Falerii Novi 2023: Methods of Excavation & Analysis
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Introduction
Located in the middle Tiber Valley, Falerii Novi presents an opportunity to study ancient urban life and climate through stratigraphy. Founded in 241 B.C., the urban centre of Falerii Novi emerged as the designated domicile for the Fulcii of Falerii Vetere subsequent to their relocation prompted by an unsuccessful rebellion.

Despite this, the location of the site is highly advantageous due to its proximity to Rome (50 kilometres), the Tiber River, and its placement on the Via Amerina; all major points of trade. This provides a unique opportunity to study Falerii Novi’s economic relationship to ancient Italy’s financial epicentre Rome, and its surrounding municipalities.

Additionally, the large size of Falerii Novi (measuring at 31.66 hectares) presents an opportunity to collect soil samples for analysis. Soil samples are capable of providing insight into the paleoclimate and landscape of Falerii Novi, and therefore of the surrounding areas.

Previous Work At Falerii Novi
2017-2020: Trent University conducted surveys and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) at Falerii Novi. The surveys documented the site’s spatial organisation, while GPR revealed sewersystem and architectural elements beneath the denuded remains, the primary east-west road.

Three findings allowed for a detailed reconstruction of the town’s layout, street network, and the distribution of buildings.

2021: A series of test pits measuring 50 x 50 x 30 cm were excavated by PNP to examine the manorial composition and its spatial distribution. Additionally, Trent University conducted petroenvironmental analyses and geoarcheology that provided a complete occupational stratigraphy. This approach led to the reconstruction of an extended chronological record of inhabitants, spanning from the Pre-Roman era to the Late Medieval period.

2022: The 2022 season marked the inaugural official excavation campaign of the Falerii Novi Project. Three distinct areas were excavated: the manorial, a domus south of the forum, and an insulin-intersection along the Via Amerina. Material excavated confirmed a wide range of occupations. Further coring and geophysical survey was conducted.

Area 2: The Domus
Opened in May 2023, Area 2 measured 8 metres by 8 metres and was subject to contained a walled structure (i.e., an enceinte due to previous geophysical survey by Ghost University). The two main focuses of excavation Area 2, were: 1. uncover, and document the walled structure, and 2. Collect soil samples for Flotation.

Methods of Excavation & Documentation
The Domus, or Area 2, was excavated according to open context stratigraphic principles, and by stratigraphic units (SU) are the result of both human interaction (e.g., midden), and natural processes (e.g., erosion).

Each SU represents individual contexts, which can be defined by these criteria: colour, composition, compaction, and consistency. Both the removal and the adding context (fragmentation and positive interactions on the stratigraphic record) are considered SU’s. Therefore, layers, pits, and dumps, and structural features are all considered to be SU, and are recorded accordingly.

Establishing the relationship between SU’s is crucial for the stratigraphic process, and is instrumental to the site. The software Archaeo was used for documentation, and the method was as described in Fig. 5.

Results of Excavation
Excavations of Area 2 revealed a walled, rectilinear structure of three floors and one room, and unique finds including ceramics, metal, organic materials and small finds.

The stratigraphic sequence of Area 2, consisting of layers of different materials, represented a high volume of site history (collage form), as well as a layer by layer providing potential insight into understandings of the structure.

Area 4, the architectural elements were also present, including built, built, and built elements. These finds included numerous architectural elements, indicating the presence of a stable, well-made structure, which in turn, supported the possibility of habitation in the area.

Common geological materials within Area 2 were red mud (silt) and pebbles.

Common biological components found were beans, charcoal, seeds, and woods.

Common artificial components found were ceramics, brasses, glass, metal, and striped marble.

Soil Collection & Analysis: Flotation
Flotation is a method of soil analysis wherein soil samples are subjected to wet-sieving. This method facilitates the recovery of minute materials, typically of botanical origin, due to the small mesh size used.

Furthermore, flotation allows for carbonized material to float to the surface for collection.

Flotation is capable of providing evidence of various botanical species, which in turn, provides insight into the palaeoclimate and landscape of Falerii Novi. Past native species, non-native species, and past climate. Seeds in particular, are amongst climate indicators. At Falerii Novi, palaeoclimate studies reveal the grassy woodlands.

Methods of Flotation
1. 48 litres of soil (approximately 4 buckets) were collected from each context for flotation.
2. Samples were sieved, 2 litres at a time with 2 mm residual mesh at the large water bath of a 0.05 mm mesh. A 0.5 mesh prevents small residue from sinking.
3. Light biological material (e.g. charcoal) floats to the surface of the water, and then is strained out into two additional 1 mm sieves.
4. The remaining material from the soil sample, or heavy residue, is dried and then sifted by hand with tweezers to recover bone, seeds, pottery, charcoal, and glass.

The floated material, caught in the 1 mm residue mesh, is dried separately and stored for microscopic analysis.

Flotation Results
Flotation and subsequent residue sorting produced a large amount of bone, pottery, and charcoal samples. A minimal amount of botany (e.g. grass, weed seeds) were collected, but these that were will be further studied.

This botanical analysis holds the potential to reveal intrigues insights into past agricultural practices and environmental conditions.