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Confirmed: Capitoline Wolf is Medieval (Romanesque), not Etruscan

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DISCOVERIES

Confirmed: Capitoline Wolf is Medieval (Romanesque), not Etruscan

The bronze sculpture of a she-wolf nursing the infants Romulus and Remus is not the masterpiece of Etruscan metalwork it has been reputed to be since the 18th century. The latest radiocarbon dating performed on organic residue from the casting process confirms that La Lupa, iconic symbol of Rome, was made in the 11th or 12th century, not the 5th or 6th century B.C.



The early history of the sculpture is murky. It's possible that it's a copy of an antique piece that once stood guard in front of the Lateran Palace, but that's speculation based on descriptions of such a sculpture going back as far as the 10th century. The Capitoline Wolf only enters the historical record in 1471 when Pope Sixtus IV donated it to the Roman people. They were moved to Palazzo Dei Conservatori on the Capitoline, and would form the core of the new Capitoline Museum collection.



The wolf's symbolic power and sculptural quality has invested it with antiquity. It was Johann Joachim Winckelmann, a German art historian, archaeologist and pioneer in the study of Greek, Etruscan and Greco-Roman art, who classified the wolf as Etruscan in his 1764

masterpiece *The History of Art in Antiquity*. Although other scholars contested Winckelmann's classification and suggested far later production dates, the Capitoline Wolf's ancient origin (Etruscan, Roman or Greek) was popularly assumed to be true until 1996 when art-historian Anna Maria Carruba restored the bronze. She fully examined the sculpture and found that it was cast in one complete piece using the lost wax method. Ancient bronze sculptures were cast in pieces and then fused together, allowing them to make more elaborate pieces. Single-piece casting was a common medieval technique, used to produce objects like bells and cannons that required a rigid structure to function properly.

"The new dating ranges between 1021 and 1153," said Lucio Calcagnile, who carried out radiocarbon tests at the University of Salento's Center for Dating and Diagnostics. Using accelerator mass spectrometry, the researchers extracted, analyzed and radiocarbon dated organic samples from the casting process. The results revealed with an accuracy of 95.4 % that the sculpture was crafted between the 11th and 12th century AD.

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