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# Special session on archaeological feedback

## Emptyscapes: filling 'empty' Mediterranean landscapes, mapping the archaeological *continuum*

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Research in the Mediterranean area reflects a real gap between archaeological recording and broader aspects of interpretation. This was not just historically conditioned, but also results from the natural characteristics of the Mediterranean landscape. Architecture and urbanism in the ancient cities lend themselves very well to investigation. By virtue of their monumental importance, artistic value and easy accessibility, the ruined remains of ancient structures have always been a focus of research. This is also true of the preserved remains of Greek field systems and Roman centuriation, which have been recorded from the ground and from the air more than half a century ago for the first time. By contrast, sites and landscape features outside the ancient urban centres, most of them now completely buried and therefore invisible to the naked eye, have been investigated less frequently. A new interest in landscape studies developed in the Mediterranean area about the end of World War II. Since the mid 1970s there has been an explosion of activity providing coverage of archaeological research in the majority of circum-Mediterranean countries (Alcock and Sherry 2004). The main approach in this revived research direction has been (and remains) fieldwalking survey, within a variety of project-based strategies. This pioneering post-WWII and later field survey work has produced dramatic data that has made significant contributions to a reconstruction of the past. Virtually every region that has been explored has produced results, which demanded the revision or review of existing ideas (Broodbank 2013).

However, going into the detail after millions of hectares of Mediterranean landscapes have now been surveyed by terrestrial reconnaissance, it is legitimate for us to ask: which questions have been answered? In essence, the general contribution is quite clear to summarize. There are two main fields where a substantial impact has been achieved: settlement and trade patterns, both mainly from the Mediterranean to the regional scale; and contributions

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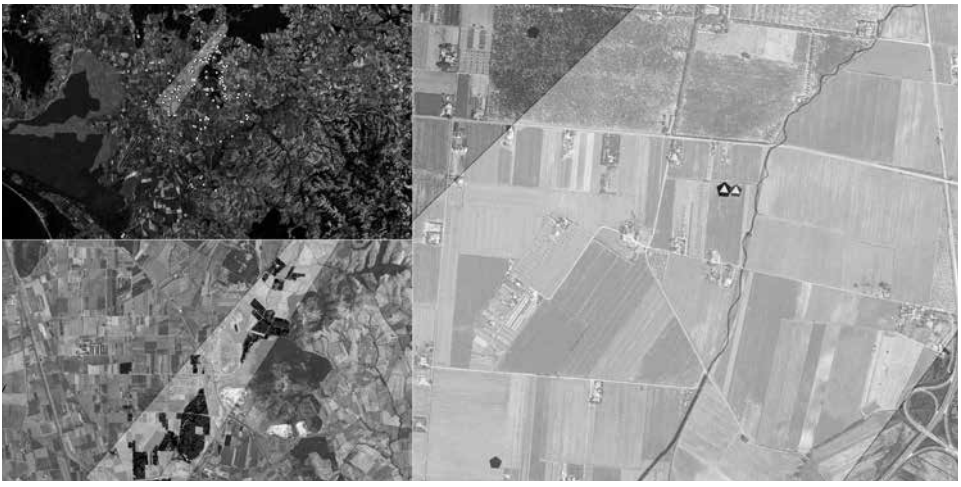

Fig. 1. The Rusellae/Grosseto study area. Top left. Distribution map (grey dots) of fieldwalking survey and Lake Prile (dark grey), which occupied part of the Rusellae/Grosseto study area during the first millennium BC and up to the end of the Middle Ages. The pale-grey area represents the sample transect now under study, with dark grey for the areas already covered by geophysical prospection. Right. Closer view of part of the sample transect showing the results of a traditional archaeological survey

to specific chronological phases, above all higher impact on to the Roman period should be recognized. By contrast, the surveys have produced generally poor results for the pre-Roman and mediaeval periods, although the degree of impact has varied from area to area. Moreover, the reconstruction of settlement patterns represents only one element in landscape complexity; this framework, for instance, generally reveals little about environmental transformations and human interaction (pedology, land-use etc). As a consequence a wide variety of questions belonging to the sphere of archaeology, history, anthropology and environment are seriously prejudiced by this approach. Furthermore, the reliability of fieldwalking survey has been debated for decades without much being achieved in resolving inherent methodological weaknesses in comparing the results of different surveys and establishing relationships between the survey results and demographic trends (Alcock and Sherry 2004).

There are further biases that affect the results of landscape study based on fieldwalking survey. Two decades ago, Barker, in his introduction to the Biferno valley (1995), outlined how Braudel (1972) in his opening chapter (part one of *La Mediterranée*) lamented how the low land has tended to dominate most previous analyses of Mediterranean history. Archaeological survey has failed to confront or resolve this bias since the application of fieldwalking is strongly influenced by present-day land-use and is therefore mainly restricted to ploughed land, which for the most part corresponds to the low land. Higher land is mainly wooded or put down to pasture, which is less responsive to fieldwalking survey. Moreover, it is worth commenting in this context that about 50% of the European Mediterranean landmass falls into this category (FAO 2006). Despite

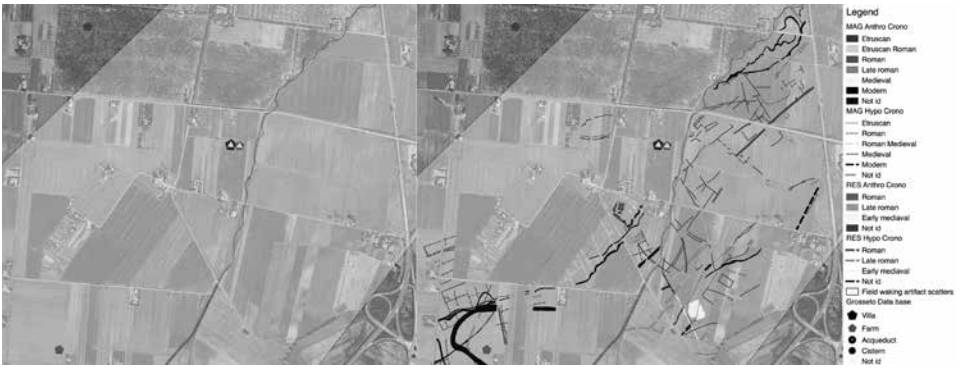


Fig. 2. The Rusellae/Grosseto study area. Left. Part of the sample transect with red to show the results of traditional archaeological survey. Right. The same area showing integrated remote sensing survey and GIS-based data mapping. Grey scale mapping drawings show the various kinds of natural and archaeological features identified so far. The quantitative and qualitative improvement in the landscape database is clearly visible, making it possible to ask, and eventually to answer, new archaeological questions about field systems, communication routes, settlement patterns, and former water courses that may have conditioned settlement and land-use within the sample area. The smaller-scale inset in the top left corner of the diagram shows the areas of completed geophysical prospection in dark grey, clearly demonstrating the correspondence between detected features and the adopted survey method

these obvious weaknesses historians as well as archaeologists use fieldwalking data to support models, patterns and large-scale landscape transformations. The answers to big historical questions are still for the most part sought through textual analysis and archaeological excavation rather than through landscape studies (Witcher 2006).

In the last two decades, a central role in the continuing debate about methodology within archaeology and landscape studies has been provided by at least three long-term European research projects: the POPULUS project (1995–2000), the Radio-PAST project (2008–2013) and the Archeo-Landscapes Europe project (2010–2015), all strongly associated with universities and other institutions belonging to both the continental geographic sphere and the Mediterranean area.

*Emptyscapes* is a two-year project funded by the European Union under the Marie Curie scheme. The research is designed and aimed to stimulate changes in the way in which archaeologists (in Italy in particular, but also more generally in the Mediterranean world) study the archaeology of landscapes, moving from an essentially site-based approach to a truly landscape-scale perspective. The project focuses on the rural landscape between Rusellae and Grosseto (Figs 1 and 2) and the once urban historical landscapes of Veii (Fig. 3) in Italy and is aimed at prompting the development and wider application of new paradigms for landscape analysis, based on an interdisciplinary programme integrating 'traditional' approaches (fieldwalking survey, aerial photography etc.), environmental studies (palaeo-environment, geoarchaeology, bioarchaeology) and new technologies in the form of high-precision, high-speed, large-scale geophysical survey and the collection and analysis of high-resolution LiDAR data.

Fig. 3. Left. Magnetic survey of the plateau of the ancient city of Veii. Right. Archaeological interpretation

In its first year the *Emptyscapes* project has clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach to landscape studies also in the Mediterranean environment, showing that archaeological features are potentially present everywhere. Moreover, following increased research, the gaps in time and space are progressively disappearing or being significantly reduced: the absence of past human activity seems to be in reality an exception rather than the rule.

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