

Élisabeth Lesnes – Randall W. Younker

SAN MICELI

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN RURAL SETTLEMENT
IN WESTERN SICILY

With a Foreword by Roger J. A. Wilson



INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

«L'ERMA» di BRETSCHNEIDER

On the cover

Mosaic A, with bird after the restoration.

On the back cover

Hypothetical reconstruction of Basilica 1, view from the northwest (J. Wilson).

Élisabeth Lesnes - Randall W. Younker

SAN MICELI

AN EARLY CHRISTIAN RURAL SETTLEMENT IN WESTERN SICILY

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Élisabeth Lesnes - Randall W. Younker

SAN MICELI
An Early Christian Rural Settlement
in Western Sicily

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2. Monumenti Paleocristiani

*Printed in Italy with respect for the environment on paper from areas
with controlled deforestation.*

*This volume is dedicated to the memory of Fred Oscar Younker
Who showed tremendous support for this project
through his love, enthusiasm, and financial help*



*“A villa that has a church
is similar to God’s Paradise”*
Giovanni Crisostomo, Bishop of Constantinople (400 AD)

Abbreviations

approx. = approximately
ca. = circa/about
cent. = century
cf. = confront
diam. = diameter
DND = data not available
ext. = external
fig./figs = figure/s
frag./frags = fragment/s
h. = height
int. = internal
L = locus
max. = maximum
min. = minimum
no./nos. = number/s
p./pp. = page/s
sup. = superior
tab./tabs = table/s
thick. = thickness
tot. = total
w. = width

Andrews University has a long history of archaeological research going back to who might be called the “Father of Adventist Biblical Archaeology”—Dr. Siegfried Horn, former Dean of the SDA Theological Seminary. Larry Geraty, William Shea, then Randall Younker.

Projects in Jordan, Israel, Cyprus, Turkey and Sicily—each project has focused on a unique period of Biblical History—earliest Biblical history in eastern Anatolia in the Mt Ararat region, the first Israelite settlements in Transjordan, the period of Solomon’s reign in Israel and the emergence of Christianity in Sicily. Collectively this research has helped us better understand the Bible and its world—a knowledge that has not only laid the foundation for Western Civilization, but offers a message of hope and peace for troubled times.

Helping the local community—Sicily has been the first home for young people escaping terrible situations in Africa—the San Miceli project has been proud to helping migrants get a new start with respected research work—the certificates they earn from the work have helped them get the legal papers to begin a new life in Europe. The work of the migrants has been highlighted in local media.

Insights into the emergence of Christianity!

Scholarship—the Andrews Way!

John Wesley Taylor V
President of Andrews University

The Paleo-Christian ruins at San Miceli have long been known for the treasures they produced in the initial, but brief “salvage” excavations conducted by the imminent Sicilian archaeology professor, Antonino Salinas, in October of 1893. Especially noteworthy was the early Christian basilica with its three superimposed mosaics, some of which contain important Greek and Latin inscriptions, dating from the 4th to the 7th centuries; the necropolis of which over 65 tombs were excavated; and the gold jewelry of an important lady whose remains were found in Tomb 54; many of the gold pieces are still on display in the Salinas Museum in Palermo.

However, while Salinas’ discoveries were significant and exciting, his work left many unanswered questions, especially about the stratigraphy of the church and the precise dating of the occupational levels, as well as the actual nature of the ancient settlement.

Fortunately, the new excavations conducted by Andrews University with the support of the Superintendency of Trapani and recently the Archaeological Park of Segesta, have helped answer many of these questions and have revealed new significant discoveries. The occupational history has been clarified, essentially placing Salinas’ initial proposals which dated the phases of the settlement to between the 4th and 7th centuries on a firm foundation; the discovery of more than 35 new tombs; the discovery of possibly the earliest Christian baptistry in Sicily; and the exposure of a large structure that has been variously described as a villa rustica, or a mansio.

These new insights and discoveries are thoroughly described, explained and illustrated in this present volume, with contributions coming from both the core staff led by Dr. Elisabeth Lesnes and Professor Randall W. Younker, as well as members of their excavation team, and a variety of specialists. The San Miceli team is to be commended for its work which will undoubtedly make a significant contribution to understanding the emergence of Christianity in Sicily.

Jiri Moskala

Dean of the Theological Seminary at Andrews University

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FOREWORD

by Roger J. A. Wilson

I shall never forget my first visit to San Miceli. It was in the early summer of 1973 during the period when I spent a year studying in Sicily. I had just come across Vincenzo Tusa's note in *Bollettino d'Arte* about his restoration of the cover building over the San Miceli mosaics.¹ I read this in the library of the Palermo Soprintendenza, then part of the complex of what at the time was called the Museo Archeologico Nazionale.² Off the library opened the office of the Superintendent – at the time Vincenzo Tusa himself. I knocked on his door and he kindly made arrangements straight away for me to visit San Miceli. This was in the days when Sicily had only three Soprintendenze alle Antichità, as they were then called, and Trapani province was part of his responsibility. Until that moment I had not even known that there was still something to be seen at San Miceli. I had first learnt about the site from the fold-out plan in the fourth volume of Biagio Pace's wide-ranging account of Sicilian archaeology,³ and then followed that up with a perusal of the young Biagio Pace's report of Salinas' excavation, published in 1916 when he was just 27 years old.⁴ I was thrilled to have the privilege in 1973 of seeing first-hand at S. Miceli one of the oldest Christian churches in Sicily, and the only one where superimposed levels of floor mosaic were (and still are) visible *in situ*.⁵

But after 1916 San Miceli slept for too long, for nearly a hundred years, without arousing the curiosity of researchers until the present project started in 2014⁶. A very full interim statement of the new work appeared with commendable speed in 2016, and an exhibition catalogue of the finds selected for display in Salemi's Museo Civico only two years later.⁷ Further excavation followed, and now, in the pages that follow, we have the impressive final report on the excavations, first published in Italian (2023) and now in English, making the results of this project internationally accessible to a wider readership of both students and scholars.

So wherein lies the importance of San Miceli in general, and of this project in particular? Firstly, there is the settlement itself, which the latest excavations have sampled and about which we have welcome fresh information. Sicily was known in Roman and late Roman times for the agricultural fertility of its soil, and the contemporary rural landscape was dotted with farms, villas and villages. San Miceli belongs to the last of these categories, a type of settlement which seems to have become common in the Sicilian countryside only after the latter became safe to live in after the end of the Second Punic War. It is inconvenient to dwell on a waterless hill-top unless there were security reasons for doing so,

¹ Tusa 1966.

² The transfer of the former Musei Nazionali in Sicily from the Italian State to the Regione Siciliana took place in 1977.

³ Pace 1949, pp. 318–319 with folding plate A, facing p. 320.

⁴ Pace 1916.

⁵ Mosaics in paleochristian churches in Sicily are still very few in number. In 1973, the mosaics in the church at Punta Secca ('Kaukana': Pelagatti, Di Stefano 1999) were protected under sand; sadly, most were destroyed by vandalism in the early 2000s and only a single fragment is now visible. The sixth-century Pirrera church mosaics (Gentili 1969: in Ragusa Museum) and that from via Dottor Consoli in Catania (Tortorici 2016, pp. 29–34: lifted in the 1950s, and in store for decades – I have never seen it) are not *in situ*. The two floor mosaics in the little church at Nunziata di Mascali, CT (surely not earlier than the late sixth century), excavated in 2013/2014, are the only other ones to my knowledge preserved *in situ* in Sicily (Buda, Taormina 2014; also Buda 2016).

⁶ The first very small-scale investigations in fact took place in 2003–5 and 2008.

⁷ Lesnes, Younker 2016; 2018.

and the *pax Romana* led to a gradual abandonment of many of the hill-towns of the interior and their replacement by a more dispersed pattern of rural settlement in the well-watered valleys below. These were also closer to the road systems, both major and minor, facilitating both transport and trade. Villages vary enormously in size, between 3 hectares and 20 hectares or even more.⁸ The precise extent of the ancient settlement at San Miceli is still not certain, but it appears to be at the smaller end of the scale. Depending on size, such nucleated settlements could have offered a range of service industries, but they were predominantly concerned with agriculture. All but the smallest would have had a bath-house, and by the end of the fifth century CE villages with two dozen houses or even fewer would have had a small church.⁹ San Miceli is one of them. We now have countless examples of such *agglomérations secondaires* all over Sicily, known (or suspected) either from the late Roman road handbooks or from numerous field surveys recording surface material which have been conducted all over the island in the past forty-five years. Yet very, very few of these have been sampled by archaeological excavation, especially in western Sicily. I bemoaned that fact thirty-five years ago, and things have changed very little since.¹⁰ San Miceli, on the basis of what we knew from the nineteenth-century excavations, was an exception then, and it remains an exception for western Sicily now. Its vastly expanded data-base of knowledge, allowing a reconstruction of the site's economy and daily life with a detail not possible before, makes it the stand-out example of its settlement-type on the western side of the island.

Secondly, there is the church itself, and the important place it occupies in our knowledge of paleochristian shrines in late antique Sicily. In discussing what was known of it in 1990, I wrote 'a lack of adequate chronological indicators bedevils discussion'.¹¹ No longer. The earliest church with its first mosaic (of which only a fragment is preserved) belongs to sometime in the later fourth or the early fifth century, with a replacement mosaic laid on top of it at some stage in the course of the fifth. The plan of the church is now clear, as is that of the slightly larger one which replaced it in the sixth century. The western apse is interesting. It points to an early date, but not necessarily to the fourth century. There are enough churches with western apses in places such as Tripolitania which are clearly of fifth-century date, and John Ward-Perkins and Goodchild long ago observed that only with Justinian did the eastern apse become the norm.¹² One wonders whether the influence of the most famous early church of them all, St Peter's in Rome, which also has a western apse, was the main driver of this early orientation. In Sicily, a western apse is also found in the village church at Giarranauti in Syracuse province and at the little fourth-century funerary chapel in Catania in via Dottor Consoli, while the larger cemetery church built alongside it at an uncertain date is similarly so aligned.¹³ And whatever the date of the present structure of S. Pietro intra moenia at Syracuse, the western apse there too surely indicates that its origins go back at least in the fifth century, if not indeed to the fourth.¹⁴

The use of Greek in the fifth-century mosaic inscriptions at San Miceli is also interesting. Bilingualism was very much the norm in late imperial Sicily, although one has the impression that Latin was the more

⁸ Sofiana, the best known, is 21 ha; Vito Soldano seems to have been about 40 ha at its maximum extent (Wilson 2024, pp. 241–243 for these and examples of other villages, with references).

⁹ Good examples are Punta Secca ('Kaukana'), with some 20 or so houses or stores (Pelagatti and Di Stefano 1999), and Giarranauti near Sortino, with less than a dozen (Basile 1996).

¹⁰ Wilson 1990, p. 236. Terme Segestane (ibid.) is an important such site in western Sicily of huge research potential, which finally appears about to be tapped: see <https://www.alpauno.com/scavi-alle-terme-segestane> (2019).

¹¹ Wilson 1990, p. 307.

¹² Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 1953, pp. 61–62.

¹³ For these sites, see the references in notes 5 and 9 above. The funerary church with the western apse at Catania is that which produced the sixth-century mosaic. Since a sixth-century church *ab initio* is unlikely to have had a western apse, the mosaic surely belongs to a secondary phase.

¹⁴ Storaci 1995.

dominant language in the western part of the island. That is underlined, perhaps, by the fact that bishop Paschasinus of nearby Lilybaeum spoke only in Latin and needed the services of a Greek interpreter when he attended the council of Chalcedon in 451.¹⁵ If the Kobouldeos, Makarios, Saprikios and Zosimos (all in Greek) of the San Miceli mosaics were his contemporaries and under his jurisdiction, perhaps he had problems of communication more locally as well!

Thirdly, the detail paid in this volume to the totality of the finds is admirable. Every year countless archaeological excavations take place in Sicily, like everywhere else. Most get at least a short note published somewhere soon after the dig is ended, and some receive longer articles with the principal finds of interest illustrated. It is only in a minority of excavations where their directors have the time, patience, energy, expertise and resources at their disposal to bring their time-consuming and labour-intensive work to full publication. Every sherd has potentially a story to tell, so every excavation deserves a full presentation of its finds in order to extract the maximum information about the site under investigation, and not just partial information. This project belongs to that happy minority of excavations which have achieved full publication. The book presents in turn catalogues of the amphorae found (93% of them African, with surprisingly only one Sicilian and five eastern amphorae detected, as well as one Spanish), fine wares (unsurprisingly all African), lamps, coarse wares, coins and more. Later in the volume we have now full descriptions of each grave and its finds and an analysis of the skeletal remains. Of all these reports the one on the glass, that Cinderella of Sicilian archaeology,¹⁶ is a *rara avis* and especially welcome, as is the discussion of animal bones, another topic where the study of material so vital for our understanding of ancient diet is still in its infancy in Sicily. These are the necessary building blocks upon which future research can build, and it is refreshing that both found a place, as did so much else, in the San Miceli project.

For all these reasons, therefore, and more, the present volume offers much reason for gratitude, and I am delighted to be given this opportunity to introduce it. Élisabeth Lesnes, Randall Younker and all their collaborators, in bringing their labours to this impressive conclusion, deserve both thanks and praise from all who care about the rich heritage of late antique Sicily.

Roger J. A Wilson

Easter 2025

¹⁵ *Patrologia Latina* LIV.1061.

¹⁶ Basile *et alii* 2004 is the sole attempt to shine a spotlight on Roman glass in Sicily (although the volume itself is scarce). There is a catalogue of unprovenanced Roman glass in Catania Museum, mostly unguentaria (Parasiliti 2008), but excavation reports that include specialist glass reports for the Roman period are very rare.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

by *Élisabeth Lesnes and Randall W. Younker*

It was during that very auspicious August of 1893, with the fortuitous discovery of some mosaic fragments, a gold coin, and a burial with two golden earrings, that the archaeological research at San Miceli actually began.¹ Thanks to the presence of mind of two young students with a passion for archaeology, Giovanni Baviera and Antonino Lo Presti, the entire administrative system of the time was mobilized, starting with Antonino Salinas, who was then the director of the National Museum and Excavations of Palermo. Official correspondence, kept in the Salinas archives at the “A. Salinas” Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo, revealed details of the organization of the first archaeological research at San Miceli,² while the photos taken by A. Salinas have brought to light some aspects of the landscape (figs. 1, 2) and architectural details of the time that have since disappeared (figs. 17, 26, 38). The results of the discoveries were published by Biagio Pace in 1917, three years after A. Salinas’ death.³ The three superimposed mosaic floors within the basilica were exposed and a total of 65 tombs were excavated.⁴ Once the research was concluded, the wall remains of the basilica together with some small mosaic remnants along the North wall of the basilica were buried, and the sepulchers were filled in, after having been consolidated. In the central nave, however, the imposing mosaic flooring was protected by a shelter with a low wooden roof⁵ which was replaced in 1966 by a brick building commissioned by Vincenzo Tusa, at the time the Superintendent of Ancient Heritage of Palermo.⁶ However, this foundation-less building revealed itself unsuitable for protecting the mosaics which were damaged by both, the pressure from the sliding of the building itself southwards, as well as by further clandestine excavations.

It wasn’t until 2001 that the site and its mosaics were once more brought to the attention of the regional administration then led by Sebastiano Tusa, recently appointed manager of the Service for Archaeological Heritage of the Superintendency of Trapani. An initial project undertook interventions of cleaning, restoration, and consolidation of the mosaics.⁷ Between 2003-2005 the restoration of the mosaics was completed and – with the collaboration of Ferdinando Lentini – a brief excavation campaign was undertaken which brought to light three additional tombs, located in the southern nave of the basilica.⁸ At the same time, an archaeological survey was undertaken in the area surrounding the San Miceli site by Ariana Di Miceli and

¹ The history of the excavations of San Miceli is already partly known thanks to the degree thesis written by (Campo 2005/06; *Idem* 2010/11) and Barbara Palermo (Palermo 2011/12), as well as the research doctorate thesis by Francesco Di Bartolo (Di Bartolo 2015).

² The edition of the chartwork on San Miceli can be found in Lanzarone, Lesnes 2016.

³ Pace, 1917.

⁴ Contrary to that stated in all the essays on the excavations in Salemi, by 1893 the number of tombs excavated was 65, not 58. See *infra* part III “The necropolis”.

⁵ This roof was created by engineer Urso from the Regional Office for the Conservation of Monuments of Sicily. In 1933, the new director of the National Museum of Palermo, Paolino Mingazzini, described it in a rather critical manner (Lanzarone, Lesnes 2016, pp. 77-78, docs. 23, 24).

⁶ Tusa, 1966.

⁷ The restoration intervention was undertaken by the company ARKÉ, led by Livia Alberti, and the results were published in 2004 (Alberti *et alii* 2004).

⁸ Work undertaken under the guidance of the Superintendency for Cultural and Archaeological Heritage of Trapani.



Fig. 1. View of the excavation in 1893 (from the south-west) (Photographic Archive of the “Antonino Salinas” Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo).



Fig. 2. View of the excavation in 1893 (from the north-east) (Photographic Archive of the “Antonino Salinas” Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo).

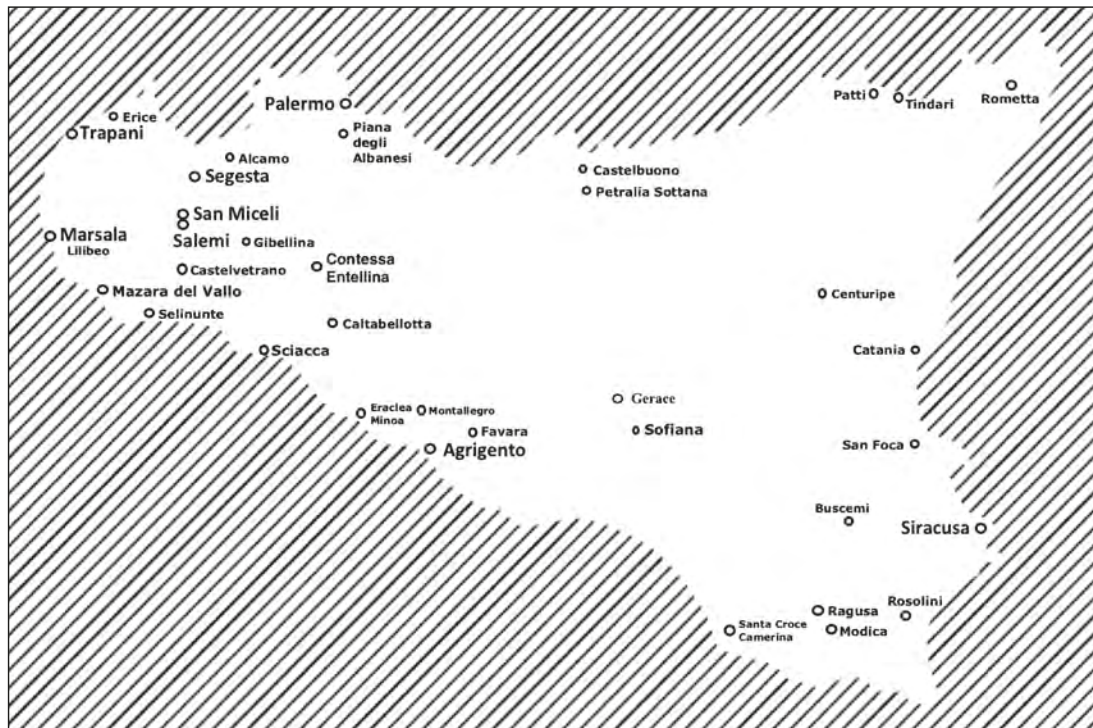


Fig. 3. Map of Sicily showing the main places mentioned in the texts.

Maria Carmela Spagnolo, provided more precise details on the extent of the settlement and its chronological limits.⁹ All around the site, scholars identified a wide area of ceramic fragments covering a rather long chronological arch from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD; this demonstrated that the territory was inhabited even before the building of the basilica.

Further excavations were undertaken in 2008, to the north and south of the old protection building, to determine the incidence of the structures provided for the project in the submerged archaeological context.¹⁰ Three probes by Emanuele Canzonieri revealed the northern wall of the basilica and a transversal wall, and four new tombs. Due to a lack of funds, the excavations were suspended shortly after they began.

What relaunched interest in the San Miceli site was our proposal to resume research throughout the archaeological area, with a project from this settlement within its context of ideological-religious transition from a pagan society to a Christian community.

The history of San Miceli in fact takes place in that period of great change, between the 4th to the 7th century, which led all the way to the end of the ancient world and the beginning of the early Middle Age. The main impetus to this progressive evolution was given by the affirmation of Christianity which, as well as modifying the ways of thinking and living of the Roman people, also favored the transformation of the territorial structure: abandonment or

⁹ Di Miceli, Spagnolo 2016.

¹⁰ Work undertaken under the direction of Dr Rossella Giglio, from the Superintendency of Cultural Archaeological Heritage in Trapani.

transformation of the villas, simplification of the settlements into centralized villages, construction of buildings of worship.¹¹

San Miceli contributes to the understanding of these changes, with particular reference to the characteristics of its rural settlement structure and to the phenomenon of Christianization, to the form and modality of occupation, to its agricultural and artisanal organization, to the construction types and techniques and, to a certain extent, to the economic and social system.

This publication, therefore, represents a further stage in the research of the San Miceli site and in the dissemination of the results obtained from our archaeological investigations from 2014 to 2019. It has been truly gratifying for us to work at San Miceli and contribute to implementing with new data the studies dealing with the spread of Christianity and its religious structures in Sicily, as well as those investigations into the dynamics of rural populations, in an area of the province of Trapani where surface explorations have multiplied over the past decades (fig. 3).

1. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA (figs. 4-5)

The area under investigation is located in the north-eastern sector of sheet no. 257 II NW of the “Salemi” IGM, at the geographical coordinates 37°49’58” as the northern latitude and 12°48’27” as the eastern longitude. The site lies on a hilly slope, exposed to the south, at a topographic elevation between 310 and 314m above sea level, at a distance of around 1.7km north/east from the historic center of Salemi.

“Contrada San Miceli” – “Contrada Vado” in the map quoted above – corresponds to a green valley with a hilly morphology crossed by the sinuous course of the Giammuzzello stream, in the direction of which the land slopes gently.

The lithologies emerging on the site belong solely to the geological formation of the “trubi” consisting mainly of marl and calcareous marl, at times interspersed with brecciated clay deposited in the late Pliocene era (conventionally dated about 3.5 million years ago) in a deep marine environment.¹²

The alteration of the marly parent rock (65% limestone and 35% clay), together with the abundance of clay, means the site’s soil is suitable for cultivating trees, fruit plants (olive trees, vines, etc.) and vegetables. At the same time, the presence of the water source facilitated the water supply, essential to the needs of the inhabitants and their agricultural and productive activities. The construction materials used in the various buildings of San Miceli are compatible with the lithologies present in the area. All the stones of the wall structures undoubtedly come from the arenaceous formation that emerges a little further north, a few hundred meters from the site, while the cobbles – occasionally found inserted into the foundations – probably came from the bed of the nearby river which transported materials picked up from some distance from the site towards the valley. The intercalation of the marl with brecciated clayey deposits has favored the availability of notable quantities of clay, used both in the preparation of flooring as well as in the binding of wall structures, while the mortar with its predominantly chalky composition – also found in the area – was used in some places to reinforce the stone blocks.¹³

¹¹ Cantino Wataghin, Fiocchi Nicolai, Volpe 2007.

¹² From Distefano, Lesnes, Sangare, “Paesaggio rurale e topografia cristiana” in Lesnes, Younker 2018, p. 16.

¹³ *Idem*.



Fig. 4. Aerial view of the site (2022).

2. ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTIC CONTEXT

The archaeological research at the San Miceli site was initiated thanks to conventions starting in 2014 between the Institute of Archaeology of Andrews University (Berrien Springs, MI, USA) and the Regional Department of Cultural Heritage and Sicilian Identity,¹⁴ in collaboration with the Superintendency for Cultural and Environmental Heritage of Trapani and the Municipality of Salemi. With the creation of the new archaeological parks and the unification of nearby secondary sites,¹⁵ in 2020 San Miceli passed under the administration of the Segesta Archaeological Park,¹⁶ managed at the time by Rossella Giglio, and since 2022 by Luigi Biondo.

¹⁴ Prot. no. 18215 of 15/04/2014 for two years; Prot. nr. 8648 of 17/02/2016 for three years; Prot. no. 26323 of 23/05/2019 for three years.

¹⁵ The Parks project with the unification of the secondary site was created and edited by Sebastiano Tusa.

¹⁶ Prot. no. 860 of 15/04/2021 for five years.

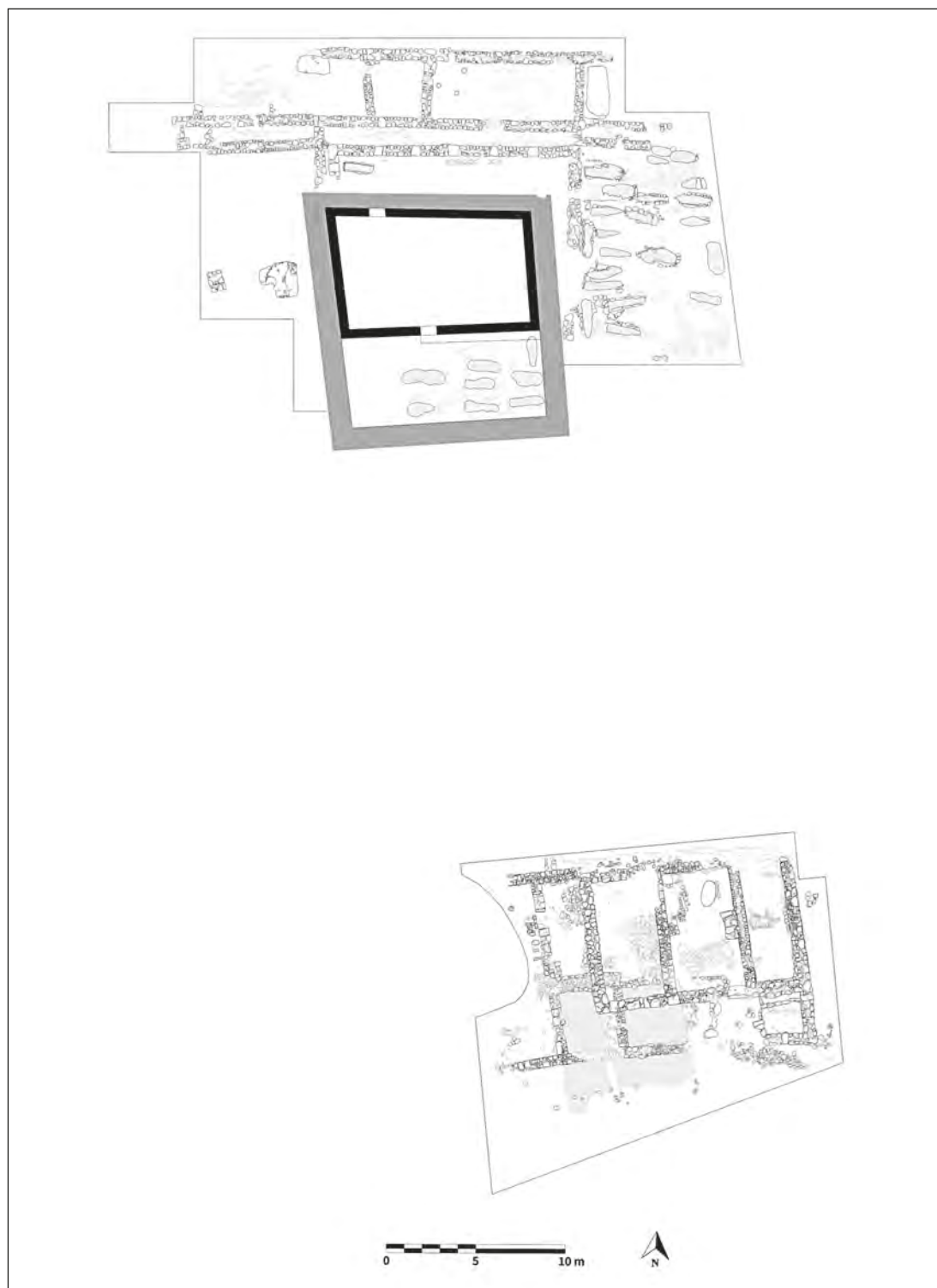


Fig. 5. General plans (2022).

The research was begun and continued thanks to Rossella Giglio, to whom we are particularly grateful for all these years of collaboration and activity which, today, have reached an important milestone with this volume.

Our thanks also go to Luigi Biondo who supported the publication project as soon as he was appointed manager of Segesta Park.

The encouraging outcome of the first excavation campaigns had led us to divulge the preliminary results in 2016 in the magazine “Sicilia Archeologica.”¹⁷ Two years later an exhibition was organized with the rich array of objects relating, through scientific-popular posters, the material and spiritual life of this ancient Christian community of San Miceli. The exhibition, entitled “*Quod Vult Deus*. The beginning of Christianity in San Miceli,” was inaugurated on 1st December 2018 and illustrated through a catalog that repropose the historical-archaeological path of the exhibition along with a description of the objects on display.¹⁸

The loci investigation, led through seven excavation campaigns funded by Andrews University, saw the involvement of a large number of people, some who participated regularly, others less so: professors, students and volunteers, all from different backgrounds, all worked on the laborious removal of the loci of earth and the recording of the excavation data. The study of the materials was otherwise undertaken by our Sicilian group under the guidance of Maria Carmela Spagnolo (Salemi).

The team also saw the occasional participation of professors and colleagues who honored us with their presence: Constance Gane, Paul Gregor, Paul Ray, John Reeve and Teresa Reeve from Andrews University, Theodore Burgh from the University of North Carolina and William Balco from the University of North Georgia.

An essential role in the success of our research was played by Giorgia Lanzarone (Palermo) who contributed to the organization of all the excavation campaigns, actively participating both as field supervisor (Basilica 1, Rooms 4 and 5), as well as coordinator of the laboratory of archaeological materials.

Among the students from Andrews University, Christopher Chadwick, Shellie Cox and Carina Prestes respectively coordinated the excavations of the Villa Rustica, Basilica 2 and Rooms 1, 2 and 6 of Basilica 1, while Jared Wilson concentrated on applying the new technologies with zenithal photographic surveys and 3D virtual reconstructions.

Two young Sicilian archaeologists, Rosamaria Tarantolo (Gibellina) and Jessica Grimaldi (Santa Ninfa), alternated over the years managing the excavation of the necropolis and as internship tutors of high school students from the “Maria Adelaide” Boarding School in Palermo.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lesnes, Younker 2016.

¹⁸ Lesnes, Younker 2018.

¹⁹ We would like to underline the significant role played by the numerous pupils of the high school classes of the “Maria Adelaide” Boarding School in Palermo during their Work Experience internships. The following were involved in 2017: Michele Amaro, Martina Anselmo, Alessia Barreca, Alessandro Bullara, Vincenzo Cacioppo, Mattia Chinnici, Matteo Corona, Francesco Damiano, Moreno Dardanelli, Alissa Dolce, Alessia Ganguzza, Riccardo Gennaro, Marco Gerbino, Silvana Grimaldi, Marina Li Manni, Alessio Li Volsi, Luna Mignano, Benedetta Prainito, Domenico Tanese, Tancredi Teresi; in 2018, Martina Anselmo, Angelo Bertucci, Elvira Bivona, Laura Bivona, Riccardo Cardinale, Sofia Castello, Leila Cavaruso, Giovanni Di Peri, Alessia Ganguzza, Silvana Grimaldi, Rosario Guzzetta, Marina Li Manni, Martina Madonia, Miryam Masetta, Rosalia Mavrikis, Anastasia Rinaudo, Virginia Varvaro; in 2019, Gaia Armanno, Irene Cappellino, Marta Cavallaro, Chiara Castello, Maria Sofia Diesi, Erica Giarrizzo, Marta Guzzetta, Julia Marchello, Giorgia Marciante, Giulia Mascari, Maria Désirée Orlando, Sveva Petruzzella, Floriana Principe, Francesca Richiusa, Francesca Salamone, Silvia Sortino, Giorgia Tamigio, Carlotta Termini, Sofia Valsellini; in 2022, Luigi Campo, Maria Laura Cerniglia, Irene De Simone Policarpo, Maria Alessia Giarrizzo, Marianna La Barbera, Erica Leone, Alica Lo Cascio, Suami Mastrogiovanni, Gloria Montesanto, Martina Panepinto, Marina Simonetti, Riccardo Trifirò.

For the palaeobiological study, we would like to thank Rosaria Di Salvo (anthropologist, former executive officer at the “A. Salinas” Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo) who, invariably, does us the honor of coming to analyze the skeletal remains, even during the excavations, transmitting her knowledge to the students. For the study of faunal remains, we are grateful to Carolina Di Patti (conservator of the “G. G. Gemmellaro” Geological Museum of Palermo) who was able, in a short time, to obtain the information necessary to define the framework of the fauna and food habits of the San Miceli human occupants. We are also grateful to Giuseppina Mammina (archaeologist at the Superintendency of Cultural and Archaeological Heritage in Trapani) who, from the very beginning of the research, has been in charge of the numismatic study. Special thanks to our two restorers for their splendid work: Laura Schepis (PhD student in “Cultural Sciences” at the University of Studies of Palermo) on the amphorae and Francesca Gaia Romagnoli (private company, Pescara) on the eastern portion of Mosaic A. Under their expert fingers, these finds have been granted new life, enriching the itinerary of the San Miceli exhibition. Amongst this list of friends, a special place is reserved for Filippo Pisciotta (PhD student in “Archaeology” in co-tutelage between the University of Aix-Marseille - CNRS, CCJ Aix-en-Provence – and the University of Studies of Palermo) for having accompanied, with his discreet but invaluable advice and suggestions, our studies of ceramics.

We also benefited from the collaboration of other university students, with appropriate archaeological training, who acted as excavation assistants: Vivian Laughlin, Stanley Lebrun, Joel Lisboa, Jacob Moody, Michael Orellana, Anne Oyerly, Justin Singleton, Ron Wakeman (Andrews University); Priscila Ambrosino (Universidad de Valencia - Spain), Layra Blenda Oliveira de Jesus (La Sierra University - USA), Violaine Bucchiotty (Université de Lyon 2 - France), Chiara Caradonna (Università di Sassari - Italy), Roy Casañas (Universidad Nacional de Tucumán - Argentina), Simona Provenzano (Università di Palermo - Italy), Mirko Surdi (Orientale di Napoli - Italy).

We would also like to mention the numerous volunteers who kindly participated in the excavation works. Some from faraway: Adrinna Beltré, Luis Beltré, Camryn Berglin, Conner Berglin, Karen Borstad, Alma Cortez, Mariam Giorgobiani, Lynn Khadija, Joanna Moody, Kirsten Nixdorf, Madeleine Reeve, Charlene Sandrin, Audrey Shaffer, Mark Wakeman; others from Salemi and Santa Ninfa: Emily Genco, Asia Giaramita, Susanna Grassa, Mariapia Di Stefano, Benedetto Lo Palazzo, Francesco Maniscalco, Giuseppe Perzi, Natalia Placenza, Chiara Scalisi and Claudia Sinacori.

We conclude these acknowledgements with a special thought to all the many young refugees from the migrant reception centers in Salemi (Villa Mokarta, Siciliabedda and Terraferma) who spontaneously and enthusiastically joined our adventure. In addition to their curiosity and desire to learn, the desire of many for integration was exemplary. We hope that this experience has helped project them towards a better future.

3. THE QUESTION OF THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN SICILY

The rapid spread of Christianity in Sicily has forever aroused the interest of scholars. However, even today, too little is known about those first centuries of the Christian era, due to the fragmentation of authentic sources, literary, epigraphic and iconographic, whilst the hagiographic ones are often linked to celebratory tales of apostles, martyrs or famous people, to give prestige to a territory and/or a diocese. Although many aspects remain to be investigated on the complex process of Christianization of the island, decades of archaeological research have made Sicily a privileged “site” for trying to understand the times, the ways and

the progressive advancement of the new faith. From the Christianization of Roman villas, to the construction of worship complexes with church, cemetery and baptistry, the penetration of the new religion changed the landscape compared to the settlement system of previous centuries. On the basis of archaeological evidence, the 5th century would correspond to the decisive phase of the Christianization of the countryside and, therefore, to the transformation of the territorial infrastructure which saw the construction of a large number of religious buildings in secondary agglomerations.²⁰

Since the 17th century, local scholars have been interested in the question of the apostolic origins of Sicilian Christianity, since, already in Late Antiquity, the idea was widespread that the birth of Christian communities in the western part of the Empire was due to the apostles.²¹ However, archaeological work in Sicily since the 19th century has indicated that the origins of Christianity on the island were a bit more complicated than hagiographic traditions indicated.²² The first scientific approach to the early Christian events in Sicily began at the end of the 19th century, with the first archaeological research by Antonino Salinas (1841-1914), Paolo Orsi (1859-1935), Biagio Pace (1889-1955) and Joseph Führer (1858-1903). In the 1980s, the re-discovery of the late antique period gave an acceleration to historical and archaeological research on early Christian Sicily, with an increasingly multidisciplinary approach that allowed us to address, in a more complete way, the temporal and geographical paths that the new faith had followed before the “Constantinian Peace of the Church.”²³ The approach of a global archaeology is much more recent, but has already reached high levels of understanding thanks to systematic investigations into rural settlements and the phenomenon of Christian enculturation of the territory.²⁴ One of the themes of this research concerns, in fact, the “Christian space” of early Christianity and the settlement dynamics between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.²⁵

The abundance of Christian evidence along the coasts of Sicily highlights the role of port cities as connection nodes between East and West, while the frequency of early Christian sites found along internal communication routes testify to the importance of road systems in the spread of Christianity.

From the East, Christianity spread westward in two important directions: northward, through Syria, Anatolia (Turkey), Greece, Italy, southern France, up to Spain; southwards, reaching Egypt and, from there, throughout North Africa which became one of the most brilliant centers of the new faith after the 3rd century.

Regarding these maritime routes, Sicily - located in the narrowest part of the central Mediterranean - has represented the “gateway to the West,” open for centuries to the traffic of goods, as well as the movement of men and, therefore, of ideas and religions. The early penetration of Christianity was, therefore, inevitable. In western Sicily, the multiplicity of exchanges with pro-consular Africa, in full Christian expansion, undoubtedly favored the propagation of the new creed within the port cities of Lilybæum/Marsala and Agrigento,²⁶ from where it then spread, along the main axes of the Roman road system, towards the rural centers of the hinterland.

²⁰ For the Italian context, see Cantino Wataghin, Fiocchi Nicolai, Volpe 2007.

²¹ Gelarda 2010, p. 39.

²² Maurici 2005, pp. 28 and 32.

²³ Particular reference is made to the studies by Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa, Vincenzo Messana, Salvatore Pricoco and Francesco Paolo Rizzo.

²⁴ In particular, with the research of Kimberly Bowes, Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa, Patrizio Pensabene, Francesco Tomasello and Roger Wilson.

²⁵ Bonacasa Carra 2010.

²⁶ See the numerous publications by Rosa Maria Carra Bonacasa for Agrigento and Rossella Giglio for Lilybæum.

However, today too little is known about the process of the arrival and diffusion of Christianity in Sicily: there is a paucity of names, few illustrious figures, few sacred places of early Christianity.

Biblical tradition mentions a three-day stop by Saint Paul in Syracuse, in the year 61, during his journey to Rome.²⁷ Although it is probable that the short visit of the apostle Paul started the spread of the Gospel in the eastern part of the island, we do not know if he had found, as in Pozzuoli and Rome, small Christian communities already existing before his arrival in Sicily.²⁸ However, based on the evidence from the Christian catacombs of Syracuse, there is no doubt that Christianity had been practiced there since the end of the 2nd/beginning of the 3rd century.

The first extra-Biblical written source, which alludes to the presence of Christian communities in Sicily, dates back precisely to the middle of the 3rd century. It is a letter sent by the Roman clergy to the bishop of Carthage Caecilius Cyprian, but intended for the Sicilian clergy.²⁹ The topic concerns the attitude to be used towards the *lapsi*, those Christians who had renounced the Christian faith for fear of being killed and who, after the persecution phase, wanted to return to the community of the faithful. Some scholars believe that the recipients of this official letter could have been the Christians of Lilybæum, a natural stopover between Rome and Carthage.³⁰

Another testimony to the role of Lilybæum is that of Porphyry of Tyre - who moved there around 268 - who, faced with the increase in Christians, felt the need to write a treatise against them, entitled *Katá Christianón*.³¹ However, once again, archaeological investigations precede the rare textual sources, proving the existence of small Christian communities in Lilybæum, at least by the beginning of the 3rd century.

Adding further information on the now well-structured organization of the Sicilian Christian communities, there is the first Sicilian council (365-366), which involved the participation of the bishops of the island as well as a delegation of three oriental Arian bishops, representing an attempt to resolve the conflicts between the Western Church and the Eastern Church.³²

Dealing with the problem of the spread of Christianity presupposes that we must also address the pagan reality and its persistence.

By the 4th century, pagan rites had obviously been reduced without being completely prohibited. The ancient monuments were preserved but pagan festivals no longer had to have a religious value. The reaction of Christians against some pagan ceremonies demonstrates the population's attachment to some divinities - Artemis and Demeter/Ceres, Erice Venus - for which their assimilation into Christian iconography became necessary.³³

The progressive affirmation of Christianity did not imply the total suppression of the pagan religion; indeed, it seems to have facilitated a mutually accepted coexistence in sharing of common spaces within catacombs, such as those of Santa Lucia in Syracuse, where Christian and pagan tombs were identified.³⁴ Only at the end of the century, with the diffusion of the cult of relics, did the grouping of the burials of the faithful occur near the remains of a saint.

²⁷ "We landed in Syracuse, where we stayed for three days" Acts of the Apostles 28, 12.

²⁸ Cataudella 2009, pp. 208-209.

²⁹ "*Sed ut ad id unde digressus sermo videbatur esse rursus revertatur, qualis litteras in Siciliam quoque miserimus subiectas habebis*" Epistolary of St Cipriano, Epistole XXX 5, 2. It is assumed that the African diocese had an influence on the Sicilian Christian community.

³⁰ See Gelarda 2010, p. 16.

³¹ Hoffmann 1994.

³² Migne 1847, vol. II, Sicile.

³³ Maurici 2005, p. 2008; Rizzo 2005-2006, pp. 137-138; Germanà Bozza 2016, p. 123.

³⁴ Germanà Bozza 2016, p. 124.

In 313, Constantine's so-called "Edict of Milan" had given Christianity legal recognition, which allowed the faithful to openly practice their religion and to equip themselves with buildings (churches and baptistries) suitable for their worship. However, the Sicilian Christians, still certainly a minority, did not immediately build their churches, perhaps due to a certain hostility within the still pagan civil community, or perhaps to avoid flaunting their faith with a monumental building that was too visible compared to the "houses" of prayer" of the pagans. As Giancarlo Germanà Bozza points out on the case of Syracuse, "the Christian community tended to minimize the importance of the place of worship, as well as that of burial, to give greater prominence to the spiritual aspects."³⁵ To confirm this theory, it should be emphasized that almost all the early Christian monuments known in Sicily do not date back before the 5th century, when, with the *Codex Theodosianus*, the State had adopted laws that required the practice of traditional religion to be reduced.³⁶ The reign of Theodosius corresponds to an important transition for Christianity as, between 391 and 392, laws were issued that prohibited pagan cults without, however, imposing the obligation to adhere to Christianity. During the 5th century, temples were closed, abandoned or transformed into cathedrals, as in Agrigento and Syracuse, and pagan worship essentially became clandestine.

On the question of the beginning of the diffusion of places of worship in the Sicilian countryside, some Sicilian literary and epigraphic sources attest to the presence of churches before the 5th century, owned both by bishops and by wealthy owners in their rural residences. According to recent studies dedicated to the Christianization of the late antique Italian countryside, the role of private owners would have been essential in the creation of this first network of rural churches.³⁷

In western Sicily, the first documentary evidence of a small early Christian worship complex, certainly prior to the 5th century, is found in a letter that the Lilybæum bishop Pascasio sent to Leo the Great, in 443/444, in response to the Pope's precise question on the debated question regarding the exact day of the celebration of Easter that year, as there was a conflict between the Western and Eastern churches on the correct calculation of that date. To defend his position, Pascasio mentioned an event that occurred on the occasion of Easter 417, in a small church in the diocese of Lilybæum: "there is a very small farm, called Meltinas, which is located on steep mountains and with very dense woods, and a small and worthless church is built there. In its baptistry on the most holy night of Easter, at the time of the baptism, even though there was no canal, no small spring, nor water nearby, the font filled up and after those few who were there were baptized, the water, even having nowhere to flow, went away just as it had come."³⁸ Unfortunately, the memory of the toponym Meltinas has not been preserved, even if Rossella Giglio hypothesizes the location as the current church of SS. Filippo and Giacomo, 12 km NE from Marsala. In any case, it is the oldest literary document that expressly mentions a baptismal structure in a rural place of worship. Mentioned for an event that occurred in 417, the church and its baptistry were therefore, built before this event and could date back to at least the end of the 4th century/beginning of the 5th century.

In eastern Sicily, an inscription found near Modica, in the Treppiedi area, attests to the presence of a church dating back to at least the end of the 4th century. It is an epitaph that honors the memory of a certain *Aithales*, a pious and irreproachable man, who died in 396 at the age of 75. It is remembered that, he had built a church with a funerary area on the *Hortesiana* property where he was buried.³⁹

³⁵ Germanà Bozza 2016, p. 124.

³⁶ Maraval 2011, pp. 104-108 and 247-258.

³⁷ Fiocchi Nicolai 2017, p. 203.

³⁸ Gelarda 2010, p. 28.

³⁹ Rizzone 2011, pp. 290-293, Fiocchi Nicolai 2017, p. 207.



Fig. 6. Zenithal view with localization of the excavation area.

Other early Christian buildings of worship, some with an adjoining baptistry, are attested in Sicily and are dated between the end of the 4th and the 6th century: Pirrera in Santa Croce Camerina (late 4th - early 5th century), San Focà near Priolo Gargallo (end of 4th-5th century), Scauri in Pantelleria (5th century), Selinunte (5th-6th century), Santa Maria dei Cerei in Rometta (5th - 6th century), perhaps Nunziata in Mascali – Catania (end of 5th -mid 6th century), Roman Houses in Marettimo (5th-6th century), Rosolini (6th century). To the list of rural churches with a baptismal function, we must add those with only a cemetery function: Eraclea Minoa (5th century), Sofiana (second half of the 5th century), “contrada Bergi” in Castelbuono and “contrada San Miceli” in Petralia Sottana (6th century) (fig. 3).

Sicilian rural areas see buildings of worship closely related to the population dynamics, along the main and secondary roads connecting the territory to the dioceses. These settlements, which rapidly expanded between the 4th and 5th centuries, correspond to a solid production organization, linked to the economic history of Sicily as a supplier of food grain to Rome, and, therefore, to its viability which catalyzes human settlement. Agricultural production was obviously not limited to cereal cultivation alone. Alternative crops and livestock for meat, milk and also for wool, as well as the high productivity of handicrafts and lively trade belong to the economic framework of late ancient Sicily. The Church had an increasingly decisive influence on the organization and control of production, as well as in the marketing thereof.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Volpe *et alii* 2015.

The favorable position of the San Miceli settlement undoubtedly played an important role in the construction of a church. The fact that the basilica also functioned as a baptismal and funerary church undoubtedly contributed, within the organizational strategies of the Christianization of rural spaces, to the revaluation of San Miceli from a “scattered settlement” to an important rural village, a Christian reference point for the entire territory under the jurisdictional control of the bishopric of Lilybæum.

This volume presents all the data from our research, aimed at reconstructing the material cultural history of the settlement between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The analyses, evaluations and interpretations that we have developed during the research are to be considered as still in an evolving phase and, therefore, open to further discussions, especially since archaeological investigation has not been concluded.

To date, the site has only been partially explored: the main buildings of the archaeological area have been identified (Villas Rusticas in Area A, basilicas, baptistry and necropolis in Area B and rooms annexed to Basilica 1 in Area C) (fig. 6), but not completely; furthermore, the investigation of the peasant houses of the village identified both by the surface survey and by the excavation of 1893 and located outside the archaeological area in private land⁴¹ (fig. 55) is still missing.

With the richness of its archaeological material, the diversity of its buildings and its atypical chronology compared to academic debates, San Miceli shows great historical-archaeological potential, opening a window into the life of a small rural settlement in full cultural and ideological transformation.

⁴¹ For the recognition, see Di Miceli, Spagnolo 2016. For the 1893 excavations, see Pace 1917, from p. 732.

PART I

STRATIGRAPHY AND STRUCTURES

I.1 – PERIODIZATION *by Élisabeth Lesnes*

The history of the San Miceli site has been summarized in the form of a stratigraphic sequence, articulated according to a diachrony divided into four time periods of varying duration which we have called “contexts” in Italian, which is equivalent to “Stratum” (figs. 7 and 53). Each period has been further subdivided internally into phases (A, B, C), corresponding to a set of activities/actions as explained in this diagram.

AREA A

Context 1 (in light green). Villa 1 (2nd/3rd ?-4th century)

Phase 1A. Construction (Walls, structures).

Phase 1B. Occupation (Floor).

Phase 1C. Destruction (Collapse of tiles, fills).

Context 2 (in blue). Villa 2 (late 4th-5th century)

Phase 2A. Construction (Trench, walls, structures, floor preparation).

Phase 2B. Occupation (Floor, level of occupation).

Phase 2C. Destruction/abandonment (Collapse of tiles, stones, fills).

Context 3 (in red). Villa 3 (6th-7th century)

Phase 3A. Construction (Walls, structures, floor preparation).

Phase 3B. Occupation (Floor).

Phase 3C. Destruction/abandonment (Collapse of stones, fills).

Context 4 (in beige) Topsoil and fills. Campaign plan formation and creation of the archaeological area.

AREA B/C

Context 1 (in light green). Sporadic pre-basilica structures (2nd-4th century)

Phase 1A. Construction (Work area, structures).

Phase 1B. Occupation (Floor).

Phase 1C. Destruction (Collapse of tiles, fills).

Context 2 (in blue). Basilica 1 (second half/late 4th century-5th century)

Phase 2A. Construction (Work area, trenches, walls, structures, floor preparation).

Phase 2B. Occupation (Floor).

Phase 2AA. Transformation (Work area, walls, structures, floor preparation).

Phase 2BB. Occupation (Floor, level of occupation).

Phase 2C. Destruction/abandonment (Traces of fire, collapse of tiles, stones, fills).

Context 3 (in red). Basilica 2 (6th-7th century)

Phase 3A. Construction (Walls).

Phase 3B. Occupation (Floor).

Phase 3C. Destruction/abandonment (Fills).

Context 4 (in beige) Topsoil and fills. Campaign plan formation and creation of the archaeological area.

Within the time grid, the individual human and natural actions, represented by locus numbers, are inserted in the column of the room to which they belong: room, Nave N, narthex, baptistry, apse for Area B/C (fig. 7) and room, courtyard, extramural east for Area A (fig. 53), which are in turn grouped within each square. A higher average elevation of each action allows the location of the elevational position. Finally, the colors of the boxes and numbers indicate the Loci with datable materials. In the tables of materials (tabs. 1-14) these same Loci are in bold.⁴²

In the graphs of the stratigraphic sequences, in the tables of materials and the plans, the acronyms used are the following:

- **L** for any earth layer, work area, or level of destruction;
- **W** for the walls;
- **S** for structures;
- **D** for doors;
- **F** for floors;
- **T** for trenches;
- **P** for pits;
- **B** for burrows.

In the artifact catalogs, the only abbreviation of the loci is the **L** for locus.

⁴² The tables are grouped at the end of the volume.

CON- TEXT	ACTIVITY	AVERAGE ELEVATION	C5 Room 6	C1 Room 3	C1 Room 2	C2 Room 1	C2 Room 4	C3 Room 4	C3 Room 5	C4 Narthex	C1 Nave N	C2 Nave N	C3 Nave N	C3 Baptistry	B6 Apse	B16 Room 3	B8 Room 3	B5 Nave N	B4 Nave N	B3/B2 Nave N	B1	B9	B10
4	Topsoil	313.7					9 10			0		2		6	7 5 10			3				1	
3C	FB	313		1	1	1			4	4										1	15 18 30 34		4 6 7
3B	Floor	312.6																		Mosaic A	Mosaic A		
	Small Wall	312.7																					
3A	Wall	312.8/311.3																					
2C	FB	312.8	3 4	3	22 23 51	4	10 21 27 35 40 41	46				10										49	
	Destruction (stones)	312.7		32	49 50 60		4 27 31	42 43 50									3	4					
	Destruction (block)	312.6	5		24	5 48 52	8 14 28 30 44 45	13 47 48 49			17												
	Trench of fire	312.2				43 44	33	21	56		18												
2B8	Occupation	312.2																					
	Floor	312.2		54 58	13			57												Mosaic B	Mosaic B		
	Floor preparation	312.1		F56 F59	F48	F32 F40 F55 F51	F58				36 37 38	11 12						24					
	Structure	312					836/78/143	553															
	Small Wall	312.8/312.1	W15 W17	W4	W3	W14/W34	W14	W34															
2A4	Work area	312				41 45	43																
2B	Floor	312.1																					
	Floor preparation	312																					
	FB	311.8		6			47	62															
	Wall/Structure	312.8/311.4	W30 W5 W30 W15 W22 W16/22070 W16 W22																				
	Trench	311.8/311.4		T12			150	163															
2A	Work area	312																					
		311.7																					
1C	FB	311.6					49																
	Destruction (block)	311.3																					
1B	Floor	311.1																					
	Unroofed	310.9																					
	Structure	311.8/310.4																					
1A	Work area	310.5																					
	Bedrock	312.8/310.4					48																

100% - 100% centuries
W1 - VI centuries
second half/first of IV - V centuries
W100 - 100 centuries

2 5 10
15 18 30
28 30
27

Loci with
datable artifacts

Loci without
datable artifacts

38 26

Fig. 7. Areas B and C – Loci sequence. The colors of the boxes and the numbers indicate the Loci with datable finds. In black and white are the Loci without datable finds.

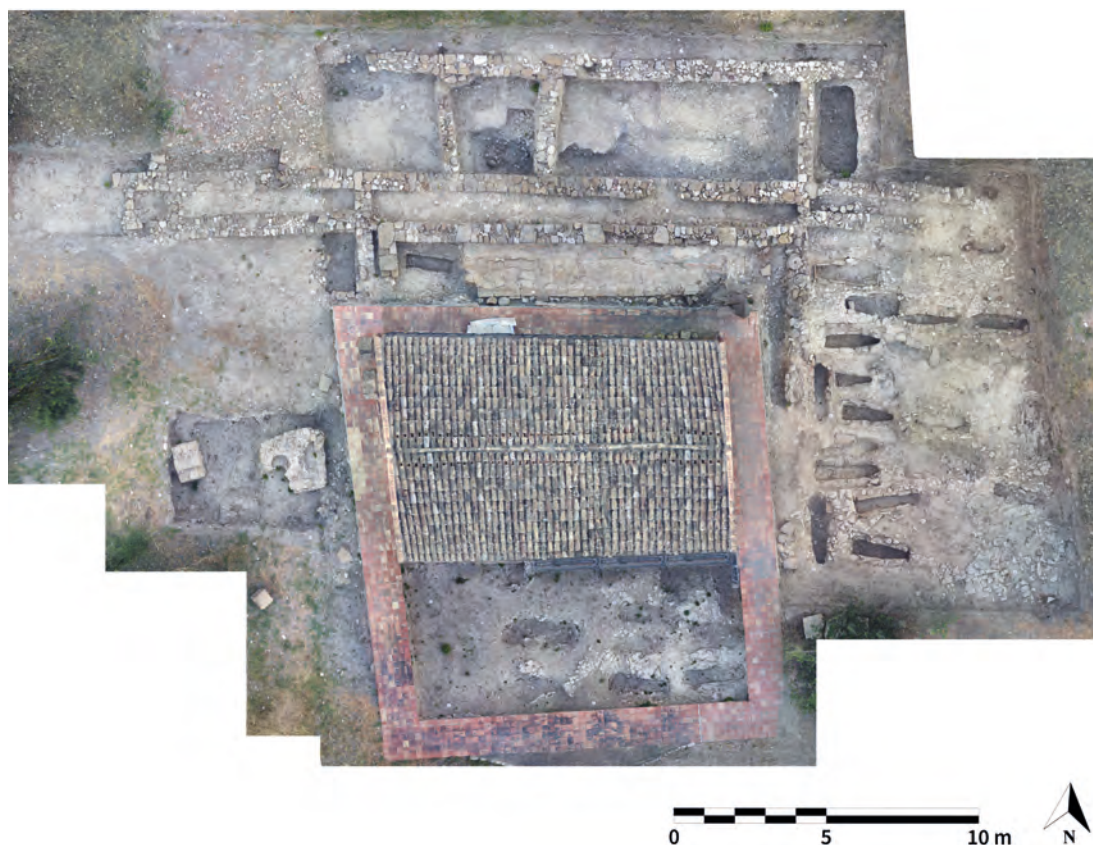


Fig. 8. Orthophotos of Areas B and C (2022).

I.2 – AREAS B AND C by *Élisabeth Lesnes* (figs. 7 and 8)

This area (fig. 9), located to the north part of the archaeological site, corresponds to the area of worship of the early Christian settlement with two subsequent basilicas, a necropolis, and a baptistry, as well as the service rooms attached to the northern nave of the first basilica.

The excavation area (fig. 10) was divided into 26 squares (from B1 to B20 and from C1 to C6) measuring 6 m x 6 m, some of which vary in size due to the presence of the building used to protect the mosaics and the sidewalk, as well as the olive trees that we wanted to safeguard. To date, most of the squares have been investigated although not in a completely homogeneous way and not always down to the bedrock.

Area B mainly includes the sectors pertaining to the basilicas, the baptistry and the necropolis, while Area C mainly includes the accessory rooms intended for domestic activities and the storage of food and various materials.

The upper stratigraphy of Area B was not reliable because the entire area corresponds to an area devastated both by the excavations undertaken by Antonino Salinas in 1893 as well as the renovation works on the custodial building carried out in 2008.

In the northern side nave (squares B2, B3 and B4) some fragments of a polychrome floor mosaic with geometric motifs (fig. 11) were brought to light, originally discovered by Salinas

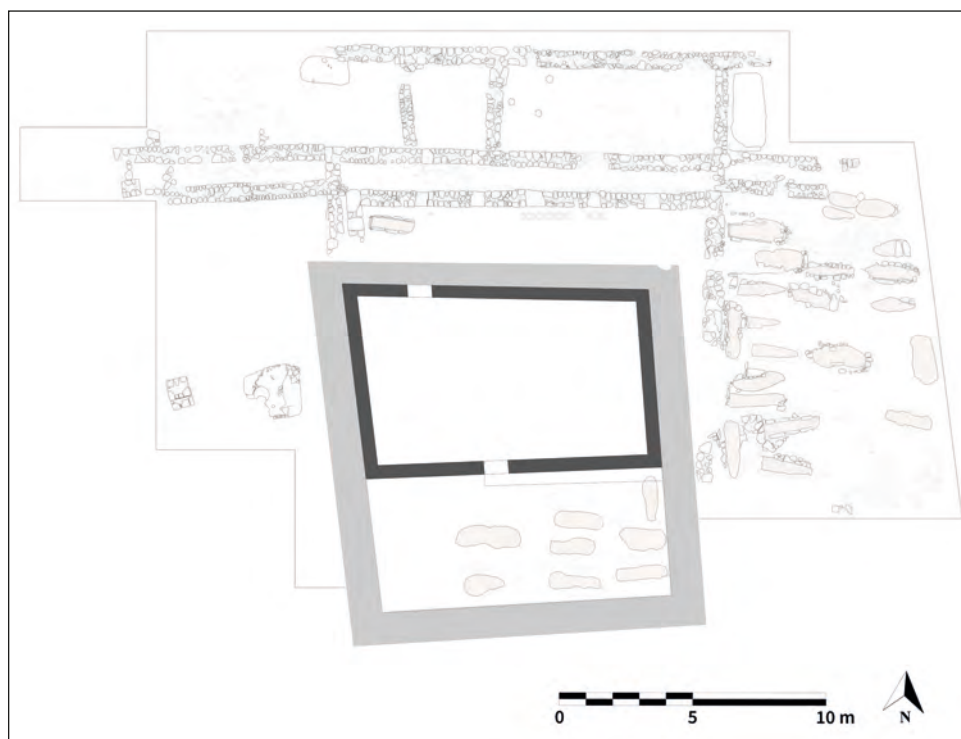


Fig. 9. Plans of Areas B and C.

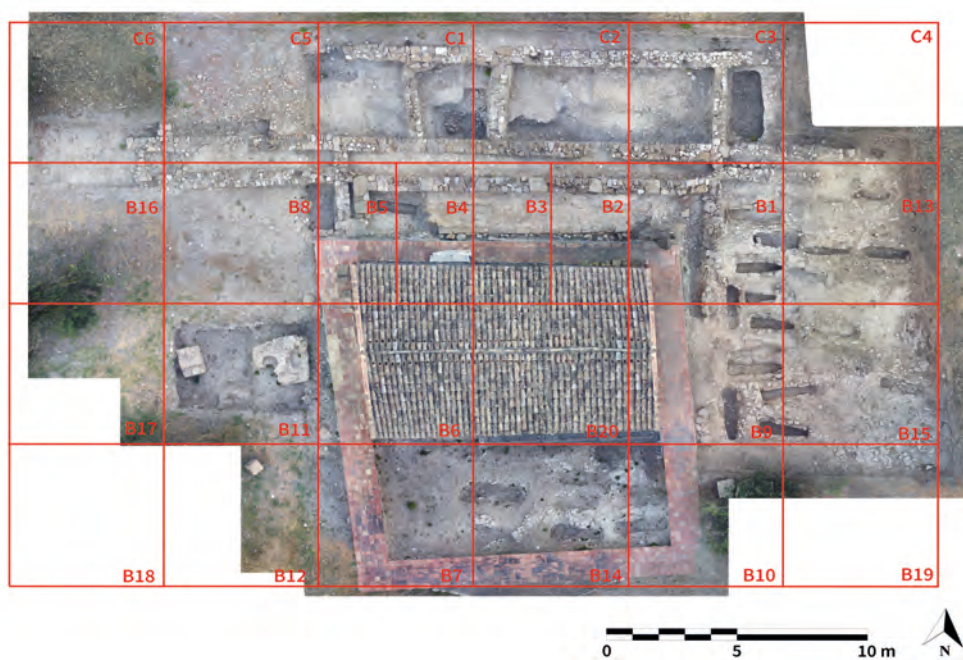


Fig. 10. Georeferencing of Areas B and C.

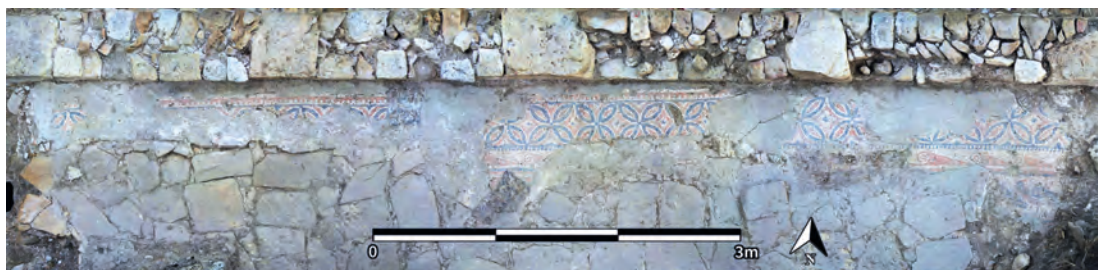


Fig. 11. Zenithal view of Mosaic A in the north nave (2019).



Fig. 12. Detail of Mosaic A with bird in situ (2019).

and reproduced in black and white by Biagio Pace.⁴³ They had already been restored before being protected by a layer of sand and then covered with a thick layer of earth. To our great surprise, in the extension of this floor we found a further section of mosaic that seemed to correspond to a series of doves. Only one dove survives from this series, along with the back end of another in front of it⁴⁴ (fig. 12).

Of the worship complex numerous portions of walls also remains, which permits a sufficiently reliable reconstruction. The excavation strategy has been such that – year after year – it allows us to recognize the overall morphology and the spatial organization of the structures and reconstruct the

chronology thereof. In some cases, it was also possible to identify the functions of some parts of the complex.

The analysis of the wall structures allowed us to identify the various phases of construction, while the acknowledgment of some constructive techniques allowed placing portions of the wall that were not connected to the rest of the buildings (fig. 13).

Phase 1A/B/C – Previous building and stratigraphic contexts at the Worship Complex (2nd to 4th century) (tables 1 and 2)

This building phase which precedes the worship complex is documented by a series of sporadic structures attested in some squares (B11, B16), by re-used architectural elements in wall structures (W5, W12), as well as by ceramic finds and coins. We are not yet able to determine the precise type of the building. However the quadrangular pillars (B16S10 and B11S11), as well as the bases (torus, Scotland), the capital (abacus, echinus, collar) and the grooved tambours of columns, reused in the walls of Basilica 1, are structural elements to be attributed to a porticoed building, certainly a villa whose plan remains completely unknown at present.

⁴³ Pace 1917, table II.

⁴⁴ Lanzarone 2016, pp. 215-218.

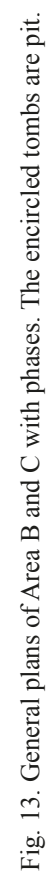




Fig. 14. Wall W12 with reused column elements (from the west).



Fig. 15. Detail of the reused capital (from the north-west).



Fig. 16. Wall W5 with reused column drums (from the south-west).

We can, however, describe these remains of columns inserted into the walls: in Wall 5, there are three tambours ($\varnothing$ 0.50 m) with wide, deep grooves and one simple smooth one ($\varnothing$ 0.40 m) (fig. 16); in Wall 12, two tambours ($\varnothing$ 0.30 and 0.50 m) cylindrical and smooth and of numerous fragments located in various parts of the wall (fig. 14), as well as of a capital ($\varnothing$ 0.45 m) made up of a Doric echinus and abacus, a grooved collar and the beginning of the column with a central hole (fig. 15). Further ancient architectural elements are represented by a fragment of a molded frieze (fig. 17) and three stela found during the 1893



Fig. 17. Fragment of frieze with triglyphs (Photographic Archives of “Antonino Salinas” Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo).



Fig. 18. Pillar S11 (from the east).

archaeological research and described in one of the letters that Eduardo Caruso (excavation assistant) regularly sent to A. Salinas.⁴⁵

Of the two pillars, only S11 has been freed from the layers of earth up to the base (fig. 18). It is a rather imposing structure (1.27 m high), composed of two overlapping parts: an almost square block (0.90 m long and high x 0.80 wide) on the middle of which rests another inverted L-shaped block (0.70 m long x 0.80 wide x 0.60 high) which outlines a step 0.30 m high. The two blocks are made of rough calcarenite stone while the exposed upper part is covered with well-squared flat stones. This system of mighty blocks for the foundation is found in porticoes or as a central pillar base in lower rooms, to support an upper level.⁴⁶

The stratigraphic data, very limited in the space, is linked to what appears to be construction activity (B11L24, 26, 27) (elevation 310.5 m) and/or land leveling (B11L20, 21) (elevation 310.9 m), with flakes of marly stone and traces of burning. The floor (B11F17) (elevation 311.1), connected to the pillar, was a very compact surface showing traces of charcoal. At the end of this phase, we found a layer of destruction (B11L13, 15) (fig. 19). No level of abandonment was identified, as the baptistry rests directly on the layer of tiles. In contrast, in C2, a deep fill was identified (C2L49), which was later used to lay the foundations of the Basilica 1. Within this fill a fragment of an oil lamp (type Deneauve VIII/4) was found dating to the mid-3rd century (LU 522).

Other ancient levels of construction and occupation yielded ceramic material centered mainly around the 2nd century (TS 513, 553, CU 492), while those of destruction are characterized mainly by 3rd-century productions (AN 446, LU499, 522).

⁴⁵ Document published in Lanzarone, Lesnes 2016, p. 64, doc. 10. “I must add that in yesterday’s excavation, in a tomb covered by three large slabs, there was the middle slab which on the internal face was half hollowed out with a beautiful, molded frame with a gable and this is preserved by the farmer and jealously guarded to be transported on his orders to Salemi in the Spedale house together with the three head stones (stela).”

⁴⁶ Sireix 2014, pp. 78-81.



Fig. 19. Destruction layer (B11L15) (from the west).

The residual finds found in layers of the subsequent phases confirm the latest chronological limit of occupation of the site. As “index artifacts” for the chronology of this initial phase are the African red slip wares A with shapes and decorations that can be classified between the 2nd and 3rd centuries (TS 404, 406, 407, 518, 536, 548, 554), and the African IIC type amphora dating to the mid-3rd to the early 4th centuries (AN 310). Finally, the 3rd-century coins (MO 5, 8, 9, 10, 12) indicated a specific currency circulation of the San Miceli settlement in an imperial Roman, pre-basilica era.

Phase 2A/B – Construction and occupation of the first Worship Complex (second half/end of 4th century) (tab. 3)

Throughout the second half/end of the 4th century a place of worship was built that we have called “Basilica 1” in order to distinguish it from a second structure, the so-called “Basilica 2.” It is a small, baptismal and funerary church, the architectural characteristics of which – not yet subjected to diocesan regulations – place it amongst the first generation of places of worship in Sicily.

• **Basilica 1**

Surviving elements of the first basilica include the northern wall (W16), parts of the eastern wall (W41, W12, W13) and a small portion of the western wall (W26 and W5). These main walls are joined by the east/west wall (W30) which extends the basilica to the west.

From a construction point of view, these walls (0.60/0.70 m thick) are made up of two facings of stones of various types, mostly medium sized, roughly hewn and levelled on the surface, with a core of very small stones (fig. 20). The binder used is made up of a clayey earth mortar which, in some places, is mixed with lime. The equipment is rather irregular with horizontal rows that frequently split. The foundations are made from limestone ashlar, large pebbles, with stone wedges inserted between the laying beds. These walls have been set at an elevation that may vary from 311.40 to 311.70 m, on earth fills from the pre-basilica occupation, from which we dug - as mentioned above - only the upper one (C2L49), under the foundation trench (C2T50) of Wall 16.

As already seen, reused column drums have been inserted into many points of Walls 5 and 12, inside the masonry: there are a total of six intact drums, plus a few fragments scattered in various points of the walls, as well as a Doric capital with the beginning of the shaft.



Fig. 20. Wall W16 (from the north).

Regarding the main access to the basilica, it is assumed that it was located in the central point where, today, the eastern wall (W12) is interrupted, before resuming its own route with the south/eastern portion of the wall (W13). This space corresponds to the main nave and is located almost on the same axis as the apse. To precisely circumscribe this opening, the ends of each jamb of the entrance door could be seen in the two tombs (T10, T12) oriented north/south, and the space of the opening in front of which they were inserted could be seen in the two tombs (T25, T26) oriented east/west. For the creation of these last two tombs, it was necessary to combine them in a forced way that is completely exceptional for the necropolis.

In B7, B14 and B10, we had to break the south/east corner of the current pavement to search for the southern wall of the Basilica, which had negative result.

The reconstruction of the shape and dimensions of Basilica 1 was, therefore, hypothetically carried out by overturning the northern walls to the south compared to the longitudinal axis of the church (fig. 21).

This first basilica has rather original dimensions, with its length (about 15 m) smaller than its width (about 17 m). The body, without transept, consisted of three naves divided by six or seven columns - or pillars -, with a semicircular apse to the west and an entrance to the east, preceded by a narthex. Like the apse and the entrance door, the columns seem to have been common to the two basilicas.

Basilica 1 first had mosaic flooring (Mosaic C) of which only a few fragments of the polychrome fabric remain (elevation 312.10 m), in the furthest south/west part of the main nave (fig. 22). The smallness of the surface discovered prevents us from establishing the extension of the mosaic, much less than if it were decorated. The restorers who worked in 2001 described this first phase mosaic as very rustic.⁴⁷ Positioned with very wide irregular spacing, the quadrangular tesserae are small in size (approximately 1 x 1 cm) with various colors and materials: white, black, brown, black-brown, ochre yellow, greenish, pink and red stones and fragments of terracotta in uneven color.

The flooring of the northern nave, of which only sporadic traces of the preparation layer remain *in situ* (C1L38) (fig. 23) (elevation 312 m), was also made in mosaic as suggested by the numerous tesserae found in the layers of the constructive phase. These sporadic tesserae are mainly in white, black, and orange terracotta, quadrangular in shape, and small in size that recall those of Mosaic C located in the main nave.

For this constructive phase of Basilica 1, the stratigraphy is, therefore, characterized by work areas (B1L47; B5L15, 16, 19, 20; C3L26, 28, 29, 30, 38, 39), linked to the con-

⁴⁷ Alberti *et alii* 2004, pp. 222-223.

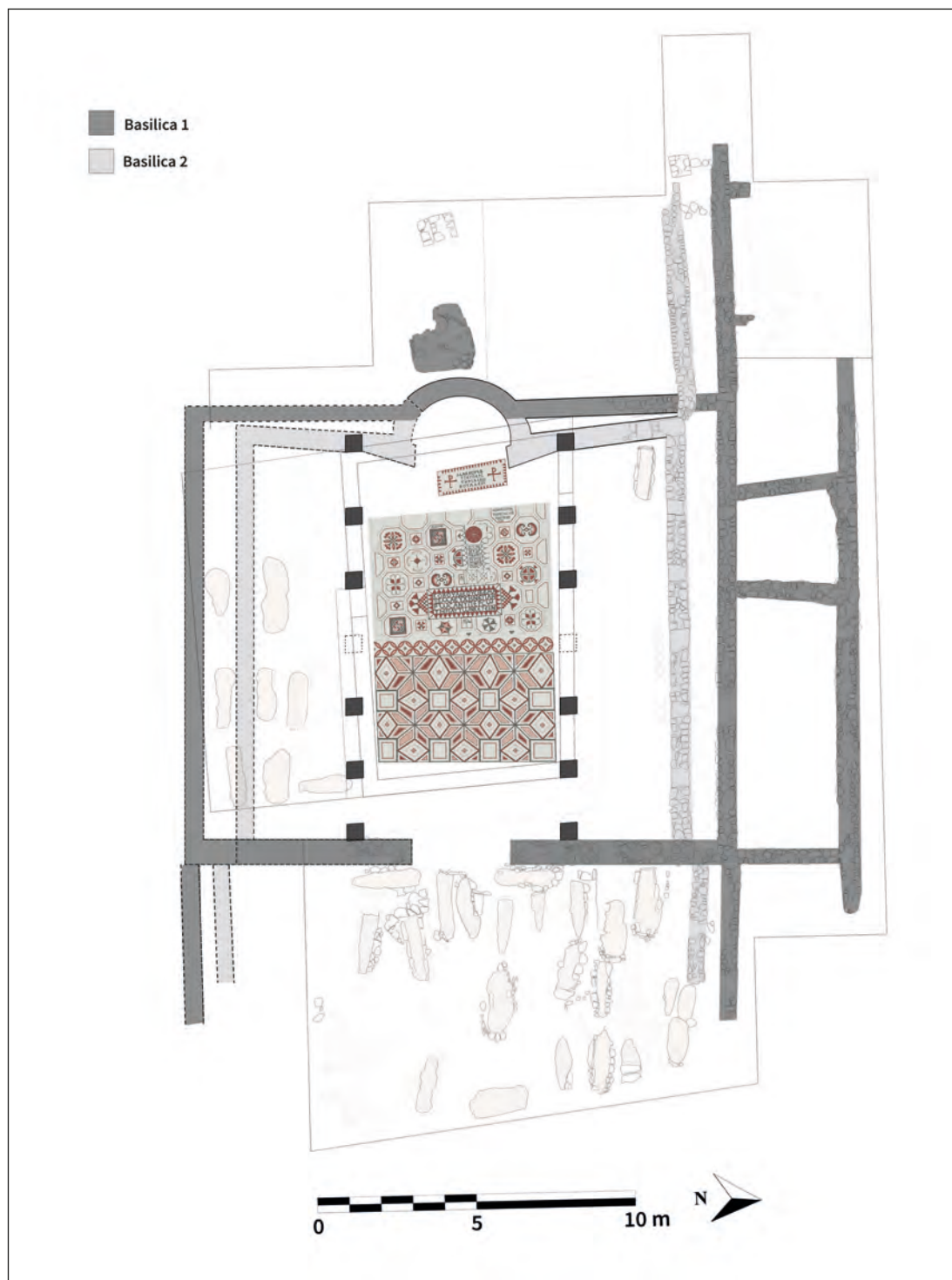


Fig. 21. Hypothetical reconstruction of the plans of Basilicas 1 and 2. Overlay of the structures found with the plan of the 1893 excavations (Pace 1917).



Fig. 22. Mosaic C after restoration (from the east).



Fig. 23. Floor preparation (C1L38) for Mosaic C.

struction of walls, with trenches (C1T12; C2T50; C3T63) and fills (C1L6; C2L47; C3L61), and by a preparation layer (B5L8, 22; C1L38; C2L13) for the mosaic flooring, evidenced by numerous tesserae relating to Mosaic C (TM 35, 253-257, 261).

The overall picture of the ceramics of this context is not particularly homogeneous since there are some remains dating to the 3rd century. The most significant datable elements are represented by the red slip ware produced up to the second half of the 4th century (TS 223, 293) and by the coins found in the work areas, in particular the *folles* of Constantine II (MO 29) and the four *AES* 3 of Constance II from 357 (MO 47, 49-51). The coin (MO 7) from the third quarter of the 3rd century, found in a preparation layer of the mosaic flooring, must be considered a remnant of phase 1, a remain that is not unusual for an *antoniniano*.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Mammina 2016, p. 199.



Fig. 25. Detail Basin S5 with baptismal font (S18) in negative.

Fig. 24. Zenithal view of Square B11 with Basin S5 and Pillar S11.

• The Baptistry (fig. 24)

The baptistry of San Miceli is today the fifth baptistry found in Sicily,⁴⁹ but is also the oldest because it dates – like the first basilica – to the second half/end of the 4th century. It was located behind the apse, in line with the central nave of the basilica. Only a part (2.00 x 2.30 m) of the quadrangular basin (B11S5) remain, covered in *cocciopesto* (elevation 311,96 m), with a single alveolus (Ø 0.60 m), and the baptismal font (B11S18) (Ø 0.90 m) preserved in negative (fig. 25). No trace of a system for the addition and discharging of water has been found, which suggests that the water supply was entrusted to people responsible for transporting water from the stream located less than 50 meters away. Despite the depth of the basin (approx. 0.80 m), there is no certainty that the rite of baptism took place by immersion.

The stratigraphy relating to the use of this basin was completely disrupted by the 1893 excavation, as can be seen by the photograph taken by Salinas (fig. 26). This photo depicts some structures discovered at the time – the mosaic flooring, the wall of the apse, a tomb, the pillar – and documents the upheaval of the entire area where we found the baptismal basin.

The fill (B11L10) inside the baptismal font (B11S18) revealed very few non-datable ceramic finds. The dating of the basin to the same phase as Basilica 1, therefore, takes into

⁴⁹ After Selinunte, Pantelleria, Marettimo and Rometta.