

Monte Pallano: a Samnite fortified centre and its hinterland

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Introduction

One of the major achievements of archaeological exploration in Samnium in recent decades has been the location and mapping of hilltop sites with fortifications built of polygonal masonry. The number of known *centri fortificati* now exceeds 80¹ — a figure inconceivable when E. T. Salmon was compiling his influential *Samnium and the Samnites* (1967) — and the outcome has been to transform our understanding of the pre-Imperial pattern of settlement. Important progress has also been made in understanding the rôle of these sites in local society, partly through topographical research linking them with the *oppida* and *castella* mentioned in ancient accounts of the wars between Rome and the Samnites, partly through excavation, notably at Monte Vairano² and Alfedena,³ and partly through investigation of the wider landscape, particularly in the Biferno valley, Molise.⁴

As a result a whole new area of debate has been developed. The models proposed include defended villages, citadels used in times of crisis by communities settled on lower ground, and the more recent view that some sites may have been proto-urban or urban settlements.⁵ While most commentators agree that a unitary explanation of the phenomenon, beyond a common concern for defence, is improbable, it is clear that what is under discussion carries profound implications for the way we view the Samnites and the nature of upland society during the rise of Roman hegemony within Italy.

The fieldwork whose initial results are described below has the aim of contributing to this debate through systematic study of the 35-ha defended site of Monte Pallano in N Samnium. Significant remains were known at the hillfort itself and from the surrounding region, and the accessibility of Monte Pallano was another important factor (most comparable sites have dense tree cover). From the outset an integrated approach has been adopted, combining excavation at Monte Pallano with survey of its hinterland, along lines developed elsewhere in Italy and NW Europe.⁶ The research forms part of the Sangro Valley Project, a fieldwork programme conduct-

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- 1 See S. P. Oakley, *The hillforts of the Samnites* (British School at Rome Archaeological Monograph 10, 1995) for the most recent and comprehensive treatment of Samnite fortified centres. New sites are reported regularly, and with many areas still awaiting close investigation it is likely that the corpus will grow considerably over the next few years. Reconnaissance by Microlite has been attempted recently and may speed the identification of new sites dramatically (D. Caiazza, pers. comm.).
 - 2 G. De Benedittis, *Il centro sannitico di Monte Vairano* (Campobasso, Documenti di antichità italiche e romane 5, 1974); id., "L'oppidum di Monte Vairano ovvero Aquilonia," in AA.VV, *Sannio. Pentri e Frentani dal VI al I sec. a.C.* (Rome 1980) 321-41; id., *Monte Vairano: La casa di 'LN'* (Catalogo della mostra, Campobasso 1988); id., "L'abitato di Monte Vairano," in *La romanisation du Samnium aux IIe et Ier siècles av. J.-C.* (Centre Jean Bérard, Naples 1991) 47-55.
 - 3 L. Mariani, "Aufidena," *MonAnt* 10 (1901) 225-638; id., "Alfedena," *NSc* 1902, 517-25; F. Parisi Badoni and M. Ruggeri Giove, *Alfedena: la necropoli di Campo Consolino* (Chieti 1980); F. Coarelli and A. La Regina, *Guide archeologiche Laterza: Abruzzo Molise* (Rome 1984).
 - 4 G. Barker, *A Mediterranean valley. Landscape archaeology and annales history in the Biferno Valley* (London 1995).
 - 5 Oakley (supra n.1) provides the fullest discussion. See also J. A. Lloyd, "Pentri, Frentani and the beginnings of urbanization (c.500-80 BC)," in Barker (supra n.4) 181-212 for questions of Samnite urbanism.
 - 6 See, for example, M. Gualtieri, "Fortification and settlement organization: an example from pre-Roman Italy," *World Archaeology* 19.1 (1987) 30-46, and id. and H. Fracchia, *Roccagloriosa I. L'abitato: scavo e ricognizione topografica* (Naples 1990) (Roccagloriosa, Lucania); C. C. Haselgrove, "Later Iron Age