

A Punic Cistern at Cosa?

Cosa, a Latin colony founded by the Romans in 273 BCE, is located on a waterless hill in southern Etruria. To cope with an absence of natural water sources, colonists employed rainwater harvesting, collecting water not only in the familiar domestic cisterns of the Roman world, but also in largescale non-domestic receptacles. At a site peppered with rainwater collection containers, one stands out for its singularity of form and placement. This cistern lies beneath Cosa's so-called Capitolium, a temple crowning the highest rise of the hilltop.

The so-called Capitolium cistern is typologically exceptional at Cosa. Rather than the typical rectangular and rectilinear cisterns of the colony, in horizontal section the "Capitolium" cistern is a rectangle with semi-circular ends. All other known cisterns at Cosa are cut into the bedrock and/or constructed from the hill's native limestone blocks, down to their roofs vaulted with limestone voussoirs. In the "Capitolium" cistern, reused decorative architectural terracotta roofing elements and a few reused worked limestone blocks are mortared together in a matrix which forms the rectangle with semi-circular ends shape as a lining which in turn is set within a 0.3-0.5 m larger rectangular delineation cut into the bedrock. Additionally, the roof of this cistern appears not to have been vaulted, but to have been gabled with thin slabs of tufa imported from the nearby site of Vulci. Lastly, though there are other temples at Cosa and the colony's nearby port, none but the so-called Capitolium has a cistern integrated into its substructure.

The closest typological parallel to the "Capitolium" cistern is the *vasca* (or *bagnarola*) cistern type known from Punic sites in North Africa, Sardinia, and Pantelleria. Given that the temple and cistern were erected ca. 150-140 BCE, around the time of the conclusion of the Third Punic War, is there a Punic connection? A contemporary cistern, the second constructed under

the site of what would shortly become the Forum's Basilica, was a "classic" Cosan (and Roman) typology—rectangular, vaulted, and made out of native limestone. Why did colonists build a different Punic style cistern simultaneously at the temple? Were natives of Cosa, familiar with Punic tradition, eager to utilize a Punic form themselves as a celebration of their victory, in the same way that later Augustan projects gestured at Rome's victory over Parthia and Egypt? Within the more lax scheme of a Latin colony, were Punic people perhaps present, as a new infusion of colonists—which according to Livy had been required half a century earlier following the Second Punic War—or as enslaved or indentured prisoners of war? In light of the fact that the temple's designation as Capitolium is not secure, does the possible Punic relationship via the cistern give any indication as to the divinities or divinity worshipped within? Is it useful or even responsible to take architecture, like the "Capitolium" cistern, as an indicator of ethnicity, cultural interaction, or religious expression? This paper aims to unpack and assess the history and identity of the cistern in order to shed new light on the early history of the colony.