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

Since 2005 a Belgian-Italian mission of the Université catholique de Louvain directed by Prof. Marco Cavaleri, part of the international project "VII Regio: The Elia 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 archaeological site, that is placed in a marginal section of the Ager Volturnus. 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 villein longinqua, 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 belong six kibobs hall, framed externally by a monumental emboltero with five kibobs that is accessible by a rectangular entrance. 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 Canzanello near Tarquinia) and by the coeval openings at the ends of the same hall.

In a later period – dated by stratigraphic dates to the latest quarter of the 4th century A.D. the villa was inhabited by heated restorations, even not real reconstructions. In particular, the excavate hall was radically transformed, both architectonically and functionally: the roof was remarkably lowered, three exedra were alternatively destroyed and the same number of rectangular rooms was built. The new arrangement gave the unusual from a trilateral hall with a triangular basis, very different from the classic trilobonon, 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 apse fronting the vestibule, while the other two aips have a central ornamental emblems (the best preserved represents a flowered goblet placed in a guilloche framed by a dentilicate arch).  

Characters of the ceramic context

Actually we 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, badges lamps, amphoras, didr. African Red Slip vessels - just in little fragments and in very lower quality - rare tiny fragments of forms of coarse ware (trilobate forms), and, in addition, singles red elements, not connected to the context and pertinent to pre-roman periods. The most relevant nucleus of this restitution belongs to the frequentation of the ruined villa with the intent to reuse, but also to settle various workshops and, finally, to the final abandonment, when we have the abandonment of these artistic structures and, perhaps, another period of depredations with the purpose of a new re-use of the material. The chronological range of these complex and composed activities is comprised from the half of 5th B.C. and the beginning of 7th C. A.D. and, probably, around the mid-6th c. we have the most intensive and artificial fragmentation of the area, connected to the workshops in action. These dots, already displayed by our taxonomic study and by comparison with analogous contexts, are confirmed and strengthened by petrographic analyses of a lot of coarse ware samples, which have shown the presence of marbles", in several frameworks, these marbles are similar to the fragments recovered in excavation, pertaining to decorative facing of the villa.

Some new forms (Fig. 4)

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

There are other indicators of this more autarchic economy 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 kenic culture, destined to show up during market crisis: oblong and portable ovens, large ciotola-coperchio for familiar use; furthermore we have to point out the presence of single forms related to a local coadun (with linear siring and vertical base for an handle), to a multifunctional double cup (similar to a softerello too), cups with central cordon, undeniably hooked. These vessels, very much refined in domestic and red coated productions; these last, in particular, imitate Hayes 91 C and D forms and have characteristic flanges, with few protruding rounded rims; the flange too, in these cases, is very little and not hooked.

Test and casserole are going to fill the functional gap left by African cooking pottery, significantly absent in Alano (Fig. 4).

We can suppose that some coarse cups and flanged bowls were used not only for cooking, but also on the table, just because, with other signals, the stage for transition towards multi-functionality of vessels, which, in a few time, with a drastic reduction of the forms, will be typical of Early Medieval period.

Another indicator for imitation of African slip wear is the red coated large dishes. In our context these forms are strongly connected with African imports, products such as Hayes 42 and 45. Their decorative stamp motifs are often similar to those of geometrical style, typical of ARS first production (320/400 A.D.). Afterwards, decorations on dishes become careless till the complete disappearance or just restricted to two fields.

The ciotola-coperchio (Fig. 7)

The corpus of ciotola-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 total forms identified on the site. The Italian term ciotola-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 silica clay which can withstand thermal shocks and the blackening of the wall (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 allowing double 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.

Concentrations of major ciotola-coperchio are located in the stratigraphic units which correspond to two phases of the site: the reconstruction of the Roman villa by craft workshops (VIII and VII centuries AD) and the final abandonment of them (beginning of VII century AD). The abundance of traditional lids (other than ciotola-coperchio) in the same phase can strongly 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.

From African Red Slip Ware to its imitations. Continuity in change

Morphological and functional references given by African Red Slip Ware were still present to the craftsmen who produced, probably in Alano too, refined domestic red coated ware. Production and circulation of this pottery, even if simplified techniques and quicker executions, is clearly due to demands of a market which still uses a domestic equipment very enough, by then directed towards a deep economical and cultural change, that will become clear from the full of this in Alano can see forewarning signals of this change that we'll show in next text.

To follow this phenomenon of imitation and transformation in Alano we can use preferential indicators in ceramics, such as open forms (spout, flanged bowls and large dishes) red coated, but also open coarse ware although these forms (casseroles, flanged bowls and test) are only 3% of vessels in this class (Fig. 4).

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