Introduction

The Groningen Institute of Archaeology (GIA) has conducted field campaigns in the Pontine region since the 1970’s, when it became a partner in the excavations of ancient Saturnia. Since then, it has extended its scope with field surveys, intensive site mappings, targeted excavations and geo-archaeological examinations throughout the region, within the context of the Pontine Region Project. In the project’s current phase, the role of minor settlements in the rural economy of Roman central Italy is being examined. Such ‘Minor Centres’ include all kinds of rural settlements that were centres of craft production and exchange, and where religious feasts and administrative tasks were carried out (Tol et al. 2014). Three case-study sites have been selected (Aurora, Forum Appii and Ad Medias), which are being studied by a combination of non-invasive archaeological techniques (field walking, geophysical prospection, coring).

In studying the relationships between these minor centres and their immediate surroundings we adopt above all a ceramic approach, which combines typo-morphological classifications with thin section petrography, and we confront material from invasive archaeological techniques (field walking, geophysical prospecting, coring).

The discovery of physical evidence for ceramic production in the Pontine region is very important, given that it provides secure reference material for local fabrics. Until now production activity have been identified at four different locations in the Pontine plain: At Forum Appii an area with four kilns was mapped northwest of the confluence of the Caivare and the Decumano rivers, whereas an industrial zone was identified northeast of the settlement, based on the presence of numerous milled stones and cover tiles. Waster fragments of amphorae, coarse ware and black gloss are also present, albeit in lesser quantities. The production activity is dated to the late 2nd – 1st c. BC (fig. 2a). At Ad Medias, a kiln and numerous waster fragments were identified, comprising tiles, cover tiles, coarse ware and amphorae (fig. 2b). The recovered fragments suggest a date in the 2nd or 1st century BC for the identified productions.

In addition, a small rural site (12317) yielded evidence for pottery production. The site is located in the interior plain near the Rio Martino canal, which drained the lower Pontine plain to the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west. The innermost part of this plain is an infamous wetland, the Pontine marshes, that was an area with four kilns was mapped northwest of the Decumano River (fig. 1). A pottery kiln and several clay pits were identified (fig. 3), and surface finds include kiln fragments and wasters, which production is tentatively dated to the late 2nd or 1st c. BC, based on associated surface ceramics.

Pottery production in the Pontine Region

The Pontine region is situated 60 km south of Rome. It consists of a large coastal plain, which is bounded by the Alban Hills and the Lepini and Ausoni Mountains to the north and east, and by the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west. The innermost part of this plain is an infamous wetland, the Pontine marshes, that was reclaimed and opened up with the construction of the Via Appia in the late 4th c. BC (fig. 1). The Tyrrhenian Sea to the west. The innermost part of this plain is an infamous wetland, the Pontine marshes, that was reclaimed and opened up with the construction of the Via Appia in the late 4th c. BC (fig. 1). The Tyrrhenian Sea to the west. The innermost part of this plain is an infamous wetland, the Pontine marshes, that was reclaimed and opened up with the construction of the Via Appia in the late 4th c. BC (fig. 1).

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Petrographic Results

Dolium: Coarse Augite, Leucite and Ferro-Manganese Inclusions

This fabric contains sand-sized angular sanidine feldspar, rounded augite, and rounded quartz and weathered volcanic glass inclusions (2.5 mm). Streaks of two types of clay can be identified: the first is red firing with silt-sized mica and iron-rich inclusions, whilst the second is light-coloured with fine quartz inclusions (fig. 7).

Tile: Clay Mixing Fabric

The fabric is characterised by well-sorted monocrystalline quartz, sanidine feldspar, sub-rounded augite (< 1 mm) in a red firing clay. Streaks of two types of clay can be identified: the first is red firing with silt-sized mica and iron-rich inclusions, whilst the second is light-coloured with fine quartz inclusions (fig. 7).

Amphora: Fine Red Matrix

The fabric is characterised by well-sorted monocrystalline quartz, sanidine feldspar and augite (< 1 mm) in a red firing micaceous clay. Occasionally, weathered volcanic glass inclusions (2 mm) can be identified, (fig. 8). It may comprise a processed version of the red clay, used for tile production at Forum Appii.

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