

African red slip ware importations in Valdinievole valley and in Pistoia (Tuscany – Italy): analysis of a trading marker in roman *Etruria*

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Valdinievole area is situated in northern Tuscany, between Apennines chain and Arno river (Fig. n.1).

The valley, passed through by the Nievole river, is divided into a northern upland area and a southern lowland one. In the southern valley a wide marshy area, in spite of several drainages realized throughout the centuries, is extant till today: it is the Padule di Fucecchio (Fucecchio marsh) former *Lacus Focensis*, even at the present day crossed by a a close-knit network of water canals flowing to the Arno river.

At the end of 2nd c. BC the valley was crossed by the road Cassia-Clodia (present day National Road n. 435), connecting Rome to the colony of *Luca*.

Excavations and surveys by Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici della Toscana during the last decades brought to light a considerable amount of pottery that allowed us to know the ancient settlements of this country, characterized by a network of lively trades from Republican to Late Roman age.

The valley was in fact dotted by a lot of farms and *villae rusticae* (Fig. 2): Pievaccia di Vaiano, Pozzarello¹ Grotta Parlanti (Monsummano Terme)² and Pieve a Nievole (settlements of Poggetto str.-Cosimini str. and Via dei Pini³) used for the processing of agricultural and sheep-rearing products, were located nearby the docks of the *Lacus Focensis* canals; Monzone and Fontanacce di Medicina settlements, maybe collecting centres of woods and sheep-rearing products

coming from the mountains, were situated over the lower Apennines spurs⁴.

The town of Pistoia, born as an Etruscan village, became a strategic centre during Roman-Ligurian wars in 2nd c. BC (it was probably the last important point for food-supplies before crossing the Apennines towards Bologna, if it's name comes from *pistoria*, i.e. "bakers"), then a *municipium* on the Cassia-Clodia road. Several emergency excavations by Soprintendenza have been carried out from the Sixties of 20th century, bringing to light ceramics of Roman age (Piazza della Sapienza, Vicolo di Sant'Atto, Sant'Jacopo in Castellare).

Most of the african red slip ware comes from Pievaccia di Vaiano in Valdinievole, site of a *villa rustica*; follow in order of amount Fontanacce di Medicina, Sant'Atto in the town of Pistoia and the settlement of Poggetto str.-Cosimini str. and via dei Pini in Pieve a Nievole⁵. The remaining sites gave a number of sherds under the ten. A synthetic catalogue of the ceramics shapes can be read in Appendix.

The study reveals the remarkable commercial receptivity of African Red Slip Ware by Pievaccia di Vaiano site during a long period extending from at least the end of 1st till the end of 6th-beginning of the 7th centuries AD; importations are mostly concentrated between half of 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Appendix, nn. 2-5, 8, 10-11, pl. 2-5). It seems important to point out that the quantity of African Red Slip Ware type 'A' found in this *villa rustica* is larger than that found in the Palazzo dei Vescovi in Pistoia, the most important excavation ever

¹ Bianchi, Patera 1997; Bianchi 1997.

² Ciampoltrini *et al.* 2000, 255-311.

³ Patera 1997, 87-92; recupero di via dei pini: Fabbri 2000; Fabbri 2001.

⁴ Gambaro 1997.

⁵ Fabbri, 1999, 62-66; Fabbri 2000, 288-292; Fabbri 2001, 80-86; 88.

done in the country. The situation of African Red Slip Ware of East Valdinievole can be connected with the agricultural revitalization begun in Etruria during Severian age (end of 2nd-half of 3rd c. AD), possibly by senatorial families owners of latifundia, which is witnessed by the remarkable spreading of the so-called "Empoli amphora", used for carrying North Etruscan wine mostly to Rome⁶. This kind of amphora is testified at Pozzarello di San Paolo, site that recent studies revealed the centre of economic interests by a rich *libertus* of Late Antonine or Severian age emperor, that sealed his bread or cheese productions by bronze seals with his name, one of them found at Pozzarello⁷. From the settlements of Fontanacce di Medicina and Monzone in West Valdinievole come mostly ARS ware cups type 'A' of half 2nd- middle 3rd A.D. The important excavations at a construction site between Poggetto str. and Cosimini str. brought to light in 1996 many sherds of the big plates in ARS ware type 'A' produced from the second half of 2nd and the first half of 3rd A.D. The current writer was appointed to study just a part of this ceramics⁸: data can be therefore liable to change by the pursuing of studies.

The elegant cups and bowls from Sant'Jacopo and Sant'Atto in Pistoia, dated between 6th and 7th c. A.D (Appendix, nn. 13-15, 19-25, fig. 3, 9) seems to indicate an upper frequentation of these two sites and testify the persistence of wares importations from Central Tunisia towards the town of Pistoia till Late Roman age. As Appendix data show (nn. 13-27), the most rare and elegant wares have been found in urban contexts; this maybe indicates the presence of tasteful purchasers even in the troubled period of the Gothic wars, with the Radagaiso troops raid of 405 AD.

The lamp from the former church of Sant'Jacopo in Castellare, with heart-shaped decorations on the shoulder, dated between 5th and 6th c. AD joins in chronological

horizon of the Late Roman age showed by the excavations of the town of Pistoia.

A common fact both of urban and country contexts is that of the very low number of ARS type 'C'⁹: the datum has been observed also in other internal sites of Roman Northern Etruria, as Fiesole and it disagrees not only with the abundance of this kind of importations in Northern Etruria coastal sites, as Poggio del Molino *villa maritima* near Populonia¹⁰ and the colony of Luni¹¹, situated near the harbours of landing, but also with the remarkable quantity of ARS type 'C' coming from the excavations of Santa Reparata church in Florence¹². This datum seems to point out that wares arrived more easily by Arno river, connecting directly this internal Etruria town with the harbours on the Tyrrhennian coast. The hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the abundance of this kind of ceramics in all internal Northern Italy, where they arrived from the Adriatic Sea landing harbours through the great fluvial ways flowing in that area¹³.

The African cooking ware of Pistoia and Valdinievole is less than half of the total African importations. Even if the contexts of excavations and survey are quite limited, this datum may be explained by the additional costs of transports, mainly on road, necessary for the spreading of the wares after they landend the ports: this maybe caused a surcharge of their prices, making their importation no good value. On the contrary, mostly in Late Roman age ARS ware was one of the few kinds of high quality wares available for sale: it was therefore in great demand, while common wares where locally produced.

African cooking ware from Pistoia and Valdinievole is dated between 1 c. BC and the beginning of 5 c. AD, with a concentration from the half of 2nd c. AD.

⁹ Palermo 1990, 150-158.

¹⁰ Fabbri, 1998, pp. 198-200, 205-216.

¹¹ Luni 1973, 375-380, Luni 1977, 170-172, 379, 382, 486-488.

¹² I'm grateful to P. Casari, who studied the ARS of St. Reparata, for the informations.

¹³ Martelli, Nobili 1982, 99-124.

⁶ Ciampoltrini 1990, 377.

⁷ Fabbri, 1997, 60 – 61; Ciampoltrini, 1997, 62 – 64.

⁸ Fabbri, 1999.

Just a part of this ware is blackened by the fire: therefore it was used non only for cooking, but for manufacturing and preservation of foods, too. African cooking ware comes mostly from Pievaccia di Vaiano *villa rustica* in Eastern Valdinievole; a certain quantity comes also from Fontanacce di Medicina and Sant'Atto in Pistoia, while the other sites gave less the ten sherds. Two types of casseroles from Sant'Atto in Pistoia, dated between the end of 1st and the half of 3rd c. AD (Appendix, nn. 37-38, fig. 3, 11, 13) show for this site a more ancient frequentation than that shown by the ARS ware found here (4th–7th c. AD). Maybe due to the political and institutional crisis of 3rd c. AD, trades became less sure and more expensive, so that for the common ware markets preferred local productions.

Several local common wares imitated African cooking vessels for a long time imported during all the Late Roman age.

Road and river trades in Valdinievole and Pistoia area in Roman time: some hypothesis.

Mostly of the ARS ware landed in the North Etruscan harbours were sold on the markets of the ports and coastal towns, while the rest was carried towards the internal areas of the country, by the *nautae* on the rivers and by the *negotiatores* on the roads¹⁴. Unlike Northern Italy, where a widespread network of rivers was available, permitting cheaper costs for merchandises transports, in Northern Etruria the mostly hilly and mountainous countryside caused a larger use of on-the-road trades, more expensive than fluvial ones. The town of Pistoia, point of roads junction between *Cassia* and the the Apennines crossing passage towards the Po valley, used in ancient times mainly these two important roads for its' trades. *Cassia* road, specially after the deduction of the colony of *Florentia* in triumviral age in the first half of 1st c. BC, served as a way of sorting for imported wares coming from the landing

ports on Thyrrhenian coasts; shipping on the Arno river, the wares landed at fluvial ports of the villages and towns the river passed through, then were carried on secondary roads towards more internal destinations.

The fluvial network of Pistoia country in ancient times, before Longobardian and Communal ages arrangements, had the river Ombrone as main water header, tributary of the river Arno at Poggio alla Malva. It is in doubt if Ombrone river, during Communal period exposed to floods and bed displacements, was navigable in more ancient times by little flat keel ships till Pistoia.

An ancient trail toward Pistoia strictly joined with Arno river, beginning from the river port near Montereppi Etruscan village on Southern Montalbano chain, went through the ridge of this mountain chain till Pistoia, going then to the Apennines passes.

This ancient road, much important as testified by Roman and Medieval settlements, along it, was the shorter link between Pistoia and the Arno valley: it was joined with the roads system of Northern Etruria over which from 5th c. BC trades between Etruria and Po valley were carried out¹⁵. Imported wares, coming from coastal ports through Arno river, headed from this river port the way to the internal countries.

The plenty of African imported pottery found in the coastal towns and in Florence, compared with the quite scanty sherds from the tow of Pistoia, seems to suggest that reaching the internal towns of Northern Etruria was expensive and difficult due to the high prices of road freights. This could explain also the bigger scanty of African cooking ware: common wares were locally produced.

Navigable until 19th century, the Padule di Fucecchio has been since the antiquity a fluvial way connected to the Tyrrhenian Sea via Arno river, over which wares could leave and reach this very internal country of Northern Etruria with lower costs than on road. The Uggia port near the town of Monsummano Terme was used by the

¹⁴ Ettlinger 1987, 10.

¹⁵ Montereppi 1985, 15, n. 28 – F. Berti.

Medici to supply with salt their villa in Montevettolini: the road between Uggia port and Montevettolini is named "Street of the Salt" till the present day¹⁶. Pievaccia di Vaiano and Pozzarello *villas*, located nearby these docks, could therefore use this lake way joined to the Tyrrhenian sea through Arno river. This datum may contribute to explain the plenty of ARS ware found in these two settlements, whose liveliness during the Middle and Late Roman time can be connected with the revitalization of the Northern and Central Etruria *villae* that in Severian age was aimed to the intensive exploitation of the country situated nearby big roads or rivers, to be used as commercial ways, as Arno and Chiana rivers valleys. Between 2nd and 4th A.D. many deserted sites were reoccupied (as Chiarone village in the country of Lucca), many *latifundia*, maybe belonging to senatorial *gentes* owners, were cultivated again. This datum has been connected by scholars with the tax advantages given by Pertinax in 193 AD for the recovering of abandoned farmlands¹⁷.

The abundance of findings of "Empoli amphora" testifies the reorganization of Northern Etruria towards specialized farmings, mostly of which finalized to be

sold on the markets of Rome; to Rome could be committed the food productions testified by the above-mentioned bronze seal of Pozzarello.

Archaeological data show a noteworthy liveliness of the internal countries of Northern Etruria during Middle and Late Roman time, which outlines are looming as a result of recent studies.

APPENDIX AFRICAN RED SLIP WARE FROM VALDINIEVOLE AND PISTOIA

Legend:

ATL = Atlante I

PIE = Pievaccia di Vaiano

POZ = Pozzarello di San Paolo

PaN = Pieve a Nievole

G P = Grotta Parlanti

MED = Fontanacce di Medicina

MON = Monzone

S A = Sant'Atto (Pistoia)

S J = Sant'Jacopo in Castellare (Pistoia)

P S = Piazza della Sapienza (Pistoia)

n.i. = not identified

In parenthesis the number of sherds

¹⁶ Flori, Jori 1969, 8.

¹⁷ Ciampoltrini 1990, 376 – 378; Ciampoltrini 1992, 229-236.

ARS 'A'		
CUPS		
1. Lamboglia 1c - Hayes 8B (ATL pl. 14, 6, p. 26)	3th c. A.D.	MED (1)
2. Lamboglia 2a - Hayes 9A (ATL pl. 14, 8-10, p. 27)	100-160 A.D ca.	PIE (4)
3. Lamboglia 2b – Hayes 9B (ATL pl. 14, 11, p. 27)	Half 2nd-half 3th c. A.D.	PIE (12) POZ (1) MED (2)
4. Lamboglia 3a - Hyes 14° (ATL pl. 16, 5-9, p. 32)	Half 2nd-half 3th c. A.D.	S A (2), PIE (20), POZ (2), PaN 1), MON (2), MED (6)
5. Lamboglia 3b1 – Hayes 14B n. 8 (ATL pl. 16, 16; tav. 17, 1, p. 33)	Half 3th c. A.D.	PIE (3) POZ (3), PaN (3)
6. Lamboglia 3b2 – Hayes 14C (ATL pl. 17, 3 4, p. 33)	End 2nd-beginning 3th c.A.D	MED (1)
BOWLS		
7. Salomonson A9a – Hayes 6a (ATL pl. 13, 15-16, 35)	End 1st-beginning 3th c.A.D.	Pistoia- provenance unknown (1)
8. Lamboglia 23 – Hayes 6B (ATL pl. 13, 18, p. 25)	Half 2nd-half 3th c.A.D.	PIE (2)
DISHES		
9. Lamboglia 9b – Hays 26 (ATL pl. 16, 4, p. 31)	Half 2nd-half 3th c.A.D.	PaN (2), MED (2)
10. Lamboglia 9a - Hayes 27 nn. 1- 2 (ATL pl. 16, 5, p. 31)	Half 2nd-half 3th c.A.D.	PIE (4), POZ (1), PaN (5)
11. Lamboglia 9a2 (ATL. pl. 16, 6, p. 31)	Half 2nd-half 3th c.A.D.	PIE (2), PaN (1)
12. n. i.		S A (11), P S (6), S J (3), PIE (50), PaN (5), MON (3), MED (29)
ARS 'C'		
BOWLS		
13. Hayes 75 (ATL pl. 29, p. 67)	420-450 A.D.	S A (1)
14. n.i.		S A (4), P S (1), PIE (1)
ARS 'C' or 'D'		
CUPS		
15. Hayes 73B (ATL pl. 31, 4-5, p. 72)	420-475 A.D.	S J (1)
BOWLS		
16. Hayes 53B	370-430 A.D.	PIE (2), MED (1)

(ATL pl. 29, 5-6, p. 67)		
ARS 'D'		
CUPS		
17. Hayes 58B n. 19 (ATL pl. 32, 6, p. 81)	End 3th-end 4 c. A.D.	PIE (1)
18. Lamboglia 52c (ATL pl. 32, 8, p. 82)	Indeterminate	POZ (1)
19. Waagé 1948, pl. 9, 831k (ATL pl. 34, 3, p. 83)	325-450 A. D.	S A (1)
20. Waagé 1948, pl. 9, 831u (ATL pl. 34, 4-5, p. 83)	325-450 A. D.	S A (2)
21. Waagé 1948, pl. 9, 878 k, p (ATL pl. 51, 7-8, p. 109)	Beginning 6th-half 7th A.D.	S A (1)
22. Waagé 1948, pl. 10nn. 7-8 k, p (ATL pl. 51, 8, pp. 109-110)	7th c. A.D.	G P (1)
23. Hayes 61 n. 26 (ATL pl. 34, 6-7, p. 84)	325-450 A. D.	S A (2)
24. Deneauve 1972, pl. 2, C771, I (ATL pl. 35, 6, p. 84)	325-450 A. D.	S A (1)
25. Hayes 67, nn. 5-6, 17 (ATL pl. 37, 10-11, 28, p. 88)	360-420 A. D. ca.	S A (1)
25.1. Hayes 76, nn. 1-3	425-475 A. D.	S A (1), PIE (1), POZ (1)
26. Lamboglia 42 –Hayes 67 n. 8 (ATL pl. 38, 3, pp. 88-89)	Half 4th-beginning 5th c.A.D.	PaN (2)
FLANGED BOWLS		
26. 1. Hayes 91C, nn. 21, 23 (ATL pl. 49, 6, p. 105)	Half 4th-beginning 7th c.A. D.	PIE (1)
LAMPS		
27. X AI a (ATL pl. 99, 6, p. 200)	Half 5th-6th c. A. D.	PIE (1)
28. n.i.		S A (7), P S (1), S J (1), PIE (8), MED (3) PaN (5)
AFRICAN COOKING WARE		
LIDS		
29. Ostia II fig. 302 (ATL pl. 104, 1, p. 212)	End 1st c. B.C.-half 2nd A.D.	P S (1), POZ (1)
30. Ostia III fig. 332 (ATL pl. 104, 3, p. 212)	End 1st-second half 2nd c. A.D.	S A (1), PIE (1), MED (2)
31. Ostia I fig. 261 (ATL pl. 104, 5-7, p. 212)	Antonine-Severian age- beginning 5th c. A.D.	S A (3), PIE (9), POZ (2), MED (8)
32. Ostia I fig. 262 (ATL pl. 105, 3, p. 213)	Antonine-Severian age- beginning 5th c. A.D.	PIE (1), POZ (1)
33. Ostia I fig. 264 (ATL pl. 105, 7-8, p. 214)	Beginning 3rd-4th c. A.D.	S A (1)

34. Hayes 183, 4; 184, 1 (ATL pl. 110, 10, pp. 223-224)	2nd-5th c.A.D.	POZ (1)
BOWLS		
35. Lamboglia 9A (ATL pl. 106, 4, p. 215)	End 2nd-beginning 5th c. A.D.	MED (1)
SAUCEPANS		
36. Lamboglia 10A-Hayes 23B (ATL pl. 106, 10-11, p. 217)	Second half 2nd-beginning 3rd c. A.D.	S A (10), P S (1), PIE (20), POZ (1), PaN (1), MED (3), G P (1)
37. Lamboglia 10B-Hayes 23A (ATL pl. 106, 12, p. 217)	End 1st-half 3rd c.A.D.	S A (1)
38. Ostia III fig. 267 (ATL pl. 107, 6_7, p. 218)	Half 2nd-beginning 5th c. A.D.	S A (2), PIE (5), POZ (2), MED (2)
39. Ostia III fig. 108 (ATL pl. 107, 8, p. 218)	Half 4th-beginning 5th c. A.D.	MED (1)
40. n.i.		S A (6), PIE (7), MON (1), MED (6)

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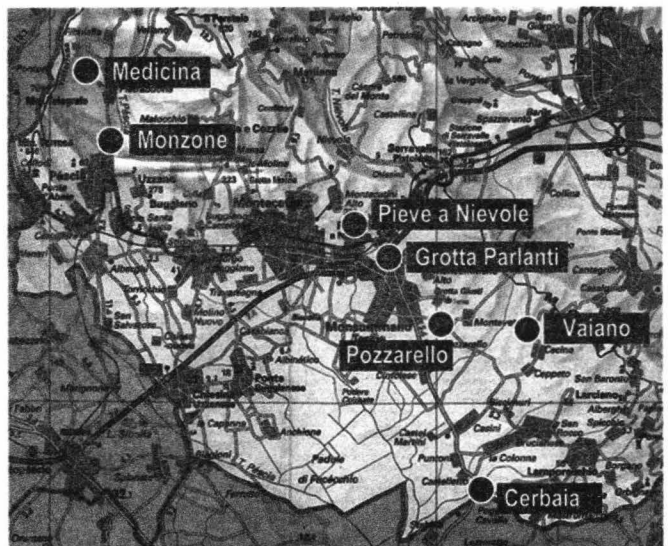
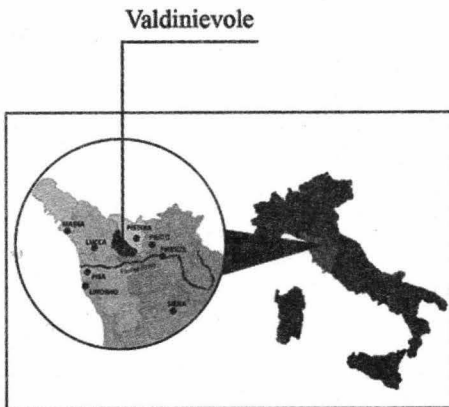


Fig. 1 – Tuscany, Pistoia and Valdinievole. Fig. 2 – Roman Sites of Valdinievole.

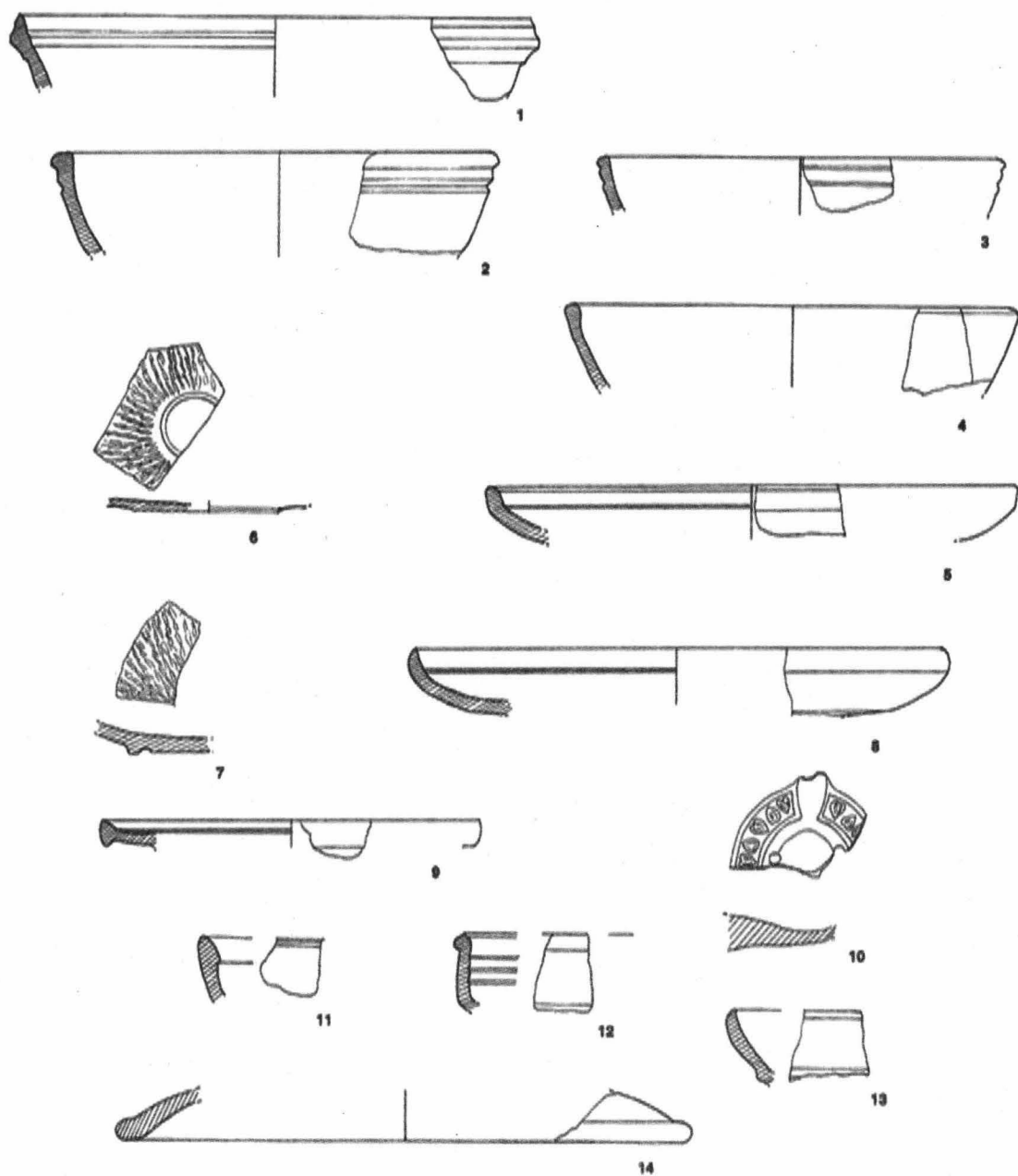


Fig. 3. - AFRICAN RED SLIP WARE 'A'. CUPS: 1. Lamboglia 1c (Medicina); 2. Lamboglia 2a (Pievaccia); 3. Lamboglia 2b (Pievaccia); 4. Lamboglia 3a (Pievaccia). DISHES: 5. and 8. Lamboglia 9a (Pievaccia, Pieve a Nievole). ARS 'C' and 'D'. CUPS: 6. Hayes 53B (Medicina); 9. Hayes 73B (S. Jacopo). FLANGED BOWLS: 7. Hayes 92C (Pievaccia). LAMPS: 10. XAI a (S. Jacopo). AFRICAN COOKING WARE. SAUCEPANS: 11. Lamboglia 10A (Pievaccia); 12. Ostia III fig. 267 (Medicina); 13. Lamboglia 10B (S. Atto). LIDS: 14. Ostia I fig. 264 (S. Atto). Drawings Fabiana Fabbri (scale 1:3).