

# THE FALERII NOVI PROJECT

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**The Roman town of Falerii  
Novi sits 50km north of Rome  
on the ancient Via Amerina.**

**According to historical sources,  
it was founded after the  
Roman conquest of the nearby  
Faliscan centre of Falerii  
Veteres in 241 BC (Polyb.  
1.65; Liv. Epit. 20; Eutrop.  
2.28; Oros. 4.11; Zon. 8.18).**

**The urban site appears to  
have persisted at least until  
the first half of the sixth century  
AD, with the bishopric of  
Aquaviva ascribed to the site  
in AD 465 (Duchesne, 1892).**

**A monastery and church of  
Santa Maria di Falleri were  
founded by Cistercians and  
first mentioned in documents  
of the eleventh and twelfth  
centuries, now forming the  
only standing structure on  
site other than the ancient  
circuit walls.**



The 2024 Falerii Novi Project excavation team.

Falerii Novi and its territory have long been a subject of archaeological study by the British School at Rome (BSR) – first through the exploration of the Roman Campagna by Thomas Ashby (Fig. 1) and, following that, the surveys of John Ward-Perkins as part of the pioneering South Etruria Survey (Frederiksen and Ward-Perkins, 1957). Indeed, it was Ward-Perkins who recognized the archaeological value of the aerial photographs taken by the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. A sortie, flown on the 24 March 1944 covered the northern area of the *Ager Faliscus*, clearly recording the city walls of Falerii Novi (Fig. 2). These photographs have been preserved, catalogued and digitized by the ICCD and a selection have been incorporated into the spatial database of the project, assisting in particular in our understanding of earlier land use patterns and diachronic changes in the

preservation of archaeological structures.

As part of the BSR's Tiber Valley Project which commenced in the late 1990s, the intramural area (ca. 32 ha) was explored using a variety of non-invasive methodologies, principally magnetometry (Keay *et al.*, 2000). Further geophysical survey was later conducted outside the northern gate (Hay *et al.*, 2010), building upon a study of the area using aerial photography by Scardozzi (2003). More recently, a more detailed plan of the town has been obtained based on a high-resolution Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey conducted by a team from the Universities of Ghent and Cambridge (Verdonck *et al.*, 2020).

Research to date raises a number of questions about the city's relationship to settlement trends in the wider Tiber Valley, as well as about Falerii's own development (cf. Millett, 2007; Biella, 2020). Was there

a pre-existing Faliscan settlement? What is the chronology and spatial development of the city's infrastructure? And what can be known about Falerii's decline and later urban phases? The new *Falerii Novi Project* seeks to address these and related questions through targeted stratigraphic excavation and multidisciplinary scientific study (Andrews *et al.*, 2023a).

In June 2021, with CoVID travel restrictions still in place, an exploratory two-week season was undertaken with the aim of refining our understanding of the site's configuration and chronological distribution and to aid in locating excavation trenches for the following years (see Bernard *et al.*, 2022). Two approaches were selected: one team of researchers from the BSR and the Universities of Harvard and Toronto carried out a test-pit campaign across the entire intramural area; and a second team from the University of Ghent simultaneously undertook a series of cores along two main axes of the site, as well as over a structure to the west of the forum interpreted as a *macellum* from GPR survey results (Fig. 3).

The test pit campaign was designed to replicate a field-walking survey by collecting material in the plough zone across the full extent of the intramural area. Limited surface collection was carried out in the 1990s, both low resolution across the entire intramural area and at a higher resolution in a focused area over the forum and *insulae* just to the south (Keay *et al.*, 2000: 70–75). The continuous working of the site for agriculture over the last century, however, limits the diagnostic potential of surface material. The test pits yielded 2,075 fragments of ce-



Fig. 1. View of the West Gate (Porta di Giove) at Falerii Novi, 1894 (reproduced from the British School at Rome Research Collections. Thomas Ashby Photographic Collection, ta-0234).

ramic, 650 of tile, 67 fragments of glass, 23 of metal, 214 tesserae and 1 coin. The eastern extent of the city yielded less material, while greater quantities of material were found in the area around the Forum and

in the north and northwest. In general, the chronology of the ceramics recovered indicates continuous occupation from the third century BC to the sixth century AD, with an apparent gap until the ninth to

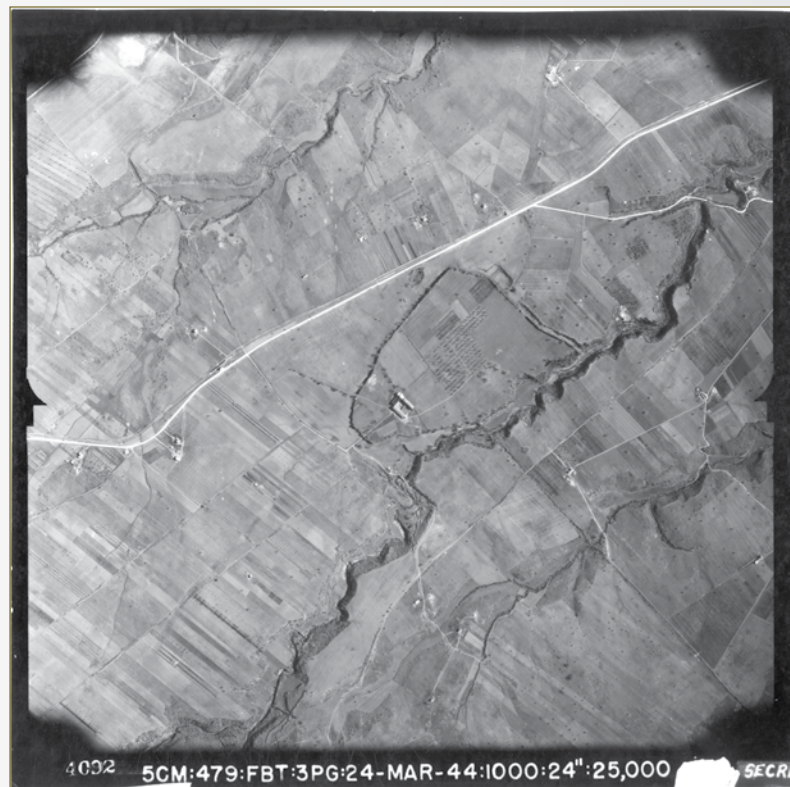


Fig. 2. Aerial photograph taken over Falerii Novi by the Royal Air Force on 24 March 1944. The outline of the city walls is clearly visible along with the Rio Purgatorio valley (reproduced with the kind permission of the Aerofototeca Nazionale Archive, Rome: RAF\_1944\_143\_55\_4092\_56813\_0).

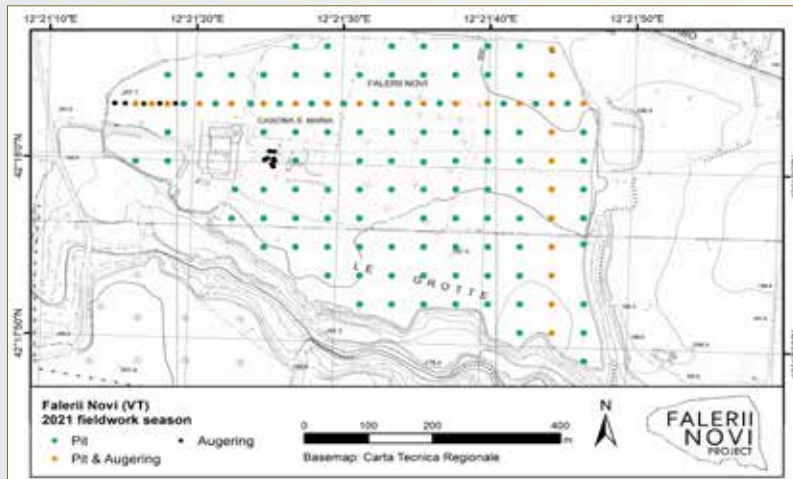


Fig. 3. Plan of Falerii Novi showing location of the 2021 test pits and augers.

twelfth century AD. This general chronology accords with the documented history of the site. The first season of systematic excavations, programmed to continue through to 2026 (under permits issued by the *Ministero della Cultura* (Decreto n. 608, 10/06/2021; Decreto n. 299, 19/03/2024) administered by the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Provincia di Viterbo e per l'Etruria Meridionale), began in the summer of 2022. Over

the course of five years, large-scale open area excavations will focus on a selection of areas: the *macellum*, a *domus* south of the forum, a row of *tabernae* on the northern edge of the Forum and a commercial area close to the South Gate, through which passed the *via Amerina* (Fig. 4). The first area under investigation is a structure that could be identified as a *macellum* due to its structural layout in the GPR data (Bernard *et al.*, 2022; Andrews *et al.*, 2023b; Andrews *et*

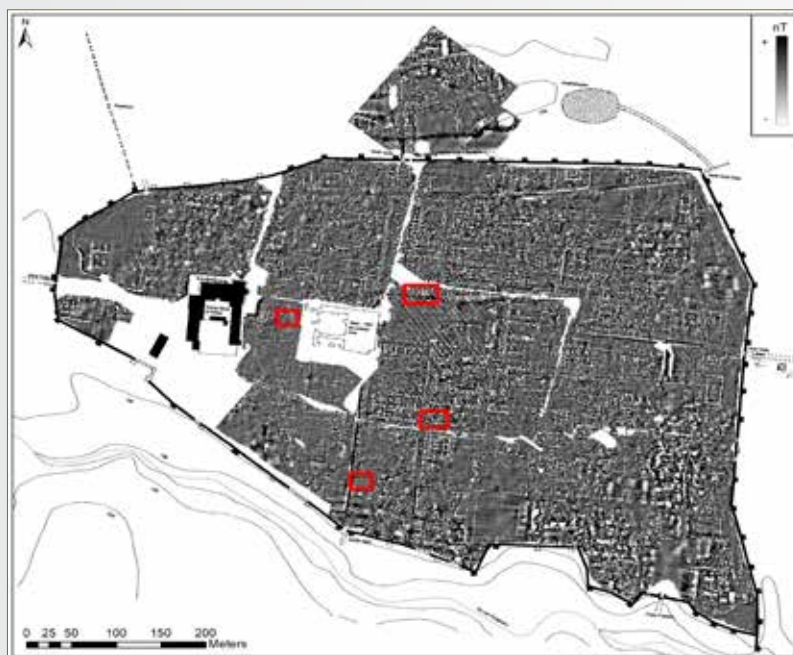


Fig. 4. Magnetometry survey results and the location of the 2022-2024 excavation trenches (after Keay *et al.*, 2000).

al, In Press). Investigation of this building aim to understand how the meat market was embedded into the city's broader infrastructure, specifically its streets, water provisioning, and drainage system. The structure, measuring 29m by 17m, consists of an octagonal perimeter surrounding an open space with two small concentric structures at its centre. Over the course of three seasons (2022-2024) large quantities of butchered animal bones have been recovered which will shed light on the dietary habits of the population of Falerii Novi in Late Antiquity.

The second area being explored is what appears in the magnetometry survey to be a house of canonical form with *atrium* and *peristyle*, oriented E-W and extending across the full c. 60m width of an *Insula*, south of the forum. The three seasons of excavation have revealed the long period of occupation of the house, from its foundation in the Republican period through to a significant remodeling in late antiquity (Bernard *et al.*, 2022; Andrews *et al.*, 2023b; Andrews *et al.*, In Press).

In 2022, an excavation was conducted 50m north of the South Gate, on the eastern side of the *cardo maximus*, where the magnetometry indicated several linear features to the immediate east of the road (the *Via Amerina*). The area was chosen because of its position at an intersection of the city's principal north-south axis of transport and movement and a secondary east-west road, as well as its potential to expose an area of potential non-elite commercial and domestic activity. Despite a limited and compressed stratigraphy, the excavation revealed the extensive reuse of the

property between the 4th and early 7th centuries AD, showing a bustling city with a wide trade network (Andrews *et al.*, 2023b).

Previous to the work of the *Falerii Novi Project*, the only large-scale excavations to have taken place were of a central insula, partially excavated by the Soprintendenza from 1969–75. As these excavations remain unpublished, researchers from the University of Florence with the support of the Falerii Novi Project have begun a reexamination of this area (Fochetti, In Press). The lack of stratigraphic data necessitated an interdisciplinary methodological approach. The entire area of the insula (circa 62m by 42 m) has been systematically surveyed by means of various methods. Photogrammetry, supplemented by a topographic survey of 220 georeferenced levels, was used to record the standing remains of the excavated eastern half. The study will allow this area, now identified as a monumental temple of the Republican period (not investigated by the preceding geophysical prospection), to be woven into our understanding of the urban topography of the city.

The final area of excavation of the project over the past three years is a series of tabernae at the northwest corner of the forum (Fig. 5). These were recorded by both the magnetometry and GPR survey as a series of regular rectangular spaces that faced on to the Forum. Of particular interest was a series of apsidal features that were recorded by the GPR and which suggested a change in use of the structures. The 2023-2024 excavations recorded five of these tabernae which revealed their changing function, from individual shop



Fig. 5. Combined laser scan and drone imagery model of the excavations at Falerii Novi of a row of tabernae (Area 5).

spaces (10.5m by 4.9m) through to their adaptation in function in the Imperial period and later incorporation into a large building, divided into two spaces in Late Antiquity (Andrews *et al.*, In Press).

Central to the work of the Falerii Novi Project is the recording of high precision digital data. The excavations are recorded using GPS (Leica GS18 T) and Total Stations, with low-alti-

tude drone photography (DJI Air 2s) used to provide highly accurate orthomosaic plans of the excavation areas (processed using Agisoft Metashape Professional). To allow later detailed examination of the excavations, features and areas are also recorded through the use of laser scanning (Fig. 6; Leica RTC 360) which is combined with the orthophotos in order to provide a correct colour



Fig. 6. Laser scanning of the 2023 excavations of the macellum.

and texture to the model (Leica Cyclone).

The study of the immediate environs of the city of Falerii Novi is also of crucial importance to the project. A programme of environmental research, involving bulk soil sampling of excavated contexts, has allowed the recovery of faunal remains which begin to help understand the food consumption patterns. More widely, the geophysical investigation of Falerii Novi is being further extended with a detailed investigation of the suburbium (Pomar, In Press). This doctoral research, which also draws upon LiDAR data and the historical aerial photographs of the ICCD, will assist in our understanding of the resources upon which the city drew and its impact upon the territory.

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#### KEYWORDS

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