Roman Settlement Patterns and the Distribution of Luxury Indicators in Roman Central Italy

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on GIS-based quantitative approaches to Roman settlement patterns in southern Latium (central Italy). The research area is defined by the Tiber Valley in the north, the westward-facing slopes of the Alban Hills, the Lepini and the Ausoni Mountains in the east and the sea in the south and west. The study area was of particular historical importance due to its strong economic, cultural, demographic and social ties to Rome. The chronological focus is on the time-span, reaching from the the late 4th century BC to the early 4th century AD. Descriptive site location modelling is conducted for sites of various types (such as villas, *villae rusticae* and hamlets) in different landscape settings (such as alluvial plain, coastline, volcanic hill or limestone mountain) to assess the role of various environmental and cultural variables, which influenced the choice of settlement sites. These variables comprise altitude, slope inclination, curvature, exposition, geological background, soil type as well as cost-distances to resources and further elements of the cultural landscape such as roads, sanctuaries and towns. The kernel-density-estimation method identified hotspots of activity in Republican and Imperial Times. A similar approach was chosen to map the distribution of luxury indicators (such as mosaic tesserae, marble pieces, wall painting fragments etc.) to identify areas of accumulated wealth in rural areas. Viewshed analyses assessed the role of intervisibilty between important elements of the cultural landscape such as villas, towns, roads and sanctuaries. Visibility may have been of relevance for aspects of social representation and a visual dominance of the landscape.