

The Reuse of Plaster Fragments in Construction Deposits at Cosa

During the American Academy of Rome's excavations on the arx of the Latin colony of Cosa, excavations revealed a deposit of materials used to level the area for the construction of a temple. The deposit, referred to in excavation documentation as the Temple of Jupiter Deposit, contained large amounts of discarded pottery that date the creation of the deposit to ca. 70 BCE. The lowest level of the deposit contained a significant group of disassociated first and second style wall painting fragments. Excavators of the deposit believed the materials to be representative of accumulated material that had been in use during the hypothesized sacking of the city in 70 BCE that was later collected and transported to the south side of the Capitolium to lend extra support to the defensive works of the arx. The fresco fragments provide important evidence for the history of wall painting at the site and the development of styles within the region but careful analysis of the excavation context provides additional information about the reuse of building materials at the site.

Situated on the saddle of two limestone outcroppings with no natural water sources, the site preserves evidence of careful attention to water management. This paper utilizes legacy data from excavation notebooks, drawings, and photographs to discuss the reuse of plaster within deposits at Cosa to aid in drainage and prevent erosion. The evidence of Temple of Jupiter Deposit is compared to four other deposits excavated by the AAR between 1948 and 1967. Additional evidence of a deposit excavated in 2019 by Florida State University from beneath a floor within the bath complex preserved evidence of the reuse of plaster fragments at the lowest level of the deposit.

Evidence of the reuse of plaster fragments from other Roman sites is considered, such as a deposit on the south side of the Eumachia building at Pompeii. Excavation reports record a deposit containing building materials, discarded pottery, and fresco fragments associated the deconstruction of a building that were repurposed to create embankments to support new construction projects and level existing terrain. The evidence from comparable excavation contexts suggests decommissioned frescos were considered a useful material for recycling and the inclusion of the fragments in the lower levels of soil fills aided in the drainage of water. The choice of specific materials and their placements across the site in deposits associated with construction demonstrates the process for the management of destruction debris within the city with a careful consideration of water management.