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BYZANTINE TRADE AND TRADE ROUTES ALONG THE NORTH TYRRHENIAN COASTS

(the 5TH–8TH centuries AD)



This article concerns Byzantine trade and the trade routes along the Tuscan coasts from the 5th to the 8th century AD. The remarkable quantity of Eastern Mediterranean pottery, amphorae and coins found along the Tuscan coast shows that this region was fully integrated in Byzantine trade routes.

The main Tuscan Harbours – *Luna*, *Portus Pisanus* (the harbour of *Pisae*), and *Vada Volaterrana* (the harbour of *Volaterrae*) seem to have played an important role in the Byzantine political and economic strategies, especially during the Graeco-Gothic war (AD 535–553) and during the Lombard invasion of the region.

Independent trade and the Byzantine military *annona*-trade continued to be intertwined in the North Tyrrhenian sea-routes until the middle of the 7th century. After the conquest of Liguria by the King Rotari (AD 643), the Tuscan harbours were no longer involved in Byzantine military plans, but they continued to be touched by Eastern commercial trade during the early medieval period.

Key words: Tuscany, Byzantine trade, *annona*, Lombard.

The region of Tuscany, rich in agricultural resources and raw materials (ores, clay, wood and timber), was part of the Augustan *regio VII Etruria* [33]. In Diocletian's provincial system, it was included in the *Tuscia et Umbria* and in the 6th century it belonged mostly to the *Tuscia et Umbria annonaria* administrative district [47, p. 336-339].

The main North Tuscan harbours *Luna*, *Portus Pisanus* (the harbour of *Pisae*) and *Vada Volaterrana* (the harbour of *Volaterrae*), located along the north-western trade route towards Gallia (Fig. 1), played an important role in the Byzantine political and economic strategies, especially during the Gothic-Byzantine war (AD 535–553) and in the last decades of the 6th century, when the region was progressively occupied by the conquering Lombards.

This strategic role in the Mediterranean trade of Late Antiquity is documented by the long-distance imports found in these areas, especially at *Luna* and *Vada Volaterrana* [15; 21; 32]. As is well known, since the late 4th century the axis of trade between Carthage and Constantinople and the trade routes reaching Rome from Carthage, Alexandria and Constantinople were the main trade routes [28; 44; 45]. Besides these, *annona* trade and independent trade took place in the Western Mediterranean, both along a northern sea-route towards Gallia, and a southern one towards Gibraltar and the Iberian Peninsula [38; 40].

African and Eastern-Mediterranean goods are therefore well documented in coastal Tuscany, especially in the late 5th – early 6th centuries AD, as regional production and trade was consistent during the transitional phase ranging from the last decades of the Roman Empire to the Reign of Theodoricus (AD 450–526) [25]. African lamps, *terra sigillata* ware and amphorae constitute the bulk of the imports in the North Tuscan markets, but Eastern amphorae are documented as well. Late Roman 1 amphorae (LRA 1), whose many workshops have been identified in Cilicia, Pieria, Cyprus and Rhodes, can be considered the symbol of the booming Eastern economy and the most prominent evidence of Byzantine trade in the Mediterranean region and beyond. The distribution of LRA 1 in the Western markets started in the decades around the middle of the 5th century AD [38]: these and the other Eastern amphorae (LRA 2, 3, 4, 5/6) are attested in a Tuscan context dating from the second half of the 5th century [26].

Afterwards, like most of Italy, Tuscany was touched by the Graeco-Gothic war (AD 535–553); during the military operations *Luna*, *Pisae* and *Volaterrae* adopted a neutral position and in AD 553 they surrendered to General Narses who was already prevailing over Goths in central Italy (Agath. I, 11). The war, causing destruction and famine in both inner and coastal Tuscany (Procop. II, 20; Procop. III, 5; III, 6; IV, 29; IV, 33; IV, 34), was a chronological boundary: the Late-Roman social-economical system still surviving in the region failed in these decades. Consequently, the differences become evident between inner Tuscany, by then almost isolated from Mediterranean trade and coastal Tuscany, with its harbours established along the main trade routes.

The Mediterranean assemblages documented in the Tuscan harbours include Eastern amphorae, Byzantine coins, African amphorae (Keay 26, 35 and 62), the late variant of Red Slip Ware, South-Italian amphorae (Keay 52), Late Roman Eastern C Ware and Pantellerian cooking ware (Fig. 2-4) [16; 17; 18; 19; 32; 39]. The same assemblages are documented in urban and extra urban coastal sites in France and Spain and in the Late Roman shipwrecks excavated in these areas [bibliography in 22, p. 770; 34]. The massive export of goods from Byzantine Africa [4] gives evidence of Carthage as a political and economic juncture between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean regions.

In Tuscany, the local distribution of these long-distance goods appears to have been limited only to the urban markets and to the main *villae* still surviving along the coasts. The upper class, mainly formed by army officers, town councillors, bishops and priests, was the market for these imports and other luxury items including Byzantine eardrops, silver cups and dishes found in the studied area [2; 8; 9; 33].

As is well known, the coastal part of Tuscany was conquered by the Lombards in the late 6th century, and changed into a dukedom with Luca as the capital [1; 10]. In AD 574–576, Grimarit *dux* of Luca conquered the coastal area up to Populonia [20], but most probably *Volaterrae* held out against the attacks until the beginning of the 7th century [6].

At the same time, *Pisae* was self-governing and interacted with both the Byzantines and the Lombards, as documented by an epistula of Pope Gregorius Magnus dated AD 603 (Gregorius Magnus, Epistula, 13, 26). The town most probably was still Byzantine, but had offered its warships – dromons (*dromoni*) to the Lombards for a sea expedition, perhaps towards Sardinia, and this event challenged the truce in progress between the Lombards and the Byzantines [46]. *Luna* continued to be Byzantine, included in the *provincia Maritima Italarum*, corresponding to modern coastal Liguria.

Most probably in the 6th century and even later, the Byzantines continued to control the Tuscan coast: A continuous fortified frontier could not be held, but by occupying high sites in strategic position and establishing a *kastra/castella* system, the Byzantines could control the connections between the coast and the hinterland, that is, the main Tuscan import-export activities. Besides archaeological data, the toponymy documents the Imperial presence in early Medieval Tuscany: e.g. the place-names Castiglioncello (from *Castellum* – *Castellio*, *one(m)*) – a typical outcome in Byzantine Italy) and Calafuria (from the Greek word *frouion* = fort) are present along the coast between *Portus Pisanus* and *Vada Volaterrana* [35]. The Byzantines were interested in controlling the district to manage the rich local resources; wood, timber, ores and wrought metals, salt, alum and slaves [12].

Mediterranean imports dated to the first half of the 7th century have been found in the *Vada Volaterrana* harbour area: African Red Slip bowls (Hayes 107, Hayes 104, nr. 22), plates (Hayes 90 and Hayes 106) and African amphora (Keay 62, LRA 2, LRA 5/6). The pottery assemblages found in *Lunae* are evidence of the same commercial trends [17; 19; 40]. Moreover, coins from the Constantinople mint were documented not only at Byzantine *Luna* [3; 36], but also at *Vada Volaterrana* [14; 27].

It is worth stressing that in the late 6th – middle 7th century AD ornamental goods (especially eardrops and fibulas found in funerary assemblages) are still documented in Tuscany. These are partly of Eastern manufacture, and partly manufactured in the local workshops producing bronze and silver jewels according to the Mediterranean technology and design [11, p. 183].

The same situation occurred in the local coarse pottery workshops, which continued to imitate the African Red Slip vessels up to the beginning of the 7th century [24]. Evidently, in the late 6th – early 7th century AD, the Tuscan coastal district kept a constant economic and commercial *facies*, in spite of the political and military changes.

This common Mediterranean *facies* shows that the main Tuscan harbours continued to belong to *Provincia Maritima* and that *Pisae* and *Vada Volaterrana*, together with *Luna*, were still important consumption and redistribution centres in the Byzantine trade system, mainly aimed to supply Rome, the Papal court, and the military forces along the frontiers of the Empire [23; 28; 29; 31; 43; 48]. *Luna*, *Pisae* and *Vada Volaterrana* were not mentioned in the late itineraria, as the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (IV, 2) and the *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia* (V, 2) the author of which, an anonymous cleric, most probably used Byzantine official documents.

The Mediterranean pottery and amphorae found at *Castrum Perti*, a Byzantine fort located along the western Ligurian defensive system [22], give evidence of the Imperial *annona militaris* trade mechanisms. It is certain that the Byzantines could keep their political control over Italy longer by ruling the main Tuscan and Ligurian harbours and the road-system going inwards.

Byzantine *annona*-trade and independent trade, both run by *transmarini negotiatores*, continued to be intertwined in the Tyrrhenian sea-routes up to the middle of the 7th century [23]. Most probably, Italian, Eastern and Jewish [37; 38] merchants were involved in this trade: their social and economical status was very different, ranging from the important *negotiatores* to the local merchants engaged in casting trade.

Maritime and overland peregrinations of many Saints (and of their relics) are documented in the Western Mediterranean harbours, along the main trade-routes. Evidently, together with the political and economic relationships, cultural and religious exchanges also took place in the Mediterranean Sea. For example, since the late 4th century, an African Monastic Community was active in the Tuscan Archipelago, at Capraia Island (Oros. VII, 36, 5; cfr. anche Rutil. Nam I, 440 ss) [13]. These monks were in touch with Saint Augustine (Aug., *Ep.* 48, dated AD 398) and played an important role in Tuscan religious life [7].

The religious interactions along the Tyrrhenian sea-routes are well documented by the Saint Julia *passio* (the 7th century AD): she was a Christian girl living in Carthage, raped by Barbarians and martyred at Capo Corso in Corsica.

Her corpse was put on a ship and taken in by Capraia Monks who buried it at Gorgona (another island of the Tuscan Archipelago). The Saint Julia cult spread over coastal Tuscany and in AD 763, the Lombard King Desiderius brought her relics to Brescia, to the Saint Salvatore church [6].

The Western Mediterranean sea-routes are documented in the Saint Torpete *passio*, dated to the 6th–7th centuries AD [7]. The corpse of this martyr travelled from Pisa to the Gallic coasts (Saint Tropez) down to the Southern Iberian Peninsula. Saint Anastasia's story also gives evidence of the Eastern-Western religious connections: she was born in Sirmio (Illiria) and martyred there. Her relics were brought to Constantinople (AD 460), then to Populonia, and finally to Pisa. From Late Antiquity to the early medieval period, many other Saints began to be venerated in the Tuscan district, coming from Africa (Felice bishop of Thibiuca near Carthage) or Eastern regions (Saint Nicola from Mira, Eufrasia from Nicomedia, Margherita from Antiochia), giving evidence of close religious and cultural relationships throughout the Mediterranean Sea [6].

After the complete Lombard conquest of Liguria by King Rotari (AD 643), the Tyrrhenian sea-routes and the Tuscan harbours lost their strategic role and consequently their commercial importance. The Eastern-Western economic relationships, however, did not fail. Byzantine coins and prestigious goods (such as gold brocades) continued to reach *Luna* and *Pisa* during the period of the Lombard Kingdom [41; 42].

Literary sources confirm the presence of Eastern merchants in Lombard Tuscany: a letter by Pope Adrianus I to King Charles the Great, dated to AD 776, documents that *in litoraria Langobardorum semper navigaverunt necdicendi Greci*. Moreover, from the same letter we can deduce that the Eastern merchants dealt with the slave trade along the Tyrrhenian coast: *et (Greci) exinde emebant ipsa familia et amicitia cum ipsis Langobardis fecerunt et per eosdem Langobardos ipsa suscipiebant mancipia* [5]. The presence of Byzantine ships from Lombard Tuscany is confirmed by escape of Adelchi, last king of the Lombards. In AD 774, in order to run away from Italy to Constantinople, he sailed a Greek ship from *Portus Pisanus* [30, p. 201]. Evidently, in the 8th century AD the maritime connections between Tuscany, the Eastern regions, and Constantinople continued to be alive and well.

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ВІЗАНТІЙСЬКА ТОРГІВЛЯ І ЇЇ ШЛЯХИ ВЗДОВЖ ПІВНІЧНО-ТИРЕНСЬКОГО УЗБЕРЕЖЖЯ (V–VIII ст. н.е.)

У цій роботі розглянуті візантійські торговельні маршрути, що проходили вздовж узбережжя Тоскани з V по VIII ст. н.е.

Основними центрами в цій області є *Luna* (Луна), *Portus Pisanus* (Пізанська гавань) та *Vada Volaterrana* (гавань Вольтерра), що відігравали важливу роль в економічному і політичному житті з часів Августа і до Лангобардського завоювання 643 р. н.е. Про участь цього регіону у візантійській морській торгівлі свідчать знахідки вздовж узбережжя, в різних пунктах, значної кількості керамічного та нумізматичного матеріалу, серед якого предмети розкоші зі Східного Середземномор'я та місцеві вироби, що імітують імпорт. Такі комплекси є типовими, як для прибережних пам'яток Франції, Іспанії пізньоримського часу, так і для корабельних аварій того ж періоду, досліджених на цих територіях. Ці артефакти свідчать про значимість даних центрів на основних морських шляхах від Константинополя і розподілу в торговельній системі Візантійської імперії, призначеній для постачання Риму, Папського двору та армії вздовж кордонів Імперії.

Негативний вплив на торгівлю в регіоні справили Готські війни 535–553 рр. н.е., внаслідок яких внутрішня Тоскана ізолюється від контактів із Середземномор'ям, де гавані все ще залишаються частиною торговельних шляхів. В цей час Візантійська імперія контролює тосканське узбережжя за допомогою системи укріплених замків. Займаючи стратегічно вигідно розташовані пункти, візантійці могли контролювати сполучення між узбережжям і внутрішніми районами, що й слугувало основою комерційної діяльності Тоскани. Зберігаючи ключові тосканські й лігурійські гавані у системі *аннони* – військово-торгівельній системі імперії, Візантія продовжувала здійснювати і політичний контроль над Італією.

Самостійна комерційна діяльність і візантійська військова торгівля забезпечували подальший розвиток Північно-Тирренських морських маршрутів до VII ст. Після завоювання Лигурії королем Ротарі в 643 р. тосканські гавані вже не були під контролем візантійської військової системи, але лишалися інкорпорованими в торговельні зв'язки зі Сходом.

Ключові слова: Тоскана, візантійська торгівля, *аннона*, Лангобарди.

ВІЗАНТИЙСКАЯ ТОРГОВЛЯ И ЕЕ ПУТИ ВДОЛЬ СЕВЕРНО-ТИРРЕНСКОГО ПОБЕРЕЖЬЯ (V–VIII вв. н.э.)

В статье рассмотрены византийские торговые маршруты, пролежавшие вдоль побережья Тосканы с V по VIII вв. н.э.

Основные центры, такие как *Luna* (Луна), *Portus Pisanus* (Пизанская гавань) и *Vada Volaterrana* (гавань Вольтерра), играли важную роль в экономической и политической жизни области со времён Августа и до Лангобардского завоевания в 643 г. н.э. О том, что этот регион был включен в систему Византийской экономики, связанной с морем, свидетельствует значительное количество восточно-средиземноморской и африканской посуды, амфор и монет, найденных на различных прибрежных археологических памятниках. Среди находок – предметы роскоши, импорт и местные изделия, имитирующие импорт. Подобные комплексы встречаются в прибрежных городах Франции и Испании, а также на исследованных в этих районах кораблекрушениях позднеимперского времени. Эти артефакты указывают на значимость данных центров на основных средиземноморских маршрутах от Карфагена до Константинополя. Тосканские гавани, продолжавшие принадлежать *Imperial Provincia Maritima*, служили важными пунктами потребления и распределения в торговой системе Византийской империи, которая была предназначена для снабжения Рима, Папского двора и армии вдоль границ Империи.

Негативное влияние на торговлю в регионе оказали Готские войны VI века н.э. (535–553 гг.), вследствие которых регион делится на внутреннюю Тоскану, отрезанную от контактов со Средиземноморьем, и приморскую Тоскану, гавани которой всё ещё оставались частью торговых маршрутов. В этот период Византийская империя контролировала тосканское побережье при помощи системы укреплённых замков. Занимая стратегически выгодно расположенные пункты, византийцы могли контролировать сообщение между побережьем и внутренними районами, что и служило основой коммерческой деятельности Тосканы. Сохраняя ключевые тосканские и лигурийские гавани в системе *анноны* – военно-торговой системы Империи, Византия продолжала осуществлять и политический контроль над Италией.

Самостоятельная коммерческая деятельность и византийская военная торговля использовали часть Северо-Тирренских морских путей вплоть до середины VII века. После завоевания Лигурии королем Ротари в 643 году, тосканские гавани больше не контролировались Византийской военной системой, но по-прежнему оставались вовлеченными в торговые контакты с Востоком.

Ключевые слова: Тоскана, византийская торговля, *аннона*, Лангобарды.

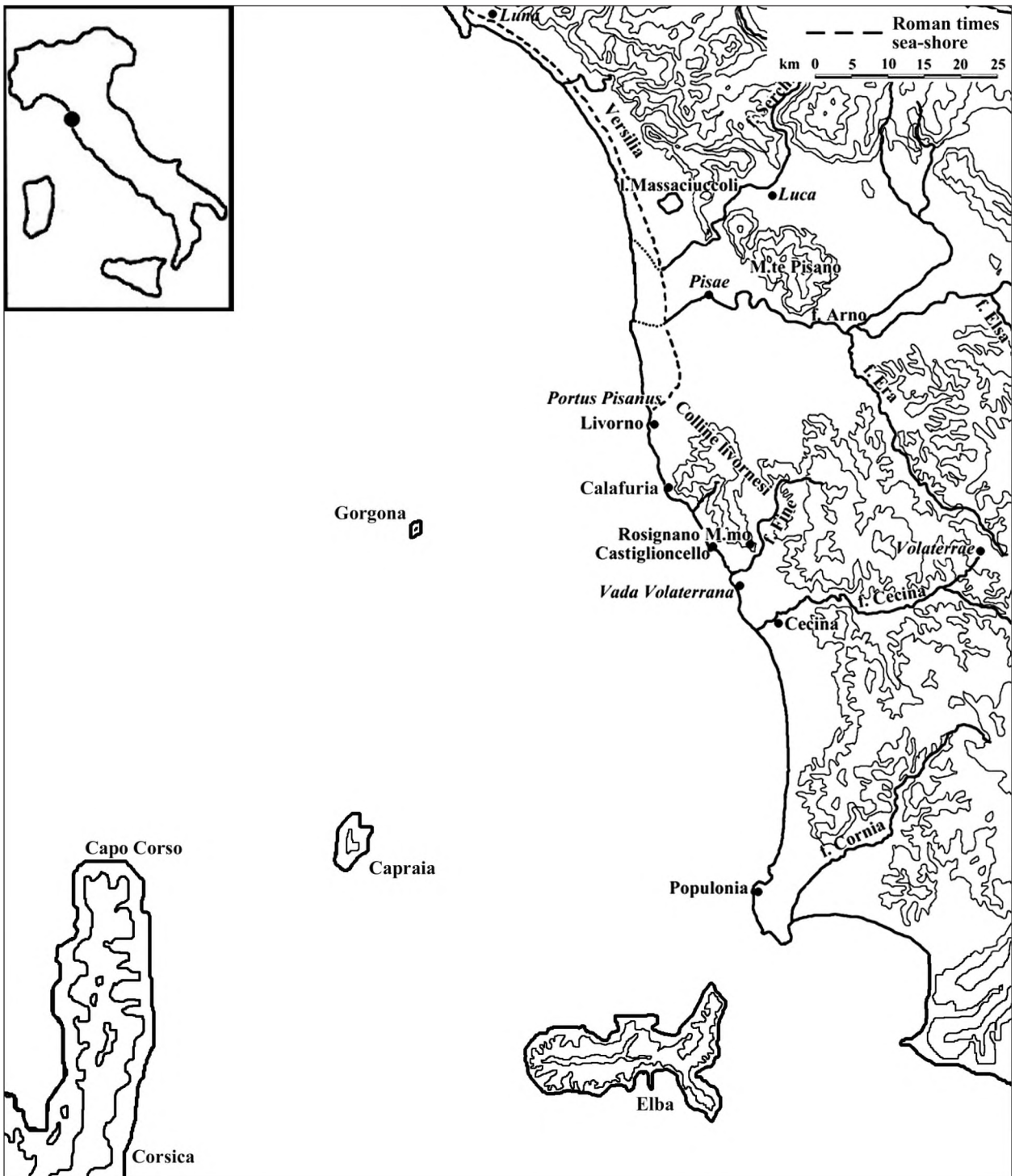


Fig. 1. The studied area.

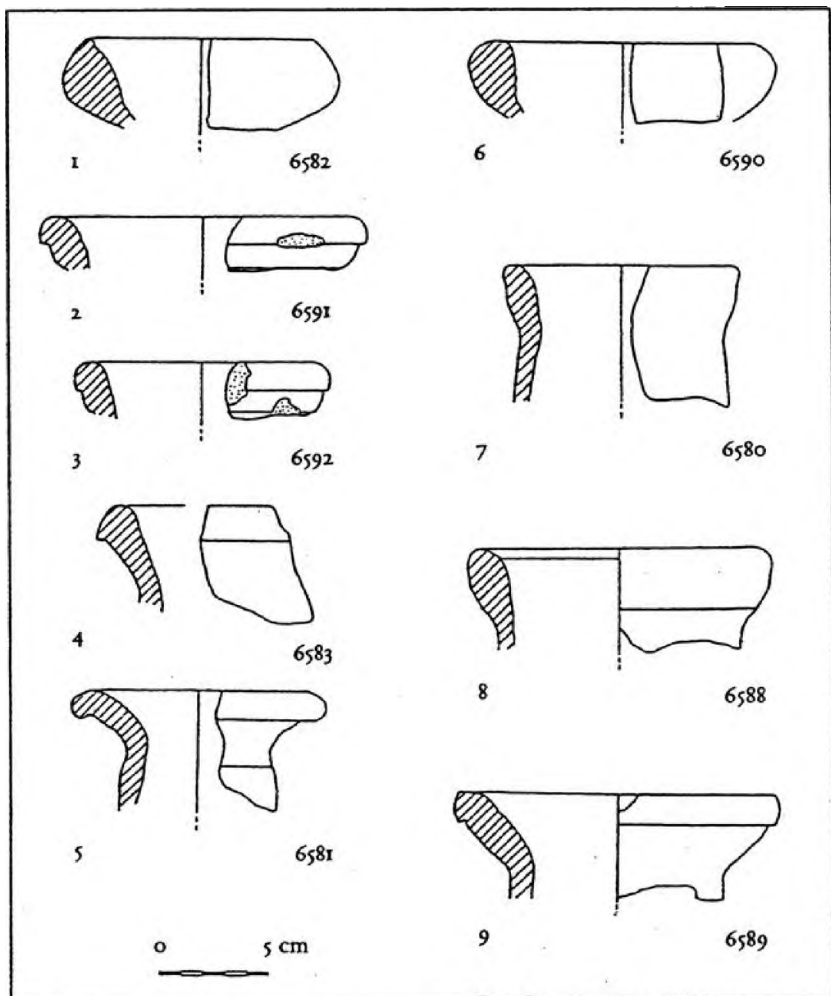


Fig. 2. *Vada Volaterrana*: Late Roman African Amphorae.

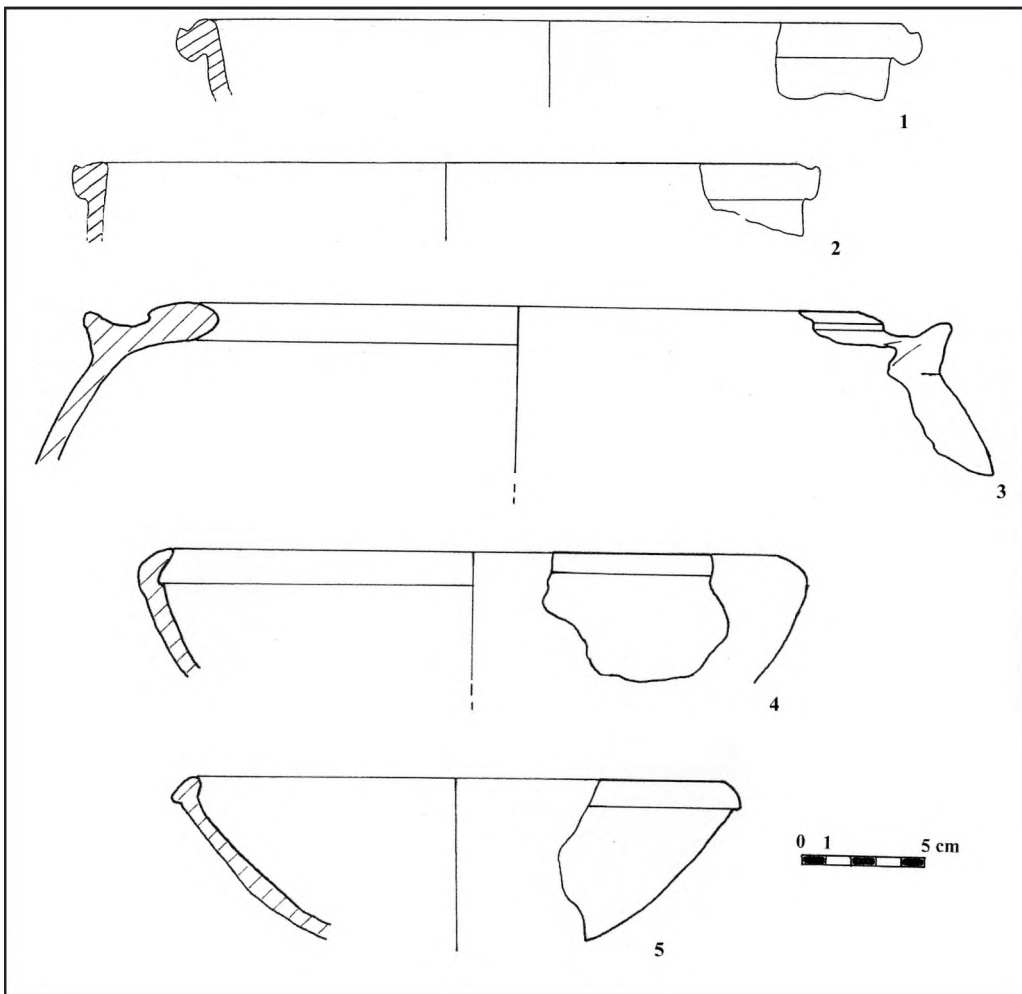


Fig. 3. *Vada Volaterrana*: Late Roman Coarse and Cooking Wares.



Fig. 4. *Portus Pisanus*: 1-7 – Late Roman Amphorae; 8-10 – African Red Slip Wares; 11-19 – Coarse and Cooking Wares.