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Notes on the rural landscape of central Tyrrhenian Italy in the 6th-5th c. B.C. and its social significance

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Introduction

During the last few decades most landscape archaeologists have noted the diffusion and the demographic importance of the rural landscapes of Archaic Etruscan communities¹ and have tried to define their significance within Etruscan society² in the same way as others have attempted to evaluate the political significance of the Greek rural landscape.³ Recent research on Italian landscapes has led to a great increase in the available data regarding the different paths of development for the various communities, allowing them to be outlined and compared.⁴

The growing dichotomy between the studies of field archaeologists and historians or art-historians may appear to be a problem. Landscape studies in Italy have been dominated since the 1950s by an Anglocentric tradition of economic and environmental archaeology, with important work focusing on long-term phenomena.⁵ Historians and art-historians, on the other hand, have tried to define an interdisciplinary approach involving the use of several sources of evidence (art-historical, epigraphic, literary) and focusing on historical events and medium- or short-term phenomena.⁶ Yet field and historical archaeology are simply two sides of the same coin, and should be viewed as complementary rather than incompatible approaches to understanding the complex evidence of the pre-Roman cultures.

Study of the Archaic landscape in Central Tyrrhenian Italy shows how such a division can be overcome, by using archaeological evidence from a number of surveys and by considering information contained in literary sources regarding Archaic Rome, the value of which has recently been re-evaluated by several scholars.⁷

Models and theories about territories and agricultural exploitation in the 8th and 7th c. B.C.

At the end of the first phase of the Iron Age in central Tyrrhenian Italy (8th c.) in a number of areas there seem to be many small communities each having an area of influence of a few square kilometers. There are two exceptions: Etruria and Rome, where the existence of larger territories (c.900 sq. km) is linked to the formation of more developed proto-urban centres and connected with the earliest evidence of state formation.⁸ Both areas are characterized by flat volcanic hills and many small rivers, which constitutes the best landscape for Mediterranean polyculture based on legumes, cereals, olives and wine.⁹

Social evolution is known essentially from funerary evidence, which in Etruria and Latium points to the rise of aristocratic élites not later than the end of the 8th c..¹⁰ As far as S Etruria

1 Potter 1979; Rendeli 1993.

2 Colonna 1990; Cristofani 1986; Torelli 1981.

3 Snodgrass 1989.

4 Torelli 1989; Attema *et al.* in press.

5 E.g., Potter 1979; Barker 1981; Perkins 1999.

6 E.g., Torelli 1987.

7 Cornell 1995, 1-30; regarding the rural landscape of Latium: Attema 2000 with previous bibl.

8 di Gennaro 1986; Ceci and Cifarelli 1992; Bietti Sestieri 1998; Guidi 1998; Pacciarelli 2001 with full bibl.

9 Ampolo 1980; Barker and Rasmussen 1998, 10-42.

10 Bartoloni 1989, 194-202. Evidence from excavations at Tarquinia (Bonghi Jovino and Chiamonte Treré 1997) and Rome (Carandini and Carafa 2000).