

A reanalysis of the lamps from the baths of the Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina, found in Gentili's excavations of 1950-1955

Arja Karivieri, *University of Stockholm, SE*
arja.karivieri@antiken.su.se



Abstract

The new archaeological project of the Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina (EN) has as one of its aims a review of the lamp finds uncovered during the excavations in years 1950-1955 led by Gino Vinicio Gentili and published in 1999. A new revised catalogue of these lamp finds was published by Daniela Patti in 2013. This paper provides an updated review of lamp finds from the baths of the Villa and their contexts. Most of the lamps are similar to previous finds from Late Roman and Early Byzantine contexts in Sicily; North African, Tripolitan, and local products dominate the scene. Moreover, the lamp finds give evidence about trade contacts to the Eastern Mediterranean, namely to Athens, in the 4th to 5th centuries A.D., which is also attested among the lamp finds of the catacombs in Syracuse.

Keywords

Villa del Casale; oil lamps; imported and local; Gentili's excavations; baths.

<https://ktisisjournal.unibo.it>

ISSN: pending

© 2025 The Author(s) - [CC BY-ND 4.0 DEED Attribution-NoDerivs 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/)

DOI: pending

1. INTRODUCTION – THE LAMPS FOUND DURING THE EXCAVATIONS OF GINO VINICIO GENTILI.

Gino Vinicio Gentili published pottery finds from his excavations in the area of Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina in 1999, in the volume 2 of his final publication¹, including also sculpture, metal finds, glass and coin finds from the excavations. A central part of the finds from 1950-1955 consists of terracotta oil lamps from various parts of the villa. Gentili divided the lamp finds in his catalogue in three main groups: Roman, Christian, and Arab-Norman lamps.

Gentili's catalogue includes 285 lamps² and the three main groups of the catalogue are further divided into subgroups. Among Roman lamps, the first item, no. 1, belongs to the so-called Warzenlampen decorated with a round central disk and raised dots in the broad rim. It was found below the mosaic floor representing the Great Hunt (room 31) (Fig. 1)³. The following 11 Roman lamps, nos. 2-12, were found above the floor levels of the Villa. This group includes lamps of several types, that can be dated between the first century A.D. and the first half of the fifth century A.D. Five of these lamps were found in the baths, above the floor level (nos. 4, 9-12)⁴, the find context that is in focus in this article.

The second main group in Gentili's study, Christian lamps, was divided into:

- a. African lamps (nos. 13-37)⁵,
- b. lamps derived from African lamps (nos. 38-73)⁶,
- c. lamps that still echo the African type (nos. 74-115)⁷,
- d. heart-shaped lamps, either with a key-shaped frame around the disk (nos. 116-124)⁸, with a ring around the disk and two parallel lines from the ring to the wick-hole (no. 125)⁹, or without a channel from the disk to the wick-hole (nos. 126-133)¹⁰, and, finally,
- e. unglazed lamps with an elongated body (nos. 134-142)¹¹, and
- f. lamp with a long body (no. 143)¹².

Gentili's third group, Arab-Norman lamps, from the last phase of the settlement in the area of the Villa del Casale, was divided into eight main types:

- a. bowl type (nos. 144-177)¹³,
- b. type with solid handle and long pointed nozzle, either 1. glazed (nos. 178-218)¹⁴, 2. unglazed (nos. 219-232)¹⁵, or 3. coarse unglazed (nos. 233-235)¹⁶,
- c. type with curled ribbon /band handle, either 1. unglazed (nos. 236-252)¹⁷, 2. glazed (nos. 253-262)¹⁸, 3. glazed with incised or simple decoration (nos. 263-266)¹⁹, or 4. unglazed lamps with simple incised decoration (nos. 267-269)²⁰,

¹ Gentili 1999, II, 83-110.

² In Gentili's final publication, no. 208 was excluded from the list, and no. 248 is published with an erroneous number, 28, between nos. 247 and 249. In addition, there are additional lamp fragments in the storerooms, four of which include the find context written in black ink on the lamp. Two of these lamps were found in the *frigidarium*, and were published by Patti in 2013 as nos. 030 and 031 in her catalogue, see below.

³ Gentili 1999, II, 50, 10.22, and 85, plate 1.1.

⁴ Gentili 1999, II, 85-86, plate 1.9-1.11.

⁵ Gentili 1999, II, 86-91, plate 1.13, 1.16, 1.22-1.24, 2.25, 2.27-2.30, 2.32, 2.33, 2.35, 3.36 and 3.37.

⁶ Gentili 1999, II, 91-95, plate 3.38, 3.40-3.48, 4.49-4.56, 4.58-4.62, 5.63, 5.64, 5.67-5.69.

⁷ Gentili 1999, II, 95-99, plate 5.74-5.85, 5.88-95, 6.96-6.103, 6.105-111, 6.114.

⁸ Gentili 1999, II, 99-100, plate 6.116-120, 7.121, 7.122.

⁹ Gentili 1999, II, 100, plate 7.125.

¹⁰ Gentili 1999, II, 100-102, plate 7.126-7.128, 7.133.

¹¹ Gentili 1999, II, 102, plate 7.134.

¹² Gentili 1999, II, 102.

¹³ Gentili 1999, II, 104-106, plate 7.178, 7.183, and 7.186.

¹⁴ Gentili 1999, II, 104-106, plate 7.178, 7.183, and 7.186.

¹⁵ Gentili 1999, II, 106-107, plate 8.219.

¹⁶ Gentili 1999, II, 107.

¹⁷ Gentili 1999, II, 107-108, plate 8.236, 8.237, 8.249, and 8.250.

¹⁸ Gentili 1999, II, 108, plate 8.253.

¹⁹ Gentili 1999, II, 108, plate 8.263 and 8.264.

²⁰ Gentili 1999, II, 108-109, plate 8.267 and 8.269.

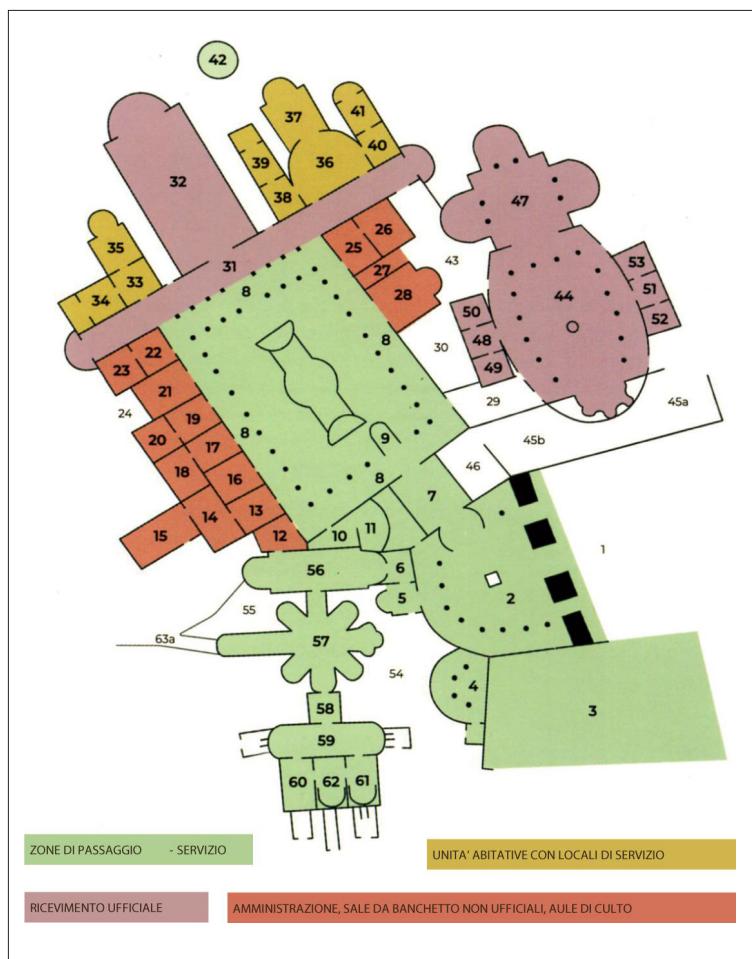


Fig. 1. Plan of the Villa Romana del Casale Piazza Armerina. Room no. 13 with a kiln; *palestra* of the baths, no. 56; *frigidarium* of the baths, no. 57; *tepidarium* of the baths, no. 59; *caldarium*, nos. 60 and 61; *laconicum*, no. 62. (Copyright: Parco archeologico di Morgantina e Villa Romana del Casale).

- d. lamps with inkwell container (nos. 270-271)²¹,
- e. lamp with inkwell container within a bowl (no. 272)²²,
- f. lamps with flukes on the sides of the beginning of the nozzle (nos. 273-274)²³,
- g. lamp with a globular jar (no. 275)²⁴, and
- h. rounded jar with high funnel, either 1. glazed (nos. 276-279)²⁵, or 2. unglazed (nos. 280-285)²⁶.

2. THE RE-PUBLICATION OF LAMPS FROM GENTILI'S EXCAVATIONS BY DANIELA PATTI IN 2013.

This article has in focus the lamp finds from the baths of Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina, based on the study of lamp finds from the excavations, published first by Gino Vincenzo Gentili in 1999. The lamps from Gentili's excavations were restudied by Daniela Patti and published in 2013 in her catalogue of 302 lamps, completing the publication of old lamp finds with 17 additional finds²⁷. Patti added to the catalogue posts information on the box where the

²¹ Gentili 1999, II, 109.

²² Gentili 1999, II, 109.

²³ Gentili 1999, II, 109, plate 8.273.

²⁴ Gentili 1999, II, 109, plate 8.275.

²⁵ Gentili 1999, II, 109, plate 8.276-8.278.

²⁶ Gentili 1999, II, 109-110, plate 8.280.

²⁷ See also Patti 2012, including a discussion on North African lamps from the Villa del Casale, utilizing the typology of *Atlante I*.

lamp was kept in the storerooms, comments on the typology, description of the material, clay, glaze and inclusions, as well as the colour of clay according to the Munsell Soil Color Charts, measurements, description of the decorative motives on the disk, rim and base, suggested date and bibliography. However, after Patti's study, one of the boxes with lamps, *Cassetta 66*, was moved to the Palazzo Trigona for the organisation of the new archaeological exhibition of the finds from the excavations of Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina. In this exhibition some of the lamps, mainly the Roman lamps and North African lamps are now visible in the showcases at the museum.

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF FIND CONTEXTS BY MARINA PIZZI.

Marina Pizzi studied anew the contexts of these lamp finds and made a new concordance for Gentili's and Patti's catalogues for her specialisation thesis at the University of Bologna²⁸, providing each lamp with a data entry for the GIS project documenting the finds from Gentili's excavations. She has also created a concordance for the room numbers in Villa Romana del Casale utilized in this study, as the room numbers vary from Gentili's to Andrea Carandini's and Patrizio Pensabene's publications. A small group of lamps listed in the excavation cards are today on display in the Museo Archeologico at Piazza Armerina, while the majority of the lamps from Gentili's excavations are being stored in the storerooms of Villa Romana del Casale²⁹, where the present author conducted a preliminary restudy of the lamps during the summer schools of ArchLABS 3 and ArchLABS 4 in 2024 and 2025.

When Daniela Patti republished the lamps in Gentili's catalogue in 2013, she emphasized the scarcity of detailed find contexts for the lamp finds³⁰. However, as Marina Pizzi suggests, it is still possible to connect several lamp finds with the help of Gentili's short descriptions of lamps, their find contexts, and measurements of the lamps that were published by Patti as unpublished or with unknown provenance³¹. This has become possible with the help of photographs and drawings published in both Gentili's and Patti's catalogues, as well as the preserved notes written on the surface of some of the lamps with black ink preserving information of the find context published by Gentili. In addition, some lamps have also numbers written in blue or red ink on the surface, or written with a pencil, that connect them to Gentili's catalogue numbers. Thus, it became possible, first, to connect the typological descriptions and the date that Patti suggested to those lamps that Gentili only shortly described in his catalogue and, second, it became possible to add a provenance to lamps that Patti believed had an unknown provenance. Marina Pizzi could thus provide GIS coordinates for many lamp finds from the 1950s that were previously without exact find context. She provided provenience for 232 lamps of 285, i.e. 82% of lamps listed in Gentili's catalogue with information of the room where they were found in the Villa³².

4. THE REANALYSIS OF THE LAMP FINDS.

The focus of this article is a reanalysis of the lamp finds from the earliest contexts of the Villa Romana del Casale, specifically from the baths of the villa, including lamps found below the Early Mediaeval/Byzantine destruction layer in the *frigidarium* (Fig. 1). The largest group of lamps found in these contexts consists of lamps imitating North African lamps. However, five lamps

²⁸ Pizzi 2023.

²⁹ Listed in Patti's catalogue (Patti 2013, 17-18) as *Cassetta 9*, *Cassetta 20*, *Cassetta 63*, *Cassetta 64* and *Cassetta 65*.

³⁰ Patti 2013, 19.

³¹ Pizzi 2023, 68.

³² Pizzi 2023, 68-69.

³³ Nos. 24-27, 32-34.



Fig. 2. Gentili no. 9 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

belonging to Gentili's category "Roman lamps" were also found in the *frigidarium* (nos. 4, 9-12); no. 4 was found in the southeastern apse and nos. 9-12 at the bottom of the *natatio* (Figs. 2, 3a-b, 4). Seven North African lamps were found in the *frigidarium* (Fig. 5)³³, either in the *natatio* or in the trilobate pool. Furthermore, additional three North African lamps³⁴ were located in 2025 in the storerooms of the excavations, preserved together with TSA, all three preserving the same text in black ink as the ones previously published by Gentili. These three lamps have as the context, room «XXXVIII, Piscina A», i.e. they were found in the trilobate pool. In addition, they preserve a text C35 written in black ink. These three lamps were not published by Gentili nor by Patti.

Furthermore, 29 lamps listed by Gentili as lamps that derive from North African lamps were found either in the *natatio* or in the trilobate pool (Figs. 6-8)³⁵, and Patti added two more lamp fragments of this category into her catalogue as nos. 30 and 31³⁶, both found in the *frigidarium* as the text written in black ink on these lamps shows; no. 30 was found in the lowermost layer inside the *natatio* and no. 31 was found in the pool with trilobate shape, at the foot of the staircase.

33 lamps listed by Gentili as lamps that still echo North African lamps were found either in the *natatio* or in the trilobate pool (Figs. 9-11)³⁷. 14 so-called Tripolitan lamps, that Gentili

³⁴ Preliminary numbers were given to these lamps during this study, adding them to the catalogue numbers of Gentili, as nos. 293*, 294*, and 295*. The first two preserve also a text written with a pencil: no. 293* has the number 282B, and no. 294* has the number 283B. NB. Gentili's catalogue includes 285 items, and both nos. 282 and 283 in his published catalogue are unglazed Mediaeval lamps (Gentili 1999, II, 109). New additional Late Antique – Early Mediaeval lamps were numbered 286*-298* during this restudy; they have either been published by Patti (286*-291*= Patti 2013, nos. 30, 31, 32, 94, 98 and 100) but not included in Gentili's catalogue, one was published by Gentili together with pottery contexts (292*= Gentili 1999, II, A.9.4), and six more North African lamps or their fragments (293*-298*) were found in the storerooms of the Villa del Casale together with pieces of TSA.

³⁵ Nos. 38-50, 52-64, 67, 69, 71-72.

³⁶ Patti 2013, 64, nos. 030 and 031.

³⁷ Nos. 74-85, 88-100, 102-107, 109-110.



Fig. 3a-b. Gentili no. 10, top and base (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).



Fig. 4. Gentili no. 11 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

Fig. 5. Gentili no. 33 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

named heart-shaped lamps, belonging to his group d, were found either in the *natatio* or in the trilobate pool (Figs. 12-13)³⁸. So, at least 85 lamps were found in the two pools of the *frigidarium*, and one Roman lamp, no. 4, in the southeastern apse.

³⁸ Nos. 116-122, 125, 126-129, 131-132. For Tripolitan lamps, see especially Joly 1974.

Furthermore, five Arab-Norman lamps seem to have been found in the upper layers above the Late Antique - Early Mediaeval layers of use of the baths, as they have received a general find context, the *frigidarium*³⁹. One glazed Mediaeval lamp with solid handle and a long pointed nozzle, no. 179, was found in the *frigidarium*, in the «grande piscina, a m 2,50 sotto il piano campagna»⁴⁰, i.e. in the upper layers above the *natatio*. A lamp of the bowl type, no. 176, was found in the first layer in the *laconicum*.

Gentili listed the following lamps with a find context in the baths: five Roman lamps⁴¹, five African lamps⁴², 30 lamps derived from African lamps⁴³, and 33 lamps that still echo the African type⁴⁴. Gentili's catalogue includes the following heart-shaped lamps from the baths: seven with a key-shaped frame around the disk⁴⁵, one with a ring around the disk and two parallel lines from the ring to the wick-hole (no. 125), and six without a channel from the disk to the wick-hole⁴⁶. Furthermore, Gentili's catalogue lists some Arab-Norman lamps from the baths: three of the bowl type⁴⁷, two glazed of the type with solid handle and long pointed nozzle⁴⁸, two unglazed lamps of the type with solid handle and long pointed nozzle⁴⁹, one unglazed and two glazed lamps of the type with curled ribbon/band handle⁵⁰.

5. LAMPS FOUND IN THE FRIGIDARIUM.

A large number of lamps were found in the *frigidarium* of the baths⁵¹. Two of these lamps were found in the apses of the *frigidarium*, no. 4 from the southeastern apse and no. 260 from the northeastern apse. Following lamps were found at the bottom of the *natatio*: nos. 9-12 (Figs. 2-4); a large group of lamps have as a general find context the "grande piscina" in Gentili's catalogue: nos. 24, 42-43, 45-48, 50, 52-59, 61, 64, 69, 72, 93-100, 102-107, 109-110, 116, 120-122, 125-129, 132; two lamps, nos. 33 (Fig. 5) and 38 (Fig. 6), derive instead from the *natatio*, "Piscina E", from the floor under the collapsed vault consisting of terracotta tubes. Three lamps were found in the pool with trilobate shape, at the foot of the staircase: nos. 39-41 (Figs. 7-8); while others were found in the pool with trilobate shape: nos. 25-27, 32, 34, 44, 49, 60, 62-63, 67, 71, 74-85, 88-92, 117-119, 131. Furthermore, five lamps were given the general context of *frigidarium*⁵². Some lamps were also found in the court north of the baths, between the *natatio* and the *tepidarium*⁵³. In addition, one lamp derives from the first layer in the *laconicum* of the baths: no. 176.

³⁹ Nos. 144, 166, 180, 229 and 249.

⁴⁰ Gentili 1999, II, 104, no. 179.

⁴¹ Nos. 4, 9-12.

⁴² Nos. 24-27, 32.

⁴³ Nos. 38-50, 52-64, 67, 69, 71-72.

⁴⁴ Nos. 74-85, 88-100, 102-107, 109-110.

⁴⁵ Nos. 116-122.

⁴⁶ Nos. 126-129, 131-132.

⁴⁷ Nos. 144, 166, 176.

⁴⁸ Nos. 179-180.

⁴⁹ Nos. 223, 229.

⁵⁰ Nos. 249, 260, 262 (from the aqueduct of the baths).

⁵¹ Nos. 4, 9-12, 24-27, 32-34, 38-50, 52-64, 67, 69, 71-72, 74-85, 88-100, 102-107, 109-110, 116-122, 125-129, 131-132, 144, 166, 176, 179-180, 229, 249, 260, 286*-287*, 293-295*. Nos. 286* and 287* were not published in Gentili's catalogue. Instead, they were published in Patti's catalogue as no. 30 (286*) and no. 31 (287*). Both lamps have no. 36 written in red ink on the surface. No. 286* has «XXXVIIIB Pisc. E ult.st» written in black ink on the surface, suggesting as find context the lowermost layer in "Piscina E", and no. 287* has «V.XXXVIII». «Piscina A piè grad» written in black ink on the surface, suggesting as find context the foot of the staircase in «Piscina A».

⁵² Nos. 144, 166, 180, 229, 249.

⁵³ Nos. 8, 23, 30, 73, 112, 113, 115, 123, 133, 138, 189.



Fig. 6. Gentili no. 38, LABS24.004 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

The find contexts in the baths show that the oldest lamps, nos. 9-12 (Figs. 2-4), so-called Roman lamps were found at the bottom of the *natatio*, "Piscina E" of the *frigidarium*. One North African lamp and a copy of North African lamps were found under the collapsed vault, and three copies of North African lamps were found at the foot of the staircase in the pool with trilobate shape, so-called Piscina A. North African lamps, their local copies, and local lamps that still echo North African lamps, as well as heart-shaped lamps were found in the *natatio* and in the pool with trilobate shape.

There is an important detail to point out: the Arab-Norman lamps found in the baths have all received a general context of *frigidarium* or the courtyard north of the baths; none of them was found in the pools. This detail may plausibly be connected to the question of the final use of the baths, i.e. for how long the pools in the *frigidarium* were still in use. Thus, Roman lamps and "Christian lamps", using Gentili's categorization, were in use in the baths before the abandonment of the baths, before the 7th century A.D., and Arab-Norman lamps were in use in various contexts of the villa when the pools and the baths were already abandoned.

Gentili describes the context of the lamps found in the pools as follows⁵⁴. Four lamps of the North African type were found at the foot of the first step to the pool, together with fragments of *terra sigillata chiara* D, remains of *paterae*, cups and a large unglazed bowl, together with pieces of marble revetment from the walls and glass tesserae from the vault mosaic. In front of the third step to the pool, 40 cm from the base of the pool, a group of 46 lamps was found, including two African lamps, 36 echoing the African lamps and 8 heart-shaped lamps, vases of *terra sigillata* D with stamped decoration, including Hayes forms 59, 61B, 91A and 91B.

⁵⁴ Gentili 1999, I, 232-233: «già al piede del primo gradone di accesso alla piscina, alto mezzo metro, era un accumulo di quattro lucerne derivate dal tipo africano, frammenti di terre sigillate chiare D, resti di patere, coppe e di un grande scodellone acromi, qualche elemento delle tarde marmoree parietali e tessere di paste vitree della volta insieme a cinque monete di bronzo purtroppo completamente ossidate e irriconoscibili oltre a mezzo piede marmoreo di statua assai malandato. Ma un accumulo più rilevante si è incontrato addossato alla fronte del terzo gradino per un'altezza di cm 40 dal fondo contenente ben quarantasei lucerne, di cui due di tipo africano, trentasei echeggianti e derivate dal tipo africano e otto lucerne cuoriforme a canale aperto e senza e vasellame di terre sigillate D con decorazioni di stampiglia, tra cui tre patere delle forme Hayes 59 e 61B e due tazze delle forme 91A e 91B e vari frammenti di forme aperte». Cf. Baldini *et alii* 2025, 196.

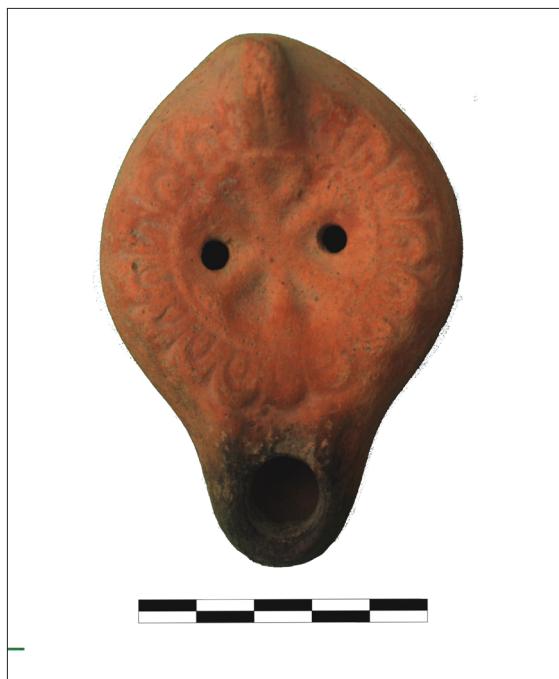


Fig. 7. Gentili no. 40, LABS24.010 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

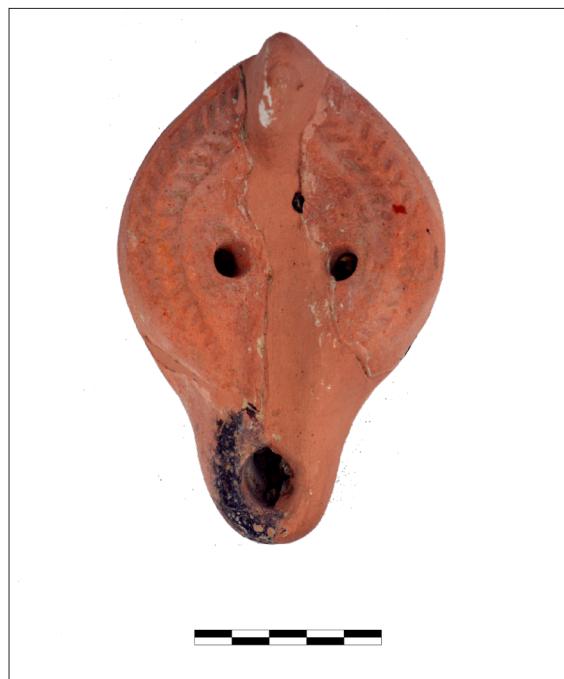


Fig. 8. Gentili no. 41, LABS23.051 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

The function of the pools in the baths, however, may have changed in Late Antiquity, i.e. as the lamps seem to have been deliberately left there. For example, the “Roman lamps” (nos. 9-12) were found at the bottom of the *natatio*, and three lamps derived from African lamps (nos. 39-41) (Figs. 7-8), one heart-shaped lamp without a channel from the disk to the wick-hole (no. 131), and no. 287*, were found at the foot of the staircase in the pool with trilobate shape. In addition, one North African lamp of Hayes II/Atlante X (no. 33) (Fig. 5)⁵⁵, a copy of North African lamps of Hayes II/Atlante X with a broad flat rim (no. 38) (Fig. 6), and one lamp (no. 95) (Fig. 10)⁵⁶ that still echo the African type were found under the collapsed vault in the *natatio*. Gentili furthermore added to his catalogue post that no. 33 was found in the “grande piscina” on the floor under the collapsed terracotta tubes of the vault, suggesting that the lamp is an indication of the latest activities in the *frigidarium* before the destruction and the abandonment. Many other lamps were found in the *frigidarium*, in the *natatio*, Piscina E, and in the pool with trilobate shape, Piscina A. So, the activities connected to the pools in the baths of Villa Romana del Casale seem to have reached their peak in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., before the final collapse of the vault of the *frigidarium* that sealed the destruction layer.

The pools in the *frigidarium* received new revetments in marble slabs, maybe in the fourth century, as Patrizio Pensabene suggests, after an earthquake in Sicily in A.D. 365⁵⁷. Pensabene has previously suggested that the *frigidarium* may have been used as an *oratorium* in the

⁵⁵ Patti 2013, 303, 311, no. 053. Cf. Barbera, Petriaggi 1993, 408, pl. 20 (Motivo 217).

⁵⁶ Patti 2013, 121-122, no. 131. Patti identifies this as an imitation of *Atlante* VIII A 2b. Even though Gentili does not mention in his catalogue specifically that the lamp no. 95 was found in the layer under the collapsed vault, this fact is written in black ink on the base of the lamp, as seen in the photo published by Patti 2013, 122.

⁵⁷ Pensabene, Bonanno 2008, 17; Pensabene 2010-2011, 65; Pensabene, Barresi 2019a, 727; Baldini *et alii* 2025, 191.

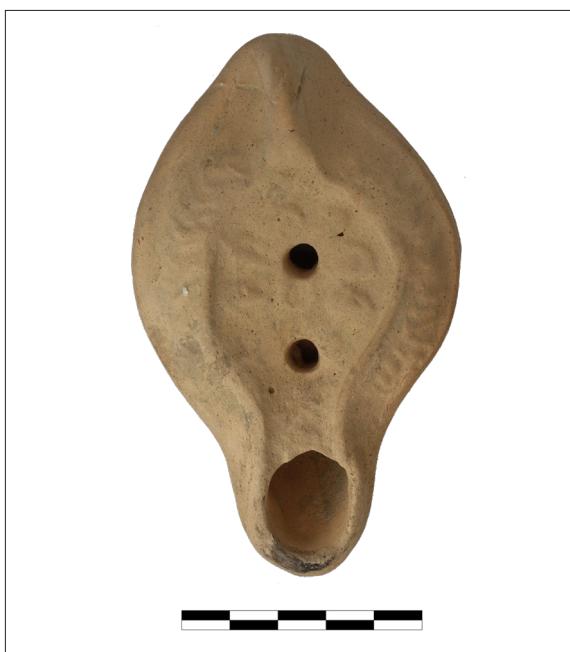


Fig. 9. Gentili no. 79, LABS24.005 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).



Fig. 10. Gentili no. 95, LABS23.058 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

Byzantine period, as some North African lamps found in the *frigidarium* have Christian motifs⁵⁸. The activities in the *frigidarium* seem to have continued until the 6th century, as suggested by the chronology of the oil lamps and pottery found in the baths underneath the collapsed vault⁵⁹. Enrico Gallocchio has previously suggested a 7th-century date for the destruction of the baths, as suggested by the lamps and coins found sealed under the collapsed vaults⁶⁰. In addition, Carmela Bonanno has studied the TSA material from the baths, found in the contexts together with lamps; the majority of the pieces can be dated from the mid-5th century to the mid-6th century A.D., as fragments of Hayes 91 were found in the *natatio* of the baths⁶¹. Bonanno notes that during the excavations of 2010-2012 in the *frigidarium* even a piece of Hayes 99A was found⁶².

The lamps that Pensabene refers to, i.e. lamps with Christian motifs found in the *frigidarium* include Gentili no. 42 (Fig. 14) with a Constantinian monogram⁶³. As Patti has pointed out, most lamps that were found in the baths belong to *Atlante* types VII, VIII, X, XIII, and XV⁶⁴. The most usual types are *Atlante* VIII (cf. Hayes I), with 41 examples in Patti's study, and *Atlante* X, with 12 examples according to Patti⁶⁵.

⁵⁸ Pensabene 2010-2011, 71; Pensabene 2016, 252-253. Patti follows this hypothesis in 2012, 309.

⁵⁹ Cf. Baldini *et alii* 2025, 193.

⁶⁰ Gallocchio in Pensabene, Gallocchio 2011, 3-4.

⁶¹ Bonanno 2019, 337-338, notes 19 and 20.

⁶² Bonanno 2019, 338, note 21.

⁶³ Gentili 1999, II, no. 42 = Patti 2013, 48, no. 007: Patti suggests El Mahrine in Tunis as the production site for the lamp, Bonifay 2004, 359. Compare with Barbera, Petriaggi 1993, 404, pl. 16 (Motivo 207).

⁶⁴ Patti 2012, 302. For a general presentation of North African lamps, see Deneauve 1969 and Ennabli 1976.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



Fig. 11. Gentili no. 109, LABS24.013
(Photograph: Stephan Hassam).



Fig. 12. Gentili no. 116, LABS24.011
(Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

6. LOCAL PRODUCTION OF LAMPS?

Especially interesting is the existence of many lamps that “echo” African lamps. They are made of light clay of soft texture and were produced by using very worn moulds. They have usually either a rectangular disk, or a rosette disk. They seem to be of local production, plausibly from the late 5th or 6th century A.D. Possible local production of lamps is also suggested by documented Byzantine and Mediaeval kilns in the area of the villa and its surroundings⁶⁶. The nearest kiln of the Byzantine period to the *frigidarium* is the one built in the *praefurnium* of the *caldarium* and another kiln was built in the room 13, located east of the *palaestra* (Fig. 1)⁶⁷. The kiln in the *praefurnium* was located c. 2 m below the Arab-Norman period in the baths⁶⁸. The kiln in the room 13 north of the peristyle was used to produce cups, amphorae and pots, that Randazzo has dated to the second half of the 6th century and the 7th century⁶⁹.

There are clearly two trends in local oil lamp production in Late Antiquity and the Early Mediaeval/ Byzantine period that seem to belong to separate phases. First, there are examples of local production copying the popular North African lamps, and second, there is a large group of local lamps produced using very worn moulds that echo the imported lamps. Most of the moulded lamps found in the baths of the Villa del Casale belong to the second category. A third phase of local production is represented in the Villa del Casale by the so-called Sicilian lamps that Gentili placed in a group of unglazed lamps with an elongated

⁶⁶ Pensabene in Alaimo *et alii* 2010, 59-60.

⁶⁷ Baldini *et alii* 2025, 197-198, figs. 10 and 11.

⁶⁸ Pensabene in Alaimo *et alii* 2010, 60.

⁶⁹ Randazzo 2019, 348.



Fig. 13. Gentili no. 131 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).



Fig. 14. Gentili no. 42 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

body (nos. 134-142) (Fig. 15a-b)⁷⁰. These lamps are usually dated from the late 6th century until 8th centuries. An important fact for the dating of the contexts of lamp finds in the Villa del Casale is that not one of these "Sicilian lamps" were found in the baths. Instead, they were found in the rooms surrounding the peristyle (nos. 134-137) (Fig. 15a-b), in the courtyard north of the baths (no. 138), from trenches outside the villa (nos. 139-140), and one lamp in the courtyard located west of the Hall of Orpheus (no. 142)⁷¹. This type of lamps were plausibly produced in the area of Syracuse where moulds for this type have been found, and several examples are preserved in the Museum of Modica⁷². One of the lamps represents Provoost 10A, the later development of the type that have been dated to the 7th or 8th century A.D.⁷³, while the others belong to Provoost type 10B, and many of them have a cross in relief within a base ring at the base⁷⁴.

The lamps of the second group from the Villa del Casale are smaller than the North African lamps and they are seldom signed, although occasionally they show producer's marks, such as a palm branch, a fish or a lizard (?) in relief⁷⁵. The quality of these products is always inferior and the ornaments are never as clear as on the models. Among the finds from the baths, an Athenian lamp import to the Villa is attested (Fig. 3a-b), very likely a product of the famous Stratolaos workshop that was active in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., as the

⁷⁰ One of these lamps, Gentili 1999, II, no. 141, is possibly a local copy of *Atlante XIII-XV*, as suggested by Patti 2013, see no. 95.
⁷¹ Gentili 1999, II, 102.

⁷² Provoost 1970, Subtype 10B; Joly 1974, 53; Rizzone, Sammito 2006, 8-9, 11-12, 18, nos. 32-36; Spadaro 2013. For "Sicilian lamps", see also Bailey 1988, Q1869-1871, pl. 31.

⁷³ Gentili 1999, II, no. 143; Patti 2013, no. 143. Cf. Bailey 1988, Q1869.

⁷⁴ See Patti 2013, nos. 144-151; Patti 2013, nos. 147-151 have a cross in relief at the base. Even though Patti suggests that many of these lamps are unpublished, Gentili included them in his catalogue with a short description: Gentili 1999, II, no. 134 = Patti 2013, no. 150; Gentili 1999, II, no. 135 = Patti 2013, no. 151; Gentili 1999, II, no. 136 = Patti 2013, no. 147; Gentili 1999, II, no. 137 = Patti 2013, no. 145; Gentili 1999, II, no. 138 = Patti 2013, no. 146; Gentili 1999, II, no. 139 = Patti 2013, no. 144; Gentili 1999, II, no. 140 = Patti 2013, no. 148; Gentili 1999, II, no. 142 = Patti 2013, no. 149; Gentili 1999, II, no. 143 = Patti 2013, no. 143.

⁷⁵ For this curious image, a possible maker's mark, see Gentili 1999, II, no. 109, pl. 6.109; also on Gentili 1999, II, no. 108, 110-111.



Fig. 15a-b. Gentili no. 134, top and base, LABS23.056 (Photograph: Stephan Hassam).

signature at the base, a lunate *sigma* suggests⁷⁶. The Athenian lamp, found in the bottom of the *natatio* can be dated to the first half of the 5th century A.D.⁷⁷. Another lamp that also was found in the bottom of the *natatio* seems to be a worn local copy of a Corinthian lamp, also datable to the early 5th century⁷⁸. A common characteristic of all lamps from the end of the 3rd century A.D. onwards is a solid handle, in Rome and Italy as well as in Greece. It is also possible that the model for the lamp with the figural disk, no. 11 (Fig. 4), came from Greece. The lamp no. 9 (Fig. 2), a third lamp from the same context as Gentili's nos. 10-12, is an example of lamps with raised *globuli* on the rim, plain disk, solid handle and flat, undecorated base⁷⁹. There is also a lamp that seems to be a *surmoulage* copy of an Athenian lamp, found in the courtyard north of the baths, between the *natatio* and the *tepidarium*⁸⁰. The lamp has a rosette disk and a panelled herringbone rim, a popular combination in the Athenian lamps during the 4th century A.D.⁸¹.

Analyses of clay samples from pieces of common pottery, one sample from a brick and one sample from a waster that derive from the Arab-Norman settlement at the Villa del Casale have been compared with sediments from river beds from the Gela river to verify the possible usage of the alluvial deposits⁸². The results of the analyses by Alaimo *et alii* showed that the alluvial material from the Gela river corresponds clay used in common pottery, sugge-

⁷⁶ Gentili 1999, II, no. 10. For Athenian lamps with twisted rosette, see Karivieri 1996. For the interpretation of the lunate *sigma* as producer's signature, see Karivieri 1996, 130-134.

⁷⁷ Cf. Karivieri 1996: Deposit H-I 7:1 from the Athenian Agora, with several lamps that have a twisted rosette with solid petals on the disk (Karivieri 1996, 214-216, nos. 179, 180, 181, 184, 185, pls. 39-40).

⁷⁸ Gentili 1999, II, no. 11.

⁷⁹ Gentili 1999, II, no. 9. Cf. Bailey 1988, Q1727-1729, pl. 16 (from Tunisia).

⁸⁰ Gentili 1999, II, no. 8.

⁸¹ An earlier version of the design with a raised herringbone on the rim, see Perlzweig 1961, 153, no. 1818, pl. 31; for the rosette, see Perlzweig 1961, 155, no. 1974, pl. 32.

⁸² Alaimo *et alii* 2010, 50.

sting that clay and sand from the nearby river Gela was used for production of pottery and tiles in the late 11th and early 12th centuries⁸³. More studies are needed, and especially interesting would be to analyse the clay of the lamps that seem to be local products from Sicily. The results could help us to localize various production centres in Sicily, and perhaps even to identify imported copies of North African and Athenian lamps.

⁸³ Alaimo *et alii* 2010, 53-56, fig. 14.

References

Alaimo *et alii* 2010: R. Alaimo, E. Gasparini, E. Giarrusso, G. Maggiore, P. Pensabene, *Produzione ceramica nell'insediamento medievale presso la villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina*, in P. Pensabene (ed.), *Piazza Armerina Villa del Casale e la Sicilia tra Tardoantico e Medioevo*, Roma 2010, 39-60.

Atlante I: *Atlante delle forme ceramiche 1. La ceramica fine da mensa nel bacino mediterraneo (medio e tardo impero)*, volume I. Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica, Classica e Orientale, Roma 1981.

Bailey 1988: D.M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum. Vol. III. Roman Provincial Lamps*, London 1988.

Baldini *et alii* 2025: I. Baldini, P. Barresi, G. Leucci, C. Sfameni, D. Tanasi, *La ripresa delle ricerche alla villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina: nuovi dati e prospettive per la storia dell'insediamento "post villam"*, in M. Cavalieri, A. Castrorao Barba, C. Sfameni (a cura di), *La villa dopo la villa 3. Trasformazione di un Sistema insediativo e economico nell'Italia meridionale e nelle isole maggiori tra tarda Antichità e Medioevo* (Collection FERVET OPUS 13), Louvain 2025, 181-206.

Barbera, Petriaggi 1993: M. Barbera, R. Petriaggi, *Museo Nazionale Romano. Le lucerne tardoantiche di produzione africana*, Roma 1993.

Bonanno 2019: C. Bonanno, *Nuovi dati sulla ceramica sigillata africana nella revisione degli scavi Gentili*, in Pensabene, Barresi 2019a, 335-342.

Bonifay 2004: M. Bonifay, *Études sur la céramique romaine tardive d'Afrique* (British Archaeological Reports International Series, 1301), Oxford 2004.

Deneauve 1969: J. Deneauve, *Lampes de Carthage*, Paris 1969.

Ennabli 1976: A. Ennabli, *Lampes chrétiennes de Tunisie: Musées du Bardo et de Carthage*, Paris 1976.

Gentili 1999: G.V. Gentili, *La Villa Romana di Piazza Armerina, Palazzo Erculeo*, vols. 1-3, Osimo 1999.

Hayes 1972: J.W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, London 1972.

Joly 1974: E. Joly, *Lucerne del Museo di Sabratha* (Monografie di Archeologia Libica, 11), Roma 1974.

Karivieri 1996: A. Karivieri, *The Athenian Lamp Industry in Late Antiquity* (Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, V), Helsinki 1996.

Patti 2012: D. Patti, *Le lucerne "Gentili" dalla Villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina. Osservazioni e aggiornamenti*, *Vetera Christianorum*, 49, 2012, 297-312.

Patti 2013: D. Patti, *Villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina: le lucerne degli scavi Gentili*. Officina di studi medievali 2013.

Pensabene 2010-2011: P. Pensabene, *Villa di Piazza Armerina: intervento della Sapienza-Università di Roma*, in F.P. Rizzo (a cura di), *La villa del Casale e oltre. Territorio, popolamento, economia nella Sicilia centrale tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo*, SEIA. Quaderni dell'Università di Macerata, n.s. XV-XVI, 31-100.

Pensabene 2016: P. Pensabene, *Il contributo degli scavi 2004-2014 alla storia della Villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina tra IV e XII secolo*, in C. Giuffrida & M. Cassia (a cura di), *Silenziose rivoluzioni. La Sicilia dalla tarda antichità al primo medioevo*. Atti dell’Incontro di Studio Catania-Piazza Armerina, 21-23 maggio 2015, Catania 2016, 223-271.

Pensabene, Barresi 2019a: P. Pensabene, P. Barresi (a cura di), *Piazza Armerina, Villa del Casale: scavi e studi nel decennio 2004-2014*, Roma 2019.

Pensabene, Barresi 2019b: P. Pensabene, P. Barresi, *I mosaici del Frigidario*, in Pensabene, Barresi 2019a, 457-462.

Pensabene, Bonanno 2008: P. Pensabene, C. Bonanno (a cura di), *L’insediamento medievale sulla Villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina. Nuove acquisizioni sulla storia della Villa e risultati degli scavi 2004-2005*, Galatina 2008.

Pensabene, Gallocchio 2011: P. Pensabene, E. Gallocchio, 2011. *I mosaici delle terme della villa del Casale: antichi restauri e nuove considerazioni sui proprietari*, in C. Salvetti (a cura di), Atti del XVI Colloquio dell’Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico, Tivoli 2011, 3-12.

Perlzweig 1961: J. Perlzweig, *The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Agora Excavations, VII. The Lamps of the Roman Period*, Princeton N.J. 1961.

Pizzi 2023: M. Pizzi, *Legacy Data e Sistemi Informativi Geografici: proposta di Progetto GIS sui “dati d’archivio” degli scavi Gentili nella Villa del Casale di Piazza Armerina (EN)*, Tesi di Specializzazione in Beni Archeologici, Università di Bologna 2023.

Provoost 1970: A. Provoost, *Les lampes a recipient alongè trouvées dans les catacombes romaines*, BbelgRom, 41, 1970, 17-55.

Randazzo 2019: M.G. Randazzo, *Le fasi altomedievali (secoli VI-IX) presso la Villa del Casale alla luce della revisione dei “reperti Gentili”: il corredo delle tombe multiple rinvenute nella basilica, la fornace per coppi a superficie striata, le ceramiche*, in Pensabene, Barresi 2019a, 343-359.

Rizzone, Sammito 2006: V.G. Rizzone, A.M. Sammito, *Ceramica commune di età tardoantica dagli Iblei sudorientali*, in D. Malfitana, J. Poblome, J. Lund (eds.), *Old pottery in a new century. Innovating perspectives on Roman pottery studies* (Catania, April 22-24 2004), Catania 2006, 493-514.

Spadaro 2013: P. Spadaro, *Early Medieval lamps from the Civic Museum F. L. Belgiorno of Modica*, in 2013 Edinburgh University Seventh Century Colloquium, 28th-29th May 2013.