Survey in the Inland Area of Lilybaeum

Annapaola Mosca
Sapienza Università di Roma
email: annapamo@tin.it

Abstract

This survey focuses on the situation of the landscape and the ancient settlement of Lilybaeum in the countryside behind the modern centre of Mazara del Vallo. Based on the survey, the knowledge of the archaeological sites was applied to create an overview of the settlement dynamics in the territory. Evidence points to a widespread settlement, developed approximately from the end of the fourth century BC but established in the second century BC. It was linked mainly to the available water and environmental resources, especially agriculture, pastoralism, the quarries, the Mazaro River and to the easy possibility of trade, especially with North Africa. What stands out the most is the organisation of the settlements: it was possible to identify both large settlements and sometimes veritable villages, extending over several hectares, in this case similar to what has been found in other Sicilian districts, and to identify minor sites, probably functional to the villae or villages. The surface of a site in the San Miceli area, located near the banks of the Mazaro River, behind the port on the estuary of Mazara is exceptional. It has a very wide extension compared to other sites. Some of these sites, with remarkable signs of growth in the Late Imperial Age, especially in the fourth-fifth centuries AD, do not seem to survive beyond the sixth-seventh centuries AD. In a few cases we witness a continuum in the settlement, albeit in different forms compared to the previous periods, almost until the eleventh century AD in sites tied to the presence of wells, mills and, presumably, a road network. It was possible to redact an archaeological map from the archaeological data collected in the territory.

Keywords: Sicily; Lilybaeum; Mazaro; Mazara; Survey.

Premise

Archaeological research in this part of Western Sicily is set in the context of topographical and archaeological studies conducted by the University of Palermo, Dipartimento di Beni Culturali, and the Soprintendenza Beni Culturali e Ambientali of Trapani. The research goal is to understanding the living patterns of the island in antiquity (Costituzione di poli formativi per la ricerca nel campo dei Beni Culturali, con finalità culturali e di conoscenza dei siti della provincia di Trapani). In this context, surface research was conducted, beginning in 2012, and continued under a multidisciplinary approach, with particular emphasis on non-invasive survey methods. In the course of recent surface surveys, the field of research was broadened compared to previous surveys (Di Stefano, 1982-1983; Fentress, Kennet & Valenti, 1986) to provide a more in-depth understanding of the settlement dynamics in the territory east of Lilybaeum and north of the urban centre of Mazara, between the fiumara Sossio (or Marsala) to the west and the Mazaro River. The surveyed area lies between the IGM maps 257 NO Paolini; III NE Baglio Chitarra; III SE Borgata Costiera. The archaeological potential of a portion of this territory had been perceived before the definition of the project. An archaeological excavation campaign was conducted at Timpone Rasta, in the Mirabile district, which unearthed a residential building dating back almost to the second century BC, with various stages of life.
Fig. 1. A) San Miceli; B) Carrebbe quarries.
These excavations allowed the archaeologists to discover the presence of a widespread settlement in the territory from the fourth century BC to the sixth century AD (Fentress, 1998; Fentress, Kennet & Valenti, 1986; Molinari & Valente, 1995).

**Survey Method**

As a first stage of research and in parallel with surveys on the ground, we examined the historical, literary, epigraphic and itinerary sources. We analysed the information contained in the archives of Palermo (Centro Regionale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione; Ufficio Regionale delle Regie Trazzere), Trapani (Archivio di Stato; Soprintendenza Archeologica) and Mazara del Vallo (Archivio Diocesano and Archivio di Stato). The surveys were carried out at different times during the year: some land, in fact, was not accessible in the winter and spring months due to the presence of sheep and goat herds. The surveys were carried out with GPS systems, descending and ascending the slopes, taking as a reference the morphological characters of the landscape and following the boundaries of the individual
fields that went to form the minimum survey units (Belvedere, 2010; Quilici & Quilici Gigli, 2004). We used the IGM maps as a cartographic reference, both the historical maps and recent ones. Both before the surveys and during research on the ground, we analysed the satellite imagery (Sicily Region) and consulted the aerial photographs at the CRCD, Palermo and at the IGM, Florence. Because some lands are not accessible since they are fenced, are open quarries or are outdoor stalls for animals, we chose two vast sample areas in order to carry out surveys in depth, one along the Mazaro river (with an extension of about 940 ha) and the other in the inland area, where settlements had already been reported (with an extension of about 3,890 ha). For all the sites we drew up specific Topographic Unit cards, which, along with the indications of the maps and a topographical description of the site, include the type of environment, the visibility degree, the surface conditions at the time of survey and a description of the survey method. Unfortunately, due to destruction of monumental artefacts and fragmented remains, partly due to deep ploughing, it was not always possible to interpret all the data collected in an unequivocal way, as is similar to other surveys carried out in Sicily (Wilson, 1980-1981). It was certainly possible to define the vastness of the site and to evaluate the quantity and the type of materials on site, but at times doubt remains as to the interpretation of the site function, although many indicators seem to suggest the presence of settlements. We specify in the cards if we are in the presence of primary concentration or dispersion, we report the blocks and re-employed architectural elements, the type of pottery found and its quantity, the presence of shingles and/or tiles, fragments of glass, other artefacts, bones and any elements useful to a definition of the site.

The Environment

The most important centre, located near the coast and further west than the territory examined, was *Lilybaeum*, characterised, as is well known, by a significant settlement beginning in the fourth century BC. *Lilybaeum* was a presence that soon obtained an urban organisation following the arrival of the Punics from the island of *Motya* (Diod. Sic. 14.55.62) to the extent that this centre remains, even in Roman times, a first rank administrative headquarter in the heart of what had been the Punic *eparcheia* formed in Western Sicily (Di Stefano, 1980-1981; Giglio, 2006; Giglio & Canzonieri, 2009; Palazzo & Vecchio, 2013; Schmiedt, 1963). *Lilybaeum*, therefore, continued to be a centre where multiple cultural elements converged as well as a prominent maritime port, with two basins surrounded by a series of smaller piers designed to allow the circulation of agricultural products and various goods coming from the villas in the hinterland (Tusa, 2010). *Mazaris*, instead, is reported in *Itinerarium Antonini* 89, 1 as a *statio* along a paracoastal route (Cuntz, 1929; Uggeri, 2004). However, the port at the mouth of the Mazaro river must have existed since ancient times, as mentioned by Diodorus when he recalls the existence, in the fifth century BC, of a settlement at the mouth of the Mazaro, *emporion* or *phrourion*, perhaps for a time controlled by the Selinuntines but also contended by the inhabitants of Segesta (Diod. Sic. 11.46.2; 13.54.6; 23.9.4; De Vido, 1990-1991). The lower course of the Mazaro, although characterised at times in spring and autumn by the phenomenon called “marrobbio”, with sudden changes in water levels due to atmospheric pressure imbalances, was also formerly a safe haven for boats (Amaro, 1880). At the mouth of the river, a coin closet was discovered with silver coins from the most important cities of Sicily and dating to 435-445 BC (Tusa-Cutroni, 1989). The existence of traces of ancient port facilities at the mouth of the canal harbour was confirmed in the course of surveys carried out in 1930 (Bonanno Marzo, 1931). Based on the epigraphs, it was a centre that perhaps depended on *Lilybaeum* (Bivona, 1987), at least in the third century AD, if not enjoying a certain independence (Manni-Piraino, 1969). The area of the Palace of the Knights of Malta, near the
Fig. 3. Giudeo Maggiore.
canal harbour, has shown various stages of use since the end of the fourth century BC, with indications of productive activities, until the tenth-eleventh centuries, when we have evidence of a construction phase of the city wall (Giglio, 1998). The sarcophagi preserved in the Cathedral are dated to the Roman Imperial Age (second-fourth century AD: Di Stefano, 2003; Tusa, 1995).

A number of necropolis probably surrounded the inhabited centre at the mouth of the Mazaro in Roman times. It would also seem that one of these necropolis contributed a sarcophagus treasured in the Cathedral (Castiglione, 1878; Di Stefano, 2003). Traces of productive activities are documented in the north-eastern outskirts in the sixth century or even before (Molinari & Cassai, 2010).

Altogether, the territory surveyed behind the present day Mazara del Vallo and east of Marsala, though apparently uniform and characterised by a predominantly agricultural and non-urban landscape, displays orographic and soil diversity. The part of territory closest to Mazara is a plateau; the central one is the area called “sciara”, a rocky soil left uncultivated, as any type of agricultural farming is impossible here. The “sciara” in the past was used for the mining of local limestone, with ravine or subsoil type exploitation. Some quarries near the Mazaro River seem to have largely been abandoned for centuries. In the “sciare”, there is a widespread presence of phrygana, with the “giummare” as part of the spontaneous vegetation. These are dwarf palms that could be used in the past to prepare strings and containers or could provide insulation from the heat (Plin., HN 13.39; Tamburello, 1990). The most northern part, with stony soils, is characterised by rolling hills with a maximum altitude around 180 m. The plantations are currently mostly vineyards but also contain olive groves and cereal crops; the wine-growing culture took over from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a number of British families increased the production and trade of local wines. In this area, there are aquifers that are still partly exploited, with wells covered by domes known as the “cubbe”. Mazara del Vallo had water collection tanks in the past in this territory: the aqueduct dating back to the seventeenth century that served the town of Mazara del Vallo was supplied with water from the Chelbi and Mirabile districts. The historical maps, for instance the one of 1843 preserved in the Archivio Mortillaro di Villarena in Palermo (Map No. 403), point to the fact that along the coast were the “margi”, internal lakes, receptors of a very diversified fauna and with a peculiar vegetation. These bodies of water,
which have now shrunk in size, represented a contributing factor to the marine intrusion in the hinterland and were probably an important source of income for the local economy. In ancient times, the paracoastal strip was most probably characterised by the presence of cork oaks (Gini & Misuraca, 2009). In the countryside there are small towers and the "guardiole", multi-storey buildings from which it was possible to monitor the extensive agricultural lands and the harvest in the fields. The most characteristic elements of the landscape are the "casali", open farmhouse settlements and, especially the "bagli", these latter being fortified farms, which have undergone several restorations over the centuries, especially in the nineteenth century, when the territory was transformed with the massive introduction of vineyards and, following the promulgation of the Corleo Law in 1862, which decreed the abolition of the ecclesiastical feuds, the structure of the countryside was reorganised. The constant changes that involved the surveyed area (new crops and introduction of heavy machinery, fencing of properties, use of some agricultural buildings as stalls, quarries that are still in use and that necessarily lead to transformations in the surrounding landscape) may have erased the traces of the ancient settlement. The landscape, though, has maintained an agrarian appearance and has not been upset by urbanisation.

Survey result

One of the problems was to verify if a certain regularity in the arrangement of the limits of the crops could correspond to a fragmentation of the territory in antiquity. What is striking indeed when we look at the remote sensing images and cartography, is the organisation of the landscape with even-spaced divisions. Traces of the divisions no longer in use are made apparent by the presence of broken lines tracing field borders, dirt roads and orthogonal intersections clearly visible from a reading of the aerial photographs and satellite imagery. But these tracks don’t seem to correspond to ancient measures, even if the survey attests to the presence of a diffused ancient settlement. Some orthogonal elements of the landscape that appear in the maps, and the development of certain settlements, such as the house excavated in the Mirabile district, starting from the beginning of the second century BC, suggested the possibility of a centuriation, valued about 105 km² and closely linked to the situation in Sicily from 210 BC, when it presumably became necessary to reorganise the territory after the final inclusion of Sicily in the Roman world (Fentress, 1998; Fentress, Kennet & Valenti, 1986). However, it was not possible to link the information gathered to precise map references. It is necessary to remember that the problematic Liber Coloniarum (Grelle, 1992) suggests for Sicily (Campbell, 2000: 166-67) a case of land division in the districts of Panormus and Segesta under Emperor Vespasian. This division, destined for veteran soldiers and for members of the Emperor’s household, as it is described, was made with borders of Tiburtine stones or of olive stumps placed at a variable distance, with intervals between 150 and 550 pedes and, as such, traces on the ground are very hard to discover. For the district under investigation, highly decentralised with respect to the area described in the Liber Coloniarum, the available cartography appears to indicate a regular fragmentation from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. However, we know from archival data that the land surveyors intervened on several occasions to carry out measurements or agricultural divisions. The most massive division was undoubtedly the one carried out after the abolition of the ecclesiastical feuds in 1862 and the redistribution of the land to new owners. Traces of this fragmentation can still be found in the maps drawn up by the land surveyors themselves between 1863 and 1866, after the Corleo Law and kept in the Archivio di Stato, Trapani. What is noticeable on these maps is that the land has been divided into several quadrangular plots, very similar to each other, but not all of the same size. Especially interesting is the comparison between an 1835 map, preserved in the Archivio Diocesano.
of Mazara del Vallo, reproducing the Ferla feud, and another map, reproducing the same feud drafted in 1865. We can see that, while the map of 1835 has no internal division, the next one is organised with regular plots, which don’t seem to correspond to any ancient land division. Not even the overall shape of the feud represented in the map of 1835 appears, however, to be related with ancient measures.

As far as we can assume from gathered data, there is a strong relationship between settlement selections, regional resources and water supply, as attested by the proximate Salemi - Mokarta area (Di Miceli & Spagnolo, 2009). In regards to water supply, the firm relation between aquifer availability and the presence of ancient settlements is evident. It can be seen that still working, covered wells are arranged around antique and medieval establishments, as for Casa Perrone/Sinubio, Chelbi and Casale Nuovo. Among territorial resources connected to the settlement patterns we find quarries, farming land, the easy connection to the harbours of Lilybaeum and, above all, to the port at the mouth of Mazaro as well as pastoralism. Indeed the area is crossed by the "trazzera" no. 591, which follows the coast and probably perpetuates an ancient road, and the no. 23, which enters the inland lining the Mazaro River and probably follows a previous track as well. Protohistoric settlements and coeval necropolis are placed along the river Mazaro (Calafato, Tusa & Mammina, 2001; Ingoglia & Tusa, 2006); therefore this concentration suggests this river as the reference element for early sites.

In the examined territory, in the Zizza area, a sizeable (2,20 ha) Hellenistic settlement was discovered. It was placed on a plateau at about 150 m above sea level. The plateau is surrounded by overhanging faces on three sides, defined by a noticeable slope to the east. It is a remarkable agricultural site and it enjoys an extraordinary view toward the sea to the south and toward the hills to the north. This site is characterised by the presence of extremely fragmented flat tiles belonging to the Hellenistic period (Wilson, 1979) and of amphorae commonly known as Greco-italic. Although fragmented, these resemble the Vandermersch V (Vandermersch, 1994) and they could be dated from the end of the fourth century BC to mid third century BC (Rizzo, 2014). The presence of severely ruined coarse pottery and the absence of black glaze pottery, indicates that the settlement had an especially agricultural vocation besides territorial control. The connection with the coast should have been assured through a path as far as the sea. The location of the Zizza site allows comparison with other Hellenistic sites in West Sicily, for example Rocca Nador (Bejor, 1972-1973), in the Sciacca district, and Cozzo Sannita, in the Himera area (Lauro, 2009) whose development was connected to their advantageous position along the routes running from the coast inland. Presumably the Zizza settlement did not survive the events following the first Punic war and was abandoned; on the other hand other sites that were placed at slightly lower altitudes appear to be more active in the period after the Punic wars, probably due to new traffic interests. Three other Hellenistic sites may have provided territorial control or could have been used to simplify farming, according to the restricted size (with a surface less than 0.50 ha) and their adjacent position, on the same hill crest. This alignment probably indicates the presence of a path along the hill ridge. Rough pottery and fragments of Greco-italic amphorae resembling Vandermersch V/VI (in the middle of the third century BC; Rizzo, 2014) and Vandermersch VI (240-220 BC; Rizzo, 2014) were discovered in these sites.

The majority of settlements, which developed significantly during the Roman period, existed since Hellenistic Age, as demonstrated by fragments of Greco-italic amphorae, by deteriorated and fragmented flat tiles (Wilson, 1979) and by black glaze pottery, comparable to Campana A or C (Morel, 1981) or to poor quality local production (Del Vais, 1997). The association of coarse pottery with black glaze pottery has not been found in every discovered Hellenistic site; on the other hand Greco-italic amphorae and coarse pottery fragments, mainly from big containers, coexist in some sites. According to this
data, these settlements were chiefly designed for farming and storage. The Timpone Rasta house in “contrada” Mirabile dates back to the second century BC and, by now, it is the sole excavated site in the area (Fentress, 1998; Fentress, Kennet & Valenti, 1986). In the whole investigated area there is a preponderance of Greco-Italic amphorae in comparison to Dressel 1A amphorae (last quarter of the second century to the beginning of the first century BC: Manacorda, 1989; Rizzo, 2014). According to available information, it appears clear that in the overlapping of artefacts of different periods, the earliest phases seem to be more restricted and cover a less extensive surface rather than successive phases dated in the central Roman Imperial period or in Late Antiquity.

Fragments of Italic sigillata were located in many sites, however its presence is very scarce compared to African red slip ware, such as in the site of Giudeo (figs. 2-3). Despite the fact that the Sicilian agriculture was exalted (Strabo 6.2.7), the apparent scarcity of Italic sigillata, together with the rare recovery of thin walled pottery, could be connected to the loss of strategic importance of the island due to the Pax Augustea and to the designation of Italian wheat provisions to Egypt (Vera, 1997-1998). The majority of the sites furnished material evidence from the Roman Empire period, especially D production ceramic, as well as a small quantity of A and C. In the territory, red slip ware decorated with water leaves of A production (Hayes, 1972 forms 2-3 end of the first century AD – second century AD) is largely documented. We found fragments of red slip ware resembling the Hayes form 24 (end of the second century AD-beginning of the third century AD) and slightly curved, smooth tiles (Wilson, 1979). The period between the fourth and seventh centuries AD seems to be well documented by the large presence of red slip ware (Hayes forms 50; 61; 86; 91; 9D, 104; 109; for last shapes see Tortorella, 1998) and containers made out of coarse pottery, presumably of north-African production (LR Basins; Bonifay, 2004). Fragments of quadrangular braziers popular in Vandalic Africa (Bonifay, 2004) were found in Giudeo; cooking pottery resembling Sidi Jdidi types (Bonifay, 2004) and Pantelleria ware, were discovered in some settlements.

In the whole examined territory the presence of huge farm-villas is undeniable (with a high average surface area between 2.2 ha and more than 10 ha, or proper villages, in sites that were previously occupied by farms, which progressively grew into a village (Vera, 1999), as also noted in the case of Campaniaio in the Agrigento area (Wilson, 2000) and in the western part of Sicily (Belvedere, 1998; Cambi, 2005) or in Piazza Amerina district (Bowes et al, 2011). Some smaller sites located in the countryside could be considered as support for large farms, as for the ones noted not far away from Biesina and Casale Amodeo. The presence of “minor” sites could indicate that settling organisation was complex (fig. 4). The settlement found in San Miceli zone covers a remarkable area of about 19 ha and was presumably used from the Hellenistic period at least up to the sixth-seventh century AD. It was probably connected to the Carrebe quarries (fig. 1). In this case it would be more appropriate to think of this site as a sort of urban centre that rose behind the emporion at the Mazaro mouth.

Combed tiles used all through the Byzantine period, but introduced at least in the beginning of the fifth century AD, were found in different sites of the territory (Wilson, 1979). In addition there is an abundant presence of middle sized (Keay XXV: Keay, 1984) and large size amphorae (Keay LV; Keay LVII), late red slip ware and spatheia (Keay XXV, 2; XXVI) which circulated up until the seventh century AD (Bonifay, 2004). This copiousness of African containers indicates that, starting from the fourth century AD, there was a close contact with North Africa due to food exchange and suggests the existence of broad cereal farming. The credit for the intense settling, which started in the fourth century AD, did not belong completely to the gained strategic importance of the coast facing North Africa; preferably, the main cause was the strengthening of the role of cereal and the fact that the firm relationship between West Sicily and the Vandalic Africa in the fifth century could have advantaged beneficial exchange. This relationship
with North Africa kept on until the seventh century. Because of the problem of prolonging the artefacts usage as well as the condition of knowledge concerning local production pottery (Ardizzone, 1999; Molinari, 2014), it is hard to establish if there was a settling continuity between the seventh century and the tenth century. As it is my opinion that the apparent decline of rural settlements, noticed in other parts of Sicily during the seventh century (Corretti et al., 2004; Molinari & Neri, 2004) could be related to soil depletion due to years of exploitation with monoculture (Johns, 1992). With the Arab period, some sites seem to have survived, as Casale Nuovo, where a golden semissis from the Syracuse mint was found, dated from 866-867 (Grierson, 1973). In this settlement is certified the presence of fragments of pottery with "pavoncella" decoration and monochrome glaze pottery from the tenth to the eleventh centuries (Molinari & Valente, 1995) even though the latter has been used at least up to the thirteenth century. As suggested by the donation made in 1093 by Ruggero to the bishop Stefano (Starrabba, 1893), in the eleventh century there was still at least one living village in the observed area. Some bone fragments together with ceramic of the tenth – eleventh centuries, as well as earlier materials, were found in a field in Chelbi Maggiore, after the soil had been turned by deep ploughing. This fact leaves plenty of doubt regarding the site interpretation. The survival of the Casa Perrone settlement was aided by the proximity of water and, probably, by the presence of a mill (during the survey a grain pit was identified) carried on by the toponym “la Mola”.

References

Amari M, 1880: Biblioteca arabo-sicula 1, Loescher, Torino/Roma.


Castiglione A, 1878: Sulle cose antiche della città di Mazara, Tipografia Bagolino, Alcamo.


Molinarì A, 2014: Le ricerche nel territorio di Segesta-Calathamet-Calatafimi ripensando ad un ventennio


