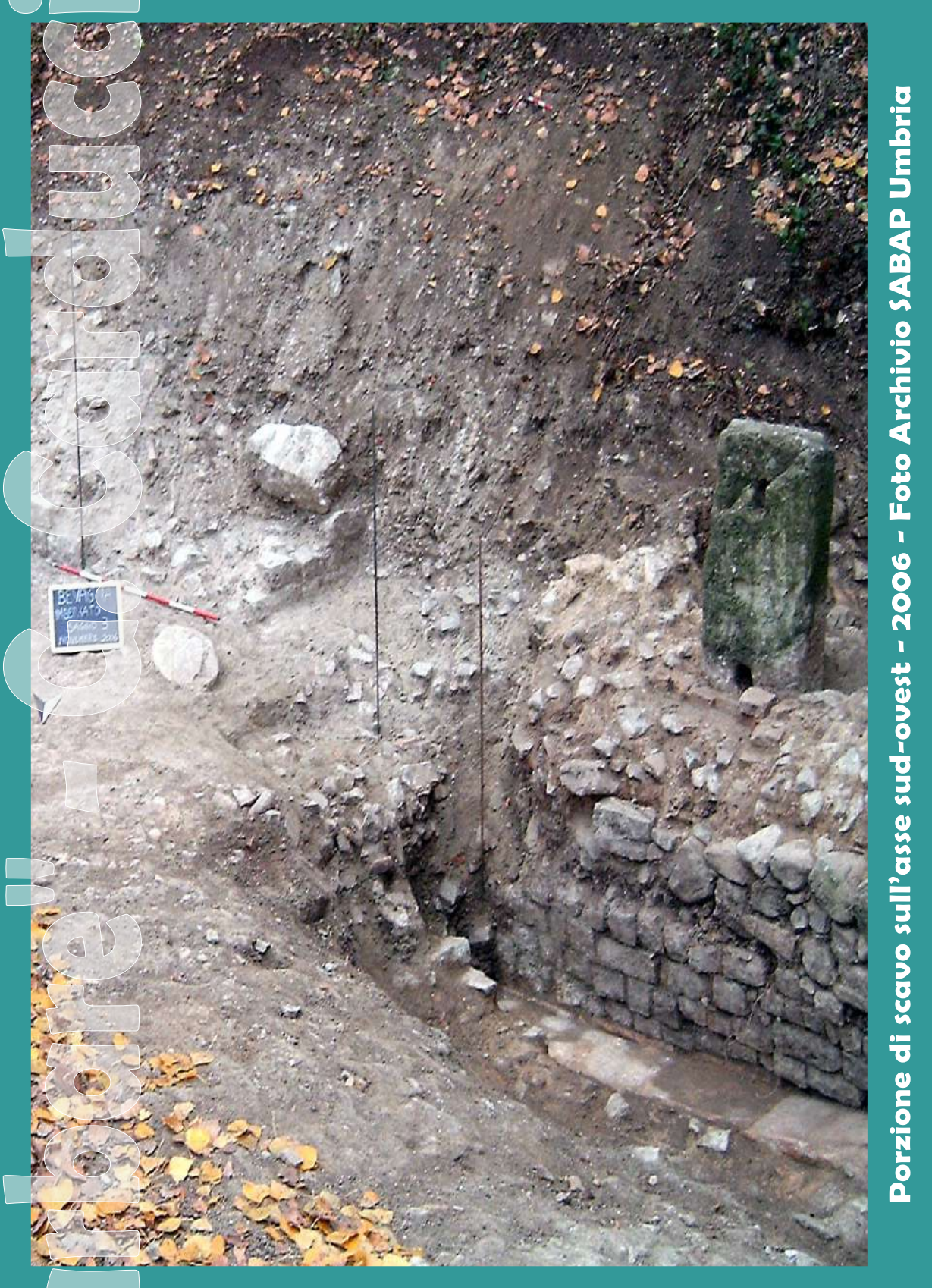


IMBERSATO THE ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE

Archaeological site of the Roman Amphitheatre in Bevagna
(1st half of the 1st century A.D.)

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Porzione di scavo sull'asse sud-ovest - 2006 - Foto Archivio SABAP Umbria

Imbersato is the local toponym that designates an elliptical cavity - measuring approximately 80 x 54 m - located 50 m away from the ancient Flaminia road and near the 17th-century church of the Madonna della Rosa. Situated at the gates of Bevagna, it is part of the vast area that goes by the name of Sant'Anna (226 m). Geologically, it is related to the same lacustrine sediments that form the hill of the Convent of the SS. Annunziata (231 m) and the hill on which the town of Bevagna stands (224 m), in a raised position with respect to the Valle Umbra, which consists instead of fluviolacustrine deposits. Recent studies tend to attribute certain characteristics of the cavity (212 m), such as its shape and the presence of water at the bottom, to "sinkholes", sinking phenomena caused by the pressure exerted by gas and water present in the subsoil. The amphitheatre from Roman Age, would have therefore, occupied the cavity only at a time after its formation.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

The only investigation conducted with a scientific method, though with its own limitations, took place as a result of a local upgrade works and the Province of Perugia financed it within the scope of PROUST project (2006). Four soundings were carried out inside the reservoir under the direction of the SABAP Umbria, which brought to light two sections of a wall structure in *opus vittatum* that follows the curve of the cavity; a channel that also follows the same course; and an internal walking surface, in the same stratigraphic sequence of the aforementioned structures (see F. Giorgi, Report, Soprintendenza ABAP Umbria). During the course of recent works carried out for the improvement of the area (2021-2023) as part of the PSR project, however, a short stretch wall structure in *opus caementicium*, only superficially investigated, was fortuitously brought to light and it could be identified as the impost for the cavea steps.

FINDINGS IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS

The presence of springs at the bottom of the reservoir, well known to Roman builders, is accounted for by the presence of a water drainage channel mentioned by Alberti, which came to light in 1751 immediately west of the Imbersato during a drainage attempt. In the words of the Mevanate (from Bevagna) Abbot "it was vaulted with stones, joined with strong concrete, and the floor paved also with stone. Its height and width was found large enough for those who entered to drain it in different spots, so that the waters could flow there more quickly".

IMBERSATO: THE ORIGINS OF A NAME

The name *Imbersato* or *Inversato*, which dates back to at least the 16th century, has been linked by local scholars to a verse from the Elegies of the Latin poet Propertius (1st century B.C. - 1st century A.D.) "et lacus aestivus intepet Umber aquis" (IV, 124). However in some codices it has been preserved in the form "et sacer aestivus intepet Umber aquis" and from it might derive the locution *Imber sacer*, understood as "sacred bath"; the root of the word Imbersato. This different interpretation has long been at the centre of the "Properzian question" and was used to attribute a Bevanate origin to the poet, rather than from Assisi, as scholars have now ascertained. Instead, Pietrangeli has linked its etymology to the verb "bersare" - to hunt - a memory of the ancient *venationes*, the animal fights that took place in amphitheatres. In recent times, it has been more convincingly interpreted as a plausible medieval transformation of the term *amphitheatrum*.

Elidiotipo di rilievo - 2006 - Disegno Archivio SABAP Umbria

We owe an account of the archaeological excavations that Pope Paul III commissioned at Imbersato in the first half of the 16th century to Antonio Beci from Bevagna. He associated wall structures, architectural elements and inscriptions brought to light at the time as pertaining to "baths" (*balnea formae ovalis*). Local tradition has it that two of the columns reused in the church of San Michele Arcangelo and the slabs of the Accolta wash houses came from here. Beci's annotations were taken up two centuries later by Abbot Fabio Alberti (1791), who shared the hypothesis that the findings belonged to a "sacred bath". Those who have studied the history of Roman Bevagna have addressed this issue: examples include Guido Boccolini (1909), who published the results of surveys he carried out, and Carlo Pietrangeli (1953), who first attributed the findings to an amphitheatre. In relatively recent times, Giuseppina Prosperi Valenti (1993), while not ruling out the hypothesis of a building used for performances and in connection with her research on the cult of the goddess *Valetudo*, has reconsidered this old antiquarian hypothesis regarding the existence of a thermal building or a water collection basin in connection with such a cultic site, identifiable in an architectural complex located in the nearby Viale Properzio.

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