

## Julia's Waterless Exile at the Ventotene Island

In her 2008 article entitled “Julia and the Development of Exile ‘*Ad Insulam*,’” Sarah Cohen observed that there was a notable difference in the treatment of exile beginning under the Emperor Augustus. Those forced to exile were sent (*deportatio*) specifically to islands, starting with Augustus's own daughter, Julia; she was sent to the Emperor's pleasure villa on the island of Ventotene (Latina, Italy). Cohen explains the choice of exile at an island like Ventotene was fairly obvious due to isolation, security, and easy monitoring offered by the island (Cohen 2008). Julia would receive no visitors nor would she be able to escape. In this paper, I want to add to Cohen's argument by analyzing the archaeological data from Ventotene. This evidence suggests that Augustus's decision to exile Julia to the island of Ventotene could be entirely based on a much older established law, rather than a new practice, allowing for exile *ad insulam* to become the normal punishment, especially for the imperial family.

The lavish villa on Ventotene have led scholars to assume Julia's exile, while perhaps lonely, would have been at least a comfortable existence. A systematic study of the island's archaeological features by G. M. De Rossi, however, disputes this notion. As a small volcanic island, Ventotene was devoid of any natural water sources; to supply the villa with all the normal aquatic luxuries, including baths, fountains, and other water features, a feat of remarkable Roman engineering was needed to establish a water collection system to harvest rain water. The water collected through the course of the year was enough for the Emperor and his entourage to enjoy the villa fully, but only for a limited period of time. The villa was only meant for a brief stay in the summer and not meant for year-round living (De Rossi 2019). Julia would not be able to partake in any of the baths and would have to be judicious with her water usage.

Augustus's choice of Ventotene for Julia was not meant to be a pleasurable stay nor was it really a new form of exile. In her paper, Cohen reviews and analyzes all the laws related to exile, including one from the early Republic: *aqua et igni interdictio*. Those punished under this law would be "denied all the essentials of life and life on Roman soil was made impossible" (Schanbacher). It is perhaps this law that Augustus is drawing upon, as Julia would literally be deprived of water at Ventotene. It seems likely then that rather than choosing Ventotene arbitrarily, Augustus knew of the island's water shortage, as he was instrumental in the construction of the villa, port, and water collection system. By choosing Ventotene specifically, he wanted Julia to suffer this well-established punishment of *aqua et igni interdictio*.

#### Bibliography

- Cohen, S. 2008. "Julia and the Development of Exile 'Ad Insulam.'" *The Classical Quarterly* 58: 206-217.
- De Rossi, G. M. 2019. *La raccolta e la distribuzione dell'acqua a Ventotene in età romana: Ricerche archeologiche nell'isola di Ventotene 2*: Archaeopress.
- Schanbacher, D. "Aqua et igni interdictio", in: *Brill's New Pauly*, Antiquity volumes edited by: H. Cancik and H. Schneider.