Ancient Topography in Southern Etruria: an Appraisal of Twenty Years of Research

Marcello Spanu
Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo
email: spanu@unitus.it

Abstract

For over twenty years, the Università degli Studi della Tuscia has carried out and coordinated surveys in Southern Etruria, today’s province of Viterbo. These investigations are performed with traditional methods (collection of all kinds of data and their analysis, systematic field-walking and so on) combined with the employment of the latest technological applications. The area covered by these surveys is very wide (from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Tiber River) and equally wide is the span of the connected studies, ranging from prehistoric to post-medieval periods. The deep geo-morphological diversities of this region have influenced, in the course of time, the occupation of the territory, its exploitation and settlement patterns. This research project has been partially motivated by the intention to fill a gap in our knowledge of a region which is very close to Rome and which has not been thoroughly examined until recently. The aim of this work is not only to redo a “census” of all the archaeological evidence of the territory but also to provide analysis according to coherent chronological phases or to specific topics (road-systems, distribution and typology of settlements, human activities and so on). A part of the data collected so far has been published in monographs by those responsible for the various surveys. In this paper, an overall presentation of the results will be outlined, with more general reflections on archaeological data and their potentiality in the field of the protection of cultural heritage (from preventive archaeology to the landscape planning).

Keywords: Southern Etruria, Ancient Topography, Archaeological Survey, Archaeological Mapping

Text

This paper aims at presenting a synthetic review of all the works on Ancient Topography that were carried out during the last twenty years by Università degli Studi della Tuscia of Viterbo, previously under the supervision of Piero A. Gianfrotta and later by me. I am not going to illustrate here the acquired results, because I intend to concentrate on the present state of the research and on the logic on which it has been based. Moreover, it is important to expose some data concerning the important changes of information occurring during these investigations, achieved following a rigorous research methodology, of Ancient Topography.

Indeed, while talking about Ancient Topography in Southern Etruria, it is impossible not to take into account the experience of the Carta Archeologica d’Italia, which unfortunately was not carried on exhaustively: this project was started just in this area by the scholars A. Cozza, A. Pasqui, G.F. Gamurrini and then R. Mengarelli, in the aftermath of the Unity of Italy.

The professed objectives of the project are clearly expressed by the words by Gamurrini ‘La Carta deve servire come di preparazione e fondamento per gli studi e le scoperte future: e inoltre ad assicurare all’Italia la conservazione dei monumenti’ (‘The Map must serve as a preparation and foundation for future studies and discoveries: and also to guarantee for Italy the preservation of monuments’) and are still extremely effective and up to date. They stress that the research must rely on
two fundamental aspects: knowledge and preservation. As it is natural, many things have changed since then (the safeguard is now the competence of specific bodies, the “Soprintendenze”) but most of all the research rests on a consolidated methodology, thanks to the adoption of modern tools.

It is well known that the good purposes of the Carta Archeologica did not always enjoy the hoped-for continuity (Castagnoli, 1978; Cozza, 1972: 429-59; Lugli, 1926; 1928). Amongst other difficulties is the consequence of the scarcity of information on many territories, even if they have already been investigated. The knowledge of the territory of the province of Viterbo in 1995 was still very partial, corresponding to 11% of the overall area, where by “knowledge of the territory” I mean of course the information gathered and published topographical works and at the disposal of the scientific community and of the authorities in charge of its safeguard (Andreussi, 1977; Quilici Gigli, 1970; 1976; Morselli, 1980) (fig. 1).

Concerning these previous works, it is not superfluous to note that the available information was concentrated on the central sector of the area, corresponding to the main settlements (Tuscania, Forum Cassii, Sutri) and markedly to the stretches located along the main roads, the via Cassia and the via Clodia. Since 1995, a research programme aimed at filling the gaps in the knowledge of this wide territory started, so as to outline also the numerous geophysical differences noticeable in the area which extends from the Tirrenic coast to the Tiber Valley and raises therefore dissimilar historical and archaeological problems.

As far as the methodology is concerned, the canonical procedure adopted in Ancient Topography has been used, taking into account all the availa-
ble information: historical cartography, archives documents, aerial photographs and more recently, satellite images. A fundamental pillar for this kind of research is, unquestionably, the systematic and thorough survey of the territory. Throughout this activity, a large number of unknown findings have been uncovered, having different entity and nature and ranging from areas with pottery fragments to built structures. The chronological range of these surveys is very wide, ranging from the Prehistory to the Late Medieval era.

During this systematic work, the opportunity of “rediscovering” monuments of different typologies whose exact localisation was no more known or which were even presumed destroyed arose. This is the case, for instance, of the very recent “rediscovery” within the territory of Falerii of the inscription of Gaius Egnatius. The text mentions a peculiar organisation of the territory (prata faci-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Area covered Systematic Survey (sq km)</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Sooprint. Archive</th>
<th>Other Archives</th>
<th>Bibliogr. Data</th>
<th>Missing Sites</th>
<th>Evidence from Systematic Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commenda (Viterbo I) IGM I36 ISE; IIN; ISE; I37 IIIIno; IINO; IINo; IISE; IV SO</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Martino (Viterbo II) IGM I37 III NE e III SE</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ager Ciminius IGM I37 IINO; IIINO</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomarzo, Bassano in Teverina, Mugnano IGM I37 IISO; IIINO</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celleno IGM I37 IV SE</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visentium IGM I36 I NE; ISE</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallesse IGM I37 II SE</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarquinia, Montalto Marina, Foce del fiume Marta IGM I42 INO; IV NE; IV SE</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1033</strong></td>
<td><strong>861</strong></td>
<td><strong>290</strong></td>
<td><strong>243</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>750</strong></td>
<td><strong>223</strong></td>
<td><strong>3832</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2. Province of Viterbo: Summary of data.

uda), whose arrangement and layout find exact correspondences on the ground, where traces and evidence have been identified by F. Rizzo (see the paper in these proceedings) during the survey co-ordinated by Università della Tuscia. This inscription had been seen at the end of the nineteenth century but afterwards, as nobody was able to find it, the common believe was that it had been lost.

Similarly, the survey project has been an occasion to evaluate the quantity of the missing archaeological sites, known from archives or bibliographies, in order to consider the degree of destruction of the archaeological heritage in a region often not interested by a strong urbanisation.

The final product is a general archaeological map with all the identified evidence; its cartographic base are the “historical” IGM maps in scale 1:25.000 (and the more recent Regional Technical Maps in scale 1:10.000 for detailed areas), adopting the standard codes and symbols used in the “Carta archeologica” and placing the sites in their exact location.
For all these investigations, the ground surface visibility during the surveys has been recorded with a map, following the usual criteria codified in the past (Guaitoli, 1999: 357-65). Naturally this mapping is referred to the best conditions observed, so that, in manifold cases, it has been necessary to visit the sites more than once in order to verify possible different conditions and to make checks and inspections.

With respect to the relationship between the present day nature of the territory and the survey, it is perhaps indispensable to make methodological considerations concerning systematic surface surveys. It may happen that areas difficult to be accessed or covered by woods were excluded from territorial studies because they were considered not very useful for the research and most of all necessitating a large amount of energy to be explored. Our research demonstrated that, on the contrary, the methodological effectiveness of a systematic survey is confirmed also in those "difficult" situations, as in the woods of the Middle Tiber Valley, where the thorough and almost complete survey made it possible to discover a large number of significant finding.

From a general point of view, the results acquired must not be intended as a simple inventory of archaeological evidence because the "Carta Archeologica" is actually the essential and irreplaceable starting point for further elaborations. These elaborations may be of different kind and are certainly facilitated nowadays thanks to the adoption of informatics tools (cartographic of a different nature), allowing for faster and more precise analysis. The natural consequence of this kind of investigations at a large scale is the elaboration of thematic maps. Amongst them, the more useful ones for the historical-topographic reconstruction of the examined territories in different periods are the diachronic maps of the sites, but also others, like those regarding viability.

Manifold other products may be redacted starting from the analysis of the territory carried out with rigorous and comprehensive methodology, for example the present land use map. This is the case when, not only is it important to register single data but it is necessary to try to understand, at a wider extent, a territory in its present conditions: this will allow for an analysis of the possible interferences with the general table of archaeological data, in the moment when the investigations were conducted, so as to become a monitoring instrument for the future.

A significant case, amongst the others, often occurring in the region under consideration, is the presence of active modern quarries which not only destroy the landscape (with all the related environmental consequences) but often delete and invalidate the possibility of carrying out archaeological research in the future (see Scardozzi in these proceedings).

Coming back to the aim of this paper, an important aspect is that concerning the acquisition of data and more generally the widening of our knowledge. Compared with the starting point, thanks to a well-structured program of exploration of the territory in various modalities (university training, master and doctoral programs, etc.) in the last twenty years the general picture of Viterbo’s territory has drastically and considerably changed. In a few cases we also had the possibility of surveying the same area more than once, with the aim of evaluating the evidence in different visibility conditions.

The most relevant portion of results have been acquired thanks to a series of PhD theses, carried out within a thematic doctoral program on Ancient Topography (based at the Università del Salento but involving the Universities of Viterbo, Roma Sapienza and Salerno): unfortunately this program no longer exists, due to new restrictive administrative measures governing the Italian university system.

It is evident that, thanks to this research, the picture of the situation has widened and deeply changed. I will expose only the information derived from the investigations carried out within this coordinated PhD program, which is more complete and conclusive for what concerns the elaboration of data. The authors of the works I will mention are A. Milioni, T. Gasperoni, G. Scardozzi, F. Sabatini, A. Sileoni, D. Rossi, T. Mastracci and F. Rizzo.
Starting from the previous knowledge framework (corresponding to approximately 397 km², 11% of the Province of Viterbo), within twenty years we obtained the result of more than 1200 km² (33% of the Province) surveyed and other 200 square km that are now under investigation, reaching a total covering more than 1400 square km, corresponding to 38.7% of the province. I must stress that I did not take into account some areas having been only partially investigated or whose investigation necessitates a more accurate analysis (master thesis, etc.).

Even without going into detail on single findings and discoveries, our effort manifestly changed in a considerable way the state of knowledge. If compared to the previous situation, the new research filled wide existing gaps and examined closely very heterogeneous areas, from the Tirrenic coast (Tarquinia’s territory) to the Tiber valley, having varied geographical aspects, occupation patterns and results.

Significant to underlining the progress of knowledge and to elaborate some further considerations is the attached diagram, comprehensive of all the concluded works (excluding the areas still under examination and for those located to the North, whose elaboration is ongoing). In this diagram (fig. 2) it is possible to observe:

1) The area, and the width of the area, systematically surveyed: basically the values are coinciding, though we are lacking data because of the presence of unexplorable areas, such as urban centres, lakes or inaccessible places.

2) The second piece of information concerns the scarce number of constraints, indicating, unfortunately, the vulnerability of the territories.

3) Other data pertaining to the existing information before the activities promoted by Università della Tuscia were carried out: they are subdivided in Archivio della Soprintendenza (containing information known only from these archives), other archives or bibliographies.

4) Another piece of information worth underlining is that concerning the evidence that is no more identifiable, meaning, in the most part of the cases, lost archaeological remains, due to modern expansion or to destructions of other kind.

5) The last data concern the knowledge that has been acquired during the investigations of Università della Tuscia. The diagram shows very clearly the important increase of knowledge in a few territories that practically were not explored before.

Fig. 3. Province of Viterbo: Sources of data.
Summing up, the very deep archaeological differences present in the Viterbo province are clear from many points of view. For example, the degree of knowledge is very heterogeneous varying from area to area (very high near Tarquinia and in the Southern Tiber Valley and very low in the other areas); the sites that are currently missing with respect to previous knowledge are several in the areas, with a recent growing development due to varying reasons (e.g. Gallese and Visentium areas: new building activities or agricultural exploitation).

More impressive (from a simple numerical point of view) is the quantity of new data acquired with the systematic survey: this new evidence given by the systematic survey are 3832, that it is to say, 79% of the total, in a relationship equal to 4:1 (fig. 3).

Of course, for every kind of archaeological surveys, it is impossible to arrive at a complete and exhaustive knowledge of the topographical development over the course of time. The systematic method of a field walking survey (together to all the other instruments proper of the survey) can surely offer not only a larger amount of data, but also a more diffuse base of information, including areas now "difficult" and problematic to investigate.

Strongly connected with the survey is, actually, the problem of the management and diffusion of the acquired data. In this sense, a choice made for the results obtained within the survey project has been that of using the Sistema Informativo Territoriale per la gestione integrata dei beni archeologici (Territorial Information System for the integrated management of the archaeological heritage) developed by Laboratorio CNR di Topografia Antica e Fotogrammetria of the Università del Salento by
M. Guaitoli (Guaitoli, 2008). The system archives vectorial maps and different kinds of files and makes queries in order to manage an enormous mass of data.

Beyond this, it has been considered opportune to promote the circulation of the acquired data and results in a more traditional way such as printed publications: four in the “Carta archeologica d’Italia” Series (Gasperoni & Scardozzi, 2010; Milioni, 2002; 2007; Scardozzi, 2004) and one in the Dipartimento di Scienze dei Beni culturali (Gasperoni, 2003) (fig. 4). Other similar works are now almost ready to be published but the long-standing problem to raise funds useful for scientific publications is now reaching dramatic levels. A solution could be the publication of the data online, but the results are not totally satisfying, especially if we consider the short life of some web sites. In this period of transition, the traditional printed edition remains valid, moreover if we consider the end-users of the archaeological surveys. Surely, we can contemplate scholars, research and safeguard bodies using the data but beyond them, we must consider the role of the local administrations, whose awareness and sensibility towards their archaeological heritage are fundamental for planning as well as for preservation.

References
