

Vagnari

Roman Imperial Estate (Puglia, Italy)

1st July to 2nd August, 2017

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site of the excavation at Vagnari in the Basentello valley lies in the beautiful rolling hills of the province of Puglia in south-east Italy. Our operational base is in the nearby Medieval and Renaissance town of Gravina in Puglia. The Basentello valley provided one of the most direct routes across southern Italy, marking the approximate boundary of ancient Apulia and Lucania. Following the Roman conquest of these regions in the 3rd century B.C., the “queen of roads”, the Via Appia, passed near Vagnari and linked this settlement with other major centres in the region, as well as Rome itself.



Students at Iron-Age Botromagno.



Map of Italy and detail of the region in which Vagnari (red dot) lies.

Excavations and survey around Vagnari have furnished evidence for older indigenous Apulian settlements, the most important being nearby Botromagno (near Gravina). After the conquest of south-east Italy, some of these territories were acquired by the senatorial elite of Rome, followed in the 1st century A.D. by the Roman emperor.

Excavations by the University of Sheffield have concentrated since 2012 on the northern edge of the village (*vicus*) of the imperial estate where we have explored large stone-built structures of the second and third centuries A.D. Evidence for metal-working industries and intensive crop processing in and around these buildings was retrieved, and work in another structure revealed the existence of a winery, a *cella vinaria*, with enormous ceramic wine storage vats still *in situ*.

Fieldwork in 2016 shed important light on the early phases of settlement activity at Vagnari *vicus*. The most exciting new discovery was a building, only partially excavated, with storage facilities. This building predates anything found thus far in the *vicus*, and the pottery, loom weights, ceramic oil lamps, and iron implements that were retrieved can be dated to the Hellenistic period, to the 2nd century B.C. at the latest. The structure was re-used and enlarged in the early first century A.D., precisely when the land came into the Emperor's possession. Some of the walls of this first Roman building were preserved, although in places they had been robbed out when another structure was built to replace this one after A.D. 70.

The structural and *in situ* artefactual evidence retrieved demonstrates beyond doubt that there was a predecessor settlement here, perhaps a villa, which was taken over and adapted when the imperial estate was

created to generate income for the imperial coffers. This Apulian region clearly had not been depopulated or empty after the Roman conquest in the third century B.C., although it remains to be clarified in further excavation seasons precisely who built and inhabited the Hellenistic settlement.

THE EXCAVATIONS 2017

The project continues to investigate Roman agricultural and industrial production in the central village of this working estate to understand elite involvement in the exploitation of this Apulian environment.



View of the landscape at Vagnari.

The project will concentrate in 2017 on the remains of the Roman winery, only a corner of which has been excavated. In this building, wine vats (*dolia*) were fixed in the ground to keep the temperature of the wine constant while it matured. Targeted excavation will clarify how large the storage room was, how many *dolia* of the emperor's wine were housed in it, and what the volumetric storage capacity of the installation was.



Excavating a wine vat in the *vicus*.

A second goal of the season is to explore more of the Hellenistic settlement and its early Roman successor to clarify how Vagnari fits into the settlement patterns and waves of population movement leading up to and after the Roman conquest in the wider region. The Hellenistic and Roman pottery also will be a focus of specialist study this summer.

Those who lived and worked in the *vicus* were buried in the village cemetery on the other side of the ravine at Vagnari, where excavations by McMaster University will be conducted in 2017 at the same time as the Sheffield excavations in the *vicus*. By combining archaeological as well as anthropological evidence, the potential for significantly advancing our understanding of the living and working conditions and health of a rural population in Roman Italy is considerable.

APPLICATIONS

Application deadline: **15th April 2017**.

Maximum number of participants: **10**

It is advisable to apply early, as places fill up quickly!

For information and application forms, go to:

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/archaeology/research/vagnari>

Submit an application to the project director, Prof. Maureen Carroll, p.m.carroll@sheffield.ac.uk.

FEES AND PAYMENT

Participation Fee: £2200 (GBP)

Fees will be paid online to the University of Sheffield. Once accepted on the field school, students may be required to submit a non-refundable deposit payment of £250 (GBP). The total fees are due by **15th May 2017**.

In case of a cancellation, reimbursement of the field school fee is not possible after 30th May.

INCLUDED IN FEES

- **shared accommodations** in comfortable apartments in Gravina;
- **meals** (breakfast, picnic lunch, restaurant dinner) on working days (Sunday to Thursday weekly);
- **supervision and training** on site;
- **instruction** in finds processing and artefact analysis;
- **transportation** to and from site.

Visits and excursions to other archaeological sites and places of interest will be arranged; some of them are included in the fees.



Students from the University of Sheffield and McMaster University on an excursion to Metapontum and the 6th-century Greek temple of Hera.

COURSE CERTIFICATE

No course credit is offered. On request, a University of Sheffield certificate will be issued on successful completion of the field school.



Learning to record contexts and draw plans.

TRAVEL

Students must make their own travel arrangements to and from Italy. The nearest airport is Bari Palese Airport on Puglia's east coast (60 km N-E of Gravina). There are direct flights to Bari from many airports in the UK and Europe. Equally, one can fly to Rome and then proceed by air or rail to Bari. Trains from Bari to Gravina are frequent.



Students at a Roman pottery seminar.



STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

The Vagnari field school provided me with a unique experience that I will never forget. This special site yields significant and exciting finds, including the brand new discovery of a late Hellenistic building and artefacts. I would highly recommend this field school for those who have a little digging experience to those who have dug many times before.



Kelsey Madden (MA Archaeology of the Classical Mediterranean, University of Sheffield)

Vagnari was my first excavation and I could not have imagined a better experience. The project puts you right in the thick of a real Roman excavation, making it an excellent counterpart to my classroom studies of ancient history. Although I was learning, I truly felt that I was contributing to archaeological research. My positive experience at Vagnari has definitely shaped my plans as an archaeologist.



Caroline Cervera (BA Anthropology, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A.)

I learned an incredible amount about the excavation process that could only be acquired by working at a site. Additionally, students were given an appropriate amount of on-site responsibility.



Sophia Draznin-Nagy (BA Anthropology, Mills College, Oakland, California, U.S.A.)

It was rewarding to uncover vestiges of Roman occupation in a picturesque wheat field in the Vagnari countryside. The daily finds gave a feeling of excitement and a sense of accomplishment to the whole group. There also was time to explore and get close to the city and people of Gravina, to hear their stories and how proud they are about the history of their city.



Nick Travaglini (retired air traffic controller, Laval, Québec, Canada)

Find us on Facebook:
Vagnari Vicus Archaeological Project



**The
University
Of
Sheffield.**