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Lorella Alderighi — Agnese Pittari

The settlement of Ponterotto (San Casciano in Val di Pesa/FI)

The *Mansio* and the So-called *Villa Rustica* A new Interpretation

The Roman complex at Ponterotto in the Pesa valley comprises a series of buildings, dating from the 1st to the 6th century CE. The paper gives a detailed report on the results of the excavations conducted 2010 till 2012 which resulted in the identification of six periods. The entire architectural complex has undergone remarkable transformations both in function and design. Although commonly recognized as Roman villa some anomalies with respect to the 'classic' model of a Roman productive villa are recognized. Thus, also based on the study of the materials found, a new interpretation of Ponterotto as mansio is proposed.

Keywords: *villa, mansio; agricultural production; working implements and installations*

1 The archaeological area of Ponterotto

In the small present-day settlement of Ponterotto (meaning *Broken Bridge* in Italian) on the left bank of the Pesa river, a series of structures belonging to various buildings of different dates and functions was unearthed beneath the alluvial fill. After catastrophic events in Late Antiquity and early medieval times, these structures were abandoned and stripped of all reusable materials down to the foundations (fig.1). The settlement was discovered and excavated when the Laika Caravans Spa factory was built to whom we owe the excavation's funding[1].

2 Roman settlements in the Val di Pesa

Besides Ponterotto, other agricultural and residential settlements dating to the imperial period have been identified by surveys and occasional findings in the Pesa valley in the territory of present-day San Casciano, such as Pieve Vecchia in S. Giovanni in Sugana. The finds mostly consist of clay water pipes and building materials as well as pottery; a marble inscription, which was reused as a threshold in an old church, may indicatethe existence of a tomb or necropolis near the main road which runs along the river Pesa[2]. Near the valley were the Roman

[1] The excavation, under the direction of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Toscana, represented by the author, Lorella Alderighi, was carried out from 2010 till 2012 by the archaeologists Agnese Pittari (site manager) and Donato Colli; members of the Mediterranean Archaeology Society (SIAM) and the Gruppo Archeologico Scandiccese participated for the entire duration of the excavation and collaborated in studying the findings.

[2] Recently Alderighi 2016.

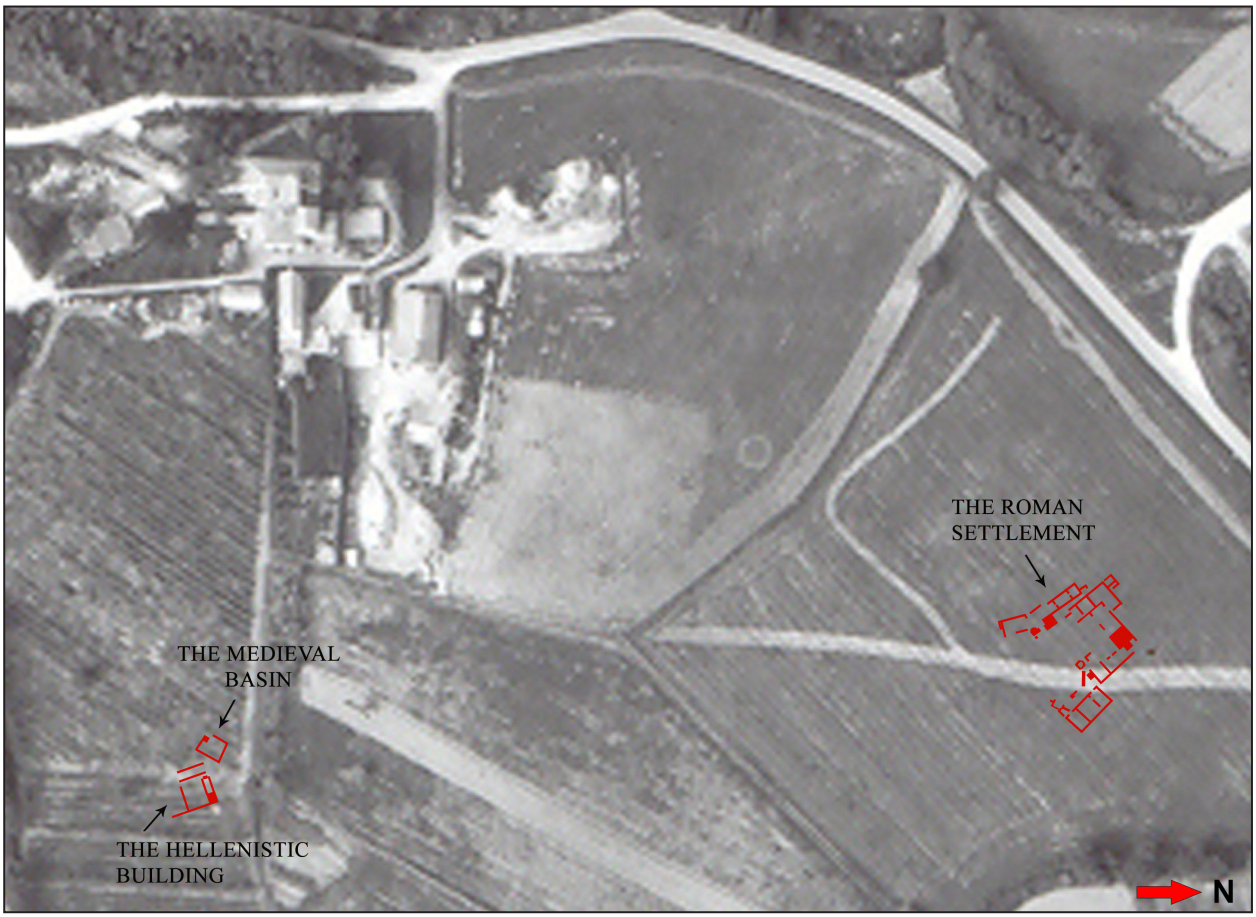

Fig. 1 Aerial photograph of the Pontorotto area with indication of the Etruscan and Roman buildings (A. Pittari)

settlements of Mucciana[3] and Sant'Andrea a Fabbrica, a residential and/or production site[4]. A further residential and agricultural complex was located at Murlo-Senecchio, on the right bank of the Virginio where the torso of a marble *togatus* was discovered reused in the wall of a house. There, we also find the remains of a rural villa with structures in *opus mixtum*, pottery, and coins dating from the Augustan period to the 3rd century CE[5]. Remains of Roman structures were also identified in San Pancrazio; in Santa Cristina in Salivolpe, near Ponterotto, roof tiles, fragments of coarse ware pottery, a loom weight, and iron slag were found[6]. Very close to Ponterotto, on a hill overlooking the river Pesa, tombs were found in the 19th century when the family chapel of the Podere Sorbigliano was demolished[7]. Along the river Pesa, outside the municipal boundaries of San Casciano, other rural settlements are also located on hill slopes

3 Findings: architectural elements, pottery: Alderighi 2015.
4 Unpublished site, under study.
5 The findings may belong to the necropolis of the villa; de Marinis 1982, 360-361; Chellini 1993, 120. 127 figs. 1-2; Alderighi - Catalli 2016.
6 AST Florence 3, prot. 6250 of 03/22/2004.
7 Carocci 1892, 154-155; Chellini 1993, 119.

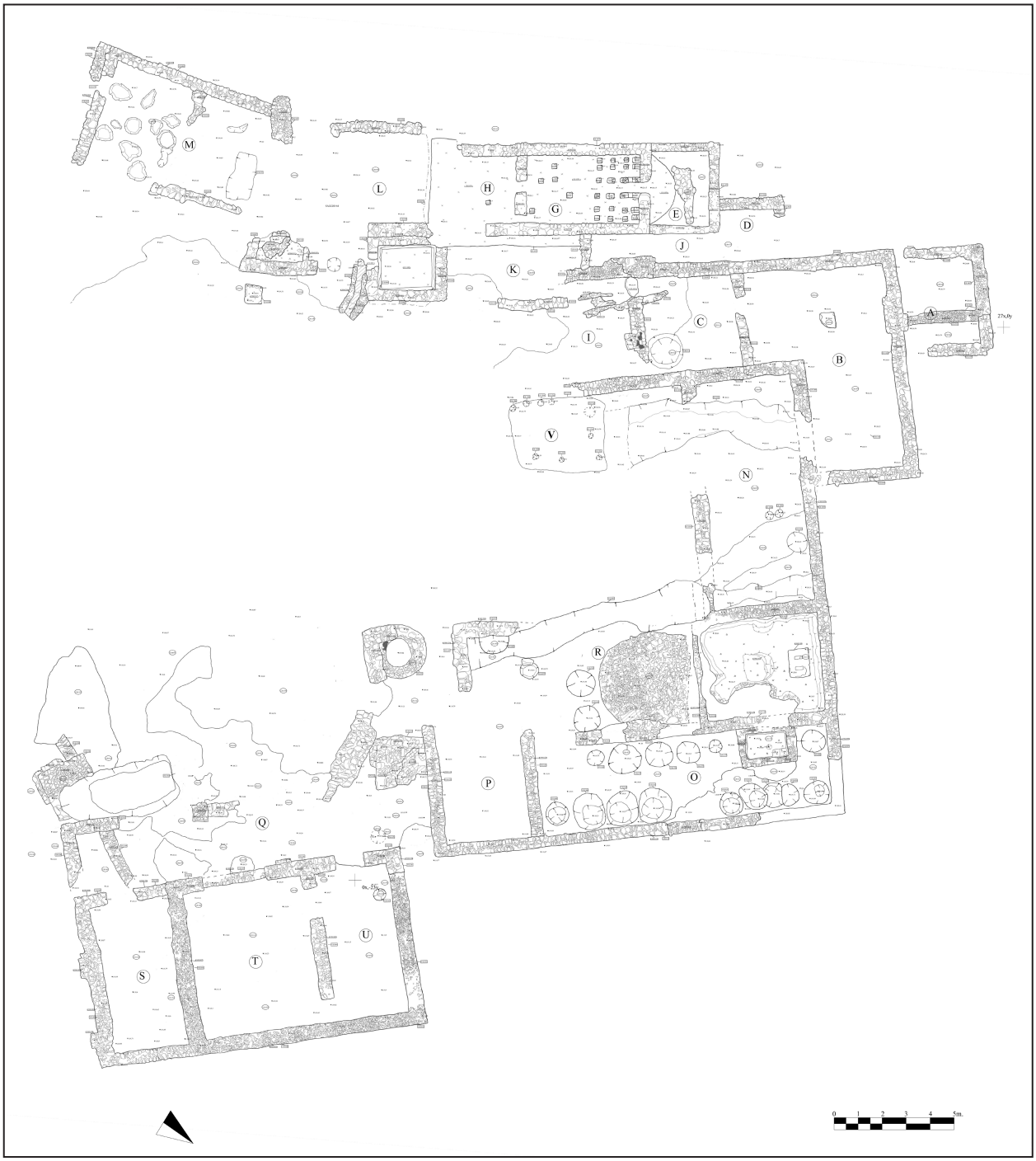

Fig. 2 Plan of the excavations of the Roman site (A. Pittari)

Fig. 3 The structures of the periods I, II, III (A. Pittari)

overlooking the river valley[8]. These include the site of Molino San Vincenzo in the municipality of Montespertoli[9]. In the case of the Roman complex of Ponterotto, the excavation show that the structures represent a mansio in use up to Late Antiquity. Evidence for agricultural production suggest a starting point in the Severan period. It was not possible to identify any residential sector that could be classified as pars urbana.

8 Alderighi - Terreni 2014.

9 See the corresponding contributions in this volume.

3 The excavation of the Roman area (fig. 2)

The oldest remains found during the excavations belong to the Hellenistic 'Etruscan' period[10]. Regarding the Roman period, which is of particular interest for this chapter, six chronological periods can be differentiated, ranging from the 1st/2nd century to the 6th century CE[11].

The Roman villa of Ponterotto stands in a strategic geographical position thanks to its proximity to the via Certaldese, the ancient road between the *ager Florentinus* and the *ager Volaterranus*[12]. The role of the river Pesa to the west of the villa is also fundamental: apart from being used for river transport, it has shaped the landscape by creating an alluvial plain, very suitable for establishing an agricultural settlement.

Period I (1st century CE): The first building (figs. 2-3)

The first building can be traced back to the 1st century CE and is only preserved partially due to building activities related to the subsequent building phase which included the removal of entire sections of the walls, which were further damaged by robbing of the material in the 15th century in order to create a water basin.

The orientation of this period-I building is NNE-SSW, with a variation of about 25° towards the east compared with the walls of the architectural complex having a NE-SW direction. The best-preserved structure is a square-shaped pebble floor with remains of a single wall structure. Concerning the activities that took place during this phase of the building, two hearths were identified, placed directly on the ground. In addition, a part of the occupation layer has been found consisting of soil with small pebbles and numerous pottery sherds, bones, fragments of charcoal, and bricks or tiles. No archaeological traces have been found that could clearly indicate the function and purpose of this building.

Period II (1st/2nd to the beginning 3rd century CE): The mansio or stopping place (fig. 2; fig. 3)

Between the 1st and the 2nd centuries CE, a *mansio* with associated baths was constructed at Ponterotto. This building had three rectangular rooms overlooking a portico covered by a single-pitched roof, supported by two quadrangular columns, and closed by two angular walls, at least on the SW side. As indicated by the finding of roof tiles in room (S), the building had a tiled roof. This room is the only one found at a lower level, about 50 cm lower than the neighboring features. Numerous iron tools were discovered below the collapsed roof, including axes, hatchets, picks, knives, etc. allowing the interpretation as a tool store[13].

10 Alderighi - Pittari 2012.
11 Alderighi - Pittari 2014.
12 See the contribution of L. G. Terreni in this volume.
13 Alderighi - Venturini 2013, 90-91.

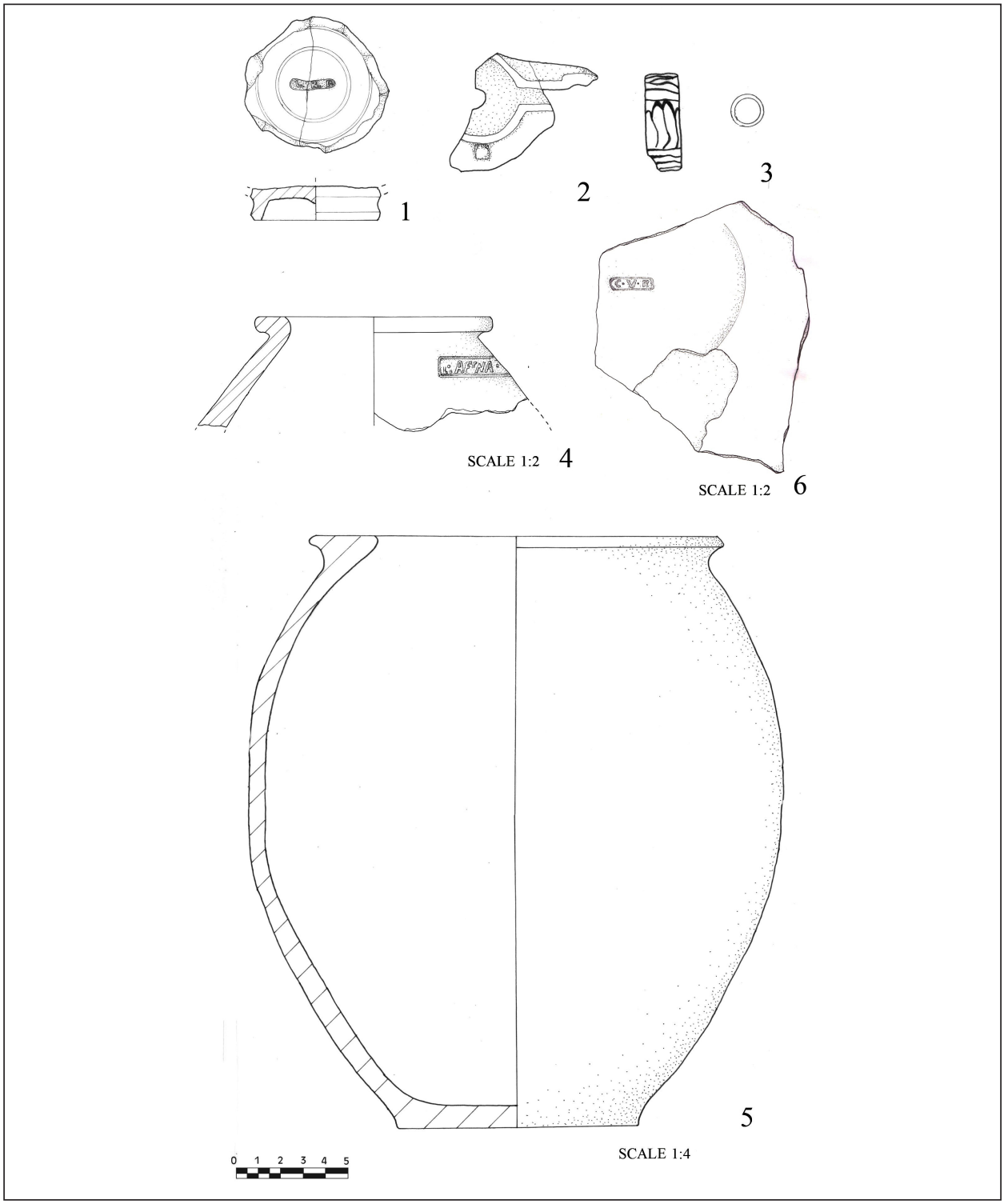

Fig. 4 Period II ***no. 1*** *bottom of a plate: terra sigilata tardo-italica*
no. 2 *lamp*
no. 3 *mouth of a glass unguentarium*
nos. 4–5 *dolia*
no. 6 *stamped tile*

(A. Pittari)

In the portico, near the northern corner, a small, wholly buried dolium used to store food or collect water was found.

The interpretation of the central space (T) and the NE space (U) is difficult. Only the floors made of beaten earth and pebbles are preserved. However, a hypothesis for the function of one of the two rooms can be provided: the discovery of the lower part of an "hourglass" millstone made from tephrite below the collapsed walls of the portico indicates that, presumably, the millstone was located in one of these two spaces. Later it was moved to the outside when it was no longer used. The building, however, was destroyed by fire soon after the millstone was disposed off.

In general, the number of artefacts related to agricultural production is not sufficient to characterize the building of period II as a farm; the possible presence of a mill does not necessarily imply the large-scale production of grain, but only the need to have a substantial quantity of flour available, a requirement that could be due to the presence of a tavern inside the *mansio*. A fire, which marked the end of period II, originated in the storeroom and spread all over the whole building, thus destroying the *mansio*. The structures were not rebuilt but stripped to the foundation level. Since the building was erected on clayey underground, the construction of buttresses was necessary, especially in the east. The subsequent buildings were built on the nearby gravel terrace, which provided a much more stable subsoil.

The finds belonging to the second period (fig. 4) consist of fine tableware, including an open plate of late terra sigillata with a planta pedis stamp reading L.R.P. (Oxé 2000 no. 1690, 46) of *L. Rasinius Pisanus* datable to 50-120 CE. Besides, a fragment of a Firmalampe (Bailey N III), datable to the first half of the 2nd century CE, was found as well as a mouth of a unguentarium made from glass; due to the small size of the fragment, the identification of the shape (Harden 1) as a container for kohl (eye makeup) can only be hypothesized[14]. Among the finds of *opus doliare* is a fragment of a rim and wall with a stamp (11×3 cm), which is unfortunately not clearly legible – we can only hypothesize the following reading: L. (?) AESNA. (?). A small dolium (edge diameter 38 cm; base diameter 22 cm; max. diameter 48 cm; h. 54 cm.) was found buried up to its mouth inside space (Q). Tiles[15] made from the same fabric and identical morphological characteristics (60 × 44 × 5 cm) are left from room (S), as mentioned above. Many of them are stamped (reading C.V.R.) near one of the short sides; C.V.R. is thereby probably the abbreviation of the company's owner or – alternatively – the workshop's name[16].

In period II, relatively poor of archaeological finds, a group of iron objects, including work tools and a door lock (fig . 5), are particularly interesting. Their concentration in a small space in room (S) led to the idea of a shelf or suspension device on which the tools could be hung. Some of the finds belong to the daily equipment of a farmer, others perhaps to brick-producing activities. During the later reconstruction of the mansio and the levelling of the ruins, these tools presumably remained undetected. Among the iron objects , several tools used in agricul-

[14] Harden 1981.

[15] Shepherd 2007, 56 fig. 1 c. 59.60.

[16] Despite not finding a precise comparison, the stamp recalls those of the Augustan-Tiberian kilns of the Vingone, in particular those of C. Volasenna Romanus (Shepherd 2006, 257-260).

Fig. 5 Period II: the metal finds. ***no. 1*** *bident;* ***no. 2*** *billhook;* ***nos. 3–4*** *hatchetts;* ***nos. 5-6*** *keys;* **no. 7** *bolt;* ***no. 8*** *wedge or small anvil;* ***no. 9*** *awl;* ***no. 10*** *knife;* ***no. 11*** *8 nails;* ***no. 12*** *ring with bronze pendant (A. Pittari)*

Fig. 6 The baths. calidarium and tepidarium (A. Pittari)

ture can be recognized: a hoe (length of arm 17.5 cm; width 16 cm), usually used for breaking up the soil in stony ground, especially for planting olives and vines[17]; a billhook, missing its tip and the lower part with which it was attached to the handle (length max 19 cm; width at the throat 8 cm; blade h. 7.5 cm). This tool was used above all for pruning vines[18], but also for the maintenance of olive trees. Further finds include two small hatchets (10 cm long), a group of spanners, and eight nails (15 to 16.5 cm long), probably originating from the room's roof[19]. There was also a ring with a bronze pendant (height 4.5 cm; ring diameter 2.5 cm), perhaps part of a small set of scales, whose elements retain their original mobility.

A 2nd-century CE as (Marcus Aurelius or Antoninus Pius), a sestertius of Faustina minor (146 to 175 CE), and a *dupondius* of Commodus (177 to192 AD; type dated from 180 to 183 CE) confirm the proposed chronology based on the other finds.

Period III (1st/2nd to mid 4th century CE): The baths (fig.3; fig. 6)

The other building nucleus forming the *mansio* was the *balneum*, located in the SW area. Since they were not affected by the fire that destroyed the mansio's NE part , the *thermae* remained in operation until the middle of the 4th century CE, when they were involved in another and more vast fire that destroyed almost the entire architectural complex, including the *pars rustica*.

The *balneum* is of modest size, only suitable for a small number of people. For that reason, it is limited to the basic spaces of a Roman bath: the *caldarium,* the *tepidarium*, and the *frigidarium,* in addition to the *praefurnium,* necessary for heating the entire building complex.

The baths' masonry structures, presumably simply plastered in white, were built with pebbles and fragments of tiles joined by large lime mortar. At the time of the discovery, the state of preservation of the building was very poor, as no traces of the pavement had been preserved. C*alidarium* and *tepidarium* were divided by a wall, of which two stretches of the foundations are preserved. The *suspensurae* survived almost exclusively in the NW section of the *caldarium*, while in the *tepidarium* only one *bessalis* brick remains in place as evidence of the presence of *pilae* (fig.6).

The area most affected by spoliation in late antiquity is the *frigidarium*: only the bottom of a rectangular tank is preserved in *cocciopesto*, covered with hydraulic lime mortar. A slight slope from the bottom of the tank towards a circular hole in the wall face allowed the water to flow out: a *fistula plumbea* was undoubtedly inserted in the hole that led the water into a small channel along the south wall of the *frigidarium*. Other structures had to be present in

[17] White 1967, p. 50.

[18] A billhook is a tool that has always been present in the history of agriculture and viticulture, perhaps since the end of the Bronze Age and certainly from the early Iron Age: Delpino 2007, 141 fig. 6. 142 fig. 7, with previous bibliography. On the various forms of billhook in central-northern Italy, see Ciacci – Zifferero 2007, 255, 256 fig. 5 with reference bibliography. On the history of the billhook, see also Monelli 2008.

[19] Iori 2006, type 1, 198.

Fig. 7 The structures of the periods IVA e IVB (A. Pittari)

the area, of which only some fragments are preserved, related to the thermal sector based on their orientation, building technique, and the use of lime mortar.

The finds that characterize period III consist of some wall plaster fragments with a white coating and bands of different heights painted in red; one of them shows an *incannicciato* imprint. A bronze coin of Constantius II (337-361 CE) gives a *terminus post quem* for the destruction of the baths.

Fig. 8 Reconstruction of the buildings in period IVA (Studio InkLink)

Period IVA (beginning 3rd to beginning 4th centuries CE): The *villa rustica* and the *mansio* (fig. 2; fig. 7)

Since the period II buildings are now considered to belong to a *mansio* and not a farm, it can be suggested that the site's agricultural exploitation developed much later as previously assumed, namely at the beginning of the 3rd century with the construction of the *pars rustica*. After the destruction of the entire building that provides the service areas of the *mansio*, the site's function as a road station persisted, as the baths continued to exist. The destroyed rooms of the *mansio* were restructured to form part of a building intended for the large-scale production of oil. Between the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, renovations and investments in the *villae urbanae*

and *villae rusticae* e in Tuscany are well established [20] , and the construction of Ponterotto's *pars rustica* could be part of this more general development.

The shape of the complex, with dimensions of 26.10 × 25.20 m (88 × 85 Roman feet), is characterized by three *alae* on the NW, NE, and SW sides as well as a yard opening to SE. Ponterotto thus belongs to the 'classic' typology of *villae rusticae* with a quadrangular ground plan, with rooms organized around an open space but closed to the outside[21] (fig. 8).

It was possible to reconstruct the production chain and to identify the spaces where the individual production steps took place. Carts had access from the open side, stopping near the storage room (C), into which the olives were put through a channel. The anomalous inclination of the channel and the blackish oily filling inside suggest that it was used to discharge olives. Written sources attest such a procedure[22]. Therefore, space (C) could have had the function of a storeroom (*tabulatum*)[23], a hypothesis that is further supported by the discovery of a large, partially buried *dolium* in the south-eastern corner of the room, which had inside a black and oily layer, identified by chemical analysis as burnt olive oil[24]. This area has initially been larger, extending over the entire SW wing of the building and included room (B) but has been divided up at the beginning of the 4th century CE (period IV B). The *tabulatum* was covered by a gabled roof, supported by at least one pillar. At its base, a large square sandstone block has been found.

All the layers found in the northern part (space B in period IV B) hint at potential reuse of the room as a canteen, based on the discovery of a wooden piece of furniture containing an entire set of tableware. It cannot be ruled out that this room was used to consume meals or to refresh travelers during the period in question. The room is located close to the baths and flanked by space (A), the shape and structure of which were of particular importance for interpreting the complex as a *mansio*. The small rectangular space protrudes out of the building and can be interpreted as a tower forming the principal entrance area towards the main road, the present via Certaldese.

All the other rooms were purposely built for pressing oil, including space (N), which is the first of the building's central wing and is bordered in the SW by the *tabulatum* and in the NE by the oil press. The large tank made from *cocciopesto* was found broken into large blocks due to a fire in the mid-fourth century. The *cocciopesto* initially rested on a foundation of tile fragments. In the concrete of the *cocciopesto*-floor, a coin of Severus Alexander (231 CE) was found, which provided a *terminus post quam* for the entire production complex. The tank's function remains doubtful: either it served for storing the olives to be crushed or (since the

[20] Valenti 2010, 512.

[21] This type of villa differs from the urbana-rustica type due to the limited space for the domus urbana; there are, however, comparisons in which this part is completely absent. On rural building types, see Bacchetta 2003, 16-19.

[22] Ceccarini 1997.

[23] Varro, De re rustica I 55.

[24] Our gratitude go to Dr. Gianna Giachi who carried out the analysis in the Restoration Centre of the Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Tuscany.

millstone used for the first pressing was not found) for collecting the *pasta frante*[25], which was then placed in the *fiscinae* and pressed[26].

In the adjacent room (R), an oil press of the Catonian type was found[27]. As described by the agronomist, key elements of an oil press were the *torcularium,* the *lapis pedicinus* with two *foramina* for the *arbores,* and the *prelum* to exert pressure on the *fiscinae*. The intensive and frequent use caused a depression in the central part of that room's cocciopesto floor. The room floor was consistently inclined to let the oil flow towards the collection tray placed in the SE, the *doliarium*. This collection tank was equipped with two steps necessary for collecting the last residues of the oil produced. Made from cement, the entire structure, including the steps, was internally covered with a layer of hydraulic mortar applied only to the walls, while the concave bottom was lined with cocciopesto and had a cavity in the center that allowed collecting the oil more comfortably.

Inside the southern part of the room (R) (*cavaedium*), located at a lower level than the *torcularium,* a semicircular pavement of pebbles had been constructed. The *doliarium* (O) contained the collection tank of the oil and thirteen partially buried *dolia* of two different sizes, as seen by the cavities in the soil. Only one of the jars was found *in situ*. The larger *dolium* had a maximum diameter of 1.40 to 1.50 m, the smaller one 0.70 m. A cocciopesto vat was also found in the area. In this area, no tiles were found; it is, therefore, probable that there was only a thatched roof or none at all[28]. In the last room of the NE wing (space [P]), only a natural gravel layer was found, artificially leveled for the use as a floor.

Some objects found (fig. 9) are a small purified grey amphora (rim diameter 7 cm; bottom diam. 5.8 cm; h. 16 cm) of a shape similar to the Vegas 40[29] type which can be dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries CE[30] , a fragment of an 'Empoli' amphora (rim diam. 9 cm; max. height 6.5 cm), a fragment of a dolium (max. length 18.5 cm; max. width 17 cm; wall thickness 4.5 cm) preserving a stamp (9.3 x 2.4 cm), incomplete due to the fracture of the piece, with letters in relief: C. LAES. Aside the sestertius of Severus Alexander already mentioned two later coins have been found: a sestertius of Maximinus Thrax (236 CE) and an Antoninian by Diocletian (284-305 CE).

Period IV (early 4th to mid 4th century CE): The *villa rustica* and the *mansio* (fig. 2; fig. 7)

Around the beginning of the 4th century CE, the economic focus of Ponterotto changed dramatically: oil pressing was abandoned entirely and the agricultural production declined as the progressive deterioration of the relevant structures show. The *villa* of Ponterotto seems to fit well into the picture of rural properties in Roman Tuscany which remained excluded from

25 This is the name given to the crushed mass of olives.

26 See the comparison with the tank of the Acquarella crusher: Fabiani, Paribeni 2012, 51

27 Cato, De agri cultura XVIII-XIX; Ceccarini 1997.

28 Fabiani - Paribeni 2012, 81.

29 Vegas 1973, 96 fig. 33 no. 2. 97: middle or late imperial period.

30 Settlement in Chiarone: Giannoni 2005, 127 with further bibliographical references.

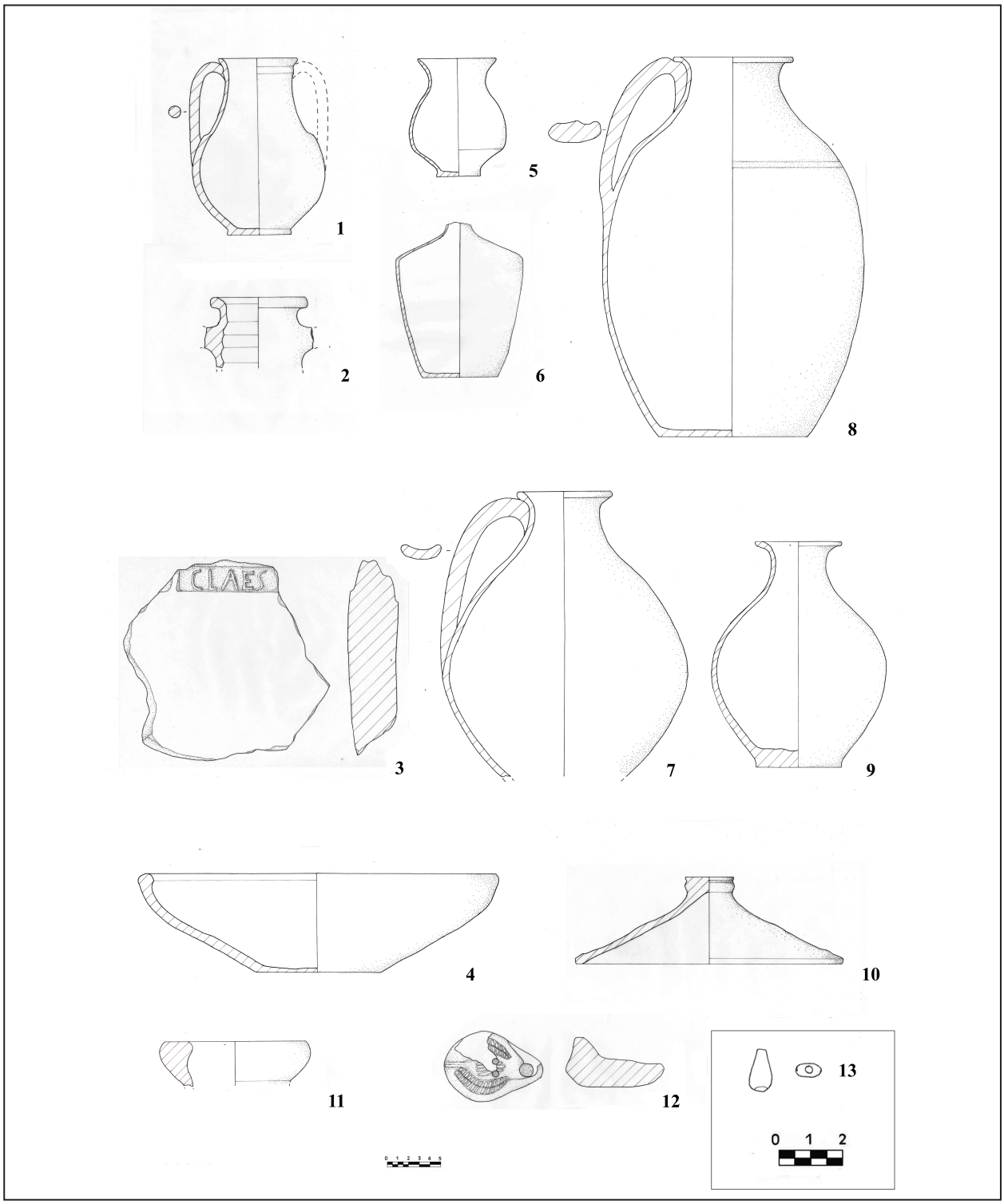

Fig. 9 *Period IVA* ***no. 1*** *tableware: anforetta*
no. 2 *amphora 'di Empoli'*
no. 3 *wall of dolium. Period IVB*
nos. 4–10 *tableware: bowl, olletta, bottle, three jugs, lid*
no. 11: *amphora of African production*

Period V ***no. 12*** *lamp in African terra sigillata*
no. 13 *glass bead*

(A. Pittari)

Fig. 10 Dolia found in the oil vat (A. Pittari)

Fig. 11 The structures of period V and VI. (A. Pittari)

the economic upturn which villas further to the North and South experienced[31]. The policies introduced during the Tetrarchy strengthened the landowners in the Diocese of Italy, which further enriched some members of the senatorial and equestrian upper classes. By that, the higher echelons of the society were motivated to move to extra-urban areas, preferring to invest their capital in restructuring their agricultural properties to avoid the strong fiscal pressure within the cities[32]. Northern Tuscany, however, was neither a supply area for feeding Rome

31 Valenti 2010, 501 .

32 Brogiolo - Chavarría 2005, 13.

nor was it significantly connected with the economic network that had developed in the north around the capitals of Milan and Ravenna[33].

The abandonment of oil production had the effect that the rooms' original function ceased since the relevant structures were removed. So, for example, the vat for oil collection was filled by pieces of broken *dolia* (fig. 10). In total, the farm's central wing, where the tanks and the press were originally situated, was definitively abandoned.

In this way, the productive activities of the *villa rustica* changed, now for other types of cultivation and perhaps also animal husbandry[34]. The only finding that can indicate the new agricultural productions consisted of some seeds of legumes and lentil recovered from the filling thrown inside the *dolia* pits after their removal.

This development made both the construction and demolition of walls necessary. Thus some rooms were enlarged (A) or new ones were created (D); others were reduced, including the large room in the SW wing, which was divided into two smaller spaces (B and C). This division into smaller rooms was not unlikely to be caused by offering more spaces as a *mansio* since the oil production had been abandoned. However, the area of Ponterotto continued to be inhabited, as demonstrated by the traces of purely domestic activities found in the southern part of space (R), where the residues of fireplaces have been detected.

Around the middle of the 4th century CE, the building was almost entirely destroyed by a great fire that caused the walls and the roofs to collapse, as shown by the discovery of tiles mixed with burned daub in rooms (B) and (C). In room (N), the fire's temperature was so high that the cocciopesto basin burst.

The destruction, however, sealed room B in the state it was left: In the northern part of the room, against the wall, a large box or small cupboard was found that contained an entire set of tableware. Although fragmented, it was possible to reconstruct – almost completely – every single vessel. Thus an image of a tableware set could be gained (fig. 9). It consists of a half-preserved basin (rim diameter 32.5 cm; bottom diameter 11 cm; h 9 cm), similar to the Vegas 20 type[35]; inside was a small flask (rim diam. 7.4 cm; bottom diam. 4 cm; h. 11 cm.) as well as a bottle (bottom diameter 7 cm; max. cons. 15 cm), a jug (edge 8.6 × 7.6 cm; bottom diameter not filled; max. diam. 23 cm; h. max cons. 26.5 cm) with a shape similar to type Vegas 44[36] for which we find a direct comparison with a specimen from Luni, dating to the late imperial age.[37]

Another large jug completes the service (rim diam. 10.8 cm; bottom diam. 13.4 cm; max. diam. 24.5 cm; h. 34.5 cm) together with another, smaller, jug (rim diameter 8 cm, bottom diam. 7.8 cm, max diam. 16.5 cm, h 21 cm), and a lid (hem diam. 24.4 cm; dia. grip 4.4 cm;

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[33] Valenti 2010, 502-503 .

[34] Thanks are due to Dr. Miria Secci Mori for the pollen analyses carried out which have allowed the identification of the seeds.

[35] Vegas 1973, 58 fig. 19 n. 4. 57: the specimen from Pollentia is dated to the second half of the 3rd century AD

[36] Vegas 1973, 102 fig. 36 no. 2. 103: 2nd-3rd century AD

[37] Frova 1973 tav. 73: 18.CM.344, 115, from the Forum and south area of the Forum, channel C1.

h 8 cm) similar to the type Vegas 17[38]. Iron tools were also found: a billhook, a chain, and a door lock (which preserves the key inserted inside), all welded together. Further finds belonging to period IV B are an amphora of African production (max. height 3, 5 cm, rim diameter 16.5 cm), type Keay IIIb (for oil or for garum), attested from the second quarter of the 3rd century CE to the first decades of the 5th century CE (peak: 250 to 280 CE). A bronze tool (length 7.5 cm) formed by two horizontally placed rings and a tricuspid element has formerly been identified as hacksaw[39], but it was more probably a bow-stretcher, based on the comparisons with modern specimens, used in hunting. Further, a reduced follis of Constantine I (306-337 AD) has been found.

Period V (mid-4th century to 5th century CE): Reorganization and reuse of the site (fig. 2. 13)

Immediately after the fire, around the middle of the 4th century CE, the central part of the villa ([A], [N], area of the press in room [R]) seems to have been abandoned; at the same time, we witness the complete dismantling of the baths while the hypocaust heating was filled in with rubble. The abandonment of room (A) and the destruction of the *balneum* indicate that Ponterotto lost its role as a *mansio*. However, the site was not abandoned since the less damaged areas were still (re-)used and rebuilt by employing a simpler building technique than previously used.

At the southern end of the baths, a new room (L) was constructed, bordered by the *frigidarium*'s walls and by a new structure on the SW side. A further new room (K) built during this period makes use of the remaining portions of the structures still standing in the thermal sector. Floors were identified in the compartments of the SW and NE *alae* (B, C, O, R), created by leveling the destruction layers of the previous phase and earth fillings; the floor in the courtyard consisted of fragments of tiles, cocciopesto, *tubuli*, bricks and pebbles.

The site was abandoned between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century CE. After the cultivation of the surrounding land has stopped, natural erosion events mostly affected the area in the west of the baths.

The finds belonging to this period (fig. 9) include a lamp in African terra sigillata (length 9.2 cm; width 6.5 cm; height 4.6 cm) of type VIII 2 (Atlas I, table XCVI, 5), datable to the first half of the 5th century CE, and a glass pendant of a necklace (d . 0.6 cm; 1.4 cm long) in the shape of an elongated drop, in use from Late Antiquity until the 7th century CE[40]. Among

[38] Vegas 1973, 53, 54 fig. 10 n. 2: middle or late imperial age.

[39] Ciampoltrini 2008, 55, fig. 21 who mentions a very similar specimen from Tricolle in the Municipality of Fucecchio, sporadic.

[40] Melucco Vaccaro 1972, 10. Amethysts begin to be imitated in blue or greenish-blue vitreous paste and inserted in necklaces, bracelets and earrings as early as the fourth century (Alföldi 1957, 435, n. 67); they continue to be in use until the seventh century as shown by graves of Lombard and autochthonous female individuals (Possenti - Rigoni - Sandrini 1999, 100).

the bronze coins, a maiorina of Constantius II (337 to 361 CE) and a *centenionalis* (end of 4th century CE) confirm the period's dating.

Period VI (5th to 6th century CE): Huts and the funeral building (fig. 2; fig. 13)

The ruins of the villa were again used between the 5th and the 6th century CE. The main reasons for re-occupying the Ponterotto site were the proximity to the river Pesa and the presence of building materials ready to be reused. In this latest reoccupation phase, it was no longer attempted to reuse the best-preserved spaces of the *villa rustica,* but new buildings were erected as frequently attested in Late Antique Tuscany[41].

Thus after leveling some areas, especially the former spaces (B) and (N), as well as the courtyard, a simple hut (V) was built. It had a sub-rectangular shape (3.80 × 3.20 m) aligned with the *villa rustica* structures. It was built entirely from perishable materials, mostly timber, as suggested by the large quantities of iron nails recovered in the destruction layer. Nearby, some pits were dug into the clayey soil, serving as fireplaces, one of which had been enclosed with fragments of a *dolium*.

The community that lived at this site also constructed a building for funerary and religious use, reserved for the inhumation of a single individual. This rectangular structure (M) measures 7.40 x 5 m. It is oriented towards NNW/SSE and had a tiled roof. The place of the tomb of the '*cappuccina*'-type is located in the NNW part of the site, while the SSE was intended for rituals with an area dedicated to the deposition of food offerings and votive objects. Another hut (Z) found west of the funerary building had an irregular trapezoidal ground plan, with the longest sides reaching 9x7.80 m.

Without any grave good, the buried corpse must have played a prominent role in the community to which the person belonged as attested by the (relatively) complex construction of a '*mausoleum*'-style building and the probable development of a well-established pagan cult dedicated personally to this person. The anthropological analysis of the human remains reveals that the person was a relatively tall (174 cm) male individual of mature age. The bones showed markers of intense physical activity, not necessarily an indication of heavy work, since this can also result from military training[42]. Traces of two healed fractures are of particular interest: one on the left ulna, caused by an indirect trauma, such as a blow received on the forearm in an attempt to defend himself (the so-called 'parade fracture'); the second fracture is that of the diaphysis of the left fibula, and it is possible that the same traumatic event may have caused both.

[41] The closest comparison, in which a hut is built in the courtyard of a farm by exploiting a previous walls, is that of Podere San Mario in Pisa. In this case, too, a series of domestic hearths located near the hut are attested. Valenti 2010, 509 and note 16 for the relevant bibliography.

[42] E. Pacciani in Alderighi - Pittari 2015, 50-52.

4 The Roman building phases: a summary

The Roman period's architectural complex consists of a series of buildings dating from the 1st to the 6th century CE. In total, the archaeological finds can be attributed to six chronologically separate periods[43]. During this long period, new parts of the complex were constructed, while others were abandoned. Also, some rooms were remodeled, reflecting the changing economic, social and political conditions of the time. The architectural complex has undergone remarkable transformations both in function and form. Various rooms were being modified over the centuries and witnessed various activities at the site. Although commonly recognized as a Roman villa, some anomalies concerning the common idea of a Roman farmstead were identified. Thus, a re-assessment of the finds allows a more plausible interpretation of Ponterotto – at least in some phases: It is no longer to be identified solely as a farm[44], but also as a *mansio*[45] . Particularly the baths which were found at the site and which are not connected with a distinct *pars urbana*, can also be assigned to the building's use as a road station.

Therefore, the buildings of the period 1 and period 2 were deliberately demolished to facilitate the construction of the *mansio*; however, these first buildings' functional attribution remains unclear. The NE-side of the newly built *mansio* is reserved for storage and service rooms, while the SW part rooms were used as baths for travelers. The period-II building remained in use until the end of the 2nd to the early 3rd century CE, when it was destroyed by fire and never rebuilt. Following this event, a new and more impressive complex was built that incorporated the buildings of the road station not affected by the fire. The new building specialized in the production and storage of oil and must have reached industrial levels (period IV A), given the size of the building and the *doliarium*. At the beginning of the 4th century CE, the oil production stopped: The oil press was decommissioned, the jars were removed and either deposited in the oil collection tank or reused for other purposes. Thus again, a change of agricultural production is evident, now focussing on subsistence crops such as legumes (period IV B). Around the middle of the 4th century CE, the *pars rustica* and the baths were destroyed by a major fire. However, this event did not prevent the workers from continuing to live in the complex up to the 5th century CE, exploiting the still usable environments (period V). The steady abandonment of the building and the surrounding countryside continued, as we see from the collapse of numerous building structures and the formation of a series of natural canals that pass through the rooms of the building, thereby eroding the structures. Period VI (5th/6th century CE) is marked by constructing two huts and a tomb for the burial of a single male who may have been worshipped there.

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43 The sporadic presence of the early building phases is caused by the plundering of the pre-existing structures in later times and by the agricultural exploitation (periods VII-IX) .

44 Alderighi – Pittari 2011; Alderighi – Pittari 2014.

45 The building of period II has so far been interpreted as a farm and is defined as such in all the articles published so far. In this article, we highlight the new interpretation that seems to emerge, based on the study of the materials found and of the bibliographic comparisons.

The building technique used for all the buildings remained almost unchanged during this long time: The foundations were constructed with river pebbles available in the surrounding area, as well as with (fragmented) bricks which were also recovered in the surroundings, presumably from the pre-Roman, Hellenistic building specializing in the production of tiles[46]. The walls, on the other hand, were made from perishable material: in the first phases, they were made of *pisé*, as shown by a large quantity of clay evenly distributed in some rooms (period II); in contrast, later walls of the *villa rustica* (period IV) were made of air-dried clay bricks. The advantages of using this building technique are the speed of construction the possibility of employing unskilled workers, and the feasibility of building elevated floors and efficient thermal isolation[47], which was particularly important since the right temperature has to be maintained in a workplace where oil was produced. Although the decision to use unfired clay brought the benefits described, it also exposed the buildings to a greater risk of fire[48], which consequently caused the destruction of the NE part of the *mansio* at the beginning of the 3rd century CE, and of the productive complex as well as of the baths sector in the middle of the 4th century CE.

5 Conclusions

The life span of the Ponterotto site over five centuries and the construction of buildings dedicated to hospitality, industry, and agriculture is undoubtedly motivated by its location close to the main communication route that connected the *ager Florentinus* with the *ager Volaterranus* and the river Pesa. Furthermore, the place was privileged by the resources available: the Pesa and Fontereggi spring provided water, the soils provide rich deposits of high-quality clay (the so-called '*mattaione*') as well as fertile arable land in the flat valley plain, and rich timber resources – also the primary source of energy – are available from the surrounding hills. In particular, the river, which is also essential for fishing, also provides the means of transporting agricultural products much faster and cheaper than road traffic. The presence of baths located in an architectural complex that clearly differs from the classic Varronian model, respectively, from that of the large slave villa estates widely attested in Central Italy from the late Republican to the early imperial period is of highest importance for the interpretation of the site[49]. Furthermore, the *balneum*, built at least a century before oil production started, does not have a corresponding *pars urbana*. The transformation into a specialized agricultural unit dedicated to the production of oil, which can best be framed in the 'common' Roman villas model, took place later, at the beginning of the 3rd century CE, in the course of the construction of the *pars rustica*.

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[46] This building technique, used in all environments, including thermal ones, is well attested archaeologically and widely described in the sources: Cato (RR, XIV, 4) and Vitruvius (II, 8, 20; repeated by Palladio I 8.2).

[47] Wand 2003, 122.

[48] This risk phenomenon is already presented in ancient sources; see Vitruvius, II, 8.20.

[49] Carandini 1985; Carandini 1989 (with another bibl.). For references of a general nature on the Italic rural setting in Roman times, see also Quilici – Quilici Gigli 1995. The wide distribution or even prevalence of the villa schiavistica has to be questioned; see e.g. Marzano 2007, 125-148[GS].

Taking the location at a vital road into consideration, the complex may have served as a *mansio* or road station right from its initial stages, offering guests the possibility of using baths and providing other services. In light of this interpretation, other structures excavated along important communication routes could be interpreted as *mansiones* like the 'villa' of Vergigno in the municipality of Montelupo Fiorentino[50] or the 'villa' of St. Antonio in the municipality of Montaione[51].

To better understand the role of *mansiones* in this part of Tuscany, a comprehensive study of the viability of the Val di Pesa and Valdelsa area is urgently needed by which the traces of Roman settlements are mapped and identified.

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[50] Berti 2013; McKenzie Lewis (†) interpreted the 'villa' of Vergigno as mansio as well in his talk given during the workshop. Unfortunately he could not deliver the manuscript for printing (GS).

[51] The excavation in progress has led to the identification of rooms relevant to large baths. Attention should be paid to a document from the end of the 13th century (Florence State Archive, Diplomatico, Municipality of San Miniato al Tedesco, 1297 October 11) which establishes the boundaries between the municipalities of Gambassi and Montaione, and recalls the "balneum de Fighino" referring therefore to baths. Finally, F. Ciappi in Alderighi et al. 2014, 30. Furthermore, sporadic finds, like in particular decorative building elements, have to be assigned to baths rather than to rural buildings because they appear more suitable for this building typ – if they do not belong to a domus urbana.

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