

# ARCHAIC SETTLEMENT AND EARLY ROMAN COLONISATION OF THE LEPINE FOOTHILLS\*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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The protohistoric and early Roman settlement history of the Pontine Region were most recently studied by Attema (1993, 1996, in prep.). The current view is that nucleated settlement seems to have originated in the Iron Age around the Alban lake (with nuclei such as Ardea, Lanuvium, and Velletri), and to have developed slightly later on the higher ground around the Pontine plain proper (with sites such as Satricum, Cisterna di Latina, and Caracupa/Valvisciolo). Many of the Archaic nucleated settlements in the latter area disappear however sometime during the later 6<sup>th</sup> century (the late Archaic), and seemed to be replaced after 500 BC (the post-Archaic) by small dispersed settlement in the volcanic tuff hills only (Attema 1993:122).

For the colluvial plain deposits in contrast, Attema reports that Iron Age and Archaic materials are very poorly represented and no discrete protohistoric sites were identified at all in the Cori survey transect, although protohistoric pottery was found among the predominantly Roman finds, indicating continuity of some sites (Attema 1993:117-8). A field walking survey south of Sermoneta again yielded very little early material for the plain, where conditions must have been generally unfavourable for settlement. Again, in a similar survey near Sezze, finds from the Iron Age and early Archaic were absent (Attema in prep.). Whereas colluviation may well be implicated in decreasing the visibility of archaeological remains in the plains, we would not expect this to have such an impact on the western slopes of the Lepine mountains. Since 1993, several field walking survey campaigns have been conducted on these slopes in order to establish whether this view is correct.

The regional chronology for the current study departs from the generally accepted chronology (see fig. 9.2) in substituting a post-Archaic period (roughly 500 - 350 BC) for the early Roman Republican period, as archaeological indicators for the Republican colonising movement (colonies, villas, amphora-like forms, black glaze) appear in the area only after 350 BC. Other important aspects of the regional chronology are the shift from Late Iron Age orientalisising pottery styles (7<sup>th</sup> century) to Archaic red pottery, and the shift (around 500-490 BC) from the latter to the post-Archaic, which is visible in the increased production of pale and orange firing pottery and tiles made from more highly purified clay and the introduction of more substantial building styles (with heavier roof tiles). It should be noted here that, in the absence of excavations, site dating in most cases does not permit us to distinguish whether a site was occupied in the post-Archaic, early Republic, or both.

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\* This chapter was previously published in *Assemblage*, online journal of the graduate students of the Archaeological Institute at the University of Sheffield, at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~assem/4/>. The fieldwork was conducted as part of a wider project by the Groningen Institute of Archaeology, aiming to map the Republican villa landscape in the immediate neighborhood of the Roman colonies of Cora, Norba, and Sezze.

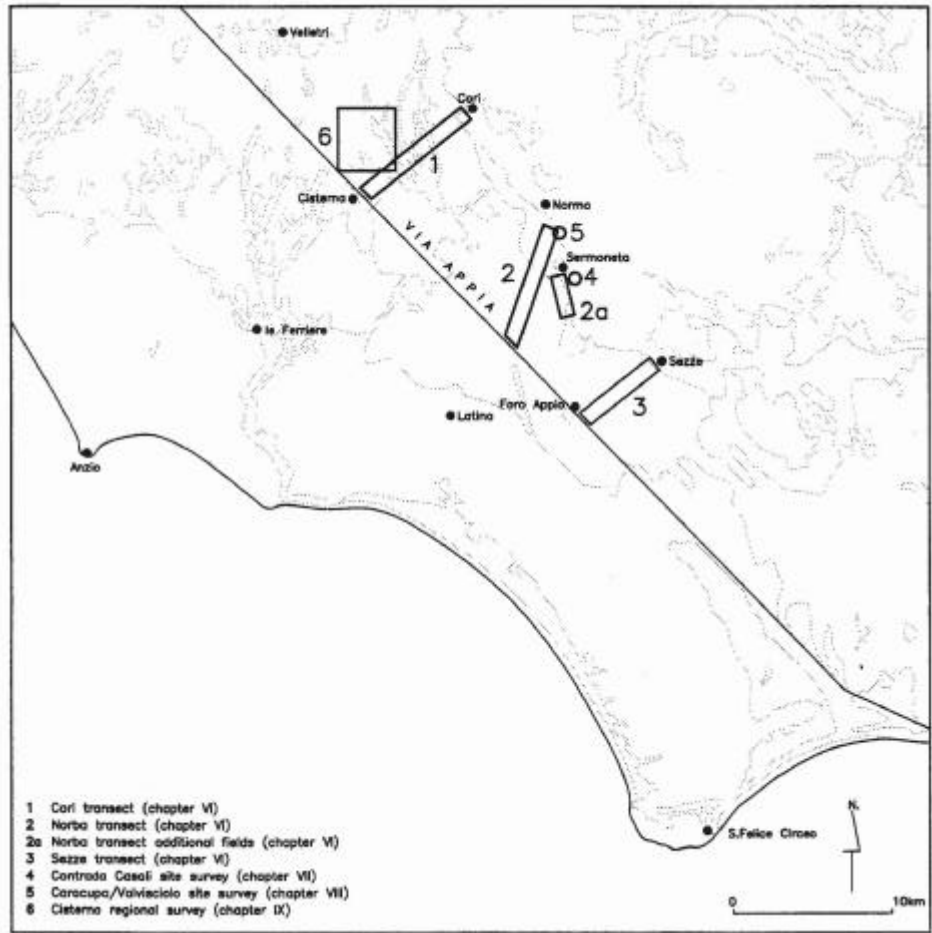


Figure 1: Map of the Pontine Region, with survey areas, from Attema 1993, fig. 2.



Figure 2: Chronological chart of central Italy, after Nijboer 1998, fig. 1. See especially the column labelled 'Latial chronology'.

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## 2 THE LOWER LEPINE SLOPES

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According to the established view, it appears there was very little settlement activity on the Lepine slopes until the later 4<sup>th</sup> century, when a system of Roman Republican villas, related to the new colonies of Cora, Norba, and Setia appeared (cf. Attema 1993:233ff). This villa system apparently represents a clean break with what went before, not just because of the change in building technique and pottery styles and techniques, but also because large-scale olive tree and vine culture began to be practised. The period 500-350 BC apparently brought an abrupt end to the evolution of the Archaic landscape - most likely due to the troubles associated with the Volsci wars – and was an archaeological ‘dark age’.

### 2.1 EARLIER SURVEYS

A topographic survey conducted in the early ‘60s in the Cori and Artena map sheet area (some 10 by 15 km) by Paola Vittucci Brandizzi was published in the *Forma Italiae* series (Vittucci 1968). Little further work was done until the late ‘80s when, in the course of the Pontine Region Project at Groningen University, field walking surveys were conducted in adjoining parts of the Lepine footslopes near Norba, Cori, Sermoneta and Sezze, and at the Archaic proto-urban site of Valvisciolo (see Figure 9.1). This work was reported on by Attema (1993). The most recent work, leading up to the 1998 survey near Ninfa, was done near Sezze (Attema 1994 in prep.) and Norba (King 1995). The goal of these two surveys was to locate and assess sites belonging to a hypothetical colonial system of Roman Republican villas, as suggested by Attema (1993:233ff and fig. 148; see Figure 9.4). Generally these sites are easily detectable in the landscape not only because of concentrations of pottery and tile, but also because their platform retaining walls and associated cisterns, constructed in polygonal dry stone and -later- cemented work, have withstood the ravages of time until very recently. For those same reasons these villas also figure prominently in the earlier topographic and desk-based survey by Vittucci. A summary of the results is presented here.

Table 1 – Descriptions of Vittucci sites in the Ninfa area.

Site ID	Description
33	villa, wall in opus caementicium, many pieces of tile and amphora especially to the south of the wall, and reticulate bricks
34	terracing in 2 <sup>nd</sup> polygonal style
35	terracing in 2 <sup>nd</sup> polygonal style
45	cisterna in opus caementicium and wall in 2 <sup>nd</sup> polygonal style. Other similar structures are supposed to have existed nearby but may have been overbuilt. Some remains of coarse ‘grossolana’ sherds in the area
46	villa platform ca. 4m high in 2 <sup>nd</sup> polygonal style and terracing below it. Covered entrance to platform. Some ceramics and tile found. Lead pipe reportedly found nearby in 1915 but later lost
47	terracing, polygonal walls, ca. 65m of a longer stretch that was recently destroyed remaining
48	tile, marble architectural remains, remains of tombe a cappuccina. Site recently disturbed due to viticulture
49	top and bottom walls of pedemontana in polygonal work
50	villa rustica (cisterna in tuff blocks, terracing in 3 <sup>rd</sup> polygonal style), around it numerous tile, imbrex and vase fragments
51	cisterna in opus caementicium, some remains of polygonal style terracing below
52	top and bottom walls of pedemontana, ca 6m wide, just below the modern path
53	long stretch of pedemontana walls, curving in order to cross a small fosso
59	villa (3-sided polygonal wall in 3 <sup>rd</sup> style, small cisterna in opus caementicium), ca 20 by 5 by 2.5m. Numerous limestone architectural fragments reported; reticulate wall reportedly found during construction of nearby house

Vittucci's (1968) map and description of sites in the Cori-Norba area relies heavily on the compilation of contemporary archaeological records and a follow-up on reports by local inhabitants. It is therefore no surprise that she reports no prehistoric activity at all, and instead concentrates on mapping Roman rural villa architectural (cisternae, platform retaining walls, field terracing) and infrastructural (the *pedemontana* road, about which more later on) evidence. The table below gives her descriptions, with Site ID referring to the numbers in Figure 9.3.

The Lepine footslopes just south and southeast of Norba were surveyed by Attema and his team on two occasions, first as part of the 1987 Norba transect survey (see Figure 1) and again in 1995 in order to further map possible Roman sites along the *pedemontana*. Attema noted that, as in the Vittucci survey, "Roman scatters [are] in all cases related to architectural remains, either polygonal masonry, opus caementicium finished with opus (semi) reticulatum or a combination of both. The latter are an indication of continued use of the site from early Republican times into the late Republican and early Imperial period." For the protohistoric period however, the evidence he gathered indicated that settlement began in the later Iron Age and intensified in the Archaic with both a proto-urban nucleus (Valvisciolo) and a dense distribution of smaller sites developing. Most of the Republican villas and other Roman sites seem to have developed out of these earlier Archaic settlements and none of the sites appears to be occupied after the early Empire.

Attema also noted that sites identified as Roman villas are distributed fairly regularly at distances of about 1 km along the lower slope deposits, suggesting the possibility of a 'villa colonisation' of the landscape, directed from the colonial towns. One Republican villa was unusual in that it is situated much further upslope inside the Valvisciolo gap; Attema suggests this could indicate that there was some level of hierarchical organisation to the rural villa system, and this site could be an example of a 'top-level' villa.

## 2.2 THE DOGANELLA DI NINFA SURVEY

In April 1998 a new team led by Attema conducted a further survey survey of the lower Lepine slopes, this time in the Doganello di Ninfa area which directly adjoins the area surveyed in 1995. This survey area, of about 5 km by 750 m and dominated by the Monte Arrestino massif (862m asl), is bounded by the *Canale delle Acque Alte (Canale Mussolini)* and *Fosso del Cavone* on the west and north sides, by the steep uncultivated slopes and cliffs of the Lepine hills, by the area surveyed in the 1995 campaign below Norba and by the Cori gap in the north (see Figure 9.3). Nowadays it consists mostly of large and small fields with olive trees, with smaller areas devoted to fruit trees, viticulture, and grazing. The slopes are cut in two or three places by (nearly) dry gullies, and drainage at the foot of the slope is NW-SE because of the elongated tuff hill geomorphology there. The area is dotted with small farming cabins and, increasingly, with modern houses. The two main rubble-metalled tracks running through the area perpendicular to the slopes, and many minor paths too, are in heavy use and we saw much evidence of fields being worked with machinery in order to remove stones. This included the removal of terrace walls and remains of Roman architecture. Increasingly, the steeper slopes are also cleared, ploughed and enclosed.

The team systematically surveyed a total of 27 fields, and discovered or reconfirmed the presence of 20 sites. Figure 3 shows the locations of these fields and sites on a topographical background. Although the stated purpose of the survey was to map further parts of the Roman system of platform villas, associated with olive culture and the strategic colonies of Setia and Norba and connected by the *pedemontana* road, most of the Ninfa area proved to be rich in Archaic finds, with Roman Republican sites (often without any platform walls) generally occurring in the same locations. This confirmed that the results of the 1995 survey should not be seen as exceptional and that the Romans could not be seen as colonisers in the sense that they brought a previously marginally used landscape under cultivation. Instead, a fairly dense and possibly differentiated Archaic settlement pattern seems to be present, which will force a partial re-adjustment of current views regarding the settlement history of the area.

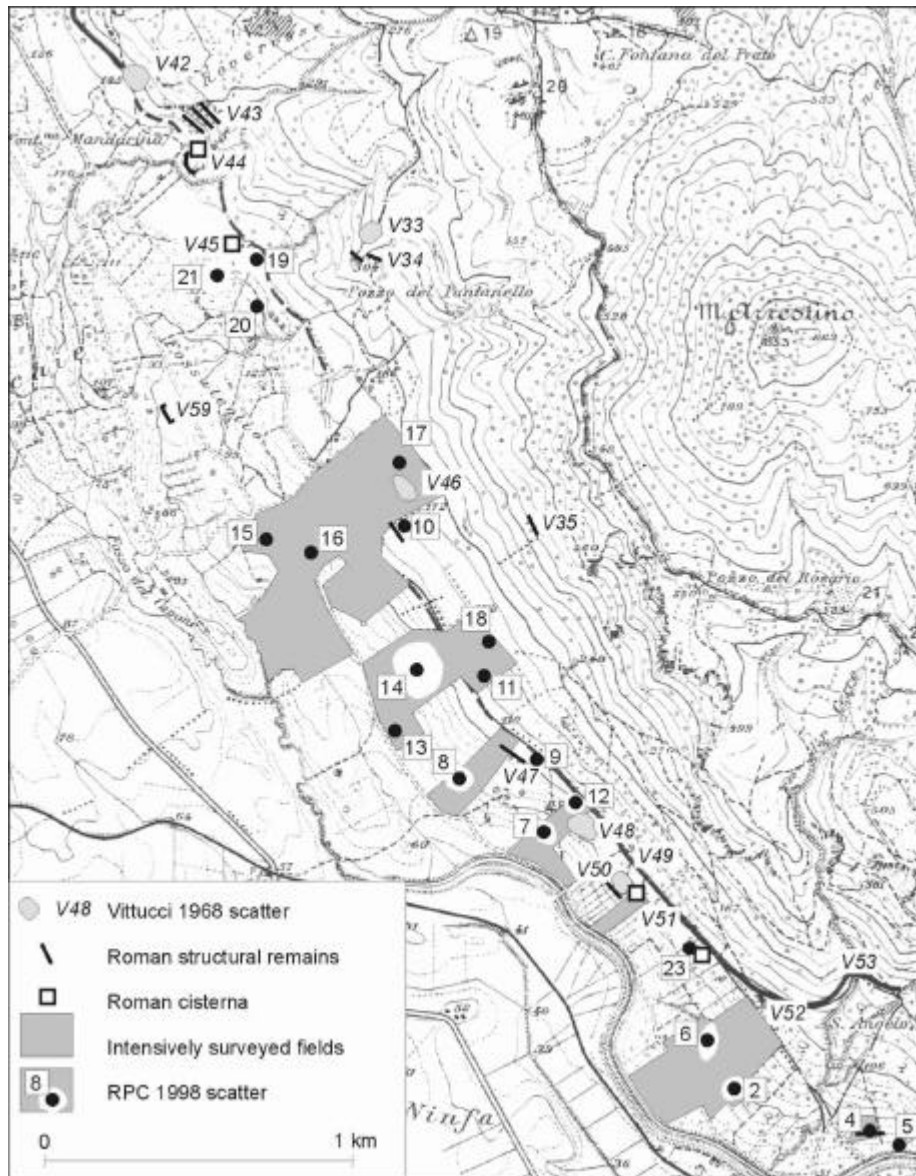


Figure 3: 1:25,000 scale topographic map of the Doganella di Ninfa survey area. Fields surveyed by the RPC in green; new Archaic and/or Roman Republican sites are represented by small red dots with site ID's in red; black numbers highlighted in red are sites identified by Vittucci (1968). Just left of center is the larger site S14 that hints at the potential complexity of the Archaic settlement system.

Table 2 - preliminary site identifications resulting from the Ninfa98 survey.

Site ID	Description
S2	diffuse scatter, early Archaic
S4	Archaic farm to Republican platform villa, some IA material present
S5	small scatter of Archaic sherds
S6	Archaic to Republican farm
S7	Archaic to Republican farm, some IA material present
S8	Archaic to Republican farm
S9	Archaic farm to Republican platform villa, some IA material present
S10	Archaic farm to Republican platform villa
S11	diffuse scatter, Archaic
S12	IA ceramic scatter, no precise date available yet
S13	tomb 'a cuppucina', Republican
S14	Archaic to Republican hamlet
S15	Archaic to Republican farm
S16	small scatter of Archaic and post-Archaic sherds
S17	scatter of Archaic and post-Archaic sherds
S18	Archaic and Republican ceramic scatter
S20	Archaic to Republican farm
S21	Archaic to Republican farm

### 2.3 SETTLEMENT HISTORY

Ceramic finds were classified according to fabric, ware, and form. Although many of the pottery and tile types found cannot be dated very closely, it is possible here to present a first rough chronological description of the settlement history of the Ninfa slopes.

The earliest datable material from the area is a red firing impasto from the early Iron Age, which occurs as offsite material on a possibly levelled tuff ridge near the Lepine slopes proper. No material from the middle IA was found. The late IA (phases IVA and IVB, dated about 730-630 BC and 630-580 BC respectively) is represented by the presence, in phase IVA, of common red slip ware occurring in very low numbers in the southern half of the study area and, in phase IVB, of a coarse red firing fabric with FeMn (manganese) temper at many locations. It would seem, then, that LIA sites occur about every kilometre, with single occasional finds in between. The regular if not very dense distribution suggests that, as in the 1995 survey area, we may trace the beginnings of the exploitation and settlement of the Lepine footslopes in the Ninfa area to this period, and especially to the IVB phase.

The Archaic period (580-490 BC) is represented in the study area by coarse red firing pottery with augite temper, occurring in thick (dolum) and thin (olla) forms. The latter may also date to the post-Archaic, but as the distribution pattern and even the densities at which both forms occur are very similar this has no effect on the settlement history of the area. The crude red augite tempered pottery in fact occurs at all sites and fields surveyed and therefore indicates that a strong intensification of settlement and land use with respect to the previous period took place (even after correcting for the fact that the Archaic period is twice as long as LIA phase IVB).

The post-Archaic period (490 - 350 BC, following Attema 1993) is less well recognised in the finds but must be represented by pale and orange firing augite tempered crude pottery (mostly tile), and by orange firing coarse ware. We find such materials occurring in fairly high numbers, probably as off-site material, in most of the area. Nearly all of the Archaic sites also contain a lot of these post-Archaic ceramics, which suggest that there may have been a continuation of previous land use patterns. This is also supported by the fact that the lion's share of the post-Archaic materials concerns the highly visible tile, whereas the orange coarse ware occurs in comparable densities to the Archaic coarse ware. We therefore must assume that the only differences between the two periods are an increased use of tile for roofing

and a shift in pottery production technology to a more controlled process resulting in lighter coloured products consisting of a more highly purified clay matrix and augite temper. Presumably the shift in roofing construction is indicative of a more general Latial change in building construction. The lack of more dramatic visible changes in the archaeological record for this period of historically attested Volscian inroads is remarkable.

The Roman middle and late Republican periods (350 – 50 BC) are represented in the finds by a growing diversity of pottery technology (depurated, reduced, and hard wares) and styles, by the use of lava temper in tiles, and by the introduction of fine wares such as black glaze. These materials occur at all of the larger sites occupied in the previous post-Archaic period, but a detailed look shows that there were changes in emphasis nonetheless - some sites seem to have been abandoned while others show a sharp reduction or growth in the number of finds. Also, the period we are dealing with has a 'stratigraphic advantage' with respect to, and is more than twice as long as, the post-Archaic, and absolute numbers of finds must be interpreted with this in mind. It would seem, then, that we must interpret the finds from the Republican period to indicate certainly not a growth in density of occupation - rather a concentration of settlement onto a lesser number of larger farm sites. In partial support of Attema's (1993) suggestion that this period saw the establishment of a system of rural platform villas, we indeed found such platforms in at least five of the sites.

Again echoing the results of the 1995 survey, we found very little evidence for the continued use of the area into the Empire, other than the occurrence of small pieces of Terra Sigillata and African Red Slip ware in some of the Republican sites. Coupled with the fact that we could not identify any full Imperial or early Medieval sites, this argues for the assumption that the area was essentially abandoned by the early Empire. However, with Barker (1996:67) we should exercise caution for the later period: "The failure of many field surveys to locate early medieval settlement effectively is [] the predictable outcome of a combination of negative factors: a much sparser population, a nucleated settlement system, greater use of perishable materials in buildings, and of poorly made pottery that is much less precisely dated than Roman ceramics."

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### 3 DISCUSSION

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In total, the Doganella di Ninfa survey uncovered 16 new site locations, ranging from a single probable 'tomba a cappuccine' to an Archaic and Republican hamlet, and from the early Iron Age to the late Republic. No sites dating definitely to the Empire or to the Middle Ages were found. Perhaps most importantly, it turns out that the whole of the western Lepine slopes between about 60 and 150 metres high appears to have been intensively used in the Archaic and post-Archaic periods.

#### 3.1 SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

##### THE ARCHAIC SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

There is now some evidence for three levels of settlement among the Archaic sites in the western Lepine slopes. In between the 'top' level represented by the single large proto-urban site of Caracupa/Valvisciolo and the 'bottom' level of the multitude of small and scattered single-family farmsteads, site S14 represents a middle level of aggregated settlement consisting of a few households without any evidence of centralised or 'proto-urban' function – a hamlet.

This system was decapitated with the abandonment of Caracupa/Valvisciolo at the end of the Archaic. It may be that the incipient urbanisation of the Pontine region, referred to in the introduction, was reversed by the end of the Archaic as circumstances became less favourable through sporadic warfare, and the inhabitants resettled into smaller and more easily defended sites on the Lepine scarp. It would have been

the latter that were targeted for the early (i.e., early 5<sup>th</sup> century) Roman colonisation reported by the early historians.

## CONTINUITY IN THE POST-ARCHAIC?

The existence and nature of any Roman colonisation in the wester Lepine slopes is to a large extent predicated on the presence or absence of a post-Archaic ‘gap’ in the settlement history of the area – the period called a ‘dark age’ by Attema (1993:17). But if there was no settlement continuity, and the area had been more or less deserted for five or six generations, then how is it possible that the republican farms are all located on Archaic settlement sites? Certainly dispersed post-Archaic settlement existed in the Cisterna di Latina area and there is no reason to deny it to the footslopes. We must therefore assume that there was settlement continuity throughout the post-Archaic, and therefore we must ask what was the nature of the change from slight buildings and thick augite tempered pottery in the Archaic, to tile-roofed platform buildings with cisterns and amphora and fine pottery in the Republic. Was the indigenous population moved away to make place for the new settlers, whose farms were constructed according to some colonial base plan? Or have the changes visible in the archaeological record occurred over a longer period, allowing indigenous farmers to take on certain Latin (and later, Roman) habits? Certainly the very fact that ceramic dating becomes very uncertain during these centuries points to the lack of recognisable development, and therefore to a disruption to normal production and cultural exchange, that we may ascribe to the Volsci wars.

## THE REPUBLICAN ‘COLONIAL’ VILLA SYSTEM

Roman style ‘urbanisation’ only begins in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of formal *coloniae* at Cora, Norba, Circeo, Terracina, and Setia. But the establishment of these colonies did not take place in a vacuum. Control over the landscape and its inhabitants also took the form of a rural colonisation of which we can most reliably trace the villas. A morphological characteristic linking both parts of this system is the use of polygonal dry stone walls; physically they are linked by the *via pedemontana* and other tracks. The recent surveys seem to indicate that these villas were not as closely tied to the colonies in a spatial sense as was thought around 1992; rather they seem to occupy all of the available calcareous soils on the Lepine margin (see figure 9.4). It is possible that closer dating of these villas may show how the villa system expanded from initial settlement areas around the colonies, to eventually fill the landscape.

Among the villas found during the survey, Attema’s villa hypothesis (Attema 1993:233ff) suggests that we may be able to distinguish three groups:

- firstly, a group of platform villas built according to the same plan around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and strung out approximately 1km apart along the pedemontana. The system might consist of as many as 20 villas between Cori and Sezze, and each may have a number of associated minor structures nearby;
- secondly, a much smaller group of ‘controlling’ platform villas, which can be distinguished by their commanding positions and much greater investment in platform architecture. This group would be contemporaneous with the first; and
- thirdly, a group of non-platform villas occurring in the lowland or lower Lepine slopes, and developing out of pre-existing Archaic farm sites, or alternatively, ‘filling in’ available space.

Evidence for the hierarchical organisation of the Roman Republican villa system is intriguing but the distinction between the three levels will need verification by excavation, which could uncover functional differences between them. The hypothesis that early platform villas were built in a communal colonial effort and are located at regular intervals of about 1 km could be further tested in future surveys and by a careful comparison of the dimensions and masonry styles of the platform architecture.

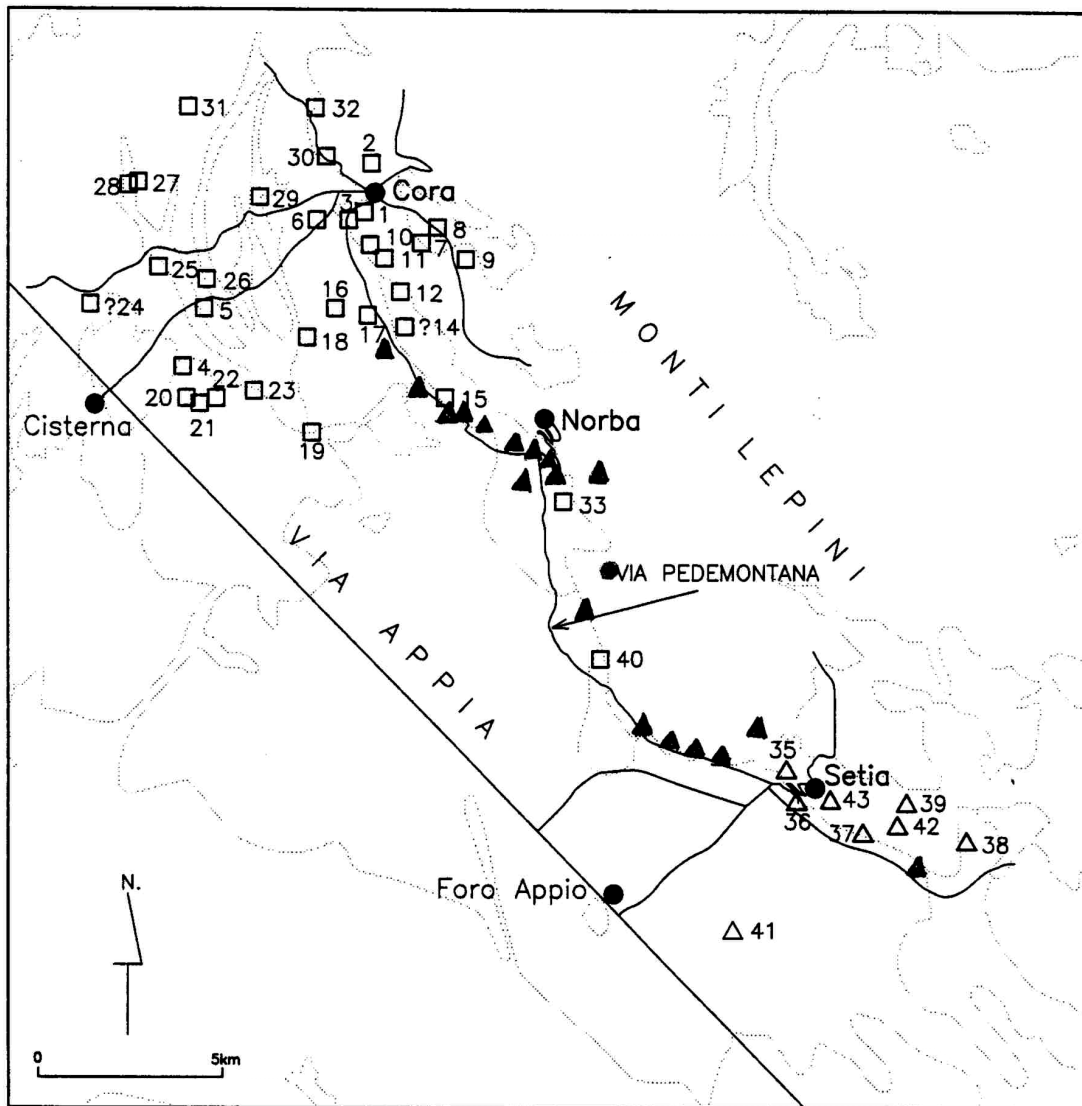


Figure 4: The Roman Republican 'colonial' villa system of the western Lepine slopes (adapted from Attema 1993, fig. 148). Before the recent surveys Republican villas appeared to be spatially tied to the colonies of Cora and Setia (open symbols); the newly located villas however (closed symbols), seem to occupy all of the available Lepine margin.

### 3.2 LOCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

#### BURIAL

Very little evidence for burial was found by any of the surveys in the area. The nearest known Archaic necropolis is that of Valvisciolo, and Republican necropoli are of course associated with the Roman colonies. Possible tombe 'a cappuccina' (cremation burials) were found in two locations some 1 km apart, but it seems reasonable to assume that burial took place normally at the edges of each individual settlement's core area. Many more graves are therefore likely to exist in the area, but they are very hard to detect from surface survey alone, as the remains of such burials could easily go unnoticed among the general off-site noise surrounding the Republican sites in the area. No evidence was found for the existence of a burial ground on the higher slopes of Monte Arrestino.

## SPACING AND COMMUNICATION

Although the *pedemontana* is generally thought of as a Roman construct, forming a system with the towns and villas built in the mid-4th century, it seems likely that its route and many lesser routes besides had been in constant use since at least the early Archaic - connecting the large proto-urban settlements while avoiding the difficult and unhealthy terrain below. There would certainly also have been communication lines with settlements (both Archaic and Republican) on the Lepine scarp, similar to or identical with paths that are still in use today.

It was suggested by King (1995:12) that sites are spaced at regular distances (approximately 500m judging from her map) along a road. Such a pattern could also be observed in the Ninfa area, with villa sites continuing from S to N along the presumed line of the *pedemontana*. The distance between large platform villas is consistently around 1000 meters here, but if we include the other sites producing Republican material the typical distance between sites again becomes 500 meters or less. One cannot imagine access to the road to have been of such great importance that sites had to be located very near it; all sites we found are within 400 meters of the *pedemontana* line anyway.

## HEIGHT AND SLOPE

The natural conditions in the area mean that, without modern farming machinery, only part of a typical slope could have been used for farming and olive culture. Archaic and Roman Republican sites are generally located between about 60 and 150 metres asl. Above this point the soil becomes too steep and stony to be used for anything but extensive grazing by, as is currently the case, goats and horses. At the lower end of the slope it is less clear that conditions are unsuitable for farming, but we may suggest two reasons not to situate farms lower than 50 metres asl - firstly, the view over the Pontine and Alban areas is dramatically reduced, and secondly, the heavy clay soil may not have been workable through the year.

Slope does seem to be a factor affecting many sites - there is a preference for flatter areas (which of course correlate with height) and often such areas appear to have been man made already in the Archaic. Platform villas also occur on steeper slopes and, in the case of villa Vittucci 46, significant walls had to be constructed to retain the villa platform (over 4 metres high). The occupants were rewarded with a magnificent view ranging all the way from the Monte Circeo and Monti Ausoni in the south to the Alban volcano in the north - a distance of more than 20 km both ways! It may be suggested that this villa was one of the 'controlling' group mentioned above.

## SOURCES OF WATER

Distance to surface water is not clearly a locational factor, although recent changes made to the landscape mean that this aspect must be further studied. Currently wells have water at about one meter below the surface, which means that early farmers were certainly not restricted to living near surface water. Unfortunately it is not possible to date any of the numerous wells in the area that are not obviously modern.

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