

# Tracing the altar: Interaction of material, social and religious dimensions of altar-based ceremonies in Southern Etruria

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Start 2017

## Topic

Within the framework of the International Graduate School, the research project proposes new reflections upon the topic of **altars** and **altar-based ceremonies** within the **Etruscan world**. Perceiving the altar as an object imbued with ritual significance, this therefore enables an individual to connect with the world in a specific temporal-spatial situation and in a particular socio-religious context that can be further investigated on a social, material and religious dimension of communication.



## Research Questions

The departure point of the project is a catalogue focusing on selected altars from the archaeological context by providing detailed descriptions of them. With the auxiliary interpretation of iconographic sources and epigraphic texts, the further analysis of these sources aims to research into these altar-based ceremonies on at least three different levels, the social, the material and the transcendental.

## Sources

The main sources used in the research project are represented by the **archaeological sources**, namely a collection of selected altars stemming from Southern Etruria, associated to either funerary or sanctuary contexts. In addition, another relevant category is represented by **iconographic sources**, and significant visual evidence can be found on a variety of archaeological categories, such as tomb paintings, vase paintings or mirror engravings.

### Image sources

Left: [https://www.canino.info/inserti/monografie/etruschi/etruschi\\_tuscia/grotta\\_porcina/index.htm](https://www.canino.info/inserti/monografie/etruschi/etruschi_tuscia/grotta_porcina/index.htm)  
Right: <https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/wall-painting/deck/13214849>

## Aim

The encompassing analysis of these altars aims to further investigate the information these provide in regards to the relationships created between the individual and the world in his **transcendental** communication with the divine, within **the social** group participating at the ceremonies, and between the individual and the **material**, the altar acknowledged as a ritual object.

## Methods

The research project proposes an inventory of the altars by **cataloguing** the archaeological evidence and offering an essential, **descriptive analysis** of these elements regarding chronology, altar description, spatial characteristics and findings related to cult. This catalogue is accompanied by an **iconographic reading** of the relevant visual sources. The subsequent part of the project focuses on the **analysis** of the sources, introducing several relevant discussions connected to the types of social, material and transcendental relations that can be deduced from the archaeological evidence.



## Results

A first result has been the elaboration of an archaeological catalogue bringing the underdeveloped category of altars into focus. The subsequent analytical chapters have delved deeper into the

- dynamics of the self-world relations developed by altar-based ceremonies,
- emphasizing the importance of materiality within the parameters of ritual undertakings in what regards aspects such as time and spatiality, as well as
- underlining the mutually constitutive processes happening on a temporal scale between altars as ritual objects and the unfolding of altar-based ceremonies, as reflected on a socio-religious level.

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