

# A Story Told in Pieces

Architectural Terracottas from Minturnae

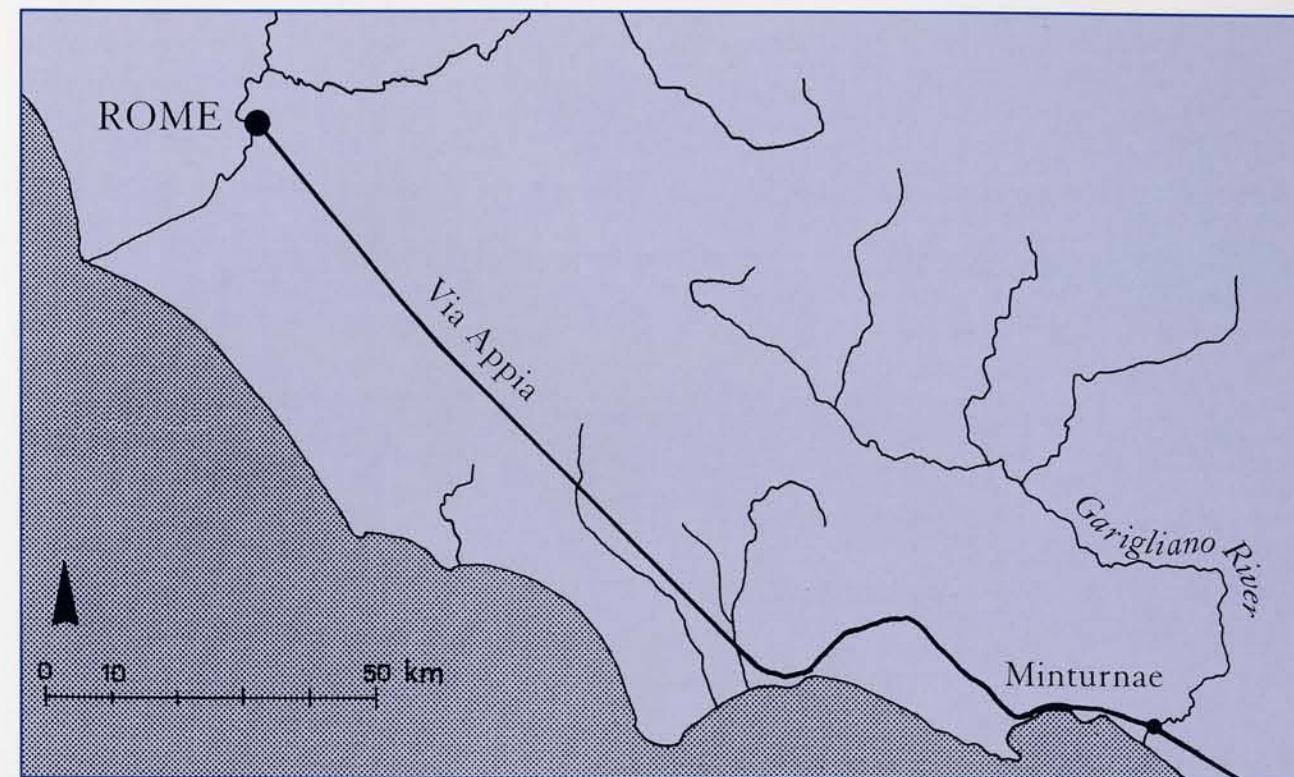
By *Valentina Livi*

At the dawn of the third century B.C., Rome was on the move. The upstart city on the Tiber was expanding into neighboring territories, leaving its imprint along the way. In turn, Roman civiliza-

tion absorbed influences from the cultures it came to dominate during the centuries of its ascendancy. Threads of these diverse influences can be traced through changes in architectural terracottas, clay tiles that were installed to



A view of the excavations looking east, showing the Etrusco-Italic temple remains and the forum. Also visible are the Via Appia and part of the temple portico, and on the opposite block, the macellum, or market, with its colonnade.



Map of central Italy showing the Roman colony of Minturnae near the Tyrrhenian coast, linked to Rome by the Via Appia

protect and embellish the roof and wooden parts of buildings. The terracottas that adorned buildings around the forum in the early colony of Minturnae reflect the evolution of Roman architecture — from its Etrusco-Italic origins through the second century A.D. — when terracotta eventually fell out of use.

*From the middle Republican age to Imperial times, Minturnae experienced remarkable urban development.*

The Roman colony of Minturnae on the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy was settled in 295 B.C. during a period of Roman expansion into Italic territories. Owing to its location at the crossroads of three important arteries — the Via Appia, which links

Rome to the south; the Garigliano River, which flows through the internal regions of central Italy; and the Tyrrhenian coast — the colony became one of the most important commercial outlets in Latium.

From the middle Republican age to Imperial times, Minturnae experienced remarkable urban development. The importance of the site in antiquity was suggested by the presence of a few significant remains where those three arteries converge. In 1931 a joint expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the International Mediterranean Research Association began the first scientific excavation of Minturnae.

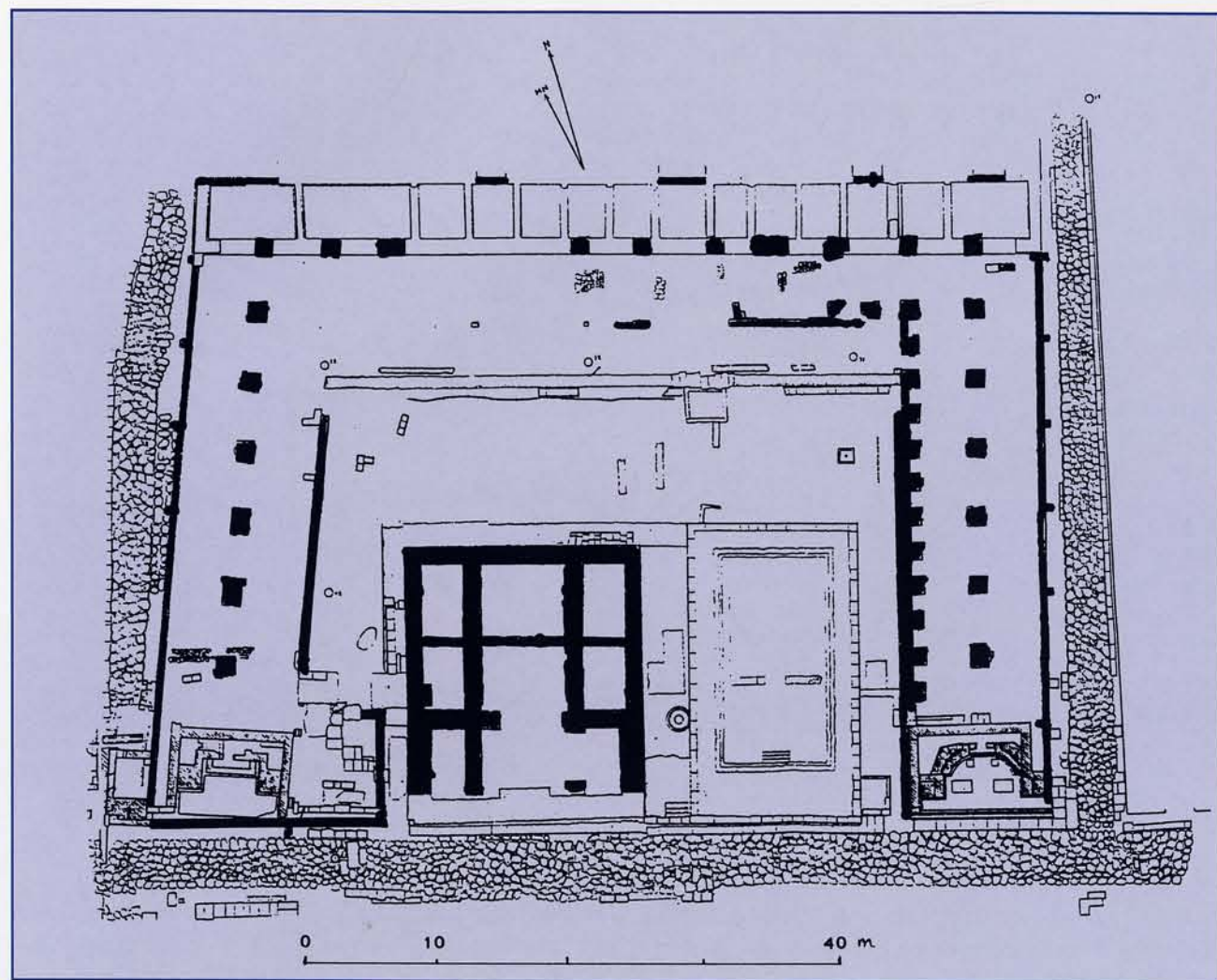
## THE STORY BEGINS

Minturnae is located 140 kilometers south of Rome, on the right bank of the Garigliano River (the ancient Liris). The colony was established after the destruction of the local population, the Aurunci, and was intended to prevent incursions from both sea and land by the Samnites, another Italic population.

According to the Roman historian Livy, Rome initially had difficulty finding volunteers willing to

THIS SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPH AND ILLUSTRATION BY VALENTINA LIVI





Remains of the third century B.C. Temple of Jupiter and those of the second century B.C. Etrusco-Italic temple with the three-sided portico. The terracotta decoration of the temple is in keeping with typical ornamentation of the Etrusco-Italic tradition of central Italy (Etruria, Latium, and adjacent territories) from the sixth century B.C. to the first century B.C.

*Antefixes — terracotta ornaments applied to the terminal cover tiles — were a standard part of Etrusco-Italic temple decoration.*

settle in this marshy and dangerous area at the extreme border of its territory. The only remains of the first settlement are parts of a polygonal limestone wall enclosing a small quadrangular area bisected by the Via Appia.

Around the middle of the third century B.C., the colony expanded beyond the limits of this wall. A forum with a small temple and shops was built, enclosed at the end of the century by a new city wall. Traces of the foundations of the forum temple (17.85 by 8.68 meters) are recognizable, as well as blocks of tufa, a porous rock, forming part of the temple podium parallel to the Via Appia.

The temple bore the first evidence of architectural terracotta decoration in Minturnae. The terracottas were found buried in a pit nearby and within a portico of later date. The building is generally thought to belong to Jupiter. Statements by Livy

suggest this, as he mentions a Temple of Jupiter at Minturnae that was struck by lightning twice, once in 207 B.C. and again in 191 B.C.

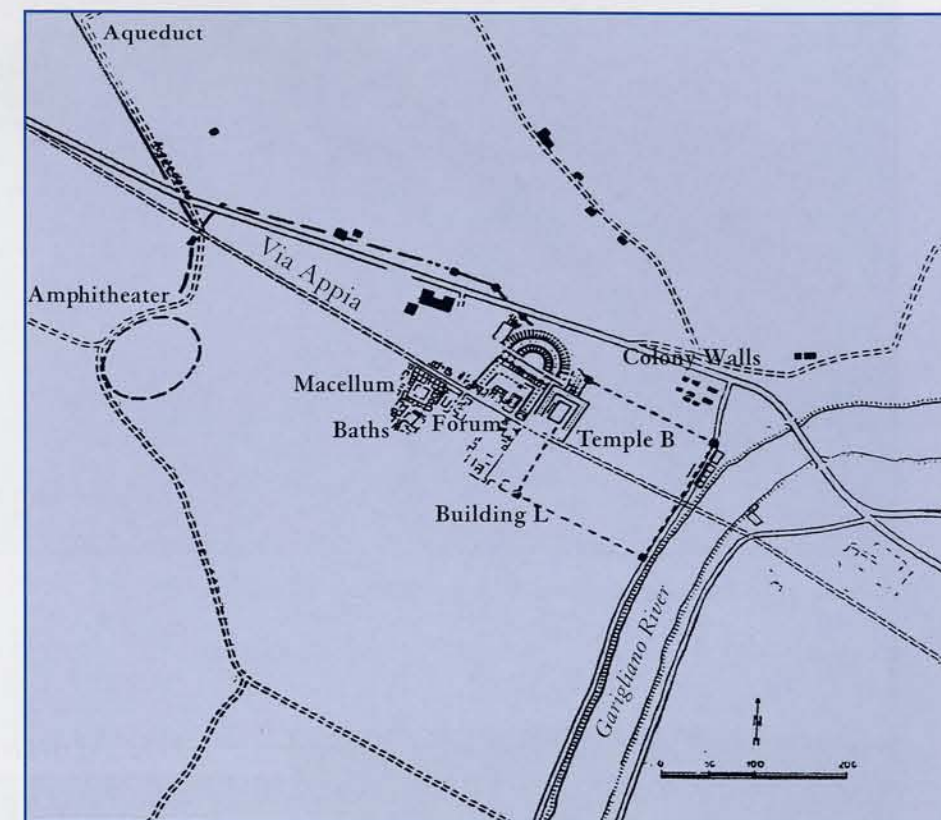
The terracotta decoration of the temple is in keeping with typical ornamentation of the Etrusco-Italic tradition of central Italy (Etruria, Latium, and adjacent territories) from the sixth century to the first century B.C. A number of identical terracotta pieces were set side by side on the temple, forming ornamental friezes. The front of the temple was decorated with crowning cornices (simae) set on the slope of the pediment, consisting of concave, vertical elements (strigils), a plain band, and a rounded convex molding (torus). The crowning cornices were surmounted by perforated plaques decorated with whirls and ribbons and topped by pointed rods of bronze (meniskoi) to prevent birds from perching on them. The external parts of the wooden structure of the roof were sheathed with terracotta plaques decorated with ribbons and palmettes, and the architraves, the horizontal elements set between columns that carry the roof, were adorned with diagonal palmettes.

Along the two sides of the temple, the only ornaments preserved were painted eaves tiles, and these, unfortunately, are now lost. Antefixes — terracotta ornaments applied to the terminal cover tiles — were not recovered during the excavations, although their presence is assumed, as they were a standard part of Etrusco-Italic temple decoration. All the pieces were brightly painted in white, yellow, red, green, and black.

A characteristic feature of this period was the presence of lead bars set horizontally and vertically in simae and in perforated plaques. Simae also had vertical flying struts used to fasten the cornices to the tiles.

#### THE APPEARANCE OF HELLENISTIC INFLUENCES

The first half of the second century B.C. saw a new, monumental phase in the forum at Minturnae. Johnson attributed this renewed activity to a fire, traces of which were found in many parts of the site. Reconstruction included rebuilding the forum temple as a larger Etrusco-Italic temple (18.6 by 17.8 meters) facing the Via Appia, perhaps a capitolium, enclosed on three sides by a portico with a double row of

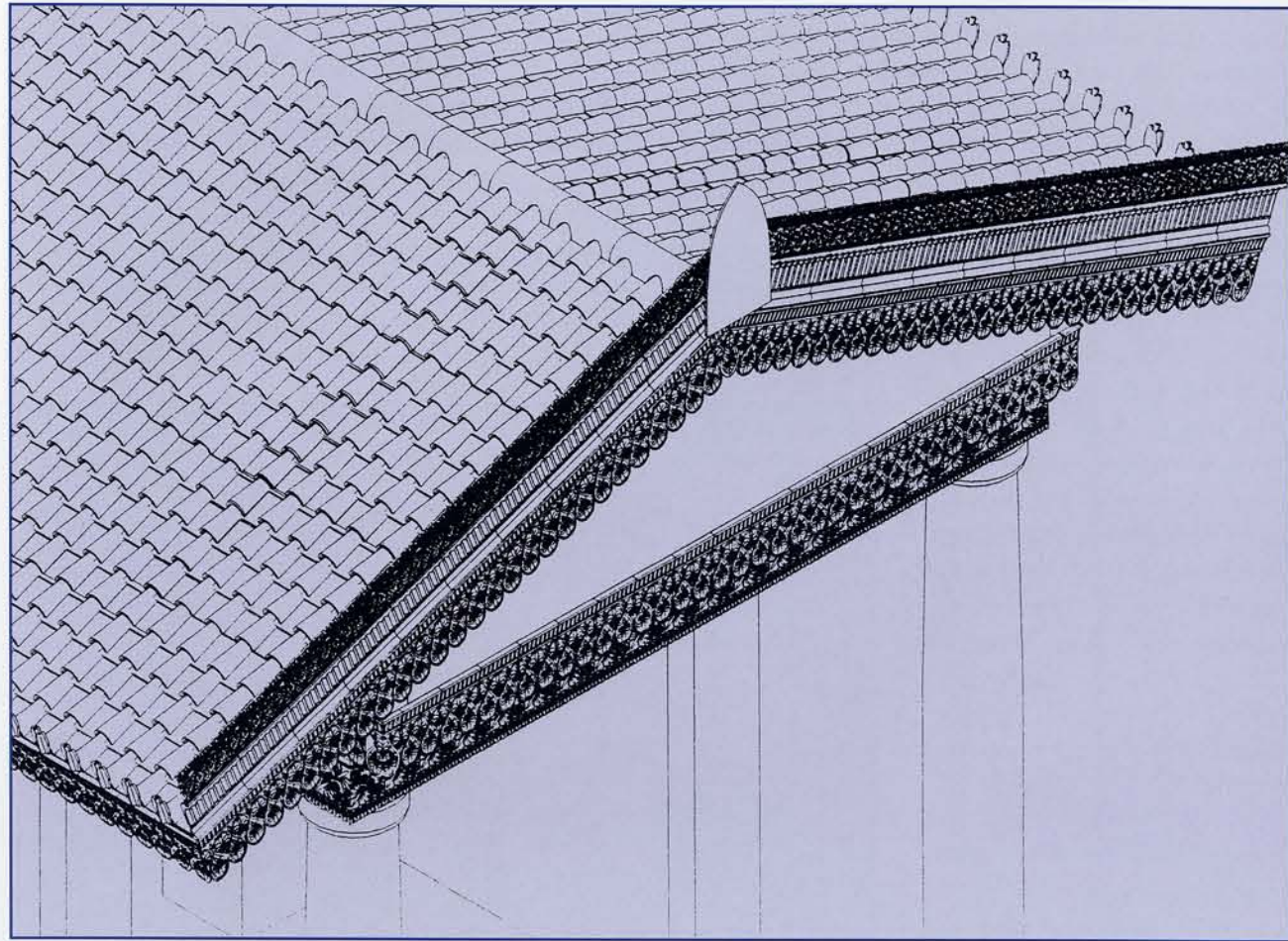


Plan of the colony showing the first quadrangular settlement and its later development, which also included the area beyond the riverbank. The city was crossed by the Via Appia, the most important Roman road leading to the south of Italy.

columns. The main forum activities thus shifted to the southern block.

The new plan of the forum is a reflection of the spread of Hellenistic architecture in Roman cities; this is particularly evident in Rome with the erection of the earliest porticoes and basilicas based on Greek models. The complex at Minturnae, with its terracotta decoration, recalls the contemporary sanctuary dedi-





Reconstruction of the terracotta decoration on the Temple of Jupiter



A sima that decorated the slope of the frontal pediment of the Temple of Jupiter. The upper part was grooved in order to hold a perforated plaque (see photo on page 30).

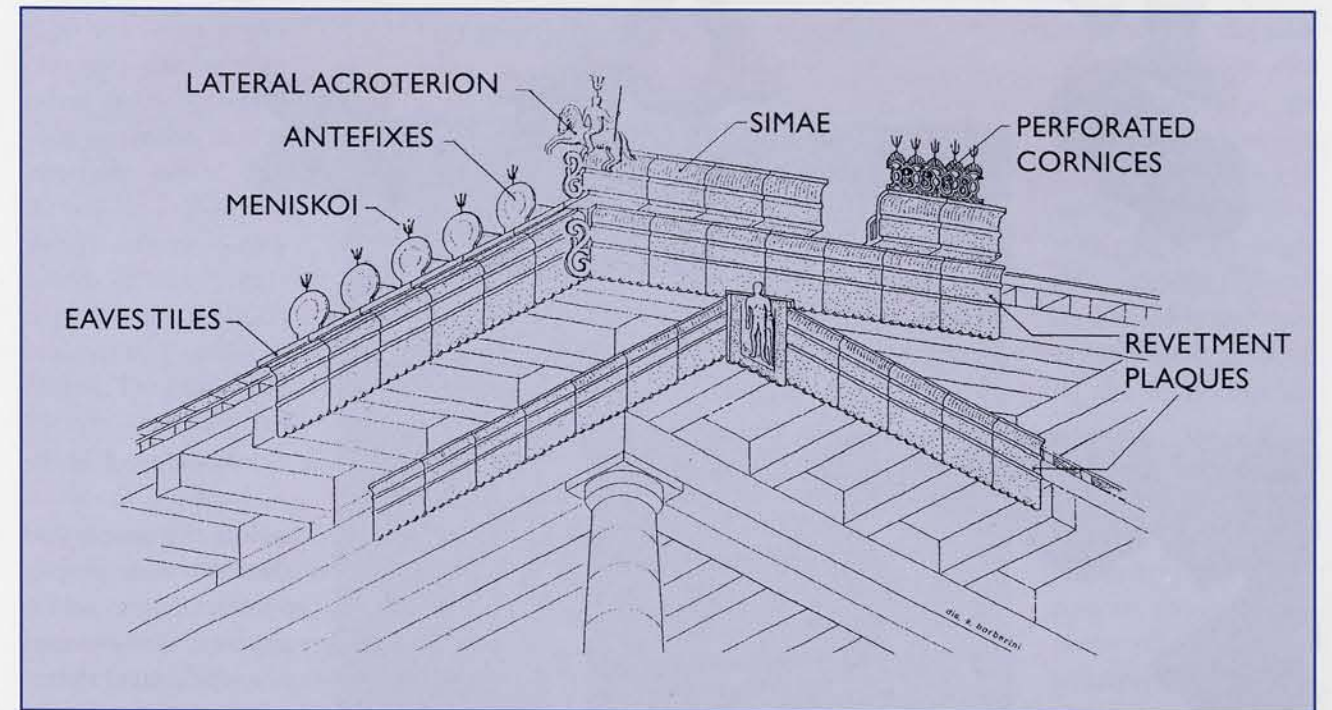
*The Minturnae Victory testifies to the Hellenic influences in the art produced in Rome and its colonies.*

cated to Aesculapius at Fregellae, a colony near Minturnae, dated to the middle of the second century B.C. The Minturnae temple and portico were made of tufa blocks; the roof and architraves were decorated with terracottas, fragments of which were found exactly where they had fallen, incorporated into the concrete foundations of a later temple reconstruction.

TOP ILLUSTRATION BY VALENTINA LIVI; BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 37-36-3, H. 50 CM

The decoration of the new Etrusco-Italic temple is similar to that of the earlier Temple of Jupiter, except the terracottas of the new temple are slightly smaller and there is some variation in the details. The fragments recovered represent the complete system of decoration, which included simae adorned with strigilated cornices, a plain band, and a torus, crowned by perforated plaques with whirls and figure eight motifs; revetment plaques decorated with ribbons and palmettes; and plaques with diagonal palmettes. On top there was an acroterion, a large ornament at

the peak of the pediment, adorned with a palmette; the edges of the two lateral sides were decorated with antefixes representing a winged woman seizing a feline's paws, called a "Potnia Theron," (Mistress of Animals). The type of antefix found here is a re-elaboration of Greek models, first attested in Etruria and Campania. The use of the Etrusco-Italic type was widespread in Latium and in territories subject to Roman domination from the third century to the first century B.C. As elsewhere, the selection of the Potnia Theron motif for this temple does not seem to be



GLOSSARY

- ACROTERION: large ornament for the peak of the pediment
- ANTEFIX: decoration applied at the end of the terminal cover tiles
- ARCHITRAVE: horizontal element set between two columns
- CAMPANA PLAQUE: architectural category of terracottas characterized by the predominance of figurative motives, produced from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D.
- COVER TILE: semicylindrical tile laid over the adjoining edges of two rows of roof tiles
- FORUM: central marketplace or public meeting place
- MACELLUM: market
- OPUS RETICULATUM: Roman masonry made in concrete faced with a network of small squared blocks set in diagonal lines
- PERFORATED CORNICE: pierced cornice of the pediment, inserted in the groove on the top of the sima and fastened with lead
- PORTICO: covered walkway around or leading to a building
- POTNIA THERON: Mistress of Animals, a female figure holding two wild animals (e.g., panthers, lions)
- REVTMENT PLAQUE: terracotta plaque nailed on the wooden structure of a building
- ROOF TILES: flat tiles set in rows; cover tiles are laid over adjoining edges
- SIMA: raking cornice made by extending one side of a terminal roof tile
- STRIGILS MOTIF, STRIGILATED: in architectural terms, vertical concave elements, derived from the curved tool used by athletes to remove dirt and sweat from their skin

ILLUSTRATION BY VALENTINA LIVI





Perforated plaques, decorated with whirls and palmettes, were set on the raking sima of the Temple of Jupiter.



Revetment plaque from the roof of the three-sided portico (second century B.C.), decorated with a double row of palmettes, flowers, and a cornice of vertical strigils

related to a specific cult worshiped in the temple itself.

The portico surrounding the temple had wooden architraves sheathed with plaques with a double row of palmettes, and on the sides of the roof were antefixes, with a winged satyr playing a syrinx (the typical wind instrument of the satyr), alternating with a winged female playing a double flute. These figures, taken from the Hellenistic repertoire, have been reworked by the Etruscan artisans.

Probably belonging to the same or a slightly later period as the Etrusco-Italic temple and its portico is an acroterion representing a winged Victory. This item was not found in situ, but in a sacred well that dates to a later period. The size and the angled cut at the base of the Victory indicate that the acroterion belonged to a small temple, the location of which is unknown. The figure is dressed in a red chiton that falls to her ankles and is tied under her breast with a narrow belt. Her large, opened wings are painted blue.

TOP PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-4, H. OF LARGEST FRAGMENT 27 CM; BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-6, MAX. H. 30 CM

Unfortunately, her head and parts of her arms and legs are missing, but the remaining portion shows that her right arm was raised, while her left arm hung along her side, carrying the attributes of her divinity. The figure was filled with lead; it was fastened to the roof with handles and set on the peak of the gable with a lip cut at an angle. This example, one of the rarest types of terracotta acroterion (which generally depict palmettes or a Gorgon), clearly follows Greek models of Victory, particularly the tradition initiated by Paionios of Mende. The Minturnae Victory testifies to the Hellenic influences in the art produced in Rome and its colonies, and is in accordance with contemporary innovations present in Minturnae.

#### REBUILDING AFTER FIRE AND LIGHTNING

Around the middle of the first century B.C., the city was again ravaged by fire, which can be traced to the well-known raiding activities of Sextus Pompey along the coast of Latium. Reconstruction occurred during the new colonization under Caesar or Augustus and marked the beginning of another important phase at Minturnae.

PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-5, H. 60 CM

*During the second century A.D., materials such as marble and travertine — more durable, precious, and available — replaced terracotta in architectural decoration.*



This plaque, which sheathed one of the wooden roof beams of the Temple of Jupiter, bears a decoration of ribbons and palmettes, and a cornice with vertical strigils, characteristic of Etrusco-Italic style.

During this latest activity, the city was planned anew: blocks were redefined with new temples, fountains, and porticoes along the Via Appia, and with a theater, market, aqueduct and amphitheater. It was, in fact, not only a monumental architectural renovation, but a complete urban overhaul that took almost 60 years to complete.

At this point the city dedicated a sacred well built adjacent to the Etrusco-Italic temple. Incorporated into it were a block inscribed with the word *fulgur* (thunderbolt) repeated on two sides, and some architectural elements of the buildings hit by lightning: capitals and drums of the Etrusco-Italic temple and the portico, and the acroterion mentioned above. Fragments of architectural terracottas of the temple and portico were found in the concrete foundation of the well. It is unclear whether the thunderbolt mentioned in the inscription has any connection to the fire that occurred in the city during the same period.

The portico that enclosed the Etrusco-Italic temple was one of the first elements to be reconstructed. The new building had travertine architraves decorated with stucco, and tufa column



drums. Antefixes were decorated with a new motif: tall palmettes with a bud at the top and a volute at the bottom. This change in decoration reflects the influence of Greek models in Rome and marks the beginning of the decline of traditional Etrusco-Italic decoration (which favors mythological or apotropaic figures). Nevertheless, there is no obvious close comparanda for this type of palmette, and it should be considered a local product of Minturnae.

The sacred area of Temple B, built a little later than the portico, occupied the east block of the Republican-era forum. This temple and its enclosing portico were built in opus reticulatum, a type of Roman masonry faced with a network of small squared blocks laid in diagonal lines and decorated both in stone and terracotta. The only architectural terracottas recovered from this area are antefixes representing Potnia Theron, already seen in the Republican temple in the forum. The motif does not reappear after its use here. The modeling on the antefixes is sadly careless compared with the earlier tradition: the eyes are retouched with the point of a stylus, the chiton falls in rigid folds, and the tall hat bears no decoration. The fragments were found along three sides of the temple, thus making their attribution certain.

The decoration of Temple B and its accompanying portico represent a transitional phase at Minturnae, in which elements of the old



Acroterion with a Victory. Originally set on the peak of the pediment of a small temple, it was buried in a sacred well (bidental) in the middle of the first century B.C., along with other building elements of the second century B.C. that had been struck by lightning.

tradition, seen in the use of terracotta and of typical Etrusco-Italic models, are mixed with new materials, such as limestone and travertine.

During the reign of Augustus (27 B.C.—A.D. 14), the Etrusco-Italic temple was completely renovated in concrete sheathed in limestone. The temple is the first building in Minturnae decorated entirely with stone, rather than terracotta. The terracotta fragments recovered belonged to the previous decoration and were “buried” in the temple’s foundations and the foundations of the sacred well.

#### FOCUS ON THE DECORATIVE

The other new sacred buildings from this period were also constructed entirely in stone. The use of terracottas continues but is restricted to the decoration of houses, baths, porticoes, monumental fountains, and tombs. Terracottas of two main categories appear: antefixes and Campana plaques, both of which represent types created in workshops in Rome. The vast majority of antefixes from Minturnae bear a palmette to which is added any of several decorative patterns on the lower portion of the pieces. The most common types of addition are taken from the neo-Attic repertoire, such as a Gorgon’s head or a pair of darting dolphins. Another pattern, two griffins flanking the palmette, makes a clear reference to Apollo and points to the principal role of

PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-364-4, H. 47 CM

the god in Augustus’ religious program.

During the course of the first century A.D., there was a general and gradual deterioration in the quality of antefixes. The architectural terracotta decorations sport the same designs as earlier examples, but are executed shabbily, pressed from old molds or retouched. Such carelessness is not universal, however. For example, a fragment from the portico of Building L, constructed at the end of the first century A.D., is clearly inspired by contemporary models, but is on a larger scale with more careful stylization.

Campana plaques were also used, particularly from the Augustan age onward. (These plaques are named after Gianpietro Campana, who in 1842 made the first study of this type of decoration as a specific figurative category.) Among the most common examples of Campana plaques represented in Minturnae are those displaying scenes of Eroses with dolphins and of a dancing Bacchante. Both types date from the Augustan age. A large number of plaque fragments portray a landscape along the Nile River, a theme particularly widespread during the Augustan age. The scene depicts a hippopotamus in the water, crocodiles, and a small boat paddled by two grotesque

PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-364-4, H. 47 CM



This antefix represents a Potnia Theron (Mistress of Animals), a winged figure seizing two panthers. The motif was very common in Etrusco-Italic decoration; this example is a later and less careful version made for Temple B (first century B.C.).

pygmies. On the shore are huts, one with a stork on the roof. The fragments were found along the portico of Building L, dating the type to the end of the first century A.D.

#### THE DECLINE OF MINTURNAE

Urban renovation at Minturnae during the first part of the second century A.D. — evidenced by the enlargement of the theater, the building of new baths, and the renovation of the forum — does not include architectural terracottas. They are no longer used to adorn stone buildings in Rome or in other Roman cities.

The production of the architectural terracottas discovered in Minturnae occurs in two main phases: the first (third to first century B.C.), represented by the decoration of the Temple of Jupiter, of the Etrusco-Italic temple and its portico, and the antefix of Temple B, is characterized by motifs taken from the Etrusco-Italic repertoire, without any reference to the local artistic tradition, the Aurunco-Campanian. (This tradition is, however, well attested in the sanctuary of the Goddess Marica, built in the sixth century B.C. close to the city.) It should not be forgotten that Minturnae was a colony of Roman



citizens, with strong political and cultural links to Rome, demonstrated by the construction in the heart of the city of a temple dedicated to the most important Roman god, Jupiter.

In the second phase (first century B.C. to second century A.D.), concomitant with the growth and urban development of Minturnae, a decisive renovation of the terracotta decoration is evident. This is due partly to the widespread use of the different types elaborated in Rome, represented by antefixes and Campana plaques. It is also due to the creation of new types in Minturnae itself. Some of these are of a high level of quality, for instance, the antefixes from the portico that enclosed the temple in the forum (second phase) and those from Building L, the latter clearly inspired by the Roman prototypes. Others, more poorly made, are imitations



Campana plaque with a scene of the Nile river animated by various animals and pygmies paddling a boat. Some colors are very well preserved: the river is painted in greenish-blue, the huts in yellow, the animals in red and magenta. The main fragments were found along the portico of Building L, built at the end of the first century A.D.



The decoration of palmettes and dolphins on this antefix is based on a Roman model that spread to Minturnae during the Augustan age. The provenance is unknown.



This antefix with palmette, festoons, and bucrania (bulls' heads) was found near Building L. This is a stylized version of a Roman prototype.

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-12, H. 16 CM; BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-10, H. 27.5 CM; TOP RIGHT PHOTOGRAPH: UPM 32-36-15, MAX. H. 18 CM

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The 1931 expedition, directed by Jotham Johnson, uncovered the public area of the colony — city walls, sacred areas, forums, and a theater (see page 27) — as well as private houses. Among the materials brought to light were numerous fragments of architectural terracottas. In accordance with contemporary Italian laws, some of this material was granted to the University of Pennsylvania Museum; a large portion remains in Italy.



Since the American expedition, the area of Minturnae has been explored by the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma and by the Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Lazio. These later excavations have focused on other zones of the city and on the restoration of monuments. A large number of additional architectural terracottas were recovered, most of which, unfortunately, have been dispersed to museums or forgotten owing to jurisdictional changes and the outbreak of World War II.

These historical circumstances required that the study of the architectural terracottas from Minturnae first involve identifying all of the existing pieces in their various locations and then reconnecting them with their original archaeological contexts through evidence provided by field records, photographs, and published reports. Thanks to the excellent preservation of the pieces at the Museum and to the richness of the related archival material from Johnson's excavations, it has been possible to successfully carry out this project. Here, I focused on the most important architectural terracottas, those that are tied to the development of the city of Minturnae, and particularly the pieces in the Museum.

I am very grateful to Dr. Donald White for his support and interest in this research, and to Dr. David G. Romano for all his valuable advice. I am also grateful to Dr. Brunilde S. Ridgway for her time in discussing terracotta sculpture. I would like to thank Alex Pezzati for his help in the Archives, Francine Sarin for the photographs of the architectural terracottas, and all Museum staff.

of Roman or Campanian models (reelaborated more or less freely).

During the second century A.D., the use of architectural terracottas ceased in Minturnae, although some types continued to be preserved and restored. Materials such as marble and travertine, which were more durable, precious, and available, replaced terracotta in architectural decoration.

At the beginning of the third century, Minturnae had so diminished in size that tombs were being constructed within the theater. The city continued to exist until the end of the sixth century, when the last few inhabitants moved to the nearby hill and founded the village of Trajectum. The original site of Minturnae was used as a quarry for the new town. Over time it was buried and forgotten until its rediscovery by Johnson. Since then, the pieces of its story have gradually been falling into place, and the architectural elements of Minturnae have been both conserving and expressing their unique aspect of Roman civilization.

*Valentina Livi, Rodney S. Young fellow at the University of Pennsylvania Museum for 1999–2000, is preparing a monograph on the architectural terracottas from Minturnae. Her archaeological research is mainly focused on Rome and Latium, where she has excavated and surveyed many sites. She is working on the excavations at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli (Soprintendenza Archeologica per il Lazio) and is involved in the interdisciplinary project of the Colosseum (Università di Roma "La Sapienza").*

#### FOR FURTHER READING

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