

# New light on the production of decorated roofs of the 6th c. B.C. at sites in and around Rome

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One of the major questions regarding ancient terracotta roofs is how the technology of tile-making was transferred from one place to another. Were workshops in different centers operating in isolation, sometimes imitating roofs seen elsewhere, or did they travel from center to center, as seems to be the case where roof-elements in different cities were made from the same moulds? Do shared tile types and/or decoration mean shared technology? An archaeological approach compares the morphologies and types of decoration found in different excavated contexts to establish a chronological sequence of roof types. A complementary approach is offered by petrographic and chemical characterization of the fabric of the roof-elements, to determine whether the roofs were always made from local clay sources and whether technical similarities in the fabric can demonstrate interconnections between different centers.

With these questions in mind, a project was initiated in 2000 by A. Ammerman to compare the fabric of plain tiles and decorated terracotta roof-elements with clay beds identified in deep coring in the ancient center of Rome. As reported in *JRA* 21, the earliest roof tiles in Rome, from undecorated roofs datable to the second half of the 7th c. B.C., have been shown through petrographic and chemical characterization to have been produced from extensive clay beds in the Velabrum, the valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills.<sup>1</sup> The tile types are the same as tiles from excavations at Acquarossa (S Etruria), which are made from a different clay, however, suggesting that at this early date each site used its own local clay source even when the design was shared. Samples taken from roof-elements datable to the 6th c. B.C. in Rome and sites to the north (Veii, Caere) and south (Satricum, Velletri, Caprifico near Cisterna di Latina) have produced equally important results regarding the sharing of designs and technology, representing a major break from 7th-c. B.C. practice. These are presented in the present article, together with new results from a few samples that have been obtained more recently. For a map of the sites mentioned, see fig. 1; for the terminology of roof-elements, see fig. 2.

In *JRA* 2008, identification of three distinctive fabrics was presented. The fabric of the tiles made from clay in the Velabrum clay beds was designated as Fabric A, basically formed from fine sediments that were deposited in mid-Holocene times. Fabric A continued in use for plain tiles from the second half of the 7th c. B.C. until at least 500-450 B.C. A second fabric, Fabric B, is instead used for decorated roofs primarily in Rome, ranging in date from 590/580 B.C. (figs. 3-4) down to at least c.100 B.C. A third fabric, mostly found outside Rome, was designated as Fabric C. A mudstone fabric, now designated as Fabric M, was used for a single piece excavated in Rome.

In the present article, attention will focus on Fabric B and the information that can be gleaned from these analyses. As a starting point, a series of questions were posed:

- Given the fact that it appears later among the samples, to what extent was Fabric B an improvement on Fabric A?
- Is there any pattern of difference between the earliest use of Fabric B in Rome and its later occurrences?
- Is there any pattern of difference between the samples of Fabric B in Rome and those from outside Rome?

Following a description of the characteristics of the individual fabrics, answers to these questions form part of a wider discussion of the implications of the test results for the roofs of the 6th c. B.C.

## The samples

Samples of 118 different tiles and decorated roof-elements were selected with three sets of

<sup>1</sup> Ammerman *et al.* 2008.