

# Sangro Valley Project: Report on 1999 Season

## Introduction

The 1999 field season formed part of the Sangro Valley Project, initiated in 1993 by Dr. John Lloyd and Dott.ssa Amalia Faustoferrri of the Soprintendenza Archeologica for the Abruzzo. For the first time Oxford has been privileged to have the collaboration of Oberlin College, Ohio.

Two trenches were opened this year. In MP 6000 we sought to conclude work begun on a wall by John Lloyd in 1997, and as well as uncovering the quarry from which the wall came, we identified a roadway built over it, perhaps not long after (early imperial?): further up the slope we were able to study a complex process of demolition of the wall and reclamation of the land for farming through agricultural terracing. Possible evidence of an Iron Age occupation horizon came to light.

A new trench, MP 7000/7000A was also opened in an area known to be rich in archaeological materials. A series of ephemeral trample horizons were exposed in MP 7000, producing a lot of late republican and early imperial debris, but importantly a silver coin of the second century B.C. and two nice pieces of (unique?) architectural terracotta with dolphin, possibly from a Hellenistic temple which must have stood nearby. The area seems to have been associated with sheep-rearing and sheep product processing. Trench 7000A, just down the slope, produced walls and a corridor, which seem to be part of a larger Roman public/villa complex being dug by the Soprintendenza Archeologica just a hundred metres or so to the north. Adverse weather meant this trench could not be finished, but importantly third century A.D. pottery may, for the first time, have been found in the upper rubble layers, extending the occupation of the site.

Reconnaissance was also carried out with a view to sampling the archaeological material on the surface of the mountain, and to placing the mountain within a visual regional landscape context through 'view shed' studies.

## MP 6000

It had always been an intention to complete the excavation of another polygonal wall made of very large limestone slabs, running NS within the settlement area on the saddle between the two peaks of the mountain (MP 6000). This wall was noted by John Lloyd in surface exploration in 1996 and dug in 1997-98. Initially it was hoped a temple podium of pre-Roman date was being dug (partly on the basis of surface finds nearby), but initial finds suggested a date in the late Republic and Early Principate as more likely; the building remains mysterious.

Two objectives in MP 6000 were to pursue the course of the wall uphill to a break of slope; and to run a trench eastwards away from the wall to investigate an area of

smoother limestone abutting it, which had shown signs of differential wear and produced hobnails and pottery, provisionally interpreted by John Lloyd as a roadway.

As to the extent of the wall, it was found to run some way north upslope, but to be in a state of some collapse, with large blocks 'surfing' down the slope on and in a wave of colluvial wash, predominantly characterised by stones, with some anthropogenic debris (ceramics, metal). Some blocks, which had seemed in 1998 to be in situ were found by study of their bedding planes to have rolled sideways as well as down. It was also found that the line of the wall was not as true as had been thought, and contained a number of small kinks; the phenomenon of large blocks giving way to courses of small stones, noticed in 1998, was found again.

The present state of the northern part of the wall is perhaps not solely due to the action of the hill-wash. Above the break of slope another trench was put in to cut the presumed line of the wall. Not only was there no wall, there were no rocks either. A good agricultural soil had been deposited, 1.5 metres deep, in two layers, the lower of which contained large unabraded pieces of tile and pot (and a small chip of white marble). Given the heavy erosion to which the rest of this part of the hillside has been subjected, and the thinness of the soil elsewhere, as well as the absence of all but the smallest stones in these two contexts, it seems logical to think that they represent a re-deposition of soil, which must have been brought from lower down in the saddle, to make a small agricultural terrace (similar re-deposition of earth a higher point is known now from Mola di Monte Gelato in S. Etruria). Prior to the deposition of the terrace, stones seem to have been thrown over the break of slope and probably some blocks of the wall with them. Whether the creation of the terrace is to be connected with the abandonment, as well as with the destruction, of this section of the wall cannot as yet be determined. Note that a trullo or shepherd's hut (almost certainly later) was built just below the break of slope to the east, profiting from the large amount of stone jettisoned during the clearance of the terrace area.

Perhaps the most surprising find was that under the two soil contexts the bedrock had been smoothed artificially, and at least one post hole cut in it, with other cuts in the rock perhaps natural, but exploited by man. Small amounts of bone have been recovered from the fill of these holes, but no ceramics. It is tempting, but as yet unprovable, to associate these holes with an Iron Age/Samnite occupation horizon. It may, however, be that pastoral activity on Monte Pallano in the context of transhumance economy required a number of animal stalls, barns, pens, and byres, which even in the Roman imperial period were

built by inserting wooden uprights into holes cut in the rock (although the smoothing of the rock here is noteworthy).

Further down slope, the extension of the original trench 6000 to the east came quickly on a surprise find: a retaining wall just beyond where the original 6000 had ended, parallel to the polygonal wall that is less than 2.5 metres away. This turned out to be the substructure for a road, the other side of which was covered however not by stones, but by a dark agricultural soil, containing among other things a sherd of XIII or XIV century A.D. pottery, almost certainly from late medieval manuring.

The road itself contained large amounts of archaeological debris re-deposited in the course of its construction, mainly coarse wares, but some large amphora fragments and some early imperial fine wares, and a very worn imperial as, possibly Augustan. The heaviest stones in the substructure were identical to some of those used in the polygonal wall, implying perhaps that they had been robbed from it; in which case the road would postdate the wall, and since it seems to lead up to the agricultural terrace described above, may have been built for the construction of the latter. Such a hypothesis cannot be confirmed, however, since the removal of the road enable use to confirm an old idea of John Lloyd's, namely that the polygonal wall was built simply by levering large slabs of limestone up from their bedding planes and standing them upright. The smoothed bedrock with the differential wear, next to the wall, turned out, after the demolition of the road, to descend in steps, following the natural slope. We had hoped that this might be natural, but were pleased to see that these 'steps' in fact turned out to mark the site of the quarrying hypothesised by John Lloyd and Simon Pressey in 1997. In the bottom-most crevices of this impromptu quarry to large pieces of what looked like imperial coarseware were found (they await final analysis). This might in fact mean that the road was laid immediately after quarrying, to fill the hole, using some spares. The hobnails and other finds on the smoothed limestone pavement next to the wall could thus simply be associated with its construction, i.e., with an ephemeral and not a continuous occupation horizon.

A further trench to ascertain the location of the southern end of the polygonal wall found only deep deposits of the dark clay identified as 'natural' in 1998, and some rocks in positions of apparent tumble; no archaeological material was recovered.

### **MP 6000: Conclusions**

The purpose of the wall in MP 6000 is still hard to fathom. It is aligned with the NS walls in the central public/villa complex being excavated by the Soprintendenza, and

may be part of a boundary wall associated with it. There is a lot of unexplored terracing in the area, however, and further interpretation must await at least the mapping by GIS of these features. The wall lies very close to where a main path up the mountain from the settlement of Sambuceto (provenance of Roman inscriptions) emerges onto the saddle through the tree-line; here again our road may be relevant. Further, the presence of a spring (Fonte Benedetti) just below where the path debouches onto the plateau must be factored into future work. The southern end of the wall was near an important spring and communications route; but the surround micro-topography is too unclear to allow definitive analysis. As for the foundations of the 1997 building found by John Lloyd (see previous interim report, 1997) abutting the west side of the polygonal wall in the original 6000, much remains unclear, although it may have run EW along a narrow, being built into the slope behind. If so, it seems to have suffered extensive erosion damage and vanished in all except the small area first excavated in 1997.

The sequence of occupation points more and more firmly to intense activity in the early imperial period, perhaps beginning in the late Republic, and may be connected to changes in the nature of the large complex in the middle of the saddle in that period. It would be nice to believe that our post-holes were Samnite, but they may even postdate the demolition of that section of the wall. It is interesting to note the continuation of agricultural activity on the mountain (note again the proximity of Fonte Benedetti) in the (undated) aftermath of the end of the occupation period associated with the wall: such activity could be late antique, but given the chronological profile of the archaeological assemblages thus far found on Monte Pallano, a Lombard or early Medieval context is perhaps more likely (even now potatoes and lentils are grown higher up on the slopes of the Monte Pallano peak); and there is possible evidence of XIII/XIV century A.D. manuring from nearby. The wall itself looks impressive, but was a rough and ready job requiring little labour to create the building slabs and not much more to move them short distances (a few metres) *in situ*. Incidentally, the northernmost stretch of the megalithic 'circuit walls' shows a very similar constructional technique and is dated as the latest phase by the Italians: local resources go on determining local patterns of construction in the absence of outside stimuli for some time.

### **MP 7000**

This trench is in a flat field, clear of stones in an area between the public/villa complex being excavated by the Soprintendenza, the car park by the Madonnina, and the modern road leading to the Telecom Repetitore and lis-

tening station on Monte Pallano. Mole-hills examined in March suggested an impressive range of ceramic materials was present in the soil.

The original aim of the trench was to search for a possible roadway to the public/villa complex, suggested by low 'walls' in the grass which were thought by Dott.ssa Faustoferri to mark the entrance area to the complex. These walls turned out to be field boundaries of one course, and probably post-medieval; similar features can be observed further to the south, where they have no other purpose.

A trench (MP 7000) was opened in this area. Two problems were encountered: firstly the depth of the soil was less than had been assumed in the upper end of the field; and secondly, while the soil was rich in archaeological debris, this seemed largely to be re-deposited colluvial material. Nonetheless, a number of trample surfaces were found on areas of what looked like smoothed bedrock; the thinness, the yellow colour, and the clayish matrix of the soil forming these layers was interestingly paralleled by similar ephemeral occupation or trample layers found a few weeks before when the Soprintendenza began work on the megalithic wall circuit.

It is probably that these trample surfaces represented outdoor working areas, since they were not associated, apparently, with built structures. Again, open areas connected with the rearing and processing of sheep within a transhumant economy seem the most reasonable interpretation, in all probability dependent on the large public/villa complex nearby in the saddle. A well preserved square-section loomweight from one of these horizons is interesting in this respect, as well as adding to the growing series of types from Monte Pallano and the Sangro Valley.

Two important finds were made on these trample layers: a silver victoriatus and a terracotta architectural plaque, from the frieze decoration of a temple or public building. The plaque has one nail hole preserved and is decorated with a floral design and a leaping dolphin. This piece is in excellent condition and a fine example of late Hellenistic work and was probably dropped not far from where it was originally displayed, rather than suffering colluvial abrasion to any serious degree. Moreover, the moulding on the kyma is almost identical to that on a fragment of architectural terracotta found re-deposited as fill in MP 6000 in 1997. These two fragments await analysis to determine if their clay is the same, but even if the two plaques were from different buildings, they look to be from the same mould, which could derive from a specialised artisan production centre on or near Monte Pallano.

Together with the antefix fragment found by John Lloyd as a surface find in 1996 near MP 6000, the decorative plaques form a growing body of hard evidence as to the presence of (a) temple/s in or near the area of the excavations (another fragment of dolphin was recovered

from MP 7000A, a few metres away from 7000). There are no parallels for the dolphin motif currently known, but a similar kyma design is found at Luni and elsewhere in Central Italy between 150 and 100 B.C. (thanks to Dr. Fay Glinister for this reference).

Once the excitement of finding the plaque had died down a bit, we had to admit that trench 7000 was finished out. Everyone moved over to MP 6000, with a small group remaining in this area to open up a sondage (7000A) just down the slope from 7000, where there seemed to be some more soil depth. The next day, the two lone pick-axers had come down on a rubble layer, predicating that work resume here on a larger scale—we were able to uncover what seemed to be two slowly collapsing parallel EW walls, with a corridor in between. At this point, an unseasonal downpour of several days turned all trenches into swimming pools, and by the end of the 1999 excavation season this trench was unfinished.

Three important points emerged, however. One is that the walls were on exactly the same orientation as those in the public/villa complex being excavated by the Soprintendenza and of the same technique. Secondly, as in that complex, the predominant type of fine ware was Italian Terra Sigillata, although we have not yet had the chance to go down to a level where this can be said to represent occupation deposit rather than general recycled building waste. The third conclusion also concerns pottery. Some coarseware forms in the levels of collapse seemed to imitating African Red Slip Ware forms, and if this is confirmed by analysis next year, we should have further evidence of occupation at and probably beyond the end of the second century A.D.. We hope to have the possibility next year to look at the solitary piece of real ARS fineware, found in the villa area of Monte Pallano and now kept at Iuvanum.

### MP 7000: Conclusions

Although MP 7000 was not finished, it seems that we have found walls which correspond in orientation and construction technique to those in the public/villa complex which forms the nucleus of the Monte Pallano site; there is as yet nothing to suggest that our walls, and the early imperial phases there, were not part of a unitary plan or design. If so, the complex is more extensive and important than has been realised (the more so if the wall in MP 6000 is a boundary wall for that complex). It is important now to find at least some of the other walls in this section of the complex, to date the phases of occupation and abandonment, to ascertain the function of our rooms and their relation to the Soprintendenza excavations. That people were still living on Monte Pallano in the late second and early third centuries A.D. looks ever more likely on the basis of ceramic finds, backing up the latest numismatic evidence, a coin of Crispina.

The presence of a temple near the saddle area looks now

almost certain. The peak which dominates it, La Toretta, seems the most likely candidate, but the site is now occupied by a (probably) Lombard tower (but cf. 1997 interim report for a probably monumental tomb dug just below the peak by Neil Christie, dating to the second century B.C.). Note also that the MP 6000 *kyma* was much more abraded than the almost pristine MP 7000/7000A dolphins, suggesting considerable peregrinations in the course of several re-depositions. On the other hand, the antefix surface find suggests the possibility of a structure closer to MP 6000 (above Fonte Benedetti?). It has also been suggested that the *victoriatus* might have come from a votive thesaurus at the sanctuary decorated by the dolphin plaque (the dates for both are suggestively close). At any rate, wherever the sanctuary was, it was demolished in the late Republic, or perhaps totally rebuilt; the late Hellenistic decoration (and other materials?) was being carried away to be used as rubble make up for newer buildings, when at least our dolphin was dropped in an open work area, at the same time that much of the other debris of a broadly late Republican/early imperial date was being deposited. Three more *victoriati* and fragments of terracotta statuary, were found re-deposited in the public/villa complex area by the Soprintendenza in the course of their excavation season this year.

The dolphin motif repays more scrutiny. The motif is rare in Central Italian art, but is found at the Temple of Hercules Curinus above Sulmo, in the cella mosaic. This is in turn thought to have antecedents on Delos. The possibility that Monte Pallano, only 15 odd kilometres from the coastline which it dominates, was open to Hellenistic artistic influences either directly, or indirectly, through transhumant contact with Apulia and Taras, is clearly attractive. This is related to one of the fundamental concerns of the Sangro Valley Project, i.e., how far and in what ways the valley mediated cultural and economic contacts between coast and interior, and between Italy and Greece/Illyria.

### Other Work in the Sangro Valley

More field survey had been planned at one stage, but the need to recoup time washed away in downpours on MP 7000A put paid to this idea. Instead two areas of activity were carried out by small teams as and when time allowed. One was reconnaissance and sampling survey of areas further north on Monte Pallano, especially around Fonte Canalone, and on the broad sloping plateau between the Monte Pallano peak and the start of the saddle where the excavations were. Some visual reconnaissance of a possible Lombard bank and ditch feature on La Toretta was carried out.

The main conclusion was that much more Total Station

mapping of the mountain top is needed, with more plot points and more attention to the terracing of the mountainside and the distribution of vegetation on it. The bank and ditch looks real, and might be worth excavating. Sporadic Roman tile finds at Fonte Canalone were also suggestive. More importantly, interesting fragments of Iron Age impasto were recovered near the Monte Pallano peak as surface finds, both in pot and tile form. It was also noted that there were no surface finds in the part of the plateau parallel to the megalithic walls, which given the large amounts of surface tile elsewhere on the mountain is surprising; even clearance cairns were bare.

This finding takes on more substance in the light of the other forms of reconnaissance work carried out in the 1999 season. Sam Carrier of Oberlin wanted to create VR nodes, accessible over the WWW, of the middle Sangro landscape, with links between high points, allowing the viewer to click on points in one virtual landscape, and then be able to have a 360 degree panorama from there. In the course of looking for suitable points to shoot nodes, we ended up in Guilmi, above the Sinello Valley, at 684 m (Monte Pallano rises to 1020 m at its peak, and to about 850 m where our trenches were). Guilmi commands an uninterrupted view of Monte Pallano's southeastern flank, and in particular the megalithic walls. We were surprised to find them visible to the naked eye across the Sinello Valley and began to wonder about the symbolic value of their visibility in the landscape (their defensive value is not obvious). They are also visible, it transpires, from high points in the landscape around Montenerodomo by Iuvanum—and *this would not have been the case had the area surveyed on Monte Pallano and found to have no archaeological surface debris, been instead built up*. We must reckon with the possibility that these walls sent out complex messages about control of the landscape to other inhabitants of that landscape. Study of the genesis of Samnite wall circuits in recent years has moved towards a down-dating of such circuits to place them as a direct consequence of the Samnite Wars. It is possible to consider that the primary readers of messages like those at Monte Pallano, were not Romans, but other Samnites. This does not mean, however, challenging an early Hellenistic dating; the work being currently done on the megalithic walls has not yet provided diagnostic material for dating them, but a bronze Hercules statuette of the late third, early fourth century A.D. was uncovered on the bedrock near the main gate).

### Further Work

Much remains to be done in future seasons. Past work on Monte Pallano has concentrated on exploring byways of deposition and stratification on the mountain, a small but scientific string to the work done there by the Soprinten-

denza in preparation for the creation of an archaeological park there. One trench is literally unfinished, and there are other areas of potential excavation which can be targeted as we start to read the landscape better, and understand what we are dealing with.

There are still big questions. First and foremost, where were the Samnites? We have the megalithic walls, one of the finest examples in Samnium, and a small fourth to third century B.C. occupation horizon under the public/villa complex, associated with fine black gloss pottery. Apart from that, and quantities of impasto pottery, nothing. On the other hand, survey by the Project in 1995-97 revealed a number of site scatters below the spring line at about 500m with substantial Iron Age and Samnite diagnostic material produced over large areas, in contrast to later periods. John Lloyd's guess that we may be dealing with a pagus centre, rather than a full-blown settlement, on Monte Pallano is intriguing and may find more confirmation. Yet large areas nearer the Monte Pallano peak are unexplored. Tile covers huge swathes of the mountain's surface in high densities, and the amounts of black gloss pottery even as colluviate material in all trenches is very high. What structures and strategies of occupation they might be associated with in the fourth to second centuries B.C. is a key issue to be explored.

But Monte Pallano is a lynchpin in a bigger system. It is ringed by site scatters and John Lloyd always wanted to sample-excavate some of these. After appropriate geophysical and stratigraphic sampling, we intend to do precisely this form of strategic excavation, and to dig more than one site, extensively if possible. One villa or farmhouse excavated per 100 km<sup>2</sup> will only take us so far.

There is also work to be done to continue the survey and the Lower Valley still cries out for systematic survey/study, especially in the areas of Paglieta and closer to the palaeo-Christian site at S. Stefano in Rivo Maris near Casal Bordino, where John Lloyd and Andrew Wilson had already done some prospection.

Finally, we need to be ready to break free of river valley systems, or at least the exploration of single valleys. The Sangro offered a greater variety of environments when compared to the Biferno, and more complicated historical problems. Yet it is possible to argue that for all the valuable results coming out of the Project, as a whole, single valley studies can constrict our approach to data; John Lloyd realised this shortly before he fell ill. Monte Pallano has only been considered in relation to the Sangro Valley, but in a way it has a much more fertile hinterland, and much

better communications with, and dominates more readily, the Sinello Valley on the other side. To study a mountain environment like Monte Pallano as a lynchpin within two adjacent valley systems, thought on good grounds to represent different cultural facies in the archaic period at least, would present fascinating new methodological and intellectual challenges.

At the same time, we have taken up an invitation to collaborate with the Soprintendenza in a survey around Iuvanum, linked to the opening of the museum there in 2001. This will provide valuable data in its own right, but material we can link to the Monte Pallano study as well—the two sites are complementary.

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Note: This document was created from materials originally presented on the Sangro Valley Project web site <[www.sangro.org](http://www.sangro.org)>. None of the text has been revised.