

Book Review

Visonà, Paolo (ed.). 2023. *Un insediamento di età romana dimenticato nel tempo. Rinvenimenti e ricerche archeologiche a Tezze di Arzignano e nella vallata dell'Agno-Guà (Vicenza)*. Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 109. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-660-1 paperback £45.

This volume contains a series of contributions, of various kinds and approaches, focusing on the history of the territory of the middle Agno-Guà Valley (Veneto, Italy), particularly during the Roman period. This valley lies to the east of the present-day city of Vicenza between the municipalities of Arzignano, Tessino and Montebelluna Maggiore. With its north-south course, the Agno-Guà Valley represents a vital corridor connecting the Alpine mountainous area with the Roman road axis of the Via Postumia, the main communication route of the Cisalpine Gaul.

The territorial study of this river valley began with a survey project started in 2010, with subsequent geophysical analyses conducted in 2012 by Kentucky University north of the hamlet of Tezze di Arzignano in a property named '*fondo Carlotto*' (Carlotto estate) after the owner G. B Carlotto. Starting in the late 1960s, a series of materials and structures indicating a possible Roman settlement (perhaps a villa) dated between the third century BC and the fourth century AD were



brought to light here, with a main occupation phase between the late republican and imperial periods. These surface investigations were coordinated by the volume's editor, who had already studied the area in the 1980s (Visonà 1978; 1984) and published in a collective journal article (Visonà et al. 2014), of which this volume is an expansion.

The first two chapters (named 1a and 1b) authored by Paolo Visonà are, in fact, a compendium and collection of all the antiquarian news, diaries and archive photos on the research, excavations and findings made in the area. These two sections on the history of the studies are separated by an Appendix (Gianni Peltrin), on a structure made by the remains of four pylons, placed in the locality of Canove di Arzignano and already known in the literature, that the author identified as an hydraulic work, without specifying any function (a bridge? an aqueduct?) or chronology. In particular, Chapter 1a collects information gleaned from writings, memoirs, newspaper articles and oral testimonies (sometimes difficult to verify), collected and published between 1543 and 1966, while Chapter 1b is a summary of the research and excavations (including unauthorized ones) conducted in or near the 'fondo Carlotto' between 1966 and 2023. In both cases, the author inserts and transcribes copious parts of the archive documentation, consisting of excavation diaries and reports, sometimes unpublished. The collection of heterogeneous material and different sources organized by years (also very distant from each other) makes the narrative uneven and not very linear, despite the fact that the historical and archaeological richness of this area is clear, intensively inhabited from the Iron Age (p. 75) to the Longobard era (p. 24–25). The large section dedicated to an imposing hydraulic structure from the Roman era (p. 29–40) is surprising, the study of which is continued in a following brief Appendix (p. 41–44), where new photos of pylons reconstructed in contemporary times are published; this seems to break up the fluidity of the narrative somewhat. The publication of photos of the 'fondo Carlotto' Roman settlement (Figures 50–51) and of some unpublished material collected from the non-stratigraphic excavations conducted by the landowner from 1969 until 2003 in an intermittent manner is appreciable.

Chapter 2 (George M. Crothers, Donald L. Handshoe and Paolo Visonà) presents the results of the geophysical prospections conducted by Kentucky University, which were already published in the 2014 article (see above). The combination of GPR and magnetometry led to the detection of several anomalies. However, according to the authors (p. 93), the small size investigated of one-third of a hectare (120 m × 30 m), prevented the recognition of well-defined Roman structures or structures that could be associated with those identified in previous excavations, and made it almost impossible to specify the plan of the settlement or even the plan of individual buildings.

It is noteworthy, however, that thanks to GPR tomography, it was possible to identify structures at different depths, not excluding pre-Roman occupations.

In Chapter 3, Luana Toniolo analyzes the ceramic assemblage from the Valbruna area referred to in the 'fondo Carlotto'. She recognizes a standard chronology on the basis of the few recognizable diagnostic elements (p. 99). The difficulty of being able to better specify the chronology of ceramic production and trade flows or local exchange circuits is admitted by the author, who bases her reflections on the common pottery that constitutes the majority of the material and whose local variation makes any detailed dating or possibility of general consideration difficult.

Chapter 4 (Armando Bernardelli) presents reflections on coin finds. Since most of the coins pertinent to the area under examination are scattered or can be studied by means of plaster casts (p. 120), the author deals with the subject in a general manner, focusing mainly on the long-term (pre-Roman to Late Antique) and regional monetary diffusion (via the Roman city of Veicetia). The chapter is accompanied by a catalogue of coins in the Agno Valley mainly based on previous authors (e.g. Bernardelli 1995; Visonà 1984), which, however, lacks an adequate photographic apparatus of the coin types.

Chapter 5 (Silvana Lora) deals with the subject of inscriptions and stamps on tiles in the Agno Valley. Most of the inscriptions, as the author notes, belong to the funerary sphere (12 out of 17) within a period between the first century BC and the second century AD (p. 163). Only two vignettes come instead from the investigations on the 'fondo Carlotto'. The inscriptions are almost all edited, and the final considerations mainly concern aspects of society. At the same time, in another Appendix (p.172–175), Paolo Visonà analyses a seventeenth-century funerary inscription previously attributed by Migliavacca to Late Antiquity who also admitted that it could be later.

Chapter 6 (Piera Allegra Rasia and Francesca Bertoldi) analyses the anthropological finds discovered in the 'fondo Carlotto' during the twentieth century. The osteological sample refers to nine individuals: one infant, two children, one adolescent and five adults from a necropolis (p. 177). Unfortunately, as the finds cannot be associated with dating elements and in the absence of chemical analyses to establish their chronology, the authors are unable to refer to this necropolis with certainty to the Roman period and the settlement under examination (p. 180).

Chapter 7 (Silvia Garavello) deals briefly (p. 186–188) with the archaeozoological sample, which is also undated. It is worth noting the discovery of a deer antler, which could confirm the presence of this species in the lower Agno valley between the fifth to the second century BCE as attested for other contexts of area (p. 186).

Archaeobotanical finds are the subject of Chapters 8 and 9 (Sila Motella De Carlo). Chapter 8 analyses a number of samples (21 in all) from the 2003 excavation carried out by the same landowner and, therefore, lacking a precise date. The picture, however, that merges with the generic Roman age is that of a relatively common vegetation landscape for these areas composed of oak and hornbeam forests. The presence of *Fagus sylvatica* may refer not to the manufacture of tools or as fuel — as the author suggests — but to its use as a leaf forage since the samples mostly refer to cut branches (p. 189). In Chapter 9, the author presents the results of the C14 analysis carried out on a wood sample from the hydraulic structure covered in Chapter 1 and the following Appendix, dated between 40 BC and 80 AD.

The long Chapter 10 (Davide Sandini) deals with the study and review of a complex of battery tanks identified in the 1980s and located along the banks of the Agno River. The hypothesis of hydraulic works for the drainage of the river dating back to Venetian republic in the seventeenth century (p. 208–210) does not convince the author, who favours a date around the year 1000 on the basis of radiometric dating carried out on mollusc shells (p. 202). The series of tanks could, therefore, have been used to macerate plant fibres (hemp, flax or wool, for example, see Buonopane 2012 especially for Roman hemp cultivation in Veneto) for production and textile purposes (p. 206). The Appendices that follow the chapter are intended to corroborate this interpretation through the analysis of the deposition rate of the bed (Appendix 1 – same author) and further analysis of molluscs, dated around mid-fifteenth century (Appendix 2 – Paolo Visonà), which constitute objective data (according to the author, p. 220) suggesting the defuncting and at the same time the construction of the basins prior to AD 1000 without specifying exactly when (Roman era? Longobard era?). The projection of the Agno riverbed deposition rate based solely on elevations and not on geomorphological analysis is not convincing.

In Chapter 11, Luciano Chilese reviews some significant toponyms of the valley and its surroundings in an attempt to give a historical and linguistic explanation, following an antiquarian tradition.

To summarize, the volume oscillates between the precise analysis of a site north of Tezze ('fondo Carlotto'), identified (or rediscovered — as the book title suggests) along the alpine Agno-Gnuà Valley, and a territorial archaeological and historical reconstruction of the Agno Valley that does not always hit the mark, as it is fragmented and poorly integrated, due to both the type of asystematic investigations carried out over time and the heterogeneity of the methodologies used (e.g. no stratigraphic excavations; lack of plans; lack of landscape and topographical units). Visonà reflects in the Concluding remarks (p. 232–234) on the preliminary nature of the work conducted

by his team. He emphasizes that the urgent task was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the area to begin comprehensive and systematic research in partnership with local authorities and the community. The author's primary concern — due to the awareness of the partiality of the research just presented — is to have raised the question of the archaeological potential of the area in view of the creation of an archaeological protection area that could preserve the context from destructive events (such as the construction of buildings) for future comprehensive research. From this point of view, the volume is a good preliminary historical-archaeological foundation for anyone wishing to conduct research in this area in the future.

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Typesetting queries

1. The following items have been included within the reference list, but are not cited within the text. For each un-cited reference, please advise where it should be cited in the text, or confirm that it can be removed from the reference list.
 - a. Buonopane, Alfredo. 2011.