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Transformations of Value: Lived Religion and the Economy

Preface

Claudia Moser, Christopher Smith

Transformations of Value: Lived Religion
and the Economy

Maria Cristina Biella

Gods of Value: Preliminary Remarks on Religion
and Economy in Pre-Roman Italy

Claudia Moser

Sacred Outreach: The Infrastructure of Port Sanctuaries
in Republican Latium

J. B. Rives

Animal Sacrifice and Euergetism in the Hellenistic
and Roman Polis

Elizabeth DePalma Digeser

Crisis as Opportunity: Urban Renewal
and Christianisation in Constantine's Gaul

Michele Renee Salzman

The Religious Economics of Crisis: The Papal Use of
Liturgical Vessels as Symbolic Capital in Late Antiquity



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Maria Cristina Biella

Gods of Value: Preliminary Remarks on Religion and Economy in Pre-Roman Italy

Abstract

This paper argues that the monumentalisation of sanctuary sites, and the practice of depositing votives in the form of bronze figurines, can be understood as a bridge between economic and religious behaviour. The first activity channels community resources and an examination of architectural terracotta decoration can thus reveal rational decisions concerning resource allocation. The second activity may be considered as part of the same nexus of behaviour which would operate with weights and measures, including coinage. Both reflect transformations of value through religious spaces and behaviours.

Keywords: sanctuaries, temples, votive deposits, artisans

1 The economy of the sacred in ancient pre-Roman Italy: some remarks

The category of ‘the sacred’ is undoubtedly one of the most frequently investigated aspects of ancient pre-Roman Italy, both in the Tyrrhenian area and in the inner regions of the Italian peninsula.¹ It is important to remember that the direct sources that we can rely upon for our interpretations of the phenomenon are primarily drawn from the archaeological and epigraphic records. Surviving written sources can only be considered as indirect evidence, since most of them were produced in later periods and by writers who belonged to different cultural systems (Greek and Roman). Thus, the scholarship has paid particular attention to the manifestations of the sacred in the archaeological record in order to find hermeneutical tools and processes to uncover the rules of religious experience through the analysis of material culture.²

1 Di Fazio 2017 with previous bibliography.

2 A broad overview of the Etruscan and Italic sacred places can be found in Torelli 2005.

In particular, it is a well-known fact that the gradual shift of interest in twentieth century Etruscan and Italic studies from the so-called ‘city of the dead’ to the ‘city of the living’, especially in the Tyrrhenian area, led to the discovery of an incredibly rich set of data connected to sacred areas. Pre-Roman sanctuaries have now been scrutinised from almost every possible point of view. The architecture of sacred buildings has been carefully studied in all of its details.³ A taxonomic approach to the sacred areas, to the votive deposits, and to the different kinds of materials from which they are composed has been attempted.⁴ Recently, particular attention has been paid to the relationship between the social and political territorial organisations of the regions of pre-Roman Italy and the different ways in which the category of the sacred was shaped.⁵

Notwithstanding this multifaceted approach, much work remains to be done in order to understand some of the functions that are connected to the Etruscan and Italic sanctuaries. In particular, the economic dimension has remained somewhat in the shadows.⁶ In the introduction to the still seminal catalogue of the 1985 exhibition *Santuari d’Etruria*, G. Colonna stated:

La funzione economica dei santuari era ovviamente preminente in quelli che si trovavano al centro di attività empiriche, in quanto gravitanti sui porti (Gravisca, Pyrgi, Foro Boario a Roma [...]) o mercati che attiravano mercatores da lontano, come il lucus Feroniae presso Capena [...]. Ma comunque il santuario era sede di operazioni economiche, sia per l’amministrazione di eventuali proprietà del dio, sia per la produzione almeno della maggioranza degli ex-voto che i fedeli offrivano [...]. Normale era inoltre la gestione di fornaci addette alla produzione delle grandi quantità di tegole e di rivestimenti fittili necessarie per la manutenzione dei templi [...]. Non va infine trascurata la costosa fornitura degli animali richiesti per il sacrificio e tutto il complesso delle attività indotte [...].⁷

Most of the single issues addressed in this statement still need to be fully examined and – *ça va sans dire* – such an investigation would be far beyond the scope of the present work (and possibly also beyond the competence of

Furthermore, an attempt to create a ‘typological grid’ of the sacred areas in relation to the Etruscan urban structure has been carried out by, for instance, Colonna 1985.

3 For a recent updated picture, see Potts 2015 with previous literature.

4 See recently Torelli et al. 2006. An attempt at a shared typology of the different materials composing the votive deposits has been carried out in the several series of the *Corpus delle Stipi Votive in Italia*, directed by Mario Torelli and Annamaria Comella. An analysis of the different kinds of votive deposits found in the Italian peninsula can be found in Comella 1981 and Fenelli 1975.

5 For the Etruscan area, see Govi 2017. For the Apennine region, see Stek 2009.

6 Recent partial works on the subject are Potts (in press); Haack 2014; Morcillo 2013; and Chericci 2012.

7 Colonna 1985, 25.

a single scholar). Nevertheless, in this paper I try to get a glimpse at some of these issues. More specifically, it is my intention to investigate the ways in which expenditure impacted the use and management of 'public' resources in relation to ancient pre-Roman sanctuaries. Where possible, I will also discuss the consequences those choices had for the private sphere.

I will analyse this phenomenon as it appears in two different moments: the first is connected to the monumentalisation of the sacred areas and the second to the moment in which the sanctuary is in 'full activity'. I will also focus on the different actors on this stage: the 'public authority' (whose clear definition in the different moments and settings of pre-Roman Italy often remains ambiguous),⁸ the artisans responsible for the production, and the worshippers connected to the consumption of the goods. I will try to achieve this aim by analysing the material evidence through the lens of a new perspective.

I am well aware of the fact that the 'when' and the 'where' in the extremely multifaceted mosaic of what we call pre-Roman Italy are two extremely relevant categories;⁹ thus, it is not my intention to generalise from specific examples. Instead, I would like to draw attention to two specific case studies from which we can extract a methodological approach that can then be used to tackle other situations. I believe that doing so will create the basis for a better understanding of the economic processes in Italian pre-Roman sanctuaries. The two specific case studies I will work on are the city of Falerii in the Tyrrhenian area (fig. 1) during the fifth to third centuries BCE, and the Hellenistic small votive bronzes, especially (but not exclusively) those connected to the general Apennine region.

It is worth emphasising the value that a paper on the pre-Roman phase of Italian history can have for the study of subsequent periods. While the subject might seem almost to be off-topic, it must be remembered that the roots of the Roman religion can be traced, in part, back to pre-Roman religious experiences. Moreover, a good number of 'Roman' sanctuaries in ancient Italy also originated in the pre-Roman moment, as did the cults associated with them that 'developed', changed, and were meaningfully reshaped

8 For an overview of the Etruscan political organisation through the centuries, see recently Tagliamonte in Naso 2017, 121–141. For an analysis of the political organisation and social structure of pre-Roman Italy, see Bourdin 2012, 175–355. Interesting considerations concerning the 'public' and the 'private' spheres in the Etruscan cities, and their mutual interrelations, can be found in Izzet 2007, 165–207.

9 In this respect, it is important to bear in mind the stimulating theoretical picture of a two-speed ancient Italy drawn by Torelli (Torelli 1988, updated in Torelli 2014).

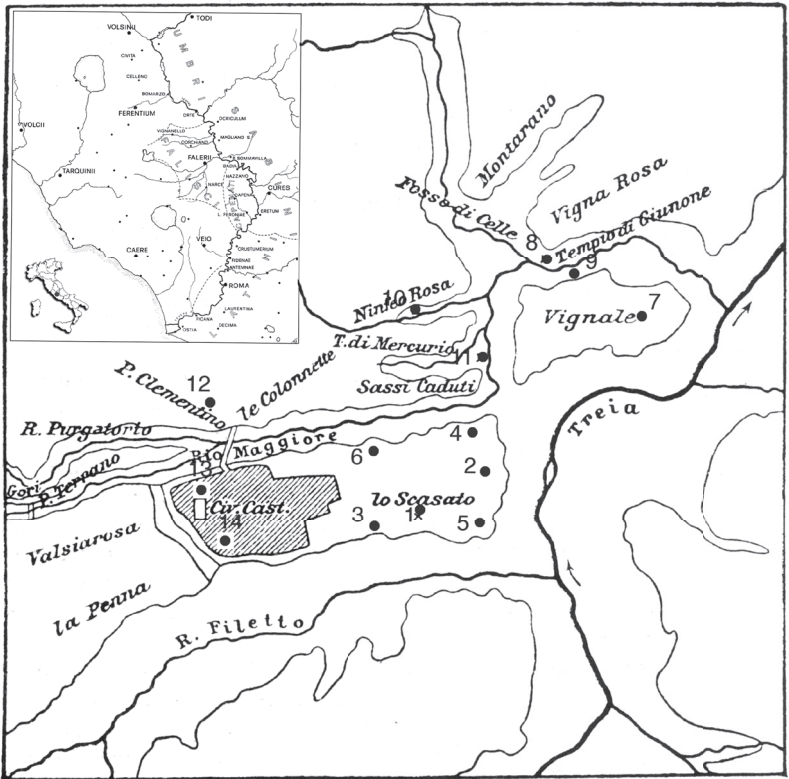


Fig. 1: *Falerii*, the sacred areas. 1. Scasato 1; 2. Scasato 2; 3. Via Gramsci; 4. Monache-Ospedale; 5. Near the South-East edge of the plateau; 6. *Officina tramvia*; 7. Vignale; 8. Celle; 9. Sassi Caduti/Celle; 10. Ninfeo Rosa; 11. Sassi Caduti; 12. Sacred area of the Andromeda chained to the rocks; 13. Via delle Conce; 14. Palazzo Feroldi De Rosa.

through time and space (see Moser, this volume).¹⁰ Therefore, the ‘Roman phase’ could/should, in many cases, be read in light of a complex process of continuity, i. e., as a further ‘development’ of something that already existed.¹¹

¹⁰ In this regard, see, for instance, the interesting case of Feronia, recently critically reconsidered in Di Fazio 2013.

¹¹ This is the case, for instance, of the sacred areas of the city of *Falerii* that were meaningfully refurbished and used also after the 241 BCE Roman conquest (see Biella forthcoming).

2 The city and the economic aspect of the monumentalisation of sacred areas

It is well-known that the sacred areas located in Tyrrhenian cities underwent a significant monumentalisation phase that began, at the latest, at the start of the Archaic period.¹² This phenomenon has been associated with the shift in the use of resources from the ‘private’ level, i. e., the funerary sphere, to the ‘public’ level.¹³ From this perspective, the Archaic period is unsurprisingly the moment in which it is possible to fully perceive for the first time the urban form in this region.¹⁴ The opening of those building sites must have required considerable economic effort for the local communities and this, perhaps, represents one of the first moments in which the categories of the sacred and the economic directly intersected, as has been noted in a recent contribution by Charlotte Potts.¹⁵

The striking magnificence of Etruscan sacred buildings has, as stated above, attracted the attention of scholars since the first decades of the twentieth century and numerous studies have been dedicated to the architectural forms and the terracotta decorations of the buildings.¹⁶ However, very little attention has been paid to the possibility of reading this phenomenon from the perspective of the expenditure of a great amount of ‘public’ (or destined to become public) resources in connection to the sphere of the sacred.

It is because these artefacts are directly connected to a public commission that a careful (re)reading of the material testimonies at our disposal can help identify the economic mechanisms relating to the building of those monumental sacred complexes. Such an approach will also help us scrutinise the variety of social actors that participated in this process. In order to achieve this goal, I will use a specific case study: Falerii, a city in the Middle Tiber Valley that can be considered to be a kind of *trait d’union* between the Tyrrhenian and other Italic regions from the eighth century to the sixth century BCE. A clear ‘urban choice’ emerged in the Archaic period and Falerii became integrated into the Etruscan urban system.¹⁷

12 For a recent discussion of this issue, see Thomas and Meyers 2013.

13 For an overview of the phenomenon, see recently Cerchiai 2012, in particular 142–145, and Smith 2014, 51–52.64–66.

14 On the wide debate concerning the development of the urban form in Etruria, see recently Marino 2015 with previous bibliography. For an interesting overview of its final phase, see Cerchiai 2012, 142–151.

15 Potts (in press). I express my sincere gratitude to Charlotte Potts for allowing me to read the manuscript of her paper.

16 Andrén 1941 remains seminal for the study of the decorative systems, updated for the most ancient phase by Winter 2009 and for the early Archaic phase by Carlucci (in press).

17 Biella 2016.

Due to the quantity and quality of the excavations and research studies conducted in the last 150 years, Falerii is one of the best resources we currently have for tackling the issue of pre-Roman urbanism in ancient Italy from a wide diachronic perspective.¹⁸ More than ten sacred areas – urban, suburban, extraurban, of varying importance and providing a range of documentary evidence – have been discovered and studied in connection with this ancient city (fig. 1). In almost all of these cases, in addition to sometimes comparatively well-documented structures, relevant sets of terracotta decorations have also been found. These objects provide a firm chronological grid from the sixth century to the first century BCE, which deepens our understanding of the development and use of the sacred areas of the city (table 1).¹⁹

As can be seen in table 1, from the first decades of the fifth century BCE the city of Falerii decided to consistently invest resources in the monumentalisation of its sacred areas (and in the preservation of the monumentality through the centuries), creating a coherent ‘sacred system’ that is identifiable from both topographical and architectural perspectives. According to our present knowledge, seven sacred areas had a monumental aspect in this period. The different sacred areas mentioned are characterised by different degrees of monumentality that must also correspond to different kinds of expenditures by the city. Claudia Carlucci, who has studied the fifth century BCE terracotta decorative systems of Falerii, argues that the system connected to the Vignale hill, which in the literature is generally recognised as the ‘acropolis’ of the city, was the only ‘original’ system created at Falerii during the period. In contrast, the contemporary sacred areas of via Gramsci and Sassi Caduti are thought to be ‘composite’ systems, i. e., a kind of miscellany of already used decorative systems.²⁰ It is plausible to think that economic differences existed between the assemblage of already used systems and the commission and creation *ex-novo* of a new coherent system. This second case testifies to the intention of the local community to make, and to the possibility of them making, a significant investment in the sphere of the sacred in connection to a specific sacred area. Moreover, and not by chance, the moulds used for the production of parts of the architectural decorations of some of the most relevant sacred buildings of the city were found precisely in the Vignale locality, very near (if not actually in) the area of the

¹⁸ De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012 and Biella (forthcoming).

¹⁹ The decorative systems of the city of Falerii are analysed in Andr n 1941; Comella 1993; Carlucci 2004, and Carlucci 2013.

²⁰ Carlucci 2013, 161.

Context	First half sixth BCE	First decades fifth BCE	Beginning fourth BCE	First half fourth BCE	Second half fourth BCE	End fourth to beginning third BCE	Third BCE	First half third BCE	Around 250 BCE	Post 241 BCE	Second BCE	First half first BCE
Scasato II ²¹		Co?	Reb/Co									
Fondo Belloni ²²		Co										
Scasato I ²³							Co				Re (second to first BCE)	
Via Gramsci ²⁴		Co	Di	Re?								
Vignale ²⁵		Co	Reb		Re	Re			Re	Re		
Celle ²⁶	Co	Re/Co?			Reb/Co				Re	Re	Re	
Sassi Caduti ²⁷		Co		Ri			Reb+Re					
Ninfeo Rosa ²⁸		Co?	Re?									
Santuario Andromeda ²⁹								Co				

Table 1: Co = construction Reb = rebuilding Re = renovation Di = dismantlement

- 21 Biella and De Lucia in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 20–21 with previous bibliography and 28–30.
 22 De Lucia in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 29–30.
 23 Biella and De Lucia in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 17–19 with previous bibliography and 27–28.
 24 De Lucia in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 24–26.
 25 Carlucci in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 30–34 with previous bibliography.
 26 Carlucci in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 63–65 with previous bibliography.
 27 Carlucci in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 57–62 with previous bibliography.
 28 Biella in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 40–41 with previous bibliography.
 29 Biella in De Lucia, Biella and Suaria 2012, 41–42 with previous bibliography.

sanctuary itself (fig. 2).³⁰ The preservation *in loco* of these artefacts can be interpreted in at least two different, but not necessarily exclusive, ways.³¹ On the one hand, the preservation of such artefacts might have been a way of ensuring that the public authority could easily replace damaged items (see also Salzman, this volume). On the other hand, it can also be read as a specific choice on the part of the public authority to create a collection of moulds that could be profitably reused to create ‘composite’ systems, resulting in a lower economic impact for the community during the construction phase.

Comparative analysis of the mould-produced architectural elements throughout the Falerii sacred areas allows for an indirect confirmation of this procedure. This analysis clearly shows that there was wide interchangeability of parts among the various sacred buildings in the city (urban, suburban, extraurban). In the case of Falerii, we can point to, for instance, the open-work cresting of the Scasato 2 that is also used in the Scasato 1 Temple.³² The same approach might also be responsible for some of the revetment plaques shared by the Scasato 2 and the Scasato 1 temples,³³ or by the Scasato 1 and the Celle temples.³⁴ Similarly, we can note that a number of antefixes are shared by the Scasato I, Vignale and Sassi Caduti sanctuaries.³⁵

Ultimately, I believe that this *modus operandi*, based on the possibility of (re)using parts of the terracotta decorations already used on other public buildings, can be read as a hint of the existence of a widely shared planning phase that could also be connected to the economic resources of the city. Re-reading this extremely well-documented class of material in terms of this new perspective has the potential to offer a range of interesting insights.

The Falerii case is probably the best known at present but it is possible to apply this perspective to other locations. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that we can glimpse a similar procedure in the city of Caere. Here too the abundance of terracotta decorations can profitably be used to reread the monumentalisation of the sacred areas in relation to the economic impact that this kind of activity had on the local communities.³⁶ Furthermore,

30 Carlucci and De Lucia 2017.

31 Biella in Biella et al. 2017, 149 for the topographical analysis and the interpretation of the evidence.

32 For the Scasato 1: Comella 1993, A1, 43–4, tab. 4; for the Scasato 2: Carlucci 2004, 39.

33 For the Scasato 1: Comella 1993, A8, 54–5, tab. 9; for the Scasato 2: Carlucci 2004, 43.

34 Comella 1993, 229.

35 See Comella 1993, 230–231 and in connection with the analysis of the moulds used to produce the antefixes, see Carlucci and De Lucia 2017.

36 Recent discussions of the terracotta decorations of the urban area can be found in Belletti 2011 with previous bibliography. The scholar writes interestingly of a ‘grandioso pro-

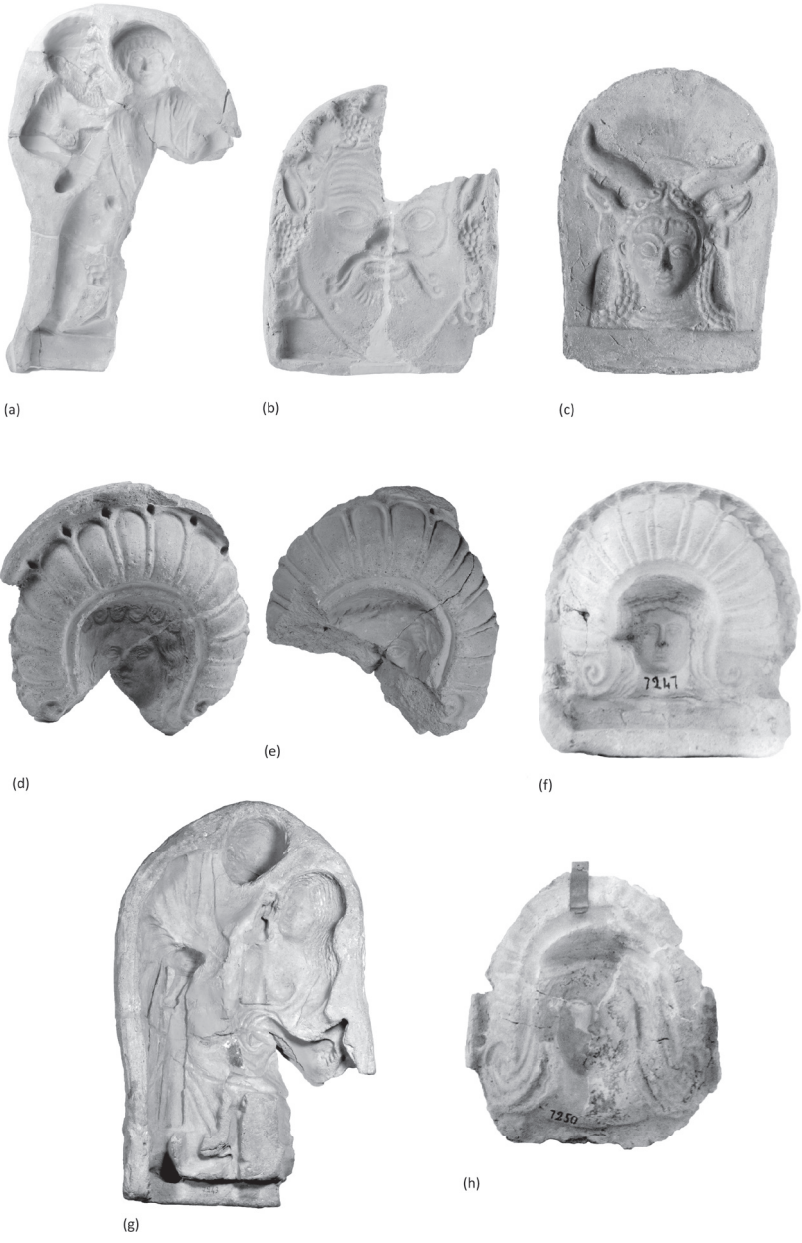


Fig. 2: *Falerii*, loc. Vignale. Moulds for antefixes (Photos Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia), after Carlucci, De Lucia 2017.

despite the (often modern!) dispersal of the materials, Caere has the potential to be even more informative than Falerii. The possibility of working on both the sacred areas of the city and on those of the territory directly dependent on the city (fig. 3)³⁷ means that this case study can provide us with details concerning the ways in which the city managed its territory through the category of the sacred. Of particular interest are the sacred areas on the so-called Caere-Pyrgi road, i. e., the route that meaningfully connected the city to its main port and to the sanctuary that was part of it (fig. 4) (see also Moser, this volume).³⁸ This is not the place to carry out a systematic analysis. However, it is worth drawing attention to the significant comparability between the decorative systems of the sacred buildings in the Montetosto area and in Pyrgi, on the one hand, and those in the city, on the other: antefixes, revetment plaques, and ridge tiles are often shared by the sacred places in the city and those in its broader territory.³⁹ The example of Caere allows us to see on a wider scale how a public authority could manage the monumentalisation of sacred buildings in its territory in a way that was directly controlled by the city and that used, at least in part, decorative systems shared with those found in the city centre.⁴⁰

gramma edilizio che plasma in modo unitario tutta l'edilizia pubblica della città di Caere e del suo territorio nella seconda metà del VI secolo' that must be connected to a 'indirizzo politico-culturale preciso, unitario, promanante dall'autorità politica cittadina' (Bellelli 2011, 102). Such an impressive programme must inevitably have also had a strong economic impact on the city.

- 37 For brief descriptions of the sacred areas of the city with previous bibliography, see recently Gaultier and Haumesser 2013 (142–178; 202; 204–219).
- 38 A broad overview of the Pyrgi sanctuary can be found in Colonna 2000; the Caere-Pyrgi road has been reconsidered recently in Petacco 2014 and Balelli Marchesini, Biella and Michetti 2015, after the still seminal researches of the 1960s (Giliuani and Quilici 1964 and Colonna 1968); for the Montetosto area, see now Balelli Marchesini, Biella and Michetti 2015. This kind of approach should be widened and systematically applied to all the sacred areas presently known.
- 39 For the Montetosto case, see, for instance, the antefix type C.III known both at Caere and at Pyrgi; the antefix type C.VI known also at Caere; the revetment plaques types D.IV, D.VII and D.X, known also at Caere; and the ridge tiles type E.I, E.II, E.III, E.IV.B, E.V known also at Caere and Pyrgi (Balelli Marchesini in Balelli Marchesini, Biella and Michetti 2015, respectively 41–42, 43, 48, 50, 52, 54–55, 55, 55–56, 56, 56–57). For the analysis of the strict relations existing between the different elements of the Pyrgi decorative systems and those found in Caere, see Carlucci 2013a, 235–245; Colonna and Melis in *Pyrgi* 1970, respectively 402–405 and 405–411; Guarino 2010, 178. The data needed to pursue such an attempt more widely will soon be available in Carlucci (in press).
- 40 On the Mediterranean role played by Caere, see Gaultier and Haumesser 2013, in particular 224–240. The possibility of building a *thesauros* at Delphi surely hints at this role (Michetti 2016, 77–78).



Fig. 3: *Caere*, the urban area. Sacred areas: Vignaccia Granarone, S. Antonio, Vigna Grande, Vigna Marini Vitalini, Vigna Parrocchiale, Vigna Ramella, Tempio di Hera, Terreno Renzi, Valle Zuccara, Tempio del Manganello (after Bellelli 2017, 205).

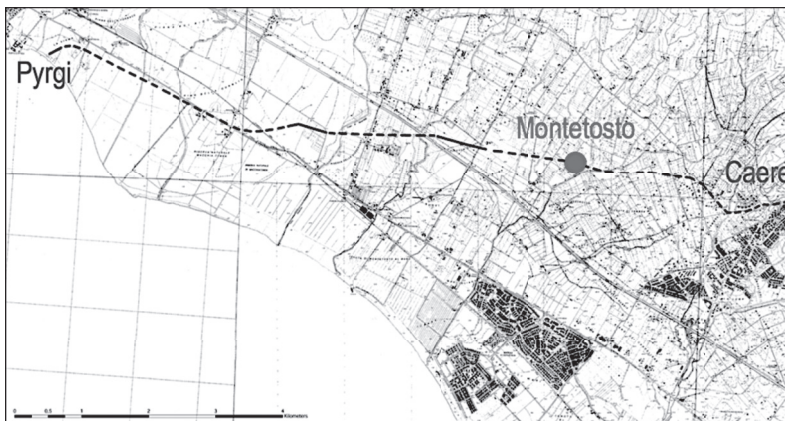


Fig. 4: The *Caere-Pyrgi* road (after Balelli Marchesini, Biella and Michetti 2015, tab. 1).

Up to now we have considered the possibility of recognising the economic impact on the city of monumentalisation through the lens of a re-reading of the terracotta decorations. I believe that this kind of approach can also impact our understanding of the multifaceted artisanal world that was responsible for the production of these artefacts. For instance, we can use this perspective to distinguish between at least two qualitatively different kinds of artisans involved in the realisation of the sacred buildings of a city.⁴¹ If systematically applied, this approach might also yield information on the organisation of the workshops in which these materials were produced.⁴² Thus, I believe that we should think carefully before systematically adopting the model of the (well-paid?) ‘itinerant artisan’ that has been drawn from the ancient written sources with the well-known and widely debated case of Vulca (Plin. *NH* 35.157), which is however and not surprisingly, given the very partial source evidence, connected to the impressive project of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.⁴³

3 The sacred areas and the economy: the case of the votive offerings

While the previous example helps to shed light on the ways in which expenditure was managed in connection with the monumentalisation of public sacred areas, my second case study will focus on understanding the ways in which economic resources were managed in everyday religious practice. The sanctuaries of the Italian pre-Roman world were clearly connected to the storage and use of considerable quantities of riches, as is noted in our ancient written sources.⁴⁴ In this respect, Pyrgi, whose sanctuary was famously plundered in 384 BCE by Dionysius of Syracuse (Diod. 15.14.4), can be considered as an indirect manifestation of the possibilities of sanctuaries as treasuries. The Hannibalic episode connected to the Lucus Feroniae (Liv. 26.11) and the plunder of the Fanum Voltumnae (Plin. *NH* 34.16.34) bear obvious similarities.

Even if we are reasonably confident about the presence of huge quantities of deposited goods in the Italian pre-Roman sanctuaries, detailing the

⁴¹ See also Rives, this volume, for the processes of creating sacred buildings.

⁴² Interesting theoretical considerations can be found in Smith 1998, 38–40 and Bonghi Jovino 1990, especially 44–54.

⁴³ For an analysis of Vulca and of his school, see recently Colonna 2008.

⁴⁴ Bodei Giglioli 1978 and Estienne and de Cazanove 2009 remain good repertoires, although referring especially to a late (Republican and in part Imperial) chronology. Compare Salzman, this volume, on the storing of riches in sacred areas.

phenomenon is a more complex task. In both the Tyrrhenian area and the inland regions of the Italian peninsula, we are dealing mostly with a substantially pre-monetary economy whose working principles have not yet been fully investigated and understood.⁴⁵ It is clear that any deposited wealth must have included an extremely varied set of goods, much of which is irremediably lost because many items were made of perishable materials or are archaeologically represented by objects of to us apparently scarce value. Even so, there is still a huge amount of data from Etruscan and Italic sanctuaries which clearly speaks to the function of the deposit and management of great quantities of goods by local communities. The informative potential of this data has been significantly underestimated in the scholarship. In particular, we can consider the well-known practice of offering metals in different forms (*aes rude*, coins, bronze statues and, in general, metal objects). It has correctly been said that, in the substantial absence of local coinage, weighed metals must have played an extremely important role. In consequence, (foreign) coins, *aes rude*, and *lato sensu* raw metals found in the sacred areas have therefore been the focus of most previous investigations.⁴⁶ However, a different approach to specific sectors of the *religio votiva* has the potential to provide a new picture of the ways in which the economy impacted on the everyday life of a sacred area.

More specifically, the widespread practice of offering small votive bronzes has not been considered in relation to potential economic value. This class of material has been widely investigated in previous research but scholars working on the objects have approached them from a non-economic perspective. The study of these bronzes has focused primarily on stylistic elements, with the realisation of *corpora* being the desired final outcome.⁴⁷ Representing both divinities and offerers, these kinds of artefacts have played a major role in understanding votive practices, in both the Tyrrhenian and (above all) Adriatic regions between the seventh century and the first century BCE (i. e., both in a genuinely pre-Roman period and in a 'Romanised' moment).⁴⁸ These bronzes are often of poor quality and extremely repetitive, but they are highly interesting in terms of religious,

45 The last comprehensive critical attempt was carried out by Cristofani 1986 in connection to the Etruscan reality. This approach has since been largely abandoned in Etruscan and Italic studies. For an updated picture, based on previous literature, see D'Ercole 2017.

46 See, for instance, for the Pyrgi case, Drago Troccoli 2013.

47 For the Etruscan productions, see Richardson 1983, Cristofani 1985 and Bentz 1992. For the Italic productions, see Colonna 1970 and Colonna 1975.

48 A general idea of the diffusion of the phenomenon can be obtained from Fenelli 1974 and Comella 1981.

cultural, artisanal, and economic factors. For our purposes, it is necessary to remember that they are made of metal and, in particular, of the same metal (bronze) from which were made the majority of the ancient pre-monetary forms and coins used in central Italy. It is evident, then, that small votive bronzes held an intrinsic value and that the presence in a sanctuary of large numbers of such bronzes also represented a consistent deposit of metal (see also Salzman, this volume, for the same phenomenon in a much later period). A direct consequence of these considerations is that a detailed study of these artefacts, based on an accurate analysis that exploits both the artisanal aspects and specific sets of data concerning dimension and weight, can shed light on important features of the economies of pre-Roman and early Roman Italy.⁴⁹

This kind of approach has recently been tested on some of the most significant groups of Italic pre-Roman votive bronzes found in modern Abruzzo: the votive deposits of Corfinium-Sant'Ippolito, Castelvecchio Subequeo, Caramanico, and Alba Fucens (fig. 5).⁵⁰ The study, which took as its starting point some 250 small votive bronzes – admittedly a mere drop in the ocean – has fully confirmed that these artefacts are a result of serial production (fig. 6).⁵¹ From a conceptual point of view, they share the artisanal practice of the clay *ex-voto*. By taking into consideration previously neglected or underestimated data, such as weight and dimensions, it is possible to identify a number of dimensional standards.

I limit myself to discussing here the example of Corfinium, where I had the opportunity to analyse a group of more than 100 small votive bronzes.⁵² As far as height is concerned, the majority of the bronzes in the sample are very small: twenty-five range between 5 cm and 7 cm, while thirty-three range between 7 cm and 9 cm. There are also sixteen figurines ranging between 9 cm and 11 cm and six figurines ranging between 11 cm and 14 cm, the latter of which are roughly double the height of the votive bronzes in the first group. There is then a large size gap before we come to two examples with a height of around 24 cm. If it is true that we cannot connect these measurements to a specific ancient measuring system but it is nonetheless interesting to consider that the smallest statuettes, ranging from 5 cm to 7 cm, are not

⁴⁹ A first attempt in this direction was proposed in connection to the so-called 'shadow of the evening' by N. Parise (Biella 2016a, 277). A few years later, Cateni tried to find a connection between the dimensions/weight of these small votive bronzes and the coinage of Volterra (Cateni 2007).

⁵⁰ Biella 2015, Biella 2016, Biella 2017 and Biella (in press) 2019.

⁵¹ In particular, see Biella 2016, 269–274.

⁵² Biella 2015.



Fig. 5: The votive deposits with a particular concentration of post-archaic small votive bronzes in Abruzzo. 1. Carsoli; 2. *Alba Fucens*; 3. Castelvecchio Subequo; 4. Corfinio – S. Ippolito; 5. Caramanico (Google Earth).

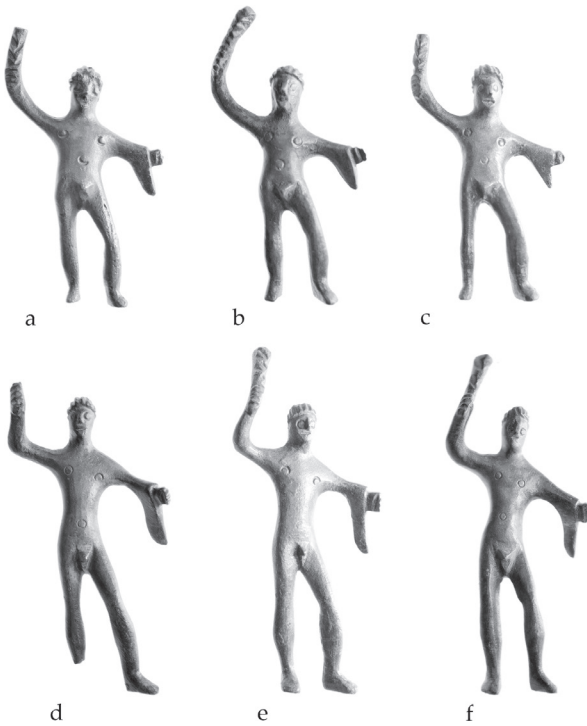


Fig. 6: *Alba Fucens*. Examples of serial production (Photos Soprintendenza Archeologia dell’Abruzzo).

far from the *quadrans*;⁵³ those that are about 9 cm could be compared to the *triens*;⁵⁴ those around 14 cm are comparable to the *semipes*;⁵⁵ and, finally, the largest are close to the *pes*.⁵⁶ These observations are not meant to create a mechanical equivalence. They merely intend to provide an idea of the dimensions of the analysed statuettes.

As far as weight is concerned, the chronology of the artefacts (late third to early first century BCE) suggests that, research being at an early stage, they should be compared with the weight standards used by Rome at the time of their production. Great care must be taken when reading the data, especially considering the degree of corrosion of the metal. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the analysed items appear to range between weights of one and three *unciae* (27.288 – 81.86 g).⁵⁷ We cannot be sure, and I do not intend to assert, that the Roman ponderal system was used to weigh the metal at the time of production or at the moment of the sale of the statuettes. Nonetheless, I believe that the established weight range should be a starting point for future research.

The recognition of those recurrent dimensions and weights is not surprising when we consider that Pliny, speaking of Roman craftsmanship, notes that honorary statues had a specific *mensura honorata*, corresponding to that of the *tripedanea* (Plin. *NH* 34.11.24), a measure that – *per incidens* – Francesco Roncalli has also recognised in connection with a group of Etruscan bronzes.⁵⁸

The evidence considered so far provides direct evidence of the presence and ‘storage’ of great quantities of metals in pre-Roman sanctuaries. However, it is worth remembering that there are other important sources which speak of the ways in which riches were managed/used by the sacred authority, such as the measuring instruments found in the Etruscan and Italic sanctuaries. One important example is the well-known case of the bronze weight with a dedication to Turms and Rath found at Caere-Sant’Antonio. This can

53 In the metric system based on the Roman foot, the *quadrans* (*plamus minor*) corresponds to 7.39 cm (Hultsch 1882, 700, tab. VI.A), and to 6.8 cm in that based on the Italic foot (Rottländer 1993).

54 In the metric system based on the Roman foot, the *triens* corresponds to 9.86 cm (Hultsch 1882, 700, tab. VI.A), and to 9.1 cm in that based on the Italic foot (Rottländer 1993).

55 In the metric system based on the Roman foot, the *semipes* corresponds to 14.79 cm (Hultsch 1882, 700, tab. VI.A), and to 13.7 cm in that based on the Oscan foot (Rottländer 1993).

56 The Roman foot corresponds to 29.57 cm (Hultsch 1882, 700, tab. VI.A) and the Oscan foot to 27.5 cm (Rottländer 1993).

57 Hultsch 1882, 706, tab. XIII.A.

58 Roncalli 1982, 94 and Colonna 1985, 25.

be considered an indirect hint of the possibility that the public authority of the Etruscan city controlled the weight standards.⁵⁹ In this respect, Maggiani has recently suggested, based on the presence of a second small bronze weight, that we have an Archaic *ponderarium* in a small building within the sacred area of Caere-Sant'Antonio.⁶⁰ In the same paper, which is dedicated to the study of the Etruscan ponderal systems, the scholar also mentions several other examples. Interestingly, a significant quantity of these weights seem to be connected to sacred places. This is the case for the weights found at the Fucoli at Chianciano Terme, for those found at Gravisca, and those that are probably connected to the Ara della Regina at Tarquinia.⁶¹ This recurrence seems to suggest that the presence of the weights in these sacred places may have been connected to the economic functions performed there.

I believe that this approach to small votive bronzes has the potential to take us much further. The recognition and detailed study of the seriality in the production process can be used as a starting point for further observations which might disclose other details of the economic lives of pre-Roman sanctuaries. Each object indirectly speaks of the artisanal environment responsible for its production. Through this kind of approach, we can try to find answers to a range of important questions: Where were these bronzes produced? Where did the raw materials for their production come from? Who paid for them or who paid the artisans who produced them? Under what kind of economic and social conditions were the artisans working? It is clear that we cannot now, and probably never will be able to, answer all these questions. Nevertheless, it is possible to sketch at least some preliminary ideas. The seriality of the production alongside the presence of a massive group of bronzes of the same type in the same sanctuary implies that it might be possible to reconstruct a local production, just as we can for the contemporary clay *ex-voto*.⁶² We cannot know what kind of position the artisans occupied in the life of the sanctuary, i. e., if they worked inde-

59 For the weight found at Caere-loc. Sant'Antonio, see Maggiani and Rizzo 2005, 179–80, fig. 5 with previous bibliography.

60 Maggiani 2012, 403–405.

61 Maggiani 2012, 394–395.

62 In this respect, Giuliano's description concerning a typical Italic sanctuary is still enlightening: 'Possiamo immaginare l'aspetto di questi santuari [...], come l'insieme di padiglioni mobile, dove gli artigiani vendevano i bronzi o lavoravano direttamente sul posto le terrecotte, spesso adeguandosi al desiderio dei committenti e ricavandone da matrici, a volte consunte, volti che arricchivano di notazioni fisionomiche più individuali, e che forse cuocevano direttamente sul posto. [...] E chi aveva meno denaro acquistava solo una mezza testa di profilo da appendere al recinto del santuario. Gli artigiani solo raramente creavano opere originali, quasi sempre offrivano agli acquirenti, uomini e donne, l'immagine prefigurata che essi desideravano: un'immagine di vaga reminiscenza ellenistica, scarsa-

pendently, selling lots of artefacts to the sanctuary or if they were somehow dependent upon the sacred authority (whose definition is once again still unclear and may have been different in different moments and areas). As far as the (expensive) raw material is concerned, the presence at Corfinium and Alba Fucens of very few residual late-Archaic bronzes in coherent lots of Hellenistic examples might suggest the practice of the cyclical melting down of votive materials (well-known in the Greek context). From such a practice would follow the possibility of a new 'local' supply of raw material for the sanctuary and/or artisans (see again Salzman, this volume).⁶³

4 Conclusions

This analysis has demonstrated how light can be shone on certain specific aspects of the economic life of pre-Roman sacred places. From a methodological point of view, the major risk in this kind of approach is the over-interpretation of the available data, which are sometimes scanty, often fragmented, and always derived solely from the archaeological record. Furthermore, it is always necessary to bear in mind that each case study must be analysed separately, in its own proper geographical and chronological context. It is essential to avoid falling into the temptation of starting an analysis against the background of a predetermined comprehensive picture. The risks entailed by such an approach cannot be underestimated when dealing with a complex system, such as that found in pre-Roman Italy.

While not discouraging interest in these kinds of topics, it is obvious that we will, inevitably, remain very far from the possibility of sketching detailed pictures, such as the one recently drawn in connection to the economic life of the Greek sanctuaries and their relations to the cities.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, I believe that the extraordinarily rich set of archaeological data at our disposal (which is continuously growing due to the extremely important studies conducted each year in the major Etruscan cities and sanctuaries) could help us go further in understanding this critical part of Etruscan social and economic history.

mente individualizzata, spesso ridotta a simbolo [...] (Giuliano in Bianchi Bandinelli and Giuliano 1973, 248).

⁶³ Biella 2016, 267–269. Linders 1989–90 for the Greek reality and Bodei Giglioli 1978; Crawford 2003, 70–71; Estienne and de Cazanove 2009, 8–10 and 19–20 for the Roman world.

⁶⁴ Sassu 2014 and Feyel 2006.

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Religion in the Roman Empire

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Religion in the Roman Empire (RRE) is bold in the sense that it intends to further and document new and integrative perspectives on religion in the Ancient World combining multidisciplinary methodologies. Starting from the notion of 'lived religion' it will offer a space to take up recent, but still incipient research to modify and cross the disciplinary boundaries of 'History of Religion', 'Anthropology', 'Classics', 'Ancient History', 'Ancient Judaism', 'Early Christianity', 'New Testament', 'Patristic Studies', 'Coptic Studies', 'Gnostic and Manichaean Studies', 'Archaeology' and 'Oriental Languages'. It is the purpose of the journal to stimulate the development of an approach which can comprise the local and global trajectories of the multi-dimensional pluralistic religions of antiquity.

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