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LAGOONS, MARSHES, AND SWAMPS IN THE ROMAN AND LATE ANTIQUE RAVENNA GREATER REGION: SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION (Federica Boschi)

During the Roman and Late Antique periods, the Ravenna Greater Region was largely characterized by a wetland landscape of lagoons, marshes, and swamps, which profoundly shaped the settlement patterns, social behaviour, and culture of its inhabitants. In particular, water was a constant presence in daily life, profoundly influencing interactions and economic development in the area. However, very little remains of this once-humid environment in the present-day landscape¹. As a result, when examining past settlement patterns or conducting archaeological research, it is crucial to consider the profound transformations that have reshaped the Ravenna region over the past two millennia.

Hence, in this paper, we aim to present a synthesis of the archaeological data available on Roman and Late Antique villas across the coastal area of the Ravenna Greater Region (fig. 1). We contextualise these settlement patterns within the long-term transformation of a landscape that was once significantly wetter and identify the key dynamics that can be discerned despite the fragmentary and scarce nature of the evidence. Environmental and settlement data considered in this paper are based on a revision of published literature combined with recent archaeological research, including a few unpublished discoveries through preventive archaeological investigations. The ongoing activities in the area have been primarily driven by researchers from the University of Bologna, which has been active in the Ravenna Greater Region since 2001. Initially, the focus was on the ancient conurbation of Ravenna-Caesarea-Classe, where work centred on remote sensing, geophysical surveys, and archaeological excavations, mainly to reconstruct the site of the abandoned city of Classe². Over the years, additional research projects have been launched in the surrounding rural areas (fig. 1), including the “Agro Decimano” project south of Ravenna³, the “Archeologia a Cervia” project in the Cervia area⁴, and the “Reclaimed Landscapes - RecLands” project along the coastal region N of Ravenna⁵. All these research endeavours were designed as landscape archaeology projects based on artefact surveys, but these initiatives have increasingly adopted a multidisciplinary and multiscalar approach, which now integrates various

¹ ABBALLE 2023.

² AUGENTI 2011; BOSCHI 2012; AUGENTI *et alii* 2017.

³ FICARA, MANZELLI 2008.

⁴ AUGENTI *et alii* 2020.

⁵ ABBALLE *et alii* 2025.

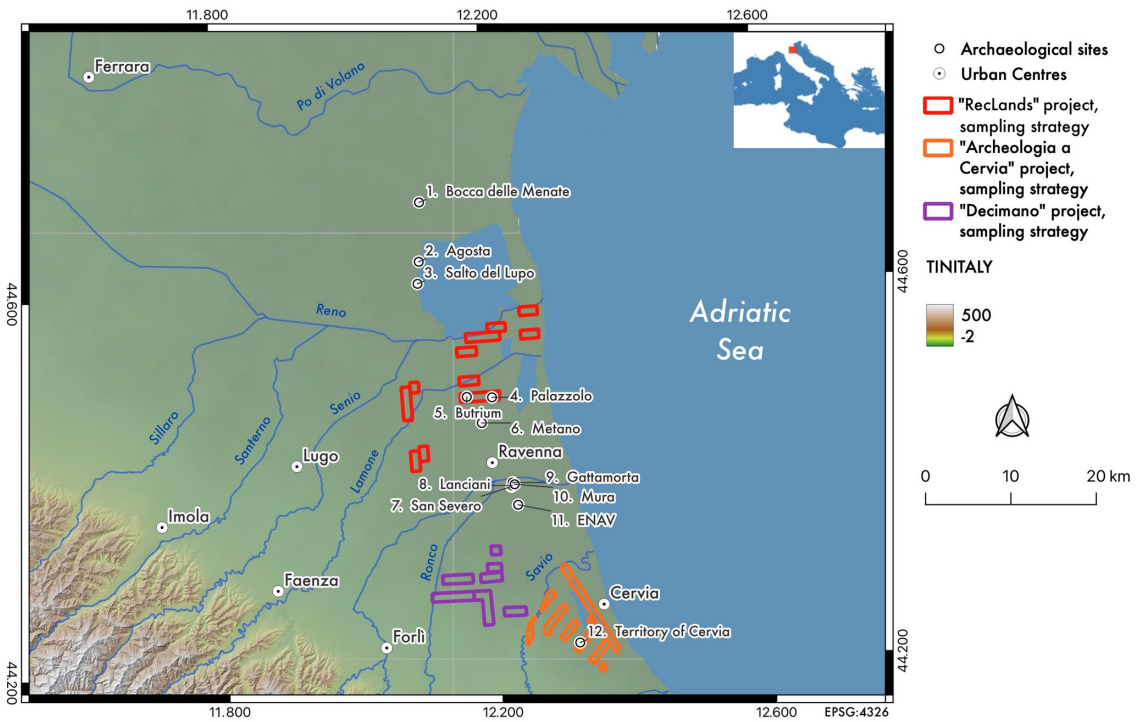


Fig. 1. Map of the study area showing the sampling strategies of the “Reclaimed Landscapes – RecLands”, “Agro Decimano”, and “Archeologia a Cervia” projects, along with the distribution of the numbered sites mentioned in the text; basemap derived from the TINITALY DEM (map by Marco Cavalazzi).

research methods such as geoarchaeological investigations, geophysical surveys, remote sensing, paleoenvironmental analysis, and targeted site excavation.

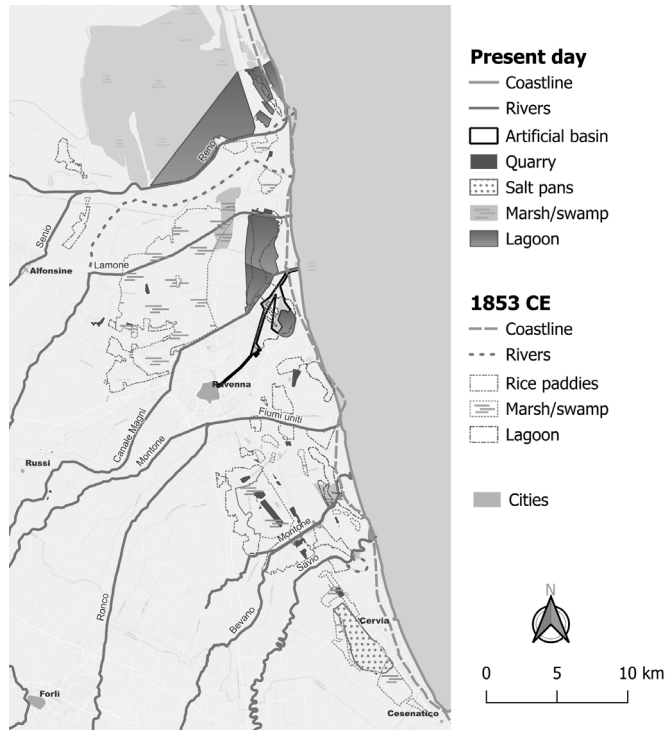
2. GEOMORPHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF A HIGHLY DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE (Michele Abballe, Federica Boschi)

For the past two decades, investigations by the University of Bologna in this area, alongside a long tradition of historical and archaeological studies, have faced one of the most methodologically challenging geomorphological contexts⁶. This is due to the major transformations the landscape has undergone over the past millennia, especially as land reclamation from the Late Middle Ages onward intensified the natural processes typical of an alluvial environment⁷.

⁶ CAVALAZZI 2020.

⁷ STEFANI, VINCENZI 2005; ABBALLE 2021.

Fig. 2. Map showing present-day wetlands, major towns, rivers, and coastline (solid line), alongside historical wetlands, ancient river courses, and the palaeocoastline as they appeared around 1853 CE, reconstructed from the *Catasto Austriaco* (map by Michele Abballe).



As a result, the landscape has lost much of its former wetland character and now features an unnaturally flattened topography, hampering our understanding of its ancient physiognomy (fig. 2). Despite these challenges, several studies have contributed to the diachronic reconstruction of Ravenna's hinterland, steadily improving

our comprehension of this complex ancient landscape⁸. Yet, investigation remains difficult due to considerable local variation: in some areas, for example, archaeological sites lie just beneath the topsoil, while in others they are buried several meters deep, up to 10 meters in exceptional cases such as Russi, inland from Ravenna⁹. Despite numerous local-scale differences, a broad distinction can be made between the landscape N of Ravenna and that to the S, between Classe and Cervia. The northern area is now a vast rural territory, but, until recently, there were extensive wetlands between the Reno River (former Po's southernmost branch known as Primaro) and the ancient dune ridges. These were only reclaimed between the 19th and 20th centuries CE during the Cassa di Colmata del Fiume Lamone reclamation project (fig. 2)¹⁰. The few known archaeological sites are found at depths of around 2 to 3 meters, except in cases where they were established on geomorphological ridges, such as dune belts or ancient river levees. It has only been since 2023 that the area has been the subject of systematic investigations promoted by the RecLands project, which has had, among many other objectives, the goal of dating the most significant landscape changes strictly connected with the former Po southernmost branch, known as Primaro. In the con-

⁸ FRANCESCHELLI, MARABINI 2007; AUGENTI 2011; BOSCHI 2011; ABBALLE 2023.

⁹ GUARNIERI, MONTEVECCHI 2023.

¹⁰ For more info, see ABBALLE *et alii* 2024.

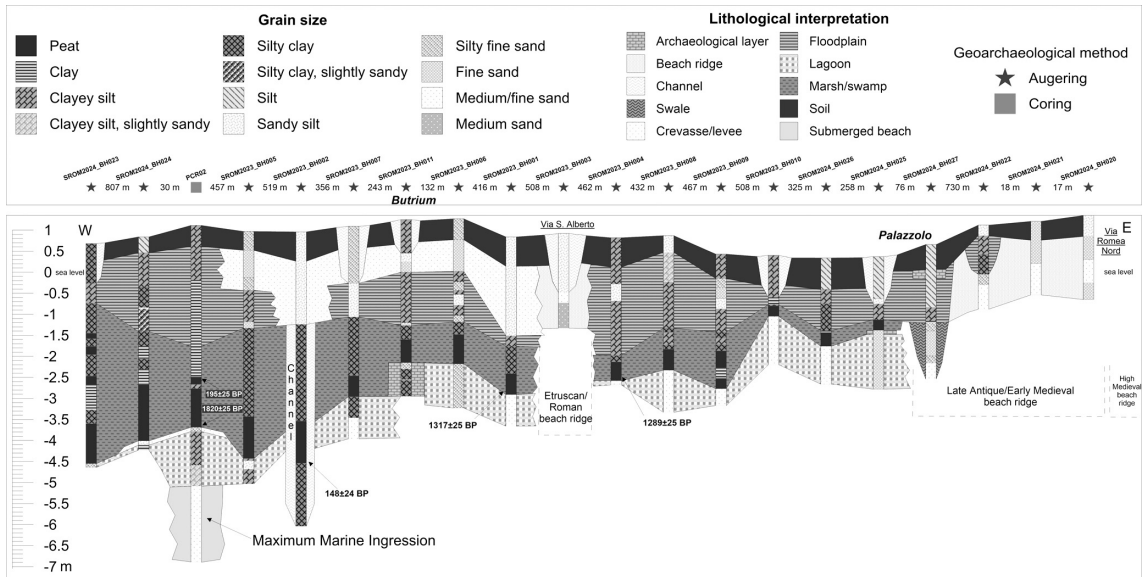


Fig. 3. Geoarchaeological cross-section S of S. Romualdo (Ravenna), crossing the main archaeological sites of *Butrium* and S. Maria in Palazzolo, including stratigraphic data and uncalibrated radiocarbon dates (modified by Michele Abballe from ABBALLE *et alii* 2025).

text of this paper, we focus on our field effort at the two most well-known sites in the area, the *statio* of *Butrium* and the monastery of S. Maria in Palazzolo¹¹, which we will consider again in what follows regarding their archaeological significance. Through a series of systematic geoarchaeological investigations primarily via hand augering, we are now able to better date the transition from the lagoon to marsh environment between the mid-7th and 8th centuries CE, likely linked to a significant phase of coastal progradation associated with the Po di Primaro. However, further inland, this transition seems to have occurred between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE, possibly due to an earlier phase of alluvial activity from the same southern branch, according to geochemical data (fig. 3). Still, we lack exact dating for most of the dune ridges, a gap that we are trying to fill in the near future.

S of Ravenna, the transformations of the coastline and the impact of land reclamation have been more limited, but they have still significantly influenced our understanding of the ancient settlement patterns. For example, the tight relationship between Classe and water was behind the genesis of this suburban port, its growth within the Ravenna conurbation¹², its economic flourishing¹³, and then its slow decline¹⁴. From being an “amphibious city”¹⁵

¹¹ ABBALLE *et alii* 2025.

¹² AUGENTI *et alii* 2017.

¹³ AUGENTI, CIRELLI 2012; AUGENTI 2019.

¹⁴ AUGENTI, CIRELLI 2012.

¹⁵ “città anfibia” as called by ERRERA 1929.

with a solid link to the sea, Classe has become an inland centre over time after the reclamation of lagoons and wetlands, the filling up of waterways and the coastal progradation, similar to what has also happened in Ravenna¹⁶. Despite these changes, our knowledge is undoubtedly greater than that of the northern hinterland of Ravenna, although most of the findings are located on the ancient coastal ridges, while more inland, it is less clear where the post-Roman wetland extended and where ancient settlements could be buried below reclamation deposits¹⁷. Further south in Cervia, most of the sites are located similarly along the ancient coastline, but also within the more stable inland area, although in medieval and early Modern times, the town of Cervia Vecchia and the site of Prato della Rosa gained a strategic role, despite its location within the present-day salt pans¹⁸.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SETTLEMENT DYNAMICS NORTH OF RAVENNA (Michele Abballe, Marco Cavalazzi, Paolo Maranzana)

The environmental transformations outlined above are closely linked to shifts in settlement patterns, which have become increasingly evident in recent decades, particularly across the long-term span from the end of the Iron Age to the Middle Ages. Most of the available data derives from surface artefact surveys, with fewer insights obtained through rescue archaeology, and only rarely from systematic research excavations.

Hence, what follows is a catalogue of sites, arranged geographically from N to S along the ancient Adriatic coastline, encompassing the areas of Comacchio, Ravenna, and Cervia (fig. 1). Following extensive discussion among the authors, we have opted not to impose rigid classifications on the available evidence. Given the fragmentary and often uncertain nature of the data, such categorisation risks leading to misleading interpretations. Nevertheless, we will attempt to highlight broader trends, both methodological and historical, particularly in light of two recent discoveries made during rescue excavations conducted as part of the Ravenna Mare – Ravenna Terra gas pipeline project. These excavations were carried out by private companies under the scientific direction of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena e Rimini, and are still unpublished.

The first site discussed in this review, starting from N of Ravenna, is the rural villa di Bocca delle Menate, Comacchio (FE), which was discovered in 1959 during the excavation of a drainage canal (fig. 1, no. 1). Since 2021, it has been the focus of a global archaeology project led by Prof. Rachele Dubbini from the University of Ferrara. A review of the 20th-century excavation data has been supplemented by new fieldwork, including drone flights, geophysical investigations, and systematic on-site artefact survey (fig. 4.A). The analysis of the legacy and novel finds confirms a date between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, with numerous stamped bricks, mainly from the *figlina Pansiana*, and a decent number of amphorae originating from various Mediterranean regions¹⁹.

¹⁶ BOSCHI 2011; BOSCHI 2012; BOSCHI 2024.

¹⁷ BERTI CERONI, SMURRA 2005; FRANCESCHELLI, MARABINI 2007; BOSCHI 2012.

¹⁸ CREMONINI 2019; AUGENTI *et alii* 2020.

¹⁹ DUBBINI *et alii* 2022; FIANO *et alii* 2022; RIZZO *et alii* 2023.

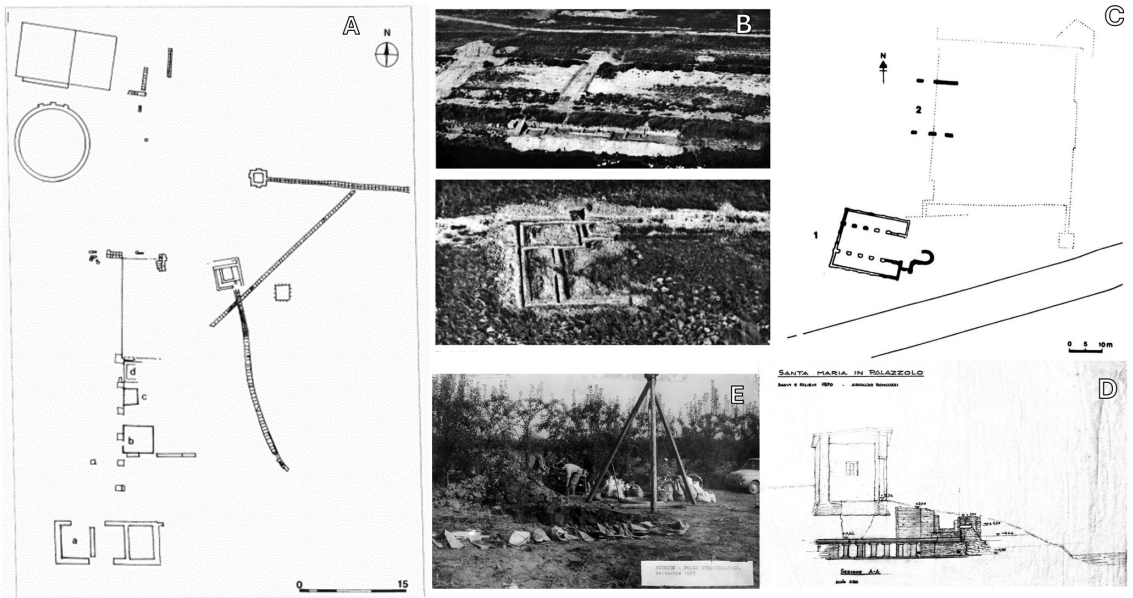


Fig. 4. Selected images from main sites, located N of Ravenna, which have been mentioned in the text: A. plan of the archaeological remains of the Villa in Bocca delle Menate (from RIZZO *et alii* 2023, fig. 3); B. aerial photos from the villa dell'Argine di Agosta (from GELICHI, CALAON 2007, fig. 1_02_13); C. plan of the church of S. Maria in Palazzolo and the adjoining villa remains (from BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1998, fig. 176); D. thermal complex of the villa next to S. Maria in Palazzolo (from Biblioteca Centrale del Campus di Ravenna, A. Roncuzzi archive); E. photo of ongoing excavation through a "stratigraphic" well carried out by Arnaldo Roncuzzi in September 1967 (from Biblioteca Centrale del Campus di Ravenna, A. Roncuzzi archive) (elaboration by Michele Abballe).

Moving southward, there are at least two villas located along what are believed to have been the banks of the *Fossa Augusti*, a navigable canal linking Ravenna with the Po River and the northern Adriatic cities: the villas of Agosta and Salto del Lupo. The villa of Argine di Agosta was excavated between 1970 and 1973, revealing a series of productive structures dated between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE (fig. 1, no. 2). While the first structure includes some furnace elements, such as slags and brick production waste, the second one has been tentatively associated with fishing activities, being located a short distance away from a watercourse (fig. 4.B). Instead, some masonry structures were uncovered at Salto del Lupo in 1962, but only hypothetically attributed to a villa (fig. 1, no. 3). A first phase, apparently from the Augustan period, was likely followed by a settlement crisis at the end of the 4th century CE, evidenced by a hoard dated to that time. However, subsequent phases extended up to the 7th century²⁰.

²⁰ DUBBINI *et alii* 2022; FIANO *et alii* 2022; RIZZO *et alii* 2023.

Moving south towards Ravenna, we encounter Palazzolo (fig. 1, no. 4), another site that poses significant interpretative challenges. Between 1966 and 1972 and again in 1996, traces of a thermal bath complex were uncovered, over which a religious building with three naves separated by pillars was later constructed (fig. 4.C-D). Additional masonry foundations were found nearby. Some of these structures may partially correspond to the *palatium modicum* that the medieval chronicler Andreas Agnellus of Ravenna attributed to King Theodoric (454/526 CE). However, the church of *Santa Maria infra balneum* and the monastery of *Santa Maria in Palazzolo* from the 9th century were superimposed on previous structures and, thus, the interpretation remains controversial²¹.

In this overview, we would also like to mention the archaeological site possibly identified as *Butrium* (fig. 1, no. 5), which is located in the vicinity of Palazzolo, around 4 km inland. Described by both Strabo (5, 1, 7 [214]) and Pliny (nat. 3, 115) as an Umbrian settlement, it was later included in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* as a *statio* located along the *Via Popilia*²². Archaeological layers dating from the pre-Roman era to Late Antiquity at depths

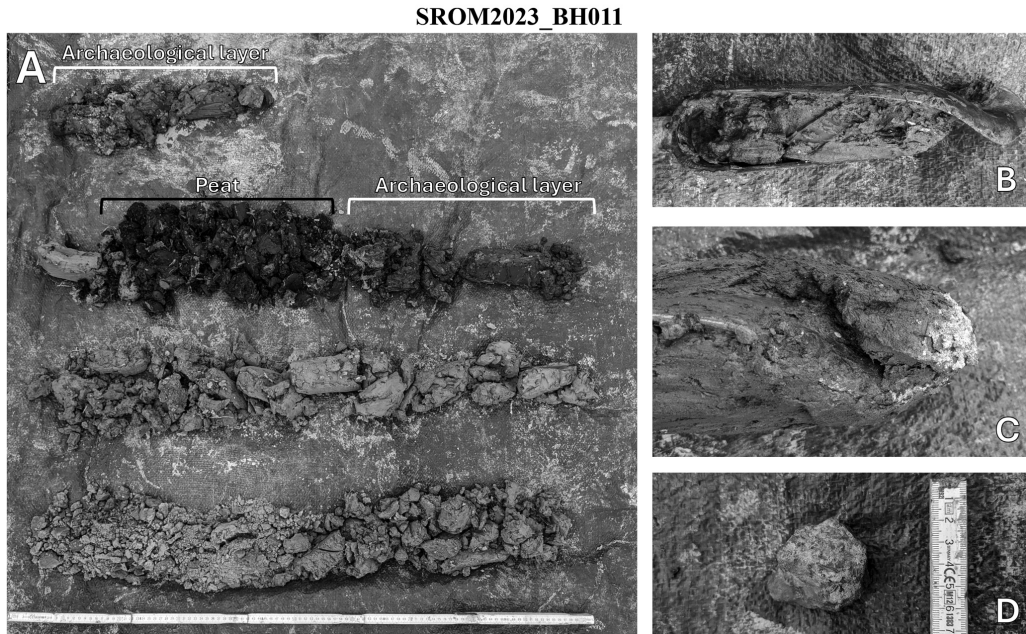


Fig. 5. Full stratigraphy (inset A) was recovered through the geoarchaeological hand auger borehole SROM2023_BH011, carried out at the site of *Butrium* in October 2023. The core revealed approximately 80 cm of potential archaeological stratigraphy, including two fragments of glass (inset B), mortar (inset C), and abundant building material (inset D). Although each horizontal line in the sediment log corresponds to 1 metre of depth, readers should note that the first 80 cm are missing, as the borehole was initiated within a modern channel (photos and elaboration by Michele Abballe).

²¹ BERMOND MONTANARI 1983; BALDINI LIPPOLIS 1998; NOVARA 2003.

²² MACCAGNANI 1994.

between 3 and 5.5 metres were identified in 1967, and they have been linked by Arnaldo Roncuzzi to this site (fig. 4.E), although not much of the original data exists today from this excavation²³. Recent geoarchaeological investigations carried out by the RecLands project confirm the presence of buried remains, including brick and glass fragments as well as mortar, below a peat layer (fig. 5). However, only additional research can help us assess the actual extent of the site and to understand whether we are dealing with a rural site, whether a farm or rural villa, or a more nucleated settlement²⁴.

Finally, two more sites were discovered N of Ravenna during recent work for the construction of a gas pipeline. Located in Via del Metano (fig. 1, no. 6), investigations revealed the presence of ancient remains over an area of approximately 100 square metres, at a depth ranging from -2.9 m to -4 m below the surface, beneath modern alluvial deposits and a peat layer. Preliminary data points to a site dated to the Late Republican-Early Imperial Roman Period, with a building with at least six rooms. However, the absence of well-appointed rooms, with, for example, mosaic floors, suggests that this structure may have been a farmstead rather than a rural villa²⁵.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SETTLEMENTS DYNAMICS SOUTH OF RAVENNA (Michele Abballe, Federica Boschi, Marco Cavalazzi)

Knowledge of the settlement patterns in the southern hinterland of Ravenna is still very fragmentary, with most of the data coming from Classe, which must have been a peri-urban area before the flourishing of the Late Roman harbour²⁶. The few archaeological remains seem to describe a rarefied landscape where necropolises, mainly located along the coastal sand dunes, punctuated areas occupied by rural farms and suburban villas. The most secure attestation of a villa comes from the archaeological investigations started by the Soprintendenza at San Severo Basilica (fig. 1, no. 7), with thermal baths datable to the Hadrianic period but probably inhabited until the 3rd century CE (fig. 6.A-B), before the site gained funerary and then religious functions between the 5th/6th centuries CE, until the 15th century CE²⁷.

Another likely residential building was discovered during excavations for the railway's construction in 1881 (fig. 1, no. 8). Drawings made at the time indicate the presence of a black-and-white mosaic floor with geometric patterns (fig. 6.C). Based on stylistic characteristics, the building was dated between the 1st and 2nd centuries CE²⁸. Closer to the coastline, along the present-day Via Romea Vecchia, there likely existed a residential quarter consisting of small dwellings with cocciopesto and fictile hexagonette floors, featuring inner courtyards spaced about 30 meters apart, indicating the use of a fully modular layout (fig. 1, no. 9). This quarter was uncovered during investigations in the last century

²³ BERMOND MONTANARI 1966.

²⁴ ABBALLE *et alii* 2025.

²⁵ CAPELLI, CASSONE 2022.

²⁶ MANZELLI 2000.

²⁷ AUGENTI *et alii* 2017.

²⁸ LANCIANI 1881; MANZELLI 2000; AUGENTI 2011.

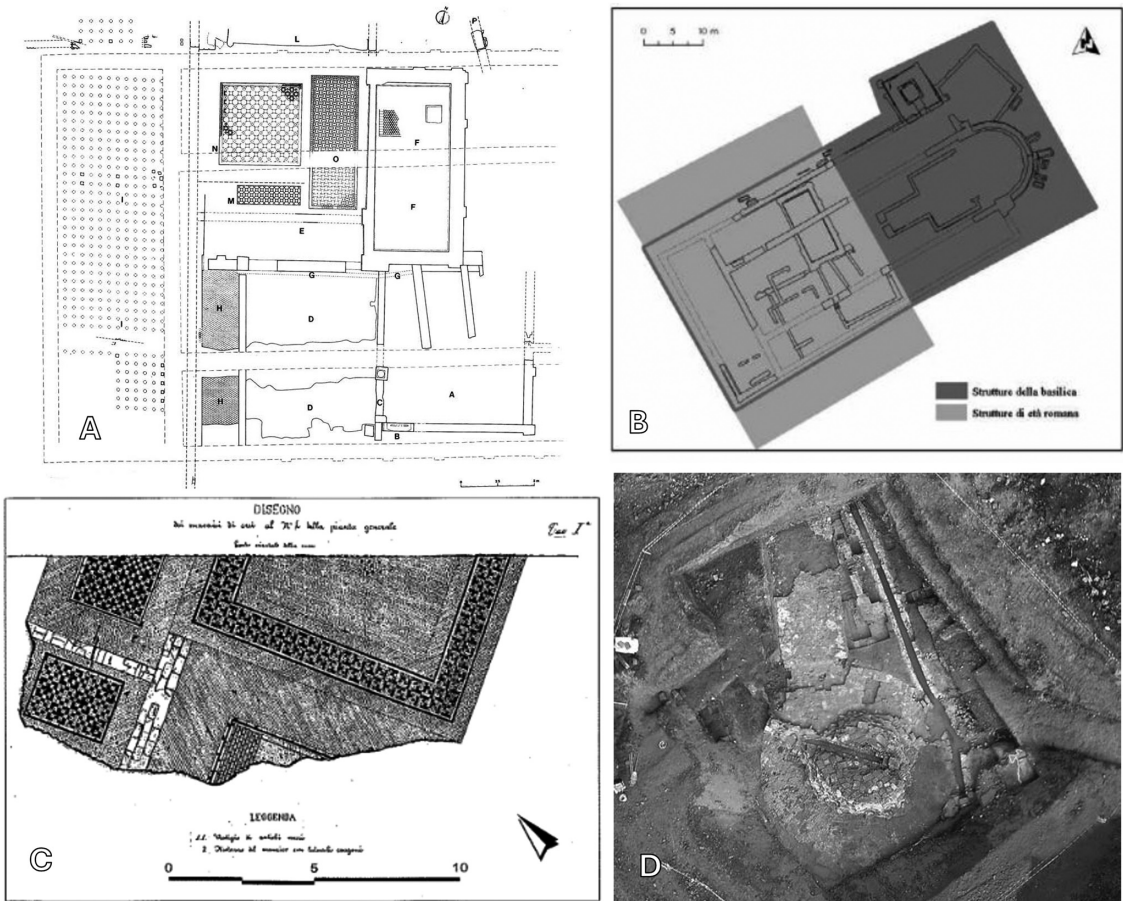


Fig. 6. Selected images from main sites, located S of Ravenna, which have been mentioned in the text: A. plan of the Roman villa adjacent to the church and monastery of S. Severo di Classe (from AUGENTI *et al.* 2010); B. schematic extent of the villa in relation to the church of S. Severo di Classe (from AUGENTI 2011); C. archaeological remains of a villa discovered by Lanciani in 1881 during excavations for the railway's construction (from AUGENTI 2011); D. pre-existing archaeological remains uncovered during excavation of a section of the city walls of Classe, likely to be identified as residential buildings (from AUGENTI 2011) (elaboration by Michele Abballe).

and has been dated between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE²⁹. Finally, additional dwelling structures were uncovered during the excavation of a section of the city walls of Classe, thus pre-dating the 5th century CE (fig. 1, no. 10). According to excavation reports, these walls intersected a pre-existing residential area (fig. 6.D), which may have been abandoned

²⁹ BERMOND MONTANARI 1975; LEPORE, MONTEVECCHI 2009; AUGENTI 2011.

later due to the challenges posed by water management in the area ³⁰. Further S of Classe, near the Torre ENAV, recent excavations for the gas pipeline have intercepted a sizable extra-urban villa equipped with a thermal bath complex that dates back to the early Roman Imperial period (fig. 1, no. 11).

The southernmost area considered in this paper corresponds to the municipal territory of Cervia. Earlier studies hypothesised the presence of nucleated settlements (*vici*) during the Roman and Late Antique periods, but recent surveys reveal a network of villas and farms, some of which appear to have been occupied as early as the Iron Age (fig. 1, no. 12). Several of these sites show continuity of occupation during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, in some cases extending into the 11th–12th centuries CE ³¹.

5. DISCUSSION

(Michele Abballe, Federica Boschi, Marco Cavalazzi, Paolo Maranzana)

In spite of the fragmentary evidence presented in this paper, it is possible to underscore a few common patterns of development in rural occupation over time. Firstly, the available data is primarily concentrated along the coastal ridges or in their immediate vicinity, which illustrates the prominent role of the *Via Popilia*, the main road along this section of the Adriatic coast, which ran through Ravenna ³². Similarly, communication networks in the inland lagoon routes, such as, for example, the famous *Fossa Augusta*, shaped the development of the settlement pattern of this area ³³. It is likely no coincidence that all villa sites along the lagoon coast are dated around the 1st century CE, likely during the Augustan Age, which is when these infrastructures across the Greater Ravenna Region were developed. If S of Ravenna, this important change has been attributed to the stationing of the fleet at Classe ³⁴, to the N, the reasoning should be sought primarily in the enhancement of transportation systems, both on land and water. Furthermore, the Po Delta became much more relevant also in terms of production area, bricks especially but probably also wood and fish, through the direct involvement of imperial estates ³⁵.

What remains less understood is the situation in the areas lying behind the dune ridges, now often buried under several meters of alluvial and reclamation deposits. The recently discovered villa near the Torre ENAV, located outside the beach ridges according to the CARG geological map ³⁶, demonstrates that even areas previously thought to be devoid of settlements can yield important new pieces of ancient occupation. Thus, the main obstacle to uncovering these missing elements of the settlement pattern is methodological in nature. Advancing our understanding requires more accurate mapping of buried features, improved chronological frameworks for the formation of coastal ridges, and the identification of

³⁰ LEPORE, MONTEVECCHI 2009; BOSCHI 2012.

³¹ AUGENTI *et alii* 2020; BONDI *et alii* 2024.

³² MACCAGNANI 1994.

³³ GELICHI 1991; NOVARA 1994; CALZOLARI 2007.

³⁴ MANZELLI 2008.

³⁵ ABBALLE *et alii* 2024.

³⁶ PRETI 2002.

the ancient mouths of the Apennine rivers, features that remain particularly elusive. For instance, our recent fieldwork assessed that the supposed site of *Butrium* is located one kilometre inland from the Etruscan-Roman Ages beach ridge, which largely corresponds to the present-day Via S. Alberto (fig. 3). This raises the question of whether the site's location may have been influenced by some other landform, perhaps of fluvial origin.

Instead, if we consider areas geomorphologically more stable as the inland territory of Cervia and the Decimano area, our surveys recorded how the scattered settlement pattern of the late Republican and early Imperial period, mostly villas and farms, is frequently anchored to a network of pre-existing sites dating to the end of the Iron Age³⁷. The study of their long-term development also shows signs of widespread crisis between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, although this trend remains to be confirmed further, as this consideration is mainly based on data from rescue excavations and surface surveys. Higher-resolution evidence is, however, available from Late Antiquity onward. In the Decimano area, we documented a widespread reorganisation of large Imperial-era villas between the 4th/5th and 7th centuries CE. While there is evidence of continuity in site use, the spatial layout was clearly restructured. Nonetheless, these sites retained their monumental character, as indicated by the abundant remains of marble fragments and mosaic tesserae³⁸. Further inland, instead, in the Bassa Romagna area, we recorded phenomena of reoccupation of flooded areas according to a scattered settlement pattern, with small and medium-sized sites (on average 2,000 square metres) not rich enough to be categorised as villas³⁹.

Between the 7th and 8th centuries CE, the abandonment of earlier villas and farms became a widespread phenomenon. However, surface surveys have identified traces of continuity from the Roman to the Early Medieval period, particularly in areas such as the Bassa Romagna, the Decimano, and the Cervese. The precise nature of these remains, however, remains unclear. Despite these uncertainties, our work underscored that processes of settlement nucleation – characterised by clusters of closely spaced dwellings – began to emerge during the Middle Ages, especially around Cervia⁴⁰, NW of Bagnacavallo⁴¹, as well as N of nearby Cesena⁴².

6. CONCLUSION (Federica Boschi, Marco Cavalazzi)

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the archaeological data regarding settlement patterns and environmental transformations in the Roman and Late Antique Ravenna Greater Region, with a particular emphasis on rural villas and habitation sites. Despite the often fragmentary nature of the data, our work enabled us to point to several key trends that highlight the relationship between the settlement pattern and changes in the rural landscape.

³⁷ MANZELLI 2008; MANCASSOLA 2008; AUGENTI *et alii* 2020; BONDI *et alii* 2024.

³⁸ CAVALAZZI, MANCASSOLA 2021.

³⁹ CAVALAZZI *et alii* 2018; CAVALAZZI 2023.

⁴⁰ AUGENTI *et alii* 2020; BONDI *et alii* 2024.

⁴¹ CAVALAZZI *et alii* 2018.

⁴² NEGRELLI 2008.

The majority of settlements were located along coastal ridges or near major transportation routes, such as the *Via Popilia* and *Fossa Augusta*; this reinforces the idea that Roman and Late Antique settlement patterns were strongly influenced by infrastructural development. Villas and rural estates, particularly from the 1st century CE, were often clustered near both land and water (i.e. artificial canals and navigable waterways) routes, suggesting that the development of the region's transportation network played a key role in shaping settlement dynamics.

The transformation of the landscape, particularly the reclamation of wetlands and coastal areas from the 4th century onward, significantly impacted the visibility and preservation of these settlements. Despite the challenges posed by modern land reclamation, recent geoarchaeological techniques, including remote and proximal sensing, have provided new insights into the original locations of villas, such as the villa of Bocca delle Menate, and the environmental changes that shaped their development.

The Roman and Late Antique villa network was characterized by a high degree of spatial dispersion, but by the 3rd to 8th centuries CE, a noticeable decline and reorganization occurred. In some areas, such as Cervia and the Decimano, continuity of occupation is evident into the Early Middle Ages, though with marked shifts in settlement structure, such as the emergence of smaller, nucleated settlements or the transformation of villas into churches and other religious structures.

In particular, the study of villas such as the villa of Argine di Agosta and Santa Maria in Palazzolo reveals significant shifts from productive agricultural estates to more complex residential and religious spaces. This pattern points to the broader economic and social transitions of the Late Antiquity period, where rural settlements increasingly became integrated into broader religious and administrative systems, sometimes losing their originally rural characteristics.

Our findings suggest that, although many villas and farmsteads were abandoned by the 7th to 8th centuries CE, others were restructured and adapted to the changing environmental and social conditions of Late Antiquity. The transformation of these settlements, coupled with environmental changes such as the infilling of lagoons and the progradation of the coastline, presents a dynamic narrative of adaptation, decline, and renewal.

In conclusion, while many questions remain unanswered, the evidence gathered from the ongoing archaeological research offers valuable insights into the long-term development of settlements and the role of environmental changes in shaping Roman and Late Antique landscapes. The combination of archaeological excavation and modern scientific techniques will continue to refine our understanding of how villas and rural settlements interacted with their environment, contributing to a deeper understanding of life in this pivotal period of history.

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RIASSUNTO

Durante il periodo romano e tardoantico, il vasto territorio intorno la città di Ravenna era in gran parte caratterizzata da un paesaggio umido, composto da lagune, paludi e acquitrini, che influenzarono profondamente l'organizzazione degli insediamenti, il comportamento sociale e la cultura dei suoi abitanti. Oggi resta ben poco di questo ambiente, e la lunga storia delle bonifiche rende ancora più complesse le indagini archeologiche e l'interpretazione dei dati attualmente esistenti. Questo contributo propone una sintesi dei dati archeologici relativi alle ville romane e tardoantiche lungo l'area costiera, inquadrandoli nelle trasformazioni di lungo periodo del paesaggio regionale. Sulla base della letteratura pubblicata e di recenti scoperte provenienti sia dall'archeologia preventiva sia da progetti di ricerca universitari, offriamo una panoramica aggiornata dello stato delle conoscenze, evidenziando al contempo le difficoltà poste dalla natura frammentaria e discontinua della documentazione e dal peculiare contesto ambientale.

Parole chiave: archeologia del paesaggio; geoarcheologia; archeologia delle aree umide; paesaggi bonificati; Ravenna.

ABSTRACT

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During the Roman and Late Antique periods, the Ravenna Greater Region was largely characterised by wetlands, consisting of lagoons, marshes, and swamps, which profoundly shaped the settlement patterns, social behaviour, and culture of its inhabitants. Today, little remains of this environment, and the long history of land reclamation further complicates archaeological investigations and data interpretation. This paper presents a synthesis of archaeological data on Roman and Late Antique villas along the coastal area, framed within the region's long-term landscape transformations. Drawing on published literature and recent discoveries from both development-led archaeology and academic research, we offer an updated overview of the current state of knowledge, while also highlighting the challenges posed by the sparse and fragmented nature of the evidence and by the peculiar environmental context.

Keywords: landscape archaeology; geoarchaeology; wetland archaeology; reclaimed landscapes; Ravenna.

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