Testing survey strategies in marginal and remote areas in the Apennine uplands. The case of the MoLuLaP project

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Abstract

The Monti Lucretili Landscape Project (MoLuLaP) explores an Apennine upland landscape northeast of Rome from a diachronic perspective. The main goal of the project is to examine the range of socio-economic and cultural activities that have defined and shaped the historical rural landscape over the centuries, as well as to assess the impact of human activities on the environment.

The upland areas are difficult to investigate and are hardly accessible due to geomorphological characteristics that inevitably impact field research. Consequently, archaeological surveys in mountainous contexts require special attention to methodology, as evidenced by the growing number of survey projects focusing on upland regions in the past decade.

The aim of this paper is to emphasize how surveying diverse forested and rocky landscapes can offer an opportunity to reconsider and reframe survey strategies, with the goal of establishing best practices for upland archaeology.

On one hand, field research is complemented by laboratories aiming at community engagement, which is particularly essential in contexts where the archaeological record is scarce or hardly visible and/or accessible. On the other hand, considering the environmental challenges, survey activities in marginal contexts require continuous experimentation, testing new strategies daily to select survey areas and overcome critical issues, primarily related to visibility. In this respect, we will discuss the self-critical approach developed, which enables reflection on the challenges and potential of the various strategies employed. For instance, in addition to traditional line walking survey, we experimented with the point sampling method as well as with the combination of extensive and intensive survey along mountain routes and

paths. Moreover, we will discuss the benefits and limitations of using a GIS mobile application in these remote contexts.

Keywords
Archaeology of uplands, landscape archaeology, mobile GIS, artifact surface survey, Apennine landscape, survey strategy

Introduction

A critical issue affecting upland and marginal landscapes is their often distorted perception as peripheral or historically insignificant. Archaeology must challenge notions of marginality, bringing these landscapes into the centre of scholarly attention as vital expressions of everyday life across different temporal and spatial scales (Cherry 1983; Bevan, Conolly 2002; Farinetti 2015). Artifact surface surveys, when employing targeted methodologies and combined with community engagement (Moshenska, Dhanjal 2012), enhance our ability to integrate past human activities into broader historical narratives even in landscapes not so easy to read.

This article aims to emphasize how surveying diverse forested and rocky landscapes offers an opportunity to reconsider and reframe survey strategies.

As a case study, we present the research conducted since 2020 by Roma Tre University in the Monti Lucretili area, a sector of rural and mountainous Latium (Fig. 1). The Monti Lucretili Landscape Project (MoLuLaP) explores an Apennine upland landscape northeast of Rome from a diachronic perspective. This upland area, located between the Licenza Valley and the wider Aniene Valley, reaches significant elevations, including Monte Gennaro (1,271 m a.s.l.) and Monte Pellecchia (1,368 m a.s.l.). Characterized by rugged terrain, deep valleys cutting through limestone formations, and karst depressions, this landscape has witnessed significant vegetation changes over the past decades, with thick forest cover gradually replacing formerly intensively exploited agro-pastoral areas. The Monti Lucretili study area represents a marginal yet dynamic landscape, affected by increasing depopulation and land abandonment alongside the gradual disappearance of traditional knowledge linked to rural and agro-pastoral activities. These transformations align with broader discussions on the historical geography of abandonment (Aristone, Cimini 2020; La Cecla 2015; Macchi Janica, Palumbo 2019). As a result, today's landscape is far less anthropized than in the past, when these mountains were vibrant economic centers engaged in charcoal production, animal husbandry, and the snow trade (Patterson 2004; van Leusen *et al.* 2010; Stagno 2018; Robb *et al.* 2021; Bernardi, Farinetti 2023; for parallels from other Mediterranean regions, see Grove, Rackham 2001).

Today, the Monti Lucretili's cultural heritage is reflected in widespread traces of past human activity, offering valuable research and preservation opportunities for the landscape as a whole. The archaeological record reflects long-term human occupation, from nucleated upland settlements in the Protohistoric period to significant Medieval occupation (Bernardi 2021; Bernardi, Farinetti 2023). Conversely, Roman settlers appear to have favoured terraces overlooking the river valleys, strategically connected to the uplands through an internal road network that linked with major long-distance routes (Witcher 2006; Tol 2012).

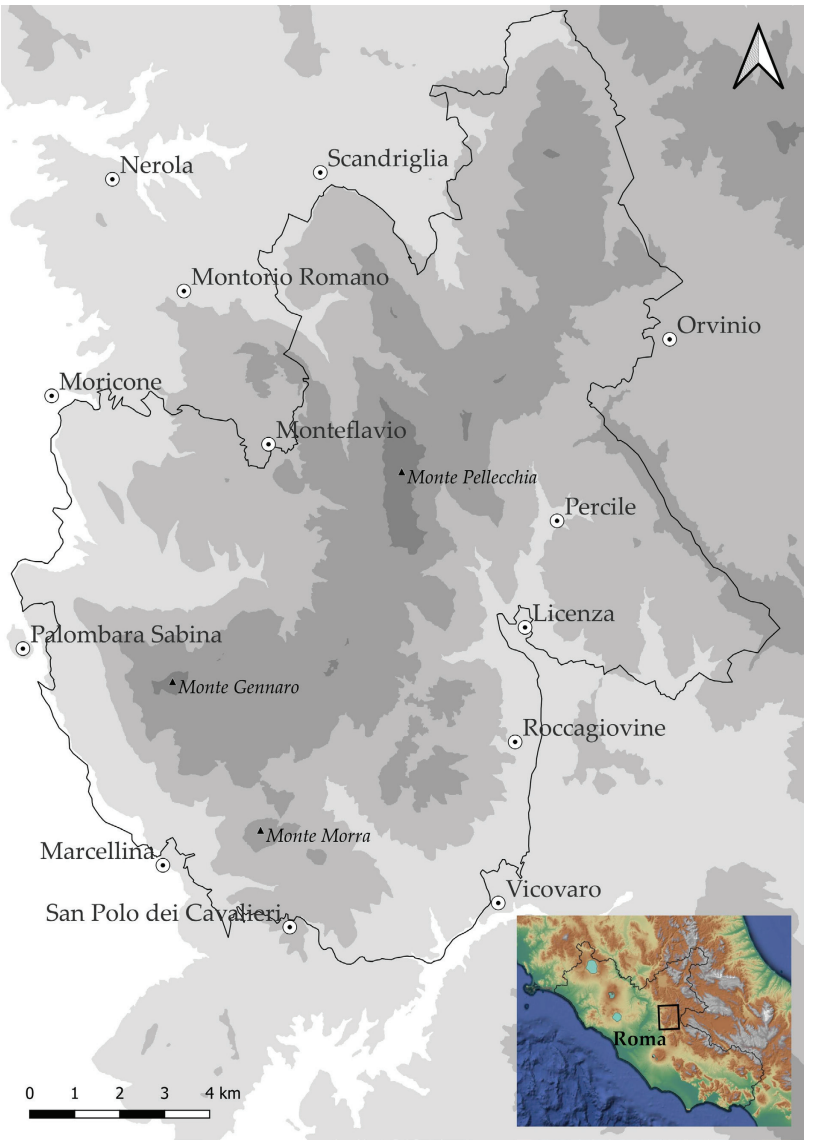


Figure 1. The research area (GIS map by M. Rossi).

The primary goal of the MoLuLaP project is to examine the socio-economic and cultural activities that have shaped this rural landscape over time, as well as to assess the impact of human actions on the environment. Recently, the project has been integrated into a broader national initiative funded by European grants, titled "*CHANGES: Cultural Heritage Innovation for Next-Gen Sustainable Society*" involving several Italian universities and national research institutions in collaborative efforts. The research so far has yielded promising results, following modern methodologies in upland archaeology, an area of increasing scholarly interest (Cambi *et al.* 2015; Farinetti 2015; De Neef *et al.* 2021). From an archaeological perspective, even seemingly inaccessible and uninhabited areas can yield critical data for

reconstructing long-term landscape dynamics (Alcock 1993; Given 2004; Attema *et al.* 2010; Bintliff *et al.* 2017).

A key thread in understanding these landscapes is human mobility over time, an essential factor in understanding communication, trade, and territorial perception in inner upland areas. For instance, the snow trade, later replaced by charcoal production and commerce, played a central role in shaping the local mountains' identity and regional connectivity (Bernardi, Farinetti 2023; Bernardi, Farinetti forthcoming). Studies on mobility within the Apennine context also intersect with research on transhumance, which influenced settlement dynamics from prehistoric times onward (De Coste 2024). In addition, ethnographic studies on recent agro-pastoral practices help us to interpret the faint traces of past activities that have shaped the landscape over centuries. For instance, rural structures known locally as "macere" - dry-stone walls widespread throughout the Mediterranean - serve as key archaeological markers of past land use. These elements not only characterize the local landscape but also connect it to broader regional settlement, economic patterns, and traditional know-how (Farinetti 2021; Bernardi, Farinetti 2024a).

(MBe, MBo, EF, MR)

Field survey strategies in the uplands

The survey area (Fig. 2) includes a challenging upland region whose geomorphological characteristics significantly impact field research. The Monti Lucretili, forming the southern extension of the Monti Sabini, act as a natural barrier between the lower Roman countryside and the Central Apennines. Their varied topography consists of steep valleys, rocky outcrops, and karst plateaus, requiring adaptive survey strategies. In this region, vegetation is primarily characterized by coppice forest, a legacy of the abandonment of traditional economic activities formerly carried out in these uplands. The steeper slopes feature exposed bedrock, with the soil - highly susceptible to erosion - remaining only in small pockets between the outcropping limestone. As a result, the landscape is rugged, inaccessible, varied and challenging to envision as it once was.

Given this landscape, a major challenge is developing research strategies that maximize data recovery while addressing the difficulties inherent in surveying marginal upland areas. The solution may lie in methodological diversity, the integration of various data sources, and the adoption of dynamic, flexible workflows tailored to specific landscape contexts (Bintliff, Howard 1999; Terrenato 2004; Bintliff *et al.* 2007; Bintliff *et al.* 2017; Parini, van Leusen 2025). We firmly believe that ceramic surveys are a valuable tool in upland and forested areas, alongside the mapping of architectural features and other signs of human presence. In the Monti Lucretili project, this approach is reflected in the parallel application of targeted-extensive and systematic-intensive survey methodologies, adapted to landscape conditions and integrated with additional data collection and analysis strategies.

Within the broader landscape, two primary types dominate our survey area: (1) steep, rocky, forested terrain with limited visibility and accessibility, and (2) more open, gently sloping grasslands interspersed with rocky outcrops. Each requires a distinct methodological approach. The study area includes upland open karstic plateaus which, while relatively walkable in their central zones, are bordered by dense forests and eroded slopes. These features significantly

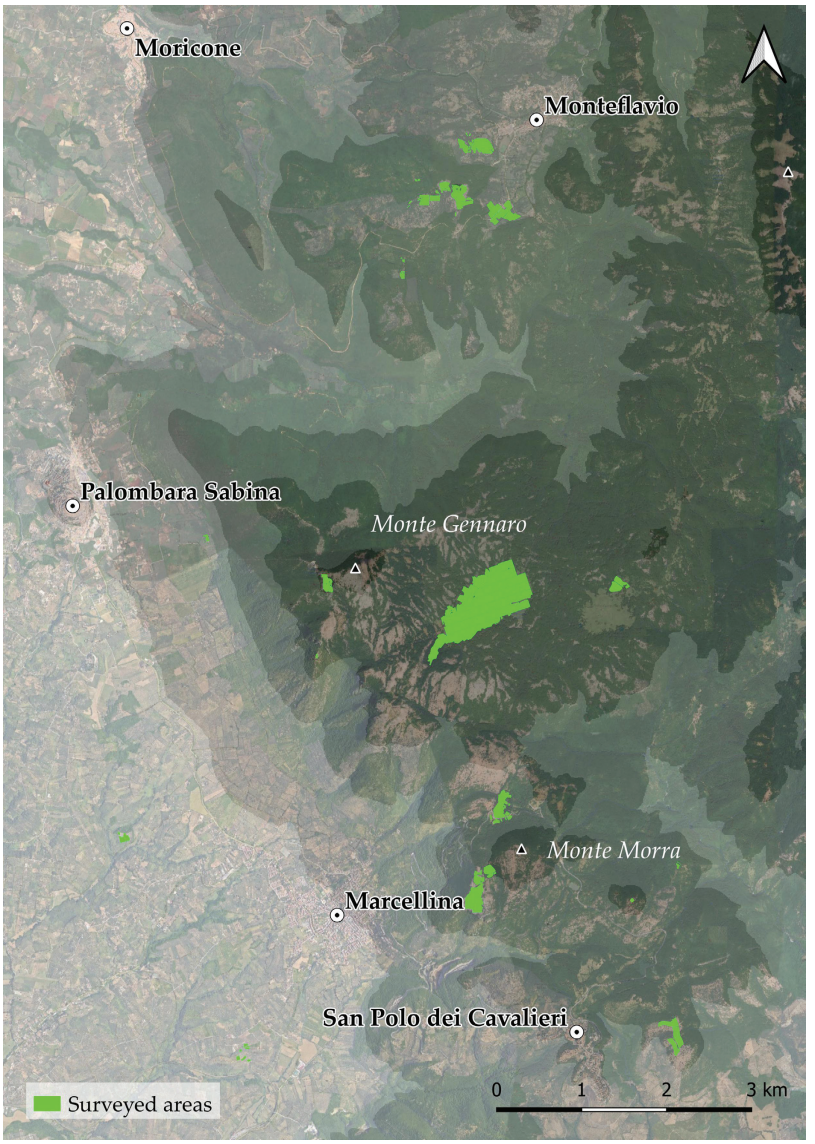


Figure 2. The surveyed areas within the MoLuLaP project (GIS map by M. Bottoni).

limit visibility and pose additional challenges for fieldwork. When surveying forested areas, we employ an "undercanopy survey" approach - a methodology specifically designed for low-visibility environments (Banning 2002; FIDO documentation: van Leusen *et al.* 2023). In contrast, in more open landscapes, we follow modern pedestrian survey standards (Attema *et al.* 2020), adapting our strategies to address the difficulties of inaccessible and rugged terrain. The case studies presented in a separate section below will illustrate this approach more clearly.

In areas with low visibility and restricted accessibility, additional strategies were adopted to mitigate these challenges. UAV photogrammetry surveys, recently enhanced with LiDAR sensors, provide valuable aerial data (Campana *et al.* 2025) even in the wooded environment[1], while on the ground, a point-sampling strategy was implemented to enhance visibility (see below the discussion of a case study; for the methodology see Stek, Waagen 2022; Mayoral Herrera *et al.* 2022). This approach enables systematic data collection in difficult-to-walk areas or along mobility corridors that are currently obscured by dense forests and undergrowth. Additionally, targeted surveys were informed by active community engagement, including participatory archaeology workshops. Interactions with local communities - through interviews, participatory mapping, and collaborative fieldwork - provided invaluable insights, guiding us towards locations and towards the interpretation of sites that might have otherwise remained undetected (see below).

Surveying complex landscapes such as the upland ones demands a high degree of flexibility - not only in the selection of different strategies but also in the implementation of adaptive tools. To support this process, we adopted a digital tool capable of accommodating such needs: the mobile GIS application *QField Cloud*. One of the key advantages of using mobile GIS in upland areas lies in its ability to visualize and update survey progress in real time, directly on the map (Chyla, Bulawka 2020; Fábrega-Álvarez, Lynch 2022). This feature allows for immediate adjustments in the strategies adopted, considering field conditions and facilitating a responsive and dynamic workflow. Beyond significantly reducing the time required for data acquisition, the GIS mobile application also enhances subsequent research phases by promoting effective teamwork and a reflexive approach to fieldwork. As this type of landscape poses numerous challenges - such as limited accessibility, reduced visibility, and the tendency to overlook areas deemed marginal in the eyes of present-day observers - the time saved using mobile GIS has proven crucial (Farinetti *et al.* forthcoming). It has enabled us to begin addressing some of these issues directly in the field, using it not only as a data collection tool but also as a means of self-reflection on our archaeological practice.

(EF)

Community engagement as a survey methodology

As part of the methodologies applied in the survey activities of the MoLuLaP project, participatory approaches play a key role. The involvement of the public in archaeological research, especially in studies conducted in the uplands as we will discuss below, should be a cornerstone of projects focused on the reconstruction of stratified landscapes. This approach is significant for achieving the development of shared governance and sustainable strategies aimed at the enhancement of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Communities represent an added value for archaeological research: local people, as oral sources, can transmit significant information about the region they live in. The knowledge they possess can then be compared with and integrated into the data collected in the field and disseminated through public engagement initiatives (Bernardi 2025).

[1] Although remote sensing does not feature in the case studies presented here due to the absence of applicable data, we have recently incorporated it - particularly through the use of the newly acquired DJI L2 LiDAR sensor - as an investigative methodology within the broader project framework. Given its proven effectiveness, it cannot be overlooked as a potential survey strategy in upland landscape research.

Since the first survey campaigns, the MoLuLaP project has planned activities to make research accessible to the public in line with Citizen Science practices (Bernardi, Farinetti 2023, 19-20; Bernardi, Farinetti 2024a, 80-82; Bernardi, Farinetti 2024b, 77-79). Throughout the research process, communities have been involved at various levels and stages, employing both top-down and bottom-up methodological approaches. The integration of these methods has proven effective in enhancing the understanding of the historical landscape and interpreting the tangible and intangible traces identified through fieldwork (Farinetti 2024; Bernardi 2025; Bernardi, Farinetti forthcoming). By activating participatory processes on both analog and digital platforms, we have engaged local communities in the research (see Sanna Montanelli 2024 and case studies discussed below). The combination of these two approaches has improved knowledge and encouraged a deeper awareness among communities of their cultural heritage - a heritage preserved also in their memories and family histories.

The first interaction with the public took place through participatory workshops supported by municipalities, local cultural associations, and volunteer groups (Farinetti 2021; Bernardi 2025). During these initiatives, targeted conversations occurred between archaeologists, scholars and citizens. The conversations were adapted to each community based on fieldwork data and consisted of approximately 10 to 20 broad topics, using an open structured format to collect information. Dialogues were also aimed at creating community maps recording places that the local population perceived as part of their cultural heritage (Baratti 2012; Bonato, Zola 2023). The topics addressed a wide range of issues related to the territory and local traditions, including, among others, agricultural production, past commercial activities, pastoralism activities, and popular festivals. Through community dialogue and participatory mapping activities, we gathered valuable information that led us to new sites or to a different interpretation of known sites that we might not have considered based solely on their material characteristics (Bernardi, Farinetti forthcoming). The outcome of the workshops is reflected in extensive, non-systematic surveys conducted with the communities, largely guided by locals who had previously been involved in the participatory activities (Figs. 3-4). A concrete result of the collaboration between archaeologists and local people, particularly in relation to participatory workshops, is the systematic recording of material evidence in the environment, such as pits linked to historical snow trade activities. The integration of digital models with local knowledge has also enabled, for example, the reconstruction of ancient pathways used for resource exploitation, exemplified by networks associated with the snow trade. Community involvement in fieldwork has facilitated the georeferencing of these features within the project's GIS, while the combination of digital datasets and oral testimonies has enhanced the reliability of interpretations (Bernardi 2022; Bernardi, Farinetti 2023, 17–20; Bernardi, Farinetti 2024c).

A second approach, using questionnaires on a digital platform through Google Forms, was implemented (Fig. 5). This initiative is linked to a doctoral thesis on the rupestrian settlements of the Monti Lucretili area (Rossi 2024). Through an open call on the web, communities were actively engaged in addressing specific tasks aimed at enhancing knowledge of critical environmental aspects related to the study area. The outcome is a digital map that highlights the features identified during the activity, serving as a valuable tool for planning new strategies to protect the historic landscape and document local cultural heritage (Bottoni, Rossi forthcoming).



Figure 3. Participatory workshops with the community of Monteflavio (RM) – March 2022 (ph. by M. Bernardi).



Figure 4. Participatory workshops with the community of Licenza (RM) – March 2022 (ph. by M. Bernardi).



Figure 5. The flyer of the questionnaire promoted through a digital platform to the Monti Lucretili community – January 2024 (edited by M. Bottoni and M. Rossi).

As the research project progressed, we have been carrying out additional activities with the communities, resulting in public engagement through a variety of approaches. In collaboration with a local cultural association, we experimented with a specific form of itinerant dialogue by organising archaeotrekking activities. During the activity, which has so far been held in the area around Montefalco in Sabina castle, participants were encouraged to share their knowledge of the surrounding area at specific moments and points along the route (Fig. 6). The result of this practice was a better understanding of the landscape, which in some cases led to a more precise interpretation of the archaeological data uncovered during the fieldwork (Bernardi 2025, 14-16).

Another successful example of a participatory process is the "Capanna di comunità" (Community Hut) initiative (Fig. 7). The project,



Figure 6. Archeotrekking activities with local people at the site of Montefalco castle – June 2022 (ph. by M. Rossi).



Figure 7. "Capanna di comunità" (Community Hut) at the end of construction – December 2023 (ph. by V. Lattanzi).

which was initially promoted by cultural associations in the municipality of Marcellina - a small town in the southwestern part of the Monti Lucretili region - aimed to reconstruct a symbolic marker of local identity. The initiative was a direct result of the participatory methods used in the MoLuLaP project: the awareness generated by the project encouraged local communities to take action themselves, with the support of the archaeological research team, starting from the communication and dissemination phase. The traditional shepherd's hut, a structure historically used for both living and production purposes by local shepherds who dwelled and worked in the area either permanently or seasonally, was built during experimental archaeological sessions involving both archaeologists and Marcellina's citizens, using traditional construction techniques passed down by the local population. The huts, made of perishable materials typical of rural architecture, are a key element of the region's cultural heritage and were still being constructed until a few decades ago in the Roman countryside (around the 1960s) (for a similar case study see Capitelli 2025, 86). The project has had a significant positive impact on the community: the hut site has now become a popular public space where local people regularly organize cultural activities related to the traditions of the area (Bernardi 2025, 16-21).

To sum up, in the archaeological analysis of mountainous contexts, employing community engagement as a research methodology is one of the strategies applied to overcome the main critical issues affecting marginal and upland areas, and in particular allows us to overcome the distorted view of them (Bernardi, Farinetti 2024d). The combination of surface artifact survey and community engagement can increase the visibility of past human actions preserved in contemporary environments, as we shall see in the discussion of two case studies. The project's approaches actively engage local people as key actors in archaeological research, supporting survey-based hypotheses, increasing awareness of the research process, and strengthening trust in researchers, while promoting a continuous cycle of mutual learning and knowledge exchange.

(MBe)

Applying methods: two case studies

The two primary landscapes of the study area described above will be analyzed here through case studies, aiming to illustrate in detail the survey strategies applied in the rugged and diverse environment of the Monti Lucretili.

When dealing with the first landscape type - characterized by steep, rocky, forested areas with limited visibility and accessibility, making standard pedestrian survey impractical - our strategy relied on targeted and extensive surveys. This strategy was substantially grounded on the contributions from local communities, who actively participated in planning these surveys. Dialogues and participatory mapping laboratories involving community members provided essential insights, guiding our attention toward spots in the landscape that we might otherwise have overlooked due to their challenging geomorphological conditions (see above).

A relevant example illustrating the effectiveness of this strategy is the survey conducted on the summit of Crestone di Rapelone, a bare summit near Monte Gennaro, rising from dense woodland disconnected from the contemporary network of mountain trails (Fig. 8). Information gathered from local shepherds during participatory-activities unveiled a legend



Figure 8. West face of Crestone di Rapelone (ph. by M. Rossi).

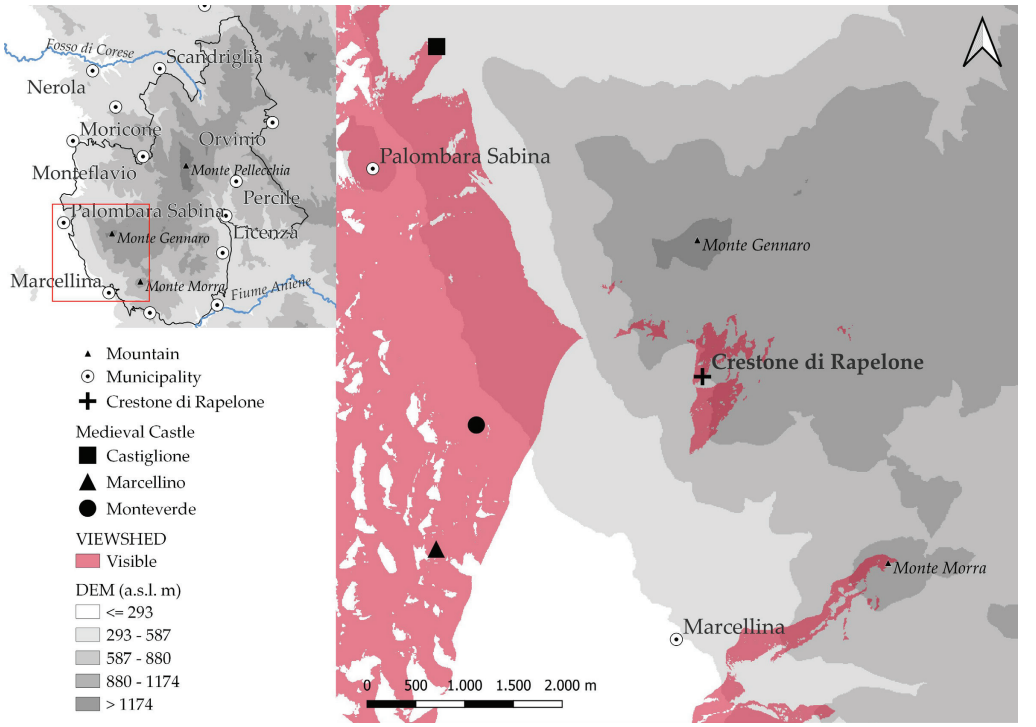


Figure 9. Visibility analysis from Crestone di Rapelone site (GIS map by M. Bottoni).

suggesting that, during the Middle Ages, the Pope is said to have positioned guards on the top of this summit due to its strategic panoramic views of the surrounding lowlands. Subsequent GIS-based visibility analyses confirmed the strategic significance of this site, revealing clear visual connections with the medieval fortified settlements (*castelli*), distributed between the contemporary towns of Marcellina and Palombara Sabina (Fig. 9). Prompted by these local narratives and by the results of GIS analysis, we decided to conduct a targeted survey in the *Crestone di Rapelone* area. To address the site's challenging geomorphological conditions, our survey strategy involved laying out survey grids that adapted precisely to the terrain's irregularities and implementing a total-count approach for surface material (Fig. 10).

In this respect, the use of a GIS mobile application proved to be particularly effective, allowing us to define survey grids directly in the field, thus excluding inaccessible areas that might have compromised pottery density calculations. Moreover, real-time monitoring of ceramic density, facilitated by the mobile GIS, enabled us to optimize the design of the subsequent survey grids, thereby maximizing site coverage and accurately mapping the extent of its pottery halo. An artifact surface survey in this area revealed the presence of cement mortar structure remains, along with significant concentrations of pottery dating to the 11th -13th centuries, as well as additional ceramic materials, including possibly reused Roman tiles. All these data likely point to a medieval occupation of *Crestone di Rapelone* (Bernardi, Farinetti 2024b, 84-85). Although the site's direct connection to papal activity remains speculative, its archaeological significance and strategic importance within the medieval landscape are undeniable.

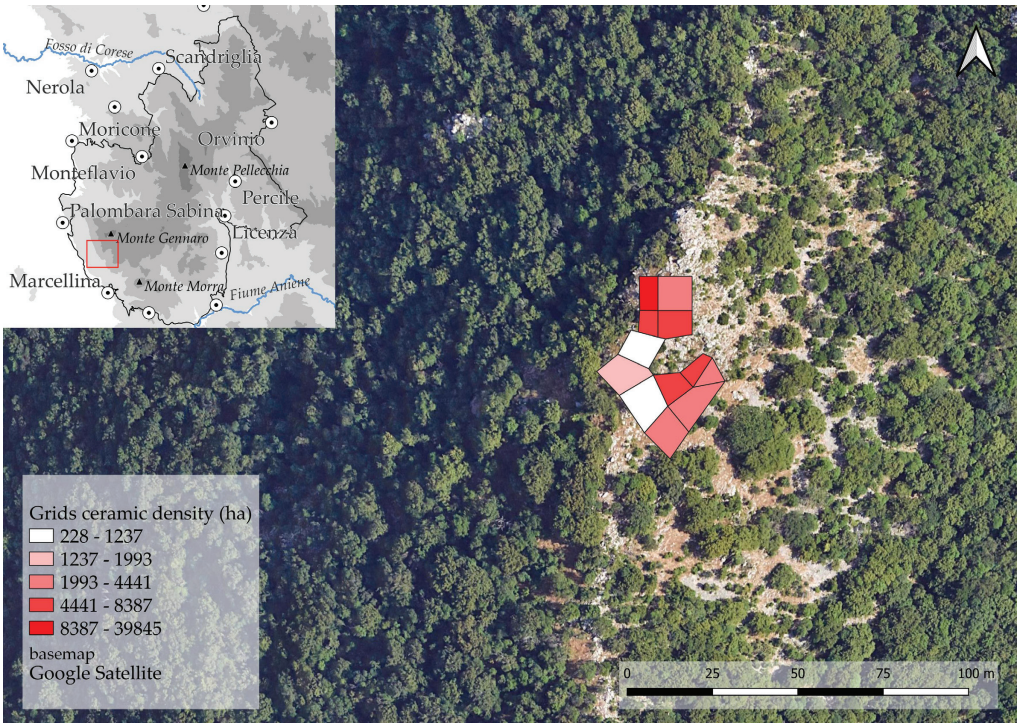


Figure 10. Crestone di Rapelone ceramic density map, weighted on visibility index (GIS map by M. Rossi).

The second type of landscape identified in the Monti Lucretili area does not present significant issues in terms of accessibility. It mainly comprises open flat grasslands and gently sloping rocky outcrops, where we adopted a transect line-walking approach for off-site areas and a total collection grid survey for on-site contexts. The principal challenge in this type of terrain lies in the low ground visibility, which poses a serious risk to the representativeness of the collected data. For example, most of the karstic plateaus in the Monti Lucretili are covered by a thick grass layer that obscures almost completely the soil surface (Fig. 11).

To address this visibility constraint, we experimented with the point sampling strategy (Fig. 12). The point samples are circular units - usually 1 meter in diameter - in which all surface finds are collected after the removal of obstructive vegetation, in order to maximize ground visibility (Stek, Waagen 2022). This approach was implemented at the *Pratone di Monte Gennaro*, a vast karstic plateau situated at approximately 1,000 m a.s.l., beneath the summit of Monte Gennaro. The area was initially surveyed using a standard transect methodology: groups of 6 to 8 individuals, spaced 10 meters apart, walked along 100-meter-long transects, each following a 1-meter-wide survey path. Along each transect, three point samples were prepared at regular 30-meter intervals. On these spots, the surface vegetation was cleared to expose the underlying soil, thereby enhancing artifact visibility. A comparison between the results obtained through standard line walking and those derived from point sampling highlights the specific pros and cons of the latter (Fig. 13). Point sampling proved to be particularly effective in increasing the quantity of ceramic sherds recovered, thereby offering



Figure 11. Pratone di Monte Gennaro (ph. by M. Bottoni).

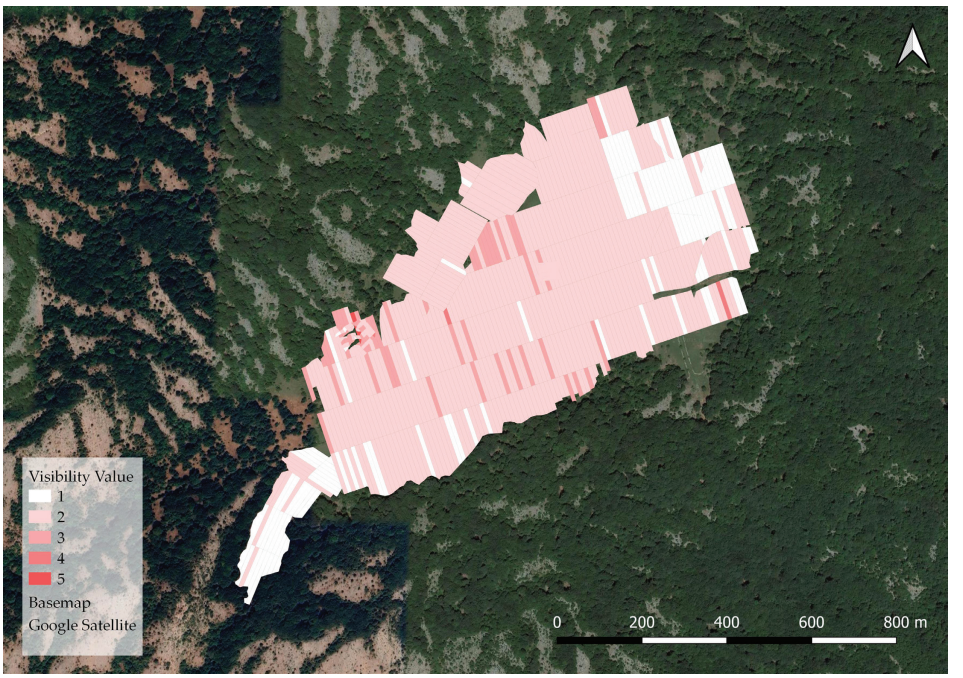


Figure 12. Visibility index map (1-10 scale) of the surveyed area at Pratone di Monte Gennaro (GIS map by M. Rossi).

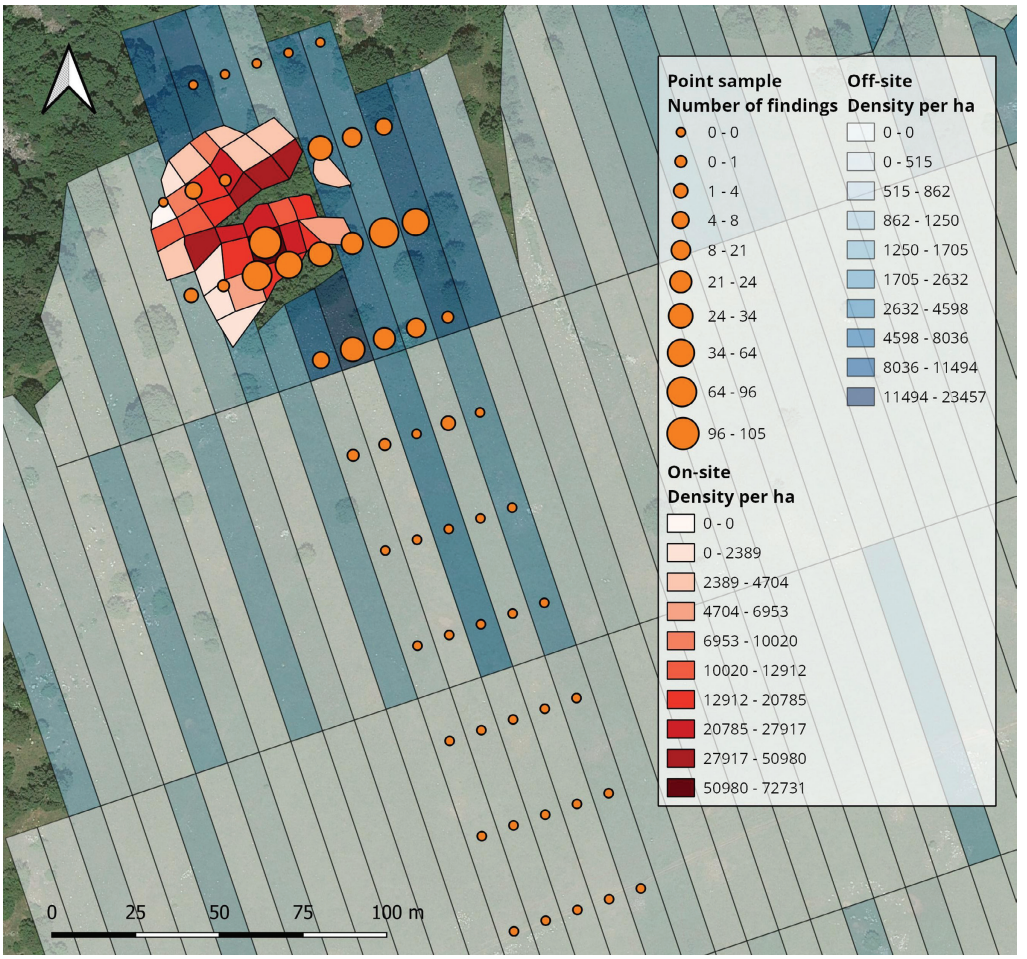


Figure 13. Point samples along the transects surveyed at Pratone di Monte Gennaro. Ceramic density values weighted on visibility index (GIS map by M. Bottoni).

a more nuanced understanding of the qualitative characteristics of the ceramic record. From a quantitative perspective, however, the data reveal an important pattern: even in conditions of very low visibility, traditional line walking was still capable of detecting the presence of ceramics. By contrast, in cases where no material was recorded through line walking, point sampling likewise failed to yield any ceramic evidence. This suggests that while point sampling can enhance the recovery of diagnostic material, it does not significantly alter the broader quantitative picture of ceramic distribution in low-visibility contexts. However, it is important to note that this strategy is not universally applicable. For instance, it was not feasible to implement point sampling in areas characterized by extensive rocky outcrops, where the absence of soil rendered the strategy impracticable. We also attempted to apply point sampling within the first type of landscape, particularly in the forested zones along narrow strips adjacent to ancient mountain trails. However, in these heavily vegetated off-site contexts, the method proved to be both excessively time-consuming and inefficient,

ultimately yielding results that did not justify the effort required. Given the above, a persistent interpretative challenge remains: does the absence of surface finds in these areas indicate a true paucity of past human activity, is it primarily the result of poor ground visibility, or could it instead reflect the specific nature of the activities once carried out? In the case of the *Pratone*, ethnographic interviews with local inhabitants indicate that the area was indeed intensively used in the past, primarily for pastoralism and charcoal production. This suggests that the inherent characteristics of these agro-sylvo-pastoral practices - typically involving perishable materials and temporary installations - have resulted in scant durable archaeological evidence. Identifying the best approaches to highlight these faint traces still remains an ongoing challenge, essential for giving voice back to the marginal stories of the upland landscape.

The two case studies outlined above illustrate how tailored survey strategies can address the varied conditions of upland landscapes. While they do not exhaust the full environmental variability of the Monti Lucretili, they exemplify how methodological flexibility and critical reflection are essential for interpreting complex terrain. The two scenarios presented here are intended as illustrative examples of survey strategies within a highly complex environment - one that certainly cannot be simplistically reduced to just two landscape types. They do not, in fact, capture the full spectrum of environmental variability encountered in the field. Nonetheless, emphasis can be placed on methodological approaches that serve as essential and adaptable tools in archaeological surveys conducted in upland landscapes.

In this regard, the role of citizens representing local communities must be emphasized once again. As mentioned above, their knowledge is quite literally brought into the field and integrated into the research process. Moreover, they are trained in the principles of archaeological survey, as well as in the use of the mobile GIS application directly during field survey activities, as they often operate as field-walkers with us. In addition to that, they are also team members within the mobile GIS project and they can directly add additional features and landscape information in a dedicated layer, during their own daily outdoor activities. This reinforces a growing bond of trust and collaboration, and allows us to gather their knowledge about the uses, soil and nature of even the most hidden and marginal places in their territory.

(MBo, MR)

Conclusions

The case studies discussed here demonstrate how flexible and well-calibrated survey strategies can effectively address the challenges posed by the environmental complexity of upland landscapes. Although they do not capture the full spectrum of landscape variability in the Monti Lucretili, they offer meaningful examples that highlight the importance of ongoing methodological reflection and targeted investigative approaches. In particular, the artifact surface survey emerges as an essential and adaptable tool, capable of producing significant data even in topographically diverse and irregular contexts - especially when integrated with complementary methodologies.

In addition, the methodology employed in the MoLuLaP project has demonstrated that when participatory processes complement field research, evidence becomes more visible in landscapes, alongside increased accessibility and knowledge of local heritage. By integrating traditional fieldwalking with participatory research strategies, we not only recover material

traces of past human activity but also revitalize local memory, ensuring that these landscapes are recognized as active cultural palimpsests rather than abandoned or forgotten spaces. The ethnographic approach, involving the local community, has proven highly valuable in achieving the ultimate goal of landscape research: to provide local communities with a deeper understanding of their past and the values and meanings embedded in the landscape palimpsest. Through participatory processes, the people of the Monti Lucretili area have gained a deeper awareness of the potential and value of the cultural heritage preserved in their landscapes. At the same time, we, as researchers, have developed a better understanding of the archaeological *continuum* that defines this entire landscape.

Ultimately, the Monti Lucretili Landscape Project underscores the value of adaptive methodologies in upland archaeological surveys, crucial for the critical and nuanced interpretation of upland landscapes, contributing to the development of more robust and empirically grounded reconstructions of settlement and landscape biographies. It is through the convergence of technological tools, community knowledge, and critical methodological reflection that we begin to perceive the full complexity of human presence within the upland Monti Lucretili landscape through time.

(MBe, MBo, EF, MR)

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