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III. Papers

Origins of Etruscan Cities.
A Brief Analysis of Recent Interpretations within Italian Research

Ulla Rajala
Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge
Cambridge CB2 3DZ, United Kingdom. E-mail: umr20@cam.ac.uk

Introduction

In this paper I will discuss briefly the transformation of different theories regarding the origin of Etruscan city-states during the history of Italian archaeology. The question of state formation can be seen as one of the key problems of Italian archaeology. Generally, the concept of Italian archaeology can be understood in two different ways: it can either refer to the research undertaken by Italian archaeologists themselves, or to research in or upon Italy by any member of the archaeological community. I will concentrate on the first sphere of studies, in order to stress the academic context of discussion being analysed. Furthermore, there has been very little research on the history of Italian archaeology outside Italy (cf. Loney 2002).

Figure 1. A view over Tarquinia.

When talking about Etruscan cities, I refer to the big urban centres of central Italy acknowledged traditionally as being such. An Etruscan city as a concept has for a long time been a synonym for the geographical locations of the centres of 12 Etruscan tribes. Lost cities such as Veii, Cerveteri, Tarquinia and Vulci have been the starting points of Etruscan studies, past and present. Because Etruscan *poleis* were independent, and because the rough territorial division was preserved in the system of Roman administrative districts (cf. Torelli 1987:97–116), the territories under their domination are often considered to be a part of their definition. But when did they begin their existence, and how one can determine the crucial moment? These questions were asked when the origins of the Etruscans were discussed at the turn of the century, and again when the birth of the urban areas has been the centre of inquiries. At both times, the different answers have induced an intensive discussion within the field in Italy.

Urbanisation has been a central issue in Italian settlement studies during the last few decades (cf. e.g. di Gennaro 1986; Mandolesi 1999; Pacciarelli 1991, 2000). Interestingly, there has never been such a contemporary multi-author synthesis on Etruscan urbanisation as was published for Latial studies in 1980 by the journal *Dialoghi di Archeologia*. The volume echoed the interest raisen after the 1976 exhibition on the excavations of archaic Latial centres. There was not an exhibition of that kind in etruscology until the beginning of the new millennium (cf. Sgubini Moretti *et al.* 2001).

A cultural historical problem: the origins of the Etruscans

The discussion of origins has been one of the main themes in etruscology, from the beginning of the subject way into the 20th century (Pallottino 1942). The rich Etruscan tomb finds, with high quality Greek vases and varied funerary architecture, and the unique quality of Etruscan language as an isolated island in the middle of its Indo-European neighbours, attracted much attention and stirred the imagination of the academic community. The main question asked was: where did these highly cultured people come from? The question was a natural one in the atmosphere of diffusionism and cultural historical archaeology – and it continued the

origins discussion already begun during the Roman times (cf. DH I, 26, 2). Although this question seem to be separate from the one of the origins of urban centres, all three answers, 1) they came from east, 2) they came from north, and 3) their culture was autochthonous, are essential in understanding the present state of the urban studies today. The theories also help us to review how archaeologists have used archaeological evidence in order to provide interpretations of a series of formation processes leading to the birth of Etruscan culture and Etruscan cities alike.

For those who defended the eastern origins, the crucial moment was the Orientalising period from the 8th century BC onwards. They saw eastern imports and influences as a proof of newcomers in the area. The theories supporting the northern direction were based on the assumption that the emergence of the Villanovan culture during the Early Iron Age was due to the spreading of the northern cremation cultures in the area south of the Alps. The scholars who supported autochthonous evolution saw the similarities between the Chalcolithic, the Bronze Age and the later periods as a proof of a continuous process of local transformations. They also made use of the linguistic evidence as well as earlier prehistoric archaeological material.

The periods that were central to the discussions of the origins of the whole culture have all been more than crucial within the reasoning of the latest theories. Furthermore, the existence of the literary evidence on the one hand and the archaeological material on the other, has been one of the central factors explaining the existence of two differing views on the birth of Etruscan towns in Italian archaeological research.

This dichotomy stems from the very formulation of different academic disciplines inside archaeology during the late 19th century and early 20th century at the Italian universities. Traditionally, the continuum of time and the succeeding archaeological periods are divided so that the periods labelled as prehistoric, i.e. those preceding and including the Early Iron Age, are studied by the prehistorians, while the etruscologists concentrate on 'historical' times from the Orientalising period to the beginning of Roman domination. The very existence of temporarily defined disciplines has profoundly influenced research and resulting interpretations, because the theories formulated by different scholars have been closely tied to their academic discipline and its temporal and material scope.

A processual problem: the origins of Etruscan cities

The definitions of simple concepts we have in everyday use in archaeology seem to be the most difficult ones. Inside or outside the discipline of archaeology no one has ever come up with the definitive definition of 'urban', 'town' or 'city'. In geography, a city has traditionally been defined as 'a geographic area designated by a special name, comprising a large aggregation of people living primarily off non-agricultural pursuits and recognized by both its inhabitants and its chartering authority as a city' (Martingdale 1984:9). This standard definition has been formulated in social sciences and social factors seem to be key when defining a city. In modern Britain, of all characterisations of urban, the most notable seem to be functional (Grove 1972:560). The services and social functions that urban places offer make the difference between a town and a village. These contemporary definitions cannot be applied directly in archaeology. The translation has to be modified to material culture.

In Anglo-Saxon archaeology, the definition of archaeologically urban has led to the creation of lists of crucial elements to be found in the physical or the social world in any given context. In his day Childe (1950) listed ten different points, including geographic area, monumental architecture, the existence of class society, arts and writing. In principle, his list defined better

the attributes of a civilization than those of a town. Therefore, in order to study the origins of urbanism, one could not limit the research and theorization solely on the attributes of urban. Instead of just describing existing elements, archaeologists looked for the determining factors turning prehistoric villages to urban centres (Trigger 1972). 'New archaeology' led to the analysis of the interdependent relationships between different parts of a cultural system to understand the processes. Increasing population was considered crucial; an increase in food supply, rural unemployment, craft specialization, trade, administration and defence were among the determinants promoting this increase. The simplest list of crucial factors was the one by Renfrew (1975). He listed only three factors, namely population agglomeration and craft specialisation, socio-religious focus, and local diversity. These three together defined not urban but protourban, a distinct evolutionary phase between a village and a proper town. Using this definition Alessandro Guidi (1989) has argued that the large-scale protohistoric settlements on the sites of future Etruscan cities are a sign of this intermedian phase. Furthermore, Guidi (1982) has stated that the settlement pattern in Latium had been protourban already during the 9th century BC.

Not surprisingly, processual discussions have mainly influenced Italian prehistorians like Guidi, while etruscologists have proposed less evolutionary theories emphasizing the civilized nature of urban culture. An etruscologist, Carmine Ampolo (1980), based his theories on the writings of the 19th century scholar Foustel de Coulanges. Like de Coulanges, Ampolo saw 'city' as a structural term reflecting the existence of citizenship, land ownership and civil and religious administration. The definition of urban was essentially social and the research concentrated on funerary material in order to find clear signs of social stratification. The securely documented signs were from the end of the Orientalising period, the latter part of the 7th century BC. A more recent etruscologist Marco Rendeli (1991, 1993) has dated the development of cities as territorial entities slightly earlier, suggesting that cities emerged around the beginning of the Orientalising period. He argues that the tumuli built around southern Etruscan cities could be interpreted as boundary markers, and a proof of stratified society and land ownership. Rendeli agrees with Ampolo on the date of the birth of a sovereign state, which would have emerged between the end of the Orientalising period and the beginning of the Archaic period. These views have been shared by younger etruscologists in a recent study of the burial material from Veii (Belardinetti *et al.* 1997).

Of the prehistorians discussing the beginning of urban settlement, Francesco di Gennaro (1986, 1988, see also di Gennaro and Peroni 1986) has presented a theory of a profound and drastic change between the Final Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. His main argument is that the concentration of population to the larger centres during the Villanovan period is the decisive moment in the process; the restructuration of settlement pattern would have been a result of synokismos on the large scale. He has put forward a view that the landscape was deserted in Etruria and the inhabitants of tens of villages came together and moved to the future sites of Vulci, Tarquinia, Cerveteri and Veii. This centralisation was the beginning of Etruscan territorial system, although as he points out, the administrative system was different from the later Etruscan system.

Marco Pacciarelli (1991) has later dated the process even further back in time. He has pointed out the fact that many of the defensible locations occupied during the Villanovan period were settled already during the Middle Bronze Age. However, the make-up of the settlement pattern was different and during the Middle and Recent Bronze Ages the centres coexisted with a series of smaller open sites. The latter disappeared during the restructuration between the Final Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age. Among the prehistorians, there seems to exist a consensus that the urban process followed the outline presented by di Gennaro and Pacciarelli (cf. Bietti Sestieri 1996). The latest monographs approve the scheme although they

emphasise the longevity of the settlement in larger centres like Vulci and Tarquinia (cf. Mandolesi 1999, 2000; Iaia 1999).

Although there is no disagreement on the restructuration of the settlement pattern, there is a divide among the prehistorians over the type of social structure present in the centres. Most prehistorians acknowledge that there were larger centres with developing social hierarchy already during the Final Bronze Age. However, some prehistorians agree with the etruscologists on the limited size and social hierarchy of earlier centres (cf. Peroni 1990). The dispute between the 'primitivists' and 'modernists' will be reconciled when the relevant funerary material will be published (Peroni pers. comm.).

Conclusions: the origins of urbanism and the origins of state formation

The interpretations put forward by the prehistorians and etruscologists are different for the obvious reasons: firstly, the temporal scopes of their disciplines are different, but most importantly, the starting points of their studies are chronologically separated. Not only are they analysing different periods, but they are looking for slightly different things from different points of view. Basically, Pacciarelli and di Gennaro have been looking for the birth of territorial systems with central *foci*. The etruscologists have been tracking the beginnings of the political and institutional structures connected with the Greek-modelled *poleis*. These are clearly not the same thing. In fact, the etruscologists are studying the origins of a state whereas the prehistorians are looking for the first possible signs of urbanism. Di Gennaro and Guidi have dated the origins to the Early Iron Age. Following Pacciarelli's arguments, the development could have happened even earlier.

When comparing differing interpretations, one finds some similarities. All agree that the stately administration was a late phenomenon belonging to the 7th century BC, at the earliest. Aristocracy as we know it was born during the Orientalising period. Furthermore, the scholars agree usually on the date of the urban expansion when the satellite towns were founded. This would have happened during the Orientalising period. These similarities only reinforce the interpretation that the time perspective used by the etruscologists is too limited. The funerary studies have lately emphasised the importance of the end of the Early Iron Age in the process (Iaia 1999), and therefore, that of integrated approach.

The need for an integrated view on Etruscan cities is apparent: the study of the whole process is possible only when the prehistoric and Etruscan approaches are united. In my own PhD the process of urbanisation was approached from a long-term point of view. The intention was to try to challenge the idea of the deserted minor centres during the Early Iron Age, and to review the existence of rural presences and absences. An integrated temporal synthesis on changes, backed by new fieldwork, did not alter di Gennaro's model on a profound change between the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age but it emphasised the early origins of the territorial system and the existence of an early state module (Rajala submitted). By continuing to look for new points of view one can be sure that the present 'archaeological truths' on urbanism in Etruria reflect the past state of affairs.

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