Elites, resources and construction works

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Tile stamps from the age of Antium and its hinterland production?

In total, we have 19 stamp types attested in the museum collection and from the PRP field survey data. These include simple rectangular stamps (typical for the late Republican period and the 1st century AD), complex round ones (perhaps of 1st/2nd century AD date?), and more complex circular stamps of the 1st to 3rd century AD.

Most of these stamps have only been attested as a single specimen, and have only a general provenance assigned. Some, however, occur more than once and/or can be traced back to specific rural sites. These include the stamp AEMILI·PAULLI, a well-known Roman gens name that provided several high-ranking administrators holding office at Rome, POMPEII·MAGINI, and L·DOMIT·DAPH. These three stamps have only been attested as a single specimen, and/or bear additional elements (e.g., a signum) (Graham 2006: 12/13).

For the Pontine region, brick stamps are primarily known from excavations in consumption contexts, especially urban centers. Only during recent PRP surveys we are also starting to systematically search for brick stamps in rural consumption contexts and brick production sites as well. Therefore, our image of production and distribution in the region is surely partial and for only one area, Antium, and its hinterland, we have a mix of data to relate such patterns to sites: besides the rich epigraphic record of this town, recent PRP surveys, site mappings and the study of a local museum collection provide data on production sites of tile and brick (De Haas et al. 2011).

The Poligono Militare di Nettuno: a hotspot for production?

We may hypothesise that the production facilities related to these elite gentes should be sought in a specific area situated along the coast c. 7 km east from Antium, now part of the poligono militare (military base) of Nettuno. In this area, a topographic study by Fabio Piccarreta (1977) has recorded a series of large villae maritimae as well as a cluster of smaller sites, which may reflect a nucleated settlement of some sort. At the villa maritimae of Le Grottacce, PRP investigations have uncovered productive facilities where both amphorae and building materials were produced in the 2nd/early 1st centuries BC (De Haas et al. 2008). Although these remains predate the main monumental phase of the villa, they should probably be seen as part of an elite estate.

The museum collection also includes a terracotta die of the above-mentioned AEMILI·PAULLI stamp. This die was found on the poligono militare and confirms that in this area, tiles bearing this stamp were produced, probably in the 1st/2nd century AD. In addition, the stamps of POMPEII·MAGINI, and L·DOMIT·DAPH are also mainly found on the poligono, and we may suggest that they were also produced in this area, using the suitable clay banks that occur on the coast.

That more workshops existed in this area is shown by very recent PRP investigations at Piccarretta site 32. During a topographic survey at this location, we mapped the remains of a large scatter of ceramics and building debris, which includes both tile and ceramic wasters and kiln remains. Geophysical prospections have thus far revealed one large building. Hopefully, future prospections will also identify the remains of kilns and associated features.

Conclusions and future work

Although the work presented here is only a pilot study, the potential of integrating epigraphic and archaeological data has arisen clearly. At Antium, a town of considerable size and therefore a large market, the production of building materials was an industry of considerable importance: we have archaeological evidence for several workshops situated at or near large elite estates, and in proximity to clay beds. The epigraphic material suggests that various elite figures were involved - a member of the Aemilius Paulli certainly, and others very probably. Such figures would have used their villa maritimae on the Pontine coast not just for leisure, but also for productive activities, providing building materials for their estates, as well as the local urban and rural markets, as is clear from the distribution of these stamped tiles in both urban and rural contexts.

These first results encourage us to extend our work: first we will continue to compile epigraphic data, extending the inventory from our pilot area towards the regional scale. At this scale, we expect geographic patterns to emerge (with Roman and/or local elites being involved in different parts of the region) (cf Graham 2006; Cifarelli 2007). On a micro-level, we will continue fieldwork on production sites, aiming to better understand the range of contexts in which production took place and using intensive survey and sampling methods, searching for both production debris and epigraphic material.

References


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GRAHAM, S., 2006. EX FIGLINIS The network dynamics of the Tiber Valley brick industry in the Roman period (Tol et al. 2014), for which we increasingly realize the importance of historical and epigraphic data to complement archaeological evidence from field surveys and excavations. This paper provides a first analysis of the combined evidence from these different sources in order to investigate systems of production and distribution of building materials in the Pontine region, using the port town of Antium and its hinterland as a pilot area.

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Background and aims

The research reported on here is part of the University of Groningen's Pontine Region Project (PRP). This project has been on-going for more than 25 years and has as its main objective to study long-term developments in settlement and landscape in the Pontine Region, central Italy, in most recent phase, we are focusing on the productive aspects of the landscape in the Roman period (Tol et al. 2014), for which we increasingly realize the importance of historical and epigraphic data to complement archaeological evidence from field surveys and excavations. This paper provides a first analysis of the combined evidence from these different sources in order to investigate systems of production and distribution of building materials in the Pontine region, using the port town of Antium and its hinterland as a pilot area.

Tile stamps in the Pontine region

Brick and tile stamps, which were in various shapes used from the 1st century BC onwards, form a very useful category of evidence to understand elite involvement in commercial activities, especially in the larger coastal towns and their hinterlands. Simple rectangular or circular stamps may mention the owner (dominus) of the production facilities, while more complex stamps may also inform us on the manufacturer (manufacturer), the year of production, and/or bear additional elements (e.g., a signum) (Graham 2006: 12/13).

For the Pontine region, brick stamps are primarily known from excavations in consumption contexts, especially urban centers. Only during recent PRP surveys we are also starting to systematically search for brick stamps in rural consumption contexts and brick production sites as well. Therefore, our image of production and distribution in the region is surely partial and for only one area, Antium and its hinterland, we have a mix of data to relate such patterns to sites: besides the rich epigraphic record of this town, recent PRP surveys, site mappings and the study of a local museum collection provide data on production sites of tile and brick (De Haas et al. 2011).