

A New Consideration of Fiesole's Theater

Fiesole in northern Tuscany was an autonomous hill-top city until its sack and colonization by Sulla (82 - 80 B.C.E.). This paper focuses on Fiesole's theater. Little is known about the theater's chronology and only a slight body of evidence exists from a secure archaeological context. Excavations of Faesulae's theater during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries paid little attention to stratigraphy, focusing instead on the form, manner of construction, and ancient historical record for dating the monument (Caputo and Maetzke 1959; De Marco 1981). Del Rosso made the first study of the theater in 1814 (Minto 1937) arguing, based on construction and ceramic evidence, that the foundation levels pre-dated the first century B.C.E. and the Social War. A century after Del Rosso's study, the theater's date was reinterpreted by Galli, who attributed the theater as a product of the Roman colonists based on the narrative of the Social War found in Appian (Galli 1914), despite the contradictory ancient testimony of Licinianus who states that in 78 B.C.E the locals revolted against the colonists. If Licinianus is to be believed to the same degree as other ancient testimony, Galli's proposed Sullan date for Faesulae's theater would be improbable. Nevertheless, Galli's hypothesis that the theater dated to the Sullan / Roman period was followed without much scrutiny. In 1949 De Agostino published a guide to the archaeological area that perpetuated and embellished Galli's hypothesis without any new data or further explanation, after which the theater's Roman origin became an established fact based on no actual evidence (De Agostino 1949). In 1957 Lugli reinterpreted the entire theater as a monument of the Augustan era, due the large amount of early Imperial remains reported to have been found in the vicinity during earlier excavations (Lugli 1957). In 1958 limited stratigraphic excavation was undertaken by Maetzke (Caputo and Maetzke 1959), who noted that the exact chronology of the theater cannot be known with certainty, though the

Augustan date advanced by Lugli “has reached full confirmation.” After Maetzke, no new examinations of the theater’s chronology have been undertaken and most subsequent discussions cite his 1959 publication as the final word on the theater’s date of construction (Calì and D’Afflitto 2001; Fuchs 1986; Sear 1990).

There still exist doubt about the Roman date of the monument (Cesati 1997; De Marco 1981; De Marinis 1990). I argue that the theater had two phases of construction, the first in *opus quadratum* during the late second / first century B.C.E. that was built by autonomous Etruscan inhabitants, and a later reworking and embellishment in *opus caementicium* undertaken during the Augustan Age. I also suggest that ideology was a factor in the chronology established throughout the nineteenth century, since before 1914 an Etruscan construction date for the theater was an acceptable hypothesis, though after Galli’s 1914 publication scholars came to embrace the ideology that the theater was a Roman monument, solidified by De Agostino in the 1940s when the monument became “Roman.” Now, the monument has indeed become part of a grand Roman tradition via Maetzke who solidified its Imperial associations. I advance that, prior to World War I, excavation reports provide good information to suggest that the theater was an Etruscan construction datable to the late second or early first century B.C.E. Between the two World Wars, however, there arose in Italian scholarship a new focus on Empire resulting in a remarkable shift that tended to look for a Roman source behind ancient monuments with an observable meta-narrative that idealistically promoted a strong Roman Imperial past to the exclusion of an Etruscan one.

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