

The Amphorae Typology of the Villa del Vergigno: Trade, Production, and Adaptation in Northern Etruria

The Villa del Vergigno is an ancient Roman villa built originally in the first century BCE and occupied through the fifth century CE. Four seasons of excavation (2013-2016) have been undertaken by an American Field School to understand the nature and extent of agricultural and ceramic production at the site. In addition, the Gruppo Archaeologica di Montelupo excavated a portion of the Villa for six seasons (1989-1994), focusing on the main habitation area. During the course of these two projects, a significant number of amphorae fragments and wasters were discovered showing a diverse range of amphorae types being used, traded, and produced on site. In this paper I will discuss the amphorae typology that I have created for the Villa and will look at what information this could reveal about trade, production, and adaptation in northern Etruria during the Roman Empire.

When discussing pottery production and trade in northern Italy there are several important points to consider about the Villa del Vergigno. Though this villa is not large, it was located in a geographically significant and advantageous location for long-distance trade. The site sits on the confluence of two rivers, the Vergigno and the Pesa, with the latter feeding into the Arno River. This location gave the Villa del Vergigno the ability to export inland as well as west to Pisa and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Inland, the Villa del Vergigno is a mere 15 miles from Florence, while the port at Pisa gave it access to markets and goods from across the Roman Empire. This gave the Villa both simple access to nearby markets and allowed for easy engagement in long-distance trade. The residents of the Villa were clearly taking advantage of this position to improve their economic fortunes as evidenced by the wide range and amount of amphorae found on site. This also is reflected in several phases of renovation on the Villa del

Vergigno, each improving the size and comfort of the Villa as it prospered. This is an important point to consider as rural villas, such as this one, were key contributors to the greater Roman economy.

While the Villa del Vergigno did receive many of the amphorae through trade, it was also engaged in producing amphorae on site. In terms of production, there are five known kilns on site with a possible sixth site scheduled for excavation during the 2017 campaign. At least one of the kilns was used for the creation of Lamboglia 2 wine amphorae as evidenced by several misfired vessels found next to the kiln. This is notable because Lamboglia 2 amphorae are a type that was previously thought to have been produced only along the Adriatic Sea (Lindhagan 2009; Peacock and Williams 1986). This amphorae typology can be used to track the movement of technological ideas like this one as they spread across the Roman Empire in addition to simply connecting the origins of goods. This production shows how the villa was producing for and engaged in long-distance trade that exchanged not only goods but ideas and techniques as well.

Finally, this amphorae typology allows for a better understanding of what the Villa del Vergigno was trading in addition to where it was being traded. Using the amphorae typology, I will draw conclusions about what goods were being produced and exported from the Villa and what goods the Villa was importing. This will lead to a better understanding of how rural villas were engaged in the larger Roman economy, what they were producing on site, and how they adapted to changing conditions.

Determining the trade routes that the amphorae from the Villa del Vergigno used and the types of goods that they carried will help us understand the prosperity of the region and its function in the Roman economy. This amphorae typology will also highlight the importance of location for rural villas economic contributions and prosperity. In this way, the amphorae

typology from the Villa del Vergigno will lead to a better comprehension of trade and the role of villas in both the region and in the Empire as a whole.

Bibliography

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