

studied by us. It belongs to the type ‘mosaico marmoreo a grand tessere irregolari’, with close parallels in Rome datable to the fourth or early fifth century AD. Dr John W. Hayes carried out some further study of the pottery and amphorae.

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AMANDA CLARIDGE AND PETER ROSE

(Classics Department, Royal Holloway University of London)

Excavations at Falacrinae (Cittareale, Rieti)

The 2008 excavations at the site of *Falacrinae* (Cittareale) took place over six weeks in July and August. The project began in 2005 and is directed by the British School at Rome and the Università di Perugia in collaboration with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici del Lazio. The primary aim of the initiative is to identify and investigate the *vicus* of *Falacrinae*, cited by Suetonius as the birthplace of Vespasian. The bimillenary of the birth of Vespasian (AD 9) is being marked by a series of exhibitions in Rome, followed by four exhibitions in the Sabina, including one at Cittareale itself.

Geophysical survey of key sites in the landscape followed by a series of excavations have identified the probable *vicus* of *Falacrinae* itself, as well as a large Republican building (probably a public *domus*, that was reused in late antiquity as a necropolis) and a large Roman villa. The 2008 season focused on extending the excavations of the *vicus* (at Vezzano) and the villa (at San Lorenzo).

The *vicus* and related sanctuary (Vezzano)

This season confirmed the presence of a sanctuary associated with the *vicus*. The first certain attestations of use date to the archaic period (beginning of the sixth century BC). This function remained unchanged until the late Republican period, its most important phase being in the third century BC. This date is of particular importance given that it coincides with the Roman conquest of the Sabina by Marius Curius Dentatus (290 BC), and is confirmed by the presence of numerous Latin graffiti on black glaze vessels. The sacred nature of the complex is demonstrated by the presence of numerous votive pits (over a hundred), many of which contained materials of various types but always relating to ritual functions: animal bones, black glaze pottery (mainly cups), loom weights and spherical bowls with incised letters (monograms). Burnt material was also present — clearly the remains of sacrifices and libations made to the underworld divinities. The absence of such remains in some of the pits can be explained by the ephemeral nature of the products used for the libations (wine, milk, cereals, for example).

This was clearly a sanctuary associated with the *vicus*, of a type known from the literary sources, inscriptions and excavations. However, this particular site is of the greatest importance, as it is the first and earliest cult site of its type discovered in the Sabina. The discovery of a number of infant

burials alongside the walls of several buildings associated with the sanctuary revealed the practice of a particular type of ritual (*suggrundaria*), which authorized the burial of infants alongside houses ('underneath the roof gutter'). This was a dispensation from the law forbidding burials within settlement boundaries, and demonstrates that the sanctuary was situated within an area that was also occupied by houses.

As regards the *vicus* itself, almost certainly this is the *Falacrinae* mentioned by Suetonius. Several trenches excavated at various points on the plain revealed only a few traces of structures, the majority of which had been destroyed by ploughing. One area seems to consist of structures interpreted as being houses, and here, in fact, votive pits were totally lacking. The pottery dates mainly to between the eighth and sixth centuries BC.

The Roman villa at San Lorenzo

Investigations of this area began in 2007 and revealed the presence of a large Roman villa complex. The excavations so far have uncovered the western part of the villa; it extends from north to south for approximately 120 m, and from east to west for 60 m. However, it is clear both from the geophysical survey results and surface material that the complex must have occupied a much larger area.

The structures are arranged on a series of terraces overlooking the valley crossed by the river Velino and the ancient Via Salaria. The eastern sector of the villa, where the entrance was probably situated, seems to be occupied by a large courtyard with a portico on the western side, as demonstrated by the presence of a series of *in situ* bases and the remains of brick columns. Immediately to the west is an area free of structures, probably a garden, perhaps associated with a drain paved with tiles. The main residential sector appears to have been situated to the north, where the excavation revealed a white mosaic pavement, belonging to the early Imperial phase of the complex, and a luxurious *opus sectile* floor composed of a rich range of marbles including *giallo antico*, serpentine and *cipollino*. The excavation of this area will continue in 2009.

The finds indicate an Augustan date for the villa — however, there is some evidence for an earlier, probably smaller, building of the late Republican period. The complex appears to have been abandoned in the second century AD, although there is some doubt as to whether occupation continued into the third century.

Probably in the mid-fourth century AD, on the basis of numerous bronze coins, the southern sector was reoccupied, at least in part, and seems to have been readapted for use as a kitchen. This is indicated by the presence of lava grinding-stones and small underground silos (from which grain was recovered) and by the nature of the pottery, primarily kitchen wares. Four bronze vessels were found also. It is possible that this was a sort of inn. In turn it also went out of use, at the beginning of the fifth century AD, when it was destroyed by a fire. The entire room was covered and sealed by the roof collapse, leaving substantial remains of carbonized beams and burnt tiles.

The chronology, size and luxurious appearance of the residential sector of the Augustan villa suggest that its owner was a person of some importance. The temptation is to attribute the

complex to the *gens Flavia*, although a dolium stamped with the name *L. Octavius Calvinus* suggests otherwise. However, the latter may have been a *dominus* who came after the Flavii, or the owner of the pottery workshop where the dolium was produced.

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FILIPPO COARELLI, VALENTINO GASPARINI, STEPHEN KAY AND HELEN PATTERSON
(*Università di Perugia; Università di Perugia; British School at Rome; British School at Rome*)

Villa Magna Project

Excavation at the imperial villa continued in the three sites opened in previous years: the *casale*, the church and monastery, and Site D. At the *casale*, where last year's excavation revealed the *cella/coenatio* complex in which the emperor and his guests dined, we completed the excavation of the modern courtyard, revealing an open court with a quadripartite basin lined in *opus signinum*, whose function is not yet clear. The limekiln, which occupied an apsidal room, was removed, and the fills excavated to the level of the foundation offset: clearly any floor had been removed at the time of the creation of the kiln. To the south of the *casale* a trench was opened to reveal the continuation of the imperial stair: the removal of topsoil and layers relating to the nineteenth-century garden revealed a series of post-holes apparently dating to the ninth/tenth century. Trenches to the north and west of the *casale* have now clarified the plan, and produced more evidence for a late third-century rebuilding. An exedra of this phase was paved in simple mosaics, and decorated with elaborate painted plaster in imitation of the *opus sectile* that covered the rest of the walls in the building.

At Site D, the 2006 trench was expanded to 25 × 25 m, showing much of the plan of what is certainly a barracks building flanking the paved road, with two lines of rooms measuring 10 × 12 Roman feet, facing each other across a narrow alley, down which runs a drain. The rooms were paved in beaten earth and generally contain a hearth and traces of a single dolium. Whether the building was occupied by soldiers or workers is not yet clear.

At the monastery, work continued in the cemetery to the west of the church, with over 200 tombs now excavated. The presence of an early narthex was confirmed, and traces of its