

A review of archaeological studies on Iron-Age and archaic Latium

C. J. Smith

1. Introduction

This article aims to present a survey of the recent work on Latium in the Iron Age and the archaic period. Such a survey is merited by the amount and the significance of new material in the past 20 years, as I hope to show. It is 119 years since the discovery of the Tomba Bernardini at Palestrina, still the wealthiest tomb known from Latium, and 89 years since Pinza's grand synthesis of the archaeological evidence in *Monumenti Antichi*.¹ Interest in Latium picked up dramatically in the 1970's, and this article will consider the work from that era, beginning with *CLP*, the catalogue for a major exhibition on the late Bronze and early Iron Age Latin civilization held in 1976, when the excavations at Osteria dell'Osa, the most significant necropolis found in Latium, had already just begun. In 1990, the *Grande Roma dei Tarquini* exhibition² complemented its predecessor. The last major synthesis of the available evidence was published as *Atti* 1980 (largely written in 1977), but we now have Bietti-Sestieri's more recent though less comprehensive survey,³ and the 1990 and 1992 Conferences of Italian Archaeology, held in London and Oxford respectively, involved a number of papers on Latium.⁴ New books are promised by Ross Holloway [*The archaeology of early Rome and Latium*, while this article was in press - Ed.] and by T. J. Cornell.

The pace of discovery has fluctuated over this long period, but our understanding of Latin civilization has increased dramatically since the war. If *novità* is yielding a little to the consolidation of previous knowledge, the benefits are no less evident. The amount of new evidence, and the number of publications this has elicited, are reason enough for some attempt at review, but it is also significant that new discoveries on the ground have proceeded at equal pace with developments in archaeological theory and in the directions of modern research. As a discipline, archaeology has altered quite radically, and the self-reflection of its practitioners has heightened the importance of theoretical debate.⁵ Work on Latium evinces some of these changes, and this is also a stimulus to review.

Review and synthesis are intimately connected processes. The need for a synthesis of Latin material has been partly met for the 10th to 8th c. by Bietti-Sestieri,⁶ but this still leaves the 7th and 6th c., which are in their own way both interesting and complex. Sufficient material is available; if more is forthcoming, it will most likely add to our understanding, rather than overturn it completely.

Studies on Latium have a particular interest because within the region there are a number of sites which have been studied in some detail but in quite different ways. Rome is dominant in the literary record, and for obvious reasons there is an intrinsic interest in the earliest days of a city that was to become the capital of the world, but Rome is also a very difficult site to

1 F. Cianciani, F. W. von Hase, *La tomba Bernardini di Palestrina* (Roma 1979); G. Pinza, "Monumenti primitivi di Roma e del Lazio antico," *MonAnt* 15 (1905).

2 Reviewed by A. J. Ammerman in *JRA* 4 (1991) 200 ff.

3 Bietti-Sestieri 1992.

4 E. Herring, R. Whitehouse and J. Wilkins, *Papers of the 4th conference of Italian archaeology* (Accordia Research Centre, London 1992).

5 See, for instance, B. Trigger, *A history of archaeological thought* (Cambridge 1989); M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-Constructing archaeology: theory and practice* (2nd ed., London 1992).

6 *Supra* n.3.