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SICILY AND CRETE BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE DAR AL-ISLAM (LATE 7TH – MID-10TH CENTURY): AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

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Abstract and Lay Summary

Focusing on the Byzantine-Islamic transitions of Sicily and Crete, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the archaeological debate surrounding the development of both islands between the late 7th and mid-10th century. Material sources have been the primary means of investigation, drawing especially on ceramic evidence, selected small finds, especially coins and lead seals, and relevant examples of built environment, which have encompassed a range of domestic, military, and religious contexts. Original arguments and data-collection have been produced through both revaluating the findings and conclusions of current secondary literature, and by drawing on first-hand studies of unpublished material sources and evidence documented during archive-based studies and field observations. Changing patterns in material culture and settlement organisation, and the modes of administrative and economic interactions between incoming Muslim rulers and pre-existing Byzantine communities inhabiting both islands have been the main fields of enquiry. Although taking a regional perspective, this thesis has been based on key case-study sites, of which Knossos and Heraklion, and Enna and its hinterland, are the principal ones.

The Byzantine-Islamic transition of Sicily and Crete might appear as a peripheral topic to the eyes of scholars working in core territories of the Byzantine and Islamic empires. When considered within their actual geographical and cultural contexts, however, both islands stand at the virtual and spatial centre of the military and ideological confrontation between Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam. Placed at the crossroads between Constantinople, Cordoba, Mecca, and Baghdad, both islands acted as sociocultural and economic lynchpins between the western and eastern halves of the Mediterranean world, but also as maritime frontier-lands located at the fringe between the worlds of Islam and Byzantium.

Key-words: archaeology of the Byzantine-Islamic transition; material culture; settlement patterns; economy and administration; Sicily and Crete.
Probably I should not make this confession, but the very idea behind the subject matter of this PhD is not properly mine. Do not get me wrong, each and every concept and argument presented in this thesis are the results of a passionate effort, to which I have fully committed myself over the past 5 years. However, if it were to me, I would have remained inside my comfort zone, focusing solely on case-studies from Sicily, which is my homeland, and drawing primarily on ceramic evidence, which is my main field of expertise. I even had hundreds of crates filled with ceramics in an archaeological archive from central Sicily (Enna) available to become my main case-study! My first supervisor, however, never accepted the idea of me remaining restricted to my comfort zone. ‘Take a more horizontal perspective’, those the words he said. I am sure he had a more ontological angle in mind, but it was thus, by literary taking a more horizontal perspective on a map of the Mediterranean, that my sight landed on Crete. Of course, in Chapter 1 I will provide specific reasons and motives that have defined this investigation, but without such an impulse, I would have never explored the Byzantine-Islamic transitions of Sicily and Crete as part of a single study. My first thank, therefore, goes to my first supervisor, J. Crow, for manifold reasons. First, to believe in my academic skills so as to challenge me with such an ambitious project of research, spanning three centuries and two islands, for which multiple lifetimes would not be enough to produce an exhaustive and comprehensive study. Secondly, because it was thanks to him that I ‘discovered’ the wonder of the island of Crete and its people, which I will keep in my heart forever. Finally, I would like to thank him for his persistent support, which dates back to the time of my MSc, and for the occasions he gave me to improve, both as a person and as a scholar. Along with him, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the remaining components of my supervisory team, B. Russell and M. Legendre, for their patience and selfless offering of energies. I have known Ben for over seven years, and he has always been present to help me however he could, in ways that have continuously contributed to my academic growth. Marie was a ‘later acquisition’ of the supervisory team, but her contribution has been massive, making up for my limited knowledge of economic and administrative matters related to the world of the early Islam.
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PART I:

Reasons, Aims, Methods, and Background of the Research
1.1 HISTORICAL, HISTORIOGRAPHICAL, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Located at the geographical crossroads of maritime routes interlinking the Mediterranean, Sicily and Crete are the most crucial points of transit in the multidirectional maritime journey of goods, people, and ideas travelling between the two halves of the Mediterranean basin. Sicily is the largest Mediterranean island and a central port of call between the West and East, and a geographical bridge between Europe and North Africa. Crete, which is about one/third the size of Sicily, is the fifth largest Mediterranean island, after Sardinia, Cyprus, and Corsica and, due to its location, it acted as the maritime gateway to the Aegean world.

A Roman province since the 1st century BC, Crete became part of the Eastern Roman Empire (i.e. the Byzantine Empire) since its establishment in the 4th century; Sicily, instead, entered in the orbit of Byzantium in 535, following the Justinian Reconquista of the island from Ostrogothic rule. Both islands remained in Byzantine hands until the 820s, a decade which marked the beginning of their conquests by Islamic forces. There followed decades of military conflicts, but also of cultural confrontations, culminated in the assimilation of these islands into the territories of Islam (the Dar al-Islam). The 960s marked another crucial decade for both islands, but from an opposite stance. In 961 Byzantium launched the final, successful expedition to recapture Crete, while in Sicily the last Byzantine stronghold, Rometta, fell in 965, and the whole island was lost irreversibly. The 960s has been taken as a chronological limit of this study, and the timeframe between the 8th and mid-10th century as the principal stage of investigation, representing altogether the period of the transition of both islands from Byzantine to Islamic rule.

According to the Kitab Futuḥ al-Buldan, written in the 9th century by al-Baladhuri (d. 892), in the 820s a group of ca. 10.000 Andalusi Muslims, which included warriors, jurists, women, elders, and children, landed on Crete, under the leadership of Abu Hafs (d. 861).¹ The precise date of

landing within the 820s (ranging between 821 to 827) is still debated, but this dispute has only marginal implications within the overall scope of this study, and could rather indicate a series of raids launched against the island as a prelude to its conquest.² Although of Andalusi origin, this group of Muslims did not come directly from the Iberia peninsula, but from Alexandria of Egypt, where they had found asylum after being expelled from al-Andalus in 818, due to a failed rebellion against the Emir al-Hakam I (796-822).³ The exact geographical and chronological stages of the conquest that followed after the landing are unknown. Baladhuri’s statement that ‘first [Abu Hafs] conquered a fortress [Heraklion/al-Handaq] and resided in it, then started to conquer piece by piece until nothing was left to the Byzantines’ sound reasonable in spite of its narrative nature. It in fact parallels the general strategy of the Islamic conquest after the 7th century (and with the exception of Iran), which first consolidated its footholds in cities and urban centres, and then targeted the countryside.⁴ More considerations and details about the phases of the Islamic conquest of Crete are discussed in the core chapters of this thesis. However, it can be anticipated that by the 860s, when the son of Abu Hafs (Shu’ayb I, 855-880) was ruling, the Emirate of Crete had been formally established and recognised by the Abbasid authority.⁵ Byzantium made multiple attempts to recapture the island, in 829, 866, 912, and 949, until the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas brought it back in Byzantine hands in 961, at the head of an impressive army and after almost one year of military campaigns, mostly spent besieging the capital of the Emirate, al-Handaq.⁶

Setting out from Aghlabid Ifriqiya, the Islamic conquest of Sicily was launched in 827, in the same decade or possibly year as the (final) Cretan expedition.⁷ Landing at Mazara, in the south-western coast, the Ifriqiyan troops moved to Syracuse, the Byzantine capital of the island, but the attempt at conquering this city was a failure; in 831 Palermo was taken and turned into the Islamic capital. Compared to Crete, the history of the Aghlabid conquest of Sicily was slower, and marked by three substantial differences. First, Byzantium did not lose a stable

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² Gigourtakis 2011b; Picard 2018, 220-25.
³ Christides 1984, 85, 164.
⁵ See Chapter 5 for a discussion drawing on a range of textual sources and material evidence.
⁶ Makrypoulas 2000.
⁷ For the historical context: Metcalfe 2009, 4-69; Chiarelli 2011; Maurici 2006.
foothold on Sicily until the fall of Rometta in 965, implying that the state of military (and ideological) confrontation between Byzantium and Islam never ceased to exist, lasting for nearly 150 years; throughout this period, both Byzantine and Islamic forces came to coexist and to share the same (is)land. Certainly, with the progressive establishment of Aghlabid control in the new capital Palermo and over western Sicily, Byzantine authority across the island diminished gradually. Following the loss of Enna in 859, permanent Byzantine control shifted to eastern Sicily, further contracting to the north-eastern mountainous tip of the island (Val Demone) after the loss of Syracuse (878), Catania (902), and Taormina (962). Secondly, Islamic Sicily was never an independent Emirate, but remained formally linked to the Ifriqiyan mainland. Thirdly, two Islamic dynasties ruled over Sicily, the Aghlabids (827-909) and the Fatimids (until the Norman conquest in 1061-91), who overthrew the former in 909. Within a broader framework of military conflict, and with the exception of Ibrahim II (r. 875-902), who promoted an aggressive strategy of expansion, the Aghlabid and Fatimid regimes were marked by different attitudes towards the conquest of Sicily. On the one hand, it would seem that the Aghlabids did not deliberately chose to conquer the whole island, but rather to consolidate their possession over western Sicily, and to sustain a booty economy over the centre and east of the island, with the aim of channeling belligerent and hostile fractions of the Ifriqiyan army (jund). This attitude changed dramatically with the coming of the Fatimids and their entrusted governors, the Kalbids (since 948), who pursued a policy of total military takeover of Sicily and expansion reaching Southern Italy, promoting at the same time a systematic process of cultural Islamisation. As will be seen, such opposite attitudes can be demonstrated archaeologically.

Within the difference highlighted above, historical affinities between Sicily and Crete in the timeframe covered by this thesis are quite telling. In fact, although stricto sensu parallels cannot be established, and will not be attempted, the overall historical developments of these two islands followed trajectories that not only are entangled to each other, but also, and more significantly, are distinct from other regions of either

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8 Nef, Prigent 2013; Arcifa 2013.  
9 On the policy of Ibrahim II: Nef 2009.  
the Byzantine or Islamic empires. First and foremost, neither the Umayyad nor the Abbasid caliphates played a direct role in the conquest of these islands. Sicily was the target of the expansion of the first independent Muslim state in the history of Islam, the Aghlabid Emirate of Ifriqiya; Crete was the prize of a dissident group of Andalusian Muslim, who were independent in theory, although likely supported by Egypt.12

Another crucial point that unites the history of the Islamic conquest of Sicily and Crete, and that marks a substantial difference with the historical expansion of Islam around and across the Mediterranean, is the fact that a systematic attempt at conquering these islands was not launched before the 9th century; this differs from Cyprus, Egypt, the Levant, and the North Africa, which had become the target of the Caliphs’ *jihad* from the 7th century, and had been assimilated into the *Dar al-Islam* by the 8th century.13 On the one hand, this means that, while Byzantium had lost the fertile regions of the Near East and North Africa, throughout the 8th century it could still rely on both the Sicilian and Cretan possessions and incomes of agricultural resources, which became indispensable means for the survival of Constantinople and for the provisioning of the Empire.14 On the other hand, the conquest of these two islands occurred in an age (the 9th century) when ‘Islamic’ political, legal, and fiscal structures, and socio-cultural practices were much better developed compared to the framework of the earlier conquest. A vast trading network linked through the *Dar al-Islam* connected a disparate world from the Atlantic to China; the Islamic world was going through a golden age, ‘the Abbasid golden age’; and the caliphate had already had over 150 years of conflict/diplomacy with the Byzantine empire.15 On the opposite Byzantine front, while from the 9th century the core regions of the Empire (i.e. mainland Greece and Western Anatolia) were recovering from a previous period of economic contraction, and eventually experiencing a phase of upsurge and

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14 As will be argued throughout this thesis, a systematic process of militarisation and a profusion of economic and landholding reforms promoted during the late 7th-8th century further corroborate this consideration, showing that Sicily and Crete were at the centre of a shared policy that was closely endorsed by the Byzantine imperial authority. Laiou, Morrisson 2007, 43. Specifically on Sicily and Crete see, among others, Brown 2008; Nef, Prigent 2006; Vaccaro 2013a; 2013b; Tsigonaki 2007; Poulou 2011.
15 For a critical discussion considering textual and material sources: Hoyland 2006, and papers in Peacock 2017. See also Priestman 2016; Sijpesteijn 2017; Tite et al. 2015.
expansion, for Sicily and Crete the same period was not synonymous with revival; on the contrary, it was the hardest time in their Byzantine history.\footnote{16} 

The points discussed above are pivotal for the discussion that will follow, showing the intrinsic connections and distinctive peculiarities intertwining the history of the two case-studies of this research, and their place within the Mediterranean stages of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

The Byzantine-Islamic transition in Sicily and Crete poses interpretative challenges and methodological problems for present scholarly research and, although to different extents and degrees, archaeological and historiographical investigations have still much to say and accomplish. As observed for other territories, such as for the North Africa, the narrative of the Islamic conquest of these islands, which does not fit within that of the central and eastern core regions of the \textit{Dar al-Islam} (Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran), might be partially held responsible for the long-lasting marginalisation of Sicily and Crete in the broader historiographical and archaeological research agenda of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.\footnote{17}

An in-depth discussion of the historiography and state-of-the-art of archaeological research into the Byzantine-Islamic transition of Sicily and Crete will be offered in Chapter 2.1. Here, however, it is necessary to flag the major current interpretations and key trends, so as to introduce the research questions, aims, and the debates to which this study will contribute.

Crete, in particular, stands as one of the most neglected territories within this narrative. The island, for instance, has remained systematically excluded by recent articles, edited volumes, and international workshops, which claimed to investigate the world of the Mediterranean islands in the Middle Ages: all islands are present, from Cyprus to the Balearic, except for Crete, if not with cursory mentions.\footnote{18} This notable neglect recalls the unfortunate derogatory attitude that has

\footnote{16}Cf. Shepard 2008; Hanson 2010. 
\footnote{17}Cf. Fenwick 2020, 1-2. 
\footnote{18}Zavagno 2016; 2020; Zavagno, Darley, Jarrett 2019; Çaykent, Zavagno 2014, and numerous workshops, such as “Islands at the Frontier of the Empires in the Middle Ages” (organised by Zavagno in 2018). For an exception regarding Early Byzantine Crete: Michaelides, Pergola, Zanini 2013.
been prevalent in the historiographical research of the first half of the 20th century, which culminated in Ostrogorsky’s stigmatized view of the Islamic Emirate of Crete being nothing but a “corsair’s nest”.\(^{19}\) Thankfully, two seminal monographs published in the 1980s, one of which by Christides entirely devoted to the history of the Islamic Emirate of Crete, have shed a more positive light on this period.\(^{20}\) Still, significant grey zones remain, especially with regard to the decades between the late 8th and early 9th century. Archaeological research conducted in the last two decades has allowed scholars to significantly advance the scientific knowledge of 8th-century Byzantine material culture and settlement patterns of the island.\(^{21}\) The same, however, cannot be said with regard to the following Islamic period and, as late as 2011, two leading exponent of Medieval archaeology and history of Crete, Poulou and Tsougarakis, wrote that ‘the Arab conquest creates a gap of knowledge in material culture and daily life of the island’, given that ‘the more than 130 years [of Islamic rule] have left almost no trace anywhere’.\(^{22}\) As expressed in the following section 1.2 on the research questions and aims, the reason for the present research steams from the deep dissatisfaction with this neglect and marginal place that Crete holds in present archaeological and historical scholarship of the Byzantine-Islamic transition, and neither Poulou’s nor Tsougarakis’ words now appear correct.

In Sicily, historiographical and archaeological knowledge of the Byzantine-Islamic transition is overall better established and developed than in Crete. However, it is necessarily to distinguish between two main trends/attitudes. The first trend has characterised the research agenda between the late 19th and late 20th century; the second trend is subsequent to the former, and to certain extents has developed as a reaction to it, beginning in the 1990s and continuing down to the present. The arabist Amari was the father of the first trend.\(^{23}\) According to him, the Islamic conquest of Sicily was like a salvation for the island, bringing about the end of what he saw as the rapacious Byzantine rule.\(^{24}\) While shedding a positive light on the Islamic period, which, as seen, has been unparalleled in the historiography of the Emirate of Crete, his

\(^{19}\) Ostrogorsky 1957.
\(^{21}\) Above all see Tsigonaki 2007; Poulou 2011; Yangaki 2016.
\(^{22}\) Poulou 2011, 382; Tsougarakis 2011, 293.
\(^{23}\) Amari 1881; 1933.
\(^{24}\) Nef 2017; Nef 2010b.
`Risorgimentalist` approach resulted in a very negative view of the Byzantine period. It has taken more than one century to dissipate such view of Byzantine Sicily, thanks to the advancement of modern archaeological and historical research, in which Nef and Prigent have been the precursors.\textsuperscript{25} Talbi, who wrote a monumental volume on the Aghlabids, can be placed on an opposite but likely biased nationalistic stance.\textsuperscript{26} Among numerous intuitions, which were admittedly ahead of his time, Talbi considered the Aghlabids` concern towards Sicily as peripheral and thus irrelevant in their process of state-building.\textsuperscript{27} This point has been recently challenged by Nef, who has argued that Sicily was in fact at the very heart of the Aghlabids` political construction and Mediterranean vision.\textsuperscript{28} Beyond historical disputes, Talbi`s perspective has had, to my understanding, negative consequences in the agenda of Islamic archaeology on Aghlabid Sicily, contributing to its scholarly marginalisation. The archaeology of Aghlabid Sicily has been practically non-existent as late as a couple of decades ago; this was in sharp contrast with the archaeological research into the following Fatimid period, which beginnings can be traced back into the 1950s.\textsuperscript{29}

A new historical and archaeological attitude towards the Byzantine and Aghlabid periods has emerged over the last few decades, thriving especially in the last years thanks to scholars such as (alphabetically) Arcifa, Ardizzone, Bagnera, Cacciaguerra, D`Angelo, De Luca, Metcalfe, Molinari, Sacco, and many others.\textsuperscript{30} Byzantine Sicily, and especially Syracuse and the eastern half of the island, are no longer perceived as being oppressed by taxes and subdued by Constantinople, but as vibrant entities, holding a prominent role in the stability and very existence of the Empire. Aghlabid Sicily, likewise, is no longer invisible in the archaeological record, although it currently remains mostly known from evidence coming from Palermo and Western Sicily, with a silence from the central and eastern territories of the island.

Central Sicily and the prominent stronghold of Kastrum Hennae (Enna), remain underrepresented in secondary literature if compared to Palermo and Syracuse, and to Western and Eastern Sicily. As will be

\textsuperscript{25} Already Nef, Prigent 2006.
\textsuperscript{26} Talbi 1966.
\textsuperscript{27} Anderson, Fenwick, Rosser-Ower 2017, 13.
\textsuperscript{28} Nef 2017.
\textsuperscript{29} For instance Ragona 1950; Cf. D`Angelo 2004; Arcifa, Bagnera, Nef 2012.
\textsuperscript{30} For a most recent overview: Molinari 2021. See also Chapter 2.1.
further discussed in due course, following the beginning of the Islamic conquest, Enna was elevated into the military headquarters of the Byzantine land forces deployed on the island, and Central Sicily became a key frontier-zone in the confrontation between Byzantine and Aghlabid forces. In spite of recent excavations and field surveys that have targeted Enna and its territory, an integrated and diachronic archaeological analysis of the evolutions and transformations of this city and the network of surrounding settlements was still missing. It is in the wake of this absence that the present research takes off, having the dynamics of the Byzantine-Islamic transition of Enna and Central Sicily as the main fields of enquiry.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS

Within the broader scholarly discussion outlined above, the selection of Sicily and Crete as case-studies allows the investigation of a number of crucial aspects and themes, requiring a range of research questions. The unbalanced amount of relevant secondary literature noted above, however, demands two different levels of analysis between the two case-studies: a more general one for Crete and a fine-grained one for Sicily. In other words, the limited but highly significant amount of data available for Islamic Crete has made it possible to attempt a discussion of the whose island as comprehensive and systematic as possible. For Sicily, on the contrary, the larger amount of data available has made it necessary to set aside any ambition of regional comprehensiveness, focusing instead on a territorial study area: Central Sicily. In both instances, changing patterns of settlement patterns and urban fabrics, of material culture, of networks of exchange and supply of goods, and economic and administrative modes of interactions have been the main subjects of investigation. The reassessment of the corpus of structural remains and material culture already available in secondary literature, and new architectural analyses of these monuments, and archive-based restudy of related ceramic evidence have constituted the methodological core of the research (see Chapter 3.2).

Regarding Crete, for which Islamic archaeology as a discipline has hardly emerged, there can be asked the following set of research questions: to what extent did the Andalusi conquest and the creation of an Emirate imply a process of ‘Islamisation’ (see 2.2iii for a discussion of
Islamisation)? Away from prejudices and misconceptions, can a more careful reading of the material sources available show that the Emirate was characterised by the establishment of a brand-new capital, which can be defined an Islamic city? With it, is it possible to see the introduction of a range of innovative material culture that fits into the broader picture of the contemporary Islamic world? What happened after the Islamic takeover to the preexisting local communities who inhabited the island? Where they persecuted, as some scholars have claimed? Or where they integrated into the economic and administrative mechanisms of the Emirate? Differently put, is it possible to explore the possible patterns of conflicts, interaction, and coexistence between pre-existing Byzantine and incoming Andalusi communities, shedding original light on the dynamics, rhythms, and forms of Islamisation occurring on the island during the period of the Emirate? In light of the traditional view of the Emirate of Crete being a “corsairs’ nest”, and in the wake of the lack of archaeological focus on this period, can this thesis be used to challenge this perspective, emerging as a manifesto for the creation of a systematic archaeological research into Islamic Crete? In doing so, can the Emirate of Crete be integrated within a broader Mediterranean debate and research agenda of Islamic archaeology, by means of comparative case-studies drawn from other regions across the Dar al-Islam?

The distinctive archaeological contribution offered in this thesis rests on the fact that this is the first systematic study to focus extensively on the material culture, settlement patterns, and economic and administrative modes of interactions developed during the 130 years of the Islamic Emirate of Crete, offering an unprecedented range of data and arguments. To do so, the discussion has been organised in three chapters (4-6), which together constitute Part II. Chapter 4 will explore the transformation of settlement patterns. In particular, first it will pay attention to the establishment of the new Islamic capital of the island, Heraklion/ al-Handaq, both in its monumental urban fabric and in the range of daily material culture. It will be argued that the progressive growth and urbanisation of Islamic Heraklion were directly proportioned to the concomitant socioeconomic decline and ruralisation of adjacent Byzantine Knossos. These two sites, however, remained indissolubly linked to each other, with Knossos becoming part of the productive

hinterland of the new Islamic capital. There will follow a discussion on the fate of the previous Byzantine capital, Gortyn, and of the other major urban centres of the island, including, Eleutherna, Vyzari, Chersonissos, Priniatikos Pyrgos, etc. Thereafter, the picture of urban settlement will be complemented by dealing with the evidence of rural settlements. In Chapter 5, according to an analysis of the distribution of material evidence known from these sites (especially pottery and coins), the social and cultural identities of their inhabitants will be called into question, addressing the possibility that pre-existing local communities, and not incomer Muslims, continued to inhabit some of those settlements well after the Islamic conquest. Therefore, attention will be drawn to the possible institutional, economic, and administrative manoeuvres promoted by the Cretan Emirs to interact and rule over these communities, with specific focus on systems of landholding and taxation. Finally, Chapter 6 will offer an in-depth analysis of material sources from Crete, especially pottery, dating to the Byzantine-Islamic transition, which have been encountered and dealt with in the previous two chapters, but which needs further discussion.

Moving on to Sicily, owing to the richness of primary sources and to the breadth of available secondary literature, it unnecessary to stress or demonstrate any further the valuable potential of archaeological enquiry for this period. On the contrary, focus has been given to specific themes and relevant case-studies, with the overall aim to advance the available knowledge of a selected study-area, as well as to deepen aspects that can only be superficially examined for Crete. Specifically, as part of this thesis, field surveys and archive studies of pottery have been conducted in a territory of Central Sicily, called the Southern Erei Uplands, stretching 30km between Enna and the agrotown of Philosophiana. As mentioned above, the reason for this choice is that, for many decades after the Islamic landing in the 820s, this central area of the island became, metaphorically and practically, the interface in the military and ideological confrontation between Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam. The importance of Enna in the urban hierarchy of the island can be further demonstrated by the fact that this city became, between the 830s-860s, the headquarters of the strategos of the Theme of Sicily, and the cornerstone of the Byzantine military forces deployed on the island to oppose the Aghlabid expansion.32

In light of these considerations, the research questions that will be asked are the following: digging deeper (metaphorically speaking) than it is currently possible to do on Crete, can we recognise specific policies of intervention promoted by the Byzantine Empire as reactions to the Islamic threat, not only on a military level, but also in regard to economic matters? The answer to this question is what in this thesis has been named the “Isaurian policy of containment”. By means of new field surveys, archive-based studies, and (re)interpretation of material culture and settlement patterns from both the Byzantine and Islamic fronts, is it possible to achieved new geographical and chronological insights into the stages of Islamisation in the central territories of the island, on both urban and rural dimensions, enhancing scholarly understanding of this process during the Aghlabid regime? What shape did the Aghlabid conquest of Enna take in the record of material culture known from this city? Can it be possible to identify ‘contexts of material transition’ from Enna dating to the late 9th – early 10th century, in the same way as similar contexts have been recently identified in Palermo and Syracuse? When can we place the definitive transformation of Kastrum Hennae into madina Qasr Yanni? Finally, can the fine-grained analysis of the Byzantine-Islamic transition in the central territories of the island provide complementary data that allow us to contextualize this study-area within a broader regional framework? Differently put, can the study-area of Enna and the Southern Erei Uplands be placed within the historical narrative and recent scholarly research, which sees the island during the 8th-10th century contented between a Byzantine East, centered on Syracuse, and an Islamic West, focused on Palermo?

Similarly to Crete, discussion has been organised in three chapters (7-9), which together constitute Part III. Unlike Crete, however, this partition has followed a diachronic principle, reliant on the dichotomy between urban space and rural settlements, and which has placed thematic emphasis on the concepts of collision, encounter, and transformation. Thus, Chapter 7, titled “Collision: from the Thematic age to the Islamic conquest”, covers the 8th and first half of the 9th century and analyses the transformation of Enna into a kastron and the crisis and subsequent upsurge of the surrounding rural settlement patterns. Chapter 8, titled “Encounter: the Islamic conquest of Enna” covers the timespan between the late 9th and mid-10th century and insists on the possible evidence of

33 Respectively: Arcifa Bagnera 2014; Cacciaguerra 2020. A full discussion of these contexts is provided in Chapter 8.
a first context of material interaction between Byzantine and Islamic material culture (the ‘context of transition’ mentioned above), with the aim of advancing and revaluing the current understanding of this period in this liminal area of the island. Finally, Chapter 9, titled “Transformation: the mature Islamic age” steps into the Fatimid period (touching the 11th century), discussing the transformation of Enna from a *kastron* to a *madina*, and the rearrangement of the rural settlement patterns, now organised in *rahals*.

To conclude with the organisation of the thesis, the following Chapter 2.1 offers a literature review of both the historical and archaeological research carried out on Sicily and Crete, identifying the main debates and gaps in current scholarship, and thus positioning this contribution within the existing research agenda. Next, 2.2. will consider a number of broader themes and debates in Islamic and Byzantine archaeology, and how they fit in the two regional case-studies of this thesis. In particular, three macro-themes will be touched upon: i.) the impact of the early Caliphal conquest (mid-7th - mid-8th century) and the struggle with Byzantium for the supremacy over the Mediterranean space, with an emphasis on the Byzantine responsiveness to the Islamic threat, especially from a military perspective; ii) the alleged economic decline and social regression occurring in the so-called Byzantine “Dark Ages”, for which a less catastrophic stance will be suggested; iii.) an explanation of what this thesis means by “Islamisation”, and its implication in archaeological investigations. Chapter 3 offers a methodological discussion regarding i.) the criteria through which the specific case-studies and study-areas within this thesis have been selected; and ii.) the dataset employed to underpin discussion, including types of material used and strategies of data collection. Chapters 1 to 3 form a section named Part I, while, as seen above, chapters 4-6 and 7-9 constitute Parts II and III. A final section, Part IV, draws some concluding remarks between these two case-studies, highlighting similarities and differences (10.1), and places these islands within a broader context of the Byzantine-Islamic transition (10.2). In doing so, specific emphasis has been given to the Mediterranean world (Iberia peninsula, North Africa, Egypt, and the Levant), to which both islands belong; furthermore, a special place in this contextual analysis has been given to the Western Sahel, a territory which is archaeologically well-investigated, and where it would seem that Islam arrived at about the same time (slightly late) as in Sicily and Crete, and followed similar trajectories.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON SICILY AND CRETE

Owing to their immense and sensational Minoan and Classical/Roman cultural heritages, medieval research in Crete and Sicily has long struggled to emerge and to affirm itself as a discipline.\(^{34}\) This is not to say that studies on Crete and Sicily during the Byzantine-Islamic transition have been absent, but that have surfaced quite lately, especially from an archaeological perspective, and that research is still in its formative stages. Moreover, as will be become evident at the end of this section, there is a gigantic gulf between historical and archaeological research on Sicily and Crete in the Byzantine-Islamic transition; impressionistically, one might say that these two islands belong to two different scholarly universes, especially with regard to the archaeology of the Islamic period. In fact, while on Sicily archaeological research into the Islamic period has received scientifically-sound attention since the mid-20\(^{th}\) century, thriving in the last decades, archaeological research on the Islamic Emirate of Crete has been practically non-existent until now, although this period has received a good deal of historical attention throughout the last century.

i.) Crete

In 1982 a superb archaeological monograph by I.F. Sanders was published posthumously, presenting an exceptional and most detailed gazetteers of settlements and an analysis of material culture from Crete dating between the Hellenistic and Early Byzantine periods.\(^{35}\) Before this study, no scholarly research had gone beyond the Roman horizon.\(^{36}\) The analysis of the 6\(^{th}\)-7\(^{th}\) century contained in this book, which was mostly drawn from firsthand fieldwork, is simply outstanding and, although other settlements have been found since then, this gazetteer remains one of the most extensive sources available to explore the settlement

\(^{34}\) For a similar problem in North Africa, connected to a devastating colonialist approach: Fenwick 2020, 12.

\(^{35}\) Sanders 1982.

\(^{36}\) For which see Pendlebury 1939.
patterns of the island. In addition to structural evidence, this young scholar could recognise traces of human activities dating to the Early Byzantine period thanks to the seminal work on Late Roman pottery recently published by Hayes.\textsuperscript{37} According to the evidence available at his time, Sanders concluded that the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century was on Crete a period of social growth and economic prosperity.\textsuperscript{38} A similar picture was later confirmed in 2004, when Livadiotti and Simiakaki edited the colossal proceedings of the conference titled “Creta Romana e proto bizantina”.\textsuperscript{39} However, when it came to the 8\textsuperscript{th}-early 9\textsuperscript{th} century, the picture became blurry altogether, resampling what scholars of that time resolutely called the “Dark Ages”.\textsuperscript{40} Nevertheless, Sanders concluded his book with extreme lucidity and foresight, saying that the almost total lack of archaeological evidence for the 150 years before 827 “was probably misleading and revealing only of the present ignorance of the material, especially pottery, rather than a decline in occupation”.\textsuperscript{41}

Nearly 40 years after these words were written, we can fully acknowledge that Sanders was correct. However, one has to wait until the 2000s before significant advancements in the knowledge of material culture were made. In 1988, in fact, D. Tsougarakis published his seminal historical monograph on Byzantine Crete, covering the whole timespan from the 5\textsuperscript{th} to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{42} The historical reconstruction presented in this book is very remarkable, also with regard to the period of the Islamic Emirate (see below). However, in light of the archaeological material available at his time, Tsougarakis deduced that the 8\textsuperscript{th}- early 9\textsuperscript{th} century marked “a low ebb in the economy and social conditions of Crete” which “had entered a phase of general decline, economic recession and demographic crisis”; for, if it were only to judge from the archaeological evidence one “could suppose that most of the island had become deserted”.\textsuperscript{43} Tsougarakis cannot be blamed for this view, which was an unfortunate result of the existing limited archaeological knowledge of these centuries that was accessible at his time. In fact, by evaluating the evidence available of Byzantine lead seals, the scholar did not fail to point out that “by no means Crete was

\textsuperscript{37} Hayes 1972.  
\textsuperscript{38} Sanders 1982, 7.  
\textsuperscript{39} Livadiotti, Simiakaki 2004.  
\textsuperscript{40} For a full discussion see Chapter 2.2ii.  
\textsuperscript{41} Sanders 1982, 134.  
\textsuperscript{42} Tsougarakis 1988.  
\textsuperscript{43} Tsougarakis 1988, 28, 148.
cut off from the mainland. On the contrary, the closer we come to the 9th century, the more official presence becomes manifest.”

As anticipated, in the last decades archaeological research has made gigantic leaps forward in advancing the knowledge of the material culture, especially pottery, produced and circulating on Crete in the 8th century. This has been particularly possible thanks to attentive excavations that have targeted major urban centres of the island, first and foremost Gortyn and Eleutherna, along with the semi-urban site of Priniatikos Pyrgos and the rural settlement on Pseira Island. Naturally, these sites occupy a privileged position in the discussion that this thesis draws on secondary literature. Recent syntheses of the results produces by these excavations have been presented in the course of the 2010s by N. Poulou and A. Yangaki, showing a full spectrum of the ceramic instrumentum domesticum of this period, ranging from table-ware to cooking-pots and amphorae. However, two problems still persist. First, as recent archaeological research conducted in other territories of the Byzantine Empire (including on Sicily and mainland Greece) has demonstrated, specific ceramic evidence such as globular amphorae, cooking-pots, and chafing-dish, can be confidentially dated throughout the late 8th and 9th century (see also 2.2ii). On Crete, however, there is a tendency to date these ceramics within the 8th century. Secondly, some prominent sites on the island remain underrepresent in modern secondary literature dealing with the late 8th – early 9th century; Knossos is one of those. This thesis will attempt to fill this gap by both offering a first-hand revision of a ceramic assemblage from Knossos, which will be argued dates to the timeframe of the late 8th – early 9th century, and by using this assemblage as part of the supporting evidence to reconstruct the diachronic evolution of this settlement from the late 7th to the mid-10 century (Chapter 4.1). This will allow this study to offer additional insights to the on-going scholarly debate concerning the changing patterns of settlement and material culture of Crete during the Byzantine-Islamic transition. In addition to Knossos, specific attention has been paid to revaluation of the structural remains and material

44 Tsougarakis 1988, 29. See also Chapter 2.2i.
45 A full bibliographical discussion of the excavations conducted at these sites will follow in Chapter 3.2. For now it is enough to reference: Di Vita 2010 and Baldini 2013 for Gortyn; Tsigonaki 2007 and Yangaki 2005 for Eleutherna; Klontza-Jaklovaa 2014a for Priniatikos Pyrgos; and Poulou 2011 for Pseira.
46 Poulou 2011; Yangaki 2016.
47 This will be discussed in details in Chapter 6.

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evidence from other sites of the island, one of the most crucial of which is Vyzari (see Chapter 3.2).

Moving on to the Islamic Emirate of Crete, historical research has attracted a good deal of interest since the beginning to the 20th century. The arabist Gaspar was among the first scholars to provide an account of the Andalusi conquest of Crete, followed by authors such as Brooks, Sefakas, and Papadopoulos, who wrote between the early and mid-20th century. Although primarily concerned with sourcing the textual accounts available to reconstruct the history of the Emirate, and to investigate themes such as the spot and date of the Andalusi landing on Crete, from their works emerges a prevailing obscurantist idea of the Cretan Emirate, marked by piracy, conflicts, oppression, and forced conversion of the local Christian communities. A few years later, such prejudicial attitude climaxed in the already mentioned assertion made by Ostrogorsky that Islamic Crete was nothing but a ‘corsair’s nest’.

With the beginnings of the 1960s Tomadakes was among the first scholars to reject the previous exaggerations on the alleged forced conversion and annihilation of the local population. In the 1980s the two milestone books in the modern historiographical research into Crete during the medieval, and specifically Islamic period, were published: the seminal works by Tsougarakis and Christides. To them, and especially to the latter, we owe a critical reading of the sources, and a sharp and groundbreaking vision of the Emirate, now described as a positive example of an Islamic state. In spite of their efforts, however, the stigmatising words of Ostrogorsky have left wounds too deep to be healed easily and, as late as the 1990s an emeritus professor of history at the University of Crete wrote that ‘the Arab presence was very severe for the native inhabitants of Crete, who were plunged into a long period of harsh servitude. Crete become detached from the Byzantine Empire and disappeared from the civilised world, to a very rudimental form of lifestyle’.

Since these words were written, Christides and Tsougarakis have come back several times to deal with the Emirate of Crete through articles and edited volumes dating to as late as 2017, all of which pursuing and

48 Gaspar 1904; Brooks 1913; Sefakas 1939; Papadopoulos 1948.
49 Ostrogorsky 1957.
50 Tomadakes 1960.
52 Detorakis 1994, 125.
promoting a positive view of the Islamic rule.\textsuperscript{53} However, their effort as historians has not been paralleled by a similar archaeological approach, and Islamic archaeology as a discipline has not yet emerged in Crete, a consideration clearly expressed by Poulou in 2011.\textsuperscript{54} This fact is even more striking considering that there had been promising archaeological investigations conducted in the 1950s by scholars such as Platon and Kalokyris, who had started to explore the monumental fabric of the Islamic capital and the record of material culture, specifically from Vyzari, an inland site of the island.\textsuperscript{55} Even more remarkable was the work conducted in the 1960s and 1970s by numismatist Miles, who could be regarded as the father of an unfortunately never-born discipline of Islamic archaeology of Crete.\textsuperscript{56} In addition to various articles and a thorough monograph on the coinage of the Emirate, Miles was the first scholar to conduct independent and focused archaeological research on Islamic Crete, albeit with limited success. He carried out, with Warren, the only existing work on a rural building dating to the Islamic period (the so-called Arab Building at Knossos), and he was the promoter and director of the urban excavations at Ag. Petros in Heraklion.\textsuperscript{57} These urban excavations, however, remain largely unpublished and, although they uncovered significant features of the Islamic capital and sealed archaeological contexts, many of the artefacts remain unstudied in the archaeological archives of the city.

Similarly, the numismatic and ceramic finds unearthed in the 1990s and 2000s during several urban excavations in Heraklion remain largely unpublished.\textsuperscript{58} A limited selection of a dozen ceramic items and a few small finds from the Kastella excavations (dir. L. Starida) are exhibited at the Historical Museum of Crete (IMK). These, currently, constitute the bulk of material evidence known from Heraklion, providing a glimpse into Islamic material culture from the capital of the Emirate. Poulou published three of these items in two separate articles, which are among the most prominent archaeological studies of medieval Crete.\textsuperscript{59} One article treated the urban development of Heraklion from the early

\textsuperscript{53} For example: Christides 2003; 2017; Tsougarakis 2011. Also Chatzaki 2011.
\textsuperscript{54} Poulou 2011, 382.
\textsuperscript{55} Platon 1950; Kalokyris 1959.
\textsuperscript{56} Miles 1964; 1970; 1976.
\textsuperscript{57} For the Arab Building at Knossos: Warren, Miles 1972, and Chapter 4.1i. For a preliminary report of the 1967 excavations at Ag. Petros: Miles 1974.
\textsuperscript{58} Starida 2011; 2016, 62–68. See also Starida, Kanaki 2010. Detailed analyses were only published with regard to structural features.
\textsuperscript{59} Poulou 2008 and 2011.
to later Medieval period, and the other discussed broader settlement patterns and ceramic production and circulation across the island from the 7th to 12th centuries. However, in spite of her outstanding treatment of the first and second periods of Byzantine occupation (7th-8th and 11th-12th centuries), discussion of the Islamic Emirate is limited in scope, and, with the exception of an article published by the present author in 2019, little has changed over the course of the 2010s. For example, two important archaeological conferences of the last decade exemplify this lack of interest towards the archaeology of the Islamic period: the 3rd Archaïologiko Ergo Kretes (2013), and the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies (ICCS 2016). In both cases, the contributors jump from the first to the second Byzantine period, without any significant discussion of the archaeological evidence pertaining to the intervening years of Islamic rule. In this thesis, the entire body of published and unpublished ceramics exhibited at the IMK has been studied, in the first attempt at presenting a comprehensive overview of the limited corpus of material evidence available.

The remarkable lack of archaeological research into Islamic Crete is in sharp contrast to territories of the broader Mediterranean world, encompassing the Iberian peninsula, the Maghreb, Sicily, Egypt, and the Levant, where recent archaeological research has produced a wide range of new insights into the processes of Islamisation during the 8th-10th century. It is in the context of this notable gap in scholarship that this thesis proposes a targeted and independent focus on the archaeology of the Islamic Emirate of Crete, demonstrating that a more systematic analysis of the available material evidence can advance our understanding of the island in this period, and can indicate fruitful directions for future research.

60 Randazzo 2019b.
61 For the former: Karanastasi, Gigounaki, Tsigonaki 2015 (proceedings of the 4th meeting held in 2016 are in press). For the online proceedings of the 12th ICCS: https://12iccs.proceedings.gr/en/
ii.) Sicily

Following M. Amari (see 1.2), historiographical research in the 20th century developed an ‘imperialistic’ view of Byzantine Sicily, as a marginal region of the empire oppressed by the Imperial court, which was sending “parasite” administrators to this peripheral island, with the sole intention of spoiling its resources. 63 There resulted in a very negative scholarly opinion of the Byzantine rule, similar to the attitude prevailing in the historical reconstruction of the Byzantine period along the Italian Peninsula. 64 Among the few scholars of the 20th century who tried to oppose different assumptions to this picture, A. Guillou and T.S. Brown deserve a special mention for their substantial contributions. 65 They argued that the history of Byzantine Sicily cannot be read through the lens of an Italian perspective and, while the Peninsula suffered greatly in the 6th-8th century due to the Byzantine-Gothic and Byzantine-Longobard wars, Sicily was in fact experiencing a period of economic growth and social prosperity. Although for different reasons, and despite Amari’s work, Islamic Sicily ended up suffered the similar misfortune of being conceived as a peripheral region in the eyes of international historians of the Islamic studies. Apart from the geographical location of the island, this opinion was particularly due to the limited duration of the Islamic rule which, lasting for approximately two centuries, left a body of textual sources that is meager in comparison to other territories of the Islamic world. 66

Leaving the 20th century behind, in a ground-breaking article published in 2006, eloquently titled “Per una nuova storia dell’alto medioevo siciliano” [for a new history of early medieval Sicily] A. Nef and V. Prigent pointed out the biases of the historiographical research conducted until then on Byzantine and Islamic Sicily. 67 The traditional view resulting from Amari’s ‘Risorgimentalist’ approach was challenged, something that had never been done before “as if nothing else could be written about the history of Sicily in the 7th-10th century”. 68 According to the new analyses of textual sources and available material evidence, especially sigillography and numismatic, they drew a new picture of

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63 Position clearly expressed in Pace 1949, 122. See also Cracco Ruggini 1980.
64 For a critical review: Cosentino 1998.
66 Nef, Prigent 2006, 14.
67 Nef, Prigent 2006.
68 Nef, Prigent 2006, 14.
Sicily, which, though geographically peripheral, was not marginal to either Constantinople or Muslim rulers of the North Africa (the Aghlabid first and then the Fatimids). In fact they conclude it was pivotal in their economy and political stability, and fully integrated in their cultural spheres. More recently, these considerations have been further corroborated by other historical analyses. At the same time, however, Nef and Prigent exposed a notable lack of archaeological research conducted on Sicily for the period between the 8th and mid-10th century, which they saw could have held a significant potential to enrich the historical picture available; the 9th century, in particular, was still perceived as a “black hole”. Fortunately, exceptional progress has been made on this front over the past 25 years, a period which can be described as the golden age of Medieval archaeology in Sicily.

The collection of essays by P. Orsi, published posthumously in 1942, inaugurated undoubtedly the beginning of archaeological research conducted on early Medieval Sicily. Despite the profound interest in Byzantine remains, which was quite unusual for the late 19th century, Orsi was after all a man of his time, when post-classical remains were perceived as second-rate evidence, both in Sicily as everywhere in the Mediterranean. This same attitude was still strong throughout the first half of the 20th century. For instance, in the 1950s it led excavator Gentili to ‘sacrifice’ the more than one-thousand-year long stratified history over the remains of the Roman Villa del Casale of Piazza Armerina, whose layers were carelessly wiped out with the sole purpose of reaching the magnificent Late Roman mosaic floors. And this is only one of the many practical examples of excavations that caused the irreversible loss of precious evidence, which could have allowed archaeologists to reconstruct the history of Medieval Sicily, if only they had wanted to. Archaeological research on Medieval Sicily, and in particular on the Byzantine and Islamic periods, has been patchily represented in the decades between the 1950s and 1980s. Agnello, Ragona, D’Angelo, and Fiorilla are among the scholars who have most

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69 Nef, Prigent 2006, 55.
70 For instance, Metcalfe 2009.
71 Nef, Prigent 2006, 54.
72 Orsi 1942.
73 Once again, the reference is to the colonialist approach in North Africa: Mattingly 1996 in addition to Fenwick 2020.
74 Randazzo 2019a. The material evidence recovered from those excavations was however stored in an archive.
contributed to advancing the investigation of the material culture of this period, laying the foundation for modern scholarship. Of great importance is also the impact of the research conducted in Sicily in the 1970s and 1980s by French scholars who, albeit primarily concerned with the later Medieval period, contributed to promote broader scholarly interest towards the material culture of the Middle Ages. Moreover, it should not be forgotten the contribution that the study of the bacini from Pisa has improved the knowledge of glazed ware produced in Fatimid Sicily. However, it was only the 1990s and 2000s that Medieval Archaeology saw a decisive turning-point in Sicily.

In addition to an edited volume dating 2002, entitled “Byzantino-Sicula”, which shed much light on the archaeological evidence of the 6th-7th century, in the 1990s and early 2000s the first articles were published by A. Molinari, A. Arcifa, and A. Ardizzone, three scholars to whom modern archaeological research into the 8th-10th century owes its very existence. Based on the archaeological evidence available, Molinari attempted a diachronic reconstruction of settlement patterns from the 5th to the 12th century which, although later partially revised, was unimaginable at that time. Ardizzone was the first to discuss the evidence of globular amphorae of the 8th century, showing that interregional trading activities involving Sicily had remained quite vibrant in a period that had been traditionally described in terms of economic stagnation. Finally, Arcifa not only shed further light on Islamic pottery of the 10th century produced in Palermo, but also paved the way for a major breakthrough in the knowledge of the ceramic evidence dating to the 8th-9th century: In 2004, she published an article focusing on two categories of pottery, namely the cooking pots so-called ‘Tipo Rocchicella’ (after the site where they were identified stratigraphically for the first time) and the amphorae with ‘grooved strap handles’, and nothing would ever be the same.

75 See, for instance, Agnello 1952; Ragona 1950; 1975; D’Angelo 1976; 1986; 1995; Fiorilla 1991a; 1991b.
76 For example, Bresc-Bautier, Bresc 1977; Pesez 1984.
77 Berti, Tongiorgi 1981.
78 Carra 2002.
79 An article exploring the evidence of Islamic burials ranging from the 10th to 13th century is furthermore worthy of mention: Bagnera, Pezzini 2004.
82 Arcifa, Lesness 1997.
discussion of these ceramics see Chapter 7). These categories of ceramic have become the regional archaeological markers of the 8th-9th century *par excellence*: this undetectable centuries were no longer invisible, and scholars working on the island were thus provided with the tools necessary to explore this period archaeologically. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that over the past 25 years Sicily has progressed from being a backwater region to one of the best-known on an international scale. Once again, the work of Arcifa, Ardizzone, and Molinari has been fundamental in this regard, although a number of other scholars have made a name for themselves in the course of the 2010s.

In 2010 Arcifa and Ardizzone published two articles gathering the whole range of the ceramic evidence dating to the 8th-11th century available from Sicily, which became essential points of reference in secondary literature. Another crucial essay published in this period was co-written by Arcifa, Bagnera, and Nef, in which ceramic evidence of the Aghlabid period (late 9th century) were discussed for the very first time. During the same years an edited volume titled “Sicilia Bizantina, storia, città e territorio” was published and, in 2013, the same editors published a second edited volume focusing entirely on Sicily in the 9th century, “tra Bizantini e Musulmani”, enhancing significantly scholarly knowledge of this watershed century in the history of the island. In the meantime, according to the new archaeological acquisitions, Molinari updated the reconstruction of settlement patterns of the island between the 5th and 12th century, affording at the same time an ethnic and socioeconomic interpretation behind the introduction of a new record of pottery following the establishment of the Fatimid rule over the island. Around the same years, De Luca published two articles which advance enormously the archaeological knowledge and understanding of sigillographic and numismatic evidence dating to both the Aghlabid and Fatimid periods, supplemented by Prigent’s work on the Byzantine front.

In 2014 Nef and Ardizzone published the edited volume titled “Les dynamiques de l’islamisation en Méditerranée centrale et en Sicile:

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83 Arcifa 2004.
84 Ardizzone 2010 (but also 2004); Arcifa 2010a, but also 2010b; 2010c; 2010d.
85 Arcifa, Bagnera, Nef 2012.
86 Congiu, Modeo, Arnone 2010; Congiu, Modeo, Santagati 2013.
nouvelles propositions et découvertes récentes ” marking another major breakthrough in the archaeology of Sicily in the 8th-11th century.\textsuperscript{89} The articles written by Arcifa, Bagnera, Ardizzone, Pezzini, and Sacco were of paramount importance within this volume, as they presented an archaeological picture of Aghlabid and Fatimid Palermo unavailable until then, with specific regard to ceramic assemblages dating between the second half of the 9th and the early 10th century.\textsuperscript{90} In addition, this volume contained a number of articles presenting the results of field surveys conducted in various study-areas of the island, including Entella, the hinterland of Agrigento, the hinterland of Termini, and the hinterland of Syracuse, which offered a first comprehensive insight into the dynamics of transformation of rural settlement patterns during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.\textsuperscript{91} Certainly, this was not an exhaustive picture, and in addition to these sub-regional studies, other study-areas were survived and published in the same years with a specific focus on the Middle Ages. Among them, those at the Valle dello Iato (in the inland of Palermo), and in the hinterland of Philosophiana and the Villa del Casale (central Sicily), are some of the most representative.\textsuperscript{92} Excavations carried out at Philosophiana, in particular, have had the great merit of identifying the remains of the first ceramic workshop known in Sicily dating to 8th-9th century.\textsuperscript{93} Other excavations of outmost importance for the chronological scope of this thesis are those conducted at Contrada Edera, on the northwestern slope of Mount Etna, which uncovered the remains of a Byzantine settlement of the 8th-9th century that had been concealed, basically untouched, by a volcanic eruption (see 2.2ii).\textsuperscript{94} Other excavations and field surveys have been conducted over the last years in various sites and study-areas of the island, including at Castronovo di Sicilia, Contrada Kastro (Corleone), Paternò, and Rocchicella di Mineo, adding precious data to the picture available.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{89} Nef, Ardizzone 2014.
\textsuperscript{90} Arcifa, Bagnera 2014; Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014; Sacco 2014. Also, Arcifa, Bagnera 2017; Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2017.
\textsuperscript{91} Corretti, Facella, Mangiaracina 2014; Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014; Bergemann 2014; Belvedere, Burgio, Cucco 2014; Caccia Guerra 2008; 2013; 2014.
\textsuperscript{92} Respectively: Alfano, Sacco 2014; Vaccaro 2012; Alfano 2015; Alfano, Arrabito, Muratore 2014.
\textsuperscript{93} Vaccaro, La Torre 2015.
\textsuperscript{94} Arcifa, Turco 2016.
Finally, a last milestone has just been published in 2020: “From Polis to Madina”, presenting a fresh and complementary discussion focusing on the transformations of the urban space during the Byzantine-Islamic transition. Each and every article presented in this book is an exceptional and sometime unprecedented contribution for the study of the urban habitat of Sicilian cities between the early and later Middle Ages. However, while cities such as Palermo, Catania, and Agrigento were already well-represented in secondary literature, the evidence that G. Cacciaguerra has presented from Syracuse is the first of its kinds. Thanks to the thorough analysis and exemplary preparation of this scholar, we now have a good understanding of the production and circulation of ceramics in the Byzantine capital of Sicily throughout the 8th – 11th century, including the crucial period between the late 9th and early 10th century, when the city transitioned from Byzantine to Islamic rule. Before Cacciaguerra’s study, comparable ceramic assemblages dating to this timeframe were only available from Palermo (see above).

In the context of the scholarly research outlined above, the subject of the Byzantine-Islamic transition remains underrepresented in the area of the Southern Erei Upland in Central Sicily. For instance, this territory remained excluded from the sub-regional study-areas included in the volume edited by Nef and Ardizzone in 2014. This absence, however, does not reflect a lack of archaeological investigations. On the contrary, as mentioned above, several field surveys and excavations have targeted the area around Philosophiana and the Villa Romana del Casale. Moreover, the city of Enna does appear in “From Polis to Madina”, with two articles that attempt a first reading of the transformations of the urban fabric of this centre from Byzantine Kastrum Hennae to Islamic Qasr Yanni. It should be noted, however, that although one of these two articles takes at its core the fortified citadel of the city, the Castello di Lombardia, it focuses exclusively on structural remains, while overlooking the record of ceramic evidence available, which before research for this thesis, remained unstudied in archaeological archives of the city. Likewise, it should be pointed out that although several excavations and field surveys have been carried out in this area, they have remained isolated instances rather than being

96 Arcifa, Sgarlata 2020.
97 Cacciaguerra 2020.
98 See Chapter 3.2ii.
considered as components of a more complex and multifaceted archaeological landscape. In other words, archaeological research has lacked, until now, a holistic overview of the evidence already available from this area in order to attempt an integrated and diachronic reconstruction of the big picture, featuring the first-rank urban centre of Enna and its surrounding network of rural settlements.

In the wake of this notable lack, this thesis aims at filling this gap by offering the first archaeological attempt at investigating the study-area of the Southern Erei comprehensively and systematically. It does so through both a critical revaluation and blending of the evidence already available, and by means of new archaeological investigations. In particular, poor knowledge of the ceramics from the Castello di Lombardia has been rectified by means of a systematic study of this evidence, which has revealed most valuable data. In addition, new field surveys have been conducted at various sites and territories across this study-area, which were either underrepresented in secondary literature, or that needed further verification. Details of the methods and strategies adopted follow in Chapter 3. The overall result has been the acquisition of evidence that allows us to integrate this central and key territory in the current scholarly research agenda of the island during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

2.2 SICILY AND CRETE IN THE CONTEXT OF BROADER DEBATES IN BYZANTINE AND ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeologically (and historically), the understanding of a specific context in a particular period is often proportionate to the understanding of the same context during earlier periods. The more archaeologists know about a site/region in a precise moment in time, the better they can investigate and interpret what followed next, no matter if these periods were unconnected or linked by a cause-and-effect relationship. Therefore, in order to better understand the Byzantine-Islamic transitions on Sicily and Crete (late 8th – mid-10th century), it is necessary to shed light on the conditions of these islands in the century preceding the Islamic conquests, setting the scene for what follows in Parts II and III. This is particularly necessary for the timeframe which goes from Justinian II to the death of Constantine V

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100 For an historical perspective: Croce 1938; Bloch 1950.
(ca. 695-775). This period, in fact, was fundamental not only for the two case-studies of this thesis, but also for the transition of the Byzantine and Islamic empires into the Middle Ages. From the second half of the 7th century, the Islamic expansion, which had originally started from the Arabian peninsula, embarked on the naval conquest of the Mediterranean; between 695 and 717, Byzantium saw seven emperors, seven violent revolutions, one civil war, the loss of vast territories across the empire to Islamic hands and, with the consolidation of Islamic naval power, a siege laid again Constantinople between 715 and 717. Both siege and struggle for imperial succession were ended by Leo III, the father of Constantine V and the founder of the Isaurian dynasty, which held the crown until the early 9th century.

Outlining in a few thousand words the numerous historical events and archaeological features characterising both islands during this period is unrealistic. Therefore, in accordance to the scope of this thesis, this section focuses on three principal matters, which have received much attention in current scholarly debated in Byzantine and Islamic archaeology, and are pivotal for the discussion that follows, hence the decision to outline them now and for good. The first issue concerns the impact of the Islamic Mediterranean expansion in late 7th–early 8th century, and consequent Byzantine military responsiveness in reaction to this maritime threat. The second matter regards the alleged economic decline and social regression affecting the Byzantine Empire during the 8th-9th century. The third and final point concerns Islamisation, a concept which needs to be explained and nuanced in its principal archaeological declinations, and institutional and cultural aspects.

Before moving further, an additional and short chronological and conceptual clarification is due. Scholars working on Sicily and Crete have long considered the late 7th and early 8th century as belonging to two different historical phases: the late 7th century has been considered part of the Late Antiquity (i.e. tandem with the 6th-7th century); the early 8th century, instead, as a block with the late-8th-9th century. Rather than this approach, historical circumstances and new archaeological evidence

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102 Haldon 2016, 48-53.
103 See, for instance, the chronological partitions in Arcifa 2010a; Ardizzone 2010; Molinari 2013; Poulou 2011.
support the fact that the timeframe spanning the late 7th to early 8th century, especially between the 690s and 720s, should be considered as belonging to an univocal picture, still fitting into the legacy of the Late Antique world (what scholars have called the ‘Long Late Antiquity’). In fact, for both Sicily and Crete there is now good ground to argue that the economy and living conditions in the shift between the 7th and 8th century were still as much vibrant and prosperous as in the decades before, having both islands become vital breadbaskets of the Byzantine Empire and critical military bases of operation in the maritime confrontation against the Islamic Mediterranean expansion. By contrast, it would seem that the turning point can be placed in the 8th century, around the 730s-750s. In addition to natural and endemic catastrophes (see sub-section ii.), during these decades both islands became the main foci of the economic and landholding reforms energetically promoted by Leo III and accomplished by Constantine V; as it will be argued in due course, we believe that these reforms held a decisive role in marking the definitive transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages on both Sicily and Crete.

i.) **Islamic Mediterranean expansion and Byzantine military responsiveness (ca. mid-7th – mid-8th century): an overview of the archaeo logical evidence**

Unlike the Indian Ocean, which became the peaceful Muslim trading space *par excellence*, since the mid-7th century the Mediterranean, otherwise known as the ‘Sea of the Romans’, found a singular place in the heart of the Muslim domain, as the favored space for the Caliph’s jihad. However, while this consideration is especially valid for the eastern territories encompassing Syria-Palestine, Egypt, and Cyprus, all of which were struck by the wave of the rising Islamic naval power as early as the 630s, this early Islamic maritime expansion seems to have had only marginal impacts on Sicily and Crete. According to textual sources, both Byzantine and Islamic (see 3.2), historians have listed a series of dates spanning the mid-7th to early 9th century, in which Islamic raids against Sicily and Crete are said to have taken place: the first

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alleged Arab attack against Sicily was dated 652, while Crete was first assaulted in 654; other dates within the 7th century include 656, 671, and 674 for Crete, while in Sicily it would seem that raids had stopped until the 670s, perhaps owing to Consans II’s decision to move the imperial court to Syracuse in 663-668. Repeated attacks against both islands are said to have resumed throughout the first half of the 8th century, in 703, 705-706, 713-715, 720-726, 728-729, 735, 740 etc.

As will be discussed in a moment, the raids dating to the late 7th-8th century are historical matters of fact supported by archaeological evidence. By contrast, a critical reexamination has led recent historians to suggest that the earliest such raids of the 7th century were mostly marginal or even fictional episodes, forged by later propaganda. It should not be forgotten, in fact, that none of the available Islamic textual accounts date before the late 8th-9th century. Eventually, however, the Islamic maritime threat did reach the Central and Western Mediterranean, which in the late 7th-8th century turned into a battlefield between Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam. A military and ideological frontier-zone, referred to as thaghr in Arabic, came to separate these two powers, running, roughly horizontally, through the major islands, from Cyprus to the Balearic, via Crete, Sicily and Sardinia. Byzantium responded to this threat by promoting an active policy of militarisation. Focusing on the two case-studies of this thesis, Justinian II established the Theme of Sicily in around 698, comprising the Duchies of Naples, Apulia, and Calabria. A few years later, Leo III strengthened the Sicilian fleet basing naval squadrons on the island, which became a maritime base of operation in the heart of the Mediterranean; this maneuver brought enhanced security to the Empire’s western flank, as Islamic raids in the Tyrrenian ceased almost entirely between the 730s-740s.

Regarding Crete, some scholars have suggested that this island was part of the Theme of Hellas during the 8th century.

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107 Metcalfe 2009, 4-5; Christides 1984, 89; Tsougarakis 1988, 22-23.
109 Tsougarakis 1988 already questioned the reliability of textual sources. More recently see: Kislinger 2010, 150; Jankowiak 2013, who goes as far as questioning the reality of the first Arab siege of Constantinople in the 650s.
110 Picard 2018, 10-14.
century, while others underline that there is no solid proof to demonstrate the upgrading to thematic status before the 9th century.\textsuperscript{114} Regardless of this dispute, it is undeniable that in the late 7th – early 8th century Byzantium organised its maritime military defence in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, establishing permanent military bases of operations in Rhodes and Caria, which led to the creation in the 8th century of the Cibyrraioton Theme.\textsuperscript{115} In this climate, Leo III and Constantine V established a special provincial fleet, the \emph{Aigian Pelagos} (i.e. the Aegean islands), whose name could have not been more explicit to underpin the importance of the waters between Crete and Constantinople.\textsuperscript{116} Sigillographic evidence, moreover, shows that Crete was upgraded to an Archonate during the 8th century (see below).\textsuperscript{117}

Having established these sources, what range of archaeological evidence do we possess in support of the limited effect of the Arab Mediterranean expansion of the mid-7th century, as opposes to the impact of the Islamic naval power in the late 7th-8th century? Answers to this question are manifold and include a wide variety of evidence, spanning two exceptional Arabic inscriptions from Crete dating to the 710s, sigillography, and structural remains of fortifications. Ceramics should be added as well: until few decades ago, scholarly knowledge of pottery did not exceed the mid-7th century, the same period as Arab raids were thought to devastate the Mediterranean, considering therefore these two facts as inevitably entwined.\textsuperscript{118} Now we are able to recognise ceramic evidence dating to the late 7th and 8th century, filling therefore that gap of information which had previously been interpreted as an indication of the Arab raids (see subsection ii).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Tsigonaki 2019, 183; Tsougarakis 1990a, 141-142. Also: Auzepy 2008, 265; Brubaker, Haldon 2011, 734-739.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ragia 2011, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Kountoura 2017; Ragia 2011, 105. Also: McCormick 2008, 400; Oikonomides 1972, 353; Leontsini 2017.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Tsougarakis 1990s.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Already: Pirenne 1937.
\end{itemize}
An extraordinary piece of archaeological evidence bearing testament to the Islamic presence on Crete in the early 8th century comes from Tsoutsouros, ancient Inatos, a coastal settlement in the south-central area of the island. This evidence consists of two Arabic inscriptions engraved on two sides of the central bema in the early Byzantine church of the settlement, apparently with an interval of two years. The two inscriptions are of different length: one is composed on two lines, while the other on four lines. The shorter inscription (FIG.1 above), which overlaps a carved Christian cross, has been translated and published by
Christides, reading ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abs al-Hakim, 97AH [AD 715-16]. The second inscription (FIG.1 below) remains unpublished; its precarious state of conservation complicates the reading; however, it is clear that it bears a different date of the hegira, \( dhû al-qa’da \) 99AH, which is June or July AD 718.

This preliminary reading does not allow for broader historical interpretations or reconstructions to be drawn, for instance the composers’ affiliation to specific junds, such as the Ifriqiyan, Egyptian, or Syrian, something that is possible doing in other Aegean instances. Although unique to Crete, this evidence, might find its historical context in the corpus of similar examples dating to the same period, which have been recorded in the Eastern Aegean, on Kos and Cnidus, and on Cyprus, and which have been convincingly interpreted as evidences of the temporary (and partial) occupation of those islands by Umayyad troops partaking in the Arab siege of Constantinople (717-718). In this regard, it is worth recalling al-Baladhuri’s Futuh al-Buldan account of Islamic forces, led by Junada b. Abi Umayya al-Azdi, landing on Crete in around 715, and occupying part of the island temporarily. Thus, the inscriptions from Tsoutsouros could possibly be seen as tangible evidence of that short and partial occupation.

Broadening this geographical picture, comparable inscriptions dating to a similar timeframe have been recorded in other territories within the orbit of the Dar al-Islam between the mid-7th and mid-8th century, such as Syria-Palestine and the North Africa, but they seem to have little implications with the Arab siege of Constantinople. For example, 12 Arabic inscriptions have been recorded at the site of Yavneh-Yam, on the coast of Syria-Palestine, incised or chiseled on the surface of three Byzantine marble columns of a Christian church. One column was found in situ along with its marble base, showing that it was still standing upright when the carvings were made. These inscriptions have been dated to the early 8th century on paleographical bases, and all have a clear religious Muslim nature bearing short prayers of men asking for Allah’s forgiveness. The most significant inscription mentions a warrior

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120 I owe my gratitude to M. Legendre for this reading.
121 Imbert 2013.
122 Imbert 2013.
124 Fischer, Taxel 2014, 234-236.
who aspires for martyrdom. In this case, the evidence of these inscriptions has been linked to the strategy of fortification and militarisation of the Levantine coastal plain, which was accomplished through both the construction of rubut (sing. ribat), and the introduction of new Muslim military personnel.

To a further different context could instead belong two inscriptions coming from the nearby sites of Tell al-Samak and Horvat Berachot, both of which have been dated to the late 7th - early 8th century on paleographical bases. The former was carved into the wall of a vaulted burial chamber in a rock-cut arcosolia tomb; the latter in the wall of a crypt inside a Byzantine church. The suggestion has been made that these graffiti belong to an invocative and poetic Arabic epigraphic genre documented in literary sources, referring to Muslims of various social classes who, in Early Islamic times, visited churches, monasteries, and other Christian holy places, in order to attend festivals, to see the beautiful objects and decorations of these loci, and even to pray. Perhaps, the same habit of early Muslim travellers to record their presence at memorable places, including churches and monasteries, could be attributed to six examples of Arabic inscriptions that have been found carved in the walls of a Byzantine church at Ras al Hilal, a town on the coast of Cyrenaica (modern Libya), at a relatively short sail away from Crete. All these graffiti exhort the piety of the Almighty for their writers, and bear dates spanning 719-726, so just a few years later than the Cretan examples.

If also the longer inscription from Tsoutsouros belongs to this epigraphic genre, rather than being purely an evidence of raids and temporary military occupation, is a suggestive hypothesis, which, however, remains inconclusive until this engraving will be deciphered in its full length.

- Some remarks on sigillographic evidence

The only sigillographic evidence currently available of a military officer deployed in the late 7th – early 8th century on Byzantine Crete is the lead seal of a certain Stephen strategos, of which theme, however, is not

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125 Taxel 2013a.
126 Taxel 2013a, 80-81.
known. With this exception, all the remaining lead seals at our disposal date to the 8th - early 9th century, a further indication that Byzantium did not promote a systematic process of militarization of the island before this date. On the contrary, the corpus of about 15 lead seals of military and civil officers found on Crete testifies, eloquently and incontrovertibly, that even though not elevated to a theme, between the 8th and early 9th century Crete became an Archontate, an independent administrative unit governed by archons. The Isaurian dynasty is credited with this operation; it is in fact a widely accepted scholarly view that in addition to strengthening the fleet (see above), the Isaurian Emperors from Leo III down to Irene (d. 802) gave absolute priority to the land forces. In addition to the evidence of 9 archons, the Cretan sigillographic evidence dating to the 8th - 9th century includes seals of (FIG.2): a military officer from the Constantinopolitan Opsikion Theme, dating to the first half of the 8th century; one turmarch, dating to the first half of the 9th century; a series of patricians, especially from Gortyn and Eleutherna, who it is likely were invested or exercised some sort of military role; the seal of a further anonymous strategos, found on Crete (Gortyn), but not necessarily of Crete; and other court administrators.

129 Tsougarakis 1988, 168, no.1.
130 Tsougarakis 1988, 168-170; 1990a.
The Sicilian sigillographic record is one of the largest in the Byzantine Empire, accounting for hundreds of specimens, which are exceptionally eloquent in bearing testament to a process of militarisation of the island occurring between the late 7th and 9th century.\(^{133}\) Besides strategoi and other officers, such as archons, turmarchs, logothetes, drugari, and imperial spathari, which are in common to Crete and to the broader Byzantine world, the Sicilian record is enriched by the peculiar evidence of a Constantinopolitan officer that in the mid-8th century was allocated ad hoc to the Theme of Sicily, the topoteretes.\(^{134}\) In the Byzantine military system, topoteretai were upper-middle rank officers belonging to the Constantinopolitan tagmatic forces, who were permanently allocated to a selected city of important strategic value, and put in command of a unit of elite troops, especially cavalry, with an average of 15 banda each, of 50-100 mounted soldiers apiece.\(^{135}\)

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\(^{134}\) Prigent 2015; besides Sicily, topoteretai appear in only one other region of the Empire, Thrace.

\(^{135}\) Or 200-400 infantrymen: Prigent 2006.
In 2015, Prigent showed that four Sicilian cities—Syracuse, Catania, Cefalù, and Enna—yielded evidence for the existence of *topoteretai*.\(^{136}\)

The fact that some seals bear the name of different officers but a common place-name witnesses the continuity in the existence of this office in the same cities over time, possibly up to the Islamic takeover during the 9\(^{th}\) century. In a relatively short time after that article, I identified the lead seal of a *topoteretes* from another Sicilian city, Ragusa (FIG.3).\(^{137}\)

Apart from updating the sigillographic record, interpreting this evidence within its historical and topographical contexts offers a theoretical basis to formulate a working-hypothesis on the possibility to see a specific strategy of the Isaurian emperors to defend key agricultural districts of the island from the Islamic threat; this strategy has been defined in this thesis as the Isaurian ‘policy of containment’, and will be discussed in details in Chapter 7.2.

\(^{136}\) Prigent 2015, 169. Inside the *Theme*, the only evidence known outside Sicily in from Tropea in Calabria.

\(^{137}\) I was shown this lead seal after a conference held in Sicily in 2016, by a private individual whose family has owned it for many generations. I deeply thank the owner for having allowed me to take the photos that are present here. According to the owner, this lead seal was found at near Morgantina.
Some remarks on fortifications

Until recently, it was widely accepted that most of the post-Justinian fortifications found across the Byzantine Empire were built under Constans II, as a reaction to the Arab’s threat of the mid-7th century; besides a reading over-reliant on textual sources, this opinion was enforced by the upsurge of coins of this emperor that were recorded scattered throughout the empire. More recently, however, archaeological research has challenged this opinion, demonstrating that, at least in the Aegean and Southern and Western Asia Minor, the main period of construction of Byzantine works of fortification dates between the late 7th and early 8th century. In fact, it was only at that stage that the Islamic threat became real for these territories, calling for precautions to be arranged, promptly and swiftly, and ‘walls became as important as men’.

The available evidence from Sicily and Crete accords well with this revised chronology. Regarding Crete, this chronological revision has been already advanced in recent secondary literature dealing with the evidence of Byzantine fortifications from Gortyn, Eleutherna, Chania, Lyttos, and Heraklion, just to mention the most relevant instances. Discussion of these works of fortification is included, when relevant, in Chapter 4.

A similar chronological revision has been done for Sicily too, albeit mostly drawing on theoretical considerations. This thesis has contributed to this debate by means of two firsthand case-studies. The first is the Euryalos fort, an extraordinary military structure constructed in the 4th century BC on the Belvedere plateau, overlooking Syracuse. Recently, the hypothesis has been advanced that in the late 7th-8th century this complex might have become the headquarters of the thematic forces detached on the island, whose strategos was in fact located in Syracuse. However, such consideration has not been reinforced by archaeological investigations. By following a close

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139 Crow 2017, 94-97.
140 Auzepy 2008, 265.
142 Uggeri 2010.
143 Arcifa 2016b, 431-32.
examination of the structural remains of this monument, structural evidence have been identified, which can in fact be attributed to this period on the basis of comparative analogies drawn with fortifications of the late 7th-8th century from others territories of the Byzantine Empire, including Chios and Crete. A full discussion of this suggestion is provided in APPENDIX 1.1. The second case-study regards the Kassar at Castronovo di Scilia, a formidable fortification in Central-Western Sicily running for nearly 2km and featuring one monumental gate, 11 towers, one of which pentagonal, and enclosing an open area 90ha in extension. Most recent archaeological excavations have revised the construction of this fortification from the mid-7th to approximately the 690s-730s. This thesis has reached a similar conclusion through a complementary restudy of the masonry technique and building materials employed in its construction; a close examination of this case-study is offered in APPENDIX 1.2.

ii.) The Byzantine “Dark Ages” do not look so dark anymore (late 7th – early 9th century)

As seen above, the period spanning the mid-7th to 9th century was of greatest importance for the formation, consolidation, and global expansion of the Dar al-Islam. During these centuries, the Umayyad (up to 750) and Abbasid dynasties ruled an empire stretching from the Atlantic coasts to Central Asia, funding new capitals, building grandiose palaces and mosques, turning deserts into gardens, and establishing commercial connections with lands as far afield as China. With some regional exceptions, and in spite of four civil wars and the general lack of material sources dating to the first generations following the death of Muhammad, Islamic scholars, including archaeologists, would define this period as one of prosperity, and certainly not of decline.

On the opposite side, Byzantine scholarly perceptions of the 20th century considered the mid-7th to mid-9th century as a most problematic period for the Byzantine Empire, which was assumed to have reached its lowest socioeconomic ebb, evoking basic forms of lifestyle and self-

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144 Vassallo et al. 2015.
146 See footnote 15.
Two main factors contributed to paint this archaeological picture of regression and decline: the first was the drop of mass-produced and bulk-traded pottery around the second-half of the 7th century, which resulted in the inescapable contraction of settlement patterns; the second was the de-monumentalisation of urban fabrics and the deterioration of both urban and rural forms of habitation. It is on these two main factors that the following discussion will focus.

A series of internal and external factors were adduced to find valid historical reasons for this crisis. The rise of the Islamic Empire and its military conquest of Egypt, Syria-Palestine, and North Africa, which until then had been pivotal for the Byzantine economy, were mostly taken as the main explanations. Other reasons can be outlined thus: the inner political strife for imperial succession, which was ended by Leo III establishing the Isaurian dynasty in 717; the religious controversy promoted by this dynasty over the cult of icons (Iconoclasm); natural catastrophes, especially a series of devastating earthquakes; and endemic diseases, the most dramatic of which was a new outbreak of the Justinian plague in the mid-8th century, for which less optimistic scholarly estimations suggesting a decrease in the population of the Empire by as much as 30%. Thus, in sharp contrast to archaeologists of Islamic studies, ‘Western’ scholars, who customary focused on classical and monumental remains, have long labeled ‘the Dark Ages’ the period between the rise of Islam and the Byzantine revival of the mid/late 9th century; cities, rural settlements, social life, economic activities, and material culture were all considered to have undertaken an inexorable process of regression, contraction, and demise.

On the international academic stage, the 1990s and 2000s have seen a turning point in the traditional historical and archaeological attitude towards the ‘Dark Ages’. Now, after almost three decades of research, an increasing number of projects and excavations occurring on the broader Mediterranean basin are offering the opportunity to investigate the ‘differing reactions from the urban and rural

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149 Recent literature reviews in Haldon 2001; 2014; 2016.
150 Scholars such as Arthur, Curta, and Zanini have been among the most zealous advocates of opposing a pessimistic view of the Byzantine society during the 8th-9th century. See for example Arthur, Bruno 2009; Zanini 2016; Curta 2016.
communities responding to what we are coming to recognise as a multiplicity of differing challenges in differing circumstances'.\textsuperscript{151} Steps forward have been made also on the front of the inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural dialogue between Islamic and Byzantine studies. For example, within the logic of military conflict, there is now a greater awareness that the confrontation between Byzantium and the \emph{Dar al-Islam} was also played on cultural, ideological, political, and administrative levels, and that these two sovereign powers interacted and exchanged knowledge continuously.\textsuperscript{152}

Certainly, compared to the Classical and Late Antique periods, a degree of economic and demographic downturn is, overall, undeniable across the Byzantine Empire during the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. However, rather than in terms of a catastrophic regression and irreversible demise from the Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, new concepts such as ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ are now enriching and nuancing the discussion on the Byzantine Empire between the late 7\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century, conferring a new complexity and shedding a more positive light on the darkness of the ‘Dark Ages’. In what follows, an outline is drawn of a major transformation in the economic systems of production and distribution of goods: the decline of mass-produced and bulk-traded pottery, and its prompt replacement by local markets. Next, the structural deterioration of the built environment is considered, arguing that it did not necessarily equal social regression.\textsuperscript{153}

- \emph{Changing patterns of ceramic production and distribution: the rise of local markets and the persistence of interregional trade networks}

Pottery is a most efficient archaeological tool to investigate and reconstruct past societies, especially from a socioeconomic perspective. From this point of view, the idea itself of the ‘Dark Ages’ was bound to the knowledge and visibility of ceramic evidence in the archaeological record. Since the 1960s, the pioneering works conducted, among others,

\textsuperscript{152} See: Nef, Prigent 2006; Legendre 2016, 4-5. Also Bintliff 2008.
\textsuperscript{153} Specific discussion of settlement patterns from Crete and Sicily is afforded in Parts II and III respectively.
by Lamboglia, Carandini, Hayes, and Keay have allowed archaeologists to gain a satisfactory knowledge of ceramics mass-produced and bulk-traded across the Mediterranean until the mid-7th century. Among the most representative ceramic categories of this period, there are: Red Slipped Wares, whether African (ARSW), Phocean (PRSW), or so-called Cypriote (CRSW); Aegean and African cooking pots; and a series of African and Eastern Mediterranean Late Roman Amphorae (LRA 1, 2, 4-5, and 13). Towards the end of the 7th century, these mass-produced ceramics stopped being made, and archaeologists encountered main problems in the ‘visibility’ of the archaeological record; needless to say, the Islamic takeover of Carthage in 698 and the threat along the coasts of Asia Minor and the Aegean were adduced as the main reasons for this abrupt interruption.

Fortunately, over the last two decades, archaeological research has made significant progress towards the successful recognition of the material culture dating to the ‘Dark Ages’, and both Sicily and Crete can now rely on a better understanding of the changing patterns of production and distribution of ceramics during this period. In particular, three main points can be highlighted: 1) the chronology some ceramics, which were dated within the mid-7th century, has now been extended by (at least) one or two generations; 2) after their eventual decline, these ceramics were immediately replaced by high-quality local products; and 3) some ceramics, especially amphorae, continued to be bulk-traded inter-regionally; along came a niche distribution of semi-luxury glazed wares, hinting at the persistence of interregional connections and maritime trade networks.

With regard to the first point, over the last two decades, scholars such as Bonifay and Reynolds have shown that the production of some RSW and LRA continued into the late 7th and early 8th century. For instance, the production of ARSW 99D and 105C can be confidentially placed in the late 7th century (690+), with the manufacture of the 109C continuing into the early 8th century. Similarly, the forms 9B-C of CRSW, which was produced in southern Anatolia, were manufactured up to the late

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156 Bibliography is extensive. Indicatively: Bonifay 2004; 2019; Cau Ontiveros, Reynolds, Bonifay 2012.
8th century. Analogous considerations can be applied to amphorae produced in North Africa, the Aegean, and the Eastern Mediterranean, including Spatheia 3C, Keay 8a, 61a, and 50, LRA 1c, LRA 2c, LRA 5 and LRA 13. Revising the period of production of these items from the mid- to the late 7th century implies an even later date for their deposition in the archaeological record. Although this reasoning might sound historically irrelevant, in archaeological terms it is of paramount importance. In this way, it is finally possible to bridge the gap between the drop in mass-production of pottery and the emergence of local productions in the 8th century, a gap which has long been perceived as a major period of socio-economic blackout.

A representative survey of RSWs and amphorae from Sicily and Crete shows that both islands were plentifully supplied with examples now dated to late 7th century (FIG.4). Sometimes it has even been possible to find such evidence in stratigraphic contexts of the early 8th century: in Sicily, for instance, ARSW 105 and 109 have been documented in association with amphorae Keay 61a, K8a, and Spatheia 3C in contexts of the early 8th century at Catania, Agrigento, Marettimo, and Ganzirri (Messina). In Crete, analogies can be drawn with evidence of ARSW 105 and 107, and CRWS 9 from stratigraphic contexts at Knossos, Pseira, and Kissamos, and with the evidence of Keay 50 and 61a recovered in 8th-century layers in the Gortyn agora. These are, in my opinion, clear indications of active economic connections linking Sicily and Crete to

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160 Zanini, Costa 2012; Sanders 2018; in press.
161 Malfitana, Bonifay 2016; Malfitana, Franco et al. 2012 are the bibliographical starting-points for the overview from Sicily, to which evidence drawn from Ardizzone 2010; Arcifa 2010; and Randazzo 2019a have been added. Dello Priete 1988 is the bibliographical starting-point for the overview from Sicily, to which evidence drawn from Hayes 2001; Klontza-Jaklovaa 2014a; Vogt 1994; 2005; Yangaki 2016; and Xanthopoulou 2004 have been added. Certainly, this is only a trivial overview compared to the picture that actually existed. This is particularly true for Sicily, an island on which, it has been argued, there is more ARSW than in Tunisia: Fentress et al. 2004.
162 Ardizzone 2010, 58; Arcifa 2010a, 27.
163 Respectively: Hayes 2001; Tzavella 2019; Scordou 2018; Portale 2011, 174-175. The evidence from Gortyn has been interpreted in terms of ‘residuality’. Instead, it would be worth questioning whether it could reflect the enduring reuse of these containers into the 8th century, in a trend widely documented stratigraphically in contemporary Mediterranean contexts, such as Ravenna’s harbour: Cirelli 2018.
well-established Mediterranean markets up to the late 7th – early 8th century.

Eventually, as a response to the increasing scarcity of bulk-imported pottery, during the late 7th and early 8th century both islands developed specialised ceramic productions (FIG.5), some of which endured or further evolved into the 8th – early 9th century. For example, in support of their agricultural productions, both Sicily and Crete manufactured large volumes of amphorae. The Cretan T(ardo) R(omano) C(retese) 7 and 10, and the Sicilian Crypta Balbi 2 and later variations of Keay 52, are some of the most principal 7th-century productions, which endured into the early/mid-8th century. After this point, so-called globular amphorae and amphorae ‘with grooved strap-handles’ replaced the

FIGURE 4: A representative survey of RSWs and amphorae from Sicily and Crete (maps by the author).

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former in Crete and Sicily respectively (see below). Similar considerations can be made with regard to other categories of the instrumentum domesticum, comprising tableware, cooking-pots, and oil lamps.\footnote{For recent overviews see: Poulou 2011; Tangaki 2016 for Crete; Ardizzone 2010; Arcifa 2010a; 2010b for Sicily.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{A representative selection of late 7th – early/mid-8th century local pottery from Sicily (left) and Crete (right). All examples are redrawn for graphic consistency. Sicily (from top to bottom): amphorae Crypta Balbi 2 and Keay 52 from Rome (Saguì 2001, 2002); tableware from Catania, Philosophiana, and Rocchicella (Arcifa 2008b, 2010b; Vaccaro 2013a); cooking-pots from Segesta, Cignana, and Santa Caterina (Faccella, Capelli, Piazza 2013; Rizzo, Zambito 2012; Cacciaguerra 2010a); oil lamp ‘a rosario’ from Rome (Saguì 2001). Crete (from top to bottom): amphorae TRC 10 and 7 from Gortyn (Portale, Romeo 2001; Perna Fabrini 2009); tableware from Gortyn and Knossos (Vitale 2004; Rizza, Scinari 1968; Hayer 2001); cooking-pots from Eleutherna (Yangaki 2016), oil lamp ‘a fiaschetta’ from Knossos (Hayes 2001).}
\end{figure}
Considering tableware of the late 7th - 8th century, a major difference between Sicily and Crete can be noted with regard to the adoption of diverging decorative styles: painted decoration was extensively deployed in Crete, as much as an entire production has been named *ceramica sovradipinta* (lit. painted-over); instead, incisions and comb-striations prevailed in Sicily.\(^{166}\) However, a closer look at the morphological repertoire of domestic pottery produced on both islands reveals the existence of trajectories that are equivalent. Sometimes, Late Antique shapes of RSWs were reproduced, suggesting a link to the legacy of the recent past.\(^{167}\) But, most remarkably, new functional typologies were developed in parallel on both islands, including carinated bowls for individual consumption of food; wide and deep basins with flared rims, suitable for collective serving; mugs, pitchers, jugs, and other small storing and serving containers. Unsurprisingly, similar morphological comparisons can be drawn with contemporary contexts from other regions of the Byzantine Empire, including Apulia, Butrint, Naples, and also Rome.\(^{168}\) Both the wide range of typologies, and the fact that these tableware are still wheel-made, well-fired, and crafted with good-quality clays suggest the endurance of complex culinary habits, productive skills, and social organisation of the communities inhabiting Sicily and Crete during the 8th century, all of which describe a picture that does not fit with a sharp socioeconomic decline. In this regard, it is crucial to note that in the 8th century the first attempts to produce tableware with glaze were made in the workshops of Eleutherna, Pseira, and Philosophiana.\(^{169}\) Outside the Islamic East (i.e. modern Iran and Iraq) and Egypt, at this period glazed pottery was perceived as a semi-luxury good in the Byzantine Empire, whose manufacture was almost exclusively limited to Rome and Constantinople; the production of these ceramics on Sicily and Crete not only reflects the possible demand of local elites for them, but also reveals the local availability of skilled artisans with a technological


\(^{169}\) Poulou 2011; Yangaki 2016; Vaccaro, La Torre 2015.
background directly linked to the two major urban centres of Christendom.  

Besides the rise of local markets, interregional trade of ceramics continued to be conducted in the 8th-9th century on two main levels. One, in bulk and most likely piloted by the Byzantine State and the Church, involving large cargos of the so called ‘globular amphorae’, whose evidence is plentiful on Sicily and Crete (FIG.6a-b).

![FIGURE 6a: Distribution map of 8th-9th century imported amphorae in Sicily (map by the author)](image)

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170 Martin, Tite, Watson 2018.
171 As economic historians have recently argued, there was never a moment throughout the early Middle Ages in which interregional connectivity and long-distance Mediterranean commerce ceased to exist: Wickham 2000; 2004, 161-65; Haldon 2000; 2012; Horden, Purcell 2000, 123-172.
172 A full discussion of the dataset used to draw these maps follows in Chapter 3.2. For a most recent edited volume dealing extensively with globular amphorae of the 8th-9th century: Gelichi, Molinari 2018. Specifically on Sicily see synthesis in Vaccaro 2013a (for the evidence from Enna and Case Bastione see Chapter 7). For Crete: Poulou 2011, 400-402 and, more recently, Yangaki 2016; Poulou 2018. The evidence of amphorae with grooved-strap handles from Crete is based on personal field observations, for which see Chapter 3.2 and 6.1.
FIGURE 6b: Distribution map of 8th-9th century imported amphorae in Crete (map by the author)

FIGURE 7a: Distribution map of 8th-9th century glazed wares in Sicily (map by the author)
FIGURE 7b: Distribution map of late 7th-early 9th century glazed wares in Crete (map by the author)

The other, involving a much smaller circle of consumers, was based on the distribution (either via trade or gift-exchange) of semi-luxury goods, most notably glazed wares. A macro-division of glaze-wares can be made between the Constantinopolitan Glazed White Ware I (GWW I) whose chronology has recently been reassessed from the early 7th to the late 7th-9th century, and the brown or greenish vetrina pesante (lit. heavy-glazed), which was developed during the 8th-9th century in Rome and Constantinople.

Chafing-dishes are among the most distinctive evidence of glazed ware, both GWW and vetrina pesante: these are specific portable braziers with lids designed for heating up and keeping warm food and liquids. Beginning to appear around 700, chafing-dishes have been found across almost all the territories of the Byzantine Empire, and a significant number of local workshops, including Otranto, Naples, Butrint, Corinth, as well as Sicily and Crete, soon began to manufacture their own examples. In spite of this regional character, it is most noteworthy that all these workshops employed the same glazing technique and adhered to similar morphological features, two factors that have led scholars to consider whether these cooking devices can be indicative of specific culinary customs in the Byzantine world, perhaps linked to dining

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174 Armstrong 2008; Vroom 2016b.
175 Paroli 1992; Romei 2001b.
176 For what follows: Vroom 2012a.
practices of high-rank military officers and other privileged civil and religious hierarchies.\textsuperscript{177} 

A closer discussion of the evidence of glazed wares from Crete and Sicily will follow in Parts II and III. Here, however, it should be anticipated that Sicily is one of the Mediterranean regions with the highest number of finds of \textit{vetrina pesante} and chafing-dishes (FIG.7a); on the contrary GWW I is virtually absent, and altogether rarely documented in the Western Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{178} GWW I is better documented in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in the Aegean, and the record of evidence from Crete is one of richest of the Byzantine Empire, comprising at least nine sites (FIG.7b).\textsuperscript{179} The remarkable number of glazed-ware from Sicily and Crete has extraordinary social and economic implications as it is undoubtedly an important element for tracing contacts with the major cities and territories of the Byzantine Empire, above all Constantinople, Greece, Asia Minor, Rome, and Southern Italy, with which the elites of these islands shared common circuits of distribution of semi-luxury ceramic imports.\textsuperscript{180}

This short excursus has shown the giant leaps made by archaeological research in advancing the knowledge and understanding of ceramic evidence dating to the late 7\textsuperscript{th} – 8\textsuperscript{th}/9\textsuperscript{th} century, with a specific focus on Byzantine Sicily and Crete. The emergence of technologically advanced and highly functional local productions on both islands bear testimony to the availability of technical expertise, technological know-how, manpower, and the endurance of complex social practices linked to the domestic sphere, which appear well-integrated in the cultural \textit{koine} of the Byzantine world. The presence of decorative patterns, moreover, might indicate that not only the basic needs of the local demand were met, but also the effort was made to fit into different tastes and, perhaps, customers’ expectations. Interregional imports of amphorae indicate that the economies and agricultural productiveness of both islands were still vibrant and dynamic throughout this period, capable of not only supplying their regional demands, but also supporting long-distance export, which is further paralleled by the imports of semi-

\textsuperscript{177} Arthur 2007; Vroom 2012b.
\textsuperscript{178} One sherd of GWW I comes from Carthage: Hayes 1992, 18. One sherd of GWW II (9\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} century) has been documented on Malta, which until the late 9\textsuperscript{th} century was part of the Sicilian \textit{Theme}: Bruno, Cutajar 2018.
\textsuperscript{179} Poulou 2011; Yangaki 2016.
\textsuperscript{180} Poulou 2011, 395; Vroom 2006, 164.
luxury glazed fine-wares. True, the creation of a market-system that was overall more sub-regionalised than before is a matter of fact; however, none of the evidence discussed above is synonymous with a sharp economic decline, hence from this perspective it is unconceivable to persevere considering these centuries as the ‘Dark Ages’ in the Byzantine history of these islands.

- Did urban de-monumentalisation and structural decline equal social regression?

Similar conceptual considerations to those about ceramics offered above can be applied with regard to the fate of the urban fabrics of Classical cities and to the forms of rural and urban habitation after Antiquity. Until recently, the impoverishment of urban fabrics and form of habitations across the Byzantine Empire in the late 7th–8th century were taken for granted. Coastal and lowland villages were described as being deserted by their settlers, who had escaped to hilltops and inland fortified sites for better security; likewise, cities were generally seen as shadows of their past, shrunken from their former glory, and reduced to basic forms of habitation.

According to the evidence of recent archaeological field surveys, it is possible to demonstrate that in the 8th century the number or rural settlements had indeed declined across the Byzantine Empire, although on a much reduced scale than previously thought. Despite this numerical decrease, in this fragmented landscape fewer agro-towns remained the backbone of local economy and peasant society. In fact, with the turn of the 8th century, the role of cities and their urban curia in tax operation had come to an end, while the chonion (rural village) and komai (aggregation of villagers) became the points of reference within the Byzantine fiscal system. As will be seen, Crete and Sicily fit well in this reconfiguration, as the rural settlement patterns in the agrarian

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181 For general discussions on what follows: Cameron 2002; Louth 2008; McCormick 2008; Lavan 2009.
182 See, for instance, Zanini 2009 and the relevant results of the Boeotia Survey in Bintliff 2012.
184 This is vividly testified by the Farmer’s law, according to which taxes had to be collected through the choria system, increasing the role of great landowners, both civil and ecclesiastical: Prigent 2014a, 205; Auzepy 2008, 264.
heartlands of both islands appear vibrant throughout the 8th – 10th century.

By Classical standards, Byzantine cities of this period were less magnificent and prosperous than their old selves. Three recurring features have contributed to confer an aura of decline to the processes of transformation of Byzantine cities during the 8th-9th century: a) the intensive militarisation of the urban space, via the restoration or construction of new city-walls, which often mirrored the reduction of the urban area in a process described as a shift from ‘polis’ to ‘kastron’; b) the emergence of new intra-urban areas of burials; and c) the process of de-monumentalisation and abandonment of large intramural or suburban areas, turned into agricultural spaces, and the consequent reoccupation of former public spaces with housing and workshops. This latter point, in particular, has been crucial in stressing that a process of ruralisation occurred to the urban space of Classical cities. Losing their previous ‘non-productive’ façade and solely ‘consumer-driven’ character, these cities became populated by the working force of men engaged in related farming and crafting activities taking place inside the urban fabric or in the surrounding countryside. As will be seen in Chapter 4.1, Gortyn offers an excellent examples of this process, with a monastery/workshop occupying the Praetorium, the previous political and administrative centre of the city.

However, by remarking on the ‘physical and hierarchic topography of powers’ within Byzantine cities of the 8th-9th century, Zanini and Auzepy have recently argued that rather than in absolutistic terms, the very idea of medieval cities needs to be reviewed and ‘declined in a plurality of forms’: in many cases, in fact, cities continued to be the seats of high-rank secular officers and religious institutions, continuing to be pivotal in their micro-regional system and well beyond. Besides the economic role of cities as places for production and exchange, their main function become that of ‘local branches of the State’ from both a military and administrative perspective—as garrisons for the army and refuges for the surrounding rural population—and from an ecclesiastical point of view, as the residence of bishops. The role that the memory and sights

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of ancient ruins played on the way in which the ‘surviving’ local communities remembered their old cities and perceived the new urban spaces is still a matter of scholarly debate. However, judging, for instance, from the careful selection and meaningful use of spolia in curtain walls, one cannot help but notice that the monumental character of the previous ‘Classical’ cities was still largely visible and, possibly, playing a significant role in the civic life and identity of urban communities.\textsuperscript{187}

These considerations accord well with a recent suggestion made by Curta, who has criticised the biased practice of thinking in terms of continuity/discontinuity between cities in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{188} Although he refers to cities outside Sicily and Crete, such as Amorion, Naples, Butrint, and Thessaloniki, his reasoning can be applied to these islands. The core point of this argument is that to fully appreciate the identity of Byzantine ‘Dark Age’ cities, these must not be compared with their own ancient selves (as they used to be), but considered as they were in that precise historical moment. If comparisons must be made, then these should be advanced with contemporary examples, for instance the emporia in north-western Europe. Only in this way, by avoiding comparisons with their past, and beyond disputes between continuity and discontinuity, ‘Dark Age’ cities can be understood and appreciated not in terms of a narrative of mere decline. This does not mean that there was not a degree of structural decline or ruralisation of the urban space; on the contrary, the abovementioned example from Gortyn will point at this direction. Nonetheless, as remarked in the next point, Curta’s argument should be borne in mind before equating the structural decline recorded on 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century Sicily and Crete to social regression.

The other point to bear in mind, which is not in tune with social regression, is that although the forms of rural and urban habitation had in fact declined on both islands (as well as on a broader imperial basis), the analyses of their household goods yield a different perspective on the economic potential and social dynamism of their inhabitants. For instance, in the 8\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} century the inhabitants of Pliska, the capital of the medieval kingdom of Bulgaria, which in this period was a vassal state of Byzantium, lived in huts; however, the ranges of daily material

\textsuperscript{187} Crow 2017, 99. Also Vionis, Papantoniou 2019, 11.
\textsuperscript{188} Curta 2016.
culture and luxury goods from these domestic contexts are exceptionally rich and outstandingly exquisite.\textsuperscript{189} A similar parallel can be established with Sicily.

In the course of the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} century, a new form of housing was adopted in Sicily, consisting of circular and rectangular hunts, often paired, delimited by postholes, with floors 20-40cm sunk in the ground, and frequently provided with inner pits (FIG.8). Examples of this kind have been recorded at both urban and rural settlements, including Enna, Rocchicella di Mineo, Cittadella di Morgantina, Colmitella, and Contrada Edera.\textsuperscript{190} As Arcifa has already pointed out, such peculiar solution is alien to the pre-existing forms of habitation found in Byzantine Sicily, finding instead parallels with the contemporary \textit{grubenhäuser} or \textit{roundhouses} appearing in Balkan and Slavic regions bordering the Empire, as those from Pliska mentioned above.\textsuperscript{191} The structural decline of this form of habitation seems undeniable if compared with that of the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century (a parallel that Curta exhorts us not to make!), but, was this structural impoverishment necessarily synonymous with social regression? The record of pottery found in association with the huts at the site of Contrada Edera, a settlement located on the north-western slope of Mount Etna, is revealing.\textsuperscript{192}

The village at Contrada Edera was gradually obliterated by layers of lava from various eruptions of Mount Etna, the latest of which was in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. To date, about 20 structures of this ‘Dark Age Pompeii’ have been explored archaeologically, covering a remarkable extension that surpasses 9ha. This area was not densely occupied, as individual dwellings are distanced from each other by an empty space, sometimes reaching 30m, perhaps intended for agricultural and farming activities. The circular structures are smaller in diameter, ranging between 3 and 5m, and have been interpreted as workshops. Hearths are frequently found inside them. The rectangular buildings, instead, are thought to have a proper domestic function. They have bigger dimensions, about 35/40m\textsuperscript{2} in area, and their roofs were formed by tiles (of the voided type ‘\textit{vacuolati}’) and supported by beams set in postholes. A most interesting feature of these dwellings is that, internally, they have pits dug into the ground. In one case, a pit was stone-lined, suggesting its

\textsuperscript{189} For a first glimpse: Henning 2007a; 2007b; Fiedler 2008.
\textsuperscript{190} Arcifa 2019; 2010d; Arcifa, Turco 2016; Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014.
\textsuperscript{192} For what follows: Arcifa 2019; Arcifa, Turco 2016, unless specified otherwise.
use as a granary silos. Except for this example, according to their fillings, these pits have been interpreted as cabinets and cupboards to store everyday goods.

Among the ceramics that have been recovered almost intact from these pits, there appear both significant quantities of imported amphorae, which bear testament to economic potential and commercial vibrancy of their communities, and glazed tableware, including chafing-dishes. As seen in the section above, glazed wares represented the most technologically advanced type of ceramics produced and circulating within the borders of the Byzantine Empire at that chronological stage, as well as a sign of social and convivial sophistication of their users. In other words, despite the apparently poor standards of habitation, the communities living in these huts maintained commercial ties and social contacts with core regions of the Byzantine Empire, signifying that they were part of a broader cultural \textit{koina} equal to those dining on identical glazed tablewares and consuming produces travelling in similar amphorae as found at the Crypta Balbi in Rome and the Church of St. Polyeuctus in Constantinople, just to mention two of the most
remarkable examples where analogous ceramics have been found in contemporary contexts.  

This, therefore, would suggest that the social prestige of the Byzantine householder of the 8th-9th century was not necessarily reflected in its dwelling, as it used to be, especially in Roman and Late Roman times, but in the household and personal goods, such as ceramics and dressing accessories. Although this is a rather simplistic and perhaps provocative consideration, it could nevertheless demonstrate that we must avoid confusing the structural impoverishment, which is undeniable, with a social regression real enough ‘to be apparent to those who lived at that time’.  

iii.) Islamisation: a conceptual distinction between the institutional and cultural processes

In conclusion of this chapter, the notion of Islamisation requires discussion. The one offered here is a conceptual discussion. The practical application of the points and theories that follow below will be considered in the concluding chapter (10.2), when the processes of Islamisation of Sicily and Crete, which have emerged from this thesis, will be put in a broader theoretical context, drawing on the evidence of similar or different processes known from other territories of the Dar al-Islam, namely al-Andalus, the Maghreb, Egypt, the Levant, and the Western Sahel.

Before moving further, three points require clarification. First: there is not an unique definition of Islamisation, and different scholarly disciplines apply to this notion a wide range of differing defining attributes, semantic nuances, conceptual meanings, and practical implications. A broader distinction could be made between historical and archaeological approaches. The former is mainly concerned with aspects of religious conversion, adherence to linguistic and legislative models, military and political activities, forms of education, and so on, all of which, of course, are mostly investigated through textual sources. The latter is more interested in tangible evidence of economic, material, 

194 Fenwick 2020, 27.  
195 Above all see various papers contained in the most recent edited volume: Peacock 2017. See also Insoll 1999.
civic, and administrative nature, such as changing patterns in the record of daily material culture, urban fabrics, and settlement patterns. Because this author is an archaeologist, archaeological evidence is the main field of enquiry of this study, especially pottery.

Secondly (and directly linked to the first point): categories of archaeological evidence indicative of Islamic influence can exist without conversion to Islam taking place. Thus, the term Islamisation reflects a sociocultural meaning, and not a religious one, for which the term ‘Muslim’ is preferred. The religious component certainly played a fundamental role in the process of Islamisation; archaeologically, however, this can only be detected by means of specific evidence, such as places of worship and burials. These are only minimally known from the case-studies of this thesis, so occupy a crucial but marginal role in the argument that will follow. Similarly, by Islamisation we do not refer to an ethnic phenomenon: equally to religion, ethnicity would have played a major role, and the manifestation of ethnicity is not beyond the possibilities of archaeological interpretation; however, its investigation requires a thorough contextual framework, which is currently unavailable for Crete, and beyond the scope of this research on Sicily.

On the contrary, Muslim communities and Islamic precepts may be recognised archaeologically as elements of a possible ‘package’, which include dietary habits (and therefore pottery), personal possession (dress), the domestic and public built environment, etc. These can be considered to transcend ethnicity, and might be used to create an overall cultural and social identity. Surely, exceptions to every proposed structuring principle can, and did occur: not all Muslims lived in typical ‘Islamic houses’ (see below), alcohol was drunk, prohibited food consumed, and the list continues.

Third, the cultural background of the first groups of Muslim conquering Crete and Sicily will be set aside so far as the concept of Islamisation is presented in this thesis. This is not because such issue is irrelevant; on the contrary, as discussed below, it is possible to assume that the first

196 For an introduction to this distinction see: Gilotte, Nef 2011 and Withcomb 2004b.  
197 Insoll 1996, 81. For a different opinion, i.e. that the use of ‘Islamisation’ should be limited to those forms of material culture closely associated with religious practice: Molinai 2021, 337.  
198 Withcomb 1995a, 49.  
200 First, Monory 1995, then Insoll 1999, 93. Also Insoll 2007a.  
201 Insoll 2001, 144
generations of conquerors brought a ‘cultural package’ with them. Based on the experience of al-Andalus, this paradigm is considered crucial for the later formation of a fully Islamised range of material culture.\textsuperscript{202} The reason for this exclusion is due instead to the fact that we possess for neither islands a comparable knowledge of material culture dating to the first generations after the conquest, so similar considerations cannot be made. This point, nevertheless, could still hold implications for better understanding the set of evidence available.

In short, the current prevailing archaeological view considers Islamisation as a slow and gradual process, sometimes spanning centuries, and often articulated into subsequent stages, for which scholars have employed different terms.\textsuperscript{203} Therefore, from the point of view of material culture and ceramic evidence, Islamisation has often been perceived as a gradual transition in the wake of a substantial sense of continuity with the pre-existing local crafting tradition, and not as a sudden and distressing event.\textsuperscript{204} According to this ‘transitionalist’ paradigm, scholars working from al-Andalus to the Arabian peninsula have emphasized an initial continuity of about 150 years in between the pre-Islamic and Islamic ceramic traditions, followed by a period of sharper change noticeable in the 9\textsuperscript{th} or 10\textsuperscript{th} century, depending on the region considered.\textsuperscript{205} For example, in Umayyad Arabia (Najran), Iran (Susa), Syria (Pella), Egypt (Alexandria and Fustat), and North Africa (Jerba), ceramics were produced with the same clays and shapes as preexisting tableware, but using different slip, glaze, or painted decorations.\textsuperscript{206} So far, emphasis has been on continuity with the previous tradition of forms and wares, relegating the technological/decorative innovations as rather trivial in the narrative of change. Most recently, this position has been challenged by a thought-provoking article by Carvajal who, on the contrary, insists on a “formationist” perspective (as defined by Carvajal): accordingly, the early evidence of

\textsuperscript{202} Carvajal 2019.

\textsuperscript{203} See overview in Insoll 2017 and Insoll 1996, 91-96. Gayraud 2014, for example, has labelled the successive steps in the Islamisation of Egypt as Arabization, Islamification, and Orientalisation.

\textsuperscript{204} Carvajal 2019. For the point of view of an art historian: Grabar 1978.


\textsuperscript{206} Najran, Susa, Pella, and Alexandria: Morony 1995, 10-29; Fustat: Gayraud, Trégila, Vallauri 2009; Jerba: Cirelli, Fontana 2009. Other changes could regard the introduction of new forms, manufacturing technique, wares, and sizes.
‘small’ technological/morphological innovations, which he notes in 8th-century ceramics produced in al-Andalus, although minimal, is in fact revealing precocious signs of a new social order, yet to fully emerge and consolidate, but already present in its potentiality, and coexisting for some time with the former traditions.207

Besides different theoretical perspectives, the ‘transitionalist’ and ‘formationist’ approaches are not necessarily in conflict, but could simply reflect a different level of detail in the knowledge of the evidence available, in which the latter is the consequence of a more detailed archeological picture. This seems to be the case for Sicily and Crete. Thanks to the significant archaeological progresses made on Sicily (especially from Syracuse and Enna), Chapter 8 will argue that we are finally able to bring the narrative of changing patterns of material culture at a level of precision which is fairly close to al-Andalus, although happening at a different timeframe. On the contrary, it does not come as a surprise that for Crete we are still far away from sweeping the ‘transitionalist’ perspective away, as this island remains one of the least studied regions in the context the Islamic archaeology. These points being noted, we can now proceed with the core argument of this conceptual (and subjective) discussion on the processes of Islamisation.

According to the evidence gathered in this study, this thesis has opted for a division between two main stages/processes of Islamisation, each holding different implications. This twofold division is between what is defined here as ‘institutional’ and ‘cultural’ Islamisation.208 In a nutshell, the former is related to political, economic, and administrative practices connected to the expansion and consolidation of Islamic state authority over non-Islamic territories and communities. The latter is a further step ahead, implying the appearance of local communities, whose range of material culture, declined between potable items and built environment, shows adherence or integration into sociocultural practices that were shared with the broader koine of the Islamic world.209 Although in Chapter 10.2 it will be argued that this partition can in fact be applied to a range of case-studies from various territories of the Dar al-Islam, and at different chronological stages spanning the late 7th – 11th century, the claim is not made here that it has universal

validity and, as always, exceptions did exist. As a matter of course, this division has emerged as the result of the present investigation into the Byzantine-Islamic transitions of Sicily and Crete, and therefore it is above all functional to these two regional case-studies.

Referring to the establishment of state structures, institutional Islamisation can be seen from an archaeological perspective in the *mis en place* of economic and administrative devices in order to gain fiscal control and expand Islamic authority over non-Islamic communities. Coins, for example, whose evidence is plentiful on both Sicily and Crete, are clear expedients of both ideological and economic control.²¹⁰ By introducing coins into local economies with distinctive names, formulas, and metrology, Muslim rulers were affirming their political power, while providing economic means by which undertaking transactions and performing tax collection. Their use by the pre-existing population, however, does not mean that local communities had been integrated into the Islamic cultural milieu, but only that economic interactions were occurring between them and the Islamic monetary system (see especially Chapter 5 for a case-study from Crete). Lead seals and glass-weights are other archeological evidence appearing on Sicily (both) and Crete (only glass-weight), which bear testimony of state-promoted institutional operations aimed at expanding economic, administrative, and political authority.

A remarkable corpus of 44 Aghlabid lead seals dating between 856-909 comes from Sicily, from the hinterland of Agrigento.²¹¹ On the basis of comparative evidence with examples from other regions of the *Dar al-Islam* (Egypt, al-Andalus, and Syria-Palestine), in which the purposes of these objects are specified, it is known that lead seals could have been addressed to both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and held a range of different functions ranging from authentication and protection of documents, to proofs of peace-treaty and receipt of tax-collection.²¹² Due to the ‘unspecified aim’ of the specimens from Sicily (only the emir’s name and a date are specified), there is still uncertainty and even disagreement among scholars about the function of these Aghlabid seals, that is how they were used, by whom, in what context, and for what purpose(s). On one side, there are scholars who envisage this

²¹¹ De Luca 2012.
²¹² For recent overviews: Sijpesteijn 2018; Robinson 2005; Amitai-Preiss 2000; 2010; Tawfiq 2015; Porter 2011, 3-4.
evidence to prove that pre-existing Byzantine communities continued to inhabit these territories, and were subject to poll-taxes (*jizya*) or other tributes from the new Aghlabid rulers.\textsuperscript{213} Others, instead, believe that these lead seals were addressed to Islamic rural communities, who had already settled in the hinterland of Agrigento at that time.\textsuperscript{214} This debate is further considered in Chapter 8 and expanded in APPENDIX 3.

Only one (readable) glass-weight is currently known from Crete; it was found in stratigraphic excavations in Heraklion, in a contexts dating to the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century according to the association with a coin of Leo VI (886-912).\textsuperscript{215} In newly conquered lands, glass-weights were used for converting pre-existing currencies into the metrology of the *Dar al-Islam*.\textsuperscript{216} Although uncovered in the 1990s, its identification and examination have been done for the first time in the framework of this thesis; a close description and in-depth discussion of this item follows in Chapter 5. Here, it is worth anticipating that, despite its uniqueness, the significance of this item is enormous. This evidence, in fact, is indicative of the need of the new Andalusi rulers to create economic and administrative links with the fiscal system of pre-existing local communities, who could have met their tax obligations by paying with pre-existing currency. This item, therefore, shows the adherence of the Emirate of Crete into the contemporary economic and administrative system of the broader Islamic world, and thus a clear institutional operation.

According to the numismatic and sigillographic evidence available, it is possible to argue that the process of institutional Islamisation on Sicily and Crete was particularly accentuated during the first 50-70 years of the Islamic conquest/occupation, that is when the Islamic control was being consolidated on both islands. As further shown in Chapter 10.2, this trend accords with both historical and archaeological research conducted in other regions of the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{217}

Moving on to cultural Islamisation, leaving the personal background of the conquerors aside, this stage comes second to institutional Islamisation, as the cultural assimilation of the conquered communities

\textsuperscript{213} De Luca 2012, 297; Metcalfe 2009, 34; Alfano 2015, 348.
\textsuperscript{214} Nef 2010, I wish to express my gratitude to this scholar for the stimulating discussion we had on this matter.
\textsuperscript{215} Along with an unspecified number of Islamic coins and pottery: Starida 2016, 62.
\textsuperscript{217} For example: Hoyland 2006; 2010; 2015; Sijpesteijn 2007; 2013; 2017; 2020.
rarely followed immediately after a military conquest.\textsuperscript{218} The Cretan case-study, moreover, will demonstrate that cultural Islamisation was not a natural development of the previous stage of institutional Islamisation, but a process that needed to be pursued and promoted by the central authority. Cultural Islamisation, understood as synonymous with the creation or assimilation of local communities into the \textit{Dar al-Islam}, concerns language, religion, and material culture, with its multiple arrays of everyday objects, and public architectures and domestic buildings. Regarding language, the scattered nature of the available material sources from Sicily and Crete allows us to gain but a superficial glance into the linguistic interactions and overall shifting patterns occurring over one century and a half on both islands. At the level of pre-existing communities, in particular, it does not permit to assert how, when, and on which social level the linguistic substratum changed between the 9\textsuperscript{th} and mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century, and if it changed at all considering that institutional and spoken languages did not usually overlap.

With regard to religion, both necropolis and places of worship are excellent indicators of changing models of belief.\textsuperscript{219} Written sources do mention the existence of mosques on both Sicily and Crete as early as the mid-9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century; when it comes to the archaeological record, however, neither islands yield incontrovertible evidence of mosques dating to the timeframe of this study, but only some highly hypothetical or later examples, which will be discussed in due course. Moreover, the only Islamic necropolis dating to the 9\textsuperscript{th} century is currently known from Sicily, in Palermo, which is not surprising considering that this city was the Islamic capital of the island.\textsuperscript{220} Unexpectedly, not one Islamic burial is known on Crete, not even from the capital Heraklion/al-Handaq, where large-scale urban excavations have covered a significant area of the city. Structural evidence for urban dwellings has emerged instead.

Public and domestic buildings are further categories of evidence which could indicate cultural Islamisation in the archaeological record, especially with regard to forms of architecture and the social organisation of space in urban contexts dating from the 8\textsuperscript{th} century

\textsuperscript{218} Withcomb 2004b, 1-7.
\textsuperscript{219} Among many others: Gilotte, Nef 2011, 70-79; Insoll 1996, 43; 2001, 123.
\textsuperscript{220} See Arcifa, Bagnera 2014.
onwards.²²¹ In an ideal scenario, iconic evidence of urban architecture defining an ‘Islamic city’ as such would include: on a public level, the construction of a congregational mosque, graveyards, suqs/marketplaces, and a dar al-imara/governmental residence, which define the hub of communal life in the city; on a domestic level, the influence of Islam should be noticeable with the appearance of distinctive clusters of houses with inwards courtyards, which incorporated social notions of privacy and kinship.²²² Heraklion offers excellent examples of courtyard houses, while from Palermo we known Muslim graveyards and the Fatimid dar al-Imara, but not courtyard houses. Drawing on both textual and architectural evidence, an attempt at reconstructing the urban fabrics of Islamic Heraklion will be presented in Chapter 4.1, while for Palermo an analogous attempt has just been made.²²³ In Chapter 9, instead, I will focus on the urban changings occurring at the city of Enna.

Therefore, among the types of archaeological evidence outlined above, ‘portable items’ seems to be the sole category available to provide enough insights to reconstruct more complex aspects of daily life and social and economic realities, which could be revealing of a cultural Islamisation. Within the corpus of portable items, this study will consider especially ceramics, but also dress accessories, coins, and other small finds. However, it is important to make it clear from the outset that, if an object incorporates or displays ‘Islamic features’ (such as design, decorations, or the application of a certain crafting technique, as glazing), this does not necessarily indicate cultural or ideological integration of their users into the Dar al-Islam. Again, coins are paradigmatic examples. Despite displaying strong ‘Islamic features’ in terms of inscriptions, discussion of the cultural implications of coins is highly problematic due to their economic value and extra-cultural circulation (see institutional Islamisation discussed above). By contrast, careful evaluation of the morphologies and technical features of ceramic assemblages could grant us closer insights into aspects of daily habits, domestic practices, technical expertise, economic activities, and culinary tastes of the incoming ‘Islamic’ community on Sicily and Crete. ‘Food

and eating habits, almost as language, made up a fundamental element in the definition of cultural groups and in differentiating foreigners’; ceramic items, in particular, are essential and transversal elements of pre-modern domestic life, and therefore are reflections of practices and customs of the social groups which designed, crafted, used, and disposed of them.\footnote{224}

This is particularly illuminating with regard to the marked transition between Byzantine and Islamic culinary habits and technological practices of the 9th century. In fact, as observed above, the 9th century would appear to be the turning point when it could be said that a general change in material culture occurred across almost the entire \textit{Dar al-Islam}, in which a standardised assemblage of pottery was introduced, perhaps from the modern territories of Iraq, Iran, and Egypt, for cooking, serving, and storing food and liquids.\footnote{225} Distinctive glazed and unglazed plates, basins, mugs, pitchers, jars, cooking pots, oil lamps, and specific devices such as bread-baking plates and \textit{tannurs} (bread-ovens), or \textit{saqiya} irrigation pots for agricultural water management, were among the most common and distinctive items introduced and adopted throughout al-Andalus, the Maghreb, Egypt, and the Levant.\footnote{226} This point, of course, should not be taken in absolute terms, as the process of cultural assimilation was nuanced. In fact, besides the introduction of a standardised record of pottery, different regions of the Islamic world, even neighbouring, maintained distinctive productions of domestic pottery, which often reveal technical and/or decorative connections to previous local traditions of ceramic production.\footnote{227}

As will be discussed, in conquered cities and surrounding rural areas, and thus in the two capitals of our case studies, Palermo and Heraklion, cultural Islamisation is more visible and, according to the record of ceramics available, its beginning can be traced back in the course of the 9th century. Through the case-study from Enna, moreover, it is now possible to argue that in Sicily the process of cultural Islamisation outside Palermo was on its way already in the late 9th-early 10th

\footnote{225 See footnote 206.}
\footnote{226 Alba Calzado, Gutiérrez Lloret 2008; Arcifa, Bagnera 2014; 2017; Gutiérrez 2015b; Reynolds 2016; Salinas, Montilla 2017; Carvajal 2019.}
\footnote{227 For example, in the (late) 9th century, production of painted amphorae was extremely rare in North Africa, yet they were common in Sicily, where there was a consolidated tradition of painted amphorae during the previous Byzantine period: Arcifa, Bagnera 2014, 171-172.}
century. By contrast, according to the general lack of ceramic evidence outside Heraklion, it will be concluded that on Crete the process of cultural Islamisation was probably never utterly achieved, or perhaps willingly pursued. The specific dynamics of the material and cultural encounter between Byzantine and Islamic traditions are treated in details in Parts II and III.

A final word of warning is necessary. As much compelling as ceramic evidence could be, especially from the perspective of this author, the study of pottery is not an exact science and, with the exception of extraordinary circumstances, a level of doubt will always remain in attributing cultural and social value to ceramics (construction of identity and ethnicity is not considered here). In other words, it is nearly impossible to affirm with certainty that ceramics incorporating technological, decorative, or morphological features, which can be defined ‘Islamic’, were used by people who were Muslims, and to traditional views that underline the connections between specific ceramics (especially cooking-pots) and social groups, more recent and critical ethno-archaeological approaches show that, in the end, “pots are pots and not people”. Can we exit from this loop? Material culture is not simply a product of society, it is integral to society; the materials which remain from the past are more than evidence of a vanished entity: they are a part of that entity. By definition, however, we cannot see these objects in use, we cannot ask the users about the cultural or social significance they attributed to them; what we can do is to interpret their meaning. Interpretation can never be fully completed, but an attentive examination of the context in which ceramics are found might provide a valuable frame: the more we know about a past material world, the closer we come to the understanding its components and complexity. In the end, however, answers will remain interpretations of the past, which are made in the present and for the present, but as archaeologists we cannot help but accepting this ‘conceptual challenge’.

228 For the ‘traditional’ view see Arthur 2007 and Moroni 1995 with specific regard to the social meaning of Islamic pottery; for the opposite view: Cruz 2011.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. STUDY-AREAS AND CASE-STUDIES

The landscape represents a crucial contextual factor in the framework of this study, especially to investigate both settlement patterns and the modes of cultural, economic, and administrative interactions between communities of conquered and conquerors inhabiting Sicily and Crete in the timespan under scrutiny. Yet, landscape is a loose and fluid concept, to which different academic disciplines (archaeology, ethnography, geography, ecology, etc.) put different emphasis on either environmental or human factors. In line with the scope of this thesis, particular relevance has been given to two main aspects. One is the interdependency between humans and environment, that is both how the landscape might determine the spatial living choices of human communities, and how humans responded to these environmental circumstances when interacting with the landscape. In this range of interactions, geography and topography are not entirely deterministic. The second aspect, therefore, draws on socioeconomic and political factors, which in the contexts of Sicily and Crete were the economic and historical challenges of the 8th-9th century (see 2.2), and the change in political regime following the Islamic conquests.

In what follows a description is offered of the main features defining of the landscapes in which the archaeological investigation of this study has taken place; the specific dataset of material evidence, and to a lesser extent of textual sources, employed is provided in the section 3.2. In the case of Crete, for which a more comprehensive examination has been attempted, six principal study-areas have been identified across the island, which combine geographical and historical/socioeconomic features, as well as a concentration of archaeological evidence drawn on secondary literature. Each study-area comprises a number of specific case-studies; these include first-rank urban centres (namely

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233 This is a ‘phenomenological approach’. In addition to bibliography provided above, see: Renfrew, Bahn 2000, 16, 42; Nixon 2006, 1-6.
Heraklion/Knossos, Gortyn, Eleutherna/Vyzari, Chersonissos, Priniatikos Pyrgos, and Arcadia) and selected second- and third-rank rural sites. Two further areas of the island (i.e. Eastern Sitia and Western Crete) have been left aside from a close examination due to the lack of material sources available in secondary literature for the 8th-10th century, hence the definition of ‘secondary’. They will still be considered in light on the evidence that is at our disposal. Regarding Sicily, this research has focused on one specific study-area, central Sicily and the Southern Erei Upland, in which Enna is the first-rank urban centre taken as the main case-study, and as many as 20 rural sites are known archaeologically in its surroundings, and will be dealt with. Moreover, contextual references to the urban developments of Syracuse and Palermo will be provided, as well as to broader patterns of settlement across the island in the transitional period between the 8th and 10th century.

i.) Crete: a unique combination of topographic basins and settlement chambers

The Cretan landscape is characterised by a marked geographical and environmental diversity, sometimes described as a ‘landscape fragmentation’, which is broadly defined by three topographical features: prominent mountain ranges, extensive hilly terrains, and, in between, numerous but relatively small plains and valley systems. A range of three mountain massifs runs across the island, generating a physical partition into four sub-regions, roughly corresponding to the modern division in the four prefectures of Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion, and Lasshiti. From west to east of the island there are: the White Mountains (2452m), extending over most of the south-eastern modern prefecture of Chania, down to the coast, in the Selino and Sfakia areas; the Psiloritis Mountains (2456m), occupying central Crete; the Dikiti Mounts (2148m), standing between the eastern prefecture of Heraklion and the western prefecture of Lassithi; and the Sitia Mountains (1231m), stretching across eastern Crete. Above the average altitude of 800m, the rocky soils of these mountains do not allow for intensive agricultural activities to be conducted. On the contrary, these

apparently inhospitable environments offer most suitable conditions for grazing and sustaining livestock, which is an essential part of Cretan economy, but that leaves only very evanescent traces in the archaeological record.\[^{235}\] Although under-population is a widely accepted feature of the medieval Cretan landscape, it is possible that the lack of clear archaeological evidence from peripheral mountainous areas in the far east and west of the island, such as Sfakia and Sitia, could in fact echo the presence of pastoral groups of people, who are archaeologically invisible.

Only one-third of Crete can be extensively and systematically cultivated.\[^{236}\] Fertile hilly terrains and valleys characterise the largest proportion of the island’s landscape, forming the principal resource of agricultural land. Water-rich alluvial plains constitute only 10% of the Cretan landscape. Most of the northern coast of the island is occupied by coastal plains, among which the most important are, from west to east: the plain stretching between Kissamos and Chania; the Mylopotamos Plain, in the hinterland of Rethymno; the Heraklion and Pediados plains; the Chersonissos Plain, bordered by the northern foothills of the Dikiti Mounts; and the Mirabello Plain, in the hinterland of Priniatikos Pyrgos. In the interior, the Messarà Plain is the largest and most productive agricultural basin on Crete. It extends for over 10km north-to-south and for about 50km west-to-east, from Phaistos, through Gortyn, to the southern slopes of the Dikiti Mounts, encompassing Arcadia and the Monofatsi Plain. The general topography of the island results in a range of small topographic basins, which are naturally defined by hills (see discussion below).

In the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the geographer Lehmann took Crete’s distinctive landscape as a practical case-study for the formulation of a theoretical model for the socioeconomic significance of microenvironments in long-term organisation and analyses of settlement patterns.\[^{237}\] According to Lehmann, microenvironments are relatively small and homogenous territories, rich in desirable natural resources (water, cultivable land, pathways, sources of fuel, etc.), which are physically delimited by natural boundaries (hills, mounts, rivers, etc.). In this thesis, the name ‘topographic basin’ is used instead of

\[^{235}\] See discussion in Vionis, Papantoniou 2019, 8-10; Rackham, Moody 1996, 161-162.
\[^{236}\] Whitelaw 2018, 218.
\[^{237}\] Lehmann 1939; Vionis, Papantoniou 2019, 2-3.
microenvironment. Accordingly, topographic basins are able to sustain and foster nucleated communities through time, even though ‘temporal continuity’ does not always imply ‘ethnic or cultural continuity’. Within topographic basins, there can be found settlement chambers, consisting of a dynamic hierarchy of first-, second-, and third-rank settlements; these range from hegemonic sites, otherwise known as ‘central place’, to villages, hamlets, and farms, whose number may vary considerably according to natural, political, and socioeconomic variables. Central places are generally identified as major cities and towns holding political, administrative, juridical, religious, industrial, defensive, and trading/retailing functions, although their existence, on a practical level, is connected with their integration in small-scale networks of economic activities involving the surrounding web of rural settlements.

Lehmann’s theory has long been applied to the Minoan period, when the palaces of Knossos, Malia, and Phaistos were central places by definition, followed by second-rank towns and surrounded by third- and fourth-rank satellite rural settlements. More recently, Whitelaw has applied new computer based analyses to this theory, attempting to define the catchment territories that were indispensable to the provisioning of the urban residents of these palatial central places. According to this scholar, a 5-10km radius, corresponding to 1-2 hours walking distance, is a reasonable parameter for maximising the efficiency of both farmers commuting to their fields, and the transportation of the produce from the fields to the homes and markets of urban centres. This figure finds an equivalent in the archaeological investigation of settlement patterns in Boeotia on the longue durée, for which Bintliff and collaborators have argued that 15km is the maximum radius for the catchment-area of a central place. Generalisations apart, integrating topographical features and administrative or political boundaries is indispensable for achieving a more realistic definition of these catchment territories. For example, the catchment-area of

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238 Bintliff et al. 2000, 144-147; Vionis, Papantoniou 2019, 3.
241 Whitelaw 2018, 2019. This argument has been especially based on a calculation of the urban and rural population involved in agricultural activities and surface-cost and terrain GIS analyses.
Phaistos cannot have a radius greater than 5km to the north, where the southern foothills of the Psiloritis Massif are a natural barrier. Similarly, the prominent political and urban dimension of Knossos, with an estimated population of 25-28,000 individuals, meant that the catchment-area of this site had to extend outside its topographically-defined basin (i.e. the Heraklion Plain), into the Pediados Plain.

But, how does this argument fit into the settlement patterns of Crete during the Byzantine-Islamic transition? Of course, parallels *strictu sensu* are out of question and, although drawn on basic socioeconomic principles (such as labour investment, travel/transport cost, etc.) one cannot expect that Minoan and medieval farmers behaved in the same way. However, it should be noted that, within limited variations, extensive records of pollen analyses indicate that the Cretan landscape remained overall unchanged from the Late Minoan to pre-modern periods.\(^{244}\) Thus, in line with due adaptations to a different historical context, it will be argued that this model can in fact be productively applied to the Cretan settlement patterns of the Byzantine-Islamic transition. In particular, within a general framework of settlement contraction, and in spite of formal political and administrative changes, it is argued that during the late 8\(^{th}\) – mid-10\(^{th}\) century settlements on Crete clustered in a number of sub-regional areas, which in this thesis are defined ‘demographic districts’ and coincide with the principle and secondary study-areas of this study.

The boundaries of each district seem to roughly coincide with a topographic basin, which never exceed a radius of 15km. At its core, each district has a previous Late Antique urban centre (Gortyn, Eleutherna, Chersonissos, Arcadia, Heraklion, etc.) and a network of satellite rural units scattered in their agricultural hinterlands (i.e. settlement chambers). The table and map below (FIGs 9-10) gather and show the principal defining features of these districts, including geographical boundaries, first-rank centres, and a possible classification of minor settlements into second- and third-rank units. According to the available archaeological evidence (see 3.2), five districts may be defined as ‘major’ (ID nos.1-5), while the remaining three as ‘minor’ (ID nos.6-8). The five ‘major’ districts are listed according to their possible scale of importance within the socioeconomic hierarchy of Crete in the

\(^{244}\) Rackham, Moody 1996, 130-138.
Byzantine-Islamic transition; the remaining three, for which less archaeological evidence is available, follow a west-east progression.

FIGURE 9: Table of the study areas from Crete according to which discussion in Part II has been organised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District ID number</th>
<th>Topographic basin (or pseudo-urban)</th>
<th>First-rank centre</th>
<th>Second-rank settlements</th>
<th>Third-rank units</th>
<th>Max radius</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Heraklion Plain &amp; Western Pediada</td>
<td>Heraklion- Knossos</td>
<td>Archanes?</td>
<td>Tylissos, Phoinikia, Dafnes</td>
<td>15km Heraklion-Dafnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Western and Central Messarà</td>
<td>Gortyn-Mitropoli</td>
<td>Phaistos</td>
<td>Geregeri, Ampelouzos, Choustoiuliane, Plora</td>
<td>15km Gortyn-Phaistos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mylopotamos Plain &amp; Northern Amari Valley</td>
<td>Eleutherna + Vyzari/Sybrita</td>
<td>Panormos</td>
<td>Kamalevri, Yannoudi, Arkadi Mesonisia, Patsos</td>
<td>11km Eleutherna-Panormos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chersonissos Plain &amp; Eastern Pediada</td>
<td>Chersonisoss</td>
<td>Kastelli P./ Lyttos</td>
<td>Kalochorio P., Avdou</td>
<td>15km Cherson-Kastelli P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eastern Messarà and Bonifatius Plain</td>
<td>Arcadia</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Melindocori, Afrati, Garipa, Rotasi</td>
<td>15km Arcadian-Melindoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mirabello Plain</td>
<td>P. Pyrgos</td>
<td>Pseira</td>
<td>Meseleroi</td>
<td>12km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chania &amp; Kissamos Plain</td>
<td>Chania &amp; Kissamos</td>
<td>Episkopi Kissamos</td>
<td>Meskla</td>
<td>14km Chania-Meskla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Selino and Sfakia</td>
<td>Kandanos, Loutro</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 10: Map of the ‘study-areas’ from Crete according to which discussion in Part II has been organised
ii.) Sicily

Sicily is by far the biggest and one of the most environmentally diverse island in the Mediterranean, factors which make it impossible to attempt a survey of its regional landscape as detailed as the one offered for Crete. Instead, in line with the scope of this thesis, focus is given to the principal study-area of investigation in Central Sicily, the Southern
Erei Upland, stretching between Enna and Philosophiana. Concepts such as ‘topographic basins’, ‘settlement chambers’, and ‘demographic districts’, which have formed the backbone for discussion of Crete, can be applied to the Sicilian case-study, but their significance need to be revised with a different mind-set, more extensive and environmentally composite than in Crete. The ‘demographic district’ of Enna, indeed, covers more than 1000km², in contrast to the approximately 200km² of the Heraklion district; it includes as many as seven well-defined ‘topographic basins’, and at least three major ‘settlement chambers’.

Specifically, the study-area selected for discussion measures about 30 x 20 km and it is outlined mostly by natural features. To the North, it is bordered by the highly mountainous range of the Northern Erei and it comprises the site of Case Bastione to the north-west. To the East, the limit is represented by the Valleys of the Rivers Dittaino, Gornalunga and Margherito, which are overlooked by the sites of Marcato and Cittadella di Morgantina respectively. The archaeologically-rich valleys of the Rivers Leano and Gela mark the southern edge of the study-area, with the important sites of Gallinica and Philosophiana at its southeastern and southwestern corners. Finally, to the West, the study-area is delimited by the hilly basin of the River Olivo and its tributaries, rivers (Balatella and Furma), with Gerace representing the westernmost site.245 Archaeologically, the most significant ‘settlement chambers’ dating to the timeframe of this study are the River Leano Valley, the River Olivo Basin, and the River Gela Valley, whose several rural settlements have been taken as pivotal case-studies in this thesis. Enna, likewise, has represented the main case-study of an urban centre, being this the only unit within the study-area that can be classified as a city. The absence of archaeological evidence of settlements in the southeastern environs of Enna (in the River Ramata Valley) and in the River Dittaino Valley should rather be attributed to a lack of field surveys than to an actual deficit. The area between the River Leano Valley and Cittadella di Morgantina is markedly mountainous and densely forested, precluding systematic archaeological investigations.

245 The choice to exclude from this study-area the valley of the River Torcicoda, which springs in Enna and flows to the southwest across Pietraperzia and to the foothills of Caltanissetta, has been arbitrary. Recent field surveys have in fact shown that this valley is rich in evidence of settlements of to the late 8th – 9th century; however, the results of these investigations are yet to be fully published, hence the decision not to include them here: Valbruzzi in press; for preliminary considerations: Giannitrapani 2014.
Despite this topographic diversity, historical considerations would indicate that this study-area between Enna and Philosophiana belonged to a single administrative unit since Late Roman time and, possibly, throughout the period in consideration. This argument is supported by Prigent, who used this as ‘l’exemple plus parlant’ for describing the process through which, during the 6th-7th century, the Church of Rome inherited the Late Roman senatorial latifundia of the island, which in turn passed substantially unvaried to the Byzantine state following an administrative reform of the Isaurian emperors in the mid-8th century (this point is extensively discussed in Chapter 7 and is part of what we have come to call the Isaurian ‘policy of containment’).246 Up to the 5th century, in fact, the area between Enna and Philosophiana belonged to the Nicomachi senatorial family, but in the decade between the 6th-7th century, it can be found in the hands of the Roman Church, as testified by the Registrum Epistolarum. Finally, by the mid-8th century, these ‘biens pontificaux étant très certainement mis à contribution pour l’entretien des troupes’ allocated at Enna under the authority of its topoteretes and strategos.247

In addition to this remarkable historical reconstruction, the selection of this study-area with its range of case-studies offers a perfect stage of investigation due to three other main reasons. First, as will be shown in Chapter 3.2, this territory is archaeologically well-known due to a number of recent field surveys and excavations. Secondly, until the fall of Kastrum Hennae in 859, this area become a military frontier zone and a cultural interface between ‘Byzantine Eastern Sicily’ and ‘Aghlabid Western Sicily’ (see 1.1), for which some scholars have postulated the existence of a virtual limes/thaghr that divided the island, almost vertically, passing through Enna.248 The city of Enna itself, as seen, became the headquarters of the strategos of the Theme of Sicily and his troops. Third, it offers specific archaeological markers for tracing changing patterns of settlements and ceramic production/consumption between the late 7th and 11th century, which is something that, with some exceptions, it is not possible to do in other areas of the island, at least with a similar level of precision.

246 Prigent 2017, 207. This latter point is demonstrated by the evidence of pontifical officers appearing in lead seals of the Theme of Sicily after the Isaurian reform in the mid-8th century.
247 Prigent 2017, 208.
248 Arcifa 2013a; Nef, Prigent 2013.
In particular, thanks to the detailed knowledge of the ‘Byzantine pottery’ produced in Philosophiana throughout the 8th – mid-9th century, and to the recent acquisition in regard to the ‘Islamic ceramics’ produced in Palermo between the late 9th and early 10th century, and then also locally, it has been possible to divide this chronological timeframe into four macro-periods/phases. The first phase, dating between the very late 7th – mid-8th century, is characterised by the ceramics produced in Philosophiana, which are found in association with later production of ARSW; the second phase, extending and covering the late 8th – mid-9th century, when Philosophiana’s ceramics came to be integrated with other products circulating on a sub-regional scale, most notably the cooking ware Type Rocchicella; the third phase, dating between the late 9th – early 10th century, when the first ceramics produced in Aghlabid Palermo appear in the archaeological record from Enna; and finally the mid-10th – mid-11th century, that is the Fatimid period, when both Enna and the countryside were inundated with ‘Islamic pottery’, produced both in Palermo and locally. As will be seen in Part III, besides pottery, each of these periods is also characterised by a different settlement patterns.

This study area, in other words, allows us to investigate changing patterns of urban fabric, rural settlement patterns, and ceramic production and consumption throughout the crucial period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

3.2 DATASET

The aim of this section is to expand on both the type of sources used to underpin the discussion that follows in Parts II and III, and the strategies employed to collect and present these data. Undoubtedly, material sources have been the primarily means of investigations, including ceramics, coins, lead seals, particular small finds, and structural remains. Textual sources have been used too, albeit very limitedly and by drawing on secondary literature. In order to attempt broader archaeological interpretations of economic, social, and cultural nature (i.e. changing patterns of settlements, of administrative and fiscal control, of production and trade of goods, etc.), these material sources have been analysed on multifold levels, considering their synchronic and diachronic models of spatial distribution, questioning their significance.
in terms of quantity and quality in the archaeological record, and trying to moderate and clarify the problems deriving from their differing representativeness in the body of secondary literature. With regard to the strategies of data collection, these have comprised:

- Reassessing the body of secondary literature (especially field surveys and excavations)
- First-hand archive-based study of finds, above all pottery
- Systematic field surveys on Sicily
- Non-intensive field observations on Crete
- First-hand reevaluation of structural remains
- Appraisal and limited use of textual sources

In order to gather and present the evidence thus collected in an effective and convenient manner, the sources forming the dataset of this research have been sorted into tables and mapped in synchronic and diachronic distribution maps, which are shown in the subsections below. For practical reasons, a chronological division has been made between Byzantine-period artefacts (ca. 700-820s), and artefacts dating to the period of the Islamic Emirate, which include also Byzantine pottery and coins dating between the 830s-960s. Although mapping is one of the most efficient archaeological expedient, especially in order to reconstruct changing patterns of settlement systems, it has major setbacks, too. On the one hand, distribution maps allow us to practically visualise, within a given territory, the spatial distribution of archaeological finds, which are assumed to represent traces left on the ground by human activities and occupations. On the other hand, however, they too often end up drawing an oversimplified and mono-dimensional picture of the reality, in which sites are represented as symbols of equal size and significance. Instead, the evidence of diverse types and quantities of artefacts at different locations might indicate differing socioeconomic roles, chronological and spatial extents, and hierarchies between these sites. This condition calls for further characterisations and descriptions of the evidence mapped, hence the necessity of the two subsections that follow, which aim at presenting, schematically, the corpus of artefacts forming the backbone of this research, first for Crete (i.) and then for Sicily (ii.).

As will become clear at the end of this chapter, for the study-area of Sicily I have been able to reach a significant level of precision, which has made it possible to characterise individual sites on the bases of their
dimension, topography, and chronological phases of occupation. It was not possible to achieve the same result for Crete, hence the distribution maps presented below should be considered a rather approximate reconstruction, undeniably subject to further adjustments and improvements. Still, it should be noted that the map presenting the evidence dating to the period of the Islamic Emirate of Crete is the first of its kind, so such a hurdle could be expectable.

i.) Crete

Reassessing body of secondary literature

Overall, most of Crete has been object of numerous campaigns of extensive and systematic field surveys. Among the most substantial, there can be mentioned those targeting the Akrotiri peninsula, the Sfakia region, the Western Messara and the Plain of Phaistos, the environs of Knossos (KULP), the Lasithi plateau, and the area of Vrokastro (in the Mirabello district). However, as Zanini and Yangaki have recently remarked, these surveys have focused mostly on Minoan and Classical-Roman remains, either neglecting or mentioning only cursorily the 8th century, and omitting the 9th and 10th centuries almost systematically. Similar considerations can also be recalled for various urban and rural excavations. Just to mention one of the most remarkable gaps, none of the several volumes publishing the results of the multi-decades-long Greek-Swedish excavations at the Kastelli hill, in the heart of Chania, deals with the intervening period between the 7th century AD and the Venetian era. This is a striking absence considering that material and textual sources available do indicate that Chania continued to be one the most prominent urban sites of western Crete throughout the 8th-10th century. Gortyn/Mitropoli, Eleutherna, Prinatikos Pyrgos, and Pseira are the best examples of recent excavations that have prioritised the chronological framework of this

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249 For a no longer brand-new but still very valid overview: Raab 2001, 22-30.
251 Zanini 2019, 142-148. Yangaki 2016, 200. Only a few sherds of the 8th century, for instance, are said to come from the KULP and Akrotiri surveys.
253 See Chapter 4.1iv for full discussion.
research, albeit from a Byzantine-centered perspective of the 8th-9th century.254 The structural and material evidence emerging from these investigations constitutes the bulk of the artifacts appearing in the tables and distribution map of the Byzantine period shown below, and the backbone for the discussion that will follow in Part II.

A hurdle, however, exists. Both the diversity of aims and operational practice that have been adopted, and the disproportion between what is available for the Byzantine (ca. 700-820s) and Islamic periods, pose major problems to achieve a synthesis of data, coherent and consistent. Challenges, in particular, arise when the attempt is made to establish the exact spatial and chronological extension of sites, and therefore their hierarchy. An example of this difficulty is given by a recent article by Triolo and Costa who, using GIS, have attempted at creating a comprehensive distribution map of sites known archaeologically for the 8th – early 9th century.255 Leaving a numerical problem to later discussion (only 17 sites are mapped in the face of 30 identified in the present study, see 4.2), these scholars have used symbols of different dimension in the effort to distinguish between sites yielding different quantity and quality of material sources. Although this might appear a sensible approach, in practical terms it has resulted in a picture that is flawed and unrealistic, being entirely reliant on what is known from secondary literature, which is in fact very limited. For instance, the sites of Gortyn, Heraklion, Phaistos, and Gergeri have all been characterised using a symbol of identical size. However, in Chapter 4 will be shown that this condition is inaccurate, being Grotyn and Heraklion two urban centres whose extent and significance in the 8th – early 9th century were quite different to Phaistos and Gergeri, a rural village the former, and a non-better specifiable site the latter, known archaeologically only through a single coin of Michael II (820-829).

Because the present state-of-the-knowledge prevents us from achieving a picture close to the reality, in order to avoid similar inaccuracies, a choice has been made here to use a more schematic trifold partition in the distribution map of the Byzantine period (ca. 700-820s), between first, second-, and third-rank units (FIG.12a, see also FIG.9). First-rank units [in capital and bold] have been considered as all those cities that

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255 Triolo, Costa 2015.
are known archaeologically to have existed as such up to the late 7th century AD (ex. Gortyn, Eleutherna, Knossos, Chersonissos, Chania), or for which their status in the 8th – early 9th century is indicated either by archaeological excavations (ex. Priniatikos Pyrgos) or via textual sources (ex. Vyzari, Arcadia, and Kissamos, which are listed as bishoprics in the late 8th century, see below section on textual sources). A level of approximation, instead, has been employed to identify second-rank units [capital, no-bold]; this, indeed, has tentatively been done on the basis of the archaeological evidence available, such as a relatively elevated number of coins (ex. for Archanes and Panormos), the presence of monumental remains (Lyttos), or substantial ceramic assemblages (Pseira, Phaistos). All the remaining sites, for which archaeological evidence was minimal or ephemeral (ex. one coin or a few potsherds) have been classified as third-rank units [minuscule]. Kandanos, Lourtro, Lappe, and Ierapetra, which are only known textually as bishoprics of the late 8th century (see section below) have been marked with a cross, which has also been assigned to all the other sites listed as bishoprics in the same textual sources.

An even simpler and more approximate partition has been employed to indicate the sites known during the Islamic period (FIG.12b). Heraklion is the only first-rank centre; a few sites yielding more than isolated finds, either numismatic of ceramic, have been considered second-rank units (ex. Gortyn, Knossos, Phaistos, Kastelli Pediados, and Vyzari). The remaining sites, which are 22 in number, are only known through isolated finds, and have been considered as third-rank units.

The specific range of material sources that have been used to create these maps is discussed next.
FIGURE 12: Distribution maps of Crete showing sites known archaeologically and textually during the Byzantine period (8th-early 9th century) and the period of the Islamic Emirate (820s-961)
### FIGURE 13: Synoptic table of dataset sources for Byzantine Crete in the 8\textsuperscript{th} -- early 9\textsuperscript{th} century (table by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites (from W to E)</th>
<th>CERAMICS</th>
<th>COINS</th>
<th>LEAD SEALS</th>
<th>-TEXTUAL EVIDENCE*</th>
<th>-STRUCTURAL REMAINS**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glazed</td>
<td>Ammora</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Military/Civil</td>
<td>Ecclesiastical (Bishops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissamos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>(Bishops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episkopi K.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chania</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akrotiri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vafe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panormos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleutherna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyzuri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agia Galini</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaistos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mires</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitropoli</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gortyn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(f-d-s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gergeri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temenos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knossos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(d-s?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heraklion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chersonissos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X***(d-s?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyttos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areadia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxa</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X** (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Pyrgos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X**(s-d?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseira</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(s?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mochlos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitta/Petras</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Armeni, Kamalevri, Kamilari, and Lassithi Plateau information non available, see Triolo, Costa 2015
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites (from W to E)</th>
<th>CERAMICS</th>
<th>COINS</th>
<th>SMALL FINDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Byzantine pottery</td>
<td>Islamic pottery</td>
<td>Byzantine coins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chania</td>
<td>X?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meskla</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yannoudi, Kamalevri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panormos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleutherna, Arkadi, Patsos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesonisia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (hoard earrings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyzari</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phaistos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gortyn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampelouzos, Mitropoli, Plora Choustouliana,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tylliosos, Phoinikia, Dafnes, Archanes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heraklion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (glass weight)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knossos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chersonissos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X**(s?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalochorio P., Kastelli, Avdou.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia, Melindochori, Rotasi, Garipa, Afriti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meseleroi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Pyrgos, Pseira, Sitia/Petas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 14: Synoptic table of dataset sources for the Islamic Emirate of Crete (table by the author)
### Coins of the Byzantine Period 717-820s (Tot: 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Heraklion</th>
<th>P. Pyrgos</th>
<th>Eleutherna</th>
<th>Gortyn</th>
<th>Panormos</th>
<th>Gergeri</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leo III, and Leo III and Constantine V (717-741)</td>
<td>2⁵</td>
<td>1²</td>
<td>1³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine V (741-775)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1⁴</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo IV (775-780)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3⁵</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine VI (780-797)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3⁰</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael I (811-813)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo V (813-820)</td>
<td>3⁴</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael II (820-829)</td>
<td>1⁹</td>
<td>1⁶</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Byzantine Coins of the Islamic Period 830s-960s (Tot: 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Heraklion</th>
<th>Meskle</th>
<th>Mesonisia</th>
<th>Panormos</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theophilos (829-842)</td>
<td>2¹¹</td>
<td>1¹³</td>
<td>1¹¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo VI (886-912)</td>
<td>3¹⁴</td>
<td>2¹⁵</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine VII with Romanos II (944-ca-63)</td>
<td>1⁰</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Lead Seals of Bishops of the Byzantine Period Mid-8th—Early 9th Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bishopric</th>
<th>Kissamos</th>
<th>Chania</th>
<th>Gortyn</th>
<th>Knossos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7. Sanders 1982, 162 (for both references).
15. Sanders 1982, 118.
17. Tsougarakis 1990a, 144.
19. Tsougarakis 1990a, 144.

FIGURE 15: Synoptic tables of coins and lead seals from Crete dating to the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition (table by the author)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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FIGURE 16: Synoptic table of coins of Cretan Emirs in Miles 1970 and Warren, Miles 1972 (table by the author)

The cornerstones on which the distribution maps shown above have been realized are: ceramics (both ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Islamic’), most notably glazed wares, amphorae (especially globular and with grooved strap-handles), and domestic pottery, such as cooking pots, oil lamps, and tableware; coins; lead seals; structural remains; and relevant textual sources.
Beginning with ceramics, Poulou (2011) and Yangaki (2016) reference almost all the Byzantine pottery appearing in the table referring to Byzantine Crete (FIG.13). Poulou, moreover, contains the discussion of the Byzantine pottery of the 10th century (namely Constantinopolitan and Marmara amphorae Sarachane 45-54) from Heraklion, Pseira, and Sitia (FIG.16). Among the exceptions there are: the glazed ware (a chafing-dish) from Kissamos; the assemblages of domestic pottery from Phaistos, Mitropoli, Knossos and Priniatikos Pyrgos; globular amphorae from Dia and Oxa; and the amphorae (with grooved-strap handles) from Vyzari. The ceramic evidence from Arcadia, Chersonissos, and Temenos have been documented during personal field observations (see section below). I was not able to find specific references in secondary literature to material sources of this period from Armeni, Kamalevri, Kamilari, and the Lassithi plateau; these sites, however, are mapped in Triolo, Costa (2015), hence the decision to include them in the distribution map presented above.

With regard to the period of the Emirate (FIG.14), Randazzo (2019b) offers the most recent and extensive overview of Islamic pottery from Heraklion and Knossos (see also section below on the first-hand archive-based study of pottery). The ceramics from Vyzari were already published in the 1950s, but had remained overlooked since then. A few glazed sherds from the acropolis of Gortyn were attributed to the ‘Arab’ period by Rizza and Scrinari; according to my judgment, however, they rather seem to belong to later Byzantine productions of the 11th-12th century. In addition to the Byzantine amphorae of the 10th century mentioned above from Heraklion, Pseira, and Sitia, similar specimens dating to the period of the Emirate come from Gortyn and Priniatikos Pyrgos, in the latter case in association with sherds of 10th century GWW II.

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256 Poulou 2011, 428.
257 Scordou 2018.
260 Kalokyris 1959.
261 See also Randazzo 2020a.
262 Kalokyris 1959.
263 Rizza, Scrinari 1968, 93, fig. 164.
Moving on to numismatic sources, the evidence of Byzantine coins included in this study (FIGs.13-14) has comprised specimens dating from Leo III (717) to Constantine VII (d. 963), covering therefore both the periods preceding the Islamic conquest (717-820s) and of the Emirate. A first collection of nine specimens dating to the 8th – early 9th century was offered by Tsougarakis, to which three examples published by Sanders, dating to the period of the Emirate should be added, for a total of 12 specimens. Since these works of the 1980s, 26 further specimens dating between 717 and 963 have emerged (or have been published), bringing the total to 38. Considering the relatively high volume of specimens and the range of sites at which they have been recorded (Gortyn, Heraklion, Eleutherna, Priniatikos Pyrgos, Panormos, Gergeri, Meskle, and Mesonisia), a convenient and practical choice has been made here to include the bibliographical references to individual specimens in the tables presented above (FIG.15). A similar choice has been made with regard to Byzantine lead seals of the 8th – early 9th century appearing in the table referring to Byzantine Crete (FIG.13): those of military and civil officers from Gortyn, Eleutherna, Knossos, and Priniatikos Pyrgos have been listed and referenced in Chapter 2.2i (FIG.2), while the bibliographical references for those of the bishops of Gortyn, Knossos, Chania, and Kissamos are included in figure 15 (FIG.15).

To date, the bulk of Islamic coins of the Cretan Emirs is known in secondary literature through two distinct contributions, one is Miles’ monographic corpus published in 1970, the second is Starida’s recent article from the 1990s-2000s urban excavations at Heraklion. To these, the evidence of nine specimens published from the ‘Arab building’ of Knossos should be added. Together, these publications account for more than 500 specimens, of which about 350 have been recovered in Heraklion. A precise chronological breakdown, however, is unavailable for the more than 250 specimens mentioned by Starida, which are generally defined as ‘Arab’. Thus, Miles’ extensive corpus of 268 coins remains the most reliable and comprehensive source of evidence, offering a precise chronological breakdown for all but 10 unclassifiable specimens. Out of Miles’ 268 coins, 206 were found on Crete, but of these the exact place of recovery is only known for 126

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266 Miles 1970; Starida 2016, 63-75.
267 Warren, Miles 1972.
specimens (63 of which were found in Heraklion; specific considerations on the distributive patterns of Islamic coins across Crete will follow in Chapter 5). It comes without saying that these 126 specimens have been the only to be mapped and listed in a tables above (Figs. 15-16).

Finally, structural remains are the last source of evidence used; as with the other materials discussed above, these are only referenced here, while full discussion will follow in Chapter 4. With regard to the table dealing with the Byzantine period, bibliographical references to both (all) the fortifications, and the remains of domestic and sacred structures from Gortyn, Mitropoli, Priniatikos Pyrgos, and Pseira, can be found above. For the evidence from Vyzari and Phaistos see Kalokyris (1959) and La Rosa, Portale (2004), although the structural remains of the basilica from Vyzari have been restudied in the framework of this research (see below). Likewise, domestic structures of the 8th century from Chersonissos were mention only cursorily in secondary literature, and have been reconsidered in Chapter 4.1iv. The site of Episkopi Kissamos is only known from the remains of the church of Archangel Michael, whose aniconic frescos of a standing cross could date to the 8th or early 9th century (the Iconoclasm period). The only domestic structures dating to the period of the Emirate come from Heraklion and Knossos, and these have been extensively reexamined in this thesis drawing on published literature. The remains of two highly hypothetical mosques could come from Gortyn and Chersonissos.

First-hand archive-based study of finds

Besides secondary literature, original data have been collected through systematic studies of pottery assemblages and other small finds stored in archaeological archives of Heraklion and Knossos, the capital of the Emirate and its immediate hinterland. Regarding Heraklion, the ‘Ephorate of Antiquity of Heraklion’ granted me permission to study-and-publish both a selection of ceramics unearthed in the 1990s during the ‘Kastella excavations’, and a previously unpublished glass-weight

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268 For fortifications see Chapter 2.2i, footnote n°140, and Tsigonaki 2019 for a most recent synthesis. For the other case-study see footnote n°256.
269 Sythiakaki, Manolis, Spyros 1993; Sythiakaki 2010.
271 Starida 2016; Warren, Miles 1972; Randazzo 2019b; 2020a.
272 Respectively: Perna 2012, 186; Sanders 1982, 98.
from stratigraphic excavations at Odos Koroneou. These items are currently exhibited at the Historical Museum of Crete (IMK). To date, the urban excavations conducted in Heraklion remain the only significant contexts available for the period of the Emirate, but most of the material evidence recovered is still unpublished. This corpus of ceramic evidence, which comprises mostly tableware and oil lamps, constitutes the core of material sources available to provide a glimpse into Islamic material culture of al-Handaq, while the glass-weight has offered a most valuable window onto administrative and financial practices (see Chapter 5).

Concerning Knossos, the British School at Athens granted me the permission to study-and-publish two assemblages of pottery unearthed during the 1960s and 1970s at the ‘Sanatorium Basilica’ (KSB) and the ‘Arab building’, and currently stored at the Stratigraphical Museum of Knossos. The ceramic assemblage from the KSB, from a context called ‘Level 3c’, was already dated to the 8th-9th century in the 1960s on stratigraphic basis, but had lacked a modern re-study of its ceramics. Scholars have long dated the abandonment of Knossos by the early 8th century. The restudy of this assemblage from Level 3c not only draws a different narrative of continuous occupation, but has also been most useful to further enhance the understanding of possible local productions and interregional trade of pottery, which continued to link this site to Aegean and Constantinopolitan networks of exchange on the eve of the Islamic conquest. The so-called ‘Arab building’ yielded a modest but revealing assemblage of domestic pottery and cooking-pots dating to the period of the Emirate, which had remained overlooked since the 1970s. Its restudy has provided an initial avenue into the nature and significance of domestic pottery and cooking-ware in use during the Emirate of Crete, providing complementary data to the tableware from the IMK.

Finally, during a review of ‘stray finds’ which are part of the museum collection at the British School at Athens, I was able to recognise a sherd of ‘Islamic’ glazed pottery coming from Knossos, which unfortunately lacks any further specific information on its context of recovery.

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275 For instance: Sweetman 2004a.
276 Warren, Miles 1972.
**Non-intensive field observations**

In order to achieve a data collection as uniform as possible, it would have been much desirable to link together the legacy data available in secondary literature with systematic field surveys targeting each of the sites taken in consideration. However, while this methodology could be applied to Sicily, where the research was limited to a study-area (see section ii.), it would have been unfeasible to do the same for Crete, which was taken as a stage of investigation as a whole.

In addition to issues related to the spatial extent of the island, restrictions to conduct field surveys have also resulted from the Greek laws in force for the safeguard of the cultural heritage. These dictate that systematic archaeological field surveys must be previously authorised by the ‘Ephorate of Antiquity’ and -as I learned from personal experience- Greek red tape can be extremely time-consuming: it took nearly three years to obtain the permit to study the ceramics from the IMK, and permits for field surveys usually take longer and are not assigned to individuals. In practical terms, these restrictions mean that not only the off-site removal of artefacts is forbidden, but also producing systematic documentation (photo, drawing, measurement, mapping) of monuments and movable items. However, although archaeologists cannot conduct field surveys, they can still legitimately visit sites and produce non-systematic documentation (such as taking one-off photos, personal notes, and informal sketches), in ways that can be justified as just being a tourist. Accordingly, rather than systematic and intensive field surveys, it has appeared productive to employ a strategy of study centered on unsystematic field observations, which have been conducted within the framework of what is legally possible, i.e. never taking artefacts off-sites and never producing systematic documentation.\(^{277}\)

Field observations of this kind have been conducted at a number of different sites across the island, which include Temenos, Chersonissos, Arcadia, Vyzari, Gortyn, and Eleutherna. Unexpectedly, these visits have contributed to bring new and significant data in this thesis. Undoubtedly, the site of Arcadia was the greatest ‘surprise’. Recently (2010s), the Ephorate has partially investigated the remains of a monumental basilica near the village of Ini, in the Monofasi Plain, which

\(^{277}\) For a similar approach: Geisler 2015.
has been identified with the episcopal complex of the bishop of Arcadia, who is known textually in the late 8th century. The results of this excavation are yet to be published, but as recently as 2019, this site was missing in distribution maps of the Byzantine period. During a site visit, an extensive area of surface scatters was noted surrounding the church with ceramic evidence dating to the 5th-7th and 8th-9th century, namely a sherd of GWW I and one grooved-strap handle. Similar handles have been noted during field observations at Gortyn, Chersonissos, and Eleutherna, only the latter of which has been photographed.

The evidence of this category of Sicilian amphorae with grooved strap-handles was hitherto unknown on Crete, and its significance and possible implications will be discussed in Chapter 6. One example of Aegean globular amphora of the 8th-early 9th century was recognized during an on-site visit at the fortification of Temenos, which could bear testament to a possible occupation of this site before Nikephoros II Phokas ordered the construction of the fort in 961. Besides ceramic evidence, these unsystematic field observations have also paid attention to structural features, especially from Vyzari, Chersonissos, and Temenos, which are discussed next.

In addition to these field observations, other visits have been conducted to the sites and monuments of (from W to E): Kissamos, Episkopi, Chania, Aptera, Loutro (ancient Phoenix), Frangocastello, Lappe, Syvritos, Panormo, Arkadi, Phaistos, Tylissos, Lasithos plateau, Lykto, Elounda, Priniatikos Pyrgos, Hierapetra, and Itanos. Although these site visits have been most useful to achieve a first-hand knowledge of the structural remains and topographic settings of these sites, none of them has contributed to bring new evidence to light in comparison to the data already available in secondary literature. Regrettably, I was not able to

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278 I was not able to find the bibliographical reference to this excavations; I owe this information to Z. Aletras. The site of the Christian Basilica is located in a field that is publicly accessible and is even signalled on Google Maps: https://www.google.it/maps/place/%CE%A0%CE%B1%CE%B8%CE%91%CE%89%CE%B6%CF%87%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%9D%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE+%CE%92%CE%B1%CF%83%CE%B9%CF%8B%CE%89%CE%BA%CE%AE+%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%AF%CE%8F%CF%85/@35.0872034,25.2790427,15z/data=!4m12!1m6!3m5!1s0x149a7f8cee65706f:0x35116b8fbba958ac12sPanaghia+Kera!8m2!3d35.156788!4d25.6551957!3m4!1s0x149a8db030fd602f:0x35116b8fbba958ac12sPanaghia+Kera!8m2!3d35.089554!4d25.289529

conduct site visit to Kandanos, which is known to have existed in the late 8th century textually.

**Reevaluation of structural remains**

Observations of structural features were conducted at three monuments, all of which appear already in secondary literature, and have been limited to producing informal sketches of their masonry. These three structures are: the basilica at Vyzari, the ‘houses’ on the Kastri acropolis at Limani Chersonissos, and the curtain wall of the Temenos fort. These structures will be discussed in details in Part II, but it can be anticipated that the personal analysis of their masonry techniques (and plan layout in the case of Vyzari) has enable me to refine their dating and enrich the extant agenda of *comparanda* by drawing parallels with new case-studies.

**A second-hand and limited use of textual sources**

In addition to material sources, this thesis has made a limited use of relevant textual sources, both Byzantine and Arabic. This author, however, is not a historian and is unable to approach the reading of original texts; any reference to primary written sources, therefore, has been drawn on secondary literature. The *Notitia Episcopatum* 3 and 7 are most precious textual sources offering insights into the ecclesiastical network of the island in the Byzantine period preceding the Islamic conquest. Both Notitiae were written around the early 9th century and report the list of bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea in 787. In similar cases, these lists find support in sigillographic evidence, as for Gortyn, Eleutherna, Kissamos, and Chania; in other cases, they inform us about the apparent creation in the late 8th century of dioce, either *ex novo* or re-established from the past, such as Phoenix, Sitia, Hierapetra, and Arcadia; in yet other cases, they represent the only reference to sites otherwise unknown archaeologically, such as Kandanos and Lappe. The trustworthiness of these accounts has been recently

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282 See especially Tsougarakis 1988, 227; 388.
questioned, and it would seem that, in general terms and with due caution, these Notitiae could be considered reliable sources of information.\textsuperscript{283} Another crucial source of information for the urban hierarchy of the island in the period preceding the Islamic conquest is contained in the Bios of St. Stephen the Younger (mid-8\textsuperscript{th} century), which has been most recently reconsidered by S. Cosentino (see 4.1i).\textsuperscript{284}

For the period of the Emirate there is a wealth of textual accounts. Among the most noteworthy Arabic authors who mention Crete and that are pivotal for the arguments developed in this thesis there are: al-Baladhuri (d.892), al-Istakhri (d. 957), Qadi al-Nu’man (d.974), and Ibn Hawqal (d. 988). References to these authors have been drawn from Christide’s work.\textsuperscript{285} The only exception of any significance, which escaped Christides’ notice, is a most revealing reference to the Emirate of Crete made by al-Mas’udi (d.956), which will be dealt with in Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{286}

Finally, a few Byzantine authors have left written accounts of the Emirate of Crete, and especially of its capital. Among those, the most revealing for the arguments contained in this thesis are: Kaminiates’ description of the city in 904;\textsuperscript{287} Leo Deacon (d. 992), who was probably an eye witness of the Byzantine recapture of Crete in 961;\textsuperscript{288} Theodosius Deacon’s poem of the capture of Crete (written in 963), which is quite informative in spite of its literary form;\textsuperscript{289} and Genesios (d. late 10\textsuperscript{th} century), who mentions the early stages of the Islamic conquest in a way that accords with Arabic authors (ex. Baladhuri).\textsuperscript{290}

\textbf{ii.) SICILY}

The study-area of the Southern Erei Upland is archaeologically well-known due to a number of recent field surveys and excavations, in most of which I have taken part as either a field surveyor or ceramic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{283} Tsigonaki, Sarris 2016.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Cosentino 2019.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Christides 1984.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Horton 2017, 254.
\item \textsuperscript{287} Frendo, Fotiou 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{288} Talbot, Sullivan 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{289} Criscuolo 1979. For the critical review of this text in the Cretan context: Kaldellis 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{290} Kaldellis 2006, 40.
\end{itemize}
specialist. Due to the frequent personal participation in these investigations, it was not possible here to divorce the body of secondary literature from the first-hand archive-based study of finds. Additional field surveys within this study-area were conducted by this author in the framework of the present doctoral research. The diachronic map of distribution and the tables shown below (FIGs.17-18a-d) have been created by drawing on the dataset emerging from this range of investigations, the specifics of which are discussed in the following subsections. As above, the dataset is only presented here, while analysis and discussion will follow in Part III.

FIGURE 17: Diachronic distribution map of sites known inside the main study-area of this thesis, the Southern Erei Uplands, in Central Sicily (map by the author)
Proceeding from North to South, recent field surveys conducted along the River Morello Valley have identified only one site, albeit of a certain importance, with ceramics of the 8th-9th century: Case Bastione. Two stratigraphic pit-tests were conducted at this site in 2007; a systematic archive-based study of the ceramic evidence recovered was undertaken by this author in the context of the present research.

Limited urban excavations have been conducted in the city of Enna. In 2006, Fiorilla and Cilia-Platamone gave notice of a few ceramic sherds of the 8th-9th century coming from rescue excavations at Porta Pisciotto and inside the Church of San Calogero, the latter yielding also evidence of a sherd of Islamic glazed ware of the mid-10th - early 11th century. More recently, excavations conducted at Vallone Santa Ninfa have uncovered disturbed layers with ceramics (and structural remains) covering the whole timespan of the 6th/7th - 10th/11th century, which have been systematically studied and published. Perhaps, the most significant archaeological context from this city is that of the Castello di Lombardia, the fortified citadel of Katrum Hennae. Excavations have been conducted within the walls of this fort since the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. However, the ceramics unearthed in the 1970s and 80s remain still unpublished and ‘buried’ in an archaeological archive of the ‘Soprintendenza di Enna’ (which is off-limits due to the danger of a falling roof!). Only a patchy selection of finds were published until now from the excavations of the 1990s and 2000s. In the framework of this thesis, I have conducted a systematic study of the pottery recovered at this site between 1998-2002, which is currently stored at the archaeological archives of Palazzo Varisano, in Enna. This study has allowed me to bring a significant contribution to the knowledge of ceramic evidence of the 8th-11th century from this site. Finally, rescue excavations conducted in 2019 in the

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292 Cf. Valbruzzi in press.
295 Bonanno 2013a; Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020.
296 Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020.
297 Cf. Randazzo in press b.
neighbourhood ‘Mulino a Vento’ have brought to light a necropolis with 14 of graves, which follow the Muslim burial rite.\(^{298}\)

Systematic and extensive archaeological research has not been conducted in either valleys of the rivers Ramata and Dittaino. The only site known within this area is Marcato; pit test excavations were conducted here in the 1990s, showing an extraordinary continuity of human occupation between the Neolithic and the 13\(^{th}\) century AD. The results of these investigations have only been partially published.\(^{299}\)

While studying the pottery from the excavations of the Castello di Lombardia, I was able to examine a few crates from these excavations stored in the archives of Palazzo Varisano, which contained a few sherds of the 8\(^{th}\) - 9\(^{th}\) and 10\(^{th}\) - 11\(^{th}\) century.

The site at Cittadella di Morgantina, which lies on a hilltop next to the homonym Classical polis, was excavated between the 1960s and 1980s, although with a focus on proto-historic and classical remains.\(^{300}\) Recently, Arcifa has conducted a revision of the finds emerged during these excavations, showing the existence of ceramics dating between the 7\(^{th}\) and 9\(^{th}\) century.\(^{301}\) The environs of the sites, down to the Valley of the Margherito River, have been systematically field-surveyed by Thomson in the 1990s, but no evidence of the 8\(^{th}\) - 11\(^{th}\) century has emerged.\(^{302}\) The only exception is the site of Gallinica, which however falls within the basin of the River Leano.

The three remaining topographic basis of the rivers Olivo, Leano, and Gela are those yielding the richest dataset. Excavations conducted over the last years at Gerace have uncovered a Late Roman villa, which was still occupied thought the 6\(^{th}\) - 9\(^{th}\) century.\(^{303}\) Another well-known villa with phases of occupation spanning throughout the Middle Ages it that at the Casale site. Excavated partially and unsystematically in the 1950s, recent 10-year long stratigraphic excavations conducted under the direction of P. Pensabene and C. Bonanno have investigated the


\(^{299}\) Caffo et al. 2013.


\(^{301}\) Arcifa 2013b.

\(^{302}\) Thomson 1999.

\(^{303}\) Bonanno 2014; Wilson 2015.
transformations of the Late Antique monument into a large medieval village, which was still inhabited during the Norman period.\textsuperscript{304} While partaking in these excavations between 2010 and 2015, I was responsible for the study of the ceramic evidence dating to the 6\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century coming from the residential core of the villa\textsuperscript{305}. On that occasion, I was also able to ‘inspect’ a further one hundred crates from excavations on Monte Navone, stored in the archive of the villa, most of which containing ceramic assemblages of the mid-10\textsuperscript{th} – 12\textsuperscript{th} century. Moreover, within the broader framework of these archaeological investigations, a team of scholars, led by A. Alfano, and of which I was a component, conducted field surveys in the wider surroundings, documenting ceramics of the 8\textsuperscript{th} – 9\textsuperscript{th} century at the following sites: Polino, Rambaldo, Rametta, Mangone, Azzolina, Leano, Pendici Navone, and Monte Navone.

As discussed in the next subsection, in the framework of this thesis I have complemented this picture by conducting new systematic field surveys. Almost all the sites known in previous literature have been re-visited, applying uniform methods of recording, and important territorial gaps, which were left untouched during previous investigations, filled. The evidence of five additional sites with ceramics of the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century (and 10\textsuperscript{th} century in one case) has been thus brought to light. For one site, Montagna di Marzo, I have also conducted a first-hand study of ceramics unearthed in excavations of the 1990s, but remained overlooked.\textsuperscript{307} The occupation of Philosophiana in the 9\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} century was already known in the 2000s, and has more recently been clarified by Vaccaro’s field surveys and excavations of the ceramic workshop.\textsuperscript{308}

\textit{Systematic field-surveys}

Despite the discrete archaeological coverage of this study-area, the field surveys and excavations mentioned above were driven by different

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{304} Most recently: Bonanno 2018; Pensabene 2010; 2016; 2019; Pensabene, Sfameni 2006; Pensabene, Barresi 2019.
\textsuperscript{305} Randazzo 2019a; for the pottery of the Fatimid and Norman period: Alfano 2019.
\textsuperscript{307} In the archaeological archives of Palazzo Trigona, Piazza Armerina. Cf. Guzzardi 1996-97; 2003.
\textsuperscript{308} Fiorilla 2009; Vaccaro 2012; 2013a; 2013b; Vaccaro, La Torre 2015.
\end{flushleft}
research aims and based on differing approaches and methodologies of investigation and data recording. In order to achieve a consistent dataset, a systematic ri-documentation of all the sites (except Gerace) appearing in the distribution map presented above was undertaken, applying uniform criteria of recording. These criteria have considered: geo-localisation and topographical setting of the sites (lowlands, hillsides, hilltops, etc.); the patterns of diachronic occupation inferable through material sources, either visible on the ground or known in secondary literature; the extension of surface scatters and the average number of diagnostic sherds, either visible on the ground or recovered during excavations; the interrelations between sites, for instance their intra-visibility; the proximity to known road-networks and/or specific landmarks (such as strategic viewpoints or defiles); and the proximity to natural resources (such as rivers, lands suitable for agricultural production, etc.). For each site, both methods of investigation (i.e. field surveys and/or excavations), and the visibility of the ground in the case of field surveys, have been specified. The only structural remains discussed in details are those from Enna, for which bibliographical reference was provided above.

The data thus collected have been gathered and presented in the table shown below (FIG.18a-d). By interpreting the extension and quantity of material sources available, and the topographic settings, an attempt has been made to classify these sites into a hierarchy of settlements. With the exception of Enna, which is the only unit that can be considered an urban centre, this classification has included a variety of categories, ranging from farmsteads to extensive rural villages, and from hamlets to hilltop beacons. The criteria and results of this characterization are discussed in Part III.

As anticipated, these new field surveys have also targeted some territorial gaps which were not covered by previous investigations. Four brand-new sites with ceramics of the 8th-9th century have been documented: Serre Caniglia, San Nicola, Leano II, and Balatella. At the site of Polino, I have documented an area of scatters with Islamic pottery of the mid-10th – mid-11th century, which was unknown until now.

Textual sources
Drawing from secondary literature, a few Arabic textual sources will be mentioned in Part III. These have comprised: the *Cambridge Chronicle*, a list of cities defeated during the Islamic conquest, up to 965, written by the early 11th century, and the accounts of the conquest left by Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233) and al-Nuwayri (d.1333), both translated by Amari.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site name</th>
<th>Topographic setting &amp; key landscape features</th>
<th>Patterns of diachronic occupation</th>
<th>Material sources of the 8th – 10th/early 11th century &amp; method of investigation</th>
<th>Size and settlement interpretation (8th – 10th/early 11th c.)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azzinuma</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Between Cassil and Norman periods (ca. 5th BC – 4th c. AD), with gaps in the Late Roman (ca. 4th–5th c.) and Islamic periods (ca. 10th–11th c.).</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility); Late 8th – 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 9th – 10th/11th c. ca. 3ha intensively occupied. Rural village/hamlet suitable for farming, and with good defensive potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balitella</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Between 3rd and 9th c., AD, with a peak in the 6th c.</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility); Late 8th – 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 8th – 10th/11th c. ca. 3ha dispersed settlement, with two main nuclei of ca. 1-2ha each, with empty gaps in-between. Rural hamlet, open site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Bastione</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Eneolithic village with a sporadic occupation in the 6th c. (i.e. one sherd of PRSW); intensive occupation in the 8th–9th c.</td>
<td>From a stratigraphic pit-test Late 8th – 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 8th – 9th c. ca. extent ill defined, more than 3ha. Rural village/hamlet, open site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cittadella di Marcantina</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Settlement of the Iron Age and Indigenous period (ca. 10th–6th BC); Classical and Hellenistic periods (ca. 5th–2nd BC); Byzantine period (6th–9th c.); Norman and Saffian periods (12th–13th c.).</td>
<td>From stratigraphic excavations (precise minimum number of Individuals not available); Late 8th – 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 8th – 9th c. ca. extent ill defined, more than 3ha. Natural defensive position, also suitable for farming (testified by extensive terracing, late medieval?).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cozzo Rametta</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Sporadic prehistoric occupation in a plateau 500m to N-W.</td>
<td>From stratigraphic excavation (poor visibility); Late 8th – 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 8th – 9th c. ca. 0.5ha limited to the hilltop. Isolated unit (Beacon?) which combines naturally defensive position with farming potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enna</td>
<td>- Personal field survey</td>
<td>Uninterrupted occupation between prehistory and the present day.</td>
<td>From stratigraphic excavation of the late Etna period and Valfone Santa Minina:</td>
<td>Fortified city, ca. 25ha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

310 Amari 1881; 1933. More recently these have been revaluated by A. Nef, for example: Nef, Prigent 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site (locale) &amp; bibliography</th>
<th>Topographic setting &amp; key landscape features</th>
<th>Patterns of diachronic occupation</th>
<th>Material sources of the 8th – 10th/early 11th century &amp; method of investigation</th>
<th>Size and settlement interpretation (8th – 10th/early 11th c.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallinaca</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°21’02.5”N 14°26’10.1”E Hilly plateau 580m a.s.l., water-rich, in the linking point between the valleys of the rivers Leano (to the N), Margherito (E), and Elsa (S). Next to the modern road SP37, 27.5 km form Enna.</td>
<td>Between Classical and Norman periods (ca. 5th BC – 12th c. AD), with a gap in the Islamic period (i.e. 10th-11th c.). (excellent visibility): Late 6th – 7th, 9th c.</td>
<td>Late 8th – 9th, 10 c. – 3ha intensively occupied. Rural village/hamlet suitable for farming. Open site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerace</td>
<td>Giovanni 2014; - Viscosi 2015 (lack of direct field reading)</td>
<td>37°28’00.1”N 14°14’59.5”E Hilly-foot 600m a.s.l. On the modern road SP78, 11km S-W form Enna.</td>
<td>Roman Villa (ca. 2nd – 5th c. AD); Byzantine settlement (ca. 6th – 9th c.).</td>
<td>Late 8th – 9th, 10 c. – Grooved strap-handles (10-20) - Roof tiles with voids and striations (10-20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leano I</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°22’18.0”N 14°24’24.0”E Lowland, 626m a.s.l., in the midit of the River Leano Valley, ca. 150m from the river. On the modern road SP38, 24km S-E from Enna.</td>
<td>Sporadically in the Classical/Hellenistic period; Late Roman village (7 c. 3rd-5th c. AD); early Byzantine and early chemonic periods (ca. 6th-8th c.); Norman period (late 11th – 12th c.).</td>
<td>From field survey (good visibility): ca. early – mid 9th c. – Grooved strap-handles (10) - Basics type Philosopherina (&lt;5) - Roof tiles with voids and striations (&lt;10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leano II</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°21’48.6”N 14°25’01.1”E Hilly plateau 677m a.s.l. at the S-W foot of Mount San Nicola. In proximity of the crossroad between the modern roads SP 16, 17, and 37. 25km S-E from Enna.</td>
<td>Late Roman/Vandal (ca. 5th – early 6th c.), Byzantine period of the late 7th – mid 8th c.</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility): late 7th c. - ca. mid 8th c. - ARSW 99c-D; 105; 107 (5-10); - Grooved strap-handles (&lt;10) - Basics type Philosopherina (&lt;5) - Roof tiles with voids and striations (&lt;5) - Locally produced cooking pots, coarse ware, table ware (&lt;50).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangone (Monte)</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°21’58.7”N 14°20’15.1”E Hilly site 650m a.s.l. on the S-W flank of Mount Mangone. Overlooking the site of the Villa dei Casale and the River Siris Valley. Direct visual contact with Monte Avone.</td>
<td>Between 5th – 12th c.</td>
<td>From field survey and a pit-test excavation (visibility unknown): Late 6th – 7th, 9th c. – Type Rochecliff (&lt;5) - Grooved strap-handles (&lt;5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcato</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°30’02.1”N 14°23’23.4”E Hillside 540m a.s.l. on the S-W ridge of the River Oltotino Valley, and at the E edge of the River Namata Valley. 126km S-E from Enna, with which it has direct visual contact.</td>
<td>Uninterrupted (1) occupation between Nothotic and 13th c. AD.</td>
<td>From pit-test excavations (precise dating, non available): Late 8th – 9th, early 10th c. – Type Rochecliff (&lt;10) - Grooved strap-handles - Aphorai with curly-cail painted decoration (14) - white glazed tableware - amphorae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montagna di Marre</td>
<td>Personal field survey</td>
<td>37°23’55.8”N 14°18’54.1”E Hilly plateau (ca. 139a) between 650-700m a.s.l. Between the valleys of the rivers Olio and Biatezza. Next to the Regia Trazera Calatanissetta-Piazza. 16km S from Enna.</td>
<td>Uninterrupted (1) occupation between Nothotic and 9th c. AD.</td>
<td>From pit-test excavations and field survey (good visibility): Late 6th – 7th, 9th c. – Type Rochecliff (20-50) - Grooved strap-handles (15-30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 18b: Synoptic table of the dataset sources for the sites with evidence of the Byzantine-Islamic transition known in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands (table by the author)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site (substrate) &amp; bibliography</th>
<th>Topographic setting &amp; key landscape features</th>
<th>Patterns of diachronic occupation</th>
<th>Material sources of the 8th–10th/early 11th century &amp; method of investigation</th>
<th>Size and settlement interpretation (8th–10th/early 11th c.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monte Navone</td>
<td>37°21’25.6&quot;N 14°17’22.2&quot;E Hilltop plateau (ca. 6 ha), 750m a.s.l. Between the River Gela (to E), and River Olivo (to N-W). 23km S for Enna.</td>
<td>Between pro-history and Norman period (ca. 7th BC–12th AD), with a significant gap in the Roman period (ca. 1st–5th c. AD).</td>
<td>From pit-test excavations and field survey (poor visibility): - Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - Type Rocchiella (&lt;10) - Grooved strap-handels (&lt;10) - Mid-10th – mid-11th c. - Glazed tableware (100+); - plain, whitened, or painted tableware (100+); - cooking ware (100+); - Amphorae (100+).</td>
<td>Naturally defensive position, also suitable for farming (tested by extensive terracing, late medieval?).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenidi Monte Navone</td>
<td>37°21’29.1”N 14°18’10.9”E N/E foothill of Monte Navone 511m a.s.l. In proximity of the crossroad between the modern roads SP 15 and 159.</td>
<td>Sporadically in the Roman imperial period (ca. 2nd-4th c. AD).</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility): - Type Rocchiella (&lt;10) - Grooved strap-handels (&lt;5).</td>
<td>Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - 0.5 ha. Farmstead, open site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophiana</td>
<td>37°19’08.2”N 14°17’31.9”E Hilly plateau 500m a.s.l., Overlooking the River Gela Valley. 27km S da Enna.</td>
<td>Uninterruptedly from Roman Imperial age to Staufen period (ca. 1st – 13th c. AD).</td>
<td>From field survey and excavations: - Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - Type Rocchiella (50+) - Grooved strap-handels (100+) - Mid-10th – mid-11th c. - Painted tableware (NMI unavailable) Glazed, plain, whitened, painted tableware, amphorae.</td>
<td>Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - 11ha. agr-o-town with Christian basilica, workshops, necropoleis. -mid-10th – mid-11th c. - 3/5 ha, rural village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polino</td>
<td>37°24’36.4”N 14°15’53.3”E Hillside 500m a.s.l., 300m E from a tributary of River Olivo. In proximity of modern road SP 126. 6km N from Monte Navone, with which it has direct visual contact. 17km S from Enna.</td>
<td>Sporadically in the Early Byzantine period (ca. 7th c.). Thematic period (late 8th – 9th c.). Fatimid period (mid-10th – mid-11th c.).</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility): - Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - Type Rocchiella (10&gt;25) - Grooved strap-handels (10&gt;25) - Mid-10th – mid-11th c. - Glazed, plain, whitened tableware (25&gt;) - amphorae (50+)</td>
<td>Open site suitable for farming - Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - 2ha dispersed settlement. Hamlet/farmstead. - mid-10th – mid-11th c. - 0.5 ha intensively occupied. Farmstead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rambaldo</td>
<td>37°23’44.5”N 14°21’39.8”E Hilltop 730m a.s.l. In the linking point between the topographic basin of the rivers Olivo and Gela. 20km S from Enna.</td>
<td>Exclusively in the late 8th – f. h. 9th c. AD. Settlement of the 4th -7th c. AD located in the S-E foothill.</td>
<td>From field surveys (good visibility): - Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - Type Rocchiella (&lt;10) - Grooved strap-handels (&lt;10).</td>
<td>Late 8th – f. h. 9th c. - 0.5 ha limited to the hilltop. Isolated unit (beacon?) which combines naturally defensive position with farming potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossoamanno (f)</td>
<td>37°27’57.9”N 14°23’28.3”E Hilltop 800m a.s.l. On the Strada vicinale Rossoamanno-Cacia. 15km S-E from Enna, with which it has direct visual contact.</td>
<td>Settlement of the &quot;Indigenous&quot;, Classical and Hellenistic periods (ca. 7th–3rd BC); Roman Early Imperial age (ca. 1st – 3rd c. AD); Staufen fortified city (13th c.).</td>
<td>No ceramic evidence of the 8th-11th century has been observed during several personal field surveys (visibility poor to good). A few sherds of Type Rocchiella are exhibited at the Antiquarium of Valguarnera and said to come from Rossoamanno (f).</td>
<td>Naturally defensive position, also suitable for farming (tested by extensive terracing, late medieval?).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 18c: Synoptic table of the dataset sources for the sites with evidence of the Byzantine-Islamic transition known in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands (table by the author)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site (name) &amp; bibliography</th>
<th>Topographic setting &amp; key landscape features</th>
<th>Patterns of diachronic occupation</th>
<th>Material sources of the 8th – 10th/early 11th century &amp; method of investigation</th>
<th>Size and settlement interpretation (8th – 10th/early 11th c.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Nicola (Monte)</td>
<td>37°22’01.7”N 14°25’16.3”E Hilltop 740m a.s.l. On the W ridge of the River Leano Valley. In proximity to modern road SP17. Overlooking the sites of Gallinica, Serre Caniglia, Leano I, Leano II, Monte Mangone, Monte Nuvo. 25km S-E from Enna.</td>
<td>Sporadically in the Roman period (ca. 1st – 4th c. AD), Early Byzantine (ca. 6th-7th c.) and thematic period (late 8th – f.h. 9th c.) and Norman period (12th c.).</td>
<td>From field survey (poor visibility):</td>
<td>- Late 8th – f.h. 9th c. c. Isolated unit in a naturally defensive position, non-suitable from farming. Beacon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serre Caniglia</td>
<td>37°21’35.5”N 14°26’19.4”E Hilltop plateau 640m a.s.l. In the linking point between the valleys of the rivers Leano (W) and Margherita (E). Overlooking the modern road SP37, 27km S-E from Enna.</td>
<td>Exclusively in the late 8th – f.h. 9th c. AD.</td>
<td>From field survey (excellent visibility):</td>
<td>- Late 8th – f.h. 9th c. c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Type Rocchicella (3x15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Grooved strap handles (3x10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Roof tiles with voids and striations (25x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Late 9th – f.h. 9th c. c. 2ha dispersed settlement. Hamlet + beacon? Naturally defensive position, also suitable for farming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa del Casale</td>
<td>37°23’52.3”N 14°20’05.4”E Lowland 535m a.s.l. In the S-W foothill of Monte Mangone and on the E bank of River Gela. 22.5km S from Enna.</td>
<td>Between Classical and States periods (ca. 5th BC – 13th AD) with gaps in the f.h. 8th c. AD and during the late 9th – early 10th c. AD.</td>
<td>From excavations:</td>
<td>- Late 8th – f.h. 9th c. c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Type Rocchicella (50x100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Grooved strap handles (1x10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Roof tiles with voids and striations (1x10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- one of Leoni V; one of Teodillo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-10th – mid-11th c. c. extensive ceramic assemblages of all the categories of the Inhumation domesticium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open site suitable for farming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Late 8th – f.h. 9th c. c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ca. 3ha limited to the central core of the Roman Villa. Village/hamlet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-10th – mid-11th c. c. more than 20ha. Rural town with various neighbourhoods and ceramic workshops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 18d: Synoptic table of the dataset sources for the sites with evidence of the Byzantine-Islamic transition known in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands (table by the author)
PART II: CRETE

BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE DAR AL-ISLAM (mid/late-8th – mid-10th century)
CHAPTER 4: SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Introductory remarks

As argued in Chapter 3, by evaluating the quantity (when available) and nature of the extant archaeological evidence, it is possible to provisionally classify the sites known on Crete during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition in two groups. First-rank centres, which especially include Late Antique cities, seats of military, civil, and/or religious institutions; and surrounding second- and third-rank units, such as rural villages, hamlets, and farmsteads.

Section 4.1, ‘Urbanscape’, investigates the nature and socioeconomic significance of the former; section 4.2, ‘Ruralscape’ explores the latter. To do so, discussion has been organised by following the order of the eight study-areas (or ‘demographic districts’) shown in Figure 9 (FIG.9), in which it is argued that settlement pattern of Crete came to be structured during the 8th-mid-10th century. Each district includes a first-rank unit (i.e. Heraklion, Gortyn, Eleutherna/Vyzari, Chersonissos, Arcadia, Priniatikos Pyrgos, etc.) and a surrounding network of rural settlements, which appear located in strategic points of the agricultural landscape, namely the plains of Messarà, Monofatsi, Mylopotamos, Pediatos, and the Amary Valley. In section 4.2, specific attention will be given to the rural settlement patterns in the period of the Islamic Emirate of Crete (820s-961), a topic on which, to my knowledge, there has been a lack of scholarly research.

4.1. URBANSCAPE

In the following section 4.1, focus is first given on the two principal ‘first-rank’ centres of the island, Heraklion/al-Handaq, the new capital city of Islamic Crete, and Gortyn, the previous capital of Roman and Byzantine Crete. With regard to Heraklion, discussion will focus on the processes through which this city gradually replaced Knossos. Regarding Gortyn, attention is drawn to the compelling evidence, produced by on-going archaeological research, showing continuous occupation at this site throughout the 9th-10th century. A closer examination of the available evidence for the
continuity of occupation at the remaining first-rank sites follows next, even though, with a few exceptions, available archaeological and textual sources allow for only sketchy or preliminary outlines to be drawn. Scholarship has long dated the abandonment of all these cities before the Islamic period. Here, instead, it will be argued that there is enough evidence to prove their survival into 9th and possibly 10th century. A final section deals with those cities/episcopal sees known through textual sources (Ierapetra, Kandanos, Lappe, and Phoenix), for which current archaeological investigation has been unable to uncover material evidence of this period.

1. District no.1: from Knossos to Heraklion

Historically, the area under scrutiny was the cradle of the Minoan Palatial civilisation, when Knossos was the largest and wealthiest settlement on Crete. Recent field surveys conducted within the framework of the Knossos Urban Landscape Project (KULP), suggest that at its zenith (ca. 1600 BC), the settlement of Knossos extended over as much as 130ha, with an estimated population of 25.000-28.000. Throughout the Minoan period, a harbour-town named Poros existed to the east of the modern city of Heraklion, functioning as the sea-port of Knossos.

Following a period of settlement contraction during the Iron Age, Knossos achieved a new urban zenith during the Late Classical or Early Hellenistic period, when, reaching a size of 120ha, it was one of the most important poleis on Crete. At this stage, the harbour town of Poros moved westward, in correspondence to the modern site of Heraklion, marking the beginning of the history of this settlement in the location that we know today. In 31-27 BC Knossos became the first Roman colonia on the island. Although remains significant in extent, during the Roman Imperial age (1st-3rd century AD) its urban scale decreased, contracting to approximately 70ha. After the 5th century,

311 Cf. Tsigonakis 2007, 285
314 Trainor 2019.
315 Karetsou 2008.
Knossos received a new monumental and institutional façade, with the creation of extensive cemeteries and the construction of two large Christian basilicas at the sites of the modern Medical Faculty (KMF) and Sanatorium (KSB). The whole settlement, however, continued to downsize and to move northwards from the Minoan Palace, in correspondence of the KMF and KSB, in what here is called the ‘northern neighbourhood’.\textsuperscript{317} Archaeological excavations from Heraklion (near the Archaeological Museum) have unearthed residential buildings with mosaic floors, ceramics, and 36 coins spanning 283-457 AD and testify that this settlement prospered during the 3\textsuperscript{rd}-5\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{318}

Concerning the centuries preceding the Islamic conquest, archaeological evidence indicates that, although further reduced in size to about 40ha, until the late 7\textsuperscript{th} – early 8\textsuperscript{th} century Knossos occupied almost certainly the hierarchical summit of District no.1. For this period, the specific forms of habitation at this site are still uncertain, yet it is clear that a large segment of the settlement had moved to the ‘northern neighbourhood’, nucleating around the KSB and KMF (FIG.19).\textsuperscript{319} This latter building might have ceased to have its religious role by the late 7\textsuperscript{th} century, but the record of domestic pottery from this site extends up to the mid-8\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{320} Featuring productions such as Tunisian RSW 109, Cypriot RSW 9, Constantinopolitan GWW I, and Aegean globular amphorae, these ceramics not only bear testament to the continuous occupation of this site, but also to the endurance of well-established economic partnerships and sociocultural links with core territories of the Byzantine Empire.

\textsuperscript{317} Hayes 2001; Sweetman 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; Sweetman, Grigopoulos 2010; Trainor 2019. The first appearance of a Bishop of Knossos dates to the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century.

\textsuperscript{318} Markoulaki 2008a; Penna 2008; Poulou 2008; Andrianakis 2013.

\textsuperscript{319} Sweetman 2004b; Whitelaw, Bredaki, Vasilakis 2007; Sweetman, Grigopoulos 2010; Trainor 2019.

\textsuperscript{320} Hayes 2001.
Sigillographic evidence is also revealing. The lead seal of Andrew of Crete, archbishop of Gortyn (d. 740), has been recovered in the ruins of the old core of the Minoan and Greco-Roman city. This evidence shows the relevance and interconnection of its Knossian recipient(s) within the episcopal network of the region, but might also suggest that the heart of the site had not been completely deserted by the mid-8th century (although this find-spot could reflect its site of disposal). Certainly, if compared with its glorious past, it is difficult to regard this site in urban terms. However, in line with these material sources, which are few but consistent, it is anachronistic to insist placing the urban collapse of Knossos in the 7th century. Up to the mid-8th century, in fact, this settlement and its community maintained a dominant institutional

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role, continuing economic activities, and, possibly, an urban façade and size respectable for a city of this period (see infra for discussion of the fate during the 8th century of the churches noted above). \(^{322}\)

Both textual sources, such as the 7th-century *Anonymi Ravennatis Cosmographia*, and archaeological finds from urban excavations (see below) reveal that a Byzantine settlement existed at Heraklion long before Muslim conquerors upgraded this site to the capital of their Emirate. \(^{323}\) The precise extent, significance, and urban fabric of this settlement, however, are still unclear, but it is generally accepted that, until the early 8th century, it still functioned as the *emporium* of Knossos. \(^{324}\) Early Christian architectural features of the 6th-7th century have been found in various excavations across the city, such as at the Almirou Street and in the proximity of the Archaeological Museum; likewise, fortifications unearthed at the Bendenaki plot have been recently dated to the late 7th–early 8th century, in line with the revised chronology proposed for the main works of fortifications across the island. \(^{325}\) The finds documented during these urban excavations include a *solidus* of Leo III and Constantine V, which is the firmest chronological evidence dating to first half of the 8th century, while the dating of belt-buckles, GWW I, Aegean globular amphorae, and regional oil lamps and painted tableware could well extend into the late 8th century. \(^{326}\) In spite of this evidence, it is still impossible to establish a precise point in time when this site replaced Knossos at the summit of the local urban hierarchy of settlements. A revaluation of the material evidence from Knossos dating to the second half of the 8th – early 9th century could be decisive with this regard.

Thus far, the only –although extraordinary– piece of material evidence from Knossos dating to the late 8th – early 9th century was a lead seal belonging to a high ranking imperial civil officer, Ionnis Vestitor and Protonotarios of the Imperial Treasury. \(^{327}\) This seal was found on the eastern slope of the ancient acropolis of Knossos (Monastiraki Kefala), a few hundred meters to the west from the Minoan palace. Before this

\(^{322}\) Cf. Curta 2016 and Chapter 2.2ii.

\(^{323}\) Cosentino 2019.

\(^{324}\) Trombley 2001; Andrianakis 2013; Cosentino 2019.

\(^{325}\) Tzobanaki 1996; Markoulaki 2008b; Andrianakis 2013; Sythiakaki, Kanaki, Bilmezi 2015; Tsigonaki 2019.

\(^{326}\) Penna 2008; Poulou 2008; 2011; Andrianakis 2013.

\(^{327}\) Dunn 2004.
evidence was found, this central area of the site was believed to be either deserted, or reduced to mere forms of squatter occupation. However, as Dunn observed, this lead seal might imply that Knossos had maintained, at this later stage, an important relevance in the economic and administrative hierarchy of the island. Furthermore, in view of its find-spot, it could be that the central nucleus of the site had not been completely abandoned, as previously assumed. That Knossos had maintained a privileged position in the settlement hierarchy of Crete finds further support in the mention, contained in both *Notitiae Episcopatum* 3 and 7, that its bishop attended the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787.328

Extant material sources from the central core of the old Greco-Roman site, however, are extremely scarce and, where they exist, a contradictory imagination emerges altogether. As discussed next, on the one hand, it would seem that the urban fabric had undergone a process of de-monumentalisation; on the other hand, however, ceramic evidence still yields a picture of economic vibrancy. In this regard, a well-stratified ceramic assemblage called Level 3c, which was found in the 1950s during the excavation of the southern tower of the KSB, is quite illuminating (FIG.20).329 Level 3c was found overlapping the rubble layers of destruction of the basilica, which contained coins and ceramic sherds dating to the 7th century. Above, it was sealed by a sandy stratum that, lacking ceramic evidence, was interpreted as a flood layer, which was further covered by a third stratum, containing later medieval glazed pottery (ca. 13th century onwards). In accordance with this stratigraphic sequence, Level 3c was dated to the 8th century already in the early 1960s, when Frend and Johnston published the results of the KSB excavations.330 However, due to the limited scientific knowledge available at that time, the ceramics from Level 3c were not accurately identified. My restudy allows us to clarify the chronology of this context, which should be dated between the mid-8th - early 9th century in light of the present knowledge of Byzantine pottery.331

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328 Tsougarakis 1988, 388.
329 The need for a restudy of this assemblage was already pointed out in Vroom 2003, 55–56.
331 Randazzo 2020a.
An in-depth description of this modest but significant assemblage of ceramics from Level 3c will be offered in Chapter 6. Here, however, it is worth underscoring that containing cooking pots and amphorae...
imported from Constantinopolitan and Aegean workshops, this context testifies the continuous economic connections linking Knossos and its communities to core territories of the Byzantine Empire, right on the eve of the Islamic conquest. However, while showing that occupation at the ‘northern neighborhood’ endured up to this later chronological stage, Level 3c yields an eloquent picture of squatter occupation at the Christian basilica, which by the late 8th century had utterly lost its original function and monumentality. Therefore, the second half of the 8th century can tentatively be taken as the chronological turning-point in the irreversible process of ruralisation of the urban fabric of Knossos.

This being noted, the ruralisation of Knossos in the 8th century could be explained in light of the concomitant upsurge of Heraklion as the new urban centre within District no.1, a circumstance which is also supported by textual sources and material evidence. In particular, reinterpreting a reference contained in the life of St. Stephen the Younger (mid-8th century), Cosentino has argued that Heraklion might have become the seat of secular power of the island as early as the mid-8th century, when the residence of the archon of Crete was relocated from Gortyn to Heraklion.332 The life contains the mention of a praetorion sited in Heraklion (ἔν τῷ λεγομένῳ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρακλείου), and not in Gortyn. In former scholarship, such information was interpreted in reference to a residence built by emperor Heraclius in Gortyn, but current archaeological research has demonstrated that when the life of St. Stephan was written, the Gortynian complex had definitely ceased to function (see and following section 4.1.ii).

According to Cosentino, this ‘case of redefinition of Cretan urbanism’ was part of a broader state-sponsored process, aimed at enhancing the relationships between the northern coast of Crete and Constantinople. Indisputable archaeological proof to support this argument does not currently exist. However, the evidence contained in the Notitia Episcopatum 7 that Heraklion (Herakleionpolis) was upgraded to episcopal see in the second half of the 8th century hints at this direction, bearing testament to a process of empowering, which also involved the ecclesiastical institutions of this city.333 As shall be seen next, the process of urbanisation of Heraklion gained momentum rapidly in the mid-9th – mid-10th century when, with the name al-Handaq, it became

333 Andrinakis 2013, 253-54.
the capital and principal city of the Islamic Emirate of Crete, definitively and irreversibly. Conversely, by this time the settlement of Knossos had eclipsed into a rural site, located in the outskirts of the new capital of the island.

Although the number of extant material sources is limited, through a careful analysis of both ceramic and structural available evidence, it is possible to provide a glimpse into the urban fabric of al-Handaq and the range of daily material culture used by its citizens.

A relatively small but significant corpus of ceramics is displayed at the IMK and has been systematically studied in the context of this doctoral research (FIGs.21-22). A close examination of these items is presented in Chapter 6.1i, while the results of this archive study are discussed here. The spectrum of pottery is almost complete in terms of dining ceramics and tableware, encompassing especially glazed and unglazed tableware, including two Middle Eastern ewers, a bowl from Cordoba, a bottle and a range of cups, mugs, drinking pitches, and oil lamps. The bottle, cups, and oil lamps could well be local products, but they find precise morphological, decorative, and technological parallels with pottery dating to the 9th-10th century from other regions of the Dar-al Islam, especially (and unsurprisingly) from Egypt and al-Andalus.334 Morphological and technological parallels are so close that these ceramics could be reasonably defined as ‘Islamic’. Conforming to the material culture of the broader Islamic world, the corpus of ceramics from the IMK offers clarity on the integration of Handaqi citizens’ patterns of consumption and serving of foods and liquids within that of other contemporary regions of the Dar al-Islam, whose people shared common culinary and social habits with the Muslims of Crete.335

Setting this corpus of objects aside, in what follows I will focus on structural remains, especially related to domestic architecture, which has surfaced in Heraklion, discussing their analogies with contemporary urban and rural architectures of the Islamic world. To my knowledge, this task has never been performed before, but these outstanding urban structures form Heraklion help shed light on the sophisticated living standards in the capital of the Emirate.

334 Cf. Randazzo 2019b.
335 Randazzo 2019b.
FIGURE 21: Islamic pottery from the Kastella excavations in Heraklion displayed at the IMS (photos by the author with permission of the IMK and the Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion, except no.i, after Poulou 2011, 411-413)
FIGURE 22: Islamic pottery from the Kastella excavations in Heraklion displayed at the IMS (drawings photos by the author with permission of the IMK and the Ephorate of Antiquities of Heraklion)
FIGURE 23: Example of a courtyard house from Heraklion from layers of the period of the Islamic Emirate, from Byron-Thalita Streets (photo and plan after Starida 2016, 67-68)

In Heraklion, domestic buildings dating to the Islamic period have surfaced since the earliest urban excavations of the 1960s at the Kastela plot and in the Streets Kornoneou, Almirou, and Byron-Thalita, for which
Starida published a survey and detailed descriptions in 2016. All these examples of domestic architecture consist of relatively small rectangular rooms, well-built, with strong foundations that often reach the natural bedrock, and provided with small windows. Large blocks are used in their masonry, with tiles, pebbles, and rock-chips used as fillers between blocks. Spolia appear quite frequently, such as column shafts used as doorways or to support postholes. Inner walls were covered in white and coloured plaster, while floors were made of carefully arranged stone slabs, laid down on a preparatory layer of beaten earth. At Kastela, and Byron and Kornoneou Streets, groups of rooms connected to each other via narrow doors have been found organised around central paved atria, in a layout that clearly defines courtyard houses (FIG.23). Water-wells were documented in these open-air central yards, which were crossed by a system of pipes, for both drawing and draining water.

As far as these available examples of domestic architecture are considered, they perfectly match the iconic “Islamic courtyard houses”, whose standard module, in the words of Fentress, offers a “consistent pattern in domestic architecture of the 9th-10th century, which can be found from Spain to the Persian Gulf”. In particular, close comparisons can be drawn between the buildings from Heraklion and contemporaneous examples of courtyard houses known from archaeological investigations across al-Andalus, the Maghreb, and the Middle East, such as House V4 from Pechina and no.6 from Cordoba (al-Andalus), dating to the 9th and 10th century respectively; the houses from Siraf (Iraq), of the 10th century; and the Building I from Setif (Algeria), dating to the mid-11th century. On the contrary, this type does not find direct parallels on Byzantine Crete.

According to these parallels, the rectangular rooms of each house could have had multi-purpose functions, from cooking and dining to sleeping and carrying out household activities, although some rooms should be imagined to be reserved for the male and female components of the family. The central yard, called ga’a, was perhaps the most important

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336 Starida 2016.
338 For al-Andalus and the Maghreb: Gutiérrez Lloret 2013, 253, fig.7, nos.1-2; Fentress 2013. For Siraf: Fentress 1988, 61, fig.8, no.2.
339 See, for instance, the 7th-8th century houses in the ‘Byzantine neighbourhood’ of Gortyn: Di Vita 2010, 248, fig.365.
space of the house, in the privacy of which, enclosed and shielded by the four wings of the house, most everyday activities were conducted, and daily life spent. Only the systematic archaeological study of the multiple assemblages of ceramic evidence, glass, stone ware, and bone and metal objects that are reported to come from these buildings of Heraklion will able to shed further light on the functions and possible social organisation of the urban dwellers inhabiting the capital of the Cretan Emirate.

Domestic architecture apart, as seen in Chapter 2.2iii, by the mid-8\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} century the urban fabric and built environment of cities across the Islamic world featured a series of other distinctive architectures, which were especially related to the public sphere, and which might be used to define the ‘Muslim urban space’ as such.\textsuperscript{340} In truth, regarding Heraklion, current archaeological knowledge lacks evidence of iconic Islamic buildings and architectures such as suqs-marketplaces and mosques, which are among the most defining structural features of ‘Islamic cities’. Textual sources, however, yield a different scenario. The accounts written by contemporaneous authors such as Kaminiates, Leo Deacon, and Theodosius Deacon, in fact, indicate the existence in Heraklion of suqs, mosques, a ‘royal palace/citadel’ (dar al-imara), a well-organised port, with a roadstead, and a monumental circuit wall.\textsuperscript{341} Notwithstanding the rhetorical and literary nature of these texts, these features find precise parallels in the urban fabric of other prominent cities of the Islamic world, allowing us to place al-Hanqad and its forms of habitation at the same levels of urban development as other cities of the Dar al-Islam.\textsuperscript{342}

The spatial extent and volume of the urban population of al-Hanqad are currently unknown, and only educated, yet considerable guesswork can be conceived. By plotting the sites from urban excavations that yielded evidence of Islamic occupation, it is possible to reach an approximate figure of 15-20 hectares for the urban core (FIG.24).

\textsuperscript{340} See footnotes 224-225.
\textsuperscript{341} Frendo, Fotiou 2000, 115-123; Talbot, Sullivan 2005, 64-75; Criscuolo 1979.
\textsuperscript{342} In addition to footnotes 223-224, see essays in Jayyusi et al. 2008, especially Neglia 2008; Raymond 2008; Kennedy 2008; Denoix 2008; Petruccioli 2008.
As seen above, these excavations revealed that this central core was densely occupied, mostly by sophisticated domestic architecture, with complex systems of water-management and rich evidence of material culture, but also by workshops and, possibly, ‘cash and carry’ shops.\(^{343}\) Calculating the population that occupied the walled city-centre is challenging, with parameters of persons-density per hectare varying considerably by historical periods, but general estimations ranging between 200 and 400 persons/hectare would result in an average of at least 5000 inhabitants.\(^{344}\) This figure does not include the extramural population living in the suburbs of the city, which according to the evidence of Islamic coins consistently found as far afield as the Airport, Mastaba, Ag. Ionnis, Amoundara, Gazi neighbourhoods, and the Bendevi Kamara bridge, almost certainly extended for about 3 km to the west, east and south of the walled city-centre, over an area of more than 300 hectares. Thus, applying a coefficient as low as 100 persons per hectare,

\(^{343}\) This latter consideration is supported by the abundance of numismatic evidence found during these urban excavations, which in secondary literature accounts for nearly 500 coins, mostly of Cretan Emirs. Kiln wasters suggest instead the evidence of ceramic workshops: Starida 2016; cf. Penna 2008; Miles 1970.

\(^{344}\) For a similar average of 5000 people per 25ha in a ‘typical’ early Roman town: Wilson 2011; Hanson, Ortman 2017.
which is usually conferred to rural realities, the total population inhabiting these extra-urban areas would amount to at least 30,000 people, which with the 5,000 calculated above result in a figure that seems plausible, or even under-representative, for the population of the Islamic capital of Crete at its zenith.\footnote{345}

Leaving the urban constructions and population of the capital behind, by the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century the site of Knossos seems to have completely disappeared as an urban centre, losing any previous semblance of civil and religious prestige, even if only honorific. In the early 1970s, in fact, the so-called ‘Arab building’ was found in the Makryteikhos village, near the Kairatos river, circa 350m northwest of the Minoan Palace (FIGs.19 and 25a).\footnote{346} Elliptical in shape, it measured approximately 2x3m; with a sunken floor 58cm lower than the outside ground level and, as in the examples from Heraklion, it consisted of slabs of stone set into the beaten earth. The perimeter walls, standing to a maximum height of approximately 1m, preserved between two and four courses of mostly unworked rounded river boulders, irregularly shaped blocks of limestone, and spolia from nearby Roman edifices. Traces of plaster were found during the excavation, suggesting that the interior might have been plastered. A small circular pit dug into the ground level on the west side could have been a hearth, or a posthole. Already in the 1970s this structure was dated to the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century according to numismatic evidence documented on its floor, comprising nine coins minted by Cretan Emirs, the latest of which dating within the early 940s. Alongside these coins, two circular grindstones and a small assemblage of a minimum of eight samples of domestic pottery were found on the floor of this building. These ceramics were restudied, and are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.\footnote{347}

\footnote{345} The estimated population for the main contemporaneous ‘Middle Eastern’ cities of the Islamic word is significantly more, ranging between 100.000 and 300.000 for centres such as Barsa, Nishapur, Shiraz, Samarkand, etc. As a starting point: Kennedy 2008; 2011. In the Maghreb, a population ranging between 14.000 and 300.000 is estimated for Kairouan: Fenwick 2020, 60.

\footnote{346} For the details of the excavation: Warren, Miles 1972.

\footnote{347} Randazzo 2019b.
FIGURE 25: a. plan and photo of the ‘Arab building’ from Knossos (after Warren, Miles 1972, 289, fig.3 and Pl. 57a). b. an example of 9th century ‘monocellular’ dwelling from El Tomo de Minateda, with reconstruction (after Gutiérrez 2013, 250)

The revaluation of this structure in the light of current knowledge of contemporaneous Islamic rural forms of habitation allows us to propose an identification of this building as a ‘monocellular’ rural workplace, similar to other examples found in rural contexts across the Islamic world, especially in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, where are called *buyut* (*bayt* sing.). Parallels, for instance, can be drawn with late 8th-10th century examples from El Tolmo de Minateda, Volubilis, and Utica.\(^{348}\) These workplaces had multiple functions, ranging from permanent dwellings of a single family unit, to temporary or seasonal shelters for the labour force employed in agricultural and farming activities in the surroundings of urban centres. The portable items

coming from this building (see Chapter 6) suit well the rural character of this context, encompassing grindstones, amphorae, cooking pots, and unelaborate tableware, which form an assemblage of household ceramics that is remarkably similar to the one reconstructed from El Tolmo de Minateda (FIG.25b). According to the analysis of its ceramic assemblage and structural remains, it is reasonable to believe that this building provided shelter for the labour force involved in daily and seasonal farming activities conducted in the agricultural hinterland of the Islamic capital, from and to which farmers could easily have traveled and transported their produce within one hour’s walking distance.

In the contexts known of early Islamic rural settlement patterns, *buyut* were usually isolated in the landscape, separated from neighbouring dwellings by ample empty spaces. The current lack of archaeological information pertaining to Knossos in the Islamic period prevents us from reconstructing long-term patterns of occupation at this site. Unsolved questions remain whether settlement was permanent or sporadic, scattered or nucleated, and whether this *bayt* was a completely isolated building, or one of many in the agricultural wheat-belt surrounding the capital of the Emirate. The general absence of distinctive Islamic pottery from the KULP surveys and in the numerous contexts re-examined at the Knossos Statigraphical Museum would confirm, preliminarily, that this was an isolated building, but this consideration needs further validation.

Moving on from the new Islamic to the previous Byzantine capital of the island, the next case-study focuses on Gortyn.

**ii.) District no.2: Gortyn**

In the 7th century, Gortyn was a metropolis and the most important city on Crete and, although partially losing its monumental urban fabric (see below), it continued to be the major centre of the interior throughout the 8th century. Various earthquakes have been commonly adduced as the main cause for the urban decline of this city, the most widely

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349 Gutiérrez Lloret 2013, 250, fig.4.3.
350 For recent overviews on Late Roman and Early Byzantine Gortyn (4th-7th century): Di Vita 2010; Baldini et al. 2013.
agreed and devastating of which is the one dating 796. However, recent archaeological research has produced new insights into the continuity of urban life at this centre beyond the 8th century, even though under different and non-monumental circumstances. Throughout the 9th century, in fact, it would seem that important military, religious, and probably civil institutions continued to occupy the vestige of the Late Antique urban fabric of this city. In particular, its inhabitants seem to have nucleated around sources of water in three principal neighbourhoods: the fortified acropolis on St. John’s Hill, the St. Titus-Praetorium area, and Mitropoli, which together describe an area of about 10ha. In the areas in-between these principle neighbourhood, occupation appears scattered, and mainly aimed at agricultural and craft productions, but by no means absent, increasing the total surface of the settlement to at least 40ha. A late 9th century Islamic coin found at Ampelouzos, less than 800m on the western flank of St. John’s Hill, might indicate the existence of a fourth nucleus in this area. Of the three major neighbourhoods, the fortified acropolis on St John’s Hill makes the most compelling case for evidence of occupations spanning throughout the 9th-10th century, and well beyond, while for both the remain nuclei, evidence for the 10th century is less conclusive.

FIGURE 26: the Byzantine fortification on the acropolis of Gortyn, late 7th – early 8th century (redrawn by the author after Di Vita 2010) and detail of the pentagonal tower (after Perna 2012)

351 Tsougarakis 1988, 148. For a more gradual approach: Zanini 2013, 186.
352 In addition to Di Vita 2010 and Baldini et al. 2013, see Zanini 2013; 2016; 2019; Giorgi 2016, 111-117.
St John’s Hill is enclosed by a circuit wall (FIG.26a), which runs for more than 800m and is built *ad emplekton*,\(^{354}\) using mortared rubble in its core, and *spolia* and ashlers in the outer face; it has an average thickness of nearly 3m and, originally, it was up to 6m height. Four towers survive, one of which is pentagonal and still standing for a height of nearly 10m (FIG.26b). Similar pentagonal towers, dating between the late 7\(^{th}\) and 9\(^{th}\) century, have been recorded at key sites of the Byzantine Empire, such as Ephesus and Ankara to mention a couple, suggesting a state-promoted intervention in the context of a general imperial policy of militarisation, responding to the aggressive military challenges of the age.\(^{355}\) At the centre of the walled area, the monumental remains of two buildings survive: one is a Christian basilica, the other the so-called Kastro. Recent investigations at the latter structure, which measures 75x40 m, have confirmed its Roman origin (3\(^{rd}\)-4\(^{th}\) century), yet its exact original function, probably but not exclusively related to water management, is still a matter of debate.\(^{356}\) At a later date, possibly in the late 7\(^{th}\) – early 8\(^{th}\) century, a series of 11 chambers measuring 4x8m were added onto the western and southern sides of the building, using *spolia* and ashlers mortared with ceramic tiles. The masonry of these rooms is different from the rest of the Roman structure, finding an equivalent in the technique employed in the rest of the circuit-wall. The precise function of these compartments is still debated but, among various hypotheses, according to Di Vita they could have offered lodgings to the Byzantine army headquartered on the acropolis of Gortyn during the 8\(^{th}\) century.\(^{357}\) In this case, this monument could be tentatively identified with the city’s fort that is mentioned in the life of St. Andrew, bishop of Gortyn from ca. 710-740.\(^{358}\)

Excavations conducted in the 1960s inside this circuit-wall have produced numismatic evidence from the basilica complex covering the whole 9\(^{th}\) century, including Byzantine coins of Leo V (813-820), and Islamic coins of the first two emirs, Abu Hafs and Shu’ayb I (ca. 830-880), as well as coins of the second Byzantine period (mint-dated as early as

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\(^{354}\) *Emplekton* is a building technique where the core between two parallel walls is filled with rubble or other infill.

\(^{355}\) Crow 2017 and Chapter 2.2i.


\(^{357}\) Di Vita 2010, 338.

\(^{358}\) Tsigonaki 2019.
the late 10th century.\textsuperscript{359} This evidence has led to a recent scholarly debate accepting that the fortified acropolis continued to be inhabited throughout the Islamic period, perhaps as a centre of secular/military power.\textsuperscript{360} In this regard, Perna has recently advanced the hypothesis that the Basilica on the acropolis of Gortyn might have been turned into a mosque during the period of the Emirate.\textsuperscript{361} This consideration is based on a series of walls that, built above the 8th-century church, modified the overall layout of the edifice, and yield a masonry technique that is strongly different from that of the Byzantine constructions underneath. In supporting this suggestion, Perna mentions the discovery at this site, during 1960s, of glazed pottery and coins of the Cretan Emirs. However, as argued in Chapter 5, the coins might simply testify the occupation at this site by communities who were involved in monetary activities with the Muslims of Crete, but for whom there is no evidence demonstrating were Muslim themselves. The pottery, likewise, in the 1960s was believed to be ‘Arab’ but, according to more recent revaluation, it looks rather later in date (i.e. 12th century onwards, see Chapter 3.2i.). Such an attribution, therefore, remains inconclusive in light of the available evidence.

No further archaeological excavation, in fact, has been conducted on the acropolis since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{362} Thus, in spite of the considerable archaeological evidence outlined above, the current lack of focused archaeological research on the St. John’s Hill prevents us from drawing a more detailed picture of the forms and levels of human occupation and habitation occurring during the 9th-10th century on the fortified acropolis of the former capital of Byzantine Crete.

\textsuperscript{359} Rizza, Scrinari 1968.
\textsuperscript{360} For the structural remains: Perna 2012.
\textsuperscript{361} Perna 2012, 186.
\textsuperscript{362} Gortyn’s acropolis has long been regarded as national heritage and thus protected through building and farming restrictions. Modern urbanisation and agricultural techniques have instead threatened the archaeological remains of the lower city (ca. 400ha), calling for main archaeological interventions and rescue excavations: Di Vita 2010, 91.
FIGURE 27: The monastic complex built in the 8th century over the Roman praetorium at Gortyn, detail of the siloi found inside the complex, a selection of agricultural tools, and a coin of Constantine VI (late 8th century) found in the filling of one silos (all after Di Vita 2010)

Descending from the acropolis, on the south-eastern foothill of St. John’s Hill there lies the St. Titus neighbourhood, which, centred around the basilica of St. Titus, extended over parts of the former Praetorium. The St. Titus basilica has been object of antiquarian and scholarly attention since the late 19th century, when a hoard of liturgical furniture, probably dating between the late 8th – early 9th century, was
found inside the southern aisle of the church (see Chapter 6). Most recently, archaeological investigations have focused again on this complex, exploring a group of undisturbed graves located in the southern aisle of the church. Most notably, coins of Constantine V (741-775), Leo V (813-820), and Michael II (820-829) have been found inside these tombs, indicating that this complex might have retained religious functions into the 9th century, perhaps following works of restoration or reconstruction after the earthquake of 796. According to Cosentino, these graves could be attributed to privileged groups of civilians, whose clustering around this monument in the lower-city was firstly initiated by Bishop Andrew between the mid-720s and 740s, and continued into the 9th century.

Contemporary with these graves, the adjacent area of the Late Antique Praetorium underwent major structural and socioeconomic transformations. During the 8th century, a monastic complex was established above the remains of the Heraklius Basilica, which was the previous centre of secular power of the city (FIG.27). This monastery had a strong agricultural role, which is shown by installations and tools found inside and nearby the monument, such as presses, pithoi, siloi, and hoarded iron farming tools, mainly ploughshares. Pithoi were even found with their lids in situ, one of which reading ‘+God bless your house and your pithoi+’. According to the numismatic evidence of a coin of Constantine VI (780-797), which was found inside one silos, the monastery and its agricultural installations would have been still active up to the late 8th – early 9th century. On the one hand, the transformation of this urban space into a monastic workplace during the 8th century might offer an extraordinary example of the renewed ecclesiastical involvement in the conduct of farming activities and processing of agricultural produce. This renewed role acquired by the clergy could be a practical effect of the landholding and administrative reforms promoted on Sicily and Crete by the Isaurian Emperors, Leo III and Constantine V, between the 730s and 750s, which will be discussed in more details in Chapter 7.

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363 Xanthopoulou 1998; Baldinin 2009.
365 Ousterhout 2019, 259.
366 Cosentino 2016.
367 Di Vita 2010, 194-204.
368 Di Vita 2010, 197.
369 For a general background: Prigent 2004; 2014b.
evidence indicates quite explicitly that the previous monumental urban fabric of this part of the city was undergoing a process of ruralisation, although, as argued in Chapter 2.2ii, this should not be entirely seen in terms of social regression, but as an aspect of the urban fabric of a city of the 8th-9th century. In fact, as shown by the next case-study, at just about a few hundred meters from this monastic complex there was a concomitant coexistence of poor dwellings and a prestigious civil ‘palace’.

Specifically, I am referring to the evidence that surfaced over the last 15 years, or so, in the so-called ‘Byzantine district’, next to the Pythion shrine.\textsuperscript{370} Here, a large building was found, yielding compelling evidence of high economic and social status of its occupants. Among the finds, a marble slab was uncovered, which bore a gilded monogram of a high-ranking civil officer, along with bronze belt buckles, a Constantinopolitan chafing dish, plenty of amphorae, and a marble sigma-shaped mensa. This ‘privileged’ building, however, was surrounded by stables and poor small houses, with one room and workshops. This context, in other words, describes a multifaceted scenario, in which persisting forms of civil power coexisted simultaneously next to a ruralised and ‘poor human cityscape’.\textsuperscript{371}

Besides the presence of military elites on the acropolis, and privileged groups of civilians in the St. Titus-Praetorium area, the episcopal complex of Mitropoli might reveal the persistence of religious groups at this site into the 9th century. Indeed, in addition to being one of the major economic, political, and military centres of Byzantine Crete, at that time Gortyn was still the cornerstone of the ecclesiastical network of the island, whose Metropolitan had his seat at Mitropoli.\textsuperscript{372}

Located about 500m south of the St. Titus basilica, the Mitropoli neighbourhood featured an octagonal baptistery and a monumental basilica, whose dimension place it among the largest of the whole Byzantine Empire. Both archaeological excavations at this complex and the study of the artefacts are currently in progress, although, from the preliminary results, it would seem that the basilica was in a state of

\textsuperscript{370} For what follows: Zanini 2019, 154-158.
\textsuperscript{371} Zanini 2019, 158.
\textsuperscript{372} Five lead seals of bishops of Gortyn dating to the 8th – mid-9th century are known in secondary literature: Tsougarakis 1990a, 144.
abandonment by the 9th century. Notwithstanding this, in line with the material sources available, which include three coins of the Cretan Emirs, it is possible to reconstruct an uninterrupted occupation of this area during the Islamic period. At this stage, however, it is impossible to clarify in which state and under which circumstance this complex continued to be used: as a religious locus? As a domestic space?

With the due caution, the archaeological evidence discussed above supports the fact that Gortyn existed throughout the period of the Islamic occupation, perhaps as the most important settlement of the interior, and as the hub of the local Christian community. This assumption finds support in both a textual reference contained in the life of St. Nikon, written in the 960s, which mentions Gortyn as the only place to have survived on Crete after the Islamic period, and in the network of rural settlements that surrounded Gortyn during the period of the Emirate; as will be seen in section 4.2, this network of satellite settlements was the densest of the island, after Heraklion’s.

iii.) District no. 3: Eleutherna and Vyzari

The two topographic basins of the Mylopotamos Plain and the Amari Valley, which are distinct yet connected to each other, can be united into a single district; in doing so, both Eleutherna and Vyzari hold the position of central places within their relative settlement chambers (see 4.2), but Eleutherna becomes the main first-rank centre in the hierarchy and networks of surrounding settlements, outweighing Vyzari to a lower first-rank site.

Topographically, Eleutherna occupies a naturally defended hilltop on the southern ridge of the mountains delimiting the Mylopotamos Plain, about 10km inland from the northern coast and overlooking the defile leading to the Amari Valley. This site had the recognised status of polis uninterruptedly since the Classical-Hellenistic period, and throughout the Byzantine age it was the seat of an episcopal see, whose bishop was still attested into the late 8th century. The Late Roman and Early

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373 Baldini et al. 2013.
374 Baldini et al. 2013
375 Tsougarakis 1988, 118-119.
Byzantine settlement of Eleutherna encompassed an ‘upper city’, on the Pyrgi plateau, and a ‘lower city’, which extended on the south-eastern foothill. It has long believed that the ‘lower city’ and its edifices, comprising four basilicas, baths, and domestic neighbourhoods, were all abandoned by the late 7th century, or reduced to mere forms of squatter occupation. Although tentatively, the abandonment of the lower city in the 7th century has been more recently questioned. This fact could find further support in the light of a few ceramic sherds that were noted during personal on-site observations, which include globular amphorae and an example of amphora with grooved-strap handle, certainly dating to the 8th-9th century (see Chapters 6 and 7). The occupation of the upper city during these centuries is instead a matter of fact.

The whole Pyrgi plateau is enclosed by a circuit-wall, which dating to the Classical-Hellenistic period, was re-built in the course of the 8th century, according to recent archaeological research. A monumental basilica complex occupies the centre of the fortified upper city. Excavations conducted at and around this monument have uncovered ceramics, belt-buckles, and two lead seals of *patrikioi*, dating to the late 8th and early 9th century. This evidence not only testifies to the survival of the ‘upper city’ during this period, but also its importance as a secular and religious centre. Other material sources uncovered during these excavations include a coin of Leo III and Constantine IV (735-741), minted in Sicily, and one coin of Shu‘ayb I, which currently represents the sole material source for human activities at this site during the late 9th – early 10th century. In section 4.2 it will be seen that Byzantine and Islamic coins of the 10th century have been found in surrounding settlements, evidence that, coupled with the archaeological reappearance of Eleutherna in the second Byzantine period, might suggests that this centre had been in fact never completely abandoned during the Islamic period.

The site of Vyzari is located about 20km to the South from Eleutherna, in the midst of the Amari Valley, which is a natural corridor connecting

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380 Tsigonaki 2007, 272-283.
the Mylopotamos and Messarà plains through the western foothill of the Psiloritis Mountains. Archaeological excavations at this site were conducted in the late 1950s and uncovered the remains of a three-nave basilica, which was dated to the 7th-8th century according to structural features (see below). It was interpreted as the cathedral of the Bishop of Sybrita, who had moved to this site during the centuries preceding the Islamic period. The importance of this site, which has long been overlooked, is twofold, laying in both the structural features of the Christian basilica, and the record of ceramics that was found inside this monument during the excavations of the 1950s.

The walls of this monument stand over 1m, almost 2m in some points; the layout plan is very distinctive, presenting two smaller apses at the end of each lateral nave, which from the outside flank the larger central apse (FIG.28a). This solution is unique on pre-Islamic Crete. According to the evidence of reused carved marble architectural features, which were found in the excavation, an earlier church has been suggested at or near this site during the 6th-7th century. However, on account of its plan layout and other structural observations, Sanders already proposed to date the main phase of construction of the extant monument to the 8th century, a chronology that accords with the range of some ceramics that were selected for publication in the 1950s (such as oil lamp, a fiaschetta, see below). In particular, Sanders drew attention to the comparison with the plan of the 9th-century Skripou church in Boeotia (FIG.28b). In light of current knowledge, new parallels can be established. To begin with, the well-studied corpus of 65 Byzantine churches from the nearby island of Naxos helps highlight that analogous smaller flanking apses do not appear before the mid-7th century. On the contrary, all the eight basilicas of this corpus that are suggested to date to the 8th-9th century bear evidence of lateral smaller apses projecting outwards. Theodokos at Demos and Ag. Ioannis at Afiklis are two of the most relevant examples (FIG.28c), although it should be noted that these Naxian churches have a significantly reduced scale. Broadening this structural review to examples from other regions of the Byzantine world, the recent architectural survey conducted by

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381 Kalokiris 1959; Sanders 1982, 115-117.
382 Kalokyris 1959; Sanders 1982, 115-117.
384 For the information that follows on Naxos: Aslanidis 2018.
Ousterhout clarifies that the phenomenon recorded on Naxos occurred in other core territories of the Empire at the same ‘Transitional Period’. The small Buyukade Church at Amasra, on the Black Sea, is an example dating to 8th century (FIG.28d), while the episcopal church of Ag. Sophia at Vize, in the Marmara region, dates to the 9th century (FIG.28e). In the 8th or 9th century, smaller later apses were added also at the Salamis Cathedral of St. Epiphanius, although in this case these features do not protrude outwards. A further and very close parallel for both layout and dimension can be established with Santa Lucia at Syracuse, which was probably rebuilt in the 8th century (FIG.28f).

In addition to considerations drawn from the layout, the chronological framework proposed for this monument can be further supported by personal observations of the masonry technique employed in the northern aisle of the basilica (FIG.28g), which hint at a date to the late 7th – early 8th century based on comparative evidence. The bulk of stones and blocks employed in the masonry have small and medium dimensions, whereas sizable blocks appear in lower number. The majority of medium and big blocks has been roughly squared, especially in the side facing the interior of the aisle, while small stones were left mostly unworked. Both blocks and irregular stones are organised in horizontal courses. Small stones and rock-chips are used both as gap-fillers between blocks; ceramic tiles are employed in the masonry too, both as fillers between blocks, and organised in regular horizontal rows laid down between courses of blocks. A tenacious lime mortar is predominant, although sporadic traces of clay mortar can be recognised as well. All these technical features recall very closely the masonry from Castronovo in Sicily discussed in Appendix 1, which can be securely dated to the late 7th – early 8th century. Comparisons, moreover, are possible with the masonry Type 2 from Apalirou (Naxos), which should be analogous in date, as well as with other examples of masonry from Crete that could date to this or a slightly later period, such as the structural features from Chersonissos that will be discussed below in subsection iv.

385 Ousterhout 2019, 246-264.
386 Ousterhout 2019, 252, fig. 11.7; 276, fig. 11.12A.
388 By Leo the Thaumaturgus (d. 785), bishop of Catania: Pace 1942, 199, 318.
389 Roland 2018.
FIGURE 28: a) the Byzantine basilica at Vyzari an b-f) comparisons with the plan layouts of contemporary examples from surrounding regions of the Byzantine Empire (see in-text bibliographic reference for individual examples); g) a sketch of the masonry employed in the northern aisle of the Vyzari basilica (graphic elaboration by the author)
The record of ceramics found during excavations of this monument and selected for publication is also highly revealing. Following an ‘approximate’ stratigraphic excavation, certainly rudimentary to modern eyes, but accurate for that time, three undisturbed ‘macro’ strata were found in the northern aisle of the basilica, the only that had been spared by grave robbers. The lowest layer, called γ, included the original floor of the nave and was sealed by the roof collapse presenting traces of fire. Elements of architectural furniture (marble columns, capital, plates, etc.), ceramics of the 7th-8th century (most distinctively, oil lamps a fiaschetta), bricks and roof tiles were found in this layer. The stratum in the middle, called β, is the one that is the most relevant for this study, and is discussed below. Stratum α was the uppermost one, spanning from β upwards to the present topsoil, and containing ceramics dating from the Venetian period (13th century on) to the pre-modern era.

Two Islamic coins of the Emirs of Crete were found in stratum β, one dating between 860s -900s, and the other between 910s-950s (FIG.29a-b). A modest assemblage of ceramics was found in association with these coins. Although a scientific restudy of these ceramics has not been conducted, the revaluation of the eight sherds published in two poor-quality black-and-white photos of the 1959 suggests a date in the 9th – mid-10th centuries, allowing us to single out distinctive vessels that could well belong to the Islamic material culture of the period. These eight ceramic items include: a) one oil lamp (FIG.29c), which is identical in shape to the samples documented in Heraklion that will be seen in Chapter 6, and that, therefore, represents the most solid indication of Islamic material culture at this far-inland site; b) a one-handled mug (FIG.29d), which does not parallel examples known from Crete, but finds very close analogies with contemporary examples from different regions across the Dar al-Islam; c) two examples of cooking-pots (FIG.29e), both handled, with ribbed body, and rims bent outwards, for which no other information can be added due to the lack of first-hand examination; and d) three handles, two of which bear very distinctive central grooves (FIG.29f). Regarding these two handles, in Chapter 6 it will be argued that they could belong to Sicilian amphorae of the 8th-9th century. On the one hand, this evidence could offer a window into the phases of Byzantine occupation at this site in the period just preceding

the Islamic conquest; on the other hand, it enables us to establish a *terminus post quem* for stratum β, while the Islamic coin of the 910s-950s gives the *terminus ante quem*.

The site of Vyzari is key for the interpretation of the possible dynamics and patterns of Islamic occupation across the Cretan countryside, as it could represent the only visible ‘pocket’ in the interior of the island with distinctive evidence of Islamic material culture. Accordingly, in will be reconsidered as a major case-study in Chapter 5.

![Figure 29: a-b) coins of Cretan Emirs from stratum 'beta' in the Vyzari basilica (after Kalokyris 1959, 16, fig.1); c-f) pottery from stratum 'beta' (after Kalokyris 1959, 32-35, Tabs 1A-1B, nos.4-5).](image)

iv.) District nos.4-7: Priniatikos Pyrgos, Chersonissos, Chania and Kissamos, Arcadia

Compared to the sites seen above, archaeological knowledge of the five units considered in this subsection is overall patchier and scarcer, especially with regard to Arcadia, Chania and Kissamos, while recent
excavations at Priniatikos Pyrgos and Chersonissos do help shedding light on these coastal settlements and their possible urban, or quasi-urban fabrics during the 8th-10th century.

Priniatikos Pyrgos is a coastal settlement lying on a protected bay in the middle of the Mirabello Gulf. Although remains of the Early Byzantine period have been recorded at this site, its relevance as a city-like centre is not archaeologically attested before the 8th century.\(^ {391}\) Excavations, in fact, have revealed intense building activities conducted throughout the 8th and early 9th century, involving both domestic structures and a Christian basilica, the latter possibly reflecting the presence of religious elites. Moreover, great quantities of imported amphorae and a discrete number of GWW I testify considerable trading activities and cultural bonds with Constantinople. This connection is enforced by numismatic and sigillographic evidence, such as one lead seal belonging to a military officer of the Constantinopolitan Opiskion theme. No fortifications are now to be seen at this site. However, both the lead seal mentioned above and the name Pyrgos (meaning tower) might indicate the significance of this site in the military hierarchy of the island. Perhaps, the framework of the broader state-sponsored process supposed by Cosentino could be recalled, which aimed at enhancing the relationships between Constantinople and the northern coast of the island.\(^ {392}\) Excavations at this site have been also decisive to produce ceramic evidence of human activity, albeit very limited and connected to layers of destruction, dating to the period of the Islamic Emirate, most notably GWW II and amphorae of the 10th century. The significance of these material sources is discussed in Chapter 5, but it clearly demonstrates that this site was not abandoned during the Islamic period, although it might have been occupied only sporadically.

Chersonissos (modern Limani Chersonissos) was a prominent city in the Roman and Late Roman period, as testified by its urban structures comprising a theater, domus with mosaic floors, and monumental baths; in the 5th century AD, a large cathedral for the local bishop (called Basilica B) was built at the centre of the promontory, named Kastri, which stands in the waterfront of the city (FIG.30above).\(^ {393}\)

\(^{391}\) For what follows: Klontza-Jakovaa 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015.
\(^{392}\) Cosentino 2019.
\(^{393}\) For a general discussion of the Roman city: Sander 1982, 145-146.
According to the results of archaeological excavations conducted in the 1950s, 1982, and 1993, this rich basilica was rebuilt in the early 7th century, after it had been destroyed by a natural catastrophic event, possibly an earthquake of the 620s (a coin of Heraklius and Constantine III was found in the foundations of this second phase). \footnote{Sythiakaki, Manolis, Spyros 1993; Sythiakaky 2010; Starida 2000; Starida, Mari 2004.} According to current understanding, perhaps too much reliant on traditional views, this church and the whole site are assumed to be abandoned by the late
7th century, due to the Arab maritime threat. However, the archaeological evidence discussed below indicates that this chronology should be reviewed and postponed at least into the 8th century, even though one must admit that the basilica might have not preserved its previous monumentality.

The excavations of 1993 have in fact challenged the previous assumptions about the overall abandonment of the Kastri site, demonstrating that, after the de-monumentalisation of Basilica B, a series of ‘poorly made houses’ were built in the surroundings of the shrine, ‘giving shelter to residents who did not want to leave the settlement’. 395 Conclusive evidence to support the endurance of Christian activities cannot be currently offered, although the existence of the Bishop of Chersonissos is mentioned up to the late 8th century in both Notitia Episcopatum 3 and 7.

The exact chronology of these dwellings on the Kastri promontory has not been firmly established yet, and their evidence has been overlooked since their discovery. In the southern side of Basilica B, where these dwellings are better preserved, a sherd of grooved strap-handle amphora was noted during an on-site personal observation, in association with the floor of one of these constructions (see Chapter 6). This evidence, although unique, could offer a firm chronological indication for the use of this building during the 8th-9th century. Furthermore, one coin of the Cretan Emir Shu’ayb was found in the surroundings of this site, indicating some degree of human occupation up to the second half of the 9th century. 396 Observations and a creative analysis of the masonry technique employed in these later buildings at Kastri allow us to attempt a chronological interpretation of these architectural features to the late 8th – early 9th century.

The two walls shown above (FIG.30below) belong to two distinct, yet adjoined square-rooms measuring ca. 5x5m., both of which preserve entrance doorways framed by vertical monolithic orthostats. Four courses survive in their masonry, to a height of roughly 1m. Both irregular stones of small and medium dimensions, and well-squared blocks appear in these courses, the latter likely spolia from the nearby Christian shrine. Each course alternates with a row of well-ordered

395 Sythiakaky 2010, 370.
396 Miles 1970, 55-56.
ceramic tiles, which give the impression to be carefully placed to create not only stable structures, but also aesthetical brickworks. In a few places, fragments of tiles are also used as fillers between blocks. Clay mortar is the only binding material used in the construction technique, evidence that perfectly accords with a 8th-century chronological framework proposed for these structures. In addition to the example from Vyzari seen above and from Castronovo, this distinctive masonry technique is very similar to one occurring on two walls from the Casale site in central Sicily, in which it is possible to appreciate a comparable use of ceramic tiles and clay mortar. According to the stratigraphic context and a close examination of the ceramics used as building material, it is possible to date the walls from the Casale site between the late 8th and early 9th century. This might not be a conclusive evidence. However, both the recurrence of a distinctive masonry technique using ceramic tiles to form horizontal regular courses between rows of blocks, and the adoption of specific structural features and building materials, such as clay mortar in place of lime mortar, are very consistent and distinctive features, which could tentatively allow us to place these examples within a broader structural narrative of contemporary examples of Byzantine craftsmanship.

Finally, another site at Limani Chersonissos has been hypothetically interpreted, by other scholars, as a mosque, although the evidence remains inconclusive. This building is the so-called Basilica A, which is located on the coast, about 2km to the southeast of Kastri and Basilica B. At an uncertain point in time, a circular tower was constructed inside a rectangular building that was attached to the north side of the atrium (FIG.31). The excavators interpreted this structure as a lighthouse, however, as Sanders has noted, this interpretation seems unlikely as the actual port appears to have had one such structure already, and the headland here is of no danger for shipping. By contrast, he argued, ‘a remote but possible interpretation is that this is in fact a minaret of an Arab conversion of the church into a mosque’, whose circular plan inscribed in a rectangular basis would find a parallel with other examples of minarets known from the 9th century. During a personal observation, it has been possible to note that most of this circular

397 See Arcifa 2010c for the trend to replace lime mortar with clay mortar in 8th-century masonry from Sicily.
398 Randazzo 2019a.
399 Sanders 1982, 98.
400 Sanders 1982, 98, footnote 35, who quotes Rivoira 1918, 174; Cresswell 1958, 278.
structure has now disappeared. Yet, the surviving section of wall (roughly 2m length and 50cm height) displays a masonry which is different from the surrounding buildings, showing use of spolia and clay mortar, both important details that were missing in Sanders’ observations, and which could in fact confirm the later chronological sequence of this round structure. However, the main limit to the attribution of this edifice to a mosque remains the fact that its south and east sections have not been excavated (as shown in the plan below). This circumstance is unfortunate, because the structural attribute that could define this structure as a mosque, i.e. the *mihrab*, would be located on this side. Yet, the same circumstance is full of potential for future investigation, as this feature might still be preserved in the non-excavated area.

![FIGURE 31: Limani Chersonissos, detail of the atrium of Basilica A, which was turned into a mosque according to I. Sanders (after Sanders 1982, 95, fig.27)](image)

Remaining on the northern coast of the island, but on its western side, the next case-studies focus on Chania and Kissamos. As noted above (3.1i.), there has been a notable lack of archaeological focus on the post-7th century (or early 8th century) phases of occupation and transformation of these two centres, which are still attested as bishoprics in the *Notitia Episcopatum* 3 and 7. However, as will be seen, the limited archaeological evidence and textual sources available do indicate that life and economic activities continued throughout the 8th-10th centuries in Chania, while for Kissamos there remains a gap of knowledge for the period of the Emirate.
Alongside St John’s Hill at Gortyn, and with significant analogies to it, Chania yields one of the most remarkable and best known example of monumental urban circuit-wall on Byzantine Crete (FIG.32), whose construction has been recently dated to the late 7th – early 8th century.\(^{401}\) Similar to Gortyn, Chania’s city wall runs for more than 800m around the Kastelli Hill, has an average thickness of 3m and an height of more than 6m. Like Gortyn’s, the circuit-wall was built *ad emplekton* with abundant use of *spolia* along ashlar blocks, which appear meaningfully organised in the outer face. Eight of the original 14 towers survive, which are both square and polygonal in shape, some still standing for more than 10m.

![FIGURE 32: Byzantine circuit-wall on the Kastelli Hill at Chania, late 7th-early 8th century (perimeter redrawn by the author after plan displayed on in-situ info board), and detail of the masonry technique (photo by the author)](image)

The circuit-wall apart, the lead seal of a local bishop dating to the 8th century currently represents the sole, albeit strong material source for the physical existence of a site during this period.\(^ {402}\) However, other non-archaeological evidence leaves little doubt about the continuous existence of a settlement throughout the Islamic period. In particular, Chania stands out as the birthplace of St. Nicholas the Studite (793–868), and a settlement is mentioned in textual sources of the early 9th century, even though it is described in contrasting ways, either as a ‘prosperous village’, or in entirely rural terms.\(^ {403}\) Regrettably, at present it is not possible to assert either the extent or the character of the settlement during this period; however, the Islamic conquest seems to have had a profound impact on this site, or at least on its name, which

\(^{401}\) Andrianakis 2012.
\(^{402}\) Tsigonaki 2007, 285.
\(^{403}\) Tsougarakis 1988, 117-138.
changed irreversibly from Kydonia to (C)Hania, the latter possibly being a post-Islamic Greek adaptation of Hanim.\textsuperscript{404}

The corpus of available information for Kissamos is even more meager. The only material sources available for the 8\textsuperscript{th} - early 9\textsuperscript{th} century are one lead seal of its bishops,\textsuperscript{405} and an example of chafing-dish, which has been most recently found during urban rescue excavation along with a bronze belt-buckle and an oil lamp \textit{a fiaschetta} (FIG.33).\textsuperscript{406} These finds have been dated to the 7\textsuperscript{th} century by the excavators, but there is no doubt that they belong to a later chronological framework, of the 8\textsuperscript{th} - early 9\textsuperscript{th} century (see discussion in Chapter 6). It is hard to believe that these finds are unique and isolated instances, and more probably they are part of a bigger picture of occupation, yet to be fully painted and understood. Conversely, the absolute lack of material and textual sources dating to the period of the Emirate might conceal the abandonment of Kissamos at this stage, representing the plausible exception to the general pattern of urban continuity described so far.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{kissamos_finds.png}
\caption{Kissamos, finds of the 8\textsuperscript{th} - early 9\textsuperscript{th} century (after Scordou 2018)}
\end{figure}

Finally, Arcadia is the last site to be discussed in this section. This site is located at the centre of the Monofatsi Plain, a very fertile area of eastern Messarà, a few hundred meters from the modern village of Ini. This central heartland of the island was largely unknown to archaeological research until recently, resulting in a big blank patch on

\begin{footnotes}
\item[404] Cf. Platon 1947.
\item[405] Tsougarakis 1999a, 144.
\item[406] Scordou 2018, figs.16-17.
\end{footnotes}
distribution maps.\textsuperscript{407} In the 2010s, the Ephorate of Antiquity of Heraklion partially investigated the remains of a monumental basilica, identified with the episcopal complex of the bishop of Arcadia, who is mentioned to have attended the Council of Nicaea in 787. The results of these excavations are still unpublished, but during personal field observation, a dense area of ceramic scatters was noted surrounding the church for over 3ha (FIG.34).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig34.png}
\caption{FIGURE 34: examples of ceramic sherd material of the 5\textsuperscript{th}/7\textsuperscript{th} – 8\textsuperscript{th}/9\textsuperscript{th} century observed on situ at Arcadia. Note on the top, sherds of grooved-strap handle and GWW I (photo by the author)}
\end{figure}

Sherds dating to the 5\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century (i.e. RSWs and LRA) are the most numerous (>100). A few examples of globular amphorae, amphorae with grooved-strap handles, and one fragment of GWW I have been recorded as well, indicating the persistence of human occupation at Arcadia throughout the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century, although the extent of this

\textsuperscript{407} Cf. Triolo, Costa 2015 and Zanini 2019. The site is however mapped in Tsigonaki 2019.
occupation cannot be established yet. A late 9th century Islamic coin was published by Miles from the environs of this site, suggesting a possible continuity of occupation into the late 9th – early 10th century.\footnote{Miles 1970, 35.}

Regarding the existence of Arcadia during the 10th century, the lack of focused archaeological research prevents us from gaining a clearer picture; the lead seal of George, bishop of Arcadia, which dates to the second half of the 10th century, makes the most convincing evidence to assume the continuous presence of a settlement at this site throughout the period of the Emirate.\footnote{Tsougarakis 1999a, 145, no.6.} Moreover, as discussed in section 4.2, Islamic coins of the late 9th century have been found in settlements in the Monofatsi Plain, corroborating the previous argument and offering compelling evidence to interpret the settlement patterns of this most fertile central heartland of the island.

\vspace{15pt}

\textit{v.) Dealing with absence}

In conclusion of this overview on the Cretan ‘urbanscape’, it is useful to draw attention to four bishoprics, Kandanos, Phoenix, Lappe, and Ierapetra, which are known to exist in the late 8th century through textual sources, but for which archaeological research, when available, has been unable to produce material evidence dating after the 7th century. Kandanos and Phoenix are located in remote areas of south-western Crete, in Selino and Sfakia respectively, and for both settlements, material evidence and structural remains of the 7th century are available.\footnote{Sanders 1982, 29-31, 165, 171. More recently: Nixon et al. 2000; Nixon 2006.} Although remote, Selino is a fertile area, with a landscape presenting a number of highly productive agricultural basins, first of all the valley system in which Kandanos is located. Conversely, with the exception of the small coastal plain surrounding Frangokastello, Sfakia has a rougher and inhospitable mountain landscape, more suitable for shepherding than for stable agriculture activities. For example, the site of Phoenix (modern Loutro), as well as others such as Sougia and Ag. Rumeli (all yielding archaeological evidence of the 7th century) lack agricultural hinterlands, and are only reachable via the sea. Although –it should be noted– the south-western area of the island is archaeologically under-explored, especially for this later chronological framework, available evidence indicates a general pattern of
demographic decline and settlement contraction.\textsuperscript{411} However, it is quite improbable that an entire area of more than 600km\textsuperscript{2} had been completely abandoned. Any generalisation, of course, should be avoided; however, it could be questioned if the textual reference to Kandanos and Phoenix as episcopal sees in the late 8\textsuperscript{th} century could reflect the survival of local Christian communities, whose material culture remains to be either identified archaeologically, or archaeologically unidentifiable, for instance in the case of pastoralism (see further considerations in the section 4.2 on ‘ruralscape’).

Moving eastwards, the site of Lappe lays in a very strategic position in the middle of the 20km-width mountain isthmus connecting western and central Crete, overlooking both the northern and southern coasts. An important Roman settlement and a number of early Christian graves are known in an area spanning from the modern village of Argiroupoli into a valley located 1km to the northeast, but post-7\textsuperscript{th} century evidence is lacking. Unpublished excavations in Argiroupoli have unearthed the remains of an apse underneath the main church of the village (of the Venetian period). Sanders, already, advanced the hypothesis that around the 7\textsuperscript{th} century the Byzantine settlement of Lappe had contracted coinciding with this modern village, a hypothesis that, although plausible, has remained archaeologically unverified since then.\textsuperscript{412}

Finally, on the south-eastern coast of the island, the city of Ierapetra lays in a fertile coastal plain located in a favourable position of the 12km-width isthmus connecting the inland viability between central Crete and the Sitia region. Recent archaeological excavations, whose material evidence has been extensively studied and published, have produced structural remains and material sources dating up to the late 7\textsuperscript{th} century, after which point the settlement appears to have been abandoned.\textsuperscript{413} Considering that in the early 8\textsuperscript{th} century Muslim raiders were indeed stationed in Tsoutsoursos, only 40km to the west (see 2.1i), it is possible that the Islamic maritime treat undermined the security of this settlement. With this regard, maybe, in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century the episcopal seat of Ierapetra was relocated to a safer place, but

\textsuperscript{411} Nixon et al. 2000; Younger, Rehak 2008.
\textsuperscript{412} Sanders 1982, 25-27, 54, 120, the latter page for the reference of three additional Byzantine churches from Lappe.
\textsuperscript{413} Gallimore 2011.
maintained its name, an endeavour verified in other contemporary instances within the Byzantine Empire.\footnote{414} In light of the evidence from Priniatikos Pyrgos discussed above, whose settlement and basilica were expanded in the 8th century, it is tempting to suggest that this latter site, located only 10km from Ierapetra, on the northern opposite side of the isthmus, could have become the new seat of its bishopric. This suggestion would accord with the already mentioned process, postulated by Cosentino, of urban enforcement of the northern coast of the island, but for the time being it remains a working hypothesis.

Further archaeological investigation is needed to shed light on these controversial matters. It is unquestionable that an episcopal see, working as a central place, is able to foster the aggregation of scattered communities. However, it is not currently possible to prove whether between the 8th century and the Islamic period these four sees were physical settlements, or whether they were only ‘abstract’ names reiterated from the previous period to identify administrate units. The archaeological identification of a network of rural settlements surrounding these bishoprics could be a strong indication of their existence as physical central places, but such evidence is currently unavailable. By contrast, networks of satellite second- and third-rank rural settlements have been identified all around the major centres of Heraklion, Gortyn, Eleutherna, Chersonissos, Arcadia, and Priniatikos Pyrgos, and it is on this evidence that the next and final section 4.2 focuses now.

4.2 RURALSCEAPE

Current archaeological research is far from achieving a clear understanding of the evolution of settlement patterns on Crete between the 8th century and the end of the Islamic occupation.\footnote{415} However, it has been widely accepted since the 1980s that the 8th century, seen as a whole, marked the lowest ebb in the number of rural

\footnote{414} Besides the possibility the bishopric of Sybrita was moved to Vyzari, in the 860s the archbishop of Crete was relocated to Thessaloniki, but retained its title: Christodoulakis 2011.

\footnote{415} Within this period, moreover, it is rarely possible to distinguish between the early to mid-8th century, and the late 8th – early 9th century, the latter period Tsigonaki 2007; Tsigonaki, Sarris 2016; Zanini 2013.
settlements on Crete; for instance, by drawing on both archaeological and textual sources, in 1988 Tsougarakis counted 20 sites dating to the 8th century, 14 of which appearing the Notitia Episcopatum 3 and 7.\textsuperscript{416} As late as 2015, by drawing exclusively on archaeological evidence, only 17 settlements dating to the 8th century appear in the comprehensive distribution map published by Triolo and Costa, only 10 of which yielding evidence dating to the (early) 9th century.\textsuperscript{417} To be fully appreciated, this numerical values need to be contextualised with the number of sites known archaeologically during the preceding century. In the same distribution map, 41 sites are pinpointed with evidence of the 7th century: put in percentages, this equals to a drastic contraction of 65\%, which means that, according to these authors, only \(\frac{1}{4}\) of settlements survived in the shift from the 7th to the 8th century.

A different scenario, however, has emerged from this research, which looks markedly less catastrophic than previously thought. According to a more careful evaluation of secondary literature and the result of personal field observations, it has been possible to revised these numbers significantly. First of all, the number of sites known archaeologically for the 7th century now amounts to 54. Among the most notable example of sites yielding evidence of the 7th century (namely ARSW H105), which were already known in secondary literature before 2015, but that had escaped Tirolo and Costa’s notice, there are: Ierapetra, Sitia, the Akrotiri peninsula, Dia, Mitropoli, Apodoulou, Tsoutsouros, and Elounda.\textsuperscript{418} Evidence of the 7th century from Kissamos, Polirrenia, Oxa, and Episkopi Pediados have emerged after 2015,\textsuperscript{419} while, as seen above, the evidence from Arcadia was documented during personal field observation (see 4.1iv).

The most significant amendment, however, regards the period of the 8th- early 9th century: from the 17 sites known in 2015, now at least 32 units are known archaeologically (FIG.35), a figure that is almost doubled up.\textsuperscript{420} Once again, there are a number of remarkable sites with evidence dating to the 8th – early 9th century that were known in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{416}{Tsougarakis 1988, 145-46.}
\footnotetext{417}{Triolo, Costa 2015.}
\footnotetext{418}{Respectively: Gallimore 2011; Poulou 2011; Raab 2001; Theodoulou et al. 2013; Baldini et al. 2013; Hood 1964; and Tsougarakis 1988, for both Tsoutsouros (p.317) and Elounda (p.308).}
\footnotetext{419}{Respectively: Scordou 2018; Tsigonaki 2019; Katzalis, Kokkini 2016.}
\footnotetext{420}{For a full discussion of the material sources used to reach this new figure see Chapter 3.2i, especially fig.13.}
\end{footnotes}
secondary before 2015, such as Knossos, Mires, and Sitia, to mention only but a few, which had escaped Tirolo and Costa’s notice. Material sources from other sites, such as Kissamos, has emerged after 2015 (see above 4.1iv), while evidence from Arcadia and Temenos was documented in the course of this doctoral research. Put in percentages, this means that 65% of the settlements known in the 7th century survived in the 8th century, and not only 25% as previously believed. Of course, these numbers still bear testament to a settlement contraction, but the new figure thus achieved sheds a completely different light on the decline of urban and rural life on Crete after the 7th century.

From the material sources available, the contraction of the settlements during the Byzantine period preceding the Islamic conquest seems to have been most severe along the south-western coast, especially in the Sfakia and Selino areas. In this rough landscape, characterised by environmental isolation and fragmentation, settlements could only survive by compensating the shortage of agricultural hinterlands with maritime trade. Considering that in the 8th century Muslim raiders (?) were stationed in Tsoutsoursos (see 2.2i), it is in fact possible that the Islamic maritime threat could have contributed to undermine the settlement patterns of the southern coast. This datum, however, should be partially biased by the lower intensity of modern archaeological research conducted in this area, especially with regard to the 8th-10th century. In fact, as note above (4.2v) both bishoprics of Phoenix and Kandanos are recorded throughout the 8th century, a fact which could hide the existence of pre-existing communities who kept inhabiting this territory, but are still unknown archaeologically.

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421 Respectively Hayes 2001; Sythiakaki, Vassilakis 2010; Poulou 2011.
FIGURE 35: distribution map of sites of the 8th – early 9th century known archaeologically on Crete (map by the author)
By contrast, the settlement patterns of central and central-eastern Crete appear much vibrant and dynamic still in the 8th century, both along the northern coast and inland. As seen in Chapter 4.1, the major urban centres and episcopal sees, among which Gortyn, Eleutherna, Chersonissos, Knossos, Heraklion, Sitia, Vyzari, Chania, Kissamos, and Priniatikos Pyrgos, show evidence of continuous occupation in the 8th and early 9th century, and are all surrounded by networks of settlements located in strategic points of the agricultural landscape, such as the Plains of Messarà, Monofatsi, Mylopotamos, Pediatos, and the Amary Valley. As will be seen next, these same topographic basins, or ‘demographic districts’, formed the beating heart of the rural landscape and settlement patterns during the following period of the Islamic Emirate.

The distribution map of sites known archaeologically for period of the Emirate (FIG.36) accounts for 36 units, a figure that apparently is higher than the previous period, with a blossoming and clustering of sites in central Crete. However, before moving on to further interpretations, it should be noted that current hypotheses are limited by three principal factors. The first, already mentioned above, is the unbalanced volume of archaeological investigations focused on the Middle Ages, conducted in different areas of the island, with the westernmost and easternmost regions of Crete being under-represented. Thus, the greater abundance of archaeological evidence from central Crete could actually mirror a feature of the medieval settlement patterns in the island, but could also hide a certain degree of archaeological bias. Secondly, a large proportion of the extant material sources dating to the period of the Emirate, especially coins, which are mapped and discussed in the following subsections, were recovered in non-scientific investigations, which implies a lack of insight into their specific contexts of provenance.\(^{423}\) Thirdly, many of the considerations on rural settlement patterns that follow are based on a reduced number of coins, which, however, are scattered across a large number of sites. The evidence of these coins does give a chronological indication of when they entered in the archaeological record.\(^{424}\)

\(^{423}\) See anecdotal accounts in Miles 1970, footnotes 28, 30. Since Miles’ publication, little has changed in our knowledge of Cretan Islamic coins, for which: Mazarakis 2011; D'Ottone 2019, 393-396.

\(^{424}\) The persistence of coins in the archaeological record might last much longer than usually assumed. For the impact of residual coins: Prigent 2014a, 189. The example
FIGURE 36: distribution map of sites of the period of the Islamic Emirate (9th – mid-10th century) known archaeologically on Crete (map by the author)

from Amorium is illuminating, recording 14% of residual coins of the 6th-7th century in layers of the 8th-9th century: Lightfoot 2002, 158, 235.
However, isolated finds of one coin are not sufficient to qualify this numismatic evidence as being indicative of a settlement, or to indicate the nature of this site, which could have ranged from a second-rank village to a hamlet or even scattered farm. Regrettably, of the approximately 100 coins of the Islamic period known on Crete outside Heraklion, the majority (two-third, or 18 sites out of 27) consist of single finds, although a few notable exceptions fortunately exist, especially Knossos, Phaistos, and Kastelli Pediados. Notwithstanding this limitation, on the assumption that a certain proportion of these coins may in fact indicate economic and broader human activities at their sites of recovery, it is worth noting that the distribution of a remarkable number of examples is concentrated in the agricultural catchment-areas of all those first-rank centres that have been discussed in section above (4.1). Evidence from the agricultural hinterlands of Heraklion, Gortyn, and Eleutherna are those offering the best insights into the patterns of their second- and third-rank rural settlements during the period of the Emirate, and will be discussed in this given order.

Altogether, within the ‘demographic districts’ of Heraklion, Gortyn, and Eleutherna, archaeological finds indicate the existence of about 15 satellite units, five for each district, although, as said, the evidence for the existence of a settlement at these sites is not always conclusive. A first interesting fact is that, according to the current archaeological knowledge, only 1/3 of these 15 sites are known from the Byzantine period preceding the Islamic conquest (7th-8th century), while the others appear for the first time (or reappear after a long time, i.e. since Minoan, Classical, or Roman time) only at this chronological phase. A similar trend is recorded also in the other districts, especially Chersonisso, Arcadia, and Priniatikos Pyrgos, where a total of 10 further units are known for the Islamic period, only two of which yielding evidence of earlier occupation during the preceding Byzantine period. At first sight, this might suggest a degree of demographic revival of the Cretan countryside in comparison to the previous Byzantine period. However, in Chapter 5.1 it will be shown that this assumption is not straightforward; in fact, even assuming that all extant archaeological evidence is indicative of settlements, in many cases it remains unknown whether these settlements were newly established during the Islamic period, or whether they were already existing and, at that point, simply continuing or even undergoing economic expansion. In other words, those apparently ‘new’ settlements may have existed, even in the same
form, in the previous Byzantine period, only to become archaeologically visible in the late 9th–mid-10th century due to the appearance of Islamic coins at their sites, which are highly noticeable evidence in the archaeological record (see below, subsection iv). Having made these necessary remarks, it is now possible to proceed with a closer interpretative examination of the settlement patterns within each of the main districts.

i) District no.1: the Heraklion Plain and Western Pediada

Archaeological evidence allows for pinpointing five units in the rural hinterland of Heraklion: Knossos, Archanes, Phoinikia, Tylissos, and Dafnes (FIG.37). Of these, Knossos is the only one that is known, archaeologically, from the Byzantine period preceding the Islamic conquest. Moreover, it is the only one that, in light of the structural and material evidence documented for the Islamic period, could be classified as a second-rank rural settlement (see 4.1i). However, it should be borne in mind that, compared to the other site, Knossos has been the stage of a most thorough and extensive archaeological research, which, maybe, could explain this biased status quo.

Perhaps, inside this district, also Archanes was a second-rank settlement. This site is crossed by the river Kaeratos, which, passing by Knossos, flows into the sea to the east of Heraklion, establishing a natural connection between these sites. Known as an important Minoan settlement subordinated to Knossos, four Islamic coins have been recorded from Archanes, dating between the second half of the 9th and the first half of the 10th century, signifying the relevance and endurance of this site within the local network of settlements (see FIG.16). Three Islamic coins of the late 9th century come from Phoinikia, which, although relatively modest in number, are not isolated finds, suggesting the existence of some sort of settlement at this site. With the exception of this numismatic evidence, post-classical Phoinikia is not known archaeologically; Theodosius Deacon, however, shed light on the possible existence and relevance of this location in the 10th century, when Nikephoros Phokas selected this site to encamp his troops.425

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425 Tsougarakis 1988, 67.
Current archaeological knowledge of Tylissos and Dafnes in the post-classical era is lacking. If one were to judge from the evidence of one single coin of the Islamic period recorded at each site, then both settlements should be considered as third- or fourth-rank units; however, one coin is not conclusive evidence for supporting the existence of a settlement, and further archaeological research is essential to turn these interpretative considerations into solid arguments. To conclude with District 1, it is worth noting that the spatial distribution of these five rural sites describes, almost identically, the same catchment-area that has been postulated for Minoan Knossos, which was spread between the Heraklion Plain and Western Pediados. This circumstance is not surprising, considering that throughout the history of these topographic basins, Minoan Knossos was the only settlement to have ever reached an urban dimension.

economic potential, and political relevance comparable to that of Islamic Heraklion.

ii.) District no.2: the Central and Western Messara Plain

Current archaeological research in the agricultural hinterland of Gortyn allows us to pinpoint five sites: Phaistos, Geregeri, Choustouliana, Plora, and Ampelouzos (FIG.38). Given the close proximity of the latter to Gortyn, however, the question was already been raised (4.1ii) whether it should be considered as a western neighbourhood of Gortyn rather than a distinct settlement. Of the remaining four sites, Phaistos and Gergeri are known from the preceding Byzantine period. However, present scientific knowledge offers archaeological insights into only one of them, Phaistos, which is the only case-study available to shed light on the form of habitation and organisation of a second-rank rural village during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

FIGURE 38: Demographic district no.2, distribution map of sites of the period of the Islamic Emirate known archaeologically (map by the author)

The occupation of the Minoan palace of Phaistos during the ‘Christian Era’ (5th-7th century) was known since the first unsystematic excavations were conducted at this site in the late 19th – early 20th century, when a
group of ‘Byzantine’ houses and graves were found above the ruins of the palace.\footnote{For what follows: La Rosa, Portale 2004; personal observations.} Their evidence was only summarily documented and consequently destroyed in order to reach the layers of the Minoan period, causing the unrecoverable loss of essential information pertaining to these later phases of occupation. In the 1960s, archaeologists of the Italian School of Athens targeted the research on the south-eastern slope of the palace’s hill, in a neighbourhood called Chalara, founding the remains of a ‘late Roman farmstead’. Once again, the focus of these excavations was on the Minoan and the Hellenistic- Early Roman periods. However, the evidence of later phases of occupation were carefully documented, producing detailed plans of structural features and an archive of ceramic finds. This evidence has been largely overlooked until the early 2000s, when Portale published a restudy of the most representative structures and ceramics uncovered at this site. Not only was the ‘late Roman farmstead’ shown to be a 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century rural village, but also that it was lately transformed and inhabited, possibly into the 9\textsuperscript{th} century. Drawing on Portale’s restudy and on numismatic evidence published by Miles, in what follows the site of Phaistos is used as a case-study into the organisation of a rural village (or hamlet, in the words of Portale) and its peasant community during the Byzantine-Islamic transition.

During the 8\textsuperscript{th} – early 9\textsuperscript{th} century, the previous agricultural village of the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century was reorganised in smaller nuclei, resulting in a rural agglomerate of farmsteads (i.e. a hamlet), two of which have been excavated extensively. They are located at a distance of about 15m to each other, and there is evidence for similar buildings existing in the surroundings at a similar interval of space. Both structural features, which include olive-oil presses and \textit{phitoi} still walled or grounded in their proximity, clarify the agricultural character of these farmsteads. Each building, moreover, was connected to a large open yard, which according to Portale should be interpreted as the linking point between the agricultural activities carried out in the surrounding fields and the post-harvest processes conducted within the domestic environment.\footnote{La Rosa, Portale 2004, 502-512.} The nature of the domestic pottery found within the rooms of these structures accords with a simple and rural household economy. However, among the most notable artefact, a bag-shaped cooking-pot imported from Syria-Palestine and dating to the 9\textsuperscript{th} century is
particularly noteworthy (see Chapter 6). Besides indicating the persistence of trading activities reaching this inland rural settlement, this pot is also suggestive of an occupation of this hamlet into the Islamic period. Although Portale assumed that the site was abandoned on the eve of the Islamic conquest, six Islamic coins were published by Miles from Phaistos, dating to the second half of the 9th century. Although these coins were recorded during surface fieldwork, their number cannot be underestimated, and they constitute the most compelling evidence for the (uninterrupted?) occupation of this settlement in the middle of the Islamic Emirate. In light of the consideration that will follow in Chapter 5, such continuity of a ‘late’ Byzantine agricultural settlement during the Islamic period is not surprising, and could also conceal the presence of pre-existing local peasant communities.

Moving on to the remaining sites within this district, post 8th-century Gergeri is only known through the evidence of two coins, one of Michael II (820-829) and the other of a Cretan Emir of the late 9th century.429 This evidence, alone, is not conclusive for the existence of a settlement. The location of this site, however, is very telling and revealing of its strategic position within the topographic setting of this district, laying on a hilltop overlooking the central and western Messarà Plain, and the inland communications between Gortyn and Heraklion. Both the remaining two sites, Choustouliana and Plora, are known during the period of the Emirate only from the evidence of a single Islamic coin of the second half of the 9th century (FIG.16). On the one hand, such isolated evidence prevents us from drawing more conclusive considerations; on the other hand, however, if cautiously interpreted, it could suggest the existence of rural units of third- or fourth rank, of the type of scattered farms, which would make perfect sense considering their close proximity to Gortyn (Choustouliana is only 3km away). Regarding the potential survival in the Islamic period of other settlements within this district, such as Mires and Kamilari, which were known as important units in the 7th-8th century, it is not currently possible to add further details.430 To date, archaeological research at these sites has been unable to produce evidence of occupation for the Islamic period, but the disinterest that archaeologists have had towards this period needs to be considered before claiming their complete abandonment.

429 See figs. 15 and 16.
iii.) District no.3: the Mylopotamos Plain and the northern Amari Valley

As many as six satellite settlements can be identified, archaeologically, in the hinterland of Eleutherna and Vyzari: Panormos, Kamalevri, Yannoudi, Arkadi, Patsos, and Mesonisia (FIG.39).

FIGURE 39: Demographic district no.3, distribution map of sites of the period of the Islamic Emirate known archaeologically (map by the author)

All these sites have a rural character, except for Panormos, which is a coastal settlement, and which, together with Kamalevri, is the only archaeologically-known site with evidence of the 7th-8th century. Specific details are not currently available for Kamalevri. Panormos, instead, stands out as the port of Eleutherna, and in the 6th-7th century an exceptionally sizable and rich basilica enthroned this coastal town, demonstrating its socioeconomic relevance and prosperity. Nothing is known archaeologically with regard to the later phases of occupation or structural reuse of this basilica after the 7th century. The evidence of

globular amphorae and a coin of Michael I (811-813) found in the surrounding of this complex, however, indicate that commercial activities continued at this site during the 8th – early 9th century.\footnote{433 For the coin: Sanders 1982, 162. For the reference to the globular amphorae: Poulou 2011; Fraidaki 2019.} Moreover, according to the further evidence of two coins of Leo VI (886-912), it could be possible to assume that this settlement continued to be inhabited into the midst of the Islamic period. These coins, however, come from the filling of a cistern that had previously served the Christian basilica, lacking therefore any value to reconstruct specific forms of human occupation at this site during the late 9th – early 10th century.\footnote{434 Sanders 1982, 118.} Nevertheless, although modest in number and from a context of abandonment, these finds suggest that probably Panormos continued to occupy an important position in the local network of settlements, perhaps as a second-rank unit.

The sites of Yannoudi, Patsos, and Arkadi are only known from the evidence of single coins of Cretan Emirs, preventing to define these sites as settlements. Of these three coins, the one recorded near the monastery of Arkadi is perhaps the most revealing from a chronological stance, being the only within these group dating to the first half of the 10th century, while the others are of the late 9th century.\footnote{435 Miles 1970, 65.} This site is about 5km from Eleutherna; thus, if this coin is actually an echo of human activities conducted there in the early 10th century, it is difficult to imagine that life had ceased completely in the nearby centre of Eleutherna, a circumstance that is widely assumed (see above 4.1iii).

Finally, Mesonisia deserves special consideration. This is the site where a remarkable hoard of ‘treasure’ with cross-cultural connotation was found, featuring jewellery with Byzantine design and (grammatically incorrect) Arabic inscriptions, and a solidus of Romanos II and co-emperor Constantine VII (946-959). These material sources will be dealt in detail in chapters 5 and 6. The unscientific fashion of their recovery, unfortunately, has caused the loss of much valuable information about the surrounding context of this hoard. Perhaps, behind these objects it is possible to image the existence of a community of wealthy (Muslim?) people, but for the time being these remain preliminary thoughts.
iv.) Districts nos. 4-5: the hinterlands of Chersonissos and Arcadia

Archaeologically, these two districts are overall less-known than the previous three, but nevertheless offer precious data to enrich the picture of rural settlement patterns in Crete during the Byzantine-Islamic transition. Three sites are known archaeologically between the Chersonissos coastal plain and inland Pediados: Kalokorio Pediados, Avdou, and Kastelli Pediados (FIG.40). Together these sites describe a catchment-area that is roughly equivalent to that postulated for Minoan Malia, recalling a model evoked for Knossos/Heraklion.436

Both Kalokorio and Avdou are only known via the single evidence of one Islamic coin, which is of the late 9th century in the case of the former, while of the first half of the 10th century for the latter. However, whether these two coins are indicative of settlements is impossible to say in light of the present archaeological knowledge of these sites. By contrast, available material sources for Kastelli Pediados is more abundant, describing what seems to emerge as a second-rank settlement. Three coins of Cretan Emirs have been recorded at this site, and one more in nearby Xyda, the modern village of ancient Lyttos. Two coins date to the second half of the 9th century, the other two to the

first half of the 10th century, thus covering most of the period of the Islamic Emirate. Kastelli was already an important settlement during the Minoan era, but archaeological evidence for the period preceding the Islamic conquest is lacking. By contrast, recent archaeological research has produced convincing evidence to demonstrate that the occupation of Lyttos continued into the 8th century. This latter site was a heavily fortified centre, laying less than 2km to the east from Kastelli. On the one hand, Kastelli could be an example of relocation during the Islamic period of the Byzantine community of Lyttos from a fortified to an unfortified site. On the other hand, however, it could be more realistically assumed that the two settlements were already existing before the Islamic conquest, one as the main fortified site of the region, the other as its lowland village. In this case, Kastelli would have remained archaeologically invisible until the appearance of the Islamic coins.

The last territorial case-study of the Monofatsi plain, in the eastern Messarà, could offer further insights into this latter scenario of settlements potentially existing in the Byzantine period, but currently invisible before the appearance of Islamic coins.

FIGURE 41: Demographic district no.1, distribution map of sites of the period of the Islamic Emirate known archaeologically (map by the author)

Inexplicably, the eastern Messarà, with its central basin of the Monofatsi Plain, have remained until now largely unknown and under-explored by archaeological research. As noted above, as late as 2015 and 2019 this most fertile heartland of the island was underrepresented in maps of distribution of Late Antique and early Byzantine settlements on Crete, presenting not a single site dating between the 4th and 9th century, not even Arcadia. In section 4.1iv this gap has been partially filled by showing archaeologically the existence and relevance of Arcadia in the 5/6th to 10th century. In the surroundings of Arcadia, coins of the Islamic period have been recorded at four sites: Rotasi, Garipa, Afrati, and Melindochori (FIG.41), none of which are currently known from the preceding period. The first three sites are only represented by one coin each, whereas three coins have been documented from Melindochori (FIG.16).

Unfortunately, at present, too little is known archaeologically about this district, preventing us to attempt any hierarchical interpretation or settlement identification of these sites. However, considering the existence of an important centre as Arcadia during the early Byzantine period, it is hard to believe that already at that stage there were not (currently unknown) satellite rural settlements surrounding Arcadia. Of course, without conducting further archaeological investigation and systematic field surveys, these remain speculative thoughts, but it is perfectly plausible that some, if not all these four sites around Arcadia were in fact in existence before the Islamic conquest, to become only archaeologically visible in the Islamic period due to the appearance of the coins of the Cretan Emirs. Compared to the range of contemporary ceramic evidence of the later Byzantine and Islamic periods, these coins are much more noticeable in the archaeological record, and have long attracted a greater deal of interest from both the academic world and the non-scientific public of the island.438

v. ) Districts nos.6-7: Mirabello Plain/Sitia and Chania Plain

Finally, the last two districts which are located at the westernmost and easternmost areas of Crete, pose major interpretative problems and challenges. Only one site is known in the hinterland of Chania: Meskle. Monumental remains and numismatic finds dating throughout the

438 See anecdotal accounts in Miles 1970, footnotes 28, 30.
Hellenistic to Early Byzantine period are known at this site, including a Christian basilica with mosaics of the 6th-7th century, which lays underneath a later church built around the 12th - 13th century. However, the only material source known for the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition is one coin of Theophilus (829-842), mint dated 832-39. Coupled with the possible contemporary abandonment of Kissamos (see 4.1iv), this evidence could in fact suggest a pattern of settlement decline in the rural hinterland of Chania, but the extremely ephemeral nature of this evidence leads us to regard this consideration as a purely preliminary remark.

Evidence of settlements in the easternmost area of Crete is more abundant, especially along the northern coast of the Mirabello plain and in the Sitia region, accounting for four units: Priniatikos Pyrgos, Pseira, Sitia, and Meseleroi, only the latter of which is not coastal. Of these sites, Meseleroi is the only yielding numismatic evidence of the Cretan Emirate, although this is limited to a single coin. On the contrary, the source material from the remaining three sites comprises ceramics of the 9th and 10th century, which are directly linked to the heartland of the Byzantine Empire, consisting of Marmara and Constantinopolitan amorphorae and GWW II (from Priniatikos Pyrgos). Tentatively, the evidence of these ceramics, coupled with the lack of indicators of ‘Islamic’ material culture, might suggest that the communities inhabiting these sites continued to be still economically connected, and perhaps culturally integrated, with the core regions of the Byzantine Empire, most significantly to Constantinople, a point which will be further discussed in the following Chapter 5.

**Concluding remarks**

Compared with the scenario of an island largely deserted, previously prevailing in secondary literature, a more careful reading of archaeological evidence offers a different picture, in which as many as 36 sites can be pinpointed on Crete during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition. For some sites, evidence is more conclusive then for others, but within the present methodological limits, it is possible to

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440 Sanders 1982, 169.
appreciate that these units are mostly clustered in lowland areas of central Crete, suitable for agricultural activities. Moreover, it can be deduced that the nature of these sites ranged from scattered farms and rural hamlets, to villages, towns, and even urban centres. This scenario finds further support in the textual accounts of contemporary travellers and geographers of the Islamic world, such as al-Baladhuri and Qadi al-Nu’man (9th-10th century), who state that Crete was a populous island, with many villages and cities, the latter alluding to particularly populous centres.\(^{442}\) The picture painted here matches the well-known continuity of settlements of all scale in other regions of the Islamic world after the conquest, especially in Syria-Palestine and North Africa.\(^{443}\) A further important point is the persistent importance of existing (or ‘inherited’) cities and capitals, even after new ones are founded, which can be visible especially in Egypt and North Africa.\(^{444}\)

Moving from interpreting the spatial distribution to interpreting the cultural value of these artefacts, which is from an archaeology of things to an archaeology of people, analysis until now has been limited to the ‘physical’ evidence of these settlements and archaeological finds, without questioning the social and cultural realities behind these objects. Who was inhabiting these settlements and sites? With the sole exception of Heraklion and its hinterland, the continuous occupation of urban and rural settlements known during the preceding Byzantine period calls into question the social and cultural identities of their inhabitants, raising the possibility that pre-existing local communities and not incomer Muslims continued to inhabit some of those settlements well after the Islamic conquest. This possibility, the plausible reasons behind it, and the consequently related administrative, economic, and cultural Muslim-Christian interactions and arrangements resulting from it are illustrated and critically argued in the next Chapter 5.

\(^{441}\) As repeated in Chapter 5, any reference to Arabic textual sources is drawn by secondary literature, in this case Christides 1984, 107.

\(^{443}\) Avni 2014; Taxel 2018; Fenwick 2020.

\(^{444}\) Legendre 2016; Fenwick 2020.
5.1 INTERPRETING MODES OF CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.1i, traditional historiography of the 20th century has long depicted the period of the Islamic Emirate of Crete as one marked by the collapse of socioeconomic activities and the decline or urban and rural life.\(^{445}\) Scholars such as Tomadakis, Miles, and Christides represented a significant exception to this trend.\(^{446}\) However, as late as the 1990s, plundering, piracy, and slave trade were still seen as quintessential socioeconomic pillars of this ‘corsair’s nest’; likewise, it was taken for granted that the new Muslim rulers oppressed the pre-existing Christians inhabitants of the island, who were deprived of their possessions, slaughtered, and forced to convert, or to flee in search of safety to inland uplands and hilltops.\(^{447}\) The ghosts of the recent—and eventually repressive—Ottoman dominion of Crete in the 17th-19th century, still haunt the local popular imagination, have certainly contributed to forge this distorted prejudicial perception of the Islamic Emirate.\(^{448}\) However, these two historical periods are too far apart from each other, and aside from a common adherence to the Islamic faith, the Muslims of the Cretan Emirate of the 9th-10th century and those of the Ottoman period shared nothing in common in ideology, social practices, and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, as Peacock reminds us, before the 15th-17th century there is no evidence in the Islamic world of state-sponsored proselytisation and forced conversion; episodes of warfare apart, massacres of local inhabitants, forced-mass conversion, and harsh social inequality feature more in popular imagination than in modern scholarly literature.\(^{449}\)

In practical terms, of course, Muslim economic and political interactions with pre-existing Christian communities varied in time and space, and according to the particularities of the local social order in individual territories. However, regarding the chronological and geographical framework of this study, recent archaeological and historical research

\(^{445}\) Cf. Gibbon 1929, vol.6, 39; Sefakas 1939; Ostrogorski 1957, 282.
\(^{446}\) Tomadakis 1960; Miles 1964; Christides 1981; 1984.
\(^{447}\) Detorakis 1994.
\(^{448}\) For a critical essay: Şenişic 2014.
\(^{449}\) For a recent synthesis: Peacock 2017b, 5-7.
conducted in various territories of the Mediterranean Dar al-Islam has revised the traditional narrative of Christian-Muslim cultural interactions, especially in rural contexts. A much smoother picture has been drawn of ‘social coexistence’ between Muslim and Christian communities who came to interact in al-Andalus, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, and Ifriqiya during the 8th-10th century. Of course, it should made it clear that, in comparison with these regions, the corpus of available archaeological evidence and direct textual sources of the Islamic period from Crete is significantly smaller.

Methodologically, this condition prevents us from drawing ‘strict sense’ comparisons with these regions. For instance, archaeological (i.e. lead seals) and textual evidence (i.e. legal documents) from Syria, Egypt, and al-Andalus inform us, more or less explicitly, that in the centuries following the Islamic conquest, the Christian populations inhabiting these territories were granted the status of dhimmis: ‘protected people’. This procedure seems to have been generally adopted during the Islamic expansion of the 8th-10th century. Legal rules of this period from across the Islamic world, in fact, established that, under the payment of taxes and the fulfilment of other fiscal obligations, private landholdings and cultivate lands should remain in possessions of their previous owners and those who cultivated them. Concerning the Islamic Emirate of Crete, similar legal documents and material evidence are not currently available, which makes it impossible to support any assumption about social order, religion, and administrative practices conclusively. As seen, however, forced conversion and landholding confiscation were de facto against the economic interests of the new Muslim rulers, so why one would assume that the Christian population of Crete was treated differently than in these other territories of the Islamic world?

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450 See footnotes below and Chapter 10.2, when the broader processes of Islamisation of Crete and Sicily are put into the context of wider processes of Islamisation of these Mediterranean territories.
452 In addition to above: Bonner 2006, 92-93; Bernheimer, Rippin 2013, 102; Donner 1981, 240; Kennedy 2011, 181-182; Nef 2013b. For a general focus on the Muslim West: Fierro, Tolan 2013.
453 This point was already expressed in Tsougarakis 1988, 75; 2011, 293-94.
Of course, this does not mean that this chapter redraws a new utopian history of peaceful multiculturalism and tolerance. By contrast, piracy, slave trade, and sea raids launched from Crete into the Aegean throughout the period of the Emirate are historical events, which have long shaped the negative scholarly perception of this Emirate, but are in line with the booty economy and military necessities typical of the frontier zones of that period.\(^{454}\) However, by shifting the focus to within the island, and by exploring the possible modes of administrative and socioeconomic interactions between Muslims incomers and pre-existing communities, in what follows it will be argued that these activities were parallel sources of revenues, especially targeted at acquiring valuable and profitable goods from outside Crete. On the island, instead, rather than oppression and enslavement, it would seem that the interest of the new Islamic rulers was to sustain the pre-existing local communities settled in the Cretan countryside, which still represented the bulk of the island’s population and formed an indispensable source of taxpayers and food creators. Accordingly, in the following section 5.1i.), by interpreting material sources and with the support of some textual evidence,\(^{455}\) it will be argued that the pre-existing communities inhabiting the Cretan countryside remained mostly unaffected by the process of cultural Islamisation. On the contrary, they seem to have retained a distinctive form of material culture and socioeconomic contacts with Constantinople.

Thereafter, in section 5.2, attention is drawn to the process of institutional Islamisation and a series of possible economic and administrative manoeuvres promoted by the Cretan Emirs, with a specific focus on systems of landholding and taxation, which it will be argued were specifically aimed at interacting with the pre-existing population of the island, and were pivotal for the formation of this short-lived yet relatively successful Emirate. It was imperative that these communities continued to be agriculturally productive, as any decline in this respect would have been economically self-damaging for the Muslim rulers. With this regard, as Christides noted already in the

\(^{454}\) For a definition of Mediterranean piracy in the 9\(^{\text{th}}\) century: Horden, Purcell 2000, 156-58. For episodes of piracy involving the Emirate of Crete: Christides 1984, 158-162. For contemporary examples of Islamic booty economy launched from Sicily to Italy: Metcalfe 2009, 29. See chapter 2.2.i for broader discussion of the Islamic Mediterranean expansion and the theme of the frontier.

\(^{455}\) As stated in Chapter 3.2i, references to primary textual sources are exclusively drawn from secondary literature.
1980s, the continuous and intensive trade of the Emirate of Crete with other Islamic states, for example known through Ibn Hawqal (d. 988) and the Geniza documents, is particularly telling, as it was based on this island’s persistent and abundant flow of agricultural productions.456

i.) Did changing everything, change nothing, or little?

This section aims at answering the question asked in conclusion of the previous Chapter 4 on settlement patterns: with the possible existence of as many as 36 sites on the island during the period of the Emirate, who inhabited these sites? And, how did the Islamic conquest affect the status quo of the pre-existing population? Considering the preliminary state-of-the-art for the archaeology and archaeological material available for the period under scrutiny, these questions can be only answered formulating interpretative models, which however go in tune with the corpus of textual sources at our disposal and extensively dealt with by Christides (see below).

Environmental and genetic analyses, which could reveal dietary and hereditary markers compatible with a Muslim population, have not been conducted in the context of the Cretan Emirate.457 Likewise, as shown in the preceding chapter, indisputable structural evidence related to Muslim rural communities, such as mosques and necropolis, have yet not been identified. Therefore, the portable artefacts partially discussed throughout Chapter 4 and further analysed in Chapter 6, such as pottery, coins, some highly revealing small finds, and the hoard from Mesonisi, constitute the best available evidence at our disposal. However, before attempting to answer the questions asked above, it is imperative to remind the methodological pitfalls, exposed in Chapter 2.2.iii, of using coins and ceramics as indicators of cultural or ethnic identity. In particular, simplifying a more complex debate, it has been discussed that coins, due to their intrinsic economic value, are not indicative of cultural affiliation, but of fiscal or commercial interactions with given monetary systems. By contrast, a careful analysis of technological, morphological, and technical characteristics of pottery could provide a good insight into the adherence of their users to a

457 For the result of similar analyses conducted in the context of Islamic Sicily: Carver, Molinari et al. 2019.
specific cultural milieu, either ‘Islamic’ or ‘Byzantine’, especially when the timeframe of this study is considered (i.e. the 9th-10th century).

Accordingly, numismatic evidence, which is remarkably extensive for Islamic Crete, has been momentarily set aside, but will reappear in section 5.2, with the example of glass weight, as most important sources of material evidence for drawing administrative and economic considerations. Ceramics and some highly revealing small finds, namely the earrings from the Mesonisi hoard, are predominately discussed here as sources to investigate artistic, linguistic, and cross-cultural interactions. However, it should be noted that a satisfactory understanding of the cultural implication behind ceramic material is directly proportioned to the breadth of knowledge possessed with regard to pottery produced and used in domestic activities, especially linked to cooking and food preparation. As will be seen in Chapter 6, this knowledge remains in its infancy in our case-study, as cooking-pots and domestic ceramics appear only sporadically in the (limited) body of pottery currently known for the Islamic period. Similarly, with the sole exception of GWW II tablewares and Sarachane amphorae series 45-54, nothing is known about the possible range of domestic pottery used by the pre-existing local communities inhabiting Crete during the period of the Islamic Emirate. This absence makes it impossible to recognise them adequately in the archaeological record. However, bearing in mind this caveat, it is nevertheless possible to achieve some interpretative remarks based on the corpus of evidence available, if considered creatively.

The first of such remarks is that, subject to further validation, it would seem that throughout the period of the Emirate, Heraklion remained the single epicentre of the Muslim population of Crete. This means that everything changed for this site and its urban fabric, which structural remains show was turned from an annex of Knossos to the capital city of the Emirate (see 4.1i). In support of this, contemporary textual sources written between the late 9th and mid-10th century, such as Leo Deacon, Genesios, and al-Baladhuri, are quite revealing in spite of their rhetorical and literary nature. For example, Leo Deacon (d. 992), who deals extensively with the Emirate of Crete and held a first-hand knowledge of the events narrated, throughout his account is consistent in epitomising Heraklion/al-Handaq as ‘the town of the [Arab] Cretans’, while no other
urban centre ever appears to be held in Muslim’s hand.\textsuperscript{458} The fact that Leo only refers to one town of the [Arab] Cretans strengthen the consideration that Heraklion was indeed the main and perhaps sole urban centre for the Muslim population of the island. Likewise, both Genesios (d. late 10\textsuperscript{th} century) and al-Baladhuri (d.892), referring to the Islamic conquest in the 820s, wrote that ‘[Abu Hafs] built a city and, from there, ruled over the entire island’.\textsuperscript{459} Rather than a figures of speech, these views could in fact be very much influenced by the perception of Heraklion/al-Handaq in their own times, as the hegemonic and ruling centre of the island. Material evidence concurs to draw a similar picture, as the bulk of Islamic material sources appear to be found only from this city.

Outside Heraklion, the potential recovery of highly distinctive Islamic ceramics (such as those from urban excavations currently exhibited at the IMK and shown in Chapter 6) at those sites across the island where Islamic coins have been found could be an indication of Islamic settlers. However, with all the biases of a patchy archaeological research, almost no examples of Islamic pottery have been recognised at Cretan sites. The only exceptions of any significance are two, Knossos and Vyzari. The presence of Muslim settlers at Knossos might be expected, since this site is practically located in the outskirt of Heraklion. Likewise, due to the close geographic proximity to this city, it would not be surprising if future research will identify Islamic pottery and other material culture from the other satellites sites across the Heraklion Plain, surrounding the rural hinterland of the capital of the Emirate, namely Tylissos, Dafnes, Phoinikia, and Archanes (see Chapter 4.2i).

Regarding Vyzari, for the time being the following considerations remain preliminary since, as noted above (4.1.iii), the ceramics unearthed at this site during the late 1950s still await to be studied. The possible presence of Islamic communities at this inland site accords with Theodosius Deacon’s account (written in 963), which informs us about scattered communities of native-born Muslims inhabiting ‘dense mountain thickets and clefts in inland districts’ of the island, a description that fits the Amari Valley (but also other areas of Crete).\textsuperscript{460}

\textsuperscript{458} Talbot, Sullivan 2005, 62-63, who make it clear the semantic meaning of Cretans in this context as Arab Cretans.
\textsuperscript{459} Kaldellis 2006, 40; Christides 1984, 91.
\textsuperscript{460} Criscuolo 1979, xiv. For the critical review of these texts in the Cretan context: Kaldellis 2015.
The hoard from Mesonisi, only 10km to the northwest of Vyzari, might represent a further compelling evidence of Muslim communities inhabiting this inland area of the island, containing Kufic inscribed earrings bearing Arabic names and formulas of Islamic faith (FIG.42). 461

![FIGURE 42: a pair of golden earrings of the first half of the 10th century from the Mesonisi hoard (after Sidiropoulos, Vasiliadou 2011, 147, no.72)](image)

These earrings (three pairs plus one spare) were found in a non-scientific investigation in the early 1900s as part of a ‘treasure’ dating to the mid-10th century, containing other jewels and precious items, including a golden coin of Romanos II and co-emperor Constantine VII (946-959), which sets a terminus post quem. Along with these items, a series of other objects showing a clear Christian character were found, such as cross-shaped amulets. At first sight, it could be argued that the mixed Christian-Muslim composition of these finds would signify a cross-cultural nature of this hoard. A 9th-century solidus of emperor Theophilus, however, shows that these items were likely gathered due to their intrinsic economic value, rather than for ideological reasons. And yet, according to a closer analysis of the crafting and decorative features of these inscribed earrings, it can be still argued that these finds offer a glimpse into the possible cross-cultural interactions that

461 For what follows: Albani 2010; Poulou 2011, 433-435; Sidiropoulos, Vasiliadou 2011. Most of the artefacts from this hoard are kept at the National Museum of Athens; only a few are exhibited at the IMK.
might have occurred on an artistic and linguistic level between the pre-existing Byzantine communities of the island, and the new Muslim incomers.

On one side, these earrings bear enamelled decorations depicting peacocks, lions, rosettes, birds, trees of life, and human figures. On the other side, one specimen per pair bears a Kufic inscription invoking the blessing of God (Baraka min Allah), while the other specimen of the pair states its owner and addressee of God’s blessing (li-sahibihi...), who have Arab names in both the preserved examples: ‘A’isha and Zaynab. Although the Kufic inscriptions signify quite uncontrovertibly the association between these items and the Islamic cultural milieu, two further considerations show that local Byzantine craftsmanship was instead responsible for their manufacture. First, the form and decorative technique of these earrings, with crescent-shaped plates, pearl ornaments, and enamelled and granulated decorations, precisely parallel examples of the 7th-10th century found and manufactured in various workshops across the Byzantine Empire, including on Crete and Sicily, where similar jewelleries were produced locally. Secondly, and most significantly, both the two preserved Arab inscriptions stating the owner’s names are grammatically incorrect. In fact, as Sidiropoulos and Vasiliadou have pointed out, the possessive li- sahibihi is masculine, while both ‘A’isha and Zaynab are feminine names. They argued, therefore, that this grammar mistake was probably due to the crafter’s limited knowledge of Arabic, suggesting that these objects were manufactured by local Byzantine artisans, possibly following the request of Arabic-speaker commissioners.

The artistic and linguistic integration between local formal prototypes and foreign decorative fashions appears indicative of the cultural interactions developing on Crete in this period, in which pre-existing models evolved in accordance with the tastes and demands of the new ruling class. As said above, the nearby site of Vyzari is the sole location on Crete –outside Heraklion and its hinterland (i.e. Knossos)–

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462 Albani 2010; Baldini 2010.
463 Sidiropoulos, Vasiliadou 2011.
464 A reverse hypothesis is that the earrings were made by an Arab prisoner for a local Byzantine commissioner, but this suggestion seems inaccurate in light of the linguistic mistakes presented by these items: Albani 2010.
for which distinct evidence of Islamic pottery is currently available, suggesting that a certain degree of cultural Islamisation (definition 2.2.iii) had taken place at this site. Therefore, we might go as far as saying that evidence of these earrings makes it clear that, in this very inland area of the island, the process of interaction and integration between pre-existing and Islamic material culture was at a good stage of development in the mid-10th century.

Broadening our analysis to the other sites and demographic districts identified archaeologically across the island, for some, such as Chersonissos and Chania, current archaeological research does not allow for further discussion to be made concerning the possible identity of their settlers. However, in light of the few textual and archaeological evidence discussed in Chapters 4, it is conceivable that Muslim communities might have settled at these coastal sites during the period of the Emirate, but, as said, for the time being such considerations remain not conclusive. For other sites, such as those located around Arcadia, we still remain in the dark. According to a recent linguistic analysis, it would seem that the modern names of nine villages in the Monofatsi Plain have an Arabic origin; Garipa, for instance, could derive from *gharib*, stranger.\(^{466}\) The same could be true for other sites of the Amari Valley, Messàra and Chersonissos Plains, for examples Astipadhes (from *aslyd*, ‘lord’), Sivas (from *siva*, ‘water spring’); and Sarakina (i.e. Saracens) respectively.\(^{467}\) However, rather than interpreting this as a direct evidence of Muslim settlers, it would be worth questioning to which extent this circumstance could be seen as the legacy of governmental practices of the Muslim rulers, who introduced new names for these settlements due to administrative reasons, for instance in order to record tax collection (see 5.2). Although in different historical contexts, this practice was commonly adopted also in other territories conquered during the Islamic expansion of the mid-7th and 8th century, for example in Egypt, for which a significant corpus of bi- or three-lingual administrative papyri reporting the Arab, Greek, and Copt versions of the same place-names is available.\(^{468}\)

Focusing on those sites which have undergone extensive excavations for several decades, the absence of Islamic pottery outside Heraklion

\(^{466}\) Aletras 2016, 325. The other villages are Aposelemi, Gassi, Tefeli, Chandras, Chandrou, and Zabres.

\(^{467}\) Rackham, Moody 1996, 105.

extends to sites such as Gortyn, Mitropoli, Eleutherna, Phaistos, Pseira, and Priniatikos Pyrgos. Of course, although extensive, the areas of excavations represent small percentages of the whole sites, therefore some sort of archaeological bias remains. Likewise, this complete lack of evidence could possibly be a consequence of the lack of focused archaeological research into this period. However, notwithstanding archaeologists’ lack of interest in Islamic-period layers, highly distinctive ceramics like those from Heraklion would probably have been recognised and documented, if they in fact existed at those excavation sites, as it happened at Vyzari.469 By contrast, as anticipated in section 4.2iv, ceramics dating to the period of the Emirate but belonging to Byzantine productions have been recorded at various sites of the island. Most notably, Constantinopolitan GWW II and Aegean and Marmara amphorae of the Types Sarachane 45-54 have been recorded at Heraklion, Priniatikos Pyrgos, Pseira, Sitia, and Gortyn.470 With the exception of Heraklion, which had become the main economic and trading hub of the island, this evidence might suggesting the persistence at these remaining sites of communities who continued to be economically, and perhaps culturally, bonded to the core regions of the Byzantine empire during the period of the Emirate.

Arguments ex silentio are problematic. However, keeping this limitation in mind, 1) the continuity of human activities at settlements known during the preceding Byzantine period, 2) the evidence of Byzantine pottery at these sites and, 3) the general lack of association between Islamic coins found at these sites and other evidence of Islamic material culture, call into question the identity of their inhabitants, and raise the possibility that pre-existing local communities survived after the Islamic conquest. Material sources apart, in wording his History, Leo Deacon makes a clear semantic distinction between ‘Arab Cretans’ and ‘native-born barbarians’, both of which refer to the Muslim population, and ‘native-born man’, the latter indicating Christian descendants of Greek

469 As a further example, when in the 1950s the Roman Villa del Casale (Piazza Armerina, Sicily) was excavated, archaeologists were not concerned about the Islamic-period village established on the remains of the villa. Nevertheless, because layers and artefacts of this period were found so copiously during excavations, references in reports are common and archives full of selected material, ceramic and otherwise: Gentili 1999. 
470 See also Chapter 3.2.
natives of Crete. Likewise, 10th century Muslim authors such as al-Istakhri (d. 957) and Ibn Hawqal (d. 988) clearly indicate that the Emirate of Crete was marked by a demographic composition of Muslims and Christians. A further and most revealing textual source that seems to conceal the fact that pre-existing community remained the majority in the Cretan countryside throughout the period of the Emirate is al-Masʿudi (d.956); the present chapter will return on this evidence in the concluding remarks. Subject to further validation, if these considerations are taken as valid, then it would be possible to conclude that a significant process of mass-migration of Crete never took place during the period of the Emirate, which, by definition, implies limited cultural pressure on pre-existing rural local communities.

While triggering demand for agricultural production and economic activities, the general historical attitude of early Muslim conquerors to cluster in urban centres did not foster cultural integration with the pre-existing population inhabiting the countryside, at least during the first decades or centuries after the conquest (see next subsection). Once again, although the historical context is different, a parallel can be drawn with the Arab conquest of neighbouring Egypt. According to recent studies, it has been argued that the first such cultural interactions occurred only after about 50-70 years after the conquest (late 7th – early 8th century), but until the 9th century these remained mostly marginal and limited episodes (see concluding remarks of this chapter). Further parallels could be recalled with various other territories which entered in the orbit of the Dar al-Islam between the 8th and 10th century, including Syria-Palestine, the Maghreb, and parts of al-Andalus; this point will be closely examined in Chapter 10.2. The Gao Region, in the Western Sahel, is among the most convincing instances that are chronologically close to the period of the Emirate of Crete. There, the appearance of ‘Islamic’ architecture and material culture in the main urban centre of the region (Gao city) can be charted back to the mid-10th century, yet it has persuasively been argued that ‘Islamic’ material culture did not spread outside this city before the 13th century,

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472 Christides 1984, 109; Christodoulakis 2011.
and the impact of Islam as a religion was not really felt in the countryside until the late 18th – early 19th century.\footnote{Insoll 1996, 48, 86.}

The role of Heraklion/al-Handaq as the epicentre of the Muslim population of Crete, and the possible survival of pre-existing rural communities in the countryside, raise the question of the nature and significance of the economic and administrative policies of the new ruling class, especially with regard to systems of taxation and landholding targeting these rural communities, matters which are discussed next in section 5.2.

5.2 INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMISATION: ACHIEVING AN EQUILIBRIUM?

Before attempting to interpret the possible economic and administrative models which were developed and deployed on Crete by the new Muslim rulers, it is important to briefly dwell on the primary material source on which such interpretations are based: numismatic evidence. In any ancient state with a monetised economy, the minting of coins, and the naming of rulers on them, was a widespread political practice through which sovereign power was demonstrated; the territories of the Dar al-Islam were not an exception to this trend and, according to the political language of Islam, sikka defines the right of minting coins with the name of rulers.\footnote{Johns 2003; Lewis 1988, 127, footnote 51; Heidemann 2010. Cf. De Luca 2014; Foss 2008.} The Cretan Emirs exercised the sikka right from the beginning of their rule on the island, and Abu Hafs (ca. 820s-855) issued bronze coins (fulus) bearing his name and that of his descendants. Golden coins (dinars) appeared as early as the rein of Shu‘ayb I (ca. 855-880), the son and first successor of Abu Hafs, whereas silver coins (dirhams) were only marginally and limitedly minted during the 10th century.\footnote{Miles 1970, 7-22.} The metrology of Cretan dinars is in conformity to the rest of the Dar al-Islam (ca. 4 gr.), whereas a study of the metrology of bronze and silver issues is still lacking. Cretan Islamic coins do not bear dates, but beside local rulers, they name the Caliphs in Baghdad, offering relative dates and showing the formal recognition of the Abbasid power as the universal authority.
More than 500 specimens of coins issued by Cretan Emirs are known in secondary literature, of which about 350 have been recovered in Heraklion, suggesting the existence of a mint there.\textsuperscript{477} The evidence of these coins can be interpreted on two levels: one regarding the dissimilar volume of emissions issued by different emirs during the period of the Emirate; the second considering the geographical distribution of the specimens across the island.

Regarding the first point, Miles divided his corpus of 268 coins into three chronological macro-groups. Group 1, gathering coins minted by Abu Hafs, which accounts for only two specimens. Group 2, comprising coins minted by Abu Hafs’ son, Shu’ayb I, from the 860s throughout the second half of the 9th century. This is the most numerous group, accounting for 211 specimens, that is nearly 80% of the total. Finally, Group 3 includes the remaining 45 coins minted by Cretan emirs throughout the first half of the 10th century. This markedly unbalanced numerical figure points at a clear fact. Besides noting the economic investment made by all the Emirs of Crete, the exponential increase in the circulation of coins across the island at the time of Shu’ayb I, with evidence growing from a handful to hundreds, might attest to the effort made by this Emir to consolidate the political and economic authority of the Emirate after initial decades of military conquest. With regard to this point, is it possible to indicate an approximate date which marked the turning point in the process of institutional Islamisation of Crete?

Both material and textual sources that are listed below agree in seeing the late 860s as the moment in which Constantinople lost its political authority over Crete, or perhaps temporarily renounced to it. First, after 866 Byzantine emperors did not launch any military expedition or attempt to recapture the island, until 912. Secondly, the Life of Saint Theodora, dating about 867, considers Crete no longer as a Byzantine territory; thirdly, a letter of Pope Nicholas I (858-867) sent to Michael III, reclaiming the dioceses of Illyricum, mentions all of them except for Crete. Both these two omissions, although possibly accidental, could more realistically reflect the loss of the Byzantine jurisdiction over the island.\textsuperscript{478} Fourthly, in the late 860s, the see of Crete was moved to Thessaloniki, even though it maintained its title; fifthly, a number of Arabic sources indicate that 865 was the ultimate date for the Islamic

\textsuperscript{477} Cf. Miles 1970; Starida 2016.
\textsuperscript{478} Tsougarakis 1988, 208.
Lastly, as noted above, from the 860s onwards it is recorded an exponential increase of Islamic currency of the second Cretan emir, Shu‘ayb I, while the record of Byzantine coins circulating on the island drops drastically to zero specimen between the emperors Theophilos (d. 842) and Leo VI (d. 912) (FIG.43). Of course, this evidence should be considered as preliminary, and it could easily change as new archaeological research is carried out, for instance should a hoard be found.

![Bar chart of Islamic and Byzantine coins](image)

**FIGURE 43**: the trend of Islamic and Byzantine coins dating between 820s and 963 found on Crete (bar chart by the author)

Regarding the spatial distribution of these coins across the island, out of Miles’ 268 coins, the place of recovery is known for 136 of them. About 63 such specimens were found in Heraklion and its suburbs, 10 are vaguely said to come from the prefectures of Chania (3) and Rethymno (7), while for the remaining 47 specimens it is possible to pinpoint their exact place of recovery (FIG.44). Although disseminated throughout Crete, the bulk of this evidence is especially concentrated in the centre of the island, along the possible main road-axes (which are

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479 Christodoulakis 2011; Brooks 1913, 438-43.

480 With this in mind, it is worth noting that a remarkable hoard of 1090 solidi was found in central Crete (at Emparos) in 1588, and dispersed soon thereafter. Although its composition is unknown, according to some scholars it contained coins dating to the 8th century: Garaffo 2004, 192.

481 The remaining coins recorded outside Crete have been found in territories both within and outside the Dar al-Islam, including al-Andalus, Egypt, Spain, and the Byzantine Greek mainland, especially in Athens and Corinth.
known through the *Tabula Peutingeriana*), and more specifically is clustered in the rural districts of Heraklion, the Messarà Plain (around Gortyn), Mylopotamos Plain (surrounding Eleutherna), and Monofatsi Plain (around Arcadia). As discussed in Chapter 4.2, these were the principal economic and demographic hubs of the island. On the one hand, this distributive pattern demonstrates that Crete’s most fertile areas were still inhabited during the Islamic period, therefore undermining the previous assumption that their rural communities had run away from these plains to seek refuge on hilltops and uplands. On the other hand, the nucleation of a remarkable quantity of coins in these fertile topographic basins may reasonably suggest that intensive agricultural activities were conducted in these areas. But, how could the evidence of such a strong monetised economy in the Cretan countryside be explained in light of administrative and governmental practices?

An answer to the question asked above can be provided by combining this numismatic evidence with the argument made above about the settlement patterns of Crete in the Islamic period and the role of the new capital of the Emirate, al-Handaq, as the epicentre of the Muslim population. In fact, the condition that a considerable proportion of the

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482 Although dating to the 4th century, it has recently been argued that the road system known though the Tabula Peutingeriana might have been used substantially unvaried into the medieval period: Pazarli, Livieratos, Boutoura 2007.

Muslim population appears to have been urban-dwelling implies, by definition, that they had to rely on the countryside to achieve stable agriculturally self-sufficiency. According to this, expanding the fiscal control on rural communities allowed the Emirs of Crete to achieve a double goal: extending their political authority over the pre-existing (Christian?) inhabitants of the island, and ensuring a regular income of taxation and agricultural supply for the capital. A canonical economic model can be readily recalled and applied to explain this process in administrative terms (FIG.45). At first, coinage from al-Handaq was put into circulation by the central authority in the form of exchange for agricultural produce, thus introducing a degree of monetisation in the countryside; individuals were therefore able to meet their fiscal obligations, with coins flowing back to the Capital in the form of taxes and revenues imposed upon the agrarian population.

FIGURE 45: exemplification of an economic model explaining the wide circulation of coinage of Cretan Emirs across the countryside of the island (graphic elaboration by the author)

484 Kennedy 2011; Tsougarakis 2011, 293-94.  
485 The same economic model was employed within the Byzantine Empire: Laiou, Morrissos 2007, 32-52. Tsougarakis 1988 pointed out that this abundance of coins meant a low pressure of taxation on pre-existing communities, for whom no trace of rebellion survives in the textual evidence of the period.
The fact that the Cretan coins are predominantly minted in copper finds an equivalent in the monetary systems of most territories in the early Islamic world, where taxes were in fact mainly collected with copper coins. The remarkable volume of numismatic evidence from Islamic Crete, however, does not parallel the trend recorded in other regions of the Islamic world during the early phases of political conquest. This circumstance could signify a greater effort and higher degree of state intervention of the Cretan emirs in implementing and supporting the administrative mechanism of tax-collection and food supply (see below), but it prevents us from drawing more conclusive considerations on the forms and dynamics of social interaction. For instance, examples from neighbouring Islamic regions such as Egypt and Sicily indicate that local landholders, bishops, and village headmen were employed as the principal agents and interlocutors responsible for tax-collection; more importantly, such evidence demonstrate that the chorion (village) was by this time the basic fiscal unit of reference for taxation. If applied to Islamic Crete, this tax-system would indeed explain the nucleation of coins in rural areas. Of course, the hinterlands of Heraklion would be the primary catchment-area for its population, and in fact the settlements surrounding the capital are those with the highest rate of numismatic finds (see FIG.16).

Within the general paucity of available material sources, the evidence of the previously unpublished glass-weight Islamic glass-weight, which has been recognised and studied at the IMK in the context of this research, might bear testament to this process of tax-collection targeting pre-existing local communities (FIG.46). Indeed, besides official coinage, local communities, from both within and outside Crete (for example from Naxos and other nearby Cycladic islands that paid tribute to the Emirate of Crete) could have met their tax obligations/tributes by paying with pre-existing currency, whose intrinsic metal-based value was incontestable. The metrology, however, was different, calling for ad-hoc measures of conversion to be taken, and glass-weights were some of the most efficient of such measures. In newly conquered lands, in fact, glass-weights were used for converting pre-existing currencies into

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486 For instance, all 69 early Islamic coins (late 7th – early-9th century) found in the Egyptian city of Antinoupolis are copper: Castrizio 2010; cf. Legendre 2016, 12.
488 Vionis 2017, 175.
the metrology of the *Dar al-Islam*, a serious matter in the Islamic law.\footnote{Being influenced by the Quranic injunction ‘to weight with the right scale’ (Qur’an 17:35): Rebstock 2008, 2255. Cf. De Luca 2015.}

This artefact, therefore, is among the most remarkable (of the few available) indicating the adherence of Crete into the contemporary economic and administrative system of the broader Islamic world.

This specimen, in particular, was found in stratigraphic excavations at Odos Koroneou in Heraklion, in a context dating to the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century according to the association with a coin of Leo VI (886-912).\footnote{Along with an unspecified number of Islamic coins and pottery: Starida 2016, 62.} The diameter is 1.6cm, and it bears an inscription on three lines that reads: ‘On the order of (lit. ‘by the hand of’) Emir Ahmad’.\footnote{I wish to thank M.A. De Luca for reading this specimen and for her invaluable suggestions. Without her help, I would have been unable to approach this item analytically. Cf. Randazzo 2019b.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure46.png}
\caption{Islamic glass-weight from Odos Koroneu excavation (Heraklion), first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century (photo by the author with permission of the IMK; translation by A.M. De Luca).}
\end{figure}

Study of the Cretan examples of these artefacts has been completely absent in the secondary literature, and this is the first time that one object of this kind is documented and analysed for Crete. The content, design, and calligraphic style of this inscription are identical to that of no.3467.482 in the online catalogue of the Gayer-Anderson collection at Cairo.\footnote{http://www.numismatics.org/dpubs/islamic/ga/GayerAndersonPage48.html.} Although the authors of this catalogue assign the glass-weight from Cairo to Ahmad ibn Tulun (d. 884), the founder of the Tulunid...
dynasty, a careful comparison between this specimen and others securely dated to his reign reveals profound difference between them, particularly concerning the more complex protocol formula of Ahmad ibn Tulun.\textsuperscript{494} Thus, it can be suggested that both these glass-weights (from Cairo and the IMK) might be linked to the dynasty of the Emirs of Crete, which between 925 and 940 saw a very prominent emir, Ahmad ibn Umar II (ca. 925-940), whom we know through numismatic evidence was quite active economically.\textsuperscript{495}

In addition to the need of the new ruling Muslims to create economic and administrative links with the fiscal system of pre-existing local communities, the presence of a Cretan glass-weight in Egypt, or vice versa, strengthens the economic and cultural links between these two neighbouring territories of the Islamic world, which thus far were only known textually.\textsuperscript{496} For the Cretan Emirs to undertake commercial activities with other Islamic states, they needed a standard metrological system to conform their coins, and these glass-weights were the typical devices used to achieve this goal. Because these two examples from Cairo and Heraklion are currently unici, more conclusive parallels are needed in order to pursue this hypothesis further.

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

With the most notable exception of Iraq, the initial attitude of Muslim conquerors to cluster in garrison cities and maintain the pre-existing status quo of indigenous communities living in the countryside was a common endeavour in Egypt, Ifriqiya, the Levant, and parts of al-Andalus.\textsuperscript{497} This position has been vividly expressed by Sijpesteijn who has argued, on papyrological bases, that throughout the first century after the conquest of Egypt (in some cases up to the 9\textsuperscript{th} century) ‘for most Egyptians living [in the countryside] under the new rule, the prevailing sense was one of continuity of daily economic and social life

\textsuperscript{494} Cf. Miles 1958, 85-86, nos.198-199. Stylistic and textual reasons exclude the connection to Fatimid glass-weights.
\textsuperscript{495} For the genealogy of the Emirs of Crete: Miles 1963, 1970.
\textsuperscript{496} For example: Christides 1982, 83-84 (with regard to the support of Egypt in the Andalusi expedition of the 820s); p.117-118 mentioning the export of Cretan cheese and honey to Egypt during the 10\textsuperscript{th} century.
\textsuperscript{497} For general studies on landholding in the early Islamic period: Kennedy 2011; 2014; essays in Delattre, Legendre, Sijpesteijn 2019. Specifically for these territoris see Chapter 10.2.
rather than rupture’.\textsuperscript{498} Certainly, as Sijpesteijn noted, such initial ‘non-interventionist approach’ was partially due to the practical limits of the new Muslim rulers, who were largely outnumbered in comparison with the pre-existing communities; nevertheless, she adds, ‘the new rulers seem to have understood that sudden and violent rupture with the past would probably have been unnecessarily disruptive and inefficient’.\textsuperscript{499} Living in their garrison cities and capitals, Muslim rulers were not interested in undermining the social order of pre-existing rural communities, as doing so would have been self-damaging. What mattered most was that local rural communities acknowledged their authority, paid taxes, and continued to be agriculturally productive. In return for this, local pre-existing communities were entitled to stay on their land, to maintain their freedom of belief, and to obtain guarantees of safety and inviolable protection.\textsuperscript{500}

Of course, 7\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} century Egypt and 9\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} Crete are two different historical contexts and, due to the lack of similar administrative documents, it is currently impossible to apply the same Egyptian considerations to the Cretan case-study, tout court. Nonetheless, the archaeological evidence gathered in this thesis and discussed above seems to suggest that most rural areas of Crete were never touched by the systematic process of cultural Islamisation, and both Greek and Arabic sources mention the existence of Christian communities (see below). However, to attempt to qualify their social status is all a different matter. Although there is no ground to assume that the Muslim rulers promoted a program of forced religious conversion to Islam, the present archaeological knowledge does not allow us to conclude whether, and to which extent, pre-existing communities chose to maintain their belief or formerly adhered to the Islamic religion (for instance due to fiscal benefit). Religion apart, the persistence of human activities at inland sites and rural areas that are archaeologically known from the preceding Byzantine period hints at the following conclusion. As happened in Egypt nearly 150 years before, it would seem that the Muslim rulers of Crete did not modify, at least to any large extend, the pre-existing status quo and landholding/taxation system of the indigenous population, who kept inhabiting the Cretan countryside under their rule.

\textsuperscript{498} Sijpesteijn 2013, 112; 2020.
\textsuperscript{499} Sijpesteijn 2013, 84.
\textsuperscript{500} See footnotes above.
By overturning the previous prejudicial assumptions, a different scenario surfaces in the Cretan economic and administrative patterns of interactions between incomer Muslims and pre-existing Christian communities, in which the balance is tilted towards patterns of coexistence rather than on forms of social oppression. The lack of administrative documents prevent us from achieving conclusive remarks about processes of institutionalisation and social interactions. However, in the light of the evidence discussed above, it would seem possible to argue that the Islamic Emirate of Crete, in its mature form, could be taken as an example of social equilibrium between Muslim rulers settled in their capital and pre-existing communities inhabiting the countryside. With this regard, an Arabic textual source of the early 10th century offers a vivid support to this empirical assumption. In 916, the traveller al-Masʿudi (d.956) sailed to the East African port of Qanbalu, probably located on Pemba island, in the Zanzibar archipelago. Here, he noted that this island was mostly inhabited by a non-Muslim population, but it was ruled by a small Muslim community, including the royal family, who had arrived there around 750, and ‘had subjected its population in the same manner as the conquest of Crete’. According to Horton, this historical tradition refers to the Andalusi capture of Crete using naval forces in the 820s. However, if this was true, it would be quite striking that specifically Crete was taken as a term of reference, as by the early 10th century many other territories of the Islamic world had been conquered through naval warfare. Instead, it could be questioned to which extent this excerpt might bear testament to something different and more unique to Crete, that is al-Masʿudi’s historical perception of this Emirate as a contemporary model of coexistence between urban Muslim rulers and non-Muslim rural population. As seen above, independently from this textual source, this thesis has reached a similar conclusion through the interpretation of the range and distributive patterns of material evidence across the island. This evidence appears to indicate that during the approximately 130 years of Islamic rule, the whole island was economically bound to the authority of the Emirs (i.e. institutional Islamisation), but the cultural Islamisation of Crete was never achieved, or willingly pursued into the countryside, at least at any significant extent.

CHAPTER 6: MATERIAL CULTURE

6.1 CERAMICS

Until recently, archaeological knowledge of material culture produced and circulating on Crete between the late 8th and mid-10th century was still in its infancy, both regarding the last decades of Byzantine rule (late 8th – early 9th century), and the Islamic Emirate. Fortunately, recent scholarship has increasingly focused on this period, and a number of material sources can now be dated to the late 8th – mid-10th century. Concerning the last decades of Byzantine rule, the documentation of new regional stratigraphic contexts, especially from Gortyn-Mitropoli and Pseira, has allowed scholars to reassess the production of some local ceramics into this period (such as tableware so-called *sovradipinta*, amphorae TRC 10, and oil lamp *a fiaschetta*), and to demonstrate the endurance of imports from Aegean and Constantinopolitan workshops. Besides outlining some of the most distinctive examples of ceramics and small finds dating to this period, this chapter presents a revaluation of a stratigraphic context from Knossos, the Level 3c from the Sanatorium Basilica, as well as new evidence of ceramic imports from the Byzantine West. Regarding the Islamic Emirate of Crete, current understanding of ceramics dating to this period is still in its infancy. The study conducted in this thesis can be considered the first attempt to produce an initial systematic record of material culture dating to the period of the Emirate, and to place this record within the context of a global agenda of Islamic archaeology.

i.) Byzantine pottery of the mid/late 8th – mid-9th century

As a starting point for discussion, this section presents the restudy of a ceramic assemblage coming from a well-stratified context from Knossos, the Level 3c from the Sanatorium Basilica (KSB); this context was excavated in the early 1960s, but has lacked a modern study of its

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504 Especially: Vitale 2008; Fabrini, Perna 2009; Poulou 2011; Baldini at al. 2013; Yangaki 2016. Also Chapter 2.2ii.
ceramics since then.\textsuperscript{505} Chafing dishes, of which only three samples are attested to date on Crete, and some types of utilitarian wares for storing, serving, preparing, and consuming food, which do not appear in the record of ceramics from Level 3c, will then be treated, especially drawing on contexts from Gortyn and Pseira.

\textsuperscript{505} Frend, Johnston 1962. Vroom 2003, 55–56 already expressed the need for a restudy of this assemblage.
Level 3c from the Knossos Sanatorium Basilica (KSB)

Level 3c was located in the south tower of KSB (FIG.47) and postdates the abandonment of the church, possibly in the mid-8th century, if parallels are drawn with the nearby Medical Faculty excavations. Level 3c was found directly overlaying the rubble layers of destruction of the basilica, in which ceramics dating within the 7th century were identified during this restudy, including LRA 1, LRA 2, and rims of Aegean cooking-pots (FIG.48a-b).

Above, Level 3c was sealed by a sandy stratum that, lacking ceramic evidence, was interpreted as a flood layer. These two layers were covered by a third stratum, containing green monochrome glazed ceramics that, previously believed of the 10th century, should be re-dated to the Venetian period (13th century on). In accordance with this stratigraphic sequence, Level 3c was already dated to the 8th – early 9th century in the 1960s. However, due to the scientific knowledge available at that time, the ceramics coming from this context were not accurately identified. The restudy of this modest but significant assemblage confirms a late 8th – early 9th century date, showing the endurance of ceramic imports up to the eve of the Islamic conquest, and offering an initial avenue into possible local productions.

A total number of eight diagnostic sherds come from Level 3c (FIG.48c-j). Two sherds are cooking-pots (FIG.48e-f); one (48f), with a grey gritty fabric rich in silvery mica, is an Aegean-Constantinopolitan product finding a precise parallel with the example no.13 in Ware 3 from the deposit 35 of Sarachane, dating to the late 8th – early 9th century. Similar examples have been recorded at various sites on Crete, including at Gortyn, Itanos, Pseira, Akrotiri, and Eleutherna. Finding these cooking-pots on Crete is not surprising as the continuity of their Aegean and Constantinopolitan specialised workshops during these centuries is now well-known.

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507 Hayes 1992, 175, fig.56; Vroom 2016b.
509 Vroom 2016b.
FIGURE 48: KSB, south tower; a-b: ceramic sherds from below Level 3c; c-j: ceramic assemblage from Level 3c (details of fabrics not in scale). Photos and drawing by the author with permission of the BSA.
The other cooking-pot (48e) has a dark-red fabric presenting seashells and sporadic mica. The shape parallels Corinth/Mitello cooking-pots of the 8th-9th century, for instance the no.7 from Cantiere Mitello (Apulia). These pots are widely attested in mainland Greece, including at Sparta, Argos, Athens, Corinth, and in Southern Italy but, although sharing common morphological and technological features (globular body, ribbed surface, kiln-firing in oxidant conditions, etc.) were produced at a range of different sites, in a process that Arthur has summarised by the expression 'Byzantine tradition, but local productions'. The fabric of this pot would exclude Corinthian and Aegean productions, which lack either mica or seashells. By contrast, the macroscopic analogies with the fabric of the examples of plain ware presented below would indicate a possible local origin.

Two sherds from Level 3c belong to plain wares (FIG.48c-d). One, 48c, is the rim of a wide-mouthed jar with a mica-rich fabric and traces of seashells. The other, 48d, is the rim of a lid, with a fine fabric presenting seashells, traces of mica, and miniscule black inclusions. Both fabrics recall the example of cooking-pot seen above, according with a possible local origin. The shape of the lid is too generic, and any attempt to classify it typologically would be inappropriate; the profile of the jar is more distinctive, but the limited knowledge in secondary literature of contemporary local productions of plain wares does not currently allow for precise comparisons to be drawn.

The amphora rims 48f and 48g are very similar in shape and have identical fabrics; morphologically and technically these two examples find a precise parallel with the specimens 30, 34, and 43 from the Deposits 35 and 36 of Sarachane (late 8th – first half 9th century), belonging to the Aegean Globular Amphora Types 36 and 44.Inside the broad ‘family’ of globular amphorae, Types 36 and 44 are among the most widespread and better known and, on Crete, analogue examples have been documented at Gortyn, Priniatikos Pyrgos, and Pseira, just to mention some prominent sites. The wall sherd 48i, with an incised pattern of five deep combed parallel lines, should belong to equivalent globular amphorae, and finds an exact parallel with examples found in

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511 Arthur 2010.
512 For the compatibility with Knossos fabrics: Kotsonas 2019; Boileau, Whitley 2010.
513 Hayes 1992, 177, fig.57.
514 Portale 2014, fig.7; Klontza-Jaklova 2014c, figs.8-9; Tzavella 2019.
late 8th century layers at Priniatikos Pyrgos. Finally, the amphora 48j yields a grey fabric rich in silvery mica. The section of the handle is identical to the example no.4 of the Sarachane classification. An exact morphological match for this sample has not been found, although the shape of the rim recalls the no.38 from the Deposit 35 of Sarachane, as well as Aegean derivate of LRA 1, which on Crete have been attested in late 8th century contexts from Gortyn.

Despite its limited size, the ceramic assemblage from Level 3c helps us to further enhance the understanding of possible local productions and interregional trade of pottery, which continued to link Crete to Aegean and Constantinopolitan networks of exchange on the eve of the Islamic conquest. According to recent studies, the ‘Aegean system’ continued to be ‘a market without frontiers’ throughout the 8th and early 9th century, especially with regard to amphorae. Although the restudy of ceramics from Level 3c was not able to improve the present knowledge of transport containers, the archive study at Knossos and field observations conducted at a number of sites across the island have allowed this thesis to enrich the present knowledge of medieval amphorae circulating on Crete, by documenting a new typology of 8th-9th century Western amphora that, so far, had not been recorded or identified in secondary literature, whose evidence is discussed next.

**Sicilian amphorae with grooved-strap handles (8th-9th century) on Crete?**

The name of the new typology of amphora that has been documented on Crete in the framework of this thesis is ‘with grooved strap-handles’, after the distinctive central groove scored on each handle before kiln-firing. Appearing for the first time in contexts of the very late 7th century, amphorae with grooved strap-handles were manufactured in Sicily especially during the 8th-9th century, at a number of different workshops across the island (see Chapter 7). In Crete, seven examples of this typology have been documented during both archive study of pottery at Knossos (three), and in field observations at Gortyn, Arcadia,

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515 Klontza-Jaklova 2015, 149, fig.8.
516 Hayes 1992, 66, fig.23.
519 For an overview: Arcifa 2010b.
Chersonissos, and Eleutherna, (FIG. 49a). Two more examples appear in a black-and-white photo from excavations at Vyzari (see 4.1iii), but their attribution remains hypothetical due to the lack of first-hand knowledge of these items.  

FIGURE 49: a) Distribution map of amphorae with grooved-strap handles observed on Crete, and detail of the example from Eleutherna (map and photo by the author). b) Mediterranean distribution map of amphorae grooved-strap handles (map by the author).

520 Kalokiris 1959.
The macroscopic analysis of the specimens from Eleutherna and Knossos reveals the presence of microfossils and volcanic inclusions in their fabrics, making these items suitable candidates for a Sicilian origin. However, because none of the specimens from Crete come from stratigraphic excavations, and because petrographic analyses have not been conducted, neither the absolute dating nor the precise provenience of these items can be securely established, yet. Thus, although no other similar production is known outside Sicily, nor in different periods, the attribution of these artefacts to 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century Sicilian workshops should be considered as probable, but not scientifically proved. The specifics of this Sicilian production of medieval amphorae are discussed in Part III. For now it is important to underline that, so far, the export of these containers was already documented in regions of the Upper Adriatic and in other territories of the Byzantine West, such as in Calabria, Apulia, and Butrint, but never eastwards of the Otranto Straight.\textsuperscript{521} A further possible example from Constantinople’s Sarachane excavations was published by Hayes, from a context dating to the 9\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{522} In 2016, one sample of grooved-strap handle was observed during fieldwork in the surroundings of Kastro Apalirou, on Naxos.\textsuperscript{523} However, isolated finds apart, those recorded on Crete constitute the first systematic evidence for the circulation of this production in the Aegean.

This is a discovery of great economic significance, but not surprising considering the close economic and political bonds linking Sicily and Crete under the Isaurian dynasty. On a regional level, the spatial distribution of these artefacts offers potential elements to interpret possible networks and patterns of their circulation across the island. In Sicily (see Chapter 7), ecclesiastical and military institutions seem to be at the core of both production and distribution of these amphorae. With this in mind, it is worth noting that all the sites on Crete where these amphorae have been documented are both the major urban units of the island, and therefore appropriate contexts to assume the presence of military units, and bishopric. Tentatively, this circumstance, which is hard to believe a simple coincidence, could be interpreted as a

\textsuperscript{521} Cacciaguerra 2018, 168, fig.20; Vroom 2012a; 2012b.
\textsuperscript{522} Hayes 1992, 182, fig.62, no.42.47.
\textsuperscript{523} I was with Dr M. Jackson of Newcastle University. Due to methodological reasons, the item from Naxos was not collected, and neither photos nor drawings are available for this item.
consequence of the Isaurian reforms that brought Sicilian and Cretan bishops together under the authority of Constantinople, which will be further discussed in Chapter 7. These, however, are only first considerations, which we hope will provide valuable bases for future investigations.

On a broader level, and in line with the previous argument, this evidence allows us to support and visualise what Wickham and Arthur have defined as the ‘Ionian Seaway’ (Fig.49b).\(^{524}\) According to their persuasive arguments, Sicily is seen as the starting-point of a maritime route that in the 8\(^{th}\) – early 9\(^{th}\) century linked all the coastlines of the Byzantine West, through Calabria, Apulia, and Butrint, eastwards into the Aegean, in what they see as the effort made by Constantinople to create an economic, political, and cultural connection bonding the western and Aegean territories of the Empire. The links of Crete to a common cultural koine with core regions of the Byzantine Empire during the 8\(^{th}\)-9\(^{th}\) century find further support in the record of ceramics discussed below.

**An overview of ‘representative’ ceramics of the late 8\(^{th}\) – mid-9\(^{th}\) century**

The items discussed in this section are selected as supporting evidence for the enduring economic and cultural integration of Crete within the broader koine of the Byzantine world on the eve of the Islamic conquest, and as proxies of advanced local artisanal expertise. As discussed in Chapter 2.2ii, chafing-dishes are indicative of both.

Three examples of chafing-dishes have been recorded on Crete, from Kissamos (see Fig.33), Pseira (Fig.50a), and Gortyn, in the latter case featuring also a lid yielding the outer surface covered in barbotine petals (Fig.50b).\(^{525}\) In spite of this low number, a close examination of these items allows for a series of valuable considerations to be made. First, regarding their spatial distribution, the whole of Crete is covered, with one evidence from the West (Kissamos), one from the centre (Gortyn), and one from the East (Pseira), implying the persistence of a certain degree of social and cultural cohesion across the island. Secondly, with the exclusion of the sample from Kissamos, for which

petrographic information is unavailable, archaeometric analyses have verified that the example from Pseira is a local production from the area of the Mirabello Gulf, while the examples from Gortyn are imports from Constantinople. Archaeometric analyses conducted on kiln-wasters from Eleutherna reveal that glazed pottery was produced at this site too during the 8th-9th century, but wasters of chafing-dishes have not emerged yet.526

FIGURE 50: chafing-dishes and a representative selection of late 8th–mid-9th century pottery from Crete. Specimens a, c, f, h, and k are from Pseira (after Poulou 2011); specimens b, d, e, i and l are from Gortyn (all after Di Vita 2010, except l, after Perna 2010); specimens g and i are from Phaistos (after La Rosa, Portale 2004)

526 Poulou 2011; Yangaki 2016.
Concerning the local ceramics belonging to other categories of the *instrumentum domesticum*, which have not been documented in the Level 3c from Knossos, relevant examples of utilitarian vessels used for preparing, serving, storing, and consuming food are considered here. They all come from household contexts from Pseira and Gortyn (and surroundings, including Phaistos), a choice driven by the availability of specific secondary literature for these sites.\(^{527}\) Among the most distinctive items that can be mentioned there are (FIG.50c-l): multiple shapes of tableware *sovradipinta*, including carinated bowls, jugs, mugs, and bottles (c-e); handled basins with very large openings at the mouth (f-g), cooking pots, including frying pans (h-j), pitches, jars, some with pouring spouts, and other domestic utensils (k-l). Much of these ceramics circulating on Crete in the decades before the Islamic conquest fit perfectly into the preceding morphological, technological, and decorative local ceramic tradition of the early and mid-8\textsuperscript{th} century (see 2.2ii). The bag-shaped cooking-pot (FIG.50i) is some of an exception: it was found as part of a Byzantine rural household in Phaistos and, according to Portale, it is a late 8\textsuperscript{th} – early 9\textsuperscript{th} century import from Palestine.\(^{528}\) This evidence is currently unique, reminding that exceptions are quite a rule in archaeological studies.

This record of ceramics testifies both vibrant local productions and persistent interregional imports that, within the necessary precautions, can be taken as synonymous with social complexity and economic dynamism. Moreover, it emerges that Crete’s material culture of this period was intrinsically linked to the Aegean and Constantinople; some parallels and connections, however, could also be drawn with western territories of the Byzantine Empire: with this regard, the possible evidence of Sicilian amphorae with grooved-strap handles of the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century from Crete, discussed above, could be the first concrete archaeological evidence of these economic and cultural contacts, but further archaeometric analyses are needed to validate this consideration.

The range of ceramic evidence described so far has told an entirely different narrative from the scenario of drastic economic collapse and sociocultural regression previously attributed to the late 8\textsuperscript{th} – early 9\textsuperscript{th}


\(^{528}\) La Rosa, Portale 2004, 503, fig.30.
century on Crete. In the decades preceding the Islamic conquest, Crete was still part of a broader cultural *koine* and networks of economic exchange, touching various territories of Byzantium. As a further proof of this, it has been shown in Chapter 5.1i that some sites across the island (i.e. Priniatikos Pyrgos, Pseira, Sitia, and Gortyn) retained a level of connectivity with core regions of the Byzantine Empire also during the period of the Emirate, when the territories of the *Dar al-Islam* had become the major cultural and economic interlocutors of its capital, al-Handaq.

**ii.) Islamic pottery of the mid/late 9th – mid-10th century**

What follows is the first attempt at presenting a comprehensive overview of the limited corpus of ceramic evidence available, produced and circulating on Crete during the more than 130-year-long period of Islamic Emirate. Two main regional contexts are considered: Heraklion and Knossos.529

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529 The only other known site with ‘Islamic’ pottery being Vyrazi, for which see Chapter 4.1iii, Fig.29.
530 Starida 2011; 2016; Starida, Kanaki 2010.
531 For a description of the architectural features: section 4.2 and Chapter 5.2.
In the context of this thesis, the entire body of published and unpublished ceramics exhibited at the IMK has been studied (in addition to the FIGs.51-52 shown below, see Chapter 4.1i, FIGs.21-22).

FIGURE 51: table presenting the ceramics from the IMK (drawings by the author) and parallels with other territories of the Dar al-Islam (examples redrawn by the author for graphic consistency; see in-text bibliographic reference for individual examples). See figure 52 for a map with the sites mentioned in the table.

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533 Randazzo 2019b.
FIGURE 52: map with the sites mentioned in figure 51 (map by the author)
The three samples of glazed tableware already published by Poulou are taken as the starting points for this discussion: two jugs, perhaps ewers (rims are missing), and one bowl. The two green-glazed jugs (FIG.51a.i FIG.52), both one-handled, have hemispherical bodies, flat bottoms, narrow necks, and strap handles. Their outer surfaces are entirely covered in incised and excised geometric decorative patterns, executed directly on the red clay fabrics (superimposed triangles, parallel lines, and dots are arranged in vertical and horizontal bands). According to Poulou, the origin of these two items should be sought in the Middle East.534 Aside from the generic parallels proposed with products from Raqqa-Samarra and Shiraz, green-glazed pitchers and jugs produced in Nishapur in the 9th-10th century display identical shapes and similar use of incised decorations (FIG.51a.ii); identical moulded decorations appear also on contemporaneous unglazed jugs from Egypt and the Levant (FIG.51a.iv).535 Further west, similar but not identical shapes, both glazed and unglazed, occur throughout the Maghreb as a macro-region, which includes Sicily and Tunisia (FIG.51a.v).536 However, a 10th-century green-glazed jug from Mérola in the Garb al-Andalus, at the westernmost extent of the Dar al-Islam, is almost identical in shape to the Cretan sample (FIG.51a.iii).537 This indicates the adoption of similar technologies and ceramic morphologies in Islamic households across the Islamic world, and highlights the pitfalls of assigning a secure provenance to our items without clay analysis.

The third item published by Poulou is a bowl with round walls, short ring-foot, and the rim slightly incurved inwards (FIG.51b.i). Although a Corbodan provenance can be confidently assigned according to technical and decorative features, which show painted decorations of green and brown manganese under a thin layer of transparent glaze, it is worth noting the adoption of an analogous combination of this shape

534 Poulou 2011, 412.
535 Example from Nishapur Fig.89a.ii: Wilkinson 1974, 231, no.2. For more unglazed jugs displaying the same shape and similar decorations: 338, nos.16-17. Egypt and the Levant: Fehérvári 2000, 190-191. Example from Fustat Fig.89a.iv: Vogt 1997, 253, Pl.6, no.2.
536 Bibliography on ceramics from the Maghreb is extensive, but not always systematic. For similar jugs from Tunisia and Sicily: Arcifa, Bagnara 2017, 386, fig.19.1, nos.11;14. Example from Palermo Fig.89a.v: Sacco 2016, 226, PB617.
537 Gómez Meartìnez, Rui Santos 2018, 148, fig.5, no.1.
and of similar decorations in contemporaneous ceramic productions across the Islamic world (FIG.51b.ii-iv).\textsuperscript{538}

The remaining unpublished items are the following: two drinking pitchers, one glazed and handled, one unglazed and unhandled; one bottle; at least seven small cups(?); and three oil lamps. The first two items share a common function, that of individual consumption and the serving of liquids and semi-liquids; however, due to their size, they cannot be classified as mugs or cups. The example with a handled (FIG.51c.i), with monochrome green glaze, displays a highly distinctive shape with sharp changes of angle in the profile of the body, and a flaring neck, perhaps imitating metalware. The section of the handle is round, whereas the base is a disc-foot. Close morphological parallels for this specimen can be found in samples from the Middle East and al-Andalus (FIG.51c.ii, c.iii).\textsuperscript{539} Similar angular samples have been found in the Levant as well, notably at Ramla, Abu Ghosh, and Tiberias (FIG.51c.iv), where they have been dated to the 8\textsuperscript{th} -9\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{540}

Material from the Maghreb does not yield identical morphological comparisons, but does feature similar functional typologies, including glazed and unglazed cups and filter-vases, sharing angular designs (FIG.51c.v).\textsuperscript{541}

Moving on to the unhandled pitcher (FIG.51d.i), it has a globular body, thin wall sections, a tall flaring neck, and a disc-foot. The colour of the outer surface is buff-cream. An incised decoration with a diamond pattern runs around the neck. Aside from drinking, larger unhandled examples like this could be used to hold dried food.\textsuperscript{542} Unhandled drinking pitchers are common across the Maghreb, but bases are usually


\textsuperscript{539} Example from Nishapur Fig.89.c.ii: Wilkinson 1974, 295-96, no.4. From Al-Andalus Fig.89c.iii (Pechina and Tolmo de Minateda): Gutiérrez Lloret 2015b, 19, fig.4, no.10; Alba Calzado, Gutiérrez Lloret 2008, 592, fig.4. fifth row, right.

\textsuperscript{540} Stacey 2004, 132, 144, fig.5. The cup from Egypt (Fustat): Gayraud, Treglia, Vallauri 2009, 182, fig.5, no.8.

\textsuperscript{541} Example from Palermo Fig.89c.v: Sacco 2016, 218, PB968.

\textsuperscript{542} Reynolds 2016 suggests, on ethnographic comparisons, that this shape is particularly suitable for storing ayran, the cold-savoury yogurt beverage popular in the Islamic world.
domed or flat in this region, and are rarely disc-shaped (FIG.51d.v). In Egypt, the Levant, al-Andalus, and the Middle East, the vast majority of drinking pitchers, glazed or plain, have handles (usually one), and unhandled specimens are only sporadically attested. Among the comparisons with handled samples, some drinking pitchers from Mérida and Vascos, dating to the 9th-10th century, display a similar shape and incised decorations (FIG.51d.iii). Likewise, several samples dating to the 10th century found across the Levant (such as at Tiberias and Ramla) and the Middle East (Nishapur) display remarkably similar shapes and incised decoration running around the neck (FIG.51d.ii). A further very close morphological parallel can be drawn with an Egyptian unhandled specimen from Fustat, also dating to the 10th century (FIG.51d.iv, right). The range of tablewares displayed at the IMK which is linked to serving liquids is complemented by a one-handled bottle with a cylindrical body, flat bottom, flanged horizontal rim bent outwards, and covered with transparent glaze (FIG.51e.i). Bottles are common in contemporaneous Islamic dining contexts; however, in the 9th-10th century, their normal shape comprises a globular body and a tall and narrow neck (with or without either one or two handles). Although a sample from el Tolmo de Minateda (FIG.51e.ii) dating from the mid to late 8th century could be interpreted as a prototype, the item from Crete finds its closest morphological and chronological parallel with samples crafted in an Egyptian monastic workshop, Wadi al-Natrun, during the late 9th century (FIG.51e.iii). With regard to tablewares in the collection, there are a number of small wheel-made cups, all identical in shape and fabric, which could indicate local production (FIG.51f.i). Their functions and uses could be multiple, from small drinking cups and goblets to

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543 Example from Palermo Fig.89d.v: Sacco 2016, 277, PB294. See also Arcifa, Bagnera 2014, Tab.III, nos.14-16. Example from al-Basra Fig.89d.v: Benco et al. 2009, 675, fig.3A.
544 Example from Mérida Fig.89d.iii: Alba Calzado, Gutiérrez Lloret 2008, 603, fig.10, no.5. From Vascos: Izquierdo Benito, Ramos Benito 2015, 427, fig.3, fourth row, third from right.
545 Example from Nishapur Fig.89d.ii: Wilkinson 1974, 300, no.23. From Tiberias Fig.89c.iv: Stacey 2004, 144, fig.5.60, nos.1-4. From Ramla: Frenkel, Lester 2015, 170, fig.7.13.
546 Example from Fustat Fig.89d.iv: Gayraud, Treglia, Vallauri 2009, 186, fig.8, no.5.
547 Example from El Tolmo de Minateda Fig.89e.ii: Amoros Ruiz et al. 2012, fig.4, no.12. Example from Monastery of Saint Macarius at Wadi al-Natrun Fig.89e.iii: Konstantinidou 2015, 243 fig.10, no.3.
ramekins for dipping sauces.\textsuperscript{548} In themselves, these little pots are not distinctive or exclusive to Islamic material culture, and similar items can be found in different geographic and chronological contexts. It is nonetheless notable that similar miniature vessels appear regularly in contemporaneous domestic contexts throughout the Islamic world (FIG.51f.ii-f.v).\textsuperscript{549}

Apart from dining pottery, the last ceramic items dating to the Islamic period that are exhibited at the IMK are three oil lamps (FIG.51g.i), all sharing the same morphological features: a pointed long nozzle, a vertical knob, and a round filling hole (not a funnel-neck).\textsuperscript{550} With the sole exception of the Levantine area, where up to the 10\textsuperscript{th} century oil lamps continued to resemble Byzantine products from the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{551} oil lamps with a long pointed nozzle became the standardised forms of lighting ware within all Islamic territories in the 9\textsuperscript{th}-10\textsuperscript{th} century, although samples with a tall funnel-neck are most widespread.\textsuperscript{552} Regarding the examples from the IMK, which Starida suggests are local products, the closest parallel is with one sample from \textit{La Bataiguier} shipwreck (off Provence) likely of North African origin (FIG.51g.iv), and also with samples from Sicily and Egypt (FIG.51g.iii).\textsuperscript{553} In al-Andalus, an early 9\textsuperscript{th} century example from Cordoba (Saqunda district) displays a similar handle and nozzle, but a wider filling-hole (FIG.51g.ii).\textsuperscript{554}

Although limited in number, the corpus of ceramics from the IMK fits perfectly well into the ‘typical’ record of material culture of the broader Islamic world, offering exceptional insights into the integration of Handaqi citizens’ patterns of consumption and serving of foods and

\textsuperscript{548} Miniature vessels could have been used for several other purposes, such as ointment and ink pots.

\textsuperscript{549} Examples from Nishapur Fig.89f.ii: Wilkinson 1974, 317, 326, no.133. From El Tolmo de Minateda Fig.89f.iii: Alba Calzado, Gutiérrez Lloret 2008, 592, fig.4, fourth row, centre. From Egypt, Fayyum, Fig.89f.iv: Rousset, Marchand, Foy 2001, 459, fig.47.d. From Egeria, Fig.89f.iv: Stacey 2004, 138, fig.5.51, no.4. From Palermo and Raqqada Fig.89f.v: Arcifa, Bagnera 2017, 386, fig.19.1, nos.1-6.

\textsuperscript{550} Starida 2016, 75.

\textsuperscript{551} Starida 2004, 149-165.

\textsuperscript{552} Mason, 2011, 335-353. Cf. for example, 9\textsuperscript{th} century al-Andalus: Salinas, Montilla 2017, figs. 21.2.

\textsuperscript{553} Example from \textit{La Bataiguier} shipwreck Fig.89g.iv: Rossiter, Reynolds, MacKinnon 2012, 261, fig.137. From Palermo Fig.89g.iii: Sacco 2016, 346, variante 1. From Fustat Fig.89g.iii: Kubiak 1970, 6, fig.3.

\textsuperscript{554} Example from Cordoba Fig.89g.ii: Casal et al. 2009, fig.1, bottom row, second from left.
liquids within that of other contemporary regions of the *Dar al-Islam*,
whose people shared common culinary and social habits with the
Muslims of Crete. Ceramics from the IMK, however, are not informative
about two key aspects of daily life and domestic economy: the cooking
of food, and the transport and storage of foodstuffs in amphorae and
storing containers. Regarding cooking, the next section offers a first-
hand restudy of a context discovered during stratigraphic excavations at
Knossos, the so-called ‘Arab Building’, which yielded a modest but
revealing assemblage of domestic pottery and cooking-pots.

Concerning amphorae and storing containers, the lack of publication of
such vessels has prevented us from placing Crete within a broader
network of interregional economic activities and patterns of circulation
and consumption of goods. The only exception is a late 9th-century
Palestinian bag-shaped amphora found in urban excavations in the area
of the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, and published by Poulou
(FIG.21).\(^{555}\) Although divorced from its archaeological context, this
artefact is among the first to indicate the existence of trading networks
across the territories of the *Dar al-Islam*. Other similar Palestinian
amphorae are said to come from the Odos Almirou excavations, in a
context yielding 100 Islamic coins and glazed and unglazed ceramics
similar to those from Kastella.\(^{556}\) The systematic study of this and other
ceramic assemblages is necessary in order to reveal the nature and
extent of these trading networks.

**Ceramics from the ‘Arab Building’**

The remains of the so-called Arab Building of Knossos were found in
1971, during rescue excavations conducted in a field located 350m
northwest of the Minoan Palace (FIG.53a).\(^{557}\) The architectural remains
of this small structure have been described in Chapter 4.1i. This section
dwells on the pottery (currently stored at the Stratigraphical Museum at
Knossos) found in this well-stratified context, whose restudy provides an
initial avenue into the nature and significance of domestic pottery and
cooking-ware in use during the Emirate of Crete.

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\(^{555}\) Poulou 2011, 411, fig.32.
\(^{556}\) Starida 2016, 66.
\(^{557}\) Warren, Miles 1972.
The dating of this building to the Islamic period, more specifically to the 10th century, has been established on the basis of nine coins found on its floor, all minted by Cretan Emirs, the latest of which dating to the early 940s. A small number of ceramic sherds belonging to a minimum of eight vessels (FIG.53b-h) were found on the floor together with the coins, but they have been overlooked since their discovery, hence the need for their restudy.558 This small assemblage of pottery consists of the nozzle of an oil-lamp, body-walls of at least two amphorae, body-walls of at least one closed tableware (jug?), one pouring spout, one flat disc, and two cooking-pots. Several iron nails and two large, flat, and circular grindstones complement the array of finds from the interior of this building. In spite of their intrinsically low economic value, these artefacts show that domestic and industrial activities were conducted when this building was in use. A few glazed sherds come from the surroundings of the buildings, but they date to later Medieval periods.559

The nozzle of the oil-lamp (FIG.53b) precisely parallels the examples exhibited at the IMK, and therefore comprises the most reliable ceramic chronological evidence from the building. The body-sherds of the two samples of amphorae (FIG.53c), both featuring a corrugated surface, are not indicative in themselves, although petrographic analyses could establish their sources of origin. Neither the body-sherd of the closed tableware (FIG.53d), nor the pouring-spout (FIG.53e) are diagnostic, although jugs with pouring-spouts are widely attested in Islamic contexts of the 10th century. The flat disc (FIG.53f), diam. 18cm, which displays a lattice incised decoration on the upper side, is most likely to be the stopper of a wide-mouthed jar, although similar ceramic items interpreted as bread-baking plates (tabaq) have been found in al-Andalus and in the Maghreb.560

558 Randazzo 2019b; 2020.
559 Vroom 2003, 55-56 and personal observation.
560 Bread baking-plates were usually made of soft-stone. For an overview of ceramic examples from al-Andalus and the Maghreb: Reynolds 2016, 160-61, who notes that similar vessels have pre-Islamic origins.
FIGURE 53: a. location of the ‘Arab building’ at Knossos (after Warren, Miles 1972, fig.1); b-h. ceramic assemblage from the floor of the ‘Arab building’ (photos and drawing by the author with permission of the BSA); i-k. comparison with contemporary examples of ‘Islamic’ cooking-pots (redrawn with the author for graphic consistency; see in-text bibliographic reference for individual examples)
Finally, both the two examples of cooking-pots coming from the building (FIG.53g-h) are wheel-made, fired in oxidising conditions, and share an identical coarse fabric, dark-red in colour with seashells and mica, which is generally compatible with local productions (see above Level 3c). Morphologically, these two pots are similar, although one has a handle circular in section. Rims are bent outwards, with an inner groove to receive a lid; body-walls are markedly straighter than those of the globular examples. The outer surface of the unhandled example is slightly corrugated, while the other one was smoothed. Individual examples of these morphological and technical features can be found on contemporary non-Islamic pots. However, they appear together predominantly on pots made within Islamic regions where, despite significant regional variations, similar wheel-made pots are dominant in the broader panorama of Islamic cooking-ware.

Regarding the samples from the ‘Arab building’, whereas only general comparisons can be drawn with al-Andalus and the Levant (FIG.53i), close morphological parallels are with examples from Sicily (FIG.53j) and, especially, with pots from Fustat in Egypt (FIG.53k), which display very similar profiles and rims. Since other cooking-pots from Islamic Crete have not been published, these remarks remain preliminary. Recent evidence from al-Andalus, the Maghreb, and Sicily (see Chapter 8) demonstrates that cooking-pots were the first ceramic objects to appear during the introduction of a new ceramic repertoire in the period of transition between Islamic and pre-existing material culture; the last layers in which local ceramics are present indicate coexistence with these new arrivals. Cooking-pots and pre-existing local products are therefore pivotal to a better understanding of the cultural Islamisation of Crete, and they ought to be researched in further detail in light of their neglect in previous scholarship.

561 For example, from Byzantine Apulia: Leo Imperiale 2004, 334-35, fig.4. From Crete: Yangaki 2016, 214, fig.14.6.
562 For a synthesis from al-Andalus: Alba Calzado, Gutiérrez Lloret 2008, 600, fig.8. For the examples in Fig.6i: Casal, Castro, López, Salinas 2009, fig.1. Cf. the Levant, Tiberias: Stacey 2004, 123, fig.5.32.
563 For Sicily, Palermo: Pezzini, Sacco 2016; Ardizzone, Agrò 2014, 267, fig.2, no.116 (example in Fig.6j, below); Sacco 2016, 284-354, in particular PB713 (example in Fig.6j, above). Examples from Fustat in Fig.6k: Vogt 1997, 255, Pl.9, nos.9-14 (in the table, nos.9-10). Also Gayraud, Treglia, Vallauri 2009, 182, fig.5, no.6; Rousset, Marchand, Foy 2001, 450, fig.34, k-o.
Compared to ceramic and structural evidence from Heraklion, which is located less than 6km to the northwest, both the context and the instrumentum domesticum of the ‘Arab building’ suggest that the character of this structure and of its occupants was distinctively rural, although the identity of those occupants remains obscure.

Finally, during an informal revision of ceramic evidence that are part of the museum collection at the British School at Athens, I was able to recognise a sherd of ‘Islamic’ glazed pottery decorated with Kufic inscription, on which is labelled ‘Knossos’. The outside is plain, while inside there is a polychrome glaze (yellow, green and brown), which is applied directly on the ceramic surface (i.e. without slip or whitening underneath). The fabric is pinkish-white. Both fabric and glaze recall ceramic produced during the 9th – 10th century in the Levant or North African. This sherd, unfortunately, lacks any further specific information on its context of recovery, and for the time being cannot be used to draw further considerations.

6.2 SELECTED EXAMPLES OF SMALL FINDS AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

i.) Byzantine small finds of the 8th-early 9th century

While producing new evidence of ‘Islamic’ small finds (ex. the earrings and glass-weight seen in Chapter 5) this thesis has been unable to produce new evidence of Byzantine small finds of the 8th – early 9th century from Crete. Thus, rather than attempting a comprehensive summary, the following section focuses on a selection of items that further corroborate the consideration, already achieved through ceramic evidence, according to which, on the eve of the Islamic conquest, Crete and its inhabitants were still part of a broader cultural koine tightly linked to the Byzantine Empire. In particular, two groups of objects have been selected: belt buckles, which illuminate on possible networks of civil and military officers, and liturgical furniture, which is

565 A few dress accessories made of bone, including one ring, one spatula, and three hair pins are displayed at the IMK and said to come from Islamic layers of the Kastella excavations. However, none of these small finds is distinctive of Islamic material culture per se, since similar objects can be found in archaeological contexts that are either very different in date, or contemporary but linked to Byzantine material culture, for example, Sarachane and the Crypta Balbi: Gill 1986, pls.349-351; Ricci 2001c, 407, II.4.816-21. For Islamic contexts see, for example, relevant items in: Shatil, Behar 2013; Farhi 2016; Ayalon 2005.
informative of ecclesiastical institutions. Of course, complementary
discussion of utilitarian and ‘unpretentious’ objects, such as agricultural
tools used by those peasants who formed the effective majority of the
social substratum, would have been desirable. Unfortunately, with some
limited exceptions (as the ploughshares from Gortyn seen in Chapter
4.1ii), current secondary literature of Crete lacks specific focus on these
objects for this later chronological period, and the bulk of available
examples are dated within the 7\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{Brokalakis 2013; 2014; Bryer 1986.}

\textit{Belt buckle}

A recent survey conducted by Poulou has gathered more than 40 bronze
specimens of belt-buckles, of which 25 coming from modern
archaeological investigations at the sites of Eleutherna, Gortyn, Knossos,
Heraklion, and Pseira (FIG.54a).\footnote{Poulou 2005; 2011. Also: Manganaro 2004.}
A couple more specimens have been recently documented at Kissamos and Episkopi Pediados.\footnote{Scordu 2018, fig.16; Katzalis, Kokkini 2016, fig.5.}
The evidence of these belt-buckles offers insights into multiple aspects of
Byzantine Crete in the period preceding the Islamic conquest. First,
according to new stratigraphic evidence of graves containing coins,
there is now scientific ground to extend the conventional chronology of
some of these items from the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century, throughout the 8\textsuperscript{th} – early
9\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{Poulou 2005; Poulou, Tzavella, Ott 2012, 388-401.}
The impact of this revision is significant, especially
because it compels us to reconsider the chronology of several
specimens that, found in both stratigraphic and non-stratigraphic
contexts of the island, are commonly dated within the 7\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{As the examples from Kissamos and Episkopi Pediados mentioned above.}
Secondly, local imitations apart, these objects were produced in specific workshops of the Byzantine Empire, and were mostly worn by military and civil/administrative officers, who during their nominations were offered a belt-buckle along with their title.\(^{571}\) The evidence of belt-

\(^{571}\) Poulou, Tzavella, Ott 2012, 389.
buckles, therefore, offers invaluable insights into both the mobility of these officers, and the connections between Crete and different provinces of the Empire. Finally, on a local level, belt-buckles allow us to further support the fact, already evident from the ceramic evidence, that the sites of the island in which these objects have been recorded were among the major hotspots in the regional network of Crete before the Islamic conquest (Chapter 4.1).

**Liturgical portable furniture**

Considering the corpus of portable items connected to liturgical activities, 73 hoarded bronze objects were discovered in 1901 during antiquarian excavation inside the southern aisle of the St. Titus basilica, at Gortyn; this certainly is one of the richest and best preserved assemblages available not only for Crete, but for the whole medieval Christendom.\(^{572}\) Among the most distinctive or recurring items there are (FIG.54b): one processional cross, one bowl, one ewer, a few censers, both complete and fragmentated, and numerous chandeliers or *polycandelia*, both complete and disassembled in distinct components (discs, candlesticks, hangers, supports). Four more items, interpreted as icon holders, were found hoarded nearby. In 1998, Xanthopoulou offered an examinations of these items, providing a wide agenda of comparanda with case-studies drawn from different regions within and outside the Byzantine Empire.\(^{573}\) According to this scholar, most of the items of this assemblage parallel productions of the Middle Byzantine period (10\(^{th}\)-12\(^{th}\) century), and therefore their evidence should be linked to ecclesiastical activities occurring at this site after 961. On the other hand, however, she acknowledged that other items from this hoard, such as those that are illustrated above, could have been earlier in date, finding equivalents with productions of the 7\(^{th}\)-9\(^{th}\) century.

More recently, Baldini has suggested to date the hoarding of these objects within the historical context of the decades immediately preceding or following the Islamic conquest.\(^{574}\) This chronology finds

\(^{572}\) Orlandos 1926. All items are currently displayed at the IMK.

\(^{573}\) Xanthopoulou 1998.

\(^{574}\) Baldini 2009, 664-65; Baldini et al. 2013, 277.
support with a critical bibliographical revaluation of these items, and accords with the result of recent archaeological excavations conducted in the environs of St. Titus, which have provided researchers with a more refined understanding of the patterns of human occupation occurring at this site between the late 8th and early 9th century (see 4.1(ii)). Due to the loss of important stratigraphic evidence, and to the tendency of liturgical objects to maintain unvaried shapes over centuries, the absolute chronology of these specimens cannot be established. However, should Baldini’s argument be correct, this corpus of items would be an exceptional material evidence into the great economic potential that the ecclesiastical institutions of Gortyn retained up to the eve of the Islamic conquest, emphasising at the same time the cultural cohesion linking the church of Crete to the rest of the Byzantine world.

ii.) The Temenos Fort: a new reading of the masonry

Like ceramics and small finds, the built environment (i.e. the arrangements of building layouts, the recurrence of distinctive masonry techniques, the adoption of specific structural features or building materials) is a key expression of material culture. Analyses and interpretation of the built environment, in fact, can be very revealing of chronological horizons and indicative of cultural aspects of the society who designed, realised, lived/utilised, and finally abandoned the ruined constructions that archaeologists uncover during excavations and document in field surveys.

As seen in Chapter 4, a limited yet significant knowledge is currently available in secondary literature with regard to examples of Cretan Byzantine and Islamic built environment. By drawing from both secondary literature and personal structural observation of extant examples, Chapter 4 has offered insights into some of the most relevant case-studies from different contexts on the island, encompassing urban, rural, domestic, military, and religious buildings from Heraklion, Knossos, Gortyn, Chersonissos, Vyzari, etc. Similarly to the indications gained through the evidence of ceramics and small finds, the analysis of

these case-studies has enabled us to trace patterns of substantial technical and cultural cohesion between Crete and the surrounding regions of the Mediterranean world, both during the Byzantine and Islamic periods.

In this subsection, a further and most revealing example of build environment is discussed, that of a section of the circuit wall of the Temenos fort, ca. 19 km to the South from Heraklion. It will be argued that this section of the circuit wall should date to the mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century, finding therefore its place within the evidence of material culture from the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition. Moreover, it also yields a picture of substantial technical cohesion with contemporary example of Byzantine works of fortification.

Leo Deacon informs us that Nikephoros Phokas built the Temenos fort in the aftermath of the recapture of Crete in 961.\textsuperscript{576} In line with sherds of globular amphorae observed in situ, this site had been previously occupied in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. In the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the fortification was rebuilt and enforced with a double, triple in some points, line of defence, and the enclosed site was occupied throughout the Venetian period (FIG.55a). Archaeological excavations at this site are currently absent, but Gigourtakis has conducted an interpretative structural surveys of the different phases of construction of this fortification.\textsuperscript{577} In partial disagreement with this scholar’s conclusions regarding the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, a different reading is offered of the sole section of wall for which the examination of structural features can indicate a dating to Phokas’ time.

This section comprises the semi-circular tower located in the outer line of defence on the north-eastern side of the complex. Although this tower is joined to the outer circuit wall, these two architectural features do not share the same masonry techniques. This evidence is not necessarily synonymous with a chronological difference between them, but it is only the masonry of the tower that yields specific technical features allowing for chronological and architectural considerations to be made (FIG.55b).

\textsuperscript{576} Talbot, Sullivan 2005, 80.
\textsuperscript{577} Gigourtakis 2004. See also Mavritsaki 2012.
The tower is built with the *emplekton* technique; on the outer face, sizable blocks are predominantly used, most of which are roughly squared. Clay mortar appears only in the core of the *emplekton*; instead, the binding used in the external side is a strong lime mortar. Similarly to the examples of Byzantine built environment seen in Chapter 4, also this
case-study shows the meticulous and constant employment of ceramic tiles as both fillers between blocks and proper building material. The masonry of this tower, moreover, grants us a fine look at a precise stage in the evolution of a Byzantine structural narration, which takes us into the Komnenian period of the 11th-12th century. At Temenos, in fact, ceramic tiles not only are arranged into horizontal rows alternated to courses of blocks, but also, and more distinctively, tiles are meaningfully placed vertically between blocks.

A similar, but more coherent and consistent arrangement, called the *cloissoné* style, can be found in other examples of fortifications built by the central authority in surrounding regions of the Byzantine Empire during the 11th-12th century. Among many possible comparisons, the fortification built at Pergamon by Manuel I Komnenos in the mid-12th century offers an effective example to support this argument (FIG.55c). The visual impact resulting from this comparison is highly significant of the strong connections entwining the masonry techniques of these two monument. Certainly, Pergamon’s circuit walls show a more advanced level of execution than Temenos’. This difference could be due to the grander political relevance of the former over the latter, which probably meant a greater deployment of fiscal capital, crafting expertise, and human resources. Pergamon was at that time a significant urban centre and the capital of the theme of Neokastra, a significance that the Temenos never had in spite of its importance during Phokas’s time. The chronological sequence at Pergamon could offer a further explanation for the more approximate execution of the masonry employed in the Temenos wall. This latter, dating almost two centuries before Pergamon’s, could therefore be regarded as a sort of *proto-cloissoné* style, whose evidence is able to bridge the evolutionary trend in Byzantine masonry techniques recorded between the early and later Middle Ages.

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578 Crow 2017, 102.
Concluding remarks

Whether ceramics, small finds, or structural features (see Chapter 4), a careful re-evaluation of material culture from Crete dating to the late 8th – mid-10th century draws a picture of economic vibrancy, sociocultural complexity, and sophistication unimaginable until now. Certainty, compared with the standards of the earlier Byzantine period (up to the 7th century), the record of material culture from Byzantine Crete in the late 8th – early 9th century appears overall partially impoverished. Nonetheless, material sources available demonstrate that the island was still an integral part of the broader Byzantine world, including the Byzantine West (i.e. the evidence of grooved-strap handles amphorae), with which it retained close economic and cultural connections.

The Islamic conquest brought a great deal of innovation in the record of material culture produced and imported in Heraklion/al-Handaq, the new capital of the island, and in its immediate surroundings, with the introduction of a new range of ceramics finding precise parallels with contemporary examples from other territories across the Islamic world. However, as already discussed in the two preceding chapters (4 and 5), the impact of the cultural Islamisation of Crete outside Heraklion is still unknown archaeologically, and to date, Vyzari and its hinterland (see earrings from Mesonisia) seem to be the only visible ‘pocket’ in the island with distinctive evidence of Islamic material culture.
PART III:

(CENTRAL) SICILY

BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE DAR AL-ISLAM (mid-8th – mid-10th century)
CHAPTER 7:
‘COLLISION’, FROM THE THEMATIC AGE TO THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST
(ca. 700-859)

Introductory remarks

This chapter covers the 8th and first half of the 9th century, that is from the establishment of the Theme of Sicily to the Aghlabid conquest of Enna in 859. Section 7.1 analyses the transformation of Hennae into Kastrum Hennae, which became one of the most important Byzantine bases of operation in the military confrontation against the Aghlabid forces. Section 7.2 explores the crisis of the surrounding rural settlement patterns during the early 8th century, and is subsequent upsurge in the late 8th – mid-9th century. Specific focus is given to the analysis of rural settlement patterns in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands, which lays at the interface between the phenomenon of settlement contraction documented in western Sicily during the 8th century, and the opposed trend of a continuous thriving networks of rural villages in the south-eastern areas of the island. Therefore, possible state-promoted initiatives will be suggested as historical explanations for this diverging trend. The period covered in this chapter marked the highest point in the Byzantine-Islamic struggle over the control of central Sicily, which climaxed with the fall of Enna after three decades of unsuccessful attempts initiated in 829, hence the reference in the title to the concept of ‘collision’.

7.1 THE CREATION OF KASTRUM HENNAE

As noted in Chapter 2.2i, during the 8th century Sicily became the stage of numerous naval raids launched from Ifriqiya. In response to this threat, the Byzantine Empire promoted an active policy of militarisation and fortification (see also APPENDIX 1). It was in this context that the religious acropolis of Classical Henna became a kastron, defining the process of militarisation and fortification of Byzantine Enna. However, it was only following the beginning of the Aghlabid conquest in 827 that Central Sicily became the theatre of the military confrontation between
the Islamic and Byzantine forces. The former had established their capital in Palermo already in 831, and had quickly gained control over the westernmost half of the island (see Chapter 8); the Byzantium still held Eastern Sicily and its capital Syracuse. This contrasting situation between an ‘Islamic West’ and a ‘Byzantine East’ has led scholars to postulate the existence of a frontier zone, which ‘variable and permeable in time’, ran vertically through Central Sicily, following roughly the course of the rivers Platani and Salso, having Kastrum Hennae as the main military headquarters.\textsuperscript{580}

Located on a mountain plateau at the centre of the Erei Uplands, at nearly 1000m above the sea level and at the cross road of the ancient and modern inland road networks, the modern town of Enna occupies a site that, first inhabited during the Neolithic, has been uninterruptedly and permanently settled since the Archaic and Classical periods. The central role of \textit{Kastrum Hennae} in the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition is textually well-known through the Arab chronicles of the conquest. Thus, al-Nuwayri placed the seat of the Sicilian \textit{strategos} not at Syracuse but at this city.\textsuperscript{581} Textual sources apart, the lead seal of its \textit{topoteretes} confirms the military prominence of this city, and defines its urban rank within the network of \textit{kastra} of the island (see Chapter 2.2i).\textsuperscript{582}

Although patchy, archaeological research into the medieval urban fabric of this centre helps investigating some of the most remarkable works of defense, which were built between the 8\textsuperscript{th} and mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century and define the transformation of the urban fabric of this city into a \textit{kastron}. In particular, the excavations conducted inside the Castello di Lombardia and in the nearby Vallone Santa Ninfa are the most revealing (FIG.56).\textsuperscript{583}

\textsuperscript{580} Maurici 2013, 288-290; Arcifa 2013a, 168-174; 2013b; Arcifa, Messina 2018.
\textsuperscript{581} Amari 1881, I, 120; Maurici 2013, 288-90; Nef 2013, 40, footnote 6; Prigent 2015, 170-71.
\textsuperscript{582} Prigent 2015.
\textsuperscript{583} Respectively: Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020; Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020.
i.) The Castello di Lombardia

Excavations conducted over the last decades at the Castello di Lombardia have clarified the dating of this stronghold to the 8th century. \(^{584}\) This date accords with the appearance of the office of the *topoteretes*, and is perfectly supported by the record of ceramics unearthed at this complex during the excavations of the 1998-2002, which previously unstudied, have been systematically studied in the framework of this research.

The excavations conducted in 2001-2002 and 2007 inside the Castello di Lombardia (FIG.57a) have brought to light a deep ditch oriented North-South, which is 42m long and 4m width; on the inner side, the ditch is bordered by a quadrilateral structure, which is about 40m in length, and has square towers at its corners, each measuring 4 m per side and with walls 2.20m thick (FIG.57b). \(^{585}\) In the later Middle Ages, this structure was encapsulated within the fabric of the Norman and Staufen castle. Ceramic roof tile of the type with striations and voids were found inside one of the corner towers, laying directly on the floor; this type of roof tiles dates to the 8th century, strengthening the dating of this complex to this period. \(^{586}\)

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\(^{584}\) Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020; Bonanno 2013a.

\(^{585}\) Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020, 200-201, figs.12, 16.

\(^{586}\) For the type: Arcifa 2010b, 108-110.
FIGURE 57: a) plan of the Castello di Lombardia and the excavations conducted therein (courtesy of E. Canzonieri); b) photo of a tower of the Byzantine kastron (courtesy of E. Canzonieri)
It is noteworthy that the masonry employed in this structures does not feature *spolia*; it follows however the *emplekton* technique, with the use of sizable ashlars (ca. 60/80 x 40/50 cm) and stone chips in the outer faces, while the core is made of fieldstones bonded with lime mortar. A similar technique occurs at the Kassar of Castronovo, which is certainly dated to the late 7th – mid-8th century (see APPENDIX 1), the only significant difference being the lack at Enna of ceramic roof tiles used as building material. This complex could likely be interpreted as the actual *kastron* of the site, whose size and plan layout, it has been noted, recall another and better-known example of 8th-century quadrilateral fort with angular towers from Sicily, the one from Selinunte.

Moving on to the ceramic evidence, it should be noted that, unfortunately, the bulk of the examples illustrated below come from unstratigraphied contexts, which were found during works of structural maintenance conducted in 1998-99 (director R. Giunta). Although lacking stratigraphic insights, the findings unearthed during these excavations were gathered in crates maintaining their original context of recovery. Following a careful analysis of this ceramic material, it has been possible to identify a number of contexts presenting chronologically coherent assemblages of pottery (more will follow in Chapters 8 and 9), to which other finds can be added, whose chronology provides comparative evidence drawn with other sites of the island. Therefore, despite the lack of stratigraphic insights, the evidence of the ceramics discussed in this section is unquestionable, and an evaluation of their numbers and categories enables us to both underscore the economic relevance of this site within the urban network of the island, as well as linking some of these ceramics to the presence of troops and officials headquartered in this stronghold.

The first evidence to be discussed are two examples of Byzantine glaze wares of the 8th-9th century, namely a chafing-dish and a sherd of petal ware (FIG.58.1-2). As seen in Chapter 2.2ii, chafing-dishes represent a material statement of privileged social networks of consumers, whether military, civil, or ecclesiastical.

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587 Vassallo et al. 2015, and personal observation.
588 Bonanno, Guzzardi, Canzonieri 2020, 201, fig.17.
589 Arthur 2007; Vroom 2012a; 2012b. See Marchese 2003 for an ecclesiastical context from the island.
Up to 2016, the sites known archaeologically on Sicily with evidence of chafing-dishes were Syracuse and its hinterland, Catania, Taormina, Contrada Edera, and Patti; a further example unglazed and produced locally at Philosophiana should be included, as well as a lid with petal
decoration from Rocchicella.\textsuperscript{590} The example from Enna is not only one of the most inland to be known thus far, but also one of the best preserved, whose profile can be almost entirely reconstructed.

The presence of privileged social groups at this site is further supported by the sherd of petal-ware belonging to a closed shape of tableware, whose macroscopic analysis of the fabric indicates that could be an import from Rome. In Sicily, sherds of this type are known from the main urban centre of Syracuse, Catania, Taormina and Palermo, as well as from a few semi-urban and rural contexts of Patti, Rocchicella and Velle dello Jato.\textsuperscript{591} Two more sherds of vetrina pesante were documented among the ceramics from the Castello di Lombardia (FIG.58.3): a small handle and a thin body wall, probably belonging to a flagon or pitcher.

In addition to these semi-luxury ceramics, whose circulation was restricted to privileged social groups, the next ceramic evidence is indicative of short and long distance trade, linked to patterns of bulk consumption, and therefore to ampler groups of consumers. Transport containers, among which amphorae with grooved-strap handles, and cooking pots Type Rocchicella, are particularly revealing in this regard.

Produced throughout the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century, the evidence of grooved-strap handles predates that of cooking-ware Type Rocchicella, which made its first appearance in the Sicilian record towards the late 8\textsuperscript{th} century, after which point these two categories are often found together.\textsuperscript{592} This thesis has already considered grooved-strap handles in Chapter 6.1i, when possible specimens from Crete were discussed. Handles of this type could belong to either amphorae or tableware, such as pitchers and jars, presenting in this case smaller dimensions and thinner sections of body-walls. The dating of grooved-strap handles to the 8\textsuperscript{th} century was firstly secured in the 2000s and, since then, the study of new stratigraphic contexts from (especially) Syracuse has extended their

\textsuperscript{590} Cacciaguerra 2009; 2010b; Vaccaro 2013a; Arcifa, Turco 2016; Longo 2016.
\textsuperscript{591} In addition to the previous footnote: Alfano, Sacco 2014; Aleo Nero, Chiovaro 2016. Only three sites were known on Sicily in 1992, when Paroli first drew attention to the Sicilian evidence: Paroli 1992, 39-42.
\textsuperscript{592} For grooved-strap handles: Arcifa 2004; 2010a-c, 2018; Cacciaguerra 2018; Vaccaro, La Torre 2015. For cooking-ware Type Rocchicella: Arcifa 2004; 2008b; 2010d; Randazzo in press a.
circulation well into the mid/late 9th century. Moreover, recent archaeometric analyses have demonstrated the existence of a range of different centres of production across Sicily, in the west (Palermo or Agrigento’s hinterland), centre (Philosophiana), and east (the Etna area, but also many more). Of these numerous workshops, Philosophiana is the only one to have been investigated archaeologically. Within the common features of grooved-strap handles, these products are marked by substantial non-morphological-standardisation of details, both across different workshops and even within the same one. For example, at least four groups of rims were contemporarily produced at Philosophiana using the same clays and kilns. Likewise, the width and depth of the grooves of the examples documented at this workshop display a high variability, which means that these features cannot be used to establish chrono-typologies. Bases are generally domed or slightly round, and do not feature spiked bases as amphorae of the previous periods generally did. As Vaccaro has pointed out, this feature could be interpreted as a consequence of the intensification of intraregional trade conducted inland, on roads rather than ships, possibly using animal-dragged wagons.

Apart from the benefits of having a widespread archaeological marker of the ‘Byzantine Dark Ages’ readily available, the significance of grooved-strap handles lays in their potential to weave patterns of intraregional circulation of these products, and their contents, across the island. The evidence documented from Enna clearly demonstrates this point. A total number of 46 specimens of grooved-strap handles, belonging to a minimum number of 30 amphorae, have been documented among the ceramics unearthed in 1998-2002 at the Castello di Lombardia of Enna (FIG.5.4-6). The macroscopic analysis of the fabrics of these examples reveals the existence of at least eight macro-groups (FIG.59), which means that at least eight different short-distance sources of supply were provisioning Enna with their produces. To these regional containers it is possible to add the evidence of a globular amphora, whose mica-rich fabric suggests an origin from

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593 First appeared in the late 7th century, their diffusion peaked in the 8th century: Arcifa 2010a; Cacciaguerra 2018.
594 Arcifa 2018; Cacciaguerra 2018.
595 Vaccaro, La Torre 2015.
In light of the military role of this *kastron* following the Aghlabid landing, it is tentatively possible to link the evidence of these products to a centrally-promoted effort, aimed at channelling provisions towards one of the most important military nodes of the island. Likewise, it is possible to imagine that the large number (over 50 individuals documented) of cooking-pots Type Rocchicella unearthed at this site during the same excavations are to be seen as part of the *instrumentum domesticum* of these troops.

![FIGURE 59: the eight macro-groups of fabrics of amphorae with grooved-strap handles documented at the Castello di Lombardia (photo by the author)](image)

The recognition of the cooking-pot called Type Rocchicella as dating to the late 8th– early/mid-9th century is relatively recent, in 2008 at the site of Rocchicella, in southeaster Sicily, hence its name. Previously it was believed to be either prehistoric or ‘Islamic’.

The main features of this cooking-ware are: A) a domestic household production (often handmade or slow-wheeled), using calcite-rich fabrics and fired in reducing condition; B) decorative patterns including impressed circles and striations on the outer side, resembling wick-work motives, which are absent in previous local products and are identical throughout the island, regardless of the fact that it was a domestic production.

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597 Close morphological paralells can be established with the n°38 from the Deposit 35 of Saraçhane: Hayes 1992, 117; also Otranto cantiere 2: Leo Imperiale 2018, 52, fig.5,1,5. 598 Arcifa 2004; 2008b; 2010d. Cf. Fiorilla 2009, 337; Bergemann 2013, 69-71. 599 Evidence of Type Rocchicella is absent in western Sicily beyond the axis Palermo-Agrigento. The examples from Palermo and hinterland, which are the westernmost evidence recorded to date, present morphological, decorative, and technological features that are similar but not identical to the standard type spread in central-eastern Sicily, thus could be considered sub-regional equivalents: Alfano 2015; Aleo Nero, Chiovaro 2016.
C), concerning the morphological repertoire, the most attested shape is the casserole with an inward rim, recorded at over 100 sites across the island. According to new discoveries, four more shapes can be added to the morphological repertoire of the Type Rocchicella, which are: pots with an outward rim, lids, one saucepot, and one bowl. Among the ceramics studied from the excavation of the 1998-2002 at the Castello di Lombardia, a total number of 44 specimens of Type Rocchicella have been documented, comprising 32 casseroles with an inward rim, eight pots with an outward rim, and four lids (FIG.58.8-11).

Finally, other ceramic evidence includes 34 examples of roof tiles of the type with striations and void fabric mentioned above (FIG.58.13), and about 10 cooking pots with horizontal flaring rims, calcite-rich fabrics, kiln fired in reducing condition, but with the surfaces oxidised (FIG.58.12). Identical examples have been found in context of the 8th-9th century during the stratigraphic excavations in the nearby Vallone Santa Ninfa (see below), and dated to the 8th century on the basis of parallels with other stratigraphic contexts of the island, especially from Cefalu and Marettimo.

The ceramic evidence discussed thus far has comprised only a selection of the most solid archaeological markers available for the 8th – mid-9th century, which it would have been significantly more, if these ceramics came from stratigraphied contexts. As will be seen in subsection 7.2, these same ceramics represent also the most reliable and frequent evidence when it comes to detect forms of human occupation during field surveys, and therefore to attempt interpretations of rural settlement patterns. First, however, an overview is offered below of the other contexts from Enna which help exploring the forma urbis of this city during the 8th – mid-9th century, first and foremost the works of fortification recently uncovered at Vallone Santa Ninfa.

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600 Randazzo in press a. The saucepot comes from the site of Colmitella, in the hinterland of Agrigento; the bowl from the Villa del Casale site.
ii.) Vallone Santa Ninfa and other urban contexts

Within the available urban contexts excavated, the site at Vallone Santa Ninfa, which is located a few hundred meters to the east below the Byzantine *kastron*, is of utmost interest to investigate the structural transformations that Enna underwent during the 8th-9th century, especially in regard to works of fortification and the appearance of distinctive forms of habitation. Recent excavations, in fact, have brought to light a section of the urban circuit wall and some possible barracks.

Topographically, the site at Santa Ninfa is located on a small hillside plateau located on the upper part of a natural pathway leading from East to the summit of Enna, in correspondence to the castle. As such, this spot represents a weak point in the natural defensive potential of the upper plateau. Like the larger plateau above it, this site was already occupied between the Classical/Hellenistic and Early Byzantine periods, in both cases as a place of worship: during the 6th-7th century AD, in particular, a small chapel was built there, of which only a few structural remains survive.\(^{602}\) During the 8th-9th century, which is at the same period as the first nucleus of the Castello di Lombardia was built, the function of this Christian shrine and of its surroundings were radically changed. Recent excavations, systematic but not extensive, have in fact identified a segment of a 2m-thick circuit-wall enclosing the upper plateau, which has been brought to light for a length of 10m, and whose construction incorporated at its core the outer wall of the previous chapel.\(^{603}\) This wall is built *ad emplekton* but, unlike the structure on the upper plateau, it has circular towers and does feature the use of *spolia*, among which ashlars and columns shafts, likely belonging to pre-existing Classical or Roman structural remains. The use of spolia might indicate a phase of construction for this circuit-wall slightly later than the structures of the Castello di Lombardia, suggesting moreover a less programmatic and hasty intervention, perhaps due to the concrete Aghlabid threat, and therefore dating to the late 8th or even early 9th century.

Two structures, one rectangular and one elliptic, have been found in the inner side of the circuit-wall, laying directly on the bedrock, and partially

\(^{602}\) Giannitrapani, Valbruzzi 2015.
\(^{603}\) Giannitrapani, Valbruzzi 2015; Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020.
dug into it.\textsuperscript{604} The perimeter of these structures was delimited by postholes, although small stone-built walls have also been found in connection to them. The interior was found to be empty, while open-air hearths were rediscovered in their proximity, sometimes in stratigraphic association with cooking-pots Type Rocchicella. Due to their locations in proximity of the circuit-wall, these buildings have been interpreted as barracks for the troops in charge of defending this site. This interpretation is plausible, but examples of analogous structures having domestic function appear at a number of other sites across the island (Rocchicella, Cittadella di Morgantina, Colmitella, etc.), including those seen in Chapter 2.2ii from Contrada Edera.\textsuperscript{605} We do not know if comparable structures were also present on the summit plateau. Elliptic huts were found in the 1970s during excavations inside the Castello di Lombardia, but then dated to the Iron-age.\textsuperscript{606} Because this evidence remains still unpublished, one can only wonder if these huts were in fact barracks or dwellings of the late 8\textsuperscript{th} - early 9\textsuperscript{th} century AD.

In addition to the contexts from the Castello di Lombardia and Vallone Santa Ninfa, ceramics of the late 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century, namely cooking pots Type Rocchicella and grooved-strap handles, have surfaced from other urban excavations at various points across modern-day Enna, most notably at Porta Pisciotto and inside the church of San Calogero.\textsuperscript{607} By mapping these sites (see FIG.56), it is possible to approximate the portion of plateau occupied during these centuries, which might have extended across an area between 25-35ha, depending on whether the site of the Norman cathedral, which was a pagan temple and assumed to be a Byzantine place of worship, is included. Of course, this extension does not mean that the area thus enclosed was intensively occupied, but it is still very remarkable for the standards of contemporary cities, and it is close to that of the contemporary fortified centre of Catania (the Montevergini hill), which extended over ca. 25ha.\textsuperscript{608}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{604} For what follows: Giannitrapani, Valbruzzi 2015; Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020.
\textsuperscript{605} Moreover, due to the evidence of postholes, these structures have been defined as poorly built huts. Once again, the examples from Contrada Edera demonstrate that this assumption might be biased, and only reflecting our present perspective.
\textsuperscript{606} Personal information L. Arcifa.
\textsuperscript{607} Cilia Platamone, Fiorilla 2006, 190; Valbruzzi 2013.
\textsuperscript{608} Arcifa 2016b, 420-27.
\end{flushright}
7.2 THE CRISIS OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE 8TH CENTURY AND THEIR REVIVAL IN THE LATE 8TH – MID-9TH CENTURY

In discussing rural settlement patterns in Sicily, the timeframe spanning the 8th to early/mid-9th century needs to be split into two blocks, each presenting a different situation: one, covering the early to mid/late 8th century, which corresponds to the period of the Isaurian emperors Leo III and Constantine V (d.775); the other, spanning the late 8th to early/mid-9th century, covering therefore the period of the last Isaurian emperors and the Amorian dynasty. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish between the western and eastern halves of the island, as diverging patterns of decline and revival of settlement were recorded contemporaneously. After offering a regional outline of settlement patterns between the 8th and early 9th century (i.), the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands will be put in the context of this dichotomy (ii.). Finally, possible reasons and state-promoted actions will be suggested to explain the chronological and geographical difference between the early – mid/late 8th century and the later period, as well as between the diverging trends of settlement contraction and revival recorded in western and eastern Sicily (iii). In this regards, it will be argued that both the co-called ‘policy of containment’, which appears to be promoted by Leo III and Constantine V, and the later ‘settlement policy’, which was deployed by the late Isaurians and Amorian dynasty, might be partially held responsible for these diverging scenarios.

i.) A regional outline

The processes that contributed to changing settlement patterns in Sicily during the Byzantine thematic period have been extensively treated by Arcifa and Moliari, whose papers, gathering and interpreting the results of various field surveys conducted across the island, constitute the backbone and points of departure for the considerations that follow.609

In particular, it has been convincingly argued that the 8th century marked the watershed in the progressive process of ‘differentiation’ of settlement patterns between western and central-eastern Sicily. Thus, following the destruction of the economic axis Rome-Tunisia, and as a

possible reflection of the Isaurian reforms and ‘policy of containment’ (see below and 7.2iii.), the distinction between the pars occidentalis of the island, intrinsically bound to the Tyrrhenian, and the pars orientalis, traditionally closer to the Eastern Mediterranean and Constantinople, became accentuated.\textsuperscript{610} The major coastal sites in western Sicily and their immediate surroundings maintained a level of economic and demographic vibrancy, but inland cities and rural settlements declined inexorably, generating a process of demographic contraction that Arcifa (2013a) has labelled ‘settlement desertification’. This consideration is especially based on field surveys and excavations conducted to the west of the Mounts Sicani, in the territories of Entella, Segesta, Trapani, Salemi, and Valle dello Jato.\textsuperscript{611}

In south-eastern Sicily, on the contrary, the networks of cities, rural settlements, and dioceses seem to be strengthened following the establishment of the Sicilian theme and throughout the late 8\textsuperscript{th}-early/mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{612} The dioceses of Syracuse, Catania, Lentini, and Taormina were the main pillars of eastern Sicily and core of its graecitas.\textsuperscript{613} Throughout the 8\textsuperscript{th} – early/mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century, these urban centres and their territories yield evidence of close economic and cultural ties to core regions of the Byzantine Empire and solid networks of peasant communities.\textsuperscript{614} New strongholds with urban connotations were moreover established, namely Ragusa and Butera, each one with dense networks of satellite rural settlements.\textsuperscript{615} For example, recent field surveys have documented a myriad of small sites (as many as 66) dating to the late 8\textsuperscript{th} – early/mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century in lowlands and hilly terrains surrounding Butera and across the Gela Plain, testifying to the new intensive occupation in this pocket of land.\textsuperscript{616} As will be seen next, the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands fits perfectly within this trend.

\textsuperscript{610} Nef, Prigent 2006.
\textsuperscript{611} See: Corretti, Faccella, Mangiaracina 2014; Molinari 2014; Rotolo, Civantos 2014; Lesness, Younker 2019; Alfano, Sacco 2014.
\textsuperscript{612} Prigent 2014b. The increase in the number of rural settlements in central and eastern Sicily during the late 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century is especially visible through the appearance of the cooking-pots Type Rocchicella: Randazzo in press a.
\textsuperscript{613} Arcifa 2010a; 2016b
\textsuperscript{614} For example: Malfitana, Cacciaguerra 2016, 51; 2018.
\textsuperscript{615} Ragusa: Di Stefano, Fiorilla 2006; Distefano 2013; Fiorilla, Rizzare, Sammito 2020; Butera: Fiorilla 2020.
\textsuperscript{616} Bergemann 2013; 2014; Baas, Bergemann 2010.
ii.) The study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands

As noted in the methodological section (Chapter 3.1.ii), thanks to the detailed available knowledge of the ceramics produced in Philosophiana throughout the 8th – mid-9th century, this study-area allows us to distinguish between two chronological phases, something that, with some exceptions, it is not possible to do for other areas of Sicily (FIG.60). One phase, dating to the early to mid-/late 8th century, is
characterised by the ceramics produced in Philosophiana, which are sometimes found in association with later productions of ARSW and LRA; the other, extending and covering the late 8th – mid-9th century, when Philosophiana’s ceramics came to be integrated with other products circulating on a sub-regional scale, most notably the cooking ware Type Rocchicella. From the perspective of rural settlement patterns, the former period appears marked by a sharp contraction of settlements, recalling the trend occurring in western Sicily; in the latter period, instead, a sensational revival of rural settlement patterns is recorded. This case-study, in other words, can open a valuable window on the evolution of settlement patterns in an area located at the interface between the phenomenon of settlement contraction documented in western Sicily, and the continuous thriving networks of rural villages known in the south-eastern areas of the island, with specific focus on the types of settlements involved and their possible hierarchies.

The crisis of settlement in the 8th century

Although the 7th century was excluded from the chronological scope of the thesis, both available secondary literature and field surveys conducted during this doctoral research allow for identifying the existence of at least 14 rural sites within the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands, which yield clear ceramic evidence dating to the 7th century.617 Yet, it should be noted that this number does not include other sites in which ceramics of the 6th century where recorded, which could also date to the 7th century, such as LRA 1, LRA 2, ARSW 104, and roof tiles with striations covering their outer surface. This number, therefore, represents a representative but non-exhaustive figure of sites dating to the 7th century that actually existed within this study-area.618 Notwithstanding this caveat, this datum is satisfactory in order to underscore the sharp decline in the number of rural settlement between the 7th and 8th century, which decreased from 14 units known in the 7th century, to only three secure sites: Philosophiana, Leano I and

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617 These are: Marcato, Gerace, Polino, Cittadella di Morgantina, Villa del Casale, Monte Navone, Philosophiana, Gallinica, Scarante, Baucio, Leano II, Priorato di Sant’Andrea, Torre di Pietro e Malocristiano: many of these sites are mentioned in Alfano 2015 and Alfano et al. 2019.
618 For example Montagna di Marzo and Balatella, which have clear evidence of the 6th century, but none of the 7th.
Leano II. In addition to these sites, a few other units could have potentially been inhabited throughout the 8th century, such as the sizable settlements of Gallinica, Cittadella di Morgantina, Monte Navone, and Marcato, which do yield ceramic evidence dating to the 7th and late 8th–early/mid-9th century, but for the time being lack clear markers dating to the early/mid-8th century.\footnote{This number could be partially biased by the method of investigation: indeed, with the exception of Philosophiana, Case Bastione, and Casale, this dataset emerges from surface finds and not from stratigraphic excavations, which always require to be considered as preliminary results: see Coletti 2011; Randall 2013; Attema, Bintliff et al. 2020.}

On the contrary, such ceramic evidence of the early/mid-8th century have been documented in the two sites of Leano I and Leano II, which are located less than 1km apart along the valley of the rivers Leano and Rasalgone.\footnote{Leano I already known in Alfano 2015 (UT34); Leano II was previously unknown.}

Leano I is a lowland site with an area of ceramic scatters covering nearly 4ha, with evidence spanning the Classical to Norman periods, albeit with significant intervening gaps. The occupation of the 8th century, which seems concentrated in an area smaller than 1ha, is demonstrated by the presence of grooved-strap handles and other ceramics produced in Philosophiana, including basins with flaring rims (FIG.61.1). Yet, ceramics of the late 8th–early/mid-9th century are absent, narrowing down the period of occupation of this site within the late 8th century. A similar circumstance occurs at the site of Leano II.

Leano II is located on a hilly plateau overlooking the lower valley of the rivers Leano and Rasalgone. The overall area of ceramic scatters extends over 3ha, which includes evidence of the 5th-6th century.\footnote{As testified by sporadic evidence such as Pantellerian ware, ARSW H61, H67, H104a, African amphorae K8B, K57, and Eastern amphorae LRA 1 and 2. A more in-depth study of this study is in preparation in the context of the PhD of M. Riso: “Rural Christianity in Late Antique and Byzantine Sicily, 5th-9th centuries: an archaeological and textual analysis”, University of Leicester.} The phase of occupation dating to the late 7th–mid-8th century appears nucleated in an area of about 1ha, in which, however, a high density of ceramic evidence was recorded (ca. 5-10 sherds per square meter). Among the most diagnostic ceramics documented there are: ARSW 99c, 105b and 108 (FIG.61.2); basins compatible with products from Philosophiana (FIG.61.3); grooved-strap handles (FIG.61.4); and other coarse and plain wares, likely produced regionally (some have volcanic inclusions)
(FIG.61.5-7). Ceramics of the late 8th-9th century, namely cooking pots Type Rocchicella, are missing. The interesting fact that both sites of Leano I and II appear abandoned by the late 8th century might be explained by the concomitant growth during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century of two nearby sites, called Azzolina and Gallinica, which will be discussed in a moment.

FIGURE 61: ceramics of the late 7th - mid-8th century from the sites of Leano I-II (drawing by the author)
The wealthy agro-town of Philosophian deserves specific attention, as it is exceptional in its kind, showing the evidence of economic growth and settlement expansion during the 8th-9th century, when it reached an extension of 11ha. In particular, a large ceramic workshop (1ha), was established ex-novo in a peripheral area of the site, which until then had remained uninhabited, but that was closer to sources of water and clay. A great quantity of transport containers was manufactured in this workshop, in as many as four different typologies and sizes, hinting at a production aimed at broader markets and not only limited to the local demand. Paleobotanic analyses have revealed that in Philosophiana a peak of grain, vines, and olives can be recorded in layers dating to the 8th-9th century. Significantly, chemical analyses of the organic remains of some amphorae point to markers of both wine and olive oil, offering a case-study in which agricultural and ceramic productions went in parallel. As Vaccaro, who has directed the excavations of this workshop, has underlined, the creation ex-novo of this workspace is somewhat unexpected at this period, when pre-existing structures were generally re-occupied and re-functionalised. As such, he argues, in the case of Philosophiana it is possible to see the ‘clear economic potential of a vibrant local community’, who had the means to plan, build, and run this workshop from the sourcing of clays to packing the produce. This definition, however, leaves some degree of uncertainty in regard to the specific identity of the members of this ‘vibrant local community’. Who were they? Private initiative of local landowners? Public State enterprise? As argued below, evidence would suggest that the local Church played a central role in promoting and supporting these business activities.

According to intensive field surveys conducted at this site, in the 8th-9th century the settlement clustered around the three-ailed village basilica, which until then had occupied its outskirts. This process of nucleation seems to demonstrate that this monument acquired a new importance as a physical hub and religious point of aggregation within the rural landscape and the local networks of peasant communities. However, it does not inform us about the economic potential of this religious institution. In this regard, more revealing information can be gained from the structural analysis of the basilica. In contrast to the domestic

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622 For what follows: Vaccaro 2012; 2013a; 2013b; Vaccaro, La Torre 2015.
623 Vaccaro, La Torre 2015, 86.
624 Vaccaro 2012; 2013b.
and religious architecture of this period, which on Sicily witnessed an overall structural simplification (Chapter 2.2ii), throughout the 8th-9th century works of construction were undertaken on the basilica of Philosophiana; not only consolidation, but also, and unique evidence of its kind, the whole plan was expanded, with the addition of a narthex. Archaeological research at this site has not produced, to date, any evidence of imperial agents and civil or military officers, for instance in the form of lead seals and belt-buckles; by contrast, it is worth remembering that Philosophiana was at the centre of a former pontifical estate. All these circumstances point towards the same direction: the economic prominence and financial availability of the local Church. This appears to be the only institution in the settlement able to count on a fiscal reserve to address towards the promotion and management of both agricultural production and trading activities, some of which possibly stretching to Tyrrhenian and Aegean markets, as demonstrated by the evidence of both Tyrrhenian and Aegean globular amphorae found at this site.

The central role of local ecclesiastical institution in the success of the town of Philosophiana might find a historical support in the reforms promoted around the mid-8th century by Leo III and Constantine V. Until the early 8th century, Sicily held a distinctive position in the balance of power between the Papacy and the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople was in control of fiscal and financial matters, but Rome held religious jurisdiction and economic primacy over the agrarian landscape of the island. The 730s marked a turning point in this situation. Besides clashing with the Roman Church over the cult of icons, Leo III launched a series of confiscations and reforms, which were later completed by his son, Constantine V, by the mid-750s. Formerly subordinate to the Roman Church, the bishoprics of Sicily, along with Illyricum and Crete, were transferred, with the ownership of their estates under the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate, and consequently in

625 Carra 2002.
626 Prigent 2017, 207-08.
627 This, however, does not rule out ipso facto that, in other cases or even in this one, private and public institutions were not also involved in these business activities. By contrast, in the case-study discussed in Chapter 7.1, it has been argued that the Byzantine state played a parallel and fundamental role in the distribution of agricultural produces, travelling onto local amphorae, especially to supply the army.
628 Ruggini 1980; 1995, estimates that the Roman Church owned one-third of Sicily when Gregory the Great was pope.
629 Prigent 2004; 2014b.
Leo’s hands, who ensured the Patriarch acknowledge his imperial authority.\footnote{Auzepy 2008, 285.} Far from being a religious operation, this deprivation of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Roman Church had a precise economic intent. Leo ordered that the land revenues, which had previously been collected and sent to the papal treasury, were to be paid directly to the imperial tax authorities, sanctioning the detachment of the island from Rome. In order to enforce these landholding and administrative reforms, Leo and Constantine promoted a new census upon the newly seized lands; to achieve this task, local bishops and clergymen were put in charge alongside the imperial genikon.\footnote{‘Major fiscal department that dealt with assessment of land and other taxes, maintaining the lists of taxpayers, and collecting payments’ (ODB). Cf. McCormick 2008, 400-401; Hendy 1985, 77-91. In doing so, bishops became owners of extensive property in the form of churches, estates, and monastic lands, acquiring a new institutional role.} This manoeuvre reveals a crucial point in their policy: the empowering of local ecclesiastical hierarchies as imperial agents through which dealing with local matters related to landholding.\footnote{Prigent 2008, 17-19. Also: Louth 2008, 246; Sijpesteijn 2020, 388-89, the latter shedding light on the vital institutional role maintained by bishops in Egypt as late as the 10th century.} The case of Philosophiana seems to bear testament to this empowering of the local church.

In light of what discussed thus far, it seems possible to argue that the 8\textsuperscript{th} century marked a period of drastic reduction of sites compared with the number attested in the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} century; this decline of the settlement patterns accords with the process of demographic and settlement contraction described above (7.2i) for other areas in central and western Sicily. Although this consideration could be partially biased by the modes of data collection reliant on field surveys, the contraction of the settlement patterns in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century appears as a matter of fact also at sites that have been object of modern and intensive archaeological research, such as the Villa del Casale site. A 10-year-long project of excavations has just been concluded at this site, according to which it is possible to conclude that up the late 7\textsuperscript{th} century this settlement was still dominant in its local network of sites, but by the mid-8\textsuperscript{th} century it was deserted, to be later repopulated during the late 8\textsuperscript{th} – mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{See papers in: Pensabene, Barresi 2019, especially: Randazzo 2019a; Alfano 2019.} This abandonment could be read in relationship to the parallel growth of the centre of Philosophiana, which is only 6km away, and which, it has just been seen, represented a contemporary...
hub of agricultural and trading activities. As anticipated, the possible causes of this settlement contraction will be further discussed in subsection iii. First, however, the revival of the rural settlement patterns during the late 8th – mid-9th century is analysed.

The settlement revival in the late 8th – early/mid-9th century

The study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands is revealing with regard to the trend of settlement revival recorded in central-eastern Sicily during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century. From three rural sites known in the 8th century, 19 are known within this study-area with evidence of the late 8th- early/mid-9th century.634 These are (FIG.60): Case Bastione, Marcato, Gerace, Cittadella di Morgantina, Gallinica, Balatella, Villa del Casale, Monte Navone, Pendici Navone, Polino, Azzolina, Rametta, Rambaldo, Monte Mangone, Montagna di Marzo, Serre Caniglia, San Nicola, Philosophiana, and Rossomanno (the latter uncertain, see below).635

Numbers apart, is it possible to argue further from the patterns of diachronic and synchronic occupation of these sites, and their spatial distribution? As a starting point for discussion, the 19 rural sites of the late 8th – mid-9th century mentioned above, plus Enna, have been categorised, using symbols, on a new distribution map (FIG.62). On the one hand, these symbols reflect key topographic features of the sites, namely whether located on lowlands, hillsides, or hilltops, which in turn might be revealing of their agricultural role or defensive potential.636 On the other hand, both the quantity and extent of archaeological evidence documented at these sites, when available, have been considered to indicate their size and typology, classifying them, of course in broad terms, into agrotown (more than 10ha), village (between 3 and 7ha), hamlet (1-2ha), farmsteads or beacons/viewpoints, depending on the location (less than 1ha). The first-hand knowledge of these sites has

634 The 13 ‘farmsteads’ recorded by Vaccaro in the immediate surroundings of Philosophiana (max 1km radius) have not been counted as individual sites but incorporated into a unique settlement with Philosophiana: Vaccaro 2013a.
635 For bibliographical details see Chapter 3.2ii, Figs.18a-d.
636 For the concept of ‘defensive potential’, classifiable between null, low, midum, and high: Schiappelli 2008, 42-44.
certainly helped to achieve this characterisation as accurately as possible.

![Map of sites in the Southern Erei Uplands](image)

**FIGURE 62**: ‘characterised’ distribution map of sites of the late 8th-9th century known archaeologically within the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands (map by the author)

*City and agrotown*

Within the study-area, Enna is the only site that can be classified as an urban centre (see 7.1), while the majority of the remaining sites (18 out of 19) may be identified as rural settlements with an evident agricultural role, sometimes remarked by structural evidence such as *siloi* (found at Philosophiana and Marcato).\(^{637}\) Philosophiana is the only instance of

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\(^{637}\) Alfano, D’Amico 2017.
agrotown (i.e. an exceptionally big rural village), measuring more than 10ha, and with ceramic workshops and a basilica. Ranging between 0.5 and 7 ha, and according to the variable volumes of on-site archaeological evidence, spanning from a handful to hundreds of ceramic individuals, the remaining sites can be classified as follows.

Unfortified rural villages and hamlets

Six units, Gallinica, Villa del Casale, Balatella, Gerace, Marcato, and Case Bastione, are placed on hillside and lowland sites, lacking any defensive potential, but in most favourable locations for conducting intensive agricultural activities; according to their surface scatters, these can be classified as either unfortified rural villages or hamlets. Similar to Philosophiana, but on a smaller scale, these sites should be imagined as representing the beating heart of the local system of agricultural production and food supply, especially in relation to the provisioning of the military forces allocated to Enna between the mid-8th and 9th century (see following case-study).

Located just about 6km to the northeast from Enna, the rural settlement at Case Bastione stands out in the network of settlements surrounding Enna. Not only is this the closest site known in the catchment area of Enna, which can be reached within two hours walking distance, but it also reveals its diachronic trend of occupation thanks to the conduction of stratigraphic excavations.638

With the exception of a sporadic occupation in the 6th century, the settlement of the late 8th-9th century was established directly above a prehistoric village, after a hiatus of millennia. Thus, it seems plausible to argue that the foundation ex-novo of this settlement in the wheat-belt of Enna bears testament to the empowering of the system of agricultural supply related to this city, which had become the military headquarter of the army of the Theme of Sicily and the seat of a topoteretes. The ceramics from this site (FIG.63) offer a record that is broadly analogous to the one from Enna, which including both regional and interregional amphorae, demonstrates the participation of Case Bastione in micro-regional networks of food production and

638 Vabruzzi in press. Personal observation.
(re)distribution. Moreover, further evidence can be added thanks to the support of stratigraphic association.

FIGURE 63: ceramics of the late 8th – early/mid-9th century from Case Bastione
(drawings and photos by the author)
In addition to Type Rocchicella (FIG.63.1-4), grooved-strap handles (FIG.63.6), an example of Aegean globular amphora (FIG.63.7), and body sherds of two amphorae with curly coil painted decorations (FIG.63.8, see Chapter 8 for this type), the following evidence can be included. Two cooking-pots, which have fabrics and surface treatment similar to the Type Rocchicella, but an unparalleled shape (FIG.63.5); two closed tablewares, one of which has a wide opening at the mouth and whitened surface (FIG.63.9), the other being classifiable with the *Brocca tipo 5* from the Philosophiana workshop (FIG.63.10); and two tableware for individual consumption of food (FIG.63.11). Table wares of this kind are extremely rare in Sicilian contexts of this period, so that Cacciaguerra wonders if ceramic tableware was in fact replaced by wood: they are absent from Philosophiana’s productions, and only a couple of specimens of carinated bowls are known from Rocchicella and Catania. The two examples of tableware identified at Case Bastione have a different, non-carinated shape; they display a good-quality production, are wheel-made, with fine fabrics, white slip coating both inside and outside, and kiln-fired with constant temperature. The macroscopic analysis of their fabrics did not reveal distinctive features of either the two centres of production that are currently known archaeologically: Philosophiana and the Etna hinterland. Of course, imports cannot be excluded *a priori*, but this evidence would more probably suggest the parallel existence of other regional workshops manufacturing good quality tableware for individual use.

Because only test-pits and not extensive excavations have been conducted at Case Bastione, neither the extension nor the patterns of intra-site occupation can be established. By contrast, the systematic and extensive method of field survey employed at Balatella has allowed us to gain a glance into a particular model of intra-site occupation. Although the total area of scatters of the late 8th – early/mid-9th century (i.e. Type Rocchicella and grooved-strap handles) extends over 5ha across the hillside, ceramics are centered within three main clusters spanning 0.5 to 2ha each, with substantial empty gaps in between. In other words, from this case-study it emerges a multi-nucleated pattern.

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639 Cacciaguerra 2020, 80.
640 Cf. Longo 2016, 36, Tab.VI, no.6.
641 Riso in press; the site appears occupied between the 3rd and 9th century, with a peak in the 5th-6th century.
of settlement occupation, which could be applied to other case-studies within this study area (see below). In parallel, however, a proper nucleated model of occupation is known from other surrounding and contemporary sites, namely Villa del Casale, Gallinica and Azzolina.

Regarding Gallinica, only preliminary considerations are available for the time being. During a first campaign of field surveys, it has been possible to observe an apparent process of nucleation of the site which, extending over nearly 6ha during the 5th-7th century, seems to contract to ca. 3ha during the late 8th-9th century. The Villa del Casale site, instead, offers evidence from excavations.

Extensive excavations conducted over the last 10 years at the Casale site have targeted a liminal area to the south of the Roman Villa, uncovering the remains of a Fatimid and Norman period village (see Chapter 9)\textsuperscript{642} With the exception of a few sporadic finds of the 6th-9th century, the excavations showed a hiatus of occupation of this area during this period, especially during the 8th century, when ceramic evidence is completely absent, signifying probably the abandonment of the site.\textsuperscript{643} By contrast, a significant number of ceramics of the late 8th – early/mid-9th century were documented in the findings coming from the non-stratigraphic excavations which in the 1950s targeted the central core of the villa.\textsuperscript{644} Because analogous ceramics are absent from outside the core of the villa, it can be argued that the whole settlement had clustered there during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century. If the same pattern reoccurs at Gerace, another Late Roman villa in this study-area, which was reoccupied during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century, it cannot be established yet, but the future publication of the on-going excavations may clarify this matter.\textsuperscript{645}

Relatively little is known about the site of Marcato, which however seems to be one of the most relevant settlements with regard to the transitional period between the late 9th and early 10th century, and will be discussed in the next Chapter 8 accordingly.

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\textsuperscript{642} Most recently: Pensabene, Barresi 2019.
\textsuperscript{643} Ceramics of the 8th century are absent, most notably those produced at the nearby site of Philosophiana: Randazzo 2019a; Alfano 2019.
\textsuperscript{644} Randazzo 2019a
\textsuperscript{645} Wilson 2015.
Unfortified farmsteads

The two sites at Polino and Pendici Monte Navone share the same unfortified position as the examples seen above but, having a low density of ceramic scatters (less than 15 MNI) and small area of scatters, which is less than 1ha, should be classified as farmsteads (or scattered units), occupying the bottom of the hierarchy of agricultural settlements discussed here.\textsuperscript{646} Still, it should be noted that both sites are located in the immediate proximity to high mountains (Monte Polino and Monte Navone), which could have offered a natural defensive spot in case of need. These two sites, therefore, lay in an intermediate position between the completely unfortified settlements seen above and the sites combining an agricultural role with a naturally defensive location, which will be discussed next. Polino, moreover, offers a very interesting case-study of a small rural settlement of the Fatimit period, and will be discussed in further details in Chapter 9.

Villages, hamlets, and farmsteads combining agricultural role with a good defensive potential

Eight sites, Azzolina, Montagna di Marzo, Cittadella di Morgantina, Monte Navone, Cozzo Rametta, Serre Caniglia, Rambaldo, and Monte Mangone, combine the agricultural role with a good defensive potential, this latter deriving from their locations on naturally fortified hilltops and uplands, overlooking either nearby lowland villages and hamlets, or agricultural resources, or both. The extension of these sites ranges between 0.5 and 5ha.

Intensive and systematic field survey conducted at the site of Azzolina revealed a settlement with a high density of ceramic scatters of the late 8\textsuperscript{th} – early/mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century extending over 3ha; this area appears already occupied sporadically between the Classical and early Byzantine periods.\textsuperscript{647} The occupation during the late 8\textsuperscript{th} – early/mid-9\textsuperscript{th} century at Montagna di Marzo and Monte Navone seems to cover the whole of the respective hilltop plateaus, which range between 3 and 5ha.\textsuperscript{648} Either

\textsuperscript{647} Alfano 2015; Alfano et al. 2019; personal observation.
\textsuperscript{648} Personal observation.
cases, however, the evidence available would suggest a multi-nucleated pattern of occupation, similar to the one seen from Balatella.

The sites of Cozzo Rametta, Cittadella di Morgantina, and Serre Caniglia are the most remarkable example of settlements combining naturally defensive potential, given by their topographical locations, and suitability for farming activities, the latter demonstrated by extensive works of terracing (late medieval? Early modern?). Cozzo Rametta is located on a hilltop at 837 m above the sea level, in a very prominent position overlooking the surrounding landscape and the sites of Montagna di Marzo, Balatella and Polino (as far as Enna and Catanissetta); the ceramic scatter extends over about 0.5ha, limitedly to the hilltop. Cittadella di Morgantina is located on a dominant hilltop position controlling the River Dittaino and the Catania Plain; its extension could not be determined. Finally, Serre Caniglia overlooks the lowland villages and hamlets along the River Leano Valley, especially Gallinica, and the River Margherito Valley; the ceramic scatter extends over more than 2ha on the hilly plateau, describing what it seems to emerge as a small village or hamlet.

The sites of Rambaldo and Monte Magone can be placed within this category but, presenting only sporadic ceramic scatters, which do not reach 0.5ha of extension, should be classified as scattered units. Mangone is almost certainly a satellite unit of the nearby settlement of the Villa del Casale, while the hilltop site of Rambaldo (730 m. a.s.l.) might be classified as a beacon type site, of the time discussed next, although it does offer a suitable location for farming activities.

The site at Rossomanno poses a number of interpretative challenges, and its very existence at this period is dubious.

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649 All personal observations, except Cittadella di Morgantina: Arcifa 2013b.
651 A few examples of Type Rocchicella are exhibited at the antiquarium of Valguarnera and said to come from this site; however, none of the numerous field surveys conducted at Rossomanno by this author has ever been able to document such evidence on site, nor any ceramic evidence dating to the early medieval period at all.
**Beacon/viewpoint**

The last site considered here, Monte San Nicola, is an unicum. Similar to the sites discussed above, San Nicola is located on a hilltop (740 m), which is a natural landmark, overlooking the surrounding landscape and sites along the River Leano Valley, as well as further away settlements. From this site, there starts an exceptional chain of inter-visibility with the settlements of Serre Caniglia, Monte Mangone, Monte Navone, Polino, Montagna di Marzo, Rambaldo, Rametta and, from there, to Enna. However, unlike the previous units, the topographical location of this site is not suitable for farming activities, being a rocky hilltop, and the material evidence documented here is extremely scattered, being limited to a single sherd of Type Rocchicella and some dubious structural remains.

Accordingly, it seems possible to classify this site as exclusively a beacon or viewpoint, whose evidence can be fully grasped in the light of the contemporary state of warfare affecting Central Sicily. It should not be forgotten that the late 8th – early/mid-9th century recorded the climax in the Byzantine-Islamic military confrontation within this study-area. Therefore, besides the evidence of continuous occupation of unfortified lowland settlements (Gallinica, Villa del Casale, Balatella, etc.), it possible to witness the parallel existence of other sites combining agricultural role with natural defensive position (Azzolina, Rametta, Serre Caniglia, Montagna di Marzo, etc.); as well as the existence of beacons and strategic viewpoints, which are necessary in a logic of military confrontation. Within this same logic, proximity and control of inland axes of road-networks seem to be a further key feature that influenced the position and survival of settlements in this landscape, especially along the principal roads of the Roman period. In particular, this appears the case with regard to the road axes linking Syracuse and Enna, the latter having become the new military headquarters of the Theme of Sicily. This point is further discussed in APPENDIX 2.

In the following subsection, it will be questioned if, and to which extent, selective imperial policies promoted by the Isaurian and Amorian emperors enhanced the urban and rural settlements in the core

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652 Personal observation.
653 Nef, Prigent 2013.
territories of central and eastern Sicily, and might have played a central role in defining this new shape of the Sicilian settlement patterns and its division between East and West.

iii.) From cutting the losses (‘policy of containment’) to empowering settlement patterns (‘settlement policy’)?

As outlined in section 7.2i, during the 8th century the rural settlement patterns on Sicily underwent a process of ‘differentiation’ between the western and central-eastern halves of the island. In the West, rural settlements declined inexorably, generating a process of demographic contraction. In south-eastern Sicily, the networks rural settlements seems to have maintained a degree of stability and prosperity throughout the 8th century. In what follows the question is asked if, and to which extent, imperial policies can be held responsible for this division between settlement patterns in the East and West of the island, and to the later revival of rural settlements recorded in the central and eastern half of the island during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century.

It should be remembered that in the 8th century the Byzantine Empire went through one of the most problematic periods in its history. A series of factors support this statement. Among these there are: the military expansion of the Umayyads in the Levant and across Egypt and the North Africa; a new outbreak of the Justinian plague in 720-30; the outbreak of a civil war for imperial succession, lasted for nearly 20 years and ended with the accession of Leo III in 717; the Arab siege of Constantinople; the threat of the Bulgarian Kingdom on the Balkans, and the Longobard wars along the Italian peninsula.655

In order to cope with this problematic period, and according to the needs and possibilities of their time, it is argued here that the Isaurian emperors Leo III and Constantine V tried to ‘cut the losses’ by saving what could be saved, in a selective strategy that here is named ‘policy of containment’. This argument follows that the extensive and wealthy territories stretching over the main urban centres of south-eastern Sicily, Syracuse, Catania, and Ragusa, were for the Isaurians a sufficient enough resource of exploitation to supply the local population and the army, and to send surplus to Constantinople. Stretching over one/third

of the most fertile soils on the island, this is a sizeable area, equivalent to the whole of Crete, which needed to be defended and reorganised in accordance to the reformed framework of landholding and systems of tax-collection promoted on Sicily by these emperors (see the Isaurian reforms discussed in Chapter 7.2ii). Thus, on the one hand, the State introduced the office of topoteretai in the cities (see 2.2i). On the other hand, there was an enhanced pattern of associated settlements and a network of rural churches. Together these became local instruments to assist the dioceses and the State with the administration of rural estates. In this regard, it is worth noting that 40 out of about 50 rural churches known to secondary literature in Byzantine Sicily lie in south-eastern Sicily, most of which within the diocese of Syracuse. A handful of these rural shrines were abandoned in the shift from the 7th to the 8th century, others lack specific archaeological research, but quite a few (between 15 and 20 structures) yield clear evidence of occupation during the 8th-9th century. In one case, archaeological excavation at the church of Gramnena, in the hinterland of Catania, has even proved that it was built in 8th century.

As shown by the study-area of the Erei Uplands, this area of Central Sicily appears to be the western margin of this policy of containment (or resistance), being in a limbo between the crisis of rural settlements recorded in Western Sicily, and the success of both Philosophia and its church, and of Kastrum Hennae. At this stage, therefore, it would seem that the western territories beyond the Mounts Sicani and the axis Palermo-Agrigento, although equally rich and fertile, were deemed too distant and difficult to be controlled from Constantinople, which could explain why the first settlements of the Islamic period (after the 820s) can be found only there (see Chapter 8.2i). A recent hypothesis formulated with regard to the unsuccessful attempt at establishing an urban centre within the fortification of the Kassar in the period following its construction between the late 7th and early 8th century hints also at this direction.

Also the evidence collected from Crete would suggest the adoption of a similar selective strategy, as the contemporary phenomenon of settlement decline seems more evident in peripheral areas of the island,

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656 Riso in press.
657 Bonacini, Turco, Arcifa 2012.
rather than in its central agricultural heartlands (see Chapter 4.2). Notably, both Sicily and Crete were at the centre of the shared Isaurian economic and landholding reforms of the 730-750 discussed above (7.2ii); thus, it is hard to believe that this was a mere coincidence, but it would rather seem that Leo III and Constantine V tried to make the most of the Sicilian and Cretan resources.

In contrast to the sharp decline of settlements recorded during the 8th century, in the study-area of the Erei Uplands it has been shown that the late 8th – mid-9th century witnesses a new upsurge of settlement patterns; the same has been demonstrated for the adjacent western territories of Butera and Agrigento.659 This upsurge of settlements is clearly shown by the significant distribution of ceramic evidence, first and foremost the Type Rocchicella. At the same time, the lead seals of Theokistos Strategos of Macedonia, found at Serre di Villalba and dating to the first half of the 9th century, would indicate not only the strengthening the Byzantine line of defense on the island, but also its expansion westwards, between Enna and Agrigento.660

The exponential increase in the number of settlements in central and eastern Sicily should indicate, by definition, the parallel demographic revival of these areas of the island. This, in turn, calls for historical explanation to be adduced in support. During this period, the Byzantine Empire had reached a renewed phase of stability under the late Isaurian and Amorian dynasties. Could, therefore, state-sponsored initiatives, known to have been promoted on Sicily historically, be recalled once again to explain this new trend?

The ‘settlement policy’, which is known to have been promoted during the late 8th – early 9th century by the Isaurian and Amorian dynasties in core territories of the Empire, including on Sicily, could provide a satisfactory answer to the contemporary ‘demographic revolution’ recorded on the island.661 On the eve of the Aghlabid conquest of Sicily, and throughout its early stages, this policy had a trifold aim: reinforcing the land-forces of the island, and thus its overall military defence; restoring the demography of the region, which had been severely affected by the recent outbreak of the Justinian plague; and revitalising

659 Respectively: Bergemann 2013; Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014.
660 Prigent 2015, 172.
the agricultural outputs, especially in the wake of the catastrophic loss of Egypt, North Africa, and Syria-Palestine.

In this triple effort, the figure of the soldiers-homesteaders, either local or detached from other themes, had a crucial role, receiving inalienable lands as payment for their military service. And in fact, it is critical to note how both Islamic chronicles of the conquest and Byzantine sources, such as Theophanes the Confessor, accord in reporting the detachment of troops to Sicily from the Balkans, the Armeniakon theme, and other themata of the Empire in 782, 793, and throughout the first half of the 9th century, as late as 859-860.662

Certainly, these detachments, alone, are unable to explain in toto the revival of rural settlement patterns recorded in central and eastern Sicily, but do help defining a significant contributing historical factor, which fits within the logic of the military struggle between Byzantium and the Aghlabid forces over the island.

Concluding remarks

In the 8th to first-half of the 9th century, Kastum Hennae became one of the main nodes (if not the main) in the networks of kastra built in central and south-eastern Sicily in reaction to the Aghlabid threat (i.e. Ragusa, Butera, Cefalù, Scicli, Modica, etc). The city was provided with a citadel and surrounded by a circuit wall, becoming the seat of a topoteretes and the headquarters of the strategos and its thematic troops. In addition to structural remains and sigillographic and textual evidence, the record of ceramics known from key contexts of the site seems to bear testament to both the process of troops headquartering (i.e. through the bulk presence of amphorae and cooking pots), and the occurrence of elite groups (i.e. evidence of chafing dish and semi-luxury glazed wares).

Following a period of decline in number of settlements during the 8th century, which was particularly accentuated and irreversible in Western

Sicily, archaeological evidence suggests that between the late 8th and early 9th century the rural settlement patterns in the central and eastern territories of the island were significantly revitalised. Here, it has been argued that this rebooting of rural settlements could be due to state-sponsored initiatives, promoted by the late Isaurian and Amorian emperors in the context of ensuring the accessibility to permanent provisions of food for the thematic troops engaged in the military confrontation with the Aghlabid forces, a crucial matter when it came to secure the strategic supremacy in the battlefield.

In the context of this thesis, a detailed reading of patterns and networks of settlements was attempted in the micro-regional study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands, between Enna and Philosophiana, in the heartland of the island. This case-study has revealed a surprisingly complex system of different settlements, and has shown possible hierarchical relationships between them, with a fortified urban centre at its apex (Enna), and a network of as many as 19 sites classified into rural villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and beacons/viewpoints according to the extension and extent of on-site archaeological evidence. These rural settlements are located predominately in areas suitable for agricultural activities, which often show a good defensive potential, underlining the pivotal importance of this area as an economic resource in support of its military significance.
CHAPTER 8: ‘ENCOUNTER’, THE ISLAMIC CONQUEST OF ENNA” (860s – early 10th century)

Introductory remarks

In the winter of 859, after 30 years of unsuccessful attempts, the Aghlabid forces conquered Kastrum Hernnae. This chapter covers the period from the fall of Enna to the mid-10 century, after which point ceramic and funerary evidence clarify that Enna had become an Islamic madina (see Chapter 9). This period remains the least known archaeologically, both with regard to the urban transformation of this city, and the patterns of rural settlements in the Southern Erei Uplands (see Chapter 8.2ii). It is probable that, within the logics of military confrontation between the Aghlabid and Byzantine thematic forces, there were episodes of intercultural encounter, which however we are still unable to see clearly, but that were integral part of the broader process of Islamisation (see Chapter 2.2iii). Relying on the archaeological progress recently made on Sicily with regard to the central phases of encounter and transition between ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Islamic’ material culture at the key contexts of Palermo and Syracuse, the following chapter focuses on the possible existence of similar evidence (or lack thereof) from Enna and its rural hinterland.

8.1 CONTEXTS OF ‘BYZANTINE-ISLAMIC MATERIAL TRANSITION’

i.) Examples from Palermo and Syracuse

By ‘context of Byzantine-Islamic material transition’ this section defines an archaeological assemblage, stratigraphically coherent, in which ceramics belonging to both Byzantine and Islamic cultural and crafting traditions are found. Unsurprisingly, the earliest such context in Sicily, named US865, was documented in the new Islamic capital of the island Palermo, during excavations at Castello San Pietro, and dated to the late 9th century.663 Most recently, a further context of this kind, called

663 Arcifa, Bagnera, Nef 2012; Arcifa, Bagnera 2014; 2017.
US222, has been documented at Syracuse and dated to the early 10th century.\textsuperscript{664}

US865 was documented in an area near the harbour of Palermo that had not been permanently occupied during the Byzantine period. During the second half of the 9th century, this area underwent a first permanent process of domestic and funerary occupation with the construction, on the natural bedrock, of a number of dwellings and 12 graves, all of which follow the Islamic ritual deposition. US865 was found inside ‘dwelling no.8’, as part of the filling of a domestic well fallen in disuse. Beside ceramic evidence, the chronology of US865 is confirmed by the layers that sealed this context, which date to the early 10th century and testify to a more systematic urban occupation at this area during that period. A total of 114 ceramic items were documented from US865, ‘only’ five of which (4.39%) belonged to Byzantine material culture. In particular, one is a highly fragmented sherd of \textit{vetrina pesante}, two are body-scherds of eastern Mediterranean globular amphorae, one of which could be an Otranto Type 1, and two are amphorae \textit{a cappio continuo} (for more information on both amphorae Otranto Type 1 and \textit{a cappio continuo} see 8.1ii). Among the remaining 109 items there are: three glazed wares, one of which is a cup produced locally and two are North African imports; 39 cooking pots, most of which are wheel-made with globular bodies and enlarged rims bent outwards; and 54 tableware and other utilitarian pottery, including bottles, carinated bowls, drinking pitchers, and one filter-vase; the majority of these items are made in local fabrics, showing a response to meet the local demand. A similar record of shapes does not appear on pre-Islamic Sicily. Filter-vases and cooking pots are emblematic examples; the former find their prototype in Maghreb and Egyptian production of the 9th century;\textsuperscript{665} the latter revealing the importance of changing practices of food preparation, a circumstance that will be further discussed in the context of transition from Enna. Moreover, three \textit{saqiya} or watermill pots are particularly worthy of mention, bearing evidence to the introduction of new techniques of irrigation and water management, which found their origin in the innovative

\textsuperscript{664} Cacciaguerra 2020.
\textsuperscript{665} Arcifa, Bagnera 2014, 170; Gayraud, Treglia, Vallauri 2009, 181-186.
agricultural methods developed during this period in Egypt, Ifriqiya, and al-Andalus.\textsuperscript{666}

US856 is a context of the Byzantine-Islamic transition, but containing nearly 95\% of pottery that can be fully identified as belonging to a record of ‘Islamic’ material culture, it is not one of material transition. Instead, it offers a view of the process of Islamisation from the Islamic-centric perspective of a social group of users already fully ‘Islamised’.\textsuperscript{667}

These ceramics, therefore, can be taken as conclusive indications that the Islamisation of material culture produced and circulating in Palermo was completed by the late 9\textsuperscript{th} century, presenting already all the morphological, technological, and decorative features typical of the Islamic material culture of the island at its apex (see Chapter 9).\textsuperscript{668} The next case-study from Syracuse offers a reverse perspective, that is the introduction of a new record of ‘Islamic’ material culture in a strongly Byzantine context.

Context US222 from Syracuse was documented at Pizza Minerva, in the centre of Ortigia, which was the core of the Byzantine capital of Sicily. This context is dated to the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century and, unlike the previous one from Palermo, offers a ‘hybrid’ ceramic record (as defined by Cacciaguerra), with productions that are in between the earlier Byzantine craft tradition (especially true of cooking wares), and new shapes of tablewares (including mugs, drinking pitchers, basins, but also oil lamps), which are closer to the contemporary morphological


\textsuperscript{667} Current archaeological knowledge of Palermo’s urban fabric during the thematic period is still in its infancy, which makes it impossible to interpret satisfactorily the evidence of the few Byzantine pottery sherds found in the Islamic context of US865. Were these Byzantine ceramics in use in that Islamic household? And, if so, how did they ended up there? Chance? Serendipity? Trade? The result of a conscious acquisition? Answers to these questions cannot be currently provided. The only significant exception is one of the two specimens of amphorae \textit{a cappio continuo}, which was in primary deposition, suggesting that this item was in fact an integral part of this Islamic household.

\textsuperscript{668} Arcifa, Bagnera 2014, 169-172; Gragueb Chatti, Touhiri, Sacco 2019. Another context from Palermo, named Gancia US264, can be dated within the 9\textsuperscript{th} century too, but without including Byzantine pottery, it does not represent a context of the Byzantine-Islamic transition. It is instead one of the earliest available evidence for the accomplished cultural Islamisation of this city: Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014; 2015; 2017.
repertoire of Islamic pottery known from Palermo. Amphorae of the *cappio continuo* type are also documented in this context.

Cooking pots so-called Type Syracuse, occupy a special place in this discussion. On the technological front, these pots employ the same craft tradition as the precedent Type Rocchicella, having calcite-rich fabrics and being fired in kilns with reducing conditions. However, these items were systematically wheel-made, and their morphological record, characterised by pots with rims bent outwards, differs from that of the Type Rocchicella, pointing to a distinctive morphological evolution and therefore practice of food preparation. The technological similarities with the Type Rocchicella are nonetheless highly significant. In fact, in spite of the formal Islamic conquest of this city in 878, the Type Syracuse shows that up to the early 10th century the material culture produced at the previous Byzantine capital of Sicily remained close to Byzantine craft traditions.

Within expectable dissimilarities between Palermo and Syracuse, due to their different cultural background and timeframe of the Islamic conquest (831 versus 878), a common trend emerges in the aftermath of the Islamic conquest of both cities, in which a material interaction involved first of all cooking wares. As will be argued next, the context US159 from Enna, which should date between the late 9th and early 10th century, fits perfectly within this picture.

**ii.) Context US159 from Enna**

Both textual sources and material evidence emerging from the present study show that not only was Enna continuously occupied following the Aghlabid conquest in 859, but that it also maintained a significant institutional role. Al-Nuwayri, for example, reported the construction of a congregational mosque at this city following its conquest, underscoring the importance of this city. Regarding material evidence, Byzantine ceramics of the late 9th – early 10th century have

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669 Cacciaguerra 2020, 66-69.
671 It was only from the mid-/late 10th century that Islamic material culture is commonly found across the city.
been documented during the study of the findings from excavations at the Castello di Lombardia, conducted in the framework of this research.

Among the most distinctive evidence there are two sherds of amphora Otranto Type 1 (FIG.64.1), one of which presents the distinctive incised wavy line running around the shoulder horizontally. This sherd has been documented in a context, called ‘pozzetto esterno’, with other ceramics
dating between the late 9th and 10th/early 11th century (see below). These amphorae are frequently found in the Byzantine territories of Apulia (Otranto, Lecce) and mainland Greece (Corinth, Argos, Thebes), which could both be simultaneous regions of production. Before this study, this type of amphora was known at only three sites on Sicily: Palermo, Taormina, and the area of Syracuse.

A further distinctive category of Byzantine amphora appearing in record of ceramics from the Castello di Lombardia is the so-called a cappio continuo, which is named after the curly-coil painted decorations covering the outer surface (FIG.64.2-3). These amphorae made their appearance in the archaeological record around the second half of the 9th century, continuing to circulate up to the first half of the 10th century. One example of this kind was already known from the Castello di Lombardia; to this unicum, it has now been possible to add nine examples. One specimen was documented in the context ‘pozzetto esterno’, along with one of the Otranto Type 1 mentioned above; three further examples appear in the context named US159, which is pivotal for the discussion that follows. Outside Sicily, evidence of cappio continuo comes from Campania (Naples), Apulia (Salento and Terra d’Otranto), the Balkan Peninsula (Butrint), and the Ionian shore of Calabria. On Sicily, they are known from Syracuse, Ragusa, Catania, Taormina, Palermo, Marcato and Cittadella di Morgantina.

In addition to these ceramics, a proper context of Byzantine-Islamic material transition, named US159, has been identified at Enna during this study and, as will be argued, it can be dated to the late 9th – early 10th century (FIG.64.2-8). The significance of this evidence is manifold. It is the first clear context of transition to be documented outside Palermo for this early chronology. Compared with Palermo, it balances and almost reverses the standpoint of cultural Islamisation to a Byzantine perspective, presenting a mixed composition of ‘Islamic’ and ‘Byzantine’ pottery; and it confirms the trends of cultural interactions seen in the contexts US865 and US222.

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673 Most recently: Leo Imperiale 2018.
674 Arcifa 2018; Cacciaguerra 2018.
675 Arcifa, Ardizzone 2009; Arcifa 2018. Also Fiorilla, Rizzone, Sammito 2020 for evidence from Ragusa.
677 After Arcifa 2018.
Context US159 was found during non-systematic excavations executed in 1998-1999 at the Castello di Lombardia of Enna. Due to the non-systematic nature of these interventions, no written record was produced, a lack that in many cases has compromised the study of the ceramic assemblages recovered therein. However, it has been constant concern of the director of the 1998-99 excavations to gather the findings in crates according to their contexts of recovery, which have been specified in labels attached to each crate. In some cases, as in the filling of a disused well (Pozzetto Rivellino), material evidence ranges from the geometric period to the early modern era, covering the whole lifespan of human occupation at this site. In other instances, such as context US137, the record of ceramics is coherent with a chronological sequence spanning the 8th-10/11th century (see Chapter 9). More rarely, a few contexts yield ceramic assemblages that are exceptionally coherent and homogenous in date; context US159, in which all the material, but a few sherds, belong to a narrow chronological framework between the late 9th and early 10th century, is one of these rare and exceptional instances.

Despite the lack of documentary records, the extraordinary state of preservation of most ceramics from US159, which are almost intact, indicates the stratigraphic coherency and consistency of this context, whose items, it can be safely said, were found in a primary context. Such assumption is further supported by the only piece of documentary information available: the label applied to the crates in which these ceramics were gathered, which was written during the excavations, and that sometimes contains short notes on specific features about the contexts unearthed. Four crates are labelled US159; their labels includes a note, which informs us that this context was found under a layer of roof collapse. Indeed, out of these four crates, two are packed with 231 are fragments of roof tiles of the type with voids (vacuolate), and their label is further enriched with a short note specifying ‘livello superiore’ (i.e. upper level).

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678 The clay of roof-tiles was mixed with straw, which burning during kiln-firing, resulted in voids. In this process the weight of each tile was lightened, and as a consequence that of the whole roofing-system. This type of roofing-system was developed on Sicily since the 8th century, and then largely employed during both Islamic and Norman periods: Arcifa 2010b, 108-110. In a couple of instances, the roof tiles from US159 bear one or two wavy incised lines, this latter perhaps an almost lost legacy from the previous roof tiles *a superficie striata.*
Excluding 35 non-diagnostic sherds, of which 22 are body-sherds of tableware, both plain and with a light whitening, and 13 belong to amphorae, context US159 comprises 72 ceramic sherds, corresponding to a minimum number of 19 distinct vessels. Of these, two sherds are residual (one is a Classical or Hellenistic black slip, the other a 6th-7th century Byzantine roof-tile), and one is an intrusion, dating to the late 11th-12th century (Norman *sovradipinta in bianco*). This takes the total of diagnostic ceramics from US159 to a minimum number of 16 individuals, whose significance is paramount in spite of their limited number.\footnote{It could be argued that the small number of individuals is a limiting factor to achieve sound conclusions. However, this is not entirely true, and it is worth noting that, for example, the context called 'Fase I' from the stratigraphic excavation at the Gancia of Palermo, which is one of the most crucial contexts on which many arguments on the process of Islamisation of Palermo have been based, accounts for only 15 MNI, comprising three sherds of glaze-ware, five tableware, seven cooking pots, and a non-specified number of amphorae: Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014.}

Of the 16 individuals calculated above, eight (50\%) clearly belong to Byzantine material culture. In particular, these are body-sherds of five cooking-pots Type Rocchicella, and three examples of partially intact amphora *a cappio continuo*, one of which preserving the domed base (Fig.64.2-3). It should be noted that the state of preservation of the examples of Type Rocchicella is significantly worse and more fragmentary than all the remaining items from this assemblage. This fact is unlikely to be a coincidence. Instead, it could reasonably suggest that these sherds are slightly residual compared with the amphorae *a cappio continuo* and the cooking-pots from this context that are illustrated below. In fact, it is argued next that these latter items belong to a relatively later chronological framework, of the late 9th – early 10th century.

An ‘Islamic’ cultural milieu can instead be firmly established for four items (25\%) from US159. These are all cooking-ware, including three pots and the knob of a lid, which presents the same fabric as the pots, but whose profile cannot be reconstructed.\footnote{It recalls specimens of the early 10th century from Palermo: Sacco 2014, 227, no.b.} The most important specimen of these three pots is the one almost intact (11 fragments) with globular body, relatively flat base, and an enlarged rim slightly bent outwards (Fig.64.4; Fig.65.1). The fabric yields calcite inclusions, but it is markedly different from the Type Rocchicella and presents a very distinctive ‘sandwich’ kiln-firing, resulting in the centre of the section being grey or dark in colour, while both inner and outer surfaces turn to...
orange to redbrick (FIG.65a). This fabric is compatible with the Macrogruppo A, which is characteristic of ceramic workshops from Palermo. A buff slip coats the outside. Shape, fabric, and technological details of this pot find exact parallels with examples from Palermo, and in particular with one coming from the Phase I of the Gancia, which dating to the second half of the 9th century (but before the introduction of glazed wares) is one of earliest context of Islamisation documented in Sicily. The same typology has also been found in other contexts of the late 9th – early 10th century from Palermo, such as Piazza Bologni, but also from the Fase III of the Gancia (ca. second half of the 10th century).

FIGURE 65: cooking-pots from context US159, and details of their fabrics (photos by the author)

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681 Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, 223,17; Pezzini, Sacco 2018. I wish to thank V. Sacco for confirming this attribution macroscopically.
682 Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, 217, fig.2, no.6, for the fabric, 223, no.17.
683 Aleo Nero, Chiovaro 2014, 257, Tab.III, no.15; Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, fig.6,12.
Also the other two cooking pots (FIG.64.5-6; FIG.65.2-3) can be attributed to workshops from Palermo and find close morphological parallels with pots of the early 10th century from various contexts of this city. These pots from US159 are largely intact but lack bases; have different sizes, one of the two being remarkably smaller. Both have the characteristic ‘sandwich’ fabrics, identical to the example seen above (FIG.65b). Fabrics apart, a closer examination reveals very distinctive morphological features of their rims and shapes of the body, which appear identical in cooking-ware produced in Islamic Palermo during the early 10th century. In particular, cooking-pots with similar rims, carinated bodies with sharp changes of angle in the profile, ribbed surfaces, and sandwich fabrics appear at Castello San Pietro, Gancia, and Butti di Via Imera, where it is also possible to verify the association of similar examples with significant differing sizes.684

Of the remaining four items, the attribution of the large basin (FIG.64.7) with whitened surface, rim bent outward, and an incised wavy line on the upper part of the rim remains dubious. Its fabric is not distinctive and, on the island, identical shapes presenting the same decoration and whitened surfaces can be found in both Byzantine and Islamic contexts of the 9th century.685 The fabrics of the next and last cooking pots, on the contrary, allows us to advance further interpretations.

Finally, the last items from this assemblage are three cooking-ware, two of which are pots (FIG.64.8; FIG.65.4) and one is a very fragmented lid, whose profile cannot be reconstructed. Both cooking pots are wheel made, have rims slightly bent outwards, and a globular body, all features with no parallels with Islamic products of the period. Bases are missing. The most distinctive feature of these ceramics is their calcite-rich fabric fired in reducing condition FIG.65c), which is identical to the Type Rocchicella. Also the colour of the outer surface, which is nut-brown when not blackened by exposition to fire, closely resembles that of the Type Rocchicella. However, as said, these items are wheel-made,

684 Arcifa, Bagnera 2014, 188, Tab.IV, nos.2-4; Ardizzone, Agrò 2014, 267, fig.2, nos.117, 119, 126,127.
685 See, for example, parallels from Contrada Edera and Palermo: Arcifa, Turco 2016, 65, Tab.II, no.6 and Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, 217, fig.3, no.2; Sacco 2014, 227, fig.1, no.13, 229, fig.2, nos. 14-15.
and their morphology is incompatible with the Type Rocchicella, finding instead a significant parallel with an example of Type Syracuse.  

Therefore, in these cooking-pots from US159 it would seem possible to verify the same process occurring in Syracuse in the early 10th century, that is after the disappearance of the Type Rocchicella, when pots of the Type Syracuse were manufactured locally using same fabrics as the Type Rocchicella, but employing the wheel and different shapes. Thus, although preliminarily, it is possible to argue that these pots from Enna could reflect later developments of the local Byzantine material culture, finding an equivalent in the analogous process developed in the Type Syracuse. The specimens from US159 are not the sole examples documented at the Castello di Lombardia. Two further examples appear in the context called ‘pozzetto esterno’, which it has been seen above, contained ceramics of the 9th and 10th century, including amphorae Otranto Type 1 and cappio continuo, and distinctive pottery of the Fatimid period discussed in Chapter 9. Three other examples were documented at the nearby excavations of Vallone Santa Ninfa, but were erroneously attributed to Fatimid period productions from Agrigento, in my judgment.  

In conclusion, ceramic evidence from US159, which can be securely dated and identified, reveals a mixed Byzantine-Islamic composition of this ceramic assemblage, with the examples of ‘Islamic’ pots from Palermo being one of the first compelling evidence of cultural Islamisation documented so far on Sicily. At present, it is not possible to argue that the mixed composition of this ceramic assemblage also reflects a similar mixed ethnic or cultural composition of the people who created this context (see discussion in Chapter 2.2iii). However, it is worth underlining that the proposed chronology of US159 in the late 9th century accords with the Aghlabid conquest of Enna in 859. Therefore, in this evidence it is tempting to see an initial allocation of troops or groups of people linked to an Islamic cultural milieu, who, it is furthermore possible to assume, would have occupied the foci and symbols of the previous political regime, and therefore the Castello di Lombardia. Although Enna was not founded ex novo, this hypothesis recalls the model of the ‘garrison cities’ developed by the Umayyad and Abbasid army at the earliest stages of the conquest outside the Arabian

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686 Cacciaguerra 2020, 67, fig.8,4.
687 Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020, 182-83, fig.6, no.7-9.
Peninsula, and in the western expansion across North Africa and the Iberia peninsula. The construction of a congregational mosque at Enna in the aftermaths of its conquest, which is known textually, would accord with the privileged status of a garrison city. However, one fact remains unquestionable. The first appearance of ceramics belonging to the Islamic cultural milieu at this site regarded cooking-ware, further validates the consideration expressed above for Palermo that ‘l’islamizzazione della cultura materiale sembra coinvolgere anzitutto il repertorio delle forme legate alla preparazione dei cibi’. In fact, produce could continue to be traded and stored in pre-Islamic foodstuff containers, and food could have been consumed in pre-Islamic tableware, such as the amphorae *a cappio continuo* and the large basin from US159. However, different dietary habits would require the introduction of different types of cooking-wares, which are among the most distinctive indicators of cultural Islamisation. This being noted, it is difficult to believe that the appearance at Enna of cooking pots produced in *madina Balarm* following the Aghlabid conquest of the city is a mere coincidence.

Other ‘Islamic’ ceramics documented at the Castello di Lombardia could date to the late 9th – early 10th century according to comparisons drawn with stratigraphic assemblages from Palermo and Syracuse. However, due to the lack of stratigraphic insights for Enna, the decision has been made to discuss these ceramics in Chapter 9.1, which covers the Fatimid period between the mid-10th and early 11th century. By then, the record of ceramics circulating in Enna shows the definitive assimilation of this city within a fully Islamised cultural milieu, signify the transformation of *Kastum Hennae* in *madina Qasr Yanni*. First, however, some considerations are offered below with regard to this transitional period *strictu sensu* in the rural hinterland of the Southern Erei Uplands.

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689 Similarly, for Tunisia: Fenwick 2020, 54-80.
690 Arcifa, Bagnara 2014, 168-69. But see also Ardizzone, Agrò 2014, 261 for the consideration that follows below.
692 This attribution has been attempted for evidence from Santa Ninfa: Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020.
FIGURE 66: distribution map of sites with archaeological evidence of late 9th – early/mid-10th century ‘Islamic’ pottery (map by the author)
8.2 RURAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

i.) A regional overview

With a few exceptions, the settlement patterns of the Aghlabid and early Fatimid period (late 9th – early 10th century) have received limited attention in the research agenda of archaeologists working on Sicily. The lack of archaeological evidence that has long overshadowed this period is a major factor explaining this deficit. More recently, however, important progress has shed new light on the material culture of this period preceding the Kalbid rule of the mid-10th century. In particular, we can now rely on the knowledge of two categories of vessels: one gathering cooking-pots, such as those seen above from Enna; the other comprising amphorae with specific painted decoration consisting of patterns of vertical and wavy lines, called with ‘decorazioni sinusoidali’. At present, evidence of cooking ware appears widespread especially in the hinterland of Palermo (i.e. across Valle dello Jato), as far as Alcamo and Entella; as further discussed below, instead, amphorae of the type with ‘decorazioni sinusoidali’ have been documented at a large number of sites across western Sicily. An additional ceramic category dating to the period of the late 9th – early 10th century is the tableware so-called ‘giallo di Palermo’, which however appears at only one site outside madina Balarm: Casello della Pietra, a key settlement on the road axis between Palermo and Mazara. The evidence of these ceramics allows us to pinpoint a remarkable number of sites in the distribution map illustrated above (FIG.66). All the sites pinpointed in this map are represented by these two sources of material evidence (i.e. amphorae with ‘decorazioni sinusoidali’ and cooking-pots), for which Alfano and Sacco have provided a bibliographical survey in the form of distribution maps. There is one important exceptions: Milena, in the hinterland of Agrigento, where a corpus of 12 Aghlabid lead seals was found (see below).

Of course, the distribution of ‘Islamic’ material evidence at these sites/settlements is in fact representative of consumers/users who were associated to the orbit of Islamic production and distribution centres,

693 Alfano 2015; Molinari 2015.
694 Alfano 2015, Sacco, Alfano 2014; Sacco 2018.
696 Alfano 2015, 348, fig.23; Sacco 2018, 187, fig.9.
but in itself is not revealing of their faith, ethnicity, and political allegiance. However, in line with the conceptual discussion afforded in Chapter 2.2iii, and for the scope of this chapter, here such material evidence has been considered as a possible proxy of ‘Islamic’ settlers.

The map reveals, quite incontrovertibly, that Islamic material culture of the late 9th – first half 10th century is found predominantly in western Sicily, becoming increasingly scattered when progressing to the east of the hinterland of Agrigento. Prior to the study conducted at Enna during this thesis, Muculufa, near Butera, was the easternmost site known to secondary literature with ‘Islamic’ pottery dating to the late 9th – first half of the 10th century (amphorae with ‘decorazione sinusoidale’).\(^\text{697}\)

Since it was collected during field surveys, the evidence from Muculufa does not grant us closer insights into the modes of interaction through which this evidence reached the site.

Westwards from this point, the evidence of Islamic material culture becomes progressively more numerous and systematic. Agrigento, in particular, was among the first cities to fall permanently in Islamic hands, by 830, even earlier than Palermo. As such, the hinterland of this city, along the River Platani and on the Sicani Mountain range, acquires particular relevance in relation to possible patterns of settlement during the Aghlabid period. Fortunately, this area is well-known archaeologically for the period under study. On the western side of the River Platani, field surveys have investigated key hilltop sites on the Sicani Mountain range (Monte Giudecca, Monte Conca, Monte Castelluzzo, Serra del Palco, Lordichella, etc.).\(^\text{698}\) Also the hilly terrains on the opposite eastern banks of River Platani have been intensively surveyed and, in some cases, excavated (i.e. Milena, Colmitella, Delia, Castronovo).\(^\text{699}\)

According to the archaeological evidence emerged from these investigations, during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition the hinterland of Agrigento appears divided in two opposite zones, virtually separated by the line of the River Platani. Byzantine pottery of the late 8th – early/mid-9th century (i.e. Type Rocchicella and grooved-strap handles) are widespread in the hilly terrains to the east of the River

\(^{697}\) Bergemann 2013; 2014.  
\(^{698}\) Bergemann 2013; 2014.  
\(^{699}\) Rizzo 2004; Zambito 2013; Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014; Rizzo, Romano 2012; La Rosa 1997; Carver, Molinari 2016; Carver, Molinari et al. 2017; 2018; 2019.
Platani, while are consistently absent on the opposite side.\footnote{Especially Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014.} On the opposite western side of the River Platani, plenty of evidence of amphorae with *decorazione sinusoidale* has been documented in hilltop sites in the rugged landscape of the Sicani Mountain range, which might represent evidence of settlers linked to an ‘Islamic’ economic and perhaps sociocultural background. Moreover, this is the same area where the corpus of more than 40 lead seals bearing the name of Aghlabid emirs comes from.\footnote{De Luca 2003; 2012 and APPENDIX 3.} All these considerations show the special place that the hinterland of Agrigento occupies in attempting interpretations of modes of both cultural and institutional Islamisation of the island, and in fact this territory is taken as a study-area in APPENDIX 3.

Further to the West, both amphorae with *decorazione sinusoidale* and cooking-pots of the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century have recently emerged from field surveys in the surroundings of Entella and on-going investigations in the territory of Corleone, both of which were important nodes on the Roman road Palermo-Agrigento, which apparently existed throughout the Byzantine and Islamic periods.\footnote{Castrorao Barba et al. 2018; 2020; Corretti, Facella, Mangiaracina 2014; for the road: Nef, Arcifa 2018.} Further to the North, recent field survey conducted in the Valle dello Jato e Belice Destro have documented numerous sites with evidence of both amphorae with *decorazione sinusoidale* and cooking-pots of the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century, collecting invaluable data to reconstruct the evolution of settlement patterns during this period, which seems to point at a process of settlement revival of this area during the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century (see below).\footnote{Alfano, Sacco 2014; Alfano 2015.} In the westernmost area of the island, amphorae with *decorazione sinusoidale* are known from the hinterlands of Mazara, Trapani, Alcamo, and Carini.

The geographical proximity between western Sicily and Tunisia is a straightforward element that could explain the concentration of settlements with ‘Islamic’ pottery of the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century in the western territories of the island. However, as anticipated in Chapter 7.2i, the demographic and settlement contraction that affected western Sicily in the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century could be taken as an additional and reasonable factor to explain why Islamic material evidence of this period
can only be found there. In other words, it is plausible that, at this stage, newcomers from Ifriqiya were only able to settle in these territories because they found such lands only minimally inhabited by preexisting communities. Present evidence does not allow us to fix a chronological starting-point for this process of occupation. However, judging from the material evidence seen above and according to the textual sources available, such as the Ifriqiyan jurist Sahnun (d. 855), who claimed that ‘nothing in Sicily was conquered [legally] by the Muslims’, it would seem that this process did not start in the immediate aftermaths of the conquest.\footnote{Metcalfe 2009, 33.}

What appears clearer, instead, is that these westernmost territories of Sicily were widely occupied by the late 9th century, although the forms of this occupation remain debated. According to Alfano, the ‘structured settlement organisation’ which seems detectable in western Sicily in this period (late 9th – early 10th century) did not reflect a process of stable territorial colonisation, but mirrored patterns of diffusion of Muslim incomers who followed the road-axes of the Aghlabid conquest running between Palermo, Mazara, and Agrigento.\footnote{Alfano 2015, 329, 341.} However, by complementing the spatial distribution of these sites with relative topographic features, it can be observed that most of the settlements situated on the roads linking Palermo to Mazara and Trapani are in fact located in open sites, which have strong agricultural potential.\footnote{Alfano 2015, 347-48.} By contrast, those closer to Agrigento, and far as the Muculufa site, are all placed on hilltops and naturally-fortified sites.\footnote{Bergemann 2013; 2014. Cf. Alfano 2015, 347-48.}

In light of this dichotomy, therefore, on the one hand we agree with Alfano in saying that the evidence of Islamic material culture from these hilltop sites can be interpreted within the logic of the military confrontation between Aghlabid and Byzantine forces, which in the second half of the 9th century had its focus in this central area of the island between Agrigento and Enna.\footnote{Nef, Prigent 2013.} On the other hand, however, the nature of the open sites in western Sicily leads us to believe that, already in the late 9th century, they might reflect a stable and systematic first phase of rural occupation of these territories, which by then had

long been held in Aghlabid hands.\textsuperscript{709} The results of the survey in the Valle dello Jato seem to strengthen this view, demonstrating a settlement revival of this area; 13 sites have been documented for the Islamic period of the late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century, five more than in the previous Byzantine period, all of which are located in proximity to inland roads, but also in suitable areas for agricultural activities. This circumstance is not surprising, as this area represents the natural wheat-belt surrounding Palermo, the new capital and main centre of population on Islamic Sicily.

One final point needs clarification. While, as just seen, the lands to the west of the axis Palermo-Agrigento became the backbone of the early Islamic settlements, until the mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century Eastern Sicily remained the core of the Byzantine military resistance, which was tenaciously organised around the key stongholds of Catania (fell in 902), Taormina (962), San Marco d’Alunzio and Rometta (965). In fact, after the fall of Syracuse in 878, Taormina became the seat of the Sicilian strategos, who von Falkenhausen has shown is attested at this site as late as 938, and probably continued to reside there until 962.\textsuperscript{710} The record of material culture from Taormina not only underlines the importance of this stronghold and its continuous occupation throughout the first half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, but also the persisting cultural and economic connections of this city with core regions of the Byzantine Empire.\textsuperscript{711} Similarly, 15 coins spanning the 810s to mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century are known from San Marco d’Alunzio (13) and Rometta (2), underscoring the prominence of these sites until their final surrender to the Fatimids in 965.\textsuperscript{712}

In other words, throughout the period of the Islamic conquest (820s-960s), Sicily was divided between two different realities, two islands one could say, a circumstance that is visibly supported by the distribution map presented above of late 9\textsuperscript{th} – early 10\textsuperscript{th} century Islamic material culture, in which the whole of Eastern Sicily appears blank. This being noted, can the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands bring new insights into this debate regarding patterns of Islamisation in Central Sicily? The next section aims at answering this question.

\textsuperscript{709} For a similar opinion: Arcifa 2013a, 174.
\textsuperscript{710} Falkenhausen 1978, 28.
\textsuperscript{711} Arcifa 2018, 132-33, esp. figs.7-8.
\textsuperscript{712} For the coins see Morrison 1998; Fallico, Guzzetta 2002; Arslan 2005. More recently synthesis in Vaccaro 2013a.
ii.) Islamisation in Central Sicily after the conquest of Enna: absence of evidence or evidence of absence?

Following its conquest, the role of Qasr Yani as the outermost foothold from which Aghlabid forces could maintain control over this area and progress their military takeover eastwards can be easily expected. Yet, this currently cannot be demonstrated, due to the lack of archaeological evidence of institutional Islamisation, such as the contemporary Aghlabid lead seals from the hinterland of Agrigento. What remains even more obscure is the involvement of Enna in the process of cultural Islamisation of Central Sicily, owing to the fact that contemporary evidence of Islamic material culture dating the late 9th – mid-10th century has not emerged outside this city. Because most of the sites within the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands have been intensively surveyed, and some extensively excavated, this absence seems to suggest a lack of cultural Islamisation in this area of the island prior to the mid-10th century and the Kalbid period. As will be seen in Chapter 9.2, at this later stage five Islamic settlements are known to exist, in addition to Enna, within the perimeter of this case-study (Philosophiana, Marcato, Villa del Casale, Monte Navone, and Polino).

Therefore, a gap of approximately 50-75 years remains between the late 9th/early 10th century, when the last evidence of Byzantine pottery at these sites can be dated (i.e. Type Rocchicella and amphorae a cappio continuo), and the mid-10th century, when the five ‘Islamic’ settlements mentioned above are known. The available corpus of material sources does not allow this study to shed conclusive light on this matter. A number of questions and considerations can be nevertheless posed with regard to this lack of archaeological evidence.

The first question is: what happened to these sites and their communities between the late 9th and mid-10th century? Of course, it is possible that present archaeological research lacks the knowledge of sub-regional markers of preexisting communities dating between the late 9th and mid-10th century, which would make it possible to visualise these communities archaeologically. However, according to the current understanding, we can infer quite confidently that most sites were abandoned after the late 9th century. Some, like the Villa del Casale, Polino, Azzolina, Gallinica, Cittadella di Morgantina, and Leano I, were

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713 Maggiore 2010, 233.
reoccupied at a later date, either around the mid-10th century (Casale and Polino) or during the Norman period (the others); and others, like Case Bastione, Montagna di Marzo, Balatella, and Gerace, were abandoned for good. So, where did their communities go after these sites were abandoned? At present, answers to this question are beyond any interpretative reach. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine that extensive territories were deserted, although similar circumstances are historically and archaeologically verified, especially following long periods of warfare. A parallel, for example, could be drawn with the so-called ‘Dead Cities of Northern Syria’, which are circa 40 Byzantine rural villages abandoned between the 8th and 10th century due to the state of warfare with the Abbasid caliphate.714

Philosophiana and Marcato are the only sites for which a possible pattern of continuous occupation could be assumed, even though only theoretically and on a reduced scale. The proposed continuous occupation at Philosophiana is based on the importance of this site during the 9th century. In fact, if any of the 19 rural sites of the late 8th-9th century documented in this study-area had survived, then one would expect this to be the most important one. No archaeological proof, however, can be brought in support of this speculative consideration. Regarding Marcato, this is the only site, except from Enna, yielding evidence of both amphorae a cappio continuo and Islamic pottery of the mid-10th century (including glazed tableware and amphorae, which unfortunately have not been exhaustively published yet).715 In north-eastern Sicily and Southern Italy, amphorae a cappio continuo are attested in stratigraphic contexts up to the mid-10th century. Therefore, these ceramics could reduce or potentially fill the chronological gap of 50 years between the last evidence of Byzantine pottery and the first appearance of Islamic ceramics at Marcato. Yet, again, this conclusion is based on a theoretical consideration and not on factual stratigraphic evidence from this site. The location of Marcato, at just about 12km from Enna, with which it has direct visual contact, and on the natural corridor of the River Dittaino Valley, which links Enna to Catania, might be one of the successful factors that assured this site its long term patterns of occupation.

714 Riis 2015.
715 Caffo et al. 2013.
We could, therefore, summarise this complicated matter in one simple consideration. Of course, it is possible that the number of field surveys and excavations conducted in this central area of the island have failed to identify evidence of cultural Islamisation before the mid-10th century. This circumstance, however, does not appear utterly convincing. As seen above, among the ceramic markers of the late 9th – early 10th century there are the amphorae with *decorazione sinusoidale*, which are highly recognisable finds in field surveys, and have in fact been documented in numerous rural sites in western Sicily, of which the Muculufa site is the one closest to the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands.

More likely, instead, this evidence of absence would in fact reflect an absence of evidence, and the distribution map presented above with Islamic ceramics of the late 9th – mid-10th century offers indeed a reliable snapshot (although subject to further improvements) of the settlement patterns and process of cultural Islamisation of Sicily between the late 9th and mid-10th century. Accordingly, the hinterland of Agrigento would represent the easternmost pocket of Islamic settlements on Sicily prior to the mid-10th century (see again APPENDIX 3), while the evidence gathered from the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands would indicate that the process of cultural Islamisation was limited, at this chronological stage, to the urban centre of Enna.

**Concluding remarks**

The study of ceramic evidence from Enna has allowed us to identify one of the first contexts of material transition, called US159, to be currently known outside Palermo, indicating that the process of cultural Islamisation at this city took off around the late 9th – early 10th century. Cooking wares were at the core of this process, recalling a pattern known from Palermo. The fact that the ‘Islamic’ cooking-pots from US159 were imported from Palermo, seems to underline the leading role of the Islamic capital of Sicily in implanting a new record of material culture at this site, and perhaps new communities. Throughout the period of the Aghlabid conquest (and well beyond into the 10th century), Sicily remained divided between two distinct areas of cultural and economic influence. Byzantium retained the eastern half of the island. To the West, beyond the axis Palermo-Agrigento, the island underwent
a gradual process of cultural Islamisation, which might have initiated soon after the capture of Palermo in 831, but that becomes clearly visible archaeologically towards the end of the 9th century. In addition to the close proximity of western Sicily to Tunisia, the fact that the western territories of Sicily appeared under-populated on the eve of the Islamic conquest could be adduced as a reasonable factor to explain the clustering of material culture of the Aghlabid period in this area of the island. Current understanding would indicate that the spreading of contemporary Islamic material culture in the countryside of central Sicily did not begin before the mid-10th century (see next chapter). Between the late 9th and mid-10th century, most rural settlements known within the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands appear deserted, although some, such as Philosophiana and Marcato, might have survived.
CHAPTER 9:
‘TRANSFORMATION’, INTO THE MATURE ISLAMIC AGE (mid-10th –early 11th century)

Introductory remarks

Chapter 9 steps into the Fatimid and Kalbid period (touching the 11th century), which represents both the highest point in the process of Islamisation of the island, and the latest chronological limit for the present study. First, it discusses the evidence available for the socioeconomic transformation of the urban habitat of Enna into madina Qasr Yanni. Then, it examines the rearrangement of the surrounding rural settlements in a loose-mesh pattern, which appears centered on the rahals.

9.1 THE CREATION OF MADINA QASR YANNI

i.) Funerary evidence

Until very recently, the urban fabric of Qasr Yanni during the Fatimid period was utterly unknown archaeologically. As late as 2010, for example, a study drawing on the urban planning, historical toponyms, and textual evidence concluded that that the ‘Arab’ imprint in the development of Enna, which is visible in the narrow streets, cul-de-sacs, courtyard houses, and underground qanat, cannot be dated before the 11th-12th century, that is after the Norman conquest of Sicily.716

Following most recent urban excavations and the study of ceramics conducted in the framework of this research, a funerary context and a number of material sources are now available, which allow us to conclude with absolute certainty that Enna was an Islamic madina already during the Fatimid period. Thanks to this evidence, we now know that part of the urban population professed the Muslim faith, and that Qasr Yanni was perfectly integrated in a network of ceramic exchange connecting this city to the network of surrounding rural villages, to the capital of the island madina Balarm, and to more distant Ifriqiyan markets.

716 Maggiore 2010.
The certainty that part of the urban population was Muslims is entwined to the most recent discovery (December 2019), occurred during rescue excavations, of a necropolis dating to the Fatimid period, which is still under study, but that has been preliminary presented in November 2020. This necropolis is located in the western side of the mountain plateau of Enna (on the opposite side of the castle) and comprises 14 graves following the Muslim funeral ritual, all of which have been found in primary and undisturbed contexts (except for one). Bodies lay on their right side, oriented West-East, with the head to the west and the face facing southwest, in direction of Mecca (FIG.67). The pits are narrow (ca. 30-50 cm) and shallow (ca. 40-50 cm). The taphonomic processes documented during the excavation indicate that bodies were wrapped in shrouds, and grave goods are absent. In the late 11th century, the Norman church of Santa Maria la Nova was built on top of this necropolis, establishing the terminus ante quem for the use of the graves, which have been dated to the mid-10th – early 11th century by the excavators.

FIGURE 67: an example of burial following the Muslim funeral ritual from Enna (by R. Nicoletti)

In addition to the stratigraphic sequence, the construction technique of these tombs adheres to the regional examples available of contemporary Muslim funeral contexts. Close parallels, in particular,

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can be established with the graves known from the necropolis of Castello San Pietro in Palermo, dating to the late 9th – early 10th century (Aghlabid or early Fatimid period). As mentioned in Chapter 8.1i (Contexts of Byzantine-Islamic material transition), this extra-mural area was not inhabited permanently before the mid/late 9th century. After this point, it underwent numerous and consequent phases of urban development, which culminated in the second half of the 11th century with the construction of the Norman Castle overlooking the harbour. A total of 12 burials were found in the first phase of permanent occupation. All graves present a construction technique similar to that seen from Enna, consisting of narrow (ca. 25x50 cm) and relatively shallow (ca. 30-60 cm) pits, with vertical edges that are dug directly into the soil and reach the bedrock; all the corpses (but two of infants) were found lying on their right side, with their faces facing southeast.

ii.) Ceramic evidence

Before this study, evidence of Islamic pottery of the mid-10th – early 11th century from Enna was entirely unknown to secondary literature. With a few exception, the ceramics shown below come from five contexts of the excavations 1998-1999 inside the Castello di Lombardia, comprising a coherent and homogenous composition of findings dating within the 9th/10th – 11th century. These contexts are: “US137” (crates 29 and 53); “Strato rinvenuto sotto scarti lavorazione pietra, Cortile Rivellino vicino torre rinvenuta” (crates 284, 285, 291, and 292); “Scavo accanto Torre Rivellino davanti porta principale” (crate 298); “Cortile II, trincea 2” (crate 344); “Pozzetto esterno” (crates 7, 64, 215, and 275).

Although mostly limited to ceramic categories of the instrumentum domesticum that are highly distinctive of cultural Islamisation, the overview that follows represents the first systematic evidence of pottery dating to the Fatimid period from Qasr Yanni, and therefore a point of departure to explore socioeconomic circuits of consumption of goods in which this city was part.

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719 Arcifa, Bagnera 2014.
720 The only exception is a sherd of glazed tableware found during the test pit excavations inside the church of San Cataldo: Cilia Platamone, Fiorilla 2006, 188.
Despite the lack of documentary support for these contexts, as was noted in the previous chapters, the pottery discussed here can be confidentially dated to the period under scrutiny in line with morphological and technological comparisons drawn with contemporary stratigraphic contexts known from other centres of the island objects of
extensive studies, such as Palermo, Agrigento, Villa del Casale, Paternò, and Syracuse. According to a recent chronological revision of contexts from Palermo, some of the ceramics presented below, especially amphorae, might well be dated to the first half of the 10th century, while the chronology of other categories, such as filter-vase, extends up to the 12th century.

The first evidence considered here pertains glazed tableware, which is among the most distinctive indicator of cultural Islamisation. In fact, although produced in previous periods and within the Byzantine Empire, it was only at this chronological stage and within the borders of the Dar al-Islam that glazed ware became commodity goods (process of commodification). A minimum number of eight examples of glaze tablewares were documented within the five contexts considered in this chapter (FIG.68.1-5). Five are carinated bowls (catini carenati) with polychrome glaze, comprising two ring-foot bases and three rims whose morphological details fit perfectly into contemporary regional productions. Of the remaining three sherds, one belongs to a mug, the other two to non-better specifiable shapes. All examples bear the whitened surface under the glazing coating. Within these specimens, it is possible to distinguish between two main fabrics: six examples (among which FIG.68.1-3) belong to productions from Palermo, as clearly indicated by the presence of the distinctive sea-shells. In particular, it is possible to further classify this fabric within the Variant 7.1 (FIG.68.a), which was kiln-fired in oxidizing condition, and Variant 7.2 (FIG.68.b), which yields the same matrix but was kiln-fired in reducing condition. The remaining specimens (FIG.68.4-5) have a white and powdery fabric (FIG.68.c), which is compatible with the ceramics produced in the closer workshop of the Villa del Casale site.

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722 Priestman, forthcoming. Glazed wares appear in Palermo already in the late 9th century and, together with imports from Ifriqiya, productions were soon established locally too, probably following the physical and concomitant migration of artisans with their knowhow from the Ifriqiyan homeland to Sicily: Sacco 2017; Arcifa, Bagnera 2017, 399-400; Molinari 2012.

723 For the no.1 see Sacco 2016, 195-196; for the nos. 4-5 see wide range in Sacco 2018, 171-188.

724 Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, 203.
which between the mid-10th and mid-11th century produced glazed wares with similar shapes and decorative features.\textsuperscript{725}

Alongside glazed tablewares, similar carinated bowls and other shapes of tableware, such as hemispherical bowls, appear in the five contexts under consideration, either with plain or whitened surfaces, and with fabrics that are identical to the examples with glaze seen above (FIG.68.6-10). Wider basins, probably used for the collective serving of food, are moreover present, among which an example with notched rim and wavy incisions stands out (FIG.68.6) due to its close morphological and decorative analogies with vessels circulating in Syracuse during the late 10th – mid-11th century.\textsuperscript{726}

Moving on from tableware intended for the service and consumption of food, to containers designed to serve and consume liquids, a wide range and assorted size of bottles (FIG.68.11), mugs and cups (FIG.68.12-15), and drinking-pitchers (FIG.68.16) have been documented, all of which presenting the ‘typical’ morphological and technological repertoire of contemporary products circulating across the island.\textsuperscript{727} Among the cups, it is worth noting some examples with extremely thin walls (ca. 2-3 mm), which find parallel with contemporary examples from Palermo, Syracuse, and the Villa del Casale.\textsuperscript{728} The filter vase is a further and most distinctive ceramic category that is synonymous with the contemporary introduction of an ‘Islamic’ record of pottery across most territories of the Mediterranean \textit{Dar al-Islam} (see 8.1i). Consistently, examples from Sicily present handles with small pyramidal protrusions; one specimen of this type with whitened surface was documented in one of the contexts from Enna (FIG.68.17).\textsuperscript{729}

Furthermore, a number of jars have been documented in the contexts from the Castello di Lombardia, presenting rims bent outwards and painted decorations, which could have served to both containing and storing food and liquids (FIG.68.18-22). Their many profiles resemble

\textsuperscript{725} Most recently: Alfano 2019.
\textsuperscript{726} Cacciaguerra 2020,75, fig.13,7-13.
examples recorded throughout the island, a fact that is supported by the
variety of the fabrics documented in the specimens from Enna, which
include examples with volcanic inclusions, and therefore produced in
the hinterland of Mount Etna.\textsuperscript{730}

As discussed in Chapters 2.2iii and 8.1ii, cooking-pots hold a special
place in the discourse of cultural Islamisation linked to the introduction
of new ceramic typologies. Among the cooking pots documented from
Enna, two of the most recurring shapes are presented here (FIG.68.23-
24). Both have tapered profile with the body walls inclined inwards, and
both have darkened surfaces. One type has the rim bent outwards and
enlarges in an ‘almond’-shape profile (FIG.68.23), similar to several
contemporary examples known from Palermo and the Villa del Casale.\textsuperscript{731}
The other type has a simpler inward rim, flattened along the upper side;
pots with these features are known from Palermo, Paternò, Syracuse,
and the Villa del Casale.\textsuperscript{732} A flat and handmade base is moreover
worthy of mention (FIG.68.25), belonging to the category of handmade
cylindrical cooking pots typical of the Islamic North Africa, which were
introduced on Sicily during the 10\textsuperscript{th} century and lasted as late as the 13\textsuperscript{th}
century.\textsuperscript{733}

An overview of the numerous and varied typologies of amphorae
documented within the five contexts that were the objects this study
conclude the selection of ceramics of the mature Islamic period known
from Enna (FIG.69). Within a broader picture of typological diversity,
amphorae produced and circulating in Sicily during the 10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th}
century show a significant degree of standardisation of morphological and
decorative details, which was probably due to the fact that such
containers were bulk produced in specialized workshops, of which those
from Palermo and Agrigento were the principal ones and are the best
known at present.\textsuperscript{734} This circumstance makes it possible to recognise
these products confidently in archaeological contexts, including non-

\textsuperscript{730} See similar examples from Palermo, Paternò, and Villa del Casale: respectively
Arcifa, Bagna 2014, Tav.IV,24-27; Tav.V.2,7; Arcifa, Messina 2018, p.382, fig.5,4-5;
personal observation.
\textsuperscript{731} Palermo: Sacco 2016, 310. Villa del Casale: personal observation.
\textsuperscript{732} Palermo: Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, fig.6,25. Paternò: Arcifa, Messina 2018,
Siracusa: Cacciaguerra 2020, p.73, fig.12,1.
\textsuperscript{733} For examples of the 10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} century see: Cacciaguerra 2020, 73, fig.12,2. Arcifa,
Messina 2018, 381, fig.4,16.
\textsuperscript{734} Sacco 2018; Ardizzone 2007; 2012.
stratigraphic ones. In addition to morphological details, the macroscopic analysis of fabrics offers further support to distinguish between regional workshops, but also to detect imports from Ifriqiya.

FIGURE 69: selection of Fatimid-period amphorae (mid-10th – mid-11th century) from the Castello di Lombardia of Enna (photos and drawings by the author)
Among the examples included in this selection, specimens nos. 1 and 2 from context US137 could be the earliest evidence of their kind (first half of the 10th century). Specimen no.1 (FIG.69.1), in particular, is identical to PB268 (i.e. Palazzo Bonagia) and no.7 from the Gancia, in both cases dating to the early 10th century. It should be however noted that the same morphology appears duplicated on examples produced in Islamic Paternò, Agrigento, Carini, and Syracuse between mid-10th – first half 11th century. The fabric of the specimen from Enna (FIG.69.a), pale red in colour and rich in small sea-shells, is compatible with Palermo products, and the surfaces bear evidence of a deep whitening, but this is not enough to refine its chronology.

Similar considerations can be made with regard to the specimen no.2, with wide opening at the mouth (FIG.69.2). Similar examples have been documented in contexts of the early 10th century from Syracuse, but also of the mid-10th – early 11th century from Palermo and Agrigento. The fabric of this specimen (FIG.69.b) is not compatible with workshops from Palermo, recalling instead productions from Agrigento. Specimens nos.3-4 (FIG.69.3-4) have whitened surface and identical profile, which recalls examples known from Palermo (Gancia and Palazzo Bonagia), a fact that is further supported by their fabrics rich in sea-shells. Specimen no.5 (FIG.69.5), has wide opening at the mouth, whitened surface, and an enlarged rim with a triangular section, which externally is marked by two horizontal grooves; this example belongs to the type known as Carini A17/Group II, one of the most widespread type in contemporary contexts of the island. Specimen no.6 (FIG.69.6) yields a distinctive Tunisian buff fabric with inclusion of Aeolian quarts (FIG.68.c). The rim is enlarged and marked in the outer side by three

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735 Ceramic material from context US137 is very homogenous and coherent in date, presenting other evidence of 10th – early 11th century Islamic pottery, such as the glaze wares shown above.
736 Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, fig.6; Sacco 2016, 249; Sacco 2018, Type 4.
737 Respectively: Arcifa, Messina 2018, fig.4.1; Ardizzone 2012, 101, fig.40,16; Ardizzone 2012, 96, fig.36, A13; Cacciaguerra 2018, 158, no.3; 2020, p.70, fig.11,3
739 Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, fig.3,7; Sacco 2016, 254, PB772, 258, PB746.
740 See Sacco 2018, Type 7.
741 I wish to thank C. Touihri for confirming this attribution on the basis of a macroscopic analysis.
horizontal incisions, one of which is wavy; this specimen is identical to examples documented from Palermo and Carini.\(^{742}\)

Specimens nos.7-11 (FIG.69.7-11) have rims whose shapes are quite different from each other; yet, they all share the same distinctive morphological detail of a horizontal protuberance, referred to as ‘collar’ in Italian (i.e. *collarino*), which marks the joining point between the neck and the rim. This feature is widespread in contemporary examples documented throughout Sicily; for example, remaining in the context of Enna, several examples of this kind have been recorded in the nearby excavations at Santa Ninfa.\(^{743}\) Specifically, the shape of no.7 recalls example PB919 from Palermo; its fabric is buff with small red inclusions circular in shape (FIG.69.b), which is certainly not from Palermo, although a more specific attribution cannot be established from the time being.\(^{744}\) Specimen no.8 yields traces of dark paint and the same fabric as the previous one, but a shape for which no close parallel has been found. Specimens nos.9-10 yield evidence of red paint and both their fabrics and shapes are compatible with productions from Palermo (Palazzo Bonagia, Piazza Bologni, Gancia).\(^{745}\) Morphologically, specimen no.11 is compatible with several examples from Palermo (Palazzo Bonagia), although its fabrics recalls productions from Agrigento.\(^{746}\) Specimen no.12 has very thin body walls and painted decorations in red; the fabric is compatible with productions from Palermo, but precise morphological parallels are missing. Finally, about one hundred body sherds are worthy of mention due to their painted decorations in red or dark (FIG.69.13); their decorative motives, which comprise strips, splashes, loops, etc., find their context in the wider decorative styles characterising contemporary regional productions.\(^{747}\)

The record of ceramics presented above demonstrates that during the mid-10\(^{th}\) – early/mid-11\(^{th}\) century, Enna was participating in economic and social networks of consumption of goods, which were integrated in the broader panorama of ‘Islamic’ material culture known from other

\(^{742}\) Palermo: Sacco 2016, 261, PB574; Carini: Ardizzone 2012, 102, fig. 41, A16.
\(^{743}\) Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020, 183, fig.6.1, 185, fig.7.1, 186, fig.8.1.
\(^{744}\) Sacco 2016, 262.
\(^{745}\) Sacco 2016, 262; Aleo Nero, Chiovaro 2014, Tab.II,17. Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2014, fig.4.6
\(^{746}\) See Type XI in Ardizzone 2007, fig.30, 89.269, 89.379, 89.274. Palazzo Bonagia: Sacco 2016, 236-37, 252, 258, PB78, 87, 924, 933.
\(^{747}\) See selection in Ardizzone 2007, 282, fig.5; Aleo Nero, Chiovaro 2014, Tav.II; Sacco 2018.
centres of the island and well beyond, first and foremost in Ifriqiya.\textsuperscript{748} During this period, archaeological research has demonstrated that the record of Islamic pottery found throughout Sicily increased dramatically, reaching the easternmost areas of the island (i.e. Syracuse, Paternò); moreover, amphorae and glazed wares from Sicily made their way in mid- and long-distance Mediterranean markets, in bulk and systematically.\textsuperscript{749} Following the upsurge of the Fatimids and Kalbids to the rule of Sicily, it has been recently argued that this marked spatial and quantitative increase in evidence of Islamic pottery was due to the imperial policy of these dynasties, who promoted a systematic process of cultural Islamisation and Mediterranean trade and exchange.\textsuperscript{750}

Along with the cooking-pots from context US159 seen in Chapter 8.1ii, some of the amphorae described above, especially those from context US137, might have been the first ‘Islamic’ ceramics reaching Enna already in the early 10\textsuperscript{th} century, while other distinctive products, such as glazed and unglazed tablewares, seem to appear at this city only from the mid-10\textsuperscript{th} century onwards. The dominant origin of these ceramics from \textit{madina Balarm} is indicative of a gradual integration of Enna in a network of economic activities and ‘Islamic’ cultural milieu, which appear clearly to be promoted and transmitted from and through the new capital of the island. However, setting the leading role of Palermo aside, it is also worth underling the parallel close relationship emerging between Enna and its hinterland, especially with the site of the Villa del Casale, where a discrete number of the ceramics documented at Enna were produced. This circumstance allows us to imagine a certain level of connectivity linking Enna to its territory, which in the next subsection it will be argued that was radically changed in comparison with the previous periods.

\textsuperscript{748} For this point see most recently: Gragueb Chatti, Touhiri, Sacco 2019. 
\textsuperscript{750} Ardizzone, Pezzini, Sacco 2015.
9.2 RURAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

i.) The rahal system: a regional outline

According to the ceramic evidence discussed above and in the previous chapters, a trajectory could be drawn of the process of cultural Islamisation in Sicily, which starting from Palermo, advanced gradually eastward across the island, reaching Enna between the late 9th – early 10th century, and Syracuse in the second half of the 10th century. Yet, matching evidence of Islamic pottery with evidence of actual Muslim communities is still challenging outside Palermo and without the support of textual sources (or burials and places of worship, see Chapter 2.2.iii). In this regard, in fact, it is crucial to note that the amount of textual sources indicative of Muslim settlers and settlements increases exponentially under the Kalbid dynasty (950s onwards). By then, numerous geographers from across the Dar al-Islam visited Sicily, leaving accounts of their journeys and describing a region and its population that, with some isolated exceptions, appeared utterly ‘Islamised’ to their eyes.751

By combining the corpus of available material and textual sources, the transformations undergone by the rural settlement patterns during the mature Islamic age have been at the centre of most recent scholarly debate. Overall, a marked variation has been noted between different regional study-areas, a factor that prevents us from formulating of a unique evolutionary model, which could be generalisable to the whole island.752

In study-areas across Western Sicily, for example, it has been proposed to apply the model known as hisn + alquerias, which has been developed by scholars working in al-Andalus.753 Accordingly, rural settlement patterns appear organised in a ‘loose mesh’ network in which extensive unfortified rural villages were located far apart to each other on lowlands, and coexisted along hilltop and/or fortified settlements.754 This model would have allowed to optimize the

751 Ibn Hawqal and al-Muqqadasi, visiting Sicily in 973 and 988 respectively, are among the first scholars to leave accounts of the island and its Muslim communities, and many others followed thereafter, cf. Metcalfe 2009.
752 Nef, Prigent 2019.
753 Molinari 2013; 2015.
754 In addition to footnote above, see also Alfano, Sacco 2014; Alfano 2015; Rotolo, Civantos 2014.
agricultural output of a territory, assuring at the same time its defense. However, studies conducted on the opposite eastern side of the island, especially in the hinterland of Noto (between Syracuse and Ragusa) revealed a different trend, in which the rural landscape appears intensively occupied by extensive villages surrounded by small units, located in close proximity to each other, and lacking evidence of fortified sites of the type known in Western Sicily.\textsuperscript{755}

Within this multifaceted picture, a common denominator can be found in the settlement patterns of the Fatimid period throughout Sicily, which is the emergence, during the mid-/second half of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, of the *rahal* system. This system consists of extensive unfortified villages, which beside standing out as the main rural foci of demographic aggregation, represented the hubs of agricultural production as well as the administrative and fiscal points of reference within their surrounding territory, over which they held jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{756} It is in fact this compound demographic, administrative, fiscal, and legal bond intertwining rural villages and their surrounding territories that defines *rahals* as such. After the Norman takeover, this system continued to form the organisative backbone of the island, although the word *rahal* was gradually replaced by the term *casale*.

Focusing on the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands, the next subsection aims at contributing to this debated by placing the settlement patterns of the Fatimid period in Central Sicily within it broader regional context.

ii.) \textbf{A contribution to the knowledge of rural settlement patterns in Central Sicily}

Archaeological research conducted over the last decades in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands has documented the existence of three extensive and unfortified rural villages dating to the Fatimid period: Villa del Casale, Marcato, and Philosophiana (FIG.70).\textsuperscript{757} These villages are located at some distance from each other, and do not appear to be surrounded by smaller satellite units. A fourth settlement

\textsuperscript{755} Especially Arcifa, Nef 2008, but also Cacciaguerra 2014.

\textsuperscript{756} Nef, Prigent 2019, but already Arcifa, Bagnera, Nef 2012.

\textsuperscript{757} Alfano 2015; Alfano et al. 2019; Vaccaro 2012.
of this period is known on the hilltop of Monte Mangone, a few kilometers from Villa del Casale and Philosophiana; apart from the hilltop location, it would seem that this site was surrounded by a circuit wall. This circumstance, therefore, not only recalls the model of the *hishn* + *alquarias*, but also demonstrates the accomplishment of a process of transformation of the rural settlement patterns in this area of the island, with a shift from the ‘tight mesh’ network of settlements known during the previous *thematic* period (late 8th - mid-9th century, see Chapter 7.2ii), to this new ‘loose mesh’ system of villages.

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758 Alfano 2015 and personal observation.
Undoubtedly, among these settlements, the most extensive and significant was the one developed at the site of the Villa del Casale. Recent excavations allow us to establish that this village extended over more than 20 ha, that it was arranged in nuclei of residential neighbourhoods organised around groups of courtyard houses, that it was provided with a system of internal paved roads, and that it comprised artisanal workshops for the production of pottery, metal, and sugar.\textsuperscript{759} The evidence of Muslim burials and the recovery of objects such as amulets bearing Quranic professions of faith written in Kufic reflects the spread of both the Islamic religion and the Arabic language at this site.\textsuperscript{760} Among the amulets beseeching God’s merciful protection known from the Casale site, one bearing the date 400 AH (1009 AD) is the earliest known recorded find.\textsuperscript{761} The exact extension of Marcato is unfortunately unknown, while the extension of both the settlements at Monte Navone and Philosophiana ranged around 3 – 5 ha.\textsuperscript{762}

Owing to the thorough knowledge in secondary literature of the village at the site of the Villa del Casale site, it is unnecessary here to dwell further on this exceptional case-study. Instead, it is my intention to provide new insights into a matter that still remains rather obscure in the present understanding of rural settlement patterns in this area of Sicily during the Fatimid period: the forms of occupation existing in the space between these major settlements. As mentioned above, to date none of the field surveys conducted in the surroundings of these main villages has been able to document evidence of small and scattered units located in the space between them.\textsuperscript{763} This consideration can now be partially revised in the light of the field surveys conducted within this study-area in the context of the present doctoral research. These investigations, in fact, have revealed the existence of one such small and isolated unit at the site called Polino, adding a new and thus far unique evidence to the picture currently available of rural settlement patterns.

\textsuperscript{759} See papers in Pensabene, Barresi 2019; Bonanno 2018. Also Alfano 2018; Alfano, Carloni, Pensabene 2018.
\textsuperscript{760} Cf. Gilotte, Nef 2011, 79-80.
\textsuperscript{761} Palma 2010, 73-74; cf. De Luca 2004 for later examples.
\textsuperscript{762} Philosophiana: Vaccaro 2012; Monte Navone: personal observation.
\textsuperscript{763} Alfano 2015; Alfano et al. 2019; Vaccaro 2012.
The site of Polino is located on the southeastern foothill of Monte Polino, in perfect visual contact with the site of Monte Navone (but also Montagna di Marzo). As seen in Chapter 7.2ii, this site was sporadically occupied already during the late 8th – mid-9th century, although rather loosely. Following an apparent hiatus of occupation spanning nearly one century, ceramic evidence shows the reoccupation of this site during the mid-10th – mid-11th century. Regarding the mid-10th – mid-11th century, a remarkable concentration of ceramic scatters, quantifiable in an
average of 10 sherds per square meter, with peaks of 20 sherds, has been documented in a small area that does not exceed 1ha. Among the most distinctive ceramics, there are both glazed and unglazed tableware (FIG.71.1-2), some of which come from Palermo, while others from the workshops of the Casale site, as well as painted amphorae (FIG.71.3-4), among which a Type Carini A17/Group II (no.3), once again both imported from Palermo and produced locally (Villa del Casale).

Without further stratigraphic excavations, it is not possible to add further details with regard to either the patterns of occupation at this site, or the forms of inner organisation. Still, it is crucial to underscore that this site represents, for the time being, the only example of a small and scattered settlement to be known in the intervening space between major rural villages within this study-area. Perhaps, an explanation for the existence of this unit can be found in the position of this site in proximity of the road-axis that, it has been argued in Chapter 7.2ii, during the thematic period would have connected Enna to Philosophiana (see also APPENDIX 2, in which this road-axis is defined ‘way B2’). The same circumstance would still be valid during the mature Islamic age, in which context Polino might have served as a stopping point along the road connecting Enna to the major rural settlements of Villa del Casale, Monte Navone, and Philosophiana.

Concluding remarks

Although archaeological research is still in progress in this area of the island, it seems safe to argue that the Fatimid period (mid-10th – mid-11th century) triggered a wave of transformations in each and every aspect of the urban habitat, rural settlement patterns, and ceramic record discussed in this chapter. The evidence of Muslim burials and the record of pottery from Enna show the definitive transformation of this centre into madina Qasr Yanni, finding equivalents in the material culture and funeral practice of the surrounding territories of the Islamic world. In this process, the leading role of Palermo emerges quite clearly, as testified by the systematic influx of pottery coming from the Islamic capital of the island.
Rural settlement patterns appear now organised on a ‘loose mesh’ model, with the population gathered in extensive rural villages, which became the administrative and jurisdictional foci of reference within their territorial districts (*rahals*). These settlements are mostly unfortified and located in lowlands, although there is one instance of a fortified hilltop site (Monte Navone), recalling the model *hīsn* + *alquarias*. Moreover, during this research an example of a scattered and small settlement has been documented at the site of Polino, which represents for now the only instance of this kind to be currently known within the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands.
PART IV:
CONCLUSIONS
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUDING REMARKS

10.1 THE BYZANTINE-ISLAMIC TRANSITION OF SICILY AND CRETE IN COMPARISON

Having summarised the main arguments and contributions of this thesis on a chapter-by-chapter basis, a broader comparative synthesis is drawn here, in which some of the most significant results of this investigation into the Byzantine-Islamic transitions in Sicily and Crete are discussed.

After experiencing a relatively successful period during their ‘Long Late Antiquity’ (late 7th – early 8th century), the 8th century brought major changes and an overall economic decline to both islands, even though a less catastrophic picture than previously imagined has emerged from this study. In addition to natural and endemic calamities, two main factors defined the 8th century for Byzantium: the rise of the Islamic maritime threat, which was particularly forceful on south-eastern Crete due to its location on the sea-route leading to Constantinople (see inscriptions from Tsoutsouros); and the establishment of the Isaurian dynasty, which ruled throughout this century and promoted critical interventions on both islands. As argued throughout this thesis, the Isaurian emperors from Leo III (717-741) down to Irene (d. 802) acted on various levels to try to cut the losses of the empire, having Sicily and Crete as key pillars in their policy.

Continuing a process commenced in the shift between the late 7th and 8th century, both islands were heavily militarised (see evidence of Byzantine lead seals): Sicily was elevated to theme and Crete to archontate, and ad hoc measures were taken, as testified, for instance, by the appearance of topoteretai on Sicily. Fortifications were built in both urban and rural contexts. Both the grand scale of these fortifications, and the adherence to building techniques and architectural archetypes (such as pentagonal towers) common to contemporary examples across the Byzantine Empire suggest a degree of imperial intervention behind their planning and construction.

In parallel, following the Isaurian administrative and economic reforms, in the mid-8th century the rural estates and land revenues of both islands were redirected from Papal to Imperial jurisdiction. By making the most of the Sicilian and Cretan fiscal and agricultural resources, we
have seen in this operation an effort to contain the economic and territorial losses caused by the Islamic expansion in Egypt, the Levant, and North Africa, as well as the loss of imperial authority across the Balkans. However, according to the available means of their time, it would seem that the Isaurian emperors had to neglect some peripheral areas, such as south-western Crete and western Sicily, while attempting to sustain the core and most productive territories of both islands: central Crete and central and south-eastern Sicily. In this thesis, this selective strategy has been defined ‘policy of containment’. As a result of this attitude, the number of settlements decreased undeniably compared with the previous period, but such numerical decline needs to be revised through the lens of a less catastrophic approach.

The territorial case-study from central Sicily, in fact, has demonstrated that this core area was demographically reinvigorated during the late 8th – early 9th century, that is at the time of the last Isaurian Emperors and of the Amorian dynasty. The same pattern applies to 1/3 of the island between Syracuse, Catania, and Agrigento. Historians explain this process in light of an imperial-sponsored ‘settlement policy’, which seems archaeologically detectable through the appearance of new material sources, such as the cooking-pot Type Rocchicella. Analogous material evidence dating to the late 8th – early 9th century is still patchily known in Crete, and this period remains one of the most obscure in the history of the island. Yet, by reinterpreting the available material sources, this thesis has redrawn a picture of overall limited contraction in the number of settlements. Accordingly, only 25% of units were abandoned from the previous period, in contrast to the 65% previously envisioned. By mapping the distribution of archaeological evidence of this period, settlements on both islands appear to be clustered in sub-regional districts, each presenting a Late Antique city and a network of rural units. The internal organisation of these settlements is still unclear. From the example available, cities seem to have acquired a dominant fortified urban façade and military role (the ‘from polis to kastron’ process), while rural units appear to be occupied loosely, with significant empty spaces left between dwellings (perhaps reserved to agricultural and farming activities).

Concerning the range of material culture of the Byzantine communities inhabiting Sicily and Crete before their Islamic conquests, comparative analyses drawn with contexts from other territories of the Byzantine
Empire, including Constantinople, Corinth, Butrint, Naples, Apulia, and Rome, show a consistent pattern of cultural and social coherency between these territories, of which glazed wares, globular amphorae, and domestic pottery are some of the most common traits. The closer one comes to the eve of the Islamic conquest, the lesser the Byzantine communities inhabiting Crete are archaeologically visible. Material sources from Byzantine Sicily are more abundant and well-known than Crete’s, allowing for a better archaeological understanding of its communities up to the early/mid-10th century, especially in the eastern part of the island that remained under the authority of Byzantium until the 960s. Of course, some details in the range of 8th-9th century material culture and settlement patterns diverged between Byzantine Sicily and Crete, and the former seems to have received more imperial attention than the latter (see below). Overall, however, a picture of considerable similarity can be drawn between these two islands, which changed dramatically after their Islamic conquests in the 9th century, as much as two different patterns of ‘forced’ versus ‘institutionalised’ coexistence seem to emerge.

In particular, by drawing on material sources, this thesis has attempted to shed innovative light on the phases and dynamics through which the Aghlabid and Andalusi forces landing on Sicily and Crete in the 820s consolidated their political authorities and introduced new ranges of material culture. An argument has been made for two main processes, defined in this thesis as institutional Islamisation and cultural Islamisation (see Chapter 2.2.iii for full discussion). The former aiming to expand political authority over pre-existing communities in newly conquered lands through state-promoted economic and administrative operations, of which coinage, lead seals, and devices such as glass-weights are the archaeological remains. Crucial examples of these items from both islands have been discussed, although Islamic lead seals are currently unknown in Crete.

Cultural Islamisation is a more nuanced and multifaceted process, comprising religion, language, and cultural habits. In this thesis, the appearance of distinctive ranges of material sources (especially ceramics) and forms of habitation and inhumation (i.e. courtyard houses and necropolis) have been taken as the main proxies for the possible appearance on both islands of local communities who were integrated into the cultural and economic sphere of the Dar al-Islam. The phases
and main aspects of the Islamisation of Sicily and Crete have been summarised in a comparative table (FIG. 72).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>SICILY</th>
<th>CRETE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 0 (827-830s):</strong>&lt;br&gt;THE BEGINNING OF THE CONQUEST</td>
<td>- Failed attempt to take Syracuse</td>
<td>- Establishment Islamic capital in Heraklion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Establishment of Islamic capital in Palermo and in main garrison cities (especially Agrigento)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Issuing of non-official coinage (to pay the army).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase I (840-860):</strong>&lt;br&gt;THE BEGINNING OF INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMISATION</td>
<td>- Islamic consolidation in Palermo and Western Sicily; available evidence for pre-existing 'Byzantine' communities in Central and Eastern Sicily</td>
<td>- Islamic consolidation in the Heraklion; available evidence for pre-existing Byzantine communities in the rest of the island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Issuing of official coinage and beginning institutional Islamisation (i.e. expansion of political and administrative authority) in the hinterland of Agrigento via state-controlled activities (i.e. first Aghlabid lead seals)</td>
<td>- Issuing of official coinage and beginning institutional Islamisation (i.e. expansion of political and administrative authority) in Central Crete via state-controlled activities (i.e. coins).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase II (870-900):</strong>&lt;br&gt;THE CONSOLIDATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMISATION AND THE BEGINNING OF CULTURAL ISLAMISATION</td>
<td>- Accomplished cultural Islamisation of Palermo (ceramics + necropolis)</td>
<td>- Accomplished cultural Islamisation of Heraklion (ceramics + courtyard houses) and, perhaps, in its surroundings (i.e. Knossos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Consolidation of institutional Islamisation in the hinterland of Agrigento (i.e. the bulk of Aghlabid lead seals)</td>
<td>- Consolidation of institutional Islamisation throughout Central Crete (i.e. the bulk of Emirs’ coins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Beginning cultural Islamisation in Western Sicily. First evidence of cultural Islamisation in an urban centre outside Palermo and Western Sicily (i.e. Enna, which becomes the easternmost Islamic foothold on the island)</td>
<td>- There seems not to have been a wave of cultural Islamisation outside Heraklion, and some pre-existing ‘Byzantine’ communities can be still seen across the island through material sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Eastern Sicily is still under Byzantine authority, and pre-existing Byzantine communities are archaeologically visible through material sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase III (900-960s):</strong>&lt;br&gt;A DIVERGING FINALE</td>
<td>- The Aghlabids are replaced by the Fatimids, who promoted and eventually achieved the institutional and cultural Islamisation of the whole island, first in cities and then in the countryside by the mid-10th century</td>
<td>- First possible evidence of cultural Islamisation outside Heraklion (i.e. Vyzari and Amari Valley), but there still are evidence of pre-existing ‘Byzantine’ communities across the island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- By the end of this phase Sicily was an Islamic state and Byzantium had been drawn away</td>
<td>- By the end of this stage Byzantium had conquered back Crete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 72: the Islamisation of Sicily and Crete (820s-960s): a synoptic table (table by the author)
Within broader analogies (such as the establishment of new capitals and the introduction of coinage), major differences and opposite attitudes can be highlighted in the creation of an Islamic state on each island, allowing us to place the Byzantine-Islamic transitions of Sicily and Crete in a wider context of Islamisation (which will be done in section 10.2).

Regarding Sicily, it seems possible to argue that the process of institutional and cultural Islamisation followed a parallel and gradual geographical and chronological progression from the west to the east of the island, gaining ground in cities first and then spreading in the countryside. Starting from Palermo, western Sicily appears under Aghlabid political authority by the 850s (lead seals from Agrigento’s hinterland), and by the late 9th century evidence of ceramics linked to Islamic economic circuits (i.e. cooking-pots and amphorae with decorazione sinusoidale) is found at various sites there. According to the evidence that emerged during this research from Enna and the surrounding study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands, cultural Islamisation seems to reach central Sicily by the late 9th – early 10th century, although limitedly to this city. The evidence that the first ‘Islamic’ material sources known from Enna are cooking-pots (and possibly amphorae) produced in Palermo shows the pivotal role of the new Islamic capital of the island in implanting and transmitting a new form of material culture and possibly social order. By the mid-10th century, the cultural Islamisation had reached the easternmost areas of the island, appearing contemporarily in major cities, such as Syracuse and Paternò, and rural contexts, as the Casale site and Polino. Both the Aghlabid attitude towards a non-total conquest of Sicily, and the prolonged military strife with the Byzantine forces occupying the central and eastern territories of the island could explain why both institutional and cultural Islamisations were achieved so gradually and slowly. Sicily was divided between Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam for nearly 150 years, yet there was never a moment when the simultaneous presence of these two States was in equilibrium; it remained always a binary system, a ‘forced coexistence’.

In Crete, it would seem that it took only two generations for the new Andalusi rulers to accomplish the institutional Islamisation and, according to numismatic evidence, most of Crete was under Islamic authority by the late 9th century. This same numismatic evidence suggests the restoration of energetic economic and administrative
activities, which appear organised around a vibrant network of rural settlements, and possibly involving preexisting local community. Ceramic evidence, in fact, would indicate that the cultural Islamisation remained a phenomenon limited to the capital and, possibly, to its immediate hinterland (i.e. Knossos) and some inland pockets (as the Amari Valley), but never widespread across the countryside.

Such an apparent ‘incomplete’ process of cultural Islamisation raises the question as whether this was the result of the resilience and ability of pre-existing communities to adapt and maintain distinctive forms of material culture, or a consequence of the Muslim attitude to intervene as little as possible in the existing social order in rural areas, as long as authority was acknowledged and taxes paid. Probably, it was a combination of both. However, as argued below (10.2), a similar endeavour was common in contemporary Islamic states where pre-existing communities, especially Christians, constituted the majority of the rural population and formed indispensable sources of revenues. From this point of view, it seems plausible to conclude that there never was an ‘Islamic Crete’ outside Heraklion, whose walls and surroundings constituted a physical and ideological barrier inside the island. Of course, some armed control would have existed, and one can speculate what could have happened if Crete had remained in Islamic hands for longer. However, from the available evidence, it seems that from their capital, the Andalusí rulers sought to achieve an equilibrium with the preexisting inhabitants of the island, in what could be called an ‘institutionalised coexistence’. Although ‘Islamic Crete’ never existed in a form comparable to ‘Islamic Sicily’, the significance of this ‘capital-centric’ Emirate should not be underestimated. As its range of material and structural remains demonstrates, Heraklion was a proper Islamic capital, whose inhabitants were economically and culturally integrated into the broader koine of the Dar al-Islam.

Before placing the cultural and institutional Islamisation of Sicily and Crete in a wider context, a point should be further underlined. The different situation between Sicily and Crete was also the result of a different response of the Byzantine Empire. According to the evidence collected in this thesis, it has been argued that in the 860s Byzantium chose to temporarily set the Cretan matter aside, while both the Amorian and Macedonian dynasties invested extensive resources to keep a stable foothold on Sicily until the 960s. The strategic prominence
and value of Sicily is shown by the fact that, as late as the 950s, Constantine VII claimed that this island was ‘under Byzantine rule since the emperor of Constantinople rules the sea as far as the Pillars of Hercules’; as Shepard points out, this view should be inverted, as it was a presence in Sicily (although minimal at that stage) that ‘gave Byzantium disproportionate influence and status in the western Mediterranean world, and to abandon claims to it would have been demeaning’.  

**10.2 THE PROCESSES OF ISLAMISATION OF SICILY AND CRETE IN CONTEXT**

With due generalisations and variable outcomes, some distinctive features that have emerged from this thesis find parallels and antecedents in the processes of institutional and cultural Islamisation across various territories of the *Dar al-Islam*, allowing us to place the Byzantine-Islamic transitions of Sicily and Crete in a broader context. According to their Mediterranean setting, and their respective cultural and socioeconomic connections to Ifriqiya, Egypt, and al-Andalus, specific attention has been paid to these surrounding regions, stretching to the Syrian-Anatolian inland borderlands and the Western Sahel, but leaving further Middle Eastern regions of Iraq and Iran aside. This does not mean that contacts between Islamic Sicily, Crete, and Middle Eastern territories were absent; on the contrary, both material sources and textual evidence indicate multiple degrees and levels of direct and indirect connectivity intertwining these regions, which however exceede the geographical scope of these thesis.

Before proceeding further, it is imperative to address a crucial caveat: the different temporal scale related to the process of Islamisation in the case-studies, which in this section have been taken as contextual framework. At a first glance, it might appear misleading to draw parallels between Sicily and Crete, in which the process of Islamisation dates to the 9th-10th century, and territories such as Syria-Palesine.

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764 Shepard 2008, 538.

765 For example, the argument in Arcifa, Bagnera 2014 for the introduction in the 9th century of specific decorative motives on glazed pottery produced in Sicily and the Maghreb by artisans coming from Iraq or Iran; or the displacement of Caliph Musta’ former vizier from Baghdad to Crete in 862: Chrissides 1984, 185, footnote 178.
Egypt, the North Africa, and al-Andalus, which were conquered by the late 7th-early 8th century. However, this dispute is rather marginal. In fact, as discussed below, although militarily conquered by the 7th-8th century, current ongoing research is constantly demonstrating that a systematic process of cultural Islamisation in these regions took off only in the 9th-10th century, which is at the same time as in Sicily and Crete, meaning therefore that parallels can be drawn without incurring in contextual biases. The Western Sahel, where Islam arrived for the first time in the 9th-10th century, represents the sole exception chronologically close to the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition of Sicily and Crete. Still, a main difference does exist: in comparison to Sicily, Crete, and all the other territories mentioned above, the Western Sahel was not integrated into the Dar al-Islam by force, but Islam was introduced through trans-Saharan trade and the routes by which it was conducted.  

Involving economic and administrative actions and interactions promoted by the new Islamic state, institutional Islamisation is well-visible archaeologically, and the interpretation of material sources is rather straightforward. For instance, the immediate introduction of a new Islamic metrological system after the conquest of Egypt, North Africa, and al-Andalus, demonstrates the importance held by coinage in the political expansion and ideological consolidation of Islamic states in these regions. The evidence from Sicily and Crete is paradigmatic. The Emirate of Crete boasts a very extensive corpus of Islamic coins, and the Aghlabid lead seals from Sicily are a further evidence of the institutional Islamisation pursued in this island; similar devices were used during the 8th-9th century in Syria, Egypt, and al-Andalus, demonstrating the adherence to common governmental and administrative practices.

When it comes to cultural Islamisation, however, archaeological evidence is not always conclusive, and interpreting how and when the rise of a new political regime determined the changing record of daily habits, material culture, and settlement patterns has generated scholarly disagreement and theoretical discontent.

Bearing this problem in mind, the attitude of the Muslim conquerors of Crete to reside in their capital Heraklion and to seek an institutionalised

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766 Insoll 1996, 60, 95.
767 For an overview: Sijpesteijn 2018.
768 See discussion in Carvajal 2019.
equilibrium with pre-existing rural communities of the island can be found in various regions of the Islamic world, although a precise example of a capital-centric Islamic insular state is only known textually (Pemba island, see concluding remarks of Chapter 5). Among the case-studies available, Egypt offers a suitable example supported by both textual and material sources. As with the Andalusi rulers of Crete, the bulk of new Muslim rulers of Egypt remained city dwellers for nearly a century after the conquest, claiming territorial leadership in the countryside from their capital, Fustat.\textsuperscript{769} During this period, local agents, who are attested during pre-Islamic times (such as dukes and clergymen), were recruited to collect taxes and perform administrative duties at a village level, leaving the pre-existing order in rural areas largely unchanged. Certainly, the land is useless without labour-force, and local Christian communities ensured revenues and made produce available. However, being outnumbered, this appears to be rather a necessity than a strategy of the incoming Muslim rulers, and the same could be valid for Crete, for which we have argued that a systematic process of mass-migration never occurred (see below).

The Gao Region, in the Western Sahel, offers a further convincing archaeological case-study showing the significance of one main urban centre in the coming and consolidation of Islam. Like Heraklion, structural remains and material sources show that the city of Gao became the hotspot of the first Muslim communities of the region (or at least of communities who where trading from Islamic territories). Structural evidence apart, a most noticeable point in common with Heraklion is that prestige items, such as imported glazed pottery, are found only within Gao city.\textsuperscript{770} On the one hand, the lack of imports outside Gao city concurs with the argument for a limited spread of Islam outside this primay urban centre in the period ca. AD 900-1250; on the other hand, this circumstance has led to suggest that Gao city was not representative of other settlements within the region, showing "certain monopolistic tendencies", which can be perfectly recongnised in Heraklion too, whereby one large Islamic capital exists amidst a rural hinterland which does not display any significant impact of social and cultural change.\textsuperscript{771} As late as the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, Gao city exhibited the characteristics of an Islamic urban centre, which was home to a Muslim

\textsuperscript{769} Legendre 2016; 2019; Sijpesteijn 2009; 2013; 2020.
\textsuperscript{770} Insoll 1996, 33, 74.
\textsuperscript{771} Insoll 1996, 86.
community, but it was surrounded by a majority of non-Muslim rural population.\textsuperscript{772} This circumstance invites us to turn our attention to the countryside.

Once again, Egypt and its corpora of papyrological documents occupy a pivotal place to known patterns of the Muslim occupation of rural areas. The earliest documents reporting small numbers of Arabs settling in the Egyptian countryside date to the early 8\textsuperscript{th} century, but this appears to be a marginal occupation, especially limited to the Delta; on the contrary, it would seem that Muslim communities in the countryside remained a minority up to the 14\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{773} This condition validates the hypothesis currently formulated for Crete, demonstrating that it is possible that throughout the period of the Emirate the bulk of incoming Muslims had remained city dwellers.

In addition to the Egyptian case-study, recent research on the Byzantine-Islamic transition in Syria-Palestina helps us shed complementary light on the patterns of Muslim occupation and administration over pre-existing communities inhabiting the countryside. Like Egypt, Muslim population in the countryside is almost invisible in Syria-Palestine until the 9\textsuperscript{th} century; however, more than Egypt, this case-study allows us to see a phenomenon of clustering of rural settlements in ‘economically successful areas’, in a way similar to what it has been argued in this thesis that occurred in Central Crete. In particular, through extensive field surveys and excavations, it has been possible to demonstrate that while peripheral areas of the region had been nearly abandoned during the 8\textsuperscript{th} century, other areas located in proximity to the main Islamic cities of Lund and Ramla experience expansion, with hundreds of villages, hamlets, and farms in which the lion’s share of the country’s population resided.\textsuperscript{774} As with Heraklion and Central Crete, the increasing need for land that could supply the growing population of these cities with agricultural and industrial products is a straightforward explanation to the wealth of settlements known in their surrounding areas.\textsuperscript{775} However, the Levantine context adds a further invaluable piece to this picture: places of worship indicate that non-Muslim population (mainly Christians) remained the overwhelming majority of the country’s rural society until late 9\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{772} Insoll 1996, 47.
\textsuperscript{773} Legendre 2019, 408.
\textsuperscript{774} See Taxel 2018 for a synthesis, especially 159-161. Also Walmsley 2015.
\textsuperscript{775} See Taxel 2013b, 192; also 2018, 162.
century, suggesting a similar pattern to the model of institutionalised coexistence formulated for Crete, whereby the needs of the new Muslim urban population of the region might have been easily and effectively met by the uninterrupted output and stability of the local rural population. Archaeological research is still in its formative stages in Ifriqya, but the latest studies would suggest that also in this region the spread of Islam in the countryside was slow, and Christianity remained the dominant religion for several centuries.\footnote{Fenwick 2020, 129-145; 2021, 259.}

The quick and extensive Islamic conquest of the Iberian peninsula and the immediate migration of Arabs and Berbers are unparalleled events in Crete, which pose major limits in drawing direct parallels, while offering partial terms of comparison for western Sicily (see below). Newly discovered necropolises testify the occupation of most of the Iberian peninsula by a mix of new ethnic and social groups already in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century, with evidence of burials from as far afield as Pamplona and Nîmes (France).\footnote{Most recently: Carvajal 2019; Gutiérrez Lloret 2021.} However, both material and textual sources demonstrate that, as in Crete, the incoming Muslim conquerors had only limited interest in subverting the pre-existing social and cultural order in specific and intensively urbanised Visigothic regions in central Spain, as long as taxes were paid and authority acknowledged. Thus, a treaty dating 713, which is backed by the evidence of lead seals, was signed between the Muslim conquerors and the local Visigothic duke, Theodimer, stating that, in return for the surrender of key towns and payment of taxes ‘there will not be any change in the situation of his people and that his right of sovereignty will not be contested’.\footnote{Citation after Reynolds 2016, 149. See Tawfiq 2015 for lead seals.} Up to two centuries later, archaeological and textual sources concur in demonstrating that almost nothing had changed in these areas, where the descendants of Visigoth aristocracy remained pivotal in the organisation of rural settlement patterns.\footnote{Salinas, Montillas 2017, 433.} Explicit textual sources and material evidence are lacking for Crete, but this example can present a similar scenario for institutionalised coexistence and equilibrium with the pre-existing local communities. Regarding al-Aldadus, the Islamic heartland of the Iberian peninsula, funerary evidence shows the appearance of Muslim communities as early as the 8\textsuperscript{th} century; however, with some notable exceptions (see below), other material
contexts (ceramics, domestic and urban spaces, epigraphy) do not support the full social Islamisation of the populations until very late in the 9th century, or even the 10th century.\footnote{Cressier, Gutiérrez 2021, 324-329.}

Finally, this \textit{modus vivendi}, it should be noted, does not imply any degree of ‘shared right of ownership’, and thus differs profoundly from the \textit{condominium} model developed on Cyprus between the late 7th and mid-10th century.\footnote{Most recently: Zavagno 2017, 2-4, 81-90; see also 2012; 2013; Christides 2006; Mansouri 2001.} In the perspective of Islamic jurists, the payment of tributes was a vital condition to preserve the status of truce, but it was the very act of making the truce that defined the special condition of Cyprus: a territory that was part of the \textit{Dar al-`}Ahd} (the tribute states), but that was not assimilated into the \textit{Dar al-Islam}.\footnote{A similar truce was signed with the Balearic islands, which in the early 8th century became part of the \textit{Dar al-`}Ahd} but formally remained within the Byzantine political sphere until the early 10th century: Signes Codóner 2005, 46-47; Cau Ontiveros, Mas Florit 2013; Zavagno 2017, 90.\footnote{Ceramic assemblages from Cordova are fundamental to show the appearance of a new record of material culture already in the 8th century: Casal et al. 2009.}

Moving on to the cultural Islamisation of Sicily, throughout the 9th and early/mid-10th century the island was divided between an Islamic West and a Byzantine Central-East, which remained in a constant and prolonged state of military confrontation. This condition calls for a twofold approach, which reflects this geographical and political partition. In western Sicily, following the establishment of the capital Palermo and other garrisons (e.g. Agrigento and Mazara), we have argued for an initial stage of immigration in the countryside, which could be compared, in general and tentative terms, with the southern regions of al-Andalus. There, recent archaeological evidence indicates that the bulk of Muslim incomers clustered in major urban centres in the southmost areas of the Iberian peninsula, namely Seville, Cordoba, Granada, and Pechina.\footnote{Carvajal 2013; 2019.} More importantly, and dissimilarly to the rest of the region, it has been demonstrated that a wave of occupation in the hinterland of these cities occurred in parallel, targeting especially rural areas that were found under-populated.\footnote{This trend seems to reoccur in western Sicily, although the available archaeological evidence allows us to trace this process back to the late 9th century, and not immediately after the conquest, as in the Andalusi example. Closer}
proximity to Tunisia aside, finding a depopulated land meant that it could be immediately redistributed among the conquerors, as experienced in al-Andalus. By contrast, as for the urbanised Visigothic regions of the central Iberian peninsula, it is possible that the remarkable level of urbanisation in Byzantine eastern Sicily represented an initial obstacle and element of deceleration for the spread of cultural Islamisation. However, a further explanation for the early occupation of the countryside in western Sicily, as opposed to the pattern emerging from Crete, is that the scale of immigration, as indicated by the material evidence, was greater in Sicily than in Crete.\footnote{785}{Also Molinari 2012.}

Unlike any of the regions considered so far, central-eastern Sicily was the stage for a continuous military strife between Byzantine and Islamic forces, which was protracted for over a century. This prolonged confrontation does not parallel any pattern of the Byzantine-Islamic transition seen in the West. Instead, it is reminiscent of the situation developed along the eastern borderlands of Anatolia, amid the Anti-Taurus and Taurus mountain ranges, which remained a zone of prolonged military conflicts between Imperial and Caliphate forces from the 650s to the 10th century.\footnote{786}{For what follows: Haldon 1999, 77-79; Tougher 2008, 297-300; Greenwood 2008; Kaegi 2008; Eger 2015.} Admittedly, the argument from these borderlands is mostly drawn on historiographical approaches, but when archaeological evidence is available, it accords with historical reconstructions. The security of these borderlands was paramount for the survival of the Byzantine Empire, and Justinian II’s displacement of a strong expeditionary force to Armenia shows the level of threat reached already by the late 7th – early 8th century. Cilicia and Fourth Armenia, which lay at the centre of this frontier zone, had in fact fallen under Arab overlordship from the late 7th century onwards, and important Islamic Emirates are known to have emerged there by the end of the 8th and 9th century, all under the authority of the Abbasid Caliphate. Melitene, Tarsus, and the Qaysid Emirate (stretching between Theodosiopolis and Manzikert) were some of the most remarkable examples, and it was from these centres that Islamic raids were launched into Byzantine Anatolia. Among these, there was the devastating expedition in 838, when Amorium, the capital of the
Anatolokoi theme, was brutally sacked, leaving unquestionable traces in the archaeological record.\textsuperscript{787}

A degree of simplification is implied, but a comparison may be drawn between the situation in eastern Sicily and western Anatolia. In this context, central Sicily and the thughur stretching from Cilicia to the upper Euphrates, with high mountains with few passes, acted as buffer zones between opposite military fronts.\textsuperscript{788} After its conquest, it has been argued that Enna was to take on the role of a garrison town for the continuing Islamic conquest, in a way that resembles the role assumed by Adana, Melitene, and Tarsus. It is not surprising, therefore, to find out that ‘burnt-earth’, ‘booty-economy’, and ‘guerrilla’ strategies were all developed in parallel along both Sicilian and Anatolian borderlands.\textsuperscript{789} However, in contrast to Sicily, between the late 9\textsuperscript{th} and early 10\textsuperscript{th} century Byzantium reorganised these eastern borderlands creating a network of new themes, which enabled the re-conquest of Melitene, Theodosiopolis, and Tarsus between 934 and 962. At the same time, the last footholds held in Sicily were about to fall, writing a different finale between these two regional case-studies. As noted above, archaeology has yet to shed significant light on the Byzantine-Islamic transition in eastern Anatolia. Yet, if the parallel with central Sicily is taken as valid, then the context US159 from Enna documented in this thesis could offer an example of osmotic combination of cultural milieux transcending the dichotomy between conquerors and conquered, which is well-known in other contexts of Islamisation (e.g. in al-Andalus), and that one cannot help but wondering if it occurred along the eastern Anatolian borderlands, too.\textsuperscript{790}

Finally, it is difficult to draw parallels between the Islamisation of Sicily and motherland Ifriqiya and, although one would expect to find many similarities due to their geography and political interdependency, a first evaluation of material sources would indicate the existence of significant differences between these two regions. For example, Aghlabid lead seals do not appear in North Africa, and with some important exceptions, the record of ceramic evidence followed diverging evolutions in decorative languages and technological

\textsuperscript{787} Lightfoot 2012; 2017.
\textsuperscript{788} Cf. Eger 2015, fig.3.
\textsuperscript{789} See the ‘zones of devastation’ in Kaegi 2008, 368-69, and the ‘no-man’s land’ in Haldon 1999, 77-79.
\textsuperscript{790} Carvajal 2013 for the reference to al-Andalus.
These different scenarios could be the result of an unbalanced development of Islamic archaeology, which is emerging only lately in North Africa and still leaves significant lacunas in our understanding, especially for the 8th century. However, when digging deeper into the available evidence, important parallels do surface between the Islamisation of Sicily and Ifriqiya, although more research on this front is definitely necessary. One similarity is the tendency of the first Muslim conquerors to settle in previous urban centres, the ‘inherited towns’, which like on Sicily, ensured a general pattern of urban continuity. Likewise, previously under-populated rural areas appear to be the primary targets of the migration and colonisation of the countryside, although archaeological evidence of intensive agricultural exploitation reached a peak only in the 10th-11th century. Besides these points, Sicily and North Africa could provide complementary evidence to enrich each other’s gaps for the early Islamic period. The sensational preservation of Aghlabid architectures in Ifriqiya could offer a model for the future identification of analogous architectures in Sicily, while the refined knowledge of ceramic evidence from Sicily dating to the 8th-9th century could indicate productive paths for the codification of contemporary material culture produced and circulating in North Africa. Surprisingly, attempts to create a synergetic Islamic archaeology between Sicily and North Africa have only rarely been made in the past; most recent studies have begun to explore this approach, which could hold a great potential if further endorsed.

The overview drawn above has shown manifold aspects in the process of Islamisation in various territories across the Mediterranean world and beyond, some of which offer valuable comparisons to better grasp and interpret the Sicilian and Cretan case-studies. One fact that emerges is that while Islamic Sicily and Crete might appear as peripheral regions to

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791 Gragueb Chatti, Touhiri, Sacco 2019.
793 Fenwick 2020, 45-47, 55. The same for Syria-Palestine, for which, most recently: Taxel 2018.
794 Fenwick 2020, 94.
795 Grauber Chatti, Touihri, Sacco 2019.
the eyes of scholars working in core territories of the Islamic world, in practice when considered within their actual geographical and cultural contexts, both islands stand at the virtual and spatial core of the Dar al-Islam. Placed at the maritime crossroads between Constantinople, Cordoba, Mecca, and Baghdad, both islands acted as sociocultural and economic lynchpins between the western and eastern halves of the Islamic world, and well beyond. Laying at the centre of the Mediterranean border between the worlds of Islam and Byzantium, Sicily and Crete were maritime frontier-lands of an international military and ideological confrontation, which involved the two greatest sovereign powers of the time. This double dimension is reflected in the archaeological record, which has revealed two complex and – to certain extents – sophisticated islands, which shared much of their material culture and social intercourse with contemporary case-studies from Byzantine and Islamic neighbouring regions.

Much remains to be done to fully understand the Byzantine-Islamic transition of Sicily and Crete. However, the evidence collected and discussed in this thesis has provided a distinctive archaeological contribution to expand and further nuance our knowledge and understanding of this period on both islands. For Crete this thesis represents the first archaeological study of the Islamic Emirate; for Sicily a fine-grained analysis has been offered of the the Byzantine-Islamic transition of Enna and the Southern Erei Uplands, a study-area located in a liminal position between the Byzantine eastern and Islamic western halves of the island. On the basis of the evidence collected, Sicily and Crete appear now as compound states characterised by the organisation of energetic and vibrant communities and settlements, the introduction of distinctive ranges of Islamic material culture and forms of habitation/inhumation; and the restoration of complex economic and administrative practices. In Crete it would seem that patterns of coexistence between incoming Andalusi rulers and pre-existing communities prevailed over those of oppression, with the former nucleating in the main urban centre of the region (Heraklion) and the latter continuing to inhabit the most productive hearlands of the island.

A climate of military conflict prevailed in central Sicily; after its conquest, Kastrum Hennae was gradually transformed from the headquarters of the thematic troops into madina Qasr Yanni, and the surrounding settlements came to be organised in a loose-mesh rahal system centered around extensive villages and a few fortified units.
Archaeological research is still in progress, but we hope that some of the considerations offered here will contribute to the research agenda yet to come, whether they will be verified to be valid or disproved.
Responding to the increasing maritime threat coming from Ifirya, between the late 7th and mid-8th century Byzantium initiated a programme of militarisation on Sicily and elsewhere where territories were exposed to the Arab expansion. Besides sigillographic evidence, fortifications are key archaeological features bearing testament to this process. Before delving into two selected examples of work of defence from Sicily, it is important to briefly draw attention to two main historical issues and archaeological challenges facing the study of Byzantine fortifications (see also Chapter 2.2i). The first problem is to assign a more refined chronology to the phases of initial construction, maintenance, and disuse of individual examples. Until recently, it was prevailing scholarly opinion that most of the post-Justinian fortifications across the Empire were built under Constans II, in the mid-7th century. More recently, however, archaeological research has challenged this opinion, demonstrating that, at least in the Aegean and Southern and Western Asia Minor, their main period of construction dates between the late 7th and early 8th century. The second issue is to identify the agents responsible for commissioning, planning, and executing the construction of these fortifications, and the levels on which they acted, that is as representatives of the central government, of local authorities, or as a combination of both. Here, it will be argued that a more careful reading of structural features and masonry techniques of some case-studies from Sicily can offer some basis to enrich the interpretative debate concerning the commissioning and construction of these structures.

Over the last decades, patchy archaeological research has been conducted at various fortified sites in Sicily but, to date, an exhaustive archaeological survey gathering the evidence of Byzantine fortifications from the island is still lacking. The Arab chronicles of the conquest, such as Ibn al-Atir and al-Nuwari, reveal that Muslims raiders of the 8th

796 For example: Foss, Windfield 1986.
797 For a critical review of this issue: Crow 2017, 94-97.
798 For recent reviews: Uggeri 2010; Vaccaro 2013a; Molinari 2016.
century found a heavily fortified region, whose main cities were all surrounded by circuit walls. However, due to the continuity of occupation at most urban centres, the corpus of reliable archaeological evidence available to investigate urban fortifications is scant. Only a few possible sections of city-walls survive inside the urban fabrics of centres including Syracuse, Catania, Taormina, Enna, and Ragusa.

Seven km. from the centre of Syracuse, overlooking the city and its harbours, is the Euryalos fort, an extraordinary military structure constructed in the 4th century BC on the Belvedere plateau (FIG.73). This monument covers almost 3 ha with complex sequences of three walled courtyards, rock-cut ditches, underground tunnels, bastions, towers, cisterns, and a monumental gate.

Recently, it has been suggested that in the 8th century this complex became the headquarters of the thematic forces detached on the island, whose strategos was located in the nearby Syracuse. Field surveys conducted in the surroundings of this monument confirm that the area was intensively occupied in the 8th-9th century, and pottery finds, including semi-luxury items such as glazed wares, have suggested an elite presence at this location. In spite of the great potential for further archaeological investigations, the medieval phases and structural remains of this monument have received only limited scholarly attention. According to personal structural observations, it seems possible to isolate some features that, although lacking of independent dating elements, such as specific ceramics used as building materials, can be tentatively linked to the Byzantine period. In particular, a series of 11 square rooms measuring 4x4m are aligned along the southern edge of the central rectangular courtyard (FIG.74).

800 Arcifa 2016a; 2016b. Also: Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, Valbruzzi 2020; Fiorilla, Rizzone, Sammito 2020.
801 Arcifa 2016b, 431-32. Specialists of Arabic sources should target Islamic chronicles and accounts of the various sieges and final conquest of Syracuse, seeking for possible reference to this fort.
802 Cacciaguerra 2009. Agnello 1952 interpreted this complex as an early medieval monastery.
FIGURE 74: Above, plan of the central yard of Euryalos fort, with row of 11 rooms built against the southern wall during the Byzantine period (late 7th-8th century?) (graphic elaboration by the author). Below, details of the masonry technique employed in the wall of the rooms; note the use of both spolia and tiles and small slabs of stone as fillers between blocks (drawings and graphic elaboration by the author).

Each room has a doorway that is delimited by a pair of monolithic orthostats presenting, one per pair, a bolt-socket. The walls that divide these rooms show a masonry employing both isodomic blocks of spolia and irregular stones, which are alternated and often surrounded by
small slabs, rock chips, and ceramic tiles, used as fillers between blocks. This masonry is easily distinguishable from Classical period construction, in which monumental isodomic blocks and metal clamps are used. Traces of lime mortar can be observed, but clay mortar is the prevailing bonding material employed. The trend to replace lime mortar with clay mortar has been noted elsewhere in Sicilian masonry of the 8th century. This masonry technique, therefore, defines a relative chronological sequence that, according to the following case-study from Castronovo (but also to the other examples discussed in the body of this thesis), can find a parallel with other examples dating to the same period from both this island and the wider Byzantine world, including Crete (i.e. see the walls from Limani Chersonissos shown in Chapter 4.1.iv, FIG.30).

Concerning the function of these 11 rooms, only speculative assumptions can be made at this preliminary stage. Their layout, however, would support the idea that these were barracks accommodating (mid/high rank?) troops of the theme, but this remains to be further validated. Moreover, among other comparisons, a strong parallel can be established with the 11 rooms, seen in Chapter 4.1ii, that were added, possibly in the late 7th – early 8th century, to the so-called Kastro on the acropolis of Gortyn, which have the same width, but double depth. A further very close parallel can be drawn with the series of 10 square cells, having identical size to those from Syracuse, recorded during stratigraphic excavation in the fortress of Emporio on Chios. Built against the inner side of the northern circuit wall, some of these rooms were found with undisturbed stratigraphic contexts yielding plenty of ceramic and numismatic finds, whose study has enabled excavators to date their main period of occupation to the late 7th – early 8th century. Sicily also offers a case-study of extraordinary importance for a rural fortification dating to approximately the 690s-730s, which on the island correspond to the early thematic period: the so-called Kassar at Castronovo. Built on a 1000m mountain in central-western Sicily, the 3m-thick circuit wall of this fortification runs for nearly 2km, and it has recently been the object of systematic and intensive campaigns of

803 Arcifa 2010c.
804 Ballance et al. 1989, drawings nos. VII-IX.
archaeological investigation.\textsuperscript{805} It is built \textit{ad emplekton}, featuring one monumental gate, three secondary entrances, and 11 towers, one of which pentagonal, all enclosing an open area 90ha in extent (FIG.75). Besides producing an architectural survey and structural plan of this monument, recent field surveys and geo-radar prospections have shown that, with the only exception of a few barracks, the inside of this enclosure was an ‘empty space’. A series of test pits conducted along the inner edge of the wall have made it possible to identify finds and stratigraphic contexts that link the construction of this fortification to the late 7\textsuperscript{th} – early 8\textsuperscript{th} century, such as ceramics and a fine example of a belt-buckle.\textsuperscript{806} Surprisingly, the whole site seems to be abandoned by the late 8\textsuperscript{th} century, that is well before the Islamic landing in the 820s, thus before it could fulfill the function for which it had been designed: stopping the Islamic expansion across the island.\textsuperscript{807}

To date, there has been only limited archaeological attention to the masonry techniques employed in the curtain wall. This study has tried to overcome this deficiency by sampling and examining sections of the monumental gate, which shows a masonry (Type A according to Vassallo et al.) that recurs along the entire circuit (FIG.76). Lime mortar is abundantly used, although clay mortar appears too. Besides the use of rock slabs and stone chips as fillers between blocks, the most revealing element in this masonry is the meticulous and methodical use of specific roof-tiles as building material, the so-called \textit{a superficie striata}. These tiles can be securely dated to the 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, and possibly early 8\textsuperscript{th} century; since later typologies of tiles are absent from the masonry, they represent a firm \textit{terminus ante quem} to date the construction of this fortification. The positioning of the tiles within the masonry is quite relevant too: not only as fillers, but also accurately laid down in well-levelled layers between courses of blocks. As mentioned above and further discussed below, close parallels for this masonry can be established with various structural examples from Sicily and the Aegean, including Crete, following a structural narrative that stretches into the 10\textsuperscript{th} century and beyond (i.e. the Temenos fort from Crete and the \textit{clossoiné} style). Moreover, because it is a well-dated monument, this

\textsuperscript{805} Vassallo et al. 2015; Carver, Molinari 2016; Carver, Molinari et al. 2017; 2018; 2019; Molinari 2019.

\textsuperscript{806} Carver, Molinari 2016.

\textsuperscript{807} Although not occupied permanently, this fort could have retained a military value, but this remains to be identified archaeologically.
masonry can be used as a typological model for drawing parallels with other structures from Sicily, which have been dated to this period only tentatively. The walls of the Euryalos fort are suitable examples, as tiles, small rock chips, and slabs are in fact organised in horizontal rows and used as fillers between blocks.

In addition to chronological issues, contextualising these fortifications and masonry techniques from Sicily with examples of from the Aegean and Asia Minor can offer valuable insights into the commissioning and execution of these structures, emphasising a degree of uniformity between these islands and surrounding core regions of the Byzantine Empire.

FIGURE 75: the late 7th – early 8th century fortification of Kassar at Castronovo di Sicilia, and details of the monumental gate and the pentagonal tower (after Vaccaro 2013a and Vassallo et al. 2015)
These two case-studies from Sicily illuminate a series of key factors, which allow for some interpretations to be made regarding the possible levels of imperial patronage, local engagement, and technical expertise linking this island to Byzantine traditions of building fortifications.
Particularly revealing in indicating a possible degree of imperial intervention behind the planning of these fortifications is the adherence to architectural archetypes and building techniques that can be found across the Byzantine Empire. Of course, some of these solutions, such as the use of *spolia* or *emplekton* cores formed by mortared rubble, could simply be the results of functional structural reasons and practical needs of the time. However, in the case of the other features, such as pentagonal towers and plan layout of the square-rooms, it is reasonable to assume that major fortification works were promoted by the state, in the context of a general imperial policy of active intervention in the Aegean, Sicily, and Asia Minor, responding to the aggressive military challenges of the age.\textsuperscript{808} Similar pentagonal towers dating between the late 7\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} century, for example, have been recorded at key sites such as Ephesus and Ankara, to mention a couple.\textsuperscript{809}

Similarly, common building and masonry techniques, especially the use of ceramic tiles as primary building material—and not only as fillers between blocks—might reveal that the workforces responsible for the construction of these fortifications, whether working on an external, local, or mixed level, were all part of a common cultural and technical milieu of the Byzantine craftsmanship tradition.\textsuperscript{810} Certainly, the use of bricks and tiles bonding courses can be traced as back as the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century AD (for example at Nicomedia).\textsuperscript{811} However, it was only in the late 7\textsuperscript{th} century that, everywhere across the Byzantine Empire, the arrangement of bricks and tiles started to become increasingly less organised, degenerating from ordered bands to imprecise rows.\textsuperscript{812} Similarly, it was only in the second half of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century that *spolia* begun to be carefully selected and meaningful organised in the façade of circuit walls.\textsuperscript{813} Comparable structural narratives can be found in numerous works of fortification of the Byzantine Empire dating between the second half of the 7\textsuperscript{th} and the early 9\textsuperscript{th} century, such as at Miletus,

\textsuperscript{808} Crow 2017.
\textsuperscript{809} Crow 2017.
\textsuperscript{810} Considering the levels of engagement of local and private agents in the constructions of these fortifications, the richness in different technical expertise and pragmatic expedients adopted in individual monuments would suggest that local builders and private labour-force were at the core of their practical constructions, adapting and adjusting their work according to specific geographical and social contingencies: Crow 2017, 102.
\textsuperscript{811} For both: Crow 2017, 91.
\textsuperscript{812} Cf. Dalbon 2014; Foss, Winfield 1986.
\textsuperscript{813} Crow 2017.
Ephesus, Rhodes, Patara, Amorium, Nicaea, and Kastro Apalirou on Naxos.\textsuperscript{814}

\textsuperscript{814} Crow 2017; Roland 2018 specifically on masonry Type 2 in the fortifications of Kastro Apalirou, which should be dated to the late 7\textsuperscript{th} century, and in fact is remarkably similar to Castronovo’s.
APPENDIX 2:

THE INLAND ROADS FROM SYRACUSE TO ENNA, AN HYPOTHETICAL RECONSTRUCTION

The exact routes of pre-modern roads in Central Sicily is unknown archaeologically, although a recent study has tried to demonstrate the possible correspondence between the networks of Regie Trazzeri known from 18th-19th century cartography, and axes of the Roman and Medieval period. According to this plausible yet hypothetical notion, then, all the major sites considered in the study-area of the Southern Erei Uplands are related to both intra-sites tracks and broader regional axes of communication. Generalisations apart, since cooking-pots Type Rocchicella were first recognised and mapped in 2010, it has become increasingly clear that their known distribution followed the main road axes linking Syracuse to the principle cities and settlements in eastern and central Sicily; the axis between Lentini and Piazza Armerina via Palagonia, Ramacca (Casalgismondo), and Gallinica was one of the earliest to be drawn. The significance of this evidence, however, has not been fully exploited, and the question why this road mattered so much in the late 8th-9th century was not properly asked. The new role of Enna as the military headquarters of the Theme of Sicily might offer an answer to this question, implying the (re)establishment of an inland axis which put this centre in communication with Syracuse as efficiently as possible. The area between Palagonia and Ramacca, in particular, is well-known in the context of road networks due to the existence of a statio of the Roman Imperial axis linking Catania to Agrigento, called Capitoniana, which according to the Itinerarium Antonini came before the statio of Philosophiana. The exact location of Capitoniana is unknown, although there is wide scholarly agreement that it could have been at Casalgismondo, in the River Margherito Valley.

815 Calabrese forthcoming. Also considerations in Arcifa 2017, 249-253.
816 For example, Case Bastione is on the trazzera Enna-Gangi; Montagna di Marzo at the crossroad between Enna-Piazza Armerina-Caltanissetta; Navone between Piazza Armerina-Mazzarino-Barrafranca; Azzolina on the trazzera Piazza Armerina-Aidone; etc.
817 Arcifa 2010d; 2013b; 2017; Alfano 2015, 339.
818 Bonacini 2006; 2010; Bonanno 2014, 97; Sfacteria 2016a; 2016b; 2018; Uggeri 2004, 251-266.
From Casalgismondo, there are two equally plausible routes to reach Enna (FIG.77). One, here called A, is shorter but steeper, goes north via the hinterland of Ramacca and, ascending 550m, passes by Cittadella di Morgantina and turns west cutting through Marcato and the Ramata Valley. The route of this road was first supported by Arcifa.819 The other route B, which has two variants, B1 and B2, takes a slightly longer way, quantifiable between 4 to 20 more kilometres, but is gentler, ascending circa 400m and, most importantly, could count on a segment of the pre-existing Roman highway Catania-Agrigento, coinciding with the leg of the trazzera Lentini-Piazza via Gallinica. This latter route was not previously considered, although the scope of this thesis does not allow for a detailed discussion. In light of the archaeological evidence collected during this study, and according to broader considerations concerning pre-modern road-networks, it is however argued that not only the axis between Casalgismondo and Gallinica duplicates the leg between Capitoniana and Philosophiana of the Roman road Catania-Agrigento, but also that it became pivotal in connecting Syracuse and Enna during the late 8th - 9th century.820

![FIGURE 77: Hypothetical reconstruction of the inland roads leading from Syracuse to Enna during the late 8th-9th century (graphic elaboration by the author)](image)

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819 Already Arcifa 2010b.
820 An article on this matter is in preparation with colleague A. Arena. According to Sfacteria's GIS least cost path calculation, the leg of the Roman road Capitoniana-Philosophiana did not pass by Gallinica but 3km to the south via Mirabella: Sfacteria 2016b, 69-70.
In other words, it is argued that the Byzantine land forces of the late 8th-9th century arriving at the site/area of Casalgismondo from Syracuse could have taken two ways to reach Enna, way A and way B, either of which serving a different purpose. Route A, going northward was shorter but steeper, thus more functional for rapid movements of squadrons and exchange of communications, for example by couriers on horses. Route B, going westward along the River Margherito Valley, was one (B1) to five (B2) hours slower on foot (according to GIS calculation using Google Maps) but, merging and taking advantage from the pre-existent segment of the Roman road Catania-Agrigento, was the more efficient for the slower movement of troops and bulk goods on wagons and alike. From Gallinica it is probable that this route went northwards through Azzolina and the modern trazzera to Aidone and Marcato via the foothill of Rossomanno (B1). The evidence of hilltop sites of this period at Serre Caniglia and San Nicola, which overlook the defile through Gallinica and the River Margherito Valley, and the passage to Azzolina, support this view. Alternatively, the track could have proceeded further to the west through the River Leano Valley and Casale, intercepting, possibly at Navone, the segment of the highway that would have existed between Philosophiana and Enna (B2). Once again, this road in not known archaeologically, although one cannot help but notice that the trazzera 50-16 runs, almost in a straight line, between Philosophiana and Enna via Navone, Polino, and Montangna di Marzo. Overall, this latter solution was the longest, but also the most comfortable one, exploiting the track of pre-existing Roman highways. These, for the moment, are interpretative considerations, which however accord with archaeological evidence, topographic features, and historical contingencies that saw this area of the island becoming focal during the military organisation of the theme.
APPENDIX 3:
AGHLABID LEAD SEALS FROM THE HINTERLAND OF AGRIGENTO: OUTWITTING A CONTROVERSY

From the beginning of the Islamic conquest in 827, and throughout the 9th century, the hinterland of Agrigento between the Mounts Sicani and the River Platani became an interface in the military confrontation and institutional interactions between Byzantium and the *Dar al-Islam.*

This must have been especially true in the short term. Agrigento fell permanently into Islamic hands by 829-30, even earlier than Palermo (831), and was among the first and major Islamic cities of Aghlabid Sicily, and an early gateway for the new Muslim communities coming from Ifriqiya. The role of Agrigento is only known textually, while archaeological research has failed, so far, to produce material evidence of occupation from the city dating between the late 8th and early 10th century. Among other notable absences, it is worth noting that, unlike its hinterland, Agrigento has not produced evidence for cooking-pots Type Rocchicella. The lack of archaeological evidence of this period from Agrigento is balanced by the richness of evidence from its territory, which, therefore, acquires a central relevance in investigating the modes of institutional (and cultural) interactions which developed during the earlier stages of the Islamic conquest.

However, both the dynamics of the Aghlabid occupation in this area, and the possible survival of pre-existing communities remain matters of controversy, which divide scholarly opinion. The corpus of 44 Aghlabid lead seals dating between the 856 and 909 found in the hinterland of

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<sup>821</sup> Arcifa 2013a
<sup>822</sup> For a historical context: Metcalfe 2009. Even today the coastal area of Agrigento represents the most targeted landing spot for the small boats of migrants coming to Sicily from Tunisia, which underlines the geographical significance of this area as a bridgehead between these two regions.
<sup>823</sup> Although, until now, excavations have mostly investigated the so-called Valle dei Templi, which was the sacred area of the city throughout the Classical to Early Byzantine periods, up to the early 8th century, but which is peripheral to the adjacent hill on which the city moved during the later Fatimid or Norman period. It is therefore plausible that this urban shift had already occurred in the context of the Byzantine-Islamic transition, leaving no trace of this period in the area of the Valle dei Templi. This area was later reoccupied, in the 10th century, for industrial purposes by a ceramic workshop and, maybe, by a monastery: Ardizzone 2012; Ardizzone 2020; Ardizzone, Pezzini 2014; Carra, Ardizzone 2008; Caminneci et al. 2018; Caminneci, Parello, Rizzo 2018; Rizzo 2011a.
Agrigento represents the core of this dispute. These seals (FIG.78), which were probably spherical in shape, are roughly quadrangular, possibly due to their compression between two stamps; their dimension is between 1 and 2cm, and a narrow hole runs through them, which was functional to the insertion of a string. Both sides are stamped, and their content is always the same: by order of Emir..., on one side, and the year of issue on the other side (in the year...AH). The earliest examples are three specimens bearing the name of the Emir Abu Ibrahim Ahmad b. Muhammad (856-863), followed by four of Ziyadat Allah II (863-864), 15 of Muhammad II b. Ahmad (864-875), 14 of Ibrahim II (875-902), and one of Ziyadat Allah III (903-909). The reading of eight specimens remains uncertain. Twelve specimens were found during archaeological excavations in rural sites of central Sicily around Milena, 30 km from Agrigento; the exact place of recovery of the others is unknown.

FIGURE 78: Aghlabid lead seal from Milena od Ziyadat Allah II, 863-64 (after De Luca 2012, 310, no.2)

Due to their ‘unspecified aim’, there is still uncertainty and even disagreement among scholars about the function of these Aghlabid seals from Sicily, that is how they were used, by whom, in what context, and for what purpose(s). In brief, on one side there are scholars who envisage this evidence to prove that pre-existing Byzantine communities continued to inhabit these territories, and were subject to taxation from

824 For what follows: Balog 1979; De Luca 2003; 2012.
the new Muslim rulers. Others, instead, believe that these lead seals were addressed to the Muslim rural communities who had already settled in the hinterland of Agrigento at this time. The aim of this appendix, of course, is not to solve this scholarly dispute, but to offer a personal perspective to interpret and, perhaps, understand this debate.

As noted in Chapter 8.2i, according to recent archaeological excavations and field surveys that have targeted the hinterland of Agrigento, it would seem possible to conclude that during the period of the Byzantine-Islamic transition this area was divided in two opposite zones, virtually separated by the line of the River Platani (FIG. 79).

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**FIGURE 79:** the hinterland of Agrigento in the Byzantine-Islamic transition (late 8th – early 10th century) (map by the author)

825 De Luca 2012, 297; Metcalfe 2009, 34; Alfano 2015, 348.
826 Nef 2010, I wish to express my gratitude to this scholar for the stimulating discussion we had on this matter.
827 This system was already described as ‘un limes per definizione permeabile e varabile nel tempo’ in Arcifa 2013a.
In the hilly terrains to the east of the River Platani a network of sites and settlements can be found that, during the late 8th – early/mid-9th century, would appear inhabited by ‘Byzantine’ communities, as the range of material culture recorded at these sites might indicate. Cooking-pots Type Rocchicella and amphorae with grooved-strap handles were found at most of these sites, including Palma di Montechiaro, Giummello, Cangiana, Ciccobriglio, Delia, Castrofilippo, and Colmitella. The lead seal of Theokistos strategos of Macedonia, dating to the early/mid-9th century, was discovered at Villalba and represents a remarkable and tangible evidence of Byzantine state authority there. Moreover, an unspecified number of golden coins of Theophilos were found at Monte Conca, which however do not indicate necessarily a Byzantine site; as argued below, in fact, such finds could reflect Islamic taxation or booty economy.

The context of Colmitella, 15km from Agrigento, is the most complete and noteworthy from an archaeological perspective. Recent rescue excavations unearthed ceramic assemblages spanning the 7th-12th century, including Type Rocchicella and grooved-strap handle amphorae, and Byzantine small finds of the 8th-9th century, such as the lead seal of Antiochos notarios (second half of the 8th century). The remains of seven structures and workplaces were also discovered, of the type similar to the rectangular and circular huts with postholes seen from Contrada Edera (see Chapter 2.2ii), one with a rock-cut press. Most importantly, more than 80 rock-cut siloi were found at this site (FIG.80), some of which were plastered inside, while others accommodating dolia. These siloi probably date from the 7th century but were used thought the 8th, 9th, and possibly early 10th century, after which they were gradually turned into dumps, as their fillings indicate. All these features suggest the existence at this site of a well-structured and relatively wealthy village within the local network of settlements of the 8th-9th century. Two similar siloi were found at Milena, but appear to be slightly early in date.

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828 Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014.
829 Rizzo, Danile, Zambito 2014.
830 Rizzo 2011b; Rizzo, Romano 2012; Alfano, D’Amico 2017, 79.
831 Arcifa 2008a, 52.
On the opposite western side of the River Platani, in the rugged landscape of the western Sicani Mountain range, recent field surveys have identified a number of hilltop sites, namely Monte Castelluzzo, Lordichella, Monte Giudecca, Monte Guastella, and Monte Conca (Serra del Palco) di Milena, with evidence of Islamic amphorae of the late 9th – early 10th century (with decorazione sinuisodale). These sites appear to have been occupied (sporadically?) in the late 7th – early 8th century, a date that would accord with the construction of the Kassar (see Appendix 1). However, Byzantine ceramics such as Type Rocchicella and grooved-strap handles are consistently absent there, indicating, quite convincingly, that this area and sites were not inhabited immediately prior to their Islamic occupation in the late 9th – 10th century. As argued in Chapter 8.2i, the fact that these sites were not previously inhabited by Byzantine communities offers a reasonable explanation as why Islamic pottery of the late 9th – early 10th century is found there. Their location on hilltops and naturally-fortified sites, moreover, fits perfectly in the framework of the military confrontation of the Islamic conquest. But, what happened in between these two

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832 Bergemann 2013; 2014.
833 The dating is based on the evidence of Byzantine roof tiles with striations (sometimes with voids) but the lack of African Red Slip Ware: Arcifa 2013b, who draws from Rizzo 2004.
areas when the new Islamic and pre-existing Byzantine states came to clash? The sites of Milena and Colmitella, which lay at the fringe between these two areas, offer exceptional archaeological evidence to consider the possible process of implementation of economic and administrative actions of the Aghlabid state over this territory, which was until then firmly Byzantine.

On their own, the more than 80 rock-cut siloi from the Byzantine village at Colmitella bear a clear evidence of both farming activities and the storing of agricultural produce. However, when the spatial organisation of these siloi within the settlement is considered, then a different significance emerges. These rock-cut pits, in fact, are all concentrated in a single area of the settlement, which has been interpreted as a communal space, rather than in proximity of individual dwellings, as in the contemporary cases of Contra Edera, Philosophiana, and Marcato. According to Molinari, this clustering might correspond to the need for reciprocal control within peasant families of the same community. However, moving from local to supranational dimension, Rizzo explains this as a response to the *choria* system (see 2.2ii), and the renewed responsibility of Byzantine villagers to collect taxation in kind collectively. The lead seal of Antiochos *notarios* found at Comitella could support this latter consideration. Certainly, one hypothesis does not exclude the other, but neither consider the Islamic component. In other words, these views are valid for the period preceding the Islamic conquest, but what happened next, when Muslim communities appear to have occupied hilltop and fortified sites on the western bank of the River Platani? The corpus of Islamic lead seals from Milena, which bear the name of the Aghlabid emirs, might offer an answer to this question, but a controversial one.

Again, because the specific function of the Aghlabid lead seals from Sicily is never specified (only the emir’s name and a date are specified), there is a scholarly debate and even disagreements about their purpose(s) and addressees. Of course, to set these Islamic seals in relation with the siloi at the Byzantine settlements of Milena and Colmitella is very tempting. It is almost a mathematical equation, which results inevitably in the Aghlabid’s application of the *jizya* system to the

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836 Molinari 2015, 208.
non-Muslim communities of these settlements or, better in this case, a form of taxation in kind.\textsuperscript{838} Most scholars have adhered to this view, which is accepted in this thesis, and it is validated by comparative evidence drawn with contemporary Islamic lead seals of the 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century form Egypt, Palestine, and al-Andalus. In some fortunate cases, lead seals from these regions contain the explicit reference to non-Muslim populations or a place-name and an amount to be paid, which attests their incontrovertible use to record payments of poll-taxes or other tributes, such as peace-treaties, by non-Muslim subjects.\textsuperscript{839} But, can other functions be excluded for the Sicilian lead seals? For instance, could these seals have been attached as authentication and protection of documents and letters that the Aghlabid rulers sent from Palermo or Ifriqiya to the Muslim communities who had recently settled at these villages in the hinterland of Agrigento? After all, Muslim communities were also normally and commonly subject to the payment taxes.\textsuperscript{840}

If Muslim communities were indeed settled at these sites, taking advantage of pre-existing siloi and other agricultural installations, then it is perfectly possible that they were the recipients of these seals, but this cannot be proved archaeologically. The years between 886-900, however, which correspond to the period of the seals, are known historically for a civil war between Arab families of the jund from Palermo and Berber factions coming from Ifriqiya, who are associated with settlements in and around Agrigento.\textsuperscript{841} This is a very striking coincidence, which implies a degree of control (either fiscal or political) by the central authority over the insurgent Muslim communities settled around Agrigento. Even more, it could reflect an attempt to reach out and to consolidate control over the dissident communities, and therefore could well explain and justify the distribution of the Aghlabid lead seals at these sites surrounding Agrigento. Perhaps, future archaeological research will provide new evidence to resolve this controversy. However, whether the addressees of these seals were Muslim or non-Muslim communities, and whether they were used as

\textsuperscript{838} Both systems in cash and kind might have been implemented at the same time, as the golden coins of Theophilos form Monte Conca could indicate.
\textsuperscript{839} For recent overviews: Sijpesteijn 2018; Amitai-Preiss 2000; 2010; Tawfiq 2015; Porter 2011, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{840} Nef 2010; Metcalfe 2009, 13.
\textsuperscript{841} Metcalfe 2009, 28-30. The dispute between Muslims of Palermo and Agrigento broke out again in the 920s-930s, this time certainly due to tax-related issues: Metcalfe 2009, 49-50.
tax-receipts or for other administrative or legal reasons, one fact remains, which enables us to by-pass this current scholarly controversy. In fact, no matter how one envisions the function and recipients of these seals, this evidence indicates, powerfully and indisputably, the institutional effort made by the Aghlabid state to expand and regulate their economic and administrative authority over this area of the island as early as the second half of the 9th century. In this thesis, this effort has been defined as institutional Islamisation, and shows the implementation in Sicily of contemporary economic and administrative practices that were adopted throughout other regions of the broader Islamic world.

In this scenario, the site at Milena stands out as a focal place in the local network and hierarchy of settlements along the valley of the River Platani, not only geographically, but also as an institutional linking-point between the Aghlabid state and local communities. Furthermore, it is not relevant whether they were pre-existing Christians or incoming Muslims. Other similar sites must have existed in the hinterland of Agrigento, as the evidence of 32 further comparable lead seals coming from this area testifies, although their exact place of recovery is unknown. The assumption that these administrative interactions and, perhaps, fiscal control were targeting the produce of the land that was gathered in the siloi of the nearby settlement of Colmitella is definitely plausible, but unverifiable for the time being.

Broadening this analysis outside the hinterland of Agrigento, similar lead seals are not attested anywhere else in Sicily, an indication that the Aghlabid state did not implement an analogous economic/administrative system outside this specific territorial case-study. As argued in Chapter 8.2, it is even likely that, at this stage, Muslim communities were not settled permanently in the central and eastern territories of the island beyond the River Platani and the garrison city of Enna. The lack of comparable sigillographic evidence suggests that these central and eastern territories of the island were outside the reach of the Aghlabid’s program of institutional Islamisation. But, as a collateral effect, they became central in the parallel military confrontation between Byzantine and Islamic forces. In the second half of the 9th century, a peak in the burnt-earth strategy was adopted by

842 Gilotte, Nef 2011, 69-70.
843 Balog 1979; De Luca 2003 ; 2012.
Islamic raiders in eastern Sicily as indicated by textual sources.\textsuperscript{844} This evidence has led Nef and Prigent to argue that the Aghlabids were never determined to conquer eastern Sicily permanently, and thus had no intention to promote a program of institutional Islamisation there.\textsuperscript{845} Their intent was limited to raids and acquisition of booty, although, as noted in Chapter 3.1, this strategy ultimately threatened the sources of food supply for the Byzantine military forces and communities of the island, which in fact collapsed at the turn of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century. At that point, in 909, the Aghlabids were overthrown by the Fatimids, who wrote a new chapter in the history of Islamic Sicily by accomplishing the institutional and cultural assimilation of the whole island into the \textit{Dar al-Islam}.

\textbf{Concluding remarks}

The Aghlabid lead seals documented in the hinterland of Agrigento have posed major interpretative issues to scholars, especially with regard to their function(s) and the identity of their recipients, who it is debated if were pre-existing Byzantine communities or new Muslim settlers. Setting this scholarly controversy aside, this appendix has stressed a different aspect behind this evidence, which is the indisputable value of these seals as administrative devices, and therefore as indicators of a process of institutional Islamisation that was promoted by the Aghlabid state in this area of the island.

\textsuperscript{844} Nef, Prigent 2013, 17-18, 32.
\textsuperscript{845} Nef, Prigent 2013; Nef 2017.


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