

## Erotic Imagery on Roman Lamps at Gangivecchio: “Come on baby, light my fire”

Gangivecchio is a Sicilian site located in the southeast region of the Palermo province, and has provided a wealth of material for archaeologists to better understand this poorly investigated area of the Mediterranean world. Occupation of the site possibly dates from the Greek colonial period (7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), through the Roman Empire, and to the present, and contains archaeological evidence from both Greek and Roman cultures (Storey 2013). The 2012 and 2015 field excavations carried out by the University of Iowa and the University of Palermo have revealed a structure in Particella 19 believed to be a Roman villa with corresponding ceramics dating to the 1st-3rd century CE. Bones from the 2012 excavation were analysed in the summer of 2014, and from these deposits it is clear that some form of animal processing happened at this site, notably marrow extraction, on at least a moderate scale.

Excavators have also theorized that this could have been a site of some ritual importance, even a sanctuary, perhaps to a fertility deity, which was common in ancient Sicily (Halloway 1991). Sanctuaries themselves could often function as locations for trade and cultural exchange (Antonaccio 2011) perhaps increasing this site’s importance as a center for trade and cult practices in the area. In the 2015 summer field season, excavators discovered materials that added a new dimension to the site’s importance. Some of this material includes a large number of “feminine” objects like carved bone hair pins, cosmetic applicators, and loom weights and needles. Interestingly enough, all of this was discovered along with a large number of ceramic lanterns, some of which depict erotic scenes.

It has been noted that "Greek and Roman sex was never confined to a back room" (Vout 2013), but it is clear that we do not fully understand the context of this erotic imagery within a domestic space. Thanks to sites like Pompeii, archaeologists and scholars are quick to cry

“brothel,” partly because previous scholarship has relied on Victorian standards of morality and sexual decency to identify these spaces. Does the material discovered in Particella 19 provide evidence for some form of cult activity occurring at the site, or is it simply a domestic space in which archaeologists are trying to play out their “fantasies”? This paper attempts to reconcile the 2014 analysis of the animal bones, and the most recent 2015 materials to come to a better understanding of the structure of Particella 19, and its function in the wider landscape of rural Sicily, both religiously, economically, and now domestically.

### Bibliography

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