

Landslides and Recycling: Evidence from the Coriglia Excavation

This paper will use recent evidence from the Coriglia Excavation Project to examine the impact of natural disasters on well-established sites in Central Italy. First, this paper will examine the evidence for a landslide on site, before investigating the coordinated recycling program that followed and what this means for the region in the Late Roman period. The site of Coriglia is located northwest of Orvieto Italy, overlooking the Paliga River. The major occupation of Coriglia begins with an Etruscan phase in the 6th century BCE and reached its peak during the Roman Imperial period. The site occupies a large hillside defined by a series of L-shaped terrace walls that are persistent through the life of the site. At various periods, these walls supported domestic areas, at least two bath complexes, production spaces, and a possible sacred space associated with a hot spring. The continuous habitation, regular restructuring, and later spoliation has made broad interpretations difficult, but evidence from recent excavations has resulted in several important interpretations about the end of the life of the site.

Based on this new evidence, it appears that during the 5th century CE a landslide cut across Coriglia, burying portions of the area and destroying major infrastructure. This disaster seems to have initiated the abandonment of the section of the site currently under investigation, which aligns with the level of damage in this area and the general physical, political, and economic instability in the region. However, unlike other sites, this abandonment was marked by an immediate, intensive, and systematic recycling program where all valuable or reusable materials were removed from the site in a coordinated manner over a period of one or more years. This includes the removal of metals and glass, the burning of marble for lime, the operation of a brick and tile kiln, and the construction of a road. All of this evidence points to an

intentional, well-planned program involving a significant number of people, coordinated by a central authority.

Interestingly, while the recycling program represents a success of coordination and planning, the landslide itself suggests a failure of preparation and investment at Coriglia. The two natural springs on the site, coupled with the depth of the soil, meant that instability was a major issue facing the site from its first period of habitation by the Etruscans all the way through to its eventual abandonment. This instability was successfully managed until the 5th century CE landslide. After looking at the history of the site, this paper will discuss this success and examine possible explanations for why it failed. Then it will shift focus to discuss the recycling program, first examining the practical realities of the methods and purposes behind the activity, before examining the motivating factors coordinating the systematic process. Finally, this paper will situate these results in the context of the larger central Italian countryside and discuss what it means for this region during the Late Roman period.