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Margarita Gleba
Bryn Mawr College

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WEAVING AT POGGIO CIVITATE (MURLO)



Margarita Gleba

Although few fragments of Etruscan fabrics survive, we know that textile production was important in Etruria because of the tools found at sites such as Poggio Civitate (Murlo). Spinning and weaving implements constitute the single most important and plentiful type of evidence for assessing the scale and technology of the weaving industry in early Italy. Many tools were made of perishable materials such as wood and do not survive in the archaeological record. Other implements, however, were made of fired clay and are frequently found during excavations; these include spindle whorls, loom weights, and *rocchetti*.

In Etruria, spinning and weaving implements appear in three types of archaeological contexts: funerary, votive, and settlement. Implements found in graves and votive deposits inform us of certain social aspects of spinning and weaving activities. The primary technological function of spinning and weaving tools, however, can only be inferred from the habitation sites. A study of the number, morphology, and distribution of these implements provides information about the technology, scale of production, and importance of the local weaving industry.

At Poggio Civitate (Murlo), spinning and weaving implements have been discovered in almost every season since the excavations began in 1966. The sheer number of tools (over 1000 objects) suggests that Murlo was a significant center of textile production during its Orientalizing phase. Their concentration in the area of the so-called South-East Building, identified as a workshop, confirms that textile production on the site was organized and carried out on a scale significantly larger than that needed for domestic consumption.

Analysis of various types of implements allows us to generalize about the technical aspects of the products. Thus, the relatively small size of the Murlo spindle whorls indicates that the yarn spun at the site was very fine. The loom weights, on the other hand, are quite large and, unlike at other sites, their number at Murlo is sig-

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nificantly smaller than quantities of spindle whorls and *rocchetti*. The unusually large number of *rocchetti*, small cylindrical clay objects often identified as spools because of their shape, suggests that they may have functioned as analogs of loom weights to produce narrow, patterned strips of cloth. Such decorative borders could then be attached to garments woven of plain cloth. Many of the tomb paintings at Tarquinia show these elaborate and colorful borders on white garments which, some authors quite reasonably suggest, represent linen, a fabric that is notoriously difficult to dye and thus requires another method of decoration. Environmental conditions and archaeological evidence indicate that linen could not have been produced in northern Etruria, but was most likely imported from the Po Valley. The Murlo textile workshop may have specialized in decorating imported plain garments with borders that are often regarded as a hallmark of Etruscan clothing in artistic representations, among which are the Murlo seated statues.

On a broader scale, the evidence for textile production suggests that Poggio Civitate played a significant role in Etruscan exchange in the Orientalizing Period. Analysis of the spinning and weaving implements excavated at Murlo also demonstrates that the absence of actual textiles should not detract from our understanding of their production. Comparison of the Murlo material with that from other sites in turn will create a broader understanding of weaving technology and textile production in Etruria.

Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology
Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010