

REVIEWS

Satricum – Scavi e reperti archeologici. Exhibition in Le Ferriere, province of Latina, Italy, 11 June 2014 – 11 January 2015 (prolonged until 1 June 2017)

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M. Gnade (ed.), 2007. *Satricum. Trenta anni di scavi olandesi*, Amsterdam: Amsterdams Archeologisch Centrum, Universiteit van Amsterdam. ISBN 978-90-78863-14-4. 208 pp., € 25,00

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Satricum (Le Ferriere, prov. Latina, Italy): a new, on-site exhibition

Today, the ancient town of Satricum (modern Le Ferriere, province of Latina), located approximately 60 kilometres southeast of Rome, may be counted among the better-investigated sites of *Latium Vetus*. Excavations at Satricum were already carried out in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, but it was not until 1977 that the site began to be systematically excavated, by teams from various Dutch research institutes. These investigations, currently under the aegis of the University of Amsterdam, have continued uninterrupted up to today, producing a vast amount of valuable data. The site has yielded several burial grounds, roads, many different architectural structures, and two sanctuaries, among which a monumental temple to the Latin deity Mater Matuta, for which the site is particularly known. At present, about 40 percent of the ancient settlement has been systematically excavated. Results of the long-term Satricum Project are now presented at a new exhibition in Le Ferriere.

A new, on-site exhibition

Satricum – Scavi e reperti archeologici is the third temporary exhibition solely devoted to this ancient Latin town. In 1982, an exhibition was organized in Latina, as part of the celebrations surrounding the provincial capital's fiftieth birthday. A similar show was held at the Dutch Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden a few years later (1985-1986) (Beijer 1982; Attema et al. 1986). Drawing on 36 years of research, the current exhibition, created by the University of Amsterdam (Prof. M. Gnade) in collaboration with the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo and the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Lazio, provides a new account of the history and culture of Satricum, from its beginnings in the Iron Age to its decline in the Imperial period (ninth century BCE – c. 100 CE). The new exhibition may well be considered a milestone in presenting Satricum to the public: for the first time, a large selection of finds normally tucked away in storage can now be viewed at Le Ferriere itself, in a former factory that was renovated specifically for the purpose. The building lies at the foot of the ancient acropolis, allowing for not only an easy visit of the exhibition, but of

the site as well. Organizing the exhibition proved to be a difficult undertaking; it was initially scheduled to be opened in 2007, to coincide with the 30-year anniversary of Dutch archaeological research at Satricum, but was delayed several times over the years due to various circumstances. It is the organizers' intention to eventually make the temporary exhibition space into an official site museum, but the plan is still awaiting approval from the Italian authorities.

The exhibition displays about 700 objects divided over three floors. The main arrangement is chronological, each floor being devoted to a different period. The arrangement perfectly reflects archaeological stratigraphy: the oldest finds are shown on the lowest floor, artefacts from the Archaic and Hellenistic period on the next, and materials from the post-Archaic and Roman period on the top floor. Within the rooms, objects are displayed in thematic sections that elucidate clearly and effectively the different facets of the ancient town and its multi-layered community (e.g. sacred and private architecture, daily life, social relations, religious activity, burial customs and funerary ideology). In the room dedicated to the Iron Age, architecture is among the principle themes. At least 47 huts of different layouts and dimensions have been identified on the acropolis hill, which was the first place of settlement in Satricum, the earliest of which can be dated to Latial period IIB/III. The exhibition addresses their layout, chronology, function and use. Excavations in this zone have also produced some evidence regarding funerary and religious practices. For instance, on display are the physical remains and accompanying grave goods from a number of infant burials. The fact that these graves were found at the acropolis, rather than in the contemporaneous Northwest Necropolis (the oldest cemetery, late ninth - late seventh century BCE) shows that the settlement area was occasionally also used as a burial place. The infant graves are linked to the *suggrundaria* mentioned in ancient literature. As for the evidence of early religious activity, excavations have shown that Hut 1 probably was the earliest place of cult: it had associated votive deposits and was superseded by a *sacellum/oikos* (Temple 0) in the late seventh/early sixth century BCE.

In the rooms dedicated to the Archaic and Hellenistic periods, main themes are the sanctuary of Mater Matuta and the changing townscape. During the course of the sixth century BCE, the settlement underwent dramatic changes. It reached its largest size (c. 40 ha), was fortified with a ditch and rampart, and huts were replaced by more monumental structures with stone foundations and tiled roofs. On the acropolis, the appearance of new architecture is well illustrated by the replacement of the modest Temple 0 with a larger structure (Temple I) in about 540 BCE, which in its turn was supplanted by a temple of enormous dimensions (Temple II) in the first decade of the following century. Each of the three successive buildings had different sets of roof terracottas. Extensive research has revealed much about the original appearance and iconographic programme. A rich selection of finds from the enormous votive deposits illustrates the past religious activity in the sanctuary area. The diversity of languages used in the votive inscriptions (Greek, Etruscan, Latin) reflects the 'international' character of the sanctuary. Of particular importance in this respect are a large *vernice nera skyphos* (320-280 BCE, no. 638 in the catalogue), found in Votive Deposit III on the acropolis, and a fragment of a Late Republican votive *cippus* (cat. no. 640), found in front of the temple, which both carry dedications to the Latin deity Mater Matuta.

The inscribed *cippus* indicates that the cult was still alive in the Late Republican period. When the sanctuary fell out of use remains obscure; it is possible that the building burned down after a lightning strike in 207 BCE (cf. Livy 28.11.2).

The room on the top floor, dedicated to the Post-Archaic period, features materials from a Roman villa site, and many sets of grave goods from burial grounds in the lower city, which are generally linked to the Volscian occupation of the area.

Catalogue

The accompanying publication, *Satricum: trenta anni di scavi olandesi*, edited by M. Gnade, is structured into four forewords, seven thematic chapters, a catalogue of the exhibited objects, a glossary, and a bibliography. The introductory first chapter offers an overview of the history of archaeological research at Satricum, and the concluding chapter discusses the various inscriptions found at Satricum. Chapters 2-6 and the catalogue are organized chronologically, following the exhibition's main arrangement. The chapters, all written by specialists, are concise but informative and richly illustrated. No bibliographical references are included in the running text, but readers will find a comprehensive list of scholarly publications at the end of the book. A proper catalogue, consisting of 641 entries, provides specific information on most of the exhibited items as well as bibliographic references to academic publications. About 60 percent of the entries are illustrated. The glossary of technical terms makes the book more accessible to a wider range of readers.

Evaluation

The exhibition offers precisely what its somewhat prosaic title promises: a presentation of results of archaeological research at Satricum. Many of the items on view come from old excavations and have already been shown before, but the exhibition also includes some newly discovered material. Some of these recent finds are highly interesting and open up new pathways for additional research, such as a richly furnished infant's grave (Latial period IVA1) found isolated in the lower city area during the 2013 campaign. One of the major assets of the exhibition is the holistic and diachronic approach: rather than laying the focus upon one particular aspect, such as elite material culture, the exhibition aims at providing visitors with a comprehensive understanding of the complex history and culture of Satricum from its beginnings to its decline. On display are not only finds from the acropolis with its famous sanctuary, but also from many other zones of the site. Even materials from another site are included in the exhibition: the so-called Laghetto del Monsignore, a small lake located near Campoverde a few kilometres to the northeast of Le Ferriere, which served as an open cult place for a long period of time (tenth to fifth century BCE), as apparent from a large quantity of votive objects found in the lake and the direct surrounding area (for the Laghetto del Monsignore, not covered in the exhibition catalogue, see Giovannini & Ampolo 1976: 347; Crescenzi 1978: 51–55; Kleibrink 1997–98: 441–511; van Loon 2009: 1–8).

In the light of this broad scope, it is somewhat surprising that the aforementioned Northwest Necropolis of Satricum is not covered in the exhibition. Like in other parts of the central Italic peninsula, Satrican society became increasingly stratified during the course

of the second half of the eighth and the seventh centuries BCE, a process clearly reflected by the presence of lavishly furnished, monumental chamber tombs, the so-called *tombe principesche* in that cemetery. A proper presentation and discussion of the results of research in this zone would certainly have contributed to a better understanding of important matters such as the development of social stratification, funerary practices and tomb architecture (for the Northwest Necropolis, see Attema et al. 1985: 47–50, 120–30, and especially Waarsenburg 1995; 2001). A selection of finds from this cemetery are on permanent display at the Villa Poniatowski of the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome. Also, the absence in the exhibition of some of Satricum's most celebrated finds, e.g., the famous *Lapis Satricanus* or the splendid architectural terracottas of the Mater Matuta temple, may be disappointing to some informed visitors, but such highlights are, of course, not essential to an effective narrative. The *Lapis Satricanus* is now in the Museo Epigrafico of the Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.

The exhibition narrative is solid, and the spatial organization and presentation are clear and effective. Objects are consistently subservient to the narrative, without a hint of *oggettistica*. The exhibition is also serene: the organizers have clearly chosen not to follow the modern tendency to create a show that is a multimedia extravaganza. It is in many respects a traditional archaeological exhibition, very much comparable to the permanent exhibitions in many local archaeological museums in Italy. Some would argue that such an exhibition is more interested in communicating to a specialist audience than to the general public. However, the exhibition has a strong didactic component; for example, visitors learn much about the archaeological activities themselves: a short film, shot during one of the excavation seasons, shows the typical activities on site, and a section called *Dallo scavo alla pubblicazione*, addresses the processing, study and publication of the excavated material. Scale models and reconstructions are used to facilitate a better understanding of the past domestic and sacred architecture. The information provided at the exhibition is written in a comprehensible style largely free from professional jargon. The exhibition has attracted many visitors from Italy and abroad, and has proved of special interest to members of the local community. In fact, the fact that after a long period of abandonment the old factory was renovated and given a new purpose has had major effects on the local community. The building is deeply embedded in the history of Le Ferriere; the iron mill/strawboard factory that was located here (and to which the town owes its name) had many employees from Le Ferriere. To (re-)acquaint the locals with both the ancient and modern history of Le Ferriere, with their heritage, is one of the exhibition's primary aims. Text panels in the entrance hall narrate the modern history of the area, while large photographs portraying Dutch archaeologists together with locals, hanging prominently throughout the building, underline the longstanding and close Dutch-Italian relationship. The square in front of the building with its adjacent *theatron*-like stairs, is frequently used for cultural events. In this respect, the building has again become a social and economic focal point of the area. As such, the exhibition also encourages contemplation on notions of heritage and identity. For these reasons, it is of pivotal importance that the current exhibition space will be granted a permanent status. At any rate, this exhibition can already be regarded as a successful step towards the establishment of a "Museo Archeologico di Satricum".

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Figure 1. The renovated factory building that houses the exhibition (photograph by N. Steensma).

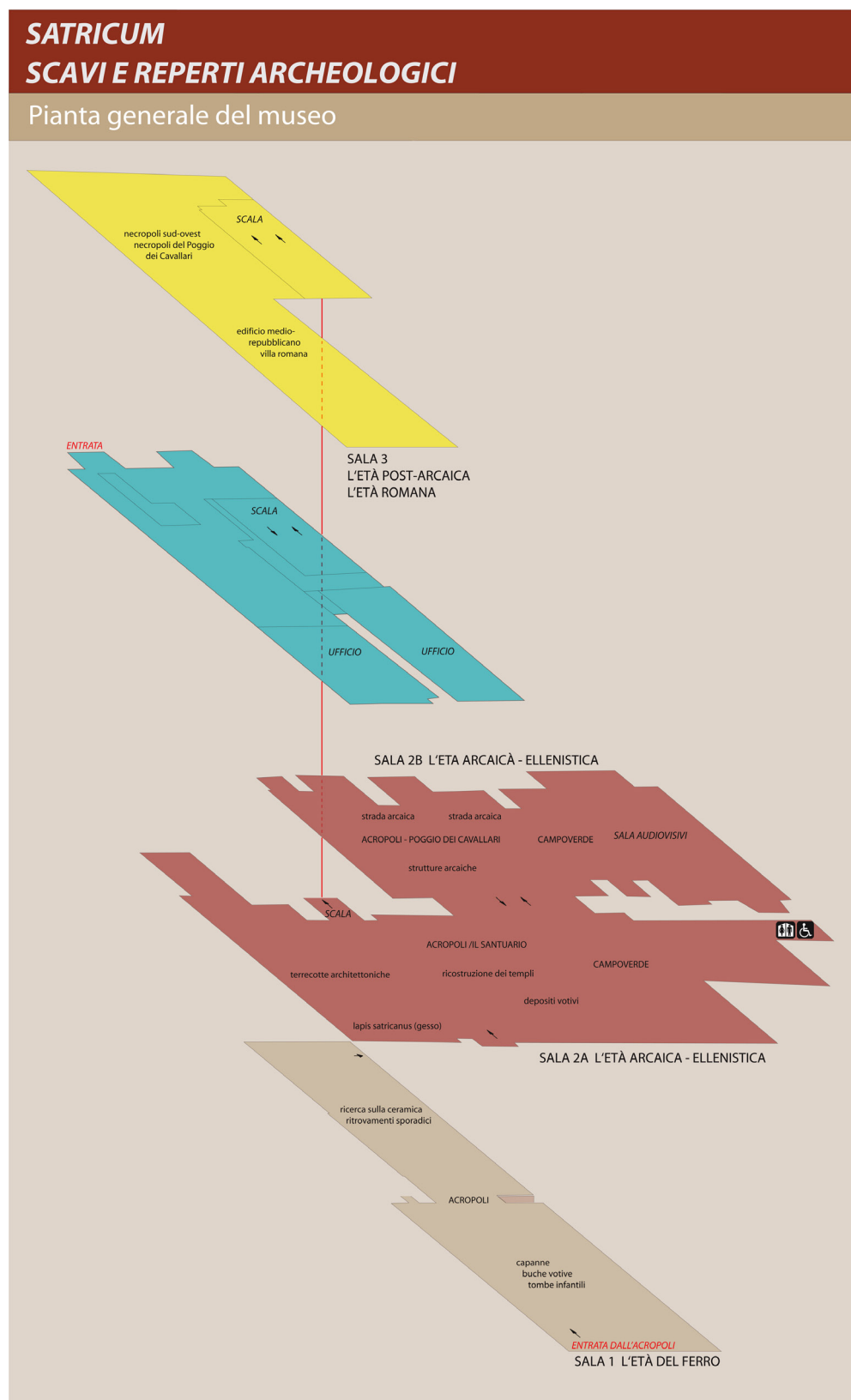


Figure 2. Floor plan of the exhibition space (courtesy Satricum Project, University of Amsterdam).



Figure 3. Room II (photograph by N. Steensma).



Figure 4. Grave goods from an infant's grave at Poggio dei Cavallari (photograph by N. Steensma).

