**Inspecting the transformation of Roman settlements in the Upper Potenza Valley (Marche region) across Late Antiquity and into the Early Medieval era**

The presented analysis shows the changes that occurred in the settlement patterns in the upper Potenza river valley (MC, Marche region) during the transition period between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. The considered area, positioned within an intermediate basin between the Umbria-Marche Apennines and a lateral dorsal ridge, dominated by the hilltops of Monte Primo and Monte Castel Santa Maria, coincides with the westernmost of the sampling zones investigated by Ghent University in the context of the Potenza Valley Survey project, carried out since 2000, under the direction of Frank Vermeulen.

The systematic survey in the upper-Potenza valley, combined with field-checks of crop and soil marks traced through aerial photography as well as with information from previous finds in the area, allowed some 34 sites to be very well-defined as non-problematic Roman “settlement sites,” based on the presence of artifact scatters.

The considered rural sites were located within the *municipales agri* of *Matilica* (the ones north of the Potenza river) and *Camerinum* (the ones southward).

Both the cities, as well as the settlement of *Prolaqueum*, born in connection with the *diverticulum* of the Via Flaminia linking *Nuceria* to *Ancona,* which show an undoubted continuity of occupation since Roman times.

The first study of the archaeological materials allowed to ascertain for a third of the total sites number a continuity of occupation until Late antiquity (half of the fifth century A.D.), while three hill top sites were recognized as Medieval settlements.

As a result of the review of ceramic materials collected during the surveys, the evidence now demonstrates the *longue durée* of many of the rural sites identified along the upper Potenza valley.

Compared with the catalogue of sites already published (Percossi, Pignocchi, Vermeulen 2006), it could in fact be ascertained that three sites more of the rural Roman settlements occupied until Late Antiquity were frequented also during the early Middle Ages: one of them is located north of the Potenza river, in the north-eastern corner of the considered sample area, while the two others are situated southward, respectively within the actual municipality of Pioraco and Camerino. These settlements are all on hilltops or on high slopes areas, overlooking the valley below and in good visual relationship among them.

So, a series of clues associated with the recognition of new pottery markers ,mainly related to the category of “light clay unglazed ware”, possibly dating to the period between the end of African and Eastern imports and the emergence of new forms characteristic from the tenth century in central Italy, allows for the reconstruction of a scenario of substantial continuity within homogenous topographical contexts.

The analysis confirms the necessity of overcoming the geographical framework represented by the “tout-court” river valley territory for focusing the attention on the relationship between town and countryside, from the countryside perspective, such as the sustainability of the demographic growth of towns and the diachronic developments in the settlement chamber of which towns are part. Archaeologically, a way to understand the change of rural settlement patterns in the upper Potenza valley during the considered transition period is to combine and compare the data produced through survey investigations in the rural sites with the ones that have merged (or will be brought to life) from the excavation of the stratigraphies related to the different phases of life at the concerned cities *Camerinum* and *Matilica,* as well as *Prolaqueum*.

The matching of all the different frames can lead to the restitution of the picture in its complexity and to the comprehension of the destructuration process patterns that surely occurred to rural settlements, as well as to the urban centres, before their subsequent reconstruction, also in contexts of prolonged duration or even uninterrupted continuity.