

# GENIUS LOCI

# LASZLOVSZKY 60

edited by  
Dóra Mérai  
and

Ágnes Drosztmér, Kyra Lyublyanovics,  
Judith Rasson, Zsuzsanna Papp Reed,  
András Vadas, Csilla Zatykó



ARCHAEOLINGUA

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# Scarlino in the 1980s, Forty Years On

RICHARD HODGES\*

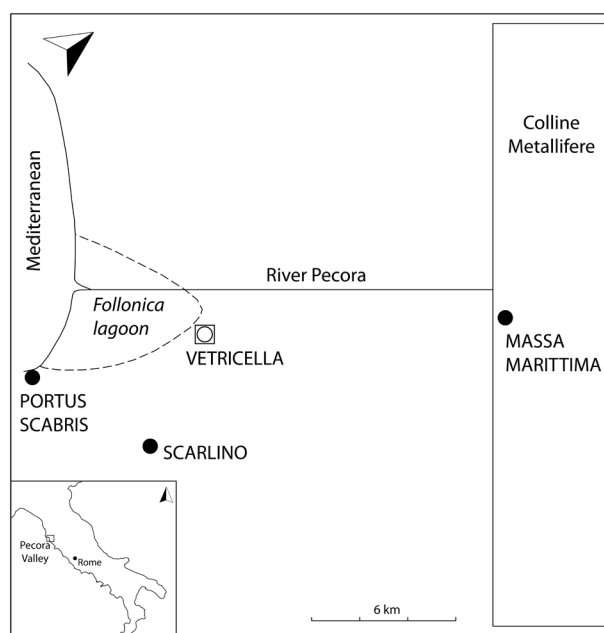
*Jóska's first odyssey out of Hungary was to Riccardo Francovich's excavations at Scarlino, Tuscany. The project has a new afterlife forty years on.*

Scarlino is perched high on the long spine of a hill in the lee of a dark range that overlooks the Tyrrheanean Sea (Fig. 1). It is a quintessential Maremma village. Tightly organized around narrow streets, Scarlino is bigger than it seems from afar (Fig. 2). It stretches from a bulky though-elegantly-towered Pisan castle (founded by the Aldobrandeschi in the eleventh century) down to a barn-like baroque church a mile away, passing a little piazza that grandiloquently commemorates a visit by Giuseppe Garibaldi. Here, between 1980-83, the effervescent Riccardo Francovich, in his early thirties, first experimented with a modern excavation technique to understand the origins of medieval village formation, known as *incastellamento*.

When proposing the excavations at Scarlino in 1979, Riccardo Francovich was already established at Siena University (Fig. 3). He had travelled widely through Europe visiting archaeological digs, and was determined to emulate what his friend Andrea Carandini had done at the Roman senatorial villa near Cosa, Settefinestre, and create a new archaeological generation — in Riccardo's case, medieval archaeologists. Scarlino was to be the first iteration of this ambition. Later, digs at the deserted village of Montarrenti (near Rosia) and then Rocca San Silvestro (near Campiglia Marittima) were to be even bolder versions, but as Scarlino was a living village, it was special for all involved and those who visited.

Riccardo lured many younger archaeologists to Scarlino, including foreign students destined

to become distinguished in this field. To name three: József Laszlovszky (Jóska) from Budapest; Anthony Heidinga from Amsterdam, and John Moreland from Sheffield. Each discovered an Italy now beginning to be expansive and open after the political unrest of the 1970s. Bevie of young Italian students were present too. These were the



► Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Scarlino, Vetricella and the Pecora valley in the Maremma, western Tuscany (drawn by Sarah Leppard, courtesy of the nEU-Med project, University of Siena)



► Fig. 2. View of Scarlino (courtesy of the nEU-Med project, University of Siena)

\* The American University of Rome



► **Fig. 3.** Riccardo Francovich excavating at Scarlino (courtesy of the Department of Medieval Archaeology, University of Siena)

sons and daughters of those who had prospered in the post-war Italian miracle and found pleasure in Riccardo's luminous mentorship and his vision of European medieval archaeology. For all it was the heady optimism of the dig and the nights carousing that confected an unforgettable spirit forever associated with Scarlino.

Scarlino has lived on for archaeological reasons. Here, in front of the stolid Pisan castle Ric-

cardo's teams found the first substantive sequences of an early medieval hilltop village in Italy. Other hilltops investigated by trenches in the 1960s and 1970s had provided some sense of the prospects that archaeology offered for this historical question, but by using the new concept of open area excavation, Riccardo was hoping to make sense of the topography of an early medieval village. This was a groundbreaking ambition, and Riccardo revelled in it. The results exceeded his expectations.

In an area measuring nearly 3500 m<sup>2</sup> on the brow of this hill, undamaged by the later fortress (Fig. 4), the excavation revealed countless post-holes. Their appearance was almost magical. Dug into the natural rock, the post-holes had to be treated carefully to discern the shape and size of dwellings that they belonged to.

Riccardo later reflected upon the early medieval structures,<sup>1</sup> but with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that this first village of perhaps five, seventh-to-tenth-century, buildings (with an estimated population of 40), erected on shallow terraces, had roots in the memory of place. Enigmatic



► **Fig. 4.** View of the Pisan castle and borgo in which Francovich excavated (courtesy of the nEU-Med project, University of Siena)



Bronze Age and Hellenistic structures preceded the later first millennium buildings on this hilltop, confusing the structural record, yet emphasizing the significance of place. Scarlino, in sum, possesses a deep history. Roman phases were almost absent, predictably to be found on the coast at the Tyrrhenian cabotage harbor of *Portus Scabris*<sup>2</sup> and in dispersed points on the coastal littoral below Scarlino.

The excavations extended down to the deserted later medieval church on the terraced north-facing flank of the hill (Fig. 5). Excavating this, I suspect, was not really in Riccardo's mind at the outset. After all, his philosophical and political roots were fiercely anti-clerical and not at all disposed to a Christian archaeology which then championed the Church, its monuments and art rather than people in the past. Yet the abandoned church was irresistible. Could it have formed part of the village? Possibly influenced by the celebrated stratigraphic excavations of the church at Wharram Percy in North Yorkshire, England, Riccardo set to unravelling this monument beyond the rim of the myriad post-holes. The result was unexpected.

In legend, Riccardo left one late medieval wall cupboard as he progressed downwards. Only on the final day did he instruct it be excavated, discovering a remarkable early Renaissance hoard of gold coins. It was an astonishing discovery with lasting consequences: the *comune* was so thrilled that it granted him citizenship. It was a short step to being honored after his untimely passing in 2007 aged 60 with the Riccardo Francovich Centre,



► Fig. 5. The excavated church of Scarlino looking north-eastwards (courtesy of the Department of Medieval Archaeology, University of Siena)

Scarlino's small museum. How Riccardo laughed about the treasure and the municipal acclamation. He loved the attention but he was an honest archaeologist. He knew that the coins were of minor historical import compared to the vestigial but unmistakeable remains of the 3 m wide, mud-mortared apse of the earliest church (14 m long × 5.5 m wide) within which were discovered fragments of a fresco belonging to its initial decoration.<sup>3</sup> This was a stone building belonging to the tenth or eleven centuries, broadly the age of *incastellamento*.

Scarlino set in motion a field survey of the valley of the Pecora below, as well as investigations of many other hilltop villages that affirmed Riccardo's "Siena model" for village formation in Tuscany.<sup>4</sup> As the decades passed, for Riccardo Scarlino represented the seed where this paradigm was first planted and a place woven with unalloyed joy where in heady summer campaigns he became an international archaeologist as well as the peer of the classical barons. Scarlino was where Italian medieval archaeology lost its innocence.

## Scarlino, forty years on....

Twenty years later, in the early 2000s, air photography revealed a remarkable triple-ditched site on the coastal plain immediately below Scarlino (Fig. 6). Christened La Castellina rather than Vetricella, the location itself, this site once lay close to the inner edge of the reclaimed Follonica lagoon and close to the Via Aurelia. Its location



► Fig. 6. Air photograph taken by Stefano Campana of "La Castellina", Vetricella (courtesy of the nEU-Med project, University of Siena)

suggested it might be Roman in date, while its form, confirmed by field survey, showed it to be an undocumented ninth to tenth-century site.

Riccardo tacitly dismissed it as an aberration as far as the “Siena model” (for village formation) was concerned. After all, this unusual site possessed no memory either historical or archaeological. The first excavations in the autumn after Riccardo’s untimely death suggested it might be an early (feudal) castle of the kind found in the late Carolingian age in the lower Rhineland.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation, however, has now been completely revised as an ERC project has provided the opportunity to understand this place in its broader spatial context, leading to a reconsideration of the discoveries on the hilltop of Scarlino, above.<sup>6</sup>

Vetricella encompasses four phases dating between the seventh and eleventh centuries. The earliest seventh-to-ninth-century phase was poor in material, and possibly a minor landing point of a periodic nature close to the lagoon. The presence of this landing point was perhaps the motive for creating phase two, consisting of the three concentric ditches within which a masonry tower was constructed in the mid- to later ninth century. The concentric ditches were excavated from a notional compass point at intervals of 44, 88 and 132 Liutprand (early medieval [Lombard]) feet, an enigmatic model of architectural ambition.<sup>7</sup> At the same time the river Pecora was canalized and new crops were introduced upstream.

Vetricella’s tower remained at the center of this place as the ditches filled in during the tenth century, while forges for making iron tools were created (over 1300 iron objects have been found), and in time an unusual cemetery of children and men was established on the east side of the site. No obvious church has yet been identified. Extraordinarily rich in material culture, Vetricella was abandoned in the second quarter of the eleventh century as new villages like Scarlino defined themselves as places with the erection of churches and as the new town of Massa Marittima became a bishopric with the acquisition of St. Cerbone’s relics.<sup>8</sup>

How Riccardo Francovich would have loved the challenge posed by a new generation of scientifically trained archaeologists. A major non-place, Vetricella, poses questions about the introduction of rural management and village formation be-

tween the seventh and eleventh centuries. The discovery of an Etruscan bronze figurine and an Egyptian scarab at Vetricella do not obfuscate the fact that this site was short-lived and without ancient roots. Once a new order had been successfully established in villages like Scarlino, Vetricella’s *raison d’être* apparently ceased.

Excavations at Vetricella and the accompanying research in the Pecora valley are not yet completed. This project reveals a settlement episode that was driven by the late/post-Carolingian elite, who in time transferred their patronage to new places in the eleventh century as the Mediterranean economy revived around AD 1000. The project also reveals that without understanding the spatial dynamics of the past, making sense of a place, even with memory, is only part of a complex, evolving regional picture. What began at Scarlino in the late 1970s as an exploration of a prominent village has, with Riccardo’s enduring legacy, become an incipient model for the beginnings of feudalism in Central Italy.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Riccardo Francovich, “Changing Patterns of Settlements,” in *Italy in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Cristina La Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144–167.
- <sup>2</sup> Emanuele Vaccaro, “Long-distance Ceramic Connections: *Portus Scabri* (Portigliotti-GR), Coastal Tuscany and the Tyrrhenian Sea,” in *Origins of a New Economic Union (7th-12th Centuries. Preliminary results of the nEU-Med project: October 2015-March 2017)*, ed. Giovanna Bianchi and Richard Hodges (Florence: Insegna del Giglio, 2018), 81–97.
- <sup>3</sup> Lorenzo Marasco, “La Chiesa della Rocca a Scarlino: dalla *Curtis* al *castello*,” in *Chiese e Insediamenti nei secoli di formazione dei paesaggi medievali della Toscana (V-X secolo)*, ed. Stefano Campana, Cristina Felici, Riccardo Francovich, and Fabio Gabbriellini (Florence: Insegna del Giglio, 2008), 147–168.
- <sup>4</sup> Riccardo Francovich and Richard Hodges, *Villa to Village* (London: Duckworth, 2003).
- <sup>5</sup> Lorenzo Marasco, “La Castellino di Scarlino e le fortificazioni di terra nelle pianure costiere della Maremma settentrionale,” *Archeologia Medievale* 34 (2013): 57–69.
- <sup>6</sup> The nEU-Med project is part of the Advanced Category (no. 670792) in the EU’s Horizon 2020 initiative. For preliminary results see; Bianchi and Hodges, *Origins of a New Economic Union*.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Paolo Squatriti, “Digging Ditches in Early Medieval Europe,” *Past and Present* 176 (2002): 11–65.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Pierre Toubert, *Les Structures du latium Médiéval. Le latium Méridional et le Sabine du IX<sup>e</sup> Siècle à la Fin du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Rome: L’École Française de Rome, 1973), 859–867.
- <sup>9</sup> My thanks to Giovanna Bianchi, Lorenzo Marasco, and John Moreland for kindly reading a draft of this essay.