An integrated approach to the study of local production and exchange in the lower Pontine plain

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Prevailing models of the Roman economy tend to focus on long-distance exchange and are biased towards urban centres; thereby, much emphasis is placed on imported pottery, seen as an indicator for a strongly globalized and economically integrated market. Yet Roman economic networks must have been much more complex, with most communities strongly embedded in their local environment and depending chiefly on short- and medium-distance trade for their everyday goods. The evidence for such relationships has to come from a comprehensive investigation of local and regional systems of ceramic production and exchange. While this topic has received attention especially in areas with extensive evidence for kiln sites or in areas made up of relatively distinct geological units, the available evidence for central Italy, being still rather incomplete and of varied quality, displays a number of biases. For example, the evidence for ceramic production is often provided by the detailed investigation of just one kiln site, and such cases are seldom considered within their broader spatial, social and economic contexts in a way that would allow inferences to be drawn on the mechanisms of production and distribution on a local scale.

Here we aim to furnish insights into the workings of such a local system by focusing on the evidence for ceramic production and circulation at a number of “minor centres”, a blanket term covering a range of forms of nucleated rural settlement that are attested in the sources (fora, stationes, mutationes, conciliabula, etc.). Such sites occur throughout the empire in both more densely and less populated areas. The longevity, success and complexity of individual settlements varies greatly: some minor centres existed for just a short period of time; others, spurred by favourable local conditions, grew into sizeable settlements (sizes of more than 10 ha are not uncommon) and received public buildings, such as baths and theatres. Despite these apparent differences, such sites also share a number of common traits. Many are favourably situated along main thoroughfares, beyond

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