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Toys for the gods: clay and jewellery toys in Lavinium and Etruria

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Abstract

In various Central Italian and Etrurian sacred sanctuaries, such as Lavinium, Gabii, or Nemi for Lazio, Cerveteri, Tessennano, or Veii in Etruria, statues were discovered representing young men and women, as well as little boys and girls, holding balls, birds, tops, fruits or jewellery. Researchers have demonstrated that the personality of the deity honoured in the sanctuary may explain these types of offerings. In order to further investigate the reason of this votive context, this article compares archaeological finds with Greek, as well as Latin, authors who explain the function of these objects.

Keywords: Lavinium, Etruria, offerings of toys, role of community, transition stage.

In various Central Italian and Etrurian sacred sanctuaries, such as Lavinium, Gabii, or Nemi for Lazio, Cerveteri, Tessennano, or Veii in Etruria, statues were discovered representing young men and women, as well as little boys and girls, holding balls, birds, tops, fruits or jewellery. Researchers have demonstrated that the personality of the deity honoured in the sanctuary may explain these types of offerings. In order to further investigate the reason of this votive context, this article compares archaeological finds with primarily Greek authors and discoveries from Latin or Greek sites, which may explain the function of such objects.

The study of these offerings was part of the author's PhD thesis entitled *Les rites féminins dans les sanctuaires du Latium et de l'Étrurie méridionale (IV^e siècle av. J.-C. – I^{er} siècle apr. J.-C.)* (Thibaut, 2015). Figurines representing children and young people were often associated with deities guarding the transition from the wild nature of youth to marriage, or chthonian gods, with sanctuaries situated outside towns. Thus, for example, Juno was honoured in Gabii as a deity of adulthood, also in the form of Minerva and Menerva in Lavinium or Portonaccio (Veii); however, these two divinities were also chthonian. So they might, too, have been honoured in order to avoid premature death, before becoming adult, like Apollo Soranus, in Tessennano.

These offerings may be divided into two distinct groups. The first included statues of children holding toys, usually balls or tops, or animals, especially birds, in order to display both the children's wealth and education. The second group

included statues of young men and women in adult clothes, the young women adorned with jewellery, holding their last toys, usually balls, and fruit. These figurines were most certainly offered at the time of transition from childhood to adulthood. Fruit, like pomegranates, which included pips, symbolized a most valued female role; fertility in marriage and associated with love. Moreover, the statuettes looked *doll-like* because of their physical similarities with actual dolls discovered in these sanctuaries. These statuettes may allude to a future role of women in the community, since when they were children, these young women played with dolls and potentially learn how to take care of babies. That may be why dolls were offered, to show the young women were ready to take their place in the community. Others statues may have been used to display the attractiveness of the future bride. Finally, the location of the sanctuary, outside the towns, reflects this transitional phase, relinquishing childhood to become adult. This article will discuss the types of toys appearing in sanctuaries, according to sex and gender, and attempt to examine their cultural and religious meaning, in a votive context, in Central Italy and Etruria (4th cent. BC to 1st cent. AD).

This paper focuses on these two groups and their collective dimension in Etruscan and Roman societies. Firstly, an attempt will be made to identify the believers (age group, social status) of the first group, the context and the aim of the submission of these offerings. Secondly, an exploration of the symbolism of the second group, in particular that associated with coming of age and life passage of young people in the Ancient world. The Etruscan world will be compared with Greek civilization, to understand that world, since they were in contact prior to Romanization¹.

Toys to teach?

Whether a game is called *skolè*, or leisure in Greek, and *ludus* or amusement, in Latin, it is invariably associated with teaching. It was believed that learning began at birth, because the child's body and soul were compared to virgin wax, on which it was possible to imprint all the physical and moral qualities indispensable to any good citizen. Plutarch, in his *Education of Children*, explains it thus:

Εὐπλαστον γὰρ καὶ ὑγρὸν ἢ νεότης, καὶ ταῖς τούτων ψυχαῖς ἀπαλαῖς ἔτι τὰ μαθήματα ἐντήκεται· πᾶν δὲ τὸ σκληρὸν χαλεπῶς μαλάττεται. Καθάπερ γὰρ σφραγίδες τοῖς ἀπαλοῖς ἐναπομάττονται κηροῖς, οὕτως αἱ μαθήσεις ταῖς τῶν ἔτι παιδίων ψυχαῖς ἐναποτυποῦνται.²

Therefore, adults viewed games and toys as having an educational value which permitted the refinement of the child's character and role within society, in which

1. Trucco, 2012, pp. 195-248.

2. Plutarch *From the education of children*, 5: "Youth is indeed malleable and fluid, and in these still tender souls lessons permeate, while all that is hardened is difficult to soften. For, just as the seals leave their print on tender wax, so does acquired knowledge leave its mark on the souls of very young children." (trad. A. Philippon, J. Sirinelli, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1987)

the child lived³. Plato recommended that boys and girls played together until the age of six, and thereafter separated, to learn social etiquette and a future profession. At least that is what he recommended for boys:

Λέγω δὴ, καὶ φημι τὸν ὅτιοῦν ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι τοῦτο αὐτὸ ἐκ παίδων εὐθύς μελετᾶν δεῖν, παίζοντά τε καὶ σπουδάζοντα ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πράγματος ἐκάστοις προσήκουσιν. οἷον τὸν μέλλοντα ἀγαθὸν ἔσεσθαι γεωργὸν ἢ τινα οἰκοδόμον, τὸν μὲν οἰκοδομοῦντά τι τῶν παιδείων οἰκοδομημάτων παίζειν χρή, τὸν δ' αὖ γεωργοῦντα, καὶ ὄργανα ἐκατέρω σμικρὰ, τῶν ἀληθινῶν μιμήματα, παρασκευάζειν τὸν τρέφοντα αὐτῶν ἐκάτερον, καὶ δὴ καὶ τῶν μαθημάτων ὅσα ἀναγκαῖα προμεμαθηκέναι προμανθάνειν, οἷον τέκτονα μετρῆν ἢ σταθμᾶσθαι καὶ πολεμικὸν ἵππεύειν παίζοντα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων ἄλλο ποιοῦντα, καὶ πειραῶσθαι διὰ τῶν παιδιῶν ἐκείσε τρέπειν τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας τῶν παίδων, οἱ ἀφικομένους αὐτοὺς δεῖ τέλος ἔχειν. Κεφάλαιον δὴ παιδείας λέγομεν τὴν ὀρθὴν τροφήν, ἣ τοῦ παίζοντος τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς ἔρωτα μάλιστα ἄξει τούτου ὃ δεήσει γενόμενον ἄνδρ' αὐτὸν τέλειον εἶναι τῆς τοῦ πράγματος ἀρετῆς· ὁρᾶτε οὖν εἰ μέχρι τούτου γε, ὅπερ εἶπον, ὑμῖν ἀρέσκει τὸ λεχθέν.⁴

The same must have been true for girls as well, even if Plato did not specify it explicitly. In any case, the child had to be introduced to the rules of social life through games. It is possible Etruscan people followed the same rules, as may be noted.

Animals to train, animals to socialize

Every game is bounded by a set of inherent rules. Learning to observe these rules inculcates respect for laws and tradition, whereas modifying them, or inventing new ones, threatens the order of society as a whole:

Οὐκοῦν, ὃ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐλέγομεν, τοῖς ἡμετέροις παισὶν ἐννομωτέρου εὐθύς παιδιᾶς μεθεκτέον, ὡς παρανόμου γιγνομένης αὐτῆς καὶ παίδων τοιούτων ἐννόμους τε καὶ σπουδαίους ἐξ αὐτῶν ἄνδρας ἀξάνεσθαι ἀδύνατον ὄν.⁵

This may explain, in the depository of the North Gate, at Vulci, in Etruria, the discovery of a statue depicting a little naked girl, sitting, holding a ball in her hand

3. Cf. Dasen, 2017, pp. 89-107.

4. Plato, *Laws*, 1, 643b-c-d: "I declare that whoever wants to excel in anything one day must apply himself to this object from childhood, by finding both his amusement and his occupation in all that relates to it. For example, those who want to become good farmers or architects must have fun either building one of those houses that children build, or working the land, and their educator must provide them both with small tools that imitate the real ones; they must learn all the sciences whose preliminary study will be necessary to them, such as the carpenter needs to practice using the meter or the line, the man of war to ride on horseback while playing and so on; and one will strive to turn the tastes and the desires of the children, through the use of games, towards the goal which they must have reached in adulthood." (trad. Éd. Des Places, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1968)

5. Plato, *Republic*, 4, 424d-425a: "Consequently, as we said at the beginning, we must subject our children's games to more rigorous discipline from the outset, because, if the game and children escape the rule, it is impossible for children to grow up to be men of duty and solid virtue." (trad. E. Chambry, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2013)

(figure 1), similarly, another seated statue, this time representing a little boy, unearthed in the votive deposit of the sanctuary of Fontanile di Legnisina (figure 2).



Figure 1.

Votive deposit of the North Gate (Vulci).
E1, Pautasso, 1994, p. 61, tav. 32 a-b.
n° inv. 59740, Museum of Villa Giulia.



Figure 2.

Sanctuary of Fontanile di Legnisina (Vulci).
n° 50, Ricciardi, 1988-1989, p. 161, fig. 24.

Interpretation remains difficult, given the few cases in existence. However, the two votive deposits contained, for the first ninety-five terracotta representations of babies in swaddling clothes⁶ as well as a large quantity of reproductions of female and male heads⁷, and, in the second, about two hundred and sixty-five votive uteri⁸. A natural conclusion is that these types of deposits clearly related to reproduction⁹ and growth¹⁰, else many more children could have been found imitating a game. The first deposit was located near a door and the second was suburban,

6. Pautasso, 1994, pp. 37-44.

7. Pautasso, 1994.

8. Ricciardi, 1988-1989, pp. 175-189.

9. The ancients knew that the womb was the seat of life, but in the face of the vulnerability of the woman's reproductive system, faced with the obvious lack of knowledge of how the future mother would protect herself and the future infant, and in view of the very diversified quality of the medicine of the time which, most often, was powerless in the face of the mortality of these two beings, a "folk medicine" was resorted to, combining recourse to divinities, beliefs and magic. This is why the faithful placed their fears and hopes in offerings of an appropriate nature: different reproductions of the uterus to highlight the different stages of pregnancy and fetal growth.

10. Olivier de Cazanove has done a comparative study of different swaddled babies' reproductions found in a votive context. He highlighted that different sizes of sculptures existed and deduced that they were like the faithful's hope to see their children grow and, for this, to place them under the protection of the qualified deity (Cazanove, 2008, pp. 271-284).

suggests that, by offering this kind of ex-voto, the faithful wished that the children would safely pass, through the various stages of life leading to adulthood. Despite this, only five seated children figurines were found at the North Gate and a single example at Fontanile di Legnisina.

It seems unlikely that the difference arose from a resistance, by the indigenous population to Roman customs, since both deposits were dated between the 4th and 1st centuries BC, a period when Etruria was being, or had already been, colonised. However, it is observed that the girl is wearing a kind of small necklace around her neck. This raises questions as to whether it had the same apotropaic virtue as the Roman *bulla* offered to little boys.¹¹ It is known that among the Romans, only little boys wore them around their necks, after having been recognized by their fathers¹². But in Vulci, it seems that statuettes of babies in diapers, on which the female sex of the child had been clearly indicated, also carried this protection. This may be an Etruscan custom that was locally continued after Romanization since, unlike the Romans, all Etruscan children, boys and girls, had the right to wear the same protection¹³. Little is known on this subject, but it may explain why, in Etruria, the faithful did not usually dedicate representations of games or children at play.

However, it is true that these few examples clearly show that children played, regardless of their gender. Their position and the fact that two of them were not clothed indicate that the children were aged between one and three years old. Perhaps the learning was meant to be productive. According to Cicero, a child is capable of intelligence from the time it acquires some autonomy through motor skills:

Cum autem paulum firmitatis accessit, et animo utuntur et sensibus conitunturque, ut sese erigant, et manibus utuntur et eos agnoscunt, a quibus educantur. [...]. Quae domi fiunt, curiosius incipiuntque commentari aliquid et discere et eorum, quos uident, uolunt non ignorare nomina, quibusque rebus cum is aequalibus decertant, si uicerunt, efferunt se laetitia, uicti debilitantur animosque demittunt. Quorum sine causa fieri nihil putandum est.¹⁴

In all cases, it was from that moment that the child needed to be socialised.

Socializing through a game

Usually, once a child has learned to sit, it starts crawling. Nevertheless, the Ancients determined that only animals and demons could adopt this position. Even though knowledge on this is minimal, it is why it may be expected to find this type

11. The ancients believed *bullae* drove female demons away wanted to kill babies unable to protect themselves: Dasen, 2003, p. 277.

12. Suetonius, *Nero*, 6, 306; Baills, 2005, p. 361; Dasen, 2005, p. 124.

13. Haack, 2007, pp. 57-67.

14. Cicero, *De Finibus*, 5, 41: "When they have acquired a little strength, their mind and senses come into play: they make efforts to stand up, use their hands, recognize the people who bring them up [...] they are concerned by what is done at home and seek to know everything. They start to think and to learn." (trad. J. Martha, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1989)

of ex-voto in this seated position to protect children, along with statuettes of boys and girls playing with balls or holding birds. The bird was an animal often associated with childhood, as shown by the many Greek and Roman funerary headstones on which birds are depicted as children's companions (figures 3 and 4).

Some ancient texts illuminate the passion that boys felt for birds:

Nepos namque meus et itineris huius suavis comes, dum forte passerem incantantem sepiculae consecatur arripere, delapsus in proximam foueam, quae fruticibus imis subpatet, in extremo iam uitae consistit periculo [...].¹⁵

This very symbolic text by Apuleius describes the role of birds during the initiation of young men, as the boys expose themselves to the dangers of the world by climbing trees to recover the birds. Then, with some effort, the boys tame the birds by teaching them to whistle, as a metaphor of their own childhood which must pass from the wild world, into that of being civilized.



Figure 3.
Apollonia's funerary stele.
n° inv. 74AA.13, The Paul Getty Museum.



Figure 4.
Funerary stele.
n° inv. MNA 746, Athens, National Archaeological Museum.

15. Apuleius, *Metamorphosis*, 8, 20: "I was walking with my grandson, sweet companion of my old age. He saw a bird singing on a hedge, and as he tried to seize it, he suddenly disappeared into the ditch alongside the hedge, and which had been hidden from our sight by the undergrowth." (trad. P.-P. Vallette, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1947)

This is perhaps the reason why two representations of little boys holding birds may be found in the Vulci North Gate votive deposit: one of the boys is naked and seated (figure 5), the other one, older, is already depicted wearing a garment and standing (figure 6). While a city gate symbolised the boundary between the barbarian world and civilized worlds¹⁶, this particular votive deposit was found not far away, but interestingly outside the walls of the city of Vulci. It is likely that it belonged to a nearby place of worship, probably dedicated to Hercules, since terracotta statuettes representing the diety were found in the pit along with these offerings.



Figure 5.

Votive deposit of the North Gate (Vulci).
G1, Pautasso, 1994, p. 178, tav. 38a.
n° inv. 59739, Museum of Villa Giulia.



Figure 6.

Votive deposit of the North Gate (Vulci)
.E2, Pautasso, 1994, p. 62, tav. 33a.
n° inv. 59749, Museum of Villa Giulia.

The demi-god, called *Hercle* in Etruscan civilisation, was well known¹⁷ for his warlike character as illustrated on Etruscan mirrors from the fourth century AD and more recently on gems in which he is depicted fighting monsters. On one gem in particular, he is fighting a lion, standing on an ouroboros containing the uterine organ. The fight between Heracles and the lion symbolized his control over the uterus as an undisciplined organ, the pain of the womb being compared to the

16. Camporeale, 2012, p. 328.

17. The demi-god seems, indeed, to enjoy certain popularity in southern Etruria as well as in Lazio. He was honoured in the sanctuaries of Sant'Antonio and Vignaccia (Caere), Celle (Falerii), or Campetti, Macchia Grande and Portonaccio (Veii).

violence of the animal that must be made docile¹⁸. So, to the extent that he patronised perhaps this extra-urban place of worship, it is possible that the offerings may have been dedicated to him in order to transform the little animal, that the child was supposed to be, into a civilized adult¹⁹.

This lesson was not done only to socialize the child or to make him defter through games of skill, but to aid his development into being able to devote himself to another game, that of seduction.

Games and imitation: imitating to grow up better

Although games involving skill and animals seem almost non-existent within the Etruscan-Italic *ex-voto*, it is not certain that these were absent in the childlike universe of the Etruscan and Latial populations. Their absence in places of worship may simply indicate that the vow accompanying the offerings was perhaps not the same as that of Greeks and Romans, where many such *ex-voto* were found. Perhaps the wish to see a child grow up in a way which enabled them to take their place physically and morally in the community was expressed differently.

It may be surprising to note that the statues of the children holding toys, animals or fruit are most often represented with features that may today be classified as 'adolescents'. It may be equally surprising that in the votive deposits of the sites where they were discovered, statues and statuettes were associated with certain other categories of offerings similar to them, such as reproductions of babies in diapers, mixed couples, women breastfeeding, or children sitting, but not with uteruses or terracotta phalluses. This raises the question of whether there was a specialization of sanctuaries and gods where some were specifically devoted to births, while others were worshipped to obtain growth. This is most probable if there were several places of worship within the same city.

This paper now focuses on two sanctuaries in the Etruscan city of Veii, the Etruscan city of Cerveteri as well as the eastern sanctuary of Lavinium (Pratica di Mare), in Lazio.

The end of childhood: a ritualized gift?

Statues, almost life-sized, have been discovered in these two sanctuaries, along with votive heads imitating pubescent children who, given their dress and the objects held in their hands, may be associated with a rite of passage symbolising the end of childhood.

18. Dasen, 2007, pp. 54-55.

19. The demi-god was known to the Romans as the representative of the civilizing mission of Rome. So, when Rome colonized the other cities, a place of worship was dedicated to the demi-god not far from a door so that it protects their change of status, the harmony established towards the foreigners and the hospitality for the new elements of the city: Carosi, 2011, p. 125.

This rite for boys, described as the *togae virilis sumptio*, the attainment of the virile toga, is well recorded in written texts. In Rome, it was arranged for citizens' sons on March 17, during the Liberalia festival, in honour of Liber Pater, the god of seed and puberty²⁰. It was the day when the "phase of break" was celebrated, which is to say, the attainment of adulthood, during which the children submitted the most significant symbols of their childhood to the Lares of the family, the *bullae* and their toys, then leave their *toga praetexta* and take up the virile toga.

After the private phase of the rite was performed in front of the family altar, the procession moved first to the *tabularium*, where the new citizen was registered as belonging to a tribe, and finally on towards the Capitol, during the Republic. There, at the entrance of the temple of Minerva, a coin was offered to the altar of *Iuventas*. After the inauguration of Augustus' *forum*, at the temple of Mars Ultor (in 2 BC), the last stage of the rite involved the new citizen accompanied by his father, close relatives, friends and clients of the family, proceeding to the public square.

During these rites of passage, the young people dedicated to the gods, clothes and objects which had connected them to the world of childhood. The description of which was recorded in Greek and Latin texts. For example, an epigram of Leonidas of Taranto, included what a little boy dedicated to the god of travel: "Philocles dedicated to Hermes his renowned ball (*sphaira*), the boxwood castanets (*platageta*), the dice (*astragaloi*) that he loved above all, and the top (*rhombos*) that he spun: all the toys (*paignia*) of his childhood²¹."

While another text describes what a little girl offered to Artemis : " Goddess of Limnes, when Timareta got married, she consecrated her tambourines (*tympana*), the ball (*sphaira*) she loved, the net that held her hair; and her dolls, she, virgin, as required she dedicated them to the virgin goddess, with the clothes of the little virgins. In return, daughter of Leto, reach out your hand to Timaretos' daughter and piously look after this pious girl²²."

Since the sites included in this study were not in Rome, it is difficult to know whether such feasts were held, however a small number of dedications indicate that, in Rome and Italy, it was customary to erect monuments on the occasion of the "taking of the toga". The offerings mentioned above may have been part of the feasts, since some of the figurines held toys like spinning tops, balls or astragals. In all cases, the geographical location and the divinities honoured there lent themselves to the idea of rites of passage²³, since the other places of worship were suburban; except for Campetti I in Veii, Portonaccio located northwest of the same city²⁴, Vignaccia in the southwest of Cerveteri²⁵ and the eastern sanctuary was located to the east of Lavinium²⁶. Although the Campetti I site was not within the

20. Horace, *Saturnalia*, 1, 5, 65; Perse, *Satires*, 5, 31 ; Propertius, *Elegies*, 4, 1, 131 ; Torelli, 1990, p. 99.

21. *Palatine Anthology*, 6, 309.

22. *Palatine Anthology*, 6, 280.

23. Ducaté-Paarmann, 2003, p. 354.

24. Ambrosini, 2009.

25. Nagy, 1988.

26. Fenelli, 1989-1990, pp. 487-505.

city limits, it was not far from one of its gates²⁷, it may be possible that the children went through a gate leading out of the city, to symbolize their still wild nature, and after the rite, returned through another one leading into the city, to show that, at present, they had taken their place in their community.

As a result, the young girls came to place themselves under the protection of fertility goddesses like the Etruscan *Veī*²⁸, the equivalent of Demeter, in Campetti, or to other goddesses like the Etruscan *Menerva*²⁹, *Artumes*³⁰ or their equivalents, Minerva³¹ or Artemis in the other sanctuaries, to enable them to control their still wild nature and to help them reach maturity as *Herle*. In some cities, there were several places of worship, in the case of Veii and Cerveteri, this may indicate a specialization of places of worship and Campetti I and Portonaccio in Veii, for example, may have been used to leave the world of childhood while others had to be used for other purposes. Were there no differences between Etruscan and Roman initiations rites?

The city of Veii in particular, highlights the Etrurian custom of separating the male and female rites of passage, as more terracotta representations of young girls were discovered in the sanctuary of the Campetti, patronized by *Veī*, rather than that of Portonaccio. No doubt this preference was due to the fact that the goddess was linked to the growth of any living organism which may explain why *Veī* was implored to promote fertility and reproduction of devotees whose future role was that of a mother. Offering at this site included five hundred and fifty-nine statuettes of breast-feeding women³², eight statues of sitting children³³, eight statues of babies in diapers³⁴ and seventeen representations of mixed couples³⁵. However, if a city lacked several shrines, boys and girls used the same place of worship, as in Lavinium. It is possible that Roman gods, linked to the passage, like Minerva, protected all young people, in contrast to those Etruscans, like *Menerva*, who covered only one gender, in this case, young boys.

The exact age of this ritual passage into adulthood is still debated, but by examining various statues which were discovered, it is clear that the figurines may be divided into two groups. The first consists of statues depicting plump childish faces, the body shapes still undeveloped, short hair for girls (figures 7-8), boys wearing the *toga praetexta*³⁶ and *bullā*³⁷, holding toys like spinning tops, astragals or

27. Comella, Grete, 1990.

28. Bellelli, 2012, pp. 455-478.

29. *Menerva* was often honored in peripheral shrines. It was therefore linked to rites of passage. The statuery represented her also armed and helmeted, which means that she must be perceived as a *potiona theron* and by extension, as being able to control the savagery contained in the children: Ducaté-Paarmann, 2003, pp. 351-357.

30. Nielsen, Rathje, 2009, pp. 261-293.

31. Torelli 1984 ; Fenelli, 1989-1990, pp. 487-505 ; Ducaté-Paarmann, 2003, pp. 354-355.

32. FVIII, GXXI, GXXIII-GXXIV, GXXIII, Vagnetti, 1971, pp. 60 and 72-73; E8 VI b-d, E8 XII, Comella, Grete, 1990, pp. 84-88.

33. L I - L IV, Vagnetti, 1971, pp. 85-87; E5 I-II, Comella, Grete 1990, pp. 72-73.

34. MI a - b, MII, Vagnetti, 1971, p. 87.

35. O II, O IV, Vagnetti, 1971, pp. 89-90 ; E11 II, E11 III, E11 IV, Comella, Grete, 1990, pp. 96-97.

36. In Etruria: Campetti (Veii): I XIV, I XIV, Vagnetti, 1971, p. 80; E2 I, Comella, Grete, 1990, p. 60. Portonaccio (Veii): VTP 1109, 1109b, 1171 and 1272b, Colonna, 2002, p. 180; VTP 1070, Colonna,

balls³⁸ (figures 9-10), but more gender-specific toys, like three hundred miniature ceramics perhaps representing a dining set made up of cups, bowls and *olla* and a hundred *thymiateria* found in the sanctuary of Lavinium³⁹. This raises questions as to whether the offerings symbolise an unfinished, still wild state, a happy childhood that would soon be left behind, or metaphors for the qualities adults wished to inculcate in the child.



Figure 7.
A young girl's statue (Lavinium).
D 234, AA. VV., 1981, p. 251.



Figure 8.
A young girl's statue (Lavinium).
Torelli, 1984, p. 48, fig. 30.

2002, p. 202; VTP 16, 19 and 22, Colonna, 2002, p. 205; VTP 385, Colonna, 2002, p. 206; VTP 1109, 1109b and 1171, Colonna, 2002, p. 180; VPS 8-9, Moretti Sgubini, 2008, p. 108; 40777, Boitani, 2013, p. 199; 40812, Boitani, 2013, p. 200. Fontanile di Legnisina (Vulci): n° 30, Ricciardi, 1988-1989, pp. 153-155. Lazio: Pratica di Mare (Lavinium) : D 142, 144, AA. VV., 1981, p. 213 ; D 206, AA. VV., 1981, p. 228; D 225, AA. VV., 1981, p. 242; D 232, AA. VV., 1981, p. 250 ; D 241, AA. VV., 1981, pp. 254-255.

37. In the sanctuary of Portonaccio (Veii): VTP 1070, Colonna, 2002, p. 202; VPS 8 - 9, Moretti Sgubini, 2008, p. 108; n° inv. 40812, Boitani, 2013, p. 200.

38. Pratica di Mare (Lavinium) : inv. n° 77.61; 77.12; P. 77.45; P. 77.72; P. 77.185, Deposito Archeologico di Pratica di Mare; D 186, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218 and D 225, AA. VV., 1981, p. 1981.

39. AA.VV., 1981.



Figure 9.
Left hand with five astragals (Lavinium).
D 184, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218.

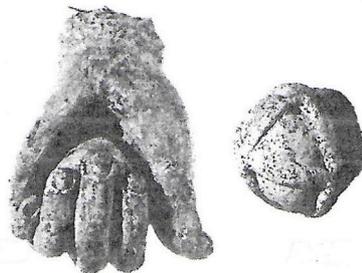


Figure 10.
Left hand with a ball and ball (Lavinium).
D 186 and D 187, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218.

As for the second grouping, it is made up of naked or shirtless young men, with bulging muscles⁴⁰ (figures 11-12) and young women whose body shapes are visible under their shifts, their hair held by a tiara as per the style of their time, most often veiled, wearing beautiful jewels like earrings *a grappulo*, as well as three rows of necklaces, one of which was a cord holding pendants engraved with the image of Eros and a pectoral necklace with the image of men wrestling⁴¹ (figures 13-14), offering a box⁴² (figures 15a-b), fruit⁴³, egg⁴⁴ (figure 16) or bird, like a dove⁴⁵.

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40. Etruria : Campetti (Véio) : E2 I, Comella, Grete, 1990, p. 60; I XIV, I XVI, Vagnetti, 1971, p. 80. Portonaccio (Veio): VTP 1070; VTP 1272b, Colonna 2002, pp. 180-202; VTP 16, VTP 19, VTP 22, Colonna 2002, p. 205; VTP 385, Colonna 2002, p. 206; VTP 1109, VTP 1109b, VTP 1171, Colonna 2002, p. 180; VPS 6 and 8-9, Moretti Sgubini, Torelli, 2008, p. 208; 40777, Moretti Sgubini, Boitani, 2013, p. 199; 40812, Moretti Sgubini, Boitani, 2013, p. 200. Fontanile di Legnina (Vulci): n° 30, Ricciardi, 1988-1989, pp. 153-155. Lazio: Pratica di Mare (Lavinium): D 142 and D 144, AA.VV. 1981, p. 213; 206, AA.VV., 1981, p. 228; D 225, AA.VV. 1981, p. 242; D 232, AA.VV., 1981, p. 250; D 241, AA.VV., 1981, pp. 254-255.
41. For example: Pratica di Mare (Lavinium): D 202, AA. VV., 1981, p. 226; D 227, AA. VV., 1981, p. 244.
42. Pratica di Mare: statue of girl holding in her hand a box, D 229, AA.VV. 1981, pp. 247-249. Only boxes were also discovered on the site: D 180-183, AA.VV. 1981, p. 218; n° inv. unpublished P77.784, P. 78.377, P. 78.382.
43. Etruria : Vignaccia (Cerveteri): 3 statues of men, IIE8, Nagy, 1988, pp. 217-218; Campetti (Veii): 16 statues of girls, E6 I A-B, Grete, Comella, 1990, pp. 71-74; Campetti II (Veii): a statue of girl, F5, Pohl, Torelli, 1978, p. 252; girl's statue F6, Pohl, Torelli, 1978, p. 252.. Lazio: Pratica di Mare (Lavinium): girl's statue, D 256, AA.VV. 1981, p. 261; two left hands with a box, D 180-D 181, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218; two boxes, D 182-183, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218; unpublished hands holding a grenade: n° inv. P.77.48; P. 77.57; P. 77.78, Fenelli, 1989-1990, p. 497 and n° inv. P. 77.12; P. 77.45; P. 77.72; P. 77.185, AA.VV., 1981, p. 242.
44. Pratica di Mare (Lavinium): two right hands holding an egg, D 175 et D 176, AA.VV. 1981, p. 218.
45. Etruria: Campetti (Veii): girls holding a dove: F III (36 examples), Vagnetti, 1971, p. 58; FXII (2 examples), Vagnetti, 1971, p. 61; E6 II (7 examples), Grete, Comella, 1990, pp. 74-75; boys holding a dove: I VIII (4 examples), Vagnetti, 1971, p. 78; E2 I (1 example), Grete, Comella, 1990, p. 60. Lazio: Pratica di Mare (Lavinium): girls holding a dove: D 202-203, AA.VV., 1981, pp. 225-227 and D 242, AA.VV. 1981, p. 256; female right hands holding a dove: D 170-173, AA.VV., 1981, p. 217.



Figure 11.
A young naked man's statue (Portonaccio).
n° VPS 9, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa
Giulia.
Torelli, Moretti Sgubini 2008, p. 67.



Figure 12.
A young man's statue (Portonaccio).
n° VPS 6, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa
Giulia.
Torelli, Moretti Sgubini 2008, p. 67.

These two statues are heavily stylised as they represented an idealized youth. It is difficult to explain the nakedness, as normally nudity was the prerogative of the gods, so arguably, these forms represent the ideal to achieve. For example, in the Roman world, babies wore diapers from birth, since diapers accentuated the natural forms of each sex. For boys, it was necessary to accentuate the curve of the back and to ensure that the foreskin covered the glans penis well, so that eventually they would resemble the marble ephebes: "if the male child appears to have a short foreskin, that the midwife gently pulls the tip of this foreskin, or even restrains it with a strand of wool to maintain it in place: pulled slightly forward in this way and continuously elongated, it easily reaches its natural size, covering the glans penis and gets accustomed to keeping the shape intended by nature. The midwife also shapes the testicles by detaching them well from the fork of the thigh, to avoid their compression, and places them on a woollen pack, which is placed on the thighs of the child⁴⁶."

Similarly, the girls had to resemble Hellenistic Venuses, with delicate breasts and broad hips as a sign of fecundity: "she will do the same for the swaddling of

46. Soranos of Ephesus, *Women's diseases*, 2, 12, 114-123.

the other arm, then will proceed to that of the thorax, covering it with a wider bandage: the bandage will be tightened uniformly for the boys, but for the girls, it will be tightened more at the chest level, releasing the part which covers the hips, because the shape which one thus obtains is particularly suitable in women⁴⁷." Although these prescriptions are prerequisite to this study, it is likely that the Etruscans followed similar recommendations, as demonstrated by statues and pictorial scenes where the characters are idealized.



Figure 14.
A young woman's statue (Lavinium).
D 202, AA. VV., 1981, p. 26.



Figure 13.
A young woman's statue (Lavinium).
D 227, AA. VV., 1981, p. 243.

The presence of this second group in the same places of worship as the first may symbolize the separation of the "asexual" world of the family unit and the integration into the community and the "sexual world". Given the refinement of these statues, they must have been offered by the highest social classes of the cities. For the boys, they symbolize the new citizen and for the girls, the future bride and mother. At least, that is how the Laviniate statues could be interpreted, as on each is found faithfully reproduced a headband or tiara, veil, shape of the earrings, pectoral necklace and the different headgear which were the prerogative of married women and Roman matrons in the middle of the Republic⁴⁸. The jewels were to constitute the trousseau that the young girl would bring to her wedding, which had been collected by the families over several years, as well as the small box which some statues may be depicted holding. The box symbolised the box accom-

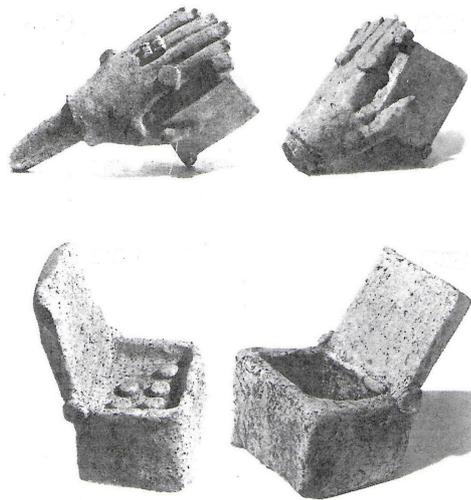
47. Soranos of Ephesus, *Women's diseases*, 2, 6a, 133-139.

48. Fenelli, 1989-1990, p. 498; Gerchanoc, 2006, pp. 239-266 ; Glinister, 2009, pp. 193-215.

panied the bride, containing her perfume and her clothes, when she went to live with her husband.



Figure 15a.
A young woman' statue with a box (Lavinium).
D 229, AA. VV., 1981, p. 247.



Figures 15b.
Left hands with a box and boxes (Lavinium).
D180-183, AA. VV., 1981, p. 218.



Figures 16.
Left hand with an egg and an egg (Lavinium).
D175-176, AA. VV., 1981, pp. 217-218.

The wish associated with these offerings by parents may have been that their children would become accomplished adults, making their community prosper, similarly perhaps the young people themselves hoped to influence their future.

Playing the future-seduction games

Arguably the idealization of these statues may be an invitation to the game of romance as depicted in the developed musculature and prominence on the statues representing young men, likewise increased desirability of young women through the richness of the finery, close-fitting clothes and a beauty enhancing veil. The cloth envelope, like a gift package, makes her an attractive and pleasing gift to behold, intended to arouse desire and envy, and to lead to the final accomplishment of marriage and procreation. This may be the reason for the young women's necklaces including images of Eros or men fighting⁴⁹; similarly why statues representing young women donate a dove, a fruit like a pomegranate or an apple, since these are emblematic of Aphrodite's grace and presence⁵⁰.

Further questions arise as to whether the spherical objects depicted are fruit or balls. The two merge, since apple, μήλον, and ball, σφαῖρα, may replace one another in an erotic context as symbolising a woman's body⁵¹, as both promote contact between girls and boys. For poets of the *Palatine Anthology*, the apple is an invitation to the reciprocity of the feeling of love: "I am an apple (mêlon); the one who throws me is someone who loves you. Accede to his wishes, Xanthippe; we are, you like me, destined to wither⁵²". According to Meleagre, a ball may become a heart with which Eros plays: "He is a ball player, the Love I nourish; he throws to you, Heliodora, the heart that leaps in my bosom. Come, accept him as your part-

49. These necklaces belonged to D 224, AA. VV., 1981, p. 239; D 227-D 229 AA. VV., 1981, pp. 243-247.

50. Pirenne-Delforge, 1994, pp. 409-465.

51. For the symbolism of the pomegranate: Chirassi Colombo, 1968, p. 73.

52. *Anthology Palatine* 5, 80.

ner; but if you do not desire me in return, I will not tolerate this affront even if it is against the customs of the palestra⁵³”.

A game involving several balls, and the way they fall on the ground, may be perceived as permitting questioning of the gods about, and possibly influencing, a future love life⁵⁴. This may explain statues in which a young girl holds a ball in each hand⁵⁵. In any case, it appears that more female statues are depicted holding these objects than male effigies, perhaps as an aphrodisiac attribute, representing the sexual desire to be instilled in future couples and probably up to the new wife to initiate – this may explain the presence of eggs in some of the votive lavinate hands as they symbolise vitality and fertility⁵⁶. In all cases, only young boys and girls of childbearing age were represented holding a food type⁵⁷.

Others games and toys requiring skill, such as spinning tops⁵⁸ and astragals⁵⁹, may have indicated a desire to influence or discover the future, by offering ex-voto representations⁶⁰. Perhaps these skills based games were a specific indulgence of young Roman men and women, as such objects were not found in the Etruscan sanctuaries, perhaps they practiced another form of amusement. In any case, the games involved risk taking, which translated in another way, may indicate that the future could consist of ups and downs, like balls, or random events like the movement of the top, and unpredictable like the astragals, whose fall could lead to a variety of interpretations.

If the iconography of playful practices creates a disconnection from the real game and reconstruction of its course, it fully participates in the construction of a history of intimacy and gender, locally, in the Etruscan world. The games examined in this paper reflect an anxiety and uncertainty about the future, tensions generated and feelings of love viewed as risk taking.

However, the abandonment of objects related to a boy or girl’s childhood may not allow the reconstitution as a whole, the rite of initiation associated with it, but serves only to highlight that the child placed themselves under the jurisdiction of a deity, who they believed had accompanied them until then, or to ask for the pro-

53. *Palatine Anthology*, 5, 214.

54. This motif appears in the second third of the fifth century on the painting of Attic vases and has continued to devolve towards the space of the gynoecium taking an erotic character: Dasen, 2016, pp. 2-5.

55. D 256, AA. VV., 1981, p. 261.

56. For the symbolism of the egg: Nilsson, 1951, p. 3.

57. Stelae of children holding a bird were found in sanctuaries where deities related to different stages of childhood were honored. It is possible that, in this case, the dedication of statues of young people holding a bird, even a dove, has a pattern similar to those already exposed: Santos Da Silva, 2018, pp. 71-74.

58. Inv. n° P. 77.61, Deposito Archeologico di Pratica di Mare: *Palatine Anthology*, 7, 89. The whirling of the spinning top can also be associated with the magic of love, the vertigo that this feeling causes: Dasen, 2016, pp. 5-6.

59. A votive hand holding astragals was found at the Sanctuary of Pratica di Mare: D 184, AA.VV., 1981, p. 218.

60. Astragals were discovered in large numbers in Apollo’s sanctuaries where we consulted oracles. Ovid, *Loves*, 1, 8, 7; Lambrugo, 2013, p. 31; Zwierlein-Diehl, 2013, p.60; Hermary, 2019, p. 97.

tection of those who were going to take the next step, for the future was just as uncertain as the game of ossicles. Finally, it illustrates that the practices appeared to differ between periods and regions: the Etruscan youth was placed under the patronage of a different entity according to their gender and motivation while the Roman child was accompanied by the same, to the extent of their powers; the latter appeared to relinquish more objects than the former, as if they thought they had more to lose, to enter the adult world.

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