Rome’s expansionist activities against independent Italic groups and the deadly conflicts with Hannibal culminated in the 3rd century B.C. in the annexation of the territories of southern Italy reaching to the Adriatic Sea. Apulia, one of these territories, had long been a zone of commercial and cultural exchange between inland and coastal sites, and it was particularly sought after by Rome. One of Apulia’s indigenous population groups in the Iron Age, the Peuceti, lost their independence to the Romans, their major settlement at Botromagno (Gravina) being taken and all but abandoned in the 3rd century B.C.

Land conquered by the Romans in Italy became common property of the Roman state (*ager publicus*), however the impact of the annexation on the culture, society, and economy of the conquered populations can only be measured through archaeological exploration and the examination of material culture assemblages, as such details were of no interest to Roman historians who only felt compelled to record Roman historical events and names.

The site of Vagnari in Peucetian territory is crucially important in helping us to understand what might have happened after the conquest. The pottery collected by Carola and Alastair Small during field-walking around Vagnari in 2000 pointed to a break in occupation in the early 3rd century, and we know that there was a flourishing settlement here belonging to the emperor in the Roman imperial period. The University of Sheffield has been exploring it since 2012. But excavations in the last two years have shown that the area around Vagnari had not been devoid of settlement or people for the whole period between the Roman conquest and the establishment of the imperial estate. An assessment this summer of the ceramics from storage pits found at Vagnari in 2016 makes it clear that there was a ‘Hellenistic’ settlement of the 2nd century B.C. here, perhaps a villa or a farmstead, and that it was inhabited into the mid-1st century B.C. A revival of occupation and economic activity at Vagnari is now certain.
The pottery of this first post-conquest phase of the 2nd century at Vagnari included perfume flasks, oil lamps, plates, cups, and bowls. Most of these vessels and fabrics are widespread throughout the Greek colonies and Italic settlements of southern Italy and Sicily, but they also occur in areas around Rome. Although some black gloss pottery was present, the largest group of vessels of this phase consisted of grey gloss pottery, made in southern Italy, possibly at the Greek colony at Metaponto on the south coast.

Another small, but informative, pottery assemblage found in 2016 suggested that there was renewed activity at Vagnari in the early 1st century A.D. which very likely was connected with the foundation of the imperial estate. Further work on the ceramics of this period found in 2017 will provide clarity on the precise chronology of the imperial acquisition of Vagnari and shed light on a possible influx of new imperial settlers in the vicus.

We are now in a good position to explore the nature of Roman imperialistic expansion in Apulia after the conquest in the 3rd century B.C. The new evidence of human occupation in the 2nd century B.C. is of special importance. In the coming year, we will explore how the appropriation of the site by the emperor in the 1st century A.D. contributed to changes in population and landscapes at Vagnari.

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