

## Excavations at Vagnari 2012

This interdisciplinary and collaborative programme of archaeological research focuses on industrial, artisanal, and agricultural production and the exploitation of human and natural resources in a central village (*vicus*) of a vast Roman imperial estate in ancient Apulia in south-east Italy (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Map of S-E Italy showing the location of Vagnari. Map by C. and A. Small.

Sheffield's fieldwork at Vagnari in 2012 concentrated on a large building (North Building) on the northern edge of the *vicus* that formed part of a complex with ranges of rooms and courtyards (Fig. 2).

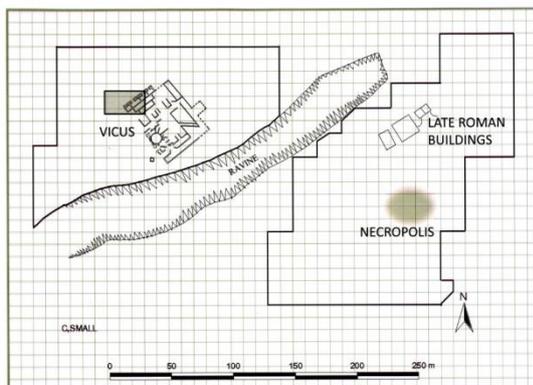


Fig. 2 Fig. 2 Plan of the Roman *vicus* at Vagnari, based partially on resistivity and magnetometry surveys. The Sheffield excavations are in the area highlighted by a grey rectangle; south of the ravine is the Roman necropolis. Plan by C. Small.

Contrary to the impression gained by earlier resistivity survey of this area, the building did not consist of small cell-like rooms interpreted as possible slave quarters. It now is clear that, although the function of the building remains to be clarified, it had larger and smaller rooms and corridors (Fig. 3).



Fig.3 Vagnari, 2012. Excavations in the North Building on the northern edge of the *vicus*

Two steeply-inclined stone drains ran beneath the North building, clearly once carrying considerable quantities of waste and/or water from an unknown structure up-slope, and they give tantalising glimpses of adjacent industrial or residential habitation (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Vagnari, 2012. Excavated walls and stone drains in a building in the *vicus*.

The pottery and coins found on site suggest that the excavated building dates to the 1st or 2nd century A.D. and that it was dismantled or abandoned in

the latter part of the 4th century. A broad range of ceramics was used for transport, domestic storage, food preparation, dining, and cooking. A study of the pottery by David Griffiths (Leicester) indicates that these wares were produced in Italy and further afield, for example in Albania and North Africa. Pottery of the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., however, indicates that activities on the site began much earlier (for a brief report on the pottery, see [http://www.romansociety.org/fileadmin/documents/pdf/M\\_Carroll.pdf](http://www.romansociety.org/fileadmin/documents/pdf/M_Carroll.pdf)).

Substantial evidence was retrieved for metal-working, especially with lead, but also iron and bronze, mainly in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Numerous roughly torn and cut pieces of metals taken from other objects, such as pipes, vessels, and tools were excavated, suggesting that metal was being recycled and reduced to a fragmentary state for smelting and re-working (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Vagnari, 2012. Fragmented vessels and objects, as well as droplets, of lead.

Glass slag was also retrieved, indicating, for the first time at Vagnari, that glass might have been produced in the vicus (Fig. 6)

Evidence for agricultural production was the carbonised plant material

fortuitously found in a hearth associated with the excavated building. Analysis of the material by Ellen Simmons (Sheffield) points to the cultivation of macaroni/durum wheat as a cereal crop on the estate. This data is important because records for charred plant remains recovered from contemporary deposits at other sites in the region, including Vagnari, are very sparse.



Fig. 6 Vagnari, 2012. Glass slag recovered in the vicus.

Fieldwork in 2013 will focus on the exploration of the new evidence for industrial activity and domestic habitation, with a possible nearby kiln also being investigated. The connection between industrial production and domestic habitation is of significant interest and importance in understanding living and working conditions in the vicus. Further retrieval of materials for scientific analysis will enable an informed assessment of the sourcing of raw materials and the socio-economic implications of manufacturing. Important evidence for wool production and cereal cultivation also will be explored to understand elite involvement in the exploitation of the environment and control over labour, as well as the impact of the estate on the Apulian landscape.

The collaborative nature of research here is reinforced by parallel excavations in the cemetery at Vagnari, conducted by Tracy Prowse (McMaster University), and at the estate manager's residence at San Felice, directed by Hans vanderLeest (Mt. Allison University) and Myles McCallum (St. Mary's University). The cemetery, in particular, offers the rare chance to study the population engaged in industry, both slave and free, of whom ca. 20% originated outside the region and Italy from distant areas such as North Africa and East Asia, as confirmed by stable isotope and DNA analysis (Prowse). This interdisciplinary project is uniquely placed to investigate essential aspects of life and death on an imperial estate.



Fig. 7 Vagnari, 2012. The vicus excavation team. Front row, from left: Lucie Paštiková, Mara Polansky, Jonathan Boffey, Joao Freire de Andrade, Gabrielle Lawrence, Franco Taccogna, Maureen Carroll, Victoria Rose, Martin Trenz. Back row, from left: Jonathan Moulton, Aaron Kulakiewicz, John Quarrell.

### Bibliography:

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