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Shaping the Margins in Southern Latium. Sant'Andrea di Campello and the Making of a Medieval Mediterranean Landscape

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Riassunto: Il sito medievale di Sant'Andrea di Campello (Monti Aurunci, Lazio meridionale), indagato dal 2022 nell'ambito del Monti Aurunci Project, rappresenta un osservatorio privilegiato per lo studio delle dinamiche insediative e paesaggistiche dell'Italia tirrenica tra alto e basso Medioevo. Situato in posizione strategica presso il valico di San Nicola, tra la valle del Liri e la costa di Gaeta, il sito documenta una lunga sequenza di occupazioni, abbandoni e riusi che riflettono le trasformazioni politiche, economiche e ambientali dell'area. Le indagini archeologiche hanno messo in luce una cinta muraria, strutture difensive e, sul pianoro sommitale, una piccola chiesa absidata con cimitero annesso, fulcro di aggregazione e cristianizzazione per le comunità rurali circostanti. Le sepolture, databili tra XIII e XV secolo, attestano pratiche funerarie comunitarie e riusi successivi, confermando il ruolo del complesso come nodo identitario e territoriale. Le fasi più tarde mostrano tracce di sfruttamento silvo-pastorale e insediamenti effimeri, a testimonianza della persistenza d'uso della montagna fino all'età moderna. Sant'Andrea emerge così come un laboratorio per comprendere l'interazione tra paesaggio, potere e comunità, in un contesto dove l'eredità bizantina, i processi di incastellamento e le economie marginali si intrecciano nella costruzione di un territorio in trasformazione. Il sito contribuisce a ridefinire il ruolo delle montagne tirreniche non come periferie passive, ma come spazi di mediazione, resilienza e innovazione nella formazione degli stati territoriali medievali.

Parole chiave: Monti Aurunci, incastellamento, paesaggio medievale, economia marginale, territorializzazione ecclesiastica.

Abstract: The medieval site of Sant'Andrea di Campello (Monti Aurunci, southern Latium), investigated since 2022 within the Monti Aurunci Project, offers a privileged perspective on settlement and landscape dynamics along the Tyrrhenian frontier between the Early and Late Middle Ages. Strategically located near the San Nicola pass, between the Liri Valley and the coast of Gaeta, the site preserves a long sequence of occupation, abandonment, and reuse phases reflecting the region's political, economic, and ecological transformations. Excavations revealed a fortified enclosure, defensive structures, and, on the plateau on the summit, a small apsidal church with an associated cemetery — a focal point of aggregation and Christianisation for surrounding rural communities. The burials, dated between the 13th and 15th centuries, display collective and reused funerary practices, confirming the church's role as a symbolic and territorial nucleus. Later phases record evidence of silvo-pastoral exploitation and ephemeral huts, attesting to the continued use of the mountain landscape into the modern period. Sant'Andrea thus emerges as a laboratory for understanding the interplay between landscape, power, and community, where Byzantine legacies, processes of incastellamento, and marginal economies converged in the making of a changing territory. Far from being a passive periphery, the Tyrrhenian mountains appear as active zones of mediation, resilience, and innovation that contributed to the political and environmental construction of the medieval Mediterranean world.

Keywords: Monti Aurunci, incastellamento, medieval landscape, marginal economy, ecclesiastical territorialisation.

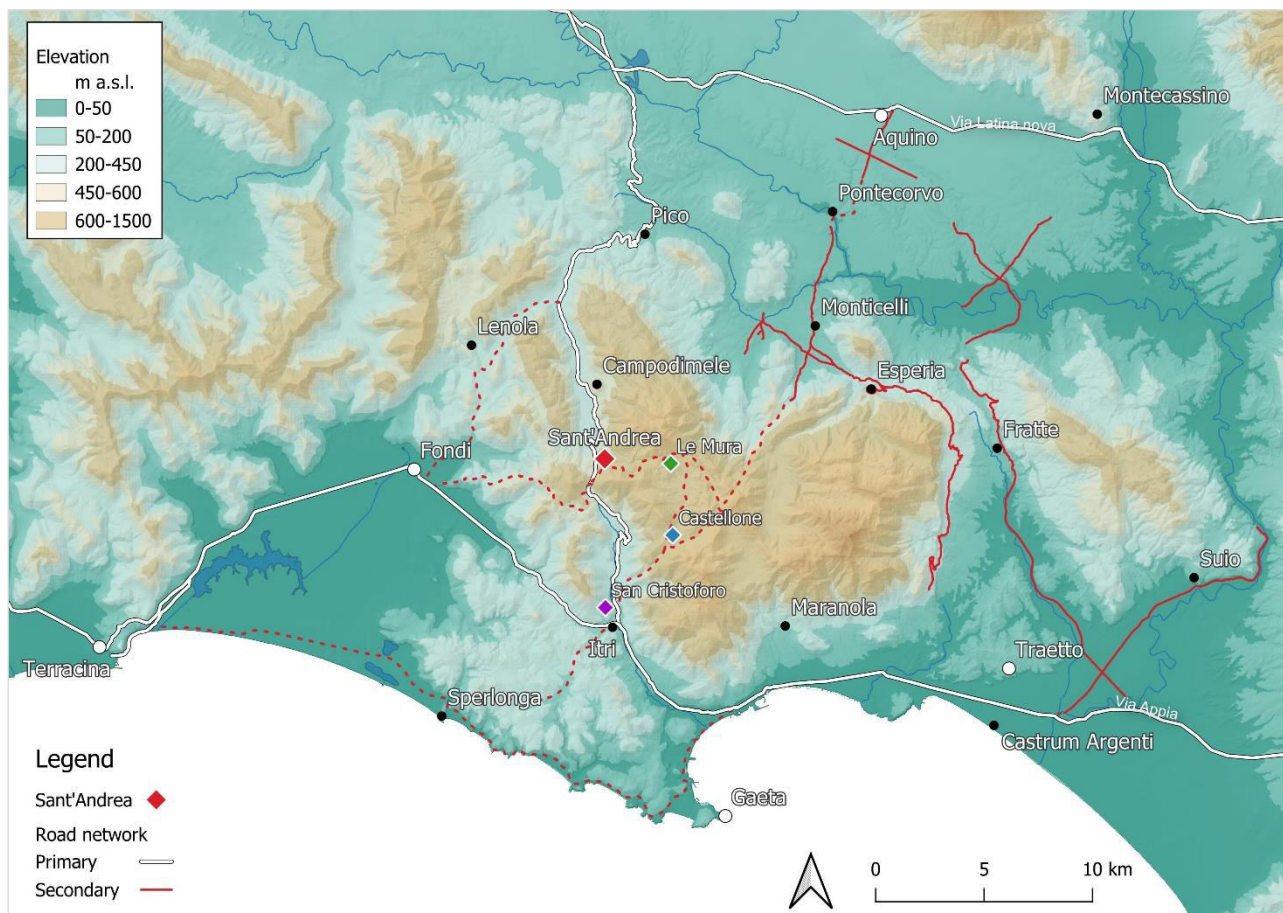


Fig. 1: The Area under investigation by MAP (main archaeological sites quoted in the text) (elab. FS).

1. The Geographical and Historical Context

The early medieval site of Sant'Andrea di Campello, located between the municipalities of Campodimele and Itri, in the heart of the Monti Aurunci Regional Nature Park, occupies a position of exceptional significance for the study of the settlement processes and landscape transformations that shaped the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy between Late Antique and the Middle Ages. Its location near the San Nicola pass, a natural transit point between the Liri valley and the Tyrrhenian coast, highlights its potential strategic role, both as a road control hub and as a territorial stronghold functional to the political organisation of the Duchy of Gaeta, one of the most distinctive seigniorial entities in the early medieval Mediterranean (Fig. 1)¹. Recent excavations, conducted as part of the *Monti Aurunci Project* (MAP) since 2022, have revealed a complex stratigraphic sequence, with phases of occupation, abandonment and reuse, which fit into the context of the medieval settlement and fortification phenomena (*incastellamento*) that marked the political and social geography of central-southern Italy between the 9th and 11th centuries², with the articulation of defensive and rural structures, moments of discontinuity and subsequent transformation of spaces and landscapes.

Unlike the nearby *castra* of Campello, Itri, Suio or Maranola—each of which is attested in 10th–11th-century narrative and diplomatic sources—Sant'Andrea is entirely absent from the written record. No medieval charter,

¹ On the strategic role of the Monti Aurunci as a political and military frontier between the Liri Valley and the Tyrrhenian coast, see VANNI, SACCOCCIO, ZOCCO 2023; for a reinterpretation of the Duchy of Gaeta in the Mediterranean context, see SKYNNER1995 and MARAZZI 2021.

² The concept of *incastellamento*, introduced by TOUBERT 1973, has been widely discussed and reformulated: BROGIOLO 1996; WICKHAM 1989: 223-256; FRANCOVICH, HODGES 2003: 67-93.

chronicle, or ecclesiastical document refers to the site, nor does it figure in earlier archaeological literature³. Its identification therefore rests exclusively on fieldwork and landscape analysis undertaken by the Monti Aurunci Project. This documentary silence is significant: it highlights the extent to which portions of the Aurunci uplands remained structurally invisible to contemporary documentary production, and it underscores the need to rely on the material and topographical evidence to reconstruct the territorial organisation of these mountain districts.

However, the importance of Sant'Andrea goes far beyond the local dimension. The site represents a privileged observatory from which to interrogate the relationships between the coast and the mountains, between maritime centres of power and inland communities, between Byzantine continuities and new forms of the organisation of power, as well as for analysing the relationships between the mountain environment, settlement processes and political dynamics in Tyrrhenian Italy between the 9th and 12th centuries. The mid-altitude environmental context, characterised by a network of ridges and passes connecting the Apennine area to the shore, makes Sant'Andrea a potentially decisive point for understanding how mountain communities interacted with coastal power structures and the territorial strategies of emerging states. These elements, integrated with topographical, stratigraphic and geomorphological analysis, allow Sant'Andrea to be included in a broader historiographical debate.

First, there is the persistence and transformation of the Byzantine legacy in territorial and social terms, i.e. the ways in which the organisation of the territory, land use, social stratification and local power relations were preserved, renegotiated or dismantled during the Middle Ages⁴. Placing the Sant'Andrea site in context thus makes it possible to observe, at a microterritorial, though still significant, scale, the interplay between late antique continuities — linked to road control and the management of agro-silvo-pastoral resources — and early medieval innovations associated with the assertion of the *castrense* model and the consolidation of the Duchy of Gaeta. As emphasized by Skinner and, more recently, by Marazzi, the latter represents a political anomaly within the Tyrrhenian framework, capable of combining conservative elements inherited from the Byzantine settlement geography with autonomous tendencies in an original formula of urban and territorial lordship⁵. In this sense, the Tyrrhenian duchies themselves (Gaeta, Naples, Amalfi) functioned as laboratories of political and social hybridization, in which the settlement pattern of the mountains was instrumental in constructing territorial states able to mediate between Byzantine authority, local aristocracies, and emerging seigneurial powers. As far as the persistence and transformation of the Byzantine legacy are concerned, recent scholarship has highlighted how, in the duchies of Gaeta, Naples and Amalfi, the features of land ownership, occupation and settlement hierarchies persisted, with specific remodulations between the 10th and 11th centuries — as seen in

³ Although no medieval charters, narrative sources, or ecclesiastical documents explicitly mention the site, a set of indirect non-archaeological sources contributes to contextualising the area: (a) early-modern toponymic attestations (IGM 1:25,000, 1942) preserving the name “Sant'Andrea,” albeit likely a cartographic misattribution; (b) medieval boundary descriptions of the dioceses of Fondi and Gaeta referring to churches of S. Nicola and S. Gregorio in the vicinity of the pass; and (c) oral testimonies collected from local shepherds concerning the function of post-medieval huts. These elements, although fragmentary, integrate the archaeological narrative and help reconstruct the *longue durée* perception of the hilltop.

⁴ In general SHEPARD 2009 and COSENTINO 2021. See COSENTINO, ZANINI 2021: 15–17 for late antique administrative legacies and the long timescales of material transformations; COSENTINO 2021: 31–41, 45–51 for the stratification of local powers; GELICHI 2021: 373–375, 381–382 for rural landscapes, markets and elite mediation in Byzantine regions; ROGNONI 2021: 760–769 for the continuity of legal practices and reuses in the transition from byzantine period to medieval one; BROWN 2009: 433–464 and LOUD 2009: 560–582 for the persistence of territorial and institutional frameworks in Byzantine and post-Byzantine Italy. For an exhaustive picture of persistence and change in southern Italy see ARTHUR 2022.

⁵ SKINNER 1995: 25–45, 96–115 defines the Gaeta case as a Tyrrhenian anomaly, showing how the Gaeta model of power retains elements conservative of the Byzantine system (titles, urban structures, administrative lexicon) and at the same time develops autonomist and proto-communal traits, based on control of the territory and Tyrrhenian trade networks; MARAZZI 2021: 409–420 places Gaeta, Naples and Amalfi in the broader “interstitial” political space of the early medieval Tyrrhenian Sea, where the Byzantine heritage is combined with processes of local autonomy, as a political and territorial laboratory: an original form of urban and maritime lordship that preserves the Byzantine topography and defensive logic (acropolis, churches, “Greek” toponymy), but reinvents them in a communal-dynastic key. From this perspective, Gaeta becomes a case of “institutional hybridisation” between imperial memory and emerging powers, a perfect synthesis of the “Tyrrhenian anomaly” referred to in our case.

terms such as *massa*, *fundus*, *casale*, *campus*, *publicum* — and their transfers to elites⁶. In particular, it is in the Duchy of Gaeta that the emergence of *castra* accompanied a territorial reorganisation, whereas elsewhere persistence prevailed (as in the case of Naples)⁷. The relevant literature on the subject invites us to interpret this “heritage” not necessarily in a conservative sense, but rather as a process of interweaving — a blending of late antique/Byzantine frameworks with new seigneurial practices (see, for methodological comparison, the debate on the Adriatic and the Exarchate)⁸. In this context, the mountain landscapes of the Monti Aurunci — often relegated to a ‘marginal status’ — appear instead as an active frontier, where public lands and emerging lordships meet and clash, redefining land use and modes of occupation.

Secondly, there is the process of *incastellamento* that was, notably, linked to the formation of coastal territorial states, marking a veritable discontinuity in the landscape of southern Latium. From this perspective, the settlement of Sant'Andrea, at least in its earliest phase preceding the full territorialization attested in the region, may reflect a landscape of scattered villages, agricultural structures, and small defensive structures. Instead, the subsequent transition toward a more “fortified” configuration of the mountain spaces fits into the broader phenomenon of *incastellamento* — whether complete, partial, or failed — responding to new needs for security, control, and territorial hierarchization⁹.

Medievalist research has long emphasized that, between the 9th and 10th centuries, growing pressures linked to territorial insecurity and the emergence of new local powers pushed rural societies toward forms of defensive aggregation in fortified settlements — *castelli*, *castra*, *castra specialia*¹⁰. This process is now understood not solely as a reaction to external military threat (e.g. Saracen raids), but as part of a broader restructuring of land control, social hierarchies, and ecclesiastical networks, actively shaped by episcopal, monastic, and aristocratic institutions¹¹. Archaeological studies have confirmed a variety of regional trajectories in chronology, form, and actors involved, and insist on the need for an interdisciplinary perspective combining written sources, settlement archaeology, and landscape analysis. Overall, the *incastellamento* marks a decisive transformation of medieval rural space, redefining both habitat patterns and local lordship in medieval Italy¹².

⁶ For the Byzantine legacy, a summary and Tyrrhenian cases in MARTIN 2017: 73–89; in particular 121–124 on the evolution of the *publicum* and *casalia*, and 136–148 on the transition from open habitats to the appearance of *castra* (with emphasis on Gaeta).

⁷ On internal variance (Gaeta vs Naples/Amalfi) and the archaic nature of land vocabulary (*massa*, *fundus*, *casale*), see MARTIN 2017: 119–124.

⁸ For a macro-regional comparison of late antique/Byzantine legacies and early medieval remodelling, see GELICHI 2017: 55–79 on Ravenna and the Adriatic sea, where forms of Byzantine administrative and material continuity are more fragmented and renegotiated on a local scale, and MANCASSOLA 2017, which analyses the persistence of large estates and Byzantine forms of management in the Adriatic territories and identifies a model of ‘institutional continuity’ as opposed to the ‘functional disarticulation’ of the Tyrrhenian contexts; ARCIFA 2017, on the other hand, identifies in Sicily an extreme case of adaptation of the Byzantine heritage in a context of strong ruralisation, useful for comparing the processes of reorganisation of the Aurunci landscapes and the role of local elites in the reconversion of the territory.

⁹ Territorialisation refers here to the multi-scalar process by which political powers, ecclesiastical institutions, and rural communities transform physical spaces into socially and economically recognised territories — by embedding systems of authority, resource governance, mobility control, and collective memory into the landscape. For the term ‘territorialization’ see the work of the geographer RAFFESTIN 1980 and SACK 1986; more recently PAINTER 2010; for its possible application to medieval landscapes see GUGLIEMOTTI 2006 and discussion in WICKHAM, CAFFARI, TIGRINO 2008.

¹⁰ The classical narrative of *incastellamento* as an early (9th–10th c.) reaction to insecurity derives from Toubert’s influential Latium model, but scholarship has since emphasized both military and regional variability. Wickham, for instance, has noted limits in treating Latium as an “Italian prototype” and urges recognition of diverse territorial frameworks (WICKHAM 1988, 1998).

¹¹ The restructuring of settlement and authority involved multiple agents (MANCASSOLA 2018: 135–138). CROVA 2004: 53–55 demonstrates early monastic and episcopal initiatives that catalyzed nucleation in parts of Latium, while LANCONELLI, ROMAGNOLI 2018: 379–380 underline the role of public authority and late antique legacies in other locales. Toubert’s model remains foundational, but its broad adoption has been reshaped by fieldwork that foregrounds local lordship strategies and differing politico-institutional contexts. AUGENTI 2018 stresses methodologies combining documentary and archaeological evidence.

¹² AUGENTI 2018: 18–19. On the broader historiographical reconsideration of Toubert’s model for central Italy and southern Latium, see in particular HUBERT 2002, whose nuanced critique highlights how geo-ecological conditions—topography, resource ecologies, and mobility

In Southern Italy, the dynamics of fortified settlement diverge markedly from central-northern models. Processes of effective *incastellamento* materialize chiefly from the late 11th century, particularly after the Norman conquest and consolidation of territorial lordship — unlike central Italy, where earlier transformations occur in the 9th–10th centuries¹³. Instead of growing from *curtense* rural frameworks (largely absent in the South), fortified sites often arose from Longobard and Byzantine strategic installations positioned along contested frontiers (e.g. Monti Dauni, Gargano, Murge, Southern Latium), later reinforced or refunctionalized by Norman lords¹⁴.

Furthermore, this phenomenon was closely connected to the emergence and evolution of territorial states along the Tyrrhenian coast, which needed to maintain internal lines of communication and to protect their mountainous hinterlands from external pressures. The erosion of central power (Byzantine, Lombard, Carolingian and papal) and the progressive autonomy of local elites fostered the stratification of a reticular defensive network, composed of minor hilltop castles controlled by vassals, local lords or aristocratic clans. In this context, the 'internal border' between the sea and the mountains was transformed into a complex system of relationships linking hilltop villages, defensive routes and coastal administrative circuits. From this point of view, Sant'Andrea, located in a corridor (or interface) of contact and osmosis between diverse political, economic and socio-ecological entities, represents a privileged observatory for medium-term transformations.

It is well known that the process of *incastellamento*, widely reconsidered by historiography, should not be reduced to a purely military or architectural phenomenon, but should be interpreted as a complex process of settlement concentration, redefinition of productive spaces and formalisation of power relations¹⁵. In southern Lazio, and in particular in the Monti Aurunci, this process assumed peculiar characteristics: here, the mountains are not a marginal or residual space, but rather a frontier territory, intensely traversed and contested, in which local communities and emerging aristocracies have shaped the landscape according to their own social, economic and symbolic strategies¹⁶.

For southern Latium, the *castrense* paradigm should not be understood as a sudden shift, but as a gradual, differentiated and hierarchical process, triggered by defensive needs, political and fiscal dynamics (transfers of the *publicum*, control of revenues) and the growing autonomy of local elites. The documentation on the *castra* of lower Lazio shows a densification between the end of the 10th and 11th centuries (Argento, Sperlonga, Fratte/Ausonia, Suio,

networks—produced heterogeneous and often non-linear trajectories of fortified nucleation in central Italy. Crucially, Hubert stresses that *incastellamento* was not simply the outcome of aristocratic initiative, but a negotiated process in which rural communities actively shaped the aggregation, defence, and reorganisation of upland landscapes. Recent archaeological work in the Monti Aurunci reinforces this perspective, showing how communities operated as agents of territorial construction, adapting settlement forms, managing common resources, and renegotiating power relations in a mountain ecology. For a parallel archaeological demonstration of these dynamics in another highland district, see BERNARDI 2021.

¹³ Regional comparison highlights chronological divergence. Puglia demonstrates that only after Norman consolidation (11th–12th c.) did fortified nuclei become central to rural organization, revealing delayed trajectories under Byzantine and Lombard influence. These southern rhythms challenge any monolithic timeline and show that *incastellamento* was shaped by distinct political histories, environmental frameworks, and earlier settlement structures (FAVIA 2018: 413-414).

¹⁴ Southern Latium stands as a transitional laboratory between these models. Early fortification in the Duchy of Gaeta reflects frontier militarization and maritime-adjacent defense, aligning with earlier central-Italian developments. This spectrum exemplifies the hybrid logics of frontier governance, ecclesiastical power, and lordship construction (CROVA 2004)

¹⁵ For southern Lazio, Pierre Toubert's model remains essential (TOUBERT 1973), but it should be read critically. For instance in a comparative archaeological key, BROGIOLO 1996: 15–44 and FRANCOVICH, HODGES 2003: 85–132 insist on gradualism and hybridisation; WICKHAM 1989 instead has pointed out the role of mountains in hierarchical reorganisation. Finally, on fortification, see the volume by AUGENTI, GALETTI 2018 and MOLINARI 2017 for a focus on southern Lazio. In short, the linear model of 'fortified revolution' is now outdated, with more recent research emphasising the plurality and gradual nature of the processes.

¹⁶ On the 'frontier space' character of the Monti Aurunci, see VANNI, SACCOCCIO 2024. For the active Tyrrhenian frontier and the role of mountains as links between coastal cities and the interior, see the classic comparison in WICKHAM 1989: 3–18, 205–234, with results applicable (*mutatis mutandis*) to the mountains of Lazio.

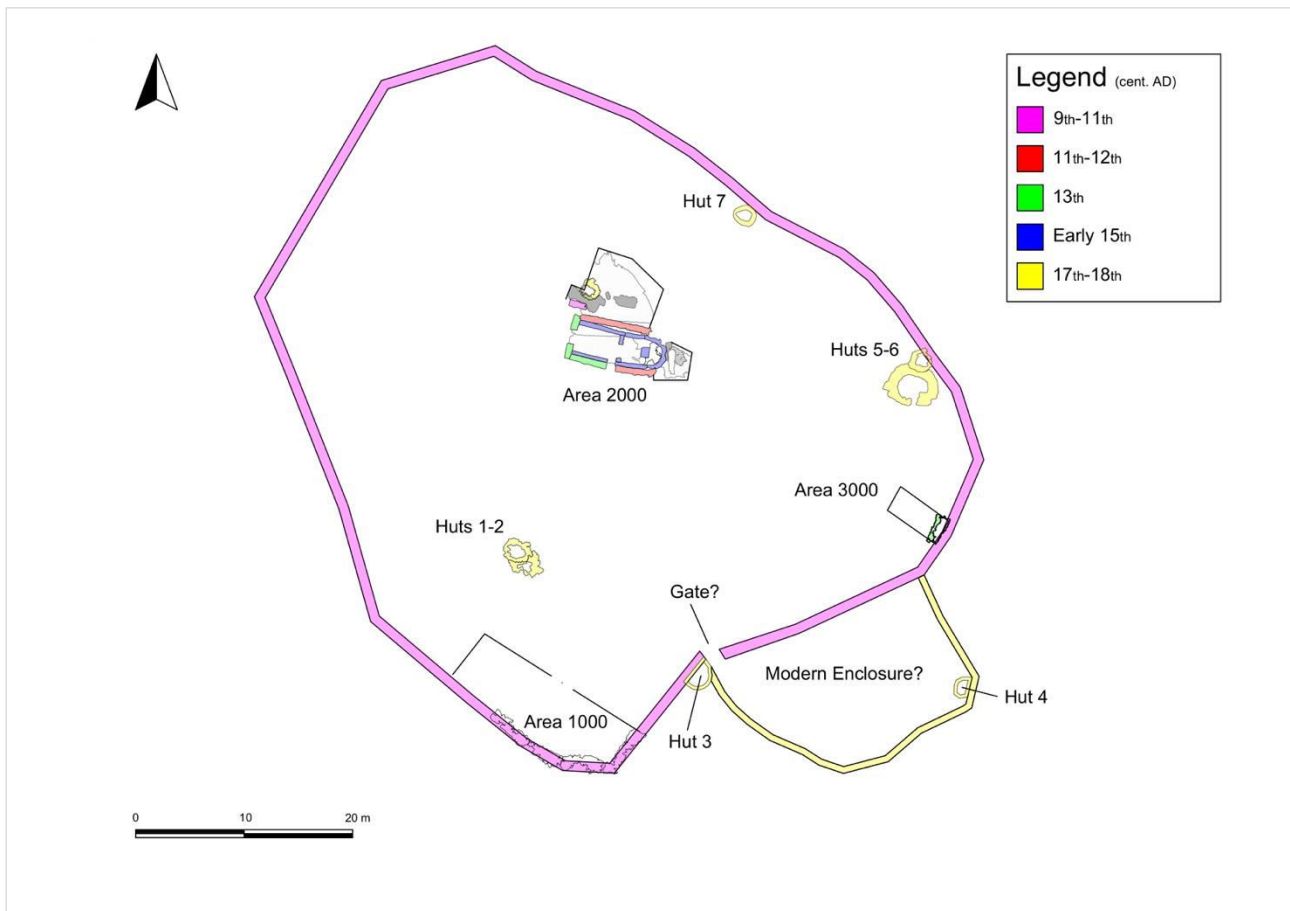


Fig. 2: Site plan of Sant'Andrea. Circular structures have been interpreted as modern huts (elab. FS; SZ).

Maranola, Itri, and Campello¹⁷, to which Sant'Andrea is topographically connected), with more marked effects in Gaeta than elsewhere¹⁸: a fact that fits well with the sequence of Sant'Andrea and its position on the internal passes, consistent with strategies of reconnection between the coast and the hinterland.

The process of *incastellamento*, analysed by Toubert for Lazio and taken up by Chris Wickham¹⁹, provides the most coherent theoretical background for interpreting the Aurunci transformations between the 11th and 13th centuries. Wickham pointed out that in marginal areas, far from the centres of documentary production, the *incastellamento* was not so much a process 'imposed' from above as the result of local communities adapting to the logic of emerging territorial power. The evidence from Sant'Andrea — with the coexistence of defensive structures, religious buildings and funerary areas — reveals a form of low-density and low-intensity fortification, in which ecclesiastical polarity compensates for the absence of a proper *castrum*. Our recent research also fits into this interpretation, emphasising how the construction of the mountain landscapes of the Monti Aurunci should be understood as a process of 'intermittent territorialisation', in which phases of abandonment and reuse alternated in response to political crises and ecological changes.

¹⁷ New data on the castle of "Le Mura di Campello" in VANNI et al. 2025b.

¹⁸ For a chronology of *castra* in the Gaeta area (late 10th–11th century) and effective reorganisation only in Gaeta, see MARTIN 2017: 144–148 (*castrum* Argento; Sperlonga as *castrum* from 1028; Fratte/Ausonia 1025; Suio 1023; Maranola 1029; Itri 1054; Campello later), with the note that in the documents 890–1030 *castra/civitates, casalia, curtes* and other settlements coexist.

¹⁹ WICKHAM 2005: 310–325.

Although still in its early stages, archaeological research in the Monti Aurunci is advancing rapidly and beginning to define a coherent framework of interpretation. On the one hand, there are the dossiers on medieval Campello district and the 'invisible' elites of Gaeta, and on the other, the systematic integration of new excavation and survey data from Sant'Andrea and the surrounding territory offer the opportunity to move from topographical hypotheses to contextualized stratigraphic models — in a setting where archaeological data have often been uneven, generating variable and poorly coordinated historical interpretations²⁰. It is therefore crucial that a site such as Sant'Andrea inserted into a comparative context, in which chronological, material and spatial data can dialogue with the broader trajectories of Tyrrhenian power.

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2. The Archaeological evidence

The fortified area, which was first identified using LiDAR data and then confirmed by ground surveys, comprises a wall enclosing an area of approximately 4,800 m², with numerous remains of internal structures and terraces (Fig. 2).

The previous excavation campaigns (2022–2023) enabled the general morphology of the complex to be defined and a series of main excavation areas to be identified. The first excavation campaign (2022) focused on Area 1000, along the south-eastern sector of the circuit walls. Here, a complex stratigraphy was documented, characterized by construction and spoliation levels, followed by phases of abandonment and the deposition of large quantities of material. Ceramic and numismatic finds — including ducal *follari* and *denarii* of Pavia from the Ottonian period — yielded a chronological sequence primarily spanning the 9th to the 10th centuries, with abundant evidence of early medieval occupation. Common painted and fired pottery, glazed ceramics, and ducal coins from Gaeta confirm the existence of a settlement or garrison active between the Ottonian age and the High Middle Ages. Possible earlier phases remain to be investigated, as suggested by the presence of Byzantine coins (*nummi*) from the 5th and 6th centuries found in disturbed contexts.

Subsequent campaigns (2023–2024) extended the excavation to the top of the hill (Area 2000), where a masonry apsidal building was unearthed and identified as a small rural church with a single nave. Measuring 9×4.5 metres, the building was constructed using limestone blocks and mortar, and shows traces of polychrome plaster, two entrances, and an internal dividing wall. The construction technique and the remains of polychrome plaster suggest that the building dates to the late medieval period (14th-15th century), although the presence of earlier structures (foundation walls and preparation levels on rock) indicates that an older core existed in the 12th-13th century. Near the apse, two burials carved into the rock were found, one of which was multiple, indicating the religious use of the complex. These burials are part of a larger cemetery complex structured around the church and probably refer to the last phase of the complex's life.

On the eastern side, a further test trench (Area 3000) was excavated. Located on a limestone terrace and bordered by a dry stone wall, it is thought to have been an activity area attached to the complex. The identified deposits, which are rich in coarsewares and the remains of *instrumenta* such as querns and pestles, suggest phases of use between the 8th and 10th centuries, probably prior to the construction of the church. Analysis of the boundary walls exposed in the southern and eastern sectors (areas 1000 and 3000) has revealed at least two construction phases. The first used large dry limestone blocks and the second used medium-sized stones with friable mortar. This second phase may be linked to renovations in the 11th-12th centuries. Despite the absence of identifiable residential structures, the archaeological evidence suggests that the site primarily served strategic and territorial control functions rather than residential ones. It acted as a fortified garrison within the defensive and communication system of the Duchy of Gaeta. Nevertheless, the presence of imported materials and Ottonian coins (*denarii*) testifies to intense trade and connections

²⁰ For a recent overview of the Monti Aurunci, see SACCOCCIO, ZOCCO 2023, for the history of the pre-duchy; VANNI, SACCOCCIO 2024 for surveys and landscape archaeology in the area; VANNI, ZOCCO 2025 for medieval rural typologies in the region; VANNI et al 2025A for the structuring of the landscape between late antiquity and the Middle Ages; for the regional picture and the research paradigm (LIDAR, surveys, targeted excavations) see VANNI et al. 2025B.

with neighbouring centres, particularly the fortified site of “Le Mura di Campello” and “Monte Castellone”, forming part of a coordinated network of upland settlements.

On the basis of the archaeological evidence collected so far, the occupation sequence of Sant'Andrea can be reorganised according to a neutral chronological framework, subsequently associated with an interpretative definition of each phase:

Late Antique / Early Medieval phase (6th–8th c.). Although fragmentary, several indicators (isolated Late Antique ceramic fragments, a possible *nummus*, occasional structural traces on bedrock) point to sporadic occupation or use of the hilltop prior to the construction of the fortified enclosure. These elements remain to be contextualised, but they suggest that the summit was not entirely devoid of activity before the 9th century;

Early Medieval phase (9th–11th c.). This is the earliest securely attested occupation. Ceramic assemblages, ducal *follari* from Gaeta, and Ottonian *denarii* indicate a fortified garrison or control point operating within the political-territorial framework of the Duchy of Gaeta. The erection of the perimeter wall and associated terraces belongs to this phase, which reflects the strategic surveillance of the San Nicola pass;

Late Medieval phase (12th–15th c.). A major reorganisation of the summit occurs. An earlier quadrangular building (12th–13th c.) is followed by the construction of the apsidal church (14th–15th c.), complete with an internal masonry lining and painted decoration. The establishment of the cemetery, including rock-cut tombs and areas of re-deposition, also belongs to this phase. Activity areas on the terraces (Area 3000) show abundant ceramic and instrumental materials consistent with productive use;

Post-Medieval phase (16th–17th c.). After the abandonment of the church, the hilltop is reappropriated as a pastoral and silvicultural landscape. Dry-stone huts, hearth installations and terraces attest to a recurring seasonal use by shepherds and charcoal-burners. These activities partially reworked earlier deposits and altered the preservation conditions of the medieval stratigraphy;

Subcontemporary phase (20th c.). During the Second World War the summit served as a military observation and defensive point, as indicated by cartridge cases, bullet impacts and structural damage to the church. These disturbances constitute the final recognisable phase of human activity on the hill²¹. The damage caused by intense clashes during the final phase of the hill's occupation, together with the significant erosion characteristic of the karst landscape of the Monti Aurunci, has compromised the preservation of the archaeological stratigraphy in this area (Fig. 3).

The 2024 campaign's research focused on continuing the excavation of the religious building (Area 2000), paying particular attention to the apse and northern section, as well as extending investigations in the eastern terrace (Area 3000). These interventions further clarified the construction sequence of the church, revealing phases prior to the apse, and expanded knowledge of the funerary context through the anthropological study of human remains from the two main burials (Tomb 1 and Tomb 2).

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3. The rural church on the hill of Sant'Andrea

Since 2023, archaeological investigations have concentrated on the summit of the hill of Sant'Andrea di Campello. Although a quadrangular limestone structure had been identified in previous years, it had not yet been excavated; only with the subsequent campaign did systematic exploration begin. Drone surveys proved equally decisive: aerial imagery revealed the presence of an apse, confirming the religious nature of the building. Stratigraphic excavation within the small nave, designated as Room A, then brought to light multiple phases of occupation and evidence of a later shift in the building's function.

²¹ For this latter occupation, see details in MULAS, SACCOCCIO 2025.



Fig. 3: Plan of Area 2000 (elab. FS).

From an archaeological perspective, the building reveals a complex and highly articulated vertical stratigraphy, the result of successive construction phases and episodes of reuse that make it an exemplary case study for understanding the site's architectural and cultic development. The earliest building (12th–13th c.) appears to have been a simple quadrangular structure set on a levelled bedrock platform. A major reconstruction (14th–15th c.) introduced the apsidal termination, the internal masonry lining with painted decoration, and a more complex internal articulation. The medieval layout of the church reveals a single-nave plan organised around a clear liturgical axis, with a main entrance to the west and a secondary access on the south side. The sanctuary culminates in an apses area preceded by a small transept-like articulation, which separates the sacred space from the area reserved for the congregation and underscores a deliberate hierarchy of functions within a compact structure. The surviving fresco traces point to a level of refinement consistent with regional ecclesiastical architecture.

The masonry techniques used for the external and internal perimeter walls, highlight different chronological phases of the church: the north wall (40) and a small part of the south-east wall (44) are made of medium-large limestone blocks arranged in irregular rows with a still poorly defined horizontality; a technique that can perhaps be traced back to a period between the XII and XIII centuries²². Further clues also come from the cleaning of the ridges and wall facades in the northern part of the church: here, a small fragment of red plaster has been identified (56), obliterated by the subsequent wall 'lining', indicating an early decorative phase of the religious building (Fig. 4).

The others walls portions (43; 42; 29) feature medium-sized limestone blocks, with the addition and installation of rectangular elements, that create a more defined and regular horizontal line; this technique can be attributed to a

²² FIORANI 1998: 125. The masonry technique is comparable to A3 group II.



Fig. 4: Detail of the red plaster in the northern part of the church (56) (ph. AC).



Fig. 5: South-west wall of the church (USM 43). (ph. AC).

period between the XIV and XV centuries, probably just before the distinctive internal "lining", already mentioned²³ (Fig. 5). The latter (28; 41; 30; 51) is built using a construction technique involving medium-to-small sized limestone blocks, set with mortar, probably dating back to the first half of the XV century²⁴. It should be noted that the masonry technique was not visible in ancient times, because it was covered by a cycle of frescoes (47) that is now almost completely lost, but from the very few traces that remain, it is still possible to hypothesise the colours and structure of the decorative apparatus. The fragments found are mainly yellow, red, blue and a dark colour that is not easily identifiable. As for the composition of the fresco, it is possible to suggest a pictorial cycle in panels or scenes inserted within frames, as can be seen from the traces identified on the north side of the church and on the internal wall of the apse.

Both the masonry technique and the colour analysis of the frescoes suggest a chronology, dating back to the early 15th century, which can also be found in other rural churches throughout the territory of the Western Aurunci and the nearby Ausoni Mountains. San Cristoforo in Itri (LT), the chapel of San Vito below, and the church of Via Ripa in Le Querce, on the border between Fondi and Campodimele (LT), can all be considered excellent points of comparison in terms of both internal masonry techniques and frescoes. It should be noted that between the second half of the XIV century and the first half of the XV century, many 'secondary' churches were the subject of particular attention in terms of both construction and decoration, almost on a par with the large city churches²⁵. The last phase detected is therefore the aforementioned reoccupation and transformation into a pastoral hut, with the raising of the original perimeter walls, using large dry-stone blocks typical of rural areas in Southern Italy. This confirms the extent of the later medieval rebuilding in the 14th–15th century, with the addition of an apse and an internal painted lining (Fig. 6).

Such a complex layout raises questions about why the client used certain construction tricks. The most plausible hypothesis is perhaps that relating to the static nature of the church itself, which is in fact laid on this natural limestone platform, which does not seem to guarantee the solidity of the structure. This is evident in the heavy inclination, still visible, on the north wall and perhaps also in the reconstruction of the southern wall partition, as well as the internal "lining" wall, which may also have been designed to further reinforce the fragile stability of the church. After the medieval phase, there must have been a long period of abandonment as evidenced by its transformation into a pastoral dwelling.

The analysis of the internal stratigraphy reveals that the church was built on a bank of worked and smoothed rock (3), probably corresponding to a level of use predating the construction of the religious building. The stratigraphic sequence identified above this surface documents the preparation of the bedrock, the laying of mortared pavements, the formation of collapse deposits, episodes of post-medieval pastoral reuse, and finally the disturbances associated with twentieth-century military occupation. The worked rock surface was subsequently reused as the base for the church flooring; the overlying layer contains mortar preparation lenses that can be interpreted as the floor preparation of the Late Medieval church. This portion of the stratigraphy has yielded the greatest quantity of materials, both ceramic and numismatic.

The upper layers are associated with the collapse of the wall partitions and access doors, containing large limestone elements, plaster and mortar, but also traces of more recent occupation, dating back to the Modern Age. The layer of abandonment attributable to the transformation and pastoral occupation of the church is identified in the surface humus layer. It is worth noting the total lack of physical connection between the layers of the nave and those of the apse, which will be described in more detail below.

The upper layers still returned materials relating both to the late medieval church, both from pastoral occupation, such as a pipe, and various clay materials, such as tiles and bricks, which show signs of burning or, in any case, evidence of fires having been lit inside the building. A particular note is the large quantity of military material dating back to the Second World War: cartridge cases and bullets were found both in the upper stratigraphy and in the

²³ FIORANI 1998: 140. The masonry technique is comparable to A4 group IIc.

²⁴ FIORANI 1998: 125. The masonry technique is comparable to A3 group Ib.

²⁵ DI SEGNA 2004: 31-37; PESIRI, DI CICCIO 2004: 79-94.



Fig. 6: Detail of one of the frescoes in the church (perhaps an animal's paw) (ph. AC).

perimeter walls of the church, indicating that the hill of Sant'Andrea was a strategic point for both German and Allied troops. A more in-depth analysis of the stratigraphy and the materials recovered reveals that the quantity of finds is rather limited. This situation may be linked to the contexts found in Areas 1000 and 3000 below, with the former gradually obliterated by deposits of earth and ceramic material and the latter affected by the discovery of layers of washout rich in pottery; in both cases, the origin seems to be from the top of the hill.

These hypotheses therefore justify the scarce presence of materials inside the small nave, but in general throughout Area 2000. The earliest stratigraphic level of *Room A* yielded tableware, kitchenware, and a numismatic find — likely a *nummus* — which suggests that the initial occupation of the settlement may already have begun in Late Antiquity, if not earlier.

The issue of the total absence of furnishings needs to be examined. Little or nothing was found in the collapsed layers, except for a few fragments of tiles and bricks and some glazed bricks, perhaps the last traces of the ancient flooring. Nothing remains of the architectural elements either, a sign that after losing its religious function, a long and systematic plundering must have taken place, depriving the church of its most recognisable elements, after which it was reused as a shelter for shepherds who carried out their silvo-pastoral activities there.

Initial conclusions suggest that the structure was used for a very long time, reaching its peak in the late Middle Ages, when the church must have played a fundamental role in the religious and territorial management of this specific area of the Western Monti Aurunci.

The church on the hill of Sant'Andrea di Campello is not the only one in the western part of the Monti Aurunci. The border area between the present-day municipalities of Campodimele, Itri and Fondi was dotted with various monastic and ecclesiastical establishments which, according to the documents, may have played a much more complex role that went beyond the mere ecclesiastical sphere. The religious and territorial situation in the early Middle

Ages was certainly defined by the presence of several monastic establishments, founded by the dukes, which tended to centralise both religious and territorial power through the creation of clearly defined territories with clear boundaries. In the delicate transition phase between the Tyrrhenian duchies and the new Norman domination, we see how this type of territorial organisation slowly tended to disintegrate. Between the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Age, there was a radical change in the conception of the religious organisation of the Aurunci territory. Here we can include the church on the hill of Sant'Andrea. Late medieval and Renaissance documents tell us of a proliferation of small churches and a more widespread ecclesiastical control, perhaps better able to penetrate the mountain communities of the Aurunci.²⁶ Another issue concerns the name and toponym of the hill itself. The church of Sant'Andrea, with this name, does not appear in any document from the early Middle Ages to the early modern period. This name is linked to a place name that appears only once, in a military IGM 1: 25,000 map drawn up in 1942, which has raised more than a few doubts, even among the local population. In the area under consideration, there are several places bearing the agiotoponym "*Sant'Andrea*", including one well known to archaeological research in Southern Lazio²⁷, but located a few kilometres south of our area of investigation. The question remains as to the real name of the church, and ancient documents give us two names: *S. Nicola* and *S. Gregorio*. The former has been present in the area since the end of the 10th century²⁸ and most likely gave its name to the pass which today, as in ancient times, is the most direct route between the Tyrrhenian coast and the mountainous areas of Southern Latium. The second is mentioned for the first time at the beginning of the 14th century, then disappears towards the end of the 17th century. It constituted a boundary point between the ancient dioceses of Fondi and Gaeta; this boundary appears cyclically in ancient documentation and seems to pass precisely over the hill examined by archaeological investigations²⁹. The question remains open and documentary sources are fragmentary and unclear, raising more than a few doubts that cannot be resolved with the vast amount of archaeological data available. However, we can say with certainty that the church cannot be attributed to Sant' Andrea.

AC

4. The occupation of the hilltop of Sant'Andrea

Area 2000 (the apsidal zone)

A particular focus within Area 2000 was reserved for the apse, whose soil layers did not display any physical relationship with those of the nave. The zone appeared promising due to the presence of a stone accumulation that could have preserved the original abandonment levels of the religious structure, elsewhere obliterated by spoliation and cleaning activities at the beginning of the modern period.

In the apsidal zone, the natural bedrock was found to be unlevelled, unlike in the rest of the church. This feature was also clearly visible from outside the structure, where the removal of wall collapse revealed the irregularity of the rock beneath the apse wall. Given the distinct construction phases, the current hypothesis is that the levelling operation observed elsewhere was not carried out during the reconstruction of the church (14th-15th century), but rather belongs to an earlier phase, possibly in anticipation of the erection of the chapel's first nucleus. Considering the extent of the summit terrace in relation to the overall volume of the building, it is plausible that the primitive structure lacked an apse and was most likely quadrangular in plan. The absence of any evidence for a circular wall attributable to the first Late Medieval Phase (12th-13th c.) in the external area, combined with the interruption of the bedrock corresponding to the visible apse, strongly supports the hypothesis of a change in the building plan during the second Late Medieval Phase (12th-13th c.).

²⁶ VANNI ET AL. 2025A: 221-224.

²⁷ Referring to the oratory of Sant'Andrea *ad clivum Fundanum*, now on the border between Fondi and Itri on the Appian Way and already documented in the 6th century AD and 5 km away from the church examined in this article.

²⁸ CDC I, LVIII (YEAR 958); FORTE 1992: 167.

²⁹ CDC II, CCCXLV; CCCLI (YEARS 1158; 1170); FORTE 1992: 167; PESIRI, ANGELONI 2008: 15.

In the apsidal zone of Room A, above the bedrock, was a homogeneous spread of whitish-yellow mortar with a levelled surface, subsequently confirmed as the original floor (*Fig. 7*). This surface, almost intact, was positioned at a slightly higher elevation than the nave's floor level, with a difference of approximately 20 cm. Such evidence indicates the existence of a step or raised platform around the altar. This interpretation is further supported by observations in Room A, where remnants of mortar adhered to the inner walls clearly mark the point at which the pavement abutted the presbytery platform. Moreover, the mortar floor was interrupted by at least two monolithic limestone elements leaning against the circular perimeter wall, possibly serving as pillars (perhaps to support a wooden shelf) or as small columns. Their precise function remains uncertain.

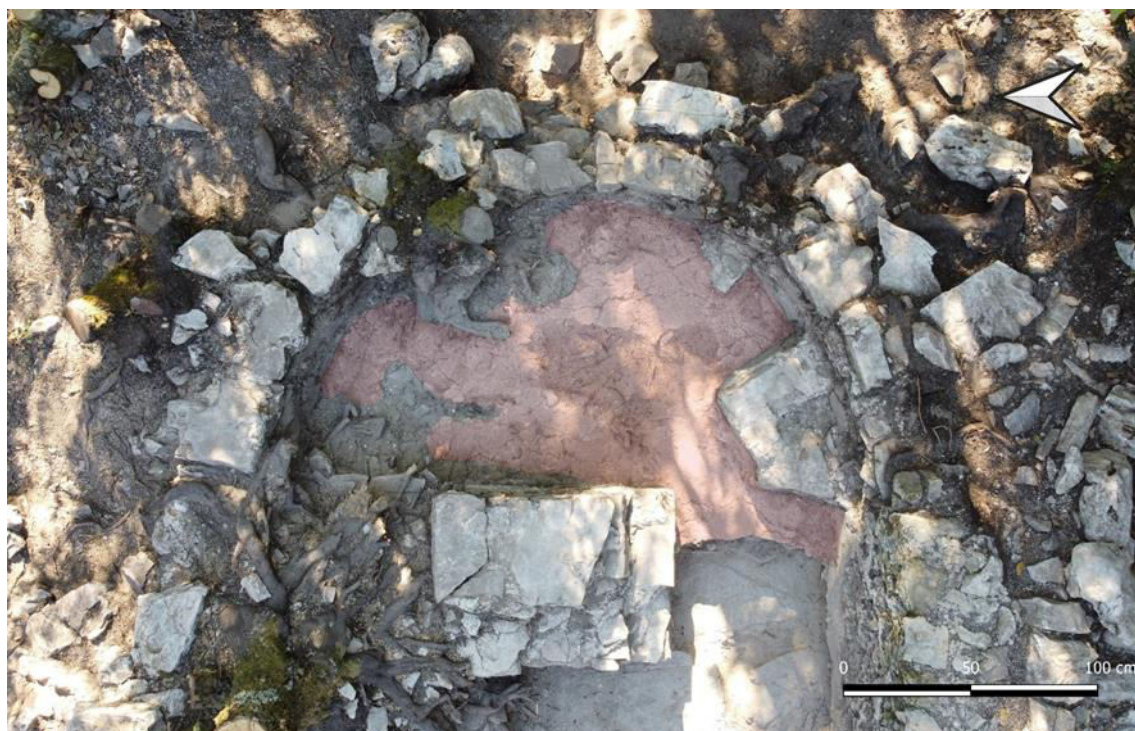


Fig. 7: The apse with the original floor of Room A, in red (drone ph. EV).

Overlying this floor was a white, compact, and hard deposit composed of mortar, small limestone fragments, and crumbled plaster. The nature of this deposit corroborates previous suspicions regarding the presence of a layer associated with the building's disuse. This abandonment context, also resulting from the deterioration of wall plasters, yielded several significant small finds through systematic sieving of the excavated soil. Among these were very fine fragments of transparent glass, some bearing an applied thread, suggesting a 14th/15th-century date. Another find consisted of a small circular bronze handle, possibly from a lamp or small container, while tiny shell fragments were also collected, which may once have decorated liturgical furnishings or ritual objects. The abandonment context was sealed by two other layers characterized by large thin limestone fragments mixed with white mortar and crumbled plaster, interpreted as the collapse of the apse vault.

Another noteworthy discovery in this sector, behind the apse, was the identification of a burial in a privileged position (*Fig. 8*). Preliminary anthropological analyses will be presented separately. Here it is sufficient to note that the tomb was oriented north-south, cut directly into the bedrock, and sealed with thick limestone slabs. Its northern end was semicircular in shape, imparting an almost 'anthropomorphic' aspect. The overlying deposits were composed of grey soil with limestone rubble (deriving from the apse collapse) and friable grey-yellowish soil. The latter, in direct contact with the tomb cover, contained the rim of a small medieval cooking pot (*Fig. 9, n. 3*) and glass fragments. Alongside these finds, human bones in secondary position were retrieved above the slabs: as observed in the northern



Fig. 8: Tomb 2 (ph. SZ).

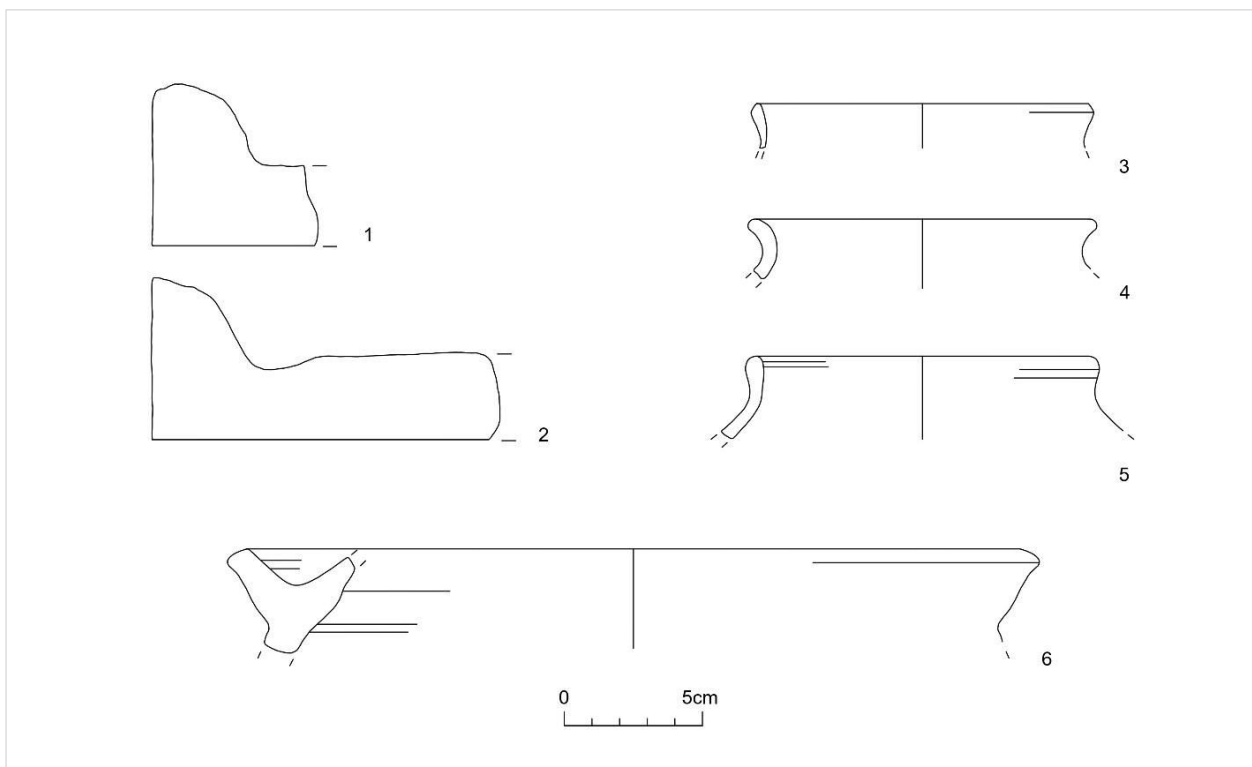


Fig. 9: 1-2, tiles (belonging to the church?); 3, late medieval cooking pots from Area 2000 (13th-14th century); 4-5, early medieval cooking pots from Area 3000 (9th-11th century); 6, *clibanus* from Area 3000 (9th-11th century).

part of Area 2000, it is possible that during the post-medieval period the sector underwent restructuring, including partial removal of collapsed material, during which burials were disturbed and soils redeposited. Nevertheless, a series of indicators – including differences in elevation between the layers and the building, the nature of the excavated deposits, and the recovered materials – suggests that the original burial behind the apse may even belong to the first Late Medieval phase (12th-13th c.) or an earlier period. Supporting this hypothesis is the evidence that, at a certain point (towards the end of the Middle Ages), the tomb was reused as an ossuary. The burial contained remains of at least three individuals; the earliest interment had been partially displaced westward to accommodate later remains. The individual for whom Tomb 2 was originally constructed must have held an important status within the community of Sant'Andrea, as indicated by the tomb's isolated and privileged spatial location within the religious complex, by the care taken in its construction (in particular, the small limestone blocks lining its inner walls), and by anthropological evidence suggesting good health (see *infra*).

SZ

Area 2000 (North side)

In 2024, the excavation in Area 2000 was expanded to include a new sector on the northern part of the hilltop, beyond the northern wall of the church. This extension provided a better understanding of the relationship between the surroundings and the church, as evidence of a burial ground as well as of earlier structures was uncovered.

The whole sector can be briefly described as an artificial terrace cut into the hilltop of Sant'Andrea, and served as a burial ground associated with the late medieval church though there is no direct connection between the burial area and the building itself, as the access is instead located to the south.

The artificial terrace was cut flat from the limestone bedrock, on which traces of several other cuts are visible. The cut from Tomb 1 runs parallel to the northern wall (40), where it is also possible to observe the original level of the bedrock:



Fig. 10: Zenithal view of Tomb 1 (ph. EV).

this level was probably lowered after the construction of the church, either to create a burial area in this sector or as part of the spoliation activity when the church was abandoned.

Before the construction of the church this area probably hosted other structures, part of which was uncovered along the western edge of the sector. A portion of a dry-stone wall (82) constructed with large blocks of local limestone (measuring up to 60x60 cm) might represent the remains of these earlier structures. This wall, oriented east-west, was built inside a cut in the bedrock, and extended westwards to the limit of the excavated area.

The level of the terrace was lowered when the first church was built, and the area began to serve as a burial ground, as indicated by the presence of cuts associated with the construction of the northern wall (40). Indeed, the first evidence of human remains was encountered in the area between the northern wall and the surviving portion of the original bedrock floor. A disordered accumulation of bones (context 77; see the anthropological discussion) was located north of the northern wall of the church, near its midpoint. Subsequent removal of these remains revealed the presence of a preserved burial – designated as Tomb 1.

This was a rectangular pit cut into the bedrock, with the northern wall of the church and the nearby dry-stone block wall serving as its southern and northwestern boundaries (*Fig. 10*). The western half of the tomb was partially sealed by a few small limestone slabs. The pit was filled with soil mixed with very fine limestone gravel and contained the complete skeleton of one individual, along with a few bones belonging to another individual. The main individual, oriented northwest, was well preserved, although part of the feet and the frontal portion of the cranium were missing. The cranium itself was highly fragmented and partially displaced toward the chest. This detail, together with the absence of some of the sealing slabs, may suggest that the tomb was reopened and disturbed, perhaps during the spoliation activities.

No diagnostic material was found in the fill of Tomb 1, making it impossible to determine the chronology of the deposition. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the inhumation took place after the north wall of Room A (40) was already in place, as both the cut of the tomb and the position of the individual appear to respect its orientation. This wall may also represent the oldest wall within the main structure, possibly belonging to a phase prior to its use as a church.

The absence of material from Tomb 1 and from the disrupted burials makes it impossible to date these depositions, and it is unlikely that they predate the occupational phase of the medieval church (**Phase 3a**). As previously discussed, the church underwent at least two major construction phases before eventually falling out of use. Evidence of spoliation activity was identified above the tombs, preceding the gradual collapse of the building. The spoliation likely took place in the early modern period and aimed at retrieving building materials from the abandoned church, particularly roof tiles and architectural elements.

Despite the abandonment and the spoliation of the church, evidence from the northern sector confirms that the hilltop of Sant'Andrea was frequented by shepherds and charcoal burners during the modern period. A small sub-circular dry-stone structure built of local limestone (59) was identified a few metres north of the north-west corner of the building, and probably associated with silvo-pastoral practices. The presence of a collapse along its south-east side suggests a height of c. 1 m for this feature, although its limited size makes interpretation difficult. Nevertheless, fragments of glazed cooking ware recovered from the soil layers within the structure allow it to be dated to the 17th-18th century.

This structure can be compared with others of similar shape and size located both at Sant'Andrea and in the Monti Aurunci region, some of which have been interpreted by local shepherds as doghouses - well-preserved examples can be observed in the Fossa degli Occhi near Campodimele. The presence of charcoal and bone fragments together with the glazed pottery may indicate use as a hearth, possibly connected with activities such as cheese-making, temporary/seasonal camping, or meat smoking.

It is therefore possible to note that silvo-pastoral activities took place when the church was already abandoned and in poor condition. The hearth-like structure clearly overlaid several collapse layers and building material deposits that filled the entire sector and can likely be attributed to the modern period. Indeed, this sector also produced evidence of fighting from World War II, though to a lesser extent than that observed inside the church.

FS

5. The Eastern Terrace of the settlement (Area 3000)

During the 2024 excavation campaign, investigations were also resumed in Area 3000, a terraced area near the eastern section of the perimeter wall of Sant'Andrea, which had already been the subject of preliminary analysis in 2022. During the first campaign, UT3 - a semicircular structure made of dry-laid limestone blocks and fragments of various sizes - had been identified, but not excavated. It was interpreted as a shepherds' hut probably dating to a recent historical period. The discovery of brick materials in its immediate vicinity suggested that the area might have been occupied by other contemporary or earlier structures.

To better understand the configuration of the terrace, a trench of approximately 3x5 metres was positioned against the eastern section of the perimeter wall, in the belief that this may have limited the erosion and runoff of the stratigraphy that could be observed on the lower plateau, thereby preserving the context (*Fig. 11*).

The excavation, currently in its preliminary stages, has not yet revealed any direct evidence for the function of the area. However, we can already state that it was not used for the installation of a charcoal kiln, which is present in Area 1000 along the southern slope. The large quantity of ceramic fragments found here seems to result from runoff from the top of the hill where the church is located (Room A); among these there are also fragments of *instrumenta*, such as querns and pestles.

In the oldest layers investigated so far, a complex situation was uncovered. It consists of some stone elements that may represent a structure of blocks or a floor of calcined limestone slabs, what appears to be a structural collapse of the perimeter wall, and a probable looting operation, suggested by a layer of limestone flakes mixed with soil.

These layers were covered by context 97, a very noteworthy layer made of soil and rubble located in the central part of the trench, rich in materials: numerous large ceramic fragments, bricks, glass elements, and a fragment of *forum ware* were recovered. A notable quantity of archaeobotanical remains (seeds), which were completely absent from the



Fig. 11: Zenithal view of Area 3000 (drone ph. EV).

other levels, were also found, along with some animal bones. The amount of material suggests this layer may represent a dump, probably connected to a similar dump Area 3000. In the northern corner of the trench, instead, a partial layer made of calcined limestone slabs was uncovered, which appears to extend beyond the limits of the trench. Only a later expansion will reveal its true extent and provide more information about its nature.

Many materials were also found in the upper layer, located at the centre of the trench, and made of very friable soil mixed with limestone fragments. This is probably a levelling layer used to create a walking surface associated with the site's most recent occupation phases in the modern era. Among the materials there were some *instrumenta*, glass fragments, and three buttons probably from a Bourbon-era military uniform.

Finally, a collapse of limestone and mortar fragments, sealing these layers just below the humus layer, was discovered near the wall, probably related to the wall itself.

Although the excavation of Area 3000 is still at a preliminary stage and interpretations must remain cautious, the large quantity of materials discovered so far seems to suggest a chronological horizon different from the phases identified on the hill. This opens up the possibility of an occupation phase of the area dating back to the 8th and 10th centuries AD.

FDP

6. Sant'Andrea cemetery: the anthropological analysis

This communication aims to present preliminary results concerning the human remains excavated at the site and previously described. The ongoing anthropological analysis seeks to provide initial insights into the demography of the burials, including the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) and basic biological data such as sex and age at death. As described in previous sections, the human remains come from two excavation areas, designated Tomb 1 and Tomb 2 (hereafter T1 and T2) (Fig. 12).

Following excavation, the remains were processed in the laboratory. All bones were washed in water; in specific and isolated cases, consolidation and restoration were carried out using Paraloid B-52 solution at varying concentrations. Not all materials were reconstructed to avoid interference with future analyses. Both burial contexts were examined



Fig. 12: Orthomosaic of Area 2000 showing the locations of T1 and T2. (elab. FS).

using standard anthropological methods³⁰, with particular emphasis on macroscopic analysis to establish sex and age at death, palaeopathological conditions, and recording of taphonomic traces.

Although preservation of the remains is generally good, certain methodological decisions were necessary. Sex estimation was based primarily on cranial features rather than the pelvis, as the crania were better preserved. In some cases, the diameter of the femoral neck was also used when associations between postcranial and cranial bones could be established. Age-at-death estimation employed dental eruption and wear, as well as the degree of epiphyseal fusion³¹.

Tomb 1 is a multiple burial showing clear evidence of successive phases of use, as indicated by stratigraphic analysis. The first individual examined is in a partially primary inhumation. As shown in Fig. 10, the entire spine, some ribs, the pelvis, and the upper and lower limbs are preserved in their original positions and retain anatomical articulation. In contrast, the cranial region shows signs of disturbance, having undergone multiple mechanical events resulting in fractures. Skull fragments and parts of fractured long bone diaphyses were found in Context 77 of Area 2000, covering the body still *in situ*. This absence is likely due to post-depositional processes rather than intentional removal, possibly linked to the reopening of the tomb.

The burial lies supine, facing west. The position of the axis marks the area of disturbance that probably led to the skull's displacement. The patellae are in anatomical position, and there is no verticalisation of the clavicles, rotation

³⁰ MCKINLEY 2004.

³¹ ACSÁDI, NEMESKÉRI 1970; BUIKSTRA, UBELAKER 1994; BROTHWELL 1981; CUNNINGHAM, SCHEUER, BLACK 2016; LOVEJOY 1985; SEIDEMANN, STOJANOWSKI, DORAN 1998.

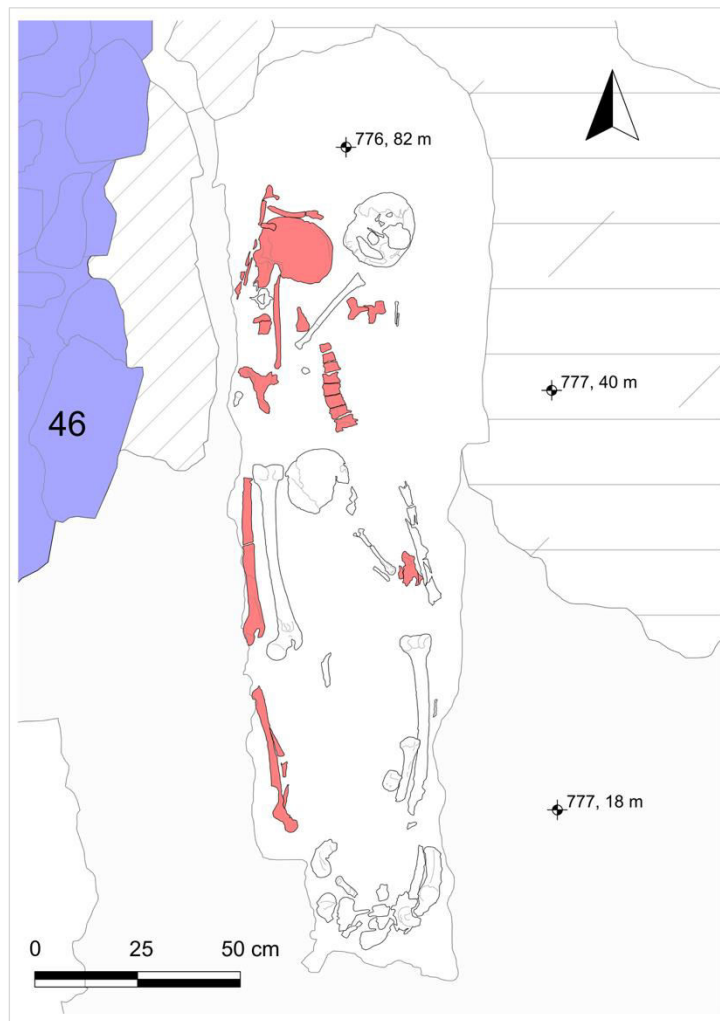


Fig. 13: Detailed plan of Tomb 2. Highlighted: the main burial disturbed by the creation of the ossuary (elab. FS).

of the coxae, or other signs suggesting a disturbed empty burial space. These anatomical data suggest an earth-filled burial. This individual likely represents the last human deposition in the tomb, in contrast to two others found only partially preserved.

Morphological assessment of this first individual, based on mastoid process morphology, a reliable sex indicator³², and confirmed by femoral neck diameter³³, indicates a female. Age-at-death, estimated through dental wear and cranial suture closure, places the individual between 45 and 55 years³⁴. Dental preservation is poor, with pronounced wear, heavy calculus deposits, and only one C1 in anatomical position; remaining teeth were lost post-mortem. The cranium exhibits *cribra cranii*, likely associated with dietary deficiency, while no other macroscopic pathological or taphonomic alterations were observed at this stage.

Additional remains from T1 include: an isolated radius from a second adult individual, likely displaced during post-depositional disturbance; a right mandibular fragment from a subadult with an erupting molar, estimated at 5 ± 1.5 years o³⁵; two unerupted lower M1 and M2 from a subadult with no occlusal wear and a tibial fragment with an unfused epiphysis, for which age estimation is not possible.

Tomb 2 in Area 2000 (Fig. 13), also a multiple burial, differs from T1 in that no individuals are preserved in primary articulation. At least three individuals are represented. Bone arrangement and displacement suggest multiple episodes of reopening and reuse over an undetermined period. The crania are oriented mainly to the west and, compared to those from T1, are generally better preserved.

To date, only cranial remains have been examined; postcranial analysis is pending. 'Cranium 1' is complete, female, with reduced glabellar prominence and a mastoid process consistent with female morphology³⁶. Dental wear suggests an age at death of 40–50 years. "Cranium 2," nearly complete and associated with part of the left mandible, belongs to a subadult aged approximately $4-5 \pm 1.5$ years. This individual occupies a lower stratigraphic position than the two skulls in joint position on the north side. The third individual, represented by a skull and mandible, shows male traits and an age at death of 35–40 years based on dental wear. Associated postcranial remains from all three individuals

³² DEL BOVE 2023.

³³ SEIDEMANN, STOJANOWSKI, DORAN 1998.

³⁴ LOVEJOY 1985.

³⁵ BROTHWELL 1981.

³⁶ ACSÁDI, NEMESKÉRI 1970; BUIKSTRA, UBELAKER 1994.

are under study for classification and attribution. Combined data from both tombs indicate a minimum of six individuals: two adult females, one adult male, one indeterminate adult, and two subadults aged between 4 and 5 years.

The two tombs suggest different periods of use, as indicated by both body positioning and disturbance patterns. Only after establishing a relative and absolute chronological framework will it be possible to determine whether these burials are contemporaneous. Future taphonomic analyses may provide further insight into depositional processes. Tomb 1 is clearly an earth-filled burial and does not contain empty coffins; Individual 1 is certainly the last burial in chronological order. Interpretation of Tomb 2 remains more challenging at this stage, as no preserved elements yet allow for a definitive classification of the burial type. Future research will investigate taphonomic agents, particularly through postcranial analysis, and will explore the relationship between the two tombs. Anthropological studies will also expand to include more detailed biological profiles, addressing questions about the lifestyle and identity of the buried individuals.

ADB

7. From the site to the history of the medieval landscapes of the Monti Aurunci

The site of Sant'Andrea di Campello, investigated within the framework of the Monti Aurunci Project, now stands as a privileged observatory for understanding the settlement and landscape dynamics of the Tyrrhenian mountains between the High and Late Middle Ages. The evidence brought to light during the 2024 excavation campaign a complex picture, with multiple building phases, reuse, spoliation, and silvo-pastoral practices intertwine — but above all, the presence of funerary nuclei highlights the symbolic and communal role of the church, extending far beyond its liturgical function.

One of the most significant aspects is the stratigraphic sequence of Area 2000, in the apsidal sector of the church, which has made it possible to distinguish two main construction phases: an earlier building, probably with a quadrangular plan, without an apse and dating from between the 12th and 13th centuries; and a later more complex reconstruction with an apse, dating from between the 14th and 15th centuries. The discovery of the white mortar floor, slightly raised above the nave, together with residual liturgical elements (decorative glass fragments, shells possibly belonging to ecclesiastical furnishings) reveals a sacred place endowed with a material apparatus not lacking in refinement, although already marked by processes of systematic spoliation in the modern age.

Behind the apse, the discovery of Tomb 2, in an isolated and privileged position, provides strong evidence of the building's funerary centrality. The choice to place an anthropomorphic burial cut into the rock and sealed with thick limestone slabs attests to a significant form of community investment, intended for an individual of high social prestige—potentially a member of the local elite. Comparable late medieval parish and seigneurial contexts occasionally include privileged burials of women, particularly those linked to patronal families or ecclesiastical benefactors. The reopening and reduction of the tomb, with its transformation into an ossuary containing at least three individuals, suggest practices of funerary reuse typical of long-lived parish spaces and manorial chapels in the late Middle Ages³⁷. The northern sector of Area 2000, with Tomb 1 and the accumulations of disturbed bone remains (a practice that also emerges for other tombs identified on the plateau), confirms that the space immediately outside the church was used as a necropolis for a local community.

³⁷ On the phenomenon of late medieval funerary reuse and reduction practices, see SALVESTRINI, VARANINI, ZANGARINI 2007, for a general overview of post-burial interventions, ossuaries, and secondary depositions across Italy. KLEVNÄS *et al.* 2021 on the social and symbolic dimensions of grave reopening. For southern Italy and the Tyrrhenian area, evidence of multiple or reopened burials in privileged ecclesiastical locations is well documented: see EBANISTA 2015, FIOCCHI NICOLAI 1986. These cases collectively illustrate the continuity of communal funerary management in parish and seigneurial chapels from the late Middle Ages onwards, where reopened tombs and reductions reflect both spatial constraints and evolving notions of collective memory and identity. DALOZ 2010: 71-93 highlights how privileged tombs located in the apse area—often constructed as monolithic stone coffins with heavy cover slabs—represent forms of communal funerary investment intended for high-status individuals, including, in certain cases, women (or children) of noble or religious standing (see DALCEGGIO 2020; 2024). The frequent reopening and reuse of these burials for multiple interments indicate both the continuity of the site's memorial function and the practice of secondary deposition typical of long-standing ecclesiastical spaces.

Overall, the two female burials from Sant'Andrea, although devoid of grave goods, exhibit forms of non-material funerary privilege, discernible in the selection of the burial space, the continuity of use of the tomb, and the topographical proximity to the ecclesiastical building. These features correspond to the defining criteria for "privileged" female burials, in which social distinction is expressed not through the opulence of the funerary assemblage but through the visibility and permanence of the funerary space. Taken together, the anthropological and contextual evidence suggests that the women interred at Sant'Andrea belonged to a middle to upper-ranking social group, integrated within the local ecclesiastical milieu and engaged in strategies of social differentiation and collective remembrance comparable to those observed among the female elites of Lombard Italy. The Sant'Andrea case thus broadens the current documentation on early medieval female funerary practices, providing a meaningful example of topographical and symbolic privilege consistent with the patterns of representation and authority observed in subdiocesan contexts adjoining religious buildings.

Although compromised by spoliation and later reuse, the stratigraphic sequence shows that the artificial terrace carved into the rock platform had assumed the function of a cemetery annexed to the ecclesiastical complex, likely from its earliest phase. It is significant to note that the orientation of the burials aligns directly to the oldest walls, suggesting that the community anchored its funerary memory to the very materiality of the building. The choice of ground-level or rock-cut burials recalls practices widespread in Tyrrhenian and Apennine mountain contexts between the 11th and 13th centuries³⁸, yet it also presents parallels with Pyrenean and Balkan rock necropolises, where rock serves as both a building and funerary matrix³⁹. The assemblages from Sant'Andrea demonstrate that the summit plateau was not a marginal appendix, but a control node that integrated worship, burials and territorial signalling along the route connecting the Liri valley with the Tyrrhenian Sea. The two building phases — the first quadrangular, the second apsidal with an internal painted surface — the raised presbytery, and Tomb 2 behind the apse (initially a privileged burial, later reused as an ossuary) reveal a community capable of institutionalizing sacred space while also adapting it to new liturgical and memorial needs. To the north, the funerary terrace, with disturbed deposits and a single intact grave (Tomb 1), reflects temporally modulated burial practices consistent with a highland cemetery associated with the late medieval church, yet possibly superimposed upon earlier structures.

Furthermore, the archaeological evidence from Sant'Andrea engages directly with the historiographical debate on *incastellamento*. While the site does not constitute a veritable example of the phenomenon in the strict sense defined by Toubert, it nonetheless embodies the dynamics through which the medieval landscape of the region was reshaped. As a secondary fortified site integrated within the wider territorial system controlled by the castle of Campello, Sant'Andrea reflects the diffusion and adaptation of *incastellamento*-related processes — combining defensive awareness, control of resources, and symbolic-religious functions within a peripheral yet active context of medieval reorganisation.⁴⁰ At the same time, the position of Sant'Andrea, projected onto the inner mountain slopes,

³⁸ BROGIOLO 1995: 209-215 reinterprets the phenomenon of *incastellamento* through the lens of building archaeology, emphasising the importance of construction sequences and architectural typologies in reconstructing the dynamics of medieval settlement. Moving beyond a purely documentary or socio-political reading, he demonstrates how fortified sites materialised complex interactions between seigneurial control, community agency, and topographical constraints. The study underscores the coexistence of continuity and innovation within rural building practices, framing castles not only as instruments of power but also as active nodes in the reorganisation of the medieval landscape.

³⁹ BONNASSIE 1975: 134-140 analyses the transformation of Catalan society between the 10th and 11th centuries, identifying the emergence of a *mutation féodale* rooted in the disintegration of Carolingian order and the localisation of power within new seigneurial frameworks. His model highlights the correlation between fortified settlement, agrarian expansion, and the privatisation of public authority, processes that collectively redefined the social and economic geography of the Pyrenean world. The Catalan case thus provides a comparative matrix for understanding similar trajectories of territorial consolidation and social stratification in central and southern Italy.

⁴⁰ TOUBERT 1973: 137-190 offers the classic formulation of the *incastellamento* model, analysing the genesis of fortified villages as the material expression of a profound restructuring of the countryside between the 9th and 11th centuries. Through the convergence of seigneurial power, ecclesiastical organisation, and demographic contraction, the dispersed late antique settlement pattern was progressively replaced by nucleated sites (*castra*), in which defensive, administrative, and religious functions were integrated. This process, central to the

invites reflection on its function as a mediator between coastal communication networks and uplands circuits: the presence of imported materials (glass, ceramics and coins) dating from the 8th to the 14th century indicates a persistent exchange network linking the mountain community to broader horizons, in line with what Wickham has described for the relations between seigneurial centres and villages in Tuscan and Campanian landscapes⁴¹.

Comparative analysis allows us to recognize in Sant'Andrea a fragment of a broader phenomenon: the progressive territorialisation of power and the construction of fortified landscapes between the 11th and 14th centuries in the Tyrrhenian regions. In this context, the evidence from the Monti Aurunci finds specific parallels in southern Lazio, —particularly with the smaller castles of the Lepini Mountains—⁴², but also with the seigneurial settlements of Campania and Amalfi⁴³. From a wider Mediterranean perspective, it also resonates with Provençal and Pyrenean examples, as the area under study shares patterns of spatial control and forms of communal organisation characteristic of the medieval Mediterranean mountain world.⁴⁴ In this sense, our context fully participates into the debate on the Byzantine legacy in central-southern Italy, where 'peripheral' yet resilient forms of settlement became interwoven with seigneurial processes of the 11th-13th centuries — particularly within the maritime duchies, where the dialectic between communal autonomy and seigneurial intrusion shaped both settlements and religious structures. Recent historiography on this topic⁴⁵ has emphasised the persistence of 'interstitial' and marginal organisational models, capable of integrating themselves onto the seigneurial transformations of the High Middle Ages. Ultimately, the case of Sant'Andrea fits perfectly into this scenario, showing how mountain communities reworked forms of occupation, socio-economic and ecological organisation, and symbolic practices — from the monumentalization of the church to the reuse of the cemetery — in a local key.

These local dynamics align perfectly with the trajectory — well documented for Gaeta — of the selective reorganisation of the territory in the late Middle Ages: not a uniform 'fortified revolution', but a hybrid process that exploits topographical platforms, pastoral networks and symbolic presences to aggregate resources, people and memories. Hence the 'pilot' value of Sant'Andrea: a case allowing stratigraphic and funerary data to calibrate the well-founded hypotheses for Gaeta that identify the 11th century as the moment when dense networks of *castra* and hilltop churches emerged as instruments for governing passages and communities.

Sant'Andrea partially restores agency to the mountain: not a periphery, but a frontier where political landscapes were fabricated, cult places were established, and necropolises were organized in dialogue with both coast and hinterland. It is here that the Byzantine legacy was renegotiated and *incastellamento* become a practice of territorial organisation, with particularly tangible outcomes in the Gaetan area, where the nexus between the fortified settlement, the church, the necropolis and the prominent geographical position constitutes the fulcrum of new economic, symbolic and political arrangements. The peculiar forms of Byzantine continuity in the Adriatic coastal or island areas show a sort of 'adaptive fragmentation' in the Tyrrhenian mountain regions (Gaeta, Monti Aurunci, and northern Campania). From

redefinition of medieval territoriality, reveals how the consolidation of lordship and parish networks transformed the very fabric of rural space across central and southern Italy.

⁴¹ WICKHAM 2005: 310–315 traces the progressive fragmentation of late imperial administrative frameworks and the emergence of regional micro-systems of power that laid the foundations for the fortification and feudalisation processes of the later Middle Ages.

⁴² FIOCCHI NICOLAI 1999 analyses the diffusion of rural ecclesiastical complexes in Lazio and Campania, emphasizing the role of sanctuaries and extra-urban churches as focal *nuclei* for emerging settlement patterns.

⁴³ As MARTIN 1992; 2009: 746 has observed, the concept of a *frontière fluctuante*—capturing the unstable and permeable character of the southern Italian borderlands between Byzantine and Lombard spheres—offers a framework for interpreting hilltop sites not as peripheral outposts, but as zones of political, economic, and cultural mediation.

⁴⁴ For comparisons with the Pyrenees and Provence, see PESEZ 1998: 215–225. The rural settlement models and spatial organisation of these mountainous regions—examined through the interplay between vernacular architecture, agricultural exploitation, and community structures—demonstrate the continuity of building traditions from the 10th to the 14th century and their remarkable adaptability to extreme environmental conditions. They also reveal the social redefinition of the landscape that followed the crisis of the manorial system.

⁴⁵ GELICHI 2017 has emphasized the role of coastal centres and monastic communities as key nodes within transmarine trade networks, as well as the function of smaller Tyrrhenian mountain religious sites within a Mediterranean system that remained strongly Byzantinised.

this perspective, 'Sant'Andrea di Campello' may be seen as a micro-expression of this diversity, where the Byzantine heritage was "translated" and reabsorbed on a small scale regime within the logic of *incastellamento*.

Ultimately, Sant'Andrea emerges as a strong node in the medieval topography of the territory and in the formation of the medieval mountain landscapes of the Monti Aurunci owing to its position on a pass, its dominant morphology and its defensive traces, all consistent with a function of monitoring and territorial control. Moreover, its prolonged occupation during the early Middle Ages - with significant phases of transformation - suggests that the site was not an isolated garrison, but was integrated into a political-administrative system and constituted a settlement of intermediate rank (sub-seigneurial/viscount), dependent on or related to the coastal structures of the Duchy of Gaeta or emerging local lordships, such as the castle of 'Le Mura di Campello'. The local trajectory of settlement in the Campello district, from a scattered settlement to a strong *castrum*-centered landscape, took place during a period of transitional phase (late 10th-11th centuries) highlighted by sources for the *castra* of lower Lazio (Argento, Sperlonga, Fratte, Suio, Maranola, Itri, Campello). In the Gaetan case, this is interpreted as an effective territorial reorganization rather than a mere addition of fortifications⁴⁶. The model appears gradual, selective, and hybrid, depending largely on topography, road networks, the development of agro-silvo-pastoral strategies, and the legal forms of landholding — from the *publicum* and common rights to their appropriation by rising elites⁴⁷.

In this scenario the mountains became the place where seigneurial power was exercised above all through the control and redistribution of collective resources, i.e. pastures, woods, water, rights of passage and grazing (*fide, erbatici, ripatici*). These were used as both political and economic instruments, alongside the monetization of common uses and their transformation into seigneurial or state exactions, while rural communities remained active agents in negotiating such rights⁴⁸. From this perspective, the territorial structure of Sant'Andrea di Campello can be interpreted as part of an 'ecological lordship' or 'socio-ecological formation', where the mountain space functioned simultaneously as an economic system, defensive place and symbol of collective belonging — recognizing that the occupation of marginal spaces constituted a form of "horizontal" and hybrid lordship in constant mutation. The control of highlands and ridge routes — often connected with seasonal transhumance — delineates what might be called a power system legitimized through the management of natural resources rather than strict land ownership.

This model appears consistent with Toubert's reflections on 'environmental fortification'⁴⁹, emphasizing the role of upland areas in the construction of polycentric seigneurial spaces, where communities retained margins of autonomy in the management of the common rights.

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8. Synthesis and Perspectives on the Monti Aurunci's Medieval Landscape History

The evidence from Sant'Andrea — notably the long sequence of occupations and phases of pastoral reuse marked by huts, charcoal kilns, and smokehouses built upon ecclesiastical remains — underscores the enduring functionality of mountain spaces. Over time, these areas evolved from sacred and nodal points within the medieval landscape into economic pivots for silvo-pastoral communities of the modern age. This continuity exemplifies what Wickham termed the "highland economy," or more precisely, those "marginal economies" in which collective ownership sustained the cohesion of dispersed settlements.⁵⁰

⁴⁶According to MARTIN 2017: 144–148, while several *castra* are documented in the area, Gaeta stands out as the sole instance of a full territorial reorganisation, while Campello appears only in the later phase of this sequence.

⁴⁷ On the formation of the *publicum* (mid-10th century) and seigneurial consolidation, DELOGU 1988; MARTIN 2017: 121-124 and SKINNER 1995: 44-78 on Gaeta and ducal families.

⁴⁸ GINATEMPO 2023: 203-216, particularly with regard to the mountain geo-economies of central and southern Italy, where frontier systems were defined by the dual economic and institutional value of natural resources. The management of forests, waterways, and pastures entailed a negotiated balance of prerogatives between local communities and seigneurial or castellany authorities, within a framework of diffuse and continually rearticulated lordship.

⁴⁹ TOUBERT 1973: 155-167.

⁵⁰ WICKHAM 1989: 312-319; VANNI 2021 on marginal economies.

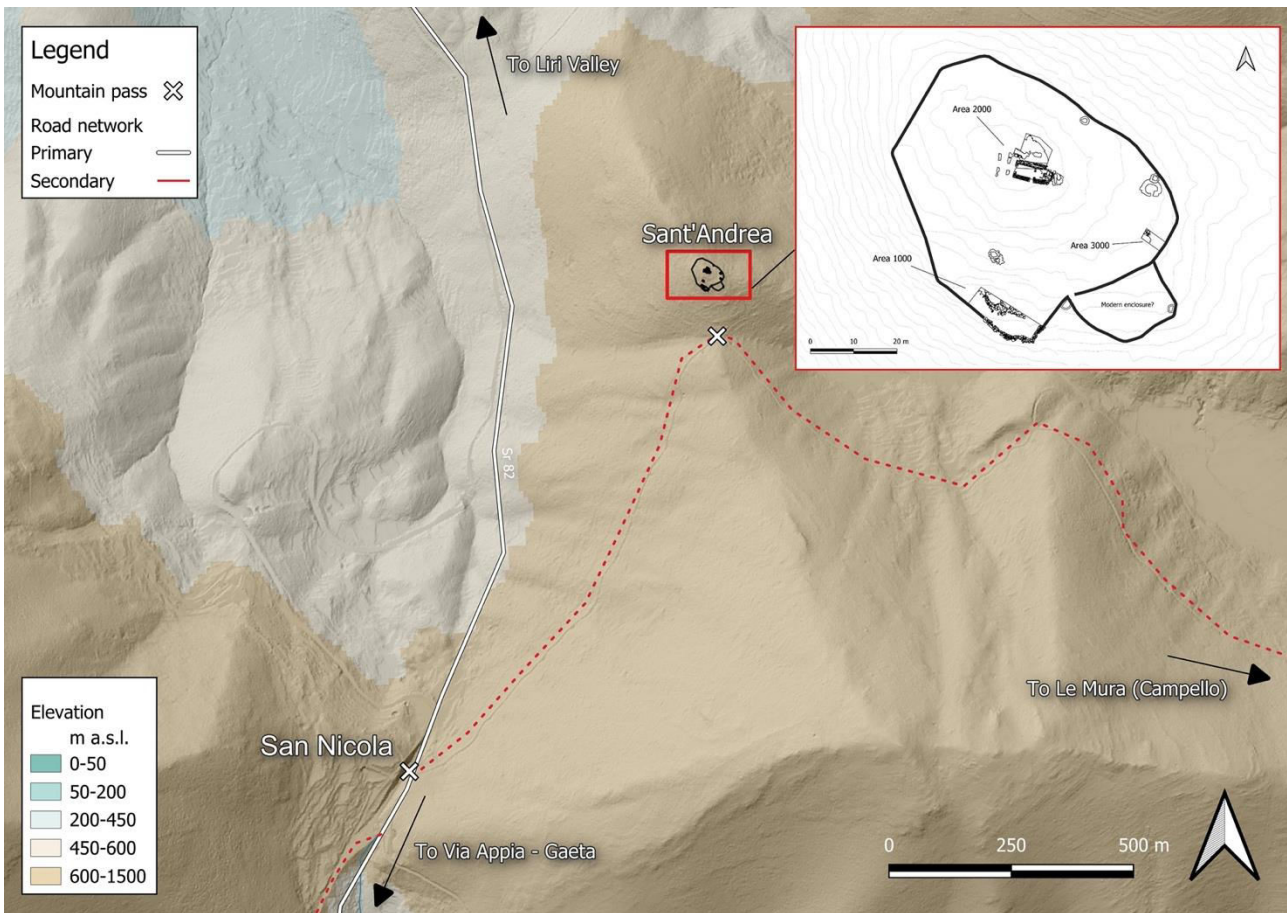


Fig. 14: Map showing the San Nicola pass (elab. FS).

Viewed through a *longue durée* lens, the site illuminates the interplay between low-intensity economies and supra-territorial powers that moulded Mediterranean mountain environments — spaces of mediation and resilience, responsive to fluctuations of central authority and ecological change⁵¹

Evidence for one of the cores of this transformation comes from the strategic position of Sant'Andrea — a hilltop that, already in the medieval period, functioned as an agglomerative and sacral node, that anchored the dispersed rural communities to a common centre, within wider mobility networks linking the Liri Valley to the Tyrrhenian coast. The construction of the church and cemetery temporarily formalised this role, concentrating settlement, memory, and ritual in a single, highly visible point of reference. Even once the ecclesiastical structures had fallen into abandonment and ruin, the place itself retained its centrality: the hill continued to operate as a stable hub of circulation and collective practices, reconfigured through pastoral exploitation yet still structuring social relations and territorial cohesion across the *longue durée*.

Sant'Andrea may thus be read as part of a broader strategy of inland penetration by coastal centres — a dynamic only partially aligned with canonical models of fortification, such as the nearby *castellum* of Le Mura di Campello. These processes transformed mountain interiors from marginal zones into arenas of power projection and control over collective resources — woods, pastures, and raw materials. This perspective transcends the traditional

⁵¹ WICKHAM 2005: 295-340. The economic and social transformations that reshaped the western Mediterranean between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages—particularly the decentralisation of power and the emergence of new territorial centres—along with the gradual dissolution of imperial administrative structures and the rise of local economies, underpin the redefinition of settlement hierarchies and the formation of medieval mountain landscapes.

dichotomy between centre and periphery, revealing the permeability of internal borders and the existence of ascending networks of communication and authority.

Sant'Andrea fits precisely within this paradigm: a site transformed, over centuries, from garrison to multifunctional landscape, embodying the adaptive capacity of communities *inhabiting the borders*. The dialogue between archaeology and history allows this small settlement to be recognised as a fragment of a broader mosaic, in which *incastellamento*, ecclesiastical territorialisation, and landscape redefinition intersect within a continuous sequence of adaptations (Fig. 14).

Within this framework, Sant'Andrea becomes a key to understanding the active role of Mediterranean mountains in the construction of political space. Far from passive peripheries — the “voids” between cities and plains — recent research in the Monti Aurunci has demonstrated the centrality of these uplands as mediating zones between coastal economies and inland resources, between religious memory and military strategy.

The Mediterranean ranges, far from serving as a passive backdrop to coastal development, emerge instead as active laboratories of ecological and economic experimentation, crucial to the genesis of the first territorial states as a general phenomenon throughout the Mediterranean⁵².

In conclusion, Sant'Andrea di Campello is not an isolated site but a node within a wider network linking communities, authority, and landscape. Its archaeological complexity narrates the evolving relationship between human activity and environment in areas often deemed “marginal,” yet structurally central to medieval state formation. Future research — integrating geophysical prospection, absolute dating, and paleoenvironmental analysis — will further refine this picture, restoring the material and temporal depth of a mountain long inhabited, exploited, and invested with meaning. Sant'Andrea thus endures as a fragment of the wider dialogue between people and the Mediterranean mountains — a dialogue still resonant in stone, mortar, and silence.

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⁵² Similar cases can be found in the Catalan Pyrenees (CONSTANT 1995, 1997; PEZIN 1993; SABATÉ I CURULL 1997), the Provençal Alps (FELLER 2017: 103-132; CURSENTE 2003: 425-426; CARRIER, MOUTHON 2010: 221-250) and in the Western Balkans (CURTA 2002: 202-214).

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