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The Acroteria From the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate (Etruria)

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Poggio Civitate is the location of an ancient Etruscan settlement in present-day Tuscany which, in the Archaic period (c.580-c.480 BC), was home to a monumental courtyard complex, its roof adorned with a series of terracotta acroteria. These acroteria took the form of seated and standing men and women, which form the basis of this study, as well as fantastic and real animals. The question addressed will be the appropriate identification of these figures, regarding which there is currently no scholarly agreement. The matter is contentious because of the uncertainty about the function of the Archaic Building itself. This paper argues that the Archaic Building most likely functioned as a domestic complex, based on an analysis of the plan of the building and its relationship to the previous phase. It is then argued that the arbitrary categories of "mortal" and "divine" often applied to the acroteria are an anachronism and that the acroteria should in fact be identified more broadly as status markers: symbols of the wealth and power of the Archaic Building's elite occupants.

Keywords: Poggio Civitate, Etruscan, architectural terracotta decoration, Archaic period

Contents

Introduction

Poggio Civitate is located in northern inland Etruria, near to the River Ombrone and the modern *comune* of Murlo, an hour's drive south of the major city of Siena (see **Fig.1**). It is situated in a prominent, highly visible position (Meyers 2003: 114) on the eastern portion of a hilltop plateau bordering central Tuscany (Donati 2000: 324; Meyers 2003: 72). Occupied since the Iron Age, the site was first monumentalized in the Orientalizing period (c.720-c.580 BC) (Haynes 2000: 115). After the Orientalizing Period complex was destroyed in the late seventh century BC (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 3), Poggio Civitate was rebuilt in the Archaic Period (Damgaard Andersen 1990: 79). It was upon the Archaic Building that the rooftop acroteria considered in this paper once stood.

A descriptive overview of the rooftop acroteria from the site will be given in Part One. To interpret these acroteria, one must first decide upon the likely function of the Archaic Building, something that is still disputed. Therefore, Part Two of this paper is dedicated to demonstrating precisely how the varied scholarly interpretations of the site's function impact the understanding of the acroteria. From this discussion, the conclusion is drawn that the Archaic Building functioned as a domestic structure. Finally, in Part Three, the implications that this proposed function has on the interpretation of the acroteria are explored. All dates given will be BC.

Fig.1: Map showing the location of Poggio Civitate within wider Etruria.
Source: Plan by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, page LII.

Part One: Descriptive Overview

The Orientalizing phase of occupation at Poggio Civitate (**Fig.2**) is dated from 650 to around 610/600BC, when a fire destroyed the site (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 198). The Orientalizing complex comprised three buildings; OC1, a residence; OC2, an industrial workshop; and OC3, a tripartite structure which has been interpreted as a religious building (Haynes 2000: 115).

Fig.2: Plan of the Orientalizing phase at Poggio Civitate.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Plan 8.

The Archaic Building (**Fig.3**) was constructed between 600-575BC atop the remains of the Orientalizing complex (Haynes 2000: 117). It consisted of a monumental four-winged structure measuring 60 x 61.8m (Meyers 2012: 4), enclosing a colonnaded courtyard (O'Donoghue 2013: 269), surrounded by four wings of continuous rooms (Meyers 2003: 70). On the western side, a defensive structure extended the complex a further 30m (Tuck et al. 2010: 93).

Fig.3: Plan of the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Plan 9.

The acroteria were part of a decorative programme which encompassed the whole terracotta roof. **The** roof was also decorated with sculpted female heads, feline waterspouts, rosettes, and gorgon

antefixes (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 203), as well as relief sculpted revetment plaques, bearing images of a banquet, a procession, an assembly, and a horse race (Rathje 1994: 95). Stylistic analyses suggest that all of the roof elements were conceived as one sculptural programme (Winter 2009: 159). **Fig.4** provides a guide to where these elements would have been situated on the roof.

Fig.4: Generic roof with names of architectural elements.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, page 6.

Now that the context of the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate has been defined, the general features of the acroteria can be described, before the specifics of each category of sculpture from the roof are given. All of the acroteria are made of terracotta (Phillips 1992: 17), sculpted in the round, and would originally have been painted (Winter 2009: 511). They were located on top of the tiles used to protect the ridgepole, the horizontal beam that formed the apex of the roof. This location is identified by the fact that the feet of some of the acroteria are still connected to ridge tiles (Winter 2009: 198). Although around 30% of the building's entire decorative elements survive (Tuck 2016: 111), no single acroterion is whole, but there are over 200 fragments (Edlund-Berry 1993: 117).

There are five categories of acroteria: seated figures, striding figures, helmeted heads, and real and fantastic animals. Fragments from at least ten life-size seated males are known (Winter 2009: 155). ***The*** bearded males (**Fig.5**) wear wide-brimmed, high-crowned hats, long tunics, and pointed boots (Haynes 2000, 120; Winter 2009: 196). They are seated on stools.

Fig.5: Reconstruction drawing of a seated male acroterion from the Archaic Building. This reconstruction is now known to comprise elements from two different figures but it nevertheless gives a general idea of the original appearance of this class of sculpture.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Ill. 3.8.1 3.E.1.a.

The seated female sculptures (**Fig.6**) are estimated to number at least nine (Winter 2009: 155) and are slightly smaller than the males. The seated women, also positioned on stools (Winter 2009: 198), wear long skirts, medallions, and boots with curled toes (Haynes 2000: 120). The positioning of the hands of both the male and female seated figures indicates that they once held attributes, but these are now lost (Tuck 2016: 110). The formation of the ridge tile fragments below the acroteria suggest that the seated statues were positioned across the axis of the roof, either facing into or out of the courtyard (Edlund-Berry 1993: 119). In addition to this, at least four figures represented in a striding pose are known from the roof (Winter 2009: 155). Only the ball of the foot and the toes of these figures touches the ridge tile, indicating a striding posture (Winter 2009: 199). At least six helmeted heads have been discovered, which likely belong to these striding figures (Winter 2009: 200).

Fig.6: Reconstruction drawing of a seated female acroterion from the Archaic Building.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Ill. 3.8.2. 3.E.1.b.

An estimated minimum of thirty-two animal statues have been recovered from Poggio Civitate (Winter 2009: 157). Usually, these are smaller than the human figures (Donati 2000: 324). The

fantastic animals include sphinxes, centaurs, griffins, and a hippocamp (Winter 2009: 157), as well as real animals like felines, boars, rams, horses, and hippopotami (Tuck 2016: 111). The animal acroteria, like the striding figures, were oriented along the axis of the roof (Edlund-Berry 1993: 119).

Fig.7 Reconstruction drawing of a male sphinx, part of the acroterion. From the Archaic Building

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Ill. 3.8.3. 3.E.2.c.

The exact location of the sculptures along the ridgepole is unknown (Edlund-Berry 1993: 119) because the remains of the acroteria are often not found in the position where they would have fallen from the roof (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 209). Fragments have been discovered in four main locations across the site: alongside the building's north wing; in the fossa ditch which runs along the building's west wing; within the so-called "dump" past the fossa; and inside the courtyard (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 210). An assemblage of fragments belonging to the human figures has been discovered on the northern flank, which might indicate their original placement here (Winter 2009: 157). The animal acroteria may have occupied the roofs of the other three wings (Winter 2009: 157). **Fig.8** indicates how the acroteria may have looked on the roof.

Fig.8: Line drawing reconstructing the appearance of the acroteria on the roof of the Archaic building.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Ill. Roof 3-8. 3. Ridge.

Part Two: Reconciling the Building Function

The human acroteria figures that form the main subject of this paper have been variously interpreted in scholarship as divinities (Edlund-Berry 1993; Turfa & Steinmayer 2002; Rathje 2007), heroized ancestors (O'Donoghue 2013), and symbols of the surrounding community (Tuck 2016). These interpretations are problematic for a number of reasons. First, the fragmentary nature of the remains and their scattered find-spots makes a full reconstruction of the figures difficult. Second, they lack attributes that might aid their identification. Third, the understanding of the acroteria is tied up with the interpretation of the function of the Archaic Building as a whole (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 206), but there is little scholarly agreement about the use of the complex. Problems with interpreting the function of the Archaic Building stem from the fact that it was emptied of many of its goods prior to its abandonment (Tuck 2016: 111) and that many of the small finds that were discovered were recorded in a manner that would be deemed imprecise by modern standards (Rathje 2004: 59). There is also disagreement about the destruction of the building. Furthermore, few comparanda for the Archaic Building exist, save for one similar complex at Acquarossa, near Viterbo (Meyers 2013: 46). The effect that the proposed function of the building has on the interpretation of the acroteria can be shown through examining the various scholarly debates.

Sanctuary

Scholars previously believed that all Etruscan buildings decorated with architectural terracottas were religious (Phillips 1992: xv). The interpretation of the Archaic Building as a religious complex might lead one to identify the figures on the roof as gods. Figures of gods as acroteria are indeed found on sanctuary buildings throughout Etruria. Examples include the fragmentary acroteria

thought to represent Herakles and Athena from a temple at Satricum, dated 540-520BC (Winter 2009: 466), the central acroterial group representing Herakles and Athena from the second-phase of the Temple of Matuta at S. Ombono in Rome, dated 530BC (Winter 2009: 379), and the terracotta acroteria representing Herakles and Apollo from the Portonaccio Temple at Veii, dated 510BC (Neils 2008: 40). These acroteria are identified as deities by the presence of attributes such as the helmet of Athena and lion skin of Herakles.

Arguments for reading Poggio Civitate's Archaic Building as religious are made on the grounds of artistic comparanda and the supposed ritual destruction of the site. Artistic comparanda can be found in painted pottery and bronze reliefs from the Orientalizing period. Here, divinities are frequently represented alongside fantastic animals, and the presence of these two motifs together on the roof at Poggio Civitate has been taken to indicate that the seated figures are divine (Phillips 1992: 47). Another stylistic argument is made on the grounds that the seated acroteria are shown in a similar manner to seated figures on the assembly revetment plaques from the building (**Fig.9**) (Edlund-Berry 1993: 120). These figures are often interpreted as gods (Rathje 2007: 180).

Fig.9 Line drawing of one of the terracotta revetment plaques from the Archaic Building, illustrating an assembly scene. The participants in this scene are commonly interpreted as gods.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Ill. 3.7.3. 3.D.5.c.

The supposed ritual destruction of the Archaic Building may also indicate a religious function. Scholars see evidence for ritual destruction at Poggio Civitate in the burial of some of the architectural terracottas in the fossa ditch, 25m away from the building (Edlund-Berry 1993: 17). This has been taken to indicate the deliberate removal of these artefacts. There is comparative evidence from Etruscan religious contexts for the burial of sacred images. For example, the temple terracottas at Veii underwent a similar deposition (De Grummond 1997: 33). Other evidence for ritual destruction comes from a well on the site, which contained large quantities of roof tile, all dated to the Archaic period (Tuck et al. 2010: 97). The excavator has concluded that the tiles were deliberately deposited there as part of the ritual destruction (Tuck et al. 2010: 102). Ritual destruction of a site is thought to be an indicator of sanctity (Edlund-Berry 1993: 121), so this evidence has brought about the conclusion that Poggio Civitate was a sanctuary, and that the acroteria represent divinities.

However, there are many counterarguments to this theory. First, the plan of the Archaic Building is nothing like any other known religious structure (Phillips 1992: xv). There are no votives, altars, or religious inscriptions at Poggio Civitate, which are indicative of a sanctuary (Damgaard Andersen 1990: 79). The stylistic evidence is also problematic: that the figures on the assembly plaque are divinities is contentious (Damgaard Andersen 1990: 79); the assembly scene may equally represent mortal banqueters (Rathje 2007: 180). Furthermore, unlike the comparable examples of acroteria from Veii, Caere, and S. Ombono, which bear attributes of the gods and goddesses that they represent, no extant iconographic feature of the acroteria at Poggio Civitate suggests that they are divinities (De Grummond 1997: 36).

Additionally, the claim that the site was ritually destroyed is not universally accepted. Most arguments regarding the ritual destruction rest on the fact that the acroteria were ritually buried. But not all the terracottas from the Archaic building were found in the so-called ritual burial

area; some were found where they are likely to have fallen during the building's collapse (De Grummond 1997: 33). If ritual burial of the acroteria was the intention, the job was incomplete (De Grummond 1997: 33). It can be argued that the building was instead abandoned. This is indicated by the fact that many of the contents of the Archaic Building were removed prior to destruction, suggesting an intentional abandonment rather than catastrophic demolition (Tuck 2016: 111). Additionally, the erosion of the Archaic Building's eastern wing indicates that the destruction was a drawn out process (De Grummond 1997: 34). Due to the refutation of the ritual destruction evidence and the absence of votives and other religious material from the site, the theory that the Archaic Building had an exclusively religious function is now largely abandoned in scholarship.

Communal Meeting-Place

That the Archaic Building functioned as a sanctuary is not the only possible conclusion that can be drawn from the ritual destruction argument. Other proponents of the ritual destruction theory, working from the same evidence detailed above, state that the Archaic Building was thus destroyed because it was a powerful political center (Phillips 1992: 49). Phillips argued that the time, effort, and expense involved in ritual destruction indicate that Poggio Civitate was a center of political importance, destroyed as it posed a threat to neighbouring communities (Phillips 1992: 49). However, Phillips leaves the exact nature of the powerful political organization he believed to be based at Poggio Civitate obscure. There are two available theories: an organization of either local or regional significance.

Firstly, the building may well have served as a gathering place and mercantile center for the local community. Festivals, exchange, and trade necessitated a gathering of the population, and the current excavator suggests that Poggio Civitate was the place where this occurred (Tuck 2016: 112). The plan of the building has elements which might be suited to public use, including the large, two storied rooms within the Archaic complex's northern flank (Donati 2000: 324; Winter 2009: 153). The smaller rooms within the western and southern flanks may have been appropriate for use as shops (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 9). The complex thus might be seen as a venue for community interaction.

Conversely, others argue that the central location of Poggio Civitate within northern Etruria means that it served as a meeting place not for the local community but for an Etruscan league of northern cities. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* 3.51) refers to an alliance between the Etruscan towns of Volterra, Arezzo, Chiusi, Vetuloni, and Rusellae, and the site of Poggio Civitate was ideally placed to connect all of these urban centers (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 198). The sizeable Archaic building might have accommodated members of the league (Damgaard Andersen 1990: 79). If either of these interpretations about the public function of the Archaic Building hold true, the acroteria might thus be interpreted as symbols of these collective entities, either the local community, or the northern league (Tuck 2016: 112).

But again, these theories are problematic. Livy attests to the existence of an Etruscan League (4.23.5, 4.25.7, 4.61.2, 5.17.6, 6.2.2), which is believed to have met at the *Fanum Voltumnae* near Orvieto (Haynes 2000: 135; Stopponi 2014: 632), but nothing from Poggio Civiate suggests that such a league met at this site (O'Donoghue 2013: 273). Additionally, for the complex to be a gathering space for the local community, one would expect the Archaic Building to be the only structure of its type in the area. However, this is not the case. Poggio Civitate was not iso-

lated; there are thought to be several other courtyard complexes in the near vicinity (Acconcia 2012: 96-105). Consequently, that Poggio Civitate functioned as a central gathering place either for the surrounding community or for a league of cities is doubtful, as is the interpretation of the acroteria as emblems of these associations.

Elite Residence

Another theory is that the Archaic Building functioned as a domestic structure, the residence of an elite Etruscan family, on the basis of which, the acroteria are seen as either ancestors of this aristocratic dynasty (O'Donoghue 2013: 268), or divinities associated with them (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 9). Those who propose such a theory base their arguments on the few small finds from the Archaic Building and the elaborate architectural decoration.

That people lived on the site of Poggio Civitate is suggested by the discovery of domestic pottery and courseware (Damgaard Andersen 1990: 79). The size of the building, and the luxurious small finds of ivory and bronze, and imported Greek pottery (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 201) have been considered evidence that the building served as a residence for an elite family (Edlund-Berry 1994: 16). Although not peculiar to residential contexts, the aristocratic themes such as banqueting which are illustrated on the revetment plaques from the Archaic Building have also been taken to indicate that it functioned as a domestic complex (O'Donoghue 2013: 272). However, **the** original excavator wrote that it was "out of the question" for the building to be considered a domestic complex (Phillips 1992: xvi). Nevertheless, this paper, building on the above arguments made by O'Donoghue (2013) and Turfa and Steinmayer (2002), argues that an analysis of the plan of the Archaic Building confirms its residential function.

The plan of the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate may well indicate its use as a domestic structure. Although there are few well-excavated parallels in Etruscan archaeology for a structure like the Archaic Building, there is comparative evidence from Zone F in Acquarossa (**Fig.10**) (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 199).

Fig.10: Plan of the monumental residence in Zone F at Acquarossa. Dated to the second quarter of the sixth century.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Plan 2.2

At Acquarossa, a monumental residence was constructed in the mid 6th century, comprising two L-shaped buildings and a forecourt (Haynes 2000: 139). Like the complex at Poggio Civitate, smaller rooms were arranged around the central courtyard, which was porticoed on two sides. Small finds, including cooking stoves, hearths, and wool-working equipment, suggest that the Acquarossa building was domestic (Haynes 2000: 141). Although the complex at Acquarossa is smaller than the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate (Meyers 2012: 5), their similarities in plan and decoration (the roof at Acquarossa was also tiled and bore terracotta adornments (Damgaard Andersen 2001: 256)) mean that they may well have functioned similarly.

However, there are some notable differences between the two structures. For instance, the Acquarossa building is located in an urban area, unlike Poggio Civitate (Meyers 2013: 43). Furthermore, the large northern rooms in the Archaic Building are not paralleled at Acquarossa. This may shed doubt on the suggestion that the buildings functioned in the same manner. Nevertheless,

evidence from the Orientalizing period domestic structure at Poggio Civitate provides further parallels which link the Archaic Building with a domestic function.

At Poggio Civitate, Structure OC1 from the Orientalizing phase is almost universally identified as a residential building. Its identification is relatively secure, thanks to the numerous small finds. These include cooking equipment and inlays for furniture as well as banqueting equipment and precious metal jewellery (Tuck 2016: 107). Supporting evidence of a domestic function for OC1 comes in the form of faunal remains, which indicate the consumption of beef on the site, associated with elite banqueting (Kansa and MacKinnon 2014: 85). OC1 is comparable in size and plan to the large rooms in the Archaic Building's northern flank. There is also evidence that OC1 was two-storied (Haynes 2000: 115), like the Archaic Building's northern rooms. The argument that the northern part of the Archaic Building served a public function is based on its size, but the domestic use of the similarly sized Orientalizing period structure on the site suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Such large quarters could evidently serve a domestic purpose in the Orientalizing period and this may have continued in the Archaic phase.

The strong sense of continuity between the Orientalizing and the Archaic phases (Meyers 2013: 41) might add further weight to the argument that the later building continued the functions of the earlier complexes. The placement and orientation of the Archaic Building closely follows the Orientalizing structures OC1 and OC3 (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 3), seen when comparing the two plans in **Figs.2-3**. As well as the similarities in orientation and plan, the short lapse of time between the destruction of the Orientalizing complex and the construction of the Archaic Building has led some to conclude that the latter was built as a direct replacement for buildings OC1 and OC3 from the earlier phase (Edlund-Gantz 1972: 198). OC1 is confidently identified as a residence, but OC3 has prompted more debate. Its tripartite layout has led scholars to interpret it as a religious structure, because many later Etruscan temples took this form (Tuck 2009: 95). However, contemporary domestic structures with a tripartite plan have been found at Acquarossa (Potts 2011: 319). Therefore, OC3 may equally be interpreted as a domestic building. This could lend itself to the conclusion that the Archaic building was the successor to the domestic complexes OC1 and OC3, and that it fulfilled the same role. However, this alone is insufficient evidence to conclude that the Archaic Building served a residential function. Functions of buildings can change through different phases of occupation, as shown globally through examples such as the reuse of Neolithic-era chamber tombs as dwellings in late Bronze Age/early Iron Age Scotland (Hingley 1996); the repurposing of former Forum spaces as domestic complexes in mid-fifth century AD Emerita (Osland 2016); and the changing function of buildings used successively for habitation, storage, and livestock enclosures in Iran (Cameron 1991, 44-5). Nevertheless, the Archaic Building may still be interpreted as a domestic area, based on the arrangement of rooms in the western and eastern flanks of the building.

Prima facie, **the layout of** the western and eastern flanks **may resemble that of shops. However,** many of these **communicate with each other through internal doors (Fig.11), which is more indicative of a domestic structure. Rooms surrounding courtyards in domestic complexes are often connected in this manner, as seen in the plan of the eastern wing of the monumental residence from Acquarossa (Haynes 2000: 139). Competing vendors in neighbouring shops would be unlikely to have an interest in their premises being connected in this way. Therefore, it seems likely that the rooms in the western and southern flanks of the Archaic Building were also domestic.**

Fig.11 Plan of the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate. Arrows added by author to indicate internal doorways within the western and southern flanks.

Source: Drawing by Renate Sponer Za for Winter, Symbols of Wealth and Power, 2009, Plan 9.

In addition to this, the Archaic Building's courtyard structure may well have functioned in the same manner as the atrium in the Roman *domus*. Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History* 5.40) records that in domestic architecture, the Romans adopted the Etruscan invention of the peristyle courtyard,[^1] a structure used to contain the homeowner's entourage. The Roman form of this structure is known as the atrium (Prayon 2009: 60), the reception space where the Roman paterfamilias could receive clients for the *salutatio* ritual (***Platts 2016: 47***). ***The anecdote from Diodorus Siculus suggests that the Etruscan courtyard was used for similar purposes, which may mean that the courtyard at Poggio Civitate functioned as a semi-public space within a domestic complex, like the Roman atrium. However,*** the size of the 40m² courtyard (Winter 2009: 153) might make this proposal seem unlikely. Yet ***there is strong evidence that the Orientalizing building OC1, which is of comparable size to the Archaic Building, served a domestic purpose. This means that the size of the complex need not discount the interpretation of the Archaic Building having a residential function.***

If the Archaic Building did function as a domestic complex, it would be in keeping with trends seen in wider Etruria. Studies of general settlement patterns in Rome's hinterland show a growth in the total number of new sites during the Orientalizing period, with a twofold increase in the Archaic period (Fulminante 2014: 141). This has been interpreted as an aristocratic migration into the countryside (Fulminante 2014: 142). The theory finds support in the succession of so-called proto-villas, dating back to the 8th century, that have been discovered on Rome's Palatine; similar settlement patterns are also known at Poggio dei Cavallari at Satricum, beginning in the late sixth century (Fulminante 2014: 142). Therefore, if we choose to read the Archaic Building as a domestic complex, it would not be an anomaly in the Italian countryside, as other elite countryside residences exist in the region in the Archaic period. Overall, it seems highly likely that the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate functioned as a domestic complex.

Part Three: Interpreting the Acroteria

In Part Two, we reached the conclusion that the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate is likely to have served as an aristocratic residence. Now the implications that this function has on the interpretation of the acroteria can be ascertained.

Most scholars who view the Archaic Building as a domestic structure view the figural acroteria as heroized ancestors of the elite family, or deities associated with them. Advocates of the deity theory cite the sculpture's position on the roof as evidence for their status as gods, as they walk the sky in the manner of the divine (Warden 2009: 207). In addition to this, divine figures are very often accompanied by fantastic animals in Orientalizing art, and the presence of similar motifs on the roof at Poggio Civitate has led to the conclusion that the acroteria represent deities (Phillips 1992: 47). Stylistic parallels are cited as evidence of the acroteria representing aristocratic ancestors (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 9). These parallels include the seated figures from the Tomb of the Five Chairs at Cerveteri (**Fig.12**), dated 30 years earlier (O'Donoghue 2013: 276). The seated figures from this chamber tomb are thought to represent the ancestors of those interred within the complex (Haynes 2000: 93). These figures have much in common with the acroteria from

the Archaic Building in terms of form and positioning, which has led scholars to interpret similar meanings into the Poggio Civitate statuary.

Fig.12 Photograph of two of the terracotta seated ancestor statues from the Tomb of the Five Chairs in Cerveteri, dated to the seventh century BC (author's picture).

Straightforwardly interpreting the figural acroteria as divinities, however, is problematic. While distinction between sacred and secular is very clear in the modern realm (Edlund-Berry 1993: 121), Warden argues that such a definite divide was not applicable for an Etruscan audience (Warden 2009: 209-10). He theorises that for the Etruscans, divinity and mortality were not hard and fast categories but two points on a single spectrum, along which it was possible to move; he cites evidence for an Etruscan belief that one's status could move from human to immortal through the consumption of sacrificial meat (Warden 2009: 205). In addition to this, the elite of Etruscan society was theocratic, meaning that religious and secular powers were inseparable (Warden 2009: 198). This is illustrated in the texts from the Zagreb mummy wrappings, one of the few extant examples of substantial Etruscan literature. There are a series of prayers are preserved where the divinities are consistently referred to as noble (Warden 2009: 209). This emphasizes the conflation of the noble and the divine for the Etruscans (Rix 1997: 393). It therefore seems an anachronism to enforce the modern separate categories of "ancestor" and "god" onto the acroteria. It may be more appropriate, and closer to the original Etruscan perception of the sculptures, to consider the acroteria from Poggio Civitate as neither gods nor mortals.

This paper instead proposes that might be more appropriate to interpret the acroteria by considering their prominence and visibility, and the expenditure that their production necessitated. The acroteria were highly visible in the landscape; they were positioned two stories above ground level (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 9), on a hilltop building that would have been easily seen from the surrounding hills, and from the complex's southeastern approach (Meyers 2013: 52). They were handmade (Winter 2009: 509) with an incredibly high level of detail (Meyers 2012: 6) and their manufacture would have taken months, necessitating a substantial financial outlay (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 18). Firing the terracottas would also have been costly due to the expense of the charcoal required (Turfa & Steinmayer 2002: 18). This conspicuous consumption may well indicate that the acroteria should be interpreted as status markers, prominent symbols which conveyed the wealth of their owners.

In fact, the entire Archaic Building can be read as a public display of elite status and prestige. The huge area occupied by the building speaks of the elite residents' ability to control the landscape. The acroteria complement this by communicating of an ability to command resources and engage in conspicuous consumption. This interpretation also fits with the animal acroteria found on the roof. Although the original excavator, believing the seated figures to be gods, concluded that the fantastic animals served to augment the status of the divine figures on the roof (Phillips 1992: 24), there is no reason to believe that the same interpretation cannot apply when the figural acroteria are more broadly considered as status indicators. They can still be understood as enhancing the prestige of the roof, as it seems reasonable to assume that the real-life animals featured were chosen because they were held in high regard by the Etruscans (Harrison 2013: 1091). In Etruscan art from the Archaic period in general, domestic animals often accompanied the main images (Harrison 2013: 1091), and the acroteria fit with this overall trend. As for the fantastic animal acroteria, beasts of this type are usually interpreted as having an apotropaic role: they are seen as

protective figures on temples and tombs (Harrison 2013: 1099). This interpretation may also be applicable to the mythological animals seen on the Archaic Building roof; they might be read as protectors of the aristocratic occupants within. Therefore, the interpretation of the animal acroteria is in-keeping with that of the rest of the statuary from the roof, as collectively, the building itself, the figural acroteria, and the animal acroteria all convey the same message of wealth, power, and elite command over the landscape.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper has argued that the function of the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate was domestic, based on the internal layout of the building and its relationship to the preceding Orientalizing phase. As a consequence, this paper advocates the interpretation of the acroteria as status markers, symbols of the wealth and power wielded by the aristocrats who inhabited the Archaic Building. This approach is prioritized over that seen in existing scholarship, which favours the arbitrary categories of "mortal" or "divine".