CHAPTER 5

The Insula Equilus: A Lagoon Community in the Early Middle Ages

Silvia Cadamuro, Alessandra Cianciosi and Claudio Negrelli*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the preliminary results of an ongoing archaeological project that started in 2011, through a survey in the countryside around the present-day town of Jesolo (NE Italy). This project, led by Prof. Sauro Gelichi, focuses on the archaeological site of the ancient Jesolo-Equilo. Its location is attested by the presence of a Romanesque cathedral built over two older churches, and an early medieval monastery, San Mauro, founded probably in the 9th century¹ (both sites were excavated during the second half of the 20th century).

The archaeological survey was conducted by an interdisciplinary team composed of archaeologists and geologists. The goal of this research was not only to identify the ancient settlement, but also to recreate the past environment and its historical transformations.² Today the site is located inland, but during the Roman period and Middle Ages it was an island, and its importance is strictly related to the development of the Venice lagoon during Late Antiquity.³

After three seasons of excavation (2013–2015) in the area between the cathedral and the monastery, we have collected a large amount of data regarding the

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1 We have little information about this monastery: Wladimiro Dorigo, Venezie sepolte nella terra del Piave. Duemila anni fra il dolce e il salso (Rome, 1994), pp. 157–160.

2 See in this volume the important results of this interdisciplinary approach for the environmental study in the southern lagoon by Elisa Corrò, Cecilia Moine, and Sandra Primon.

period spanning the 4th to 7th centuries. The case of Jesolo is a clear example of how the interdisciplinary approach that we used, encompassing the study of the archaeological and geological records, can contribute to the historical interpretation of the site in relation to the development of coastal settlements in the northern Adriatic basin. In addition, the good degree of preservation of the archaeological deposits and the large surface area that was exposed allowed a wider perspective of research⁴ (Fig. 5.1).

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4 Part of this paper has been already been published in Italian: Silvia Cadamuro, Alessandra Cianciosi, and Claudio Negrelli, “Nuove comunità lagunari tra l’età di transizione e l’altomedioevo: i casi di Jesolo e Cittanova,” Reti Medievali Rivista 16–2 (2015), pp. 151–195. For more information regarding the preliminary results of this project, see also Sauro Gelichi, Silvia Cadamuro, Alessandra Cianciosi, and Claudio Negrelli, “Vivere la laguna nella Tarda Antichità: il caso di Equilo,” Notizie di Archeologia del Veneto 2 (2013), pp. 82–90.