

An atrium house of the 6th c. B.C. at Rosselle

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LUIGI DONATI, *LA CASA DELL'IMPLUVIUM: ARCHITETTURA ETRUSCA A ROSELLE* (Archaeologica 106, Giorgio Bretschneider, Rome 1994). Pp. 164, pls. 66, figs. 38, tables 8. ISBN 88-7689-100-5 (paper). Lit. 650.000.

Within three years of the close of excavations on the N slope of Roselle, L. Donati and his team have brought together, in this extremely thorough presentation, the fruits of 10 years' labor on the site. The present publication manifests the results of a strong collaborative effort between the Soprintendenza Archeologica per la Toscana and the Università di Firenze and is a tribute to the team of conservators, photographers, illustrators and field archeologists.

The object of their study is a remarkable dwelling located on the N slope of the North Hill, some 5 m from the summit. The building is known as the House of the Impluvium. Thanks to a series of particularly favorable circumstances, the structure is well enough preserved to provide a range of information on domestic architecture of the Archaic period in Etruria. The fortuitous combination of its state of preservation and careful excavation has allowed the authors to comment with confidence on matters ranging from techniques of construction to internal organization and use of rooms. As a result of their careful endeavors, it is apparent that the typology of the Italic house, centered around an *atrium* with *impluvium*, as hypothesized for Marzabotto, was already in use in Etruria by the 6th c. B.C.

An equally interesting and important aspect derived from the excavators' work is the recovery of evidence which suggests a continuity of habitation and architectural development in the immediate area running from the late Villanovan through to the early decades of the 5th c. B.C. Three successive occupation phases have been recognized. The first is indicated by material recovered from a hollow (*cavita A*) in the bedrock, which at one point may have served as a cistern or storage-pit for grain. Most characteristic of the Villanovan tradition is a biconical urn (pl. I,B) apparently used as a container for water. At the time of its abandonment, the hollow was being used as a refuse pit. The material contained therein probably belongs to the destruction of one or more habitations situated in the same area, later occupied by the House of the Impluvium. To judge from the finds, the technique of construction involved the use of reed-impressed plaster. For the author, the absence of tiles suggests a roof of organic material such as straw or thatch, a situation reflected in the contemporary "Casa con recinto", uncovered in the area of the Forum between the two hills.

The second phase of occupation is represented by the remains of House C. The building, a free-standing unit of two rooms, is somewhat difficult to pinpoint chronologically, though its technique of construction suggests to the author a date between the Villanovan construction associated with *cavita A* and the House of the Impluvium (between the end of the 7th c. and the first half of the 6th).

The House of the Impluvium itself belonged to the Archaic period and according to the excavators had a relatively brief life. In its final form it incorporated foundations of the earlier House C, which was built on the same site. Dating for the house and its *floruit* are derived primarily from the ceramic evidence recovered from the upper level of Well E. Corroboration is provided by occasional finds within the individual rooms and from material recovered from hollow nr. 70. In general, the material can be placed within the second half of the 6th c.; the latest ceramic evidence is given by some Attic ware attributed to the circle of Onesimos, thus placing the final phase of the house in the early decades of the 5th c.

The publication treats the material in a logical and orderly manner. Following a brief introduction, the authors present observations on the predecessors to the main house. The material remains for these come from 5 distinct deposits, each of which is carefully described.

The fifth deposit, a well situated just outside and to the east of the house, contains the largest quantity of ceramic evidence and provides the primary chronological anchors for the site.

Of the five strata, the first is interpreted as being contemporary with the house and thus treated separately in the second half of the book. The catalogue descriptions are brief, though reference is made to the typologies and description of fabrics which can be found in amplified form in the appendices. Almost all of the material is generously illustrated by drawings and photographs. The order of presentation and the visual documentation make it easy to gain a clear sense of the nature of the deposits and allows for easy comparisons. Where appropriate, dates are suggested for individual pieces and comparanda cited.

The second chapter is devoted to the House of the Impluvium. Here again a very orderly approach is taken. Beginning with the state of preservation, the reader is led through a discussion of technique in construction, analysis of the floor plan, room by room, followed by discussion of the roofing system and its individual elements. Ceramic evidence is presented by room and by stratum. The finds are amply illustrated. Chronological observations follow and the section concludes with a lengthy and detailed discussion of the suggested reconstruction, enhanced by two isometric drawings, one illustrating the position of post-holes in walls, the other emphasizing a possible roof reconstruction. The documentation for the reconstruction presented is impressive and provides a most useful compendium of references on recent literature relevant to a variety of aspects of domestic architecture.

Of considerable interest to students of Etruscan architecture will be the reconstructions (figs. 37-38 = figs. 1-2 here). Although they present a more understandable image of the structure, they also raise several questions. The reconstruction of supporting posts (our fig. 1), as derived

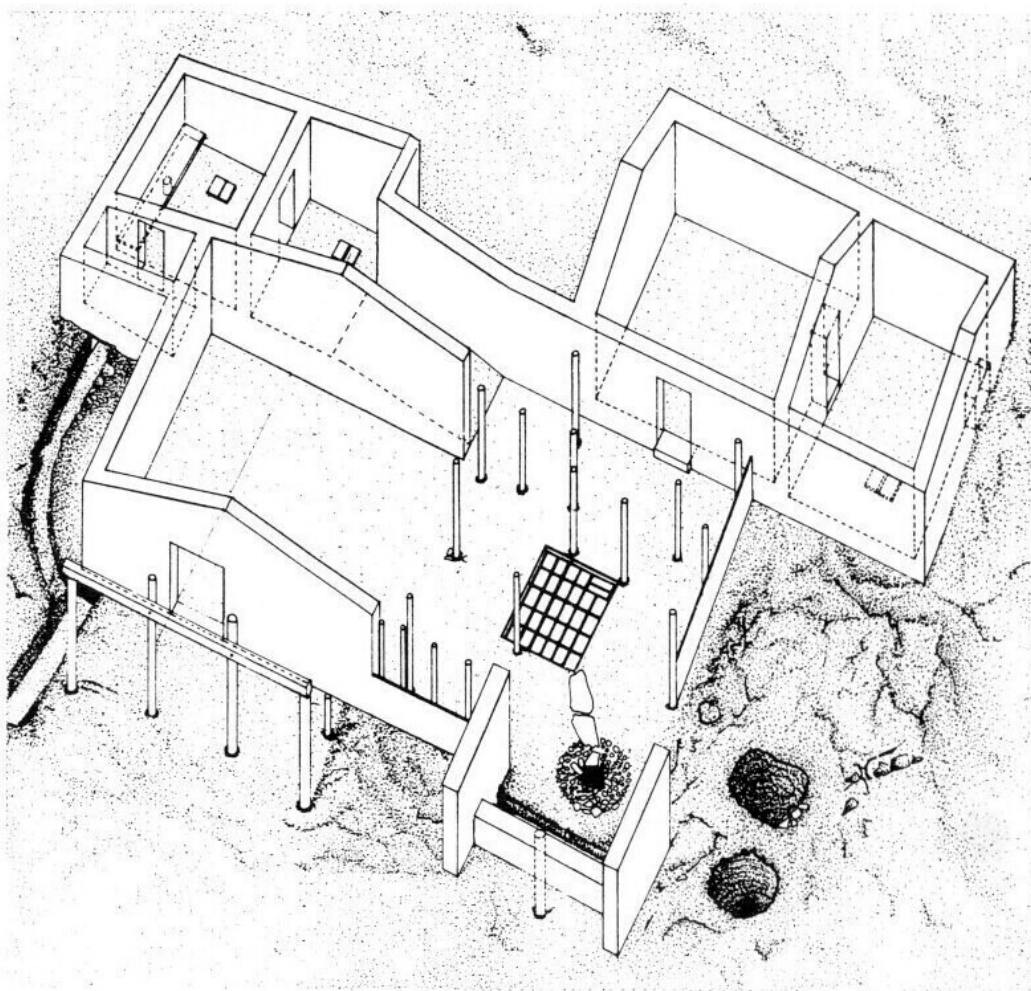


Fig.1 = Donati fig. 37. Disegno ricostruttivo dello spaccato della Casa dell'Impluvium.

from post-holes in the bedrock, seems complicated and confusingly irregular. Several of the post-holes (nos. 13, 51 and 67; p.32, fig. A) seem unnecessary for the support of various roofs. In the *atrium* alone 17 post-holes are associated with the support of the roof or the 2 screen walls. Could the picture be simplified by assuming that some of the post-holes belong to different construction/repair phases? The unusual arrangement of 3 posts supporting the *compluvium* may lend weight to the possibility. That two of the posts (nos. 46 and 48) are not at the corners of the *impluvium*, as one might expect, may provide evidence that the *impluvium* was extended to the E some time after its initial construction. Perhaps other holes may be associated with different phases of the building. On the other hand, is it safe to assume that the find circumstances associated with the post-holes preclude any of them from belonging to earlier structures for which evidence has been found (p.10)? It would be helpful to know why this possibility was excluded. One is tempted to see in nos. 49 and 50 supports for an original, small porch belonging to the earlier House C. The post arrangement for the N portico is puzzling since the holes (nos. 9-12) do not align. The reconstruction presented (our fig. 2) provides for a single architrave supported primarily by the end posts and affixed tangentially to 2 central posts. The portico itself is formed by an extension of the gabled roof, with no visible support for the ridge-pole. The arrangement is unusual and necessitates a comment from the author (92) citing several Caeretan tombs as justification. In general the roof reconstruction presents some problems. It is difficult to understand how the roof is supported along the valley at the SE corner of the *atrium* since there are not corresponding post-holes aligned below. Nor are there

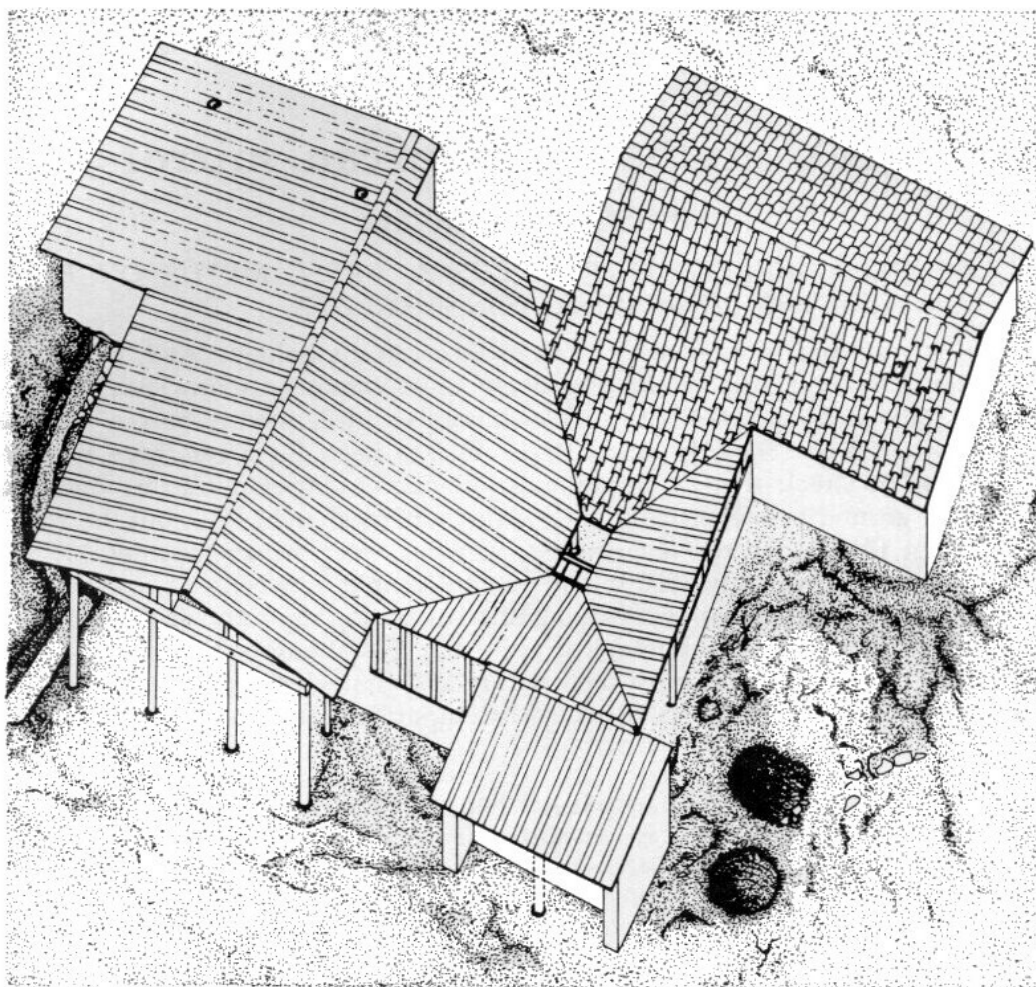


Fig.2 = Donati fig. 38. Disegno ricostruttivo della Casa dell'Impluvium.

any along the NW. Similarly, the treatment of the roof along the W screen wall and the N flank of the *atrium* raises questions. For those unfamiliar with the wood members of early roofing systems, an isometric drawing showing such would have been welcome.

There is no doubt that the House of the Impluvium is important for the early history of domestic architecture, for which so few examples exist. The discovery of *tegulae conliciares* (2 fragments), allowing for the reconstruction of the *compluvium*, provides a solution to the roof, which is unique for the area at this early date. The Upper Building at Poggio Civitate, some 55 km inland and to the north, has yet to produce evidence of such tiles, although the presence of a colonnade on three sides of the central court would have benefitted greatly from such a solution. Is the absence of such tiles at Poggio Civitate due to that building's earlier construction date? On the other hand, the absence of fictile revetments for the Roselle house is surprising given its later date and rough contemporaneity with the houses of Acquarossa. What is one to conclude regarding the use of decorative elements? The absence of a lateral *sima* with spouts is also unexpected in an area where water conservation, as suggested by an *impluvium*, cistern, well, and other retainers, appears to be important.

The book answers many more questions than it raises and provides a thoroughly organized and well-documented presentation of material. It is an excellent reference-work for field archaeologists and no doubt will be a staple of excavation libraries where architecture is involved. Given that, and for the price, it is unfortunate that the binding could not have been better constructed to handle the usage expected of reference works.

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Greek myths on Etruscan mirrors

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L. VAN DER MEER, *INTERPRETATIO ETRUSCA. GREEK MYTHS ON ETRUSCAN MIRRORS* (Amsterdam 1995). 285 pp. 108 figs. ISBN 90 5063 477 X.

There are few studies in English devoted to Etruscan mythology.¹ And, while articles in *LIMC*² attempt to cover the field comprehensively, these volumes are unwieldy for those who have them at hand and inaccessible to smaller libraries with limited resources. Other articles are widely scattered in scholarly journals. There is a need for a reference work and/or introductory text on Greek myths with particular attention to Etruscan mirrors, one that might strike a middle ground between treatments of single heroes² and *LIMC*, but the work under review does not fill this need. Nevertheless, van der Meer brings together 300 inscribed mythological scenes on roughly 3000 mirrors manufactured between 490 and 250 B.C. In his introduction he sets a clear goal of clarifying and expanding the intricate picture of myth in early Italic culture, using the iconological approach. He attempts to address the difficult issues of myth, the interrelationships, their nature and character. Ancient texts are analyzed and earlier epigraphic misreadings corrected.³ Comparisons are made with Greek tales and

1 These are primarily in German and include A. J. Pfiffig's *Religio etrusca* (Graz 1975); R. Hampe and E. Simon, *Griechische Sagen in der frühen etruskischen Kunst* (Mainz 1964); I. Krauskopf, *Der thebanische Sagenkreis und andere griechische Sagen in der etruskischen Kunst* (Mainz 1974); also J. P. Small, *Studies related to the Theban cycle on late Etruscan urns* (Rome 1981).

2 Following in the footsteps of E. Gerhard, K. Klugmann and G. Körte, *Etruskische Spiegel* (Berlin 1843-).

3 E.g., A. J. Pfiffig, *Herakles in der Bilderwelt der etruskischen Spiegel* (Graz 1980); cf. also other works on mirrors (though lacking the mythological focus) such as U. Fischer-Graf, *Spiegelwerkstätten in Vulci* (Berlin 1980); I. Mayer-Prokop, *Die gravierten etruskischen Griffspiegel archaischen Stils* (Heidelberg