

Hélène Verreyke

LATE ROMAN POTTERY IN THE POTENZA VALLEY

First results regarding late Roman *Potentia* (Porto Recanati, Marche, Italy)

In this article I would like to present the first results regarding the analysis of the late antique pottery from the Potenza Valley and in particular from the Roman town *Potentia* (Porto Recanati, Marche) (fig. 1)¹.

Since 2002 the Potenza Valley survey-team has been active in the lower Potenza Valley, under the direction of F. Vermeulen of Ghent University (Belgium)². The aim of this interdisciplinary project was to study the urban and rural occupation patterns in the Potenza Valley³. Systematic field survey was carried out in three main research areas respectively in the upper, middle and lower Potenza Valley. *Potentia* is part of the lower Potenza Valley research area and was the subject of several initiatives. A large part of *Potentia*'s territory is presently farmland which allowed us to carry out detailed intra-site survey on the city and immediate surroundings⁴. Since the beginning of the PVS-project in 2000 there have been regular flights for aerial photography which helped to establish the layout of the city. Exceptionally good crop marks observed in the grain fields during several flights in 2003 helped to enhance the layout of the street network, town walls and traces of city buildings. Recently geo-physical research has been carried out on a large area (ca. 3 hectares) north-west and south of the excavated area by the Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton and the British School at Rome⁵. Also recently, the

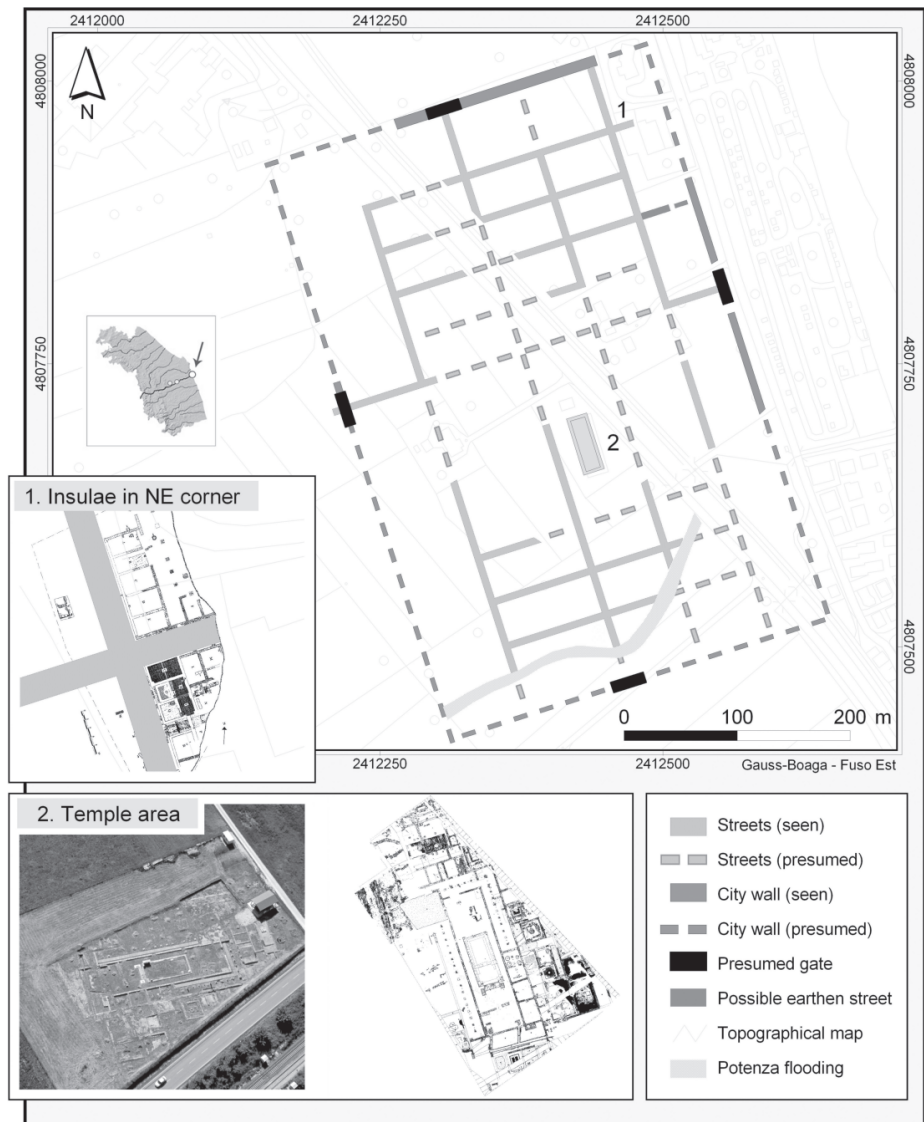


Fig. 1: Map of *Potentia* based on aerial photographs

(Based on VERMEULEN/VERHOEVEN 2004 fig. 5). —

1–2 Excavations of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Marche
(MERCANDO 1979 fig. 94. — PERCOSSI SERENELLI 2001 fig. 7)

¹ This study is part of a research program on late antique ceramics in the Marche region (Italy). This research is carried out with the support of Ghent University (Department of Archaeology and Ancient History of Europe) and the Research Foundation – Flanders. I would like to thank G. De Marinis and E. Percossi Serenelli for providing the opportunity to study the late antique material from *Potentia*.

² F. VERMEULEN, The Potenza Valley Survey. Preliminary Report on Field Campaign 2002. *Babesch* 78, 2003, 71–106. — VERMEULEN/VERHOEVEN 2004, 57–82.

³ IPA (V/09) “Urban and rural transformation in the western and eastern Roman Empire. Interdisciplinary archaeology of late antique and early medieval times.” A collaboration of universities (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Université Catholique de Louvain, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, Ghent University and the Royal Museum of Central Africa Tervuren) studying late antiquity within their research areas in the western and eastern Roman Empire.

⁴ The whole urban area of the ancient town, currently under ploughing, was subdivided into regular units (on average 40 × 40 m) and large samples of datable ceramics and other artefacts were collected in a systematic way.

⁵ S. Hay (Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton) and E. Baldwin (The British School at Rome).

study of the late antique material was initiated, of which we are able to present some first results in this contribution.

The first systematic archaeological research on the site involved the excavation of the northern necropolis of 'La Pineta'. This was a rescue excavation triggered by the appearance of several graves during the exploitation of a sand quarry. From 1962 to 1965 this necropolis was excavated by the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici delle Marche and a total of 385 graves were excavated, dating from the founding of the colony (184 BC) to the 4th century AD⁶. A small rescue excavation in 1967 further south revealed some more graves overlying several buildings. The latter were first identified as rural buildings, but they proved to be part of the town when aerial photographs revealed parts of the regular street-grid of the Roman city. When in 1982 structures came to light during public works along the *strada statale*, excavations were initiated by the Soprintendenza, under the direction of E. Percossi Serenelli, revealing part of the city centre in the following years. In total some twelve campaigns have taken place mostly concentrated on the monumental centre of the town. The last campaign, which took place in the extra-urban area in Spring 2004, revealed part of the road leaving *Potentia* towards the north. Along this road several graves were brought to light⁷.

The ceramic material discussed in this article originates from four areas in the centre of the town. The first area is the south-eastern portico of the temple. This part of the portico was subdivided into several compartments, probably during a reorganisation of the city in the 4th century AD. These were most probably used as storage rooms and/or for the preparation of food as indicated by four dug-in *dolia*⁸. Of an adjacent area to the east the artificial filling was examined. The second area is a levelling layer in front of the entrance of the temple podium. A third context is the late antique deposit which cuts across the layers of the so-called 'edificio est' from the Republican era. Finally we studied the late antique structures in the area south-west of the temple. Several of the fragments that are presented here are currently being petrographically analysed by the Department of Geology of Ghent University under the direction of P. De Paepe. This research is still in progress and will be published in the near future.

The first pottery class that I shall discuss is Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica, a tableware production which is typical for Emilia-Romagna and the Marche region. This pottery class was first defined in *Sentinum* (near Sassoferrato) and Classe. It was L. Brecciaroli Taborelli who made a typology based on the material from *Sentinum*, distinguishing 25 types⁹. Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica, as it is defined today, is the collective name for a range of local productions of fine ware with relief and painted decoration dated from the 2nd to the 5th centuries AD. It is believed that the production of this tableware started in order to fill in the need for fine tableware when the production of Terra Sigillata was gradually decreasing and the importation of African tableware was still limited. Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica probably never exceeded a regional market. It is very well attested in the Marche region and Emilia-Romagna, which therefore must also be the area of production. Savignano sul Panaro

and Classe are sites which have been proposed as being production centres¹⁰. Considering the wide range of fabrics, there must have been several centres of production. A fairly common type of Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica in the lower Potenza Valley is Brecciaroli Taborelli form 19 (fig. 2,1). This is a shallow, large plate in a buff, fine clay with a flaky red slip, decorated with dark brown painted motifs. Dating these types is still difficult due to the lack of well dated published contexts. This piece originates from an artificial fill from the area adjacent to the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple. Also present in this fill was African Red Slip Hayes 61A, Hayes 58 (fig. 2,2) and a foot of a Late Roman 3 amphora (fig. 2,13). Based on the context we can suggest a wide date from the second half of the 4th to the first half of the 5th century AD.

African Red Slip ware was imported in the Adriatic area from the 2nd century onwards with a climax during the 4th and the 5th centuries AD. At the beginning the importation in the western Adriatic was still very modest. The types found in the Potenza valley span the full chronological range from the 2nd to the 6th centuries AD. The most common types are Hayes 50, Hayes 61B (fig. 2,5), Hayes 58 (fig. 2,2) and Hayes 68 (fig. 2,6). Later types are very scarce. In grave n° 90 of the Lombard necropolis of Castel Trosino (near Ascoli Piceno) an African Red Slip plate Hayes 105 was found which indicates that such a piece had a kind of status value¹¹. With regard to the importation of African Cooking Ware on the Adriatic is concerned it seems that the import is restricted to the coastal area and the immediate hinterland (*Helvia Ricina*, *Trea*, *Suasa*)¹². In any case the presence seems to be far more limited than on the Tyrrhenian coast. Imitations of African Red Slip occur frequently in *Potentia*, especially Hayes 61 is often imitated. In some cases only the form is copied. In other cases form, stamped decoration and red slip are adopted (fig. 2,3). This example is executed in a brown coarse fabric with a red slip of very poor quality. It originates from the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple. It is associated with African Red Slip Hayes 61B (fig. 2,5) and

⁶ L. MERCANDO, Portorecanati (Macerata). La necropoli romana di Portorecanati. NSc 28, 1974, 142–430.

⁷ Two graves with monumental character were visible on aerial photographs taken in Spring 2003.

⁸ In one of the *dolia* food remains were found: PERCOSSI SERENELLI 2001, 66.

⁹ *Sentinum*: L. BRECCIAROLI TABORELLI, Contributo alla classificazione di una terra sigillata chiara italiana. Riv. Stud. March. 1, 1978, 1–38. — M. G. Maioli identified this pottery class in Ravenna and Classe and called it "*terra sigillata tarda*": M. G. MAIOLI, Terra sigillata tarda del Ravennate. RCRF Acta 16, 1976, 160–173. — See also Monte Torto (Osimo): M. GIULIODORI, Terra sigillata tarda medio adriatica. In: PIGNOCCHI 2001, 67–70.

¹⁰ Savignano sul Panaro: C. MICHELINI, Il territorio di Savignano sul Panaro in età romana: le testimonianze ottocentesche e i materiali, in: Modena dalle origini all'anno Mille. Studi di archeologia e storia (Modena 1988) 534–547.

¹¹ Castel Trosino: R. MENGARELLI, La necropoli barbarica di Castel Trosino presso Ascoli Piceno. Monumenti Antichi dei Lincei 12, 1902, 1–236 fig. 143. — J. W. HAYES, Late Roman Pottery (London 1972) 167.

¹² In the Potenza Valley Hayes 23B was attested at *Helvia Ricina* (Villa Potenza): L. MERCANDO, Villa Potenza (Macerata). Rinvenimento di edificio romano con pavimento a mosaico. NSc 25, 1971, 391 fig. 12,9.



Fig. 2: 1 *Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica* Brecciaroli Taborelli 19. — 2 African Red Slip Hayes 58. — 3 Imitation African Red Slip. — 4 African Red Slip stamp. — 5 African Red Slip Hayes 61B. — 6 African Red Slip Hayes 68. — 7 'Aegean' Cooking Ware Albarella 1. — 8 'Aegean' Cooking Ware Albarella 2-3. — 9 Frying pan handle. — 10 African Cylindrical Amphora Keay 25/2. — 11 'Spatheion' 1. — 12 Late Roman I Amphora. — 13 Late Roman III Amphora. — 14 Coarse Ware bowl with inclined rim. (Scale 1 : 3).

the foot of an African Cylindrical Keay 25/2 amphora (**fig. 2, 10**) which confirm a date in the second half of the 5th century.

Eastern imports like Late Roman C tableware reached the Adriatic region from the second half of the 5th century AD onwards. When we look at the presence of this class in the Marche region we see a good representation in the coastal area and in the immediate hinterland (Castelfidardo, *Trea*, Suasa and Fossombrone)¹³. The excavation of a 5th century deposit of S. Giacomo degli Schiavoni (Molise) demonstrated that there existed an import of eastern coarse wares in the western Adriatic in this era¹⁴. Fairly common in *Potentia* is what is described by Albarella and colleagues as 'Aegean' Ware Form 1a-d, a large cooking pot with a carinated body, grooves on the exterior and a distinctive rim with a grooved lid-seating (**fig. 2,7**). Other parallels in the western Adriatic

were found in Pescara, Ortona, Crecchio and Classe¹⁵. The same type was also brought to light during the excavations

¹³ Castelfidardo: MERCANDO 1979, 148-149 figs. 59p-r.t-v.z. — *Trea*: G. M. FABRINI, Dal culto pagano al culto cristiano: testimonianze documentarie e archeologiche per l'area del SS. Crocifisso a Treia. *Picus* 10, 1990, 126. — Suasa: F. BIONDANI, Importazioni di ceramica Africana e orientale a Suasa e nell'area medio ad altoadriatica. *Riv. Stud. Lig.* 58, 1992, 170-173 fig. 10,4. — Fossombrone: G. GORI/M. LUNI, Edificio termale a 'Forum Sempromii'. Nota preliminare. *Picus* 2, 1982, 126; 129.

¹⁴ ALBARELLA/CEGLIA/ROBERTS 1993, 180-181. — See also: P. ROBERTS, The late Roman Pottery of Adriatic Italy (unpublished PhD Thesis University of Sheffield 1992) 135-145. — For 2nd-3rd century 'Aegean' imports in the Adriatic: J. ISTENIĆ/G. SCHNEIDER, Aegean cooking ware in the eastern Adriatic. *RCRF Acta* 36, 2000, 341-348.

¹⁵ Pescara: STAFFA 1991, 201-367 fig. 79 n° 211. — Ortona: STAFFA 1991, 201-367 fig. 80. — Crecchio: A. R. STAFFA, Le produzioni

of the north-eastern quarter of *Potentia* and was published by L. Mercando¹⁶. Our example originates from the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple. As already mentioned this context contained African Red Slip Hayes 61B (fig. 2,5) and the foot of an African Cylindrical amphora Keay 25/2 (fig. 2,10). Consequently this fragment can be dated in the 5th century AD. Form Albarella 2–3 also occurs, a large cooking pot with everted rim and sharp beading on the inner edge of the rim (fig. 2,8). This type was also located at Napoli and Classe¹⁷. Our fragment originates from the structures in the area south-west of the temple and was accompanied by African Red Slip Hayes 61A and B and can therefore be situated around the second half of the 4th, or first half of the 5th century AD. Also eastern is the handle of a frying pan (fig. 2,9)¹⁸. It was found in the artificial fill from the area adjacent to the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple. As already mentioned this context could be dated in the second half of the 4th, or first half of the 5th century based on the presence of a fragment of a Late Roman 3 amphora, Hayes 61A and Hayes 58 (fig. 2,13; 2,2).

When we speak of imported table and coarse wares we must bear in mind that these goods were mostly transported in combination with amphorae. The imported amphorae which were identified in *Potentia* are mostly from northern Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. The most common types from northern Africa are the Africana II, the Cylindrical amphora of medium size Keay 25/2 (fig. 2,10), the so-called *spatheia* and in this case the “*spatheion*” type 1B (fig. 2,11). Also occurring but in smaller quantities is the Cylindrical amphora Keay 62¹⁹. From the eastern Mediterranean the Late Roman 2 and 3 amphora (fig. 2,13) are the most frequent imports. Also occurring is the Late Roman 4 and Late Roman 1 amphora (fig. 2,12). The latter was found in a late Roman deposit cutting through the so-called Republican ‘edificio est’. This context also contained a Hayes 68 plate and a stamp type Hayes 69 (fig. 2,4).

Today the regional and local fine and coarse wares of this area are still difficult to analyse. The only defined regional ware is the Terra Sigillata Medio-Adriatica, and as like already mentioned dating is still very difficult. The key-problem is the lack of well dated published reference material. In the recent publication of the excavation of the rural production site Monte Torto (near Osimo, *Auximum*), the regional late Roman coarse wares are discussed in detail, which has already proved its value²⁰. There are several types of table and cooking ware that seem to be typical for this region. For instance the coarse ware bowl with inclined rim, used both for cooking and for serving (fig. 2,14)²¹. This simple form has a long rooted tradition in Roman pottery, but occurs frequently in the late Roman contexts of *Potentia*. Within this category there are several varieties, with a pronounced inward hook of the rim, with an internal groove which emphasizes the rim, various diameters etc.²²

The pottery that I have discussed in this article is dated between the second half of the 4th and the 5th century AD. It is believed that *Potentia* had a prosperous economic environment during this period, after the 3rd century crisis that affected large parts of the Italian peninsula²³. The ceramic evidence of the 6th century is less abundant. This is explained

by the Gothic-Byzantine war (AD 535–553) which affected this region profoundly. Procopius does not mention *Potentia*, but he does report the occupation of strategic cities like Ancona, Ascoli Piceno and *Auximum* (Osimo, some 15 km north-west of *Potentia*). The magnitude of the devastations is illustrated by Procopius when he states that as many as 50.000 farmers died a death of starvation in *Picenum*²⁴. There are references to *Potentia* in several sources up to the beginning of the 7th century, but it is clear that the city did not survive under Lombard rule. A combination of a poor strategic position in the valley plain and a changing situation in the soil hydrology must have been the cause of the diminishing population in favour of the surrounding hill settlements²⁵. Furthermore, what is considered as the boundary between the exarchate of Ravenna and the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto, namely the Musone (*Misco*), is located just north of the Potenza. It is attested that all coastal cities south of Numana were abandoned²⁶. The ceramic material seems to confirm this hypothesis. The analysis of the late antique pot-

ceramiche in Abruzzo tra fine V e VII secolo. In: L. SAGUI (ed.), *Ceramica in Italia: VI–VII secolo*. Atti del Convegno in onore di John W. Hayes, Roma 11–13 maggio 1995 (Roma 1998) 463–471 fig. 20. — Classe: FIUMI/PRATI 1983, 124 figs. 6.36–6.38. — I would like to thank K. W. Slane and P. Turnovsky for their advice.

¹⁶ MERCANDO 1979, 255 fig. 162o. — Another example was found at Castelfidardo: MERCANDO 1979, 153–154 fig. 64w.

¹⁷ ALBARELLA/CEGLIA/ROBERTS 1993, 181–182. — Napoli: P. ARTHUR, Naples: notes on the economy of a dark age city. In: C. MALONE/S. STODDART (eds.), *Papers in Italian Archaeology IV* (Vol IV). BAR Int. Ser. 246 (Oxford 1985) 251 fig. 16.2.1. — Classe: FIUMI/PRATI 1983, 123 figs. 6.32–6.34. — See also: G. F. BASS/F. H. VAN DOORNINCK, A Fourth-Century Shipwreck at Yassi Ada. *AJA* 75, 1971, 35 pl. 2 fig. 24.

¹⁸ It is similar to the frying pan handles found at Kenchreai, Beirut and Carthage. — Kenchreai: B. ADAMSHECK, Kenchreai. Eastern port of Corinth 4. The pottery (Leiden 1979) 144–145, RC 100 pl. 38. — Beirut: J. W. HAYES, From Rome to Beirut and beyond: Asia Minor and Eastern Mediterranean trade Connections. *RCRF Acta* 36, 2000, 296 fig. 31.3. — Carthage: M. G. FULFORD/D. P. S. PEACOCK, Excavations at Carthage: the British Mission, I, 2. The Avenue du Président Habib Bourguiba, Salammbô: the Pottery and other ceramic Objects from the Site (Sheffield 1984) 191 figs. 71, 5.1–5.4. — See also Fos: F. MARTY, La vaisselle de cuisson du port antique du Fos (Bouches-du-Rhône). *Société Française d'Etude de la Céramique Antique en Gaule*, Actes du Congrès de Vallauris (20–23 mai 2004) (Marseille 2004) 117 fig. 19 n° 159.

¹⁹ The Keay 25/2 spike originates from the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple. BONIFAY 2004, 119; 121 fig. 165. — The “*Spatheion*” 1B rim originates from the levelling layer in front of the temple podium, BONIFAY 2004, 124–125 fig. 67.6.

²⁰ PIGNOCCHI 2001.

²¹ Only some examples display fire traces. Our example originates from the subdivided south-eastern portico of the temple.

²² For a typological and archeometrical study of this type: L. MAZZEO SARACINO/L. N. MORANDI/M. C. NANNETTI/M. VERGARI, Una produzione di ceramica da cucina da Suasa (AN): esame tipologico e studio archeometrico, per la definizione della funzione. In: S. SANTORO BIANCHI/B. FABBRI (eds.), *Il contributo delle analisi archeometriche allo studio delle ceramiche grezze e comuni: il rapporto forma/funzione/impasto*. Atti della 1^a Giornata di archeometria della ceramica, Bologna, 28 febbraio 1997. *Studi e Scavi* 4 (Bologna 1997) 200–213.

²³ This 3rd century demographic crisis is also visible in the necropolis: PERCOSSI SERENELLI 2001, 44.

²⁴ Procop. *bell. Goth.* 2,20: G. BINAZZI (ed.), *Regio V. Picenum*. In: *Inscriptiones Christianae Italiae* 10 (Bari 1995) XV. — ALFIERI 2000, 237.

²⁵ PERCOSSI SERENELLI 2001, 45.

²⁶ ALFIERI 2000, 237.

tery of *Potentia* is crucial for the interpretation of the latest occupation phase of the town, but is also indispensable for the chronology of the rural sites located in the Potenza Valley through survey.

Bibliography

- ALBARELLA/CEGLIA/ROBERTS 1993 U. ALBARELLA/V. CEGLIA/P. ROBERTS, S. Giacomo degli Schiavoni (Molise): an early fifth century AD deposit of pottery and animal bones from central Adriatic Italy. *PBSR* 61, 1993, 157–230.
- ALFIERI 2000 N. ALFIERI, Le Marche e la fine del mondo antico. In: G. Paci (ed.), *Scritti di topografia antica sulle Marche*. Picus, suppl. VII (Tivoli 2000) 221–241.
- BONIFAY 2004 M. BONIFAY, *Etudes sur la céramique romaine tardive d’Afrique*. BAR Int. Ser. 1301 (Oxford 2004).
- FIUMI/PRATI 1983 F. FIUMI/L. PRATI, Note sulla ceramica comune. In: G. BERMOND MONTANARI (ed.), *Ravenna e il porto di Classe. Venti anni di ricerche archeologiche tra Ravenna e Classe* (Imola 1983) 118–126.
- MERCANDO 1979 L. MERCANDO, Marche. Rinvenimenti di insediamenti rurali. *NSc* 33, 1979, 89–296.
- PERCOSSI SERENELLI 2001 E. PERCOSSI SERENELLI, *Potentia. Quando poi scese il silenzio... Rito e società in una colonia romana del Piceno fra Repubblica e tardo Impero* (Milano 2001).
- PIGNOCCHI 2001 G. PIGNOCCHI, *Monte Torto di Osimo: l’impianto produttivo* (Falconara 2001).
- STAFFA 1991 A. R. STAFFA, Scavi nel centro storico di Pescara 1: primi elementi per una ricostruzione dell’assetto antico ed altomedievale dell’abitato di “Ostia Aterni-Aternum”. *Arch. Med.* 18, 1991, 201–367.
- VERMEULEN/VERHOEVEN 2004 F. VERMEULEN/G. VERHOEVEN, The contribution of aerial photography and field survey to the study of urbanization in the Potenza Valley (Picenum). *JRA* 17, 2004, 57–82.

