

The Sullan Foundation of Roman *Florentia*

The origin of the Roman colony *Florentia* (modern Florence) was questioned as early as Dante (*Paradiso* 16.140-50), who wrote that violent Roman colonization came upon native Etruscan territory. Vasari painted a similar scene two centuries later in his “*La Fondazione di Florèntia*.” The first systematic study on the city’s foundation was by Borghini in the 16th century, who also saw Etruscan origins, though sometimes confusing ancient monuments with Medieval. During the subsequent centuries, scholarship on *Florentia* looked more critically at monuments, inscriptions, and the ancient record. A shift happened in the early 1900s, however, when it became commonly accepted that *Florentia* was founded by Julius Caesar in the mid-40s B.C.E. and was settled as a colony shortly afterward by Augustus. Evidence for this episode is drawn almost exclusively from the fourth century text *Liber Colontiarum* (213.6-7) and this interpretation was solidified during the 1940s and 1950s when significant ideological importance was attached to the view that unified Italy’s first capital and cultural center was founded by a strong, imperial Rome (Capecchi 1996).

More recently, Hardie (1965) advocated for a Triumviral colony founded by Octavian in 41 B.C.E, and Campbell (2000) sought to pinpoint the date of veteran colonization at *Florentia* to Caesar in either 59 B.C.E. or between 47 and 45 B.C.E., to the Triumvirs shortly thereafter, or to Octavian after the battle of Actium. Yet, these interpretations consider only texts that relate to existing evidence of the city’s centuriation, while omitting textual and material evidence that contradict the accepted narrative of imperial foundation.

This paper introduces recent archaeological data, together with textual evidence that seemingly contradicts the account of the *Liber*, to provide an earlier date for and a settlement system of the origin of *Florentia*. In respect to textual testimony, Florus (2.9.27) records that *Florentia* was “put up for auction by Sulla” in the years after the Social War. Since *Florentia*

is not supposed to have existed until fifty years later, this passage has been discarded in most treatments of colonial foundation. Similarly, Granius Licinianus (36.34-5) states that in 78 B.C.E. *veterani Sullani* who reportedly had been settled at *Faesulae* (modern Fiesole), the hilltop above present-day Florence, lived in rural *castella*. From their hilltop city, the native *Faesulani* attacked the Sullan colonists, driving them from the land. This passage has also been disregarded in treatments of *Florentia*, since Appian's longer and more mainstream account of the Social War place these veterans at *Faesulae*.

These previously overlooked textual references are supported by archaeological data published in the last decade (Pagni 2010). For instance, inscriptions from *Faesulae* are only pre-Social War Etruscan and Flavian era Latin, with no epigraphy attributable to a Sullan colony. At Florence, excavations in the city center reveal late-second and early first century B.C.E. coins in the forum area under the Capitolium and early first century B.C.E. houses along what would later be the colony's *cardo*. This paper argues that the city's origin dates to the settlement of Sullan colonists at a new site in the valley along the Arno River. This nascent city gradually developed into Augustan *Florentia*, akin to Republican-era *fora* that sprang up along other Roman roads, bringing with it houses, commercial buildings, a port facility, and a market center.

Bibliography

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