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Commerce in Exile: Terracotta Roofing in Etruria, Corfu and Sicily, a Bacchiad Family Enterprise

Nancy A. Winter

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Following the appearance of terracotta roof tiles in Greece on the Temple of Apollo at Corinth in the second quarter of the 7th century BC (fig. 1),\(^1\) the technology spread to Italy, where tiles are found in contexts datable to the third and fourth quarters of that century at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) and Acquarossa in Etruria.\(^2\) At Poggio Civitate, tiled roofs occur on a workshop known as the Southeast Building (figs. 2-3) and on a domestic structure known as the Lower Building; at Acquarossa, the earliest tiled roofs are all on domestic architecture.\(^3\) The same basic tile forms as occur on the early Corinthian roof, i.e. flat pan tiles and convex cover tiles, are used, with adjustments in scale and design (smaller size, separate pan and cover elements) probably intended to speed production, reduce costs, and ease handling.\(^4\) Some of the early roofs in Etruria, however, display decorative features lacking on the Corinthian roof, such as cut-out acroteria and revetment plaques with painted decoration. At Acquarossa,\(^5\) the earliest roofs draw upon local pottery decoration for motifs painted on the revetment plaques. But another group of roofs draw instead on models from Greek art and these roofs are the main focus of this paper. One early example is the roof of the Southeast Building workshop at Poggio Civitate, dated ca 630 BC, which includes eaves tiles mounted with feline-head water spouts, and antefixes decorated with female heads, together with cut-out dou-
ble-volute acroteria (figs. 2-3). The roof of the so-called Lower Building at Poggio Civitate also used cut-out double-volute acroteria, as well as a raking sima with cavetto profile decorated with a painted tongue pattern and painted revetment plaques. Representations of raking simas, cut-out acroteria, pan tiles and cover tiles on roofs of house urns at Caere, datable by tomb context to the last third of the 7th century BC and probably copying the elements of actual roofs on buildings there, taken in conjunction with the evidence from Poggio Civitate and Acquarossa, demonstrate a surprising koiné between the early roofs of northern and southern Etruria, and between inland and coastal sites in the specific roof elements used, their forms and the use of white-on-red painted decoration.

As specific and unusual as these structural and decorative features are, the cavetto raking sima with painted tongue pattern, eaves tiles mounted with feline-head water spouts, and antefixes decorated with female head, all found at Poggio Civitate, appear again together on a roof on the island of Corfu (figs. 4-5), off the northwestern coast of mainland Greece, while the same type of cavetto sima with painted tongue pattern is found among the earliest architectural terracottas from Sicily, at Syracuse; furthermore, a revetment
plaque with the same double guilloche design is found in the early 6th century BC at Acquarossa, on the Temple of Artemis in Corfu, and in Sicily, with the closest similarity in plaque form found between Acquarossa plaques and an early one at Syracuse. Moreover, Sicilian roofs of the 6th century BC frequently also carry cut-out double-volute acroteria on semi-cylindrical ridge tiles, a characteristic of the early Poggio Civitate roofs.

Attempts to explain these shared features (e.g., trade in Greek objects where the guilloche is frequent on bronzes and painted pottery) have failed to explain their identical placement in the roofing systems of three geographically distinct areas: Etruria, Corfu, and Sicily. Hypotheses that all three areas derived these elements from a single source in mainland Greece, and Corinth in particular, with northwestern Greece and Sicily as intermediaries along the route to Etruria, have foundered on the fact that there is no evidence for the existence of any of these decorative elements on tiled roofs at Corinth in the 7th century, and Etruria appears to have earlier examples than Corfu or Sicily.

Although early Corinthian terracotta roofs could not have been the source of inspiration for the decorative elements on the Western roofs, another Corinthian monument contains all of the motifs present on the early roofs of Etruria, Corfu and Sicily: the stone perirrhanterion (fig. 6) from the Corinthian sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia, an important cult object placed in front of a temple that carried a tiled roof similar to that at Corinth itself. The perirrhanterion is dated on stylistic grounds to 660-650 BC but the associations discussed below would suggest a date closer to 660 than to 650 BC. The ring base for the basin has a cavetto molding with a painted tongue pattern (see fig. 7), below a fascia with a possible painted guilloche. The perirrhanterion is supported by sculpted figures representing potnia theron, the same deity recognized by Nielsen in the iconography of the early Poggio Civitate workshop roof (figs. 2-3), where female heads are flanked by feline heads. The association of potnia theron with the water basin and the edges of a roof where water drains from the eaves may be connected to the role of female caryatids as votive water bearers. Double volutes on the perirrhanterion basin could possibly have been the source of inspiration for the cut-out double-volute acroteria at Poggio Civitate. In addition, the appearance of ram’s heads on the perirrhanterion recalls their early use on a lateral sima from Acquarossa where they are equally non-structural. According to Sturgeon, the ram’s head may allude to sacrifice or to the pail used to fill the perirrhanterion basin. No other single monument combines so many of the decorative elements found on the early roofs of Etruria, Corfu and Sicily.

The close correspondence between the decoration of these early roofs of Etruria, Corfu and Sicily, and the Isthmia perirrhanterion can, to my mind, be explained in only one way: through the common bond formed by the Bacchiad family, a large clan that ruled Corinth during the 8th and 7th centuries BC. According to ancient tradition, when the Bacchiads were ousted from Corinth by the Kypselids in 657 BC, part fled to Corfu, another part went with Demaratus to Etruria, and others went to Sparta. The choice of Corfu was based on earlier ties: ca. 733 BC, when the Bacchiad Archias left Corinth to found colonies in the West, part of his group settled in Corfu and the remainder founded Syracuse. Demaratus likewise chose Etruria because of previously established commercial ties; he married an Etruscan aristocrat and fathered Tarquinius Priscus who became king of Rome. A tradition related by Pliny (N.H. 35.152) claims that Demaratus was accompanied by three fictores who introduced the art of
modelling into Italy. As pointed out by C.K. Williams, II, the Bacchiad exiles left Corinth shortly after the construction of the early Temple of Apollo, and so Pliny’s story could indicate that Demaratus was accompanied by experienced tile makers, a possibility supported by the similarity in forms between the early pan and cover tiles of Corinth and Italy; as the roof of the Temple of Apollo was undecorated, the artisans carried with them no models for roof decoration and were thus free from preconceived traditions to develop in new directions.

Other ancient sources describe the great wealth associated with Demaratus and his descendants, a fortune obtained even before his son Tarquinius Priscus became king of Rome. Although Tarquinius Priscus is regularly referred to as the first Etruscan king of Rome, F. Zevi has pointed out that he should more appropriately be known as the first Corinthian king of Rome, given all of the Greek social customs introduced there during his reign. Among other things, during his reign, a temple built at Sant’Omobono, just below the Capitoline Hill, carried a closed pediment, unique in Etruscan architecture and more typical of Greek temple architecture, filled with terracotta plaques depicting a Gorgon flanked by heraldic felines.

M. Mertens-Horn recognized the link with the Bacchid family in the identical pedimental decoration on this first temple at Sant’Omobono in Rome, on the Temple of Artemis in Corfu, and another from Syracuse, viewing the image of Pegasos held by the Gorgon (preserved on the Corfu and Syracuse examples) as a coat of arms of the Bacchiad family. She suggests that all three temples were commissioned by Bacchids, whose tradition as patrons can be traced back to the early Temple of Apollo at Corinth.

Patronage alone cannot explain phenomena such as the decorated roof of a workshop at Poggio Civitate, nor the numerous decorated roofs of houses at Acquarossa. Bacchiads did not dedicate these buildings, but they may have supplied the expertise to manufacture their roofs, as suggested in the tradition recorded by Pliny. The legendary prosperity of 7th century Corinth has been attributed in part to the Bacchids’ establishing workshops (in contrast to home industry) and creating markets for their products, as witnessed by the wide diffusion of Protocorinthian pottery. Added to this should be consideration of the use of moulds, introduced at Corinth in the early 7th century BC, a technology that must have had a tremendous impact on production levels and quality. Thus, the Bacchids may have brought with them from Corinth to the West not only artisans with an understanding of workshop organization and the use of moulds, but also a strong tradition of marketing skills.
With this background in mind, it can be suggested that the Bacchiads may have gained some of their reputed wealth from a flourishing business in the production of terracotta roofs in the areas where they settled during their exile from Corinth. Marketing skills are apparent in Etruria, where a wide demand for tiled roofs may have been created by targeting homeowners, convincing them of the increased safety from fire provided by tile roofs rather than thatch. The clear necessity for simplification in tile design from the complex forms of the early Corinth tiles, in order to boost production levels and reduce costs, was immediately recognized and implemented in the West.

The slight differences that can be noticed from area to area, for example the use of relief on the terracottas of the Artemis Temple in Corfu for tongue and guilloche patterns rather than just paint, can be attributed to employment of local workers and the following of local traditions and preferences. The artisans accompanying Demaratus would presumably have trained local craftsmen in technical matters of production and sent them out to set up local workshops. Clearly it was local demand for decoration on their roofs that required a change from practice at Corinth, requiring the original Corinthian artisans to adapt images from another medium to the new terracotta roofs in Etruria. Local customers would certainly have dictated the final selection for the decoration of their buildings, choosing from a wide range of native and imported motifs known to them from traditional architecture and minor arts. But the close correspondences in form, decoration and placement that do occur on some specific early roofs of Etruria, Corfu and Sicily could be attributed to a common thread provided by contacts between the Bacchid owners of architectural terracotta workshops.

Bacchid involvement in the production of terracotta roofs would not only explain the occurrence of such similar details of roof design in different parts of the ancient world, but would also solve another serious problem: during the hiatus formed by the Bacchiads’ exile from Corinth, i.e., during the Kypselid rule between 657 and 583 BC, there is no firm evidence for terracotta roof production at Corinth, a gap otherwise inexplicable for the
city that not only may have invented the use of terracotta tiles, but was famed for its workshops during the Archaic period and down into Hellenistic times. The first terracotta roofs with raking simas appear in Corinth only around 580 BC and they are decorated with the now-familiar painted tongue pattern superimposed on a cavetto profile, above a painted guilloche pattern, features that characterize the earlier roofs of Etruria, Corfu and Sicily.

The introduction of raking simas in Corinth ca. 580 BC brings to mind another point, raised in Pindar’s Olympian 13.21: the introduction of the double pediment into Greek temple architecture of the Doric order. In praising past inventions of Corinth, Pindar lists the “twin kings of birds” on the temples of the gods. The king of birds has been interpreted as referring to the eagle (αετός), from which comes a term used for pediment (αετωμα) due to its resemblance to an eagle with outspread wings. The early temples of Corinth and Isthmia had no pediment, as indicated by the presence of hipped tiles and lack of raking sima. The roof at Mon Repos on Corfu (figs. 4-5) had a pediment at one end only, with a hipped roof at the back. When raking simas appear in Corinth ca. 580 BC, there are no accompanying hip tiles in the repertoire of tile forms, suggesting that both ends of the building carried pediments. Although the presence of a raking sima does not necessarily prove the existence of a pediment, but only of a sloping edge to the roof, its timely appearance in Corinth is very significant, as the solidification of the Doric order appears to have taken place at precisely this time. One very prominent new feature of the canonized Doric temple is the appearance of pediments at both ends of the building. But the initial use of a raking sima on both ends of a building occurred earlier in Etruria, as witnessed by the material from Poggio Civitate and Acquarossa, and house urns from Caere. The connection of these earlier raking simas with workshops owned by Bacchiads could explain the importation of the idea into Greece at Corinth in 580 BC when Bacchiads returned to Corinth from exile in the West. Thus, there may be some truth to Pindar’s attribution to Corinth of the invention of the double pediment in Greek architecture.

In conclusion, the cumulative evidence presents a consistent picture demonstrating a link between the Bacchiad family and the production of terracotta roofs, first in Corinth during the second quarter of the 7th century BC, then in Etruria, Corfu and Sicily where they lived in exile during the second half of the 7th and early 6th century, and, finally, back in Corinth itself from 580 BC onwards, after the fall of the Kypselids. In light of this history, it should come as no surprise to see cut-out double-volute acroteria on the mid-6th century Temple of Apollo in Corinth (fig. 8), aligned along the axis of the ridge in the same way as on the early roofs at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) (fig. 2) nearly a century earlier.

NOTES

2. Wikander 1990, 289-90; Wikander 1992. Damgaard Andersen and Toms 2001 suggest that roof tiles found in Villanovan tombs at Quattro Fontanili at Veii could date before 850 BC. While the existence of other, and earlier, tile workshops in Etruria than those dis-
cussed in this paper is not precluded by the arguments presented here, the evidence for the Veii tombs is not totally convincing, in my view: of the 4 tombs discussed, Nos. 2 and 4 were disturbed in antiquity, No. 1 dates to the late 6th century BC and the tiles from No. 3 are only illustrated in drawings of the tomb as flat slabs without articulation, making it impossible to assess their typology and date. In any case, it should be remembered that the date of the latest object in a context, even if it is a tile, dates the context.

Pan tiles of Ø. Wikander’s Type I, small cover tiles and plain antefixes, in characteristic thin, dark red fabric, have been found at San Giovenale (Wikander 1981, 71, 76), Satricum (Maaskant-Kleibrink and Attema 2001, 416-17), Ficana (Ficana 85, no. 38), Rome (Colonna 1988, 309, dated 650-625 BC) and Caere (unpublished). These undecorated roofs may represent another early workshop, separate from that discussed in this paper, but probably date no earlier than the mid-7th century BC. Similar tiles from Lavinium, Decima and Gabii are mentioned by Guaitoli 1984, 378, dated to the fourth quarter of the 7th and beginning of the 6th centuries BC.

3. For Poggio Civitate, see infra n. 6. For Acquarossa, see especially the series Acquarossa, published in Acta Instituti Romani Regni Sueciae, and Architettura etrusca nel Viterbese. Ricerche svedesi a San Giovenale e Acquarossa 1956-1986 (Rome 1986).

4. As recognized by Wikander 1990.

5. See especially C. Wikander 1988, 120-126, and Ø. Wikander 1993, 157-158, where the earliest Acquarossa roofs, designated Phase 1 and dated ca. 640/630 BC, are shown to rely heavily on Italic pottery and minor arts; Greek style appears only in Phase 2, dated ca. 600 BC.

6. See especially Nielsen 1987. I would like to thank Prof. Nielsen for permission to study and publish these architectural terracottas, and to reproduce the drawings in figs. 2 and 3.
7. Coen 1991, 8 and 30, no. 1, fig. 9 and 50-51, no. 22, Pl. 38.c.
8. See Winter 1999, 460-63 for a more detailed discussion, with bibliography.
9. As noted by C. Wikander 1988, 106-107. See also Winter 2000, where further examples of connections are also cited, together with additional bibliography for the arguments presented here and below.
10. Sturgeon 1987, 14-61. I would like to thank Prof. Sturgeon for permission to reproduce the drawings in figs. 6 & 7 here. Her careful reconstruction of the painted decoration has enabled comparison of the many common motifs between this monument and the roofs under discussion.
11. Nielsen 1994. He also discusses the frequent occurrence of the Gorgon with the *potnia theron* on bucchero pottery at the site and elsewhere in Etruria, a combination also found on the Mon Repos roof.

The theories presented in my paper differ from those of Damgaard Andersen 1992-1993, who credits the Phoenicians with the introduction of the *potnia theron* into Etruscan Italy from the Near East. While the *potnia theron* was clearly an Oriental divinity, I see a different intermediary as responsible for transferring the iconography, at least to the early roofs.

13. Double-volute acroteria in Etruria have usually been thought to derive from the crossed wooden elements holding down thatch on Villanovan huts. While double-volute acroteria from Acquarossa are aligned in such a way as to support such a derivation, those of Poggio Civitate are aligned along the axis of the ridge, rather than cross-wise, suggesting a different origin at least for these examples.

Also, the otherwise unparalleled use of a chevron pattern on the side locks of the *potnia*’s hairdo, thought to represent hair bands on the perirrhanterion caryatids (see fig. 7) and braids on the Poggio Civitate antefixes, might be considered a point of comparison.

16. The theories presented in this paper apply to the specific roofs in the specific geographical areas discussed, while other influences were clearly at work in the creation and dissemination of terracottas roofs in other areas of Italy, such as Magna Graecia. The concept of a terracotta tile roof may have spread rather quickly, once introduced, but ideas for individual decorative elements demonstrate specific links that functioned as the means of dissemination.

20. Experienced tile makers may also have accompanied Bacchiad exiles to Sparta, where tile roofs attributable to the third quarter of the 7th century BC are found, and they can be shown to have evolved from the tiles on the roof of the early Temple of Apollo at Corinth: Winter 1993, 98-100.
23. CAH² III.2, 335-36.
24. See Ö. Wikander 1992, 159, for his suggestion of a connection with Demaratus for the spread of tile roofing into Central Italy.
25. In Winter 1993, 20, 63-65, I suggested that some pentagonal antefixes at Corinth could date as early as 600 BC or even 620 BC, based on the appearance of decorative elements in other Greek mainland roofing systems during the last quarter of the 7th century BC, but noted that Billot would not date them before 580 BC. In fact, there is no reason to put any of the decorative roof elements at Corinth earlier than 580 BC, except for an antefix from the Demeter sanctuary that I had already suggested (Winter 1993, 163, fig. 19.1) might be a product of an Argive workshop rather than local.
27. The eventual prevalence of cavetto raking simas with painted tongue pattern above a guilloche in the many different roofing systems of mainland Greece, and as far east as Didyma in Asia Minor, during the second quarter of the 6th cent. BC has, I believe, obscured the fact that the earliest examples are in fact found in the West.
28. See the discussion in Payne 1931, 250, n. 3.
30. Barletta 2001, 54, 79-83. She also points out that Sicily and Corfu were both active participants in the evolution of the Doric order, thereby verifying another aspect of mainland Greek architecture that may have been derived from the West. Scholars in the past have been loath to acknowledge that ideas travelled from West to East in the formative stages of the Archaic period, but in certain specific instances, there may be clear evidence for such.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


