

## A CHANGING FUNERARY RITUAL AT CRUSTUMERIUM (CA. 625 BC)

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### *Introduction*

Since the summer of 2006, the Groningen Institute of Archaeology (GIA) has been involved in annual excavation campaigns with students at the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area at Crustumerium, working in close cooperation with the Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma (SSBAR). During this time we have been able to study over 40 tombs, ranging in date from the early 7<sup>th</sup> until the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. This paper will focus on the latest phase of the funerary area and more specifically on the changes in funerary ritual that occurred around the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.

### *Introduction to the phenomenon*

Towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the funerary customs that had been used and elaborated for centuries underwent a dramatic change in large parts of *Latium Vetus*. The most radical changes consisted of a reduction of the funerary wealth, paired with architectural innovations of the tomb itself. This phenomenon has been identified in Rome, Ficana, Castel di Decima and other Latin settlements<sup>2</sup> and at Crustumerium as well. Whilst tombs dating to this later period are relatively rare in *Latium Vetus*, the excavations at the Monte Del Bufalo area have provided us with numerous examples of 'late' tombs. This funerary area is thus very suitable for a study of the changing funerary customs, enabling us to better understand what this change actually entailed and why it occurred.

The developments observed in the funerary data are of relevance, since they provide us with additional information on the socio-political

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2. See Bartoloni 1987, 157; Cifani 2008, 325; Nijboer and Attema 2011 and Naso 1990, 250.



*Fig. 1 Personal ornaments of bronze from T76.*

developments that took place in this period. Elite families struggled for power in an increasingly urbanised and stratified society. Social competition now took place in the public arena, resulting in an intensification of construction work on temples and other communal buildings. The historical sources inform us about sumptuary laws aimed at curtailing the excessive public display of wealth both in the public arena and in the funerary domain (see the section on Sumptuary Legislation below). A reflection of these developments can be found in the changing burial customs. It is believed that the way the funerary ritual and the contents of the tombs changed throughout this period, reflects the changes that took place in society at large, at least to a certain extent.

### *Reduction of funerary wealth*

The dramatic decrease of funerary wealth may well be the most important aspect of the changing funerary ritual. Whereas the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> century BC tombs were generally quite wealthy,<sup>3</sup> equipped with an elaborate banqueting set and many personal ornaments, the tombs of the late 7<sup>th</sup> century and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC generally contained a very modest funerary assemblage.

3. Princely tombs have not been encountered at Crustumerium so far (Belelli Marchesini 2008; Nijboer and Willemsen 2012). However, some of the 8<sup>th</sup> century tombs do contain elaborate sets of personal ornaments, as well as a large number of vases referring to an extensive funerary banquet. For an elaborate description of female tombs with opulent assemblages of personal ornaments in this region, see Pitzalis 2011.

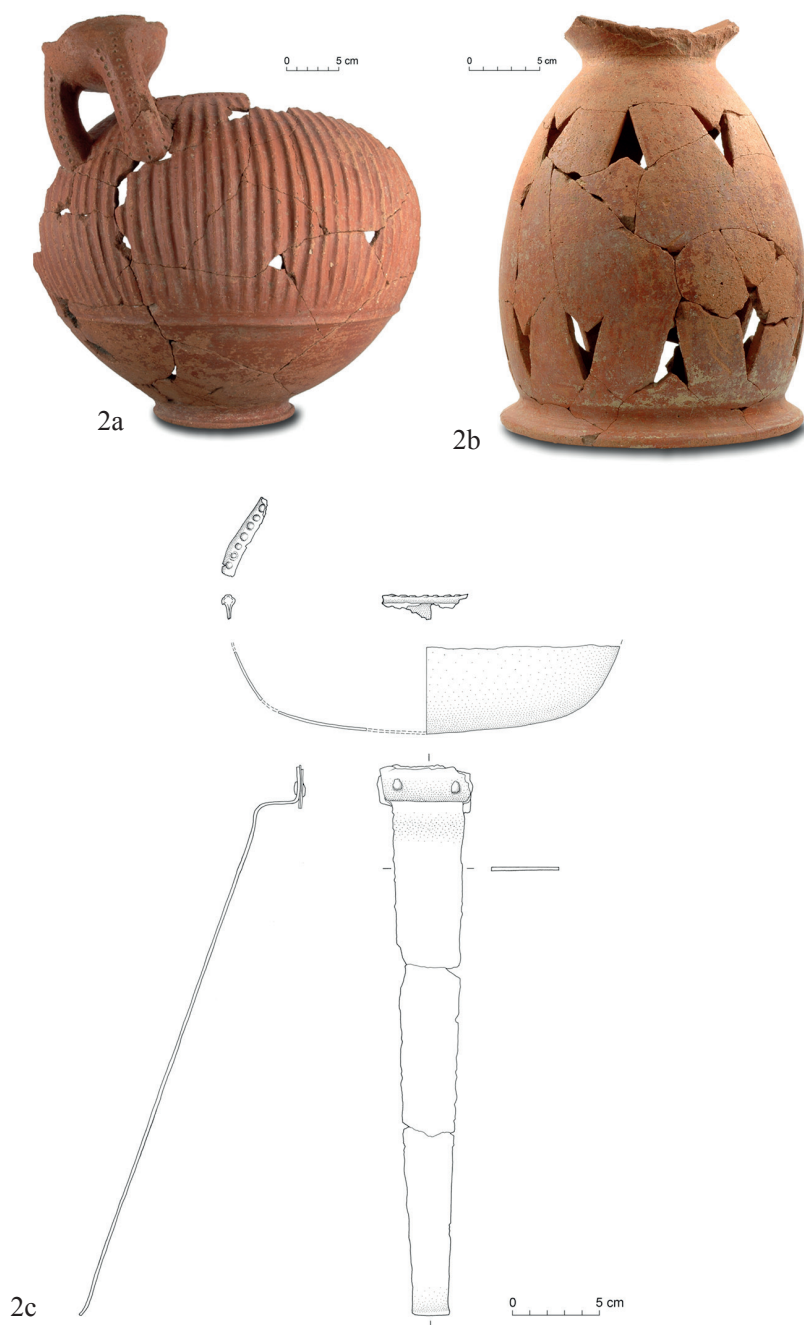


Fig. 2 A. An olla a coppette from T71; B. Part of a holmos from T232; C. A bronze tripod from T71.



Fig. 3 Contents of T223.

We will first have a look at the ‘standard’ assemblage of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century tombs, in order to elucidate how the later tombs actually differ from their predecessors. The *fossa* tombs T232, T71 and T76 are good examples of quite wealthy tombs dating to this period. The female individuals interred in these tombs were equipped with an elaborate *parure*, consisting of numerous fibulae, suspension rings, clasps, and in one case even a headdress (Fig. 1). Although all three tombs suffered severely from looting by tomb robbers, the scanty surviving ceramics pointed in the direction of extensive banqueting sets, consisting of a *holmos*, an *olla a cop-pette*, a bronze tripod and many other items (Fig. 2A-C). The composition



Fig. 4 Oinochoe and kantharos of T222.

of these sets, the decoration of the vases and the material used for their production all refer to the special character of the tombs and the women buried inside them.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from these relatively wealthy tombs, we have also studied a number of contemporary graves that were slightly more modest in their contents. T223 for example, is a *fossa* tomb that contained a female individual, accompanied by no more than two fibulae. The banqueting set, placed in the head niche, consisted of 14 vessels made of *impasto rosso* and *impasto* (Fig. 3). Although the assemblage of *anforette*, *tazze* and *ciotole* may represent quite an investment of the relatives, it is certainly not as opulent as the *corredi* of the tombs described above.<sup>5</sup>

However, even more modest tombs would occur towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. A deposition accompanied by no more than a single fibula is no exception for this period. If a ceramic assemblage is present, it generally constitutes no more than a drinking cup and an *olla* or *oinochoe* (Fig. 4). This is of course in sharp contrast with the previous period, in which the banqueting set would comprise vases in several different

4. See Nijboer and Willemsen 2012 for an in depth description of these three tombs.

5. The 'standardisation' of the banqueting set in this period has been noted for other areas in *Latium Vetus* as well (Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 65 and 83).



Fig. 5 Collection of alabastra from T294.

shapes and sizes, representing various different functions, such as ladling (*tazzina-attingitoio*), mixing (*tazza cratera*), pouring (*oinochoe*), storing (*olla*, *anforetta*), presenting (*calice*), etc.

The ceramic contents of the later tombs refer almost solely to drinking (*kantharos*) and storing or pouring (*olla* or *oinochoe*). An inventory of the archaeological remains could lead us to suspect that the funerary banquet had by this time boiled down to a very simple ritual that comprised only an act of drinking.<sup>6</sup> However, the actual banquet may have taken place somewhere else, leaving very little traces in the grave. Whereas some objects were now no longer placed inside the grave, items used for personal care and hygiene appeared for the first time. Although already occurring in some mid-7<sup>th</sup> century tombs, *aryballoi* and *alabastra*, presumably containing perfumed ointments and cream, are very frequently found in the late 7<sup>th</sup>, early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC tombs (Fig. 5).

It has already been noted that the amount of personal ornaments dwindled in the Monte Del Bufalo graves, just as the amount of banqueting vessels did. A slightly different development can be noted for the personal, functional objects inside the tombs. In tombs containing female remains,

6. The dwindling amount of fire dogs, axes and knives deposited in the tombs would indicate that the consumption of wine had increased, at the cost of the consumption of meat in Latial period IVB (Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 82).





*Fig. 6 Overview of chamber tomb T32.*

items referring to activities such as weaving and spinning seem to disappear. Spindle whorls and distaffs have not been found in the late tombs, whereas they previously formed a standard element of the female funerary assemblage.

With regard to weapons such as swords, spears and daggers, frequently found with male burials, we can detect a continuity of practice; even in the latest tombs, men are still very often accompanied by a set of weaponry.<sup>7</sup>

### *Architectural innovations*

Whilst the funerary wealth decreased quite dramatically towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the architecture of the tombs became more and more elaborate. During the first phase of the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area,

7. At Osteria dell'Osa the number of men buried with a weapon even increased from Latial period IVA1 to IVB; from 60% to 100% (Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 82). To this note we should add that the burial ritual was limited to an even smaller group in the later period (Bietti Sestieri 1992), suggesting stricter selection criteria for burial in a tomb and possibly a differential treatment of those that did so.

in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, people were buried in simple trench tombs. Over the course of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, this type was elaborated with an apsidal niche and/or a lateral *loculus*. Further architectonic elaboration and increasing size resulted in the introduction of the chamber tomb in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 6). Although some of the more ‘traditional’ architectonic types remained in use,<sup>8</sup> the chamber tomb so far appears to have been the most frequently used tomb type from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

### *Family graves*

Our archaeological investigations at the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area indicate that the chamber tombs were generally intended for more than one burial. Although we have a few examples of chambers containing only one individual, most chamber tombs housed more burials, generally of different age groups and of both sexes. It is therefore tempting to assume that this spacious tomb type was intended to house an entire family or an otherwise closely linked nuclear group.

The reason why people started burying multiple individuals in one tomb is not clear. It has often been suggested that the use of chamber tombs was inspired by the wish “to maintain the unity and continuity of the family”.<sup>9</sup> Whereas members of a family would previously have been buried in a cluster of closely spaced graves, they were now interred together within one single tomb.

One could also argue that the reuse of a larger tomb for several burials may have been more cost effective. Although a chamber tomb was generally much larger than a *fossa* tomb, the amount of cubic meters of tuff that had to be carved out, was probably a lot lower if compensated for the number of individuals buried in the tomb.

8. Belevi Marchesini 2008, 8.

9. Cornell 1980, 76. Riva states that the 7<sup>th</sup> century elite chamber tombs in Caere had a house-like shape, because the house was the element through which political authority was expressed (Riva 2010, 120).



*A degree of negligence...*

Apart from the dwindling numbers of funerary gifts and the innovative architecture of the tombs, another alteration comes to mind regarding the late tombs of Crustumerium. Judging from the archaeological investigations, it seems as though the funerary rites were treated with an increasing degree of negligence in the later period.

While the use of traditional *fossa* tombs seems to have lessened towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the 'prescribed' spatial lay-out of the funerary gifts in relation to the deposition was more or less abandoned as well. In the *tipo Narce* tombs for example,<sup>10</sup> the banqueting set was, almost without exception, placed at the head end of the burial. This is in clear contrast with the location of the vessels in the chamber tombs; often they do not seem to have a relation to one of the burials, being placed in a corner of the chamber or somewhere on the floor.<sup>11</sup> The haphazard location of the vessels may have been caused by subsequent opening and closing of the tomb for new inhumations; we have several indications for relocation (and even removal) of vases.

Furthermore, although the vessels generally refer to a drinking ritual, there is a great variety in the types of vases selected for deposition inside these later graves. For drinking purposes you may find a *kantharos*, a *kylix*, or a *calice*, while for storing and pouring one can encounter an *olla* (with or without handles), an *oinochoe*, or an *olpe*. The standardised banqueting assemblage we find in the *fossa* tombs of the previous period has made way for a reduced, but at the same time more varied set in the later tombs.

Another important element of the funerary ritual is of course the placement of the deceased individual inside the grave. Whereas in the *tipo Montarano* and *tipo Narce* tombs the location of the body was clearly defined (placed inside a lateral *loculus* and closed off with tuff slabs), the placement of the dead person becomes much less rigid towards the end of

10. See di Gennaro and Vergantini 2001 for an overview of the architectonic variants of tombs recognised at Crustumerium.

11. More often than not, there is even a physical barrier between the deposition and the banqueting vessels; the deceased individuals would often be placed inside loculi, afterwards closed off with tiles, whereas the vases were placed outside of the niches, in the chamber. This is in clear contrast with the burial practice of the earlier *fossa* tombs, where the loculi were admittedly closed off as well, but in which we find the body and the banqueting set at the same location. The separation of the body and the banqueting vessels is maybe not so much an indication of negligence, but rather proof of a changing attitude towards the burial ritual.



Fig. 7 A primary and a secondary burial (on the left) inside T32.

the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Although the burials inside a chamber tomb can generally be found inside the *loculi*, in numerous instances they were placed on the floor of the chamber or even in (a *loculus* in) the *dromos*.

Besides being placed at random locations inside the tomb, the burials often seem to lack a predefined orientation. They may be directed towards the entrance, or towards the back wall, but are also often found in various different directions. This is very unlike the *fossa* tombs of the previous period; they have a predominant N/S orientation, and the same thing goes for the burials inside of them.<sup>12</sup>

A practice we hardly ever find in the 8<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> century tombs is secondary burial. However, it is certainly not exceptional in late 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century graves; we have often encountered situations in which older (decayed) bodies had been moved to make room for a new burial, resulting in a pile of scattered skeletal remains at the feet of the more recent, primary deposition (Fig. 7).

A related topic is the spatial distribution of tombs on the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area in the later period. There are many tombs that overlap or cut each other especially in the northern part of the burial ground (Fig. 8). The *dromos* of a chamber tomb cut part of an older *fossa* for example, or a simple trench tomb had been dug out in the shaft of another grave.

The fact that the tombs were positioned so close to one another, while there seem to have been large open spaces available, may indicate intentionality; people wanted to be buried close to other people they were related to (by blood or otherwise). The lack or disappearance of grave markers

12. Belelli Marchesini 2008, 9.



*Fig. 8 A cluster of five connected and overlapping tombs; T254, T255, T256, T257 and T285.*

may have caused the pattern of overlapping tombs we discern today; people were no longer aware of the exact location of the older tombs on the grave field. One could argue that the damage done to the graves was the result of a lack of care and respect for the older tombs, and as such we could characterise the positioning of the graves as careless and as another sign of an increased degree of negligence towards the burial ritual. On the other hand, a close look at the overlapping tombs shows that the actual burial and its accompanying gifts in the older tombs were hardly ever damaged, suggesting a very careful, intentionally interlacing positioning of the later tombs.

We could argue that the lack of a spatially demarcated location for the deceased, the lack of a predefined orientation, the overlapping tombs, and the frequent rearrangement of bodies, signals a decreasing level of care (or even respect) towards the buried individual.<sup>13</sup> However, the altered way of dealing with the dead could also be the result of a changing attitude towards spiritual matters in general and death in particular. Maybe it was no longer deemed necessary to 'seal' the dead person's burial with monumental tuff slabs and let it be accompanied by an elaborate banqueting set for the hereafter. The strict rules that applied to the positioning of the grave and the dead person inside it in the previous period were possibly not considered as important anymore.

We could also claim that the observed negligence should be interpreted in the light of a changing location for expression of status and wealth; the funeral was no longer being exploited for showcasing an individual's social standing, because there were other, more appropriate arenas to do so. I will return to this point later on.

#### *A private ritual*

A topic that is related to this is the increasing level of seclusion of the funerary ritual itself. The modifications in the architectonic lay-out of the tombs, developing from a simple trench tomb to a chamber tomb with *dro-mos* and *loculi*, resulted in graves that were admittedly far more spacious and monumental, but all the while also more screened off and increasingly private. The actual burial of the deceased inside a chamber tomb will have been concealed from most of the partakers in the funeral. Although a few people must have entered the grave to execute the burial, most bystanders may not have had any idea of what went on inside the tomb, since once the body and the accompanying funerary gifts had entered the chamber, they were no longer visible to the people standing at the edge of the grave pit. The situation would have been somewhat different for the *fossa* tombs of the previous period, in which the deceased (whether or not buried in a coffin) was far more visible during the funerary ritual, at least until tuff slabs were placed on top of the coffin or in front of the *loculus*.

13. Beijer has indeed argued that the standardisation of the ceramic objects and the decrease of funerary gifts at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC was the result of less individual care for the deceased (Beijer 1992, 112-113).



The question is whether the innovative architecture of the chamber had dictated the ritual, resulting in a more modest burial since it was hardly visible to the public, or whether the secluded character of the chambers was a consequence of a desire to screen off the burial ritual from unwanted outsiders.<sup>14</sup> It is clear however that the ostentatious component of the funeral itself must have been deemed far less important in this later period. Unfortunately, we have no archaeological information regarding the funerary rites that went on at home or in the public arena. Here, the burial rites may have had a very open and visible character. The restrictions on the amount of flute players described on the Twelve Tables seem to suggest that public funerary processions indeed took place (see also below).

### *Explanations for a changing burial ritual*

The dramatic change of the funerary customs around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, did not only take place in Crustumerium, but in many other settlements in *Latium Vetus* and southern Etruria as well.<sup>15</sup> Not only did the funerary wealth decrease, graves seem to disappear altogether from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards.<sup>16</sup>

Many scholars have tried to explain the sudden alterations in the burial rites, citing various different causes for this phenomenon, summarised in the short overview below. Explaining the changing funerary customs at the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area lies beyond the scope of this article. However, an attempt is made to test the various theories on this matter against the archaeological background of Crustumerium.

### *Sumptuary Legislation*

One of the most cited (and most discussed) causes for the changing burial rites is the introduction of sumptuary legislation. Although the Twelve Tables, on which the sumptuary laws were recorded, were issued

14. In this respect we should consider the dialectic relationship between funerary space and ritual action. In a recent work, Riva has stated that not only did ritual actions transform the tomb; the transformed space of the tomb itself in turn dictated the spatial relations amongst the participants and viewers of the rites (Riva 2010, 121).

15. For example Ficana, Castel di Decima and Veii (Bartoloni 1987, 157).

16. Cornell 1995, 105.

somewhere after the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC,<sup>17</sup> it is believed that they reflected the moral values that people already abided by since the time of king Servius Tullius.<sup>18</sup>

According to many scholars, the Twelve Tables should be interpreted as ‘an attempt to restrict aristocratic display and offensive expenditure in order to promote isonomy and to prevent unrest among the non-aristocrats’,<sup>19</sup> as a means to confine *habrosyne* (luxury) and *tryphè* (delicacy).<sup>20</sup> The legislation written down on the Twelve Tables would have assured an egalitarian aristocracy, reigning according to the principles of isonomy.<sup>21</sup> The modest funerary ritual would have been an expression of solidarity, requested at the time of urbanization.<sup>22</sup>

A close look at Cicero’s account in his *De Legibus* (2.58-2.62) on the tenth table, which deals specifically with funerary legislation, reveals however that most regulations were directed towards restricting ‘death’s invasion of life’, or in other words, towards minimising the impact of the funerary ritual on daily life and society as a whole;<sup>23</sup> very few notes actually refer to constriction of the affluence of the graves. Furthermore, the few notes that do specifically refer to a curtailment of the funerary wealth are for a large part contradicted by the archaeological record. As has been noted above, at Monte Del Bufalo many of the late tombs still contain drinking and pouring vessels, suggesting that people did not abide by the banning of the *circumpotatio* ritual (passing the cup). We further find that many of the late tombs contain *aryballoi* and *alabastra*, which supposedly held perfumed oils and creams, seemingly contradicting the prohibition of anointment of the body before burial as described on the tenth table.<sup>24</sup> In other areas of *Latium Vetus* we still find a few opulent tombs,<sup>25</sup> which are in clear contrast with the idea of restriction expressed on the Tenth Table.

It is therefore suggested that ‘the change in funerary practice gave rise to the new legislative forms, rather than the other way around’.<sup>26</sup>

17. Toher 2005, 279-280.

18. Colonna 1977.

19. Toher 2005, 269.

20. Naso 1990, 249.

21. Colonna 1977, 158.

22. Ampolo 1984, 97.

23. Toher 2005, 283; Cornell 1995, 107.

24. Cicero, *De Legibus* II. 60.

25. For example at *Fidenae*, *Lanuvium* and *Pratica di Mare* (Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 65).

26. Cornell 1995, 107.



*Investing in the public arena?*

Apart from a reflection of sumptuary legislation, the changing burial rites have been interpreted as a component of the social developments of the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is well known that this was a period in which several elite families fought each other over power and territory.<sup>27</sup> Competition would have taken place in the public arena and as a consequence, resources were invested in the construction of monumental public buildings and sanctuaries, away from the funeral processions and graves.<sup>28</sup> While the burial rite had always been a practice reserved for a select group within society, it seems to have been abandoned altogether towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Instead of investing in private familial monuments such as tombs, public buildings became the main focal point of the settlements of which many were by now almost completely urbanized.<sup>29</sup> This theory finds affirmation in the fact that the number of votive gifts in sanctuaries increased at exactly the same time as the decrease of funerary gifts occurred.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, attention shifted from individual to public and religious interests.<sup>31</sup>

*Religious change*

The alterations in the funerary rites may also have come about as a result of changing religious beliefs and a different moral attitude towards the deceased. The belief in an afterlife would have changed the way people looked upon funerary rituals and tombs; no longer were they seen as the last resting place of a loved relative, but rather a first stop on the journey to the underworld.<sup>32</sup> This spiritual change could have resulted in a different treatment of the dead and their tombs; it was no longer deemed necessary to let an elaborate banquet set accompany the dead, since they were traveling directly to the hereafter.

27. Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 66.

28. Bartoloni, Nizzo and Taloni 2009, 65-66; Toher 2005, 281; Smith 1994, 294 and Smith 1996, 186.

29. Ampolo 1984, 79.

30. Bartoloni 1987, 143-144 and Colonna 1977, 158.

31. Beijer 1992, 114.

32. Colonna 1981, 230.

*Conclusion*

This article has focussed on the funerary practice in Central Italy that started to change around the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The relatively high number of 6<sup>th</sup> century BC tombs at the Monte Del Bufalo funerary area of Crustumerium makes this site, an ideal test case for a study of the changing funerary customs.

The article focussed on the different elements of change, as they have been encountered in the excavations at Crustumerium. It has been noted that the funerary wealth did not only decrease quite dramatically, the architecture of the tombs proper was innovated at the same time. The more spacious chamber tombs enabled multiple depositions within one grave, probably stressing family ties. All the while, the burial ritual itself seems to have been increasingly secluded, leading to a more private ceremony during the funeral in the chamber itself. Ultimately, an increasing level of negligence has been observed in reference to the execution of the funerary customs; no longer was there a clearly defined location for the deceased and its funerary gifts, there was no fixed orientation for the dead body and secondary burial became common practice.

The question is how we should explain these changes in the funerary customs. Are they the result of sumptuary laws, or do they rather point in the direction of changing socio-political circumstances or a different attitude towards ideological and religious conventions? It is hard to pinpoint the exact cause for the changes based on the study of a restricted number of tombs. Our investigations have revealed, however, that the archaeological reality is far from straightforward or clear cut. A detailed analysis of the changes and developments shows that old customs and revolutionary practices occurred alongside each other, resulting in a complicated interplay between tradition and innovation. A faithful reconstruction of the reasons behind the changing burial rite should be based on a thorough analysis of the mortuary variability in the light of the socio-political processes that took place in this period. This is the aim of my forthcoming PhD thesis.<sup>33</sup>

33. Willemsen forthcoming.