"The material culture in the re-use phase (V-Earlier VII A.D.) on the site Aiano-Torraccia di Chiusi (San Gimignano-Siena-Italy). Preliminary notes"

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ABSTRACT

Since 2005 an Italian-Belgian expedition, supported by the Université catholique de Louvain, part of the international project “VII Regio. Valdelsa during the Roman Age and late Antiquity” manages the archeological dig of a villa longinqua built between the end of 3th and the beginning of 4th century A.D. with monumental, architectural and decorative characteristic. At the end of 4th century A.D., the villa was subjected at significant restoration and, perhaps, also a resizing. At the end of the 5th century A.D., it was abandoned, and for the first time spoiled of the main part of marble, reused for the production of lime. Between the 6th and the 7th century A.D., it was occupied by craftsman that installed several workshops for the iron, glass, gold, lead and probably bronze manufacturing; they used, villa's architectural and decorative parts, for the production of base material. Among the handcrafted plant there was a furnace for the pottery production (not yet dug). The mai...

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The villa at Alano (Torraccia di Chiusi, San Gimignano-Siena-Italy) (Figs.1-2-3)

Since 2005 a Belgian-Italian mission of the Université catholique de Louvain directed by Prof. Marco Cavalieri, part of the international project "VII Regio: The Elva Valley during Roman Age and Late Antiquity", had the license from the Italian Ministry for the Cultural Heritage and Activities (Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali) for the excavation of an archaeontological site, that is placed in a marginal section of the Ager Volturnensis. During the last six campaigns, this area, well known for many and significant discoveries dated to the Roman Age, has shown an articulated settlement. It consists of a villa longinquus, probably built at the end of the 3rd – beginning of the 4th century A.D., provided with a monumental architecture and decorative apparatus. To this first phase belongs a six koubals hall, framed externally by a monumental umbrella with five kubes that is accessible by a rectangular staircase. Within the specific functions of these rooms, the communication among the different parts of the building seems to be not secondary, as testified in other contemporary structures (for example the villa at Castronovo near Tarquinia) and by the coeval openings at the ends of the same hall.

In a later period – dated by stratigraphic dates to the last quarter of the 4th century A.D. the villa was invaded by heavy restorations, even not real reconstructions. In particular, the excavated hall was radically transformed, both architectonically and functionally: the floor was remarkably lowered, three exedras were alternatively destroyed and the same number of rectangular rooms was built. The new arrangement gave the unusual form of a tribular hall with a triangular basis, very different from the classic triclinchon, result of complex architectural history. The new floor of the hall is set up by an opus signinum soil with geometric decoration in the centre of the hall and in the apses fronting the vestibule, while the other two apses have a central ornamental emblem (the best preserved represents a flowered gollet placed in a guilloche framed by a dentilicate arch).

Some new forms (Fig.4)

Most coarse ware consists of fast wheel made clyde, well-finished by hand or by some cloth, but we have to point out the presence of little pot-bellied jars, with few sagged handle at the same plane of the rim. These jars are slow-wheels or handmade and, with other indicators, are the evidence of household or very low-level artisanal and local production, coexistent with a medium level artisanal industry, characteristic of the total context.

There are other indicators of this more autonoma economic which will prevail between 7th and 9th c. in these internal and rural areas. They are unique - at the moment - vessels, heir of an ancient tradition, witnesses of a domestic kitchen culture, destined to show up during market crisis: cibor and portable ovens, large ciotole-coperchio for familiar use: furthermore we have to point out the presence of single forms related to a big cauldron (with linear string and vertical base for an handle), to a multifunctional double cup (similar to a softtolio), cups with ceral round, underlined connected with pre-roman heritage, and finally simply lamps “a ciotola” (with open base), feed by charcoal and by oil.

Moreover, among red coated closed forms (jugs and two-handled jugs, bottles, flask) we can point out the presence of original variants, with characteristic comic wave decorations, which probably will start to appear at the same time as dishes, with African style motifs, are gradually going to disappear.

About Toscana:

Characters of the ceramic context

Actually we have analyzed ceramic from 2006, 2007 and 2008 excavations; the context is composed of 10,000 fragments, subdivided among coarse ware, red coated ware, refined and semi-refined domestic ware, broad lamps, amphora, spouted, African Red Slip vessels - just in little fragments and in very low quantities – rare tiny fragments of black-slipped wares (such as ciotole-coperchio), and, in addition, single residual elements, not connected to the context and pertinent to pre-roman periods.

The most relevant nucleus of this collection belongs to the frequentation of the ruined ambulatio, i.e., the ruin that has the purpose of recovering marbles for reemployment. In particular, the amphora and the ollae, besides lamps, amphoras, spouted, focus on the functional changes that have the purpose of recovering marbles for reemployment.

During the 5th century A.D., presumably at the end, the structure shows the first traces of diocese and collapse: some parts (like the tribular hall) are abandoned and progressively hidden by the collapse of the parietal panels and covering. Other parts are instead subjected to the first depredations that have the purpose of recovering marbles for reemployment.

Still in this period the ruins were not despoiled, but also to settle various workshops and, finally, to the final phase, when we have the isolated presence of marbles in the site.

From African Red Slip Ware to its Implications: Continuity in Change

Morphological and functional references given by African Red Slip Ware still present to the craftsmen who produced, probably in Aiano too, refined domestic, red coated and coarse ware. Production and circulation of this pottery, even if simplified techniques and briefer executions, is clearly due to demands of a market which still uses a domestic equipment very efficient, but not through a simple deep economical and cultural change, that will become clear from the full 5th c. in this area can see fragmentary signal of this change that will show in next too.

To follow this phenomenon of imitation and transformation in Aiano we can use preferential indicators in ceramics, such as open forms (spouted flanged bowls and large dishes) red coated, but also open coarse ware although these forms (cassiere, flanged bowls and testae) are only 3% of vessels in this class (Fig.6).

Concentrations of major ciotole-coperchio are located in the stratigraphic units which correspond to two phases of the site: the reoccupation of the Roman villa by craft workshops (VIIIth and IXth centuries AD) and the final abandonment of them (beginning of VIIth century AD.). The abundance of traditional lids (other than ciotole-coperchio) in the same phase can say that the site presents a situation as this time horizon (V-VII century AD) since these traditional lids disappear in the central centuries of the Middle Ages.

About the material culture in the re-use phase (V-Earlier VII A.D.) on the site Alano-Torraccia Chiusi (San Gimignano-Siena-Italy). Preliminary notes

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Fig.1: The site of Aiano (San Gimignano, Tuscany).
Fig.2: View of Fasti Tombal in Aiano.
Fig.3: Final plan - summer 2010
Fig.4: Example of ciotole-coperchio with cream decorated lids
Fig.5: The corpus of ciotole-coperchio discovered in the site Alano-Torraccia di Chiusi (Survey, excavation campaigns 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008) represents 170 fragments for a minimum vessel count equal 103, which corresponds to 22% of vessels identified on the site.

The corpus of ciotole-coperchio (Fig.7)

The corpus of ciotole-coperchio discovered on the site Alano-Torraccia di Chiusi (Survey, excavation campaigns 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008) represents 170 fragments for a minimum vessel count equal 103, which corresponds to 22% of vessels identified on the site.

The Italian term ciotole-coperchio refers to a dish used as lid. As a ceramic cooking, they should therefore be used to cover containers to undergo the action of fire. This hypothesis is reinforced by the use of silice clay which can withstand thermal shocks and the blackening of the walls (due to exposure to flames) on many examples. In addition, two of them have a side with a hole for steam leaked, this last element leaving no doubt as to their use as lid. The evidence of the systematic use of this form as cooking lid, however, are not observed in all cases; we can also assume a double function for this type of shape (dish and lid) without impact on technology or morphology of the objects found.