

Excavation at Castellaraccio (Civitella-Paganico – GR) 2018

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This report summarizes the first archaeological campaign (May – June 2018) at the medieval settlement of Castellaraccio of Monteverdi. The scope is to first identify the life span and activities of the castle and to understand the relationship of the hilltop with its immediate surroundings. The research will further determine the socio-economic role that the castle played in this strategic area, positioned over farming land, a bridge and a major road that led inland from the coast to Siena. The presence and collaboration of a nearby ongoing excavation of earlier Etruscan and Roman settlements are the ideal conditions to address how the activities changed and transformed through time, adding another perspective to the current debates. This first season aimed to clear the castle from the collapse to expose its plan and date the life span of its occupation. Further clearing was also extended to the exterior of the castle to document the different wall techniques of the fortification. Only one area was opened over the most monumental part of the castle. The lack of medieval glazed pottery, except for a few fragments of undatable kitchenware, could indicate a pre-majolica settlement. While it is still premature to assess any date of occupation of the hilltop, it seems safe to establish that Castellaraccio belongs to the first incastellamento generation. The use of non-invasive techniques in the next campaign will help read the territory around the castle, along the Ombrone river and possibly to the nearby Cannicci valley.

The medieval settlement of Castellaraccio lies about 30 km from Grosseto near the road that leads to Siena. It has never been studied. However, the countryside below the hilltop has been surveyed and excavated by the Soprintendenza in the late 1990s, providing a fascinating preview of the archaeological potential of the site. Here, in the valley, different production activities took place during the Etruscan, Roman and Medieval periods benefitting from a large-scale hydraulic system that controlled the waters. The fortuitous convergence of the imposing Ombrone river with its tributaries, the Lanzo and Gretano rivers, and major roads running through the area are among the many reasons that have continued to attract settlements and confirm the crucial position of the later castle. Altogether, this geographical position provides ideal conditions for production, settlement, and trade (fig.1).

The inception of a joint project

The first campaign in 2018 included a general survey of the hilltop and a small test trench on one of the two highest points of the ruins. The land belongs to the large estate of Monteverdi which overlooks the Ombrone River (fig. 2) and the valley where the sister project at Podere Cannicci saw its first campaign in 2017

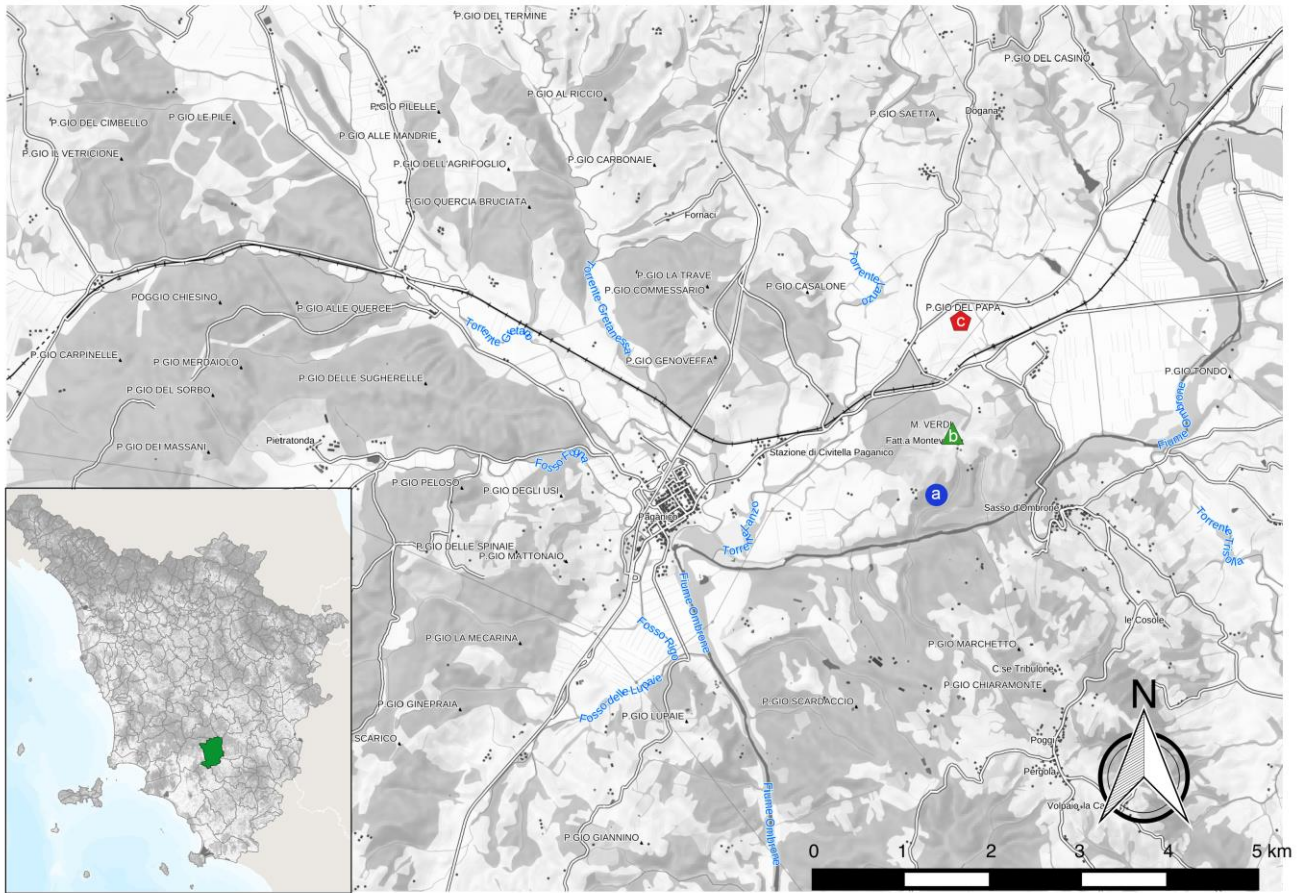


Fig. 1. Map of the territory of the castle of Castellaraccio (a), the Renaissance farm of Monteverdi (b) and Podere Cannicci (c) part of the comune of Civitella Paganico, near Grosseto, Italy. <http://www.regione.toscana.it/-geoscopio-wms>.



Fig. 2. Ombrone river looking at the Amiata from the east. Photo by Emanuele Mariotti.

(fig. 1c).¹ Data from these two parallel excavations will clarify the diachronic picture of the area and its connections to the interior and the coast. The excellent field survey by Andrea Marcocci from 2015 has guided our decision process and provided the background of the region settled since the prehistoric times onwards². The next few seasons will establish the nature of the castle, the activities it served and the presence of earlier settlements.

A description of the excavation of the first campaign is followed by background material from previous research of the area and a brief historical introduction of the family who gave the name to the Ardenghesca territory.

The Ombrone valley has been surveyed partially by the local government institution, the *Soprintendenza Archeologia delle Belle Arti e Paesaggio* (1989-1990) when the installation of a gas pipeline was cutout through the territory of the modern Commune of Civitella Paganico (Grosseto)³. The Podere Cannicci area will be explored for prehistoric, Etruscan, and Roman features whereas the Castellaraccio site involves at this stage a medieval settlement. Under investigation are issues of historical continuity, the post-Roman environment, the migration towards hilltops, and who commissioned the castle.

The short-lived Castellaraccio was ultimately expropriated and incorporated into the Senese *contado*. Its citizens were moved to the newly fortified town of Paganico built over and by the main road between Siena and Grosseto. By 1294 the castle was considered a ruin.

The Ardenghesca Region

The castle lies in the Ardenghesca territory, named after the family who ruled over the region. This territory consists of woods and a series of valleys that link Siena's *contado* to that of Grosseto along the Tyrrhenian coast. The territory is also rich in natural springs, and several smaller rivers, namely, the Farma (north), the Gretano (southwest) and the Lanzo (northeast) which all supply the Ombrone. The Ardengheschi, mentioned in several documents since the 11th century, was among one of the first landowning families to be targeted by the rising commune of Siena. The growth of the modern medieval towns demanded ever-growing supplies of food and wood and access to maritime trade flourishing in the Mediterranean. The other newly created communes such as Savona, Genoa, and Pisa attracted and traded goods in Sardinia, Sicily, and the Balearic Islands and North Africa. Siena, on the other hand, grew because of business along the *Francigena* road from Rome, becoming an essential stop on the way across the Alps. Grosseto, originally a small village of fishermen and salt marshes, was quickly annexed to the city together with its landings on both the coast and along the Ombrone River. While Siena increasingly imposed its jurisdiction over the new opportunities for trade, it also managed to establish its control over salt. Grain and other basic goods came with the land expropriation or acquisitions from settlers between the coast and Siena.

Castellaraccio is described by the local community as one of the many castles that were abandoned and reused as a quarry for the building of the valley settlement, called Paganico, along the road that runs from Grosseto to Siena, with connections to many other centers such as San Quirico, Montalcino, Buonconvento and Chiusi. By the mid of the 13th century, Siena had control over most of this part of the region and it is by this time that Castellaraccio was probably abandoned. About one hectare of a flattened oval plateau commanded a 360-degree view of the southwest of the Ombrone river below, the Amiata mountains to the southeast and the many wooded hilltops around the settlement. Surrounded by the Ombrone and other smaller rivers, Castellaraccio presents an anomaly today--that of the exclusive presence of holm oak trees occupying the entire hilltop creating a different microclimate from the surroundings⁴. While the wood covering the castle postdates the medieval settlement, the woodland continues extensively below the fortification walls and over nearby hills and appears to provide an alternative to the other agricultural grain cultivations of the area. These trees were ex-

¹ The project is a joint collaboration between the University of Buffalo, SUNY (Alessandro Sebastiani) and The Cooper Union for the Advancement of the Arts and Science, New York. See www.imperoproject.com.

² MARCOCCI 2015-2016.

³ For history of the previous explorations of the areas see SEBASTIANI *et al.* 2018.

⁴ While the woods may have expanded with time over the old ruins it seems that their use was well known during the middle ages and was one of the main resources in the area.



Fig. 3. Castellaraccio Monteverdi Holm Oak. Photo by Emanuele Mariotti.

tremely valuable, providing not only firewood and charcoal, but also serving for shipbuilding, bark for tanning fabric and leather, and as animal food (fig. 3)⁵.

Little is known on the origin of the Ardengheschi family besides that they gave their name to the region. The few documents that survive are papers in Lucca and the Amiata, but neither reveal to which urban territory the Ardenghesca land belonged.⁶ The suggestion that they belonged either to the towns of Roselle (later Massa Marittima) or Siena seems at this stage speculative and improbable. Another more traditional hypoth-

esis goes back to the controversial donation of lands to the family by Charlemagne establishing their role in the community and anointing them counts over land in which they had already invested and developed⁷. However power was passed, the Ardenghesca appear to have had *de facto* in control of many of the major medieval centers along the Grosseto - Chiusi road which brought salt to the interior of the region. That very road ran below the ruins of the Castellaraccio parallel to the Ombrone river.

The Ardenghesca family, settled in the region, was divided into three branches of which the two most important centers were Civitella, mentioned in documents since the 12th century, and Pari. Further documentation of the castle tells us that twenty-five *masseritie* or roughly two-thirds of the castle settlement were registered and later transferred to Siena in 1279. The last recorded information shows that the castle was re-appropriated by private landowners: Ugolino the son of Rustico bought Castellaraccio from the *Comune* of Siena in 1294. Later in the chain of ownership, a certain Niccolò son of Bonifazio Bonsignori bought it from the Abbey of Saint Galganus and only three years later, in 1297 the Bonsignori family then donated its properties back to Siena. The castle was by then abandoned and ruined, *destructus et nullus habitat in eodem*⁸. The castles stones were reused in the newly built fortification at Paganico for the gates, the walls, and the hospital. The castle's intimate relationship with its original site persisted when the land and its ruins officially became part of Paganico in 1320. The land passed on to two other families, with the Patrizi in the 16th century and more recently with the Giannuzzi Savelli who still live there and have kindly hosted our team during our research. It is to them that we dedicate this article.

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The Excavation

The site of Castellaraccio was firstly recorded during a survey conducted to complete the *Carta Archeologica* of Paganico's municipality⁹. The surveyor suggested the existence of at least two towers amidst other structures and pottery which he identified but not collected, one of them being a fragment of "maiolica arcaica"¹⁰.

The 2018 archaeological campaign at Castellaraccio had two main objectives: first, to provide an approximate plan of the site recording the main circuit wall and the emerging structures; second, to test a small area

⁵ BUONINCONTRI, DI FALCO, DI PASQUALE 2013. In England oaks and derivative types were used and found in records as early as the 13th century. The Ely Coucher Book of 1250 mentions holm oak trees as key assets of the Bishopric of Eyl. Rackham 1986. Although, not proven yet, the cultivation of holm oaks planted at Castellaraccio would have taken place after the abandonment of the castle.

⁶ ANGELUCCI 2000.

⁷ SCHNEIDER 1975.

⁸ ANGELUCCI 2000.

⁹ The survey was conducted between 1998 and 2008 by MARCOCCI 2016: 234-35 (Site 134) and 412.

¹⁰ MARCOCCI 2016: 234-35 (Site 134) and 412.

inside the castle (4x3m) to provide us with a first archaeological sequence which will help to date the site. Two teams worked on the project, one dedicated to the main excavation area (A1000) and the other exploring the rest of the castle.

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The hilltop of Castellaraccio has still preserved most of its fortification to an average height of 1-1,5 m, on three sides (north, east and west). The two western and eastern sections are the best preserved, with the latter conserving 2-3 m of standing structures. It is immediately clear how the castle exploited the conformation of the hill, encircling the top (one-hectare ca.), with its northeast-southwest axis as the longest one.

A handful of aligned rooms have been identified inside the castle abutting the northern curtain wall; while at least another L-shaped independent structure has been identified in front of Area 1000. Numerous emerging walls are visible in other parts of the fortified area, as well as outside, which lead us to believe that the site was developed in two levels; the main one, on the top of the hill, and a lower one occupying the southwestern slopes. This interpretation needs to be confirmed in the future, (fig. 4).

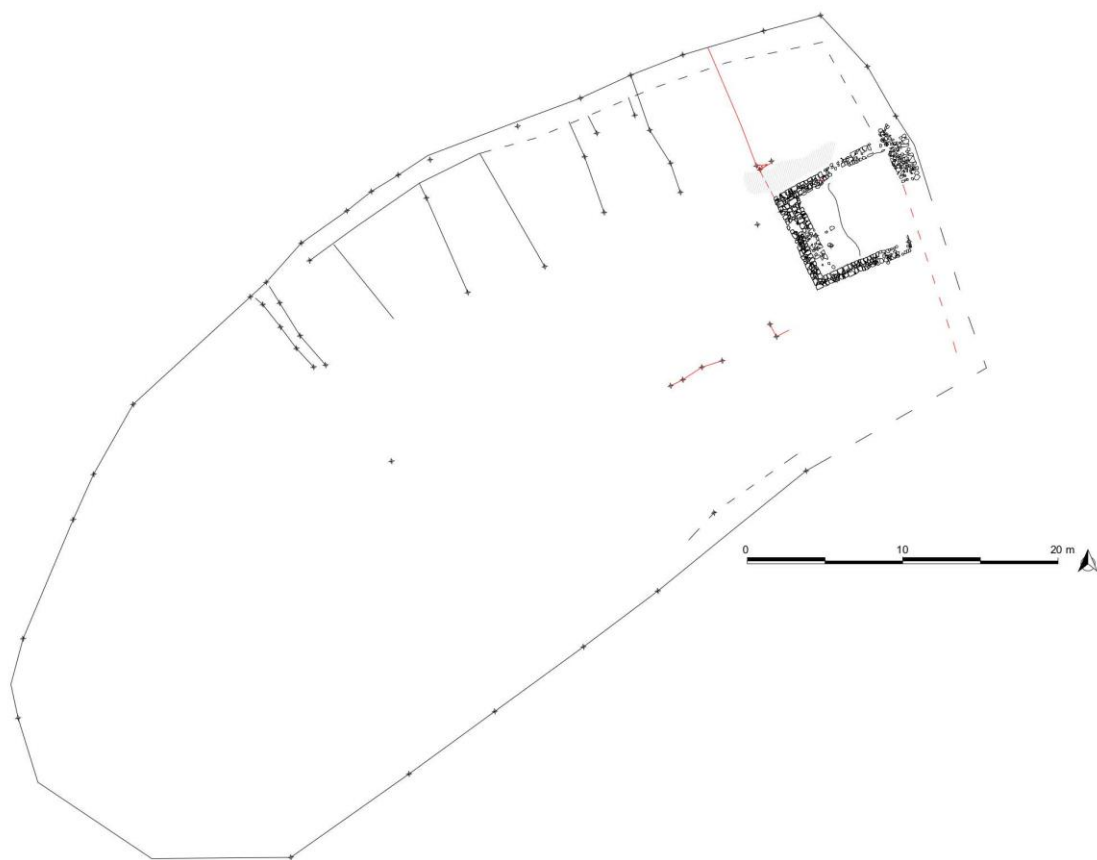


Fig. 4. Plan of the Castellaraccio of Monteverdi, Area 1000. Plan by Emanuele Mariotti.

The survey has also revealed how the southern side of Castellaraccio is the less preserved one, probably due to the steeper condition of the ground, which may have caused the collapse of most of the structures downhill.

The two south-western and north-eastern opposite corners of Castellaraccio were identified as a possible location for towers in Marocci's survey; moreover, they are the best preserved sections of the site. However,

after the survey and the excavation, it is clear that at least the north-eastern one was not a tower, but rather a larger structure.

One evident “anomaly” while surveying the area inside the castle was immediately recognized by the absence of a significant mound of stones, generated by the collapse of the buildings, usually located in the center of rooms or on the sides of walls. In Castellaraccio most of the rooms identified are characterized not by accumulations of stones but by depressions. This may be either a sign of structures built with a mixed technique combining a stone foundation and walls built in perishable materials or the possibility that a significant part of the ruined materials has been removed. The only area with a significant collapse still in place was where we started our excavation, Area 1000. At the end of the campaign, we were able to draft a preliminary plan of the emerging structures to give a general idea of the extension and structure of the castle, (fig. 4).

The Excavation



Fig. 5. The southern edge of the Circuit wall, Context 3, Western view.

the north-eastern corner of the room, almost at the same height of the curtain wall **3**, still preserved and gradually receding towards south and west. We reduced the level of rubble on the eastern side of the room, in order to work more safely in the western area, where, in the end, we opened our trench, (fig. 5).

Under the collapse a new layer was identified, with a mixed composition of stones, earth and mortar, which was interpreted as an earlier phase of destruction. This layer covered a harder level of ground mixed with flattened fragments of tiles, covered with mortar on both sides. Initially, we interpreted this context **11** as the remains of the collapse of the roof of the building, but the low and random number of tiles discovered made us doubt this interpretation, (fig. 6).



The area selected for the excavation was on the north-eastern side of the site, one of the possible locations for a tower. In this point, the curving curtain wall was abutted by a large structure divided into two rooms, one on the north side and one to the south side. The area, together with its south-western counterpart, appears as a significant position of the settlement from the ruins still visible on the surface which are some of the best preserved. We decided to operate in the southern enclosed space, where the collapse was more imposing. The area was also chosen for safety reasons, since the northern one had a prominent depression in the center.

After clearing the area, we removed the stone collapse that occupied the room. The highest level of the collapse was reached in

Fig. 6. Castellaraccio, Area 1000, Context 11.

A few fragments of a mortared floor or mortared wall surface are still in place. The possible floor remains (19), were protected by the collapse in the north-western corner of the room (fig. 7). A few stones protruding inwards the room from wall 5 are proposed as the remains of a stair. The structure exposed during the excavation corresponds to a possible door which was later filled in. The door was meant to connect Area 1000 with the associated room/space on the northern side.

First, the wall 16 is older and partially covered by wall 4. The wall 16 continues towards the north, under below wall 5, on the south. Two different elements emerged under the layers 11 and 19 (figg. 7-8). The first layer 11 uncovered below the collapse is composed of mostly irregular stones and pebbles, with a yellowish clay used as a bonding agent. It was initially interpreted as a first phase of the medieval structures, partially demolished and later reused as a foundation for wall 4. However, after the discovery of a fragment of a *dolium*, lying under wall 5, we cannot exclude that this structure may be even older.



Fig. 7. Clearing of context 11. Note the tile emerging from context 19.



Fig. 8. Aerial view of Castellaraccio, Area 1000, georeferenced by Josef Soucek.

The second element that emerged under **11** is a layer **13**, composed by reddish dirt with the presence of charcoal and sparse angular stones. This layer against wall **16**, and has not yet been interpreted. To conclude, all the contexts and the few finds, with the notable exception of the *dolium* fragment, are found inside the room. While only context **13** clearly continues under wall **5**, and is therefore the oldest layer uncovered, predating the construction of the two rooms. At some point a posthole was created in the eastern part of this layer, but its fill had no useful material. The function of the posthole is not clear. Only with an extension of the area, it will be possible to recognize other related features.

Structures analysis

After the excavation, it was possible to elaborate a preliminary sequence for the features investigated.

The oldest visible feature at the moment is wall **16**, clearly obliterated by the later construction of the fortified settlement. It is still unclear if this continues straight against the north west curtain wall, or turns under the later wall **5**, as a precursor of the same structure. It is unclear at this stage if the eastern main curtain wall **3** has been built after wall **16**, which could have been exploited for the construction of one large, possibly covered, space. The first building was composed basically by three walls: **4** and **7** the first running north-south, parallel to the curtain wall **3**, and wall **7**. In a second moment, this larger space was divided in two rooms with the addition of a new structure, **5**, provided with a gap, probably a door, later closed (fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Castellaraccio Monteverdi. Area 1000, general view from curtain wall 3 with contexts. Final field day 2018.

The main curtain wall is clearly the most robust structure present, 1,4 m wide, built with large irregular stones, a sort of rubble masonry bonded with a pinkish mortar (fig. 5). It is not possible to speculate what the façades looked like.

The other two walls **4** and **17** present very similar features; they are each 0,7m wide, and use white mortar and a construction technique of irregularly coursed semi-worked stones and mortar with a rubble core. As mentioned before, the latest wall, **5** displays more than one phase of construction and is disrupted by the presence of a tree stump. At least two construction phases seem recognizable at the moment, together with an increased use of white mortar.

The excavation was able to produce preliminary results, but without a chronological sequence for the site. At this stage despite the previous identification of “maiolica arcaica”, no trace of this type of material has yet been identified. Most of the campaign consisted of the removal of the collapse of stones and random bricks and tiles are not useful for preliminary chronological identification. The very few fragments of pottery recovered were unglazed.

What is clear is that the site had at least two main phases, a later one, composed by the visible structures (main curtain wall, large room later subdivided in two and the remains of a floor), and an older one, lying directly under it. This earlier phase could potentially be distant in time from the medieval settlement, as suggested by the recovery of a *dolium* fragment in layer 13. Only further excavations will confirm or dismiss this hypothesis, which, however, finds some comparisons in other similar sites in southern Tuscany, such as Castel di Pietra, Donoratico and the castle of Tricosto Castle at Capalbiaccio¹¹.

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¹¹ CITTER 2009; BIANCHI 2004; HOBART *et al.* 2009.

Future Research and Goals

The next seasons at Castellaraccio will establish the nature and lifespan of the castle, its expansion and domestic activities, while looking for evidence of previous settlements. Furthermore, given the geographical position of the castle and the nearby bridge over the Ombrone river, our goal is to reconstruct the medieval (and possibly earlier) road network associated with this place. A handful of documents describe the demise of the castle during the thirteenth century and the relocation of its community to Paganico. Siena founded in Paganico one of the first *Borgo franco*, an administrative order where inhabitants were exonerated from paying taxes and were encouraged to resettle. It was a fruitful investment as the new town would benefit from the trade imported inland from Grosseto and its salt marshes.

The 2018 preliminary campaign has:

- identified the entire wall circuit of the fortification;
- started the clearing of the collapse of the monumental structures and the surface of wall alignments;
- opened a rectangular trench of a structure from which no dating material was found, except for a few fragments of uncoated ceramic. Archaic majolica was instead found during the surface collection by topographer Andrea Marcocci in 2005;
- highlighted the two largest collapses within the walls where at least two towers or buildings and a series of house alignments existed.

The choice of research in this particular area defined by a conjunction of roads and rivers in southern Tuscany that includes a parallel project of Etruscan and Roman valley activities and communities will allow diachronic research which will focus on:

1. Review of the historical idea of “continuity” between the post-Roman world and the Medieval age
2. Comparison of excavation data with geophysical technologies.
3. Analysis of settlement migration and/or abandonment of sites.
4. Relationship between the castle of Castellaraccio, the river, and the valley contemporary to other medieval settlements.

Castellaraccio's strategic position provides new information as an interface between the coast, the riverine landings and larger urban places. Furthermore, as a sealed settlement it will supply precise chronologies, accompanied by a few, but significant documents that will help to clarify both aspects of daily life and the political settlement strategies and how comital families reacted as larger cities prevail in the countryside.

The history of early medieval rural settlements and the families that worked to cultivate or mine the lands has received great attention in Tuscany. The research continues thanks to the finds from many other excavations by universities and the local Soprintendenza, enabling us to rethink and update our settlement models for the Tuscan landscape. In this specific context of transition, the local focus on an early medieval castle will be compared to a wider regional rural and urban settlement pattern, expanding the geographic research through the lens of economic exchanges during the political expansion of the commune of Siena.

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