. Hence, 51 out of the 75 figurines which are no longer in the BM lack so-called 'Greek influence'. It is, thus, possible to assume that Etruscan figurines may primarily have been collected, especially in the past, with the purpose of showing connections with Greece. Those examples that did not resemble Greek art were deemed less valuable and were left largely forgotten within the museum stores or dispersed to other collections.

Dispersal across the rest of the world

Beyond Italy and the UK, the figurines are found in collections across the globe, particularly in North America. Their extensive dispersal was undoubtedly facilitated by their small size, rendering them more manageable for handling, storage, and transportation. Nevertheless, practicality was not the sole factor at play; the figurines also evolved into coveted status symbols among affluent groups. As mentioned above, portability is in fact not just a practical advantage but it also allows for a closer and more intimate relationship between the object and its owner[67]. This was true in the ancient world when the figurines were created and for this reason often assumed a religious aspect[68], but also in modern times when the figurines were collected and dispersed. Furthermore, what is also interesting is the formation of collections through the acquisition of many single objects rather than larger groups of artefacts. Apart from some exceptions, in fact, the figurines were collected individually, and their value mostly relies on their 'beauty' as defined by the collector, viewed from an art-historical rather than archaeological perspective. Indeed, this approach to the figurines has promoted their decontextualisation, as is demonstrated by the fact that the find spots of figurines are rarely recorded in non-

[67] Bailey 2005, 2018; Joyce 2018; Elsner 2020; Colzani 2023.
[68] Arbeid – Iozzo 2015; Cadario 2015; Elsner 2020; Colzani 2023.

Italian museums. This could be also attributed to the fact that the figurines in their singularity are seen as small-scale versions of life-size sculpture[69] with the addition of being portable, autonomous, because they are not connected to a place, and especially affective[70]. In this sense the figurines do not only get their meaning from the assemblage, but also in their individuality[71], although it is arguably unproductive to separate one from the other. More often, moreover, there is interest in looking for the workshop the figurine was made in, rather than the context in which it was discovered, and value is placed on the objects themselves rather than where they originated[72].

The figurines originally left Italy either in the hands of aristocratic figures or dealers and have subsequently been traded or donated to museums. As a result, Etruscan figurines are in the collections of many European museums (Fig. 4), whilst a significant number have found their way to the United States and Canada (Fig. 5). For example, the metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met) has an important collection of the figurines and a significant collection is held in Paris both in the Louvre (130 figurines)[73] and the Bibliotheque National (17 figurines)[74]. Five of the Louvre figurines were purchased after the discovery of 600 votive bronze figurines on Monte Falterona in 1838. We know through Bruschetti[75] that many of the figurines from Falterona were dealt by the Italian dealers Campanari and Capranesi, but it is difficult now to say where they ended up.

The dispersal of the figurines in North America was facilitated both by the acquisition of European collections by American museums and wealthy American citizens collecting artefacts during their travels to Europe. According to De Puma[76], American collectors were mostly

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[69] Arbeid – Iozzo 2015; Koortbojian 2015.
[70] Martin – Langin-Hooper 2018; Colzani 2023.
[71] Elsner 2020.
[72] *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024.
[73] Ridder 1913; Colonna 1970; Cristofani – Formigli – Micheli 1985; *Musèe du Louvre* 2024.
[74] Colonna 1970; Cristofani – Formigli – Micheli 1985.
[75] Bruschetti 1988.
[76] De Puma 2015, p. 3.

formed during the so-called 'Gilded Age'. This was when many Americans became wealthy and started to collect art to show their status, whilst also travelling to Europe to establish their 'cultural sophistication', with an attitude which was the legacy of the Grand Tour. In this context, two important figures to influence the practice of collecting were James Jackson Jarves and Luigi Palma di Cesnola, first director of the Met. The former was a wealthy art collector who moved to Florence in 1852 starting the practice of excavation and collection of Etruscan artefacts, collecting objects for the museum of his hometown Boston and urging Luigi Palma di Cesnola to buy Etruscan artefacts for the Met[77]. Another important American collector was Samuel Thomas Baxter, who collected 900 classical objects all bought by the Met in 1895 under Luigi Palma di Cesnola[78].

The collection of the American Academy in Rome was formed through the years with the donations of several American collectors[79]. The eight figurines which form the highlight of the collection were catalogued by Richardson[80], according to her classification. The figurines selected by Richardson, in fact, all represent different styles and periods and are described accordingly. Figurines N. 1855, 1856, 392 and 469 are considered to belong to the schematic type, with the first two very similar to the figurines from the Esquiline votive deposit, such as the ones now stored in Villa Giulia Museum, and the third paralleled by figurines found at Pasticetto di Magione. The fourth is a nude warrior of the schematic type, but no parallels have been found by Richardson. These are the only figurines not considered to have external foreign influences. In fact, figurine N. 8776 is considered an antitype of small Greek bronzes "signed with Polykleitan proportions in an easy, quiet pose"[81]. Finally, figurines N. 1851, 1292 and 1254 are considered Hellenistic type, Roman Imperial type and Egyptian type respectively[82]. The dichotomy created between

[77] De Puma 2013; 2015.
[78] De Puma 2015.
[79] Geffcken 2015.
[80] Richardson 2015.
[81] Richardson 2015, p. 177.
[82] Richardson 2015.

naturalistic (and influenced by foreign cultures) and schematic figurines is evident in Richardson's classification, with the latter also being grouped together, as they are not seen to have value in their singularity.

Within the North American collections, the Met presents an interesting case as most of the figurines (61) were purchased in 1896 as an already formed collection from Florence through the agent Arthur Lincoln Frothingham[83]. Interestingly, 54 of the figurines are of the schematic type, forming probably the largest schematic collection outside of Italy. These figurines were considered meaningful only archaeologically and could have been purchased as an assemblage for this reason, with Richter[84] writing: "the statuettes here classed together are all of more or less crude workmanship and have no artistic value. They are interesting, however, from an archaeological point of view, as they probably represent the common votive offerings of the poorer classes, who naturally had to have their presents cheap". This statement is significant because it underlines how only the 'Hellenistic' Etruscan figurines are considered of artistic value, therefore the schematic figurines have no agency in their individuality, but somehow retain the archaeological context that the more elaborate and naturalistic figurines lose. Despite this, the museum later catalogued some of those 'rude' figurines as Hellenistic, showing how heritage is easily influenced by the ideology of the time. In fact, as of 2024, looking at the online catalogue[85] the classification of the figurines has changed once again, even if they are still catalogued according to style, dependent on Western ideals. It is thus uncertain why such a big number of schematic figurines was acquired by the museum in 1896. It is possible that the 59 schematic figurines were sold together as part of a collection, but the Met was interested mainly in the seven naturalistic figurines from this collection which could be linked to Greek art (N. 96.9.382, 96.9.405, 96.18.19, 96.9.236, 96.9.296, 96.9.301, 96.9.429). It is also possible that the Met, founded in 1870, was trying to create and consolidate a large founding

[83] RICHTER 1915; DE PUMA 2013.
[84] RICHTER 1915, p. 92.
[85] *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024.

collection so numbers were important in addition to perceived quality, especially as in 1895, the year before the acquisition of the figurines, 900 objects were purchased from Samuel Thomas Baxter Sr.[86].

Amongst this large collection of figurines, 28 are not listed in the Met online catalogue, it is possible therefore that they were disposed of. Of these, 26 belonged to the group which was considered 'primitive' by Richter[87]. This phenomenon is like the schematic figurines which have vanished from the BM, even if in this case they were probably not re-catalogued, as there is no evidence of any deaccession. More specifically, these BM schematic figurines are listed in the first phase of cataloguing in 1899[88], but not in a second phase, which corresponds to the online catalogue as of 2024 and was last updated during the covid pandemic in 2020[89]. Therefore, it is not clear where these figurines are now. In contrast, there is the probability that the 28 figurines from the Met, which were not re-catalogued online[90], were sold during the auction of classical antiquities in March 1928 organised by Anderson galleries[91]. The Trustees of the Met, in fact, decided to put on sale the Cesnola collection alongside other classical antiquities, presumably including the Etruscan *bronzetti*[92]. From the auction the Met received $102,267.57 for proceeds of sale of objects of art for the year 1928[93]. The letter sent from Robert W. de Forest of the Met to Mitchell Kennerley of the Anderson Galleries reads: "material there have accumulated in years past a number of [...] classical antiquities, consisting of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman vases, bronzes, terracottas, glass, and marble sculpture, which duplicate what we already have on exhibition. Rather than continue to hold these objects in storage where they perform no useful service, the Trustees

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[86] De Puma 2013.
[87] Richter 1915.
[88] Walters 1899.
[89] *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024.
[90] *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024.
[91] *The Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 1928a, 1928b.
[92] *The Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 1928a.
[93] *The Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 1928b.

have determined to dispose of them by auction sale"[94]. The idea of the duplicates is interesting because it implies that the Etruscan figurines which were probably sold during the auction were all of the same nature, not providing any additional value to the museum. This idea raises two significant points; firstly, considering that 26 out of the 28 figurines sold were schematic, it is presupposed that the schematic figurines are all the same, whilst the naturalistic ones can be distinguished in their individuality. Secondly, this is still a very art historical approach rather than archaeological, because it does not see the value in the group. Instead, the schematic votive figurines represented in large groups would be archaeologically meaningful as well as effective for the observer. However, given there is no clear evidence of what was sold during the auction, it is also probable that the figurines were potentially misplaced over time in the storerooms as in the BM, but the fact that it is the schematic types that are possibly missing is also telling in itself.

The other Etruscan figurines from the Met collection are classified by Richter[95] together with the bronzes from Greece. This is because they all are naturalistic figurines, which present some characteristics of the Greek style, however Richter still marks the difference between Greek and Etruscan art. For one figurine (N. 17.190.2066, Fig. 6) he claimed: "that it is Etruscan and not Greek is shown by the mistakes made in the rendering of the garment [...], which betray the hand of the copyist"[96]. Ritcher, therefore, stresses how the Etruscan figurines were seen merely in their artistic individuality and especially as copies of Greek ones. This idea is reinforced in the current online catalogue[97] which states: "the Greek himation [...] is misrepresented [...], perhaps an indication that the artist was looking at a two-dimensional source". In fact, similar to the BM, the figurines are still often associated with Greek traits[98]: "The facial features, hair, and musculature are all precisely and accurately modelled. The stance and even the hairstyle

[94] *The Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 1928a.
[95] RICHTER 1915.
[96] RICHTER 1915, p. 34.
[97] *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024.
[98] *Ibid.*

with long wavy locks parted at the center owe much to Greek sculptures by Polykleitos, especially his Doryphoros and Diadoumenos" (figurine 97.22.11, Fig. 7); "The nudity, short hair, and pose of this youth demonstrate clearly that he represents an Etruscan response to Greek sculptures of the second half of the sixth century BC" (figurine 1972.118.64, Fig. 8); "The stance, nudity, and hairstyle of this fine bronze remind one of large-scale *kouroi*, the famous commemorative statues of youths set up in Greek sanctuaries and cemeteries. The Etruscan artist focused more attention on the facial details and less on musculature than Greek artists typically did" (figurine 1972.118.74, Fig. 9). In addition to this, it is significant how, to Western eyes, schematic bronzes all seem the same, so they have been dismissed as duplicates. This points the way to a wider issue as schematic figurines are considered relevant from an archaeological point of view in the assemblage rather than in their singularity, but at the same time, in 1928, the MET seems to have considered them as duplicates and thus not worthy of being kept. This contrast in views and almost schizophrenic attitude can likely be explained with commercial logics and museological priorities given precedence over archaeological significance. In other words, the importance and value of the schematic figurines is only recognised to a certain extent, before the commercial attitude of some museums come into play; the more naturalistic figurines are easier to display and probably what audiences expect to see, so the schematic examples, despite having great archaeological and contextual value, become merely a source of potential revenue in the case of the MET sale, or something to be hidden in storage.

After 1915, the year Ritcher's catalogue was published, more Etruscan figurines were purchased or donated, with the last accession in 1996[99]. In particular, 39 Etruscan figurines became part of the MET collection, with another 28 figurines catalogued as Italic, which are also possibly Etruscan[100]. Furthermore, there are three figurines accessioned before 1915 which were not catalogued by Ritcher, whilst

[99] De Puma 2013; *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024.
[100] *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024.

one figurine (N. 17.190.2066) appears as a purchase from 1910 in Ritcher's catalogue and a gift from J. Pierpont Morgan in 1917 in the online collection[101]. The figurine was, therefore, probably bought from the museum and successfully donated to the museum again. Overall, according to the online collection there are now 92 Etruscan figurines in the Met[102].

Bronzetti Schematici

Within these important collections, very few of the figurines (apart from the Met) can be considered of the schematic type. This can be attributed to the fact that, being less desirable[103], the *bronzetti schematici* were not collected as widely and therefore are now less widely dispersed, mainly residing in the collections of museums local to where they were discovered: Marzabotto Museum[104] for examples found near Bologna, Villa Giulia[105] for examples found in Latium, Archaeological Museum of Florence[106] for examples found in Etruria. An exception are the three collections of the academic English museums, shown in Fig. 4, the Pitt-Rivers in Oxford, the Fitzwilliam and the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology (MAA), both in Cambridge. Furthermore, contrary to the other Etruscan bronze figurines, as already suggested, the schematic figurines were collected and are displayed or stored as a group. This is significant because it means that their meaning relies on the assemblage rather than the characteristics of individual objects. The fact that these figurines are displayed in these institutions distinguishes academic museums from other institutions. Therefore, the *bronzetti shematici*, with their lack of interest from an art-historical point of view, are meaningful in a socio-political perspective, which might have influenced their collections

[101] *Ibid.*
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] FULMINANTE – UNAVANE 2020, p. 2.
[104] CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985.
[105] COLONNA 1970; FULMINANTE – UNAVANE 2020.
[106] CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985.

history. The same presumption applies to the schematic figurines which were forgotten within the BM, previously described, and were classified by Walters[107] as 'grotesque'.

Bronze figurines which have been discovered through the systematic excavation of archaeological sites have been collected similarly to the schematic figurines: in groups, collected by museums located close to their find-spots. This can be attributed to the fact that the context of the figurines charges them with socio-political significance and local importance. This phenomenon refers to the collections of the Archaeological Museum of Florence, as the Florentine collection is one of the biggest collections of Etruscan figurines (approx. 97) and it is mainly constituted by the finds of the Brolio excavations in 1863 (21 figurines), and the excavations carried out at Fonte Veneziana (near Arezzo) in 1869 (25 figurines)[108]. Nevertheless, the other half of the figurines in the Florentine National Museum is mostly part of the Medici and Lorraine collections and for this reason there are little or no recorded provenances and contexts[109] as often occurred with the figurines collected by aristocrats.

In contrast to historic discoveries, figurines found more recently and excavated by professional archaeologists have become part of the local history of the site and therefore they are stored in local museums as part of the excavation archive, displayed as a representative of the discoveries made from that site. Thus, on the surface, it appears that systematic excavation prevented the dispersal of figurines. This is partly true, however, it is not as simple as it appears, particularly for historic excavations. For example, Cristofani, Formigli and Micheli[110] explain that according to 19th century drawings of the findings from Fonte Veneziana, there were 180 figurines from the site, which means that much of the assemblage has in fact been dispersed, the same can be said about Monte Falterona where originally 600 figurines had been discovered.

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[107] WALTERS 1899, pp. 52-60.
[108] CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985.
[109] ARBEID – IOZZO 2015.
[110] *Ibid.*

Both the bronzetti schematici and systematic excavations show how Italian and world collections of the figurines differ. The schematic figurines and many of those found during scientific excavations were, in fact, mostly collected locally because they become part of local history and were therefore collected in groups and not decontextualised.

The figurines held in private collections around the world are understandably more difficult to locate than the ones in public collections. Considering the current high demand for classical antiquities and the auctions created by museums (especially in North America) in the past a good proportion of the Etruscan figurines are still held in private collections. According to Chippindale and Gill[111], contemporary classical collecting is still a practice which is widely developed, continuing the historic preference in favour of the artistic characteristics of figurines over their archaeological context. A famous private collection of Etruscan artefacts is the Ivor Svarc collection of Geneva of which 120 objects were donated to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and 35 lent for a temporary exhibition on *Italy of the Etruscans*[112]. During this exhibition in 1991, 166 out of 382 objects came from private collections, stressing their prevalence[113]. Auction houses still sell Etruscan bronze figurines with a very high market value; for instance, the Royal Athena galleries in New York are currently offering 15 Etruscan bronze figurines with prices ranging from $4,250 for a representation of a boar, to $35,000 for a figurine representing a centaur. In Italy, the market value is lower as all the objects excavated and not purchased by museums are sold in the country according to the legislative decree n. 42 of 22nd January 2004[114]. This leads to a disproportion between offer and demand. Evidence of this are the relatively low prices of figurines for sale in Italy, starting from circa €500.

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[111] CHIPPINDALE – GILL 2000, pp. 463-511.
[112] *Ibid.*
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* 2004.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the fate of the figurines has been largely dictated by how they were categorised. This led the schematic examples to be deemed less valuable, they are therefore less widely dispersed, more likely to have been deaccessioned by museums, or not included in museum online databases. In contrast, the naturalistic figurines have been consistently associated with a process of Hellenisation, which caused the 'evolution' of Etruscan art. This association with Greek art and culture has led to the naturalistic figurines being more highly valued than schematic examples, especially by collectors and some museums. This evident dichotomy is particularly significant as it is the evidence of the important role played by Western ideals on heritage.

The 're-assemblage' of Etruscan figurines has revealed their wide dispersal across Europe and North America following acquisitions, bequests, and donations from antiquity collectors. In Italy, on the other hand, dispersal is more limited with figurines from different excavations tending to be collected locally and mostly within the regions where they were found, with the exception of some larger national museums such as Florence and Villa Giulia in Rome. This dichotomy is paralleled by the distinction between schematic and naturalistic figurines, with the first collected mostly locally and as a group, whilst the others were collected individually and dispersed. To this, it needs to be added that in the catalogues the schematic figurines are dismissed because they are schematic, whilst the naturalistic examples are decontextualised and celebrated for their evidence of Greek influence in style. In fact, despite some improvements in the ways the figurines are described (no longer as 'primitive' or 'rude'), naturalistic figurines and associations with Greek or Roman traits are still favoured in some institutions.

Finally, all the data which was collected about the figurines can be said to relate to a certain modern ideology in different ways. There is still a strong sense of the idea of acculturation in the forms of Hellenisation and Romanisation, which is underpinned by the association with Greek and Roman styles, considered superior. This is derived from the Western conception of aesthetic values based on

naturalism, which causes the establishment of the dichotomy between schematic and naturalistic figurines. Moreover, the figurines are decontextualised to convey nothing but their artistic value.

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DATE	EVENT
1772	Acquisition from Sir W. Hamilton's collection - 26 figurines (now 24) 1814
1814	Acquisition from Mr C. Towneley's collection (Second Act) - 10 (now 6)
1824	Bequest of Mr R. Payne Knight - 29 (now 17)
1836	Milligen Collection - 8 (now 4)
1837	Purchase from Lucien Bonaparte, Prince of Canino and Musignano - 2
1838-42	4 figurines purchased from different owners
1844	Second Hamilton collection - 3
1847	Second Milligen collection - 6 (now 3) + Acquisition from Vulci's excavation through dealer Campanari - 5 (now 4)
1859-42	2 figurines purchased from Harry Osborne Cureton and Jones
1856	Donation from Canon Luc Angelo Bracci - 2 + Bequest of Sir W. Temple - 14 (now 5)
1859	Purchase from Bram Hertz's collection - 6 (now 4)
1862-65	Purchases from Eastwood (3), Strangford (3, now 2) and de Pourtal`es-Gorgier (1)
1865	Purchases through dealer Castellani (2) and Christy Collection (1)
1867	Blacas collection - 11 (now 7)
1868-1966	28 (now 26) figurines purchased from 23 different owners
1873 and 1884	Purchases through dealer Castellani - 18 (now 15) and 2
1878	Donation of Lt-Gen Augustus W H Meyrick - 12
1997	2 figurines transferred from the Museum of London
2001	Figurine purchased through Oliver Forge and Brendan Lynch

Table 1. Timeline of the formation of the British Museum collection

Fig. 1. Figurine 1838,0317.2 in the British Museum
(Online catalogue, *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

Fig. 2. Figurine 1824,0497.1 in the British Museum
(Online catalogue, *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

Fig. 3 Figurine 1847,1101.5 in the British Museum
(Online catalogue, *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

Fig. 4 Map of the dispersal of the figurines in Europe
In alphabetical order: Amsterdam (4), Autun (2), Avignon (4), Barcelona (1), Basel (6), Berlin (13), Bern (3), Besançon (2), Bourges (1), Bruxelles (9), Budapest (22), Cambridge (46), Cassel (3), Chartres (1), Compiègne (1), Copenhagen (2), Fècamp (3), Friburg (1), Genève (13), Göttingen (1), Heidelberg (1), Karlsruhe (7), Leeuwarden (1), Leiden (12), Liverpool (10), Lyon (6), Leipzig (3), London (178), Madrid (4), Manchester (17), Mariemont (1), Marseille (2), Montepellier (1), Neuchâtel (3), Newcastle (4), Nîmes (1), Oxford (37), Paris (147), Rouen (3), St. Germain-en-Laye (1), St. Petersburg (12), Stuttgart (13), Troyes (1), Vienna (9), Warsaw (5), Zurich (1).
Based on WALTERS 1899; RIDDER 1913; COLONNA 1970; TURFA – PALLOTTINO 1982; CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985; RONCALLI 1989; CORBUCCI 1990; WINGFIELD 2011; STODDART – STEVENSON – BURN 2013; BRUSCHETTI *et Alii* 2014; TURFA – MUSKETT 2017; FULMINANTE – UNAVANE 2020; *Ministère de la Culture* 2024; *Musée du Louvre* 2020; *The Trustees of the British Museum* 2024; *Tyne Wear Archives Museum* 2024

Fig. 5 Map of the dispersal of the figurines in North America
In alphabetical order: Ann Arbor (3), Baltimore (5), Berkeley (4), Boston (28), Cincinnati (1), Detroit (6), Harvard University (21), Kansas City (1), Los Angeles (1), Malibu (3), New York (92), Oberlin (1), Philadelphia (17), Princeton (4), Providence (1), San Francisco (1), Toronto (7), Washington (1).
Based on RITCHER 1915; TANNER 1935; VERMEULE 1960; DEL CHIARO 1967; COLONNA 1970; CRISTOFANI – FORMIGLI – MICHELI 1985; CACCIOLI 2009; TURFA 2011; DE PUMA 2013, 2015; *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* 2024; *Regents of the University of Michighan* 2024; *Royal Ontario Museum* 2024; *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 2024

Fig. 6 Figurine 17.190.2066 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Online catalogue, *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Fig. 7 Figurine 97.22.11 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Online catalogue, *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Fig. 8 Figurine 1972.118.64 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Online catalogue, *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Fig. 9 Figurine 1972.118.74 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Online catalogue, *Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*)