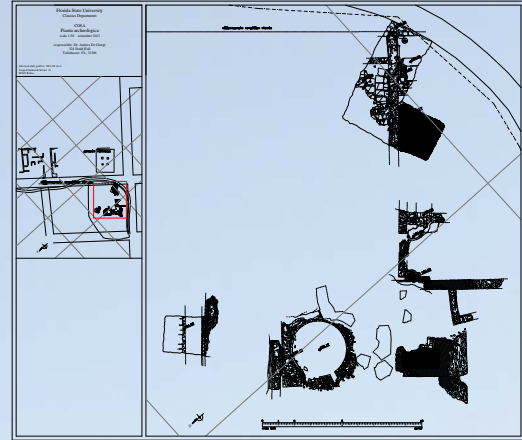


Water Sustainability : the Roman Baths at Cosa

- In June 2013 Florida State University, Bryn Mawr College, and the University of Tübingen renewed excavation and initiated a new geophysical survey at the Roman republican site of Cosa in Southwest Tuscany under the auspices of the Archaeological Superintendency for Tuscany. The purpose of this work is to investigate a prominent monumental complex adjacent to the forum of the town, and to gain a better sense of its urban development than was possible when it was first surveyed by the American Academy in Rome after the end of World War II. The initial program of research, which continued into the 1970's, led to publications that have made Cosa the most important site for our knowledge of Roman republican Italy, as well as shedding light on the development of architecture in Rome itself in the second century BCE.
- This research is directed to the excavation and study of a complex that will illustrate the development of the Roman bath in the republican and imperial eras and the engineering necessary to generate and maintain a water supply on a site that had neither springs nor aqueducts.
- How did a Roman bath function and serve a community at a waterless site? How did its engineering exploit the only available potential water sources, those provided by underground cisterns and reservoirs, and what constraints did such a system impose on its use? These are the questions my research at Cosa addresses.
- The proposed exploration of subterranean features along with the continuing excavation of the area around surface features that were identified in 2013, a Laconicum (sweat room) and four elevated catchments, is intended to discover the mechanisms that made possible the provision and circulation of water within the bath complex. Although this community was disadvantaged by the lack of springs and aqueducts, from the archaeological evidence obtained thus far, it nevertheless seems to have successfully operated its baths for several centuries through a rational, sensible usage of water. The negotiation between the ecological framework and the mechanical/architectural and administrative solutions adopted at Cosa takes center stage in this research, which promises to make a significant scholarly contribution to the current climate of burgeoning interest in the history of Roman baths and their built environment.
- Sustainability is a mantra in this day and age and rightly so. The poor management and eventual loss of renewable, natural resources is now demanding a more responsible behavior from present and future generations in terms of how human beings interact with their environment. Not surprisingly, antiquity can contribute to this discourse in many ways, from engineering to agricultural practices. In this regard Cosa has a remarkable story to tell.



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