

The production centres and river network of Italian terra sigillata between the Arno and Tiber valleys: a geographical point of view

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The study of ceramics — which has become almost prohibitive nowadays due to the amount of money and time it requires — still plays a fundamental rôle in the historical reconstruction of trade in the Mediterranean. Just as geology and archaeobotany allow for reconstructing ancient landscapes, and archaeozoology for reconstructing the dietary habits of ancient peoples, so the archaeology of production, with its unappealing routine of recording and classifying finds, is essential for understanding the economic dynamics of a given area. Typology, combined with appropriate archaeometric analyses of the fabric and the coating, allow for ascertaining, with a reasonable degree of surety, the provenance of vessels, and hence the ratio of imports to local products. This can make a significant contribution to the historical reconstruction of ancient economies and commercial exchange.

By focusing on production sites, we can gain a more precise appreciation of the output of individual potters, the allocation of tasks within the workshop, and commercial relationships between different workshops (for example, the exchange of and/or trade in moulds, poinçons, or even of skilled labour).

The research needs to be framed in a geographic context; for this, the logistics of transport networks need to be investigated. An important rôle was certainly played by river waterways, with their systems of ports and moorings, especially in areas lacking direct access to the sea. Despite the higher costs, the road network, which operated synergistically with the river network and cabotage, was no less vital for the distribution of finished products.¹

New technologies applied to cartography and to the computerization of archaeological data have proven extremely useful for investigating the whole economic production chain, from producer to customer. The purpose of this article is precisely that of outlining a preliminary geographical pattern for a distributive network in an area that encompasses the Arno and Tiber valleys.

Production centres

We must start from facts, such as the production centres positively identified and known from the bibliography. First there is Arezzo. More recently, new sites have been located and sometimes also excavated, such as those at Pisa (via S. Zeno and via S. Stefano), Isola di Migliarino, Torrita di Siena, Podere Marzuolo, Sesta, San Cassiano, Scoppieto, Vasanello and Prima Porta. Still uncertain are Capolona, Castiglioncello and Poggio Fiori. The sites follow in alphabetical order.

Arezzo

The recent study carried out by S. Vilucchi has produced a valuable map of attested workshops of Italian terra sigillata in Arezzo and in its immediate vicinity.² It shows a

1 H. Kiiskinen, *Production and trade of Etrurian terra sigillata pottery in Roman Etruria and beyond between c.50 BCE and c.150 CE* (Turku 2013) 59-85.

2 S. Vilucchi, "Arezzo e la produzione di terra sigillata italiana: i protagonisti e le evidenze archeologiche", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 32 (2019)