Veleia and ager Veleias, concisely*

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At the end of May 1747, in Macinesso (Piacentino Apennines: since 1815 aggregated to Lugagnano Val d'Arda, Piacentino), on a terraced plateau of the secluded Val Chero, a monumental rectangular bronze epigraph was casually unearthed [cm 136 / 138 x 284 / 285.5 x 0.8], the *Tabula alimentaria*, 107/114 BC [vd. ill. 1].



1. *Tabula alimentaria*

Partial estate registry of agricultural funds of the Piacenza-Parma Apennines, historical-administrative-economic and name-toponymic *breviarium* of ager Veleias in the first imperial age, public register of 51 mortgages established by the participants in the financial operation "*alimentaria*" of the emperor Trajan (102 and 107/114 AD) to guarantee a regular food subsidy [*alimentum*] to 300 free indigent «*pueri puellaeque*» (young boys and girls) in the area.

And then – slowly and disorderly – the ancient site (1760 subsequent years), which was until then unknown even to cartography, was brought to light: in parallel, the innovative R.

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Museum of Antiquity of Parma (now the National Archaeological Museum) was born at Pilotta, adequate and organic place of conservation and exhibition, though reserved to a few, of local antiquities, and, albeit by reflection, archaeological research began in western Emilia.



2. Western Emilia

Ligurian-Celtic *oppidum*, in the heart of the Piacentino Apennines Veleia – after Roman expansion and colonization in the north Italy – became *municipium* in 49 / 42 BC (a large bronze fragment of the *lex Rubria de Gallia Cisalpina*, from about 42 BC, aimed at regulating the competences of municipal magistrates in various subjects was found in 1760 in the Veleiate *Forum*), linked to central power and imperial worship, but actually in a marginal position.

Its citizens – 1/2.000 in the centre, 20/25.000 in the hilly-mountainous countryside – were ascribed to the Galeria tribe, typical of the Ligurian ethnic group (Genoa, Luni, Pisa): the assignment took certainly into consideration political-administrative evaluations and maybe also the affinity, if not the cultural identity, of the centre with the Ligurian, Apennine and coastal *municipia* [vd. ill. 2].

Since the protohistoric age, halfway between the western part of Aemilia (Regio VIII) and Liguria (Regio IX), Veleia was a non-marginal road junction, somewhat mysterious and decentralized from the main consular itineraries, towards Lunigiana and towards the Tyrrhenian Sea, from which the marble of the Apuan Alps was imported: it was connected to the via Aemilia by two road routes – about thirty kilometres long – along the Piacenza valleys of the Riglio (towards Piacenza) and the Chero (towards Fiorenzuola d'Arda, Piacentino), in a sort of functional isolation, a rare example in Roman antiquity of high-altitude urban planning.

Located just under 500 meters, on the slopes of the relief called Monte Rovinasso [858 m] to the north-west and Rocca di Moria [901 m] to the south-east, about 50 km south of Piacenza (about thirty linear), Veleia [vd. ill. 5] developed – from the late Iron Age (second millennium BC) until the 3rd/early 4th century of the empire – on a vast landslide: which allowed the Romans to operate the terraces for the setting on the road axes of the *decumanus* and *cardo,* and for the urban infrastructure (five, at least, the phases of building development between the first century BC and the first century AD), of which today an urban quadrilateral of 200 x 200 m remains.

Its territory – 1.000/1.100 km² – stretched between Libarna [Serravalle Scrívia (Alessandria)] to the west, Piacenza to the north, Parma to the east, Lucca [?] to the south.



3. *Forum*

The first half of the 1st century AD is the Golden Age of housing development (and plumbing/sewerage), unfortunately sometimes better evidenced by the eighteenth-

nineteenth-century cartography than by homogeneous archaeological remains: residential districts; *thermopolium*; *thermae (caldarium, tepidarium, frigidarium)*; "Cisternone", the circular system (today elliptical) south-east of the *Forum*, gradually understood as a *castellum aquae* or an amphitheatre.



4. "Ciclo giulio-claudio"

Through a process that lasted for five centuries and which also skillfully enhanced the indigenous housing and socio-economic system, «*municipium*» Veleia was able to offer the traditional Roman "services" essential for the medium- and high-Apennine side:

— the rectangular *Forum* [vd. ill. 3], the heart of public life, closed to vehicular traffic, paved with local greyish sandstone slabs (the *platea* measures 32.75 x 17.25 m), the only well-preserved *Forum* example of Regio VIII;

— the annexe, great Julio-Claudian *Basilica*, the best example of a single nave of the Cisalpina, the nerve centre of the entire local political-economic-administrative life (with 12

marble sculptures of Julio-Claudian Dynastic Group [«Ciclo giulio-claudio»: vd. ill. 4]), which included the *Curia* (in which the *ordo decurionum*, the municipal senate, assembled), the *Tribunal* (maximum legal-administrative expression of the community) and the *Tabularium* (the public archive of the territory);

— the space with side by side rectangular *tabernae* and warehouses for wholesale trade, on the long sides of the *Forum*;

— the sacred area for the official cult of the Capitoline triad, whose existence and location are still discussed.

Divided into 33 rural districts, for census and tax purposes (*pagi*: in the hilly-mountainous areas also in 9 indigenous territorial sections / *vici*), due to its composite nature, the ager Veleias was linked to agricultural activities (cereals, legumes, fruit trees, vines), to the breeding of poultry, to pig farming (?) and to beekeeping, based on the *fundus*, a traditional land unit with self-sufficient adjacent lots and structures.

And it continued to be linked to forestry-pastoral activities, inherited from the Ligurians, in the vast pastures (*saltus*) – meadow valleys, pastures, wood, pitch and hunting woods – and in the highlands (sheep farming and dairy production). It also developed – and not only for the internal market – a lively craft activity, metallurgical in particular (figured bronzes), stony and fictile (known in the first century BC furnaces for the manufacture of clay and stamped bricks).

In the III / IV century Veleia, which was already undergoing a real demo-economic reflux due to the decline of traditional agricultural activities, slowly died out (the last two certain figures include honorary inscriptions to the emperors Aureliano [270] and Probo [277]): the centre, subject to severe degradation, due to water infiltration and failure to control the landslide, was gradually abandoned and the territory redistributed between Piacenza and Parma.



5. Veleia

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