

## ***IESP, International Etruscan Sigla Project***

Cross-signs, anchors, double axes, tridents and many other symbols similar to the ones used for the Etruscan alphabetical letters occur on a high number of artifacts of different provenance (sacred contexts and artisans' quarters, habitations and cemeteries). They date from around 700 BCE to the first century BCE and were widely spread in Italy (from the heartland of Etruria to the Po Valley and the Bay of Naples) (MURRAY THREIPLAND, TORELLI 1970; SASSATELLI 1984, SASSATELLI 1994, BAGNASCO GIANNI 1996; DE GRUMMOND et al. 2000).

*Sigla* are often neglected in Etruscan studies because no clear connection with language and literature may be found. Nevertheless such marks seem to perform an important role by conveying complex meanings in a synthetic way. The dissemination and the acceptance of such signs among a wide public seems to indicate that *sigla* had significance both for Etruscans who were literate and those who were not, thanks to the strong visual impact that characterizes this particular means of communication.

In order to investigate the potential of communication of such markings, their significance and role in the frame of the information retrieved from their epigraphic supports and archaeological contexts, *IESP* is developing a database and a website able to gather all the Etruscan *sigla* and their related data found so far. The principal aim of *IESP*, in fact, is the creation of an interactive system based on an integration of different knowledge sources, able to recognize, group and compare similar *sigla* by means of different factors (VALTOLINA, BAGNASCO GIANNI, GOBBI, DE GRUMMOND 2012).

Along with features such as date, provenance, context, artifact type, artifact function and location of the mark on the artifact, the system could also group comparable items by means of matching scanned images, safeguarding in this way the visual approach to the study of such an evidence.

The system is also endowed with other information retrieval services for recovering geographical information based on Google maps in order to design an atlas for territorial reading of the *sigla* in the database.

In this perspective, the *IESP* offers scholars a collaborative knowledge platform where they can face and discuss interpretation problems linked to the meanings and the usages of *sigla* within the Etruscan society. An important goal of the project is that the system may also be open to accept comparable *sigla* deriving from other cultures, different from the Etruscan but strictly related to it in Italy (the cultures of the Faliscans, Golasecca culture, etc.), or in the Mediterranean environment (Greece, Crete, the Near East, etc.).

Attempts to explain *sigla* have been mainly focused so far on trying to read them as numerals or abbreviations or marks for commerce or craftsmanship and there is certainly evidence to support such interpretations. The *IESP* system provides, however, a flexible methodology allowing a wide range of interpretations according to the evidence that there is no single explanation that covers all usages of *sigla*.

In such a perspective a relevant example is provided by combinations of *sigla* consisting in a cross inscribed in a circle, occurring on a number of Etruscan objects and monuments since the Orientalizing period (Tomba delle Ginestre at Cerveteri, impasto dish from the tumulus of the Tomba II at Casaletti di Ceri). Such *sigla*, dividing up the space in four quadrants, seem to convey issues of delimitation, partition and orientation thanks to their layout on the epigraphic support (*'DIVORI sigla'*) and recall the ritual of partitioning and marking specific fields as for the creation of the 'sacred space' according to the principles of the *Etrusca Disciplina* (BAGNASCO GIANNI 2008; BAGNASCO GIANNI, GOBBI, SCOCCIMARRO 2015; BAGNASCO GIANNI, DE GRUMMOND *forthcoming*).

To allow the whole scientific community to access and use the *IESP* database, a basic signary for *sigla* has been developed. The signary, using Latin names to describe the most recurrent symbols, represents the first step towards an international terminology meant to gather, list and recognize most common *sigla* (DE GRUMMOND, in BAGNASCO GIANNI, DE GRUMMOND, *forthcoming*).

The *IESP*, already presented to the Etruscan scholars community in occasion of several International Conferences (Milano, London, Tallahassee, Tarquinia), relies on the fruitful collaboration with different international archaeological teams investigating and digging some of the most relevant sites of the Etruscan world.

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#### *Bibliografia*

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