The hinterlands of early medieval towns: the transformation of the countryside in Tuscany

RICCARDO FRANCOVICH

1. The disintegration of the antique settlement structure

Archaeological research, carried out for the most part in southern Tuscany, lets us propose a model of the processes that led to the formation of the rural and urban landscapes of the medieval period. This is an integrated model that takes into account microregional differences on the one hand, and new ideas that are constantly derived from fieldwork on the other.¹

The disintegration of the rural landscape of the Roman period in Tuscany had its roots in the early imperial period. Although this process occurred in different ways over different timescales in a variety of contexts, it had one eventual outcome: the disintegration of the ancient landscape. Archaeological research, mainly in the southern part of the region, allows for the construction of a model of the processes that, between the fourth and seventh centuries, led to a simplification of the settlement network and to a prevalence of nucleated village-type settlements at the centres or perimeters of vast estates. Occasional public and private interventions failed to halt this phenomenon, because they happened without the conditions of political and economic supremacy that had allowed in Tuscany, as in other Italian regions, the development of complex interlinked forms of settlement in the [earlier Roman] countryside. The early medieval countryside was thus formed following a profound and irreversible break with the past. Archaeology now allows us to hypothesise a series of stages in this process; although their sequence can be clearly defined, detailed definition of the stages themselves is still awaited.

The fundamental change is represented by demographic decline and by the concentration of the population in a few villages after the collapse of the late Roman settlement system. This contributed to a process of selection and contraction in the settlement network that affected both the coastal and inland regions; its widespread

¹ For a regional overview of the activities of medieval archaeology in the urban and rural spheres, see the “Portale di Archeologia Medievale” on the website for “Archeologia Medievale” at the University of Siena.
nature demonstrates that it was not an isolated event but must have occurred for reasons that were connected, even if the periods of its impact varied. In the southern part of the region this process occurred in the mid-second century, while in the Valdarno we have signs of it appearing in the third century. We can also note a further element of [geographical] differentiation from the mid-fourth century until the Theodosian period (in the region of Pisa perhaps until the start of the fifth century). During this period numerous villas were founded or refounded in the northern area: the productive system in the Valdarno region shows signs of resumption, Pisa became an important port centre, and new sites can be documented between the Arno and Serchio rivers and the Apuane Alps that can be more readily categorised as villages. In the south of the region, however, the process of abandonment and population nucleation continued uninterrupted.

The late fifth century appears, however, to be the first important watershed, the moment in which the fortunes of the traditional Roman countryside altered irreversibly. Between the end of the fifth and the start of the sixth centuries we have clear signs of a profound decline in the settlement network that resulted in its fragmentation into a myriad of small sites of varying type. These often existed without links to the urban centres, which also suffered an analogous process of disintegration in the same period.

A number of developments can be placed within this framework. These include the reoccupation of sites of the imperial period that had been previously abandoned (such as the farm of S. Mario in the area of Volterra), the appearance of small farm-type units in the inland areas, and the abandonment of a large number of sites that had remained active until that moment. Another development was the profound transformation of those sites that continued to be inhabited because they were important for maritime routes, although in some cases (like that of Torre Tagliata in the area of Cosa) these sites were very modest in structural terms and were sometimes reoccupied following a period of abandonment, like many villas on the islands of the Tuscan Archipelago.

Two further phenomena can be placed in the final phase of the disintegration of the late antique countryside: the appearance of cemeteries on the sites of villas or villages, which attest to the permanence of small nuclei in the countryside during the sixth and part of the seventh century, and the reuse of cave sites, as in the tufo area around Sovana and in upper Lazio, typical of the Etruscan period. This process took place during the end of the fifth century, throughout the sixth century and for part of the seventh century. It can be considered a genuine transitional phase between an economic, social and settlement system still linked to the past, and the new forms of habitation that developed in the first centuries of the medieval period, outside a system of fiscal control and under the control of a rather weak rural aristocracy.

In order to better define this process, we can consider that the late antique rural landscape, often based more or less on estates, had retained the earlier social fabric formed around the great properties of the imperial period and the ways in which they
were administered. The Byzantine-Gothic war (535-554) represented a point of no return: the profound devastation suffered by the peninsula struck at the heart of the institutional and social system that had produced this landscape. For this reason, the period between the middle of the sixth and the first decades of the seventh century appears to be a genuinely crucial moment.2

2. Vanishing cities, shrinking cities, and fortified cities (second to sixth centuries) (Pls 7-11)

The prolonged disintegration of the “Roman” order of the landscape also affected the most characteristic aspect of Roman society: the city. Tuscany does not contradict the picture established in the best studied cases in Italy, such as Brescia and Verona, even if the quantity of recovered data is much smaller. The cities, which had benefited from the presence of a middle class and its investment of agricultural revenues, entered a crisis during the Antonine period. Corresponding perfectly with the process that can be observed in the countryside, they suffered from a destruction of the urban fabric that physically signified the transformation of both their social and economic basis as well as the concept of *civitas*. However, much remains to be studied and defined.

In fact, if there is a period in the history of the Italian peninsula, and of Tuscany in particular, in which the role of the cities must be defined with clarity, it is that which lies between the late imperial and early medieval periods. However, historical and archaeological literature on this subject is discontinuous and constructed on very fragmentary sources; we could even say that until very recent years, urban archaeology did not exist as a discipline. Archaeology has been carried out in the cities where life has continued, but without establishing a strategy towards a systematic understanding of the transformations that occurred. Meanwhile in the abandoned cities, particularly in southern Tuscany, the deposits of post-classical life, at least until the 1990s, were generally destroyed and still today are neglected.

Two things, however, are certain: between the third and eleventh centuries, the civic order of the cities changed fundamentally, and the use of materials and construction techniques changed from stone to wood and then back again. Other changes can also be seen in the functions of different urban areas as well as in geomorphological sequences with the formation of “dark earth”. Above all, however, it was the spatial distribution of the cities in the region that suffered a substantial upheaval in this phase, leading in fact to a marked displacement towards the north of the concentration of urban centres. Tuscany can be divided into two large areas: in the southern part the crisis was earlier and more profound, largely eliminating the existence of urban life, while in the north it

2 An overview can be found in Francovich 2002, 144-167.
came later and did not entirely undermine the foundations of urban settlement (as can be seen from the illustrative maps).

In fact, when the conditions arose for the re-emergence of the cities in the central centuries of the medieval period, Lucca, Pisa, Florence, Siena, Arezzo, Volterra, Fiesole, and Pistoia became high-ranking centres not only in Tuscany, but also in the European sphere. In the southern part, however, the collapse of the Roman towns of Cosa, Heba, Saturnia, Sovana, Roselle, Vetulonia, Populonia and Chiusi left a substantial gap, filled only for a limited period and somewhat later by the presence of Massa Marittima and Grosseto.3

Once the parameters of the profound difference between the north and south of Tuscany have been clearly established, we must explain the reasons behind them. Many factors could have had an influence. In the first place, the economic weakness of the greater part of southern Tuscany was countered only in the most intense period of ‘romanisation’. Secondly, perhaps already in the early imperial period, the cities of the south functioned as service centres for a population that preferred to reside in the countryside, in the great villas and surrounding villages. A third reason was communication. The Apennine roads all converged on the Arno, navigable for a large part, and perhaps already in the seventh century were also connected with the Francigena (the trans-European pilgrimage route to Rome). The coast was substantially excluded from the great late antique and early medieval routeways. Malaria and increasing marshiness do not appear to have been endemic or decisive factors in determining a demographic decline in the coastal areas before the late medieval period.

Although they were profoundly ruralised and their topography and built environment were altered, Pisa, Lucca, and Florence remained cities between the sixth and seventh centuries, while cities in the south lost the last element that distinguished them from their hinterlands: their role as centres of administration. It is obvious that the process occurred at different rates in each town, as tradition and the conjunction of many diverse factors always played a role in determining the rate at which administrative functions were lost.

The different phases in the dissolution of the ancient city can be placed within this general framework. All the excavations conducted until now point in the same direction and we can therefore assimilate the Tuscan city (whatever the peculiarities of specific cases) into the general model established for central northern Italy.4 Between the second and fourth centuries, inhabited spaces contracted and the late Republican and early imperial wall circuits became too large. Public building activity reduced until it

3 The most up-to-date results regarding the fortunes of the Tuscan cities between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages remain those presented in Gelichi 1999, although see also Citter/Vacaro 2003.
disappeared. Restorative interventions may have been carried out under Probus at Lucca and Fiesole in the Severan era and similarly, the baths of Volterra in Valpolicella could have been the subject of a public intervention analogous to the one at the Neronian baths in Pisa but no further examples are known. Lucca must have played a particular role within the late imperial economy because it was the site of one or more sword factories. This could explain the central imperial authority’s significant interest in the town.  

The only attested public works are statues with inscriptions dedicated to the *potentes* of the moment and some restoration in Lucca, Pisa and Volterra. However there are more consistent archaeological data relating to new buildings of a private character that arose alongside the levels of dark earth and the ruined monuments. In this context we should note the rich *domus* in Luni, the baths next to the east gate in Roselle, the buildings with mosaic pavements in Florence, and the syncretistic cult building in the *forum* in Cosa, all constructed during the course of the fourth century.

The process of disintegration proceeded without interruption. Between the fifth and sixth centuries, the only element apparently contradicting this tendency was the religious euergetism that absorbed the greater part of resources, starting perhaps in the fourth century and certainly present in the fifth. Churches arose everywhere, often occupying public spaces such as the baths in Roselle, the *curia* in Cosa, and the *forum* in Lucca. Sometimes instead they were built in private areas, as were the episcopal churches in Luni and Pisa, while in Chiusi the identification of the early Christian cathedral on the site of S. Secondiano within the city walls has recently been proposed again. These new constructions, even if they might appear to have been part of a revitalisation of the urban fabric, in reality determined new and different centres of gravity and lines of communication.

The Christianization of urban spaces had a further significant impact in terms of the appearance of intra-mural cemeteries that co-existed with the old extra-mural cemeteries of Roman tradition at least until the end of the seventh century. In the course of the sixth century the Tuscan cities, like others in the rest of Italy, fragmented into nuclei and islands [of population], retaining this form until the aristocracy of the late Lombard and Carolingian periods began to re-establish the urban fabric on a new basis.

In Luni, the *forum* must have already fallen out of use in the sixth century when small huts were erected within it. This could be interpreted in two ways: it could indicate a spontaneous private invasion of former public spaces in the absence of a central authority, or conversely, an initiative on the part of the central Byzantine power aimed towards accommodating the population of the countryside in times of insecurity. The vitality of this city, sustained by its marble industry, must have already collapsed in the imperial period, and the great quantity of imported Mediterranean material there must

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5 For information relating to these cities and those in the discussion that follows, see Gelichi 1999.
not make us suppose a still-functioning vital urban centre. Luni in the sixth and seventh centuries was a Byzantine fortress, functioning as part of Liguria’s defensive system. The finds indicate a military presence that would have required supplies, as did all the Ligurian *castra*, and it is no coincidence that the imports ceased in the mid-seventh century, when the conquests of Rothari brought Liguria into the Lombard kingdom.

Thanks to its extraordinary written documentation, Lucca has always received the attention of historians; it permits the reconstruction of the physiognomy of a city of the late Lombard period as perhaps no other city in the *Regnum*. This has also been a limiting factor, however, because it is only in recent years that a requirement for archaeological research has been demonstrated. It is not surprising, therefore, that many doubts remain regarding the nature of Roman Lucca. Our level of knowledge of the late antique and early medieval city lies between these two poles, although archaeology has started to form stratigraphic sequences through which the city’s late antique and early medieval phases can be detected. The levelling in the area of the *forum* by means of the usual *strata* of dark earth signals here, as elsewhere, the transformation of the Roman city. However, it appears that the *cardo maximus* remained in use, because its route is followed by the later via Fillungo. In Lucca the significant toponym *parlascio* could suggest that, as in Pisa and Roselle, the amphitheatre could have been a fortified point used by the Lombards at the moment of their entrance into the city – but the medieval toponym alone is not sufficient evidence for this. However, Lucca is one of the cities that are best imagined as a cluster of isolated settlements. One of these was based around the church of SS. Giovanni e Reparata, while a further more modest example was located in the vicinity of a gate in the Republican wall. Between the end of the fourth and the early fifth century, furthermore, the area of the future church of S. Frediano, outside the Republican wall, was occupied by a productive installation.

Florence, a centre of commerce and manufacturing, was equipped with walls datable to the end of the first century BC, but very soon the area of habitation extended beyond them towards the west and north. The foundation in the fourth century of a praiseworthy church with three naves and a baptistery next to its south door allows us to see a weakening of the third-century crisis and, in this case, the deepening of social differences. Between the end of the fourth and the fifth century there was still a restricted wealthy class able to access Mediterranean products via the River Arno. The city thereafter appears compatible with the model of “islands of settlement”: one nucleus was located around S. Reparata to the north, another around S. Cecilia to the south, while a third is indicated by the cemetery of the Syriac community across the Arno at S. Felicita.

The long period of war that afflicted the whole peninsula between the sixth and early seventh centuries helped to accelerate the process of transformation. The cities became ever more like military fortresses, and it is no coincidence that for the Byzantines the term *kastron* was synonymous with *polis*. All the Tuscan cities that remained active, as
well as others like Cosa that had been abandoned, were reoccupied in this period and became fortresses involved in the imperial defensive system. Furthermore, although these interventions appear to have been driven by the need to maintain the ancient urban systems, they in fact acted in the opposite way, eliminating in many cases the small differences still visible between the cities and rural centres. Archaeologically little is yet known of the long subsequent process that led to the formation of the “Romanesque” cities between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

3. The “curtense” transformation (eighth to tenth centuries)

From the middle of the seventh century, a series of transformations reached its conclusion in the countryside, not only in Tuscany but also in the greater part of Europe. The picture generated by archaeology suggests that the period between the first decades of the sixth and the first decades of the seventh century may have been the final moment in the disintegration of the rural landscape of Roman tradition, while the seventh and eighth centuries are generally agreed to have been the period of the formation of the medieval landscape (Pls 12-13).

This period saw the disappearance of the last ceramic production that recalled the forms and technological traditions of late antiquity. New villages of huts were constructed on hill-tops sometimes previously occupied by protohistoric or Etruscan sites but deserted for the entirety of the Roman period, and cult buildings were constructed or reconstructed and embellished with sculptural decorations, whose traces evidently remained as spolia in the countryside as well as in the cities. The village became once again the point of reference in the settlement network.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy also played a role in the reorganisation of the countryside between the eighth and tenth centuries. Despite Tuscany’s vicinity to Rome, the Christianization of the region was a long process that was completed only with the definitive conversion of the Lombards in the late seventh century. The religious aspect, although important, was accompanied by other factors. Some of them emerge through the lens of archaeology: the necessity to control the territory not only politically, and to coalesce a fragmented population around new centres like churches, parish-churches and monasteries. In this context, it is interesting to note that the churches were often built on the ruins or whatever remained of the villas and the Roman settlements that had been abandoned between the fifth and sixth centuries. This aspect emerges with clarity in two areas where investigations have been more exact – the coastal area between Lucca and Pisa, exemplified by such cases as S. Felicita in Pietrasanta, S. Bartolomeo in Triano and S. Giulia di Caprona, and the hinterland of Siena, exemplified by S. Marcellino in

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6 Valenti 2004.
Chianti, S. Cristina in Buonconvento and S. Pietro Pava. However, these should not be treated as isolated examples, but rather as an indication of the new forms through which the residual vitality of the aristocracy still present in the late antique countryside was demonstrated.\(^7\)

The final elements that contributed to the reorganisation of the landscape were the monasteries of royal or ducal foundation. In Tuscany along the via Francigena, the Lombard kings founded a monastery every 30 km, evidently with the aim of controlling both the route itself and the surrounding territory. Every monastery, as illustrated for example by S. Salvatore in Monte Amiata, was endowed with property – often a part of the fiscal patrimony of the Lombard kingdom – and it can be supposed that this disturbed the traditional political-institutional equilibrium. S. Salvatore had, like nearly all the Italian monasteries, a moment of great splendour during the course of the ninth century (which can be seen also in the exemplary case of S. Vincenzo al Volturno), i.e., the moment in which the curtense system was growing in strength.\(^8\)

The renewed aggregation of the dispersed population did not occur immediately; it was a long process that evolved in different times and ways according to the micro-regional context. Archaeology can demonstrate the growth of villages of huts placed on hill-tops between the sixth and eighth centuries, inhabited by populations that the archaeological evidence indicates did not possess marked internal social stratification. Looking forward in time, it would be these settlements that would be successful: despite many centuries and transformations, it was the fortified hill-top settlements that would later attract the churches and parishes, and not vice versa.

Social stratification within the hill-top villages becomes evident only at the end of the eighth and in the ninth century, when elite longhouse-type housing or fortified areas in the centre of the village destined for the accumulation of agricultural produce were imposed within the pre-existing context of wooden huts. It is these developments that have been associated with the assertion of new strong powers in the context of the formation and development of the curtense system. Already present in the Tuscan documentation for the eighth century, the curtis was the rural settlement structure used by seigneurial landowners as a basis for the process of reorganising agrarian assets. This process was completed with the rise of the territorial seigneury, evidenced archaeologically through the massive proliferation of castelli starting from the tenth century.

The inversion of the trend followed in the preceding period (sixth to mid-seventh centuries) is intimately linked with changing social and economic conditions in the Lombard kingdom, although an overly optimistic reading has to be refuted. In Italy and beyond, other non-economic factors outweighed the economic aspect of the curtis:

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\(^8\) Kurze 1989.
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The angaria was the manifestation of a relationship of power, not one of economics. Moreover, the curtense system only reached its fully developed form in the Carolingian period. It shows a variety of topographic types, from that with more structured dominico to that where the dominico is absent; certainly at present, the isolated curtense farm does not find any confirmation in the archaeological evidence, while there are clear indications of its presence within communities of nucleated villages.

Tuscany is certainly a region privileged by the wealth of its early medieval archival documentation, although it is worth recalling that nearly all the available documentation comes from two ecclesiastical institutions – the bishopric of Lucca and the monastery of S. Salvatore at Monte Amiata – with all the limitations and problems that this entails. This documentation demonstrates that in the eighth century the process of social stratification was still beginning, which accords fully with the archaeological data.

The curtis of the bishop of Lucca, distributed in clusters between the Garfagnana and the Maremma, all had more or less the same organisation and were interlinked with one another. The monastery of S. Salvatore at Monte Amiata also had properties dispersed as far away as the sea. These more or less followed the course of the river Fiora and were organised in curttes, called cellule, that always had one part rented out and one kept under direct management.

The mountainous areas, like the Garfagnana, the Casentino and the Lunigiana, appear to be also characterised by nucleated settlements (vici/villae). A similar topographic aspect has also been proposed for the curttes of southern Tuscany. This forms the central theme in the debate that is emerging between historians and archaeologists regarding the curtis: the transposition into historical terms of archaeological data. The archaeologists interpret the social distinctions emerging in the documents of the ninth and tenth centuries not as an episode within a system still based around dispersed settlements, but as the affirmation of a new social and settlement system that was imposed on a system of pre-existing village communities and that thus calls for a new and more attentive reading of these same sources.9

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9 On the need for a critical re-examination of the sources, see Francovich forthcoming; for a general evaluation of this phenomenon, see Valenti 2004, XVIII-XXII.
Fig. 1. The castle of Montarrenti - aerial view and details
In Montarrenti\textsuperscript{10} (Fig. 1, Pl. 15), the summit of the hill, then the centre of the castle, was occupied by huts larger in size than those discovered on the flanks of the hill and in part intended for the collection of food supplies. The first phase of wooden huts was followed by a phase of mixed construction in stone and wood and by the construction of an enclosure wall. This all occurred well before the site’s Romanesque build-up in stone (twelfth century).

In Scarlino\textsuperscript{11} (Pl. 16.1), the change is still more evident. Between the end of the ninth century and throughout the tenth, the construction of a frescoed church, the change from huts of just wood to buildings of mixed construction as in Montarrenti, and the construction of an enclosure wall are unequivocal signs of the assertion of a strong power within the original social structure of the village. This should be interpreted as resulting from the establishment of the \textit{curtis} mentioned in 973.

Also in Poggibonsi (Pls 16.1-17.1) between the ninth and tenth centuries, we have clear indications of social differentiation after at least four phases of a socially undifferentiated village. This new situation is demonstrated by the appearance of a “long house” with annex buildings, in which the diet of the occupants appears to be privileged in relation to the rest of the village.\textsuperscript{12}

The evidence emerging from recent excavations is still more explicit (if such is possible). The castle of Miranduolo\textsuperscript{13} (Fig. 2), attested in documents from the beginning of the eleventh century, began to develop during the course of the eighth century and life continued there without interruption until the fourteenth century. In its early phases, the village was composed of huts with annexes that appeared to occupy the entire summit area of 750 sqm. Around the middle of the ninth century, these spaces (later destined to be the principal manor house of the castle) were redesigned, starting with an impressive excavation of the bedrock, the creation of a deep ditch about 7 m wide, and the erection of an extensive defensive palisade, which in some points was a double palisade.

The settlement must have revolved around an extensive central hut that demonstrates a continuous sequence of restoration and renewal, in part obliterated by the remains of a twelfth-century stone palace. 40 postholes relate to this building, which probably had a rectangular plan around 8 m long and at least 5 m wide (the width that has been revealed up to now), and which is clearly recognisable as an aisled structure. This building was situated in the midst of service structures. It was flanked to the south by a circular hut with a wooden floor in which horn and bone were worked. In the middle of the tenth century, the summit of the hill underwent a new reconstruction that attests to the first \textit{incastellamento} of the hill; the buildings and fortifications were transformed but the

\textsuperscript{10} Cantini 2004.
\textsuperscript{11} Francovich 1993.
\textsuperscript{12} Valenti 1996.
\textsuperscript{13} Nardini/Valenti 2003, 487-495.
occupied area does not seem to have been enlarged. An enclosure wall was constructed that followed the same course as the earlier palisade that it replaced.

The impressive and monumental remains of the castle of the Gherardesca family in Donoratico\textsuperscript{14} (Pl. 17.2) are located not far from the Tyrrenian coast, a little north of Populonia. The castle is first attested in the second half of the twelfth century, but the stratigraphic sequence commences in the Hellenistic period. The early medieval settlement, extending across the entire surface of the over 8000 sqm of the plateau later occupied by the castle, and consisting of huts at least from the middle of the eighth century, underwent numerous phases of renewal and reconstruction. The sequence recognised to date allows a glimpse of the construction of a palisade; a tract of about 2 m characterised by an alignment of large closely placed posts, in some cases in a double line, was present in the area later occupied by the church. During the tenth century the first wall was constructed, which divided the settlement into two parts still constituted by huts and marked by sparse glazed pottery. The presence of the wall has been interpreted as a division between a productive area under strong seigneurial control and the inhabited area.

In all these cases there is evidence of a progressive topographic reorganisation of the sites and a functional rearticulation of their spaces. To these well defined cases can

\textsuperscript{14} Bianchi 2004; Francovich/Nardini 2004, 123-144.
now be added that of Castel di Pietra, where the construction of a ditch dividing the area that would later be the site of the twelfth-century manor house could indicate an earlier hierarchisation of the site. The data recovered in the castle of Grosseto also appears to point in the same direction: the development of the city is placed at the centre of the process through which the curtense system was established. Therefore, the second phase of huts there could be the echo of the curtis recorded in 973 that over the course of a hundred years could have developed to the point of absorbing the economic and subsequently administrative prerogative of Roselle. In the case of Grosseto, therefore, social differentiation was still more marked, leading to the formation of a social class within the community that was antagonistic towards the seigneurial power of the Aldobrandeschi.

4. From the conquest of the hill-tops to the formation of the castles (castelli) (seventh to twelfth centuries)

From an archaeological point of view, therefore, the problem of the curtis is intimately connected to the problem of the formation and transformation of the villages, and thus to the process of transition from an estate-based seigneury to a territorial seigneury. The archival documentation available for some sample areas poses a series of questions to which the archaeological evidence can make a fundamental contribution.

In particular, the almost general invisibility of early medieval sites in field surveys is above all a problem stemming from the fact that the castelli of the eleventh and twelfth centuries are superimposed on the villages of the seventh and eighth centuries. Over 60% of the castelli investigated archaeologically in Tuscany have furnished clear elements of pre-existing early medieval villages. When we also consider that some of these sites have not been entirely excavated and that earlier deposits often have been destroyed by later occupation, this record suggests, generally speaking, that the formation of villages on hill-tops was not merely one episode among others, but rather a truly characteristic element in the history of the rural Tuscan landscape. Many were successful sites for a long period of time, not uncommonly until the present day.

A second aspect concerns the transformation of village communities into castelli. We have seen that the constitution of a curtense system can be seen archaeologically in the tangible elements of social differentiation that, between the second half of the eighth and the tenth century, were superimposed upon and modified the fabric of the village communities of the seventh and eighth centuries. Therefore, let us briefly summarise the first archaeological evidence for the reconquest of the hill tops.

15 Citter 2002, 115-168.
16 Francovich/Citter 2000, 87-94.
Once again, the data from Scarlino, Montarrenti, Poggibonsi, Miranduolo and Donoratico are in accord with those from Rocchette Pannocchieschi, Cugnano and Montemassi. This concordance is not so much chronological, as the process occurs at various times between the end of the sixth and the eighth century, with some cases earlier than others, but rather topographic. The levels that precede the phases of the mid-ninth and tenth centuries are characterised by very poor structures – wooden huts that are not always easy to distinguish because of later interventions. We have no doubts regarding the continuity of the occupation of the hill-tops, because in all instances there are distinct phases of postholes that we can interpret as the rebuilding of the wooden structures by every new generation. What clearly emerges is that, in the first phase of the life of these settlements, there are no elements of social differentiation: the huts are all more or less of the same generally small dimensions, and the diet and material culture are undifferentiated. The image that we get is one of small villages composed of communities of peasant shepherds lacking a marked internal social hierarchy. The difference that we have seen emerge in the mid-ninth and tenth centuries, both from written sources and excavated data, is very marked and cannot be anything else other than an indication of a considerable transformation in the nature of these villages.

The “stone-built” phases of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which generally date to the same period as the first documentary attestation of a *castrum*, constitutes therefore a third phase in the long process of the development of the social fabric of the hill-top villages. Historically, this implies the slow formation of a territorial seigneury through a particularly marked stage (the *curtis*) that coincides with the rise of aristocratic groups and the establishment of large estate-based properties after the crisis of the *possessores* of the late Roman era.

Therefore the castelli that we see today are not static elements, but rather a system characterized by complex phases of both formation and development, structurally linked to the population dynamics, and very different from the first early medieval castelli, which were expressions of public power and had a marked defensive and military character.17

It thus appears evident that the authoritarian direction of the first installation of urban planning at the castles is a clear signal of the power exercised by the aristocracy in the planning stages. In Rocca San Silvestro, the first stone-building phase, datable to between the tenth and eleventh centuries, did not yet feature high-quality construction techniques, which suggests recourse to local manpower. From the end of the eleventh century, however, all the castles investigated demonstrate the construction of defensive curtain walls and towers of regular texture with well-finished stones, certainly the work of master craftsmen from specialised centres who possessed a much deeper knowledge

17 For a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of *incastellamento*, cf. Francovich/ Ginatempo 2000.
of the art of construction. This phase, at least for the castles of southern Tuscany, is the other side of the coin for the consolidation of seigneurial power over the castles and their surrounding territories, and can be dated to around the end of the eleventh and the start of the twelfth centuries. These structures, from their marked military and symbolic connotations, are nevertheless very different among themselves in topographic terms: at Rocca San Silvestro and Rocchette Pannocchieschi they encompass the entire inhabited area, while at Castel di Pietra and Selvena we have at present only evidence of modest circuits with one and two towers respectively. The process of organised town-planning certainly started early at Rocca San Silvestro, where it can be placed still in the eleventh or early twelfth centuries, while in Selvena and Castel di Pietra it began nearly a century later. The first stone-built phase at Campiglia Marittima, however, appears to date to a period similar to that at San Silvestro.

The Romanesque fortifications of Montarrenti date to the twelfth century and suggest a fundamental reconstruction of the inhabited area along an orientation already established in the eleventh century at least for the wall encircling the manor house, but with a more marked differentiation of the seigneurial area. In Scarlino, however, the transformation of the built environment from one of wood to one of stone can only be considered complete in the eleventh century.

These data, albeit very summarised, demonstrate that *incastellamento* was not a homogeneous phenomenon. Recent documentary research furnishes a picture that is still more articulated. Above all, during the twelfth and part of the thirteenth centuries in southern Tuscany, the process of nucleation, begun still earlier than the written attestation of the *curtes*, continued further with the development of the castles. In this period new *castelli* were founded or refounded with much larger and denser populations than previously, as demonstrated by the cases of Scarlino, Castel di Pietra, and Selvena, and sometimes went as far as the foundation of new centres. The historical fortunes of these new centres varied widely, with Poggibonsi as a “quasi city”, Radicondoli as a demographically important castle, and Montecurliano as a city reduced to a second-rate castle. As with the first *incastellamento*, the promoters of these initiatives, which we can define as a second *incastellamento*, were always the aristocracy. Due to their importance as population centres, these new *castelli* were often planned with regularly ordered dwellings.18

One element that emerges with clarity is that the further nucleation of the population into a small number of sites affected the less populated areas in terms of an abandonment of the small and dispersed settlements that still existed and sometimes of certain first-phase *castelli*. This appears to be the case with Selvena and nearby Penna, Saggiano (also in the Amiata region), Camigliano and S. Giovanni d’Asso in Val d’Orcia, and Prata in the iron-rich Massetane hills, to name only a few examples.

18 Farinelli/Giorgi 2000, 239-284.
Therefore, as well as a first and second *incipellamento*, today we can also speak of a first *decastellamento*, distinct from the crisis of the 1300s that knocked down all the first-phase *castelli* not chosen as nodes in the new settlement system. The *castelli* abandoned in this first *decastellamento* are sometimes invisible in the archival documents because they are the works of the minor seigneury. They can, however, be detected with the instruments of archaeology, starting with an accurate investigation of aerial photographs and followed by an equally detailed field survey.

The perspective offered by this new research on the last phases of *incipellamento* necessitates a series of reconsiderations of the traditional models of the relationship between towns and castles, not so much for the evident demographic aspect, but above all in terms of their respective military functions and capacities as administrative centres of the territory. The new and concrete perspective provided by archaeological research for reconstructing the historical fortunes of the forms of settlements allows us to accurately define the character of the discontinuity in the urban and rural order between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

The urban and rural landscape of Tuscany witnessed great transformations in the architectural structure of public buildings, the adoption of perishable materials such as wood and earth in private buildings, the disintegration of the topographic order, the traumatic transformation of archaeological stratification in urban areas, or even the abandonment of many towns of antiquity. The inexorable process of the abandonment of the Roman settlement structures and the formation of wooden villages can be identified with the birth of inhabited nuclei on which the *castelli* of stone were planted starting in the tenth and eleventh centuries. These are now new and indisputable documents constructed by ever more sophisticated archaeological research. These facts on the one hand allow us to return to the sources with new interpretative tools and to rewrite chapters of history that seemed consolidated, and on the other open for us a new way to see this vast but not unlimited patrimony of information constituted by the archaeological monuments and areas of the Middle Ages.
Bibliography


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