Burial continuity and visibility in changing landscapes of northern Marche (Italy): new data and perspectives from the SEARCH Project

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Abstract

The SEARCH (SEnsing ARCHaeology) project explores the continuity and transformation of burial landscapes in the northern Marche region of Italy, with a diachronic approach and a focus on the transition between the pre-Roman Piceni culture and the Roman period. By combining non-invasive survey methods with targeted excavations, the research investigates how funerary sites, particularly necropolises marked by circular ditches, were reused, reinterpreted, or preserved over time. The case study of the Contrada Nevola necropolis in Corinaldo uncovers an Orientalizing Picene burial core with monumental princely tombs, later surrounded by Roman burials that avoided direct intrusion, suggesting enduring visibility and sacred recognition. Complementary geophysical and surface surveys at other sites in the Nevola and Misa valleys have identified similar circular features, reinforcing the hypothesis of long-term funerary continuity and persistent landscape memory. The project emphasizes the concept of "visibility", both as a methodological tool and as a historical phenomenon, to understand how ancient communities perceived, remembered, and engaged with earlier sacred spaces. Through the integration of advanced sensing technologies with traditional archaeological methods, SEARCH aims to trace patterns of visibility, reuse, and cultural memory within funerary landscapes. In doing so, the project offers new data and theoretical perspectives on landscape archaeology, cultural continuity, and the diachronic perception of sacred space, particularly in the context of Romanization.

Keywords

Picenian princely tombs, circular ditches, Romanization, funerary landscape, remote sensing, geophysical prospections

Introduction

Within the ongoing scholarly debate concerning the extent and nature of Rome's influence on local funerary practices in newly annexed territories (Keay and Terrenato 2001; Pearce, Millett and Struck 2000; Carroll 2011), the recently launched SEARCH project seeks to contribute new insights into the longstanding issue of continuity versus discontinuity in burial site use during the transition from the indigenous Piceni culture to Roman occupation in northern Marche (central Italy). At the same time, the project interrogates the potential of non-invasive survey methodologies to enhance our understanding of long-term occupation at archaeological sites, particularly when dealing with material traces that are faint, ambiguous, or otherwise invisible to traditional archaeological approaches (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Fieldwork carried out as part of the SEARCH project using non-invasive methods: geophysical, topographic, and drone-based aerial surveys, and surface reconnaissance.

SEARCH (SEnsing ARCHaeology) is a new research initiative funded through the AlmaIdea Grant 2022 programme[1]. It builds upon previous investigations led by the University of Bologna in the river valleys of the Cesano, Nevola, and Misa in northern Marche, a region that has long been a focal point for archaeological research (Giorgi and Lepore 2010; Silani 2017). Recent developments, including the systematic application of non-invasive methods such as aerial remote sensing and geophysical survey, have significantly expanded our knowledge of the region's buried heritage (Boschi, Giorgi and Vermeulen 2020). These efforts have been bolstered by sustained collaboration with the Superintendencies and local authorities, ensuring both effective research outcomes and protection of archaeological resources.

A case in point is the recently discovered necropolis at Contrada Nevola in Corinaldo, located in the middle Nevola valley. This site exemplifies the SEARCH project's methodology and its broader potential, both in terms of archaeological insight and in guiding territorial planning. Here, a combination of cartographic analysis, field walking, aerial photography, and geophysical survey informed the archaeological impact assessment of a proposed construction project (Boschi 2020a, 2020b; Boschi and Venanzoni 2021). Preliminary non-invasive research revealed an area of high archaeological potential, initially attributed to a Picene necropolis, which appeared to have been in use over several centuries. This prompted a series of extensive excavation campaigns (2019-2024), revealing an Orientalizing-period necropolis with monumental tombs enclosed by large circular ditches, including princely graves with

[1] AlmaIdea Grant is a competitive funding program of the University of Bologna aimed at supporting innovative basic research ideas with long-term potential, within the framework of the University's Strategic Plan 2022–2027. The SEARCH Project – *SEnsing ARCHaeology. Non-invasive mapping and tracking technologies for evaluating and protecting buried archaeology* (PI: Federica Boschi; Co-PI: Marco Dubbini) was awarded first place for the Department of History and Cultures in the 2022 call. For an overview of the project, refer to Boschi *et al.* 2024.

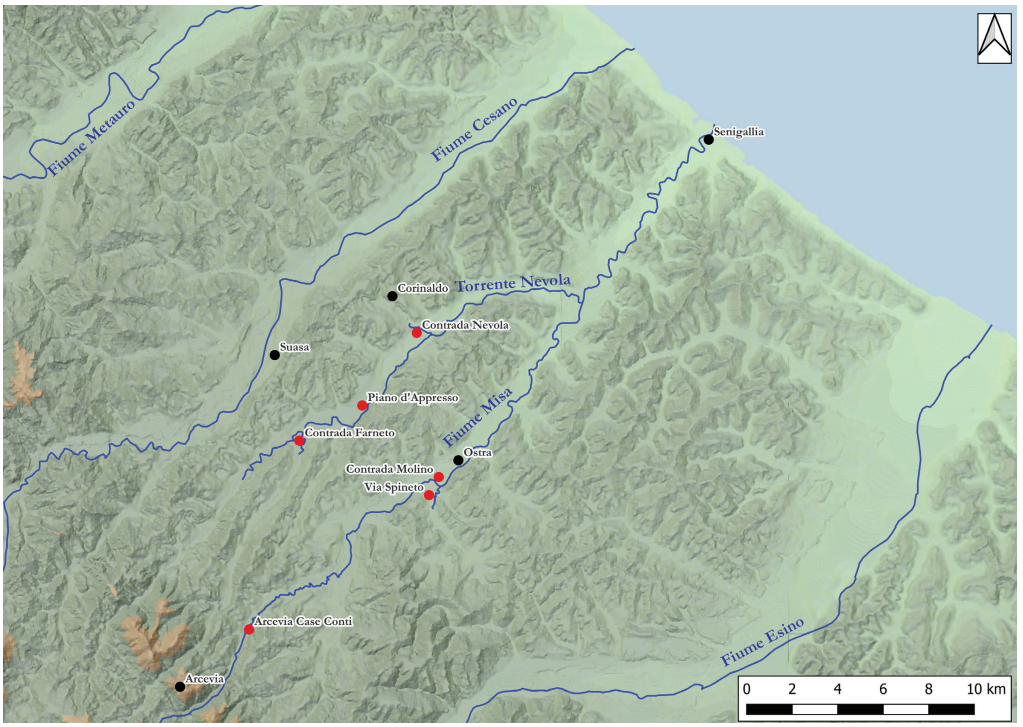


Figure 2. The river valley system of the Cesano, Nevola, and Misa in northern Marche. Black dots indicate the main archaeological sites in the area; red dots mark the sites identified as cropmarks and investigated by the project.

opulent goods dating to the mid-7th century BCE, alongside a large Roman Imperial cemetery (1st – 4th century CE) (Boschi *et al.* 2020, 2022; Boschi and Venanzoni 2021).

Building on this successful experience, the SEARCH project now aims to replicate and expand this integrative survey strategy. It combines terrestrial geophysics, remote sensing (satellite and drone-based), proximity analysis, and ground-truthing to investigate other newly identified sites. Six were identified through preliminary aerial photography, all distributed along the middle and upper valleys of the Misa and its tributary Nevola (Boschi 2022) (Fig. 2). Characterized by circular cropmarks visible only under specific climatic and soil conditions, these features are tentatively interpreted as necropolises with burials marked by circular ditches and mounds (Fig. 3). However, their nature, chronology, and extent remain to be verified (Boschi *et al.* 2024).

This paper presents the preliminary intra-site findings from three of the study sites, contextualized in relation to the more extensively studied Contrada Nevola necropolis. Although investigation is still ongoing at all the study contexts, the discussion is limited to the three sites where aerial prospection, geophysical survey, and surface reconnaissance have been successfully combined. The analysis is then extended to the case of Contrada Nevola in Corinaldo, where archaeological excavation is currently in progress, offering a comparative framework for understanding funerary landscapes in the region during the Italic-Roman transition.



Figure 3. Aerial views of cropmark sites between the Nevola and Misa River valleys.

Under the surface of the site at Contrada Molino (Ostra Vetere): integrated non-invasive surveys

The cropmark site at Contrada Molino (Ostra Vetere), discovered during aerial survey in 2016 (Boschi 2018), was the focus of systematic and intensive surface and subsurface investigations during the summer and autumn of 2023, as part of the initial activities of the SEARCH project.

Located on a Pleistocene fluvial terrace, the site had previously revealed five cropmark features, interpreted with good confidence as circular ditches, with diameters ranging from 25 to 30 meters, closely resembling those documented at Contrada Nevola (Boschi 2022). The ground-truthing campaign, conducted under ministerial license, was designed to evaluate and deepen understanding of the site's nature and archaeological potential[2].

In July 2023, a geomagnetic survey was carried out, covering almost the entire cropmark-bearing field, for a total area of approximately 2.5 hectares (Fig. 4). The north-western portion of the field, however, was excluded from the survey due to unsuitable conditions caused by agricultural activity. The geomagnetic mapping employed a 2-Foerster probe gradiometer (Ferex 4.034) mounted on a cart, a configuration that proved well suited to both the terrain and survey goals. The system used two vertical gradient fluxgate probes, spaced 50 cm apart, with the lower sensors positioned 10 cm above the ground. Data were recorded at a frequency of 100 Hz per channel.

Although the vertical gradient setup does not allow for deep subsurface detection, it successfully provided a detailed map of buried features while minimizing interference from

[2] The authorization details for the research project are as follows: Prot. Sabap, 02/03/2020 n. 4457-A; prot. Sabap n. 0002191, 13/05/2024; Prot. Sabap n. 1490-A, 03/02/2025. Dr. Ilaria Venanzoni, the archaeologist responsible for the procedure at SABAP AN-PU, is gratefully acknowledged for her ongoing collaboration.

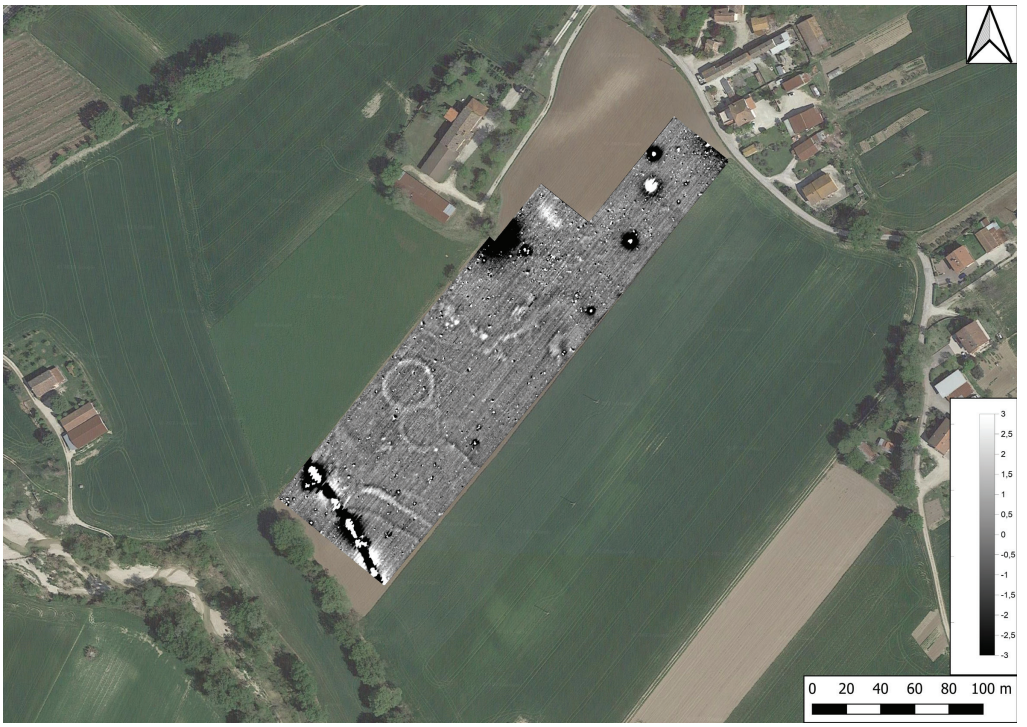


Figure 4. Geomagnetic mapping of the site at Contrada Molino (Ostra Vetere).

the high magnetic noise produced by a pipeline crossing the southern sector of the area. Other negative magnetic anomalies, likely related to modern disturbances, such as a light pole, are visible in the northern half of the survey area.

Amid these disturbances, the circular features corresponding to aerially detected cropmarks are clearly visible, especially the three larger ditches in the central portion of the field. Among these, two features on the central-western side, measuring 30 and 25 meters in diameter, are particularly prominent. In contrast, two smaller circles previously identified via remote sensing at the northern edge are less perceptible, partly due to incomplete coverage in that sector.

A preliminary processing of the magnetic data, which is still ongoing, has also revealed additional intriguing features to the north of the main circles (Fig. 5). These may correspond to a paleochannel and at least five smaller circular ditches (10-15 m in diameter), often arranged in clusters. If confirmed, these would significantly revise the initial assessment, potentially doubling the number of funerary features at the site. In the southern sector, a number of linear anomalies, possibly ancient ditches or canals, suggest a functional or hydrological connection to the nearby river.

A pedestrian surface survey was conducted in October 2023 under less-than-optimal visibility conditions, after the harvest but before ploughing, due to scheduling constraints related to

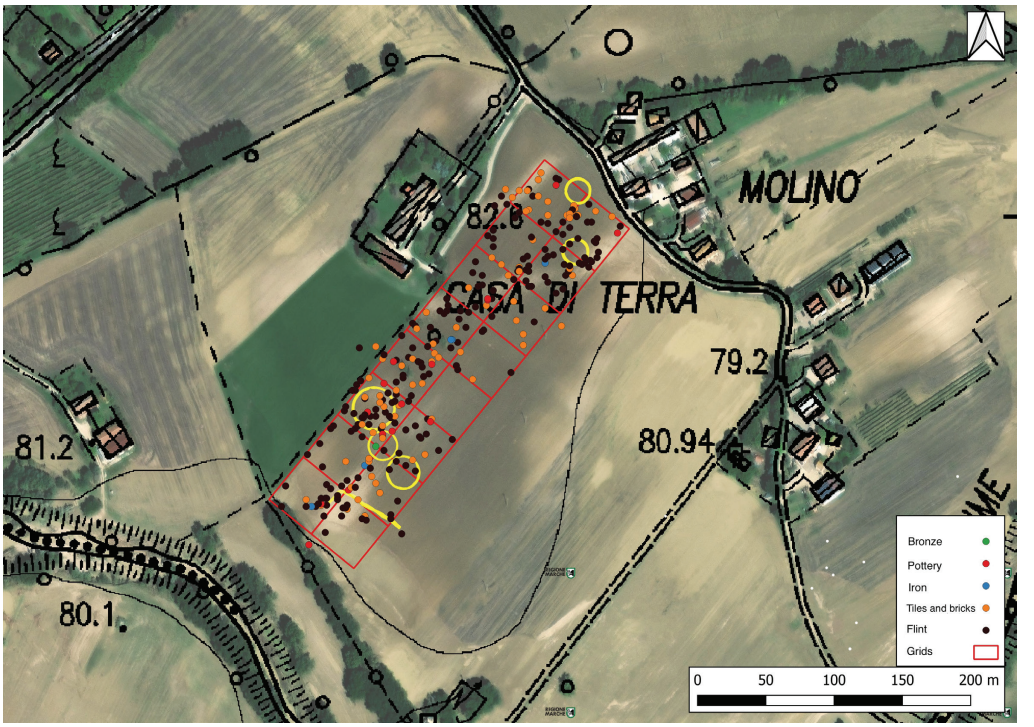


Figure 5. Contrada Molino (Ostra Vetere): intra-site surface survey.

field access. Despite this, the fieldwalking yielded a substantial amount of information. The survey area, covering more than 3.5 hectares, was divided into sixteen 40×40 m grid squares, georeferenced using a differential GPS RTK system. Each square was systematically walked with a transect spacing of 5 meters. Data collection was facilitated by the Epicollect5 mobile application, using a customized input form that enabled the recording of observed materials with a preliminary typological classification (e.g. ceramic, brick, iron, bronze, flint, other lithics). Findspots were geolocated via standard smartphone GPS (accuracy between 5 and 10 meters), and all recorded materials were documented photographically in the field. In total, 305 artefacts were documented across the surveyed area. While detailed study of the material is still in progress, a high concentration of flint fragments is already noteworthy, along with ceramics spanning a wide chronological range - from protohistoric to post-medieval periods - as well as brick fragments (including Roman examples), and a bronze object tentatively attributed to the Picene cultural horizon. The integration of the datasets reveals a new picture of the site (Fig. 6), indicating a more complex buried record than previously suggested by the first aerial and geophysical surveys, probably consisting of around ten circular features, alongside traces attributable to natural elements - most notably a clearly visible possible palaeochannel - and additional minor anomalies that remain to be interpreted, which may also hint at a later reuse or subsequent activity within the funerary area.

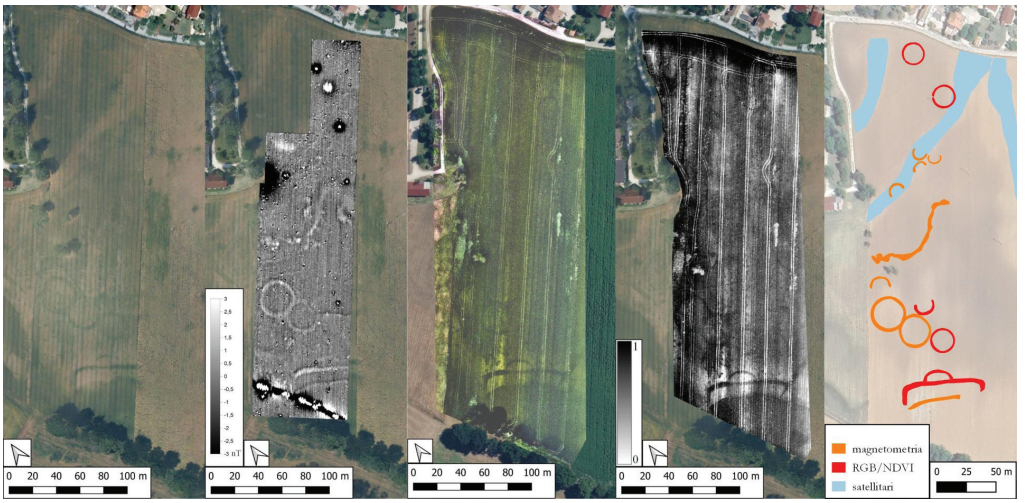


Figure 6. Contrada Molino (Ostra Vetere): traces documented through aerial photogrammetry (2012), geomagnetic survey (2023), and new drone orthophotos (2025) in RGB and NDVI; on the right, an integrated interpretative synthesis.

Geophysical insights from the Nevola Valley: the sites of Contrada Farneto and Piano d'Appresso

Along the Nevola Valley, in addition to the well-documented necropolis of Contrada Nevola (discussed later), the SEARCH project enabled further analysis of two other sites characterized by circular features: Contrada Farneto (Arcevia) and Piano d'Appresso (Ostra Vetere).

Both sites are situated on elevated river terraces along local streams and lie approximately 4 km and less than 2 km, respectively, from the Corinaldo necropolis. Their locations again reflect a strategic position relative to the valley floor, cross-valley roads, and watercourses. Although investigations are still ongoing, preliminary geophysical data provide valuable insights.

At Contrada Farneto, a GEM-Systems 35P potassium gradiometer was employed, while at Piano d'Appresso, a 2-Foerster probe gradiometer (Ferex 4.034) mounted on a cart was used. In both cases, magnetometry produced encouraging and informative results. The circular clusters are clearly identifiable due to the contrasting magnetic signatures of the ditch fill compared to the surrounding soil, aligning well with features observed through aerial photography. Of high archaeological interest are the prominent magnetic anomalies within some of these circles. These correspond closely to magnetic peaks detected at the Contrada Nevola necropolis, where excavation revealed rich burial pits aligned with geomagnetic highs. Similar magnetic highs appear consistently in at least two circles within the Contrada Farneto cluster and potentially in one group at Piano d'Appresso. Although these anomalies are less pronounced relative to the background, compared to the case of Contrada Nevola, they represent elements of potential significance. Once again, the comparison with the situation found at Contrada Nevola suggests that there is a real possibility of a buried rich deposit at both sites, containing part of the storage pits and, inside them, quantities of objects, including metal residues. Their

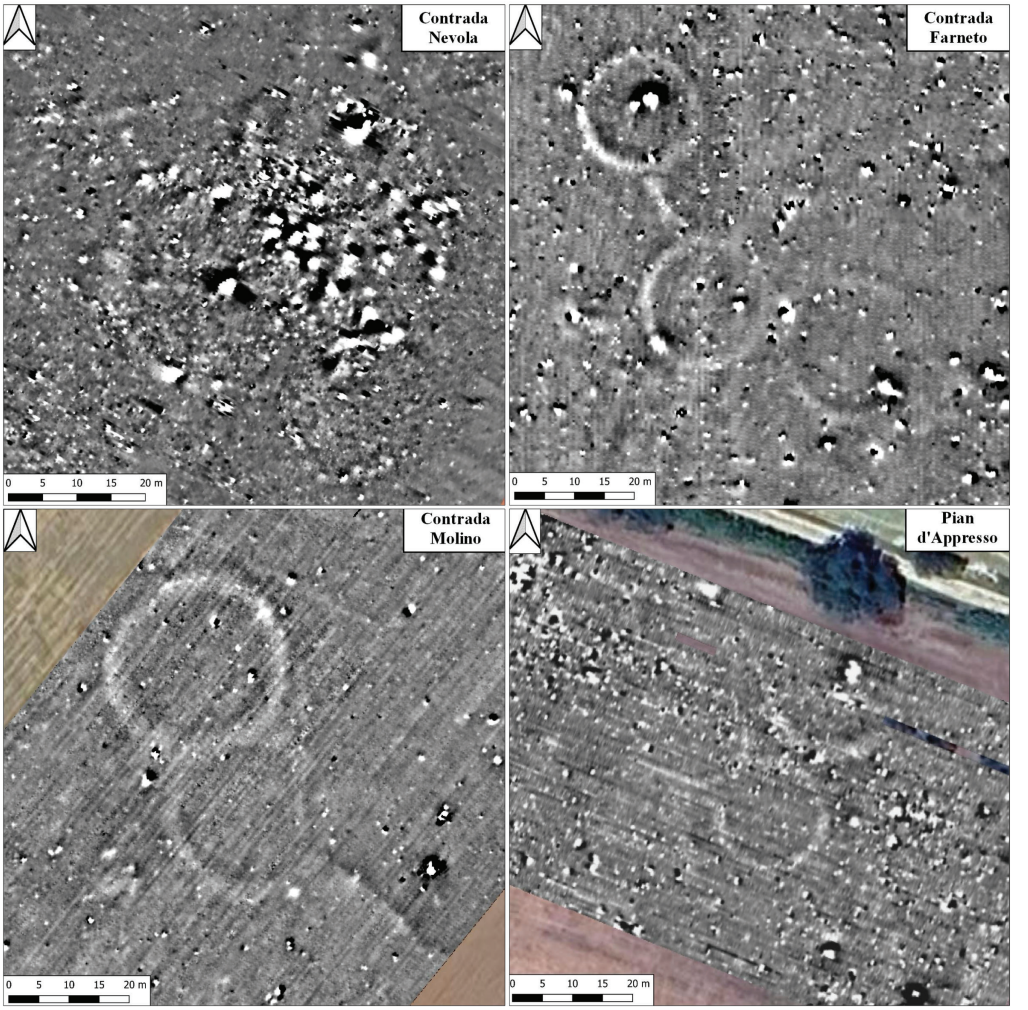


Figure 7. Buried circular ditches and geomagnetic investigations. Comparative analysis of sites.

presence highlights the need for further investigation and underscores the importance of adopting protective measures to safeguard the buried archaeological heritage at these sites (Fig. 7).

The necropolis of Contrada Nevola (Corinaldo): a funerary landscape and its possible *longue-durée*

Research in the Corinaldo necropolis has been ongoing for seven years (2018-2024) and is still underway through periodic surveys and excavation campaigns. The project on the Corinaldo necropolis (named ArcheoNevola), grounded in preventive archaeology, has developed through a continuous dialogue between non-invasive survey methods, which guide the planning phase, and the subsequent excavations. This approach has enabled the systematic



Figure 8. Contrada Nevola (Corinaldo). The interruption of circular ditches: from aerial photography, to excavation, to possible reconstruction.

planning of investigations across various sectors of the necropolis in terms of methodology, timing, resources, and logistics. It has also facilitated the exploration of the two major circles within the Picene burial core, which contained princely tombs with an extraordinary assemblage of grave goods and required carefully coordinated recovery strategies.

The same approach involved favouring a systematic exploration of the funerary landscape, guided by specific research questions, focusing on its complexity, evolution, and monumental character over time, as well as its use and re-use through the centuries.

The integration of non-invasive methods with archaeological digs enables a preliminary reconstruction of the ancient funerary landscape - at least as it appeared during the Picene phase - which in turn must have influenced the dynamics of later occupation. The Piceni monuments were enclosed by large, fairly deep circular ditches that created a strong visual and spatial separation from their surroundings. In terms of form and monumental emphasis, the structures likely consisted of an earthen mound covering and protecting the actual burial, probably built using the soil excavated from the ring-ditch itself and possibly reinforced with additional material. We are currently investigating the possibility that the reddish flint - found in large quantities at the investigated sites, even during surface surveys alone - may have been intentionally added to reinforce the artificial mounds, reflecting a broader tendency to assign symbolic or cultic value to selected lithic materials (Denti 2022). Archaeological investigations of the two largest circles have revealed a pronounced break - approximately 5 meters wide - in the continuity of the ditches, which likely functioned as an entrance to the funerary space. This architectural feature suggests that the earthen mound was concentrated in the central area of the monument, while the surrounding enclosed space remained accessible and was likely intended to be entered and used, perhaps in relation to ritual practices (Fig. 8). This is a significant distinguishing feature, first identified through aerial photography and



Figure 9. A view of the Roman burial ground of the Contrada Nevola necropolis, Corinaldo.

geophysical surveys, and later confirmed by archaeological excavation in the two largest monuments (Circles 1 and 2). Although not unprecedented in the Picene context (cf. Baldelli 1991), this feature remains distinctive among the case studies considered, appearing in only a limited number of examples. In the necropolis of Contrada Nevola, it seems to be reserved for the two main monuments, which are dedicated to individuals of princely rank, possibly elevated to heroic figures worthy of celebration and a cult that may have continued over time.

A great deal of data has already been acquired, as well as clues and open questions. Among the most interesting ongoing lines of research is undoubtedly the issue of continuity or discontinuity in the occupation of the site by the Piceni tribes and Roman settlers.

Currently, the excavation seems to indicate a significant gap of at least six centuries between the two main phases of use. However, it is important to emphasize that our understanding of the chronology of the Roman necropolis remains limited, as only a portion of the site has been explored through direct archaeological excavation, with the remainder assessed through geophysical and field-walking surveys. Additionally, dating Roman burials, often lacking grave goods, presents a common challenge. While C14 analysis, which has already been employed in the project, could provide an ideal solution, its application remains relatively limited for the time-being due to logistical constraints, particularly the associated costs.

The 90 Roman tombs excavated so far are all inhumation tombs and belong to different types of tombs (in Capuchin-style, in a tiled coffin, with a tiled base, in a simple earth grave), and present rather small and modest grave goods, although a subtle diversification – perhaps even social – can be recognized (Figs. 9, 10, 11). Most of the Roman tombs have intact, well-preserved roofs or tops, with libation tubes and ritual devices that allow us to speculate on their original plan of use (Fig. 12), and all of them are arranged according to an evidently sought-after relationship with the Piceni mounds, and the tomb they held in the center (Boschi *et al.* 2021).



Figure 10. Contrada Nevola, Corinaldo: detail of some Roman tombs.



Figure 11. Contrada Nevola, Corinaldo: Roman tomb with tile bed during excavation.



Figure 12. Contrada Nevola, Corinaldo: Capuchin-style tomb with libation system under excavation.

On the whole, the tombs were organized around the circular monuments, positioned immediately outside the ditches, often tangent to them, and in some cases even inside the ring ditches, but never reaching or encroaching upon the ancient memorial pit at the centre (Fig. 13). This was particularly evident in the case of the two largest circles, both reconstructed with an original diameter of 30 meters, each yielding a princely burial. Circle 1, which contained the so-called Prince of Corinaldo tomb discovered in 2018, featured the rich princely burial positioned almost at the centre, surrounded by 30 Roman tombs, only two of which encroached upon the inner space defined by the ring ditch. Circle 2 (Fig. 14), excavated during the 2024 campaign, similarly yielded a Picene princely burial, even more lavish in terms of the quantity and quality of grave goods (Fig. 15). It also reaffirmed the deliberate yet marginal presence of Roman tombs, with a total of eight graves clustered around the Picene burial, all placed peripherally and only slightly encroaching upon the ancient funerary space. By contrast, the third circle excavated so far (Circle 4), smaller and less well-preserved, contained a greater number of Roman tombs within the inner space. However, these were still clearly positioned with respect to the oldest central tomb, suggesting an intentional management of the inherited cultural legacy, with a clear regard for the sacred site, which was evidently perceived and acknowledged over the long term (Schot, Newman and Bhreathnach 2011).

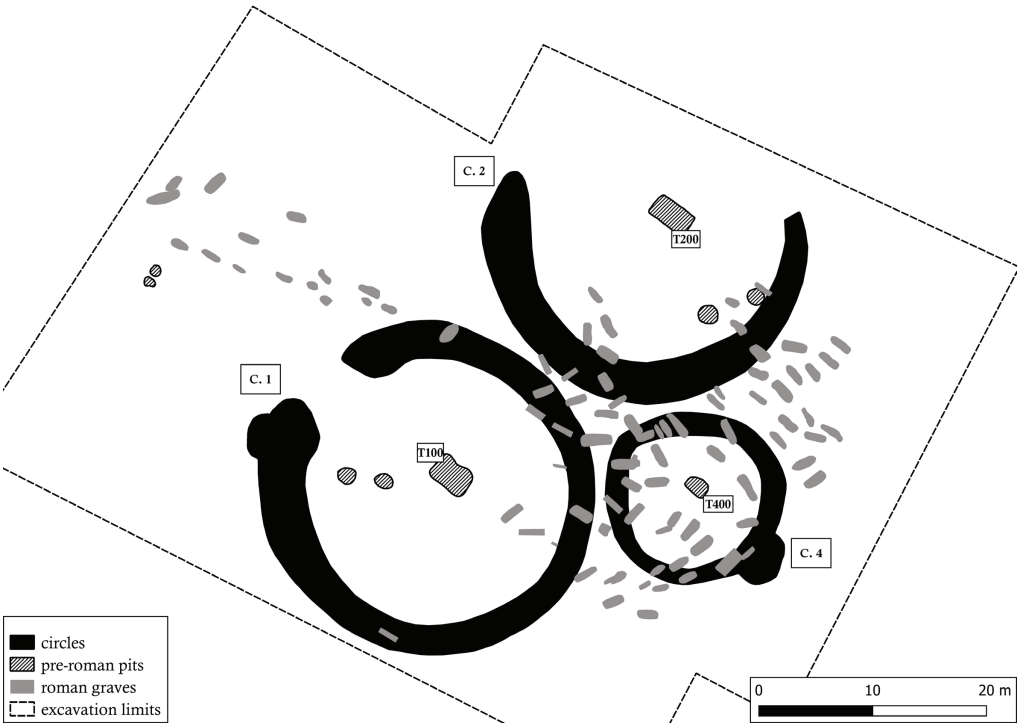


Figure 13. Contrada Nevola, Corinaldo. Excavation plan resulting from the 2018-2024 investigations.



Figure 14. Contrada Nevola, Corinaldo. Aerial view of the so-called Circle 2 (2024 campaign).

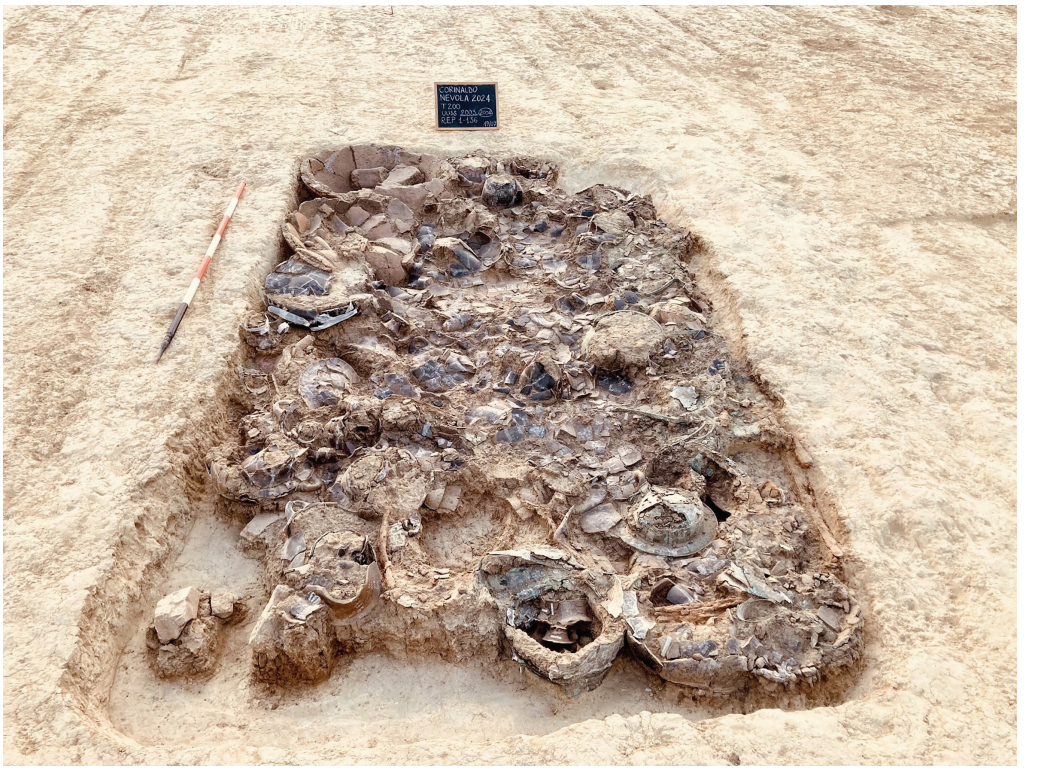


Figure 15. Orientalizing princely tomb uncovered inside Circle 2 (2024 campaign).

Although research is still ongoing, the necropolis of Contrada Nevola appears to represent another example of long-term funerary reuse, among the many instances attested by archaeology in various contexts and periods. Similar patterns have also been noted in other areas of central Italy, suggesting that the phenomenon may deserve broader comparative investigation.

A large number of studies on funerary landscapes between the pre-Roman period and the Roman conquest demonstrate that the burials of Roman age are a quite common element at older barrow sites and urnfields (Pearce, Millett and Struck 2000; Chapman 1997; Mitkoski, Bulatović and Mikić 2016; Potrebica 2012). The site location often appears deliberate, indicating that many burial monuments were still visible in the Roman-period landscape. The characters and lay-out of the Roman-period cemeteries can vary considerably, because at some sites older monuments were clearly used as focal points while others show a spatial separation of burials with different chronologies. Also 'ambiguous' attitudes towards ancient monuments have been demonstrated in several cases.

The Contrada Nevola necropolis represents, in our opinion, a very promising context, which can help investigate the process of overlap between Roman and native culture also in relation to funerary spaces and perhaps to the sacredness or magical value attributed to them by the new occupants.

Such an attitude seems to be attested in at least two other cases in the Marche region itself, which display similar dynamics. These include the Roman burial ground developed around the Piceni tumuli at Matelica, showing a pattern similar to that observed in our case (Casci Ceccacci, Biocco and Pasqualini 2016), and, even more closely, the Roman necropolis attested along the Cesano River at Corinaldo itself, also grown around a Picene tomb, unfortunately poorly preserved and only partially published (Baldelli *et al.* 2008). These examples are consistently united by a sense of respect for the Picene burial core, which seems to imply a visual perception by the Romans and perhaps also retained a cultural memory of the earlier funerary phases.

For the necropolis of Contrada Nevola at Corinaldo, there are still many open questions: was the occupation of the Picene necropolis by the Romans intentional from the outset? Perhaps attracted and conditioned by visible and perceptible elements? To what extent have the former monuments been preserved over the centuries? What was the practical, cultural, and religious attitude of the Romans toward the ancient funerary landscape? We do not yet have definitive answers, but indicative hints emerge from the excavation campaigns conducted so far, which echo the comparisons already mentioned from the same area and region, and which seem to precisely suggest the role of the rural tombs of earlier occupants as topographic and cultural markers of the landscape and as elements embedded in long-term systems of social memory and gentilicial identity (Di Fazio 2019).

As already pointed out, the problem of the continuity of burials, in relation to topography and landscape, requires a subtle and nuanced approach for various reasons connected to specificities of contexts and sites (Vermeulen and Bourgeois 2000), and also in the case of Contrada Nevola the need to question the forms of the funerary landscape in its evolution in diachrony is urgent and firmly sought. Research is proceeding on a double track, combining excavation with analysis of the landscape and its features, with an emphasis on the location of the site, the ancient topography, and how much this may have contributed to the preservation of older monumental forms and landmarks and their visibility in the diachrony.

With regard to location, the necropolis of Contrada Nevola occupies the highest point of the river terrace, in a prominent position with respect to the ancient road system and well protected from the flooding of the river, hence the part of the area that, likely due to its specific characteristics, must have attracted settlement over time. On the possible role of the necropolis as a boundary marker or more generally on its location in a marginal and less productive area within the economic system of the Roman territorial organization (Botturi 2016), our research is still too preliminary to expound on this topic. It is also true that the archaeobotanical analyses carried out within the princely tomb found in Circle 1 and on a sample of Roman tombs, indicate only the sporadic presence of cereal caryopsis remains and suggest instead a landscape of wild fruits and essences, much more consistent with a funerary use of the site that must have lasted over time (Boschi and Venanzoni 2022).

What visibility? Reflections on methods and results

Visibility is a fundamental aspect of the ongoing research, addressed both as a historical factor, which has shaped the way in which the funerary landscape has been perceived, remembered, and consequently managed and reoccupied over time, and as a methodological

and interpretive lens through which to read the spatial logic and diachronic transformations of the site. It also highlights the challenges inherent in "seeing" such sites using archaeological methods, including non-invasive approaches, which often struggle to fully capture the complexity and subtlety of these ancient landscapes, where the archaeological traces are often faint and elusive.

All the contexts we are studying initially emerged as traces (cropmarks) visible from a distance, either during aerial surveys or in aerial imagery, and in any case always as exceptional and non-recurring manifestations. This manifestation is exclusively related to the circular ditches of the likely pre-Roman phase across all case-studies and provides little or no information about other phases of occupation. The circular ditches themselves represent an easily identifiable target for both remote and proximal sensing, especially considering their size, which ranges from 15 to 30 meters in diameter in the studied cases. Geophysics consistently makes an important contribution, at least from the geomagnetic and geoelectric methods tested so far, which are able to detect the contrast caused by the ditch fill soil, evidently more conductive and more magnetic due to its richness in organic materials. Magnetometry seems particularly suitable for characterizing buried deposits, especially with regard to their complexity and evolution, offering insights for the identification of localized features (such as individual tombs, even from later periods) as well as indications about the material components (for example, the presence of metal objects).

However, the complexity of the contexts and their use only emerges through a combined approach, relying on multiple remote sensing and geophysical techniques, and ultimately confirmed by direct field survey. Surface survey is proving to be a very useful method precisely to overcome the elusiveness and sometimes the punctiform nature of targets that may escape other forms of extensive, non-invasive mapping. On this point, and still regarding methodology, it is worth emphasizing that soil conditions play a key role in the visibility of the contexts under study. Alongside systematic and intensive coverage (with a maximum spacing of 5 meters between surveyors), working on freshly tilled soils and after periods of exposure to weathering is quite important. Equally valuable are repeated surveys, which offer the opportunity to collect weak and sporadic clues that may occasionally appear in relation to seasonal crops and transient circumstances, but which can ultimately be indicative of the buried stratigraphy. At Contrada Nevola in particular, but also in the other contexts analysed here, the first ground inspection often did not allow for the recognition of fragments of artifacts indicative of Picene occupation, precisely because the traces forming the deposit are mostly ephemeral. Only by returning multiple times and under different conditions (after rain, after ploughing, etc.) was it nevertheless possible to collect suggestive evidence, such as small fragments of bronze or iron sheet metal.

The road undertaken by the project is still long and winding, but rich in new data and insights that will contribute to the multicultural framework known for this area between the Iron Age and the Roman period, which we trust can be understood with many nuances precisely through the funerary landscapes and their possible long-term use. Among the many questions we will try to answer are the major issues connected to the ethnic and cultural transition brought about by Romanization.

Did the rural tombs of earlier occupants preserve their role as topographic and cultural markers of the landscape? Were such cemeteries crucial in legitimising right claims to the land through the presence of the dead or of the ancestors of the indigenous population? Is there an observable breach in the attitude towards the ancient cemeteries as a result of the Romanization in the region?

While awaiting new data from forthcoming investigations, the evidence collected so far highlights the central importance of visibility - often manifesting itself in exceptional or intermittent forms - in addressing these questions. Rather than being understood solely as a visual phenomenon, visibility emerges as a multifaceted concept that encompasses both the physical and cultural dimensions of the funerary landscape and its perception through time, particularly in relation to long-term processes of social memory and identity construction (Di Fazio and Paltineri 2019).

Ultimately, the ongoing investigations point to a complex and multilayered funerary landscape in which material elements - whether visible or invisible - interact with long-standing cultural memories, ritual practices, and dynamics of spatial appropriation. The case of the Contrada Nevola necropolis, together with the other sites explored within the SEARCH project, provides a privileged observatory for examining not only the processes through which sacred spaces were reoccupied, but also how territorial memory and cultural negotiation between pre-Roman and Roman communities were constructed and expressed over time (Terrenato 2022).

The integrated approach adopted in this project - combining non-invasive techniques, systematic field surveys and targeted excavations - has proven particularly effective in revealing data that would otherwise have remained difficult to identify or only partially understood, while also demonstrating its potential applicability in other archaeological contexts characterized by subtle or fragmentary traces. Within this perspective, visibility should be regarded not simply as a condition of the archaeological record, but as an interpretative key for understanding historical processes and their inherent complexity. What has been made visible, or conversely left invisible, over time may reflect deliberate social and cultural strategies that deserve to be explored through appropriate methodological approaches. Investigating the landscape over the long term and the continuity of occupation remains a challenging task, yet it also invites us to reconsider whether the overlap between indigenous and Roman cultures may have been less abrupt and traumatic than traditionally assumed.

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