

Excavation campaigns

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REGIONE DEL VENETO

Regione Emilia-Romagna



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Partner in Charge	PP1 Po Delta Veneto Regional Park
Partners involved	
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Summary

The interventions for the improvement of the archaeological area of San Basilio in Ariano nel Polesine (Rovigo) terminated on 11/04/2022. Several entities were involved in the development of the activity, including the Superintendence of Verona Rovigo and Vicenza, the Museum system of Veneto, the University of Padua, University Cà Foscari of Venice, the Municipality of Ariano nel Polesine (area of the intervention) and the project partner Po Delta Veneto Regional Park, together with other local associations and groups of interest.

Premises

San Basilio is a fraction of the municipal territory of Ariano nel Polesine, originating its name from the medieval church built on the dunes that constituted the original coastline of the Adriatic Sea in the first millennium B.C.; the area - comprised within the Po Delta Regional Park, between the branches of Po di Goro and Po di Venezia – is today destined mainly to an agricultural use, but it offers several aspects of historic-cultural and environmental interest, making it a site of strong touristic value.

The archaeological interest of the site, already known through fortuitous findings, has been evidenced through excavation campaigns starting from the 1970s. The investigations, though partial, revealed the presence of an important Veneto-Etruscan settlement, probable coastal landing point active between the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., and of a Roman villa connected to the passage of via Popillia, the consular road realised in the 2nd century B.C. to connect Rimini with Adria. During the imperial age, a second road route was set, which just from San Basilio broke away from the previous one, continuing along the coast, behind the sand dunes, until it reached Altino, on the current Venetian lagoon. In correspondence with the road branch, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* indicates the presence of a post station, the *Mansio Hadriani*, with which the Roman site of San Basilio is traditionally identified. More recent investigations carried out in the early 2000s on the Forzello estate have provided new extraordinary information and have enabled the enhancement of an archaeological area open to the public, the only one as of today in the Polesine territory.

The structures visible in the 1100-square-meter archaeological area date from between the 1st and 8th centuries and tell an important chapter in the millennia-long history of San Basilio, at the time of its transformation from a centre of Romanity to a paleo Christian community. Beneath the wide, low vaulted roof on the eastern side are visible the mighty foundation walls of a large rectangular building of imperial Roman age brought to light so far for a length of 45 mt., equipped with internal pillars referable in good probability to a warehouse serving the post station. Side of the Roman building are the remains of the early Christian complex, of which the basilica layout has been only partially investigated while the

octagonal baptistery, surrounded by a small cemetery, has been fully exposed, housing some 30 inhumation burials protected by Capuchin structures.

In the 8th century, the early Christian complex is now in a state of abandonment, while a new worship building is set up further east, in a raised and protected position on the sand dune where the Romanesque parish church of San Basilio currently stands: the remains of its first installation dating back to the 9th century, followed by at least two subsequent renovations, have been brought to light along with a dozen brick tombs by archaeological investigations conducted under the present floor of the church, where a suitable arrangement with openings protected by glass allows them to be seen.

Among the accommodations present, just a few steps from the parish church, the Cultural Tourism Centre offers a reception area and an information point that through illustrative panels introduces the history of the site in its many facets while some showcases and the adjoining lapidary house a selection of finds from the archaeological excavations conducted in the Etruscan-Venetian settlement and the villa from the imperial Roman period, to which a larger exhibition space is dedicated at the National Archaeological Museum of Adria. Instead, the materials returned from the investigations at the archaeological area, which are currently stored in the storage rooms of the Adria Museum, remain awaiting restoration and valorisation. The archaeological area, which in 2014 was equipped with a new glulam roof made by Veneto Region thanks to fundings under the "Italy-Slovenia Interreg IV Cross-Border Cooperation Project (2007-2013) PARSJAD - Upper Adriatic Archaeological Park," also needs some important and essential completion work on the archaeological structures left exposed and their stratigraphy. The remains of the large Roman building are still covered with protective fabric pending the completion of the excavation work and the restoration and consolidation of the brick masonry; widespread consolidation work is also necessary on the entire surface of the area and on the structures of the early Christian complex, which despite the protection provided by the cover present traces of disintegration and flaking that over time may jeopardize the very protection of the site by compromising its conservation.

Project objectives

The project aims to include the territory of Ariano nel Polesine, and in particular the hamlet of San Basilio, in a wide and innovative tourist circuit, in an archaeological key, but not only, through actions aimed at its redevelopment, the resumption of research activities and the completion of the archaeological area. The planning-which is expected to be multi-year with a series of intermediate steps-starts from the direct involvement of the community and local authorities, together with the bodies in charge of research and protection, so that participation and shared knowledge can become the starting point for an adequate revitalization of the historical-cultural and naturalistic heritage and the flywheel for a development of the territory through innovative formulas of sponsorship and promotion. the idea

of an innovative offer in the tourism scene allows to include the deltaic circuit, of which San Basilio represents the main archaeological pole, in activities of great impact also at the international level. it offers the opportunity to develop an archaeological tourism declined in its different potentialities, from the simple tour finalized to the in-depth knowledge of the Veneto (and in particular of the Po Delta and its naturalistic heritage), to the direct experience of excavation activities, of the treatment of materials, of the first operations of cataloguing of the finds. The project aims at the valorization of the territory through experiential modalities for the development of an interactive knowledge.



Photos of the interventions













































































































































