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PREFACE

«I asked the German boy about the Etruscan places along the coast: Volci, Vetulonia, Populonia. His answer was always the same: “Nothing! There is nothing there”.»

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Etruscan Places*, Siena [1932] 1986, p. 115.

«...the possible world of narratives is the only universe in which we can be absolutely certain about something, and it gives a very strong sense of truth... In this universe of ours, with its wealth of errors and legends, historical data and false information, one absolute truth is the fact that Superman is Clark Kent. All the rest is open to debate.»

U. ECO, *The Book of Legendary Places*, New York 2013, pp. 431-432.

This is the first volume arising from the ERC’s nEU-Med project¹. San Quirico and Populonia anchor the north-west coastal corner of the research territory of the project, which extends from this Tyrrhenian Sea promontory through the Pecora valley, past Massa Marittima to the Colline Metallifere. The analysis of the excavated material from the excavations in 2002-2006 at San Quirico, as well as the present detailed reinterpretation of the early Medieval material from the excavations of the Republican and Imperial Roman contexts at Populonia form a critical cornerstone for the nEU-Med project. As will be apparent from this monograph, the stratigraphic excavations of the late antique oratory and the 11th-century monastery at San Quirico are especially important points in the nEU-Med narrative, as indeed, with its affiliations to the Aldobrandeschi family, is the 9th-to 10th-century ceramic and soapstone assemblage from a specific unit at Populonia. Thanks to support from the ERC’s nEU-Med grant, the report marks a first step towards constructing a new narrative for the Maremma sub-region between the Tyrrhenian Sea and the mineral-bearing Colline Metallifere. There is also a symbolic significance to including Populonia and San Quirico in nEU-Med. Populonia marks a staging point in the post-classical history of the relics of san Cerbone, a holy man whose ultimate destiny in the 11th century was to become the cult figure for Massa Marittima, the principal commune in the Colline Metallifere and a critical urban component in the economic revival of this Tyrrhenian riverine corridor.

In reading this book you cannot help thinking of Riccardo Francovich.

¹ The ERC nEU-Med (no. 670792) research project (2015-20) is entitled: *Origins of a new economic union (7th-12th centuries): resources, landscapes and political strategies in a Mediterranean region*, see www.neu-med.unisi.it

That much is clear from the chapters setting out the origins of the project on this promontory. This was his vision and I well remember the passion with which he described it to me. The steel mills at Piombino were closing. How could the Medieval fortified port with its great castle be re-positioned as an attractive new narrative to attract an international audience? The answer was to persuade many of the vacationers taking the ferry from Piombino to Elba to pause at Populonia-Baratti, and to find pleasure in walking around the headland beyond². A consortium of universities and their combined archaeologists, Riccardo believed, could produce a narrative brand to transform Piombino and its hinterland as far as Populonia into a place worth visiting. Described on a brisk walk with Riccardo above his house at Antella, this seemed an extraordinary concept. But, really, would visitors want to deviate from their journey to Elba and visit this promontory? Only when I accompanied Riccardo to Populonia and San Quirico did I fully understand. Here was a Tuscan secret, a sublime secret.

You think of Tuscany in Lawrence-ian terms³. Of a flowery landscape, blessed with great cities. Tuscany’s relationship with the Tyrrhenian sea has been completely eclipsed by its cities and inland regions such as Chianti. Riccardo understood this foreign perspective of his homeland and set out to change it.

Soon after the turn of the millennium accompanying Riccardo I visited the excavations at Populonia where the Republican and Augustan monuments were being excavated.

² R. FRANCOVICH, *Materiali per un progetto di parco nell’area del promontorio di Piombino e Populonia-Baratti*, in R. FRANCOVICH, A. ZIFFERERO (a cura di) *Musei e Parchi Archeologici*, Firenze 1999, pp. 227-247.

³ D.H.LAWRENCE, *Flowery Tuscany*, in *Selected Essays*, London 1950, pp. 139-154.

We paused afterwards at the Medieval castle and modern village close by, and then we took a jeep along the woodland track to see San Quirico. The journey was short but memorable. Every few moments the dazzling radiance of the shimmering sea would emerge through gaps in the dark canopy of the trees. Like the Colline Metallifere close by, it seemed like a forgotten world.

Locked in these woods was an altogether different rhythm – proud above the seaways, a compact and strategically located monastery – once a seaport – with a storied history. Hornets chased us on this first visit. Yet their menace could not distract us from this jewel of a place with a long post-classical tradition whose memory gave purpose to taking the path from Piombino to Populonia – a place that belonged to an age when monasteries rather than towns mattered in Tuscany.

This excavation report brings sharp definition to this place, and in so doing extends the long Etruscan and classical history of Populonia into the modern era. This is not an issue of continuity, so much as an exercise in reviving an understanding of a headland that was largely eliminated from its past by the industrialization of Piombino and its surroundings. With the renewed, stratigraphic excavations at Populonia and the ‘re-discovery’ through excavations of San Quirico, Riccardo Francovich’s legacy has lent relational identity to Piombino’s origins and its hinterland after the town’s collapse with late 20th-century globalization⁴. Just as I had sensed from his passion walking above his home at Antella, it was a master-stroke.

Comprehensive and elegantly illustrated, this report would have given Riccardo Francovich much pleasure. It contains two clear narratives. The first is born of the texts, few in numbers, but thoughtfully described and analysed by Maria Luisa Ceccarelli Lemut and Simone Collavini. A great deal has been skillfully made of rather little. The second is a seminal new narrative from the excavated remains, their phasing into eight periods and the objects these phases contain, clearly and correctly aligned to give this place, the headland and indeed this sea-based monastery a new past. Both narratives have then been woven together in two concluding chapters, respectively by Sauro Gelichi and Giovanna Bianchi, thoughtful scions of the Francovich school.

The excavations at San Quirico along with those devoted to Populonia and Baratti provide scale. Understanding size matters because the investment in some form or another reflects the actions of the time, either directly or indirectly. The Augustan loggia of the acropolis honoured the memory of a place with a long established history. It belongs to a moment of immense investment in Tyrrhenian commerce and its indubitable importance to Imperial Rome. In the same way, the first San Quirico, a miniscule funerary chapel of late antique date, around which Gelichi weaves a magisterial narrative, belongs to a world where individuals – bishops or hermits – not the rhetoric of architecture or material – mattered. This was a world with astonishingly reduced ambitions.

⁴ R. HODGES, *The Great Place-Maker*, in *Riccardo Francovich e i grandi temi del dibattito europeo*, Atti del Convegno (Siena 2007), Firenze 2011, pp. 109-111; cf. R. HODGES, *The Archaeology of Mediterranean Placemaking*, London 2016.

In his forensic treatment of the archaeology Gelichi provides several plausible hypotheses for interpreting the making of a place at San Quirico. Did its origins lie in a privately-funded oratory, or an oratory built over the tomb of a hermit, or the monumentalisation of a bishop’s tomb? Each hypothesis, however, takes its departure from a memory and a set of historical associations. This was surely never the wilderness⁵ or a refuge⁶ or most likely ever menaced by pirates or insecurity. These narrative tropes belong to an ethnohistory that was confronting dramatic social and economic change, as the nEU-Med project aims to show. This place served other purposes. In each case it was simply a seaport as ancient Populonia had also been, albeit on a scale consonant with the seismically-altered post urban conditions of the end of antiquity⁷.

Similarly, Gelichi’s magisterial analysis of 9th-century Populonia focusses upon another episode in the town’s episodic afterlife. He makes a good case for the assemblage of 9th-to 10th-century ceramics and *pietra ollare* representing a moment when Ildebrando II, the Aldobrandeschi count, occupied the southern Tuscia as the bishop of Populonia also shifted his seat to Cornino in AD 861, an unknown place in the coastal littoral close by. Gelichi’s convincing reinterpretation of this unusual 9th-to 10th-century ceramic assemblage is a critical contribution to the nEU-Med project. It provides an invaluable chronological fixed point as the new project focusses upon a diversity of sites within this Maremma sub-region. Specifically, red-painted vessels are almost absent from the triple-ditched fortified site at Vetricella in the Pecora valley, and rare on the early Medieval villages of the Colline Metallifere⁸. As Gelichi proposes, the assemblage must relate to a particular residential unit, almost certainly with an aristocrat’s culinary culture. Gelichi’s interpretation resonates with our understanding of the changing economics of the central decades of the 9th century, when new administered periodic markets fueled by new material commoditization (of ceramics, ironwork, etc.) first competed with traditional gift exchange in central Italy⁹. Incidentally it also marks a moment when control over salt-water fish (in this case tuna) for inland elite consumption was becoming important, and when a new dining culture involving red-painted and glazed ceramics was being adopted by monasteries and perhaps an emergent rural aristocracy¹⁰.

⁵ Cf. J. LE GOFF, *The wilderness in the medieval west*, in J. LE GOFF, *The Medieval Imagination*, Chicago 1988, pp. 47-59.

⁶ Cf. E. TZAVELLA, *The Byzantine chapel and its finds*, in C. RENFREW, O. PHILANIOTOU, N. BRODIE, G. GAVALAS, M.J. BOYD (eds.), *The settlement at Dhaskalio*, Cambridge 2013, pp. 87-91; W. BOWDEN, *A window on the world: Butrint and the fortified sites of Epirus in the 7th-9th centuries*, in N. CHRISTIE, H. HEROLD (eds.), *Fortified Settlements in Medieval Europe*, Oxford 2016, pp. 235-247.

⁷ Cf. R. HODGES, J. MITCHELL, *The Forty Saints, Saranda, Expedition* 56.3, 2014, pp. 38-44.

⁸ Unpublished analysis of the nEU-Med first season at Vetricella, 2016, thanks to Arianna Briano and Lorenzo Marasco. See also F. GRASSI, *La ceramica, l'alimentazione, l'artigianato e le vie di commercio tra VIII e XIV secolo. Il caso della Toscana meridionale*, Oxford 2010, esp. pp. 57-58.

⁹ R. HODGES, *Dark Age Economics. A New Audit*, London 2012, pp. 134-135.

¹⁰ Cf. R. HODGES, *In Small Things Forgotten: Iuxta Flumen Vulturum*. Gli scavi lungo il fronte fluviale di San Vincenzo al Volturno, «Archeologia Medievale» XLII, 2016, pp. 417-421; Id., *Trade and culture process in a 9th-century monastic statelet: San Vincenzo al Volturno*, in A. MILOŠEVIĆ (ed.), *Croats and Carolingians – Revisited: fifteen years later*, Leiden 2017.

A hundred or so years later the old oratory at San Quirico was re-purposed following the new rhetoric of the 11th century. With the early 11th-century revival of Mediterranean trade, the promontory's seamount was reinvented as a model monastery. It was as elegantly compact as its history was limited. But in the later 12th century, as the urban communities of western Tuscany began to impose their authority on land and sea, one abbot, it is surmised, tellingly acquired a batch of late antique memorials from Rome. An amazing assemblage of 135 inscribed slabs and funerary inscriptions of late antique date was found in an early modern context. The intention, as Giovanna Bianchi proposes, may have been to support San Quirico's ambitions as a place with far-reaching connections in time and space as it faced increasing local competition. On the eve of the creation of Piombino as a fortified town serving the central Maremma in the 13th century, San Quirico was

at its zenith. Thereafter, it lay within the penumbra of the Tyrrhenian port and, ultimately, in ruins until this excavation found its umbilical affiliation through texts to Populonia.

In spring and summer months the carpark at Populonia is now full. The park with its trails has given new life to this place, creating employment for local people. This legacy along with this report on San Quirico and those devoted to Populonia and Baratti make this a showcase in Mediterranean placemaking. With this archaeological narrative San Quirico retrieves its status as a significant chapter of the long story of this promontory, and an important participant in the making of the Medieval Maremma. Not all is yet known. Parts of the narrative will be a matter of debate, to be examined and appraised as a key cornerstone of the nEU-Med project as it seeks to establish the role of mining precious metals in the Medieval economic revival of this Tyrrhenian coastal region.