

# A NEW PUNIC “MOULD FOR RITUAL BREAD” IN TERRACOTTA FROM SARCAPOS (VILLAPUTZU, SARDINIA)

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*Abstract:* In 2019, a University of Bologna excavation at the Punic-Roman settlement of Santa Maria near Villaputzu (SU) unearthed a new fragment of a terracotta “ritual bread mould”. The artifact is ring-shaped and decorated with a frieze of “Phoenician-Cypriot” palmettes and a braid motif. It comes from a peripheral sector of the settlement, and thus, for the Punic era, neither a connection with the nearby necropolis nor a different functional, productive, or cult-related intent can be excluded.

*Keywords:* Santa Maria – Villaputzu; Sarcapos; Terracotta “Moulds for Ritual Bread”; Punic Sardinia.

In the 1960s, F. Barreca discovered the Punic-Roman settlement of Santa Maria near Villaputzu (SU) after performing surface surveys<sup>1</sup> (FIG. 1). This site is commonly identified with the *statio* of Sarcapos, which is listed in the *Itinerarium Antonini* as along the coastal road *A Portu Tibulas Caralis*.<sup>2</sup> The settlement was strategically located at the mouth of the Flumendosa River to control Tyrrhenian trade routes and the inland metalliferous basins, and had likely been in use since the end of the Bronze Age as part of the Levantine “metal trade” route. Starting from the 7th century BCE, it was probably home to a small Carthaginian population dedicated to maritime trade and the exploitation of mineral, agricultural, and fishery resources in the area.<sup>3</sup> The discoveries of transport amphorae and Etruscan, Greek-Eastern, Attic, and Roman Republican pottery testify to the extent of its transmarine trade. At the same time, the presence of exotic materials in the hinterland, as well as the discovery of a supposed Punic military in the Muravera territory,<sup>4</sup> indicate its function as both a crossroads for land traffic along the transhumance and coastal paths, as well as a redistribution center of raw materials and handicrafts. The site likely maintained this function until its final abandonment towards the end of the 7th-8th century AD. After research from the 1980s and 90s, the discovery of a large sector of the necropolis in 2009 contributed significantly to the study of its late Punic and Roman phases.<sup>5</sup> In order to acquire new data on the settlement’s topographic and urban layout, the University of Bologna

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1 Barreca 1967, p. 114.

2 See Zucca 1984, pp. 29-46; Barreca 1986, p. 324; Ledda 1989, pp. 328-337; Bartoloni 1990, p. 165; Secci 2012, pp. 517, 521-522; Zucca 2017, p. 257 in particular.

3 The writer has recently placed the birth of the settlement towards the end of the 7th century BCE in the context of an early economic and cultural Carthaginian expansion (Secci 2019, p. 181). This interpretation is based on the analysis of the ceramic repertoire, which appears to have been influenced by that of the African metropolis. The single-handled globular pot (“cooking pot”) is particularly relevant here, as it is likely the result of a western and specifically Carthaginian innovation (Secci 2019, p. 188, fig. 4, n. 6, with previous bibliography).

4 Barreca 1967, pp. 112-113.

5 Manunza 2013.

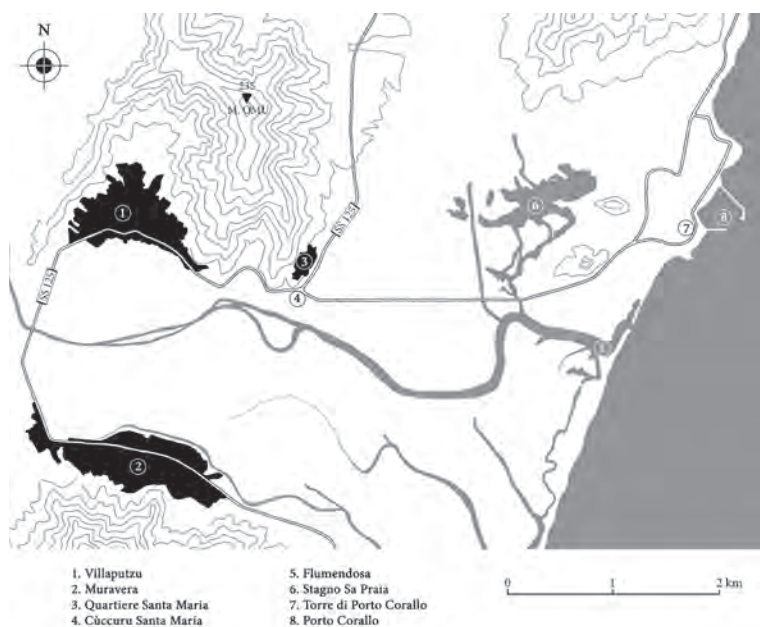


FIG. 1. Santa Maria – Villaputzu (Sarcapos): localization of the settlement (drawing R. Secci, after IGM 1:25.000 F. 549 Sez. II, Muravera).

conducted a geophysical survey campaign in 2017, focusing on the areas located south and south-east of the Santa Maria hill.<sup>6</sup> In 2019, a limited excavation carried out by the University<sup>7</sup> identified traces of production activities<sup>8</sup> presumably related to the Roman era.<sup>9</sup> Among the materials unearthed by the investigation, a new fragment of a decorated Punic terracotta mould is most notable and forms the focus of this paper.

This class of artifacts has been the subject of recent reviews aimed at synthesizing existing knowledge.<sup>10</sup> As is known, it involves mostly circular plaques, decorated on one or both sides with phytomorphic, zoomorphic, or anthropomorphic motifs as ei-

ther negative or positive moulds, and is considered a Carthaginian innovation based on Hellenic models.<sup>11</sup> Plaques conveying fertility, apotropy and funerary eschatology messages are found in Carthage,<sup>12</sup> North Africa,<sup>13</sup> Sicily,<sup>14</sup> Sardinia,<sup>15</sup> and Ibiza.<sup>16</sup> They are among the most original Punic cultural productions from the end of the 7th and 2nd century BCE in living, cult, and funerary contexts.<sup>17</sup> As far as function is concerned, it is likely that the specimens with impressions were moulds for stamped ritual bread or cakes, and

6 For the institutional framework of the project and initial results of the ongoing study, see Secci – Boschi – Silani forthcoming.

7 The excavation, directed by the author, took place during a 1-year ministerial concession scheme (DG ABAP protocol number 0013727-P on 15/05/2019) in accordance with the ABAP Superintendency and a formalized agreement with the Municipality of Villaputzu. Thanks goes to Superintendent Dr. M. Picciau and to Dr. E. Trudu for permitting the investigation, as well as to the Municipal Administration of Villaputzu for its indispensable logistical support.

8 The excavation highlighted a quadrangular tank, about one meter in size and set on a base of small to medium-sized stones. It is covered internally with layers of hydraulic plaster and features a circular recess on the bottom. Preliminary interpretations suggest it was involved in wine or oil production activities.

9 The structures discovered in 2019 can be more precisely dated only through further excavation at the site and analysis of the materials.

10 See Mattazzi 1999; 2004; 2006.

11 Bisi 1968, pp. 306-308.

12 Astruc 1959.

13 For example, Fantar 1986, pp. 312-317, pls. CXXXI-CXLVI.

14 Bisi 1968; Mattazzi 2004.

15 Mattazzi 1999. For further evidence, see Forci 1998; Campanella 2009, pp. 526-528; Stiglitz 2012, p. 137; Tanda *et al.* 2016, pp. 271-272, 284, fig. 11, n. 49.

16 Astruc 1957; Mattazzi 2006.

17 Compare bibliography at notes 10-16.

that those decorated in relief were plastic transpositions of the latter with specific symbolic value.<sup>18</sup>

This most recent terracotta discovery is not new to the site. Following surface excavations, a fragmentary mould had been previously discovered that, according to the author's initial analysis, bore a "phytomorphic" decoration and was attributable to the 6th century BCE.<sup>19</sup> After reviewing photographic documentation, however, P. Mattazzi recognized a figurative section «campito a spirali senza ripartizioni a fasce» comparable to analogous artifacts from Padria and Tharros in the Hellenistic-Roman era.<sup>20</sup> The mould published in this paper came from a surface layer upset by plowing, where it was found together with materials dating from the archaic age to the first centuries of the imperial age.



FIGS. 2-4. Terracotta mould from Santa Maria – Villaputzu (Sarcapos) (photos and drawing R. Secci).

Circular double ring terracotta mould (FIGS. 2-4).

Santa Maria – Villaputzu. Excavation 2019. US 1. 5.96 m above sea level.

Moulded. Type Galeotti A5. Orange-pink ceramic body (7.5YR 7/6, reddish yellow), hard, well purified, with very few small white flecks. Orange-pink surfaces (7.5YR 7/6, reddish yellow). About 15% of the original size; slight chipping and abrasions on both surfaces; diffuse soil encrustations. Rebuilt external border, diam. 14 cm; reconstructed internal border, diam. 3 cm; 5.4 cm width between outer and inner edges; 2.2 cm thick.

The fragment is decorated on both sides in a negative mould. On one side, there is a four-sepal "Phoenician-Cypriot" palmette, most probably originally arranged to compose a frieze of seven palmettes connected by arched elements. On the opposite side is a braid motif. In the first case, the figurative field is framed externally by a cornice with parallel oblique dashes, while being framed internally by a ridge. In the second, it is delimited by two cornices with parallel dashes.

The decorative palmette and *guilloche* pattern is widely recognized in the class repertoire, dating from the late 7th to the early 5th century BCE.<sup>21</sup> Carthaginian documents – all rediscovered in funerary contexts – demonstrate this chronological arc. Among the specimens from the North African metropolis, the oldest comes from a tomb in Dermech, surveyed by P. Gauckler and dated between the end of the 7th and

18 See Mattazzi 1999, p. 119; 2004, pp. 118-119 in particular.

19 Ledda 1989, p. 330, tav. XCI, 3, n. 6.

20 Mattazzi 1999, pp. 75, 125; regarding Padria and Tharros, see Mattazzi 1999, p. 71.

21 Mattazzi 1999, pp. 35, 65-66, 115; 2004, pp. 94, 105; 2006, p. 137.

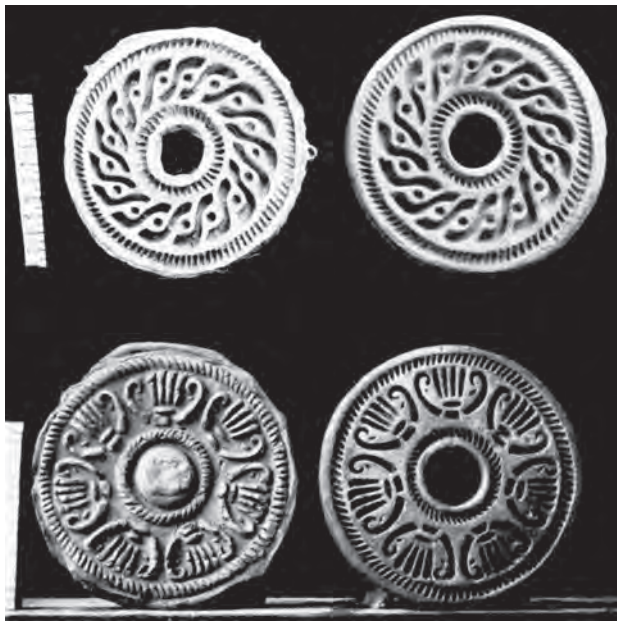


FIG. 5. Terracotta moulds and modern impressions from Carthage (after Gauckler 1915).

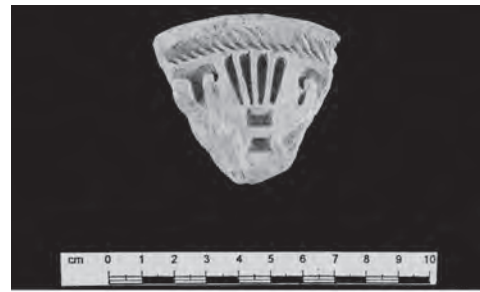


FIG. 6. Terracotta mould from Sant'Antioco (Sulci) (after Canino 1997).

6th centuries BCE<sup>22</sup> (FIG. 5); another mould may also refer to the same type, coming from the same sepulcher but not described by the discoverer.<sup>23</sup> The disk of Douïmès is also similar to ours in terms of size and era (around 6th century BCE), though it is characterized by juxtaposed, disconnected palmettes.<sup>24</sup> Finally, an analogous association between the phytomorphic frieze and the braid motif can be found on another fragmented terracotta from a burial located east of the theater and dated from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 5th century BCE.<sup>25</sup>

Broadening the analysis to Sicily, the island of Mozia has provided three specimens, one of which pertains to the Whitaker collection, while the other two are from different sectors of the urban area. Although the discovery context of the first remains unknown<sup>26</sup>, the other two belong to the so-called “Settore Centrale”<sup>27</sup> and to “Zona A” of the settlement,<sup>28</sup> respectively. The type has also been found in the city of Gela, an area beyond the reach of Punic influence, in a votive pit dating back to the first half of the 6th century BCE.<sup>29</sup> The authors initially considered the artifact a Greek production, but A.M. Bisi subsequently ascribed it to Punic craftsmanship and hypothesized it was a Motyan import.<sup>30</sup>

22 Gauckler 1915, p. 33, pl. CCXXVII, below. Photographic evidence shows a decoration of seven palmettes. Dimensions are not given. For dating the tomb to 7th-6th century BCE, see Mattazzi 1999, pp. 19, 35, with further bibliography.

23 Mattazzi 1999, p. 19.

24 The disk, with an external diameter of 14.5 cm and internal of 3 cm, was decorated on one side with seven palmettes, one close to the other, not “tied” by a curvilinear design: see Delattre 1897, pp. 28-29, fig. 52 (= Astruc 1959, p. 111, n. 9, pl. II, n. 1).

25 Chelbi 1985, pp. 78, 86-87, n. 15. See also Mattazzi 1999, p. 19.

26 Mattazzi 2004, pp. 94, 110, 114, n. 2, fig. 2, with previous bibliography.

27 Mattazzi 2004, pp. 94, 105, 107, 112, n. 14, with bibliography.

28 The allegedly imported artifact was dated to the 6th century BCE: Famà – Toti – Vecchio 2002, pp. 321, 322, n. 6.

29 Orlandini – Adamesteanu 1962, p. 404, fig. 87; Bisi 1968, pp. 293-294, tav. I, n. 8.

30 Bisi 1968, pp. 301-302.

Two further fragments come from Sardinia, though unfortunately without any clear context. One of them, interpreted as an import, was found during the 1982 excavations at the Tharros *tofet*,<sup>31</sup> while the second derives from undocumented excavations in the urban area of Sulci<sup>32</sup> (FIG. 6). The latter is currently the most accurate comparison for the item under review here, though it does differ given the clearer contours of its figures. The Tharros specimen, on the other hand, features a frieze of palmettes in negative mould, contrasted with a braid motif in relief.

The final piece of corresponding evidence comes from Ibiza and is a fragment of a terracotta ring decorated on one face (such as Galeotti A4), datable to the 6th century BCE.<sup>33</sup> It is only somewhat possible to match another fragmentary mould from Tharros, in which the vegetable background is obtained in relief, to this Ibiza find.<sup>34</sup>

The documentation examined thus far is notable in technical, iconographic, and possibly even historical terms. From an exclusively artisan point of view, the specularity of the braid motif on the terracotta from Sulci and Sarcapos, compared to those of the rest of the Punic world, is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights a possible derivative relationship, meaning one decorative mould likely served as an imprint for the other.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, it allows for a hypothesis on the use of different mould models,<sup>36</sup> in which the motif could be oriented either to the left or right.

On an iconographic level, it must be underlined that both the *guilloche* (in the two variants just mentioned) and the “Phoenician-Cypriot” palmette are found in artisan productions intended for elite use, inspiring numerous decorative themes in the class.<sup>37</sup> G. Scandone Matthiae interpreted the first element, characterized by two wavy bands alternately superimposed on one other, as typically Syrian and symbolizing «le correnti delle acque sotterranee».<sup>38</sup> It spread widely in the Iron Age in various craft categories, like the Nimrud ivories,<sup>39</sup> as well as on metal bowls<sup>40</sup> and Phoenician stone relief.<sup>41</sup> It is also found in circular form within figurative fields that are divided into concentric bands on the famous reliefs of the North-West Palace in Nimrud,<sup>42</sup> as well as on an ivory pyx cover (dated to the 8th century BCE) from the same Palatine complex.<sup>43</sup> These latest finds seem to represent the most direct antecedents of an ivory disc preserved in the Antiquarium Arborense at Oristano. S. Moscati argues there is a strong correspondence between the disc and the repertoire of the metal bowls.<sup>44</sup> In the West, the *guilloche* is also found on ostrich eggs, delimiting the figurative panels with metope friezes.<sup>45</sup>

31 Acquaro 1983, pp. 55, 69, tav. XVI, n. 8; Mattazzi 1999, pp. 34-35, 86, n. 14, fig. 1, tav. 5.

32 Canino 1997, pp. 101-102, n. 1, tav. I; Mattazzi 1999, pp. 65-66, n. 75, tav. XXXI.

33 Astruc 1957, p. 147, n. 10; Mattazzi 2006, pp. 136-137, 150, tav. IV, n. 27.

34 Mattazzi 1999, pp. 53-54, 99-100, n. 51, fig. 14.

35 Mattazzi 1999, p. 121.

36 Mattazzi 1999, p. 121.

37 Mattazzi 1999, p. 41; 2006, p. 146.

38 Scandone Matthiae 2002, p. 38.

39 See, for example, Herrmann 1986a, pp. 120, 159; 1986b, pl. 80, nn. 350-351, pl. 166, n. 682; 1992, pp. 58, 62, 95, 129, pl. 10, n. 62 (ND7969), pls. 14-15, n. 95 (ND7559), pl. 52, nn. 275-278 (ND7778), pl. 91, nn. 475-476 (ND6345/6-ND6346).

40 See, e.g., Markoe 1985, pp. 177, 177-178, 187-188, 202-203, 215, 216, Cy7, Cy8, Cy22, E15, U1, U4 (*cable band Type B*).

41 For an example, see the marble plate from Arado reissued in Caubet – Fontan – Gubel 2002, pp. 29-30. See also Matthiae 1997, pp. 235, 236.

42 Layard 1853, p. 5, pl. 51, n. 12.

43 Herrmann – Laidlaw – Coffey 2009, pp. 130-131, pl. 2, n. 15 (ND3638), with previous bibliography.

44 Moscati 1987, pp. 107-109.

45 See in particular the specimens from Ibiza and Villaricos: Savio 2004, *passim*.



FIG. 7. Ivory plaque from Nimrud (after Herrmann 1986b).



FIG. 8. Marble plate from Arwad (after Matthiae 1997).

The second element consists of two swirls folded inwards alongside a variable number of sepals. It is widely used in the East both in ivory<sup>46</sup> (FIG. 7) and in stone relief,<sup>47</sup> sometimes in association with the previous motif (FIG. 8). It is occasionally reiterated in the classic “sacred tree” composition on metal bowls.<sup>48</sup> In the West, numerous examples can be found in goldsmithing,<sup>49</sup> ivory production,<sup>50</sup> and coroplasty.<sup>51</sup>

The greater age of the two motifs in eastern documentation suggests they may have been transmitted to the Punic world through the same Phoenician culture. Although a derivation of the so-called Fikellura<sup>52</sup> ceramic «a S e punti alternati»<sup>53</sup> motif has been hypothesized, it must be considered that the affinities between the two craft classes may be the result of parallel evolutionary processes arising from the same initial models. On a more general historical level, it is still difficult to interpret the diffusion of the class relative to the spread of Carthaginian culture before the end of the 6th

century BCE, given the scarcity of palmette and *gilloche* moulds and lacking archaeometric analysis on the specimens thus far. A potential indication in this regard, however, could come from a confirmation of the Gela specimen’s Motyan origins:<sup>54</sup> were the provenance from Motya demonstrated, it would represent further evidence of an early cultural irradiation phenomenon from the North African metropolis in the central Mediterranean. This phenomenon would likely have occurred through a transfer of Carthaginian artisans to Sicily and Sardinia prior to the alleged armed conquest, as recently hypothesized based on the ceramic evidence.<sup>55</sup>

As for the artifact under review here, the data currently available – admittedly incomplete – allow for several hypotheses of origin. On the one hand, the peripheral location of the residential sector adjacent to the necropolis might suggest a funerary intent. On the other hand, the uniqueness of the discovery, being quite different from objects with analogous sepulchral features, prevents the complete exclusion of a workshop,

46 See, among others, Herrmann 1986a, p. 228; 1986b, pl. 312, n. 1199.

47 Caubet – Fontan – Gubel 2002, pp. 27-30.

48 See, e.g., Markoe 1985, pp. 169-170, 172-173, 177-178, Cy 1, Cy 4, Cy 8.

49 See, for instance, Quattrocchi Pisano 1974, pp. 66, 92, 97-98, 98-99, 164-165, figg. 1, 3, 4, 14, nn. 1, 107, 122-124, 127, 400.

50 Uberti 1975, pp. 97, 102, tav. XXXVI, n. D11.

51 Jiménez Flores 2007.

52 Bisi 1968, pp. 301-302. See Cook 1933-1934, pp. 71-72, fig. 11, n. 7 for an example of this type of *cablè pattern* in this ceramic class.

53 For this definition, see Bisi 1968, p. 301.

54 See above.

55 See lastly Secci 2019.

processing area, or cult origin. Continuing field investigations, supplemented by the results of geophysical tests, will provide further data in the near future, which will be useful for understanding and enriching knowledge on the functional environment of this artifact class.

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