

The Tuscania Archaeological Project and the Excavations of the Sasso Pinzuto Necropolis

by Alessandro Naso, Martina Zinni,
Stefano Valentini and Guido Guarducci

The inception of the excavation and research activities directed by CAMNES (Center for Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies) in Tuscania date back to 2011. The initial excavations were part of the agreement between the Municipality of Tuscania and the Superintendency for the Archaeological Heritage of Southern Etruria.

This first project, under the direction of Stefano Giuntoli, involved the investigation of the necropoleis of Pian delle Rusciare and of Podere Pratino, located north-west of the modern town of Tuscania in the area of Macchia della Riserva. From 2013 up to 2019 the archaeological research was developed under an official permit of the Ministry of Culture.

The archaeological investigation has revealed the presence of underground structures, in some cases excavated by looters or more rarely collapsed due to natural events and therefore sealed in antiquity. Despite these issues, the excavations revealed several funerary contexts that were nearly intact.

In total, over forty tombs have been brought back to light - the majority are characterized by a pit and an underground chamber with a *dromos* access - which can be dated from the Hellenistic age up to the early Roman Imperial age.

The Tomb of the Black Pigs

In 2020, during the pandemic, the excavation of the Necropolis of Macchia della Riserva was interrupted. CAMNES, however, continued its field activity in Tuscania, responding to a request for collaboration, from the Superintendency of Southern Etruria, for a highly urgent intervention in a rock burial complex within the necropolis of Sasso Pinzuto (Tomb 118, the so-called Tomb of the Black Pigs) on the left bank of the Marta River, immediately south-east of the modern city.

The aim of the project was to conclude the excavation of a die-like structure, built with square blocks of tufa, already identified in 2017, and partially investigated by the Superintendency in collaboration with the CNRS-AOROC team, directed by Vincent Jolivet.

The 2020 excavation, whose study and publication are still in progress, has brought to light a 2.2 x 4.3 m structure of irregular plan, built with dry-laid tufa blocks, preserved on all sides for a few courses. The entrance, still sealed by large stone slabs, gave access to a funerary chamber, with a rectangular plan, which was made-up of three deposition benches, two on the sides and one at the back. These were probably meant to house at least five individuals, of which only a few bone remains were recovered.

Unfortunately, the tomb was violated, most probably already in antiquity as well as at a more recent date. Despite these upheavals, the context has yielded a substantial part of the grave goods, which count to over a hundred objects, often in a fragmentary state, but of exceptional workmanship, including Attic black-figure

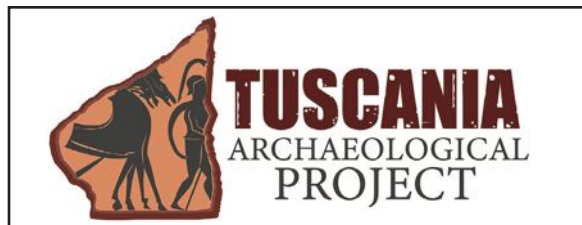


Fig.1. Drone shot of the Sasso Pinzuto necropolis.



Fig. 2. Drone view of both tumuli. On the left "tumulus 1", on the right "tumulus 2".



Fig. 3. Tumulus 1: photogrammetry of tomb superimposed on the orthophoto.



Fig. 4. Tumulus 2: photogrammetry of the tomb.

vases, Etruscan black-figure vases and Bucchero.

The finds allow us to establish a preliminary dating of this tomb to a time span from the last quarter of the 6th century B.C possibly down to the beginning of the 5th century B.C. On top of the structure, carved into the rock ceiling of the funerary chamber, a pit tomb was discovered. The small tomb was disturbed but it preserved a few grave goods inside, which date this part of the structure to the beginning of the 7th century B.C, classifying this part of the complex as one of the oldest features in the Sasso Pinzuto necropolis.

TAP: Tuscania Archaeological Project

Following these encouraging preliminary results, CAMNES decided to continue its activity within the Sasso Pinzuto necropolis, under a new excavation permit obtained in 2022 from the Ministry of Culture. The Tuscania Archaeological Project (TAP) was therefore activated in collaboration with the Department of Humanities of the University of Naples Federico II, under the scientific direction of Prof. Alessandro Naso.

The Sasso Pinzuto necropolis is located along the eastern slope of the Marta River and south-east of the urban center of Tuscania. It represents one of the least investigated and known funerary realities in the area. The burial ground is flanked by a stretch of the Etruscan Road cut into the tufa and connects Tuscania with the hinterland of Caere. In Roman times it became known as the Via Clodia. Since it was linked through this important communication route, the site had an uninterrupted occupation in ancient times (Fig. 1).

The chamber tombs currently visible belong to two main types: one type with an upper fissure and the second one entirely cut out of the tufa.

The tombs entirely excavated in the tufa are the most numerous and they show different types of plans that are based on those found in domestic construction. Most of them consist of single rooms, but there are also numerous tombs that are made up of two coaxial rooms. In general, the typology of the two coaxial chambers is widespread in Tuscania and it began from the end of the 7th century BCE.

There are other hypogea with plans and characteristics of the internal elements that allow them to be dated mostly within the 6th century BCE and that are mainly based on models developed at Caere.

Excavation Campaigns

The 2022 and 2023 excavation campaigns investigated two areas of the necropolis of Sasso Pinzuto in Tuscania, conventionally called the Northern and the Southern areas.

In the Northern Area the investigations started with Tumulus 1 (already investigated in 1994 by the GAR: Gruppo Archeologico Romano) and then proceeded with the discovery of a second tumulus nearby (Tumulus 2) (Fig. 2).

The plan of the tomb of Tumulus 1 (approx. 10 meters in diameter) has a typology derived from models of Caere belonging to the end of the 7th century BCE with a transversal atrium and three chambers excavated along the back wall; it is a hypogeal tomb that is totally dug into the tufa (Fig. 3).

The tomb had been violated already in ancient times,

but the excavation made possible the recovery of remarkable finds: some ceramics of Etruscan production (Bucchero and Etruscan-Corinthian amphorae from the *Monte Abatone Group*), imported (Attic Black-figure and Eastern-Greek vases), and few metals including a gold braid clip.

According to the architectural typology and the materials found during the GAR excavation in 1994, it is possible to hypothesize a chronology around the first quarter of the 6th century BCE.

However, a small pit burial belonging to a newborn child was found intact and recently published by A.M. Moretti Sgubini. The tomb was located on the southern side of the *dromos* and originally covered by a tufa block; according to the funerary objects found inside, this grave may be dated to around the second quarter of 6th century BCE.

Tumulus 2, a smaller size compared to Tumulus 1, contains a hypogeal tomb composed of a transversal atrium and two chambers along the back wall (Fig. 4).

The tomb of Tumulus 2 had also been violated in ancient and modern times but the few materials recovered suggest that the tomb was built shortly after Tumulus 1, i.e. around the second quarter of 6th century B.C. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the discovery of a few almost complete vases connected to the preparation, management and consumption of food. Particularly significant are an Impasto cooking stand, a brazier with traces of cooking and a Bucchero crater.

The excavation of annular trenches of both Tumuli 1 and 2, revealed many fragments of revetment plaques confirming the presence of sepulchral buildings in the area. The mould-decorated architectural plaques belong to the types found in the Etruscan settlement of Acquarossa (types A, B, C and D: respectively with chariot procession, departing warriors, dance scenes and banquet (Fig. 5).

In the Southern Area – a small plain about 90 m from the Northern Area – four shaft graves (Nos. 126, 127, 128, 130) and two chamber tombs (Nos. 125 and 129) were excavated (Figs. 6-7). The shafts correspond to two types: one with a simple profile (nos. 126 and 128), while the other is characterized by a more complex profile of deeper level (nos. 123 and 130).

All tombs were violated but it was possible to recover small finds of personal equipment that escaped from the illegal excavations. In Tomb 126 a fibula type Lo Schiavo 142 establishes the chronology within the 7th century BCE; Tomb 127 yielded a thin fibula with a rhomboidal profile, type Lo Schiavo 182.

The small Tomb 128 (approx. 90 cm long and 30 cm wide), contained pieces of the closing slab, while a small cushion in relief had been cut in the inner surface. Although the burial did not yield any funerary equipment, the dimensions suggest that it certainly belonged to an infant, indicating in this sector the presence of tombs reserved for both infants and adults, all belonging perhaps to the same family.

In chamber Tomb 125, belonging to the coaxial type, some elements, especially a lenticular ribbed spindle, allow us to establish that at least one female figure was buried here. Some complete vases pertaining to a Bucchero drinking set (*kyathoi*, cups, chalices, *kantharoi*, an *oinochoe* and a small jug) were also found. Particu-

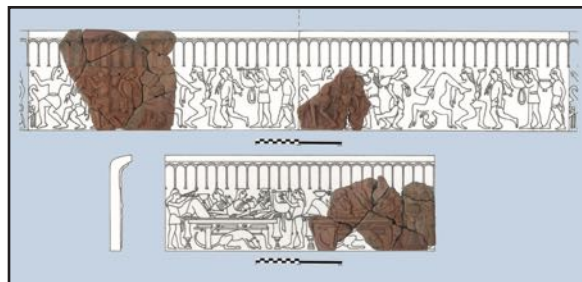


Fig. 5. Some fragments of relief plaques superimposed on the drawings of the Acquarossa types C and D (after N. Winter).



Fig. 6. Drone view of southern area.

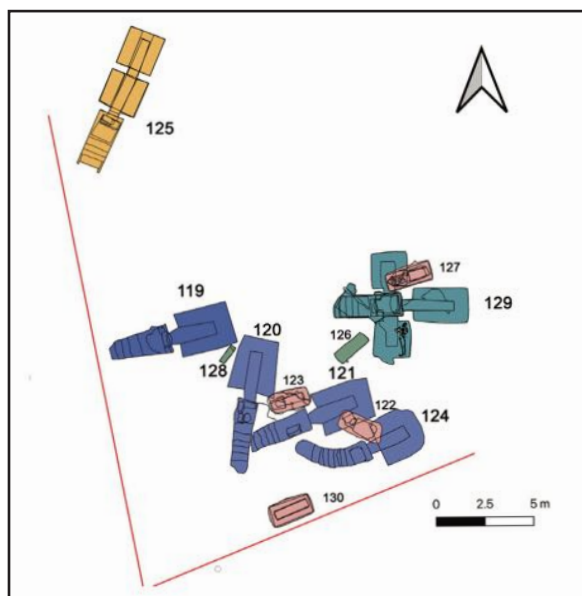


Fig. 7. Planimetry of tombs in the southern area.

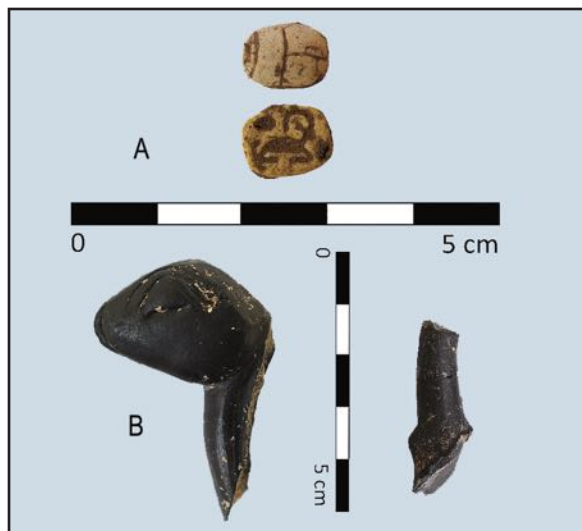


Fig. 8. A: Naukratis scarab; B: Ram protome and a small paw in Bucchero.

larly significant stratigraphically is the discovery of a layer composed of dense, dark clay, with plastic consistency and positioned in the vestibule of the tomb; this can be interpreted as a waterproofing arrangement, functional to the sealing of the chamber from water infiltrations. Chemical analysis samples revealed that some minerals had been intentionally added to the natural clay to increase their waterproof properties.

Chamber Tomb 129 has a cruciform plan with a *dromos* and vestibule featuring a tufa seal, made of two overlapping quadrangular slabs resting on two monoliths, both positioned at the end of the *dromos*. Along the steps in the *dromos* some iron objects (spearheads, javelin heads, *sauroteris*, a knife and a spit) were found and they can be interpreted as a possible ritual offering after a reopening of the tomb. The tufa slabs were probably placed in the vestibule when the tomb was reopened. On that occasion some clay vases were removed from in front of the entrance door. The vases consist of Etruscan-Corinthian pots (two *amphorae*, a figured *alabastron* and balsam containers painted with linear decoration), Bucchero (chalices, *kantharoi*, cups, *oinochoi* and *olpai*) and Impasto vases (jars and bowls). Two trade amphoras from Samos and Chios and an Attic floral band cup date the deposit no later than 530 BCE.

In the chambers, some elements characterize the people buried in the tomb: In the left-side chamber, fragments of iron sandals and a scarab from Naukratis (Fig. 8A) ensure that at least one woman was buried here; In the right-side chamber, a rare protome of a ram and a small paw in Bucchero (Fig.8B) were probably special commissions by the tomb's owners.

Beyond the dig

As part of the project, along with the archaeological research of the Necropolis of Sasso Pinzuto (to which students from all over the world participate every summer by taking part in the Archaeological Field School developed in partnership with the Lorenzo de' Medici International Institute) CAMNES has recently signed an agreement with the Lazio Regional Museums Directorate and the Department of Humanistic Studies of the University of Naples Federico II, for the restoration of the archaeological materials discovered in prior excavations in the necropolis of Sasso Pinzuto and now preserved in the deposits of the National Archaeological Museum of Tuscania.

Recently, in collaboration with the University Cattolica of Milan, the University of Naples Federico II and Agriturismo Casa Caponetti (the owner of the land where the necropolis is located) the SAfAL (Sustainable Archeology for Agricultural Landscapes) project was launched to delve into the complex and often problematic relationship between archaeology and farming (agriculture and livestock raising).

The objective of this project is to demonstrate that the scientific research and valorization of our heritage can be fruitfully integrated to develop local economies (in this case the cultivation of olive trees and the breeding of horses and pigs), in the framework of a sustainable growth of a territorial landscape that must be preserved and enhanced at the same time. For further information: <https://camnes.org/Archaeology-Field-School-Tuscania>