

Campanaio — an agricultural settlement in Roman Sicily

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FIGURE 1. *Hellenistic building with late Roman structures in foreground.*



FIGURE 2. *Late Hellenistic stamped mortarium.*

Roman Sicily has long been known from classical sources for its agricultural fertility, but little archaeological research has been conducted on the rural economy. The Campanaio project is uncovering a wealth of information about a small (3 ha) Hellenistic and Roman rural settlement and its economy, 25 km west of Agrigento. Excavations (1994–95, 1997–98) have revealed seven principal phases. Activity started c. 200 BC, and was intensive for two centuries in the central part of the site. A complex of buildings underwent two complete reconstructions between 200 BC and AD 25; in its last phase (c. 50 BC) it comprised an L-shaped building some 17 m long and 8.40 m wide, with dry-stone walls, earth floors and mud-brick superstructure (FIGURE 1). A rubbish dump outside it yielded much 2nd/1st-century BC ceramic



FIGURE 3. *2nd-century BC amphora water-pipe.*



FIGURE 4. *2nd-century BC tile kiln.*



FIGURE 5. *5th-century AD destruction deposit, Pantellerian casserole with hole drilled in bottom*

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and environmental material, with evidence for contact with Cyrenaica (brazier lugs), Greece (Rhodian wine amphora stamped 'Agathokleus') and north Africa (including a *mortarium* stamped with an ostrich and the letters T and P (FIGURE 2) – can anyone furnish parallels?). Nearby industrial activity, starting before 150 BC, is attested by two inter-connecting cisterns and a tile kiln. One cistern had an inflow channel (of purpose-made pipes) and an overflow pipe (an afterthought), made up of re-used Punic amphorae with their spikes knocked off (three are stamped, one with the 'Tanit' sign) (FIGURE 3). The re-use of amphorae as water pipes is surprisingly rare – I know of examples at Gela, Eyguières, Bibracte, Rome, Cagliari, Nora and Gortyn: does anyone know others? The tile kiln was replaced c. 125 BC by a bigger structure (4.75 m by 4.25 m; FIGURE 4): curiously it has a split-level firing chamber with a brick-revetted step marking the junction – are any comparanda known for this feature? At this stage the Campanaio settlement was probably quite small, a large farmstead rather than a village proper, although the tileworks represents considerable estate investment. Scanty early imperial activity was followed by renewed building work in the late Roman period (c. AD 375–460). Fresh structures were tacked on to the ruined hellenistic building, a new warehouse was erected nearby, an olive oil separating-vat was built to the west, and elsewhere a lime kiln (the first in Sicily of Roman date), and a whole set of buildings on the eastern side of the settlement were constructed – in total amounting to a substantial village. These buildings (except the kiln) are also dry-stone with mud-brick or adobe superstructure, demonstrating that this time-honoured construction method continued in Sicily into late Roman times. In this phase there was also evidence for iron-working, possible leather production (a cess-pit) and the manufacture on site of tiles, *mortaria* and amphorae (represented by wasters dumped c. AD 400 in the disused lime kiln). The amphorae are variants of the flat-bottomed Keay 52, production of which is known also at Sicilian Naxos and at three sites in the toe of Calabria.

All this activity came to a violent end c. AD 460, with vivid destruction levels everywhere, possibly the result of Vandal attack (attested in the sources at this date – Campanaio lies only 5 km from the south coast). One destruction deposit contained an ARS plate and three Pantellerian casseroles, all with holes drilled post-firing in the middle of their bases (FIGURE 5). Could they have been used for keeping balls of wool in place dur-

ing spinning? Or were they used in food preparation, possibly for making the cake called *encytum* (Cato tells us that this required vessels with a hole in the bottom)? Another smashed deposit contained 16 amphorae (including examples of Keay 25, 25/6, 33 and 35); five have incised letters on the spikes, presumably control marks cut before firing. The amphorae are mostly African, but one LR1 amphora, not of standard Cilician/Cypriot fabric, is probably a Sicilian imitation of the eastern amphora (itself attested in other Campanaio deposits). It is intriguing to find imported oil amphorae at what is clearly (weightstones, olive vat) an oil-producing site: was Campanaio a market for oil of different provenances and qualities, or were empty containers being filled with local oil – possibly even sold off to unsuspecting buyers as imported produce?

There was modest spasmodic reoccupation c. AD 500 before life at Campanaio petered out. Somewhere, however, a modest later settlement of Arab or Arabo-Norman date awaits discovery, its presence indicated by three human inhumations (lying on their sides, supposedly facing Mecca) on the eastern edge of Campanaio. One is a juvenile (12/15 years), of indeterminate sex; teeth marks indicate sustained malnutrition before the child was seven. The other two were male, aged 25/35. One had had a tumour in his jaw surgically removed, the other had suffered chronic toothache: the teeth in the left lower mandible were much more worn than those on the other side – he had clearly been chewing all his food on one side to avoid pain. The abnormal thickness of both adult male skulls (and cavities in them) indicate that both suffered from anaemia: thalassaemia is still endemic in Sicily today.

Ovicaprids are most numerous in the bone assemblages, followed by pig and cattle; horse, dog, hedgehog, hare, tortoise and duck are also represented. Of particular interest is the quantity of deer bones (second only to ovicaprids in 5th-century deposits), not only of red and roe deer, but also of fallow deer, very rare on Mediterranean sites: the largest published assemblage comes from the Sicilian medieval site of Brucato. Were fallow deer originally indigenous to southern Italy/Sicily?

References

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