Towards a More Diversified Roman Economy:  
A Working Hypothesis for Central Adriatic Italy

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WHERE AND WHEN?  
A working hypothesis was put forward for the central Adriatic part of Italy between 200 BC and AD 200. This area includes today’s Marche region and the northern part of Abruzzo, a territory covering some 11643 km². It is situated between the Apennine hills and the central Adriatic coast and is characterised by a comb-shaped geomorphologic structure in the form of a series of parallel river valleys descending towards the sea. Case studies are developed for the river valleys of the Potenza and the Tenna.

DIVERSIFIED?  
Regional variability is one of the key-points in understanding changing rural settlement patterns of any period in Roman History. For the Late Republican and Early Imperial countryside in Roman Italy in particular, an important catalyst seems to have been the specific interaction between intra-regional and extra-regional economic networks; i.e. the level of dependence of a certain area on the regional market (local urban centres and rural population), the Roman market (here the city of Rome), and the Mediterranean market. Predictive modelling of the balance between intra-regional consumption and extra-regional export in a certain area is one way to explore this issue.

THE DATASET  
• Field survey data (Potenza Valley Survey; Pisa South Picenum Survey).
• Additional geo-archaeological, literary, and pre-industrial data.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS  
• An archaeological visibility of rural settlements mainly from the 2nd century BC onwards; an apparent substantial increase in rural settlements in the Early Imperial period; and their generally modest character and fairly high level of continuity throughout the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.

WHY?  
• The lack of a central Adriatic “side of the story” in the debate on the Italian economy.
• Regional field surveys in this area have begun to deliver the exact data required for predictive modelling.
• A predominantly rural world with many small and medium-sized towns could be more characteristic for Roman Italy.

OBJECTIVE  
• A possible theoretical framework for further economic research.

PROBABILITY MODE  
Predictive modelling as a tool for dissecting the balance between intra-regional consumption and extra-regional export.

ANALYSIS AND TOOLS  
• correlation between soils and crops  
• crop suitability  
• amount of available land  
• archaeological, literary and pre-industrial evidence  
• potential agricultural yields <

PROBLEM  
Agricultural productivity and surplus possibilities depend on available consumption markets.

WORKING HYPOTHESIS and METHODOLOGY  
Defining these consumption markets can be difficult.

• The presence of professional oil and wine presses merely indicates production for A market.
• The circulation of amphorae only represents a portion of all used transport containers.
• Grain production and transport are even more problematic.

Probable markets?

“PERIPHERAL” REGION: local towns were more likely to rely on intra-regional supplies. But INTRA-REGIONAL consumption often overlooked.

Geographic position favoured commercial contacts with the northern Adriatic region and the Eastern Mediterranean.

QUESTIONS  
• Do changing rural settlement patterns reflect changing agricultural exploitation systems?  
• Does this reflect a shift in consumption markets?  
• Differences between landscape-related sub-regions?  
• Differences between key-phases within the studied timeframe?

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References:  