

# Central Places and Liminal Landscape in the Territory of Populonia

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This paper<sup>1</sup> aims to outline some of the most important phases of Populonia's urban development starting from its foundation,<sup>2</sup> with particular reference to the results of archaeological surveys carried out by the University of Siena since the 1980s. My new data on the urbanization of Populonia are one of the most significant results of my PhD research project, which focused on the development of Populonia's frontier and territory with respect to the neighboring Etruscan centers of Volterra to the north, and Vetulonia and Roselle to the south.<sup>3</sup> To pursue this goal, I reconstructed both the organization of the settlements and the management system of resources applied by Populonia over the *longue durée*, moving from the late Bronze – early Iron Age to the Hellenistic period. In this paper, I concentrate on the period between the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, before Populonia was incorporated into the Roman Empire. The approach of landscape archaeology has allowed us to reconstruct the Etruscan city's organization of settlements as well as its management of resources. In addition, this investigative tool has proven the most effective method to detect places of economic or ideological centrality and specific liminal landscapes in the territory of Populonia. Despite several anomalies in the urban development process and unconventional choices in the control of Populonia's territory,<sup>4</sup> our research leads us to suggest that the Etruscan city's acropolis seems to have played the role of central place starting right from the establishment of the city. A hierarchical settlement system, based on a network of sites and the foundation of new population centers, was promoted starting from the end of the 9<sup>th</sup>–the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Once the city ended its development process, especially in the Hellenistic period, policies such as the hierarchical settlement system in the *chora* and supply basin exploitation were mainly implemented through the foundation of hilltop fortresses both on the mainland and on the Island of Elba.<sup>5</sup> The central place was again concentrated on Populonia's acropolis, which, endowed with an upper wall,<sup>6</sup> became the main focus of the fortified settlements and the stronghold of the defense against Roman imperialism. Within some of the new results coming from my PhD research we have to consider the feature of the hilltop's fortress system<sup>7</sup> and the detection of a "liminal landscape"<sup>8</sup> in the northeastern stretch of the territory between Populonia and Volterra. This particular part of the landscape was a sacred district<sup>9</sup> with a strong peripheral character and possibly had close connections to the central place thanks to the significant availability of natural resources.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a full version of this paper, see Di Paola 2018, 1–16.  
<sup>2</sup> Bartoloni 1991, 1–37; Acconcia et al. 2004–2005, 57–87.  
<sup>3</sup> Di Paola 2015.  
<sup>4</sup> Milletti 2015, 59–96.  
<sup>5</sup> Cambi et al. 2015, 73–91.  
<sup>6</sup> Mascione – Salerno 2013, 411–427.  
<sup>7</sup> Cambi – Di Paola 2013, 190–209.  
<sup>8</sup> Holm et al. 2009, 5–9.  
<sup>9</sup> Esposito 2005, 224–232; Manacorda 2008, 305–328; Di Paola – Vanni 2016, 93–104.

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