
The late-Republican villa of San Marco (Portoferraio): the Valerii in Elba Island

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Résumé

The excavation campaigns in locality of San Marco, located at the eastern part of the Portoferraio bay (Elba Island), has begun in 2012 and they revealed a very extensive Roman villa facing the sea (the area investigated covers a total of approximately 30 m²), with a vast and articulated *pars fructuaria* on the ground floor and a *pars urbana* on the first floor.

The villa was built in the second half of the 2nd century B.C. and was destroyed in the 1st century A.D. by a fire that 'cooked' the structures and ensured the survival of its remains. The residence shows the diversified use of two building techniques, i.e. dry-stone foundations and clay-brick walls, covered with plaster, for the external walls, and *opus craticium*, again finished with a layer of plaster, for the partition walls and upper floors.

In the course of the years, 9 rooms were brought to light, 8 of which had an upper floor, for a total of 17 rooms. The rooms on the ground floor were intended for the storage and preparation of foodstuffs, as the presence of hearths and numerous fragments of cooking pottery, animal bones and transport amphorae seems to indicate. These rooms gravitated around a large room that constituted the villa's cellar, in which five large *dolia defossa*, intended for storing wine, were partially buried. The impressive collapses of roof tiles, walls and floor remains made it possible to ascertain the presence of rooms on the upper floors, which had residential or representative functions. The painted plasterwork found in collapse in some of these rooms, characterised by a lively polychromy, is typical of the decorative system of the early phase of the 2nd style. The presence of cinnabar, identified only in prestigious contexts and used constantly and profusely in the paintings of the 2nd style, confirms the high quality of the decoration of the room. The decorative schemes and the use of skilled craftsmen demonstrate the high rank of the residential area of the villa at San Marco and the full adherence of the patrons to the models in vogue in the luxurious residences of Rome in the late republican period. The epigraphic evidence found on the walls of some *dolia*, we can attribute to the *gens Valeria*, firmly rooted along the entire Tuscan coast, confirming its belonging to members of the Roman ruling class.

Mots-Clés: Elba island, villa, Valerii, building techniques

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