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*New research at the Sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo
(FM)*

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Section: Note

New research at the Sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo (FM)

The remains of the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo (FM) are located midway along the Aso river valley in an archaeological park known as 'La Cuma' which was excavated and partially reconstructed in the 1960s. The complex dates to the 2nd – 1st century BC and centres on a Tuscanic temple surrounded by a porticoed area flanked by a *sacellum*. Since 2016 the site has been the focus of a new research programme led by the University of Bologna Department of History and Culture, the British School at Rome, the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio delle Marche and the Comune di Monte Rinaldo (Fig. 1).¹



Fig. 1: The sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo in the Piceno region.

The first phase of work focused on a review of the documentation about the site that was held in archives covering a period of over 60 years, which was found to be partial and incomplete². However, through an examination of the records it was possible to locate and reconstruction several of the original contexts from which belong some of the material now displayed at Monte Rinaldo and at the National Archaeological Museum of Ancona. The first phase of work also included a systematic study of the previously excavated architectural clay decorations³. In mid-June 2016 a first field campaign of non-invasive archaeology was undertaken through a geophysical and topographic survey with the aim of assessing the potential for further buried remains and to document the various architectural elements.

Building upon these results, it was possible to create a new georeferenced plan of the site (scale 1:50) as well as a 3D photogrammetric documentation for the analysis of all the architectural elements. The integration of this new data together with those previously studied has led to a new interpretation

1 Annibaldi 1973; Landolfi 2000; Landolfi 2005; Demma 2018; Demma 2016; Demma, Giorgi, Kay 2018; Giorgi, Demma, Belfiori forthcoming; Giorgi, Demma, Kay forthcoming.

2 Demma 2018; Demma, Giorgi, Kay 2018.

3 Demma, Belfiori forthcoming.

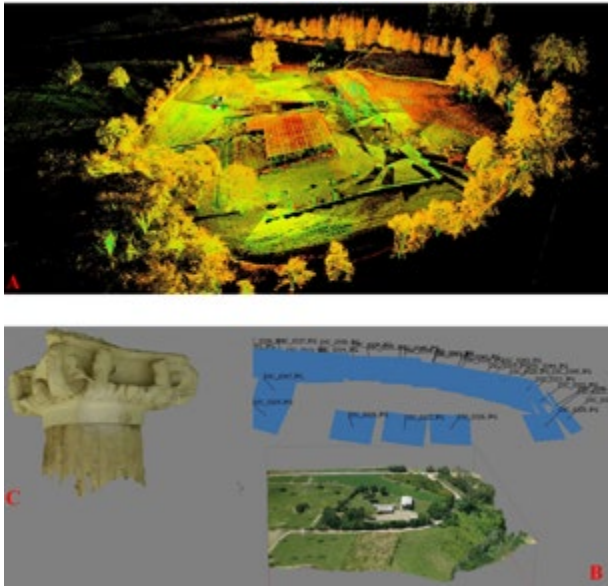


Fig. 2: A- Laser scanner Leica P30 Point cloud; B- Image based photogrammetric mapping of the site of the sanctuary; C- Image based photogrammetric mapping of the architecture of the sanctuary.



Fig. 3: A-B-C Survey areas of the first excavation season of the University of Bologna (2017); D: stamp "lovei Sacrum" on black glazed cup; E: terracotta horse head relating to a continuous frieze from the area of the main temple.

concerning the chronology and building phases of the site in addition to a new proposal for its architectural reconstruction (Figg. 2, 6).

Between 2017 and 2018, the first two field campaigns of archaeological excavation were conducted by the University of Bologna. During the first season three areas were investigated to the North, South and inside the temple. In the second season, work focused on the western part of the sanctuary which was previously unexplored, and which corresponds to the *sacellum* (Building C). Analysis of the stratigraphy has allowed new information to be recorded concerning the establishment of the sanctuary and its later abandonment, but above all, for a link to be hypothesised between its origin and the Latin colonization of *Firmum Picenum*, and more generally, to the Romanization of Picenum between 3rd and 2nd century BC⁴ (Fig. 3).

The area of Monte Rinaldo was occupied by Rome after the conquest of the Picenum (268 BC). In the aftermath of the conquest, which also included the Tenna and Aso valleys, the Latin colony of *Firmum* was deduced. The Aso valley, in the most precise historical reconstruction, represents the southern band of the colony's *ager*, bordering the territory of the federated city of *Asculum*⁵.

The proximity of Monte Rinaldo to the southern boarder also highlights its role as a probable boundary sanctuary. This hypothesis should be critically evaluated as this type of sanctuary may be a modern reconstruction based on settlement models linked to the Greek world and furthermore, the idea of a border in a pacified region, nevertheless subject to Rome, implies a more complex explanation⁶. A further aspect to consi-

der is that the Aso valley, which may have initially gravitated towards the Latin colony of *Firmum*, could have progressively acquired its own administrative autonomy and may have been populated by Roman colonizers in the following centuries.

The sanctuary at Monte Rinaldo may also have had a central role in the territory, not only for religious activity, but also as an administrative and economic centre. Indeed, although on a smaller scale, the Aso valley denotes a geographical analogy similar to most of the valleys of the Marche region,

4 Belfiori 2016; Belfiori 2018.

5 Giorgi, Demma, Kay forthcoming.

6 Smith 2017.

with its river flowing between watershed ridges which become steep moving away from the coastline to the internal area. These hillcrests separate the various parallel water catchments that drain from the Apennines to the Adriatic Sea. The Roman settlement phenomena witnessed in this mid-Adriatic area usually implies at least one centre in the middle of the valley, often paired with a port settlement at the mouth of the river. In terms of the Aso valley this pattern does not comply, especially if the placement of the ancient *municipium* of *Novana* within this territory is excluded. In the light of recent archaeological findings, and in accordance with Pliny, most studies now place *Novana* more internally. The suggestion of locating this centre in the middle of the Aso valley would therefore be excluded⁷. In this scenario the role of the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo in the populating this area of *Picenum* should be given a more detailed evaluation, especially through the methods offered by landscape archaeology.

At Monte Rinaldo, similarly to the sanctuary of Colle dell'Annunziata at Ascoli Piceno⁸, the stratigraphic contexts that are associated to the first phases of occupation of the area yielded pottery that is linked to the “indigenous” culture of *Picenum*, in association with black glazed pottery which is clearly linked to the arrival of Latin colonizers throughout the 3rd century BC. Given the regularity with which this occurs, it seems unlikely that this material can only be considered residual of a previous indigenous cultic area where the later sanctuary was built. This interpretation is now the subject of an intense critical re-examination⁹. The persistence of this phenomenon following the Roman conquest of the territory also leads to further considerations (Fig. 4).

An analysis of the stratigraphy and material from the two seasons of excavation suggests that the site was first frequented in the 3rd century BC perhaps as a *sub divo* cultic place (or still not monumentally structured) in connection to the Latin colonization of *Firmum*, as is suggested by the presence of pottery which is dated to this chronological period (even though it was retrieved in secondary position in 2nd century BC contexts). As noted above, the heterogeneity of the material suggests that the sanctuary may have been a meeting place, perhaps for the integration of the new colonizers with the existing population after the Roman conquest of *Picenum*.

In the successive phase the first monumental Tuscanic-style temple was built on a podium (first half of 2nd century BC) with a portico on the northern side of the square (Fig. 5). During the second half of 2nd century BC the complex underwent reconstruction and new structures were built where parts of the architectural decoration of the first phase were also reused. The Tuscanic temple was reconstructed in the form that is still partially visible today, and a new architectural decorative cycle was added. The

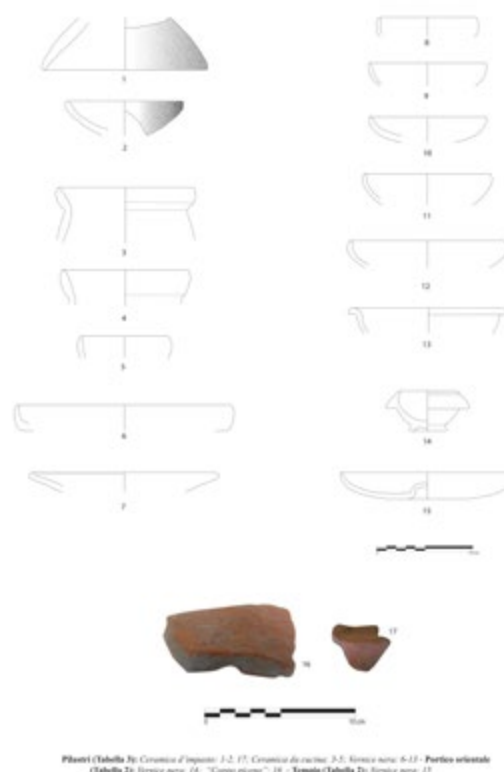


Fig. 4: Stratigraphic context with heterogeneous materials (“indigenous” and black-ware pottery)

7 Bernetti 2009; Menchelli, Iacopini 2016.

8 Giorgi, Demma 2018.

9 Landolfi 2005; Giorgi, Demma, Kay forthcoming.

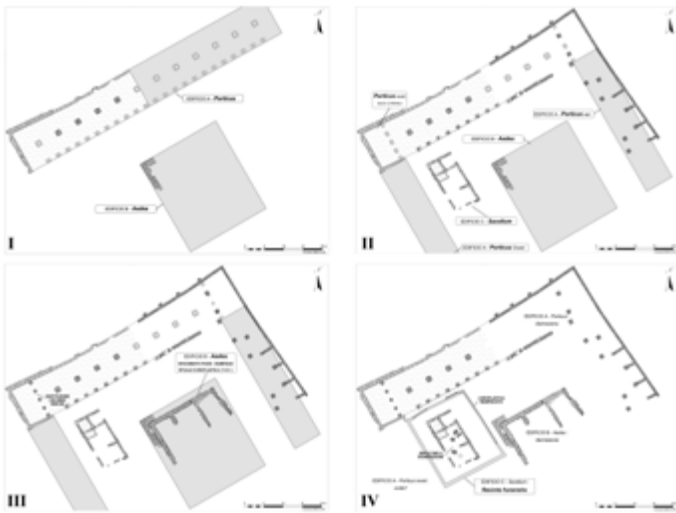


Fig. 5: Hypotheses of main construction phases of the Sanctuary (Demma, Belfiori forthcoming)

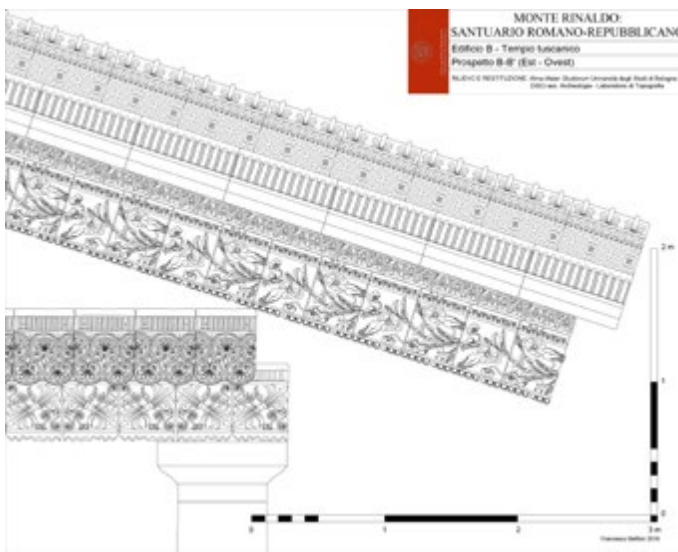


Fig. 6: Hypothetical reconstruction of the roof system of the main temple of the sanctuary (F. Belfiori)

temple (Building B) was built off-centre in the square, probably to allow space for the sacellum which was also built in this phase, and which was probably connected to the ritual use of water from a nearby spring (Building C)¹⁰. The square, on a plateau that opened scenographically to the South, was bordered on three sides by a portico. The Eastern side presents a sequence of *tabernae*, in front of which was a portico. Due to the poor state of preservation, the structures to the west are more difficult to understand. The earlier Northern portico had a rear wall in *opus quadratum* which retained the rear slope. An Ionic-Italic colonnade followed a median line, dividing it into two parts, whilst a Doric colonnade built above a short staircase faced towards the square. In this phase, the sanctuary was modified to follow the more standard Hellenistic architectural style. The new physiognomy of the sanctuary is therefore a consequence of a renewed architectonic *koine* and has comparisons with other temples in the region such as Colle dell'Annunziata at Ascoli Piceno, or sanctuaries in the Abruzzo region of Pagliaroli at Cortino and of Colle S. Giorgio amongst others¹¹, as well with more notable Latin examples. The ongoing study will continue to focus upon the reconstruction of the structure and the architectural decoration as well as the phasing of the Northern portico and its roof.

The lower portico was enriched by two lateral spaces with Ionic columns possibly added during 1st century BC¹². The sanctuary at Monte Rinaldo was destroyed during the Late-Republican period and the site was later reoccupied in the early Imperial period by a rural complex that reused some of the architectural decorations as building material. An important portion of this structure emerged during the 2018 excavation season in the area where the western part of the portico is supposedly located and future excavations will continue to examine this area.

Finally, further confirmation was made during the last excavation season concerning the deities to which the sanctuary was dedicated: the finding of new inscriptions engraved on black glaze pottery enriches the panorama of already known inscriptions from the old excavations and leaves little doubt

10 Demma 2018; Giorgi, Demma, Kay forthcoming.

11 Iaculli 1993; Guidobaldi 1995; Demma 2016; Demma, Belfiori 2018; Giorgi, Demma 2018.

12 Giorgi, Demma, Kay forthcoming.

that the sanctuary was dedicated to Jupiter, possibly as the major deity, together with the worship of other deities, amongst which was Hercules¹³.

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13 Demma, Belfiori forthcoming.