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Review of M. Ducci, ed., *Santuari Etruschi in Casentino*

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M. Ducci, ed. *Santuari Etruschi in Casentino.*

Pp. 48, figs. 109, 16 in color

Catalog of the exhibits, "Il 'Lago degli Idoli' primi

risulti della recente campagna di scavi" held at the

Palagio Fiorentino, Stia (AR) July 24-October 2, 2004 and

"Il tempio di Socana e le stipi votive del territorio nuove acquisizioni"

held at the Museo Archeologico, Partina (AR) July 31-October 2 2004.

by Gretchen E. Meyers

The fascinating Etruscan past of the mountainous district of Casentino is brought to light in this slim, informative volume that incorporates the catalogs of two recent archaeological exhibitions held in Stia and Partina from July 24-October 2, 2004 and July 31-October 2, 2004, respectively. The region of Casentino has not received a great deal of attention in general studies of Etruscan culture and archaeology, despite the fact that it has produced some rather significant evidence of ritual and cultic activity from the Archaic through Hellenistic periods. This volume thematically unites two separate exhibitions held during the late summer of 2004 that drew attention to new discoveries associated with the votive deposit of the Lago degli Idoli on Monte Falterona and the Etruscan temple located beneath the church Pieve a Socana. Both sites have long been known and discussed by scholars, but recent attention to the archaeological past of the Casentino region by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana and the Comunità Montana del Casentino has resulted in noteworthy new finds and a fresh reassessment of the social, economic and especially, ritual significance of this important area along the eastern edge of Etruria.

The origin of scholarly attention in the area occurred in the nineteenth century with the discovery of a large votive deposit in the Lago della Ciliegeta on Monte Falterona. Nearly 600 bronze pieces, including human and animal figurines, small heads, representations of human anatomical parts, coins and fragments of weapons and ceramics comprised this deposit, making it one of the largest votive deposits in the Etruscan world and inspiring the site's name change to "Lago degli Idoli." Unfortunately near the mid-nineteenth century the deposit was broken up and individual pieces were scattered into private collections and public museums. In 1972 three new bronze pieces were found at the same site, inspiring

further excavation in the area. A brief campaign produced similar finds, now displayed in the Museo di Partina and featured in this volume. This material stimulated the 2003 excavation campaign under the direction of Luca Fedeli that uncovered an even greater quantity of remarkable votive, metal and ceramic evidence. The finds from the 2003 campaign formed the centerpiece of the 2004 exhibition in Stia, and the catalog of these finds comprises a major portion of the volume under review.

Over half of the volume is dedicated to the history of the Lago degli Idoli votive deposit and the current re-evaluation of the site. Luca Fedeli writes an informative summary of the history of the original votive deposit and discusses scholarly interpretations of the diversity of the material and its significance. This short passage has been updated and modified from its original publication in the exhibition catalog *Etruschi nel tempo* (reviewed in *ES* 8). Since the deposit's initial discovery in the nineteenth century, scholars have postulated that the pieces must have originated from different locations within Etruria, both along the coast and inland to the north and south. Fedeli provides a useful discussion of the various explanations put forth for diverse populations depositing votives in such an isolated location, including transhumance, military campaigns and the perceived medicinal effect of the lake. The summary is followed by a catalog of 16 objects recovered from the Lago degli Idoli prior to the 2003 season—masculine and feminine bronze figurines in human form, fragments of human figurines and a spear point.

Following the history and catalog of earlier excavations at the site of the Lago degli Idoli, Fedeli provides a brief account of the 2003 campaign. Based on information from the earlier work on the site, eight trenches were opened in the center of the ancient basin. In addition to the rich material evidence recovered in this excavation process (see below), the trenches yielded important information on the geology and formation of the lake. The volume includes an interesting archaeological discussion by Alfredo Bresciani on Carbon-14 dating and dendochronology, which have been used to determine that the lake formed naturally c. 6000 years ago. The inclusion of such scientific data toward understanding the ancient impact of the landscape and natural features in the designation of sacred space is a valuable demonstration of the interdisciplinary nature of today's archaeological process.

The remainder of the discussion of the 2003 campaign is devoted to the large deposit of votive material uncovered during the excavation. Several trenches yielded substantial deposits of archaeological finds—one in particular producing bronze votive statuettes, bronze heads, fragments of bronze weapons, two pieces of gold foil shaped into bull-headed protomes and two polychrome beads. A catalog of 147 objects follows. Many of the objects are illustrated and 14 of them are reproduced in color. The sheer quantity of material is noteworthy, and as the excavators point out, sheds some light on the volume and variety that must have characterized the now dispersed original deposit of the nineteenth century. Most of the finds are datable to sixth-fifth centuries B.C. and they demonstrate a considerable range in function and style. In addition to the objects named above, other finds include nails, spear points, ceramics (including an intact bucchero grigio miniature cup), arrows and *aes rude*. As the presentation of these pieces is preliminary, the catalog entries are brief and more detailed information on individual pieces awaits a full scholarly publication. However, it encompasses a remarkable assemblage of new material, of particular interest to

those studying votive deposits and ancient metals.

The value of this volume does not rest solely with the publication of new material from the Lago degli Idoli. But rather, it provides a useful synthesis of other evidence for sanctuaries and cultic activity in the Casentino region by thematically uniting the material from the Lago degli Idoli exhibition with material from an exhibition on the Etruscan temple from Pieve a Socana. Evidence for an Etruscan temple in the vicinity of the church of Pieve a Socana had been known for some time and had been explored between 1969-1973. Restoration in 1986, 1987 and 1992 added further information and together these campaigns have brought to light evidence of a sanctuary with at least two phases: the first dated to the fifth century BC and a second of Hellenistic date (c. 250 BC). Of the Etruscan sanctuary very few structural remains have been found because of its position beneath the church. Portions of a large retaining wall delimit a rectangular temple terrace on which there are also remains of a large, well-preserved altar and a portion of the staircase that provided access to the temple. Unfortunately these structural remains are not illustrated in this volume, an addition that would have added to the presentation of this material.

Rosabla Settesoldi describes the terracotta architectural decoration associated with each of the Socana temple phases and Christian Soverini discusses the roofing system. The preserved architectural terracottas from the first phase consist of female-headed antefixes surrounded by a palmette border. Minerva-headed antefixes adorned the second phase. Several illustrations of the earlier antefixes are provided in the accompanying catalog. These fragments are incomplete, but several preserve large quantities of white, red and black paint. Other interesting roof-tile fragments are illustrated which preserve a painted zig-zag pattern and one fragment that preserves incised lines, which the excavators suggest were used a guide in painting. The placement of the chromatic pieces and other available fragments of antefixes and cover tiles are utilized by Soverini in creating a helpful three-dimensional illustration of the proposed roofing system. Together with Luca Fedeli's discussion of the site's architecture these texts illuminate an important sacred structure.

Santuari Etruschi in Casentino is a notable collection of both new and previously-known material from a distinctive region along the borders of Etruria. Massimo Ducci, in an introductory essay entitled "Santuari Etruschi in Casentino" comments on the area's importance as an intersection of water-based transit and the source of the Arno River. He suggests that waterways and water cults may have played a role in the sacred significance of the area. Given the volume's aim of reconstructing such broad views of the Etruscan past in the Casentino region, I suggest that this goal would be met more effectively with the inclusion of a map of the sites illustrating their location with respect to each other and relevant topographical features. A lack of visually accessible didactic material for understanding the region and the sites is the volume's only deficiency.

In conclusion, *Santuari Etruschi in Casentino* is an important addition to recent publications of current archaeological projects in Tuscany. While of particular interest to those pursuing questions of ritual and sacred practice in Etruria, this useful book provides all scholars of the Etruscan world with a tantalizing glimpse at a region whose importance is just beginning to be understood.