

# ALONG THE CAERETAN COAST AND FORWARD ON

Patrizia Tartara

CNR-IASI P.le Aldo Moro 7, 00185 Roma, tel. 06-4993.7505, e-mail: [patrizia.tartara@cnr.it](mailto:patrizia.tartara@cnr.it)

**Abstract** – The territory along the coast north-west of Rome, still well preserved; in the Etruscan period was for the most under Caere control; it had the three important ports. The territory of Caere has been analyzed for a long time now, through an historical-topographic analytical study of the traces of archaeological remains. The research has been carried out by use of historical and recent aerial photographs and glass slides, last but not least the contribution of the monitoring aerial flights operated with the Carabinieri Helicopter Group of Pratica di Mare.

## Introduction

The territory along the coast north-west of Rome is still well preserved; in the Etruscan period it was for the most under Caere control, which had three important ports: Punicum (Santa Marinella), Pyrgi (Santa Severa) and Graviscae (Porto Clementino). Later it had gone under Roman control and its rural district as well. The territory of Caere has been analyzed for a long time now, through an historical-topographic analytical study of the traces of archaeological remains, specially related to the wide necropolis that are a characteristic of this site, howsoever able to have a rather satisfactory view of the historical landscape, where possible. The research has been carried out by use of historical and recent aerial photographs and historical glass slides, last but not least the contribution of the monitoring aerial flights operated with the Carabinieri Helicopter Group of Pratica di Mare in collaboration with the General Headquarter of the Nucleo Tutela Patrimonio Culturale of the Carabinieri. During such flights has been possible to take a large amount of oblique images with Cultural Heritage remains, both on land and into the sea.

## Material and methods

Primary need is to take a census of the cultural heritage evidences known but particularly unknown, of the area taken into interest. In relation with the history of the coastal territory, a detailed study of the territory of ancient *Caere* has been dedicated to the topographical definition and the correct geographical positioning of every archaeological traces relating to its extensive necropolis and ancient road-network. This study initially involved the two plateaux of Banditaccia and Monte Abbadone. Subsequently, it was extended in the direction of the coast, SSE and NNW as far as Pyrgi (today the Castle of Santa Severa); it is still in progress. The maps used were those best suited for geographical positioning (in particular, those for the Regione Lazio, 1:10 000 scale). Analysis of historical and recent aerial photographs from different archives, with additional monitoring flights over areas of risk help to obtain an historical perspective of the territory and the coast to help the

protection of cultural heritage remains and of the few spots (fragments) of historical landscape. The first aim of this case study is the reconstruction of this territory in the past, as it has been occupied and used by ancient inhabitants: from the city to the two ports of Pyrgi and Alsium, along the coast and of course the vast necropolis. At the beginning of the research have been collected all the photographs since 1929 till today and consequently have been given an interpretation to all the traces of archaeological evidences that later have been geographically positioned on the cartography.

The IGM 1930 aerial photographs (glass slides 13x18 preserved at the Istituto Geografico Militare of Florence, IGM) are the most interesting for this kind of research. They can allow us to have a picture of the territory very close to the ancient time. It has been well preserved till the introduction of mechanical ploughs (during 60ties) to cultivate fields. A mosaic had been created from more than 40 photograms (fig. 1). The restitution of the vast number of traces evident in those aerial images of 1930, which were positioned upon the map (fig. 2), allows a good global vision of the archaeological patrimony area and a (currently partial) reconstruction of the ancient landscape.

The necropolis, on the two sides of the large plain of the inhabited area of the ancient city, make evident the global aspect of the complex, which consisted of the urban area and very extensive monumental necropolis flanking (or rather surrounding) it. These burial areas extend along the major axes of communication as far as the coastline and ports, with nuclei of various sorts of tombs or large isolated tombs. The excellent definition of the images 1930 also allows the reading and restitution of even the accesses (dromoi) and sometimes the burial chambers of the individual tumulus, as well as the primary and secondary road-system, both related to the necropolis and to the network of the territory and the coast. The global result of the graphic reconstruction based upon objective data deriving from photographic interpretation and systematic positioning, presents a situation quite different from the image of the archaeological area that is today available to the visitor as representative of the ancient city. This last is substantially constituted by that portion of the monumental necropolis of Banditaccia, systematised and able to be visited, in front on the medieval village and the castle on the acropolis (which are possible to be visited as much as the interesting Museum) and the modern inhabited area, which is partially overlaps the urban area of the ancient Caere. The monumental archaeological area that people visit is in fact but a minute fraction (roughly 10 %) of the ancient burial zone, most of which is preserved and able to be measured. The necropolis are mainly those of Banditaccia, Monte Abbadone, Polledrara and those less known of Macchia della Signora, Monte Abbadoncino and il Sorbo, the vast burial area at the base of the acropolis, where systematic excavations and fortuitous discoveries have documented even the most ancient phases of the necropolis. Consequently, the visitor does perceive them as obvious parts of a single, enormous monumental complex that is exceptional for its extent and in terms of its structural evidence for ancient Italy, which only in a little part, it should be remembered, is for some years now been listed amongst UNESCO sites.

On an aerial photogrammetric photograph of 2001 (fig. 3) it is possible to observe the modern and often unplanned urbanization: in comparison with the mosaic of the territory in 1930, we can appreciate as a big portion of the historical patrimony and the landscape have been cancelled. Thus much of the evidence have been obliterated by urban development, and the density of constructions has destroyed any possibility of the "appreciation" of the surviving monuments. Even in this instance, a good knowledge and a detailed census of the archaeological patrimony would have permitted a more rational urban development.



Figure 1 - Mosaic: photographs IGM 1930. The ancient city, the necropolis and part of the territory as far as the sea.



Figure 2 - Restitution of the traces (in red color), by P. Tartara.

Along the coast, beginning from the area of Fiumicino and its surroundings towards north, we find the Roman city of Ostia antica, still very well preserved and built with very good materials; it is less valorized than what would be possible. In fact, it would be useful, for instance, to organize small buses for little groups of tourists to be brought from the



Figure 3 - Cerveteri and the layout of the territory, with the new centres of urbanization (Cerveteri, Cerenova / Campo di Mare, Ladispoli, Valcanneto), in 2001.

Fiumicino airport to visit it. There are many people in transit at the airport, waiting even several hours to continue their flight to the final destination.

At the end of the runways of Fiumicino airport (after the Macchine Idrovore di Maccarese), there is the WWF Oasis of Macchiagrande. Past the little town of Fregene, in the area of Maccarese, the ancient coastal dune it is no longer very appreciable: intensive cultivation of carrots like other types of vegetables have caused the leveling of the terrain, cancelling the historical sites of many roman farms and villas that where built on it. A roman coastal dune road was even present, known by ancient sources. The watch tower of Maccarese, close to the beach, and the old village of Maccarese with the ancient castle of San Giorgio are very characteristic to be valorized, even for the biological products of the several farms in that area.

Corresponding to the coast, just a bit in the inside of the land, there is the beautiful castle of Torrimpietra (Albertini-Carandini property). The name derives from the nearby tower located on a large boulder (Torre in Pietra), which later became Torre Pagliacetto, from the name of the farmer who worked a magic. The first mention of the property is in a bull of Pope Leo IX of 24 March 1053. It had several owners, then in 1620 it became the property of the Falconieri, to whom the current appearance is due. The building has a central body and two towers with Ghibelline battlements. It was restored in the 18th century. Of great value are the church and the great staircase on the main floor of the castle made by Ferdinando Fuga and the internal frescoes by Ghezzi.

North of the modern village of Passoscuro it is visible the watch tower of Palidoro. Just beyond, during a monitoring flight with the Carabinieri Helicopter Group of Pratica di Mare, it has been possible to take some oblique photograph of an ancient canalization perpendicular to the coast. Coming from the inside, it ends with a semicircular basin. A little artificial pool is connected to it; on the north side of this last one it is visible the trace of a particular building, probably seventeenth century. Just ahead, after the mouth of the river Statua, it is visible part of the large roman villa of Marina di San Nicola, close to the beach, still not completely excavated.

Here again, just a bit in the inside of the land, a fortified farmhouse is visible in its current XIV century structure, with subsequent additions; probably built on Roman remains. The central body is fortified by 4 corner towers with battlements. Located along the Via Aurelia, it was a stopping point for travelers.

Carrying on along the coast the well known castle of Palo faces the sea with the close houses of the ex Villaggio dei Pescatori, both surrounded by the green area of the Natural Oasis Bosco di Palo.



Figure 4 - A) The roman maritime villa of Grottacce; B) Torre Flavia.

After the town of Ladispoli, the ancient Torre Flavia was almost into the sea (fig. 4, B), bombed during the last Second World War and now protected by breakwater. Built on the second half of the XVI century (as one of the 61 watch towers system, due to the reorganization plan for the defense of the coast desired by the Papal States) on the remains of a roman maritime villa, its name is due to the cardinal Flavio Orsini, owner of the entire property until the town of Cerveteri. In 1674 the whole property was sold to the Marquise Ruspoli.

Close to it to the north, there is an interesting green area: the Monumento Naturale Palude di Torre Flavia, visible, as it was, also in some historical aerial photographs IGM 1930. It represents the last fragment of the marshes and swamps that were to extend also to the area now occupied by the town of Ladispoli.

Passed the historical military airport of Furbara, still in use, there in another green area: the Riserva Naturale di Macchiatonda.

Along the modern via Aurelia, on the south side, during a monitoring flight it had been possible to identify some traces of a villa (fig. 5); the traces seem to belong to residential structures (and baths?), probably Roman in date, that lie to the East of the colony of Pyrgi. Close to them, other traces of structures linked to the previous group, probably storehouses and a cistern.

Further on is visible the beautiful castle of Santa Severa facing the sea (fig. 6).

The castle and the small fortified village maintain the form of the roman colony of Pyrgi (since 264 a. C.). Into the sea are visible the remains of the structure in tufa blocks (fig. 6), related to the ancient channel-port. Some other structures are perceptible under the surface of the water (fig. 7).

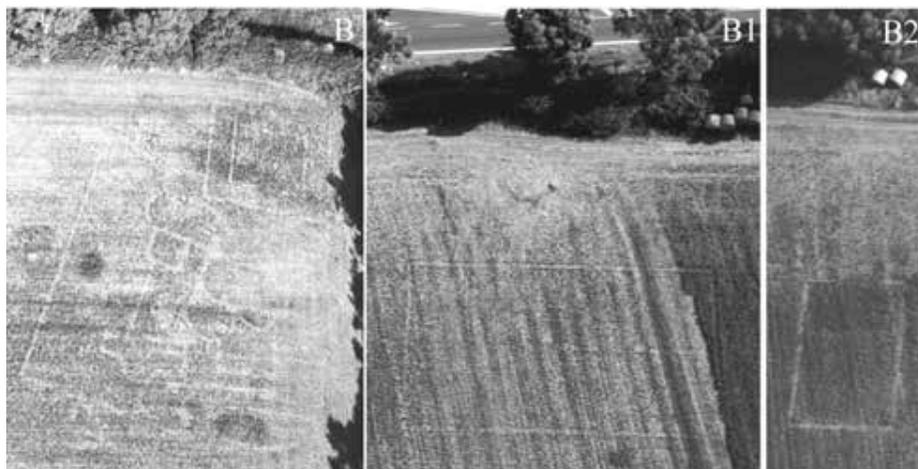


Figure 5 - B) Traces of residential structures (and baths?), probably Roman in date, that lie to the E of the colony of Pyrgi.

B1) Trace of a structure linked to the previous group.

B2) Trace of a structure (cistern?).



Figure 6 - The castle of Santa Severa and the structure in tufa block.



Figure 7 - Some other structures just under the surface of the sea, on the east corner of the castle.

Just a few dozens of metres to the south, lie the etruscan temples of Pyrgi in a wonderful preserved bay. An old Etruscan road joined the port to the ancient city of Caere; it was almost 9 metres wide.

Further on towards north, the remains of the roman villa of Grottacce are visible between the via Aurelia<sup>1</sup> and the sea, strictly surrounded by modern urbanization (fig.4 A) and in part covered by the sea, as shown by the semicircular structure and the other close structures of the maritime villa.

Along the coast, almost passed the town of Santa Marinella, shortly after the Yacht Club Castrum Novum, the remains of another roman maritime villa are visible into the sea, sometime just surfacing (fig. 8).

Even further ahead, at Punta della Vipera, other remains of a huge roman maritime villa with “peschiera” are visible underneath the surface of the sea; they are still well preserved, (fig. 9).

Last but not least, the remains of a roman maritime villa are visible in the north sector of the Civitavecchia port; close to them, some remains of tombs excavated into the rock. They have been almost cancelled by the urbanization related to the port and to the sea activities, (fig. 10), but actually preserved.

---

<sup>1</sup> To be added to the information about the territory is the presence of several “stations” or place where to change horses and rest for a while, like a sort of medieval “osteria” situated along the ancient route of the via Aurelia. Some remains of them are still visible in Casal Bruciato (Aranova) and at Statua.



Figure 8 - Remains of a roman maritime villa shortly after the Yacht Club Castrum Novum.



Figure 9 - Punta della Vipera, remains of a huge roman maritime villa with "peschiera".



Figure 10 - Civitavecchia, northern area of the port (from Google Maps, 2020).

## Conclusions

I want to clarify that I made the choice not to write the Discussion but to insert more images. I will say that it would be useful, for instance, to organize small buses for little groups of tourists to be brought from the Fiumicino airport to visit all those. As already said, there are many people in transit at the airport, waiting even several hours to continue their flight to the final destination. A strong work should be done to create a network to preserve and valorize them all, allowing people to appreciate the cultural heritage along this sector of the coast. But the primary need is knowledge.

## References

- [1] AA.VV. (1968) - *La via Aurelia – da Roma a Forum Aureli*, QuadTopAnt, IV, De Luca, Roma.
- [2] Enei F. (2001) - *Progetto Ager Caeretanus – Il litorale di Alsium, Santa Marinella (RM)*, Regione Lazio-Comune di Ladispoli, Roma.
- [3] Tartara P. (1999) - *Torrimpietra (Forma Italiae)*, Olschki, Firenze.
- [4] Tartara P. (2003) - *Ortofotopiano storico IGM 1930 del territorio tra Cerveteri e la costa*, in Guaitoli M. 2003, *Lo Sguardo di Icaro. Le collezioni dell'Aerofototeca Nazionale per la conoscenza del territorio*, Campisano Editore, Roma, pp. 157-166.
- [5] Tartara P. (2008) - *Historical aerial photographs: the case of Caere*, in Proceedings of SPIE, Remote Sensing for Environmental Monitoring, GIS Applications, and Geology VIII, Cardiff (Wales-United Kingdom).
- [6] Tartara P. (2018) - *Territorio di Caere: viabilità e distribuzione delle necropoli attraverso la fotografia aerea*, in *Studia Caeretana* 1, pp. 123- 153