

The power of ancient stones: Protecting children in Greek Sicily

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the occurrence of Castelluccian (Early Bronze Age) pebble pendants in sub-adult tombs found in Greek, but also indigenous sites in Sicily from 8th century BC onwards. These pebble-shaped pendants are made of various materials, especially alabaster and translucent stones. They are usually unearthed with shells, perhaps to form a single ornament, in close bond with selected people.

The occurrence in archaic infant burials, both in Greek and indigenous contexts, without being documented meanwhile, brings up a challenging issue: we can argue that these items, discovered accidentally in very ancient tombs, were considered to be old and therefore deemed particularly valuable also due to the intrinsic properties of the stones, being shiny and translucent. As a consequence (by drawing inspiration from native women's ancient knowledge?) they were probably conveyed a new meaning and turned into apotropaic amulets in order to protect children from diseases during life, and from perils in afterlife.

KEYWORDS

Greek Sicily, Gela, Castelluccian *facies*, pebble pendant, necropolis, funerary scenario, premature death

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This paper¹ focuses on the occurrence of Castelluccian pebble pendants, that is, those belonging to the Early Bronze Age, in some archaic sub-adult tombs excavated in Greek Sicily. This occurrence, which has been attested in only a small number of infant burials until now (but on-going research could enrich the available data for sure), raises quite a challenging issue about their meaning as exceptional “objects with biography”.²

Let me begin by presenting some noteworthy examples of their presence in the archaic necropolis of Gela. Between 2012 and 2013 – following my publication of the archaic necropolis of Gela,³ which had been excavated in the early 1900s by Paolo Orsi⁴ – among the numerous ideas and reflections derived from the investigation of the burial ground, my attention turned to two unusual-looking, rarely documented stone pendants found in two tombs belonging to sub-adult individuals.

Prior to describing these said tombs, it must be specified that the archaic necropolis of Gela consists of 636 tombs, mostly dating from the second quarter of 7th century to the late 6th century BC. Of these, about 43% belong to newborns, children, and adolescents, that is, 276 tombs including *enchytrismoi* and burials in monolithic sarcophagi, pits and clay *larnakes*. This figure is substantially consistent with the high infant mortality rate, estimated at around 50% in all the ancient world. In order to contextualize further the ensuing debate, it is equally important to mention that 268 out of 636 unearthened tombs did not display any grave goods. In addition, it is worth highlighting that Gela’s funerary scenario seems to suggest a preference for basic burial ceremonies and the assemblage of modest grave goods. Whilst this is known to be a common

¹I worked at improving this paper during my stay at the Trendall Research Centre, La Trobe University, Melbourne/Australia (January–February 2019), thanks to the La Trobe Trendall Fellowship 2018. I am extremely grateful to Gillian Shepherd, Ian McPhee and Elizabeth Pemberton, who made my ‘Australian’ period absolutely unforgettable, as well as fruitful. Great is also my debt to the Directors and the staff of both the Regional Archaeological Museum of Gela and Syracuse for their constant support. Please note that bibliography is updated to 2020.

²For the notion of “objects with biography” and their centrality in shaping identity and social order, see LANGDON, S.: *Beyond the Grave: Biographies from Early Greece*. *AJA* 105.4 (2001) 579–606; WHITLEY, J.: *Objects with Attitude: Biographical Facts and Fallacies in the Study of Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Warrior Graves*. *CArchJ* 12 (2002) 217–232; GALLOU, CH. – GEORGIADIS, M. (eds): *The Past in the Past: the Significance of Memory and Tradition in the Transmission of Culture*. Oxford 2009; REITERMAN, A.: *Keimelia in Context: Toward an Understanding of the Value of Antiquities in the Past*. In KIER, J. – PIERER, C. (eds): *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World*. Boston–Leiden 2014, 146–170; DASEN, V. – SPADINI, F. (eds): *Bijoux antiques: de l’ornement au talisman. Identités et pratiques sociales. Actes du colloque international (Université de Fribourg, 23-25 novembre 2016)*. *Gemmae* 2 (2020) & 3 (2021).

³LAMBRUGO, C.: *Profumi di argilla. Tombe con unguentari corinzi nella necropoli arcaica di Gela*. Roma 2013; following studies are LAMBRUGO, C.: *Reconstructing Early Colonial Identity: Funerary Space in Archaic Gela (Sicily)*. In ÁLVAREZ, J. M. – NOGALES, T. – RODÀ, I. (eds): *XVIII Congreso Internacional de Arqueología Clásica, XVIIIth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Centro y periferia en el mundo clásico, Centre and Periphery in the ancient World, Proceedings of International Conference (Mérida, May 2013)*. Mérida 2014, vol. II, 1269–1271; LAMBRUGO, C.: *Dying Young in Archaic Gela (Sicily): From the Analysis of the Cemeteries to the Reconstruction of Early Colonial Identity*. In SÁNCHEZ ROMERO, M. – ALARCÓN GARCÍA, E. – ARANDA JIMÉNEZ, G. (eds): *Children, Spaces and Identity, The 2012 Sixth International Conference of Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (Granada 2012)* [Childhood in the Past Monograph Series vol. 4]. Oxford–Philadelphia 2015, 282–293; LAMBRUGO, C.: *Gela: la necropoli arcaica. Paesaggio funerario, rituali, società e “piccoli principi”*. *AION* 26 (2019), 141–172; LAMBRUGO, C.: *Hoping for Continuity. Being born and dying young in Archaic Gela (Sicily): from the analysis of the cemeteries to the reconstruction of cultural identity*. In SHEPHERD, G. (ed.): *Interaction and Identity. Sicily and South Italy from the Iron Age to Late Antiquity* [Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology], forthcoming.

⁴ORSI, P.: *Gela. Scavi del 1900–1905*. *MonAL* XVII (1906) 31–268.





Fig. 1. Gela, archaic Borgo necropolis, Tomb 476: an *enchytrismos* belonging to a newborn, buried with imported unguent vases and a rich bronze parure; Late Protocorinthian Period. From Lambrugo: Profumi (n. 3) fig. 97

habit in the Sicilian Greek communities of the archaic period, in Gela it appears to take the tone of a peculiar *mesotes*, i.e., a display of wealth already alien to the Greek mentality, which appears to be even more contained in Gela, almost a celebration of modesty. This is attested by the small number of cremations (slightly over one hundred) and by the scarcity of metal ornaments and valuable *exotica* among the grave goods of the 7th and 6th centuries BC.

Within this framework, especially between the middle of 7th and the middle of 6th centuries BC, considerable attention was devoted to conferring a 'formal burial' to a selected group of sub-adult individuals – a sort of *jeunesse dorée*, consisting of very young aristocratic Geloans, upper-class young girls and infants, all of whom were probably descendants of *élite* families. Restricted almost exclusively to them were lavish funerals and precious artefacts, among which metal ornaments and accessories in bronze, silver and gold to be worn on clothes, as well as valuable alabaster unguent jars or imported vases, abundantly laid out in the grave goods assemblage (Fig. 1). The funerary visibility reserved to young and very young members of leading families, however, is not an isolated ritual behavior. As outstanding studies conducted by Gillian Shepherd in 2006 and 2007 clearly illustrate,⁵ this behavior was concurrently shared by other Greek colonies in Sicily, including Syracuse, Megara Hyblaea, Agrigento and Selinus, each one of them with its own cultural practices. This was a funerary rite clearly associated with a substantial social investment in their descendants by the most prominent *ghene*, each of them competing for leading roles within a society that was in the process of coming-into-being. When faced with the trauma of a tragic premature death, their immediate reaction was to start a process of

⁵SHEPHERD, G.: Dead but not buried? Child disposal in the Greek West. In HERRING, E. – LEMOS, I. – LO SCHIAVO, F. ET AL. (eds): *Across Frontiers. Etruscans, Greeks, Phoenicians and Cypriots. Studies in honour of David Ridgway and Francesca Romana Serra Ridgway*. London 2006, 311–325; SHEPHERD, G.: Poor little rich kids? Status and selection in Archaic Western Greece. In SHEPHERD, G. – CRAWFORD, S. (eds): *Children, Childhood and Society*. Oxford 2007, 93–106.



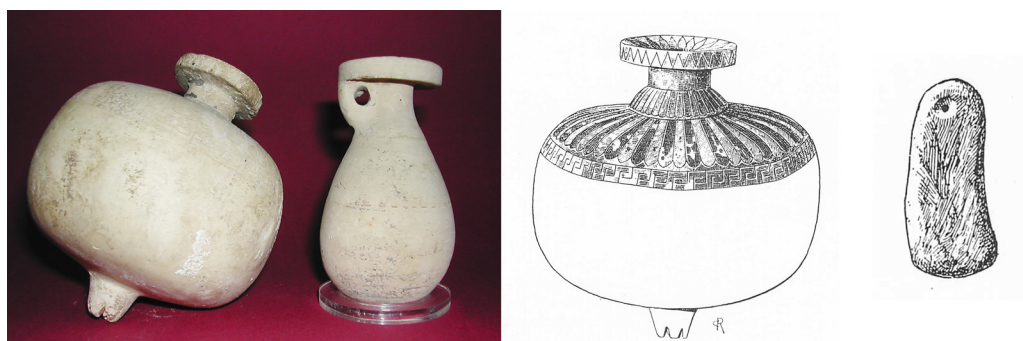


Fig. 2. Gela, archaic Borgo necropolis, Tomb 77, Via Buscemi. From Lambrugo: *Profumi* (n. 3) figg 27, 29

reconstructing a family identity and memory by arranging sumptuous funerals in commemoration of their loved ones, thus exorcising the fear of their dynasty becoming extinct.⁶

After this brief yet essential introduction, let me proceed to the two tombs preserving the stone pendants that originally captured my attention. Both burials are located in the so-called Borgo necropolis, West of ancient Greek settlement of Gela, and precisely Tomb 77, which was unearthed in the western part of Via Buscemi,⁷ and Tomb 99 in the southern part of Via Smecca.⁸

The first tomb (Fig. 2) is an *enchytrismòs* in a large *dolium* (a storage vessel) containing two small skeletons, the one a few months old, the other a few years old (quoting from Paolo Orsi). Among the grave goods found inside the *dolium* are a Corinthian *alabastron*, type NC 376, an East-Greek pomegranate-shaped vase, type Ducat 1966, Grenade I, and the stone pendant discussed here. This is unfortunately no longer available but was sketched by Rosario Carta and described by Orsi as a pendant amulet made from polished hard stone.⁹ The ceramic artefacts suggest that the *enchytrismòs* was used twice: it was originally laid in the Early Corinthian Period (i.e. 620–590 BC, chronology of the *alabastron*) and reopened in the decades 590–570 BC (chronology of the pomegranate-shaped vase). We clearly lack the evidence to define which of the two infant burials the stone pendant is to be referred to.

The second tomb – Tomb 99 in Via Smecca – is a rock cut *fossa* belonging to an infant skeleton (I am quoting Orsi again), buried with a Corinthian scale *alabastron*, type NC 379, a local *kalathiskos* and (I am still quoting Orsi since these artefacts are also no longer available)

⁶For these aspects mainly refer to LAMBRUGO: *Dying Young* (n. 3); LAMBRUGO: *Hoping for Continuity* (n. 3); see also NIZZO, V.: “Antenati bambini”. *Visibilità e invisibilità dell’infanzia nei sepolcreti dell’Italia tirrenica dalla prima età del Ferro all’Orientalizzante: dalla discriminazione funeraria alla costruzione dell’identità*. In NIZZO, V. (a cura di): *Dalla nascita alla morte: antropologia e archeologia a confronto. Atti dell’Incontro Internazionale di studi in onore di Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Roma 2010). Roma 2011, 51–93; SHEPHERD, G.: *Display and the Emergence of Elites in Archaic Sicily*. In VAN WEES, H. – FISHER, N. (eds): *Aristocracy in Antiquity. Redefining Greek and Roman elites*. Wales 2015, 349–379.

⁷LAMBRUGO: *Profumi* (n. 3) 97–98.

⁸LAMBRUGO: *Profumi* (n. 3) 167–169.

⁹ORSI (n. 4) 59, fig. 33.



two unwrought stone slabs of peculiar form, i.e. one with both sides presenting a concave-cylindrical shape and the second one with a truncated conic shape.¹⁰ This tomb, based on the *alabastron*, dates to Transitional Period (i.e. 630–620 BC).

Orsi's intuition¹¹ and a footnote by Rosa Maria Albanese Procelli¹² set me on the right course. The two pendants are indeed identical to the pebble-shaped pendants uncovered in the burial grounds of the Castelluccian *facies*. This coincides with the culture that developed in Sicily in the Early Bronze Age and dates to between the last two centuries of the 3rd millennium BC and the transition to the Middle Bronze Age, around 1600 BC, based on the most recent calibrated dates.¹³

Until a few years ago there was only one study on Castelluccian stone beads and pendants (I am referring to the study by Ornella Adamo back in 1989¹⁴). Today, with the contribution of a lithic analysis expert, Ilaria Matarese's recent research (a 2014 PhD thesis) has produced an extensive *dossier*¹⁵ providing us with a systematic typology of the stone pendants (disc-shaped, flattened globular, biconical, oval, rectangular, sub-rectangular and axe-shaped) and recurrent lithic materials of which they are made (Fig. 3).

According to the aforementioned research, the pendants appear to be made mostly of common soft stones¹⁶ – sedimentary siliceous, sandstone and limestone rocks, not translucent or polished – the most prominent being the so-called *pseudolimonite* or *limonite*, which term had already been used by Orsi to identify a ferruginous rock with yellow and red tones.¹⁷ This first category of stone pendants, which is deemed to be more extensive and generally of a poorer quality, is complemented by pendants made with precious soft stones which are mainly alabaster and steatite, both translucent or polished. But there are also sophisticated, masterfully hand-made pendants featuring translucent or polished hard stones, namely basalt, jasper and quartz. It is worth underlining that the provenance of most stone types seems to be from within Sicily, and mainly constituted from local stone materials. This is consistent with the general impression of a closed Castelluccian economy based on an agro-pastoral, eneolithic type, one in which chipped stone artefacts still played a dominant role (flint blades are commonly found at this time), while the presence of metal is still scant.¹⁸

¹⁰ORSI (n. 4) 70.

¹¹ORSI, P.: Siracusa – Gli scavi nella necropoli del Fusco a Siracusa nel giugno, novembre e dicembre del 1893. *NSA* (1895) 126, n. 2; ORSI (n. 4) 59.

¹²BERNABÒ BREA, L. – ALBANESE PROCELLI, R. M.: Calascibetta (Enna) – La necropoli di Cozzo S. Giuseppe in Contrada Realmese. *NSA* (1982) 621.

¹³See MATARESE, I. – CRISPINO, A. – JUNG, R. – MARTINELLI, M. C. – PALLANTE, P. – PACCIARELLI, M.: Vaghi e pendenti litici dell'età del bronzo dalla Sicilia e dalle Eolie. *Archeologia Austriaca* 99 (2015) 136.

¹⁴ADAMO, O.: Pendagli e amuleti della *facies* di Castelluccio in Sicilia. *ASSO LXXXV* (1989) 7–68.

¹⁵MATARESE ET AL. (n. 13); MATARESE, I. – PALLANTE, P.: Vaghi e pendenti in alabastro da contesti dell'età del bronzo italiana: tipi e luoghi di approvvigionamento. In NEGRONI CATACCHIO, N. (a cura di): *Preistoria e Protostoria in Etruria. Ornarsi per comunicare con gli uomini e con gli Dei. Gli oggetti di ornamento come status symbol, amuleti, richiesta di protezione. Ricerche e scavi. Atti del Dodicesimo Incontro di Studi*. Milano 2016, 251–254.

¹⁶Mineral hardness is determined on Mohs scale.

¹⁷Concerning *limonite* and *pseudolimonite*, see ADAMO (n. 14) 15.

¹⁸MATARESE ET AL. (n. 13) 145.





Fig. 3. Some Castelluccian pebble pendants as amulets from: (left) Monte Sallia necropolis (Ragusa) Tomb 9, except for n. 1 which is a decorated bone sword pommel, imported from Mycenaean Greece; (right) Castelluccio village's dumps. Syracuse, Archaeological Museum. (Author's photograph. Polo Regionale di Siracusa per i siti e i musei archeologici – Museo Archeologico Regionale "Paolo Orsi" di Siracusa; su concessione dell'Assessorato ai Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana – Palermo)

It can be assumed that the occasional presence of a hole on both ends of the plaques and pebbles meant the lithic materials were not only conceived of as pendants but were also worn as bracelets. For reasons of time, I am not going to take into consideration in this paper the category of pebbles or plaques made of the same stone but without any holes or traces of stone perforation nor even any other system of hanging. It is indeed highly likely that these artefacts, recurrent in the Castelluccian age, share the same purpose as the previous ones, but were carried and displayed in a different manner, presumably inside sacks or net bags, rather than being worn around the neck or on the arm.¹⁹ Furthermore, it is worth stressing how the stone pendants unearthed in Castelluccian tombs are frequently associated with shells,²⁰ perhaps forming a single necklace, as in Tomb 12 of the necropolis of Melilli.²¹

Despite the obvious lack of explicit literary sources on the customs of Sicily's prehistoric peoples, we have strong reasons to believe in the apotropaic nature of these stone pendants. They may have been held in high esteem for their magical powers because of some uncanny and curious properties, such as the capacity of making strange sound if shaken, of attracting straw, hay and bits of paper, or even of emitting a special odor when rubbed.²²

¹⁹ADAMO (n. 14) 7.

²⁰ADAMO (n. 14) 10.

²¹ORSI, P.: La necropoli sicula di Melilli (Siracusa). *Bollettino di paleontologia italiana* XVII.5–7 (1891) 64–69.

²²An interesting example of sensory analysis carried out on some carved stone balls is in MACGREGOR, G.: Making Sense of the Past in the Present: A Sensory Analysis of Carved Stone Balls. *World Archaeology* 31.2 (1999) 258–271.



According to many scholars, the therapeutic usage of stones can be traced back to a long-lasting tradition ranging from Antiquity to the Renaissance, which attributes healing properties to individual stones organized in an analogical system based on the principles of sympathetic magic.²³ We need only mention the frequent connection between stones – typically their colour – and specific parts of the human body and mood. For example, the bubble-like appearance of dark red stones, which resemble coagulated blood, consisting mainly of iron, such as aetites, limonite, hematite and magnetite, were traditionally considered to be powerful talismans for safe childbirth (aetites) and for love-magic (magnetite and hematite).²⁴

As to the brilliance and translucence of the stones, in the presence of jasper, quartz and alabaster, we could with due caution refer to what Giuman wrote about the power of specific unusual-looking or shiny amulets to keep the evil eye of the *baskanos* away, thus blocking or interrupting the visual contact between the curser and the victim.²⁵ It is also worth highlighting that in many ancient cultures shiny and brilliant objects were believed to possess special generative power and fertilizing energy, as translucence and brilliance were considered to be qualities imbued with a sacredness.²⁶ In addition, we have to mention that axe-shaped pendants (as well as other cutting small objects) are usually attributed powerful apotropaic qualities in rites of passage, both from adolescence to adulthood and from life to death.²⁷

That said, it is still not easy to ascertain, considering the collective nature of the *grotticella* inhumations in the Castelluccian *facies*, whether or not all these pendant amulets were most commonly recovered in tombs of sub-adult individuals.

To return to Greek Sicily, it should be pointed out that, along with stone axe-shaped and pebble pendants, with or without a hanging hole, eye-shaped, miniature bronze double-axes also continued to be in use from the Late Bronze Age throughout the Early Iron Age and into the archaic period.²⁸ Matarese's research offered a significant contribution to a better understanding of how Castellucian pebble pendants did not completely disappear in the early phase of the Middle Bronze Age. Indeed, they were found in tombs of the subsequent Thapsos phase (dated to between 15th and 13th centuries BC based on Mycenaean imports), albeit in smaller quantities

²³DASEN, V.: *Le sourire d'Omphale. Maternité et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*. Rennes 2015, chapter I; see also FARAONE, CH. A.: *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times*. Philadelphia, PA 2018, 89–100.

²⁴DASEN (n. 23) 34–41, 45–46; FARAONE (n. 23) 92–93, 94–97; see also DASEN, V. – NAGY, A. M.: *Gems*. In FRANKFURTER, D. (ed.): *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*. Leiden–Boston 2019, 410–411.

²⁵GIUMAN, M.: *Archeologia dello sguardo. Fascinazione e baskania nel mondo classico*. Roma 2013, 116 ss.

²⁶SAUNDERS, N. J.: Pearls, Transformations of Matter and Being, c. AD 1492. *World Archaeology* 31.2 (1999) 243–257.

²⁷ORSI: La necropoli (n. 21) 67 and n. 1; see also DUBOIS, C.: Des objets pour les b  b  s? Le d  p  t de mobilier dans les s  pultures d'enfants en bas   ge du monde grec archa  que et classique. In HERMARY, A. – DUBOIS, C. (  ds): *L'enfant et la mort dans l'Antiquit  *. Vol. III: *Le mat  riel associ   aux tombes d'enfants. Actes de la table ronde internationale (Aix-en-Provence 2011)*. Aix-en-Provence 2012, 339–340; REITERMAN (n. 2) 153.

²⁸ALBANESE PROCELLI, R. M.: *Sicani, Siculi, Elimi. Forme di identit  , modi di contatto e processi di trasformazione*. Milano 2003, 143–144; ALBANESE PROCELLI, R. M.: Pratiche religiose in Sicilia tra protostoria e arcaismo. In ANELLO, P. – MARTORANA, G. – SAMMARTANO, R. (a cura di): *Ethne e religioni nella Sicilia antica. Atti del convegno (Palermo 2000)*. Roma 2006, 53. To give some examples of tombs with eye-shaped miniature bronze double-axes, see CAVALLARI, F. S. – ORSI, P.: Megara Hyblaea. Storia, topografia, necropoli e anathemata. *MonAL* I, part 1 (1890), Tomb CLVI, 860; DUDAY, H. – GRAS, M. (  ds): *M  gara Hyblaea 6. La n  cropole m  ridionale de la cit   archa  que, 1. Les donn  es fun  raires*. Rome 2018, Settore Cimiteria, Tomb Z 81, 110–111.



due to the increased concentration of ornaments (which now appear to be more elaborate and made of glass and amber) in the hands of a restricted *élite*.²⁹ I myself noticed some examples among the tombs belonging to the Thapsos *facies* on display at the Archaeological Museum in Syracuse (autumn 2018).³⁰

Equally rare are finds of pebble pendants in the following Pantalica *facies*. From chamber Tomb 133 of the NW necropolis of Pantalica – published by Orsi in 1899 – is (quoting from the excavator) “un ciottolletto piatto ellittico di pietra schisto-ferruginosa (l. mm. 58) con due tentativi di pertugio all’apice, un pendaglio-talismano” – says Orsi – “nuovo, anzi unico per questa età, ma tanto frequente nella precedente, che non occorrono citazioni”.³¹ Another pendant, also uncovered in Pantalica, would be later on mentioned by Orsi in *Monumenti Antichi* 1912.³² A final one comes from Tomb 241 of the South necropolis of Pantalica, on display at said Museum in Syracuse.³³ On the other hand, some axe-shaped and pebble pendants, with or without a hanging hole, such as the one unearthed in the necropolis of Cozzo S. Giuseppe in Contrada Realmese, in Calascibetta (Enna), date back to the turn of the 2nd and 1st millennium BC.³⁴

Notwithstanding the abundance of stone pendants in Castelluccian contexts and their later persistence in much more uncommon examples of tombs dating to the Middle and Late Bronze Age until the Early Iron Age, however, what is worth mentioning here is that such stone amulets reappear within some archaic tombs in Greek Sicily. This brings us back to the two infant tombs in Gela that originally captured my attention.

Convincing comparisons to the Fusco necropolis in Syracuse can be offered. Among these, Tomb 175bis (Fig. 4)³⁵ is an *ossilegium* with an adolescent’s skeleton (quoting from Orsi) pushed aside to make room for a later deposition inside the same rock-cut *fossa* for another deceased female infant, dating to the second quarter or to the middle of the 7th century BC, based on the rich ceramic grave goods. These included, among other things, Protocorinthian drinking vessels and a valuable grey bucchero *aryballos*. But particularly worth mentioning is a stone pendant (h cm 1,8 ca.) which resembles a Castellucian type (see Fig. 3). It is laid out with other precious ornaments, namely an iron *fibula* with ivory and amber beads, about forty faïence beads, and a heart-shaped pendant, perhaps made of bone or ivory. Still interesting from our point of view, but unfortunately no longer available (and therefore we are not able to verify whether it deals with a Castelluccian amulet or not), is a globular rock crystal bead from Fusco, Tomb 338, belonging to an adolescent.³⁶

²⁹MATARESE ET AL. (n. 13) 138, 146.

³⁰Thapsos, Tomb 29, stone axe-shaped pendant, inv. n. 14721; Milocca necropolis, two stone amulets, inv. nn. 18714–15.

³¹ORSI, P.: Pantalica. *MonAL* IX (1899) 66, fig. 20.

³²ORSI, P.: La necropoli sicula di Pantalica. *MonAL* XXI (1912) tav. VII, 43.

³³Axe-shaped amulet, inv. n. 23665.

³⁴BERNABÒ BREA – ALBANESE PROCELLI (n. 12) 620–621 (T. B10, No. 6; T. E48, No. 2; T. G5, No. 3).

³⁵ORSI: Siracusa (n. 11) 126; HENCKEN, H.: Syracuse, Etruria and the North: Some Comparisons. *AJA* 62 (1958) 260, plate 58.

³⁶ORSI: Siracusa (n. 11) 151–152.





Fig. 4. Syracuse, Fusco necropolis, Tomb 175bis. Syracuse, Archaeological Museum. (Museum's courtesy. Polo Regionale di Siracusa per i siti e i musei archeologici – Museo Archeologico Regionale “Paolo Orsi” di Siracusa; su concessione dell'Assessorato ai Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana – Palermo)

Another striking comparison comes from the North necropolis of Megara Hyblaea, where a jadeite axe-shaped pendant, probably belonging to an inhumation in a lithic *fossa*, was uncovered in 1951 (Fig. 5, n° 4).³⁷

The publication, between 2017 and 2018, of the archaic South necropolis of Megara Hyblaea provides us with other significant data.³⁸ There appear to be at least three burials containing stone pendant amulets which might belong to Castellucian age, at least judging from shape and lithic materials of which they are made.

Here is a brief overview of the three tombs: the first is Tomb Z 20 (Settore Cementeria), dated between the end of the 8th century and the second quarter of the 7th century BC (Fig. 6, n° 6). It is an *enchytrismòs* of a 6-7 year-old child, inhumated in a Corinthian *pithos* of local production, whose handles are impressed with multiple circles, reminiscent of the Sikeli taste of central-eastern Sicily. Apart from three ceramic vases (one Protocorinthian *skyphos*, one globular *lekkythos* of unknown type, one flat-bottomed *oinochoe*), a matched set of ornaments belonging to a bronze indigenous parure³⁹ suggest “un lien fort de la famille de cet enfant avec le

³⁷GENTILI, G. V.: Megara Hyblaea – Scoperta di nuove tombe arcaiche della necropoli meridionale. NSA (1954) 90, fig. 10. I was not able to see the amulet in autumn 2018, because unfortunately not available.

³⁸DUDAY-GRAS (n. 28); BÉRARD, R.-M.: *Mégara Hyblaea 6. La nécropole méridionale de la cité archaïque. 2. Archéologie et histoire sociale des rituels funéraires*. Rome 2017.

³⁹DUDAY-GRAS (n. 28) 29–31.

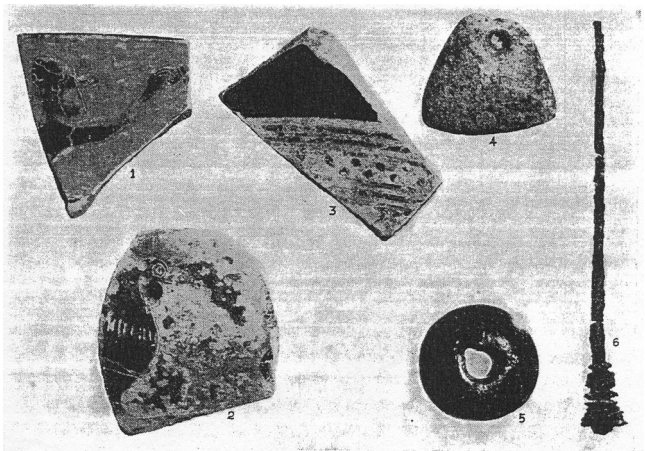


Fig. 5. Megara Hyblaea, North necropolis, jadeite axe-shaped pendant from Tomb D (n. 4). From Gentili (n. 37) 88, fig. 10

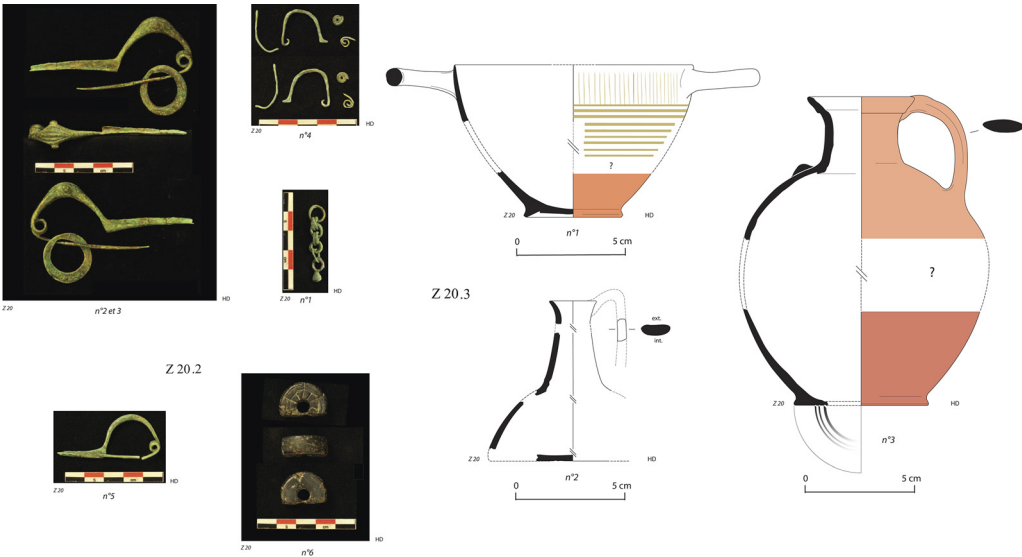


Fig. 6. Megara Hyblaea, South necropolis, Settore Cimiteria, Tomb Z 20. From Duday-Gras (n. 28)

monde indigène”.⁴⁰ Within this framework, one engraved disc-shaped jet pendant is outstanding. Although engraved decoration is not so common among the Castelluccian stone pendants, jet is reported to be a powerful medium for different reasons: it has electrostatic

⁴⁰BÉRARD (n. 38) 109.





Fig. 8. Monte San Mauro di Caltagirone, Tomb 164; part of the extremely rich grave assemblage; stone pendant in the middle. From Frasca (n. 44) 8, fig. 19

scaraboid. Based on the ceramic grave goods, the editors suggest the presence of two subsequent burials, the former dating to the first half of the 7th century BC, the latter to the third quarter of the 7th century BC.

Finally, excavated from an indigenous context dating to the 6th century BC is Tomb 164 (Fig. 8), an extremely rich burial from Monte San Mauro di Caltagirone.⁴⁴ This tomb belonged to a young woman who was certainly a member of an aristocratic group. After dying around 570 BC, possibly prior to marriage, she was buried in a prestigious rock cut chamber, which features an extraordinary display of wealth, especially evident in the magnificent set of imported unguent jars. The tomb also preserved an oval-shaped stone pendant, without a hanging hole, but provided with incisions on the outer surface, which resembles similar Castelluccian amulets⁴⁵ (see Fig. 3).

Based on the evidence gathered so far, these tombs seem to share the following elements: a high chronology ascribed to the earliest colonial generations (this is the case for the above-mentioned tombs from Gela, Syracuse and Megara Hyblaea); and their belonging to sub-adult individuals of an élite ruling class, as attested by the presence of rich ceramic and metal grave goods, often supplemented with exotic items (i.e., the amber scaraboid from Tomb 21 Settore Pontile).

⁴⁴FRASCA, M.: Monte San Mauro di Caltagirone. Quattro tombe di un nucleo aristocratico nel VI secolo a.C. *BA* 117 (2001) 6–16, and more recently FRASCA, M.: *Monte San Mauro di Caltagirone e la calcidese Euboia. Archeologia in Sicilia con note inedite di scavo*. Roma 2020, 66–67.

⁴⁵MATARESE ET AL. (n. 13) 129, fig. 12A.



If, on the one hand, the common occurrence in said tombs of parures and clothing accessories of indigenous tradition does not necessarily imply that the buried infants had been born to indigenous mothers, on the other hand it does contribute to depicting a society in which the early colonial generations were characterized by episodes of Greek-indigenous cohabitation and forms of cultural and biological blending.⁴⁶ Moreover, if we consider that the way of clothing, feeding, protecting and taking care of the offspring is one of the most traditional forms of cultural identity, we should not underestimate the role played both by the bronze ornaments typical of rich indigenous parures in preserving the local clothing habits of mothers and children,⁴⁷ and by the very ancient Castelluccian pebble pendants in adopting kourotrophic practices of indigenous tradition.

Moreover, according to recent studies carried out by Massimo Cultraro and Anita Crispino,⁴⁸ beginning from the final stages of the Bronze Age, some prominent women of indigenous Sikel origin started to take increasingly leading roles in their community, and not only within their own families. They were key in forging strategic marriage alliances between different ethnic groups and in transferring dowries. They were also known for their magico-medical knowledge and for being employed in highly specialized jobs. In addition, the kourotrophic ‘specialization’ of indigenous Sicily has been convincingly proven by Giulia Pedrucci in her essay *L’isola delle ‘madri’*.⁴⁹ The author focuses her attention on the existence in Sicily of a significant number of local rites addressed to kourotrophic gods and on the abundance, in Sicily alone, of *kourophoroi* and *kourotrophoi* clay figurines.

Within this framework, it is of the utmost importance what Stéphane Verger points out by analyzing the metal deposits from layer 5 in the *Thesmophorion* of Bitalemi at Gela: between the last third of the 7th century and the third quarter of the 6th century BC, Geloan women would have been collecting various bronze and iron ornaments which came, both intact and broken into pieces, to be recycled, from the Balkans and the remote Languedoc. Being considered powerful *exotica* and originally belonging to prominent women in those very far-apart-countries, the ornaments probably conveyed a new meaning and were turned into apotropaic amulets for the protection of pregnant women and children, or into charms for devotional and magical

⁴⁶For the rather controversial topic of mixed marriage, see LAMBRUGO: Profumi (n. 3) 396–398; BÉRARD (n. 38) 57–78, and related bibliography.

⁴⁷As claimed several times in ALBANESE PROCELLI: Sicani, Siculi, Elimi (n. 28) 143–145; ALBANESE PROCELLI, R. M.: Presenze indigene in contesti coloniali: sul problema degli indicatori archeologici. In TRÉZINY, H. (éd.): *Grecs et Indigènes de la Catalogne à la mer Noire. Actes des rencontres du programme européen Ramses (2006-2008)*. Paris 2010, 503–505; see also BÉRARD, R.-M.: Le métal et la parure: identité ethnique et identité de genre dans les nécropoles de Grande Grèce et de Sicile. *DHA Suppl.* 10 (2014) 145–169.

⁴⁸CRISPINO, A. – CULTRARO, M.: Il dolio e il fuso. Per una ricostruzione del ruolo e della sfera di azione della donna nelle Sicilia orientale alle soglie della colonizzazione greca. In BERG, R. (ed.): *The Material Side of Marriage. Women and Domestic Economies in Antiquity*. Rome 2016, 69–80; CRISPINO, A. – CULTRARO, M.: Ambivalenze materne: rappresentazioni e costruzioni dell’identità femminile nella Sicilia protostorica. In PEDRUCCI, G. – PACHE GUIGNARD, F. – SCAPINI, M. (a cura di): *Maternità e Politeismi – Motherhood(s) and Polytheisms*. Bologna 2017, 517–534.

⁴⁹PEDRUCCI, G.: *L’isola delle ‘madri’*. Roma 2013.



practices to ward off premature death.⁵⁰ The same process could be applied to the Castelluccian pebble pendants (some of them are also attested in the *Thesmophorion* of Bitalemi⁵¹) which came as well from very far-apart-locations, not from a geographical, but from a chronological point of view.

But there is a last issue to be tackled: how could women in Gela, Syracuse or Megara Hyblaea get hold of these ancient stone pendants? Pebble-shaped pendants and stone hatchets might as well have been the result of accidental discoveries as a consequence of archaic tombs overlapping prehistoric burials. Such is the case with Gela, where, back in the spring of 1900, while digging the archaic Borgo necropolis, Orsi uncovered some Castelluccian tombs with multiple inhumations containing numerous stone pendants.⁵² But it might also have happened that the powerful talismans had passed down over different generations that were, however, unlikely to be related in direct line of descent all the way back to the Early Bronze Age.

In this case, according to the definition given by Whitley,⁵³ these pendants would be considered not so much *keimelia*, but rather objects “with their own biography”, credited with prophylactic properties and imbued with powerful symbolism, having been perceived as very old and therefore deemed particularly valuable, also due to the intrinsic properties of the stones, being shiny and translucent. Belief in the magical properties of things from deep antiquity is largely widespread in ancient societies, as well as is the notion that objects having a temporal depth are fitting accompaniments for children, who also embody the past, present and future simultaneously.⁵⁴

In conclusion: the hypothesis of a possible transmission of the significance and use of Castelluccian stone pendant amulets and of their magico-medical powers both to Sikel mothers and women born and having grown up in the multicultural society of early Greek colonization, characterized by strongly hybrid cultural practices, is far from unlikely. The Castelluccian pebble pendants, buried with infants, come to the “end” of their long-lasting biography: while the object

⁵⁰VERGER, S.: Dévotions féminines et bronze de l'extrême nord dans le thesmophorion de Géla. In QUANTIN, F. (éd.): *Archéologie des religions antiques. Contributions à l'étude des sanctuaires et de la piété en Méditerranée (Grèce, Italie, Sicile, Espagne)*. Pau 2011, 15–76; VERGER, S. – PERNET, L. (éds): *Une Odyssée gauloise. Parures des femmes à l'origine des premiers échanges entre Grèce et la Gaule*. Arles 2013. For women's special ability in making complex amuletic ornaments, also integrating ancient *keimelia*, see VERGER, S.: Manipulation des objets et recomposition du passé dans les sociétés de l'âge du fer. In GOLOSETTI, R. (éd.): *Mémoire(s) de l'âge du fer – Affacer ou réécrire le passé. Actes des 1ères rencontres internationales de l'École Européenne de Protohistoire de Bibracte*, 10-12/10/2012. Paris 2019, 274–282. It is also worth mentioning the extraordinary necklace with bronze pendants of different provenance and cosmological meaning from Tomb 660 at Megara Hyblaea; Verger believes that the necklace bears testimony to the special magico-medical powers of the deceased woman, buried in said tomb: VERGER, S.: Sotto la protezione delle Eliadi. La collana della tomba 660 di Megara Iblea. *Medicina nei secoli* 23/1 (2011) 151–172.

⁵¹*Odyssée gauloise* (n. 50) 254.

⁵²ORSI, P.: I Siculi della regione gelese. *Bollettino di Paleontologia Italiana* XXVII (1901) nn. 7–9, 154–157, fig. 2. For other archaeological evidence of Castelluccian *facies* in Gela, see CONGIU, M.: *Gela. Topografia e sviluppo urbano*. Caltanissetta–Roma 2012, 67–72.

⁵³WHITLEY (n. 2).

⁵⁴REITERMAN (n. 2) 166.



also “dies”, its being valued pays homage to the child and protects it from perils in its afterlife. In addition, the connection with the past and the control of the cultural imagination linked to previous eras might have played a significant role as means both to construct the family memory on the occasion of lavish funerals and to get and maintain power by *élites* groups.⁵⁵

⁵⁵BOSSOLINO, I.: *Keimelia e valore della memoria a Kamiros in epoca geometrica*. In CIPRIANI, M. – PONTRANDOLFO, A. – SCAFURO, M. (a cura di): *Dialoghi sull'archeologia della Magna Grecia e del Mediterraneo. Atti del II Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Paestum 2017)*. Paestum 2017, 154, 156 with bibliography.

