

# Monte Rinaldo. A Roman Sanctuary in the middle of Picenum

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## Monte Rinaldo between Firmum and Asculum

The remains of the Sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo are located in the middle-Adriatic area, along the border between the territories of the Latin colony of Firmum Picenum to the north and of the *civitas foederata* of Asculum to the south (fig. 1). Ancient literary sources recount that Asculum was *civitas caput gentis*, one of the capital cities of the *Pikentes*, and that Rome made an agreement with Asculum and the *Pikentes* during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, in order to jointly oppose the invasion of the *Galli Senoni* from the north, and probably the city was still an ally of Rome in the following centuries up to the Social War at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (90 BC).<sup>1</sup>

Following the defeat of the *Pikentes* in 267 BC, the region became a territory of Rome (*ager publicus populi Romani*) and three years later the Latin colonies of Hatria and Firmum Picenum were founded to the south and north of Asculum. The status of allied city (*civitas foederata*) was granted only to the *caput gentis* Asculum and to the Greek port of Ancona.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, thanks to the *lex Flaminia de agro Gallico et Piceno viritim dividundo* (232 BC), the remaining lands were assigned for each one (*viritim*) to the settlers, who were Roman citizens, and managed with the system of the *praefecturae*. The central place of each territory, usually a *conciliabulum civium Romanorum* or a forum, became the headquarters of the *praefectus* to administer justice. As is well known, many of these places became full cities between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, with the status of *municipia* or of Roman colonies in a few cases such as Aesis, Auximum or Urbs Salvia.<sup>3</sup>

From a geographical point of view, this middle-Adriatic region is crossed by rivers that begin on the Apennine ridge and flow towards the Adriatic Sea, separated by the ridges of the hills (the so called ‘comb system’). Usually the pattern of settlement includes at least two cities along each valley, with the main town in the middle and its harbour at the mouth, such as Firmum and Castellum Firmanorum in the Tenna valley or Asculum and Castrum Truentinum in the Tronto Valley. The sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo is located at the southern border of the Firmum territory, along the Aso Valley and close to Asculum. There are no known Roman towns in this area, which includes not only the Aso but also the Tesino Valley (further to the south). Pliny mentions Novana among the cities of this area, but this town is yet to be located. Previous studies have suggested Monte Rinaldo may be the location of Novana, but a recent work has located this town more in the inland, thanks to new archaeological discoveries and in accordance with the description of Pliny (Plin. nat. 3, 11), who writes *intus Novana*. Current research in the hinterland of the sanctuary has yet to locate any traces of wider settlement, therefore



Fig. 1: Map of ancient Pikenum with Monte Rinaldo between Asculum and Firmum.

it is yet unknown whether Monte Rinaldo was an isolated sanctuary or also a central place for managing the surrounding settlement.<sup>4</sup> (S.K.)

### A short history of the research in Monte Rinaldo

The sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo was discovered thanks to agricultural activity and has been investigated several times over the last sixty years. In the middle of the last century the collapsed main *porticus* was discovered and was subsequently rebuilt in the form that we can still see today (fig. 2, fig. 3). The remains of the sanctuary were brought to light thanks to the excavations directed by the Italian archaeologists Giovanni Annibaldi and Laura Fabbrini between 1957 and 1961.<sup>5</sup> In the first three years, Annibaldi was in the field only occasionally and his assistant C. Bonfigli managed the clearance. The archaeological excavations directed by Laura Fabbrini were more accurate, with the correct interpretation of the provenance of the finds, even if there was no precise stratigraphic methodology. Beyond the main *porticus*, the foundations of the central temple, the lateral porticoes and a small sacellum were found, but many ancient structures had been destroyed and removed in order to recover architectural fragments to be reused to build the walls in a later phase.

The excavation documentation was recorded with drawings and photographs, the latter of which are fundamental for understanding the original situation. Some scholars, such as



Fig. 2: View of the archaeological area of Monte Rinaldo.

Maurizio Landolfi, have more recently begun to study the complex reconstructing its shape and its chronology.<sup>6</sup> The most widely shared hypothesis is that of a big square bordered by a *porticus triplex* with Doric columns and with a Tuscan temple at the centre. A small sacellum, probably linked with a sacred spring, was located in the north-western corner of the square. The sanctuary is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC with some changes occurring in the following century.<sup>7</sup> (F. D.)

### The new research project

In 2016, following an agreement between the British School at Rome, the Regional Archaeological Superintendency and the University of Bologna, a new research project commenced with three main aims: the restudy of old data, topographical and geophysical survey and new excavations.

2016–2017: A new analysis of the old excavation material data, based on a review of the archive and a study of the pottery as well as the architectural elements preserved at three different locations (the archaeological park, the local museum and the National Museum of Ancona). The diagnostic ceramics have been drawn and the architectural elements have been recorded with a new photogrammetric survey. In the last two years the project has analysed this data in order to achieve a better understanding of the chronology of the building phases.

2016–2017: A geophysical and topographical survey (with two different types of magnetometry, ground-penetrating radar, laser scanning and GPS) of the structures in the archaeological park and in the surrounding area, in order to record any further traces of the sanctuary



Fig. 3: The reconstruction of the columns of the main porticus.

and a possible settlement. Due to a number of factors, the geophysical survey noted few features of archaeological significance but has provided a basis for continued future work. A topographical survey of the surrounding territory has been ongoing since 2017.

2017–2018: New archaeological excavations to identify better preserved stratigraphic contexts. The first season of excavation took place in 2017 with a focus upon the area of the temple. In the following season in July 2018 work concentrated on better understanding the sacellum as well as opening a new excavation of the north *porticus* (fig. 4). The archaeological stratigraphy has been heavily disturbed as many structures were destroyed and rebuilt in the 1960s during the restoration project. However, at deeper levels the structures and the stratigraphy are better preserved. In particular, precisely in the area of the western *porticus* an undisturbed stratigraphy was recorded. The contexts provided information relating to the first occupation of the sanctuary as well as successive phases.

Whilst the research at Monte Rinaldo is still ongoing, the preliminary results suggest some new hypotheses and areas for research regarding the building phases,

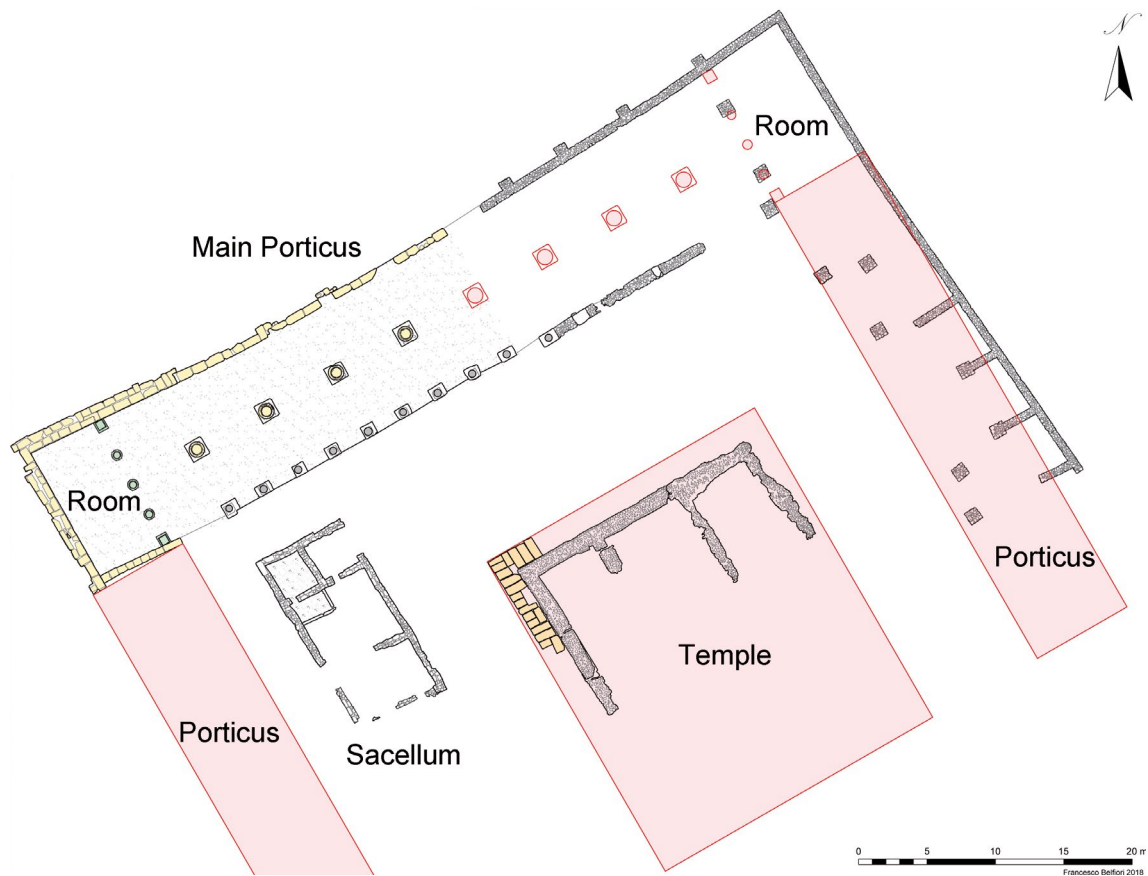


Fig. 4: The sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo. Plan of the structures.

the material culture and the cults. On the basis of the results of the new excavations and in particular the study of the architectural fragments, in the first building phase (during the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) there existed only the temple with the main porticus. These phases can be recognised based upon the ceramic and the architectural elements reused in the following phases. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC the lateral porticoes and the sacellum were built. Subsequently, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, two rooms with Ionic columns were built in the corners on the sides of the main porticus (fig. 4). The final phase documents the collapse of the sanctuary and its reuse as both a necropolis and a farm with structures that were built between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, reusing many architectural fragments to construct the new walls. The ongoing study of the architectural features of the identified phases, by Francesco Belfiori, is also providing a better understanding of these buildings. Through the digital recording of the architectural fragments it has been possible to assign pieces to the specific construction phase of each of the different buildings (fig. 5, fig. 6).<sup>8</sup>

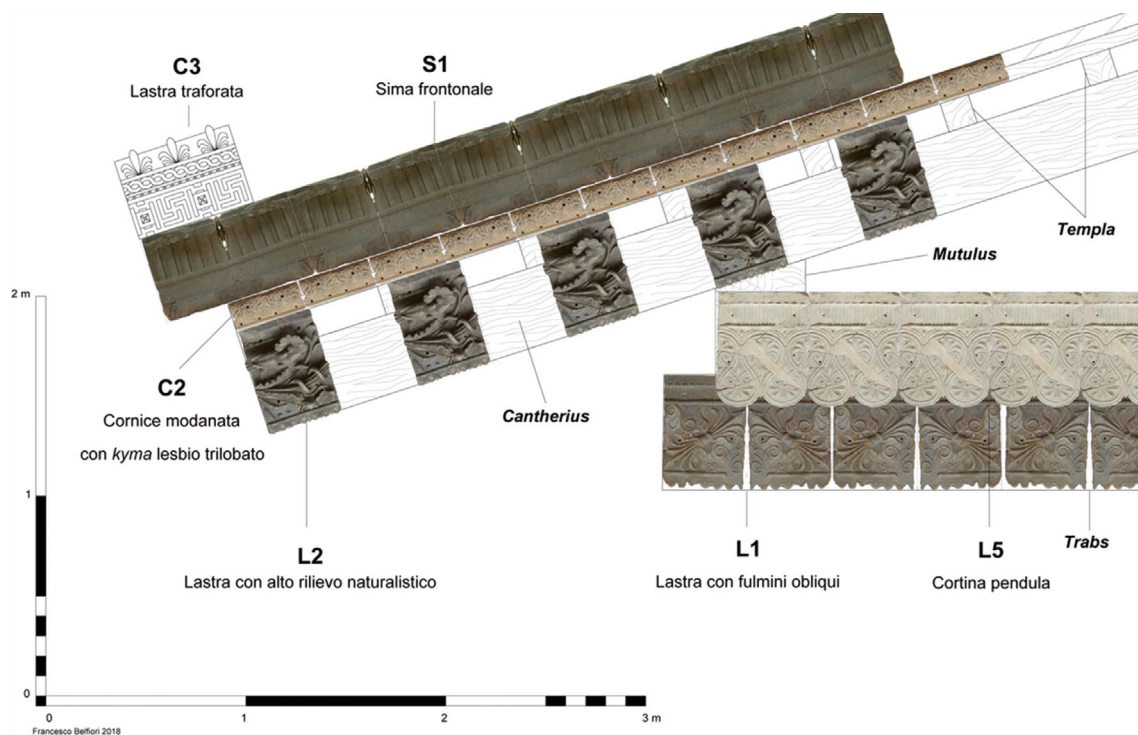


Fig. 5: The roof of the temple: reconstructive hypothesis.

The study of ceramic evidence has been useful not only for understanding the chronology but also to assess the cultural landscape. An analysis of the material at the museum from the early excavations and those found in the new stratigraphic excavations has shown that in the deeper stratigraphy of Monte Rinaldo, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, it is possible to find together impasto ceramics and fragments of black-glazed pottery (fig. 7). The first is usually considered a trace of the material culture of the *Pikentes*, and the second a result of the Roman conquest. This therefore presents two possible hypotheses: either there was an earlier pre-Roman sanctuary or the sanctuary was used by both the Romans and the *Pikentes* at the time of the first Latin colonists (in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC). It has also been attested that there was a sanctuary before the building of the temple, probably *sub divo* (without a roof) or with perishable structures related to the ritual use of the sacred spring.

In terms of the evidence for cult at Monte Rinaldo, through the discovery of several black-glazed cups with stamps or graffiti, it can be understood that Jupiter was the main god venerated at Monte Rinaldo. However, there is also evidence for minor deities, such as Hercules (because of the imagery of several terracottas depicting the semi-god and of some fragments carrying the *H* mark) and possibly the Muses *Camēnae*, connected with the sacred spring.<sup>9</sup> Some black-glazed cups were probably made in a kiln close to the sanctuary especially for this cult.

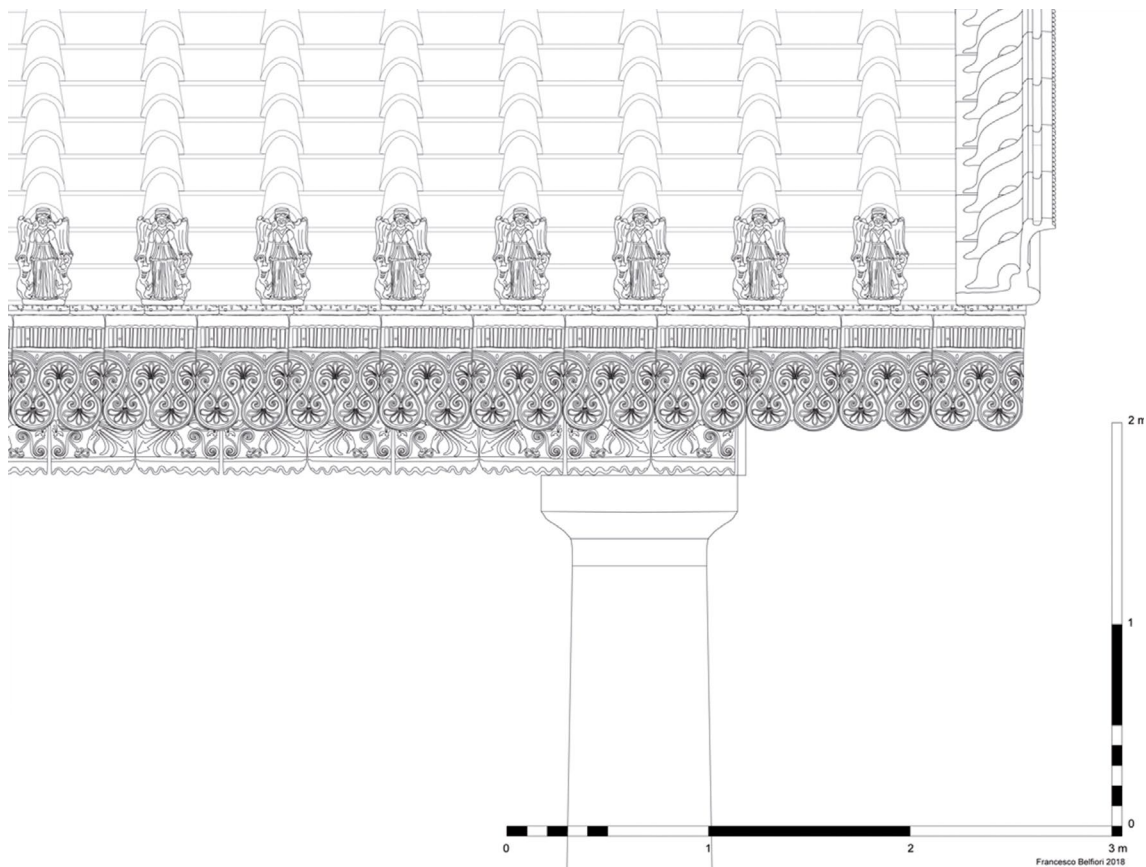


Fig. 6: The side of the temple's roof: reconstructive hypothesis.

### Hypotheses or open questions

Following two years of research, the evidence from Monte Rinaldo has led to the formulation of different hypotheses about the site. Primarily there is a need for a better understanding as to why the sanctuary was built and what role it had in developing the Roman settlement.<sup>10</sup> Was it an isolated sanctuary or part of a larger settlement? Did it only have ritual functions for the settlers of Firmum or was it a central place able to manage the entire valley? Was it built as a sanctuary during the foundation of the Latin colony of Firmum or was it the result of a more ancient ritual use of the site used by the *Pikentes*?

In order to answer some of these questions it is useful to draw a parallel with the sanctuary discovered at Asculum. Following archaeological excavations along Via Capitolina (in 2009), a small Picenean sanctuary was discovered. It was made of mudbrick and organic materials with ritual depositions of vessels (dated between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC). When Asculum became an ally of Rome (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) the sanctuary was still used and finally a Roman temple was built on top of a large terrace supported

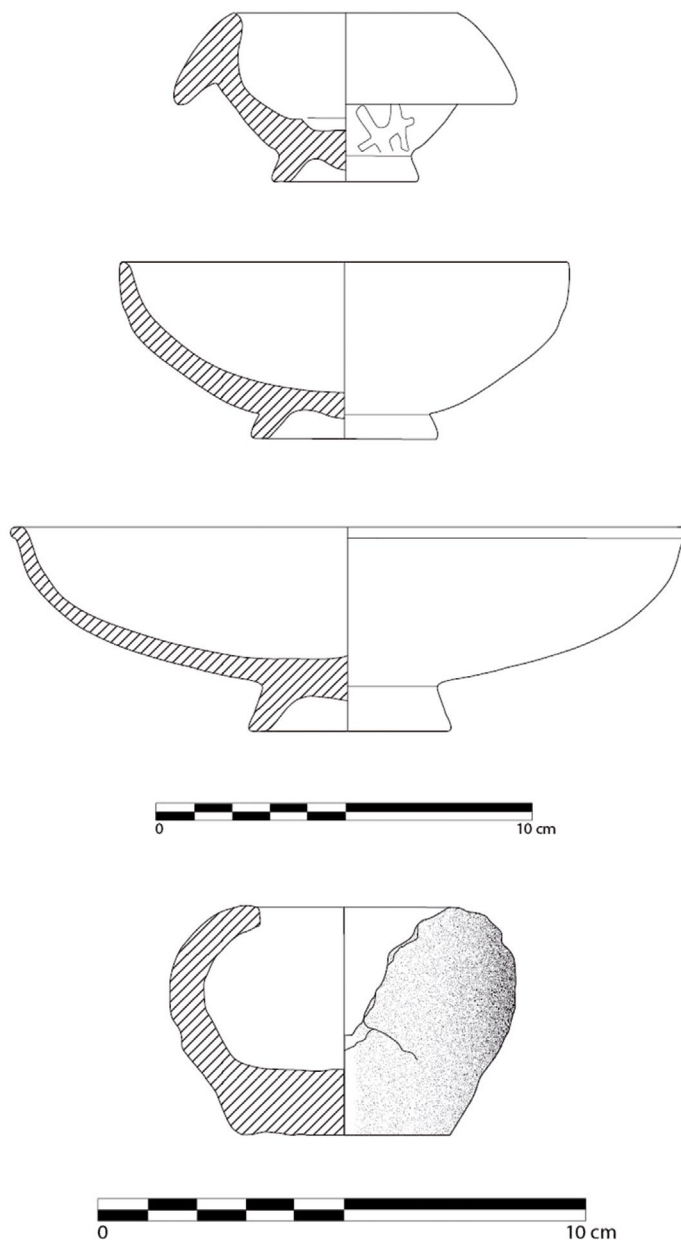


Fig. 7: Black-glazed and impasto pottery from the same archaeological context of Monte Rinaldo.

by masonry substructures (between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC). The remains of the architectural fragments, with the representation of a Mistress of the Animals (*potnia theron*) are very similar to those found at Monte Rinaldo. At the sanctuary of Asculum two different periods of archaeological contexts were discovered. The earliest, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, records many fragments of *pocola Picena* (impasto ceramics) and



imported black-glazed pottery mixed together. In the second, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, local black-glazed wares were discovered as were many fragments of *pocola Picena* (not only of impasto). Some black-glazed cups have graffiti with the name of the goddess (maybe *Ankharia*, a deity of the *Pikentes*) on them. Therefore in Asculum it is possible to recognize a Roman cultural assimilation as well as the continuation of the more ancient culture. The sanctuary probably played a role in the development of the *civitas caput gentis* and in the increasing of the cultural integration.<sup>11</sup> It therefore leads to the hypothesis that perhaps the sanctuary of Monte Rinaldo played a similar role in the integration between the *Pikentes* population with the new Latin settlers. (E.G.)

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Paci 2014; Raggi 2014; Giorgi – Demma 2018, 54–56.

<sup>2</sup> Ciuccarelli 2012, 24–32.

<sup>3</sup> Paci 1998; Sisani 2011; Marengo 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Bernetti 2009; Menchelli 2012; Menchelli – Iacopini 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Annibaldi 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Landolfi 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Demma 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Demma – Belfiori in press.

<sup>9</sup> Landolfi 2000; Demma 2018, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Belfiori 2016; Belfiori 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Mazzeo Saracino – Morsiani 2014; Giorgi – Demma 2018, 60–62. See the paper of Francesco Belfiori in this volume.

### Image Credits

Fig. 1–2: by the authors. – Fig. 3 Demma 2018, 98, fig. 31. – Fig. 4–6: by F. Belfiori. – Fig. 7: by P. Cossentino.

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