CHAPTER 2

The *Mundus* of Caere and Early Etruscan Urbanization

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Introduction

The organization of space is a fundamental aspect of the process of development and definition of the ancient city. The study of the criteria that guided it may allow modern scholars to reconstruct a picture, even if largely incomplete, of the mind-set and cultural background of the developing urban communities. In the case of the Greek polis division and organization of space, along with the rigorous definition of concepts such as inside and outside, private and collective space, that is evident in the Homeric description of the shield of Achilles\(^1\) and the early phases of the urban history of the Greek colonies of South Italy,\(^2\) has been considered by many a veritable ‘act of birth’ of the polis.

In the case of the urbanization of central Tyrrhenian Italy, the picture is still largely incomplete within the bounds of both the literary and the archaeological record.\(^3\) The investigation of the earliest phases of the settlement history of Rome is limited by the problems typical of research in urban sites with an uninterrupted history, but many of the great cities of Etruria and Latium could be open to extensive exploration. As is well known, the cemeteries with their spectacular finds have attracted much attention, and research on urban areas has been long neglected. The trend has changed in the last few decades and important results have been achieved, especially in smaller sites that did not see significant occupation after the archaic period, but much work is still to be done. This deficiency is especially regrettable since literary sources stress the importance of religion in the procedures of the definition and organization of Etruscan and Roman urban space. The prestige of the Etruscan religion in the field of foundation rituals was so high that according to the Roman tra-

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3 See, e.g., Gros, Torelli 1992 5–126; Torelli 2000a; Cornell 2000; Riva 2009; with previous bibliography.
dition the Urbs itself would have been founded following “the Etruscan rite”. Thus, the discovery of the so-called hypogaeum of Clepsina in the urban area of Caere is a most valuable case study not only for the investigation of actual urban planning, but also in its connection to its religious premises.

The Hypogaeum of Clepsina: Initial Interpretation

The monument in question lies in a central area of the Etruscan—and later Roman—city. Foundations of monumental buildings and finds of architectural terracottas show that this was a public area of the Etruscan city. A theatre and a group of sculptures and inscriptions found in the nineteenth century confirm that the Roman forum was also near. The underground room known as the hypogaeum of Clepsina was first presented to the scientific community by M. Cristofani and G.L. Gregori in 1987. The presence of inscriptions immediately set this building apart from the usual rock-cut utilitarian structures. The earliest inscription is that of C. Genucius Clepsina, consul at Rome in 276 and 270 BC. As is clearly visible, the second part of the inscription was traced on still soft plaster, while the first was added on a hardened surface by a different hand, as indicated by the different form of some letters, especially c and o. The earlier text reads \textit{CLOUSINO(S) PRAI}, stating who was responsible for the construction—or rather renovation, as we will see—of the building. The text is probably in the nominative case, since Latin inscriptions of this period still use the ablative ending in -\-d. His name was later completed as \textit{C. GENU-CIO(S) CLOUSINO(S) PRAI}. The cognomen is here written in its more “regular”

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5 See, e.g., Nardi 1989 52–57; Cristofani 1991; Boss, Burkhardt and Cristofani 1992; Cristofani 2000 399–409; Nardi 2001 nos. 4–6; Cristofani et al. 2003, with bibliography; also see Romizzi 2003; Lulof 2008; Guarino 2010; Bellelli 2011.


7 Cristofani, Gregori 1987; earlier shorter reports in Cristofani 1986a; Cristofani 1989. The room had been accidentally discovered already in the 1950s and 1960s and was included in the unpublished Tesi di Laurea of E. Camerini (Università di Roma-La Sapienza 1975–1976).

8 The image was produced by Alexander Gabov of the Queen's University using the RT1 technique.