



CLA320H5F

The Etruscans

Week 2

Today's class

1. The Great Debate: Etruscan Origins
2. From Village to City: The First Big Shift
3. Villanovan Dwellings
4. Villanovan Burials: Hut Urns and “Biconic” Urns
5. Burial and Grave Goods
6. *Your research project*
7. *Practice quiz*

Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Etruscan Origins

Roman Antiquities 1.26-30

(1st cent. BCE)

26 ... As regards these Tyrrhenians, some declare them to be natives of Italy, but others call them foreigners ...

27 But those who relate a legendary tale about their having come from a foreign land say that Tyrrhenus, who was the leader of the colony, gave his name* to the nation, and that he was a Lydian by birth. Lydus, they continue, ... inherited his father's kingdom, and from him the country was called Lydia; but Tyrrhenus, who was the leader of the colony, conquered a large portion of Italy and gave his name* to those who had taken part in the expedition.

1.27 (*cont.*)

Herodotus, however, says that Tyrrhenus and his brother were the sons of Atys, the son of Manes, and that the migration of the Maeonians to Italy was not voluntary. For they say that in the reign of Atys there was a dearth in the country of the Maeonians ... As the mischief continued, they divided the people into two groups and cast lots to determine which should go out of the country and which should stay in it; of the sons of Atys one was assigned to the one group, the other to the other. And when the lot fell to that part of the people which was with Lydus to remain in the country, the other group departed after receiving their share of the common possessions; and landing in the western parts of Italy where the Umbrians dwelt, they remained there and built the cities that still existed even in his time.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities 1.26-30 (cont.)

28 I am aware that many other authors also have given this account of the Tyrrhenian race, some in the same terms, and others changing the character of the colony and the date ...

30 ... And I do not believe, either, that the Tyrrhenians were a colony of the Lydians; for they do not use the same language as the latter ... For they neither worship the same gods as the Lydians nor make use of similar laws or institutions ...

Indeed, those probably come nearest to the truth who declare that the nation migrated from nowhere, but was native to the country, since it is found to be a very ancient nation and to agree with no other either in its language or in its manner of living. Their own name for themselves, however, is the same as that of one of their leaders, Rasenna.

The Great Debate: Where Did the Etruscans Come From?



Three Competing Theories in Antiquity (and beyond):

1. Eastern Origin

1. Etruscans migrated from **Lydia** in Asia Minor (Herodotus 1.94; others; widely accepted in antiquity)
2. Led by **Tyrrhenus** (colonial/etiological myth)
3. Explains the Greek name *Tyrrhenoi*

2. Autochthonous (Native) Origin (< autós + chthon 'sprung from the land itself')

1. Etruscans always lived in **central Italy** (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.26-30; **slides 3–5**; confirmed by archaeological research)
2. Developed from earlier Bronze Age cultures
3. Called themselves *Rasenna / Rasna* ("the people")

3. Northern / Alpine Origin ("Continental" theory)

1. Migration from the **north (the Alps)** (Livy, some modern scholars; popular in the late 18th and 19th cent.)
2. Linked to the people known as the **Rhaeti**
3. Explains certain linguistic similarities

Cf. Barker & Rasmussen pp. 43 f. and 82-84

(cont.)

- Massimo **Pallottino**, the father of modern Etruscology, re-defined the problem: in his view, Etruscan civilization is the result of a gradual historical **formative process** in which various ethnic and cultural elements participated.
- This view is confirmed by archaeological research, which shows **continuities** in settlement patterns and social structure in central Italy from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age and to the historical period. Hence, it seems that the Etruscans developed from **local Bronze-Age populations**.



Massimo Pallottino (1909-1995)

From Village to City: The First Big Shift

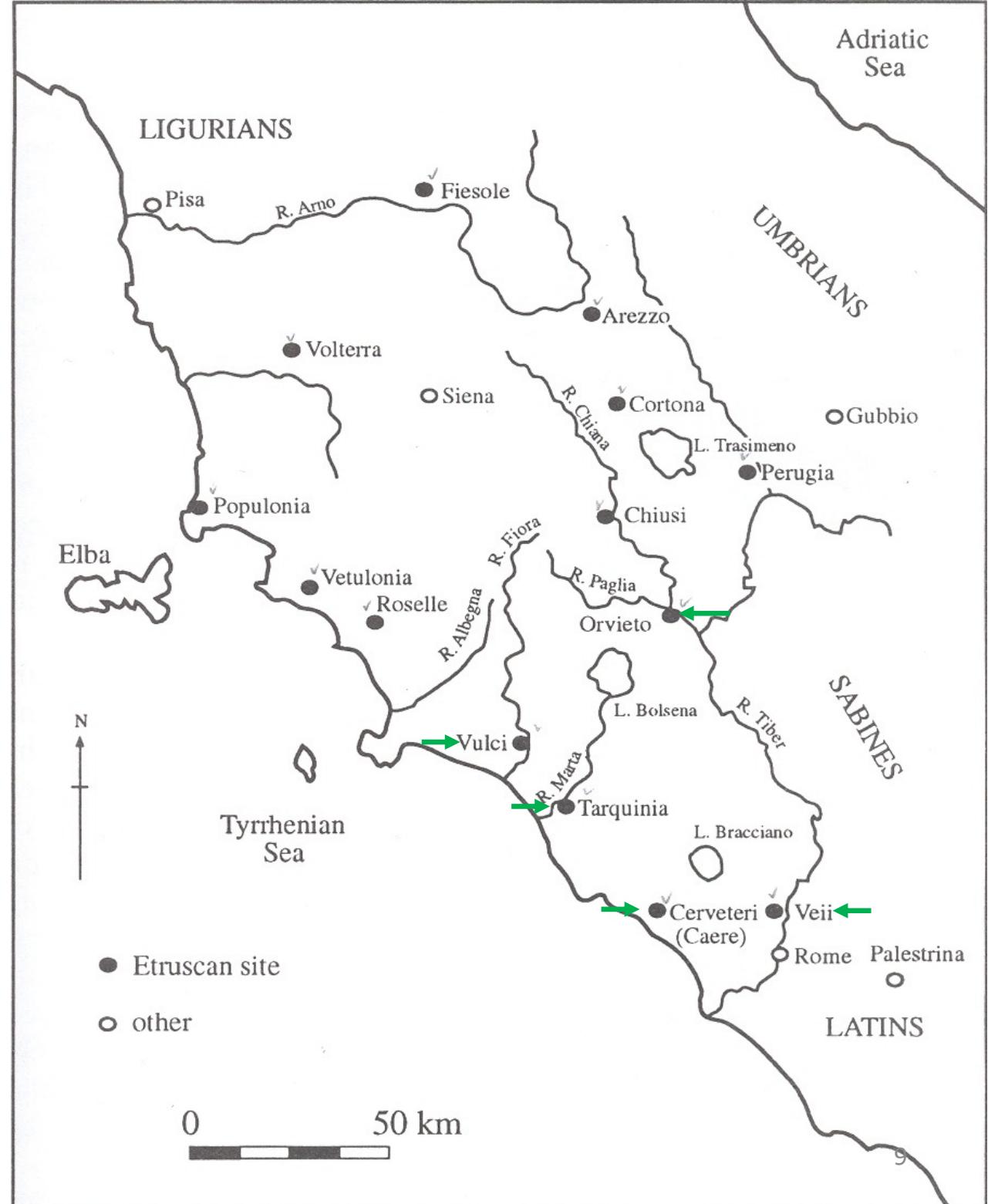
The **Late Bronze Age** (1300-900 BCE) marked the first crucial phase in the transition from village to city in the region later inhabited by the Etruscans. The most significant changes include:

1. **Nucleation** (the formation of larger settlements that potentially serve as focal points for their hinterland; begins in the region of southern Etruria)
2. **Economic intensification**
3. **Social hierarchies**, while still limited, become more marked
4. **Demographic increase** (likely linked to economic intensification)

→ cf. Barker and Rasmussen pp. 53-65

Main settlements in Etruria
 (black dots)
 → Cf. Barker&Rasmussen p. 15
 fig. 4

The arrows indicate
five large 9th-century centres
 that maintained their importance
 from the Villanova period
 into the Etruscan and Roman periods



The following photograph shows a reconstruction of a Villanovan dwelling.

- ① Looking at this reconstruction, how would you describe the dwelling?
- ② What kinds of evidence do you think scholars used to create this reconstruction?



Reconstruction of a 9th/8th century BCE Villanova hut

Villanovan Dwellings

- The **Early Iron Age** civilization in Etruria is called “**Villanovan**” (ca. 1000/900-700 BCE). In Villanova near Bologna in Northern Italy ([slide 13](#)), this civilization was first identified through the excavation of a cemetery in the mid-19th century.
- **Villanovan huts** ([slides 11, 14, 15, 17](#)) are of oval, rectangular or circular plan. Usually only the hut’s foundation trenches are preserved ([slide 15, left](#)). They received wattle-and-daub walls ([slide 16](#)) and postholes for wooden roof supports.
- Larger huts in Tarquinia measure 13x7 m and could have been inhabited by up to 10 people belonging to the same family. The smaller huts of 5x4 m would have housed a couple and their child or children. The distances between the huts and the random location of the huts in relation to each other suggest that the surrounding areas were used for animal keeping or the cultivation of small plots.



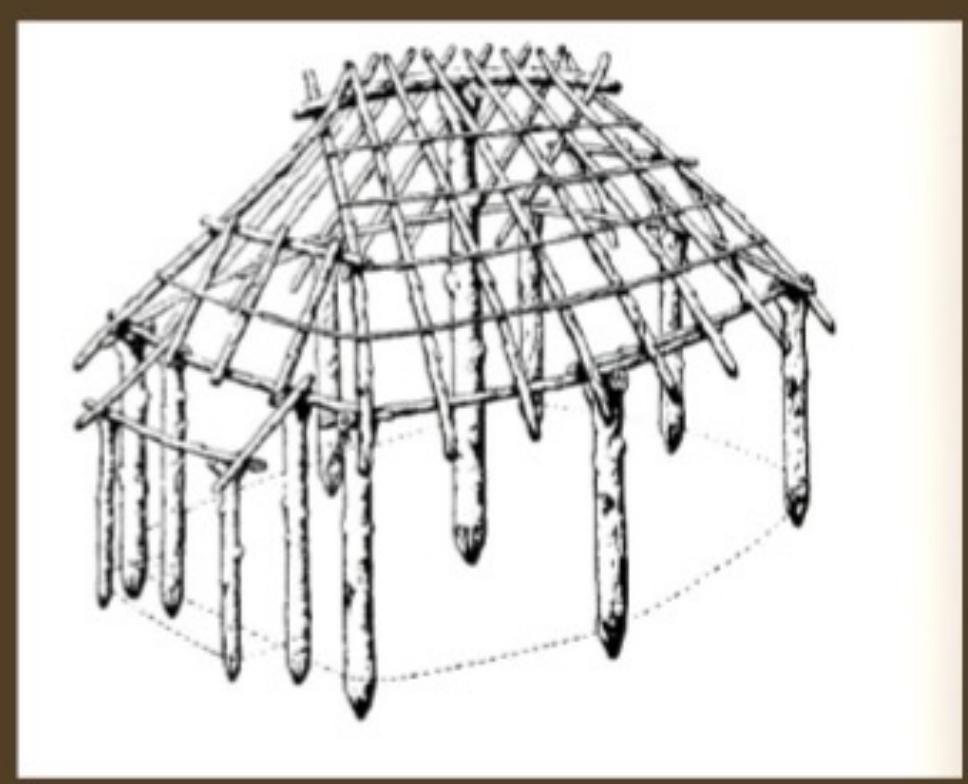


Model of an iron age hut
Rome, Palatine Museum 425531



Hut urn from Vulci
Coarse clay (impasto)
H 34.5 cm
9th cent. BCE
→Compare Barker&Rasmussen,
p. 69 fig. 27

(cont.)



Left: **Foundations** of oval hut in tufa bedrock

8th century BCE

From Rome, Palatine Hill

Right: reconstruction drawing of the **wooden frame** of a hut

Fragments of
burnt clay with
impressions, from
Iron-age
wattle-and-daub
constructions
From La Peña del
Castro and Llagú,
Spain





Villanovan Burials: Hut Urns and “Biconic” Urns

- **Hut urns** made of clay (**impasto**) or bronze imitated the dwellings of the living (**slide 19**). Impasto is an unpurified and therefore coarse clay that was modeled by hand.
 - The thatch was held in place by ridge logs. Their top ends projected beyond the ridge pole and could be carved in the form of birds or horns.
 - The use of such urns may derive from the wish to restore to the deceased persons a dwelling modeled on their actual homes. The hut urn may indicate an **elevated status** of the deceased person, especially when made of bronze (**slide 20**).
- For hut urns, cf. also Barker&Rasmussen pp. 69 f.
- **Biconic urns** (possessing twin-cone shape; **slide 21**) were more frequently used than hut urns. They have only one handle located at the widest expanse of the vessel, where the twin cones merge with a bulge.
 - This shape originally belongs to a **water vessel**. These urns were often covered by an inverted **drinking bowl** with a single handle.
 - The urns were often decorated with **geometric patterns** incised with a comb-like tool or impressed on the urns with stamps.
 - **Helmet-shaped lids** (**slide 21, left**) indicate the burial of a **warrior**, a sign of beginning **social stratification**.

Hut urn from Vulci
Coarse clay (**impasto**)
H 34.5 cm
9th cent. BCE
→Compare
Barker&Rasmussen,
p. 69 fig. 27



Bronze hut urn

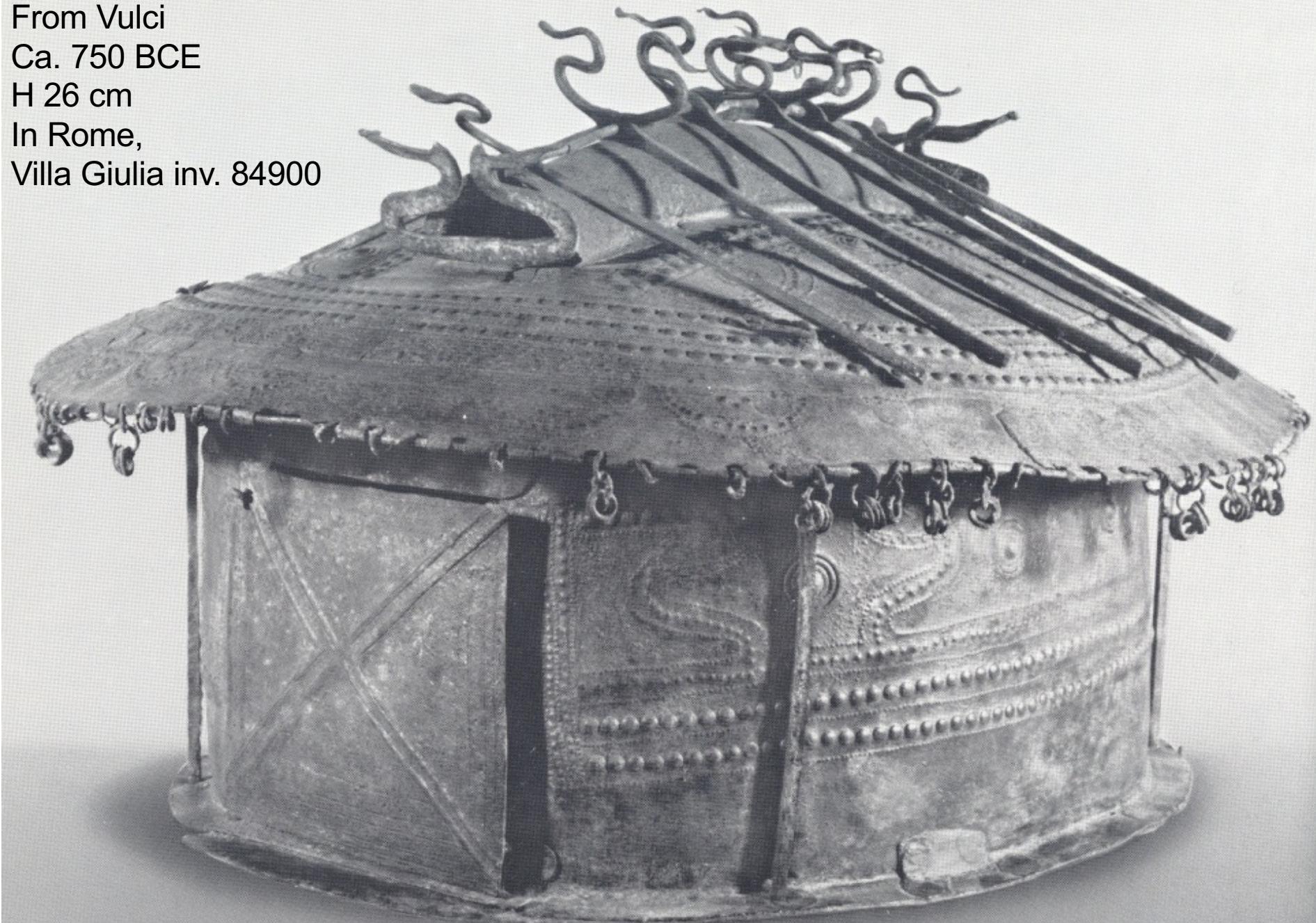
From Vulci

Ca. 750 BCE

H 26 cm

In Rome,

Villa Giulia inv. 84900



Biconic urn

From Tarquinia

Impasto H 57 cm

9th cent. BCE

In Florence,

Archaeological

Museum

**Biconic urn** From Vetulonia Impasto H 35 cm

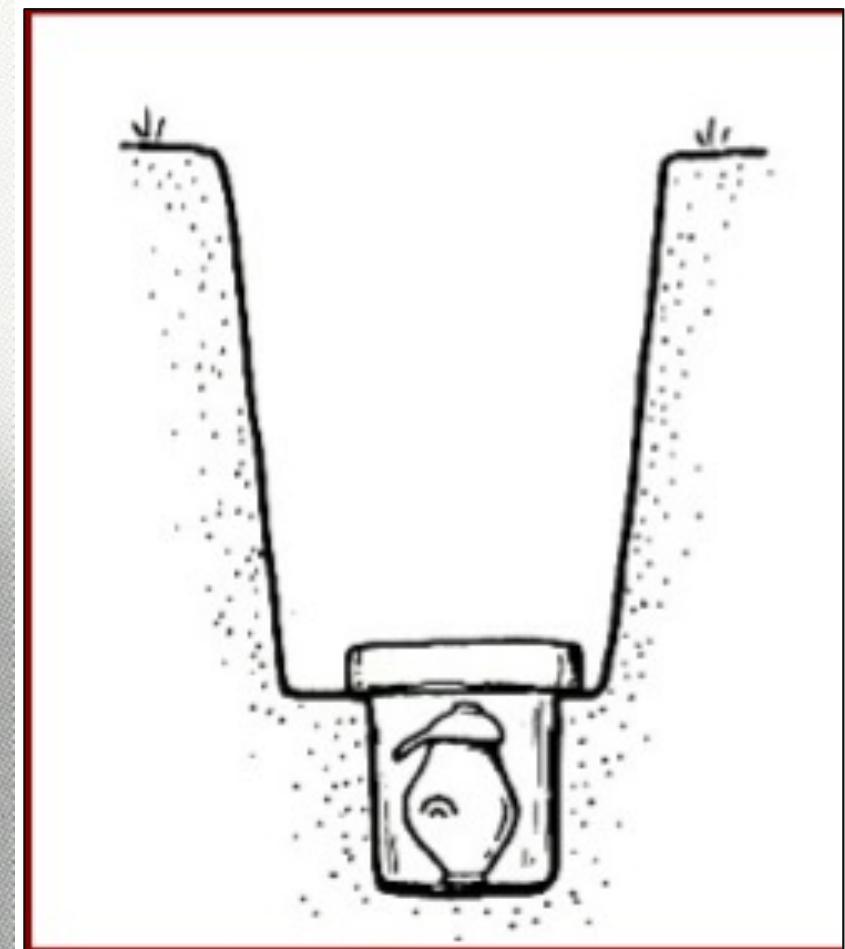
Late 9th cent. BCE In Florence, Archaeological Museum



Burial and Grave Goods

- In a typical Villanovan burial, the dead were **cremated** and their ashes placed in **urns**. The urns – whether biconic or hut-shaped – were buried in deep **pits** cut into the earth or rock and covered by slabs or piles of stone (**slides 23–24**).
- The cemeteries were usually located outside the settlements. While the pits usually contain only one urn, the graves of a **family group** were concentrated in one area.
- In the early Villanova period (9th cent.), burials generally contained a modest number of surviving grave goods (**slide 23, left**). **Rank** was expressed by types of ash urns and, rarely, by an increased number of grave goods.

→ cf. Barker & Rasmussen pp. 70-73.



Top: Tomba a pozzo “tomb in a well”
(schematic drawing; cf. [slide 23](#))

9th cent. BCE

Based on finds from Tarquinia

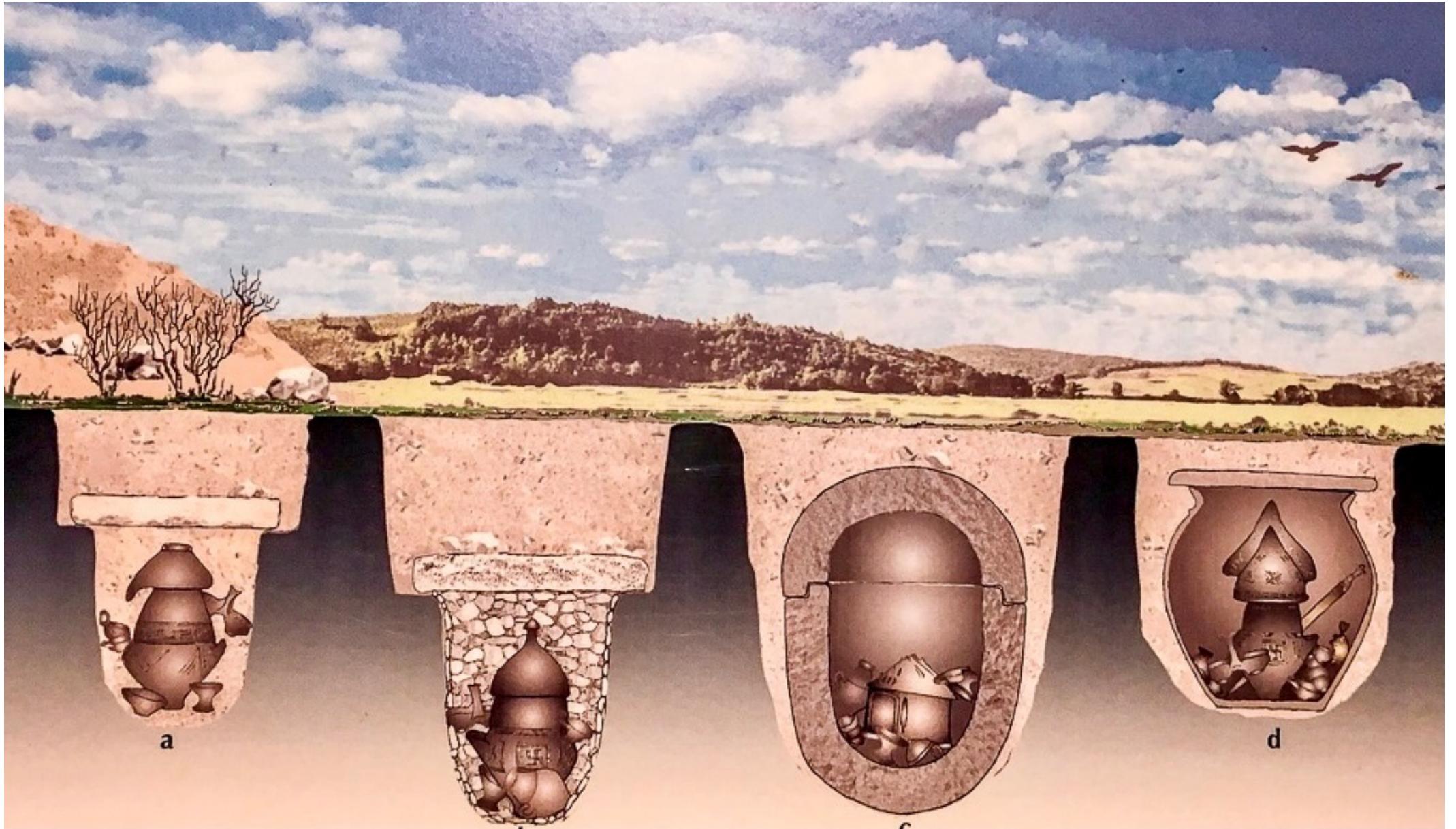
Left: Cremation burial

From Volterra

9th cent. BCE

In Volterra, Guarnacci Mus.

fibula (clothing pin)



Villanova cremation burials (tombe a pozzo/well-shaped tombs) in Tarquinia (cross section)
Didactic poster in Tarquinia, National Etruscan Museum