

Intrasite Artefact Survey at Terravecchia di Cuti (Sicily)

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Abstract

In this paper, we discuss the results of an artefact survey and a sampling collection in the indigenous settlement of Terravecchia di Cuti, in the *chora* of the Greek colony of Himera (Sicily). The whole area of the town was gridded with squares of 10x10 m to isolate functional areas and identify the most interesting zones for new archaeological samples. The survey was carried out in two fields (9400 m²), counting and recording all findings. Only diagnostic pottery and figured pottery, antefixes, loom weights, millstones and so on were collected. We can observe, analysing in detail our results for both fields, that functional areas could not be isolated, perhaps because the urban and social organisation of the settlement did not provide for clear distinctions. The multi-functionality of everyday objects, also, does not allow us to recognise these areas. Finally, we must consider the effect of decades of ploughing carried out on the site.

Keywords: Sicily, Intrasite, Survey

Text

In 2013, archaeological research started again at Terravecchia di Cuti, a well-known and important indigenous settlement in the *chora* of the Greek colony of Himera, overlooking the upper valley of the Southern Imera river. In 1959, excavations (Militello, 1960) were carried out within the settlement, in the eastern necropolis and a section of

the fortifications on the eastern side was brought to light where excavations continued from the late 1970s to the 1980s (Epifanio, 1980; Epifanio & Vassallo, 1984-1985; Epifanio Vanni, 1988-1989). Our aim was to investigate again the settled area of the town, but due to heavy ploughing for fifty years from the fifties to present, we felt it necessary, before starting new excavations, to make an artefact survey and sampling in order to isolate functional areas in the settlement and identify the most interesting areas to program new archaeological samples. Aerial photo interpretation is not useful to this aim (Schmiedt, 1970: tav. 82) and ground penetrating radar survey is useless due to the rocky limestone subsoil.

From the 1970s (Cherry, Gamble & Shennan, 1978) and the 1980s (Blankholm, 1991; Hietala, 1984), artefact survey is a common practice in Mediterranean surveys, both extrasite and intrasite (Bintliff, 2013: 193-95). We also have performed, from the 1980s, controlled collections during the survey of the *chora* of Himera on small rural sites (about 2.000/3.000 m²) by making thin transects across the area of the site (Belvedere, 2002: 13). All sherds were collected, except tiles, which were counted and sampled. It was always necessary to collect diagnostic sherds from the whole area of the site. However, these collections, as it is known, are useful only to identify the core and boundaries and to assign a chronology.

In the 1990s, we attempted a sampling collection in a large Late Roman village (contrada Grotte, Mussomeli, CL) of about six ha using a grid extended across the whole area, with squares of 20x20m, of

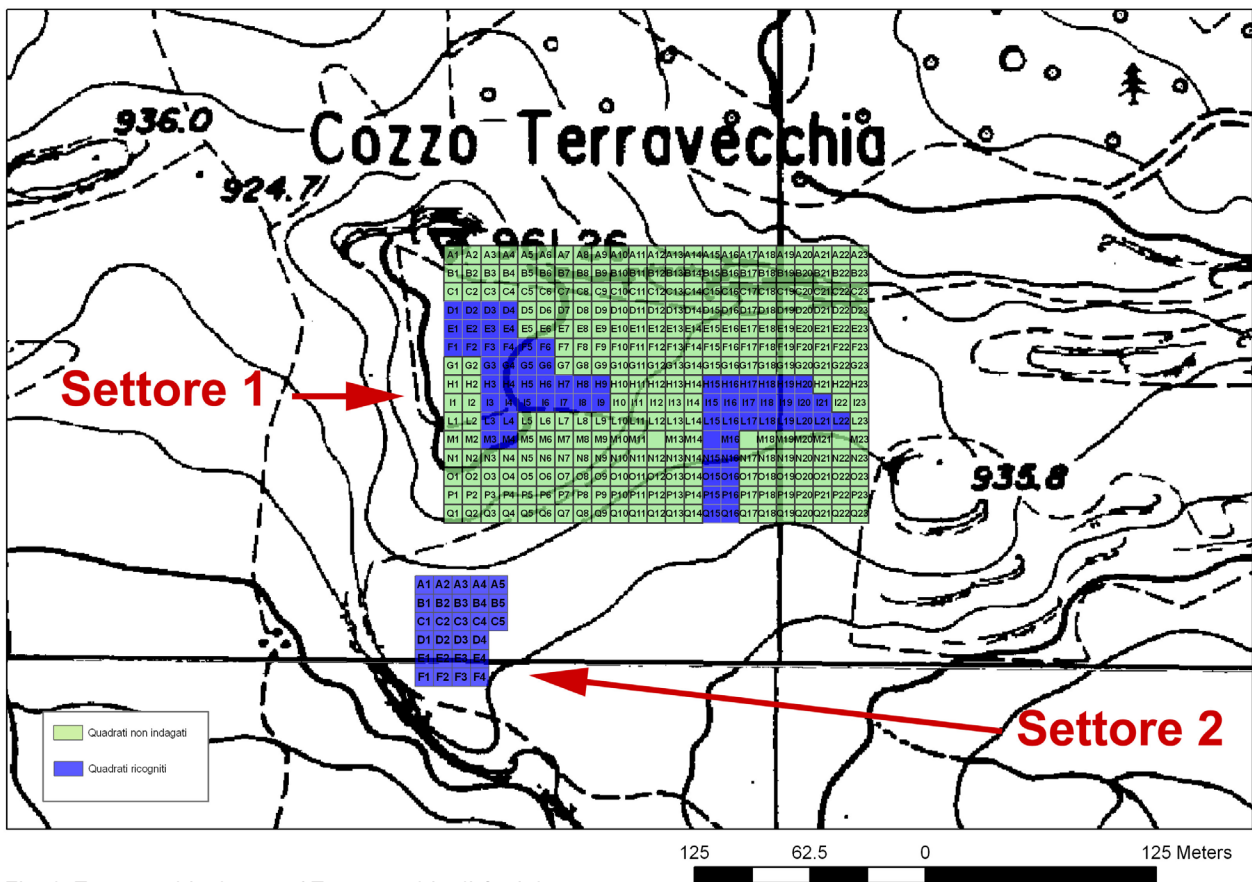


Fig. 1. Topographical map of Terravecchia di Cuti. In dark blue, the squares recorded and collected.

which 30% were sampled. Several thousand ceramic sherds were gathered which proved difficult to treat so the study was never completed.

More recently in the first decade of the new millennium, at Agrigento, working on the archaeological map of the ancient city, inside the inhabited area, we built within the GIS platform, a “virtual” grid (squares of 25 m) in vector format, oriented to the north. The grid has been inserted as a layer in overlay in the ArcPad platform on the handheld GPS used during the field survey. Within each square of 25 m, the surveyors placed five squares of 1 m per side (Bintliff, 2013: 195-98 for two-scale sampling and collection), counting the number of pottery sherds, noting also the visibility of the ground. The average calculated in the five squares was then attributed to the square of 25 m and consequently a density value, calculated on the

average of the squares falling inside it, has been assigned to each field unit (Belvedere & Burgio, 2012: 58-59). Because our first goal was to calculate the density of the finds, only diagnostic sherds were recorded, but not collected. However, it was possible in this way to identify the area occupied by the city of the Roman Imperial Age compared to that occupied by the Greek city.

At Terravecchia we gridded the whole area of the town with squares of 10x10 m. The collection was carried out in two areas, the first (field 1) extended from the top of the hill (so called acropolis) to the centre of the settled area, the second (field 2) located in a semi-flat area on the south side of the settlement (fig. 1). In the first area, east and south of the acropolis wall, we hoped to identify again a small sanctuary excavated in 1959; the second semi-flat area could have facilitated the conservation of archaeological strata under a thick layer of soil more than other areas of the site on a steep heavily eroded slope.



Fig. 2. Terravecchia, artefact survey and collection in field 2.

Overall, the sampling was carried out on 9400m², 6700 in field 1 and 2700 in field 2 (fig. 2). All the findings were counted and recorded on forms, the tiles were sampled and only diagnostic pottery sherds and figured pottery, antefixes, loom weights, millstones and so on were collected. For each square, visibility (generally excellent) and the crop conditions were noted. In total 24,417 findings from field 1 and 8,658 from field 2 were recorded. In our opinion, this is a significant collection size, related to the extent of the two sampling areas (Bintliff, 2013: 196-98, for size and quality of a surface collection).

Here are some results shown in the following figures.

Field 1

There is an important concentration of finds only at two points (squares F 4-5-6/G 5-6 and H 8-9/I 8-9, fig. 3). The general distribution of the finds is coincident with that of the tiles, which are dispersed with significant values around these points. We can find a similar pattern for black-glazed and indigenous wares, which are also present with significant values in L 16-17-18. The peak concentration of the loom weights (H8) coincides with that of the tiles and of the finds in general. Loom weights are dispersed also around the same sampling squares, as are the few fragments of millstones (G/H 3-4, 6-7 and M/L 3-4).

Most of the few finds of coroplastics, arulae, antefixes are located on the southwestern uphill side of the field (M 3), overlooking field 2 (fig. 4). Indeed, squares F/G 4-5-6 are the most suitable area for an archaeological sample.

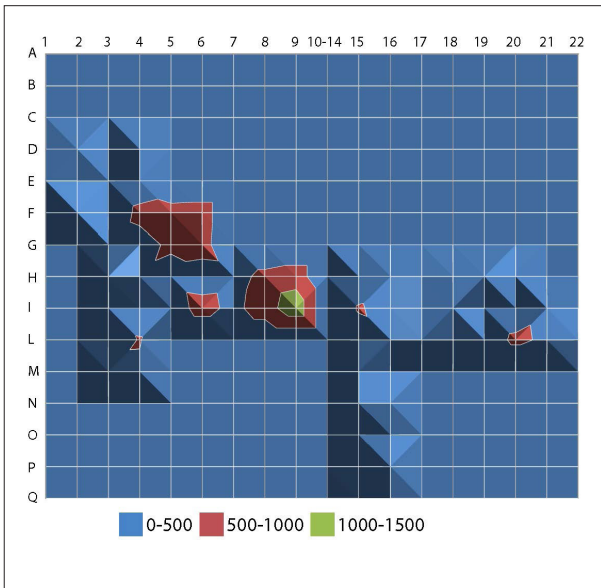


Fig. 3. Field 1. Densities of total findings for each square.

Field 2

There is only one peak concentration of all finds: squares B 3-4, with the adjacent squares C 2-3 (fig. 5). The tiles are concentrated in the same squares, but there are two other concentrations in D 1-2-3 and especially E 1-2. Scarps and ill-fired roof tiles are concentrated in the same B 3. Black-glazed and indigenous wares are well documented in C 1-2-4-5 and E 1-2. Loom weights are few, but a peak seems perceptible in C/D 2. Coroplastics are random dispersed in the whole area, as well as the few fragments of millstones. The most suitable area for an archaeological sample seems to be squares B/C 3-4.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the accuracy of the collection, we did not fully achieve our goal: to identify functional areas within the site. Nor it was possible to place the area of the small sanctuary excavated by Militello in 1959, which was located halfway between the acropolis and the outer walls. The assemblages of artefacts found in the main peak areas of the two fields look domestic but they are not so well char-

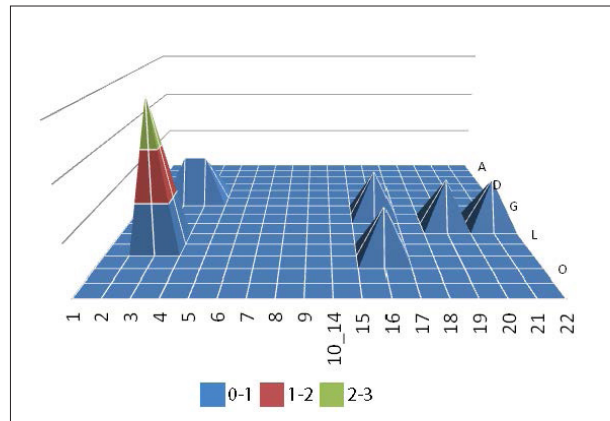


Fig. 4. Field 1. Dispersal of coroplastics, arulae, antefixes.

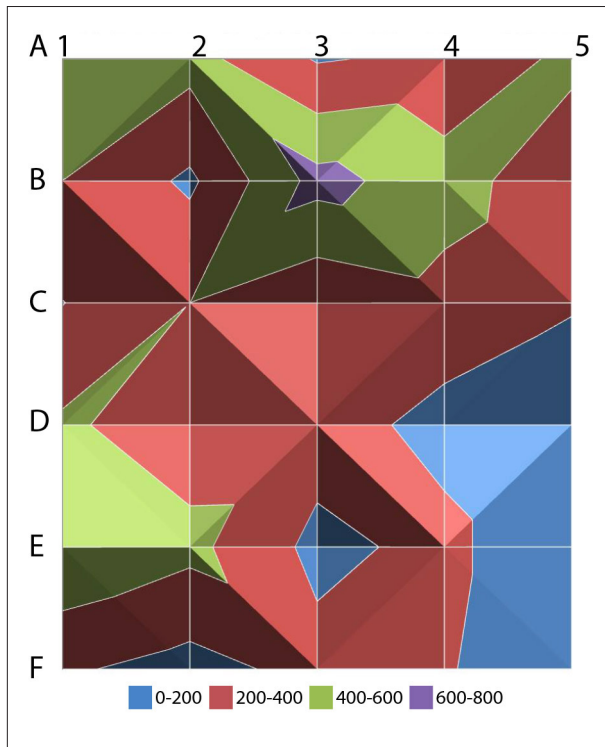


Fig. 5. Field 2. Densities of total findings for each square.

acterised as to be sure of this statement.

It has already been noted the difficulty of distinguishing functional areas in multi-stratified and complex sites (Bintliff, 2012; 2013) but a site such as Terravecchia is relatively complex and substan-

tially covers a single (archaic-classical) chronological phase. Perhaps the urban and social organisation of the settlement did not provide for a clear distinction between functional areas. It is also possible that the multi-functionality of everyday objects does not allow us to recognise these areas, because the same objects were used for different purposes. Finally, we must consider the effect of decades of ploughing carried out on the site and the subsequent scatter of the artefacts.

The collection has allowed, however, to set the lower chronological limits of the settlement, testifying the presence of a phase at the beginning of the fourth century BC, while no data were found about the early occupation of the site (Bintliff, 2013: 196-97), assumed in the seventh century BC.

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