

## Agricultural and Ceramic Production in Northern Etruria:

### The Villa del Vergigno Archaeological Project

During summer 2013 a collaborative effort between the University of Wyoming, the Sistema Museale di Montelupo Fiorentino, and Cooperativa ICHNOS re-opened excavations at the Villa del Vergigno for an archaeological field school in northern Tuscany, Italy. The villa and nearby subsidiary structures occupy over two acres of land located ten miles west of Florence near Montelupo Fiorentino in the mid-Arno Valley. The first excavators classified the site as a large *villa rustica* that was inhabited from the early first century B.C.E. to around 400 C.E. The purpose of this paper is to (re)introduce this villa and the significant finds from its original 1990s excavations to the scholarly community, to present new information discovered during the 2013 season, and to illustrate the use of “PyArchInIt”, a new Geographic Information Systems open-source software specifically designed for use on archaeological projects that we piloted this year.

The first excavations at the Villa del Vergigno were conducted by Il Gruppo Archeologico di Montelupo between 1989 and 1994. These seasons concentrated on the residential area of the villa and revealed a large structure (52 meters long, 11 meters wide) that consisted of sixteen rooms, a bath complex, and areas for agricultural production and grape-pressing. After the 1994 season, however, excavations at the villa stopped in order to preserve the remains and, unfortunately, reports were never formally published beyond guidebooks by the local Comune (Berti 2007). Nevertheless, these early excavations revealed significant finds. Most importantly, there is evidence that one of the villa’s four kilns was used for firing Lamboglia 2 wine amphorae, a type believed to have come from sites along the Adriatic Sea (Peacock and Williams 1986). The fact that Lamboglia 2 amphorae had a heyday between the

late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.E. suggests that the villa was likely active prior to Rome's colonization of northern Etruria (80 - 30 B.C.E.). Ceramic evidence found during the 1990s excavations and in 2013 also supports this dating.

These aspects of the villa's early life are significant for two reasons. For one, the chronology is in line with recent studies that have illustrated site continuity as Etruria transitioned between its "Etruscan" period into a "Roman" one (Terrenato 1998). Thus, we should not see this large villa as simply a product of Roman settlement, but perhaps instead an example of the local prosperity that likely brought Roman settlement to the region. Second, in northern Etruria it is rare to find rural villas invested in intensive agricultural and economic production (Terrenato 2007). Thus, the 2013 field season focused on investigating the agricultural sector of the villa so that we might understand more completely the scale and nature of production and the site's contribution to the regional and Mediterranean economy. We also conducted a survey of the outlying areas of the main villa to determine the extent and chronology of occupation on the villa's plateau. In respect to the latter goal, in an area approximately 100 meters away from the villa's residential complex we uncovered rectilinear walls suggestive of a house or a tomb with associated pottery datable between the second century B.C.E. through to the third century C.E. In respect to the former goal, we found what is likely a late-first century B.C.E. kiln, the fifth discovered on the site.

The Villa del Vergigno rather closely conforms to the model of rural villas as reported by Cato, Varro, and Columella, and is thus a site that can fill in a large gap in our knowledge of northern Etruria and the mid-Arno valley. Its location at the confluence of two rivers the River Vergigno and the River Pesa, the latter feeding into the Arno, make the site ideally suited for export inland to the Chianti region and west to Pisa and the Tyrrhenian Sea. The specific

location at which the Pesa and Arno meet, moreover, has significant economic importance, for it is the furthest point inland that boat traffic could travel up the Arno from Pisa to Florence before having to portage, which makes the site a natural docking point. Between 1300 and 1700 C.E. this area became the largest producer of Italian fine ceramics, largely due to its location. It is likely that this level economic importance had its beginning during the long heyday enjoyed by the Villa del Vergigno.

## References

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