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North African pottery in Palermo: preliminary findings from the Montevergini excavations

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Introduction

Via Montevergini is situated in an area of Palermo's Historical Center known as the "Casaro" located between the Norman Cathedral¹ and the Baroque intersection of Quattro Canti. Passing through this crossroads, Corso Vittorio Emanuele was the main axis of the city and comprised the backbone of the Punic and Roman town. Via Montevergini presumably corresponds with one of the streets of the ancient plan that branched off from the main axis toward the north. The former Montevergini monastery occupies part of a block bounded on the east by Via Montevergini and on the west by Via del Giusino and was where the Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. of Palermo carried out excavations in 1998² and 2001³. Considering the likely correlation between the Cassaro and the ancient *Panormos*⁴ road system in relation to the material finds from the area around Via Montevergini⁵, these all point to the heightened possibility of discoveries from the outset of archaeological works⁶. In both campaigns,

¹ The area around the cathedral of Palermo probably coincides with the forum of the Roman town: see Spatafora (2003), 1181.

² The excavation was directed by Dr. Carmela Angela Di Stefano with the collaboration of Dr. Irina Garofano: see Di Stefano (1997-1998), 573. Garofano (1997-1998a), 583-586.

³ The excavation was directed by Dr. Francesca Spatafora with the collaboration of Dr. R.M. Cucco and Dr. Daniela Lauro: see Spatafora (2004), 242-244. Spatafora (2005), 51-52.

⁴ Concerning the situation of Via Montevergini within the urban plan of *Panormos*: it was probably based on the large Punic cubit of 52.18 cm, see: Belvedere (1987), 293-296. Belvedere (1998), 76. One may note the recent discovery by the Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. of Palermo of an ancient road in Via del Celso (Fig. 7.3) that was parallel to Corso Vittorio Emanuele dating to the 4th century B.C. and used until the Byzantine age. This find sheds new light on the urban plan of *Panormos*: see Aleo Nero (2019-2020), 35. Aleo Nero, Vassallo (2020), 603-604.

⁵ Where mosaics and other ancient objects were found in previous centuries.

⁶ Garofano (1997-1998a), 583-584.

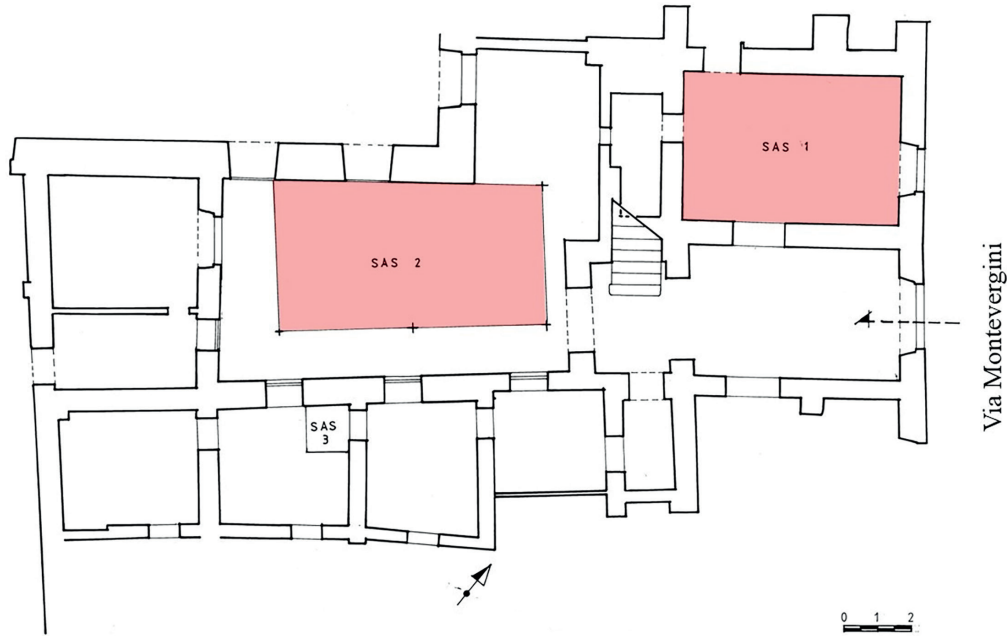


Fig. 1. Plan of the former Montevergini monastery showing the excavation areas (in red).

prior to the restoration of the monastery⁷, the excavation campaign focused on the room north of the entrance (SAS 1) and the inner courtyard (SAS 2) (Fig. 1 and Fig. 7.1).

The 2001 excavations extended and further investigated the 1998 test pits, revealing an extraordinary sequence of levels from the medieval to the Punic age. To this latter period can be dated the remains of dwellings with walls made in the typical frame technique (*opus africanum*) below the Roman levels in SAS 2.

The excavations and their contexts

SAS 1

The 1998 excavations in SAS 1 took place only in the western half of a room (Local Q), which had been intended for the accommodation of an elevator. An *opus signinum* floor was discovered there in an excellent state of preservation dating to the 2nd century B.C.⁸ and a wall (USM 75), probably from the medieval period, bisects the room in a NW-SE direction. In 2001, the excavation was extended to the eastern part of the room used as a dump in modern times⁹. Beneath these more recent levels, several further layers evidenced continuity of life during the medieval period, where a context was identified that consisted of a courtyard paved with cobblestone (US 101) and the remains of a wall of a modest dwelling facing onto the courtyard from the north¹⁰. Continuing the excavation in the northern part of the trench uncovered that the *opus signinum* found west of the medieval wall USM 75 did not continue in this part of the room. The exploration of the southern part of the room revealed useful clues for the interpretation of the Roman age complex below the monastery and for its location within the urban plan of *Panormos*. In the southern sector of SAS 1, a wall of

⁷ Already attested to the 16th century and, more recently, used as an urban social center.

⁸ Garofano (1997-1998a), 585.

⁹ There were five waste pits (UUS 33,80,82,84,86) found with food residues.

¹⁰ Preliminary analysis of diagnostic finds during the excavation suggests a date between the 11th and 13th centuries.

large, squared tufa ashlar (USM 127) with a SE-NW orientation set on the calcarenite bed has been brought to light, which is assumed to have been the northern outer limit of a supposed late Roman building found in SAS 2 (see below)¹¹. A significant discovery is a drainage channel (USM 131) of the same phase as the large ashlar wall USM 127 that was probably connected to the alley (*ambitus*) now traced by Via Montevergini¹² onto which the building faced.

SAS 2

Extending about 25 sqm., SAS 2 corresponds to the area of the inner courtyard of the monastery¹³ where during a 1998 test pit conducted by the Soprintendenza a mosaic fragment depicting a dolphin was found (US 1014)¹⁴. The excavation in 2001 made it possible to understand the archaeological context to which the mosaic belonged, elucidating the historical evolution of the area from the oldest Punic settlement established on the calcarenite bed. From the post-Roman period onward, the courtyard probably coincided with an open area with gutters and a well set into the late Roman levels consisting of the building with the mosaic above (US 1014) and a floor covered with marble *crustae* (US 1046-1047) adjacent to the mosaic. Therefore, the excavation data suggest a different situation for the Hellenistic and Roman phases when this area was occupied by block dwellings likely delimited to the north by an alley (*ambitus*) corresponding to present-day Via Montevergini.

SAS 2 appears to be divided into two sectors by a NE-SW *opus quadratum* wall (USM 1082) partly made of reused architectural elements¹⁵ that probably continued in SAS 1 (USM 127), which can be interpreted as the limit of a late Roman house. NW of this wall, which would have been in the interior the house, a complex stratigraphy has been identified characterized by the overlapping of three floor layers: the mosaic with a dolphin (US 1014) and an *opus sectile* (US 1047) overlay an *opus signinum* floor (US 1061) covering an underlayment whose surface (US 1059) is unknown. We cannot exclude that the dolphin mosaic and the *opus sectile* decorated a single open-air room, as the water channel that marks the boundary between the two floors would seem to suggest.

The luxurious late Roman building with mosaic and marble facings was erected above pre-existing dwellings. To the earliest Roman phase can be ascribed the *cocciopesto* floors found south of the large wall USM 1082, as well as the *opus signinum* floor in SAS 1¹⁶. The *cocciopesto* floors belonged to a dwelling constructed on a Punic building that can be documented by a fragment of a frame wall (USM 1102) founded on the rock.

Methodology and data collection

The analysis of finds from US1048 entailed three tasks following a step-by-step protocol. The first was to compute the relative proportions of different materials and functional categories of objects. The quantitative approach applied to qualitative data by means of Excel

¹¹ This wall had similar masonry to USM 1082 in SAS 2, which was perpendicular to USM 127.

¹² A stretch of the alley (*ambitus*) paved in stone and oriented on a NE-SW axis seems to have been identified during the excavations at Via Montevergini no. 34 in 2010 (US 103). Via Montevergini was likely part of a block bounded to the north and south sides by streets that were probably parallel to those identified during excavations at Palazzo Arcivescovile (Fig. 7.6) and in Piazza Sett'Angeli (Fig. 7.4). Cf. Spatafora (2003), CLXXXIX.

¹³ This part of the complex was known as “della Mazara” or “della panetteria”.

¹⁴ Di Stefano (1997-1998), 573. Spatafora (2005), 51-52.

¹⁵ It is likely that the building followed the orientation of the main urban axis: see Spatafora (2003), 1180.

¹⁶ We may note the correspondence of elevations (a.s.l.) between the *cocciopesto* and the *opus signinum* floors.

spreadsheets resulted in a summary table that provided us with a complete overview of the archaeological context and to avoid data loss (Tab. I). The excavation resulted in a total amount of 907 finds, mainly consisting of bricks and tiles (25.7%), amphorae (39.5%), table wares and cooking wares (28.8%). There are also scatter shards of lamps (0.8%), *dolia* (0.2%), glass (0.3%), iron (0.1%), plaster (0.4%), mortar (0.7%), marble (0.4%), mosaic (2.5%) and animal bones (0.6%). The sum of amphorae, table wares, cooking wares and lamps corresponds to 69%. However, only the diagnostic part (10%) has been selected and analysed using an integrated approach¹⁷. The process entailed simultaneously examining shapes, coats, decorations and fabrics to identify typologies, their supposed origin and chronology. Using a 10x geologist lens allowed a pilot fabrics analysis, revealing the presence or absence of specific rock fragments and other minerals on fresh break. Finally, all the selected pottery has been drawn according to the Montpellier Round Table standards¹⁸ and photographed using a Nikon 3500 camera with an AF-S NIKKOR 18-140mm (1:3.5-5.6) zoom along with the use of a lightbox to ensure the same lighting conditions¹⁹. The catalogue below mainly focuses on African imports, including cooking pots and other plain wares whose origin and dating are currently unknown.

Tab. I.: Total amounts of finds from level 1048, all categories included. Key: R= Rim; B= Bottom; H= Handle; W= Wall; OT= Other; TF= Total Fragments; MNV= Minimum Number of Vases; HA= Hayes; KE= Keay; BO= Bonifay; AFR= Africana; ARS: African Red Slip ware; ACW: African Cooking ware; APW: African Plain ware.

Class	Type	R	B	H	W	OT	TF	MNV	Comments
African amph.	Maña D		2				2	1	
Plain ware lamp	Corinth 16 (?)	1					1	1	Probably from local manufacture
African amph.	Tran. AFR IIIA (?)	1					1	1	
African amp.	AFR IIIA (?)	1					1	1	
African amph.	Spatheion 1B	1					1	1	
African amph.	KE 61 or 62 (?)		1				1	1	
African amph.	KE 62 or BO 47 (?)	1					1	1	
African amph.	Ind.			1	28		29	-	
ARS C	HA 52B (?)	1					1	1	
ARS CD	HA 61B3	1					1	1	
ARS D	HA 61B3	1					1	1	
ARS D	HA 61C	1					1	1	
ARS D	HA 87B	1	2		1		4	1	
ARS D	HA 94B (?)	1					1	1	
ARS D	HA 108 (?)	1					1	1	
ARS D	Ind.		1		3		4	-	
ARS D2	HA 99A	1					1	1	
ARS D2	HA 99B	2					2	2	

¹⁷ Capelli, Bonifay (2007), 551-552.

¹⁸ Arcelin, Rigoir (1979).

¹⁹ Original drawings (64) were scanned in greyscale and vectorised on dedicated graphic software. An asterisk in the catalogue indicates that the find has been drawn. The pictures (237 in number) were saved in JPEG and RAW formats to ensure the ease of post-production manipulations.

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Class	Type	R	B	H	W	OT	TF	MNV	Comments
ARS D2	HA 103/104A		5				5	1	Decoration style E(ii)
ARS D	HA 91	3					3	2	
ACW A	HA 181	1					1	1	
ACW B	HA 181				1		1	1	Blackened exterior
ACW B (?)	HA 184 (?)	1					1	1	
ACW (?)	Ind.	1					1	1	
APW	Carthage Class 1B	1					1	1	
APW (?)	Mortarium	1					1	1	≈Fulford 22-23 (?)
APW (?)	Mortarium		4				4	2	Fragments of basalt inside
ARS C lamp	Atlante XC2	1					1	1	
ARS D lamp	Atlante XD3					1	1	1	
ARS D lamp	Atlante X		1				1	-	
ARS D lamp	Ind.				2		2	-	
Plain ware lamp	Ind.				1		1	1	
Ind. amph.	Medieval, ind.		1	4	9		14	1	1 grooved handle
Glazed ware	Jug	1	3				4	2	2 jugs with green and light brown glaze
Glazed ware	Dish	3	1				4	3	Glazed decoration in green and brown
Glazed ware	Bowl	3	1				4	3	On a predominantly white background. Majolica?
Glazed ware	Ind.				4		4	3	Glazed decoration in green and brown
Cooking ware	Casserole	1					1	1	Brown glaze on lip, medieval or post-medieval
Cooking ware	Ind.	1	2	1	19		23	-	Probably medieval or post-medieval
Ind. amph.	Ind.		2		285		287	-	4 shards with peach inside
Ind. amph.	Ind.				21		21	-	Corrugate walls
Cooking ware	Pot	2			1		3	2	With small handle
Cooking ware	Pot	3					3	2	
Cooking ware	Pot	1					1	1	Thick rim. Medieval ages not excluded
Plain ware	Jug	8	1	5			14	10	
Plain ware	Jug (?)			6			6	-	
Plain ware	Flask (?)		1				1	1	Spheric bottom
Plain ware	Basin	3					3	3	
Plain ware	Dish	1					1	1	
Plain ware	Bowl	1					1	1	
Plain ware	Mug (?)	1					1	1	
Plain ware	Lid	5					5	5	

Class	Type	R	B	H	W	OT	TF	MNV	Comments
Plain ware	Ind.	2	5	3	137		147	-	
Brick	Ind.						18	-	
Tile	Wilson B	15					15	-	
Tile	Wilson A	3					3	-	
Tile	Medieval				9		9	-	
Tile	Ind.				183		183	-	
Pipe	Ind.	3			2		5	-	
Dolium	Ind.		1		1		2	-	
Glass	Ind.	1			2		3	-	1 multicolour (white and green) wall
Iron nail	Ind.							-	
Plaster	Ind.				4		4	-	1 yellow, the others white
Mortar	Not applicable					6	6	-	
Mosaic	White stone					23	23	-	
Marble	Bigio				1		1	-	
Marble	Giallo antico (?)				1		1	-	
Marble	Pavonazzetto				1		1	-	
Marble	White marble				1		1	-	
Toot	Equid?				1		1	-	
Rib	Ind.				1		1	-	
Bons	Ind.				3		3	-	

Catalogue of selected pottery

African Punic amphora

1.* Maña D. Bottom. Granular pinkish fabric, speckled with minuscule and medium-sized limestone (?) and quartz; whitish outer surface. From Tunisia. [MV.1].

Classical Roman-African amphorae

2.* Africana IID, transition with Africana III (?). Rim (D: n.a.). Fine granular, red fabric with infrequently placed small and reddish grits; whitish outer surface. From Tunisia. [MV.2].

3.* Africana IIIA (?). Rim (D: n.a.). Granular brownish/orangish fabric, with small round quartz; surfaces as fabric. From Tunisia. [MV.3].

Late Roman-African amphorae

4.* Spatheion 1B. Rim (D: 12 cm ext.) and fragmentary handle. Granular red fabric with small limestone and quartz; surfaces as fabric. Probably from Nabeul. [MV.4].

5.* Keay 61 or 62 (?). Spike. Orangish granular fabric, with small round quartz, some slightly bigger reddish grits, and rarer limestone. From Tunisia, probably Byzacena. [MV.5].

6.* Keay 62 or Bonifay 70 (?). Rim (D: 14 cm ext.). Granular, pinkish fabric, with frequent quartz and other small grits; yellowish outer surface. From Tunisia, probably Byzacena. [MV.6].

ARS C

7.* Hayes 52B (?). Rim (D: 24-28 cm ext.). Standard fabric, very fine and pinkish. From central Tunisia, probably the Sidi Marzouk Tounsi region. [MV.11].

ARS CD

8.* Hayes 61B3. Rim (D: n.a.). Standard fabric, reddish surfaces. Probably from the Sidi Khalifa region. [MV.10].

ARS D other workshops

9.* Hayes 61B3. Rim (D: n.a.). Standard fabric, fine granular and pinkish; eroded surfaces. From northern Tunisia. [MV.9].

10.* Hayes 61C. Rim (D: n.a.). Standard fabric, fine granular and orangish; orange surfaces. Probably from the north of the Gulf of Hammamet. [MV.8].

11.* Hayes 87B. Rim (D: ≈34 cm int.) and bottom, with lustrous decoration, group 1B (cross with A and Ω). Standard fabric, fine granular and orangish, abundant round quartz; slip only inside and on the lip. Probably from northern Tunisia. [MV.18].

12.* Hayes 91. Rim (D: 19 cm int.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric; matte carmine slip inside and outside, except on blackened flange. Origin unknown, Tunisia not excluded. [MV.16bis].

13.* Hayes 91. Rim (D: n.a.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric; matte orange slip on outer surface; brownish bands inside, on lip and on flange. Origin unknown, Tunisia not excluded. [MV.17].

14.* Hayes 94B (?). Rim (D: ≈19 cm ext.). Standard fabric, fine granular and pinkish; pinkish/orangish surfaces. Northern Tunisia not excluded. [MV.12].

15.* Hayes 108 (?). Rim (D ≈19 cm ext.). Standard fabric, fine granular and pinkish/orangish; light orange surfaces. Northern Tunisia not excluded. [MV.13].

ARS D2

16.* Hayes 99A. Rim (D: ≈18 cm int.). Standard fabric, fine granular and orange; glossy orange surfaces. Probably from Oudhna. [MV.14].

17.* Hayes 99B. Rim (D: ≈20-22 cm int.). Standard fabric, fine granular and orange/pinkish; glossy orange slip on the inner surface and lip. Probably from Oudhna. [MV.15].

18.* Hayes 99B. Rim (D: n.a.). Standard fabric: fine granular and pinkish fabric; eroded smooth surfaces. Oudhna not excluded. [MV.16].

19.* Hayes 103 or 104A. Bottom (D: 22 cm ext.), decorated in style E(ii), 4 rosettes and 2 human figures. Standard fabric, fine granular and orangish; matte and smooth orange slip only inside. Atelier X not excluded. [MV.19].

ACWA

20.* Hayes 181. Rim (D: n.a.). Standard fabric, fine granular and orangish; abundant round quartz. Orangish matte slip on the inner surface. From the region of Carthage. [MV.24].

ACWB

21. Hayes 181. Wall. Standard fabric, fine granular and reddish, abundant round quartz; lustrous slip inside, blackened band on the upper outer surface. From Byzacena (?). [MV.25].

ACW B (?)

22.* Hayes 184, late variant (?). Rim (D: ≈12-14 cm int.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric, abundant round quartz; in part blackened from fire exposure; bands of orange slip only on the outer surface, similar to ARS. From Byzacena (?). [MV.23].

ACW (?)

23.* Indeterminate. Rim (D: n.a.). Fine granular orangish fabric, abundant round quartz; traces of orangish slip on the outer surface(?). Tunisia not excluded. [MV.49].

African plain ware

24.* Carthage Class 1B. Rim (D: ≈20 cm int.). Granular pinkish fabric, with a variety of small grits including limestone, quartz, and other small reddish fragments. From Tunisia, Oudhna not excluded. [MV.26].

African plain ware (?)

25.* Mortarium, ≈Fulford 22-23 (?). Rim (D: n.a.). Very fine, beige, and powdery fabric. Origin unknown, North Africa or Sicily not excluded. [MV.27].

26.* Mortarium. Bottom (D: ≈9 cm int.). Fine granular and beige fabric, grey at the core; fragment of basalt on inner surface (max 0.6 mm). Origin unknown, North Africa or Sicily not excluded. [MV.28].

27.* Mortarium. Bottom (D: 7 cm int.). Fine granular pinkish fabric, many planar voids, quartz, and rare limestone fragments; whitish surfaces, basalt (?) fragments on inner surface (max 3 mm). Origin unknown, North Africa or Sicily not excluded. [MV.29].

ARS C lamp

28. Atlante X group C2. Shoulder decorated with Ennabli squares A10 and branches S1-2. Standard fabric, very fine and pinkish; matte reddish and smooth outer slip. From central Tunisia. [MV.21].

ARS D lamps

29. Atlante X group D3. Shoulder and part of the disk. Highly spaced decoration with Ennabli hearts M2 and rosettes on the shoulder; cross (?) on the disk. Standard fabric, fine granular and reddish, rare limestone fragments; slip eroded. From north Tunisia, region of El Mahrine not excluded. [MV.20].

30. Atlante X. Bottom. Standard fine granular and pinkish fabric, with rare reddish grits, matte orange slip; partially eroded. From north Tunisia. [MV.22].

Cooking wares, origin unknown

31.* Pot. Rim (D: 22-24 cm int.). Coarse brown fabric, greyish at the core, many small and medium size grits (black inclusions, vitreous inclusion); brownish surfaces, blackened on outer surface. Sicily not excluded. [MV.31].

32.* Pot. Rim. (D: 24-26 cm int.). Coarse brown fabric, many small and medium size grits (black, white, vitreous inclusions); brownish surfaces, blackened outer surface. Sicily not excluded. [MV.32].

33.* Pot. Rim (D: 18 cm int.) and small handle. Very coarse brown fabric, many small, medium, and large grits (black, white, vitreous inclusions); brown surfaces. Sicily not excluded. [MV.33].

34.* Pot. Rim (D: n.a.) and small handle. Very coarse yellowish fabric, many small and medium size grits of different kinds (black, white, vitreous inclusions); brown surfaces, blackened outside. Sicily not excluded. [MV.34].

35.* Pot. Everted rim (D: n.a.). Coarse blackened fabric, many small and medium size inclusions of different kinds (black, white, vitreous inclusions); black surfaces. Sicily not excluded. [MV.35].

Plain ware, origin unknown

36.* Jug. Rim (D: 8 cm int.). Coarse orangish fabric, many different medium-sized grits (black, vitreous, probably quartz); blackened outer surface. Origin unknown. [MV.37].

37.* Jug. Rim (D: 10 cm int.). Fine granular and yellowish fabric, with small limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.38].

38.* Jug. Rim (D: 8 cm int.). Fine granular and orangish fabric, with small limestone fragments, rare microfossils, and round quartz. Origin unknown, North Africa and Sicily not excluded. [MV.39].

39.* Jug. Rim (D: 8 cm int.). Fine granular and yellowish fabric (calcareous), many small inclusions of different natures (mainly black, reddish, whitish inclusions). Origin unknown. [MV.40].

40.* Jug. Rim (D: 8 cm int.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric, orangish at the core, many small limestone fragments and microfossils. Origin unknown. [MV.41].

41.* Jug. Rim (D: n.a.). Coarse orangish fabric, many small and medium size inclusions of different nature (quartz, limestone fragments, reddish inclusions). Origin unknown. [MV.42].

42.* Jug. Rim (D: n.a.) and grooved handle. Coarse orangish fabric, grey at the core, rich in small limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.43].

43.* Jug. Bottom (D: 8 cm ext.) and wall. Fine granular and orangish fabric, many small limestone fragments and microfossils; whitish exterior, greyish interior. Origin unknown. [MV.44].

44.* Jug. Handle and corrugated wall. Fine granular and orangish fabric, with small limestone fragments, microfossils, and rare black inclusions. Origin unknown. [MV.36].

45.* Basin. Rim (D: 34 cm int.) and wall. Fine granular and pinkish fabric, with limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.45].

46.* Basin. Rim (D: 36 cm int.). Coarse greyish fabric, many limestone fragments and other small inclusions (mainly quartz); whitish surfaces. Origin unknown. [MV.47].

47.* Basin. Rim (D: n.a.). Granular, pinkish fabric, rich in microfossils, very abundant round quartz on whitish surfaces. Origin unknown, Sicily and North Africa not excluded. [MV.46].

48.* Dish. Rim (D: n.a.), incised zigzag decoration. Fine and bicolour fabric (orange/grey at the core), with whitish stripes probably due to poor mixing of two clays. Origin unknown [MV.50].

49.* Bowl. Rim (D: n.a.). Fine whitish fabric with rare microfossils (?). Origin unknown. [MV.51].

50.* Lid. Rim (D: n.a.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric, with small and medium size limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.53].

51.* Lid. Rim (D: n.a.). Fine granular and pinkish fabric, with rare limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.54].

52.* Lid. Rim (D: 16 cm ext.). Fine reddish fabric, with small limestone fragments and microfossils. Origin unknown. [MV.55].

53.* Lid. Rim (D: n.a.). Granular and light brown fabric, with rare limestone fragments. Origin unknown. [MV.56].

54.* Lid. Rim (D: n.a.). Granular whitish fabric, with rare small inclusions of different nature (mainly quartz and limestone?). Origin unknown. [MV.57].

Integrated analysis of selected pottery

The North African imports amount to a minimum number of about 28 different ceramic objects. The dating of this assemblage seems quite homogeneous, ranging from the 4th to the 6th century AD. In this regard, the Maña D amphora (Fig. 2.1) should be considered residual.

The classical Roman African amphorae include two rims probably from an African IID, transition type with Africana III²⁰ (Fig. 2.2) and Africana IIIA (Fig. 2.3). In both cases, a Tunisian provenance cannot be doubted. However, precisely identifying the workshops is more challenging due to the large number of sites that produced these amphorae and the few comparative material available for fabrics²¹. The other amphorae belong to a later group, which includes large and small containers widely in use in the western Mediterranean. One belongs to a Spatheion 1B (Fig. 2.4) whose fabric fits well with the Nabeul's amphorae standards, notably with examples from Sidi Zahruni²². There is also a spike (Fig. 2.5) and a rim (Fig. 2.6) that probably belonged to two different large amphorae. In the first case, we cannot exclude Keay 61 or 62 types: both amphorae had a similar spike except for the inner pivot, which is a distinctive feature of Keay 61, and it remains unclear whether it was present in our shard. In the second case, we have not determined if the rim belonged to a Keay 62, whose many variants were widely exported in Sicily²³, or whether it came from a Bonifay type 47. In both cases, the fabric would seem to suggest the Sahel as the place of origin where several workshops existed in the 6th century²⁴.

ARS came mainly from northern Tunisia, except for a shard from central Tunisia (Fig. 2.7) that probably belonged to a Hayes 52B²⁵. There is evidence for Hayes 61B3 imports, in one case (Fig. 2.8) from the area of Sidi Khalifa as suggested by the fabric and slip²⁶. A second exemplar may be generically ascribed to northern Tunisia (Fig. 2.9) without a precise identification of the workshop²⁷. Finally, the Hayes 61C dish (Fig. 2.10), quite common in south and southwestern Sicily, most likely came from the area north of the Gulf of Hammamet considering its frequency between Nabeul, Sidi Jdidi and Segermes²⁸. Other ARS generically belong to the D production, among them, a Hayes 67B rim²⁹ and its bottom (Fig. 3.11) bearing a cross-monogram with A and Ω under the left and right arms, which is typical for

²⁰ Bonifay (2004), 115-117; Pisciotta, Capelli (2021), 556, note 14.

²¹ Bonifay (2016a), 601.

²² Capelli, Bonifay (2014), 237-328.

²³ Ducati (2020), 90.

²⁴ Monkine 1: Nacef, Capelli (2017), 494; Dkila: Nacef, Capelli (2018), 151-152; Leptiminus: Dore (2001), 76-77; 80-82, fig. 1.65; Bir El Hammam: Nacef (2014), 104-105; Henchir Chekaf: Nacef (2007), 582-583.

²⁵ One may note that US1048 does not yield any trace of ARS A1, A2, A1/2, AD or E.

²⁶ Ben Moussa (2007), 137-139; Hasenzagl, Capelli (2019).

²⁷ Sidi Zahruni also produced Hayes 61B, although ARS production is marginal there. Ghaliya *et al.* (2005), 496.

²⁸ Mukai (2016), 17-20.

²⁹ Reynolds (1987), 20.

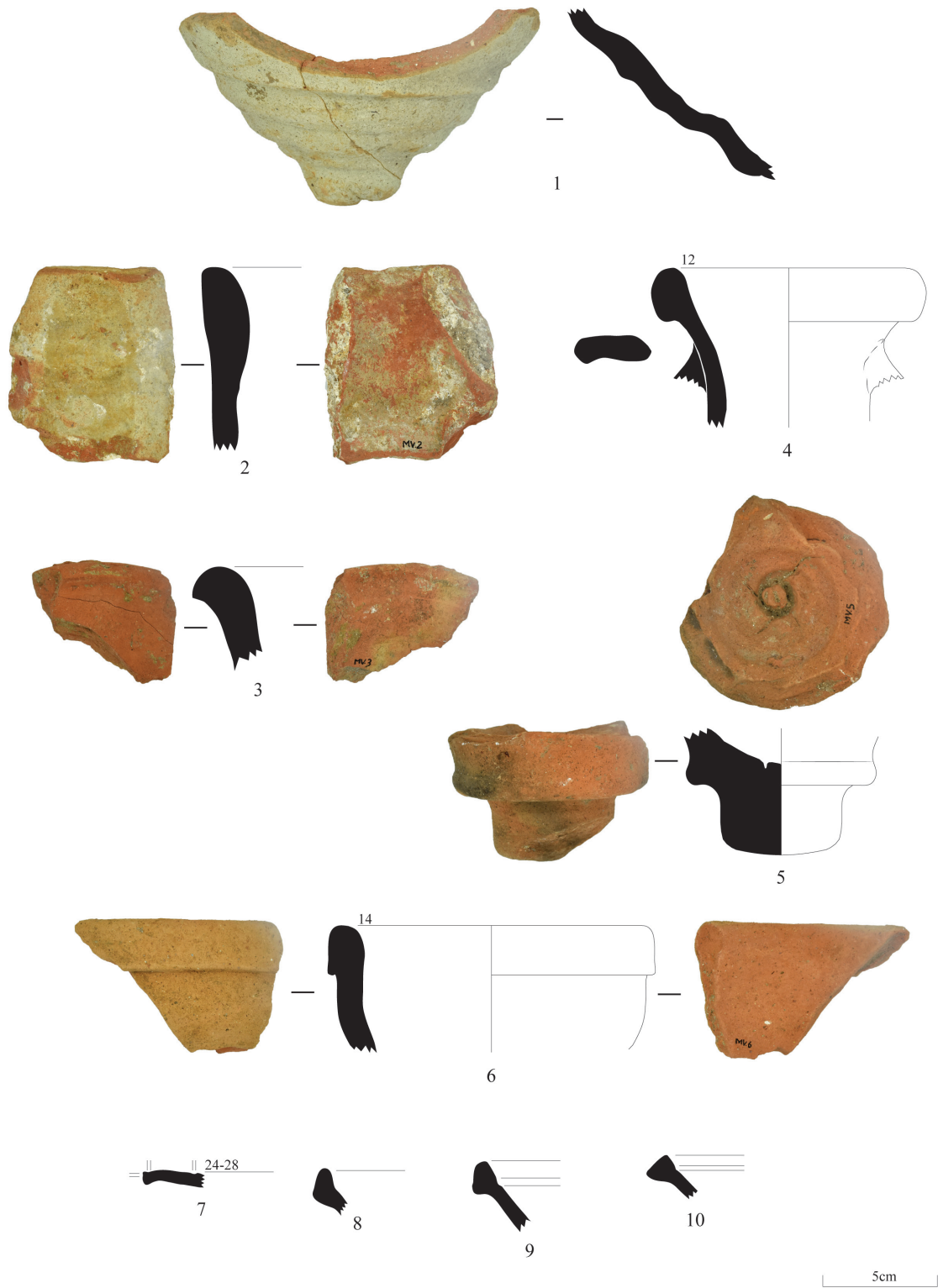


Fig. 2. African amphorae and African red slip wares from level 1048.

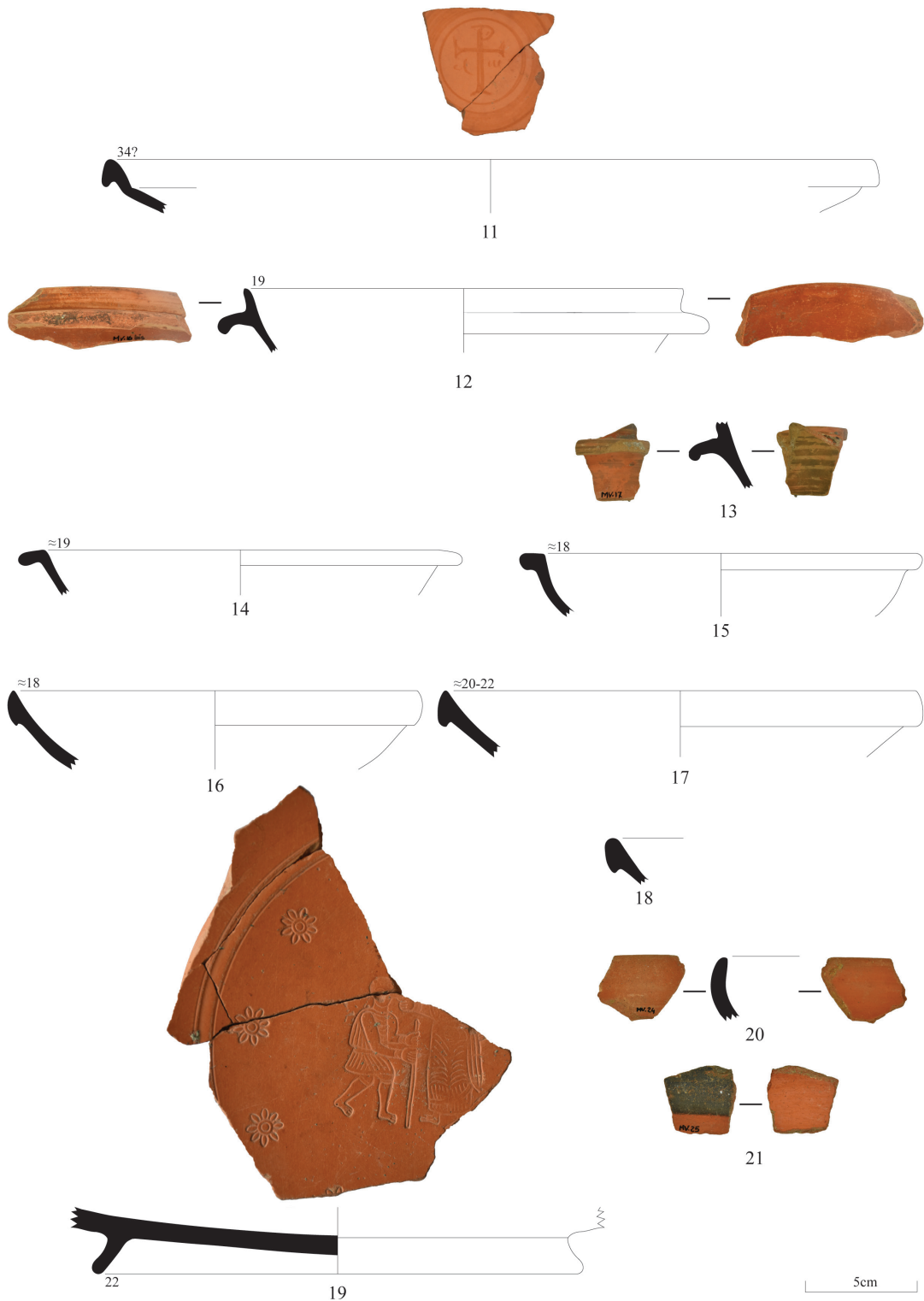


Fig. 3. African red slip wares and African cooking wares from level 1048.

the B1 decoration group³⁰. In this case, the fabric does not match the CARS group 11-12³¹. Two interesting shards of an ARS flanged bowl (Fig. 3.12 and Fig. 3.13) can be related to the Hayes 91 series. Several regions of Tunisia produced this shape, including El Mahrine (variants A and B), Oudhna (variant C), Sidi Khalifa, and central Tunisian workshops. In the case of our example, the profile recalls the C variant, but neither the fabric nor the slip belongs to the ARS D2. Moreover, both shards bear regular greyish bands on the outer flange (Fig. 3.12) and inner surface (Fig. 3.13). One may suppose that this detail was a deliberate choice of a potter deviating from the ARS tradition³². Flanged bowls with blackened rims were produced by local Algerian manufacturers, notably in Zana and Noua Sparsa, that took inspiration from Tunisian repertoires³³. However, in our case, there is not any bright red slip on the inside and outside of the vase, which seems to have been a distinguishing feature of Numidian Red slip ware³⁴. Another possibility is comparing Fig. 3.13 with a flanged bowl from Henchir Bloul in the Tunisian High Steppes³⁵. Equally complicated is identifying the origin of two bowls whose shape may be related to Hayes 94B (Fig. 3.14) and Hayes 108 (Fig. 3.15). However, attributing similar shards to a specific type is challenging without the whole profile, as ARS D includes in its repertory many bowls with downward, thick, and flattened rims. There are no determining elements to identify the origin, although the pinkish fabric may suggest, notably for Fig. 3.14, the El Mahrine region as the origin place. ARS D2 mainly includes Hayes 99A (Fig. 3.16) and B (Fig. 3.17 and Fig. 3.18), which probably came from Oudhna. On the contrary, the bottom of a large Hayes 103 or 104A dish decorated in E(ii) style (Fig. 3.19) may come from Atelier X. The delicacy and the rendering of human figures tends towards naturalism, and the richness and detailing of the clothing may suggest a rather early date for this plate. One might arrive at the same conclusion by comparing the rosettas with eight pointed petals in a simple outline and decorated by two circles with Hayes motif 56. The same motif, also common on Oudhna products, appear on several early dishes of Style E(ii) from around the second quarter of the sixth century³⁶.

There are very few traces of African cooking and plain wares. In the first case, we can mention two Hayes 181 examples from the area around Carthage (Fig. 3.20) and from Byzacena (Fig. 3.21) respectively, based on the treatment of the inner surface. The incurved profiles might suggest a dating within the 3rd century AD, making them among the earliest African imports. The other two ACW shards may belong to a late Hayes 184 variant³⁷ (Fig. 4.22) and an indeterminate cooking pot whose fabric fits well within a North African standard (Fig. 4.23). African plain wares include a mortarium Carthage Class 1B (Fig. 4.25). This shape was also produced in Oudhna, where it is evidenced in mid-6th century layers and in homogeneous contexts from Sidi Jdidi dating to the second half of the 5th century³⁸. It is possible that a second mortarium (Fig. 4.24) with high and flattened rim should be considered a local version of the Fulord 22-23³⁹. This type was commonly produced in Nabeul, but in our case,

³⁰ Bonifay (2004), 193-196.

³¹ Capelli *et al.* (2016), 314.

³² Indeed, these details suggest that both bowls were probably fired without the use of the cassettes.

³³ Amraoui (2017), 285-290.

³⁴ Bonifay (2016b), 528.

³⁵ Ben Moussa (2007), 70.

³⁶ Hayes (1972), 223-224; 240.

³⁷ Bonifay (2004), 219.

³⁸ Bonifay (2004), 252; Mukai (2016), 40.

³⁹ Bonifay (2004), 255-257.

a different fabric and the plain flange exclude a Sidi Zahruni origin⁴⁰. The same question concerns other mortaria with basalt grains on the inner surface (Fig. 4.26 and Fig. 4.27), due to similarities between Tunisian and Sicilian clay beds.

Finally, we can mention two ARS lamps of the Atlante X/Hayes II type. The first one (Fig. 4.28) can be related to the C2 group from central Tunisia. This is suggested by the pure, clear-breaking fabric and the detailed decoration on the shoulder with squares Ennabli A10 and branches S1-2. The second one (Fig. 4.29) belongs to the D3 group that are characteristic of the region of El Mahrine and can be confirmed by the rather spaced sequence of hearts Ennabli M2 and rosettes. The same shard also preserves part of the disc originally bearing a cross (?) with splayed arms. It is unclear if the ARS D lamp base (Fig. 4.30) belongs to the same object.

The same context yielded incurved rimmed cooking pots (Fig. 4.31, Fig. 4.32, Fig. 5.34), one of them preserving a small handle under the lip (Fig. 5.33). They are handmade or slow wheel-made pots with thick walls and irregular voids inside characterised by heat-resistant tempered fabrics. However, no shard belongs to the calcitic ware, and they are predominately ferric (Fig. 5.31, Fig. 5.32, Fig. 5.33) or calcareous (Fig. 5.34) clays resulting in different colour ranges. Similar cooking pots are quite common in late antique and early medieval Sicilian contexts, both in cities and in the countryside. Still, establishing a more precise chronology is challenging and the same applies for the identification of their supposed origin, since related shapes were produced in different places, notably in North Africa, Pantelleria, Sardinia, Balearics and eastern Spain⁴¹. A fifth cooking pot belongs to a different type, where the rim is thickened and distinct from both the inner and outer walls (Fig. 5.35).

Finally, there is a varied assortment of plain tableware, mainly jugs (Fig. 5.36, Fig. 5.37, Fig. 5.38, Fig. 5.39, Fig. 5.40, Fig. 5.41, Fig. 5.42, Fig. 5.43, Fig. 5.44), a limited number of basins (Fig. 6.45, Fig. 6.46, Fig. 6.47), dishes and bowls (Fig. 6.48 and Fig. 6.49) and some lids (Fig. 6.50, Fig. 6.51, Fig. 6.52, Fig. 6.53, Fig. 6.54). The origin of this pottery is completely unknown: they were probably locally manufactured objects, but we cannot exclude imports from North Africa as well as from other Mediterranean regions. Proposing a chronology is equally difficult, as these were functional vases subject to few modifications in shape over time. It is worth noting that plain ware jugs often represent the only findings for 6th-7th centuries burials in Lilybaeum⁴² and Agrigento⁴³; yet for our case, we lack data supporting their chronology or use⁴⁴.

Palermo and the shipping routes from North Africa

The spectrum of African imports above complies well with the ceramic *facies* A detected during the CASR project along the northern coast of Sicily from Palermo to Milazzo, in addition to the Aeolian islands⁴⁵. In this trading zone, African commodities included the main

⁴⁰ Ghalia *et al.* (2005), 496.

⁴¹ Reynolds (2015), 185-187; Reynolds (2016), 156-158, and note 120.

⁴² Palazzo, Vecchio (2013), 163-165; Baumer, Mistretta (2020), 143.

⁴³ Parello, Rizzo (2016), 60.

⁴⁴ We should also consider the presence of medieval and post-medieval pottery in US 1048 due to further interventions (e.g., construction of water channels and pits), which altered the original stratigraphy.

⁴⁵ Bonifay, Malfitana (2016), 409. See also Ducati, Capelli (2021), 7-12.

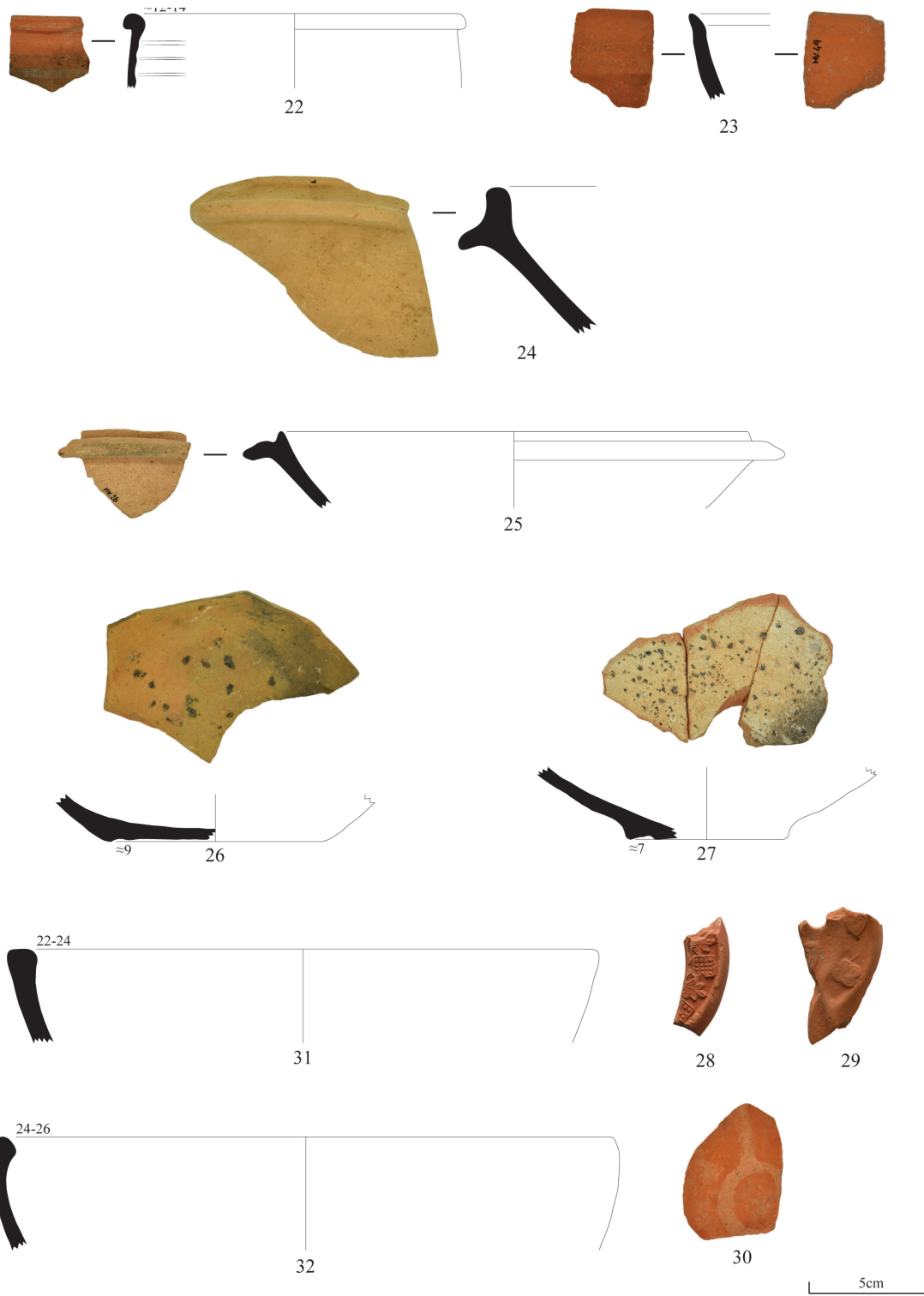


Fig. 4. African cooking wares, African coarse wares, African red slip lamps, and unknown hand-made cooking pots from level 1048.



Fig. 5. Unknown hand-made cooking pots and common wares from level 1048.

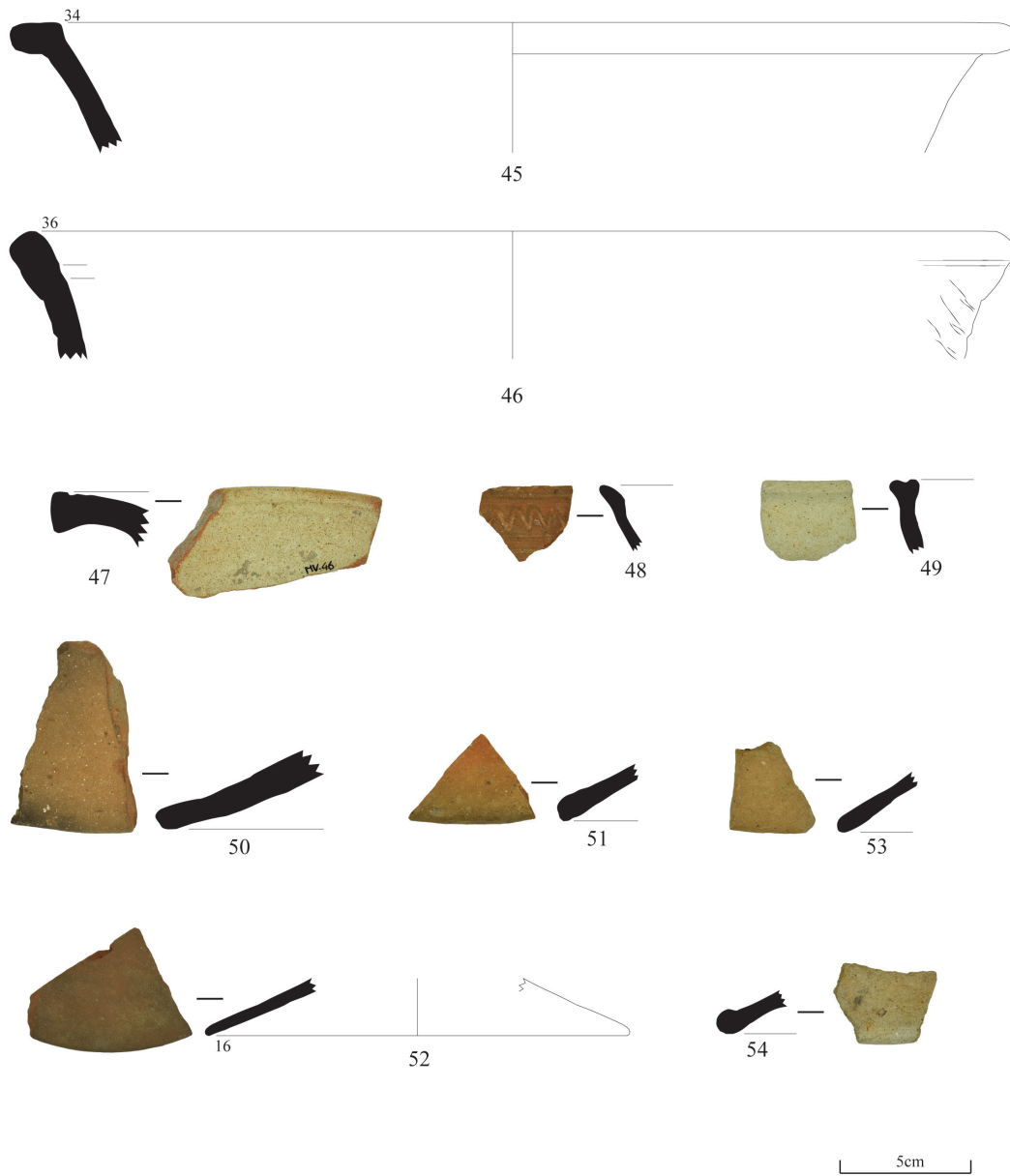


Fig. 6. Unknown common wares from level 1048.

manufactures widely exported in the western Mediterranean. Even in the later period, most of the fine wares came from the area of Carthage and, in a lesser quantity, from the northern Gulf of Hammamet and Nabeul. Productions of a later date from central Tunisia (ARS C5) are currently absent, while amphorae do not show display evidence of any preferred imported commodity.

In this regard, one may note that recent excavations at Piazza Bologni (Fig. 7.2), only 170 m southeast of Montevergini, detected a few slightly later contexts (6th-7th cent.+?) and yielded amphorae from the Sahel (Keay 62, Keay 61, Keay 8A), late ARS D (Hayes 105) and lamps (from Atlante X at least in one case)⁴⁶. ARS lamps (Atlante X, group C2?) are also present in the excavation of the nearby Palazzo Artale (Fig. 7.5), but no further information is currently available for late antique layers nor for the late African amphorae mentioned above⁴⁷. Lamps are probably the best documented African class for late Roman Palermo, and one may appreciate the variety of provenances that include Tunisia (types Deneauve VII, VIII.2, IXB, Atlante IV, VIII, X groups C2, C3, C5) as well as Tripolitania (Atlante XV)⁴⁸. ARS A1 is also present inside Palermo's Historical Centre along with a few fragments of ARS C2: as is the case for the excavations at Piazza della Vittoria (Fig. 7.7) (Hayes 8A, including variant Lamboglia 1a, Hayes 45A, Hayes 48.11 (?) with applied decoration) where African cooking wares (Hayes 181) were also present⁴⁹. Another 2nd-3rd (?) century context, apparently yielding ARS A1 (Hayes 8A?) and A2 (Hayes 27?), comes from the church of St. Maria Maddalena (Fig. 7.8)⁵⁰. The only well-published African pottery assemblage is that found outside the perimeter of the ancient town, inside the area of a presumed Punic fortification on the top of Monte Pellegrino. Two contexts there yielded two different groups of imported vases: the first one included ARS A1 (Hayes 3B, 8A, 9A), the other ARS D (Hayes 58A, Hayes 67B from northern Tunisia, Hayes 73A, 81A, 91B), as well as some presumed imports from Sidi Khalifa (Hayes 61B3 and A(iii) style bottom)⁵¹. Irina Garofano also mentions African amphorae (Africana II, Keay 35⁵²), African cooking wares (Hayes 23A and Hayes 196), lids, casseroles, and pans from Pantelleria (*sic*), and other plain wares, yet we still lack adequate quantification or documentation for these finds.

The above is the only evidence that we possess for Palermo, although more extensive surveys of the findings housed in the Soprintendenza's warehouses, in addition to the publication of whole ceramic assemblages of previous excavations, will probably drastically improve our state of knowledge⁵³. Furthermore, for example, it is not known what kind of pottery Ettore Gabrici was referring to during his excavation of the late cemetery inside House A in

⁴⁶ Aleo Nero *et al.* (2018), 6; 11. After reviewing the excellently illustrated catalogue, we might suggest the following changes: n. 30 = Keay 61 rather than Ramon T-6.1.1.4 (which would fit well the proposed chronology of the layer); n. 55 = Keay 8A rather than Africana IIIB. Considering the description of fabric, we are not certain that n. 56 should be considered as a Tunisian import.

⁴⁷ Aleo Nero, Chiovaro (2016), 211.

⁴⁸ Bonifay *et al.* (2016), 386.

⁴⁹ See the review of partial finds in Bonifay *et al.* (2016), 386; on ACW and other ARS A1 see Montali, Milazzo (2020), 10 note 69, 17 note 94.

⁵⁰ Vassallo *et al.* (2017), 4.

⁵¹ Bonifay *et al.* (2016), 386; Di Stefano *et al.* (1997), 13-19.

⁵² According to Bonifay *et al.* (2016), 386.

⁵³ The same applies to the emergency excavations recently conducted by the Superintendency of Palermo within the ancient city and outside it as well.



Fig. 7. Plan of Palermo displaying the main places cited in the text

Piazza della Vittoria, and the same applies to the finds that Adolf Holm mentioned that came from a Roman building near Villa Giulia⁵⁴.

Some concluding remarks regarding Palermo between late antiquity and the early Byzantine period

Considering the current state of knowledge, the findings from US 1048 at Montevertigini provides new evidence that enhances our awareness of the consumption practices in Palermo between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D. and contributes to better situating the city within a broader Mediterranean trading network. Despite its presumed small size⁵⁵, Palermo remained a major port in western Sicily whose fortifications were in good repair⁵⁶ and which maintained infrastructures for receiving travellers and merchants at the end of the 6th century⁵⁷. The means by which US 1048 had been generated –as a steady accumulation of wastes and rubbles rather than a single violent event– suggests similarities with the transformations affecting the residential neighborhood in Agrigento from the 4th century onwards⁵⁸. Therefore, Palermo seems to have undergone a similar process that caused the abandonment of earlier

⁵⁴ Holm (1901), 466-467: “Si trovarono quivi anche ampolline di vetro e altri oggetti simili. [...] Anche allorchè nel 1777, fu costruita la Villa Giulia, si trovò una grande quantità di rottami e di monete.”

⁵⁵ Α χωρίον according to Procop. *Got.* I.5.12. Cfr. Wilson (1998), 155 and Prigent (2013), 25-30.

⁵⁶ The city resisted Gensericus' siege in 440/41 (*Hyd. Chron.* 120 and *Isid. Vand.* 75). At the beginning of the 6th century, it was one of two Gothic headquarters that persisted in Sicily (Procop. *Got.* I.5.12-16).

⁵⁷ Caliri (2020), 200. St. Gregory the Great mentioned two *xenodochia* in Palermo, in addition to other hospices attached to Jewish synagogues.

⁵⁸ Parello, Rizzo (2016), 55-61.

housing patterns and, in some cases, the reoccupation of the same dwelling in a more impoverished way⁵⁹. In this regard, the rise of groups of burials within the city provides further evidence of the ongoing transformations affecting the cityscape⁶⁰. One may imagine that in late antique Palermo, residential blocks alternated with empty spaces or areas now destined for a different purpose (workshops, quarries for secondhand materials, animal shelters, graveyards), according to a process that affected the *forum* in Syracuse⁶¹ or the theater in Catania⁶² in the same period. However, currently we are unaware of the extent of these phenomena and understanding if Palermo underwent a more pronounced contraction, as in Agrigento⁶³, Lilibeo⁶⁴, or Tindari⁶⁵, is still a challenge.

⁵⁹ It is possible that the thick layer of reddish earth mixed with charcoal and mudbrick found in Piazza Bologni demonstrates that these were poorly built structures, which bear striking similarities with the masonry employed in coeval rural settlements. Cfr. Aleo Nero, Chiovaro (2016), 208 and Wilson (2000), 349.

⁶⁰ Wilson (1990), 330; Sami (2013), 31, 33; Garofano (1997-1998b).

⁶¹ Guzzardi *et al.* (2020), 47-48.

⁶² Branciforti (2020), 98-102.

⁶³ Parelo (2018).

⁶⁴ Giglio (2020), 302.

⁶⁵ Aiello (2016).

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Riassunto / *Abstract*

Riassunto. Palermo durante la tarda antichità e il primo periodo bizantino è in gran parte sconosciuta. Molte ragioni contribuiscono a generare questa lacuna, tra cui l'assenza di indagini sistematiche e un critico ritardo nella pubblicazione dei vecchi scavi. Nonostante questi problemi, la nostra conoscenza della città nel periodo citato è leggermente migliorata negli ultimi anni grazie a scoperte fortuite. Tra queste, gli scavi condotti all'interno dell'ex monastero di Montevergini, dove gli archeologi hanno trovato una complessa sequenza di livelli archeologici dal III secolo a.C. ai giorni nostri. Il presente lavoro si concentra su un singolo strato che ha restituito un ricco insieme di oggetti ceramici di epoca tarda importati dal Nord-Africa, associati ad altri di presunta produzione locale. Questi ritrovamenti migliorano la nostra conoscenza dell'economia locale e della vita quotidiana in una delle principali città portuali della Sicilia occidentale.

Abstract. Palermo during late antiquity and the early Byzantine period is largely unknown. Many reasons contribute to this gap. What remains yet to be uncovered is continuity of life that has not seen any systematic investigation, hampered also by a critical delay in the publishing of previous excavations. Despite these issues, our knowledge of the town in the above period has improved slightly in recent years thanks to chance discoveries. Among them, the excavations conducted inside the former Montevergini monastery where archaeologists have found a complex sequence of archaeological levels from the 3rd century B.C. to the present day. This paper will focus on a single layer that has yielded a rich pottery assemblage comprising late African imports and other presumed locally manufactured objects. These findings enhance our knowledge of the local economy and daily life in one of the major port cities of western Sicily.

Parole chiave. Tarda antichità, Sicilia bizantina, ceramica nord africana, Palermo, rotte commerciali, urbanistica

Keywords. Late Antiquity, Byzantine Sicily, North African pottery, Palermo, trade routes, urbanism

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