

The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient *Akrai/Acrae*, Sicily

Edited by Roksana Chowaniec and Marta Fituła



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Introduction to the Book 'The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Akrai/Acrae, Sicily'

Rosa Lanteri

Introduction

The town of *Akrai*, founded by the Syracusans in 664–663 BC, is now part of the S.39 Parco archeologico e paesaggistico di Siracusa, Eoro, Villa del Tello e Akrai. Within the perimeter of the newly established Park (2019), much larger than the previous one, Syracuse and the sub-colonies are therefore included: Eoro (Municipality of Noto) along the southern coastal road; *Akrai* (Municipality of Palazzolo Acreide) and *Kasmenai* (Municipality of Buscemi), along the *via Selinuntina*.

As is known, *Akrai's* public monuments were known above all thanks to the excavations carried out by baron Gabriele Judica in the early decades of the 19th century.¹

Subsequent excavations, conducted by the Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. of Syracuse, had then explored the temple of Aphrodite and resumed investigations in the quarries of the city,² the urban area (the decumanus particularly)³ and the Aphrodision area.⁴

Little known, however, was the urban organisation of the town, with its network of roads, blocks and housing structures. Thus, when in 2009 Roksana Chowanec, director of the Archaeological Mission, proposed a research project aimed at highlighting the town, the proposal was immediately accepted and shared by the Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. of Syracuse, territorially competent at the time.

After the first campaigns, dedicated to the surveys and the geophysical investigations, and after the careful evaluation of the collected results, in the area between two *stenopoi* (south of the main *plateia* and west of the supposed *agorà*), the excavations began. In the course of these works the remains of a Late Hellenistic-Roman houses were unearthed, showing various stages dated back to the 3rd century BC up to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

Since 2009, the Italian-Polish archaeological mission has thus reached its thirteen year!

The extraordinary results of the excavations were promptly presented to the scientific community, both through communications at conferences and the publication in the form of articles in scientific journals, and as monographs, of which this is the fourth.

This volume collects the contributions of scholars who took part in the archaeological mission in various capacities: professors and researchers, archaeologists, and Phd-students.

The 18 scientific contributions, testimony of a collective effort and multidisciplinary approach, address monographic themes aimed at illustrating material culture, particularly refereed to the Roman period, although some studies concern more ancient chronological phases.

I like to remember that in recent years we have also tried to share the results with a wider non-specialist public. So in 2016, at the Archaeological Museum of Palazzo Cappellani in Palazzolo Acreide, an exhibition was set up with materials from the latest excavation campaigns, which offered to the common people a picture of

¹ Judica 1819.

² Bernabò Brea 1956; Bernabò Brea 1986.

³ Pelagatti 1966; Voza 1999.

⁴ Leggio 2013. Excavations carried out in 2005–2006 by Maria Musumeci are unpublished.

the daily life of the ancient inhabitants of *Akrai*. In December 2019, shortly before the outbreak of the pandemic, another exhibition was organised, showing materials from the *Akrai* area, until then kept in the deposits of the Archaeological Museum “Paolo Orsi” in Syracuse.

The exhibition was inaugurated by Calogero Rizzuto, the first director of the new Archaeological Park, who a few months earlier (July 2019), freshly appointed, had personally wanted to begun the *Akrai* excavation campaign (fig. 1).

This volume is dedicated to him.



Fig. 1. Calogero Rizzuto, the first director of the new Archaeological Park, who wanted to begun the *Akrai* excavation campaign.

Introduzione

Il sito archeologico di *Akrai*, fondata dai Siracusani nel 664–663 a.C., è oggi parte del S.39 Parco archeologico e paesaggistico di Siracusa, Eloro, Villa del Tellaro e *Akrai*. All'interno del perimetro del Parco di nuova istituzione (2019), ben più esteso del precedente, ricadono quindi Siracusa e le sub colonie: Eloro (Comune di Noto) lungo la via costiera meridionale, *Akrai* (Comune di Palazzolo Acreide) e *Kasmenai* (Comune di Buscemi), lungo la via *Selinuntina*.

Come è noto, di *Akrai* si conoscevano soprattutto i monumenti pubblici (teatro e *bouleuterion* fra tutti), grazie agli scavi del Barone Gabriele Judica nei primi decenni del '800.⁵ Gli scavi successivi, condotti dalla Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. di Siracusa, avevano poi esplorato il tempio di Afrodite e ripreso le indagini nelle latomie della città,⁶ indagato l'area urbana, in particolare il decumano⁷ e approfondito l'indagine dell'*Aphrodision*.⁸

Poco conosciuta restava invece l'organizzazione urbana della città, con il suo reticolato stradale, gli isolati, le strutture abitative. Così, quando nel 2009 Roksana Chowaniec, direttrice della Missione archeologica, ha proposto un progetto di ricerca mirato alla messa in luce dell'abitato, la proposta è stata subito accolta e condivisa dalla Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA., all'epoca competente.

Dopo le prime campagne dedicate all'attività di survey nel territorio e alle indagini geofisiche

indirette e non invasive e la attenta valutazione dei risultati ottenuti, è così partita l'attività di scavo vera e propria nell'area compresa tra due *stenopoi*, a sud della *plateia* e ad ovest della supposta agorà.

Dal lontano 2009, l'attività della Missione archeologica Italo-Polacca è così giunta al suo tredicesimo anno.

Gli straordinari risultati degli scavi sono stati puntualmente presentati alla comunità scientifica sia attraverso le comunicazioni a convegni e pubblicazione di articoli su riviste scientifiche, per i quali si rimanda alla bibliografia, che in volumi monografici, di cui il presente è il quarto.

Il volume raccoglie i contributi degli studiosi che a vario titolo hanno preso parte alla missione archeologica: professori, ricercatori, archeologi del Parco, dottorandi.

I 18 contributi, testimonianza di una sforzo collettivo e di un approccio multidisciplinare, affrontano temi monografici, volti ad illustrare la cultura materiale, con particolare riferimento al periodo romano, anche se non mancano studi che fanno riferimento a fasi cronologiche più antiche.

Mi piace ricordare che in questi anni si è voluto rendere partecipe dei risultati anche un più vasto pubblico non specialistico. Così nel 2016, presso il Museo archeologico di Palazzo Cappellani a Palazzolo Acreide, è stata allestita una mostra con i materiali provenienti dalle ultime campagne di scavo, che offrisse al pubblico uno spaccato della vita quotidiana degli antichi abitanti di *Akrai*.

Nel dicembre 2019, poco prima dello scoppio della pandemia, un'altra mostra ha esposto i materiali provenienti dal territorio di *Akrai*, fino a quel momento custoditi nei depositi del Museo arche-

⁵ Judica 1819.

⁶ Bernabò Brea 1956, Bernabò Brea 1986.

⁷ Pelagatti 1966; Voza 1999.

⁸ Leggio 2013. Gli scavi condotti da Maria Musumeci nel 2005-2006 sono ancora inediti.

ologico Paolo Orsi di Siracusa. La mostra è stata inaugurata dal primo direttore del Parco, l'architetto Calogero Rizzuto, che pochi mesi prima (luglio 2019), fresco di nomina, aveva personal-

mente voluto dare il via alla campagna di scavi di *Akrai* (**fig. 1**).

Questo volume è dedicato a lui.

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Foreword

Roksana Chowaniec & Marta Fituła

'The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient *Akrai/Acrae*, Sicily' is the fourth multiple authors volume which describes the results of interdisciplinary archaeological research and excavations conducted between 2009 and 2020 within the zone of the residential area of the Graeco-Roman town *Akrai/Acrae* and its vicinity. It consists of seventeen chapters covering history of south-eastern Sicily in the Roman Imperial period and Late Antiquity, various examples of elaboration of material culture, and multidisciplinary studies outlining the methodology of research. This volume is focused around historical and archaeological artefacts being a determinant of all cultural processes which occurred in Antiquity.

Ancient *Akrai/Acrae*, situated in the central part of south-eastern Sicily, happens to be a significant place on the archaeological map of the island and the whole Mediterranean.¹ The ancient town is located to the south-west of the modern town of Palazzolo Acreide, in the Hyblaean Mountains, atop naturally protected hill, called Acremonte, surrounded by an area composed of large plateaus (amounting to over 600–800 m asl). *Akrai/Acrae*, as one of the towns founded by Syracuse in 664/663 BC, was located about 35 km from the coast and the main port. Fertile land, forests, and two

ivers the Anapo (*Anapus*) and the Tellaro (*Helorus*) envelope the town. It is highly probable that before settlements appeared, the majority of the area was covered by Mediterranean woodlands, with abundant wild game and lush, dense vegetation. The foundation of the town was linked to both, political and economic factors. Moreover, the plateau offered a perfect view of the surrounding area, permitting early detection of any potential danger as well as to control the cultivated lands and grazing areas. For centuries, *Akrai* was a place on Syracuse's boundary. Until the 3rd century BC, the town had little importance and functioned under the Syracusan dominance. Intensive development probably began in the mid-3rd century BC, at the time of Hiero II, ruler of the Syracusan Kingdom. Following the fall of Syracuse, *Akrai*, like other Syracusan towns, fell under the Roman administration. The town, now dependent on Rome (*civitas decumana*) continued to be inhabited and functioned well enough in the new political structures, as suggested by the fact that it was able to pay the *decuma* to Rome.²

The recent studies (2009–2020) unearthed the households, whose original basic plans were created by the end of the 3rd century BC. The construction effort seems to have taken place during the final phase of rule of the Syracusan tyrant, Hiero II and/or at the beginning of the formal Roman administration (after 212 BC). The new stage of excavations (2011–2017)³ yielded

¹ In addition, the strategic position had an importance to keep control on the Sicels tribes inhabited in the hilly coastal hinterlands. Must to be remembered that Greek town was not founded on a virgin territory, taking into the consideration numerous prehistoric sites in its surroundings and a certain number of artefacts coming also from the area of excavation at *Akrai*. Favorable environmental condition of this area had an impact to the development of human settlements since the Palaeolithic.

² Chowaniec 2015a (on history of research); Chowaniec 2017.

³ Special acknowledgments go to Dr. Rosa Lanteri, for her great support of research at *Akrai*, first on behalf of the Soprintendenza dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali di

archaeological material dated from the end of 3rd century BC up to the beginning of 8th century AD, which provides a vivid picture of the inhabitants' life. The residential complex built in the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman period, was later used in the Imperial period and destroyed by natural disaster in the 50s–70s of 4th century AD, later, in the late 4th century AD the area was intentionally levelled and reused as place for various activities until the 8th century AD.⁴ Also the field survey and non invasive investigations brought informations about vicinity of town.⁵

The multidisciplinary research conducted therein is of great importance not only due to the status of the archaeological site, but even more so due to the challenges and scholarly problems it poses. Up to date, the town has been excavated only in a small degree mainly around the area comprising of public buildings (a theatre, a temple, a *bouleuterion* and fragments of an agora), remaining more than 70.0% of the archaeological site is yet to be explored.

The present monograph is focused on various artefacts, and each chapter contains separate references and bibliography. For the reader's convenience, all illustrations have been placed either in the texts or at the end of respective chapters.

In the introduction of the publication, we find a text addressing an international scholarly cooperation, which allowed to create the extraordinary results of the excavations presented to the scientific community, both through communications at conferences and the publication in the form of articles in scientific journals, and as monographs (Rosa Lanteri).

Next chapter is focused on the comprehensive introduction to the history of south-eastern Sicily during the Early Roman Empire (Cristina Storaci). It is followed by a chapters dedicated to the presentation and discussion about various sets of artefacts. The reader will find articles which provide following issues: lead-seals from *Akrai* and their multifaceted elaboration, shedding light on sealing, stamping and securing processes in Antiquity (Roksana Chowaniec); diversity of lamps from *Akrai* dated from the Late Republican period to the 3rd century AD in the context of long-distance trade routes and micro-regional productions (Laurent Chrzanowski); changes in the fine pottery supply pattern in south-eastern Sicily during the Late

Republican and Early Imperial period as reflected by finds from the recent excavations in *Akrai* (Krzysztof Domżański); repertoire of transport amphorae from recent excavation in *Akrai/Acrae* (Marcin Matera); main kitchen and cooking ware categories with their typology and technological groups (Jerzy Oleksiak); and mortaria, lekanai, kraters? that is about large open-form vessels from *Akrai/Acrae*, their formal typology, chronology and function (Jolanta Młynarczyk). First remarks on ceramic building materials from *Akrai/Acrae*, with particular reference to roof tiles with stamps (Weronika Stanik).

Next chapters are devoted to the overview of terracotta figurines from residential contexts from *Akrai* (Aleksandra Konrad and Marta Fitula) and to the multidisciplinary study on ceramic production in south-eastern Sicily supported by an artificial neural network (ANN) (Paolo Mazzoleni, Claudio Finocchiaro, Simona Raneri, Grazia Spagnolo, Germana Barone).

Further five chapters of the monograph are dedicated to the special artefacts coming from new and old excavations, as well as from museum collections. The Reader will find articles discussing: Greek vase from the countryside of Palazzolo Acreide (Agostina Musumeci); assemblage of selected types of brooches excavated in the domestic contexts with their typological and chronological identifications (Ireneusz Jakubczyk); selected bronze finds from *Akrai* (Angela Maria Manenti); pair of *pinakes* from *Akrai* (Ermelinda Storaci); and preliminary notes on the caves in the district of 'Pisciarello' in Palazzolo Acreide (Paolo Daniele Scirpo).

The book is closed by detailed analyses of archaeobotanical materials from the recent excavations within the residential area of *Akrai/Acrae* along with addressing the issues of landscape and landuse in *Akrai/Acrae* from the middle of 3rd century BC to the 8th century AD (Matilde Stella and Girolamo Fiorentino).

At this point, we would like to offer our warm and deep gratitude to all the Contributors for the immense amount of work and input they invested in the preparation of this book. All of the Authors graciously submitted to a long and arduous editorial process, and we are especially grateful for their kind indulgence and fortitude, cooperation and involvement.

This book grew out of the marvellous, fruitful, and constructive collaboration and engagement shown by them during the excavations as well as the process of the laboratory and library studies. The views and interpretations offered here are the

Siracusa and later the Parco archeologico e paesaggistico di Siracusa, Eloro, Villa del Tellaro e Akrai.

4 Chowaniec 2015b; Chowaniec 2017, 130–177.

5 Chowaniec *et al.* 2021.

results of long conversations, shared experiences, and cross-cooperation. Leading the project and excavations with all these people was an enjoyable challenge. Beyond the practical aspects, we wish to emphasize the help which we have received from them, and still hope to receive. This help arose from a bond of friendship between us. For we are all united by a common goal, namely the honest and rigorous elaboration and publishing of the results of research.

Our appreciation goes also to all those who collaborated with Archaeological Mission, supported it and made its proceedings possible in the first place. Among them are (in alphabetical order): Dr Maurizio Aiello, Arch. Donatella Aprile, Dr Beatrice Basile, Dr Concetta Ciurcina, Dr Salvatore Gallo, Dr Lorenzo Guzzardi, Dr Orazio Micali, Dr Mariella Muti, Dr Francesca Gringeri Pantano, Dr Andrea Patanè, Prof. Rosalba Panvini, Dr Elena Pizzo, Prof. Mariangela Puglisi, Dr Luca Russo, Dr Carlo Scibetta, Prof. Mariarita Sgarlata, Arch. Carlo Staffile, and all the employees of the archaeological park in *Akrai/Acrae*.

The book is dedicated to the Director of the Archaeological Park of Syracuse, Dr Calogero Rizzuto† (1955–2020). We had a great pleasure and honour to work with him. One cannot forget about Dr Sebastiano Tusat† (1952–2019), a great archaeologist and Councilor for Cultural Heritage for the Sicilian Region. The last few excavations of Archaeological Mission at ancient *Akrai/Acrae* have been possible due to the support and assistance both of them.

Much work was contributed by undergraduate and postgraduate students from Polish, Italian, Dutch and American universities, as well colleagues and friends from the universities and laboratories in Catania, Lecce, Athens, Kiel, Syracuse, Toruń, and Warsaw. We are grateful for their labour and the efforts they put into this research.

Particular acknowledgements go to Dr Rosa Lanteri, who demonstrated great dedication and goodwill in supporting the scholarly proceedings of the Archaeological Mission and – first on behalf of the Soprintendenza dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali di Siracusa, now Parco archeologico e paesaggistico di Siracusa, Eloro, Villa del Tellaro e Akrai – ensured their high quality, and Dr Lorenzo Guzzardi, who initiated this cooperation. Special acknowledgements go also to Dr Maria Musumeci, for all the given help.

Last but not least, we give separate and warm thanks to Mr Armando Albanese who provides great support for archaeological research.

It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the help provided by Mr Stephan Hassam, and Mr Andrew Rigsby who are very much responsible for this volume getting done. They provided their time for translation and proofreading of all the texts. This work would be impossible without their help and understanding.

We appreciate the keen interest in our research shown us by the President of Sicily Dr Sebastiano Musumeci and Councilor for Cultural Heritage for the Sicilian Region Arch. Alberto Samonà during their visits at excavation area of *Akrai/Acrae* in 2019 and 2020.

The fieldwork at the archaeological site in *Akrai/Acrae* has been possible thanks to the financial assistance of numerous institutions and private sponsors. The excavations in 2011–2012 were supported by a grant from the Polish National Science Centre (N N109 104940). The scientific research in 2013–2014 was possible thanks to another grant from the Polish National Science Centre (UMO–2011/03/B/HS3/00567). The achievements of the Archaeological Mission in 2012–2020 would have never happened without for financial support of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (4815/E–343/SPUB/2012/3; 4815/E–343/SPUB/2013/3–1; 4815/E–343/SPUB/2014/1; 4815/E–343/SPUB/2015/1; 4815/E–343/SPUB/2016/2–1; 4815/E–343/SPUB/2018/1; 21/E–343/SPUB/SP/2020). All these institutions have our deepest gratitude for advocating archaeological research in *Akrai*. In turn, the research presented in this book would have never been published without financial aid of the Polish National Science Centre (UMO–2011/03/B/HS3/00567).

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Finally, we give our appreciation to all those who sincerely support us and archaeological research in *Akrai/Acrae* and waited their results with honest interest. The present monograph is fourth of series excavation results and hopefully will be continued.

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On the History of South-Eastern Sicily during the Early Roman Empire

Cristina Soraci

Abstract

While literary sources depict a sometimes bleak and often fragmentary picture of the history of Sicily during the Early Roman Empire, archaeological and epigraphical remains prove that several centres had a very long and uninterrupted history, although they cannot claim the existence of particularly developed urban centres.

This paper contextualises the few remaining literary sources and compares the data from history and archaeology to examine some concrete examples of south-eastern Sicilian cities which scholars believe no longer existed during the Imperial age, but which in reality continued their lives as minor centres. Groups, large and small, of inhabitants moved elsewhere and the sites remained the residence of a few people, who often exploited them for production purposes, to continue a family tradition or to live a life away from the problems of the cities; some of these centres could boast renowned products, as saffron, honey, tuna fish and wine.

Roman Imperial period, Sicily, minor centres, splendour vs. decay, production

Introduction

Modern scholars commonly identify regular shifts in the history of ancient Sicily: from periods of splendour, with typical moments of military glory and successful political experiments, to times of crisis and decay.

More generally and most importantly, according to the perspective that originated from the revolutionary uprisings of the 19th century which came back into vogue even after the Second World War of the 20th century, scholars have for years contrasted Greek Sicily and its moments of political independence with the events of Roman Sicily, considered a relic of the glorious past. Only the revival of internal autonomy during the Roman Republican domination was considered in parts

noteworthy, although not comparable to the splendours of the Greek period.¹

In the last few years, some scholars have preferred to abandon the comparative method, re-evaluating the history of the periods previously considered as the 'darkest'. The so-called 'defeated minorities' often showed great initiative and vitality, re-purposing the representative structures of the ancient *polis* to become part of political relations with the city of Rome and its leaders

¹ Among the studies and reflections, however masterful, which profoundly influenced the subsequent works, for example cf. Holm 1898, 220–225; Finley 1968; Clemente 1980, 468–473; Coarelli 1979, 380–381; Ruggini 1980, 483–487; Mazza 1980–1981, 338–344.

(be they consuls, proconsuls, or emperors);² they produced artistic and architectural masterpieces, reinterpreting models that came from the centre of power with masterful originality.³

While literary sources depict a sometimes bleak and often fragmentary picture, archaeological and epigraphical remains show quite a different situation. It would indeed be reductive to speak of a decline in the case of the continuous occupation of inhabited areas, towns, and countryside: life was transformed and Sicily continued to be well-populated throughout the ancient age, albeit differently at different periods. Of course, each settlement had its unique history, and any research that can shed more light on it is welcome.⁴

It is undeniable that political and economic reasons led Augustus to favour a few coastal cities, which were elevated to the rank of the colony and had the task of serving as bulwarks of Romanity and loyalty to the emperor; other small towns were granted municipal statute and limited groups of people received Latin law.⁵ Several sites lost their administrative autonomy and were politically incorporated into the largest neighbouring urban centres.⁶

On the other hand, the renewed attention given to the productivity of agricultural areas and the tendency towards the constitution of vast estates (*latifundia*) in the hands of a single owner, under whom numerous people worked as settlers, led to a more definitive shift of the population towards the countryside and in consequence to more or less total abandonment of some smaller towns.⁷

However, loss of administrative autonomy and partial depopulation does not mean loss of interest in a site from the local population or even from its conquerors.⁸ Archaeological remains prove that

several centres had a very long and uninterrupted history, although they cannot claim the existence of particularly developed urban centres; groups, large and small, of inhabitants moved elsewhere and the sites remained the residence of a few people, who often exploited them for production purposes, to continue a family tradition or to live a life away from the problems of the cities.⁹

Although archaeological remains attest, in several of these cases, to a continuous occupation of the sites, it is necessary to contextualise the few remaining literary sources correctly. Chronology is paramount.

The evidence of ancient literary sources

Thanks to Pliny the Elder, we know of sixty-eight communities in Sicily; Pliny's list and numbers differ from those offered by other sources but, as Robert Thomas Pritchard reminds us, 'in all our discussions on the question, the stumbling block no doubt lies in the precise meaning of *civitas*. Some would accept a site with a sprinkling of human habitation as a *civitas*, whereas others would strictly limit this term to a well-established community, exercising some form of self-government and recognised by Rome. The evidence, however, points to many more than Cicero's 65 or Pliny's 68'.¹⁰

Pliny mentions some cities in south-eastern Sicily:



Oppida Leontini, Megaris, amnis Pantagies, colonia Syracusae cum fonte Aret<h>usa, quamquam et Tem<e>nitis et Archidemia et Magea et Cyane et Milic<h>ie fontes in Syracusano potantur agro, portus Naustathmus, flumen Elorum,

² Salmeri 2004; Prag 2014; Salmeri 2015, 94; Soraci 2016; Soraci 2018a; Soraci 2018b; Pfuntner 2019, 12–15.

³ Portale 2005; and especially Portale 2007.

⁴ For an overview, cf. Pfuntner 2019.

⁵ Soraci 2019a (with bibliography).

⁶ Soraci 2019b, 1061; Pfuntner 2019, 207.

⁷ Alföldi 1987, 143–144 and 198–200; Mazza 1987, 29–30; Wilson 1990, 155; Soraci 2016b, 117–118. The cities, in any case, will never have hosted all the agricultural workers, who had to live for the most part in the countryside (Duncan-Jones 1974, 259–260).

⁸ In this regard, the hypothesis of Chowanec 2017, 144–145 is very interesting: observing the prevailing number of 'purely' Roman artefacts in *Acrae* between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD, she speculates that a new group of settlers may have arrived in *Acrae* in that time. Whether they were Roman citizens who had decided to move to this provincial town, or whether they were local elites in

contact with Rome, the phenomenon is, however, indicative of the constant interest held by the island centres in the eyes of the upper-middle class.

⁹ On the advantages of a life led away from the city, cf. Hor. *Epist.* 1.14.

¹⁰ Pritchard 1975, 37–41. This subject was emphasised by scholars in the past: Pais 1888, 132–135; Beloch 1889, 71–83; Ciccotti 1895, 60–65; Holm 1898, 375–377; Carcopino 1905, 4–9 (= Carcopino 1914, 207–211); Cavallari 1951, 27–29; Pace 1958², 321; Calderone 1960, 5–8; Kahrstedt 1968, 246–267 (especially 251–255 and 258–260); Sartori 1974, 246–248; Bartošek 1977, 119–121; Manni 1981, 24–26; Genovese 1993, 196–207; Pinzone 1999, 93–101.

promunturium Pachynum, a quo, fronte Siciliae flumen Hyrminum, oppidum Camarina, fluviu Gelas (...).

*Stipendiarii Assorini, Aetnenses, Agyrini, Aces-taei, Acrenses, Bidini, Citarini, Drepanitani, Ergetini, Echetaenienses, Erycini, Entellini, Etnini, Egguini, Gelani, Galacteni, Halasani, Hennenses, Hyblenses, Herbitenses, Herbesnenses, Herbulenses, Halicuaenses, Hadranitani, Imaearenses, Ichanaenses, Ietenses, Mutustratini, Magelani, Murgentini, Mutycenses, Menaini, Naxi, Noini, Petrinii, Paropini, Phintienses, Semelitani, Scherini, Selnunti, Symaethii, Talarenses, Tissienses, Triocalini, Tyracnenses.*¹¹

According to scholars, Pliny's data goes back to the Augustan period rather than to the Flavian reign.¹² In these passages, Pliny mentions both towns and populations, respectively employing two terms (*oppida* and *stipendiarii*) which are a little ambiguous to us.

As Patrick Le Roux has pointed out, the word *oppidum* bore a juridical-political meaning, which does not exclusively and automatically infer an equivalence with the *municipium*, but which *définissait un certain degré d'urbanisation et d'organisation locale susceptible de conduire à la municipalisation*;¹³ in practice, Pliny employs *oppidum* when he has no details on the real status of the cities. Indeed, from the Republican age onward, the term could indicate, with the advantage of grouping them into a single term, both *coloniae* and *municipia* and, sometimes, even the *peregrinae civitates*.¹⁴

The list of Sicilian *stipendiarii* is listed in alphabetical order. Contrary to what is generally believed, in Pliny's work, the word *stipendiarii* does not have the meaning of 'provincial cities subject to tax', distinct from those that were exempt from it, nor does it denote subjection to a particular type of tax, the *stipendium*, but it indicates centres located on the lowest rung of the political-institutional hierarchy of the empire. In Pliny's work, the distinction is based on the institutional status that linked each individual *oppidum* to Rome, from the condition considered closest to the model of the city, that of the colonies, to the one that most differed from it, represented by the subjects, the *stipendiarii*. Natu-

rally, the choice of the latter term, derived from official documents, had the advantage of encompassing both political and fiscal aspects.¹⁵

Strabo's picture of Sicily is very drastic in underlining the absolute *ἐρημία* (loneliness) of the inland settlements. However, scholars disagree on dating the information he provided, which could originate either from the Augustan age or from the years following the Servile Revolts.¹⁶ In any case, the bleak picture offered by Strabo does not seem to correspond with the reality of neither period¹⁷ and must be attributed to the concept of the decline of the classical *πόλις* – considered to be the result of the synoecism of the population, previously scattered between villages and countryside – with which the geographer compares the various local realities. Strabo, influenced by Posidonius' description of the island in the aftermath of the Servile Wars, described Sicily in the light of his own categories; his vision was focused on the concept of the city, whose autonomy and local traditions, often kept in force by lively elites who, when he wrote his work, had almost or already disappeared from some centres. He, therefore, assumes that the 'classical' cities no longer existed, due to the absence of synoecism.¹⁸ The verb *συνοικέω* ('to live together, to make a synoecism'), employed with the negation *οὔτε* to define the status of ancient Greek centres, is noteworthy, especially when compared to *ἐκλείπω* ('to leave, to quit') or to *ἐξαλείφω* ('to delete, to destroy'), used immediately after – in regards to indigenous centres: the latter were completely abandoned while the former no longer existed as *πόλεις*.¹⁹

Among the centres that were most affected by this phenomenon, which could be defined as deurbanisation,²⁰ Strabo mentions *Leontini*, which was

¹¹ Plin. *HN* 3.14.89 and 91 (ed. H. Zehnacker).

¹² Cf. for example: Sallmann 1971, 89–107; Roddaz 1984, 572–591; Wilson 1990, 37–38; Vera 1996, 38–42; Zehnacker 2004, 192.

¹³ Le Roux 1986, 339.

¹⁴ Le Roux 1991, 580. Cf. also: Capalvo Liesa 1986, 55; Chastagnol 1987, 6–7; Tarpin 1999, 279–297; Sisani 2011, 727–740; Le Roux 2015, 162.

¹⁵ Soraci 2020, especially 28–38.

¹⁶ Str. *Geog.* 6.2.6 (ed. F. Sbordone); Stone 1983; Manganaro 1988, 8; Stone 2002. Gallo 1980, 1264–1265 attributes the character of a *topos* to Strabo's description.

¹⁷ Pfuntner 2013.

¹⁸ Str. *Geog.* 6.2.6: οὔτε γὰρ ἡμέραν ἔτι συνοικουμένην ἴσμεν οὔτε Γέλαν οὔτε Καλλιπόλιν οὔτε Σελινούντια οὔτ' Εὐβοίαν οὔτ' ἄλλας πλείους. Cf. already Manganaro 1988, 16–17, who spoke of reduction of cities to village level.

¹⁹ Str. *Geog.* 6.2.6: καὶ τῶν βαρβαρικῶν δ' ἐξελείφθησαν πολλαί (ed. A. Meineke); compare καὶ τῶν βαρβαρικῶν δ' ἐξηλείφθησαν πολλαί (F. Sbordone). Both verbs (*ἐκλείπω* and *ἐξαλείφω*) proposed by Augustus Meineke and Francesco Sbordone in their editions are suitable.

²⁰ Pfuntner 2019, 22–93.

seriously damaged,²¹ *Camarina* and *Gela*, which were no longer cities in the classical sense.²²

Writing in the 2nd century AD, Ptolemy mentions *Leontini*, *Netum* and *Acrae* among the inland cities (πόλεις δὲ εἰσι μεσόγειοι), but considers *Gela*, *Camarina* and *Helorus* to be inland cities too.²³ This apparent inaccuracy is probably due both to the geographer's method and his sources, which were of two types (the *periplus* and the itineraries between the different towns of the interior). First of all, Ptolemy would have marked on his map the coastal locations identified by cabotage and then he would have located the centres of the interior of the island, which were included in the *scripta* or *picta* itineraries available to him.²⁴

Both itinerary sources that have come down to us from the imperial age date back in their present form to the 4th century AD. While the *Tabula Peutingeriana* mentions *Acrae* (*Agris*) as the only centre in south-eastern Sicily,²⁵ the *Itinerarium provinciarum Antonini Augusti*, a register of distances and stations placed along the empire's roads, also counts *Gela*, *Hible* and *Agris*; the *Itinerarium maritimum* records also *Megeira*.²⁶ Of course, the late antique Sicilian roads and especially those which some scholars call *via Selinuntina*, *via Pompeia* and *via Elorina*, still passed through several sites in south-eastern Sicily, which were not explicitly mentioned in the *Itinerarium*; among these, there must have been *Megara Hyblaea*, *Leontini*, *Camarina*, and *Helorus*.²⁷

Some examples: history and archaeology compared

As we have seen, data from ancient sources can be interpreted differently to how they were commonly held in the past. Let us examine some concrete

examples of cities (*Acrae*, *Camarina*, *Gela*, *Hybla*, *Leontini*, *Megara Hyblaea*, *Netum*) which scholars believe no longer existed during the Roman Imperial period, but which in reality continued their lives as minor centres.

Acrae was mentioned by Pliny, Ptolemy and the *Itinerarium Antonini*; there can be no doubt that it continued to be occupied throughout the Roman period, to which several remains, even epigraphical ones, found during excavations date back.²⁸ It can be assumed that the city lost its political autonomy and was administratively incorporated into the territory of Syracuse.

Scholars believed that *Camarina* ceased to exist after the Roman conquest of 258 BC, but it is now certain that it existed at least until the end of the 1st century AD.²⁹ It is worth noting that Strabo remembers only *Camarina* among the remains of ancient settlements in the midst of a situation of total abandonment that affected the southern coast of the island: so *Camarina* was no longer properly a πόλις, like *Agrigentum* and *Lilybaeum*, but there was still a 'trace' (ἵχνος) of the ancient colony (κατοικία).³⁰ In this case too, other literary sources (Pliny, Ptolemy, Solinus, Claudian) remember the existence of the city even in Imperial times and archaeological remains attest to life in the area.³¹

28 Plin. HN 3.14.91 (*Acresnes*); Ptol. Geog. 3.4.7 (ed. K. Müller); It. Ant. 89.8 (*Agris*). CIL 10.7188 (1st–3rd century AD); Akrai 59 (1st–3rd century AD): *d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) p(ublica) p(ecunia) f(ecit) f(aciendum)*; Akrai 51: [P]lura [f]lacias [et] melior[a] aedif[il]ices amen. Giacomo Manganaro dated the funerary inscription in Greek from Akrai (IG 14.235) in the Severian period (Manganaro 1988, 36). This inscription mentions an Ἀλφ(ιος) Κλωδης, who would have participated three times in diplomatic delegations sent to the emperor for goods transport, cf. Chowaniec 2015, 58–60; Chowaniec 2017, especially 127–177; cf. also the various contributions: Chowaniec (ed.) 2018.

29 Uggeri 2015, 94–104 and 178–184; Pfuntner 2019, 46–47.

30 Str. Geog. 6.2.5 (C 272): τῶν δὲ λοιπῶν τῆς Σικελίας πλευρῶν ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ Παχύνου πρὸς Λιλύβαιον διήκουσα ἐκλείπεται τελέως, ἵχνη τινὰ σώζουσα τῶν ἀρχαίων κατοικιῶν, ὧν ἦν καὶ Καμάρινα ἀποικὸς Συρακουσίων; cf. already Pais 1888, 223–226. Literary sources speak only of conquest and not of destruction of the city, cf. Manganaro 1964, 415; Soraci 2011, 42.

31 Plin. HN 3.14.89 (*oppidum Camarina*); Ptol. Geog. 3.4.7, who mentions it among the centres of the interior; Solin. 5.16 (*Camerina*); Claud. Rapt. Pros. 2, v. 59 (*Camerina palustri*), cf. Pelagatti 1985, 295–296; Di Stefano 1994, 240–241. Giovanni Uggeri remembered that the most superficial layers were destroyed for agricultural purposes: those layers probably belonged to the Roman Imperial period and, in any case, it must be taken into account that a large part of the housing area has not yet been brought to light (Uggeri 2015, 184).

21 Pfuntner 2019, 22–93: κεκάκωται δὲ καὶ ἡ Λεοντίνη πᾶσα.

22 On *Camarina*, cf. Str. Geog. 6.2.5 (C 272) and *infra*, no. 20; on *Gela*, cf. *supra*, no. 18.

23 Ptol. Geog. 3.4.7.

24 Marrone 2018, 49–54. But, in order to understand some location 'errors', we must also take into account the serious gaps in the ancients' understanding of longitude, cf. Tsorlini 2009.

25 Miller 1906, 395–405.

26 It. Ant. 88–89 (ed. O. Cuntz), but the mentions of *Gela* in the *Itinerarium* seems to refer to the river *Gelas* (Uggeri 2004, 254–255). It. Mar. 517.3. Both *Itineraria* are included in the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*.

27 Uggeri 2004, 200–202, 223 and 230.

Like *Acrae*, *Camarina* may also have lost its political autonomy and been incorporated into the territory of Syracuse.

The question concerning Gela is more complex. In the *Verrines* the *Gelenses* are mentioned twice, but at the time of Strabo, Gela is listed among the Sicilian centres that were no longer inhabited. The *Gelenses*, therefore, should be the descendants of those Geloï who around 281 BC were transferred to Phintia by order of *Agrigentum*'s tyrant Phintia, after the destruction of their city.³² However, Pliny still considers the *Gelani* and *Phintienses* to be distinct from each other: is this an error, as some scholars believe, or did Pliny consciously refer to the population of ancient Gela?³³ After all, the housing structures of the late Republican and Imperial era found in the surroundings during archaeological campaigns suggest that its inhabitants had not completely abandoned it, even if we cannot speak of the survival of a real city centre.³⁴ In any case, Gela could have been administratively incorporated into the territory of Syracuse or into that of its former colony, *Agrigentum*.

Certainly, there are several cities in Sicily with the name *Hybla*, whose exact identification has always been a *vexata quaestio*; it seems, however, that one of these was located in south-eastern Sicily.³⁵ It is strange that the traces of the exact location of a city, so famous mostly in the Roman Imperial period from the production point of view, as we will soon see, have been lost.

Leontini continued to live as a city. Pausanias wrote that Λεοντίνων <δὲ> ἐρημωθεῖσάν ποτε ὑπὸ Συρακοσίων τὴν πόλιν κατ' ἐμὲ αὖθις συνέβαινεν οἰκεῖσθαι:³⁶ if the inhabitants of Syracuse abandoned it, it was once again populated at the time of Pausanias. Perhaps the abandonment (and not the destruction, as the majority of scholars suppose: the contrast between ἐρημώω and οἰκῶ proves it) cannot refer to events that occurred as far back as the 1st century BC,³⁷ but to the general lack of interest shown by the Syracusans towards the city during the Roman period and especially between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD.³⁸ While Cicero considers *Leontini civitas misera atque inanis*³⁹ and refers to it mostly as an *ager* or *campus*,⁴⁰ the city continued to mint coins⁴¹ and both Ptolemy and Pausanias count it among the cities in existence between the end of the 1st century AD and the beginning of the 2nd century AD, when *Leontini* must have flourished, albeit modestly.⁴²

Most scholars believe that *Megara Hyblaea* was uninhabited in the Roman times.⁴³ Strabo counts it among the cities no longer in existence at his time⁴⁴ but, as we have seen, he refers to a classical, politically independent πόλις. However, other literary sources and archaeological remains attest to its life

- ³² Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.43.103 e 2.4.33.73; Str. *Geog.* 6.2.6 (C 272): ἡ δ' ἄλλη κατοικία καὶ τῆς μεσογαίας ποιμένων ἢ πλείστη γεγένηται· οὐτε γὰρ Ἰμέραν ἔτι συνοικουμένην ἴσμεν οὐτε Γέλαν οὐτε Καλλιπόλιν οὐτε Σελινούντα οὐτ' Εὐβοίαν οὐτ' ἄλλας πλείους. About Gela's destruction and inhabitants' transfer to Phintia, cf. Diod. *Sic. Bibl.* 22.2.2 and 22.7.1; Manganaro 1990, 391–408; Ghirafi 1991, 26. We know that the inhabitants continued to call themselves *Geloï*: Schubring 1873, 67–68; Bejor 1982, 815 and 820. Suggestive, but not entirely convincing (cf. for example, Uggeri 2004, 254–255, according to which Gela refers to the homonymous river), the hypothesis of La Torre 1993–1994, 769–770; La Torre 1994, 132–136, according to which the toponym Gela would have gone on to indicate the town found in the territory of Mazzarino and remembered by the *It. Ant.* 88.2 as *Gela sive Philosophianis*.
- ³³ Plin. *HN* 3.14.91. According to Pace 1958², 323–325; Manni 1981, 24, Pliny made an error. *Contra*, cf. for example, Pais 1888, 236–239; Beloch 1889, 75; Wilson 1990, 358 and no. 47.
- ³⁴ Panvini 1996, 122–130; Panvini 2002, 59–60. Cf. also Bergemann 2010.
- ³⁵ Soraci 2011, 32–33 and no. 22. We cannot say if the *Hyblenses* mentioned by Pliny (Plin. *HN* 3.14.91) are the inhabitants of south-eastern *Hybla*.

³⁶ Paus. 6.17.9 (ed. G. Maddoli, M. Nafissi).

³⁷ Moscati Castelnovo 2004, 289–290 and no. 16 (with bibliography).

³⁸ Massimo Frasca speaks of loss of importance (Frasca 2017, 93); Dario Palermo assumes that the city was deprived of an important component after the Roman conquest (Palermo 2020, 159–160 and no. 18).

³⁹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.66.160.

⁴⁰ Its χώρα was one of the best on the island: Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.18.47 (*quod caput est rei frumentariae, campus Leontinus ... in uberrima Siciliae parte*) and 2.3.44.104 (*duarum mihi civitatum reliquos feci agros, iudices, fere optimos ac nobilissimos, Aetnenses et Leontinum*); Cic. *Phil.* 8.26 (*Campanus ager et Leontinus, quae duo maiores nostri ammonae perfugia ducebant*). Cf. Soraci 2011, 15, nos. 35, 57 and 129.

⁴¹ But the dating is, as often in Sicilian coinage, controversial: G. Manganaro dates the coins between the 2nd and 1st century BC (Manganaro 2005–2006, 64–68); Mariangela Puglisi follows the dating to the years between the end of the 3rd century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century BC (Puglisi 2009, 281–282) proposed by Carroccio 2004, VIII.

⁴² Ptol. *Geog.* 3.4.7 (ed. K. Müller); Paus. 6.17.9. Pliny's testimony (Plin. *HN* 3.14.89) date back instead, as we have seen, to the Augustan period.

⁴³ Kahrstedt 1968, 247–248; Uggeri 2004, 200. Stone 1983, 19; Stone 2002, 145; Wilson 1990, 37 believe that the city ceased to exist at the time of Sextus Pompeius.

⁴⁴ Str. *Geog.* 6.2.2 (C 267): τοὺς μὲν οὖν Χαλκιδέας κτίσαι Νάξον τοὺς δὲ Δωριέας Μέγαρον τὴν Ὑβλαν πρότερον καλομένην. Αἱ μὲν οὖν πόλεις οὐκέτ' εἰσι.

during the Roman Empire: Pomponius Mela, Pliny, Ptolemy and the *Itinerarium maritimum* remember the city among those still in existence in their time and archaeological excavations have brought to light the remains of a small settlement from the Late Republican period (and then also from the 3rd–4th century AD):⁴⁵ evidently, *Megara Hyblaea* continued to exist as a small village and the clarification of the *Itinerarium maritimum*, according to which *Megea* was an *oppidum*, *id est castellum Siracusanorum*, confirms the loss of the political autonomy of the city (that is, in ‘technical’ terms, its disappearance as a πόλις) and its annexation to Syracuse.⁴⁶

Netum, however, probably had a shorter life. Pliny mentions its inhabitants among the people *Latinae condicionis*⁴⁷ and Ptolemy records the site as one of the inland cities, but we have no other information about it: except for the small epigraphic and archaeological finds from the Late Imperial period and proto-Byzantine era, the silence of sources from the Roman Imperial period is striking, especially if we consider that the city was an ancient *foederata* of Rome.⁴⁸

Economic prosperity and trade in Sicilian products

Some products of south-eastern Sicily were very well known: in the 1st century AD, for example, *Hybla* was renowned for its saffron and honey. Saffron was appreciated,⁴⁹ but the honey from *Hybla* was especially and often renowned together with that from Attica, to the point that Martial could say: *when you offer sweets from the hills of central Hybla, you are allowed to say that they are honeycombs*

from Attica.⁵⁰ It seems that what made it so good were the thyme flowers whose nectar drank by the bees.⁵¹ Evidently, the *Hybla* honey was particularly appreciated in the Imperial times when it became a highly sought-after product, which was also used for therapeutic purposes.⁵²

The sea around *Pachynum* was also famous for what it could offer. The red coral of this area was renowned for its abundance⁵³ and the same can be said for tuna fish. According to Solinus, who wrote in the 3rd century AD, *Pachyno multa thynnorum inest copia ac propterea semper captura larga*;⁵⁴ tuna fishing in the Syracuse area was attested as early as the 5th century BC, as evidenced by the fact that Sophronius dedicated a comedy to this theme.⁵⁵

Other areas of south-eastern Sicily had famous products too: for instance, *vinum Mesopotamium* was exported to Carthage and perhaps *Vindonissa* at the end of the 1st century BC, to Pompeii in the 1st century AD.⁵⁶ Scholars have theorised that this

⁴⁵ Pompon. 2.7.117 (*Megarida*); Plin. HN 3.14.89 (*oppida Leontini, Megaris ...*); Ptol. Geog. 3.4.7 (Μέγαρα), who mentions it among the centres of the interior; about the archaeological remains, cf. Vallet, Villard & Auberson 1983, 174–175; Cacciaguerra 2007.

⁴⁶ It. Mar. 51.73 (*ab oppido Megea, id est castello Siracusanorum ...*). Already Ettore Pais thought that *Megara Hyblaea* continued to exist in Roman times as a ‘misereabile villaggio’ (Pais 1888, 218–223); cf. also Beloch 1889, 75.

⁴⁷ Plin. HN 3.14.91.

⁴⁸ Marotta D’Agata, Arcifa & La Rosa 1993; Manganaro 2001, 82–85. About *Netum* as *civitas foederata*, cf. Soraci 2016a, 109–111 (with bibliography).

⁴⁹ Colum. Rust. 10, v. 170; Str. Geog. 6.2.7, C 273 speaks more generically of Sicilian saffron and Pliny (Plin. HN 21.17.31) of *Centuripinus crocus*.

⁵⁰ Mart. 13.105 (*Cum dederis Siculos mediae de collibus Hyblae/Cecropios dicas tu licet esse favos*); cf. also: 2.46, vv. 1–2; 7.88, v. 8; 9.11, v. 3; 9.26, v. 4; Verg. ecl. 1, vv. 53–54; Ov. ars 2, v. 517; 3, v. 150; trist. 5.6, v. 38; epist. 4.15, v. 10; Lucan. 9, vv. 285–292; Sil. 14, vv. 26 and 199–200; Petron. sat. fr. 29, v. 5 (ed. K. Müller, W. Ehlers); Str. Geog. 6.2.7, C 273 speaks more generically of Sicilian honey.

⁵¹ Verg. Ecl. 7, v. 37; Ov. Trist. 5.13, v. 22; Hor. Epist. 2.7, v. 26; Mart. 5.39, vv. 2–3; 11.42, vv. 3–4; Colum. Rust. 9.14.19 (bees from various parts of Sicily were brought to Hybla in the summer); Plin. HN 11.13.32; Stat. Silv. 2.1, v. 48; 3.2, v. 118; Ar. Ach. 1, vv. 556–557; Serv. Ecl. 1 v. 54 and 7, v. 37. Cf. Santagati 2017, 23–25.

⁵² In the 3rd century AD Ser. Med. 13, vv. 199–200 (ed. F. Wollmer) certifies the beneficial effects in the field of ophthalmology: *Hyblaei mellis sucus cum felle caprino subueniunt oculis dira caligine pressis*. Honey could be sold directly inside the honeycombs, cf. Santagati 2017, 29–30.

⁵³ Diosc. Med. de materia medica 5.121 (ed. M. Wellmann) (εὐρίσκεται δὲ πλεῖστον ἐν τῷ κατὰ Συρακούσας ἀκρωτηρίῳ <τῷ> καλουμένῳ Παχύνῳ); cf. also Plin. HN 32.11.21 (who speaks of the *laudatissimus* red coral of the Aeolian archipelago and Trapani). Cf. Marzano 2013, 165.

⁵⁴ Solin. 5.6. Cf. Felici 2020, 104–106.

⁵⁵ Ael. Nat. Anim. 15.6. On the varieties of fish caught in Lipari (ἰχθύων παντοδαπῶν παρέχεται πλῆθος τοῖς κατοικοῦσι) cf. Diod. Sic. Bibl. 5.10.3. Ath. 7.315d. Between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD, speaks more generically of Sicilian tuna fish, which were very large, while Pollux (6.63) remembers ἐκ Συκελίας αἱ πλωταί.

⁵⁶ About the *vinum Mesopotamium* at Carthage (CIL 8.22640, 60 instead certifies the presence of *vinum Mamertinum*), cf. an amphora dated 2nd BC (CIL 8.22640, 8 = AE 1893, 111 and 1895, 7): *Q(uinto) Lepid(o) M(arco) Lollio co(n)s(u)libus/AP/vinum Mesopotamium/L(ucio) Afranio Silvo*. The same wine was perhaps found in *Vindonissa* (Bohn 1926, 205–206: *MES/XIII*) and in Pompeii: CIL 4.2602 and 2603, where the inscription *MES* was interpreted

wine was from south-eastern Sicily because of the name of a *statio* which, in the *Itinerarium Antonini*, was called *Mesopotamium* and was located between Gela and *Camarina*.⁵⁷

The region around Syracuse supplied a sweet wine called *Pollios*.⁵⁸ Perhaps systematic archaeological investigations and detailed analyses of amphorae from the area will confirm the existence of *vinum Mesopotamium* and the production and distribution of *Pollios*.

As has recently been demonstrated, the presence in Rome and Ostia of Sicilian products, such as wine and fish sauces, surged in the 2nd century AD,⁵⁹ thanks to a numerical increase in production areas and the consequent diversification of supply sources. Certainly some Sicilian fish sauces were packaged in specially made amphorae, such as Dressel 21–22. However, at the current state of research, it is difficult to establish which part of Sicily the wines and fish sauces that were contained in the amphorae found in Rome and Ostia came from.⁶⁰ One of the Sicilian workshops best known for the production of Dressel 21–22 amphorae is located in north-western Sicily⁶¹ and its products were certainly exported to Campania,⁶² but in south-eastern Sicily there was an important fish processing plant at Portopalo, near

a furnace for the production of amphorae, which has been identified but not studied in depth.⁶³ It is always possible that tuna fish products were packaged not only in amphorae produced for this purpose but also in other types of ceramic containers, including wine amphorae;⁶⁴ in this case it would be even more difficult to trace the spread of Sicilian products to Italy (and in the Mediterranean) and identify the exact area of origin.

Sicilian oil, a tenth of the production of which arrived in Rome in the Roman Republican period,⁶⁵ is subsequently no longer mentioned, perhaps because it was destined only for the consumption of Sicilians. Sicilian oil probably could not outcompete the strong Spanish and African productions.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, oil devices have been found in structures belonging to the Roman Republican period serve as evidence of uninterrupted production activity.⁶⁷

In conclusion: the history of Roman Imperial Sicily, and in particular of the centres considered to be minor, can be rewritten. It should not be interpreted in terms of splendour and decline, of flowering and destruction, but in the light of the process that recorded alternating and intertwining phases – from the point of view of population, urban splendour, economic vivacity and so on.

as *Mesopotamium*), cf. Héron de Villefosse 1893 (*CIL* 4.2618, 5563–5568 instead attest the *vinum Tauromenitanum*). Str. Geog. 6.2.3 (C 268–269) remembers only the wine produced in the Messina (Plin. HN 14.8.66 and 17.97 explicitly mentions both wines, *Mamertinum* and *Tauromenitanum*) and Catania areas. On this subject cf. Scramuzza 1937, 350–351; Pace 1958², 400–404; about possible wine vats found in Sicily, cf. Wilson 1990, 192.

⁵⁷ *It. Ant.* 96.1, cf. Uggeri 2004, 221. It was perhaps exported from *Camarina* (Uggeri 2015, 103), where, at the end of the 5th century BC, tetradrachms with images of amphorae were struck (Westermarck & Jenkins 1980, nos. 149–157), but it is questionable what type of amphorae were represented on these coins: according to some scholars, they were wine amphorae (Schubring 1881, 387; Pace 1958², 403), according to others, oil amphorae granted as prizes for agonistic competitions (Stuart Poole 1874, 438; Salinas 1881, 362); for other hypotheses, cf. Westermarck, Jenkins 1980, 50.

⁵⁸ Poll. 6.16: καὶ πού γλυκὺς καὶ Πόλλιος· ἔστι μὲν ἐκ Συρακουσῶν; Ath. 1.31b; Ael. Var. Hist. 12.31.

⁵⁹ Radaelli 2021.

⁶⁰ Edoardo Radaelli, whom I thank, informed me that he had recognised in Rome and Ostia amphorae for wine from the north-east of Sicily, including Naxos and Lipari, and for the production of tuna fish from north-western Sicily (Alcamo?) and from Lipari.

⁶¹ Cf. for example: Giorgetti, Gonzales & Botte 2006.

⁶² La Rocca & Bazzano 2020; about the amphorae found in Pompeii, probably from north-western Sicily, cf. Toniolo 2020.

⁶³ Marzano 2013, 109–110; La Rocca & Bazzano 2018, 300.

⁶⁴ Wilson 1990, 192; La Rocca & Bazzano 2018, 297–298; La Rocca & Bazzano 2020, 144. There could also be other types of amphorae for wine: Tchernia 1986, 278–279.

⁶⁵ Cic. Verr. 2.3.7.18–8.19.

⁶⁶ Wilson 1990, 266–267 even thinks that African oil must have been available alongside Spanish oil in Sicilian markets of the 1st century AD.

⁶⁷ Portale 2005, 48.

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Sealing, Stamping, Protecting, Securing ... Lead-seals from *Akrai/Acrae**

Roksana Chowaniec

Abstract

The chapter presents recent studies on rich and diverse assemblage of lead-seals discovered within the residential area of ancient town *Akrai*, dated between Late Hellenistic period up to the Byzantine period. The lead-seals, both the official as well as trade ones, provide material evidence for the circulation of goods in *Akrai*, in reference to both the local and global markets, as well as for decisions and investments taking place in the town. These processes are also confirmed by other abundant imports flowing into the town from various directions. The objectives focus on the history of studies on the lead-seals, the various types, shapes, and functions of the lead-seals, typology of the Sicilian lead-seals, and detailed elaboration of the lead-seals from *Akrai* with its iconographical and chronological analysis. The research comprises also brief studies on the external and internal flow of goods or their circulation to/from Sicily, whose testimony could be assemblage of lead-seals.

Seals, Sicilian lead-seals, *piombi mercantili*, trade, Hellenistic, Imperial, Byzantine periods, *Akrai/Acrae*

Introduction

In the course of excavations in *Akrai*, namely within the remains of Late Hellenistic-Roman houses inhabited until the 350s–370s AD and then used for manufacturing activities since the late 4th century AD,¹ a huge and diverse assemblage of artefacts meant for sealing and protecting different goods was discovered (fig. 1). Among them were three Roman seal-boxes² used to

protect wax seals,³ typically applied on letters⁴ written both on tablets and papyrus,⁵ or to seal soft containers (e.g. made of leather or textiles). Two

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1 Chowaniec 2017, 106–198.

2 Chowaniec 2018, 50–53.

3 For more on this category of finds, cf. Hingley 2005, 50 and 98; Holmes 1995; Andrews 2012. The use of seals for protecting wax tablets has been questioned in the publication of the material from *Augusta Raurica*, cf. Furger *et al.* 2009, 17–21. However, Ton Derks points to the possibility of such a use, cf. Derks 2010, 725¹⁷.

4 Alison Cooley believes that such finds are direct proofs of the use of Latin, cf. Cooley 2002, 12. A similar opinion has been expressed by Ton Derks and Nico Roymans, cf. Derks & Roymans 2002. However, the fact that they were used to protect purses or other containers does not automatically prove this hypothesis.

5 Papyrus was commonly used in the Greek parts of the Empire for letters, lists, calculations, documents, etc.

specimens of copper alloy were egg-shaped and had a hinge mechanism joining their two parts (the base and the top), whereas three small holes were made in the middle of the base, so that they created a triangle. They are dated to the reign of Emperor Augustus, while their occurrence spans the whole 1st century AD. The third, is circular and decorated with concentric circles featuring a central hole and is dated to the 1st–2nd century AD.⁶ They have been interpreted as containers for sealing documents circulated within the *cursus publicus*,⁷ military letters,⁸ and/or *nuncupatio*.⁹ In the western and northern provinces of the Empire they tend to appear only occasionally in civilian contexts, however such uses cannot be entirely ruled out.¹⁰

In general, it is known that seals of various types, shapes, and functions registered across the ancient world appeared already in the Near East, in Assyrian and Babylonian cultural contexts.¹¹ Over the centuries, they were made of clay or plastic fusible metals (e.g. lead), as well as less durable materials, such as wax. They are known under different names in the literature depending on the language or preferences of the author of a given publication. Hence, one encounters such terms as: ‘seal siegel’, ‘lead-seal’, ‘bulla’, ‘Bleisiegel’, ‘plomb’, ‘piombo mercantile’, ‘plomb du commerce’, ‘tessera frumentaria’, ‘fermaglio’, or ‘sigillo’. Sometimes, they are also referred to as ‘tesserae’ or ‘seal-tessera’, and as such are included in numismatic compilations.¹² Due to such a diversified nomenclature, the above-mentioned terms are often misused and extended beyond the seals proper by being applied to other artefacts also labelled as ‘seals’, such as stamped objects or tools used for stamping.

The primary function of seals and lead-seals was to warrant the authenticity of the sealed content. Accessing the content required tearing off or breaking the seal or the cord used to attach it to the parcel. Tying everything together with a string or thong was a basic method for securing the shipped goods. The string or thong would then be sealed or reeved through an open container, with its bottom

part then poured with beeswax¹³ or secured with a lump of tar or clay upon which a stamp could be impressed. Finally, the whole container was carefully closed.

As far as the Roman cultural circle is concerned, prototypes of the discussed seals and seal-boxes must have appeared already in the 1st century BC, if we take into account that Cicero commented in 63 AD:



*Thereupon we showed Cethegus his letter, he agreed that the seal was his and we cut the thread.*¹⁴

Later, Pliny the Elder complained that



*to think what life was in the days of old, and what innocence existed when nothing was sealed! Whereas nowadays even articles of food and drink have to be protected against theft by means of a ring (...).*¹⁵

In the late 2nd century AD, Clement of Alexandria decided to phrase himself in the following way:



*For if all were well trained, there would be no need of seals, if servants and masters were equally honest. But since want of training produces an inclination to dishonesty, we require seals.*¹⁶

Containers for wax seals were used until the mid-3rd century BC, when they were presumably substituted by leaden seals already popular in commerce as means for protecting bags, purses, etc.¹⁷

In the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, seals again started to serve as protective measures and warrants of authenticity of documents, both in private contexts (including letters or last wills)¹⁸ as well as official ones (ecclesiastical, military, or Imperial).¹⁹ The most wide-spread were seals made

⁶ Derks & Roymans 2002, 27–28 and 92; Andrews 2012, 12, 15, 72 and 104.

⁷ Holmes 1995, 391. Nevertheless, Simon Holmes does not exclude other uses, cf. Holmes 1995, 392.

⁸ Derks & Roymans 2002, 99–100.

⁹ Derks 1998, 224–231.

¹⁰ Andrews 2012, 95–97.

¹¹ Regulski, Duistermaat & Verkinderen (ed.) 2012.

¹² Rostovcev 1903.

¹³ Traces of beeswax and impressions have been found on many specimens, e.g. from Wroxeter, cf. Andrews, 2012, 84.

¹⁴ Cic. Or. III.4.10.

¹⁵ Plin. HN XXXIII.26.

¹⁶ Clem. Alex. *Paedagogus* III.2.

¹⁷ Holmes 1995, 394. For a separate discussion on trade, taxes, and Sassanian seals, cf. Lukonin 1983, 712, 719, 732–733, 736, 738 and 742–743.

¹⁸ Moreover, we decree that the end of a testament shall be the subscriptions and seals of the witnesses. For a testament not subscribed and sealed by witnesses must be considered imperfect, cf. *Theodosian Code. Novels of the Sainted* 16.5.

¹⁹ Vikan & Nesbitt 1980, 10–12; *Eerdmans Encyclopedia* 2016, 228–229.

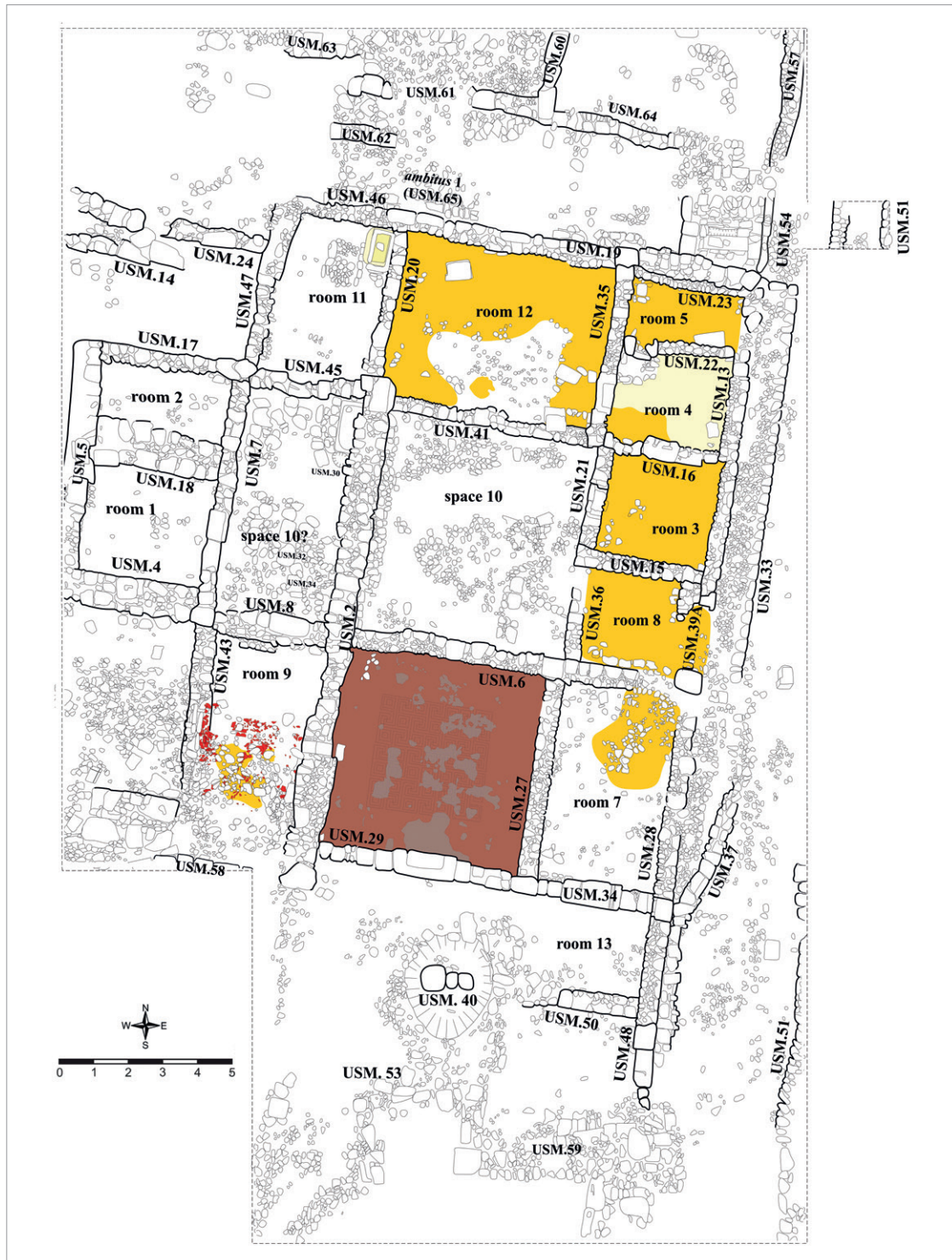


Fig. 1. Plan of excavated area of Late Hellenistic-Roman house (© R. Chowaniec)

of various metals,²⁰ predominantly lead, manufactured with the use of iron tong pincers called a *boulloùtèrion*, clenched on a hot malleable flan transferring die impression on it, or with a stamp-seal or seal-ring.²¹ On the obverse side of the flan, there would usually be letters or inscriptions in Greek or monograms, whereas the reverse would display religious images or mottoes. However, one-sided seals would also be used at times. According to the 'Book of the Prefect', traditionally dated to the reign of Leo VI the Wise (886–912), but certainly – just as many texts from this period – formed through systematic accumulation of knowledge:

» Grocers may keep their shops throughout the city as well as in the streets, so that the necessities of life may be easily procurable ... (but) ... Any grocer who has weights or measures [which] do not bear the seal of the Prefect ... shall be flogged, shaved and exiled.²²

In practice, the vast majority of goods would be sealed, especially those imported or exported.

Typology of the Sicilian lead-seals

The lead-seals in general, and those from Sicily in particular, belong to a group of artefacts extremely rarely mentioned in the literature, apparently mainly due to their poor visual appeal and problematic identification. Even if a seal is unearthed during excavations,²³ right after extraction it usually resembles a simple lump of lead. Only after a meticulous process of conservation, its shape as well as traces of stamps may become discernible. Hence, it seems safe to state that among thousands of Greek and Roman 'labelled artefacts',²⁴ trade seals were merely named, but received little to no treatment in scholarly discourse.

It seems also worth adding that a prominent place in any discussion on lead-seals should be

given to Sicily, as it is where a great number of these artefacts have been discovered, dated from the Late Hellenistic through the Roman Imperial to the Byzantine periods.²⁵ Despite their modest visual appeal, these seals are important sources of knowledge about the daily life, iconography, or technology, and studying them may help analyse mechanisms of trade.

One of the earliest publications dedicated to ancient seals is a monograph by Francesco de Ficoroni from 1740 titled 'I piombi antichi', in which the author published numerous finds of seals – not only connected to trade – of various dating.²⁶ Unfortunately, while collecting the enormous material evidence for his seminal work, F. de Ficoroni failed to correctly identify many of the finds and mixed trade seals with those related to diplomatic uses, as well as *bullae*, or *tesserae*. It bears adding here that the lion's share of these artefacts lacks any specific place of discovery. In 1755, Cesare Gaetani, Count della Torre, published a study on the assemblage of ancient trade seals (titled 'Piombi antichi mercantili') which – as he indicated himself in the subtitle – was meant as a supplement to the above-mentioned monograph by F. de Ficoroni.²⁷ C. Gaetani illustrated his publication with two charts in which he juxtaposed drawings of twenty-four seals (with standardised dimensions). On the other hand, the year 1788 saw publication of the work titled 'Il traffico antico delle manifatture siciliane cavato da' piombi mercantili' by Giuseppe Logoteta, which discussed the questions pertaining to Sicilian craftsmanship on the basis of the discovered trade lead-seal.²⁸ G. Logoteta drew comparisons between the iconography of seals and images displayed on coins issued in Sicily by pointing to triskeles as an example, which seems incorrect as a matter of fact, but he emphasised that the trade seals had never be used for any other purposes than to identify given goods' place of origin (region, site, or workshop).²⁹

The 1834 issue of the 'Giornale di scienze, letteratura ed arti per la Sicilia' contained a printed text by Francesco di Paolo Avolio which consisted of four letters sent to Abbot Niccolò Maggiore (from 16 February, 1 March, 28 March, and 6 May, 1833)³⁰

²⁰ Cheynet & Caseau 2012.

²¹ Vikan & Nesbitt 1980, 24–25; Cheynet & Caseau 2012, 133–134. For a more detailed discussion of the Byzantine lead-seals, known also as 'usual seals', cf. Oikonomides 1983.

²² *Book of the Prefect* 13.1–2.

²³ The seals are sometimes of less than 1.00cm in diameter and heavily-deformed. Registering this category of finds is virtually impossible without metal detectors.

²⁴ Allison 1997.

²⁵ Still 1995, 27.

²⁶ de Ficoroni 1740.

²⁷ Gaetani 1755.

²⁸ Logoteta 1788, 12–18 (on trade seals).

²⁹ Logoteta 1788, 13–14.

³⁰ The indicated dates refer to the time when the letters were written, since they are treated as their dates of publication in the literature, despite they were not actually published before 1834.

and discussing trade seals and Greek-Sicilian mercantile relations.³¹ In his first letter, he offered his addressee an outline of the history of studies on trade seals and stressed the role of C. Gaetani as the first scholar to correctly identify and publish these artefacts. However, he gives more attention, both in the first and the following letters, to circulation of goods and trade by highlighting the role of Sicily in the sea trade. It is not before his fourth letter that P. Avolio returns to the question of seals by enclosing a short catalogue of sixteen described specimens.³²

Another publication of extreme importance was 'Descrizione di una raccolta di piombi antichi siciliani detti mercantili' published in 1864 by a renowned numismatist and archaeologist, Antonio Salinas.³³ A. Salinas then expanded upon his studies in a paper titled 'Piombi Antichi Siciliani'³⁴ published in 1866. In his work from 1864, he stated that he was able to distinguish eighty-six types of seals,³⁵ all coming from Sicily, whose list (with brief descriptions) he presented in the paper.³⁶ The author paid attention to the construction of the seals by noting the lead strip (Italian *striscia in piombo*) as their distinguishing feature. This feature, in turn, made these artefacts remind him of textile seals *e che sola può fornire un dato certo sulla destinazione di queste anticaglie*.³⁷ Simultaneously, while describing images found on seals, he stated that they depict themes known from the world of art, nature, as well as fantastic imagery. In others, he found colligations with coinage, for instance from *Akrāgas* (Latin *Agrigentum*, now Agrigento) or *Syrakousai* (Latin *Syrācūsae*, now Syracuse), and quotes a seal with the head of Apollo and with Pegasus as an example. A. Salinas suggested also that trade seals with the lead strip were character-

istic for Sicily, which would be supported by their scarce number registered outside the island.³⁸ A. Salinas's interest in seals, including the trade ones, was further developed in another text from 1866 by introducing twenty-eight new specimens coming mostly from *Kentōripa* (Latin *Centuripae*, now Centuripe) and *Solontīnos* (also *Solōeis*, *Soloūs*, Latin *Soluntum*, now Solunto).³⁹ In his description and interpretation of the seals, he lists several peculiar ones, such as a seal with a frontal depiction of Medusa on the obverse and a vessel in a pearl border encircling the word *ὕδωρ* (water) on the reverse, which he rejects to see as a *tesserae balnearia* and instead hypothesizes that it could, for instance, warrant the right to draw a specific amount of water from a public cistern.⁴⁰

Since the publications of A. Salinas, only but a few newer studies have been presented, among which even fewer were focused solely on the trade seals. In 1892, in volume V of the 'Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines, d'après les textes et les monuments', under the entry on 'tessera', the authors – Charles Victor Daremberg and Edmond Saglio – included a brief discussion on the lead-seals. There, they stated that it was the most numerous group of seals unearthed in various locations across the ancient world, represented in diverse iconography, dated predominantly to the Roman Imperial period, and used for controlling and warranting goods.⁴¹ The seals discovered in Sicily earned a special mention, due to their specific construction composed of a band-like slat joining the conical part which would be pushed through a plate with an opening on the opposing end of the slat and then compressed by striking a stamp.⁴²

The referential collection used by C. V. Daremberg and E. Saglio comprised more than a thousand specimens from the National Museum in Athens, dated mostly to the Roman Imperial period.⁴³ Obviously, this collection has been subjected to numerous more detailed studies, both earlier and later. For instance, Arthur Engel published an article in 1884 in which he discussed the repertoire of these artefacts and argued for their Greek (Crete, Euboea, Pergamon, Samos,

31 Avolio 1834.

32 Avolio 1834, 327–331 (the chart illustrating the artefacts which is placed before the text as a whole).

33 Salinas 1864. Naturally, other texts were published in the meantime, presenting other or the same examples of seals (e.g. Politi 1834; Garrucci 1847, who focuses mostly on official *tesserae*, but on p. 53, tabl. II–III.18 features nine lead-seals with the head of Gorgon and a boar found in Noto), but apart from introducing new specimens to the scholarly circulation, they did not provide any original insights.

34 Salinas, 1866. In his paper of 1871, Benedetto Rocco mistakenly referenced this publication as coming from the year 1871, cf. Rocco 1971, 27. Furthermore, in 1894 A. Salinas published seals unearthed in Reggio Calabria, cf. Salinas 1894.

35 One hundred thirty-four specimens in total.

36 Salinas 1864, 344–345.

37 Salinas 1864, 352.

38 Salinas 1864, 354.

39 Salinas 1866, 19–21.

40 Salinas 1866, 23–24. This seal was published again by B. Rocco, cf. Rocco 1971, 35 and fig. XI.5.

41 Daremberg & Saglio 1892, 131–132.

42 The figure shows even the seal which was prepared, but never actually used, cf. Daremberg & Saglio 1892, fig. 6826.

43 Daremberg & Saglio 1892, 130–132.

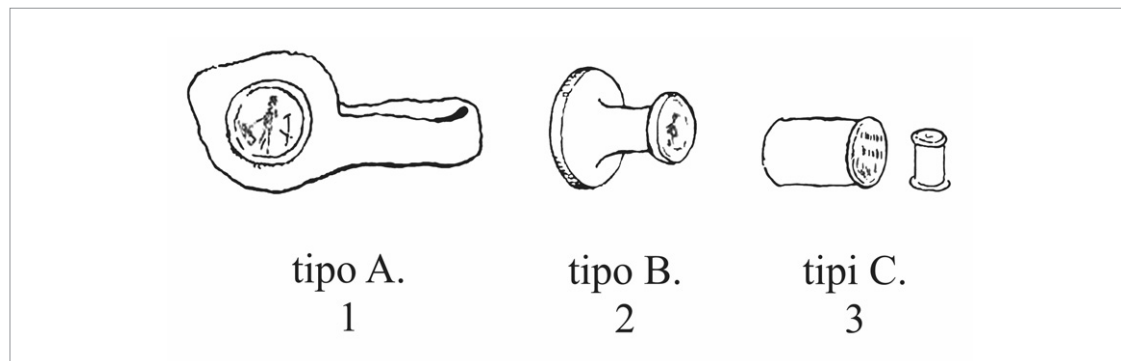


Fig. 2. Three main types of lead-seals prepared by B. Rocco in his paper titled 'Nuovi piombi mercantili dalla Sicilia greca' (redrawn after Rocco 1971: 28 and fig. 1)

Smyrna, or Thebes) provenance⁴⁴ and chronological compatibility with the Hellenistic⁴⁵ and Roman Imperial periods⁴⁶. In his study, he often quoted the compilation by Albert Dumont, founder of the École française de Rome, titled 'De plumbeis apud Graecos tesseras'.⁴⁷

One of the oldest and most orderly classifications of this category of finds (dated to various periods, from Antiquity to contemporary times, and of various functions) is the work by Mihail I. Rostovcev titled 'Catalogue des plombs de l'antiquité du moyen âge et des temps modernes conservés au Département des Médailles et Antiques de la Bibliothèque Nationale'.⁴⁸

In 1958, Biagio Pace, while describing trade and manufacturing activities in Sicily in his monumental 'Arte e civiltà della Sicilia antica', touched upon the question of lead trade seals. In his enumeration of the known forms of seals, he mentions the cylindrical and conical types, but reserves a more detailed description for seals with a band-like slot.⁴⁹ In his study, quoting the aforementioned compilations by C. Gaetani, F. Avolio, or A. Salinas, he repeated the information that the seals could be used to mark textiles and compared them to objects known to him from his contemporary reality and used as a confirmation of payment or certification of a trademark. B. Pace

concluded, however, that it remained unknown whether such trade seals were authorised by a public institution or rather by the manufacturers themselves. However, he was more inclined towards rejecting authorisation by manufacturers, because in this case the seals would be found also outside the island. On the other hand, by turning to the discussion on iconography, he returned to postulating, just like earlier authors, their analogies among some of the images on Syracusan coins (Pegasus, triskeles) or those from other Greek mints in Sicily: *Kentòripa*, *Kamàrina* (Latin *Camarina*, now Camarina), *Akràgas*. It is also worth to mention his comment regarding dating the lead trade seals which he identified as pertaining to the Greek and Late Hellenistic-Roman periods.⁵⁰

In 1971, Benedetto Rocco in his paper titled 'Nuovi piombi mercantili dalla Sicilia greca' attempted at typologising thirty-three trade seals,⁵¹ which he divided into four basic types according to their manufacturing technique and morphology.⁵² The first type (A) consists of a narrow band-like slot terminating on one side with a round (or almost round) plate which prior to seal's application had a conical form and was where the stamp would usually be struck, whereas the other side ends with a plate with an opening. Type A was further divided into Aa and Ab, although this internal division does not reflect differences in construction of A-type seals, but only informs whether the band-like slot was preserved or not. Type B consists of a cylindrical core terminated on

⁴⁴ The author is aware that these artefacts are also found in other parts of the ancient world – Syria, Sicily, or Italy.

⁴⁵ Mentioned as 'Époques macédonienne', cf. Engel 1884.

⁴⁶ Engel 1884, 1.

⁴⁷ Dumont 1870.

⁴⁸ Rostovcev 1900. This work is even often quoted as the first typology of the lead-seals, cf. Still 1995, 19.

⁴⁹ Pace 1958, 418–420 (description like in Daremberg & Saglio 1892, 132).

⁵⁰ Pace 1958, 420.

⁵¹ The seals were found in Montelepre, Licata, *Soluntum*, and in one case – between Bagheria and Termini Imerese, cf. Rocco 1971, 35.

⁵² Rocco 1971, 27–28.