

## Field Report

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# Field Survey in the Middle Fortore Valley: A Preliminary Report

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**Abstract:** The Fortore Valley Project, which began in 2005 and is still ongoing, aims to create an archaeological map of the Fortore Valley. Several intensive and extensive survey campaigns were carried out in the territory of the middle valley. More than 100 km<sup>2</sup> have been surveyed and more than 300 sites identified. This contribution analyzes the collected data and proposes a model of population evolution based on a GIS spatial analysis and a preliminary study of the finds. The artifacts found between 2005 and 2006 in the territory of Occhito Lake (Macchia Valfortore) provide a case study for understanding settlement patterns in the Fortore Valley.

**Keywords:** landscape archaeology, field survey, Samnium, Molise, GIS analysis

## 1 Introduction (A. Naso)

In 2005, the Valle del Fortore Project was launched to create an archaeological map of the middle Fortore Valley, an area located along the Fortore River, which currently marks the geographical and administrative border between Molise and Puglia (Figure 1). Molise was a region with little archaeological exploration, and the field survey in the Fortore Valley provided some basis of comparison with results of the Biferno Valley Project, a survey conducted by G. Barker during the

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**Figure 1:** Geographical overview of project area and South Italy administrative regions (C.S. De Simone).

1980s.<sup>1</sup> Based on relevant but sparse data known from other research, the survey was initiated in the territory of Macchia Valfortore (province Campobasso). Three campaigns of field surveys were carried out from 2005 to 2007, and 170 topographic units have been identified and mapped in an area of 20 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

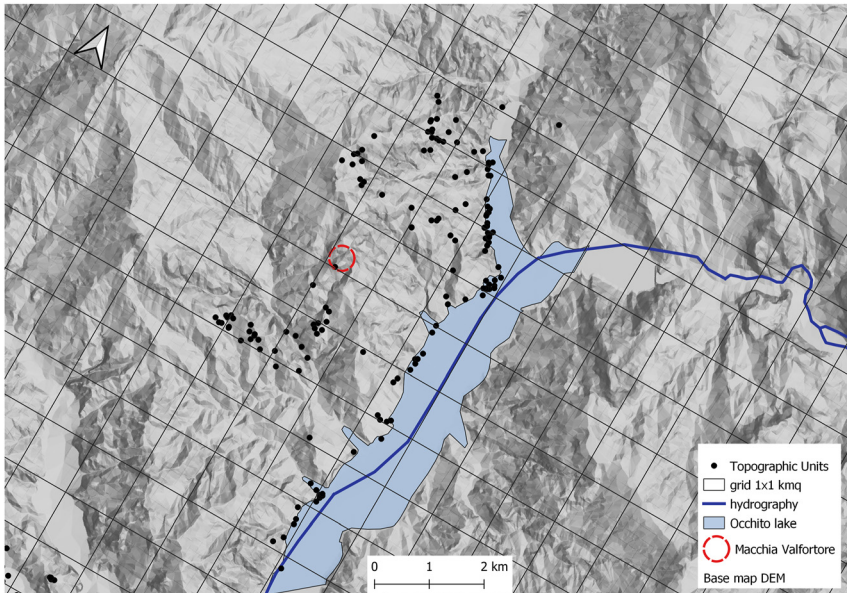
The field surveys, systematic and intensive, were conducted by teams of 10–15 walkers with repeated passages in the same areas and in different seasons, considering both the visibility of the finds and the geomorphological conditions of the ground. Topographic units have been divided into two different typologies: a site (Italian *sito*), interpreted as a locus of discrete and potentially interpretable human activity, where “discrete” means spatially circumscribed and with the perimeter underlined by at least a change in the relative density of artifacts;<sup>3</sup> and an occurrence (Italian *presenza*), identified both as area of archaeological finds (mostly pottery), spatially delimited but without a significant density and fields with low density of sporadic or “off-site” archaeological material.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barker 1995a; Barker 1995b.

<sup>2</sup> Naso 2008a and Naso 2008b; De Simone and Naso 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Plog, Plog, and Wait 1978, 413; Corazza, Di Renzoni, and Ferranti 2014, 543–549.

<sup>4</sup> Barker 1995a, 45.



**Figure 2:** Location of “Valle del Fortore” project’s topographic units around Occhito Lake (Macchia Valfortore, province Campobasso).

The project was suspended following the 2007 campaign but reinitiated in 2016 with ongoing research in the Fortore Valley.<sup>5</sup> The first step of the new phase was the construction of a geo-database for data collection and analysis, which has allowed us to reconstruct the territorial dynamics and the settlement patterns of the valley through time, producing spatial models that can be used for scientific research but also for safeguarding the heritage and valorization of the territory.

The following contribution presents a case study based on GIS spatial analysis and artifacts found between 2005 and 2006 in the territory of Macchia Valfortore around Occhito Lake.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Marchi et al. 2020, 287–302.

<sup>6</sup> The sections about the settlement patterns are by C.S. De Simone and those about the finds by M. P. Esposito. Thanks are due to A. Babbi, P. Miranda, S. Privitera, and N.L. Saldamacchia, who managed the drawings archive of the “Valle del Fortore” Project (De Simone 2021). Occhito Lake is an artificial basin, built in the 1950s in order to enlarge and modify the course of the Fortore River, the ancient Fertor.

## 2 The Case Study of the Occhito Lake: Settlement Patterns and the Material Culture of the Middle Fortore Valley

### 2.1 Prehistoric and Protohistoric Period (Figure 3a) (C.S. De Simone)

From the Upper Paleolithic, and with greater consistency during the initial Neolithic phase, evidence exists for human frequentation of the middle Fortore Valley. A preliminary analysis of the lithic finds suggests the occupation of some areas along the Fortore River, including Masseria San Nicola and Piano Iscarami.<sup>7</sup> Frequentation of the river terraces near the Cigno river is documented in particular during the Middle and Final Bronze Age. One example is site MV.05.10 at Piano Iscarami, located on a 1.6 ha large plateau, where the remains of a defensive trench and a quadrangular structure built of river stone have been documented (Figure 4).<sup>8</sup> Site MV.06.72 along the Celone torrent is located on a large terrace and is connected to multiple occurrences, datable between the Middle and the Recent Bronze Age, in the nearby locality of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Distinct from this is a settlement in Piana San Lorenzo (MV.06.90), on a plateau at 594 m a.s.l., datable to a late stage of the Middle Bronze Age. An intensive infra-site survey over a surface of 2000 m<sup>2</sup> has identified specific areas of use, such as those designated for the storage of foodstuffs, an identification based on the recovery of sherds of large clay vases. Similarly, from the Middle Bronze Age a more extensive settlement developed in the locality of Masseria San Nicola on a lower rise at 410 m a.s.l., nearly 1 km from Piano San Lorenzo.

Units datable to the final phase of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age are quite sporadic but similar to the previous periods, as a probable habitation structure found at Masseria San Nicola would suggest.<sup>9</sup>

The collected data appear to indicate a non-uniform territorial organization. From the Middle and Late Bronze Age on, the settlement patterns seem to prefer proximity to rivers, a choice that also provided means of communication through the hydrographic network, as evidenced by the occurrences in Piano Iscarami and Santa Maria degli Angeli. The latter could exploit the agricultural potential provided by close proximity to the Fortore River, as well as benefit from an accessible

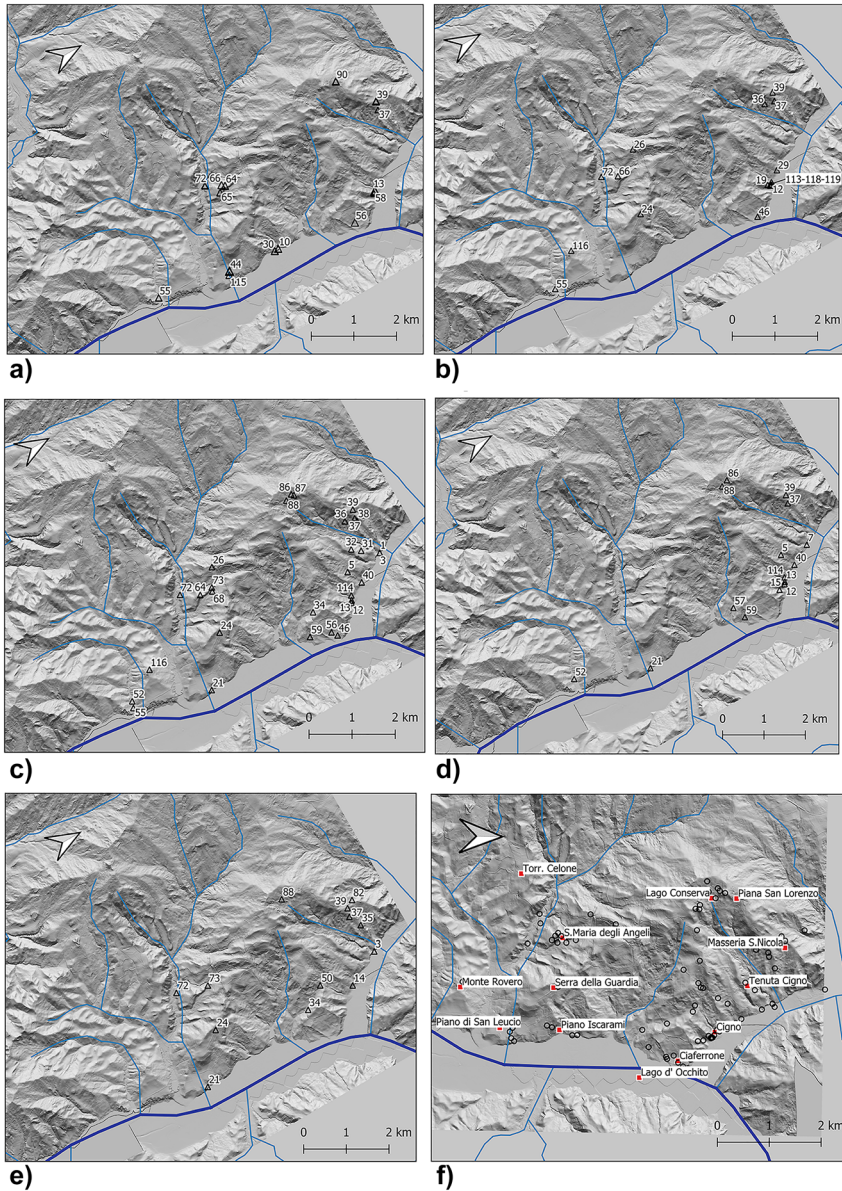
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<sup>7</sup> Minelli 2008, 49–54. The sites mentioned are M(acchia)V(alfortore).05.10 (Piano Iscarami) and MV.05.39–MV.05.37 (Masseria San Nicola).

<sup>8</sup> Photographs and drawings are from the archive of the “Valle del Fortore” Project.

<sup>9</sup> MV.05.36 (Masseria San Nicola).





**Figure 3:** Overview of the topographic units in relation to the topography and hydrographical network of the area: a) Prehistoric and protohistoric period; b) Archaic-late classical period; c) Hellenistic–Samnite period; d) Imperial Roman period; e) Late Imperial Roman period; f) place-names mentioned in the text. Base map DEM processed from LIDAR's data (Ministry of Ecological Transition).



**Figure 4:** The site MV.05.10 at the time of the field survey.

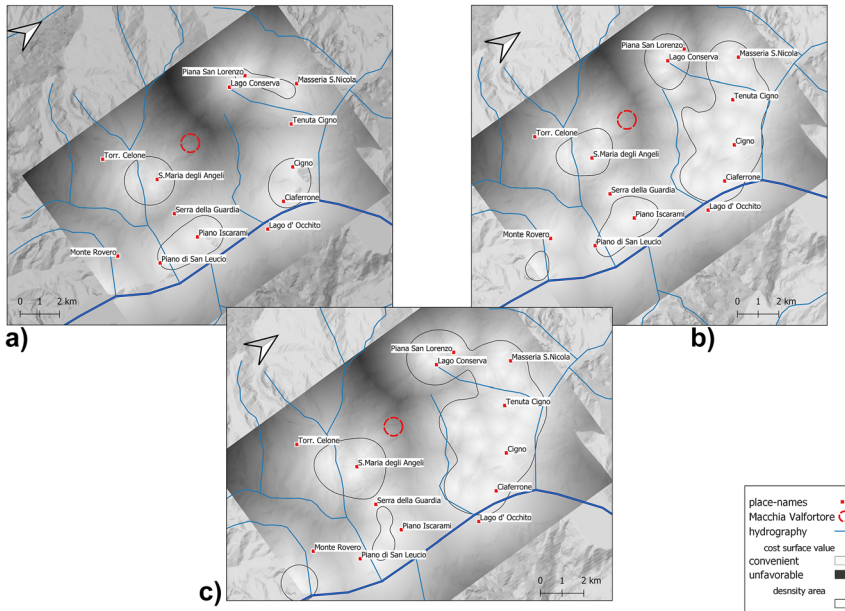
position. The sites at Masseria San Nicola and Piana San Lorenzo show a completely different territorial choice (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> Spatial analyses show that these sites, located in a foothill area far from the course of the Fortore River or its major tributaries, could be isolated, although a possible link with other nearby areas, such as the Apennines and Apulia, cannot be excluded.<sup>11</sup>

The model derived from our analyses finds an interesting comparison with that hypothesized for the Biferno Valley during the Middle and Recent Bronze Age, in which the sites occupied the territory in two different ways. The first is defined by larger settlements linked to the resources and advantages provided by a position directly connected with the river course; the second is represented by small sites located between the Biferno River and its main tributaries, possibly reflecting organization by small units with presumably different forms of exploitation of

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<sup>10</sup> See De Simone 2021.

<sup>11</sup> The presence of ancient regional and interregional tracks, used also for livestock transhumance, is documented from the Bronze Age (Barker 1989, 1–11) by the find of extra-regional artifacts in the Voltorno Valley, whose links with the Molise finds have been highlighted by Cazzella, De Dominicis, and Ruggini 2008; see also Cazzella et al. 2010; Naso 2012.



**Figure 5:** Cost surface patterns for different historical periods; the cost is established considering as an incidental factor the difficulty of movement given certain topographical characteristics, like altitude and slope. Base map DEM processed from LIDAR's data (Ministry of Ecological Transition).

primary resources.<sup>12</sup> In the Recent Bronze Age there is a strong contraction in the number of sites that would continue to be occupied with the same pattern as in the previous phase.<sup>13</sup> In the Biferno Valley and in the Celone Valley (in modern-day Puglia) settlements are similarly structured according to this dual modality.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3 Prehistoric and Protohistoric Finds (M.P. Esposito)

In the territory of Macchia Valfortore, the lithic industry, which dates to the Paleolithic period, shows the typical characteristics of the Mousterian, such as unretouched blades, Levallois lithotechnics, and blades with steep retouching.<sup>15</sup> These come mainly from the sites of Piano Iscarami and Masseria San Nicola.

<sup>12</sup> Danesi et al. 2009, 130; Barker 2001, 150–61.

<sup>13</sup> Peroni and di Gennaro 1986; Danesi et al. 2009, 131–33.

<sup>14</sup> Romano and Recchia 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Minelli 2008, 48–53.

The transition from an economy of hunting and gathering to one based on agricultural exploitation is confirmed by the appearance of ceramic material.<sup>16</sup> Surface survey has recovered a few examples datable to the Early Neolithic, including ceramic sherds of engraved decorations<sup>17</sup> (Figure 6), to the Middle Neolithic with *stralucido* decoration<sup>18</sup> (Figure 6), and to the Final Neolithic–Eneolithic. Both of the later ones have been recorded in the Apulian sector of the valley as well as in the nearby Biferno Valley.<sup>19</sup>

The transition between the Eneolithic and the Early Bronze Age (2300–1700 B.C.E.) is particularly difficult to define based on ceramic evidence from the region,<sup>20</sup> but this changes with the Middle Bronze Age (1700–1350 B.C.E.). Ceramic sherds from the shores of Occhito Lake (Figure 7) confirm a consistent presence<sup>21</sup> attributable to the Apennine facies that is recognizable by typical geometric motifs engraved or imprinted on the vase, sometimes with a *cordicella* decoration as on a small globular olla datable to the Middle Bronze Age III.<sup>22</sup> Fragments of ovoid cylinder mugs datable to the Late Bronze Age (1350–1200 B.C.E.),<sup>23</sup> carinated cups,<sup>24</sup> and a bowl with apex loop<sup>25</sup> come from the site of Piano Iscarami.

The transition between the Final Bronze Age (1200–1120 B.C.E.) and the Early Iron Age (1200–700 B.C.E.) is difficult to define due to a stasis in ceramic production, a situation that is documented throughout the Adriatic side of the Italian peninsula.<sup>26</sup> The lack of typical ceramic indicators has been noted throughout Molise, creating an archaeological vacuum.<sup>27</sup> This diagnostic lacuna is balanced, however, by the presence of dolia and containers for foodstuffs.<sup>28</sup> During the Iron Age, there is an increase in archaeological material including mugs with a truncated-conical profile<sup>29</sup> and a fragment of cylindrical neck jug (Figure 7).<sup>30</sup>

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**16** Ceccarelli 2017, 24–8.

**17** MV.05.39.181.1; MV.06.90.ASW.11 (compare Gravina 2014a, 52, fig. 18, nos. 11–12). MV.19.39.A1.1 (cf. Gravina 2014a, 44, fig. 10, no. 4).

**18** MV.06.90.A12.1; MV.06.117.5 (cf. Barker 2001, 130–31).

**19** Gravina 2014a; Barker 2001, 130–31.

**20** Ceccarelli 2017, 24–8.

**21** MV.05.10S.4 (cf. Gravina 2014b, 178, fig. 5, no. 10); MV.05.56.1 (cf. Babbi 2008, 74, no. 7).

**22** Bietti Sestieri 2010, 128–42; Babbi 2008, 64, no. 7, fig. 7; cf. Gravina 1994.

**23** Babbi 2008, 64, no. 9, fig. 9.

**24** For a comparison see Gravina 2014b, fig. 12, no. 11.

**25** Babbi 2008, 60, no. 5, fig. 5.

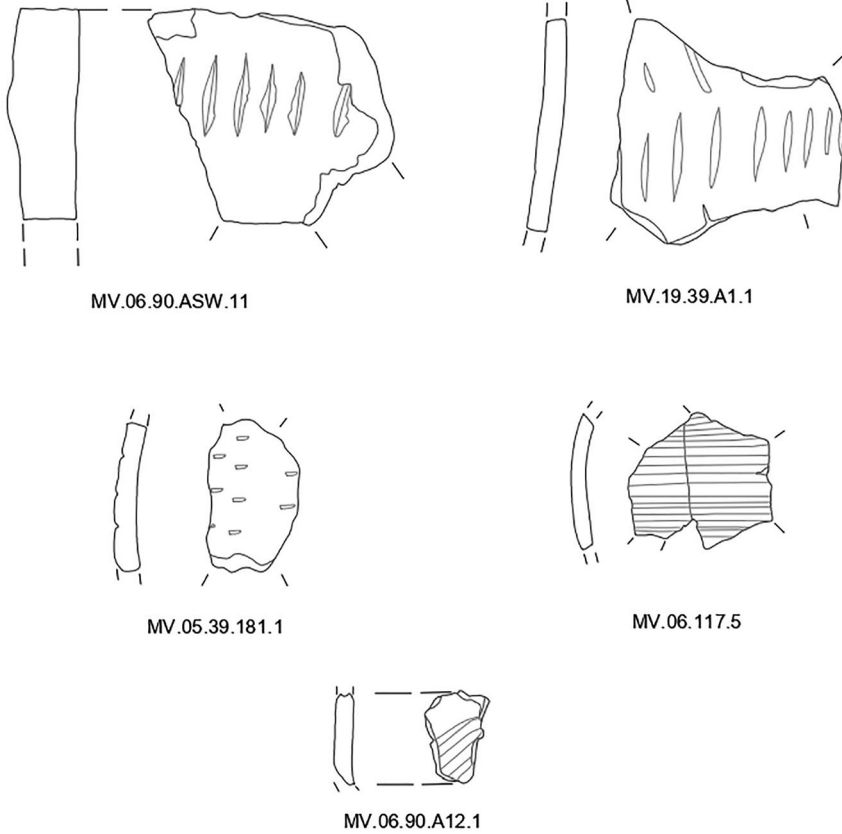
**26** Natali 2018, 224–41.

**27** Ceccarelli 2017, 103–108; Bietti Sestieri 2010, 128–42.

**28** Babbi 2008, 60, nos. 17–18, figs. 17–18.

**29** MV.05.58.1 (cf. Di Niro 1991a, 39, no. b4).

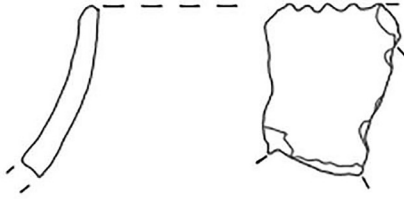
**30** MV.05.62.9 (cf. Natali 2018, 229, fig. 2, no.19).



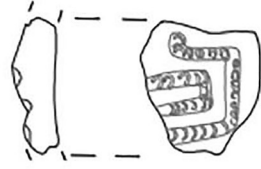
**Figure 6:** Ceramic finds from the Neolithic–Eneolithic age (digital editing D.E. Moschetti).

Despite this apparent paucity of evidence, one can trace the influence of the larger centers with known gender differentiations. Weapons, associated with men’s furnishings, begin to appear at the end of the ninth century B.C.E. and become common from the eighth century B.C.E. Examples from the centers near

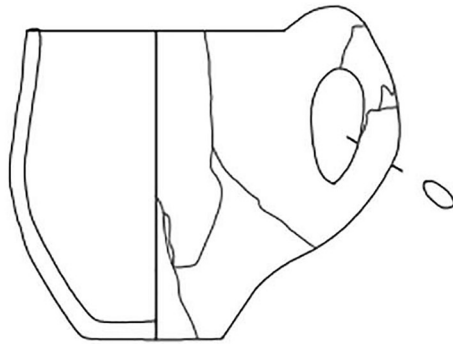




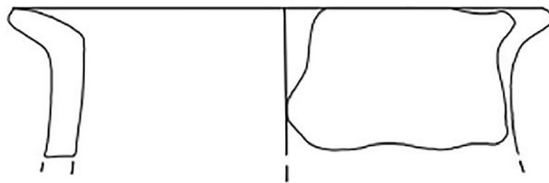
MV.05.10S.4



MV.05.56.1



MV.05.58.1



MV.05.62.9



Figure 7: Ceramic finds from the Bronze–Iron Age (digital editing D.E. Moschetti).



Occhito Lake include the eye axe (*ascia ad occhio*) from Pietrascatella<sup>31</sup> and a bronze spearhead from Monacilioni.<sup>32</sup>

## 2.4 Archaic–Late Classical Period (Figure 3b) (C.S. De Simone)

From the late eighth through fifth century B.C.E., a slight increase in the archaeological activity (i.e., occurrences) can be noted as occupation along the Fortore River in the Cigno locality flourished. The units identified are mostly characterized as productive or burial sites, while residential contexts are more difficult to identify.<sup>33</sup> During the fifth century B.C.E, graves become more numerous and widespread along the river in the localities of Cigno and Ciaferrone (site MV.05.46). Most of these are burials in earthen fossae covered with river stone (Figure 8).<sup>34</sup>

At Masseria San Nicola, several sherds of plaster and bricks suggest built structures located downstream of the protohistoric settlement in a flat topographical area. Between the fifth and fourth century B.C.E. occupation of hilly areas of medium altitude is attested, even in isolated topographical units, as demonstrated by Serra Guardia,<sup>35</sup> a rocky ridge (370 m a.s.l.), and Monte Rovero<sup>36</sup> (311 m a.s.l.). These could correspond to small-scale settlements or areas of frequent occupation. Similarly, in Santa Maria degli Angeli, a burial ground and an area covering 3000 m<sup>2</sup>, probably a settlement, can be dated to this period.<sup>37</sup>

The pattern of occupation for this period is that of the village, as evidenced by sites in the localities of Masseria San Nicola and Santa Maria degli Angeli. There is broad agreement in identifying archaic communities—both in the interior and on the coast of Molise—as small villages dedicated mainly to some agriculture practices, an identification based on the different types of ollae and dolia.<sup>38</sup> This settlement pattern also characterizes the area south of the Fortore River in modern-day Puglia, such as in the territory of Carlantino (province Foggia),<sup>39</sup> as preliminary results of the *Ager Lucerinus* project have demonstrated.<sup>40</sup>

31 Rome, Museo delle Civiltà, inv. no. 23219; Carancini 1984, 221, no. 4396.

32 Museo Sannitico di Campobasso, inv. no. 1261; Di Niro 2007, 79.

33 Some evidence is provided by a few architectural terracotta finds; see Naso and Privitera 2008, 80–90; Naso 2012.

34 The sites are MV.05.29, MV.05.46, MV.05.113, MV.05.118, MV.05.119. cf. Bernardini et al. 2008, 89–94.

35 MV.05.24 (Serra della Guardia).

36 MV.06.116 (Monte Rovero); cf. Naso and Privitera 2008, 84.

37 MV.06.66 and MV.05.26 (S. Maria degli Angeli).

38 cf. Di Niro 1991b; Di Niro 2004; Pelgrom and Stek 2010, 45–6.

39 cf. De Benedittis and Santone 2006; Marchi 2016, 54–5.

40 cf. Marchi, Castellaneta and Forte 2014; Marchi et al. 2020.



**Figure 8:** A fossa grave (MV.06.118) near Occhito Lake.

## 2.5 Archaic and Late Classical Finds (M.P. Esposito)

Finds datable to the archaic and classical periods were recovered in the valley particularly on the shores of Occhito Lake. The burials identified in the locality of Cigno<sup>41</sup> along the shores of Occhito Lake are characterized by several items found in similar contexts in the nearby areas.<sup>42</sup> Male burials are made up of coarse ware pots and iron spits,<sup>43</sup> with diagnostic elements of social status. Female burials

<sup>41</sup> MV.05.29; MV.06.118; MV.06.119 (cf. Bernardini et al. 2008, 89–94). New data can be added on the basis of recent excavations (Muccilli, Colombo, and Santone 2021).

<sup>42</sup> See the necropolises of Santo Venditti in Carlantino (province Foggia) (De Benedittis and Santone 2006) and of Larino (province Campobasso) (Di Niro 1981).

<sup>43</sup> Bernardini et al. 2008.



**Figure 9:** Bronze torque from Masseria San Nicola.

dated to sixth century B.C.E. are characterized by bronze suspension rings.<sup>44</sup> These ornaments, common in burials from Lazio to Calabria, could be suspended either from the fibulae of the deceased or from the midsection by means of a belt as a fertility symbol.<sup>45</sup> Child burials are attested by ornaments of small dimensions, such as a bronze torque from Masseria San Nicola (seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.) that is twisted with curled ends (Figure 9).<sup>46</sup>

In this period bucchero from Campania and painted ceramics with geometric/sub-geometric decoration (Figure 10) also appear.<sup>47</sup> A coarse ware oinochoe with a trefoil mouth and dotted decoration belonging to the late seventh–early sixth century B.C.E. has been found in the territory of Monacilioni.<sup>48</sup> The few bucchero vases found in Molise are of northern Campanian fabric and confirm the role of Fortore as the main trading road between Campania and Puglia.<sup>49</sup> Special finds from the Fortore Valley including fragments of a bowl, an oinochoe or olpe, and a ribbon handle likely from a kantharos date no later than the sixth century B.C.E.<sup>50</sup> The coarse ware, a fabric with multiple inclusions, includes forms mainly designated for cooking; these date to the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Forms of

<sup>44</sup> Naso and Privitera 2008, 77–88.

<sup>45</sup> Di Niro 2007, 159–60.

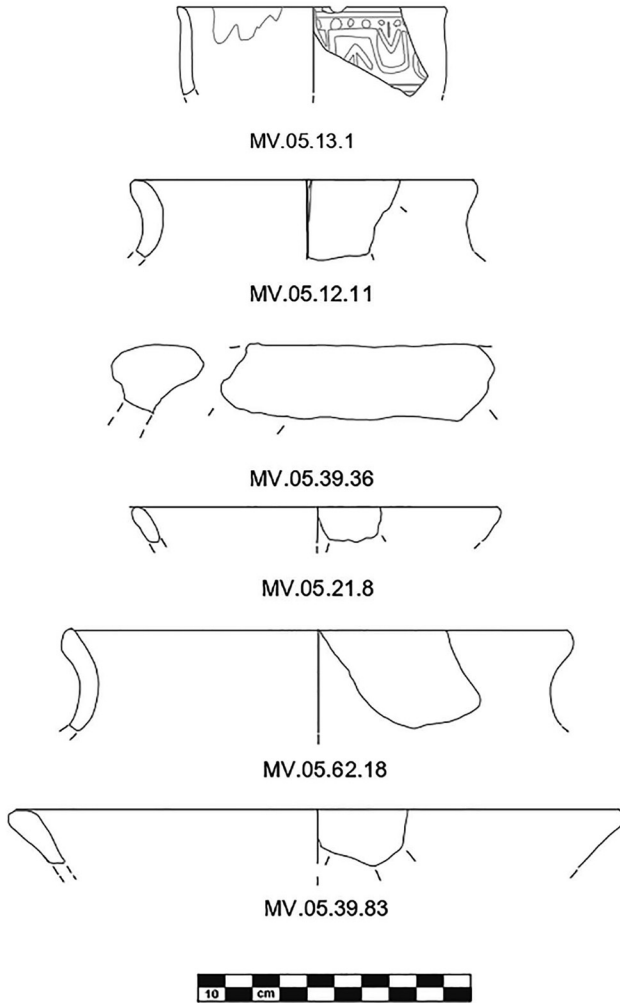
<sup>46</sup> MV.19.39.180.1; Ø max. 12 cm. cf. De Benedittis and Santone 2006, 55, nos. 5–6.

<sup>47</sup> MV.06.13.1 (cf. Barker 2001, 183, fig. 68). MV.06.37.1 (cf. Naso and Privitera 2008, 80, fig. 7, no. 7).

<sup>48</sup> De Benedittis and Santone 2006, 16, fig. 4.

<sup>49</sup> See Paoletta 2012 for a review of the bucchero finds in Molise.

<sup>50</sup> The sherds belong to a bowl (MV.05.19.1), an oinochoe or olpe (MV.06.105.2) and a kantharos (MV.06.109.1); see Naso and Privitera 2008, 78–80, figs. 1–2, nos. 1–3.



**Figure 10:** Ceramic finds from the archaic–classical period (digital editing D.E. Moschetti).

Apulian origin are quite common and include ollae with a sinuous profile<sup>51</sup> and ollae with an oblique edge;<sup>52</sup> an *olla a bombarda* shows contacts with the Samnites (Figure 10).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> MV.05. 12.11; MV.05.39.36 (cf. De Benedittis and Santone 2006, 6, n. 1).

<sup>52</sup> MV.05.21.8; MV.05.39.83 (cf. De Benedittis and Santone 2006, 42, n. 2).

<sup>53</sup> MV.05. 12.11; MV.05.62.18 (cf. Natali 2020, 109, fig. 9, nos. 28–9; Sirano 2008, 46).



**Figure 11:** An example of *factory-villa* (MV.06.88) during the field survey.

## 2.6 Hellenistic–Samnite Period and Romanization (Figure 3c) (C.S. De Simone)

Two sites identified in the localities of Lago Conserva and Cigno respectively show a flourishing occupation of the land in the Fortore Valley between the third and second centuries B.C.E. and are similar to the farms and *villae* documented in the Biferno Valley.<sup>54</sup> The first, partially damaged by agricultural works, would have developed over a large area (9 ha) subdivided into built and unbuilt zones, as the distribution of tile and pottery fragments seems to suggest (Figure 11).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Barker 2001, 217–19; Marzano 2007.

<sup>55</sup> MV.06.86, MV.06.87, MV.06.88 (Lago Conserva).



**Figure 12:** Clay gutter from the locality Cigno, II century B.C.E. (Campobasso, Museo Sannitico).

In September 2007, a particularly dry period permitted in-depth investigation of the Cigno site and the identification of a large building—divided into several areas—that is otherwise covered by water.<sup>56</sup> The recovered artifacts made it possible to identify areas with both service and reception functions. The site is of considerable importance based on the recovery of an extraordinary terracotta gutter representing two human faces, probably derived from theater masks, and datable to the second century B.C.E. (Figure 12).<sup>57</sup> Quantitative and spatial analyses have also suggested a probable connection of the Cigno area to the settlement of Masseria San Nicola, which also saw a more or less regular occupation in this phase (Figure 5). In addition to these large structures, other sporadic occurrences, such as the units at Serra della Guardia, can be dated to the Samnite period. These activities tend to appear in areas no higher than 450 m a.s.l., but with an acclivity allowing a naturally defended topographical position.

This growth occurred in many geographical areas of Samnium. In the third century B.C.E., in the Matese mountains, the typical structure of oppida lost their defensive function and were permanently occupied, as documented at the centers of Monte Vairano and Cercemaggiore (province Campobasso).<sup>58</sup> From the second

<sup>56</sup> MV.05.40 (Cigno). See Babbi and Naso 2008, 125–29; Naso 2010, 312–13. A preliminary geophysical investigation in the area was carried out; see Compare and Cozzolino 2008, 131–33.

<sup>57</sup> Känel and Naso 2008, 41–45. cf. *infra*.

<sup>58</sup> Di Niro 1991c; Oakley 1995, 121–28; De Benedittis 2016, 36–49.





**Figure 13:** The Oscan inscription (after Garrucci).

century B.C.E. onwards, a dense network of farms scattered on medium-altitude hillsides developed consistently in the territories of Sepino and Bojano. These were connected to the main communication roads<sup>59</sup> and to small rural cult places.<sup>60</sup> An Oscan inscription on a lithic slab, found in 1752 and now lost, confirms the existence of a worship area in the territory of Macchia Valfortore, the precise location of which remains uncertain (Figure 13).<sup>61</sup>

Two Latin inscriptions dated to the late first century B.C.E. have been found not far from the territory of Occhito Lake and show a Roman presence in the valley.<sup>62</sup> One from Piana delle Noci near Gambatesa belongs to a funerary monument of the gens Camilia and features a Doric frieze;<sup>63</sup> the other, found in Monacilioni, belongs to an honorary monument and refers to the presence of the Sergia tribe.<sup>64</sup>

## 2.7 Hellenistic and Late Republican Finds (M.P. Esposito)

In 1752 the scholar Giovanni De Vita reported the discovery of an inscribed marble slab found on land owned by the Knights of Jerusalem in Macchia Valfortore in the Diocese of Benevento.<sup>65</sup> The Oscan inscription, dated to the second century B.C.E., was first published by Th. Mommsen (1850) and later by R. Garrucci (1864)

<sup>59</sup> Scaroina 2010. Regarding Sepino see Tagliamonte 2005, 341; Matteini Chiari and Scocca 2015. A bibliographical review of Bojano is in Tagliamonte 2005, 335; see also Scaroina and Somma 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Stek 2009, 53–73; La Regina 2014; Capini, Curci, and Picuti 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Benelli, Monda, and Naso 2008, 23–24; see *infra*.

<sup>62</sup> The current state of research does not provide any evidence of *centuriae* in the territory of Macchia Valfortore: cf. Soricelli 2008; Forte and Savino 2021.

<sup>63</sup> De Benedittis 1997, 22, n. 14; De Benedittis and Santone 2006, 17–18.

<sup>64</sup> De Benedittis 1997, 23–4; Mandato 2008, 40–2.

<sup>65</sup> The slab is known only through the references made to it in the 19th century and is now lost (Rix 2002, Sa 30).

(Figure 13) but is now lost. The text records a votive offering to mother and daughter divinities.<sup>66</sup> The first deity [—]ras is commonly identified with Demeter ([*damat*]ras), well attested in Samnium, or with less probability, with the mother goddess Cupra ([*cup*]ras), whose cult was widespread in Central Italy.<sup>67</sup> Other cult places are suggested by two bronze statuettes of Hercules found in the territory of Pietracatella and dated to the third–second century B.C.E.; they are probably related to votive deposits.<sup>68</sup> Finds collected during the survey, such as large storage containers and black-gloss ceramics, show the presence of *villae rusticae* in the territory. Per Morel’s chronology, the earliest datable types are from the late fourth century B.C.E., such as a skyphos with sinuous profile, disc foot,<sup>69</sup> and painted concentric circles (Figure 14), a type also attested in the Biferno Valley.<sup>70</sup> The concentration of black-gloss ware begins to increase during the third century B.C.E. and in the second century B.C.E., sinuous profile cups with a deep basin appear<sup>71</sup> (Figure 14); these types are attested elsewhere in Molise, northern Samnium, and Apulia. While the role of the Fortore Valley as a communication route is clear, it is almost impossible to define a specific production center (Figure 14).<sup>72</sup> Paterae with a shallow basin from the Fortore Valley are comparable to similar shapes found in the Biferno Valley (Figure 14).<sup>73</sup> Around the late second and the first century B.C.E. examples of black gloss are even more rare, while a few shapes belonging to the Roman *atelier des petites estampilles* are attested (Figure 14).<sup>74</sup> Coarse wares designated for food storage appear less frequently than black-gloss ware. Containers typically associated with *villae rusticae* include ollae with an almond rim (*orlo a mandorla*)<sup>75</sup> and those with a distinct rim (*orlo distinto*),<sup>76</sup> which appear in the fourth century B.C.E. and last until the first century B.C.E. Among the utilitarian wares used for cooking and eating, a number of closed forms made from semi-purified clay are attested in the settlement of Monte Vairano in the Tappino Valley (Figure 15).<sup>77</sup>

66 Benelli, Monda, and Naso 2008, with previous bibliography.

67 Naso 2010.

68 Both in the Museo Sannitico in Campobasso: Tarasco 2017, 755, no. 56.

69 MV.05.55.4; MV.05.46.6 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 4373).

70 Barker 1995b, 104–19, fig. 64.

71 MV.05.46.10 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2600; Stek 2009, 100, fig. 5.21); MV.05.46.19 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2153; Stek 2009, 101, fig. 5.23); MV.05.56.2 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2762; Abate et al. 2010a, 268, fig. 1); MV.05.39.4 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2284; Barker 1995b, 104–19, fig. 65).

72 From De Benedittis 1990, 45.

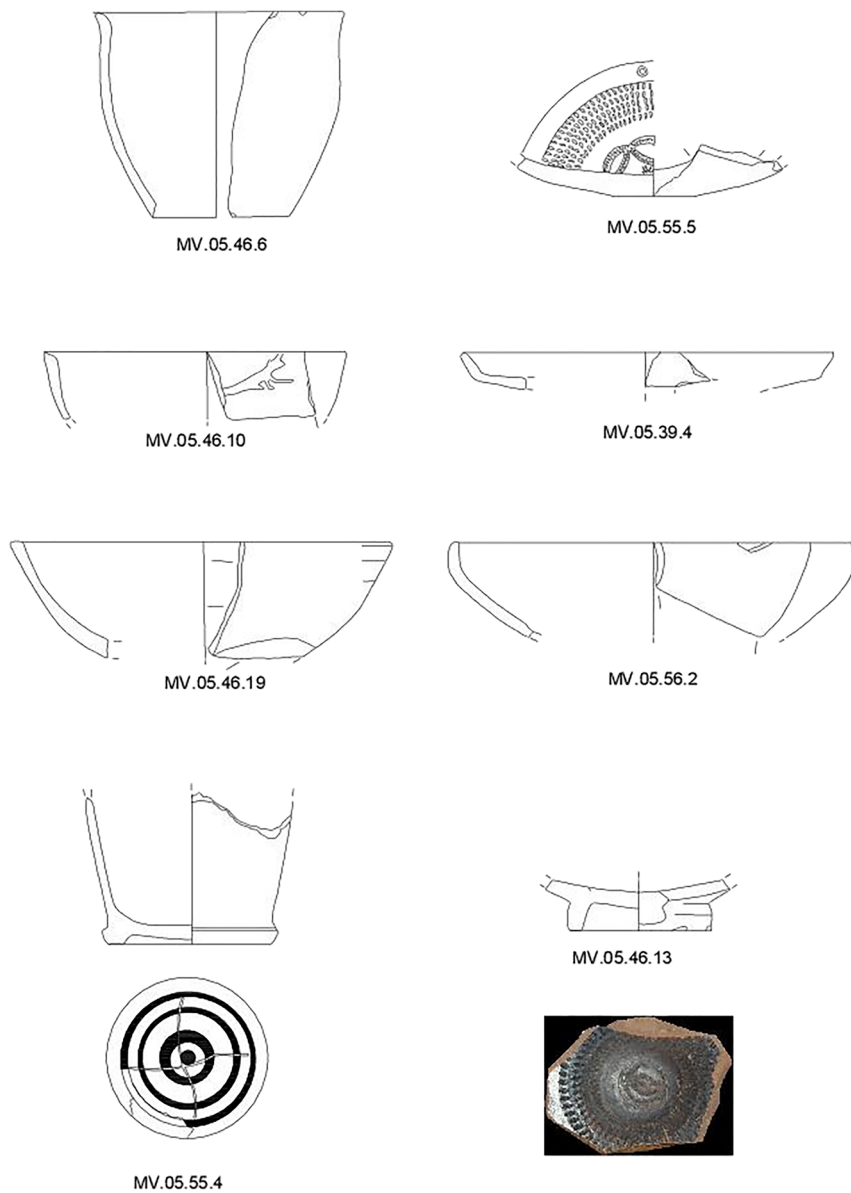
73 MV.05.39.4 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2284; Lloyd et al. 1995, 108, fig. 65, no. 80.3).

74 MV.05.55.5 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 2177); MV.05.46.13 (cf. Morel 1981, no. 32.1 c4).

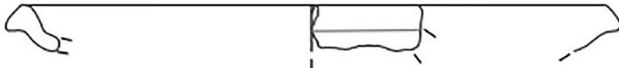
75 MV.05.21.9; MV.05.34.5 (cf. Abate et al. 2010a, 280, fig. 13, no. B1).

76 MV.06.88.A4.5 (cf. Abate et al. 2010b, 79, fig. 32, no. 17).

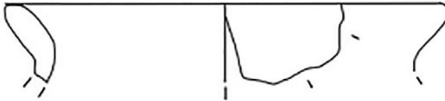
77 MV.05.24.4 (cf. Mandato 2014, 51, no. 11).



**Figure 14:** Black-painted ceramic finds from the Hellenistic-Samnite period (digital editing G. Giorgio).



MV.06.88.A4.5



MV.05.21.9



MV.05.24.4



MV.05.34.5



Figure 15: Ceramic finds from the Hellenistic period (digital editing G. Giorgio).

Material recovered in the Fortore Valley, including ceramic and architectural evidence, suggests the presence of villas scattered throughout the area. Deep ploughing in the locality of Cigno in 1957 revealed a terracotta gutter depicting two theatrical masks (mentioned above) (Figure 12).<sup>78</sup> The male mask represents a satyr with a wide-open mouth and grotesque face; the other mask, which features a closed mouth, depicts a young female face (Figure 12). Both masks may be characters associated with new comedy. The gutter, though unique, likely dates to the second century B.C.E. based on comparanda from northern Apulia and may have decorated the inner courtyard of a villa.<sup>79</sup>

## 2.8 Early and Late Imperial Roman Period (Figure 3d and e) (C.S. De Simone)

While the period between the third and first century B.C.E. may have been characterized by a complex political and social geography throughout the entire region, by the end of the first century B.C.E. the scenario is different.<sup>80</sup> For the Fortore area, the data suggest a decrease in human activity and occupation in the whole territory compared to the previous period. Indeed, hills of medium altitude (between 400 and 650 m a.s.l), such as at Lago Conserva, are now occupied. Activity at the site at Cigno seems to decrease; the only evidence found there could be linked to the *villa rustica* investigated in 2007 and includes sporadic finds of terra sigillata italica. The absence of data may be related not only to changed political-administrative conditions, but also to instability of the Fortore riverbed. In the first case, the area would have come under the control of the municipium of Saepinum.<sup>81</sup> In the second, it is assumed that the Fortore River rose about 3 m above its current level around the first century C.E., leading to a territorial reorganization of the areas on the margins of the riverbanks.<sup>82</sup> A few large *villae rusticae* and related structures are the only sites dating to the Imperial period, and these remains are generally difficult to identify.<sup>83</sup> This lacuna, combined with a lack of diagnostic material, could also perhaps be attributed to continuous

<sup>78</sup> Känel and Naso 2008; Babbi and Naso 2008, 125–29.

<sup>79</sup> Naso 2010, 312–13 with bibliography.

<sup>80</sup> Stek 2017; Soricelli 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Soricelli 2008, 97–101; Ricci and Rocca 2016. A different proposal appears in De Benedittis 1997, 21–5 and in Muccilli 2010, 405.

<sup>82</sup> Roskopf 2012, 13–15.

<sup>83</sup> Marchi, Castellaneta, and Forte 2014, 375–96; Marchi et al. 2019, 10–13. The two *villae* identified in the locality of Difesa delle Valli in Carlantino (Muntoni, Frangiosa, and La Trofa 2021), and the site in the locality of Lago Conserva previously mentioned, are examples of this trend.

occupation, as has been documented in the Biferno Valley. In this period, reuse and modernization of existing structures in the territory occurred, as the sites of Matrice (province Campobasso) and San Giacomo degli Schiavoni show.<sup>84</sup> Finally, between the third century and the fifth century C.E., sporadic finds in some areas overlooking the Fortore suggest newly occupied locations. During the late Roman period the frequentation of hilly and easily accessible places, far from the riverbanks, continued, while several fragments of terra sigillata africana reveal the development of the site of Lago Conserva. This area, perhaps together with the sites at Masseria San Nicola, could be understood as a village consisting of several scattered farms.<sup>85</sup> It cannot be ruled out, however, that these nuclei were part of large landed estates belonging to rich and powerful families such the Neratii, who are documented by inscriptions in the area of the Tappino valley as land owners.<sup>86</sup> The Neratii were a family from Saepinum who, after a rapid rise, achieved prominence in the early imperial period in Samnium.<sup>87</sup> Some members rose to important positions as magistrates in Rome, while others built a dense economic network based on land use in the Apennines of Central Italy and in particular in the area of the lower Molise.<sup>88</sup>

## 2.9 Early and Late Imperial Finds (M.P. Esposito)

From the first century B.C.E. archaeological finds become rare. Utilitarian wares remain similar in form to those of the previous Samnite period; black-gloss wares gradually disappear. The coarse ware forms are reduced to a few specimens of pots and pans with flat<sup>89</sup> or band rim<sup>90</sup> (Figure 16). Terra sigillata is particularly rare and comes mainly from the Lago Conserva, with a few fragments of *Conspectus* type 4.3.1<sup>91</sup> and *Conspectus* B1.2<sup>92</sup> (Figure 17). Similar forms are attested in the Biferno Valley in the first quarter of the first century C.E.<sup>93</sup> One recovered cup features a *planta pedis* stamp of the potter C. H(–) *Fes*(–), whose activity has been dated to

**84** Pelgrom and Stek 2010, 51 and Barker 2001, 246–48; about San Giacomo degli Schiavoni cf. Albarella, Ceglie, and Roberts 1993, 157–222. Recent research would suggest a similar situation in the valley of the Tammaro River; see Muccilli and Colombo 2021.

**85** Ceglie and Marchetta 2014, 647–662.

**86** Ricci and Rocchia 2016; Barker 2001, 240–55.

**87** About the gens of Neratii, see Gaggiotti 1991.

**88** Gaggiotti 2010.

**89** MV.06.88A6.3 (cf. Abate et al. 2010a, 279, fig. 12).

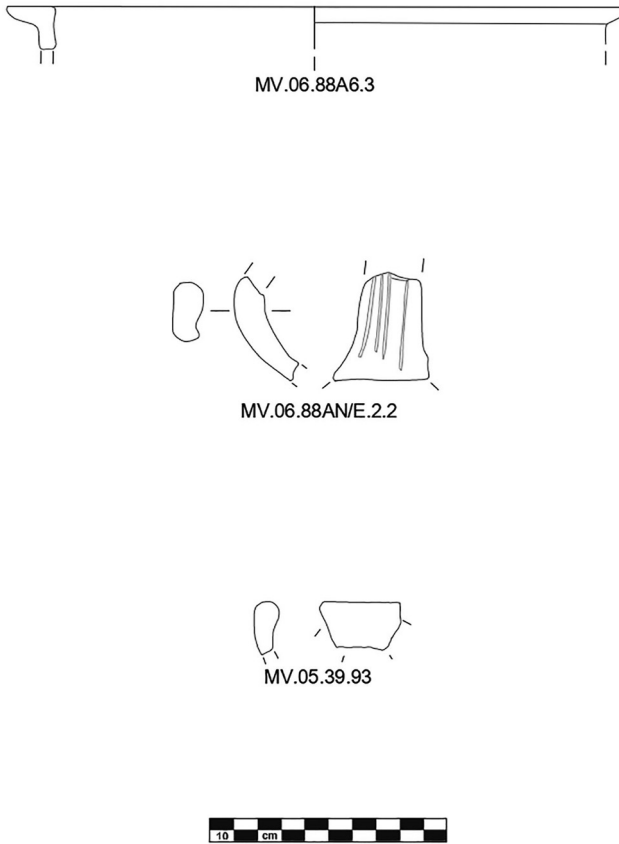
**90** MV.06.88AN/e.2; MV.05.39.93 (cf. Abate et al. 2010a, 280, fig. 13).

**91** MV.06.114.1 (cf. Ettlinger et al. 1990, 58, form 4.3.1).

**92** MV.06.88A4.1 (cf. Ettlinger et al. 1990, 154, form B1.2).

**93** cf. Lloyd et al. 1995, 119, figs. 69–70, no. 107–124.





**Figure 16:** Ceramic finds from the Roman period (digital editing G. Giorgio).

the second half of the first century B.C.E. (Figure 17).<sup>94</sup> Terra sigillata africana appears rarely in the entire area of Molise, with some fragments of Hayes 7, 50, and 61 of groups A, C, and D collected during the project.<sup>95</sup> The fragment of type Hayes 7, group A, features a rim with a straight line and wheel decoration and belongs to a deep basin bowl datable to the first quarter of the first century C.E.<sup>96</sup> A bowl with a flat bottom of type Hayes 50, group C, is datable between 300 and 450 C.E.<sup>97</sup> Plates with a deep basin, rounded profile and internal grooves of type Hayes 61, group D, date between the third and fifth centuries C.E. (Figure 17).<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> MV.05.7.2 (cf. Oxé et al. 2000, 905.2).

<sup>95</sup> Hayes 1972.

<sup>96</sup> MV.06.114.3 (cf. Hayes 1972, 31, form 7, type A).

<sup>97</sup> MV.06.88A1.2 (cf. Hayes 1972, 69, form 50, type C).

<sup>98</sup> MV.06.88A3.0 (cf. Hayes 1972, 100, form 61, type B)



MV.06.114.1



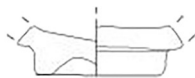
MV.06.884A4.1



MV.06.114.3



MV.06.88A1.2



MV.05.7.2



Figure 17: Italic and African ceramic finds from the Roman period (digital editing G. Giorgio).

### 3 Research Perspectives and New Questions

This contribution and preliminary observations offer a possible historical and archaeological reconstruction of the middle Fortore Valley. The results of this research support initial hypotheses, suggest new perspectives, and underline the importance of research conducted in a multidisciplinary and global direction.<sup>99</sup>

It is necessary at this point to explain the relationship between the two banks of the Fortore during the pre-Roman period and the role of the river: can the river network be interpreted as an obstacle or as a comfortable and easy route of passage? Ancient literary sources describe the Fortore River as navigable and its valley as rich.<sup>100</sup> Along this route some urban centers, like Tiati, flourished from the Archaic age. The same literary sources highlight the peculiar nature of the area as part of an Osco-Daunian enclave. According to Elena Antonacci Sanpaolo, this word indicates the coexistence of groups of Osco-Sabellian and Daunian cultures.<sup>101</sup> For the middle Fortore Valley, a comparison of the finds from the locality of Cigno with those from the necropolis of Carlantino (province Foggia) would suggest that this term may also be appropriate for these communities.<sup>102</sup> The role of the Fortore becomes clearer during the Samnite-Hellenistic period, with a settlement pattern characterized by small to medium-sized farms located in proximity to the hydrographic network and the main road system, which was widespread in the valley. In this period, small sanctuaries spread throughout the territory. This model appears to be in crisis at the beginning of Romanization. Is this shift due entirely to the new political-administrative structure? Or did the geomorphological dynamics of the river significantly influence settlement choices? Further research will have to answer these new questions, filling in the lack of data for the late Hellenistic and Roman periods. The study of the landscape, on the other hand, does not end with the identification of historical landscapes, but understanding that *il paesaggio diventa lo spazio geografico dove la storia umana si esplica in un rapporto di reciproco condizionamento con la natura.*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Volpe 2018 and the contributions in Modolo et al. 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Antonacci Sanpaolo 2000.

<sup>101</sup> Antonacci Sanpaolo 2000.

<sup>102</sup> Bernardini et al. 2008; De Benedittis and Santone 2006.

<sup>103</sup> Farinetti 2012, 9: “The landscape becomes the geographic space where human history plays out in a relation of a mutual conditioning with nature” (transl. C.S. De Simone).

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