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A NEW LATERAL SIMA FROM POGGIO CIVITATE (MURLO)*

For the past four seasons, the excavations at Poggio Civitate have been carried out along the south flank of *Piano del Tesoro*, where a stoa-like workshop has been discovered¹. Although the excavations in the area are not complete, the work to date sheds light on a number of aspects concerning the site; the nature of workshops in the seventh century B.C.; and the development of the lateral sima as an architectural unit. It raises questions concerning the interpretation of the site and the role of Greece in the development of architectural terracottas in Etruria. Further, the decorative elements associated with this new structure necessitate a reconsideration of the assumption that elaborate architectural members belong only to religious or secular buildings of prominence. Conversely, the identification of a building's function on the basis of its decoration must also be questioned.

Some twenty meters to the south-east of the «Upper Building», along the southernmost edge of *Piano del Tesoro*, lies the newly discovered «South-East Building», (*fig. 1*). Forty-three flat stone column bases of similar size but irregular shape form three straight rows aligned with the cardinal points of the compass (*tav. I, a*). The bases are set ca. 2.75 m. apart, center to center, both longitudinally and transversely. Between the column bases lies a hardpacked floor of clay-like plaster. No foundation walls have been uncovered to date along the north and south flanks of the structure, and it is possible that none existed. At most they may have been erected along the short sides, at the eastern and western extremities. The current excavations document a structure whose minimum dimensions are 48.5 m. × 6 m. and whose form is that of a long *stoa*.

Lying directly on the floor, in what is currently the center of the building,

* The general text of this paper was presented at the Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco, in Florence, May 28, 1985. A more complete treatment of the «South-East Building» and the architectural members associated with it has been presented to *Opuscula Romana* for publication.

¹ For a preliminary report on the excavations in this area, E. NIELSEN, *Recent Excavations at Poggio Civitate*, in *StMat*, in press.

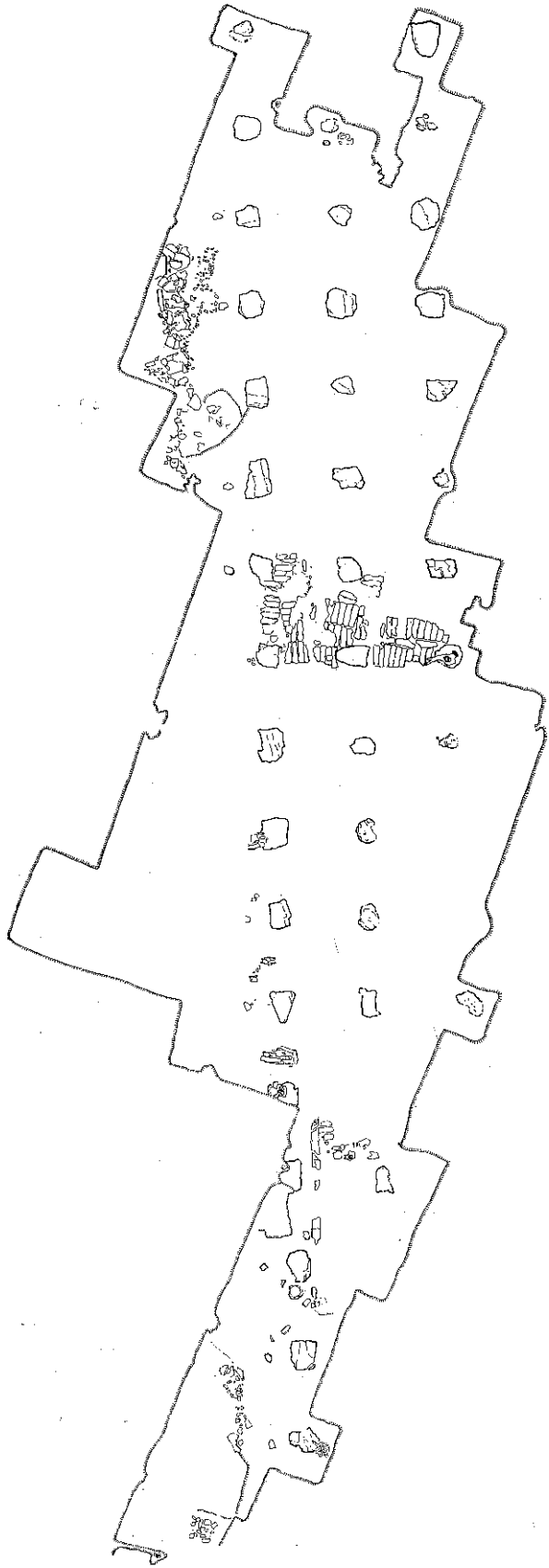


fig. 1 - State plan, « S.E. Building ». E. Simmons, after D. Peck.

are sixty-seven unfired cover tiles², which were neatly laid out to dry in rows, some perpendicular to others (*Tav. I, b*). Before the tiles were baked, however, a fire destroyed the building. In the subsequent chaos and confusion, several people ran over the soft tiles leaving behind clear sets of footprints (*Tav. I, c-d*). The intensity of the heat from the conflagration baked the tiles and preserved the prints³. The presence of fired pan tiles nearby, carefully stacked one on top of the other, lying on the floor of the building, reinforces the impression that this area was used for the production of architectural terracottas. This might explain the absence of walls. A roofed structure, open on all sides, would afford adequate protection from the elements while providing maximum light and ventilation for work and for the slow drying of terracottas. The east-west alignment also takes advantage of the winter sun. The eastern end of the building may have been reserved for work of a different nature. Previous excavations in this area, immediately to the north, revealed the presence of a large cache of bone, antler and ivory fragments⁴. All were variously broken. The context in which the pieces were found suggests that they formed part of a discard pile. Fragments of a similar nature continue to be found at this end of the building. In addition, recent discovery of what may be bellows' fragments and the earlier discovery of «forni» in the vicinity indicate the likelihood that metal work was also being carried out in the area⁵. Thus it seems that the entire structure served as a workshop with different activities being conducted in its various parts. Perhaps low partition walls were used to separate the individual areas of production⁶. That so large a workshop, involved in so many operations, existed on the site, at such an early date, must be taken into account in any attempt to characterize the nature of the occupation on Poggio Civitate.

Lying on the floor of the building, mixed with the destruction debris, are two architectural members which belong to the roofing system. The first is a mould-made female antefix head, of which seven complete and three partial examples have been recovered to date (*tav. II, a-b*)⁷. From the numerous hair fragments, it is possible to estimate a minimum of twenty-two heads. The pre-

² The excavations in this area are not complete and there are indications that more tiles lie on the floor.

³ Some indication of the intensity of the heat may be seen in the numerous fragments of heavily vitrified pan tiles which fell from the roof.

⁴ E. NIELSEN, *Speculations on an ivory workshop of the Orientalizing Period, in Italy, Cross-roads of the Mediterranean* (1984); IDEM, *Recent Excavations at Poggio Civitate*, in *StMat*, in press.

⁵ B. BOULOUMIÉ, *Murlo (Poggio Civitate, Siena): Céramique Grossière Locale*, in *MEFRA* 84, 1972, 64-66 nos. 1065-1070.

⁶ Large quantities of plaster, with reed impressions, have been found within the confines of the building. In the absence of foundation walls along the flanks of the building it is possible that the reed reinforced plaster may have served to form light partition walls.

⁷ N. WINTER, *Architectural Terracotta Heads with Human Heads from Poggio Civitate (Murlo)*, in *AC* 29, 18, Pl. 3, fig. 1.

sent evidence indicates that two moulds were used to produce them. The heads were made in a relatively shallow mould, unlike those associated with the lateral sima of the « Upper Building ». At a second stage in the manufacture, the braids of hair were attached and incision was applied to outline the eyelids and define the mouth. All the heads are similar enough in their general features to suggest that both moulds were drawn from the same archetype. One example, 82-79 is sufficiently preserved to reveal that the cover tile to which it was attached had notches cut into the sides, just behind the head (*tav. II, c-d*).

The second member is a lateral sima with attached feline water spout. One almost complete tile has been found *in situ*, lying on the floor of the building, where it fell from the roof (*tav. III, a*). The width of the sima (0.54 m.) accords well with the intercolumniation of the building as it allows for the placement of five tiles between two columns (*fig. 2*)⁸. The heads which formed

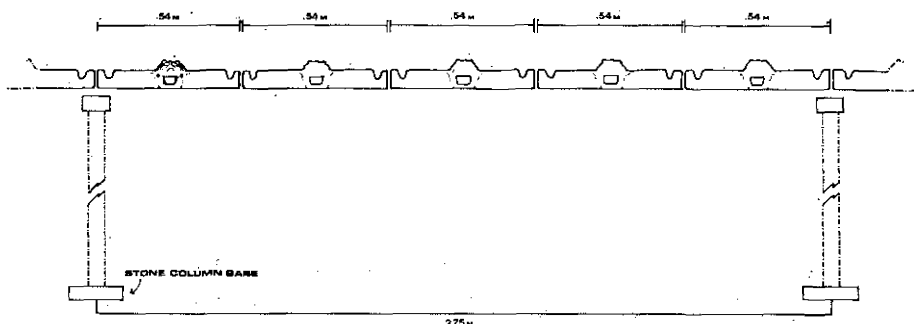


fig. 2 - Lateral sima and intercolumniations.

the spouts were produced in several stages. The upper half⁹, composing the crown, was mould made (*tav. III, b*), while the lower jaw and fangs were hand-modelled and added later (*tav. III, c*). At least five moulds, involving two individual archetypes, were used to produce the heads. Toward the ends of the low front wall of the sima, two notches have been made. These correspond to the notches behind the female heads and allow the two members to form an interlocking system with covertile resting flush on the floor of the pantile (*fig. 3*).

⁸ The current length of the building indicates that ninety felines were needed to decorate one long side, if arranged five to each intercolumniation. An equal number of females would be necessary. The distribution of females and felines within the building suggests that only the north flank of the structure, that facing into the center of the plateau, received the elaborate façade.

⁹ An example from the early years of excavation has already been published. Most recently in *Case e Palazzi d'Etruria*, 73, no. 24.

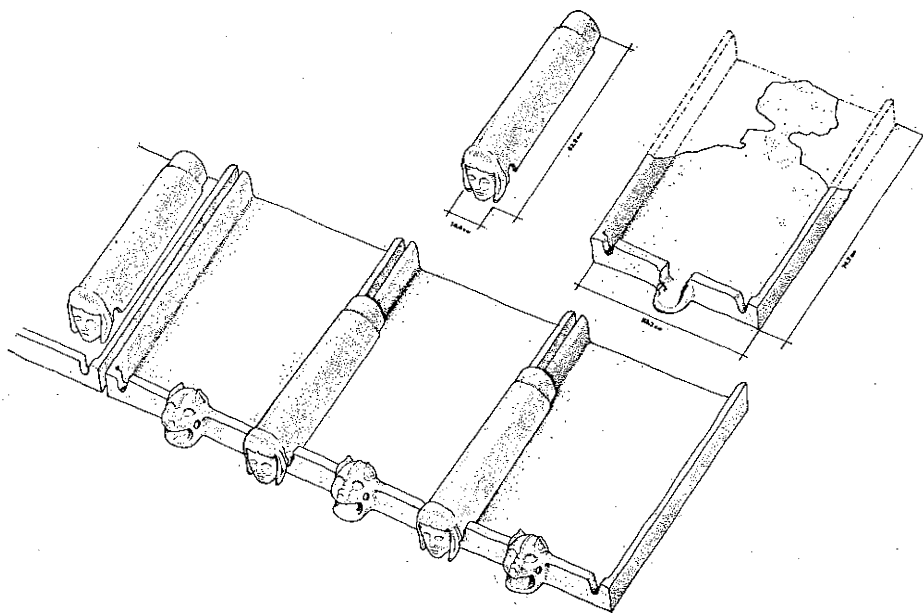


fig. 3 - Reconstruction of lateral sima.

The result is a relatively watertight fit. The overall effect, with alternating female heads and lion spouts is not unlike that of the lateral sima associated with the « Upper Building ». It is apparent that this new system, belonging to the « South-East Building », illustrates one stage in the evolution of the lateral sima at Poggio Civitate, that which immediately precedes the sima of the « Upper Building ». The earlier female heads, which served the practical purpose of sealing the openings of the covertiles, have lost this function on the later sima and have to an extent become decorative. However, as previously, they are still used to mask the point of abutment of the pan tiles.

Recently, a terracotta antefix head, found during the early years of excavation on the site, has become a point of discussion¹⁰. The head, produced from a shallow mould and bearing strong similarities to those decorating Canopic Urns possesses a number of correlations with the architectural members described above. Both the « Canopics » and the female heads are produced from similarly shallow moulds, and are approximately the same size. Further, two canopics were found in a dump to the west of *Piano del Tesoro*, together with two feline spouts of the type under discussion. Both were probably discarded during

¹⁰ For an updated bibliography, *Casa e Palazzi d'Etruria*, 73, no. 25.

the final destruction of the site. Finally, during the 1985 season, a fragment of a terracotta mould used in the production of the « Canopic » heads was discovered lying on the floor of the « South-East Building (tav. III, d). It seems very likely that all three architectural elements, the « Canopic » heads, the female antefixes and the lateral sima with feline spouts, decorated the roof of the south-east structure. That so functional a building was decorated in such an elaborate fashion makes one hesitate to identify the nature of buildings solely on the basis of their decorative elements.

Chronologically, the three architectural elements are difficult to pin down because of the diversity of styles. The « Canopics » which appear to be the earliest of the three should belong to the second half of the seventh century, by comparison to the Dolciano head¹¹ and its contemporaries. Though strong parallels for the head are not readily forthcoming outside the site, several local handles of the « Potnia theron » type bear similarities in the treatment of the details of the face¹². Their find circumstances associate them with the material found on the floor of the « Lower Building ». Thus a date toward the fourth quarter of the seventh century B.C. seems appropriate¹³.

The female antefix heads, on the basis of style, may be slightly later than the « Canopics ». The differences in appearance may be due to different periods of production or to radically different sources of inspiration. The « Canopic » heads decorating Chiusian urns, which may have served as the inspiration for the Murlo type, seem less susceptible to change over time, certainly during the second half of the seventh century B.C. The Murlo female antefixes, like the Murlo « Canopics » find their strongest parallels in the local handles associated with the « Lower Building » on the site¹⁴. Thus both heads are associated with the same material whose context places them toward the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. The comparanda appear to be contemporary and their differences in style may reflect the same situation that exists with the architectural heads. If, as is possible, the material from the « Lower Building » at Poggio Civitate represents an accumulation spread over a number of year then it is equally possible that some time separates the initial production of the two antefix heads. Perhaps the « Canopics » represent the initial period of roof decoration, followed by the substitution of the female antefixes as replacements became necessary.

In any event, the existence of a large stoa with elaborate roof decorations

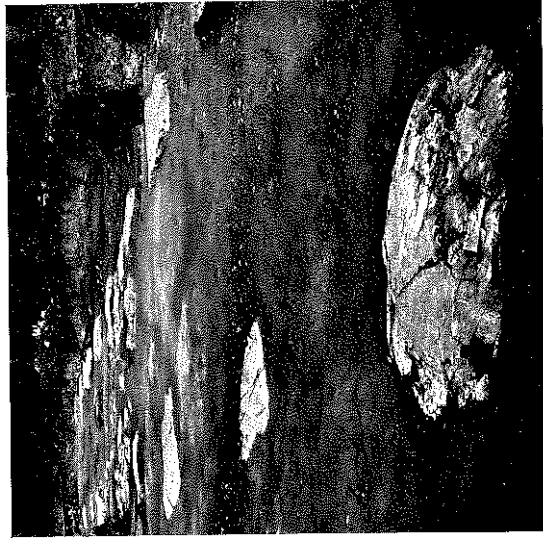
¹¹ Florence Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 79213.

¹² Murlo inv. 73-325. *Casa e Palazzi d'Etruria* 83, no. 93.

¹³ K. M. PHILLIPS JR., *The Date of the Archaic Terracottas from Poggio Civitate (Murlo)*, in *ParPass* 35, 202 ff.

¹⁴ Murlo inv. 72-323. *Casa e Palazzi d'Etruria* 83, no. 84; E. NIELSEN and K. M. PHILLIPS JR., *Poggio Civitate (Siena) - The Excavations at Murlo in 1976-1978*, in *NS* (in press), figs. 10 c-e.

already in use by the last quarter of the seventh century B.C. in Etruria, must cause us to reexamine the role of Greece in the development of fictile revetments in early Etruscan architecture. The presence on one building of cut-out croteria, human headed antefixes and feline waterspouts, echoes in spirit, if not in every detail, a system that can be observed in the hut models of the Villanovan period.



a



a) «South-East Building»,
to E.; *b*) Unfired cover
tiles, *in situ*; *c*) Footprints,
detail; *d*) Footprints, de-
tail.



4



3



a



b

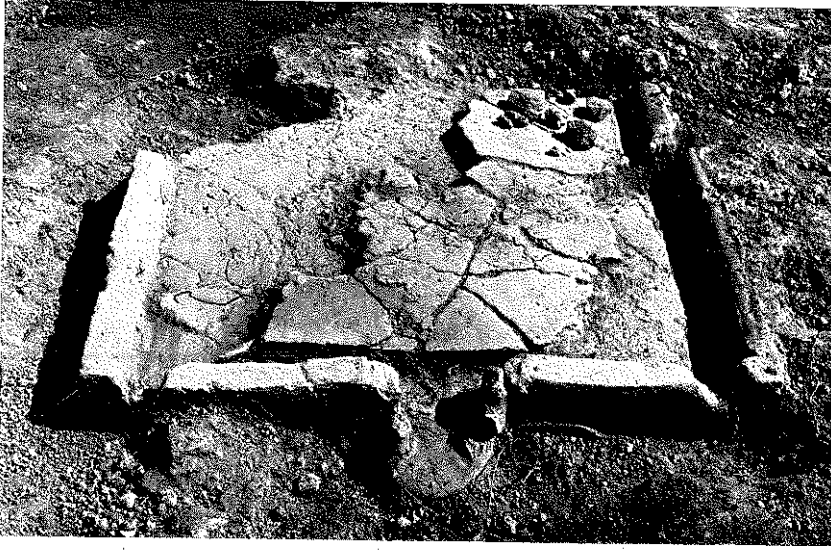


c

a) Female antefix head, 83-29, three-quarter; *b)* Female antefix head, 83-29, left profile; *c)* Female antefix head, 82-79, front; *d)* Female antefix head, 82-79, left profile



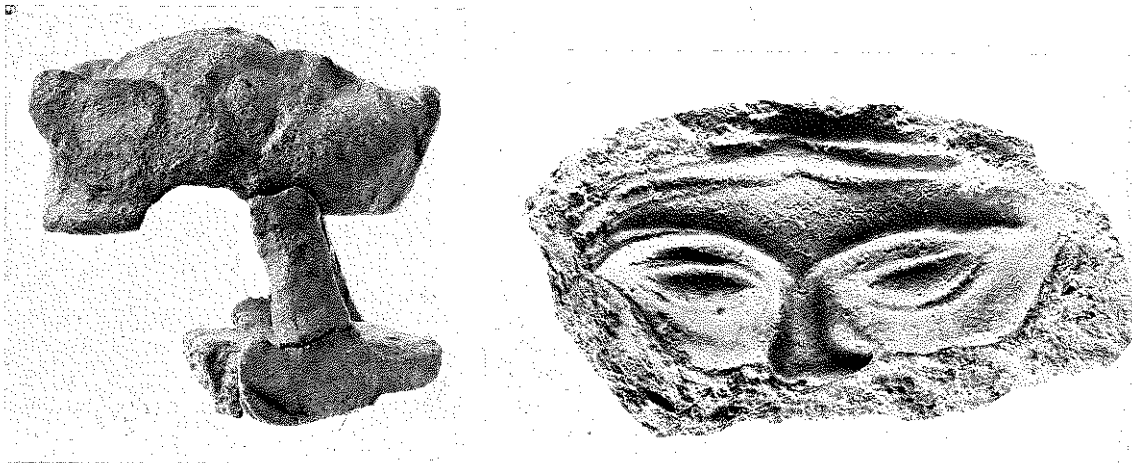
d



a



b



c

a) Lateral sima, 83-92, *in situ*; b) Feline waterspouts; 84-101; 84-103; 84-105; 84-109; c) Feline waterspout 84-35, right profile; d) Terracotta mould, 85-33.