

PANTHEON

Pantheon

A NEW HISTORY OF ROMAN RELIGION

JÖRG RÜPKE

TRANSLATED BY
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not know whether they, let alone their opulent contents, even remained visible after what must have been equally opulent funerary ceremonies.⁹⁷

We know neither the extent nor the visibility of another social practice of this period. The consumption of wine, which began in the ninth century, developed during the “Orientalizing Period,” into a banquet culture, with goblets and pitchers finding their way to cult sites and into tombs.⁹⁸ The enjoyment of wine remained a luxury activity, its regular use being confined to wealthy households. In the following period, it became associated with Dionysian imagery.⁹⁹ This may have been an ancient legacy, or perhaps an attempt to give legitimacy to a criticized lifestyle by giving it a religious patina. In any event, prominent depictions of banquets were avoided in Latium from the fifth century onward. In Veii and even Anagni, on the other hand, there were many who found fit to draw attention to their attachment to the culture of wine by displaying banqueting paraphernalia in cult sanctuaries.¹⁰⁰ At least when it comes to Latium, however, we may dismiss the notion that this particular brand of religious activity supported the establishment of sustained religious roles and forms of authority. It can be assumed, however, that drinkers (and in Latium this included females) continued undaunted to pursue this cultural ritual, which was surely conducive to the maintenance of their social networks.

Italian religion also deviated from the pattern set in the ancient Orient, in that it did not produce a religious literature; this although writing had been adopted, further developed, and disseminated by the second half of the eighth century. This was not due to any restrictions on written scholarship. More likely the literate and priestly *Etrusca disciplina* simply came late, as a reaction to Roman expansion rather than an original mark of a revealed religion. But that will be the subject of a later chapter.¹⁰¹

III

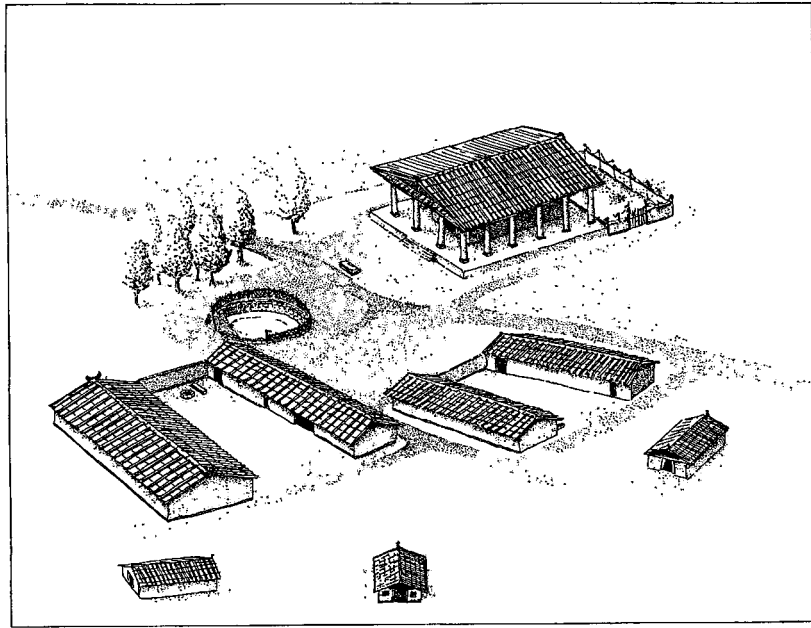
Religious Infrastructure

THE SEVENTH TO THE FIFTH
CENTURIES BC

1. Houses for Gods

The settlement identified today with Satricum sits on a spur of a steep escarpment a good hundred meters to the west of the little river Astura, some fifteen meters above its bank and downstream from Campoverde (which featured in the previous chapter).¹ In the late ninth century BC, several small groups, probably families, came together at this spot and built huts around a small body of water formed by a spring. Within a hundred years, communal life had stabilized so that closer attention was paid to the position of the huts relative to one another, and common areas and access ways had been reserved and gradually paved. By the second half of the seventh century, the huts were not only of differing sizes, but now also had walls of wattle and plaster and were roofed with tiles.

The dead were buried in the near vicinity, and those who wished to converse with invisible named actors presumably also went to nearby locations. These remain unknown to us, but they were probably not as remote as Laghetto del Monsignore. A new possibility arose at some time around 600 BC. Over what was probably a rather long period of time, objects had been finding their way into a pit within the



9. Plan of Satricum, the archaic phase of the acropolis. Reconstruction by Marianne Kleibrink, reproduced with her kind permission.

settlement, close to the main street, which had meanwhile been well paved. A rectangular house was now built in front of this pit (fig. 9). The house, with a solid roof and terracotta decoration, was of a type that was standard for only a few decades before larger houses of horse-shoe design became the norm.

Who was responsible for this new building? What did it contain? As the answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of archaeology, the only tools that are left to hand are comparison and speculation. The structural finds indicate that Satricum was a community engaged intensively in communication, but not a community of equals. Economic inequality was not concealed; it was in fact given a kind of deliberate staging in the necropolis situated to the northwest of the settlement.² But this inequality did not prevent the development of an infrastructure from which all profited: the network of streets, and above all the road that enabled connections beyond the immediate

region. Enduring, visible religious activity, on the other hand, came late to the settlement, and developed during a phase of intense social differentiation.

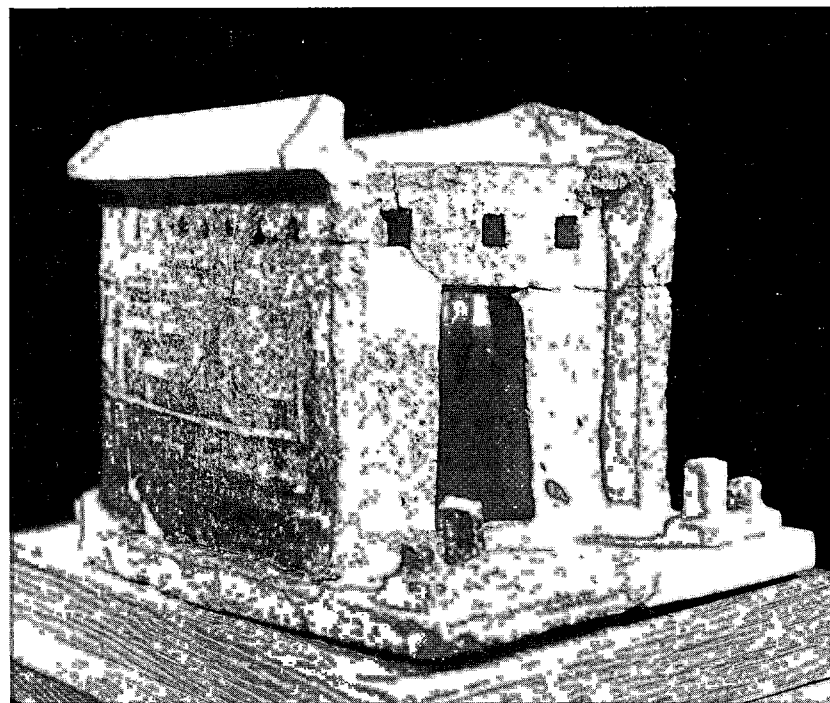
Innovation

Those who erected this new building devoted to religious communication—and they may as well have been female as male—were clearly engaged in competition with other locales at the settlement's periphery. Theirs was not an action calculated to express a common identity. Their aim was to ensure that the building would be appealing, both by its proximity and, even more, by its architectural design. While space was still reserved within or outside the building for the traditional practice of deposition, the building itself offered something entirely new, an innovation that was at once architectural and religious. "Monumentalization"³ lent an immediately perceptible aura of authority to the building as a religious structure, as did its optimal setting. The entrepreneur (or entrepreneurs) who, in about the year 600, undertook this project, was perhaps concerned less with sheltering an image of a god⁴ than with providing a location where objects could be displayed that would then finally be deposited in the pit, in a gradual process or as need arose. We do not know, however, whether all objects reached the pit via the building.

Unfortunately, we cannot identify the builders of the new structure with any precision. The evidence provided by Satricum's dwellings and graves is insufficient to indicate either an acephalous or an autocratic regime. What we do know is that our first evidence of religion and religious innovation comes from the central core, the focal point of settlement, on the so-called acropolis. Did the initiative come from the richest family, or from the genius who saw to the paving of the streets? Was it perhaps a benefaction from the lady who owned the most beautiful house? Or maybe the act of some individual or some small group that feared losing its position in the community? We cannot know the answer. What is self-evident is the innovative spirit that this undertaking demonstrates, and the degree of risk involved.

The example of Greece makes it clear that only local significance can be attached to the term “innovation.” The number of locations recognizably designed to receive depositions increased markedly over the course of the eighth century BC. At the beginning of the century, these sites were normally open to the elements; by its close, approximately half were provided with structures of some kind.⁵ Three types can be distinguished. First, in the region of the Cyclades, for example on Delos and on Crete, we typically find a rectangular dwelling furnished with a bench, probably intended to accommodate objects for use in communicating with superhuman agents possessing (ancient)⁶ names but (as yet) no form. Such objects have frequently been found in the gap behind the bench in such dwellings. Common on the Greek mainland and in western Asia Minor is a second structural type: a long, narrow house with a rounded apse at one of the narrow ends. The interior was accessed via a vestibule or veranda that opened into a hall with a steep roof, and there is sometimes a separate room at the rearmost, rounded end. In these buildings too, users deposited objects for communicating with gods. A pitcher-sized clay model of such a building (fig. 10) was used at Perachora on Cape Melangavi in the Gulf of Corinth as a means of communicating with Hera. The third and most prestigious type of structure referred back to the hegemonic tradition of a long, rectangular building with a vestibule, central space, and rear room. Early Greek temples were built on this plan by about 800 BC; an example is the first Heraion on the island of Samos, which had a length of some 30 meters (100 feet), and was completely surrounded by a row of wooden columns.

In all these instances, and surely in many others independently of one another, innovators decided to use a dwelling layout as the model for a structure intended for religious communication. This was surely a masterstroke. It would be easier to attract the attention of superhuman addressees if they were regularly addressed at one specific location. Where, if not at such a site, could humans be sure of finding their faceless counterparts? The trick, perhaps, would lie in successfully tying the addressee to the location. Beautiful, attention-catching architecture might work, especially if it was of larger than normal size.



10. Terracotta model of an early Greek temple, ca. eighth century BC. From Perachora, Greece. Athens, National Museum of Archaeology, inv. 16684. akg-images / De Agostini Picture Lib. / G. Nimatallah.

Cult images would reinforce a sense of possession, and the right furnishings would suggest a home. Ever more lavish objects might in the long run have a part to play. Visitors would surely be prepared to invest in aesthetically appealing tokens liable to attract attention (and perhaps increase in value over time), because the spatial context offered a guarantee that the offering would have a prolonged presence and high visibility. Objects were displayed above ground and for long periods, while being protected from theft. However visible, though, objects could be recognized as the offerings of a particular actor only if that actor had succeeded in attracting a larger public to witness the process of communication in which he or she was engaged, thus anchoring the association between the person and object in the memories of third parties. In this way, the objects would constitute

memorials of a shared experience. And this would remain the case when donors began to render the context “visible” to non-participants as well by means of painted or engraved inscriptions (although these did not yet play a role in the eighth century).

In at least some places in Greece, on Samos and perhaps also Delos,⁷ the practice of deposition progressed to such an extent that, as early as the end of the eighth century, treasuries enlarged their display areas. Visibility was an issue in relation not only to supernatural beings, but also fellow humans: an ancient religious practice provided a path to social prestige that was more direct now, no longer being merely a by-product of pious action. In a society that was still scarcely monetized, accumulated surpluses were increasingly⁸ channeled toward religious practices, in the form of building projects as well as objects.⁹

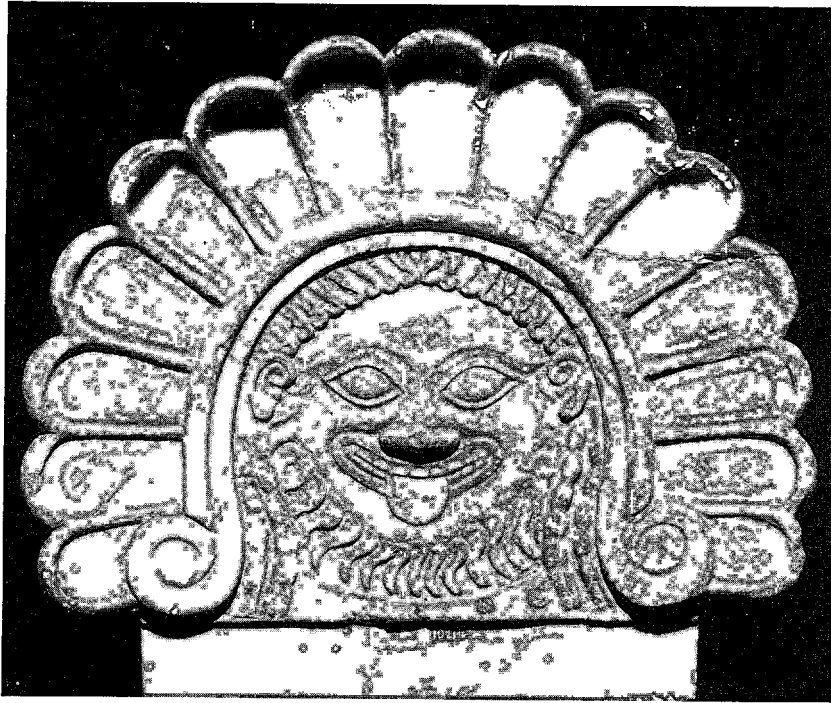
Before returning to Satricum, we must again consider the question of innovation, a concept that does not fit comfortably with the traditional image of religion. A monumentalized cult site already existed on Kea in the second millennium, at the location now called Ayia Irini, and it continued in use, at least sporadically, despite the destruction of the associated settlement. When the head of a much older terracotta statue was found in the eighth century BC, someone positioned it in such a way as to make it serve as a divine counterpart.¹⁰ In the present state of our knowledge, the use of one cult site over such a long span of time is highly unusual, and here we see not only the continuation of religious practices, but also traces of older practices being incorporated anew into later religious activity. Innovation was thus not some kind of counter-movement within a religious practice that was by its nature traditional, but the actual motor driving new practice.

Investments

To return to central Italy: a religious undertaking may come with risks, but the initiative of the princely patrons in Satricum—and we must not forget that “princely tombs” were also built for women!¹¹—paid

off handsomely. The new site, or at least the enormously enhanced visibility afforded the old pit by the new structure, attracted many visitors. Why, people may have begun to ask, should we continue to invest substantial wealth in visible burials and tombs in the far-off northwestern necropolis?¹² Growing households (and we must remember that this does not include all households) were increasingly inviting one another to ceremonial banquets, and they recalled these occasions to mind with increasingly frequent deposits not only of drinking vessels and pitchers, but also of articles associated with personal grooming. Perhaps the vessels had last been used at a symposium where spouses and friends were present, which would have enhanced their significance. A second pit was opened on the other side of the street and used from the fifth century BC onward. Its contents suggest that people often celebrated together in the area and made contact with the gods. One analysis suggests that the pit’s contents represent the remnants of sixty-seven such parties.¹³ The participants, comprising both men and women, did not confine themselves to drinking on these occasions but partook also of the meat of domesticated animals: cattle, sheep, and pigs.¹⁴ Perhaps the house beside the pit afforded them some protection from the elements, especially at cooler seasons of the year or in the event of rain. This may in fact have been the primary function of the structure, as also of the apsidal structures in Greece.¹⁵

The long-term success of the model combining a pit with a building was mirrored in other developments in Satricum. Some decades after the construction of the first structure, in the third quarter of the sixth century BC, it was replaced by the structure referred to as Temple 1. Those who undertook this new venture clearly intended to dazzle the onlooker, and it was the roof, they decided, that would be the foremost attraction; in Etruria too, roofs were designed to make a dramatic first impression. But it was not Etruria that provided the model for the first (or perhaps only the second) version of the structure in Satricum, as we will soon see. The terracotta tiles at the eaves and gable were provided with coping stones, or antefixes, representing palmettes, heads, and *gorgoneia* grimacing and displaying their tongues



11. Terracotta from the Temple of Mater Matuta at Satricum, ca. 490 BC.
Rome, Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia. akg-images / Pirozzi.

(fig. 11). Among the decorative features on the ridge were predatory felines. At the base of the pediment were terracotta representations of cattle.

These embellishments to the roof followed a fashion recently developed in Campania, a district further to the south and more exposed to Greek design concepts. Craftsmen from Capua could perhaps have produced on-site in Satricum designs that their patrons had seen on trading journeys to the south. But it appears that those same patrons finally opted for a simpler but considerably more expensive procedure: they had the entire roof produced in Capua, and the consignment of some 2,500 tiles, weighing in total about forty tonnes, shipped to Satricum via the coastal searoute and the river Astura.¹⁶ Such a radical course may have been motivated by the construction of a second temple at Satricum, probably about 550 BC, thus shortly before the

construction of Temple 1.¹⁷ For this temple, a three-element *cella* was commissioned, proof that extra-regional fashions were sufficiently familiar to be employed in this building erected at Macchia Santa Lucia—and it was perhaps not the first temple at that location. That a number of people in Satricum had far-flung contacts is attested also by imported wares from Italy and Greece, based in part on Cypriot and Egyptian models. These were paraded at funerals before being deposited in rich seventh-century tombs.¹⁸

As we have already mentioned, reorientations could be quite rapid. Within a few generations, the collections of objects deposited in tombs and pits would change, and along with them the structural components of those same tombs and pits. In the fifth century BC, after the abandonment of the northwestern necropolis, burials were even carried out on the acropolis itself, at the center of the settlement. These perhaps represented ripostes to rivals, innovations in the competition for status, influence, marriage opportunities, and economic or even military alliances. And religious communication was one weapon in the arsenal available for such competitions.

2. Temples and Altars?

The entire eastern Mediterranean world, and especially ancient Greece—of which Ionia, the coast of Asia Minor, must always be counted a part—was fascinating to the Italian elites, and especially to the moving spirits of the Etruscan-Latin region and the southern Italians of the coastal zone, with its Greek colonies. Witness to this is the Orientalizing Period of the second half of the eighth and early seventh centuries BC, when those who had access to overseas imports by virtue of their economic status and contacts put such objects on show to enhance their social standing at home.

Our discussion of large-format images showed how complex such contacts and imports could be.¹⁹ And this serves to remind us to take care when comparing Greek and Italian developments in religious buildings. I have on purpose largely avoided the term “temple,” which carries with it a connotation based on Greek material: namely, that a