Progetto R.I.M.E.M.: problematiche e dati delle ricognizioni nelle aree interne delle Marche

This paper concerns the methodological aspects and some main results of a archaeological survey carried out since 2006 in the inland of the Marche Region and related to the R.I.M.E.M. project (the Italian acronym corresponds to the English “Researches on the Medieval Settlement in the Marchean Inland”. The article is strictly linked to the others papers published in this special issue, all concerning the same project, and in a special way to the three essays focused on the pottery finds, presented by Ana Konestra, Eleonora Paris and Sonia Virgili.

In the first section the Author reports about the hard methodological problems faced in the course of the research:

1. Geomophological features. All the surveyed area is characterized by hilly and mountainous lands, interspersed with a few fields having a lower slope. This activates strong slope processes, landslides and colluvial deposits that make difficult the reading of the archeological record.
2. Vegetation cover. The inland areas are affected by a low population density because of the depopulation phenomenon increased after World War II, even due to the strong industrialization of the middle valleys and of the coast. By consequence, the cultivation of many fields has been abandoned, resulting in a wide spread of forests and uncultivated lands. In short, a large number of fields has a low or no visibility, and only about the 40% of the whole area is suitable for survey in plowed zones.
3. Pottery fragmentation. The mechanized farming techniques produce a strong fragmentation of the archaeological finds, making seriously complicated the typological and chronological classification.
4. Lack of knowledge. Medieval archaeology is not a widespread discipline in the Marche; then the shortage of published stratigraphic sequences represents a further impediment to the interpretation of archaeological data collected, even because the majority of the pottery sherds is constituted by coarse wares.
5. As for the time span between the Roman Republican period and the Xth century A.D., only a very small part of the sherds was diagnostic (less than 17% of the selected material; less than 2.4 % of the whole).
6. All the problems listed above make very difficult the classification of the sites and the interpretation of the great amount of off-sites, apart from the main materials concentrations, attributable to sites clearly recognizable *in situ*.

In the second section of the paper, the methodological - technical aspects of the survey are illustrated. As the R.I.M.E.M. project relies on a diachronic approach, a very intensive analysis has been applied, based on a grid survey in each field (10 x 10 m squares); this is the only way to gather the markers of Early Medieval Period and others characterized by a low/very low visibility, and to prevent the biases due to the inexperience of the students engaged in the survey.

All the field activities are recorded in several forms, which the author encloses to his essay.

Finally, the paper illustrates some results of the survey in some selected settlement areas, especially focusing on the rural settlement evolution between the Late Roman Period and X-XIth centuries.

In addition to previous geophysical analysis and aerial photos taken from low-flying airplanes, is parsed here the contribution provided by the pottery findings (see Konestra, Paris and Virgili in this same issue).

Despite of the problems described above, the archaeological sources - contrary to an old approach based only on documentary sources - allow us to understand that the transition between the Late Roman Period and Early Middle Ages did not correspond to an abandonment of the settlement areas, but rather to a change, the details of which however still escape us.