

Metal Age Craftsmanship in Sicily

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This work embodies over 30 years of research, and this publication is incredibly moving for me because it was created in collaboration with Sebastiano Tusa, Aldina Cutroni Tusa, Maurizio Tosi, and Vincenzo Tusa, who have always been dear to my heart. Great Masters not only in their profession but also in their lives, for whom respect was a priority because they were all linked by deep friendships. The area's history, spanning at least 12,000 years and linked to the extensive and continuous humanization of the land, required special attention, but now it seems that every piece has been placed in the right place within the panorama of Sicilian antiquity. The Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods (10,000-8,000 BC) held the greatest surprises, revealing an unexpected humanization of this hinterland in several locations, even remote ones. It was the period of hunting and gathering, and prehistoric man likely found ideal conditions for better survival in this area. Groups of hunter-gatherers pushed towards this hinterland which reached its peak with the transition to the Neolithic, and therefore with the advent of agriculture and livestock farming. Another established fact is that the two major historical entities of the territory, Corleone and Montagna Vecchia, should not be separated, because one is consequential to the other, but always within a single Chora, of which Montagna Vecchia constituted the natural stronghold inhabited during external incursions by other peoples colonizing Sicily. The latest discoveries have confirmed this fact, which was achieved by traversing inaccessible areas and crossing an often impenetrable nature that has also put our physical safety to the test. However, the result achieved is amply rewarding, as the vast amount of data collected now allows us to have a "scientific historical" and, above all, a clearer view of the evolution of Montagna Vecchia/Corleone. To achieve this goal, we long ago abandoned the study of sources, especially literary ones, which are highly unreliable and riddled with errors. For example, Arab-Sicilian sources provide us with unrealistic distances in Arabic miles between the cities in this area, while those (Scuderi, Tusa, & Vintaloro, 1997; Vintaloro, 2020)¹ from the 17th to 20th centuries merely represented a "competition" to see who had the most important ancient city and to whom a name was attributed, a name rarely found today. This was merely a desire for parochialism that has unfortunately diverted methodical and scientific study of the area. Archaeological research in this area, conducted using rigorous scientific methods, only began in 1991. Unfortunately, Corleone enjoys a reputation that will not be easy to shake: land of the Mafia. Indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Superintendencies expanded into the interior of Sicily with their research, but no one ever wanted to delve deeper into the Corleone area, where a terrible Mafia war was raging at the time. A simple glance at an archaeological map of Sicily prior to 1991 reveals a lack of knowledge about this area. Thanks also to Ferdinando Maurici, a renowned medievalist, for his scientific collaboration in reconstructing the region's history during a particular period, present-day Corleone arose. We hope this work will stimulate further research, providing the necessary depth to support our conclusions and placing this area in its proper rank among Sicilian archaeological sites.

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¹ The scientific study according to modern technologies was started in 1990 by Angelo Vintaloro, Alberto Scuderi, Sebastiano Tusa, who then produced the following publications: Alberto Scuderi, Sebastiano Tusa, & Angelo Vintaloro, 1997; Angelo Vintaloro, 2020.

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Introduction

For the Metal Age, the historical sources of Paolo Orsi and Luigi Bernabò Brea are the most important. These furnaces, dating from the 1930s to the 1950s, were reworked by Sebastiano Tusa, with whom I worked for 28 years (Sebastiano Tusa died in a plane crash in Ethiopia in 2019). For the Upper Paleolithic and Early Neolithic, in addition to the frequent archaeological excavations, a specific study was conducted with experts in the field, such as Professor Fabrizio Nicoletti. Much data was also collected at the First Conference on Sicilian Prehistory, where I was the main organizer together with Tusa, and which saw the participation of all archaeologists working on Sicilian prehistory.

The first artisanal artefacts, used primarily by women, date back to the late Epigravettian in Sicily. The earliest evidence in Sicily dates back 18,000 years to the Giovanna Cave near Syracuse, and already demonstrated the refined craftsmanship that was gaining traction on our island (Fabbri & Lo Vetro, 2022). Many shell necklaces have been found in excavations, but it was with the Neolithic, with the discovery of navigation and therefore with the arrival of new peoples that ceramic production began to be seen, first incised or impressed by the Stentinello Culture (6000 BC) and then painted with the Trichrome Culture, which featured, on the body of the vase, a flame-shaped design in yellow, red and brown (Talamo, 1997; Tusa, 1992). Since prehistoric times, Sicily has always had important artisanal skills, and archaeology confirms this through new discoveries that sometimes astound the scientific community. Located at the center of the Mediterranean (Talamo, 1997)² our island became a hub for direct and indirect maritime and commercial traffic (Panvini, 2017, pp. 24-87, 112-231), but also for the influx of people from the Aegean world in the Late Bronze Age. During excavations of the citadel of Mycenae, objects from all the Mediterranean coasts were found, including Sicily, with which Mycenae played an important trading role over the millennia. The distribution of these artifacts is vast. In the west, these were peoples still organized at the chieftdom and tribal level. Initially, these were interpreted as sporadic contacts, rather than actual commercial ones. During this period, southeastern Sicily saw the flourishing of the Castelluccio culture of the Early Bronze Age. The fact that the first contacts with the Aegean world occurred in a phase in which the Mycenaean had not yet reached the complexity of the palace society, probably contributed to a more gradual contact. Avoiding the trauma of two cultures too different in terms of social evolution, it is at this time that the contribution of specialized artisans arrives, most likely from Monte Grande, on the Agrigento coast, which was a hub on a trade route along the North African coast. The discovery of ceramics identical to the types found at Monte Grande, in an intermediate geographical location at Mursia on the islet of Pantelleria, would support this hypothesis. For this reason, the Helladic ships headed west, which was outside the Cretan sphere of influence but at the same time rich in raw materials, particularly metals from Spain. Various cultures and styles had a very strong connection with the Castelluccian style. The so-called Moarda style, perfectly fitting within the Bell Beaker culture, represents its grafting onto the typological-cultural context of northwestern Sicily, where the strong legacy of the widespread craftsmanship of the Conca d'Oro interacted. The circulation of grey-body pottery from the Castelluccio Culture became a crucial transfer of knowledge. The Eneolithic (3500-2300 BC) marks the beginning of the Metal Age, when humans advanced in animal husbandry (primarily cattle, sheep, and pigs), no longer producing solely for meat but also for by-products such as milk and wool (Fitula, 2017, pp. 24-

² From the work of the archaeologist Talamo which is followed by the publication: Talamo, 1997.

131; Matarese, 2020) The stylistic and technological changes in artisanal production point to a very intense yet complex and problematic relationship, as it was never easy to move groups of people from one place to another while maintaining the traits of their original identity. As we have seen, it is not just about craftsmanship, but about true minds, which enabled a significant leap in technology, bringing with it, with craftsmanship at the forefront, all aspects of that era. From the Neolithic and up until, exceptionally, the end of the Castelluccian period, ornamental objects appeared, such as vases and pendants, made with local lithotopes, such as alabaster, limestone, schist, trachyte, agate, jadeite, serpentinized basalt, siltstone, green chalcedony and marl/sandstone, made by local craftsmen. We find disc-shaped, barrel-shaped, biconical, and oval pendants. It is thought that there was a single center that produced them, and then distributed them throughout the island. They were a status symbol, worn during life but deposited in the tomb at death (Cazzella, Gori, Recchia, & Pacciarelli, 2020).

The First Ornaments

In Sicily, among the oldest ornaments discovered in prehistoric contexts, two shell necklaces from the burials of the Grotta d'Oriente in Favignana (Trapani) are particularly valuable due to their rarity, dating to the Mesolithic (7th millennium BC). Also of note are pendants made from animal teeth and elements of a worked shell necklace from the Grotta dell'Uzzo (Trapani), dating to the Mesolithic (7th millennium BC). Even in the Early and Middle Bronze Age (22nd-13th century BC), the use of bone jewelry or jewelry obtained from the processing of minerals collected in nature is widely attested, even if the various shapes of the beads that make up necklaces and bracelets (lenticular, cylindrical, barrel-shaped, etc.) attest to more advanced techniques and a decidedly more refined taste: This is demonstrated, for example, by the calcite necklaces found in the two tombs of Torrebighini (Tp), hypothetically reconstructed on the basis of the shape and size of the beads. Beginning in the Bronze Age—and especially between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age—necklaces were joined by armillae (bracelets for men and women), chains, brooches and pins of various shapes, and rings. In the protohistoric period (11th-8th centuries BC), the widespread use of personal adornments, especially bronze, is also attested by grave goods: Necklaces—sometimes embellished with bone, amber, and coral elements—were very common, as were earrings, rings, brooches, hairpins, and pendants of various shapes and sizes. Among the most common were double-spiral or single-spiral ones, which, along with single- or multi-spiral armillae, document the existence of specialized metalwork that was also widespread in peninsular environments.

Fibulae

The fibula, with its typical safety pin shape, was widely used in ancient times as an accessory, to fasten men's and women's clothing, or as an ornamental object. Its history is closely linked to that of costume and, therefore, to the different ways in which it was used, depending on the type of clothing, the material from which the garments were made (cloth or leather), and the tastes of the different eras in which they were used. The fibula entered the daily use of Mediterranean and continental European populations starting in the Late Bronze Age and was particularly popular throughout the Iron Age. The comparative study with other fibres from European countries is very important in order to confirm the arrival of the first people, who were the Indo-Europeans and who arrived in Sicily via the Balkans/Puglia/Calabria/Sicily route. The simple and violin bow fibulae testify to consolidated contacts with the Aegean. The fibula became part of everyday life among Mediterranean and continental European populations starting in the Late Bronze Age and was particularly popular throughout the Iron Age. The Bell Beaker culture, which at a certain period declined from a pan-European model to a derived

indigenous facies, forms the link between the Eneolithic and the Bronze Age, together with the Capo Graziano culture in the Aeolian Islands, and is contemporary with the Tarxien Cemetery culture in Malta. Ceramics from Castelluccio and Rod  Tindari-Vallelunga are often found in the same stratigraphy. In this early Bronze Age phase, village fortifications took shape, sometimes surrounded by a large moat for better defense against enemy warriors.

The Arrival of the Campaniforme

The Bell Beaker, which at a certain period declined from a pan-European model to a derived indigenous Facies, forms the link between the Eneolithic and the Bronze Age, together with the Capo Graziano Culture in the Aeolian Islands, and is contemporary with the Tarxien Cemetery Culture in Malta. Ceramics from Castelluccio and Rod  Tindari-Vallelunga (RTV) are often found in the same stratigraphy. It has also been confirmed that for painted and burnished ceramics, artisans with different specializations, both in the preparation of the clay and in the modeling of the vessels, were employed. For metals, the Castelluccian craftsmen used copper and bronze in equal measure, and the RTV groups managed trade in the Strait of Messina. In the Aeolian Islands, however, the new settlers had acquired extensive knowledge and were able to read the landscape, enabling them to better construct villages and burial sites. These new peoples arrived in Sicily from Iberia, via Sardinia, and from Central Europe through Tuscany and Sardinia. Archaeological research shows that there was extensive cultural exchange between the natives and the new peoples. Many religious, civil, cultural, and ritual customs were changed, and many peoples invaded the Platani Valley. Meanwhile, the Aeolian Islands had had constant contact with the Campanian islands since the Neolithic, as demonstrated by the Trichrome Pottery, also known as the Capri Style. At the beginning of the Copper Age, the new peoples brought new skills, such as the potter's wheel, and the amphorae of the Late Bronze Age were identical to those made in the Aegean. These aliens were seeking new lands and resources and began sending out Prospectors, followed by others, who operated with more sophisticated techniques. Once they reached the coasts, they infiltrated the interior via the rivers, sometimes visiting areas infested with warriors unwilling to engage in dialogue. In the Middle Bronze Age, with the appearance of the potter's wheel and the arrival of new workers from the Aegean, cooking techniques also improved³.

The Arrival of Specialized Craftsmen

The artisans did not replace the locals, but rather worked by interpolation (Panvini, 2017; Nicoletti, 2017). These innovations involved ceramic production, flint and obsidian processing, weaving, agriculture, and livestock farming. These aliens were seeking new lands and resources and began sending out Prospectors, followed by others, who operated with more sophisticated techniques. Once they reached the coast, they entered the interior via the rivers. In the Middle Bronze Age, with the appearance of the potter's wheel and the arrival of new craftsmen from the Aegean, cooking techniques also improved. With their craftsmanship, the various groups differentiated themselves within their macro-areas, but also through territorial and settlement organization, economic and production choices, and ideological systems.

³ The Bell Beaker culture appears to have arrived in Sicily from the Iberian Peninsula, via Sardinia, while other scholars believe it originated in Egypt. Recent studies provide some evidence that suggests the culture originated in Sicily.

Agro-pastoral Phenomenon

This phenomenon would have led to a crisis in the agro-pastoral economy, unwilling to engage in trade with outsiders. This would have undermined the Castelluccian culture and favored the development of new Thapsian coastal settlements. Another hypothesis is that non-native artisans formed the Rodì-Ciavolaro culture (northwestern Sicily and also widespread in central-western Sicily), which would have played a significant role in the formation of the Thapsian facies. According to archaeological finds, the abandonment of the coastal settlements by the Thapsos facies population in favor of the inland mountains occurred between the Middle and Late Bronze Age.

The Second Wave of Migration

The second wave of migration would have been more massive, while the third wave, based on the findings, shows a more fleeting Aegean presence in the Pantalica area. The formation of the protohistoric communities of Mount Dissuerie di Butera (in the Gela hinterland) has been placed within these contexts (Pantalica III culture). The relationships of the Sicilian natives with the foreign peoples (Mycenaeans and Cypriots) contributed significantly to the formation of their identity starting from the Middle Bronze Age, which was then perfected with the Late Bronze Age and is emblematically represented by the translucent red decoration (Panvini, 2017; Palio, 2017). The process of urbanization led to the first social differentiation of the population. Various trades emerged, including specialized crafts. The artisans of the time specialized in the production of food containers, vases, and cups, and, later during the Middle Bronze Age, also in painted pottery, imitation Aegean pottery, as well as bronze swords and daggers, chisels, punches, awls, blades, and shovels. The increased demand, not only for primary goods, and the search for less readily available materials, such as copper, fostered the development of trade and related activities. As evidenced by the types of burials, ceramics, and metal objects found throughout Sicily, during the Metal Age the island was at the center of important trade with mainland Italy, Sardinia, and Malta. Ceramics techniques evolved significantly during the Eneolithic period. A type of pottery with decorations and paintings (Conzo, Serrafellicchio, S. Ippolito) made by local artisans is evident, as is a type of pottery belonging to the so-called “Bell Beaker Culture” (S. Ippolito), typical of Central and Western Europe. This evidence of contact between Sicily and Europe was already in the Eneolithic period, with significant contributions from Sicilian artisans, who by then had achieved significant professionalism. Globule-shaped bone vessels are elongated objects carved from bone so as to be decorated with a succession of adjacent globules in relief, the surface decoration completed with very fine incisions. They reached Malta and Troy II and III via trade routes, demonstrating that Sicilian craftsmanship was at the forefront of the Mediterranean. Such objects were widespread throughout the Mediterranean basin starting in the Eneolithic period. The significance of these objects is uncertain, whether they were schematic idols or everyday objects. In Sicily, they have been identified as part of what is known as the “Castelluccio Culture”. In the Late Bronze Age, a more refined type of pottery with painted feather and geometric decorations appeared.

Bronze Age

The Thapsos Culture, partly Cape Graziano, represents the evolution of the RTV Culture, based on a craft element that now transcended regional boundaries, becoming identified throughout much of the Mediterranean. The Magnanisi peninsula, in fact, entered the sphere of interest of the Mycenaean Empire’s maritime commercial activities, given the presence there of artisans specialized in every sector. This is the period in which we can

glimpse proto-urban forms of aggregation and a new and revolutionary political and economic model open to trans-maritime mercantile dynamics that brought new artisans from the Helladic area to Sicily. Of note is the production of bronze fibulae, including the violin-bow and simple-bow types, as well as the straight-needle and elbow-bow or simple-bow types, often with richly engraved decorations (Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche, 2020; Radina et al., 2020; Tusa, 1992, pp. 144-191; Iannì Vassallo, S., & Chiovaro, 2022).

Protohistory

Between the end of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, a new migration arrived from the peninsula. It seems that they were the Sicels, who violently expelled the Sicanians from eastern Sicily to western Sicily and settled there. The Sicanians had to struggle for a long time with the Elymians to gain a foothold in western Sicily, while around the 12th century BC, the Shekelesh, a group from the island associated with the Sea People, significantly disrupted maritime trade with acts of extreme piracy. A more refined type of pottery with painted feathered and geometric decorations appeared in the 6th century BC, and this is the period in which the greatest number of villages with different ash layers are found, a sign of the violent destruction of the settlement.

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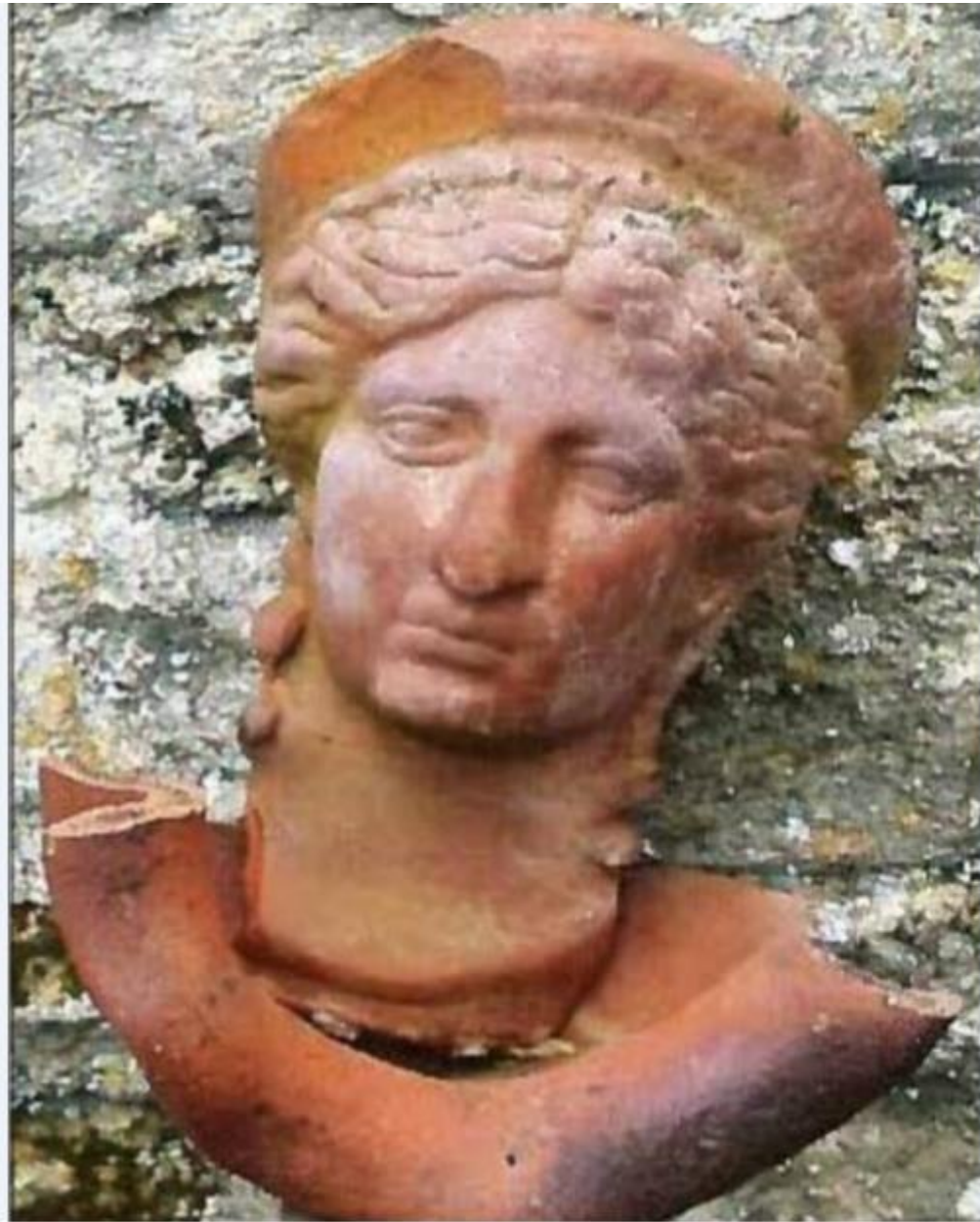
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Gold ring from the S. Angelo Muxaro culture, late Bronze Age-early Iron Age.



A carinated bowl from the Rodi-Tindari-Vallelunga culture, dating back to the early Bronze Age, found in Montagna Vecchia di Corleone.



Clay head of Demeter found inside the town of Corleone.