

What's beyond the Etruscan bridge?

Analysis and dating of the Vignale plateau

San Giovenale. Results of excavations
conducted by the Swedish Institute
of Classical Studies at Rome and
the Soprintendenza alle Antichità
dell'Etruria Meridionale
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Yvonne Backe Forsberg
& Richard Holmgren

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Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies
Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Stockholm
secretary@ecsi.se | editor@ecsi.se

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Back cover: Bridge (illustration by R. Holmgren).

Dust jacket: The enigmatic Stone Platform excavated on Vignale in 1959, looking north-west (photograph by C.W. Welin, courtesy of SIR). See p. 183, *Fig. 155*.

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ABSTRACT

Yvonne Backe Forsberg & Richard Holmgren, *San Giovenale VI:2–3. What's beyond the Etruscan bridge? Analysis and dating of the Vignale plateau* (Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Rom 4°, 26:6:2–3), Stockholm 2024.

The Etruscan site of San Giovenale has been excavated periodically since 1956. From the beginning the main focus has been the question of settlement remains. However, a fundamental area within the site had still not undergone the inquiry necessary for a complete understanding of the site as a whole. The Vignale plateau, connected to the main site by an Etruscan bridge, was surveyed and partly excavated in 1959–1960, but not published. The Vignale Archaeological Project (VAP) began new investigations in 2006 that aimed to answer the question of “What's beyond the Etruscan bridge?” This publication focuses on the initial investigations of 1959–1960, augmented by new ground- and aerial remote sensing surveys.

The current volume is divided in six chapters. Through an introduction, and geological/topographic and historical/archaeological settings (*Chapters 1–3*), the reader achieves a general understanding of Vignale within a larger framework. The main archaeological studies of various features on the plateau, their function and dating are covered in *Chapter 4*, where Vignale from the Final Bronze Age to medieval times is approached with an emphasis on the Etruscan periods. The study of the latter investigates the connection to Vignale's sister plateau (the Acropolis area), and the plateaus' connection to the surrounding landscape. An intrinsic aspect of Vignale is the association with wine over time. *Chapter 5* therefore elaborates on wild and domesticated vines with emphasis on production, ritual, and material remains, concluding with a summary and synthesis in *Chapter 6*. Two extensive appendices follow, one detailing the material remains and data connected to the southern Bridge Complex, and the other a treatise on the Etruscan awareness of their local mineral salt, alunite.

Keywords: San Giovenale, Vignale, Etruscan, viniculture, viticulture, cisterns, infrastructure, necropolis, remote sensing, LiDAR, aerial, bridge, ram's head, settlement, photography, defence structures, platform, quarry, wine press, alun, alunite

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AUTHORS

Dr Yvonne Backe Forsberg
Salabacksgatan 5 C
SE-754 32 Uppsala
forsberg.yvonne@gmail.com

Richard Holmgren
ARCDoc Archaeological
Documentation
Follingegatan 29
SE-596 33 Skänninge
arcdoc@icloud.com

Appendix 3. Conservation of a Hellenistic altar

An altar fragment of peperin stone was found during excavations at San Giovenale in 1958 (*Fig. 214*). It had for a long period of time been left in the garden of the Swedish Institute of Classical Studies in Rome, and had become covered with moss and soil. Two large cavities on one side were used for ants' nests. Before sending the altar to the Museo Nazionale Etrusco Rocca Alborno in Viterbo, where it was to be exhibited, it had to be cleaned (*Fig. 249*).¹¹⁵⁸

Interventions

An initial cleaning was made with tap water, a soft brush, and a medical scalpel to remove the accumulations of soil, moss, and remains of plant roots—after which a biocide was applied

and left on the surface for three days (*Fig. 250*). The altar was then mechanically cleaned, again with a medical scalpel, a soft brush, and tap water, in order to remove any remaining plant traces as well as white and blue paint stains (*Fig. 251*). The interventions were undertaken in May 2016.

Observations

On the altar's underside are remains of cement, which were not removed.

In addition, there are areas of a dark grey film on the top side, which might be the remains of ashes or have been caused by fire, or might be some kind of mechanical damage (as opposed to that caused by plants).

Rome, 18 May 2016
Agneta Freccero

¹¹⁵⁸ The altar was described in Boëthius *et al.* 1960, 308, 311, fig. 269. From 2016 onwards the altar has been on display in the Museo Nazionale Etrusco Rocca Alborno in Viterbo, Backe Forsberg & Holmgren 2016a.



Fig. 249. The altar before cleaning. From top to bottom: top surface of the altar, the underside, and three of its lateral surfaces (photographs by A. Freccero, courtesy of SIR).

Fig. 250. Top surface and a lateral side of the altar during cleaning (photographs by A. Freccero, courtesy of SIR).



Fig. 251. The top surface (upper left), and the four lateral surfaces of the altar after complete conservation (photographs by A. Freccero, courtesy of SIR).

