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The excavation of a rural workshop and forge in the vicinity of the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo (Comune di Monte Rinaldo, Provincia di Fermo, Regione Marche)

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The excavation of a rural workshop and forge in the vicinity of the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo (Comune di Monte Rinaldo, Provincia di Fermo, Regione Marche)

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The apparent isolation of the mid-Republican sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo in the surrounding landscape was the question that drove the 2021 archaeological research, with a focus on a nearby area that did not seem to be directly related to worship at the sanctuary (Fig. 1). A previous non-invasive survey conducted by the project during the 2019 excavation campaign indicated a potential area of interest towards the south. The magnetometry survey carried out by the British School at Rome had revealed strong magnetic features that suggested the presence of a substantial archaeological deposit (Kay et al., 2020). An initial campaign of test pits confirmed the nature of the deposit by revealing, at a shallow depth (approximately 0.4m below ground level), several masonry structures.

The excavations, covering an area of 250 m², revealed a complex structure, the plan of which was fully uncovered over the course of the season. That the structures may be related to the sanctuary (built in the second century BC), similar to other sites in the Middle Adriatic area, was disproven by the subsequent archaeological excavations (Fig. 2). Whilst the study of pottery is still in the early phases, of interest is the reuse in the construction of fragments of architectural terracottas originating from the roof decoration of the sanctuary. This repurposing of terracottas from the sanctuary provides a date for the abandonment of the sacred complex (first half of the first century BC), which has also been confirmed by the excavation of a series of rooms, probably belonging to another building, discovered in 2018 along the western slope of the sacred area (Giorgi and Kay, 2019). The reused material for the construction of the walls indicates that it was built after the second half of the first century BC and that it was in use for the duration of the Julio-Claudian period. It was partly abandoned in the second half of the first century AD.

The preliminary analysis of the excavation data for 2021 indicates a similar construction date. The structure, like those closer to the sanctuary to the north,

suggests a series of service environments belonging to a workshop which undertook agricultural activities. This hypothesis is drawn from several factors, including an open area within a courtyard with few roof tiles. Inside the building were simple beaten earth floors, similar to those excavated in the building to the north. A small tank, lined with cocciopesto, was built reusing fragments of tiles. The shallowness of the tank, and the presence of a drain just 20 cm above the bottom suggest its use, not as a simple water tank, but rather as a structure connected to some type of workshop activity. The presence of substantial layers containing charcoal, ash, burnt clay and a considerable amount of iron slag and objects, both complete and fragmentary, also confirm some form of workshop. These layers were concentrated along the eastern edge of the building, an area identifiable as external due to the presence of a drainage channel for the tank described above, and around a quadrangular structure made of large stone blocks above which were found remains of burnt clay.

A preliminary hypothesis is that the structure formed the base for a furnace with a clay chimney, in which charcoal was introduced to reach temperatures necessary for smelting or for working iron objects. The type of feature and the construction technique, built entirely from stone, differentiate it from other walls recorded at the site which were built in brick. This reflects a need to use only refractory material for a space exposed to very high temperatures. The feature also opened towards the valley to the east, suggesting a need to force oxygen into the updraft to increase the temperature within the furnace. Linked to the building, at the southern limit of excavation, a well was discovered lined with large stone river pebbles, the mouth of which had been created by reusing the rim of a large dolium, carefully sawn to create the circular opening. Around the well was an enclosure built with large stone blocks, differing from the other construction techniques recorded by the excavation, and perhaps suggesting that it belonged to an earlier phase of the building. Within the construction of the well, fragments of black glazed pottery were recovered, perhaps indicating a similar chronology to the nearby sacred complex. Differing from the area of the sanctuary where the ceramics were almost exclusively fine black glazed pottery (cups and plates), or vessels used to hold or pour liquids, the material recovered was mostly fineware. Furthermore, a significant number of dolia fragments were recorded together with iron tools (blades, knives, hatchets) that seem to confirm the artisanal use of the building.

The 2021 excavation provided new information regarding the occupation of this area through the identification of a workshop. This has raised a number of

questions regarding the change in use of this area. In the early phases of Roman occupation, there arose a need to build a sanctuary that has no comparison in terms of its size within the territory.

The construction may have been driven by a need for self-representation of the new settlers as well as providing a recognisable point of reference in the valley. However, little more than a century later this requirement had disappeared and been replaced by new necessities, such as settling the veterans at the end of the civil war.

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Fig. 1. The sanctuary complex at Monte Rinaldo. The 2021 excavations were at the southern extent (A7/2021 and A8/2021). Image Francesco Pizzimenti.



Fig. 2. Orthophoto of the 2021 excavation area. Image Francesco Pizzimenti.