
**From Theodosius to Constans II:
Church, Settlement and Economy in Late Roman and
Byzantine Sicily (AD 378-668)**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the archaeology of late antique Sicily from the time of Theodosius I (347–95) to the reign of Constans II (630–68). Analysing published data from urban and rural contexts I aim to define three research subjects that are: 1 – The potential different phases of Sicilian Late Antiquity; 2 – The part played by the Church and the impact of Christianity in this transitional period, and, finally, 3 – The definition of a regional economic pattern.

During the centuries here investigated, Sicily went through three main phases named: the fall of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine conquest of the 6th century and the process of Byzantinization of the Sicilian society and culture.

The Church played a key role in all these three phases initially negotiating with local elite and cultural background its presence within the urban walls. But after the Byzantine conquest and until the Arab occupation of Sicily, the Church imposed its authority through the building of churches, monasteries and chapels transforming the urban and rural landscape.

After the Vandal invasion of North Africa, Sicily became the only food supply for Italy and this deeply impacted the provincial economy increasing production and trade with Italy resulting in a period of economical prosperity and cultural liveliness.

Key words: Sicily, Late Antiquity, Byzantine, Archaeology, Christianity, Mediterranean

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Preface

'You will often have been told that Syracuse is the largest of Greek cities and the loveliest of all cities. Gentlemen, what you have been told is true. Its position is not only a strong one, but beautiful to behold in whatever direction it is approached, by land or sea. Its harbours are almost enfolded in the embrace of the city buildings, their entrances far apart, but their heads approaching till they meet each other. At their meeting-place, that part of the town which is called the Island, being cut off from the rest by a narrow strip of sea, is re-united with it by a connecting bridge. So large is the city that it is described as being four great cities joined together. One of these is the Island already mentioned, girdled by the two harbours, and extending to their two mouths or entrances. In this quarter is the house, once King Hiero's, which our governors regularly occupy. Here also are a number of temples, two much finer than the rest: namely, that of Diana, and the other one that of Minerva, a place rich in treasures in the days before Verres arrived there [as governor]. At one extremity of this island is the spring of fresh water called Arethusa; an incredibly large spring, teeming with fish, and so placed that it would be swamped by the sea waves but for the protection of a massive stone wall. Then there is a second town in the city, called Achradina: this contain a broad market-place, some fine colonnades, richly-adorned town-hall, a spacious senate-house, and the noble temple of Olympian Jupiter, beside the rest of the town, which is filled with private houses, and divided by one broad continuous street crossed by a number of others. There is a third town, called Tycha from the ancient temple of Fortune that once stood there: this contains a spacious athletic ground and several temples, and is also a crowded and thickly inhabited part of the city. And there is a fourth town, which, being the most recently built, is called Neapolis: on the highest point of this stands the great theatre; beside which there are two splendid temples, one of Ceres and the other of Apollo Temenites – which, if Verres had been able to transport, he would not have hesitated to carry off'.

(Cic. Verrine II,4, 117–19)

Cicero gives us a distinctive and powerful description of Syracuse at his time: a large city full of rich temples, roads, monuments, public spaces, and harbours; we can also imagine crowds of

people walking through streets, markets, buying and selling goods, talking in Latin, Greek and probably Aramaic too.

In June 2009, I visited Syracuse for the first time spending a week in a B&B in the old district of Ortigia. While dragging my bags from the bus station to the accommodation, I had eyes only for the buildings surrounding me. Having studied history and archaeology of the town for several years and having drawn out plans of Syracuse, I knew the disposition of monuments and roads so well that I did not need a map, but, in spite of my research I was confused. The first impact caused by the chaos typical of south Mediterranean cities with a sort of an exuberant driving anarchy immediately changed my mind. Dipped into the urban noise, I suddenly realized that I had got from books an aseptic, unreal and rather romanticized idea of Syracuse, meaning that I had to re-approach my studies from the beginning to bottom up. Therefore, I faced the most elementary question: What was Syracuse (and the other Sicilian towns) like in Late Antiquity? How different was it from Cicero's portrait of the city? How much had its urban society changed? What sources guide us in this?

Introduction

This thesis will offer an overview of the archaeology of Sicily for the period spanning A.D. 378 to 668, spanning the accession of Theodosius the Great (378–95) (fig. 1) and the murder, in the bath of the imperial residence in Syracuse, of the Byzantine Emperor Constans II (641–68) (fig.2). These two dates are only useful poles in a time-line, since it is clear that history is a long process and Sicily did not change the day after Theodosius was crowned emperor nor the day after Constans II was murdered – although, in this case, the death of the Byzantine emperor entailed a radical modification of Byzantine politics toward Sicily and the Western territories.

Through the detailed analysis of archaeological contexts, I will try to answer to three major questions: 1 – Can we recognize different phases in term of urban disposition and social transformation in late antique Sicily? 2 – What was the role of the Church and the impact of Christianization in the urban landscape and its society? 3 – How was the economy of Sicily and how did it changed in the period here investigated?

As I shall debate, I chose these two dates because both marked materially and tangibly the political decisions inaugurated often decades before. The effective, widespread and physical occupation of the town space by the Church became, in Sicily, evident only from the time of Theodosius I, but it was under Constantine's reign, sixty years earlier that Christianity was accepted and officially supported by the state. On the other hand, Constans II in the mid-seventh century, moving to Italy and settling his court in Syracuse, put into practice the idea of regaining the control of the Western Roman territories – a dream that went back to Justinian's ideology in the first half of the sixth century.



Fig.7: Gold solidus of Theodosius I (courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum).



Fig.8: Gold solidus of Constans II (courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum).

The period analyzed here is full of important changeovers in the history of the Mediterranean (fig. 3). It includes the acceptance of Christianity as a Roman religion, its later definitive victory over other cults formalized by the Edict of Theodosius in 380, the fall of Rome in the West, as well as the Justinian Era and the spread of Byzantine rule into the central Mediterranean. All these periods affected Sicily, its society and its settlements, and I shall try to show, their consequences are traceable through archaeology.

Theodosius was not legally born Christian since he was only baptized by the Bishop of Thessalonica Acholius in 380, therefore after being appointed by Gratian as Augustus in the West (for the life of Theodosius I see Leppin 2003). There is, of course, a relationship between his baptism, the Edict of 380 declaring the adoption of the Trinitarian Catholic faith, and the first Council of Constantinople in 381, at which Arianism was condemned as heretical doctrine. We can imagine a sincere and sudden, although later, deep conversion to Christianity by Theodosius, or more pragmatically, the Emperor adopted the new faith and began a determined Christian policy for more practical reasons. Theodosius replaced the Augustus Valens, who felt at the disastrous battle of Adrianople in 378, and immediately had to face the defensive emergency against the Goths, the reorganization of the Army and the strengthening of the *limes*. His embracing of Christianity, and specifically the Nicean Creed, brought Theodosius the support of the powerful Church of Rome, Milan and Carthage, gaining back the ideological sustain in the celebration of the imperial figure, the administration skills of bishops, but also, and most important, the sustain of the Army where Christianity found wide consensus (Stephenson 2009: 66–71).

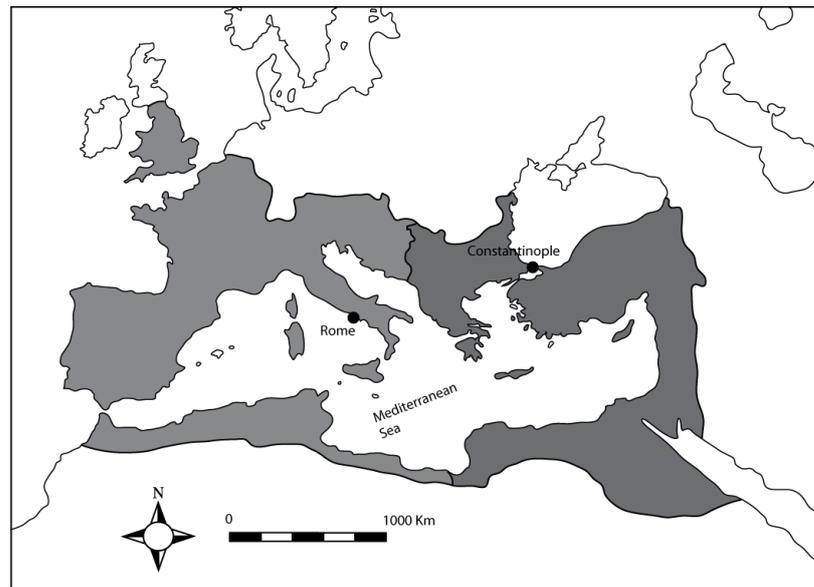


Fig.9: The Roman Empire at the time of Theodosius I.

Despite imperial Christian policy, the traditional Roman religions were well rooted within the senatorial elites and the emperor had to negotiate with this group. Acting as a Christian Emperor, Theodosius never appeared in art as Christian. The astonishing silver *missorium* (fig. 4) unearthed in the nineteenth century near Mérida (*Emerita Augusta*) in south-western Spain represents Theodosius flanked by Valens II and Arcadius and a group of soldiers carefully depicted with their shields, spears and torques. As the inscription engraved in the *missorium* says D(ominus) N(oster) THEODOSIVS PERPET(uus) AVG(ustus) OB DIEM FELICISSIMVM X, this silver dish was made to celebrate the decennial of Theodosius' accession in 388, and, therefore it was an official representation of the emperor. But there is no sign of Christianity.

The hippodrome of Constantinople was the space where the emperor publically manifested himself to the population. In the pedestal of the obelisk of Theodosius, erected in the 4th century in the centre of the hippodrome (fig. 5), the emperor is represented within the *kathisma* (a sort of box-seat) surrounded by members of the court and the Army, but even in this case there is no sign of Christianity, even in form of symbols of the cross. Just like Constantine earlier in the century, Theodosius was living in a society still characterized by different beliefs and the art in part depicts this 'caution' negotiation. Sicily was part of the senatorial nexus and Theodosius needed to negotiate with aristocracy in order to rule the province. We will see in the next chapters how complex and heterogeneous the Sicilian society was at that time and how the

mediation between the Imperial court, the Church and the senators influenced the history of Sicily.



Fig.10: Replica of the missorium of Theodosius I displayed at the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida, Spain. The emperor is represented as flanked by Valentinian II, Arcadius and the army (Parada López de Corselas 2007).



Fig.11: Istanbul-Constantinople – Base of the obelisk of Theodosius I representing the imperial family and the court attending games at the circus (Jansoone 2007).

On the other hand, the reign of Constans II was a mix of ideological and political frustrations. Despite from the fifth to the sixth century being occupied by Ostrogoths, Franks and Langobards the western territories (fig. 6) and in particular Italy – so symbolically, economically and

strategically important for the Byzantium – were considered by the Byzantine imperial ideology as not renounceable. The long and exhausting wars against the Vandals in North Africa and the Ostrogoths in Italy undertaken by Justinian in the sixth century were the result of this thought. Procopius describes a dialog between the Byzantine general Belisarius and the Ostrogothic embassy during the war, which offers some guide to understanding the Byzantine perception towards the western territories.

“For Theodoric was sent by Emperor Zeno in order to make war on Odoacer, not in order to hold the dominion of Italy for himself. [...]. And though Theodoric disposed of the tyrant in a satisfactory manner, in everything else he showed an extraordinary lack of proper feeling; for he never thought of restoring the land to its rightful owner.”

(Proc. *Gothic Wars* VI.6.23–6)

The expedition of Constans II in Italy in 663 and his arrival in Syracuse, should be seen within this thought, although, as it will be shown later Chapters, he had a different strategic plan that was targeted on designing a western *limes* to Arab expansion in North Africa.

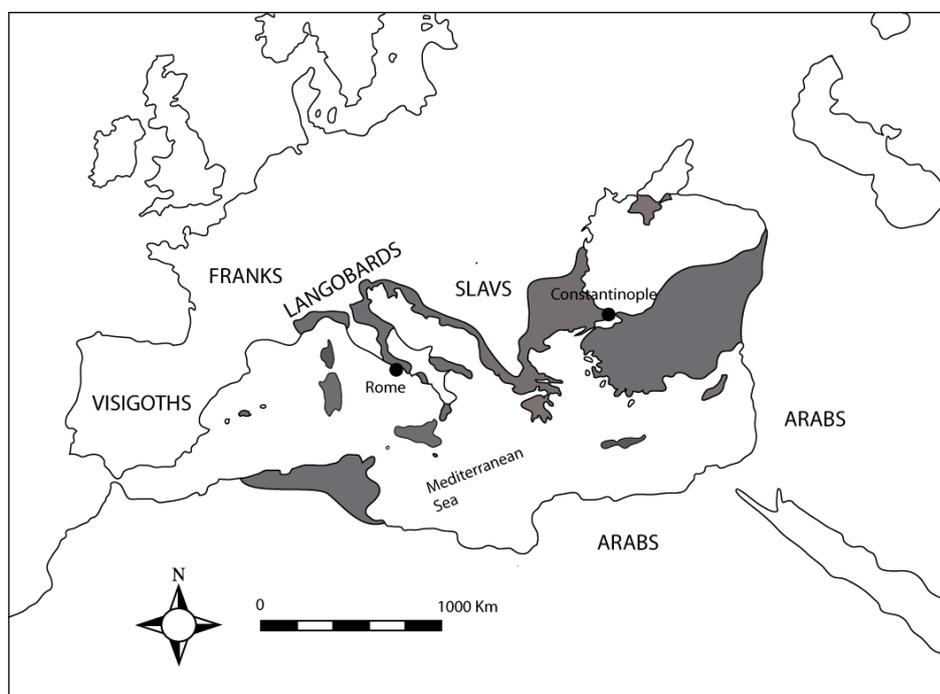


Fig.12: The Byzantine Empire at the time of Constans II.

In fact, this plan was continually frustrated. Soon after Justinian's death in 565, the conquered western territories began to be progressively eroded by Franks, Visigoths and Langobards. In Italy, at the beginning of the seventh century, the Byzantine control was reduced to Liguria, the coastal part of the Po valley and the North Adriatic, the Pentapolis, the areas of Rome, Naples, part of Apulia and Calabria, Sardinia and Sicily. The reality was that the Byzantine Empire was not economically and militarily able to maintain its sixth century frontiers spanning North Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, North Italy and the Balkans. The reason for these losses should be found in the pressure caused in the sixth/seventh centuries by the Slavs in the Balkans and the Persians on the southern *limes* (Zanini 1994: 79–80).

Across the whole time period, there was an increasing role played by the Church. From the early Christian clusters documented around the mid-third century in Syracusan catacombs to the time of Constans II, the Church, as a result of a long process, increased enormously its capital and its political influence in the province. We will see that the role of the Church in Sicily was strictly connected with the rising importance of the island as food supplier for Italy. The foundation of Constantinople and the consequent switch of the grain production of Egypt to the new capital, the early fifth century rebellions in North Africa and its later occupation by the Vandals, all played in favour of Church interests in Sicily. Becoming the major grain producer and supplier after the mid-fifth century, Sicilian Church's properties turned into more valuable possessions and the more the Church became important the more the local elites donated their lands to the Church, seeking to share its rising power. As will be illustrated, letters of Pope Gregory the Great offer us precious information about the attraction of Sicilian properties by the Church.

Within the Western Mediterranean provinces, Sicily represents a unique case study which allows us to observe the development of Roman society and the progressive effects of its Christianization, down through the early middle Ages without the traumas suffered in other western provinces. Civil wars, Germanic invasions or migrations affected the territories of the Empire on different levels and with different consequences (for a recent discussion about the fall of Rome and its consequences see Ward-Perkins 2005), Saxons moved to Britain, Visigoths first invaded Italy then Gaul and finally settled in Spain, Franks created a kingdom in Gaul, Vandals moved through Europe and founded the Vandal kingdom in North Africa, but Sicily, despite its economical and strategic position, was spared.

In comparison with other provinces, Sicily was a relatively peaceful place – with the exception of the raids by Vandals in the second half of the fifth century – and it maintained through the centuries a vital and strategic position. Moreover, Sicily possessed a key military and strategic

position with regard to the control of both North Africa and Italy, as the expedition of Belisarius in 534 would demonstrate. We will see later how, in the seventh century, this role fell away in the eyes of Constantinople, facilitating the progressive Arab take-over.

Terminology

Both the reigns of Theodosius I and Constans II fit within the label of 'Late Antiquity' (for a debate concerning the Italian late antique studies see Christie 2006: 2–5). However, the time span considered in this thesis is one that has also to deal with a Babel of terms that we need to clarify. The age of Theodosius I is indicated by some scholars as 'late Roman', 'proto-Byzantine', and recurrent in Italian publications is the category *archeologia paleocristiana* (early Christian archaeology). I will refer to late Roman as the period spanning the time of Constantine the Great to the late fifth century because Sicily was, until then, under the administration of Rome. I will try to avoid the label "early Christian", in particular in the Italian connotation that tends to isolate Christianity from the context of the Roman world focusing attention on only one aspect of that time.

And yet, the age of Constans II is generally indicated as the early Middle Ages ('Alto Medioevo' in Italian) or proto-Byzantine period, according to byzantinists (Zanini 1998: 49–80). To avoid overlap and confusion I will use the adjective 'Byzantine' in describing the sixth–ninth centuries Sicilian regional context and cultural background, while the term 'early medieval' will be employed in the description of the wider Mediterranean and west European historical context.

The term 'Late Antiquity' will, however, be used to define the whole span 313 to 668 with the intention of underlining the long phase of transformation (varying from region to region) that this period involved. Of course, it could be argued that the Ostrogothic reign in Italy was neither Roman nor Byzantine; although it is inappropriate to talk about an Ostrogothic era in Sicily, because, despite the efforts of Theodoric's on the island, the physical presence of Goths here was limited – hence the more suited word Late Antiquity. In a similar way, we can talk of Vandal Sicily for only a very brief period – and the impact of this rule is, in many cases, a matter of debate (Merrills and Miles 2010: 130–4) – therefore I will refer to this period still as 'late Roman'.

Thesis Organisation and Questions

This thesis is articulated in six chapters with related sections and a full bibliography which will cover the main aspects of late antique studies in Sicily. Chapter 1 will present and discuss the main and most recent bibliography related to late antique Sicily. Starting from the pioneering excavations run by Salinas and Orsi in the late nineteenth century to the most recent researches, the history of archaeological research will be here defined. The development of excavation and documentation techniques, as well methodological approaches to the subject, has changed considerably through the last decades. The questions I will try to answer here are: what are the contemporary theoretical approaches to late antique Sicilian studies how have these changed, and in which directions are these studies going?

The progressive rise of Christianity is central in the transformation of late antique society and in Sicily, this process has been the subject of study mainly focused in the period spanning the second and fifth centuries– more recently Rizzo, F.P. (2005–06) faced this topic with an excellent analysis. In Chapter 2, I shall draw the religious background of the fourth–fifth century province of Sicily in order to offer an idea of the cultural context that will be archaeologically explored in Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, I will also explore the role of senators in the administration of the province. Which senatorial families governed Sicily? Where did in the Empire these senators have estate? What religious identity did they have?

Chapter 3 is the core of this thesis; here the material evidence of the Christianization of Sicilian cities is detailed explored. In the Italian context the process of moving by Christianity into the urban landscape has been subdivided in three phases (Christie 2006: 94–7; Cantino Wataghin 1995) – the creation of early aggregation foci in sub-urban areas to consolidate the Christian identity in pre-constantinian context; 2 – the emergence of Christianity within the civic space through the construction of churches; 3 – The expansion of the early Christian units with the construction of ancillary structures and an articulated net of monasteries, hostels and hospitals. Does this pattern fit the Sicilian case? Do we observe similarities or differences? In the Sicilian case a fourth phase named the “Byzantinization” of the intramural space should be added. This process, as it will be showed was carried with the occupation of public spaces by the Church, the imperial patronage, the militarization of the society and the introduction of the cult of eastern saints.

The Christianization of urban spaces was a slow process that entailed a new perception of civic spaces and their monuments. This transition saw the foundation of monasteries, shrines, chapels,

but also the disappearance or the conversion of pagan buildings. In general, my attention is focused on the rise of Christianity, but what did happen to the pagan or non - orthodox communities? And, more importantly, what did it mean to be Christian in the fourth and fifth centuries?

The growth of the 'Christian city' in Italian and North African contexts entailed the appearance of burials in the intramural area (Leone 2007: 198–208; Christie 2006, in particular 153–6; Cantino Wataghin 1999). Is this phenomenon documented in Sicily as well? Does it have distinctive characteristics?

However, in the transformation of late antique city, we can observe a re-definition of the domestic space and a different use of Classical public monuments. How did residential quarters change through the late antique period in Sicily? What was the fate of public buildings such as theatres, circuses and baths? In Chapter 4 I shall explore these topics and, although documentation is scanty, a preliminary debate and the suggestion of hypothetical trends are possible.

Late Antiquity is also a period of heavy militarization of the urban space: town walls, towers and gates are documented in most important urban centres from the far north of the Empire to the southern *limes*. Such fortifications varied depending on local factors, and in some cases, as for example Aquileia in North Italy the protected urban space was reduced, whereas, in contrast, Rimini maintained its Classical enceinte (see Christie 2006: 202–6; Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998). Sicily is an interesting case study since the island (until the mid-5th century) was not directly involved in the waves of Germanic migrations that deeply affected other provinces of the Empire. How then was the defensive status of late antique Sicily? What do we know about urban fortifications? When Belisarius in 534 landed in Sicily, starting the Gothic War, he did not face strong military opposition, but much later, in the early ninth century, the Arabs at the climax of their power struggled for almost a century to take complete control of the island, implying that Sicily had a powerful system of defences. When was this built? Chapter 5 will follow the development of urban defences from the early emergencies due to the Vandal raids passing to the Gothic War and the Byzantine militarization, seeking to observe the transformation of Sicilian cities from this perspective.

Finally, I shall conclude this research by exploring the economy of the late antique province. I dedicated a particular attention to this final chapter since it is through the economy that we can observe the political choices that lead the late antique and Byzantine Sicily. In particular I will explore and draft urban and rural production, as well as the provincial consumption, focusing

attention on the role of the Church and questioning the part that the local elites had in the management of the provincial landed wealth.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

1.1. *Historical Studies*

A few years ago, an extensive account of historical and hagiographical studies and researches in Sicily was published by F.P. Rizzo (2005–06). The first volume of *Sicilia Cristiana* is entirely dedicated to the discussion of the last two centuries of studies in the field, spanning the antiquarian period until the publication of Rizzo's work. The earliest studies concentrated in the compiling and translation of the several Sicilian hagiographies, but also on writing historical syntheses, as for instance the *Rebus Siculis. Decades dues* by Dominican monk Tommaso Fazello (1558), Vincenzo di Giovanni *La topografia antica di Palermo dal secolo X al XV* (1890) and *Storia di Siracusa Antica e Moderna* in three volumes by Serafino Privitera published in 1879 are some of the most famous examples.

In terms of monumental evidence, we have the description contained in early travel books. Eliana Mauro (2006) traces with great care the development of interest by north European travellers in the 1eighth and 1ninth centuries and the many copies of their travel books conserved at the British Library testify to the success and the attraction that Sicily exercised toward the European cultural elite. Among tourists of the *Grand Tour*, Sicily appeared a romantic and attractive melting point of cultures, of art and architecture of the Mediterranean civilization – '*der Schlüssel zu allem*', 'the key to everything' in the words of Goethe (1817). The illustrations made for these travel books are precious sources of information for many monuments, which are not, as well preserved now, as they were in the 1eighth or 1ninth century and some have been lost. In particular, the detailed drawings by French artist Jan Pierre Houel for the *Voyage Pittoresque des Isles de Sicile de Malte et de Lipari* (1782–7) offer us rare and valuable urban views of Palermo,

Syracuse, Catania or Taormina before the invention of the film camera and before the urban expansion of the 19th–20th century. Rural and isolated late antique monuments are also contemplated in Houel's work, including for example, the fifth century church of S. Croce di Camerina in south-east Sicily, whose dome and central aisle are finely illustrated (fig.1.1).

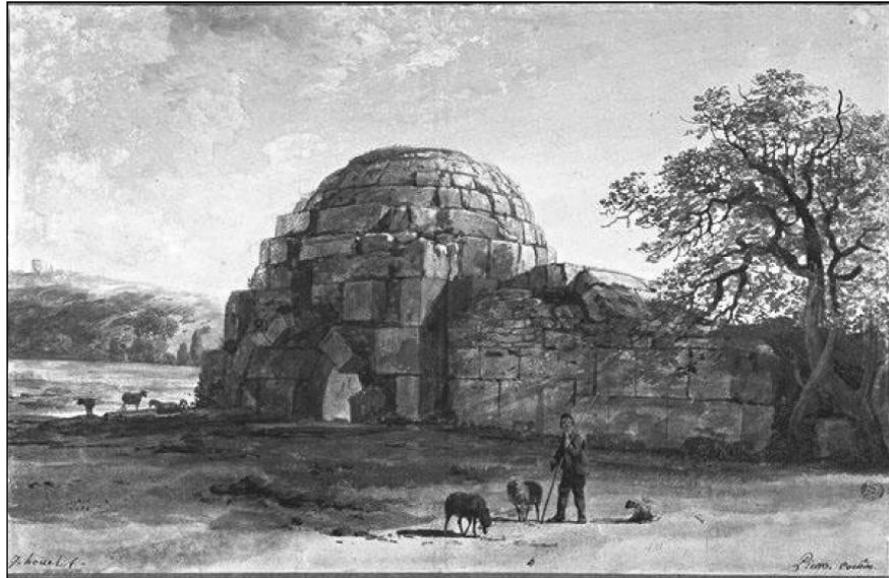


Fig.1.5: Jean Pierre Houel – Drawing (1782–7) of the S. Croce di Camerina church (from Pace 1949, fig. 116).

Nineteenth century archaeological research in the island is marked especially by the works of Antonino Salinas (1841–1914) (fig.1.2) and Paolo Orsi (1859–1935) (fig.1.3). The first was Professor of Archaeology at the University of Palermo and was later director of the Archaeological Museum; it was under his direction that the fourth century basilica of S. Miceli near Alcamo was unearthed (see Chapter 3) and the early investigations of the urban defences of *Lilybaeum* begun. Orsi arrived in Sicily in 1889 when he was appointed to the office of Chief of Excavations and Museums in the Syracusan area. Under Orsi's supervision, catacombs, churches, shrines and settlements, both in town and country, were methodologically and carefully investigated and periodically published. The contribution of Orsi to the archaeology of Sicily is still fundamental in terms of his collection of data, especially considering that it was realized in a time of scant interest for the post-Classical periods. A series of articles regarding Byzantine monuments in the country, as well as its material culture and funerary sites was published posthumously in 1942 under the title of *Sicilia bizantina*.



Fig.1.6: Left – Antonino Salinas director of the Archaeological Museum of Palermo (Pace 1935, fig. 4).

Fig.1.7: Right – Paolo Orsi (Museo Civico Rovereto).

Immediately after World War Two, archaeological activity was limited and some monuments needed restoration from war damage. The early phase of the basilica of S. Francesco di Paola in Taormina was uncovered during these restoration campaigns (see Chapter 3.3). However, the fourth and final volume of *Arte e civiltà della Sicilia antica. Barbari e Bizantini* published in 1949 by Biagio Pace (1889–1955), entirely dedicated to the period spanning the fourth to the tenth centuries, was a remarkable input in the field of post-Roman studies of this period. Pace was, in fact, a great expert of Sicilian archaeology and, as a young student participated directly in some important field projects, such as the excavation in Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo. His research showed aspects of real innovation since the author analyzed the island not only from its historical sources, via primary textual information (hagiographies, archive documents, letters of Popes), as well as archaeological data, but also through local traditions like festivals, songs and even the dialects spoken in the island. The result is a massive amount of data that gives a proper idea of the complexity of the subject.

In the same period, the organization and publication of the first national conference of Christian archaeology (ACNAC) hosted in Syracuse in 1952 marked a further turning point for the discipline prompting new studies. From the early 1950s to the late 1960s, Giuseppe Agnello (1888–1976) published a series of reports on the ‘early Christian archaeology’ in the area of Syracuse; his *Architettura Bizantina in Sicilia* (1952) represented the first attempt to frame a Sicilian architectural pattern for the post-Roman period. Although the volume is largely a collection of descriptions of Byzantine and Norman churches, for the first time attention was being expressly focused on Byzantine studies.

However, in the panorama of late antique Sicilian archaeology, the charismatic character of Santi Luigi Agnello (son of Giuseppe) (1925–2001) can be viewed as the leading researcher from the 1960s to the early 1990s. In S.L. Agnello's works, we observe a rigorous descriptive methodological approach concentrated in particular on the investigation of Syracusan catacombs and churches, which enabled the author to identify the close relationship between the eastern region of Sicily and the Byzantine Near East (1962).

In terms of monographs, *A History of Sicily. Ancient Sicily to the Arab Conquest* (1968) by Moses Finley provides a useful historical synthesis spanning prehistory to the Arab occupation, but despite a good general background of historical events, this book is insufficient for any specific research.

After more than ten years of archaeological investigations in Sicily, Roger Wilson in 1990 published his *Sicily under the Roman Empire. The Archaeology of a Roman Province* – the first modern attempt to study Sicily in a full south Mediterranean context. Wilson was basically influenced by an economic approach and has a decline-led idea of Late Antiquity '*In the fourth century; however, decline may set in here too [coastal towns] at least in some cities – by contrast, for example, with north Africa...*' (1990: 188). In his view, late antique towns slowly declined, since no public urban building activity was undertaken – but he recognizes the continued importance of towns as food supply for Italy. Wilson wrote in a period when little good evidence had been gathered from excavations; he was working with scattered data at the best and before debates on Late Antiquity had begun to be articulated. Nonetheless, Wilson's monograph remains a fundamental part of Sicilian studies. Unfortunately, however, Sicilian scholars after Wilson did not pick up the opportunity to open a new debate and regional consideration of Sicilian archaeology using ideas and directions identified by the British scholar.



Fig.1.8: Published sources of data; top left to right - national and regional journals; bottom - monographs.

If the only regular source of data before and immediately after World War Two were periodicals like the *Atti dell'Accademia dei Lincei* (in which Orsi used to publish his research) or the *Archivio Storico Siracusano* and *Archivio Storico Catanese* – these last two of very limited diffusion – modern debates have come in through journals like *Sicilia Archeologica* and *Kokalos* (this published by the Istituto di Storia Antica dell'Università di Palermo). *Kokalos*, in particular, has become the main publication in the field since the *Soprintendenze* of Sicily habitually publish here the reports of their activities. Luckily, *Kokalos* also has a wider distribution in the international library system (fig.1.4).

In the last 30 years, along with regional journals, several conferences hosted in Palermo, Catania, Syracuse and Agrigento (most recently, Bonacasa Carra and Vitale 2007; Bonacasa Carra 2002; Pricoco and Mannelli 1988) have provided important sources of new data on both history and archaeology. These conferences have been organized in order to explore specific topics as the Christianization of the province (Pricoco and Mannelli 1988), cave settlements (Fonseca 1986), the relationship between the island and Italy (Pricoco *et al.* 1991). The attempt to point out the status of the research and set the future agenda was made during the first *Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia della Sicilia Bizantina* held in Corleone in 1998, and published in 2002. Together with reports of excavations and descriptions of archaeological finds were

presented statements of systematic field-walking; for the first time, attention was directed not only to the collection of finds and the study of architectural styles, but also to the landscape around the main urban centres. At Corleone, Emma Vitale (2002), summarizing research in the field, concluded that study should focus on two directions: firstly, increasing attention on the stratigraphic context with a careful attention to late antique and Byzantine deposits; secondly, investigations should concentrate on the formulation of typology and classes of finds in order to clarify the economy of late antique Sicily.

Research in Sicily is still deeply rooted in and overburdened by traditional approaches based on the history of art and architecture that means that Sicilian archaeology is still not properly at the level of modern international methodological approaches. Important aspects of archaeological study, such as archaeobotanical researches, human and animal remains analysis and chemical study of soils, are systematically neglected, as well as C 14 calibrations that might be of great help especially at sites where finds are poorly known. Urban production is an aspect also currently ignored and this prevents the fuller understanding of ancient town life. In addition, systematic landscape archaeology has only in the last decade entered into regional practice (most notably Buscemi and Tomasello 2008; Bonacini 2007; Fitzjohn 2007; Arcifa and Tommasello 2005; Cambi 2005, Bejor 1986 for a list of Roman and late antique sites, an early programme of landscape archaeology was organized by Johns 1992).

Sadly, we must observe that late antique Sicilian archaeology remains largely outside Italian and international archaeological debates and the consequence has long been the marginalization of Sicilian studies in the international discussion. From 2000 to 2008 only four articles regarding late antique Sicily were published in *Archeologia Medioevale*, the main Italian journal in the field (Cacciaguerra 2008, 2007; Sami 2006, 2005). This failure to communicate reports of excavations or researches, obviously, prevents Sicily from being properly considered among major studies and do not help an international awareness of late antique Sicilian archaeology. Ward-Perkins in his *From Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (1984) simply mentions the well-known conversion of the Temple of Concordia and that of Athena in Syracuse, but Sicily is not an important case study (although, his book focused its attention on to North and central Italy). Enrico Zanini (1998) in *Le Italie bizantine* completely avoids the island and this might not be ascribed only to geographical factors. Most recently Christie (2006) in *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300-800*, while exploring and describing in details mainland Italian cases, only dedicates a few paragraphs to Sicily mainly about famous excavations like the villa of Piazza Armerina or Patti Marina (e.g. Christie 2006: 432–5).

However, when Sicilian late antique archaeology is present in the national Italian debates is almost exclusively under the label of 'Christian Archaeology', so for example, in the presiding of the *Atti del IX Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana* hosted in Agrigento in 2004 and edited by Bonacasa Carra and E. Vitale (2007) Sicily is explored by a good number of articles, whose emphasis is on the Christian aspect.

Finally, debate is still concentrated on single sites or focused within modern provincial borders, whereas it is time to generate a wider view. Thus, South Italy has recently been the subject of good analysis, in particular regions like Puglia, thanks to the research of Giuliano Volpe exploring settlements through the fourth to the eighth centuries (2005), the studies of Paul Arthur on the economy (1998; 1989) or Savino (2005) who dedicated a monograph to the investigation of Campania, where, for the same region, Chiara Lambert (2008) with her *Studi di epigrafia tardoantica e medievale in Campania* offers an exhaustive debate about late antique epigraphy. But in this context of research, Sicilian archaeology is still struggling to find a place in national and international debates.

Sicilian research is also stuck and polarized in debates regarding Latin versus Greek culture, Christians versus Pagans, whereas, as Greco R. (1999) demonstrated, in his study of the funerary practice of fourth century Syracuse, the cultural background was more complicated and varied (see Chapters 2 and 3). Debate is also limited, within a pure economical discussion between supporters of continuity in imports and trades with North Africa and Italy (Cracco Ruggini 1980, Chapter 6), versus pessimists who claim decay in late antiquity (Wilson 1990: 276).

While I am submitting this thesis two books: *La Sicile de Byzance à l'Islam* edited by A. Nef and V. Prigent in 2010 and *La Sicilia bizantina: Storia, città e territorio* edited by M. Congiu, S. Modeo and Massimo Arnone are both in printing. In addition, a PhD thesis submitted in 2009 at the University of Wien by Susanne Metaxas approached Sicilian Byzantine archaeology from the material culture point offering a useful and interesting discussion about production and consumption in Sicily from the sixth to the ten centuries.

1.2. Primary Sources

Primary sources have a valuable part to play in understanding late antique Sicily. I opened this thesis citing Cicero's description of Syracuse from the *Verrine* because it gives a proper idea of

how extraordinary and important Syracuse – as, probably, many other centres of the island – was in the first century B.C. In the next chapters, we will see how the landscape of Syracuse (and the other towns of Sicily) was gradually altered, in terms of creation of new foci, production areas and alterations of the road system that entailed a different urban space from Cicero's description.

The second and third volumes of *Sicilia Cristiana* by F.P. Rizzo (2005–06) investigate the early documents and the hagiographies compiled both in Latin and Greek from the fourth to the eighth centuries. These represent an important source of information concerning the heterogeneous early Christian community in the island and the presence of heretical aspects to be discussed in Chapter 2. However, these texts need to be handled carefully since Byzantine hagiographies often reflect the political and cultural contemporary background and might be of arguable reliability. The life of St Marcellinus, for instance, claims the Syracusan bishop as being a disciple of St Peter, yet indicates his martyrdom came in the 3rd century under Gallienus (*ibid.* 2005–06, II, 1: 79–82).

As explained in the Introduction, the *Gothic War*, written by Procopius, is a relevant source in the understanding the roots of the Byzantine ideology towards the Western territories. In addition, Procopius uses to describe the existence of a urban defensive system in Syracuse and Palermo, as well as to illustrate the importance of Sicily in the agricultural production and food supply for the Byzantine Army during the Italian campaign (see Chapter 6).

The letters of Pope Gregory the Great regarding Sicily have been widely studied (e.g. Rizzo, R. 2002; Richards 1980; Pace 1949). This corpus of correspondence between the Pope and the Sicilian religious and civil authorities describes, often in great detail, the administration of Church properties in the island, but also the political tensions between the Imperial officials, the Governor and the local bishops. Gregory's words also offer an idea of the relationship between the Christian community and other religious groups, specifically Jewish, but heretical clusters are also mentioned (Chapter 2.1). I have broadly used Gregory's letters to illustrate the foundation of monasteries and their management by abbots or private owners (Chapter 3.4), since there is still a gap of archaeological information about this topic.

In the exploration of temple conversions, key is the Life of St Gregory of Agrigento (Life of St Greg.), as from the words of seventh century abbot Leontios we learn about the ritual of the conversion of the temple of Concordia in Agrigento. Furthermore, in the Life of St Gregory we have a good description of the political background and local interest within the Church of Agrigento that led the bishop to be arrested and prosecuted in Rome, before finally being released.

Chronologically, the later textual sources used here are the letter of Abbot Theodosius – written after his capture followed the Arab siege of Syracuse in 878 and reported by Michele Amari in his *Storia dei Mussulmani di Sicilia* (1854) and translated to English by Crawford (1901) (Chapter 5) – and the medieval list of Syracusan bishops named *Archetipum* (*Episcoporum Syracusanorum numeros*). The trustworthiness of the *Archetipum* has been debated, in particular for the early names of bishops of the second to the 3rd centuries; however, its reliability for the period covering the fourth and fifth century might be acceptable (Rizzo, F.P. 2005–06, II, i: 111–12), since material evidence, such as the inscription documented by Privitera (see Chapter 3.3) and the supposed chronology of some Syracusan churches, matches with the information of the list.

Inscriptions can provide a vivid account of the time in terms of contemporary rhetoric and historical data. So, for instance, the funerary inscription of Julia Florentia is a touching description of mourning in the early fourth century, but it also gives us information about the *corrector* and the existence of a shrine (Chapter 3.5). The epitaph of Adelfia carved in a stunning sarcophagus informs us about the religious identity of Syracusan elite in the late fourth or early fifth century (see Chapter 2.1). Finally, the *Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire* (PLRE, vols 1–2) contains several inscriptions related to late antique Sicily and these volumes have been of fundamental importance in the writing of Chapter 2.2 where the religious identity of the Sicilian governors and their landowning are discussed.

Chapter 2

The Religion and Politics in fourth- and fifth-Century Sicily

2.1. *Sicilian Christianity in the fourth- and fifth- Century*

The Christianization of Sicily has been debated at length within Sicilian studies with, on the one side, supporters of a quite rapid and early conversion of the province, completed in southern Italy by the end of the fourth, or at the beginning of the fifth century (Otranto 1991) and, on the other side, advocates for a slower process (Pricoco 1997–8; Rizzo, F.P. 1988–9, 1980–1; Siniscalco 1987). The debate has also been concentrated on the discussion regarding the claimed apostolic origin of Sicilian Christianity on the basis of the fact that St Paul spent three days in Syracuse while on the way to Rome in A.D. 59 (*Acts of Apost.* 28, 11–12). Unfortunately, in spite of all the effort in exploring early Sicilian Christianity, we have to admit that we possess very few and weak data and the debate is stuck by limited information. In sum, the main events used to prove the development and the importance of the early Christian community are: the attendance of the Council of Arles in 314 by the Syracusan bishop Cresto (Rizzo, F.P. 1980–1: 387), the participation of an unknown Syracusan bishop at the Council of Serdica in 343 (Otranto 1991: 50–2; 63–4), as well as the attendance of representatives of the Sicilian Church at the Council of Antioch in 363 (Siniscalco 1987: 83; Pace 1949: 45) and, finally, the organization on the island of a Council held in 365–6 and probably hosted in Catania or Syracuse (Pace 1949: 40). However, despite this, we do not know of the actual role of the Sicilian clergy in the theological disputes; although, at least the involvement of Sicilian representatives in the Christological debate indicates a certain degree of importance and competence.

Written sources are poor regarding the religious context of Sicily in the fourth and fifth centuries. The complaints and the reproaches, periodically addressed by religious authorities to Sicilian abbots about non-orthodox Christian lifestyles and morality, concern bad habits rather than different forms of Christian orthodoxy. So, for example, when in 384 St Jerome in the *Epistula ad Marcellam de Onaso* argued with the presbyter Onasus about ethics in the community of Segesta (Rizzo, F.P. 2005—06, II, i: 126), he was just stigmatizing a non-Christian behaviour. In the same period; however, Jerome in the *Praefatio in lib. IV Jeremiae* condemned an uncertain doctrine named *impeccantia* in Sicily, confirming the existence of heretics in the island (*ibid.*: 126, II, ii: 272). The existence of heretical beliefs in Sicily is also confirmed by a letter sent in 414 to St Augustine by a Syracusan land owner named Ilarius, who was concerned by the presence in Sicily of Pelagius who was gathering up converts (*ibid.* II, i: 148–52). Pelagianism found a tolerant audience and approval in Rome and Carthage and so it is most probable there were followers of this doctrine on the island too. Concerns about Pelagianism by the Church, led Augustine and Jerome to contest Pelagius' heretical creed with a series of texts including the *De natura et gratia* by Augustine and the *Dialogus contra Pelagianos* by Jerome (*ibid.*: II, i: 148–52).

Our knowledge of non-Christian beliefs dramatically drops in the fifth century and it is only from a letter sent by Pope Gregory the Great in 593 to the bishop of Tindari that we are informed about the presence of *Angelii* worshipers (Greg. *Let.* III.59) (see Chapter 3.6) (fig.2.1).

Archaeology is therefore central in filling the gap of information in this topic. Examination of the finds collected from the funerary areas of Syracuse, R. Greco (1999) demonstrated how Christianity co-existed with other cults for the wide of the fourth century. In the Syracusan catacomb of S. Giovanni, the contemporary presence of a Gnostic inscription (Agnello, S.L. 1953: 51 n. 103; 103–04), an epigraph concerning devotion to angels (Orsi 1915: 203–05), as well as lamps with erotic motifs (Greco, R. 1999: 84–7), document a more complicated and shadowy religious background than the simple dichotomy between pagans and Christians. Other emblematic cases are the Syracusan *hypogea* Ippolito I and II explored and illustrated by G. Agnello. Here, hundreds of lamps with Christian and non-Christian decorations were left as part of the funerary ritual. This hazy religious background persisted through the fifth century – and probably until the sixth – and was not limited to Syracuse. In the necropolis of the Vescovato, on the small island of Lipari off the north coast of Sicily (Chapter 3.5) were found burials with objects decorated with Christian, pagans and Jewish motifs, such as lamps, interred in the same area until the mid-fifth century (Bernabò Brea 1988: 83–103; Agnello S.L. 1988: 165–70). The late fifth-century Greek inscription of Proba, also found in this necropolis, with its reference to the Catholic

faith, indirectly attests to the presence of non-Catholic followers – in the opinion of S.L. Agnello (1988: 83–103) these were Arians. Of later date, a series of carved lead tablets containing magical formulae in Greek or using the Hebrew alphabet uncovered in the rural areas of Camarina on the south-east coast and Cefalù on the north coast (Cordaro 1997–8a-b: 293–7; 607–12; Manganaro 1994, 1989) document the presence of non-Christian clusters between the fifth and sixth centuries.



Fig.2.6: In Sicily several late antique non-Christian inscriptions are known. The first epitaph here illustrated was found in Comiso and contain a prayer of Paul's vineyard. The second inscription was found in Syracuse and contains an incomprehensible text written using Greek alphabet (from Wilson 1990, fig. 263 and 264).

However, we would make a mistake in thinking of Sicily as an exceptional, late case of Christianization in the Mediterranean context. Enlarging the view to other provinces of south Italy, we observe similarities in the diffusion of the new faith. In Campania, for example, despite an early small community in *Puteoli*, Christianity spread slowly and the epigraphic context shows an uncertain attribution until the time of Constantine (Lambert 2008: 127–8). But, if the epigraphy is useful to follow the modes of communication of the personal faith or the way Christianity was communicated from ecclesiastics to citizens, inscriptions also offer us a pre-eminently urban and Christian point of view and we still lack data regarding the development of the new faith in rural areas. In Atripalda, a small centre near *Abellinum*, according to Rotili (2007: 993), non-Christian groups are claimed as documented from burials set alongside Christian inhumations, but the author does not explain how Christian and pagan burials are different and in general we should be careful with the binary opposition between pagan and Christian identity in funerary contexts.

In Sardinia, the recently excavated necropolis of Pill'e Matta presented fourth- and fifth-century burials containing several goods like plates and bowls in ARS (in particular Hayes 61B, 67, 91A), glass vases and African lamps decorated with Christian and Jewish motifs (Salvi 2007). However, despite many researches about the distribution of Christian artefacts in the rural or urban landscape, the modes of Christian diffusion and the connection between the new faith and the various pagan beliefs remain a field to be explored. The recent *Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Christiana* (Bonacasa Carra and Vitale 2007), in spite of offering a wide point of view and insights into fourth- and fifth- century Christian archaeology, does not in fact dedicate space to the analysis of the relationship between Christians and pagans and the potential of syncretism (see Chapter 3.5).

The theories concerning the social status of early Christian faithful run between a Marxist idea of low classes of poor and slaves, as early adherents, to a “middle/high class” acceptance and support of the new religion (Stark 2006: 29–37) (fig.2.2). The majority of the population of the Roman Empire was made of low class citizens and it is probable for this reason that we have an over-representation of Christians from this social status, but the involvement of some part of the Roman elite has today been recognized. According to Salzman (2002: 125–7; for this debate see also the works of Brown 1978 and Macmullen 1997, 1984), the success of Christianity among the imperial bureaucracy can be identified through the absence of ties between the provincial elite, of non-senatorial origin, and the traditional Roman families. These local elites were more prone to follow the example of the emperor. Finally, the emperor favoured Christian officers in order to create a new tie between his person and the Christian bureaucracy. As the general idea of a fast and peaceful diffusion of Christianity is based on textual sources – therefore studies reflect the side of the winners. But, as we will see below, when we enter the field of archaeology, finds can tell us a different story.



Fig.2.7: The sarcophagus of Adelpia is a stunning example of a “middle class” Christian funerary monument dated to the late fourth or early fifth century. Adelpia was the wife of the Syracusan Comes Valerius and had a monumental inhumation in the catacomb of S. Giovanni (from Wilson 1990, fig. 265)

2.3. The Correctores and Consulares of Sicily in the Fourth–Sixth Centuries

There are ways we can explore the resistance to the new religion from parts of Sicilian society. Despite some success, especially among the urban ‘middle class’, the new faith met a strong opposition from within the senatorial elite who governed the island and were the prime landowners. The official support of the Christian faith by Constantine inaugurated a period of tensions and opposition between the emperor and its court of the senators. To counter the traditional senatorial families, the Emperor tried to attract new non-aristocratic wealthy families, appointing them to the senatorial rank. Under Constantine and Constantius II the number of senators, in fact, increased from about 600 to c. 2000 in 359 (Salzman 2002: 31). The Emperor also consolidated his alliance with the army commanders through oaths of loyalty granted with gifts (Stephenson 2009: 8), as for example the gold *fibulae* carved with the inscription celebrating Constantine (see Donati and Gentili 2005). In the process of appointment of Christians to high positions, the short reign of Julian (361–3) represent a turning point. Under Julian, traditional Roman senatorial families were again preferred in the administration of the Empire. After Julian’s death, Jovian re-established Christianity as an official imperial religion, although, until the reign of Theodosius I, pagan senators were still being elected to prominent positions, such as provincial governors (tab. 2.1).

Reign	Christian	Pagan	Unknown	Number
Constantine (317–37)	56%	18%	26%	55
Constantinus and Constans (337–50)	26%	46%	28%	43
Constantius (351–61)	63%	22%	15%	27
Julian (361–63)	18%	82%	0%	17
Valentinian (364–78)	31%	38%	31%	32

Valens (364–78)	39%	25%	36%	36
Gratian (375–83)	50%	11%	39%	44
Valentinian II (383–92)	32%	32%	36%	19
Theodosius I (379–95)	27%	19%	54%	83
Arcadius and Honorius (395–423)	34%	12%	54%	161
Theodosius II and Valentinian III (408–55)	48%	4%	48%	157

Tab. 2.1: Religion affiliation of senators appointed as Consuls or Prefects from 317–455 (after Stark 2006: 191). Stark table is based on Burners' (1995) study of office positions held by Roman aristocrats (1995).

On the other hand, some Senators responded by financing usurpers like Flavius Eugenius (?–394) whose defeat by Theodosius at the battle of the river Frigidus cost the life of the pagan Sicilian Governor Virus Nicomachus Flavianus. However, the conservative aristocracy underwent slow erosion until a final and complete adhesion to Christianity in the late fifth century.

Scholars approaching the theme of the Christianization of the senatorial elite, split in two parties, both intriguingly supported by contemporary written sources. On the one hand, according to the Christian poet Prudentius (348– c. 413), all senators embraced the new faith soon after Constantine's victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge: 'That day/The Senate glorified the cross and adored/The name of Christ, borne by avenging troops' (Prud. *Contra Symm.* 1.493–5; see also Barnes and Westall 1991). On the opposite side, Zosimus (fl. c. 490–c. 510) was a pagan who in his *New History* described the resistance of pagans to conversion. Therefore, the questions are: when did senatorial elite convert to Christianity, and why did they do it? Who were the first to transfer? What benefits were there to "resist"?

In *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (2002), M.R. Salzman, analyzing the lives of 414 western senators through inscriptions, textual sources and archaeological data, proposes a slow and non-uniform transfer and adhesion to Christianity. Some patterns emerge: for example, senatorial families from Gaul and Spain of relatively new appointment converted faster to Christianity rather than senatorial families of old tradition from Italy (2002: 86–93). We will see

below how the Sicilian case appears more conservative and connected with the Italian senatorial families' context.

Late antique Sicily was administered by a high ranking officer of senatorial origin (*Vir Clarissimus*) named *Corrector* and, after 330, named *Consularis*. Thanks to surviving information in written and archaeological sources, it has been possible to speculate about the religious affiliation of some of the Sicilian Governors up to the early sixth century – however, we should wonder how far pagan titles were a proof of religious affiliation or just tradition. Thus, *Vir Clarissimus* L. Aradius Valerius Proculus was, in the words of Symmachus, a zealous pagan: '*Olli semper amor veri et Constantia, simplex Caelicum cultus*' (Symm. *Lett.* 1.2.4). Symmachus' description is confirmed by the offices L. Aradius Valerius Proculus held in the traditional Roman religion: according to an inscription found in Rome, he was *Augur*, *Pontifex Maior*, *Pontifex Flavialis*, as well as *Quindecemvir Sacris Faciundis* (CIL: VI, 1690; see also PLRE, 1: 747). Proculus had also held important positions in Africa, Callicia, Numidia, Thracia and was appointed *Consularis Siciliae* from 325 to 330. Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus Honorius (early fourth century–c. 364) was *Pontifex deae Vestae* (CIL: VI, 1741) and *Pontifex dei Solis* (CIL: VI, 1739-42, see also PLRE, 1: 651–3). Virius Nicomachus Flavianus was one of the most important politicians of the second half of the fourth century and he was a proud pagan holding the office of *Pontifex Maximus* (CIL: VI, 1783; see also PLRE, 1: 347).

Tracing the material effects of the pagan politics of Sicilian senators, I have focused attention on the way local aristocrats displayed their status. The life of an aristocrat required an enormous amount of wealth spent in the construction of huge and richly decorated *villae*, in the maintenance of the large estates, in rich clothes, hunting, public duties (meals, celebrations) and clients. The mosaic floor decorations unearthed in the villa of Piazza Armerina are of great help in the understanding of the style of the aristocracy. The *dominus* (fig.2.3) of this villa has been initially identified with the *Augustus* Maximian Herculeus (250–310), but from an excellent analysis of the decoration, Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo (1962) has convincingly demonstrated that the owner of the villa was more probably Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, *Consularis* of Sicily in 364–5. This villa, as well as those of Patti Marina and Tellaro (see Chapter 6) and that which belonged to Melania the Younger described by Gerontius (*Life of Mel.* 18) are the material expression of senators belonging to old tradition with interests in the island. Luckily, in the case of Piazza Armerina the representation in one of the fourth century mosaic-floors of a pagan ritual, proves the non-Christian faith of the owner, as similar iconography was unacceptable to Christians (for the representation of power and identity see Scott 2004) (fig.2.4).

However, it is hard to define any religious affiliation in the case of owners of other *villae* and more studies are needed to shed light on this subject.

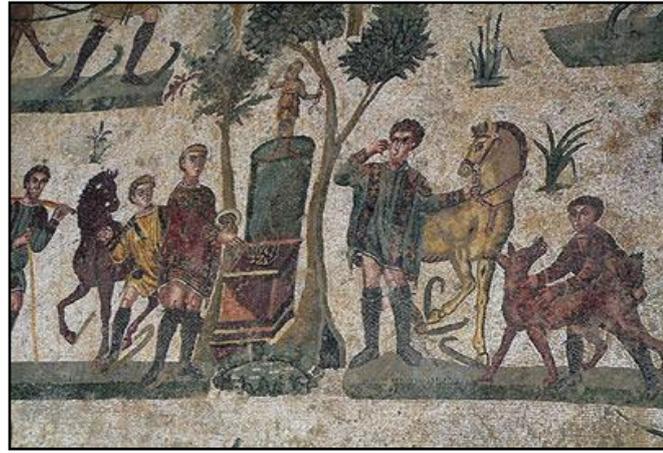


Fig.2.8: Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina. The dominus represented in the mosaic has been identified with the Senator *Virus Nicomachus Flavianus* (courtesy A. Zavatta)

Fig.2.9: Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina. Representation of sacrifice to *Diana*, goddess of hunt (courtesy A. Zavatta).

The townscape was the place where the pagan aristocracy actively opposed the Imperial-Church. Unable to erect new temples, senators turned to patronize the erection of statues, the restoration of public buildings or financing games in order to display publicly their status. At the same time, the Church opposed paganism by erecting churches, hospitals and shrines. In Syracuse, the construction of the basilica of S. Paolo facing the temple of Apollo was erected in the late fourth century, when pagan groups were still present. In Catania, the theatre was restored and adapted to host water games in the late fourth or early fifth century (see Chapter 4). These works might have been the object of celebration, as suggested by the inscription found during the excavation and mentioning the *Consularis* *Facundus Porfyrius Mynatidius* (CIL: X, 7014; see also PLRE, 1: 614; PLRE, 2: 769; Wilson 1990: 187; 1988: 135; Mazarino 1980, II: 347–50):

Vernantibus

Saeculis ddd (ominorum) nnn(ostrorum trium)

Genio splendidae ur-

Bis Catinae

Facundus Porfyrius

Munatidius v(ir) c(larissimus),

Con(sularis) (?) eiusdem

Facundus Porfyrius Mynatidius dedicated games to the splendid Genii of the city of Catania – a dedication that a Christian would hardly have displayed. Circus games and chariot races are known from written sources in Catania and Syracuse until the mid-fifth century and they were financially granted by aristocrats like Symmachus (see Chapter 4) and the mosaic representing a chariot race uncovered in Piazza Armerina might allude to such a potential economic support and attendance of circus games in Sicily's major cities.

In contrast, the restoration of the *Praetorium* (governor's palace) documented by an inscription found in Via Matteotti (Ortigia) in Syracuse and dated to the last quarter of the fifth century (Chapter 4) cannot be taken as a manifestation of pagan public patronage, since the *Praetorium* was not symbolically related with any traditional cult, but was connected more with the manifestation of imperial authority and civic life.

Also controversial is the reading of a second epitaph discovered in the *cavea* of the theatre of Catania and referring to the restoration of a group of statues, the *Pii Frares*, which decorated the public monument (Mazzarino 1980, II: 355–61).

[fl]ammi[i] fugas fratre[s]

Pietatis maxima dona

Quos tulit hostilit[as]

Reddidit hos Merulus [v. c.]

Et spectabilis consul[aris]

[p]rovinciae Siciliae

These statues represented local heroes of Hellenistic date who were symbols of devotion and family love; most probably these sculptures were the same ones mentioned by Claudian in his *Carmina Minora* at the end of the fourth century (Claudian, *Carm. Min.* XVIII; Cameron 1970: 392). On the basis of Merulus' title *Vir Clarissimus et Spectabilis*, Mazzarino dated the inscription to the very end of the fifth century and most probably to the reign of Theodoric, suggesting that the

word *hostilitas* might refer to Vandal raids (1980, II: 336–54). I think this dedication should have a different interpretation.

Vandals attacked Sicily several times after the conquest of North Africa, and they sacked *Lilybaeum* and besieged Palermo in 440–41, but, in this last case, probably without any success. They pillaged the south coast of Sicily in 456, but they were defeated by Ricimer, and during another incursion in 465, they were beaten by the Count Marcellinus (Idatius, *Chron.* 227; Courtois 1964: 190–3). We do not have any secure information about Vandal raids against Syracuse or Catania – although they led attacks on Calabria, therefore crossing the area of the Strait of Messina. The fact that the constitution released by Valentinian III (Cod. Theod., *Nov. Valent.* I, 2, 1,) that reduced tax payments for the areas which had been the subject of Vandal assault and dated between 438–42 reports: ‘*Syracusanus vero, Catinensis, Aetnensis, Lilybetanus, Thermitanus, Soluntinus...*’. These do not automatically imply an occupation of these cities, but more probably refers to the fact that their territories were damaged in their ability to contribute to the fiscal system. Indeed, the politics of Genseric toward Sicily and Italy was that of a political blackmail of Rome, preventing collection of any income from the province in order to negotiate political agreements with Rome. In addition, Catania and Syracuse were cities well defended by walls and towers (see Chapter 7) and their conquest might have been too difficult for Genseric’s forces – whose priority was the consolidation and the recognition of his position by Rome. We should also bear in mind that Genseric never arranged a consistent expedition to permanently occupy the island (see discussion in Merrills and Miles 2010: 129–34) and that Sicily was continuously administrated by a Latin governor until 526 (more details about the Vandal impact on Sicily will be explored in Chapter 7). Looking to the setting of the theatre in Catania’s urban landscape, we note that this monument is built exactly in the centre of the town, therefore, if, as Mazarino suggests, the statues of the *Pii Fratres* brothers were damaged or destroyed by Vandals it would signify that the town was taken and heavily plundered by Vandal raiders – yet we lack historical or archaeological support for this.

I suggest that the term *hostilitas* does not refer to external enemies, but in fact to internal opponents. The high degree of syncretism archaeologically documented in Sicilian towns of course does not deny the possibility of urban conflict by Christian mobs (Sauer 2003). Notoriously, statues were often subjects of violence by crowds of fanatics (Christie 2006: 92–4; Bayliss 2004). In Rome, the City Prefect Gracchus publicly mutilated a statue of Mithras (Christie 2006: 92) and, although such public acts of hostility centred on statues were not frequent, they might have occurred. Written sources do not mention any specific pagan-Christian religious conflict in the

island; however, this silence does not exclude tensions between different groups of faithful or political factions that may have led to the desecration of the *Pii Fratres* statues. However, the inscription's words would fit the idea of a celebration and a symbolic effort undertaken by a provincial governor in the restoration and replacement of the sculptures in a central public building. If this is correct, what interpretation can we draw? Was it a religious achievement attempting to affirm the presence in Catania of a traditional Roman religious group at the top of the urban administration and one which was capable of showing proudly its identity? Or did these statues lack any religious connotation and by the late fifth century were they perceived by citizens just as urban decorations of public interest? Indeed, there are several theories regarding the display and the restoration of statues in Late Antiquity spanning from the 'antiquarian' collection of nostalgic objects belonging to a *Grand Era*, to a more triumphal Christian celebration of mutilated sculptures, as an evident victory over paganism (Kristensen 2010). However, an idea of 'pagan' opposition documented by restorations should be also considered. In the case of Catania, without more information, we can only speculate, but the epigraph of *Consularis Merolus* remains an intriguing statement.

In Table 2.2 are indicated the towns where inscriptions mentioning the Sicilian governors have been discovered and therefore denote the places of potential economic interest by the *vir clarissimi* (fig.2.5); in the central column I identify the provinces where *consulares* held positions – presumably areas where they had landed properties. So, for example, L. Aradius Valerius Proculus was appointed to important offices in North Africa and in northern Spain (*Callegiae*) as *Peraequator Census*, an office connected with the collection of taxes; in addition, in the period 325–8, he was *consularis Europae et Thraciae*. This leads me to propose that this *Vir Clarissimus* had properties in North Africa, Spain, Sicily and the Balkans area too. Virius Nicomachus Flavianus was *Vicarius Africae*, as well as Prefect of Italy and *Illiricum* (CIL: VI, 1783 see also PLRE, 1: 347) and he might have had properties in those provinces.

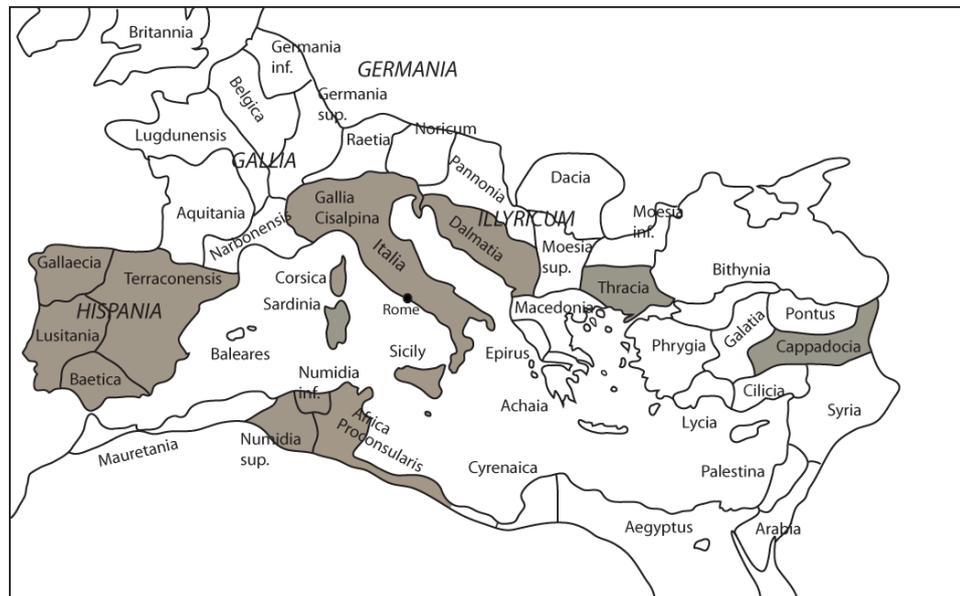


Fig.2.10: Map showing the provinces where Sicilian consulars held positions. It is evident how the economic interests of Sicilian governors spread mainly through the Western Empire.

The Sicilian *consulares* demonstrate landownership chiefly in the west part of the Empire, mainly set in North/South axis: North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Italy – in these cases, particularly in the central and southern regions of the peninsula. It will be extremely interesting, in a future study, to explore if these senatorial properties became at some point Church lands and these estates were administrated. The several possessions owned in the island by the churches of Ravenna, Milan and Canosa (see Chapter 6) suggest a progressive cession of these estates to the Church. Furthermore, much later, from the letters of Pope Gregory the Great, we are informed of the appointment of Sicilian landowners as abbots or abbesses, therefore the aristocracy maintained the control of its properties despite being absorbed by the Church (Chapter 3.6).

Name	Place where inscriptions were found	Non-Sicilian properties
Calvisianus	Catania?	?
Betitius Perpetuus	Mazzara	North Africa?
Domitius Latronianus	Palermo, <i>Lilybeum</i> , Carthage	Spain, North Africa
Domitius Zenofilus	<i>Lilybeum</i> , <i>Thignica</i> (Proconsularis), <i>Lambaesis</i> (Numidia)	Africa, Numidia
C. Valerius Apollinaris	<i>Lilybeum</i>	?

Zoilus	Catania	?
Lucius Valerius Aradius Proculus	Rome, Carthage	Africa, Byzacena, Calletia, Numidia, Rome, Thracia
Alpinus Magnus	<i>Lilybeum, Aleria (Corsica), Salerno (Campania)</i>	Brutium, Campania, Corsica, Lucania
C. Caelius Censorinus	<i>Atella (Campania), Carthage</i>	Africa, Campania, Corsica, Rome, Sardinia
Tettius Facundus		?
C. Maesius Aquillius Fabius Titianus	Ephesus; Roma; <i>Traiana (Thrace); Cumae; Delphi</i>	Asia, Flaminia, Rome Picenum
Anonymus	Mazzara	?
Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus	<i>Thermae Selinuntiae, Rome</i>	Africa, Rome
Fl. Dulcitus	<i>Thermae Selinuntiae</i>	?
Fl. Arsinius	Catania	?
Martinianus	Greg. Naz. <i>Epit.</i> 42	Africa, Cappadocia Rome
Volusius Venustus	<i>Canusium (Apulia)</i>	Apulia, Calabria, Rome, Spain
Virus Nicomachus Flavianus	<i>Leptis Magna</i>	Africa, Byzacena, Illyricum, Italy, Rome
Domnus	Known from <i>Codex Theod.</i> VIII.5.29a	?
M. Valerius Quintianus	<i>Lilybeum</i>	?
Castorius	Cupra Marittima (Picenum)	Italy
Nicagoras	Known from Symm. <i>Let.</i> II, 41	?
Titianus	Known from Symm. <i>Let.</i> V, 74	?
Iulius Claudius Peristerius Pompeianus	<i>Lilybeum</i>	?
Facundus Porfirius Mynatidius	Catania	?
Neratius Palmatus	Syracuse	?
Perpenna Romanus	Syracuse	Rome

Anonymus	Known from Sym. <i>Let.</i> 9. 75	?
Iulius Agrius Tarrutenius Marcianus	Rome	East and Rome
Fl. Liberalis	Catania	?
Fl. Felix Eumathius	Catania	?
Fl. Gelasius Busiris	Syracuse:	?
Cassiodorus	Was <i>Corrector Brutii et Lucaniae</i>	South Italy
Merulus	Catania	?
Gildas	Syracuse	?

Tab. 2.2: List of attested presences

Chapter 3

The Church and Urbanism in Late Antique Sicily

3.1. Introduction

In spite of the presence of Christian communities in the main Mediterranean cities since the first century, it was only from the second half of the fourth century that in Sicily, Christianity became structurally visible in the urban landscape. The progressive takeover of the urban space by the new religion was a slow and long process that had to face and negotiate with the presence of the traditional pagan culture and with the classical civic space.

The existence in Sicily of Christian clusters since the first century has been debated by historians on the base of very weak data (see Chapter 1), but archaeologically we have proof of these small communities – at least in Syracuse – only from the mid-third century, as the original nucleus of the catacomb of S. Maria del Gesù attests. However, at that time, these funerary spaces did not materially impact on, nor change the urban landscape, since they were set in suburban areas already designated for this purpose (e.g. burial). So which were the early steps of Christianity into Sicilian cities?

This section (3.1) will outline the early Christian monuments of the fourth century; some of them have been described and debated in several contributions, most notably Bonacasa Carra (1987; 1982–3); in other cases, in light of new data and from comparisons with other Sicilian examples, I will propose additional potential early Christian buildings not precisely considered. The questions here explored are: 1 – What kind of early Christian buildings do we know of in Sicily? 2 – What was the relationship of these early monuments with the surrounding urban context? 3 – Do we observe any specific pattern?

This section 3.2 follows the progressive consolidation of the urban Church and the impact the construction of its new buildings brought. Did the erection of churches modify the flow of people

using the network of roads? Did the creation of the cathedrals entail the swift of residential or productive areas?

Although, we possess a certain amount of archaeological information, Sicilian towns have never been the subject of a specific research program seeking to clarify the late antique urban development. Section 3.3 aims to fill this gap analyzing the case of Syracuse – since this city is the best documented urban context of Sicily. What does Syracuse reveal about Late antique urban change? Was this city typical of Sicilian urbanism or an exception?

What we miss, in walking within the walls of late antique Sicilian towns is the perception of how strong the presence of the Church in the everyday life will have been. The number of *basilicae*, oratories, shrines and chapels was higher than we can see today and, in particular, we do not see the busy presence of monks periodically performing chants and processions using the urban landscape, as a sort of ritual. Yet, unluckily, despite the information of the letters of Pope Gregory the Great, our archaeological knowledge regarding monasteries is weak. In Section 3.4 urban monasticism and its social and material impact will be considered. In debating urban monasteries, I will also explore the rural religious communities, since these monasteries have, in general, been better studied.

Without doubt, one of the major transformations of late antique urban contexts was the appearance of burials in intramural space. This phenomenon is documented in Sicily as well as Italy, North Africa and Western Europe to reflect the different use and perception of the urban space from Classic period. Insecurity, availability of land within the walls and the movement of the Church are, among scholars, all supposed reasons for the urban inhumation practice. The island features several very well studied funerary sites, such as, for example, the catacombs of Syracuse and the *sub-divo* necropolis excavated in Agrigento by Bonacasa Carra. But how has the phenomenon of urban burials been explained in Sicily? In particular, can we clarify any of the debated causes of this phenomenon?

The funerary ritual practice is also key to understanding the religious identity of the local communities. Traditionally, scholars had offered us a polarized description of the religious background of Sicily split between, on the one hand pagans and, on the other hand Christians. But, archaeology, as well as an unbiased evaluation of textual sources tells us a different story. Paganism did not end with the material rise of Christianity in Sicilian towns, since goods found in necropoleis document a long phase of syncretism between the two religions. This combining was studied first in Syracuse (Greco, R. 1999) but, as it will be shown, it was common practice also in other Sicilian centres. Furthermore, Christianity was until the early sixth century a heterogeneous

faith: heresy and heretics were spread especially in rural areas of Sicily (see Chapter 2.1). Sicily was a melting pot of creeds, from which Christianity finally emerged condemning other cults to oblivion. What can archaeology tell us about the assimilation of non-Christian – and in particular traditional Roman-believers – into the new Christian town?

In Section 3.6, the conversion of pagan temples is investigated; in most cases, these monuments were dismantled, but some were preserved until their final transformation into churches. The most obvious questions are: why were any of these impressive urban monuments preserved? When they were finally reused? With the exception of the temples of Athena and of Apollo in Syracuse and the temple of Concordia in Agrigento, this topic has not met any particular attention in Sicilian studies which traditionally concentrate on the analysis of the temples, Classical phases.

The conversion of Sicilian temples is a subject that it will be here introduced with a preliminary summary of the *status quo* of studies and consequently, I will open a debate concerning the material and political impact of these monuments in the urban space. I shall also explore the data we possess in regard to the presence of converted temples in rural areas, and try and define a potential agenda for future research in the subject. Finally, section 3.8, will put Sicily into a wider context and the Sicilian case will be compared to the Italian background in order to find a potential similarity or differences.

3.2. The Fourth Century Christian Monuments of Sicily

The peculiarity of fourth century Christian architecture is the process of creation and definition of an appropriate set of buildings, which was functional to the new official religious cult. The architects of the Constantinian period found in the basilica the ideal framework, where both religious and official ceremonies were combined in a new interpretation (Krautheimer 1975: 43). Churches, shrines and monumental funerary constructions – all these buildings were “variantions on a theme” reflecting the versatility of the basilica which was well known in the pagan era. Although the most common Constantinian buildings were apsidal halls without aisles, frequent were churches subdivided into the three naves, where both practical purposes and symbolism connected with the ideological concept of the Trinity were realizable (Deichmann 1993: 90). If the pagan temple was a representation of mystery cults, whose knowledge rites and secrets were revealed only to priests or single adepts, the Christian Church was a collective ritual where all the

faithful were asked to participate regularly (see Stark 1997, which interesting study – although, sometimes lacking historical methodological approach – investigates the rising of Christianity among other late Roman cults).

Nowadays, in Sicily, we know of only a very few churches and shrines dating back to the fourth century (fig.3.1), and this restricted number of buildings has been questioned by scholars seeking to understand if this phenomenon was due to a lack of excavations or to a different diffusion of Christianity in the island (Bonacasa Carra 1982–3; Agnello, S.L. 1962: 55–6;). Fourth century Christian monuments are, in fact, archaeologically documented in Catania (Via Dottor Consoli), Syracuse (S. Pietro *intra moenia* and S. Paolo) in Priolo (S. Foca), Agrigento (the ‘Basilichetta’) and Sofiana; therefore, on this basis, all the early Christian structures appear in the central-eastern part of Sicily, while the only contemporary monument known in the west, is the church of Salemi (fig.3.4.4).

A second theme emerging is the identification of a potential original contribution of a regional Christian architecture in the panorama of the fourth century monuments (Agnello, S.L. 1962: 56–8; Pace 1949: 318–63, in particular 328–30). Investigating this topic, the attention of scholars has been focused on open-basilica form; this was a rare fourth or early fifth century building, probably for funerary use, whose external walls were delimited only by arches, leaving the monument open. This specific basilica type is certainly documented in Sicily in the church of Contrada S. Giovanni near Palagonia (c. 35 km from Catania), S. Foca in Priolo, where excavation works were undertaken by P. Orsi (Agnello, S.L. 1962; Pace 1949: 296–8; Orsi 1942: 51–6). Moreover, it has been suggested that the church of S. Maria della Pinta in Palermo might be an open-basilica too (Agnello, S.L. 1962: 69–70), but the monument is no longer extant and in the absence of archaeological investigations this idea cannot be confirmed. Indeed, the open-basilica, as advised by S.L. Agnello (*ibid.*: 79–81), is rooted in pre-Roman Sicilian architecture and, despite being a regional characteristic, the open basilica did not survive the fourth – century, probably because the definition and standardization of the Christian cult occurred in the late years of the century.

The earliest Christian building known on the island is the funerary monument uncovered in Via Dottor Consoli in Catania (Rizza 1964). Excavation works undertaken in 1950s documented the remains of a small, one aisle basilica c. 5.20 m long. and c.4.50 m wide and provided with a *trichora* apse oriented north/west (fig.3.4.1). The monument was extramural facing the road leading the north gate of the town, in an area dominated formerly by the amphitheatre. During the excavation, broad necropoleis, set around the monument and organized in bordered spaces,

were uncovered (Chapter 3.4); the area already had an uninterrupted funerary use, since Hellenistic and Roman burials and memorials were documented.

Not far from the monument, in 1730, during construction works, a funerary inscription carved in Latin and dedicated to Julia Florentia was recovered (Chapter 3.5). Although, other inscriptions were later collected from the zone, the Julia Florentia epitaph is the most important for two reasons: firstly, it is the earliest textual source of devotion in Catania and, secondly, the text mentions the existence of a *memoria martyrum*. It was in the light of these data that Rizza proposed a direct connection between the monument of Via Dottor Consoli and the *memoria martyrum* recorded in the epitaph (Rizza 1964: 593–4). If, in general, the proposal of an early fourth century date for the monument of Via Dottor Consoli is widely accepted by scholars, Wilson noted that the building cannot certainly be related to the epitaph because of its uncertain provenance and, furthermore, he does not agree with the proposed chronology, suggesting a later date (1990: 307). Of course, it is possible that restorations of the monument took place during the fifth century or even later, but Rizza's idea seems to be acceptable and, without doubt, the construction attests the first appearance of the Christian community in the urban landscape of Catania.

The small basilica uncovered by Ernesto de Miro in Agrigento (1980) reveals how early Christian shrines in Sicily were rooted in the local funerary monumental tradition. The so-called "Basilichetta" (De Miro 1980: 142–60) (fig.3.4.2), was erected at the extramural site of a pre-existing tomb dug in the bedrock. Despite being built in a quite isolated area, this shrine was laid along the access road to the town. Unlike the Via Dottor Consoli basilica in Catania, the Basilichetta was not surrounded by a large number of burials. However, its funerary use is confirmed by the presence of two inhumations integrated within the monument and a third burial cut outside the building. According to De Miro, the first graves may be the martyr burials of S. Libertino and S. Peregrino and therefore the small basilica was a *memoria martyrum* erected in the mid-fourth century. Restoration works, mainly done in the apse structure, are dated by the discovery of some coins to around 370 and corroborate the fourth century date for this structure (Rizzo, F.P. 2005-06, II, i: 69–72; De Miro 1980: 157–9).

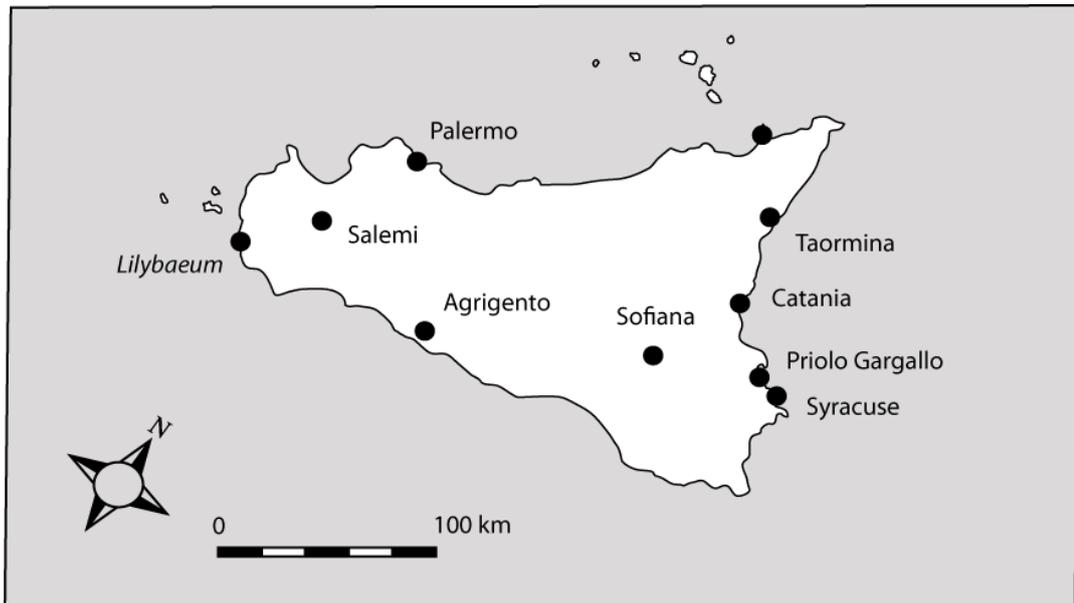


Fig.3.68: The distribution of known fourth century Christian monuments of Sicily.

The former building displays good quality construction techniques: with precisely cut stones; however, it is the formal use of such ‘Roman construction techniques’ that allowed Wilson to argue against the Christian use of the monument (Wilson 1990: 139; 304). In spite of this, De Miro, using archaeological and hagiographical data, provides a persuasive documentation for his hypothesis and we can take this idea in consideration.

In non-urban contexts are known the basilica of S. Foca in Priolo Gargallo, the small monument of Sofiana and, in the western part of Sicily, the church of S. Miceli near Salemi. According to the *Archetipum* (Chapter 3.3), S. Foca was – together with the church of S. Pietro *intra moenia*, S. Paolo, S. Giovanni Battista and that of the Spirito Santo in Syracuse – erected under the supervision of Bishop Germanus in the second half of the fourth century. This monument might have been be of a certain importance if, as the *Archetipum* mention, Germanus was buried here “[...] *positus est in eodem templo*” (Rizzo, F.P. 2005-06, II, ii: 243). S. Foca is a three aisles and single apse basilica erected in stone and measuring c. 18.40 m x c. 11.70 m (Orsi 1942: 51–6) (fig.3.2). The central nave was separated from the lateral aisles through four pillars sustaining three barrel vaults covering the central nave and the two lateral aisles. Orsi considering the good construction techniques, the size and its proximity to Syracuse, was expecting a mosaic floor, frescoes and architectural decorated elements; unfortunately nothing of this was recorded on site. The original floor was a poor earth surface; the walls did not offer any elements to suggest the presence of frescoes and, sadly, no carved stones were collected; certainly, the absence of

ornaments contrasts with the rich and contemporary church of S. Pietro *intra moenia* in Syracuse and that of S. Miceli.

In plan too, the basilica of S. Foca is unusual: in fact, as Orsi recorded, the perimeter walls were built using five arches, clearly walled up only in a later phase. Despite his skills and experience in late antique and Byzantine Sicilian monuments, Orsi did not understand the monument. He firstly advanced the idea of additional lateral aisles forming a peculiar five aisles basilica, but after he had opened some trenches, he admitted he was investigating an church without perimeter walls (Orsi 1942: 51–7). We do not know if the basilica had any funerary use, but the presence of a catacomb less than 500 m distant, might suggest so.

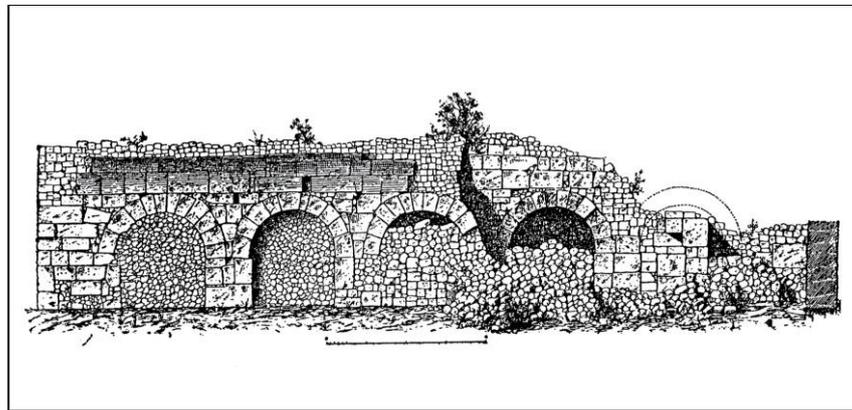


Fig.3.69: Priolo, S. Foca – External eastern facade (from Orsi 1942, fig. 28).

Similar in plan is the basilica excavated in 1893 by Salinas in S. Miceli, a few kilometres from Salemi (fig.3.4.4) (Billotta 1977; Agnello, S.L. 1962: 82; Pace 1949: 318–19). The three aisled building was decorated with a mosaic floor bearing Latin and Greek funerary inscriptions and during the excavation several inhumations were uncovered confirming the funerary use of this basilica, probably serving a nearby village. Detailed analysis of the decorated pavement documented three different phases spanning the fourth to the seventh centuries. The chronology of the early mosaic layer (layer C) has been explored by Billotta (1977) that, through the style and the grammar contained in the inscriptions of Sapricio (CAΠPIKIOC) and Zosimo (ΣΩCIMOY) suggested a fourth century foundation. Billotta explained how the Latin name *Sapricius* – meaning ‘Putrid’ – is a common self-imposed disparaging name frequent in catacomb contexts of the third and fourth century; furthermore, *Sapricius* is mentioned as *servus Christi* (TOY ΔΟΥΛΟΥ COY), another widespread fourth century formula (*ibid.* 42–8).

MNHCCΘH

TIXPICTEC (απ)

PIKIOYTOYΔO (υλο)

YCOY

‘Remember

Oh Christ, your slave Sapricius’

Less than 10 km from the famous villa of Piazza Armerina, was excavated, near Mazzarino, the settlement of *Philosophiana* at which major expansion took place through Late Antiquity and into the Byzantine period (Adamasteanu 1962). During the excavation was uncovered the remains of a small basilica whose original foundation dates back to the fourth century. However, the early monument was neither a basilica nor a church, but, as S.L. Agnello (1967) states a *memoria*, a shrine dedicated to a holy person whose names remain unknown. The basilica developed from the early shrine with a funerary function and, in fact, several the of late Roman and Byzantine period have been excavated near the building (fig.3.4.5).

Generally ignored in the debate concerning early Christian monuments, is the mosaic floor uncovered in 1873 in Carini (15 km from Palermo). Although, a debate about the original use of this decorated pavement is still open – Camerata Scovazzo (1977) suggests a civil use postulating a late Roman villa – more connection to a widely accepted is the idea of a fourth century basilica (Bonacasa Carra 2006: 56; Vitale, E. 2004; Greco *et al.* 1997–8: 366–7).

Finally, recent excavations in *Lilybaeum* and Milazzo may offer new ideas in the field of early Sicilian Christian monuments. The church of S. Giovanni Battista al Boeo might shed light on early Christianity in *Lilybaeum* (Cusenza and Vecchio 2006; Caruso and Tusa 2004; Wilson 1990: 304). The existing church was built in 1576, in place of an earlier building demolished for defensive reasons in 1552. As some documents attest (Caruso and Tusa 2004), the complex was already active in the 1fourth century, as a property of the Basilian Abbey of S. Maria della Grotta in *Lilybaeum*. Despite the modern building showing no traces of its Byzantine phase, archaeological investigations are still collecting interesting information. The church was built on top of the Grotta della Sibilla that was an *hypogeum* space cut in the bedrock to a depth of c. 4.80 m and

subdivided in three rooms (fig.3.3). The main hall is circular in plan surrounded by a dome featuring a skylight; in the middle of this vestibule was cut a circular pool, while smaller apsed rooms are open in the northern and western part of the hall.

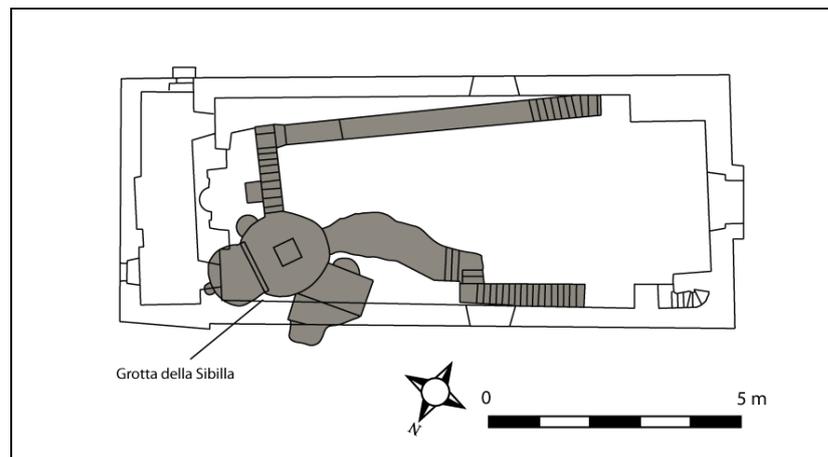


Fig.3.70: Lilybaeum – In grey the Grotta della Sibilla hypogeum and its entrances (modified from Cusenza and Vecchio 2006, fig. 12)

The *hypogeum* is probably of Punic origin and it might have been used as a tomb or a sort of cultural shrine; later on, in the Roman period, this underground space was included in a *domus* (*ibid.*: 99–100) and then, in the fourth century, it was converted into a Christian devotional point. To this phase belongs part of a mosaic floor set in the apsed space and some frescoes whose remains show images related to water (*ibid.*: 100). Certainly, the church had funerary function between the fifth and the seventh centuries, since several burials have been excavated around the monument. Considering the presence of a pool and a spring, one might advance the idea of a baptism connection. The dedication to S. Giovanni Battista (but was it the original dedication?) also seems to support this idea, but at the moment, whilst waiting for the full publication of the site, only hypotheses can be proposed.

Concluding this section, I would like to advance a particular interpretation of a monument that has never been considered in the discussion about early Christianity in Sicily. Excavation conducted in Via Cumbo Borgia and Via Matteo Nardi at Milazzo on the northern coast of Sicily, uncovered an important urban necropolis (see Section 3.5). The graveyard was in use for a time spanning the fourth to the seventh century and the burials were organized around a small building that in the opinion of Tigano was a funerary chapel (Tigano 1997–8a). Notably, the necropolis lay in the piazza in front of the 1seventh century Cathedral – and in the same square, stood the 1fourth century monastery of S. Salvatore. Therefore, despite the different period, the

area maintained a devotional use to stress its religious importance. Was it a shrine as documented in Via Dottor Consoli in Catania? Obviously, in the absence of material proofs, it is not possible to confirm this hypothesis; although, comparison with Catania, Syracuse, and Agrigento, does seem to sustain this idea.

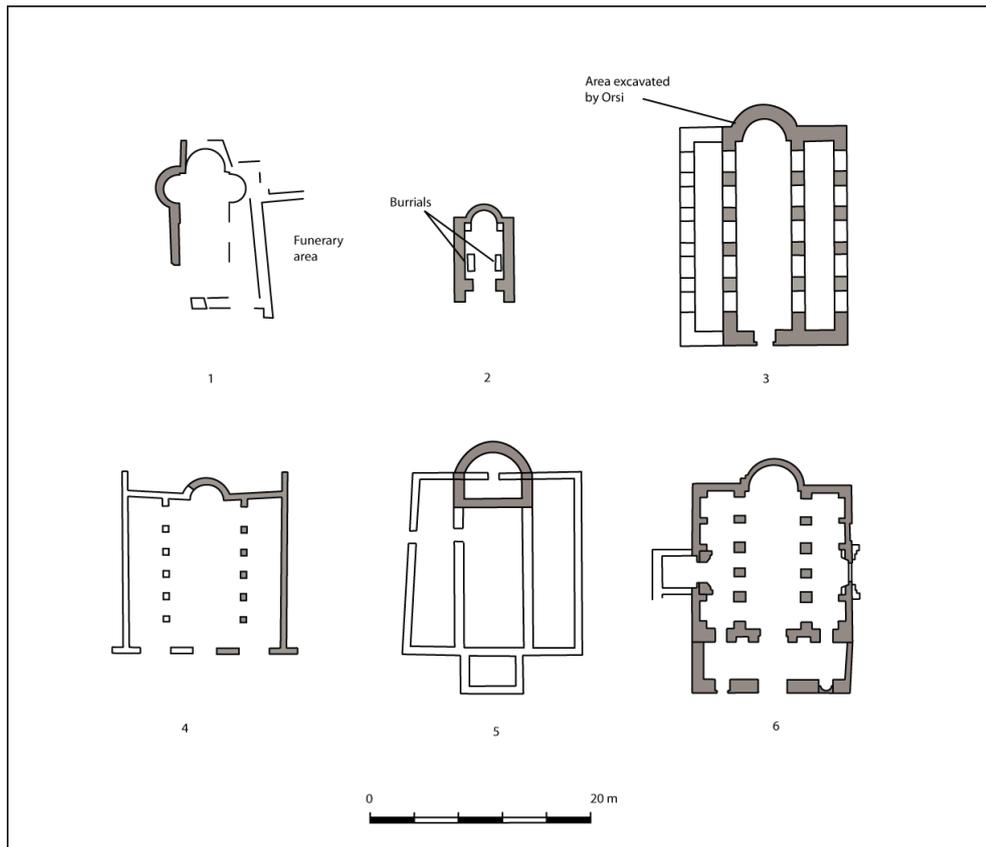


Fig.3.71: Sicilian fourth century Christian monuments: 1) Catania, Via Dottor Consoli; 2) Agrigento, "Basilichetta"; 3) Priolo, S. Foca; 4) Salemi, S. Miceli; 5) Sofiana; 6) Syracuse, S. Pietro.

3.3. The Consolidation of the Church in the Towns: Churches in Sicilian Centres from the Fifth to the Eighth Century

If in Italian and North African urban landscapes the fifth century is a period of monumental affirmation of the Church (Leone 2007: 148–54; Christie 2006: 94–112), in Sicily appears one of general stagnation. As will be analysed in Section 3.4, even in an important city like Syracuse, new churches are not documented within the enceinte in the period between the end of the fourth and the early decades of the sixth century. The reasons for this gap will be debated in the end discussion of this chapter; however, in brief, it seems that in this period, the Church's efforts were

concentrated instead on the conversion of rural communities and the consolidation of its main Episcopal presences. Hence, it is after the Byzantine conquest of 535 that a new and widespread programme of building construction took place on the island.

According to a local tradition, Belisarius celebrated the capture of Palermo by funding the church of S. Maria della Pinta (Bonacasa Carra 1987: 312–14; Agnello, S.L. 1962: 69–70; Pace 1949: 329–30). This monument no longer exists; however, we know it was erected in the area of Piazza Vittoria where, in the early 20th century, during excavation researches, Pace saw remains of the monument (Bonacasa Carra 1987: 325). Fortunately, the Jesuit father Agostino Inveges in the 17th century drew a plan of the church which indicates that the building was a three-aisled basilica of an unusual T plan; three altars were set respectively in the two lateral apses, while the remaining altar was located in a central position against the eastern wall (fig.3.5). The building was bounded by a wall and in the space around the basilica was found burials confirming the funerary use of this monument.

Sadly, we do not have consistent archaeological date regarding Palermo in the Byzantine period, although documentarily, from a letter by Pope Gregory the Great to abbot Marinianus dated September-October 598, we are informed about a church dedicated to S. Giorgio located “*Ad sedem*” (at the seat) – probably meaning a church set in the Episcopal palace – that was dependent on the monastery of Marinianus (Greg. *Let.* IX.7).

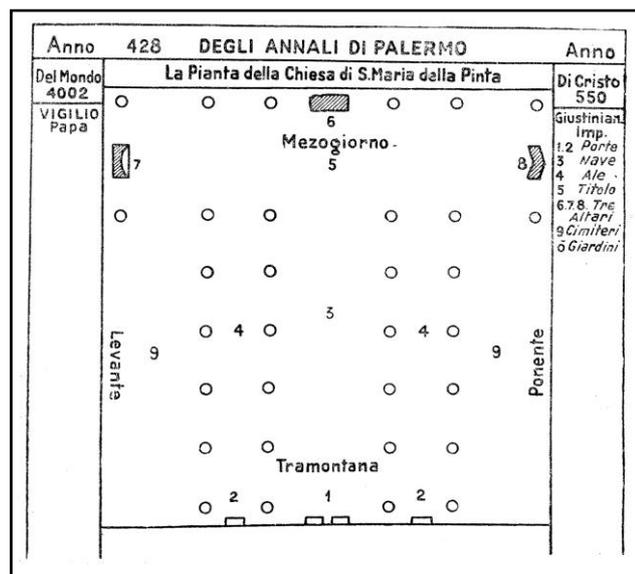


Fig.3.72: Palermo – Plan of S. Maria della Pinta drawn in the 17th century by Agostino Inveges (from Pace 1949, fig. 103).

In order to establish the possible continuity of use from the Byzantine cathedral to the Norman basilica (fig.3.6), scholars have taken two sources of data. Firstly, the discovery, in the area of the medieval cathedral, of a funerary inscription (today lost) dated to the fifth century (Bonacasa Carra 1987: 310). Secondly, the Arab geographer Idrisi (c. 1100–60) describes the main mosque of the town, as being built on the site of the cathedral (*ibid.* 1987: 310). Without doubt the central intramural position, facing the gate of the *Paleapolis* and the main road of Palermo are all good clues to locate the Byzantine cathedral in the area of modern Piazza della Cattedrale, but we still need good archaeological support for this hypothesis.

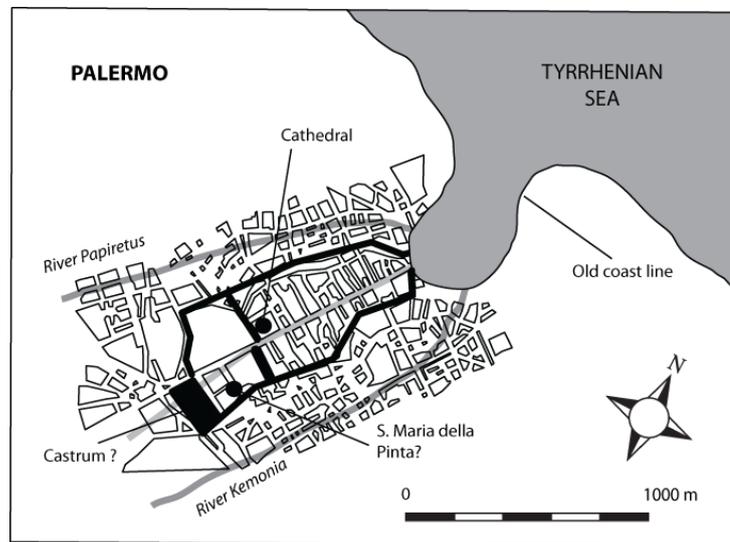


Fig.3.73: Palermo – The position of the supposed church of S. Maria della Pinta and the Byzantine cathedral within the walls.

Excavations conducted within the medieval cathedral of Cefalù, on the north coast, documented the first phase of the monument in the fifth–sixth century (Tullio 1997: 76; 1989: 48–9, 51, 63, 66–7) (fig.3.7). The new building partially encroached on the nearby road since the church narthex was erected over a paved street dating back to the first century A.D., thus altering the Classical urban system. The early basilica was decorated with a polychrome mosaic representing animals and vegetal decorations, whose parallels are, in the opinion of Tullio (1996: 78), to be found with mosaics of North Africa. This monument was still in use in the seventh and eighth centuries, since a tile pavement set in a herring-bone design, as well as lead seal and lamp remains were recorded in the excavation (Tullio 1997: 77; 1985: 95).

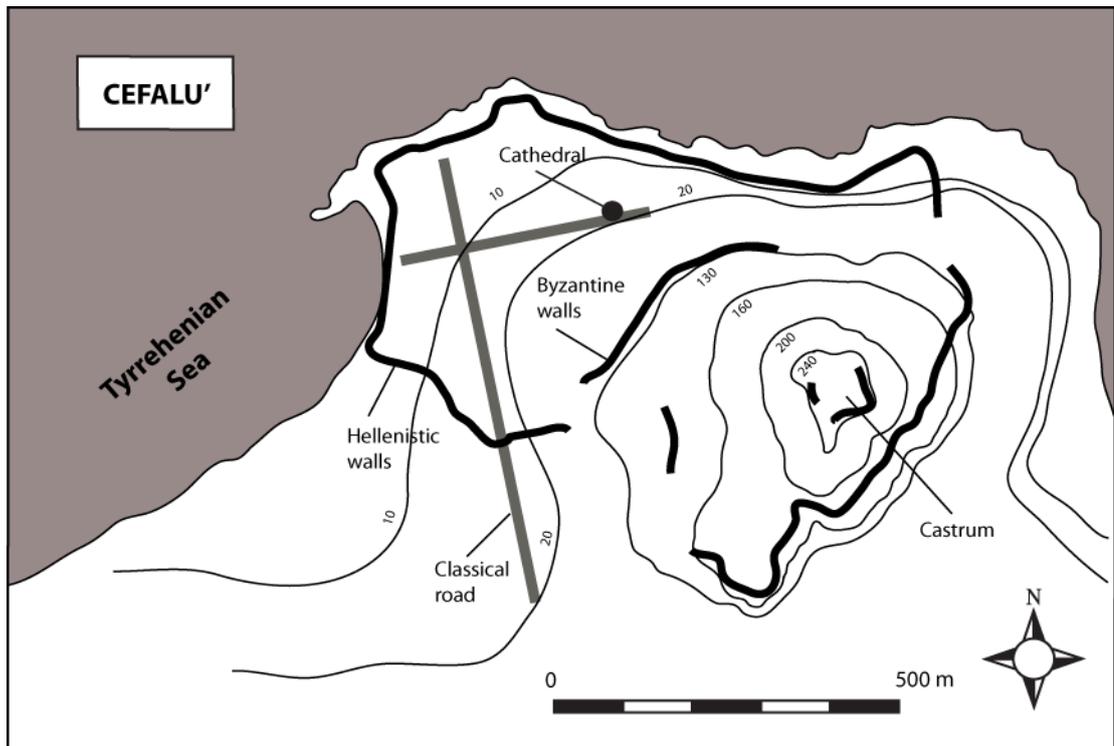


Fig.3.74: Cefalù – Plan of the town with the cathedral position.

At the time of Pope Gregory the Great, Tindari was a bishop's Seat (Greg. *Let.* III.59; IX.181). The exact location of the Byzantine cathedral has not been recognised despite extensive excavations undertaken in the residential district (Wilson 1990: 52–7); however, it is most probable that the early cathedral underlies the post-medieval basilica erected on the promontory of the classical acropolis (fig.3.8) and protected by the urban wall.

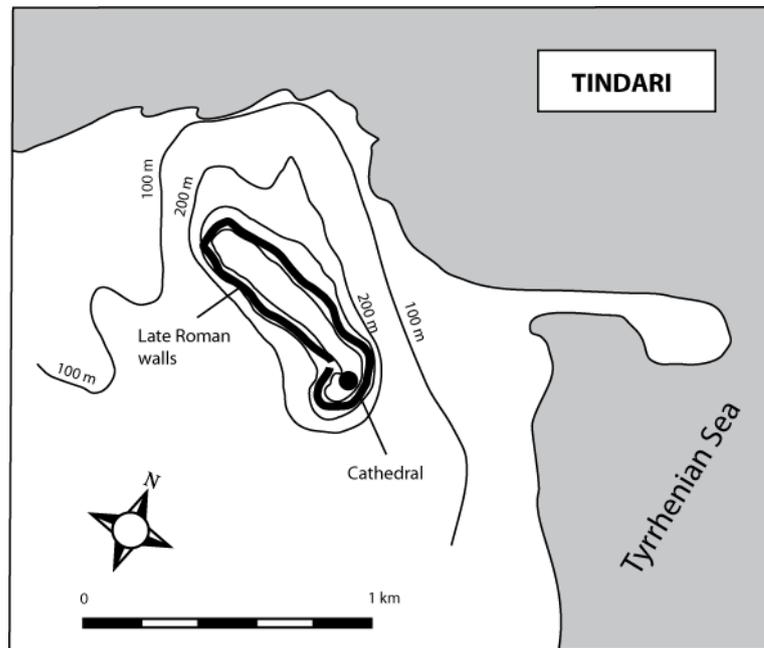


Fig.3.75: Tindari – The position of the supposed Byzantine cathedral on top of the classical acropolis.

The Byzantine phase also remains very poorly documented in Messina (fig.3.9). Letters sent to Bishop Felix and later to Bishop Donus by Pope Gregory the Great, inform us about the very wealthy local Church (Greg. *Let.* I.64; VII.35). A monument dedicated to S. Stefano, Pancrazio and Euplo was founded by the deacon Januarius in 591 (Greg., *Let.* II.6), but its location is unknown. Coins of Justinian have been found in the foundations of the bell tower of the medieval cathedral of S. Maria, and from the same church come Byzantine capitals of local production (Pace 1949: 329; 422–5). These data, although weak, may indicate continuity between the Byzantine cathedral and the Norman basilica.

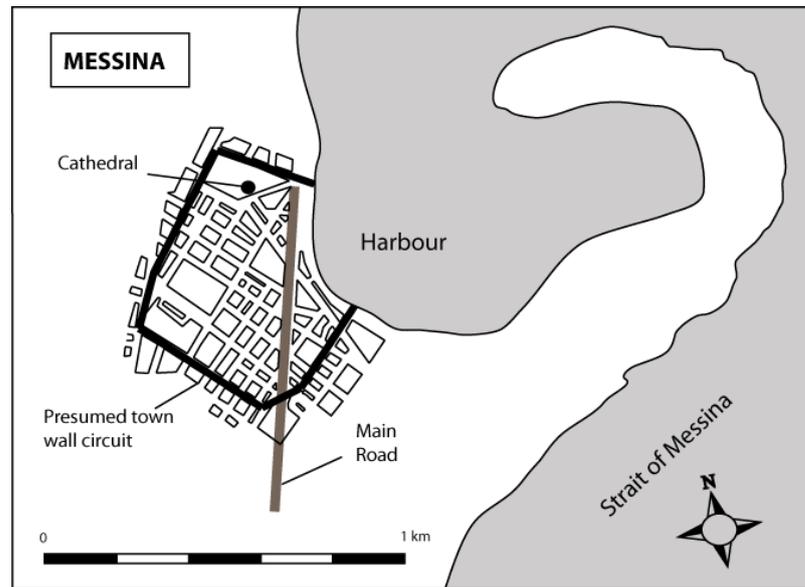


Fig.3.76: Messina the position of the supposed Byzantine cathedral within the urban defences.

Proceeding south from Messina, at the town of Taormina (3.13), it has been speculated that the potential early Byzantine cathedral was in the extramural triple-aisled basilica of S. Francesco di Paola (previously dedicated to S. Maria) c. 100 m from Porta Catania (Pace 1949: 331). During restoration works undertaken to repair World War Two damage, walls presumed to be of Byzantine date – formed largely of *spolia*, including column fragments and capitals – were collected (fig.3.10). However, because of the scarcity of archaeological and textual information, it is problematic to trace the shift of the late antique cathedral in the urban landscape.

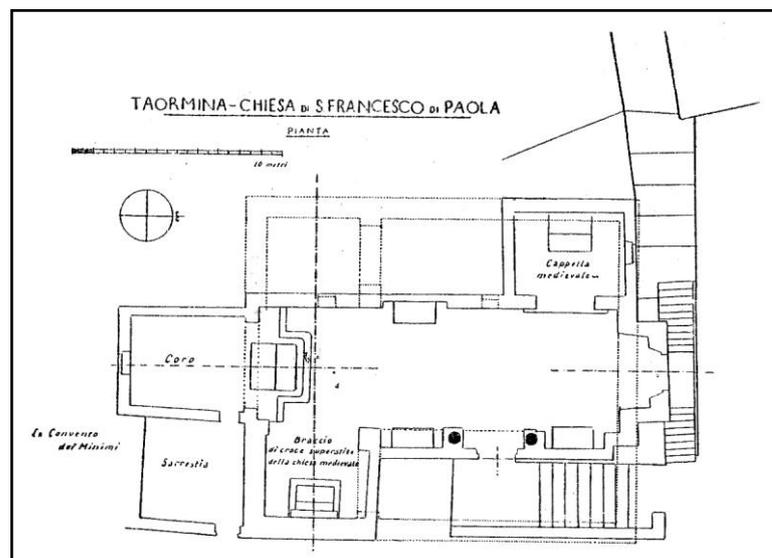


Fig.3.77: Taormina – Plan of the S. Francesco di Paola church (from Pace 1949, fig. 117).

Later on, with the Arab takeover, the cathedral was probably moved within the enceinte. The most suitable candidate for the new Byzantine *episcopium* is the Norman church of S. Nicola erected in 1087 few metres from Porta Catania; excavation, here, might document the existence of a former basilica, but new research is still awaited.

The intramural basilica of S. Pancrazio (fig.3.11) was erected on the site of the temple dedicated to Jove Serapis, whose remains are still visible in the external walls of the church (Pace 1949: 71; see Section 3.7). The important role of this church was represented by the relics of S. Pancrazio here fostered until the Arab occupation, when the relics were moved to Rome.



Fig.3.78: Taormina – The church of S. Pancrazio. Visible on the north wall of the church are the remains of the temple of Jove Serapis (photo by Sinitò 2010).

More attention is needed for the church of S. Caterina built in the northern area of the town near the Greek theatre. This basilica was also erected on the site of a Classical temple, and Roman structural remains are still visible between the post-medieval rebuild. It is probable that this church (as well as S. Pancrazio?) was related to the nearby Byzantine necropolis excavated in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II (Bacci 1980–1: 742) (Section 3.5).

Finally, the extramural *sub-divo* necropolis excavated in Via Pirandello (see Section 3.5) lay around the 1fourth century church of S. Pietro (fig.3.12). This area was intensively used between the fifth and the ninth century, as the flooring and several burials reflect; it is not to be excluded that future research focused on this monument will reveal a Byzantine origin.



Fig.3.79: Taormina – The west facade of S. Pietro (photo by Sinitò 2010).

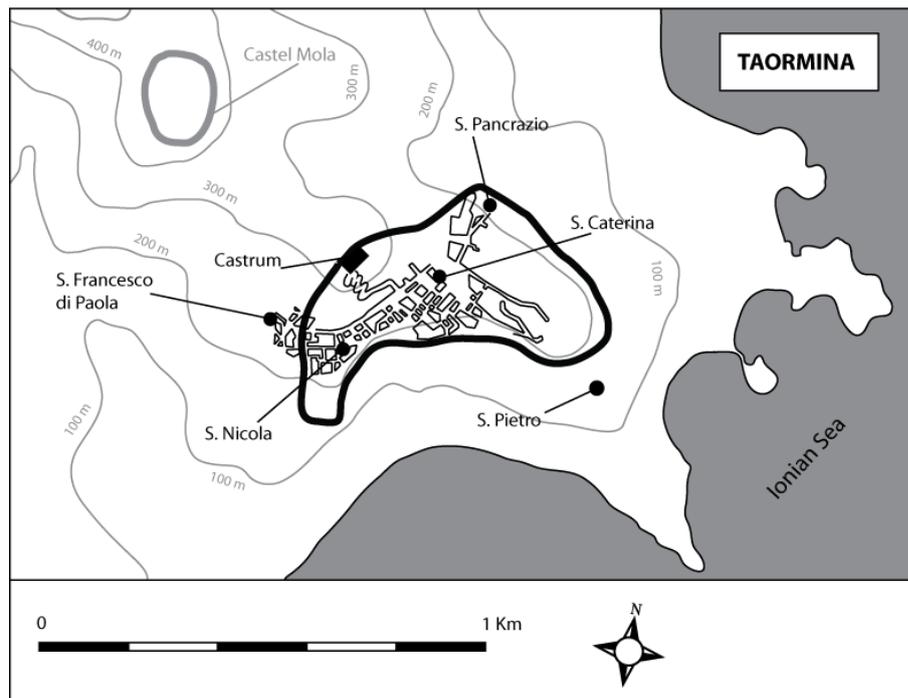


Fig.3.80: Taormina – Distribution of the Byzantine and presumed Byzantine churches.

Catania (fig.3.17), together with Syracuse, offers the most fully documented example of Christian urban development in Sicily, but, sadly, we lack enough published data. According to local tradition, the early Christian devotional point was the chapel of S. Maria di Betlemme (in Piazza Carlo Alberto) erected in c. 262 under the supervision of Bishop Everio (Pace 1949: 199). This monument is a subterranean *hypogeum* cut in to the volcanic rock that was used in classical

times as a water cistern. Structural re-adaptations with the construction of an altar and two benches, transformed the cistern into a Christian point of worship. Fleeting traces of frescoes document decorations on the walls of the chapel dating back, in the opinion of Pace, to the Byzantine period (Pace 1949; 199). On top of S. Maria di Betlemme was later erected the church of S. Gaetano alle Grotte. Today the monument is a 19th century restoration of a post-medieval building; however, given its location, a Byzantine origin for this basilica is not unlikely.

The first cathedral in Catania was the intramural church of S. Agata la Vetere (fig.3.14) erected in a marginal area in the northern part of the town (Pace 1949: 199). The basilica is a single nave monument that was completely rebuilt in post-medieval times and, today the only early remnant is a late Roman sarcophagus of unknown provenance. If the post-medieval church respected the Early Christian basilica's size, we might expect a bigger monument for an important town like Catania. It is therefore possible that S. Agata la Vetere was a cathedral church until the sixth century when the Episcopate was moved into a bigger monument.



Fig.3.81: Catania the church of S. Agata la Vetere (photo by Augulino 2009).

Excavations in 1964, in Via Dottor Consoli indeed uncovered a large Byzantine basilica whose central nave was c. 8 m wide and c. 35 m long (the lateral aisles were not preserved, but they should have been c. 4 m wide). The church featured a mosaic floor representing geometrical and floral motifs. From the area of the apse were uncovered a bench for catechumens and a base for a seat. Notably, in the central space of the main nave lay an unusual structure (probably an altar) that was cut by a monumental tomb. The church size, the rich mosaic floor, the presence of a

likely Episcopal seat, as well as the celebration of a burial in the centre of the central nave, undoubtedly underline the importance of this monument in the urban landscape of Catania. Furthermore, its construction on the site of a fourth century *memoria* (see Section 3.1 above) (and we do not know if the basilica completely replaced the *memoria*) highlights its prominence.

Later on, probably in the seventh century (when in Syracuse the cathedral was moved from the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista to the converted temple of Athena), the *episcopium* of Catania might have been transferred to the central Piazza Duomo, where today the Norman cathedral dedicated to S. Agata lay (Pace 1949: 199).

Near the medieval church of S. Agata is located the Cappella Boaniuto dedicated to S. Salvatore. This building is one of the most interesting and controversial Christian monuments of Catania (figs 3.15-6). The church has a central square body of c. 8 m, three apses 4.30 long and 3 m wide that are open in the northern, eastern and western side of the construction. The monument is covered by an imposing dome with a 7 m diameter and 12 m height that has survived several earthquakes through the centuries. The long life of the Cappella Boaniuto is documented through restorations and modifications still visible – especially in the western apse and at the base of the dome, where windows were walled up to providing more stability to the building (Agnello, G. 1952: 124, 126).

Excavations undertaken in the early decades of the twentieth century uncovered the original floor at a depth of 2 m below the modern level, revealing a group of burials whose chronology remains uncertain (*ibid.*: 122).

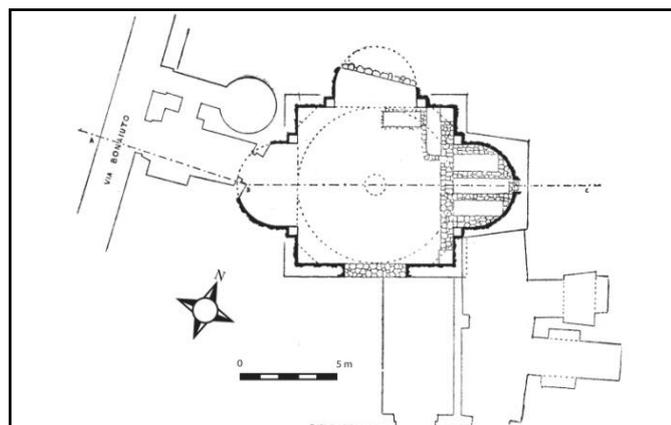


Fig.3.82: Catania – Plan of the Cappella Bonaiuto or S. Salvatore (modified from Agnello, G. 1952, fig. 15).

The church of S. Salvatore might have had a specific devotional connotation, as has been suggested by S.L. Agnello (1962: 60). However, the insertion of burials inside the church is not a

prerogative of a *memoria* since it was common in the Byzantine period among elites (secular and religious), as documented in Syracuse at S. Salvatore and S. Maria (Section 3.4). The chronology of this monument has been much debated: G. Agnello proposed a date spanning the eighth and the ninth century, while Libertini prefers a seventh century date and S.L. Agnello speculates on the ground of formal architectural data on a sixth century chronology (see Agnello, S.L. 1962: 58–60).

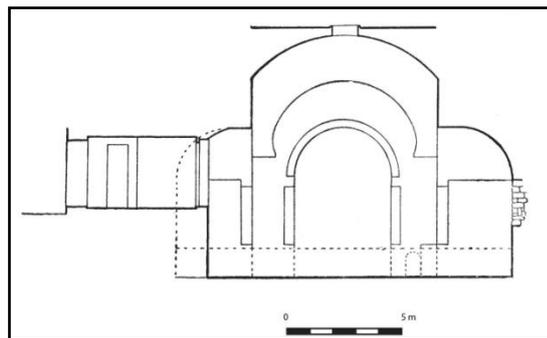


Fig.3.83: Catania – Section of the Cappella Bonaiuto (modified from Agnello, G. 1952, fig. 17).

From written sources, between the end of the sixth and the ninth century, we hear of other churches in Catania: S. Quaranta Martiri di Sebaste – perhaps related to the construction of the chapel dedicated to the same saints in Syracuse in the seventh century (see Section 3.4) – S. Stefano, S. Elena e Costantino, S. Pantaleimon, as well as a church dedicated to S. Lucia by Bishop Leo the Thaumaturgus (709–85) (Pace 1949: 199, 318).

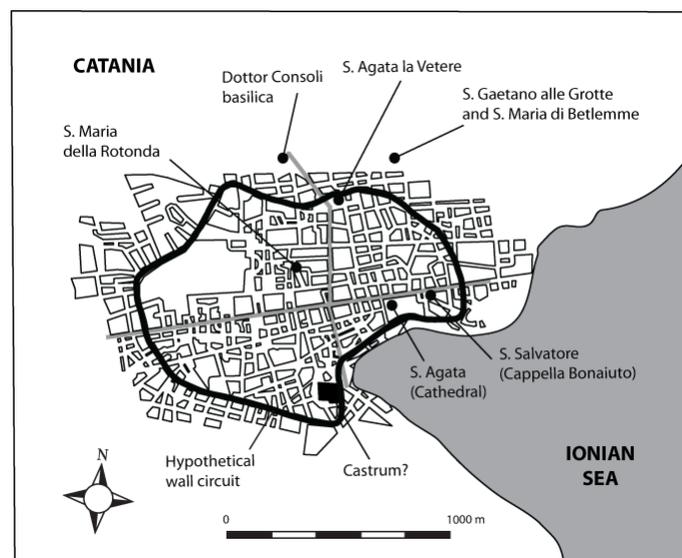


Fig.3.84: Catania – Plan of the town and distribution of Byzantine churches.

Regarding Agrigento (fig.3.18), we possess rather scattered documentation. In 1980, E. de Miro published the result of church excavations in the area of Villa Athena. Sadly, the investigations were neither stratigraphic, nor systematic and, as a result, at the time it was only possible to collect parts of the church's architectural decoration (De Miro 1980: 161–9). From the quality of finds and the size of the archaeological area, De Miro advanced the idea of a triple-aisled basilica built in the mid-sixth century with restoration works undertaken in the seventh and eighth centuries. This monument, in the opinion of De Miro, might have resembled the complex in Via Dottor Consoli in Catania; furthermore, De Miro, considering the prominent position nearby the Classical and Late Roman residential area, speculated that this basilica was the city cathedral in the fifth and sixth centuries.

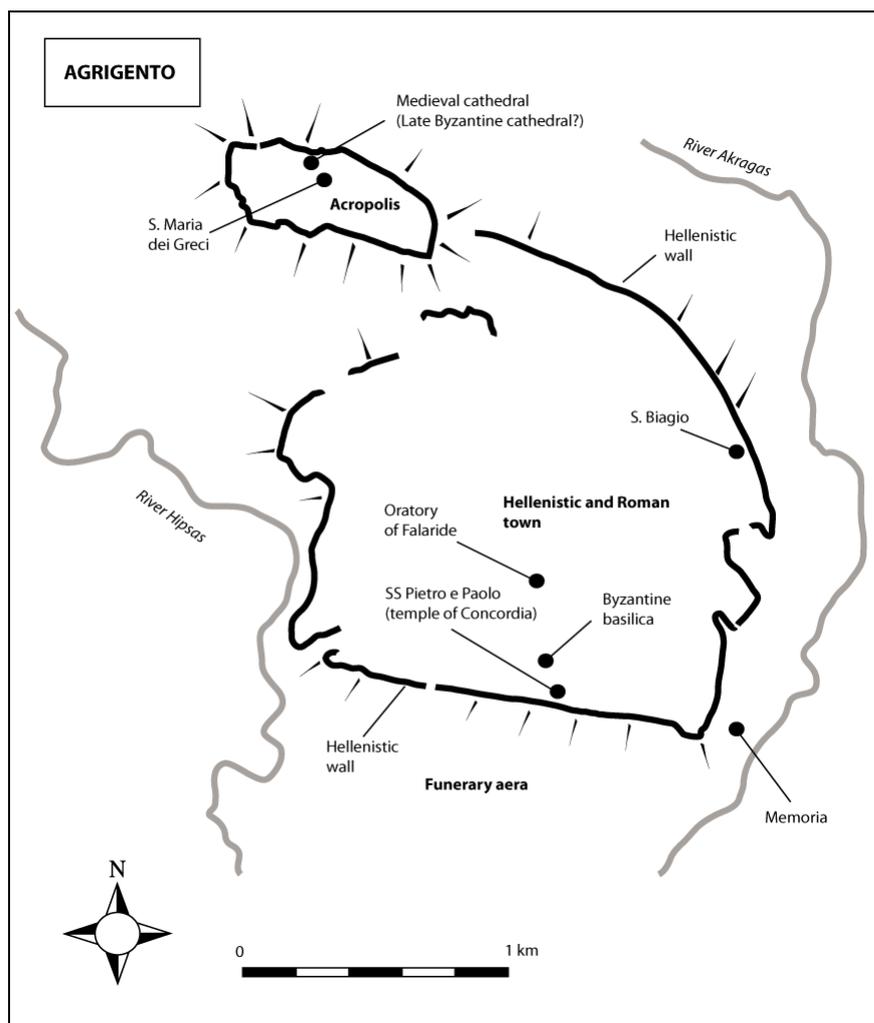


Fig.3.85: Agrigento – Plan of the town and location of churches.

However, without doubt the converted temple of Concordia is the most paradigmatic example of the Christianization of Agrigento. It is mentioned in the seventh century *Life of St Gregory of Agrigento* compiled by Abbot Leontius, and a campaign of archaeological investigation, targeted to analyze the Byzantine transformation of the Classical monument, was undertaken in the late 1970s (Trizzino 1980, see section 3.7). In brief, according to the Byzantine *Life of S. Gregory of Agrigento* (Leont. *Life of St Greg.* 53–4), the bishop (591–630) – who was a member of a wealthy local family – was accused by two rivals: Sabinus and Crescentius, of immoral behaviour; consequently, he was arrested and sent to Rome to defend himself in front of Pope Gregory the Great. Bishop Gregory had good motivations and the result was the re-confirmation by the Pope of his Episcopal position. Returning to Agrigento (but first journeying Constantinople where he met the Emperor Maurice) Gregory did not take up his seat in the cathedral, but he instead went to the nearby temple of Concordia, where, after fighting two devils named Eber and Raps, he consecrated the monument to S. Pietro e Paolo, probably in 597:

‘However, they (Gregory and his collaborators) did not go into the bishop’s palace or into the church, and were unwilling ever to turn and look at it, but moving away he pitched his tent outside the idolatrous temple near the wall and facing the sea. And he was there all night with people, making a likeness of the holy table. And then he raised high the honoured and life giving crucifix. After that he prayed to God and put to flight the Devil there, those lurking in the idols of Eber and Raps. And he built the new church most beautiful to look at, and dedicated it in the honour of the holy princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul. And he ordered the archdeacon to provide all those in the city who were up, the widows and orphans, enough for their needs’.

(*Life of Saint Gregory of Agrigento*, 91)

Bishop Gregory, by ignoring the early cathedral and building a new Episcopal seat, probably intended, on the one hand, to stress his legitimate position, just recognised both by the Pope and the Emperor – each gave him money for the monument; on the other hand, the conspiracy against Gregory might have had its origin within the clergy of the Episcopate, as Sabinus was, according the text, a priest and Crescentius was a deacon (Leont. *Life of St Greg.* 34). Building a new cathedral, Gregory, accompanied by trusted monks from Rome and Constantinople, created a new Episcopate.

It is uncertain when the cathedral was moved from the church of S. Pietro e to a new building within the protected citadel set in the Classical acropolis. However, from comparison with Syracuse we might suppose the new relocated Episcopate was created in the mid-seventh

century, most likely on the site of the medieval cathedral dedicated to S. Gerlando. It is most probable that in the same period, between the sixth and seventh century, that the temples of Demeter and Persephone and that of Athena were transformed in the churches of S. Biagio and S. Maria dei Greci (see Section 3.7), as well as the early Roman funerary monument of Faleride.

Finally, in *Lilybaeum* (fig.3.19) and Trapani it is particularly difficult to trace the development of the Christian monuments because of the scarcity of data. Recent excavation campaigns at the church of S. Giovanni Battista al Boeo might suggest Byzantine origins to the building, as suggested by the *sub-divo* necropolis (Caruso and Tusa 2004). The exact location of the Byzantine cathedral is much debated; Caruso, on the basis of a local tradition, proposes the church of S. Matteo (Maurici 2003: 889); however, its position far from the centre of the town is suspect. More probably it lay on the site of the Norman cathedral: the cases of Palermo, Cafalù, Messina, Catania and Syracuse show the Norman custom of re-organizing the Episcopal seat in the previous Byzantine cathedrals; in addition, the discovery of probable fifth or sixth century burials in nearby Via Cammarieri Scurti (Section 3.5) document the funerary role of this area and its potential connection with a late antique church.

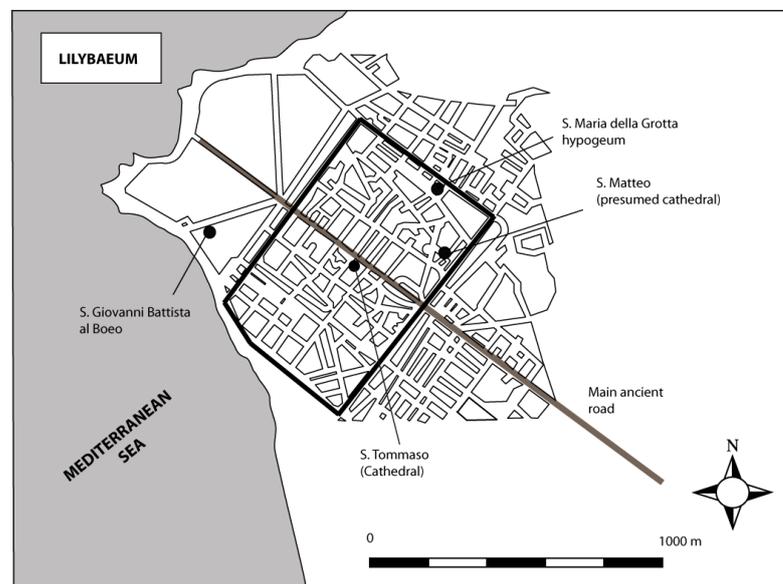


Fig.3.86: Lilybaeum – Plan location of the late antique churches.

The only late antique churches known in Trapani are those of S. Maria del Soccorso (previously S. Sofia) and S. Nicola (in the past dedicated to the Ascension) built, according to a local tradition, by Belisarius in 536, on the northern side of the town (*ibid.*: 895); but the data are currently minimal and only a systematic campaign of excavation might reveal any Byzantine origins.

3.4. Syracuse – A Case Study

Syracuse was the main religious and cultural core of Sicily, as celebrated by the letters of Gregory the Great and it was eminent for martyrs such as St Lucy and St Marcian, as well as being a distinguished centre of learning where clerics, bishops and patriarchs received theological and political preparation (Pace 1949: 273–308). Fortunately, of the fervent building activity undertaken in late antique and Byzantine Syracuse, today several archaeological traces survive that make the town an important case study (fig.3.21; 3.27). Furthermore, since written sources often mention Syracuse and its administrative role in the government of the island, therefore we can supplement the material data with various textual information. In addition, thanks to a long tradition of urban archaeological research, Syracuse represents the best, accurately investigated archaeological example in the province.

Christianity became visible in Syracuse's cityscape around the mid-third century, when catacombs were cut in the north-east side of Acradina (see 3.5), but it is only in the second half of the fourth century that we have material proof of Christian building activity in the town. According to the *Archetipum* – a medieval list of early Syracusan bishops – in the fourth century were erected and consecrated several Christian monuments. Eutichius, the 16th bishop of the town (in charge probably in the first half of the fourth century), dedicated an oratory to S. Andrea: '*Eutichius fuit sextus decimus. Hic aedificavit uasorum receptorium, et oratorium Sancti Andreae, apostoli*' Privitera (1879, II: 34) states that in 1225 the Franciscan monks organised their monastery in the old church of S. Andrea, suggesting, therefore the monument might be of pre-Arab date. The church of S. Andrea was set in Piazza Corpacci and was, in the post-medieval period, replaced by a new edifice dedicated to S. Maria dell'Immacolata (Acerra 1995: 70), so nothing remains visible of the former building.

Later, a second bishop named Eutichius was buried in a church consecrated to S. Lucia: '*Eutichius alter xviii. Qui tradidit ecclesiam Sanctae Luciae in tempore martirii eius positum est autem corpus illius sacratissimum in eiusdem virginis templo in muro [...]*', 'Eutichius the other Eutichius: in post for eighteen years, he committed a church to St Lucy, at the time of her martyrdom; his holy body (Eutichius) was buried in a wall (a sarcophagus set against the wall?) in that temple [...]' The basilica of S. Lucia still exists, even if shrouded in a medieval and post-medieval building. G. Agnello, analysing this church, minimised the destruction claimed for the Arab period and supported the proposal of a substantial preservation of the original plan. The

idea may have some value and recently a Byzantine phase has been recognized in the apse (Sgarlata 2006: 52; Agnello, G. 1952: 180–92), but more detailed investigations are needed to confirm this hypothesis. Finally, the late fourth century bishop Germanus (Rizzo 2005-06, I, i: 165–7) is called the promoter of five churches: ‘*Germanus was the ninth bishop, he built the churches of S. Paolo Apostolo, S. Pietro Apostolo and the church of S. Foca where he is buried*’ (Archet. in Rizzo 2005-06, II, ii: 242–4). A second confirmation of Germanus’ building activity comes from a Greek and Latin inscription walled in the church of the Spirito Santo and still partially legible in the fifth century, when it was recorded by cleric Privitera in his *Storia di Siracusa* (1879, vol. I, 553, 616–7):

‘Post Chrestum Germanus Syracusarum Antistes/ Ope Sancti Spiritus, voto,/ Praedicatione, laboribus./ Ortigiam pene totam Christo adiecit/ Ibique ante Castrum forum/ Eidem cooperanti Paracletto/ Templum erexit, consecravit, obtulit./ Ubi etiamnum Aram/ Marciano Antiocheno.../ Anno sui Praesulatus X/ Iterum Insulae boreali loco/ Ecclesiam Divis Petro, ac Paulo sacravit;/ Quinquennio inde/ Aliam prope Urbis medium/ Ioanni protulit Praecursori’.

‘After Crestus, Germanus, bishop of Syracuse, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the prayer, the preaching, the efforts./ Almost all Ortigia added to Christ/ and there, in the square in front of the *castrum*, helped by the Holy Spirit/ he built, consecrated, offered a church./ Where is still today/ an altar to Marciano of Antioch.../ In his tenth year of bishopric/ (Germanus) consecrated in the northern part of the island (Ortigia)/ one church to Saints Peter and Paul/ After five years/ near the city centre/ he built another church to John the Baptist’.

This last source added to the list of monuments erected by Germanus, the churches of Spirito Santo and that of S. Giovanni Battista, these two buildings also still visible. However, only S. Pietro is partially discernible in its original form, while the others are obscured in later reconstructions. The remaining fourth century churches were erected within the walls of Ortigia; of these, the basilica of S. Pietro *intra moenia* is the best preserved and has been the subject of detailed analyses by G. Agnello and later scholars (Agnello, G. 1952: 89–106; Agnello, S.L. 1962: 74).

In brief, S. Pietro *intra moenia* (fig.3.20; 3.28.6) is a triple aisled basilica, c. 15 m wide and c. 21 m long with a semicircular apse set in the east side and, as in the case of S. Foca, the space within the church was subdivided by four pillars supporting a barrel vault.



Fig.3.87: Syracuse – Ortigia, the north facade of S. Pietro intra moenia (photo by author).

Today, it is difficult to perceive the original urban context where the church was erected: were important public monuments in the proximity? Or was this simply a residential area? Unfortunately, the lack of archaeological data does not allow any secure hypothesis; the church was set far from the city gate and not in a prominent position in the urban road network; further it did not have a funerary function, since burials have not been found, and therefore we can presume the basilica served a residential district.

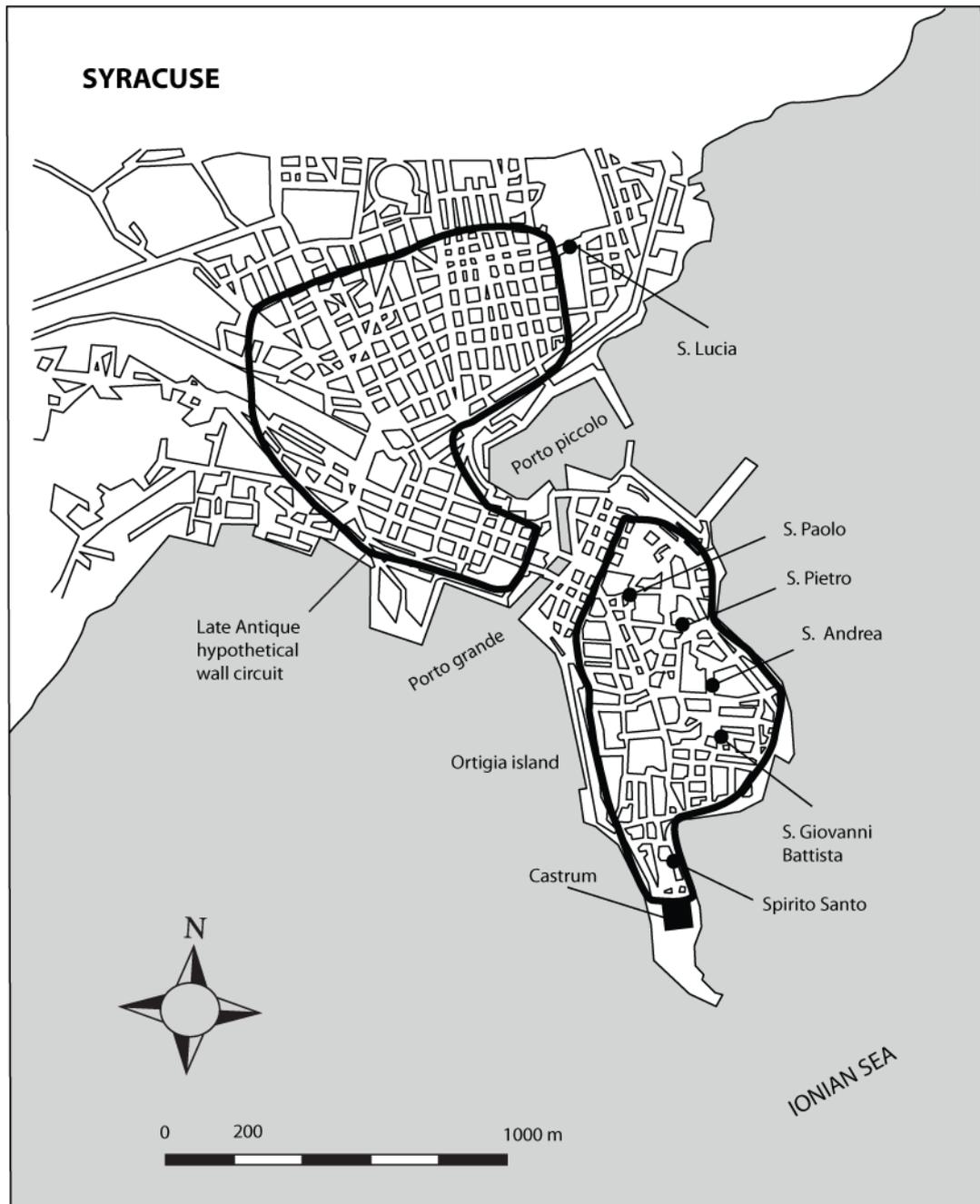


Fig.3.88: Syracuse – Plan of the fourth century churches known from text and archaeological data.

In the northern region of Ortigia, the church of S. Paolo Apostolo is still completely visible from Largo XXV Luglio and Via dell'Apollonion. Although the modern building shows nothing of its late Roman origin (fig.3.22), it is, in fact, one of the oldest monuments of Syracuse. This church was built in a strategic position: it lay not far from the town gate (c. 130 m) and along the major ancient road of Ortigia (Corso Matteotti) (fig.3.23). At the time of its construction, probably around 380, the church of S. Paolo would have stood just in front of the massive temple of Apollo.

Were the temple of Apollo and the church of S. Paolo in contemporary use? If both buildings were functioning at the same time, how did the locals conciliate the two religions? Or was the temple already deserted at the time of S. Paolo's construction? Does it mean that in Syracuse (and elsewhere), pagan foci were abandoned by the second end of the fourth century? We have seen how some of the *Consulares* governing Sicily were often pagans; hence, we might observe a political design behind this 'power sharing' between Imperial officers and Christian administrators.



Fig.3.89: Syracuse – Ortigia the church of S. Paolo from west (photo by author).

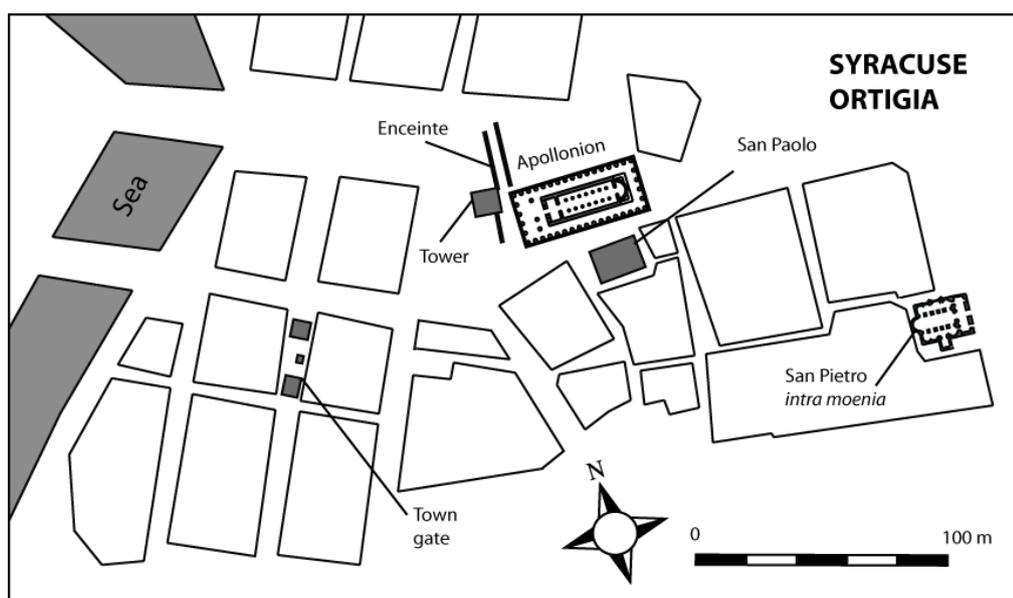


Fig.3.90: Syracuse – Plan of the entrance to Ortigia with fourth century churches and the temple of Apollo.

Sadly, we know nothing about the churches of Spirito Santo and S. Giovanni Battista, and the current buildings do not help us since both are post-medieval reconstructions. However, as the inscription recorded by Privitera mentions, the church of Spirito Santo was set in the forum in front of the *castrum* – ‘*ante Castrum forum*’ – and, according to the source, in this church were preserved the relics of S. Marciano celebrated through the construction of an altar or a shrine: ‘*Ubi etiamnum Aram Marciano Antiocheno...*’. The basilica is still today commemorated as the place where St Marcian first arrived to Christianize Syracuse – later, as will be explained, in the sixth century, the relic and the cathedral were both moved to S. Giovanni Evangelista. The basilica of Spirito Santo was set in a prominent position along the coast, facing the enceinte, the forum and the governor’s palace (if we can interpret the word *castrum* as the seat of the Sicilian governor). Whilst we do not know the chronology of the epitaph (today, sadly lost), we can assume a pre-Arab date because of the use of the two languages. In sum, it is quite possible that the church of Spirito Santo was the first cathedral of Syracuse.

Regarding S. Giovanni Battista very few hypotheses can be formulated and neither textual nor archaeological data help the research. Presently, the triple aisled basilica is visible within the late 14th century building; the dedication to S. Giovanni Battista might suggest a baptismal role. Noticeably, this church was set in a central position, in the Giudecca, the Jewish district, perhaps in the hope of converting this community.

The fifth century is a controversial phase for the monumental building activity in Syracuse. On the one hand we have archaeological proof of restorations of public buildings like the theatre; textual sources attest the reinstatement of the *Praetorium* and, concerning Christianity. But, on the other hand, we lack any written mention or archaeological evidence of urban churches. Is this gap related to the lack of urban excavations, or was this period really a phase of stagnation in church construction? And if the latter, why did it happen? Was the attention of the Sicilian Church focused instead toward the foundation of chapels in rural areas?

It is in the sixth century, after the Byzantine conquest of Sicily in 535, that a second wave of Christian monumental construction took place in Syracuse. In this period, just outside the Acradina’s walls, was created from the excavation and the transformation of a funerary *hypogeum*, the crypt of S. Marciano and the basilica of S. Giovanni Evangelista (Agnello, S.L. 1980: 18–19; Agnello, G. 1968) (fig.3.24; 3.28.3). S. Giovanni Evangelista was a triple aisled monument of impressive size for the time, measuring c. 47 m x 20.86 m; the inner space was subdivided by twelve columns reused from nearby classical constructions (Agnello, G. 1952: 160–79; Pace 1949: 323) and a semicircular and mezzanine apse was set on the church’s eastern side. Archaeological

investigations by Orsi documented a rich set of iron and stone decorated barriers bordering the central area where probably stood the original altar directly atop the crypt of S. Marciano (Agnello, S.L. 1980: 19).

The location of the sixth century cathedral held an important symbolic role in Syracuse: this area, in fact, was, since Classical times a funerary space (Chapter 3.5) and it was here that, from the mid-third century A.D. was cut the biggest catacombs of the city, confirming continuity in the cultural use of the space. But this area also held a strategic position in the urban and suburban road network since it was from this point that the main roads to *Lilybaeum* – via Agrigento – and following the coastal road to Catania departed (Uggeri 2005: 163–214). Certainly, the transfer of the cathedral from the intramural church of Spirito Santo to the extramural S. Giovanni must have had a considerable impact in the urban landscape; we can imagine that around the new Episcopal complex grew and developed offices, hostels and monasteries, workshops, warehouses to feed priests, monks, clerics and pilgrims, plus chapels and necropoleis. Butcheries, fishmongers, wine traders and *tabernae* no doubt also grew around the cathedral, as well as ceramic and fabric workshops, stoneworkers, ironsmiths – all sadly difficult to trace archaeologically (see Chapter 6).



Fig.3.91: Syracuse – The basilica of S. Giovanni Evangelista (photo by author).

Yet, S.L. Agnello in his latest works rejected the idea of a cathedral set in this basilica (1990: 66–7). In his opinion, the belief was founded on an erroneous interpretation of Byzantine Sicilian *vitae Sanctorum* and the stray mention of the monument in the letter of monk Theodosius in the ninth century (see Chapter 5). Agnello's considerations; however, go against the sizable amount of archaeological evidence now available and the basic argument of how the biggest late antique

basilica of Sicily could be a simple church? How can the sixth century *memoria* of Syracuse's most celebrated bishop be built far from the Episcopal palace – especially, considering how the first cathedral was strictly connected with the cult of S. Marciano? Finally, how can the amount of money and architectural efforts not been invested in the celebration of the most important *episcopium* of the region?

In Byzantine times, the attention of Church patronage was also focused on the final transformation into active Christian monuments of the remaining temples (Section 3.7). Thus, it was in the second half of sixth century that the sanctuary of Athena and later, probably in the early seventh century, the temple of Apollo were transformed into Christian *basilicae* (Agnello, S.L. 1980: 22–3). The temple of Athena was already a church at the time of Gregory the Great since the future bishop Zosimus (570–662) was consecrated as priest in this monument in the late sixth century (*ibid.*: 22–3). Architecturally, the transformation involved the colonnades being walled up, the *cella* was cut and transformed into the central nave, and three apses were built on the eastern side of the building. However S.L. Agnello proposes a less substantial restructuring of the temple (fig.2.25; 3.28.4).

It was in this converted temple from the late sixth century dedicated to S. Maria that, around the mid-seventh century, the noted Bishop Zosimus shifted the cathedral, again, from S. Giovanni Evangelista. The *episcopium*, therefore, returned one more time to within the walls in the protected area of Ortigia where it is still set today. Unluckily, the post-medieval rebuilding and decoration have completely obliterated the Byzantine adornments of the cathedral; however, we may expect that the monument was richly decorated and refurbished with mosaics, frescoes, icons, lamps, fabrics, gold and silver vases that were plundered by the Arabs in 865 yielding, in the words of monk Theodosius, 5000 pound of gold (Theod. *Epist.*). The sum indicated by Theodosius might be exaggerated, but, if we consider that 5000 pound of gold are the equivalent of c. 363.520 gold *solidi* (a *solidus* is c. 4.50 gr and a Roman pound c. 327.168 gr) then the plunder of the Arabs was almost what a high late Roman senatorial family gained in one year (see Chapter 6; Vera 1997–8: 56).



Fig.3.92: Syracuse – The former temple of Athena, later converted into the cathedral and dedicated to S. Maria (photo by author).

The shift of the new cathedral to within the urban circuit, might have been less traumatic than the previous; it is probable that the devotional centre remained in the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista and in the crypt of S. Marciano with all the related funerary structures and shrines, as well as adjacent monasteries and hostels, and that only the bishop's office and other administrative bureaus moved to Ortigia. As explored in the discussion, the reasons for this late reorganization of the cathedral was not connected with insecurity or defensive problems, since Sicily in the mid-seventh century was still far from the battlefields of the Byzantine Empire. Comparing similar cases in Catania, Taormina and Agrigento we may deduce it was a political programme in which, the "Byzantinization" of Sicily entailed a strict collaboration with the imperial offices set within the wall circuit.

More problematic is to trace the conversion of the temple of Apollo into a church dedicated to S. Salvatore because this building was encompassed in post-medieval constructions and heavy demolished in the 1seventh and 1eighth centuries. Giuseppe Agnello suggests that the seventh century capitals collected from near the temple were probably part of the church decoration (Agnello, G. 1952: 52–61). The Byzantine conversion affected the Classical *cella* already partitioned in three aisles by columns and an eastern apse was added (fig.3.26; 3.2); in general,

however, the impact on the classical structures was not as profound as occurred in the conversion of temple of Athena (Agnello, S.L. 1990: 69).



Fig.3.93: Syracuse – The remains of the temple of Apollo. On the left the cella transformed into a basilica, and on the right the church of S. Paolo (photo by author).

After the first decades of the seventh century, our knowledge of Church patronage in Syracuse becomes fragmentary. Without doubt, the arrival in the city of Constans II in 663, brought a revitalization of urban building activity which endured until his assassination in the summer of 668. The amount of gold coins discovered during excavations and the several hoards found in Sicily document a huge circulation of money minted in Syracuse and Catania under the Emperor (see Chapter 6). This wealth was certainly invested in building construction activities targeted to create the appropriate urban environment for an imperial residence. Coins help to date the restoration of classical road running parallel to Via Teocrito and Piazza della Vittoria, in the Acradina district (maybe the successor to the *Via lata perpetua* of Cicero, *Verr.* IV, 53; Agnello, S.L. 1990: 55–6; Voza 1976–7: 554–5). In this same period, the basilica of S. Pietro *intra moenia* was enlarged with a transept and refurbished with a new apse on the east side that changed the original fourth century orientation; in addition frescoes were painted on the interior walls of the basilica (Agnello, S.L. 1990: 69; Agnello, G. 1952: 100–6).

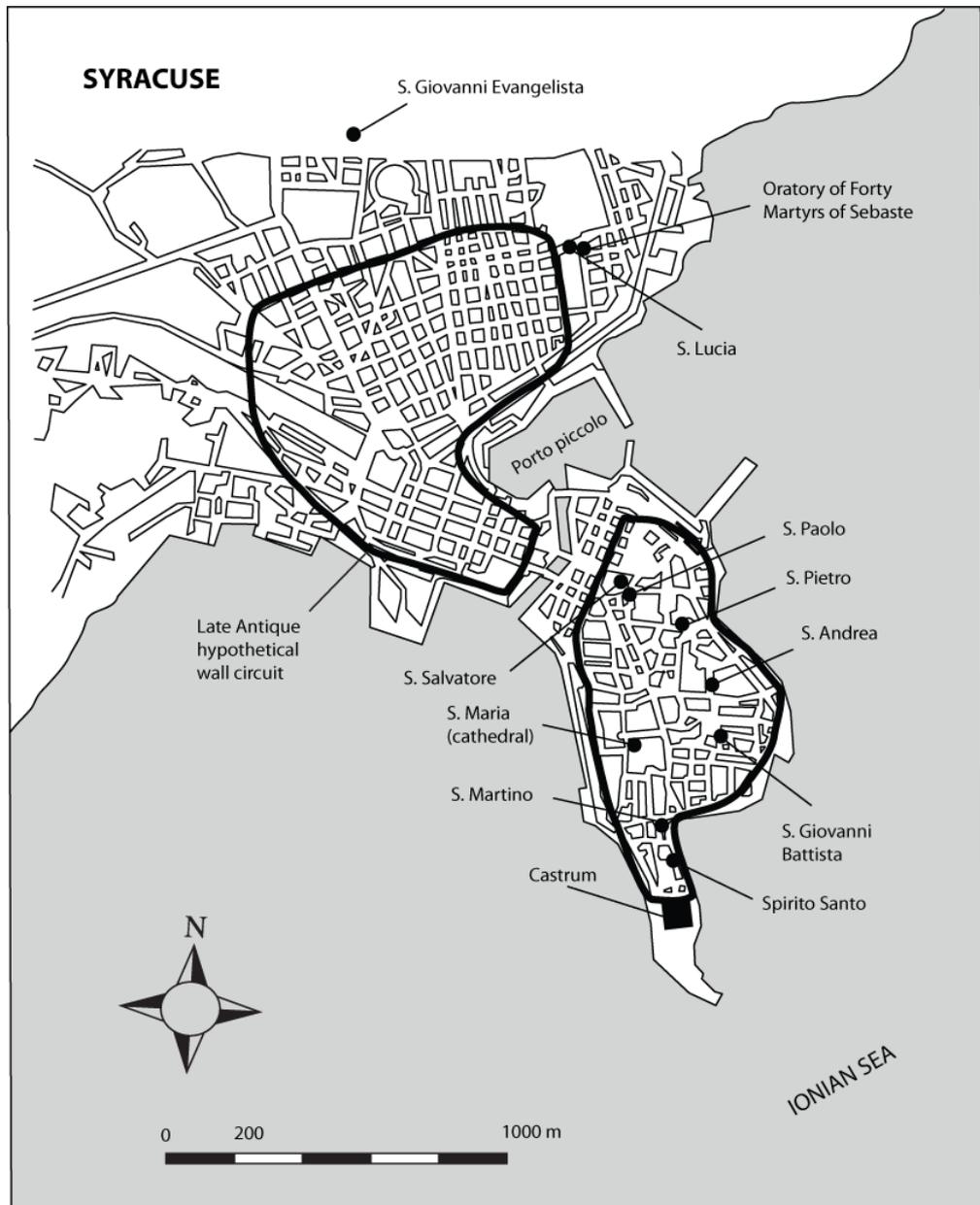


Fig.3.94: Syracuse – Distribution of the sixth and seventh century churches.

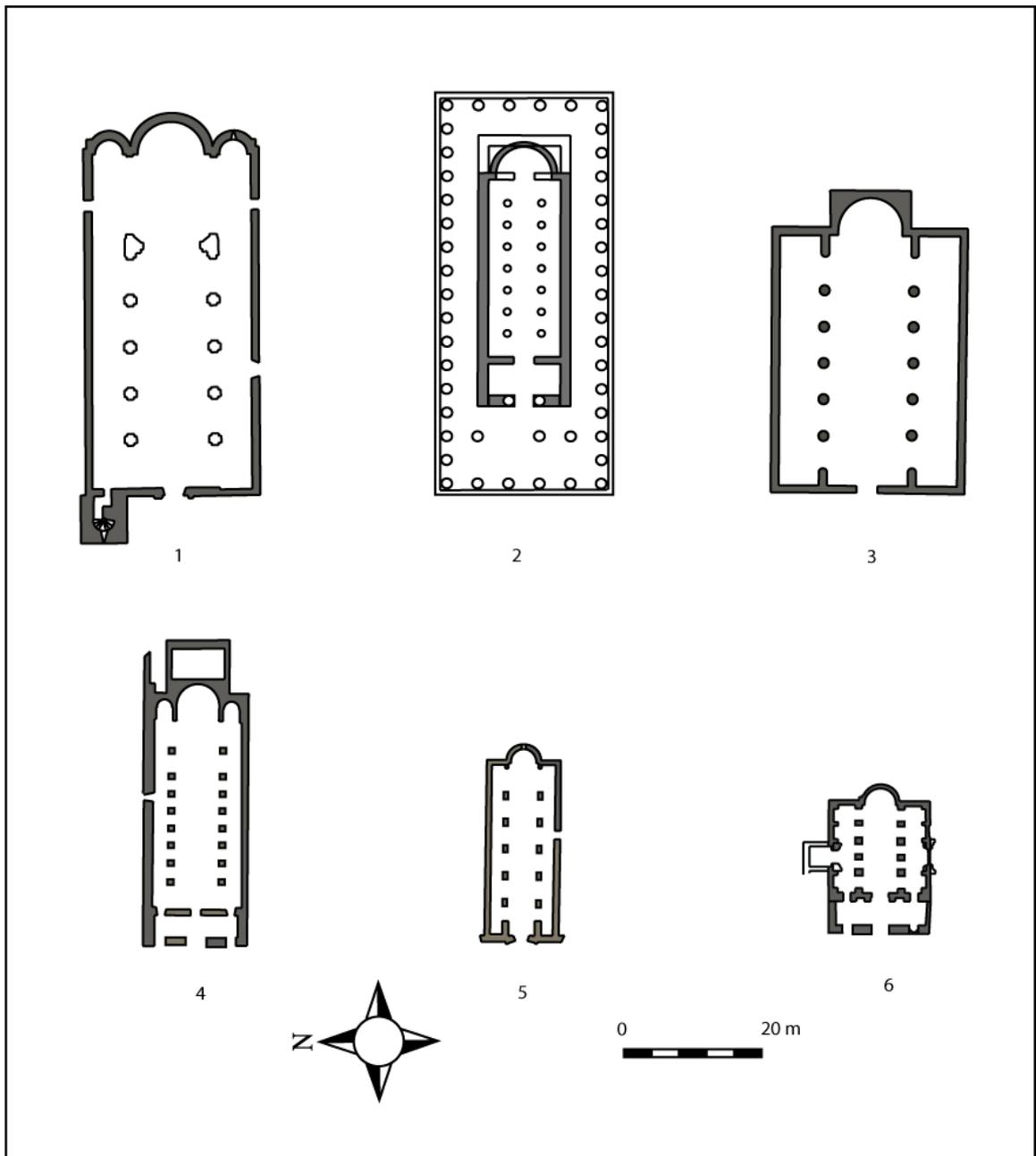


Fig.3.95: The sixth century churches at Syracuse: 1) S. Lucia; 2) hypothetical reconstruction of S. Salvatore (temple of Apollo); 3) S. Giovanni Evangelista; 4) S. Maria (temple of Athena); 5) S. Martino; 6) S. Pietro intra moenia.

A final monument to take into consideration is the recently restored oratory of the Quaranta Martiri di Sebaste cut into the underground catacomb of S. Lucia in the north-eastern part of Acradina (Sgarlata and Salvo 2006; Pace 1949: 149; 395–8; Orsi 1942: 71–93) (fig.3.29).

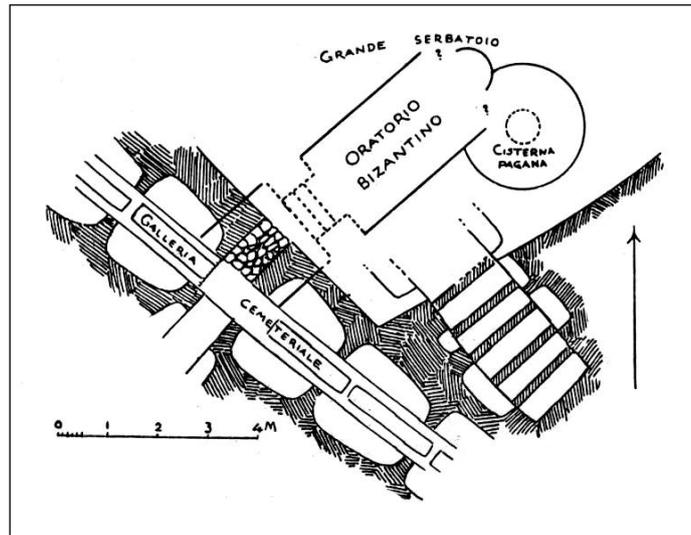


Fig.3.96: Syracuse – Plan of the oratory of the Quaranta Martiri di Sebaste (Orsi 1942, fig. 35).

This oratory is a small chamber c. 4.30 m long x c. 2 m wide and 2.30 m high. Stunning frescoes represent the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste on the vault surface and St Cosma and Damian, St Elen and Syracusan former bishop St Marcian, plus two unidentified bishops on the south-east wall (Orsi 1942: 75–8). Through the style of fresco a chronology spanning the late seventh to the early decades of the eighth century is proposed (Sgarlata and Salvo 2006: 90–2), therefore documenting a good quality artistic patronage in the town, in the middle Byzantine period. However, it is likely that this monument was built during the presence of Constans II in Syracuse. The cult of the Forty Soldiers of the *Legio XII Fulmintina*, who professed their Christianity in 320 and died together upon a frozen lake, was particularly widespread through the army and the elites – especially at Constantinople – for its message of unity and brotherhood (*ibid.*: 69–71). The politics of Constans II toward the Western imperial territories was of contrast toward the power and independence of the Roman Church (see analysis of the Italian campaign of Constans II written by Corsi 1983, in particular for the Sicily: 187–8). Constans II weakened the influence of Rome in Sicily by supporting the apostolic origin of the Syracusan episcopate, granting independence to the Church of Ravenna in 666 and imposing high taxation of properties of the Church of Rome (*ibid.*: 187, 202). This policy was, in Sicily reflected in the compiling of hagiographies concerning Sicilian saints, often related with the pastoral activity of St Peter. In addition, during the time of Constans II, were most probably introduced in Sicily eastern cults, such as the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, which importance is celebrated in the stunning decoration of the Oratorio dei Quaranta martiri di Sebaste in Syracuse, where are also represented Sicilian saints, as for example St Marcian (fig.3.30). The veneration for the Forty Martyrs was particular spread within the Army

and the Byzantine aristocracy for its message of unity and military solidarity that fitted well with the militarization of Sicily undertaken by Constans II (Treadgold 1997: 315–22; Corsi 1983).

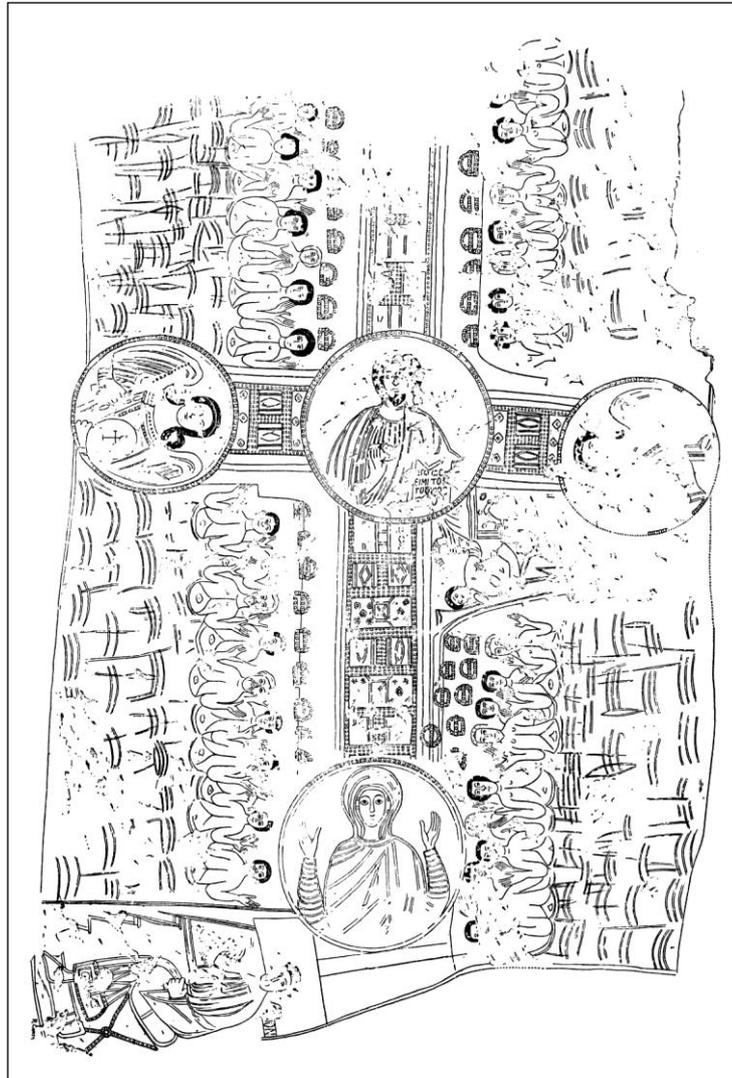


Fig.3.97: Syracuse – Oratory of the Quaranta Martiri di Sebaste (from Orsi 1942, tav. 5).

3.5. Late Antique Monasteries on Sicily

Monasteries were essential units in the process of Christianization of the late antique urban and rural landscape and were favoured way through which the aristocracy came to show its support to the Church. Famous, in the Italian context are the cases of Melania and Pinianus, as well as

Paulinus of Nola, all from senatorial families, who dedicated their lives in the creation of monastic centres in Palestine and Campania (see discussion in Christie 2006: 85—9, 430—6).

In Catania, Julian, a rich lord, founded a monastery in late sixth century to support the poor of the town (Greg. *Let.* XIII.23) and in Syracuse, the monastery of S. Lucia was one of the most important centres of charity in the city. Pope Gregory the Great indeed recommended abbot John to '*Show concern over hospitality. Be as generous as you can towards the poor [...]*' (*Let.* III.3).

Monasteries were also places of teaching and study, where bishops, clerics and administrators were taught theology, grammar, mathematics, poetry and music. For example, in his childhood, the seventh century monk Zosimus – later bishop of Syracuse – was instructed at the monastery of S. Lucia in Syracuse (*ibid.* III.3). From the late sixth century to the last years of the early ninth, important personalities of Byzantine culture were educated in the main Sicilian centres, notably Syracuse, Catania and Messina (Pace 1949: 272–309). St Gregory of Agrigento, one of the major cultural personalities of the late sixth century, attended monasteries in Sicily, Rome and Constantinople and gained knowledge here of the works of Aristotle, at that time almost unknown in the West (Pace 1949: 287). It was also because of this cultural background that three Sicilian bishops were appointed Pope: Agatho (c. 678–681), Leo II (682–3), Sergius I (687–701), as well as Methodius, who became Patriarch of Constantinople from 843–7.

Textual sources inform us about several Sicilian urban and rural monasteries, some with interesting and detailed description of the types of foundation, the rituals and the management of these institutions. The letter sent by Pope Gregory the Great to Bishop Decius of *Lilybaeum* in August 599 is paradigmatic of the procedure of establishment of such urban foci:

'Adeodata most glorious woman, has suggested to us with the notification of a declaration, which is held in the appendix, that she has founded a convent in a house in fact owned by her, inside the city of Lilybaeum, with its land, as proof of her devotion. And she wants it to be consecrated in honour of Saint Peter, prime of the apostles, and of Sainst Laurence, Hermes, Pancras, Sebastian and Agnes, martyrs of Christ. And for that reason, my very dear brother, do so. For the construction just mentioned is subject to the control of your city. Provide it is certain that no human body has been buried there, first of all, receive all the donations on soil out by law, that is for income, top quality gold, free from taxes, ten, and slave-boys, three, oxen of same age, three, other servants to serve in that convent, five in numbers, mares, ten in numbers, cows, ten in numbers, vine plantations, four in number, sheep, forty in number, and the rest according to what is normal'.

(Greg. *Let.* IX, 233)

From this letter we see that many urban monasteries were founded in *domus* donated by the urban aristocracy to the Church (fig.3.31); we also gain an idea of the provision of goods with which these urban monasteries were supplied: land, livestock and slaves to contribute and sustain the centre with food and income; although this was not always economically sufficient. Thus, a patrician named Julian founded a monastery in Catania, but after a while he faced financial problems sorted directly by the Pope (Gre. *Let.* XIII.21).

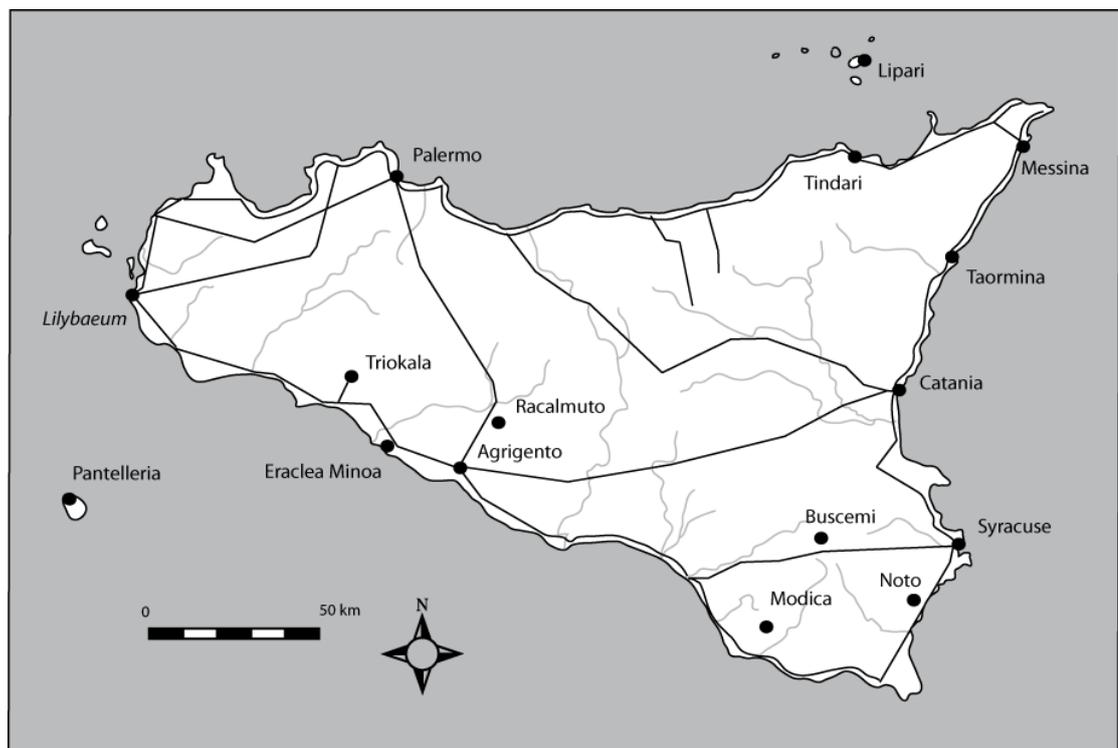


Fig.3.98: Sites of monastic seats mentioned in this section.

Patronage of monasteries was also a visual marker of a local elite's social status. In particular, it seems that the performing of rituals was the most sought-after privilege for the local aristocracy. In 599, the nun Januaria founded an oratory dedicated to Ss Severino Confessore and Giuliana in the parish of Tindari, but Mass was not allowed to be celebrated without express permission of the bishop (Greg. *Let.* IX.181). The celebration of rituals in private monastic foundations might have also unexpectedly violent aspects, especially in urban context. For example, the Syracusan patrician and ex monk Venantius, who established a monastery in his house, asked Bishop John to celebrate Mass in his property. After John's declined the invitation, Venantius recruited soldiers, besieged the *episcopium* and forced the Bishop to perform the

ritual! The case was sent to Rome, and Pope Gregory suggested moderation from both sides, but eventually ordered Bishop John to celebrate Mass in Venantius' monastery (*ibid.* VI.42–3).

If such textual sources offer us some vivid details of the administration and the management of Sicilian monasteries, sadly, we have a gap in the archaeological record. Indeed, it is quite difficult, lacking clear information such as inscriptions or explicit Christian architectural or artistic decorations, like frescoes or mosaics, to trace the material transformation of *domus* into monasteries. A typical case study might be the *domus* of Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo (Chapter 3.5): here, around c. A.D. 500, burials were cut in the south-west part of the *domus*, while in the north-east area mosaic floors dated to the third and fourth centuries were restored and the pagan scenes substituted with cross motifs (David 2000). The idea of a conversion of this *domus* into a monastic centre has not been considered. However, contextualizing this site in a wider background of data, such as the nearby presence of the church of S. Maria della Pinta and the adjacent funerary area, the central position of the *domus* alongside the main city road and the proximity of the south-eastern town gate, the idea does not appear so fantastic. Similar cases might be documented in Taormina, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum* (Chapter 3.5), where burials were cut within *domus* and lay near late antique churches.

Giuseppe Agnello suggested that public monuments too were objects of reuse as Christian monastic foci, as he claim for the ancient theatre, as well as Castel Eurialo in Syracuse (Agnello, G. 1952: 70–4). But, it is most probable that the theatre was converted into residential buildings following the wave of refugees from the Lombard invasion of Italy (see Chapter 4) and in Castel Eurialo barracks for soldiers were built in the Byzantine period (Chapter 5). However, field surveys seem to indicate that the suburb of Syracuse was a place of eremitism: monastic cells were created in the extramural area near the theatre by reusing Hellenistic burial chambers, these sometimes decorated with carved crosses on the walls (Agnello, S.L. 1980).

The letters of Gregory the Great inform us about several religious centers founded in the interior of the island. Rustica, a Sicilian noblewoman appointed her husband Felix to construct a monastery – presumably set in the area of Comiso – and supported its foundation with the incomes from her estate at Comas (Greg. *Let.* IX.165). The already mentioned nun Januaria funded an oratory in the parish of Tindari within her estate Furiana '*and it remains under her charge*' (*ibid.* IX.181,182). Similarly, one Capitulina built a monastery in the region of Syracuse (*ibid.* X.1). These religious sites became in fact the retirement places of the local aristocracy, such as, for example Venantius, Petronella, Estranea, Onorata and the wife of a certain Redentus and of Leo (Rizzo, R. 2004: 136–7).

Luckily, archaeological exploration has helped us in the material understanding of a number of rural monastic centres establishments in the island. The most important regional monastery was the sixth century complex of S. Pietro *ad Baias*, located c. 7 km north-west of Syracuse (fig.3.32). The church still partially exists hidden in a post-medieval construction. This monument was a three aisled basilica (measuring c. 16 m wide and c. 23 m long), whose space was subdivided by eight pillars. A peculiarity of this basilica was the presence of a central apse ending with a small niche and two lateral semicircular apses. (Agnello, S.L. 1980: 15–16; Agnello, G. 1952: 82–88). Unfortunately, of the monastic complex of S. Pietro *ad Baias* we know little beyond the basilica itself.

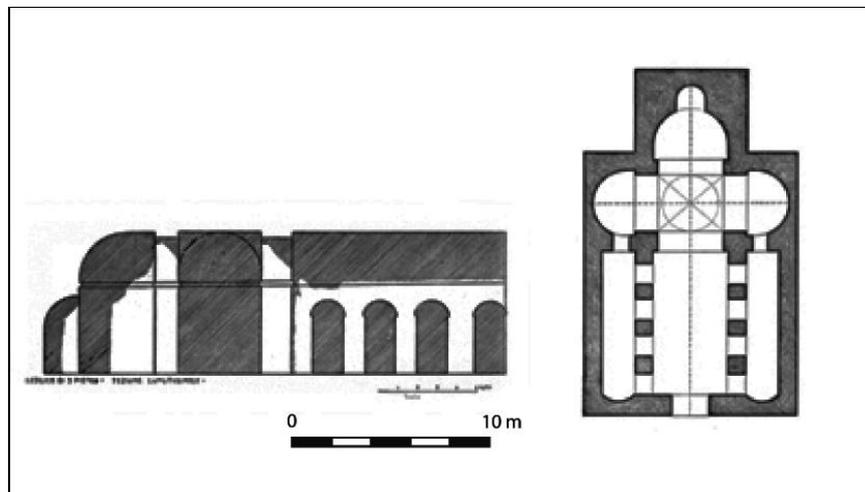


Fig.3.99: Syracuse – Section and plan of the basilica dedicated to S. Pietro *ad Baias* (from Agnello, G. 1952, fig. 10–11).

Excavations in Eraclea Minoa, a coastal site near Agrigento, uncovered the remains of a monastic centre (Fiorentini 2002). Here, a fifth century basilica (fig.3.33) was built on the site of a pre-existing fourth century necropolis and a contemporary village is reported close by the site. Later on, this cult focus increased in size and, between the sixth and the late seventh century, new buildings were added to host a probable nunnery (fig.3.34)). The quantity and quality of goods found within the several burials seem to support the idea of a wealthy community; this monastery was, in fact, located in an important and fertile agricultural region exploited since Hellenistic times and densely settled with villages and farms in the Byzantine period (see Chapter 6).

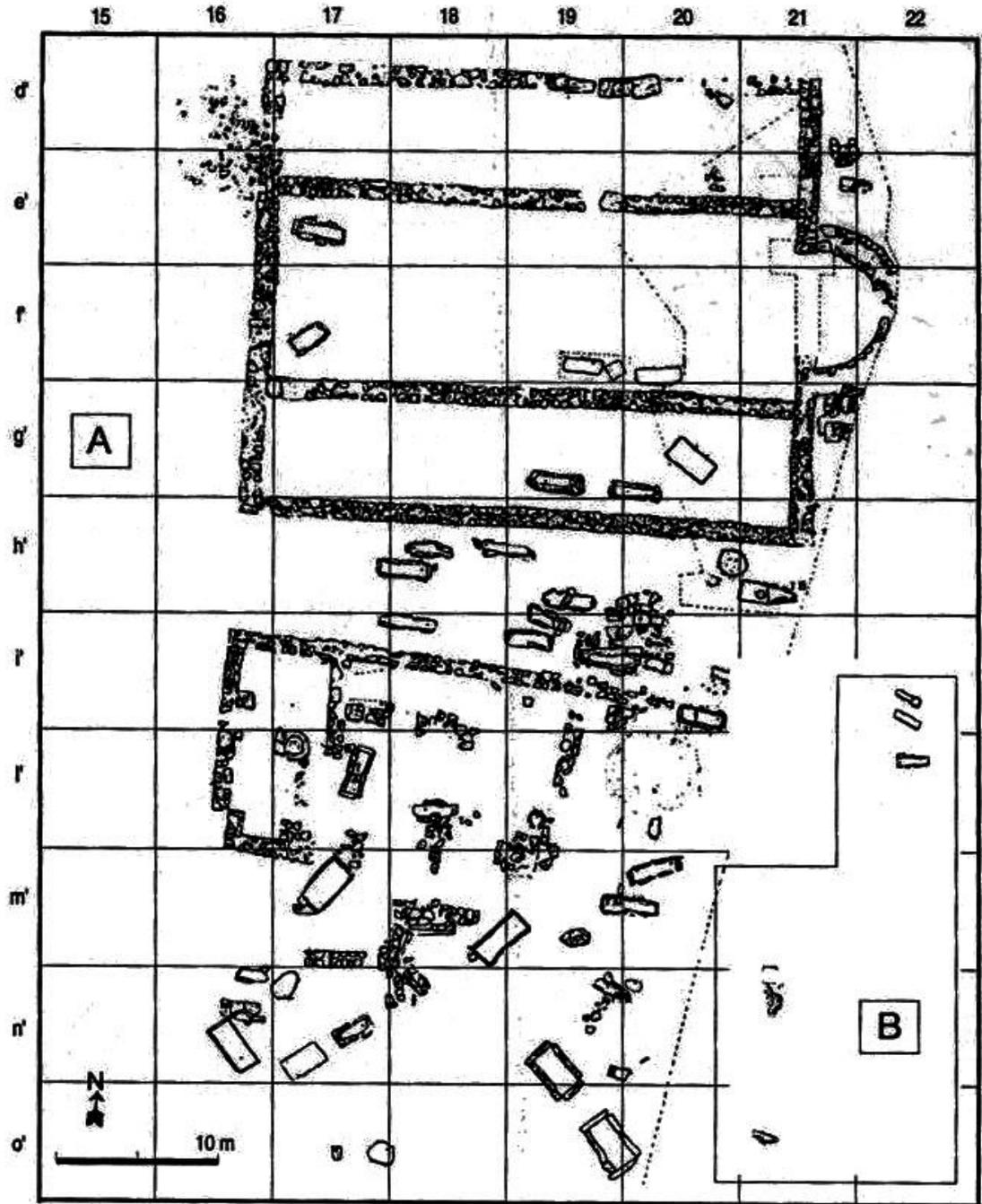


Fig.3.100: Eraclea Minoa – Plan of the religious buildings and the necropolis (from Fiorentini 2002, fig. 4).

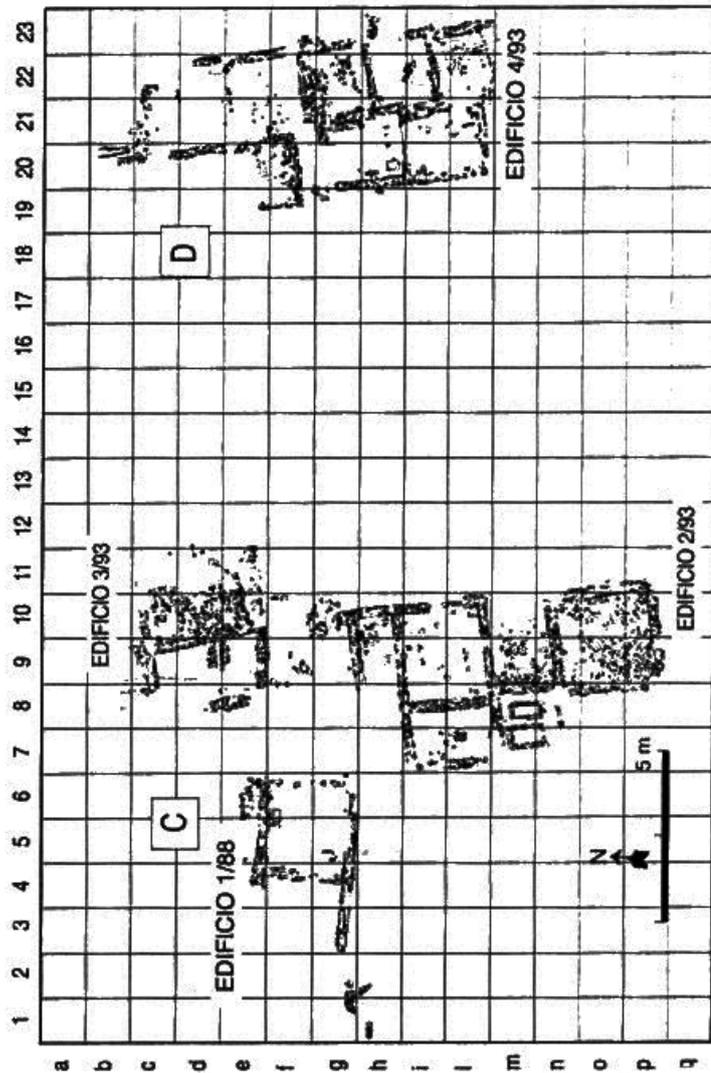


Fig.3.101: Eraclea Minoa – The buildings uncovered near the basilica and identified as monastic structures (from Fiorentini 2002, fig. 25).

Coenobia have been particularly documented in the Iblei Mountains on the south-east part of the island (Messina 1994, 1979; Agnello, G. 1952: 205–83; Orsi 1942). Often these constructions were excavated out of the bedrock to form *basilicae*, service rooms and accommodations of different size and plans. The most important monastic centre of this area is certainly that of S. Marco near the town of Noto, c. 30 km south of Syracuse (Agnello, G. 1952: 219–26; Orsi 1942: 16–19) and established in an isolated area cut off from the main regional road system and probably along a secondary network of paths connecting the several villages documented in the area (see Chapter 6). The *coenobium* of S. Marco was cut into the mountainside and set on two separate levels: in the upper floor was set accommodation space to host the monks, while the ground floor featured the triple-aisled basilica and a small sanctuary and water spring was

channelled to supply the community (fig.3.35). This monastery was clearly the result of skilful planning in the precise subdivision of the spaces, the regularity of the cuts, as well as the full use of the available rock and water facilities.

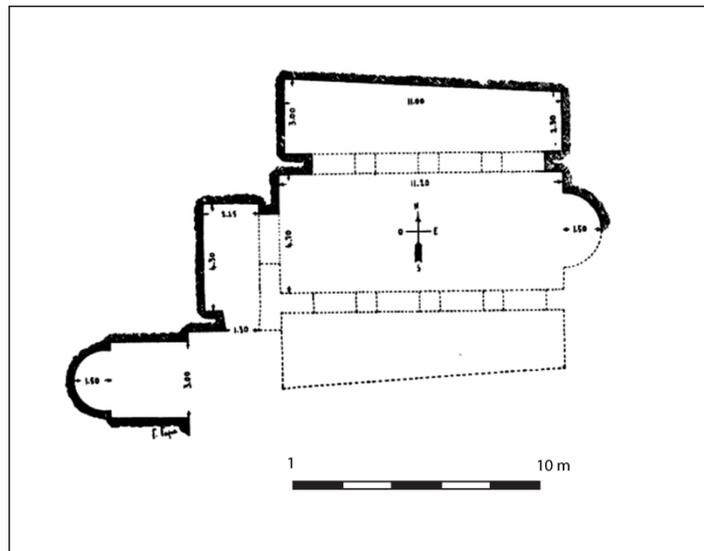


Fig.3.102: The monastery of S. Marco near Noto (modified from Agnello, G. 1952, fig. 46).

A second example of the architectural complexity achieved by these monasteries is the church near Buscemi, a small town 40 km west of Syracuse. This monument is entirely cut into the flank of a mountain and is subdivided into three main spaces (fig.3.36): an entrance with narthex, a cult area provided with an altar and a seat, and a space for catechumens set in the northern side (Orsi 1942: 40–6). Only the basilica is known, while other structures, as accommodations, cellars, burials, service spaces and store rooms await discovery. A Latin inscription commemorating a certain Pietro – probably a venerable man (was he an abbot?) – suggests that this complex was founded in the sixth century, when Latin was still widely used and had a long life, as later dedications and epitaphs in Greek document pilgrimage to this church.

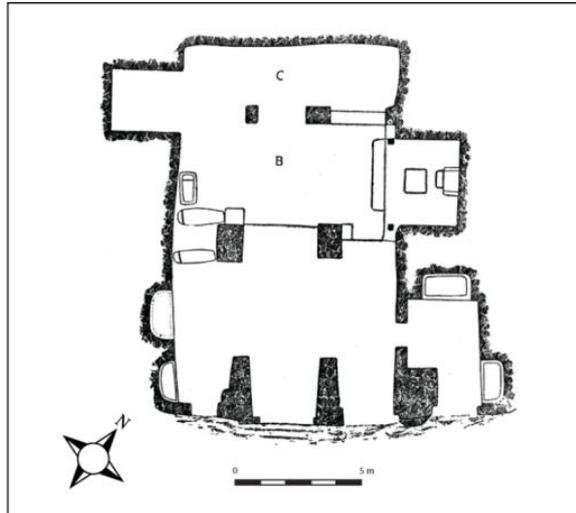


Fig.3.103: Buscemi – Plan of the rock-cut Christian complex (modified from Orsi 1942, fig. 22).

The mountain of Pantalica in the Anapo Valley 30 km north-west from Syracuse was settled by numerous bedrock-cut coenobitic monasteries, all of small size, some articulated in a complicated plan like S. Micidiario and others of simpler plan like S. Nicolicchio (Agnello 1952: 308–09) (fig.3.38).

These monasteries were often decorated with coloured frescoes with representations of saints and geometric motifs, although, unfortunately in most cases, these have since disappeared under the actions of humidity and abandonment. The fleeting remains of Byzantine frescoes described by G. Agnello (1952: 226–36), in the semi-underground, sub-circular chapel of Castelluccio near Noto (fig.3.38.3) are dated between the seventh and tenth century. In the same period might have been painted the frescoes representing no less than 30 saints disposed within rectangular frames in the Grotta dei Santi (fig.3.37) near the church of S. Pancrati at Cava d’Ispica, 6 km south-east of Modica (*ibid.*: 244–8). Also, the importance of small chapels is evident from the efforts in decorating these monuments with frescoes; the Grotta della Madonna near Modica is a good example (*ibid.* 1952: 248–50) (fig.3.38.6).



Fig.3.104: Remaining example of Byzantine frescoes from the church of Grotta dei Santi in Cava d'Ispica (from Agnello, G. 1952, figs 50–2).

The typology, size and location of these monastic foci are variable and, in some cases the real use of these spaces remains unclear. In particular, small devotional points raise questions: where these chapels, oratories or eremitic refuges? Were they permanently occupied? Were these monuments markers between different Church properties or parishes? The landscape explorations conducted by Orsi, Agnello and Messina offer a good idea of the number of monastic points spread through the territory and, in addition, a good idea is given by the very small size of monuments of S. Basilio documented on the island of Lipari by Giustolisi (2001: 98–124) (fig.3.38.9). The reasons for such a dissemination of monuments might have been numerous. On the one hand, we can presume that these tiny churches were material contributions to the Christianization of the rural areas in regions where the presence of non-Christian groups like Jews or heretics were strong. The discovery of a lead tablet with a magical formula dated to the fifth/sixth century (see Chapter 1.1) in the region, where these churches are documented might support this idea.

To determine the monastic rule of these centres remains very problematic because of the scarcity of information. We know that the Rule of St Benedict was well known to Gregory the Great's collaborators, whom he sent to Sicily as regional administrators or bishops; however, it was only from the second half of the eighth century that the Rule of St Benedict saw wide take-up (Christie 2006: 166) and in Sicily, by that time, the Rule of St Basil was probably well established and supported by the court of Constantinople. The influence of oriental monasticism in the Byzantine Sicily is testified by the *Typicon* of the monastery of St John the Forerunner on the small island of Pantelleria, off the south-west coast of Sicily (Fiaccadori 2000), a rule which has been

dated to the late eighth century and consists of a strict authoritarian regulation, where monks lived in prayer and hard work. Thus:

[2.] 'Likewise, let [the monks] approach the communion, the meal, and the salutation according to the order of their status. Again, let them keep the proper order also during the day. Let them recite their prayers three times from the first to the third hour, three or four times from the third to the sixth, two times from the sixth to the ninth, until vespers, and three times during the night.

[...]

[4.] Once more, whoever seeks salvation and enters the monastic state, should he be physically healthy, [that is] able to do it, let him fast during the day. (4) Should [he] instead be performing heavy work, let [him] have one fourth [of the regular portion], and a cup of wine before his meal. Whereas, should his body grow thin and look feeble, let him fast on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday [only]. He who is unwilling to comply with these commandments shall not achieve salvation'.

(translated by Fiaccadori 2000: 62–3)

In addition, we might consider that these monasteries and chapels were part of a rural pilgrimage system established along the network of interior roads; we know that some monasteries were set along important routes, as, for example that of Eraclea Minoa along the coastal road, or the hostel of *Via Nova* set in the region of Racalmuto (Greg. *Let.* 1.42). Monasteries established in the mountainous regions might have been set beside secondary paths, but we still lack data and only a specific historical study of the landscape will enlighten us.

Finally, we do not have, at the moment, any archaeological nor historical evidence indicating the presence in Sicily of a large big monastic rural complexes like Farfa and S. Vincenzo al Volturno in central Italy or S. Giusto in Apulia (see discussion in Christie 2006: 164–74). The reason for this gap is certainly the absence of specific archaeological research focused on the exploration of monastic centres. A planned series of excavations at the site of S. Pietro *ad Baias* in Syracuse would certainly provide important data. However, in contrast, we can recognize a high number of small chapels and monasteries both in rural and urban contexts. This might reflect a different approach in the administration of the landscape by the Church. Perhaps, urban monasteries and churches directly managed rural properties through the network of small monastic centres.

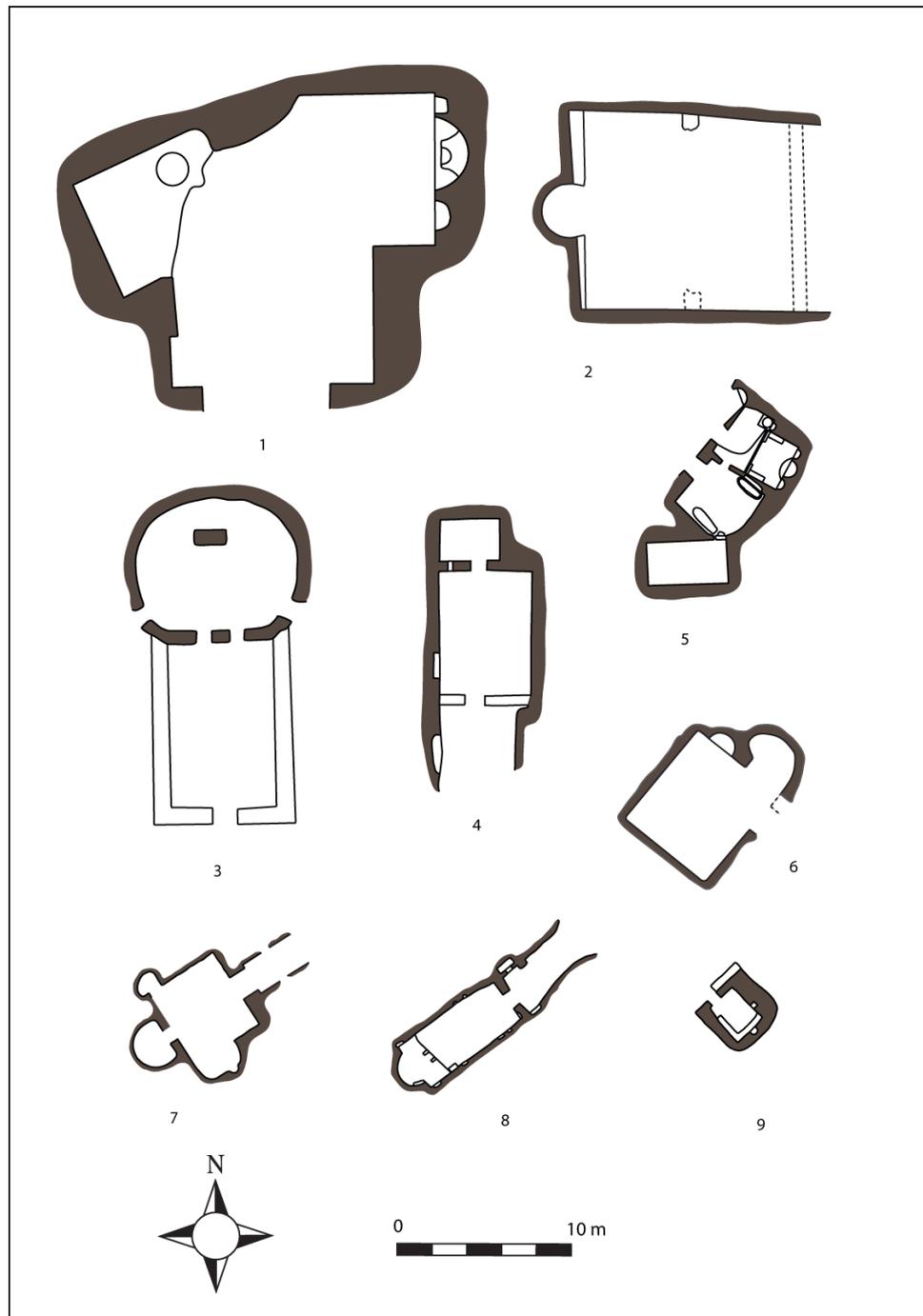


Fig.3.105: Rock-cut churches: 1) S. Nicolichio; 2) S. Maria; 3) Oratory of Castelluccio; 4) Grotta dei Santi; 5) S. Micidiario; 6) Grotta della Madonna; 7) Church of Cugni; 8) Church of Bibinello; 9) S. Basile (all plans modified from Agnello, G. 1952 and Giustolisi 2004).

3.6. Burials and Towns

Catacombs, *hypogea*, *sub-divo* necropoleis, *mausolea* and scattered inhumations in residential urban and suburban contexts are very significant structures in understanding the diachronic

development of towns and the progressive definition of rituals and religious customs, in late Roman and Byzantine Sicily. Moreover, the funerary constructions are important keys to comprehending the perception of the urban landscape and its exploitation in terms of subdivisions between residential and worship areas and to define the existence of specific religious groups. For example, as we will see below, despite the attestation in Palermo of fourth century Christian funerary areas, we have no archaeological proof of any shrine or church until the late fifth and early sixth century; therefore, in this case, necropoleis are the only marker of early Christian presence in this town.

Starting from c. A.D. 250, with a subsequent flourishing from the Constantinian era, a good number of *hypogea*, catacombs and necropolis *sub-divo* were created in towns and villages in Sicily; of these, not all are well known and much work remains to be done to pinpoint others. In particular, the relationship between cemetery area and town roads is still not adequately investigated, as well as the connection with old public monuments, as for example *fora*, town walls, and buildings for entertainment. Funerary spaces generally lay near churches, shrines or small chapels and set in an *extra moenia* position; however, starting from the fifth century; tombs are also dug in intramural quarters and within church spaces as well.

3.6.1. Catacombs and Hypogea

In Palermo, since the fourth century, extramural catacombs of consistent size, as well as small *hypogea* were contemporary active. In this phase, necropoleis were concentrated in extra mural position cut in the valley of the rivers Kemonia and Papiretus flanking the town (Denaro 2007, Bonacasa Carra 1987). One of these major catacombs is the funerary complex cut in the area of Porta d'Ossuna (Bonacasa Carra 1987; Pace 1949: 187–8). This monument was excavated in the region of Transpapireto (today the area of Corso Alberto Amedeo 110), a suburban district by the Papiretus stream on the north-west side of Palermo and was organized in a prominent position along the road leading to the northern gate of Porta Rota (fig.3.39).

From the homogeneous disposition of burials and *arcosolia*, often regularly cut in groups, one can possibly perceive a careful planning of this funerary complex, whose size probably indicates use by a large community (Bonacasa Carra 1987: 318). In contrast, in the area of the river Kemonia on the eastern part of Palermo several small *hypogea* of tiny size are known that may

had served families groups or a limited community. These are the *hypogea* of S. Mercurio, S. Pancrazio, S. Calogero *in thermis*, S. Maria *de crypta* and S. Cosma e Damiano and Ss Quaranta Martiri, S. Parasceve, S. Ermete, all cut in the area of the post-medieval church of Casa Professa (Denaro 2007; Bonacasa Carra 1987).

Unfortunately, since fresco decorations are lost and no finds are published from these monuments it is very hard to debate the chronology of the original foundations and later enlargements of these funerary complexes. In addition, the gap in information concerning materials with the inhumations compromises any possibility to analyze the rituals performed there.

The catacombs of Palermo are generally viewed as orthodox Christian funerary spaces; however we need to consider the complexity of the Sicilian religious context of the period spanning the third and fifth centuries and other Christian cults cannot theoretically be excluded. As noted above, Sicilian cities contained non-Christian or heretical groups of believers – sometimes substantial like the Jewish community – so, where Arians, pagans and Jews were buried?

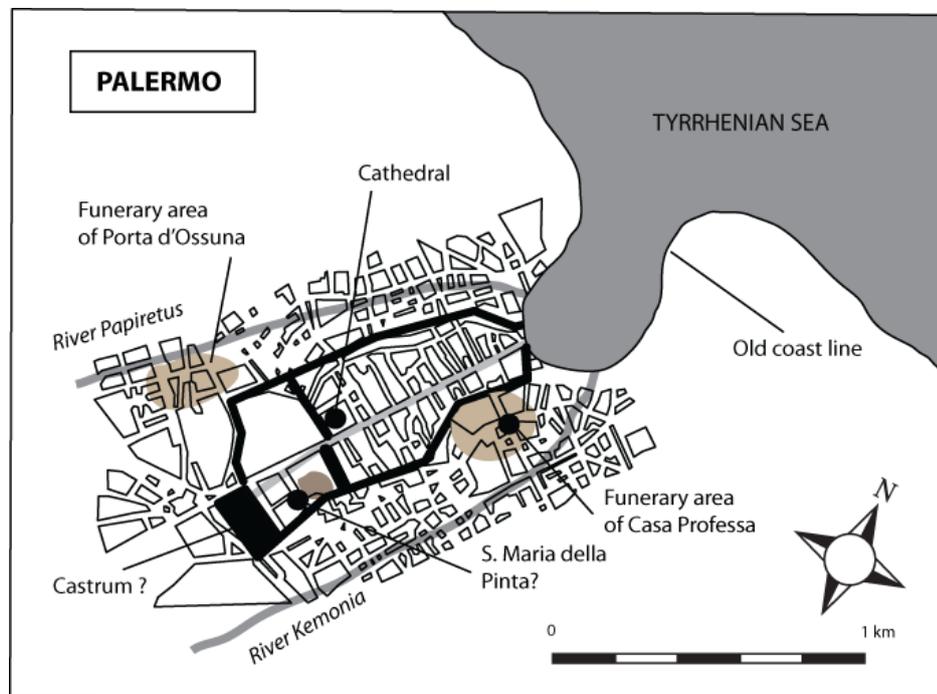


Fig.3.106: Palermo – Plan of the urban funerary areas.

Without doubt, the best known and studied catacombs of Sicily are those of Syracuse (Sgarlata 2007; Agnello S.L. 1969, 1958). In this city, communal and private sepulchres were cut in the

bedrock in the northern region of the town, bordering the limits of the urban space of Acradina district (fig.3.40).

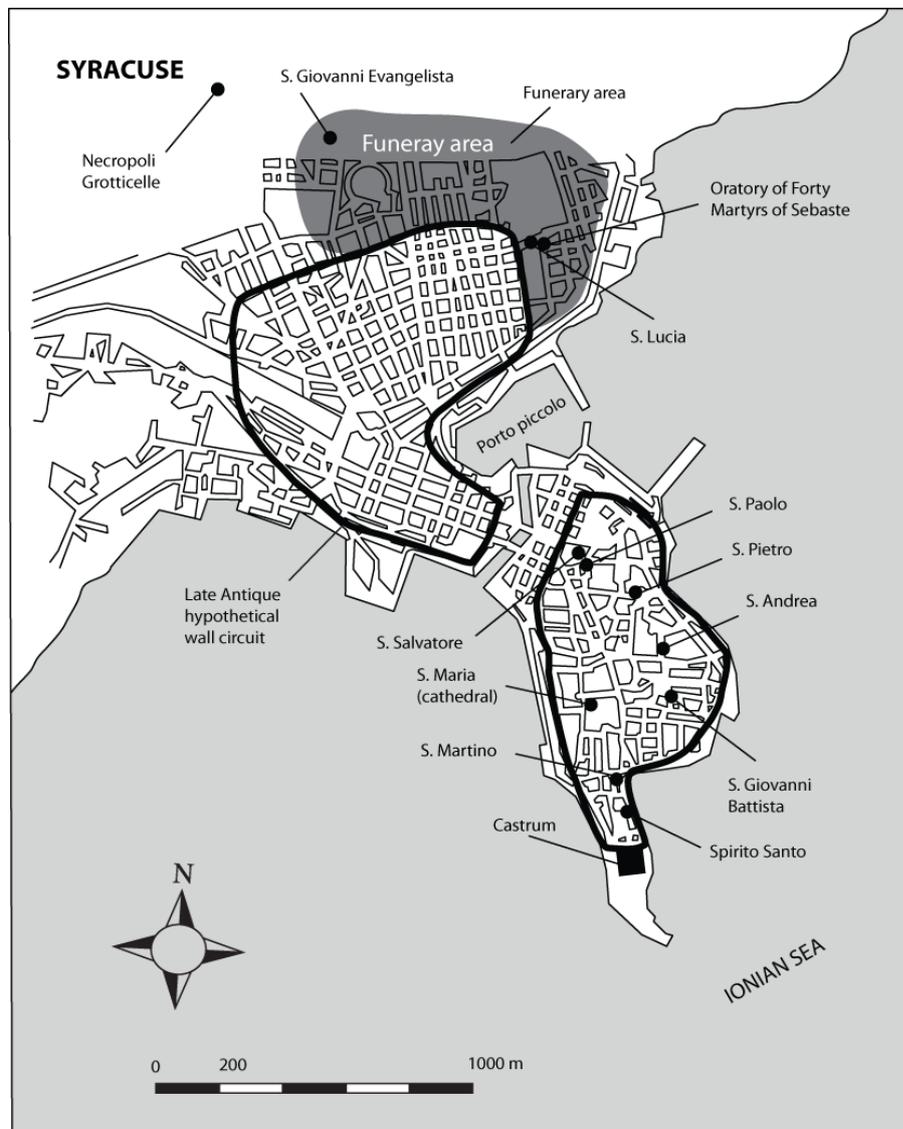


Fig.3.107: Syracuse – Plan of the urban funerary area.

The oldest documented catacomb seems that of S. Maria del Gesù and S. Lucia, dated to the middle of the third century and subsequently enlarged (Sgarlata 2007a-b; Agnello, S.L. 1958: 74–6). One of the biggest catacombs in the late antique Mediterranean is that of S. Giovanni, located near the sixth century basilica of S. Giovanni Evangelista and the crypt of S. Marciano. Its intricate maze of corridors and tombs was cut following a well organized plan in a relatively short time span, between c. A.D. 315 and 350/60, although some restoration and expansion may have occurred into the fifth century (Agnello, S.L. 1958: 68). The S. Giovanni catacomb was probably

the most prominent underground burial space of the town; here, in fact, Adelpia, wife of the *Comes Syracusanae civitates*, Valerius, was buried in c. A.D. 400 in a remarkable sarcophagus. In addition, it is from this catacomb that important inscriptions of Syracusan citizens were collected including that mentioning the tomb of fourth century Bishops Siracoso and Ceperione (Rizzo, F.P. 2005–6, II, i: 168).

A second relevant devotional station in town was the catacomb of S. Lucia where it is supposed the martyr was buried. Here, tombs grew up in the years around the saint memorial today visible in a 1seventh century construction (Sgarlata and Salvo 2006). This devotional funerary area was in use until the Arab conquest of the town as some restorations and the oratory of the Quaranta Martiri di Sebaste document (see Section 3.4).

Although, the successful practice of underground burials is manifested by the several numbers of small *hypogea* spread in the northern side of the town, not all fully documented. These sepulchres varied in size and plan. The *hypogea* Ippolito I and II are two paradigmatic cases (Agnello, G. 1969) (fig.3.41). The *hypogeum* I is a burial chamber excavated in the bare rock which dimensions are of 10 m by 8.50 and 2 m of high. The *hypogeum* contained 74 burials between *arcosolia*, and pit tombs and some charnel niches; during the archaeological investigation 219 human bodies were collected attesting a long use of this *hypogeum*. A similar dimension has the *hypogeum* Ippolito II that is 13 m by 8.50 and 2 m c. high. Minor was the number of burials cut here, 74 and 200 bodies were documented in this chamber. It is interesting to analyse, as a case study, the variety and typology of the materials collected in these two *hypogea* in use from the late third to the fifth century.



Fig.3.108: Syracuse – The entrance of the hypogeum Ippolito I (photograph of the author).

Despite very few personal ornaments were collected a considerable number of glasses, small bowls and beakers were gathered; furthermore an enormous amount of lamps of African and local production were found (more than 400 in *hypogeum* I, 163 in *hypogeum* II were complete and many more were fragmentary). The decoration of this corpus of lamps may help us in the understanding the devotional ritual and the religious identity of the Syracusan faithful. The pagan, neutral, Jewish and Christian representations decorating these lamps suggest us an idea of syncretism in the use of these funerary spaces, where the borders between Christianity and other creeds are not so well defined, as commonly believed from old studies. Orsi, facing the problematic of these lamps decoration suggested the presence of heretical groups (Orsi 1909: 367). Later, G. Agnello (1969: 318) evaluated the possibility of a contamination between pagans and Christian rituals and symbols. More recently, R. Greco (1999) investigated in depth the idea of G. Agnello and demonstrated how the religious context of the fourth and fifth centuries was in Syracuse characterized by a high degree of syncretism.

Catacombs and funerary *hypogea* are also well represented in Agrigento and *Lilybaeum*. The Grotta Fragapane (fig.3.42) is probably the first Christian catacomb of Agrigento (De Miro 1980). This subterranean complex was excavated in the fourth century enlarging water tanks and silos of Classical date set in the south portion of the Greek city wall. Like to the catacomb of Porta d'Ossuna in Palermo and the main Syracusan complexes, the Grotta Fragapane featured burials and *arcosolia* regularly ordered and grouped, signifying a structured and consistent Christian community.

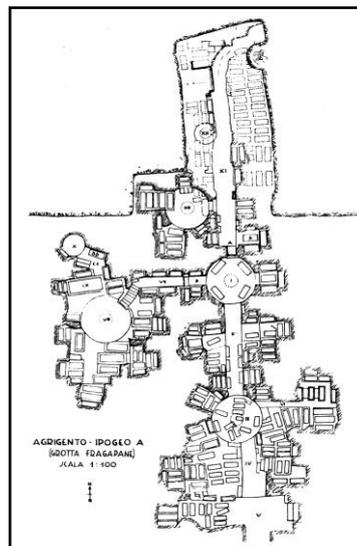


Fig.3.109: Agrigento – Plan of the catacomb Fragapane (from De Miro 1980, fig. 1).

Family *hypogea* spread near the Fragapane catacomb are numerous. Usually, these small chambers are the result of enlargements and re-adaptation of Classical cisterns and document the different use of the area and the structures (fig.3.43).

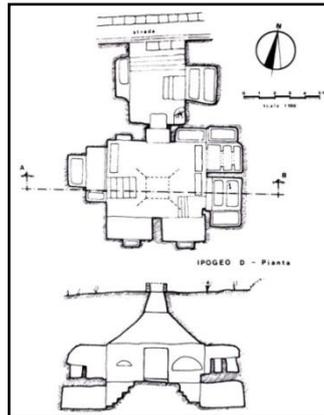


Fig.3.110: Agrigento, Hypogaeum D – One of the several hypogea documented in the south part of Agrigento (from de Miro 1980, fig.6).

Lilybaeum, despite lacking large catacombs, has several family sepulchres set in extramural position (fig.3.44). The catacomb of Vigna Spalla, between the Via Paceco and the railway probably served a sizable group of faithful together with a nearby *hypogaeum* set in Via Marettimo (Pace 1949: 182–3). Early Christian *hypogea* deriving from Punic and Classical tombs have been investigated in the area of the 1eighth century churchyard of S. Maria della Cava or della Grotta built at the Northern gate of the town, in Corso Gramsci and in the ex-stabilimento Curatolo where a Classical building (a tower?) was reused from the third century, as funerary area (Giglio 2007: 1790–1; Giglio and Vecchio 2000: 655–6). The most important concentration of *hypogea* lay in the district of Complesso dei Niccolini, in the eastern side of the town, near the church of Madonna dall'Itria and the Convento dei Padri Agostiniani (Giglio and Vecchio 2000: 656–67). *Hypogea* containing stone *sarcophagi* and *arcosolia* were investigated here at the end of the 1ninth century by Führer and Schultze (1907) and recently re-explored by the local Soprintendenza.

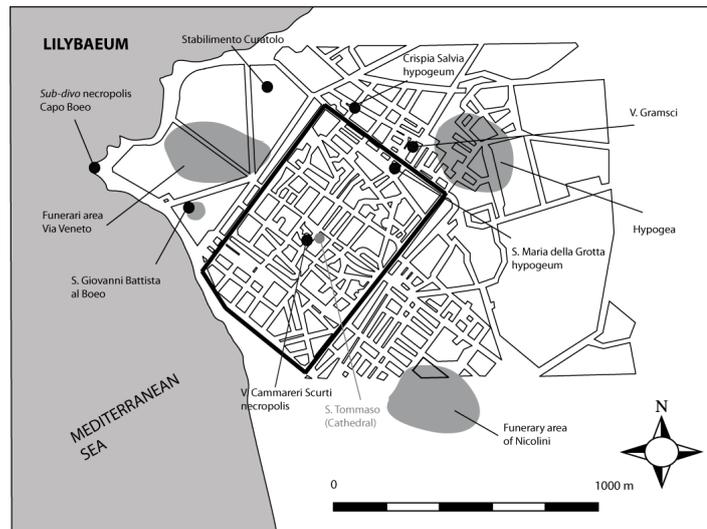


Fig.3.111: Lilybaeum – Plan of the town and position of the funerary areas.

3.6.2. Sub-Divo Necropoleis

Towns and rural areas also featured *sub-divo* cemeteries organized in clusters of varying size and quality. In Palermo this type of funerary space is not well documented, except between Via Cammillo Benso conte di Cavour and Via Roma in the north-western part of the town. Here a late fifth century Latin inscription mentioning *Petrus Alexandrinus linatario* and *Munatia* was discovered along with a possible Byzantine-Greek epitaph (Pace 1949: 189). Sets of burials were also excavated in proximity of the catacomb of Porta d'Ossuna.

At Taormina excavation undertaken in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele – the presumed forum – uncovered a *sub-divo* necropolis of more than 40 subrectangular burials set on different levels (Bacci 1980—1: 742—4) (fig.3.45). Fragments of red and brown painted pottery suggest a late Byzantine date for this necropolis (probably set in a period spanning the eighth to the very early tenth century). Only a pair of silver earrings dated not before the ninth century were collected (*ibid.*: 742—4).

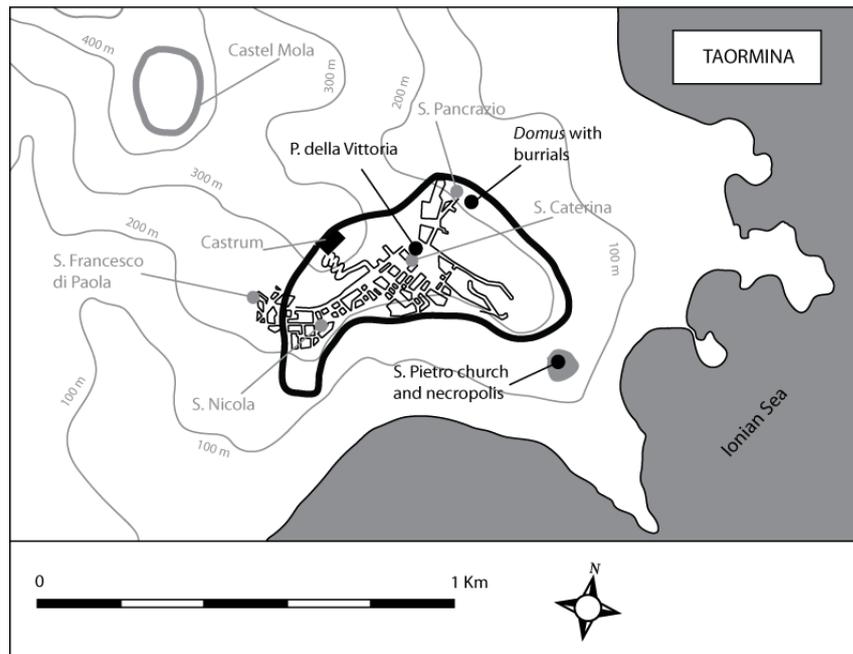


Fig.3.112: Taormina – Position of the urban and suburban funerary areas.

A second necropolis was excavated in the area of the extra mural church of S. Pietro, today in Via Pirandello (Bacci and Rizzo 2002). It was active from the fifth century. Coins and ceramics dated the use of this space to the fifth—seventh centuries; however a few metres distant from the late antique necropolis are a controversial set of burial niches partially cut in the bedrock and built with stone and reused bricks and set side by side (fig.3.46). These rectangular tombs measure 2 m x 0.80 m were daubed both on the inner and external surface; a barrel vault covered the single tombs. It has been identified as an Arabic feature, but they might be of Byzantine date. Coins of emperors Theophilus (829–42) and Michael III (842–67) were collected during explorations of the area.

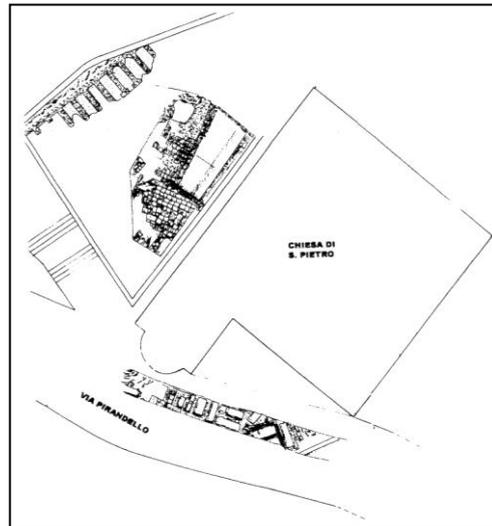


Fig.3.113: Taormina – The church of S. Pietro and the related necropolis (from Bacci and Rizzo 2002, fig.5).

A *sub-divo* necropolis was set in the area of Via Dottor Consoli in Catania around the fourth century memoria and the sixth century basilica (Rizza 1964). Here, fourth century burials and monumental tombs reused the space of a previous Classical necropolis; family tomb groups were ordered and separated by walls and burials had often Latin or Greek inscriptions (*ibid.*: 596–9). Other burials lie in the area of Via Regina Margherita not far from the church of S. Maria del Gesù, in Piazza Duomo and the waterfront, in the stretch between Via S. Giuliano and Piazza Bellini and in Via Stesicoro up to the area of the church of Carmine (Pace 1949: 197) (fig.3.47).

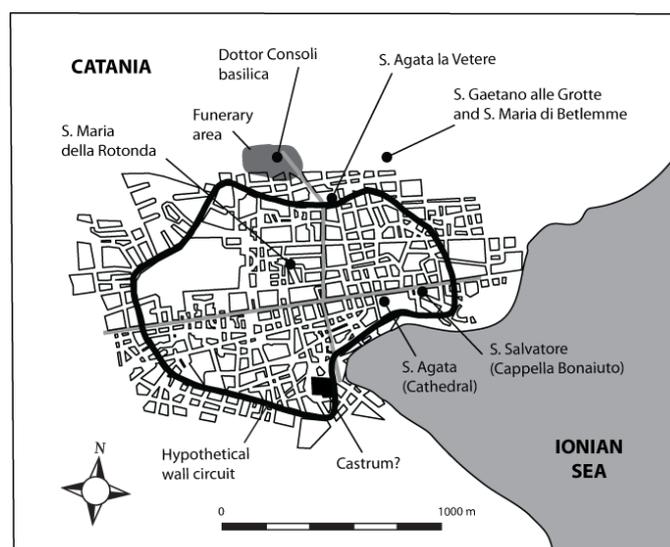


Fig.3.114: Catania – Plan of the town and position of the funerary area.

The necropolis uncovered in Contrada Grotticelle, in the north part of Syracuse is a *sub-divo* funerary area continually in use from the third to the ninth century. Other late antique and Byzantine necropoleis were documented in the site of the Hellenistic necropolis del Fusco and near the catacomb complex of S. Giovanni Evangelista (*ibid.*: 148–9).

If, in general, the documentation of Sicilian urban *sub-divo* necropoleis is incomplete, because of the modern damage, the case of Agrigento is an exception (fig.3.48; 3.50). Here, Bonacasa Carra provides clear records of a consistent fifth/sixth century necropolis set in the southern part of the Classical town, which in Hellenistic period contained a production centre (Bonacasa Carra 1995). Several pit tombs, stone sarcophagi and burials with vault covers were set in regular lines along paths (fig.3.49); in some cases simple tombstones without inscriptions marked the burials. The regularity of cut, as well as the carefully subdivision of inhumation groups, often containing more than one body, led Bonacasa Carra to suggest family plots.

Unfortunately, although the burials were still sealed no relevant finds were collected during the excavation campaigns, presenting debate about the social and the religious identity of the community who used this funerary space. Scattered food remains spread through the tombs document funerary ritual offers. However, once again, the orthodox Christian use of this necropolis is only a speculation since, so far, we do not have any religious marker that can help scholars to understand more about rituals and creeds.

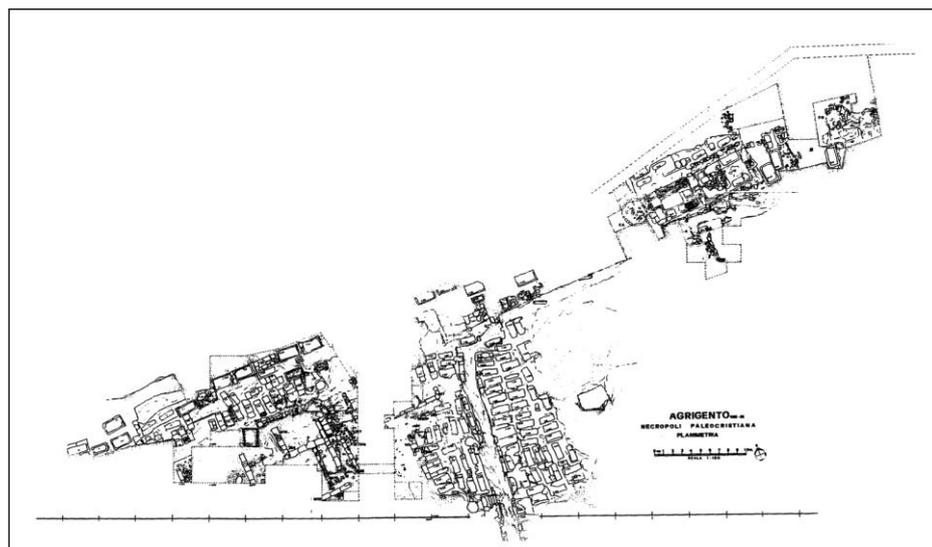


Fig.3.115: Agrigento – The necropolis excavated by Bonacasa Carra (from Bonacasa Carra 1995, fig. 1).

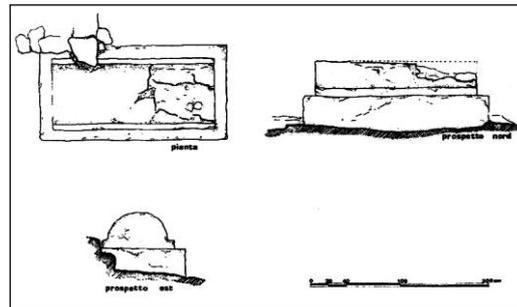


Fig.3.116: Agrigento – Example of a sub-divo burial (from Bonacasa Carra 1995, fig. 6).

From the anthropological study of the human remains from this site, we know that childhood mortality between the age of one and five was about 30% and in general the life expectation was c. 35 years (Mallegni 1995: 327–56). Surprisingly, the quality of food supply was not poor; diet featured a good amount of proteins from fish and meat in higher quantity with respect to vegetables (Bartoli 1995: 357–61). Hence we should wonder which social level is represented in this necropolis – a poor community of farmers or citizens from a middle class?

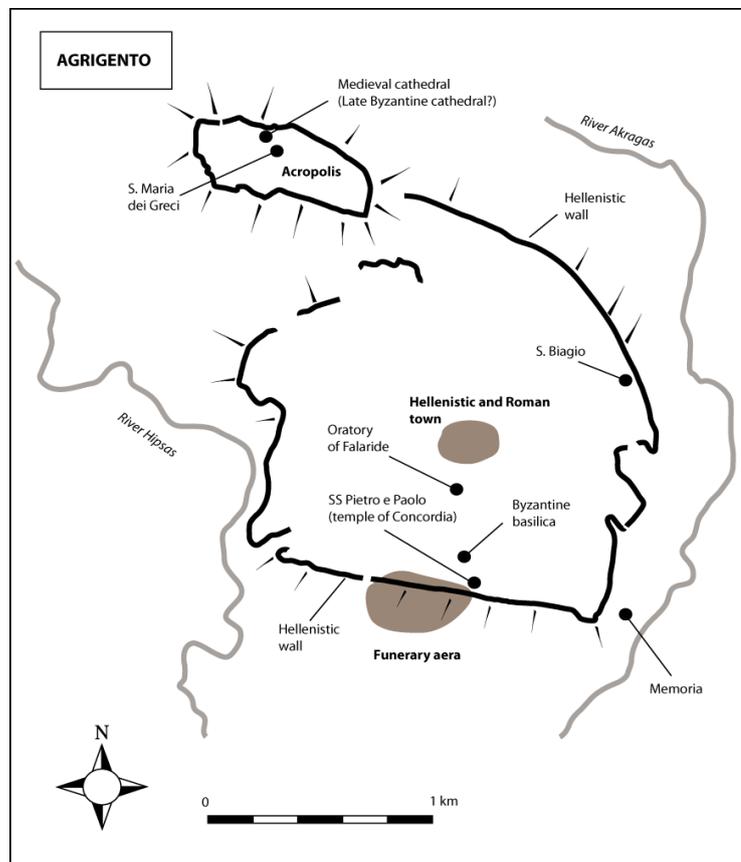


Fig.3.117: Agrigento – The funerary areas.

In *Lilybaeum*, recently published are the extramural burial groups of Capo Boeo and in the area of the ancient *decumanus* (Via Vittorio Emauele) (Giglio 2007), and a *sub-divo* necropolis in use from the fourth to the seventh century excavated in the backyard of S. Giovanni Battista (Giglio 2007; Caruso, Tusa 2004: 101) (see Chapter 3).

On the northern coast of Sicily, investigations undertaken in Milazzo in 1994–7, explored an extramural monumental necropolis set between the modern Via Cumbo Borgia, Matteo Nardi and Nino Ryolo, in front of the post-medieval Cathedral (Tigano 1997–8b: 513–45) (fig.3.51-2). This graveyard was built in two chronological phases spanning between fourth and the late seventh century featuring burials “alla cappuccina”, small burial chambers and groups of tombs surrounded by a wall (fig.3.51-52). In general, the inhumations contained minimal finds. Some glass cruets, fifth and early seventh century coins, as well as personal ornaments. The necropolis of Via Cumbo Borgia present another strict similarity with that of excavated by Rizza in Catania, in fact, burials were organized around a freestanding structure (see Chapter 3.1).

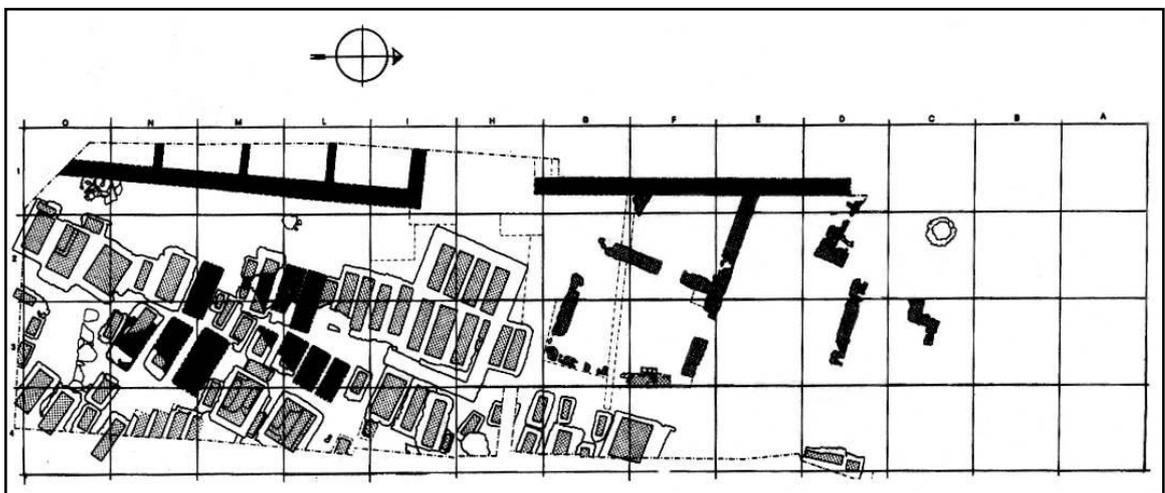


Fig.3.118: Milazzo – Plan of necropolis in Via C. Borgia (from Tigano 1997–8, fig. 7).

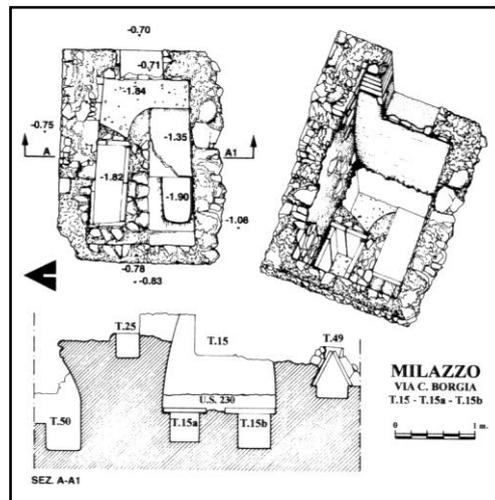


Fig.3.119: Milazzo – Excavation details of a burial investigated in Via C. Borgia (from Tigano 1997–8b, fig. 8).

Not far from Milazzo, in a sub-urban district of Messina, beside Via degli Orti and the parallel Via Battisti has been partially excavated a *sub-divo* necropolis uninterrupted used from Hellenistic to late fifth century (Tigano 1997–8b: 487–506). As seen in the case of Milazzo, also in Messina the fourth and fifth century graveyard was carefully projected in terms of spatial subdivision among groups of tombs.

Finally, on the small island of Lipari from 1975–84 a *sub-divo* necropolis was excavated in the Podere Zamagni, just outside the urban walls (Bernabò Brea 1988: 92–103). After a first phase in which burials were cut in regular groups encircled by walls, later tombs were added without respect for the original disposition. In this necropolis are documented the multi-level inhumations recorded in other Sicilian urban contexts (see above). Pit tombs of different quality were also spread in the area. The discovery of a *hypogean* cistern reused as a funerary chamber decorated with the menorah motif, seems to suggest the idea of a sharing with the Jewish community of this necropolis.

3.6.3. Funerary Monuments

Recurrently associated with *sub-divo* necropoleis are funerary monuments. The simplest were those built in multilevel structures and covered by a vault, but more articulated buildings have been also documented in Sicily.

In Agrigento, excavations in 1988–9 in the main funerary area identified an unusual monumental chamber partially cut into the bedrock and partially erected using stones. This structure has a rectangular plan subdivided in two separate spaces that were covered by a vault; burials were cut on the floor and on a stone desk (fig.3.53). Unfortunately little can be said about the human remains and few finds were collected; however, coins, African Red Slip Ware (ARS) and lamp fragments date the structure to the fourth and fifth, showing that it was contemporary with the nearby *sub-divo* necropolis.

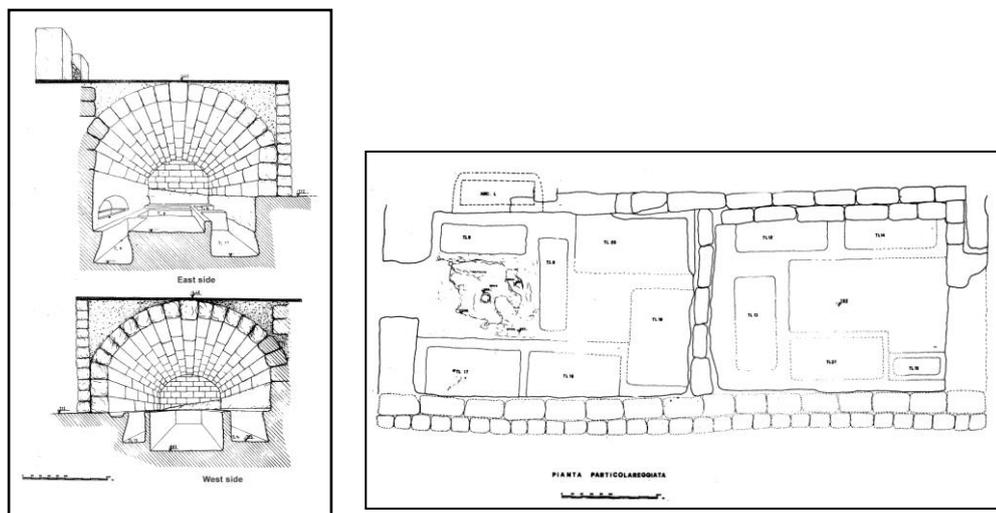


Fig.3.120: Agrigento – Reconstruction and plan of the funerary monumental chamber (from Bonacasa Carra 1996, fig.1).

Elsewhere for late antique funerary monuments those in Lipari are important (Bernabò Brea 1988: 83–103). Here, in a suburban area, between the third and the fourth century, a series of buildings of different plan and size were erected (fig.3.54). Particularly well preserved was a memorial built in semi subterranean position with simple basilica plan and small apse; tombs were periodically added here until the fifth century, cutting the floor. The amount of finds collected in the monument was very poor, an African lamp decorated with a lion and an ARS bowl came from one of the oldest tombs, while two gold coins of *Valentinian II* (372–92) and *Valentinian III* (425–55) were discovered in the later tombs near the apse. Unfortunately, a second monument built in a cruciform plan and containing two burials was in poor condition; but, its plan was similar to that of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna and so might indicate a fourth or fifth century chronology.

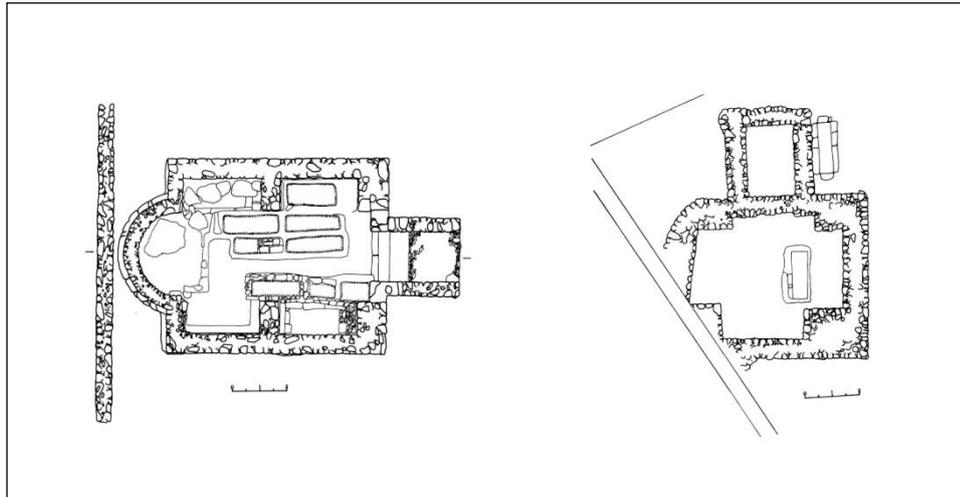


Fig.3.121: Lipari – The basilica plan and the cross funerary monuments (from Berabò Brea 1988, fig.30, 36)

3.6.4. The Intramural Burial Phenomenon in Sicilian Towns

Without doubt, one of the most debated topics in contemporary urban archaeology related to funerary practice is the controversial phenomenon of *intra urbem* burials in Mediterranean late antique centres. (Leone 2007: 198–208; Christie 2006: 252; Cantino Wataghin 1999)

Excavations in early 20th century in the houses of Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo documented a group of simple burials cut into the floor of the rich *domus* A, in the older and monumental district of the Roman town. In the opinion of Gabrici the inhumations were the result of the military insecurity due to Vandal raids or the Gothic war, while Tamburello proposed a catastrophic event such as the earthquake of 365 as the reason for such funerary dispositions (Wilson 1990: 333; Bonacasa Carra 1987: 315–16; Tamburello 1980; Pace 1949: 189; Gabrici 1921: 24, 28) (fig.3.55). One set of inhumations is assembled in rectangular and ordered cuts separated by walls, while a second is cut in sub-rectangular pits oriented east-west, and a final group is cut disorderly, suggesting three different phases spanning the fifth to the sixth century. The lack of detail about finds and stratigraphic relationships prevents us from understanding more about this necropolis; however, these burials might be related with the now lost, but nearby church of S. Maria della Pinta (see Chapter 3.3).

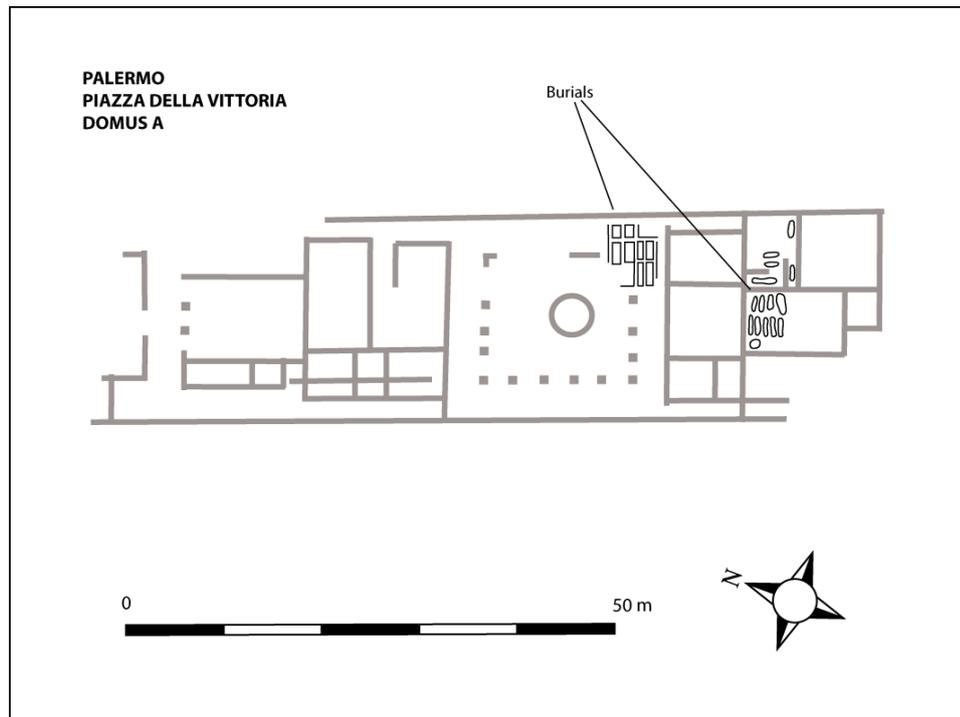


Fig.3.122: Palermo – Piazza della Vittoria the burials cut in the floor of domus A (after Wilson 1990, fig. 109.8).

A similar case has been documented in Taormina; here, fifth/sixth century burials were cut into the floor of the intramural *domus* uncovered in Via S. Pancrazio, close to the city north gate (Wilson 1990: 418 note 35; Bacci 1980–1: 742–4) (fig.3.56).

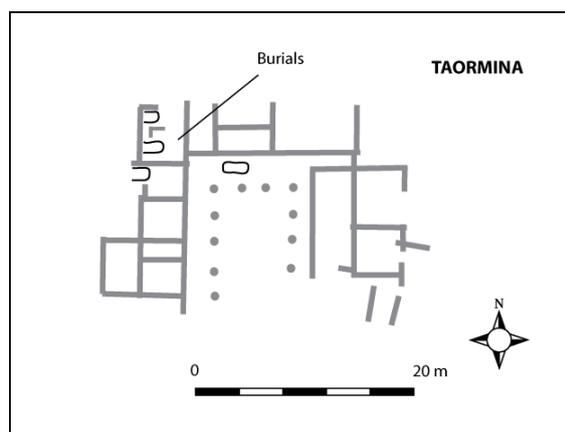


Fig.3.123: Taormina – Burials cut within the living space of a domus in Via S. Pancrazio (after Wilson 1990, fig. 109.7).

In *Lilybaeum* burials are known from the central area within the urban defences: tombs were uncovered in Via Sebastiano Cammareri Scurti, a few metres from the 12th century Cathedral of S.

Tommaso di Canterbury (Di Stefano, C.A. 1976–7). These burials were excavated into the floor of a Roman *domus*, between the fifth and sixth century. In addition, a funerary inscription dated to between the sixth and seventh century found in the north-west area of the old town seems to confirm the use of central urban space for funerary functions (Ferrua 1982–3: 29). Burials are also recorded within urban walls in Tindari and Agrigento (Wilson 1990: 115,165). The documentation of the late antique layers in the urban context of Agrigento is very poorly published. Floor burials were excavated in the fifth or sixth century in the area of the Classical residential quarter while dwellings were still occupying the district (Wilson 1990: 115).

During Late Antiquity, not only residential areas and *domus* were affected by the phenomenon of scattered burials, but monuments of Classical period were also involved in the process of reinterpretation of the urban landscape. Thus, in Syracuse the altar of Hieron became a necropolis and cut tombs and *arcosolia* invaded the monument (Agnello, G. 1952: 776–7). In the small centre of *Halaesa*, on the northern coast, the forum became a funerary area with burials cut into the paving of the public space (Wilson 1990: 418, note 35).

3.6.5. Discussion

Reconsidering the funerary urban practice in the Italian urban context, Neil Christie states that the intramural burial phenomenon was connected to: 1) a collapse of traditional burial practices and rituals caused by a lack of central control; 2) warfare and insecurity leading to inter in safe area; 3) availability of urban space caused by a loss of population and town shrinkage; 4) the creation of new points of attraction for burials; 5) the inward movement of the Church (Christie 2006: 252). If, for the Italy, the idea of insecurity from warfare is possible, what explanations are suited for Sicily?

As the main food supplier of Italy, from the mid-fifth century, Sicily was constantly under strict control by the Church and the imperial administration, which may be reflected in the continued use of Classical extramural funerary areas, as well as the late Roman practice of inhumation in catacombs and family *hypogea* until the late fifth century; data from Syracuse confirm that extramural funerary practice continued until the Arab invasion in the ninth century.

From the late fifth, or most probably the sixth century, intramural burials are also documented in Sicily. This phenomenon, however, presents some differences from the Italian context. In Sicily,

in fact, there are scattered burials randomly cut into the urban space, but sometime they are organized in clusters, as in the case of Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo. The setting of the funerary areas in Palermo and *Lilybaeum* excludes their organization in abandoned or ruralised parts of the towns, since they were central in the urban landscape and it is most probable that these funerary spaces were related to churches or monasteries. Finally, the reduced size of these urban necropoleis might indicate they were reserved for clergy or elites.

In regards to Sicilian urban inhumations, we have to consider that burials in catacombs, *sud-divo* necropoleis, as well as scattered tombs had different social and economic values and costs. The funerary inscription of Julia Florentia from the *sub-divo* necropolis of Catania (Rizza 1964) helps us to understand locally the prestige and the related economic aspect of such burials. Julia Florentia was a young child from Hybla (today Paternò, c. 20 km from Catania), who died when she was just eighteen months old. The text, after telling us how a *Maiestatis vox* forbids mourning of the child, records the inhumation near a *martyrium (pro foribus martyrum)* at the time of the *corrector provinciae* Zoilus (in office between 314–30). Thus, her body was moved from Hybla to Catania, interred *ad sanctos* and her grave was decorated with a considerable Latin inscription all of which must have been a considerable financial expense for Julia's parents. Why did the parents of Julia Florentia not bury the baby in Hybla? Without a doubt a burial *ad sanctos* was more prestigious and expensive since a town *memoria* was a significant point of attraction. Spending money on a burial was both a religious and a socially prestigious investment. Nevertheless, we could offer other reasons. Maybe in Hybla the Christian community of early fourth century was not strong as it was in Catania, or perhaps there were different Christian groups locally like Donatists, as Manganaro (1958: 15) suggests, or other form of Christian syncretises.

In conclusion, the study of urban burials in Sicily needs to be approached considering from point of view. Wars and insecurities probably played a temporary role in specific local sites, but are not suitable to fully explain the creation and the disposition of new necropoleis in towns. For Sicily, the presence of regional authority regulating burials practice is particularly visible in *sud-divo* necropoleis. The maintenance or the erection of walls bordering sets of tombs, as documented in Milazzo, for example, Messina, Lipari, as well as Catania, denote the effect of a capillary legislation from the fourth to the seventh century. Furthermore, the quantity of aligned tombs in Via Pirandello in Taormina suggests – at least in this town – this regulation went on until the late Byzantine ages.

Inhumation practice involved complex religious and symbolic aspects engaging the devout. But monuments and devotional places were all implicated in the perception of a funerary area that

today is irremediably compromised by modern constructions and a different sensitivity toward urbanism. Moreover we know only a very few of the several chapels, shrines, *memoriae* and churches spread throughout the city space. What we usually identify as scattered burials probably were not as random as we commonly think. Urban burials are most probably the concrete sign that there was a church or a funerary chapel in the vicinity. In this way, by identifying even a small group of burials we may reveal a network of devotional stations in these transformed townscapes.

3.7. The Conversion of Pagan Temples

As well as official history being written by the winners, so too memory is created by the leading elite. In reading early hagiographies of Sicilian saints or looking to the urban landscape of churches, catacombs and shrines, the first impression is that of a solid, homogeneous and successful urban Christian panorama. However, what seems to be straightforward hides enormous complexities.

In August 593, Pope Gregory the Great sent a letter to Euty chius bishop of Tindari, who required instruction about his conduct in respect of the presence of ‘idol worshippers’ and adherents to the dogma of *Angelii* (Greg. *Let.* III.59).

‘For you have written to us that some worshippers of idols and adherents to the dogma of the *Angelii* were found in this part in which you are established. You have asserted that several of them had converted, but that some defended themselves though the name of potentates and by the nature of the region. [...] Your fraternity should therefore show the greatest of concerns over this matter’.

While it could be debated whether the letter refers to ‘pagans’ or heretical Christians, nonetheless Gregory’s words indicate the existence of non-Christian or non-orthodox believers in Tindari at this time. A few years later, in 597, another Gregory, this time Bishop of Agrigento, went to the temple of Concordia in Agrigento; he fought against two devils in the shape of two statues and once these were defeated, he converted the monument into the cathedral:

‘However, they [Gregory and his fellow’s monks] did not go into the bishop’s palace or into the church, and were unwilling ever to turn and look at it, but moving away he pitched his tent outside the idolatrous temple near the wall and facing the sea. And he was there all night with people,

making a likeness of the holy table. And then he raised high the honoured and life giving crucifix. After that he prayed to God and put to flight the Devil there, those lurking in the idols of Eber and Raps. And built the new church most beautiful to look at, and dedicated it in the honour of the holy princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul. And he ordered the archdeacon to provide all those in the city who were up, the widows and orphans, enough for their needs.'

(Leo. Life of St Greg. 91)

Gregory's letters to Sicilian bishops and clerics are quite numerous. Not all talk about idols or about misbehaving office-holders, but the implication for this island (as, noticeably, also for Sardinia) is that all was not smooth-running. Did paganism really endure in both towns and country or does the archaeology reflect none of Gregory's concerns? This section explores mainly the urban context; the countryside is far too little explored to provide coherent data to corroborate or counter the claimed sixth century idol worship. We should, in any case, focus on the urban context, since significant survival here should support any possible continued existence in the landscape.

As shown in Chapter 2, the Christianization of the Empire was a long process that involved Roman provincial society at different times, dependent on the region and on the social level. This transformation is in general only partially intelligible because texts mainly offer the Christian point of view and the victory of Christianity entailed the almost complete disappearance of any reliable information concerning pagans and paganism in towns. Hagiographic sources, of course, generally tell us what contemporary Christian readers wanted to hear, and should be carefully evaluated in considering residual paganism. What, then, of the final pagan monuments in the towns of Sicily?

Temples, in Late Antiquity, represented enigmatic spaces, emblematic of a society in transition; however, unfortunately, a combination of ancient and modern omissions and carelessness in the archaeological documentation makes a study of later transformations problematic. The traditional archaeological approach to Classical temples was to remove any post-Roman accretions in order to reveal the Hellenistic or Roman phase. As a consequence, Sicilian studies have only marginally analyzed the question of temple maintenance and later conversion or destruction. However, Pace started the debate by suggesting a direct overlap of Christianity with pagan buildings to facilitate the transition from the old cults to the new religion (Pace 1949: 70–3). Primarily focused on the architectural aspect of structures like the temples of Athena and that of Apollo in Syracuse are the studies by G. and S.L. Agnello, but these do not analyze the interaction of such monuments within their urban context (Agnello, S.L. 1962; Agnello, G. 1952). Unique is the detailed work of Trizzino (1980) on the temple of Concordia in

Agrigento that specifically aimed to traces the material and structural impact of its transformation into a Christian monument, thus considering the walling up of the colonnades, enlargements to open a door in the western façade and the construction of a new roof. A valuable contribution in the field came in 1990 when R.J. Wilson, discussing early Christianity in Sicily, pondered on the rural aspects of paganism and its regional syncretism that might have involved rural temples; but Wilson did not fully consider the urban context, discussing only related inscriptions (1990: 310–12):

Such work suggests that the end of Sicilian temples was a long and slow agony that is difficult to prove via archaeological data. It is possible to divide this decline into three main stages: the first is one of structural decay, since natural disasters might have had an important role in Sicily, notably the earthquakes of 358 and 365 strikingly described by Ammianus Marcellinus in his *Res Gestae* (XVII, 7, 13 –14; XXVI, 10, 11–19); both quakes probably caused the destruction layers found in the small basilica in Agrigento and in the forum of Tindari (Wilson 1990: 185; De Miro 1980: 151). Furthermore, a loss of wealthy patronage, as the elite converted to Christianity probably meant that many damaged buildings did not see repair (for the Italian context: Christie 2006: 91–4; for North African see: Leone 2007: 209).

A second phase was the institutional directives from the imperial courts in Rome and Ravenna with the promulgation of a series of laws against pagans and temples that definitely hindered any maintenance work (Bayliss 2004: 9–12). However, often these monuments were officially protected from economical speculation because they were buildings of public interest. The sixth century Church as well, recognized the value of old pagan monuments; in 601, Gregory the Great wrote to Bishop Mellitus in Gaul suggesting he convert but also preserve the pagan structures (Greg. *Let.* XI, 56):

‘That is, that the temples of the idols among the people (*Angli*) ought not to be destroyed at all, but the idols themselves, which are inside them, should be destroyed. Let water blessed and sprinkled in the same temple, and let altars be constructed; it is necessary that they should be changed from the cult of demons to the worship of the true God, so that, while that race sees itself that its temples are not being destroyed [...].’

In Sicily, despite the pulling-down of some temples, a considerable number were preserved and subsequently dedicated to Christian saints. This transformation prevalently took place at a late stage, in the second half of the sixth century. If the signs of new restoration works are evident

and still visible on the monuments, as for example in the cathedral of Syracuse or in the temple of Concordia in Agrigento, it is very difficult to find archaeological proof of the ritual of consecration that allowed the transition to Christian devotion.

3.7.1. Converted Urban Temples in Sicily

Today Sicily features quite a lot – compared to other Italian regions – of temples/churches in both urban and rural contexts (fig.3.57; tab.3.1). Some of these constructions are well known and other need more investigation; we should also not exclude that additional temples may be obscured within medieval or post-medieval building and will be discovered in the future.

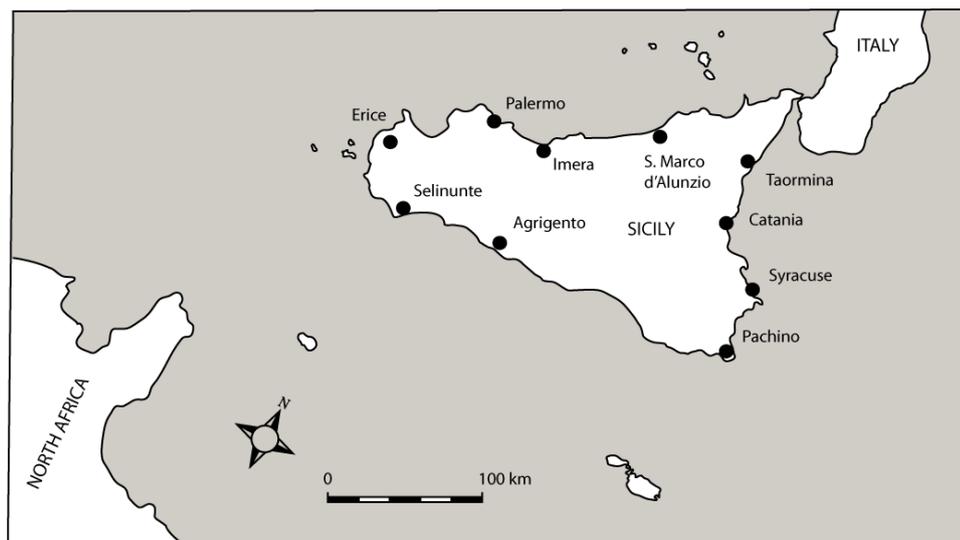


Fig.3.124: Location of the temples converted into churches mentioned in the text.

Local tradition records that after the defeat of the Ostrogothic garrison at Palermo and the Byzantine conquest 534, Belisarius celebrated his victory by building a church on the site of a Pagan temple within the defensive wall in the old part of the town (Pace 1949: 104, 329). This presumably was the church of S. Maria dell' Annunziata (Chapter 3.3). However, despite archaeological proof of the church, the existence of a pagan temple in the area cannot yet be securely determined.

Town	Temple dedication	Church dedication	Century			
			fifth	sixth	seventh	eighth
Palermo	?	S. Maria		?	●	
Taormina	Jove Serapis	S. Pancrazio		●		
Catania	Ceres and Proserpina	?	?			●
Syracuse	Apollo	S. Salvatore		?	●	
	Athena	S. Maria		●		
Agrigento	Concordia	SS Pietro e Paolo		●		
	Asclepius	?		●		
	Athena	S. Maria dei Greci		?	?	?
	Demetera and Persephone	S. Biagio		?	?	?

Tab.3.1: *Converted Sicilian temples. A summary guide of dated conversions.*

A paradigmatic regional case study is the temple/cathedral sequence at Syracuse. Cicero, describing Syracuse in the *Verrinae* (II, 4, 117–19), mentions long before, the magnificence of the local temples plundered by the governor Verres. Of these constructions, two were later transformed into churches: the temple of Athena, today the cathedral dedicated to S. Maria (figs 3.59-60); and the temple of Apollo, of which only a few ruins are preserved, which was rededicated to S. Salvatore (fig.3.60). As G. Agnello proposes (1980: 22), the transformation of the temple of Athena probably dates to the second half of the sixth century, since the future Bishop Zomimus was consecrated priest here during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (Agnello, S.L. 1980: 22). Few data exist for the temple of Apollo's conversion: however, it seems that only its central *cella*, already subdivided in three aisles, was reused and transformed into a church (Agnello, G. 1952: 291–2. The size of the temple of Apollo was 58.29 x 24.50 m, while that of

Athena was 55 x 22 m). In contrast, the whole temple of Athena was converted; here, in fact the colonnade was walled up creating an impressive three aisled basilica (fig.3.63.1,3).



Fig.3.125: An 18th century drawing of the converted temple of Athena in Syracuse (from Privitera 1879, tab, 10).



Fig.3.126: Syracuse – Detail of the external wall of the cathedral with the Greek colonnade walled up (photo by author).



Fig.3.127: Syracuse – The remains of the temple of Apollo. The wall visible in the picture is what remains of the Byzantine church of S. Salvatore (photo by author).

Unfortunately, a study of the conversion of the temple of Apollo has never been organized, and so, it remains difficult to establish exactly when this transformation took place. However, the presence of seventh century Byzantine column capitals recorded near the monument (Agnello, G. 1952: 52–61) suggests that, by this date, the temple was already a church. Most probably, the Classical monument was consecrated contemporary to the conversion of temple of Athena in the second half of the sixth century.

On the eastern coast, at Taormina, the sixth century intramural church of S. Pancrazio was built on top of a sanctuary dedicated to Jove Serapis and Isis (Agnello, G. 1952: 29; Pace 1949: 71). The original wall foundations are still visible, but a lack of study prevents determining any certain temple-church sequence; despite the extent post-medieval fabric it is feasible that the first church might be of Byzantine date (fig.3.63.9).

In Catania, we lack material evidence of converted temples. However, the eighth century local Bishop St Leo the *thaumaturgus* described the temple of Ceres and Proserpina as a point of active paganism in his time (Pace 1949: 198). Did Leo, in using the term ‘pagan’, mean iconoclastic or heretics? Yet in the eighth century there still was the memory of a temple in the town. Why did Leo refer to it with its Christian dedication? Was the pagan structure still preserved or in a state of abandonment and not being converted into a church? Why was this temple not demolished or quarried for material to restore other urban buildings? We shall see in the conclusion of this section how these are questions that involve other Sicilian cases.

Agrigento is the richest Sicilian town in terms of temples/churches. The most famous and best documented is the temple of Concordia, transformed in 596 by Bishop Gregory. In this old pagan monument a complicated process of re-use was undertaken exploiting only the eastern part of the temple. In order to build the new church part of the colonnade was walled up creating two spaces, of which the southern became the episcopium; a triple-apsed *aula* was set in the pagan *cella* and was preceded by a narthex, the remaining area of the Sanctuary not directly involved in the Byzantine construction was transformed into a funerary space (Trizzino 1980) (fig.3.61,3.634).

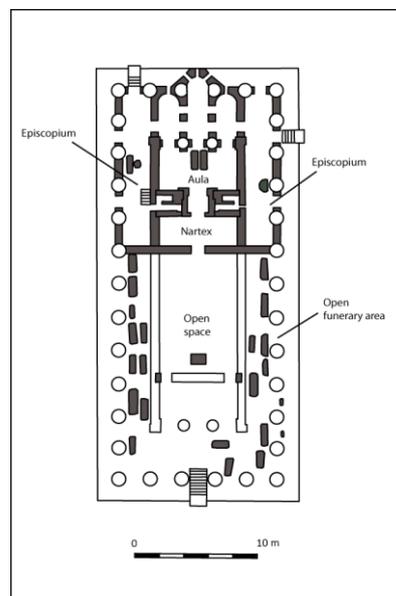


Fig.3.128: Agrigento – The sixth century transformation of the temple of Concordia (modified from Trizzino 1980, fig. 2).

It is also probable that traces of structural transformations found in the nearby Sanctuary of Asclepius – set in an area locally named *Casa di S. Gregorio* – might relate to conversion of this temple into a monastery (Trizzino 1980: 181–3).

Despite the extant churches of S. Maria dei Greci and of S. Biagio being of Norman period, conversions within the programme of transformation inaugurated under Pope Gregory should be considered (Agnello 1952: 290). S. Maria dei Greci was built using the remains of the temple of Athena on the acropolis – this later Byzantine citadel – and sited c. 160 m from the medieval (and Byzantine?) cathedral. The conversion works were here quite destructive since a great part of the peristyle and the central *cella* was removed; three apses were added on the east side, but these are of medieval origin (fig.362). The basilica of S. Biagio was erected within the temple of Demeter and Persephone in the hill of S. Biagio, 2 km c. from the citadel's gate and 1.3 km from the early

cathedral built in the Hellenistic-Roman quarter (fig.3.62). Unlike the Sanctuary of Athena that of Demeter and Persephone was less impacted by the construction of the church where a small apse was built and four columns erected to divide the basilica's space into three aisles.

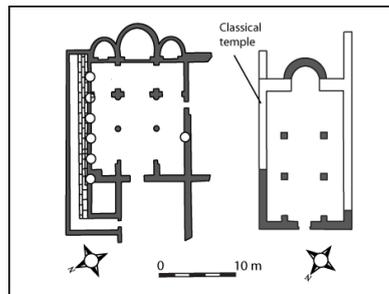


Fig.3.129: Agrigento – left: the church of S. Maria dei Greci (temple of Athena); right: S. Biagio (temple of Demeter and Persephone) (after Koldewey and Puchstein 1899, figs 5,6).

The programme of conversion of Classical monuments also included the small early Roman funerary monument named the Oratory of Phalaris built in the Hellenistic-Roman quarter (Agnello, G. 1952: 291). This was a construction of rectangular plan 10.90 m. long and wide 7.40 m; the Christian transformation did not impact on the original structure since no apse was added to the monument (fig.3.63.10).

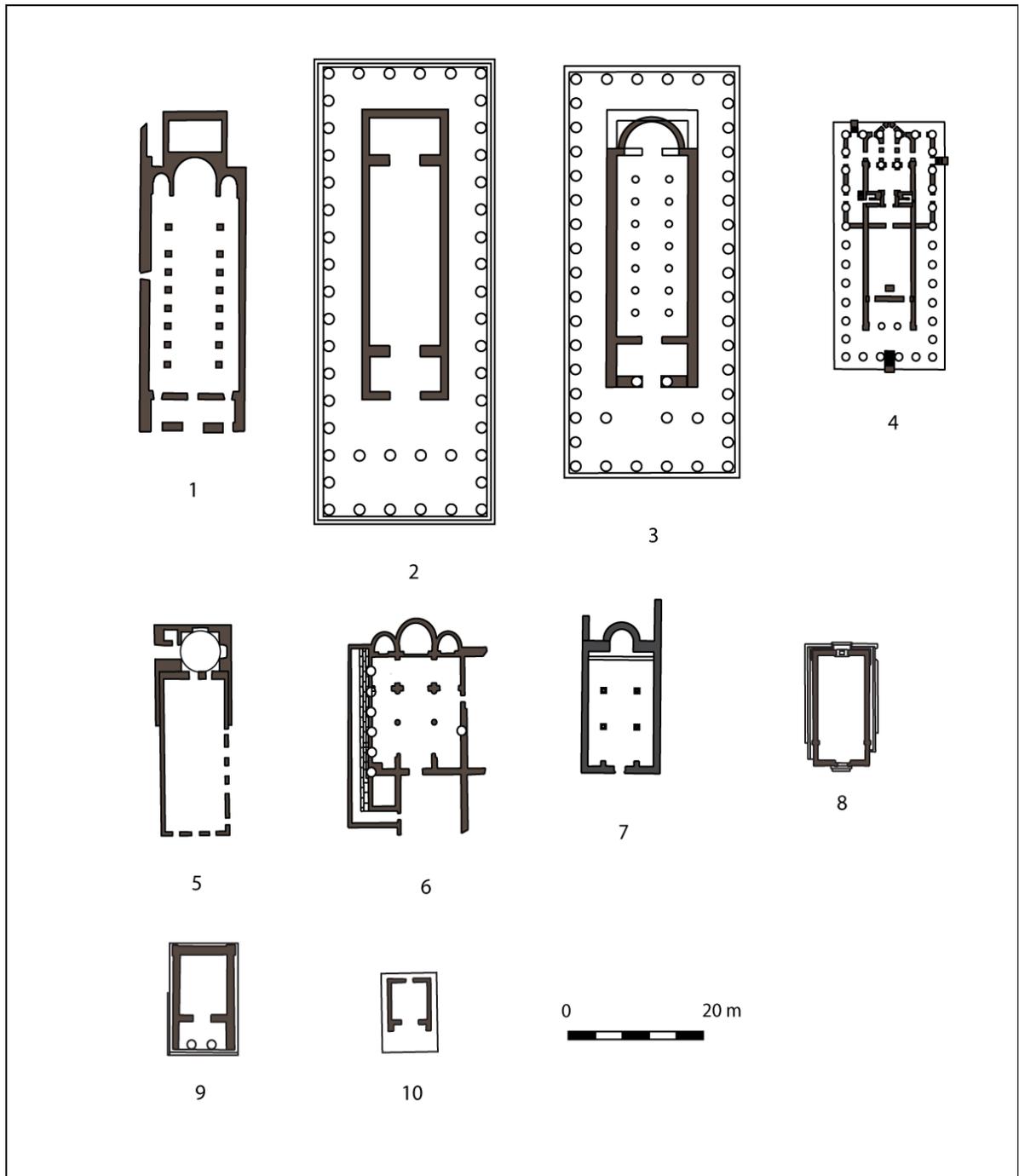


Fig.3.130: Sicilian temples converted into churches. 1) Syracuse, temple of Athena-S. Maria; 2) Selinunte, temple C of Apollo; 3) Syracuse, temple of Apollo-S. Salvatore; 4) Agrigento, temple of Concordia-S. Pietro e Paolo; 5) S. Lorenzo Vecchio; 6) Agrigento, temple of Athena-S. Maria dei Greci; 7) Agrigento, temple of Demeter and Persephone- S. Biagio; 8) S. Marco d'Alunizio, temples of Heracles-S. Marco; 9) Taormina, temple of Jovis Serapis-S. Pancrazio; 10) Agrigento, Oratory of Phalaris.

3.7.2. Rural Temple Conversion

The conversion of temples into churches is a phenomenon documented also in rural settlements or minor urban centres across Sicily (tab.3.2). On the northern coast, in the small village of S. Marco d'Alunzio in the province of Messina, a temple dedicated to Heracles probably was in Byzantine period converted into the basilica of S. Marco, but lacking dedications or decorations this remain speculation (Quartarone 2006: 51–2). More secure is the converted Sanctuary in contrada S. Lorenzo Vecchio, near modern Pachino in the far south-east of the island. Here, is still visible a group of buildings connected to an 1eighth century farm, where G. Agnello documented the remains of a temple/church perhaps transformed between the sixth and eighth centuries (Agnello, G. 1952: 129–38) (fig.3.64). The *cella* of the pagan monument was the focus: measuring 23 by 10 m, it lacks an apse, although, on its western side was opened a passage leading to a small quadrangular oratory.

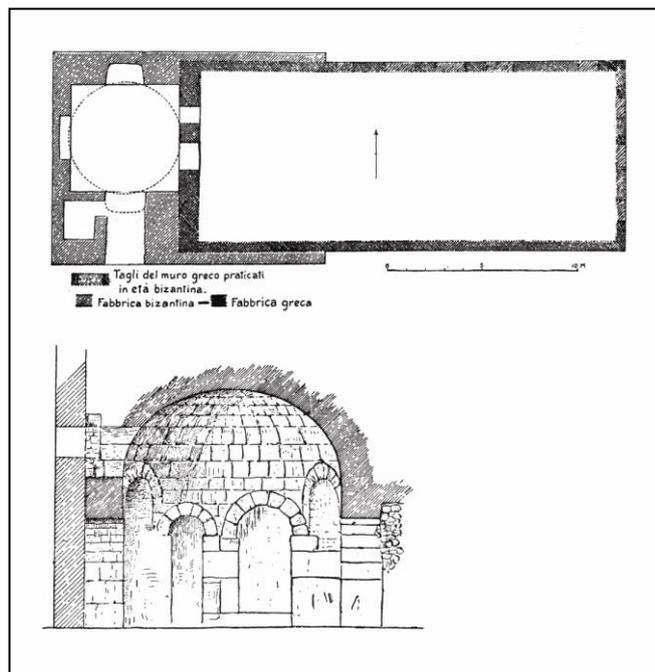


Fig.3.131: Pachino – Plan and section of the oratory of the church of S. Lorenzo Vecchio (after Agnello, G. 1952, figs 18 and 19).

Several tombs were excavated in proximity to the church. In the same district, Tommaso Fazello mentions a temple converted into a church with an oratory dedicated to St Basil and a shrine dedicated to St Hippolytus (Agnello, G. 1952: 130).

Town	Temple dedication	Church dedication	fifth	sixth	seventh	eighth
			Century			
S. Marco d'Alunzio	Hercules	S. Marco		?	●	
Pachino	?	S. Lorenzo Vecchio		●		
Imera	Victory	?		?		?
Selinunte	Apollo	?		?		●
Erice	Venus	?				

Tab.3.2: Documented converted temples in rural or secondary centres.

As documented in the Oratory of Phalaris and S. Lorenzo Vecchio the transformation into a church did not always entail the construction of apses or the radical alteration of the Classical structure. The temples *in antis* of Heracles – later S. Marco – in the village of S. Marco d'Alunzio in the north coast of Sicily (fig.3.65) and that of Jove Serapis – later S. Pancrazio – in Taormina, both witness the considerable maintenance of the original architecture. In these two monuments the transformation took place though simply the walling up of the porticoes.

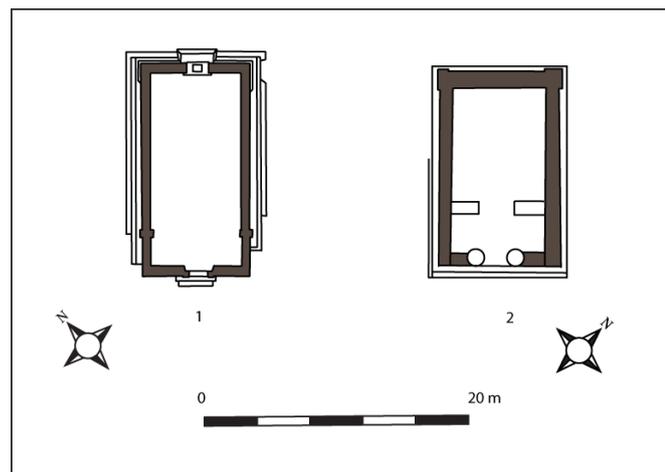


Fig.3.132: The two temples in antis of Heracles and Jove Serapis.

More controversial is the transformation of the Temple C dedicated to Apollo in Selinunte on the south-west Sicilian coast. The importance of Selinunte in Greek period is testified by its many

stunning sanctuaries. Of these, during Late Antiquity, Temples A and O became part of a fortress (see Chapter 5), whereas Temple C was probably transformed into a church (fig.3.63.2). Archaeologists are still struggling to shed light on this monument's post-Classical life (Molinari 2002). However, the presence of later walls between the intercolumns, as well as the discovery of a necropolis spanning the third–12th centuries, prompt scholars to propose a Christian conversion. In addition, excavations undertaken in the 19th century uncovered, within the temple ruins, a fourth/fifth century bronze lamp decorated with the Christian inscription *Deo gratias* (Wilson 1990: 272–3) – potentially part of the equipment of a presumed church (Molinari 2002: 334–43; Pace 1949: 179–80). If this was a church, then the transformation was centred on the *cella* chiefly: indeed the size of Temple C that was too large to easily convert or use, especially in a centre of only minor importance in Late Antiquity.

Finally, Pace proposed that the Sanctuary of Venus on top of the promontory of Erice, in south-western Sicily was in Byzantine period reused as a church (Pace 1949: 183), but he does not offer details or evidence regarding the possible Christianization of the monument.

3.8. Discussion. Sicilian Urban Christianization

Summarizing the process of Christianization of the Sicilian towns from the late fourth to the second half of the seventh century, we can identify four phases. The first dates from the late fourth to the early fifth century and seems to be characterized by local pragmatism (see Gauthier 1999). The Church negotiated (with local aristocracy?) its space within the urban walls gaining different results. In Syracuse, the early move of the Church in intramural space was carefully planned and churches are central and well distributed in the urban landscape. In contrast, in Catania, this negotiation resulted in the foundation of the early cathedral in a marginalized position (that of the amphitheatre, see Chapter 4). For other towns we lack data, but how far this is due to a gap in the research or it reflects the early Christian urban space is difficult, so far, to establish.

A second phase is defined by a period of stagnation recorded in all the urban centres of Sicily from the early decades to the late fifth century. This inactivity contrast with the construction of monuments in rural areas such as for example S. Pietro *ad Baias* near Syracuse or the decorated basilica of the Pirrea near Santa Croce Camerina on the south west coast (Agnello 1962). The erection of such rural monuments excludes any possible relation between the Vandal raids and

the potential negative impact onto the urban construction activity. The reason of such gap might lay in the political choice of concentrate the effort of the Church in the rural rather than in the urban areas; this in a moment of rising importance of Sicily as grain supplier for Italy.

The Byzantine conquest of the sixth century marks a third phase of urban changes defined by adaptation of the Church to local necessities. Archaeologically, the redefinition of the Church's presence in the landscape is documented by an intensive and spread project of construction of new cathedrals, churches and monasteries and the conversion of old temples.

Big size cathedrals were erected in all the most important coastal towns, but the position of the cathedral was adapted to local factors – most probably related to the administration of rural properties – that determined the extra-or intramural position of the *episcopium*. Local aristocracy displayed its support to the Church, as well as its role in the urban landscape, patronizing the construction of monasteries, hostels and hospitals. The strict bond between Sicilian aristocracy and Rome is stressed by the dedication of these monastic foundations to Latin saints, such as St Agnes, St Hermes, St Pancras and St Sebastian. In addition, the letters of Pope Gregory I clearly illustrate the control exercised by Rome over Sicily. The systematic conversions of old temples in the second half of the sixth century reinforce the idea of a centralized plan of consolidation of the Church position both in urban and rural areas.

It is only after Pope Gregory's death in 604 and the taking of power by Heraclius in 610 that Sicily underwent a Byzantinization around the Greek identity. The arrival of Constans II, Sicily coincides with the final Hellenization and militarization of Sicilian society. This process is manifested in the urban landscape by the introduction of eastern saints, such as the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste documented in Palermo, Catania and Syracuse and by the exclusive use of Greek in written sources. The Byzantinization represents the last phase of major changeover in Sicilian urban landscape until the Arab conquest of the ninth century.

Chapter 4

Public Buildings and Residential Spaces in Late Antique Sicily

4.1. Introduction

The late antique cities of Sicily were not only towns of monuments, but living spaces where people worked, moving through the net of roads and alleys, buying and selling goods at the market, meeting other inhabitants in the *fora*, attending plays and games in circuses or theatres and gathering in churches. Wealthy people lived in rich *domus* decorated with mosaics and fountains; others in rooms, in *insulae* of two or three floors; and many more in quarters and houses of poor construction often in the suburban area. To understand towns and populations, we therefore need to have some understanding of the spaces both public and private. What did happen in Late Antiquity to Classical structures like *fora*, circuses, theatres and thermal baths? Did they disappear from the post-Classical civic life? Were these spaces transformed and how did this transformation impact on the late antique urban form? The shrinkage or abandonment of *fora*, as well as the desertion of entertainment buildings have been particularly used as examples of decay in late antique civic life (Ward-Perkins 1984: 14–37, 92–118). However, if we consider that alongside the end of the classical Roman monuments new buildings like churches, town walls, and fortresses were being erected, we clearly note how contradictory and open the current debate is.

Recent studies stress the difficulty in defining a common pattern for the use of *fora* in late antique Italian cities (Christie 2006: 215) and in general it seems – although partially occupied by churches (often cathedrals, e.g. Aosta, Bergamo, Florence) and private activities – that in the peninsula, the space of *forum* survived (Christie: 2006 214–17).

4.2. Fora

In Sicily, *fora* are not archaeologically well documented and limited space has been dedicated to the topic in recent publications (Wilson 1990: 49, 51–2). The main difficulty in the exploration of these ancient public spaces are all the post-medieval buildings and, as a consequence the lack of extensive excavations.

In Palermo the forum is supposed to be under the modern central square facing the cathedral, but archaeological data are needed to confirm this claim (Wilson 1990: 361, n 3) (fig.4.1).

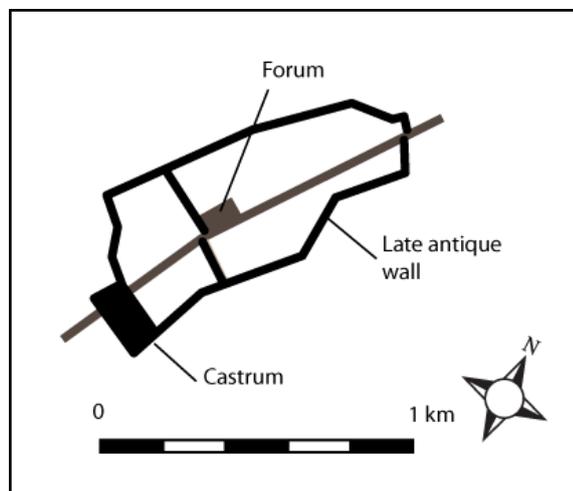


Fig.4.15: Palermo – Presumed position of the forum.

The *forum* of Taormina (fig.4.2) has been recognised thanks to excavations in the area of Piazza Vittotio Emanuele II (*ibid.*: 50; Bacci 1980–1). This space had been deeply altered in the late Byzantine phase when a necropolis was created – probably connected with the church of S. Caterina (see Chapter 3.3.).

In Catania, the position of the *forum* is known and partially still visible (Wilson 1992: 154–7) in the area of Cortile S. Pantaleone (fig.4.6). Here, remains of eight rooms have been unearthed, but the chronology of these ruins is still uncertain. The area was occupied by poor dwellings until the late ninth century and partially the site is still occupied by residential buildings, suggesting that at some point, perhaps in the Byzantine period (maybe when the cathedral was moved to Piazza del Duomo, and re-setting of urban landscape took place?), the site was occupied by private structures.

4.3. Entertainment buildings

The political space of late antique cities was not limited to the governor's palace or the bishopric: theatres and circuses still represented structures for entertainment, but also the spaces where the local authorities met the urban population. Theatres, amphitheatres and circuses have been analyzed by scholars within the debate concerning the continuity or the decay of late antique urban life (see discussions in Christie and Loseby 1996; Ward-Perkins 1984: 92–118). More recently, Christie has focused attention on the reuse of the western and, more specifically, the Italian entertainment monuments, sketching a very heterogeneous background (Christie 2009). According to Christie, insecurity, as well as changed economic and social contexts played a fundamental role in the abandonment and reuse of theatres and amphitheatres; in North Italy these were being deserted from the second half of the third century. The fate of these monuments was indeed different, spanning incorporation in defensive enceintes (e.g. Cirencester, Spoleto, Tour), quarries for *spolia* (e.g. Aquileia, Bologna), as well as reuse as residential areas (eg. Arles, Chieti, Rome theatre of Balbus, Ventimiglia). In North Africa theatres and amphitheatres were deserted by the fifth century (Leone 2007: 137–8) and it is thought that the earthquake of 365 had probably a strong impact in the decline of these monuments.

Circuses, by contrast, had a longer life thanks to their symbolic and political status (Vespignani 1994) and chariot races were still performed in Milan, Ravenna and Rome, as well as in North Africa until the early sixth century (Christie 2009: 229; Leone 2007: 140).

Despite Sicilian in Taormina, Catania and Syracuse being archaeologically documented and often still today in use for summer performances, the fortune of these monuments in the late antique and Byzantine years is hardly decipherable, basically because old excavations did not document this later phases. The theatre of Taormina is probably one of the best preserved examples of entertaining building in the south Mediterranean area (Wilson 1990: 70–8), but we have no information about the use of this structure in post-Classical times. Considering its preservation, certainly this monument was not robbed and we might suppose it was “colonized” as a residential area.

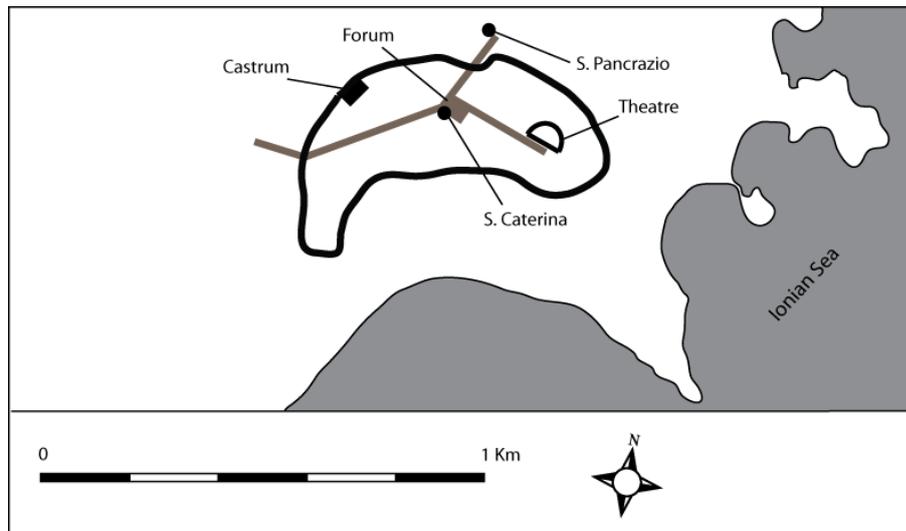


Fig.4.16: Taormina – Position of the theatre and the nearby churches.

Thanks to an inscription found in the *cavea* of the theatre of Catania, we know that this building was, probably at the end of the fourth century or in the early fifth century, restored and modified to host water shows (Wilson 1990: 69–70, 332) (fig.4.3,4). In the late fifth century, the theatre maintained a certain importance, since the statues of the *Pii Frates* here were restored by the Sicilian governor, as celebrated by an inscription (see Chapter 2.2). This monument was until the 1930s occupied by a residential quarter that maintained great part of the ancient structures today still visible and it is possible that the modern inhabited unit had its origin in Late Antiquity. Catania had also an amphitheatre built on the northern side of the city alongside the road to Taormina (fig.4.3). We know from a letter written by King Theodoric to Cassiodorus (see Chapter 5) that the amphitheatre was by the early sixth century already long deserted and its stones reused to repair the town walls. Excavations unearthed part of the north area of the monument, but modern buildings cover the majority of the structure area preventing further exploration.

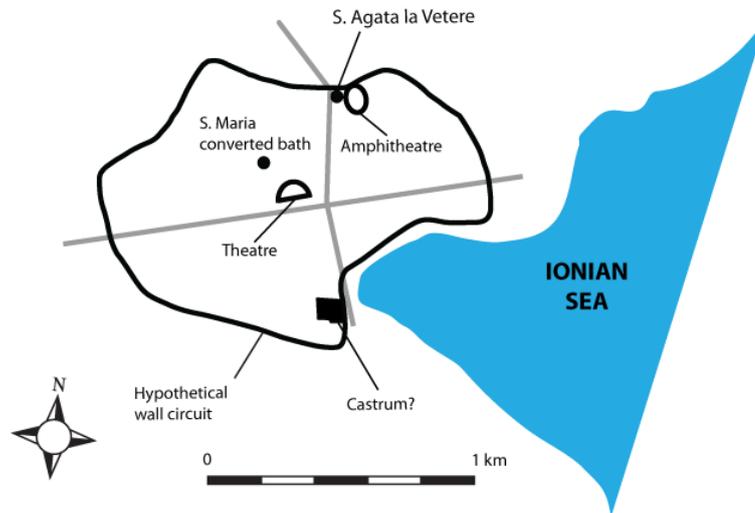


Fig.4.17: Catania – Position of the theatre and the amphitheatre and the nearby churches.



Fig.4.18: Catania – Photograph of the theatre in the 1930s before the restorations (from Wikipedia).

Thanks to the summer festival of the Classical Greek drama, the theatre of Syracuse is certainly – together with the monument of Taormina – one of the most famous Classical entertaining buildings of South Italy. It is located in the north-west part of the city, outside the Akradina's defensive wall and near the Roman amphitheatre. Despite this site having been studied in its Classical phase (Polacco 1990; Wilson 1990: 60–5; Bernabò Brea 1967), nothing is known about its later life except for some restorations undertaken by the governor Neratius Palmatus, as documented by an inscription of the late fourth century (Wilson 1990: 63; PLRE I: 662). Fleeting traces, still visible in the modern restored monument, it will be analyzed in the next section, suggest that the theatre was reused for private residences. A similar fortune might come to the amphitheatre at Syracuse, excavated in the first half of the ninth century without documenting any trace of post-Classical activities (fig.4.5).



Fig.4.19: Syracuse – The Roman amphitheatre in the 1900s (G. Sommer cat. 2639, Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. Catania).

Oddly, of the huge circuses of Catania and Syracuse we lack any archaeological trace and even their position is uncertain. In the *Expositio totius Mundi et Gentium* Syracuse and Catania are described thus:

'Civitates autem habet splendidas Syracusam et Catanam, in quibus spectaculum circensium bene completur [...]'.
(*Expositio*, LXV)

In addition, in the late fourth or very early fifth century, the Senator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (c. 340 – c. 405) mentions in two letters charioteers and actors from Sicily.

'Si qua adhuc de Sicilia speramus, incerta sunt. Nam cum litterae Euscii nuntiaverint, dudum circi et scaenae artifices navigasse, etiam nunc de adventu eorum rumor in aperto est ...'
(Symmachus, *Ep.* VI. 33).

'Euscii nuper litteras sumpsit. Quibus aurigas nostros et aliquos scaenicos navi impositos et secundum praeceptum meum missos ad Campaniam nuntiavit'.
(Symmachus, *Ep.* VI.42).

Remains of the circus of Catania were still visible in the sixth century when the antiquarian Lorenzo Bolano described the building as being c. 500 m. long and 100 m. wide, therefore

comparable to some of larger circuses of North Africa (Humphrey 1986: 575–6). It should be considered that the statue of an elephant (whose chronology is still debated between supporters of a Punic and a Late antique origin – see Pace 1949: 416–17) and the obelisk reused in the 1eighth century fountain build in Piazza del Duomo were part of the decoration of the circus.

4.4. Baths

Public baths were among the Classical buildings that were in Late Antiquity deserted and often subject to reuse; however, in some cases their use is documented in connection with churches until the seventh century Ward-Perkins (1984: 135–41).

In Taormina a bath has been documented near the forum. It was subdivided in contiguous rooms identified as the *calidarium*, the *tepidarium* and the *frigidarium* and other service rooms. The early phase of the building is dated at to Julio-Claudian period, later it was modified and restored several times. It ceased activity probably only at the end of the fifth century or at the beginning of the sixth century, but lack of data prevents any suggestion about the use of this bath until its final phase, as well as its fate after its abandonment (Wilson 1990: 89–90; Bacci, 1984–5: 722–5).

In Catania three examples of imperial baths are documented (fig.4.6). The largest was the third century Terme della Rotonda that, according to the technique of some restorations, was probably still functioning until the mid-fifth century. This monument was in the early Byzantine period converted into the church of S. Maria della Rotonda and is today still visible in the north-east part of Catania (Wilson 1990: 92). Also the monumental Terme Achilliane (Wilson 1990: 94) are partially visible under the medieval cathedral of S. Agata. An inscription date of A.D. 434 seems to support the idea that this bath complex was active around the mid-fifth century (Wilson 1990: 92 with references). The Terme dell'Indirizzo is a very well preserved bath located in the south-east part of the town (Wilson 1990: 92–3). This structure was erected in the late fourth or early fifth century, but we lack data regarding the use of this monument after the fifth century; however, given its good preservation it was probably protected and reused for purposes that we are unaware about.

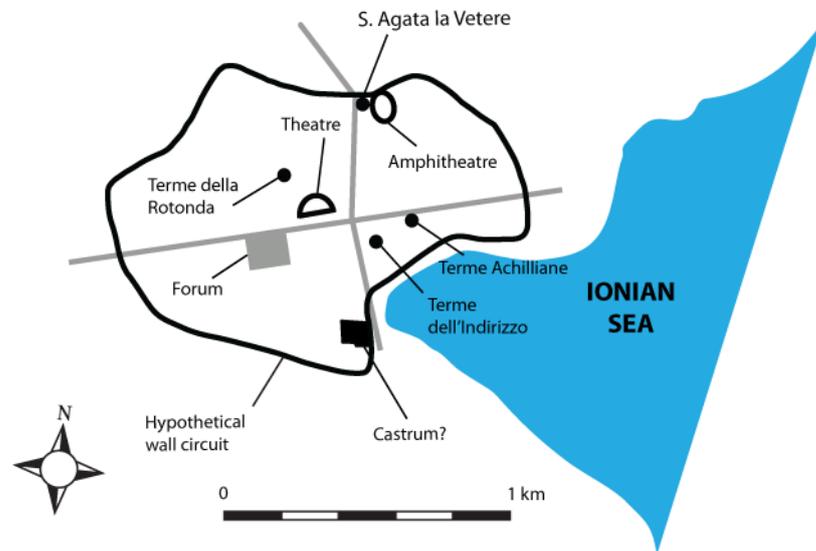


Fig.4.20: Catania – Position of the thermal baths in relation to the theatre and amphitheatre.

What emerges from the few data available is that the few Sicilian amphitheatres were most probably already deserted in the late fourth century (since the late third or early fourth centuries?), but theatres were still employed to display games and shows. The restoration, as well as the adaptation for water games documented in the theatre of Catania, proves a wealthy patronage by the local elite or Italian aristocrats and perhaps, this even denote a public affirmation of non-Christian identity by a group of citizens. Why, in fact, did the local elite prefer to support public games instead of patronizing the construction of new Christian buildings? These few archaeological details might be all that today remains of a confrontation between the emergent urban Christianity and the enduring pagan society within the Sicilian urban context.

Uncertain is the relation between entertainment monuments and churches. In Catania the potential early cathedral of S. Agata la Vetere was erected probably in the second half of the fourth century near the amphitheatre, which, as said, might have already been deserted. The church of S. Maria della Rotonda was founded in the thermal bath near the theatre, after the mid-fifth century, when probably the monument will have already ceased its public activity. The theatres of Taormina, Catania and Syracuse seem to have been reused to accommodate poor residential units, probably to cope with the arrival of refugees from Italy and North Africa (see below section).

4.5. Sicilian Residential Buildings

Simon Ellis, summarizing the research on urban late antique domestic space pointed out how ancient housing has been traditionally connected with charting changes and loss in towns through natural disasters, economic crisis and Germanic invasions (Ellis 1988). Nowadays, the end of the Roman *domus* is approached by considering the social connotation, as for instance the display of the political role of the landlord or the economy of the urban elites (Ellis 2004; 1988; Lavan *et al.* 2007; Brogiolo 1994).

In Italy, the debate is concentrated in the analysis of the representation of power and social position, through mosaic decorations and architectural plan (Ellis 2004: 38–43; Baldini Lippolis 2001) and in the study of building techniques and the use of different construction materials (Parenti 1994). The topic has even been approached from an ethnoarchaeological point of view seeking to demonstrate the emerging of pre-Roman building techniques in Late Antiquity (Staffa 1994). In the northern region of the peninsula, the domestic spaces of rich *domus* built between the first and the third centuries were, in general, around the late fourth century and the first half of the fifth divided up with wood partitions or poorly constructed walls, often, without any consideration even for mosaic floor decorations (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998: 121–35, paradigmatic is the case of the *Domus* of Piazza Ferrari in Rimini, Negrelli 2006). But how far changes were social, economic or even prompted by military impositions remains to be traced.

Unfortunately, we possess much less information concerning the central and southern Italian regions. Systematic archaeological investigations undertaken in Naples have documented *domus* with peristyles periodically restored through the early and middle Empire. Like the north Italian panorama, also in Naples several houses were divided into two or more residential units in the time spanning the late fourth and the end of the fifth century. Hence, until the Byzantine period, in spite of the alterations occurring within the house's space, external walls were often preserved, as a boundary between properties (Arthur 2002: 46–7).

While in the Italian towns the rich *domus* system seems to be in crisis from the late fourth century, in North Africa the situation appears to be somewhat different. In *Proconsularis* province, *domus* were still being enlarged combining small residential units in the fourth and early fifth century; in the same period, in the south–west quarter of *Thuburbo Maius*, *domus* were refurbished with annexes and new extensions (Leone 2007: 45–66) . However, this renewal building activity is not documented everywhere in North Africa: in *Hadrumetum* (Souse) and *Thysdrus* (El Jem), for example, much of the residential area was deserted between the fourth and

fifth century. Other important centres, for instance *Leptis Magna* and *Sabratha*, suffered notable damages from the earthquake of A.D. 365 and *domus* were in some cases abandoned (*ibid.*: 51).

Because Sicilian cities are still heavily populated, the great majority of late antique urban houses still lie under extant medieval and post-medieval buildings, which are still standing. Unfortunately, a consistent lack of attention and inaccuracy, particularly affects availability of data. Paradigmatic are the reports regarding the excavations in *Lilybaeum* (Bisi 1966; 1967): the residential area was here investigated without any consideration for the stratigraphic context and, as a result, the published documentation is unclear and contradictory; these lack scales and detailed plans have vague orientation making the study of this site extremely difficult.

In line with the Mediterranean context, Wilson, tracing the development of Sicilian urban housing, recognized the *domus* with peristyle as the common architectural model from the third century B.C. to the late Roman Empire (1990: 114–16). More recently, Isabella Baldini Lippolis (2001) has drawn up a Mediterranean-wide catalogue of housing case studies, usefully attempting to define a Mediterranean pattern to urban late antique *domus*. She briefly mentions the controversial urban monument of Termini Imerese, the house excavated in the garden of the Palazzo del Governo in Catania in 1930s, and she debates the supposed Byzantine bath of Syracuse. Peculiarly, the author does not deal with the key centres of Palermo, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum*, where much useful documentation is in fact available. In the view of Baldini Lippolis, the demise of the peristyle house is connected with urban shrinkage and the general crisis of the late Empire; the pattern drawn by Baldini Lippolis is of a substantial discontinuity and decay of civic housing after the fifth century. Furthermore, she considers only the elite *domus*, without any reflection about the whole urban residential panorama, which is made up also of poor houses and dwellings.

According to the *Ordo urbium nobilium* by Ausonius (c. 310–95), Syracuse and Catania were in his time very populated cities – respectively set at the sixteenth and seventeenth position of the most inhabited cities of the Empire, after Athens and before Toulouse (*Aus., Ordo Urbium Nobilium, XVI-XVII*). Although not to be taken as an accurate or even fully contemporary description of all towns listed, nonetheless it should offer some indication of perception of such towns.

But ancient demographic studies for Sicily are particularly problematic especially in urban contexts, where we have only small excavations. The extension and the numbers of necropoleis, as well as the number of funerary inscriptions found in Sicilian towns, suggest that the cities were, especially in the eastern coast, of large dimensions. Catania, for instance, may have had in Roman times a population of c. 38.000 inhabitants and Syracuse slightly more (Asheri 1982–3: 465–70).

In pondering the everyday life of Sicilian late antique citizens, we should wonder where this multitude of people lived, consumed dinner and bred. What social statuses are represented? Who actually lived in the towns? Moreover, tracing the evolution of housing, such as demolitions, rebuilding and restorations of *domus* can give us information about the development of the urban landscape. When were *domus* modified and why? What social changeover is denoted in this transformation? Another aspect of late antique urban housing in Sicily that should be investigated is the identification of specific quarters: where did elites live? Where were the popular quarters set?

4.5.1. Palermo

The early twentieth century excavation undertaken in Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo yielded an important set of data regarding housing within the town walls (Wilson 1990: 127). The explored residential area was set in the *paleapolis* – the oldest and most prominent part of Palermo settled from the seventh century B.C.

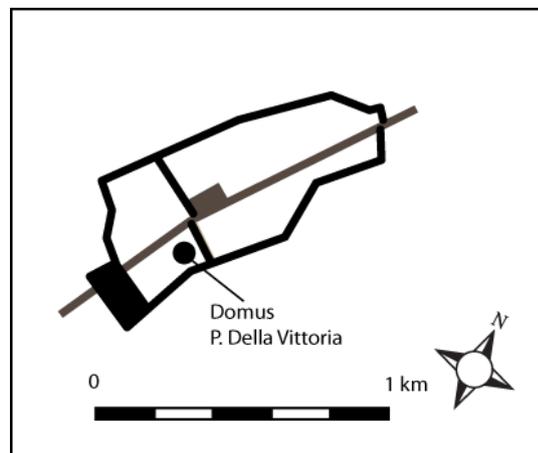


Fig.4.21: Palermo – Position of the Piazza della Vittoria domus.

Of the three houses uncovered in the Piazza della Vittoria (fig.4.7), House A was completely excavated, while Houses B and C were only partially documented. Building A was probably erected in the second or first century B.C. and covered c. 75 by 25 m. The *domus'* rooms were organized on the northern and southern side of the *peristyle*, and many rooms were decorated with frescoes and mosaic floors set up between the second and third century A.D. The quality of

the decoration, the size of the building and its central position suggest that the *domus* was occupied by a high ranking owner at least until the late fourth century.

Subsequently, in c. A.D. 400, the stunning mosaic of the Four Seasons was altered and mythological representations were patched with geometrical or floral decorations of pretty good quality, whereas in other cases the restoration was done with small marble slabs (David 2000: 367, n. 32, 34; Wilson 1990: 127). Contrasting opinions have been advanced with regard to these reinstatements: according to Wilson it marks a general decline of urban life and poor technical ability (Wilson 1990: 127, 333), while David suggests a censorship of pagan motives denoting a changeover in the cultural and religious sensibility of the landlord, but he omits to indicate a chronology for these works that might help to clarify this transitional phase (David 2000).

Because the stratigraphy and the relative finds were not fully investigated, we do not know what happened to this house between the earlier decades of the fifth and those of the sixth century when burials were cut in both the southern rooms and in the peristyle area. Was the *domus* abandoned, or was it, if partially, still in use in this time? Was the *domus* in use for domestic functions or was it employed for other purposes? The lack of archaeological data makes difficult answer to this question; however, considering the central and prestigious position of the building we may consider that the *domus* was not deserted and life continued into the Byzantine period.

It is the intrusion of a series of burials that mark a dramatic changeover in the use of this residential building around the earlier sixth century (Gabrici 1921: 190, pl. II; see also Chapter 3.5). Pondering the last phase of this *domus* only speculation can be made: after the laying out of burials, the residential space will have been limited to those northern rooms decorated with the censored mosaic of the Seasons. A connection might be made with the burials and the nearby church of S. Maria della Pinta and the suggested earlier cathedral (Chapter 3.2). Since the conversion of *domus* into religious houses is also documented in *Lilybaeum* by a letter written by Pope Gregory the Great (see Chapter 3.5), it will perhaps not be a major surprise if the *domus* was converted for some religious purpose. Unluckily, we lack information about the presence on the site of postholes, wood partitions or poor constructed walls that may highlight any residential use of this house after the sixth century.

4.5.2. Termini Imerese

On the northern coast of Sicily, the monument documented in Termini Imerese is a controversial construction. Excavations conducted in the first half of the ninth century found remains of a massive building identified by the excavator as the local *curia* (Romano 1838: 29–31). Of the building only four rooms were investigated: the main space is a large apsed hall (16,65 by 10,90 m) connected with a cross-plan room; two other large rooms were built in the southern part of the building, while two corridors were set on the east of the apsed hall and another one in the south-west side (fig.4.8).

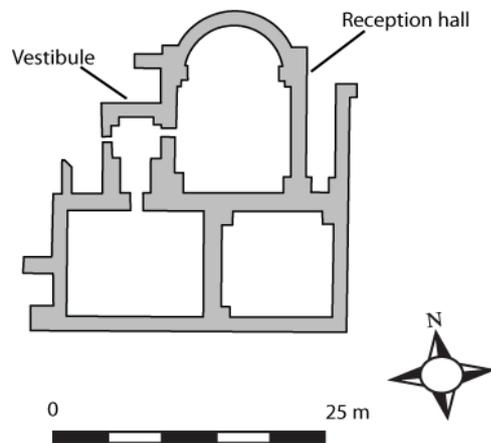


Fig.4.22: Termini Imerese – Plan of the presumed domus (after Wilson 1990, fig. 109.9).

The existence of an apsed hall of such considerable dimensions might suggest a reception hall and the cross-plan space a vestibule. The thickness of the walls (c. 1 m.) implies a building of a certain height and monumentality; according to Wilson, they probably supported a vault – this would underline the importance of the monument as a point of representation and display of the landlord’s status.

The archaeologists did not document any restoration works or subdivisions of the inner spaces and so we cannot trace the development of the overall construction through the centuries. Lacking details about pottery or other finds also means it is difficult to establish a chronology for this construction; nonetheless, a late antique date is possible. In spite of its considerable dimensions Wilson and Baldini Lippolis agree in recognizing the monument as a potential late Roman private house (Baldini Lippolis 2001: 305–06; Wilson 1990: 127). Notoriously, one of the main implications of the fourth and fifth century urban *domus* was the building of reception halls

for the property-owner to receive his clients (see discussion in Scott 2004; Baldini Lippolis 2001: 63).

4.5.3. Taormina

The use of the peristyle-type *domus* seems to be familiar in every Sicilian urban centre. Thus, in Via S. Pancrazio in Taormina (fig.4.9) an intramural complex (*domus* 1) was erected probably during the first century A.D., but was still in use in the fourth century; maintenance works to walls and floors seem to prove a later life for this *domus*. However, in this final phase, walls were erected without regard to the original structural orientation; moreover, a room was created within the peristyle area increasing the availability of the domestic space. Noticeably, burials were cut into the northern rooms, but their date is unclear and more data are needed to evaluate this last stage (Wilson 1990: 126; Bacci 1980–1: 744–4).

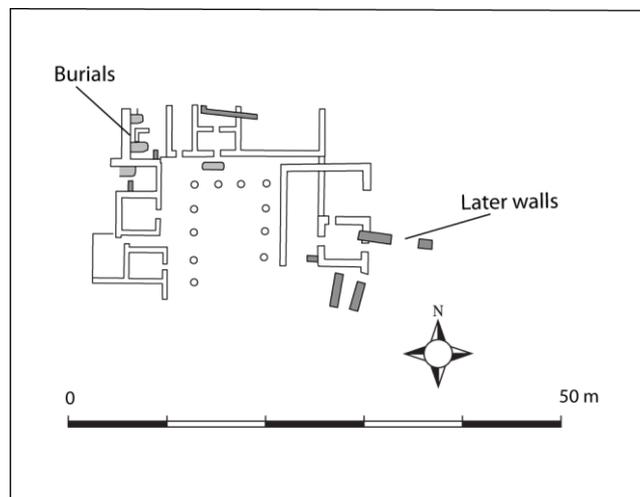


Fig.4.23: Taormina – Plan of the domus of Via S. Pancrazio (after Wilson 1990, fig. 109.7).

More recently, four rooms belonging to a second (or perhaps less likely the same) *domus* (*domus* 2), were investigated in the same area of Via S. Pancrazio: three cisterns were filled with material dated from the first to the fourth century A.D., although their top layers had been removed without archaeological documentation and a fifth or later date material cannot be excluded (Bacci and Rizzo 2002: 363). Unfortunately, in the excavation report few sentences are dedicated to this building and Bacci does not provide a plan, nor does she explain if she felt that the rooms investigated were related to *domus* 1. Nonetheless, the evidence confirms the

residential destination of the area into the Empire. As already theorized in the case of the *domus* of Piazza della Vittoria in Palermo, it is probable that also in Taormina *domus 1* was converted into a religious space and the cutting of burials within the house, as well as the nearby presence of the church of S. Pancrazio seem to confirm this idea (Chapter 3.5).

4.5.4. Catania

'Results from Catania have been equally fragmentary, and virtually nothing coherent is known of its domestic architecture' (Wilson 1990: 125). The desolate picture painted by Wilson has not been tremendously improved in the last 20 years and archaeological documentation concerning housing in Catania remains very poor indeed (for the bibliography until 1990 see Wilson 1990: 124–5). A portion of a *domus* was uncovered in 1982 in Piazza Asmundo 9, in the area of the Benedictine monastery on the Montevergine Hill (Wilson 1990: 125; Rizza, G. 1984–5: 849–53) (fig.4.10). This early imperial house was demolished probably around c. A.D. 300 and a new construction with a frontage of 50 m. erected. In spite of the archaeological excavation, the real function of this huge construction is still not defined and a public function, as Wilson notes, is not excluded (1990: 125; Rizza 1984–5: 849–53). The idea of a wealthy residential area in this part of Catania seems confirmed by the discovery in 1965 of a bath in the near Piazza Dante. This thermal structure probably belonged to a private house; Wilson notes that the bath appears to be a late antique addition – partially erected using the garden's space of the former residence (Wilson 1990: 125). The quality of the construction technique is not high; however, comparisons with the nearby Terme dell'Indirizzo, leads Wilson to propose a fourth or fifth century date (*ibid.*: 126).

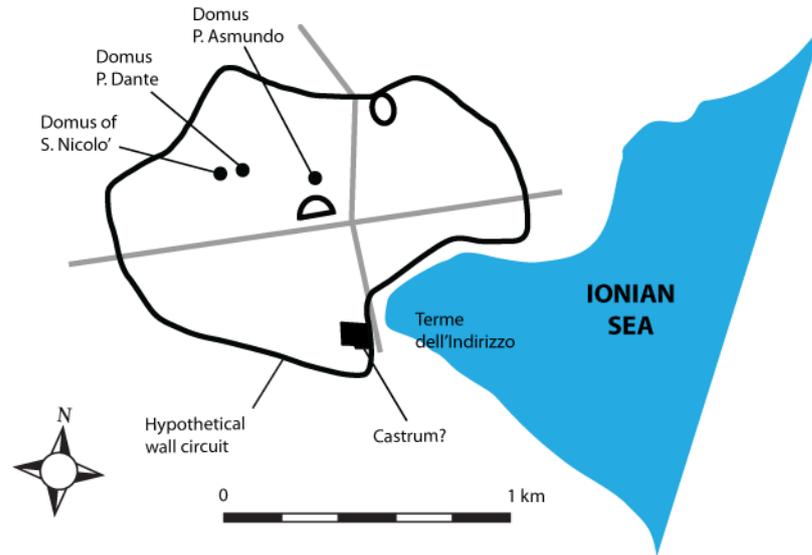


Fig.4.24: Catania – position of the excavated domus.

Other excavations occurred in the ninth and early 20th century in the area between Piazza Dante, Via Teatro Greco and Via Quartarone and also found remains of urban houses (Branciforti 1997). Very few notes are available for these excavations and unfortunately no plans or graphic illustration was made. Walls of different orientation – probably belonging to at least one *domus* – semicircular pools and corridors decorated with mosaics, seem to belong to an early imperial house; however, the presence of poorly erected walls and the proximity of the late antique Terme dell'Indirizzo may suggest potential later stages for this complex not fully investigated.

Finally, in 1997, excavations in the ex-monastery of S. Nicolò l'Arena built in front of Piazza Dante, identified, under a thick layer of lava formed in 1663, a *domus* with peristyle. Restoration of the house was undertaken in the third century and the use of the building is archaeologically documented until the fifth century. Portions of third and fourth century mosaic floors were discovered in the area of the monastery, but we know nothing of these later residential stages (*ibid.*).

4.5.5. Syracuse

In spite of its importance, urban private buildings are inadequately documented also in Syracuse. The building excavated in the 1930s in Via dell'Arsenale in the Acradina district, has been debated

between Cultera (1954) proposing the idea of a thermal bath, and Wilson (1990: 125) suggesting the construction was a Roman private *domus* (fig.4.11).

The monument, only partially explored, is subdivided into rooms of different size, some of them apsed, set around a paved courtyard; in the northern side a bath articulated into *apodyterium*, *frigidarium*, *tepidarium* and *calidarium* was discovered. No later expansions or restoration are documented and the original body of the monuments was not altered. The building was erected using large bricks and stones blocks and in general, the building construction technique is of good quality. The courtyard was paved with *lithostratum* system (marble or limestone slabs often irregularly cut) and some rooms were surrounded by vaults; these construction methods are not documented in Sicily before the fifth century (Cultera 1954: 115). In the opinion of Cultera and Belvedere (Belvedere 1986: 403–5; Cultera 1954), this was the bath complex of Daphne where Emperor Constans II was murdered in 668. These authors support their proposal debating about the presence of *lithostratum* floors of Byzantine period, as well as the documented vaults realised through *tubuli*. Furthermore, Cultera mention the several coins of Constans II's reign collected in the area. On the other hand, Wilson suggests, on the basis of the small size of the construction that it was a *domus* of Roman period probably maintained into the Byzantine era (Wilson 1990: 125). Unfortunately, the lack of published ceramic contexts and other goods, as well as the omission of details regarding potential restorations or subdivisions within the rooms. Baths are known to have been used during Late Antiquity in Ravenna, as part of the Episcopal palace (Cirelli 2008: 213 n. 56) and the idea proposed by Cultera cannot be excluded, but we need more data.

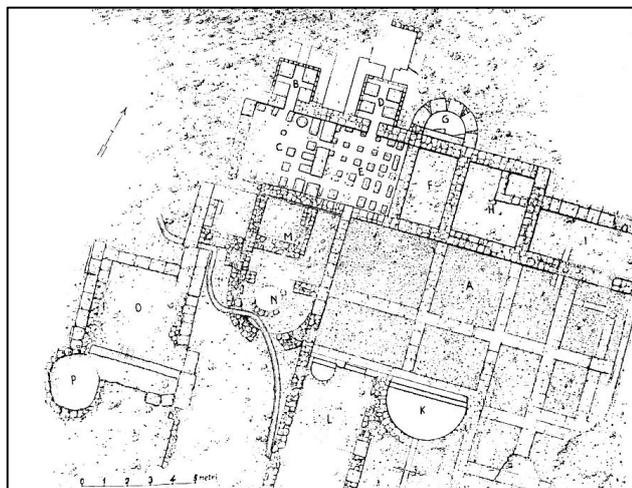


Fig.4.25: Syracuse – Domus of Via dell'Arsenale (from Cultera 1954, fig.1)

A second monument to illustrate late antique urban housing in Syracuse is the *domus* uncovered in Via Paolo Orsi (in front of Viale F.S. Cavallari) (Gentili 1954: 302–33). Here, excavations undertaken in the 1950s, documented a Roman *domus* built on the site of a necropolis and a dwelling of Hellenistic period. The oldest part of the house has been dated to the first century A.D., while rooms non perfectly oriented with the original building were a later addition, but the archaeologists did not offer cronological details for this expansion. However, floors paved with a *lithostratum* technique, similar to the pavement documented in the *domus* of Via dell’Arsenale attest construction work in Byzantine times. A confirmation of the long use of this house comes from coins of Jovian (363–4), Valentinian III (375–92), Constantine III (407–11), and Justinian III (685–95) collected during the excavation. In general this *domus* was a good quality building and new domestic space was created with the addition of rooms, rather than through the subdvision of the pre-existing space. Because only few rooms have been uncovered, it is not possible to determine if a peristyle was present and how the classical *domus* developed during Late Antiquity. In the same area two cisterns reused as waste deposits were excavated; fragments of later production of ARS alongside with Hellenistic and Roman pottery filled the cisterns (Gentili 1954: 329–30).

4.5.6. Agrigento

Extensive excavations undertaken in the classical residential area of Agrigento, the so-called “quartiere Greco–Romano”, were focused on the earliest phases of the settlement dated to the late sixth century B.C. and the earlier Roman period (Wilson 1990: 114–15). Over twenty houses were uncovered during the investigations and the quarters were remodelled and transformed several times through the centuries, attesting a long life until Late Antiquity. However, not much has been published and explored about the late antique phases of the zone and, as Wilson notes ‘What is visible today, therefore, is basically the late Hellenistic layout with substantial modifications and rebuilding of imperial date. The last datable material belongs to the fifth century A.D., but the quarters seem to have been already in decline then, and at some unknown period burials were planted in the ruins’ (*ibid.*: 115). Thus, the panorama is dramatic and the only data we posses for this important town are some burials of unknown position and date; we are completely ignorant of the development of domestic buildings after the fifth century.

4.5.7. *Lilybaeum*

The pre-World War Two excavations in the area of Capo Boeo provided important documentation concerning a fully uncovered late Roman *domus* (*domus* 1). Unfortunately, the archaeological investigation was not adequately published, causing difficulties in dating the different stages of construction (Wilson 1990: 122–4). The *domus* (1), in its final form, probably belongs to the first decades of the fourth century and replaced a previous structure modified several times during the early Empire. However, despite the intensive building activity, the preceding classical peristyle plan was maintained. The mosaic decoration of the bath, depicting wild animals and *cantaroï*, was probably the work of a Sicilian craft shop (Wilson 1990: 124). This and the dimensions of the building (c. 43 m²) stress the high social status of this house. The fate of the *domus* through the fifth to the seventh centuries is, sadly, completely unknown.

Wider excavations in Capo Boeo documented intensive activity during Late Antiquity (fig.4.12); however, layers seem to be underestimated in the excavation of the 1960s, when walls of poor manufacture were not adequately reported and the ceramic assemblage was not clearly understood. In Via Sebastiano Cammareri Scurti remains of a *domus* were explored in the 1970's (Di Stefano, C.A. 1976–7), but data have not been fully published yet. Other residential units were uncovered in Via Sibilla, (Wilson 1990: 124; Di Stefano, C.A. 1974: 21–7; 1976–77: 768–9), Via delle Ninfe, (Di Stefano, C.A. 1974), but data are again, poorly published and no mention of potential late antique evidences is made.

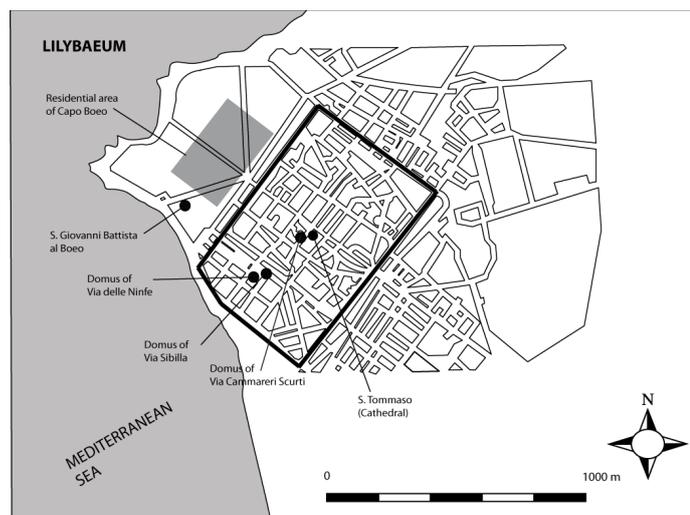


Fig.4.26: Lilybaeum – Position of the residential areas.

A monumentalization of the residential area of Capo Boeo is documented from the third to early fifth centuries with the periodic restoration of the rich *domus*; later on, the area may have suffered from the Vandal raids and a partial abandonment occurred until the late fifth century. The insertion of scattered burials within the residential space between the fifth and sixth centuries may indicate an adaptation of this zone as a cemeterial area. In addition, discoveries of floor levels and walls show that this region was occupied by dwellings respecting the previous direction frame. However, a complete and definitive transformation of the area occurred only in the twelfth/thirteenth century, when the road system was altered and dumps were deposited.

4.6. Non-Elite Living Spaces

The data described so far, unquestionably represent the elite living space: huge *domus* carefully planned and subdivided between domestic areas, peristyles and reception halls, rich and elaborate mosaic decorations covering the floors, and paintings on the walls; this picture, however, clarifies only a limited part of the whole urban living context. Common and poor people were the majority of the inhabitants and a study of their accommodations is central in any definition of a comprehensive picture of towns.

The middle and low classes in the Sicilian towns probably lived in *insulae* of two or three floors similar to the building excavated in Classe or the wooded houses excavated in Ferrara and Luni (Christie 2006: 233, 237–8, Gadd and Ward-Perkins 1991; Ward-Perkins 1981).

However, because the precarious nature of the building techniques of the poor domestic space, it is often difficult to document archaeologically these spaces. The bibliography in the topic is in Sicily scanty, but we can have an idea from a couple of excavations. In the 1970s Bernabò Brea, investigating the town defences of Lipari, uncovered a series of compact and poor dwellings (figs 4.13-4). These houses were built in the second century A.D. with a front wall facing the Greek defences. Between the second and fourth centuries the floor levels were raised, but the Roman structures were not altered. However, in the fourth century the road between the Greek walls and the Roman houses was filled and new dwellings built. In the same period, or even later, a bakery was built. The Roman houses were still in use, but at a remarkably lower level (c. 1 m.) with respect to the new constructions. Burnt layers, dated not before Justinian's reign, document the destruction of the dwellings. Finally, under a layer of volcanic origin dated at the earlier eighth

century a timber house, with different orientation was built on top of the previous buildings (Bernabò Brea 1988: 58–68).

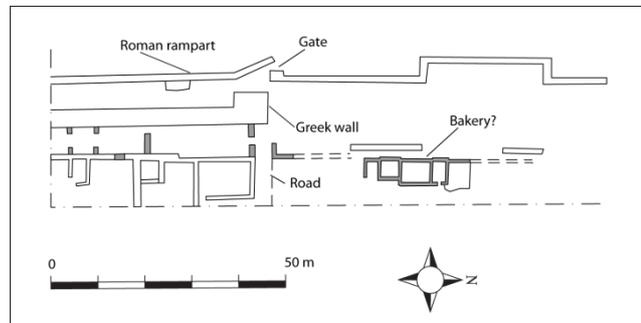


Fig.4.27: Lipari – Plan of the fourth/seventh century houses (after Bernabò Brea 1988, fig. 5).

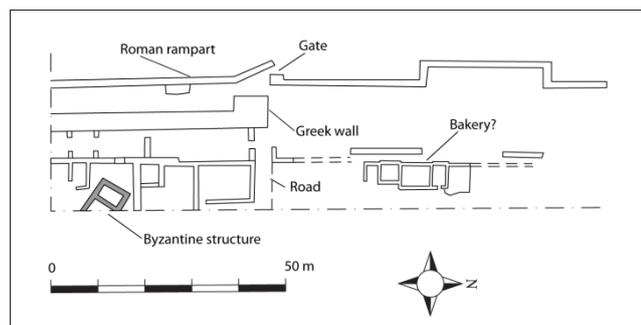


Fig.4.28: Lipari – Plan of the eighth century Byzantine house (after Bernabò Brea 1988, fig. 5).

A very similar context has been uncovered in *Lilybaeum* during investigations on the south-western town walls (Di Stefano, C.A. 1976-7). Here timber dwellings built with reused material provided with earth floors were erected against the walls, probably invading the road skirting the defences. A coin of Gordian III (238–44) led the archaeologists to date these constructions at the third century, but a later chronology is possible and more data about finds and stratigraphy are needed.

Finally, in Sicily it has never been taken into consideration the potential reuse of old public monuments as blocks of domestic units. Notoriously, in Italy there are documented several cases of theatres or amphitheatres converted into private accommodations (see above, 4.3; Christie 2009; Arthur 2002: 41, 52) and similarity may be found with Sicily.

Describing the campaign of studies in the theatre of Syracuse, Bernabò Brea (1967) refers to the cutting of numerous post holes of different size, depth and shape set all over the area of the orchestra and he suggests a connection with public executions. Unfortunately, these sets of post holes have not been plotted in a comprehensive plan of the theatre; however, a specific study focus to investigate the post Roman period of this monument might show that these post holes

relate to construction of partitions, small rooms or shops belonging to poor residential units erected after the fifth century. The later detailed study of the theatre, edited by Polacco in 1990, is a precious source of data about the post-Roman use of the monument and its area. Excavations documented a complicated and intriguing archaeological sequence rooted in the pre-Roman period and continuing through the Byzantine era. Burials, *hypogea* and a small chapel were cut in the rock in the area of the theatre between the second half of the fifth until the ninth century (Agnello, S.L. and Marchese, 1990) attesting a community here. Furthermore, the nearby amphitheatre was also reused in the Byzantine period (Agnello, G. 1952: 74–6); door frames built with *spolia*, stone patches filling lack of material in the Roman structure and portion of frescoes are material proof of a later reoccupation of this structure. Noticeably, the frescoes badly preserved at the time of G. Agnello's study, were decorated with coloured geometric motifs in red and green, suggesting a certain quality of the reuse of the monument. G. Agnello suggested a possible religious conversion of the amphitheatre, but a domestic adaptation, on the light of comparisons with the Italian context, cannot be excluded.

4.7. Discussion

If a detailed analysis of the late antique Sicilian urban domestic space is so far hazardous and need to be carefully handled, nonetheless the theme can be debated. The decline of *domus* was a complex of different causes mainly identified in the general late antique economic crisis, which impacted on the elites living in town or in the rising of a new urban administration, who rapidly became the focus of the economic investments of the urban elites (Brogiolo 1994).

However, as it will be illustrated in Chapter 6, Sicily in the fourth and fifth centuries had a flourishing economy thanks to its grain production; therefore the decline of *domus* cannot be fully assigned to economic factors. Perhaps, the reasons of such urban changeover might be explored in a new urban life-style, where social status was not displayed in building huge and sumptuously decorated *domus*, but in the foundation of new urban monasteries or patronizing churches. The Sicilian case appears to be in line with the Italian context; although, in Sicily, the transformation of the residential urban background might have occurred a little bit later.

A major topic in the study of the urban living space is the existence within the defensive walls of open areas of cultivated space, kitchen gardens, abandoned and robbed building and poorly constructed dwellings, the so called "ruralisation" (see discussion concerning the appearing of

rural architectural techniques the Italian context in Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998: 109–13, 125–35). The term “ruralisation” is used to define a generalized urban transformation that implies a decline in maintaining the old urban infrastructure in terms of water drainage, road clearance and waste disposal. However, can the presence of cultivated area, abandoned spaces, poorly constructed buildings and ruins indicate an invasion of the country side into the urban space? Or, instead, should we approach the “ruralized” areas as being integrant parts of a multifaceted late antique town landscape and functional spaces to the civic economy? Is this phenomenon documented in Sicily?

Archaeologically, the “ruralization” of the townscape has been documented through the presence of thick deposits of ‘dark layers’ and the appearance in urbanized contexts (Macphail 2010) of constructions and building techniques typical of rural areas (*ibid.*: 125–35, see debate). In Sicily the documentation is contradictory and not uniform. In Palermo, the *domus* of Piazza della Vittoria was covered by a deposit less than one metre thick. A similar situation is recorded in Syracuse at the *domus* of Via dell’Arsenale and Via Paolo Orsi where a few centimetres of soil hid the building’s remains. Recently, Vecchio demonstrated how the residential area of Capo Boeo was abandoned after the seventh century and dark layers are not documented (Vecchio 2001). In contrast in Termini Imerese and Catania, Roman and late antique structures are covered by thick deposits that, in the case of Catania are due to the Etna eruptions and damages from the 1693 earthquake.

This data seem to suggest that the main Sicilian cities continued to provide some sort of urban efficiency in the maintenance of cleaning. We also lack data confirming the presence in the city of “ruralized” areas; in contrast, the arrival of refugees and the construction of domestic spaces both the theatres and amphitheatres might suggest an increase of population and a consequence lack of free space to accommodate them.

Chapter 5

The Defence System of Late Antique and Byzantine Sicily

5.1. Introduction

The defence of urban space is an investigated (but not always systematically) topic in the historical and archaeological studies of the Late Roman and Byzantine Empires. Walls denote a new urban demarcation in the late Empire; with implicit and explicit socio-political connotations, they define at the same time order and space protection. They also represent a new presence in town society: the military. Notably, city walls have been analyzed as individual subjects as in the case of Ravenna (Christie and Gibson 1988), Bologna (Pini 1985) and Rimini (Ortalli 1985) in north Italy, Pescara (Staffa 2006) in central Italy, while in the southern regions of the peninsula, Naples (Arthur 2002: 34–8) and Terracina (Christie and Rushworth 1988) are the best documented examples (for a general discussion on the Italian context, Christie 2006: 319–99). Other approaches focus attention onto the regionalization of the defensive system and the role of the towns in the guard of the territory (Zanini 1998: 209–90)

Many scholars have questioned chronologies: when were Italian and, more widely, western Roman towns surrounded by walls? How did these constructions develop during Late Antiquity? Was there a coherent 'strategy' in urban fortification? Furthermore, apart from structural studies, more recently the social impact of those constructions has been explored, such as on preservation of urban roadways, the division between intra-and extramural quarters or the importance of gates and their relationship with churches and monasteries (Cantino Wataghin 1995). Moreover, scholars still argue about the level to which city walls are representative of the limits of inhabited space and are potential markers of town shrinkage or expansion. Thus, can we consider urban

space only as the area within the defences or should we evaluate the specific context and consider also suburban spaces? Finally, what was the psychological impact of such high thick defences?

The case of Aquileia in north Italy is highly representative of this problem. Here, the city walls of Gothic and Byzantine periods encircled a very limited space that was dominated by the basilica of Theodore and the *memoria* of S. Ilario, while the imperial palace (this not precisely located) was left outside the urban circuit. But the older, Republican and Imperial walls enclosed a wider space and were repaired and reinforced on various circumstances. Yet, none of these circuits is well studied and understood (Christie 2006: 291–4).

In general, in north and central Italy, it is from the second half of the third century that, under the pressure of the rising number of Barbarian raids, but also due to the insecurity of civil wars, western towns begin an intensive program of urban fortification. Elsewhere, for instance in Spain and Britain, the programme of town wall construction was initiated a little bit later, in the fourth century (Johnson 1981). To the second half of the third century can now be dated the fortifications of Brescia, Mantua and Susa (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998: 57–8; Christie 2006), as well as those of Piacenza (Pagliani 1991: 79–84) and Bologna (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998: 57), whose walls might have been restored in Ostrogothic times. On the coast of the Adriatic Sea, at Rimini (Negrelli 2006), defences were partially built across the site of the *domus* of Piazza Ferrari burned down after a probable Barbarianic raid in the second half of the third century. Central and south Italian towns are less well documented and here the erection or restoration of the defensive circuits may have been delayed until the fifth century (see Christie and Rushworth 1988; Arthur 2002: 34).

In Spain, city walls were first erected at the end of third century in Cartago Nova, the capital of *Carthaginensis* province, enclosing 5.3 hectares (Portass 2010) at the same time the town of *Bracara* (Braga), capital of the Gallaecia was fortified (*ibid*: 111–36). In the fourth century new circuits were erected in *Caurium* (Coria), *Augusta* (Astorga), *Lucus Augusti* (Lugo) and Gijón in Gallaecia, Iruña, Monte Cilda and *Termes* in *Tarraconensis* (Keay 1996: 27; Kulikowski 2005). Where previous defences were present, walls were restored, as for example at Gerunda, Barcino, *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza) and *Italica* (Santiponce). In these cases we cannot claim a direct correlation between walls and barbarian threat; instead, the building of a town circuit was becoming part of how a late Roman town was then defined. In North Africa the process of wall construction dates to slightly later; however, by c. A.D. 400, the main cities of the African provinces were defended by circuits. Centres like *Cesarea*, *Hadrumentum Iustinianum*, *Hippo*

Regius, *Leptis Magna*, Tripoli and Sabratha for instance, were all fortified in the immediate pre-Vandal period and later refortified – often on a reduced scale – by Byzantines (Pringle 1981).

How Sicily fits into this Mediterranean context has never been investigated. Thus, various questions emerge: how far does the Sicilian process of urban fortification follow the Italian and continental military development? Or, was the later militarization of the urban landscape of North Africa the one that influenced Sicily? What happened to the Greek and earlier Roman fortifications in Sicily during Late Antiquity?

The defence of Sicily from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages has so far been analyzed mainly through sparse historical sources except in the studies by Ferdinando Maurici, In whose *Castelli medievali in Sicilia. Dai Bizantini ai Normanni* (1992), Maurici offers the first coherent and specific investigation of the militarization and defence of Sicily starting from the sixth century to the Arab conquest and to the rise of Normans in the 11th century. Maurici's research embraces urban and rural fortifications, although the author does not in fact dedicate any specific chapter to urban defences and far more attention is dedicated to rural or small centres. However, as the author stresses in his Introduction, especially for the Byzantine periods we really possess too few data concerning town walls and often only speculation can be suggested.

Unfortunately, we have to admit that 17 years on since Maurici's pioneering study, the status of the research is still limited mainly because no new published research has focused on late antique urban defences. Furthermore, chronologies are still uncertain as the few structural remains we can trace are obscured under post-medieval buildings. More recently, Maurici sought to analyse the very poorly documented area of western Sicily and, although he dedicates the second section of his paper (2003) to *Lilybaeum*, the generally weak documentation prevents any coherent statement. In spite of the gap of information, *Lilybaeum* represents a case study that will be analyzed below as an example of contrasting views between historical and archaeological data. The study of the Byzantine *castra* by Uggeri (2006), also open further questions, in particular related to the presence of fortifications and their relationship with the road system. The general idea of Sicilian town defence, with the exception of Palermo, remains simplistic with the common idea of a limited protection from the fourth to the sixth century; even the key city of Syracuse has been usually under-evaluated in the potential amount of data (Wilson 1990: 170). Finally, studies in Sicily usually fail to draw comparisons with different contemporary contexts, notably in North Africa, and consequently the island always appears as an isolated case far from the international debate. It is crucial, therefore, to explore better the data we possess, asking also how far this lack of data is genuine or how far it reflects wider failure to recognise late Roman to early medieval

structures and materials. If it is genuine, then what does it say about Sicily in the fourth to seventh centuries as an exposed unprotected province? We need also to consider the role and the relationship of the Church in wall building and repair.

5.2. Sicilian Urban Fortifications

Certainly, in the Punic and Greek periods, Sicily was a land of impressive, extended and technologically advanced urban fortifications erected to defend the city states and to impress potential enemies, as for example the cases of Syracuse, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum* (Winter 1971). What happened to these huge constructions during Roman rule? Were they preserved and restored or were the walls neglected or even demolished? Were these structures modified, narrowed and reinforced? How much was still available in effect to re-utilise in Late Antiquity?

To determine the existence or not of a city defence, as well as its strategy, in terms of disposition of towers, gates and ditches, we need also investigate the degree of militarisation of the urban society and, of course, the political display of urban power and prestige of local urban elites.

As an island in the middle of the peaceful Roman *mare nostrum*, Sicily and its towns no longer needed defences and it is probable that a certain degree of neglect affected the walls. However, dereliction does not mean abandonment nor demolition and despite being “useless” structures, walls were at the end always public and expensive constructions and could remain visible symbol of authority. Restoration works undertaken during Caligula’s reign are, thus, documented in Syracuse by Suetonius: ‘At Syracuse he repaired the city walls, which had fallen into ruin through lapse of time, and the temples of the gods’ (Svet. *Life of Caligula* 21). Much later, in the very early sixth century, works in Catania are mentioned in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus (XLIX):

King Theodoric to the Honoured Possessores, Defensores, and Curiales of the City of Catania.
Repair of amphitheatre of Catania.

‘It is a great delight to the Ruler when his subjects of their own accord suggest that which is for the good of the State. You have called our attention to the ruinous state of your walls, and ask leave to use for its repair the stones of the amphitheatre, which have fallen down from age and are now of no ornament to your town, in fact only show disgraceful ruins. You have not only our permission to

do this, but our hearty approval. Let the stones, which can be of no use while they lie there, rise again into the fabric of the walls; and your improved defence will be our boast and confidence’.

The Ostrogothic king, here, certainly, sees walls as functional and worthy, but was this attention applied to other Sicilian centres?

Even if Sicily was far from the Danubian *limes* and the Visigothic and Ostrogothic invasions of the north and eastern regions of the Empire (however, note that the Visigoths attempted and failed in a Sicilian endeavour in 410), the migration of Vandals through Gaul and Spain and thence in to North Africa, represented a more dramatic and very tangible problem for Rome and the Mediterranean as a whole and thus for Sicily.

Prosperous and key to the grain supply of Rome and Italy, it is improbable that Sicily still lay undefended by the mid-fifth century. Indeed, from the first decades of the fifth century, the instability brought by Visigoths and Vandals in Spain and later from the 430s in North Africa was a very serious concern for the Sicilian authorities. Furthermore, troubles did not come only from the Barbarians: political dissent, governor rebellions and potential usurpers really concerned the Imperial court both in the West and in the East capitals (Christie 2006: 283–3). Harbours and coasts in the Western and Eastern Empire were far from being unpatrolled and undefended areas. Indeed, to face all these apprehensions, in 408–10 and later confirmed by Valentinian III, a coastal defence was instituted, entrusted to the *custodes litorum et itinerum* (Cod. Theod. 7, 16, 1–2; Nov. 9):

CTh.7.16.0. *De litorum et itinerum custodia*

‘Emperors Honorius and Theodosius Augustuses to Theodotus, Praetorian Prefect.

The public enemy Stilicho devised a new and unaccustomed practice, in that he had fortified the shores and harbors by numerous guards so that there should be no access to this part of the Empire for any person from the Eastern Empire. I. We are disturbed by the injustice of this situation, and in other that the interchange of different commodities may not become too infrequent, We command by this sanction that this pernicious guarding of the shores and the harbors shall cease and that there shall be free opportunity to go and come.

Given on the fourth day before the ides of December at Ravenna in the year of the consulship of Bassus and Philippus’. (December 10, 408).

1. 'The same Augustus to Anthemius, Praetorian Prefect.

All naval bases, harbours, shores, and all points of departure from the provinces, even remote places and islands, shall be encircled and guarded by skilful regulation of Your Magnificence, so that no person may be able to infiltrate into the regions of Our Empire either by violence or by stealth, either openly or secretly, who, shall not either be preserved by the barriers which have been interposed, or who when he approaches, shall not be held immediately unless he should show in a very clear manner that he bears sacred imperial letters from my uncle, Lord Honorius, to Me. 1. It must be observed with the same diligence that if the intruder should say that he has messages from the aforesaid Emperor to any other person than Me, the bearer shall be detained, and the sacred imperial letter, with all the documents, shall be sealed and transmitted to My Clemency. For an occasion of tyrannical madness and barbarous savagery persuades Us to this measure, which has been agreed upon Me and My Lord and uncle, Honorius, in memoranda that We have exchanged with each other.

Given on the eight day before the kalends of May at Constantinople in the year of the consulship of the Most Noble Vanares' (April 24, 410)

These two laws are evidently targeted to avoid infiltration by potential "inner" enemies rather than block any military invasions; however, they do inform us about the state of alert even in 'remote places and islands'. We have to recognize that it is not clear how the activity of the *custodes litorum* was organized and articulated, and how the patrolling activity was applied to Sicily. Yet, considering the central position of Sicily in the Mediterranean it is likely that the island's coast was kept under surveillance, as a *limes* probably since the first decades of the fifth century, as a defence system centred on the coastal towns (Maurici 2008: 53–7).

The discussion, thus, remain rather open: were late antique Sicilian towns isolated centres with precarious and old urban walls? Or, in contrast, were Sicilian cities part of a wider network of town fortifications that were up to date and fully functional? Here we can explore a few specific sites to consider the available data and their interpretation.

5.2.1. Palermo

Late antique Palermo (fig.5.1) was still defended by formidable walls of Punic origin erected on top of a hill flanked by the streams Papireto on the north-west side and the Kemonia on the

south. The space within the walls was partitioned into two areas by a wall: the *Paleapolis*, set in the dominant position, was the area of administrative activity and the place where probably lay the *castrum*. The *Neapolis* was a wider area and here was later built the cathedral and other churches (see Chapter 3.2). The fortifications of Palermo must have been in very good condition if they resisted the Vandal attack in 440-1 and later, only with an unusual stratagem, was the town taken from the Goths by the Byzantine army of Belisarius in 535 (Proc. *Gothic War* V.v.12–17).

To estimate the number of gates set in the late antique enceinte is problematic because of the lack of contemporary sources and archaeological documentation. Maurici (1992: 56–7), identifies ten entrances in the Arab period and of these, four were opened by the Arab authorities: the Porta Oscura (in Piazzetta delle Vergini), Porta dei Giardini (near the Palazzo Reale), Porta di Ferro (probably in the proximity of Piazza Bellini) and, finally, the 1fourth century Porta Trabocchetto (the Arab gate of Hasan, likely sited in the area of Via Genova). The remaining gates were in all probability of classical or late antique date: the Porta di Mare or *Porta Patitellorum* connected the town with its harbour and should be one of the older entries to the citadel; the Porta S. Agata was a gateway near the post-medieval church of S. Agata alla Guillia; Porta Rota was set in the western side of the *Paleapolis*, while a gate named in Arab sources as *bab Ibn Qurhub* was walled up in the area of the 1seventh century Porta di Castro. The first gate in the western wall was the Arab *bab al abna* and was, according to the source, the oldest of Palermo. Finally, another gate might have opened in Via de Biscottari in the Palazzo Conte Federico, where there still exists, hidden in a post-medieval building, a Norman tower.

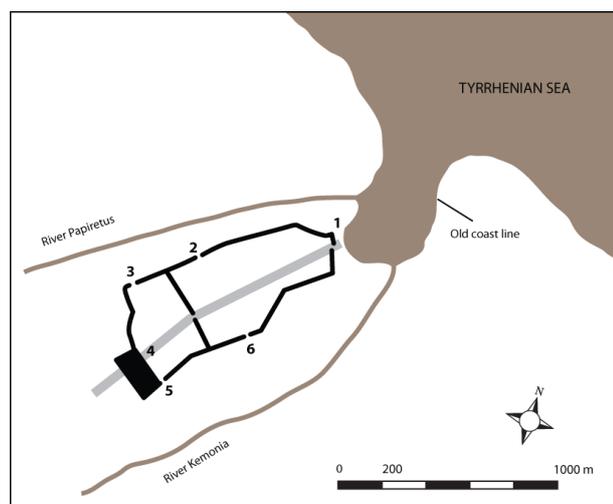


Fig.5.11: Palermo – Presumed late antique and medieval town gates: 1) Porta di Mare (Porta Patitellorum); 2) Porta S. Agata; 3) Porta Rota; 4) Bab Ibn Qurhub (later Porta di Castro); 5) Bab al abna; 6) Porta of Via de Biscottari.

5.2.2. Syracuse

Unlike Palermo, Syracuse was defended by a system of concentric walls dating back to the Greek period. The external wall encircled the quarters of Thyche and Neapolis until the fortress of Eurialo 8 km from Ortigia; a second wall surrounded the Acradina district and protected the Porto Piccolo and Porto Grande. Finally, the island of Ortigia was defended by its own curtain and a *castrum* (fig.5.2).

In Late Antiquity the Neapolis and the Tyche quarters both appear sparsely settled and the external wall was already abandoned, while the main inhabited areas remained the Acradina and the island of Ortigia (see Chapter 4). The restorations and fortification mentioned in the *Life of Caligula* by Suetonius were probably designed to preserve and reinforce the wall of Acradina and that of Ortigia. Procopius indirectly confirms the existence of the Acradina wall (or at least the part protecting the harbours: during the siege of Syracuse by the Ostrogoths the Byzantine fleet entered the town, evidently via the Porto Piccolo and Porto Grande surrounded by the Acradina wall (Proc. *Gothic War* VII. xl. 12): *'And he forced his way through the barbarian lines, sailed into the harbour, and so got inside the fortifications with the whole fleet'*. According to Procopius (Proc. *Gothic War* V.v. 18–19) the first capture of Syracuse took place without any fight, probably because the Ostrogothic garrison was too small to defend the big town and for this reason it seemingly retreated to Palermo. From the late sixth to the eighth century we lack any historical information concerning Syracuse's defences and only in the late ninth century do we gain a new mention of the Syracusan defences.

Thanks to the personal witnesses of Theodosius, a monk who lived in the city during its final siege in 877–8, we possess an impressive report about the final days of Syracuse. Theodosius wrote an *Epistola Theodosii monachi ad Leonem Archidiaconum de expugnatione Syracusarum*, widely mentioned by authors of the ninth century (e.g. Lancia di Brolo 1884, I: 249–56; Amari 1854, I: 393–409; trans. into English by Crawford 1901: 79–98). In his text, Theodosius describes the defences of the Sicilian capital: walls, towers and places where Arabs and Byzantines fought the last battle for Syracuse. Theodosius claims that the general of the Arab army, Gia'far ibn Mohammed, in the summer of 877 set his headquarters in the sixth century cathedral of S. Giovanni Evangelista, outside the Acradina walls, while the Arab troops probably camped in the nearby area of S. Lucia.



Fig.5.12: Syracuse – The ancient urban defences as reconstructed with fair accuracy in the 1eighth century (Privitera 1879, tab. 1).

This position prevented a Byzantine attack from the western side, because it was protected by the river Anapo and by marshlands; furthermore, in this way Syracuse was separated by the Eurialo fortress which, as we will see below, might have been used as a fortification under the Byzantines. Theodosius depicts only the final stage of the siege when the island of Ortigia was finally captured and he omits to illustrate the earlier phases of the blockade. Although the condition of the Acradina walls is not mentioned in Theodosius' report, these were probably in good condition and represented a serious obstacle to the immediate capture of the city since the Arab army approached the Ortigia only in the summer of 878 (Maurici 1999: 46–9; Lancia di Brolo 1884, I: 249).

From the *Epistola Theodosii* it seems that this siege of Syracuse was one of the most modern and complex for that time: catapults and rams to open a breach in the walls are mentioned, as well as the excavation of tunnels seeking to collapse the urban defences (*Epist. monk Theod.*):

'We were vanquished after many attacks made upon us by night, and many a hostile ambush, after engines had been brought up against the walls with which these were pounded almost all day, after a grievous storm of stones hurled against our works, when the tortoise-shed that destroys cities had been used against us, and those things which they call subterranean rats; for not one of those things which are of use for taking a city was left untried by those who were in charge of the siege'.

The protection of Ortigia may have been based exclusively on the enceinte and its towers. To secure the bridge and the entrance to Ortigia, as well as the Porto Piccolo and the Porto Grande in the Hellenistic period a fortified gate named Pentapile 'five doors' was erected (Mancini 1820: IV, 476) (see detail in fig.5.2). As this construction was a monumental point of access, so it is conceivable that the gate was restored during Late Antiquity; however, today unfortunately, nothing remains of the construction. Approaching Ortigia after having conquered the Acradina and probably the Pentapile fortress, the Arabs, concerned about a potential reinforcement of troops from Constantinople, demolished the Acradina wall and the towers protecting the two harbours, preventing in this way any possible Byzantine counter-attack.

In the first days of May 878 the Arab artillery concentrated their fire in the direction of a tower facing the Porto Grande on the right side of the wall (fig.5.3); after a while the tower collapsed and suddenly a breach was opened in the city wall of Ortigia. Despite the strength of the Arab army and the collapsed of this portion of the defences, Syracuse was captured only on first May. However, the end of the siege saw the culmination in a massacre.



Fig.5.13: Syracuse – The entrance to Ortigia. The Arab army concentrated its artillery attack on this part of the Byzantine defences (photo by author).

As well as the limited written sources regarding Syracuse's defences, we lack archaeological data and the town walls are archaeologically known only from a few limited excavations. In the 1930s in Via Matteotti, not far from the church of S. Salvatore, part of the urban circuit was revealed, but a plan and details were not recorded (Agnello, G. 1952: 52, note 2). Portions of the enceinte and the remains of a gate have been excavated in Via XX Settembre (fig.5.4); here, two towers of square plan measuring c. 8.35 m were erected to protect a passage divided into two entrances by a pillar. What we can see today of the monument suggests a good quality construction technique made of carefully cut and set stone blocks. The gate dates back to Greek period, but because of its bad condition no clear trace of later restorations or fortification exists, but its central position should suggest a late antique use of the structure.

Finally, the tower erected near the church of S. Salvatore is more likely a military structure rather than a bell tower as suggested by G. Agnello (1952: 57) (fig.5.5). The tower, c. 9.10 by 8 m, was erected using stones with a technique that closely recalls the gate of Via XX Settembre. Furthermore, part of the city wall is visible joining this tower. Nonetheless, more research is needed to clarify this relationship.



Fig.5.14: Syracuse – The remains of the gate in Via XX Settembre (photo by author). Fig.5.15: Syracuse – The tower in front of the church of S. Salvatore (photo by author).

Finally, there are reasons to suggest that the Hellenistic fortress of Eurialo, a *castrum* erected c. 8 km from Ortigia, was still used as part of the fortification system of late antique Syracuse. G. Agnello documented Byzantine walls and partitions within the castle, suggesting that the twelve small rooms uncovered were cells used by monks; and the fortress was converted into a monastery (*ibid.* 70–4). Castel Eurialo was in a dominant and strategic position, controlling the north-western access to Syracuse; it is most probable that in Late Antiquity it maintained its military function and might have been improved during the program of fortification undertaken by Constans II. As seen, Sicily has documented examples of temples converted into churches (Chapter 3), but we lack cases of ancient fortifications transformed into churches or monasteries; in contrast, the temples of Selinunte were converted into a fortress in the Byzantine epoch.

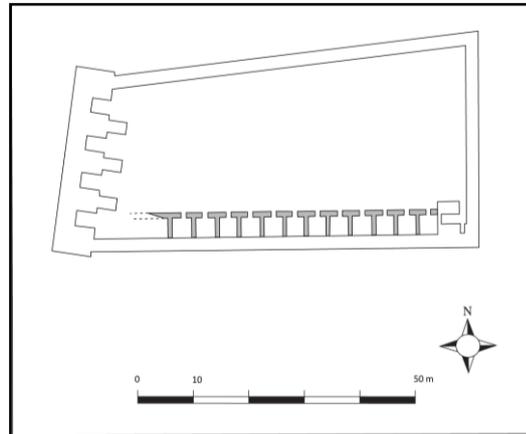


Fig.5.16: Syracuse – Castel Eurialo, in grey the late antique cells proposed by Agnello, although, these spaces it might be barracks or store rooms (modified from Agnello, G. 1952, fig. 9).

5.2.3. Lilybaeum

The remains of the town defences at *Lilybaeum* were partially investigated in the early 20th century and again in different campaigns in the 1990s (Di Stefano, C.A. 1980–1; 1976–7; 1971; 1972–3). What were archaeologically documented were the foundations – some not in very good condition – of the classical urban wall dating back to the fourth century B.C. In 2003 Caruso published the only comprehensive paper, specifically dedicated to the exploration of *Lilybaeum*'s defences up to the Norman period. According to him, at the time of the Roman conquest of Sicily in 241 B.C., *Lilybaeum* was surrounded by a ditch c. 23–30 m wide and c. 8.80–9 m deep that isolated the town from the inland. A double wall circuit built in large stone blocks protected the urban space from each side. Gates and smaller entrances are recorded near to the medieval Porta Mazara, and in the north-western wall. Excavations also documented quadrangular towers of c. 13.50/14.40 metres width set at a regular distance of c. 38 m along the northern circuit, while on the southern flank, towers were smaller (c. 9.80/8.75 m) and so probably belonged to a different construction phase (fig.5.7).

This extensive defence system survived the Punic wars and the Roman civil war of the late Republic (Wilson 1990: 170). However, what was the urban circuit's fate after Augustus? Wilson, followed by Caruso (2003: 187) and Maurici (2003: 888), suggests the walls were subsequently neglected: 'No attempt had been made to refurbish the Hellenistic defences last repaired by Sextus Pompey – houses at one point lay over the line of enceinte – and the city was therefore easy prey for Geinseric's raiding parties' (Wilson 1990: 331).

The idea of *Lilybaeum* as 'easy prey' for the Vandal army is not convincing; furthermore, considering the military success in Africa, the Vandal ability and skills in organizing a siege should not be underestimated. Procopius, in his reports of the Gothic war, mentions an official request made by Emperor Justinian to the Ostrogoths after the defeat of the Vandal kingdom in North Africa: 'The fortress of *Lilybaeum* [that was a Vandal territory] which is ours, you have taken by force...'. In contrast, the Gothic queen Amalasantha, replying to Justinian, describes the town as 'a lone rock', (Proc. *Gothic War* V.iii. 15–8). Did really *Lilybaeum* lack urban defences in Late Antiquity? Was it simply a citadel?

Pondering the broad late antique militarization of the urban space through the erection of defensive walls in the Western Empire, the idea of *Lilybaeum* without urban walls appears unusual. Certainly we know that Cassiodorus described the town of Squillace in Calabria as unwallled (*Var.* XII. 15.5), but the political and economical importance of *Lilybaeum* cannot be compared to Squillace. How could one of the richest towns of Sicily in the Late Roman period and the only Sicilian Vandal stronghold still lack urban defences? In general the absence of related inscriptions or primary sources does not imply the absence of defences (Christie 2006: 289) and probably the case of *Lilybaeum* is one of these examples. In the Sicilian context, we already have seen how, during Caligula's reign and later under Theodoric, restoration works were undertaken to repair the defences in Syracuse and Catania, while a new wall was built in Tindari (Wilson 1990: 56, 170) and in Palermo the enceinte was in c. A.D. 500 still in good condition. Thus, in Sicily there was attention to preserve and reinforce these civic monuments. The discovery of third century A.D. structures built against the walls of *Lilybaeum* (Di Stefano, C.A. 1976–7: 762) (over the line of enceinte?) is not enough to declare the abandonment, nor the dereliction of the defences. The construction of dwellings or poor residential units against the urban walls cannot be assumed as a sign of their neglect and similar examples are documented in several towns, as for example Naples (Arthur 2002: 35), Ravenna (Cirelli 2008: 55–61) and Butrint (Gilkes and Lako 2004: 167–8).

According to Caruso (2003: 191), the only late antique fortification in *Lilybaeum* was a *castrum* erected in the north-western corner of the town, in the area of the acropolis. Unfortunately this construction is today hidden by the modern prison and so nothing can be said of its late antique phase.

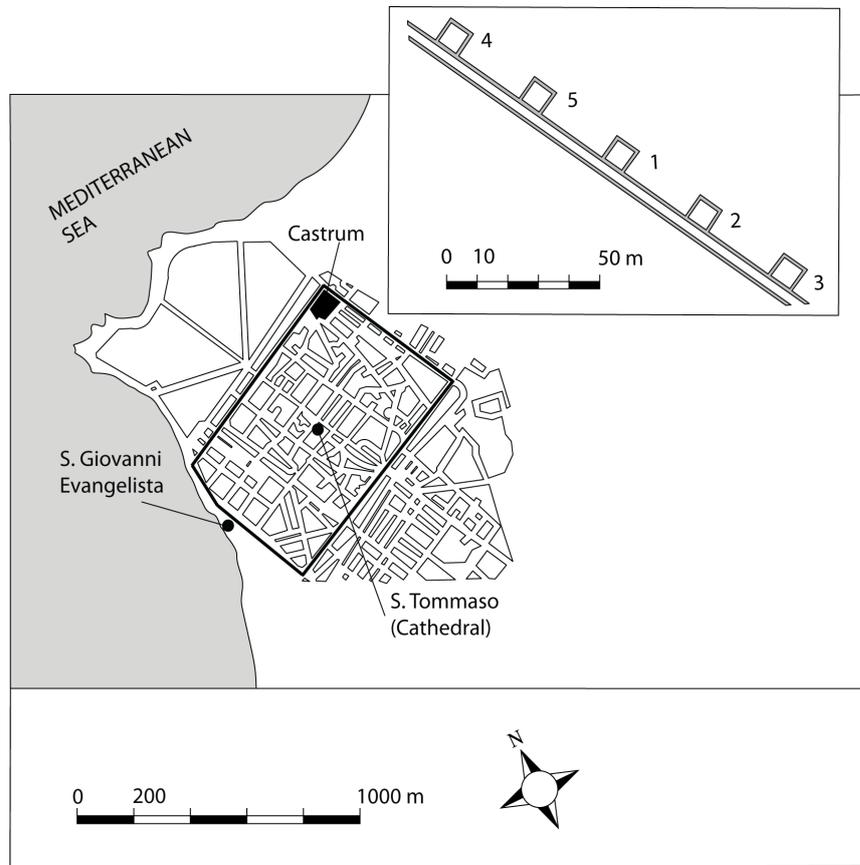


Fig.5.17: Lilybaeum – the Hellenistic wall and the towers documented on the northern side of the urban circuit: 1) tower documented in 1954; 2) tower uncovered in 1987; 3) tower excavated in 1993; 4–5) supposed towers (after Caruso 2003, tav. XXIV).

5.3. Other Urban Centres

For other important urban centres on Sicily only sporadic information exists. In Tindari, in early fifth century the settlement was fortified with a new wall erected using *spolia* from the nearby theatre or other abandoned public monuments, but later, in the Byzantine period the centre shrank, concentrating on the acropolis (Maurici 1992: 14, 27; Wilson 1990: 170, 333). In Messina, walls are mentioned by Procopius (*Gothic War* VII. xxxix. 2–3) and it is probable that part of the defences uncovered near the cathedral belong to the late antique enceinte (Maurici 1992: 14, 26–7). Taormina resisted several Arab sieges thanks to its position and its defences, only finally being taken by the Arabs in 902. The lack of data makes it difficult to establish when and how exactly the Hellenistic defences were restored in late antiquity and the Byzantine period. However, under Byzantium this centre was a real stronghold (Maurici 1992: 30, 373). The case of Taormina's

enceinte is not completely clear (Pace 1938: 389), but we know that in medieval period the town's defence was subdivided between the walled settlement and the *castrum* built in the high acropolis (Maurici 1992: 27; 126) and it is possible that the medieval defences traced the previous late antique and Byzantine system.

In spite of this political and economic importance, little is known about the city walls of Catania, whose perimeter might be suggested by funerary monuments in the suburban areas (Wilson 1990: 163). The late antique circuit must encompass a considerable area if, as antiquarian sources point out, it included the amphitheatre and circus (Wilson 1990: 170). Oddly, when describing the landing of the Byzantine army in Sicily, Procopius states that Catania was without defences (*Gothic War*: VII.xl.21). In contrast, the eighth century bishop of Catania, Leo the Thaumaturgus, mentions a 'Gate of the Arians' (Pace 1949: 45, 198). As in the case of *Lilybaeum* it is difficult to imagine an important city like Catania without urban defences and Procopius might mean that when the Byzantine army arrived in Catania, the Ostrogoths had left the town. The presence of a Gate of the Arians may also indicate an organized quarter occupied by Ostrogoths near the city walls. For other important Byzantine centres, as for instance Termini Imerese (Maurici 1992: 129; Wilson 1990: 170), Cefalù (Maurici 1992: 27, 287), Ragusa, where part of the late antique urban wall is preserved (Maurici 1992: 109) and Enna (Castrogiovanni) that resisted Arab conquest until 992 (Maurici 1992: 28–30), we need many more data even to sketch a defensive pattern.

Finally, the temples A and O in Selinunte were both fortified and transformed in a quadrangular defence of 42 by 45 m (fig.5.8). Dieter Mertens, after a detailed investigation of the monuments, suggested a ninth–tenth c. date, whereas Alessandra Molinari proposed an earlier chronology, spanning the seventh and the eighth centuries (Molinari 2002: 341–2). Once again, more and specific analyses are needed to clarify the different phases of late antique Selinunte.

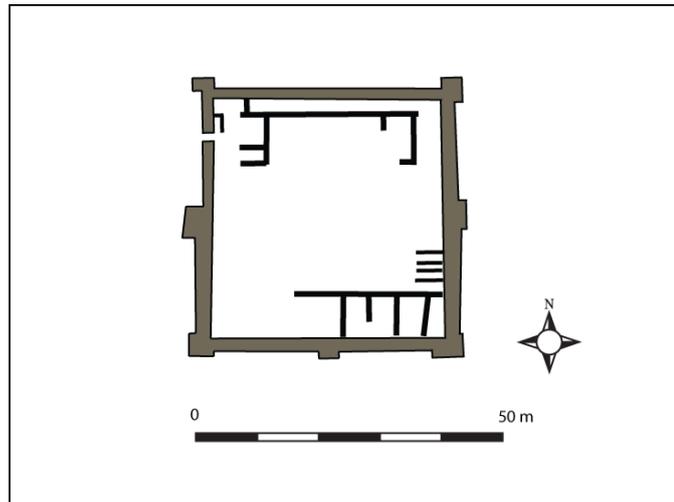


Fig.5.18: Selinunte – Plan of the fortification erected reusing the temples A and O (Molinari 2002, fig. 6).

5.4. Non-Urban Fortifications

As seen, in the late Roman and the early Byzantine period the defence of Sicily was centred on the coastal cities. From the second half of the seventh century, however, we note a radical changeover in the military strategy in the island. The politics of Constans II and the consequent creation of the Theme of Sicily (a more independent and militarized form of regional government (Treadgold 1997: 314–22), with the settlement of farmer-soldiers, entailed the foundation of a net of *castra* set along the main roads and usually built on hilltops (fig.5.9). Research in this field is still in a preliminary phase (Maurici 1992: 13–47; for an account of the late Byzantine historical context in Metcalfe 2009) and we are at the moment ignorant to the typology and the chronological development of these fortifications. What appears clear, from a preliminary census, is that these *castra* were concentrated on mountainous areas such the Madonie, the Peloritani and the Iblei mountains in the north-east and south-east parts of Sicily. Some of these fortifications were well defended by the natural position, but also by walls and towers: Castrogiovanni, for example, was taken by the Arabs in 859, after a long siege, Sutera fell in 860–1, Castel Mola in 902 and Rometta was definitely taken by Arabs only in 965 (Maurici 1992: 13–23). It will be only through a systematic campaign of surveys and excavations that we will know more details. In particular the questions the research should address are: When exactly did this precocious ‘incastellamento’ took place? How were these fortifications organized in terms of military architecture? Were they permanent citadels or temporary refuges?

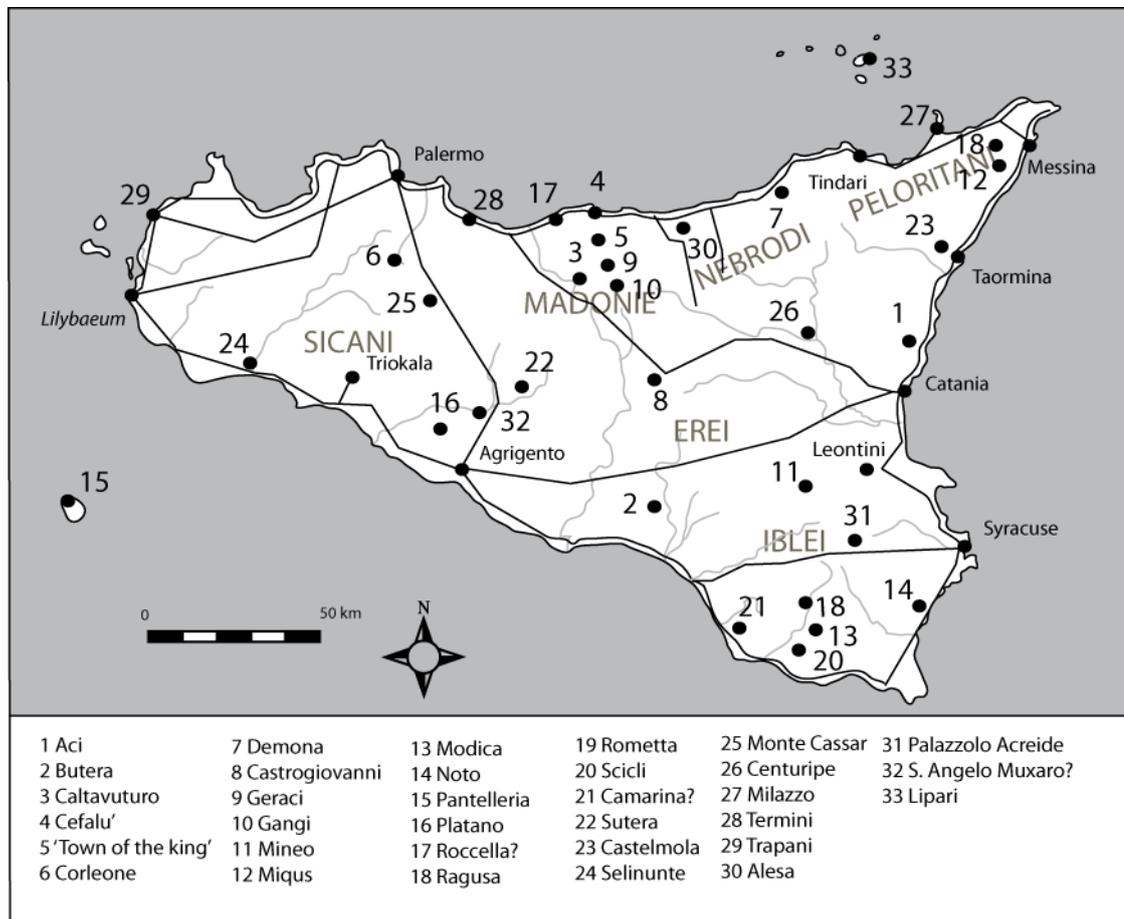


Fig.5.19: Position of the non-urban Byzantine fortifications.

5.5. Discussion

Outlined above, written sources offer little regarding the defences of Sicilian towns. Palermo and Syracuse represent the only exceptions where we can find more and detailed data and in both cases the accounts are connected with a specific event, namely the Byzantine and the Arab sieges, but, in general, textual guides are minimal.

The literary gap is partially filled by archaeological data; yet, this material information often conflicts with rhetoric in textual sources. Emblematic is the case of *Lilybaeum* where the town is mentioned in the sixth century as a 'lonely rock', but archaeology uncovered an articulated defence system of Classical date that could not have been ignored in Late Antiquity. The defences of Tindari are completely neglected by text, but we know from archaeology that a new enceinte was erected in the early fifth century. This discrepancy between text and archaeological data

might be explained with the regional predominant importance of subjects like the agricultural production or trade and, in fact, we have more and complete information about these themes, while the regional defence might be for contemporary of relative meaning. However, a “relative importance” of the defence does not mean that the island was without protection. Defences might have been part of the expected idea of town, then and so, walls were in effect disregarded.

Analyzing the late antique enceintes of Sicilian towns it is natural to wonder how far the Classical defence system endured and how these systems were changed (fig.7.1). Sicilian towns seem to maintain the Classical circuit walls: Palermo, Messina, Syracuse and *Lilybaeum* are the cases illustrated above where continuity is evident. Minor settlements like *Leontini* or *Triocala* were strongholds in the late-Byzantine period and they reused the Hellenistic defences (Maurici 1992: 270 n. 25, 309 n. 63). Of course, it can rightly be observed that the late antique walls of Syracuse did not coincide with the Hellenistic enceinte, but the defence of Syracuse was already in the early Imperial period confined to the Acradina and the Ortigia, and maintained this size until the Arab invasion. At the time of Theodoric Sicilian coastal towns were already fortified – as documented also in the Italian context (Christie 2006: 57–64), but further restorations took place in this period, as in the case of Catania were probably the result of local initiative. Observing the military background of Sicilian towns in the fifth and early sixth century the general idea is that of a preservation and appropriate restoration of the early Imperial urban walls. Sicilian biggest cities – with the exception of Agrigento – did not reduce their enceintes and it seems walls did not have a particular impact in the urban landscape of this period.

More difficult is to trace in the island the military politics of the Justinian period. While in North Africa (Pringle 1981) and Italy (Zanini 1998: 209–25) an intensive program of fortification was undertaken, in Sicily we still lack any archaeological confirmation. Zanini proposes for the Italian context a defence system centred on the role of fortified towns as gathering point of troops, therefore we might suppose that Sicilian urban defences were maintained – notably, coastal cities with important harbours were particularly important in the Byzantine strategy (*ibid.*). Hence, the sixth century military strategy was in Sicily still based onto cities and their defences continuing the late Roman approach (fig.5.10).

However, we do not have information regarding armies in Sicily at this time; so how was the local active defence organized? Was it based onto local militia? Did this system count onto the fast arrive of reinforcements via sea?

It is probably the arrival of Constans II in Sicily that originated a new definition of the military strategy. Constans II created the base for the deep defence of the island that developed in the

eighth century resulting particular effective in contrasting the Arab invasion of the ninth century. This new system was based onto three points 1 – the creation of the Sicilian Theme; 2 – the leading role of cities, as supply centres and points of arrive of reinforcements. In addition, it should be carefully considered the function Sicilian coastal towns had in the maintenance of a maritime system of defence that under Constans II was reinforced (for a general discussion see Cosentino 2007); 3 – the new Byzantine defence was extended to the fortification of the territory, in particular hilltops controlling the main road network. This precocious ‘incastellamento’ remain a topic to be explored and we are at the moment unable to draft any reliable pattern.

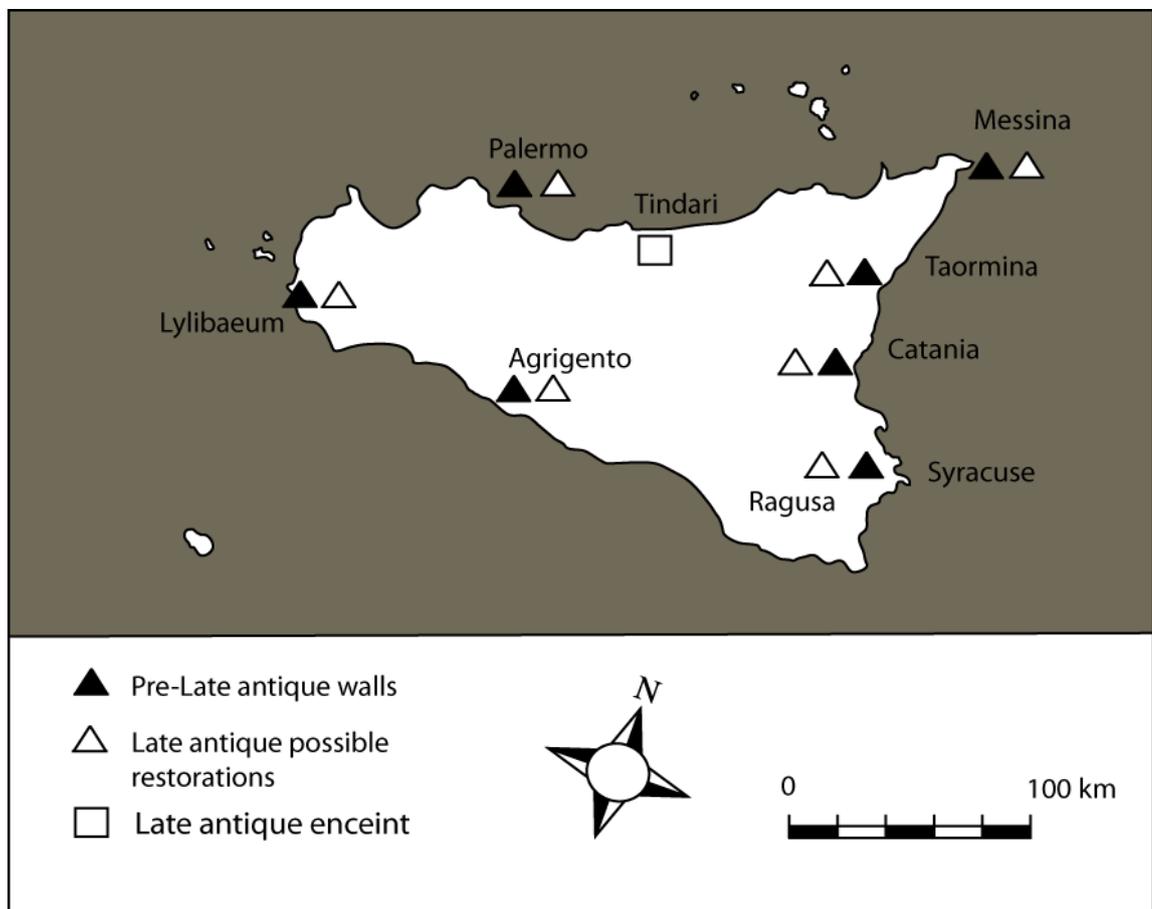


Fig.5.20: Sicily – Late antique and Byzantine

Chapter 6

Economic Evolution in Late Antique and Byzantine Sicily

6.1. Introduction

A comprehensive attempt to analyse the late antique economy of Sicily, its productions, consumption and export of goods, its fiscal system and the subdivision of the rural properties between private, imperial and ecclesiastical owners requires more than a single chapter. However, below I will sketch the late antique economic background of Sicily, synthesizing both the urban and the agrarian productive modes to demonstrate that Sicily had a rich, varied and widely exported economy mainly addressed to the payment of the *Annona*, but good enough to produce and sell abroad its surplus. Grain, livestock and wool are all Sicilian goods mentioned in textual sources, but they are extremely difficult to trace archaeologically and we do not know in which markets these products were sold. I will shed light on this problem through analysis of two case studies: the manufacture of Pantellerian ware, a particular typology of cooking pots (and lids) that had an unusual diffusion in late antique Mediterranean contexts, and the production of Sicilian *garum*; in addition the manufacture of other ceramics such as the amphora type Keay 52, some table wares (in particular jugs) and lamps will add support to my idea. Finally, I will test my hypothesis by debating the monetary policy of late antique Sicily.

The main protagonists of the provincial economy were the Emperor, the Church and the aristocrats (senators or local *possessores*) and, of course, the thousands of slaves and farmers spread both in urban and rural contexts. If we really have few data regarding the involvement of the State in the Sicilian economy, we possess much more information about the role of the Church and the aristocracy. Below, I have set my questions on two levels: the first explores the 'places',

while the second seeks to investigate the role of groups, such as the Church, the senators or the local *possessores*. First, what did cities and country produce? Did they produce for local consumption or for surplus? What scale of export can we trace for the period analyzed here? Consumption is indeed essential to define the economy of cities and rural settlements and I will attempt to sketch the importation of goods. Secondly, who managed the urban and rural production and selling? What was the role of the Church and that of the aristocracy in this process? Did they differ?

Interest has traditionally focused on external exchanges and on the definition of connecting routes between North Africa, Sicily, Italy and the eastern provinces in a macro-regional perspective. These studies were mainly targeted to show the geographical centrality of Sicily (e.g. Wilson 1990: 237–76; Cracco Ruggini 1980); in other cases the contribution of the island to the supply of the *Annona* was explored (Vera 1997–8). The organization and the transformation of the huge senatorial Sicilian estates form a second theme of debate in these studies (Wilson 1990: 214–23), while only recently has attention moved to the analysis of the landscape and minor agricultural centres.

Although production and consumption are already a debated theme of Italian urban archaeology (Brogiolo and Gelichi 1998: 156–7) and more recently considered by Leone for North Africa (2007; 2003), in Sicily this topic is still completely ignored. The appearance of workshops and production centres in the intramural space is a specific connotation of late antique North African towns and manufactures are documented in the major towns of the *Proconsularis* Province from the sixth century (Leone 2007: 219; see also *ibid.* 2003a-b). Public buildings converted into productive areas have been found in *Leptiminus* in the abandoned bath near the Byzantine citadel; here, c. A.D. 600 a factory producing glass, metal, as well as amphorae and probably ARS was installed (*ibid.*: 220–1; cf. Mattingly and Hitchner 1995). In Carthage, sixth–seventh-century cloth-making workshops have been recognised in the north sector of the circular harbour where metal and bone-working activity are also reported (Leone 2007: 223). The example of Carthage and its urban productive area contrast with the Byzantine Italian capital of Ravenna which lacks workshops and which was supplied by goods produced in its port of Classe (Cirelli 2009: 563; Augenti *et al.* 2007).

Sicily was a province of important cities that needed to be regularly supplied by goods, and although imports played a role, most was produced locally. Unfortunately, very few relevant archaeological data are available and these mainly come from Syracuse. However, textual sources

can supplement our understanding in the field; in particular, epitaphs gathered give us information in regard the profession of the deceased.

6.2. The Urban Ceramic Production

Excavations undertaken in the 1960s in the area of Villa Maria in Syracuse (fig.6.1), uncovered a pottery production area established probably in the third or second century B.C. on the site of a previous funerary space (Fallico 1971).

The site was in Roman times occupied by dwellings. Kilns, basins, cisterns and wells have been dated to the first centuries B.C. and A.D. By the Augustan era the area saw intensive production of fine ware Campana C, Pareti Sottili and in particular the local San Giuliano ceramic, a relatively good quality range of table and cooking wares (Wilson 1990: 251–6; Fallico 1971: 636).

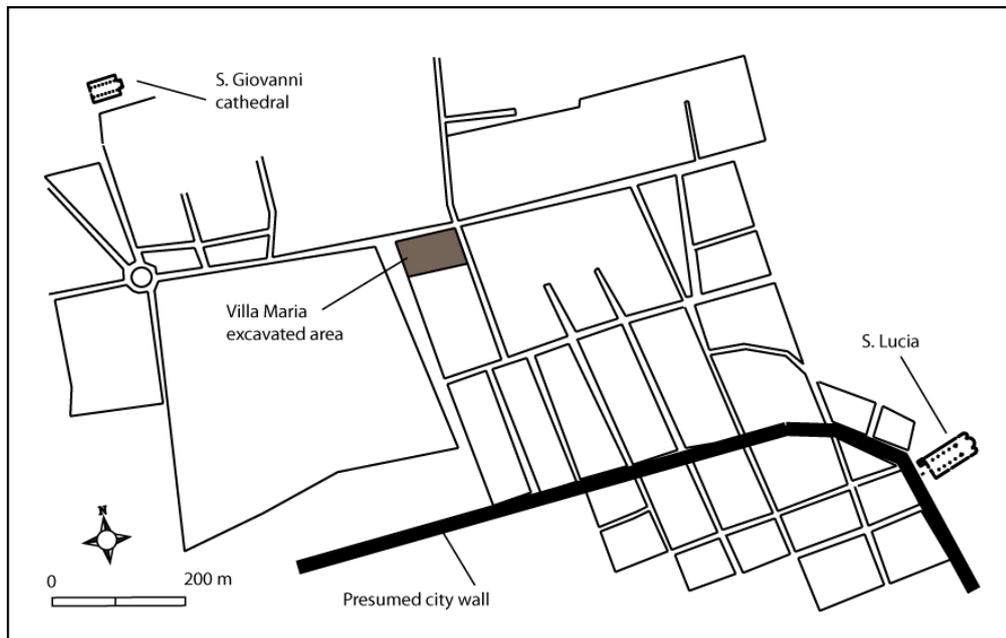


Fig.6.23: Syracuse – Position of the excavated area of Villa Maria.

According to Fallico, in the second and third centuries A.D. the area produced mainly lamps, after which production was limited to coarse ceramics; workshops were active until the fifth century: However, at the time of the excavation, late antique ceramics were poorly known and Fallico did not recognise later productions (1971: 638). Indeed, a revision of the published context of Villa Maria reveals interesting new data. The kiln waste of a jug (*ibid.* 1971: 77, fig. 35, A 208) –

similar to other containers of fifth and sixth century date found in Carthage – signify late antique production activity here; such small jugs (*ibid.* 1971: fig. 35, A 195–7) are common in other Sicilian, Byzantine contexts (Orsi 1942: 121, 126; Puglisi and Sardella 1998). In well E were collected, together with S. Giuliano vessels, jugs of probable fifth–sixth century date (examples E 13, 20–2 in Fallico’s report) (fig.6.2). These pots are comparable to types from the late Roman villa of Patti Marina in north-east of Sicily (Vozza 1976–7) and in Rome in the *Crypta Balbi* (Ricci 1998: 351: 367, fig. 9.7–8); both sites date the jugs to the seventh century – Ricci suggests a south Italian origin for the *Crypta Balbi* exemplars and a Sicilian manufacture (possibly from Syracuse?) seems a strong possibility.

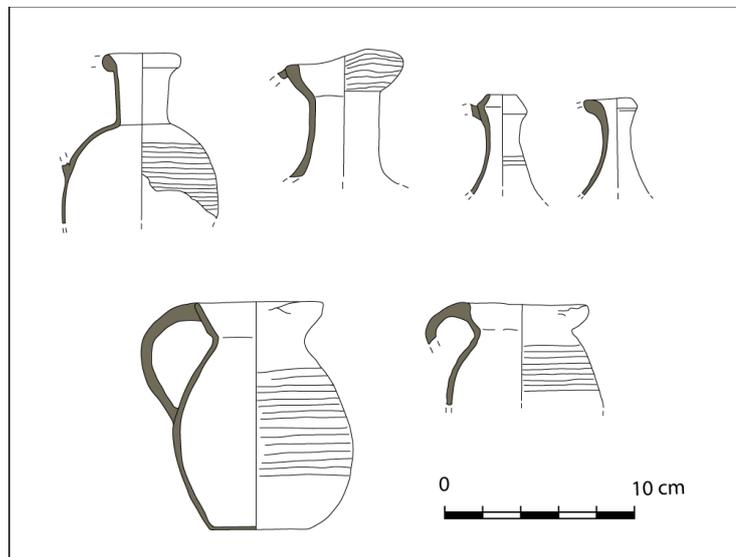


Fig.6.24: Syracuse – Late antique jugs produced in the area of Villa Maria (modified from Fallico 1971: fig. 45, 49).

The wells of Villa Maria also contained fragments of the amphora Keay 52, the small container produced in the *Bruttium*, and in Sicily from the fourth to the seventh century A.D. (Pacetti 1998: 185–208; Wilson 1990: 262–8; Keay 1984: 267–8). The amphorae illustrated in Fallico’s report (1971, A 183–5) are clearly Keay 52, but without the discovery of related kiln wastes its production in the area of Villa Maria remains hypothetical and its presence may be related to the local consumption (fig.6.3).

The Keay amphora 52 is today well documented on the east coast of the island: a kiln producing these containers was investigated in Naxos (4 km south of Taormina) (fig.6.4), if not adequately published (Wilson 1990: 256; Fallico 1976–7). The presence of kiln waste in the rural settlement of Campanaio near Agrigento (Section 7.3 below) also indicates the manufacture of

Keay 52; however, the kiln is still unallocated (Wilson 2000: 362). Wrecks carrying these amphorae have been explored in Syracusan waters, but we do not know if the cargoes were leaving or arriving in the city (Basile 1994).

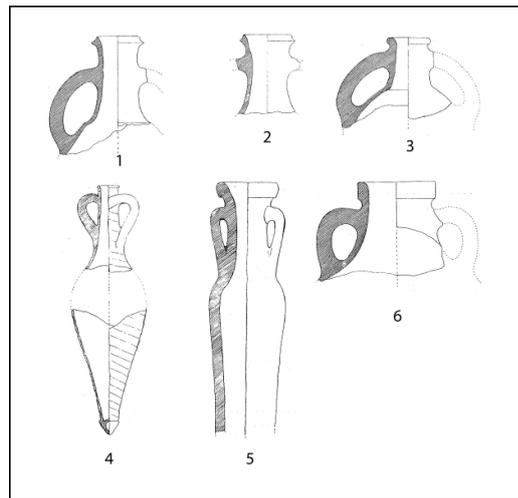


Fig.6.3: Syracuse – Amphorae from the context of Villa Maria: 1–2) Keay 52; 3) Late Roman 1; 4) Late Roman 3; 5) Spatheion; 6) North African Keay 61 (elaborated from Fallico 1971, fig.33).

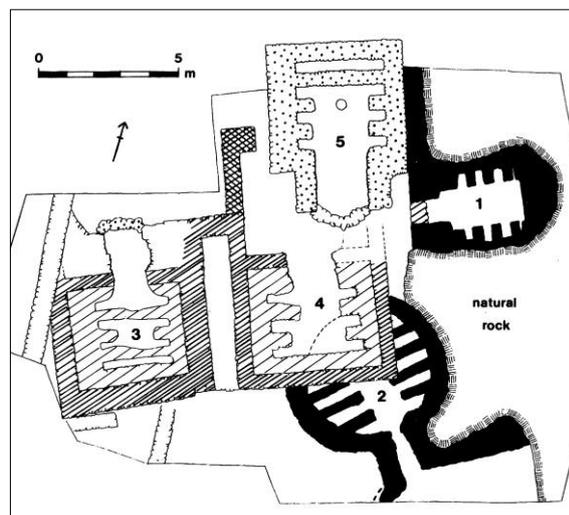


Fig.6.4: Giardini Naxos – The excavated Byzantine kilns (from Wilson 1990, fig.212)

Amphorae from the eastern provinces and North Africa such as the small Late Roman 1 and the large Keay 61 and the *Spatheion* are also attested at Villa Maria, indicating the urban consumption of products until the seventh century. According to archaeological data, lamps were one of the major exports of Sicily from the late sixth century to the mid-eighth century (Bacchelli and Pasqualucci 1998; Pavolini 1998). Sicilian lamps commonly labelled ‘*a ciabatta*’ have been

found in sixth-seventh century contexts in Carminiello ai Mannesi associated with North African and local production lamps, in Porto Torres in Sardinia and also in Ostia. The context at the *Crypta Balbi* in Rome offers us an unexpected result. Here, Sicilian lamps are predominant from the second half of the seventh century (55% of the whole context) and still documented in the eighth century, although from c. 625 local imitation of Sicilian models and open lamps became more frequent. Such a consistent exporting of lamps attests clearly the direct connection between Sicily and Rome. One explanation might be that workshops producing lamps in Sicily – e.g. Villa Maria – were under the direct control of the Church or aristocrats with economic interests at Rome; we will see below how elites living in Ravenna or Rome managed to sell the products of their Sicilian properties in the city market.

At the moment we do not have enough data to clarify if manufactures by Sicilian cities were set extramurally or if, in contrast, workshops were also present in the defended urban space. The information from Syracuse seems to suggest a substantial maintenance of the productive areas outside the city walls, but this pattern, needing more excavations, should be handled carefully. In addition, since we lack clear archaeological data regarding the late antique gates and road system, we can only speculate that being near the two major churches of the city, the workshops of Villa Maria were well connected by roads that certainly also linked these manufactures to the Little Harbour. Being already active when the cathedral of S. Giovanni and the church of S. Lucia were founded, the workshops of Villa Maria were not the result of a new reorganization of the suburban areas; however, it is most probable that the demand of goods from the two congregations increased production in the area.

Recently Daniele Malfitana (2006) has started a project to re-study ceramic deposits of early Roman and late antique periods from old urban excavations; new data about the local manufactures and consumption seem to merge, especially for the late antique and Byzantine contexts and certainly in the next few years we will gain much more information on the field.

6.2.1. Metalwork

Two views exist concerning the presence in Sicily of workshops producing metalwork and jewellery in Late Antiquity: some scholars suggest the presence of local ateliers and specialized craftsmen, while others reject the idea of a Sicilian industry. Wilson, indeed, sees minimal evidence, and in his opinion objects recovered are imports from elsewhere (1990: 272–4). In

contrast, Pace, exploring the written sources, proposes a fervent provincial craft activity. He shows how, in the *Codex Siciliae Diplomaticus* – a collection of documents about early Sicilian Christianity edited by Di Giovanni in 1743 – we hear how in the eighth century the Deacon Benedict offered Archbishop Mauro gold and silver vases and other luxury objects. Pace argues that official gifts are usually selected from local goods, as representations of the local wealth, prompting him to propose the existence of workshops, perhaps set in Syracuse, Catania or Palermo (1949: 434). To support his idea, Pace quotes from the *Breviarium rerum post Mauricius gestarum* written by St Nikephoros I of Constantinople (c. 758–828) edited by Bekker in 1837 (Pace 1949: 434–5), which mentions ‘... aurea duo labra, quae in Sicilia facta erant [...]’, two gold wash-basins that were produced in Sicily’ (*Brev. rerum post Mauric.*: 78). Similarly, P. Orsi, describing some incense burners and candelabras, did not exclude a Sicilian manufacture (1942: 177, 154) (fig.6.5).

Indeed, bronze incense burners, lamps, jugs and candelabras, as well as gold necklaces and earrings and personal decorations such as belt buckles are frequent in funerary contexts. The numerous churches and monasteries in eastern Sicily will have been ideal markets demanding liturgical equipments especially. These objects may have been donations to the local churches from the Sicilian aristocracy such as the incense burners dated to the fifth–sixth century and featuring a dedication to St Zacharias, found in Grammichele near Catania, or that found in Bibbino near Palazzolo Acreide (*ibid.* 1942: 167–74). Other examples of incense burners lack inscriptions, but a liturgical use is most probable. Other ritual items were the bronze lamps found in Selinunte and in Caltagirone (today at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Wilson 1990: 273) bearing the word *Deo gratias* and Chi-Rho decorations. Of course, these liturgical items may have been carried from North Africa or other western provinces by monks (although it is improbable that the properties of a church or a monastery were moved, unless in the case of great danger, as the Vandal or the Arab conquest of North Africa).



Fig.6.25: The metal objects documented by Orsi in Sicily (from Orsi 1942, figs 79–83).

The discoveries of several late antique pieces of jewellery reflect elite demand for such luxurious goods (fig.6.6-8). The stunning ring found in the area of the thermal bath of Via Arsenale in Syracuse belonged to a high imperial dignitary and is a unique masterpiece that only a Constantinopolitan manufacture could produce (Pace 1949: 435–9; Orsi 1942: 143–4 who state the area of the train station as the place of discovery). The consumption of jewels in rural areas is well documented by archaeology. From Constantinople or Alexandria may come the late seventh century necklaces found in Pantalica in the province of Syracuse, as well as the early ninth century necklaces of Campobello di Mazzara (Pace 1949: 439). Jewels of lower quality in Sicily derive in particular from funerary contexts or from hoards, and Sicilian origins are supposed by Orsi (1942: 155–6), again proposing workshops in one of the major Sicilian cities.



Fig.6.26: The Byzantine gold ring found in Syracuse, now at the museum of Palermo (Orsi 1942, tab. XVIII).

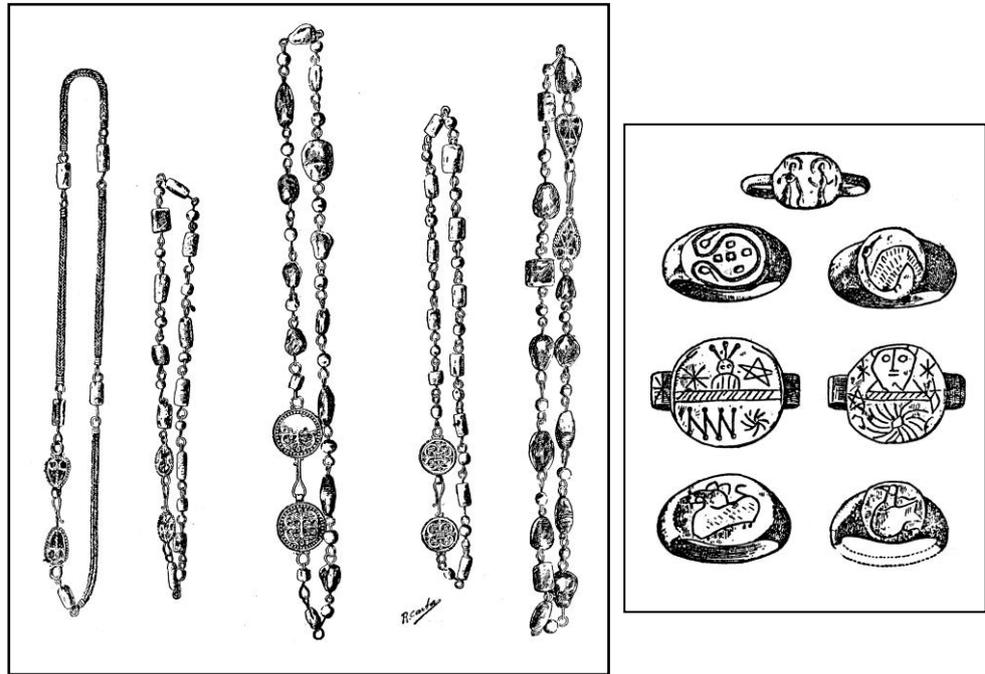


Fig.6.27: Byzantine necklaces found in Sicily (Orsi 1942, fig. 61).

Fig.6.28: Bronze rings of potential Sicilian production (Orsi 1942, fig. 68).

Metalworking activity has been documented in the suburban site excavated in Via Catania along the ancient road leading to Messina, c. 2.30 km from the city centre (fig.6.9). ARS fragments (Hayes 91? and 67) attest activity until the fifth century – although, Bonanno, without offering details, proposes a site already deserted in the third century (1997–98: 401–18). The site was probably geared to the extraction and working of iron, but we do not know the actual products, nor do we know if this workshop simply served the local community or had a wider circulation.

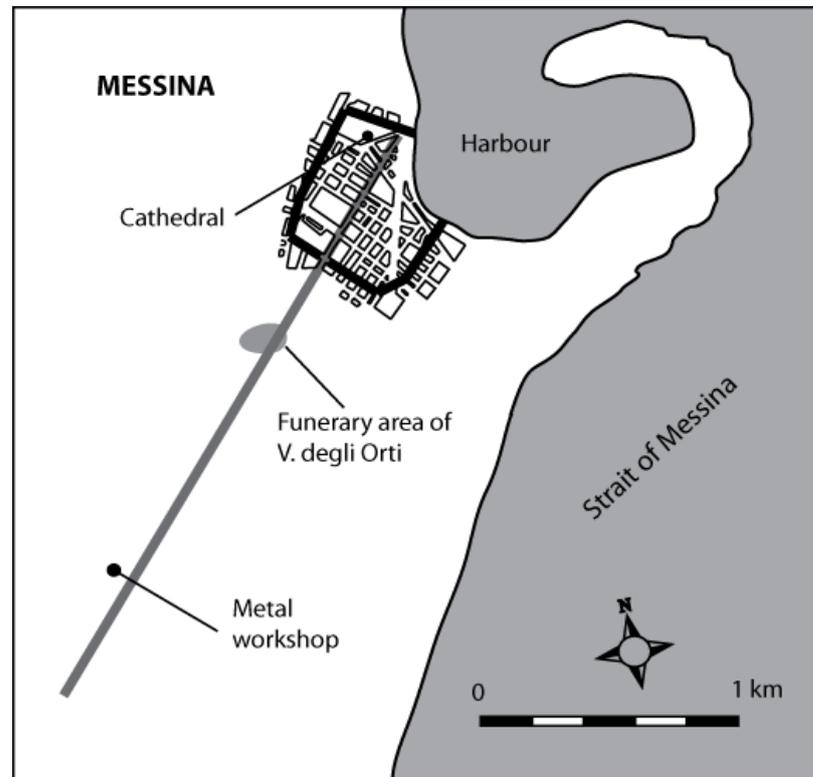


Fig.6.29: Messina – The position of the metal working area.

6.2.2. Textile Production

Although, so far, no archaeological evidence exists of structures connected with the manufacture of textiles, this industry is documented in the region from textual sources. In A.D. 591 Bishop Felix of Messina sent to Pope Gregory I 'palm-embodied robes' (Greg. *Let.* I. 64), presumably of Sicilian origin. Funerary inscriptions also confirm textile manufacture in the regional cities and, in fact, Murex dye activity is documented in Syracuse through a funerary epitaph of the fourth–fifth centuries; in addition another epitaph names a Syracusan weaver (Sgarlata 1991: 134). Linen cloths and fabrics were traded in Palermo by Alexandrine Petrus Linatarius, who died here in 602 (Pace 1949: 240). Only through improved urban excavation and in particular closer attention to the presence of Murex shells in stratigraphic contexts will archaeological evidence of such industry in Sicilian towns be forthcoming.

6.2.3. Urban Consumption

The dependence on North African products was very high until the late seventh century and fine and coarse ceramics imported from the *Proconsularis* province are predominant in Sicilian cities – although the lack of studies of local productions prevents us understanding when Sicilian manufactures replaced products from North Africa. According to the diffusion and the export of Sicilian lamps we might suspect that around the time of Constans II (660s) Sicilian production at least on the island was predominant, but more data are needed to clarify this topic.

Until the mid-fifth century Sicilian cities also ‘consumed’ plays and games at the circus or in theatres, and, as we learn from the letters of Symmachus, these cities requested actors from other provinces (see Chapter 4). Sicilian episcopates and monasteries consumed and exported culture; the participation of Sicilian bishops such as Leo the Great, Patriarch Methodius, in the main Christological debate suggest Sicilian churches and monasteries were supplied by books of the major contemporary authors. The veneration of Sicilian saints, notably St Agatha, St Lucy and St Gregory of Agrigento by the Orthodox Church is what today remains of the Sicilian cultural export since hagiographies of these provincial saints were probably sent to and read in many of the most important cultural centres of the Empire.

6.3. The Late Antique Rural Landscape of Sicily

Late antique Sicily was a province featuring many large rural senatorial estates belonging to old Roman families such as the Anicii, Symmachi and Nicomachi (see Chapter 2.2) (fig.6.10). The third century *Itinerarium Antonini* offers an idea of these domains since several centres took the name from the *cognomina* of the landowners – e.g. the *massa Calvisiana* from Calvisianus, the *massa Capitoniana* from Capito, the *Pitiliana* from Petilius (Wilson 1990: 214–16). The letters of Pope Gregory I are also rich in information regarding landownership and, as we will see, they are central for the understanding the development of land use in the sixth century province.

From the mid-fourth century, the aristocracy used to live temporarily in huge and richly decorated *villae* built both on the coast and in the country. The villa of Piazza Armerina is the most famous and best studied case (Wilson 1983; Carandini *et al.* 1982; Ampolo *et al.* 1971), but no less important, in terms of quality of decoration and size, are the *villae* of Patti Marina c. 6 km from

Tindari and Tellaro near Noto, which despite being excavated in the 1960–70s, are still waiting for an exhaustive publication (Voza 1982; 2003).

To have an idea of the scale of these estates we can read the description of some Sicilian possessions held by St Melania the Younger: in one of these properties there were ‘60 small farms comprising 400 agricultural slaves’, while another was ‘bigger than a very city, having baths, many craftsmen, gold and silversmiths and bronze workers, as well as two bishops’ (Geront. *Vita Melaniae* I.18 and 21; see also Rizzo 2005-06, II, ii: 361). Certainly the author of the *Vita Melaniae* may have exaggerated, but from a document written in Ravenna in A.D. 445/6 (Tjäder 1955, Pap. 1) we are informed that the Chamberlain Lauricius was rewarded for his service with the donation of the ‘*massae Emporitana, Fadilianensis, Cassitana*’, as well as the *fundi Aperae, Anniana* and *Callius* that, together with other regional incomes, yielded Lauricius the sum of 6.150 *solidi*. Still in the mid-sixth there were considerable properties given how the Senator Tertullian donated Sicilian land ‘*cum ecclesiis, villis, sylvis, aquis, piscariis, aquarumque descursibus ad easdem curtes pertinentibus*’ to the Abbey of Monte Cassino (Rizzo, R. 2002: 122, note 21).

In the field of archaeology, an attempt to calculate the size of Sicilian estates has been undertaken by Wilson through the distribution, in the area of Gela, of stamped tiles bearing the inscription *CAL* or *CALVI* and presumably manufactured in the *Calvisiana* property. The range estimated by Wilson is of c. 2.500 hectares; in addition the author suggests a size of c. 15.000 hectares for the nearby *massa Philosophiana* (Wilson 1990: 222–3). However, although these tiles were without doubt used within the landlord’s estate, their use in trade cannot be excluded and, indeed, Wilson admits the weakness of this calculation and we have to confess that any efforts in clarification of Sicilian estate organization are still feeble and only speculations can be deduced.

The provincial land properties did not belong only to senatorial families: the Emperor had vast interests that, according to the *Notitia Dignitatum* were probably administrated by a *curator rei privatae* (Cracco Ruggini 1980: 492–3). Constantine we know donated to the Church land in the area of Taormina (‘the estate *Tauriana*, in Sicily, territory of *Paramnense*, revenue 500 *solidi*’) and Catania (‘the estate *Castis*, territory of *Catina*, revenue 1000 *solidi*; the estate *Trapeas*, territory of *Catina*, revenue 1.650 *solidi*’), (*Lib. Pont.* 34, *Vita Silvestri*). The already noted Chamberlain Lauricius received Imperial land and later, at the end of the fifth century the *vir inlustris et magnificus* Pierius of Ravenna was granted by king Odovacer with the *massa Pyramitana* in the region of Syracuse (Cracco Ruggini 1980: 493; Pace 1949: 151, 229).

With the progressive adhesion to Christianity by the Roman aristocracy some parts of the Sicilian estates were donated to the Church. The letters of Pope Gregory I offer some details of

these lands: the *massa Cinciana* – probably set in the village of Cianciana c. 27 km north-west from Agrigento – the noted *fundus Comas* (Greg. *Let.* IX.165; Chapter 3.5), or the *fundus Monostheus*, where a monastery needed restorations (*Let.* I.42; II.50) and the *fundus Fullonicas*, probably set near Palermo (*Let.* I.9; XIII.5), the *massa Maratodis* where there was a monastery dedicated to St George (*Let.* II.26). From Pope Gregory I we also are informed about the organization of the provincial Church: in c. 600 A.D. there were 11 episcopates: Palermo, Messina, Taormina, Catania, *Leontini*, Syracuse, Agrigento, *Triocala* and *Lilybaeum*, plus islands sees on Lipari and Malta – this last was connected to Syracuse. Each diocese was subdivided into rural parishes led by a presbyter. Within the parishes there were several *ecclesiae* often held by retired aristocrats and depending directly from the local bishop (Chapter 3.5).

Through such donations of Sicilian land, Italian bishoprics extended their influence over the province; the Churches of Milan, Ravenna, Canosa and the monastery of Monte Cassino managed possessions in the region. The Episcopate of Milan inherited properties from the Aurelii family, of which Bishop Ambrose of Milan was a member (Rizzo, F.P. 2005-06, II, i: 133; Cracco Ruggini 1980: 512 note 52; Greg. *Let.* I.80). Also, the Church of Ravenna held important properties in the province, probably since the time of Bishop Orso (370–96), who has been suggested as of Sicilian origin (Rizzo 2005–06, II, i: 133). In addition, the Episcopate of Ravenna inherited from the *vir inlustris et magnificus* Pierius the *massa Pyramitana* that produced 690 *solidi* a year (Tjäder 1955, P.10–11; Cracco Ruggini 1980: 515 notes 65 and 68; Greg. *Let.* XI.8). The Church of Canosa in Apulia also held properties on the island, but we lack details about these (Greg. *Let.* I.42). For the time of Pope Gregory I, Cracco Ruggini (1980: 493) suggests that the Church held something like 800.000 ha of plots administered by c. 400 tenants.

The letters of Pope Gregory I are also fundamental in studying the local elite (Rizzo, R. 2008). In the sixth century there was a provincial class of *nobiles possessores* who were particularly influential, and Pope Gregory I recommended Deacon Petrus administrator of the Sicilian *patrimonium sancti Petri*, to maintain good relations with the local landlords; sometimes in fact there were conflicts between the provincial abbots or bishops and local *possessores* on matters such as fugitive slaves (Greg. *Let.* IX.10) or property borders; in particular in the case of the *actionarius* Felix (a land administrator) of Syracuse who illegally took away part of lands from local *possessores* (*Let.* IX.41,42). The relationship between Rome and the Sicilian nobles was of continuous negotiation and balance between the aspirations of Sicilian elite desiring to be appointed to the religious positions in the island and, on the other hand, the imposition by Rome of trustworthy clerics mainly of Italian origin (Rizzo, R. 2008: 282–3). In October 591, Pope

Gregory appointed his old friend Bishop Maximian to the seat of Syracuse (*Let.* II.5), but in Agrigento he assigned the Episcopate to Bishop Gregory, a member of a local noble family (*Life of St Gregory*). The election of the new bishop of Palermo in 602 was made by the local clergy and later confirmed by Rome (*Greg. Let.* XIII.15).

Ongoing projects of landscape archaeology could offer an idea of the organization of the provincial rural landscape, but, because of the gap in ceramic studies, our knowledge from the late seventh to the tenth century is lacking. In the 1980s Jeremy Johns inaugurated the first campaign of systematic field-walking in the region of Monreale, 7 km south-west from Palermo. In this area, according to Johns, *villae* expanded in size in the third and fourth centuries and some of these structures became villages in the fifth century. A new settlement was founded in the high ground of Monte Marafusa in the second half of the fifth century, but we do not know if this foundation was due to migration of farmers under Vandal pressure or if it was the consequence of an increasing economy of the area. The site of Monte Marafusa, as well as that of Monte Raitano, retained its place through all the Byzantine period and was later occupied by Arabs attesting the economic importance of the region (Johns 1992: 414–15).

In the area of Segesta, small settlements of Roman Imperial date were abandoned in the early fifth century. Cambi, who supervised the research does not relate this desertion with Vandal raids (Cambi 2005: 633) since this loss apparently occurred before the arrive of Vandals in North Africa. In addition in the same period bigger site such as *Aquae Sagestanae* and Rosignolo set alongside the Via Valeria connecting Segesta with *Lilybaeum*, increased in size. The expansion of *Aquae Sagestanae* and Rosignolo was probably the result of the attraction of people from nearby sites (Cambi 2005; Bernardini *et al.* 2000). *Aquae Segestanae*, in particular, appears to be fully functioning until its final abandonment in the eleventh century when the settlement was moved to the more defensible site of Clathamet c. 8 km distant to the east (Cambi 2005: 634). In contrast, Rosignoli was suddenly deserted around the end of the seventh century. Cambi proposes a pattern whereby medium to large sized villages (although the author does not specify if these centres were former *villae*), such as *Aquae Segestanae* were leading territorial units providing a focus of markets, and administration for very small nuclei of farms spread in the landscape (*ibid.*: 2005). A similar trend was recorded in the area of Trapani and Erice (Filippi 2003) and Salemi (Kolb and Vecchio 2000), confirming the proposals of Cambi.

The disappearance of small rural nuclei is also documented in the area of Milocca (modern Milena) c. 18 km north-east to Agrigento: this region was crossed by the road connecting Palermo to Agrigento and, in the ninth century it was an important point in the defence of the Byzantine

province, since the nearby fortified centre of Castronovo was taken by Arabs in 857–8 (Arcifa and Tommasello 2005). The site of Milocca rose from the fourth to the seventh century and continued to be in use until late medieval period. Here, recent excavations focused on the exploration of the fifth century farm, unearthed structures of a building (a farm?), whose older phase is dated – thanks to the presence of late antique and Byzantine tile fragments – to the late eighth and ninth centuries.

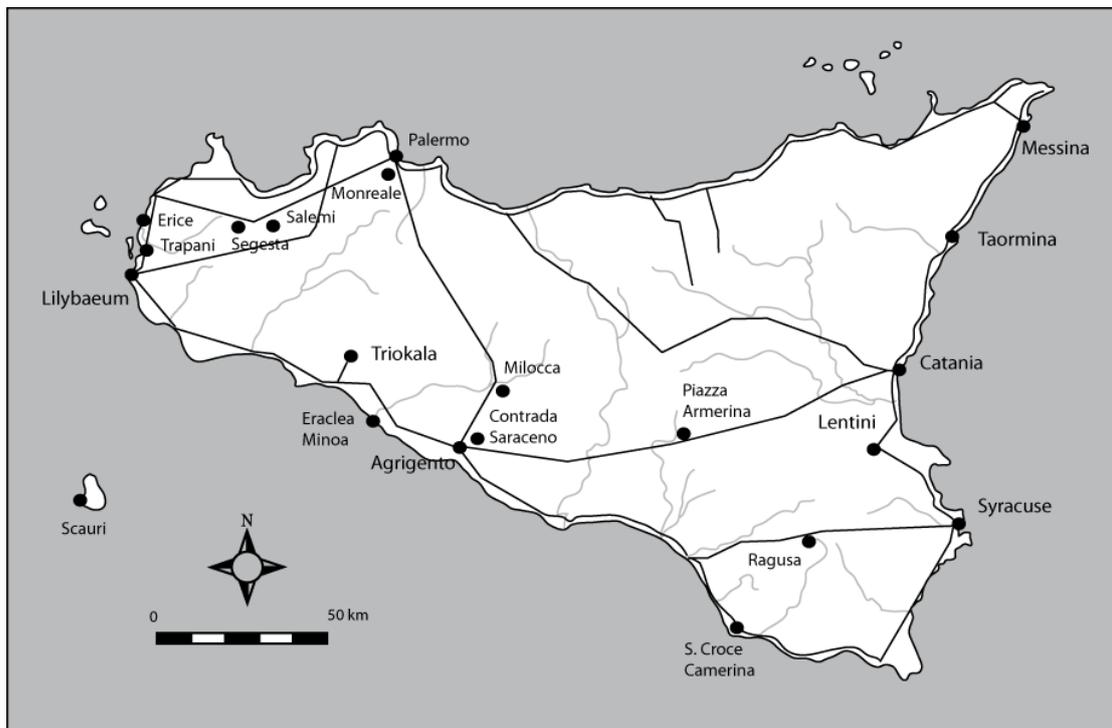


Fig.6.30: Sicily – The main rural centres mentioned in the text.

The landscape organization documented in the area of Milocca finds no parallel in the nearby area of the river Platani in the province of Agrigento (Rizzo, M.S. 2005). Here, in c. A.D. 500 new settlements were founded (contrada Canalicchio and Terrasi) which prospered until the end of the seventh century. Analyzing a small area of 4 km² in contrada Butemi, Rizzo notes how the landscape was dominated by a site of consistent size at Masseria Genuardi that was uninterruptedly occupied from the first to the seventh century and probably continued until the late medieval period. In the fifth century a second small centre was founded near Masseria Genuardi, originating, in the opinion of Rizzo, from an articulated production unit (Rizzo, M.S. 2005: 644).

Very recent new explorations in the area of the *mansio* of Filosofiana (Piazza Armerina) have documented a considerable increase in size and quantity of imported African ceramics through all the fifth century when the centre was fractioned continuing to operate until late Byzantine period and attracting large quantity of African products (Pers. Comm. Emanuele Vaccaro).

If regional landscape archaeology is improving, excavations remain few and in general their data are not exhaustively published. However, the sites extensively unearthed in Contrada Castagna and Campanaio (Wilson 1996) near Eraclea Minoa, as well as the site explored by Di Stefano and McConnel in Contrada Saraceno near Agrigento, offer an idea of the organization of these late antique rural settlements. In addition, more recently, a late antique village and farms have been explored in Scauri (Pantelleria) (Sami 2006) and Verdura (Perello *et al.* forthcoming).

The villa of Contrada Saraceno, c. 7 km north-east of Agrigento (Castellana and McConnel 1990) (fig.6.11) was founded around the second century A.D.; despite heavy damage which occurred probably during the earthquake of A.D. 365, the *par rustica* of the villa was rebuilt and expanded with the construction of new rooms; several coins of the Constantines document a certain economic activity. From the second half of the fourth century the villa turned from a mainly residential building to an industrially organized centre, as the insertion of *pithoi* for grain storage indicate. Vandal raids probably affected this site, since in the second half of the fifth century it appears to be abandoned and collapses are documented within the rooms. A re-occupation of the ruined structures took place in the first half of the sixth century and new rooms were erected with good architectural technique in the west part of the former building. Copious quantities of sixth and seventh century ARS, North African amphorae, as well as coins of Heraclius (610–41), Heraclius Constantine (613–41), Constans II (641–68), Leo III (717–41) and Constantine V (741–75) confirm the continuity of use of this site through the early middle Ages. It was during this period that a chapel was erected on the site, documenting its role of point of aggregation of this settlement.

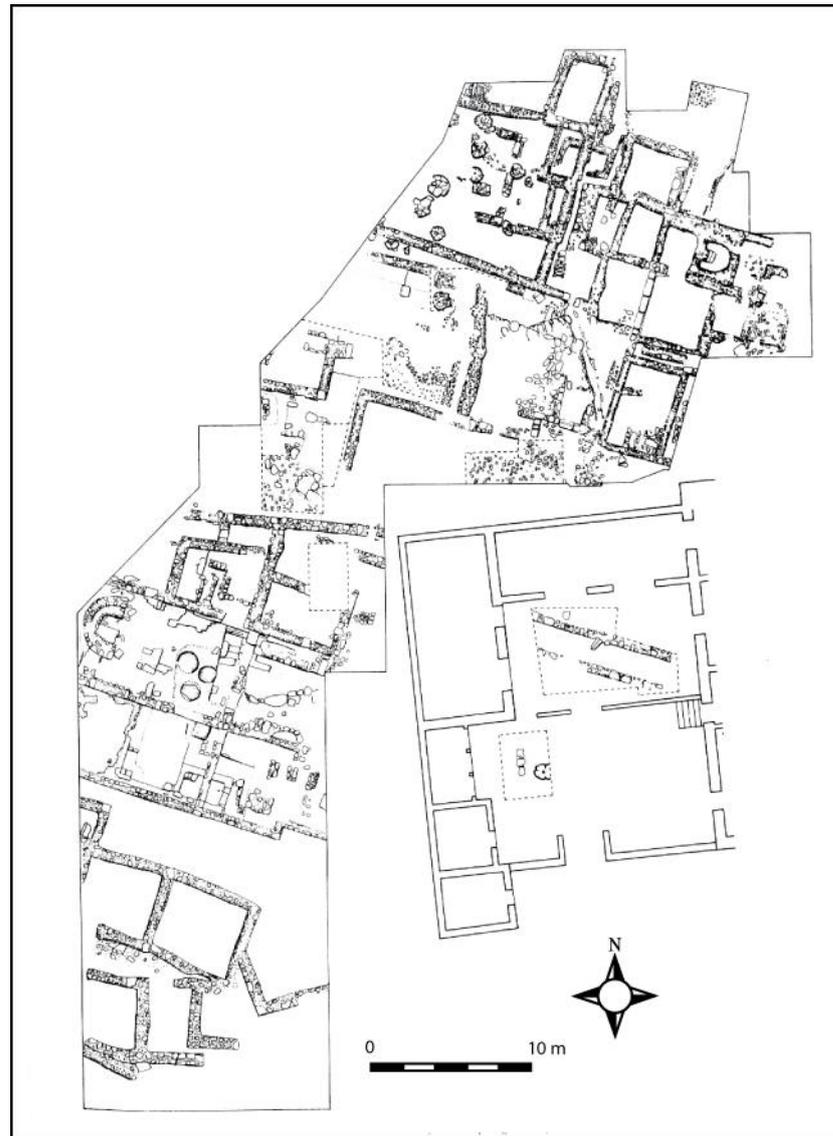


Fig.6.31: Agrigento – The excavated farm at Contrada Saraceno (from Castellana and McConnell 1990, fig.2).

The farm explored by Wilson in Campanaio near Eraclea Minoa was founded in the Hellenistic period and later abandoned from the early first until the late fourth centuries A.D. when the site was re-occupied with the addition of new buildings such as a warehouse, olive oil separating vat and a lime-kiln, iron-working, tanning and manufacture of amphorae, *mortaria* and tiles (fig.6.12). The centre was seriously damaged by a violent event, probably related to a Vandal attacks, yet it was later partially re-occupied (Wilson 2000, 1996). Wilson does not present data for the Byzantine period, but he says that the site was partially re-occupied and the cut of three burials of Islamic ritual might suggest a long life of this site.

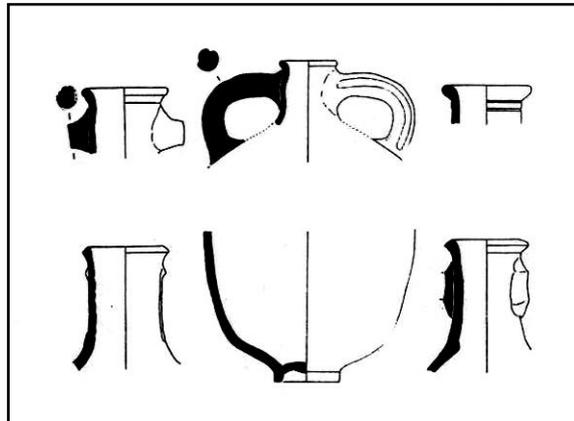


Fig.6.32: Campanaio, Agrigento – Some of the ceramic typologies produced during the fourth and fifth centuries (from Wilson 1996, fig.20).

Similar is the case of the nearby site of Contrada Castagna (Wilson 1983b; 1996) (fig.6.13) where a farm of the early Roman period was re-occupied in the late fourth century and flourished until the sixth century, although more data are still waiting to be published for this phase. The building investigated at Castagna was part of a rural productive centre of different houses still unexplored but with dynamics similar to the site of Campanaio.

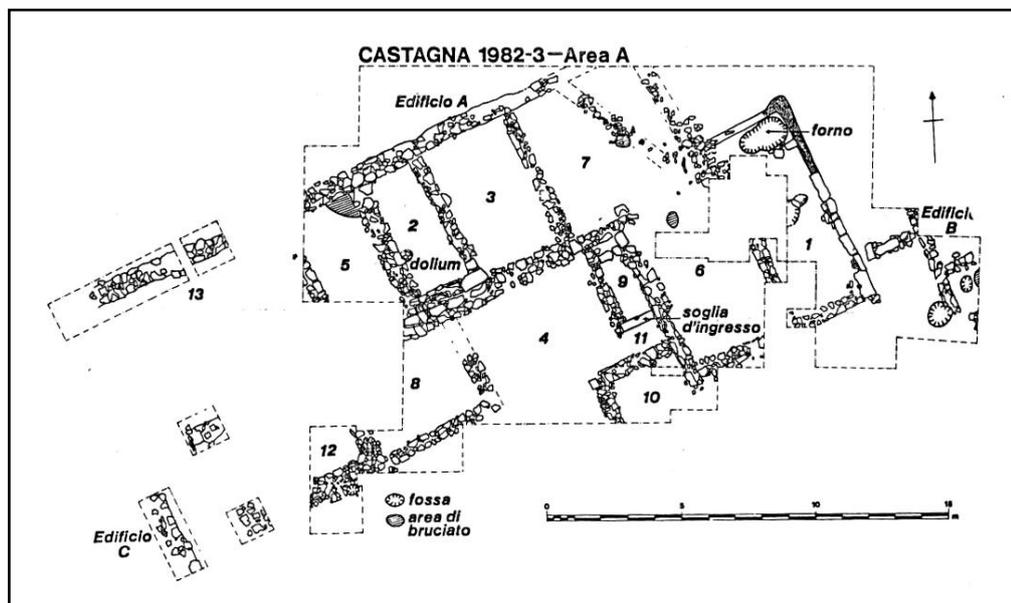


Fig.6.33: Contrada Castagna, Agrigento – Part of the excavated late antique rural settlement (from Wilson 1983b, fig. 3).

Without doubt the late fourth and fifth centuries represent a flourishing period for the Sicilian rural areas. To this phase are documented the foundation of new sites such that recently

excavated at the outlet of the river Verdura and that at the bay of Scauri in Pantelleria. The rural unit of Verdura (fig.6.14), consisting of three buildings in which have been identified both residential and storage rooms (Perello *et al.* forthcoming). The high ceramic corpus attests a good consumption of North African products. This site was suddenly abandoned in the mid-fifth century and never reoccupied. Fairly similar is the case of Scauri, a village provided with a good natural harbour – where a early-fifth century shipwreck has been documented. Ceramics and the several coins gathered during the excavation document a blooming economic life strictly connected with North Africa as the huge amount of ARS witnesses: the site abruptly dramatically ended in the mid fifth century, probably from a Vandal attack (Sami 2006).



Fig.6.34: Agrigento – The farm excavated at Verdura (from Perello *et al.* forthcoming, fig.2).

Exploration undertaken in the area of Ragusa in south-east Sicily recorded several rural sites mainly set along the ancient road connection between Gela and Syracuse (Di Stefano, G. 2005; Patitucci and Uggeri 2007). Similar to the western cases analyzed, here small centres and farms decreased or disappeared from the fifth to the seventh century while bigger agglomerates like Pianicella near Ragusa set along the main roads continued to exist and developed, reaching c. 52 houses (Di Stefano 2005).

Together with production centres of consistent size, as the above cases, in Late Antiquity Sicily persisted in the use of small isolated farms. It is most probable that after the creation in the seventh century of the Theme of Sicily – the new military and administrative unit of the Byzantine Empire (Treadgold 1997: 314–45) – the number of these tiny nuclei increased following the arrival of soldiers granted with land in the island. One of these units has been investigated in Contrada

Costa near Santa Croce Camerina (fig.6.15) (Patitucci and Uggeri 2007: 399). The former farm was organized in three orthogonal buildings while a circular structure has been identified as a silo; at a later date a tower of different orientation from the original buildings was erected in the centre of the farm courtyard, documenting a phase of fortification of the landscape. The ceramics collected around the monument have been dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, and if correct the farm may be a documented rare case of a later Byzantine rural unit.

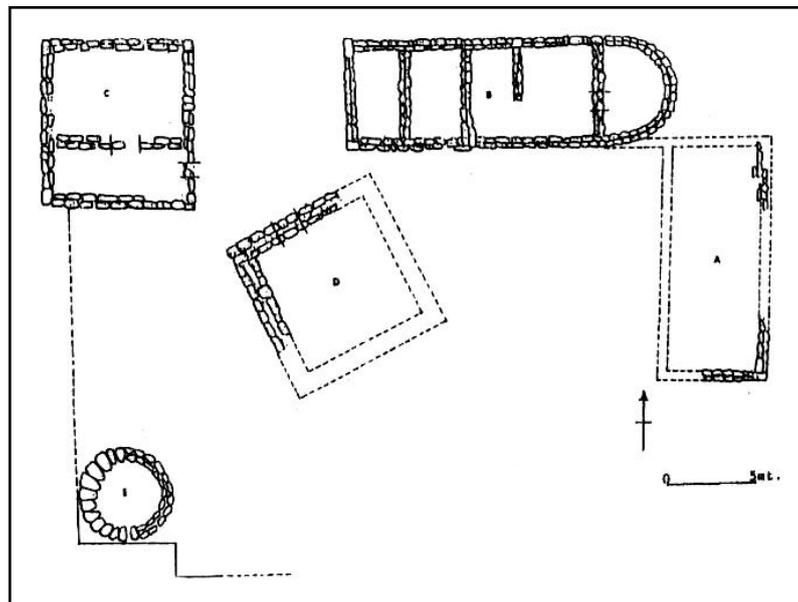


Fig.6.35: Ragusa – Plan of the fortified farm at Contrada Costa (Patitucci and Uggeri 2007, fig. 56).

6.3.1. The Potential Agricultural Production

In seeking an evaluation of the agricultural potential of Sicily we have to admit that not much has been done since Roger Wilson's study (1990: 187–94); archaeobotanical and zoological studies are, still, unfortunately rare in the island and therefore textual sources are, at the moment the only supply of data. The fourth century *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* clearly states that: 'Sicily produces a lot and appreciated goods that it sends to all the parts of the world; [Sicily] in particular abounds with wool, wheat, horses' (*Expositio*, LXV. 1–4).

Wheat was, since Roman Republican times, the most important cultivation in the province. Although, in the Imperial and late Roman period the food delivered to Italy came mainly from North Africa, Sicilian production became essential from the 430s as a consequence of the

rebellion of Count Bonifacius and the Vandal invasion of *Proconsularis* province. Later, during the Byzantine-Gothic war, wheat provisions from Sicily were central to the maintenance of the Byzantine army fighting in Italy: in 537–8 during the Gothic siege of Rome, Belisarius send Procopius to Sicily to organize the collection and dispatch of grain for the troops (Procopius, *De Bello Goth.* I.14; II.24; III.6,15,19).

Wheat production is documented in the Roman villa excavated in Contrada Saraceno, where, in Area 12, lead-repaired *pithoi* containing grain were installed in the late fourth or early fifth century (Castellana and McConnel 1990: 43). So far, the only late antique archaeobotanical rural context analyzed and published – albeit only a very short note – comes from Contrada Castagna where an early fifth-century pit contained species of grain, lentils and *vicia sativa* – a plant used to feed livestock (Wilson 1983b: 30).

Sicilian wine was also a major product. In the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, Catanian wine is celebrated: ‘On this island [Sicily] there is also the mountain named Etna that burns day and night; on its hillside are cultivated very good vineyards that are said to make a good wine’ (*Expositio*, LXV. 13–15). The manufacture of the amphora Keay 52 in Naxos and Campanaio were most probably related to this wine production, although future residue analysis of these containers might reveal carriage of other products like dried fruits, fish sauce and olive oil.

Textual sources mention Sicilian livestock as one of the most important component in the rural production. Sheep, cows, and mares are mentioned in letters of Pope Gregory I; in the donation of the urban monastery of Adeodata in *Lilybaeum* there is a list of livestock for sustaining the religious foundation (Greg. *Let.* I.42; II.50; IX, 233; see Chapter 3.4). The Church possessed properties where *servi pastores* bred horses (Greg. *Let.* II.38). Interestingly, Fazello in the *Rebus Siculis*, mentioning the converted temple of Contrada S. Lorenzo Vecchio near Pachino (see Chapter 3.5.2) noted at that church an oratory dedicated to St Basil and a nearby memoria of St Hippolytus – the later considered the protector saint of horses: perhaps the presence of a chapel dedicated to him indicates the existence in the area of a stud farm?

6.4. Pantellerian Ware

Cooking wares modelled in simple shapes using coarse clay and manufactured in a geographically restricted area, have been usually regarded as serving small, regional scale distribution. But the production of a range of pots, spanning casseroles, lids, jars and even small amphorae made in the

small island of Pantelleria in the middle of the Sicilian Channel has revealed a different distribution scheme.

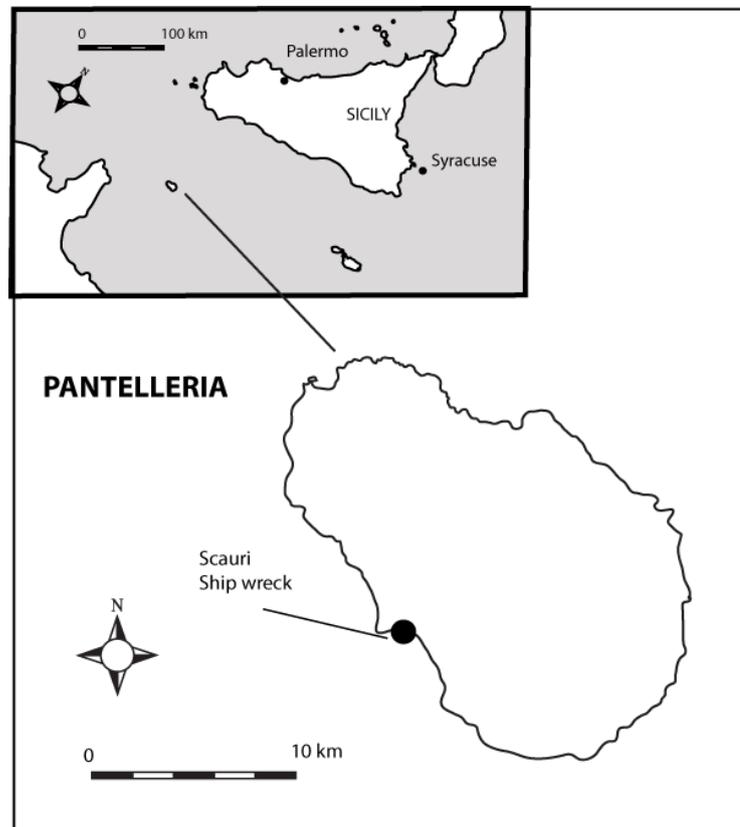


Fig.6.36: Pantelleria – Location of the shipwreck excavated in the harbour of Scauri.

Although kilns are still archaeologically absent, the production of this pottery has been confirmed by chemical analysis (Peacock 1982: 79–80). The discovery of an early fifth century shipwreck, sunk in the port of Scauri with its full cargo of pots, document the massive export of this production (Sami 2005) (fig.6.16), as is also confirmed by a wide distribution within the western Mediterranean since the first century A.D. The ceramics of Pantelleria are in fact, documented in several sites of the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy, Sardinia, France and in Spain and in North African towns (Sami 2005), and the documentation of this ceramic is increasing (fig.6.17). In Sicily, pots of this typology have been uncovered in the settlements of Contrada Castagna (Wilson 1983b: 19) and Saraceno (Castellana and McConnel 1990: 32–33), in Agrigento where, in the fourth/fifth century *sub-divo* necropolis, they represent the 30% of the ceramic corpus (Bonacasa Carra 1995: 209) and in the near residential area (Fiertler 2003); and the site of Verdura also a high quantity of this ceramic is known (Perello *et al.* forthcoming), as well as in Malta (Bruno 2004).

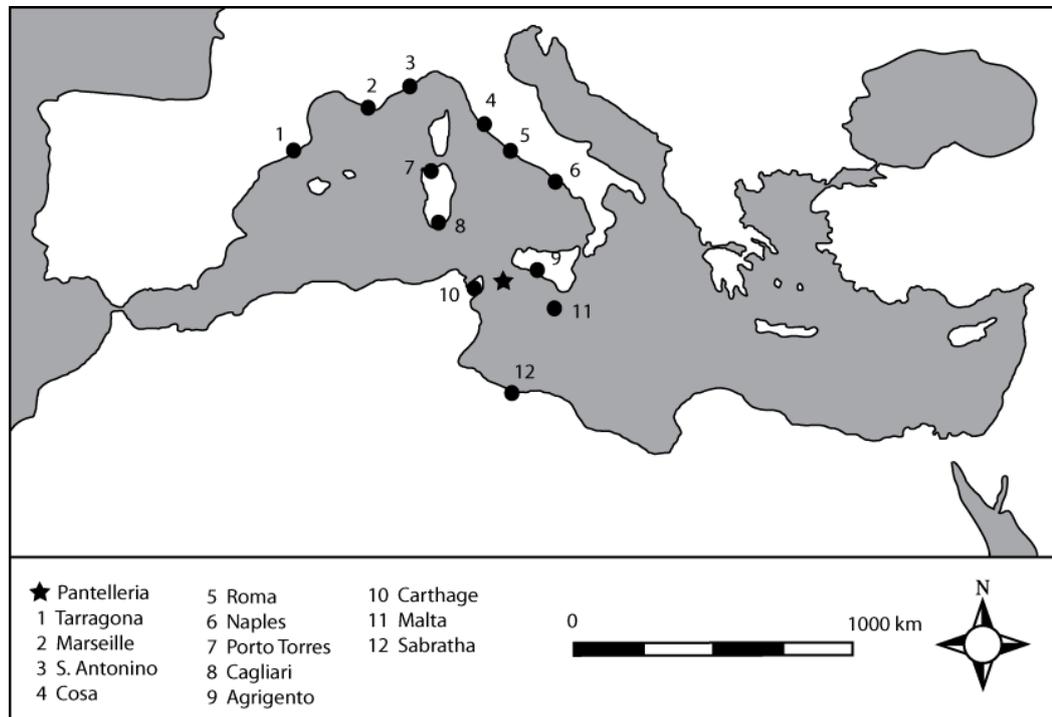


Fig.6.37: The diffusion of Pantellerian ware in the Mediterranean region.

Pantellerian production seems to have achieved its peak around the mid-fifth century followed by a drop in the second half of the century, probably in connection with the Vandal raids that hit the small island, as the abandonment of the village set at the harbour of Scauri suggests (Sami 2005). However, in spite of the heavy impact and the probable following occupation of the island by Vandals production did not end: fragments have been found in the island together with late sixth century ceramics (Sami 2000); in addition, Pantellerian production is documented in Sicily until the late seventh century (but, how far is it residual?) from field-walking surveys in the site of Rosignolo near Segesta (Cambi 2005: 634). Apparently, exports continued especially towards North Africa where, in waste deposits in Djerba, fragments dated to the sixth–seventh century have been found (Fontana 2000) and in Sardinia, at Cagliari and Porto Torres and probably in Liguria at S. Antonino these ceramics were recorded from sixth century deposits, confirming production at least until the sixth century.

The question that immediately comes to mind is why this coarse ware production had such a great success and wide market distribution. Peacock suggests that the achievement was due to the good resistance to fire, thanks to its mix of clay and volcanic inclusions (Peacock 1982: 80). However, despite the good quality (fig.6.18), it is difficult to imagine people living in the Byzantine

mountain fort of S. Antonino in Liguria or in Porto Torres in Sardinia, knowing of and demanding specifically this ceramic. Perhaps, we should consider a different way. The Pantellerian ware was probably exported mainly from the island to the big market of Carthage, partially consumed there, sold in the North African emporia and partially embarked for the Mediterranean trade routes. The key to understanding the distribution of Pantellerian ware is to recognize what kind of route spread this good. Plotting the presence of Pantellerian ware in the Mediterranean context – with the exclusion of the North African and Sicilian – we note that it occurs in coastal towns with a strong military connotation, such as Cosa, Porto Torres, S. Antonino, Malta, Naples, Marseille and Tarraco and is associated with the ARS and African amphorae. Was Pantellerian ware related to the supply of goods to forts as part of state supply? If so, was the manufacture of this ceramic administrated by private owners or by the state? Research on this ceramic is still in a preliminary phase; being basically concentrated to the definition of typology and more precise chronologies, but more developed discussion should now be opened.

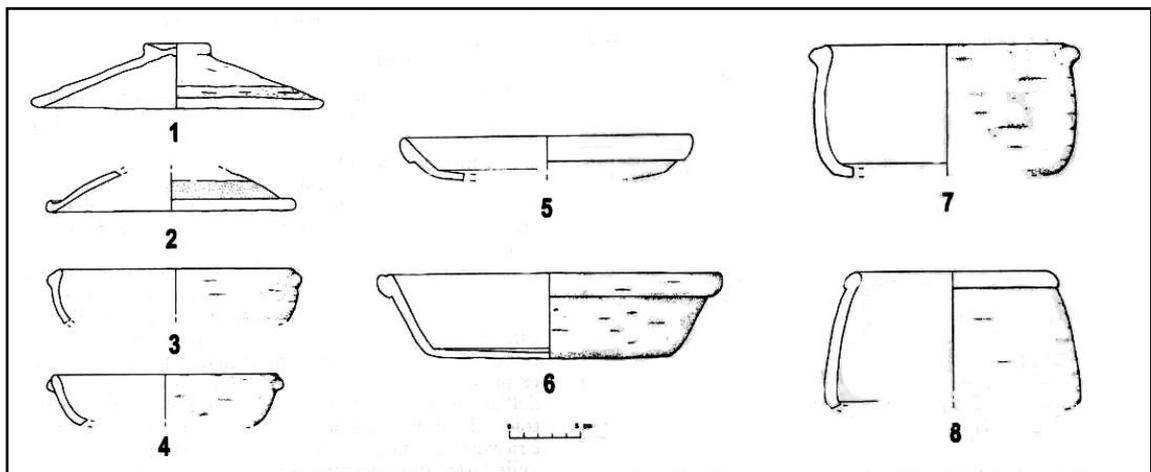


Fig.6.38: Early fifth century Pantellerian pots from the shipwreck of Scauri in Pantelleria (Sami 2006, tab.6).

6.5. *Garum* Factories

Thanks to the research conducted by Gianfranco Purpura the factories in Sicily producing *garum* and salted fish are well known (Purpura 1992; 1989; 1985; 1982; Bacci 1984–5; 1982–3). Noticeably, many modern ‘tonnare’ (centres specialized in tuna-fishing) have been built in the same place as ancient structures, thus attesting the ‘strategic’ role of these sites into recent times. Production centres have been documented in western Sicily in the area of S. Vito lo Capo, Levanzo and Favignana, on the

northern coast at Punta Raisi and Isola delle Femmine not far from Palermo, as well as in Torre di Vendicari and Ognina and Porto Palo in the province of Syracuse (fig.6.19). Recently, in *Lilybaeum* a *garum* production centre has been excavated in the area of the harbour of Capo Boeo (Giglio 2007: 1782) confirming this also as an urban activity.

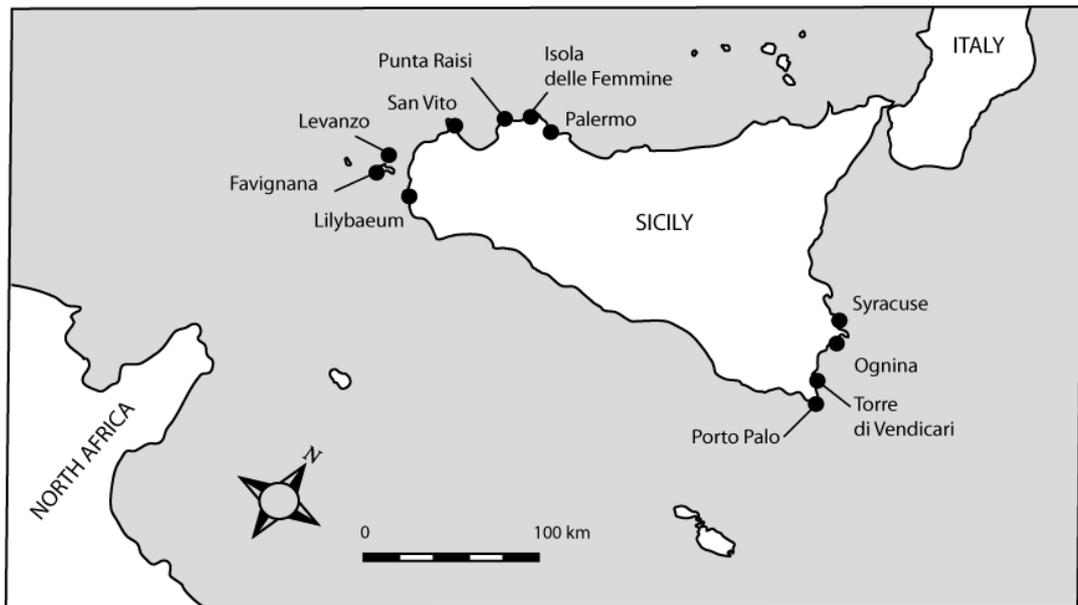


Fig.6.39: Sicily – Location of the archaeologically documented centres for the production of *garum*.

Factories for the preparation of *salsamenta* were organised around rectangular or square tanks and basins of different size and deep plastered with ‘cocciopesto’; the several crushed tiles fragments recognized in the industrial unit of S. Vito Lo Capo suggest some sort of cover surrounded the basins to protect the preparation of the product (Purpura 1982: 51–2) (fig.6.20). Although a specific archaeological investigation has never been attempted, it is likely to reveal the presence, alongside the tanks, of other constructions like warehouses where amphorae, nets and other equipment were stored and boats repaired; furthermore, workers may have lived near the factory, if not permanently at least seasonally, and remains of basic houses might be found with carefully planned research.

The ways the fish sauce produced in Sicilian centres was stored and traded remain completely unknown since so no specific Sicilian container has been identified. On these sites large amounts of amphorae mainly from North African manufactories have been collected; did these amphorae contain products necessary for the preparation of *garum*? Furthermore, were these containers

reused to store and trade Sicilian *salsamenta*? If amphorae were reused, then we have a distorted view of Sicilian exports in favour of North African trades.

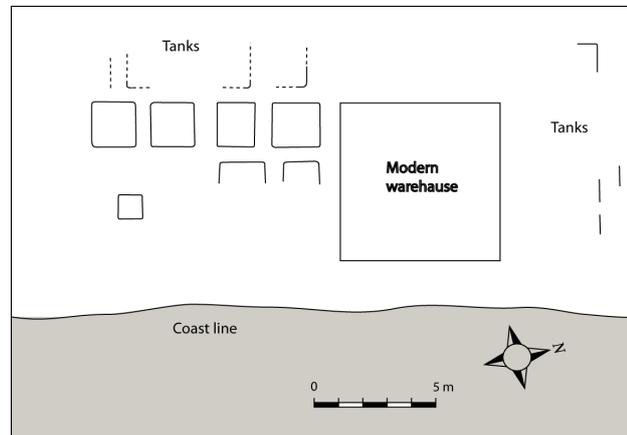


Fig.6.40: S. Vito lo Capo – The garum production centre (from Purpura 1982, fig. 4)

How long did production of *garum* endure? In North Africa it seems that *salsamenta* were not produced after the fifth century A.D. – although, recent research on amphorae manufactured until the seventh century suggest some later activity (Leone 2007: 227; 2003: 260–2). The reason for the end of fish sauce production might have been connected with the arrival of Vandals and the introduction of different culinary traditions, in which *garum* had no space. In Italy, the impact of the Ostrogothic and Langobard invasions in the alteration of food use and identity has been debated by Massimo Montanari (1988) and a similar consequence in the Vandal North Africa should be considered. Although attacked, Vandal rule on Sicily only lasted a few years (see Chapter 2) without leaving a significant cultural impact and so probably Roman gastronomic habits continued.

According to the presence of amphorae fragments in S. Vito lo Capo the production of *garum* might have endured until the late Byzantine period since the site has late antique amphorae such the Marzamemi I and II, commonly used from the third to the sixth centuries; the Keay 52 whose chronology spans the fourth and the seventh centuries; the eastern Late Roman 1; and the Keay 26; but also examples of late Byzantine or Arab containers that prove activity into the Middle Ages (Purpura 1982, fig. 13).

The preparation of fish sauce opens a series of questions related to the provincial productive system that future, specific research needs to answer. Essential for the *salsamenta* was salt; was this produced locally or was it imported from elsewhere? Who owned these factories, the

Emperor? The Church? Or particular members of the aristocracy? Finally, was Sicilian *garum* exported or was it simply geared for regional consumption?

6.6. Sicilian Monetary Policy

To give further support to the theory of a good and fervent late antique and Byzantine economy for Sicily, I shall briefly discuss the numismatic evidence. Luckily, in Sicily several hoards of coins dated from the fourth to the ninth century have been found, but, unluckily, not all of these coins ended up safely in museums; unfortunately, some reports are limited in the information of the exact provenance and even the real consistency – often bigger than what reached the museums.

Aldina Cutroni Tusa (2002) clearly summarized the history of Byzantine Sicilian numismatic research that has its modern roots in *La monetazione siciliana nell'epoca bizantina* by Ricotti Prina (1950), *Le monete siciliane dai bizantini a Carlo d'Angiò (582–1282)* by Sphar (1976) and today thanks to the rising interest in the field a good bibliography is available (see Guzzetta 1986; Castrizio 1991). Notably, hoards can offer a suggestion of the range, amount and quality of the economy: hoarding gold *solidi* is a general clue of local investments, whereas the quantity of bronze coinage gives an idea of the amount of exchanges, since everyday buying and selling were in bronze.

For the period spanning the fourth to sixth centuries the most important hoard is that of Comiso (c. 60 km south-west from Syracuse), one of the biggest ever found in Europe: c. 1100 gold *solidi* mainly of Theodosius I and Valentinian III, predominantly minted in Ravenna (Cutroni Tusa 2002: 415). The nature of this exceptional deposit remains debated: was it hidden by a wealthy landowner? Were these *solidi* sent to Sicily to counter the Vandal raids by paying for recruiting an army or fortifying the landscape? Why was such a quantity of gold in a small centre like Comiso and not in a more important fiscal and administrative city? Was it en route somewhere?

Other contemporary hoards came from Butera (c. 55 km south-east from Agrigento), composed of 52 *solidi* dated between A.D. 408 and 457 with coins from Ravenna and Constantinople mints, and at Castellana Sicula near Palermo where were found in a small jar 12 *solidi* (the original deposit was probably bigger) featuring coins of Theodosius II and Justinian I. Not just gold *solidi* were interred: in Lipari there have been found 1745 bronze coins dated from the fourth to the late fifth century; near the catacomb of the Cappuccini, in the suburb of

Syracuse were discovered 1545 bronze coins dated between 317 and 408; finally, in the bath of the villa of Piazza Armerina, 340 bronze coins of the fourth century were collected (Cutroni Tusa 2002, note 9) (fig.6.21). On the one hand, these hoards testify an economy that, despite the long period of war in the western provinces, remained active, but, on the other hand, these deposits reflect a certain degree of military insecurity no doubt due to the Vandal raids and the later Greco-Gothic war.

From the numismatic evidence it seems that Byzantine Sicily was everything but a declining and marginalized province: we can cite the hoard of Campobello di Mazara containing *solidi* from the mints of Constantinople, Milan, Ravenna, Carthage, Syracuse, Naples and Benevento, dated between the reign of Tiberius II Constantine (578–82) and Constantine V (741–75); Milazzo (58 *solidi* and 16 *tremissis* of Constans II and Constantine IV); Capo Schisò near Giardini Naxos (180 *solidi* of the late eighth century); Syracuse (103 *solidi* of Constans II and 10 of Constantine IV); Pantalica (c. 1000 *solidi* of Constans II) and Racalmuto (205 *solidi* of Tiberius IV Constantine and Eracleona) (*ibid.*: 419–21 and note 32).

In the late sixth or the very early seventh century, under Emperor Maurice Tiberius (582–602) the Sicilian economy became important enough to have its first mint, this set in Catania for coining bronze currency. Later, under Constans II, a second mint was founded in Syracuse where were minted gold *solidi* of gr 4.50/30, *semmissis* of gr 2.20/10 and *tremissis* of gr 1.40/30 (silver was never minted in the island); to this production was added a consistent bronze coining of *folles* (fig.6.22), half *folles*, *decanummos* and *pentanummos* (Cutroni Tusa 2002). The quality of the Syracusan *solidi* was very similar to that minted in Constantinople – a fact which might support the presence in Syracuse of highly specialized craftsmen and an urban production of local jewellery. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the high degree of Sicilian commercial exchanges is witnessed by the request of external supplies of bronze currency that led to the use of old fourth to sixth century coins, often marked with a special stamp, and the importation of coins from other mints such as Carthage and Ravenna (*ibid.* 2002: 430).

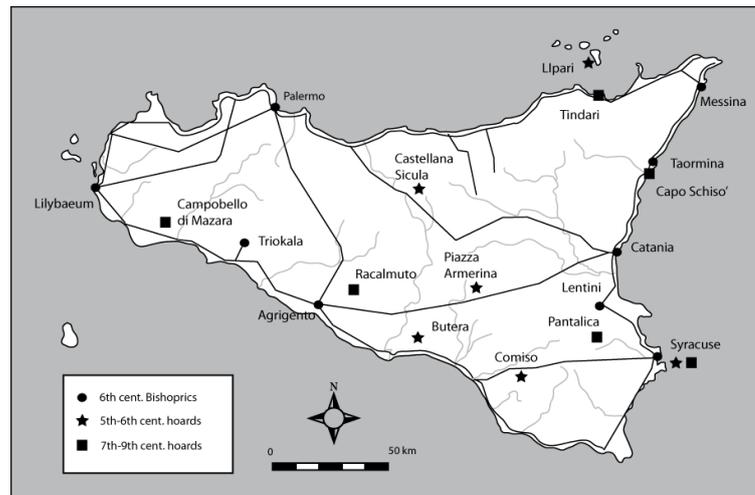


Fig.6.41: Sicily – Distribution map of known late antique and Byzantine hoards.

The increase of Sicilian minting, especially from the period of Constans II, might have different reasons. First, the slow decline of Ravenna that was the main Byzantine administrative centre might have made the supply of currency to Sicily economically difficult. Second, the quantity of *solidi* documented in the province might be related to the project of fortification and consolidation of Sicilian territories inaugurated by Constans II in order to counter the Arab expansion in the Mediterranean. Finally, Sicilian coinage should be analyzed in the context of the creation of the Byzantine Theme of Sicily – an administrative and military district granted of a high degree of autonomy (Treadgold 1997: 314–22) – inaugurated probably under Constans II in the 660s. The causes of the economic success of Sicily need to be found in the north and south-western provinces: while North Africa was under attack by the Arabs and central and North Italy was lost during the Lombard expansion (Ravenna capitulated in 751), Sicily – Sardinia as well, although to a lesser degree – became the principal economic point of the Byzantine empire in the West.



Fig.6.42: Mint of Syracuse, follis of Constans II. The mark SCL on the reverse indicates the Syracusan mint (courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum).

6.7. Conclusions

The idea of Sicily as a land relegated to the mere intensive production of grain for the payment of the *Annona* needs to be reconsidered on the light of the last decades of archaeological research. The Sicilian late antique and Byzantine economy was far more complicated and articulated. Certainly, after the foundation of Constantinople, grain remained the most important cultivation and exported good of the province. The intensive grain production deeply impacted on the agriculture of the province: Domenivo Vera (1997–8: 56) calculated 10 million of *modii* (a *modius* is c. 8.7 litres) worth c. 330,000 *solidi* (c. 1485 kg of gold) as the annual amount of grain paid as *Annona* levy, but much was probably produced on estates, giving Sicilian owners a considerable surplus to be sold in open markets. For the movement of such a huge quantity a good road system was fundamental. Late Antique and Byzantine Sicily was served by a net of roads leading to the main coastal cities where products were embarked (Uggeri 2003); there were also potential waterways since pre-modern Sicily was crossed by rivers with enough capacity to be permanently or seasonally navigated, offering a fast and easy way to transport high quantities of products; indeed, Bishop Gregory of Agrigento in the late sixth century reached Agrigento sailing along the river *Agrakas* and stopping at a place named *Emporion* where there was a harbour (Leon. *Life of St Greg.* 19) Specific field research might determine how common the use of rivers and canals was in our study period.

However, together with grain other crops and manufactures supplied the local elite and in some cases – as seen for the production of Pantellerian ware, the Sicilian lamps and probably the *garum* – the surplus was sold in Italian markets and more specifically in Rome.

Apparently, Sicilian cities maintained the Classic urban separation between the productive extramural areas and the residential space within the walls. The ceramic workshops of Villa Maria, most probably increased production after the construction of the nearby cathedral of S. Giovanni Evangelista and the basilica and monastery of S. Lucia that needed to be supplied with goods. Similar cases of connection between workshops and religious foundations, as Leone notes, are known in Italian centres, such as Torcello, Florence and Cornus in Sardinia (Leone 2003a: 277). This pattern, however, is for Sicily, still weak and it might be that here cities reacted differently depending on local factors that we still do not know.

The late antique rural landscape was characterized by the substantial loss in the fifth century of small properties in favour of more consistent settlements often related to important roads. Vandal raids certainly had a role in the decline of farms or small villages especially on the south coast of the island; however, this trend was already evident since the first half of the fifth century. The reason for

this new organization of the landscape might be seen in the setting of intensive cultivation for the *Annona* and in the concentration of houses around churches or monasteries. The main transformation of the rural landscape in the sixth century is the foundation of monasteries or hostels by Sicilian *possessores* – that could mean a great production – and only in the seventh century with the creation of the Theme of Sicily and the arrival of soldiers granted with plots of land was the system of small property restored.

From the second half of the fourth century, the rising importance of Sicily attracted the investments of the Italian aristocracy as is confirmed by the construction of rich *villae* and, perhaps, the discovery of hoards of *solidi*. Alongside the senatorial aristocracy that bonded the province to Rome, the provincial *possessores* were also engaged, including through the appointing of positions within the Church achieving very high offices – including Pope or Patriarch of Constantinople (see Chapter 3.5).

With the Sicilian *possessores*, the major beneficiary of the flourishing provincial economy was certainly the Church. The amount of properties, farmers, slaves and their products held by and gained by the Church were massive and were carefully managed by different grades of administrators such as the *actionarii*, *conductores* or *scribones*, who collected taxes and recruited for the army (Cracco Ruggini 1980: 518, note 76). To give an idea of the degree of independence and trade achieved by the Church, Pope Gregory I mentions '*naves quae commendatae sanctae ecclesiae semper fuerunt*' (Greg. *Let.* I.70) – the Church possessed its own fleet, but this often was not enough and used private transports, as in the reported case of Nostamnus a Jew from Palermo (Greg. *Let.* IX.40). Accordingly we need to be aware of the possibility that land, products and even industries lay in ecclesiastical hands – and certainly by Pope Gregory's time the Church seems by far the biggest landowner, supplying grain to Rome's clergy and poor.

The appointment as Sicilian bishops of some close collaborators of Pope Gregory I underline the strict supervision wielded by Rome on the province. However, from the sixth century other 'Churches', notably the Episcopates of Ravenna, Milan and Canosa extended their influence in the island. The conflict between these 'Churches' became evident at the time of Constans II when the emperor imposed high taxation onto Church properties in the island and at the same time support the autonomy from Rome of the Church of Ravenna (Corsi 1983: 183–9). The high taxation lamented by the Church under Constans II might have been due to the good economy Sicily held in the late seventh century and only with the beginning of the Arab invasion did this system slowly decline.

Conclusions

Urban contexts are central to the archaeological debate regarding Late Antiquity and it is for this reason that my thesis has focused mainly on the investigation of urban archaeology and sequences. However, despite the importance of towns in the regional administration, the economic roots of Sicily were planted strongly in the countryside. Core throughout has been a consideration of change and of continuity in the face of political, military and religious transformation.

The Church was the major emergent institution in Late Antiquity. From the fourth to the seventh centuries its role developed from being a mere charitable organization for the care of poor to the leading authority of the administration of the province. Analyzed in detail in Chapter 3, the Church had in Sicily a notable impact casting a new society, as well as a different perception of the urban landscape. In sum, we can archaeologically identify three stages in the fourth-seventh centuries Sicilian Christianity. A first period, from the fourth to the late fifth century, defined by a considerable high degree of syncretism. The second, inaugurated by the Byzantine conquest of the sixth century, as we will see, entailed a redefinition of the role of the Church, reinforcing its position as a religious and administrative institution; and in this new phase, the Church imposed its presence in the civic space through the erection of sizable monuments and had a predominant Latin connotation (see for example, the Life of St Gregory of Agrigento and Letters of Gregory I, discussed in Chapter 3). In the later phase (from the early seventh to the ninth century), by contrast, the Byzantinization of Sicily had clear eastern implications and was celebrated through introduction of eastern saints' cult and the imposition of Greek as the official regional language.

The periods explored in the previous chapters, namely the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Byzantine conquest and the consequent Byzantinization of Sicily can be divided into three phases. Below I summarize their intrinsic archaeological characteristics. I opened this research

pointing out three general and major questions about: 1 – The potential different phases of Sicilian Late Antiquity; 2 – The part played by the Church and the impact of Christianity in this transitional period, and, finally, 3 – I planned to define a regional economic pattern. In the following sections, I hope, a clear answer to these research questions is provided.

The Late Roman Period (Late Fourth-Fifth Centuries)

The growing importance of the *Proconsularis* province after the foundation of Constantinople in 330 – and the consequent resetting of the *Annona* system – attracted Sicily toward North Africa. The building of huge and richly decorated *villae* set in vast estates, such as Piazza Armerina and Patti or the *villa* of Tellaro near Noto – whose remarkable mosaic floors were certainly the work of skilled craftsmen from North Africa (Wilson 1982) – mirrors the switch of Sicily toward North African productive and aesthetic prototypes. The gravitation of Sicily around Carthage and its economy is confirmed by the preponderance of North African ceramic products found in Sicilian contexts. The early Christian architecture of Sicily also reflects North African monuments (Agnello, S.L. 1962).

However, the relationship between Sicily and North Africa abruptly ceased in the first half of the fifth century. The real turning point for late Roman Sicily was the revolt of Count Boniface (? – 432) and the Vandal occupation that determined the blocking of the grain supply to Italy. To avoid starvation and prevent blackmailing by Boniface and by Genseric, Rome turned to Sicily for its supply of food. This decision had a major impact on the island, instantly increasing the importance of the local Church and the elite who held properties in the island.

Sicilian towns as well, as the centres of administration and dispatch of grain, saw their role flourishing. The strict control and administration of the province by Rome, as well as its avoidance of invasions of Visigoths and other Germanic groups, resulted in a persistence of the classical urban framework until circa the mid-fifth century. In this period, in fact, as we have seen in Chapter 4, how games were still performed (with the exception of events in amphitheatres, which were in many cases deserted probably since the early fourth century), baths were still supplied by water and open to population, and in general towns maintained their size (fig.7.1). The case of Agrigento appears to be an exception – however, the town was in decline since the third century. In this context, in the second half of the fourth century Christianity made its early appearance, moving from extramural funerary areas to the intramural space, negotiating its display in the

urban landscape with different results (e.g. central position in Syracuse, marginal in Catania). This might appear a paradox: a growing Church in a fairly well preserved Classical urban context, but, as will be explained below, negotiation was the main characteristic of early Sicilian Christianity.

The first phase of Christianization, despite inevitably creating new urban foci, did not heavily impact on the existing urban setting, and it is possible that some of the early churches overlap with previous public areas. The position of the basilica of S. Paolo opposite the temple of Apollo or the church of Spirito Santo facing the forum and the *castrum* in Ortigia seems to support this idea. In addition, the early cathedral of Catania, in spite of being built in a suburban site, was set only a few metres from the amphitheatre, at that time deserted, but still a public area. The tolerance of the Sicilian Church in this period seems to have resulted in a high degree of syncretism of Sicilian society that might have favoured the spread of Christianity and the conversion of the last pagan groups; nonetheless, episodes of social tension cannot be excluded, as the case of Catania seems to suggest. Sicilian culture, was according to contemporary official textual sources then a Christian devoted society (the hagiographies of St Lucy and Agatha are the best examples of this celebration), but archaeological data show a heterogeneous society, in which, under the label of Christianity, pagan or heretical contamination were absorbed in the Christian ritual and local faiths (see the case of the *hypogea* Ippolito I and II in Chapter 3, or the magical inscription illustrated in Chapter 2).

Certainly the major event in the late Roman south Mediterranean was the Vandal invasion of North Africa in 429. The material effect of Genseric's policy toward Sicily remains unclear because of the substantial lack of detailed textual information and scanty archaeological evidence. Archaeological deposits and layers attributed to violent event related to Vandal raids have been documented in the western and southern areas of the island, in particular around *Lilybaeum* and some centres along the road connecting Trapani to Palermo, as for example in the basilica of S. Miceli near Alcamo. The territory of Agrigento was, indeed, badly affected by violent actions, as witnessed at the village of Verdura and the farms excavated in contrada Castagna, Saraceno and Campanaio. But the contemporary southern and western coastal settlements of Camarina lack any sign of destruction or damages. The fact that until the early 6th century, Sicily was governed by Latin *consulares* and that in 445-6 Lauricius and later *vir illustris* Pierius of Ravenna were rewarded with Sicilian lands indicate how land properties were maintained and still administered by Latins.

Elements of continuity are also shown by the defensive strategy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Still centred on the tactic of using fortified towns as points of resistance, and

maintaining a good road system, as a resource of a fast counterattack, Sicily was particularly vulnerable to sudden raids, but, as the defeat of the Vandals by Ricimer and later in 465, by Count Marcellinus show, the defensive system of Sicily was still able to play and sustain a decisive part.

The Proto-Byzantine Phase (Sixth Century)

Debating on the territories controlled by the Byzantine Empire in Italy, Brown and Christie (1989) underlined the lack of a “ready-made” model applied to urban centres, as well as to the defence of the territory. Brown and Christie propose a more pragmatic explanation based on flexibility and adaptation of the Byzantine administration to local needs. Yet Zanini (1998: 107–9), by contrast, despite agreeing with this idea, states that it is this lack of a “ready-made” strategy that was the main policy of the Byzantine Empire, which needed to administer provinces of different cultures, languages and needs. However, Zanini does identify two basic characteristics of the Byzantine administration in Italy: 1 – The central role of towns divided in a hierarchical importance (regional capitals, medium and small size towns); and 2 – The creation of urbanized centres holding both military and administrative functions set along the *limes* (e.g. Ferrara in north east Italy). The ideas of Brown and Christie, as well as Zanini take into consideration regions of Byzantine Italy under military pressure from the Lombard expansion and for this reason might have developed specific connotations. Sicily was a different context, however, since the island was not directly involved in the Lombard invasion, so we might expect a different pattern.

The important role of cities is still particularly evident in Sicily in the new circumstances of the sixth century. As seen, from the end of the fourth century all the key urbanized centres (for a discussion about what is a Byzantine town, see Arthur 2004) are located on the coast. This perimeter of cities was polycentric and strictly hierarchical. Palermo, Catania and Syracuse were the three capitals of the province and Messina, Taormina, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum* were major cities with a high degree of independence. In between, there were towns of medium to small size, such as Cefalù, Termini Imerese, Milazzo, Comiso and Trapani that gravitated on the orbit of the nearest city.

Being far from any sixth century *limes*, Sicily did not develop centres with military-administrative connotation typical of mainland Italian and North African contexts. The existence of urban fortification did not imply in this period the presence in Sicily of military officers (cf. the case of the north Italian Byzantine territories where military officers are often documented by

inscriptions – see Carile 1988). However, while in Italy towns were being militarized, in Sicily urban centres developed commercial connotations, more appropriate to the food supply role of Sicily. Specific rural functions might have been held by towns like Tindari, *Leontini* and *Triokala* which, despite being very small centres (with walls and cathedrals, but lacking any other public facility like entertainment monuments), were bishoprics and therefore held important administrative tasks.

These “rural cities” might have worked as poles of administration, collection and delivery to the main ports for the grain production – a sort of link between the country and the cities.

Focusing his attention on the specificity of Byzantine cities in the Italian and the Balkan contexts, Zanini (1998: 169–208) identifies three major aspects: 1 – The area within the urban walls is in general of small size; 2 – Old monuments were often restored (those not restored were definitely abandoned and dismantled); 3 – The “Byzantinization” entailed a systematic and more thorough program of Christianization of the urban space.

From my analysis, how does Sicily fit? Sicilian towns (with the exception of Tindari and Agrigento) did not reduce in size and this is one of the main traits until the Arab conquest. In Italy the process of Byzantinization of the urban space involved the occupation of public spaces, such as *fora*, or monuments, such as baths or entertaining buildings, to be reused for religious or military purposes. In addition, imperial patronage (exerted directly by the Emperor or by his officials) and the introduction of eastern saints’ cult were further characteristics of the redefinition of the intramural spaces perpetrated by the Byzantine administration.

In Sicily *fora* were in general preserved even in the sixth century and the central role of these central public spaces was confirmed in towns like Palermo, Messina, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum* by the erection of the new cathedrals. In other cases cathedrals were built in extramural positions, probably seeking to provide an ideal administrative point of connection between the town and the country or to be close to martyrs tombs. Most relevant, it was in this phase that the preserved temples were converted into churches, both in urban and rural contexts. The conversion of temples, together with the claimed foundation by Belisarius of the churches of S. Maria della Pinta in Palermo and S. Maria dell’ Annunziata and S. Nicola in Trapani seem to follow a centralized pattern of re-affirmation of the political role of the Church and the Byzantine Empire directed by Rome and Constantinople. The granting of funds by Pope Gregory and Emperor Maurice to St Gregory of Agrigento for the conversion of the temple of Concordia in Agrigento confirms the existence of central directives in matters of display of official power.

We have seen in Chapter 3 how the participation of local elites in the transformation of the sixth century urban landscape was determinant and denoted a further difference with contemporary Byzantine territories in the Italian peninsula. The Sicilian aristocracy, in this phase, donated land and supported economically the foundation of several monasteries at which members of the elite were appointed as abbots or abbesses and in some cases becoming bishops, as was the case of St Gregory of Agrigento. However, if in Italy Byzantinization entailed the introduction of eastern saints, in Sicily monasteries were dedicated to Latin saints. The strong tie between Rome and Sicilian elites emerges also from the letters of Pope Gregory that often are directly addressed to Sicilian aristocrats showing personal friendship.

The appearance of burials in intramural spaces was a typical phenomenon of the fifth and sixth centuries and was a further mark of the Christianization of the civic landscape. In Byzantine Sicily, funerary areas continued to be set in suburban areas; however, few groups of inhumations are recorded in Palermo, Taormina, Syracuse, Agrigento and *Lilybaeum* in connection with potential religious monuments and they do not seem to be related to any ruralisation of the urban space.

On the theme of defence, Sicily features additional differences from the Italian strategy. Although in Italy since the time of Theodoric a net of *castra* was restored and built to defend the territory (Christie 2006: 357–83; Zanini 1998: 209–90), the defence of Sicily remained based on the walled cities.

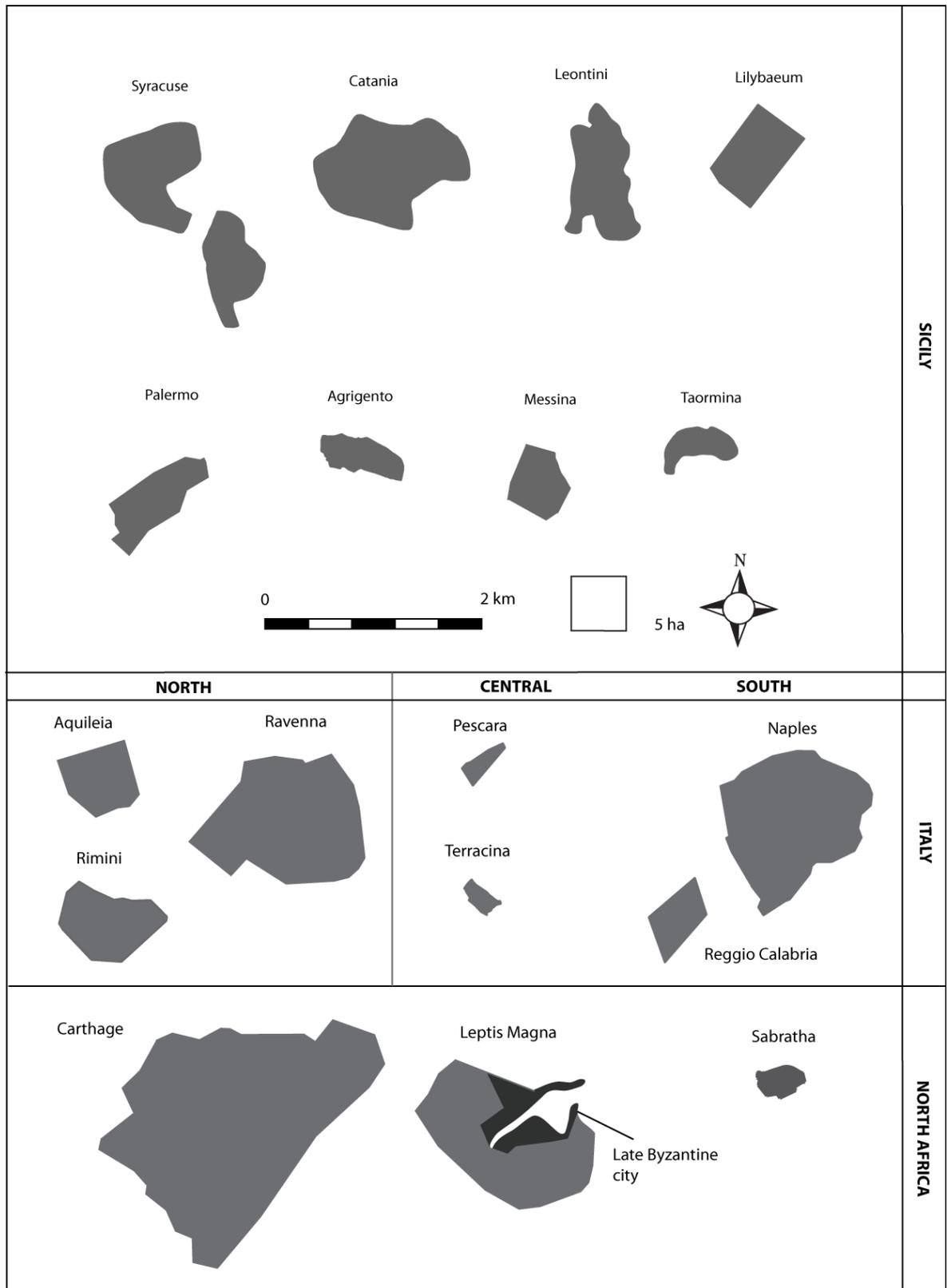


Fig.7.13: Sicilian towns in context in the 6th century – comparison between the intramural areas of Sicilian towns and the major coastal centres of Italy and North Africa.

The Era of Constans II

Data concerning Sicily after the sixth century remain poor; however, from the evidence analyzed above, we can propose that the characteristics of the mid-Byzantine towns (seventh-eighth centuries) in Sicily are: 1 – The preservation of size from the previous centuries; 2 – Probably from the time of Heraclius, we see a second phase of “Byzantinization”, this time with the introduction of eastern elements (such as eastern saints dedications, use of Greek); 3 – The imposition of a defined urban model in which the cathedral was set within the urban defences and in central position; and 4 – The militarization of society through the creation of the Theme of Sicily.

At the time of Constans II, all the major Sicilian coastal towns maintained the defended area of the previous period. The foundation of five new bishoprics at Cefalù, Termini, Milazzo, Ragusa and Trapani – four of them coastal centres – confirms, on the one hand, how important maritime towns were and, on the other hand, suggests an increasing necessity of administrative poles.

One of the major changeovers of this period was certainly the introduction of eastern Byzantine culture in the island. As seen, in the sixth century, the difference between the Byzantinization of Sicily and that of the Italian territories was the spread of dedications and the cults of Latin saints – that reinforced ties with Rome – rather than the introduction of eastern saints and a consequent orientation of the political attention toward Constantinople. From the seventh century, however, Greek culture – always present in Sicily – gained prominence and it seems, at the time of Constans II, Greek, according to inscriptions, graffiti and literature, was the only language spoken. This second phase of Byzantinization is marked in the urban landscape by the dedication of monuments to the Four Martyrs of Sebaste documented in Syracuse, Catania and Palermo. This eastern military cult, in addition, manifests the militarization of Sicilian society.

The archaeological imprint of the conflict between Constans II and the Pope (in 653 Pope Martin I was arrested and sent to exile by the Emperor) is probably reflected in the re-setting of extramural cathedrals within the urban defences, in a position certainly more safe, but also more easy to keep under control by imperial officers.

In term of defences, from the time of Constans II there was extended to Sicily the strategy already in use in the Italian context (see Christie 2006 and Zanini 1998) and centred on towns, of networks of *castra* erected on hilltops along the main roads. The reason for this new approach to the defence of Sicily remains a topic to be investigated. Certainly the expansion of the Arabs in the Near and Middle East represented a serious danger for the Empire – and although in the mid-seventh century, Sicily was not in the front line, Arab skills in navigation were rising and raids

might have occurred in this period. On the other hand, the increasing militarization of the Byzantine society may have been reflected also in the militarization of the landscape (cf. the militarization of Italian society in Brown 1984: 39–60). We should therefore wonder if this phenomenon was connected with the creation of rural military elites with interests rooted in the areas in which they served. From fig.5.9 is evident the regionalization of the defensive scheme, in particular the Madonie the Peloritani and the Iblei that as strategic fortifications were the points of principal Byzantine resistance in the ninth century. These rural fortifications were most probably directed from the nearby urban centres: Termini and Cefalù were the leading cities of the defensive system set in the Madonie mountains; the *castra* build on the Peloritani were connected to Messina; the Ibleian fortifications had Ragusa as their centre and Agrigento probably oversaw the defences set in the Platano valley. Oddly, Syracuse, *Leontini* and Catania do not appear to be part of this organization of cities-*castra*, but this might be due to a lack of material information, since a smaller town like Taormina was connected with the near fortress of Castel Mola.

The Economy

The map of the late antique trade routes across the west Mediterranean published by Reynolds (1995; see also 2010) in his well known study, show how Sicily was central in the network of goods exchanges (*ibid.* 1995: 34–6) (though, results from the excavations in Classe recently published seems to minimize this idea supporting the existence during Late Antiquity of two main regional trade routes, one set in the west Mediterranean and a second set in the Adriatic sea – see Augenti *et al.* 2007). However, the importance of Sicily in the west Mediterranean trade is clearly confirmed by the high number of shipwrecks uncovered along the Sicilian coast (Zanini 1998: 296–7) – although data from shipwrecks need to be carefully handled since the vessels might have not been destined for Sicily. As for other topics, however, as debated in this thesis, also in regards to the economy, despite its central role and importance, we still know very little. Italian data, in particular, tell us a different story and more articulated patterns have been discussed since the late 1990s (see proceedings of the conference edited by Sagui 1998, in particular about Sicily and the south Italian region – see papers by Arthur; Pacetti; Bacchelli and Pasqualucci; Puglisi and Sardella). Today the idea of a regionalization of trade in the post-Roman period is accepted and explored on local scale (for a wide view, Wickham 2005: 819–24).

The late Roman period in Sicily is characterized by the production and trade – in a system defined by Vera (1997–8) as of “free markets” – of grain cultivated on senatorial, imperial and Church estates and, after the first quarter of the fifth century, by the payment of the *Annona*. The effect of the intensification of grain production was the abandonment of the *villae* system and a fragmentation of the senatorial properties, partially donated to the Church and partially re-settled with slaves who were liberated.

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries the Sicilian market is completely dominated by North African products – paradigmatic is the case of the site of Verdura, where almost all the ceramic finds are African. In terms of local manufacture, the Vandal occupation of *Proconsularis* might have caused a re-emerging of Sicilian productions. On this question, the study of Syracusan contexts and the research project launched by Malfitana will provide in the near future very important data.

The stabilization in the second half of the fifth century of the relationship between Genseric and the court at Ravenna led to the re-opening of trade between North Africa, Sicily and Italy. ARS of late fifth and sixth centuries are documented in major Sicilian excavations as well as in Italy – although on a reduced level (cf. quantity of ARS in Classe in Augenti *et al.* 2007:266–74).

With the Byzantine conquest from the 530s A.D. and the re-establishment of long-distance trade routes, Sicilian products might have reached more distant markets in Italy such as Ravenna and the Ligurian coast, but more analysis of finds is needed to confirm this idea (see Cirelli 2009).

The main characteristic of the early medieval Mediterranean is the regionalization of the market. With the decline of North African products from the early seventh century (Reynolds 1995 and cf. Augenti *et al.* 2007), a revival of Sicilian manufactures is recorded. However, in this period, Sicilian productions are primarily directed to the central and southern Tyrrhenian Italian coast, predominantly to Rome and Naples. The discovery in Rome of high quantities of Sicilian lamps and table wares in seventh and eighth century contexts, on the one hand attests the vitality of Sicilian workshops and, on the other hand, documents the maintenance of preferential ties between Sicily and Rome, despite the heavy Byzantinization. The regionalization of the Sicilian market is furthermore confirmed by the importation of goods from south Italian production centres. Recent studies regarding the globular *amphorae* produced in Campania and in Puglia uncovered in Marettimo and Cefalù (Ardizzone *et al.* 1998) seem to reinforce the creation of a south Italian economic region linking modern Lazio, Campania, Calabria and Sicily.

The foundation in the first half of the seventh century of the mints producing *solidi* and bronze coins in Catania and Syracuse, as well as the hoards discovered, document the persistence of a

wealthy economy for Sicily until at least the eve of the Arab invasion in 821. But what we lack for this period is much in the way of physical evidence in urban and rural settings

Future Work

The late antique and Byzantine periods remain perceived as marginal topics in the context of Sicilian studies; the display of these periods in Sicilian museums is indeed very poor, even in major museums, such as that of Syracuse (whose Roman and post-Roman sections have been closed for restoration almost two years!). This research has identified several topics that need to be investigated in future research, spanning the Christianization of the urban and rural space to the defence of the territory, as well as the regional production and consumption of goods. However, in drafting a scheme of future research priorities, we can isolate three main topics: Sicilian production, regional defensive strategy, and the organization and diachronic development of the landscape (tables 7.1-3).

The more intensive study of ceramics from Sicilian contexts was already proposed in 1998 by E. Vitale and yet, twelve years on, much remains to be done in this field, both on the Sicilian manufactures, but also on the identification of imported pots and containers from south Italian regions (see Ardizzone *et al.* 1998; Arthur 2002: 122–33).

Within late antique studies, the archaeology of the Byzantine defensive organization system in Italy is well debated (see Chapter 5), but for Sicily the pioneering publication of *Castelli medievali in Sicilia* by Maurici (1992) needs to be explored by focusing attention through systematic campaigns of field surveys onto regional contexts. The recent research project by the University of Durham in the Simeto Valley, in the north east of Sicily (Leone *et al.* 2007) is investigating one of the most important areas of the late Byzantine resistance to the Arab conquest. Research in this area will be particularly important in testing the suggested pattern of a regionalization of the defensive system (connected with monastic centres?) and its relationship with the rural properties.

Finally, without doubt fuller research is required concerning rural settlements, forms and organization across of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages largely. When do villages appear? Do rural forts include farmers?

The final assessment of the last twenty years of research on late antique and Byzantine Sicily is the picture of a polycentric region where external schemes dictated by Rome and Constantinople were adapted and coexisted with local necessities. In these terms, Sicily fits perfectly with the

Italian regionalization of the Byzantine territories (labelled by Zanini as “The Byzantine Italies”) and it will find in the next decade its rightful place within the archaeological debates on Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

Topic	Target subjects	Action	Aims
Urban production	Ceramics	Ceramic studies from unpublished contexts	Definition of the degree of urban productivity, consumption and export
Byzantine ceramics	Ceramics	Reassessment of classes of Sicilian ceramics, such as the S. Giuliano or the Tipo Grotticelle; <i>amphorae</i> production	Provide finds guide for the middle-and final Byzantine phase

Tab. 7.1: Proposed topics of research concerning ceramic studies

Topic	Target subjects	Action	Aims
Urban fortifications	Remains of walls, towers, gates	Reconsideration of published reports about Classical defences, new analysis of visible remains of defenses	Document the different phases of restorations
Territorial defence	Small villages on hilltops	Filed surveys, documentation of defences structures still preserved. Elaboration of a regional map indicating the fortified centres in relation to the road system	Description of the process of defense of the landscape and its relationship with towns. The impact of the creation of the Theme of Sicily in the seventh century
Maritime <i>limes</i>	Coastal towns	Field survey, textual sources, maritime archaeology	Define the archaeology of the Byzantine navy in term of its organization in Sicilian centers

Tab.7.2: Proposed research topics concerning the defensive strategy of late antique and Byzantine Sicily

Topic	Target subjects	Action	Aims
The fragmentation of senatorial rural properties	Rural areas	Field surveys aimed to spot concentrations of finds	Follow the fragmentation of the senatorial estate and the creation of new properties
The organization of rural settlements	Rural areas	Field surveys	Trace the organization and the relationship of rural villages and churches
The impact of the Byzantine Theme onto the rural areas	Rural areas	Field survey, textual sources	Define the consequences of the creation of the Theme of Sicily and the likely introduction of farmer-soldiers

Tab.7.3: Proposed research topics concerning the rural organization of late antique and Byzantine Sicily.

Wilson's work provided a first stage of study of late Roman and late antique Sicily; I hope my thesis provides, even in its preliminary form and with various gaps, a new stage of assessment and investigation, identifying both the problems and the potential offered by Sicily for what remains a crucial period of archaeology and historical study.

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DENIS SAMI-CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION HISTORY

2006–10

University of Leicester, School of Archaeology & Ancient History

AHRC-funded PhD

Thesis title: *From Theodosius to Constans II: Church, Settlement and Economy of Late Roman and Byzantine Sicily (A.D. 379-669)* Supervisor: Dr. Neil Christie

Abstract: My project investigated, updated and filled the gaps of information concerning the period between the second half of the 4th c. until the second half of the 7th c. A.D. - the transitional period between the 'Classical World' and the early Middle Ages. Sicily is at the crossroads of east and west empires and charting its fluctuating role and archaeologies helps greatly in tracing change within the late antique world. In the development of my research, I have investigated the possibility to elaborate a homogeneous Sicilian pattern regarding the Christianization of the urban centres, the economics and economical productions of towns and country and the defence of the territory.

2003–05

Università di Pisa, Diploma di Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia (110/110 with Honours)

Thesis: *Indagini Archeologiche alla Rocca Medievale di Cesenatico* (Forlì-Cesena) Supervisor: Prof. Marco Milanese

Abstract: With this research I explored the medieval history of the coastal village Cesenatico in north-east Italy from the 12th to the 16th centuries. Being between the city of Cesena, Ravenna and Rimini, Cesenatico was for a long time contended amongst the lords of Romagna as (i.e. Malatesta, Ordelaffi and da Polenta) described by Dante in the Divine Comedy. My research investigated the defence of the village and the development of new military strategies through historical texts and material culture from the archaeological excavation at the castle. I also considered and debated the local and regional economy in light of finds collected from the archaeological excavation.

2000–01 (9 months)

Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, **Scholarship** of the Greek government spent at the **British School of Athens**.

Abstract: The aim of the nine months research was to draw a comparison between small islands in south Italy and Greece in terms of settlement organization and economy from the 5th to the 8th century A.D.

1993–9

Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di Medievistica e Paleografia (110/110 with Honours)

Thesis title: *Pantelleria Bizantina*. Supervisors: Prof. Antonio Carile and Prof. Maurizio Tosi

Abstract: In my undergraduate thesis I explored the history and archaeology of Pantelleria, a small island in the Canal of Sicily, from the 6th to the 9th century and the role of this island in the western Byzantine territories. The colonization by monasteries, as well as the rural and coastal settlements and their economy were part of my studies partially published in 2000; 2002, 2003, 2005a-b, 2006.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS

1. **2010**, Editor with Gavin Speed, *Debating Urbanism Within and Beyond the Walls A.D. 300–700*. Leicester Monograph Series 17.

ARTICLES

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