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Roman Rural Landscapes

Perspectives from the Roman Peasant Project[1]

The Roman Peasant Project, carried out from 2009–2015 in Grosseto province (Tuscany) was originally directed at the smallest and poorest types of sites, and was designed to examine a particular class of people – peasants – their labor and their lives. Therefore, the project aimed to put people, labor and production at the center of Roman landscape studies and to rethink the various ways that rural dwellers lived and worked.

Keywords: *rural settlement; Roman pesants; Tuscany; excavations; field survey*

1 Introduction

The Molino San Vincenzo Project stands out in the history of Italian rural archaeology in a number of ways. Not a wealthy villa but a rustic farm, it was nonetheless subject to the highest standards of excavation and analysis only rarely applied to even "important" rural sites. It is not located in one of Roman Italy's "definite" places[2] – like the Tiber Valley or the Bay of Naples – where power or production are thought to most matter – yet its surrounds and economic networks have rigorously examined as though they were. And most importantly, the excavations at Molino San Vincenzo were carried out not because it was assumed to represent a type of site – a villa, a villa rustica, a farm – but to ask what those terms actually mean on the ground, and how new methodologies might be applied to rethinking type and category.

The Roman Peasant Project, carried out from 2009–2015 on the other side of Tuscany in Grosseto province, was a rather different kind of project (fig. 1). Originally directed at the smallest and poorest types of sites, it was designed to examine a particular class of people – peasants – their labor and their lives. While it may been focused on smaller sites and its goals were to understand people rather than a place, it shared with the Molino San Vincenzo project many of the same questions and perplexities – about how sites are categorized, about how material culture might explode those categories to reveal lived experience, about land use

[1] The author wishes to thank Günther Schörner for the invitation to participate in this conference and volume, and for his warm spirit of collaboration on so many subjects. She also would like to thank all the members of the Roman Peasant Project, particularly Antonia Arnoldus, Stephen Collins-Elliot, Mari Ghisleni, Cam Grey, Michael MacKinnon and Emanuele Vaccaro.

[2] Horden – Purcell 2000, 53.

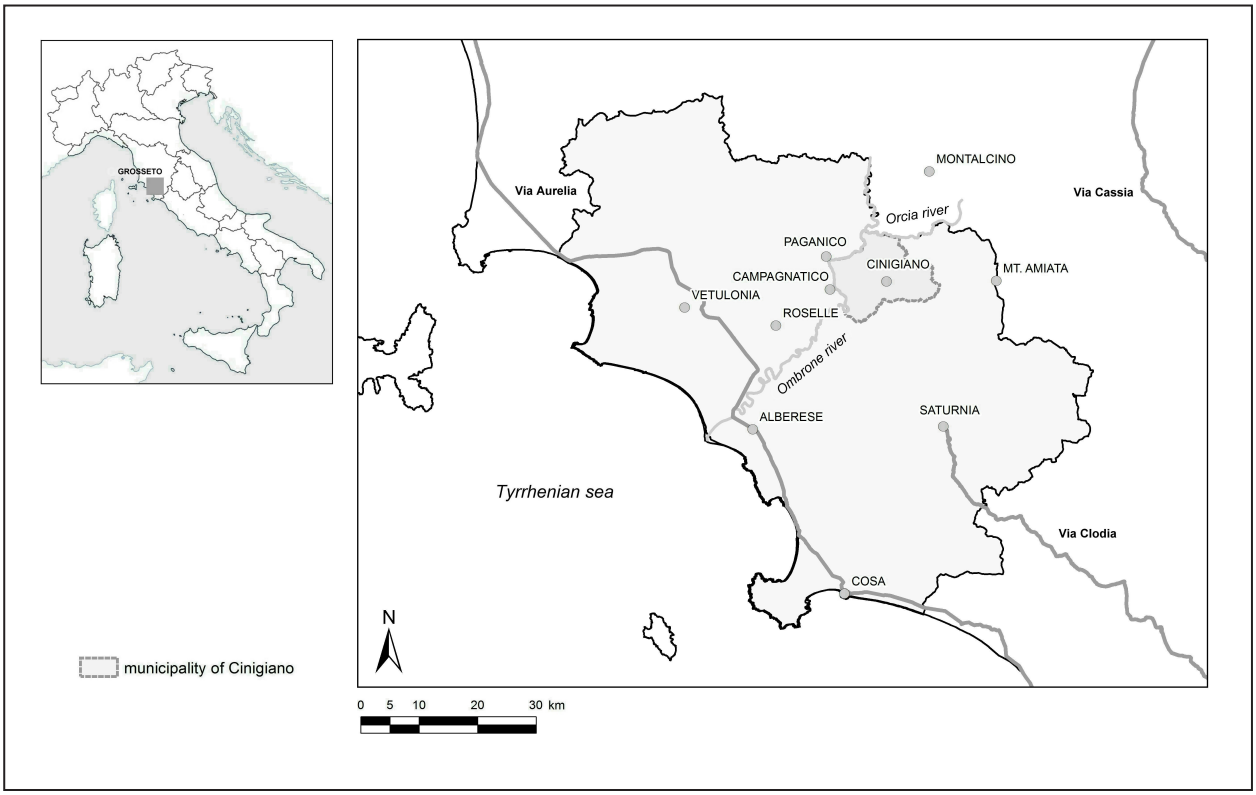

Fig. 1 Map showing location of the Roman Peasant Project (map by A. Arnoldus)

for both agriculture and artisanal activities – and a conviction that excavation combined with field survey might produce data on rural life which was both broad and deep.

The following essay reflects on some epistemological and methodological questions shared by both projects, from the perspective of the Roman Peasant Project.[3] Through a set of five paradigmatic questions and statements, it considers how that project's findings throw into even sharper relief many of the abiding concerns of the Molino San Vincenzo project, and how together they point to the way towards a different kind of Roman landscape than we often imagine for central Italy.

2 How do we classify sites using field survey versus excavation?

The study of rural lives in Roman archaeology is largely interrogated through the medium of field survey, and the results of those surveys, with some notable exceptions, has been parsed through the heuristic of the "site."[4] Sites in turn are defined by a messy combination of scatter size, functional designations drawn from both Latin literature, and modern assumptions about rural living. These categories are typically organised in some kind of spatial hierarchy from big to small – villa, villa rustica, *fattoria*, house/habitation (large and small version), off-site – and social history based on those hierarchies – histories of the decline or survival of the

[3] The final report for the Roman Peasant Project is forthcoming: Bowes in press.

[4] Rajala 2006. For one of the few artifact density surveys in Italy, Haas 2011.

peasant, of the transformations in land management and means of production, of the nature of Roman agriculture – are crafted around them. Despite a robust recent literature critiquing these categories both on epistemological and methodological grounds,[5] they seem nonetheless inescapable, and continue to appear in both archaeological and historical literature as useful shorthands for the way Romans inhabited the countryside.[6]

The Molino San Vincenzo Project was unusual in its genesis for while it began with a field survey, that survey was imagined as simply a first salvo, one which would be followed up by geophysics, shovel testing, open area excavation, and other means of actually interrogating those categories, not simply reifying them. The Roman Peasant Project had no such sophisticated beginnings: it assumed that field survey categories were more or less reliable guides to the types of places that rural people lived, and using an intensive modern survey carried out by one of the project directors,[7] set out to dig up the smallest/materially poorest of these sites as a means of getting at a group of people.

Both projects have revealed the inadequacies of surface survey alone to bear the weight of the functional designations that have defined it. Just as Molino San Vincenzo fits uncomfortably the definition of "villa," of eight sites excavated by the Roman Peasant Project, perhaps only one fit Roman archaeologists' expectations of what constituted a Roman peasant house. Even that site – Pievina – displayed unexpected site organization, and dominance of so-called productive structures over domestic ones, while the others revealed a whole range of different kinds spaces typically absent in reconstructions of the Roman countryside.

Pievina was composed of seven surface scatters ranging over a 1.5ha. It was thus classified as a village in Ghisleni's survey, one supposed, through the dating of surface ceramics, to extend from the late Republic through late antiquity[8]. Excavation revealed instead only two phases, the first a mid-1st cent. BCE through mid-1st cent. CE cluster of structures – a granary, cistern, tile/coarse ware kiln and hearth – which we tentatively described as a kind of farm (fig. 2).

We never located the domestic portion of this "farm," which may have lay in one of the unexcavated scatters to the north of the site. Thus, unlike the small collection of excavated peasant houses from Italy or even the so-called villa rusticae,[9] this early phase of Pievina saw its different functional buildings laid out in a cluster, rather than gathered under a single roof.

The site was abandoned and covered by an earth slump on the later 1st cent. A.D., only to be reoccupied in a quite different fashion in the late 4th or early 5th cent. A.D. A small 10 x 4m structure was built over the remains the farm, composed of a small rectangular pisé structure roofed with tiles, attached to which was a post-built extension, seemingly roofed with straw. We tentatively reconstructed a tiny house, with an extension for animals (fig. 3). The site, surrounded by beaten earth yards, had some small storage dolia, and drains which protected it from water run-off. With some 232 MNI of diagnostic ceramics, 292 NISP of faunal remains,

[5] Witcher 2012; Witcher 2006a; Witcher 2006b; Attema – Schörner 2012; Haas 2012.
[6] E.g. Launaro 2011; Fentress 2009;
[7] Ghisleni 2010.
[8] Ghisleni – Vaccaro – Bowes 2011.
[9] See Rathbone 2008 for a partial list.

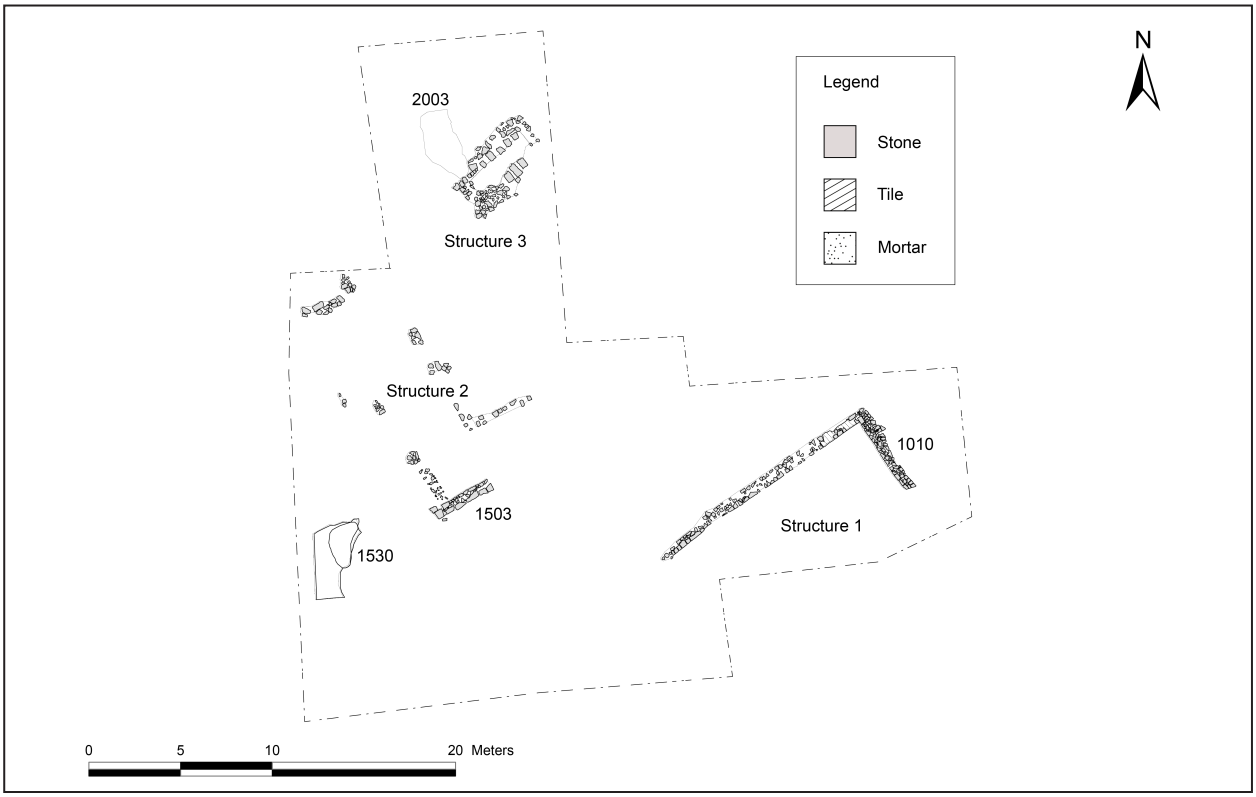

Fig. 2 Pievina, Phase 1 (plan by M. Ghisleni, E. Rizzo)

Fig. 3 Pievina, reconstruction, Phase 2 (reconstruction by Inklink)

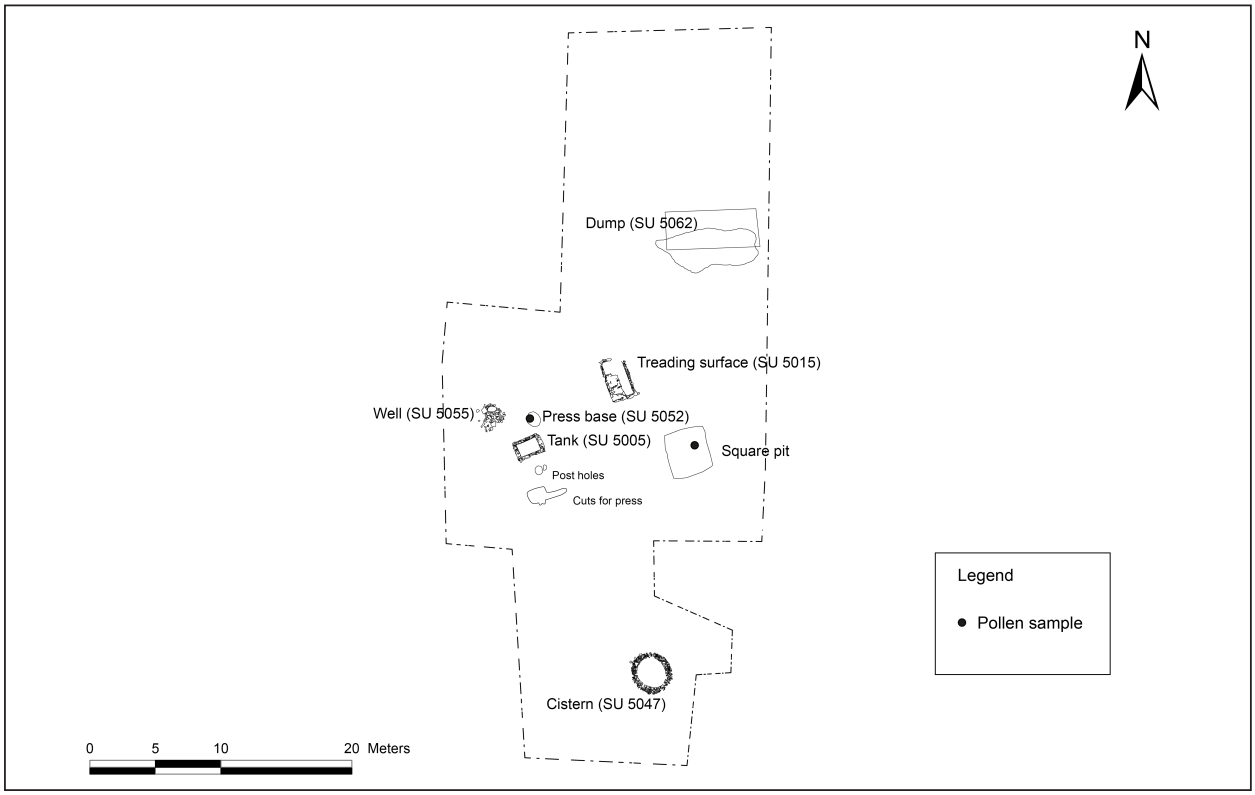

Fig. 4 Case Nuove, site plan (plan by E. Vaccaro, E. Rizzo)

Fig. 5 Case Nuove, reconstruction (reconstruction by Inklink)

34 coins and abundant glass and metal finds, including needles, pins, rings and other finds, this late antique phase provided the single example of an relatively unambiguous "house."

The excavations at Case Nuove present a more dramatic case of the challenges of survey site designations.[10] A 50 x 30m cluster of three, closely set scatters, one of which produced tile wasters, Case Nuove was classed as a habitation with possible tile kiln. Excavations revealed the site to be a pressing site for grapes and olives, abandoned in the mid-1st cent. A.D. and reused in late antiquity as a possible threshing/winnowing point for grain (figs. 4 and 5).

The site was unlike any pressing previously excavated in mainland Italy. Most excavated Italian presses for wine and oil are found in villas. The Case Nuove site was located a 500m from the then-farm of Santa Marta, had no covered structures of any kind, its pressing equipment, while made of *opus signinum* and metal connecting pieces, was very simple, and judging from the pollen and macroremains, may have served distant farmers rather than only the nearby large "farm" at Santa Marta. A kind of collective press, discussed in historical sources yet heretofore unknown archaeologically, Case Nuove illustrated the limits of field survey's functional designations by revealing instead recognizable activities – here pressing – in heretofore unexpected and complex spatial and social configurations.

Indeed, both the Molino San Vincenzo Project and the Roman Peasant Project, as exemplified by the case of Case Nuove, force a reconsideration of the "domestic" as the dominant category of rural archaeology.[11] The above-described site-types that have shaped field survey are almost entirely domestic, and we have, since Weber at least, imagined a Roman landscape dotted with "houses" of different sizes and functions – from the peasant house to the farm to the luxury home-*cum*-productive entity termed villas.[12] Most of the sites excavated by the Roman Peasant Project – and Molino San Vincenzo itself with its huge collection of amphorae and storage wares – are only poorly or partially described as houses.[13] Indeed, it is production – agricultural processing, the storage of agriculture products, animal husbandry, ceramic manufacturing and in the case of Molino San Vincenzo, possible wine production and bottling in Empoli amphorae – which dominates the material record of both projects' sites. Large-scale rescue excavations in France have similarly revealed whole landscapes dominated not by villas or farms but by hard-to-classify entities seemingly used for agro-processing, stock rearing and other manifestations of the myriad forms of land exploitation.[14] Labor and the many ways of using the land are the hallmarks of Roman rural archaeology as it emerges from both projects, while "houses" of any kind are much harder to find.

The problems locating the domestic, however, may derive from how we have defined it. The site of Podere Terrato from the Roman Peasant Project further challenged not only field survey's, but our own modern expectations of one kind of "house." Classed as a *fattoria* or farm in

10 See Vaccaro et al 2013.

11 For further critique of the dominance of domestic categories for Roman landscapes, see Trément 2017.

12 Weber 1976, 209; Neeve 1984; Cambi 2002; Goodchild 2007; Launaro 2011.

13 Bowes et al 2017; Vaccaro et al 2013.

14 Trément 2017; Leveau 2017; Cayne et al 2017.

Ghisleni's survey, excavation revealed a 11.5.x 5m structure composed of a single square 5 x 5m room with a kind of attached porch, occupied for a short period in mid-1st cent. A.D. (fig. 6).[15]

Although heavily damaged by erosion, an adjacent yard produced levels of re-leveling and packing surfaces which contained five coins of Augustan to Claudian date, 20 sherds of vessel glass, and 102 diagnostic ceramic sherds, dominated by table wares (74%), with only a small percentage of kitchen (17%) or storage (8%) wares. No cooking or storage facilities of any kind were found, but the pollen data revealed evidence for a kind of garden, with traces of lilac, geranium, mint and perhaps cabbage, possibly set into the L-shaped terraced structures nearby the main building.

Is this a small peasant house with its herb patch? Why does it have no equipment for cooking or storage? Why is there such predominance of ceramics for dining, yet only eight sherds of cooking pots? These seemingly contradictory material indicators prompt us to ask what precisely we mean by "house." The domestic bias in Roman rural archaeology has tended to not to offer a definition for house, seemingly on the grounds that one would know it when one sees it. The villa, for instance, seems a self-evident combination of urban *domus* with rural productive machine, and houses apart from villas and even possible *villa rusticae* like Molino San Vincenzo, are simply assumed to be poorer, smaller versions until one descends to the peasant house with its single space for humans and animals, cooking, sleeping and storage.[16] Houses are above all presumed to be permanent spaces, the singular locus of family life where "domestic" activities were concentrated.

Podere Terrato poorly matches these assumptions: artifactual evidence for major domestic activities are either missing or underrepresented, it is occupied for a generation or less, and even its herb garden, a rare find botanically, doesn't quite convince as the productive garden for a family. In short, Podere Terrato seems like part of a "house" or a "farm" – but without the many of the aspects of permanence – storage, longer term use – which we associate with those categories. Houses there surely were in the countryside, but we shouldn't expect that they conform to our preconceptions. Rather, data from the Roman Peasant Project, like Podere Terrato and Case Nuove, revealed sites which accommodated different, specialized aspects of peasant activities – pressing, temporary housing, animals stalls – plus more permanent sites like Pievina, which cumulatively comprised the peasant "house."

3 How do we classify sites using finds?

Both the Molino San Vincenzo and the Roman Peasant Project invested considerable resources in analyzing the material culture to emerge from excavation – from quantified studies of the ceramics to pollen analysis to multivariate statistical analysis of the small finds. These "thick descriptions" of activities and their material vestiges are not possible with the thinner datasets from field survey, and lie at the basis of both projects' ability to speak beyond site types

[15] Bowes in press, vol. 1, 221-248.

[16] See Rathbone 2008 for some queries along these lines. See also Attolini – Cambi – Celuzza 1983; Motta et al 1993; Camin – McCall 2002–2003 for some examples of peasant houses.

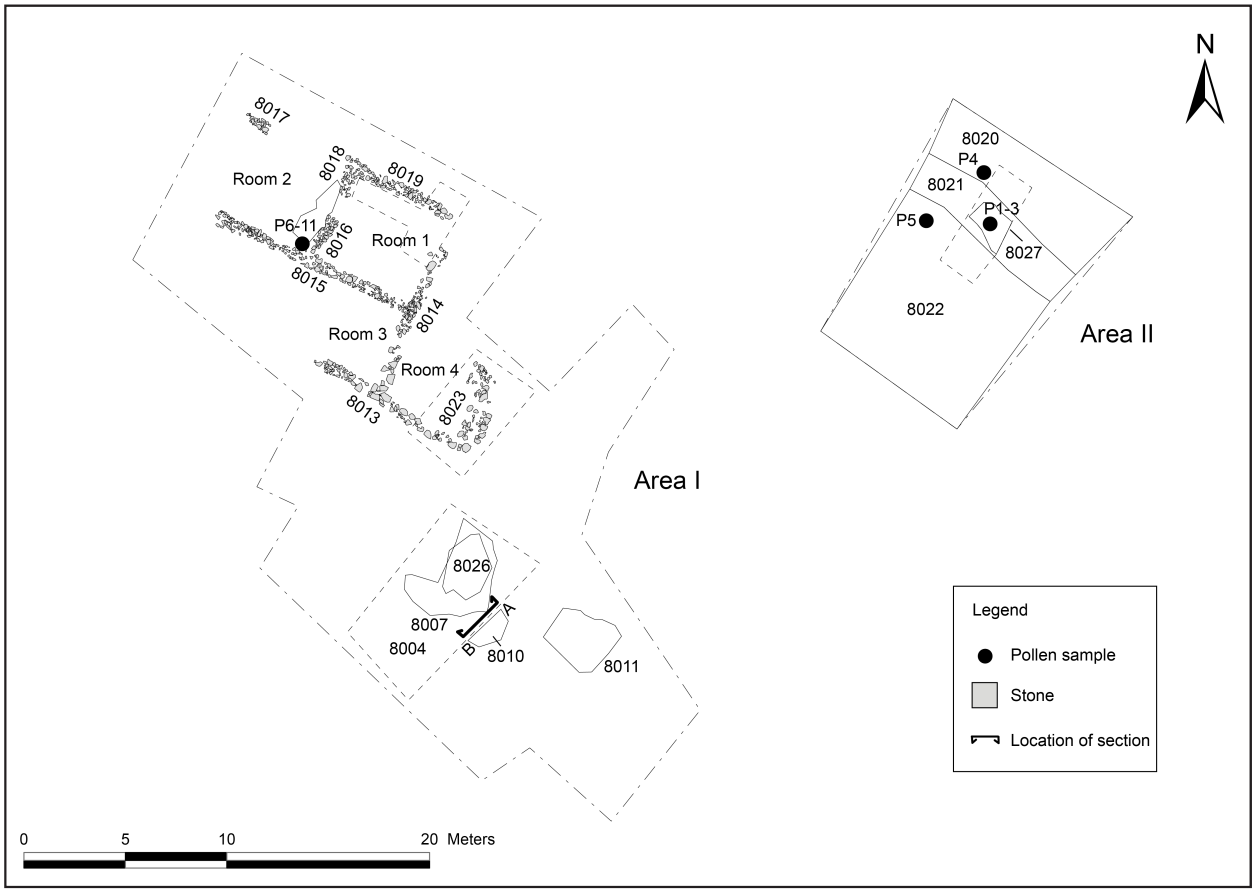

Fig. 6 Podere Terrato, site plan (plan by M. Ghisleni, E. Rizzo)

to a lived experience. Archaeobotanical finds played a major role in both projects, and indeed, Anna Maria Mercuri and her team from the Università dell'Emilia Romagna in Modena studied both sets of botanical finds. In the Roman Peasant Project, not only did archaeobotanical materials help us rethink Roman agricultural landscapes, but they also played a major role in rethinking how we classified sites.

The site of San Martino was a test-case for the importance of not only pollen and macroremains as indicators of site activities, but also non-pollen palynomorphs (NPPs) – the fungi, parasites and other microscopic organisms that accrue to human and animal presence and provide precious indicators of their activities.[17] When first we excavated San Martino, classed as a habitation through survey data, its modest size (a roughly 7 x 6m square) lead us to assume we had located a peasant house, set in what we had assumed were rich adjacent lands suitable for grain (on which more below) (fig. 7).

The archaeobotanical data, however, revealed a different story. San Martino's pollen spectrum contained the highest percentages of pasture pollen of any site in the Project and was particularly high in fodder, including leguminous plants like *Trifolium* – but virtually no cereals. The NPPs from the living levels inside the structures were rich in algae, seemingly from water

[17] Bowes in press, vol. 1, 163-184.

transported to site, fungi, particularly *Sordariaceae* and *Sporormiella*, associated with dung, and *Trichuris* and *Dicrocoelium* of parasite eggs, also associated with mammalians. Relatively high concentrations of fodder macroremains, including *Hedysarum*, *Medicago*, *Melilotus* and *Trifolium*, also pointed to animal fodder present on site. These finds pointed more insistently to animals rather than humans, the evidence for whose cooking and storage activities were, as at Podere Terrato, similarly lacunose. Archaeobotanical finds were thus of critical importance in correcting our own assumptions about site function, highlighting the importance of animals, and spaces for animals, in the Roman productive landscape.[18]

Emanuele Vaccaro's study of the ceramics similarly revealed more complex relationships between finds and site activities – although for quite different reasons. These analyses included not only traditional formal categories, but also quantified analysis of functional categories and helped reveal the differing emphasis on different kinds of activities – eating, cooking and storage – as well as changing cooking practices, the importance of liquids versus solids and other aspects of food culture.

Interestingly, neither formal nor functional categories were particularly revealing of site functions or activities: while more permanent sites or sites associated largely with production had higher percentages of amphorae and dolia indicating storage activities, the pattern was not striking.[19] Neither did percentages of dining versus cooking wares provide a strong indicator of different kinds of activities. More notable instead was a broadly shared emphasis on wares (fine and coarse wares) associated with dining at all sites, a highly diverse and sophisticated formal array of these dining wares, and, as Veronika Schreck has documented at Molino San Vincenzo, some long term shifts in dining habits as expressed through ceramics. Closed wares associated with drinking – jugs, cups, and the like – dominate the tables of peasants in the late Republic/early Empire, while in late antiquity open form dishes, more readily used for solid foods, were more numerous.[20] Analyzed in this way, ceramics reveal the details – and sophistication – of rural dwellers' table habits, habits that seem (although this remains to be quantitatively proven) broadly shared across different site types. These shared habits may further suggest that the hierarchical organization of sites by scatter size and concomitantly by putative wealth and social classes conceals more aspects of a broadly shared cultural habitus.

Not only was the oft-neglected botanical and ceramic materials interrogated to understand the activities of rural dwellers, but so, too, was the statistical analyses of ALL finds – from pollen to ceramics, metal finds to glass – considered as a gross. The separation of kinds by material and their specialized study within those material silos has prevent not only consideration of overlapping finds as a heuristic unit – ceramics and faunal materials as evidence for cooking practices, for instance[21] – but also the comparative assessment of sites' material culture as a holistic unit. By looking at all the objects consumed at a site – from food to pots – and comparing those consumption patterns across sites within the same study area – patterns emerge which

[18] Bowes et al 2017.

[19] Bowes et al. in press.

[20] Bowes et al. in press.

[21] For an example of interlinked finds analysis from this project see Vaccaro – MacKinnon 2014.

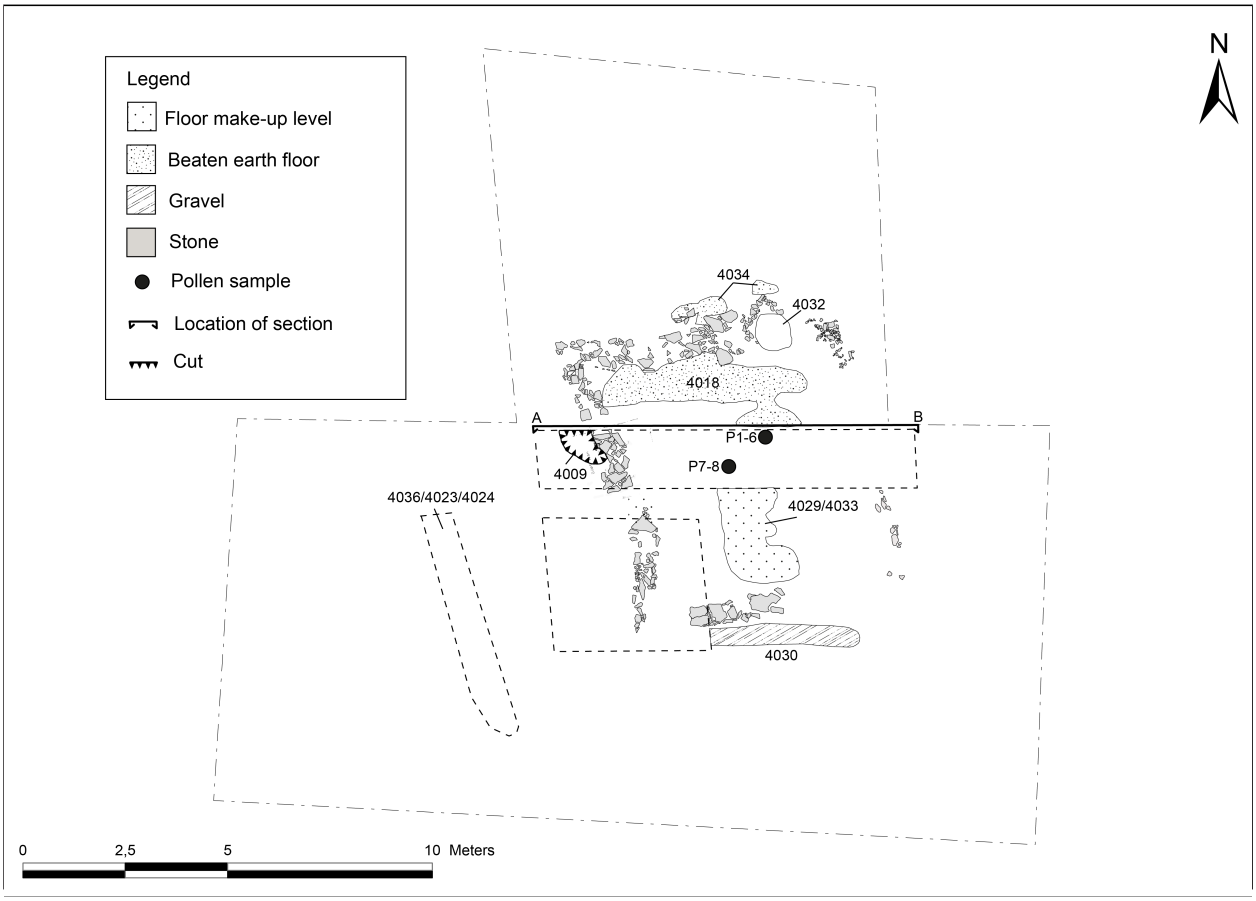

Fig. 7 San Martino, site plan (plan by M. Ghisleni)

the study of single artifacts may not reveal.[22] Collins-Elliot's multiple correspondence analysis of the RPP's finds *in toto* revealed important functional distinctions between the small, short-lived sites – like Podere Terrato and San Martino – and sites with longer, more traditionally 'domestic' characteristics like Pievina, or production–only sites like Case Nuove.[23]

4 Land use: reconstruction or hypothesis testing

Both the Molino San Vincenzo Project and the Roman Peasant Project had as a major desideratum an understanding of how the land was worked. Both projects thus prioritized pollen collection, as well as geoarchaeological analyses, although their epistemological ends were quite different.

As evidenced by Raffaela Woller's contribution to this volume and in keeping with a recent strand of Roman land use scholarship,[24] the Molino San Vincenzo project used geological and botanical data to reconstruct contemporary land use around the site. The experiences of the Roman Peasant Project left us far less optimistic that "reconstruction" – that is, the effort to

22 For an example of Pompeii, see Ray 2017.

23 Collins-Elliot 2018.

24 E.g. Goodchild 2007; Joolen 2003; Groot Kooistra 2009.

map the likely location of crops onto specific land types and to calculate outputs accordingly – was possible with the kind of data we had at our disposal.

Two principal reasons gave us cause for this pessimism: first, persuasive evidence for three-part crop rotation evidenced from RPP sites[25] strongly suggests that land went through different phases of use, with pasture occupying potentially the temporal majority of rotation schemes and cereals and legumes some unknown smaller periods. Reconstructing land use would thus require a temporal dimension whose parameters are almost impossible to know. Furthermore, the heavy mio-pliocene clays of Tuscany, ideal for grain cultivation under modern agriculture and often reconstructed as such in ancient times, would have presented challenges to pre-modern ploughing techniques; whether or not such land would be used for arable agriculture would depend heavily on the traction available to individual farmers. A farmer, who owned, borrowed or rented one or more oxen would be more capable of putting those lands into cereal cultivation than one who would not. This element of individual choice was just one instance of many examples of individual agency, rather than environmental determinism, that emerged from the Project data.

Thus, rather than attempt to "reconstruct" agrarian landscapes, we both mapped pollen and land potential separately, as well as combined them to produce hypotheses whose function was interrogatory, not reconstructive (fig. 8). These hypotheses, such as the one generated around Case Nuove, produced hypothetical maps of crop locations to answer specific questions.[26] In the case of Case Nuove, we wanted to know whether the paucity of grape and olive pollen on the site, but the presence of those species macroremains, could be a product of more distant transport of these crops to the site. When overlayed with the survey data, suggesting a cluster of sites located along a possible routeway to the south set near hilly, sandier soils better for olive and grape plantations, the hypothesis was confirmed, while field testing routeways from those sites illustrated the challenges that transport presented. We stopped short of reconstruction, but instead used the data to catalyse further questions.

5 Trade is local

Studies of Roman trade have been overwhelmingly directed at long-distance trade –in foodstuffs, building materials, ceramics and other ship-born cargoes. The study of Roman amphorae, seemingly the *sine qua non* of the Roman predilection for sea born movement of foods, is particularly is dominated by this assumption. Newer work is beginning to emphasize the degree to which all trade and exchange is ultimately local, and that the Roman movement of goods was sporadic, seasonal and ultimately dependent on the networks and topographies at micro-regional scale.[27]

The Molino San Vincenzo Project exemplifies the more complex realities of Roman exchange. Far from the coasts, but surrounded by a robust road network, the site and its locale

[25] Bowes et al 2017.

[26] See Vaccaro et al 2013.

[27] Horden – Purcell 2000; Bang 2008.

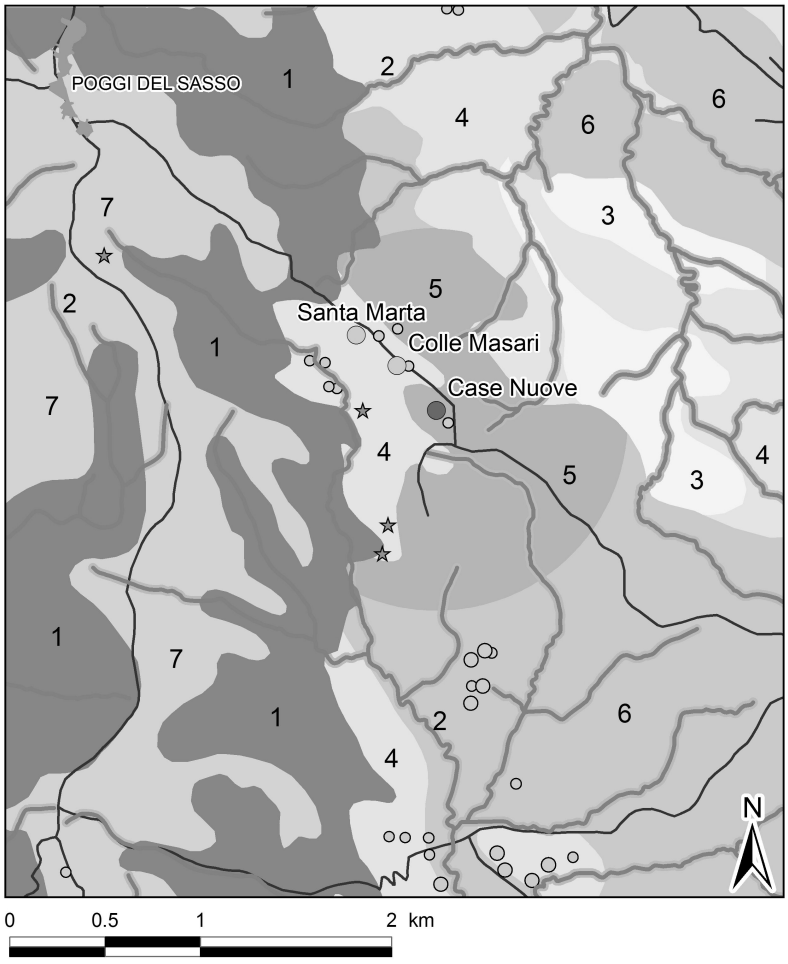

Fig. 8 Case Nuove, land use hypothesis (map by A. Arnoldus)

are immediately adjacent to Empoli – a possible Roman *municipium* which – despite its inland location was the center of a thriving amphora-born wine trade from the early empire through late antiquity. Molino San Vincenzo's abundant Empoli amphora finds, and perhaps nearby kilns, indicate it participated in this Empoli production hub.[28] Veronica Schreck's exemplary thin-section studies of the coarse wares from Molino San Vincenzo further describes a more sophisticated approach to ceramic supply in such a locale. Using a product typically assigned to a poorly defined "local" she tracked the near and far sources of such wares to their own micro-regional and trans-regional networks.[29]

The Roman Peasant Project, too, tried to take on the binary of long-distance and local through ceramic studies. Emanuele Vaccaro documented two major phases of flat-bottomed "local" amphorae in Project sites – including examples of late Republican/early Imperial and late antique date. Residue analysis tentatively suggests that at least some carried wine.[30] How widely these circulated we do not yet know, but they appear consistently alongside the better known examples of pan-Mediterranean fish sauce and wine amphorae from, in the early period, Campania and the Tuscan coasts, and in the later period North Africa, Spain and the East.[31] These newly discovered "local" amphorae are almost certainly the tip of a much broader iceberg of the ceramic evidence for intra-regional and even smaller scale movement of goods, which, once its signals are properly identified, will rebalance our notion of Roman trade, particularly in periods like late antiquity in which long-distance exchange falls off.[32]

The Project's inadvertent discovery and excavation of a Italic sigillata production site – Marzuolo – and thin section analysis of its finds, also gives new meaning to what is typically assumed to be an "imported" luxury product (fig. 9). Our excavations at Marzuolo produced evidence for two major phases of fine ware production – a so-called pre or experimental sigillata phase (30–10 BCE), and a late phase (50–70 CE). Through thin section comparison with wares from the field survey and excavated sites the wares of the first phases were found to have circulated locally; further chemical analysis is necessary to know if the later phase did as well.[33] The former data, however, indicates that sigillata was not shipped exclusively off to "consumer cities" or wealthy sites, but was also consumed locally (fig. 10).

The same sites that purchased this local Marzuolo sigillata – including Marzuolo itself – also purchased wares from Campania, Arezzo and/or the northern Tuscan coast. As Pasquinucci and Menchelli's work on the northern Tuscan coast has also suggested, ceramic production and agriculture formed part of the same portfolio of land use and labor.[34] With the massive Italian expansion of fine ware production beginning in the late 1st cent. BCE, Italic sigillata may have been many rural dwellers "local" ware.

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[28] See Veronika Schreck's contribution to this volume.

[29] See Schreck's contribution to this volume.

[30] The late antique examples are published in Pecci et al 2017; Vaccaro 2017.

[31] See Vaccaro in Bowes in press.

[32] See for instance Patterson et al 2005; Fracchia 2006; and Cerelli – Diosono – Patterson 2017.

[33] See Vaccaro – Capelli – Ghisleni 2017

[34] Pasquinucci – Menchelli 2005.

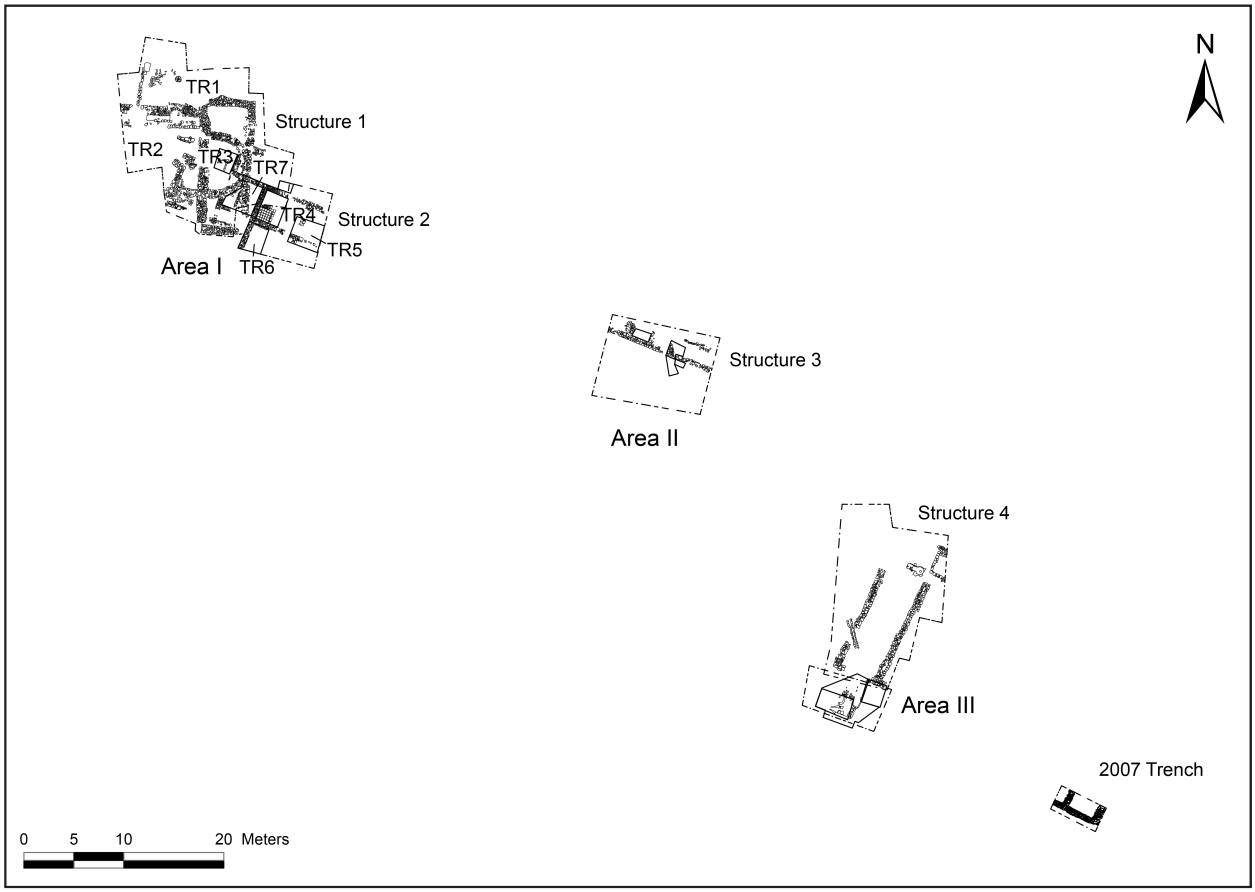

Fig. 9 Marzuolo, site plan (plan by M. Sfacteria)

6 Time is short

Unlike the Molino San Vincenzo site, heavily damaged by ploughing and erosion, most of the Roman Peasant Project sites were reasonably well preserved, such that detailed strato-chronological analysis was possible. The imagined Roman peasant is eternal; constructed from 19th and early 20th century ethnographies and Italian and European avatism about a primitive lost past, the Roman peasant is imagined to be tied to the land, never moving, never changing until slave agriculture, land grabs or war forces s/he into extinction or to the city.[35]

The rural dwellers we uncovered in the Roman Peasant Project were quite different. The average occupation period for sites in the Project was 44 years.[36] Most of the small sites like Podere Terrato or San Martino yielded ceramics that could be dated over 50–75 year spectrum, but whose highly abbreviated stratigraphy and near total lack of building repairs pointed to a much shorter actual use life. Even sites which produced surface ceramics from a longer span, like Pievina or Case Nuove, upon excavation were found to consist to two or more short phases,

[35] Weber 1891; Rostovstzeff 1910; Gaggio 2017. Different readings of temporality and rural populations can be found in Foxhall 2000; Osborne 1991, while current literature on peasants more broadly has abandoned this conviction of stasis: Bernstein and Byers 2001; Narotsky 2016.

[36] Bowes in Bowes in press.

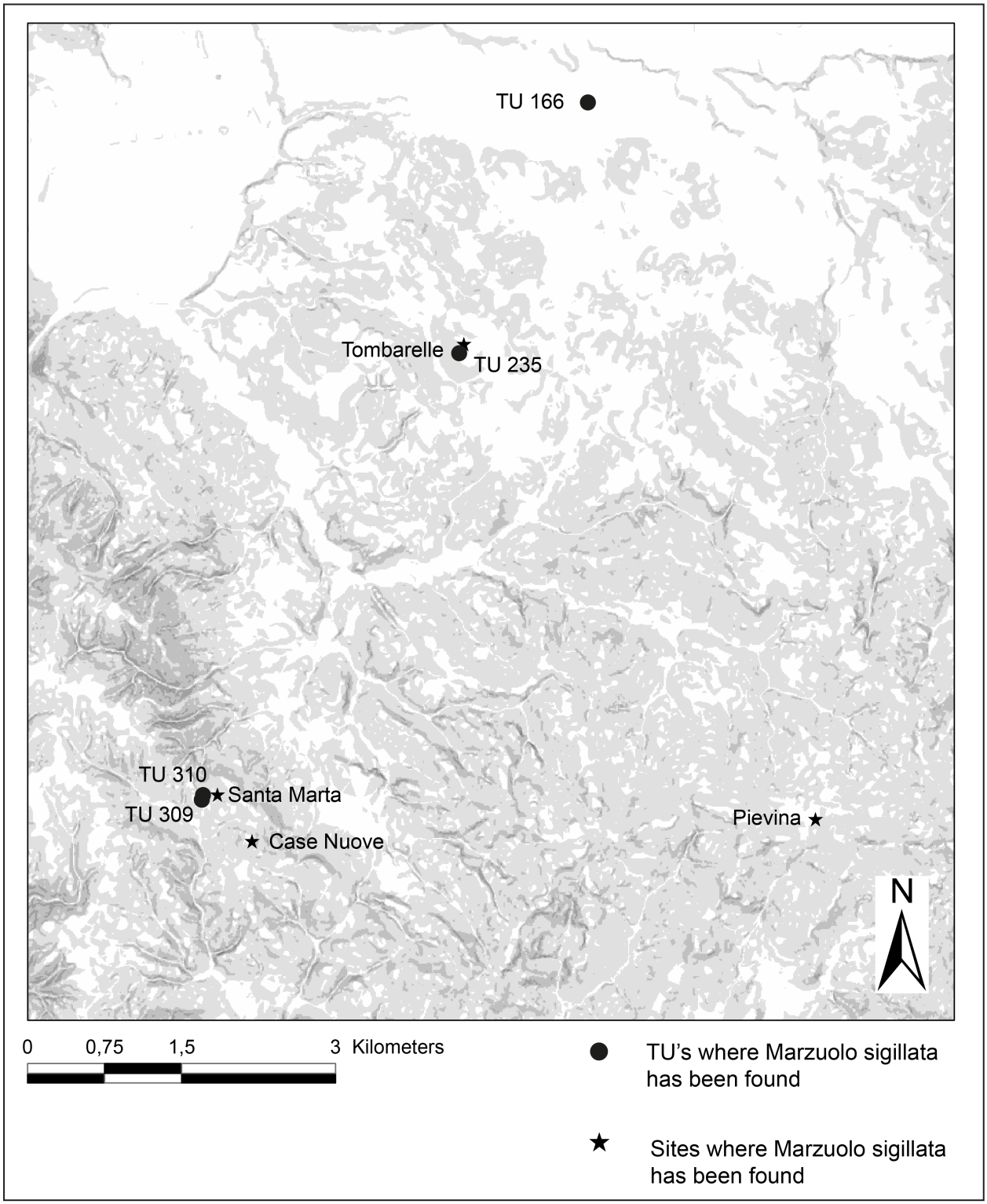

Fig. 10 Distribution of Marzuolo ceramics in the Project area (map by E. Rizzo)

separated by a hiatus. The countryside the Project found was thus a fast moving one, with sites being built and abandoned in generational or even sub-generational time.

These findings have important implications for how we imagine the Roman landscape and its inhabitants. The phased maps produced through survey are broadly imagined to be snapshots of contemporary human habitation. For certain periods of Roman history, particularly the late Republic/early Empire, this seems unlikely to be true. None of the small 1st c. BCE–CE sites we excavated in the so-called Piani Rossi section of our project area were contemporary with each other, but instead were probably separated by a generation or more. The little cluster of sites in this area – which echoes so many maps of small sites from this period in central Italy – thus emerged through excavation as constituting not a carpet, but a palimpsest. As most of these sites represented not houses, but shorter use sites such as the temporary stables at San Martino, short-term work-huts like Podere Terrato, we should also imagine that the abandonment of the site signals a potential shift in the use of the land for which that site was built to accommodate.

7 Conclusions

The detailed and inescapable complexity of any excavation raises more questions than it answers. This was particularly true of the Roman Peasant Project where the sites and people under investigation were largely unexplored. If they do nothing else, projects like Molino San Vincenzo and the Roman Peasant Project show how many assumptions underlie our ideas about the Roman landscape and how detailed excavation and finds analysis often upends them. None of the canonical site-type lists includes the places which have emerged through these two projects – more productive than domestic, neither villa rustica nor peasant house. The detailed analysis of archaeobotanical, ceramic and other finds data from both projects reveal instead complicated spaces, where activities we thought typical are harder to find (so-called domestic life) while other things like craft production and agro-processing are overwhelmingly evident. While both projects were set far from the coastal trading and export hotspots, these same analyses finds them enmeshed in dense exchange networks at both long and shorter distance scales. And in the Roman Peasant Project, these people and places seem subject to constant change as the land is used in different ways by different families in quick, almost frenetic succession. If both projects, and the Roman Peasant Project in particular, challenges these previous held assumptions it is due to the nature of the data. The "thicker" information gleaned from pollen and small finds and ceramics and faunal remains reveals not just a more complex landscape, but replaces landscape with "taskscape." The taskscape frames a reciprocal matrix of land, people, time and above all activities, all impacting one another.[37]In different ways, the Molino San Vincenzo and Roman Peasant Projects have sought to illuminate Roman taskscapes, to put people, labor and production at the center of Italian Roman landscape studies and to rethink the various ways that rural dwellers lived and worked.

[37] Ingold 1993.

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