Transport Amphorae and the Historical Space: Similarities and Differences in the Distribution of Transport Amphorae in Sicily and South Italy

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Transport amphorae are the pottery group most directly connected to ancient trade and the entire ancient economy, for the Greek as well as the Roman world. Though they are not the proper merchandise, they serve as containers of these. By researching the distribution of different amphorae types, it is possible to understand trade relations, trading routes, as well as the increase and decrease of these or of local productions.

One result of Greek colonisation was an increase in trade between Greece and the western Mediterranean region. Sicily and southern Italy serve as examples as Greek colonisation directly influenced both areas. The Greek settlements enforced exchange and contacts between diverse cultures, which is visible in changes in their respective material cultures.

Therefore, I focussed on Greek amphorae found in Greek and non-Greek contexts and the information they give on the type of exchange within the Greek world, as well as the exchange between Greeks and non-Greeks. In addition to trading aspects, intercultural aspects and questions also have to be considered.

These matters pose two basic questions. Firstly, which amphorae types arrived in the Greek settlements? Secondly, was there a strong connection with the mother city? Then, a comparison between the cities and the chora – the hinterland used for agricultural purposes – and the non-Greek areas must be undertaken.

The aim of this paper is to summarise the distribution of amphorae types in Greek and non-Greek settlements in Sicily and southern Italy. Furthermore, very few case studies are highlighted.

Distribution of Amphorae Types

Greek Settlements

To answer these questions, amphorae finds from 250 sites were analysed. The distribution of different types, the mixtures at the different sites and different times, and the changes in the 6th century BC show that the relation between mother city and apoikia is less important for the exchange system.[1] Instead, the Corinthian A amphorae is most widely distributed in the Sicilian as well as in the southern Italian cities. Corinthian A amphorae can be found on more than 90% of the researched Greek sites (without farmsteads). This is only comparable with the distribution of the Western Greek amphora type (fig.1).

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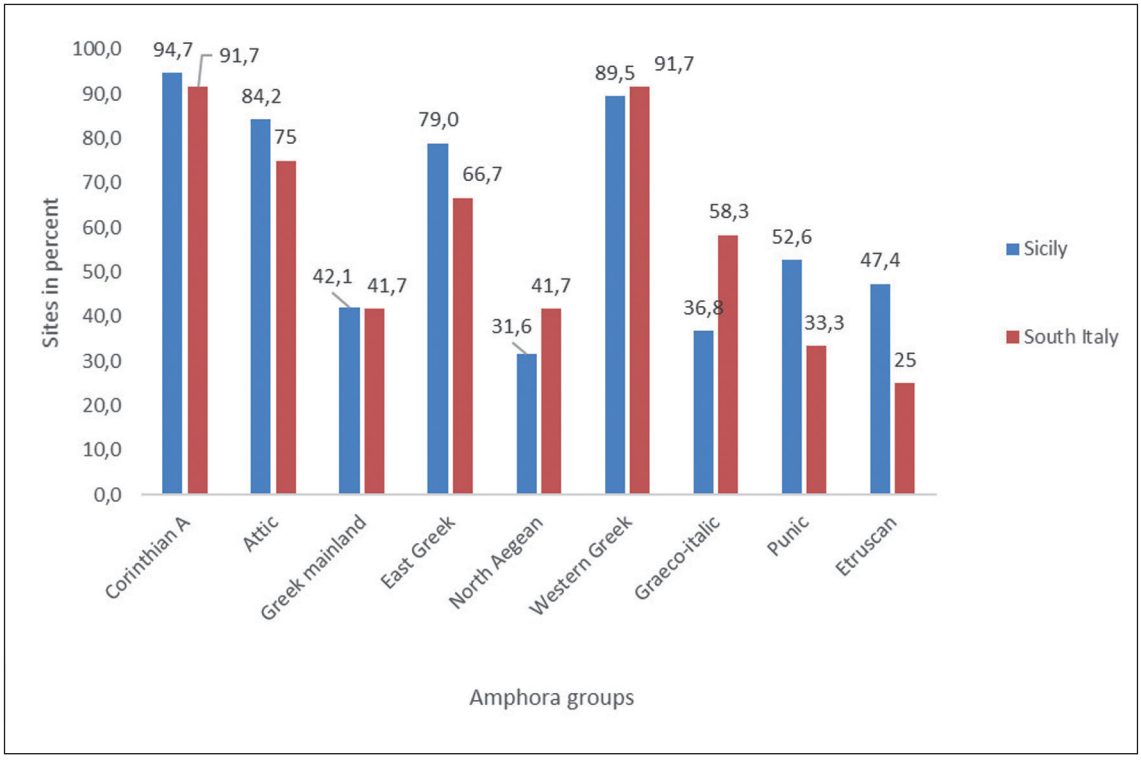

Fig. 1: Distribution of amphorae in Greek sites.

However, other Greek types also are common. Attic amphorae were found on about 84% of the sites in Sicily and 75% in southern Italy, whereas other types from mainland Greece are rather scarce. Comparable with the distribution of the Attic amphorae is the distribution of Eastern Greek types (fig.1).[2] In combination with the heterogeneous cargo in the ships, the similar composition of the finds on most of the sites shows that the most significant aspect of ancient trade are the so-called tramp-shipping routes. Therefore, the goods and the traders do not necessarily have the same origin. However, this analysis covers only the Greek cities. This general picture changes if we consider the situation inside the chora of the cities. With the much higher number of sites, differences between Sicily and southern Italy are visible. In Sicily, the Corinthian A amphorae and the Western Greek amphorae also are quite comparable. In south Italy, the Western Greek amphorae are distributed across a much wider area.[3]

Non-Greek Settlements

The analysis of the amphorae assemblages in non-Greek sites gives us another picture (fig. 2). In general, the composition of the finds is more heterogeneous. The Western Greek amphora type seems to be the most important. 75% of the researched sites in southern Italy do have amphorae of this type, but it is present at only 52% of the sites in Sicily. Comparable with the distribution of the Western Greek amphorae in Sicily is

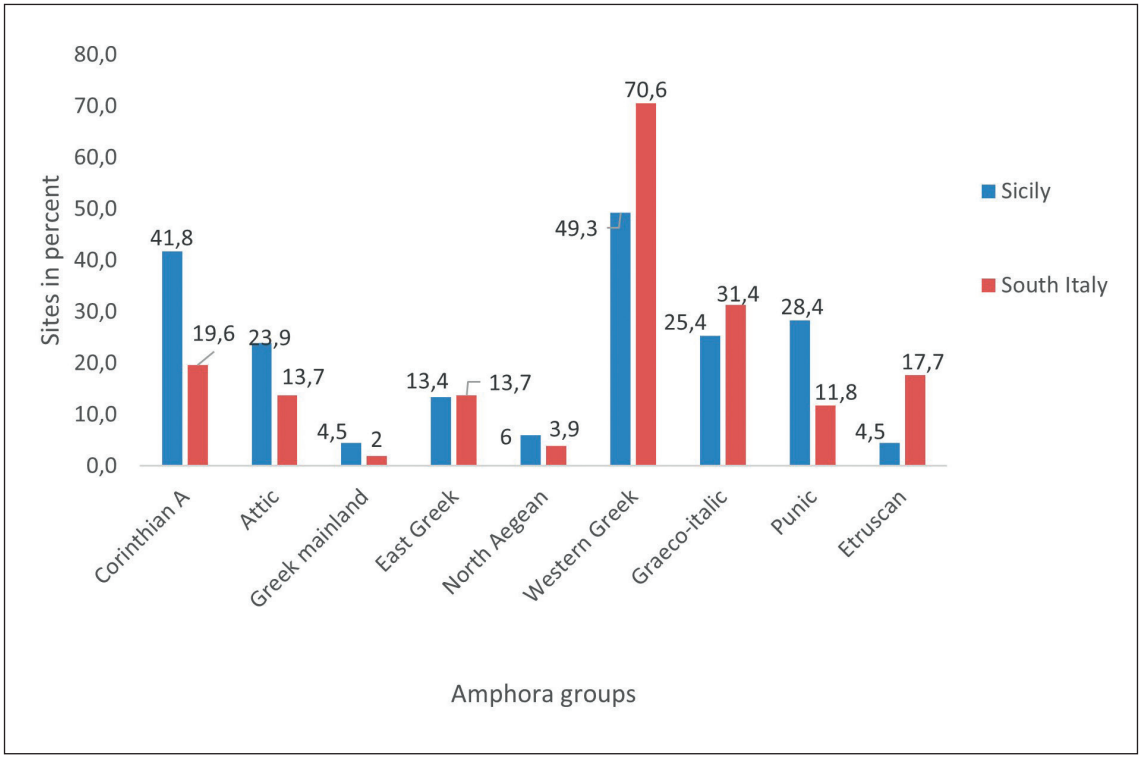

Fig. 2: Distribution of amphorae in non-Greek sites.

the distribution of the Corinthian A amphorae in Sicily, making up almost 50%. However, in southern Italy this type was detected on only 30% of the sites. All other types are less common. Instead, the third important group are the Punic amphorae. Almost one third of the non-Greek sites in Sicily had Punic amphorae. In southern Italy they are less common.

In conclusion, it seems that the Western Greek amphorae are the most common type in the non-Greek areas in Sicily as well as in southern Italy.[4] The Western Greek amphorae serve as evidence of mainly regional trade. The amphorae types belonging to the Greek mainland and Eastern Greek areas are scarce; the evidence of long-distance trade is therefore scarce as well. The non-Greek settlements seem to have their focus on regional trade and participate less than the Greek cities in long-distance trade. Nevertheless, the non-Greek settlements are closely comparable with the Greek farmsteads; at these sites in Sicily the proportion between Corinthian A and Western Greek amphorae is well balanced, but in southern Italy the Western Greek amphorae are distributed more widely in rural settlements.

Amphorae Assemblages in Different Times: Naxos, Selinus and Cumae

The mixture in the assemblages of amphorae changes over time because of the ending of some types and the development of new types, like the Western Greek amphorae. The beginning of their production dates back to the first half of the 6th century BC.[5] Already in the second half of the same century these amphorae are present in nearly all Greek and non-Greek settlements.

The ancient necropolis of Naxos is a very good example to show changes in the mixture of amphorae assemblages given its chronological spread. The northern necropolis dates from the 8th century BC to the 6th century BC. Only very few tombs, eleven, are datable to the 8th century BC, but 60 belong to the 7th century BC and another 83 to the 6th century BC.[6] Not all of these tombs were enchytrimos burials, but more than 50 amphorae were usable for this research. Analysing the necropolis as a whole context, about 30% of the amphorae are imports from the Greek mainland, and 16% are from the Eastern Greek area, mainly the islands. Most amphorae, nearly 50%, belong to the Western Greek production (fig. 3). Nevertheless, it is possible to divide them into 7th and the 6th century BC periods and to compare them.[7] In the 7th century BC, almost 60% of the amphorae have their origin in the Greek mainland; 14% are of Eastern Greek production and almost 30% are Etruscan.[8] In contrast, in the 6th century BC more than 60% of the amphorae are of Western Greek production.[9] The percentage of Eastern Greek

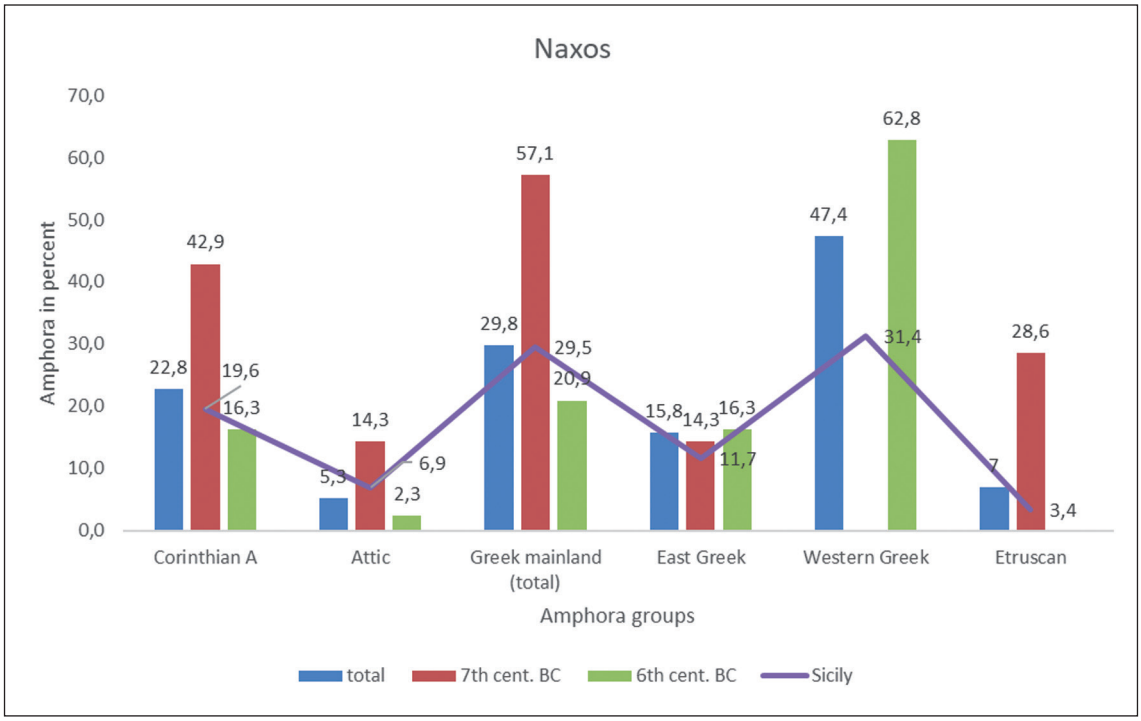

Fig. 3: Amphora assemblage in Naxos.

amphorae is almost the same, but the Greek mainland types, specially the Corinthian A amphorae, comprise only 21%. However, the amount of Greek mainland amphorae is consistent.

To verify that this result is transferable to southern Italy, too, one has to analyse the finds from Cumae. Two contexts datable to the Archaic period were analysed and compared (fig. 4). The first context is datable to the second half of the 7th century until the first half of the 6th century BC, but there are only 21 amphorae detected. The second context consists of 160 amphorae and belongs mainly to the second half of the 6th century BC.[10]

In the first context, almost 50% of the amphorae are of Greek mainland origin, mainly Corinthian A. Other types are rather scarce. However, in the second context, Greek mainland amphorae and Western Greek amphorae can be found equally.[11]

The Naxos and the Cumae case studies show that the Western Greek amphorae are widely distributed already from the beginning of their production. This is evidence for an increase in agricultural production in Magna Grecia and Sicily and therefore for surplus production. However, not only the amount of agricultural production increased during this time, but obviously the quality increased as well. Otherwise, there would be no interest in the goods of the neighbour-cities.

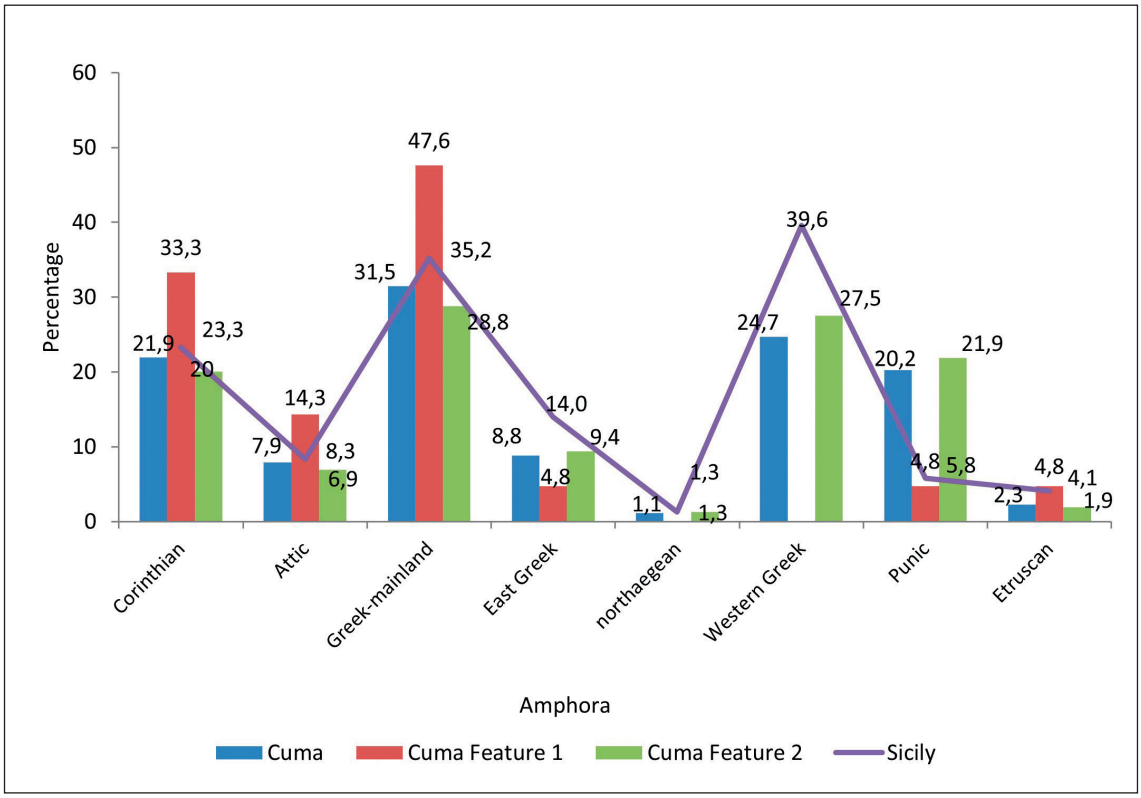

Fig. 4: Amphora assemblage in Cumae.

The amphorae finds from two contexts in Selinus also are comparable (fig. 5). The first is the so-called "Ladenzeile", which produced 37 amphorae from the first half of the 6th century BC to the middle of the 6th century BC. The main part of the amphorae came from the Greek mainland. Almost 40% belong to the type Corinthian A, and only 3% are Attic. Nearly one quarter of the finds are East Greek in origin and 30% belong to the Western Greek production.[12] The second context dates to the 5th century BC. 91 amphorae were found there, consisting of Greek mainland types, Eastern Greek types, Western Greek production as well as Punic types. The last two groups both have a share of about 34%. Amphorae connected to the Greek mainland in this context have only a share of about 14%, and East Greek production only 11%.[13] A comparison between these two contexts shows that the import had changed completely in the course of one hundred years. The formerly most important group, the Greek mainland types, played only a minor role in the 5th century. However, this fact cannot be related to a reduced importing of Greek mainland products. Indeed, the number of amphorae with this provenience, as well as of the Eastern Greek areas, does not change. Therefore, the changes in the percentages are not a sign of a declining contact with the Greek mainland, but a sign of an increase regarding local production and other trading contacts. The new trading contexts may be enforced by the Punic settlements in western Sicily or more directly by Carthage itself.

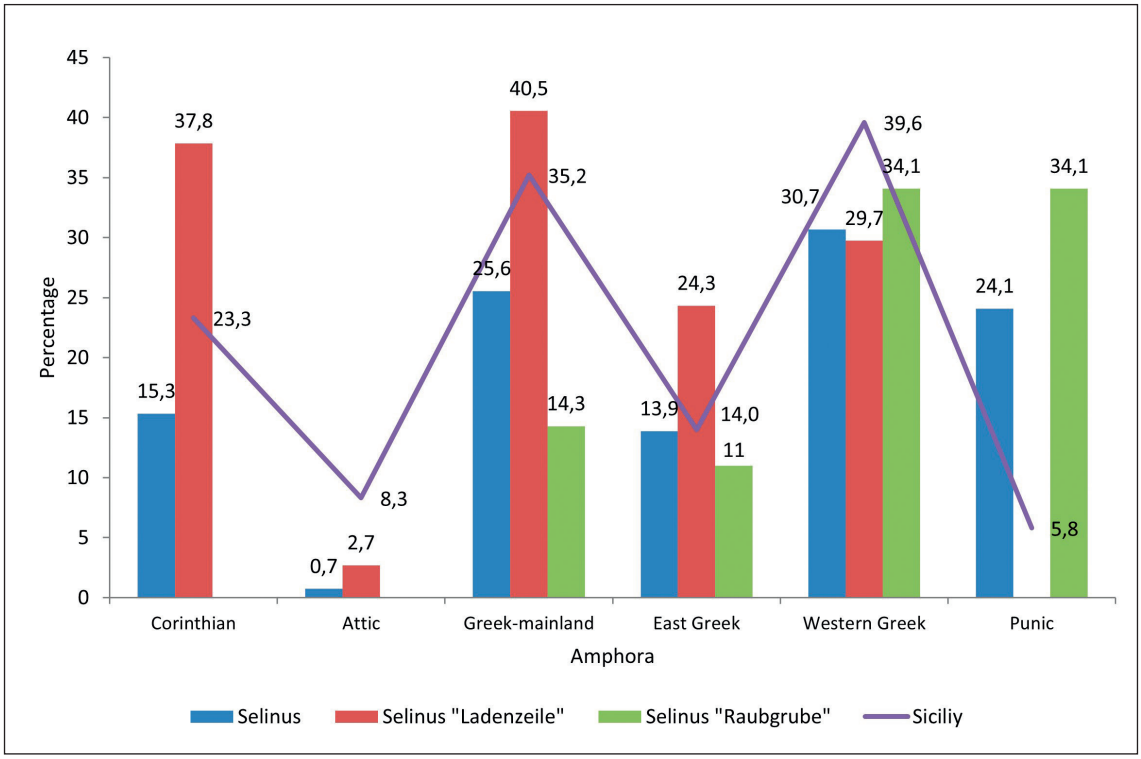

Fig. 5: Amphora assemblage in Selinus.

Himera: City – Necropolis – Territory

To focus more on the title of this paper, Himera is a good case study. It is possible to compare the material from the city with its necropolis and the hinterland – even if the statistical data of the necropolis is not complete. Therefore, the statistical research focuses on the city itself and the hinterland. Almost 190 amphorae of the urban area are published.[14] One third are of Greek-mainland production, mostly from Athens. One quarter is of Western Greek production and another 20% is of Eastern Greek origin. In contrast to the other Greek cities in Sicily, there are only very few Corinthian A amphorae from within the urban centre (fig. 6).[15] However, there are hundreds of these in the two necropoleis. Obviously, the amphorae used for enchytrismos tombs are reused containers from the urban centre. In total, the largest Greek mainland group is therefore, like in nearly all the other cases, the Corinthian A amphorae. Besides these, there are also other types, common types like Western Greek amphorae, but also Punic and some Etruscan amphorae.[16]

In the hinterland of ancient Himera, several small sites also have produced amphorae finds. The date and the interpretation of these rural sites is not always clear, but some

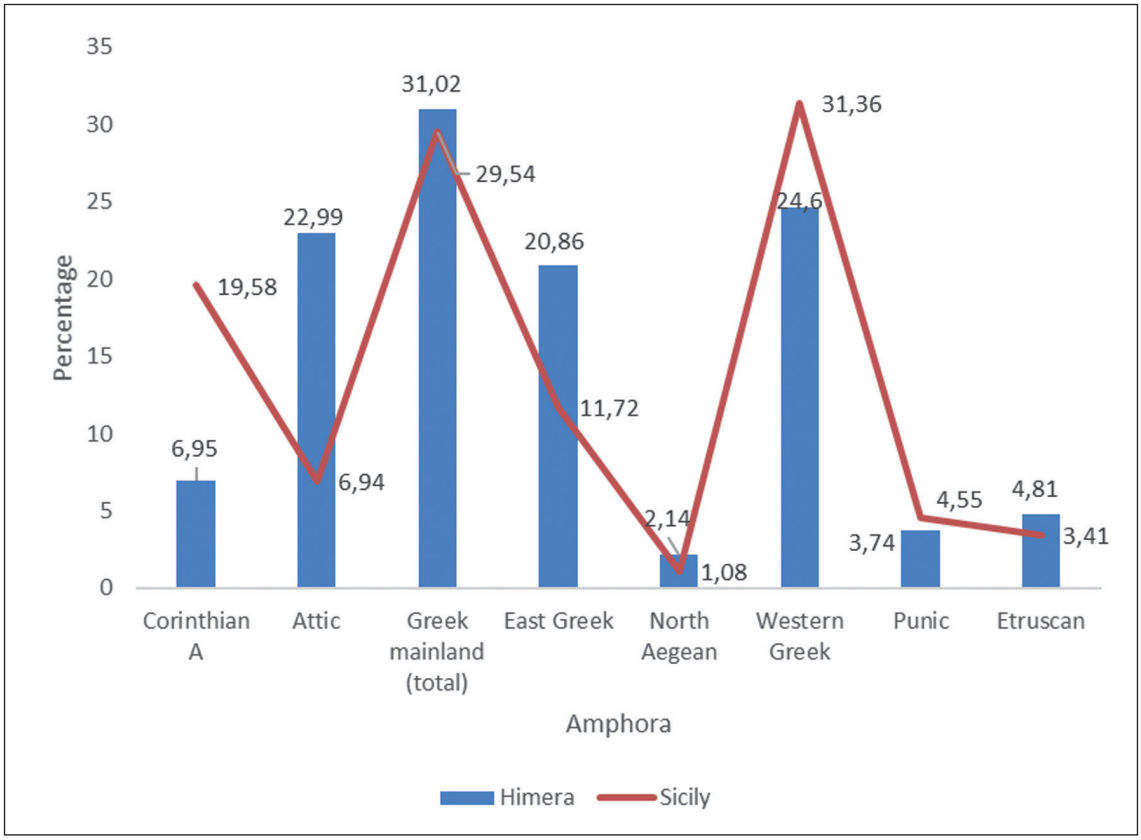

Fig. 6: Amphora assemblage in Himera.

of them can be interpreted as farmsteads. In general, the number of amphorae finds on these sites is rather small and often there is only one type, or sometimes two. 29 sites in the hinterland of Himera were included in this research.[17] The Western Greek amphora type is most common – it was found on 23 sites – followed by Punic amphorae at eight sites. Other types are rather scarce. Indeed, in the hinterland of the Greek cities, the amphorae finds are less heterogeneous. More often there are only one or two types. Only a small part of the imported goods reached the hinterland, unless they were not repacked.

Nevertheless, the unusually small amount of Corinthian A amphorae in the chora of Himera is not explainable, yet. The first idea was to pull together the missing Corinthian A amphorae in the chora with the high amount of this type in the necropolis. But this cannot be the explanation as we will see in Kamarina, where the Corinthian A is dominant in the necropolis as well as in the chora. Maybe it is more probable to think of chronological reasons: the chora of Himera increased over the time,[18] and the number of sites rose. For the Archaic period there are 30 sites known, and amphorae were found at two of them. In contrast, there are 85 sites datable to the Classical period, eleven datable to the Archaic-Classical, 28 to the Classical-Hellenistic, and 48 to the Hellenistic period.[19] In Himera, it is clearly visible that the settled chora is a phenomenon beginning in the Classical period. As we have seen before in Naxos, Cumae and Selinus, the dominance of the Corinthian A amphorae begins to vanish during the sixth century, with the beginning of the Western Greek amphorae production. In the 5th century, the Western Greek amphorae dominate the market. Therefore, the scarce distribution of Corinthian A amphorae in the chora of Himera should not be surprising.

To get a general picture of the amphorae distribution and therefore about the exchange, it seems reasonable to focus on other survey results, to see which amphorae types are more or less common in rural settlements.

Surveys in Comparison: Gela – Agrigento-Hinterland and Kamarina

It is always difficult to compare different survey projects because of different methodologies. Nevertheless, it is possible to compare the results. Therefore, the Gela survey, the Agrigento hinterland survey and the Kamarina survey are closely comparable. This is due to an equal sampling strategy, even if other methods were devised during the last years.

The Gela survey focused on the chora of ancient Gela.[20] Greek transport amphorae were found on 74 sites. 490 fragments could be used for a statistical analysis. Most of the fragments belong to Greek mainland types, namely 172 Corinthian A, 130 Attic. But there are almost 170 fragments of Western Greek amphorae found in the chora of Gela. Other types are rather scarce. The Corinthian A amphorae were detectable on 53 sites, whereas the Attic amphorae were on 44 sites, followed by the Western Greek amphorae

on 34 sites. The Corinthian A is therefore more common at the rural sites in the chora of Gela (fig. 7).

The Kamarina survey likewise focused on the chora of an ancient Greek city. This project is still ongoing, and only preliminary results can be presented here. In contrast to Gela, in Kamarina it is possible to compare the results of the survey with the amphorae assemblages in the necropolis. In the urban context there are almost only Hellenistic amphorae found. As a result, the urban context is excluded from our analysis. In the chora of Kamarina, we found Greek transport amphorae on 35 sites. The following types are proven so far: Corinthian A, Attic, East Greek, and Western Greek. 81 of the 117 fragments belong to the Corinthian A production. 16 fragments are Attic, 19 Western Greek, and only one is of Eastern Greek production. As well as in Gela, most of the fragments belong to Corinthian A amphorae. In contrast, there are only a few Western Greek amphorae found so far (fig. 7). As concerns the distribution, when examining the proportion between sites with Corinthian A on the one hand, and Western Greek on the other, Gela and Kamarina are closely comparable. In the chora of Gela, the Corinthian A amphorae were found on 53 sites, and the Western Greek on 34 sites; in the chora of Kamarina, Corinthian A was detectable on 30 sites and the Western Greek on 12 sites. The main differences are visible in the distribution of Attic and East Greek am-

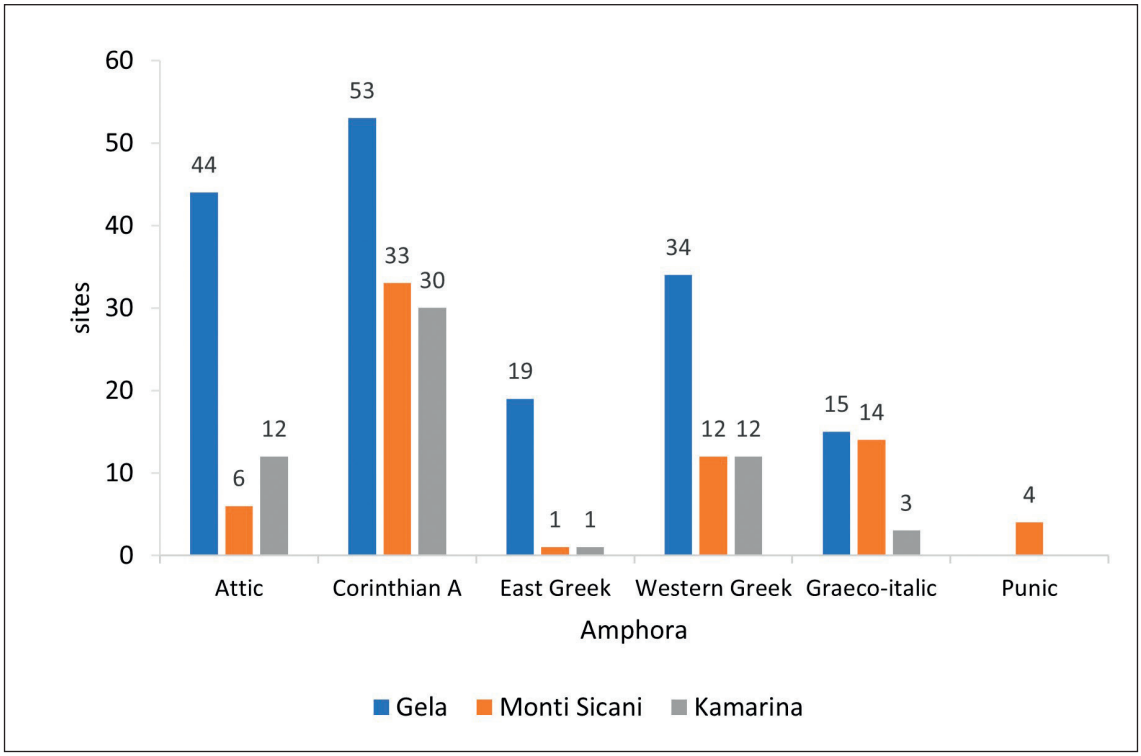

Fig. 7: Amphora distribution in the Gela survey, the Kamarina survey and the Agrigento hinterland survey.

phorae, which are very scarce in the chora of Kamarina. However, we should compare this result with the amphorae found in the necropolis of Kamarina. Most of the tombs in the Rifriscolaro necropolis belong to the 6th century BC, but some are datable to the beginning of the 5th century BC.[21] There are at least 3476 burials here, with almost 1700 usable for statistical research.[22] More than half of the burials are so called Fossa-tombs. Nevertheless, enchytrismoi burials are very common: 34,5% of the burials are in amphorae, and 0,3% in pithoi. In total, these comprise 658 amphorae.[23] Once more, the Corinthian A amphora is the biggest group, with almost one third of the finds, and the Western Greek amphorae make up the second largest group (fig. 8). However, in contrast to the chora, more than 15% of the amphorae found in the necropolis are of Eastern Greek origin. It is clearly visible that the variety amphorae types in the city itself is higher than in the rural sites. The import, particularly imports from far away, are not as common in the chora as in the city.

However, we should focus on the non-Greek areas as well. What does the distribution of amphorae look like beyond the chora? The results of the Agrigento hinterland survey (Monti Sicani) can give some answers.[24] The surveyed area covers the territories of Cianciana, Alessandria della Rocca, Bivona and Santo Stefano Quisquina, in total more than 270 km². Greek amphorae are detectable on 46 sites.[25] Once more, most of the fragments (94) can be identified as Corinthian A amphorae. They were found on 30 sites (fig. 7). The next group, with 20 fragments on twelve sites, are the Western Greek amphorae, followed by 16 Attic fragments on six sites. There is no difference between the distribution of Greek amphorae types in the non-Greek area and in the Greek area, be-

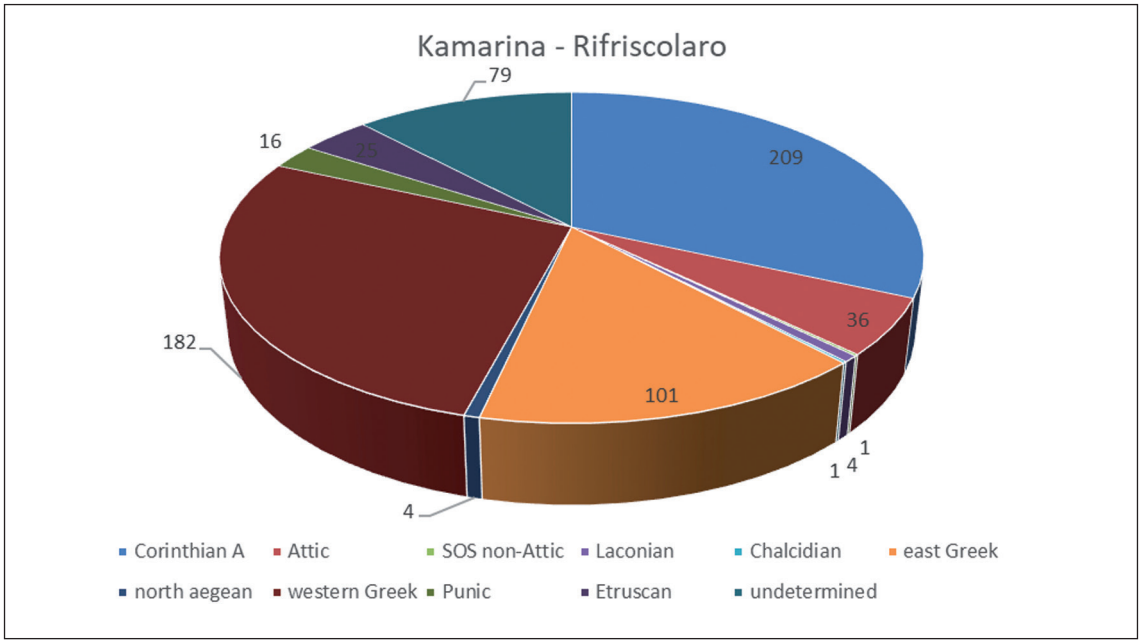

Fig. 8: Amphora assemblage in Kamarina.

sides the site density with Greek amphorae. In Kamarina as well as Monti Sicani there are 30 sites with Corinthian A amphorae and 12 sites with Western Greek amphorae. This seems equal. But, the Survey area in Kamarina covers around 40 km², whereas the area in the Monti Sicani covers 270 km².

Conclusion

After analysing the distribution of amphorae in Sicily and southern Italy, and after focussing on some case studies, a review of the former questions and assumptions seems necessary.

The first question focusses on the amphora types arriving to the Greek cities. More than 250 sites were analysed for this purpose. It is clearly visible that the variety of different amphora types depends predominantly on chronological aspects. In the Greek cities there are normally amphorae of different origins: the Greek mainland, Eastern Greek areas, northern Aegean, Western Greek, as well as Etruscan and Punic types. What differs from case to case is the percentage of each type. This leads us directly to the second question: Is there a special connection to the mother city? Not at all. In general, Corinthian A amphorae are dominant in the 7th and 6th century BC not only in the cities founded by Corinth. Cumae was founded by Euboea as well as Naxos. But there are no amphorae of Euboea detected here. Maybe some of the SOS amphorae are not Attic but Euboean, but this would constitute a rather small number. Otherwise, the comparison between several survey projects has shown that Eastern Greek amphorae are not common in the rural sites, but in the chora of Gela there are at least 19 sites with Eastern Greek amphorae. Half of the fragments belong to Rhodian amphorae. In the face of the founding of Gela, this could be a hint of a stronger connection with Rhodes. But unless there are more cases, this should not be over-interpreted. Therefore, more research is necessary in this case.

Another question was focused on the non-Greek areas. For the rural sites we can say that there are no differences between Greek and non-Greek areas. In both cases, the Corinthian A and the Western Greek types are dominant. This is also true for the non-Greek cities or centres, with the difference being that Western Greek amphorae are more widely distributed there, especially in southern Italy.

Notes

* The Gela-Survey, the Agrigento-Hinterland-Survey and the Camarina-Survey were conducted by Prof. Dr. Johannes Bergemann, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. I want to thank him for the possibility to study the material.

[1] Klug 2013, 115–122.

[2] Klug 2013, 100.
[3] Klug 2013, 103.
[4] Klug 2013, 101 f.
[5] Sourisseau 2009, 185. 189.
[6] Lentini 1986.
[7] Klug 2013, 61.
[8] Lentini 1986, 420 f.; Klug 2013, 61.
[9] Lentini 1986, 423; Klug 2013, 62.
[10] Savelli 2006.
[11] Klug 2013, 81 f.
[12] Dehl-von Kaenel 2003, 438–442.
[13] Dehl-von Kaenel 2003, 442 f.; Klug 2013, 63.
[14] Vassallo 1993; Daniele 2008; Amico 2008; Badagliacca 2008; Esposito 2008.
[15] Klug 2013, 53–55.
[16] Vassallo 1999; Bechtold – Vassallo 2018.
[17] Klug 2013, 55 f.
[18] Vassallo 1996, 202.
[19] Belvedere 1988, Abb. 198; Belvedere 2002, Abb. 219.
[20] Bergemann 2010.
[21] Sourisseau 2006, 131.
[22] Pelagatti 2006, 60 f.
[23] Klug 2013, 57.
[24] Bergemann 2020.
[25] Klug 2020, 61–63.

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