Upper Sabina Tiberina Project: 2017 Season at the Villa Romana di Vacone

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The 2017 season of the Upper Sabina Tiberina Project (a collaborative project between the University of Edinburgh and Rutgers University, along with the support of the Soprintendenza Archeologia del Lazio e dell’Etruria Meridionale and the Comune di Vacone) focused on the excavation and conservation of the Roman villa at Vacone. The villa is a late-Republican to mid Imperial multi-phase site with an elaborately decorated residential area and one of the largest olive oil production facilities in central Italy.

In 2017, we continued to excavate, document and conserve parts of the main residential area and productive zones. Particular accomplishments of the 2017 season included the discovery of the NE edge of the residential zone of the villa, the clarification of the construction phases of the terraced substructures and layout of the villa, the excavation of the full extent of the multi-phase productive zone, the identification of a late antique to Lombard-era occupation and burial area, the photogrammetric modelling of the majority of the excavated site, and the study and conservation of mosaics and frescoes.

The generous funding from the Roman Society was applied particularly to the major tasks involved in the conservation and documentation of the mosaics and the frescoes. Over the course of the 2017 season, the team made significant strides in conserving and digitally reconstructing the mosaics and frescoes from the villa. The project has thus far documented 29 rooms with mosaics, many of which also contain significant amounts of frescoes. Where possible, the frescoes and mosaics are conserved in-situ immediately following excavation, but a larger portion of fresco fragments come from collapse contexts (we have c. 300 crates of this material thus far). Our conservation team and fresco specialists cleaned and studied a significant proportion of these during 2017, identifying decorative schemes, and pigment types along with application and design techniques.

We also worked to enhance our digital documentation of the site, both for the purposes of archaeological study, but also as means of producing better outreach materials for the local community. At present, the site is back-filled completely at the end of each excavation season. This is essential to protect the remains, but also means that the local community can only see the archaeological remains while the team is actively excavating. As a means of providing a way for the local population to interact with the site outside the excavation season, we are finalizing a picture guidebook containing high-quality photos, orthophotography, site plans and 3D reconstructions produced in the 2017 season. This guidebook will be presented to the town in 2018.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies for their generous contribution towards the work at Vacone. I would also like to thank Ulrike Roth (Edinburgh) and Andrew Wilson (Oxford) for their application support. Thanks are also due to the University of Edinburgh, Rutgers University, the Soprintendenza Archeologia del Lazio e dell’Etruria Meridionale, particularly Dr Alessandro Betori, and the Comune di Vacone, Agriturismo Le Colline, Ristorante Solo per Due, along with the co-directors and team members who made the season so successful.
**Financial Statement**

The funding from the Roman Society was applied to the work by the Upper Sabina Tiberina Project on the conservation and digital reconstruction of the mosaics and frescoes from the villa. Expenses for this portion of the project included: conservation staff room and board, travel, geotextile and sand for backfill, lime and sand for mortar for in-situ conservation and laboratory conservation supplies. The £1200 from the Roman Society was applied to the room and board for the conservator (Chelsea Blake, Durham University), the plaster specialist (Federica Pollari, Universita’ di Udine, Trieste, Venezia Ca’ Foscarri), and two conservation assistants from the University of Edinburgh). The total expense for the room and board for 4 people x 4 weeks was £2462.00.