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## Area Studies in Northern Tuscany

### Local Research on Topography, Historical Toponomastics, and Traces of Ancient Roads between Val di Pesa and Val d’Orme<sup>1</sup>

The paper gives a short account on the topography and settlement geography of the study area. A first focus is laid on toponyms and the possible hints the naming of settlements can give. In a second step the paper highlights traffic routes and their traces in the region of Empoli and the valleys of Orme, Virginio and Pesa in Northern Tuscany which have been studied through geomorphological observations, reconnaissance and intensive surveys and the study of historical maps and other archival sources. After treating the main connection routes in Roman times like the via Quinctia the focus is laid on the minor roads in order to overcome the one-sided view on the larger Roman roads. By that a more detailed picture of the connectivity of the region studied is gained and the various historical layers of mobility are identified.

Keywords: *toponyms; traffic routes; landscapes of mobility; settlement geography*

## 1 Introduction

This paper on ancient topography, especially on roads and on ancient place names between the Val di Pesa and the Val d’Orme, is the result of a series of direct reconnaissance and cartographic analyses<sup>2</sup> which have been undertaken since 2007, resulting in two cultural resource and risk management plans of the municipalities of Montespertoli<sup>3</sup> and Empoli<sup>4</sup>, both in the province of Florence. The research subsequently continued in collaboration with the

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<sup>1</sup> Sincere thanks are due to the Department of Archaeological Heritage of Tuscany, specifically to Dr. Lorella Alderighi and Dr. Anna Rastrelli, who authorized my research, and the Archaeological Association of the Middle Valdarno for all the logistical help provided. Sincere thanks also are due to the University of Vienna and above all to my dear friend Günther Schörner for having invited me to present this study, and with whom I had the honour of collaborating on the archaeological research in Molino San Vincenzo. The Italian text has been translated by Dr. Davide Bianchi and Sarah Cormack and revised by Dominik Hagmann and Ralph Häussler. The character of an oral presentation by a leading protagonist of a local research initiative (Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno) was maintained.

<sup>2</sup> Most important cartographic sources: *Mappe dei Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, 1580–1595; *Catasto Lorenese* 1776 – 1834; online-database CASTORE – *catasti storici regionali*; *Tavole I.G.M.* 1:25000; municipal cadastral maps CTR 1:5000; use of satellite images (Google Earth, GEOscopio).

<sup>3</sup> This map was produced in collaboration with the archaeologists Sabrina Bartali and Sara Ugolini (2009).

<sup>4</sup> This map was produced in collaboration with the archaeologist Walter Maiuri (2012).

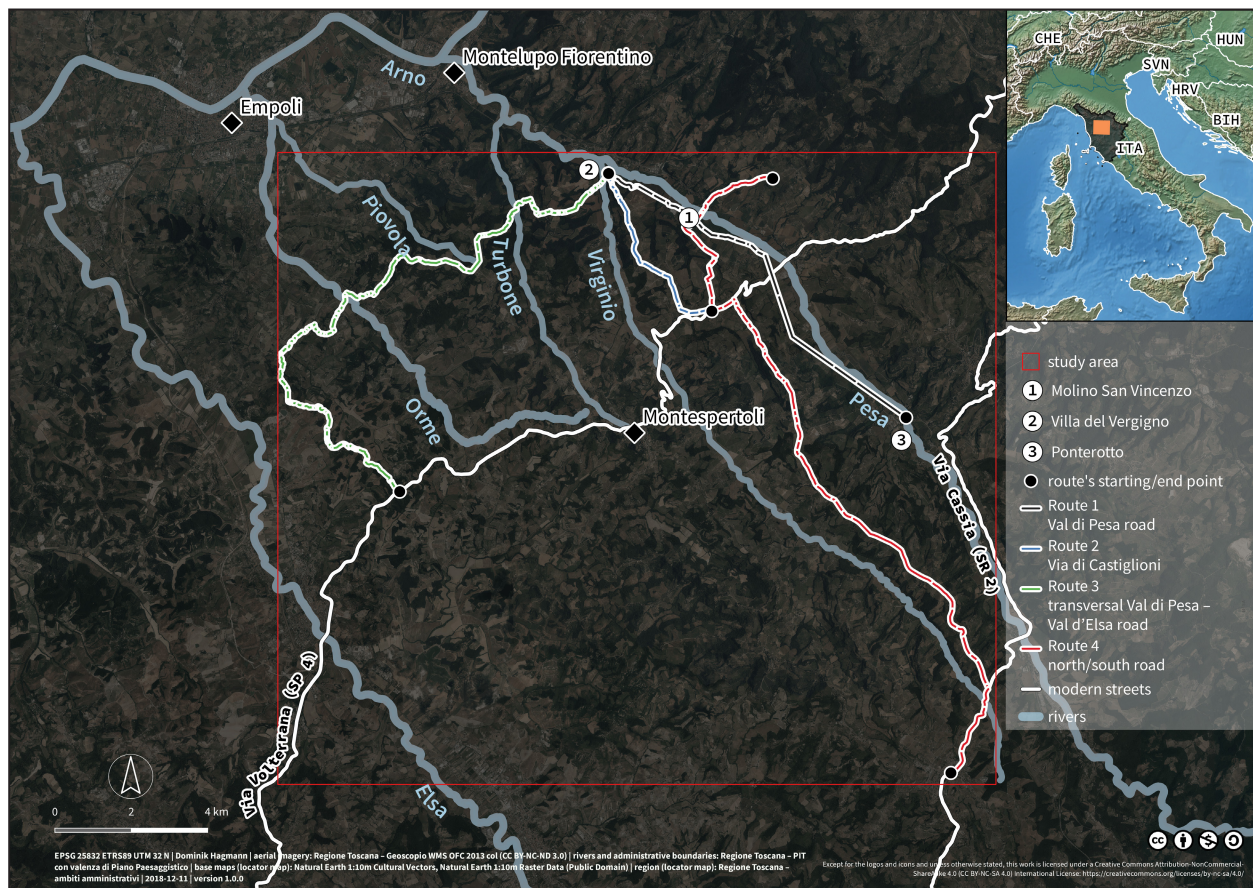


Fig. 1 Map of the study area (Dominik Hagmann)

University of Vienna.<sup>5</sup> All the work carried out to date has also aimed to help identify archaeological sites for future excavation. Furthermore, the studies are connected with the excavation area of Molino San Vincenzo, situated along the local paved road Via Viottolone, on the left bank of the river Pesa, which has provided clear traces of Etruscan/Roman-time settlements (including production sites). The research presented in this chapter is based on previous studies carried out on Roman centuriation during the triumvirate in Empoli's surroundings<sup>6</sup>, on studies in preparation of the 'International Conference on the Amphora of Empoli'<sup>7</sup>, and on studies related to the marble finds of Roman times in the Empoli area<sup>8</sup>.

All these clearly establish that the territory was organized in various distinct ways from Etruscan times to the Republican and imperial period and until Late Antiquity and subsequently up to the modern period.

<sup>5</sup> The surveying activities increased in the years 2014 – 2018, carried out by the University of Vienna.

<sup>6</sup> Ristori 1980; Ciampoltrini 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Alderighi, in press.

<sup>8</sup> Alderighi – Terreni 2016.

## 2 Characterization of the study area

The study area in present-day northern Tuscany comprises three Italian municipalities (from east to west): Montespertoli, Montelupo Fiorentino, and Empoli, all in the province of Florence. In terms of hydrology, the area is delimited by the lower course of the river Pesa to the east and the lower course of the river Orme – which as ‘torrente’ (creek) only seasonally contains water – to the west, whereby both are tributaries to the river Arno. There are numerous other creeks in the area, of which three are worth to mention (from east to west, all flowing in a north-south direction):

1. the torrente Virginio, meeting with the river Pesa near Ginestra Fiorentina.
2. the torrente Turbone, another left tributary to the Pesa.
3. the torrente Piovola, flowing near Empoli into the Orme.

To the north, the study area is delimited by the Arno plain and (in a more linear way) by the road at the Sottopoggio hills’ foot<sup>9</sup>. To the south, the study area is delimited by the via Volterrana, an ancient main road probably of Etruscan origin which crosses hilly terrain and connects Florence with the Val d’Elsa and Volterra. The via Cassia Nova, which – as a *diverticulum* – connected Siena with Florence, passed a few Roman miles away in the area of San Casciano, almost in parallel with the Via Volterrana (fig. 1).<sup>10</sup>

## 4 Major Roman settlements in the study area

Roman presence is attested from as early as the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, both in the urban and rural areas.<sup>11</sup> The main centre was indeed Empoli, which may be identified with the place named *In Portu* in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, as Empoli was an important port on the River Arno until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

Based on the current state of knowledge, the Roman settlement of Empoli is believed to have been formed on a pre-existing place of the late Etruscan period<sup>13</sup> and would appear to be characterized by a substantial populated center which spread beyond the present-day walls (15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century), at least to the west. Several *domus* have been identified, such as those found in the former Del Vivo glass factory, in the Piazza della Propositura, underneath the

<sup>9</sup> In Roman times crossed by the via consularis Quinctia, which probably had a forerunner in pre-Roman, Etruscan times. For the (re-)structuration by the consul T. Quinctius Flaminius in 123 BCE cf. Mosca 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Uggeri 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Pucci 1984; Ferretti et al. 1995.

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of the archaeological finds in the municipal area: Ferretti et al. 1995. New archaeological work in the centre of Empoli: Alderighi 2010; Pianezzoli: Alderighi – Pittari 2009; Avane: Alderighi et al.; Cotone: Alderighi – Terreni 2013; see here the contribution by H. Schörner; Pozzale: Alderighi – Terreni 2014. For the economic importance: Alderighi, in press; for the historical-artistic importance: Alderighi – Terreni 2016.

<sup>13</sup> As shown by the finds from the Hellenistic period of wall structures close to “domus”, walls, cisterns and pottery productions and “grey paste” of drinking cups and fragments of bucchero from Vulci as in the former Del Vivo glass factory excavations (outside the Medici walls) in 1991/94 and the excavations beneath Piazza della Propositura in 1999/2001. Cf. Rastrelli 2002; Pittari 2006.



pasticceria Beppino e Moreno, or beneath the town hall. Almost all of them were oriented towards the current road system. These *domus* consisted of several rooms, with painted plaster, including floral scenes, floors made from fragments of earthenware or brick mixed with lime and sand, and *opus sectile* with mosaic decoration, courtyards as well as thermal areas, separated from one another by alleys and paths. Places and possible public use areas were identified next to the Piazzetta della Propositura at the complex of the Collegiata Sant'Andrea Empoli and the Palazzo Ghibellino/vicolo dei Carbonai where a sacred area<sup>14</sup> as well as the seat of the ruling power might have been located. All these places appear to have transformed in several phases, from the mid-imperial period to the late Middle Ages.

Aside from residential areas and public spaces, zones where artisanal activities like pottery and (perhaps) glass making took place, are equally known. Considering the distribution of Empoli-type amphorae throughout the western and central Mediterranean basin, this production had certainly attained a certain level of surplus that influenced the entire regional economy, including activities related to the distribution of these vessels both by river and road.<sup>15</sup> The Roman settlement of Empoli was linked to a series of secondary river landing places – all archaeologically verifiable –, such as Avane, Riottoli, Vitiana, and Pagnana, which were connected by shipping traffic with the *Portus Pisanus* as well as by a highly developed network of secondary roads supporting the principal main roads.<sup>16</sup>

Another river port mapped on the *Tabula Peutingeriana* is named *ad Arnum*, a few miles between the *Portus Pisanus* and Florence (*Florentia Tuscorum*), which has not been precisely localized<sup>17</sup>. The vicinity of the two sites *In Portu* and *Ad Arnum* and the ample archaeological evidence in the region attests the commercial flows along the Arno – still attested in the present day in the entire region comprising Empoli and Limite Sull'Arno, Bibbiani, and La Torre at the municipality of Capraia e Limite.<sup>18</sup>

## 5 Tracing toponyms

In addition to archaeological investigations also ancient place names were studied.<sup>19</sup> Thus some of the place names reveal a distinct Roman origin such as, Montagnana (*Montanius*), Martignanola (*Martinius*), Tartaglianola (*Tertullianus*), Paterno ('father's farm'), Poppiano (from *gens Poppeia*), Petrognano (*Petronius*), Rignallo (*Herennianus*), Vestigliana (*Vestilius*), Verdigliana (*Virdilius*), Striano (*Histriani*), Livizzano (*Laevidius* or *Laevinus*), Maiano (*Marianus*), Cotone (of uncertain origin: *cos*, *cotis* or from *gens Cothu* [Etruscan], or from *Kothon*),

<sup>14</sup> Tradition speaks of a temple dedicated to Minerva, cf. Lazzeri 1873.

<sup>15</sup> Alderighi, in press.

<sup>16</sup> Maiuri 2006.

<sup>17</sup> To be identified in Bibbiani, in the municipality of Limite sull'Arno or near Montelupo Fiorentino?

<sup>18</sup> Maiuri 2013; Schreck 2018, 185-188. This insights are based on the numerous archaeological finds of the 1980s and 1990s. Sincere thanks are due to the research activities carried out in cooperation with the Department of Archaeological Heritage and by the Archaeological Association of the Middle Valdarno, to which almost all the discoveries are to be attributed.

<sup>19</sup> Pieri 1919.



Piazzano (*Platianus*), Barilli (*Varillus*), Pugliano (*Appulius*) and so on, which may be derived from names of Roman *praedia*. For other toponyms, a more indirect connection may suggest a Roman origin, for example, Al Bagno, Bagnolo, and Bagnaia (all referring to baths), Villa (self-evident), Pulica ('public road'), Fornace ('furnace'), Torre, Torrino, and Torricella (towers as names for buildings in general). However, there are also more recent toponyms, including religion-related names like San Bartolomeo, San Antonio, San Donato, San Frediano, Canonica, and others. Further, geographic/environmental toponyms, such as Il Piano, Prunellaia, Le Lame, Ripa, Leccia, Poggio, or Poggiarello, are also worth mentioning. All toponyms indicate that people continuously engaged with this landscape at least since Etruscan times, forming a multi-layered palimpsest.

## 6 Economic characteristics

Although much archaeological research still needs to be done, a dense network of production sites, both located in the bottom of the valley and on the ridges, can already be attested for early Imperial times (or even earlier) times. This network even persisted after the end of the Roman Empire, as reconnaissance surveys<sup>20</sup> have unequivocally shown, and sites of the *incastellamento* period, such as Castiglioni, Cotone, Montecastelli, and Martignana, may date back to Roman times.<sup>21</sup> Most significant for the Roman period is the local production of wine amphorae, like the Spello-type amphorae (formerly known as 'Ostia III').<sup>22</sup> This type was the forerunner for the even more important Empoli-type amphora, the 'type fossil' for surplus wine production in the region.<sup>23</sup> This amphora, once known as type 'Ostia IV – fig. 278', was produced from the middle/end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD until (at least) the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the production was still active at the height of the Lombard occupation, attesting that the region was commercially fertile even in one of the politically most critical periods.

## 7 Road networks

The productivity of a densely occupied and productive region can be mirrored by the road network in that area. Various communication routes are required that link the urban center with its hinterland as well as interconnect the different rural sites, thus forming a fully-fledged '*integrated system of production*'.

Aside from the already mentioned *via Quinctia*,<sup>25</sup> as the most important road, one can recognize a dense network of communication routes, though to a great extent unexplored, and a series of itineraries, attested by several archaeological finds and toponymic references. Furthermore, they can partly still be identified as traffic routes, streets for regular traffic, and

<sup>20</sup> See above.

<sup>21</sup> For a concise summary of this period of transition: Francovich – Hodges 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Lapadula 1997; Schreck 2018, 162f.

<sup>23</sup> Alderighi, in press; see also the contribution by V. Schreck to this volume.

<sup>24</sup> Recovery from the kiln discovered in the Montefiori shop, Empoli, under study by Prof. F. Cantini, University of Pisa.

<sup>25</sup> See n. 9.

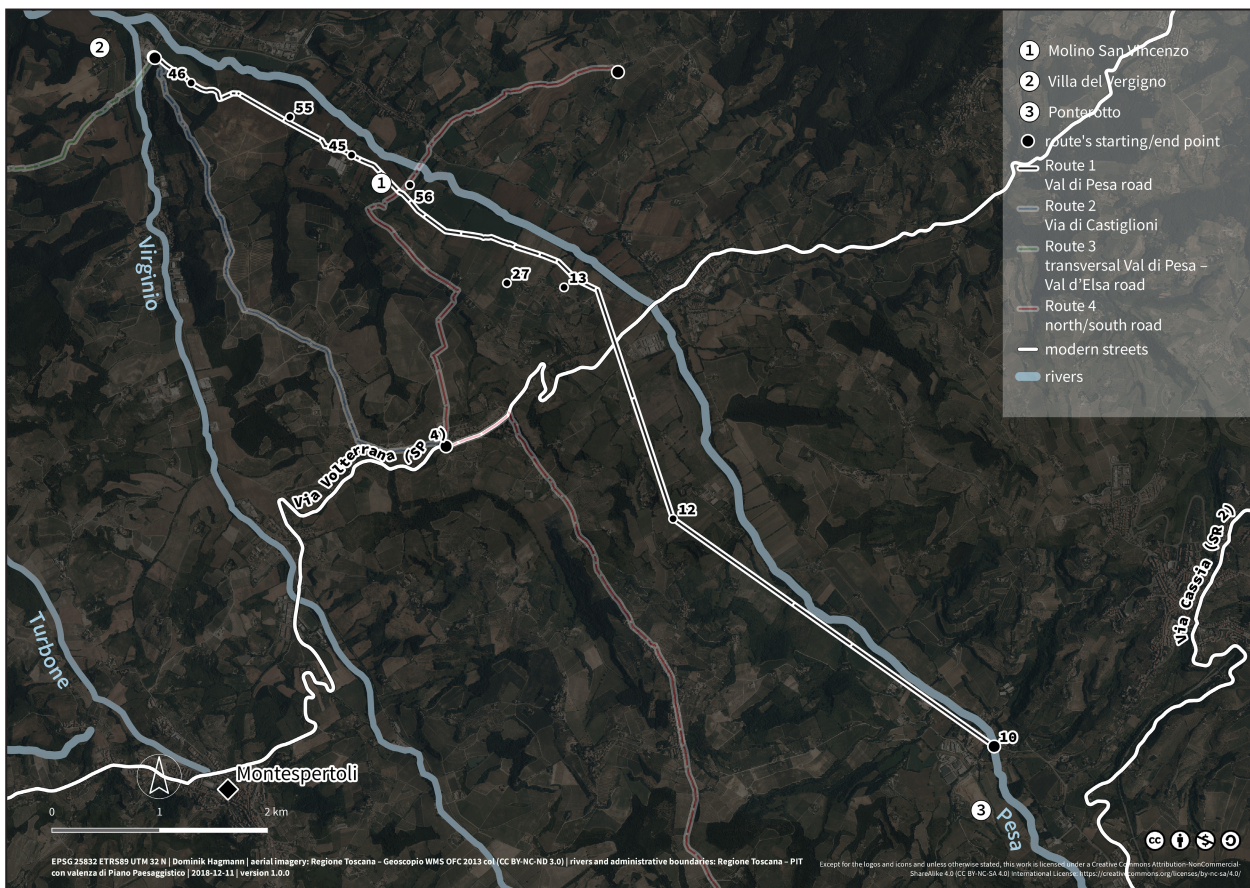


Fig. 2 Route 1 – Val di Pesa road (L. Terreni; Dominik Hagmann)

simple tracks for agricultural purposes today. For many of these routes, especially those in an eastward/westward direction, connecting the Pesa valley with the Orme valley, research is only at a preliminary stage.<sup>26</sup> Four routes are of particular interest:

### Route 1 – Val di Pesa road

The road runs along the bottom of the valley between the junction of the Virginio with the Pesa up to the site of Ponterotto di San Casciano, at the point where the present-day provincial Certaldo Road crosses the River Pesa. The route is signposted by the following toponyms: località le Masse, via Bartolomeo Intieri, località Il Piano, località Le Case, via Viottolone, località Molino San Vincenzo, località Lama di Sotto, località Lama di Sotto e di Sopra, and località Pian di Pesa (fig. 2). Further, the road heads to Ponterotto and the municipality of San Casciano. The toponyms are almost all geographical.

<sup>26</sup> I will list two briefly here because they have been the object of research by the University of Vienna in recent years; I will describe one in particular, which is deserving of attention as it has yielded interesting archaeological finds along the route. This route requires in-depth research in the short term, and it has been briefly presented in June 2018 at a workshop at the University of Vienna.



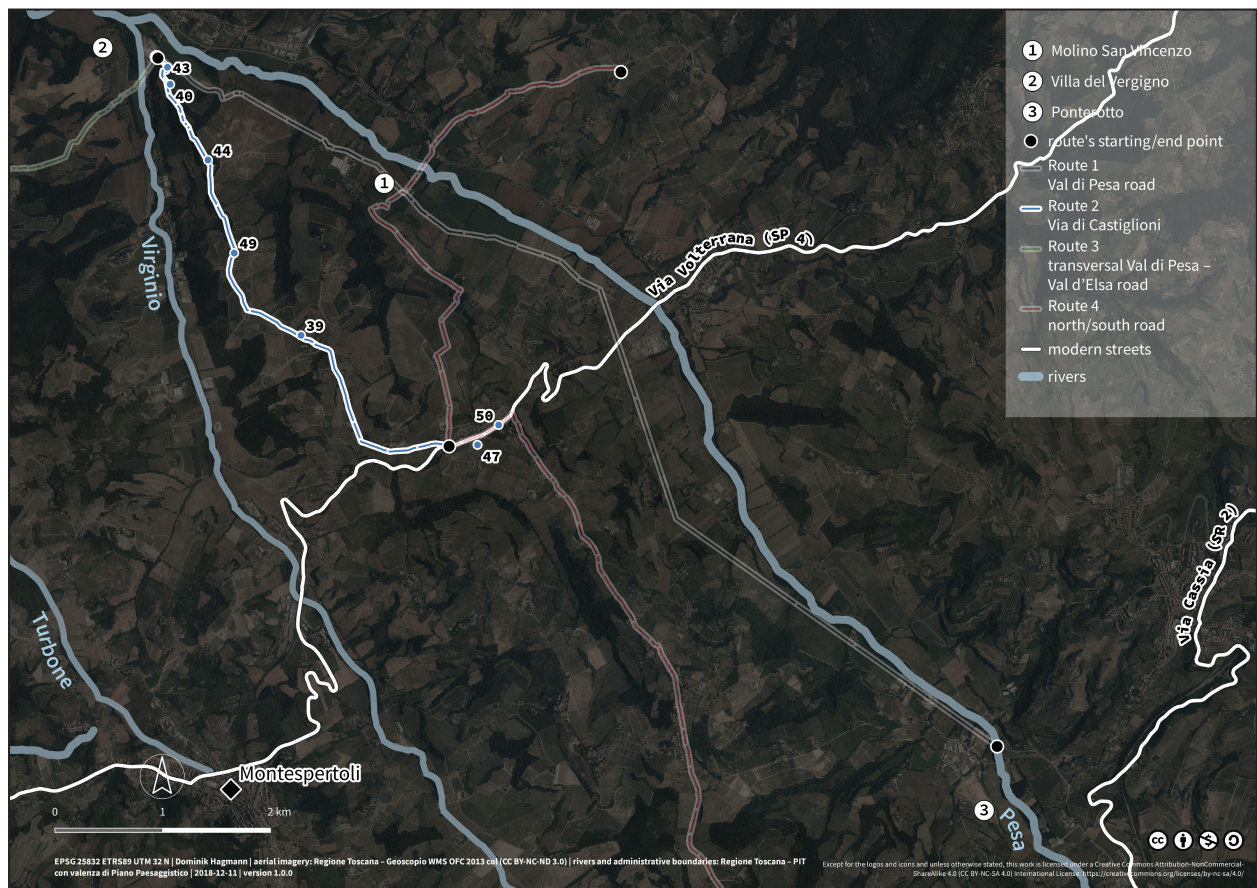


Fig. 3 Route 2 – Via di Castiglioni (L. Terreni; Dominik Hagmann)

## Route 2 – Via di Castiglioni

The *Via di Castiglioni*, which winds from north to south on the ridge facing the right bank of the Virginio, starts precisely where the Virginio enters the Pesa. It connects the valley of the river Pesa with the via Volterrana to the south. Castiglioni was a fortified complex created to control this point of confluence, presenting strong analogies with the *incastellamento* of Il Cotone near Empoli, which guarded the Orme at the point where it merges with the Arno. Interesting toponyms are il Bagno to the north at the start of the route. La via di Castiglioni follows the river Virginio and today's *via di Castiglioni* (formerly known as Strada di Campiglia), passing through Al Bagno, Villa di Castiglioni, and Podere Pozza until it reaches Montagnana (fig. 3).

## Route 3 – transversal Val di Pesa – Val d'Elsa road

This route stretches for about 12 to 13 km from the Virginio valley almost to its junction with the Pesa,<sup>27</sup> near the crossroads in an area called La Fornace, between the via di Castiglioni and the provincial road of Virginio (SP 80). The toponyms have practically remained the same since the Catasto Lorenese (figs. 3 and 4). The route may be characterized as follows: Anselmo,

<sup>27</sup> Very close to the so-called Villa Romana del Virginio.



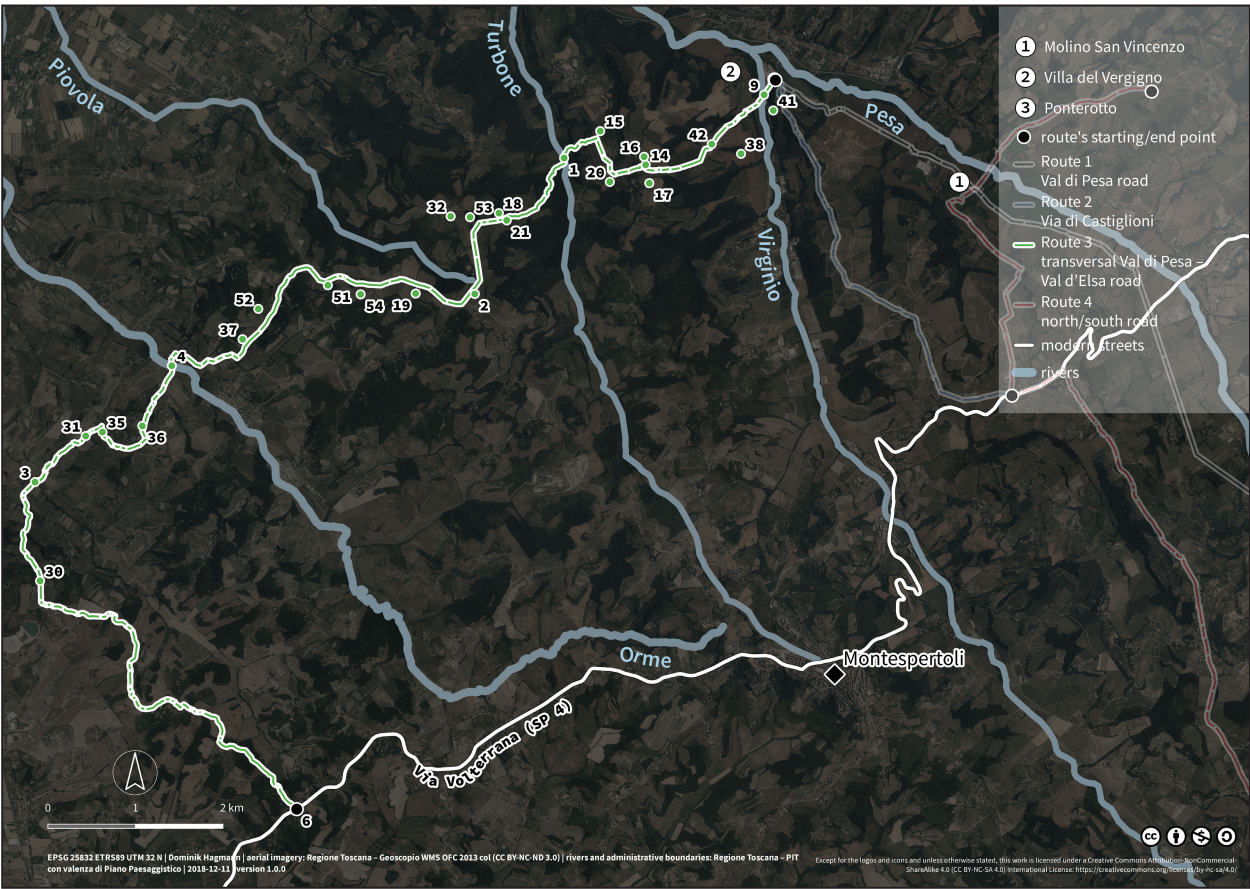


Fig. 4 Route 3 – transversal Val di Pesa – Val d’Elsa road (L. Terreni; Dominik Hagmann)



Fig. 5 Two pottery kilns on the trasversale val di Pesa – val d’Elsa (L. Terreni)





Fig. 6 Route 4 – north/south road (L. Terreni; Dominik Hagmann)

via del Virginio (old), La Villa, Rignallo (*Herennianus*), Livizzano (*Laevidius* or *Laevinus*), località Pulica<sup>28</sup> (from *Strada Publica*), and Il Masso. Then the road crosses Turbone creek and reaches out to podere Lastrino, La Torricella, località Montecastello/Bottinaccio<sup>29</sup> and crosses the via della Leccia. Then the route continues to Poggio dei Mati<sup>30</sup>, fattoria La Leccia, Terrarossa, Il Torrino/Striano<sup>31</sup> (*Histrinus*), via della chiesa di Martignana (also locally known as via San Bartolomeo), Castello di Martignana<sup>32</sup> (*Martinius*), le Tinaie di Martignana and then cross the Orme river. Then, the route continues to the Chiesa di Santa Maria Oltorme, Via Poggio Piedi Il Tratto (*Podium Petri*), via di Barilli (*Varillus*), crosses the Ormicello stream and then continues to Pugliano (*Appulius*) in the direction of Volterra, crossing the ‘via del sale’<sup>33</sup> (‘salt road’) in Val d’Elsa.

#### Route 4 – north/south road

Crossing Route 1 at Molino San Vincenzo, route 4 runs from the right bank of the river Pesa along the ridge of the north-south hills: it runs from via del Lago to San Vincenzo a Torri where it crosses the river Pesa (fig. 6). Along the via San Vincenzo it passes the località Molino San Vincenzo and joins the via San Vincenzo again. Then the route continues to località Le Borsaie, Via Volterrana, località Montagnana, via Cipollatico, via Romita, San Quirico in Collina, Lucignano, località San Pancrazio, Tavarnelle (*Tabernulae*), and the modern via Cassia (SR 2).

### 8 Conclusion and outlook

The many roads and byways form a ‘spider’s web’ of roads throughout the entire area; these connections are of high importance. This system of ‘oblique’ and ridge roads may go back to Etruscan times. However, an overlapping of the Roman period settlements can also be identified, as it is indicated by toponyms and numerous archaeological remains like smaller production sites, such as pottery kilns (fig. 5). In the study area, a continuity of settlement structures and the maintenance of a system of minor traffic routes can be attested; in other areas, such

<sup>28</sup> In Pulica, in the direction of Via di Lungopresso, in the municipality of Montelupo Fiorentino, a large amount of pottery sherds was recovered by the Archaeological Association of the Middle Valdarno (which then also included Montelupo, an area which then became part of a separate archaeological association) in the 1970s. This pottery included blackslip ware (especially open shapes such as kylikes), Roman amphoras, including Empoli amphoras, stamped Italian Terra sigillata (Ateius) and medieval pottery. The original – and unpublished – material is stored at the Archaeological Association of the Middle Valdarno, Empoli.

<sup>29</sup> Surface finds of fragments dating to the Roman and Medieval periods (unpublished).

<sup>30</sup> Tumulus, reported in the Map of Archaeological Risk of the municipality of Montespertoli. Finds of Roman coins and of an Etruscan tomb are reported (unpublished).

<sup>31</sup> Large archaeological area, with finds of Etruscan tombs from the archaic to the Hellenistic periods, two “cappuccina” tombs from the Roman period and numerous well tombs, again from the Roman period.

<sup>32</sup> Medieval settlement of the Conti Ravegnani of Florence (family of Roman origin, related to the Conti Guidi). It shows interesting potential as a continuously occupied settlement from the classical period onwards and has been the subject of research by the University of Vienna, which carried out a survey at the site in summer 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Equals to the via Volterrana (SP 4).



traffic routes were abandoned entirely in favour of a system of roads at the valleys' bottoms. It is too soon, however, to draw definitive conclusions that have an extensive scientific basis. Widespread reconnaissance, an in-depth study of the toponyms, geographic prospecting, and targeted excavations will be required. This contribution is merely the first step on a long journey.

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