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Jon Berkin, *The Orientalizing Bucchero from
the Lower Building at Poggio Civitate (Murlo).*

*The Archaeological Institute of America, Monographs
New Series, Number 6 (published by the University
of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) 2003.
Pp. 144, figs. 31, pls. 25. \$45.00.*

by Nancy H. Ramage

The new series of monographs published by the Archaeological Institute of America since the mid-1990s covers a wide variety of topics, ranging from architecture on the Athenian Acropolis, to the external relations of Early Iron Age Crete, to Egyptian boats. In this, the sixth volume of the series, Jon Berkin studies the later orientaling bucchero from “The Lower Building” at Poggio Civitate (Murlo). Presenting the material as a banquet service, he devotes attention to the history of each shape of pottery, and attempts to describe the finds in the context of Murlo itself, as well as other excavations in northern Etruria, considering both the chronology and development of shapes and decoration.

In his summary of the state of bucchero studies at this time, set out in the introduction, Berkin gives a useful overview of earlier and more recent opinions on the techniques used to make this black pottery, as well as a summary of studies on the development of shapes. In the main body of the text, he first gives a general overview of the site of Poggio Civitate (ch. 1) and then presents what is known of the Lower Building, a large narrow rectangular structure that lies below the “Upper Building” that was built on top of it. Within the structure of the Lower Building were found all kinds of luxury goods, including fine imported pottery, gold and silver jewelry, objects of metal, amber, ivory, and other materials. The large number of bucchero vessels here was mostly changed from black to brown and other colors by a large conflagration that must have destroyed the building and wreaked havoc on the objects found within. The subsequent construction of the Upper Building caused further disturbance to the stratigraphy.

The author first describes the finds other than bucchero from the Lower Building (ch. 2), and then follows with a catalogue of all the bucchero from there, by

type, giving comparanda from other sites in northern and southern Etruria (ch. 3). The finds are of particular interest because they come from a domestic location, rare in bucchero studies; on the other hand, the pottery types are essentially the same from the domestic and funerary contexts (p. 127).

A discussion of decoration appears in an independent chapter (ch. 4) that requires one to flip back and forth, whether checking the decoration of pieces in the catalogue or the object that hosts the decoration. This reader, anyway, found this division inconvenient and frustrating. In the last chapter (ch. 5) the author draws conclusions and discusses chronology, as well as the kinds of pottery found at a banquet, and he draws a comparison of domestic with funerary deposits of bucchero. Concordances and a bibliography complete the book. Unfortunately there is no index.

One of the intriguing aspects of this study is the likelihood, proposed by the author, that the production of bucchero at Poggio Civitate was local. It's a pity that this hypothesis, supported by previous research by A. Tuck and others, wasn't vigorously pursued. The conclusion (p. 114) refers to an earlier petrographic analysis of pottery, including bucchero, but unfortunately no record remains of where the tested bucchero was found, and thus it is not clear whether any examples came from the Lower Building. Would that new tests had been run! Furthermore, no local clay source that matches the fabrics has yet been identified. On the other hand, Berkin argues for a local typology that differs not only from that of southern Etruria, but also from other local towns in the north, suggesting that numerous towns had their own small potteries with independent shapes. This is an interesting idea that might have repaid a more thorough investigation, and suggests a worthy line of inquiry for future investigation.

The very good drawings by G. Grentzenberg and S. Gleit Weinstein are supplemented by the fine photographs by Chris Williams. Errors are minor (but include a garbled citing of the M. Aylwin Cotton Foundation, which helped to fund Berkin's research).

Unfortunately, the book reads too much like the dissertation from which it grew, and should have been more fundamentally altered either by the author or the editors. For instance, the word "majority" [of this or that] is found far too often in the text, and in most cases should have been substituted by "most". The book is also so heavily dependent on previous sources that the prose, with in-text citations, is chopped up by constant parenthetical references to the work of others, and the interruptions mar the flow of the argument. Nevertheless, the publication of the material is valuable, and will surely be a useful work for those studying the bucchero of northern Etruria as well as those attempting to grasp further the contributions from the site of Murlo.