Architecture, Religion, and Power: Building Gods into Early Rome

Introduction

Many scholars have considered how architecture may have influenced religious experience in pre-Roman central Italy. Studies have explored the ways in which monumental settings could have aggrandised religious agents and ceremonies; the capacity of tableaux to instruct viewers and guide action; and how the placement and scale of cult buildings seemingly reinforced the primacy of religion in communities and systems of value, among other topics[1]. Looking in the opposite direction, however, at the possible influence of religion on architecture, has been less popular. While this likely stems in part from uncertainties about both theology and how cult buildings were used in the first half of the first millennium BC, archaeology offers avenues for potential analysis. This paper calls attention to some of the relevant evidence and its utility for reconstructing the nature and limits of architectural power.

This facet of the relationship between architecture and religion will be examined by focusing on ritual deposits connected with the construction of buildings in Rome during the eighth and seventh centuries BC. The first part of the paper introduces four case studies that have been interpreted as foundation deposits. The second part argues that greater understanding of these deposits may be gained by recontextualising them within a wider pattern of ritual interactions with buildings at different points in their histories. The third part suggests what may have driven such actions and considers what they may indicate about perceptions of the emerging city. As a whole the paper thus uses relatively modest remains to explore possible interplay between physical and conceptual structures in early Rome.

[1] For example, PAIRAULT MASSA 1992, 72-75; WARDEN 2012; POTTS 2015; COLONNA 2000.

Case Studies

The four cases studies are all located in the centre of Rome and are often discussed with reference to one another due to their geographical, and to some extent chronological, proximity. All are smaller, less substantial pieces of architecture than the monumental temples and defences that followed in the Archaic period. Three are archaeologically attested and one is known only from literature, giving direct and indirect testimonies of practice.

The Porta Mugonia

Excavations on the north-east side of the Palatine hill in the 1980s uncovered evidence of centuries of occupation that included traces of a wall pierced by a door or gate dating to the late eighth century BC. More specifically, documented structures from this time include half of the threshold of a gate; a bastion with a nearby hut; and a portion of an earth wall reinforced with wooden posts and stone. The excavators have suggested that the wall was part of a defensive system that encircled the Palatine and that the gate was the Porta Mugonia[2].

A small collection of artefacts found in a pit beneath the threshold have been interpreted as a foundation deposit for the gate. The objects include two cups, one of them with a hemispherical Italo-geometric design made from depurated clay and the other a with a single, biform handle formed in dark brown impasto; a fine-clay rattle; two lozenge-shaped, arched fibulae; and a semi-worked, perforated bone disc, together suggesting a date of c.730-720 BC[3]. The pit measured approximately 80cm long x 40cm wide x 40cm deep and was sealed with a thin layer of clay beneath burned tufo flakes. The deposit may not be complete given it was disrupted by a later pit, but the excavators have also noted that the composition of the assemblage resembles that of the typical *corredo* or funerary equipment of a young girl in this

[2] RICCI *et al.* 1994-1995 (2000); CARANDINI 1997, 579-583; BROCATO 2000b.
[3] BROCATO 2000a.

period. The comparison has led to the deposit being interpreted as a cenotaph burial as well as a foundation deposit, and to the suggestion that it has the character of a symbolic or real human sacrifice connected with a child's body that is now absent or was never present[4].

The 'Doliola'

Near the centre of the Forum Romanum lie the concrete foundations of a structure that Boni excavated in 1902 and 1903 and subsequently identified as the *Equus Domitiani*[5]. The foundations have since been redated prior to the Augustan era and interpreted by Coarelli not as remnants of the equestrian statue but rather as an early part of the shrine known as the *Doliola*, the place where pots holding human remains or sacred objects were buried (Varro. *LL* 5. 157; Fest. s.v. *doliola*; Livy 5. 40. 6-8; Placid. 32, Deuerl.)[6]. Four hollowed-out travertine blocks or chests were found in the base. Three were empty but the westernmost one was found lidded and intact; its survival may be attributed to being placed lower in the ground than the other three and consequently overlooked when the area was being remodelled in the first centuries BC and AD[7]. The stratigraphy identified by Boni and later Gjerstad on the south side of the foundations suggests that the fourth chest lay between the first and second pavements of the Forum (layers 24 and 22A-23 respectively), and above the bodies of a man, woman, and child who were inhumed sightly south of the blocks (in layers 28 and 29)[8]. The dating of the pavements and the burials have been debated but their relative positions in the development of the Forum are reasonably clear.

The fourth chest held five vases from the Orientalising Period – including an olla, a small amphora, and cups – along with a gold nugget and slivers of turtle bones[9]. The

[4] BROCATO 2000a; FULMINANTE 2014, 83.
[5] BONI 1904, 574-577; GJERSTAD 1953, 22 with n.25, 82-85; FILIPPI 2007-2008, 628-636.
[6] COARELLI 1983, 282-298; FILIPPI 2005, 114-115 with fig. 119; FILIPPI 2007-2008, with fig. 16.
[7] GJERSTAD 1953, 84; GUSBERTI 2005, 125-126.
[8] GJERSTAD 1953, 49-52 with figs. 29-30; FILIPPI 2005, 103-115; FILIPPI 2007-2008, 628-636.
[9] GJERSTAD 1953, 82-85 with figs. 59-60; COARELLI 1983, 293; GUSBERTI 2005, 125-127 with fig. 124.

pottery dates to c.675-650 BC, which accords with recent reanalyses of Boni-Gjerstad's stratigraphy and related finds that would place the layer with the chest in the period between c.700 or 675 BC (layer 24) and c.675-650 BC (layers 22A-23)[10]. Scholars have proposed that the chronology and placement of the chest indicates that it may be connected with a ritual involved with the conclusion of the works relating to the first paving of the Forum, or one concerned with preparations for the installation of the second[11]. In addition, some scholars have suggested that the chests held funerary goods, either of the three bodies buried in lower layers nearby – which may have been human sacrifices intended to expiate the initial filling of the Forum valley over the earlier necropolis – or of Vestal Virgins buried in desecrated tombs in the vicinity[12]. Three of these four scenarios thus connect a deposit reminiscent of contemporary burial goods with a significant architectural context, in this case civic infrastructure.

The Building beneath the Later Regia

Beneath the building in the Forum Romanum that was identified as the *regia* in the nineteenth century lie a sequence of structures that have been reconstructed in different ways since their discovery in 1964-1965. In his capacity as the original excavator, Frank Brown issued two preliminary reports in which he identified the remains of buildings stretching from the Iron Age to the early empire, roughly grouped into a sequence that began with huts and progressed to a stone building with five phases[13]. The site was never fully published despite its importance for architectural, religious, and political histories. In the last decade the excavation archive has been reopened, however, and a team lead by Paolo Brocato and Nicola Terrenato have begun to re-examine the documents and finds in an attempt to fill lacunae and to calibrate some of the reconstructions, interpretations, and dating of

[10] FILIPPI 2005, 105-110; GUSBERTI 2005, 127; FULMINANTE 2014, 94.
[11] FILIPPI 2005, 114; GUSBERTI 2005, 127-128; FULMINANTE 2014, 94.
[12] GJERSTAD 1953, 84-85 with references; COARELLI 1983, 292-298.
[13] BROWN 1967; BROWN 1974-5.

select features[14]. This situation means that although the site is well-known elements remain provisional.

The features relevant for this discussion are two pits that were excavated in a context that falls chronologically between a series of post-holes and traces of hearths – generally interpreted as the remains of huts – and the construction of the first stone building in the second half of the seventh century BC[15]. One pit, located in trench sector 3-2, was oval and measured c.2.3m wide x 2.4m long x c.60-90cm deep. Inside were fragments of impasto ceramics including amphoras, bowls, plates, and jars along with pieces of charred wood that have been carbon-dated between c.679 and 636 BC[16], all sealed with a layer of depurated, almost white clay; the contents and the stratigraphy together date the pit to c.620 BC. The second, squarer pit was found in trench sector 6c and measured c.3.5m wide x 3.6m long x c.80-100cm deep. It too held pieces of impasto pottery and charred wood, as well as fragments of Italo-geometric and bucchero ceramics; was sealed with a layer of depurated, somewhat white clay; and is dated to c.620 BC. Both pits were created by being dug out of the alluvial layer that sealed the remains of earlier huts on the site and were placed at points that seem significant for the subsequent construction of the so-called Phase 1 building: the oval pit came to lie near the southeast corner of the reconstructed plan, while the square pit was located diagonally opposite, in the northwest corner[17]. The date, placement, and surface treatment of the pits have seen them interpreted as foundation deposits for the Phase 1 building[18].

[14] BROCATO AND TERRENATO 2016.
[15] For the measurements and descriptions of the pits (SU 25 and SU 37) see the archival documentation collected in TIMPANO 2023, Chapter 6, along with BROWN 1974-5, 19-21 with fig. 16.
[16] BROWN 1974-5, 19.
[17] BROCATO AND TERRENATO 2016, 15-16 with fig. 11.
[18] BROWN 1974-5, 19-21 (connected with a *liberatio* ritual); TIMPANO 2023, Chapter 6.

Terminus on the Capitoline

The fourth and final case study brings the type of architecture more typically associated with ritual deposits into this study. The Archaic phase of the Capitoline temple is justly famous, but the element relevant for this analysis is the smaller, earlier, and archaeologically unattested object that sources call the stone or altar of Terminus. Roman authors recount how this artefact was a focus of worship for the god and had to be incorporated into the structure of the Archaic temple when augurs determined that it could not be removed to facilitate construction (Livy 1. 55.1-4; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3. 69.3-6; Ovid *Fast.* 2.667-670). It consequently remained in situ and became part of the building, where it was regarded as significant enough for a hole to be included in the temple roof so that the god could continue to be worshipped under the open sky (Ovid. *Fast.* 2. 669-672; Fest. s.v. *Terminus* (p.368M); Serv. *Aen.* 9. 446). Conceptual chronology would place the relevant actions prior to the excavation of the foundation trenches for the temple, which archaeologists can date to the mid-sixth century BC, and sometime after the introduction of Jupiter's cult in what was traditionally regarded as either the reign of Romulus or Numa (Livy 1. 12.4-8; 1. 20.1-2). This timeframe would place the idea of the Terminus stone or altar in roughly the same era as the foundation deposits examined above. The stories that present it as an object of religious significance that was deliberately included in the construction of a building align it still further with the material that has left tangible remains.

The four case studies accordingly have a number of common characteristics. The deposits are all relatively modest: in material they forgo the richness of other assemblages in central Italy dating to the Orientalising Period, like those of the Regolini-Galassi tomb at Caere or the Bernardini tomb at Praeneste, and in quantity they differ from the thousands of objects that comprised the 'Archaic' votive deposit on the acropolis at Satricum or marked the cult place of Laghetto del Monsignore at

Campoverde.[19] Luxurious items were clearly available in the region to those with sufficient resources, but were not interred as part of the rituals that prepared the ground for these architectural projects at Rome. All four are also projects of import. Across a range of different types of architecture – possible defences; the central civic space; a residence that may have combined elite religious and political functions; and a landmark temple – the structures represent investment in the developing city. Together they point to a practice of giving humble, almost everyday objects a role in the processes that gradually produced urban infrastructure at Rome. The next sections consider why.

Interpretive contexts

The care with which unassuming objects were placed in the foundations of important buildings and protected in perpetuity implies that they had an importance separate from their economic value. Two related fields of study may offer hints about their purpose. The first is scholarship on foundation deposits in antiquity in general, focusing on the germinal stage of construction in a range of pre-modern societies. The second is the body of work examining ritual deposits associated with architecture in ancient central Italy, bringing a specific temporal and cultural context to a variety of practices connected with buildings at different stages of their histories. Both are potentially relevant for interpreting the evidence from early Rome and thus worth reviewing.

Ancient Foundation Deposits

In the archaeology of what can broadly be termed the Near Eastern and classical worlds, foundation deposits are a recognised category of artefacts that serve known architectural and ritual functions. The majority of examples come from Mesopotamia

[19] The 'Archaic' votive deposit at Satricum held approximately 20,000 objects dating from as early as the 11th or 9th century BC through to the Archaic period: BOUMA 1996, i. 81 with n. 264; WAARSENBURG AND MAAS 2001. Laghetto del Monsignore was a site of cult activity from the 10th until the 5th century BC; for quantification see VAN LOON 2010.

and pharaonic Egypt[20]. In those cultures, foundation deposits often include texts that recall the role of rulers in realising the buildings concerned, and serve as testaments to their power and wish to be remembered by those who follow. For example, the clay foundation cone deposited at Girsu (now Tello) carries an inscription that states how Gudea, the ruler of Lagash in c.2144-2124 BC, rebuilt the 'House with the White Anzu Bird' for the god Ningursi[21]. Over a millennium later, a clay cylinder that likely came from Babylon was inscribed with a proclamation that the king Nebuchadnezzer had uncovered the original foundations of a temple and placed his own inscription there[22]; another inscription gives the further detail that Nebuchadnezzer uncovered the inscription of the earlier king Naram-Sin in the same foundation deposit and added his own to it[23]. The words reveal an expectation that the deposits will one day be found and publicised, and thereby are part of the commemoration of rulers[24]. In this respect they are unlike the case studies from early Rome examined above, which preserve no names, seemingly have no individualising features, and appear to have been meant to remain hidden. Such differences highlight the need for interpretations to go beyond the general category of antiquity and to consider the specifics of time and place.

In the classical world, again broadly conceived, foundation deposits from Minoan and Mycenean buildings have been objects of study, as have select categories of deposits such as those connected with Greek temples[25]. Notable examples from the Greek world after the Bronze Age include some that contained precious metals and decorative objects, such as the approximately 800 small pieces of gold, silver, electrum, and other items in the fill of the foundations of the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus that date to sometime in the seventh or sixth century BC; and some comprised of ashes and ceramic vessels, as discovered during excavations associated with the so-called Temple D at Samos and dating to c.500 BC; and still others that

[20] Useful surveys include MONTET 1960 and WEINSTEIN 1973 (for Egypt), and ELLIS 1968 and AMBOS 2004 (on Mesopotamia), and STASSI 2022, 25-27.
[21] Glencairn Museum, Pennsylvania, inv. no. 01.IS.72.
[22] Glencairn Museum, Pennsylvania, inv. no. 01.IS.77.
[23] DA RIVA 2008, 27.
[24] DA RIVA 2008, 26-28.
[25] For example, BOULOTIS 1982; DONDERER 1984; LA ROSA 2002; HUNT 2006; WILBURN 2019.

have also yielded remains of animal and/or vegetal offerings[26]. With the possible exception of Priene, none have commemorative elements that enable to them to be connected to individual or collective patrons[27]. Formal similarities, however, have led one of the most extensive studies to argue that Greek foundation deposits and rituals were inspired by Near Eastern practices, entangling interpretations of their significance[28].

The religious dimension of these deposits is commonly held to involve attempts to provide buildings and their users with safeguards. Scholars have claimed that the rituals that produced foundation deposits sought to avert malign forces from the inhabitants and to confer protection from architectural failures such as collapse[29]. Roman history offers later insight into the awe and fear that people could feel as part of their experience of architecture. Suetonius, for instance, records how a crowd in the Theatre of Marcellus panicked when they feared for the integrity of the building (*Aug.* 43. 5), and the collapse of an amphitheatre at Fidenae during the reign of Tiberius is thought to have killed tens of thousands of spectators (Suet. *Tib.* 40; Tac. *Ann.* 4. 62-63). A common response to the scale and novelty of great architectural feats of Roman architecture hence was 'amazement tempered by unease.[30]' Given that the four case studies considered in this paper are buildings that were in the vanguard of building technology in late eighth and seventh-century Rome, it is possible that foundation deposits were prompted in party by perceived limitations in the safety and power of this architecture. Religion could consequently have been used as a buttress or safety net similar to other votive deposits.

The classical world also furnishes examples of foundation rituals associated with settlements. Descriptions by Vitruvius (1. 4. 9) of the ceremonies involved in

[26] HUNT 2006 with references.
[27] HUNT 2006, 200-201.
[28] HUNT 2006.
[29] DE BRUYN 1936; MÜLLER 2018; REED 2019; WILBURN 2019.
[30] TAYLOR 2003, 5.

founding Roman camps are relevant here, as is evidence of shafts holding structured deposits in the centre of Roman Dorchester and other Romano-British towns;[31] and although centuriation itself was not a religious act, the resulting boundary stones were sacrosanct.[32] Such evidence has led scholars like Joseph Rykwert to argue that that one of the objectives of such rituals was to align the physical plan of a town with conceptual and religious concepts[33]. Moving back in time to pre-Roman Italy, comparable ideas about communal forms being driven by cosmic ones have been advanced to account for the layout of Etruscan settlements like Marzabotto in the early fifth century BC[34]. Foundation rituals have also been mooted in connection with remains, often involving atypical burials, from the Iron Age at Etruscan centres such as Tarquinia and Veii.[35] Corinna Riva has identified the issues with interpreting these possible foundation deposits in the same terms as those from Roman towns centuries later, not least because the notion of a non-colonial settlement's foundation is opaque: it is difficult to identify a moment when a site with a long history of occupation could be considered to have been ritually 'founded.' As Riva suggests, it is more plausible that these early rituals and resulting deposits may relate to various stages of transformation rather than one incipient moment[36]. This idea paves the way for consideration of architectural deposits beyond those associated with foundations.

Ancient Architectural Deposits

Archaeology shows that buildings could receive ritual deposits at many different stages in their biographies. In pre-Roman Italy and beyond, there is evidence of deposits being placed in or near structures when they were created, altered, enlarged, reoriented, went out of use, and were dismantled. Multiple cases from Rome between the eighth and the fifth century BC have recently been researched by Vincenzo

[31] WOODWARD AND WOODWARD 2004.
[32] DILKE 1971, 98-99.
[33] RYKWERT 1976, 44-68.
[34] GROTTARELLI 2005; MALGIERI 2007; MORPURGO 2007.
[35] For overviews of the remains see BONGHI JOVINO 2010 and DE GRUMMOND 2016 (Tarquinia) and BARTOLONI AND SARRACINO 2017 (Veii).
[36] RIVA 2016, 98.

Timpano, including the interventions at the S. Omobono temple in the Forum Boarium[37], and in Latium and Etruria archaeologists have identified possible evidence of architectural deposits beneath walls at the Civita site at Tarquinia (and thus as part of the foundations); beneath the Temple of Mater Matuta on the acropolis at Satricum (in association with a phase change); in Area C at the monumental sanctuary of Pyrgi (as a means of preserving part of a temple once it had been dismantled); and a potential example of ritual destruction at Poggio Civitate (and thus perhaps an obliteration deposit)[38]. Moving from a focus on foundation deposits to an analysis of such events as parts of ongoing practices enables more consideration of how people used rituals to interact with buildings at moments of significant architectural change.

The four case studies from early Rome qualify for analysis from this perspective. The Porta Mugonia, for instance, received multiple ritual deposits over its centuries in use, while the building beneath the later Regia was likewise the site of depositions placed with care during what now appear to be four different phases.[39] The Forum Romanum came to hold cult sites and *templa* of individual fame, such as the Volcanal and Comitium, as well as temples, as it was reconfigured again and again. These examples of additional deposits range from assemblages of a few vessels to monumental installations, but arguably together hint at a culture of building that involved ritual markers potentially being laid down on a range of occasions.

Some of the interventions in the built environment under discussion include the ritual deposition of human and animal remains. As described above, certain scholars have connected the artefacts at the Doliola site with the interment of three people, while the history of the area around the Porta Mugonia gate and wall saw the subsequent

[37] TIMPANO 2023.

[38] CHIARAMONTE TRERÉ 1991 and BONGHI JOVINO 2005, 36 (Tarquinia); BOUMA 1996, i. 54-66 and SMITH 1999, 458-461 (Satricum, with explanations of how the Groningen and Dutch Schools differ on whether Votive Deposit I lay beneath Temple I or II); COLONNA 1970 (Pyrgi); EDLUND-BERRY 1994 (Poggio Civitate). An Archaic buildings on the *arx* at Gabii may represent another example of both ritual foundation and destruction: FABBRI 2015.

[39] RICCI *et al.* 1994-1995 (2000), 147-149, 158-159; BROCATO AND TERRENATO 2016.

enchytrismos burial of an infant, five inhumation tombs, and the remains of three butchered dogs[40]. Dunia Filippi has drawn on this type of evidence to argue that human entombments are one of the rituals that can be associated with the founding or destruction of significant public monuments in Rome in the eighth and seventh centuries BC[41]. Remains in such contexts can be interpreted then as architectural deposits. Framing them in this way, however, requires consideration of possible intersections with *suggrundaria*, the Latin term for infants buried in or near the eaves of buildings outside necropoleis. One could plausibly argue that *suggrundaria* were motivated by similar desires and intentions as other building deposits and belong in the same interpretive category. If so, then their presence in the remains of residences such as Domus 3 on the north side of the Palatine and the so-called Domus Regis Sacrificuli[42] would be additional grounds to recognise that architectural rituals were not restricted to what might be termed public, sacred, or civic structures in early Rome, but were part of building more generally where circumstances permitted. This leads again to considering a wider culture of building, one that may have been particular to Rome or shared by different settlements in early central Italy.

The aims of this wider range of architectural deposits are unlikely to simply echo those proposed in connection with foundations alone. Deposits made when a building went out of use or was dismantled, for example, are unlikely to represent requests for divine protection or favour for the inhabitants. In contrast, recognising the case studies as instances in what may be a sequence of ritual interactions with buildings during their life-cycles opens up a line of enquiry that combines architecture, ritual, and power. I now turn to exploring who the intended benefits of these deposits may have been and how such processes could have worked.

[40] RICCI *et al.* 1994-1995 (2000), 147-149, 158-159; CARANDINI 1997, 505-506; CARANDINI 2000; GALLONE 2000; DE GROSSI MAZZORIN AND MINNITI 2006, 65; FULMINANTE 2014, 84-86.
[41] FILIPPI 2007-2008; cf. STASSI 2022, 25-31
[42] CARANDINI AND CARAFA 2000, 60, tav. 57; FILIPPI 2007-2008, 619-628.

The Social Context of Building

One could begin by seeing the rituals associated with architectural deposits in the same vein as much other religious activity, namely a way to enhance the power of those closely involved, for example officiants or owners. Yet, most of the religious activity that underpins this reading relies on visibility: the activity gained value through being seen to happen or by remaining on display in some form afterwards. Architectural deposits admittedly may accord with this criterion in the same way that funerary equipment is believed to have done in in the Orientalising Period, in that it was likely seen during the relevant ritual and then hidden from public view. Nevertheless, the relative modestly of the foundation deposits in the case studies seems to suggest something different. Their quantity and quality do not seem to have been selected to provide a spectacle at any point. They moreover remain part of the building forever. The placement of primary deposits was presumably part of the mechanism by which they achieved their desired effect, and thus the fact that these deposits were occluded from human eyes for the majority of their ritual use tilts interpretations farther away from those based on notions of visibility and performance. Their concealment instead leads to the suggestion that the primary audience for these deposits was not human.

The intended audience accordingly could have been either the structures themselves or entities who were being induced to act. It is possible to mount an argument that buildings had their own agency and were thus capable of receiving offerings in their own right. Grounds for this theory include the practice of interring some buildings with ceremonies akin to burials when they went out of use, and that material gifts appear to have marked important stages in in the biographies of some buildings just as they did in human lives. The upright burial of acroterial statues from the Temple in the Portonaccio sanctuary at Veii; the preservation of the Pyrgi tablets following the dismantling of Temple B; and perhaps the ‘ritual destruction’ of the Archaic complex at Poggio Civitate all illustrate the idea of careful treatment after obliteration, while

the evidence for deposits associated with transitions in building phases at sites like the Regia and the S. Omobono temple in Rome support the idea of tangibly acknowledged changes[43]. When examined in the context of central Italic votive practices, however, ritualised deposits often seem to have been curated and placed in an effort to engage with the most powerful members of the community. Ceramics and other, frequently utilitarian, objects were repeatedly used as offerings that anchored exchanges with gods and represented obligations on both sides; even if left in a temple or sanctuary, the foremost beneficiary is thought to have been a deity rather than the physical space that housed them.[44] Much about early Roman religion is necessarily speculative but scholarship would encourage a reading of the four case studies as the products of interactions with deities that were placed where they could secure ongoing results, similar to later and better-attested types of votive deposit. The next step is therefore to ask why these buildings, as opposed to more narrowly defined cult buildings, might have been regarded as suitable receptacles for deposits that would be concealed when in place.

It may be the case that for all that architecture could demonstrate or have its own inherent power, it was desirable for religion to regulate that power or add still more value. In building projects with a communal dimension, rituals that forged a lasting link between a structure and the divine may have been a way to reduce potential friction or tension caused by construction and a means of legitimising the use of resources. This scenario posits that religion could have been a way to manage or moderate the potential power of architecture for communal good. In a related vein, and admittedly taking the risk of drawing on much later Roman concepts, ritualised deposits might also have alleviated any moral tension that arose in architectural projects that seemed at risk of competing with nature or the gods in their role as the ultimate makers and world-shapers[45]. Both of these hypotheses link to Christopher

[43] GIGLIOLI 1919, figs. 2-3 (Veii); COLONNA 1970 (Pyrgi); EDLUND-BERRY 1994 (Poggio Civitate); TIMPANO 2023 (Rome).
[44] For overviews of votive practices in Latium see BOUMA 1996 and SARRACINO 2020; for Etruria see BONGHI JOVINO 2005 and TURFA 2006.
[45] DELAINE 2002.

Smith's concept of enchanted cities in pre-Roman Italy, specifically in the way in which religion may have been a tool to defuse tension and manage the stresses that arose as communities grew and transformed[46]. Religion could thus have functioned as a form of mortar that spread the load and bound mortals and immortals together in the developing cityscape.

The concept of enchanted cities can be taken further still. These architectural deposits may have signalled that the gods, tethered to buildings by permanent deposits, were being literally built into the emerging city. This notion has parallels in the art and literature of late Republican and early imperial Rome when gods feature in scenes of construction. A sculpted frieze from the Basilica Aemilia in Rome shows a female figure watching men building a wall connected to an impressive gate; two female figures, either goddesses or personifications, observe walls being built in the painted decorations of the columbarium of the family of T. Statilius Taurus on the Esquiline hill at Rome; Neptune and Apollo gaze at workmen building stepped structures in a fresco in the atrium of the House of Siricus in Pompeii; and a similar scene appears in a mural from the baths of the San Marco villa at Stabiae[47]. The traditional interpretation of these scenes is that the presence of deities signifies that the subject is not the creation of generic architecture but rather the foundation of a notable city, such as Rome, Lavinium, Alba Longa, or Troy[48]. The images then become visual expressions of claims by authors like Vitruvius and Virgil that construction, the divine, and civilisation are intertwined (for example, Vitr. *De Arch.* 2. 1. 6; Virg. *Aen.* 1. 421-438). The gods turn utilitarian structures into parts of a civilised, urban community. Religion thus confers power on architecture or, in other words, cult transforms buildings into culture. Religion may hence signal one of the perceived limits of architectural power in its own right.

[46] SMITH 2021.
[47] ADAM 1980.
[48] CARETTONI 1961, 16-21; ADAM 1980, 216-217; DELAINE 2002, 219-220; HOLLIDAY 2005, 94-96.

An alternative way to explore beliefs about the relationship between building deposits and religion is to apply concepts from the social sciences. One could propose that both the case studies and the images represent a long-lasting part of Rome's religious imaginary. This idea has been developed by philosophers and sociologists, among others, and is closely related to the idea of the social imaginary formulated by Charles Taylor. Taylor used the term to describe the way that people come to understand their environment by way of stories, images, and symbols, and moreover how they conceive of their relationships to one another and their surroundings.[49] In a religious imaginary, religion functions not just as a type of spirituality but as a form of thinking: material religion confers meaning and shapes the world.[50] Viewing architectural deposits and the subsequent images of gods involved in construction from this perspective implies that the gods were thought capable of being built into the urban fabric, either encouraged or compelled to be present via efficacious rituals. Such practices would make immanent gods part of the city and community and be thought bound to its life and identity.

If architectural deposits are interpreted as attempts to build gods into the community, then related rituals may have been intended to activate and deactivate, or at least as efforts to negotiate, certain types of divine participation in society. Religious officials in the specific context of Rome in the late eighth and seventh centuries BC might thus have used architecture as a tool in the formation of not just the built environment but also the social and conceptual ones that influenced it, and were in turn influenced by it. This is not to suggest that architectural deposits were the sole or even a necessary way to create *templa* and to anchor gods to a locale. Instead, it suggests that the ritual may have been a hitherto overlooked method that should be included in the panorama of ceremonies, classifications, designs, and actions that wove the sacred into the physical dimension of the early city.

[49] TAYLOR 2004.
[50] DIELEMAN 2012, 3, 17-18; REED 2019, 2.

Conclusion

Inferring the meanings of architectural deposits in early Rome is not simple. It is useful to raise a range of possible motivations and effects, however, as a way to encourage further reflection on how people perceived, interacted with, and gave meaning to the buildings amongst which they lived. Recognising the range of structures that received deposits expands discussions about the relationship between architecture and religion beyond buildings typically associated with cult, while acknowledging affinities with other types of ritual deposit reduces the risk of artificially isolating foundations. The outcome is a suggestion that these deposits are valuable evidence for reconstructing how the power of architecture was conceived and perhaps manipulated in Rome in the eighth and seventh centuries BC. Outlines of the potential building blocks of the community arguably thus begin to come into greater focus even if some aspects, for now, must remain speculative.

Dr Charlotte R. Potts
University of Oxford and Somerville College
charlotte.potts@classics.ox.ac.uk

Il presente contributo esamina depositi di fondazione come segni dal potere relativo della religione e dell'architettura nella prima Roma. Gli esempi dei depositi presso la porta Mugonia, il Sacello dei Doliola, l'edificio sotto la successiva Regia, e racconti del santuario di Terminus sul Capitolino dimostrano come offerte modeste diventarono elementi di strutture importante nell'VIII e nel VII secolo a.C. Il contributo sostiene innanzitutto che questi depositi dovrebbero essere interpretati dalla prospettiva dei depositi effettuati in molti momenti diversi nelle biografie degli edifici nell'Italia centrale. L'analisi poi ricorre dei contesti archeologici, confronti alla Roma più tardi, e modelli delle scienze sociali per suggerire come questi rituali avrebbero potuto riguardato gli edifici e i loro utenti.

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