

Constructing Structures of Power:
A topographical approach to the architecture of central Italy, 8th-5th c. BC

Architecture has long been used within societies to express aspects of power and prestige; monumentality and conspicuous consumption are hallmarks of buildings that indicate the owner or resident is someone of significance. For the earliest periods of Italy's protohistory, select remnants of architecture, such as decorated terracotta frieze plaques, have been used to illustrate some aspects of the ancient world—banqueting, horse racing, mythology—but the study of the built landscape of towns and cities as a facet of the structure of that contemporary society has typically been restricted to later, historical periods of the Roman Republic and Roman Italy. However, by examining the transitional period from perishable to permanent architecture—often respectively called 'huts' and 'houses' in shorthand—that took place from the 8th to 6th centuries BC, we stand to learn more about a crucial moment in Italy's earliest days.

This paper presents a new way of looking at the development and implementation of new, stone-founded, terracotta-tile-capped structures in archaic central Italy. By examining at what sites, in what location within those sites, and when these buildings were constructed, we begin to see the potential power structures of those who governed these settlements. Rome, for example, has some of the earliest terracotta-tiled buildings in all of Italy, and built six of them within a 50-70 year window (Winter 2009). The Etruscan site of Acquarossa instead built 29 within a 60-80 window, and excavators have posited that a potential 1,200 were standing ca. 500 BC (Wikander 1993). And yet, the majority of sites with such structures only ever built a single building in this style in these earliest centuries (Winter 2009).

By examining these disparate pictures, we can immediately see a significant difference in expenditure, in monumentality, and by extension, likely in socio-political circumstances. But while

the protohistorical record tells us about Rome's contemporary government (Terrenato 2011), it is largely or entirely silent about sites such as Acquarossa, Tarquinia, or Veii.

Using the construction of these buildings as a proxy allows us to better understand not only earliest Rome, but also these other settlements for which we have little to no textual record. This paper uses this perspective to examine the spread of technological knowledge via architecture, and to not only theorize about the motivations behind the change in the built landscape, but also the way that the elites of these various communities utilized a new way of advertising their power, influence, and prestige at a pivotal time in Italy's earliest history.

Bibliography

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