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Reconstructing Ritual: Loom Weights and Spindle Whorls as Archaeological Evidence for Cult Practice in Ancient Etruria

Excavations on the acropolis of the Etruscan site of Poggio Colla have uncovered a monumental structure with at least three construction phases, spanning the seventh-second centuries B.C.E. (Warden, et. al. *JRA* 18 (2005), 253-266). Sacred architecture and votive deposits secure the designation of this space as a sanctuary with a history of ritualized usage. Also, within the confines of the sanctuary an unusually large number of textile tools for both spinning and weaving (85 loom weights, 131 spindle whorls and 75 spools) have been found, confirming the involvement of women in the production of cloth on the site or veneration of a deity associated with feminine craft. Elsewhere, I have discussed the social context of elite Etruscan women as agents of ritual through textile production (Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America (2010); manuscript in preparation.). However, in this presentation I offer new, unpublished data on the functional aspects of the tools themselves, providing a rare glimpse at how lost textiles may have been produced for or utilized in ancient ritual practice.

Scholars have argued that it is vital for archaeologists to record and publish functional data for textile tools uncovered in excavation (M. Gleba, 2008 and L. Mårtensson, M. Nosch and E. Andersson Strand, 2009). For example, measurements such as weight, diameter and thickness can be used to calculate a variety of textile specifications, such as type of fibre spun, quality of thread, the thread count of the fabric produced and estimated time consumption for spinning and weaving. Utilizing this methodological framework, I present a focused and detailed analysis of the formal qualities of the textile tools from Poggio Colla in order to reconstruct the lost technology of textile production on the site. Given the sacred nature of the site, this data contributes not only to the reconstruction of the textiles themselves, but through additional information gleaned, such as time consumption and loom setup, the data provides an unparalleled reconstruction of how textiles may have been incorporated into the daily and festive works of an Etruscan sanctuary.

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