

THE LEVANZO I WRECK AND A REASSESSMENT FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF *TUBI FITTILI* IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

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ABSTRACT

During the 2005-06 survey off the northwest coast of Sicily, a wrecksite was discovered north of Isola di Levanzo, one of the Egadi Islands. Based on amphora evidence, the wrecksite is dated to the first half of the 4th century AD. In addition to issues of maritime trade, the discovery of the Levanzo I wreck off the northwest coast of Sicily provides evidence for questions related to tubi fittili or vaulting tubes. Tubi fittili were small, typically poorly-made, terracotta tubes that nested within one another to create a form in the construction of concrete arches and domes. After a nearly 500-year hiatus in Mediterranean construction, they reappeared in 3rd-century AD architectural projects in Roman North Africa. The use of vaulting tubes spread almost immediately from North Africa to Sicily, and subsequently to cities of mainland Italy where they were employed throughout Late Antiquity. Although a small number of tubes have been reported on several shipwrecks, they have not been confirmed as a cargo item until the discovery of the Levanzo I wreck. An understanding of the presence of tubi fittili within the context of the Levanzo I wreck's cargo, as well as tubes from other wrecksites in the central Mediterranean, provides insights into the questions of their distribution, transport, and adoptive use in construction.