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LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENTS IN THE VALCONCA TERRITORY BETWEEN THE ROMAN PERIOD AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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During the last five years the Archaeological Department of the University of Bologna has started a new project of excavations and survey in the Valconca valley, the territory of Rimini. That region was really important for the expansion and affirmation of the roman economy in northern Italy. All the valley has been involved in intense exploitation, with many villas and farms. One of the bigger sites has been identified in the Piana di San Pietro in Cotto, close to Gemmano. We conducted there two seasons of excavations to understand the extension and the plan of the site, and to study the evolution of this settlement during the early Middle Age. At the end of the excavation we did also survey the whole site with a magnetometer that revealed the consistence of the depth and the conservation of the structures. With the help of the aerial photographs we did also observe the extension of the site. Inside the various samples of the excavation we identified the thermal area of a huge villa settled between the river Conca and crossed by a street connected with the Via Flaminia. This villa has been built during the 1st century BC and restructured at the end of the 1st century AD. The thermal area has been used until the 3rd century AD and after it abandoned. Other zones of the site have been used also during the Late Antiquity and at the Early Middle Age, with an iron production area (8th century). The project is now trying to study the transformations of this territory during the 9th and 10th century AD when the landscape is characterized by the foundation of new castles on the top of the neighboring hills and the settlement patterns changed again moving towards the Middle Age.

Key words: Valconca valley, roman economy, Piana di San Pietro in Cotto, Via Flaminia, villa, castle

Introduction

The Valconca territory is a fertile valley behind the city of Rimini. This landscape has been occupied since prehistory and many finds have been identified in the last centuries. One of the most important sites of this valley is a wide settlement close the villages of Gemmano and Montefiore Conca, two castles founded in the 10th century after the decentralization of the urban power that characterized this period in central Italy. This site has been called San Pietro in Cotto, close to the river Conca and to a small early medieval church, with small Carolingian marble decorations found in the

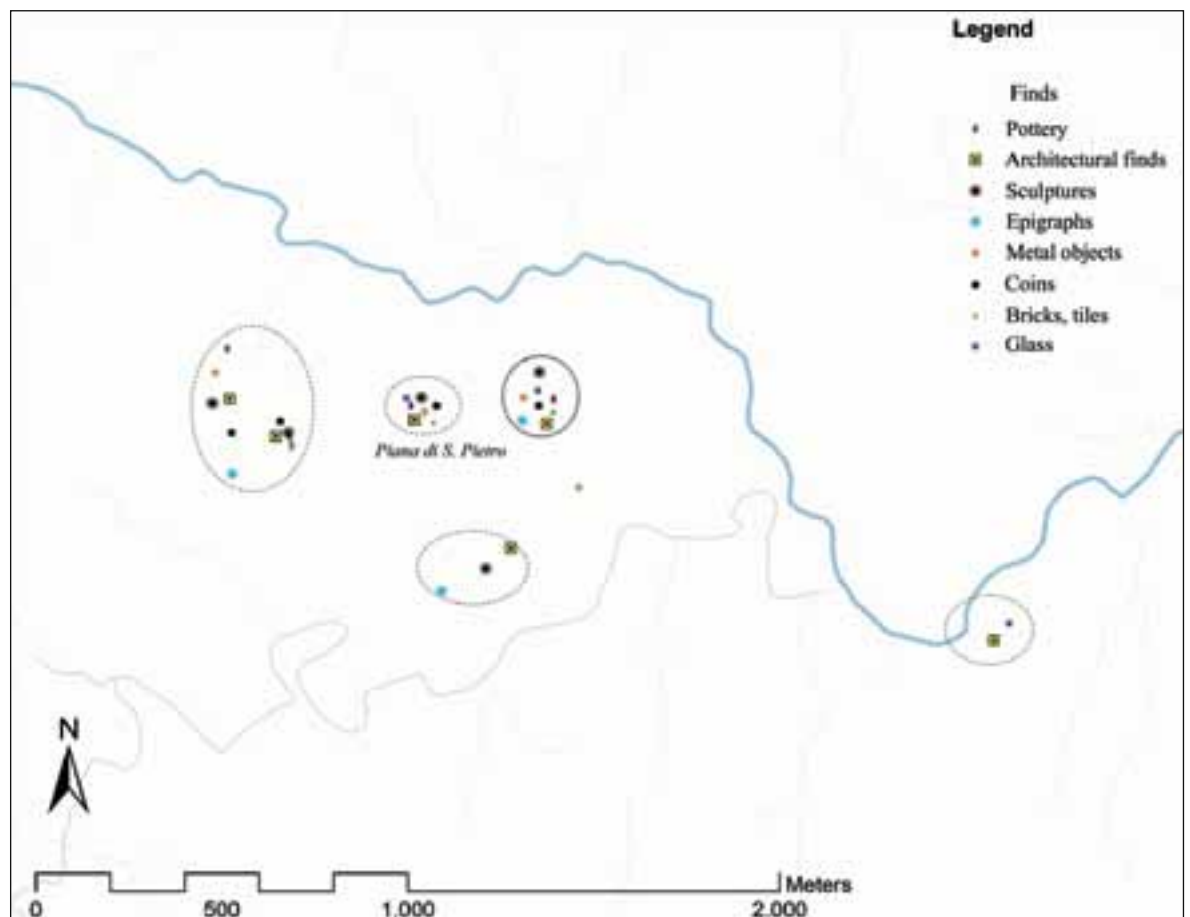
surface area close to the Piana di San Pietro in Cotto (fig. 1; SANTORO BIANCHI 1979).

The settlement was first identified by old excavations and sporadic finds, generally attributed to the Roman period and to a *vicus*, a *mansio* and sometimes even the mythic city of Conca, mentioned by epigraphic evidence. Other investigations brought to light materials and structures belonging to various settlement situated along a branch of the Via Flaminia (fig. 2). However, the evidence identified to date is not enough to define the exact extension of the settlement or its type, that is,

Fig.1 - Aerial view of the Piana di San Pietro in Cotto (Gemmano, Rimini).



Fig. 2 - Main settlements of the Piana di San Pietro in Cotto, following the surface finds.



whether it was constituted by a series of villas with productive and residential functions belonging to the rural population, or rather a small *vicus*.

The Department of Archaeology of the University of Bologna carried out two excavation campaigns in this area, where a 19th century Casale is still standing and covers the small thermal sector of an ancient villa. The current wine cellar reuses a roman wall, preserved 60 cm high, close to a paved room with rounded *suspensurae* built in bricks (about 20 cm x 20 cm) that supported the raised floor of a bath covering a hypocaust cavity through which the hot air would flow (FONTEMAGGI - PIOLANTI 1998, p. 102).

The villa

The new trenches excavated in the last two years brought to the identification of many structures of this 2nd century site and to a production area of an iron workshop, sets on the sides of a road, active up to the 8th century.

A first excavation campaign (2007) was undertaken in order to analyze this evidence and gain an understanding of landscape evolution from the types of occupation in Roman and late Roman periods until the creation of the fortified sites in the Middle Ages which still characterize this territory (BONDI, CIRELLI 2009).

Two areas were opened, in the territory under the hill where Gemmano (RN) was built, at the western end of the Piana di S. Pietro in Cotto, in the territory of the Valconca (land register sheet 8, lot 95 – Faetani property).

The area investigated provided the opportunity for a first approach to a zone which has always been at the centre of surface finds and occasional reports of archaeological evidence. The remains were generally attributed to the Roman period on the basis of the material found in the rubble layers covering the surface, exposed by agricultural works.

To this purpose, two trenches were opened (about 10 x 10 m) close to the house so that the Roman building's extension to the north and south could be checked and its type defined. The aim was also to look at the site's evolution once the Roman complex had been abandoned. Analysis of the evidence found within the two excavation areas provided dating for the site from the 2nd century B.C. onwards. The building, of which several

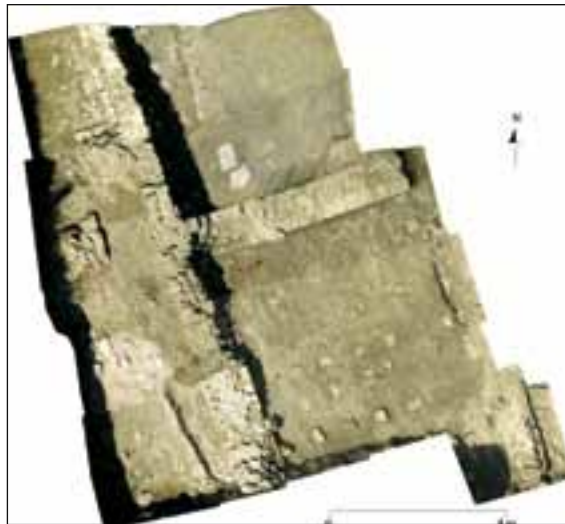


Fig. 3 – Aerial view of the bath area of the Villa in San Pietro in Cotto (Photo by D. Marino, A. Tirincanti).

walls were identified and which existence was already known, was probably a villa which moment of maximum expansion came in the Early Imperial period. The walls were built in rough stones, cobbles and strong mortar similar to the walls found in the site of Cattolica (Rimini), close to the market area of the modern city (MAIOLI 1995).

The phases of its abandonment and destruction, in the second half of the 3rd century, were identified and partially excavated.

Under these wall collapsing layers, part of two rooms belonging to a monumental building complex were uncovered. The first occupation of this area is datable to the Republican-Imperial period but the complex was badly preserved due to robbing. The building had heated rooms and at least one bath pool lined with mosaic (fig. 3). The finds attest that the structure was decorated with polychrome marble, frescoes and mosaic pavements. A previous room was also paved with small hexagonal bricks. The recovered finds were also of good quality, such as fine table wares, some imported, and numerous metal artefacts, both for domestic and personal use. All these elements make it possible to interpret the building complex as an urban-rustic villa. It should be noted that the existence at the Piana di San Pietro in Cotto of one or more *villae*, has been hypothesized in the past, or even an aggregative centre, inserted into the agricultural estate system.

The site was occupied for a long period: the first traces date to the Republican period (2nd -1st century B.C.) as attested by numerous residual fragments of black glaze ware pottery. However, it is not possible to specify whether the presence of the building complex dates to this period or whether this evidence relates to another

Fig. 4 – The late antique road identified during 2008-2009 excavations (Photo by I. Begnozzi, P. Scozzari).



type of occupation. The villa is certainly attested from the early imperial period, as shown by the abundant 1st century A.D. pottery, until the 5th century A.D. when the excavated rooms were abandoned.

The excavation continued in the sector to the south, uncovering the Imperial occupation phases of the building and those relating to the construction of the road.

The first phase of a road was identified with a number of resurfacing layer that were excavated during the previous campaign. On the basis of the pottery the first construction of the road occurred after the 1st century A.D. The carriageway was circa 3 m wide and constituted by fairly regularly arranged cobbles; no cart-tracks or structures for water drainage were identified (fig. 4).

The late antique building and the early medieval workshop

Following the building's destruction the area was probably reoccupied in the 5th century A.D., although for the moment this remains a hypothesis based on the residual materials. However, occupation in this phase continued until the early medieval period. In fact, traces of 7th and 8th century A.D. occupation were documented.

In this period the settlement was characterized by

a rather different type of evidence, without any of the monumental characteristics which the residual material and identified structures seem to suggest for the villa.

In fact, the area became an open space, in which a road was laid and maintained for a long period. The road had a cobbled surface and probably linked the productive structures (for example the metal working activity identified in the south side), rural structures (for which evidence was found over the bath) and the residential structures, all situated in this part of the Piana di S. Pietro. At the same time, traces of late antique and early medieval occupation have been identified in the North/East side of the settlement. It is an open space, probably a small court with an occupation layer that is connected to two brick pillars, which dating is based on ceramic and numismatic materials to the 5th century AD. It is linked to a small wall with reused material (fragments of tiles, river pebbles and small stones), bound with clay. Close to this building there is also a quadrangular structure constituted by heterogeneous material (broken bricks, tiles and roof tiles) bound with clay. These structures, that took place over the rests of the roman villa, represent probably a new form of occupation of the area, a smaller settlement that reused part of the ancient site, close to the important street that connected the coast with the hinterland.

The data which emerged from the excavation was similar to that found at other villas of imperial date in Romagna effected by phenomena of abandonment and reoccupation. The most pertinent would seem to be the villa found at S. Zaccaria (RA) where there was evidence not only for the abandonment of some sectors of the building but also for what seemed to be the appearance of a production area, attested by the presence of waste material from iron working. These contexts were associated with early medieval pottery: Classe type ollas and other 8th century forms, overall cooking pots and domestic ceramic bread ovens (*clibani*).

As well as excavations, the project also foresaw a series of geo-magnetic surveys in areas adjacent to the excavation (situated in the territory of Montefiore Conca) where scatters of archaeological material are present, probably relating to the structures identified on the Faetani farm. Unfortunately, the surveys did not reveal any significant structures, probably due to the intense agricultural activity undertaken in the area (BOSCHI *fc*).

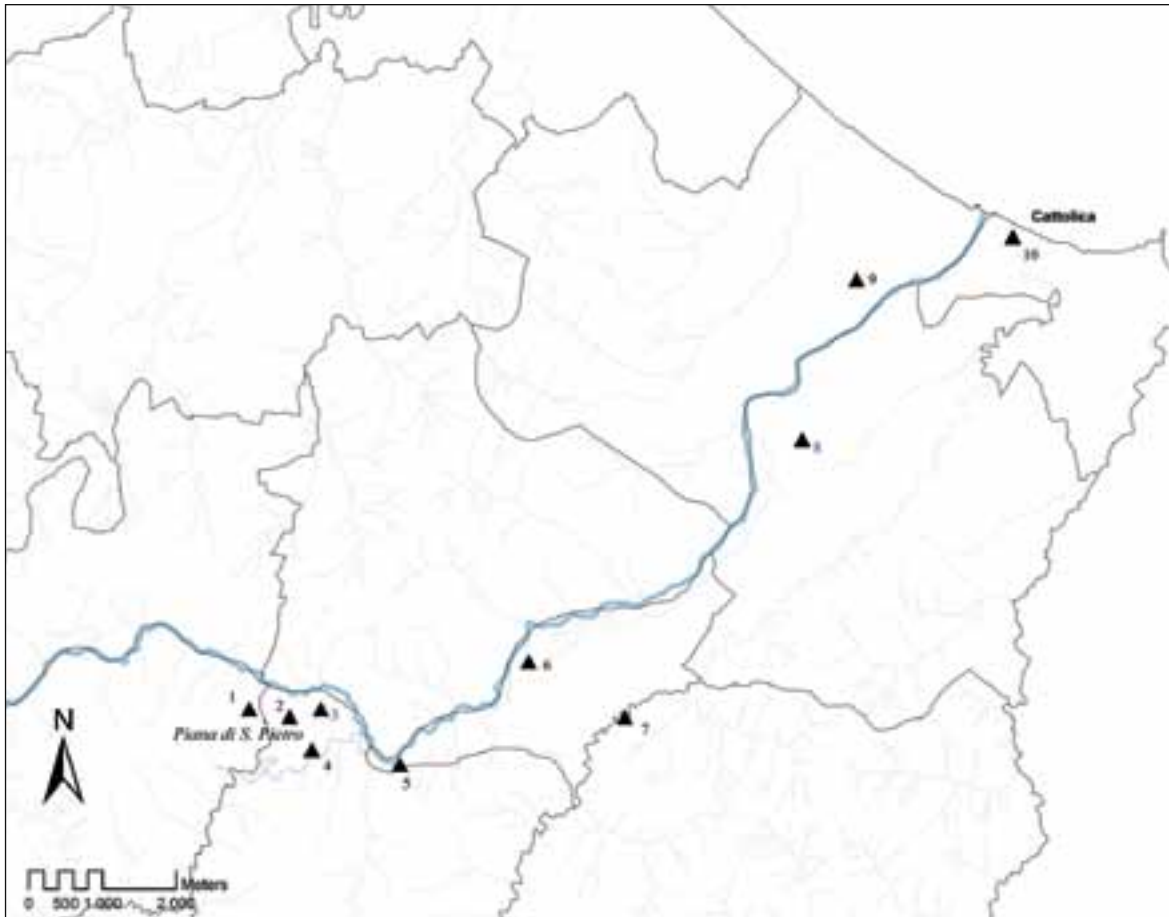


Fig. 5 – Villas found in Valconca territory.

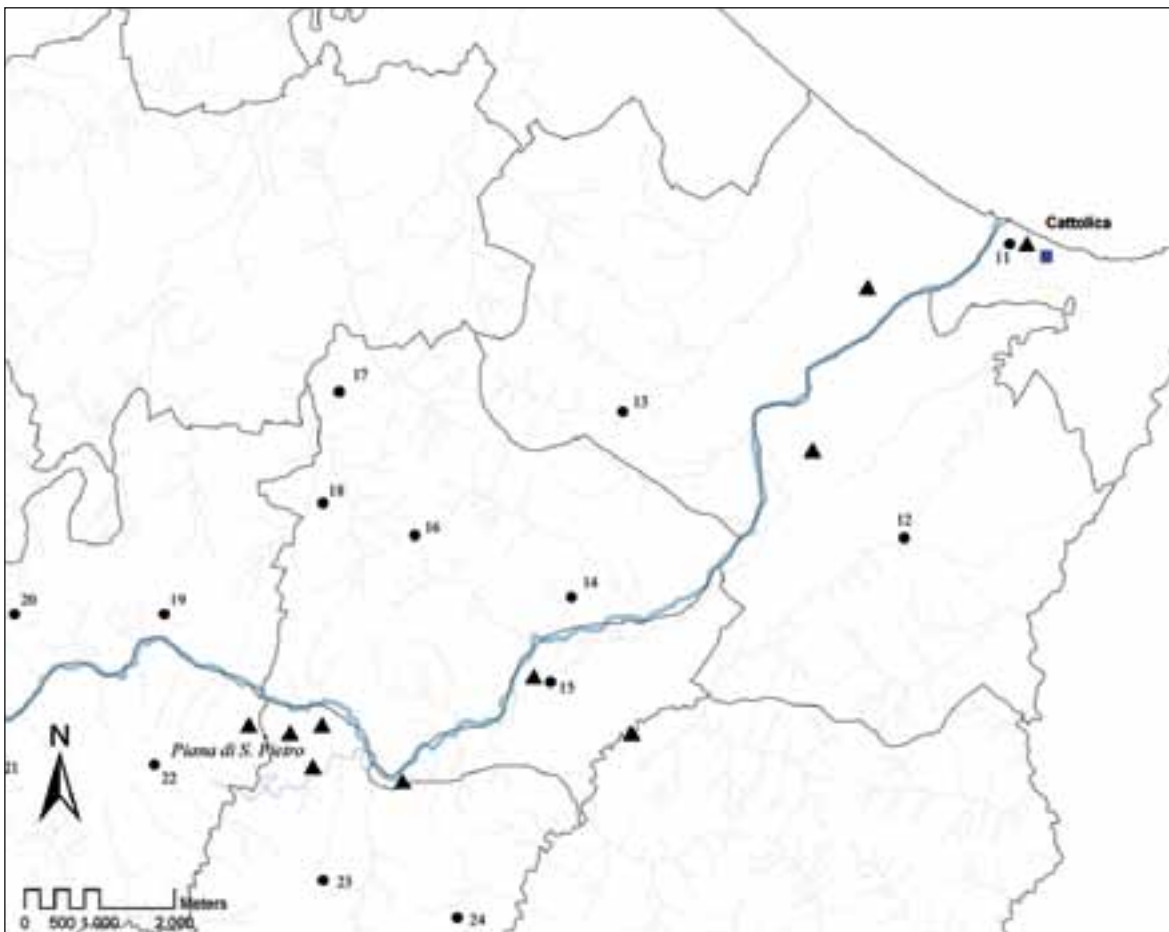


Fig. 6 – Villas and castles testified in Valconca territory (archaeological sources).

The landscape during the roman period

The data confirm the general trend of the ancient landscape of the Middle and Low Valley of the River Conca, where many finds point to a sparse settlement with an intense series of close private enclosures (fig. 5), like many other fertile valleys, between the late republican period and the imperial age. The most famous in this territory are the villas of St. Giovanni in Marignano, Morciano, Misano and Saludecio (SANTORO BIANCHI 1979; GHIROTTI 1982; FONTEMAGGI, PIOLANTI 1998, pp. 79-81, 86; DELUCA 2004, pp. 21-31; MONTEBELLI 2007, pp. 111 - 130). The site of San Pietro in Cotto seems to suggest the realization of an agglomerate of villas, similar to the suburban areas close to Forum Livii and Forum Popilii in Romagna (FONTEMAGGI, PIOLANTI 1998, p. 91).

Through the main road it guaranteed the marketing of the products towards urban centres, particularly Ariminum and other coastal sites. It is known that this area was connected with an intense net of roads for rural\urban communications, that followed in many cases prehistoric paths. The most important street that crossed this territory was a ramification of the Flaminia coming from the south through Acqualagna, Urbino, Tavoleto, Montefiore in Conca, Coriano, connecting the Piana di San Pietro with Rimini (IONI 2004, pp.

56-57). This important connections that directed the trend of the settlement in the first imperial age, determined the birth of groups of independent farms and villas that gave tributes to the major owners. Much more of these sites were also occupied during the 5th century, when the entire region got the benefit of the new Imperial see in Ravenna (CIRELLI 2010).

From villa to castle

A different way of rural organization connected the many small farms that continued to occupy this valley during the early Middle Age, when much more of the settlements of this territory gave tributes to the Archbishop of Ravenna. This area is well known through the written sources in the time, thanks to the many 10th century documents of the Ravennate Archives (MANCASSOLA 2008, pp. 215-216). The most important medieval centers of The Middle Age like Gemmano are still mentioned in the 11th century as *fundi* (1059 AD: TONINI 1856, pp. 531-535, n. 53). In these rural contracts the birth of new independent centres of the elites, for instance castles, is not represented, unlike other zones of the Central Italy, except from *Castrum Conke*, attested by a 10th century document (CB, p. 40, n. 76. LOMBARDI 1982, pp. 155-156; MANCASSOLA fc), even if other scholars believe that an undated con-

Tab.1 Castles in the low Valconca valley

N	TOPONYM	EARLIEST WRITTEN SOURCE	FIRST OWNER	ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS
11	Castrum Conche	10 th c. (969 AD)	Church of Montefeltro	Destroyed (Monte Vici – borgo S. Giorgio)
12	Castrum S. Johannis in Marignano	12 th c. (1156 AD)	Church of Rimini	Destroyed (Castelvechio)
13	Castrum Azine	11 th c. (1059 AD)	Everardo of Rimini	Destroyed (Monte Castellaro)
14	Castrum Sancti Clementis	10 th c. (962 AD) ?	Ulderico di Carpegna	15 th c. walls, Rocca (San Clemente)
15	Castrum Morciani	11 th c. (1014 AD)	Benno Bennoni	Partially destroyed (Morciano)
16	Castrum Agelli	10 th c. (962 AD) ?	Ulderico di Carpegna	15 th c. walls, Rocca (Agello)
17	Castrum Passani	13 th c. (1141 AD)	Church of Rimini	foundations (Passano)
18	Castrum Sancti Savini	13 th c. (1141 AD)	Church of Rimini	Walls, towers, gate (San Savino)
19	Castrum Crucis	13 th c.	Church of Ravenna	Destroyed (Croce)
20	Castrum Montis Culumbi	13 th c.	Church of Ravenna	Walls, two gates (Monte Colombo)
21	Castrum Marazani	13 th c.	Church of Ravenna	Walls, Rocca (Marazzano)
22	Castrum Gemmani	13 th c.	Church of Ravenna	Walls (Gemmano)
23	Castrum Montis Floris	12 th c. (1178 AD)	Church of Rimini	Walls, Rocca (Montefiore Conca)
24	Castrum Serbadonis	12 th c. (1111 AD)	Umberto Tebaldi	Foundations and structures (Serbadone, Monte Faggeto)

tract mention this important castle in the Carolingian period (BENERICETTI 2009, p. 134). All the territory seems to be still administrated by the church of Ravenna. There are some other castles, mentioned by a 10th century documents that could have been central places for independent aristocracy, as San Clemente and Agello, but the diploma that is preserved is not an authentic written source (BERARDI 1970, p. 89). We won't know, without archaeological excavations, their first chronology for the occupation of these sites. The dynamics for the choice of the settlement are similar to that observed in other Italian regions, as Tuscany and to

what happens to Montefeltro (AUGENTI *et al.* 2010).

Castles start to be the more diffuse as a type of settlement in Valconca during the 11th century (tab. 1) when are testified by the written sources sites like *Castrum Azine*, *Castrum Morciani* and by archaeological evidence Montefiore Conca. The new investigations in this territory will try to verify the first occupation of the later *castra* attested in Gemmano, Marazzano, San Savino Monte Colombo and Croce, everyone hold by the Church of Ravenna until the beginning of the 14th century.

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SAŽETAK

KRAJOLIK I NASELJA NA PODRUČJU VALCONCE U RAZDOBLJU IZMEĐU RIMSKOG DOBA I RANOG SREDNJEG VIJEKA

Enrico CIRELLI

Tijekom posljednje tri godine Odsjek za arheologiju Sveučilišta u Bologni pokrenuo je novi projekt iskopanja i istraživanja doline Valconca, na području Riminija. Ovo je područje bilo vrlo važno za širenje i učvršćivanje rimskoga gospodarstva u sjevernoj Italiji. Cijela je dolina bila uključena u intenzivno crpljenje sirovina i obrađivana, s brojnim vilama i zemljoradničkim posjedima.

Jedno od većih nalazišta identificirano je u Piani di San Pietro in Cotto, u blizini Gemmana. Ondje smo proveli dvije sezone iskopanja kako bismo shvatili veličinu i raspored nalazišta te kako bismo proučavali evoluciju ovoga naselja tijekom ranog srednjeg vijeka.

Na koncu iskopanja također smo cijelo nalazište pregledali magnetometrom, koji nam je ukazao na gustoću tla i očuvanost struktura.

Uz pomoć fotografija iz zraka također smo spoznali veličinu nalazišta. Unutar različitih uzoraka iskopa, identificirali smo termalno područje jedne ogromne vile smještene između rijeke Conca i presječene ulicom koja se spajala s Vijom Flaminijom. Ova je vila izgrađena tijekom 1. st. pr. Kr. i obnovljena krajem 1. st. po. Kr. Termalno područje korišteno je do 3. st. po. Kr. a potom je napušteno.

I druge zone ovoga nalazišta također su korištene tijekom kasne antike i u ranom srednjem vijeku, zajedno s područjem proizvodnje željeza (8. stoljeće).

Ovim projektom sada pokušavamo proučavati preobrazbe ovog ozemlja tijekom IX. i X. stoljeća, kada je ovaj krajolik obilježen podizanjem novih zankova na vrhovima susjednih brežuljaka i ponovnom promjenom uzoraka naselja s približavanjem srednjeg vijeka.