

The Second Archaeological season at Castellaraccio di Monteverdi 2019 (Civitella Paganico - GR)

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This paper illustrates the results of the second archaeological season that took place at the medieval site of Castellaraccio di Monteverdi, in the territory of Civitella Paganico (Grosseto, Italy). The excavation revealed the phases of abandonment in one of the rooms of the main keep of the settlement, completing and confirming the results of the 2018 trench. A second new area was opened on the North side of the fortification to define the role and the function of other sections of the castle. The material recovered confirms that the site was abandoned during the second half of the known 13th century, as stated in the written sources. At this stage one other earlier phase of occupation predates the visible standing structure. Further, new details were added to the general plan based on emerging remains.

Introduction

The official local role attributed to the brief life of the Tuscan fortified site of Castellaraccio of Monteverdi, overseeing the Grosseto plain, was to control the flow of traffic moving inland from the coast over the large Ombrone river. The medieval castle, abandoned after being seized and confiscated by the Sienese, was dismantled to create a new town, Paganico, about 5 km towards the western side of the valley (fig. 1). The town was built in the second half of the 13th century by the incoming citizens who used the nearby castle as a quarry to build the new *borgo franco*. Siena shrewdly offered ten years free of taxation to induce the new residents to build their homes. Documents clarify that the reason given for expansion into the heart of the Ardenghesca region was for the Sienese to save the people from the mistreatment of the local lords and bandits¹. A brief tax exemption of ten years was offered as the benefit that came with the promise that new citizens would build their own homes inside the walled, rectangular compound. This enclosed space was constructed to force all travellers through the gates. No mention is made of the revenues that would derive from the collection of taxes on goods passing through.

When the Ardengheschi were the lords of this region, corresponding more or less to the current commune of Civitella Paganico, they established their presence with castles such as Castellaraccio². This settlement, expanding beyond the hilltop, controlled the routes passing in the four cardinal directions in this specific area of the region and leading to larger communities, some of which were morphing into bigger villages and eventually important communal cities, such as Siena. Siena's economic success led to its expansion and dominion over what had been already shaped and controlled by previous families.

¹ MONACI 1993.

² The site was firstly identified in a survey, MARCOCCI 2015-2016: 234-35.

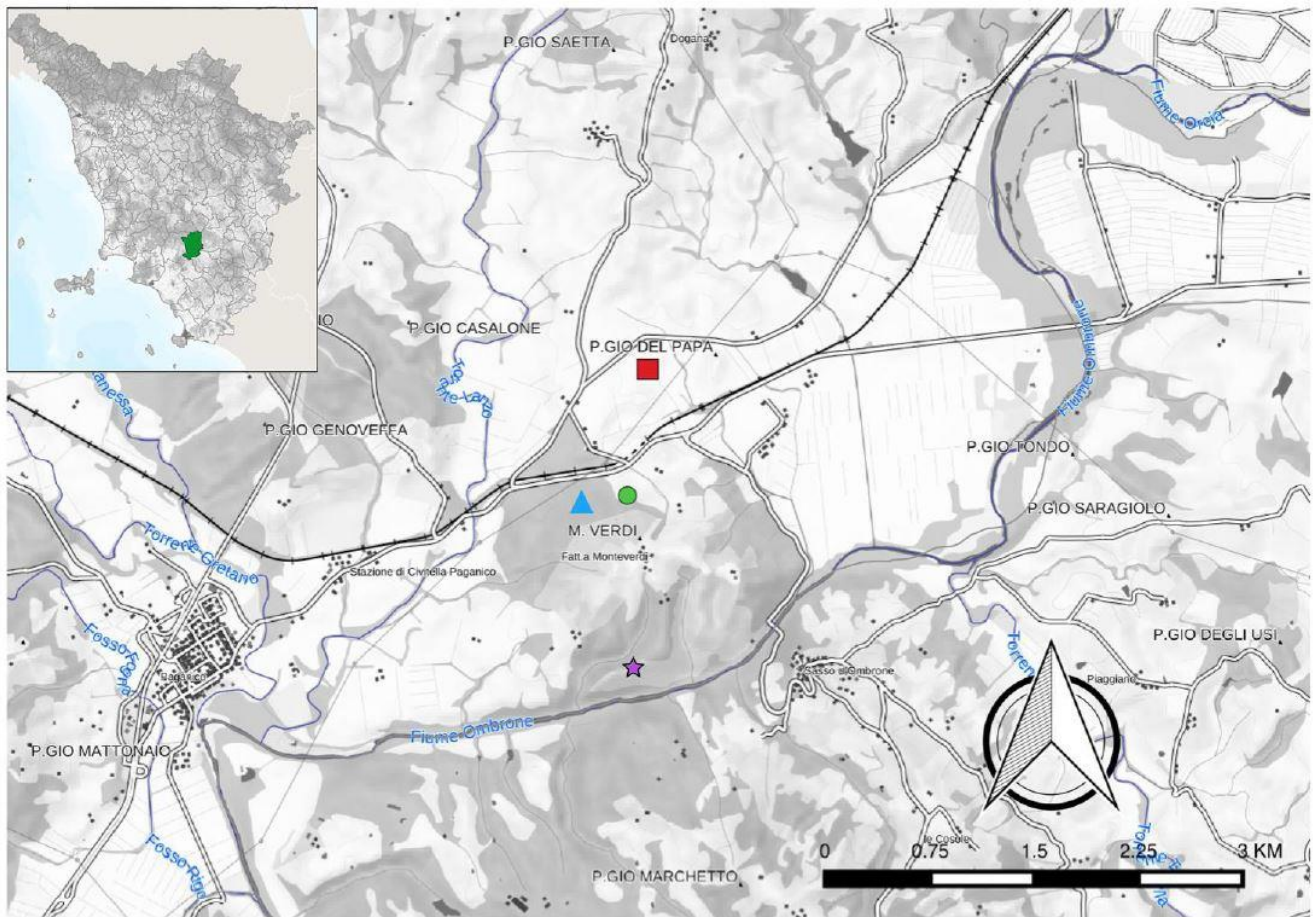


Fig. 1. General map showing the archaeological evidence within the Monteverdi estate; Podere Cannicci with the late Etruscan and Republican site – Red Square; the medieval castle of Castellaraccio – Purple Star; the Republican scatter/farmstead on the slopes of the hill (Green Circle). The Blue Triangle indicates the natural water spring.

The project

The goal of the wider IMPERO project is to connect sequentially in time two different sites lying on the same territory: the Etruscan – Roman community of the plains of Cannicci with the nearby hilltop of the medieval Castellaraccio community³. With a *longue durée* approach, the focus is to identify the changes from the early Etruscan initiatives in the area, the Roman role within the local land infrastructures, and follow their evolution into the later medieval period. This would include post-Roman shifts of political power, changes in demography within the now invisible villages, and the shift to an intermittent occupation of even lesser-known mid-slope settlements. The attraction of this part of the region is the centrality of its road network, ideal for the distribution of the typical Mediterranean staples like grains, salt, wine, oil. Moreover, the area is surrounded by woods and contains an abundance of water.

This excavation is a collaboration between three non-Italian Universities offering foreign students an introduction to archaeology in the historic and cultural context of Tuscany⁴. Below are the results of the last archaeological season.

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³ For the site location and previous archaeological campaigns of Cannicci, SEBASTIANI *et al.* 2018, 2019, 2020.

⁴ These are the State University of New York at Buffalo, The Cooper Union, and Michigan State University.

The excavation

The campaign of 2019 continued the research on Area 1000, in the easternmost section of the walled fortified hill, where we believe we have located the keep, composed of at least two rooms (fig. 2). Our investigation is still limited to the southern one, but we plan to investigate the entire complex. The second two excavation area, Areas 2000 and 3000, are contiguous trenches in the central-northern section of the hill. They were inaugurated this year to explore other sections of the hill and to start to understand its internal organization and the functional differentiations between areas and structures. Area 2000 was chosen as part of a series of rooms abutting the northern curtain, while Area 3000, a small test pit in front of it, will serve as a first stratigraphic sondage for the whole settlement. Finally, we cleaned the section of Area 4000, where we located the remains of an internal tower connected with the southern defensive wall (fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the eastern edge of the hill and Area 1000.

Area 1000

The aim of the 2019 campaign for Area 1000 was to excavate the full extent of the southern room (1) of the keep, in order to verify the stratigraphic sequence documented the previous year. We wanted to confirm if there was a consistency in the layers of abandonment of the room and to assess the relationships between the structural elements, since the two eastern corners of the area were still covered by an extensive collapse (fig. 4)⁵.

⁵ HOBART, CARABIA 2020: 6.

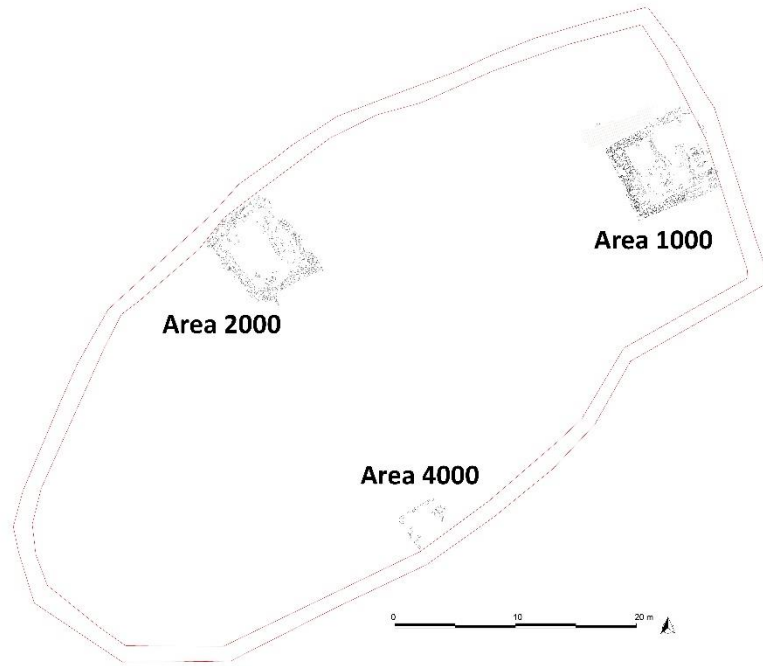


Fig. 3. Castellaraccio di Monteverdi: 2019 plan with areas. Created by Emanuele Mariotti.

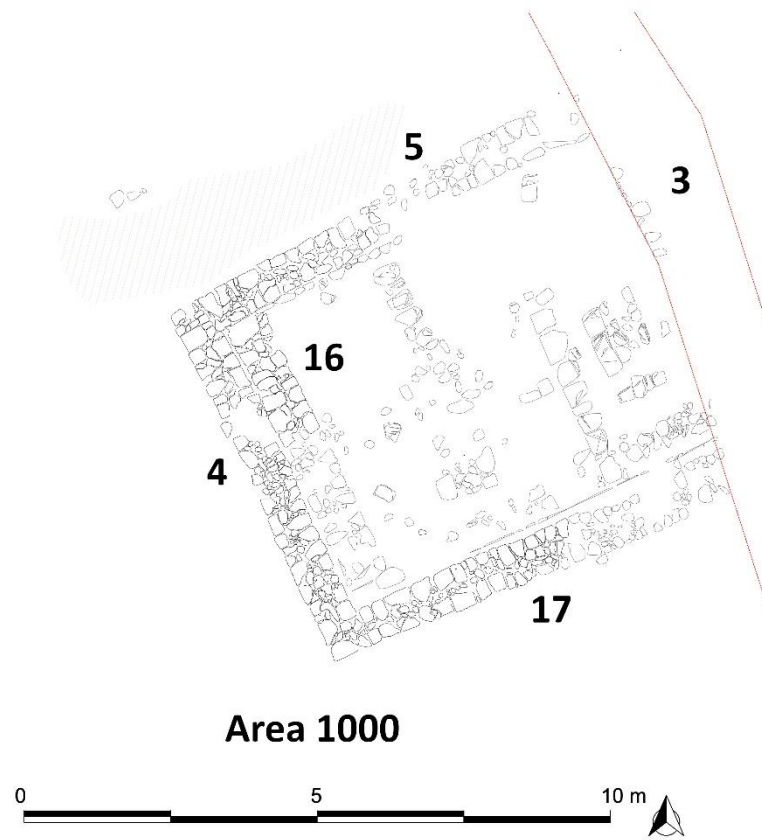


Fig. 4. Area 1000: plan of the area with the main structural remains.

Stratigraphy

The first step was to remove the remains of the collapse, **10**, from the rest of the area. A deep layer of stones was still present in the eastern portion of the room while a second team started removing the thick collapse in Area 2000. It soon became clear that the same collapse was covering the total surface of the area, similarly to the enlarged Area 1000. A different level **22** (fig. 5) of mixed composition (small/medium stones, earth, and mortar), very similar to the one already exposed in the 2018 trench, it seems to be an earlier phase of abandonment, when the building was roofless but still standing and accessible, even if no traces of human activity were found related to it.



Fig. 5. Area 1000: context 22 an earlier phase of abandonment, with the room roofless but probably still accessible.

The most interesting find from this phase was the discovery of a group of five silver coins, all recovered between the lower part of collapse **10** and the upper part of context **22** in the northeastern corner of the structure, since they came from the bottom of the collapse. (See below for details)

Under context **22** we uncovered a thick and compact homogeneous level of broken tiles and bricks **29** (fig. 6)⁶. The collapse was spread over most of the room except for the northeastern corner where the tiles were rarer, and the southeast corner where the space was occupied by another structure, only partially covered by the tiles. Tiles and bricks were probably part of a surface, from which the best-preserved elements were removed and recycled. However, no trace of human activities confirmed the general abandonment of the area, except for a possible temporary animal shelter testified by a sheep-goat mandible.

In the southeastern corner the new structural elements emerged during the removal of the last context **22**, under which there few traces of the collapsed roof. What became clear were the remains of an aligned series of roughly squared stones standing – seemingly to support something **41**. This structure was functionally connected with a north-south wall, **30**, which runs parallel to it for 3,15 m beginning from the southern wall **17** of the room (fig. 7). The combination of the two elements seems to point to a staircase that would confirm the existence of at least two floors⁷.

⁶ We recovered 33 fragments of bricks, 7 complete bricks, 434 fragments of tiles, 8 not id., 4 fragments of Roman-Classical tiles. This context is comparable with Context 11, excavated in the 2018 trench, HOBART, CARABIA 2020: 6.

⁷ For a more elaborate example, CITTER 2009: 125.



Fig. 6. Area 1000: collapse of roof tiles (29).



Fig. 7. Area 1000: contexts 44 and 30, provisionally interpreted as a pillar and a wall forming the base for a staircase.

Once we removed the collapse of roof-tiles, we exposed level **32**, composed of yellowish silty clay, and characterized by occasional charcoal fragments. It looks similar to context **13**, excavated the year before in the trench⁸. This could be a level of use before the abandonment and collapse of the structure. In this layer, almost in contact with the northern wall **5** we recovered the first and only fragment of archaic majolica. Context **32** covered a series of new elements that are starting to emerge especially in the southern and western part of the area, including possible new structures, a ditch or trench, and the remains of what it seems to have been a hearth **42** which abuts the wall of the possible staircase **41**, almost in the center of the room. In excavating **32** we basically achieved the stratigraphic connection with the 2018 trench. In this promising new phase, we were forced to stop our excavation, saving all the new features for the next season.

Construction techniques

The removal of the remaining part of the main collapse exposed a greater section of the two still standing walls of the area - the northern one **5** and the eastern one **3** – allowing a preliminary structural analysis.

The main curtain **3** (fig. 8) was built in one phase and with the same chaotic construction technique and no attention to aesthetic criteria. There was, however, an attempt to select materials of similar size, and filled in with occasional larger elements.

On the other side, the northern wall **5** (fig. 9) of the area was clearly subject to a series of interventions. Firstly, it was not originally in contact with the curtain wall, since a passage is visible that was later walled up **21**. This opening suggests that this might have been the original door into the building. If this was so, why and when was it closed since no other evident accesses have been found to the room? We hope to find answers once we will excavate both the areas.

The eastern part of the wall, apart from the infill, was built with a better technique with a precise selection of materials, creating regular courses with an alternation of thicker, almost quadrangular stones, and thinner, rectangular ones, filled with a sandy mortar. A putlog hole is also present in the highest section of the wall (fig. 9). During an uncertain date, the structure was struck by some traumatic event, which caused the collapse of most of its central and western part, with possibly only a very small section of it still in place at the junction point with the western wall **4**. The new intervention/restoration works were carried out in a different technique, using more mortar between the stones and less attention to the selection of materials and creation of regular courses. The materials employed are clearly different from the first construction phase, being composed of larger and less worked elements. Exposing the northern façade of the wall in the next campaign should clarify the issue.

⁸ HOBART, CARABIA 2020: 8.



Fig. 8. Area 1000: the western façade of the curtain wall 3. Also visible in the picture the walled-up door 21.



Fig. 9. Area 1000: southern façade of wall 5, with the walled-up door 21.

Area 2000

During this campaign we decided to open a new area in one of the rooms abutting the northern curtain wall. These aligned large spaces form an apparently coherent system that seems to occupy most of the northern half, inside the fortified area. The aim of this intervention was to understand their functions – houses, workshops, warehouses – or some of each, and their chronological relation between them and other structures of the castle (fig. 10).

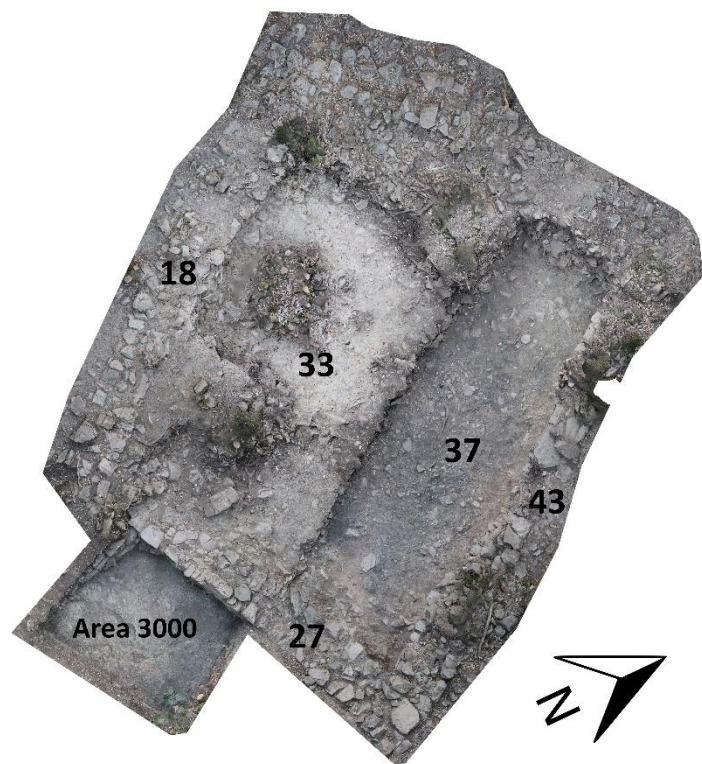


Fig. 10. Area 2000: ortophotoplan by Josef Soucek.

Stratigraphy

Before the beginning of the excavation the only visible elements were the eastern **47** and western **18** peripheral walls, clearly recognizable from the rest of the collapsed materials. The collapse of construction materials in the room formed a depression at the center, as for all the other rooms of this complex. This is another distinguished element which suggests that looting of construction materials after the abandonment of the settlement took place.

Similarly, to Area 1000 it was necessary to remove the grown vegetation, and the remains of a less imposing, but still significant, stone collapse. After a first chaotic layer of stones and roots we met a second layer composed of smaller and more compacted stones. Both these layers were interpreted as still part of the collapse and were heavily disturbed by trees, stumps, and roots. Tiles, bricks, and other ceramic building materials were very rare or non-existent as well as for pottery and small finds.

At the same time, once we started to understand the limits of the room with a careful cleaning of the walls, it became possible to locate a southern structure **27** which closed the area with a threshold **26** on its south-western section. This was later filled up and enclosed.

For reasons of time, we were forced to subdivide the room in half, excavating only a section of context **33**. In this way we discovered the remains of a surface composed of small angular stones mixed with debris and earth. Excavating on the northern section of the area, we did not find any element suggesting human activities and as we were about to classify it as an abandonment level, in the corner of the south-east section of the trench the remains of a fire became visible with an accumulation of grey ash in the same corner of the room. A small pottery deposit, consisting of two *testi* and a few fragments of archaic majolica, was found next to the hearth and abutting wall **27** (fig. 11). At this early stage, the context is interpreted as sporadic activities carried out shortly after its last occupation.



Fig. 11. Area 2000: pottery concentration abutting the wall 27.

Construction techniques

The study of the structures in this preliminary phase is yet not feasible as the walls are heavily disturbed by the invasive roots of the trees planted all over the site in the last century. The best readable structure was the western façade of the eastern wall **43**. It seems that the technique applied in the construction of this wall is a much more irregular and disordered version of the one used in Area 1000 for the structures **4** and **17**. There is no indication of a regular building pattern, the materials as well are less selected, with the combination of irregularly-cut medium and occasional larger stones. Most of the latter seems to have been used in order to create a corner or a threshold on the northern part of the wall which was later filled in. Only after a careful cleaning of the section, and the excavation of the nearby room it will be possible to resolve the issue.

More information on the foundation of the structure came from the test pit (Area 3000) that was opened just south to the threshold **26** leading outside the room. Here we exposed the foundations of the walls over a thick layer of rubble **24**, which covered a dark organic layer **25** directly in contact with the bedrock.

Area 3000

This area was a small test pit that we decided to open on the southern edge of Area 2000 in order to obtain a full stratigraphy of an external space in connection with the excavated structure.

Stratigraphy

This small test pit allowed us to examine the first full stratigraphic sequence at Castellaraccio. We were able to expose a small section of the bedrock which was almost flat in the southern area of the pit only to sink with a steep slope under the structures of Area 2000 on the northern side. On the western section of the test pit we located a north-south drystone wall **38**, running parallel to the section and barely emerging from it, which was built directly on the bedrock. The rest of the natural rock was directly covered by a very dark and organic layer **25** composed of a sandy-silt ground mixed with small irregular stones and charcoal (fig. 14). This context followed the slope continuing under the adjacent structures of Area 2000 (**26** and **27**), it was rich in fragments of common pottery, with a total absence of archaic maiolica, which may suggest a belonging to an earlier phase of the castle preceding the appearance of this class of materials at the beginning of the 13th century. This layer, and the one above (**24**), abutted the drystone wall **38** denoting the chronological precedence of the structure over everything else.

The dark level **25** was then covered by what appeared to be a spread of collapsed materials **24** or an attempt to level the surface of the hill which could be part of a later phase of internal reorganization of the castle. The “surface” formed by **24** seems too irregular to be a floor and was then covered by **20** which represented the actual living phase and then abandonment of it (fig. 12). This is confirmed in the almost absence of materials in context **24**, with a few residual pottery fragments originating from the layer above **20**. A post hole or a small pit was excavated in the north-eastern corner of this layer, possibly reaching and cutting the top surface of the bedrock.

The interpretation, of the layer which levels out a new phase of construction, lies behind the fact that it was continuing under the threshold **26** and the wall **27** (fig. 13), which were directly built on it. Moreover, the material culture of level **20** and **25**, clearly separated by **24**, is markedly different due to the common presence of archaic maiolica in **20**.



Fig. 12. Area 3000: the bottom of context 20 and emerging context 24



Fig. 13. Area 3000: stratigraphy under the wall 27.

This small test pit, despite its limitedness, enabled us a first glimpse into some of the macro-occupational phases of the hill of Castellaraccio. While we need confirmation from the study of the pottery to properly date context **25**, it seems plausible to suggest the existence of at least two main phases involving Area 2000 and 3000. An older phase without archaic majolica, was directly in contact with the bedrock, this was later obliterated by the construction of the visible structures of Area 2000, which were implanted directly on the levelling layer **24**, on top of which the most recent human activities were carried out until the abandonment of the settlement **20**.



Fig. 14. Area 3000: emerging context 25 and remains of context 24.



Fig. 15. Reconstructed jug of archaic majolica from context 20 (Area 3000).

the 12th century in Tuscany, specifically in Pisa. The quality and early shape of the small jug partially reconstructed (fig. 15) shows an early shape and type of decoration, probably made in Siena. Similar other pieces were found at Caldanelle, another nearby site currently under investigation (information kindly shared by the director).

The other interesting find is a small pouch of silver coins discovered in the lower layers of collapse from area 100, between the lower part of collapse **10** and the upper part of context **22** in the northeastern corner of the area. They are all dated to the first half of the 13th century, which confirms the last known phase of occupation

Area 4000

This area is located on the southern western section of the hill. Here, we limited our intervention to a quick cleaning of a square structure, a tower, connected to the southern curtain wall, overlooking the Ombrone river. The tower was constructed within the circuit wall and, at least in the exposed part, has been severely damaged by the vegetation (fig. 1).

A.C.

Assessment and future plans

At this stage of the research, we have identified and cleared most of the entire circuit wall at the edge of the flattened hilltop. Much of the effort is focused on clearing the two areas (1000 and 2000) from the thick stone collapse. A more detailed plan of the settlement was drafted as more alignments of walls reveal their orientation and possible configuration. There was at this point at least one tall tower, in Area 1000, built as an observation centre, yet too small to provide any living comfort.

The entire northern side of the wall is made from irregularly cut large stones with hardly any attempt to shape its visible sides. The inside of the wall has flattened surfaces. The center of the hilltop seems divided with a ridge which suggests a division of space and use. The gates of the castles remain uncertain at this stage as traces remain below the expansive collapse we are removing. Future continues unchanged from the first 2019 campaign, that is, to provide evidence of a castle that belongs to the first generation of *inca-stellamento*.

The few, fortunate finds of archaic majolica in the area 3000 confirm the date of the abandonment of the castle to the conquering Sienese Republic in the early 13th century. This innovative and revolutionary glazed technique, introduced by the Islamic world, was just starting to be imitated by the end of

of the site, in accordance with the written sources⁹. Regarding the provenance, the coins come from both Siena (fig. 16) and Pisa. The Pisan minted well preserved Madonna and Child (figs. 17-18) was rather common. If compared with the scarce dating material at this stage, these coins come as an unexpected surprise. The few pieces of archaic majolica during last's year first campaign and those recovered in 2019, suggest the abandonment of the castle by the beginning of the 13th century. It is possible that they were hidden inside the wall at the upper level of the structure, since they came from the bottom of the collapsed wall.



Fig. 16. Grosso from Siena (1220s-1229) from context 10 (small find 31) – obverse.
Fig. 17. Grosso from Pisa (1220s-1254) from context 10 (small find 12) – obverse.
Fig. 18) Grosso from Pisa (1220s-1254) from context 10 (small find 12) – reverse.

Conclusions

From an archaeological perspective, after two years of removing collapses at Castellaraccio, and the opening of two areas inside the woods (fig. drone), we are still not in a position to date when the castle's construction began. The investigations at Podere Cannicci and Castellaraccio on the hills of Monteverdi show that the Roman and medieval settlements have a more complex role within the territory of the middle valley of the Ombrone river. The two parallel excavations aim at reconstructing the phases of the hamlet as a possible medium-sized Republican village, built near a sacred place probably of late Etruscan origin which continued to exist until the years of the Social Wars, while the castle had a brief life as it was soon after destroyed by the Sienese expansion in the Maremma, at least according to written sources.¹⁰ A long period of abandonment between the classical and medieval sites seems to occur as many other excavated settlements in this part of Tuscany and also confirmed by the few surviving documents. We do know however from a hand full of earlier

⁹ ANGELUCCI 2000.

¹⁰ ANGELUCCI 2000.

medieval coarse ware pieces, that occupation of the hilltop already existed in Monteverdi in the 11th century, with a small medium range fortified settlement to control the passage of travelers and merchants along the roads that lead into the heart of the region. Rivers, rich woods, and fertile land attracted a community which had resources for potential growth, as many other hilltops.¹¹ The position of the two areas were centered with a clear economic interest linked to the primary resources offered from the plains and the proximity to the Grosseto coast, which attracted first Rome and later Siena to take over the already established agricultural communities and confiscate the land.

The remains of workshops and farms tracing both communities through time are found along the road that leads from the coast to Chiusi and later Siena and other centers. These settlements seem to share similar destinies of local success and removal by stronger agents. Over time, the territory's supply of goods became a constant draw for larger important urban centers such as Rome and Siena during the height of their expansions. Both Cannicci and Castellaraccio di Monteverdi appear as typical agricultural settlements. The first since the late Etruscan age - if not earlier, while the castle functioned during the early medieval period and one could add it continues to this day. The type of access to river waters over time is not yet clear given the size of the riverbed in antiquity and its tortuous path. Plus, there are multiple springs and streams that run through this zone and several that flow into the Ombrone. Crop planting patterns need further study. The continued reuse of water channels, springs and rivers of the classical period seems to have fallen into disuse in late antiquity, although there must have been some form of continuity with brief interruptions. It is precisely the concentration of goods, such as wheat, the transportation of salt, wine, and olive oil that guaranteed local economic success, testified by the newly identified extension of both the classical settlement and a medieval village protected by a hilltop castle. This intermittent but important sequence of occupation at the intersection of major roads seems to have attracted collectors of customs which also explain the large investment for the construction of a massive bridge over the Ombrone river. Thus, excavating this abandoned fortification seems like an opportunity for finding a pre-thirteenth-century castle.

Similarly, the materials found at Castellaraccio and Cannicci, elucidate how the controlling families generated resources from the first fortification and help us assess possible continuities within and across the ages. Every historical epoch is present - from the Etruscan-, Roman-, perhaps also the late antiquity, the early and later Middle Ages to the modern times. Further, the presence of water, roads, and crop cultivation persist as protagonists over time. The many local anecdotes allow us to engage into new dialogues that are already showing, with the first layers of life and material, a more complex reconstruction of what happened in this particular abandoned fort above the Ombrone river.

M.H.

Acknowledgments

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¹¹ BUONINCONTRI, DI FALCO, DI PASQUALE 2013.

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