

AN ETRUSCAN PYXIS NAMED ŠUNΘERUZA

(Con le tavv. XXXIII-XXXIV f.t.)

§ 1. *Pyxis*

The inscription on a tiny pyxis in a private collection gives us the Etruscan word for the container, *šunθeruza* (tavv. XXXIII *a-e*; XXXIV *b-f*).

Of bucheroid impasto, carefully made and exceptionally well preserved, the pyxis is a unique piece, though it does share several features with vases from the Orientalizing period in southern Etruria, as we shall see. It is very small: 10.9 cm. high to the top of the lid, with a diameter of 10.2 cm. at the widest point, to the tips of the handles¹. The handles, which are attached above the belly just below the wide lip, are almost horizontal, sloping only slightly upwards. They end in a point, and are pierced by two holes side by side, giving them an M shape (tav. XXXIV *b*). The rounded, cup-shaped lid fits neatly over the top, covering the whole surface of the lip including the inscription. The top of the lid terminates in a complex handle consisting of four pointed elements, forming a cross in plan, each of which is perforated with a hole.

The shape of the pyxis has been carefully formed. Its decoration is also remarkably fine. The vertical ribbings run from base to handles and lip, emphasizing the rounded shape. A band decorated with a herringbone pattern sets the lower part of the vase off from the smooth lip, around which runs an inscription, to which we shall return: the letters were neatly incised before firing and filled with red ochre paste. The base, too, carries a design: the ribbing of the body is now converted into five concentric circles, with a small circle in the middle. The lid is ornately decorated with two continuous borders at the bottom, the lower one made up of a line with loops along the upper side, and another below: these are drawn freehand and are not always precisely rendered. Like the inscription, these are filled with red ochre paste. The rest of the area below the handle is filled with

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¹ It is 10.9 cm. high; without the lid, the whole container is 8 cm. high and 6.6 cm. to the base of the lip. The maximum diameter of the container is 10.2 cm. Its circumference is 11.8 cm at the base, 26.8 cm. at the widest point of the belly. The lip measures 18 cm. at the bottom and 13.3 at the top, resulting in a sharply narrower mouth, only slightly wider than the base.

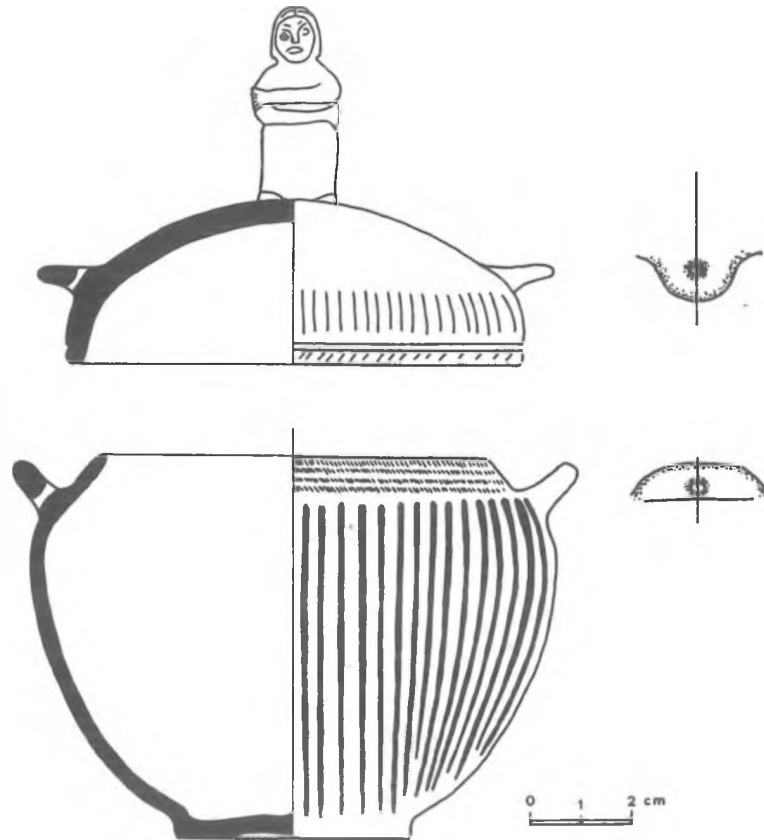


fig. 1 - Pyxis, buccheroid impasto. Unknown provenance. Seventh century BC.
École Française de Rome (after J. M. J. Gran Aymerich, in *MEFRA* LXXXVIII,
1976, pl. 1).

a handsome lotus and palmette design – two petalled palmettes pointing upwards, flowers downwards. Inside, the lid is also decorated: in the middle is a six-petalled flower with a circle and a depression in the center (for the centering of the compass with which the design had been carried out), filled with red ochre paste (*tav.* XXXIII *e*). Three lines encircle the flower: a plain line appears between the ends of the petals, the second and third resemble the lines on the lid's outer border – one with pointed triangles, the other with loops, both pointing outwards.

The vase is surely an Etruscan creation, for which there are no exact parallels. Yet the type was not unknown, for a covered container at the École Française de Rome is similar in fabric, shape, diminutive size, ridged decoration and pierced handles (*fig.* 1; *tav.* XXXIV *a*). Gran Aymerich published it in 1976, pointing out that comparable vases were called by a variety of names: 'olla', 'urnetta', 'piccolo

stamnos', or 'olla stamnoide', as well as pyxis². (We shall see that the question of the name is particularly relevant for our vase). The group of vases assembled all have in common the pierced handles: many, like the one in Rome, have a single hole, while some have an M-shaped horizontal handle with two holes, like ours. Similar to ours, too, is the inward-sloping lip, which is covered by the lid. Whereas our lid has an Orientalizing incised decoration, however, both the body and lid of the vase in Rome are covered with a ribbed decoration. But what really sets this other pyxis apart is the human figure sitting on the lid, its little arms wrapped around its knees. On our pyxis it is the inscription, carefully incised on the lip and then hidden by the lid, which serves to set it apart and 'personalize' it.

A bucchero kotyle-pyxis, one of a pair, also shares several features with our pyxis: its small size, the elaborate M-shaped, horizontal handles, the gradually narrowing lip on which an inscription is incised (*mini mulwanike keivale*, Rix, *ET AS* 3.1), and the lid, decorated – on the outside – with incised, compass-drawn, intersecting circles. The body has an incised decoration of a row of triangles and a lotus and palmette design somewhat similar to that of our lid³. But the lid is a plain one, the fabric is shiny bucchero sottile rather than bucceroid impasto, the decoration of the body incised rather than ribbed. Another incised bucchero vase exhibits a high, smooth lip, covered by a calyx lid as on our pyxis⁴.

Several features of our pyxis seem to be standard characteristics of vases in a southern Etruscan-Faliscan area – Tarquinia, Caere, Veii, Narce, Falerii. The M-shaped handles can be compared to handles of large vases, such as an olla from Ferento now in Viterbo⁵. The ribbed decoration appears here as well as on a number of smaller vases from this area, as does the horizontal band decorated with 'spina di pesce'⁶. The incised decoration of the lid and its lotus and palmette ornament are typical of Orientalizing vases of this period⁷.

The basic shape of the lid is not unusual. Cup-shaped lids are frequent: the use of cups as lids goes back to the Villanovan custom of using a kyathos as the

² GRAN AYMERICH 1976, pp. 397-435. The container is 7.5 cm. high; the lid, with figurine, is 6.8 cm.; the figurine, 3.6 cm. The maximum diameter of the container, 9.8 cm. (compared to ours, 10.2 cm); of the lid, 8.6 cm. I am very grateful to Mario Iozzo, who gave me this reference, and to Jean Gran Aymerich, who sent me the photograph and drawing.

³ BRUNI *et al.* 1987, pp. 334-336, nos. 10-12.

⁴ CAMPOREALE 1991, no. 61, pl. XXIX: «falisco-capenate».

⁵ EMILIOZZI 1974, p. 104, no. 36, pl. 57. It is typical of the Orientalizing period: for a fancier, Geometric example see CANCIANI 1987, p. 72 and p. 248, no. 13, painted lebes from Vulci, 725-700 B.C.

⁶ EMILIOZZI 1974, pp. 97, no. 22, pl. 52; 103-106, nos. 35, 37-45, pls. 58-60; EDLUND 1980 no. 25, from Bisenzio.

⁷ See, for example, CAMPOREALE 1991, nos. 50, 61, pl. XXIX; EDLUND 1980, pp. 23-27, nos. 28-31, from Capena. See also note 3.

cover of a biconical ash urn⁸. Such lids often stand on their own, with the handle doubling as a base⁹. The lid of our pyxis, too, could have rested on the four feet making up the handle, and could therefore have functioned as a cup, were it not for the addition of the ring. The hole in the ring was clearly made to run a string or leather lace through it for the purpose of hanging or – given the small size of the vase – carrying it. The holes on the four lower parts of the lid handle were lined up with the holes on the two handles of the container, an extremely elaborate arrangement allowing the owner to tie the vase securely in order not to lose any of the contents. Though they are not as elaborate, similar holes are found on a number of vases. An impasto bowl from a context dating to the end of the seventh century has two holes on the rim, probably to hang it on the wall rather than to seal it¹⁰. On the cup-shaped, footed bucchero cover mentioned above, on the other hand, the two holes on the rim could have been used for sealing¹¹.

The elaborate decoration of the inside of the lid is unusual: perhaps the cup-shaped piece was used to prepare the contents of the vase. Given the care with which the vase was made and decorated, and the elaborate arrangement to close it tightly to protect what was inside, the contents of the pyxis must have been an expensive, precious substance, an unguent or cosmetic, or something used in a sacrifice or other religious ritual. A surprising parallel is provided by the miniature Sabine flask from Poggio Sommavilla, now in Boston¹², decorated with a looped design like that of our lid. The small size of this vase, the holes for suspension on the shoulder, the inscribed, inward-narrowing lip designed to prevent any liquid from accidentally spilling, and in fact its probable use to hold a precious liquid or substance with a religious or magical function – all these features are similar to those of our pyxis, and point to the vases' probably similar functions.

The comparanda in a southern Etruscan-Faliscan area, along the course of the Tiber – Tarquinia, Caere, Veii, Narce, Falerii – agree with the southern origin suggested by the palaeographic and linguistic features of the inscription.

§ 2. *Inscription and palaeographical considerations*

The inscription (*tav.* XXXIV b-f) was written *scriptio continua* from left to right around the lip of the pyxis. The letter forms were incised rather carefully so

⁸ DE PUMA 1986, nos. 16-18, pls. 2-3.

⁹ See, for example, CAMPOREALE 1991, no. 59, pl. XXXI; cf. *Civiltà arcaica dei Sabini* 1977, pp. 26-27, pl. 1, lid with incised decoration.

¹⁰ EMILIOZZI 1974, pp. 39, no. 2, pl. 13.

¹¹ CAMPOREALE 1991, no. 59, pl. XXXI: «Capena».

¹² The flask has been much studied. See *Civiltà arcaica dei Sabini* 1977, pp. 97-108, pls. XXVIII-XXXIII. The most recent interpretation of the inscription is RIX 1996.



fig. 2 - Inscription of pyxis in private collection.

that the reading of the text, which is given below (see drawing, *fig. 2*), presents no problems¹³.

5 10 15 20

mišuntheruzašpuriasmlakaš

The inscription is 14.8 cm. in length. It occupies about three-quarters of the available writing space around the lip of the pyxis. The height of the letters varies from 1.3 mm. (*ypsilon* [9]) to .55 mm. (*theta* [6]). The letters at the beginning of the inscription [1-3, 6], and the letters in the middle portion [10-14], are smaller on average than the rest. Spacing between letters varies from .3 mm to less than .1 mm., with .2 mm. being the norm.

The letter-forms are typical of those found on inscriptions from the archaic period.

Alpha: All of the exempla [11, 17, 21, 23] have medial strokes that descend in the direction of writing.

Zeta: The top and bottom strokes are not horizontal. The stroke at the top slopes downward, the stroke at the bottom slopes upward, both in the direction of writing.

¹³ Etruscan sibilants are transcribed according to the system developed in Rix 1984 and Rix, *ET*. The sign *š* represents *sigmas* with four or five bars.

Theta: This letter [6] is quite small; the medial strokes are in the form of a cross-hatch.

My: The two examples ([1], [19]) differ in terms of the length of the vertical stroke. For letter [1], the vertical is shorter, about the same length as the following *iota* [2]. The vertical of letter [19] is significantly longer, a feature that makes this letter similar in style to *ny* [5], which also was written with a long vertical stroke.

Pi: This letter [13] is made with a vertical stroke, from the top of which a curved stroke descends in the form of a hook.

Rho: Both examples [8, 15] have long codas.

Sigma: Letters [18] and [24] have four bars, as does letter [3], though the lowest one is partly chipped off. Letter [12] has four very short bars, the last ending in a flourish, indicating a fifth bar. [12] is also much more slender in form than the four-bar *sigmas*, and its angles are extremely obtuse.

Ypsilon: Letters [4] and [9] consist of a vertical stroke with an oblique stroke attached at the middle and branching off in the direction of writing. Letter [14] has the same general shape, though it appears to have been written differently. The oblique and the lower half of the vertical are made with a single stroke < ʃ >. The upper half of the vertical was added afterward and in such a way that it does not quite merge with the lower portion of the vertical stroke < ʃ >.

The palaeographical features of our inscription are comparable to those found on inscriptions that come from the southern Etruscan-Faliscan area and that belong to the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. Of particular importance is the so-called 'progressive' writing, from left to right, a feature that seems to have been in vogue at Caere during this period, and one that is found also on inscriptions from Veii, Falerii, and the Ager Faliscus¹⁴. The forms of *my* and *ny*, which have long codas, the descending medial stroke of the *alpha*, the form of *ypsilon*, with its oblique stroke attached at the middle of the vertical, and the variation in the form of *sigma*, in particular the occurrence of both four- and five-bar *sigmas* in the same inscription, are matched by similar forms on other southern Etruscan inscriptions from this same period¹⁵. Accordingly, we propose to assign our inscription to the southern Etruscan-Faliscan area and to date it to ca. 625-600 B.C.¹⁶.

¹⁴ For inscriptions with dextrograde ductus from Caere, Veii, Falerii and the Ager Faliscus consult the appropriate sections of Rix, *ET*.

¹⁵ The palaeography of seventh-century Etruscan inscriptions from Caere is discussed in detail by COLONNA 1970. The inscriptions from the sanctuary of Apollo at Veii are presented by STEFANI-NOGARA 1930.

¹⁶ Giovanni Colonna tells us (personal communication) that he believes the form of the *alpha*, with descending medial stroke, and the form of the *zeta* (downward sloping top stroke, upward sloping bottom stroke) point more specifically to Veii or Falerii as the source of our inscription.

§ 3. *Textual analysis*

Since the text is written *scriptio continua*, word boundaries must be determined by lexical and by morphological criteria. Two word divisions are secure. The first word is *mi*, first person pronoun, subject case. The last word is *mlakaś*, an adjective form inflected with the genitive case-ending *-ś* /s/ ¹⁷. This analysis is confirmed by the final *-ś* of the preceding word, which is probably also inflected with a genitive case ending and thus the word with which *mlakaś* is in agreement ¹⁸.

The pronominal form *mi* guarantees that our text is an 'iscrizione parlante', and the genitive inflection on *mlakaś* points to an inscription whose function is proprietary ¹⁹. One of the standard structures for such inscriptions is: *mi* + PREDICATE NOUN PHRASE, in which the predicate consists of a head noun naming the type of vase or container plus a dependent noun phrase in the genitive case giving the name of the container's owner ²⁰.

After separating the word-forms *mi* and *mlakaś* from the beginning and end of the text, we are left with a medial sequence of 16 letters:

mi sunθeruzaspurias mlakaś

Given the epigraphic type to which our inscription belongs and given the limited syntactic structures possible for that type, the segmentation of the medial sequence given below seems to be the only defensible one.

mi sunθeruza spurias mlakaś

According to our analysis, *sunθeruza* is a noun referring to the pyxis and *spurias* is the name of the proprietor, *spuria-*, inflected in the genitive case. Syntactically, the text parses as follows: *mi* SUBJECT NOUN PHRASE + [copula] + *sunθeruza spurias mlakaś* PREDICATE NOUN PHRASE. The predicate consists of a head noun *sunθeruza* plus a dependent noun phrase *spurias mlakaś*. *spurias* is the head of the dependent phrase, *mlakaś* the attribute. Thus, the structure of our inscription fits well with what appears to be the norm for this class of proprietary inscription in the seventh century ²¹.

¹⁷ For the inflection of Etruscan nominals see Rix 1984, pp. 222-229.

¹⁸ Etruscan adjectives agree with their heads in terms of the feature case.

¹⁹ See AGOSTINIANI 1982 for this epigraphic type in Etruscan and in other ancient languages of Italy.

²⁰ See AGOSTINIANI 1982, pp. 173-178.

²¹ Proprietary inscriptions from this period typically indicate the owner by means of a single name.

To summarize, we analyze the inscription as a proprietary text with the syntactic structure SUBJECT *mi* + PREDICATE NOUN PHRASE *suntheruza spurias mlakas*: "I (am) the pyxis of the beautiful Spuria".

§ 4. Linguistic commentary

The morphological constituency of *suntheruza* is *sunther(u)-* + 'diminutive' suffix *-(u)za*²². The use of this suffix with the names of classes of pottery is not uncommon in the archaic period. To *suntheruza* one may compare *qutummuza* (derived from *qutum*) (Rix, *ET Ve* 2.1), *zavenuza* (from *zavena*) (*ET Fe* 2.1), and *lextummuza* (from **lextum*) (*ET OA* 2.2). The interpretation of *suntheruza* as a 'diminutive' form, then, has abundant comparative support. And a 'diminutive' formation makes very good sense in this context, since the container is indeed very small (see § 1 for dimensions).

Comparison of the lexemes cited in the preceding paragraph yields two allomorphs for the 'diminutive' suffix: *-za* and *-uza*. *-za* is affixed to bases ending in a vowel, e.g., *spurie* + *-za* ⇒ **spurieza* > *spuriaza*²³, while *-uza* is added to bases ending in a consonant, e.g., *qutum* + *-uza* ⇒ *qutummuza*²⁴. These considerations suggest that the stem of *suntheruza* could be either *sunther-* or *suntheru-*, though the latter may be more likely, particularly if the stem is originally a borrowing from a Greek o-stem (on which, see below)²⁵.

The etymological source of the stem *suntheru-* cannot be securely determined. It does seem likely, however, that *suntheru-* is not a native Etruscan form²⁶. Given

²² For discussion of the form of the 'diminutive' suffix, see § 4. The function of this suffix is discussed in some detail by BIONDI 1997, who disputes its diminutive function (see especially pp. 10-11).

²³ The medial *-a-* here probably represents a mid central unrounded vowel /ə/. This is the result of vowel weakening in medial syllables, a feature that begins to be reflected orthographically in Etruscan inscriptions in the last quarter of the seventh century.

²⁴ BIONDI 1997, p. 8 considers the underlying form of the suffix to be *-uza*. In forms like *zavenuza*, the stem-final vowel of the base *zavena* is assumed to be truncated before the addition of the suffix. But there are other possibilities. Medial *-u-* in *zavenu-za* could reflect the original base-final *-a* which has been weakened to /ə/, phonetically /tʰawendʰa/. Or original **zavenaza* could have been remade analogically to *zavenuza* following the model of forms like *qutummuza* and *lextummuza*, where the suffix had its expected post-consonantal form.

²⁵ If the etymological source of the stem *suntheru-* is indeed a Greek o-stem, the underlying Etruscan form could be **sunthere-*, and the stem-final *-u* could be due either to analogy with the *-uza* allomorph of the diminutive suffix or to vowel-weakening. Compare *zavena* : *zavenuza*.

²⁶ There are several native Etruscan words naming vases, e.g., *θafna*, *zavena*, and possibly *θina* "jug for water", if this word is built from a base *θi-* meaning "water". A recently published inscription (*StEtr* LVI, 1991, pp. 303-304, *REE*, no. 12) may give us another native Etruscan word for a vase-type, if the word-form *satu* does indeed refer to the container (olla with ovoid body) on which it is incised.

this, and given that many Etruscan names for vases are Greek loanwords, it seems reasonable to think that this stem too has a Greek source²⁷.

One possibility is that *suntheru-* comes from a Greek o-stem *συνθερο-/συνθηρο-, with its meaning of “gathering up, putting together”, as found in σύνθεσις, used for “storage”, of quinces or olives. It would thus be an example of a general name, “container”, acquiring a specific referent “pyxis”, presumably with a specific purpose or function²⁸. *συνθερο-/συνθηρο- fits nicely in terms of phonology and semantics, but the proposed source word is not attested in Greek. In fact, there are no examples of -ro-stems derived from the root θη-/θε- “to put, place” in any Greek dialect.

Another possible Greek source for the stem *suntheru-* is an o-stem nominal *συντηρος, a form that could serve as the base for the *epsilon*-contract verb συντηρεῖν “to keep, preserve”²⁹. This connection may be possible on formal grounds, provided one is willing to admit the substitution in Etruscan of an aspirated stop for an unspirated in Greek, but it is not entirely convincing in term of semantics. The meaning of συντηρεῖν is not “to keep, preserve” in the sense of “to contain” or “to hold”, but rather in the sense of “to maintain, watch over”, cf. τηρέω “to watch over, take care of, guard”³⁰.

These proposals are possible, but in the end not completely convincing. At this point we can only hope that a more plausible etymological source for *suntheru-* will come to light³¹.

The individual name *spuria-* is the feminine counterpart to the masculine *spu-*

²⁷ Greek names for Etruscan vases have been studied by COLONNA 1973-74; BIONDI 1992, 1993, 1997, and 1999; and BAGNASCO GIANNI 1996a. The material has recently been collected in Bagnasco Gianni’s book (BAGNASCO GIANNI 1996b) on Orientalizing inscriptions.

²⁸ As a comparandum, Bonfante offers *aska eleivana*, “oil flask” (Rix, *ET Fa* 2.3), from Greek ἀσκός, “wine skin”, where the addition of the attribute makes it clear that the Etruscan object had a different use from the Greek. Ultimately, what is needed is further study of the shapes of vases – such as the poppy-seed shaped containers used to hold opium – together with their names and an analysis of their contents, as has been carried out in other cases, e.g., Biers 1994. For a tiny faience jar which perhaps once contained opium, see Mertens - Picón 1993. For the relation between the contents and the word in another time and area, see Mayerson 1997.

²⁹ There is an o-stem form τηρός “warden, guard” associated with the simplex τηρέω “to watch over, take care of, guard”, so an o-stem to συντηρέω is at least possible.

³⁰ We express our appreciation to Brian Joseph, Don Ringe, Jr., Helmut Rix, Giovanni Colonna and Brent Vine (all *per litteras*) for discussing with us their ideas on these Greek sources for *suntheruza*.

³¹ Other possibilities have been suggested to us. Brent Vine (*per litteras*) notes that the stem *sunther-* could be a neologism based on Greek συν- plus the suffix -τηρ-, which is common in Greek vessel names, e.g., κρατήρ “mixing bowl”. Giovanni Colonna (personal communication) offers an intriguing interpretation. He thinks that *suntheru-* could derive from a substantivized adjective σύνθηρο meaning “fellow hunter”. *suntheruza* would then refer to the vase in a playful manner as the beautiful Spuria’s “fellow hunter”, perhaps with erotic connotations.

rie-, a form that is well attested throughout Etruria by the second half of the sixth century³². With the exception of a single attestation from Clusium (Rix, *ET* Cl 3.1), seventh-century forms of this name are found at Caere (*ET* Cr 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9), including the 'diminutive' derivative *spuriāza* (*ET* Cr. 3.15). The name is found also in Latin (*spurius*) and in Sabellian (Oscan *spuris*) and so Italic origin is possible, if not likely. Unfortunately, borrowing from an Italic source cannot be confirmed³³.

Our text provides another example of the use of the attribute *mlakas* outside of the formulaic phrase *mlax mlakas*³⁴, which, as Agostiniani showed some years ago, is a rough equivalent to phrases in Latin and Greek involving the lexemes *dueno-* (= *bonus*) and *καλό-* respectively³⁵. The use of *mlakas* here seems comparable to its use in *ET* AS 7.1, where it is a modifier of the (head of the) noun phrase *velus: larθurnis: leprnal: mlakas*³⁶.

§ 5. Concluding remarks

The pyxis is a remarkable addition to the repertoire of known Etruscan seventh-century vase shapes and inscriptions. In fact what is most remarkable about it is the combination of the two, that is the fact that this Etruscan name for a vase, *suntheruza*, has a diminutive ending reflecting its diminutive size. The fabric and decoration are typical of seventh-century vases from a southern Etruscan-Faliscan area along the course of the Tiber – Tarquinia, Caere, Veii, Narce, Falerii. The form is unique but many of its characteristics – the diminutive size, the cup-shaped lid, the M-shaped horizontal handles pierced with two holes, the recessed mouth, and even the location of the inscription – can be paralleled on a number of vases of the Orientalizing period from this area. Particularly striking is a comparison with another remarkable covered container at the École Française in

³² For the forms see Rix, *ET* I, p. 171.

³³ Rix 1995, p. 723 claims Etruscan origins for the name, deriving it from the noun **spura* "city". See WATMOUGH 1997, pp. 23-52 for a detailed discussion of *spurie-* in Etruscan and its cogeners in Latin and Sabellian.

³⁴ We are not sure that *mlax* and *mlakas/mlakas*, though etymologically connected, belong to the same lexeme. If the form *mlaxas* on Rix, *ET* Cr. 2.115 is not a mistake for *mlakas*, then it suggests that *mlax* itself is an inflectible stem distinct from *mlakas*, i.e., /mlak^h/ vs. /mlak-/ . On the other hand, if these two stems are somehow paradigmatically connected, the phonology of the consonantal alternation /k^h/ - /k/ has not yet been adequately explained.

³⁵ See AGOSTINIANI 1981.

³⁶ Exactly how *mlakas* is functioning in *mlakas: sela: aska mi eleivana* (Rix, *ET* Fa 2.3) is unclear, although it is possible that *sela* is to be read as a genitive *sela(s)* and that *mlakas: sela(s)* is a noun phrase dependent on *aska eleivana*.

Rome, with a human figure sitting on the lid. This vase is similar in fabric, shape, diminutive size, ridged decoration, cup-shaped lid and pierced handles (*fig. 1; tav. XXXIV a*). Similar to ours, too, is the inward-sloping lip, which is covered by the lid. Such a recessed lip, as well as the elaborate arrangements for tying the lids securely to the body, indicate the great value set on the contents of these tiny, elaborately decorated vases. It is in this context – the status of the owner, and the probably ritual and religious function of the vase – that the maker of our pyxis marked it with a self-referential inscription – an ‘*iscrizione parlante*’ – carefully incised on the lip and then hidden by the lid, thus ‘personalizing’ it for the owner; and, eventually, adding a new lexeme to our dictionary. Apart from the diminutive form, the question of the source of the word presents a problem. Is it a derivative of a Greek word, a name for a vase, like a number of others which have been studied recently? Whether its origin was Greek or not, there remains the problem of the meaning of the Etruscan word: what did it refer to? Was it the contents of the vase, its form or fabric, or its purpose or function? Or a combination of these, like an *alabastron*, or our own word for *censer*, for example?

Its provenance is unknown. A southern Etruscan-Faliscan origin is suggested by both the type of pyxis and its inscription.

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a



b



c



d



e

a-e) Pyxis, bucheroid impasto. Unknown provenance. Seventh century BC. Private collection.



a) Pyxis, bucheroid impasto. Unknown provenance. Seventh century BC. École Française de Rome; *b-f)* Inscription of pyxis in private collection.