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MAN OR NATURE? THE ROLE OF NATURAL EVENTS IN THE ABANDONING OF THE ROMAN TOWN OF CARSULAE (TIBER BASIN ITALY)

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The Roman town of Carsulae was founded after the construction of the “Flaminia Road“, whose track was studied by Caius Flaminius between 220 and the 219 B.C. It was realized with the aim to connect Rome with the Adriatic coast. Probably arisen from the union of several communities, its importance, testified since the 1st century B.C. by Strabo, Pliny the Younger and Tacit, was related to its excellent and elevated geographical position, which allowed for the control over the vast underlying lowlands, characterized by abundance of fertile soil and healthy waters. The town, built-up over a wide travertine deposit, is located at the bottom of the Martani Ridge at an altitude of about 500 m a.s.l., north of Terni (Tiber river basin). The history of Carsulae is poorly documented and there are few information on the period after its maximum development and, especially, on the causes that led to the progressive abandonment of the town. Historical sources attributed the progressive decline of Carsulae, mainly to the construction of a new track of the Flaminia Road and, moreover, to strong earthquakes that almost entirely destroyed the town: recent studies, based on historical seismicity, only partially support such hypothesis. The present study evidenced traces of past intense geomorphological processes, some of which are still active. Although at the time it is not possible to perform an absolute dating of the phenomena described, the correspondence between some historical and geomorphological evidences can be indicative of the occurrence of events and processes that have had a negative effect on the development and persistence of the town of Carsulae. The present state of knowledge allows to suggest, among the possible causes of progressive decline and desertion of the town, also the recurrence of natural events and a progressive worsening of the same environmental conditions that favoured its birth and development.

