

"These Phocceans had such a fate: those who fled to Reggio founded a city there in the land of the Enotrians, the city that today is called Hyele."

**Herodotus (Vth century BC),
History, book 1, 167**



Velia in History

540 - 535 b. C.

The Phocaeen navigators and merchants of Greek origin came from the coast of what is present day Turkey. When the Persians occupied their territories, the Phocaeans preferred to flee so as not to be subjugated to slavery.

After long voyages in the Eastern Mediterranean following well known routes, they managed to buy a territory between Punta Licosa and the promontory of Palinuro where they found

a new land called Hyele from the spring that flows at the back of the chosen promontory.

V sec. b. C.

The city soon acquires great fame for the prosperity of the commerce, the beauty of the land, its good laws and the presence of a philosophical school with strong medical characteristics founded by Parmenes and Zeno.

IV sec. b. C.

It successfully resists the pressure of the Lucanians, Italic people of Samnite origin, who had already occupied the nearby Poseidonia and it keeps its own independence as a Greek city. It enters the league of the Greek cities in the south of Italy that tries to block the invasion of the Lucanians.

III - II sec. b. C.

Because of its good relations with Rome, during the war with Carthage it sends ships, and maidens chosen from its aristocracy are sent to Rome as priestesses for the cult of Demetra (Ceres).

It becomes a fashionable vacation place; Emilius Paulus, conqueror of Greece (IInd century BC), who is ill, retires at Velia in a villa by the sea.

I sec. b. C.

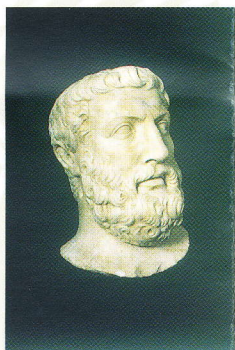
It becomes a Roman municipality (88BC) and it is inscribed in the tribe Romilia with the name of Velia. It obtains the right to keep its own language and to coin its own money.

I sec. A. D.

It prospers during Augustan times. Public buildings and thermal complexes are built and many rustic villas and small rural homes are built in the territory as well.

II - III sec.

A progressive decline is caused by the silting of the ports, but especially by the construction of Via Popilia, the principal connection between Rome and the South that used the internal roads and the Vallo di Diano totally cutting out Velia as well as all the coastal cities. It is still a vital city with important public buildings among which, once again, the grand thermal complexes stand out.



IV - VI sec.

Starting from the Imperial Age, a progressive decline is caused by the silting up of the ports; the marshland in the lower part pushes the last inhabitants up onto the Acropolis where life continues all through the Middle Ages. The name sent down to us by the codices is Castellamare della Bruca.

XV - XVII sec.

The village creates a feud within the Sanseverino family in 1420, and they will soon donate it to the house of Annunziata of Naples. It is not until the end of 1600 that no more consistent traces of life on the hill are registered in the census. The remains of the ancient cities of Velia/Helea had been invaded by the marshlands, then completely sunk in the marshlands and slowly the historical memory of its exact geographical location is also lost.

Visit to the City

The city was divided into quarters to the north and to the south of the promontory and it spectacularly used the natural terraces of the slope. On the tip of the promontory, in a dominant position, was the Acropolis, which today is dominated by the Medieval Castle, seat in ancient times for public and religious events.

The promontory was surrounded by the sea and groups of little islands acted as a natural barrier for the currents on the northern side.

The urbanistic organization of the city with its terraces and slopes, the long circuit of the city walls of about 4.5 kilometers, the variety of the excavated monuments and, last but not least, the natural beauty of the place give visitors an ample choice of an itinerary suitable for the time at their disposal and for their personal interests.



Useful information

Visiting hours
Daily from 9.00 AM to one hour
before sunset

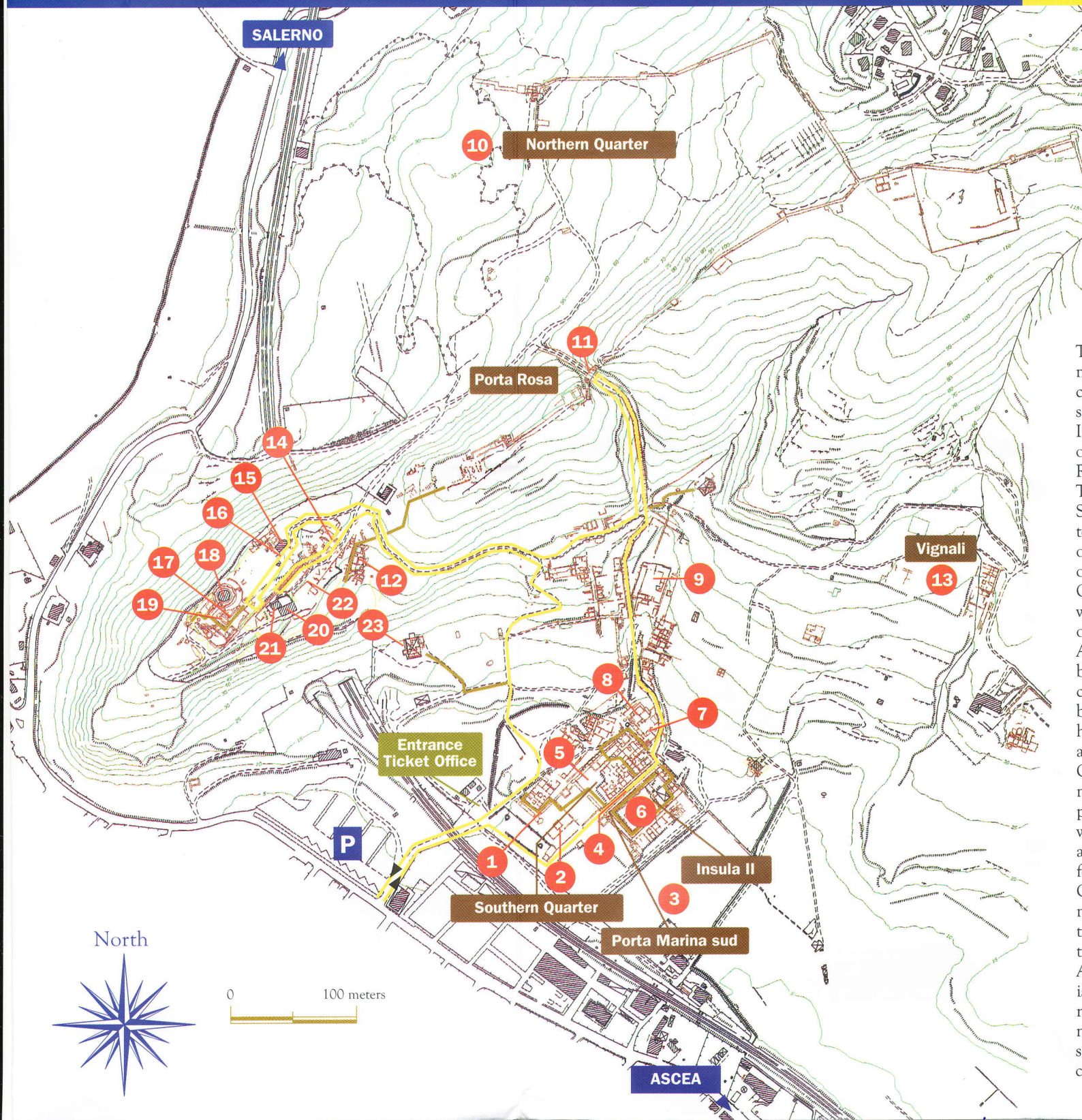
Entrance Fee € 2,06

Information

Excavation Office Velia
Tel. 0974.972396
Archaeological Superintendency
Salerno
Tel. 089.224266



To
Rail
Ro
Sup



To reach Velia

Railway: Salerno-Reggio Calabria Line, Ascea Station

Road: A3 (Battipaglia exit); SS18 (until Agropoli); Superstrada (exit at Vallo scalo); Provinciale Vallo-Palinuro.

The acropolis

The southern terraces are occupied by foundations of the more ancient settlement (VI-Vth century BC) **(12)** with houses built with a socle of sandstone blocks cut in a polygonal shape (polygons with curved sides) that are placed along a road leading towards the beach where the landing must have been.

These quarters **(12)** were already removed and abandoned during the course of the Vth century BC when the inhabitants of the city decided that the hill of the Acropolis should be a place used only for public and sacred events; so the houses were partly removed and reconstructed in the quarter of the Vignali **(13)**.

The theatre **(14)** occupies the terrace on the top and it was built during the course of the IVth century BC. The building which can be seen today is the result of a restoration during Roman times (IInd century AD) and could have held about 2000 people; it was still in use during the Vth century AD when it was destroyed by the construction of the medieval ditch.

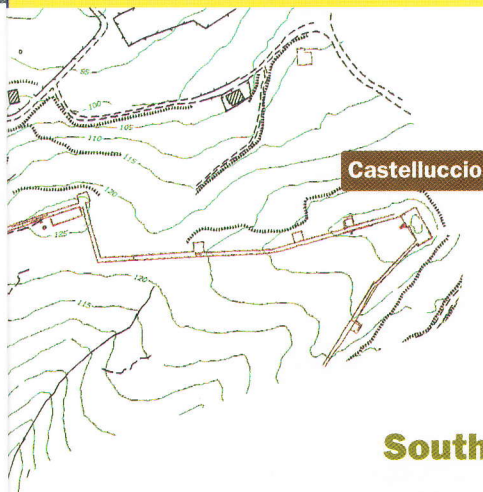
The monumental entrance (*Propylon*) **(15)** placed behind the cavea of the theatre marks the passage to the higher terrace dedicated to the cult. The Cappella Palatina **(16)** built in the XII century is built over it and also covers the paved road that led to the sanctuary as well. Now, in the Cappella the lapidarium is kept with the collection of Greek and Latin inscriptions.

The temple **(17)** has been partly engulfed by the large round tower **(18)** of the medieval fortification, the large foundation (stereobate) of the Temple that is perhaps dedicated to the principal divinity of the city, Athena, is left along with the walls of the cell. Still controversial today is the dating of the monument which has covered and destroyed preceding monuments for cults of which there is a clearly visible trace in a part of the wall built with the polygonal technique using blocks with straight sides **(19)**, which probably belongs to a previous enclosure (*temenos*) of the more archaic sanctuary (VI-V century).

Walking down from the terrace of the temple is the Chiesa di S. Maria di Porto Salvo **(20)** built at the end of 1700 with the annexed rectory **(21)**, which is today an exposition site.

Going back towards the theatre you find a long rectangular building **(22)** that was once covered by a sloping roof and used for the reception of the pilgrims.

Going down along the little road that leads back to the main exit of the archeological park, on the left there are the foundations of a splendid- so called- Casa degli Affreschi **(23)** still to be excavated, which was built at the beginning of the IInd century BC and then collapsed at the end of the Ist century AD.



Southern Quarter

The railroad built at the beginning of the XXth century more or less marks the ancient coastline, so the quarter was close to the sea and it was enclosed by walls **(1)** built of sandstone blocks with doors, inner doors and control towers. In the area in front of the walls some funerary monuments of an only partially excavated necropolis dating back to the Roman Age are left.

The entrance to the city is still today through Porta Marina Sud **(3)** flanked by a part of the urban walls with a square tower to control the passageway; this dates back to the end of the Vth century BC with later restorations in the course of the IVth and IIIrd centuries BC.

Once inside the city there is a large paved street **(4)** with wide sidewalks which look on the quarters with the houses of the Insula I **(5)** and the big building of the Augustan Age that entirely occupies the Insula II **(6)**. The rectangular building is composed of a Triporticus with an altar in the center and of a Criptoporticus with a U shape. Near this building were found many statues of Eleatic doctors and a herma of Parmenes; a copy made in Augustan times from a Greek original.

Coming back along the paved road **(4)** you find a monumental thermal building **(7)** built in the IInd century BC perfectly preserved in all its elements with a mosaic floor with marine décor in one of its rooms, the frigidarium **(8)**; a restoration in Christian times turned it into a baptismal font.

Continuing on, about halfway up on the right there is a monumental complex characterized by porticos and fountains most probably dedicated to the cult of Asklepius **(9)**, the healing God, protector of medicine.

A steep climb leads to the narrowest part of the gorge that is the passageway into the Northern Quarter **(10)** which is not open to visitors at present: the passage has become monumental because of the splendid Porta Rosa **(11)**, a stone round structure dating to the second half of the IVth century BC.