CHAPTER 8

Poggio Civitate

Community Form in Inland Etruria

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1. Introduction

The eighth through sixth centuries in central Italy was a time of significant social and political dynamism in Etruria, one which resulted in the rapid formation of urban centers within Etruria and its immediate periphery.[1] Among the various ethnic groups in Italy at this time, the Etruscans were the only indigenous people to participate in this phase of Mediterranean urbanism (see further, Chapter 7). However, archaeological evidence of the physical form of most Etruscan cities is not abundant. Areas well-suited for defense and with access to sufficient water sources remained good places for habitation well past the Etruscan period (e.g., Volterra's Etruscan gate remains an entry point into the city even today). As a result, many modern Italian communities throughout central Italy are situated directly over their ancient counterparts, thus rendering them archaeologically inaccessible. However, exceptions exist, and one important example is the site of Poggio Civitate in the central, inland region of modern-day Tuscany, which has been the focus of continuous archaeological excavation since 1966. Communities governed by powerful aristocratic families interested in using the region's vast mineral wealth formed around centers like Poggio Civitate, allowing us to understand better a specific type of urban system that functioned as a hallmark of social and political organization in Etruria's inland.

A hilltop settlement situated 25 kilometers south of modern Siena, Poggio Civitate flourished from the eighth through the sixth centuries. The hill dominates the northern reaches of the Ombrone Valley and sits at the edge of the Colline Metalliffere, Tuscany's "Metal Bearing Hills," placing it near abundant agricultural resources as well as mineral wealth (e.g., sources of copper, iron, silver, and tin). Its destruction and abandonment in the middle years of the sixth century resulted in a nearly pristine archaeological environment, one which preserves some of the region's best evidence for the development of inland urban communities. Data collected over several decades of excavation at Poggio Civitate have revealed two major phases of occupation. Moreover, because it was never re-inhabited, the site stands as one of the very few in central Italy that allows archaeologists, linguists, and art historians to

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document, analyze and interpret the nuances and facets of Etruscan everyday life at a settlement occupied over a relatively long span.

2. Poggio Civitate during the Orientalizing Period (c.675–650 – c.600)

Poggio Civitate and its western spur of Poggio Aguzzo sit atop a hill of approximately 1.8 square kilometers. A broad plateau, locally known as Piano del Tesoro (the Plateau of the Treasure), dominates the hill's western extent. Most of the site's architectural development was centered on this plateau, and evidence of human occupation stretches back to the Iron Age (c.1000–c.700).

At around the middle of the seventh century, the inhabitants of Poggio Civitate began a building program of considerable scale and ambition. Three structures (Figure 8.1) dating to this period stood by the end of the century, each reflecting different facets of the social, economic, and political interests of the aristocratic family that lived there. The complex of buildings included an opulent residence, a building that appears to have served as a temple, and an industrial building of considerable size and length (Nielsen and Tuck 2001).

The residence, known in the literature as Orientalizing Complex Building 1/Residence (OC1/Residence), occupied the western side of Piano del Tesoro. It represents a rarely preserved example of the type of house we might expect of an Etruscan aristocrat of the period, exemplified elsewhere in the archaeological record by lavish tombs such as the Regolini-Galassi at Caere (see further, Pareti 1947) or the *Tomba del Duce* at Vetulonia (see further, Camporeale 1967). The building's form was long and rectangular, and its dimensions (36.2 × 8.4–8.6 meters) set it apart from the relatively modest scale of curvilinear huts typical

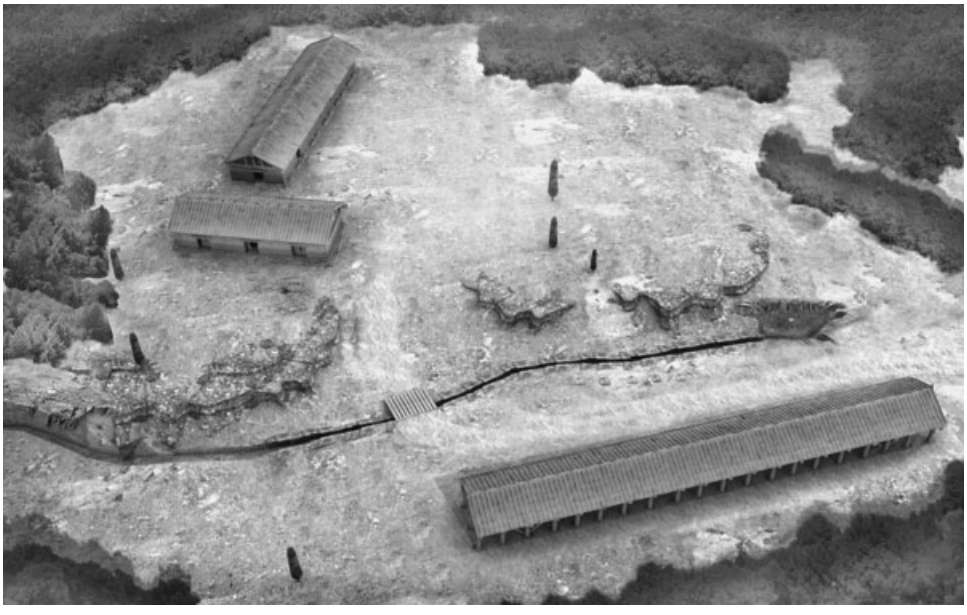

Figure 8.1 Digital reconstruction of the three Orientalizing (mid-seventh century BCE) structures at Poggio Civitate by Evander Batson. Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

of the preceding century (Colantoni 2012; see also Chapter 10) as well as recently discovered non-elite domestic architecture with which it was contemporary at Poggio Civitate (Tuck, Huntsman and Kriendler 2013).

OC1/Residence also employed the novel technology of a tiled, terracotta roof. Evidence for roofing materials at the site prior to the construction of this complex suggests builders employed traditional thatch (Carroll, Rodriguez and Tuck 2011). The movement to terracotta tiles would have required a significant degree of social organization to collect, process, form, and fire the large amount of clay needed for such tiles, a process hinted at by a number of administrative markings placed on tiles before they were fired (Tuck and Wallace 2013). But to the site's elite population, the effort was clearly worth the investment, allowing designers to attenuate significantly and monumentalize domestic architecture during this period. The building was also adorned with a system of terracotta decoration, with "cut-out" style acroterial sculptures adhered directly onto the crowning ridgepole tiles of the roof. The iconographic program of the decoration reflected the social and political values of Poggio Civitate's aristocrats and included images related to elite behaviors such as hunting (Rystedt 1984) as well as images of fertility divinities with whom the site's elite sought to associate themselves (Tuck 2006).

Inside, the building's occupants enjoyed a life of considerable luxury. Facets of everyday life are reflected in the massive storage vessels, including large countersunk *pithoi* filled with grain, and cooking equipment recovered in the northern end of the building. The great number of objects found throughout OC1/Residence suggests that the structure did not function as a common household. Rather, its residents mixed their wine in huge bronze cauldrons and ate their meals on elegant ceramics, both locally produced and imported from Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. Their tables, chairs and furniture were inlaid with carefully wrought decorations in antler, bone, ivory, and stone. Jewelry in gold, silver, and bronze found on the structure's floor as well as objects of everyday use (e.g., weapons, cosmetic implements, and fishing equipment) also speak to a domestic life of wealth and status enjoyed by the building's occupants.

Adjacent to the OC1/Residence was another building of considerable size. This rectangular, 23.25 × 9.2 meter structure, called Orientalizing Complex Building 3/Tripartite (OC3/Tripartite), remains one of the more enigmatic buildings of the plateau's early complex. Unlike OC1/Residence, it employed clear interior divisions that created a central room precisely twice the area of the two flanking chambers. This tripartite division of space is curiously similar to later Etruscan religious architecture (e.g., Tarquinia's *Ara della Regina* temple; see Bagnasco Gianni 2011), suggesting that OC3/Tripartite was an early form of temple. This possibility is further enhanced by the discovery of a series of circular pits cut into bedrock immediately south of OC3/Tripartite's southern foundation wall. Extremely high concentrations of organic material found in these pits suggest that they served some votive capacity associated with the building. Moreover, evidence recovered from the floor of OC3/Tripartite is unlike the materials found in OC1/Residence. Not only is evidence of domesticity – storage vessels and cooking wares – notable for its absence, but those ceramics that were recovered are unusual. They largely consist of refined, sometimes inscribed, bucchero vessels manufactured at other centers of the Etruscan world (e.g., Caere and possibly Populonia) (see further, Chapter 15). Moreover, the *muluvanice*-inscriptions on two of these vessels represent a type that Wallace (2008) has linked to the aristocratic gift-giving that was characteristic of this period. Their presence in a building such as OC3/Tripartite may reflect one of the ways in which the elites of the Orientalizing period used religious customs to coordinate and control material communication.

Orientalizing Complex Building 2/Workshop (OC2/Workshop) stood a short distance away from the other two structures of the complex. Positioned at the extreme southeast edge

of Piano del Tesoro, the building stretched a remarkable 52 meters in length. Like OC1/Residence and OC3/Tripartite, this monumental structure also employed a tiled, terracotta roof with an impressive decorative scheme. Sculpted acroteria in the form of lotus palmette flowers crowned its apex and a surprisingly advanced gutter system (the *lateral sima*) consisted of a series of waterspouts in the shape of feline heads punctuated by terminal cover tiles in the form of human female heads. This type of image – a female flanked by felines – is an important example of an iconography of a divinity adapted from Near Eastern sources during the socially dynamic Orientalizing period and is found on a large number of different types of artifacts associated with elite behavior and consumption throughout Etruria at this time (Damgaard Andersen 1992). The Poggio Civitate version of this "Mistress of Animals" (*potnia theron* in Greek) corresponds to Etruscan interpretations of this eastern fertility divinity, one likely known in their culture as Uni, the Etruscan predecessor to the Roman Juno (Tuck 2006; see also Chapter 23).

At first glance, it may seem surprising that a building as elaborately decorated as OC2/Workshop should be dedicated to the seemingly mundane activities of industry and manufacturing. However, the range and types of materials produced there suggest that production occurred under the control of Poggio Civitate's elite family and probably largely for its benefit.

Elements of bellows, terracotta piping, crucibles, and small ovens recovered in the eastern extent of the building all point to a tradition of metal production housed within (Nielsen 1993). In the same area, excavators recovered thousands of fragments of worked and partially worked elements of animal bone and antler, many of which were being fashioned into inlays similar to those found in OC1/Residence (Nielsen 1995). Elsewhere in the structure, archaeologists found evidence of pottery production, the spinning and weaving of wool, the butchering of animals, the processing of grains, and a number of other similar activities. In fact, the day the building was destroyed by fire, workers had produced a series of clay roofing tiles that were placed in the center of the floor to dry in the shade of the roof. When the fire broke out, people panicked and ran from the building, stepping on the still wet clay and thus preserving their footprints (Nielsen 1987).

The materials manufactured in OC2/Workshop are notable not only for the wide range of types, but also for the distinctive forms many of them take. It is all the more curious, considering how large this workshop was, that almost nothing manufactured in OC2/Workshop has ever been found anywhere outside of Poggio Civitate or its associated cemetery, Poggio Aguzzo (Tuck 2009). Instead, it seems that nearly all of the goods and materials produced there were used locally. The many types of high-status items manufactured – e.g., bronzes, inlaid furniture, and high-quality cloth (see further, Chapter 16), even something as seemingly utilitarian as elements of a terracotta roof – are all suggestive of wealth and status. They probably indicate that the site's social elite controlled the manufacturing processes, and, as has already been remarked, that most of the materials produced were for their benefit and consumption.

Given this situation, the representation of a divinity associated with fertility on the roofs of all three structures was a logical one for Poggio Civitate's elite family to display and promote. Aristocratically organized communities like Poggio Civitate often emphasize such divinities since family lineage and procreation are crucial instruments of sociopolitical control. Throughout Etruscan and later Roman political iconography, examples proliferate with both subtle and explicit references to the idea of elite familial descent from the union of a mortal man and a fertility divinity (see Tuck 2010). The fact that all three buildings employed this iconographic scheme suggests that their construction and function occurred under the direction and for the benefit of an aristocratic family interested in making reference to such a claim (Tuck 2006).

This complex of interrelated structures did not stand in isolation on Poggio Civitate. Recent excavation at the site has revealed the presence of a number of non-elite houses,

located immediately to the southwest of the plateau upon which the elite complex stood (Tuck et al. 2013). These modest domiciles, possibly the housing for workers associated with OC2/Workshop, suggest a relative degree of material affluence, although a fuller appreciation of both the extent and complexity of Poggio Civitate's subordinate community awaits future excavation at the site.

3. Poggio Civitate in the Archaic Period (c.600–550/530)

Following the destruction of Poggio Civitate's Orientalizing period complex, the Piano del Tesoro plateau was leveled and prepared for the construction of a building of truly impressive scale (Figure 8.2, Plate Section). It took the form of a four-winged structure with each wing stretching approximately 60 meters in length. The interior employed a colonnade on three sides of the courtyard, framing a small, enigmatic square enclosure on the building's western side. A defensive wall projecting south of the structure's western face added an additional 30 meters to the building's façade along this side, creating a southern courtyard and thus protecting access to water via the well located in this area. The building's size and high position on the hill are both remarkable in their own right, while the defensive moat to the north and its watchtowers suggest a concern with defense.

The exceptional size and ornate decorative program of Poggio Civitate's Archaic period phase building is not entirely without parallel in the Etruscan world. Although somewhat smaller in overall size, excavation at Zone F of Acquarossa preserves evidence of a roughly contemporary monumental complex of similar architectural sensibility (Wikander 1985). Like Poggio Civitate, the Acquarossa structures employed a terracotta decorative system representing similar themes of aristocratic identity and privilege, and are organized around a defined courtyard area (Meyers 2012). This indicates that the designers and builders of Poggio Civitate knew of and applied architectural innovations shared by other emergent, aristocratically organized communities of this period.

Figure 8.2 Digital reconstruction of the Archaic period (first half of the sixth century BCE) building at Poggio Civitate by Evander Batson. Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations. (*See insert for color representation of the figure.*)

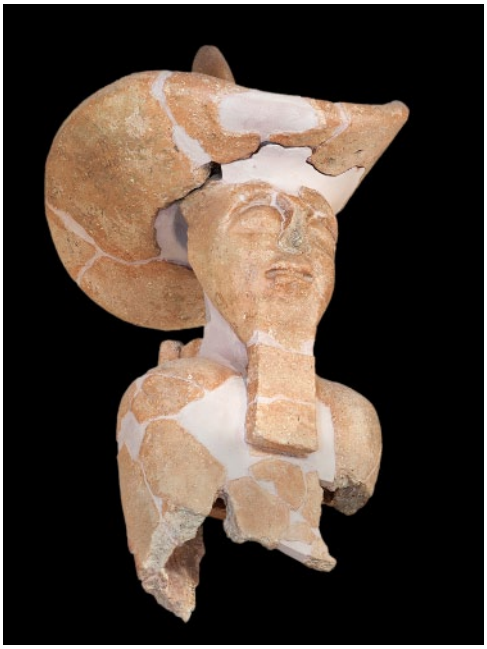

Figure 8.3 Seated Male Acroterium, first half of the sixth century BCE. Terracotta. From the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate. Antiquarium di Poggio Civitate, Inv. 111198. Photo: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

Over the many years of excavation and research at Poggio Civitate, a number of theories as to the function and use of this building have been posited. One suggestion offered by the site's first excavator, Kyle Phillips, held that the building served as a form of meeting hall, where delegates from far-flung communities could meet to engage in political and religious events (Phillips 1993). Other scholars have proposed that the building functioned as a *palazzo*, serving the domestic needs of the local aristocracy (Cristofani 1975). Still others have found parallels in the public spaces of the Greek world and posited the building served as a marketplace for commercial enterprise (de Grummond 1997; Turfa and Steinmeyer 2002). While each suggestion has its merits, a broader consideration of the building and its place in the surrounding landscape may indicate that this unusual and impressive structure could have and perhaps did serve all of these functions and potentially others as well (see further, Edlund-Berry 2012).

Like the earlier complex, this massive building was opulently decorated, with a terracotta sculptural program that was even more ambitious than the one that enhanced the site's Orientalizing structures. Atop the apex of the roof, artisans attached life-size statues of enthroned human figures, several wearing broad brimmed, peaked, sombrero-like hats – hats that encouraged some observers informally to describe them as "Cowboy" statues (Edlund 1992; O'Donoghue 2013). The seated figures, both male (Figure 8.3) and female, appear originally to have held attributes of some form that may have helped identify them to the ancient viewer, although those emblems are now lost. Even so, most modern scholars have argued that these figures most likely represented individuals associated with the ruling family of Poggio Civitate, perhaps their deified ancestors (see further, O'Donoghue 2013), another theme that finds wide expression not only in Etruria but also in the later Italic political world (Camporeale 2009). Other human figures, both standing and running, were also placed on

the roof's apex along with a number of animals and fantastic creatures. Winged sphinxes were joined on the roof's pitch by griffins, lions, wild boar, horses, and hippocampi. Unfortunately, we cannot know with certainty where particular figures were placed, although it is inviting to imagine an assortment of humans flanked by animals, akin to the notion of the *potnia theron*, an organization underscoring the politically popular and effective suggestion of a semi-divinized status for the site's ruling elite.

This monumental building was also ornamented with a sculpted *lateral sima* similar to those employed in the Orientalizing structures. Feline waterspouts alternating with applied female heads and floral rosettes lined the courtyard's interior – another use of the widely popular *potnia theron* motif (Damgaard Andersen 1990). The exterior of the structure does not appear to have had a *sima* system, but it did make use of terminal antefixes in the form of gorgons (Neils 1976). In addition, the roof's exposed wooden beams were protected and decorated with applied frieze plaques. A total of four types have been found: a horse-race (Root 1973), a banquet (Small 1971) (see Figure 23.3), a procession with a pair of individuals riding in a chariot led by attendants (Gantz 1974), and a scene of seated and standing figures holding various religious and political attributes (Gantz 1971). The latter figures may echo, in relief, the ones that adorned the building's roof. While the roofs of buildings at Poggio Civitate are uncommonly well preserved, finds from many other sites throughout Etruria suggest that the iconographic program represented here, with themes of both elite prerogative and august ancestry, was one frequently employed throughout central Italy during this period (Winter 2009).

Unlike the buildings that were part of the plateau's Orientalizing complex where the high concentration of small finds allows for a detailed reconstruction of each of its structures' functions, this particular building appears largely to have been emptied of its contents prior to its demolition. Some simple ceramics were recovered from the floor along its southern flank, potentially suggesting this area was employed as a food preparation area, but otherwise we can say little of the various functions of this multi-roomed building.

Even more puzzling is the manner in which Poggio Civitate was abandoned during the middle of the sixth century. The distribution of the various sculptural elements of the building suggests that its statues and terracotta adornments were dismantled; most were then smashed and the various fragments separated before being buried in pits located to the north and west of Piano del Tesoro. To date, approximately 30 percent of the building's decorative system has been recovered (an archaeologically enormous amount), but considerably more remains to be discovered.

Precisely why this massive, highly visible, and opulent structure would have been abandoned in this way remains unclear, although several scholars have noted that the demolition and abandonment of Poggio Civitate bears a striking resemblance to much later examples of a Roman political and military practice, the *damnatio memoriae* or the "damnation of memory" (Edlund 1994). To understand the nature of such a practice, one must appreciate the importance of identity and memory within the ancient Italic political arena. The preservation and presentation of one's family ancestry was a central component of aristocratic Etruscan and Roman households (Flower 2000). Ancestral masks of any family of importance were kept on visible display within the typical Republican house, serving both as a reminder to the living inhabitants of the house of where their authority and prestige came from as well as a display to visitors of that very lineage. At times, these masks were worn by individuals at public events (e.g., see Polybius 6.53; Suetonius *Vespasian* 19.2), creating a performance of ancestry whereby the deceased members of an elite family, complete with all the awards, honors, and emblems of office those ancestors once achieved, were made present once again. For a living member of such a family, a guiding ambition was to live a life that strove to excel these past achievements and be remembered as adding to the prestige of one's ancestors. Thus, the Roman aristocrat lived on, through and in the memory of his/her descendants. To erase such a memory – to

dismantle a building that was, in part, designed to communicate such a theme – was not only to destroy a site in the present, but to end the political utility of that familial ancestry for future generations. Thus the systematic obliteration of Poggio Civitate's Archaic period phase may have been an example of such a practice, as powerful Etruscan city states such as Populonia, Chiusi, or Arezzo began to consolidate political control over broader territories.

If the human figures that adorned the roof of Poggio Civitate's sixth century monumental building represented the ancestors of the family that governed the site, then its demolition and the site's subsequent abandonment may have been motivated by a similar desire to obliterate the visual statement of authority that the building represented. But such a hypothesis assumes that the building, during its lifetime, was seen and understood as an expression of such power. If so, who might the audience for its iconography have been?

Poggio Civitate is surrounded by a series of smaller hills to the north and west (Figure 8.4), several of which preserve evidence of ancient occupation. In the nearby town of Vescovado di Murlo, construction during the 1950s revealed the presence of a pair of chamber tombs containing material dating from the sixth through the fourth centuries. Elsewhere in Vescovado di Murlo, construction of a road revealed a complex chambered furnace. Later, controlled excavation in the immediate vicinity of this industrial space revealed an associated domestic space and produced materials demonstrating that the furnace and household were dated to the fifth to third centuries. Beneath the floor of the domicile, heavy concentrations of pottery dating to the sixth century were found (Tuck et al. 2009). Chance discovery of fourth or third century burials on the hill of Pompana as well as sporadic discoveries of sixth and seventh century ceramics at Montepescini, San Guisto, and Lupompesi further point to the occupation of these hills at a time both during and following the settlement of Poggio Civitate (Campana 2001).

While excavation continues at Poggio Civitate and its surrounding territory, the current state of evidence allows for some reasoned conjecture. From atop Poggio Civitate, the monumental building that dominated Piano del Tesoro during the sixth century would have been visible from a considerable distance. Similarly, the extremely large scale of the structure, with its interior courtyard, could easily have held gatherings of substantial numbers of people, far more than the current state of evidence from Poggio Civitate itself suggests lived on the hill. Considering this, it is probable that its ornate sculptural program communicated the power and status of the site's ruling family to the surrounding countryside. Similarly, it is not difficult to imagine seasonal festivals and social events such as weddings and birth celebrations, or even more mundane activities such as exchange and trade, that would have necessitated the gathering of the populations from these peripheral communities.

Unfortunately, the fact that most contemporary Etruscan settlements remain archaeologically invisible makes certainty on this point impossible. The state of our evidence does not tell us whether or not the massive Archaic structure at Poggio Civitate was unusual or one of many such architectural expressions of social and political power in central Italy. As noted above, only the site of Acquarossa preserves comparable domestic architecture, although new discoveries are possible with every new season of excavation. However, a model for the kind of community organization described above not only exists but also represents the political system used in the region around the site today. Since the Medieval period, rural communities like Murlo, a hilltop village adjacent to Poggio Civitate, have been organized into a *comune* system, a form of governance whereby central, larger communities served as the political and administrative center for a series of associated, smaller, physically separated hamlets and villages. Much as Poggio Civitate may have done centuries before, the town common of Murlo frequently hosts events and festivals attended by the entire population of the broader *comune*. And, in a manner much as the ornate iconography of Poggio Civitate's structures might once have functioned, the image of the "Cowboy" statue serves today as one of the official emblems that the *comune* of Murlo displays to the wider world.

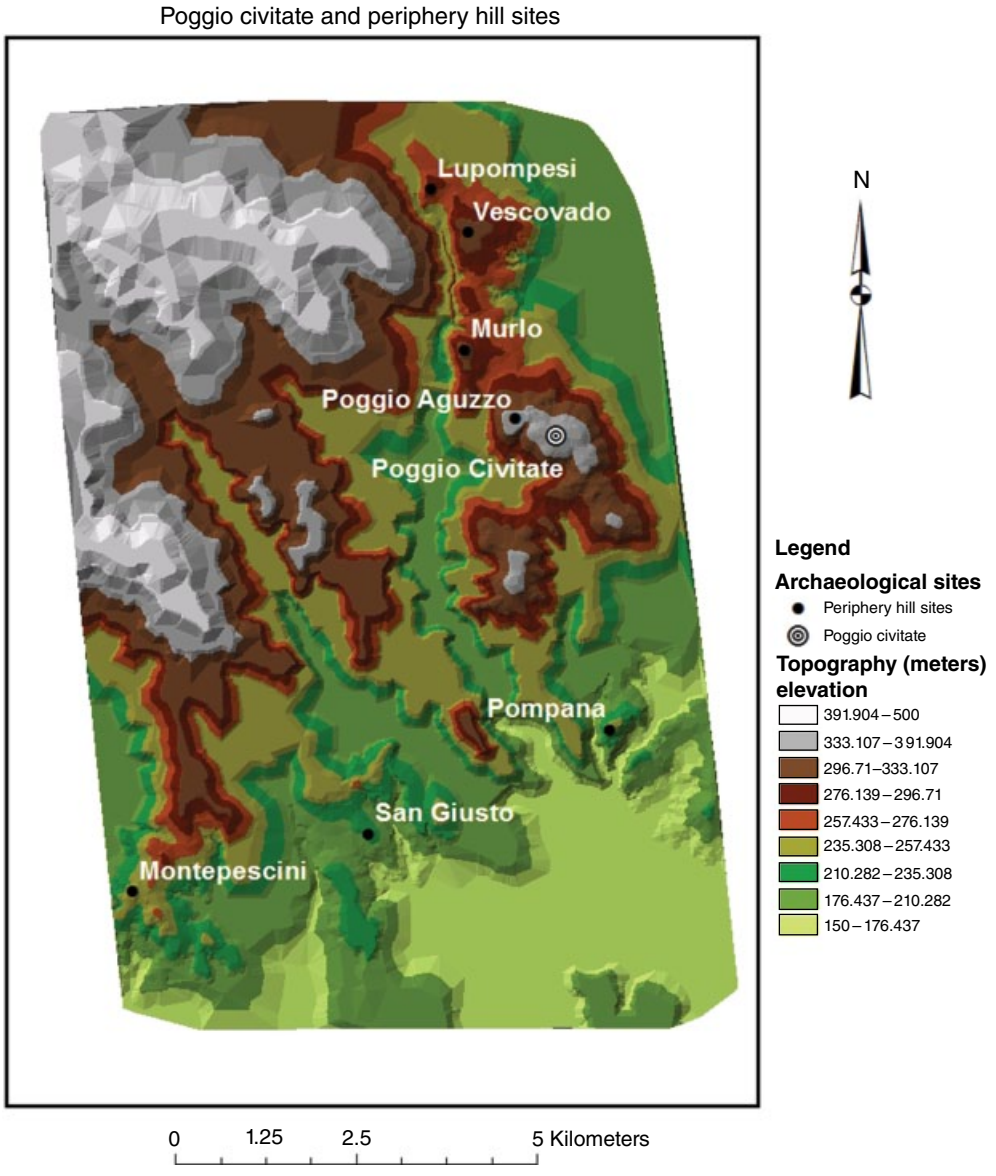

Figure 8.4 Topographic map of Poggio Civitate (PC) and its surrounding communities by Taylor Oshan. Drawing: Courtesy of the Poggio Civitate Archaeological Excavations.

4. Conclusions

Poggio Civitate was a community that flourished from the late stages of the Iron Age through the middle of the Archaic period. As excavations continue to reveal new facets of ancient life at the site, the evidence to date confirms that the aristocratic center of the community was situated atop Piano del Tesoro. With magnificently large, opulently decorated buildings and the ability to convert raw materials into usable goods, aristocrats at the site governed communities living both on the immediate periphery of Piano del Tesoro as well as populations

occupying villages atop nearby hills. Unlike the urban development atop the broad coastal plateaus of Tarquinia or Caere, the inland region of Tuscany's iconic, undulating terrain coupled with an Etruscan desire to occupy only the highest, defensible areas would have required that politically and socially connected communities remain physically separated by their topography (Tuck 2012). Nevertheless, the evidence from Poggio Civitate suggests the site's ruling elite and the craftspeople in their employ were well versed in the innovative technologies and ideologies in this early stage of the Etruscan urban experiment.

NOTE

1 All dates are BCE.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

In spite of nearly fifty years of continuous excavation at Poggio Civitate, the site continues to reveal new discoveries. All of the excavation's archival data – the foundation upon which all interpretation must rest – are available through the program's public database, located at http://www.poggiocivitate.org/. Excavators add new information to this system every year and researchers are free to download images, peruse excavation logs and reports, and even provide commentary on information housed there. This enormous archive of excavation data has been used by many scholars over the years for studies concerned with a number of different facets of life at the site. Berkin 2003 considers the large quantity of distinctive bucchero pottery recovered from within OC1/Residence, offering fascinating insight into the communal banqueting that likely occurred in this domestic space. Edlund 1992 studies the remarkable human sculpture of the Archaic period roofing system, providing important analysis concerning the manner in which these curious images were made and how they were understood by the ancient population of the site. Rystedt's work (1983 and 1984) focuses on the sculpture of Poggio Civitate's Orientalizing period complex and compares its iconography to similar decorative architectural systems from Acquarossa. Warden's 1985 study of metal artifacts recovered across the site provides one of the very few chronologically and contextually defined presentations of such objects in the region, giving researchers an important foundation upon which to compare materials recovered from sites without such well-preserved architecture. In all, research continues at Poggio Civitate as students and scholars commit to new projects that further our understanding of numerous facets of life the site.