

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

## Gijs Tol and Barbara Borgers

Prevailing models of the Roman economy tend to focus on long-distance exchange and are biased towards urban centres;<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> the available evidence for central Italy, being still rather incomplete and of varied quality, displays a number of biases.<sup>4</sup> 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.).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Many are favourably situated along main thoroughfares, beyond

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- 1 W. M. Jongman, *The economy and society of Pompeii* (Amsterdam 1988); N. Morley, *Metropolis and hinterland: the City of Rome and the Italian economy, 200 BC–AD 200* (Cambridge 1996).
  - 2 A. Wilson, “Approaches to quantifying Roman trade,” in A. Bowman and A. Wilson (edd.), *Quantifying the Roman economy: methods and problems* (Oxford 2009) 215; G. Woolf, “Imperialism, empire and the integration of the Roman economy,” *World Arch.* 23 (1992) 289; D. P. Kehoe, “The Early Roman Empire: production,” in W. Scheidel, I. Morris and R. P. Saller (edd.), *The Cambridge economic history of the Greco-Roman world* (Cambridge 2008) 546.
  - 3 Lower-scale trade networks have been more studied for prehistoric times: cf., e.g., D. P. S. Peacock, “Neolithic pottery production in Cornwall,” *Antiquity* 43 (1969) 145–49. For the Roman period, they have received relatively more attention in the NW provinces: see, e.g. various contributions in D. P. S. Peacock (ed.), *Pottery and early commerce: characterisation and trade in Roman and later ceramics* (London 1977).
  - 4 See G. Olcese (ed.), *Atlante dei siti di produzione ceramica (Toscana, Lazio, Campania e Sicilia)* (Rome 2012), for a recent overview of known Roman kiln sites in those areas.
  - 5 For a discussion of the term “minor centres” (and other labels for different forms of nucleated rural settlement), see G. Tol, T. de Haas, K. Armstrong and P. Attema, “Minor centres in the Pontine plain: the cases of *Forum Appii* and *Ad Medias*,” *PBSR* 82 (2014) 110–12.
  - 6 From an extensive bibliography see, e.g., J.-P. Petit and M. Mangin, *Les agglomérations secondaires and Atlas des agglomérations secondaires. La Gaule belge, les Germanies et l’Occident romain* (Paris 1994); M. Rorison, *Vici in Roman Gaul* (BAR S933; Oxford 2001); A. Brown (ed.), *Roman small towns in eastern England and beyond* (Oxford 1995); C. Corsi, *Le strutture di servizio del cursus publicus in*