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Dario Monti

## Monte Sant'Angelo (Terracina, Latium) before the Roman Colony. Three Millennia of Occupation from Prehistory to Archaic Age

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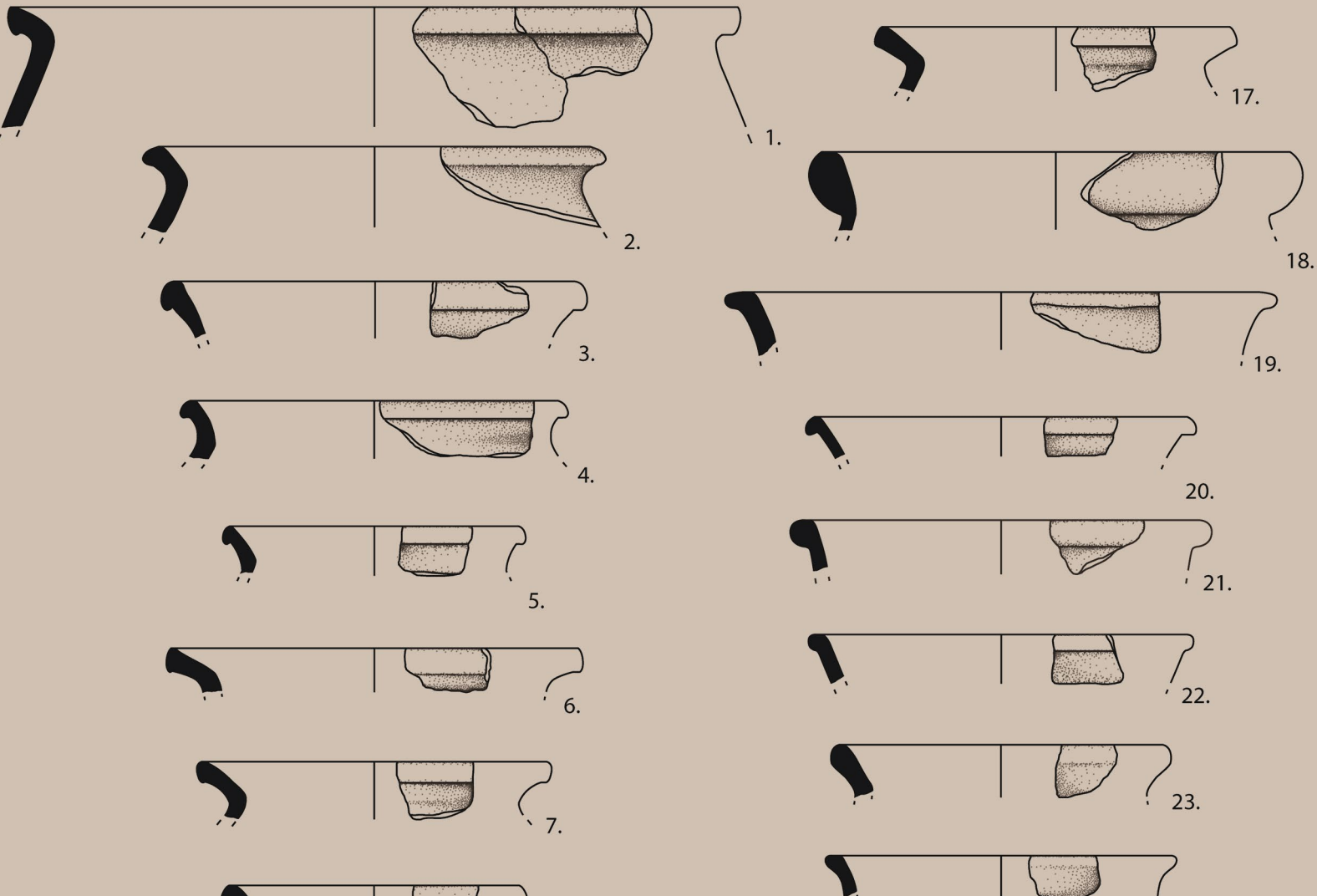
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## ABSTRACT

### Monte Sant'Angelo (Terracina, Latium) before the Roman Colony

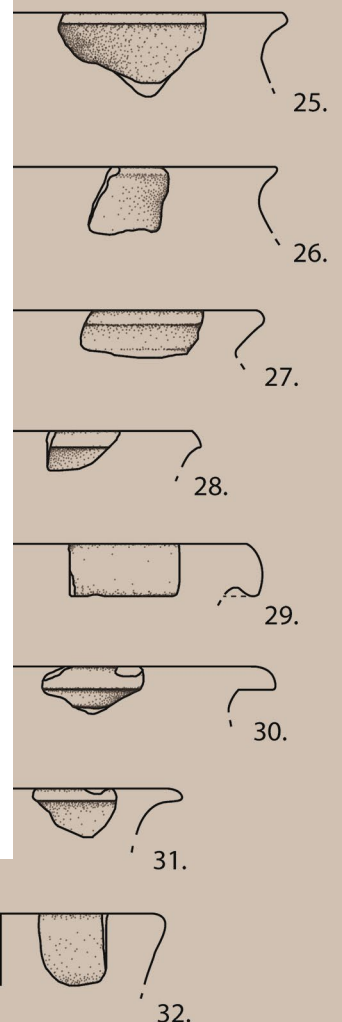
Three Millennia of Occupation from Prehistory to Archaic Age

Dario Monti

This paper investigates the pre-Roman phases of Monte Sant'Angelo in Terracina (Latium), a site extensively excavated between 2019 and 2024 by the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich. The primary aim of the excavations was to understand the monumental Roman sanctuary established on the hill during the Republican period. However, the fieldwork brought to light a substantial quantity of earlier archaeological material, allowing for a reconstruction of the site's long history prior to the sanctuary's construction. This contribution offers an initial synthesis of the site's occupation history, beginning with the earliest signs of prehistoric activity. Despite the severe disturbance of earlier stratigraphy caused by Roman and medieval interventions, the analysis of the material culture enables the reconstruction of a reasonably coherent chronological sequence. Beyond identifying the main phases of settlement, the paper also explores the centre's political and economic role within the little-known southern margins of the ancient region of Latium adiectum.

## KEYWORDS

Prehistory, Protohistory, Pre-Roman, Latium, Terracina, impasto pottery, archaeological artefacts



# Monte Sant'Angelo (Terracina, Latium) before the Roman Colony

## Three Millennia of Occupation from Prehistory to Archaic Age

### Introduction

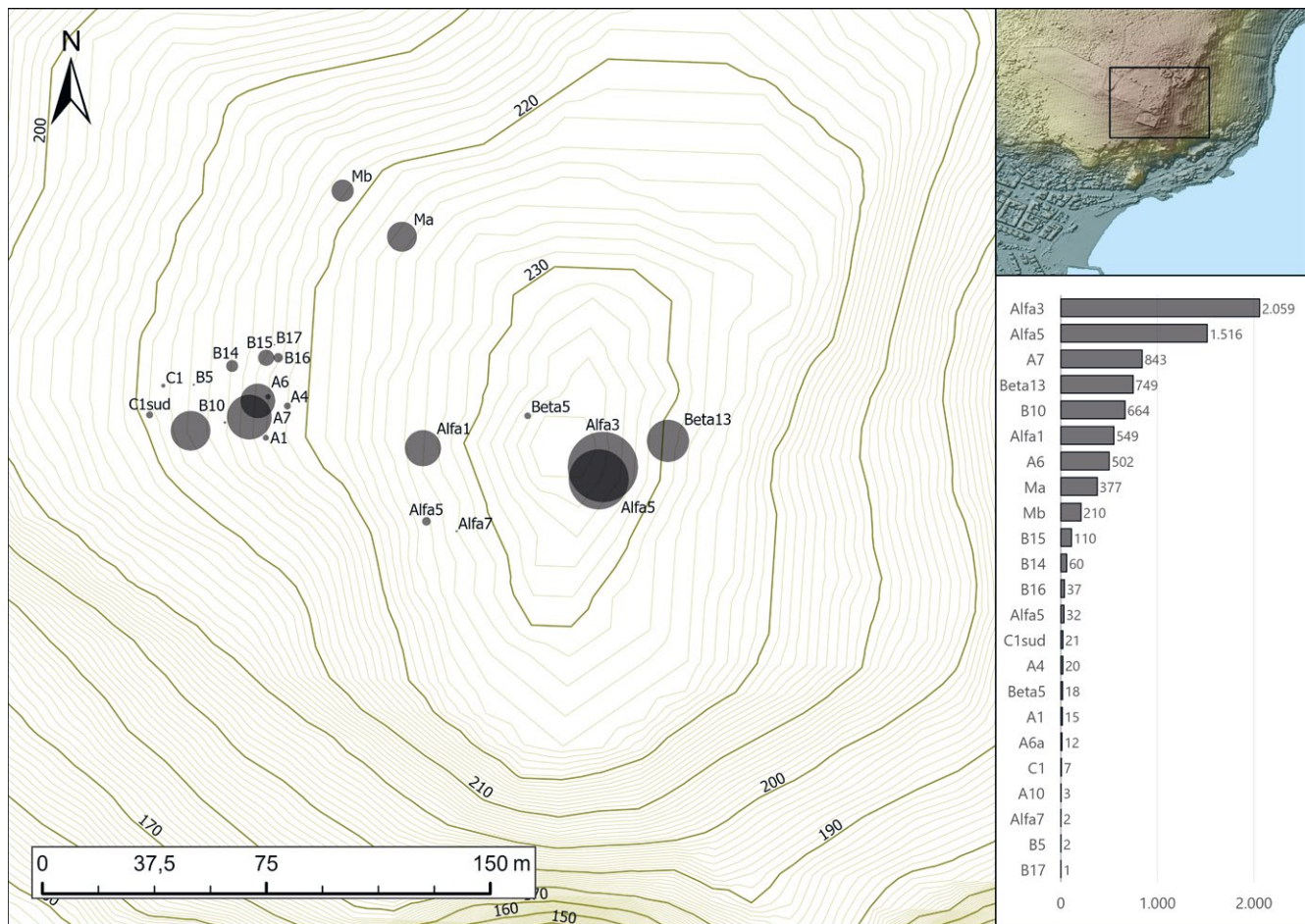
1 The limestone hill of Monte Sant'Angelo (c. 230 m asl), located immediately to the northeast of the centre of Terracina, forms a natural barrier at the southern edge of the Pontine Plain – a sort of natural gate for the ancient region of Latium adiectum – separating it first from the Fondi plain and then from those of Campania. Between 2018 and 2024, the area was the focus of a research project led by the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich (LMU)<sup>1</sup>, aimed at investigating the Roman sanctuary partially overbuilt in the medieval period by a large monastic complex. The project included five excavation campaigns between 2019 and 2024 which explored various areas of the sanctuary, including the ›Piccolo Tempio‹<sup>2</sup>, ›Campo Trincerato‹, and ›Oracolo‹ sectors. From the first season of excavation, a substantial quantity of material prior to the Roman period came to light, now estimated to represent roughly one third of all finds from the site. Although almost entirely recovered from secondary contexts, due to the disruption of the original stratigraphy by extensive Roman and medieval construction, this evidence merits an article in itself<sup>3</sup>.

2 Before addressing the analysis of this material and what it can reveal about the role played by Monte Sant'Angelo from prehistory to the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., it is important to clarify both the limitations and the potential of this type of evidence. As noted above, most of the material derives from secondary deposition. The extensive construction works carried out during the Roman and medieval periods almost completely disrupted the earlier

1 The project, a DFG-funded initiative entitled »Im Schatten des Iuppiter Anxur. Terracina und sein Heiligtum in hellenistischer Zeit«, was directed by F. Diosono, M. Knechtel, and P. Scheduling. It was carried out in cooperation with the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Frosinone e Latina; the Museo Civico Archeologico ›Pio Capponi‹, Terracina; the Technical University of Munich, Geodesy; the Technical University of Munich, Building History; the Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, Department of History and Cultures (DISCI); the German Archaeological Institute, Department Rome; and the Europeana EAGLE Project.

2 This sector has already been the focus of a publication in this journal, Diosono – Scheduling 2022.

3 Since the first year of excavation, I have been responsible for the study of the pre-Roman phases of the site, a task I completed in 2025, supported in the final stage by a *Werkvertrag* from the LMU.



1

Fig. 1: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Map showing the distribution of impasto pottery across the trenches. In the central map, this is visualised with scaled circles representing the number of fragments found in each trench; the diagram on the right shows the exact quantities.

stratigraphy<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the large-scale levelling operations required to terrace the natural slope of the hill, excavation has shown that the successive building phases frequently reached down the level of previous structures' foundations or even the geological one, repeatedly disturbing the pre-existing layers. As a result, it is generally not possible to establish stratigraphic associations for dating or interpreting the material predating the Roman phase. Moreover, all these post-depositional disturbances contributed to the abrasion of the ceramics' surfaces, often compromising their identification, particularly in terms of surface features. A further challenge lies in the lack of regional-scale ceramic fabric catalogues which significantly limits the potential for chronological attribution. For these reasons, the analysis presented here is based primarily on morphological criteria by typological comparisons of the sole diagnostic sherds.

<sup>3</sup> As previously noted, the major construction phases – especially the creation, in Roman times, of the terraces in the area of the ›Piccolo Tempio‹<sup>5</sup> – resulted in a substantial alteration of the hill's original morphology and involved the large-scale movement of soil. It is therefore highly likely that part of the material prior to the Roman period does not simply come from stratigraphy disturbed in later periods but was also displaced along with hundreds of cubic metres of soil, potentially over considerable distances from its original context. The displacement could be responsible for the poor state of many fragments, presenting worn surfaces and rounded fractures. Nevertheless, when the

<sup>4</sup> The few surviving traces of structures predating the first phase of the sanctuary, framed in the Hellenistic period (Diosono – Scheduling 2022, 187–189; Diosono et al. (forthcoming)), will be the subject of a dedicated publication currently in preparation.

<sup>5</sup> Diosono – Scheduling 2022, 176–189.

main marker of pre-Roman phases, the impasto ware, is plotted in a GIS environment onto the Monte Sant'Angelo site map, it becomes clear that the highest concentrations occur, unsurprisingly, in the excavation areas closest to the summit (Fig. 1). It is therefore highly probable that the main area of occupation was indeed located in this upper sector, although some of this material was displaced or washed downhill by erosion.

4 Despite these limitations, the material analysed here is, as this paper seeks to demonstrate, of considerable significance. It sheds new light on the pre-Roman phases of occupation in the southernmost sector of ancient Latium – a region about which we still know relatively little for these periods. Although the excavation project had different research questions, it has nevertheless made it possible, for the first time, to gain a clearer understanding of the pre-colonial situation at the site which until now had been known primarily through ancient literary sources. Over time, a number of archaeological findings, albeit limited in both quantity and quality, had already begun to provide some material grounding for these accounts and to suggest an even earlier phase of occupation in the area<sup>6</sup>.

## The Earliest Phases

5 To date, identifying the earliest phases of occupation at the site remains challenging. These phases are represented by a notably limited number of ceramic fragments, most of which fall within broad chronological ranges. Because of that, it is difficult to define whether they reflect a sporadic presence, evidence of short-term activities, or, rather, a stable settlement.

6 Among the sherds tentatively associated with the site's earliest occupation is a rim fragment with an incurving, thickened profile and a flattened top, bearing a ›spool handle‹ (it. *ansa a rocchetto*) attached beneath (Fig. 2, 1). The handle shows faint vertical ribbing. The fabric is coarse, with inclusions averaging 1.5 mm, and its colour is reddish-yellow (Munsell 5YR7/8). Traces of surface polishing are still visible despite the worn condition. At present, no direct parallels are known for the rim morphology, but strong affinities exist with Late Neolithic ceramic shapes. In particular, the handle morphology and fabric resemble a series of spool and ›saddled‹ (it. *ansa insellata*) handles from Casale Valleranello (Rome), attributed to the Late Neolithic<sup>7</sup>. These finds, together with other diagnostic elements, have been linked to the ›Diana culture‹, widely attested across central Italy<sup>8</sup>.

7 Of specific interest is a small, polished stone axe of sub-trapezoidal form and measuring just over 3 cm in length which may be broadly attributed to the Neolithic period (Fig. 3, 4). Based on its macroscopic characteristics, the raw material appears to belong to the group of metamorphic rocks commonly referred to as ›green stones‹, and more specifically to serpentinite.

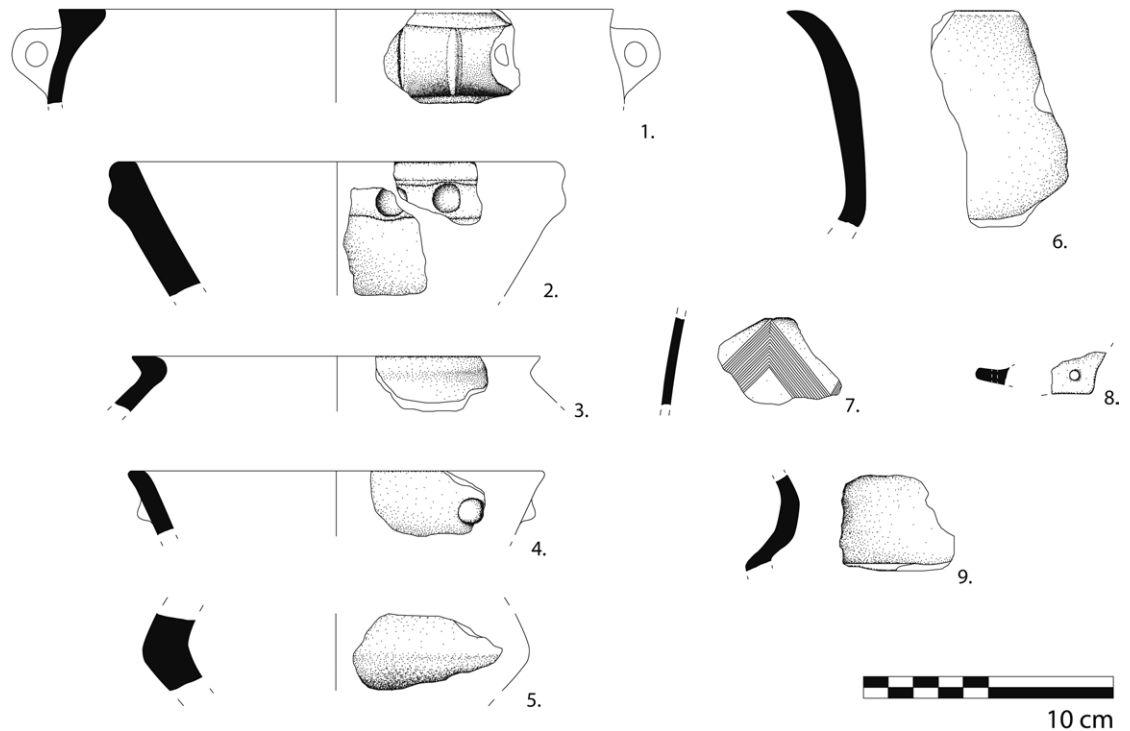
8 Even more difficult to contextualise are two non-joining fragments of impasto pottery, likely pertaining to the same vessel (Fig. 2, 2). They probably belonged to a conical bowl with a slightly flattened rim and a horizontal, rounded cord decorated with fingertip impressions just below the lip. The surface is worn, though traces of polishing remain visible; the fabric is coarse, and the colour reddish-brown (Munsell 2.5YR4/4).

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6 With the exception of the Epigravettian levels at Riparo Salvini (Alessio et al. 1993) and the sporadic mention of Gaudio-related material reportedly from the wider area of Terracina (Carboni 2020, 100 fig. 3.6.10), evidence has remained extremely limited. A particularly noteworthy case is the protohistoric material reported by A. Di Rosa (cited in Di Fazio 2020, 107) in the northwestern sector of the ›acropolis‹ of Terracina, an area subject to field surveys which, unfortunately, remain unpublished.

7 Anzidei et al. 2020a, 161 fig. 2.4.48 a–d; 148–163.

8 La Marca 2020, 439 and references therein.



2

Fig. 2: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the prehistoric phase of the site. Scale 1 : 3

Although cords so close to the rim are relatively uncommon, comparable examples – though chronologically ambiguous – can be found in the wider region. Bowls with similar profiles and corded rims are attested in the Latium region during the Final Eneolithic, as seen in the ›Ortucchio‹ facies at Osteria del Curato-Via Cinquefondi (Rome)<sup>9</sup>. Comparisons can also be found, however, with later material: for instance, a fragment from Torre del Padiglione (Aprilia) in an area yielding Final Bronze Age material<sup>10</sup>, and another stored in the Antiquarium of Nettuno with a similar dating<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Other sherds which are difficult to classify include a light brownish (Munsell 5YR7/6) incurved and flared rim, almost almond-shaped but flattened on top (Fig. 2, 3), which closely resembles a rim from Casetta Mistici (Rome)<sup>12</sup>, attributed to the Late Eneolithic (›Ortucchio‹ facies, phase IV)<sup>13</sup>. Also noteworthy is a carinated body sherd (Fig. 2, 5), whose small diameter recalls Neo-Eneolithic material from Torre Spaccata (Rome)<sup>14</sup>. The fragment is reddish-yellow (Munsell 5YR7/6) and shows exterior polishing. Another sherd which seems to be dating from the Late Eneolithic is a reddish-yellow (Munsell 5YR7/8) thin wall, with a fine fabric and a comb-made decoration of very regular continuous triangle motifs (Fig. 2, 7). These characteristics find neat comparison in the Eneolithic materials (facies Ortucchio or ›del pettine trascinato‹) from the nearby of Rome, such as those from Trigoria-Via dei Zerbi<sup>15</sup>. Speaking of Eneolithic, it is worth mentioning, incidentally, that evidence from the Middle Eneolithic (ca. 3330–2860 B.C.), attributed to the Gaudio facies, has also been already reported from Terracina<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Anzidei et al. 2020b, 626–639.

<sup>10</sup> Alessandri 2013, 205 fig. 26, 1. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Tol et al. 2011/2012, 177 pl. IX, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Carboni et al. 2020, 393 fig. 2.5.105, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Carboni et al. 2020, 390.

<sup>14</sup> Carboni – Anzidei 2020a, 272 figs. 2.4.197 and 2.4.198, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Carboni – Anzidei 2020b, 319 fig. 2.5.25, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Carboni 2020, 100 fig. 3.6.10.

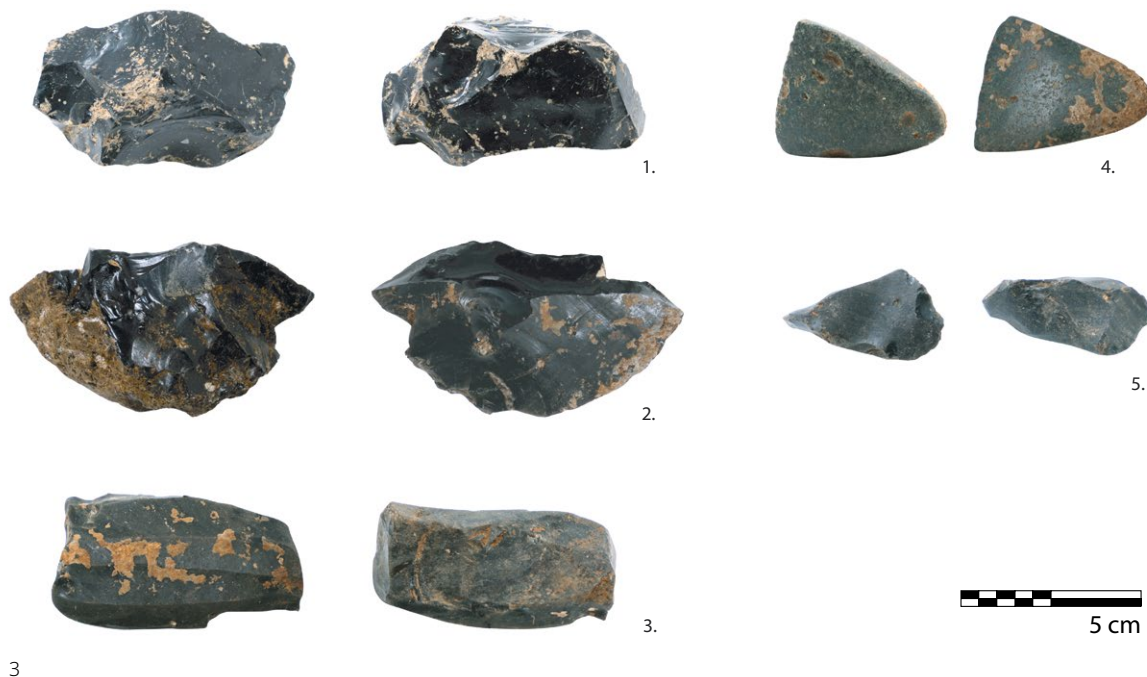


Fig. 3: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Lithic material from the prehistoric phase of the site. Scale 1 : 2

10 Three additional fragments may date to the Middle Bronze Age (MBA). The first is a dark-coloured rim (Munsell 5YR3/1) from a deep, conical bowl with a lip flattened on top and a small knob (it. *bugna*) beneath the rim (Fig. 2, 4). This shape is relatively widespread, but finds comparison, for instance, in the type 363c bowls of the Grotta Nuova culture as defined by D. Cocchi Genick<sup>17</sup>. The second fragment is part of a square handle with a vertical perforation, brown in colour (Munsell 7.5YR4/3; Fig. 2, 6); the hole's position suggests that it is one half of a handle, potentially corresponding to Cocchi Genick's type 530B<sup>18</sup>. The third fragment is an outcurving, thinned rim belonging to a vessel with a vertical neck (it. *vaso a collo*), also likely datable to the MBA. This fragment has yellowish-red (Munsell 5YR4/6) and polished surfaces. Several comparisons exist, but one particularly convincing example comes from Grotta La Sassa (Sonnino, LT), assigned to MBA phase II<sup>19</sup>.

11 As this overview suggests, defining the earliest phases of the site remains problematic. The broader prehistoric and protohistoric record of the Pontine region is further complicated by major environmental and geomorphological transformations over time, especially changes in the coastline from the Pleistocene to the present and alluviation phenomena along the foothills during the Late Holocene<sup>20</sup>. These shifts significantly affect the visibility of early occupation, chiefly in the lowlands. As observed elsewhere<sup>21</sup>, this results in a pronounced detection bias favouring sites located at higher altitude – such as in the present case. If the proposed chronological attributions are correct, the Monte Sant'Angelo site may exhibit a long-term continuity, in terms of broad occupation phases, potentially exceeding that of the nearby site of Tratturo Caniò<sup>22</sup>, where continuity has been documented from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) through to the Early Iron Age (EIA), followed by Archaic and Roman phases.

12 Unfortunately, the absence of a proper stratigraphic context and the scarcity of material make it difficult to qualify the nature of prehistoric human presence on

17 Cocchi Genick 2001, 260 f.

18 Cocchi Genick 2001, 378–381.

19 Alessandri – Rolfo 2015, 112 fig. 5, 4.

20 Sevink et al. 2023.

21 Alessandri – Rolfo 2015, 118–120.

22 Feiken et al. 2011/2012.

the Monte Sant'Angelo site. In particular, there is no definitive evidence to determine whether this presence should be interpreted as occasional, perhaps seasonal or linked to specific circumstances, or as a form of stable settlement, albeit likely on a small scale. A clue in favour of the latter hypothesis may be provided by a series of obsidian cores, probable knapping debris and possibly a tool (Fig. 3, 5)<sup>23</sup> found in various excavation areas and attributable to the prehistoric phases of site use. Among these, a very notable example is a core showing clear lamellar detachments (Fig. 3, 3), indicating the on-site production of tools in this material. Although, to date, no archaeometric analyses have been carried out on the obsidian to determine its provenance; it must be highlighted that the nearest possible one would have been the Pontine Islands, specifically Palmarola.

## The Protohistoric Phases

13 Whereas the earlier phases discussed above are supported by only a very limited number of finds, the later stages of the protohistoric period attest to a greater degree of organisation and extension of the site. The find materials do suggest that a settlement existed during the Late and Final Bronze Age (henceforth LBA and FBA) and EIA. The material attributable to these phases consists exclusively of impasto pottery, displaying recurrent and fairly homogeneous characteristics, distinguishable macroscopically into two different firing types. The first is characterised by surfaces in various shades of black (mostly Munsell 5YR3/1), the result of strongly reducing firing conditions; the second shows reddish hues (mainly Munsell YR7/8), indicating a more oxidising atmosphere during firing. The formal repertoire is rather limited and comprises mainly bowls, cups, most of which carinated, and jars. Also, tentatively attributable to these phases are several lids' fragments whose ceramic body can be classified into the aforementioned categories. Their typological attribution, however, is complicated by the simplicity of the forms, which may refer to a much broader chronological horizon.

14 In general, the pottery from these phases is relatively small in size, with rim diameters averaging around 14 cm for jars and 16 cm for bowls. Large storage vessels and decorative features are rare, with the latter consisting mainly of oblique ribbing on the shoulders of bowls and cups, or fingernail and fingertip impressions on applied cords and handles.

15 The phases examined here, which will be more specifically articulated through the presentation of the material, are characterised by a certain degree of typological uniformity over a wide area covering a good part of Tyrrhenian central Italy. For this reason, numerous comparisons can be drawn, although an exhaustive discussion falls outside the scope of this contribution which will instead offer a selective set of parallels sufficient to contextualise the attested ceramic productions.

16 As previously mentioned, carinated shapes – bowls (it. *scodelle*) and, for the smaller diameter, cups (it. *tazze*) – are among the most recurrent morphologies in the local assemblage. Of these, only four fragments preserve the profile from the carena to the rim. The first has an everted simply rounded rim and a sinuous profile (Fig. 4, 1). The carena is rounded and decorated with oblique ribbing. The shape strongly recalls examples such as those from Nemi<sup>24</sup> and the nearer site of Castel Nuovo<sup>25</sup>, suggesting a dating to the FBA. The second has a flaring, slightly everted and rounded rim, a carena with a sub-triangular

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23 E.g. Attema et al. 2007/2008, fig. 5, 11. It is worth highlighting that in the cited report of the Astura and Nettuno survey (2003–2005) only four of over 1054 lithic artefacts were made of obsidian.

24 Bruni 2009, 308 fig. 4, 2.

25 Angle et al. 1992, 302 pl. 8, 5.

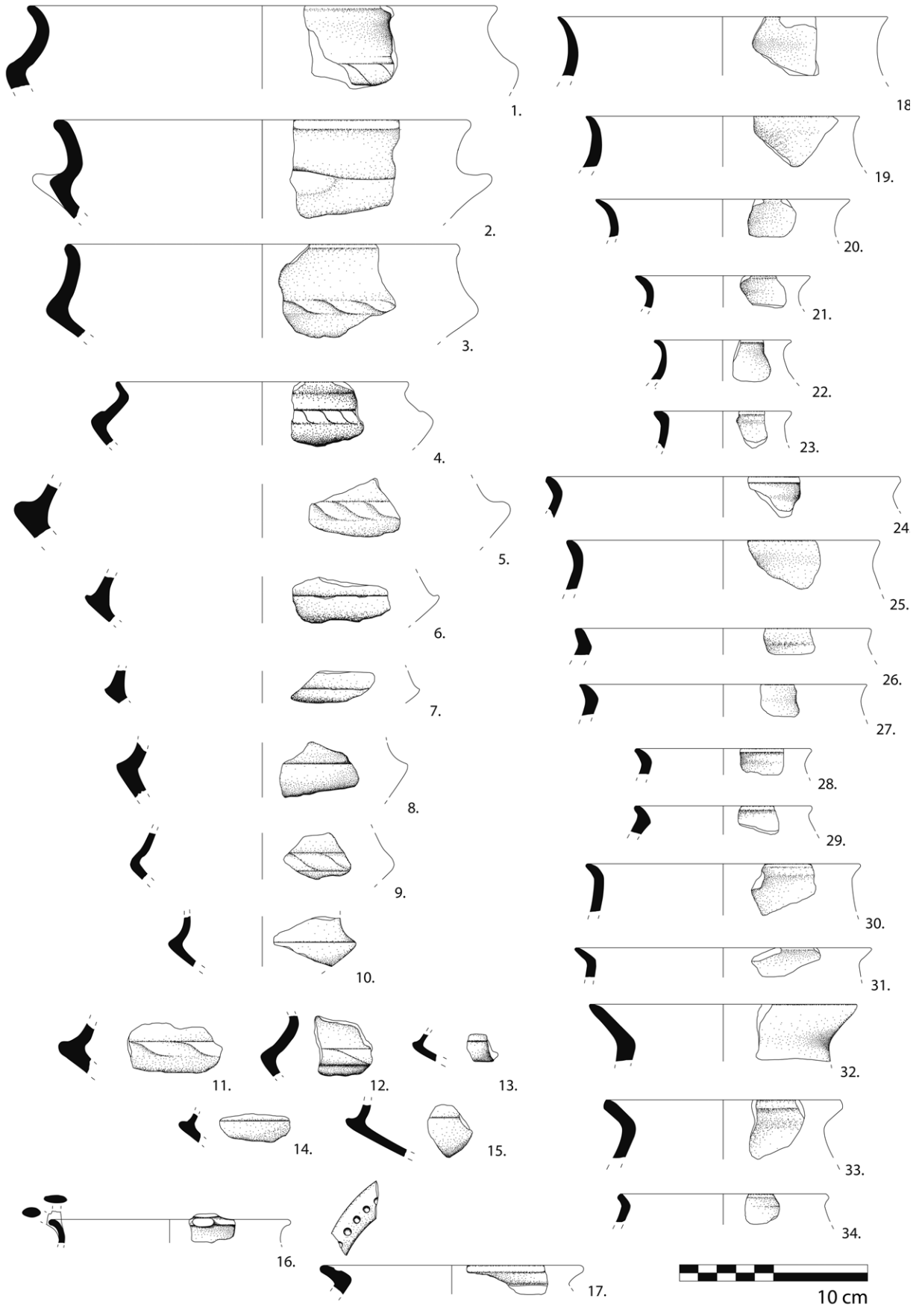


Fig. 4: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the protohistoric phase of the site. Scale 1 : 3

cross-section, and a large handle (possibly with perforations) emerging from it (Fig. 4, 2). Parallels such as, for example, those from Osteria del Curato (Rome)<sup>26</sup> or *Ficana*<sup>27</sup> suggest, again, a dating from the early stages of the FBA. The third fragment shows a more sinuous profile, with a rounded carena decorated with oblique ribbing (Fig. 4, 3). The fragment is very similar to the first one and it is thus possible to propose, based on the mentioned comparisons, a dating from the FBA. The last fragment has a more rigid biconical profile, with a markedly flared and slightly thinned rim (Fig. 4, 4). The carena is decorated with oblique ribbing. These characteristics suggest a dating from the FBA or the EIA<sup>28</sup>.

17 Numerous additional fragments preserve only the maximum expansion corresponding to the carena. In the local assemblage, both sharply angled (Fig. 4, 6–8, 10) and rounded (Fig. 4, 5, 9, 11–15) carenas occur – sometimes with concave upper surfaces (Fig. 4, 5–7, 11, 13–15) – as well as barely perceptible rounded carenas (Fig. 4, 9). Although it is not possible to determine the shapes and typology based on the carenas alone, it is likely that the smaller ones belonged, as said, to cups rather than bowls. Furthermore, in many cases a precise chronological attribution of these fragments remains elusive. They could belong from the later phases of the Bronze Age, particularly the FBA, to the EIA<sup>29</sup>. Carinated shapes, however, already appear widely during the earlier phases of LBA, the ›Recent Bronze Age‹ (henceforth RBA; it. *Bronzo Recente*)<sup>30</sup>. To this latter seems to be tentatively dated a hand-made, dark coloured (Munsell 10YR2/1), carinated fragment belonging to a small cup (Fig. 5, 14) which recalls the family 30, type 1 of the LBA repertoire made by I. Damiani<sup>31</sup>. In general, however, based on the examples with clearer dating the most recurrent shapes, and the relative abundance of material from these phases the majority of the carinated vessels should be attributed to the FBA and EIA.

18 Unlike the previous shapes, jars with everted (Fig. 4, 18–22) or flared (Fig. 4, 23–34) rims seem to have a more secure chronological placement within the EIA. However, it is likely that some examples – mainly those with strongly flaring profiles and sharply angled rims – may date back to the FBA<sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately, the lack of stratigraphic associations prevents a more definitive resolution, and consequently, these chronological attributions carry a considerable degree of uncertainty. A series of rims fits fully within this scenario with parallels in both FBA and EIA contexts (Fig. 4, 31–34). For example, material from the nearby area of Torre del Giglio<sup>33</sup> suggests the former, while sites such as *Fidene*<sup>34</sup> demonstrate the continuity of such morphologies into the latter. The difficulty to identify a clear-cut distinction between the two periods is frequently encountered in other contexts within southern Lazio, despite the region being the focus of wide-ranging studies for these phases<sup>35</sup>.

19 Among the fragments which are especially challenging to classify is a dark (Munsell 10YR2/1), polished impasto everted and rounded rim which shows the joint of a double-handle, likely a ›mullioned handle‹ (it. *ansa bifora*; Fig. 4, 16). Many comparisons can be made across Tyrrhenian central Italy for this type of handle<sup>36</sup>, suggesting a dating

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26 Carboni – Ragni 1984, 53. 63 pl. 8, 1.

27 Alessandri 2013, 363 fig. 180.3, B64 and, particularly, B68.

28 Particularly the flaring of the rim, for which cf., e.g., Bietti Sestieri 1992, pl. 23, 22 c–e.

29 Cf. e.g. Fig. 4, 7 with Di Gennaro et al. 2009, 148 fig. 5, 3. See also from Capua (Campania) the abundant evidence of carinated vessels dated from the EIA in Melandri 2011, pl. 2-XXII, 3a and 3c, or tabs 2-XXIX and XXX.

30 See e.g. their presence in Damiani 2010.

31 Damiani 2010, 219 pl. 59, 10.

32 Giontella – Villedieu 2009, 60.

33 Alessandri 2007, 91 fig. 3.56, 41 for thinned rims and fig. 3.56, 42 for more rounded examples.

34 Cf. Di Gennaro et al. 2009, 153 fig. 8, 8 for thinned rims and fig. 8, 9 for more rounded ones.

35 Alessandri 2007; Alessandri 2013.

36 E.g. for Latium, *Osteria dell'Osa*, cf. Bietti Sestieri 1992, pl. 20–23, shapes nos. 19–21; for Campania, Capua, cf. Melandri 2011, pl. 12 (2-XXIX).

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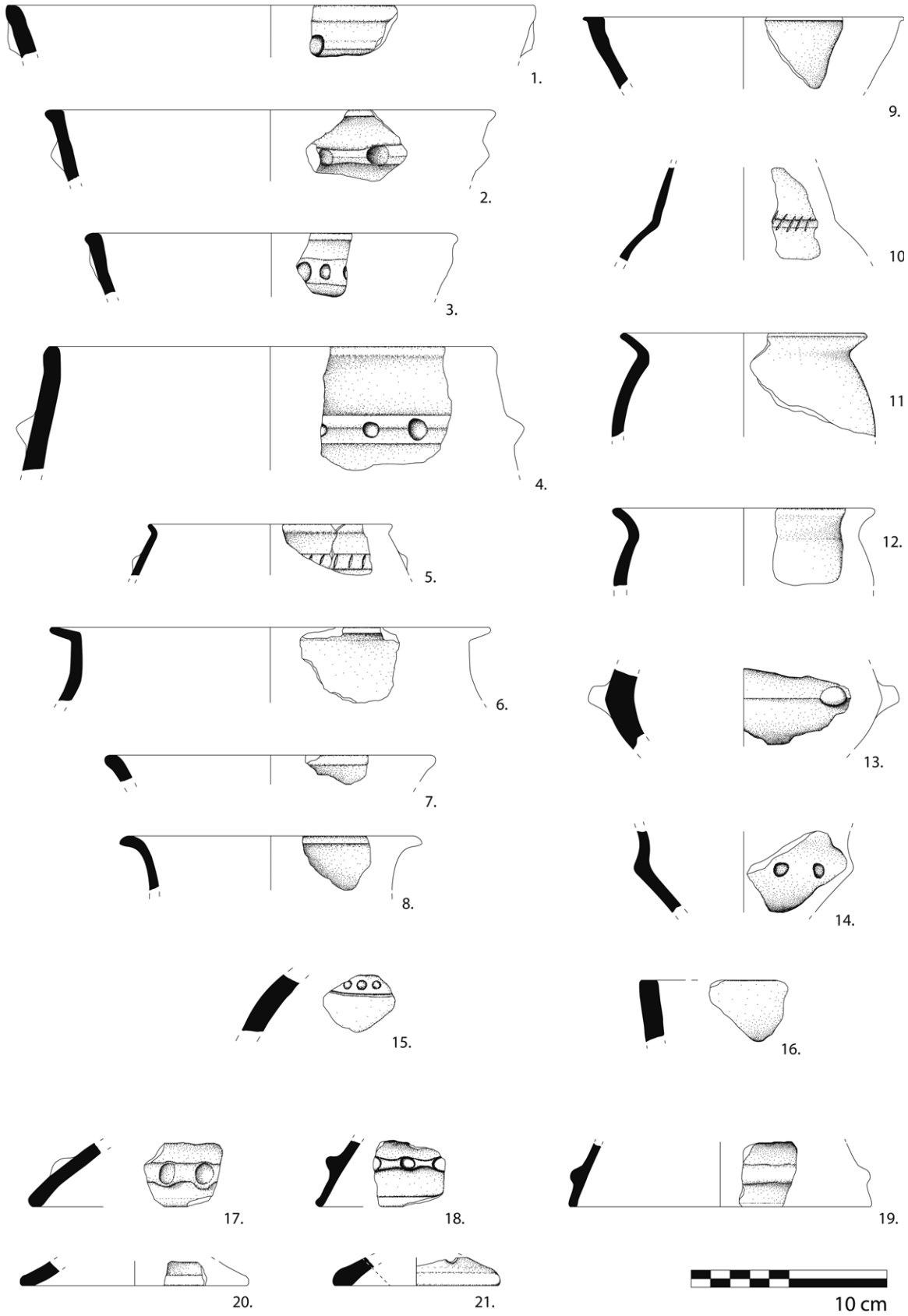


Fig. 5: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the protohistoric phase of the site. Scale 1 : 3

along the earlier phases of the Iron Age<sup>37</sup>. Another difficult one, though of particular interest due to the rarity of decoration within the assemblage, is a highly flaring and slightly thinned rim fragment, featuring a series of shallow cup-shaped impressions on the inner face of the rim (Fig. 4, 17). While no proper comparison has been found so far, the rim's shape closely resembles the flared one of the FBA/EIA jars, to which it can be tentatively attributed.

20 Other fragments seem to be, however, more securely assignable to the FBA. The first, perhaps from a jar with an in-curving profile, has a slightly everted rim and a horizontal cordon with a triangular cross-section, decorated with fingertip impressions (Fig. 5, 4); it finds several comparisons even limiting the parallels to the nearer southern Latium<sup>38</sup>. Three others likely belonged to large and deep bowls (it. *scodelloni*) or basins (it. *catini*) with thickened rims, either flattened or not on the top, also bearing a cordon decorated by fingertip impressions, albeit less regular (Fig. 5, 1–3). Strong comparisons may be drawn with finds from both Nemi<sup>39</sup> and, closer to the site under examination, the area around Nettuno<sup>40</sup>. Additional fragments perhaps also dating to the FBA include a shoulder sherd with cup-marks bordered below by an incised line (Fig. 5, 15), a bowl with a flattened rim and slightly prominent lip (Fig. 5, 9)<sup>41</sup>, and a very flared rim from a large vessel (Fig. 5, 6), closely resembling a fragment from site P13 near Nettuno<sup>42</sup>.

21 Likely more clearly attributable to the EIA are, instead, a series of fragments, starting with the jars with everted and thinned rims (Fig. 4, 18–22), as well as those with strongly flaring rims (Fig. 5, 11, 12)<sup>43</sup>. A shoulder fragment with a swollen neck, decorated with two parallel horizontal grooves and diagonal notches, probably belonged to a necked vessel – perhaps a jug or an ›*orciolo*‹ – and also likely dates to this phase (Fig. 5, 10)<sup>44</sup>. Also interesting are two handle fragments (Fig. 6, 8, 9), with similar sections and right angles, which are likely to be interpreted as belonging to EIA small ›table amphorae‹<sup>45</sup>. Finally, a reddish-yellow, thick, biconical and carinated wall fragment, with a knob (it. *bugna*) on the maximum expansion, seems to belong to a small, incurved jar (Fig. 5, 13). The fragment seems to date to the EIA, based on the comparison with similar vessel attested in Latial culture<sup>46</sup>.

22 Additional finds attributable more generally to the protohistoric macro-phase include fragments of handles, knobs, and cords of smaller and larger vessels, often decorated with fingertip impressions (Fig. 6, 1–7). Also noteworthy are three small, perforated wall sherds of strainers (Fig. 6, 10, 11).

23 Despite the frequent difficulty in assigning precise chronologies, all of this material attests to the significance of protohistoric occupation at Monte Sant'Angelo. A substantial presence during at least the FBA and EIA (ca. 12<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.) is clearly detectable, consistent with broader regional patterns in southern Latium. With due caution, the site's material culture seems to show closer affinities with that of the Latial coastal plain, rather than with Campania or inland Latium, possibly suggesting a more robust network of exchanges with the former. This trend likely continued into later periods, as will be discussed in the following section. Although it is currently not possible to determine the size and characteristics of the protohistoric settlement, the material

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37 It must be highlighted, however, how some cups with *ansa bifora* can date as late as the third and fourth Latial period, perhaps reaching the early 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.

38 E.g., Alessandri 2007, 62 fig. 3.24, 9; 121 fig. 3.91, 8, 11.

39 Bruni 2009, 307 fig. 3, 1.

40 Nijboer et al. 2005/2006, 181, no. 80 (site P13).

41 Recalling the type identified as Type III.4 in Attema et al. 2003, 119.

42 Nijboer et al. 2005/2006, 178, no. 60.

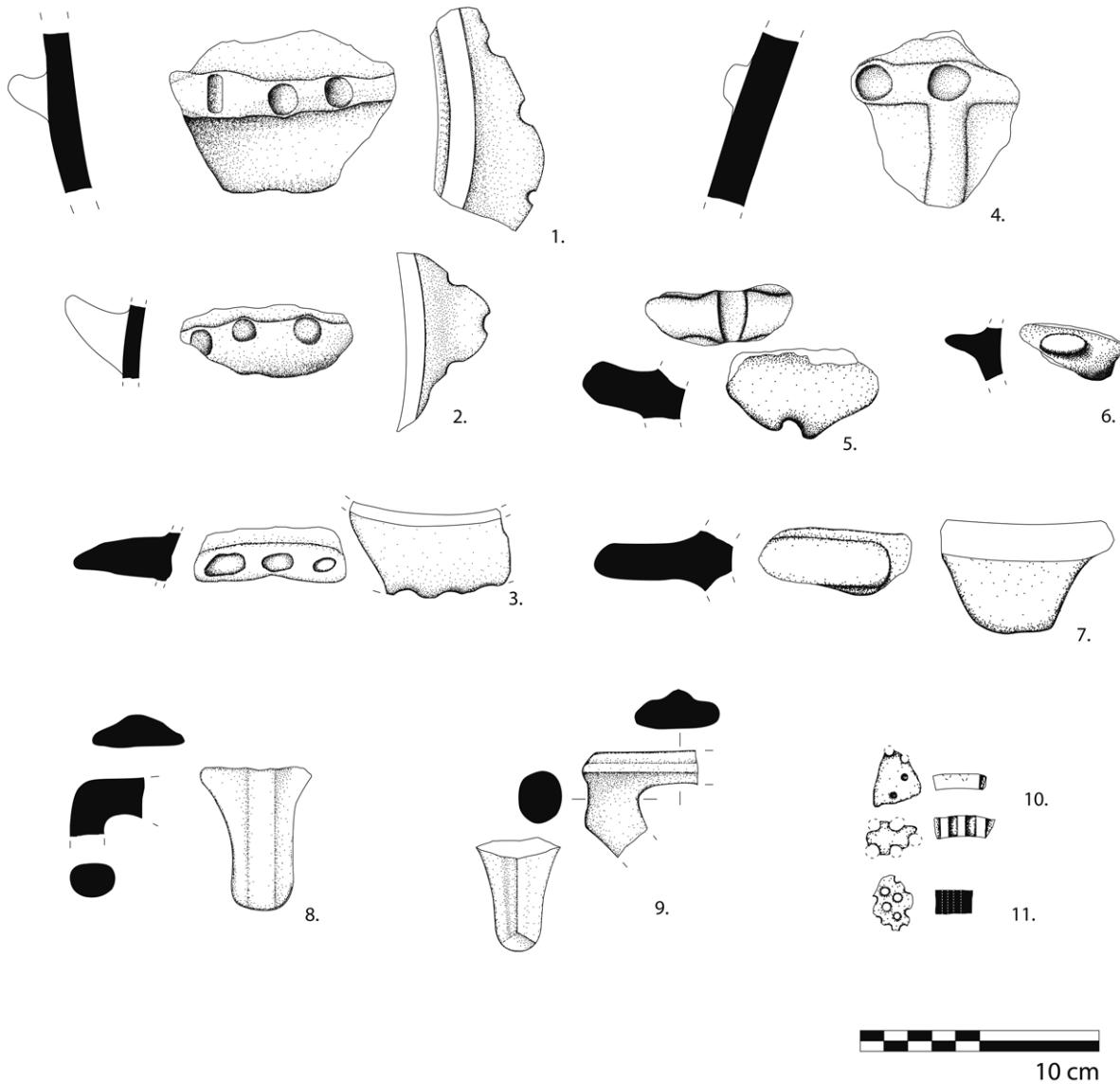
43 Bietti Sestieri 1992, tab. 27, 92 d var II; Di Gennaro et al. 2009, 153 fig. 8, 6.

44 E.g., Bietti Sestieri 1992, pl. 19, 12.

45 Attested both in Latium (cf. e.g. Bietti Sestieri 1992, pl. 12, 7 d var 1) and in Campania (Melandri 2011, pl. 9).

46 E.g. Bietti Sestieri 1992, pl. 12, 5 c.

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clearly demonstrates the existence of a village of a certain importance. The elevated position of the site must have provided favourable conditions, with a commanding view over the surrounding territory and the sea. Such a locational choice aligns well with the broader pattern of continuity in mountaintop settlements, naturally defended and visually dominant, during the transition from prehistory to protohistory<sup>47</sup>. It is also likely that the emergence of new demographic and political centralisation models between the FBA and EIA brought about a transformation in the nature of the site in the ensuing phases<sup>48</sup>.

Fig. 6: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the protohistoric phase of the site. Scale 1 : 3

## The Orientalising and Archaic Phases

24 Although the absence of solid stratigraphic indicators makes it difficult to substantiate this situation archaeologically, the material recovered nonetheless suggests a certain degree of continuity in the transition from the EIA phases to those that fol-

47 Pacciarelli 2000, 74; Alessandri 2013, 17–79.

48 Pacciarelli 2000, 115–179.

lowed. In particular, it indicates a significant vitality of the site during the Orientalising and Archaic periods (ca. 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.). Despite the already mentioned presence of a large amount of material that is difficult to date due to its characteristics and state of preservation, these phases can rely on several more diagnostic ceramic classes. First and foremost, the introduction of the potter's wheel must be noted, now employed also for impasto wares, which can therefore be distinguished from earlier hand-made productions. However, wheel-made ceramics appear to have continued to coexist with vessels shaped using the coiling technique, as evidenced by fragments of this type that are typologically attributable to these phases.

25 Beginning in the Orientalising period, more specific classes of production emerge alongside generic impasto wares, such as ›*impasto rosso*‹, ›*impasto bruno*‹, and ›*impasto rosso-bruno*‹. In addition, there is evidence of bucchero and bucchero-inspired wares, generally referred to as »buccheroid impasto«, though it is not yet possible to determine whether these are local products or imports.

26 On the whole, the break between the ceramic repertoire of these phases and that of the later Roman period, associated with the foundation of the colony, is fairly clear, although not without exceptions. By contrast, apart from a few aspects that will be highlighted in the following paragraphs, there are no traces of a clear-cut discontinuity which could archaeologically substantiate the Volscian phase of occupation of the site known from historical sources. More broadly, it can be said that the archaeological record does not appear to contain any unequivocal ethnic markers of any kind.

27 Starting with the analysis of the material it can be said that, for these phases, the most common shapes are the jars whose rim diameter remains modest, averaging just over 15 cm. In addition, a few fragments of considerably larger dolia are attested (Fig. 7, 1). The morphological range of these jars is fairly limited, with recurring features such as the flaring of the rims which may be banded (it. *a fascia*), thickened to varying degrees, or simply rounded. In some cases, an internal ledge is present to better accommodate a lid (Fig. 7, 27). Among the various types, there are sharp-angled rims, here with a barely perceptible lip (Fig. 7, 28), attested, for instance, in Rome<sup>49</sup>. In general, these are long-lived shapes that, in the case of impasto wares, can be broadly dated between the mid-7<sup>th</sup> and at least the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. However, some examples allow for more precise chronological placement. Although the various productions span different periods, for instance, the type with a rounded everted rim appears to have fallen out of use by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. (Fig. 7, 10, 11, 25)<sup>50</sup>. Rims with banded profiles and a more or less pronounced lower edge, on the other hand, seem to have lasted longer and, at least in red-brown impasto ware, may be dated between the early 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. (Fig. 7, 1, 5, 7)<sup>51</sup>.

28 Despite this general typological uniformity, some variations are nevertheless evident. One example is a wheel-made impasto fragment with a thickened flared rim, displaying a horizontal concavity that divides the rim into two lobes (Fig. 12). Comparisons from Tarquinia<sup>52</sup> and Rome<sup>53</sup> might suggest a date in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. A second example is a thickened rim, flattened on top with an internal swelling (Fig. 7, 14), paralleled by a fragment from Ficana<sup>54</sup> and resembling, though of much larger diameter, a rim from Satricum<sup>55</sup>. Another distinctive morphology is represented by two wheel-made impasto inward-curving rims, thickened externally and flattened on top,

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49 Colazingari 2009, 26 fig. 13, 302 s.

50 Colantoni 2009, 79.

51 Colantoni 2009, 80.

52 Chiaramonte Treré 1999, pl. 16, 1.

53 Carafa 1995, 135 no. 305.

54 Wenn 2006, 150 pl. 8, 42.

55 Maaskant-Kleibrink 1987, 226, 246.

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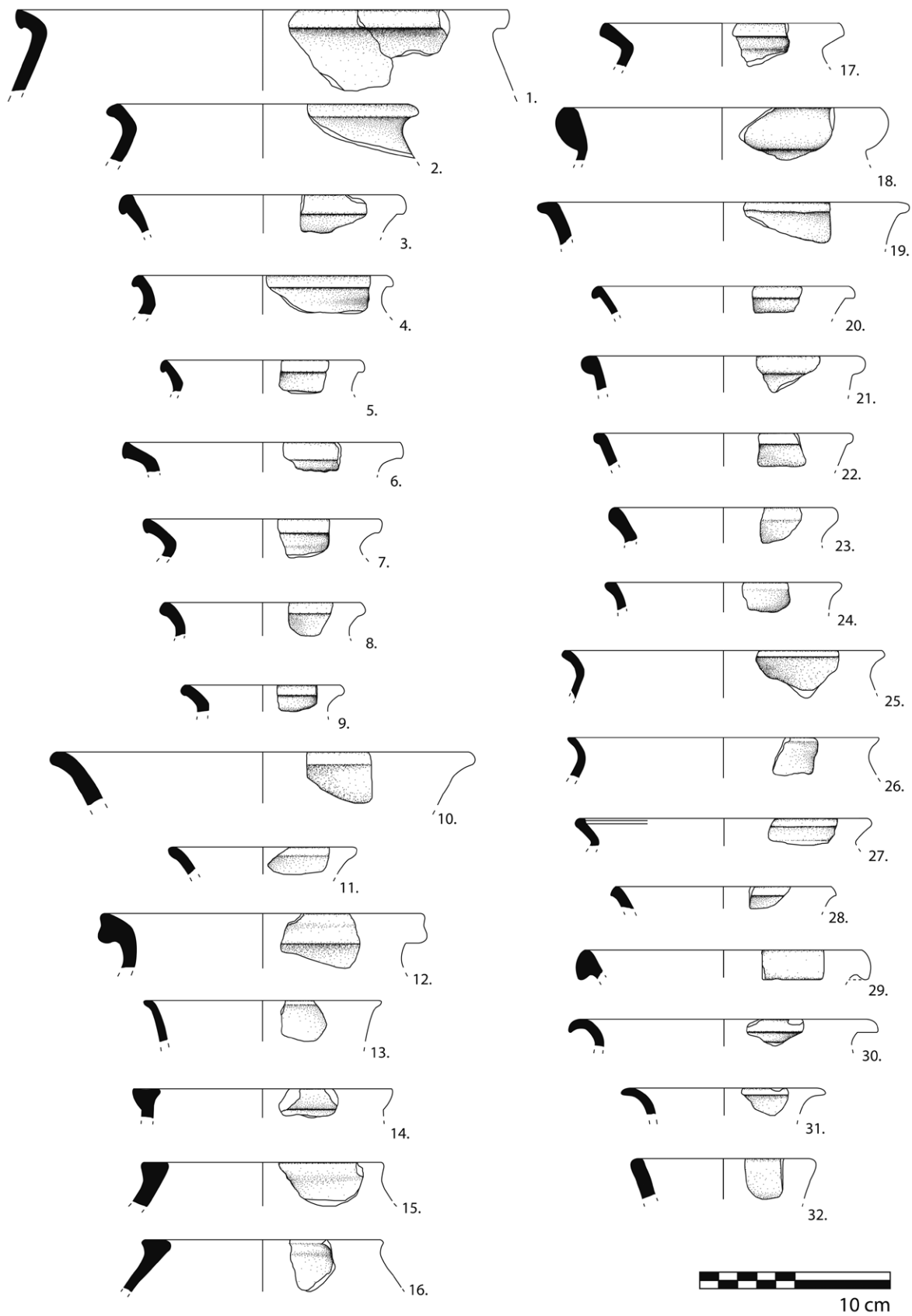


Fig. 7: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the Orientalising and Archaic phases of the site.  
Scale 1 : 3

with a vaguely triangular section (Fig. 7, 15, 16). The fragments find close comparisons both north and south of the site, such as at Podere Tartuchino<sup>56</sup> (Tarquinia) and at Capua<sup>57</sup> and can be dated between the Orientalising and Archaic period. Also attested are rims markedly thickened and rounded on the exterior (Fig. 7, 21) which finds comparison in Satricum, in a post-500 B.C. stratum<sup>58</sup>. Still datable from the Orientalising period are instead two significantly everted rims (Fig. 7, 30, 31) likely pertaining to globular ollae, such as those attested, for example, at Tarquinia<sup>59</sup> and Satricum<sup>60</sup>. As mentioned, there are also fragments pertaining to the ›*impasto rosso-bruno*‹. Among the most diagnostic is an everted almond-shaped rim which finds comparison in Archaic Etruria (Fig. 7, 12)<sup>61</sup>. Also worthy to be highlighted is an incurved, thickened rim, with a recession on top to accommodate a lid, likely pertaining to a jar or a globular basin (Fig. 8, 7). Comparisons can be established, for example, with some fragments from Satricum<sup>62</sup>, Rome<sup>63</sup> and from Tarquinia<sup>64</sup> pointing to a dating from the Archaic period. Finally, it is worth mentioning a banded rim in ›*impasto rosso-bruno*‹ (with many components of mica) of a small diameter closed vessel, possibly a jug, that strongly resembles the shapes of Etruscan amphorae (Fig. 7, 18)<sup>65</sup>.

29 In addition to closed shapes, open ones are also represented in the local repertoire, mostly in the form of bowls and lids. Noteworthy among these is a fragment in red impasto with a slightly in-turned rim thinning outward into a nearly almond-shaped lip (Fig. 8, 1). This recalls Type 613 in Carafa's typology of flat-based basins, differing in its apparent lack of external decoration<sup>66</sup>. Another fragment, made in ›*impasto rosso-bruno*‹ with a conical profile and slightly incurved thickened rim, almost almond-shaped (Fig. 8, 2), finds parallels in Rome (Palatino, Sant'Omobono)<sup>67</sup>. Surface abrasion prevents identification of any surface treatment.

30 Of particular interest is a rounded and slightly thickened rim from a carinated bowl in reddish-yellow impasto (Munsell 5YR6/6), showing traces of polishing (Fig. 8, 3). The form, inspired by Type 1 bucchero bowls in Rasmussen's typology<sup>68</sup>, is attested in Italic contexts (e.g., necropolis of the L'Aquila basin, Colfiorito di Foligno, Imola) in bucchero, bucceroid impasto, and impasto<sup>69</sup>. An example in bucchero has also been found at Satricum<sup>70</sup>. These comparisons suggest a date for the fragment between the mid-6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. In this context, the fragment shows a strikingly close morphological affinity with a bowl from Tomb 985 of the Bazzano necropolis, though the latter is in greyish bucchero. If this connection is correct, it would be one of the few fragments with parallels exclusively outside Latium, particularly in the Italic area.

31 Another class attested are the large basins (it. *bacile*) or mortars. The first is a fragment of a vertical and thin banded rim, made in ›*impasto chiaro-sabbioso*‹ (Fig. 8, 4), likely dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.<sup>71</sup>. The second is a fragment of a banded rim with irregular

56 Perkins – Attolini 1992, 97 fig. 15, 2.

57 Minoja 2011, fig. 3, 4; Ferrante 2018, pl. 2, 2.5 a. b; 2, 2.6; 4, 13.1.

58 Maaskant-Kleibrink 1992, 274 no. 1477.

59 Bonghi Jovino – Bagnasco Gianni 2012, pl. 56, Ac 33/25.

60 Maaskant-Kleibrink 1992, 308 no. 1931.

61 Ward-Perkins et al. 1970, 112 fig. 27, 18.

62 Maaskant-Kleibrink 1987, 340 nos. 1129, 1130.

63 Colazingari 2009, 19 fig. 7, 197.

64 Chiaramonte Trerè 1999, tab. 30, 6; Perego 2010, 56 no. 173/31.

65 E.g. Boss 1993, 519 (L8).

66 Carafa 1995, 219–221.

67 Colazingari 2009, 19 fig. 7, 193.

68 Rasmussen 1979, 203 pl. 41, 248, 249.

69 Weidig 2014, 526–528 (type 1).

70 See Gnade 2002, 20–23 pls. 14, 15, in the foundation trench of wall C.

71 E.g., Nardi 1993, pl. 580, 10; Carafa 1995, 240 no. 653; Di Gennaro et al. 2009, 188 fig. 19, 1.

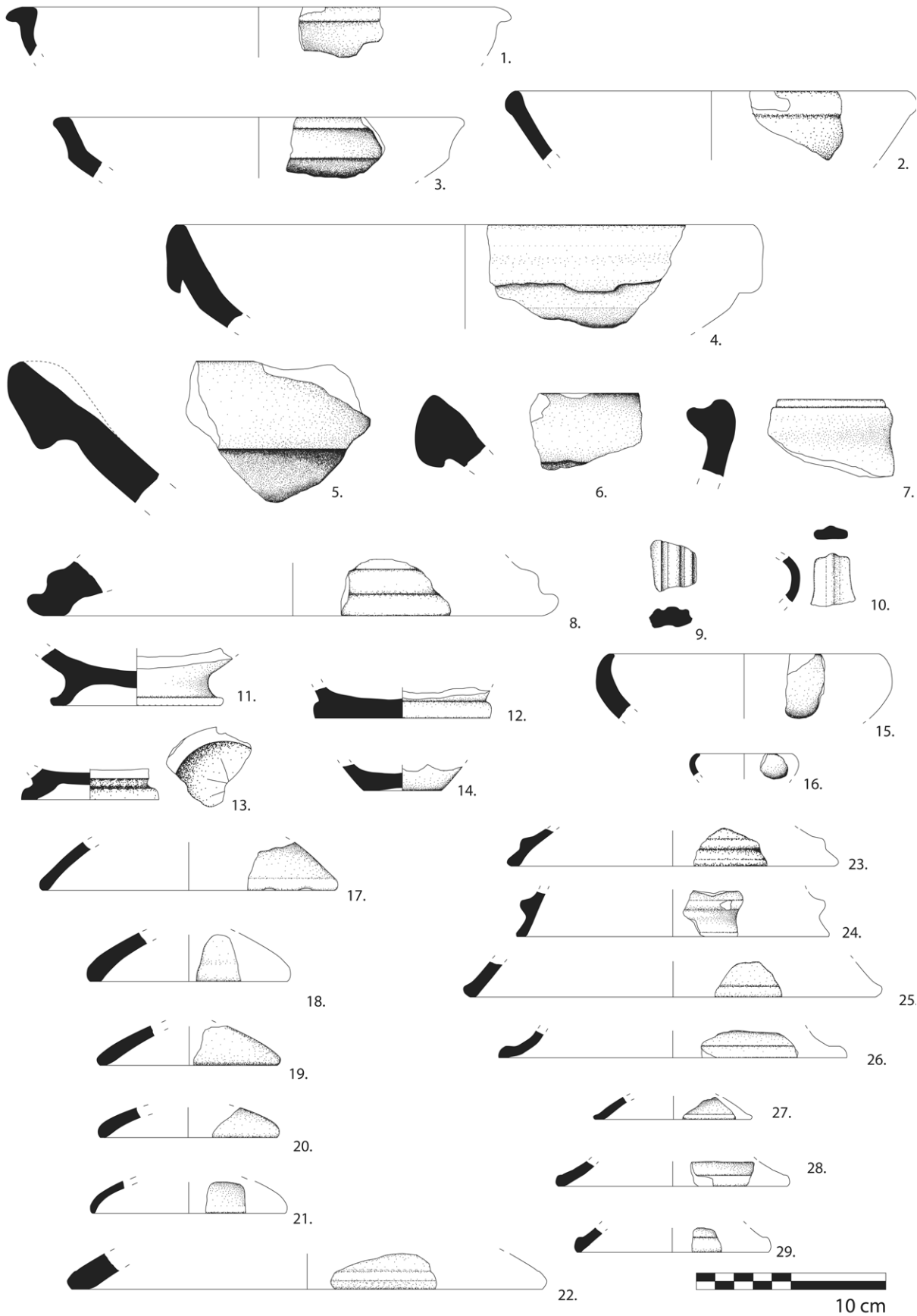


Fig. 8: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Ceramic material from the Orientalising and Archaic phases of the site. Scale 1 : 3

morphology shape probably due to the proximity of now-lost pouring spout made in a reddish impasto (Munsell 5YR6/6; Fig. 8, 5)<sup>72</sup>. The third is a thicker banded rim, likely also pertaining to a large basin or a mortar (Fig. 8, 6). By contrast, fragments of cups are rare. Among these, one may note a fragment of an impasto cup with an inward-sloping, thinned rim (Fig. 8, 15), and another of similar shape but smaller in diameter, featuring an even more markedly incurving rim and made of grey bucchero (Fig. 8, 16). Worth mentioning is a fragment of a moulded foot in red impasto, polished and wheel turned with great care (Fig. 8, 8). Besides the usual inclusions of limestone and grog, there is a remarkable presence of golden mica. The fragment seems to belong to a large vessel, perhaps a stand, a thymiaterion or an *holmos*.

32 Lids or lid-bowls are numerous, identified as such not only by their shape but, due to the fragmentary nature of the pieces, often by wear marks where the rim would originally have rested. The shapes display a certain morphological variety, especially in the basin, which may be conical (Fig. 8, 19, 23–25), hemispherical (Fig. 8, 17, 18), lenticular (Fig. 8, 20, 21) or bell-shaped (Fig. 8, 26, 28). Rims are mostly rounded, more rarely thinned or thickened. Among the few decorations, one fragment features finger-impressed decoration along the rim (Fig. 8, 17), and others have rounded cords (Fig. 8, 23, 24). Lastly, a fragment from a large lid shows a clear groove immediately above the rim (Fig. 8, 22).

33 The local formal repertoire also includes several types of bases, all wheel-made: ring feet (Fig. 8, 11, 13), heeled bases (it. *fondo a tacco*; Fig. 8, 12), and separate, slightly concave bases (Fig. 8, 14). Particularly noteworthy is a fragment of a vessel with a ring foot in bucceroid impasto, showing a post-firing star-shaped graffito on the outer side of the base (Fig. 8, 13).

34 Lastly, a few elements are of particular interest but cannot be confidently dated. The frequently lamented lack of stratigraphic associations renders their contextualisation especially challenging. This is the case, for instance, with several fragments of jars with inward-curving rims (Fig. 9, 1–6), hand-made through coiling in a rather coarse impasto with many inclusions (ca. 30% of the ceramic body), often of large size (0.2–0.3 cm on average). These vessels were always fired at relatively low and uneven temperatures, resulting in generally reddish surfaces with darker patches. Chronologically, jars with inward-curving rims are long-lived, appearing from prehistory onwards. However, in the present context, they could take on a specific significance. This shape belongs to the ceramic repertoire common in Volscian and Auruncan areas, where it is known as *olla a bombardata*, widespread between the Orientalising and Archaic periods<sup>73</sup>. Sporadic examples are also known at Satricum<sup>74</sup> where they are of particular interest as possible markers of the Volscian presence. At the same time, an alternative date may also be proposed for these fragments. To cite only nearby contexts, comparisons may be made with materials from sites datable to both the MBA<sup>75</sup> and the transitional period between the FBA and the EIA<sup>76</sup>.

35 Four additional fragments are characterised by a fine, homogeneous grey fabric, consistent in both surface and section. While these features vary slightly from one sherd to another, they support attribution to the 'grey ware' category, a label that encompasses a range of ceramic productions differing considerably in chronology and cultural context and often understudied in the archaeological literature. In regions where these wares have been more thoroughly investigated, as in northern Italy, they

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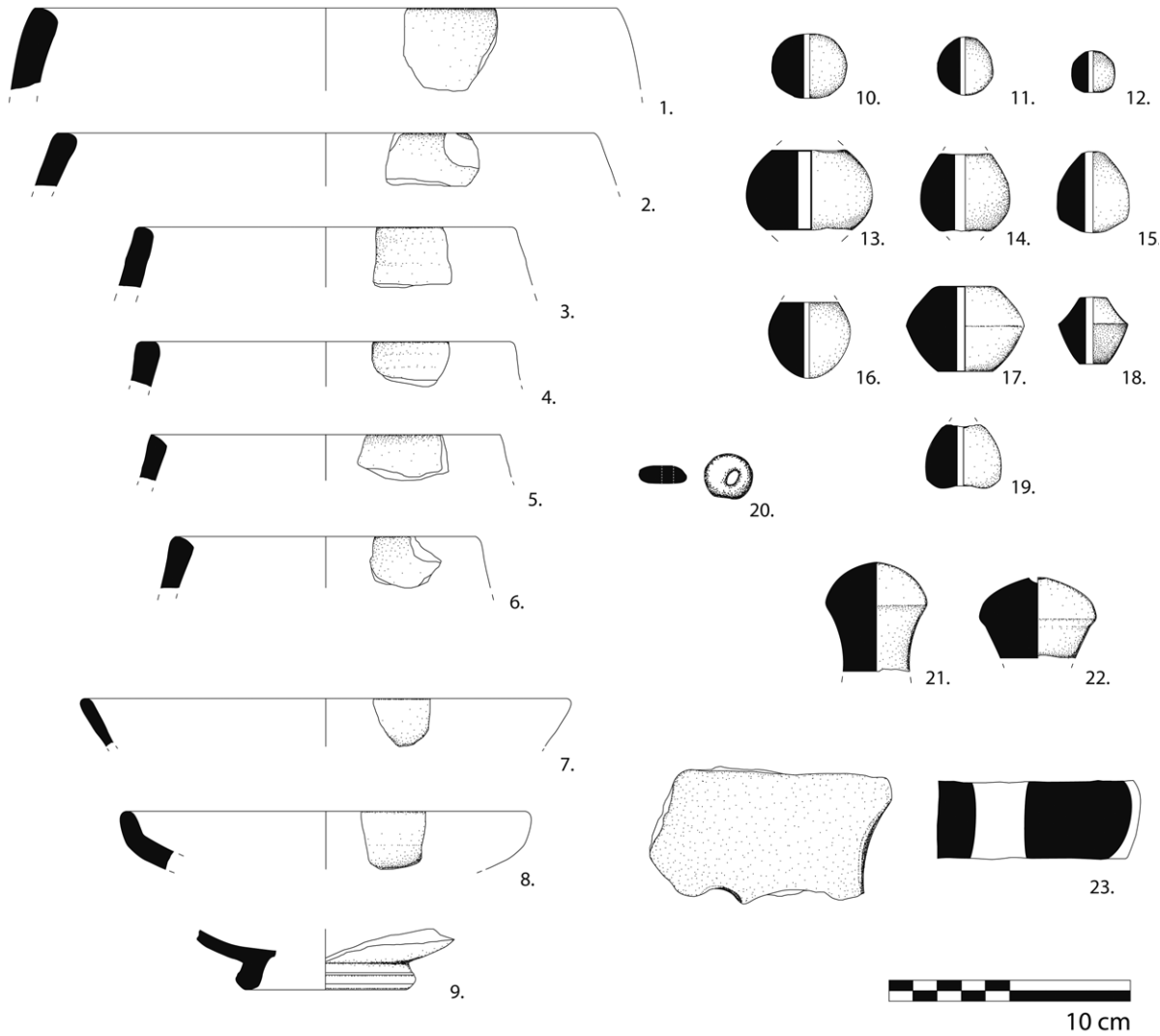
72 Nardi 1993, pl. 582, second from the bottom.

73 Talamo 1987; Cifarelli – Gatti 2006, 30–33.

74 Cifarelli – Gatti 2006, 39 f.

75 Alessandri 2013, 182 fig. 14.2, 16.

76 Alessandri 2013, 196 fig. 24.1, 3–6.



9

are frequently interpreted as deriving from the tradition of bucchero and Attic pottery, and later from black-gloss wares and even thin-walled ware<sup>77</sup>. The first two fragments (the better preserved of which is illustrated here in Fig. 9, 7) show a rounded rim that cannot be assigned to a specific form. The fragments also displayed a grey slip covering both the interior and exterior surfaces. Another example belongs to a cup or patera, featuring a rounded, near-vertical rim and a shallow body (Fig. 9, 8). The junction between the rim and the body forms a slight carination. This shape finds parallels in both bucchero<sup>78</sup> and black-gloss<sup>79</sup> typologies. The last fragment is a moulded ring-foot, more closely comparable to black-gloss productions<sup>80</sup> than to bucchero formal repertoires (Fig. 9, 9). On the basis of the available data, it is difficult to propose a secure dating for these fragments which may be placed anywhere from a later phase of the Archaic period to the Roman era. However, the absence of comparable productions among the Roman-phase materials investigated at the site would seem to suggest a date prior to the foundation of the colony.

Fig. 9: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Difficult to date ceramic material from the site. Scale 1 : 3

77 Zamboni 2013, 76.

78 Capponi 2018, pl. XIV, type XIII 132.

79 Morel 1981, pl. 39, type 2252c.

80 Morel 1981, pl. 231, type 171a 1.

36 Among the difficult-to-date evidence the first class to mention are the spindle whorls (Fig. 9, 10–19). Their profiles vary and may be spherical, pear-shaped, or biconical, but, based on their shape, it is not possible to propose a sound dating. A second element is represented by a small ring-shaped ceramic bead (Fig. 9, 20). Special attention should also be paid to a thick ceramic fragment showing traces of two curves of differing size, at least one of which was a through-hole (Fig. 9, 21). The find is likely to be interpreted as part of a stove top. The fabric is uniformly reddish (Munsell 2.5YR7/8), but there are no visible traces of burning. Finally, among the difficult-to-date evidence two lid knobs must be included (Fig. 9, 21, 22). While their morphology is attested from the Iron Age period<sup>81</sup> onward, their fabric closely resembles the Orientalising/Archaic pottery of Monte Sant'Angelo.

37 To conclude this description of the pre-Roman materials recovered during the 2019–2024 excavation campaigns, one last find remains to be discussed. It is a bronze fibula measuring just over 4.5 cm in width and 3 cm in height with a thickened and relatively high arch (Fig. 10). The arch is decorated with a series of ridges running longitudinally. On the distal end, just above the spring, it features close-set horizontal grooves over a length of ca. 0.5 cm, followed in the central portion by a small, raised knob. The most distinctive feature of this fibula, however, lies in the spring which is absent and replaced by a simple loop. Lacking a pin, it is thus non-functional in its typical role, though it does present a catch plate at the opposite end of the arch. Unfortunately, the fibula was found in the surface layer during excavation, again depriving us of any possibility of establishing a stratigraphic association<sup>82</sup>. Moreover, in view of its characteristics, and in the absence of comparative examples, it is difficult to propose a definitive interpretation. However, considering the context of its discovery, it seems plausible that the intentional production of a non-functional fibula may relate to the frequent association, in the ancient world, between the defunctionalisation of objects and the sacred sphere<sup>83</sup>. Though comparative examples are currently lacking, the piece may perhaps be broadly dated from the Orientalising and Archaic periods.

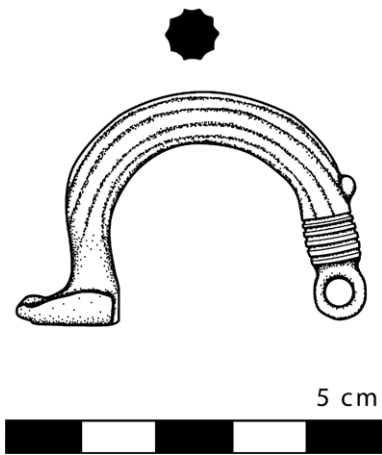


Fig. 10: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Non-functional bronze fibula. Scale 1 : 1

## The Settlement and Territory

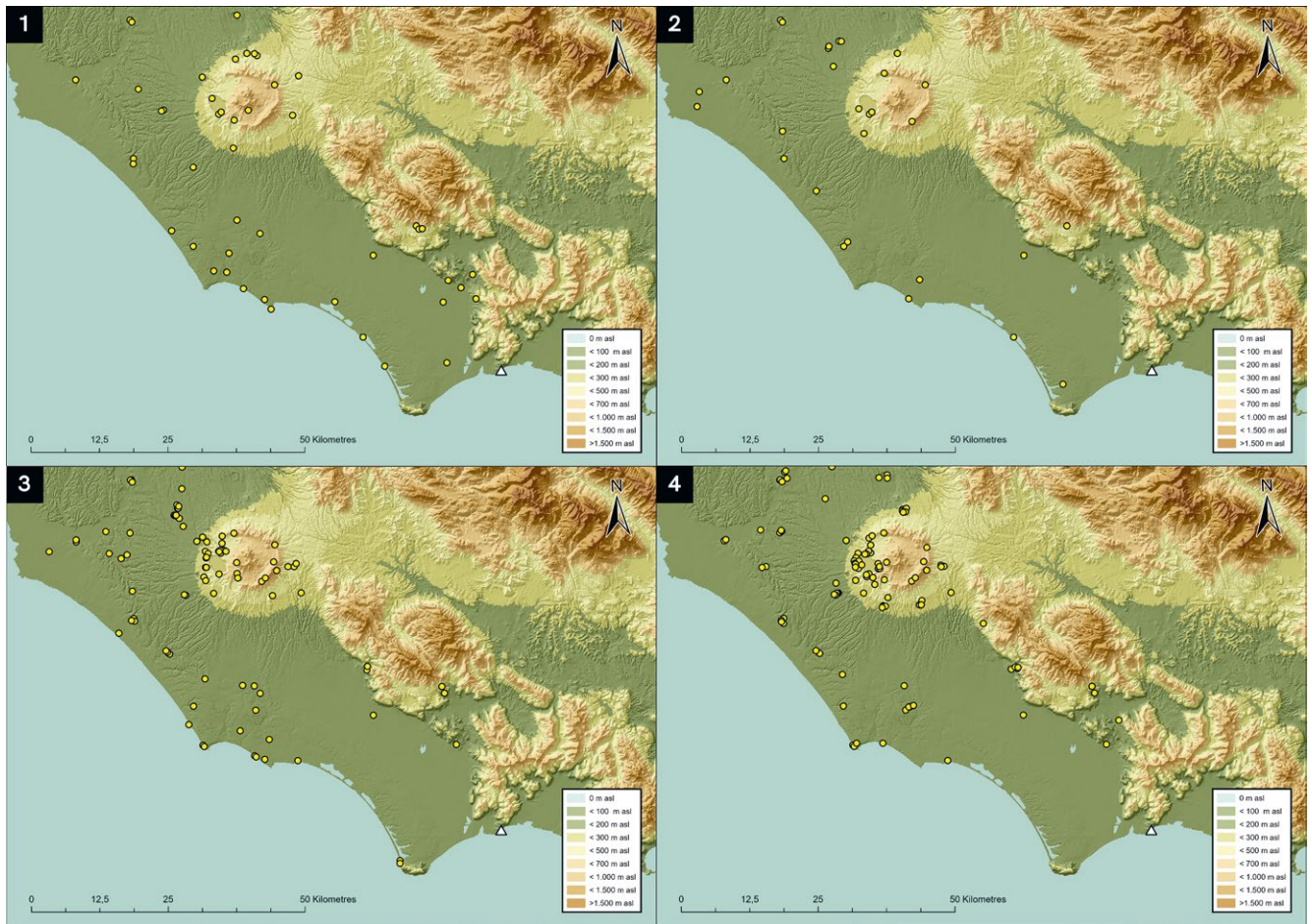
38 The materials presented thus far allow for a preliminary synthesis of the occupation of Monte Sant'Angelo during the phases preceding the establishment of the Roman *colonia maritima* of Tarracina (329 B.C.). First and foremost, placing the site within the broader territorial context<sup>84</sup>, its significance becomes clear in addressing the current underrepresentation of archaeologically documented settlement in this southern part of ancient Latium adiectum (Figs. 11, 12). As noted, this situation is likely influenced, at least in part, by the significant environmental transformations that this

81 Moscati 1993, 232 pl. 446, H 29.1.

82 It therefore appears extremely unlikely that the object in question is a forgery, despite its apparent status as a hapax, which might otherwise raise doubts.

83 A comparable case – despite being different in many respects – is that of the ›fibula simulacra‹ (it. *simulacra di fibula*) of Golasecca tradition. This term refers to a group of fibulae, mostly of the Lodigiano leech type, which were originally manufactured without a catch plate, spring, or pin. Initially interpreted as production waste due to their crude workmanship, De Marinis has repeatedly argued for their association with the sacred sphere – an interpretation made entirely plausible by the analysis of their find contexts. The emergence of this practice is dated to the period following the mid-5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. (De Marinis et al. 2016, 457–460).

84 The phase maps (Fig. 11) are based on the sites catalogues presented in Alessandri 2007 and Alessandri 2013. They reflect the current geomorphological situation, reconstructed using DEM data with a 10 m cell resolution made available by the Tinitaly project (see, most recently, Tarquini et al. 2023). For the ancient geomorphological context, particularly with regard to the major hydrological processes that led to the marshland formation in the Pontine region, reference should be made to the aforementioned important study by Sevink et al. 2023.



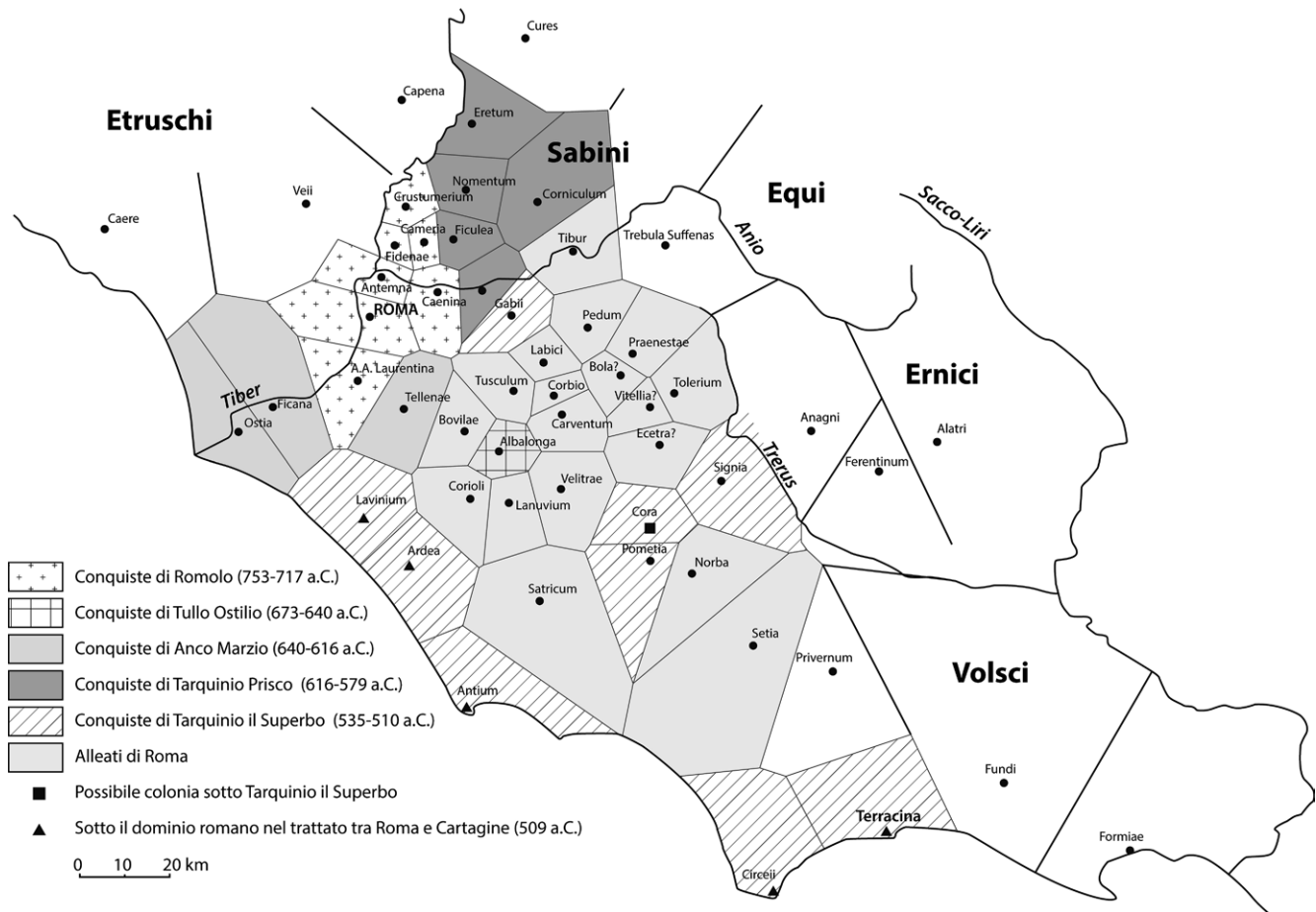
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area has undergone over the millennia. These transformations may have contributed to the concealment of traces of past human activity in an environment that in antiquity, in general, may have had limited settlement in certain areas. We must, therefore, assume that, perhaps more than in other regions, our understanding of ancient settlement is especially filtered through these phenomena. It is thus important to avoid overemphasising absences in historical reconstruction and instead to focus more intently on documented presences.

39 As previously discussed, the phases preceding the final centuries of protohistory are very elusive, precluding any definitive interpretation of the nature of human presence. Although the presence of obsidian cores, part of which worked, suggest a stable settlement at some point of prehistory (likely Neolithic and/or Eneolithic), the ceramic evidence is too sporadic to firmly support this hypothesis. At the same time, as previously noted, it is important not to overinterpret absences, particularly in a context such as this one where post-depositional processes may have profoundly affected the earlier archaeological record.

40 In contrast, during the final centuries of protohistory, the situation appears more structured. While a possible occupation starting from the RBA seems plausible, it remains archaeologically tenuous. For the FBA, however, the evidence is more robust, suggesting that, from this phase onwards, a stable and important settlement was established. The distribution of impasto ceramics shows a concentration on the summit of Monte Sant'Angelo, specifically in trenches Alfa 3 and 5 (see Fig. 1). While acknowledging a lesser impact from later monumental construction in this area, it is plausible to interpret this higher concentration of materials as evidence of the centre of the village.

Fig. 11: Phase-maps of known protohistoric sites along the southern coastal Latium, marked with yellow circles. 1) EBA; 2) MBA; 3) LBA; 4) EIA/FBA. The site of Terracina, Monte Sant'Angelo, is marked with a white triangle.



12

Fig. 12: Map of Roman expansion in Latium between the mid-8<sup>th</sup> and the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. according to historical sources, with the main sites mentioned therein

41 The settlement should have been of a certain size, likely covering at least the ca. 3 ha of the area within which the material is attested. Its location is predominantly strategic. The Monte Sant'Angelo hill is very steep, almost cliffy, on its eastern and southern sides which are therefore naturally defended. Its elevated position affords the site an outstanding visual command over the three main geographical components of the territory: the sea, the plains, and the mountains (Figs. 13. 14). From this vantage point, one has an almost uninterrupted view of the stretch of sea facing the coastline between Monte Circeo, Terracina, and Sperlonga. No ship could have sailed past unnoticed. The settlement also overlooks both the Pontine plain and that of Fondi, which are clearly visible from it. Although the distance is too great to identify individual figures or small groups – especially considering the potential (and currently unquantifiable) extent of forest cover – it is plausible that larger groups could have been detected from the summit, thereby offering a form of visual surveillance for defensive purposes. As for the mountains forming the northern backdrop to the site (belonging to the Ausoni mountain range), while it visually controls only limited portions of them, it does dominate one of their key passages: the natural route that represents the quicker connection between the *ager Pomptinus* and the plain of Fondi (and thus the *ager Campanus*). A natural corridor which was later overlapped, in Roman times, by the earlier<sup>85</sup> (and higher) course of the Via Appia. It ascends from the area of the city southwest via the saddle between Monte Sant'Angelo and Monte Sterpano, continuing through La Casina and the cemetery, and then northeast, bordering the slope of Monte Croce, and descending

85 Before Trajan cut through the cliff – known as »Pisco Montano« – to create a faster coastal route for the Via Appia, travellers had to follow the longer, more arduous inland path.



Fig. 13: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Drone photographs of the view from the site on the Pontine plain (bottom) and that of Fondi (top)

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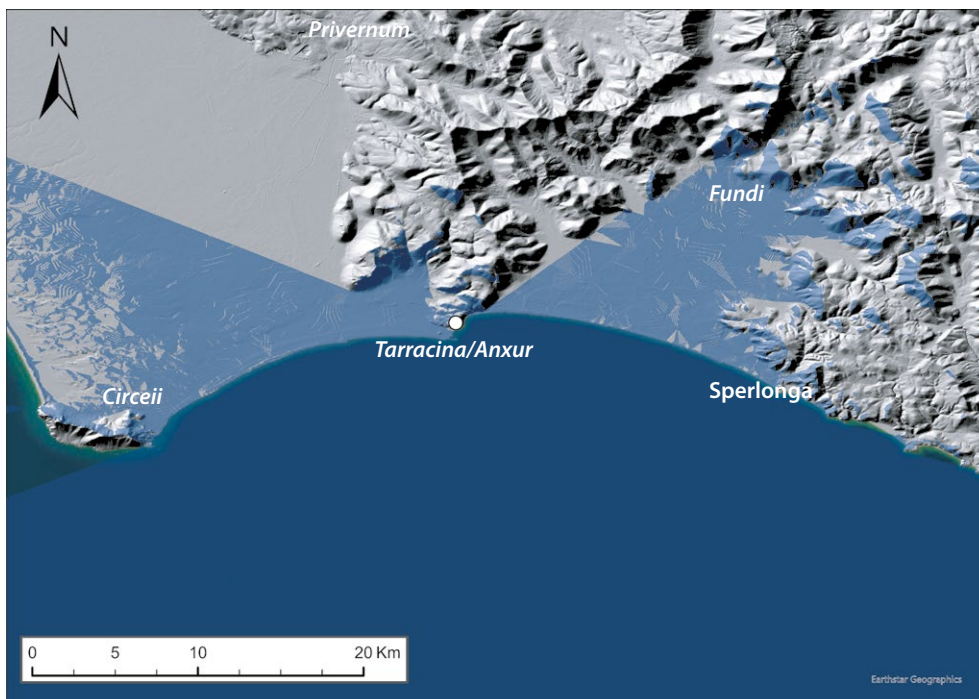


Fig. 14: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Viewshed analysis of the site. The territory visually controlled by the site is indicated in blue.

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into the Fondi plain<sup>86</sup>. A visual dominance that, incidentally, was completely reversed in the subsequent Roman and Medieval periods, when the site plausibly shifted from being a privileged vantage point to becoming a landmark, a focal point visible from all directions at great distances. Returning to the protohistoric phases, it can be argued that the site fits perfectly within the well-known settlement patterns of hilltop sites, naturally defended locations that ensured visual control over the surrounding territory. It is worth noting that approximately 17 km northeast of Monte Sant'Angelo (as the crow flies), on the summit of Monte Passignano (519 m asl), a *castelliere* has been

86 See Lugli 1926, 181, the «*Appia Superiore*».

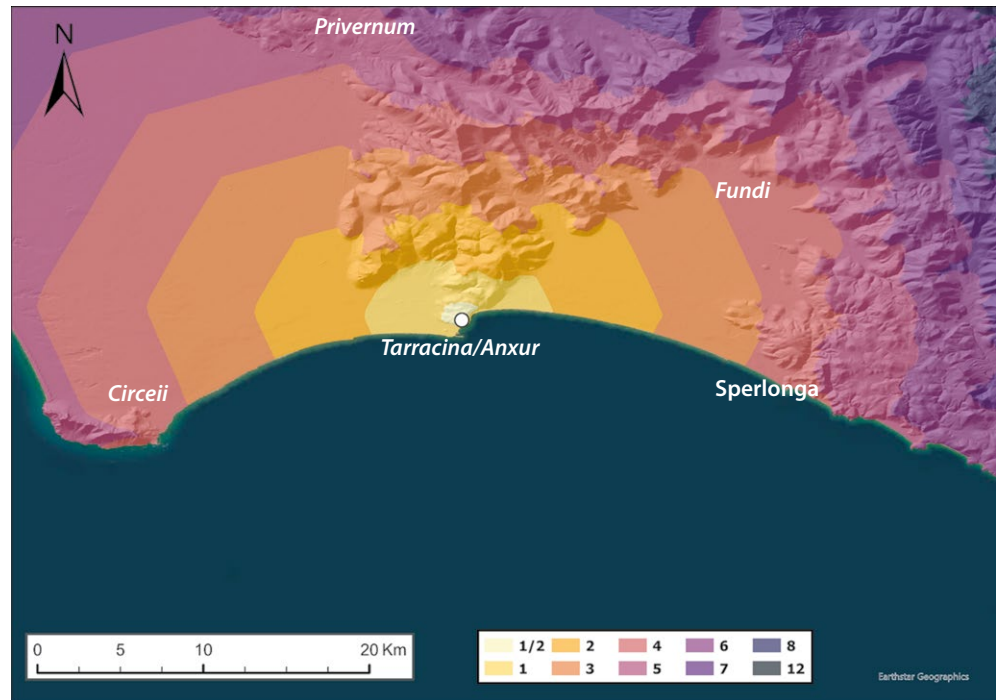


Fig. 15: Monte Sant'Angelo, Terracina (LT). Isochrone map from the site. The numbers refer to walking hours.

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identified. Although the absence of formal archaeological investigation prevents any precise chronological or functional attribution of this latter, it is plausible to suggest that, at some point during the protohistoric period, this site may have played a role within the same network of political and economic control as Monte Sant'Angelo. In other words, regardless of whether or not the two sites belonged to the same collective identity, they may have functioned, at a certain period, as interconnected nodes within analogous systems of territorial control and, possibly, of economic resource management – particularly livestock farming, an activity closely associated with this type of site.

42 In the broader territorial context, notwithstanding the above-mentioned caveats, the site's position takes on even greater relevance. It is situated at the interface of land and sea, well defended on the final promontory of the limestone hills that serve as a hinge between the Pontine plain and that of Fondi. This position makes it a threshold between Latium and Campania, an impression reinforced by the lack of information on pre-Roman settlement in the Fondi plain<sup>87</sup>. From this intermediate position, the site could have potentially accessed the resources of both coastal plains. Modelling the isochrones of movement across the landscape in a very simplistic way (Fig. 15) – considering only geomorphological features and disregarding the certainly major impact of environmental factors such as marshes and watercourses<sup>88</sup> – it appears that, within a four-hours walk from the site of Monte Sant'Angelo, one could reach the two furthest points of the coastline it overlooks: Circeo to the west and Sperlonga to the east.

43 The settlement's location, however, not only served defensive and surveillance purposes but was most likely also well suited to the exploitation of key resources. Indeed, one of the most important was the sea, from which the site remained at a safe

87 In this area, indeed, some evidence of prehistoric occupation has been identified, seemingly extending as late as the MBA, after which there appears to be a long silence lasting until the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. (Di Fazio 2006, 13 f.). New insights may hopefully emerge from the recent excavation campaigns led by M. Di Fazio and carried out by the University of Pavia in collaboration with the University of Siena, in the locality of Pianara, just above Roman Fundi. Here, a hilltop site (ca. 400 m asl) has been identified, enclosed by a circuit of large limestone blocks surrounding an area of approximately 20 ha. This site has been proposed as a possible location of pre-Roman Fundi (Di Fazio – Biella 2007; Di Fazio 2020, 81).

88 As recently reconstructed, as mentioned, by Sevink et al. 2023.

distance. Most likely it would have provided resources of different kind, first and foremost food<sup>89</sup> and salt<sup>90</sup>, as well as representing an exchange axis of main importance<sup>91</sup>. A second key element is virtually represented by the mountains connected to the site in the north. They could have provided food through foraging and hunting activities as well as raw materials, first and foremost the wood. As briefly mentioned before, even though there is no archaeological evidence for that, it is likely that the mountains could also have played a major role in terms of animal husbandry, possibly also providing, along with the marshland in the lowland<sup>92</sup>, winter pastures for flocks coming from the more inland Apennine areas. A last key element, contrary to what has been assumed for a long time<sup>93</sup>, are the lagoons and marshes that characterised the plains in ancient times. Far from being void and ›dead‹ areas, they could have been economically exploited for food through fishing, hunting, foraging, and limited agriculture<sup>94</sup> (even specialised one, like in grape productions<sup>95</sup>). Other important activities would have likely been the gathering of materials such as reeds (genus *Phragmites*), used in basketry and to thatch roofs, as well as specific wood types as willows and medicinal shrubs<sup>96</sup>.

44 The potential resources listed above must have played an even more crucial role given the limited extent of land around Monte Sant'Angelo suitable for extensive agriculture. With the lowlands forested and occupied by wetlands, and the higher areas marked by steep slopes interspersed with only small plateaus, large-scale cereal cultivation must have been exceptionally challenging. Before concluding with the analysis of the possible economy of the area, it is worth considering the following two points. The first is that these resources, indeed with the due technological and palaeoenvironmental differences, may have been exploited throughout the entire history of the settlement. The second is that one of the most significant features of Monte Sant'Angelo may have been a water source located on the hill itself. Although no longer extant today, this spring is documented in medieval sources<sup>97</sup>.

45 While the presence of a village for, at least, the LBA and EIA, if not way earlier, is attested only by the material discussed above, the following macro-phase (Orientalising/Archaic period) provides a wider array of evidence. The centre of Tarracina is mentioned in the so called Roman-Carthaginian treat of 509/508 B.C. by Polybius<sup>98</sup>, alongside Circeii<sup>99</sup>, among the centres pertaining to the Roman sphere of influence. Other sources recall how the city was then seized by Volscians<sup>100</sup>, changing its name in Anxur<sup>101</sup>, entering during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. a phase of conflicts with Rome which ended up with the conquest of the city and the establishing of the colony by the latter in 329 B.C. Tarracina and Circeii thus appear in the sources as the most impor-

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89 Evidence for the exploitation of these resources – such as fish bones and mollusc shells (mostly of clams, patellas and tellinas) – is well attested, at least for the later phases, in the excavation record. Renowned in Roman times, as Di Fazio 2006, 50 highlights, were the mackerel of Amyclae, a centre to be located on the coastline of Fondi.

90 Salt extraction that could have taken place in protohistoric times through the *briquetage* method and after with the proper saltern, starting with the Orientalising/Archaic period. On the protohistoric salt production with particular reference to the Tyrrhenian coast from Tarquinia to the Monte Circeo, see Alessandri – Attema 2021.

91 See, in relation to the Roman period, Jaia 2017.

92 As documented for modern time, see Tol – de Haas 2022, 241.

93 On the roots of this long-lived bias, see Traina 1988.

94 With specific reference to the Pontine case, see Tol – de Haas 2022.

95 As recalled by Plin. HN 14, 8 »Antea Caecubo erat generositas celeberrima in palustribus populetis sinu Amynciano, quod iam intercidit incuria coloni locique angustia...«.

96 Tol – de Haas 2022, 243.

97 Diosono – Scheduling 2022, 191.

98 Polyb. 3, 22, 1–2.

99 For the archaeological evidence of this centre, see Cébeillac Gervasoni 1987.

100 Enn. ann. 162 V. = 152 Sk. = 165 Fl.; Livy 8, 21, 11; Diod. Sic. 14, 15, 5; Plin. HN 3, 59; Festus 20L.

101 About the pre-Roman root of the poleonym, see Di Fazio 2020, 107.

tant centres on this southern margin of Latium. However, their political relationships remain unclear. It is unknown whether they belonged to the same political community or what their hierarchical relations were. Nevertheless, their importance, closely tied to the control of the sea and surrounding marshes, is beyond question.

<sup>46</sup> Moreover, based on the mentioned sources, we do not have sound elements for defining the ethnic affiliation of both Tarracina and Circeii. We do know that, at least according to Polybius' account about the 509/508 B.C. treaty, they were part of the Roman sphere of influence. However, based on that, is not possible to take for granted that the communities of these centres ascribed themselves to a Latin identity. Even more difficult, and perhaps vain, is the quest to spot ethnic markers in the archaeological records which could testify the diachronic evolution of the local identity. Indeed, several elements of the material culture of Monte Sant'Angelo – in terms of ceramic classes and morphological parallels – suggest it belonged to a network of contacts centred further north, between Latium and southern Etruria. Conversely, the few atypical materials, potentially reflecting the aforementioned historical dynamics, are too fragmentary to permit secure interpretation.

<sup>47</sup> Also difficult is to define the relationship between the LBA/EIA village and the Orientalising/Archaic phase site. While a general continuity is plausible, it is possible that these two macro-phases differed markedly in their nature and, thus, patterns of settlement organisation. The evidence of the later Roman period suggests that the area of the earlier LBA/EIA village has become, at a given time, a sacred one, but to date it is difficult to propose a sound dating for this shifting in the nature of the site. Nor can be ruled out the possibility that already in protohistoric time a sacred area existed within the village. The so-called *auguraculum*<sup>102</sup>, a rocky outcrop in the superior terrace of the sanctuary, and thus likely near the very centre of the village, may have played a sacred role perhaps already in the protohistoric phases. It was preserved in a raised position above floor level in Roman times and it shows traces of artificially carved sockets, possibly meant to accommodate some element. A similar hypothesis might tentatively be proposed for the ›oracular rock‹, located immediately east of the ›Great Temple‹. However, certain elements suggest caution in attributing a sacred function to it in earlier periods. A trench excavated adjacent to it during the 2024 campaign yielded a significant quantity of Roman material but notably no impasto pottery. Given the massive terracing works carried out in the Roman period to accommodate and provide a scenic backdrop for the temple, it is plausible that in earlier phases this rock was far less exposed. It is also worth noting that at least one of the cults possibly attested at the sanctuary in Roman times is that of Feronia<sup>103</sup>, a goddess strongly associated with water – a connection consistent with the aforementioned possible presence of a natural spring. Originally part of an Italic pantheon, Feronia was later integrated into the Roman religious system<sup>104</sup>. Given the lack of evidence regarding the ethnic identity of the Monte Sant'Angelo community in earlier phases, it is probably more cautious and accurate if we accept a cult of Feronia at the site, not to attribute it solely to the Volscian conquest of the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., as its origins may well predate that event. Unlike the Orientalising/Archaic phase, there is currently no evidence – such as structures or material finds – that would support the existence of a sacred function during the protohistoric period.

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<sup>102</sup> Bruni 2022, 12.

<sup>103</sup> This hypothesis has sparked considerable debate among prominent scholars, both in favour and against it, stemming from differing interpretations of a passage in Pliny (Plin. HN 2, 55, 146), which recounts that ›in Italia inter Tarracinam et aedem Feroniae turres belli civilis temporibus desiere fieri, nulla non earum fulmine diruta«. For the relevant discussion, see Diosono – Scheduling 2022, 190 n. 69. It is also important to note that a cult of Feronia is attested in the territory of Terracina, specifically at Punta Leano, where it is once again associated with a natural spring.

<sup>104</sup> On the cult of Feronia, see Di Fazio 2013.

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48 In interpreting the site of Monte Sant'Angelo during the Orientalising/Archaic phases, another important aspect must be taken into account. The Roman city of Terracina developed at a lower elevation where its monumental remains are still clearly visible today with the area of the modern Colle di San Francesco likely serving as its ›acropolis‹ or *arx*<sup>105</sup>. While the possibility of a shift in the toponym over time – perhaps in connection with the foundation of the Roman colony – cannot be excluded, the hypothesis that the pre-Roman centre was located in the same area as the later Roman city seems plausible<sup>106</sup>. Such a hypothesis would also be consistent with broader trends in settlement patterns during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C., especially in Tyrrhenian Central Italy. This period is generally marked by the emergence of (proto-)urban phenomena, involving demographic and political centralisation on large plateaus. These centres typically replaced earlier, more distributed settlement systems – often consisting of small, easily defensible hilltop villages that controlled the surrounding territory – characteristic of the FBA and EIA with variations depending on the regional context<sup>107</sup>. Following this hypothesis, it is also worth highlighting, again, how some protohistoric materials are reported to have been recovered in the area of the ›acropolis‹ of San Francesco<sup>108</sup>. It is thus possible that a protohistoric settlement already existed in the area that later became the acropolis or *arx* of the urban centre.

49 If at some point between the late protohistoric and Orientalising periods a process of centralisation occurred leading to the emergence of the city of Terracina, this inevitably raises the question of how the role and nature of the Monte Sant'Angelo site should be understood. One possibility, indeed, is that it assumed a sacred role or even became a sanctuary while the new urban centre was taking shape below. In this regard, some materials recovered from various trenches during the excavations suggest potential insights. In several areas, strata dating from the Roman period yielded fragments of architectural coverings in that light sandy impasto known in Italian as ›*impasto chiaro-sabbioso*‹, specifically roof tiles, cover tiles, and architectural terracottas. This ceramic type appears around the late 7<sup>th</sup> to early 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C. in Latial and southern Etruscan contexts and persists at least into the late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C.<sup>109</sup>. While also used early on for architectural elements, its use for roofing continued well into the Roman period. The analysis of these coverings at Monte Sant'Angelo identified, however, several ceramic fabrics. It is thus possible, in the absence of unequivocal indicators, that at least one of these may belong to a pre-Roman phase, substantiating the existence of architecturally significant structures<sup>110</sup>.

50 The discovery among the excavation materials of amphora fragments from various provenances, beginning in the Archaic period, testifies in any case to the importance of the site, even if the settlement had plausibly shifted to a lower elevation. The amphorae indicate the arrival of resources from a wide area to Monte Sant'Angelo, which must therefore have hosted individuals or social entities capable of attracting such goods. As with the possible architectural terracottas, it is not currently possible – on the basis of the archaeological material alone – to determine whether this was an aristocratic residence, a political structure, and/or a sacred area.

51 At present, aside from the problematic evidence of the bronze fibula discussed above, these are the only elements that may archaeologically suggest the presence of a sacred area in the pre-Roman phases. Certainly, postulating a continuity of cult practices

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105 Boccali 1997, 187.

106 For this long-lived hypothesis see already Lugli 1926, XXIII–XXIV, who suggested the pre-Roman *arx* to have been located a bit lower than San Francesco, in the area of Castello Frangipane.

107 About the (proto-)urbanisation phenomena, see Pacciarelli 2000.

108 The material, still unpublished, is reported by A. Di Rosa, cited in Di Fazio 2020, 107.

109 See, e.g., Taloni 2006, 52 f.

110 La Notte (forthcoming).

and thus suggesting that the area had a sacred function prior to the construction of the Roman sanctuary appears to be a plausible hypothesis, especially in light of the considerations outlined above. However, from a strictly archaeological perspective, the indicators currently remain too tenuous.

## Conclusions

52 In conclusion, the elements analysed here allow for a first synthesis. Although limited, the traces of prehistoric occupation identified at Monte Sant'Angelo contribute – within the constraints of the available evidence – to expanding our understanding of a historical period still relatively under-documented in this part of southern Latium. Further archaeometric analyses of the material, particularly the obsidian, may also offer valuable insights into the networks of contact and exchange involving this type of material along the Tyrrhenian coast.

53 In line with trends known across ancient Italy, the final phases of protohistory likely saw well-distributed settlement focused on naturally defensible areas. From the Iron Age onwards, the centripetal dynamics of proto-urban development likely took root in this region as well. Monte Sant'Angelo, while topographically dominant, was limited in extent and poorly suited to agriculture, and may have lost importance as a settlement site. It is plausible that the emerging urban centre developed at lower elevation where the Roman colony later stood.

54 Nonetheless, the current data do not allow us to take this hypothesis much further. While definitive evidence is lacking, the possibility that the site held a sacred function already in the pre-Roman period cannot be ruled out. Although our knowledge of the Terracina area remains fragmented, decades of research in southern Latium – especially by the Groningen Institute of Archaeology – have revealed a dense network of closely spaced sites from the protohistoric period onwards. In this light, it is tempting to hypothesise forms of socio-political integration, potentially materialising in shared cultic centres, such as Monte Cavo among the *populi Albenses*. The Monte Sant'Angelo site may have formed part of such a network, at least from a certain point in time.

55 The question of the cultural – or, if one prefers, ethnic – identification of the communities that inhabited Monte Sant'Angelo over the centuries remains open. Without forcing the interpretation of ancient literary sources to fit the archaeological evidence, it is currently impossible to provide a solid answer to this issue. As mentioned above, already from the protohistoric period, the local material culture appears to show certain affinities with those of more northern and coastal areas, even though connections with southern contexts are certainly not absent. The use of bucchero or ›*impasto rosso-bruno*‹ pottery, for instance, continues to attest – also during the Orientalising and Archaic phases – a stronger inclusion in northern networks.

56 However, these are highly general elements which do not in any way allow for a clear determination of the ethnic or political identity of these communities. Furthermore, although some of the archaeological evidence could be interpreted as discussed in a way consistent with such an event, it can certainly be stated that, based on the recovered archaeological material – especially as it is largely decontextualised – there is no trace of a clear rupture that would substantiate the narrative of the Volscian conquest of the city.

57 In any case, the data presented here significantly enrich our understanding of human occupation in southern Latium, from the prehistoric through to the Roman phases. In this broader context, Monte Sant'Angelo stands out – thanks to the recent excavation campaigns – as a site of considerable importance, at least from the protohis-

toric period and certainly during the historical era, when it may have represented the centre of a major polity on the southern fringes of ancient Latium.

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