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26

# STORIA E ARCHEOLOGIA GLOBALE

## 2

I PASCOLI, I CAMPI, IL MARE  
Paesaggi d'altura e di pianura in Italia  
dall'Età del Bronzo al Medioevo

*a cura di*

*Franco Cambi, Giovanni De Venuto, Roberto Goffredo*

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*E S T R A T T O*

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# CHALLENGING MARGINALITY: INTENSIVE FIELD SURVEY AND LONG-TERM LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS IN AN UPLAND INTER-MOUNTAIN BASIN (CICOLANO - ITALY)

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## Abstract

Marginality has proved to be a relative issue, and intensive and systematic archaeological surface surveys are often able to enhance hidden landscapes and bring whole regions or microregions back to the main historical narrative.

The Cicolano Survey research project aims at the reconstruction of the long-term human settling in the upland area gravitating around the Corvaro plain, within the wider Cicolano region, with particular interest in the diachronic man-environment interaction, for the human eco-dynamics, for past land-use, for rural landscape transformations and the movement in the area, linked to transhumance routes. In four field seasons intensive and systematic artefact surface surveys were carried out in sampling areas of the plain as well as on the surrounding mountain areas. Systematic research was also carried out on the *Frontino* hill, a long-life fortified defensive high spot overlooking the upland Corvaro plain. Survey results offer a previously unknown picture of an extensively occupied landscape in the Roman period, when the upland people inhabiting the Cicolano, never fully Romanised in a political sense, made their strong archaeological appearance showing a dispersed settlement pattern, which follows the less clearly visible lines of the pre-Roman period landscape.

**Keywords:** marginality, Cicolano, intensive survey, mountainous landscape, Roman landscape.

## 1. Introduction

Assessments of marginality are quite common in landscape and environmental studies, especially referring to mountainous landscape contexts.

Marginalities, that involve environmental, economic, socio-political or cultural issues, occur in a dynamic network of relationships between people and environment, and are embedded in cultural and physical processes. The notion *marginality* is «specific to time, space, and even the social class of the individuals who experienced these sites and associated landscapes»<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, as clearly pointed out by Horden and Purcell, the issue of marginality has to be read through the lens of «diversity, extreme mutability, and pervasive interdependence of Mediterranean microecologies»<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, contexts of marginality should be examined historically and never taken for granted. Attention should be paid to the different roles that a 'marginal' landscape could play in different periods of history, as well as to the lower or higher marginality degree according to the shifting of the centres and of changes in the socio-economical trends<sup>3</sup>.

Following modern perception and economic structures, mountainous landscapes were traditionally seen<sup>4</sup> as hostile and marginal areas, often approached as wild zones, non-productive lands, exclusively used for animal husbandry and forest exploitation, whose topographic fragmentation would increase their marginality, poverty and isolation. Upland areas are often perceived as border zones, no-man's land separating human settlement areas. On the contrary, mountainous landscapes should be considered as vital and variegated landscapes, carrying economic and strategic opportunities as well as cultural meanings, strictly integrated into patterns of production and communication<sup>5</sup>, as several studies demonstrated<sup>6</sup>.

Pastoralism, traditionally related to mountainous upland landscapes, should not be considered as a marginal activity either. As Horden and Purcell point out<sup>7</sup>, pastoralism has been wrongly regarded «as the characteristic activity of the inhospitable mountain, determined by the poverty of natural resources». Especially the practice of long-distance transhumance, in the majority of cases in the hands of economic and social élites, is far from this. Peculiar upland and wetland

<sup>1</sup> Walsh 2008, p. 553.

<sup>2</sup> Horden, Purcell 2000, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Walsh 2008; Coles 1998; Green 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Since Braudel 1972, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Horden, Purcell 2000, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Barker 1995; Nixon, Moody 1990; Horden, Purcell 2000; Van Leusen, Tol, Anastasia 2009-10.

<sup>7</sup> Horden, Purcell 2000, p. 198.

landscapes, mainly as regards their cultural characteristics, can be considered as a product of the practice of pastoralism, with nothing of the marginal about them. The so-called ‘landscapes of pastoralism’ tell us the story of a part of society which may play a minor role in the contemporary world but often played a central role in several societies and periods of history.

Central Italy, including Appennine upland areas as well as wet low-lands, constitutes an ideal context for the diachronic study of marginal landscapes as well as of the dynamics of interaction between different microlandscapes, creating a series of strong and peculiar local identities, in the long term. Strong interrelation between agricultural exploitation and animal husbandry is attested, often producing a dispersed settlement pattern with intensive farming of immediate adjacent land and animals nearby.

In marginal areas, one might expect low-level archaeological information, not only on quality and density of archaeological record but also on the entity of past structures represented. In these cases, archaeological research would need to be strongly supported by historical sources or ethnographical documents. On the other hand, since marginality has proved to be a relative issue, sometimes systematic archaeological research, approaching the landscape as a whole, could allow windows of landscape previously unknown to appear, bringing some areas back into the main historical narrative.

This paper aims at the illustration of an example of ‘relative marginality’, through the presentation of the archaeological results offered by the archaeological landscape research conducted in the Corvaro plain and surrounding areas, within the Cicolano upland region.

## 2. The Study Area and the Cicolano Survey Project

The Cicolano area is located in the central Appennine region, at the borderline between the modern ad-

ministrative divisions of Lazio and Abruzzo. Geographically, the area belongs to the Abruzzo landscape, though administratively included into the Rieti province in modern times, and it is characterised by a mountainous landscape marked by the presence of wide pasturage areas partially cultivated, forest areas, and bare limestone mountains within which open up dry Karstic plateaus. A series of upland plateaus, or wide inter-mountain depressions, descend in a NW-SE direction along the valley of the Salto river. The Corvaro plain is an inter-mountain basin at the foot of the Velino ridge, located at an average height of 800 m asl and 6500 km<sup>2</sup> wide. It is constituted mainly by limestone, with dark brown soils, partially covered by ancient fluvial deposits. As it is of glacial origin, it is bordered to the NW, E and SE by talus and glacial debris, which affect the quality of the soil, rich in rough pebbles. Karstic phenomena limit the presence of surface water and create typical morphologies such as caves and swallow-holes. Today, the only surface stream is the Ruara stream, a main feature of the local hydrologic network<sup>8</sup>.

The natural landscape is marked by the presence of the Velino ridge which overlooks the plain, while the human landscape is characterised by the medieval village of Corvaro. A well known piece of archaeological evidence in the area is the large tumulus of Corvaro, located in a fairly central position in the plain. It represents the Italic population known as the *Aequicoli*, the warlike people which inhabited the area and never became completely Romanised<sup>9</sup>.

In four field seasons (2005-2008-2009-2011), intensive and systematic artefact surface surveys were carried out in sampling areas of the plain as well as on the surrounding mountain areas (fig.1). Fieldwork activities were carried out mainly during summer field schools for students organised by the *Mykenai* non-profit cultural unit. Sampling areas were surveyed in transects measuring 150x50 m in the majority of

<sup>8</sup> On-going geo-pedological and remote sensing studies carried out by the Cicolano Survey project’s research-team, following the geomorphological analyses carried out by Chiarini *et alii* 2007, located a palaeostream crossing the plain from E to NW. It would have flown from the Terzana valley, at the Eastern edge of the plain, and then crossed the Cammarone area in the centre of the plain, reaching the large Corvaro tumulus, which was built on top of the river terrace, leading to the gorge in correspondence of the deserted village of Borgo Collefegato (earlier location of the modern village

of Borgorose, located today immediately outside the gorge towards West): Farinetti, Paolini 2011. Surface water (mainly the Ruara stream) probably used to flow into this stream, and then into the gorge, in a period before Late Pleistocene - Early Holocene, as already suggested by the geo-pedological analysis carried out in 1991 by Antonia Arnoldus Huyzendveld (in Alvino 1994).

<sup>9</sup> On the *Aequi/Aequicoli* see the catalogue of the exhibition *Gli Equi tra Abruzzo e Lazio* (Lapenna 2004). On the *Aequicoli* see also Alvino 1996; Morandi 1984; Perotti 1989.



1. - The Corvaro plain overlooked by the Velino ridge and fieldwalkers at work.

cases, with fieldwalkers 15 m apart. The intensive field survey was directed by Emeri Farinetti (University of Roma Tre - University of Thessaloniki), with the support of the municipality of Borgorose, the natural park *Montagne della Duchessa* and the *VII Comunità Montana Salto-Cicolano*, under the scientific patronage of the local archaeological service (dr. Giovanna Alvino - Archaeological Service of Lazio)<sup>10</sup>.

The field survey constitutes part of a wider research project on the historic landscape of the Corvaro plain within the wider Cicolano region. The *Cicolano Survey project* aims at the reconstruction of the long-term human settling in the upland area gravitating around the Corvaro plain, within the wider Cicolano region, with particular interest in the diachronic man-environment interaction, in the human eco-dynamics, in past land-use, in rural landscape transformations and the movement in the area,

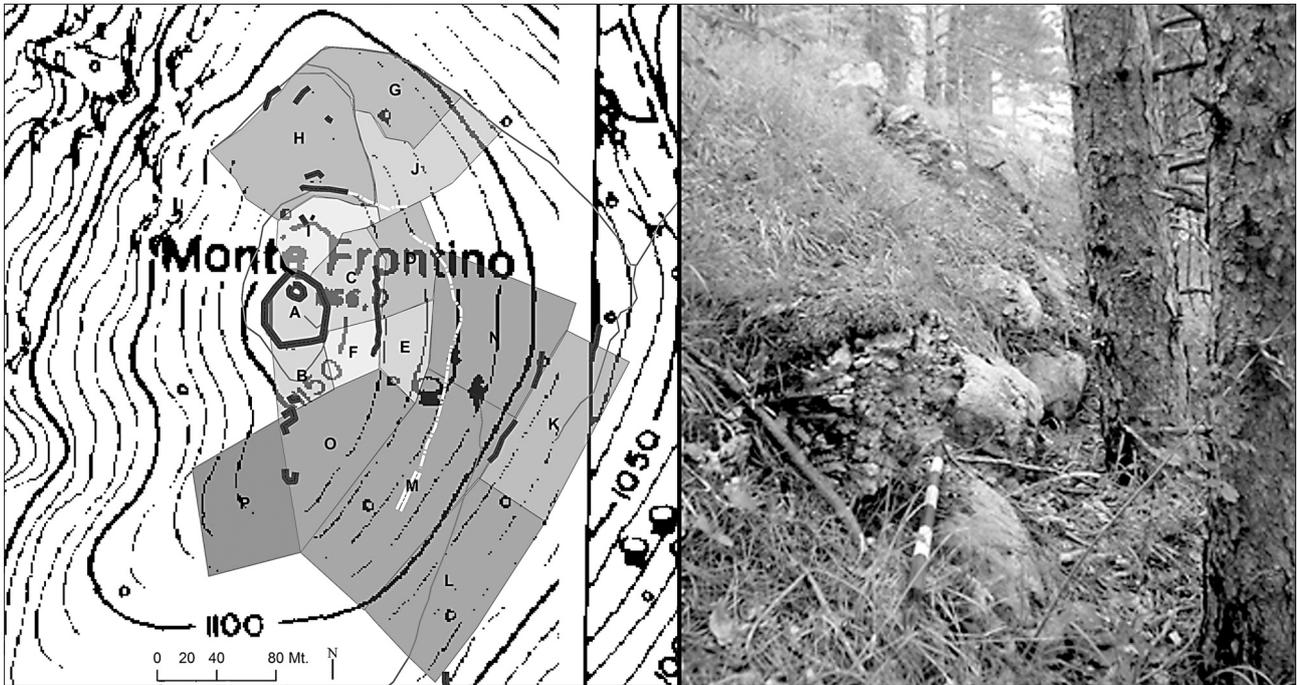
linked to transhumance routes. Guide-lines to the research were initially offered by the Rieti Survey project<sup>11</sup>, a pioneer work carried out in the upland region to the immediate North-West. The project also involves multi-temporal examination of aerial photographs aiming at the reconnaissance of human and natural features which could help in the reconstruction of the landscape history, geophysical prospection in selected areas as well as systematic research on archive data and historical maps.

The systematic artefact surface survey covered sample areas in the plain as well as higher upland areas (around the small Cartore hamlet and on the Frontino hill, respectively to the E and W end of the plain). The Frontino hill, a long-life fortified defensive high spot overlooking the upland Corvaro plain, known as a fortified *oppidum* of the *Aequi* people (7<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC) and a medieval fort (11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> c. AD)<sup>12</sup>,

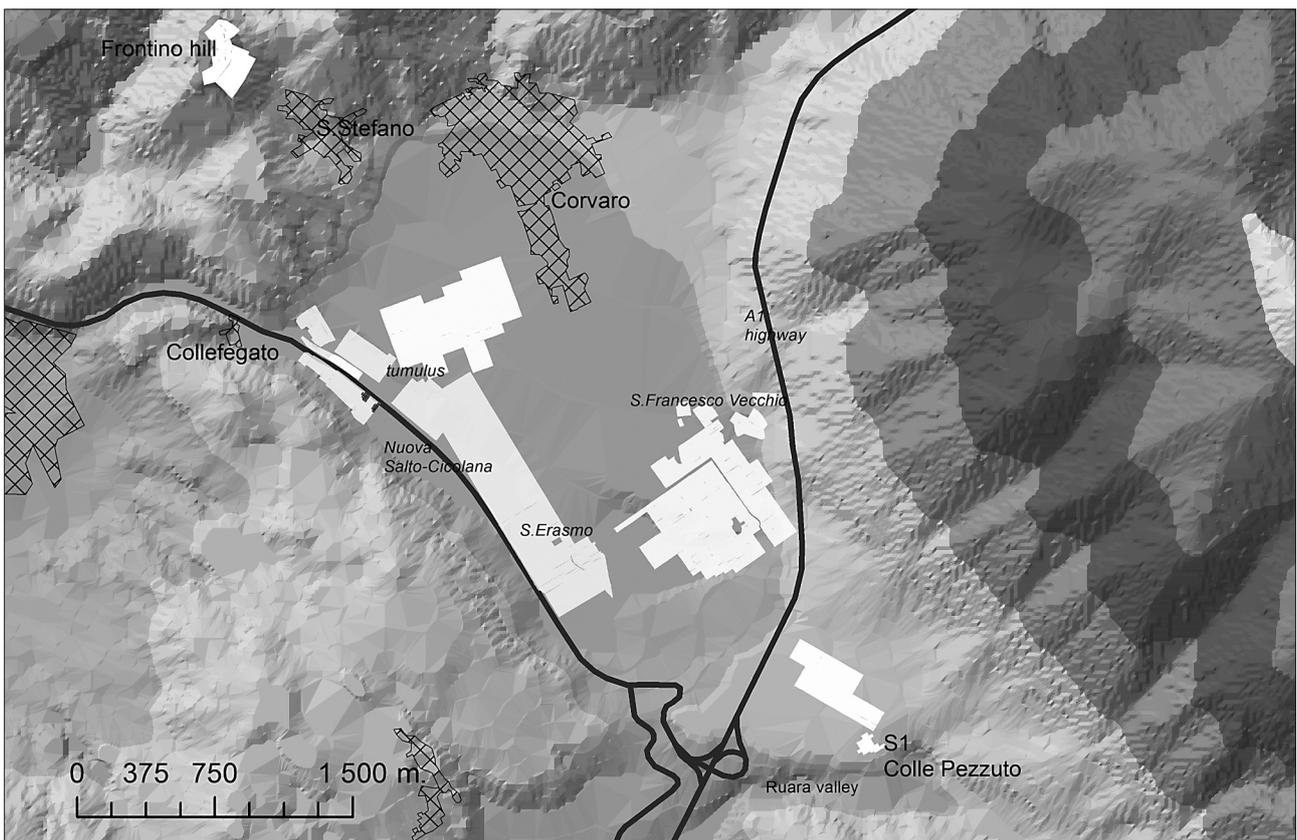
<sup>10</sup> I would firstly like to thank Giovanna Alvino, for her scientific advice and continuous support, as well as the senior archaeologists who offered their precious contribution to the research project in several ways: Francesca Lezzi for the detailed study on survey material, Kostas Sbonias for valued fieldwork assistance, Alessandro De Luigi and Carlo Virili for their helpful suggestions, Francesca Santini and Alessia Festuccia for their precious help in lab activities. I am most grateful to the junior archaeologists who took part in the project and enriched it with their enthusiasm and fresh ideas: Angela Paolini, Elisa Giunta, Elena Taffi, Michela Rossi and Fabiola Gnoli and, in particular, to Sara Pandozzi and Laura Giovannercole for their significant input in the research through their bachelor theses, on pastoralism and transhumance and on the Medieval landscape of the wider Cicolano region, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Coccia, Mattingly 1992 and 1995.

<sup>12</sup> The Frontino hill, formed by calcareous deposits of a carbonatic platform of the Early Cretaceous period, is, in the long term, one of the defensive outposts of the landscape of the area. The hill overlooks the Santo Stefano village from the North-West and visually controls both the Corvaro plain and the narrow gorge of the Apa stream, that runs between Monte Cava, Monte Fratta and the foothills of Prata hill, and it is followed by a transhumance route leading to Campo Felice. An *oppidum* (7<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC) is located on the hilltop, with a polygonal circuit and terraces, already described by Grossi in 1984. Dated to the Medieval period, and precisely since the 11/12<sup>th</sup> c., on the hilltop are the remains of a Medieval castle which reuses building material from the earlier circuit by cutting the large blocks in smaller pieces



2. - Frontino hill. On the CTR map survey units are marked with letters coloured according to the density of surface material (higher values in darker grey), whose dispersion is certainly biased by erosion and terracing (Farinetti 2011). Paths are marked with a fine gray line, while a thicker line marks the architectural remains.



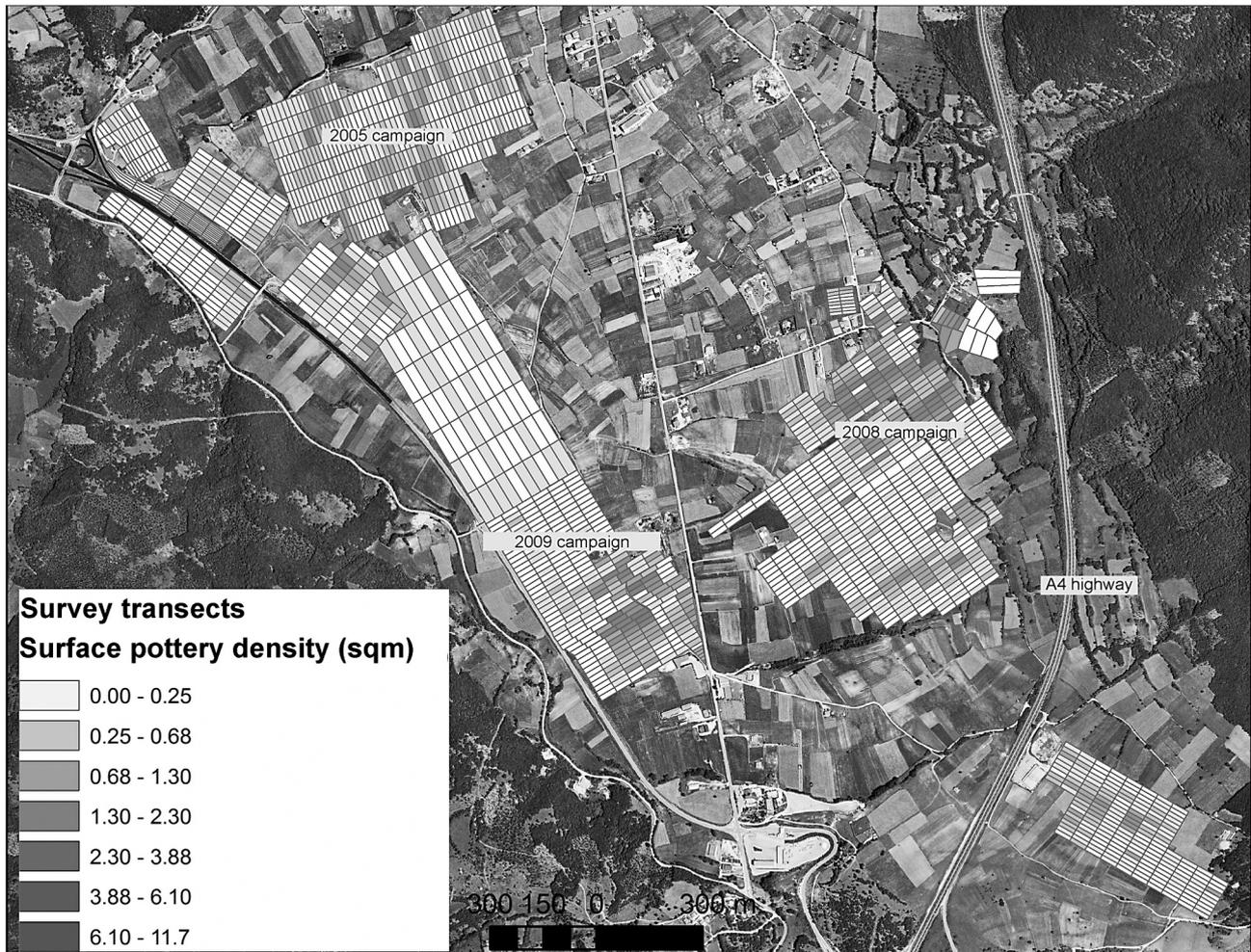
3. - Survey transects and major place names.

was surveyed applying the traditional intensive field survey methodologies used in the plain, adapted to the surface and visibility condition of a mountainous area.

(Farinetti 2011). From the castle, abandoned in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> c., originates the small village of Santo Stefano, on the SE slope of the Frontino hill, looking towards the plain.

<sup>13</sup> Farinetti 2011.

In the 2011 campaign, a survey was conducted on Frontino hill according to small survey units, following the hill's geomorphology. Evidence of pottery and architectural remains were registered, as well as paths and terrace walls<sup>13</sup> (fig. 2). In the plain, the survey covered sample areas (fig. 3) including the surroundings of the known Corvaro tumulus and the area to the



4. - Surface material density map.

East of the A24 highway (2005), the area around the small hamlet of San Francesco Vecchio (2008), the Sant'Erasmus area and the fields along the road *Nuova Salto-Cicolana* (2009). Visibility and density maps of surface material were produced, throwing light onto the rural occupation and the position of the nucleated rural settlement<sup>14</sup> (fig. 4).

### 3. A Landscape History

On the basis of the Cicolano Survey results, examined jointly with geophysical prospection and remote sensing analyses, we can attempt to trace a landscape history of the area from Protohistoric to

<sup>14</sup> Farinetti 2007 and 2010.

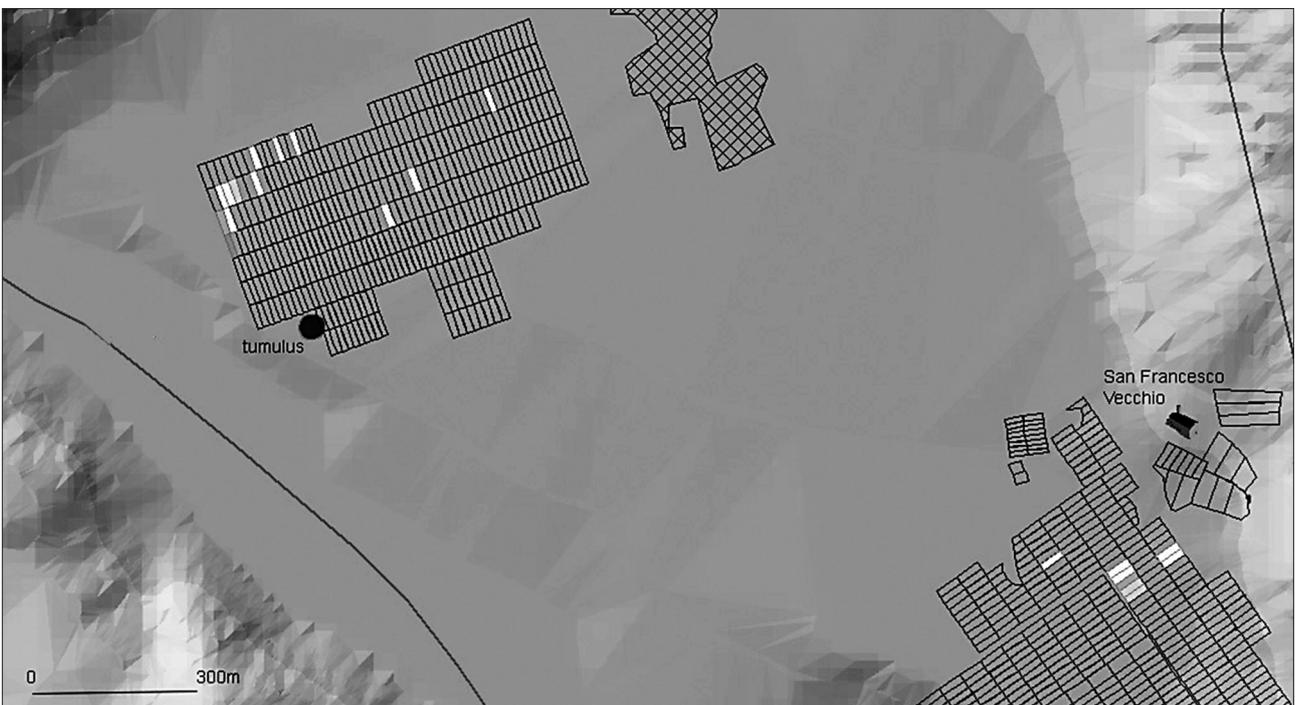
Medieval times, focussing in particular on the changes between pre-Roman landscape structures and the appearance of a distinctive dispersed settlement pattern after the Roman conquest of the neighbouring Sabina region.

Few Bronze Age sites (SP1-SP2-SP3), mainly Middle Bronze Age with earlier horizons, at a small distance to each other, were discovered in the Western part of the plain, along the road *Nuova Salto-Cicolana*. The surface survey recognised concentrations of brittle potsherds in very small pieces, which give a dark brown colour to the surface soil. They are located at a small distance and seem concentrated in the W area of the plain, since the field survey did not find similar material elsewhere, even in geomorphological and pedological identical conditions.

The Iron Age horizon is represented in the assem-



5. - Bronze Age sites in the plain.

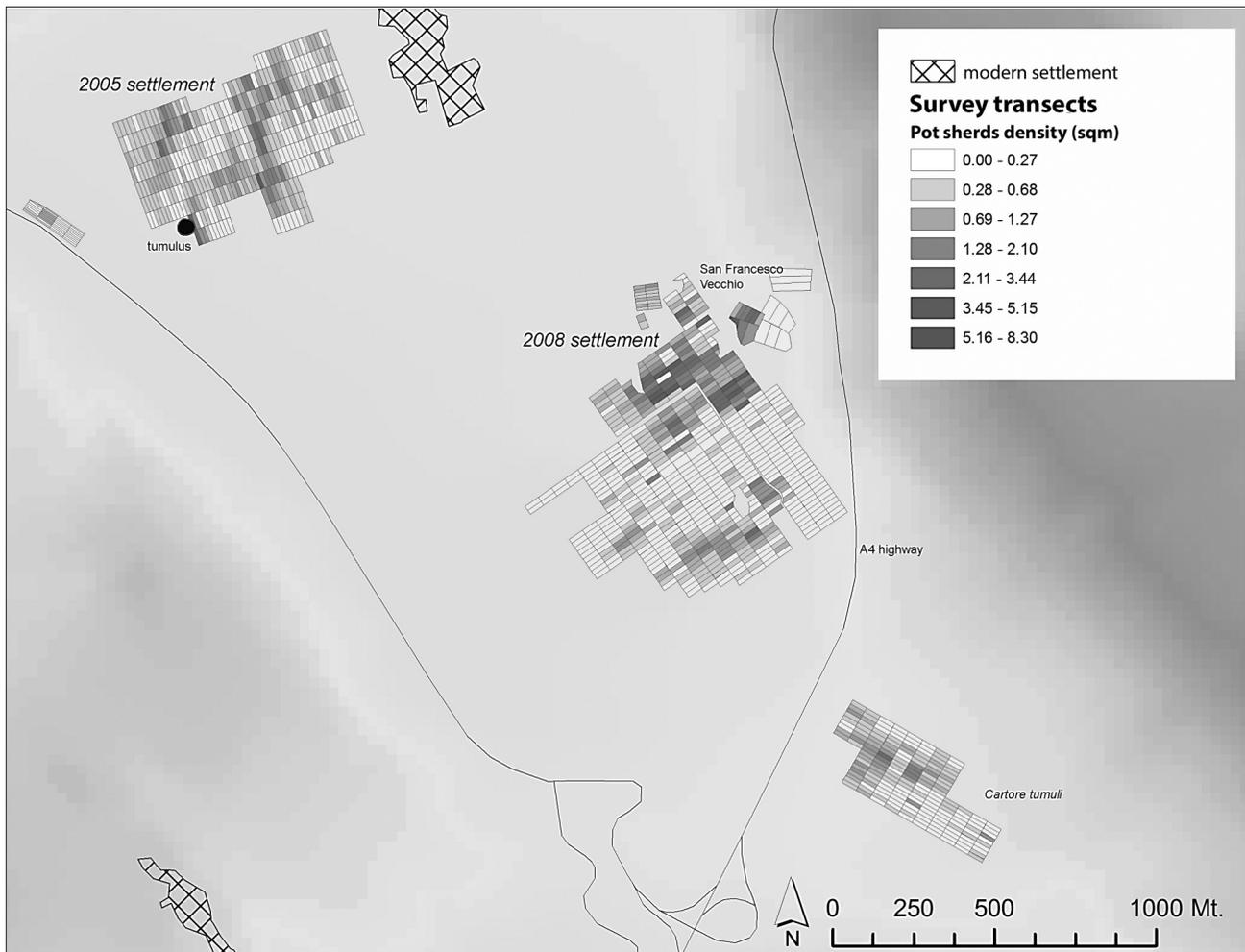


6. - Pre-Roman material detected among larger concentrations of Roman date. Survey units with pre-Roman material are shown in white and light grey colour.

blages from these sites, as well as at the Corvaro tumulus and among large concentrations of material of later (Roman) date, in the plain. Furthermore, the Frontino hill shows occupation from the Iron-Archaic age, and it is known as a fortified *oppidum* of the *Aequi* people (7<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC). Only the systematic study of the material intensively collected allowed for the appearance of new light shed on the Iron-Archaic age, previously known for its monumental funerary segment, represented by the large Corvaro tumulus and circular tombs at the SE edge of the plain, as well as for the fortified site on the Frontino hilltop. The latter probably lived along with other minor fortified hilltop sites around the plain<sup>15</sup> and with a dispersed settlement in the flat area, whose some *foci* were detected through a detailed study of the material collected during the fieldwork seasons. In fact, in small

areas within large concentrations a careful and systematic study of the material revealed the presence of archaic sherds, probably representing a pre-existing settlement focus (fig. 6). Such *foci* detected in the plain can be chronologically placed in a period preceding the construction of the large Corvaro tumulus, since comparable material was found in the soil employed for the construction of the tumulus itself. The hypothesis of an earlier settlement, whose abandonment strata were used in the construction of the large tumulus, already suggested by Giovanna Alvino, has been recently strengthened by the examination of the survey material by Alessandro De Luigi.

<sup>15</sup> *Monte Paco or Pago*, overlooking the modern *Sant'Anatolia* hamlet, and *Colle Civita*, above *Spedino* hamlet.



7. - Surface artefact density map in the large rural settlement areas (2005 and 2008).

Generally speaking, the ancient landscape recognised through survey fieldwork is mainly of Roman date, and gives us the clue of a first impression of the Roman occupation in this microregional context, approached by the Romans in a fairly early phase of the conquest, concluded with *Marius Curius Dentatus's* campaign at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, as in the neighbouring Sabina.

Survey results offer a previously unknown picture of an extensively occupied landscape in the Roman period, when the upland people inhabiting the Cicolano, never fully Romanised in a political sense, made their strong archaeological appearance showing a dispersed settlement pattern which apparently follows the lines of the less clearly visible pre-Roman period landscape.

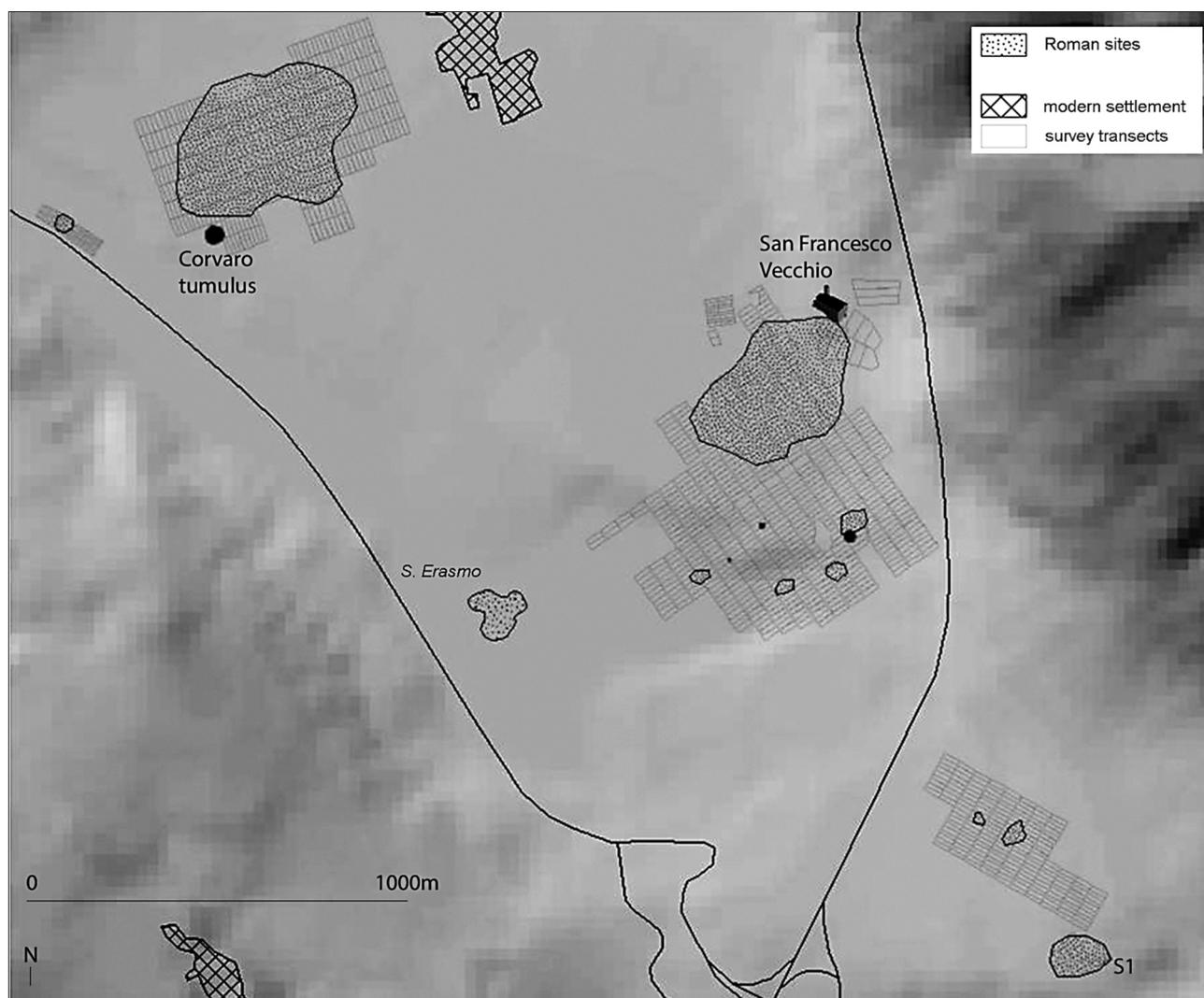
In the plain, two main rural agglomerations were detected, classifiable as mid-large nucleated rural settlements (possibly Roman *vici*). Both are located above the line feature marking the elevation gap crossing the plain, interpreted as a fluvial paleo-terrace<sup>16</sup>. The one, surveyed in 2005, is located in a fairly central location in the plain, by the large Cor-

varo tumulus; the other, detected and surveyed in 2008, is located in a foothill position along the N edge of the plain running SE-NW<sup>17</sup>. The extension of the surface assemblages, along with the distribution of surface material and the characteristics of the collected sherds, uncover two large rural settlements similar in character with slight differences. The first (2005) is ca. 23 ha large and is organised in 5/6 habitation focuses visible in the density map, while the second (2008) is ca. 8 ha in extension and looks much more nucleated.

In particular, the settlement by the large Corvaro tumulus (surveyed in 2005) appears as an extended settlement, with a density of surface material concentrated but variable on an area of 23 ha ca. It seems to be constituted by a series of habitation units organised in a dispersed settlement, and located at variable distances around an empty central space (darker in fig. 7 the highest density values). A similar structure was detected in the area surrounding the sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo (Molise), where a cluster of settlement was detected, whose larger unit is ca. 10 ha large and other neighbouring units would be linked to

<sup>16</sup> See above, footnote n. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Farinetti 2007.



8. - The Corvaro plain in the Roman period.

the first one. There, the hypothesis of a village with several groups of buildings separated by open spaces was confirmed by geophysical prospection. In our case, the settlement can be dated to the Roman period; coarse ware and tiles constitute the majority of finds, though pottery that can be dated to the Middle and Late Republican period is confirmed by an early excavation (in the 1980s), and the Imperial period is certainly present. To these phases the settlement structure, as detected by the survey, is to be related.

On the other hand, the settlement detected in 2008 looks much more nucleated and coherent, according to the picture offered by material concentration on the

surface, which outlines a settlement occupying an area of ca 8 ha. Higher density values, in comparison with the settlement surveyed in 2005, are probably due to taphonomical processes, as the area is subject to intense mechanical agricultural activities<sup>18</sup>. Collected material mainly includes tiles and coarse ware sherds, few fine ware pieces and an *opus spicatum* brick. They are all to be assigned to the mid-late Republican period and the Early Imperial period.

At the SE edge of the plain, a mid-size settlement site (8000 m<sup>2</sup>) of agro-pastoral character (S1<sup>19</sup>), in Colle Pezzuto locality, located above the deeply incised valley where the Ruara stream flows and along

<sup>18</sup> The period when the survey fieldwork took place, July, 2005 and September, 2008, along with the fact that the plain

fields are ploughed in early autumn (September-October) must be taken into consideration.

<sup>19</sup> Farinetti 2007.



9. - Route system in the plain.

a Roman upland route mentioned in literature<sup>20</sup> was also surveyed (fig. 8 and 9). The route was linked to transhumance activities and belonged to a wide network of upland communications (see below), which led to the upland plateau (at 950 m asl) where the small medieval hamlet of Cartore is located, up through the inner valleys of the Velino ridge and to the Malpasso mountain pass and, finally, downwards to *Alba Fucens*. On the S1 site both fine and coarse ware was found, from cooking and storage vessels. The site shows occupation in the Republican period and was certainly still alive in the Imperial period. According to the site typologies used by Barker<sup>21</sup> for the Biferno Valley survey, this site would belong to the *vicus/villa* category, but it could also fit into the generic category

of mid/large size rural settlement in which Barker included the *vicus/villae* and the *vicus* (villages) – from 7500 m<sup>2</sup> up to 19 ha in the Biferno valley. Our two settlements, described earlier, also fit in this large category. The in between distance, 1000 to 1500 m, is also comparable to that between nucleated settlements in the middle Biferno valley (ca. 800/1000 m).

Without entering the lively debate on the *vicus* and *pagus* categories and on their relationship with the Italic communities rather than with the processes of Romanization<sup>22</sup>, we must note that the presence of a *vicus* in the plain in the Roman period is epigraphically attested (CIL IX 4131). The site had been earlier identified with the S1 site, but could also be connected with one of the larger concentrations in the plain.

<sup>20</sup> Alvino 2004; Migliario 1995, p. 141.

<sup>21</sup> Barker 1995.

<sup>22</sup> For the debate, see Letta 1988 and 2005; Tarpin 2002; Todisco 2004; Patterson 2006; Capogrossi Colognesi 2002.

Marginally, it can be noted that the intensive-systematic survey, which registered the surface densities taking into account the actual visibility on the ground and verified the spatial extension of the archaeological surface record, proved to be a useful research tool. It allowed us to detect the inner structure of mid-size settlements (that could be further improved with functional analyses) and to better qualify the actual presence of settlement structures marked by different levels of complexity.

Thus, a clear rural pattern appears for the Roman period (fig. 8): on one hand, the settlement sites, more or less nucleated, and on the other hand several small focuses of seasonal or permanent rural occupation, probably small farms of comparable size, dated between the Late Republic and Imperial periods, that were also detected in the sample areas, at a certain distance from the large nucleated settlements and elsewhere in the plain. These small rural sites (2000-3000 m<sup>2</sup>), characterised by the presence of small, often clearly recognizable assemblages of tiles, coarse ware and some pieces of fine ware, are located at an average distance of 200 m from each other. In other rural contexts intensively surveyed, we see an interdistance of 500 m in the area surrounding the sanctuary of S. Giovanni in Galdo<sup>23</sup>, and a closer distance in the Biferno valley (100/150 m in the middle valley, where we can also recognize settlement sites comparable to ours, as seen earlier). The small sites in the Corvaro plain therefore show a relatively high density, even in the proximity of the ‘nucleated’ settlement. This enhances the hypothesis of a dispersed settlement *de facto*, with areas of higher density and lower dispersion levels. Some of the small sites are probably farm sheds, but some could even be simple tool sheds.

It is interesting to note that in the plain a site with

a possible *status* of large farm or *villa* was never found, as far as extension and/or typology of material are concerned. This would correspond to the general picture known for the Cicolano area in the Roman period, with limited presence of rustic *villae* of ‘sabino’ type<sup>24</sup>. In our wider area only one villa site is known, partially excavated recently by Torano, immediately outside the Corvaro plain. As Migliario<sup>25</sup> notes, the region would have been reached only marginally by the socio-economic changes which occurred elsewhere along with the extension and establishment of the *villa* system. This would not directly mean a low level agricultural exploitation of the area, as some scholars seem to imply<sup>26</sup>, even for the Imperial period, but it could indicate different choices in settlement and land use, perhaps due to the strong persistence of earlier settlement patterns, dispersed in character, along with a heavy presence of pastoralism.

In general, a picture of a not-urban community, spatially differentiated, marked by a fairly high habitation density can be inferred from the archaeological data. As previously mentioned, this possibly continues an earlier settlement model characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern living along with fortified hilltop sites (among which the Frontino site – see earlier) which slowly disappeared during the Roman Republican period, leaving space to a high concentration of rural population in the plain. The transformation seems to coincide with the first period of Romanization of the area, since the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, and with the first signs of activities in the cult place known as ‘Sanctuary of *Aequicoli*’ in the SW part of the plain (S. Erasmo)<sup>27</sup>, which could have played a central role as an aggregation point in the area<sup>28</sup>. This would coincide with a population increase at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, as attested by the anthropo-

<sup>23</sup> Stek 2008, cap. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Migliario 1995. For Sabina see the results of the Riety Survey (Coccia, Mattingly 1995), the results of the Tiber Valley project (Patterson *et alii* 2000); see also Reggiani 1985; Migliario 1988; Sternini 2004; Coarelli 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Migliario 1995, pp. 137-147.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Migliario 1995, p. 137, who describes the area as having low fertility, harsh climate, and a distance from the Roman market.

<sup>27</sup> On the excavation and interpretation as ‘Sanctuary of *Aequicoli*’ see Reggiani 1980 and 1988. The presence of a deep depression has been noticed in correspondence to the indication

‘Sant’Erasmo spring’ on the local C.T.R. map. On its bottom, a curve trace is visible, marked by the presence of pebbles, which could recall a river bed. The feature is visible in the airphotos from 2000 and looks as if it follows the line of the fluvial scarp recognised to the North (Farinetti, Paolini 2011; Chiarini *et alii* 2007). A local farmer tells us how he recalls that once there was water there. The so-called spring could correspond to a spot where water used to spring out, in a period later than the disappearance of the stream, which determined the morphology of the plain very much earlier than the Roman period (probably in the Late Pleistocene - Early Holocene period, see footnote n. 8). The spring could be linked possibly to the cult place.

<sup>28</sup> Reggiani 1980 and 1988.

logical study of the skeletons found in the central tumulus<sup>29</sup>.

As noted by Rupke<sup>30</sup>, the building of monumental temples often shows the vitality of rural districts in the Roman Italian countryside. Letta<sup>31</sup> talks about rural extra-urban sanctuaries ordered on the decree of the *pagus* by the North Oscan population, Vestini and Peligni. Horden and Purcell<sup>32</sup> also mention religious *foci* and great rural sanctuaries which can become major *foci* of economic and social activity, generally speaking for the Mediterranean context, and in particular point out how, in smaller contexts, they can assume socio-political values and absorb centralities that traditionally belong to towns and cities.

The so-called ‘sanctuary of *Aequicoli*’ could have played such a role for the local people and could also have been linked to the passage of transhumance routes along the plain (see below).

Afterwards, during the Longobard domination (when the area is included in the *Ducato* of Spoleto) and in the following phase (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c. AD) characterised by the control of Farfa Abbey over the whole Cicolano area<sup>33</sup> the disperse settlement pattern remained a characteristic of the landscape, based on a system of churches (*pieve* in Italian, *plebs* in Latin) not related to a particular village / hamlet but located at neuralgic points in the countryside<sup>34</sup>. Even later (12<sup>th</sup> c.), with the progressive development of castles<sup>35</sup>, a disperse settlement pattern appears in a dense network of small hamlets organised around a rural church, all over the Cicolano region<sup>36</sup>, while the *cura animarum* of inhabitants of the *castra* was often given to small churches located in the countryside (often along transhumance routes)<sup>37</sup>, as documents of the period tes-

tify. The abandonment of the castles seems to have occurred very early in the Cicolano region<sup>38</sup>, attesting once again the vocation of the area for disperse settlement.

Even today, a disperse settlement pattern constitutes a strong characteristic of the area landscape. The main settlements (Borgorose, Pescorocchiano, Fiamignano, and Petrella Salto) are widely spread into the surrounding land, densely spotted by several hamlets with strong identity characteristics.

#### 4. High Connectivity

In the long-term, the area shows characteristics of high connectivity and plays an active role in the central Appenninic wider region within «the dense net of capillaries that ties the individual mountains together», in Horden and Purcell’s own eloquent words<sup>39</sup>.

In fact, the Corvaro plain constitutes an important link between the area of Rieti (ancient *Reate*) and the Fucino basin, strategic nodes for the relationship between the Tirreno and the Adriatic sea, as well as a cross-road to *Alba Fucens* and Carsoli from *Reate*, especially after Romanization. A main road, coming from Petrigliano and crossing the Apa stream leading to Borgorose, would have entered the Corvaro plain by the Medieval and early-Modern hamlet of Collefegato and would have crossed the plain passing by the Sant’Erasmo spring and cult area (see above), finally joining the *via Valeria* on its way to *Alba Fucens*. The *via Valeria*, as a continuation of *via Tiburtina* from *Tibur* to *Cerfenniae*, in the stretch be-

and the small disperse hamlet around the church in the Cartore upland small plateau.

<sup>37</sup> Around the Corvaro plain, outside the *castrum Malitum* (*Catalogus Baronum*, n. 1123, p. 221), identified on top of the Frontino hill, a small church devoted for use of the 25 families hosted in the castle, and later used by shepherds and flocks (still existing) was located; the S. Angelo church, related to Corvaro castle, was located *in loci silvestri* on the slopes of Amara valley, along the transhumance route to Campo Felice (see below in the text); the S. Martino church was located in the countryside below the Torano castle. In addition, the monastery of *S. Leonardus in Silvis* was also located along the upland route that was leading to *Alba Fucens*, at the entrance of Teve narrow gorge (see below in the text).

<sup>38</sup> Staffa 1987; Piccinni 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Horden, Purcell 2000, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> Catalano 1996, p. 439.

<sup>30</sup> Rupke 2011, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> Letta 1992.

<sup>32</sup> Horden, Purcell 2000, p. 435.

<sup>33</sup> Farfa Abbey controlled the area (*in Eiculis*) since the 8<sup>th</sup> c., by means of the *cella Sancti Benedicti* (located by Petrigliano) in an early period and later by the *cella de Laurianum* (located in Corvaro). Staffa 1987.

<sup>34</sup> Around the Corvaro plain, the *plebs* churches of *Sancti Stephani in Clavano* e *Sancti Laurentii in Cartore* are attested.

<sup>35</sup> Known Medieval nucleated settlements and *castra* around the Corvaro plain are: Corvaro, Collefegato, the Frontino hilltop, Torano.

<sup>36</sup> Staffa 1987; Leggio 1999. Around the Corvaro plain, see, for instance, the attested Spedino hamlet at the S edge of the plain,

tween Carsioli and *Alba Fucens*<sup>40</sup> would have crossed our area of study, probably following a pre-Roman transhumance route<sup>41</sup> leading to the Malpasso mountain pass.

By looking at the modern path network, jointly with survey results, a possible ancient route can be hypothesised, which would have entered the plain through the gorge overlooked by the Collefegato hamlet and could have lined the large rural settlement surveyed in 2005 and the large tumulus, which would then have reached then the S. Erasmo cultural-funeral area marked by the presence of the so-called ‘Sanctuary of *Aequicoli*’ and by burial features. Afterwards, it would have approached the area of Colle Pizzuto (where a large agro-pastoral site has been recognised as linked to transhumance practices - S1 site), on its way to Cartore (an upland pastoral site with occupation attested at least in the Medieval period but also probably in Roman times), finally running towards the Malpasso pass through the Velino mountain, to end into the Italic town and Roman colony of *Alba Fucens* (fig. 9). Stone blocks marking the passage of the ancient path were found during the survey fieldwork both by the S. Erasmo cult area and in the proximity of the S1 site. Earlier paths, still clearly visible in a 1955 airphoto, looks obliterated after the construction of the highway in the 1960s, which clearly constitutes a critical change in the landscape. The area would have been, therefore, at least in the Roman period, at the cross point between two long-way routes, coming respectively from *Tibur* through Carsioli and from *Reate*, both leading to *Alba Fucens*.

In the wider area, from the primary road network a dense network of paths would have detached, linked to the practice of transhumance and quite recognizable still today, thanks to the relative continuity due to strong topographical constraints<sup>42</sup>. The pastoral routes connect lower areas within the Cicolano region to the higher pasturage zones (1100 to 2000 m asl).

Migliario<sup>43</sup> points out how in the wider Cicolano region the ‘vertical’ transhumance is the most used, although in the past century (in the 1980s as Migliario

says) and in some periods of the past we have evidence of long distance ‘horizontal’ transhumance<sup>44</sup>.

Nixon and Price distinguish three varieties of pastoralism in the Mediterranean<sup>45</sup>: **1.** stationary pastoralism; **2.** mobile economy within a restricted area; **3.** long distance transhumance. In the Cicolano area, and in particular in the Corvaro plain and surrounding areas, we deal mainly with the second case: a mobile economy within a restricted area, within which the flocks might go up to summer pastures no more than a day’s walk from the permanent habitation site. Certainly, though, there were also forms of stationary pastoralism, linked to the strict relation between animal husbandry and agriculture, as the settlement pattern seems to attest, allowing for intensive land use in the immediately adjacent land and animal husbandry nearby. Long distance transhumance in some periods of history and for certainty at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. also existed in the area. Transhumant flocks may coexist with stationary flocks during the locally fertile period (winter-spring in the lower plateaus).

Above the Corvaro village, one of those pastoral routes led to Campo Felice through the Amara valley, and another one to Civitatomassa and Sassa through the Ruella valley. A long-way route, coming from *Reate* and leading to the Roman colony of *Alba Fucens* through the Malpasso pass on the Velino ridge, would have crossed the plain, as seen earlier; at the edge of the plain, it would have turned towards the East along the N side of the Ruara valley towards the Medieval Cartore hamlet, and then along the Teve narrow gorge would have crossed the Duchessa and Velino mountains arriving at the Fucino plain from the North. At Avezzano, the route could have joined the well known transhumance track (*itiner callium*) Celano-Lucera, leading to *Apulia*. Along this route, above Ruara valley, the survey site S1 described earlier, as well as rural sites by the small plateau at the edge of which is located the Cartore medieval hamlet, are located. Along the same path, survey fieldwork detected the ruins of traditional structures used by shepherds, along a transhumance track (fig. 10).

<sup>40</sup> van Wouterghem 1984, p. 63; Piraino 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Tomei 1981, p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Alvino 1994; Migliario 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Migliario 1995, cap. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Barker, Grant 1991. On transhumance practice in the Roman period and on the transhumance route network in Central and Southern Italy from antiquity to the Middle-Ages, see the major work of Gabba, Pasquinucci 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Nixon, Price 2001, p. 405.



10. - The ruins of a traditional structure used by shepherds along a transhumance track.

Camerieri and Mattioli<sup>46</sup> hypothesize a strict relationship between the structures in polygonal masonry existing in the area<sup>47</sup> and the passage of transhumance roads.

The Frontino hilltop, a long-life fortified defensive high spot overlooking the upland Corvaro plain (*oppidum* of the *Aequi* people and medieval fort), surveyed in the framework of the project as mentioned earlier, controlled the Apa stream valley, along which used to run a transhumance road towards Campo Felice (via the Amara valley). The site itself should therefore be linked to transhumance practice, an outstanding economic phenomenon for the area until recent times, when on the hill were located huts and repairs for shepherds and flocks, similar to those

found on the East of the plain along the route to Cartore, mentioned above.

## 5. Relative Marginality

Today, the area can certainly be considered as peripheral. This can be due to several factors. Although the area belongs to Abruzzo, geographically as well as traditionally, it was assigned administratively to the province of Rieti (Lazio). The area is not included in the main communication network; it is crossed by the A24 high-way, which marks the landscape without really involving in it, with an exit used mainly by locals. Furthermore, in the wider region, the creation of

<sup>46</sup> Camerieri, Mattioli 2010.

<sup>47</sup> The structures in polygonal masonry in the area are mapped in Farinetti 2011, fig. 3.

the artificial Salto lake in the 1930s modified the natural and economic balance of the area. Agricultural activities collapsed and a strong depopulation process, gradual migration towards Rome and Abruzzo towns, started with a very heavy emigration abroad mainly in the 1950s. The area is characterised today by demographical decline, an increase in an aged population, reduced employment in traditional activities such as primary activities or handcraft, high number of commuters, a lack of entrepreneurs and a low level of public service.

In contrast to the above, the intensive survey detected a fairly high surface material density, 0.72 per m<sup>2</sup> in average, and offers insights against the wrong impression of abandonment and isolation, which certainly did not characterise the past biography of this landscape, at least in some periods of history.

As seen, density maps of archaeological surface material and the preliminary study of the collected material refer to a high level of occupation which certainly existed at least between the Late Republican and Imperial periods, where settlement and economic use of the plain appear quite intense, based on earlier settlement structures and land use. Thus, the picture offered by survey results matches the picture of the area as a cross-point of ancient routes which crossed the Turano-Salto river system, allowing for communication with the Rieti area and southern Sabina, and of long-life transhumance routes and highland paths that connected the area with the northern slopes of the Velino ridge, with the area of *Amiternum*, the Marsica and the Fucino. In early Medieval times (at least since the 8<sup>th</sup> c. AD), this aspect played an important role in the interest in the area of the Farfa monastery<sup>48</sup>. In earlier times, the relatively early Roman conquest (*Manius Curius Dentatus* at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, jointly with the neighbouring Sabina) would be an indication of a marginality only apparent, as firstly suggested by Migliario<sup>49</sup>.

The marginality of the Cicolano region is therefore to be seen as relative, since characters of ‘centrality’ show up in different periods of history, showing a distinctive attitude to pastoralism, in both environmental and cultural terms. However, we must consider how

the Cicolano area was not located on the main commercial routes serving the central market of Rome, and certainly was only marginally involved in the social and economic effects created elsewhere by the *villa* system. Therefore, nevertheless remaining at the borders of the main economic network, the characteristics of its landscape (high elevation, a harsh climate, low agricultural potential in comparison with the neighbouring Sabina) certainly contribute to the determination of distinctive settlement patterns, land use and economic choices during history. The landscape history of the Corvaro plain and surrounding areas, as outlined through the survey results, confirms this picture.

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<sup>48</sup> Migliario 1995, pp. 29-41, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Migliario 1995.

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