Light Framed Architecture at Poggio Civitate: A Comparison of Elite and Non-Elite Domiciles

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Light Framed Architecture at Poggio Civitate: A Comparison of Elite and Non-Elite Domiciles

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Introduction

Poggio Civitate, an Etruscan site 25km south of the modern city of Siena, preserves some of the Etruscan world’s earliest monumental architecture. In the second quarter of the 7th century BCE, platformed structures were constructed at a complex of socially-related buildings on the hill’s Piano del Teatro plateau, an elite residence, an industrial center and a major religious structure. Each of these structures was designed to accommodate an estimated 100 residents, with the site being connected to surrounding communities by a well-developed system of roads and waterways. This excavation revealed the presence of a hut situated on a terrace directly overlooking the Piano del Teatro plateau, the site of the architectural and religious structures. The hut was located approximately 300m from the Piano Teatro plateau, the site of the architectural and religious structures. The hut was located approximately 300m from the Piano Teatro plateau, the site of the architectural and religious structures.

Architectural Form

The hut’s floor was reexcavated in a manner similar to examples from sites further north, such as San Giovenale and at the Palatine Hill of Rome. In the example from Poggio Civitate, the underlying limestone bedrock was not conducive to easy excavation such as that of the above examples. Instead, the area of the hut’s floor was excavated into the sterile soil to an approximate depth of 1 meter and a half to two meters below ground level. The large posts and posts were likely made from indigenous trees, such as Aleppo pine (Pinus halepensis), Cork Oak (Quercus Suber), Prickly Juniper (Juniperus oxycedrus) or Maritime Ash (Fraxinus Ornus). The posts would be spaced at regular intervals around the depresion, the exact form of which cannot be determined at this time.

Excavation

Excavation units CC7 and CC7Ext. revealed the presence of a distinct oval depression cut into surrounding sterile soil. The dimensions of this depression were 9 meters x 4 meters, roughly comparable in size to similarly preserved substructures of Iron Age domiciles from sites such as San Giovenale, Veii and Rome.

Observations

The presence of this architectural feature on the southern terrace below Piano del Teatro’s Workshop structure might suggest that the hut served as a domestic space for laborers engaged in Poggio Civitate’s industrial activity. If so, we would expect to see evidence for additional structures in the immediate vicinity. As yet, excavation has not revealed evidence for such buildings, but exploration of the area remains limited.

Bibliography


Chronology

At this time, the available evidence suggests the floor of the feature was intentionally excavated to a depth of approximately a meter and a half below ground level. When the structure was abandoned, the depressed area was filled with debris from the area. Within this fill, excavators recovered fragments of ceramic dating to the years from the mid to late 7th century.

Although most durable material from the occupation phase of the Poggio Civitate complex on Piano del Teatro can be placed around the end of the 7th century, some materials from the complex are directly comparable in both form and date to those recovered from the lens of the CC7 hut, whose abandonment is placed around the early 7th century. To judge by the accumulated debris from within the midden created following the abandonment of the hut, the depression was overlapped to some degree with that of the monumental terracotta structures higher on the plateau.