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***Early Medieval settlements in the Latina Valley (Lazio, Italy):
topography, archive research and survey dates (2003-2007)***

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Early Medieval settlements in the Latina Valley (Lazio, Italy): topography, archive research and survey dates (2003-2007)

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ABSTRACT

The Latina Valley in Southern Lazio (Italy) was a very important long road between Rome and the South of Italy; it is an area rich in archaeological material with a history of settlement from prehistory to the present. It includes several cases of fortified hill communities that arose in the Middle Ages, but little is known about the early history of the period itself in the same area. Sometimes they are situated directly on hilltops that exploit a middle altitude between the low plains and the high mountains, an ideal location for defense, agriculture and the exploitation of water sources. In the full Medieval Age, at the top of some settlements, fortified castles with towers dominate the cultivated landscape: a network of settlements extends through the region offering defence from external attacks and a possibility of territorial supervision.

KEYWORDS: Latina Valley; early medieval settlements; castra; Aquinum.

The «Latina Valley» is situated in the south-east portion of the Lazio region in the Province of Frosinone, constituting its central nucleus; fundamental corridor of connection between Rome and the South of Italy, crossed in ancient time by the via Latina, it unifies the Valleys of the river Sacco and that of the Liri (Fig. 1).

The area presents very difficult conditions of research, being strongly anthropised; attention to the Middle Ages, in a systematic way, is of recent interest. In the «Carta Archeologica Medievale. Frosinone» (PIETROBONO 2006) the methodical work of recognition of the medieval sites is planned on four tablets (tavole) of the First Quadrant (Quadrante I) part of Sheet (Foglio) number 159 of the «Carta d'Italia» (Map of Italy), using the archived materials both published and unpublished, by carrying on direct exploration on the ground, surveys, graphic and photographic relief.

The searches conducted between 2003 and 2007 have progressively connected the starting area (Fig. 2) to a big sector in the eastern part of Frosinone, inclusive in Sheet n. 160 of the «Carta d'Italia» (Fig. 3), delimited by the rivers Liri and Melfa, widening the perspective of investigation to the historical aspect: in fact the research proceeds to integrate in the «Roman» area or commonly known as the «the Pope's Country» (Campagna del Papa), of which Frosinone was part, the «southern» area where the abbey of Montecassino excels, that Lombard and Norman «Campania» later becoming the Svevian, Angloine and Aragonese «Terra di Lavoro»; these two historical regions today are joined into the modern Lazio, set to comparison, they give interesting sprout of reflection.

The chronological viewpoint is atypical having preferred to start from the Late Ancient phase, hence from the IV century A. D., to the central centuries of the Middle Age, though analyzing the results in modern age, keeping in consideration the key transformation marked by the «industrial revolution» which has had its most irreversible conclusion in the '60 and '70 of the last century and has definitely altered the environmental, historical, social and economic balance present throughout the centuries.

Despite, over the last years, searches proposing the study of the territory, through consolidated methodologies particularly for the phases pre – Romans and Romans (bibl. CORSI 2007:455-457) have overlapped, the data shown in the most recent syntheses are necessarily bounded - for the data of recognition - to the investigation developed by the Canadian research group of the Mc Master University (Hamilton, Ontario), conducted in the low Latina Valley during the '70's and the '80s, the results of the preventive investigations by the Soprintendenza Archeologica del Lazio (Supervisor and Archaeological State Organization of the Lazio) during the digging investigations for the construction of the high speed line (bibl. BELLINI 1995) are inevitable.

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Fig. 1. Lazio, Central Italy (Wikipedia).

In parallel, the revision of the publications was necessary and the local and traditional historiography was criticized, because not always adequately filtered.

Despite the lack of systematic excavations does not show up on the first phases of the installations, the results have been encouraging: the strengthened and deepened re-reading of the publications in a critical way gives the possibility to progressively observe every single site individualized and this study has already resolved past misunderstandings and new keys of reading of the known information connected to the discoveries (bibl. PIETROBONO 2002b; 2003:167-184).

The exam of those settlements in the Lazio region was inevitably represented to remind the historical investigations conducted in the past (bibl. TOUBERT 1997), it has been considered not just the strengthened installation enucleated from the castles and from the *castra*: but also monasteries, *casalia*, villas, *curtes* and every element that could suspect the presence of shed inhabited area.

The area in examination coincides a lot with the territory of the longobard counties of *Sora*, *Aquinum* and *Atina*, next to the border of the vast Cassino area also called Terra S. Benedicti, directly

administered from the great abbey founded by S. Benedict, while on the Roman slope it includes the dioceses of Veroli and Ferentino.

In this area we have been able to isolate every element of the medieval inhabited landscape, inclusive environmental more tightly data (as those agrarian and economic, signals of cultivations, fish catching, fittings of breeding, etc). The demand to compare with projects analysed in other regional areas has developed a methodology that now crosses the traditional topographical investigation in the area. The bibliographic references have been the studies of Tuscany by Francovich, (GINATEMPO, FRANCOVICH 2000:7-24); the investigations by F. Redi (REDI 2007:185-202) and P. Peduto (PEDUTO 2008), but it goes on to gradually adapt elements inferred directly by the archive disciplines applied to the study of the territory.

1. FROSINONE

Today the city-centre in the chief town of the area has vast problems of research. The continuity of life between the late age and the medieval one is object of research due to it being mentioned in the

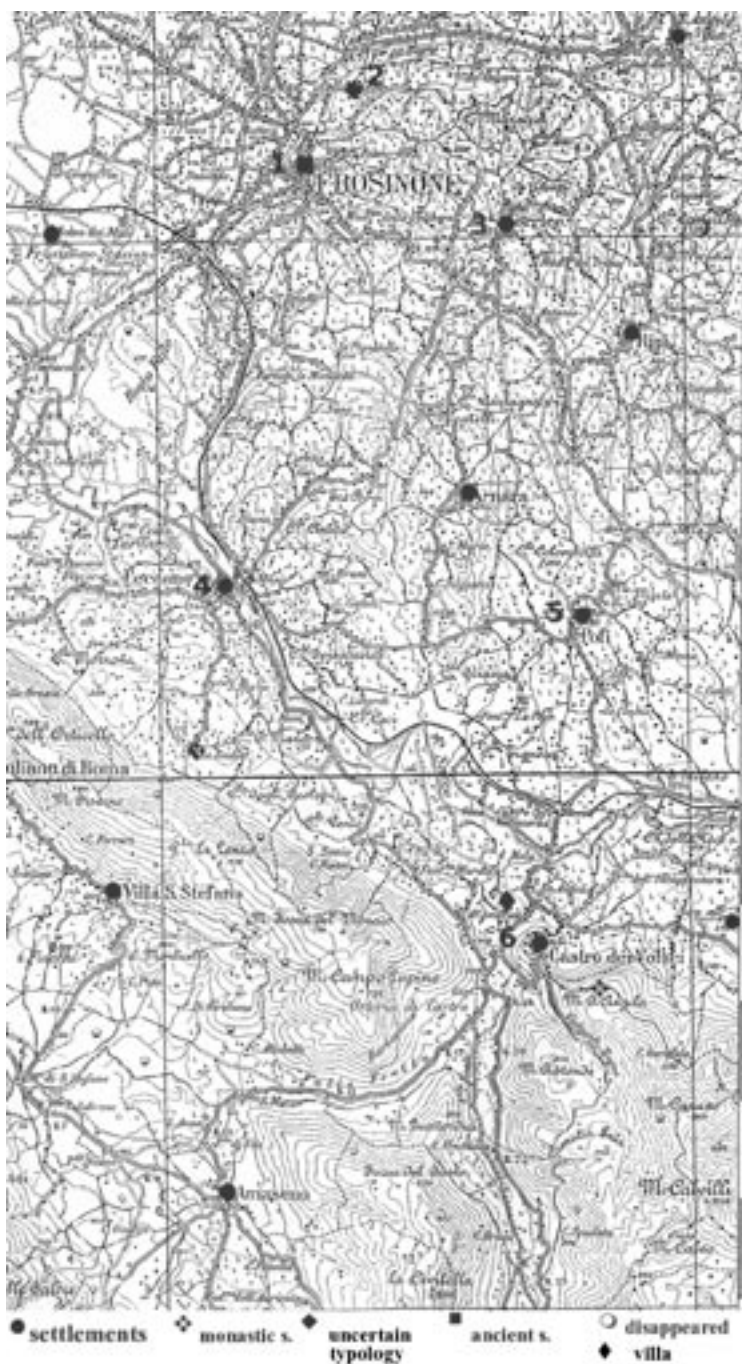


Fig. 2. From F° 159 (Frosinone), *Carta d'Italia, IGM*. 1. Frosinone; 2. Manianum; 3. Torrice; 4. Ceccano; 5. Pofi; 6. Casale and Castro dei Volsci.

Liber Pontificalis where *Frusino* can be read as the birthplace of the bishop of Rome, Ormisda, and perhaps the motherland of his child Silverio, like the mention to *Ludovicianum* dated 817 (sources in PIETROBONO 2006:38).

The central nucleus of the *castrum* probably coincides with the area so-called Civita, on the top of the hill where the historical center was based, closed by a wall circuit, reconstructed on the base

of the ancient cadastral planimetries (PIETROBONO 2007a:109-110).

2. MANIANUM

From the list of the possessions of the Chapter of the Cathedral of Veroli in 959, in the proximities of the ditch called Bagno (=Bath), situated between Frosinone and Veroli, we know the extension of a series of important rural funds, among which we recognize *Manjanus in quo est lacus, cum piscatoriis suis cum silvis et terris cum omnibus ad eum pertinentibus posito territorio verulano, miliaria ab urbe Rome sexaginta [...]* (PIETROBONO 2006: 118-119): at the moment we are unable to identify with an exact spatial location and human definition, even if recently the following can be read «*presenza demica ivi stabilmente residente. Il fondo di Maniano, quindi, si configura come un vero e proprio centro agglutinante di popolamento, probabilmente costruito anche prima della fine del X secolo ed esistente almeno fino alla metà del XII, facente parte dei beni appartenenti all'autorità vescovile verolana*» (STASOLLA, ANNOSCIA, DEL FERRO 2008). Actually it is a rural fraction to north-east of the ancient Frusino.

3. TORRICE

Placed along the road axle of the via Latina, delimited to the north by a hill of quota 321 metres, from the mid tenth century, it is defined as *oppidum*. The name brings one to think of a native small tower of a border, which would suit for its external position, towards the west, within the territory of Veroli; Torrice was the centre of a small fortress, attested in 1264, of which today there are just little supposed branches, situated in dominant position (PIETROBONO 2007a:115).

4. CECCANO

It rises in *Fabrateria Vetus* along the river Sacco. Towards the middle of the VIII century

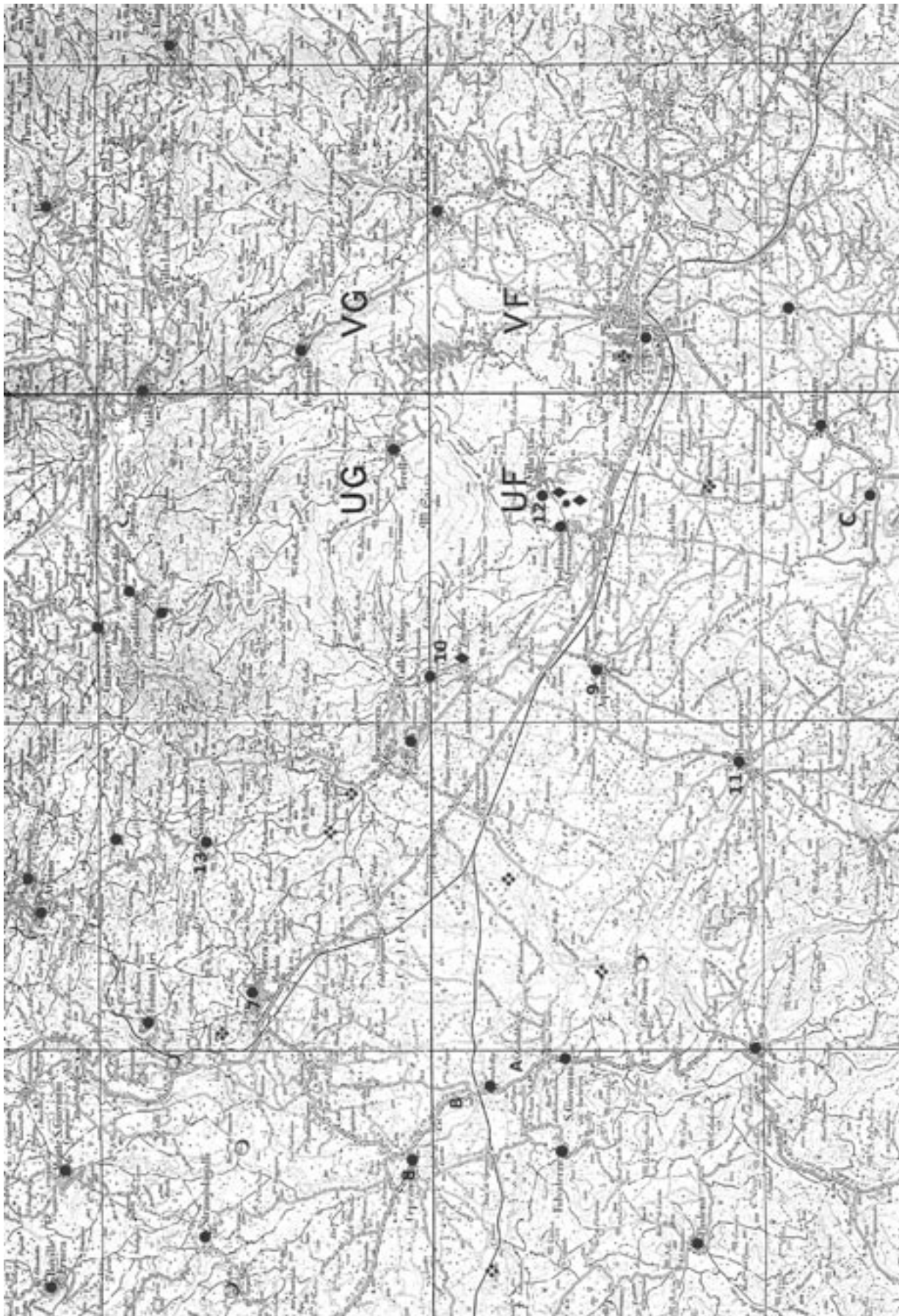


Fig. 3. From F° 160 (Cassino), Carta d'Italia, IGM. 7. Arce; 8. Ceprano; 9. Aquinum; 10. Castrocielo and Villa Eucheria; 11. Pontecorvo; 12. Parito, Piedimonte and Villa S. Lucia; 13. Santopadre.

the *Ciccanense castellum* was conquered by the troops of the Lombard King Astolfo; after Stephen II contracted the restitution to the Church (PIETROBONO 2006:41-42). The village does not keep structures clearly linked to high medieval age, the reading of cadastral maps has led to hypothesize a circuit wall containing the top of the hill, as in the case of nearby Frosinone (PIETROBONO 2006:180-187).

5. POFI

Stone quarries near the ditch Moringo exploit basalt due to the Ernico volcanism. In this subject conducive to the supply of materials and water, easily connected to the ancient road-net continued in use, surrounded by forests and lands that return traces of Roman settlements, appears in 1019 the name of the *castrum* of Pofi (PIETROBONO 2006:46-47); the place name has an uncertain etymology. There is no known data of excavation that may clarify if, on the hill hosting the centre today, at a height of 283 m., a village could have been before the *castrum*, but the useful position privileged to the control of the roads, with a visual dominion over the Latina Valley, leads not to discard the possibility of an early planting and more intensive investigations (PIETROBONO 2007a:116).

6. CASALE AND CASTRO DEI VOLSCI

Today Castro dei Volsci is a rural town, including a fortified village on top of a hill, quota 385 m., with little villages in a flat area next to it and scattered in the territory. In a location, Casale di Madonna del Piano, during the '80s and the '90s, the Soprintendenza Archeologica del Lazio dug a Roman villa now recognized in the archaeological site (BELLINI 1992): in the southern area of the Lazio region it is one of the most important constructions for the study of the different phases of settlement continuity between the late Roman republic and the Early Middle Age, crucial element in understanding the changes in the area. The discovery of an ecclesiastical building attracts the largest process of transformation of late antique villas witnessed in other European contexts (CHAVARRÍA ARNAU 2004:7-19). The materials obtained from excavation confirmed the

continuity of the Christian community to the Carolingian age. The most significant element is a great *ciborium* found in separate sheets and a little related column, between the structures (1992) and reassembled in the Archaeological Civic Museum (situated in Castro dei Volsci), as well as some fragments of pottery «Forum Ware» (BELLINI 2001:71). The site overlooking *Castrum Castrum* (PIETROBONO 2007a:116-117) arises as a primary element of continuity in the attendance of the area, even if the historical relationship between the site of the Casale and the *castrum* is not so clear; the data collection of the medieval stage project the research even in settlement contexts; it is the case of the location Acquapuzza, where local reports set the presence of areas of clay fragments and Roman and medieval walls (DE ROSSI 1980:237).

7. ARCE

From the second half of the seventh century appears *Arcis*: found in the list of *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia* (IV, 33, 8-12), after *Fabraria* and *Mulfe* (Melfa River), the settlement lies on the hill where there are the two modern villages of Arce and Rocca d'Arce, along a route that dissociate from the Via Latina, falls into the hinterland, direct to the town of Sora; then appointed by Paul Deacon (*Hist. Lang.* VI, 27), *Arcis* became a cornerstone of the Lombard border to the Papal possessions in the late seventh and the beginning of the eighth century (HAYES-MARTINI 1994:53; PIETROBONO 2007b:73-113).

8. CEPRANO

According to the authoritative sources it was built on the site of *Fregellanum*, known on via Latina during the imperial time, the *castellum Ceperani* was first mentioned in 987: part of the walls on the western side, are severely damaged; the technique used refers to types in *opus quadratum* with square blocks for reuse, (with variable module) and an input, called Porta Romana or Porta Vecchia opened on the Western Front of *castrum*, in front of them was a double moat, instinctively understood by the name of a street, via del Carbonale (PIETROBONO 2007a:112-114).

9. AQUINUM

The Roman town returned traces of discontinuous attendance between the late Roman period and the early Middle Ages. Researches conducted in the '70s by a group of study of the Canadian University Mac Master had found a different distribution of ceramic artefacts collected on the urban area, in particular the findings of the late age were concentrated around the main streets, next to the western wall at the Roman Door, the so-called *Capitolium* and in the southern areas of the city. Rare findings of the eighth century (PIETROBONO 2008) are reported in the areas immediately behind the western wall. We considered conservatively that the northern part of the urban environment, particularly in the north eastern - perhaps not in the area of the so-called *Capitolium* - has been gradually phased out over time, the dwellings seem to concentrate along the axis of the central and southern via Latina, between the walls (HAYES-MARTINI 1994:171-172).

In 1994 I started the reorganization of information and existing data: the result was to define the search for a settlement shift from the Roman town, in the lower Central Latina Valley and organized on a plateau called *S. Pietro Vetere*, in the west of a deep depression in natural travertine bench called *Vallone delle Peutime*. An agglomeration of houses concentrated around a low medieval castle from which the current town took home is now situated on a plateau to the east of the *Vallone* (PIETROBONO 2000:94-96). In an intermediate stage the stabilization of a complex wall is placed. It contains the portion of the plateau at *Aquinas* in the south east of the ancient city, known as Malanova. During the '90s the local historiography (see CORSI 2007:480-481) was convinced that a Lombard settlement was formed at the end of the sixth century, for the presence next the wall of a Door called that of St. Lorenzo or Capuana, then considered certainly Roman, but that the research carried out defines the contrary, such as access to the old medieval city (PIETROBONO 2002a; 2002b; 2003). The hypothesis of an alleged Lombard settlement, in the end of the sixth century, was therefore set aside temporarily, pending reliable archaeological data. The building or rebuilding of the long wall of containment to the south of St. Lorenzo or Capuana Door is understandable when linked to the process of fortification included in the VIII-X century in southern Lazio (PIETROBONO 2008), recognized in

Gaeta (CROVA 2005:69-86) or at *Aquinum*, probably within the same Tower of S. Gregory, recently analyzed by Paolo Peduto (2005:99-102). *Aquinum* emerges during the ninth century as the seat of a Lombard Gastaldo, Rodoaldo, the builder of the castle of Pontecorvo (*infra*).

10. CASTROCIELO AND VILLA EUHELIA

The Roman Villa Euchelia at the foot of Mount St. Sylvester at Castrocielo, once called Palazzuolo, at 256 m, was reoccupied in the fourth century; materials that come to the sixth century have been collected in the plant, situated on a plateau dated II century B.C. and with the tank, the functional continuity of use of the building. Recent investigations have been possible to infer a continuous settlement for the whole Early Middle Ages (BELLINI 2004:79; 85:86). On top of the mountain overlooking Castrocielo, lack of water, therefore not conducive to the continuity of life, lies a fortress where the object of some investigations and preventive excavations (MARAZZI *et alii* 2008), documentation and medieval name-place (BLOCH 1986:204-205), suggest an alternation of settlements in the pre-tenth century. Under the rock there are some houses of the village clearly visible, then abandoned in modern times (BERTANI 2000:90-95).

11. PONTECORVO

The castle was founded between 861 and 872, as recalled by the *Chronicles* of Montecassino (sources in BLOCH 1986:395) for the will of Radoald, gastaldus, and it was planted on a *villa* in the *ager* of *Aquinum*, in correspondence of a passage on the river Liri, onto a travertine terrace at 97 m which emerges from the surrounding context of alluvial matrix. The walls reveal elements in common with the medieval walls recognized in the Latina Valley (Ceprano, *Aquinum*, Torre San Gregorio, *infra*).

12. PARITO, PIEDIMONTE AND VILLA

S. LUCIA

At Parito, in the territory of the town of Piedimonte S. Germano, at *Aquinum*, the

reconnaissance of the Canadian research team identified along the route of a road called *Pedemontana*, originally founded maybe in pre-Roman Age, between the coordinates 969960 and 969950, a Roman settlement of considerable wealth. The findings in this place are fully from the sixth century, and some ceramic pieces can be traced back to the early Middle Ages. In the locality now known *Parito* (Fig. 4, No. 1) is just one of the nuclei of a wide area that returns traces of settlements, perhaps a village or an urban area in the settlement, where south west was then implanted the Castle called *Piedimonte* (HAYES-MARTINI 1994:51; 192-195). Medieval sources lead now in this district to

recognize a structured settlement that emerges fully in the eleventh century, in the wedge formed by the overhanging Parito Hill, said Santa Luce (Fig. 4, n. 2), from the site Villa S. Lucia to the complex of *castrum* attested to half of the eleventh century (Fig. 4, No. 3). In 1042 (LECCISOTTI 1972:214, doc. 1312, n. 29), in a land of Piedimonte called *Pariti* there was an area planted like a vineyard and land *bacciba*; in 1052, the castle is mentioned in a trial for possession of a plot of land at Fontanelle, during which men intervened *Jhoanne, Petrus* and *Teodoricus* were *natibi, et avitatori de Castello pede de monte (...)*; *Jhoanne* was *filio Guelti avitator in loco at S. Lucia*, (GATTOLA 1733:75). The term

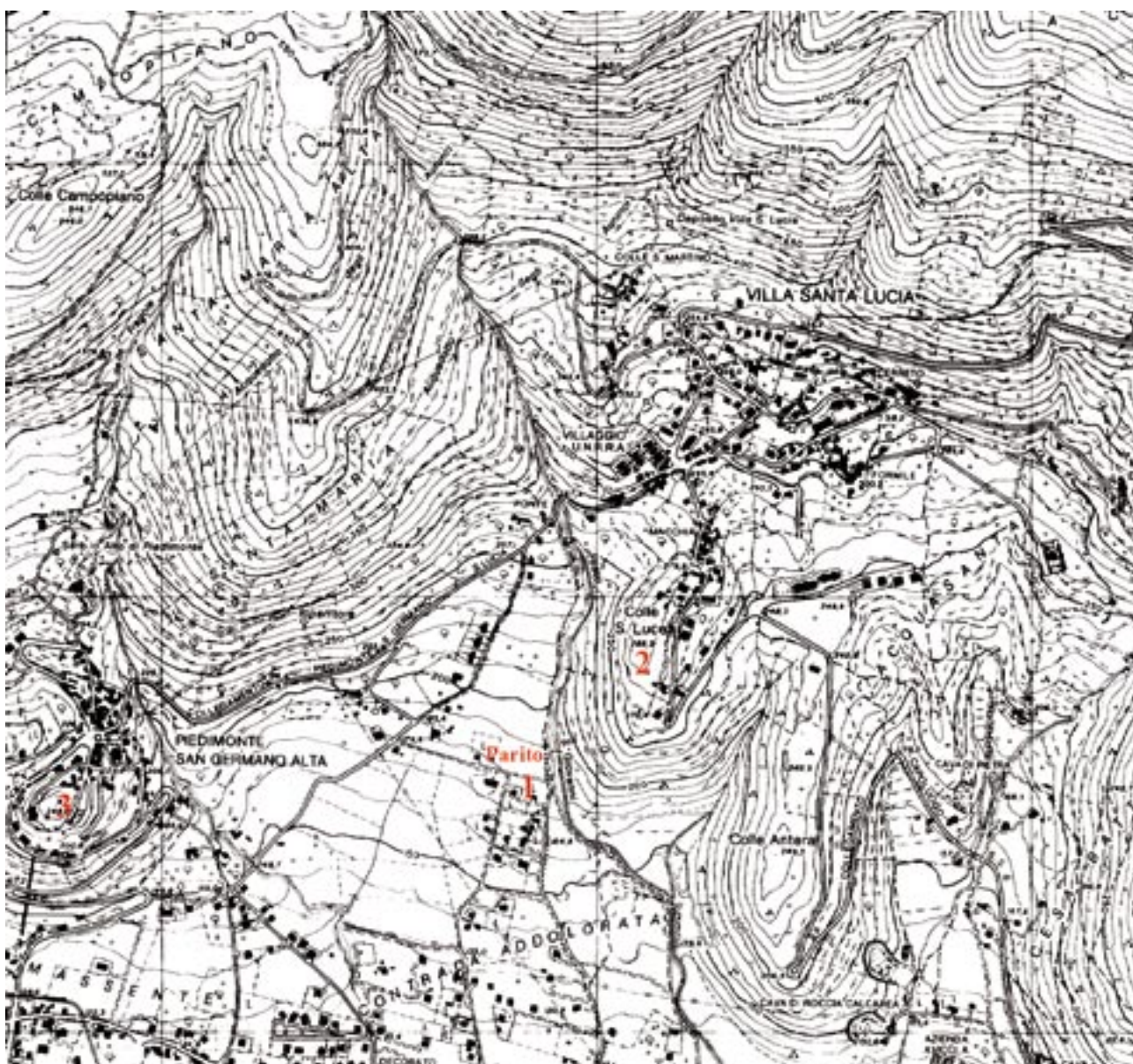


Fig. 4. From CTR 403060: Piedimonte, località Parito, n.1; Piedimonte, n. 2; S. Lucia, n. 3.

natibi brings the existence of the castle at least a few decades before, in fact across the mention of 1042. S. Lucia is an open area, which attests to the fact the persistence of population in the same location from the Roman to medieval, though without being able to demonstrate the perfect continuity in time. The morphological conditions, the presence of fertile land within short distance and of Roman structures and perhaps also from reuse, the possibility of greater security they had to facilitate the maintenance of the population. Given the presence of the village of Piedimonte, the problem is to verify the intended use of the hill on which rests the *castrum* at prior stages to its organization and to assess its role in connection to the Parito's villa and Villa Santa Lucia settlements localised to its north.

13. SANTOPADRE

A few items to confirm the local tradition that recognizes in Santopadre the center of the pre-existing Castroforolo in the seventh century, as surely as the only element back to medieval times, but hardly before the second half of the thirteenth century, is a tower-based circled at the highest point of the hill of the castle, being restored in different times (PIETROBONO 2002a).

CONCLUSION

If, during the sixth century there was a fracture or not clear in the social organization and production it is not possible to say (CORSI 2007:488-491), but the early medieval settlement is on a reorganization of populated fabric that has contracted since the late antiquity in a particular way in rural villages throughout the area surveyed, from Castro dei Volsci to *Aquinum*.

In the short space of this article it is impossible to exhaust the analysis of the early medieval context of the Latina Valley: it has revealed a number of villages and settlements, fortified or not, founded in the early Middle Age, but is not yet possible to draw up comprehensive conclusions on the stages without interruption of continuity in contexts identified. Those different sites give the possibility to think, as in the case of Piedimonte and Castro dei Volsci, discovering complex relationships between quite important Roman sites and medieval

residences built in their proximities. In the case of Roman cities, considered in the demarcated area, like *Frusino* (Frosinone), *Fabrateria Vetus* (Ceccano) and the same *Fregellanum* / *Ceperanum*, the ancient sources suggest gradual steps towards the new form of fortified village, while in *Aquinum* written and archaeological evidences slowly let complex transformation. Particular cases like *Fabrateria Nova* and *Fregellae* were excluded from the discussion (Fig. 3, A and B), referring to another location the examination of *Interamna Lirenas* (Fig. 3, C). New readings to some settlements remain to be explored further, however (eg Pofi, *Manianum*), in the hills of the Latina Middle Valley.

A network of settlements extends through the region offering defence from external attacks and a possibility of territorial supervision. Sometimes they are situated directly on hilltops that exploit a middle altitude between the low plains and the high mountains (Pontecorvo), an ideal location for defence, agriculture and the exploitation of water sources. In the full Medieval Age, at the top of some settlements (Castrocielo; Piedimonte; Rocca d'Arce; Torrice), a fortified castle with towers dominate the cultivated landscape.

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