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# Reflections on miniaturisation. The case of the Tomb of the Five Chairs from the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere

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**Abstract:** The Tomb of the Five Chairs (it. *Tomba delle Cinque Sedie*) from the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere presents conspicuous characteristics within the Etruscan funerary sphere, involving a miniaturisation process associated to the arrangement of furniture and statuettes present in one of the side chambers of the tomb. This paper aims to explore the process of miniaturisation found here and to reflect on the consequences that this intentional downscaling of objects can produce onto a potential user or onlooker of such a scene. The analysis of this arrangement will allow an insightful look into the deliberate decisions undertaken by agents informing this process and into the enabling of specific responses. Further considerations regarding the characteristics of miniaturisation will also be introduced.

**Keywords:** materiality, miniaturisation, Banditaccia necropolis, ancestor cult, Etruscan furniture

## Towards a definition of miniaturisation

What can be defined as a *miniature*? What can be described as a miniaturisation process? Interestingly, there is no clear definition of miniaturisation, with different criteria being used in order to justify and explore such a practice. For L. Foxhall, "a miniature reproduces in some sense, at smaller scale, another object, whether natural or man-made. Hence it is an imitation or a model (though not necessarily a precise one) of another thing, so that the significance of the miniature and the significance of the original remain linked (and needless to say this may not be in the same ways in all cases)".[1] In this case, the author mentions that a miniature is primarily defined in relation to an original prototype, even if it portrays a rather schematic representation or if it is only a partial representation of the original object.[2] What can be said then about small-scale objects that do not reflect a direct link with an original prototype? D. Bailey considers such an issue and expands on the definition of miniaturisation, proposing two different ways of acknowledging the downscaling of objects "one is to view a small thing as an object that has been reduced in proportion to an original. This is to think in terms of scale. (…) A second way to think about size reduction is to take the human body as the ultimate, essential measure of scale. In this sense there

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[1] Foxhall 2015, 1.
[2] Foxhall 2015, 2.

is only one scale relationship (human body – to – object) and only three significant size categories: life-size, smaller than life-size, and larger than life-size. Thus, thinking about representations in the scale – to – human is a different exercise to thinking in terms of scale – to – original".[3] The significance of the criteria brought forward by D. Bailey is therefore in acknowledging the use of the human body as a scaling comparison and expanding upon the connection to an original prototype in considering an object as a miniature.

On the other hand, within the theoretical approaches proposed by C. Knappett in regard to the phenomenon of miniaturisation, the importance of both aforementioned elements in the defining of miniaturised objects is brought to the forefront. The process of miniaturisation can be characterised as such through the "first-hand experience", referring to the acknowledgement of the dimensions of an object in contrast to the human body, and through the "second-hand experience", representing the attribution of meaning, and considering the "wider assemblage" in order to determine the defining of objects as miniaturised objects.[4] The "assemblage" is namely referring to the "inter-artefactual networks" comprised of both human agents and artefacts.[5] There are four aspects that the author takes into account with the intent of analysing miniaturised objects: frequency, fidelity, distance, and directionality. Frequency refers to how often objects are reproduced at a smaller scale in relation to the original prototype; fidelity concerns the degree of schematism or detail that the miniaturised objects have in regard to the original prototype; distance refers to the spatial or temporal scale of recognition of the miniaturised objects in regard to the original objects; directionality concerns the relation between the small-scale versions and the original objects and namely how miniature objects are created in *response to* the larger-scale objects and not vice versa.[6]

In using such an approach and by bringing together the "first-hand" and "second-hand" experience, C. Knappett acknowledges therefore two steps in considering the miniaturisation process, firstly in accordance with the human body and secondly in accordance with an original object, since the aspects introduced for analytical purposes propose an examination of the relation between the miniature and the object it aims to represent on a smaller scale. Issues still remain however in the defining of a miniature. Can we clearly identify as *miniatures* – or on the contrary

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[3] Bailey 2005, 28-29.
[4] Knappett 2012, 87.
[5] Knappett 2012, 89-91.
[6] Knappett 2012, 92.

deny this attribute – (to) those objects that fulfil just one of the two proposed criteria for the comparisons of scale? Namely, could objects "smaller than life-size", but without an original prototype from which to be created, be identified as miniatures? Furthermore, could we also identify as miniatures objects that are "larger than life-size", but smaller in accordance with the original prototype that they are trying to replicate?

Other significant characteristics of the miniaturisation process that are often proposed and discussed in previous research are represented by the loss of function in miniatures, the degree of abstraction or detail in miniatures, and the distortion of spatial and temporal dimensions. Whereas a loss of function in miniatures has been debated by researchers,[7] it can be acknowledged that the specific measurements provided by them create different affordances that affect their functionality.

Miniaturised vessels for example provide reduced capacities for holding potential liquids or foods.[8] In other cases, specific miniaturised vessels are interpreted as tokens and are supposed to represent a certain quantity of products for inventory purposes;[9] this process suggests not a loss of function, but rather a change in the function that such objects manage to obtain during miniaturisation processes. Miniatures also vary in their accuracy in contrast to the original prototypes,[10] ranging from representing abstract forms alluding to the original objects to detailed representations whose difficulty in creating is therefore increased.[11] Lastly, a downscaling of objects in regard to the scale of the human body enables distinctive sensorial and bodily responses, different from those enabled by the "life-sized" objects. This can create a distorted approach in how humans would relate to the spatial parameters that characterise the context of the miniaturised objects. It is also precisely this 'out of the ordinary' element of miniaturisation that can also produce a distortion of the temporal dimension.[12] D. Bailey proposes that "miniaturism opens up a set of actions, of narratives, of histories that are outside the field of perception that exists in the

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[7] See Foxhall 2015, 2.
[8] Foxhall 2015, 2; Knappett 2012, 99.
[9] Knappett 2012, 98.
[10] Following this criterion, D. Bailey proposes a distinction to be created between the concept of model and that of miniature; whereas the former is seen as an attempt to accurately portray the original prototype at a smaller scale, the latter is acknowledged through its abstract quality or even inaccuracy in connection to the original object (Bailey 2005, 29). This differentiation however becomes problematic when considering that the integration of an item into one of the two categories is dependent on the theoretical cultural reconstruction of both aim and perception of the downsized object in question.
[11] Foxhall 2015, 1.
[12] Bailey 2005, 36-38.

reality of the everyday routine".[13] Miniaturisation can produce therefore a different or even unique way of relating to the world. These characteristics complicate even further the establishing of a clear and uniform definition of miniaturisation; instead, they propose the necessity to acknowledge the existence of *processes* of miniaturisation that prove to be not only quite diverse but also context-dependent – both in its immediacy and in accordance with the larger temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural environment.

Building on such theoretical considerations, a peculiar case-study from the Etruscan world can be brought to the forefront and used as a starting point for further reflections. Namely, this refers to the famous Tomb of the Five Chairs from the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere, whose left-side chamber presents a specific arrangement of 'miniaturised' objects, having been further described as a "Kultraum" or "Cult Room".[14] On the background of the theoretical implications of the miniaturisation process, the analysis of the tomb can only lead to further interpretations regarding the decision-making process behind such a miniaturisation practice and regarding the enabling of specific responses as its result.

**The unique arrangement of the Tomb of the Five Chairs**

The Tomb of the Five Chairs, built within a tumulus from the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere, is dated to the second half of the 7th century BC. The tomb consists of a main funerary chamber and two side chambers, whereas its special features are attributed to the findings discovered in the left-side room. The access to the tomb is provided by a partially stepped *dromos* that opens into a vestibule where the entrances to the three chambers can be found. The main funerary chamber is surrounded by stone benches on three sides and contains the two funerary beds meant for the deceased couple to be interred within the tomb. The right-side room from the *dromos* presents only one preserved element, a table carved out of the local rock measuring c 70 x 130 cm and 84 cm in height,[15] perhaps an altar.[16] Two additional, smaller rooms seem to connect the side chambers to the main funerary chamber and seem to function rather as access ways. These do not present any preserved elements. No grave goods appear to have been found or documented

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[13] Bailey 2005, 34-35.
[14] Prayon 1974, 14; also Tuck 1994, 620.
[15] Prayon 1975, 110 fn.608.
[16] Pavel 2023, 97.

at the moment of the registered discovery of the tomb around mid-19th century.[17] Additional furnishing elements have been found however in the left-side chamber of the tomb.

Focusing on the specific arrangement provided by the left-side room of this tomb (fig.1), the chamber presents a series of undersized furnishings that have led S. Steingräber to conclude that "la chambre de gauche, qui a donné son nom à la tombe, est pourvue d'un mobilier miniature, qui en fait comme une maison de poupée"[18]. The room measures c. 3 x 2.3 m and onto its western wall, five chairs carved out of the local rock are placed in an organised line, each with a backrest with a cruciform decoration, armrests, and a rectangular footstool. According to F. Prayon, each chair measures on average 70 cm in height, whereas the seating surface starts at c. 50-55 cm from the ground up; the seating area measures 28 x 28 cm; the backrest presents on average 20 cm in height and 44 cm in width; the footstool has on average 15 cm height, 22 cm width, and 15 cm depth.[19] In accordance with the findings from within the room, five small terracotta figurines, out of which only three are preserved nowadays,[20] were meant to have been placed on the chairs. The seated figurines, three male and two female,[21] present a tunic and hold their hands in a specific gesture: whereas their left hands are resting with their palm inwards on their laps, their right hands are stretched forwards with the palms facing upwards. These statuettes measure c. 50-60 cm in height and are also said to measure c. 26-27 cm from their knees to their back.[22]

In front of the five chairs and in front of the statuettes respectively, two tables were placed, although unfortunately these have not been preserved. According to the reconstruction made by F. Prayon based on late 19th century and early 20th century descriptions and drawings of the tomb, the height of the tables was equivalent to the height of the seating surface of the chairs behind them,[23] which places them at c. 50-55 cm in height. The reconstruction of the room furniture made

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[17] Prayon 1974, 4 fn.16.

[18] Steingräber 1997, 101.

[19] Prayon 1975, 108 fn.584.

[20] Two statuettes are displayed in the British Museum, whereas one statuette is preserved within the Capitoline Museum.

[21] Reconstructed as such by researchers given the fact that the two statuettes from the British Museum present female heads placed onto male torsos, whereas the statuette from the Capitoline Museum represents a male (Prayon 2006, 55).

[22] According to the measurements provided by the British Museum in reference to two of the preserved statuettes, inv. no. 1873,0820.637 (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1873-0820-637, site last accessed on 15.08.2024) and inv.no. 1873,0820.638 (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1873-0820-638, site last accessed on 15.08.2024).

[23] Prayon 1974, 10.

by F. Prayon also provides measurements for the tables at around 80 x 30 cm each.[24] To the northern wall of the room, two other 'miniaturised' chairs were placed on top of a platform that measured 100 x 40 cm and 27 cm in height.[25] In contrast, these chairs had a semi-circular shape and a round arm- and backrest; unfortunately, these are also not preserved and hence no secure measurements seem to be documented. Given the measurements of the platform, these chairs however must not have exceeded 50 cm width and 40 cm in depth – and must have been probably much smaller.[26] Next to these, in the northeast corner of the room, a cylindrical basket with a fluted base and a decorative motif on its upper surface was also carved out of the local rock. The upper surface of the basket is only partially preserved, leading to a preserved height of 73 cm and a diameter of 50 cm.[27] In the southeast corner of the room, an altar, now missing, was represented by a single rectangular block with three *cupellae* on its upper surface. The altar was said to measure 65 x 25 cm, and had a height of 40 cm. Besides the furnishings of the room and the five terracotta statuettes, only one other element has been found, namely a golden fibula[28] decorated with sixteen sphinxes and that is hypothesised by W. Helbig to have represented an ornament for the tunic of one of the statuettes.[29]

The generally accepted interpretation of this room, based also on the initial inferences forwarded by F. Prayon,[30] is that it depicts a funerary banquet shared between the ancestors of the family, evoked by the female and male terracotta statuettes, and the deceased couple, evoked by the presence of the two semi-circular chairs placed on the platform (and whose funerary beds were present in the main chamber of the tomb).[31] The undersized nature of the furniture in the room is proposed as an argument by S. Steingräber that this scene has rather a symbolic value,[32] placing therefore the miniaturisation process in connection to the dysfunctionality of the objects. Considering this scene through a miniaturisation standpoint brings however a more nuanced discussion concerning the elements placed within the room. The Tomb of the Five Chairs presents a unique example within the Etruscan funerary sphere of such a particular ensemble of

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[24] Prayon 1974, 5.
[25] Prayon 1975, 108 fn.587.
[26] See also Prayon 1974, 5.
[27] Prayon 1975, 114 fn.643.
[28] The golden fibula is also registered at the British Museum under the inv.no. 1872,0604.740.
[29] See Prayon 1974, 6 fn.20.
[30] Prayon 1974.
[31] Tuck 1994, 620; Steingräber 1997, 101-102; Camporeale 2009, 226.
[32] Steingräber 1997, 102.

arrangements of terracotta statuettes and furniture. A deconstruction of this ensemble might provide a better understanding of the choices made behind this deliberate display and of the effect that such an arrangement might have enabled onto an onlooker of the assemblage.

**Miniaturisation and distortion of space**

Analysing the room through the perspective of miniaturisation, the most conspicuous elements are represented by the five chairs aligned on the western wall of the room that allowed the placement of the statuettes. When considering the "firsthand experience" according to C. Knappett and using the scale of the human body for comparison, then these chairs deliberately present "smaller than life-size" measurements – these objects of furniture are indeed unusable by the adult human body given their reduced seating surface (of 28 x 28 cm) and given the potential further hindrances produced by the armrests and by the backrests. However, they do not seem to intrinsically present a loss of function, considering that they replicate the original affordances but as seats for the statuettes of the ancestors – perhaps perceived as the ancestors themselves. Despite the small dimensions of the statuettes themselves, a curious interplay of scales also happens between these and the chairs they are placed on, since the statuettes do not reach the armrests, the backrests, nor the footstool, nor do they cover the entire seating area, showing therefore a discrepancy between the measurements of the two elements (fig.2). This might therefore lead to a further distortion of space within the enclosed area, as perceived by a potential observer, one that involves a magnified perception of the chairs. At the same time, these objects entail a high level of detail – the cruciform backrest, the minute addition of the footstool – that suggests that a high degree of effort has been placed in the creation of these miniature chairs and quite possibly that a high degree of "fidelity" was intended in regard to a potential original prototype.

Additionally, the other two chairs of the Tomb of the Five Chairs, the two semi-circular ones placed on the platform, also seem to present "smaller than life-size" dimensions according to the reconstruction by F. Prayon who refers to them as "Miniatursitze".[33] It is most likely, given the restrictions of the platform, that these two chairs were also unusable in regard to the scaling of the human body. Of particular interest is their placement on top of the podium, suggesting that a specific proportionality was taken into account in their arrangement, although now lost. Their shape, as well as the round armrests and backrest, are indicative of a type further found in case-

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[33] Prayon 1975, 108.

studies from the Banditaccia necropolis and elsewhere,[34] and once again propose a high degree of detail involved in their construction. It is difficult to ascertain whether these chairs were deliberately left empty or if they presented associations to other elements, now lost, made for example out of perishable materials.

In what concerns the other furniture elements present within the room, the rock-carved basket, seen as an imitation of the wicker baskets with lids used as household items,[35] arguably offers sufficient space for the potential deposition of grave goods or for the placement of perishable food offerings,[36] having an upper surface reaching c. 50 cm in diameter. Its dimensions do not render such an object dysfunctional, and the same conclusion can be drawn in regard to the two tables placed in front of the five chairs. Their reconstructed data placing their measurements at c. 80 x 30 cm and at a height of 50-55 cm can imply that these could have provided enough space for their theoretical use, for example for the placement of grave goods. The altar also presents a high degree of detail, once again suggesting the care and labour involved behind such furnishings. Despite its small dimensions, the deliberate formation of the three cavities on its upper surface pinpoints to an invitation towards its potential use for activities – such as the deposition of food offerings or perhaps even for practices of libation. The loss of function of these objects in conformity to their dimensions cannot be acknowledged as such and the defining of such objects as miniatures based on their perceived dysfunctionality should be further inquired. Their dimensions do however create specific responses in the embodied behaviour of their potential users, conspicuously different from their "life-size" counterparts.

Quite remarkable in the case of the Tomb of the Five Chairs is the deliberate interplay of scales brought by the specific and intentional arrangement of the elements contained within the room. It is this particular interplay that enhances the 'out of the ordinary' attribute of the room and that further creates a distortion of the spatial and perhaps also of the temporal dimension for a potential observer. That the spatial characteristics were manipulated for a certain point of perception might be further suggested by two other observations made by F. Prayon in the documentation of the tomb: firstly, the discrepancy between the statuettes and the footstool of the chairs was not noticeable given the height of the tables placed before them,[37] and secondly, the

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[34] See *infra.*
[35] Steingräber 1997, 109.
[36] Also S. Steingräber (1997, 109) who sees the tuff-cut imitations as symbolic recipients.
[37] Prayon 1974, 10.

basket from the tomb seems to only be decorated on its upper surface and towards the side of the room entrance,[38] pinpointing therefore to a certain perspective from which the whole scene to be observed.

**Patterns of recognition**

In pursuit of the "frequency" and of the "distance" criteria as introduced by C. Knappett and as discussed above, an overview of similar structures found within the funerary context, especially focusing on the immediate one of the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere, is necessary. This would not only consider the contextualisation of the Tomb of the Five Chairs but would also provide further reflections on the perception of the miniaturisation process associated to this tomb on the background of the spatial and temporal recognition of such an arrangement.

The most frequent comparison of the five seated statuettes from the Tomb of the Five Chairs is in regard to the two sculpted reliefs found in the Tomba delle Statue at Ceri, in the vicinity of Caere, dated to the first decades of the 7th century BC[39] (fig.3). The Tomba delle Statue, a tomb completely dug into the local rock, presents a longitudinal architecture with a *dromos* leading into the vestibule that in turn leads into the main funerary chamber, albeit smaller, where two funerary beds were shaped out of the rock. On each side of the wall within the vestibule, carved into the local rock was a relief depicting a male figure[40] seated on a throne with a round arm- and backrest, whereas their legs were resting onto a curved footstool. The clothing of these sculpted figures resembles that of the statuettes within the Tomb of the Five Chairs, although the hand gestures seem to differ – whereas their left hands are resting on their laps, with their palms turned downwards, their right hands seem to hold insignia; the left-side relief holds a sceptre with a palmette detail[41], whereas the right-side one holds an object hypothesized to have been a *lituus*.[42] The creation of these reliefs has been linked to a Near Eastern, and particularly North Syrian influence, with their construction based either on imported models or even at the hands of an immigrant artisan of the area settled at Caere[43]. The general interpretation regarding these figures

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[38] Prayon 1974, 10 fn.38.
[39] Steingräber 1997, 102.
[40] Some interpretations consider the two figures to represent a couple instead (Prayon 2006, 53).
[41] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 30.
[42] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 34.
[43] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 47-48.

sees them as ancestors of the deceased interred within the tomb, in an adaptation of the Oriental model into an Etruscan context.

Despite iconographic similarities to the statuettes from the Tomb of the Five Chairs, there are also considerable differences. First of all, these reliefs are said to measure c. 123 cm and 129 cm in height,[44] spatially overwhelming the tomb chamber that reaches a maximum height of 165 cm up to its ceiling[45]. A certain point of perception is also envisioned given the traces that suggest a specific manipulation of the figures and of the walls of the tomb itself for an enhanced point of observation from the entrance to the tomb.[46] Their dimensions and the perception of these reliefs within the tomb chamber makes them rather monumental in appearance, in contrast to those of the Tomb of the Five Chairs.[47] Secondly, whereas the terracotta statuettes are said to present gestures of welcoming of the deceased[48] or of banqueting,[49] the emphasis in connection to the ancestor reliefs is placed on their insignia as symbols of power, and perhaps alluding to political and religious functions. Whereas the two examples might share a similar artistic influence,[50] their specific contexts and their representations – differing in material, technique, measurement, iconographic detail – suggest different outcomes in their perception.

Another association has been made between the terracotta statuettes of the Tomb of the Five Chairs and the existence of anthropomorphic cinerary urns said to portray the deceased[51] (ultimately developing into the so-called *canopi* urns), that represent a more ample phenomenon predominantly found in northern Etruria (particularly in the area around Chiusi) during a chronological period covering the 8th to the 6th centuries BC.[52] Oftentimes such urns have been portrayed seating on thrones, an iconography that tends to be linked to the practice of the funerary seated banquet[53] and that is perhaps more clearly emphasized in specific discoveries linking either

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[44] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 30-31.
[45] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 23.
[46] Colonna and von Hase 1986, 23.
[47] F.W. von Hase emphasizes this point of view throughout the article, claiming also stylistic differences: Colonna and von Hase 1986, 33; 46.
[48] Tuck 1994, 620.
[49] Steingräber 2016, 107.
[50] Tuck 1994, 621.
[51] And that generally tend to be accompanied by distinguishing elements, such as decorative ornaments or insignia of power (Trocchi 2017, 890).
[52] Prayon 2006, 46.
[53] Prayon 2006, 47. See Tuck 1994 for an overview of the development of this practice across Etruria, from its Villanovan roots to its artistic modes of expression during the Orientalizing period.

banqueting utensils among the grave goods[54] or through the further presence of tables.[55] The coeval presence of the practice of seating and reclining banquets during the 7th century BC has already been acknowledged.[56]

Whereas circulation of motifs and models and inter-areal influences should not be neglected, the discussion should however be reframed to the context of the Caeretan *necropoleis* and in connection to the developments present in the funerary sphere and dictated by the elite competition among the aristocratic families of the city of Caere. Remarkable in the context of the Banditaccia necropolis is the widespread presence of rock-cut furniture, pinpointing to relevant parallels to the arrangement from the Tomb of the Five Chairs. Other examples of stone-cut chairs have been found within tombs of the same necropolis, although they all stem from a later chronological horizon; these include the Tomba della Cornice I, Tomba degli Scudi e delle Sedie, or Tomba della Sedia Canina, all dating to the first half of the 6th century BC,[57] although all these chairs are seen to present "life-size" measurements instead. Regarding the first example, two rock-cut rectangular chairs with a footstool and with a rectangular backrest bordered on its margins by two sculpted round discs present a height of 100 cm and a seating surface of 51 x 52 cm.[58] The famous Tomba degli Scudi e delle Sedie presents two seats, each with a round arm- and backrest and with a rectangular footstool. Additionally, they present a carved detail of the seating area. These seats are said to measure c. 115 cm in height and to also have a seating area of c. 65 x 60 cm,[59] reaching in turn "larger than life size" measurements. Of a smaller size is the chair from the Tomba della Sedia Canina, also with a round backrest, that measures 76 cm in height and has a seating surface of 48 x 43 cm.[60] Additionally, a fitting case-study within this chronological horizon stems from the adjacent Monte Abatone necropolis, namely the Tomba della Sedia Torlonia. The Tomba della Sedia Torlonia presents only one chair with a round back- and armrest – also

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[54] Pieraccini 2016, 145.

[55] Prayon 1974, 12, Tuck 1994, 622. Also worth mentioning is the Montescudaio biconical urn, dated to the third quarter of the 7th century BC, showing a similar iconography where a seated figure (the deceased?) is depicted in front of a table filled with food items, whereas a female attendant is standing to their right (Tuck 1994, 618-619).

[56] Pieraccini 2016, 145.

[57] Following their dating at an earlier time (Steingräber 2016, 105); the typology and connected chronology proposed by F. Prayon (1975) dates them to the period between 575-525 BC.

[58] Measurements: complete h. 100 cm; backrest h. 40 cm, w. 63 cm, depth 5 cm; seating surface depth 51 cm, w. 52 cm; legs h. 60 cm; footrest h. 16 cm, w. 51 cm, depth 25 cm (Prayon 1975, 109 fn.591).

[59] Following F. Prayon, who proposes similar measurements for these chairs as those of the chair from the Tomba della Sedia Torlonia (Prayon 1975, 109).

[60] Measurements: complete h. 76 cm; backrest 34 cm; seating surface depth 48 cm, w. 43 cm; substructure h. 42 cm (Prayon 1975, 109 fn.596).

reminiscent therefore of the two from the Tomb of the Five Chairs – that measures 115 cm in height and that has a seating surface of 65 x 60 cm.[61] Interestingly, all these chairs were placed into the vestibule of their respective tombs, namely in the first chamber opening from the *dromos* that led in turn to the entrance(s) of the one main or of the several funerary chambers that contained the funerary beds, although additional funerary beds could have been placed within the vestibule itself.

The presence of stone-cut chairs within tombs, with their particular placement within the vestibule, seems to be a relatively common phenomenon for the Caeretan *necropoleis* of the first half of the 6th century BC[62], with an actual overall predominance of such discoveries in this specific area.[63] Explanations as to their presence in this context are already disseminated by G. Dennis in his 1848 work, *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, and still pursued nowadays.

"[referring to the Tomba della Sedia (Canina)] (…) But the marvel of the tomb is an arm-chair, cut from the living rock, standing by the side of one of the two sepulchral couches in the outer chamber, as though it were an easy-chair by the bed-side, or a seat for the doctor visiting his patient! But why placed in a tomb? Was it merely to carry out still further the analogy to a house? Was it, as Visconti suggests, for the use of the relatives who came yearly to hold solemn festivals at the tomb? Or was it for the shade of the deceased himself, as though he were too restless to be satisfied with his banqueting-couch, but must have his easy-chair also to repose him after his wanderings? Or, as Micali opines, was it to intimate the blissful repose of the new life on which his spirit had entered? Was it not rather a curule chair, the *insigne* of the rank or condition of the deceased, showing him to have been a ruler or magnate in the land? It may have been for the support of a cinerary urn; for in the tombs of Chiusi, *canopi*, or vases in the form of human busts, which were probably the effigies of the deceased whose ashes they contained, have often been found placed on earthenware seats of this form".[64]

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[61] Measurements: complete h. 115 cm; backrest h. 40 cm, w. 80 cm; seating surface depth 65 cm, w. 60 cm; substructure h. 75 cm, w. 90 cm; footstool h. 30 cm, w. 50 cm, depth 25 cm (Prayon 1975, 109 fn.593).

[62] Colonna and von Hase (1986, 55-56) present a list of discoveries of tombs presenting stone chairs as furniture, with twelve tombs stemming from the Banditaccia necropolis; three additional discoveries are added to the list under the geographical listing of Caere, including the example stemming from the Monte Abatone necropolis (Tomba della Sedia Torlonia). The frequency of this phenomenon in the Caeretan funerary sphere is visible.

[63] Steingräber 1997, 108-109.

[64] Dennis 1883[1848], 239-240.

The Orientalizing and Archaic Caeretan tomb as imitation of coeval domestic architecture has been widely accepted by researchers, with the architectural elements of tombs (doorways, rock-cut windows, roof beams and patterns) and rock-cut furniture (chairs, tables, baskets) seen as a transposition of features of domestic life.[65] In regard to the presence of the chairs themselves, F. Prayon[66] further suggests that these could have represented house furniture usually placed in the vestibule of the house and translated as such in the funerary sphere, particularly within the tombs already discussed. More than simply denoting furniture however, these same chairs have often been attributed the term and concept of *thrones*, suggesting that their presence within tombs denoted a status symbol, placing the deceased among the aristocratic elite of their time. S. Steingräber[67] even proposes that the placement of this furniture object in the vestibule replicated the presence of the *solium* in the patrician domestic interior.

Overall, the connection of such chairs or thrones to the funerary sphere is not a restricted phenomenon to the Caeretan region nor to the timeframe of the construction of the Tomb of the Five Chairs. On the contrary, the discovery of wooden thrones attributed to the Villanovan era, stemming particularly from Northern Etruria, has already been amply discussed.[68] Additionally, exceptional discoveries of "bronze thrones" – wooden thrones with bronze appliques – have also been made in association to the 'princely' tombs from the beginning of the Orientalizing era, especially considering the background of the intensification of elite competition during this time;[69] the throne from the Tomba Barberini at Palestrina, dated to the first half of the 7th century BC, provides a famous example in this regard. Whereas the plurality of funerary contexts these wooden thrones have been found in does not easily lead to a unitary interpretation of their use,[70] their acknowledgement as status symbols is at the forefront. Curious is however the ubiquitous type presented by these thrones,[71] that of a cylindrical shape with a round arm- and backrest, similar then to the two chairs associated with the deceased couple within the Tomb of the Five Chairs. Unfortunately, there is little evidence regarding the possible presence of wooden thrones in the

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[65] Steingräber 2016, 105.

[66] Prayon 1975, 111.

[67] Steingräber 2016, 107-108.

[68] Examples of such wooden thrones seem to stem from necropolises around the regions of Bologna, Imola, and Verrucchio – the latter of which has produced the famous wooden throne from Tomb 89 or Tomba del Trono, dated to the end of the 8th century BC (see Bentini et al. 2018).

[69] Maggiani 2017, 546.

[70] Bentini et al. 2018, 183.

[71] See Bentini et al. 2018.

Caeretan *necropoleis* as a precedent to the phenomenon of stone-cut furniture. The reconstruction of several bronze appliques as having belonged to such a wooden throne discovered in the Tomba Regolini-Galassi from the Sorbo necropolis (c. 675-650 BC) has been more recently reconsidered, with the appliques seen to have decorated a ceremonial carriage instead.[72] It is easy however to entertain the possibility that such wooden thrones, and generally wooden furniture, would have been placed within these tombs of the Banditaccia necropolis – traces of which might have been overlooked also considering the precarious state of preservation. The Tomba della Capanna for example (dated to the first half of the 7th century BC) is said to have presented carbonized remains of what might have most likely been a wooden table.[73]

Another point of interpretation concerning the role of these chairs or thrones involves their potential use, with two different considerations being reflected upon. The first possibility is one that takes into account the material affordances of such objects. These stone-cut chairs are considered to present "life-sized" dimensions and it has therefore been proposed that they could have been used by participants during funerary festivities in honour of the deceased.[74] This is certainly a viable interpretation, given that their size generally tends to be in conformity with the reconstructed acceptable measurements for seating areas in connection to the human body and by comparison to other relevant ancient archaeological sources, placing the acceptable width of a seat between 44 and 48 cm.[75] Comparatively, wooden thrones of the Villanovan age have also been generally considered "life-sized", whereas the bronze ones tend to reach "larger than life-size" measurements,[76] most likely in correspondence to their conspicuous ceremonial role. Whether these were indeed used by the participants of such practices is uncertain, and it can be just as plausible that these were meant to be used by the deceased[77] or even that the two interpretations are simultaneously viable.[78] The presence of only one rock-cut chair in the vestibule of the Tomba della Sedia Torlonia has been placed in connection to the presence of just one funerary bed within the main funerary chamber and was brought as a pertinent argument towards such a symbolic

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[72] Emiliozzi and Sannibale 2018.
[73] Pieraccini 2016, 144.
[74] Prayon 1975, 111.
[75] For a study on the seating area of the Roman Senate, see Ross Taylor and Scott 1969; for a more general approach concerning seating areas in Antiquity (including theatre seats), see Spigel 2012.
[76] Bentini et al. 2018, 172.
[77] Prayon 1975, 111-112; Colonna and von Hase 1986, 37.
[78] Steingräber 1997, 109.

use,[79] although this pattern might not be reflected in other cases.[80] These thrones have generally been associated to both male and female burials in what concerns the interpretation of the rock-cut chairs generally connected to the deceased couple interred within the main funerary chamber. Comparatively, the wooden thrones of the Villanovan period have also been connected to both female and male burials – mainly adult, but also children.[81] Interestingly, two important iconographic documents seems to associate thrones to the practice of textile manufacturing – one of the carvings on the wooden throne of Verucchio (dated to the end of the 8th century BC) shows activities of spinning and weaving undertaken by women, whereas a bronze *tintinnabulum* found as a grave good in the "Tomba degli Ori" at Bologna (dated to the end of the 7th century BC) shows women seated on curved thrones and involved in different activities of textile production.[82] These once again portray the throne as a prestige item for an aristocratic elite.

A different aspect is brought forward in the case of the Tomba Maroi III (dated to the first half of the 6th century BC), where a fascinating discovery links a stone-cut chair directly to the practice of the funerary banquet. A brazier that contained drinking vases and carbonised meal remains, among which those of eggs and mushrooms, was found placed on a throne near one of the funerary beds.[83] Unfortunately, no dimensions of this chair are given in order to examine whether it involved a specific scaling process. Such a deposition of offerings onto the throne itself does bring into question whether other such rock-cut chairs were deliberately and symbolically left empty or whether they were supposed to provide similar amenities for the deceased. In this case, there is a clear association between the throne and the practice of the Etruscan funerary (seated) banquet, although such a connection can only be circumstantially argued in previous examples.

Lastly, a short review of relevant comparisons should be introduced regarding the remaining pieces of furniture, once again considering the perception of such (miniaturised) objects. In contrast to the basket found within the Tomb of the Five Chairs (d. 50 cm, h. 73 cm), four other

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[79] Prayon 1974, 10; Steingräber 1981, 448.

[80] The Tomba della Sedia Canina also presents just one rock-cut chair (although there are three stone funerary beds in the vestibule), whereas the number of deceased meant to be interred within the main funerary chamber cannot be ascertained.

[81] Bentini et al. 2018, 173. One particular case dated to the mid-7th century BC shows a deliberate association between an undersized wooden throne (and other undersized wooden furniture pieces) to the deceased as an infant in an unusual discovery found within one of the graves of the necropolis at Verruchio (Bentini et al. 2018, 172).

[82] Gleba 2013, 799-800.

[83] Prayon 1975, 111 fn.609; Pieraccini 2016, 142.

such baskets have been found in the Campana I tomb from the Monte Abatone necropolis at Caere, dated towards the end of the 7th century BC. Three fluted baskets of smaller dimensions were situated in the room left to the *dromos* and these had an average height of 80 cm and a diameter of 70 cm at their upper surface.[84] The larger basket was found in the main funerary chamber, and this had a height of 128 cm and a diameter of 96 cm.[85] At the same time, the other important discovery of a coeval stone-cut altar within the Caeretan *necropoleis* stems from this tomb. In this context, the altar is found within the main funerary chamber. The altar is carved out of the rock and its design of a rectangular block is completed by a 'backrest' that continues through a carving on the wall itself. The dimensions of this altar reach 115 x 44 cm, with a height of 113 cm, whereas the perpetuation of the design onto the wall gives the impression of the altar reaching 178 cm in height.[86] On the upper surface, this altar also presents three cavities for the likely deposition of offerings or for the performing of libations.

The altar from the left room of the Tomb of the Five Chairs had measurements (65 x 25 cm, h. 40 cm) that seem to correlate with those of other altars not necessarily seen as 'miniaturised' given their different contexts of discovery,[87] and that do not have a lack of use attributed to them. A relevant parallel can be introduced in the case of the altar from the Fosso Arlena necropolis found in the vicinity of a *fossa* tomb and dated to the end of the 7th century BC. The altar is represented by a rectangular block of sandstone presenting three central cavities on its upper surface, as well as several smaller cavities and corresponding drainage channels. This altar measures 23 x 37 cm and has a height of 23 cm.[88] The two inscriptions on the altar stemming from different chronological points suggest the long-term continuity of practices at the altar, from the end of the 7th at least up to the second half of the 6th century BC.[89]

**Further reflections**

The widespread cultural practice of the funerary banquet is expressed in the case of the Tomb of the Five Chairs largely through a recognisable pattern within the Caeretan *necropoleis* and especially within the Banditaccia necropolis, namely that of domestic furniture, with the

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[84] Prayon 1975, 114 fn.640.
[85] Prayon 1975, 114 fn.641.
[86] Prayon 1975, 113 fn.628.
[87] See also the comparison regarding dimensions of altars in Pavel 2023, 94-97.
[88] Bloch 1955, 64.
[89] *Santuari* 1985, 33.

statuettes reinforcing the connection between ancestor, deceased, and descendant, providing further legitimacy to the aristocratic family. Whether the two thrones were deliberately left empty in a symbolic connection to the deceased or whether further (perishable?) elements were to provide a more visible association, a conspicuous pattern was already established and further establishing itself against the cultural background. Whereas wooden furniture might have been present within the Caeretan tombs prior and coeval to the timeframe in question, namely the second half of the 7th century BC, the Tomb of the Five Chairs seems to represent one of the earliest examples pertaining to the phenomenon of rock-cut furniture within the Banditaccia necropolis to include chairs, tables, altars, and baskets. The miniaturisation process present in the left-side chamber within the tomb seems however to have represented an 'out of the ordinary' setting given the reduced frequency to which such arrangements have been found within Caeretan funerary practices. The patterns of recognition on a spatial and perhaps even on a temporal scale would suggest a particular approach associated to this tomb – whereas the general tendency in the presence of such rock-cut furniture within tombs has been an imitation of its "life-size" mode of expression, and perhaps even towards monumentalisation in an attempt to produce "larger than life-size" elements, the Tomb of the Five Chairs subverts such an expectation.

One last point of discussion should be introduced, and this regards the potential visibility of this scene. An important aspect to take into account is represented by the great care and the costly labour behind the formation of such a miniaturised arrangement that introduces a deliberate transformation of scale. This distortion of space also seems to have been enhanced when observed from the entrance to the chamber, implying an intentional conditioning of visibility towards such a display. How often would such a tomb chamber have been viewed? Whereas we can assume that the tomb was opened for the conduct of funerary rites in honour of the two people, the deceased couple interred within the main funerary chamber, its occasional reopening for further commemorative ceremonies, perhaps in an attempt on behalf of this aristocratic family to continue pursuing its legitimacy amongst a background of elite competition, is difficult to establish. Otherwise, worth considering is how the miniaturised arrangement within the Tomb of the Five Chairs might have left a long-last impression on a potential observer through its "temporariness"[90] instead.

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[90] Osborne 2014, 12.

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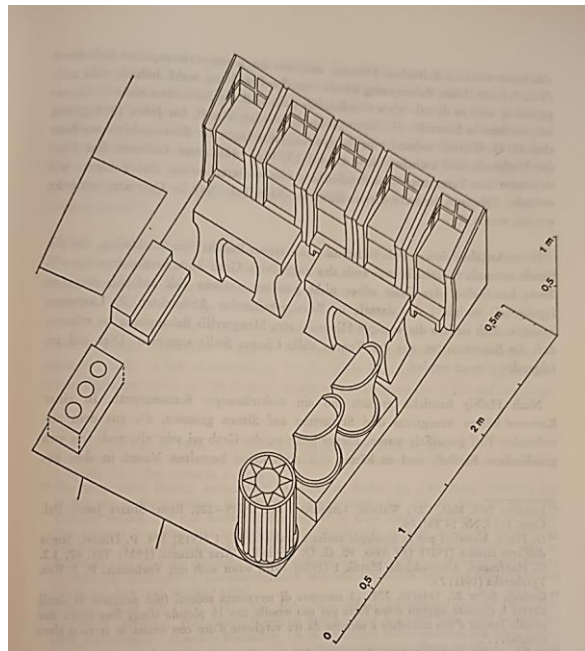Fig. 2. The placement of the terracotta statuettes onto the five chairs, as reconstructed by F. Prayon (after Prayon 1974, 11 fig. 3).
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**Images:**

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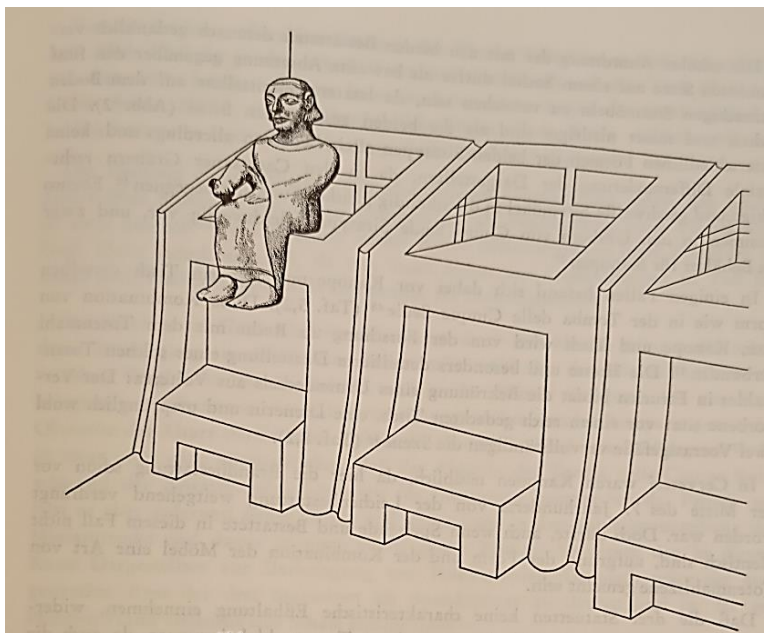
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