

Interaction and Identity Sicily and South Italy from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity

edited by

Gillian Shepherd

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In memoriam
Sebastiano Tusa



Cultural interactions: Sebastiano Tusa and Valeria Li Vigni admiring Indigenous Australian paintings, Kiwarr (upper left) and Ngurra (Country) (lower left) by Pulpurru Davies, and Minyma Kutjara (Two Sisters) by Kunmanara Stewart (right) in the Ian Potter Centre, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in 2012. Photo by Alba Mazza

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Hoping for continuity. Being born and dying young in Archaic Gela (Sicily): from the analysis of the cemeteries to the reconstruction of cultural identity

Claudia Lambrugo

In recent years some scholars have drawn attention to the lack of research on the reconstruction of the social profile and cultural identity of Greek colonies in Sicily, a perspective which can be drawn from archaeological evidence and the ancient written sources (Gras 2001–2002: 279; Torelli 2003, but more recently see, for example, Adornato 2011 and Lyons *et al.* 2013). In this respect the analysis of burial customs has increasingly been recognised as one of the most important tools in understanding past societies, their fears and anxieties, and their desires and ambitions (for a bibliographic update on the Greek *necropoleis* in Sicily see Lambrugo 2013: 414, ns 5–7 and also Spatafora & Vassallo 2010; Vassallo & Valentino 2012; Vassallo 2014).

This paper focuses on the results of a major new examination of the Archaic cemeteries of Gela (Sicily), containing mainly 7th and 6th century burials, work which I began as a doctoral student at the University of Pavia, and then continued during postdoctoral research at the University of Milan. The final results were published in a monograph (Lambrugo 2013) and in further papers (Lambrugo 2014, 2015), but here new attention (with discussion of some tombs unpublished elsewhere) will be drawn to some funerary rituals in Gela and to the Geloan choice to promote so carefully an elite group of dead children and adolescents.

Notes on the context: excavations and discoveries in the Archaic cemeteries of Gela

Gela (also named Terranova until 1927) made its appearance on the world's archaeological scene at the beginning of the 19th century, when the agricultural development of the hill, where the Rhodian/Cretan colony once stood, led to the discovery of countless high quality painted vases. These unexpected treasures, in addition to creating fortunes for local landowners and history buffs, attracted to this obscure town a disparate cohort of wealthy foreigners (among these the renowned British archaeologist Arthur Evans), who often left with more than a few crates of artefacts for their home museums or collections (Vickers 1996, 2003; Lambrugo 2009a, 2013: 19–26 with additional references). Despite the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies having some of the most advanced heritage protection laws of the time, illegal spoliations went on until the turn of the 20th century when (in the autumn of 1897) the *Direzione degli Scavi di Siracusa* extended its mandate to the Caltanissetta province

(to which Gela still belongs today) and its director, Paolo Orsi (for Paolo Orsi's great work in Sicily, see Finotti & Maurina 2010 *passim*), undertook the task of putting the Gela excavations in order.

Orsi's first intervention in Gela concerned the investigation of the ancient city's Archaic *necropoleis*, well-known following numerous foreign and private semi-illegal diggings; they were located west of the Greek settlement, in the quarter named Borgo, on the west bank of a deep valley, the Vallone Pasqualello (Fig. 1), which represented in antiquity the natural border between the *polis* and its *necropoleis*. Orsi was given the opportunity to carry out this investigation by a massive road regeneration project of the quarter owned by the *Comune di Terranova*. Following difficult authorisation procedures, an agreement was finally reached with the Municipality regarding archaeological diggings to be carried out before the sewer pipes and roads were laid. On March 30th, 1900 Orsi managed to start the excavation, which lasted three months, sometimes under unfavourable conditions such as having crowds of shouting and curious sightseers constantly standing on the trench edge, as well as insufficient funding, the risk of illegal diggers, and typhus or other infections due to the poor hygienic conditions of the excavation area (Figs 2a–b, 3). The main outcome of the excavation was the discovery of almost 570 graves in the Borgo and Predio La Paglia areas (Figs 4–5), the latter adjacent to the first along the southwest slope of a sunny terrace in the Villa Garibaldi Gardens (Lambrugo 2013: 26–34, with unedited documents published in Appendix 1: 44–53).

During the fifties of the last century, 70 other graves were discovered in the Villa Garibaldi Gardens (Fig. 6) and in other confined areas of the ancient city by Dinu

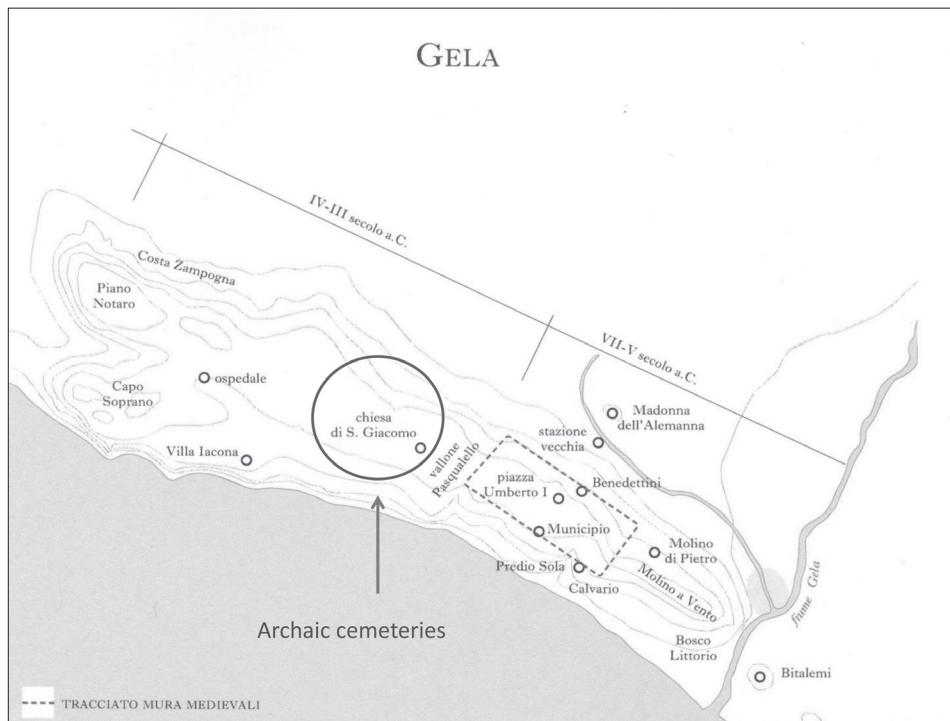


Figure 1. Plan of Gela (elaborated by the author from Magna Grecia 2012: 295)

9. Hoping for continuity. Being born and dying young in Archaic Gela (Sicily)

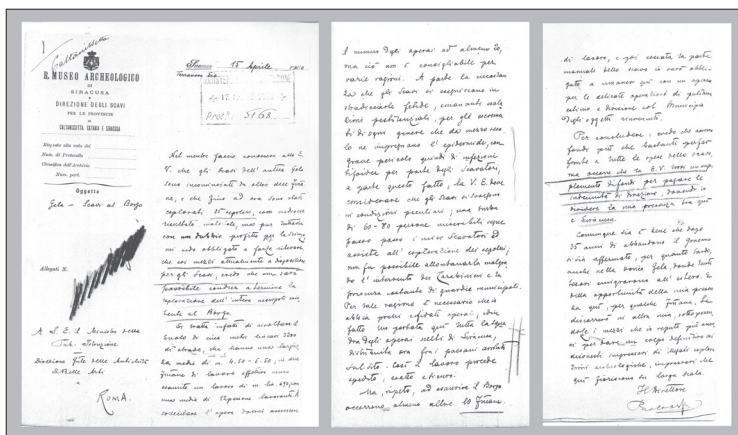


Figure 2a. Orsi's letter to S.E. Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti (Roma), 15th April 1900. Orsi describes how the diggings in the Borgo area progress, also complaining about the difficult situation in Gela

Transcription

Autografo di P. Orsi, su carta intestata R. Museo Archeologico di Siracusa, Direzione degli scavi per le provincie di Caltanissetta, Catania e Siracusa. Oggetto: Gela - Scavi al Borgo. Terranova Sic., 15 Aprile 1900, indirizzata a S.E. il Ministro della Pub. Istruzione, Direzione Gen.le delle Antichità e Belle Arti, Roma.
Data in arrivo 17 Aprile 1900, N.P. 5168.

Nel mentre faccio conoscere alla E.V. che gli scavi dell'antica Gela sono incominciati da oltre due settimane, e che fino ad ora sono stati esplorati 85 sepolcri, con mediocre risultato materiale, ma pur tuttavia con non dubbio profitto per la scienza, mi vedo obbligato a farLe rilevare che coi mezzi attualmente a disposizione per gli scavi, credo che non sarà possibile condurre a termine la esplorazione dell'intera necropoli esistente al Borgo.

Si tratta infatti di rivoltare il suolo di circa metri lineari 3200 di strade, che hanno una larghezza media di m. 4.50-5.50; in due settimane di lavoro effettivo venne esaurito un lavoro di m. lin. 690, con una media di 12 persone lavoranti. A sollecitare l'opera dovrei accrescere il numero degli operai ad almeno 20, ma ciò non è consigliabile per varie ragioni. A parte la circostanza che gli scavi si eseguono in straduciuole fetide, emananti esalazioni pestilenziali, per gli escrementi di ogni genere che da mezzo secolo ne impregnano l'epidermide, con grave pericolo quindi di infezioni tifoidee per parte degli scavatori, a parte questo fatto, la V.E. deve considerare che gli scavi si svolgono in condizioni peculiari; una turba di 60-80 persone miserabili segue passo passo i miei scavatori ed assiste all'esplorazione dei sepolcri; non fu possibile allontanarla malgrado l'intervento dei Carabinieri e la presenza costante di guardie municipali. Per tale ragione è necessario che io abbia pochi e fidati operai; ed in fatto ho portata qui tutta la squadra degli operai scelti di Siracusa, distribuita ora fra i paesani assestati sul sito. Così il lavoro procede spedito, esatto e sicuro.

Ma, ripeto, ad esaurire il Borgo occorrono almeno altre 10 settimane di lavoro, e poi cessata la parte manuale dello scavo io sarò obbligato a rimaner qui con un operaio per le delicate operazioni di pulitura e divisione col Municipio degli oggetti rinvenuti.

Per concludere: credo che avremo fondi più che bastanti per far fronte a tutte le opere dello scavo, ma occorre che la E.V. trovi un supplemento di fondi per pagare le indennità di Direzione, dovendo io dividere la mia presenza fra qui e Siracusa.

Comunque sia è bene che dopo 35 anni di abbandono il Governo si sia affermato, per quanto tardo, anche nella dorica Gela, donde tanti tesori emigrarono all'estero. E della opportunità della mia presenza qui, per qualche settimana, Le discorrerò in altra mia, sottoponendole i mezzi che io reputo più acconci per dare un colpo definitivo ai disonesti impresari di illegali esplorazioni archeologiche, impresari che qui fioriscono su larga scala.

Il Direttore
Paolo Orsi

Figure 2b. Transcription of the content of Figure 2a



Figure 3. Orsi (back row, right) and his workers at the end of the 1901 campaign in the ancient cemeteries at Gela. Archivio Fotografico del Museo Civico di Rovereto, inv. no. 7094/13

Adamesteanu and Piero Orlandini (Lambrugo 2013: 35–38), two great figures of Geloan archaeology (Fig. 7). In total 636 burials were unearthed. Apart from some preliminary news, no further information has been delivered with regards to the more recent discoveries made in Gela during hydraulic works in summer 2009 and again in autumn 2014 (apart from notes in some local newspapers, such as *La Sicilia* 26th August 2009 and 17th–18th September 2014).

The funerary scenario of Archaic Gela

Even though the available archeological finds are of course partial, as they are limited to a few areas of the Geloan Archaic *necropoleis*, their reliability and significance have been ascertained through two kinds of evaluation (Lambrugo 2013: 55–65).

But before discussing them, let us provide some chronological data: no graves of the first generation of *apoikoi* (settlers) have been found in Gela. The same phenomenon has also been observed for other *necropoleis* in Sicily and Magna Graecia such as Pithekoussai, Taranto, Lentini and Camarina (Lambrugo 2013: 381–382). This is either because the graves are to be found elsewhere, for instance (in Gela) along the slope of the Molino a Vento hill (later the Gela *akropolis*) as suggested by Orlandini (1963: 56), or because they were destroyed by the construction of graves in later periods, or because they are unidentifiable due to a lack of grave goods. In fact, we could argue that the early *apoikoi* were poor in terms of disposable artefacts and hence their burials had little funerary visibility.

9. Hoping for continuity. Being born and dying young in Archaic Gela (Sicily)

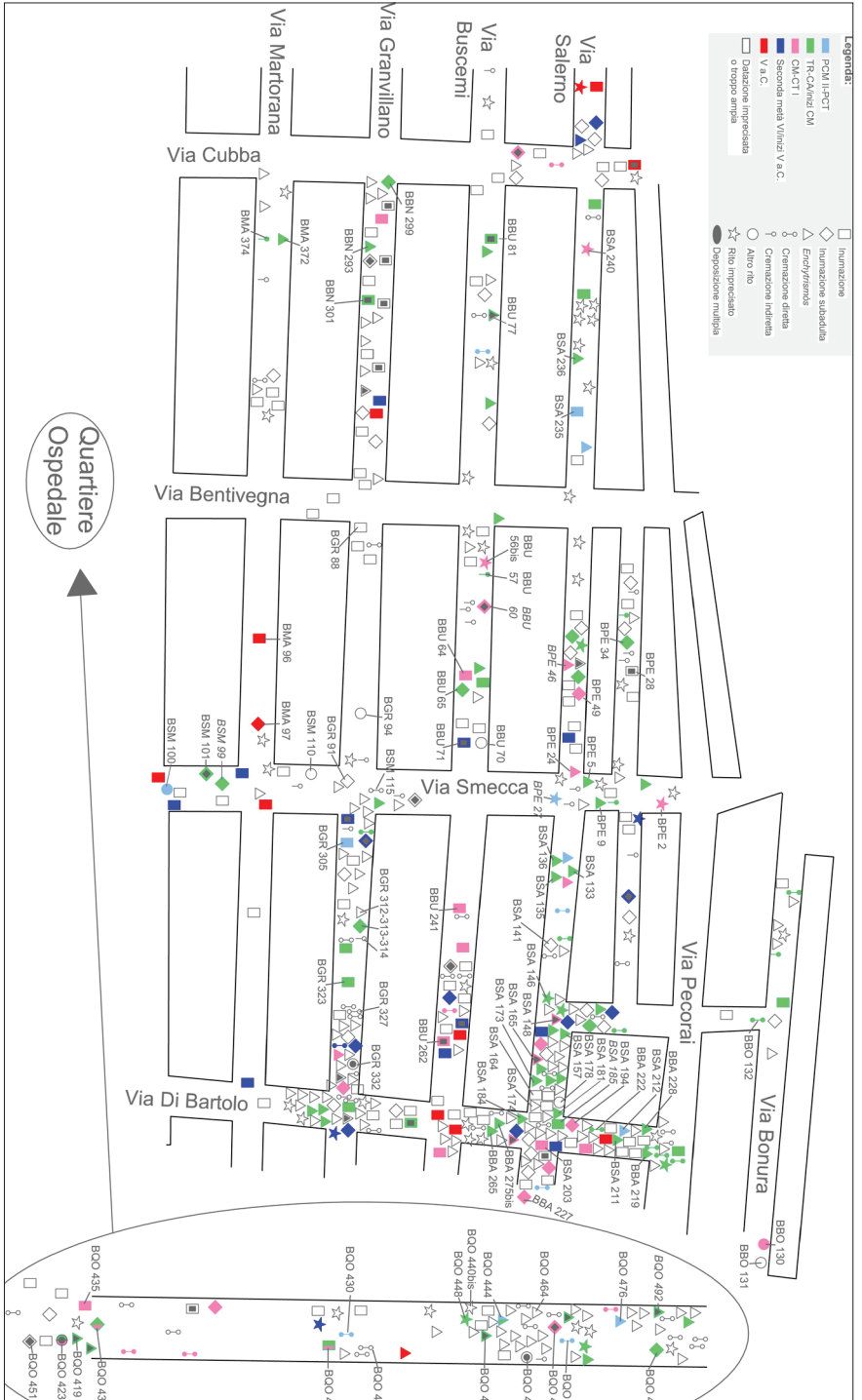


Figure 4. Plan of the Borgo area excavated by Paolo Orsi at the beginning of the 20th century. After Orsi 1906: tav. IV, with the addition of dates and grave types by the author

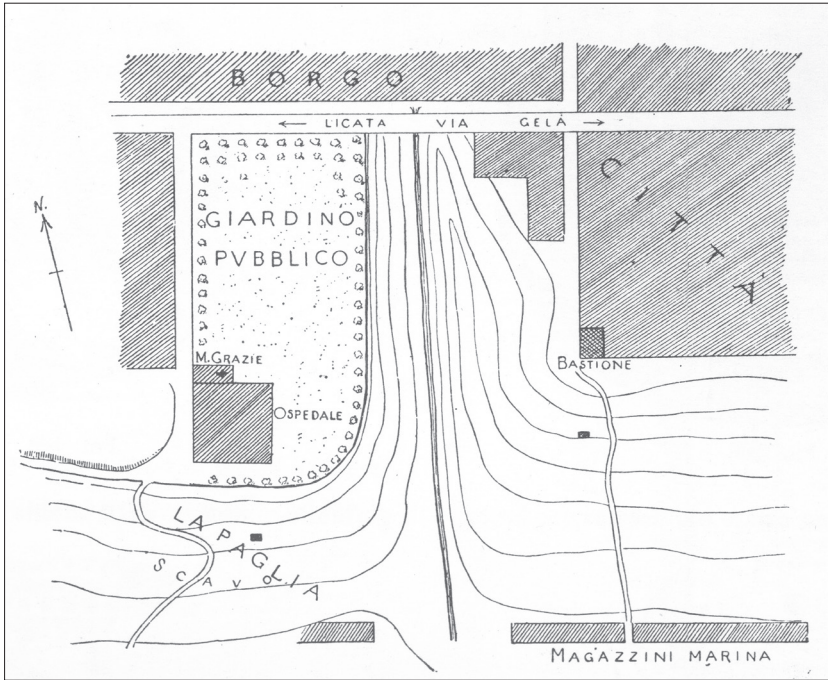


Figure 5. Plan of the Predio La Paglia area. Orsi 1906: fig. 164



Figure 6. The sunny terrace of the Villa Garibaldi Gardens. On the left, the Vallone Pasqualello which represented in antiquity the natural border between the polis and its necropoleis. Photo by the author



Figure 7. Dinu Adamesteanu (left) and Piero Orlandini (right) with a pupil during a break from excavations. Castoldi 1999: 24

The chronological distribution of the graves, mainly based on Corinthian pottery (which is the most frequently occurring ware), produces two further important data. The first is that the funerary space, west of the *polis*, was organised, shared among the colonial families and occupied from at least the second generation onwards. The second deals with a significant shift: there is clearly a gradual increase in the number of graves dating to between the Middle Protocorinthian II (MPC II, 670–650 BC) and Late Protocorinthian (LPC, 650–630 BC) periods (in total 26 burials), corresponding to the second and third generation of settlers; then an exponential increase during the following 40 years from the Transitional period (TR, 630–620 BC), throughout Early Corinthian (EC 620–590 BC), to the very beginning of Middle Corinthian (MC, 590–570 BC), in total 109 burials; and finally a rapid decrease between Middle Corinthian and Late Corinthian I (LC, 570–550 BC, in total 65 burials), starting from 585/580 BC and resulting in a distinct dearth of burials around the middle of the 6th century BC (Fig. 8).

Returning now to the reliability of the available archaeological finds, an essential preliminary evaluation is the demographic significance of the remains. The anthropometric data carefully reported by the excavators, who unfortunately did not preserve the bone remains as carefully (the same problem occurs also for other Sicilian *necropoleis*: see Elia & Meirano 2012: 429), certify that more than 43% of the graves belong to sub-adults (for additional details see Lambrugo 2013: 61–62; for other rates in Archaic Greek cemeteries in Sicily see Shepherd 2006: 312–313: 38% at Syracuse, 46–50% at Megara Hyblaea).

The second evaluation focuses on the burial variability, the analysis of which requires great attention and caution. In Archaic Gela the funerary context is characterised by a relative lack of variation in burial rites and grave goods, a well-known tendency observed in almost all cemeteries of Greek colonies in ancient Sicily, as highlighted also by some scholars (Pelagatti & Vallet 1980: 373–374; Shepherd 1995: 70; 2006: 314–315). This tendency resembles in Gela a singular *mesotes* (Torelli 2003: 100, 103), a rigorous curbing of the ostentation of wealth. A limited number of cremations, 105 in total, both primary and secondary, can be observed (Lambrugo

2013: 62, 385–388); given the high costs and symbolic connections with the heroic funerary custom, these cremations are likely to be related to wealthy, upper-class adult males, also judging from the prominent location (on the top of the hill) of these cremations in the Geloan Archaic cemeteries (everywhere in Greek Sicily cremations are less numerous than inhumations; see Pelagatti & Vallet 1980: 365–370, still valuable; also Albanese Procelli 2000a, 2000b; Elia 2006). Moreover, in addition to the cremations, the following burial rites are found: over 200 *enchytrismoï* (burials in storage vessels) in *amphorae*, *dolii*, *pithoi*, basins, clay tubes, *louterion* bases (Lambrugo 2013: 62, 389), and at least 214 inhumations in monolithic sarcophagi, stone or clay coffins, *cappuccine di tegole* (receptacles constructed of terracotta tiles), and *fossae* (trenches) dug into the rock or directly in the soil (Lambrugo 2013: 62–63, 388–389). A very few cases of *rannicchiamenti* (contracted burials) and *acefalie* (acephalous burials) i.e. with differential treatment of the skull) are evident (Lambrugo 2013: 390–391).

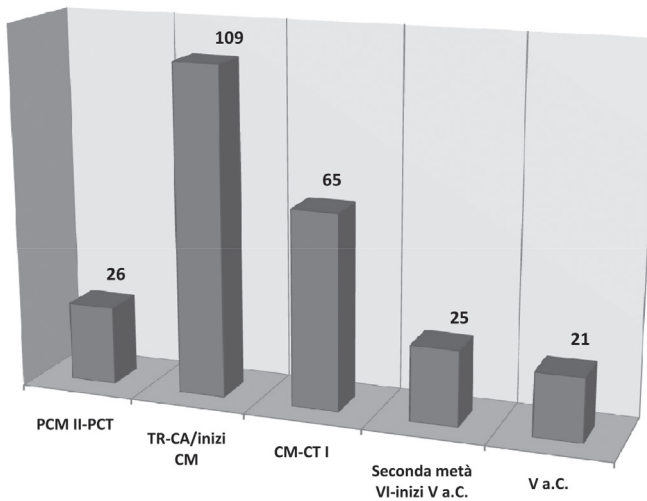


Figure 8. Chronological distribution of graves (chronology based on Corinthian pottery) in the Archaic cemeteries of Gela. Lambrugo 2013: fig. 157

Finally, the fact that 268 graves out of 636 (a little more than 42%) totally lack grave goods further characterises and limits the funerary variability of Gela in terms of horizontal (male or female tombs; adult or sub-adult tombs) and vertical (rich or poor) differentiations (for the lack of grave goods in colonial Greek tombs see Lambrugo 2013: 392 with additional references).

Basically, if present, the grave goods consist of two sets of objects: the predominant one includes perfume and oil vases of different kinds (mainly Corinthian but also East Greek, Laconian and Attic), no doubt used to perform specific corpse treatment related to the adoption of elegant and refined customs and to attempt to make the dead immortal. The other set includes different kinds of pots for pouring (mainly *olpai* and *oinochoai* of local fabric) and drinking (Corinthian Black and Linear *kotylai*, cups of local production and dozens of *kotyliskoi*), connected to a crucial funerary rite, namely libation and the ritual handling of the liquids, such as wine, honey, water and *melikraton* (honey and milk mixture) (Elia 2003), offered to the dead and chthonic deities (Fig. 9). Objects used for funeral aristocratic *deipna* (dining), such as



Figure 9. Gela, Villa Garibaldi Gardens Tomb 33. Cremation (?) in an amphora with grave goods. Bottom row (R to L), found inside the amphora: Corinthian alabastron, Rhodian globular aryballos, East-Greek bucchero ovoid aryballos; top row, found outside the amphora: olpe of local fabric, small cup of local fabric, Corinthian linear kotyle; 620–600 BC. Gela, Museo Archeologico Regionale. Photo by the author. Lambrugo 2013: 203–204

kraters, *deinoi* and *stamnoi*, as well as plates, *lekanides* and *kalathiskoi*, for the offerings and *viatica* for the journey to the underworld are quite rare (Lambrugo 2013: 343–360). A shortage of precious and exotic objects or metal ornaments can be generally underlined, especially if we compare Geloan data to that from other cemeteries, such as Megara Hyblaea and Syracuse (Lambrugo 2013: 360–364 with further details).

A third element to be highlighted is the substantial indifference of the Geloan people with regard to the funerary representation of feminine and masculine genders; this feature is once again shared with other Greek Archaic communities of Sicily (Lambrugo 2013: 365–366, 394–395 with references). Indicators of gender-related tools for spinning and weaving activities, traditionally connected to the feminine sphere, are very rare, with not more than 20 artefacts from a total of 636 graves (Fig. 10). On the other hand, the grave of the adult man in Gela is even less visible. It is impossible to observe anything that might be connected to the expression of values that are associated with athleticism or war, so well represented in other areas; also extremely modest is the presence of weapons and working tools (Lambrugo 2013: 365–366) (Fig. 11).

Another crucial point is underlined by the analysis of the so-called ethnic indicators both Greek (such as specific Cretan or Rhodian ceramics or the problematic Cretan acephalous burials), and indigenous Sikel funerary rites (like contracted burials) or the presence of indigenous artefacts (e.g. fibulae, pendants, charms, large containers for food). Even though there have been numerous recent suggestions that an indigenous element in ancient Greek settlements in Sicily (as in Magna Graecia) can be detected through funerary customs, in the light of some important recent revisions of concepts of ethnic indicators themselves it is clear that the funerary record cannot be used as a reliable identifier of such groups (Mercuri 2001; Vassallo 2003; Shepherd 2005, 2011, 2014; Albanese Procelli 2010; see also Cuozzo & Guidi 2013: 9–23, 72–87). The general impression given by Sicilian Greek cemeteries is rather of an overall subscription to



Figure 10. Gela, Borgo Quartiere Ospedale Tomb 435. Inhumation of an adult (woman?) in a monolithic sarcophagus. Grave goods. Inside the receptacle: tall Corinthian alabastron, discovered near the skull (the perfume vase still preserves the iron ring for hanging it); outside the sarcophagus, on its cover: Rhodian aryballos (left), East Greek bucchero alabastron (right), spindle whorl; 590–580 BC. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi”. Photo by the author. Lambrugo 2013: 148–151

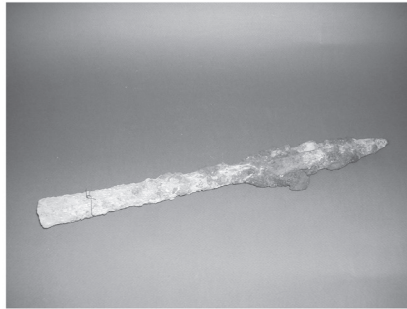
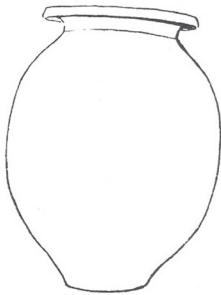


Figure 11. Gela, Borgo Via Granvillano Tomb 94. Ossilegium (bone container) in the form of a large dolium (storage vessel) of at least five adult men, whose bones were collected in the large container, deposited vertically; it is probably the burial of warriors, who died far from their own polis; inside the dolium only an iron spearhead was found. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi”. Photo by the author

coherent burial systems, which may be seen as part of an attempt to form a unified and independent new cultural identity, also different from that of the motherland. In our case, it is clear that the Geloan community in the Archaic period, although certainly dominated between the 7th and 6th centuries BC by biological and cultural hybridism and characterised by broad phenomena of mobility and circulation of people and goods in both directions (Greek and indigenous), does not seem to have been particularly interested in discriminating groups of different ethnicity, at least not through funerary rites (Lambrugo 2013: 396–398 with additional references).

Hoping for continuity: displaying children in Archaic Gela

In fact, the greatest effort in displaying a new cultural identity is expressed by the desire to appear as a society in construction or in development. This is achieved by means of an emphasis on family groups (some family plots are illustrated in more detail in Lambrugo 2013: 383 ff), through the principle of progressive spatial aggregation of the graves of adults, adolescents, children and newborns of the same household in the same place and over an extended period of time (Fig. 12), and through the adoption (very common from the third generation of colonists onwards) of multiple burials, which integrate adults and sub-adults or only sub-adults, sometimes of different ages, in the same grave. Some scholars have interpreted this practice as an ethnic sign (Albanese Procelli 2010: 506), deriving from the collective burial in rock-cut chamber tombs which was usual amongst the indigenous populations of Sicily, but it may also be viewed as an emphasis on the connections within a family and, consequently, as a desire to demonstrate the crystallisation of the new colonial community into social groups and to assert membership of specific *oikiai* or household groups (Shepherd 2005: 118–120; Lambrugo 2013: 389–390). In other words the new foundation chose to represent itself as a community in formation, emphasising the family role, in particular that of the aristocratic family, destined to take up central roles in the community, rather than highlighting the different ethnic or cultural components that constituted their society. For this reason, the reunion after death of parents and sons/daughters, buried close to each other or even in the same receptacle, occurs very often, underlying the *anchisteiai* (kinship).

Within this framework the Geloan community of the Archaic period, so reluctant between the middle of the 7th and the middle of the 6th century BC to organise

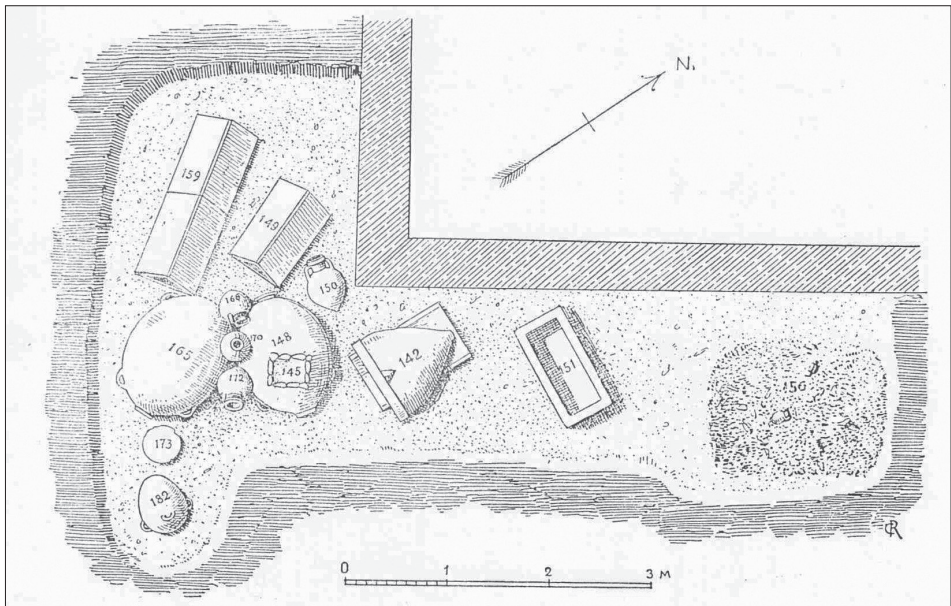


Figure 12. Gela, Borgo Via Salerno: a family plot with numerous *enchytrismoi* and sub-adult inhumations surrounded by adult burials and an *ustrinum* (pyre). The family plot remained in use for nearly a century from the end of the 7th century BC onwards. Orsi 1906: fig. 61

expensive funerals (a limited number of cremations, no bronze cinerary containers) and to display luxury goods (little enthusiasm for the deposition of metals and objects of intrinsic prestige) and to build monumental graves (only two large built 'hypogeic cella' tombs of the type more common for example in Megara Hyblaea: Lambrugo 2013: 389), shows a careful and constant solidarity in the formalisation of sub-adult death. In this respect, the Geloans not only chose to confer each newborn, child or adolescent with a funerary visibility through a formal burial (with *enchytrismoi* and different kinds of inhumations), but they also reserved special funeral rituals for a select group of young or very young people, united by similar high status qualifications. This implies an economical and cultural effort greater than that employed for the burial of adults, in particular males.

In this regard, it is noticeable that in the graves of some high-status sub-adults, and particularly in those of adolescents, certain special features occur with significant frequency; these in brief are (more details in Lambrugo 2013: 394–396):

1. The monolithic sarcophagus, an expensive receptacle, because of the lack of good workable stone in the area of Gela;

2. The deposition of exotic or precious artefacts, such as alabaster and faïence perfume vases, East Greek plastic vases, gold *stephanai* (diadems), earrings, small silver rings or other metallic ornaments, all very rare (if not entirely absent) in adult tombs;

3. A selection of tools/objects that either belonged to children or were dear to them (baby-feeders, statuettes and sea shells, the latter probably used as ornaments as well as toys); amongst these of particular interest are the lucky charms for the journey to the underworld (different types of amulets) and *coroplastica* (terracotta objects), especially female enthroned figurines, whose function as toys or votive objects or lucky charms is still under discussion (more details in Lambrugo 2013: 361–362 with references);

4. The choice of expensive imported vessels (above all Corinthian *alabastra* and *aryballoi*), often in very large numbers (**Figs 13–17**).

The Geloan choice to promote so carefully the funerary visibility of the *jeunesse dorée* is not an isolated ritual behaviour, but is also shared by other Sicilian colonies between the 7th and at least the first half of the 6th century BC, as has been demonstrated by Shepherd (2006, 2007). Even Orsi (Cavallari & Orsi 1890: 776), at the end of 19th century, could observe similar customs in the western *necropolis* of Megara Hyblaea:

La distribuzione quantitativa di essi [oggetti di corredo] pare regolata con questo criterio, che il maggior numero fosse posto attorno ai cadaveri di bambini benestanti, poi attorno a quelli di donne, la minor quantità intorno agli adulti; anzi i cadaveri di fanciulli di agiata condizione scompaiono di solito sotto il cumulo di oggetti, soprattutto dei vasettini (piccoli skyphoi ed oinochoai); in più di un sepolcro il numero di questi (fra interi e rotti) toccò la ottantina.

Something similar may be highlighted also in the *necropoleis* of Syracuse (Fusco), Selinus (Buffa/Gaggera), Agrigento and Himera (Lambrugo 2013: 411 with references; Vassallo 2014).

This marked visibility conferred after death on an elite group of children and adolescents, even if also due to emotional factors, can be interpreted as a compensatory reaction to the significant social investment in the offspring by the household, which

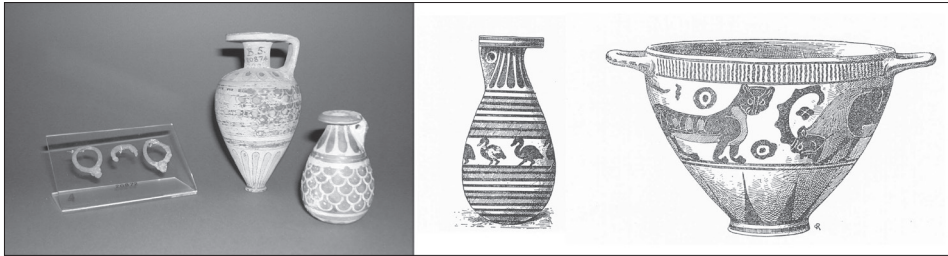


Figure 13. Gela, Borgo Via Pecorai Tomb 5. Enchytrismos in amphora. Grave goods. Inside the amphora two silver earrings and a silver ring; outside the amphora Protocorinthian aryballos, two Corinthian alabastra, Corinthian kotyle; 630–620 BC. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi”. Left: author’s photograph of extant objects; right: Orsi’s drawings of lost pieces. Orsi 1906: figs 3–4. Lambrugo 2013: 81–84

aspired to assert elite roles within a society in formation (for sub-adult death in Classical Antiquity, but especially in Sicily and Magna Graecia see the contributions in Guimier-Sorbets & Morizot 2010; Hermary 2012; Nenna 2012; also in Dasen 2004; Mustakallio *et al.* 2005; Cohen & Rutter 2007; Nizzo 2011; Rawson 2011; Terranova 2014).

It was through numerous and vigorous offspring, an indispensable resource for the future, that the aristocratic *ghene* (clans) of Archaic Gela could hope to survive and establish themselves in the territory. It was through sumptuous funerals for premature deaths that the families could reassert their ties and exorcise the danger of dynasty extinction. The closer the young man or the future beautiful bride was to the adult age, the more severe was the pain and the representative effort after death, because they were proportional to the investment of energy, resources and emotion tightly linked to the upbringing of children.

Contextualising the archaeological data in the history of Gela

In conclusion, it is possible to provide an overview of what has emerged from the interpretation of the archaeological data in the light of historical events.

For the period between the middle of the 7th and the first decades of the 6th century BC, the Geloan *necropoleis* reveal a community characterised by a progressive population growth and a social and family structuring, as shown by the peak in the number of graves between 630 and 585/580 BC. It was precisely in the same period that the oldest and principal sanctuaries of the colony, those at Bitalemi and Predio Sola (Fig. 1), were founded and intensively frequented. It is interesting to underline that the ritual functions of these sanctuaries were connected to the biological path and to the social development of the aristocratic *nymphai* (maidens), as well as brides and mothers, as recently discussed by Ismaelli (2011: 227–235; 2013).

This was also the period in which Gela undertook significant territorial expansion in southern Sicily (Lo Presti 2000; La Torre 2011: 76 with references; see also Bergemann 2011: 72). The well-established Geloan penetration of the hinterland, no doubt facilitated by the two big rivers, the Gela and the Salso-Imera, was obviously tied to the rural activities of the colony, whose demand for agriculture is displayed by the violent looting of the Sican town of Omphake by one of the founders of Gela, Antiphemos (Pausanias 8.46.2). This is the moment in which, progressively, large landholdings were forming, probably organised around farms or rural settlements,



Figure 14. Gela, Borgo Via Pecorai Tomb 49. Inhumation of a (female?) adolescent in a re-used monolithic sarcophagus. Grave goods (all outside the receptacle): (above) large globular Corinthian aryballos, three East Greek bucchero alabastro, East Greek plastic (dove) vases, two Corinthian convex pyxides, small Corinthian ovoid pyxis; statuette of enthroned female figure; (below) miniature exaleiptron of Corinthian type, small Corinthian bottle, four Corinthian kotyliskoi (one lost), Corinthian phiale mesomphalos, three small Corinthian pyxides; also (inside the receptacle, near the skull) bronze hairpin (now lost); 580–560 BC. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi”. Photo by the author. Lambrugo 2013: 89–95

but belonging to only a few *ghene*. This was followed by a top-down restructuring of the new-born Geloan community, which within a few generations moved from an initial condition of equality to an unequal concentration of the best farmland in the hands of a few people (see now also Shepherd 2015 for the emergence of elites in Archaic Sicily).

Population growth, the progressive structure of the cemetery layout in large family plots, some of which were from the very beginning strategically located in specific funeral areas in full public view (for example, the sector on top of the hill and



Figure 15. Gela, Borgo Via Granvillano Tomb 313. Inhumation directly in the soil of a new-born. Grave goods surrounding the small skeleton. Above and below: two Corinthian alabastra, two Corinthian aryballoi, Corinthian conical oinochoe, amphoriskos (now lost); in the middle: two Corinthian pyxides, Corinthian kotyle, cup of Corinthian type, kotyliskoi (now lost), 'ciambella fittile' (now lost); ca 600 BC. All objects except globular aryballos at the bottom (which is at the "Paolo Orsi" Museum at Siracusa), stored at Agrigento, Museo Archeologico Regionale. Photos by the author. Lambrugo 2013: 134–137

the terrace of the Villa Garibaldi Gardens), and the general prosperity observable in the grave goods, can be interpreted in the light of the above expansion. This expansion certainly created new dynamics, but probably aroused at the same time increasing competition among aristocratic families, who were ambitious and eager to secure a growing range of powers. The famous secession of Maktorion (Herodotos 7.153.2–4), a tale deriving from an ancient tragic Geloan event, and probably to be dated to the decades between 620 and 580 BC (Raccuia 2003: 459–463 with additional references), can be read as evidence of social discontent rumbling throughout Geloan territory during these years. The episode, which has received much scholarly attention, has recently been the object of a new reading, which interprets it as a rampant clash between *ghene*, some of whom were evidently dissatisfied or frustrated in their expectations; hence an internal secession within the oligarchic factions resulted,

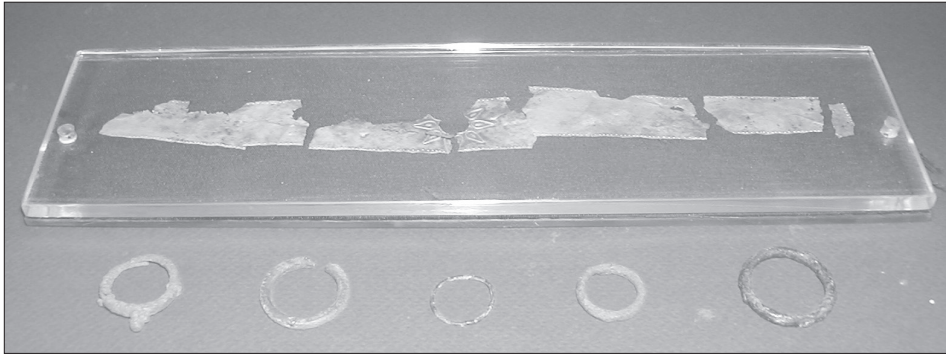


Figure 16. Gela, Villa Garibaldi Gardens, Tomb 43. Inhumation of a (female?) adolescent in monolithic sarcophagus. Grave goods. Inside the receptacle: gold stephanos (diadem), two silver earrings, silver rings, some white and grey beads (now lost), aes rude (piece of unworked bronze; now lost). Archaic Period. Gela, Museo Archeologico Regionale. Photo by the author



Figure 17. Gela, Borgo Quartiere Ospedale Tomb 485. Enchytrismos of a new-born in an amphora, closed with a stone. Grave goods. Inside the amphora: two small one-handled cups, baby-feeder. Last decades of the 7th–first half of the 6th century BC. Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi”. Photo by the author

which may have been complicated by ethnic problems between the two different cultural groups of settlers, the one from Rhodes and the one from Crete (Anello 2003: 397–398; Petruzzella 2003; Raccuia 2003; Sammartano 2011: 228, n. 39).

Probably the gilded youth discussed above were the sons and daughters of these important families; they were rich children and adolescents who died before they could fully assume their place in society or perpetuate an (aspired) aristocratic bloodline. Their premature deaths were used by adults to signal certain social conditions and to exorcise the fear of loss or disruption of bloodlines and inheritance.

Let us now provide some brief remarks about the anomalous chronological shift of burials, namely the reduction noted above of tombs from the period around 585/580 BC until the middle of the 6th century, when the number is further reduced in the Archaic *necropoleis*. The decrease in grave numbers in the second half of the 6th

century BC may be compensated by the numerous tombs of Capo Soprano, the area west of the quarter of Borgo, well-known as the classical *necropolis* of Gela, which contains however some burials of the 6th century BC (see further the very interesting study of Pace 2019). On the other hand, I wonder whether it is possible (and sensible) to link the decline in visible burials, and the simultaneous decline in activity at the Bitalemi (Orlandini 1966: 30–31) and Predio Sola (Ismaelli 2011: 209–210) sanctuaries, to the social conflict brewing in Gela during those years, and specifically to the foundation of Akragas in ca 580 BC. It is a plausible hypothesis that Akragas was founded not only by members of Geloan aristocracy not fully satisfied with their economic and political privileges, but probably also by families of medium to high status who remained less successful during the growth of the colony. In the same vein, Neeft (1994: 154) has explained the decrease of tombs at Pithekoussai during the transition between the Late Geometric and Early Protocorinthian periods with a similar argument, namely the foundation of Cumae around the mid-8th century BC.

The vacuum lasts until the middle of the century, perhaps due to the aggressive territorial expansionism by the tyrant of Akragas, Phalaris, in the years between 571/570–555/554 BC (La Torre 2010: 82–83; *contra* Adornato 2011: 69–77), with obvious impact on Gela, unable to react. We have to wait for the reinforcement group of settlers under the rule of Kleoboulos of Rhodes in the middle of the 6th century BC (Raccuia 2000: 118 with references) to see Gela invigorated; it is interesting that in the same period a restructuring of the civic body and of the urban plan started, accompanied by a reassessment of old sacral buildings and, perhaps, a reorganisation of the funerary spaces with a shift towards the new area at Capo Soprano.

But that is another story.

Children and religious folklore in modern day Sicily

The aim of this brief appendix on religious folklore in modern day Sicily is to give some further insights into a topic—the crucial role of children as authentic ‘capital’ of community—which has already emerged in the discussion of the funerary scenario in Archaic Gela. This is the outcome of a deep curiosity of mine regarding some religious customs to which modern Sicilians prove themselves to be still strongly linked. However, it is not without hesitation that I approach this topic, being well aware that to investigate the world of folklore without adequate experience could be a dangerous path, full of numerous pitfalls linked to facile interpretations.

Nevertheless, a recent work convinced me to overcome my hesitation. It is the research of a young scholar of the religions of the classical world, Giulia Pedrucci, who focuses on the very rich iconographic material record (especially terracotta statuettes) from ancient Sicily in the Archaic and Classical periods representing female figures, *kourophoroi* (women holding children) and *kourotrophoi* (nursing women), that have no parallel in Greece for the same period. Pedrucci (2013: 5–117) suggests that this could be explained by the existence of cults for female nursing goddesses in Sicily dating back to the time before the arrival of the Greeks. The good fortune to be gained from female goddesses with maternal attributes, like Demeter (even if somewhat minimised recently, see Di Stefano 2008) and the numerous Sicilian nymphs (emphasised by Mertens-Horn 1991; Copani 2009; Cordano 2009; Lambrugo 2009b; De Cesare 2012; Portale 2012a, 2012b), is well testified by the rich evidence of figurines of *kourophoroi* and *kourotrophoi*, of which Gela offers many examples (Pedrucci 2013: 144–156).

There is not the space here to go into the details of the complex debate surrounding the existence of a female divinity, a *Grande Madre*, connected with the rural life and with the use of water in Sicily from earliest times, who might have persisted in some form in the religion of Greek Sicily. On the other hand, it is interesting to keep in mind that important scholars, like Emanuele Ciaceri, Biagio Pace and Giuseppe Martorana, went beyond the indigenous and Greek past of the island by suggesting that this distinctive character could have influenced the particular form of Christianity in Sicily, dominated by the cult of the Virgin Mary and other female saints (see Cocchiara 1964–1965 *contra* Brelich 1964–1965; also Martorana 1985: 200).

Moreover, one of the eminent scholars of folklore in Sicily, Giuseppe Pitrè (see further Lazzaro *et al.* in Pitrè 2013), stated: ‘In Sicilia il passato non è morto ma si accompagna e si manifesta presso la culla e la bara, nelle feste e nei giuochi, negli spettacoli e in chiesa, nella strada, nei campi, sui monti: dappertutto, insomma, vive e parla’ and elsewhere ‘in Sicilia abbiamo un paganesimo incrostato di cristianesimo’ (Pitrè 1913: XI).

The reader may well ask what the goal of these considerations might be. It has been observed that the *necropoleis* of Greek Sicily between the 7th and the 6th century BC show particular attention to the formalisation of the infant burials (the phenomenon appears to have stopped in the Classical period). This interest has not only cultural roots, but also economic ones. The reason for this could be the idea that children represent the real resource of the community and the family, especially when these communities consisted during the foundation processes mainly of ‘youths’ and the majority of the families ambitiously aspired to social growth and self-affirmation (on the value of the children as ‘capital’ see Bellia 2014: 54; Costanzo & Dubois 2014: 166–168; Terranova 2014 *passim*).

It also has to be underlined how, at least in Gela (it would be interesting to verify this datum also elsewhere), the most ancient sanctuaries placed two different phases of the social as well as biological life course of women in particular under the protection of the female goddess: from adolescent to young bride and from bride to mother. To these considerations, we have now to add the discussion of Pedrucci on the rich documentation of figurines of females or goddesses in the action of holding in arms or suckling children and observations on the female *christianitas* of the whole island.

For this reason I ask myself, without necessarily implying the existence of direct links, if it could be possible to put under the same light the attention given to small children and toddlers in some of the most important religious celebrations in Sicily that were documented during the 18th century and are still practised.

In describing patronal festivity in Sicily, Giuseppe Pitrè (1841–1916) observed the recurrence of a ritual behaviour on the most important day of the celebration, the day of the procession during which the effigies of the saints are transported around the city on a chariot (the so-called *barella* or *bara* or *vara*). During this event, neonates of a few months are lifted up tied to a little chair or otherwise elevated towards the images of the saints that protect the infants.

This behaviour is documented by Pitrè, for example, in May at the festivity in honour of San Sebastiano in Melilli (Siracusa), in occasion of which ‘bambini sordomuti e sbonzolati... vengono per momenti più o meno brevi adagiati sulla barella in attesa del miracolo desiderato’ (Pitrè 2001a: 54); and later Pitrè himself observes: ‘è risaputo che codesta pratica per ottenere la guarigione di bambini difettosi è molto

ovvia in Sicilia, ma quello che riesce strano è la frequenza del mal di ernia, da cui nei piccoli comuni sono o si credono travagliati i bambini e per cui vengono deposti ai piedi del Santo, e in Melilli nudi come li fece la mamma dopo esserne stati offerti a San Sebastiano i vestitini' (Pitrè 2001a: 54). Elsewise it has been noted (Di Leo 1997: 148) that the children, even if naked, are wrapped in a red band and their heads are covered with a scarf, while 'le madri sfregano sulla statua, a scopo propiziatorio e come promessa al Santo, i vestitini dei figli che alla fine vengono regalati ai bambini poveri del paese' (Di Leo 1997: 148).

Pitrè (2001a: 65–66) mentions a 'vara d' i picciriddi' during the celebration for San Corrado of Noto and Avola; in this case there is also a device for the transportation of the urn with the relics of the saint, upon which as many children as possible, normally 'erniosi' children are laid down. These are healed by San Corrado with the help of a surgeon, the latter, as Pitrè writes, 'prende un bambino e ne osserva i gonfi: Mirabile dictu! I gonfi sono scomparsi; il bambino è guarito: un urlo di Viva San Currau! echeggia nella piazza; le madri singhiozzano, le campane assordano, ed il popolo raggianti di gioia glorifica il suo Patrono' (Pitrè 2001a: 65).

The patron saint of Ragusa, San Giovanni (whose feast day was moved from June 24th to August 29th because of the harvest), together with San Giorgio, also heals children with the same health problems, 'affetti da ernia' (Pitrè 2001a: 77–85). The same is true for San Biagio (celebrated on the second Sunday of July) in Comiso (Pitrè 2001a: 92) and San Rocco in Butera (16th of August) (Pitrè 2001b: 30; see also Di Leo 1997: 134). Regarding the celebration for San Calogero (July), an important saint of Agrigento, Pitrè (2001b: 47) writes:

Un prete, un farmacista, un sagrestano sono in permanenza sulla bara. Un campanello dà il segno, e la bara, fermata all'improvviso, rimbomba cupamente. Ecco avanzarsi una donna con un bambino o con un fanciullo sbonzolato. Il farmacista gli slarga le gambe coram populo, lo esamina, lo preme, lo pigia senza nulla commuoversi agli strilli che esso manda; indi lo adagia sulla macchina attendendo l'opera del Santo. Di lì a poco il miracolo è fatto: il sagrestano ne dà il segno e gli evviva, i pianti di tenerezza e lo strazio degli strumenti musicali sbalordiscono.

The festivities described are still celebrated with great participation of the faithful and the custom 'to donate' or 'to consecrate' children to the patron saint is repeated annually in many of them. Particularly striking are the celebrations for San Sebastiano and San Paolo, 'opponent' patrons of Palazzolo Acreide (Syracuse). During their celebrations, respectively at the end of June for San Paolo and between the 8th and 10th of August for San Sebastiano, the display of children is—among other evocative rituals of archaic taste—repeated annually with a harshness that sometimes astonishes. In this regard it is interesting that some local studies have highlighted the use of these pious habits at least from the 18th century (Grimaldi 1995: 31–43) (Figs 18–19).

It is interesting that Pitrè does not discuss the 'female' version of these festivities; in fact he mentions nothing about the celebrations in Gela in honour of the *Madonna delle Grazie* (July 2nd), also venerated as the *Madonna degli Ammalati*, whose wooden statue (dating to 1813) is kept at the Capuchin Church. Between 1867 and 1910—after the confiscation of religious goods—the rooms connected to the Capuchin convent at first hosted a military hospital for a cholera epidemic that broke out in 1867. After that a city hospital was established that gave shelter to foundlings and



Figure 18. Religious festivals in honour of (above) San Paolo, patron of Palazzolo Acreide, (below) San Calogero, saint of Agrigento. Photos courtesy of Massimo Raffa, 2006

offered accommodation for the nurses (Damaggio Navarra 1895; Mulé 1990: vol. 1, 71; vol. 2, 225–248). The city of Gela is still very devoted to *Madonna delle Grazie*, even if the patron saint is *Madonna dell'Alemanna* (celebrated on September 8th). In the celebrations in honour of the *Madonna delle Grazie* I have personally witnessed the repetition of the usual ritual that aims to request clemency for new-born babies or for those that were born a few months ago, a sort of preventive protection or a concrete request for the healing of health problems. Children are always 'handed' naked to the statue of the Madonna, while their clothing is donated to the needy or subjected to a sort of manumission payment, the proceeds of which are then donated to pious causes (Fig. 20).

To conclude, I think essentially that the persistent recurrence of rituals in Sicily reserved for babies and young children less than one year old and carried out on the most important days of the year, at the procession of the patron saints and other festivities, is of great interest. These celebrations all fall in summer (mostly between June and August) or were specially moved to this position, thereby trying, whenever

9. Hoping for continuity. Being born and dying young in Archaic Gela (Sicily)



Figure 19. Religious festival in honour of San Sebastiano, patron of Palazzolo Acreide (left) and little chapel dedicated to San Sebastiano near Avola. On the wall children's clothes offered to the saint. Photos by the author, 2014



Figure 20. Gela, July 2nd 2005, religious festival in honour of Madonna delle Grazie. Photos courtesy of Ennio Turco

possible, to take advantage of the breaks from the agricultural work (harvesting). However, it piques one's curiosity that these festivities are—considering what has been documented—mostly linked with male city patrons rather than with female saints or 'Madonne' (except for the Gela case).

In agrarian and pre-industrial Sicily, these celebrations were most certainly the occasion to meet, to have fairs and markets for food and livestock, but were also just a reason to 'feel better', being protected by the saints for a few hours, and to feel reassured and freed from the perennial fragility of life and everyday miseries (moral, psychological and physical).

I was given the opportunity to study some old documents providing evidence that at the beginning of the 20th century the population of Gela was still subject to devastating child mortality of often well above 50 percent. This was especially a problem during the summer months, when the heat and the lack of rain aggravated

the already miserable hygienic conditions in the city. At this time, cholera, typhus and dysentery often spread fast and were particularly fatal for children (Archives of the Monumental Cemetery of Gela). I do not have the insights to explain what the conditions referred to above were (*postpartum* umbilical hernias?), from which some children were (and still are) miraculously healed, nor do I think that Pitrè was fully able to understand them. But this is in any case not the important point. Of greater significance is that the persistent use of specific rituals dedicated to infants and children, perhaps still regarded as authentic 'capital' of the family and the community, could become an effective stimulus to better understand the cultural components of the religiosity of Sicily, not only in the modern period but also in terms of the cultural profile of the island in its remote past.

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