

Production and Trade in Late Republican and Imperial Inland Etruria: Integrating Archaeological and Archaeometric Results of the Val di Pesa and Val Orme-Project

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The Vienna Orme and Pesa valley Project (VOPP) studies a micro-region defined by the two river valleys of Orme and Pesa between the surroundings of Empoli in the Arno plain and the more mountainous territory to the south of Northern inland Tuscany.¹ The general aim of the project is to investigate changes and continuities in different aspects of human behaviour in the landscape, with a special focus on problems of site definition and site classification (e.g. villas and villa landscapes), as well as the relationship between town and country. The starting point of the research was Molino San Vincenzo, which has been studied by a large array of different methodologies.² Geophysical prospections helped to identify a large rural building but the excavation revealed that the ancient building was heavily damaged by modern agricultural activities.³

In order to characterise the site of Molino San Vincenzo by its material culture and to better define urban-rural-relations in northern Roman Etruria, it was necessary to compare the pottery assemblage of Molino San Vincenzo with pottery from the neighbouring Roman town, modern Empoli.⁴ These studies also helped to understand the trade connections and the flow of goods in the study area and in Northern Etruria.⁵

The urban site of Pratesi was excavated from 1980 till 1982.⁶ It is situated in the medieval city centre of Empoli, which is in the location of the Roman town. The findings come from a filling of two big supply containers of uncertain dating. Most of the pottery found is to be dated in Roman times, but the material was heavily mixed and it was not possible to identify any stratigraphic sequence. Because of the large amount of the sherds, the entire assemblage can be characterised as secondary refuse representative for the pottery used in the town over a long period and from different contexts.

To establish a typology of the sherds found at both sites, archaeometrical analyses have been undertaken. C. Capelli from the University of Genova analysed and classified 60 samples via thin section. With the help of this data, it was possible to catalogue most of the findings and to categorize the pottery found as local, regional or supraregional products.⁷ Referring to antique sources, the term *local* is defined as the distance which could be walked there and back in the same day. Under consideration of slope and travel speed, cost-distance can be calculated using Empoli and Molino San Vincenzo as starting points and categorizing distances in different colours (fig. 1).⁸

The most important group of the pottery under investigation is fabric A, a locally produced sherd type.⁹ Numerous forms like beakers, jugs, pots, bowls, plates, and amphorae of different date were made in this fabric. The typical temper of these fabrics is

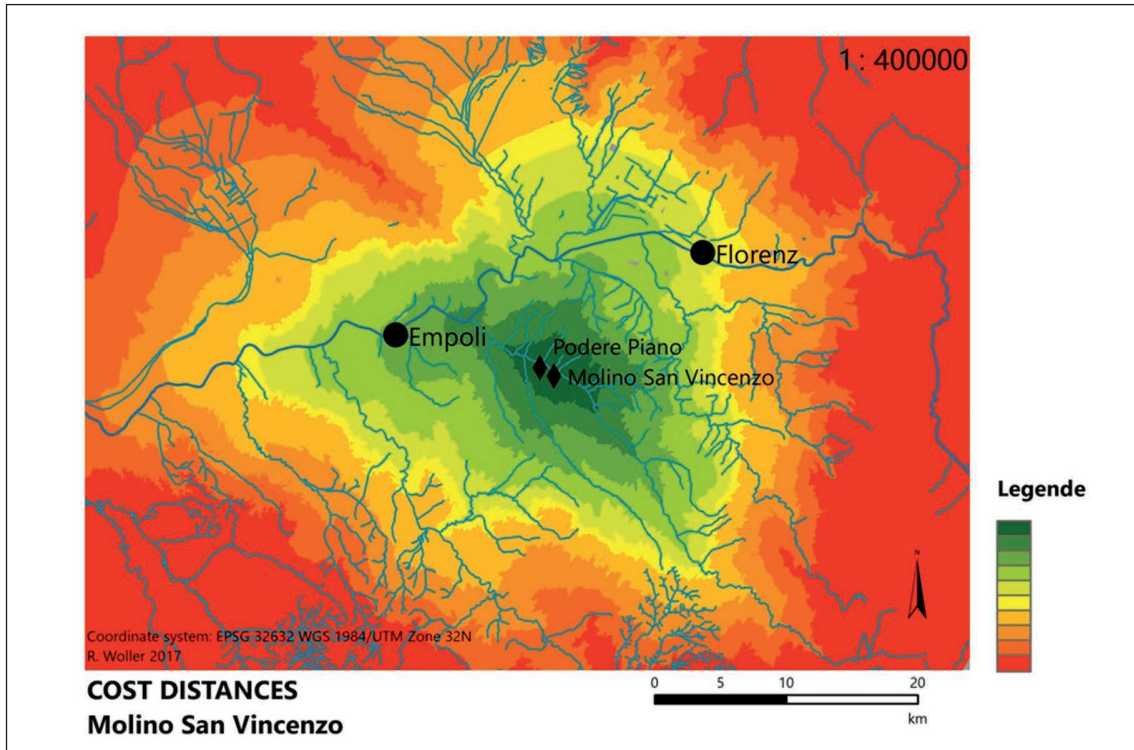
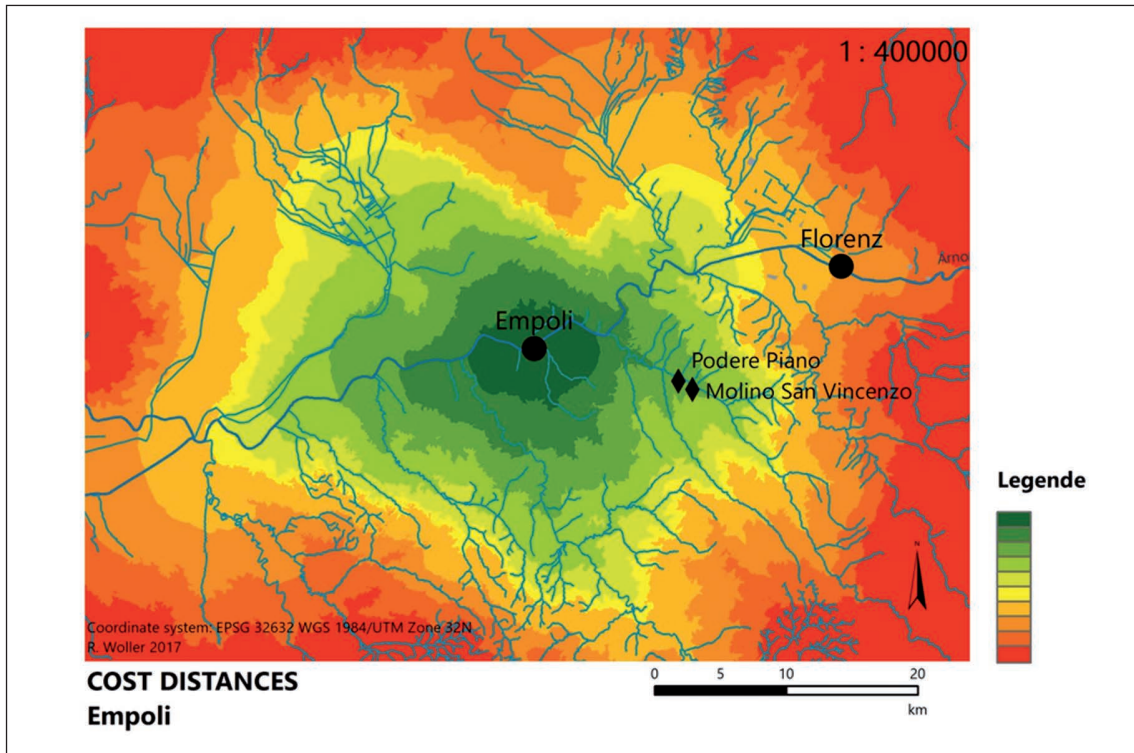


Fig. 1: Coast Distance Maps: Empoli and Molino San Vincenzo

microfossils like *foraminifera* and *radiolaria*. Clay deposits are located near the modern town of Empoli, for example on the right bank of the river Arno.

The largest group of coarse wares belongs to fabric C. It was produced with raw material, which originates from the region of Montaione or the Monti Pisani. Therefore, vessels of this fabric were imported regionally from the Elsa Valley or from the Pisa region.¹⁰ Another regional fabric may also have been produced in the area of Pisa, although further deposits of such temper material are attested elsewhere. This fabric E is tempered with calcite particles, which are discernible due to their angular and mostly transparent to light opaque grains. It was exclusively used for cooking ware as the calcite particles have an excellent heat coefficient. Fabric D was also primarily used for cooking wares. Aside from quartz and feldspar, the temper typically consists of mafic minerals. One outcrop of these minerals is located in the area of S. Casciano in Val di Pesa, and other occurrences are farther afield. Following the assumption that short transportation routes were preferred, fabric D is claimed also to be of local origin.

The comparison of the pottery found in Empoli, at the sites of Pratesi and Molino San Vincenzo revealed some peculiarities (fig. 2). One interesting phenomenon has been noted by comparing the cooking wares of both sites. A large part of the cooking ware from Empoli was made of fabric E and other fabrics, which can be traced to Campania and North Africa and which were imported supra-regionally to Empoli; pottery made of fabric E and especially imports from further away are attested at Molino San Vincenzo to a much lesser extent. In contrast, the local fabric D is strongly attested both at Empoli and Molino San Vincenzo. Also, the regional fabric C was found in large amounts especially at Molino San Vincenzo. Regarding Empoli, the distribution of fabrics can easily be explained with its infrastructural connection. Due to its location along the main west-east connection routes, the *via Quincita* and the Arno river, regionally fabricated

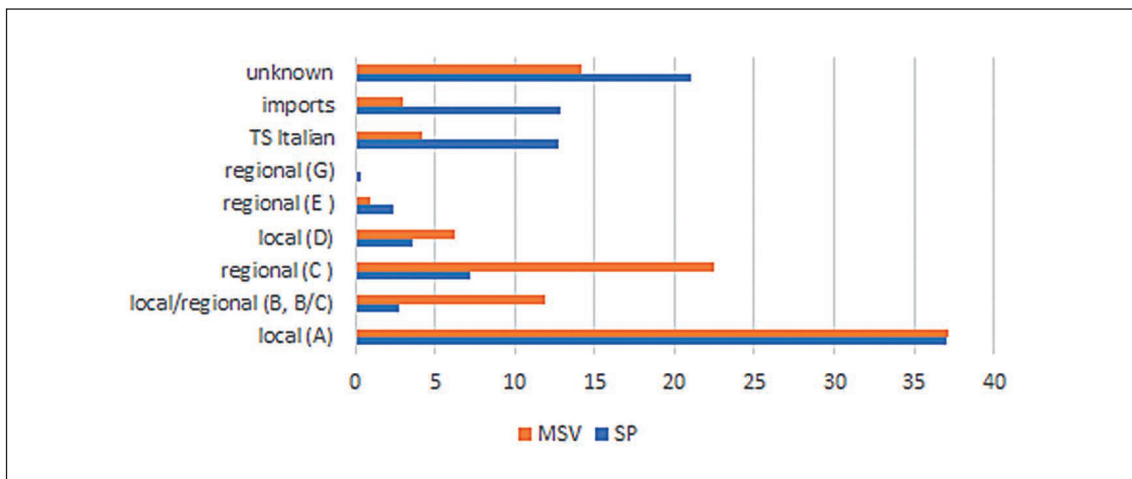


Fig. 2: Fabrics of the Urban Centre (SP) and its Hinterland (MSV)

vessels and supra-regionally imports were easily available. Thus, Empoli was a consumer itself but probably also played the role of distribution centre for its hinterland.

The distribution pattern of cooking ware fabrics of Molino San Vincenzo is more difficult to explain. It leads to the question as to why the regional fabric C is overrepresented compared to the local fabric D, since it was produced in a more remote area. It indicates close ties to the Pisa region. Supraregional imports of cooking ware like internal red slip vessels or African cooking ware, however, are lacking in the rural context. This leads to the interpretation that the purchasing of pottery in Molino San Vincenzo concentrated on the local and most accessible regional market, as these fabrics dominate. The cooking ware of Empoli however, shows an excellent integration in the local, regional, and supra-regional trade networks. This pattern follows the overall trend of the entire pottery findings of both sites. Aside from the locally produced fabric A, which is represented very well in both cases, a trend towards vessels of local and regional fabrics can be observed in the hinterland. Generally, the acquisition of goods in Molino San Vincenzo seems to concentrate on the local micro-level and the nearest and easiest accessible regional level; while in Empoli, a vital exchange of goods is recognizable via imports of regional goods but also of supra-regional amphorae, table ware and cooking ware. Empoli may have been the distribution centre for Molino San Vincenzo although, for example, vessels of fabric C are numerous at Molino San Vincenzo but not well attested in the record of Empoli.

To conclude, thanks to the analysis of the fabrics found in Empoli and its hinterland a vital local and regional network of pottery production could be identified. Due to the research presented it was possible to identify Empoli as an important consumer city, but also as a distribution centre for the region of the middle Arno-valley for incoming and outgoing goods. The imported goods were probably transported from the Tyrrhenian coast upstream along the river Arno using the *via Quinctia* or the river itself. A stronger focus on the micro-level and regional level trade was identified for Molino San Vincenzo instead. The results of the research presented here correlate with survey results conducted in the *ager Pisanus* and *ager Volteranus*. Although farmsteads participated in exchange, the import of goods played a minor role and is mainly limited to easy accessible regional sources, while the urban centres were integrated in an empire-wide trade network.¹¹

Notes

¹ Schörner 2020.

² Alderighi et al. 2011; Schörner – Terreni 2011; Schörner et al. 2013; Schörner et al. 2015; Hagmann – Schreck 2018.

³ Schörner et al. 2013.

⁴ Maiuri 2006.

- ⁵ In general for trade in Northern Etruria: Menchelli – Pasquinucci 2006; Cantini 2010.
- ⁶ Ferretti et al. 1995, fig. 21; Maiuri 2006, 29.
- ⁷ Laurence 1999, 81 f.
- ⁸ Schreck 2018, 17s. (based on Woller 2017).
- ⁹ The following is a summary of Schreck 2018.
- ¹⁰ In general to production sites of pottery in Northern Etruria: Olcese 2011, 27–45. 77–86.
- ¹¹ e.g. Pasquinucci et al. 2003.

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