

INTERAMNA LIRENAS AND ITS TERRITORY (COMUNE DI PIGNATARO INTERAMNA, PROVINCIA DI FROSINONE, REGIONE LAZIO)

The fieldwork project at Interamna Lirenas has run for six consecutive years in 2015. Since its inception, our research has endeavoured to combine an integrated array of field methodologies including geophysical survey, fieldwalking and (since 2013) excavation (Bellini et al., 2012; 2013; 2014; Ballantyne et al., 2015). The range of data so collected not only has prompted a fundamental change in our understanding of the long-term development of the site and its hinterland (e.g. moving away from narratives of early decline), but it has also further reinforced our belief in the enormous informative potential of large-scale remote sensing (e.g. making it possible to cast the results of trench excavation and surface collections against a much broader and more complex interpretive canvas).

This methodological awareness provided the intellectual background for a new important phase in our research. As part of the AHRC-funded “Beneath the Surface of Roman Republican Cities” project (2015-17), in July 2015 we launched a full-coverage Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey of the entire urban area of Interamna Lirenas (ca. 25 ha), combined with a systematic sample surface collection and test-pitting of the ploughsoil. The geophysical prospection is being carried out in collaboration with the University of Ghent and employs a custom-made GPR system, featuring an array of 500 MHz antennae mounted on a cart towed behind an all-terrain vehicle (a quadbike), with data gathered at 0.125m intervals and locations recorded at high precision using a tracking total station in combination with an RTK GPS (this system generally allows buried features to be seen down to a depth of about 1.00-1.50m below the surface).

The 2015 season has therefore adopted a three-pronged approach: a) continuation of the excavation of the theatre, b) GPR prospection and c) systematic surface collections across the site (including test-pitting). Preliminary results from (b) will be briefly mentioned (as the resulting images are currently under study), whereas (c) will not be discussed as the study of the collected materials is still in progress.

Following from the results of the 2014 campaign, we decided not to extend the trench, but rather to fully explore the deeper levels within the theatre’s *cavea* and underneath the *pulpitum* in order to get to the floor of the *orchestra* and investigate its structural relationship with the rest of the building (Fig. 1). Beneath a phase of later spoliation attested by large limestone blocks stacked against each other (which we further documented – and removed) lay several layers largely made up of incoherent and highly-fragmented debris (i.e. dumped into the *cavea* rather than an in situ collapse) featuring a high level of residuality (e.g. pottery chronology ranging from the Republican period to Late Antiquity). At a depth of more than 2m below the surface, there was still no trace of the *orchestra*’s floor (most likely robbed). It also became clear that this sector of the theatre had been radically transformed following its demise as an entertainment building: a section of the *scaena* (broadly corresponding to the South-East *hospitalium* passage) had been cut through and completely removed up to – and including – the foundations. This created a deep and wide opening, perfectly in line with the missing wall supporting the upper *cavea* (a remarkable ‘absence’ which was first noted in the previous season): these two features give the impression that a broad passageway had been created through the theatre in order to allow a better access in and out from the *cavea* (for carts?), where systematic spoliation activities did probably take place after the theatre’s abandonment (e.g. breaking down seats in smaller pieces to be burned into a possible limekiln nearby). The analysis of archaeobotanical samples from some of the deeper layers confirmed their heterogeneous composition and their likely secondary deposition, thus further corroborating our hypothesis that the *cavea* began to be used as a dump and gradually filled up as a result. A first assessment of the state of the frescoes identified in 2014 was also carried out: it was

found that they are preserved for a height of ca 30cm above a likely floor level, being decorated in their visible part with simple horizontal bands of colour (red and – possibly – yellow).

As far as the GPR survey is concerned, the 2015 season managed to cover a bit more than 8 ha, including the area immediately to the North-West and South-East of the forum. The resulting preliminary depth-slices broadly confirm the main street layout that magnetometry had first identified in 2010-12, but add considerably more detail in terms of the internal articulation of the *insulae* (Fig. 2). These images are currently being processed and require more study before more definitive interpretations can be put forward. Our understanding of the plan of the theatre has been considerably improved: it is clear now that the *cavea* is encased within a rectangular building (ca. 45x26m), surrounded on at least three sides by a portico (probably defined by the same *opus reticulatum* wall with regularly-spaced brick semi-columns known from the 2013 excavation season). Similar layouts are known from Augusta Praetoria (Augustan) and Luna (Julio-Claudian), although it seems still premature to revise our original interpretation in favour of more specific architectural forms (*odeum*, *theatrum tectum*: discussion in Sear, 2006: 39-43). Worthy of note is another rectangular building (ca. 26x18m), which stood to the immediate South of the theatre, bordering the forum and featuring quite extensive remains of the original flooring together with possible traces of an internal colonnade (*basilica?*).

On the whole the 2015 season has proved immensely informative, adding very much to our understanding of the post-abandonment phases of the theatre, its overall layout and its place within the broader urban texture.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Plan of the excavation at the end of the 2015 season.

Figure 2: Some preliminary results of the GPR survey with the location of the excavation (in red).

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