

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

Case history: a magnetic and GPR prospection on a Roman rural villa in western Piedmont (Italy)

This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/150818> since

Publisher:

Stella Arti Grafiche

Terms of use:

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)



GRUPPO NAZIONALE DI GEOFISICA DELLA TERRA SOLIDA

Atti del 33° Convegno Nazionale

Tema 3: Geofisica applicata

Bologna, 25-27 novembre 2014
Palazzo della Regione



ISTITUTO NAZIONALE DI
OCEANOGRAFIA E DI
GEOFISICA SPERIMENTALE



14° Convegno Nazionale



SERVIZIO GEOLOGICO, SISMICO E DEI SUOLI

CASE HISTORY: A MAGNETIC AND GPR PROSPECTION ON A ROMAN RURAL VILLA IN WESTERN PIEDMONT (ITALY)

L. Sambuelli¹, D. Elia², V. Meirano², C. Colombero³

¹ Dipartimento di Ingegneria dell'ambiente, del Territorio e delle Infrastrutture – Politecnico di Torino, Italy

² Dipartimento di Studi Storici – Università di Torino, Italy

³ Dipartimento di Scienze della Terra – Università di Torino, Italy

Foreword. Since the half of the past century the use of geophysical methods for archaeological prospection has been proposed (Segre, 1958; Rees, 1962). However only in the few past decades the evolution of theory, software and instrumentation has allowed for the possibility of adopting multi methods prospection with reasonable execution times and costs. New technologies, such as ERT and GPR, have been added to the traditional ones (Pasquinucci and Trément, 2000; Gaffney and Gater, 2003). On the occasion of exploring an archaeological site in western Piedmont, we then decided to proceed to a multimethod survey using fast methods and taking also into account the information achievable after a 2D or 3D data processing and/or rendering. This choice restricted the methodologies to magnetic and GPR prospecting. The non contact resistance imaging, in our opinion, still gives too smeared results even if indicative of resistivity anomalies. We selected the magnetic prospecting because of the remarkable size of some of the walls actually excavated even if, as we explain in the geological context, the probability of collecting a significant amount of noise was high.

The geological context. The village of Costigliole Saluzzo (CN) is located in north-western Italy, at the end of the Varaita Valley, at the edge between north-western Alps and the wide piedmont's plain. The Varaita Valley elongates in WE direction from the Monviso Massif and the administrative border with France (Fig. 1).

From a geological point of view, two main tectono-metamorphic units outcrop in this area: the Dora-Maira Massif, in the lower part of the valley, and the Piedmontese Zone with the Monviso Ophiolitic Massif in the upper part, from the town of Sampeyre to France.

The Dora-Maira Massif is a continental crust unit mainly constituted by ercinic and pre-ercinic methamorphites (mainly gneiss and micascists). On the other hand, the upper part of the valley is characterized by oceanic lithologies (Calcescists with Green Stones, Jurassic-Cretaceous) overthrust on the Dora-Maira Unit. The Monviso ophiolite complex is a north-trending body, 35 km long and up to 8 km wide, sandwiched structurally between the underlying Dora-Maira thrust units and the tectonically higher, dominantly metasedimentary, units of the Piedmontese Zone (Lombardo *et al.*, 2002).

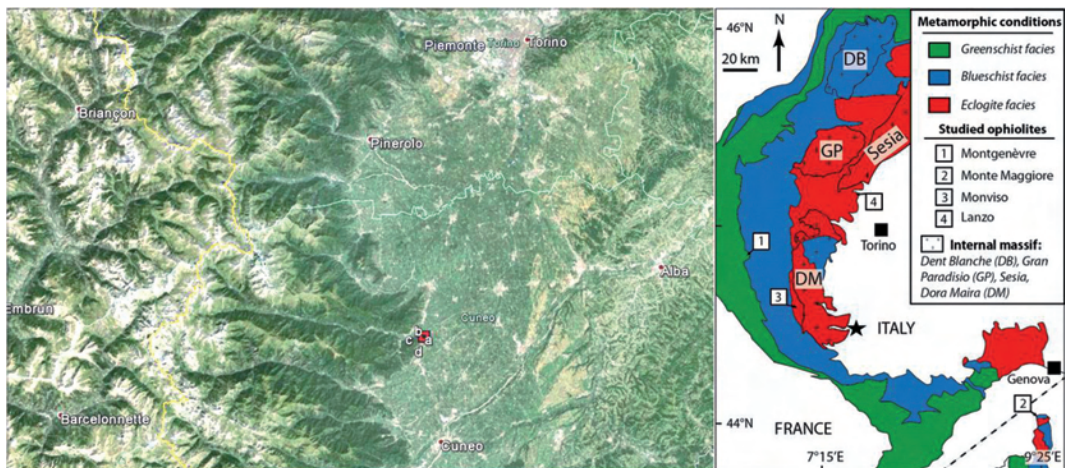


Fig. 1 – On the left the geographical location of the archaeological site: the white letters refer to the surveyed area. On the right the geological map of western Alps; the black star refers to the surveyed area.

The municipal area of Costigliole Saluzzo mainly lies on quaternary deposits mainly consisting of fluvio-glacial and fluvial sediments (Pleistocene-Holocene) of the big alluvial fan apparatus of the Varaita River that opens towards the plain with slight slope (about 1%). The deposits are mainly made by medium-to-coarse gravels with a sandy matrix and a wide variety of pebbles and blocks of variable size, resulting from the erosion of the lithologies of the whole valley, can also be found.

The alluvial deposits in the archaeological site show on the surface the presence of centimetric to decimetric pebbles. In the exploratory trenches and excavations, however, the soil seems mainly consisting of silt and clay down to about 3 m. Therefore most of the pebbles are likely due to the destruction of the ancient walls and structures. The Roman remain walls, in fact, are largely made up of these natural pebbles and blocks. From a visual expeditious analysis on the field, the pebble lithology is largely represented by serpentinites and metabasites, probably outcoming from the Monviso Massif. Monviso serpentinites consist of antigorite and magnetite, with subordinate brucite, Mg-chlorite, tremolite, diopside, Ti-clinohumite and haematite (Balestro *et al.*, 2011; Castelli and Compagnoni, 2007). Magnetite grains are generally heterogeneously distributed in the serpentine matrix but locally they appear aligned to form thin bands that cross rocks following preferential directions (Compagnoni and Fiora, 1976). Geochemical analysis of the bulk rock composition shows a very high percentage of iron oxides, variable from 6% to more than 13% (Hattori and Guillot, 2007).

The archaeological context. The ruins of a wide *villa rustica* (Fig. 2) belonging to the Roman imperial period (Ist to IIIrd centuries AD) were unearthed by the University of Turin at the southern periphery of modern Costigliole Saluzzo and are still under excavation (Barra Bagnasco, 2003, 2005; Barra Bagnasco and Elia, 2007; Elia and Meirano, 2008, 2008-2009, 2012a, 2012b; Elia, *et al.*, 2013). After the destruction and the abandonment of the settlement, an occupation of the site is attested during the late-antique period (IVth-Vth centuries AD). The area, showing structures and erratic ancient materials, extends over ca 3 hectares. Measuring ca 56 x 85 m in its major phase, the main building reaches an extent of around 5000 m².

The explorations carried out in the last few years allow for the identification of a “U-shaped” villa characterized by a clearly-defined plan which represents an *unicum* in western *Gallia Cisalpina* so far. The evidence recovered supports the identification of the functions of the different sections of the building, with regard to both the *pars rustica* and the *pars urbana*. The main body is situated in the eastern part and shows an anomalous extent for this kind of buildings. The western part consists in a wide court (more than 1200 m²) delimited by two long wings. These wings were destined to stocking agricultural products and to housing the



Fig. 2 – Plan of the villa (left) and picture of the walls unearthed after earlier excavation campaigns (right).

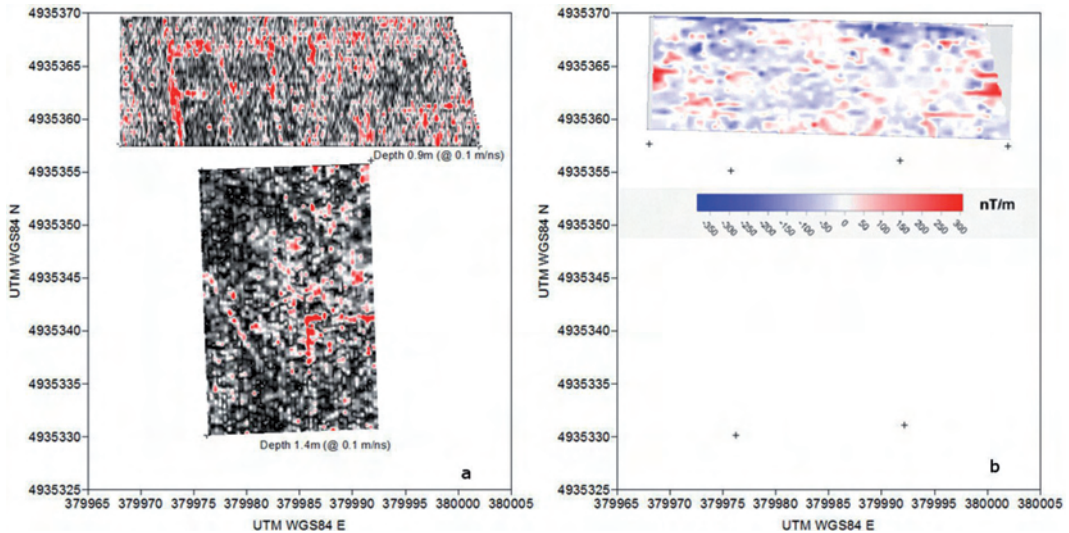


Fig. 3 – a) GPR timeslices on the south and north areas. b) Map of the vertical gradient of the TMF. Near the northern side of the area a metallic fence, that could not be removed, strongly influenced the measurements.

productive units (namely, a wine press room), while the central body had a residential function. The villa also shows a southern area including a small paved court which probably acted as a *taberna deversoria* for housing merchants and voyagers travelling on the way to ancient Gallia. The building had a water supply line and a sewer system.

The walls of the *villa* show socles in *opus caementicium* or dry rubble with pebbles and fragmentary tiles and bricks, while the elevations were basically in perishable materials, like sun-dried bricks, pisé or *opus craticium*. The roofs, sometimes covering wide surfaces, were made of large rectangular tiles and cover-tiles.

The building complex described is the result of a long series of enlargements and modifications, starting during the Augustan period.

Near the main construction, other contemporary buildings are known, probable dependencies to the *villa*. The characteristics and destination of these partially explored evidences are still under evaluation. The geophysical investigation programme started from the immediate surroundings of some of these structures, south of the "trincea F" (north area). Moreover, to test the effectiveness of the methods in the given geological context, another area was selected for a blind test (south area) where some structures were already unearthed and later covered.

Data acquisition and processing. We made the survey on two areas within the archaeological site: the North area and the south area (Fig. 3). In the north area, on May 2014, we made both a magnetic and GPR survey while in the south area only a GPR survey was performed on July 2014, after the processing of North area data which lead us to exclude the magnetic method.

In the North area we used a Radar K2 from IDS with a 500 MHz IDS antenna. On the whole we made 31 profiles, each one about 32 m long. The profile interval was 0.4m while the trace interval was 0.035 m. The trace's length was 50 ns and they were digitized with 512 samples. All the profiles show, on average, a quite broad band spectrum with a -3dB band ranging from 200 to 700 MHz. Raw radargrams showed a lot of clutters and there were no evidences of clear coherent reflections in the x-twt domain. The processing flow was very reduced and it consisted of: move start time, to set properly the zero time; dewow to remove low frequency effects and a non linear manual gain, increasing with time, to recover energy in the deeper radar section. Time slices, on the envelope of the Hilbert transform of the radargrams, have then been made summing up the samples over 1 ns window length.

In the north area we also made a magnetic survey with a GSM-19GF Overhauser magnetometer in walk-grad mode, setting an acquisition frequency of 2 readings/s. Both the total magnetic field (TMF) and the vertical gradient of the TMF were acquired with lower and upper sensors at 0.2m and 0.8 m above the ground respectively. On the whole we acquired 5093 raw readings along 51 profiles with a profile interval of 0.2 m. A further interpolation showed that, along any profile, on average, we had a 0.3 m reading interval. After outliers rejection and bad quality data removal we worked on 4647 readings. Data were then destriped and the gradient and TMF maps were obtained with a triangular interpolation.

In the south area we used a Radar K2 from IDS with a 200 MHz GSSI antenna. On the whole we made 41 profiles, each one about 25 m long. The profile interval was 0.25 m while the trace interval was 0.075 m. The trace's length was 100 ns and they were digitized with 512 samples. All the profiles show, on average, a spectrum with a -3dB band ranging from 100 to 250 MHz. Raw radargrams showed again a lot of clutters and there were no or little evidences of clear coherent reflections in the x-twt domain. The processing was reduced and it consisted of: move start time, to set properly the zero time; dewow to remove low frequency effects; a Butterworth 4 poles bandpass filter (100-500 MHz); a non linear manual gain, increasing with time, to recover energy in the deeper radar section and a time cut to 50 ns. The choice of the filter bandwidth, larger than the -3dB band, has been done to preserve shorter wavelets. Indeed in the average spectrum there is still a platform of energy at -9dB up to about 600 MHz, Time slices, on the envelope of the Hilbert transform of the radargrams, have then been made summing up the samples over 2 ns window length.

Results. Results are shown in Figs. 3a and 3b.

The vertical gradient map, as the total field one, is noisy and it is likely pervasively influenced by the serpentine pebbles and blocks. A simulation run with the software POTENSOFT (Ozgu Arisoy and Dikmen, 2011) showed that a cube having 0.2 m side with a magnetic susceptibility of 0.05 (SI), 0.2 m below the lower sensor, gives a total field and an vertical gradient anomaly compatible, both in amplitude and wavelength, with some of the high spots found in the field. Such a spread noise hinder the recognition of any alignment. The magnetic map does not seem to have any relation with the underlying structures revealed by the GPR despite the noticeable size of the structures themselves. It should however be observed that the walls are built randomly assembling blocks of serpentine and other lithologies in such a way that they might also give a magnetic signal similar to an incoherent noise. In every GPR time slice clutters are thoroughly in evidence. All the top of the walls are very irregular and there are not flat surfaces in agreement with the ones already dug up. Clutters concentration between and aside the walls let us suppose that there could be a remarkable amount of ruined material. The tops of reflecting walls in the North area are more shallow than the one in the South area. A long diagonal reflecting body, with an incoherent direction with respect to the others, appears in the western part of the South area. Looking at raw data both magnetic and GPR surveys failed to find any structure. Only time slice processing of GPR data revealed a frame of buried walls limiting rooms with dimensions comparable to the ones already dug up.

Comments and conclusions. Once again this case history pointed out the importance of the information on the target and surrounding environment materials in the early stage of the design of a geophysical prospection (Sambuelli and Strobba, 2002). The results of the prospection allow for important preliminary evaluations concerning an unexplored area and are crucial in order to plan further excavations. In this area, anomalies showing straight lines have emerged, which confidently belong to two different buildings. The North area, in particular, shows the south continuation of two parallel structures already unearthed in trench F for a very short part. They respectively correspond to the outer west wall and to a inner wall of the same building and they both can be traced for more than 12 m. Other structures, approximately perpendicular to these ones, apparently delimitate two rows of quadrangular rooms showing recurrent dimensions (4-5 m). Further anomalies in the south-east corner of the North area and

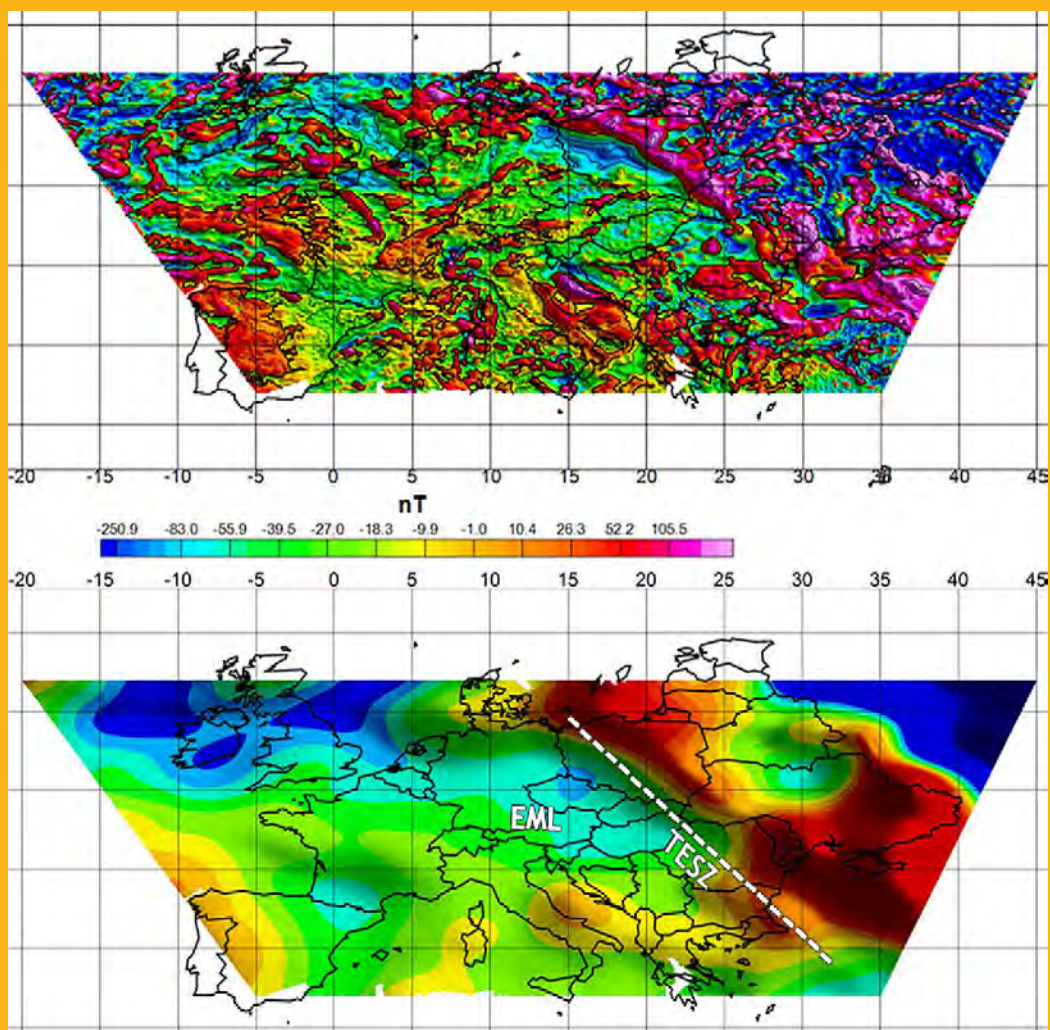
in north-east corner of the South area are probably related to a second building. Short parts of east-west orientated walls belonging to this construction had already emerged in a limited sounding made in the modern irrigation canal crossing the archaeological area. In this case, the presence of a rectangular building (11 x 7 m) can be inferred.

At this stage of research, prospection allows for a better knowledge of the dependencies of the villa in the area north to the main building, and offers new data about the extent and inner plan of these constructions, which will be verified by means of further archaeological investigations.

Acknowledgements. The Authors would like to thank Diego Franco and the students of the Ph. D. course on “Theory and application of GPR” for the help in data acquisition. The logistic support of the municipality of Costigliole Saluzzo is also gratefully acknowledged.

References

- Balestro G., Fioraso G. and Lombardo B.; 2011: Geological map of the upper Pellice Valley (Italian Western Alps). *Journal of Maps*, 2011, pp. 637-654, doi:10.4113/jom.2011.1213.
- Barra Bagnasco M.; 2003: Recenti indagini a Costigliole Saluzzo (CN): una nota. *Orizzonti. Rassegna di Archeologia*, IV, pp. 33-42.
- Barra Bagnasco M.; 2005: Nuovi documenti romani nel Cuneese occidentale: Costigliole Saluzzo. In Sapelli Ragni M. (ed.), *Studi di Archeologia in memoria di Liliana Mercado*. Torino, pp. 19-31.
- Barra Bagnasco M. and Elia D.; 2007: Un contributo alla conoscenza della romanizzazione del Piemonte: l'insediamento di Costigliole Saluzzo. In Brecciaroli Taborelli (ed.), *Forme e tempi dell'urbanizzazione nella Cisalpina (II secolo a.C.-I secolo d.C.)*, Atti delle giornate di Studio, Torino 4-6 maggio 2006. **Borgo S. Lorenzo**, pp. 275-282.
- Castelli D. and Compagnoni R.; 2007: Guide-book to the pre-Conference Field Excursion on HP Monviso metaophiolites and UHP Dora-Maira continental rocks (Western Alps). *Quaderni di Geodinamica Alpina e Quaternaria*, 9, pp. 1-33.
- Compagnoni R. and Fiora L.; 1976: Sopra una sequenza ofiolitica metamorfica di ultramafiti, gabbrri con layering magmatico e basaliti a pillow nel Massiccio del M. Viso (Alpi Occidentali). *Rendiconti Soc. Italiana di Mineralogia e Petrologia*, 32 (2), pp. 699-714.
- Elia D. and Meirano V.; 2008: Costigliole Saluzzo, loc. Cimitero. Insediamento di età romana. *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte*, 23, pp. 204-207.
- Elia D. and Meirano V.; 2008-2009: Scavi dell'Università di Torino a Costigliole Saluzzo (CN): l'insediamento di età romana in Località Cimitero. *Bollettino della Società Piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti*, LIX-LX, pp. 27-31.
- Elia D. and Meirano V.; 2012a: Costigliole Saluzzo, loc. Cimitero. Insediamento di età romana. *Campagne di scavo 2009-2011. Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte*, 27, 2012, pp. 218-224.
- Elia D. and Meirano V.; 2012b: La villa di Costigliole Saluzzo (CN). Contributo alla conoscenza del territorio piemontese in età romana. *Orizzonti. Rassegna di Archeologia*, XIII, pp. 43-65.
- Elia D., Meirano V., and Russo D. 2013: Costigliole Saluzzo, località Cimitero. Insediamento di età romana. Interventi di scavo e di restauro: campagna 2012, *Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte*, 28, pp. 220-223.
- Gaffney G. and Gater J.; 2003: *Revealing the buried past: geophysics for archaeologists*. Tempus Publishing, Gloucestershire, 192 pp.
- Hattori K.H. and Guillot S.; 2007: Geochemical character of serpentinites associated with high-to ultrahigh-pressure metamorphic rocks in the Alps, Cuba, and the Himalayas: Recycling of elements in subduction zones. *Geochemistry Geophysics Geosystems*, 8 (9), Q09010, doi:10.1029/2007GC001594.
- Lombardo B., Rubatto D. and Castelli D.; 2002: Ion microprobe U-Pb dating of Zircon from Monviso Metaplagiogrante: implications for the evolution of the Piedmont-Liguria Tethys in the Western Alps. *Ophioliti*, 27 (2), pp. 109-117.
- Ozgu Arisoy M. and Dikmen U.; 2011: Potensoft: MATLAB based software for potential field data processing, modeling and mapping. *Computer & Geoscience*, 37, pp. 935-942.
- Pasquinucci M. and Trément F.; 2000: *Non-destructive techniques applied to landscape archaeology*. Oxbow Books, Oxford, 276 pp.
- Rees A. I.; 1962: *Electrical prospecting method in archaeology*, Antiquity, n.36, Cambridge.
- Sambuelli L. and Strobbia C.; 2002: The Buffon needle problem and the design of a geophysical survey. *Geophysical prospecting*, 50, 4, pp. 403-409.
- Segre E.; 1958: *Mezzi tecnici ausiliari nella prospezione archeologica*: Lerici, Roma



con la sponsorizzazione di:



14° Convegno Nazionale



CODEVINTEC
Tecnologie per le Scienze della Terra



volume

raccolta

ISBN 978-88-940442-3-2

ISBN 978-88-940442-0-1