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The nEU-Med project: Vetricella, an Early Medieval royal property on Tuscany's Mediterranean

edited by

Giovanna Bianchi, Richard Hodges



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**The nEU-Med project:
Vetricella, an Early Medieval royal property
on Tuscany's Mediterranean**

edited by Giovanna Bianchi, Richard Hodges

with contributions by

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Giovanna Bianchi, Arianna Briano, Mauro Paolo Buonincontri,
Isabella Carli, Letizia Castelli, Cristina Cicali, Luisa Dallai, Gaetano Di Pasquale,
Alessio Fiore, Bernard Gratuze, Richard Hodges, Lorenzo Marasco,
Pierluigi Pieruccini, Marta Rossi, Alessia Rovelli, Luisa Russo,
Davide Susini, Serena Viva, Vanessa Volpi



Cover: Aerial view of excavations at Vetricella (Scarolino, GR) (photo nEU-Med project).

Unless otherwise specified, all photos are by the authors of the individual articles.

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Alexander Agostini for contributions:

Introduction by G. Bianchi, R. Hodges

The stratigraphic sequence at the site of Vetricella (8th-13th centuries): a revised interpretation by L. Marasco, A. Briano

The coins from the excavations of Vetricella. Notes on the issues of Berengar I by the mint at Pavia by A. Rovelli

The Medieval coins from Vetricella: the stratigraphic context by C. Cicali, L. Marasco

Burials from the cemetery at Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto): anthropological, paleodemographic and paleopathological analyses by S. Viva

Rural public courts for an economic history of the Kingdom of Italy (10th and 11th centuries): an archaeological survey by G. Bianchi

Virna Pigolotti for contributions:

Archaeological and geochemical surveys in the Pecora Valley: the first results by L. Dallai, I. Carli, V. Volpi

Simonetta Ceglia for contributions:

Single fired glazed ceramics and colature rosse from the site of Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto): typological study and first thermoluminescence analysis (TL) by A. Briano

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Glass artefacts from the site of Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto) by L. Castelli

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The Knots and the Nets: Fisc, Rural Estates and Cities in the Written Sources (Northern Italy, c. 800-1000) by A. Fiore

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Simonetta Ceglia for contributions:

The blue and bluish green glass sherds, decorated with opaque white glass strands, discovered at Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto): analytical study by B. Gratuze

Defining the archaeology of Bloch's first Feudal Age. Implications of Vetricella Phases I and II for the making of Medieval Italy (8th-9th centuries) by R. Hodges

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CONTENTS

THE NEU-MED PROJECT: VETRICELLA, AN EARLY MEDIEVAL ROYAL PROPERTY ON TUSCANY'S MEDITERRANEAN

IL PROGETTO NEU-MED:VETRICELLA, UNA CORTE REGIA AL TOMEDIEVALE NELLA TOSCANA MEDITERRANEA

Italian abstracts

Giovanna Bianchi, Richard Hodges	
<i>Introduction</i>	7
Lorenzo Marasco, Arianna Briano	
<i>The stratigraphic sequence at the site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): a revised interpretation (8th-13th centuries)</i>	9
<i>La sequenza stratigrafica nel sito di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): una nuova lettura interpretativa (VIII-XIII secolo)</i>	21
Davide Susini, Pierluigi Pieruccini	
<i>Preliminary Geoarchaeological results from the Intermediate ring-shaped ditch at the archaeological site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto)</i>	23
<i>Risultati preliminari dalla ricerca geoarcheologica nel fossato intermedio di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto)</i>	30
Alexander Agostini	
<i>The metal finds from the site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): preliminary results from the study of an Early Medieval assemblage</i>	33
<i>I reperti in metallo dal sito di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto). Risultati preliminari dallo studio di un repertorio alto-medievale</i>	48
Arianna Briano	
<i>Single fired glazed ceramics and colature rosse from the site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): typological study and first thermoluminescence analysis (TL)</i>	51
<i>Ceramiche invetriate in monocottura e colature rosse dal sito della Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): studio tipologico e prime analisi di Termoluminescenza</i>	60
Luisa Russo	
<i>The coarse, fine and selezionata wares from the site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): a comparative analysis of two contexts</i>	61
<i>La ceramica acroma grezza, depurata e semidepurata dall'insediamento di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): due contesti a confronto</i>	68
Letizia Castelli	
<i>Glass artefacts from the site of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto)</i>	69
<i>I vetri dal sito di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto)</i>	76
Bernard Gratuze	
<i>The blue and bluish green glass sherds, decorated with opaque white glass strands, discovered at Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): analytical study</i>	79
<i>I frammenti di vetro blu e verde bluastrò, decorati con fili di vetro bianco opaco, scoperti a Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): studio analitico</i>	88
Alessia Rovelli	
<i>The coins from the excavations of Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto). Notes on the Pavese issues of Berengar I</i>	89
<i>Le monete dallo scavo di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto). Note su di un assemblaggio di denari di Berengario I dalla zecca di Pavia</i>	97
Lorenzo Marasco, Cristina Cicali	
<i>The Medieval coins from Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): the stratigraphic context</i>	99
<i>Le monete medievali dal sito di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): il contesto stratigrafico</i>	104
Serena Viva	
<i>Burials from the cemetery at Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): anthropological, paleodemographic and paleopathological analyses</i>	105
<i>Le sepolture del cimitero di Vetricella (Scarlino, Grosseto): indagine antropologica, paleodemografica e paleopatologica</i>	119

Veronica Aniceti	
<i>The zooarchaeological analyses from Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto): an overview of animal exploitation at the site.</i> . . .	121
<i>Analisi zooarcheologiche da Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto): una panoramica sullo sfruttamento animale nel sito</i> . . .	129
Mauro Paolo Buonincontri, Marta Rossi, Gaetano Di Pasquale	
<i>Medieval forest use and management in Southern Tyrrhenian Tuscany: archaeo-anthracological research at the site of Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto) (AD 750-1250)</i>	131
<i>Uso e gestione delle foreste medievali nella Toscana tirrenica meridionale: ricerche archeoantracologiche nel sito della Vetricella (Scarolino, Grosseto) (750-1250 d.C.)</i>	141
Luisa Dallai, Isabella Carli, Vanessa Volpi	
<i>Archaeological and geochemical surveys in the Pecora Valley: the first results.</i>	143
<i>Ricognizioni archeologiche e geochimiche nella valle del Pecora: primi risultati</i>	158
Pierluigi Pieruccini, Davide Susini	
<i>The Holocene sedimentary record and the landscape evolution along the coastal plains of the Pecora and Cornia rivers (Southern Tuscany, Italy): preliminary results and future perspectives</i>	161
<i>Il record sedimentario olocenico e l'evoluzione del paesaggio lungo le pianure costiere dei fiumi Pecora e Cornia (Toscana meridionale, Italia): risultati preliminari e prospettive future</i>	167
* * *	
Richard Hodges	
<i>Defining the archaeology of Bloch's first Feudal Age. Implications of Vetricella Phases I and II for the making of Medieval Italy (8th-9th centuries)</i>	169
<i>Verso una definizione dell'archeologia della prima età feudale di Bloch. Lo sviluppo del sito di Vetricella nei Periodi I e II per un contributo alla definizione dell'Italia Medievale (VIII-IX secolo)</i>	182
Giovanna Bianchi	
<i>Rural public properties for an economic history of the Kingdom of Italy (10th and 11th centuries): an archaeological survey</i>	185
<i>Corti pubbliche rurali per una storia economica del Regno d'Italia (X e XI secolo): una ricognizione archeologica.</i> . . .	195
Alessio Fiore	
<i>The Knots and the Nets: Fisc, Rural Estates and Cities in the Written Sources (Northern Italy, c. 800-1000)</i>	197
<i>I nodi e le Reti: Fisco, proprietà rurali e città nelle fonti scritte (Nord Italia, IX-X secolo)</i>	205

INTRODUCTION

This second volume dedicated to the nEU-Med project is centered on the site of Vetricella and its territory, an important royal property that preserved this status until the end of the 11th century, when the function of the site started to be only occasionally frequented before its definitive abandonment in the following centuries.

Vetricella is the project's key site, at the centre of a sample area selected for more in-depth research because it represents a territory type exemplifying many other coastal landscapes of the Early Medieval western Mediterranean.

Thanks to the evidence garnered from research carried out in this context it was possible to locate interpretative markers that have enabled us to lay for new lines of enquiry and review previously acquired data from past research, set in a wider picture that goes beyond Tuscany encompassing the whole Kingdom of Italy.

Fieldwork carried out in 2018, followed by a smaller excavation campaign in July 2019, has in fact delivered new evidence, providing a more certain interpretation of the material culture read through inter and multidisciplinary lenses according to the research grounds on which the nEU-Med project is founded.

The volume opens with an important update of the archaeological sequence recorded at the site (MARASCO, BRIANO) and is directly connected to the successive contribution on the detailed geomorphological analysis of the ditches and their infills (SUSINI, PIERUCCINI), of fundamental importance in understanding the transformations the site of Vetricella underwent especially during the period between the 9th and 10th centuries.

These contributions are followed by a series of articles aimed at presenting a preliminary study of the most signifi-

cant materials gathered during fieldwork activities, namely: finds in metal (AGOSTINI), ceramic (RUSSO, of which, due to the significant recorded numbers, an analysis is presented of two specific contexts), glass (CASTELLI) with relative archaeometric analyses (GRATUZE), coins (ROVELLI and MARASCO, CICALI), faunal remains (ANICETI) and anthropological evidence recorded in the site's burial area (VIVA).

The picture is then extended further to the territory around the site with the reconstruction, by way of archaeobotanical analysis, of the forest cover and agricultural environment surrounding Vetricella (BUONINCONTI, ROSSI, DI PASQUALE). The Val di Pecora and adjacent Val di Cornia are instead at the centre of two articles, the first dedicated to archaeological and chemical surveys (DALLAI, CARLI, VOLPI), the second (PIERUCCINI, SUSINI) centered on the geomorphological characteristics of the original coastal lagoons developing in correspondence with the mouth of the two rivers that provide the aforementioned valleys with their name. The volume ends with three contributions (HODGES; BIANCHI; FIORE) in which, following a chronological sequence that covers the period between the 9th and 11th centuries, the case of Vetricella is placed within broader themes and contexts by way of comparative analysis, making extensive use of material sources in the first two contributions and documentary ones in the article by Alessio Fiore.

The complexity and volume of evidence recorded in the last two years of research means that almost all the contributions should be considered as preliminary studies, necessary to trace an overall picture in this volume that will be followed by future monographs for the detailed analysis of the single discussed topics.

RURAL PUBLIC PROPERTIES FOR AN ECONOMIC HISTORY
OF THE KINGDOM OF ITALY (10TH AND 11TH CENTURIES):
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

In the text preceding this contribution, Richard Hodges has described how the history of Vettricella during the Carolingian period, with its three concentric ditches, took on the material form and a broader narrative linked to the history of that feudal society outlined by Marc Bloch with distinctive features which, compared to the Roman economic system, have been at the centre of more recent historical narratives (WICKHAM 2014; DEVROEY 2006).

The very same establishment and transformation of the banal lordships has also been the topic of a wide-ranging debate among historians. Following the hypotheses and successive debates arising from the well-known mutationist theory, initially elaborated for the French area by Duby, the literature has today quite unanimously and with few exceptions taken a continuist perspective, attributing the roots of the gradual formation of the seigneurship in the second half of the 9th century, and its definitive adoption at the beginning of the 12th century (for an assessment of the subject refer to the synthesis and bibliography in CAROCCI 1997; PROVERO 2007; FIORE 2015). This has also been the view, up until recent studies, taken by Italian medievalists, that now theorize a different phenomenology in the dynamics of seigneurial transformation, suggesting the end of the 11th century as a crucial moment of radical change taking place in the Kingdom of Italy and in the physiognomy of that very same seigneurship, now characterized by a new order based on three fundamental pillars: settlements between peers; settlements with subordinates; exercise of violence (FIORE 2017, pp. XI-XVIII for the most up-to-date references on the Italian and European historiographical narration,). Such a position is partially in line with the wider picture traced by Wickham that proposes the definitive twilight of Rome's inheritance to have occurred in the 11th century, unraveling into the political and economic dynamics of Early Medieval society (WICKHAM 2014).

Among these readings, the level of involvement or opposition between royal and aristocratic powers has been variously illustrated as part of economic dynamics founded on landed property and the so-called 'land policy'. However, as noted in a recent contribution (TOMEI 2017), many questions still remain for historians to answer on the nature as well as the characteristics of the formation and management systems of public lands, these acting as the driving force that set in motion changes tied-in to the feudal world.

With regards to archaeologists, what has been their contribution in the previously illustrated issues with specific reference to the western Mediterranean area and the Kingdom of Italy in particular, a topic directly related to the nEU-Med project?

Although the answers provided by archaeology have as yet never been expressed in a single systematic narrative, these however have been significant. The most recent analyses conducted on material evidence from rural contexts has shown, at least in the past ten years, the great gulf that separates the material culture of the 12th century with that of previous centuries (see the various contributions in MOLINARI 2010), offering a valid incentive to the hypothesis of a more rapid and radical signeurial change than formerly envisaged. In his contribution Hodges has shown the role archaeology has played in identifying the socio-economic mechanisms that set the groundwork, by the mid-9th century, for the formation of the feudal seigneurship while at the same time determining the process that led to commercial stagnation in this part of the Mediterranean after late antiquity, seeing a gradual revival only by the end of the 9th century. Full development will take place from the later 10th century onwards, as clearly shown in a recently published monograph dedicated to the subject of transport vessels (GELICHI, MOLINARI 2018). Furthermore, analyses carried out on specific classes of materials, but also on architectural structures, have provided answers to different aspects of Early Medieval rural economy (BIANCHI 2012; SANTANGELI VALENZANI 2011) while the study of settlement contexts through excavations and survey activities has made it possible to better define settlement dynamics, starting from the well-known Tuscan model (FRANCOVICH 2008; AUGENTI 2016, pp. 82-184).

Even so, a gap still exists in Early Medieval Italian rural contexts between the events that took place following the end of Frankish rule and the great revival of the 12th century. In the archaeological periodization the 10th and 11th centuries are often treated as a continuation of previous periods or as the starting point of later ones. This results in their being reduced inside a timeframe that, following the canonical version outlined by the written sources, begins with the breakup of the Carolingian order and directly arrives at the first tangible and experimental forms of territorial seigneurship, a result of that continuist view so typical of Italian historiography that has only recently been questioned. If the material evidence allows us to identify those signs that point to the mid-9th century as the starting point of this trend, for archaeologists the rural seigneurship still remains the main protagonist over

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the course of the following centuries. A few contributions aside, among which the recently published proceedings of an important conference (BOUGARD, LORÉ 2019), a number of fundamental questions still remain unanswered: how did public land management function? At what level did this management affect the formation processes of the rural seigneurship as well as economic growth? What are the transformation chronologies connected with the formations of the 11th and 12th century seigneurial districts? Having determined the existence of a public policy tied to land and acknowledged 'privatized' forms of management conducted by the consolidated rural seigneurship, there are still a number of largely unclarified processes that beg answering.

I will therefore resume and focus my attention from where Hodges left off, namely on the still uncharted historical phase set between the 10th and beginning 11th century. The objective of this contribution is to formulate a number of preliminary hypotheses about the role played by central powers and the royal fisc during this chronological period, as compared to the previous century extensively discussed by Hodges (see HODGES *infra*), carrying out significant political changes in the management of landed possessions as well as natural and agricultural resources.

At the same time, I will attempt to argue how these more incisive transformations took place within a non-conflicting relationship between the 'State' and the great aristocracies, and in what way this process in the Kingdom of Italy might have constituted a basis for the development of the rural seigneurship in the course of the 11th century¹.

Our privileged observation point will be offered by the site of Vetricella, starting off from its material reality.

1. VETRICELLA AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ROYAL AND MARCH PROPERTIES

Starting where we left off last year with Simone Collavini, namely our contribution in the first nEU-Med volume, I will attempt to set in clearer focus the data currently at our disposal (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018). Even then Vetricella was seen as a privileged observation point, considering that the site was identified as the centre of the royal court of Valli, located in a vast territory characterized by large public properties among which the adjoining *curtis* of Cornino. It has already been described and commented upon at length that both the courts of Valli and Cornino appear for the first time in the double dowry issued by King Hugh of Provence in 937 in favour of Berta and Adelaide (VIGNODELLI 2012).

The study of the material aspects of Vetricella is therefore inevitably linked to the subject of royal properties. In the previously mentioned volume edited by Loré and Bougard, that brings together contributions mainly focused on the economic management of these forms of assets, a useful typological

subdivision was elaborated by Wickham in his closing remarks (WICKHAM 2019). In view of a great variety of these possessions that Wickham assigns to ten different categories, it appears clear that if we want to understand in greater detail how the economy of the royal properties functioned it is necessary to refer to the last two categories he identifies, both connected to one another, namely: inalienable royal properties directly administered by emissaries of the King or royal properties administered by public officials such as Counts and the Marquis. These types of public holdings represented the economic heart of the system to which Vetricella belonged. Focus on these properties poses, however, a serious issue for historians. Documentary sources referring to these holdings and their workings are in fact scarce due to the very nature of these possessions, often implying transactions that took on either ephemerally written or oral forms (COLLAVINI 2019).

While waiting for historians to establish the necessary parameters pertinent to identifying and reviewing, if indirectly, the nature and possible function of this category of royal holdings, for the time being archaeology appears to offer an effective route, providing a more in-depth grasp on the workings of these properties.

The study of the material evidence from royal and march rural courts is not unknown to the field of Italian medieval archaeology (see the considerations by BOUGARD 1991; 2019). It is, however, a subject that has never been dealt with in a systematic manner, having also suffered from that 'flattening' process due to its being set in-between the studies carried out on rural villages dating to the Lombard and Carolingian periods and the birth of the first castles. Furthermore, the reduced extent of archaeological excavation has up until now provided fragmentary evidence. This has led archaeologists in some cases to observe few material differences as compared to other 'privately owned' *curtes* in the kingdom, thus justifying their 'anonymous' addition in the more generic settlement dynamics of the period.

In this regard, the evidence garnered from analyses conducted over the last decades on a number of important *curtes* (*fig. 1*) such as Frugarolo-Orba (BOUGARD 1991; BONASERA, BOUGARD, CORTELLAZZO 1993), Marengo (CROSETTO 2017), Fraore (CATARSI 2018), Aulla (ARSLAN *et al.* 2006) and S. Quirico in Valdarno (Cantini in BIANCHI, CANTINI, COLLAVINI 2019) are emblematic. As for Tuscany, only in the recent case of San Genesio, one of the most important march properties in the Tuscia, do we possess a more extensive excavation with material evidence which has for the time being been illustrated in a limited manner while waiting for a final edition on the archaeological research (see BIANCHI, CANTINI, COLLAVINI 2019).

The uniqueness of Vetricella does not therefore depend on the nature of the site, but rather on the extent of its excavation, allowing the recording of a number of material aspects hitherto unknown in other research across the peninsula (*fig. 2*).

Let us therefore summarize the new elements that significantly advance our study beyond the 2018 volume.

To start with, an improved and much-needed definition of the chronology of the different phases was established (see the periodization put forward by MARASCO, BRIANO *infra*).

¹ For a summary on the relationship between aristocracies and State in past and recent historiographical models also in relation to Italian research see the contribution by FIORE 2006. For a definition of rural seigneurship we refer to the meaning attributed by Cinzio Violante that indicates how such a seigneurship was strongly characterized by the exercise of powers that were previously an exclusive prerogative of public authorities' in a specific territorial area (VIOLANTE 1991).



fig. 1 – Location of sites mentioned in this article.



fig. 2 – Vetricella. A. the site before the excavation; B, D. Aerial view by drone of the excavation at the end of the 2018 campaign; C. Planimetry of Period IV second half 10th c. first half 11th c. AD.

Today we can date the foundation of the three concentric ditches to the second half of the 9th century, distinguishing the phase dated to the first half of the 10th century (Period III) from that of the second half of the 10th-beginning of the 11th century (Period IV).

We are aware that in spite of the extension of the investigated area this represents only a minimal part of the site and consequently still reserves different and possibly contrasting evidence with what has been documented so far. It is however apparent that only the aforementioned phase, roughly corresponding to the Ottonian period, is the one that has provided the greatest amount of material evidence.

It is in this moment, in fact, that the economic aspects already present in the life of the site increase in both quality and quantity, while undergoing a significant change in layout and various settlement dynamics.

The innermost ditch was fully obliterated and shortly after partially covered by mortar thereby enlarging the surfaced area, leaving only the intermediate and outer ditch to be filled-in with water (for the geomorphologic analyses of the ditch infills see SUSINI, PIERUCCINI *infra*).

The central tower structure was fitted with a masonry base as well as a possible external enclosure or roofing, a structure that in any case bounded a specific zone of pertinence, in turn surrounded by a wider area fenced by a wooden palisade. The increase, during this phase, in the number of ceramic fragments that can be identified as storage vessels, most of them of local production (see Russo *infra*), would suggest the existence of storage practices of a certain volume, partly related to agricultural resources².

Metalworking activities conducted at the site were maintained and evidently increased with the forging of objects found in large numbers and whose recent analysis permits us to attribute them with a degree of certainty to this period (see AGOSTINI *infra*). While the study has shown that a significant number of these objects were either used or broken and probably destined to be recycled through re-forging processes, the significant number of finds (several hundred pieces) is nevertheless indicative of the number of objects produced on site or in the surrounding area. A preliminary analysis of the metalworking assemblage has revealed that the majority of these objects can be associated with equestrian practices accompanied as well by knives and other tools employed in the working of wood and leather, along with other still unidentified finds. The large number of items associated with horse assemblages (especially horseshoeing nails and a significant number of spurs) might be connected to the possible breeding of horses, hypothesized in this phase (see ANICETI *infra*).

It is interesting to note that there is little pertaining to agricultural equipment, indicative of a production aimed at the smithing of tools connected to artisanal activities, des-

² A similar hypothesis has been backed by a preliminary analysis conducted on the surfaces of several of these containers. A number of the samples did not reveal traces of organic residue, as would occur in the case of cereal content. Furthermore, carbonized seeds were recorded in close proximity to the tower, ascribable to the immediately preceding period. A similar interpretation fits well with the chronology of the novel storage systems in relation to new forms of authority and subsequent changes in agricultural landscape (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI forthcoming).

tinued, as already speculated in the past (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018) not only to this administrative centre, but also towards other royal properties at times located in areas remote from the district of the Colline Metallifere. The numerous excavations conducted in this part of the Maremma during the past decades have in fact documented iron objects in much lower percentages.

We can now trace the development of the burial area to a limited time-period between the second half of the 10th century and the first decades of the 11th. The data acquired through anthropological research has defined those elements representative of a small community constituted by men, women and children (see VIVA *infra*) possibly part of the royal center's personnel and as such destined to be buried in the vicinity of a structure interpreted as a small oratory of which only negative features were identified (see MARASCO, BRIANO *infra*). It has, however, not been possible to determine if this group actually lived in the intermediate spaces between the outermost ditches or at a farther distance where additional archaeological research, in light of what little evidence emerged during diagnostic surveys, has not as yet been carried out. The hypotheses involving the lifestyle of these persons garnered from anthropological and archeozoological analyses traces a picture of a community dedicated to the storing of possible agricultural surplus, the raising of pigs and possibly horses in coexistence with specialized smiths that might have provided their services on a seasonal basis.

Recent surveys and the limited probes conducted to the southwest of the site have revealed, during this time period, a plain supporting settlement nuclei episodically featuring their own burial areas (see MARASCO, BRIANO *infra*; see DALLAI, CARLI, VOLPI *infra*). Therefore, it is more and more evident that, in the course of the 10th century, the royal property of Vetricella was at the centre of a demographically complex lowland settlement network located in the vicinity of lagoon areas (for the study of the lagoons see PIERUCCINI, SUSINI *infra*).

The passing of royal emissaries or high-ranking figures that might have occasionally occupied the tower structure is at this point supported by the discovery of horsing equipment, in particular the spurs, glass chalice fragments featuring straight or twisted stems, along with pieces of precious blue glass vessels, rarely documented across the peninsula (see CASTELLI and GRATUZE *infra*)³, rather than by ceramic finds (unlike the Carolingian period phase where a number of jugs in sparse glazed ware were documented, see BRIANO *infra*). The exceptional recovery of 21 coins minted in a period between Berengar I and Conrad II (end of the 9th-first forty years of the 11th century) further emphasizes the exceptional role this site may possibly have had for tax collection. Fiore (see FIORE *infra*) also suggests this site as a place where subsidiary transactions in coin may have taken place during certain periods for the sale of surplus produce, the latter possibly taking the form of objects in iron. In particular, the distribution of the Ottonian coins in areas outside the central tower where metalworking activities were carried out, at least in

³ With reference to the blue glass vessels, the hypothesis put forward in CASTELLI *infra* interprets these as possible oratory accoutrements. Note their distribution in the vicinity of this structure as well as their attested use as small reliquaries or lamps.

this phase, might further support this hypothesis, although ultimately difficult to prove (as to the possible hypotheses tied-in to the distribution of the coins see the contribution by ROVELLI and by CICALI, MARASCO *infra*).

Therefore, what characteristics documented at Vetricella find parallels in the material evidence of other royal courts? Few, if truth be told, due to the limited extent of archaeological fieldwork. All the royal and march *curtes* are located at strategic points along roads or waterways. Apart from this common feature the remains of a tower-structure, generically dated to the 10th century, has been recorded only in the *curtis* of Orba along with evidence of an enclosing wall dated to the end of the 10th century and a possible ditch. More common is evidence pertaining to religious structures: a church with three apses was documented in the very same *curtis* of Orba and possibly dated to the mid-9th century (BONASERA, BOUGARD, CORTELLAZZO 1993); a large church with Canonica characterized the 10th-11th century phase in the marchional/march centre of S. Genesio (CANTINI 2010); a church dated in its first phases to the 8th century with reconstruction work carried out in the Carolingian period, is present in the nearby royal *curtis* of S. Quirico in the Valdarno (Cantini in BIANCHI, CANTINI, COLLAVINI 2019); the refurbishment of the abbey church of S. Caprasio in the *curtis* of Aulla, property of the Marquis of Tuscia, enriched with a new sarcophagus intended to house the relics of the saint (ARSLAN *et al.* 2006, p. 195).

Another recurring element can be seen also in the traces of artisanal activities: at Marengo where significant metal casting activities have been hypothesized in this royal court even though there are no clear elements that permit dating these beyond a generic Early Medieval period; at Fraore where intensive production of iron objects, although not quantified, is dated as at Vetricella to the 10th-11th century; at San Genesio where metalworking activities and a pottery furnace, along with an olive press, are dated to the full Carolingian period therefore predating the reconstruction of the church and the Canonica mentioned above. To this group one might also add the royal *curtis* of Cornino a short distance from Vetricella. Here, at the site of Carlappiano, located within the court's borders, archaeological research has brought to light traces of saltworks dated to the 12th-13th century, already possibly in use during the early Middle Ages as attested by literary sources and more ephemeral material evidence (DALLAI *et al.* 2018; see DALLAI, CARLI, VOLPI *infra*).

The description of these artisanal activities does not differ substantially from those taking place in other courts set in the great private dominions of northern Italy as illustrated by the polyptychs (see FIORE *infra*) and treated at length by various authors for an even longer period set between the 9th and 10th centuries (in the extensive bibliography see TOUBERT 1997, pp. 115-252; PASQUALI 2002, pp. 3-72).

However, the case of Vetricella is the only excavated site that provides clear evidence of two significant aspects of these production activities (in this case the objects in iron): their *volume*, that appears as exceptional when compared to average manorial standards, and their *specialization*.

Therefore, can Vetricella be seen as an exception? A *unicum* accidentally located in the Tuscan Maremma? As previously stated, the activities carried out at Vetricella are associ-

ated with important shifts of the site's layout. Furthermore, as described in past contributions, between the 10th and 11th centuries, the landscape surrounding the site, including the Val di Pecora, experienced substantial changes with the opening of new agricultural areas thanks to a more consistent practice of fire clearance as compared to 9th century phases (PIERUCCINI *et al.* 2018; see BUONINCONTRI, ROSSI *infra*).

2. BEYOND THE PUBLIC PROPERTIES, FOR A PRELIMINARY COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

The unclear evidence of these characteristics in other currently excavated royal properties has led us to review the results of investigations carried out in the past years across the whole Centre-North of the peninsula. This, in search of analogies from sites not identified as centres of royal properties but mostly classified as part of the first generation of 10th-century castles tied to the earliest forms of seigneurial initiatives.

This first screening has produced surprising evidence with the identification of over thirty sites, scarcely documented by the written sources, but whose material traces testify to uncommonly specialized forms of production or significant alterations in topography and in that of the surrounding landscape.

Due to the limited extent of this contribution it will not be possible to thoroughly illustrate the currently acquired data, but only to list some of the most representative cases, postponing the discussion to future publications (*fig.* 1).

In relation to consistent specialized forms of production, the case of a wide geographic area in the Apennines near Parma pivoted on the site of Castellare di Monte Gropallo (Piacenza) is especially indicative (BAZZINI *et al.* 2008; GHIRETTI, GIANNICEDDA 2013). The site is located in a geological district characterized by the presence of important steatite outcrops exploited since prehistory. Archaeological excavations have located traces of workshops dating to the end of the 10th and 11th centuries. Through analytical study of the finds different stages of production in the *chaîne opératoire* were traced and are attested by about 37.000 objects in steatite (including finished, semi-finished and discarded products). Other workshops, distributed across the surrounding territory (ten at least have been estimated) have been associated to this centre, presumably active during the same periods and therefore increasing the already considerable production.

Moving beyond the functional interpretation of the finds in steatite (interpreted as rosary beads, but more likely to be identifiable as spindle whorls) the evidence remains of an exceptional production between the end of the 10th into the 11th century, and perhaps not intended for internal consumption, but rather destined for export.

To this site, supposedly associated to personages with close connections to the Count of Piacenza on whose holdings the centre was located, it is also possible to add the case of Pareto di Bardi (GIANNICEDDA, GHIRETTI, BIAGINI 1995).

Still in the Apennines near Parma and not far from Castellaro di Gropallo, traces of one or more workshops have been identified for the production of spindle whorls in steatite (as interpreted by archaeologists). Although the num-

ber of finds is much lower than those found at Castellare di Groppallo (about 3.000 pieces including finished and semi-finished products) we nonetheless find ourselves confronted by an exceptional and surely underestimated figure keeping in mind the hypothetical presence of other workshops in the territory. Archaeological evidence permitting the definition of a precise date is much weaker here and confined for the time being from the 10th to the 12th centuries, while there is no mention of any political figure in charge of this site who might have gravitated in the vicinity of the territories of Parma and Piacenza.

To have at least an element of comparison it is worth remembering that whorls in steatite never occur in large numbers (ranging from 2 to a maximum of 10 finds) in some royal properties (Orba and Vettricella) as well as in a number of sites of a contemporary political and economic relevance. Typologically the finds in steatite from Groppallo and Pareti di Bardo find direct comparison with those recorded at Nogara (BUZZO 2011), Piadena (POSSENTI 2005), Sant'Agata Bolognese (NEPOTI 2014), Orba (GIANNICHELLA, GHIRETTI, BIAGINI 1995) and Vettricella. Therefore, it is plausible to hypothesize a particularly extensive, although not numerically significant, circulation of these objects well beyond their area of production.

The other geographical area that presents a specialized and numerically significant production is that of the Val Chiavenna, connected to the manufacture of objects in soapstone and surely part of a territory located in the royal holdings or connected to high ranking public figures (SAGGIORO 2019). Tiziano Mannoni, in his classification of these objects, has already described how production of type D was distributed in the Central Alps, with an increase in this area from the 9th century and thereafter becoming predominant in the 10th century as compared to wares produced in the western Alps and typical of late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (MANNONI, PFEIFER, SERNEELS 1987; ALBERTI 1997; ALBERTI 2014). Recent work carried out at Chiavenna and in its surrounding territory has confirmed this area of the Central Alps, located along a key route, as one of the main manufacturing centres for objects in soapstone, in particular various sized pots (SAGGIORO 2019). The systematic archaeological analyses conducted in recent years cannot, however, link the exact quantitative data to a production that had already started centuries before the end of the millennium; between 50 and 60 quarries have been surveyed in the comuni of Piuro and Chiavenna alone (although without offering a precise chronology of exploitation SAGGIORO 2019). Nonetheless, it is the large number of finds in soapstone quarried from this area and documented across sites located in the Pianura Padana (approximately 60-80% of the sites are involved in this distribution) that demonstrate the extent of production (SAGGIORO 2019). This appears to increase over the course of the 10th century, as indicated by the extensive evidence recorded in the archaeological levels dating to this period at sites such as Piadena, Pello Intelvi, Milan and Sant'Agata Bolognese (ALBERTI 2014) where archaeometric analyses have confirmed that 70% of soapstone found on site originates from the quarries of Chiavenna (SAGGIORO 2019). The same widespread economic wealth of the district, testified by late

10th-century written sources is further proof as Fiore argues (see FIORE *infra*) of the positive production role during this period as well as its export in a wide geographic area.

Layout changes on an uncommon scale are the element that brings together a number of sites in the central area of the Po Valley, a territory that constituted the core of the Kingdom and where both public holdings and properties pertaining to figures with close ties to royal policies were mostly located. Bovolone (SAGGIORO *et al.* 2004), Piadena (BROGIOLO, MANCASSOLA 2005) and the previously mentioned site near Sant'Agata Bolognese (GELICHI, LIBRENTI, MARCHESINI 2014) are the most representative cases cited in this contribution as these centres, although with pre-existing, but poorly documented phases, underwent a consistent reorganization between the 10th and the beginning of the 11th centuries with the digging of ditches and the planning of inhabited areas. In the case of Sant'Agata Bolognese, a number of structures with unique features in the current architectural panorama of the peninsula were erected. These are in fact composed of an extensive lot of houses set one against the other and covering a surface of almost 45 square metres. The structures were built in wood using the technique of dormant beams with fixed-in posts known only to the area during this period and featuring elements also to be found at northern European sites (SAGGIORO 2010) possibly due to the presence of specialized craftsmen (GELICHI, LIBRENTI 2010).

Furthermore, different production activities were recorded on this very site, taking the form of textile manufacture (testified by a significant number of spindle whorls as compared to the figures usually recorded in other centers during this period) as well as the production of pestles (NEPOTI 2014; GELICHI 2014).

Likewise, significant layout changes had already been noted during this phase in two Tuscan sites near Vettricella and illustrated in the first nEU-Med volume: Donoratico and Rocca degli Alberti at Monterotondo Marittimo (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018). In the case of Donoratico the recent dating of a number of finds through thermoluminescent analysis has led to exclude the substantial production of sparse glazed ware during this phase, re-dating it instead to the mid-9th century (on this note see considerations in the final paragraph).

On the other hand, the radiocarbon dating of the mortar from the older tower at Donoratico connected to the site's first stone wall enclosure today confirms a chronology that can be ascribed to the advanced 10th century⁴ and not to the end of the 9th as previously hypothesized (BIANCHI, CHIARELLI, CRISCI, FICHERA, MIRIELLO 2012). A similar chronology was confirmed also through further archaeometric analyses for the site of Rocca degli Alberti, in an analogous extensive redefinition of its structures, including cereal-storage areas. At the same time, a preliminary edition of the work carried out on the plain of Grosseto points to the 10th century as a key period during which the highest occupation peak is recorded in a site, located in the present locality of Canonica, encircled by a ditch (with a very similar layout to that of Vettricella in

⁴ We report the complete dating references: US 10249, radiocarbon age 1120±30 BP, cal. AD 862-994 (95.4%). The analyses were carried by the BETA Analytic Radiocarbon Dating laboratories in Miami (Florida – USA).

this phase) along with a parallel apportionment of agricultural lots (CAMPANA 2018, pp. 88-107).

The presence of a tower is another feature common to these sites, often the only stone building in centres still dominated by structures in perishable materials. This element has already been noted in past contributions and interpreted as symptomatic of high-level building strategies, likening them to administrative centres of royal properties (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018).

In the first nEU-Med volume the definition of 'out-of-scale' sites was adopted for Vettricella as well as for Donoratico, Rocca degli Alberti and other centers of northern Tuscany, a definition that is indicative of uncommon characteristics that are not evident in other sites. This is especially the case in southern Tuscany, one of the most thoroughly researched geographic districts in the whole peninsula, capable of offering useful and appropriate elements of comparison. The features shared by these out-of-scale sites have already been identified and can be formulated by the following definition: centres that take on the form of hill-top or lowland public holdings, characterized by a significant planimetric layout, managed by royal officials or belonging to subjects benefitting from fiscal assets, often associated with specialized forms of production and set within an economic system ordered by royal authority.

To these common elements we can also add a circumscribed chronology of reference, namely that of the second half of the 10th-beginning of the 11th century. This has been identified with greater accuracy in the cases of Vettricella, Donoratico and Rocca degli Alberti, comparing the chronology of these sites to the periodization acknowledged for those centres located in other parts of the centre-north of the peninsula and listed in the course of this preliminary review.

Furthermore, in the first nEU-Med volume a number of hypotheses were formulated (now taken up again and developed further in the contribution *infra* by FIORE) in relation to the mechanisms of this economic system based on large rural estates and specialized production set in a network capable of directing medium or long distance exchanges, although not in properly commercial form. The review of the history as well as evidence from sites in the centre and north of the Peninsula, also supported by documentary sources (described in FIORE *infra*), allows us today to add these last to the Tuscan cases illustrated above, demonstrating a wider diffusion of these settlement-production centre types throughout the Kingdom of Italy. The adoption of the definition 'out-of-scale' originated from the need, a year ago, to confer a first definition to a form of macro material evidence never previously identified as such by the archaeological research let alone attested by the historical sources. In the future it will in all likelihood be necessary to adopt a new and less reductive definition that reflects not only the anomalous 'scale' of the assets and production, but also the articulated relations between the different sites in relation to a much more complex political and economic system than that currently envisaged. An element of this political-economic complexity is, for example, represented by the fact that almost all of the reviewed sites can be ascribed either to royal or march inalienable properties as well as to possessions related to temporary foundations, donations or

benefits directed toward high-ranking political figures in a dynamic setting in which the same bequeathed property could, at a later stage, be reabsorbed into the royal holdings. These centres ultimately constitute a group of sites mostly made up of public assets directly or indirectly administered by a central authority and fully part of the categories pointed out by Wickham (WICKHAM 2019). But, analogous to Rocca degli Alberti and Donoratico (but also in the first stages of study at Vettricella, MARASCO 2013; CREIGHTON 2012, pp. 94-95) and until recently, a large number of these sites was interpreted as the first display of territorial seigneurial power.

The extent of the material evidence recorded in the currently defined 'out-of-scale' sites is nevertheless symptomatic of a mature and uniform policy of important investments that can with difficulty be related to the first concrete affirmations of territorial seigneurial status. These last, during this historical period, are still strongly tied to the urban political scene and do not as yet appear in a pervasive form in rural contexts.

As a result, how can this evidence be interpreted?

3. TOWARDS A NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE MATERIAL RECORD

The historical and economic scenario of the Kingdom of Italy and of the peninsula in general between the 7th and the beginning of the 9th century, as explained by Hodges in his contribution, was without a doubt quite different from that of northern Europe, albeit with exceptions, due to the significantly lower volume of trade and economic growth. Today the material evidence deriving from archaeological research is quite clear in this sense. In the Kingdom of Italy these differences also persisted into the successive phase, corresponding to the late Carolingian period. The affirmation of the manorial system did not cause more structured forms of management to take form alongside the development of large rural administrative centres as documented in northern Europe. The strong entrenchment of the high and middle level aristocracies in townships, the latter continuing to represent the main centres of political and territorial administration, led in some parts of the Kingdom, to a less pressing and incisive presence of these elites in rural settings (CORTESE 2017). This would explain the almost total absence of socially distinctive elements, although problematic for archaeology to determine, in the stratigraphic deposits of rural settlements during these centuries, unlike what is clearly apparent from the end of the 11th century with the appearance of seigneurial residences.

In this picture an exception is made for the great royal, monastic and episcopal properties capable of initiating more complex circuits of production and exchange, mainly directed towards the rural elites of their respective territories. This is the case, treated in detail by Hodges, of the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno. To this, going back to the Tuscan territory in the vicinity of Vettricella, we might now add the monastery of S. Pietro in Palazzuolo. This was one of the largest Early Medieval monastic institutions in Tuscany, founded in the mid-8th century by a group of aristocrats from Pisa and Lucca which evolved into a royal monastery under Frankish rule (FRANCOVICH, BIANCHI 2006). If few traces still remain of the coenobium capable of illustrating a story of substantial

transformation analogous to that outlined for San Vincenzo al Volturno, it is the production of a particular type of ceramic that draws attention to production strategies of specialized goods. Thanks to the research carried out by the nEU-Med project, the detailed study of a particular ceramic type, known as sparse glazed ware, for a long time considered to be a late 10th century product (CANTINI 2011), has reassigned the dating of its production to the mid-9th century. This particular ceramic type can be seen as a commodity destined for socially distinctive dining tables, analogous to what has been hypothesized for the contemporary heavy glazed ware produced in Rome. A production centre making these vessels has been located at the site of Torre di Donoratico, the same settlement cited in the previous paragraph that became an established 'out-of-scale' site in the course of the 10th century and for some time considered to be a property of the monastery of S. Pietro in Palazzuolo (BRIANO, SIBILIA 2018).

This example shows the important role that monastic centres played for specific forms of production in Carolingian Tuscany as well as the attention reserved by great landowners towards landed goods that also included royal revenue. This is shown by the establishment of Vetricella with its anomalous three-ringed enclosure dating to the second half of the 9th century, regardless of the role the site played during that phase and something that will need to be defined with greater precision in future study.

Recent archaeological research is moreover demonstrating, at least in Tuscany, how data revision from previous fieldwork, accompanied by new archaeometric analyses emphasizes the significant presence of those alleged traces that point to significant changes in hilltop village dynamics during the Carolingian Age. These elements had driven to ascribe a more substantial encroachment by landowners in the policies of land use and management during this period (FRANCOVICH 2008).

The material evidence of granaries, representing for archaeologists the main markers of a similar process of organized surplus management on behalf of aristocracies connected to the manorial system, can today be ascribed to the 10th century rather than the previous one (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI forthcoming). The revision of the 9th-century material evidence located in these small hilltop settlements, mainly investigated in southern Tuscany, and composed of small groups of wooden structures shifts the focus from the role played by the aristocracies to the more dynamic one played by small rural communities. These communities, presumably characterized by the presence of small rural elites that are more difficult to define at an archaeological level, might today represent, compared to what has been previously hypothesized, a more dynamic, and to some extent, independent participation in the management of agricultural and forest resources, at least until the 10th century. A participation that surely benefited, in certain rural contexts, from choices offered by landowning elites, such as the extensive deforestation carried out from the beginning of the 9th century in the vicinity of Vetricella (on the subject of the emerging role of rural communities see HODGES 2012, pp. 13-15/41-66; WICKHAM 2014, pp. 615-616; Theuvs for the significant case of areas between northern Belgium and southern Netherlands, THEUWS 2008; QUIRÓS CASTILLO 2019 for a recent synthesis on the rural communities in northern

Spain, considered as among the most solid and compact of the Medieval West).

Such a situation appears to change in the course of the 10th century when the material evidence from the site of Vetricella as well as other royal courts and those sites temporarily definable as 'out-of-scale' indicate, more than any literary source, how the 10th century and its second half in particular, was a moment of crucial change on all fronts. It is in this moment, a period that can be placed during or slightly before the full Ottonian period, in that time of the Kingdom of Italy considered as heralding changes, that various trends already partially registered in the past took on a distinct and articulated form with the marked rise of central powers.

This resulted in the establishment of a more complex economic and social system with the appearance or revival of numerous rural administrative centres (presently defined as 'out-of-scale' sites) connected to a structured management of agricultural and natural resources as well as to specialized forms of production, often related to common as opposed to luxury goods. It is in this very phase that the presence of these centres initiated a wider range of networks for exchange throughout the Kingdom of Italy, acting in turn as subsidiary commercial points for the storage and distribution of surplus produce, as hypothesized by Fiore in his contribution. The great landowning elites were the protagonists of this abrupt change, providing archaeologists with clearer and more numerous material evidence. But among these large landowners a remarkably important role was played by the royal fisc, appearing in stark relief in that shadow area related to the 10th and earlier part of the 11th centuries in this new, revised interpretation. As Fiore (see FIORE *infra*) reminds us, if 'the State' that represented the largest among landowners did not act with a logic that differed from the other landowning elites, it is in these very rural sites, directly or indirectly connected to this management, that one can observe the most important transformations and specialized forms of production.

It is therefore mainly to this player, the royal fisc, that these significant changes must be ascribed. These changes took place in a short time period, that, while imbuing rural communities with more firmly controlled management system, constituted the basis for the development of the feudal seigneurship, due also in part to a non-conflicting and mutually cooperating relationship between the 'State' and the great aristocracies. These great aristocracies, in light of their direct involvement in such a process, went on to assume new forms in the course of the 11th century, playing a decisive part in the power vacuum left by the central authority during the last decades of the 11th century (for the relationship between State and aristocracies in connection to rural properties and the wider European picture, see the considerations in HODGES 2012, pp. 1-19; WICKHAM 2009, pp. 287-414; FIORE 2006, pp. 162-169). A process that is exemplified by the abandonment of the main activities conducted at Vetricella in the first half of the 11th century and the development of different castle structures in the surrounding territory (among which Scarlino) as strongholds of the 'renewed' territorial seigneurships.

In future it will therefore be necessary to conduct a more in-depth analysis on what has been roughly outlined in this

contribution, namely the economic role played by Ottonian rule in Italy, the effectiveness of which was surely favoured by important antecedents, first during the Carolingian period and successively during the reigns of the Kings of Italy, in particular Hugh of Provence (on the role of Hugh of Provence in the reorganization of the royal rural properties see VIGNODELLI 2012).

This is a subject that has benefited from little research in the Italian and transalpine historiography both by historians and archaeologists alike, viewing the reigns of the three Ottonian sovereigns as a backdrop for what was believed to be a more incisive role played by the aristocracies (for considerations on this subject in the German area see WEST 2019).

The economic and political strategies adopted during this intense, but brief period, were probably capable of modifying on a larger scale than in the past, the balance between towns and rural contexts, catalyzing the rapid development of those urban centres set in that system of production and exchange managed by the central authority. This took place through rural strongpoints represented by the royal courts and what we have defined as 'out-of-scale' sites. In order to support the hypothesis that sees in the Ottonian period a stronger acceleration of the processes already set in motion during the Carolingian Age, with a more incisive role played by the 'State' in the mechanisms of economic development than previously assumed, a number of aspects will necessarily require more in-depth analysis. The nEU-Med project has, in fact, up to this point allowed us to garner an impressive volume of new data, especially from a material perspective, through which it is possible today to review past research while adopting a critical approach also towards well established historical narratives. However, the further development of newly acquired theories and models necessarily requires a solid basis as starting point. In the case of the hypotheses formulated in this contribution, further passages will be necessary for these to be improved. These should include: the continuation of site screening featuring phases between the 10th and 11th centuries with similar characteristics to those already identified; an improved focus on all aspects of production and their economic significance as well as on the nature of the production itself; a more precise identification of those networks of exchange and their relative workings; a better comprehension of the relations between city and countryside and the weight of this supposed economic system in the development of the new political and economic urban realities of the central Middle Ages; a more precise understanding of the consequences of this hypothesized interest of public power in rural contexts in the process of 'incastellamento' and affirmation of rural seigneurships; a more stringent comparison between the Kingdom of Italy and the south of the peninsula; a stronger comparative analysis between the Kingdom of Italy and the Germanic area in terms of material culture, transmission and circulation of knowledge. Only analyzing these subjects further will it be possible to obtain a more detailed picture of the times and rhythms of the final phases of that 'first Feudal Age' extensively discussed by Hodges in his contribution, starting off from the works of Marc Bloch and identifying with greater detail the roles and the strategic extent of the main protagonists of this age.

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CORTI PUBBLICHE RURALI PER UNA STORIA ECONOMICA
DEL REGNO D'ITALIA (X E XI SECOLO):
UNA RICOGNIZIONE ARCHEOLOGICA

Malgrado l'archeologia medievale italiana nell'ultimo decennio abbia fornito fondamentali apporti a una serie di importanti tematiche storiche, per le campagne altomedievali della Penisola esiste ancora oggi un gap di ipotesi tra quanto avvenne tra la fine della dominazione franca e la grande ripresa del XII secolo. Nelle periodizzazioni archeologiche i secoli X ed XI sono spesso trattati come continuazione dei precedenti periodi o come inizio di quelli successivi. Il risultato è il loro schiacciamento all'interno di una storia che, seguendo quella canonicamente tracciata attraverso i documenti scritti, partendo dallo sfaldamento dell'ordinamento carolingio arriva direttamente alle prime concrete sperimentazioni di signoria territoriale. Dalla constatazione dell'esistenza di una politica della terra di tipo pubblico alla presa d'atto di una gestione 'privatizzata' da parte delle consolidate signorie rurali, vi è in mezzo un contesto di processi di vario tipo in parte ancora avvolto da un cono d'ombra.

Il focus dell'articolo si concentra, quindi, su questo cono d'ombra che copre il periodo compreso tra X e inizio XI secolo, nel tentativo di proporre degli elementi di riflessione partendo dall'archeologia delle corti pubbliche.

Le indagini archeologiche in questi contesti, di cui si ricordano i casi di Frugarolo-Orba, Marengo, Fraore, Aucia, Aulla, S. Quirico in Valdarno e San Genesio hanno evidenziato un certo numero di informazioni: presenza di una torre collegata a un fossato nel caso di Frugarolo-Orba; presenza di chiese in quasi tutti i casi; presenza diffusa di vari tipi di attività artigianali spesso di difficile definizione e cronologia.

L'eccezionalità di Vettricella, non dipende, quindi, tanto dalla natura del sito, quanto dall'estensione del suo scavo, che consente di cogliere molti aspetti materiali, sinora mai evidenziati nelle altre ricerche nel resto della penisola.

I contributi presenti nel volume bene illustrano le caratteristiche di un sito, centro della corte regia di Valli, tra seconda metà X e inizio XI, ovvero nel periodo con il maggior numero di evidenze materiali: riempimento del fossato interno per sfruttare maggiormente uno spazio più ampio intorno alla torre centrale ora provvista di una tettoia o di una recinzione; attività di stoccaggio in ceramiche da dispensa destinate forse a contenere cereali; produzione di migliaia di oggetti in ferro grazie all'attività in situ di forgiatura; presenza di un allevamento di maiali e di cavalli; presenza di un'area cimiteriale destinata probabilmente ai dipendenti del centro; presenza di numerose monete; aumento dei siti intorno alla stessa Vettricella al centro ora di un sistema insediativo complesso e articolato coevo a cambi del paesaggio naturale destinato, grazie a disboscamenti e incendi, a maggiori attività agricole.

Rispetto alle altre corti pubbliche indagate, il caso della Vettricella è il solo, però, che ci illumina in maniera chiara su due aspetti singolari di queste produzioni (in questo caso degli oggetti in ferro): la *quantità*, che assume una dimensione eccezionale rispetto ai normali standard curtensi e la loro *specializzazione*.

Nel tentativo di verificare se questo caso rappresentasse una eccezione, chi scrive ha cominciato a revisionare l'edizione di scavi di siti interpretati in maggioranza come prime sperimentazioni dei castelli signorili.

Questa revisione ha consentito di individuare oltre una trentina di siti caratterizzati da produzioni specializzate fuori dal comune oppure da importanti cambi della loro topografia e dei paesaggi circostanti o da entrambe le cose. Per brevità nel contributo si portano alcuni esempi di questo insieme di siti: l'eccezionale produzione di vangi per fuseruole nei siti di Castellare di Monte Gropallo e di Pareto di Bardì; l'impennata di produzione dei contenitori in pietra ollare proveniente da Chiavenna, distribuiti in buona parte dell'area padana e anche oltre; i consistenti cambi di assetto di Piadena, Bovolone e Sant'Agata Bolognese in quest'ultimo caso accompagnato da altre produzioni specializzate relative alla filatura e ai mortai in pietra.

Tali siti per entità di intervento e cronologia sono paragonabili a quelli già evidenziati di Donoratico e Rocca degli Alberti (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018) per i quali era stata adottata la definizione di siti 'fuori scala' per distinguerli da molti altri insediamenti dove archeologicamente tali trasformazioni, in questo arco cronologico, non sono evidenti. Oggi tale definizione può, quindi, essere adottata anche per i siti del Centro Nord dimostrando una loro diffusione in tutto il Regno Italico.

L'entità delle evidenze materiali riscontrate nei siti definiti 'fuori scala' è comunque sintomatica di una matura e omogenea politica di importanti investimenti difficile da rapportare alle prime concrete affermazioni delle signorie territoriali, in questo momento ancora fortemente legate alla scena politica urbana e di conseguenza ancora poco presenti in maniera pervasiva nelle campagne. Come interpretare allora questi dati?

La rinnovata lettura delle evidenze materiali di VIII e IX secolo, sinora individuate in molti decenni di ricerca archeologica, ci mostra che, in un contesto rurale in cui probabilmente ebbero un ruolo più rilevante di quanto sinora ipotizzato le comunità rurali, solo in alcuni casi si hanno esempi di gestione strutturata delle aziende accompagnate da produzioni specializzate di beni non comuni, in proprietà comunque rapportabili a soggetti rilevanti come enti monastici o proprietà vescovili.

È solo nel corso del X secolo che si registra invece una vera e propria svolta.

In un momento sicuramente collocabile in piena età ottoniana e forse anche poco prima, in quell'età dei re d'Italia ritenuta in genere foriera di relativi cambiamenti operati dal potere centrale, molte delle tendenze già registrabili in passato si accentuarono e si articolarono. Ciò comportò la definizione di un sistema economico ma anche sociale più complesso con la comparsa o la trasformazione di numerosi centri direzionali rurali (i cosiddetti siti fuori scala) collegati a una strutturata gestione delle risorse agricole e naturali, oltre che a produzioni specializzate non espressamente destinate alle élites. È in questa fase che grazie alla nuova presenza di questi centri si attivarono scambi di ampia portata a loro volta, anche involontariamente, di carattere commerciale, nella raccolta e smercio di un maggiore surplus.

I grandi proprietari terrieri sono i protagonisti di questo netto cambiamento che ha lasciato per noi archeologi più chiare e numerose tracce materiali. Ma tra questi grandi proprietari un ruolo di assoluto rilievo lo ebbe il fisco regio che in questa nuova lettura si staglia in maniera chiara in quel cono d'ombra relativo al X e parte dell'XI secolo.

È, quindi, soprattutto a questo soggetto che dobbiamo collegare quei cambiamenti profondi e decisivi, rapportabili ad un ristretto arco cronologico, che, oltre ad incardinare maggiormente le comunità rurali ad un più controllato

sistema di gestione, costituiranno la base per lo sviluppo anche della signoria feudale. Ciò all'interno di un rapporto non conflittuale ma di mutua cooperazione tra 'stato' e grandi aristocrazie che, grazie al loro diretto coinvolgimento in questi processi, nel volgere di poco tempo assunsero, nel corso dell'XI secolo, caratteri nuovi giocando un decisivo ruolo nel vuoto che lo stesso potere centrale lascerà poi negli ultimi decenni dell'anno Mille.

Sarà, quindi, necessaria in futuro una più approfondita riflessione, rispetto a quanto solo accennato in questa sede, sul portato economico della dominazione ottoniana in Italia, la cui efficacia fu sicuramente favorita dagli importanti antecedenti dell'età carolingia e poi del regno di alcuni re d'Italia, in particolare Ugo di Provenza.

È questo, infatti, un argomento assolutamente poco trattato nella storiografia italiana e d'oltralpe sia dagli storici delle fonti documentarie, sia dagli stessi archeologi che hanno sempre visto l'azione dei tre sovrani come sfondo a quelle che si ritenevano le azioni più incisive delle aristocrazie.

La strategia politica-economica di un periodo piuttosto breve ma molto intenso, fu probabilmente in grado di modificare, maggiormente rispetto al passato, anche gli equilibri tra città e campagna, avviando un più veloce sviluppo di quei centri urbani interni al sistema di produzioni e di scambi gestito dai poteri centrali attraverso i capisaldi rurali rappresentati dalle corti pubbliche e da quelli che abbiamo definito siti fuori scala.

The nEU-Med project is part of the Horizon 2020 programme, in the ERC Advanced project category. It began in October 2015 and the University of Siena is the host institution of the project.

The project is focussed upon two Tuscan riverine corridors leading from the Gulf of Follonica in the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Colline Metallifere. It aims to document and analyze the form and timeframe of economic growth in this part of the Mediterranean, which took place between the 7th and the 12thc. Central to this is an understanding of the processes of change in human settlements, in the natural and farming landscapes in relation to the exploitation of resources, and in the implementation of differing political strategies.

This volume presents the multi-disciplinary research focussed upon the key site of the project, Vetricella, and its territory. Vetricella is thought to be the site of Valli, a royal property in the Tuscan march. It is the only Early Medieval property to be extensively studied in Italy. Located on Italy's Tyrrhenian coast, the archaeology and history of this site provide new insights on estate management, metal production and wider Mediterranean relations in the later first millennium. Apart from reports on the archaeology, the finds from excavations and environmental studies, three essays consider the wider European historical and archaeological context of Vetricella. Future monographs will feature studies by members of the project team on aspects of Vetricella, its finds and territory.

edited by
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