PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES AND RITUAL PRACTICES AT THE SANCTUARY OF AESCULAPIUS IN FREGELLAE (ITALIA): A REFLECTION ON THE MATERIALS PRESERVED AT THE ISTITUTO VILLA ADRIANA E VILLA D'ESTE - VILLÆ (MIC)

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The Context

Since the 1990s, numerous materials from Fregellae in southern Lazio, and in particular from the area of the Sanctuary of Aesculapius, have been kept in the storerooms of the Sanctuary of Hercules Victor in Tivoli. Within the Latin colony, founded in 328 BCE and destroyed by Rome in 125 BCE, the sanctuary represents a sacred complex of considerable importance, whose architectural articulation appears to have been inspired by Hellenistic models. The finds preserved in Tivoli were the subject of a large-scale inventory campaign in 2023, which aimed at providing a preliminary overview of the material, both in order to finalize its acquisition into the cultural heritage register and to assess its state of preservation (D'Alessandro *et al.*, in press). Of the 347 crates inventoried, 330 can with certainty be attributed to the Sanctuary of Aesculapius and, in particular, to a votive context known as the "stipe of Fregellae", which predates the monumental phase of the site (3rd–2nd century BCE). The construction of the monumental sanctuary itself seems to date to the second quarter of the 2nd century BCE. No stratigraphic records of the stipe materials survive, as they were mostly recovered in 1975 following a landslide, and subsequently through an excavation in 1978 (Coarelli 1986). The trial trench revealed that the materials were most probably contained within a pit. It is therefore possible that they had been intentionally deposited there as a means of disposing of surplus *sacra* within the sanctuary space. At present, the overall interpretation of the context – as one strongly oriented towards healing (*sanatio*) – is not contradicted, in line with the epigraphic evidence documenting the cult of Aesculapius and Salus at the site. However, the number of finds attributed to the stipe has increased exponentially, now exceeding 10,200 estimated items in addition to the 4,346 already known from the literature. These consist primarily of terracotta votive offerings (**fig. 1**), most of which are anatomical in nature (votive heads, masks, legs, feet, arms, hands, internal organs, animals, infants). In addition, statues, statuettes, boundary stones (cippi), and loom weights are also attested.

OBJECT	FUNCTION	QUANTITY
Anatomical votives	Votive offerings	6122*
Statues		4068*
Statuettes		52
Loom weights		15
Cippi		3
Pottery and utensils	Objects used in ritual	383
	Objects used in the life of the sanctuary	
Architectural materials	Architectural decoration	246*
	Other elements (tiles and bricks)	307*

Table 1. Sanctuary of Aesculapius at Fregellae: categories and function of the finds
*Estimated quantities

Fig. 1. Sanctuary of Aesclupaius at Fregellae: anatomical votive offerings

The pottery assemblage

The research focused on a closer examination of the less numerous classes of materials recovered from the context and in particular on a preliminary assessment of the pottery assemblage (383 fragmentary pieces). The pottery material from the votive context appears rather heterogeneous in both classes and forms and is preserved in an extremely fragmentary condition. Cooking wares and black-gloss pottery constitute the predominant classes, with 160 fragments (42% of the total) and 149 fragments (39%) respectively. These are followed in quantity by common ware (14%, 54 frags.) and amphorae (4%, 14 frags.), while fragments of unguentaria (2 frags.), thin-walled pottery (1 frag.) and lamps (1 frag.) are more rarely attested (**fig. 2**). Table and storage vessels, as well as the cooking assemblage, appear to have been produced almost exclusively in the local sphere. Within the class of black-gloss pottery, however, there are minor attestations of imports from the Urban area, southern and northern Campania, and Etruria. The fabrics of the amphorae, moreover, can be attributed to the Campanian-Latial coastal area (4 frags.) and to the Rhodian area (2 frags.) (**table 2**). Evidence of local pottery production may also be recognized in two elongated terracotta objects with flaring ends, which seem to have functioned as spacers for ceramic vessels: according to one interpretative hypothesis, these items, placed unfired within the kiln, would have served to keep the stacks of pottery separate during firing (**fig. 3**). Given the cultic nature of the context, the study of pottery forms – and by extension of their functions – assumes particular significance (**fig. 4**).

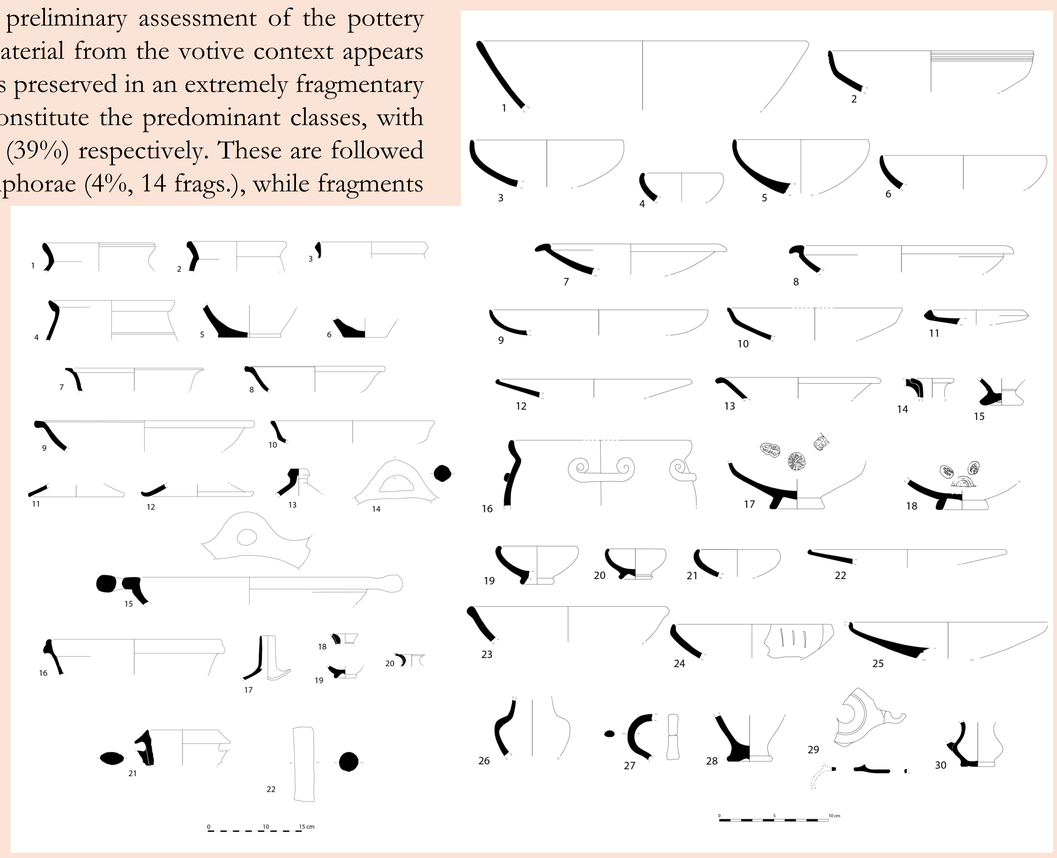

Fig. 2. Sanctuary of Aesculapius at Fregellae: cooking ware, common ware, amphorae, black-gloss ware, thin-walled pottery, unguentaria, lamps, and miniature pottery

Within the tableware, cups predominate overwhelmingly (61 frags.), generally with diameters ranging between 12 and 20 cm, followed by plates or paterae (20 frags.), whose diameters range from 14 to 24 cm. Drinking vessels are rarer, being represented only by three beakers and a single *skyphos*. As for vessels intended for the distribution of liquids, four jugs, one bottle, and one *guttus* are documented. The storage and preparation of food, instead, is represented by a substantial number of jars (26 frags.), generally employed for cooking and storing porridges based on cereals or legumes; these are accompanied by pans (6 frags.), suitable for either moist or dry cooking of meat and fish. Only a single fragment may be attributed to a pot, a form mainly used for boiling and slow-cooking preparations such as stews and soups. The assemblage is further completed by a few basins and mortaria (3 frags.), used both for grinding and crushing foodstuffs and for the preparation of pharmacological remedies, as well as by two clibani, employed for bread baking. The consumption of wine is, finally, attested by the presence of amphorae. Regarding objects that may have served an exclusively votive function, a small number of locally produced black-gloss *pocula* (6 frags.) were recorded, which, given the cultic nature of the context, may also have been employed in ritual settings. Only one specimen, however, survives in a state of preservation sufficient to allow its identification as a miniature jug, which can be securely interpreted as an *ex-voto*.

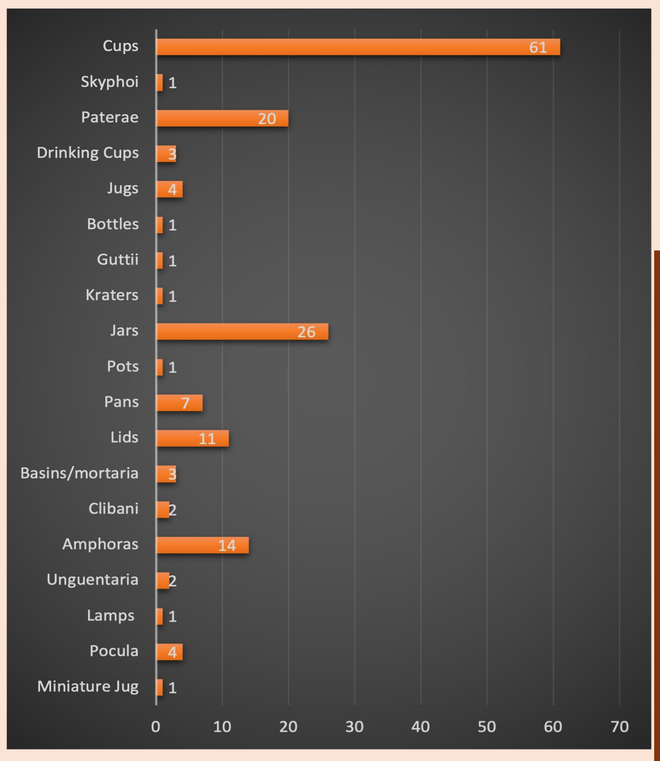

Fig. 4. Sanctuary of Aesculapius at Fregellae: pottery forms

Fig. 3. Sanctuary of Aesculapius at Fregellae: possible spacer

Table 2. Summary of classes, forms, productions, and types of pottery

	FORM	PRODUCTION	TYPE	FRAGS.
BLACK-GLOSS WARE	Patera	Local	Morel 1274 *similis*	1
	Patera		Morel 1315	5
	Patera		Morel 1534	3
	Patera		Morel 2212	1
	Patera		Morel 2234	1
	Patera		Morel 2252-2253	3
	Patera		Morel 2283	2
	Patera		N. id.	4
	Cup		Morel 2614-2615	5
	Cup		Morel 2775	1
	Cup		Morel 2783-2784	4
	Cup		Morel 2787	3
	Cup		Morel 2825 *similis*	8
	Cup		Morel 2843	2
	Cup		Morel 2981-2982	1
	Cup		N. id.	41
	Skyphos		Morel 4391	1
	Krater		Morel 4753 *similis*	1
	Jug		Morel 5281a	1
	N. id.		N. id.	29
	Patera	Latial or Northern Campanian Area	Morel 2234	5
	Cup		Morel 2614-2615	1
	Cup		Morel 2823	1
	Cup		Morel 2981-2982	1
	Cup		N. id.	6
	N. id.		N. id.	6
	Patera	Campana B Circle	Morel 1310	1
	Patera		N. id.	1
	Drinking Cup		Morel 3300	1
	Cup	Sothern Campania	N. id.	1
	N. id.		N. id.	7
	Kylix		N. id.	1
TOTAL				**149**
THIN-WALLED POTTERY	Pitcher	Local		1
TOTAL				**1**
UNGUENTARIA	*Unguentarium*	Local	Forti I	1
	Unguentarium		N. id.	1
TOTAL				**2**
LAMPS	Lamp	Urban Area	N. id.	1
TOTAL				**1**
MINIATURE VASES	Jug	Local		1
TOTAL				**1**
COMMON WARE	Basin	Local?	Carli, Ricciarini 2019: 324-325 n. 1, figs. 5.34-42	1
	Basin		Olcese 8	1
	Basin/Mortarium			2
	Bottle			1
	Jug?		Frapiccini, Saccarelli 2019:. 297 n. 49, fig. 2.49	1
	Jug			2
	Cup			1
	Guttus			1
	Two-handled Jar			3
	Ring Foot (Open Form)			1
	Ring Foot			2
	Ring Foot (d. less than 4 cm)			8
	Flat Bottom (d. less than 4 cm)			3
	Indistinct Flat Base			8
	Indistinct Flat Base with Thin Walls			1
	Open Form N. id.			2
	Closed Form with Thin Walls			1
	N. id. with Thin Walls			1
	Walls			14
TOTAL				**54**
COOKING WARE	Jar	Local	Olcese 1	2
	Jar		Olcese 2	7
	Jar		Olcese 3	2
	Jar		Olcese 15	2
	Jar			1
	Jar (Indistinct Flat Base)		Olcese 1/2/3?	11
	Pot			1
	Pan		Olcese 1	1
	Pan		Olcese 2	3
	Pan		Cerquaglia, Privitera 2019: 280, n. 56, fig. 4.56	2
	Clibanum		Olcese 1	2
	Lid		Olcese 1	3
	Lid		Olcese 2	1
	Lid (Handle)		Olcese 1/2?	7
	Handle			2
	Closed Form_Indistinct Flat Base			11
	N. id.			4
	Walls			98
TOTAL				**160**
AMPHORAE	Amphorae	Italic Amphorae	Late Greco-Italic	4
	Amphorae	Eastern Amphorae	Rodian	2
	Walls			8
TOTAL				**14**

Productive Activities and Ritual Practices at Fregellae

Recent archaeometric analyses carried out on the terracotta votives preserved at the Istituto Villa Adriana e Villa d'Este, in collaboration with the VisLab IMM of the National Research Council (CNR), appear to confirm their local production. This hypothesis had already been put forward on the basis of the large quantity and high degree of standardization of the recovered votives, as well as the similarity of their fabrics at the macroscopic level.

The presence of the two spacers, the black-gloss *pocula*, and the miniature jug, all produced with local clays, further suggests that craft activities were connected not only to the needs of the community but also to the cultic practices of the area. Helga Di Giuseppe (2012) has already emphasized the concept of "temple economy," noting how sanctuaries, between the 4th and 1st centuries BCE, through a progressive process of territorial control, became active agents in pottery production, intended both for the requirements of sacred activities and for wider distribution within the surrounding territory.

The study of ceramic tableware offers a significant contribution to understanding ritual dynamics and aspects of daily life in the area. The predominance of cooking vessels and open forms such as cups and paterae is consistent with the cultic nature of the context. The heterogeneity of forms may reflect both ritual practices (offerings, sacrifices, libations, communal meals) and the daily activities of priests and sanctuary attendants. Closed forms such as the *guttus* and jugs, though less frequently attested, likewise appear to be connected with the ritual sphere, most probably employed in libations associated with the cult.

Clearly votive in nature is the miniature jug; in addition, the two spacers may be interpreted as offerings to the deity by an artisan associated with the sanctuary.

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