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# Farms, villas, and villages in late roman Sicily: a subregional approach to the landscape evolution

Fabrizio Ducati

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ARCHAEOLOGY  
Faculty of Arts  
Charles University

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# Farms, villas and villages in late Roman Sicily

## A subregional approach to the landscape evolution



Fabrizio Ducati

9 November 2022

Building D, 2nd floor, lecture room, Kampus Hybernská



BY

# Today, we will discuss

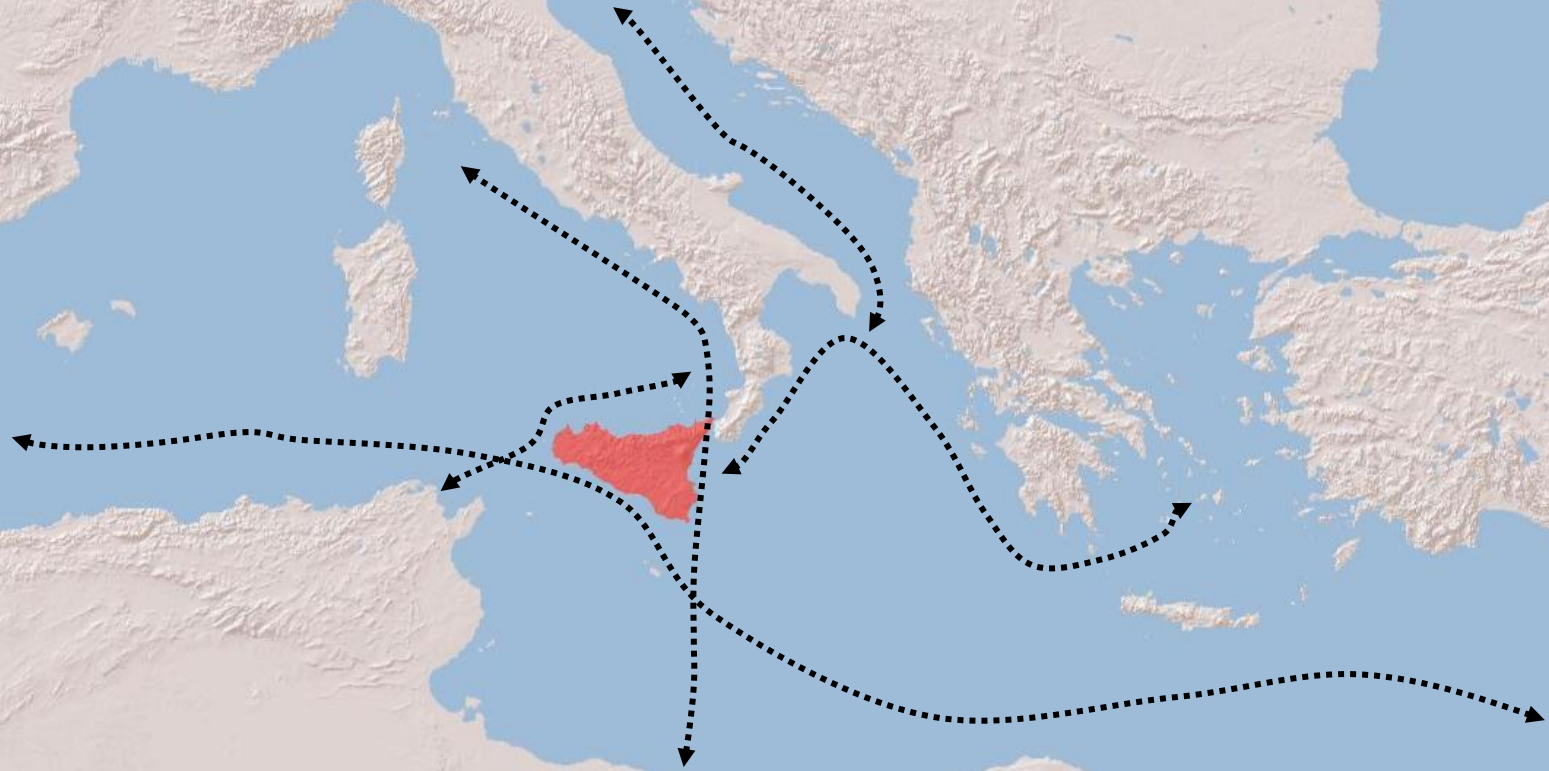
1. Sicily as Mediterranean linchpin during the Roman time
2. Cereals, wine, oil and much more: the wealth of Roman Sicily
3. Landscape in evolution
  - I. The crisis of minor rural settlements during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD
  - II. The rise of luxury villas during the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD
  - III. Sprawling agricultural villages between 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD
4. Some conclusive remarks

**Let's start**

# Chapter 1

Sicily as Mediterranean linchpin during the Roman time

# Sicily is a Mediterranean crossroad



for goods, people and ideas moving along long-standing routes

# It is a strategic island

**Sicilian Channel: 145 Km**  
**Strait of Messina: 3,14 Km**

Strait of Messina



Sicilian Channel

**It is a strategic island**

● Rome

Carthage

● Syracuse

**long contested by the great Mediterranean powers**

## Some meaningful events for Sicily before the Imperial age

**241 BC:** 1<sup>st</sup> Punic War ends. Western Sicily is under Roman control

**211 BC:** Fall of Syracuse. Sicily is totally under Roman control

**210 BC:** M. Valario Levino restores the 'provincia Sicilia'

**42-36 BC:** Civil war. Sicily sided with Sextus Pompey against Octavian

**30 BC:** Conquest of the Egypt. Sicily lost his role in Rome supplies



1<sup>st</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup>

4<sup>th</sup>

5<sup>th</sup>

6<sup>th</sup>

7<sup>th</sup>

**Then, a long period of peace and marginality**

**until the second half of the 3rd century AD**

1<sup>st</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup>

4<sup>th</sup>

5<sup>th</sup>

6<sup>th</sup>

7<sup>th</sup>

**AD 261**

slavish revolt in Sicily?

**AD 332**

Egyptian wheat is diverted to  
Constantinople

**AD 440**

Start of Vandals' raids

**AD 500**

Western Sicily is annexed to the  
Vandal Kingdom of Africa

**AD 535**

Belisarios' reconquers Sicily

## Some crucial events

## Chapter 2

Cereals, wine, oil and much more: the wealth of Roman Sicily





# Wheat

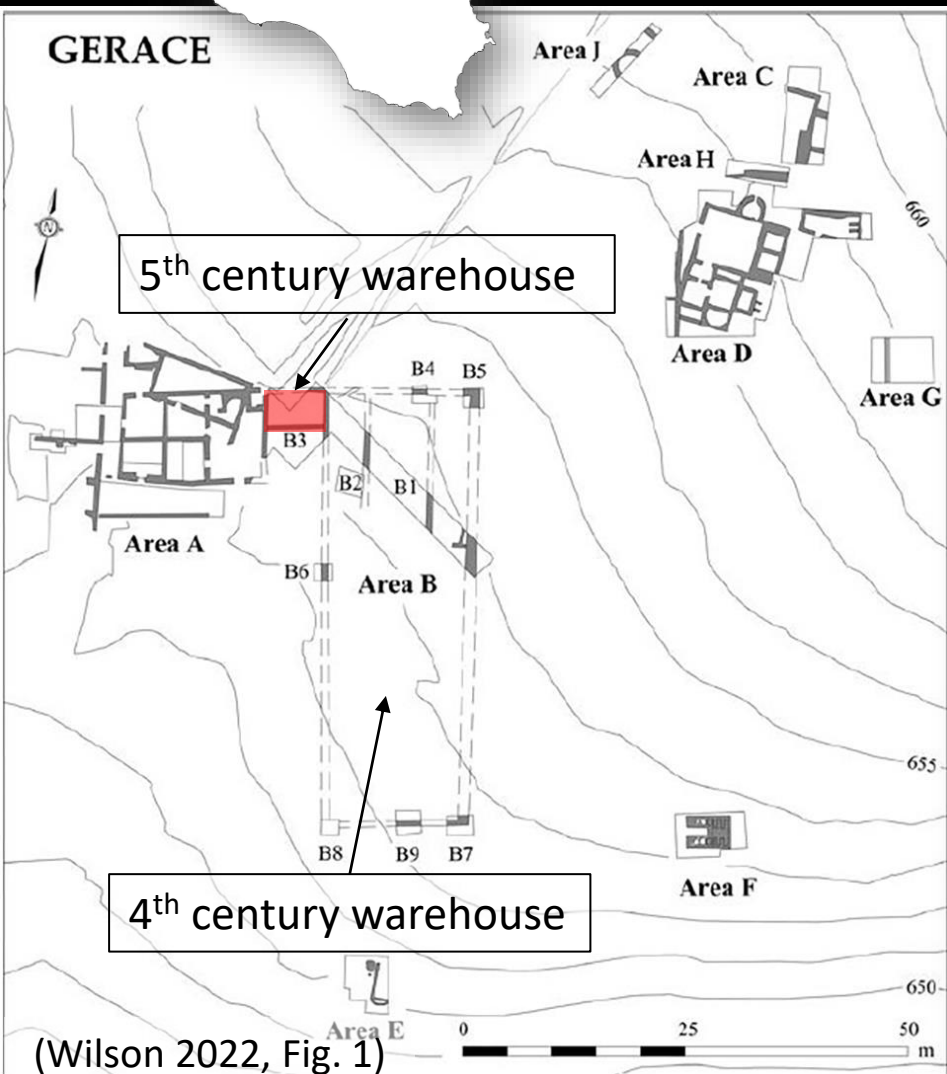




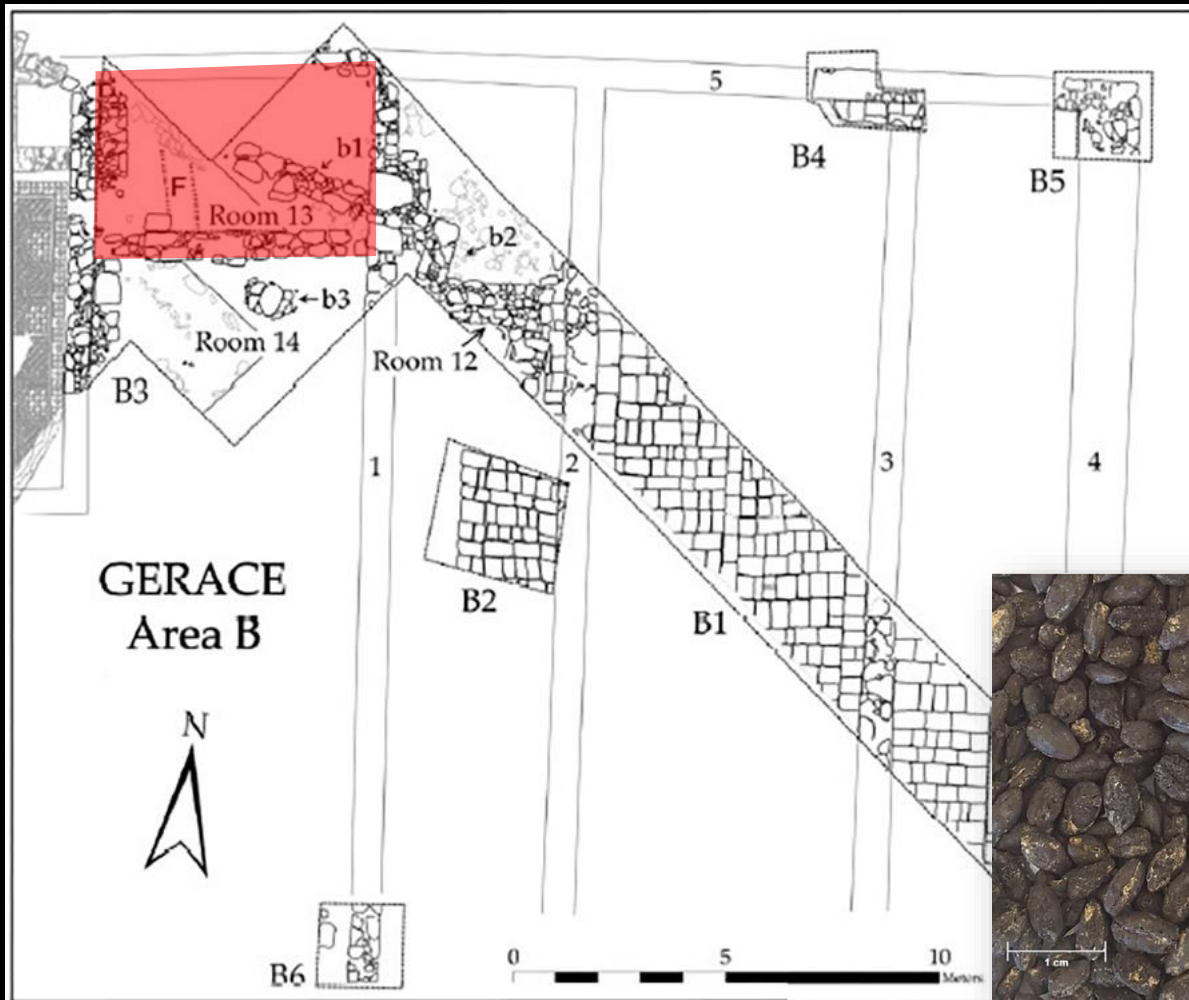
# Gerace:

## A small warehouse destroyed by fire after 450 AD

Gerace



(Wilson 2018, Fig. 4b, 11)



### Charred seeds:

- Barley
- Wheat
- Broad beans
- Lentils
- Peas
- Chickpeas
- Grapes



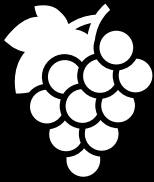


**Wheat**

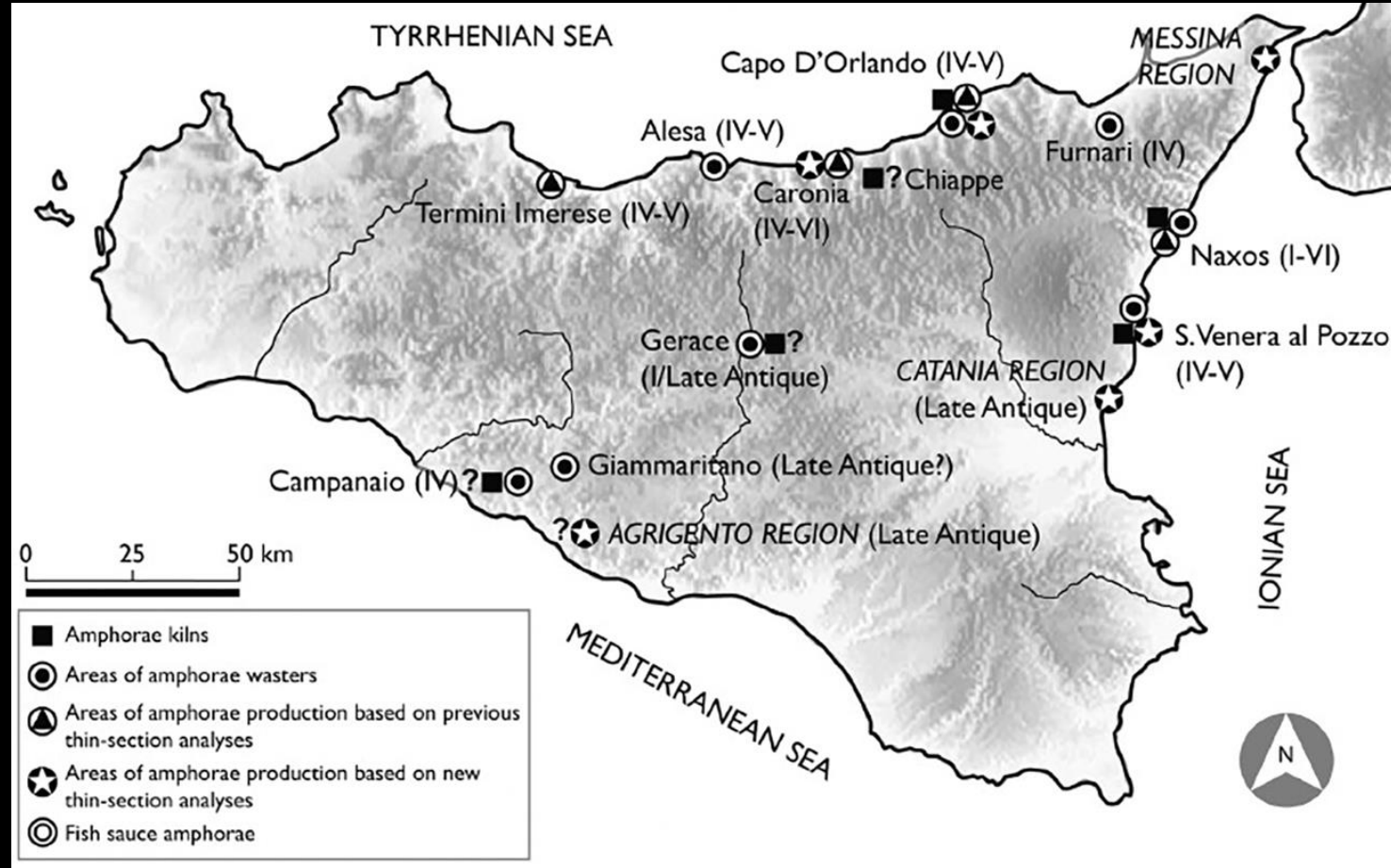
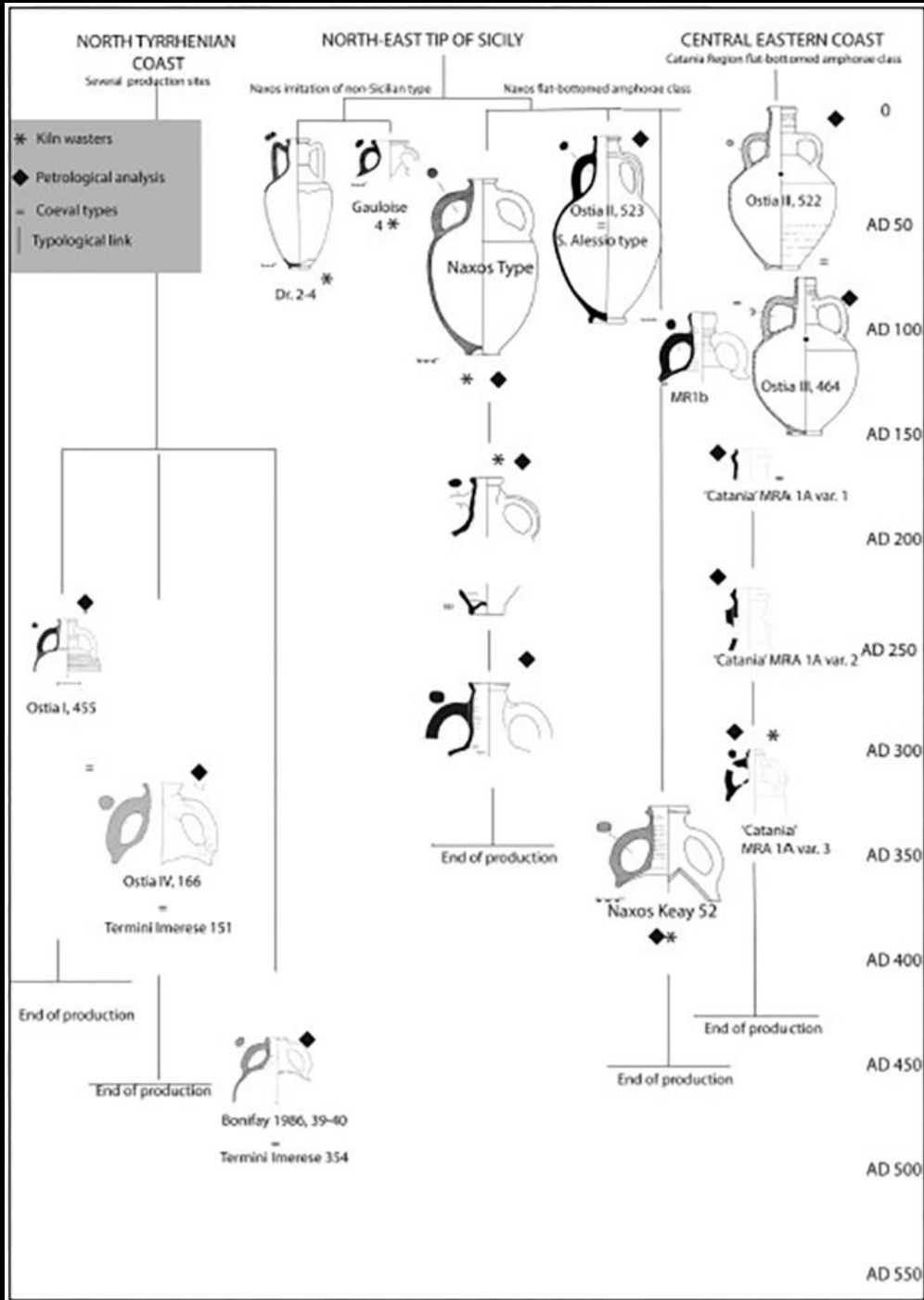


**Wine**



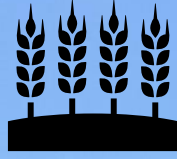


# Sicilian amphorae workshops (1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> century AD)



(Franco & Capelli 2014, Fig. 1-2)





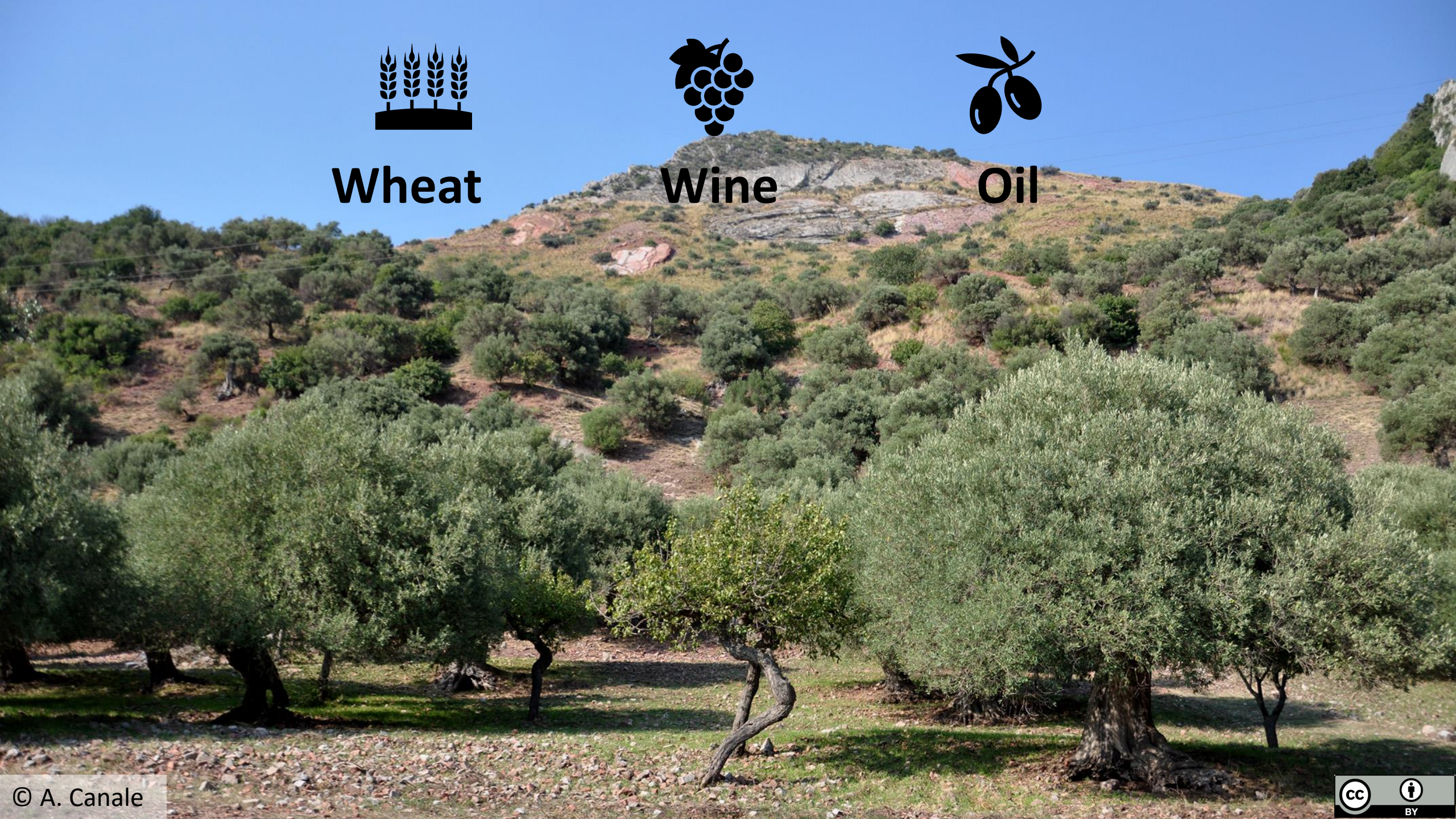
**Wheat**



**Wine**



**Oil**





# Oil industry in southern Sicily

## The Roman settlement at Serra Ciarberi

Serra Ciarberi



Di Stefano 2018, Fig. 3-5



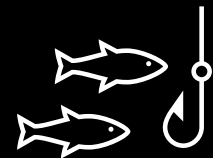
Early imperial age building



Hellenistic



BY



# Fish industry at Porto Palo and Dressel 21-22 amphorae kilns at Alcamo Marina

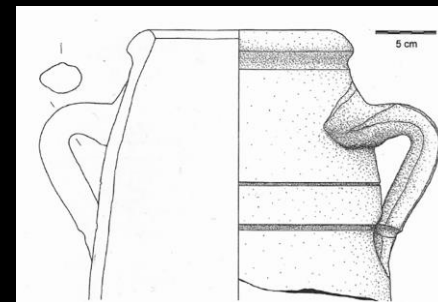
Alcamo Marina

Porto Palo

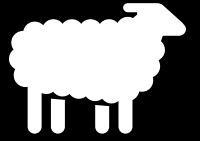
(Malfitana 2022, Fig. 2)



(Giorgetti 2006, Fig. 28, Tav. II, XIIIa, XIVb)

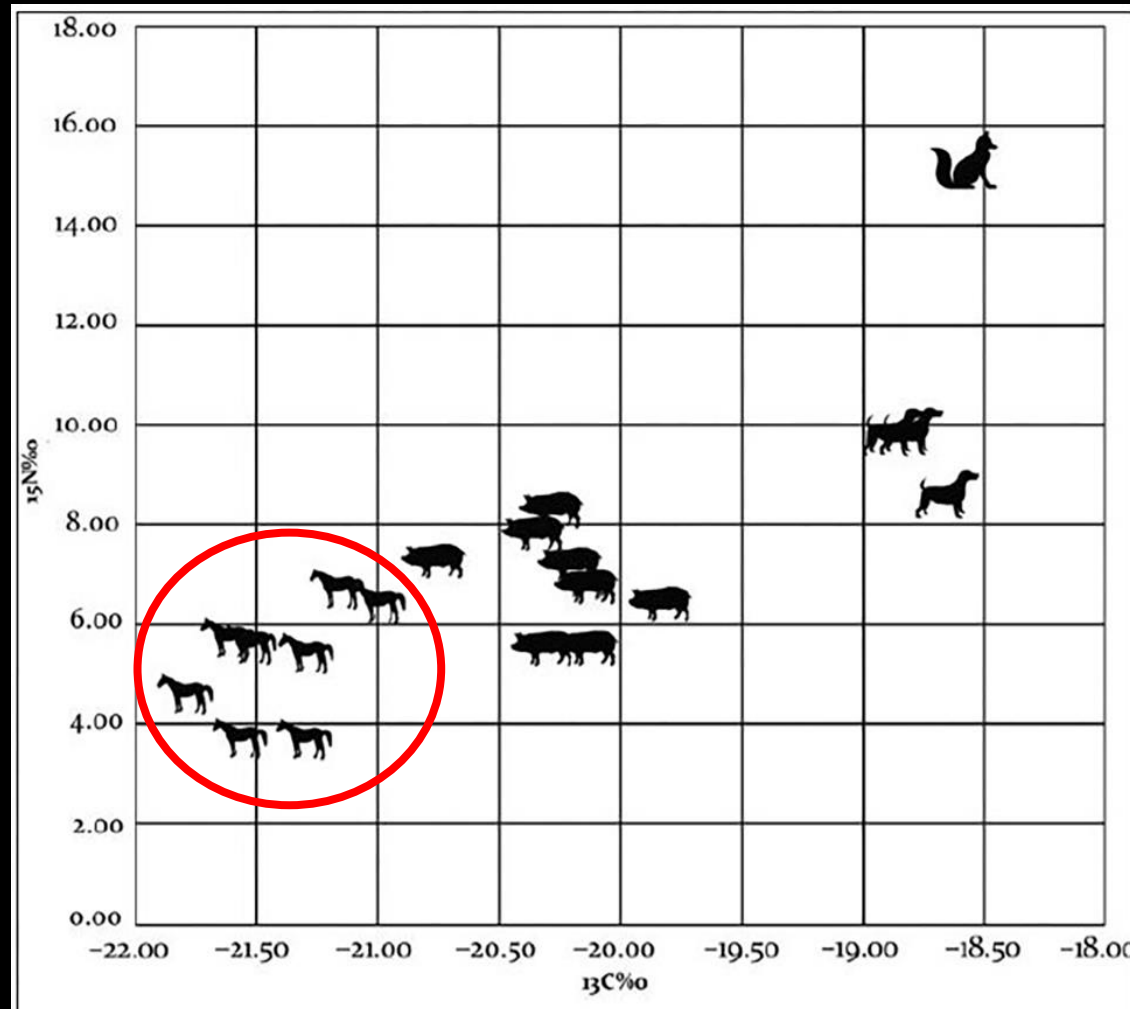


# Farming economy at Gerace: a horse ranch during the Late Antiquity



Gerace

(Wilson 2022, Fig. 48-49, 50)



(Wilson 2018, Fig. 8b-c)



## Minerals

### Rock salt

*In Siciliam flumen est **Himeras**, quod, a fonte cum est progressum, dividitur in duas partes; quae pars profluit contra Etruriam, quod per terrae dulcera secum percurrit, est infinita dulcedine, quae altera parte per eam terram currit, **unde sal foditur**, salsum habet saporem*

Vitr. 8.3.7





Minerals

Rock salt

Sulphur

*in terrae autem reliquis generibus vel maxime mira natura est **sulpuris**, quo plurima domantur. **nascitur in insulis aeoliis inter siciliam et italiam**, quas ardere diximus, sed nobilissimum in melo insula.*

Plin. Nat. 35.63



## Minerals

Rock salt

Sulphur

Gypsum  
*(lapis specularis)*

*et hi quidem sectiles sunt, **specularis** vero, quoniam et hic lapidis nomen optinet, faciliore multo natura finditur in quamlibet tenues crustas. hispania hunc tantum citerior olim dabat [...] iam et cypros et cappadocia et **sicilia** et nuper inventum africa [...]*

Plin. Nat. 36.51

# *Tegulae sulphuris ANNIO RVM* from the hinterland of Agrigento and Roman quarry of *lapis specularis* at Grotta inferno

Grotta inferno

Agrigento



(Gullì et al. 2019, p, 163; Fig. 23-25)

(Polito & Tripodi 2018, p. 26)

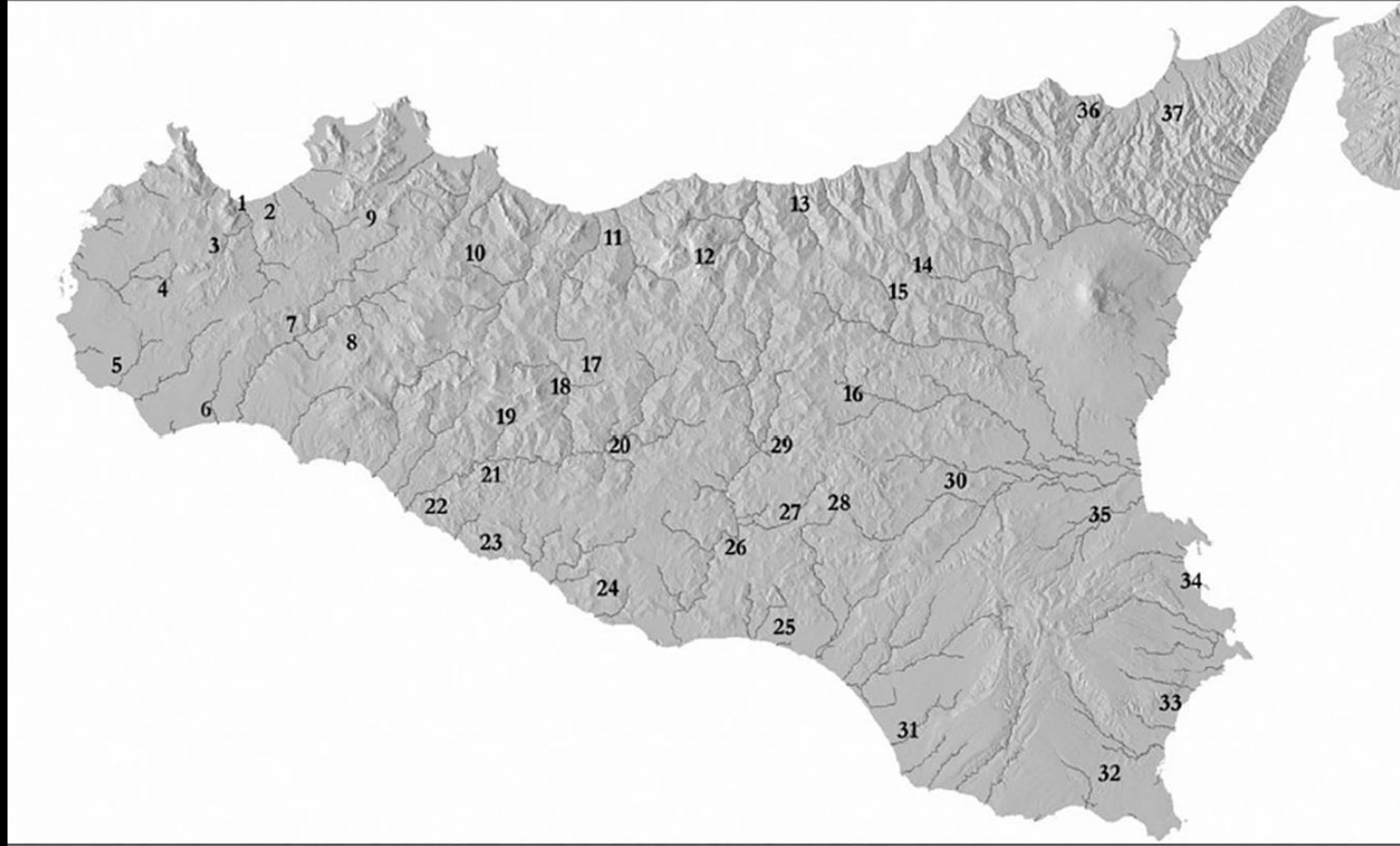




# Chapter 3

Landscape in evolution  
3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century AD

# Some surveyed areas in Sicily

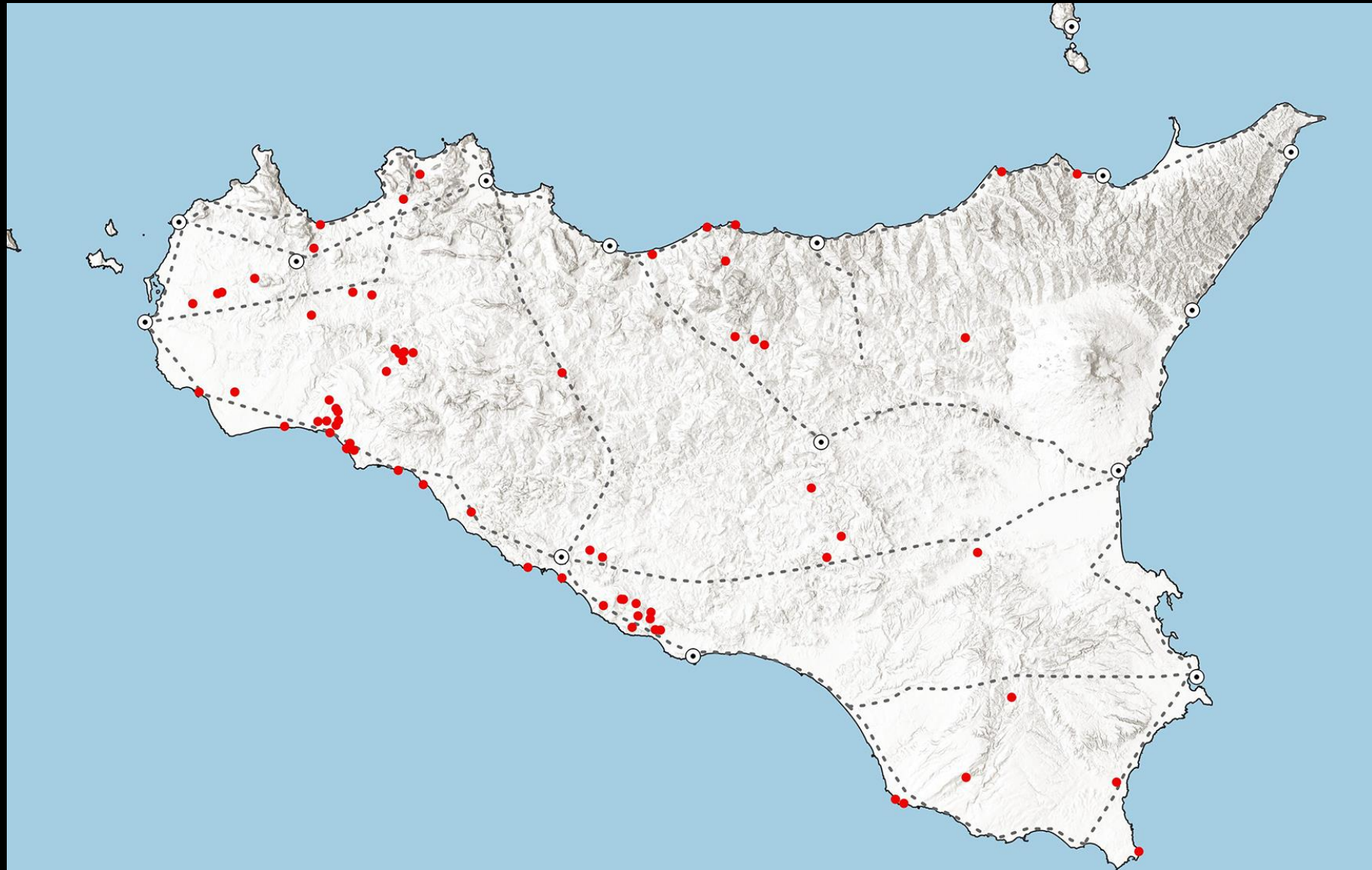


(Burgio 2017, Fig. 1)

1. Castellammare del Golfo; 2. Alcamo; 3. Segesta; 4. Salemi; 5. Marsala-Mazara; 6. Selinunte; 7. Salaparuta; 8. Entella; 9. Monreale; 10. Baucina; 11. Himera; 12. Madonie occidentali; 13. Alesa; 14. Troina; 15. Upper Simeto Valley; 16. Morgantina; 17. Lercara Friddi; 18. Castronovo di Sicilia; 19. Monti Sicani; 20. Medio bacino del Platani; 21. Basso bacino del Platani; 22. Eraklea Minoa; 23. Costa ad Ovest di Agrigento; 24. Cignana; 25. Gela; 26. Medio bacino del Salso; 27. Braemi; 28. Philosophiana; 29. Torcicoda; 30. Gornalunga-Margi; 31. Camarina; 32. Rosolini; 33. Cassibile; 34. Priolo; 35. Lentini; 36. Tindari; 37. Patrì-Rodì Milici

**A complex network  
composed of settlements different in size and functions  
in part existing since the Hellenistic period  
that changes in space and time  
with evident sub-regional differences**

# F. Ducati (ongoing work): mapping rural settlements in late roman Sicily



# F. Ducati (ongoing work): mapping rural settlements in late roman Sicily



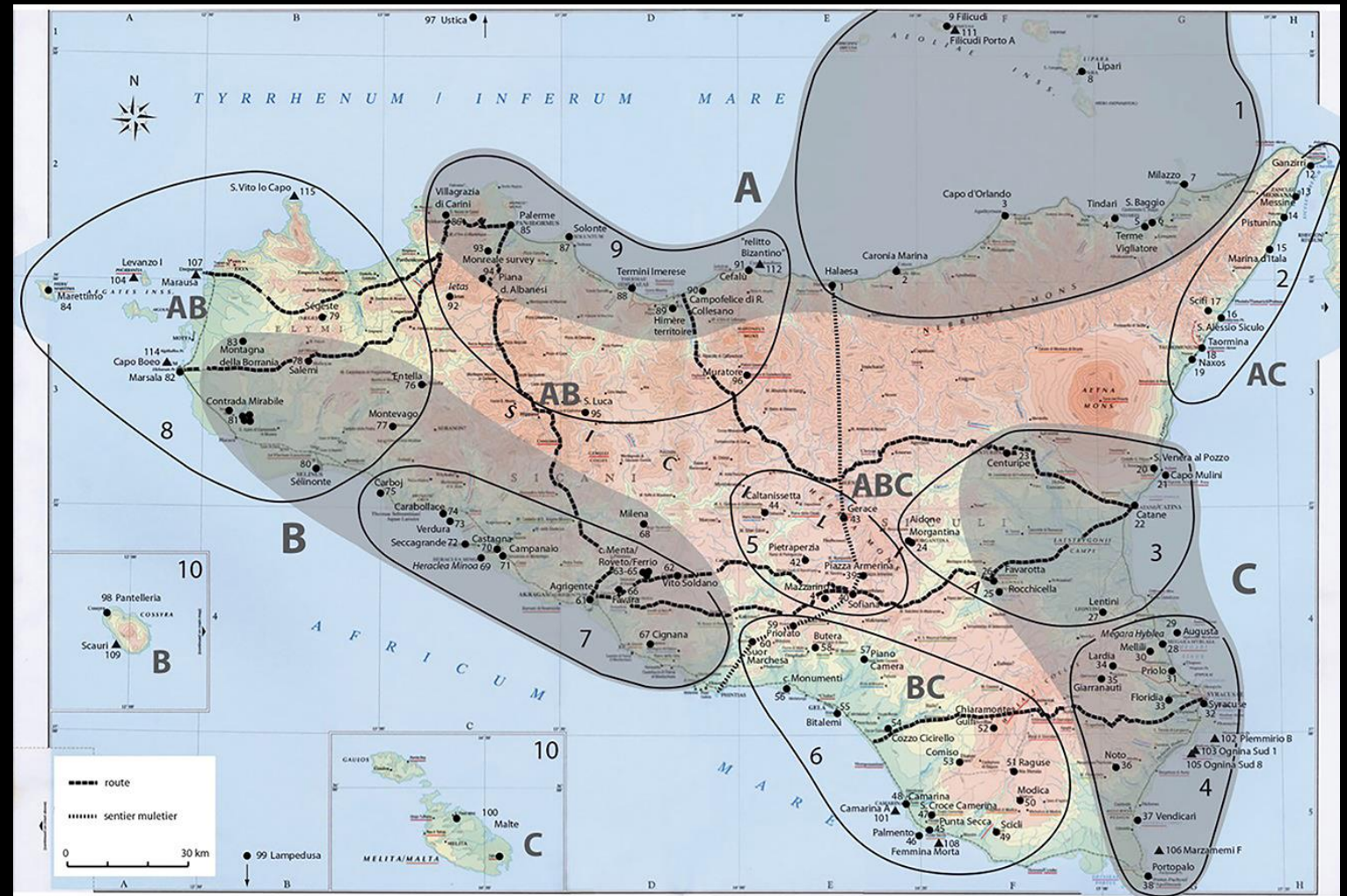


# CASR project (2008-2016)

La ceramica africana  
nella Sicilia romana

La ceramique africaine  
dans la Sicile romaine

a cura di / sous la direction de  
Daniele Malfitana e / et Michel Bonifay



Tomo / Tome I

Testo e Tavole  
Texte et Planches

Three main distribution zone:

A: Generic supply is dominant (like Ostia)

B: Privileged contacts with Capo Bon (northern Tunisia)

C: Diversified supply

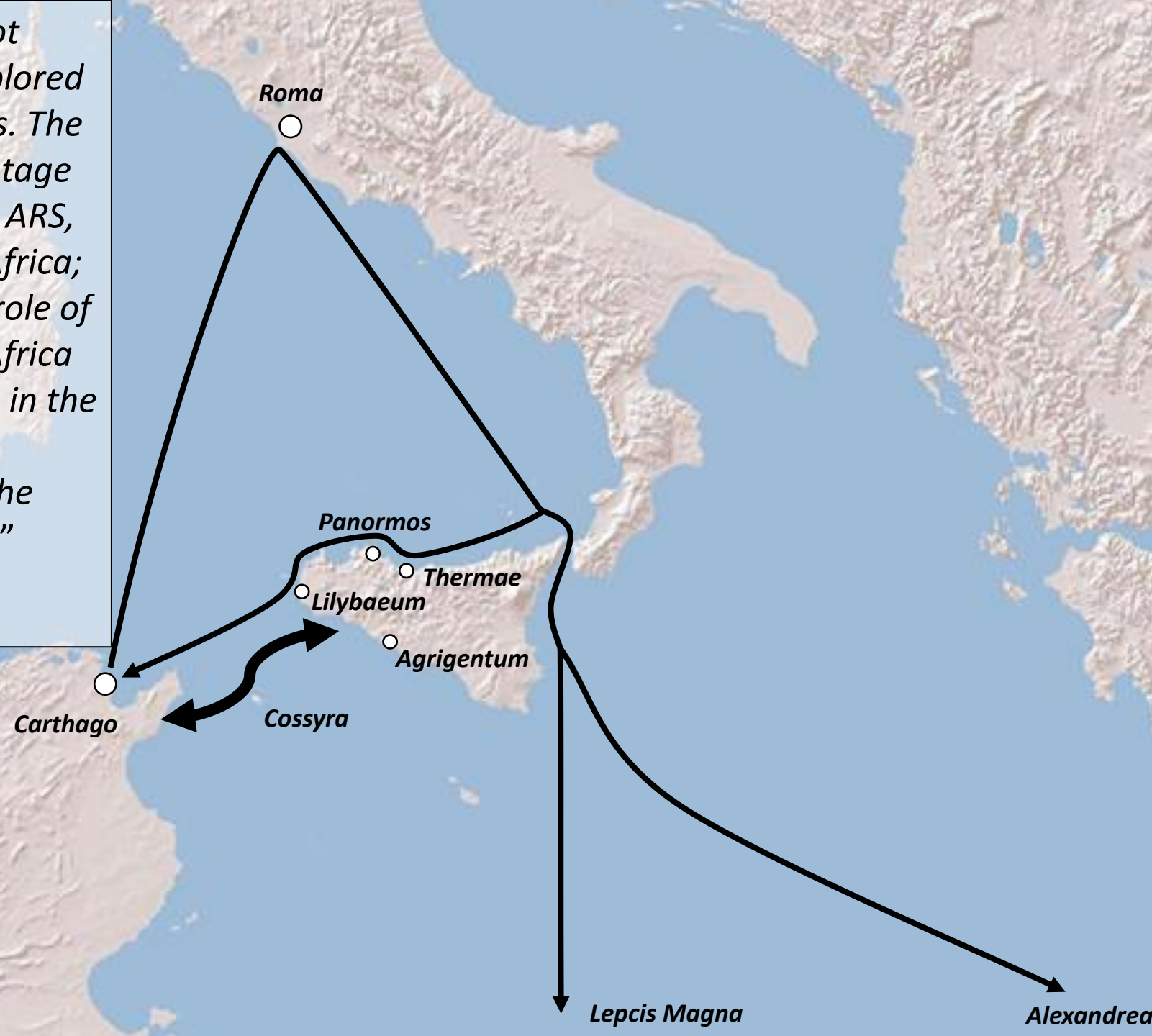


BY



*“Two mechanisms, which are not necessarily exclusive, will be explored here to explain these differences. The first is the potential role of cabotage as a distribution mechanism for ARS, given the proximity of Sicily to Africa; and the second is the potential role of Rome as an entrepôt between Africa and the western Mediterranean in the redistribution of ARS, given the pivotal role played by Rome in the economy of the Mediterranean.”*

(Fentress et al. 2004)

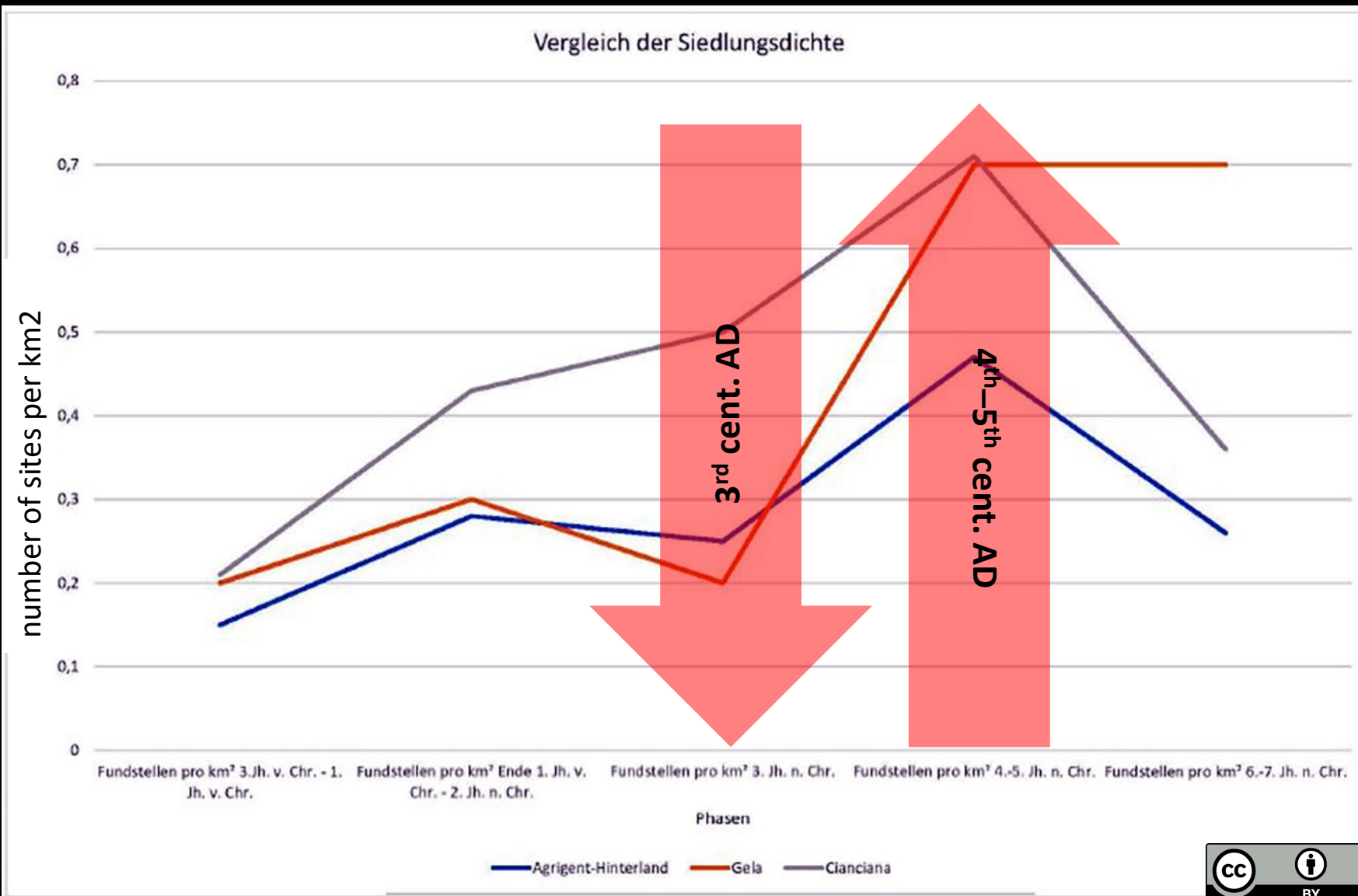
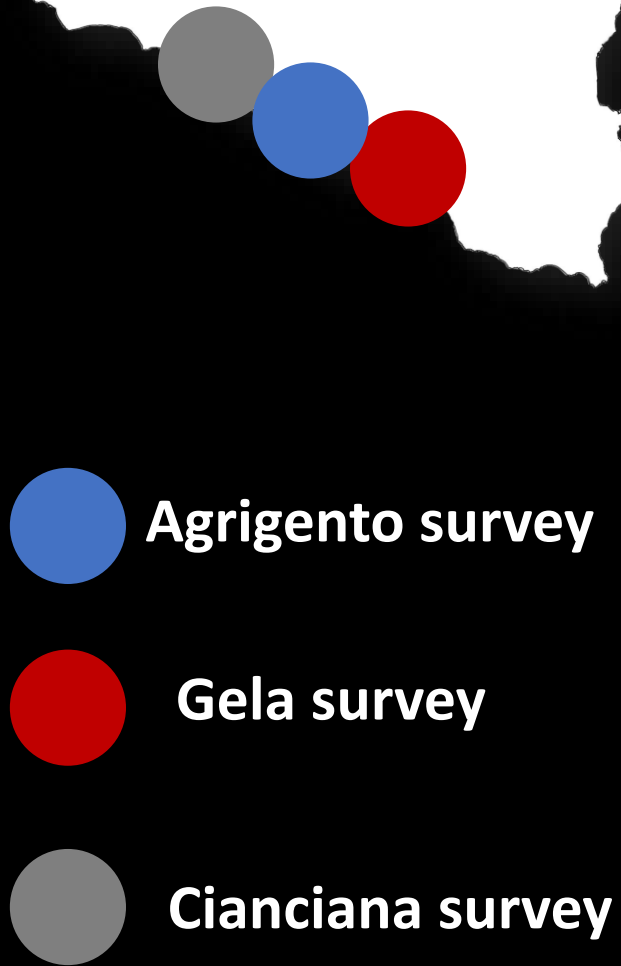


# Transition I

the crisis of the minor rural settlements

3<sup>rd</sup> century AD

# A comparison between the Agrigento, Gela and Cianciana surveys

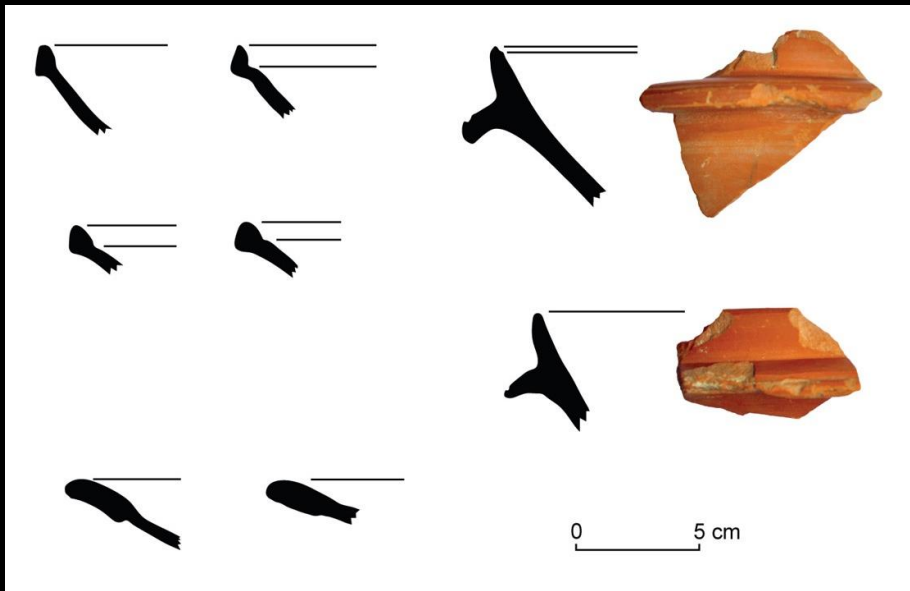


(Klug 2018, Fig. 4)

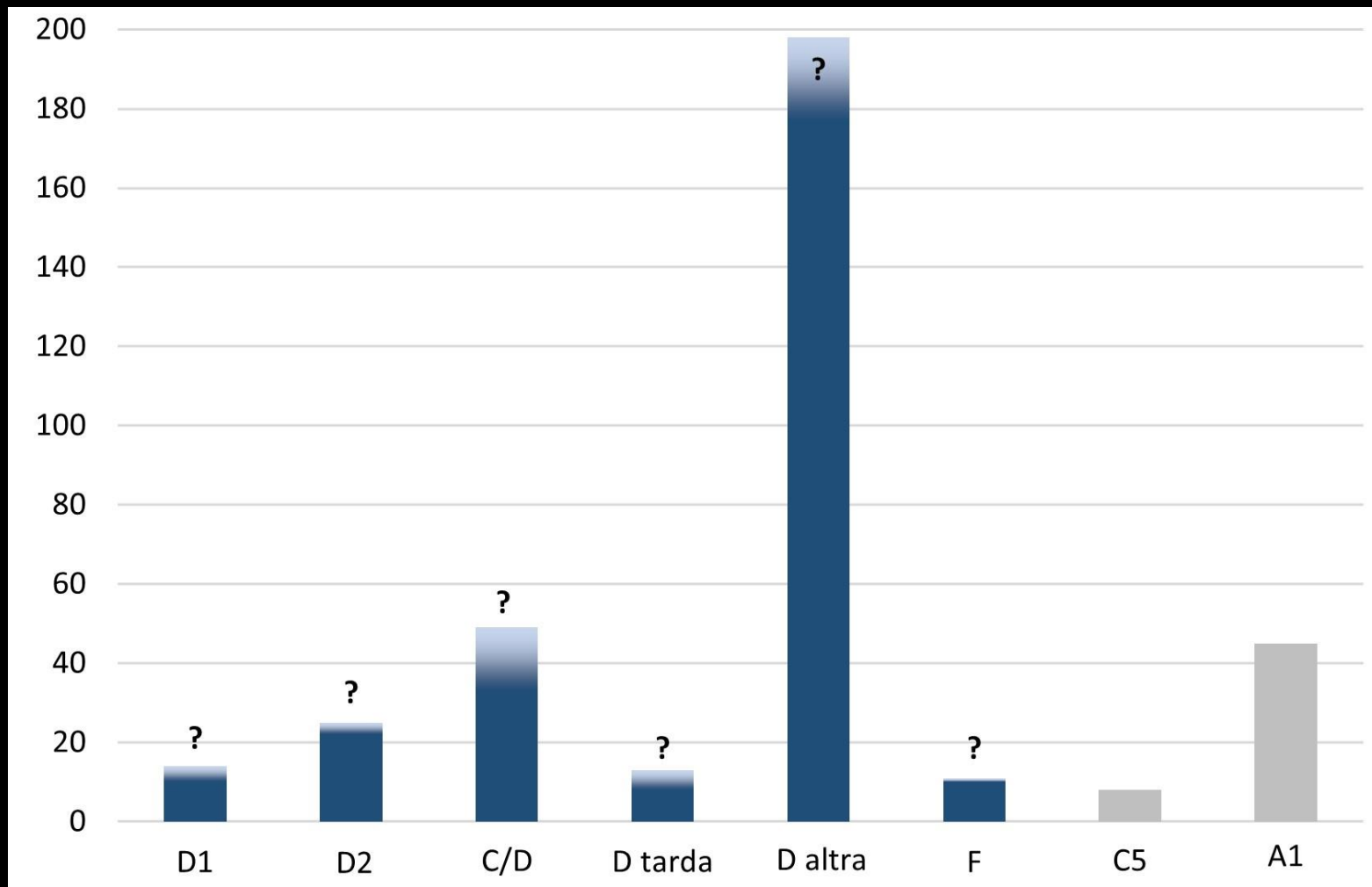


# Cignana survey: African Red Slip wares (1<sup>st</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> centuries)

Cignana



(Ducati, in progress)





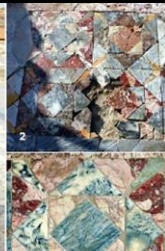
(Ducati, in progress)

Acknowledgement: Dr Maria Serena Rizzo (Parco Archeologico Valle dei Templi)

# The Durruei seaside villa

(Polito & Tripodi 2018, p. 8, 16, 20)

Durruei

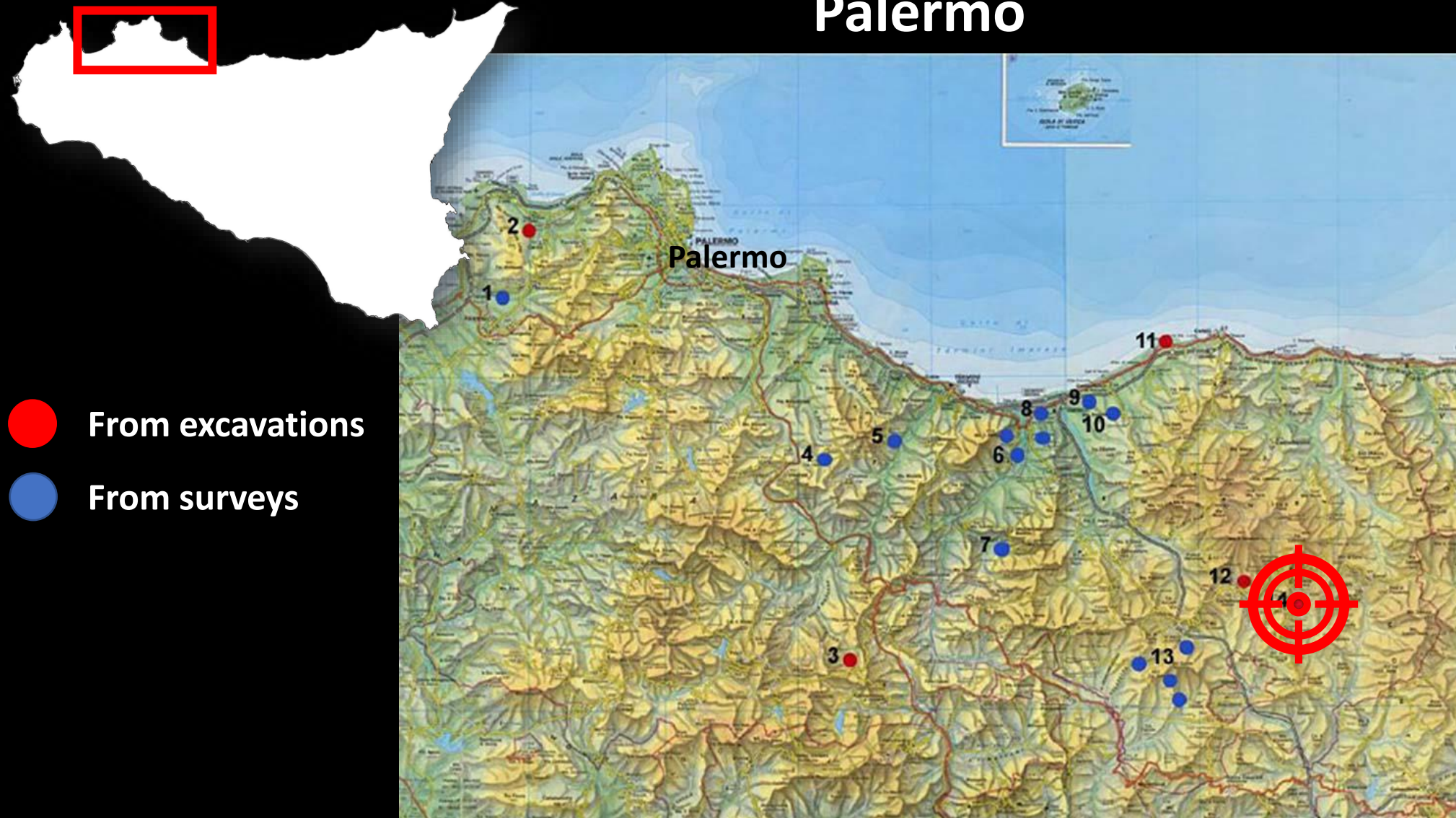


Planimetria generale della villa:

- 1 - *viridarium*
- 2 - portico con peristilio
- 3 - bacino
- 4 - *tablinum*
- 5 - *cubiculum* occidentale
- 6 - anticamera del *cubiculum* occidentale
- 7 - *cubiculum* orientale
- 8 - anticamera del *cubiculum* orientale
- 9 - *triclinium*
- 10 - anticamera del *triclinium* e ambiente di passaggio alle terme di Nettuno
- 11 - grande ambiente rettangolare
- 12 - prospetto monumentale sul mare con i pilastri di un arco a due forni
- 13-14 - ambienti di servizio delle terme di Nettuno
- 15 - *apodyterium* delle terme di Nettuno
- 16-17 - Ambienti di servizio
- 18-21 - stanze riscaldate delle terme di Nettuno e vani di servizio a Sud
- 22 - Cisterna
- 23 - *apodyterium* delle terme di Scilla
- 24 - *frigidarium*
- 25 - piscina del *frigidarium*
- 26-28 - ambienti di servizio delle terme di Scilla
- 29-30 - *tepidaria* delle terme di Scilla
- 31 - *caldarium*



# Roman settlements in the hinterland of Palermo



(Cucco 2016, Fig. 1)

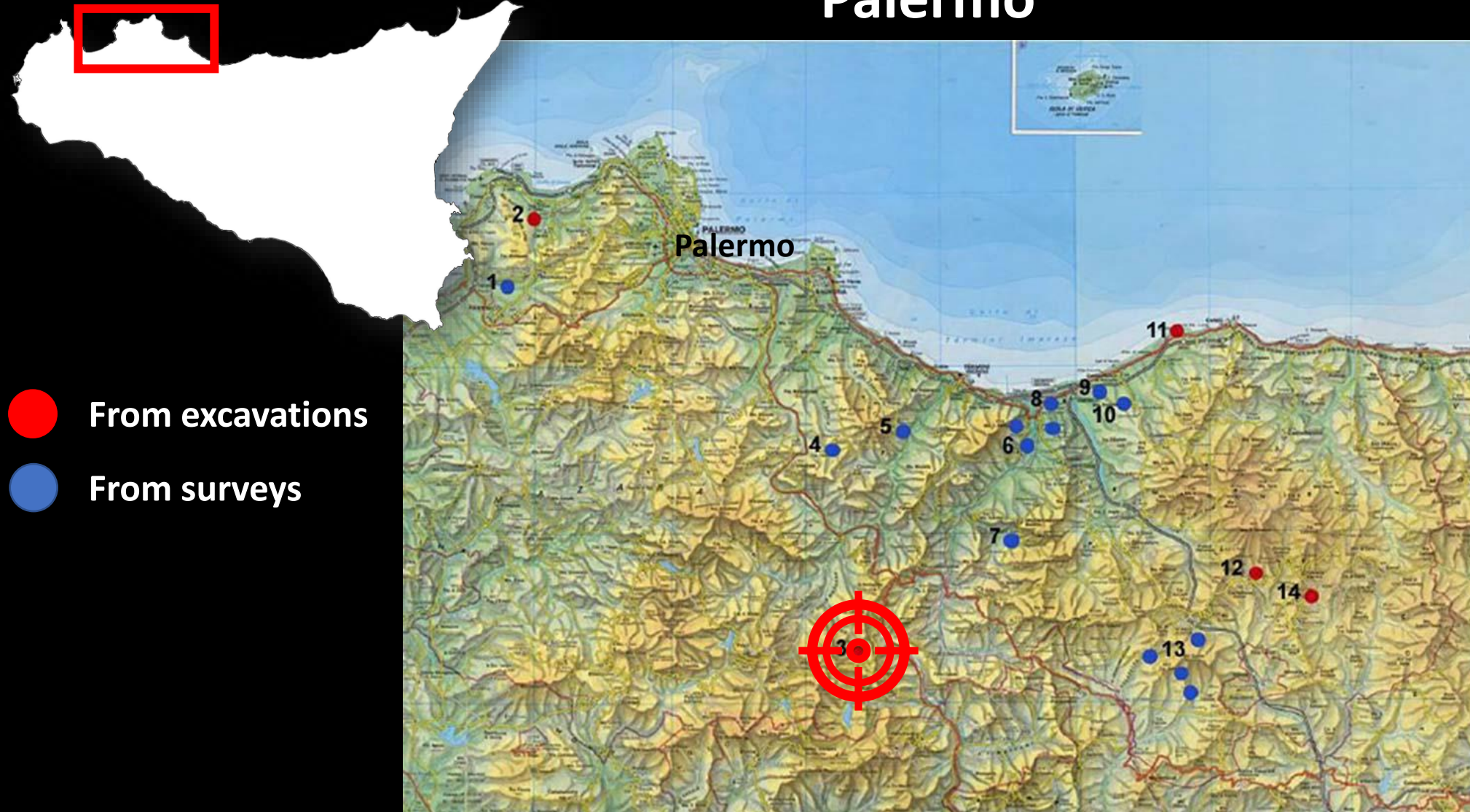
# The roman settlement at St. Marina



(Belvedere et al. 2016, Fig. 2, 5)

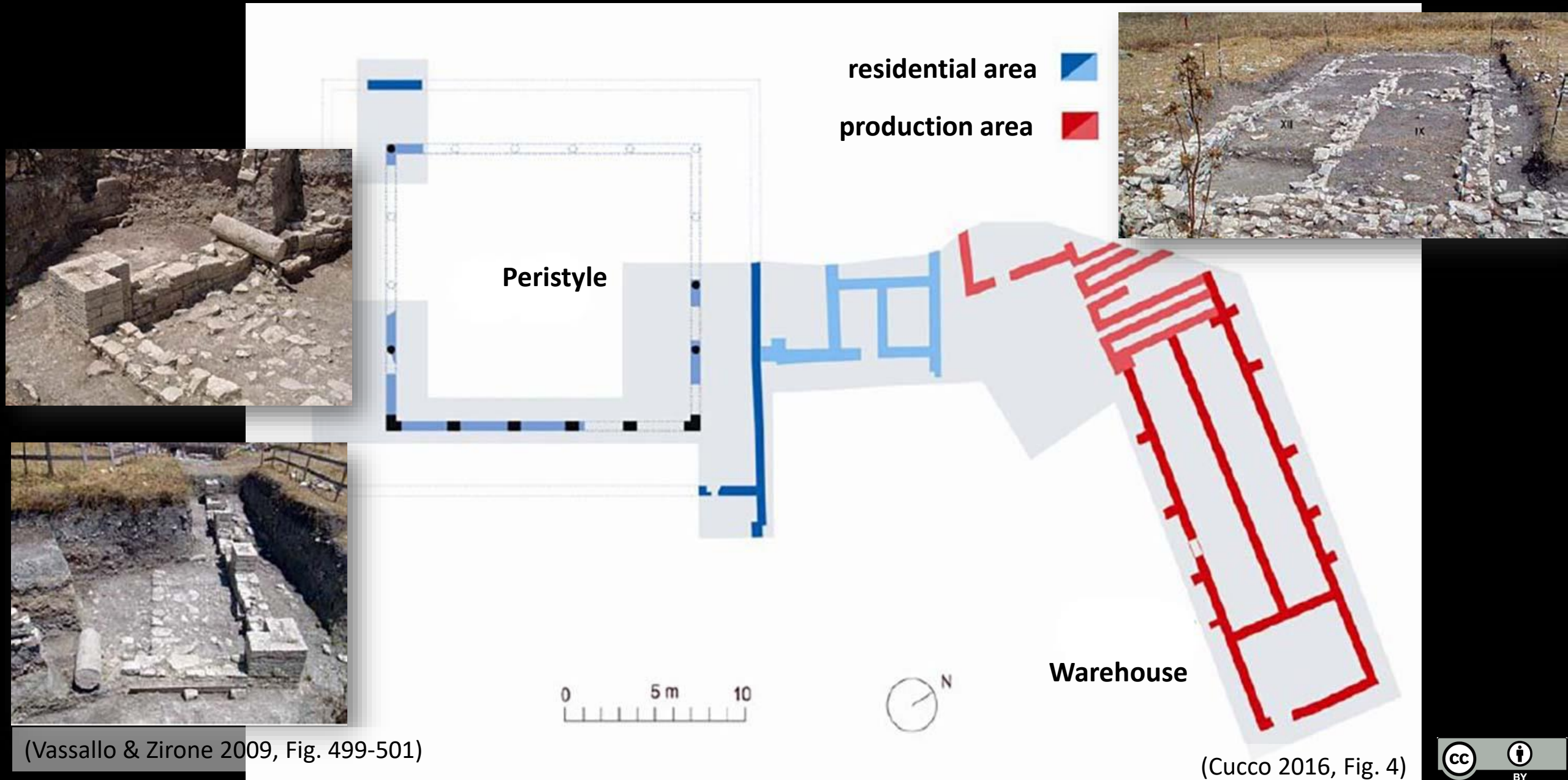


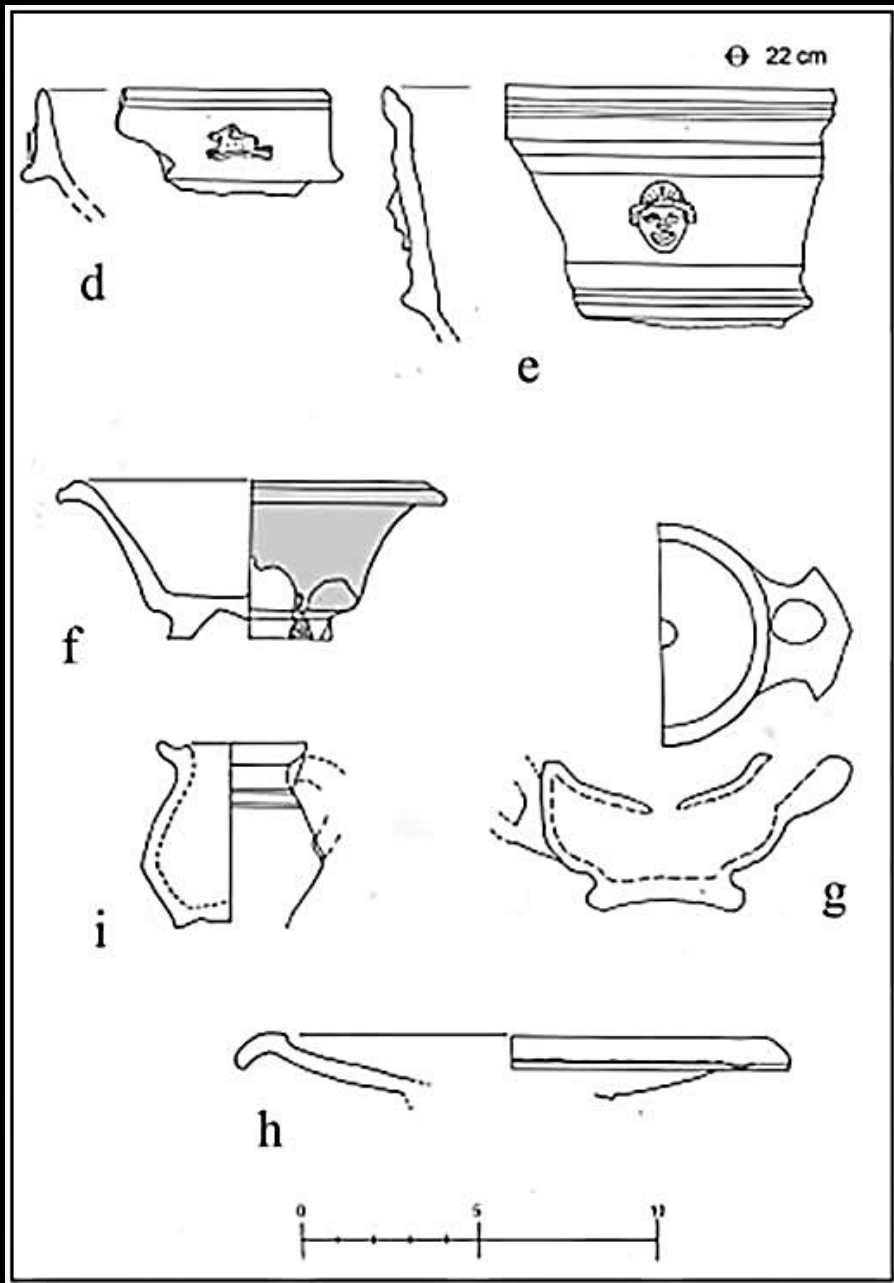
# Roman settlements in the hinterland of Palermo



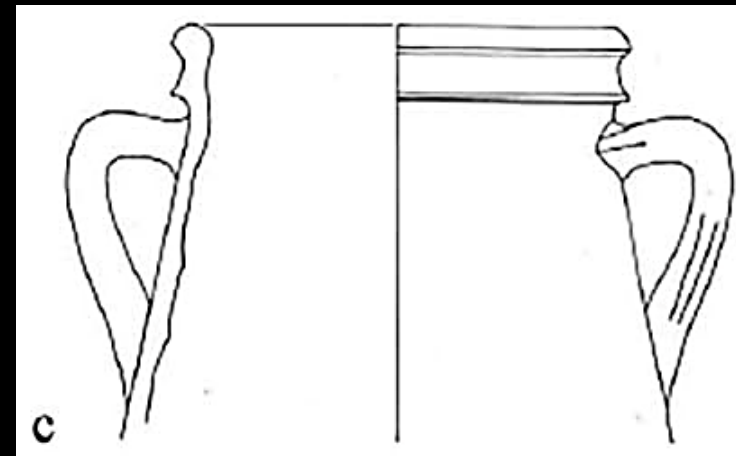
1. Namone; 2. S. Nicola; 3. S. Luca; 4. Balatelle; 5. Ciacca/Gurgo; 6. Ville della bassa valle del Torto; 7. Palisi; 8. Buonfornello; 9. Casa dell'Acquedotto; 10. Terre Bianche; 11. Costa Schiavo; 12. Muratore; 13. Susafa, S. Giacinto, Ciaramito, Tudia; 14. S. Marina.

# Roman villa at St. Luca

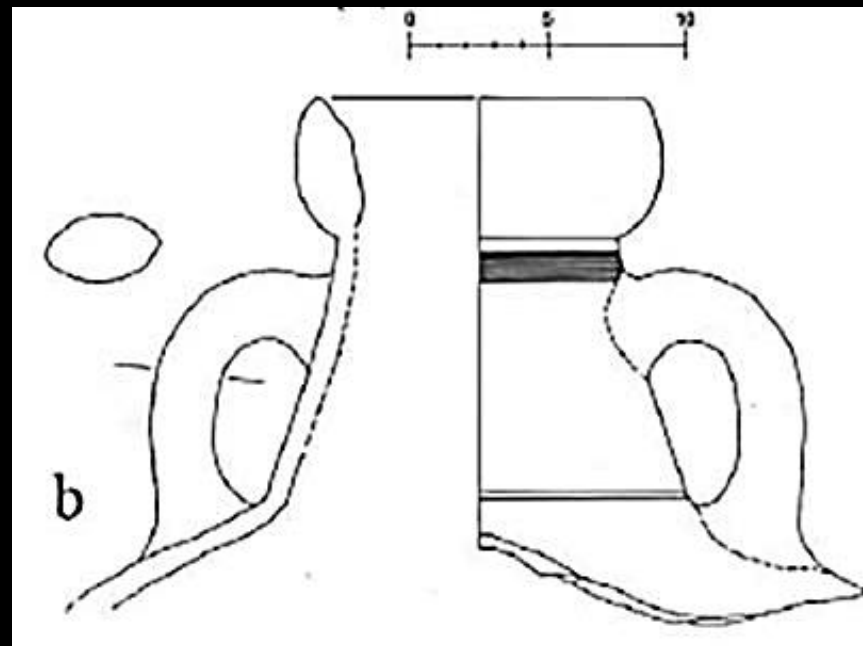




(Vassallo & Zirone 2009, Fig. 503-504)



Italian Sigillata, African Red Slip ware, and amphora Dressel 21-22 from the area of residential building

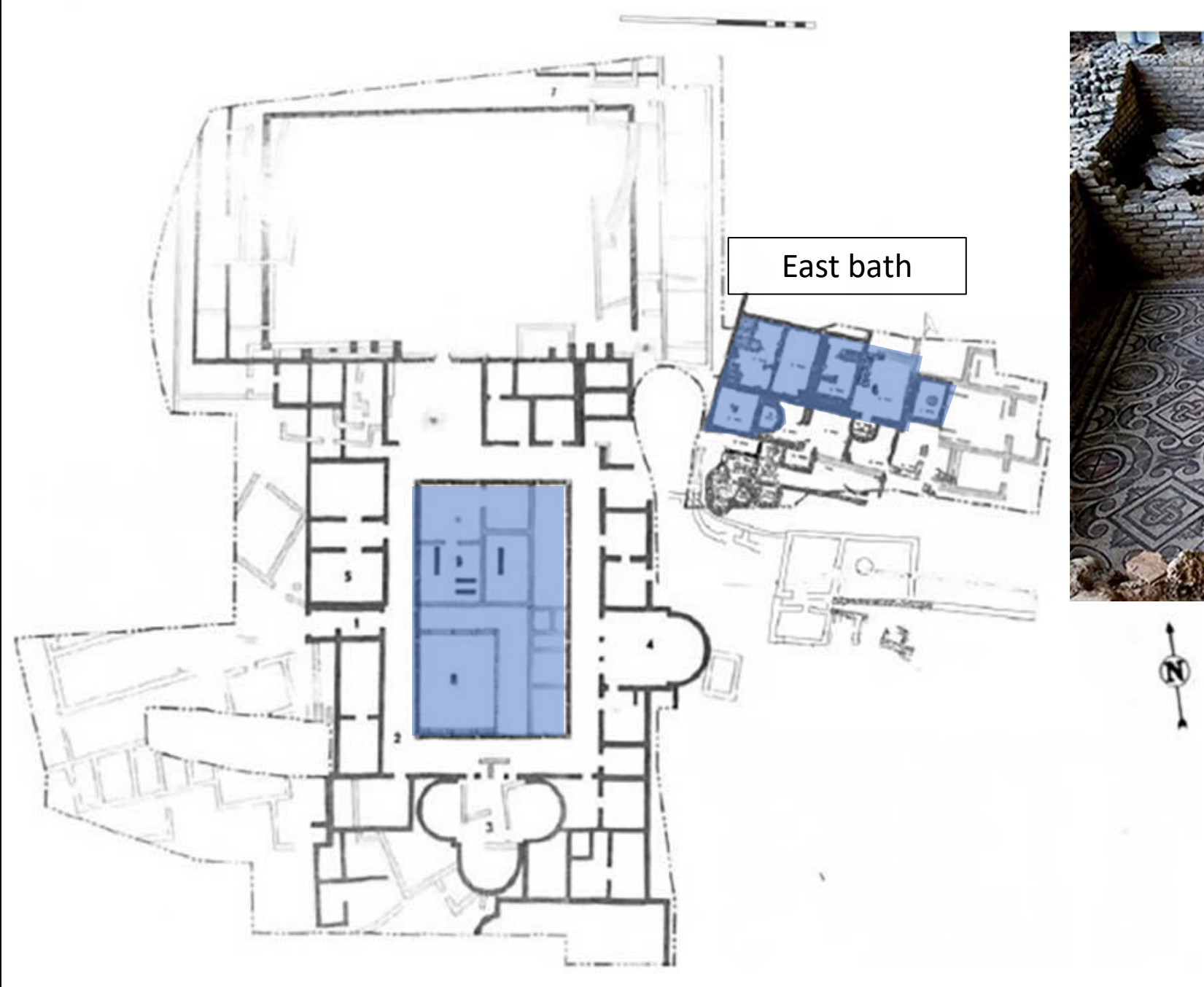


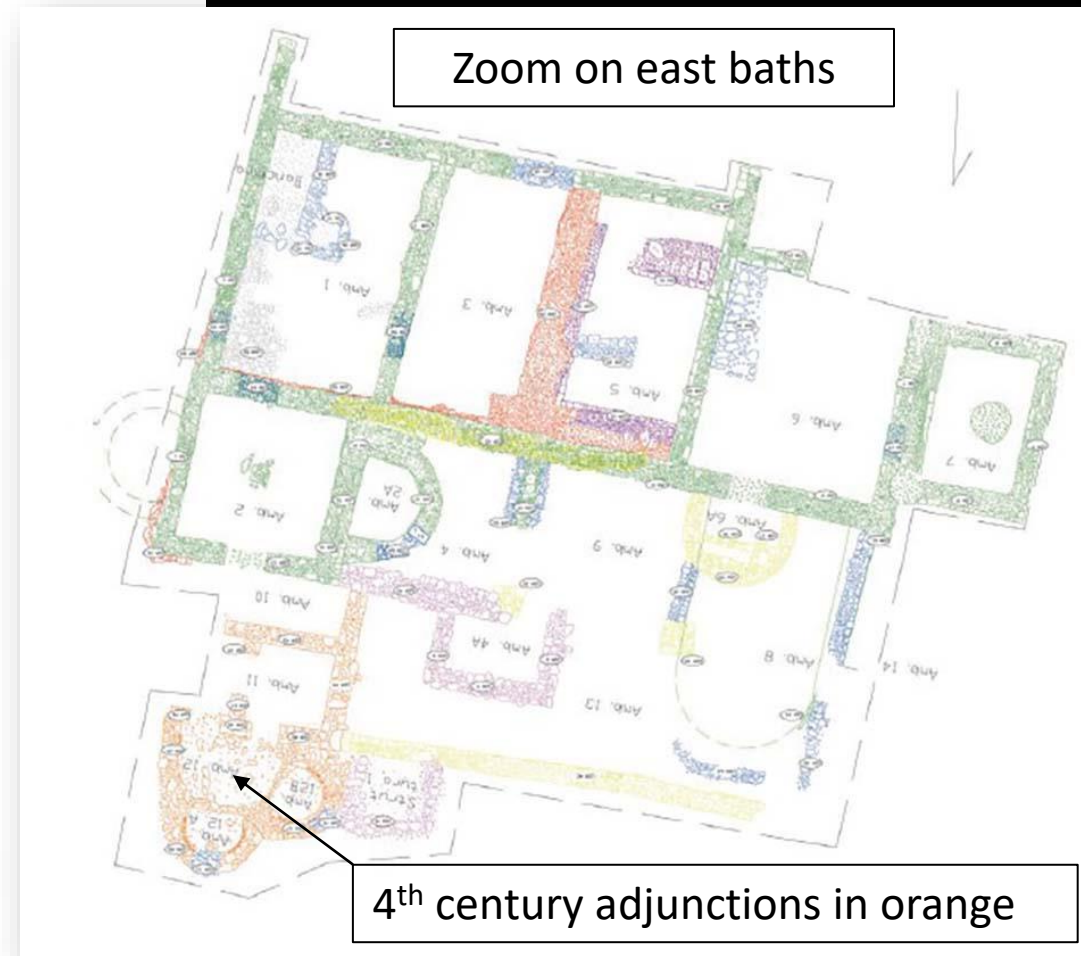
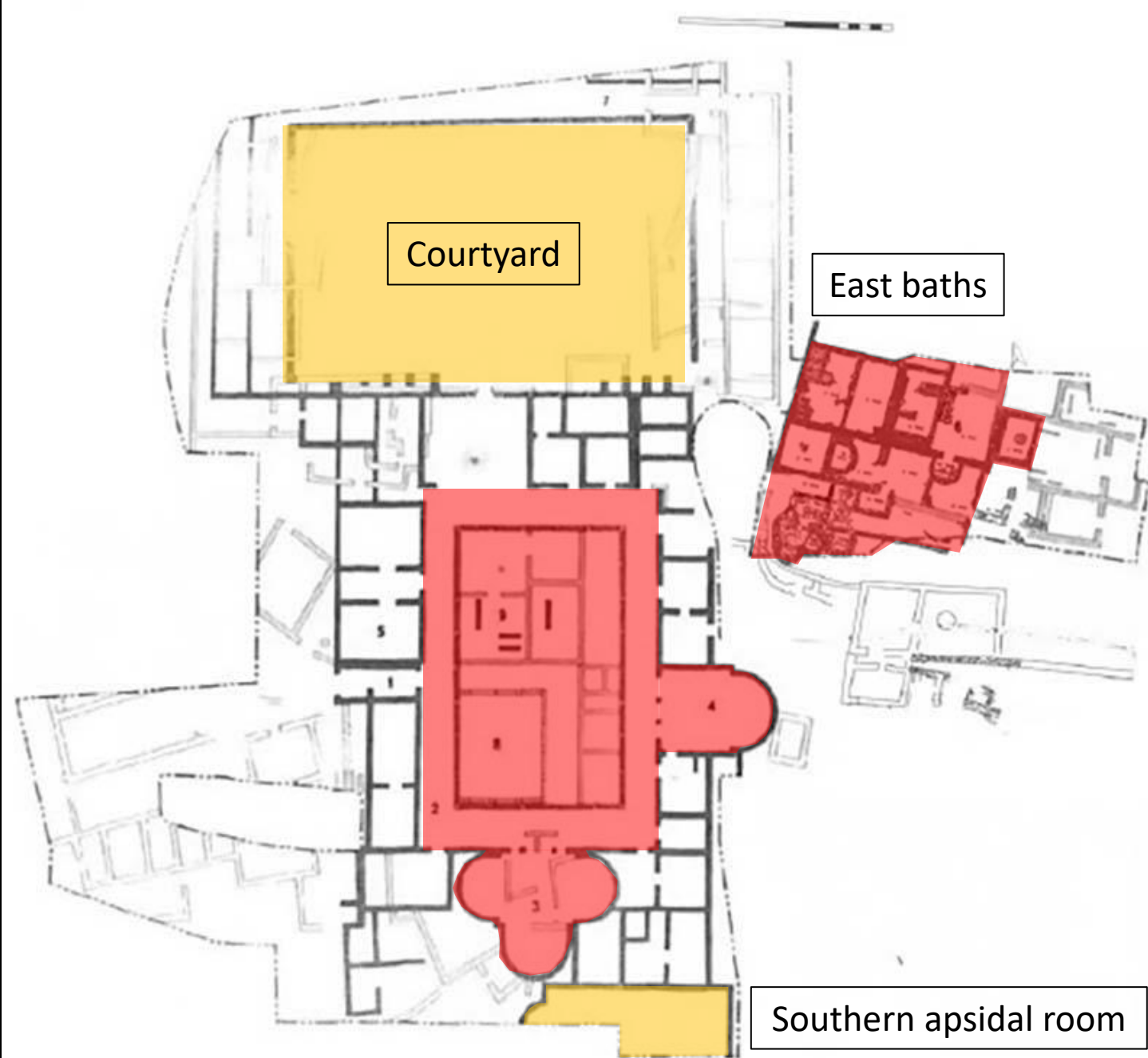
Late African amphora (Key 57) from the apsidal building

Patti Marina

# Roman villa at Patti Marina





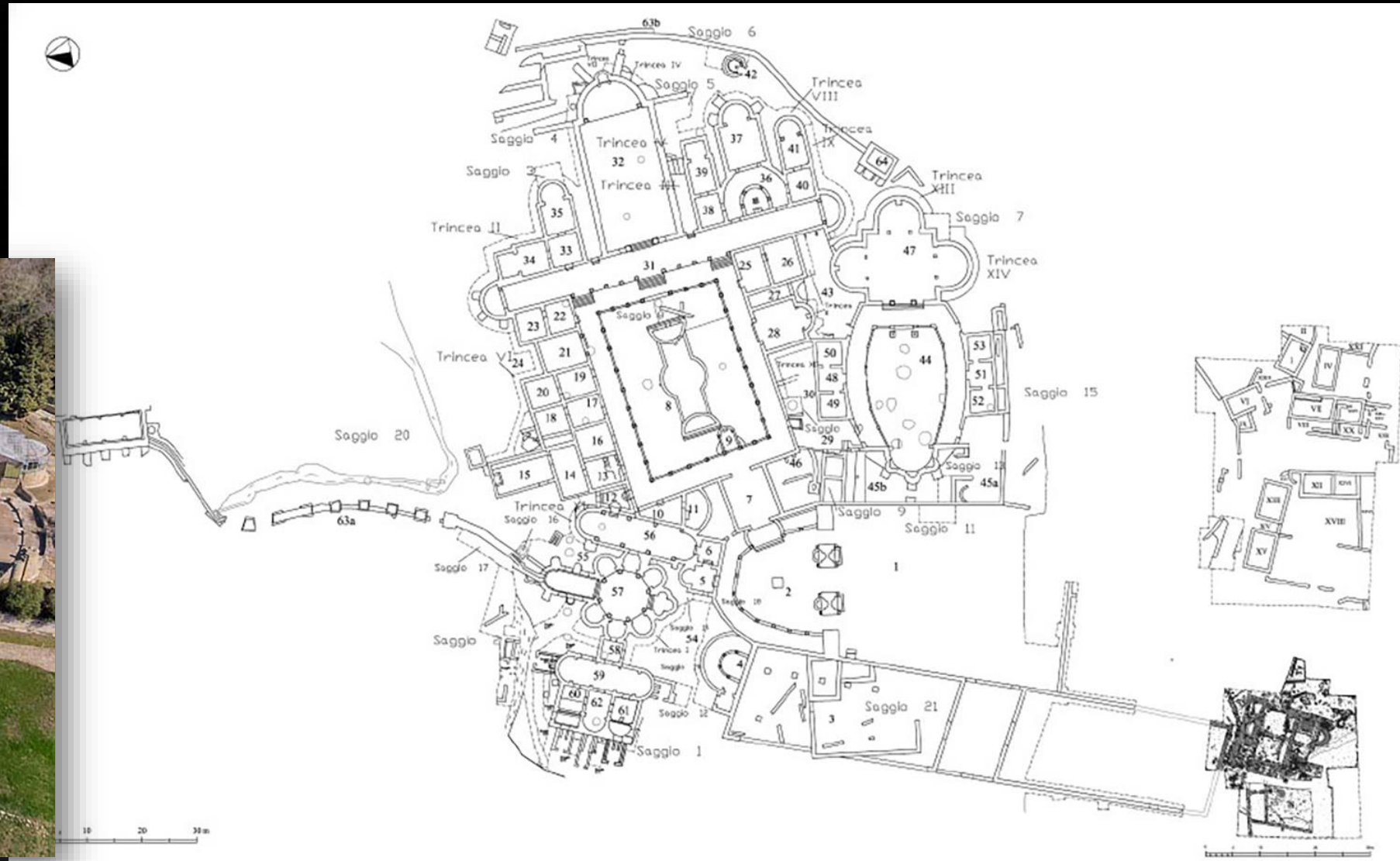


# Transition II

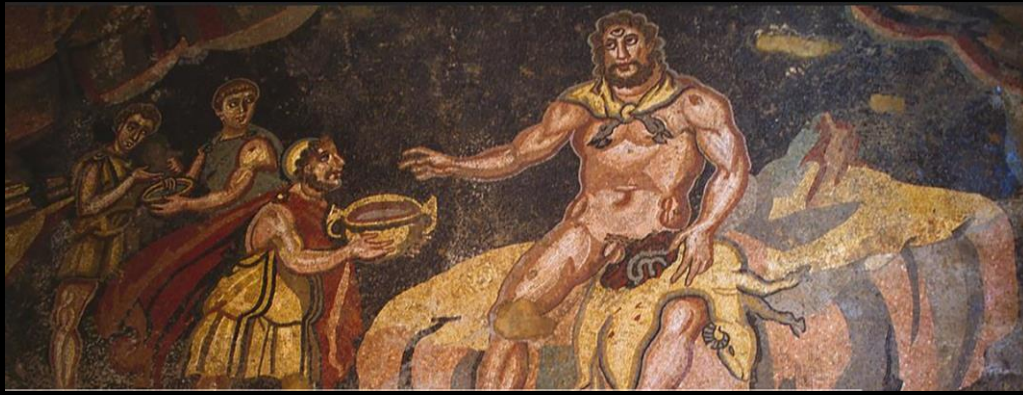
The rise of luxury villas  
4<sup>th</sup> century AD

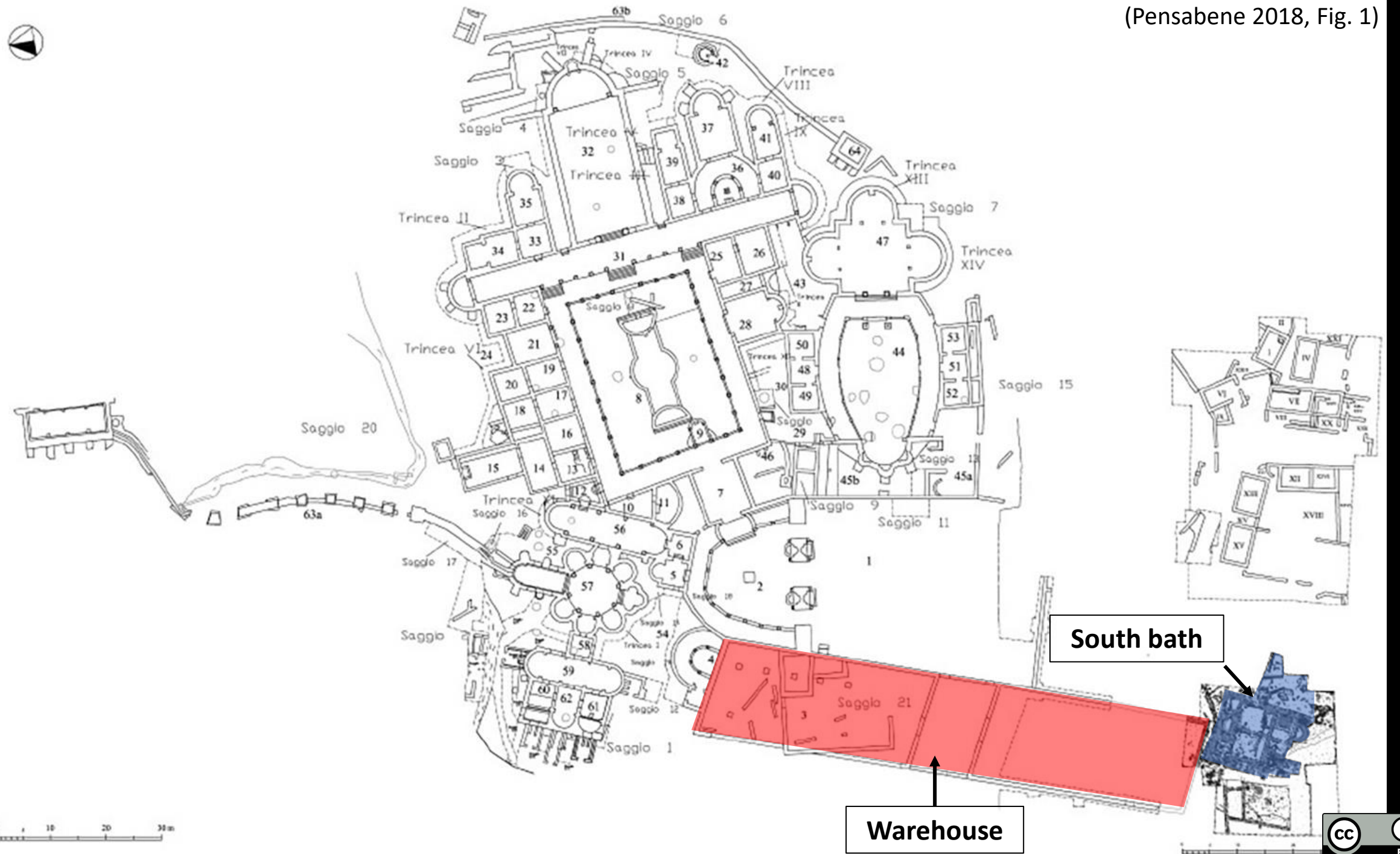
# Villa del Casale

Villa del Casale



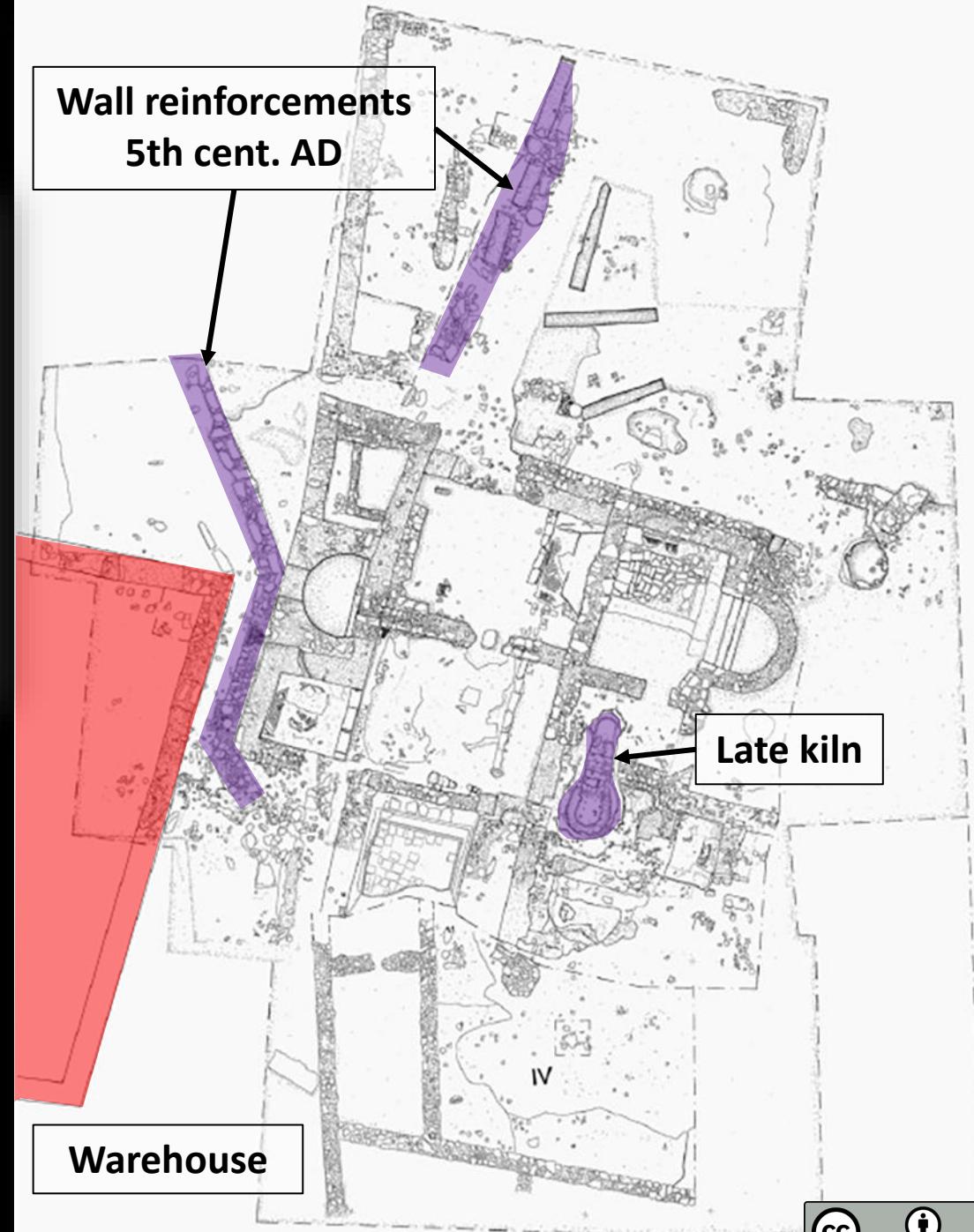




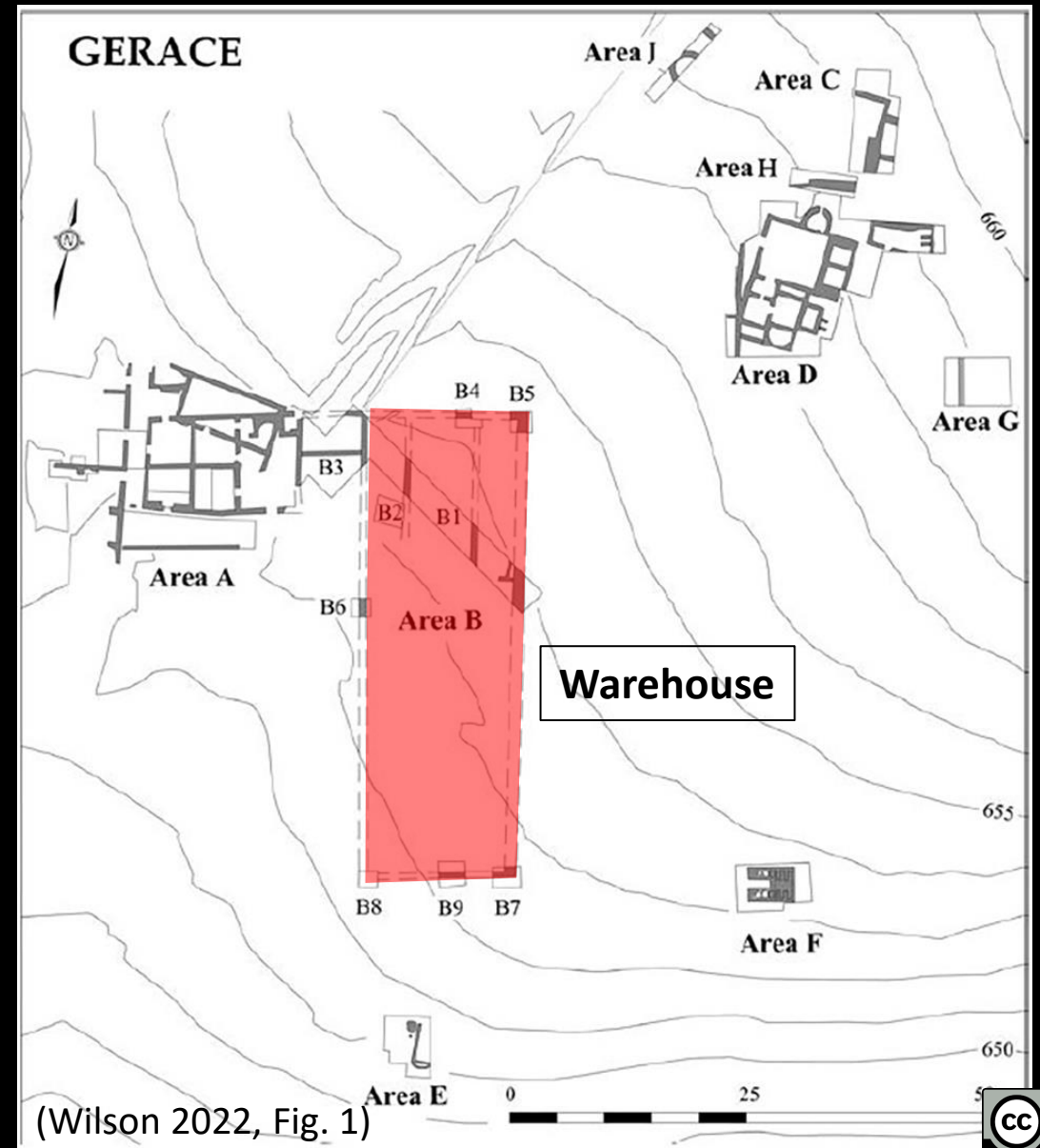
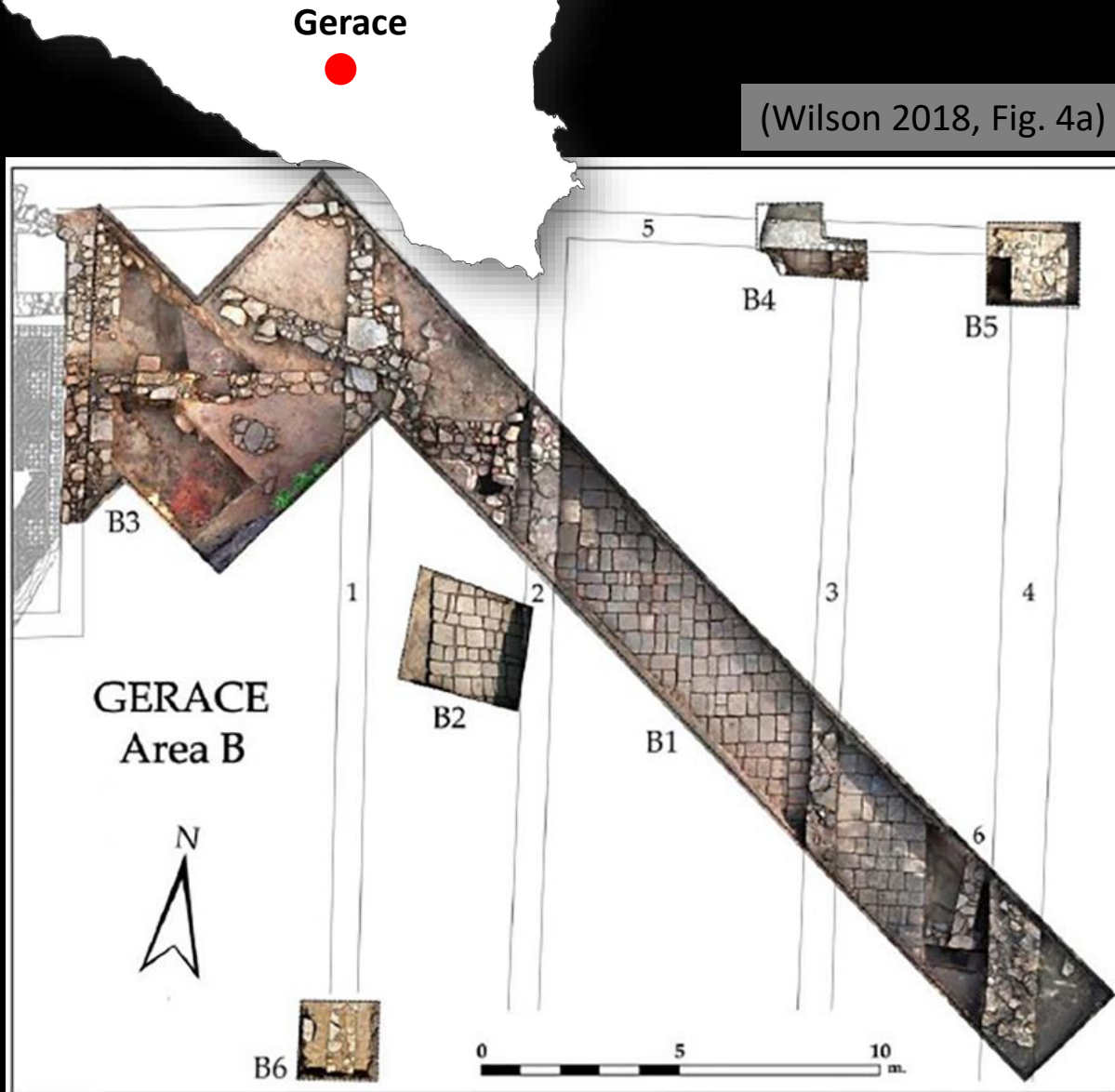


# Capitals and columns reused in late walls

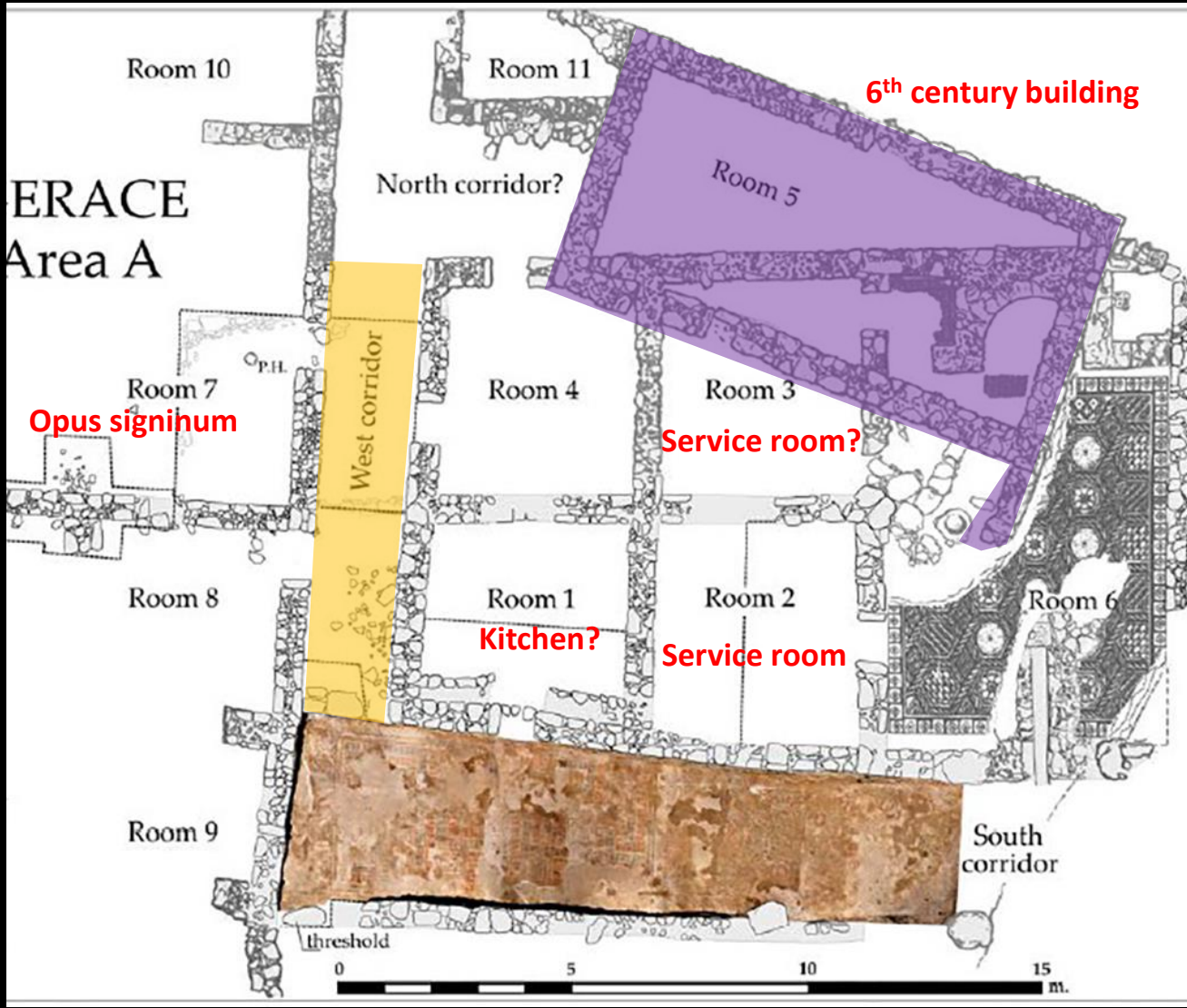
(Pensabene 2018, Fig. 2-4, Tav. I,3, Tav. II,10)



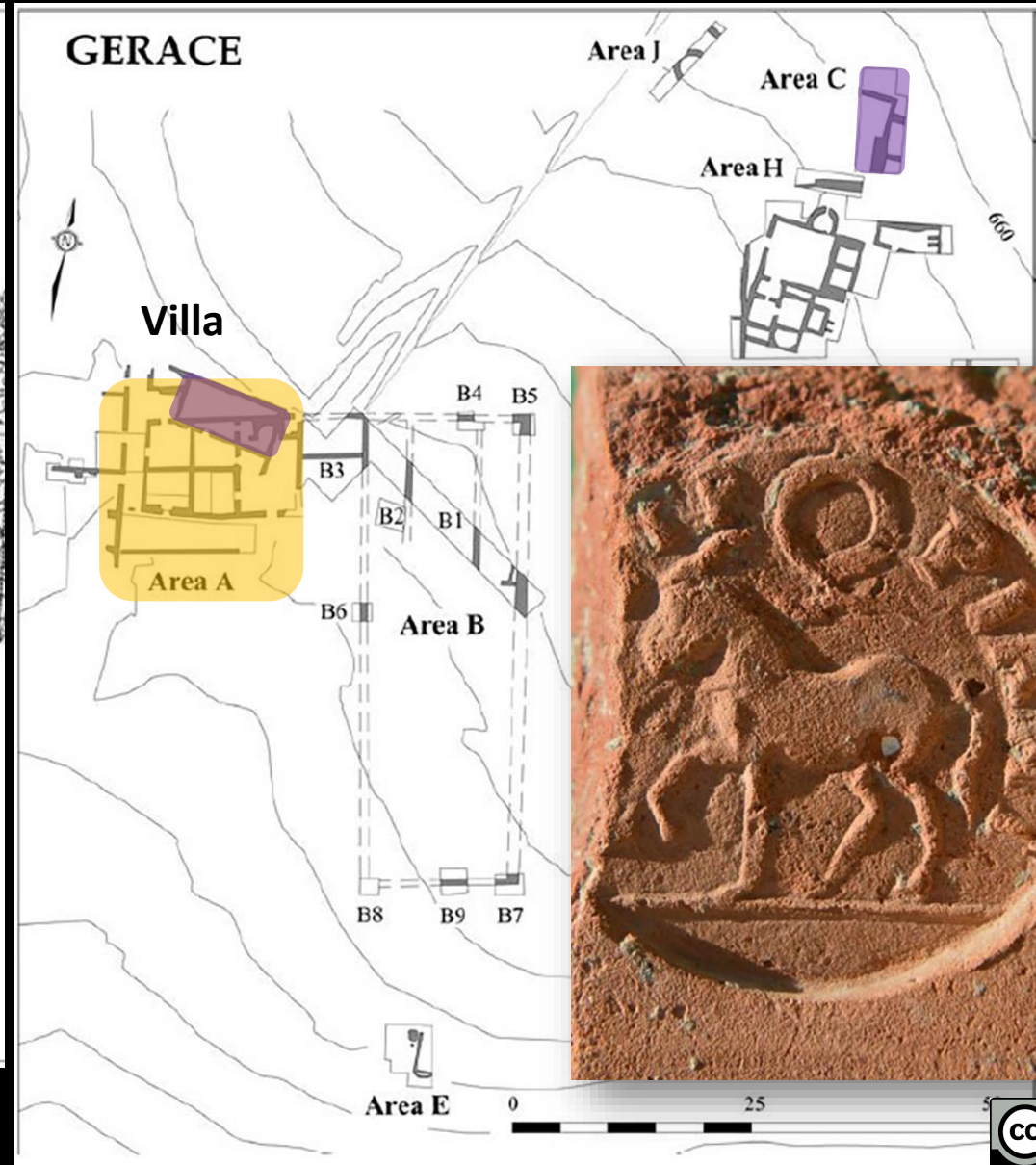
# Roman settlement at Gerace



(Wilson 2022, Fig. 1)



(Wilson 2018, Fig. 6, 8d)



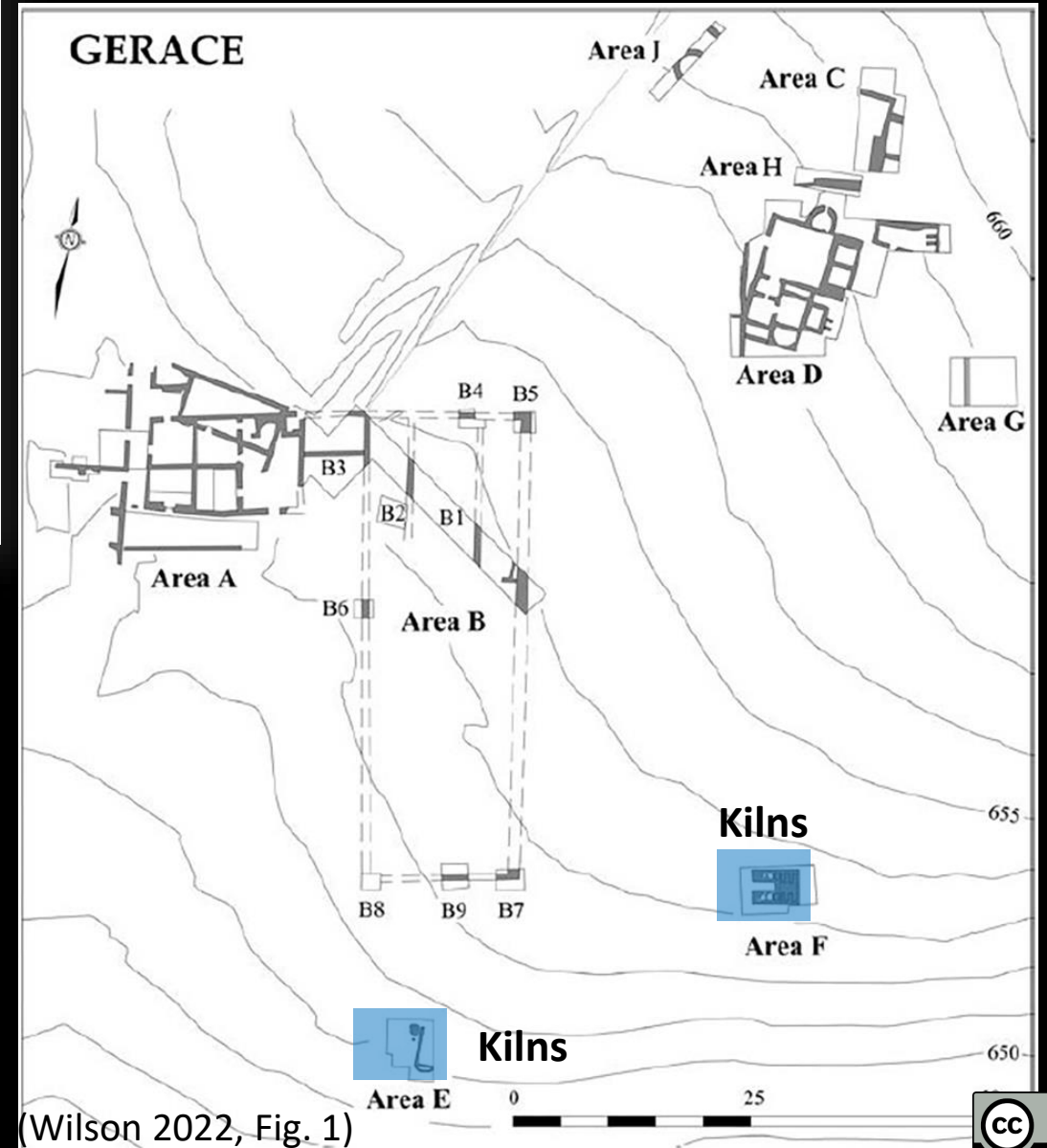
(Wilson 2020, Fig. 2)



5<sup>th</sup> cent. tile kiln (built after Philipianus' death)

5<sup>th</sup> cent. reduced kiln

6<sup>th</sup> cent. small kilns

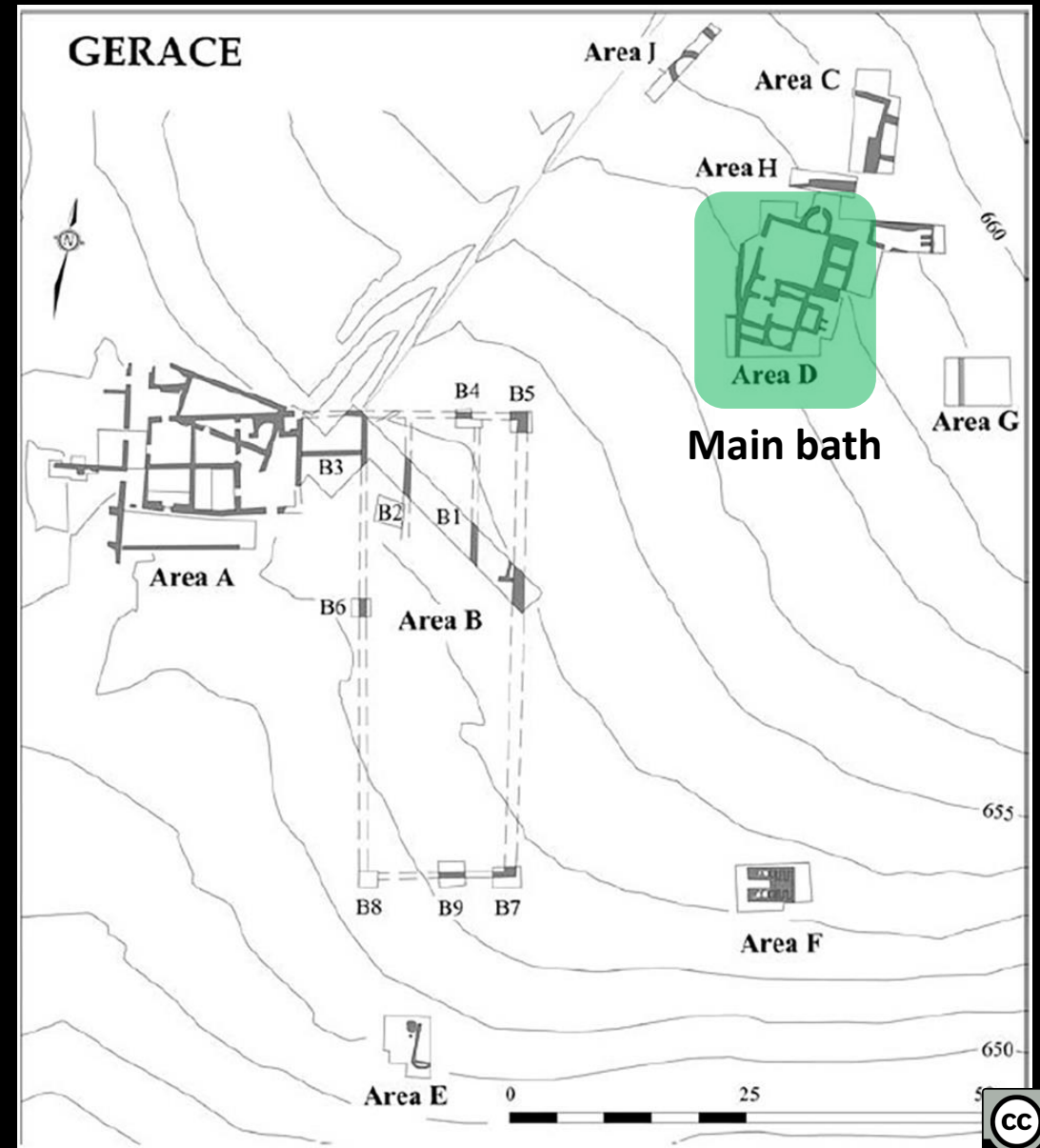
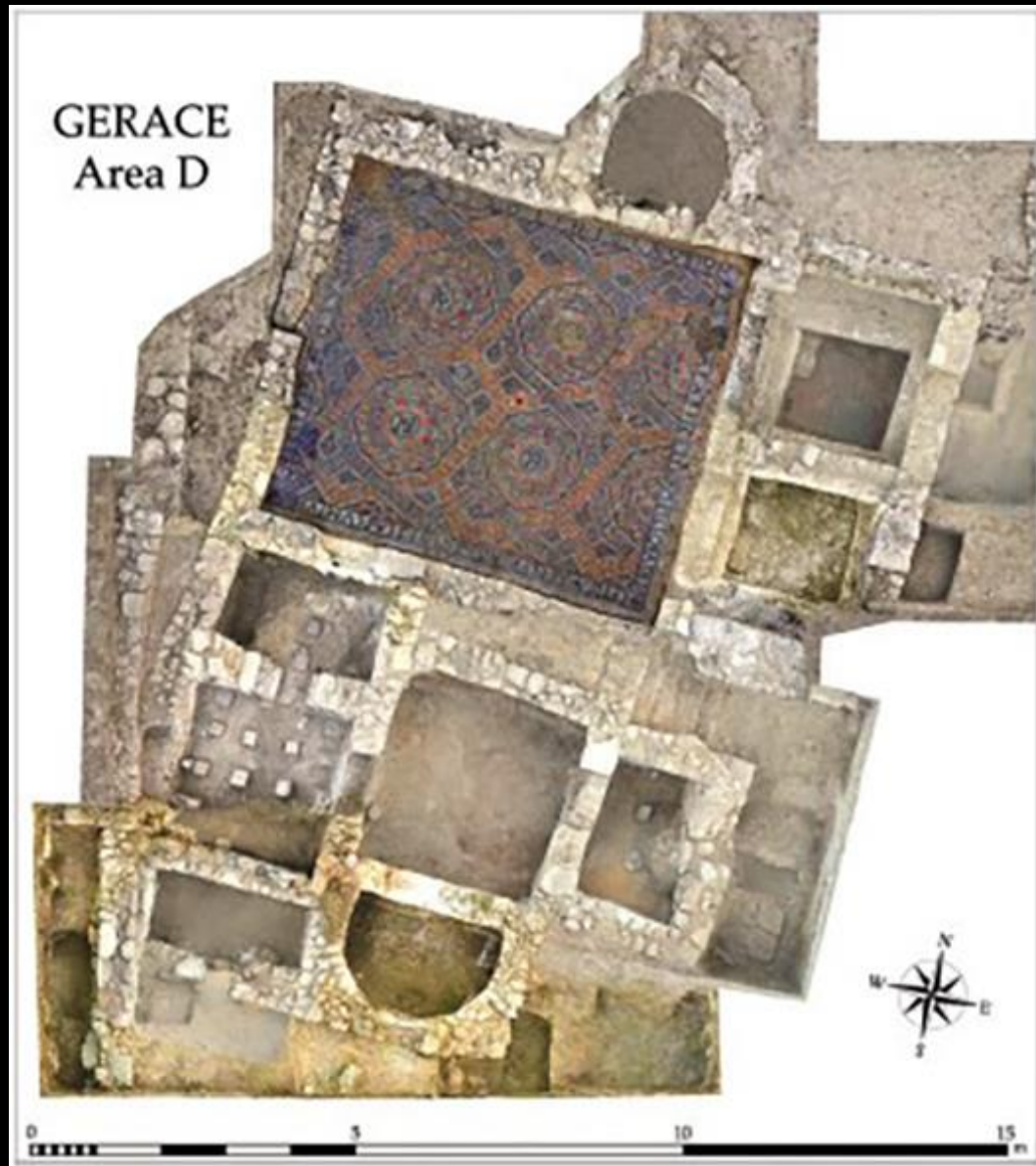


(Wilson 2022, Fig. 1)

(Wilson 2018, Fig. 12)



(Wilson 2022, Fig. 1, 34)





(Wilson 2018, Fig. 20)



(Wilson 2020, Fig. 24, 30-31)





PHILIPPIANORVM PRAEDIA FELI(cia) (palm branch)  
CAPITOLINIS GAVDIVM  
PLVRA FABRICETIS MELLIORA DEDI  
CETIS ASCLEPIADES SENESCAS CVM TVIS

Proposed interpretation:

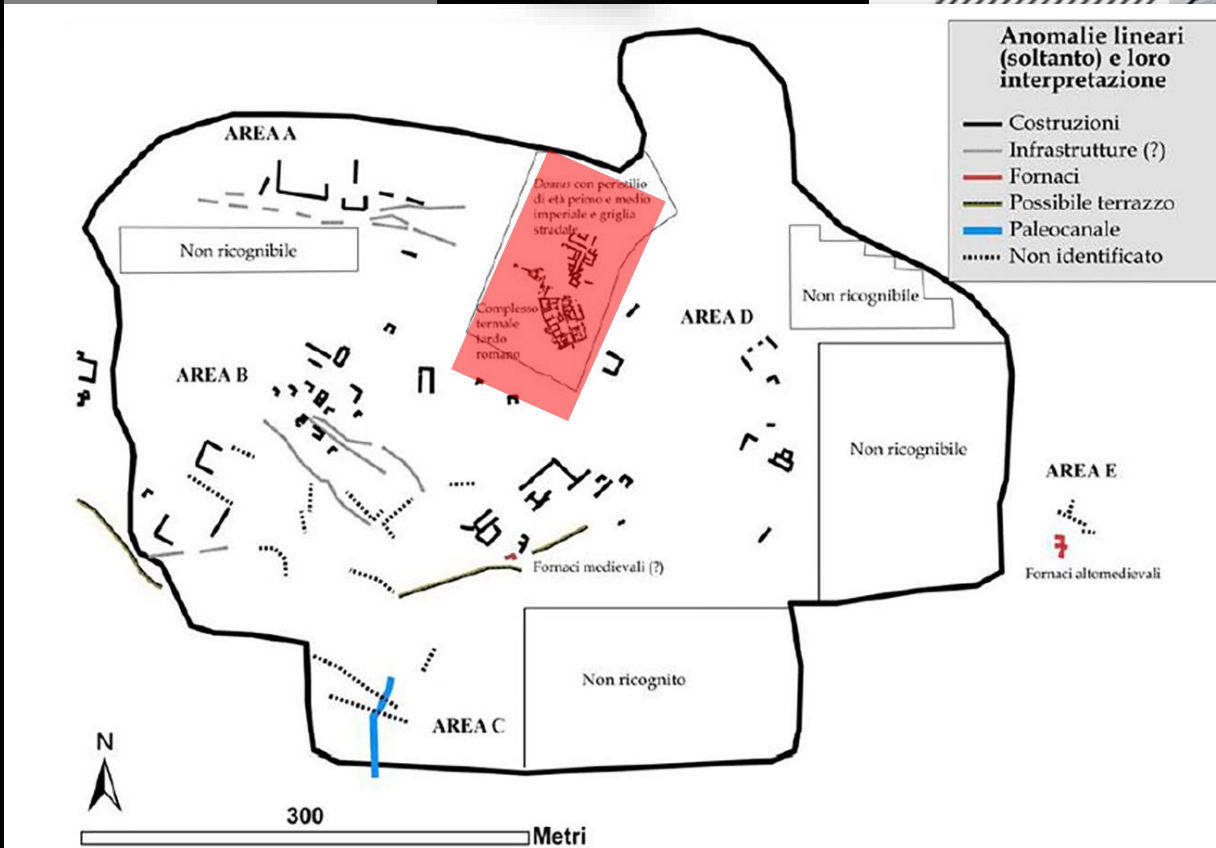
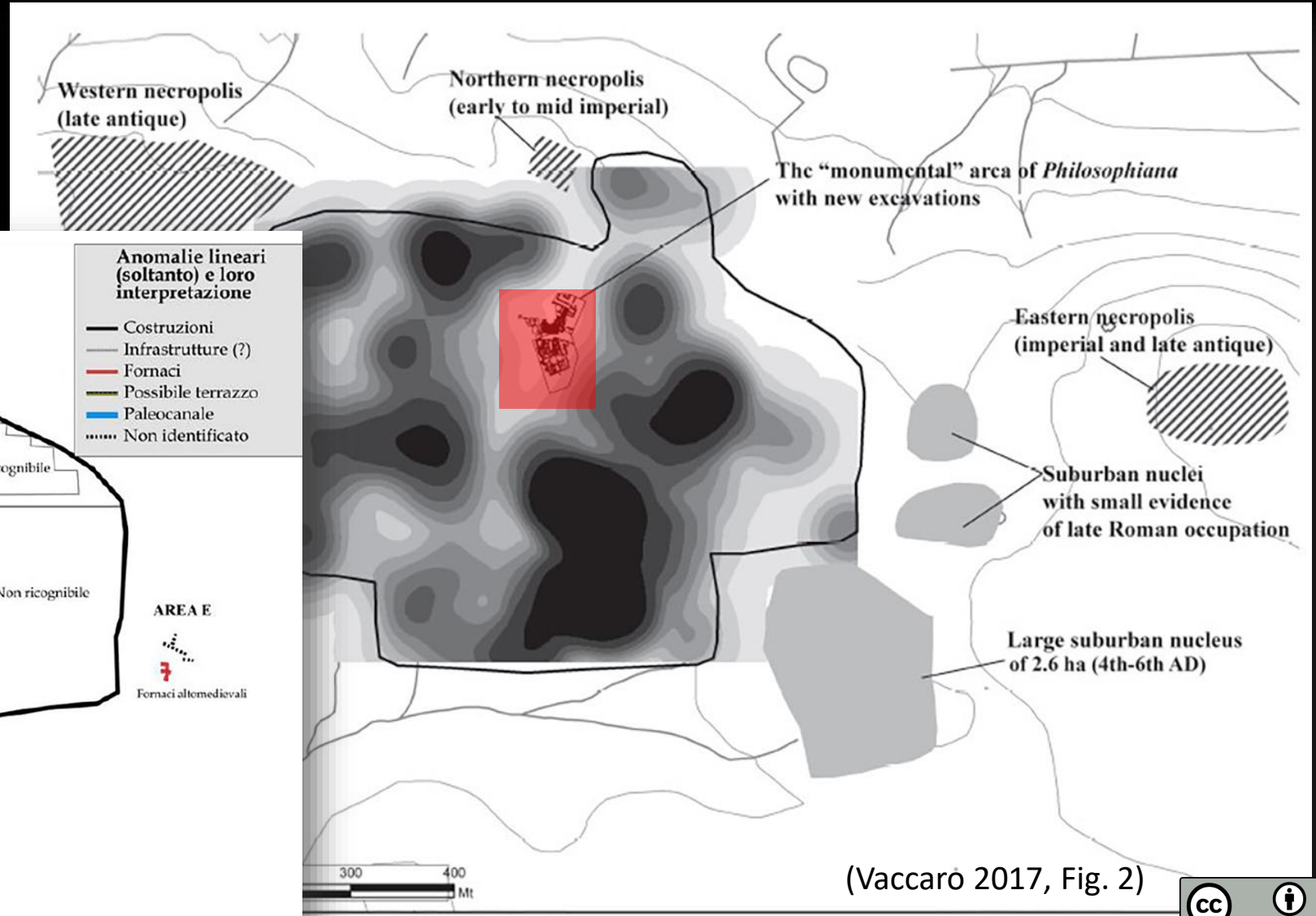
'[May] the estates of the Philippianorum prosper! Joy to the Capitoline [games]! May you build more things, dedicate better things. Asclepiades, may you grow old with your family'

# Philosophiana *stationes nunc institutae*

Sofiana



(La Torre 2018a, Fig. 3)

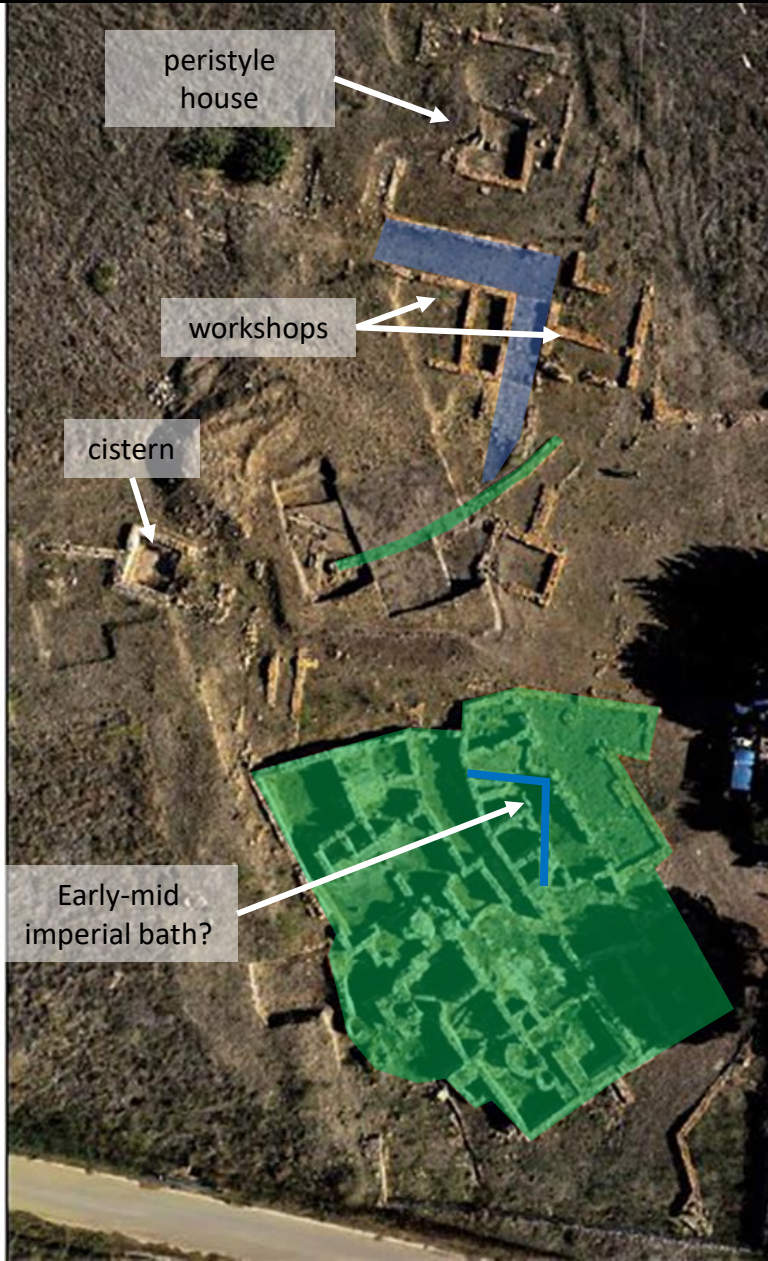


(Vaccaro 2017, Fig. 2)

# The monumental area

(La Torre 2018a, Fig. 5)

(Vaccaro 2017, Fig. 3)



# Filosofiana survey

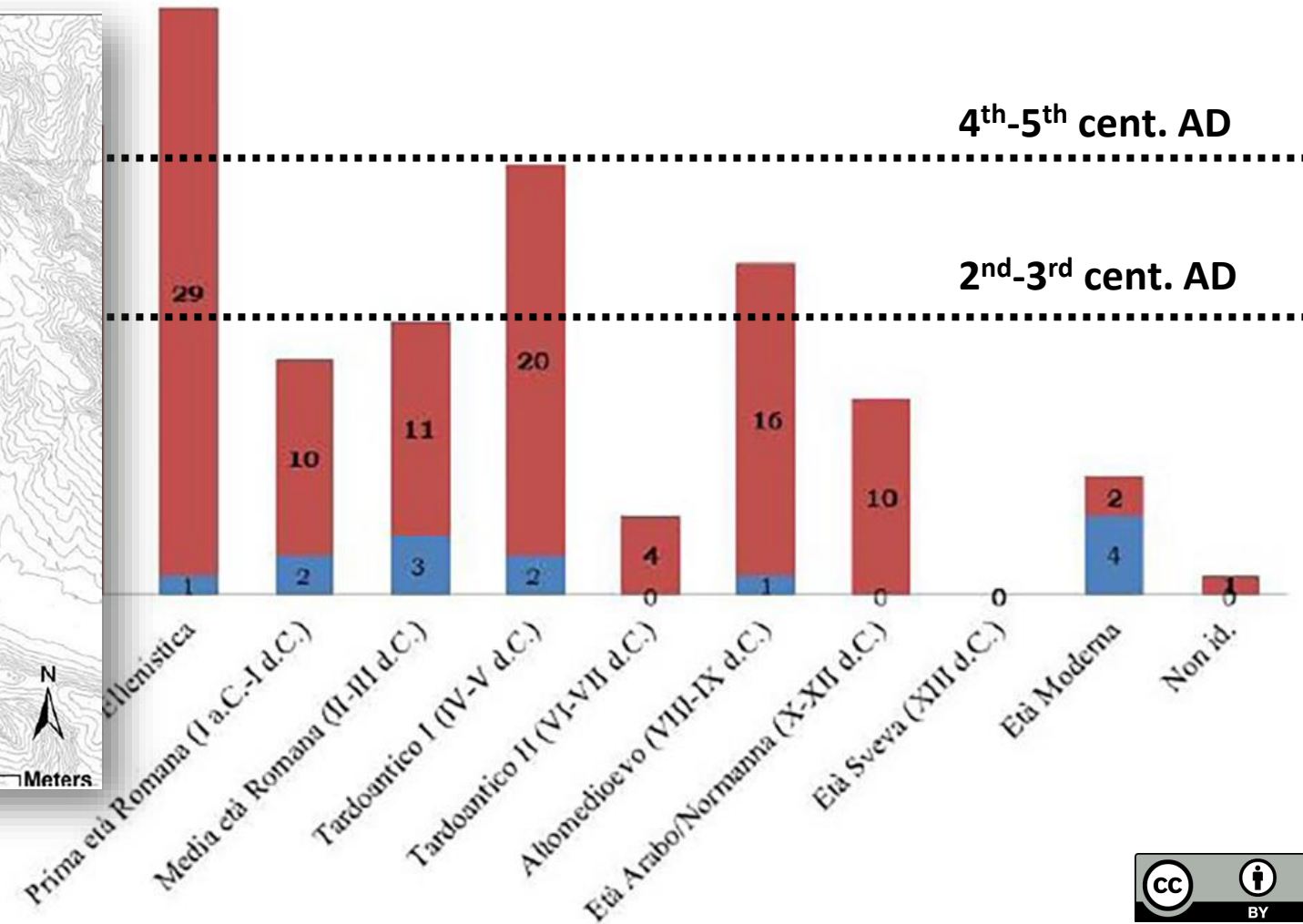
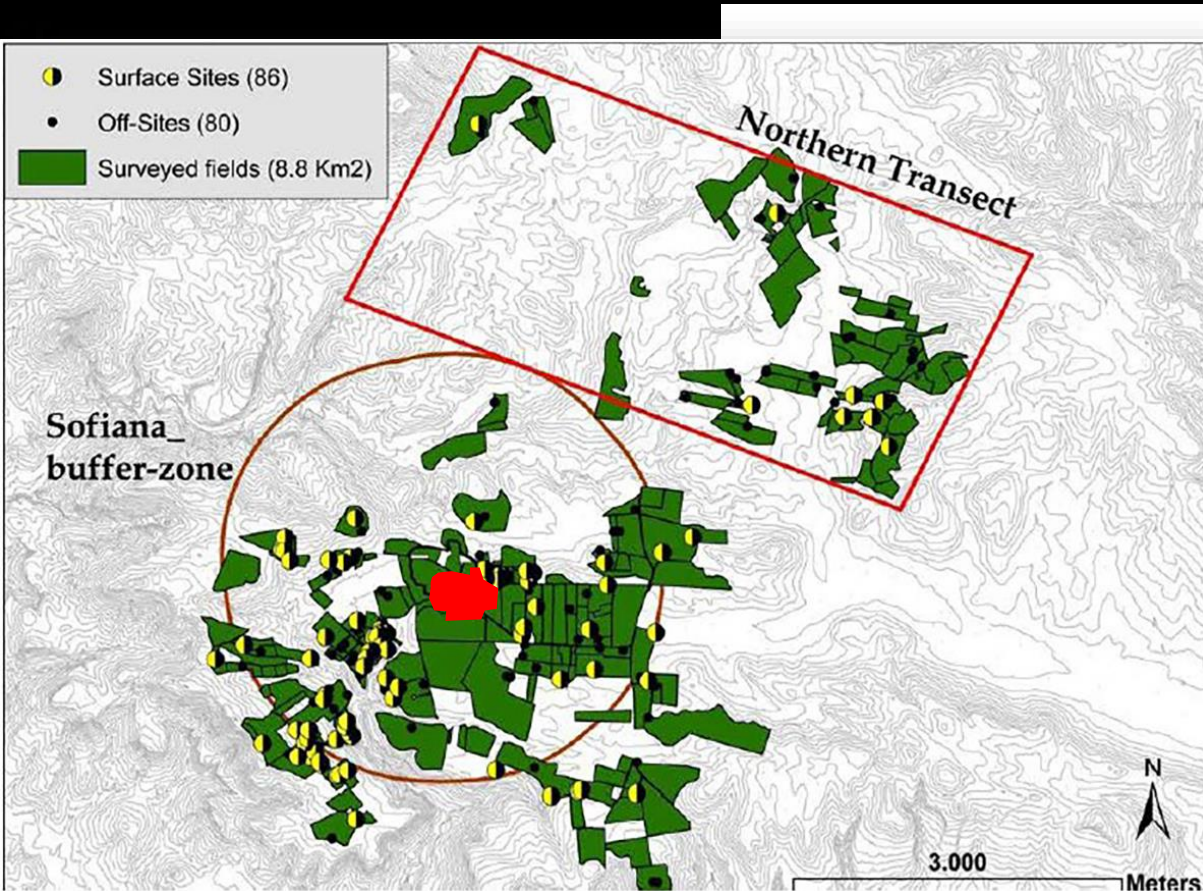
## Number of sites according to chronology



North transect



Buffer zone around the site



(La Torre 2018a, Fig. 4, 6)

# Transition III

Sprawling agricultural villages

5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD

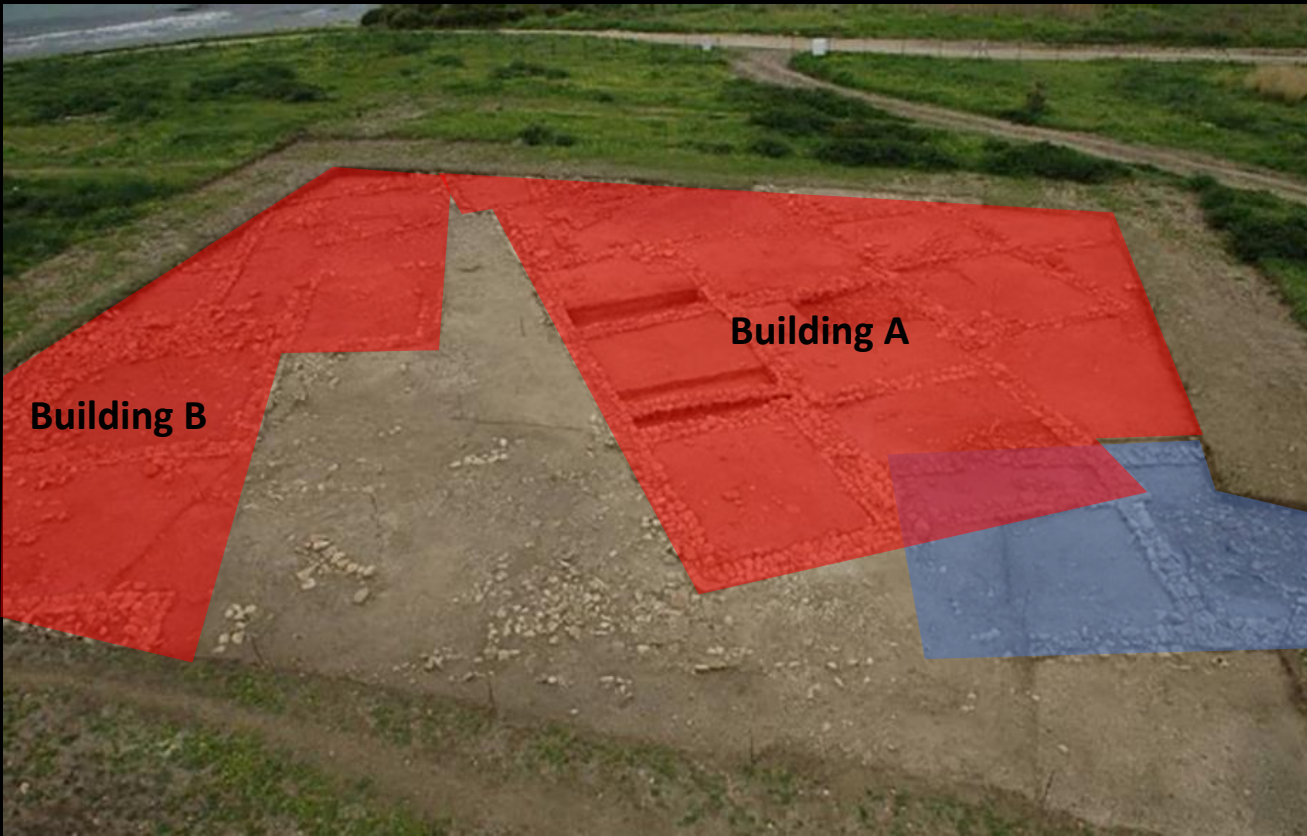
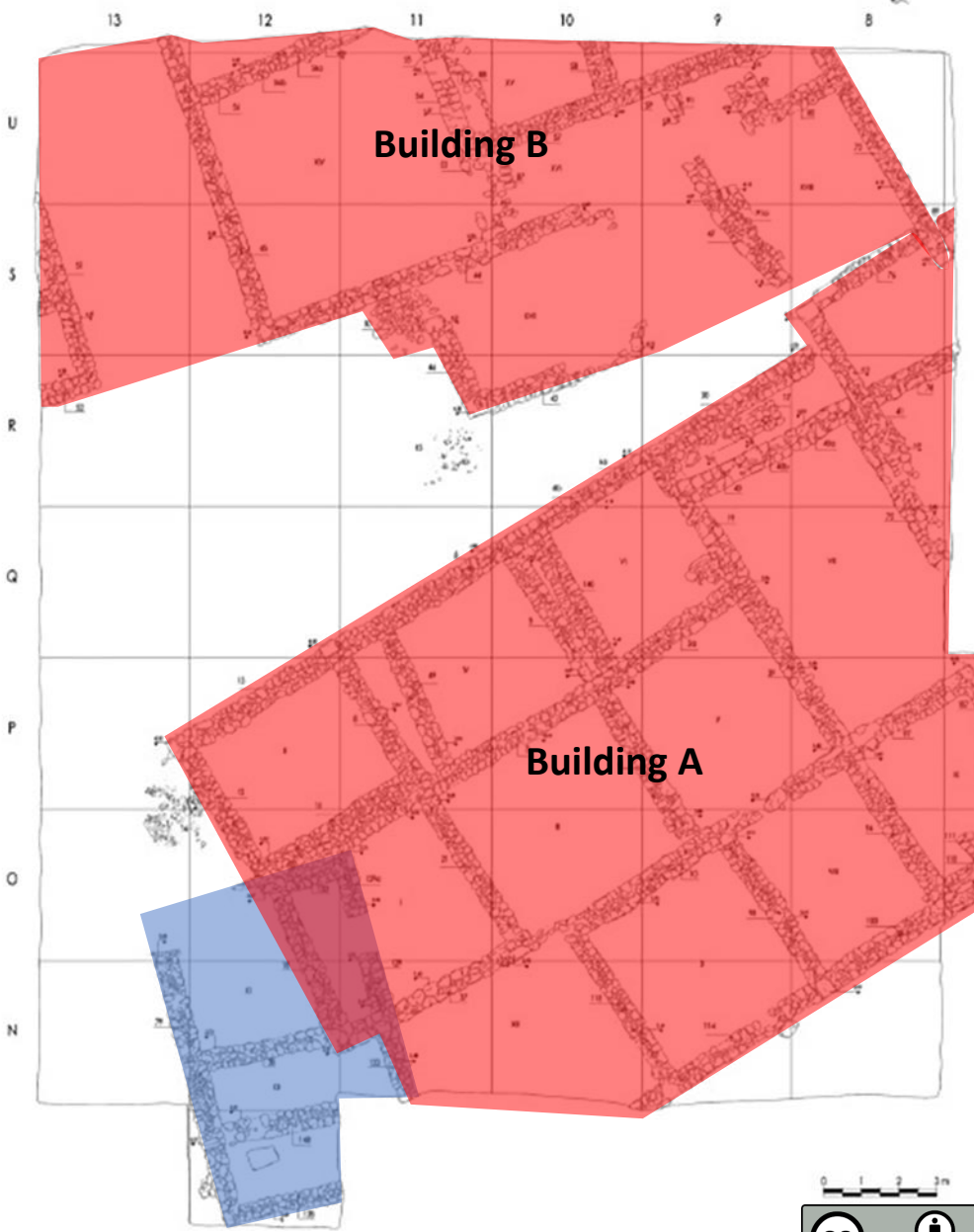
# Carabollace

Carabollace

(Caminnecci 2010, Fig. 5-6)

SCIACCA (AG)  
CARABOLLACE 2006-07

PIRELLA GÖTTSCHE LOWE  
DESIGN & COMMUNICATION



0 1 2 3m



# Verdura

Verdura



(Rizzo 2014, Fig. 5)

(Parello, Amico, D'Angelo 2010, Fig. 2)



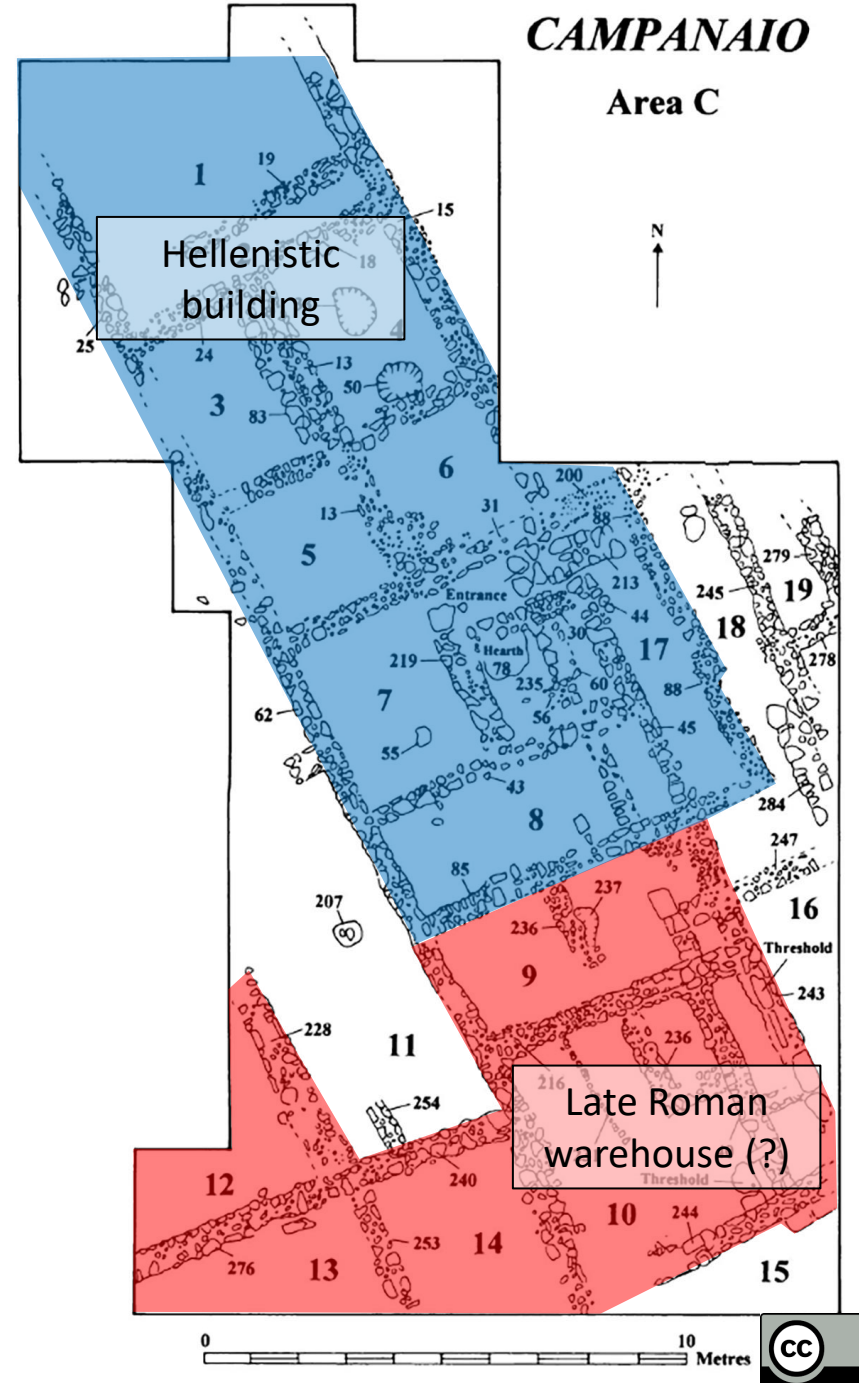
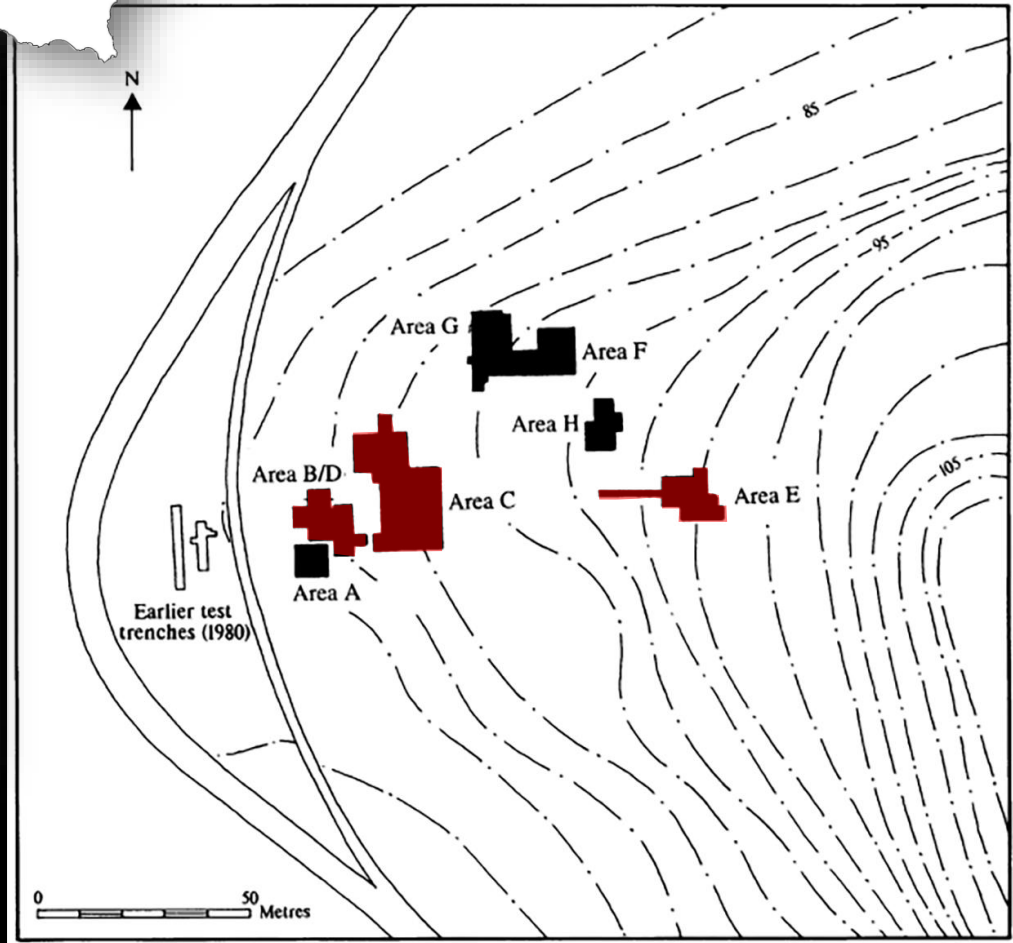
# Campanaio

Campanaio

(Wilson 2000, Fig. 2, 5, 9)



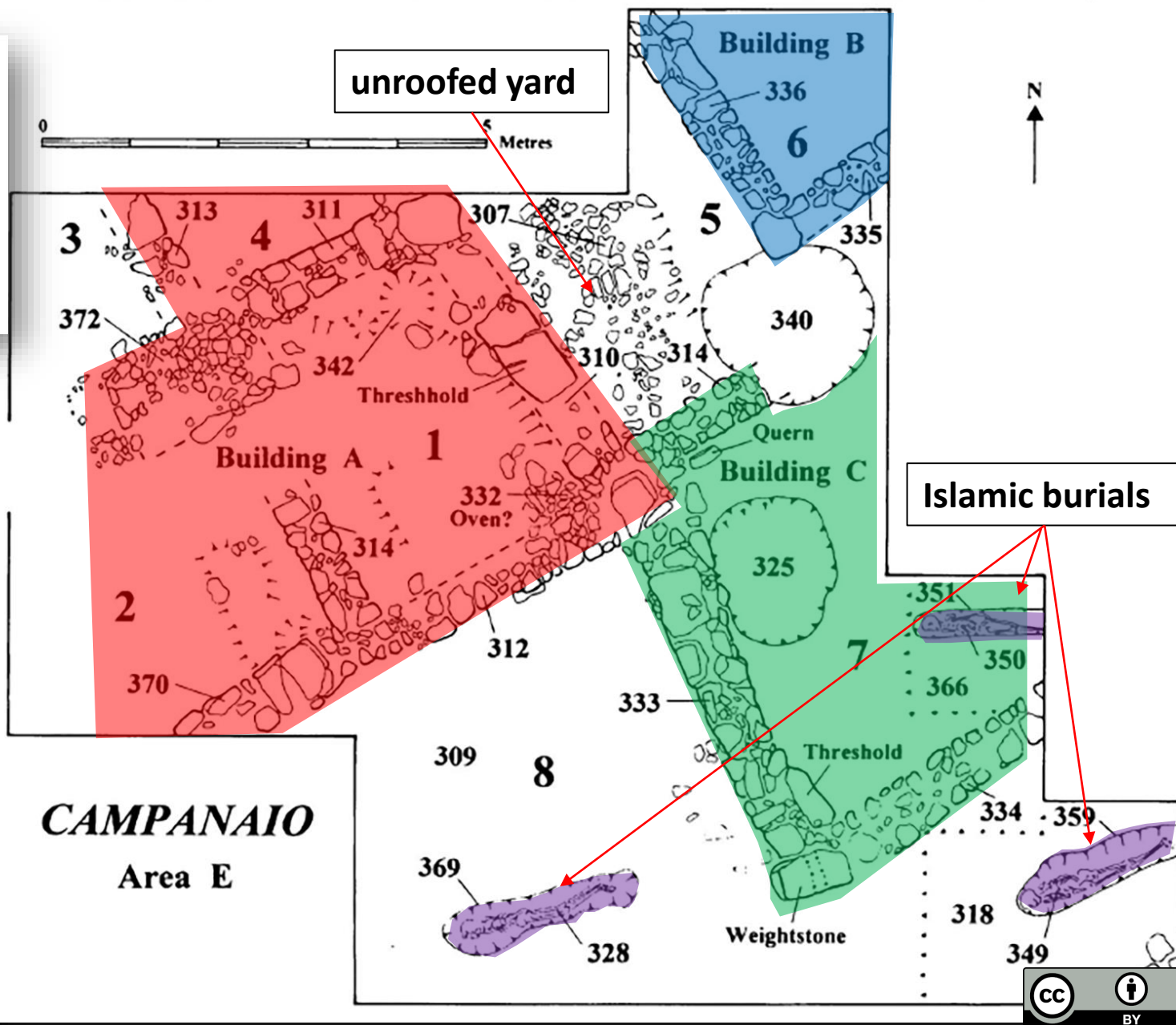
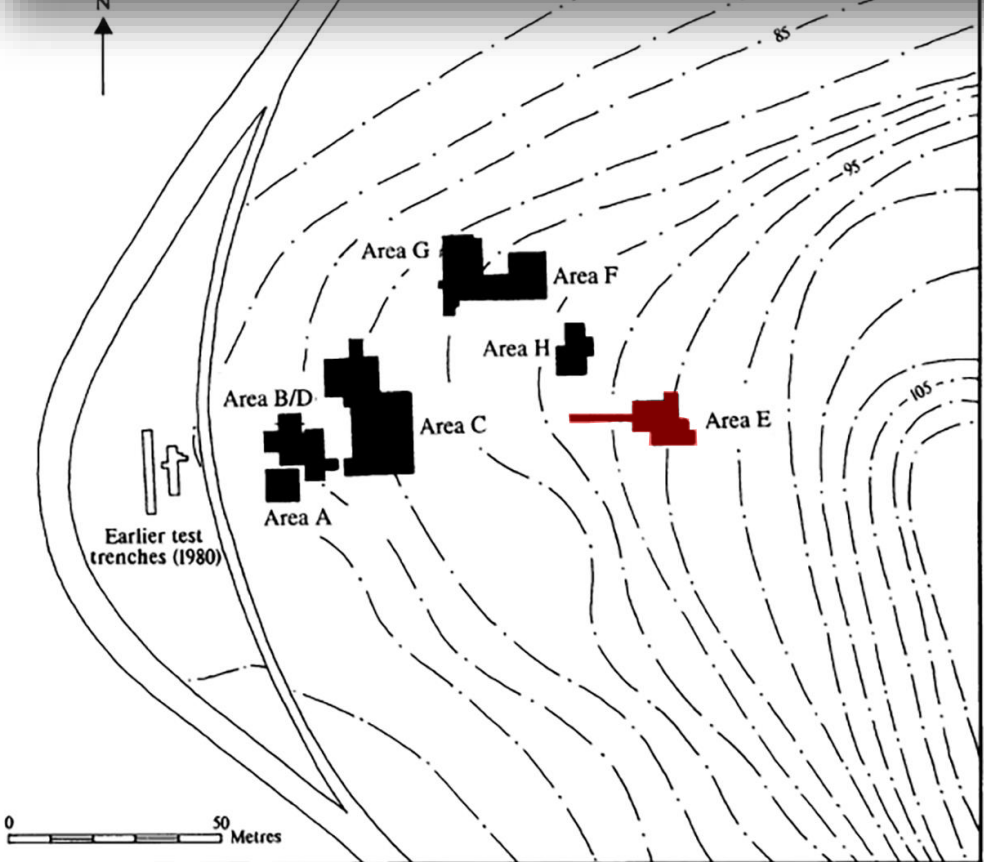
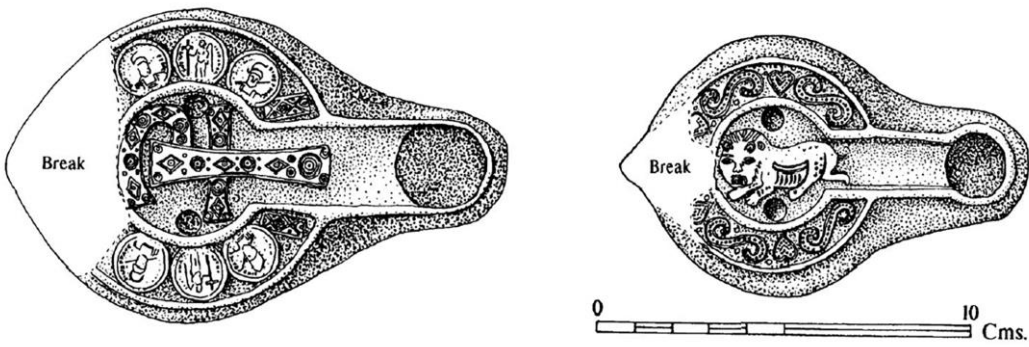
Smashed tiles and amphora deposit, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. AD, from Room 13





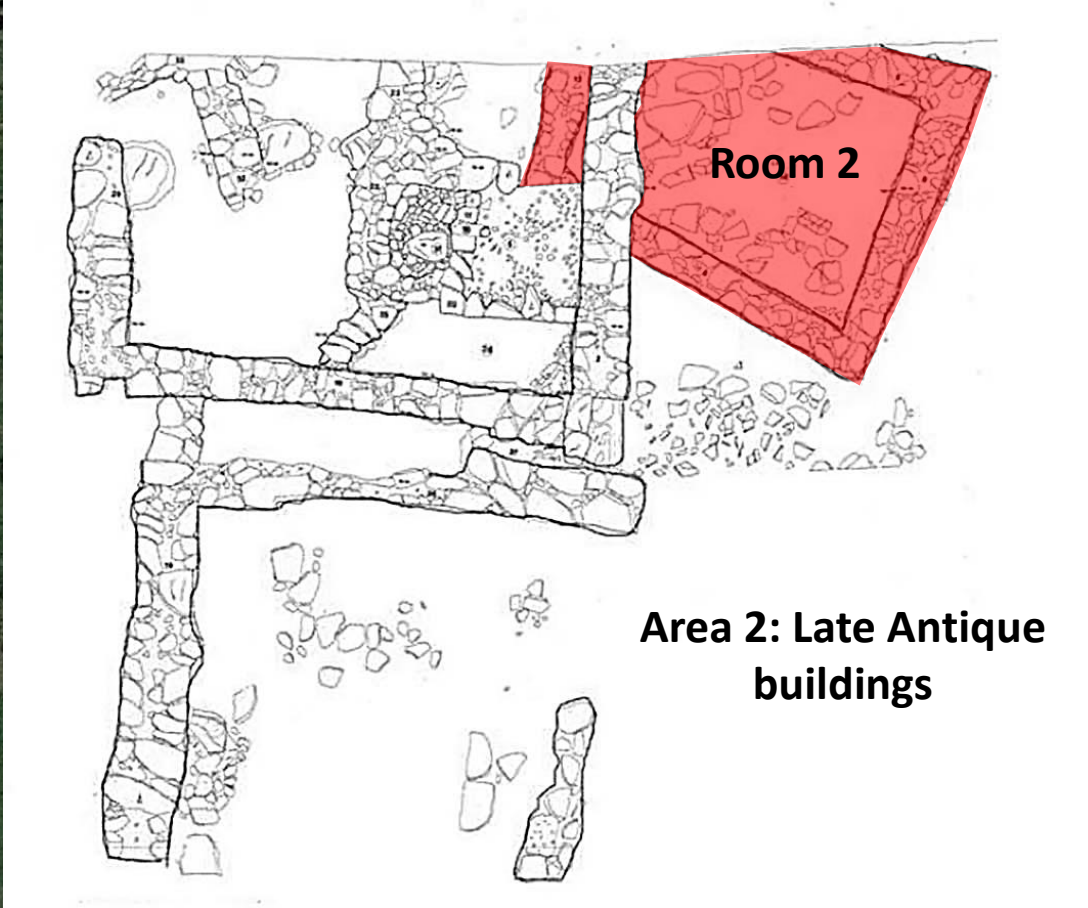
# impressions of a gold coin of Emperor Theodosius II AD 430

(Wilson 2000, Fig. 2, 10, 11)



# Muratore

Muratore

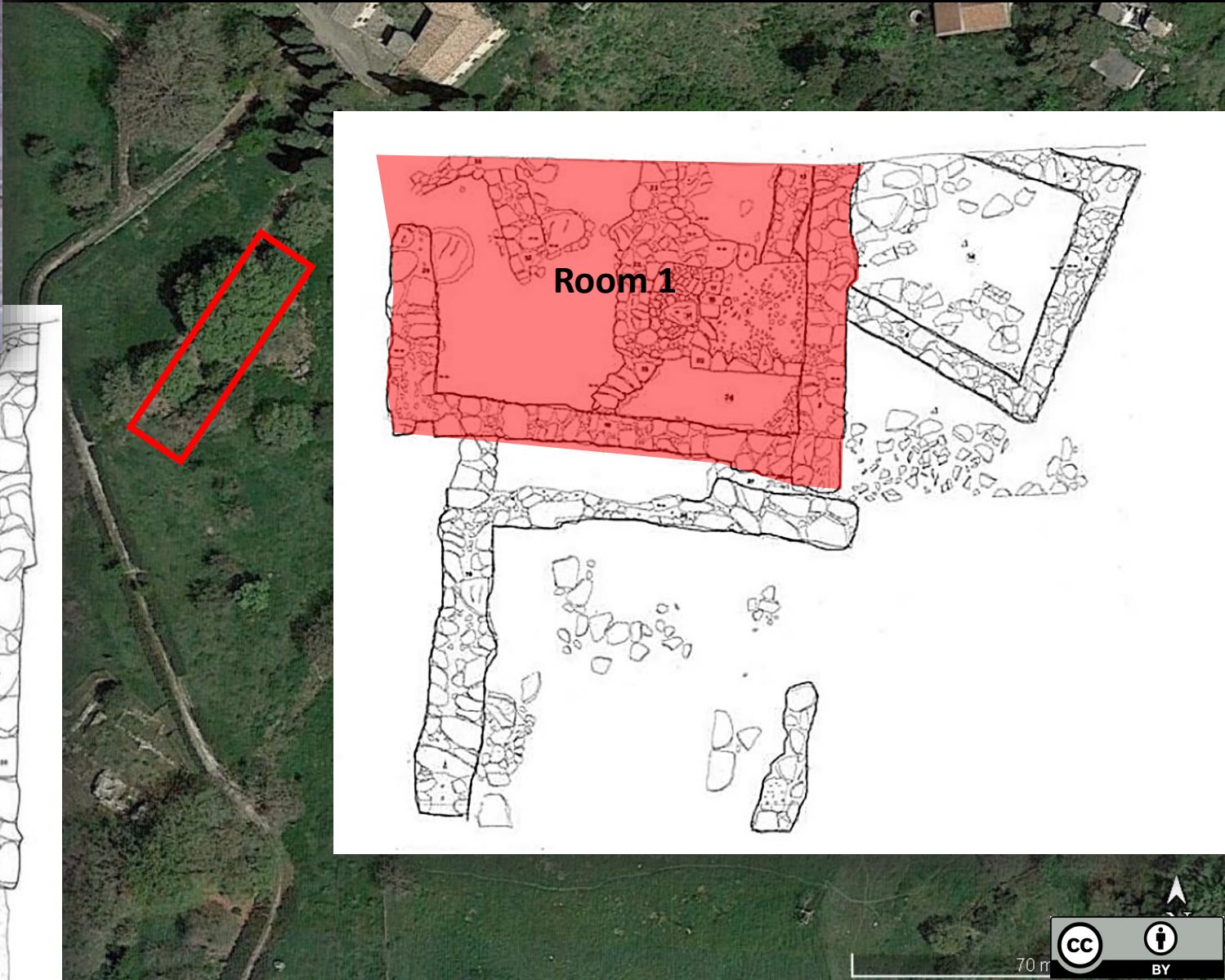
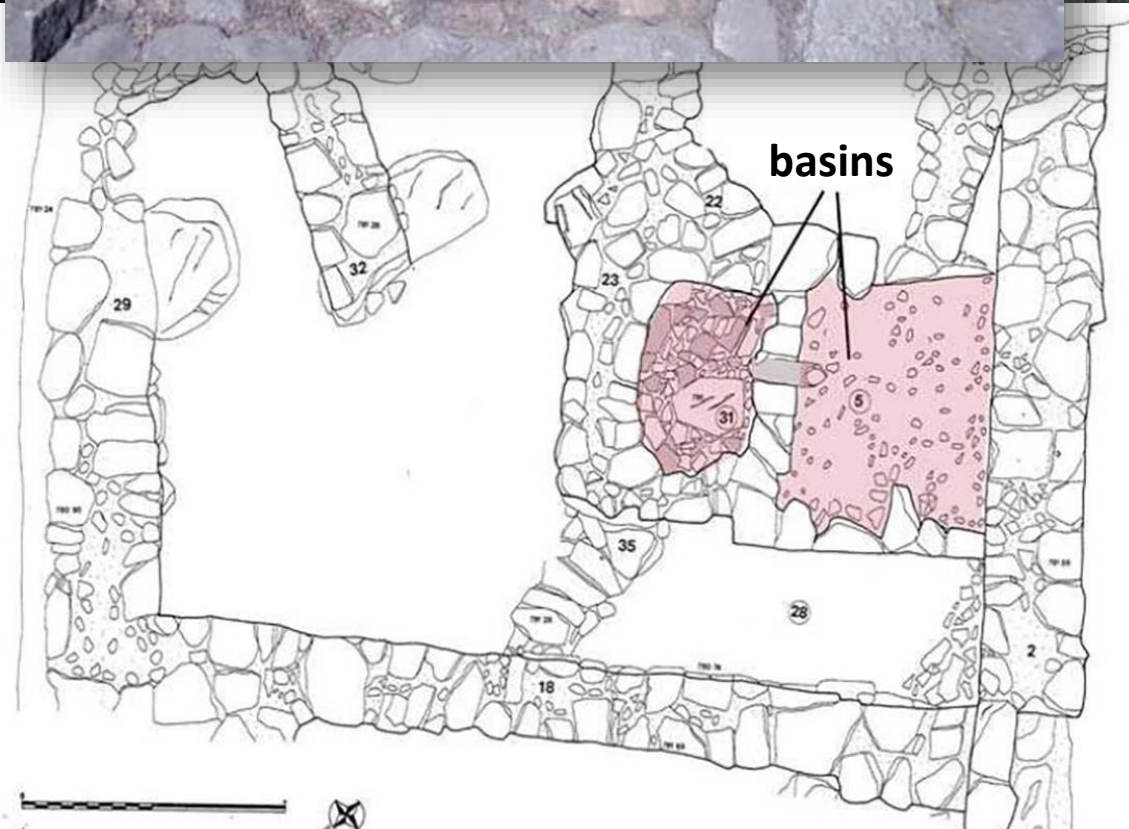


(Valentino & Vassallo 2016, Fig. 17, 19)

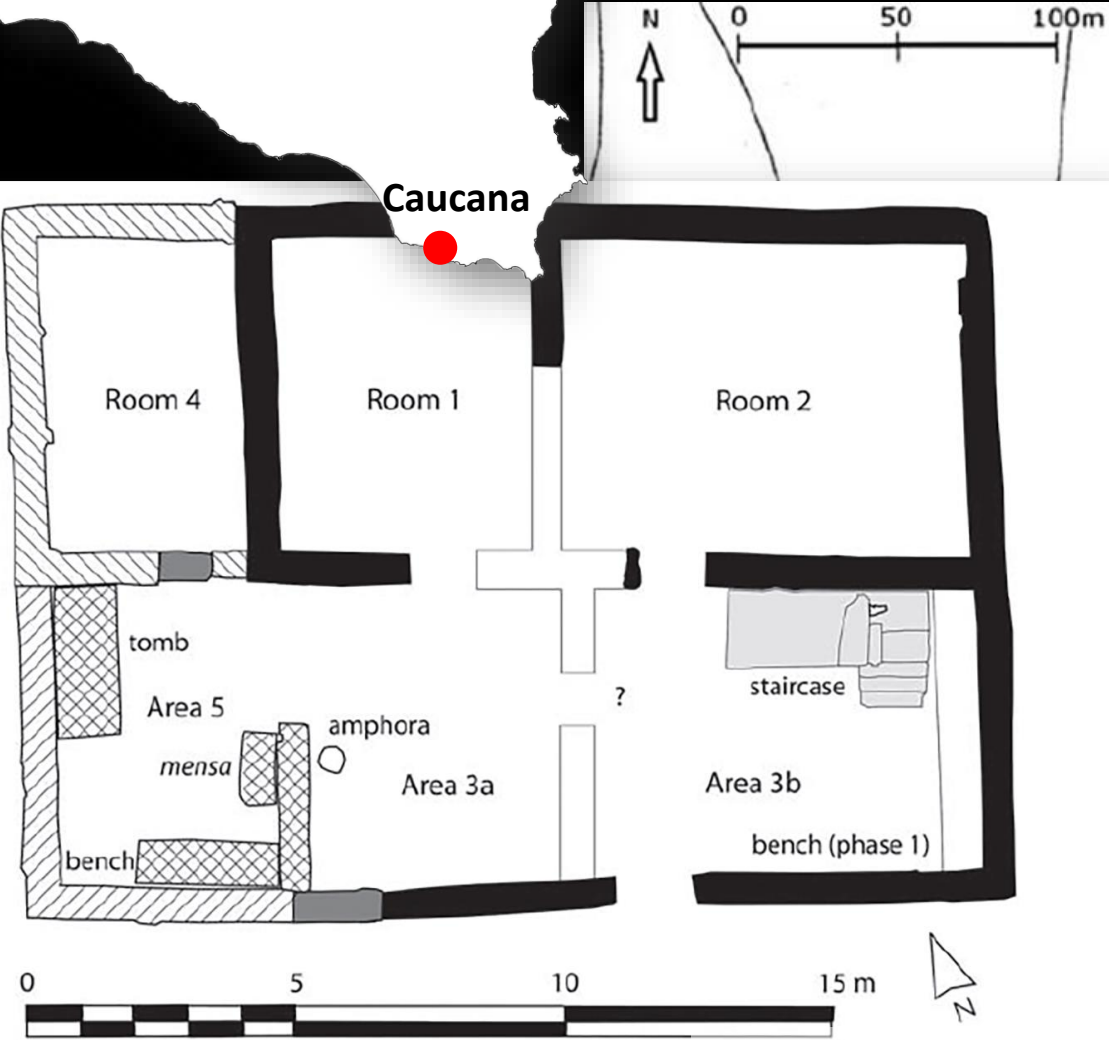
Area1: Imperial age bath?



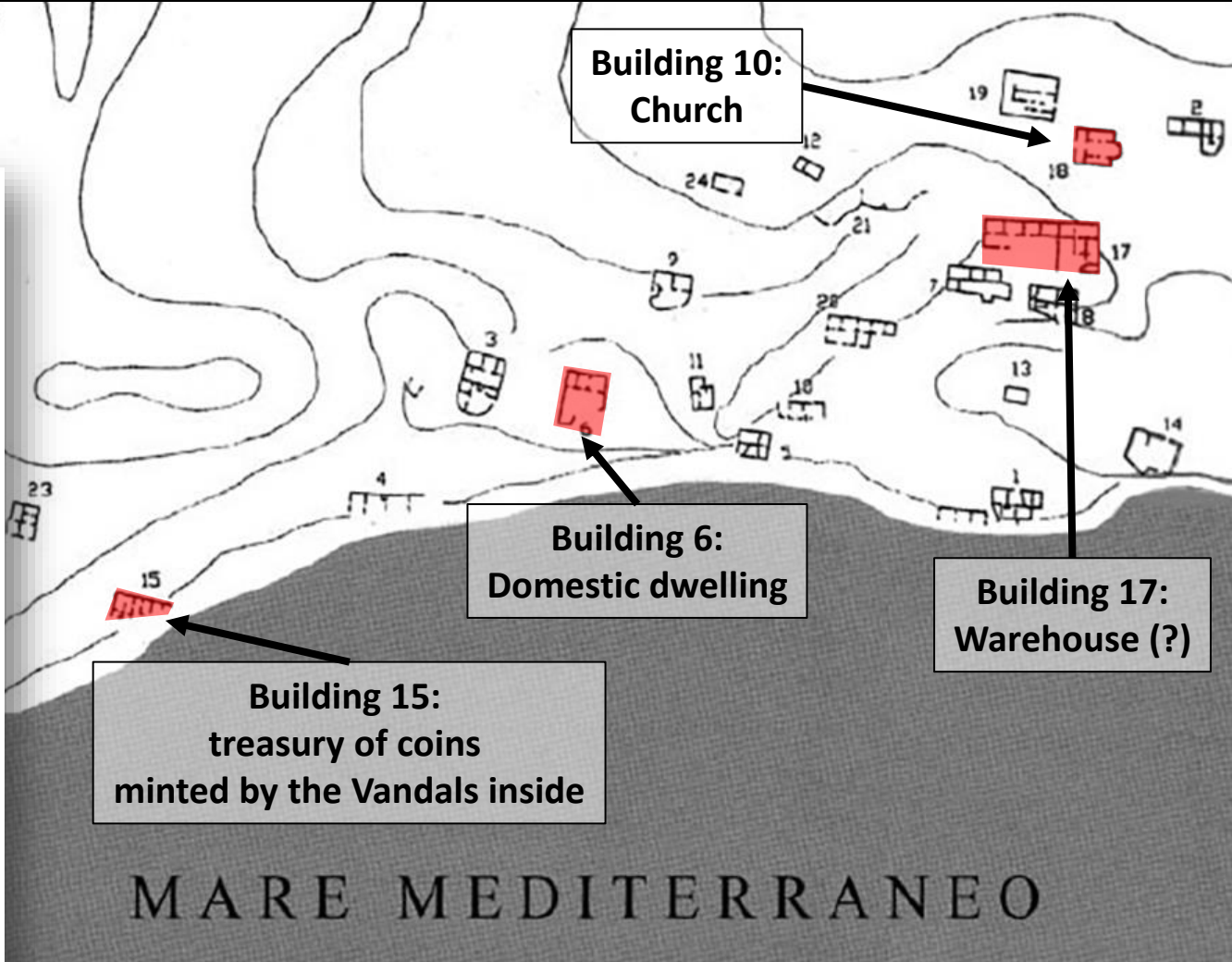
(Valentino & Vassallo 2016, Fig. 17, 28-29 )



# Caucana: a landing place in southern Sicily?



(Wilson 2011, Fig. 3)



(Uggeri 2017, Fig. 4)



# From Kaukana to Caputvada Belisarios' journey AD 533



[11] ταῦτα Προκόπιος ἀκούσας τῆς τε χειρὸς τοῦ οἰκέτου λαβόμενος ἐπὶ τὸν λιμένα ἐβάδιζε τὴν Ἀρέθουσαν, ἔνθα δὴ οἱ τὸ πλοῖον ὠρμίζετο, πυνθανόμενός τε τοῦ ἀνθρώπου συχνὰ καὶ διερευνώμενος ἕκαστα. ἐσβὰς δὲ ξὺν αὐτῷ ἐς τὴν ναῦν αἴρεσθαί τε τὰ ἱστία ἐκέλευσε **καὶ πλεῖν κατὰ τάχος ἐς Καύκανα.**

# Some conclusive remarks

# Main transitions

1. Crisis of minor rural settlements during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD
2. Big luxury villas during the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD
3. Sprawling agricultural villages between the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century

What reasons might trigger changes and resiliencies in human settlement patterns on a local scale?

## and other related issues

How to distinguish farms from minor villas, villages, workshops of different nature, service facilities for the *cursus publicus*?

Necessity of of a new protocol of analysis

Necessity of publishing old excavation reports and surveys

Necessity of broaden our knowledge concerning material culture



# Thank you

And come to Sicily for visiting these sites

We need help for solving these and much more issues

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