Insediamenti civili e religiosi nella media e alta valle del Potenza (MC). (Contributi di Archeologia Medievale 10, Premio Ottone d'Assia e Riccardo Francovich). By Sonia Virgili. 21 × 30 cm. 165 pp, 114 b&w figs, 5 tables, plus CD. Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2014. ISBN 978-88-7814-600-6 (ISSN 2035–5424). €25,00 pb.

This volume offers a very welcome historical and archaeological synthesis of a large sector of the Marche region in eastern Italy. The research is characterised by a focus on the middle and upper valley of the Potenza River. The latter also represents the trait d'union among rural sites, manufacturing districts, urban centres, Roman villas, churches and fortified hilltops: all of these site types are clearly described by Virgili, covering their phases of development, decline or survival. The analysis is divided between the study of extant medieval written sources, archaeological data deriving from rescue excavations and research projects, plus results of targeted field surveys and inspections. This is accompanied by the analysis of historical maps and satellite and aerial photographs.

The Roman period is dealt with mostly on the basis of the reconstruction of the principal road arteries; a key role was played by urban centres such as Trea, Camerino and Pioraco, but Virgili also presents useful data on the contemporary rural settlement pattern. These rural sites prospered between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD, but with the 3rd century a period of crisis begins, affecting also the towns; however, some revival is evident from the 4th into the 5th century. As might be anticipated, this endurance is more pronounced along the coast than in the mainland — an image matched elsewhere in the peninsula; but almost everywhere the 6th century AD represents a transitional phase in the economy, in society and in settlement distribution.

Much of the volume focuses on the medieval period, with most data coming from the written sources even if, with the Ottonian Age, archaeological data increase. The obvious role that the rise of the bishoprics and of secular, local landlords had on shaping the countryside and urban centres is tidily discussed, although more archaeological investigations would help develop this picture.

The volume is striking for its modern approach to the reconstruction of ancient landscapes, following the direction indicated by W V Harris' *Rethinking the Mediterranean,* Oxford, 2005: the riverine landscape becomes the key narrative element to link the histories and sequences of different settlements belonging to different periods.

Undoubtedly, this prize-winning book is an important first attempt to collect and assess relevant edited and archive information for this part of the Marche region. Furthermore, it offers a launchpad and point of reference for scholars wanting to develop new or wider research in what is an important, yet relatively understudied territory along Italy's Adriatic coast.

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