

# Persistence and change in settlement patterns in the Ofanto valley near Canusium and Cannae (Apulia) (late 4th c. B.C.-1st c. A.D.)

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## Introduction

This paper presents the results of a two-year survey carried out in 2003-4 by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Foggia in the lower valley of the Ofanto river (N Apulia). The aim of the project was to study the transformation of the human landscape in parts of the valley from the late Iron Age to the 14th c. A.D., with special attention to the period of 'Romanisation', from the late 4th c. B.C. to the early 1st c. A.D.<sup>1</sup> Although many individual archaeological sites in the area have been identified and some have been excavated, the region as a whole has never before been subject to systematic archaeological survey.

Apulia is located in the SE part of the Italian peninsula, with the Adriatic sea to the east, the Ionian sea to the southeast and the Gulf of Taranto to the south (fig. 1). The N part of the region is mostly a plain, with a low coastline interrupted by the mountainous Gargano peninsula. Further south, a wide, rectangular plateau called the Murgia slopes towards the Adriatic in a series of blunt-edged terraces. The Ofanto river, which flows northeastward to the sea from its source near Mt. Vulture, is one of the most important rivers on the Adriatic coast. In antiquity it formed the border, as well as a cultural bridge, between Daunia, the northern part of the region, and Peucetia, the central district.

The research area included the territories of Cerignola, San Ferdinando di Puglia and Trinitapoli on the NW side of the valley, and Canosa and Barletta on the SE side (fig. 2). With the exception of Canosa, these towns were founded between the 13th and 19th c. During the Roman period all of the land was part of the territory of ancient *Canusium*, which was one of the most powerful centres in Daunia from the 7th c. B.C. on.<sup>2</sup> *Canusium* voluntarily passed under Roman control in 318 B.C. and became a *municipium* at the end of the Social War. Its importance was based on its agricultural produce (grain and oil in particular) and on wool, which was dyed and cleaned there. Trade was facilitated by a port at the mouth of the Ofanto (no remains of which have yet been discovered) and by the city's position along the important road from *Brundisium* to *Beneventum* (the *via Minucia/Traiana*) (fig. 3). The city became a *colonia* under Antoninus Pius. Since the Ofanto valley has generally been regarded as the hinterland of *Canusium*, the evolution of the settlement patterns in the valley must be linked closely with the history of the city itself.

## Historiographical and geographical context

The Ofanto valley is an interesting subject for detailed examination for many reasons, and particularly as a case study of the process of Romanisation. In an account of

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1 Goffredo and Volpe 2005; Goffredo 2008.

2 On ancient and mediaeval *Canusium* (Canosa) see most recently Otranto 1991, 235-61; Cassano 1992; Grelle 1993; Volpe 1996, 95-107; Campione and Nuzzo 1999, 27-62; Volpe *et al.* 2002; Volpe *et al.* 2003; Volpe 2006 and 2007; De Stefano *et al.* 2008.