

SKRIFTER UTGIVNA AV SVENSKA INSTITUTET I ATHEN, 4°, 59
ACTA INSTITUTI ATHENIENSIS REGNI SUECIAE, SERIES IN 4°, 59

The stuff of the gods

The material aspects of religion
in ancient Greece

Edited by Matthew Haysom,
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STOCKHOLM 2024

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Published with the aid of grants from Enboms donationsfond (Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities), and Stiftelsen Långmanska kulturfonden

The English text was revised by Robert Spittlehouse

ISSN 0586-0539

ISBN 978-91-7916-068-5

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Printed by PrintBest (Viljandi, Estonia) via Italgraf Media AB (Stockholm Sweden) 2024

Dust jacket illustration: © Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, photograph: C. Kiefer.

ABSTRACT

The “material turn” in the humanities and social sciences has brought about an expanded understanding of the material dimension of all cultural and social phenomena. In the Classics it has resulted in the breaking down of boundaries within the discipline and a growing interest in materiality within literature. In the study of religion cross-culturally new perspectives are emphasising religion as a material phenomenon and belief as a practice founded in the material world. This volume brings together experts in all aspects of Greek religion to consider its material dimensions. Chapters cover both themes traditionally approached by archaeologists, such as dedications and sacred space, and themes traditionally approached by philologists, such as the role of objects in divine power. They include a wide variety of themes ranging from the imminent material experience of religion for ancient Greek worshippers to the role of material culture in change and continuity over the long term.

Keywords: Greek religion, Etruscan religion, Mycenaean religion, materiality, religious change, *temenos*, temples, offerings, cult statues, terracottas, *omphalos*, cauldrons, sacred laws, visuality, purity, pollution, gods’ identities, divine power, inscribed dedications

<https://doi.org/10.30549/actaath-4-59>

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12. An external view

Architecture and ritual in central Italy

Abstract

This comparative paper discusses two ways in which Etrusco-Italic temples were differentiated from surrounding buildings during the Etruscan Archaic period (approximately 580–480 BC): firstly, by the introduction of a religious aesthetic for the exteriors of cult buildings that distinguished them from vernacular architecture; and, secondly, by the erection, in select contexts, of precinct boundaries. These changes created new settings for religious activities and may reflect a changed conception of the divine and its role in ancient communities. Beyond exploring these changes in design, however, it attempts to move from studying the appearance of sanctuary buildings to considering the ways in which they were experienced by ancient worshippers, questioning whether visual differentiation necessarily conveyed physical or conceptual segregation. It suggests that the two methods of delineation adopted in the Archaic period could represent a desire to create an inclusive rather than exclusive experience, and in so doing challenges simple readings of the demarcation of the sacred in antiquity.

Keywords: temples, architecture, Etruria, Latium, Archaic period, central Italy, segregation, boundaries

<https://doi.org/10.30549/actaath-4-59-12>

Introduction

Architecture has a unique ability to stimulate and shape religious experience. Imposing size can inspire awe, intricate details can provoke wonder, and volume and light can mould sense and behaviour. The prominence and design of cult buildings can also convey much about the role of religion in communities and their conception of the divine. Yet, the affective and communicative aspects of many types of religious architecture have been understudied, and examples from Classical

antiquity have often been more readily described than deconstructed or attributed agency.¹

This paper responds to the organisers' invitation to examine a specific theme, namely the delineation of sacred space, in the comparative context of Etruria and Latium prior to *c.* 480 BC. Here a lack of extant contemporary literature means that material culture provides the only primary data for religious activities and beliefs, with numerous temples, altars, and votives providing a broadly familiar, although subtly different, ritual landscape to that of Greece. The first part of the paper briefly examines the changing appearance of cult buildings in central Italy and the emergence of a distinctive form of religious architecture there. The second part challenges the traditional reading of this form as emphatically frontal, imposing, and exclusive when analysed in context. By exploring whether or not visual delineation was necessarily accompanied by physical and conceptual separation, this analysis prompts consideration of the extent to which demarcation of the sacred was a feature of Classical religion and some of the ways in which materialities of religion may have differed or converged around the ancient Mediterranean.

The appearance of religious architecture

It is possible to reconstruct broad patterns in the form and location of religious rituals in western central Italy prior to the middle of the 1st millennium BC that apparently include marked changes in built space. Early votive deposits indicate that there is a long tradition of religious activity in which

¹ Notable exceptions in the context of ancient central Italy are Izzet 2001; Thomas 2007, 207–220; Warden 2012.

buildings seem to have played no discernible role. Between the Neolithic period (c. 6000–3500 BC) and the middle Bronze Age (c. 1700–1300 BC), funerary and non-funerary rituals were observed in underground spaces such as caves and rock shelters and also around sites of “abnormal” water such as hot springs and pools of still water.² The Sventatoio Cave in Latium, for example, contained burned remains of three children along with traces of wheat, barley seed cakes, and parts of young pigs, sheep, and oxen, presumably offerings.³ From the middle to the Late Bronze Age (c. 1300–900 BC) there is evidence of open-air rituals at prominent points in the landscape, such as mountain tops and rivers, and near visible manifestations of underground phenomena, for instance around a sulphurous spring near the Colonnelle Lake at Tivoli.⁴

Significantly, these rituals do not appear to have been enhanced with man-made enclosures or buildings, and took place in spaces starkly different from the huts that provided shelter for everyday life at the time. A topographical connection with settlements seems to have emerged only during the Late Bronze Age, when cereal offerings began to be deposited within hut compounds, and by the Iron Age (c. 900–720 BC) the majority of evidence for cult is found within settlements.⁵ Movements away from villages and towards larger defensible sites in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age complicate the notion of a straightforward absorption of religious activity; it is possible that some cults were relocated while elsewhere a population gradually concentrated near an already functioning cult site. Regardless of the process, however, the result was a number of buildings that stood in close proximity to votive assemblages and may consequently be examples of early religious architecture.

The huts that contained or stood near votive deposits in the Iron Age have been called “sacred huts” by some scholars and are identifiable in the archaeological record solely on the basis of their proximity to ritualised activity. At Satricum, Ardea, Rome, Anagni, and Tarquinia, for example,⁶ these huts resemble others found throughout the region. They had round, oval, or rectangular plans, with four or six internal posts and a step or post holes marking the location of the door, typically in a short side, and occasionally a porch.⁷ Their wattle-and-daub walls and thatched roofs were made from local materials and were well-suited to the needs of semi-sedentary commu-

nities.⁸ Comparisons between the possible cult buildings and those around them indicate that the ones near votive deposits had no distinctive plans, were not regularly larger than nearby buildings, and were not necessarily located at the physical centre of their communities. The limited evidence thus suggests that these “sacred huts” were not architecturally or topographically differentiated from other buildings and do not represent a significantly greater investment of resources than other structures in settlements.

As far as we can tell, visitors to Iron Age sites were also unlikely to have been able to distinguish cult buildings from other structures on the basis of specific external decor. The perishable nature of thatch and walls formed of wood and earth means that the primary evidence for hut superstructures is scarce and reconstructions instead draw on a range of secondary evidence and experimental archaeology.⁹ The most commonly cited source of information for hut exteriors is the corpus of ceramic and metallic cinerary urns from Latium and Etruria that date from the 10th to 7th centuries BC and are known as “hut urns.” Many scholars hold that these urns represent buildings that stood at the time of their manufacture and, by extension, that the added and incised decorations on some reflect the ornamentation of real huts. The sun-birds punched into the bronze sheets of a hut urn from the Necropoli dell’Osteria at Vulci, the zizags and crosses on an impasto urn from Poggio alla Guardia in Vetulonia, and the swastikas on another impasto urn from Vulci have all been read as motifs on real huts and accordingly have been echoed on the exteriors of modern reconstructions in Rome, Fidenae, and Bologna.¹⁰ There are methodological issues, however, with reconstructing the homes of the living from containers for the dead,¹¹ and there is no clear evidence that such designs appeared on the walls and roofs of any real huts, let alone a select few associated with religious activities.

Religious buildings seem to have remained just as visually ambiguous during the architectural transformations of the 7th and early 6th centuries BC. The increasing use of rectangular plans, stone foundations, and tiled roofs—usually summarised as the change from huts to houses—meant that by the middle of the 7th century BC three main building types were in use: small one- or two-roomed rectangular structures (*oikoi* in Greek architectural typologies); rooms arranged in a long line, one after the other; and courtyard complexes where lines

² Guidi 1989–1990; Whitehouse 1992, 23–86; 1995, 84; Kleibrink 1997–1998, 448–449.

³ Guidi 1989–1990, 406–407.

⁴ Guidi 1989–1990. On cult sites in nature see Edlund 1987, 44–62.

⁵ Whitehouse 1995, 86. The Pian di Civita plateau at Tarquinia may have been an unusual example of an Etruscan settlement coalescing around a cult site.

⁶ For details of these structures see Potts 2015, 125–131.

⁷ Bartoloni *et al.* 1985, 177–179.

⁸ Brandt 2001, 411.

⁹ For example, Erixon 1932 (in Swedish) republished as Erixon 2001 (in English), and Bietti Sestieri & De Santis 2001, 217–219.

¹⁰ On the hut in the Margherita Gardens at Bologna, see Carroli & Nardin 1998. On that reconstructed by Boni on the Palatine Hill in Rome, see Rykwert 1972, 174. On that at Fidenae, see Bietti Sestieri & De Santis 2001, figs. 15–16.

¹¹ Wikander 2001, 270–271.

or wings of rooms were arranged around an open space. Votive deposits indicate that religious activities were not restricted to buildings of any one plan and also took place at unusual structures such as the *Casa del recinto* in Roselle, where a square exterior concealed a circular interior.¹² While worshippers in the Portonaccio Sanctuary at Veii seem to have performed rites in connection with a rectangular building (I) measuring 9.0 × 6.2 m, the inhabitants of Caere may have been familiar with a sanctuary in the approximately 54 × 54 m courtyard complex at Montetosto.¹³ Size could thus vary as well as plan, and there is insufficient evidence to associate various plans with the needs of different social or political groups.

The ubiquity of terracotta architectural decorations including *acroteria*, revetment plaques, and antefixes in Etruscan settlements in this period would likewise seem to preclude ready recognition of a cult building. The earliest tiled roofs in central Italy currently date from c. 650–625 BC and come from buildings in and around Rome.¹⁴ They were made of local clay, had few or no decorative details, and appeared on buildings that were unusually large or prestigious, including one on the later site of the Roman Regia and another in the Sanctuary of Vesta along the Sacra Via.¹⁵ The first tiled roofs with exuberant decorations appeared shortly after, this time on residences in Etruria. In the 6th century BC the new roofing system reached its height in quality, quantity, and variety, and its brightly coloured components decorated the roofs of houses, workshops, tombs, and civic structures.¹⁶ This widespread use of architectural terracottas—that was established by excavations at Etruscan sites such as Acquarossa and Poggio Civitate—offers a noticeable contrast with Greece, where such roof decorations were one of the distinctive hallmarks of a religious building. While the pediment of the third-phase south building on the site of the Regia in Rome carried disc *acroteria* and revetment plaques featuring a bull-headed man amidst felines, and the Temple of Menerva at Punta della Vipera was ornamented with antefixes in the form of female heads and eaves tiles with painted *anthemion* designs, neither the use of terracotta decorations in themselves nor particular motifs appear to have marked these structures as cult buildings.¹⁷

In the course of the Etruscan Archaic period (c. 580–480 BC), however, religious architecture began to develop a distinctive external aesthetic through the adoption of idiosyncratic features and an increase in relative scale. The first distinctive feature was the use of a podium, a raised substructure that lifted all four sides of the cult building above the ground and necessitated stairs or ramps to access the floor of the building on top. Although Etruscan funerary mounds or *tumuli* had already used comparable, albeit rounded, substructures in the preceding century, cemeteries were located outside settlements and hence did not visually compete with the newly elevated temples.

The earliest securely identified podium temple in western central Italy at present is the so-called Temple of Mater Matuta in the S. Omobono Sanctuary in Rome. Partial remains suggest that in c. 580 BC a podium was constructed with a plan that was 10.3 × 10.3 m, stood approximately 1.7 m high, and was formed of seven courses of ashlar *tufo* masonry with the second carrying a torus moulding.¹⁸ In a second phase, dated to c. 535 BC, the temple was enlarged to 13.20 × 11.54 m and a new 1.61 m-high podium was fashioned with four courses and a double moulding.¹⁹ Additional podium temples followed in Satricum, Ardea, and again in Rome. In Etruria, the monumental Ara della Regina Temple at Tarquinia set a precedent in c. 570 BC, and from c. 510 BC podium temples also appeared in the Portonaccio Sanctuary at Veii and on the main plateau at Vulci. The introduction of *podia* is one of the factors that arguably transformed shrines into temples.²⁰

The second element that came to differentiate temples from surrounding buildings during the Archaic period was the changing distribution of architectural terracottas. Whereas these roof decorations had previously appeared on a wide range of buildings, during the 6th century BC their use was gradually limited until they became a means of conferring prominence on a select type of building or part of a settlement: in Latium these buildings were temples, while in Etruria they included temples and large buildings with functions that cannot always be clarified by finds, for example Buildings A–D arranged around a courtyard in Zone F at Acquarossa.²¹ The

¹² Maetzke 1979, 21–32. The building measured approximately 4.5 × 4.5 m.

¹³ Portonaccio: Colonna 2002, 149. Montetosto: Colonna 1985a.

¹⁴ The earliest roof-tiles, however, may have been produced at Caere or Tarquinia, and so this picture is likely to change: for a recent overview see Wikander 2017, 179–187.

¹⁵ Winter 2009, 8–11 (Roof 1-1 and Roof 1-2).

¹⁶ For examples of such uses in central Italy see Wikander 1981 (at Acquarossa) and Phillips Jr. 1993, 17–48, 56–60 (at Poggio Civitate). On the broader trend and the issue of building identification see Damgaard Andersen 1993; Winter 2009, 567–570.

¹⁷ On the decorations of the Regia building see Downey 1995; Winter 2009, 144–148 (Roof 3-2). On the roof of the Temple at Punta della Vipera see Winter 2009, 403 (Roof 6-3). As discussed by Potts 2015,

57–58 there is currently no evidence that patrons and artisans used different sets of moulds or pattern books for religious, residential, commercial, and funerary structures.

¹⁸ The stone has recently been identified as a type of *tufo lionato*, likely imported from the Anio River Valley: Brocato *et al.* 2019. Note that the number of courses cited in literature differs depending on what is defined as a course.

¹⁹ Colonna 1991, 52–53; Winter 2009, 149, 316. The bibliography on the site is extensive; for a recent summary see Terrenato *et al.* 2012.

²⁰ Potts 2015, 38–45, 143–148.

²¹ Damgaard Andersen 1993; Winter 2009, 567–570. On Buildings A–C at Acquarossa, see Östenberg 1975, 44–46, 165; Wikander 1985; 1986, 91–157.

synchronous redeployment of architectural terracottas and the construction of *podia*, together with the prominent use of external columns, can be interpreted as the generation of a religious aesthetic in architecture across central Italy. By the end of the 6th century BC visitors could have easily recognised cult buildings both north and south of the Tiber River at sites including Rome, Satricum, Ardea, Veii, Pyrgi, and Vulci.

The Archaic period also saw significant increases in the size and visibility of cult buildings. Landscapes and cityscapes were now occupied by buildings such as the Ara della Regina Temple at Tarquinia (measuring 41.33 × 25.52 m in Phase II), the Temple of Juno Moneta at Segni (with a stepped podium of 40.27 × 23.91 m at the highest level), the Casarinaccio Temple at Ardea (with a reconstructed podium of approximately 35 × 23.35 m), and the colossal Capitoline Temple in Rome (with foundations measuring *c.* 74 × 54 m).²² The scale of these buildings far exceeded those of surrounding structures and conferred extra visibility. Their creation and maintenance required substantial investments of time, labour, and financial resources and as such may represent a new conception of the role of religion or cult buildings in communities. Regardless of the rationale, however, the tangible result was not just a new aesthetic but the advent of monumental religious architecture.

The great physical changes that took place between the Iron Age and the Archaic period in Italy thus included the transition from a vernacular style of religious architecture to a distinctive and monumental one. Religious buildings were gradually distinguished by *podia*, architectural terracottas, prominent columns, and increasingly by size. Reconstructing the ways in which this adoption of a religious aesthetic set cult buildings apart from other structures is relatively straightforward. Such visual delineation, however, raises further questions. Did it complement, or replace, physical demarcation? How might this have affected the ways in which ancient worshippers experienced this new style of religious architecture? The following section explores some possible answers.

The experience of religious architecture

As part of the recent impetus for religious historians to take materiality more seriously, scholars have been urged to try “to shift the study of architecture from a focus on buildings *per se*

to the *human experience* of buildings.”²³ This is difficult to do with material in early Italy, as Etruscan, Latin, and Roman literature predating the 3rd century BC has not survived and thus we have no contemporary written evidence describing how people experienced early Etrusco-Italic temples. Nevertheless, some studies of Etruscan sanctuaries have explored possible perceptions of these buildings, and ideas about how people viewed and interacted with this type of religious architecture can also often be discerned in the scholarly descriptions of the Roman temples that followed and were marked by the same high *podia*, frontal staircases, roof-top statuary, and columned porches as many of their Etrusco-Italic predecessors. In these studies, Etrusco-Italic and Roman temples have been interpreted as defensive, inaccessible, or bastioned; as buildings governed by a tremendous sense of frontality and confrontation; and as structures that prioritised security and dominion—in other words, this set of features is judged to have produced an exclusive, not an inclusive, type of architecture.²⁴

Although frontality may seem to be more important in abstract plans than lived experience, it plays an important role in these discussions due to the effect it is thought to have on viewers and visitors. One guide to architectural terms defines it in the following way:

Frontality is face-to-face confrontation. It describes the orientation of a work of art or architecture to the viewer. However, a head-on confrontation with architecture is attended by underlying anthropomorphic connotations, i.e. when “building façade” becomes “face”, “window” becomes “eye”, and “entrance” becomes “mouth”. When we come face-to-façade, we recognize and experience *frontality*.²⁵

Another work on the philosophy of architecture says that exposure is felt

... in the drama of confrontation that can take place between the façade of a monumental building and the visitor who, approaching across open space, is compelled to stand off a respectful distance and, in that intuitive act of deference, is made to feel vulnerable. Buildings vary in the degree of assertion with which they confront the

²² Tarquinia: Bonghi Jovino & Bagnasco Gianni 2012, 33–40. Segni: Cifarelli 2003, 51. Ardea: Stefani 1954, 13 and fig. 12; Colonna 1984, 409. The Capitoline Temple in Rome: Mura Sommella 2009.

²³ Jones 2007, 256.

²⁴ For example, Izzet 2000, 47 arguing that “While the antefixes [on Etruscan temples], through their brazen frontality, fix a point from which the viewer’s gaze bounces back, the roof sculptures through their studied insouciance rebuff the viewer just as effectively.” See also Brown 1958, 114–115; Izzet 2001, 191–197; Jones 2000, ii, 270; Stirling 2006, 80.

²⁵ Porter 2004, 66. Such anthropomorphism is a longstanding part of Western architectural traditions, as shown by Vitruvius. *De arch.* 3.1–4.

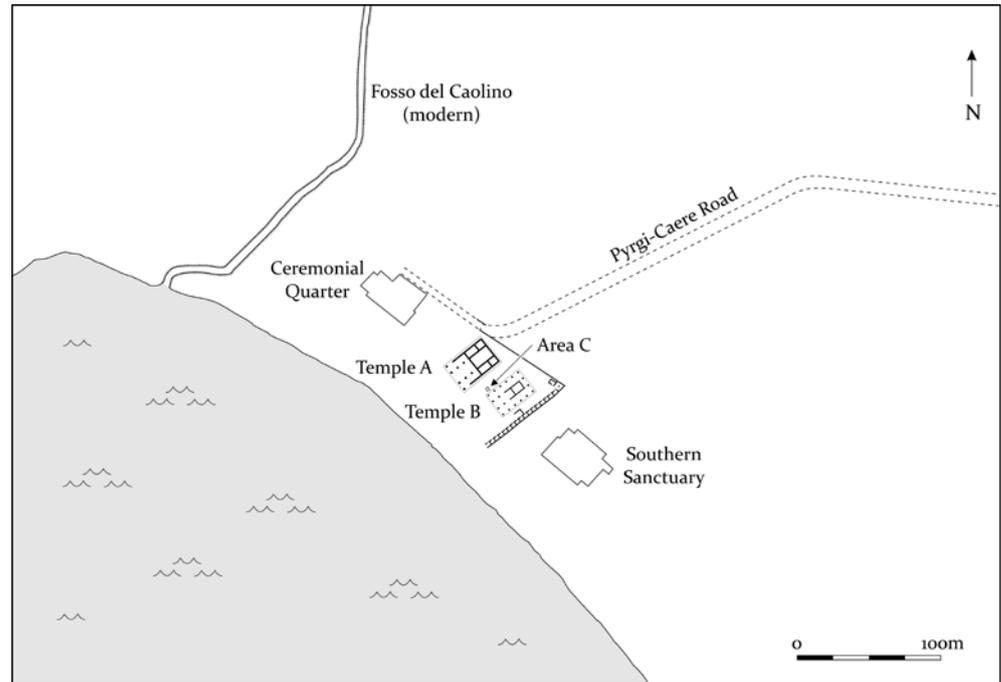


Fig. 1. Pyrgi. Site plan, after Baglione 2013, 614, fig. 30.2.

visitor: this is in proportion not only to sheer size but also to the degree of frontality.²⁶

Such connotations of opposition and resistance may partially explain why Roman temple architecture has been interpreted as defensive and segregated. The context in which these later temples were seen is especially significant: a portico around the temple or piazza before it controlled the setting, heightened the revelation of an imposing façade, and set the conditions for visual confrontation. Yet when temples with many of the same architectural features are examined in Etrusco-Italic settings instead of Roman ones, ideas about the exclusiveness, defensiveness, and frontality encountered when experiencing this type of building can be at least partially challenged.

Precinct boundaries would be a logical starting point for exploring perceptions of Etrusco-Italic temples as inclusive or exclusive spaces. Early central Italic religious sites, however, often seem to lack a visible equivalent of Greek *temene*; natural features, *cippi*, or structures in perishable materials that have not survived in the archaeological record may have played a role in demarcating central Italic religious space,²⁷ but at many sites this has to remain an unverifiable hypothesis. As a result, regardless of whether this absence is an accurate reflection of ancient sen-

sibilities or simply a product of excavations with other priorities, precinct boundaries are not an essential criterion for recognising sanctuaries in Etruria, Rome, or Latium.²⁸ The utility of precinct boundaries for judging beliefs about what stood within and without can also now be questioned. As Gunnel Ekroth discusses in *Chapter 6*, even in the Greek world *temene* are no longer necessarily seen as reflections that their contents were thought to be metaphysically separate from what lay beyond. Boundaries can mark ownership as much as seclusion or disjunction.

Some sanctuaries that do retain evidence of substantial boundaries question the notion that Etrusco-Italic enclosures acted like their Roman counterparts in manipulating approaches to bring visitors face-to-face with an imposing temple façade. The famous Etruscan sanctuary of Pyrgi is a useful example. Pyrgi lay on the western coast of Italy and was connected to the inland city of Caere by a paved road that was more than ten metres wide in places (*Fig. 1*).²⁹ The ancient shoreline is now lost beneath rising water levels but it is thought that the site possessed an Archaic harbour, capitalising on the use of the site as a landing point for travellers and traders since prehistoric times, and excavations have uncovered the remains of an Etruscan settlement.³⁰

²⁶ Wilson 1992, 14.

²⁷ On boundaries in Etruscan society see *ThesCRA IV* (2005), 347–348, s.v. ‘Terminus (Etruria)’ (A. Comella); Edlund-Berry 2006, 116–118; Becker 2013, 360–362. On those at sanctuaries see Edlund 1987, 137–138; Izzet 2007, 128–129.

²⁸ For example, they do not feature in the definition of Etruscan sanctuaries proposed by Edlund-Berry 2011, 9, but it is assumed that they must have existed in some form: Edlund 1987, 137–138.

²⁹ On the road see Colonna 1968; Baglione & Michetti 2017.

³⁰ The bibliography on the site is extensive; for a recent synthesis in English, see Michetti 2016.

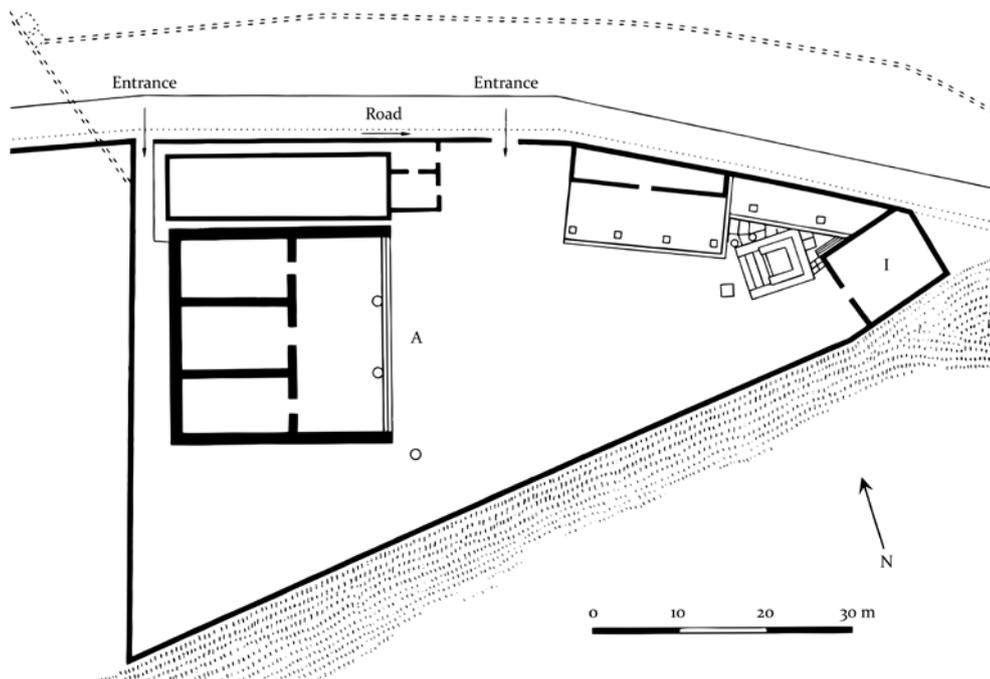


Fig. 2. Portonaccio Sanctuary, Veii. Site plan. After Colonna 1985b, 100.

In *c.* 510 BC a monumental cult building, known today as Temple B, was built facing the Tyrrhenian Sea and surrounded by a wall that took in the temple, an area with a well and an altar (now called Area C), and auxiliary buildings. Visitors approaching from Caere would have arrived at the rear of Temple B through a *tetrapylon*. During the first half of the 5th century BC Temple A was built alongside Temple B, likewise facing the shore, and the precinct wall was extended to enclose both. At that time the rear of the sanctuary was directly connected to the Via Caere–Pyrgi by the construction of a grand entrance portico that replaced the earlier *tetrapylon* and brought visitors to the rear of Temple A instead of Temple B.³¹

In both phases visitors thus appear to have been directed to the back of the temples instead of the front; the decision to relocate the rear entrance during the 5th-century BC remodelling merely moved it from the back of one temple to another. Notably, a rearward approach would not have deprived viewers of great art: where a Greek temple would have had a pediment, the back of Temple A included a striking *columnen* plaque with an intricate and brightly-coloured representation of an episode from the tale of the Seven against Thebes.³² Visitors approaching from the sea and the land, from the front

and the back, both appear to have been greeted by impressive and presumably meaningful architecture.

Boundary markers that created different visitor experiences from those at Roman sanctuaries are also noticeable at Veii. Visitors to the Portonaccio Sanctuary in the late 6th century BC are unlikely to have first experienced the monumental temple from the front. The reconstructed plan of the sanctuary shows two possible entrances (Fig. 2). The first, to the west, would have brought visitors along the pool and closed back of the Temple of Aplu (A). The second, presumably the main entry, would have brought visitors in at right angles to the Temple and provided side views of the Temple and the *sacellum* of Menrva (I).³³

Given that the approach road appears to have run alongside the sanctuary, there is a strong chance that the gaze of many visitors may have first fallen upon the famous *acroteria* atop the Temple. From *c.* 510 BC the ridgepole of this building displayed a set of acroterial statues depicting the conflict between Heracles and Aplu over a hind in the company of other deities, which replaced the roof of an earlier building likely decorated with statues found on site including representations of Heracles and Athena/Heracles and Menrva, two *kouroi*, and other figures.³⁴ The narrative quality of the ridgepole *acroteria*

³¹ On the temples and their approach in each phase see Colonna 1968; 1970b; 1970c; 1970d; Baglione & Michetti 2017.

³² Colonna 1970a. The plaque, now in the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia in Rome, measures approximately 1.2 m high × 1.4 m wide and shows Zeus hurling a lightning bolt towards Capaneus, while Athena watches Tydeus eating the brains of Melanippus.

³³ Colonna 1985b, 100.

³⁴ For overviews see Winter 2009, 377–379 (5.E.1.A); Colonna 2019, 119–120; cf. Winter 2009, 495–497 (Roof 7-1 and 7-2), 501–502 (7.E.1).

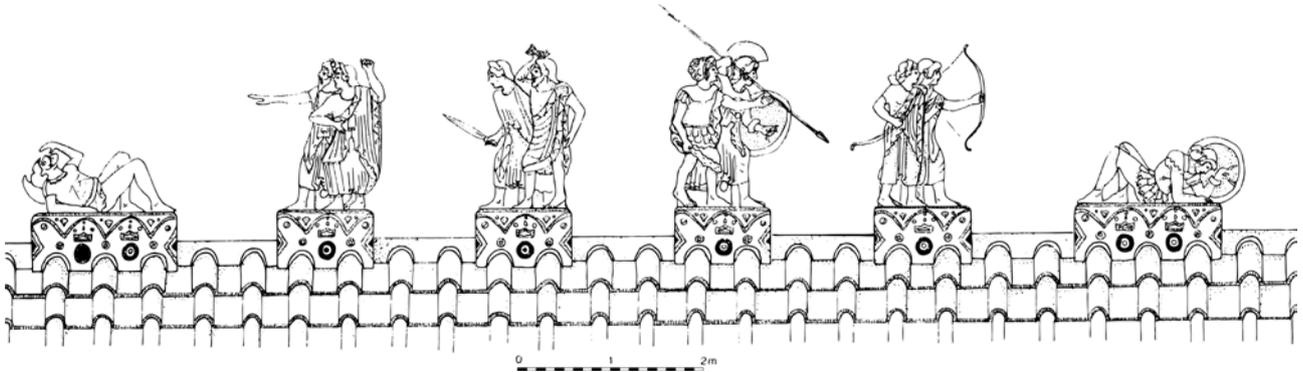


Fig. 3. Temple of Mater Matuta, Satricum. Reconstruction of the ridge-pole acroteria from the Late Archaic roof, early 5th century BC. From Lulof 1996, 169, fig. xxxiii.1.

on the monumental Temple relies upon a lateral reading as a frontal view would have obscured the story and made the dynamic composition redundant.³⁵

A similar situation is apparent on the Temple of Mater Matuta at Satricum, where six different statues and statue groups played out a *gigantomachy* along the ridgepole (Fig. 3).³⁶ Again the road approaching the sanctuary brought visitors to the temple not from the front but from the side,³⁷ meaning visitors are likely to have first contemplated the mass of the building from a lateral perspective where the skyline was enlivened with statues of the gods. The architectural decorations of these temples hence presuppose being seen from the side, not the front, and such views are facilitated by sanctuary infrastructure.

The idea that frontality was a defining feature of Etruscan sanctuary design is further questioned by the placement of many temple altars. Archaeological evidence suggests that altars were seldom placed on the axis of monumental temples in central Italy prior to the 5th century BC. Those present in sanctuaries—as opposed to funerary contexts—were often placed alongside or at oblique angles to cult buildings. For instance, Temples A and C on the acropolis at Marzabotto appear to have been served by open-air altars in the form of Structures B and D located next to, not in front of, them. In the Fontanile di Legnisina Sanctuary at Vulci the altar was placed to the southeast of the temple rather than directly on its central axis (Fig. 4).³⁸

At Pyrgi some of the altars connected with Temple B were located on the northern side of the temple, in an enclosure known as Area C, instead of along the west façade; when the

temple was dismantled in the early 3rd century BC, the famous gold Pyrgi tablets were deposited in this small, enduring “area of respect.”³⁹ The foundations of a large rectangular structure, presumably another altar, also lie approximately 18 m in front of Temple B, but located roughly 5 m off-axis to the north, presumably to allow for sightlines to both the Temple *cella* and Area C.⁴⁰ Such arrangements stand in contrast to later Roman emphasis on symmetry, axiality, and frontality, and show that these elements did not simply derive from Etrusco-Italic precedents.

If the frontality of these early religious spaces is questionable, then so too are consequent interpretations of their buildings as unapproachable fortresses. The position of Etrusco-Italic temples in the landscape suggests that their designers may not have intended sanctuaries to be segregated spaces. The Temple of Mater Matuta at Rome, for example, was built at the foot of the Capitoline Hill on a lowland site next to the Tiber River. The Tiber was one of the main communication routes of central Italy, with almost 100 km of navigable water allowing boats to travel from the coast to inland Latium, Etruria, and the western lands of the Sabines. A curve in the river at Rome contained an island that broke the water into shallower channels, and adjacent lowland to the east made the area a natural landing point for ships pausing at Rome or continuing upriver to Veii, Antemnae, and Fidenae. The Via Salaria is thought to have ended here, bringing salt and transhumant herds to the area, while one of the principal roads between Etruria and Campania passed close by. This infrastructure brought the site into contact with interregional and international networks, as demonstrated by finds of sherds of Late Geometric, Euboean, Cycladic, and Corinthian ceramics, as well as Ischian and Cumaean imitations of Corinthian

³⁵ Spivey 1997, 63.

³⁶ Lulof 1996, 158–174.

³⁷ For a map of the acropolis see Bouma 1996. ii, fig. 2.

³⁸ Massabò & Ricciardi 1988, pl. 1.

³⁹ Baglione 2013, 618.

⁴⁰ Colonna 2000, 276–277, n. 91.

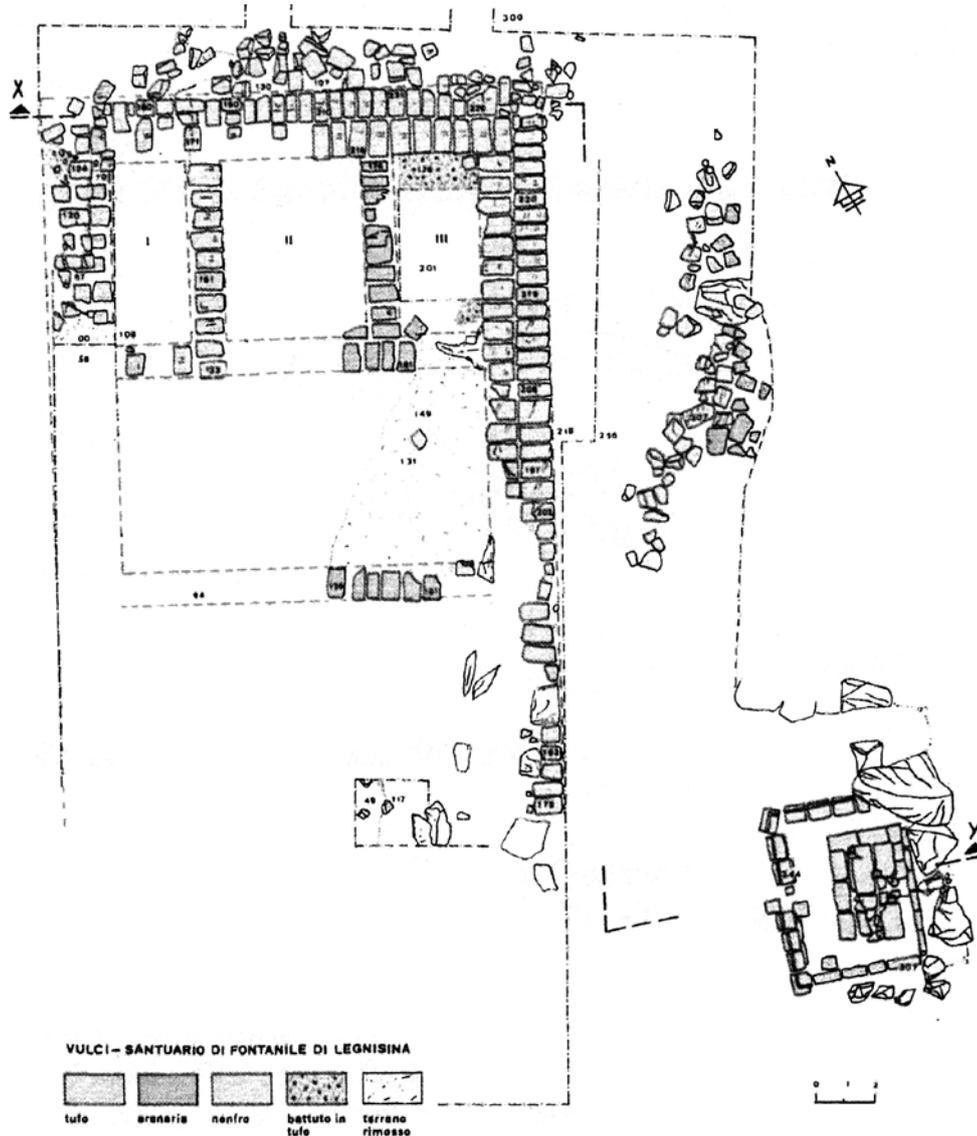


Fig. 4. Fontanile di Legnisina Sanctuary, Vulci. Site plan. 5th–4th century BC. From Massabò & Ricciardi 1988, pl. 1. © Ministero della cultura.

styles; the area is also the only Latial find spot for vessels of early Greek type other than Satricum.⁴¹ The subsequent naming of the site as the Forum Boarium furthermore implies a thriving cattle trade. This was not a site chosen for defensibility or detachment, but a space ripe for contact and trade. The decision to build one of Rome's first temples here accordingly suggests a desire for religious space to be engaging rather than exclusive.

Other Etrusco-Italic sanctuaries with monumental temples similarly seem to have prized accessibility. Both Tem-

ples A and B at Pyrgi were located on the coastline and oriented towards the water despite the risk of piracy. Instead of facing inland and towards the city that financed their construction, these temples were oriented to welcome seaborne visitors. The Portonaccio Temple was not located on the high, defensible plateau of Veii amidst the settlement but at its base near the Piordo waterway and the road that led to the coast.⁴² The Grand Temple at Vulci was probably situated along a path that crossed the surrounding plateau and led to a landing site

⁴¹ On the topography of the Archaic Forum Boarium see Coarelli 1988, 9–127 with fig. 22; Pisani Sartorio 1989; Holloway 1994, 165–167. On the ceramics see La Rocca 1982; Beijer 1995, 61.

⁴² Giglioli 1919, 13–14 with fig. 1; Stefani 1953, 93–95; Ward-Perkins 1957, fig. 2; Colonna 2001, 37.

on the Fiora River.⁴³ The largest Etruscan temples known to date, in the Ara della Regina Sanctuary at Tarquinia on the spur of the inland plateau, are also likely to have been visible from the sea. At all these sites temples seem to have been oriented to be highly visible and to have acted akin to markers or billboards that would attract, instead of deter, visitors.

It is possible to reconcile the theory that Archaic sanctuaries were designed to attract and engage visitors with the development of a separate religious aesthetic. A need was apparently felt to distinguish cult buildings from other structures and make them readily identifiable. A clearly recognisable temple would have located the sanctuary in the landscape and provided a goal for visitors, and one that drew the eye and encouraged appreciation of narrative compositions could have fostered engagement with the building and surrounding activities when they arrived. An imposing façade or porch could have focused attention in a form of scenography rather than parrying it.⁴⁴ In such scenarios visual separation is not automatically followed by physical or conceptual segregation. On the contrary, the emergence of a distinctive style for religious architecture could have attracted visitors and facilitated greater interaction between cult buildings, worshippers, and communities.

A unique situation?

Given the high level of connectivity and interaction between Archaic central Italy and other regions and cultures, it may be helpful to consider if a comparable situation can also be observed at Greek sanctuaries in the 6th century BC. The emergence of an idiosyncratic, monumental form of Greek religious architecture arguably does have some correlation with well-connected, accessible locations. Recent studies suggest that Greek temples began to adopt a distinctive set of features including an eastern orientation, a gabled decorative roof, a full colonnade, and *opisthodomos* that set them apart from other buildings between approximately 630 and 600 BC, with early examples in Achaia, Aitolia, and Phokis; the fact that these regions flank the major waterway of the Corinthian Gulf is notable.⁴⁵

During the next one hundred years the formal elements of these buildings were codified and replicated in Greek

sanctuaries around the Mediterranean.⁴⁶ Some of the most famous of all were built at highly accessible sites with significant external contacts. Literary sources connect the Archaic Temple of Artemis at Ephesos, for example, with King Croesus of Lydia (Hdt. 1.92.1) and the Cretan architects Chersiphron and Metagenes (Vitr. *De arch.* 7 preface 12; Plin. *HN.* 7.38, 36.21), whose respective finance and technical expertise produced a renowned temple that received Greek and Levantine offerings including Ephesian ware, Corinthian *aryballoi*, and Phoenician leg plates.⁴⁷ The temple faced out to sea over the harbour and “holy port”, in a settlement that acted as a gateway between the Aegean Sea and land routes across Anatolia.⁴⁸

Turning to Samos, the Heraion sanctuary was located on marshland near the mouth of the Imbrasos River where flat-bottomed ships could land.⁴⁹ Here Temple IV, with the largest known floor plan of any Archaic Greek temple, stood facing out to the sea that was the source of the island’s wealth and power.⁵⁰ The temples at Naukratis also represent substantial investment in religious architecture at a town and port during the 6th century BC, this time in the context of an *emporion* on the Canopic branch of the Nile where pottery demonstrates connections with Cyprus, Phoenicia, Cyrene, Greece, Egypt, and Etruria.⁵¹ These examples raise the possibility that a link between monumental cult buildings and highly-trafficked sites existed beyond the shores of pre-Roman central Italy.

Travellers and worshippers around the Mediterranean may have known of, and visited, these sanctuaries. The correspondence between names on pots dedicated at the Etruscan sanctuary of Gravisca, on the Tyrrhenian coast, and names recorded at Naukratis, in Egypt, indicates the movement of sailors and traders between the sites,⁵² while prominent Etruscans such as the king Arimnestos appear to have travelled to wealthy Greek sanctuaries to make dedications.⁵³ Mercenaries who served in Egypt and other Near Eastern kingdoms also returned to Greece and offered the gods tokens of their ex-

⁴³ Sgubini Moretti 1993, 34 with fig. 18, 68–69; Moretti Sgubini & Ricciardi 2001, 179 with fig. 1.

⁴⁴ On scenographic elements of Etruscan temple design see Warden 2012, 88–93.

⁴⁵ Early examples include the Temple of Apollo at Thermon, the Temple of Hera at Corcyra (Corfu), and Temple B1 at Calydon. Vink 1995, 113–114; Barletta 2001, 82–84, 153–154.

⁴⁶ Barletta 2001, 82–83, 154; Spawforth 2006, 25.

⁴⁷ Scherrer 2000, 44, 212.

⁴⁸ Zabełhicky 1995, 201–202.

⁴⁹ Kyrieleis 1981, 9.

⁵⁰ Gates 2003, 202, 215; Forsdyke 2005, 60–62.

⁵¹ Möller 2000, 94–113, 200–202; Villing & Schlotzhauer 2006, 7; Naso 2006.

⁵² Names at Gravisca and Naukratis: Moretti 1984; Torelli 1971; 1982; Smith 1996, 145; Möller 2000, 166–181. Pech-Maho: Lejeune *et al.* 1988; Cristofani 1995, 132–133; Gras 1995, 159–161; Barker & Rasmussen 1998, 139; Malkin 2011, 166.

⁵³ Paus. 5.12.5; Gran-Aymerich 2009; cf. Smith 1999, 189; Horden & Purcell 2000, 438–460, and also the dedication of an anchor at Gravisca by Sostratos of Aegina, described by Herodotus as the most successful merchant of all time (Hdt. 4.152.3).

otic experiences.⁵⁴ As discussed elsewhere, the existence of a shared, polytheistic culture at many settlements around the Mediterranean in this period is likely to have accommodated and mediated visits at a variety of different sanctuaries.⁵⁵ The important point for this paper is the potential disconnection between a mobile world and ideas about defensive cult infrastructure: why spend vast resources monumentalising sacred sites in accessible places only to deter and deflect visitors?

In conjunction with the analyses by Ekroth and Catherine Morgan in this volume (*Chapters 6, 11*) and earlier scholarship emphasising the idea of Greek sanctuaries as highly visible statements about territory and identity,⁵⁶ these observations mean one can justifiably reconsider the extent to which the changing physical form of some sanctuaries at multiple sites around the Mediterranean in the second half of the 1st millennium BC was designed to segregate the divine or, conversely, to make it manifestly present and engaging. In surroundings that did not make sanctuaries remote or unapproachable, it becomes less plausible that temples appeared exclusive and intimidating. This is not to deny that great size and particular designs could generate awe or make statements about the power and status of the gods relative to viewers. Instead, it challenges ideas that the affective experience of such sanctuaries was one of confrontation and exclusiveness, as opposed to one that drew people in, sought their attention, and created a dialogue between cults and the communities they served.

By questioning the extent to which these sanctuaries were segregated from their surroundings through design this paper adds to the body of ancient evidence undermining the argument of social anthropologists such as Émile Durkheim and Claude Lévi-Strauss that the sacred is inherently set apart from the quotidian, that “the world over, the feature that distinguishes the sacred entities are that they are withdrawn from general circulation; they are separate and set apart.”⁵⁷ If Etrusco-Italic sanctuaries were not always enclosed, if the experience of interacting with an Etrusco-Italic temple was not always governed by adversarial frontality and axiality, and if selected major sites seem to have valued accessibility, then physical and conceptual demarcation of the sacred becomes a matter of degree rather than a hallmark of religious material culture.

⁵⁴ For example, Pedon from Ionia who dedicated an Egyptian statue in his home sanctuary after serving the Egyptian king Psammetichos in the 7th century BC: Kyrieleis 2009, 140.

⁵⁵ Potts 2015, 111–116.

⁵⁶ Although the precise nature of the relationship between Greek sanctuaries and territories has been debated (for example, by de Polignac 1984; 1994; Malkin 1987; 1996; Morgan 1994), the idea that the construction of monumental cult buildings was intended to give the divine significant presence, to whatever end and effect, presupposes the importance of visibility.

⁵⁷ Durkheim 1992, 143 (an English translation of a series of lectures delivered between 1890 and 1912 and subsequently revised).

Conclusion

Architecture is more than a backdrop for ritual. As the product of a series of judgements about the role of such buildings, religious architecture offers the possibility of moving from descriptions of material culture to experiences and perceptions of the divine, topics that are particularly difficult to study in pre-Roman Italy in the absence of contemporary literature. This paper has made two related arguments: first, that a distinctive style of religious architecture emerged in Etruria and Latium in the course of the Archaic period and signalled that these buildings were conceived of as idiosyncratic structures; second, that the question of whether such visual delineation signals a broader, emerging desire to demarcate and set apart sacred space, however, is more problematic. While differentiated buildings could represent exclusivity and remoteness, they could also attract attention and invite exploration; the multivalency of objects in material culture studies furthermore allows that both may have occurred simultaneously. The link between sacred buildings and sacred spaces explored here is the setting in which delineation occurred, with surrounding buildings and topography offering contexts for distinguishing and interpreting monumental elements of cult. The possibility that delineation positively identified religious space in early western Italy instead of segregating it may be surprising but reinforces that religion was, in a variety of ways, embedded in ancient society. The archaeology of temples in pre-Roman central Italy consequently offers a somewhat unusual perspective in a volume focused on Greece but one that, like the buildings in question, hopefully invites further exploration.

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