Punic amphora lids. Evidence of a particular class of pottery from central-west Sardinia

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Introduction
Recent excavations in central-west Sardinia have shed much light on the life of rural Punic communities in the later 1st millennium. Since 2007 excavations by the university of Glasgow and the Józefowice Institute at Brown University (federally supported by the museum of San Vero Milis) have revealed stratified deposits at several important sites: the Punic farms/enclosures of Truncu ‘e Molas and Pauli Stïncus near Termine and the site of S’Urrachi, continuously inhabited between the Late Bronze Age and Roman period, near Cristianos. These sites have produced a substantial number of amphorae which are currently being studied (Gomez Belfont, Van Dommelen, & Cies Guzi, 2011; Stiglic et al., 2012; Van Dommelen, Belfont, & Trivelloni, 2012). One class of material that has often been overlooked and mis-identified is the associated amphora lids which were probably used, not during transport, but during the storage period. Any of these have been identified from the Punic area at S’Urrachi (fig. 1) and research at other sites in Sardinia and elsewhere has produced further evidence. In this poster we present the evidence of these lids and their associated fabrics from these locations in parallel with studies carried out by our colleagues as demonstrated in the companion poster.

The lids
We selected a number of lids from Truncu ‘e Molas, Pauli Stïncus and the ongoing excavations at S’Urrachi that had an internal circular ledge on the hypothesis that these would have wedged inside the mouth of the amphora, helping to keep it in place (fig. 3). This is not to say that other lids without the ledge may not also have been used with amphorae. This selection produced a limited number of identifiable lids (fig. 5). At Truncu ‘e Molas from a total of 28 lids fragments of all types only one fell into this category (fig M001 1.73) made of a coarse local ‘A’2’ fabric. It had been purposefully cut down, for secondary use and it measured only 4.5cm across, much too small in its current state to be used as an amphora lid.

Similarly, at Pauli Stïncus a total of 14 lid fragments were found, and most seem likely to have been associated with amphorae, given their coarse local fabric and conical shape with knob handle, but only one was identifiable as for use with an amphora (PSK 041 1.026), morphologically similar, despite its fragmentary state, to the S’Urrachi (or San Vero Milis + SVM) group B below. The rest were too fragmentary to allow any identification at this point. From the excavations at S’Urrachi, out of a total number of 59 lids of all types, 24 fragments of lids were identified that could have been used for either cooking pots or amphorae (i.e. coarse fabric and conical shape with knob handle). 19 fragments had an internal ledge. Morphologically, from the current evidence, the lids can be divided into two different types, A and B.

The first, comprising DQ42 381, DQ42 382, DQ42 024 are conical with a roughly made knob handle at the top, cut by string, they are characterised by a deep hollow area within the cone (figs. 2 & 8) and relatively thick walls. They were possibly made in two parts, with the upper one consisting of the knob handle and upper cone and the lower part made up of the outer rim and inner ledge, which were joined before firing. This can be clearly seen in DQ42 381 (fig. 9). The fabrics of DQ42 381 & DQ42 382 are the same (B1), which is of possibly west-Sardinian production, whilst that of DQ42 024 is fabric O1 of Carthaginian provenance. None is made in the local SVM fabric.

The second type of lid is also conical, with a roughly made knob handle. This type is represented by KQ04 390, 394, 395, 396, 590. These appear to have been made in one piece with the ledge added at the end of the process, as is quite clearly visible in KG04 394 (figs. 4, 6) the area between the knob handle and the ledge is either filled in or only a slight dip under the handles (see DQ42 385). Concerning the fabric, lids DQ42 385 & DQ42 384 are made in a local fabric provisionally labelled SVM, whilst DQ42 395, DQ42 590 & KG42 390 are made in different fabrics (B2, B3 and B1 respectively).

Their context
The context of the discoveries provides a useful guide to their chronology and use. The lids from S’Urrachi come from only two different contexts in sector D (fig. 1), both of which are relatively late (2nd-1st centuries BC) whilst they are entirely missing from sector E, which is largely made up of earlier contexts. This suggests that such lids were not used before the rough 4th century BC. In sector D, context DQ42 (room A) has been tentatively identified as part of a Punic house (fig. 1) dated to around the 2nd century BC. The lids were found in a relatively limited area near the walls. Besides the lids, it contained a variety of material including cooking pots, amphorae, which may confirm the domestic nature of the area. The most common types of amphorae from this context were T.2.2.1.2, T.2.2.1.1.1 and T.5.1.1.1.1, suggesting that the lids filled these type of amphorae (see companion poster).

Table: fragments used in analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Fragment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Provenience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>DQ42 381</td>
<td>Conical</td>
<td>S’Urrachi</td>
<td>Late 3rd</td>
<td>O1</td>
<td>Carthaginian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>DQ42 382</td>
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<td>SVM</td>
<td>SVM</td>
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</tbody>
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The second context (DQ42) is a burnt layer within corner B (fig. 1) of the outer defensive wall, which contained a large number of relatively well preserved material including bricks, globular jars and lamps. It was dated to the 2nd century BC. Even if the nature of this context is less clear, the material suggests a domestic or storage setting.

Wheel-made ceramic amphora lids are relatively uncommon, or at least rarely published, giving the large numbers of amphorae that are found on Punic sites. The fabrics of the lids found at S’Urrachi suggest that a significant portion were not made separately and only combined with an amphora when it was (inscribed for a storage). Instead, the external fabrics indicate that the lids were made with the amphora themselves, and thus presumably used for transport as well. Their material suggests, however, that they were not best used for transporting liquids, unless they could have been sealed with wax or bitumen. A clue to the use of these lids may be inferred from an example found in the Santa Cruce basin near the mouth of the Trinco river just south of modern Oristano: the shape and size of the lid is very similar to type A and was found in association with a T.2.2.1.3 amphora. Similar amphorae from the same area were found to have contained sheep or goat meat (Del Vals & Samella, 2012:213) and it may be that these lids were used when transporting more ‘solid’ goods, rather than wine, garum or oil.

An interesting comparison can also be made to a series of Punic amphorae lids found in the port of Ostia (Del Amoño, 1990). Of the four categories identified the first, a) has most similarities to our group A with a short external ledge (albeit less pronounced than ours) which the other authors suggested were used for closing a Maria D amphora, perhaps also using a string attached to the knob and handle to create a snagger fit, and a similar system could have been used at S’Urrachi.

Methodology

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1st Amphora in the Mediterranean World Congress: the State of the Art