

# 11. Interamna Lirenas: how special?

Alessandro Launaro

## 11.1. Introduction

Many ancient towns have enjoyed a long life, often reaching well beyond Antiquity. When this has happened, it has been primarily on account of the continued relevance they enjoyed as the world around them changed. Many, however, failed to keep up with such transformations and were eventually abandoned, never to be occupied again. While the memory of their former existence began to fade, some of them acquired a new purpose as vast sources of building materials ready to be extracted and (re)used elsewhere: the more accessible the site, the more systematic, thorough, and prolonged these ‘extractive activities’ turned out to be. Once this had ceased, debris were spread over to level the ground and many of these sites were eventually reclaimed for agriculture (‘greenfield sites’). The site of an ancient town is often given away by the enduring presence of some notable ruins, usually associated with those monumental features which are indicative of its original status.

Interamna Lirenas (Southern Lazio, Central Italy) is one Roman town, which, on the other hand, disappeared almost completely from sight (Fig. 11.1), its memory mostly preserved in the modern name of the area (Contrada Termine, today part of the Municipality of Pignataro Interamna). By the time modern scholarship began to take a more systematic interest in it, it offered such an underwhelming spectacle that archaeologists were quickly convinced of its early decline and fundamentally backwater character (par. 11.2). However, as it has been the case for several other ‘greenfield sites’ (e.g. Falerii Novi: Millett, this volume; Septempeda: Vermeulen, this volume), since 2010 our understanding of Interamna has been profoundly affected by the systematic and extensive application of non-destructive archaeological techniques, particularly geophysical prospection and the study of the ploughsoil assemblage (Launaro and Millett 2023), enhanced by targeted excavations (Bellini *et al.* 2014a, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020; Ballantyne *et al.* 2015, 2016; Goddard *et al.* 2022, forthcoming). This approach has since revealed an urban plan sprawling over 24 ha and featuring a hitherto unknown level of urban complexity. Furthermore, it has produced clear evidence of sustained growth from the mid-Republican to early Imperial period, with no real signs of either contraction or decline until the later part of the 3rd century AD. **[INSERT FIG. 11.1]**

If these discoveries have prompted a specific reconsideration of the archaeology of this town, their implications are in fact broader. As it will be shown, the historical trajectory of Interamna appears to have significantly diverged from traditional narratives about the development of Roman Italy in the Imperial period, long-assumed to have been characterised by stagnation and decline (e.g. Giardina 1997, 233–264, as such referred in Patterson 2006, 2, 265). Therefore, the problem is whether Interamna should be considered a special case already in Antiquity (i.e. representative of itself only) or rather an average community in Roman Italy whose nature and trajectory have been more comprehensively revealed by archaeology than it is usually the case. This chapter will thus provide an overview of the results of thirteen years of archaeological fieldwork at Interamna, and how these may contribute to a re-appraisal of the long-term development of Roman urbanism in Italy.

## 11.2. Interamna Lirenas in context

The site of Interamna Lirenas occupies a southern spur of a river terrace in the middle of the Liri Valley, a fundamental route of communication across Central Italy in any period. About 1 km long, roughly triangular in shape, the spur is oriented northwest–southeast and extends towards the meandering course of the river Liri (ancient *Liris*), only few hundred metres away. Flat on top, it features rather marked slopes on its sides (especially the southwestern one) and towers over the plain below from a relative height of 30 m (60 m a.s.l.). Gifted with a well defensible site, Interamna was placed at a strategic crossroad in the landscape (Fig. 11.2): the *via Latina*, which constituted the main axis of the urban settlement, here approached the course of the Liri (navigable at the time), where it was joined by a road running along the valley-bottom (from the northwest, today corresponding to the *Strada Provinciale 45*) and another one crossing over the river itself (to the south), before further proceeding to the southeast (towards Teanum, in Campania) (Launaro and Millett 2023, 5–7). The site represented a bridgehead along the left bank of the river Liri and lay within a territory which, in the latter part of the 4th and the early 3rd centuries BC, was crucially involved in the confrontation between Romans and Samnites. **[INSERT FIG. 11.2]**

Such character is well-reflected in the available textual evidence, which for long has represented the main source of information about Interamna (Launaro and Millett 2023, 7–10). Ancient authors mentioned Interamna in passing, primarily due to its participation in broader events of the Republican period: its foundation as a Latin colony in 312 BC in the context of the Samnite Wars (Livy 9.28.8; also Diod. Sic 19.105.5, Vell. Pat.1.14.4.); its role as a (wavering) ally of Rome during the Second Punic War (Livy 27.9.7, 27.10.10, 29.15); the Triumviral settlement of veterans in its territory (Cic. *Phil.* 2.105; also *Lib. Col. L* 234.18–20 = C 182.36–37). By the time of the Principate, Interamna had comprehensively ceased to play any part in the main narrative of Roman history and, as such, it disappeared from it. Epigraphic evidence partly compensated for this lack of information, even though it projected the image of a town soon by-passed by the main road network (Wightman 1994, 31–32; also Ceraudo 2004, 2007), and which, albeit acting as a venue for local periodical markets (*Inscriptiones Italiae* 13.2.49–50), may have struggled financially such as to require direct supervision from a *curator rei publicae* at the turn of the 3rd century AD (CIL X 4860). After all, Interamna is notably absent from the relevant sections of both the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (Segmentum V) and the *Itinerarium Antonini* (302.1–304.4). Besides, we are told that an otherwise ‘collapsing’ bath complex was maintained and kept in operation only thanks to generous benefactions from members of the *gens Sentia* (M. Sentius Crispinus and M. Sentius Redemptus) between the 3rd/4th and the early 5th centuries AD (CIL X 5348–5349).

Considering the scarcity of visible material remains across the site, it should not surprise that the first modern archaeological studies of Interamna tended to see it flourish in the Republican period, only to begin a process of inexorable decline soon afterwards. Michelangelo Cagianò de Azevedo (1947, 9–10), implicitly subscribing to a long-established view that interpreted colonies as *propugnacula imperii* (Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.27), linked the fortunes of Interamna to the military and strategic role it played while Rome was consolidating its hold over Italy. According to Filippo Coarelli (1982, 215) the centre was eventually ‘absorbed’ by nearby Aquinum, likely becoming one of its *vici*. The first systematic analysis of the ploughsoil assemblage over the urban area, carried out by Canadian archaeologists in 1978–83 and primarily focussed on the distribution of fineware and amphorae potsherds, appeared to confirm these interpretations: the area of occupation would have peaked (c. 30 ha) around the late 2nd to early 1st centuries BC, only to have shrunk dramatically (c. 10 ha) by the 1st century AD, and even further later on (Hayes and

Wightman 1984, 138 Fig. 2, 140–145, 148). The obvious contrast between Interamna and its neighbouring towns in terms of archaeological remains (“city walls are not definitely attested at Interamna, which also lacks theatre and amphitheatre”) and surviving inscriptions (“Interamna has only one quarter to one fifth of the number found in the town and territories of Aquinum and Casinum”) only reinforced this view (Wightman and Hayes 1994, 35). Admittedly, one dissonant interpretation was put forward by Gaetano Lena (1982, 60–61), a local scholar whose own analysis of the ploughsoil assemblage dated the peak of urban occupation to the Imperial period (dismissed by Hayes and Wightmen 1984, 145 n.9).

### 11.3. The Interamna Lirenas Project

#### 11.3.1. Research framework

What made Interamna Lirenas so unpromising and somewhat underwhelming is exactly what brought our team from the University of Cambridge to Contrada Termine. Looking for a ‘greenfield site’ where to pursue the non-destructive survey approaches that had been successfully applied in the Tiber Valley and elsewhere (Millett 2013; Keay & Millett 2016), we were drawn there by the ideal conditions the site offered for both geophysical prospection (almost unencumbered by later buildings and comprehensively accessible) and systematic surface collections (fields being periodically ploughed with optimal visibility) (Bellini *et al.* 2014b, 262). After all, notwithstanding its possible decline in the Imperial period, early modern wanderers had indeed recorded the presence of numerous ruins across the site (Notarjanni 2016 [1814], 41–42; Romanelli 1819, 384), with some of the paved streets being still visible (and in use!) in the 1940s (Cagiano de Azevedo 1947, 24). If Interamna had indeed experienced an early decline as previous scholarship had argued, it would have still presented a rare opportunity to map a Republican urban layout little affected by later developments (an almost ‘closed context’, akin to Fregellae: [Diosono, this volume](#)). However, there were already good reasons to believe that this may have not been the case.

First, just outside town, downhill from the main settlement, next to a likely crossing over the river Liri, stood the remains of a large room in *opus listatum/vittatum*, featuring a groin vault and two apses. Known locally as ‘Dogana Vecchia’, it was badly damaged during the Second World War and only the lower part is still preserved today. Notwithstanding the lack of any specific features normally found in association with bath complexes (e.g. *tubuli, suspensurae*), Cagiano de Azevedo (1947, 10, 24–28) was minded to interpret this structure as what was left of the building repeatedly restored by the *gens Sentia* ([par 11.2](#)), taking it as an indicator of Interamna’s flourishing between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th centuries AD. But this late vitality, not impossible after a prolonged period of decline, clearly contrasted with the results of the Canadian survey ([par 11.2](#)). As it happens, a quick re-analysis of the Canadian dataset highlighted possible flaws in its original interpretation, somewhat misrepresenting the widespread presence of early – and even late – Imperial finds across the site (Bellini *et al.* 2014b, 259–260).

These preliminary considerations convinced us that a systematic re-appraisal of the archaeology of Interamna was indeed fully warranted. While a full-coverage geophysical prospection may have well revealed the (still-buried) urban layout, we were also aware that knowledge of commonware pottery had very much improved since the 1980s. Due to their local/regional distribution, commonwares were likely to provide more reliable evidence of occupation compared to finewares and amphorae, whose access/supply had been significantly affected over time by their increasingly overseas origin (Bellini *et al.* 2014b, 267–269). To

further enhance these activities, we carried out a systematic field survey in the surrounding territory (2010–14: preliminary results discussed in Launaro & Leone 2018; Launaro 2019, 123–132) and launched a series of targeted excavations around the *forum*.

### 11.3.2. Geophysical Prospection

The extent of the surface scatters in the ploughsoil provided a good indication of the (maximum) extent of the urban area of Interamna Lirenas. Except for a group of houses located at the northwestern and southeastern ends of the spur (Masseria Cardillo and Masseria Morra respectively), the rest of the site consisted of a series of open agricultural fields, whose easy accessibility made it possible to carry out a full-coverage geophysical prospection of the site (24.3 ha in total) with both fluxgate gradiometry and ground-penetrating radar (GPR). The fluxgate gradiometry (2010–12) and the initial targeted application of GPR (2012–14) were carried out in collaboration with the British School at Rome (BSR) and the Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton University (APSS), under the supervision of Sophie Hay. The main GPR survey was carried out in partnership with Lieven Verdonck and Frank Vermeulen from Ghent University (2015–17), part of a larger project involving similar work at the site of Falerii Novi as well (Millett, this volume). The results of all these activities have been comprehensively presented and thoroughly discussed in a recent monograph (Launaro & Millett 2023, 39–104). The following discussion will draw attention to some relevant features of the ancient town which the geophysical prospection has revealed (Plate 11.1).

One of the most striking aspects of the town is certainly its dense occupation. Except for some marginal sectors featuring few (if any) geophysical anomalies interpreted as buried structures, the built area is generally packed with a wide array of private and public units. Most domestic units (84%) tend to be relatively small (190 x House I: <500 m<sup>2</sup>), but are widely interspersed with fewer larger ones (25 x House II: 500–1,000 m<sup>2</sup>; 5 x House III: > 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>), thus showing no noticeable sign of zoning or separation according to social status (a pattern which is well-attested at those Roman towns, like Pompeii and Herculaneum, whose plan is comprehensively known: Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 75–78). Furthermore, a series of 19 sizable ‘courtyard buildings’, mostly located at a distance from the *forum*, may represent service structures (*horrea*, *macella*, *scholae*) as well as apartment blocks (or indeed both, especially if they had featured an upper floor). A preliminary comparison with the new plan of Falerii Novi (Millett *et al.* forthcoming; also Millett, this volume) is proving helpful. Even though the intramural area of Interamna (c. 23 ha) was considerably smaller than that of Falerii (c. 31 ha), it did harbour a much larger proportion of smaller domestic units (House I) and about six times the number of ‘courtyard buildings’, possibly indicating a higher population density and an even larger population overall. Although its higher population density (90 inhabitants/ha) may have represented a response to spatial constraints imposed by the topography, it is in fact more or less in line with independent estimates which have been put forward for Roman urban settlement of middling size (Millett 2013, 37–39; Hanson, Ortman 2017, 314–319; also Russell & De Simone this volume). In short, from a demographic point of view, Interamna appears to have been hardly special.

However, one of the problems with this kind of population estimates is that they tend to refer to the ‘peak’ of occupation, invariably assuming the entirety of the urban area to have been comprehensively occupied at some point in time. This lack of chronological/spatial dimension is admittedly problematic but can be effectively balanced out with a systematic study of the ploughsoil assemblage (e.g. Vaccaro 2013). Taking the spread of well-dated

commonware pottery to provide a reliable diachronic indication of occupation levels across the site (par. 11.3.1), it was possible to map how the urban area of Interamna may have developed in the Roman period (Fig. 11.3). Its initial occupation appears to have been rather limited, clustered around the *forum* area and few satellites spots within the plateau (possibly involving as few as 200 families out of an initial colonial contingent of 4,000). This may be explained by considering that a larger number of colonists than normally assumed may have been settled in the *ager* (Launaro 2019, 126). Besides, the nefarious impact of the Samnite siege (294 BC) and the passage of Hannibal's army (211 BC) must have seriously disrupted the development of the Latin colony in its crucial, initial phase (Launaro & Millett 2023, 90–91). But the situation began to improve soon afterwards, and urban occupation may have indeed reached its maximum extent by the 1st century BC (as originally argued by Hayes, Wightman 1984). However, this trend continued until the early 3rd century AD, with a population likely peaking in the 1st–2nd centuries AD (Launaro & Millett 2023, 69–80, 97–99). **[INSERT FIG. 11.3]**

This trajectory appears to defy traditional expectations about Interamna – and many other towns in mid-Imperial Italy. This requires some explanation, particularly in consideration of the apparent side-lining of this community as indicated by the later course of the *via Latina* (established in the Augustan period: Ceraudo 2004: 155–156; 2007, 105–110), which effectively by-passed Interamna, in favour of a more direct link between Aquinum with Casinum (a situation later reflected in both the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and the *Itinerarium Antonini*) (par. 11.2). If the later course of the *via Latina* undoubtedly provided a more expedient route for long-distance journeys through the Liri Valley (i.e. the kind of travel which *itineraria* were arguably for), this does not imply that the existing communication network had ceased to exist. On the contrary, large and important centres like Aquinum (Ceraudo, this volume) and Casinum may have relied on this secondary network to further connect with the rest of the valley and, most importantly, the river Liri itself. After all, if the emperor Claudius had indeed considered redirecting the waters from the Fucine Lake into the Liri not only to reclaim good agricultural land, but also to make it *even more* navigable (Dio Cass. 60.11.5), it stands to reason that the river represented a very important waterway across that part of Central Italy, linked with the important port of Minturnae and, through it, the Mediterranean (Guidobaldi & Pesando 1989, 44, also n. 49). If one considers this extended and integrated communication network, the place of Interamna acquires renewed centrality: not only it was the only town located along the course of the Liri between Fabrateria Nova and Minturnae, but it was well-connected to both Aquinum (earlier route of the *via Latina*) and Casinum (road leading northwards, today known as ‘Via Vecchia Esperia’, and passing on the bridge over the Rio Spalla Bassa, the so-called ‘Ponte del Diavolo: Fig. 11.1).

These considerations may go some way towards explaining the considerable presence of those ‘courtyard buildings’ which, as it has been suggested, may have represented apartment blocks as well as *horrea*, or even *macella* (see above) (Plate 11.1). If their number appears excessive for a middling town like Interamna, it would be much more explicable had the town represented a trade-hub within the valley, in service to larger centres like Aquinum and Casinum. That Interamna played such a crucial role is indicated by the fact that its name features in two separate lists of periodical market venues (*nundinae*), meaning that it likely acted as a link between two (largely independent) regional market circuits, the only town in the Liri Valley known to have done so (Launaro & Leone 2018, 325–326). A large open space (c. 0.5 ha) at its southeastern end has been interpreted as a *forum pecuarium* (Launaro & Millett 2023, 66). This likely played a part in the wool trade, which represented a

fundamental resource across the region more generally, and at Interamna specifically (Launaro & Leone 2018, 326–327).

More recently, Interamna's direct link with the river has found further confirmation thanks to a GPR survey of the area of 'Dogana Vecchia' (Fig. 11.1), near the present course of the Liri (Launaro & Verdonck forthcoming). The preliminary interpretation of the geophysical anomalies has revealed the presence of a temple (whose remains may have been seen by Notarjanni 2016 [1814]: 42), a possible bath complex (distinct from the remains which Cagiano interpreted as such) and – more significantly – a sizable *horreum*. All things considered, these structures likely formed part of the river-port of Interamna, whose main period of operation (as tentatively indicated by the ploughsoil assemblage) is currently attested between the late 1st century BC and the 4th century AD. By intercepting – and enabling – an intense traffic between the centres of Aquinum and Casinum to the north and Minturane and the Tyrrhenian coast to the southeast, Interamna likely offered a diverse range of opportunities to many, something which may well explain its population levels and dense occupation over a prolonged period (2nd century BC to 3rd century AD). Remarkably, the scale and significance of these activities would be completely lost were we to exclusively rely on the presence of finewares and amphorae imported from overseas (Launaro & Leone 2018, 335–337).

Interamna was thus a lively node in a local/regional network which the town supported and – no less importantly – benefitted from. Without this awareness, it would be impossible to explain the hitherto unknown urban monumental character as revealed by the geophysical prospection. Two intramural sanctuaries dominated the lower plain and the course of the Liri to the southeast, their position consonant with a Hellenistic architectural tradition well-attested both in Italy and abroad (Gros & Torelli 2007, 193–196; Yegül & Favro 2019, 96–110). Similarly, along the northwestern side of the town, a roofed theatre (par. 11.3.3) towered over an open terrace (an elegant garden?), enhancing its visibility from the road running on the parallel spur immediately to the northeast (today *Strada Provinciale 152*). Remarkably, notwithstanding the relevance of the *via Latina* as the backbone of the urban layout, the town's most impressive public buildings were located away of it, invariably facing outwards, as if to convey a sense of the opulence and success of that community to those approaching it from any side (Launaro & Millett 2023, 97). But Interamna did not merely offer a spectacle to outsiders: at least one secure *macellum* and three bath complexes served its own population. Of the latter group, the largest one is likely the one maintained and renovated by members of the *gens Sentia* (Launaro 2019, 132; Launaro & Millett 2023, 101; *pace* Cagiano de Azevedo 1947, 10, 24–28). Conditions may have significantly changed from the 3rd century AD onwards, involving a significant if gradual reduction of both the urban area (Fig. 11.3) and the underlying population, a process apparently mirrored in the countryside (Launaro 2019, 130–132). Nevertheless, that the town continued to exist as a civic centre of some relevance well into the 5th century AD is indicated by that late act of *euergetism* from a wealthy *patronus* (M. Sentius Redemptus, in AD 408). This represents a rather unusual case among the towns of southern Latium in this period (Savino 2005, 187–188), made even more remarkable by the fact that, although the *gens Sentia* was probably from Atina (Wightman & Hayes 1994, 43), they had clear interests at Interamna. One cannot but wonder if Interamna's privileged relationship with the river Liri, an important waterway whose existence did not require the same level of maintenance or investment as the road network clearly did, may have had a part in slowing down and delaying the town's decline and abandonment (Savino 2005, 66–70).

### 11.3.3. Excavation

Since 2013, guided by the results of the geophysical prospection, targeted excavations around the *forum* area have brought to light a series of public buildings and some remarkable epigraphic evidence whose nature and chronology have significantly added to our understanding of Interamna Lirenas and its development. But geophysical prospection did not merely identify the most promising sectors where to open our trenches. It rather provided invaluable information about both their immediate and broader context, making it possible to widen the reach of our interpretation in ways that would not be possible in the absence of such (detailed) data about what it is still buried (and invisible).

The earliest well-dated structures brought to light belong to a *porticus* built in the early 2nd century BC, which was eventually razed to make room for the theatre towards the end of the 1st century BC (Bellini *et al.* 2019). A small section of the covered walkway (featuring a width of *c.* 6 m) was uncovered underneath the *postscaenium* of the theatre (Fig. 11.4). It likely extended further in both directions, its continuation to the Southwest having been entirely removed (including foundations) when the (lower) *cavea* was excavated. It is defined by two linear parallel structures in *opus quadratum* (local travertine): the one to the northwest was open, featuring descending steps and a series of columns/pilasters (as indicated by their foundations), whereas the one to the southeast corresponded to a perimeter wall which closed the building on that side. Whatever complex it may have been originally part of, the *porticus* was located quite centrally, but notably away from both the *via Latina* and the *forum*, along the northeastern limit of the settlement. This situation strikingly resonates with the one already recorded for the intramural sanctuaries (and their likely *porticus*) which have been identified along the southwestern edge of town (par. 11.3.3).

#### [INSERT FIG. 11.4]

An adaptation of the Greek *stoa*, the *porticus* was being adopted by Roman architecture at about the same time, especially in its more ‘functional’ versions closely associated with trade and other business activities (Davies 2017, 128–132). But precocious examples of this architectural type were to be found outside Rome too, notably at Minturnae, where a *porticus duplex* (190–174 BC) was built along the *via Appia*, immediately outside the western gate of the original *castrum* (Guidobaldi 1989, 50–51). What may have acted as the model for the *porticus* at Interamna is less relevant than its early date, which is contemporaneous with precocious developments elsewhere. Besides, a preliminary study of the early (Republican) phase of the *basilica* (see below) recorded same building technique and materials as those employed in the *porticus* (Goddard *et al.* 2022, 345–346; forthcoming), thus suggesting that both buildings may have formed part of a contemporary monumental development. All things considered, whatever the actual scale of the troubles experienced by Interamna during the 3rd century BC, this community had begun to flourish flourishing soon after the end of the Second Punic War, likely seizing the unprecedented opportunities that the conquest of the Mediterranean offered to both Romans and their Italian allies.

The next major urban transformation took place between the end of the 1st century BC and the early decades of the 1st century AD. Hardly a surprising outcome when considering the development of Roman urbanism in Italy (Gros & Torelli 2007, 243–270), this discovery actually defied traditional expectations about Interamna, a town long assumed to have been already declining by the beginning of that period (par. 11.2). Building activities associated with this phase tend to feature same techniques (mainly *opus reticulatum*, complemented with *opus testaceum*) and building materials (*cubilia* made of local travertine). The earlier *basilica* at the northern corner of the *forum* was demolished to (and largely including) foundation level, being replaced by a new structure (*c.* 26 x 19 m) (Fig. 11.5)

(Bellini *et al.* 2020, 365–367; Goddard *et al.* 2022, 345–346). This building presented a rather standard plan, whose internal layout was defined by a series of fourteen columns. The excavation confirmed these columns to have been made of bricks and decorated with a thick layer of stucco featuring twenty-four flutes (as typical of the Ionic/Corinthian order which was popular at the time). **[INSERT FIG. 11.5]**

The sector immediately to the north of the *forum* underwent an even more significant re-development: two *insulae* were merged (by closing off the road running behind the *basilica*), earlier buildings were knocked down (including a *porticus*: [see above](#)) and a large terrace was created (supported by a solid retaining wall: Bellini *et al.* 2020, 367). The resulting platform was then occupied by a theatre (c. 55 x 31 m), whose *cavea* was contained within a rectangular roofed hall (c. 45 m x 26 m) (Bellini *et al.* 2017; 2018). Roofed theatres, albeit not unknown in Italy, did represent a relatively rare occurrence (in general: Sear 2006, 119–185). Acoustically better performing than their more traditional, open-air counterpart, they presented their own structural challenges (in general Izenour 1993). It certainly made sense to advertise the clear monumental ambition of this project (and the notable wealth which had made it possible) by giving it pride of place on a purpose-built stage (the terrace): anyone traveling along the alternative route of the *via Latina* few hundred metres away would have linked this with the ambition and resources of the citizens of Interamna – and of their wealthy and powerful *patroni* too.

What the excavation has brought to light mirrors what else we have since learned about the place which Interamna occupied within a political network which extended across the region, including Rome. Not only a re-appraisal of a well-known inscription has confirmed that Julius Caesar had been *patronus municipi* in 46 BC, but the excavations themselves have uncovered new epigraphic evidence that matches and enhances our renewed narrative of the development of the town (Launaro & Patterson 2020). A member of the local *gens Novia* (M. Novius Tubula) likely began a senatorial career by being elected as a plebeian tribune in the time of Augustus, celebrating this achievement by donating an inscribed sundial to its hometown. The construction of the theatre itself likely benefitted from the generosity of a wealthy freedman of the Sulipicii Galbae, a certain Anoptes, whose name may have featured on the *frons scaenae* itself. The fact that the interests of this powerful and wealthy family primarily concentrated along the coast between Terracina and Puteoli, passing through Minturnae, provides a suggestive indication of the place which Interamna occupied within the political and economic geography of the region between the late Republican and early Imperial periods.

What the excavation reveals about later phases is heavily affected by significant post-abandonment disruptions. Dating any development to the mid to late Imperial period is thus rather challenging. The *basilica* certainly received a new concrete floor, but the associated stratigraphy has not yet revealed an absolute chronology for this intervention. The *frons scaenae* of the theatre was certainly transformed at a later period, with the addition of elements in *opus testaceum* whose characteristics (e.g. the increased thickness of the layer of mortar) may find some correspondence with examples dated to the 3rd century AD (Lugli 1957, 611–621, also tav. CLXXI fig. 3). That the theatre was still in operation in this period (and possibly after) seems indicated by the fact that M. Sentius Crispinus had been awarded the honour of a *bisellium* (double-seat at the theatre) at some point between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD ([par. 11.2](#)).

On the other hand, the excavation has been quite informative about the post-abandonment phase. In line with earlier interpretations, it seems likely that the increased level of disruption, conflict and general insecurity associated with the Greco-Gothic War (AD 535–554), and not experienced in the area since the time of Hannibal, had prompted the last

remaining inhabitants to abandon the town, probably already deserted by the time of the Lombard invasion of the late 6th century AD (Launaro & Millett 2023, 101). The earliest archaeological sign of abandonment may indeed be represented by some skeletal remains radiocarbon dated to 588–704 Cal AD at 83.8% probability (LTL21908 – 1381±45BP). These belonged to a 30/40-year-old woman, whose burial cut through what was left of the marble floor of a building of uncertain function located at the southwestern corner of the *forum* (Goddard *et al.* 2022, 347). Additional juvenile burials are attested at this spot, one of which has been radiocarbon dated to 994–1155 Cal AD at 95.4% probability (LTL20241A – 977±40 bp) (Bellini *et al.* 2020, 367). These latter activities may well have taken place at the time when the theatre was undergoing a systematic and thorough process of spoliation (as indicated by the presence of few fragments of *ceramica a bande rosse* tentatively dated to the 10th–12th centuries AD). This process is attested across the trenches more generally and resulted in a large quantity of debris being accumulated everywhere. Later on, this material was spread over: the area was levelled by filling any hollows (e.g. the theatre's *cavea*) so as to create an even surface suitable for arable agriculture (although few remains of modest height must have remained partly visible across the plateau).

#### 11.4. Conclusions

Our understanding of Interamna Lirenas has profoundly changed. Whether our insights can be used to develop any more general consideration about the development of towns in Roman Italy depends on how representative we consider this case to be. Interamna's trajectory for the period up to and including the 1st century AD now hardly stands out compared to our expectations for most other Italian towns over the same period. Clear signs of expansion in the 2nd century BC and, even more so, in the time of Augustus and the early Imperial period, are well-known phenomena. The significance of Caesar's patronage of Interamna in 46 BC should not be overstated: although only three other towns are currently known to have boasted such privilege (Alba Fucens, Bovianum and Vibo Valentia), significantly more probably did so (Caesar needed to consolidate his network of political support as widely and thoroughly as possible across Italy, especially at such a critical time). What really defies expectation is the lack of visible crisis and the apparent continuity in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Again, this is not unheard of (Russell & De Simone, this volume), but it is something which we would have remained ignorant about Interamna had it not been for the study of commonware pottery as evidence of local/regional networks.

That Italy and its towns had been experiencing a precocious crisis during the 2nd century AD, somewhat prefiguring and anticipating the more general crisis of the 3rd century AD, has been predicated on a very specific interpretation of the earlier period. For a long time, the success (and wealth) of Italian communities in the late Republican period has been attributed to their elites' ability to fully exploit the unprecedented business opportunities resulting from a combination of most favourable market conditions across the Mediterranean and the widespread availability of (cheap) slave labour. This would have led to the development of an intensive agricultural system centred on cash-crops (wine, olive oil) and so closely reliant on such specific conditions as to be fundamentally inflexible (i.e. the so-called 'villa economy': Launaro 2015). As such it could have not survived the maturation of the empire and the rise of the provinces (less favourable market conditions), let alone the decline in the supply of the essential slave labour (as the empire stabilised and military campaigns became much rarer) (Giardina 1997, 233–264; also Carandini 1989). The crisis of Italian agriculture and overseas exports could not but have a negative feedback effect on the

wealth of the Italian landed elite and their ability to invest and take a direct interest in towns and their communities. On the other hand, Italian towns would have been effectively sidelined as the flow of trade and wealth between Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean had fundamentally changed. In other words, the success of Italy and its towns has for long been understood as a function of its participation in long-distance Mediterranean trade.

However, it is precisely this emphasis which is probably unwarranted. It has been shown that overseas demand for the products of such an intensive, export-oriented, slave-based agriculture was relatively limited even at its peak (Launaro 2017, 96–102). Thanks in no little part to the wealth generated by military campaign overseas and the varied range of business opportunities which they had created, the Roman and Italian elites took on themselves to invest in their towns, triggering a process which turned Italy into one of the most urbanized regions in the Roman world (Gros & Torelli 2007, 181–198). The supply of this growing urban demand (including – but not limited to – Rome) likely came to represent a solid and vast market for Italian agriculture, largely independent of changing patterns across the empire. Given the variety and fragmentation of the Italian landscape, an integrated communication network must have played an effective and essential role in guaranteeing a comprehensive supply of these communities (especially when located further away from the coast, and thus less likely to be able to intercept the flow of provincial goods to Rome). The local and regional nature of these networks may well explain their limited archaeological visibility if only (imported) finewares and amphorae are considered diagnostic (Launaro & Leone 2019).

All things considered, Interamna was never ‘special’. Between the late Republican and early Imperial period, it enjoyed that same growth that is attested at many other Italian towns. On the other hand, its unexpected continuity in the mid-Imperial period may reflect conditions that were much more widespread across Italy than traditionally acknowledged. What, if anything, makes this site somewhat special is how comprehensively its archaeology has been revealed (Launaro & Millett 2023, 107–108): none of the approaches, methodologies and techniques employed there are new, but their systematic combination and scale of application have allowed a remarkably holistic (re)appraisal of a Roman town in Italy. This research has indeed shown the immense informative potential of ‘greenfield sites’, even those – like Interamna – which may look the most underwhelming on the surface. It is precisely their marked accessibility and, therefore, suitability for the application of a wide array of extensive survey techniques and approaches which holds the greatest potential. Indeed, more integrated studies like this one will hopefully follow, expanding our dataset of Roman towns – both in Italy and beyond – whose plan and full range of material culture are comprehensively known and understood.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Interamna Lirenas Project is run by the Faculty of Classics of the University of Cambridge in close collaboration with the *Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le Province di Frosinone, Latina e Rieti* and the *Comune di Pignataro Interamna*, in partnership with the British School at Rome (since 2010) and Ghent University (2015–17). Fieldwork has been made possible by generous support from the Faculty of Classics, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/M006522/1), the *Comune di Pignataro Interamna*, the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust.

## Bibliography

- Ballantyne, R., Bellini, G.R., Hales, J., Launaro, A., Leone, N., Millett, M., Verdonck, L. & Vermeulen, F. (2016) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84, 322–325.
- Ballantyne, R., Bellini, G.R., Launaro, A., Leone, N. & Millett, M. (2015) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 83, 299–302.
- Bellini, G.R., Hay, S., Launaro, A., Leone, N. & Millett, M. (2014a) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 82, 327–331.
- Bellini, G.R., Goddard, D., Grünwald, D., Launaro, A., Leone, N. & Millett, M. (2019) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 87, 333–336.
- Bellini, G.R., Goddard, D., Grünwald, D., Launaro, A., Leone, N., Millett, M. & Pantano, W. (2020) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 88, 365–368.
- Bellini, G.R., Launaro, A., Leone, N., Millett, M., Verdonck, L. & Vermeulen, F. (2017) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 85, 321–324.
- Bellini, G.R., Launaro, A., Leone, N., Millett, M., Verdonck, L. & Vermeulen, F. (2018) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 86, 303–306.
- Bellini, G.R., Launaro, A. & Millett, M. (2014b) Roman colonial landscapes: *Interamna Lirenas* and its territory through Antiquity. In J. Pelgrom & T. Stek (eds) *Roman Republican Colonisation: New Perspectives from Archaeology and Ancient History*, 255–275. Rome, Palombi Editori.
- Cagiano de Azevedo, M. (1947) *Interamna Lirenas vel Sucasina*. Rome, Istituto di Studi Romani Editore.
- Carandini, A. (1989) L'economia italica fra tarda repubblica e medio impero considerata dal punto di vista di una merce: il vino. In M. Lenoir, D. Manacorda & C. Panella (eds) *Amphores romaines et histoire économique: dix ans de recherche*, 505–521. Rome, École française de Rome.
- Ceraudo, G. (2004a) La via Latina tra Fabrateria Nova e Casinum: precisazioni topografiche e nuovi spunti metodologici. *Archeologia Aerea* 1, 155–181.
- Ceraudo, G. 2007. Miliari della via Latina nel territorio di Aquino. In A. Nicosia & G. Ceraudo (eds) *Spigolature Aquinati: Studi storico-Archeologici su Aquino e il suo territorio*, 105–119. Aquino: Museo della Città.
- Coarelli, F. (1982) *Lazio*. Bari, Laterza.
- Davies, P.J.E. 2017. *Architecture and Politics in Republican Rome*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Giardina, A. (1997) *L'Italia romana. Storie di un'identità incompiuta*. Rome-Bari, Laterza.
- Goddard, D., Launaro, A., Leone, N., Millett, M. & Pantano, W. (2022) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 90, 345–348.
- Goddard, D., Launaro, A. & Leone, N. (forthcoming) Interamna Lirenas. *Papers of the British School at Rome* 91.
- Gros, P. & Torelli, M. (2007) *Storia dell'urbanistica. Il mondo romano*, New Ed. Rome-Bari, Laterza.
- Guidobaldi, M.P. & Pesando, F. (1989) La colonia *civium romanorum*. In F. Coarelli (ed.) *Minturnae*, 35–66. Rome, Nuova Editrice Romana.
- Hayes, J.W. & Wightman, E.M. 1984. Interamna Lirenas: risultati di ricerche in superficie 1979-1981. In S. Quilici-Gigli (ed.) *Archeologia Laziale VI*, 137–148. Rome, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche.

- Izenour, G.C. (1993) *Roofed Theatres of Classical Antiquity*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Keay, S. & Millett, M. (2016) Republican and early Imperial towns in the Tiber Valley. In A.E. Cooley (ed.) *A Companion to Roman Italy, 357–377*. Malden-Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Launaro, A. (2015) The nature of the villa economy. In P. Erdkamp, K. Verboven & A. Zuiderhoek (eds) *Ownership and Exploitation of Land and Natural Resources in the Roman World*, 173–186. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Launaro, A. (2017) Something old, something new: social and economic developments in the countryside of Roman Italy between Republic and Empire. In T. de Haas & G. Tol (eds) *The Economic Integration of Roman Italy: Rural Communities in a Globalizing World*, 85–111. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Launaro, A. (2019) Interamna Lirenas – a history of ‘success’? Long-term trajectories across town and countryside (4th c. BC to 5th c. AD). In A.U. De Giorgi (ed.) *Cosa and the Colonial Landscape of Republican Italy (Third and Second Century BC)*, 119–138. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Launaro, A. & Leone, N. (2018) A view from the margin? Roman commonwares and patterns of distribution and consumption at Interamna Lirenas (Lazio). *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 31, 323–338.
- Launaro, A. & Patterson, J. (2020) New epigraphic evidence from the Roman town of Interamna Lirenas (Central Italy). *Epigraphica* 20, 213–241.
- Launaro, A. & Millett, M. (2023) *Interamna Lirenas: a Roman Town in Central Italy Revealed*. Cambridge, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Launaro, A. & Verdonck, L. (forthcoming) The river-port of Interamna Lirenas.
- Lena, G. (1982) Interamna Lirenas: note di topografia antica. *Quaderni Museo Civico Pontecorvo* 2, 57–75.
- Lugli, G. (1957) *La tecnica edilizia romana*. Rome, G. Bardi.
- Millett, M. (2013). Understanding Roman towns in Italy: reflections on the role of geophysical survey. In P. Johnson & M. Millett (eds) *Archaeological Survey and the City*, 24–44. Oxford, Oxbow.
- Millett, M., Launaro, A., Verdonck, L. & Vermeulen, F. (forthcoming) *Falerii Novi: the Ground-Penetrating Radar survey of the Roman town*. Cambridge, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- Notarjanni, F.A. (2016 [1814]) *Viaggio per l’Ausonia*. Latina, Atlantide Editore.
- Patterson, J.R. (2006). *Landscapes and Cities. Rural Settlement and Civic Transformation in Early Imperial Italy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Pelgrom, J. (2013) Population density in mid-Republican Latin colonies: a comparison between text-based population estimates and the results from survey archaeology. *Atlante Tematico di Topografia Antica* 23, 73–84.
- Romanelli, D. (1819) *Antica Topografia Istorica del Regno di Napoli, Parte Terza*. Naples, Stamperia Reale.
- Savino, E. (2005) *Campania tardoantica (284–604 d.C.)*. Bari, Edipuglia.
- Vaccaro, E. (2013) Re-evaluating a forgotten town using intrasite survey and the GIS analysis of surface ceramics: Philosophiana-Sofian (Sicily) in the longue durée. In P. Johnson & M. Millett (eds) *Archaeological Survey and the City*, 107–145. Oxford, Oxbow.
- Wightman, E.M. (1994). Communications. In J.W. Hayes & I.P. Martini (eds) *Archaeological Survey in the Lower Liri Valley, Central Italy*, 30–33. Oxford, Tempus Reparatum.

- Wightman, E.M. & Hayes, J.W. (1994) Settlement patterns and society. In J.W. Hayes and I.P. Martini (eds) *Archaeological Survey in the Lower Liri Valley, Central Italy*, 34–40. Oxford, Tempus Reparatum.
- Wallace-Hadrill, A. (1994) *House and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Yegül, F. & Favro, D. (2019) *Roman Architecture and Urbanism: from the Origins to Late Antiquity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.



Fig. 11.1. The site of Interamna Lirenas and its environs (image from Google Earth, retrieved on 28/05/2021; 41°25'35.22"N / 13°45'11.82"E).

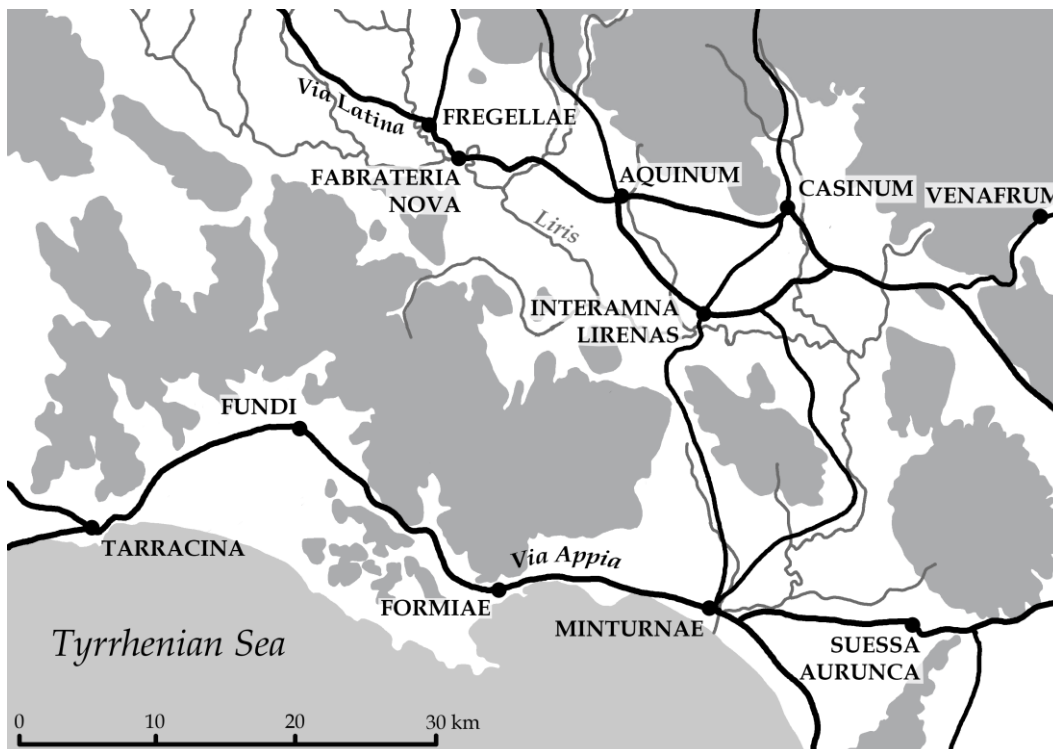


Fig. 11.2. Settlement and road networks in the lower Liri Valley in Antiquity (dark grey areas = over 1,000 m a.s.l.).

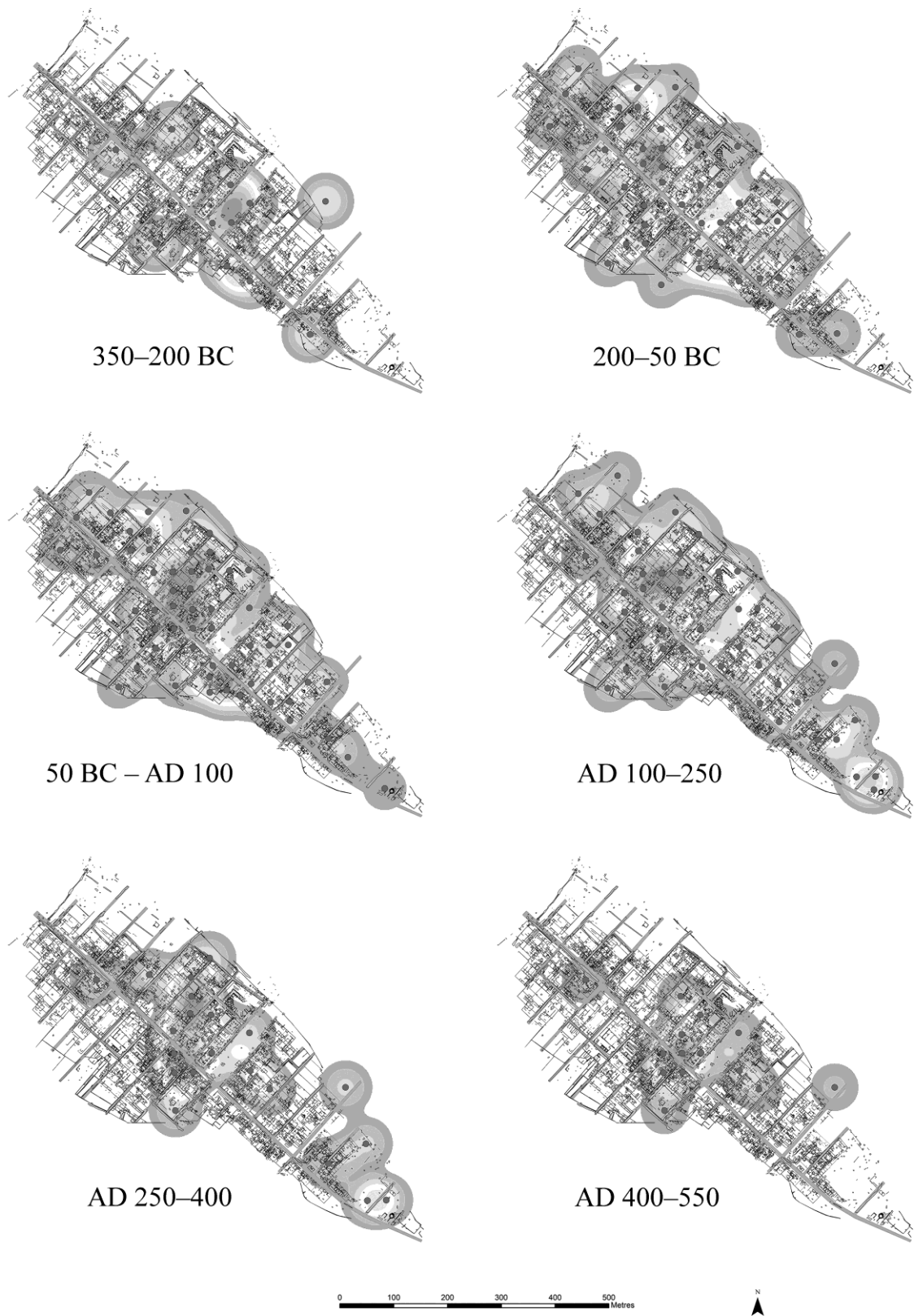


Fig. 11.3. The spread of commonware potsherds by period over the urban area of Interamna Lirenas (as modelled in Launaro & Millett 2023, 72–77 figs 4.22–27).

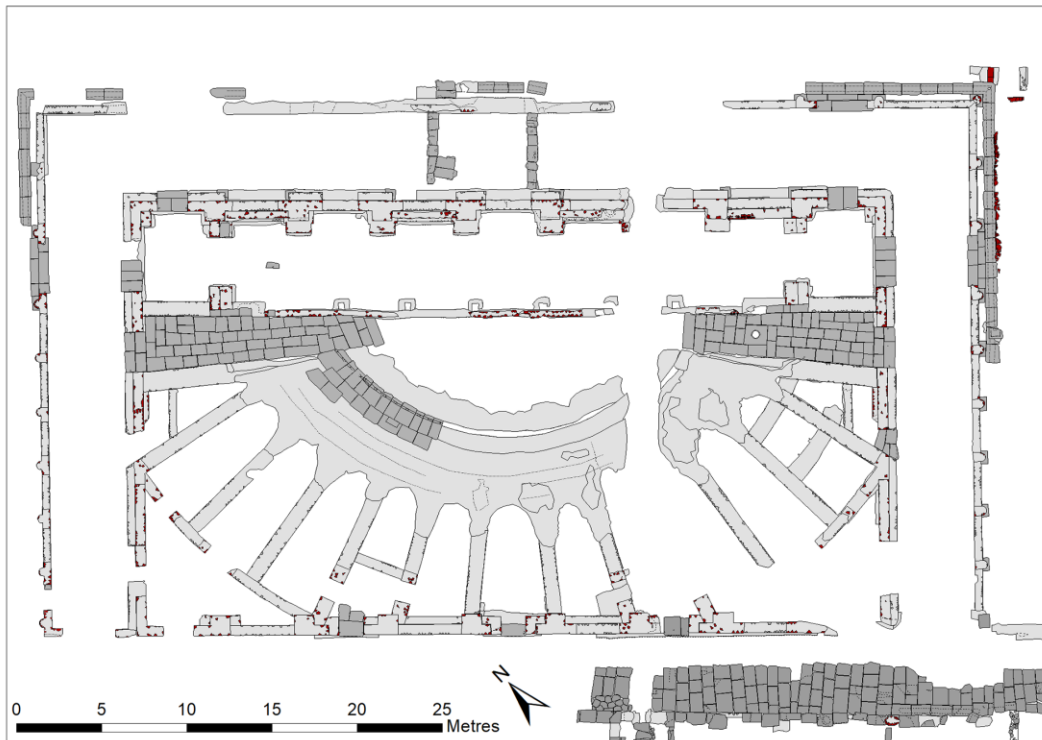


Fig. 11.4. Plan of the theatre of Interamna Lirenas, including remains of the Republican *porticus* uncovered under the *postscaenium*, as revealed by the excavation (2013–22).



Fig. 11.5. Plan of the basilica of Interamna Lirenas as revealed by the GPR prospection (2015–17) light grey) and excavation (2019–22).

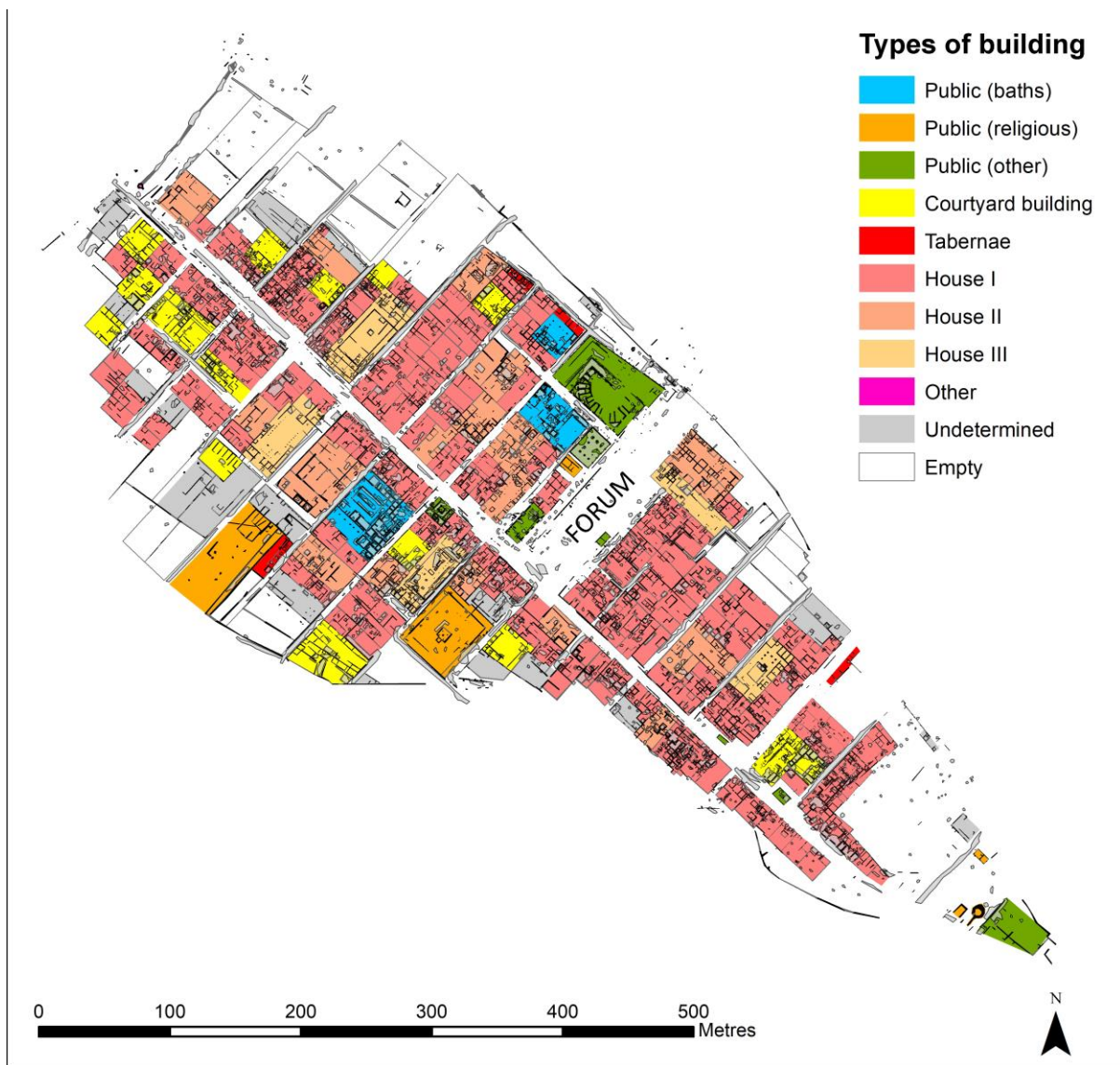


Plate 11.1. The plan of Interamna Lirenas as revealed by the geophysical prospection (2010–17), showing the distribution of different types of building.