

The Etruscans at Lattara: An Unambiguous Identification

The Etruscans were active players in the Mediterranean, particularly during the Archaic Period. Livy writes, “Before the Roman Empire, the wealth of the Etruscans opened wide the land and sea” (*Ab Urbe Condita*, 5.33.7). The presence of Etruscan material throughout the Mediterranean certainly corroborates Livy’s statement. Given such prolific activity, it would seem only natural that certain enterprising Etruscans would establish themselves abroad. Yet no major Etruscan settlement comparable to those established by their Greek and Phoenician contemporaries has been discovered outside of the Italian peninsula. There do exist, however, particular non-Etruscan settlements *ex Italiā* in which material evidence suggests a degree of Etruscan interaction beyond what would have been possible for a standard port-of-call to attain; Lattara (ancient Lattes) in Southern France is one such site.

Excavations at Lattara have revealed a group of structures (*Ilot 27*), dated to the second half of the 6th BCE, that contain a markedly high number of Etruscan objects, including Etruscan type amphorae, bucchero vessels, and common Etruscan cooking ware, a few of which even bear Etruscan inscriptions and *sigla* (graffiti) (Py 2009). Based on this evidence, it has been proposed that Lattara simply represents an enclave of foreign merchants (Idem; Dietler 2010). Through a close and contextualized examination of *Ilot 27*’s structural features and material, combined with the recent results of chemical analysis and archaeobotanical research, it will be shown that the Etruscan “foreign merchants” of *Ilot 27* and their relationship to the greater Lattaran community can be explained in far less ambiguous terms.

While scholars have compiled and studied Etruscan material *ex Italiā* (Camporeale 2004), seldom is any explanation offered as to the impetus and means of their dispersal: Who traded such material? What did they receive in return? Were they themselves Etruscans? If so, what relationship did they have with those who accepted their goods? It is commonly held that the presence of such material abroad was the result of *cabotage* trading, in which small, possibly independent vessels with heterogeneous cargos frequented preferred ports (Dietler 2010). This, however, does not adequately explain the presence of the Etruscans at Lattara, let alone aid in their identification.

Recently, Jean Gran-Aymerich has proposed that *Ilot 27* at Lattara resembles the later Mediterranean *fonduk* (Arabic for “inn”), which, unlike standard port-of-calls, had a specific role, “guaranteed by treaty,” in establishing and facilitating diplomatic relations (2013). While it is true that the Etruscans allied themselves with various cities, most famously Carthage, this too neither adequately explains the marked Etruscan presence at Lattara, itself a relatively small independent Celtic site doubtful to offer any benefit to the greater Etruscan cities other than access to localized trade, nor does it help in reaching a more precise identification of the Etruscans at Lattara.

With the recent results of chemical analysis and archaeobotanical research, it is now possible to identify the Etruscans at Lattara more precisely, and thus garner an explanation as to their presence. Residue analysis of *Ilot 27*'s Etruscan amphorae has shown that wine, specifically Italic wine, was the major commodity traded. Furthermore, the presence of carbonized grape seeds within *Ilot 27*, as well as a wine press located nearby, suggests that the Etruscans of Lattara were involved in more than simply

importing wine, but were wine makers themselves. Indeed, they may have in fact been the ones who introduced viticulture to France (McGovern 2013).

In this paper I will use historical and archaeological evidence to show that the Etruscan inhabitants of *Ilot 27* were enterprising non-elite merchants, facilitators of the Etruscan wine trade, independent of both the wine producers in Etruria and the maritime traders who transported the wine, who most certainly had the potential to become an intimate part of the greater Lattaran community. In establishing this unambiguous identification, I believe that it then becomes possible to approach the greater questions concerning Archaic Period Etruscan relations, both within Etruria and abroad.

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