

Acknowledgements

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THE SANCTUARY OF MONTE RINALDO: THE 2023 SEASON

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Excavation

The final season of excavations at the archaeological park of Monte Rinaldo (La Cuma) took place between 22 June and 15 July 2023 thanks to the support of the University of Bologna and with the logistical assistance of the Comune di Monte Rinaldo. The fieldwork was undertaken as part of a research agreement with the Soprintendenza per le Marche meridionali (SABAP AP-FM-MC) and the British School at Rome.

The excavations, undertaken by a team composed of 15 researchers and students, focused on the southwestern area of the archaeological park, corresponding to the area where it was presumed were the last structures not previously brought to light by the

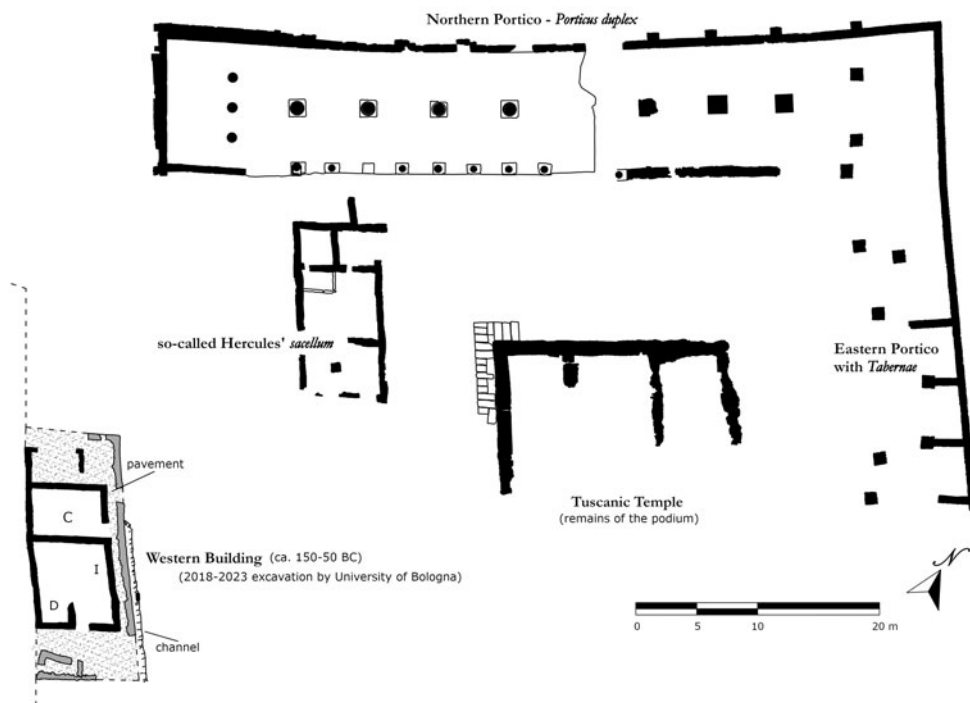


Fig. 1. Plan of the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo and location of 2023 excavations.

past investigations (Belfiori and Giorgi 2020; Giorgi, Pizzimenti and Kay 2020). The excavation area was 11m in length in a north–south direction and 6 m wide and was located on the western edge of what was the ancient square of the Roman sanctuary (Fig. 1). The crests of the Roman walls were recorded at a depth of approximately 1 m, although the section further up the slope was buried to a greater depth.

The excavations brought to light the façade of a Republican building facing towards the square which had previously been identified in its western part between 2018 and 2022 (Fig. 2). In front of the building, a pavement bordered by a small channel was recorded, which appears to define the western limit of the square of the sanctuary in its second construction phase, dated to the second half of the second century BC. As previously reported (Belfiori, Giorgi and Kay 2023), the walls of the Republican buildings were subsequently reused to support the walls of a later rural building dated to the Augustan period, which widely reused elements of the sanctuary including the architectural terracotta decorations as construction material.

The Republican phase

The earliest phases corresponded to the levelling of the area at the time of the reconstruction of the sanctuary in its second phase (second half of the second century BC). This type of so-called ‘diffused deposit’ has previously been recorded, where the layers contain the remains of the repeated ritual actions and traces of frequentation of the sanctuary in its first phase (first half of the second century BC), together with numerous fragments of ceramics and bricks which from an initial analysis of the fabric



Fig. 2. The 2023 excavations showing the drain, pavement and eastern wall of Rooms C and I.

may belong to an earlier occupation phase. Among the most significant finds from these layers, alongside the coarseware material, were large quantities of black glaze pottery (in particular bowls, *pyxides* and plates) together with metal items (bronze objects and coins) and organic material, identified thanks to the flotation of the samples (fragments of charcoal, seeds and small animal bones). This levelling was contained by a large wall, built against the natural slope, using large river pebbles with the external face covered in a hydraulic mortar which also defined the edge of the channel (Fig. 2). This drainage channel had a gravel base 0.45 m in width and ran parallel to the building and is bordered on the other side towards the valley by a row of large limestone blocks of which only one element still survives in place.

Behind these supporting constructions (comprising the wall and the channel) were further structures that defined the Republican building. All together, these walls served as the perimeter structure for a rectangular building, 12 m in length and 6.5 m wide, that extended in a north–south direction on the western limit of the square. On the side facing towards the square, the building had an opening measuring 1.12 m, which was presumably the main entrance. Inside the building was an east–west dividing wall which divided a northern room (C) and two southern rooms (D and I) (Fig. 1). These last two rooms were separated by a further north–south dividing wall brought to light by the previous excavations. The building, dated to the Republican period, was constructed with medium-sized river pebbles laid regularly in the façade, as well as freshly cut sandstone ashlar of varying sizes and tiles.

The Triumviral-Augustan phase

The structures of the Republican period were later reused and rebuilt using material from the previous construction, in particular architectural terracottas. This reuse may explain the absence of any destruction layers or collapsed structures of the Republican period, as these were seemingly cleared in order to make use of the precious building material.

Among the excavated structures, Room C had the best-preserved stratigraphic layers. Below the thick alluvial deposit, at a depth of approximately 1 m, a collapsed roof and painted wall plaster were discovered. Below this was conserved the floor surface made from beaten earth with a hearth in the northeast corner of the room. Also seemingly belonging to this phase of reuse of the complex was a large limestone threshold. It was previously part of a wider threshold composed of at least two stone elements with a channel used for a large, sliding wooden panel door.

Fieldwalking survey

Complementing the excavation, in October a fieldwalking survey was conducted by a team from the University of Bologna, who undertook an intense investigation (12 people at a regular separation of 5–7m) of the ploughed fields around the sanctuary, with a radius of approximately 1 km. Among the most significant results is seemingly the absence of a population in the area immediately around the sanctuary, with the survey recovering only rare, sporadic fragments of pottery.

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