

Cilician Amphorae in Rome and Ostia during the Middle Imperial Age (2nd – Early 3rd Centuries AD) and Reflections about the Consumption of Their Contents

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Introduction

This paper is based on the remains of amphorae discovered during the excavations held in the building commonly known as the ‘Terme di Elagabalo’ in Rome (fig. 1), carried out (from 2007 to 2013) by the ‘Scienze dell’Antichità’ Department of Sapienza – University of Rome.¹ It is based on them because they are an interesting and valuable source of information about economy, dietary needs, taste, culture, and the purchasing capacity of the consumers.² It analysed globally 40,882 fragments – corresponding to 777 amphorae – from the Middle Imperial contexts discovered in this building (2nd – early 3rd centuries AD).³ Among them, 260 amphorae were recognised as originally coming from the Eastern part of the Mediterranean and nine of them were identified as Cilician ones. Despite the importance of this site and its general large amounts, the low quantities of Cilician amphorae lead to consider also several published ceramic assemblages dating to the Middle Imperial age which had been found both in Rome and even in Ostia because this latter city had always been a comparison site to understand the commerce to the Capital.⁴ The number of vessels for all the considered sites had been determined combining the methodologies called NMI (Minimum Number of Individuals), its calibration NTI (Typological Number of Individuals), and EVE (Estimated Vessel Equivalent).⁵ The percentages that will be offered are based on the volumes in litres that had been calculated on the basis of the number of vessels for each in-phase form (therefore not considering neither residual nor intrusive vessels which give misleading evidence in all the considered contexts). The volumes used (in litres) had been taken from recent publications offering this information or geometrically calculated from drawings of entire objects offered by them.⁶ These amounts (which of course could change with future discoveries and publications) gave the opportunity to analyse the presence of Cilician amphorae in both cities during the chosen chronological period which was divided into four phases, named after the Emperors so as to standardise nomenclatures (Trajanic age, Hadrianic age, Antonine age, and Severan age⁷). At the same time, in spite of the low presence of these amphorae, this study scrutinised many ancient sources mentioning the wines from this province, as these amphorae mainly contained wine, so as to determine their qualities.

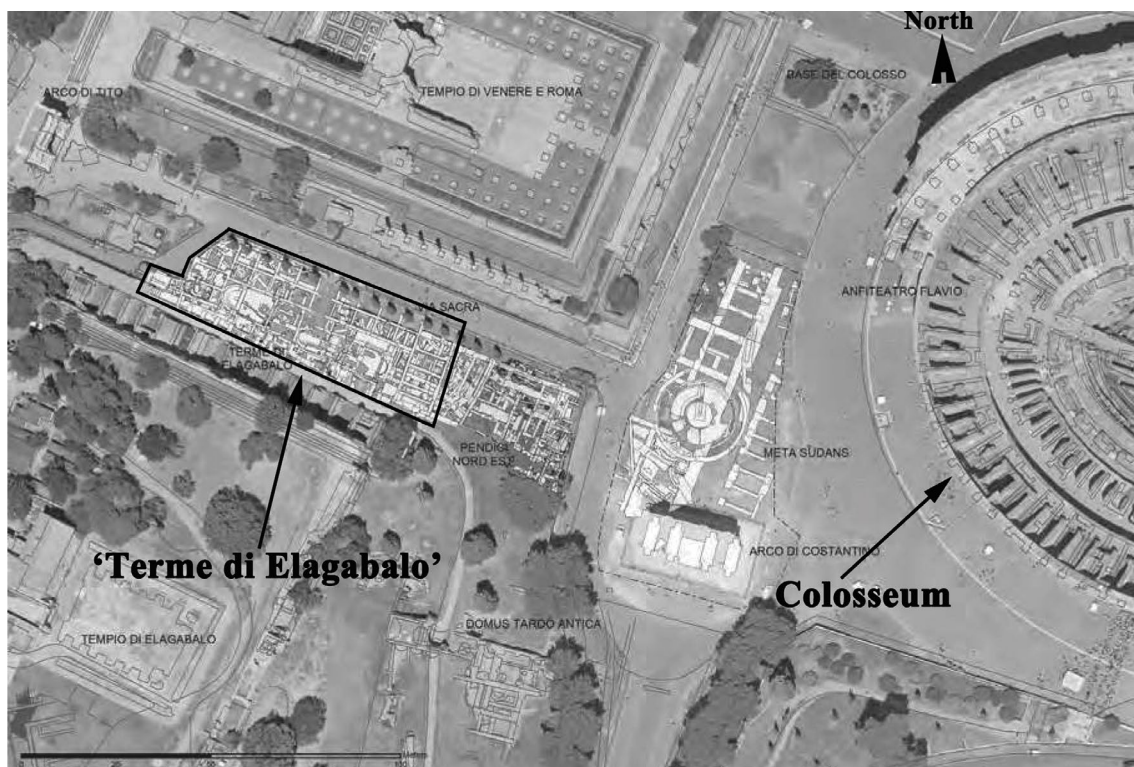


Fig. 1: Vertical picture of the Western portion of the Colosseum's valley.

Cilician Amphorae in Rome and Ostia

The *redactio in formam provincie* with the capital at *Tarsus* is due to Pompey in 62 BC, after his campaign against the pirates and the battle at *Korakesion* (modern Alanya)⁸ and during the Roman times it was divided into two areas following orography and hydrography (the *Cilicia Tracheia* and the *Cilicia Pedias*).⁹ However, the existence of a province of Cilicia (with the regions of *Cilicia*, *Isauria* and *Licaonia*) is confirmed for the first time during Antoninus Pius¹⁰ which have been recognised recently as the beginning of its flourishing period which lasted till the Late-Antiquity and the Proto-Byzantine period.¹¹ At the same time, the commercial flows in this area (which linked Asia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia) already existed before being included in the Roman domains and involved several products. Among them can be cited timber,¹² saffron and the unguent that derived from it, wool and clothes (used to produce cloaks, tarps, sacks, and heavy wickers), processed fish,¹³ olive oil, and wine. Without considering sub-varieties or those fragments which had been difficultly given to specific forms for their intrinsic characteristics, only the following four main forms of amphorae produced in Cilicia had been identified among the fragments discovered in the excavations considered in Rome and Ostia: Mau XXVII–XXVIII (also called Zemer 1977, n. 41; Agora G199; ‘pinched

ORIGINS	FORMS	CONTENT	LITRES	ROLE	TRAJANIC AGE - AMPHORAE			HADRIANIC AGE - AMPHORAE			ANTONINE AGE - AMPHORAE			SEVERAN AGE - AMPHORAE		
					ELAGABALO	ROMA	OSTIA	ELAGABALO	ROMA	OSTIA	ELAGABALO	ROMA	OSTIA	ELAGABALO	ROMA	OSTIA
CILICIA	MAU XIII	WINE	32.77	IN-PHASE	0	2	0	0	9	0	0	0	5	0	0	0
CILICIA	MAU XIII/ AGORA M54	WINE	30.38*	IN-PHASE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5		0	0	0
CILICIA	AGORA M54	WINE	28	IN-PHASE	0	1	0	0	64	0	0	3	2	2	0	0
CILICIA	MAU XXVII/XXVIII	WINE	28.2	IN-PHASE	0	2	0	1	7	0	0	0	12+2?	5	0	0
CILICIA	SCHÖNE V	WINE	12.76	IN-PHASE	0	4	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
CILICIA	LATE SCHÖNE V	WINE	12.76	IN-PHASE	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Fig. 2: Quantifications of Cilician amphorae found in the ‘Terme di Elagabalo’, Rome, and Ostia with volumes (in litres) and deposition role. Asterisks refer to average volumes.

amphora’; Dyczek 2001, type 22; or Anemurium A), Agora M54 (also called Knossos 47 or Psuedo-Cos en cloche), Schöne-Mau V, and Schöne-Mau XIII (also called Agora G198).¹⁴ These Cilician amphorae (that very likely principally contained wine) had been mainly found in Rome, while in Ostia they had only been found during the Antonine age (fig. 2). This is not surprising as the Capital of the Empire always had a significant role in the commerce of foodstuffs which also implied a larger variety of imported commodities. At the same time, the data deriving from the remains in the ‘Terme di Elagabalo’ become extremely significant during the Severan age because this is the only site that offers Cilician amphorae during that chronological phase.¹⁵ The total amounts of litres are generally very low, with the exception of the Hadrianic age in Rome when they reach a rather significant quantity. This is possibly due to the commercial routes for which these amphorae arrived at first elsewhere and lastly in Rome, although even the amounts found elsewhere in Italy are rather scarce.¹⁶

Cilician Wine

Generally speaking, the wines coming from the Eastern part of the Mediterranean sea seem to be predominant in Rome during almost all phases (fig. 3), especially during the Hadrianic age (when they reach 57% of presence) and with the exception of the Severan age (25.7%) when their leadership seems to be surpassed by North-African wines (47.1%).¹⁷ On the other hand, in Ostia they never surpass 26% of total litres and always reaching third place. Among these Oriental wines, the Cilician one is always present with low amounts and percentages that never surpass 2% during all chronological phases considered. Unfortunately not much is known about this Cilician wine,¹⁸ although the production in this province seems to have increased during the Roman times (at least from the Hadrianic age as visible from the amphorae) for its favourable climatic condition.¹⁹ Pliny the Elder praises the Cilician *passum*, stating that it was second only to the Cretan one,²⁰ especially when it was flavoured with *hyssop*²¹ (although probably that wine was not excellent²²).

WINE QUANTIFICATIONS		ITALY		GAUL		IBERIAN PENINSULA (INCLUDING DEFRUTUM)		NORTH AFRICA		EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN				UNIDENTIFIABLE	
		CILICIA		TOTAL		LITRES	%	LITRES	%	LITRES	%	LITRES	%	LITRES	%
		LITRES	%	LITRES	%										
TRAJANIC AGE	ROMA	18,248.2	34.5%	13,071	24.7%	2887	5.5%	363	0.7%	200.98	0.4%	18,282.2	34.6%	0	0%
	OSTIA	1,854.32	30.1%	2,546	41.3%	534	8.7%	253	4.1%	0	0%	857.26	13.9%	120	1.9%
HADRIANIC AGE	ROMA	70,270.78	29.4%	23,342	9.8%	6388	2.7%	2,733.62	1.1%	2401.85	1.0%	136,404.52	57.0%	0	0%
	OSTIA	1,716.8	29.9%	2,112	36.8%	516.25	9.0%	254.5	4.4%	0	0%	748.96	13.1%	390	6.8%
ANTONINE AGE	ROMA	6,081.02	33.2%	3,222	17.6%	383.75	2.1%	1,960.62	10.7%	248.66	1.4%	6,671.31	36.4%	0	0%
	OSTIA	12,297.12	31.6%	13,613.75	35.0%	2571.25	6.6%	1,909.5	4.9%	627.41	1.6%	8,537.72	21.9%	0	0%
SEVERAN AGE	ROMA	2,480.26	12.8%	2,325	12.0%	457.5	2.4%	9,105.72	47.1%	209.76	1.1%	4,974.31	25.7%	0	0%
	OSTIA	1,161.2	26.0%	1,449	32.5%	135.75	3.0%	503.86	11.3%	0	0%	1,142.9	25.6%	66	1.5%

Fig. 3: Quantifications of litres of wine and percentages about all macro origins calculated from all amphorae discovered in the ‘Terme di Elagabalo’, Rome and Ostia.

In the *Expositio totius mundi* Cilicia is mentioned for producing large amounts of wine²³ and medical sources suggest using the Cilician *Abâtes* (elsewhere cited as *albate*, *sybate*, *abate*, *anabate*²⁴) for its laxative capacities.²⁵ This product seems to have been used as a medicament (both for humans and animals) as well as for cooking, in agriculture, and for specific ceremonies.²⁶ Recent fieldworks discovered large numbers of mills in the Rough Cilicia (or *Cilicia Tracheia*²⁷), although simpler techniques might have been used for wine production, such as flat stones on the ground level and cylindrical rolls made of stone²⁸ or rock-cut presses.²⁹ Some wine-amphorae originally produced elsewhere had been also imitated in Cilicia³⁰ and apart from the already mentioned forms, that still partly imitated other forms, during the Late Antiquity the manufacture seemed to radically increase. In fact, much information is now offered by the excavations held in *Elaiussa Sebaste* where several kilns were found producing many Late Roman 1 amphorae,³¹ a commercial container whose typology³² and content are still not totally clear, but it might have contained wine.³³ Despite the scarce amount of information and knowledge about this product, it reached Rome with quantities of litres which cannot be neglected. In fact during the Hadrianic age in Rome the amounts are quite large (although the percentage reaches just 1% of total litres) and during the Antonine age in Ostia (which is also the only chronological phase in that city offering remains of amphorae produced in this province) the resulting percentage of total litres is the largest in all sites and phases (reaching 1.6%). These data show that the production of wine in this province was rather important, possibly linked with its being a significant and strategic hub for the commercial routes coming from the Eastern part of the Mediterranean sea and directed towards the West for the presence of many harbours along the Mediterranean coast.³⁴ The wine produced in Cilicia

was also possibly meant to meet the needs of some consumers in the Capital of the Empire (and, partly, of its port) whose request for this alcoholic beverage had always been large and constant. All Romans, in fact, usually drank a lot of wine, especially during the Imperial period.³⁵ Alcohol was indeed (and still is) a very strong social binding agent,³⁶ something that could bring enjoyment to *convivia* (when it was largely consumed³⁷), as well as something that could serve to deeply strengthen group identities, to satisfy cultural needs³⁸ and to define boundaries among ranks.³⁹ In fact all commodities might have been chosen also for their ability in expressing roles,⁴⁰ aggregating people, and creating connections among them.⁴¹ All wines were imported to Rome because they had to have a market, someone consuming them,⁴² otherwise undertaking such risky journeys by sea would not have been profitable enough.⁴³ All imports to Rome and even to Ostia had possibly always been established by the élite through a codified system which organized the supply of all products in Rome that had to be available for everyone.⁴⁴ At the same time the élite always tried to increase its wealth with buying/selling transactions, as it had land possessions throughout the Empire which resulted in crops to be sold in the Capital.⁴⁵ It has already been assumed that Romans were aware of differences and qualities of wines related to their origins (especially the élite as shown by ancient sources⁴⁶), however not all people could purchase the same products which arrived in the two cities considered: different ranks could have used different wines to demonstrate their place in the social hierarchy and to express social differences.⁴⁷

Conclusions

The number of kiln sites (both in the Western portion of the province and in *Elaiussa Sebaste*), the amount of production sites (based on discoveries derived from fieldworks about sites with presses⁴⁸), the variety of amphorae produced, and the quantity of finds (both in the same area and in the entire Mediterranean basin) all reflect a rather significant agricultural *surplus* (which can be referred to wine and/or olive oil) of Cilicia. The data considered in this analysis confirm the flourishing period that this province experienced at least since the Roman times, but (as mentioned above) they also permit to slightly anticipate it to the Hadrianic age (at least looking at the remains of amphorae in both the cities considered). The production of wine was likely an important step into the 'Romanization' of the inhabitants of this region who could therefore feel to be part of this same productive process and included in the commerce with other areas of the Empire.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, in spite of this, it is impossible to clearly and surely define who consumed what, because many times the same form of amphora coming from an area could have been used to transport different wines which could have had diverse qualities.⁵⁰ At the same time, ancient sources can be misleading and should always be taken very cautiously because they

were always a reflection of the belonging to higher social ranks of their authors or the moral intent of those works.⁵¹ In spite of this, looking at them and at the studies, a very hypothetical assumption can be made.⁵² As already mentioned, Cilician wine had been rarely cited for its high quality and the quantities resulting from the discovered amphorae (that very likely contained wine) are rather low both in Rome and in Ostia during all the considered chronological phases. Despite this, the presence of these Cilician amphorae in both the cities considered is very significant, although with low amounts. For this reason it is possible to suppose (although without any certainty) that this wine was probably not too expensive and was directed to or mainly consumed by those people belonging to social ranks which were not totally poor, but not even rich and who tried to emulate higher ones so as to obtain an elusive social standing.⁵³ In any case, the significant finds analysed here can surely be referred to the importance of Cilician wine both in Rome and Ostia because it had a market there with people who bought and drank it.

Notes

¹ For the phases and building discovered cf. Sagui – Cante 2015 with references.

² Bruno 2004, 358; Ollà 2008, 283. Cf. contra Peña 2007, above all 345 who seems to expressly deny the validity of whatsoever study which aims to reconstruct patterns of supply in foodstuffs based on amphorae.

³ This paper offers parts of data widely discussed in the PhD thesis in Archaeology at The University of Southampton. Many thanks must go to Prof. S. J. Keay, Prof. C. Panella, and Prof. L. Sagui for their help, the suggestions, the opportunity to study these ceramics, and for the possibility of presenting this paper and to Mrs. Valerie Sinden for having proof-read this text.

⁴ The excavations considered in Rome are: Meta Sudans; Palatine's Northern Slopes; Crypta Balbi; Trajan's Markets; Forum Transitorium; Domus Tiberiana; Santo Stefano Rotondo; Via Sacchi; Nuovo Mercato Testaccio; Aqua Marcia; and Via Blaserna. The excavations considered in Ostia are: Terme del Nuotatore; Casa delle Pareti Gialle; Taberna dell'Invidioso; Piazzale delle Corporazioni, Portico Ovest; Domus dei Pesci. For all their references cf. Radaelli 2018a, 246 n. 5. 6. Some published sites in these two cities were not considered for their intrinsic problems about quantifications and chronology.

⁵ For these methodologies cf. the references in Radaelli 2017, 1045.

⁶ For the methodology used cf. Radaelli 2018a, 246 f. n. 10.

⁷ The Trajanic age = early 2nd century AD; the Hadrianic age = second–third decades of the 2nd century AD; the Antonine age = mid–late 2nd century AD; and the Severan age = very late 2nd/early 3rd centuries AD.

⁸ Syme 1939, 300.

⁹ Strabo, XIV, 5, 1.

¹⁰ Both Marcus Aurelius (in AD 176) and Septimius Severus (in AD 194) passed through Cilicia during their campaigns to Syria (Pilhofer 2005, 38). During the 3rd century AD all this area was invaded by the Persians who created a general discontent and rebellions among the local population (Equini Schneider 1999, 41).

¹¹ Schenider 1999, 39; Ferrazzoli 2010, 43.

¹² In 36 BC the Tracheia region was given to Cleopatra who exploited it for this product: Syme 1939, 326; Bean – Mitford 1962, 187; Bean – Mitford 1965, 10.

¹³ Equini Scheiner 1999, 40 nn. 105. 106. 108 with references to ancient sources.

¹⁴ For the chronology, capacity, production, and distribution of these forms, cf. Rizzo 2014, 337–340 with further references. At Ayaş/Elaiussa Sebaste a variety which seems a transitional form between Mau XXVII-XXVIII and Late Roman 1 was produced: Ferrazzoli – Ricci 2010, 193 f. fig. 187; Ferrazzoli 2010, 46 fig. 40. For the discovery of Agora M54 amphorae in Naples cf. Bragantini et al. 2010, 616 n. 38. For the discovery of Schöne-Mau V amphorae in Cyprus (Nea Paphos) cf. Meyza – Bagińska 2013, 142 fig. 7d. For the discovery of Schöne-Mau XIII amphorae in Pompeii cf. Improta 1991, 99; Conticello de' Spagnolis 2002, 299. 302 nos. 209–211; Bragantini et al. 2010, 613 n. 28.

¹⁵ Cf. also Komar 2016, 177, table 2 mentioning 0% of Cilician/Cypriote wine during the 3rd century AD.

¹⁶ Cf. Auriemma – Quiri 2004; 2006; Auriemma et al. 2015 (all with references).

¹⁷ Cf. Radaelli 2018a, 249.

¹⁸ For sources and finds dated before the Roman times, especially in Rough Cilicia, cf. Rauh et al. 2006, 51–55.

¹⁹ Şenol 2008, 110 f.

²⁰ Plin., HN, XIV, 81 f.

²¹ Plin., HN, XIV, 109.

²² Tchernia 2011, 345 f.

²³ *Expositio Totius Mundi*, 176.

²⁴ <http://remacle.org/bloodwolf/erudits/athenee/livre1.htm#_ftn130> (20th August 2019).

²⁵ Ath., *Deipnosophistae*, I, 33b; Gal., *De Victu Attenuante*, 99; In Hippocratis *de Auctorum Morborum Victu*, III, 8. About the export of Cilician wine cf. also Pedanius Dioscorides, *De Materia Medica*, V, 40, 1; *Expositio Totius Mundi*, 39; Gal., *De Sanitate Tuenda*, V, 5, 15.

²⁶ Cf., for example, the Jewish Passover in ancient Palestine, as suggested in Rauh et al. 2006, 59.

²⁷ Rauh et al. 2006, 63–76 although rarely they had been linked to a specific product between wine and olive oil. For other sites cf. also Brun 2004, 95.

²⁸ Two of them were found in Antiochia with a space for the installation of a press: Rauh et al. 2006, 68.

²⁹ Aydınoğlu – Alkaç 2008.

³⁰ Coan-style (Rauh et al. 2006, 54); Gaulish amphorae (Ferrazzoli – Ricci 2007a, 304); North-African containers (Şenol 2008, 114 and note 30).

³¹ Ferrazzoli – Ricci 2007a, 306; 2007b, 673; 2009; Borgia – Iacomi 2010. About some petrographic analyses held on these objects cf. Burrigato et al. 2007. Emepereur – Picon 1989 (236–243 figs. 18. 19) already identified several production centres during their fieldworks. Cf. also Abadie-Reynal 1992, 364; Pacetti 1995, 273. For another kiln site in Pompeiopolis cf. Autret et al. 2010. Not only Cilicia produced this amphora, but also Rhodes, Pamphilia, Lycia, and Caria (cf. Reynolds 1995, 71; Vroom 2005, 53; Williams 2005, 160 f.; Winther Jacobsen 2005; Pieri 2007); the island of Cos (Didiomi 2014; Diamanti et al. 2014, 183); and even the island of Lipsi in the Dodecanese (Papavassiliou et al. 2014, 160 f.).

³² This Form had been studied on different occasions, but a clear typological organization is still not reached. Egloff (1977), basing his study on the ceramics found in the Kellia monastery realized a first

typological division. Keay (1984, 268–278) identified four varieties for this amphora called Type LIII. Bonifay – Pieri (1995, 108 f.) divided the form into three varieties, using finds from Marseille. Remolá Vallverdú (2000, 217) added a third variety, calling it ‘Late LRA 1’. Williams (2005) questioned about this problem and Pieri (2005) offered another division. Opaït 2010 argued about precursors of this form. Demesticha 2013 and 2014 offered typological subdivisions into generations. Cf. also Leidwanger 2014 and Waksman et al. 2014 for a few petrographic analyses.

³³ About the problem of the content of these amphorae cf. Opaït 2004, 297 f. and Elton 2005.

³⁴ Rinaldi Tufi 2000, 317 f.

³⁵ Radaelli 2018a, 250 with references.

³⁶ Barnett 2014, 15; Martín i Oliveira 2015, 24.

³⁷ Varone 2010, 226; Carlan 2012, 89–91.

³⁸ Brun 2003, 9; Barnett 2014, 15.

³⁹ Radaelli 2018a, 250 with references.

⁴⁰ Cf. Solomon 1983 basing on Mead 1934 and Goffman 1959.

⁴¹ Cf. Cova 1997, 298–302; Cova – Cova 2001, 67–72; Siri 2001, 8 f. This suggestion comes from the so-called ‘post-modern’ studies about consumer behaviour (for the meaning of the word post-modern cf. Lyotard 1981; Slater 1997, 176; Codeluppi 2000, 16; Fabris 2003; Petruzzellis – Chebat 2010, 18–20) which started considering human interactions based on cultural processes created by attractions and repulsions, emotions and passions (Maffesoli 1993).

⁴² Not only wines from the Eastern Mediterranean, but even those from other origins can be assimilated to this same hypothesis, as the ones produced in the Tiber Valley in Italy (Radaelli 2016, 85). Carandini 1989, 506 in fact suggested that the majority of wines in Rome were never directed to the élite.

⁴³ Radaelli 2018a, 251.

⁴⁴ Radaelli 2018a, 251. Wine, however, did not derive from taxation on provinces, as recently stated again by Sanz Palomera 2010, 32–35.

⁴⁵ Cf. Radaelli 2018a, 251 with references.

⁴⁶ Radaelli 2017, 1046.

⁴⁷ Cf. Radaelli 2018b, 135 and Radaelli forthcoming (with further references).

⁴⁸ Brun 2004, 95; Rauh et al. 2006, 56 f.

⁴⁹ Rauh et al. 2006, 76.

⁵⁰ Radaelli 2018a, 251.

⁵¹ Radaelli 2017, 1045.

⁵² Ancient wine did not contain any preservatives, therefore when it was consumed it was more similar to vinegar, despite its provenance (Prof. C. Panella, personal communication).

⁵³ Cf. Radaelli 2018a, 252 with references.

Image Credits

Fig. 1: after Radaelli 2018a, 261, fig. 1. – Fig. 2: Elaboration by E. Radaelli. – Fig. 3: Elaboration by E. Radaelli.

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