

Roman Pottery from Lilybaeum. Some remarks on imported products and transmarine contacts

Antonella Mandruzzato – Martina Seifert – Debora Oswald

The team of Hamburg and Palermo Universities has been working in Marsala since 2007, when the “Lilybaeum Archaeological Project”, led by Inge Nielsen and Nicola Bonacasa, started in collaboration with the Superintendence of Trapani and the Archaeological Museum of Marsala.¹ Following a preliminary geological survey and geophysical prospecting,² excavations were carried out in the northeastern area of the Archaeological Park of Marsala, the so-called ‘Zona Mura’, between 2008 and 2009 (fig. 1).³ They brought to light the remains of some structures belonging to insulae delimited by limestone-paved roads⁴ and of a fortification wall from a late Roman rebuilding phase.⁵ The results of the study of the located structures are undoubtedly interesting as they mark the starting point for new investigations on Lilybaeum’s urban history.

However, this paper shall not focus on the architectural remains, but on the pottery. Among the features that have marked the history of pottery productions in Lilybaeum, two are particularly worth mentioning: firstly the gradual decrease in traditional Punic forms in the local coarse pottery repertoire over the Hellenistic period, as suggested by Babette Bechtold in her analysis of the vessels found in the necropolis,⁶ and an increase in typical Hellenistic-Roman forms;⁷ secondly, the great development of Lilybaeum’s trade, which flourished during the Roman period, due to the harbour activities importing products from Italy and northern Africa.⁸ The second point is particularly important with regard to the preliminary results presented in this paper.

The exhibition “Lilibeo. Testimonianze archeologiche dal IV sec. a. C. al V sec. d. C.”,⁹ organised by the Superintendence of western Sicily in 1984, offered an important synthesis of all research carried out on urban studies, architecture, art and handcrafted production in Lilybaeum. It first provided an organic presentation of pottery samples from the Republican and the early Imperial period brought to light by the ancient town and necropolis excavations.¹⁰ The prevalence of thin-walled pottery¹¹ and Italian Sigillata¹² among fine tableware, for example, is particularly worth pointing out.

Concerning the materials imported during the late Roman period, a recently published archaeological context of the ‘*decumanus maximus*’ (excavations carried out by the Superintendence of Trapani) showed a significant number of vessels imported from North Africa: over fifty percent of the amphorae, for instance, are African imports.¹³

Despite the increase in research in Marsala and its surrounding area, followed by the prompt release of results, the systematic study of Roman pottery is still at its early stage. The elaboration of an overall summary of all data from previous excavations combined with results from more recent researches should mark the starting point to lay out efficient strategies for future work. In consideration of the role carried out by Lilybaeum, the expected results will represent an important frame of reference for a



Fig. 1: ‘Zona Mura’, Sectors III, IV and V during the excavation.

deeper understanding of the economic situation and trade patterns during the Hellenistic and Roman period on the island.¹⁴

The ongoing analysis of the pottery found in the area called ‘Zona Mura’ allows to provide some preliminary data.¹⁵ Imported fine tableware was mostly produced in North Africa, although its types were widespread in the western Mediterranean from the middle Imperial period to at least the 5th century. African red slip ware is mainly represented by plain shapes in D fabric¹⁶ – as flat-based dish Hayes 58B, bowl Hayes 61A, the large bowl Hayes 67 and the flanged bowl Hayes 91A, except for few forms, as ARS E¹⁷ Hayes 70 – most of which come from production centres in northern Tunisia.¹⁸

African cooking ware found together with ARS sherds includes forms such as the dish Hayes 181 (fig. 3,1), the lids Hayes 182 and Hayes 196 (fig. 3,4), the ‘classic’ type of the casserole Hayes 197 (fig. 3,2); the findings also include lids with undifferentiated or thickened rolled rim,¹⁹ finally some others with blackened rim and un-slipped exterior wall are attributable to form Hayes 195.²⁰

Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of fragments of cooking pots among the catalogued material. The texture of the fabric and diverse inclusions, which are visible to the naked eye and include traces of volcanic origin, lead to the conclusion that they consist mainly of samples of Pantellerian Ware.²¹ The considerable presence of Pantellerian Ware is likely due to the trade routes between northern Tunisia and western Sicily, that could include a stop in Pantelleria,²² and the competitiveness of these specialised cooking pots: as Peacock wrote on Pantellerian ware production “[...] it was probably greatly esteemed for its resistance to thermal shock”.²³

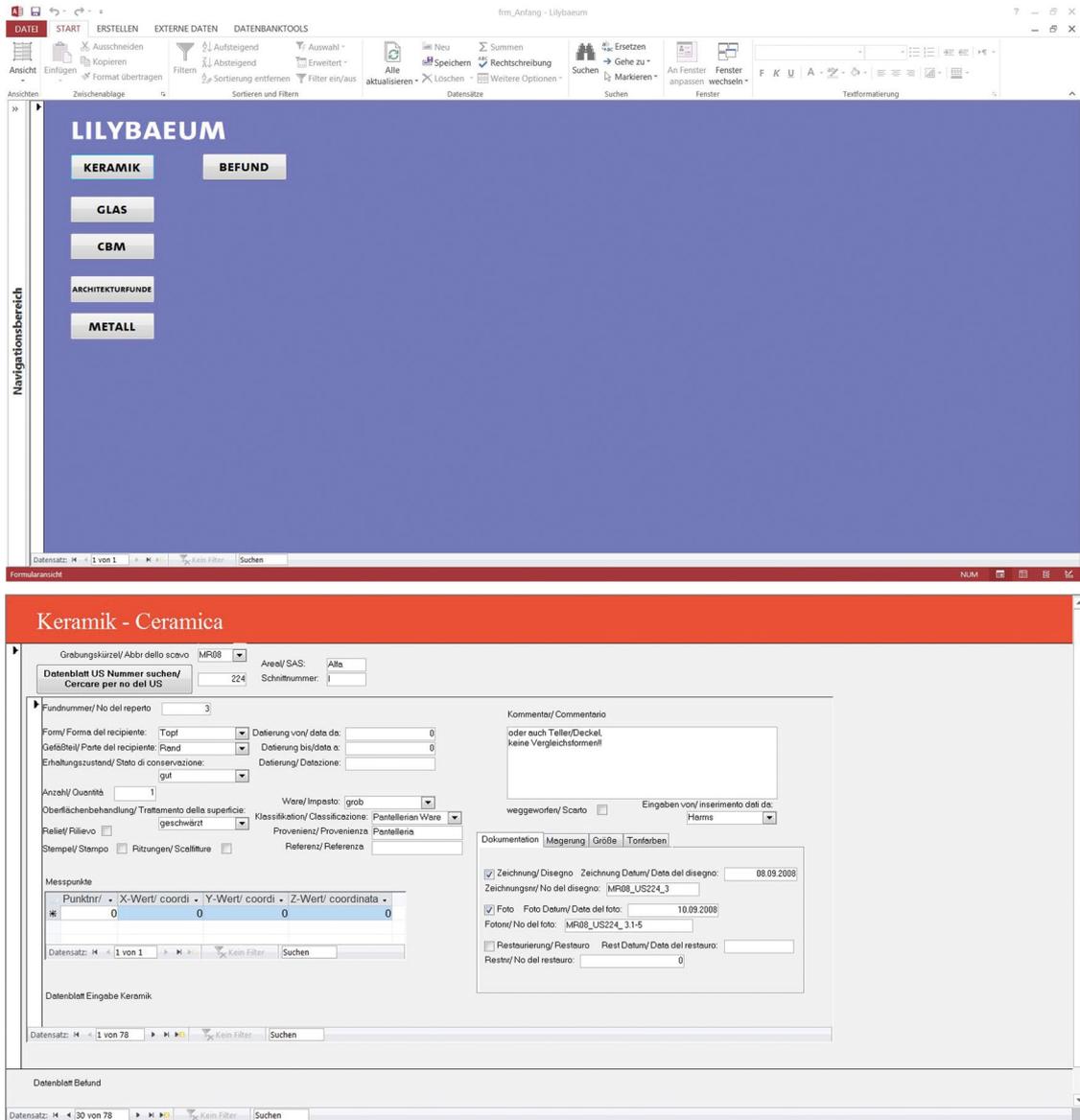


Fig. 2: Lilybaeum database: splash screen and pottery form.

The study of common ware is already showing that some typologies are present in other centres of the western and southwestern regions of the island as well. The basins of the late Roman contexts in the sub divo necropolis in Agrigento prove to be a good example. The morphological characteristics of the artefacts brought to light by the ‘Zona Mura’ excavations show close correspondences not only with vessels produced at Agrigento, but also with those imported to Agrigento from other Sicilian and African workshops.²⁴

The pottery of the ‘Zona Mura’ presents close analogies to the findings belonging to a late Roman context from a sewer within the aforementioned excavation of the ‘*decumanus*

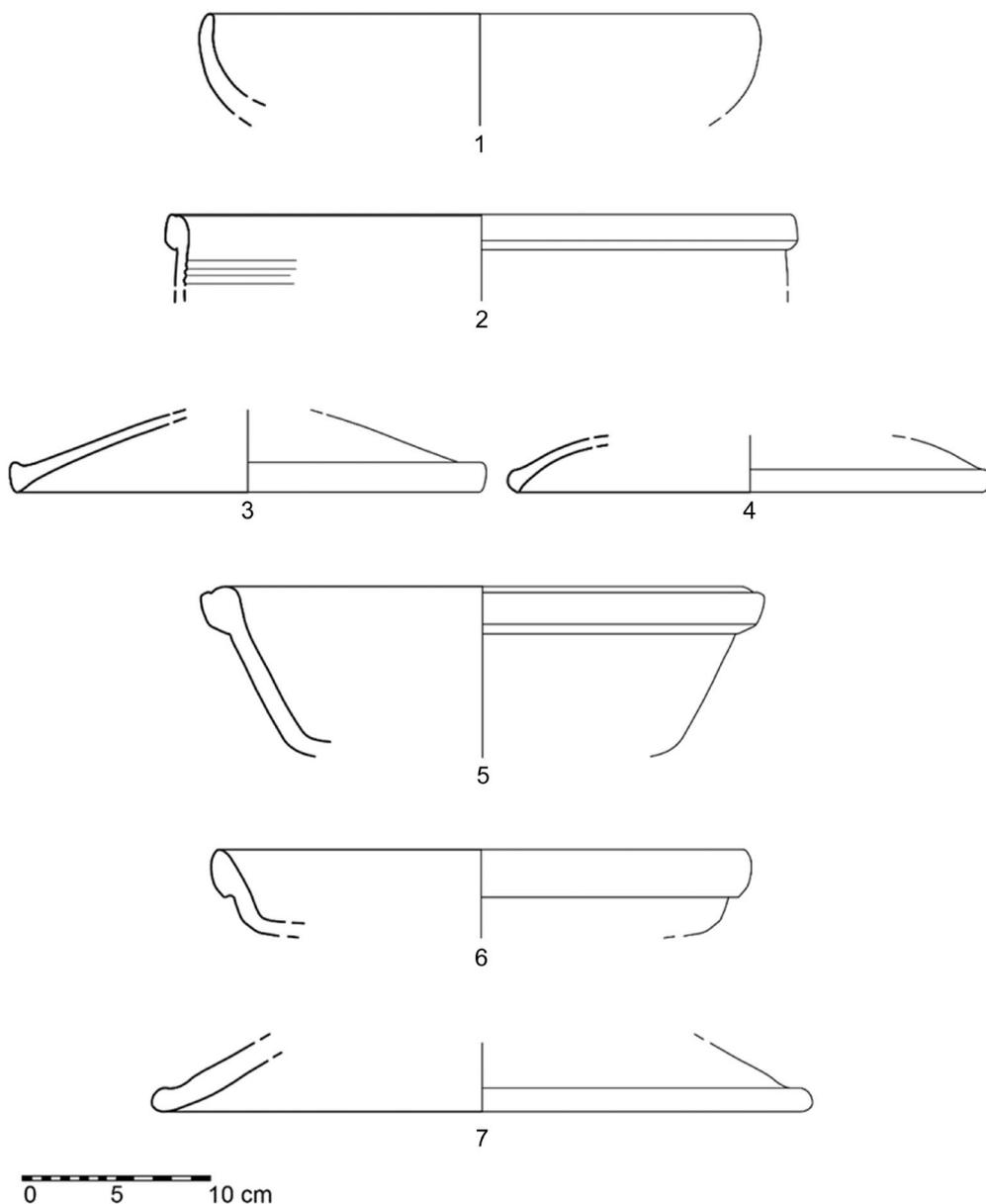


Fig. 3: African cooking ware (1–4) and Pantellerian ware (5–7) (drawings by L. Fazio).

maximus.²⁵ The two contexts are connected through the origin of both the tableware and cooking ware. The recurrence of forms Hayes 50B, 61A, 67 and 91 is particularly striking. Concerning the cooking pots, the most common typologies – other than form Hayes 181 – are numerous sherds attributable to the Pantellerian Ware, with the same repertoire that was brought to light by the ‘Zona Mura’ excavations.²⁶

Recent studies on the trade routes between North Africa and Sicily during the Roman and late Roman period tried to figure out the reasons for the constant flow of African

pottery imports and the presence of Carthaginian products in Lilybaeum and its region up to and throughout the 5th century AD. The study by Michel Bonifay and Daniele Malfitana, who have evoked Elizabeth Fentress' and Pascal Arnaud's hypotheses, focused on the role of coastal navigation and the concept of "circular trade" between the Tunisian coast and the extreme western areas of the Strait of Sicily on the basis of archaeological evidence. This system was independent from the larger trade routes that brought African and Sicilian wheat to Rome and it kept on working throughout the 5th century AD, as documented by the findings on the southwestern Sicilian coast.²⁷ The vicinity of Lilybaeum to the northern Tunisian coast should be highlighted in particular, as was already noticed in Antiquity: "The shortest passage from Lilybaeum across to Libya in the neighbourhood of Carthage" – Strabo writes – "is one thousand five hundred stadia; and on this passage, it is said, some man of sharp vision, from a look-out, used to report to the men in Lilybaeum the number of ships that were putting to sea from Carthage".²⁸

The fact that the city possessed three well-equipped harbours on the promontory is equally relevant. These harbours – as Enrico Caruso pointed out²⁹ – formed an actual "harbour system", that represented a privileged dock for coastal navigation. Next to the greater trade routes for the transport of African and Sicilian wheat and other merchandise to Rome, other routes between the northern Tunisian coast and the southwestern coasts of Sicily, that could include a stop in Pantelleria, are therefore highly probable. This helps to explain not only the constant flow of the African vessels towards the centres in the south-western sector of Sicily, but the relevant presence of Pantellerian Ware imports.³⁰

Notes

¹ Members of the mission 2007–2009 at Marsala were Martina Seifert, Antonella Mandruzzato, Andrea Harms, Alessia Mistretta and Thomas Fuchs.

² Bonacasa – Nielsen 2010, 146–149.

³ Bonacasa – Nielsen 2010 (Lilybaeum Archaeological Project). Mistretta et al. 2014 (preliminary results of the excavations and complementary geophysical prospection by M. Seifert and N. Babucic in 2012).

⁴ The structures show a complex stratigraphic sequence. Mistretta et al. 2014, 67–72.

⁵ Bonacasa – Nielsen 2010, 153; 155 fig. 13.

⁶ Bechtold 1999, 188–191.

⁷ Local production of black glazed pottery in the Hellenistic period: Di Stefano 1993, 44 f.; Di Stefano 2002, 88.

⁸ Wilson 1990, 251–270 (trade patterns in the Imperial age). Malfitana 2004, 2006 (on Eastern and Italian Sigillata imported to Sicily). Bonifay – Malfitana 2016, 409 f. 415 f. 423 (Northern Africa imports).

⁹ Di Stefano 1984.

¹⁰ Oliveri 1984, 117–123.

¹¹ Some workshops have been identified in Sicily: see Denaro 2008, 85–89.

¹² The stamps (L. Tettius Samia, Cn. Ateius, L. Rasinius Pisanus, C.P.P. and more) suggest that imports from Italian workshops were constant at least until the beginning of the 2nd cent. AD. Oliveri 1984, 119–123. See also: Mandruzzato 1987, 429 f. pls. II.2, VI.4; Polito 2000, 70 f.; Malfitana 2004, 326.

¹³ Pisciotta 2013, 155–158: cp. Diagrams 1–3, 156 fig. 33. ARS ware was coming from workshops in the region of Carthage.

¹⁴ The aim of the ‘Lilybaeum Archaeological Project’ is therefore to contribute to a better definition of the trade flows to Lilybaeum, through the data provided by analysing the pottery from the ‘Zona Mura’. The project involves the database Lilybaeum (fig. 2), to manage both the sampling of data and the visual documentation. Bonacasa – Nielsen 2010, 146.

¹⁵ All fragments catalogued come from layers which lie above the road and floor levels in Sectors III, IV and V of the excavation.

¹⁶ Atlante I, 78 ff.

¹⁷ Atlante I, 119 ff.

¹⁸ Bonifay 2004, 48–50. For the ARS imports on the Western coast of Sicily see Bonifay 2016, 520 fig. 126; 521 fig. 127; 524–526.

¹⁹ A sherd is ascribable to the form Hayes 185 (fig. 3,3); its fabric is reddish, with several inclusions typical of cooking ware probably produced by workshops of Byzacena. On African cooking ware from ‘Zona Mura’: Mandruzzato – Seifert 2014; Mandruzzato – Seifert forthcoming.

²⁰ This type is morphologically linked to the lid form Hayes 182: Bonifay 2004, 227. It has been documented on the northern coast of Sicily, in Termini Imerese: Belvedere – Burgio 2016, 226; see also Malfitana – Bonifay 2016, 649.

²¹ Such identification is further supported by the repertoire of the forms, which are common in this production. In fact, we could record the presence of the bowl with straight wall and short flat or oblique rim, the bowl with a convex-topped rim rounded to the outside (fig. 3,5) and some samples of the rounded-rim type. This form is also documented in its straight, or everted-wallshape (fig. 3,6) and with pendent rim. As for the lids, we have samples with straight wall and thickened rim (fig. 3,7) as well as lids with rim curved to the outside and separated from the straight wall by a groove. Mandruzzato – Seifert forthcoming.

²² Bonifay – Malfitana 2016, 416; 412 fig. 91.

²³ Peacock 1982, 80. On the reasons for the wide distribution over a vast area of the Central and Western Mediterranean see Peacock 1982, 79 f.

²⁴ Cp. Carra 2007, 71–81.

²⁵ Pisciotta 2013.

²⁶ Pisciotta 2013, 159. At a recent congress in Palermo new data has been presented: Pisciotta forthcoming.

²⁷ Bonifay – Malfitana 2016, see esp. 408 fig. 90. 409–410. 412 fig. 91. 420–423.

²⁸ Strab. VI, 2, 1 (English translation by H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, 1924).

²⁹ Caruso 2008, 82 f.

³⁰ Bonifay – Malfitana 2016, 416.

Image Credits

Fig. 1–3: Archive of the Archaeological Mission of Hamburg and Palermo Universities at Marsala.

References

Atlante I

A. Carandini (ed.), *Atlante delle forme ceramiche I. Ceramica fine romana nel bacino mediterraneo (medio e tardo impero)* (Rome 1981).

Bechtold 1999

B. Bechtold, *La necropoli di Lilybaeum* (Rome 1999).

Belvedere – Burgio 2016

O. Belvedere – A. Burgio, *Termini Imerese*, in: *Malfitana – Bonifay 2016*, 223–231.

Bonacasa – Nielsen 2010

N. Bonacasa – I. Nielsen, *Il Progetto Archeologico Lilibeo, Mare Internum. Archeologia e culture del Mediterraneo 2*, 2010, 145–155.

Bonifay 2004

M. Bonifay, *Etudes sur la céramique romaine tardive d’Afrique*, BARIntSer 1301 (Oxford 2004).

Bonifay 2016

M. Bonifay, *Annexe 1. Éléments de typologie des céramiques de l’Afrique romaine*, in: *Malfitana – Bonifay 2016*, 509–573.

Bonifay – Malfitana 2016

M. Bonifay – D. Malfitana, *L’apport de la documentation sicilienne à l’étude du commerce de l’Afrique romaine*, in: *Malfitana – Bonifay 2016*, 403–439.

Carra 2007

R. M. Carra, *La ceramica comune: le forme aperte*, in: R. M. Bonacasa Carra – F. Ardizzone (eds.), *Agrigento dal Tardo Antico al Medioevo. Campagne di scavo nell’area della necropoli paleocristiana. Anni 1986-1999* (Todi 2007) 71–81.

Caruso 2008

E. Caruso, *Lilibeo punica e romana: storia e topografia*, in: E. Caruso – A. Spanò Giammellaro (eds.), *Lilibeo e il suo territorio. Contributi del Centro Internazionale di Studi Fenici, Punici e Romani per l’archeologia marsalese* (Palermo 2008) 73–92.

Denaro 2008

M. Denaro, *La ceramica romana a pareti sottili in Sicilia* (Mantova 2008).

Di Stefano 1984

C.A. Di Stefano (ed.), *Lilibeo. Testimonianze archeologiche dal IV sec. a.C. al V sec. d.C. Marsala, Chiesa del Collegio, dal 3 dicembre 1984* (Palermo 1984).

Di Stefano 1993

C.A. Di Stefano, *Lilibeo punica* (Marsala 1993).

Di Stefano 2002

C. A. Di Stefano, La documentazione archeologica del periodo dionigiano nella Sicilia occidentale, in: N. Bonacasa – L. Braccisi – E. De Miro (eds.), *La Sicilia dei due Dionisi*. Atti della settimana di studio Agrigento 24–28 febbraio 1999 (Rome 2002) 81–91.

Malfitana 2004

D. Malfitana, Italian Sigillata imported to Sicily: the evidence of the stamps, in: J. Poblome – P. Talloen – R. Brulet – M. Waelckens (eds.), *Early Italian Sigillata. The chronological framework and trade patterns. Proceedings of the First International Congress Leuven May 7 and 8 1999* (Leuven 2004) 309–336.

Malfitana 2006

D. Malfitana, Metodologie, problemi e prospettive di ricerca negli studi di ceramologia ellenistica e romana in Sicilia. Un planning per future ricerche tra archeologia e archeometria, in: D. Malfitana – J. Poblome – J. Lund (eds.), *Old pottery in a new century. Innovating perspectives on Roman pottery studies. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Catania 22–24 Aprile 2004* (Catania 2006) 399–421.

Malfitana – Bonifay 2016

D. Malfitana – M. Bonifay (eds.), *La ceramica africana nella Sicilia romana, I–II* (Catania 2016).

Mandrizzato 1987

A. Mandrizzato, La sigillata italica in Sicilia. Importazione, distribuzione, produzione locale, in: H. Temporini (ed.), *ANRW II, 11.1* (Berlin 1988) 414–449.

Mandrizzato – Seifert 2014

A. Mandrizzato – M. Seifert, Ceramica da cucina dalla “Zona Mura” a Marsala. Le importazioni africane, *ReiCretActa* 43, 2014, 573–580.

Mandrizzato – Seifert forthcoming

A. Mandrizzato – M. Seifert, Marsala, “Zona Mura”: la ceramica da cucina tardoromana, in: *Land and sea: pottery routes. Proceedings of 6th International Conference on Late Roman Course Ware, Cooking Ware and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: Archaeology and Archaeometry Agrigento 24–28 maggio 2017*, forthcoming.

Mistretta et al. 2014

A. Mistretta – A. Mandrizzato – M. Seifert, Note di archeologia lilibetana. Un primo bilancio delle indagini della missione archeologica delle Università di Palermo e di Amburgo, *Mare Internum. Archeologia e culture del Mediterraneo* 6, 2014, 67–78.

Oliveri 1984

F. Oliveri, *Terra Sigillata Italica*, in: Di Stefano 1984, 119–123.

Peacock 1982

D. P. S. Peacock, *Pottery in the Roman World. An ethnoarchaeological approach* (London 1982).

Pisciotta 2013

F. Pisciotta, Periodo 5. (fine V - inizi VI d. C.), in: *Epigrafia e Territorio. Politica e Società. Temi di antichità romane IX* (Santo Spirito 2013) 153–162.

Pisciotta forthcoming

F. Pisciotta, Lilibeo, le Egadi e le rotte mediterranee: il dato ceramico, in: *La Sicilia e il Mediterraneo*

dal tardo antico ai Normanni. Prospettive di ricerca tra archeologia e storia. Congresso Internazionale dedicato a Fabiola Ardizzone Palermo 11–13 ottobre 2018, forthcoming.

Polito 2000

A. Polito, La circolazione della sigillata italica liscia in Sicilia, *QuadAMess* I.2, 2000, 65–102.

Wilson 1990

R. J. A. Wilson, Sicily under the Roman Empire. The archaeology of a Roman province, 36BC – AD 535 (Warminster 1990).