


Rediscovering the Heel

Archaeology and History in Northern Apulia

BY GIULIANO VOLPE



Archaeologists excavate the Roman Villa of Faragola (Ascoli Satriano Fg).

DAUNIA, THE ANCIENT TERRITORY that occupied the modern province of Foggia in northern Puglia, is extraordinarily rich in cultural heritage. Artistic masterpieces abound, such as the great Norman cathedrals at Barletta and Trani, or the polychrome marbles recently found in Ascoli Satriano. Less well known, but now becoming ever more visible, are its archaeological treasures, which span every period of human history. For the prehistoric period, one may visit the caves at Apricena or Grotta Paglicci as well as the Neolithic villages of the Tavoliere, while the Daunian culture of the 11th to 4th century BC is exemplified by the houses and burials of Arpi (near

Foggia). The great cities of Herdonia (near Ortona), Luceria (modern Lucera), and Canusium (modern Canosa di Puglia), villas like Faragola, and the great roads used for commerce and transhumance document the spread of Roman occupation to the region. The pilgrimage sanctuary of St. Michael at Gargano, Byzantine churches, cathedrals, and Norman castles alike describe a rich and cosmopolitan Middle Ages.

The real uniqueness of the Daunia's heritage, and indeed its real identity, lies in the integration of natural landscape and human history. The modern inhabitants of Daunia live with its past every day, and the visitor can easily capture these traces simply by passing through its countryside. These landscapes,



Ancient Daunia is located near the heel of Italy. Below, this map of Daunia shows the major river valleys and ancient Roman cities in the region.



rich not only in aesthetic value but also as a source of ancient and modern identity, constitute one of the region's most precious cultural assets.

In 2000, the Università di Foggia began a program to better understand the story of Daunia's past. In collaboration with regional government and with three other Apulian universities, our objectives were to not only map these archaeological resources, but also to understand how they functioned within their diverse local landscapes. From Roman cities to medi-



The four Apulian universities/Regione Puglia project has catalogued many ancient sites: each of the red dots on this map shows cultural heritage sites now documented in Apulia.

eval farms, we set out to record history over the long term, from the Roman through the end of the medieval periods, using every tool available. Such an approach is termed "total landscape archaeology," and, in what follows, we describe four Daunian landscapes for which this approach has yielded unexpected new results.

A Total Landscape Archaeology

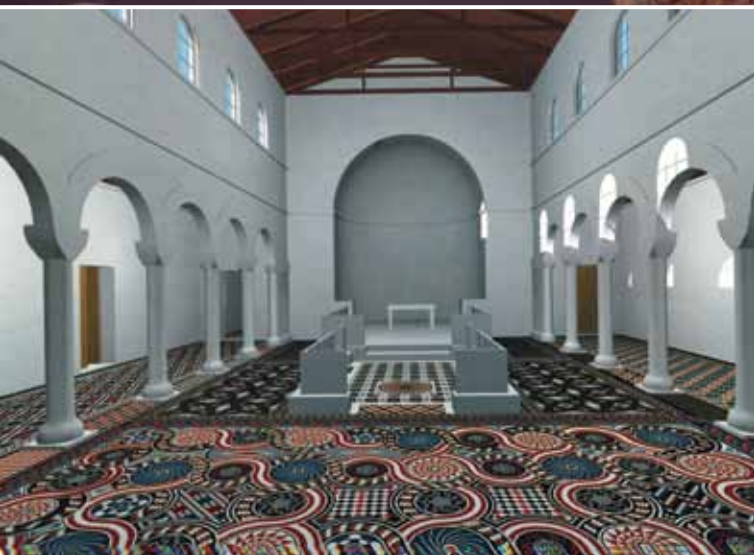
Our point of departure is the land itself, selecting specific topographies—such as river valleys or the sub-Apennine hills—as units of study. We then bring to bear a whole range of tools: textual data such as epigraphy, as well as literary and documentary sources; aerial photography; laser mapping; field survey; and excavation. We then use the many different kinds of resultant data to assemble a total history of each locale.

For us, the modern landscape is itself also an object of research. In it are conserved traces of the past and the transformations impressed upon it by man and nature throughout the ages—by settlement patterns, by the working of the land, by technology, and even by religious conventions. The object of research thus becomes not simply artifacts but extends to "eco-facts," or natural objects used by humans, and their relationship with their human users. "Total" in our sense of the word does not presume to produce "total knowledge," but rather refers to a totality of approach.

One landscape tool used to great effect in Daunia is aerial photography, particularly that taken at low altitudes during optimal moments. In Daunia, these moments occur during May and June after the winter rains, and when the first growth of wheat vividly captures the outlines of buried structures. Aerial photography has a long tradition in Puglia, begun in World War II by British archaeologist and RAF officer John Bradford. In more recent years, we have compiled an archive



Top, Motta della Regina, a Neolithic village and a superimposed Medieval Village, is one example of an archaeological site found by aerial photography. Middle, San Giusto (Lucera) is an early Christian complex with a double basilica and baptistery. Bottom, this computer reconstruction shows the interior of the early Christian basilica at San Giusto.



of some 50,000 photos and located over a thousand new sites of various kinds, dating from the prehistoric to the medieval period. Many of these sites were also subjected to extensive geophysical survey: geophysics carried out over whole landscapes. These modes of research have also been important as rescue tools, particularly in the face of the large-scale wind-farm construction in the region that has threatened many archaeological landscapes.

San Giusto and the Celone River Valley

We first began this approach to landscape in 1998 in the Celone River valley. The Celone lies in the territory of ancient Luceria, the first Latin colony in Apulia, founded in 315–314 BC. The project began with an emergency excavation at the site of San Giusto, carried out in difficult conditions inside a dam. Here we revealed a large Roman villa provided with wine production facilities, warehouses for grain, structures for the washing and working of wool, a kiln for ceramic production, and other agro-industrial facilities. In the 5th and 6th centuries AD, a great church complex was built at this site, composed of two connected churches, one with fine mosaics and the other designed for purely funerary uses; a centrally planned, monumental baptistery; residential spaces; and a small bath house. On the basis of historical and epigraphic sources, we identified the site as the seat of a rural diocese; one of the bishops was Probus, *episcopus Carmeianensis* or bishop of the Carmeia estate, present at the synod of Rome convened by Pope Symmacus in AD 501–502. The bishopric or diocese grew up within a large imperial estate called the *saltus Carminianensis*, which the *Notitia Dignitatum*, an official administrative document drawn up in the 5th century, tells us was administered by a particular official, the “imperial property manager for Apulia and Calabria.”

In addition to the excavations at San Giusto, we also carried out intensive field survey in the Celone River valley. For the late antique period (4th to 6th century), a time when other areas of Italy experienced a steady decline in rural settlements, we discovered an unexpectedly populous landscape, with numerous villas, villages, and small farms. Particularly significant was the discovery of a *vicus*, or village, at Montedoro, set along the north-south road that joined the Roman city of Benevento with the port of Siponto, and along whose length were located the cities of Aecae (modern Troia) and Arpi (near Foggia). Montedoro may be the roadside station called



Above, at the Villa of Faragola (Ascoli Satriano), cut marble, or *opus sectile*, panels covered parts of the floor and the sides of the couch in the dining room. Left top and middle, the summer dining room of the Villa of Faragola (Ascoli Satriano) was used in a recent restaging of 4th century author Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, a philosophical dialogue that takes place during a dinner party. Left bottom, the Roman baths at Herdonia (Ordona Fg.) are visible along traces of the Via Traiana.



Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the Swabian king of Sicily, was passionate about hunting and wrote a book entitled *On the Art of Hunting with Birds*. The King's vacation home and zoo were located at Pantano and were recently excavated by our team.

the *Praetorium Lauerianum*, known from the 4th century map called the Peutinger Table. In other villages in this territory were found early Christian churches, pointing to a profound diffusion of Christianity to rural areas.

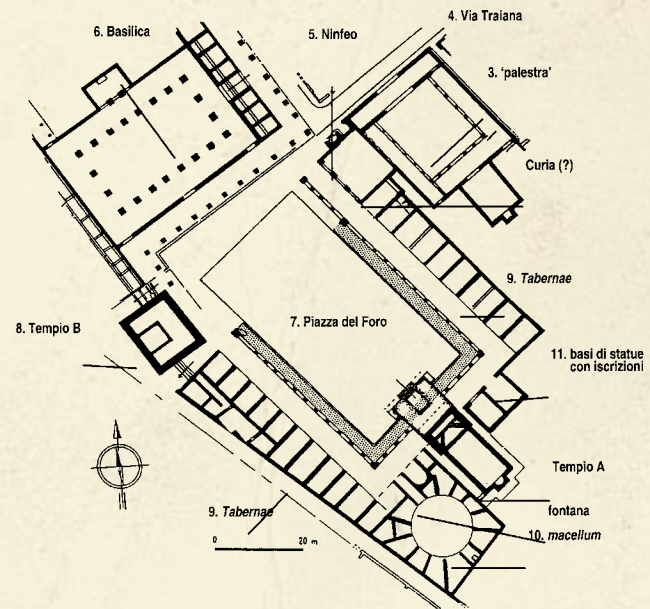
Recently, we have also begun excavation at the nearby site of Pantano, which in the early 13th century served as a vacation home for King Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the Swabian King of Sicily, who would go on to become Holy Roman Emperor. The site was outfitted with a park—a kind of zoo with exotic animals and gardens—all to accommodate the king's passion for hunting, as described in his famous book of ornithology and falconry, *On the Art of Hunting with Birds*.

The Villa of Faragola, the City of Herdonia, and the Carapelle River Valley

In another valley, that of the Carapelle, a large, luxurious Roman villa was excavated at Faragola, and a survey carried out in its surrounding territory. Faragola was one of many sites in Daunia with an unusually long history. First occupied in the Daunian period (6th–2nd century BC), the earliest site was a domestic structure and included a room paved with a pebble mosaic. Abandoned in the 3rd or 2nd century BC, the site was later reoccupied by a great Roman villa. The villa was organized as a series of rooms around a peristyle, and was enlarged in late antiquity with mosaic-paved baths and a great summer dining room paved with a highly unusual floor composed of

cut marble and glass. Inside the dining room emerged a surprising find: a very rare example of a built *stibadium*, or curved Roman dining couch, encrusted with marble, in the center of which was a fountain of water, cascading to a shallow pool—designed to cool residents and guests in the summer heat. All these luxuries suggest the wealth of the Roman aristocracy whose monies derived from farming the surrounding lands. After the villa was abandoned in the late 6th century AD, a village grew up over its remains, its small huts, graves, and industrial installations for ceramics, glass, and metal in sharp contrast to the luxurious house that preceded it. Faragola is currently being conserved as an archaeological park and can be visited as part of a network of such parks, including the Archaeological Park of Daunian Culture and the archaeological museum of Ascoli Satriano.

As in the Celone Valley, our field surveys found the surrounding Carapelle River valley to be rich in Roman settlements and dotted with other villas, villages, and small farms. The most notable settlement, however, is the Roman city of Herdonia with an important medieval occupation, abandoned only in the early modern period. The history of Daunia from the prehistoric through the later medieval periods is found in layers at this significant site. Thanks to systematic excavations run since 1962 by Belgian archaeologist Joseph Mertens and, later, a Belgian-Italian team directed by myself, Herdonia is one of the most important urban sites in southern Italy. Unfortunately, the land is privately held, and although it is open to the public, it has not yet been developed into an archaeological park.



A plan of the Roman forum at Herdonia shows the market (*macellum*), shops (*tabernae*), temples, senate house (*curia*), and other structures.



The early Christian complex at San Leucio is shown in this aerial view at Canosa di Puglia.

The excavated area represents a portion of a Roman city that witnessed particular expansion between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. It was during this period that a great highway, the Via Traiana—built by the emperor Trajan—ran through the site, connecting Benevento with Brindisi. The city also boasted a Roman amphitheater, built over an earlier Daunian defensive ditch; Roman houses and industrial buildings; and a plaza seemingly used for gymnastic shows. The city's forum preserves the remains of a civic basilica, senate house (*curia*), the remains of two temples, and a covered market or *macellum*, specializing in the sale of meat and fish. Our own recent excavations revealed a large bath complex of imperial and late antique date, with hot and cold rooms all richly decorated. At the extreme north of the city are the remains of a medieval church; the church was later transformed into a fortified nucleus, surrounded by a ditch, within which was built a hunting lodge for Frederick II.

Canusium and the Valley of Ofanto

Urban archaeology is also part of the study of landscapes, and we have focused much of our recent efforts on the urban land-

scape of Canusium, modern Canosa di Puglia, another city with a particularly long life. Canosa was very much a product of its landscape, and was advantageously set along the course of the Ofanto River, which in antiquity was navigable for much of its length. Canosa was adjacent to a great fertile plain and was set at the junction of a series of major roads. As a result, the city was consistently wealthy, evident from its rich Daunian tombs to its impressive Roman remains. Our work has focused on the later Roman period, when Canosa became the most important city of the province of Apulia et Calabria, which extended over most of Italy's boot. It thus became the capital of the provincial governor and seat of the province's highest-ranking bishop.

Our work in Canosa has focused on two major early Christian complexes: the church of Saint Peter, and the city's cathedral, dedicated to the Virgin. The city played a key role in the Christian politics of its day, thanks to a consistently energetic community led by a series of powerful bishops who attended all the most important church councils of their day. These bishops also played significant diplomatic roles, particularly in relationships with the East. By the 4th century, Canosa had a bishop named Stercorius, who took part in the Council



Above, this brick includes the monogram of Bishop Sabinus of Canusium. Right, at Canosa di Puglia, an aerial view shows the early Christian complex of Saint Peter.



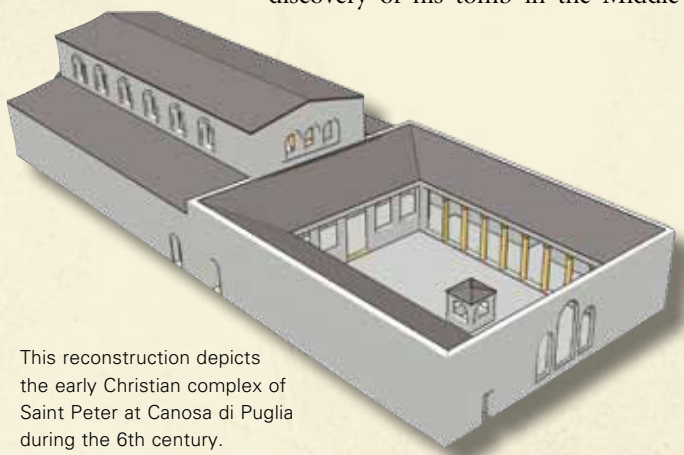
of Sardica (modern Sophia, Bulgaria). It was in the 6th century, however, that the church of Canosa really came into its own under its most famous bishop, Sabinus, who led the diocese for over half a century (514–566). Friend of Saint Benedict, confidant of various popes, emissary to the East, and leader during the tumultuous years when war decimated the southern provinces, Sabinus was also an active builder. In Canosa, the textual evidence claims he built a church of Cosmas and Damian, later dedicated to San Leucio, a baptistery dedicated to John the Baptist, and the church of the Savior near the cathedral. Bricks bearing his monogram have been found in numerous churches in Canosa, as well as in Canne and Barletta, showing the reach of his ambitious building projects. A 9th century account of his life, the *Life and Translation of Saint Sabinus, Bishop*, shows that by this time, Sabinus was regarded as a saint, called the *restaurator ecclesiarum*—restorer of the churches. This biography describes the miraculous events of his life, the discovery of his tomb in the Middle

Ages, and the movement of his relics, and constitutes the richest, if not always most reliable, source of information on his buildings. This source also credits him with the construction of a church of Saint Peter, in which Sabinus himself was buried. The tomb was then lost and only rediscovered in the 7th century when it became an object of holy pilgrimage. Later, during the 9th century, Sabinus' relics were transferred to the city's new cathedral and then again to Bari.



TO VISIT

Most of the sites and museums mentioned here are easily visited, such as Ascoli Satriano, Canosa, Herdonia, Foggia, Luceria, Montecorvino, San Severo, Siponto-Manfredonia, and Monte Sant'Angelo, while San Giusto is unfortunately covered by the waters of the nearby dam. The University of Foggia has also begun an archaeological guide service (www.archeologicasrl.com, info@archeologicasrl.com), in collaboration with a local tour operator (GTours, www.gtours.it), which allows you to visit these and other sites in the company of an archaeologist.



This reconstruction depicts the early Christian complex of Saint Peter at Canosa di Puglia during the 6th century.

Giuliano Volpe (top left), A. V. Romano and G. De Felice (top right), G. Sibillano (right)

The excavations carried out between 2001 and 2006 in Saint Peter's have revealed a huge complex composed of a large church with three aisles, preceded by an ample atrium and surrounded by residential and funerary structures. The discovery of many bricks bearing his monogram shows that the complex was, in fact, built by Sabinus himself. If we believe the *Life*, Sabinus was buried in this church, and his tomb may

THE HUNGRY ARCHAEOLOGIST



Daunia's cuisine is like its archaeology, close to the land, and many dishes are based on peasant food that varies enormously with the seasons. Among the most notable dishes are *pancotto*, made from wild seasonal vegetables, bread, and potatoes; homemade pastas like *cicatelli* served with arugula or *troccoli* with cuttlefish; lamb with thistles and eggs; baked *torcinelli* with potatoes; and various cheeses, particularly *caciocavallo podolico* (made from local, free-range cows' milk). For desserts, try the *calzungidde* or *grano dei morti* (literally, wheat for the dead), available only in the first days of November; wafers filled with almonds from the Gargano; and *mostaccioli*, or fig cookies. It is also amazing to see (and taste) the huge wheels of bread from Monte Sant'Angelo and Orsara. Finally, while little known in America, Apulian wines are excellent, particularly the reds: San Severo, Nero di Troia, and naturally, Daunia are some of the notable vineyards, while San Severo has also begun to produce a fine *spumante*.

In all the cities of Daunia one can find good, modestly priced restaurants and *trattorias*. Many can be found in the town of Orsara di Puglia, winner of the Italian slow-food prize and complete with a beautiful historic center. Here, try the 'Pane e Salute,' a small *trattoria*, where they still use a 16th century straw-burning oven and seasonal products at their absolute freshest.

be identified with an elegant, apsed mausoleum, paved with mosaics, which formed part of the first phase of the complex and later came to hold other privileged burials. We suspect that the apse of this mausoleum originally contained the sarcophagus of the bishop, later removed during the many relocations of his remains.

The excavations at Saint Peter's may have also revealed a rarity in early Christian archaeology: the residence of the bishop. The various structures discovered around the church comprise a central courtyard surrounded by finely decorated rooms, complete with underfloor heating, and paved with both mosaics and with those same monogrammed tiles bearing the insignia of Sabinus. To the south of the church another elite two-story house was also found, one room of which contained a type of throne, perhaps for the bishop.

Another of Sabinus' projects was the baptistery of Saint John, a large 12-sided building. An outer gallery connected four rooms in a cruciform arrangement, while the center of the building held a great octagonal baptismal font. This fine example of late antique architecture was preceded by a *narthex*, or vestibule, and an ample atrium surrounded by porticoed walkways. The *Life* of Sabinus claims that the bishop built this baptistery "next to the church of the most holy and ever virgin mother of God, Maria," that is, alongside a pre-existing church which should be the first cathedral of Canosa. To test this hypothesis, in 2006 we began excavations to the south of the baptistery and revealed a three-aisled church which dated to the 4th or 5th century AD, preceding the time of Sabinus. Sabinus nonetheless left his mark here, restoring and embellishing the church and connecting it to his new baptistery via a corridor.

A Journey through History

This article highlights the work carried out by the Università di Foggia, but Daunia has many other treasures to offer. Those who have a passion for culture will find the region's cities and countryside rich with other monuments, from cathedrals to caves. Italo Calvino, one of Italy's most beloved authors, said that "for the traveler, the past changes according to the trip they make." A trip through Daunia offers any number of pasts, some of which we have helped uncover and others of which still wait, unexplored, in the region's haunting landscapes. 🏠

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