

Feasting the Community: Ritual and Power on the Sicilian *Acropoleis* (10th–6th centuries BC)

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Abstract

In recent years, the emergence of new theoretical perspectives such as post-structuralism, post-colonialism and feminism in the study of colonial situations in the ancient Mediterranean have broken the hegemony long held by acculturation. Earlier perspectives focused mainly on the colonies, Greek or Phoenician, and considered them as the only active agents, while local populations were traditionally interpreted as static and monolithic entities, passive recipients of colonial innovations. Moving away from these interpretations and approaching new ways of reading colonial histories, the focus of this article is centered on the native Sicilian people, particularly on the recuperation of their agency, through an analysis of their ritual politics. In this case I examine processes of making social identities and the idea of community that these peoples constructed through the collective practices carried out in their main communal ritual settings, the acropoleis.

Keywords: Sicily, feasting, ritual politics, cultural contact, community, social identities, acropoleis

Introduction

In recent decades, several studies from different disciplines have recognized the importance of ritual in political action and in community construction and representation. These works have pointed out how highly formalized and routinized practices mark social temporalities, create group identities and project images of difference between groups, negotiate interests, and legitimize and contest different relations of power. These same studies have also emphasized that it is not only elites and religious technocrats who are active in the negotiation, achievement and legitimation of these social outcomes. In fact, all community members participate actively in these practices (Bourdieu 1972; Kertzer 1988; Connerton 1989; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Bell 1992; 1997; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994).

In line with this reappraisal, recent archaeological studies have put an end to the subordination and marginalization that ritual practices have often held in archaeological narratives (e.g. Barrett 1991; 1994; Brück 1999; Joyce 2000; Plunket 2002; Bradley 2005; Gonlin and Lohse 2007; Swenson 2006; Delgado and Ferrer 2011a). These works moved away from traditional binary readings, usually represented by the dichotomy of 'sacred' versus 'profane', and rejected essentialist discourses in which everything regarded as irrational, unusual or strange is lumped together under the label of 'ritual', as opposed to raw functionality and rationality (Brück 1999).

There are three premises that have been central to overcoming this duality and to recognizing the importance of the ritual sphere in relation to other arenas of action. First of all, ritual has

begun to be considered as a specific field of discourse spatially and temporally integrated into other areas of human practice (Barrett 1991; 1994: 72-80). Secondly, it has been argued that ritual practices form a continuum with daily actions, with the former acquiring new meanings and greater emphasis through their own performance or 'ritualization' (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Bradley 2005: 34). Finally, scholars have begun to recognize that the dualist model does not correspond to a universal conception of the world. On the contrary, it corresponds to an understanding of the world typical of modern Western societies, and its direct and uncritical transposition to other historical contexts thus involves a strong anachronism as well as an interpretative fallacy (Brück 1999).

In spite of the gradual acceptance of this revised thinking, most studies devoted to Sicily during the first half of the first millennium BC continue to place ritual practices in a purely symbolic arena of action, completely isolated from other dimensions of society, such as the political and the social spheres. In these accounts, ritual actions are seen simply as religious expressions or manifestations. As such, those spaces, practices or materialities that do not neatly fit in with functional interpretations (or with patterns of behavior considered to be normative within the community) are the only ones assumed to belong to the ritual sphere (e.g. Palermo 1981; Vassallo 1999; Albanese Procelli 2006; Guzzone 2009; Tanasi 2009a; Domínguez Monedero 2010). The maintenance of this ritual conception, which in archaeology has been broadly based on Renfrew's work (1985: 19-20; 1994: 51-52), limits these studies to the search and identification of exclusively and specifically cultic elements, and in turn prevents—and also rejects—any type of analysis that goes beyond a formal description.

Likewise, the strong hegemony of the Hellenization perspective until recent times assumes that in most cases Sicilian religiosities were simply seen as local reproductions of Greek religious patterns. Ritual manifestations or expressions

by native Sicilian peoples are usually defined by certain elements of the Greek religious model, which are regarded as genuine canonical ritual markers (Albanese Procelli 2003: 211; 2006: 55-56; Domínguez Monedero 2010: 139). Nevertheless, the lack of a universal ritual pattern and the consequent inability to identify in a general way elements of Greek religion in other historical and/or cultural contexts has strongly hampered the study of ritual in non-Hellenic areas, especially regarding its socio-political analysis.

With respect to Sicily, the persistence of this deeply colonialist attitude has led some scholars to suggest that before the settlement of the first Greek colonists on the island (late 8th century BC), religious expression was barely visible or even absent among Sicily's native peoples, except in the funerary sphere (Albanese Procelli 2006: 56; Domínguez Monedero 2010: 134). In accordance with this reading, most ritual manifestations documented during the colonial period (7th–5th centuries BC), such as those registered on the *acropoleis* and dealt with in this paper, have been interpreted frequently as mere assimilations and/or responses to colonial settlement. New ritual expressions born of a direct transmission of foreign ideas and religious values, as well as resulting from multiple needs—social, political and economic—emerged after the establishment of relations with these new colonies (Leighton 1999: 261; Albanese Procelli 2003: 211; 2006: 56; Hodos 2006: 129; Domínguez Monedero 2010: 136-37). It is thus no exaggeration to conclude that this conception of ritual and its direct association with traditional assumptions about colonization have not only reinforced conventional evolutionary readings based on acculturation, but also have facilitated a complete subordination of native Sicilian agency to the influences and innovations received from those who lived in the colonies.

In this study, I suggest that to conceive of ritual practices as actions, rather than as straightforward religious expressions or manifestations, enables us to examine the social

and political histories that characterized native Sicilian populations during the first half of the first millennium BC. In particular, I argue that feasting practices carried out periodically in the main Sicilian communal ritual setting of the *acropolis*¹ were actively involved not only in the construction of a sense of community but also in the creation, negotiation and legitimization of the social and power relations that prevailed within native Sicilian communities. On the one hand, then, this study makes it possible to cease interpreting Sicilian peoples as static and monolithic entities, merely passive recipients of colonial innovations. On the other hand, it allows us to highlight these people's agency, thereby demonstrating the social and political dynamics at work during this period.²

I thus focus first on the main Sicilian communal ritual settings, i.e. the *acropoleis*. In particular, I examine the suitability of these spaces for approaching the agency of these people, as well as the various elements that characterized the *acropoleis*. I then turn specifically to the feasting practices repeatedly celebrated in these ritual settings. In the end, I show how collective commensality practices enabled native Sicilians constantly and simultaneously to build and rebuild both a shared sense of community and the social and power relations that structured their communities.

Communal Ceremonial Spaces in Sicily: The *Acropoleis*

At the end of the second millennium BC, local Sicilian populations began a progressive transformation that was galvanized in the late 8th century BC by the gradual establishment of Phoenician and Greek colonies on the Sicilian coast and the consequent development of regular contacts and relations among these three communities. The resulting changes are registered in settlement patterns, which reflect population concentrations around certain newly founded and older settlements, in funerary

spaces, where a reduction in the number of individuals buried together is documented, and in domestic contexts, where there is a greater diversification and specialization of space (Ferrer 2012: 190-217).

The changes recorded in all of these spheres point to a reformulation of the relations established among both those who resided in the same settlement and those who were part of the same household. These different transformations attest to the appearance of new social and political dynamics that can be analyzed through the study of the native communities' ritual politics. More specifically, I refer to the analysis of the *acropoleis*—the principal communal ritual spaces in these settlements—and especially to the feasting practices that were periodically carried out in these settings.

Three factors underlie the suitability of the *acropoleis* for analyzing these dynamics and, in particular, for studying processes of community identification and social differentiation among native Sicilian peoples during the first half of the first millennium BC. The first lies in the incompleteness of the archaeological record currently available for Sicily during this period. Because archaeological practices on the island have been dominated, from their start in the late 19th century until relatively recently, by the archaeology of monumentality and objects, most archaeological activity in Sicily has focused on contexts traditionally associated with power, like city-walls or ritual spaces, as well as contexts (like cemeteries) that potentially provide complete artifacts suitable for display in museum. This bias in the Sicilian archaeological record, at the expense of areas such as the domestic sphere (Spatafora 2003; Albanese Procelli and Procelli 2007; Mühlenböck 2008), has turned the *acropoleis* into the best available contexts for a diachronic analysis of native Sicilian peoples during the period under consideration.

The second factor is the long-standing local tradition of communal ritual celebrations that may be traced throughout the second

millennium BC and in which the *acropolis* ceremonies fit in perfectly. In fact, if we look further back in time, beyond the so-called colonial period (8th–5th centuries BC), we note spaces devoted exclusively to communal ritual ceremonies inside native settlements. These settings attest to a clear predominance of collective commensality practices, much like the *acropoleis* of the first millennium BC. Examples of these ceremonial spaces are offered by La Muculufa, dated between the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennium BC (Holloway *et al.* 1990), the sacred area of Madre Chiesa di Gaffe, dated to the mid-second millennium BC (Castellana 2000), and the first levels of Polizzello, dated between the 10th and 9th centuries BC (Tanasi 2009a; 2009b; 2102). This continuity in Sicilian ritual behavior makes the *acropoleis* and the practices carried out there suitable arenas in which to analyze—from the perspective of their own historical trajectories—the processes of identification and power relations that prevailed among these peoples. Indeed, to examine local dynamics otherwise would be to subject them directly and indiscriminately to colonial agencies and interests.

Finally, there is the issue of the meaning of these markedly ritual places. *Acropoleis* were spaces mainly used for the periodic celebration of communal ritual ceremonies. They were all located in the most prominently visible areas of their settlements, either at the highest point as at Polizzello (Palermo *et al.* 2009), Monte Polizzo (Morris *et al.* 2002; 2003) and Montagnoli (Castellana 1990; 1992), or in areas of great topographic importance, as in Sabucina (De Miro 1981) or Segesta (Mertens 2006). Their own physicality, as well the successive celebrations carried out in them, make the *acropoleis* crucial spaces of local interaction inside the settlements. They were meeting points, but also places of constant visual and mnemonic reference for all those who lived in or simply visited these centers. The continued

execution of communal ritual practices in these settings transformed the *acropoleis* into arenas where social solidarity was promoted and group identity was forged among all those who participated in these events. The heterogeneity of the participants, however, their different experiences and social and cultural identifications, also turned the *acropoleis* into arenas where the various power relations that existed within these communities were built, negotiated and reified. Paraphrasing Bourdieu (1980), I would suggest that for these populations the *acropoleis* represented one of their symbolic or cultural capitals.

Spaces, Architectures and Complexities on the Sicilian *Acropoleis*

From the end of the second millennium BC and during all of the first millennium BC, native Sicilian populations mostly settled the upper part of certain hills (Leighton 1999: 187). The settlements were placed at strategic points along routes of travel and transportation and with easy access to the Sicilian river network, which favored convenient communication not only among the hilltop settlements but also with the colonies scattered along the coast (Figure 1).

The elevated topography of these centers determined their internal organization, as the slopes visually and spatially distinguished the three areas that usually made up these settlements. At lower levels were the cemeteries, mostly characterized by clusters of rock-cut chambers, some of which held depositions from one single moment, while others were used and reused in different periods during the life of the settlement (Albanese Procelli 2003: 164–75). At a second level, either at a lower plateau of the summit or on the upper slopes of the hill, we find the habitation areas usually situated on artificial terraces (Spatafora 2003; Mühlentock 2008). Finally, at the highest or at least the most visually conspicuous point was the *acropolis* itself, the place devoted to the periodic celebration of communal ritual ceremonies (e.g.

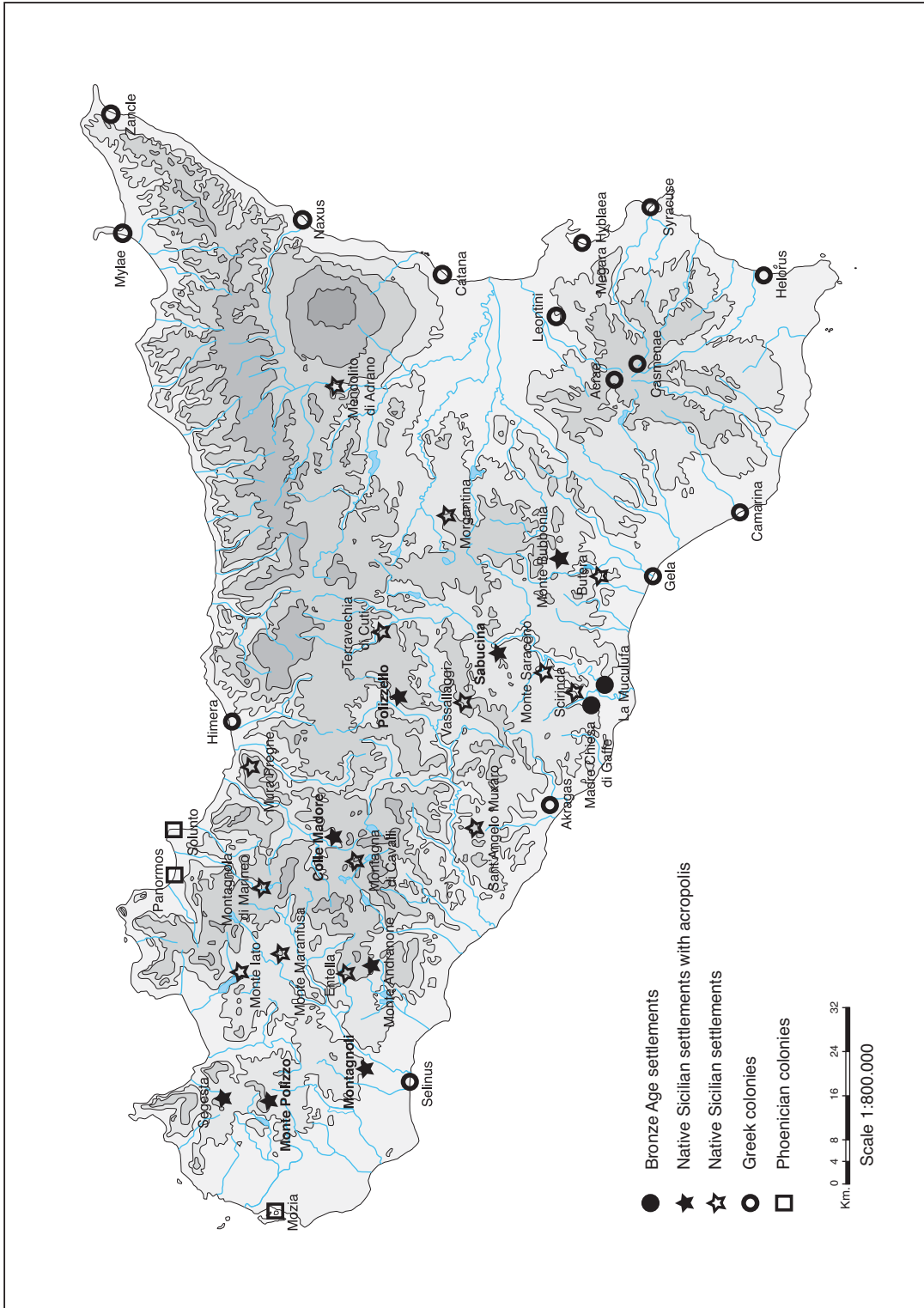


Figure 1. Map of Sicily showing the main native settlements of the first half of the first millennium BC, the main *acropoleis* and Greek and Phoenician colonies.

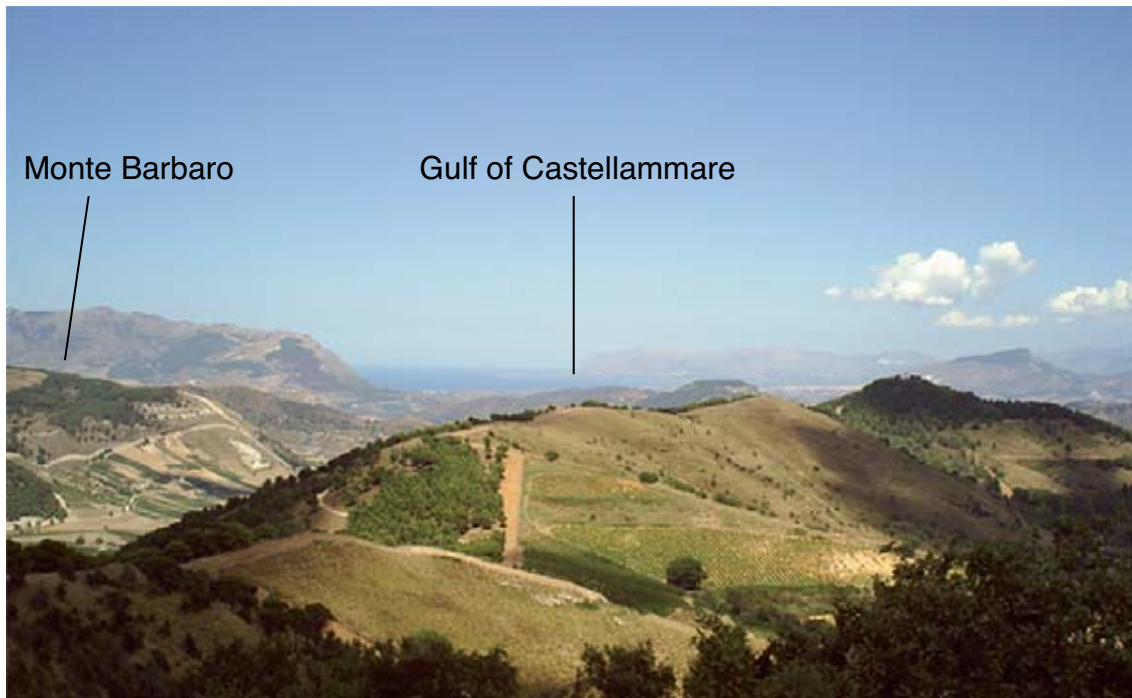


Figure 2. View toward the northeast from Monte Polizzo's *acropolis*, with Monte Babaro, Segesta on the left and the Gulf of Castellammare in the center (photograph by the author).

Vassallo 1999; Castellana 1992; Morris *et al.* 2002; Palermo *et al.* 2009). This topographic placement endowed the *acropolis* with a visual and geographic dominance over the whole settlement, its surrounding areas and the visual links established between them and the rest of the island (Figure 2).

Beyond this natural position of power, the prominence of the *acropoleis* was reinforced and magnified through the use of a differentiated architecture. The use of building patterns that completely differ from those used in contemporary domestic contexts not only accentuates the monumentality of these spaces but also maximizes their differentiation from the rest of the settlement. This distinction was achieved by resorting to archaic architectural styles, as in the construction of circular buildings at a time when these had completely gone out of use in areas of habitation, as for example in Monte Polizzo (Morris *et al.* 2002; 2003), Polizzello

(Palermo *et al.* 2009) and Montagnoli (Castellana 1990; 1992), or by adopting elements of foreign architectural traditions, whether Phoenician and Greek, like the stele-baetyl at Monte Polizzo (Morris *et al.* 2002: 24), the use of antefixes (ornamental roof tiles) decorated with Selenus heads and a portico with columns in Sector D at Sabucina (De Miro 1981; 1983; Guzzone 2009) and, most spectacularly, the monumental Doric temple at Segesta (Mertens 2006) (Figures 3, 4).

It is important to note that both local and foreign architectural styles were used at specific times in the lives of these *acropoleis*, where these expressions may be found both in combination and at successive moments in time. This pattern of use suggests that local communities reified the construction and legitimization of their hegemonic discourse on the *acropoleis* in a highly heterogeneous array of forms. In fact, this variety of responses and manifestations represents the



Figure 3. Structure A on Sabucina's *acropolis*, Sector D (after De Miro 1981: fig. 8).

use of those architectural expressions that each community at each historic moment considered most suited to its needs and strategies, regardless of the primary origin of these elements (Ferrer 2010; 2012).

The heterogeneity of architectural responses over time brings us to another aspect of the *acropoleis*, which is their high level of complexity and dynamism. In most of these spaces we

find several buildings, some devoted to restrictive or esoteric practices, others to ancillary practices such as the storage of food or objects used in these ceremonies. At the same time, the considerable presence of open spaces where auxiliary structures such as altars, hearths or pits were located tells us that in these areas ritual activities were carried out, probably those visually accessible to a wide audience.



Figure 4. Doric temple of Segesta (photograph by Peter van Dommelen).

It is also worth highlighting that the varied use of space on the *acropoleis* was in no way static but was constantly changing over time. Such successive spatial and architectural reformulations are best illustrated on the *acropolis* of Polizzello (10th/9th–6th centuries BC), where four phases of complete restructuring have been identified (Palermo *et al.* 2009), at Monte Polizzo, where seven different construction phases have been documented in one century (ca 650/625–550/525 BC: Morris *et al.* 2002; Morris and Tusa 2004), and in Sector D at Sabucina, where at least six instances of spatial reorganization have been recorded between the end of 8th and the end of 5th century BC (Guzzone 2009) (Figure 5).

Feasting on the *Acropoleis*: A Sense of Community and Social Difference

Material evidence from the *acropoleis* bears witness to a great variety of ritual practices,

ranging from the emphasis on deer hunting at Monte Polizzo (Morris *et al.* 2002: 58) to metal production at Colle Madore (Vassallo 1999: 37–38), and to an emphasis on warrior groups in the latest levels of Polizzello (Palermo *et al.* 2009: 110–14). In spite of this considerable diversity, in all of these settings and throughout their occupation, practices of collective commensality have been documented. These activities do not represent a novelty within the Sicilian ritual tradition; they are well known from the pre-colonial period as illustrated at La Muculufa (Holloway *et al.* 1990), Madre Chiesa di Gaffe (Castellana 2000) and the early levels of Polizzello (Tanasi 2009a; Tanasi 2009b; 2012). In fact, the repeated documentation of this practice over time indicates not only their importance within the Sicilian ritual sphere, but also the continuity in native Sicilian ritual behaviors that extends uninterruptedly from the beginning of the second to the middle of the first millennium BC.

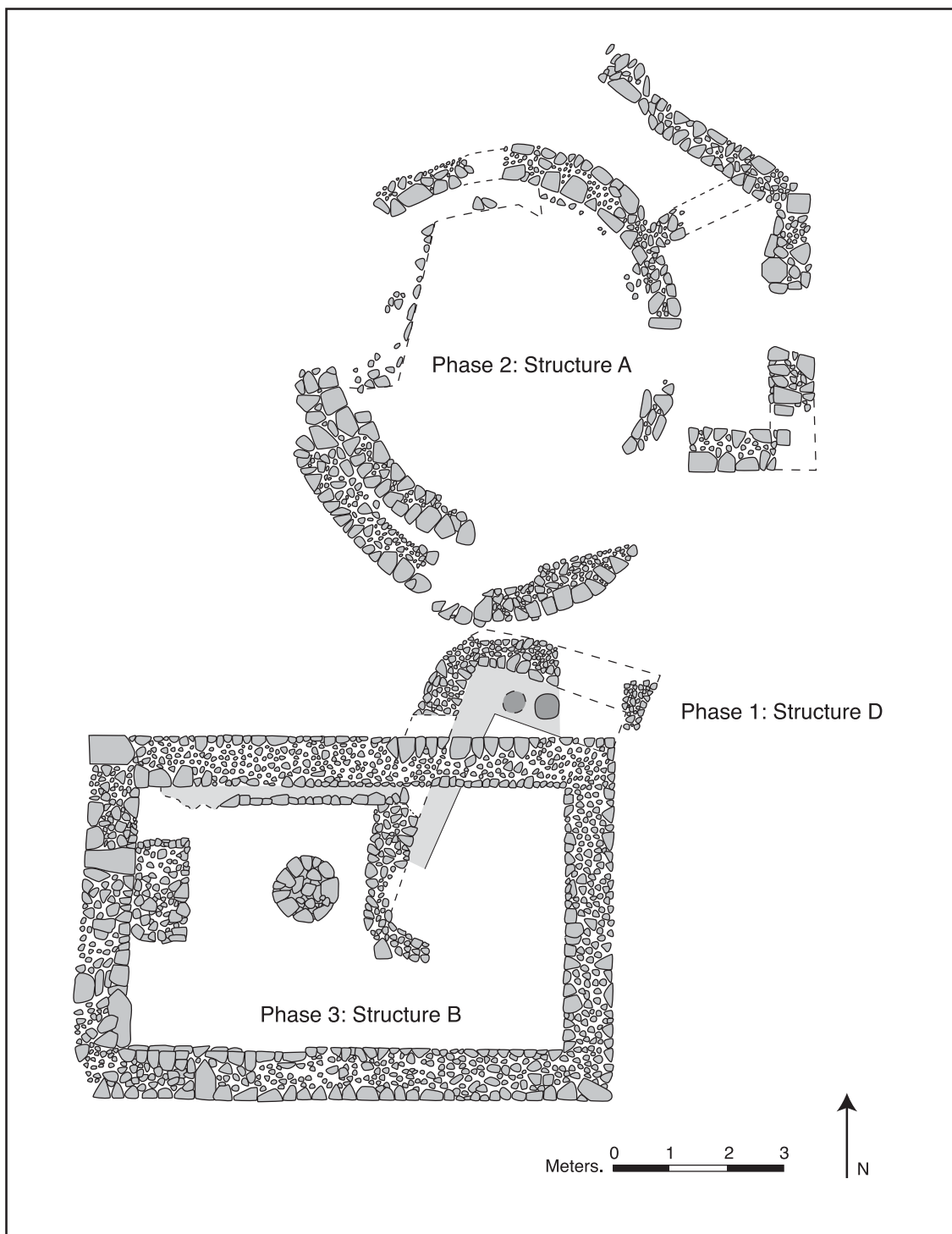


Figure 5. Successive architectural elaborations of Sabucina's Sector D, late 8th to 5th centuries BC (after De Miro 1991: fig. 8).

In recent years several archaeological studies have argued for the sociocultural importance of these practices (e.g. Dietler 1990; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Gumerman 1997; Hamilakis 1998; 2008; Pauketat *et al.* 2002; Bray 2003; Halstead and Barrett 2004; Swenson 2006; Mills 2007; Hayden and Villeneuve 2011; Aranda *et al.* 2011; Twiss 2012). In spite of the theoretical and methodological differences between them (see Hamilakis 2008: 3-15; Twiss 2012), most scholars assume that feasts are a universal phenomenon through which social identities are established and altered, social competitions are held and ideologies are infused. These studies agree that feasting constituted a key factor in the negotiation and maintenance of social order, as in processes of social change. In other words, practices of commensality are understood as arenas where both social competition and integration are produced simultaneously (Dietler 2001: 77).

Some of these studies argue that the power of feasting derives exclusively from its extraordinary nature, in particular the presence of a large number of banqueters and a differential consumption of food and drink, both in quantity and quality (Dietler 1990; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Gumerman 1997; Pauketat *et al.* 2002; Bray 2003; Jennings *et al.* 2005; Hayden and Villeneuve 2011). This perspective of exceptionality, however, isolates feasting practices from daily meals and does not consider the inherent importance of food. Other studies, on the contrary, have suggested that the importance of feasting lies precisely in the social, cultural and symbolic dimension of food (Appadurai 1981; Simmel 1994; Caplan 1997; Smith 2006), its centrality to the construction of temporalities, memories and forgetting (Seremetakis 1994; Sutton 2001; Hamilakis 2008), as well as in the close relationships between these collective practices and everyday meals (Douglas 1975; Weismantel 1989; Bradley 2005; Delgado 2008; 2010; Delgado and Ferrer 2011a). From this perspective, feasts represent an extrapolation

from daily meals in households to broader social and power dynamics.

Food ingested in both 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' consumption practices contributes actively and in a dual way to the processes of constructing and representing identity—both collective and individual—and power. On the one hand, food is involved in the construction of social and political relations characterized by equality, cohesion or solidarity, while on the other hand it plays a part in the creation, legitimization and representation of social and political relations based on difference (e.g. Appadurai 1981; Goody 1984; Bourdieu 1988; Caplan 1997; Counighan and van Esterik 1997; Counighan 1999; Scholliers 2001; from an archaeological perspective, Hamilakis 1998; Halstead and Barrett 2004; Smith 2006; Delgado 2008; 2010). Moreover, the different contexts in which both actions are performed, their different social and political purposes and, especially, the ritualization that encompasses feasts convert these culinary practices into arenas where collective temporalities are constructed as well as disrupted and punctuated, allowing the creation of different social acts of remembering and forgetting (Hamilakis 2008: 15-16).

The continuity between feasts and daily meals implies that most material culture from the *acropoleis* directly related to the celebration of collective commensality practices was highly similar to the material recorded in contemporary household contexts. With respect to the archaeological record, however, it must be pointed out that repeated cleaning, either after a ceremony or as part of a wider architectural remodeling (Ferrer 2012: 394-98), means that the materials documented on the *acropoleis* do not reflect all the material culture involved in the communal ceremonies carried out in these spaces. Most of the materials we possess correspond directly to two indirect depositional patterns: some finds had escaped cleaning and consequently were unintentionally left behind, while others were selected and deliberately deposited by participants in

pits (e.g. Vassallo 1999: 46-48; De Miro 1988: 27-31; Morris *et al.* 2002: 54; Tanasi 2009b: 53).

Although the archaeological record is incomplete, most of the materials from the *acropoleis* belong to the sphere of food and its storage, preparation, serving and, most of all, consumption; they thus bear witness to the repeated celebration of feasting practices throughout the histories of the *acropoleis*, from foundation to abandonment. The recurrence of these activities reveals their centrality and importance in the ritual politics of these peoples, and most of all in the construction of a sense of community shared by all participants and in the legitimization of the social and power differences that existed among them.

Drinking on the *Acropoleis*: From Acculturation to Hybrid Practices

All the *acropoleis* reveal a conspicuous presence of ceramics related to drinking. The repertoire includes a considerable number of closed vessels for serving liquids, especially jugs, table amphorae and trefoil *oinochoai* (wine jugs), mostly of

local production. Among the ceramics related to drinking there is an absolute predominance of open shapes devoted to consumption, particularly cups and bowls of local production, to which Greek imports of foreign and colonial production were added from the second half of the 7th century BC.

This pattern, documented in all the Sicilian *acropoleis*, is perfectly illustrated at Polizzello throughout the life of the settlement. During the early occupation of the *acropolis*, in particular, open vases—cups and bowls both simple and carinated—represent 75% of all the ceramics identified in occupation layers of the North Building, ca. 1050–850 BC (Tanasi 2009b: 102; 2012: 1322-24). In a later period, 17 pits from the final level of Structure B (ca. 600–550 BC) again show a clear predominance of drinking paraphernalia. In almost all these pits, service and—mainly—consumption vessels were documented. Among them, deposits 5 and 9 are worth highlighting, as the former containing 77 vases and the latter 40, both with an abundance of drinking vessels of both local and foreign production (Tanasi 2009b: 34-43) (Figure 6).

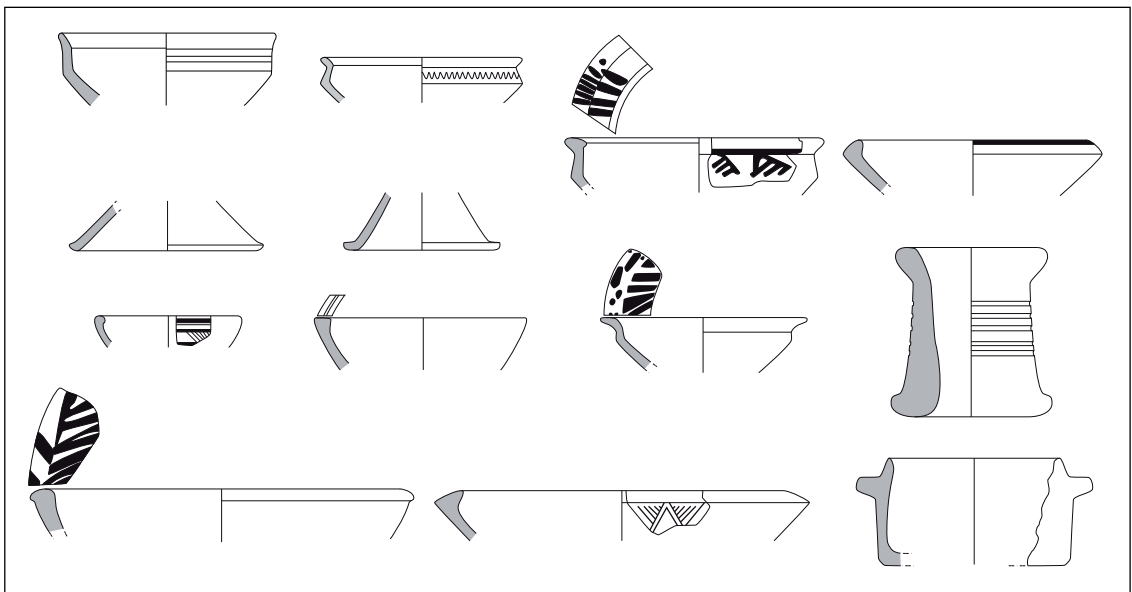


Figure 6. Vessels from inside the North Building at Polizzello, ca. 1050–850 BC. Scale 1:6 (from Tanasi 2012: fig. 4).

Along with this material related to drinking, other elements associated specifically with solid and semi-solid food, such as cooking wares, grill hooks and faunal remains, have also been documented on the *acropoleis*, although in smaller quantities. Despite their recurring presence, it is worth pointing out that they have had little influence on the traditional scholarly narratives concerning Sicilian *acropoleis*. In fact, in these accounts feasting has been inferred only through drinking paraphernalia and alcohol consumption. The practice of ignoring everything that goes beyond drinking derives not only from the considerable volume of material related to it in these spaces, but also and principally from the importance that is usually given to alcohol consumption. I refer in particular to the connotation of alcohol as an 'extraordinary' food related to prestige and status, to the establishment and maintenance of a direct association between this beverage and the masculine sphere and, above all, to its traditional association with the import of specifically Greek products. Regarding the last, it must be noted that in most of these discussions the introduction of wine and its paraphernalia typically has been considered to be one of the principal indicators not only of the existence of contacts between the local and colonial community, but also specifically of the Hellenization of local peoples (Hodos 2000; 2006; Domínguez Monedero 2010).

Generally, it is assumed that the Mycenaean Greeks introduced wine consumption to Sicily during the second half of the second millennium BC (Hodos 2000: 48; Antonaccio 2004: 73; Morris and Tusa 2004: 72). This notion is based principally on the appearance of new shapes related to the consumption of this type of drink within the local repertoire (Tanasi 2005: 566). Despite the earlier consumption of wine, the shape of certain vases and the occurrence of jugs with strainer spouts in later contexts (10th–9th centuries BC) suggest that beer and mead remained the main alcoholic beverages consumed at the beginning of the first mil-

lennium BC (Morris *et al.* 2003: 56; Morris and Tusa 2004). This consumption pattern seems to change in the 8th century BC, when Greek and Phoenician cups and amphorae related to wine began to be distributed in Sicily. By the end of the 7th and throughout the 6th century BC, wine consumption became widespread over the island and in every type of context, domestic as well as funerary and ritual. Even if this notion is generally accepted, it must be pointed out that there is currently little palaeobotanical evidence from native Sicilian contexts of the first half of the first millennium BC to substantiate it, which reduces this hypothesis to a supposition in expectation of new palaeobotanical data to confirm it.³

Whatever the beverage ingested in these celebrations may have been, the evident preponderance of drinking vessels registered on the *acropoleis* points out the importance of collective drinking in these ceremonies. The relevance of this practice lies in the act of sharing the same drink as well as the way of drinking it and the specific setting where this activity took place. This shared activity would have made it possible for all participants to identify themselves as members of the same group or community, weaving bonds of solidarity and equality that would elide and mask the social differences that existed among them. Nevertheless, the use of different vases or the order of service, for example, should at the same time have materialized and legitimized the existing differences within the community.

Here it must be remembered that we are dealing with an activity that has a long tradition within Sicilian ritual behavior, and the presence of foreign products does not seem to warrant the indiscriminate adoption of new models of behavior or consumption, as the traditional acculturation perspective would have it. On the contrary, the presence of imported objects, always in association with locally produced vessels, seems to indicate that a process of hybridization was involved in deciding which

foreign materials were selected, appropriated and introduced by local populations into their own practices, thereby providing a new meaning related to their understanding of the world, their community and their rituals (Ferrer 2012: 447). These kinds of practices nicely match the appropriation of Phoenician and Greek architectural elements as documented on some *acropoleis* (Ferrer 2010). In fact, in both cases the presence of foreign objects and elements should not be analyzed in isolation, nor be considered as merely exceptional, as the acculturation perspective sees it. Rather, they should be seen as the appropriation, incorporation and reinterpretation in native terms of certain elements selected by some members of these local communities at specific historical moments (see also Thomas 1991: 75-82; van Dommelen 1998: 110-12; van Dommelen and Rowlands 2012). These appropriations, through which local populations endowed foreign material with a new meaning, add to and strengthen indigenous norms and values, creating new symbols of power suited to the new social and political necessities that involved these peoples as a whole, both elites and some non-elites (van Dommelen 1998; 2006; Tronchetti and van Dommelen 2005).

Faunal Record and Consumption Patterns

Another phenomenon consistently recorded on the *acropoleis* that also alludes to the repeated

celebration of communal feasts is a faunal pattern that differs slightly from that found in contemporary domestic contexts. We should note, however, two difficulties that usually accompany faunal data. First, because faunal—as well as botanical—remains were not considered important for understanding these spaces until recently, those sites excavated earlier do not present a detailed record. The second difficulty arises from the archaeology of power and monumentality that traditionally has dominated archaeological research in Sicily, which has repeatedly ignored domestic spaces. This bias in the archaeological record makes it difficult to carry out a comparative study of the faunal remains from domestic and ritual contexts, and by extension, of the totality of material culture from both contexts.

Despite these limitations, all the *acropoleis* from which we have some faunal data—especially Colle Madore (Di Rosa 1999), Monte Polizzo (Hnatiuk 2003), Polizzello (Palermo *et al.* 2009) and Sabucina (Guzzone 2009: 95)—show a pattern that seems to differ and contrast with that documented in contemporary domestic contexts, regarding both the type and quantity of animals and the parts represented. These differences are well illustrated in Monte Polizzo, the only center that offers a detailed faunal recording of its *acropolis* (Hnatiuk 2003) and two contemporary domestic contexts, in particular Houses 1 and 2 (Mühlenbock 2008) (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1. Faunal remains from the *acropolis* at Monte Polizzo, Zone A. Identifiable fragments = 3649 (from Morris *et al.* 2003: table 2).

Species	Definitely identified (A)	Bones of the size of this species (B)	Total (A+B)	Percentage of total assemblage
<i>Cow</i>	157	248	157-405	4.3-11.8
<i>Sheep/goat</i>	411	1053	411-1464	11.3-42.5
<i>Pig</i>	208	0	208	6.0
<i>Red deer</i>	1367	0	1367	39.7
Total	2143	1301	2143-3444	58.8-100.0

Table 2. Faunal remains from House 1 and House 2 at Monte Polizzo, showing their percentages in relation to fragments from each domestic context (from Mühlenbock 2008: table 5).

Species	House 1	Total percentage of H1	House 2	Total percentage of H2
<i>Cow</i>	119	24.0	31	32.9
<i>Sheep/goat</i>	252	50.0	46	48.9
<i>Pig</i>	109	22.0	15	15.9
<i>Dog</i>	1	0.2	0	0
<i>Horse</i>	1	0.2	0	0
<i>Red Deer</i>	13	2.6	2	2.1
Total	495	99%	94	99.8%

Generally speaking, the same animal species are represented in the houses and on the *acropolis*. The proportions of each species, however, differ completely between the two contexts. In the two houses we see an absolute predominance of domestic animals, which represents almost all the fauna identified in these spaces (House 1: 96%; House 2: 97.7%); wild animals have a very limited presence (House 1: 2.6%; House 2: 2.1%). On the *acropolis*, by contrast, this pattern is completely inverted, with a clear predominance of wild animals, mainly deer, representing 51% of the *acropolis*'s faunal register (Zone A: 39.7%; Zone B: 84.4%), while domestic animals represent only 15% of the total (Hnatiuk 2003: 77). Despite the limited presence of domestic animals on the *acropolis*, the relative proportion among them coincides entirely with what is observed in domestic contexts, ovicaprids being the most common species, followed by bovines and, finally, pig.

The spatial distribution pattern that we can infer from the different *acropoleis* reveals that most of the documented remains are associated with areas of combustion, mainly hearths but also simply burnt areas (Di Rosa 1999; Guzzone 2009; Palermo *et al.* 2009). In Monte Polizzo this pattern is clearer around structure A2, a rectangular building formed by large sandstone blocks (2.05 x 1.02 m) that has been interpreted as an altar because of its shape and the evidence of burning on its surface (Morris *et al.* 2002:

46). On the same *acropolis* 2089 faunal remains were recorded, with clear evidence of burning, although only 248 fragments were identifiable (less than 5% of the total). Most of these were antlers and teeth, with only a small number of long bones.

The high incidence of these specific animal parts brings us to another interesting feature of these faunal remains: the partial representation of the animal. Most of the remains documented on the *acropolis* at Monte Polizzo come from the head and the extremities, mainly hoofs, the presence of long bones being scant relative both to the foreparts and hindquarters of the animal. This virtual absence of remains of the more edible animal parts, which have more caloric and nutritional value, suggests that the activities related to dismembering—and probably also cooking—predominated on the *acropoleis*. Meat consumption on a large scale seems to have taken place outside the central area of the *acropolis*, either in domestic contexts or in the open areas adjacent to these settings, where the audience that lacked access to the main platform during ceremonial celebrations would be placed.

The same pattern of activity can be found in other centers, such as Polizzello (see Palermo *et al.* 2009). Faunal remains from the most edible parts of the animal have not been recorded in large numbers on its *acropolis*. Grill-hooks found in several pits, however, suggest that the

cooking of meat had a certain cachet in the recurring ceremonies held on the *acropolis*. It is also interesting to note the discovery in the first level of Structure E (second half of the 8th century BC) of three extremely sharp lithic tools deliberately deposited around the central hearth (Pappalardo 2009: 130). The precise position of these objects points to the importance that animal dismemberment and later animal cooking had in these ceremonies, or at least in the parts of these ceremonies.

Although there are no detailed faunal records for the other *acropoleis*, the importance of animal dismemberment and cooking during successive celebrations in those spaces may be inferred through a generalized pattern that seems to reproduce the one witnessed at Monte Polizzo. Regarding this, it is interesting to note the considerable presence of faunal remains around the hearth and several structures interpreted as altars, for example, at Polizzello (Palermo *et al.* 1999) and Sabucina (Guzzone 2009), as well as inside numerous votive pits, as happens at Colle Madore (Di Rosa 1999) and Polizzello (Palermo *et al.* 2009).

This faunal pattern tells us about certain collective practices carried out repeatedly during the ceremonies developed on the *acropoleis*. Unlike the ceramic record, however, which points directly to collective consumption in these settings, the faunal remains documented on the *acropoleis*, or at least at Monte Polizzo, suggest that meat consumption was less localized. According to the faunal record, animal dismemberment and cooking took place on the *acropolis*, as well as possibly a small amount of meat consumption, if we take into account the modest presence of long bones. As with drinking, sharing the same animal meant participating actively in creating a sense of community. The transfer of shared meat consumption to other spaces, however, broadened this construction of collective memory into other areas of settlement. The diversification of meat consumption, however, and especially the execu-

tion of the various acts involving the animal, also would have worked actively in the creation, exhibition and legitimation of the social and power differences that existed within the community.

Eating at Home, Feasting on the *Acropoleis*

Other vessels recorded on Sicilian *acropoleis*, although unrelated to drinking alcohol or meat consumption, also tell us about feasting practices. Most of these vases, as with the drinking paraphernalia, represent a material culture and, by extension, patterns of use and consumption very similar to those recorded in contemporary domestic contexts. This similarity is clear evidence of the close link between the domestic and ritual spheres in these ceremonies.

Connections between the domestic sphere and the *acropoleis* are revealed by the distribution patterns on the *acropoleis* of those materials deposited after cleaning the site, as opposed to those where activity ended suddenly. This is best represented by contexts at Montagnoli and Colle Madore. In the mid-7th century BC, a fire swept through the ritual complex of Montagnoli, leading to the complete and accidental destruction of Structure 7 and yielding the only context with materials *in situ* that we have on a Sicilian *acropolis* (Castellana 1990; 1992). Unlike the usual pattern of materials from these spaces, vases found inside this building show a clear predominance of closed shapes, mainly locally produced table amphorae and jugs, while open shapes were only represented by a few bowls with impressed decoration (Castellana 1992: 267). Two large bowls (0.50 m and 0.43 m in diameter), a globular storage pot and a large *pithos* were also found in the same context (Castellana 1990: 329).

Somewhat later, at the beginning of the 5th century BC, Structure 1 at Colle Madore was also destroyed by fire. Among the *in situ* materials inside this space was a considerable number of large storage vases, including two *pithoi* of

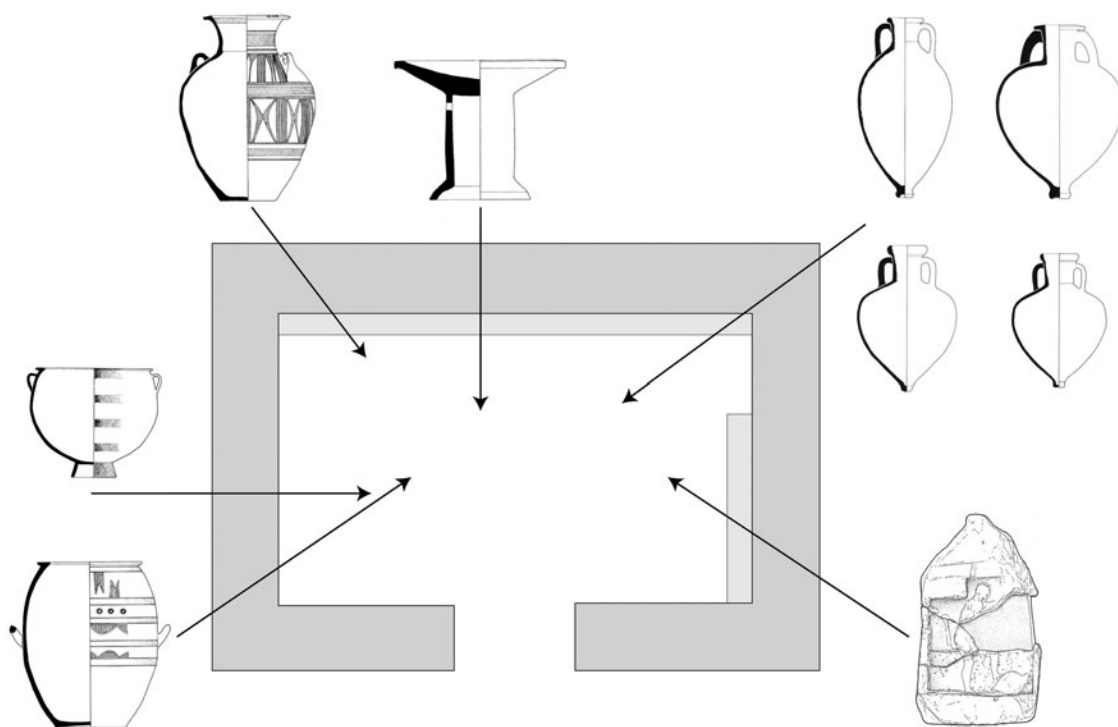


Figure 7. Material found *in situ* inside Structure A at Colle Madore (from Vassallo 1999: fig. 77).

local production and four imported amphorae (two East-Greek, one Samian and one Corinthian type A). Other finds from the same space include a local crater, one *louterion*, two East-Greek *lekythoi*, one mortar, one grill-hook, one spearhead, one iron billhook and a small stele bearing an anthropomorphic representation. In this particular case the predominance of large receptacles strongly contrasts with the complete absence of drinking vessels, which are widely documented everywhere else on the *acropolis* of Colle Madore (Vassallo 1999: 40-54) (Figure 7).

The different patterns presented by cleaned contexts and by those where objects were found *in situ* suggest that most of the vases intended for alcohol consumption at these celebrations were items provided by the participants themselves, probably belonging to their household property. By contrast, large containers seem to be possessions of the *acropoleis*—immovable objects located permanently in these spaces,

such as two *pithoi* found anchored in the ground of the second use-level of Structure A at Polizzello, ca. 700–600 BC (Tanasi 2009b: 9), and only transferred and/or discarded during the remodeling of these spaces.

Tanasi (2009a: 51) has proposed the same interpretation for the occupation layer of the North Building at Polizzello (9th century BC). Based on the suggestion that small clay supports were used to hold flat base cups, he argues that the considerable difference in quantity between these objects and the number of cups could be due to the fact that the former were part of the property of the *acropoleis*, while the latter belonged to the participants in these ceremonies. Regarding this assumption and its application to other sites, we may cite the strong heterogeneity, both typological and decorative, in drinking vessels from all of the *acropoleis*, both locally produced and, in later phases, imported. These formal differences could be due to the fact that these vases belonged to

the individual participants in these ceremonies or, by extension, their households. In that case, although the act of eating the same food and drinking together establishes bonds of solidarity and creates a sense of belonging to the same group, the differences among the vessels serves to construct, legitimize and reify social distinctions that may have existed among these participants.

This possible personal or household contribution can also be suggested for other vessels whose use relates to food, although in this case specifically to preparation. Although cooking pots are poorly documented on the *acropoleis*, they are nevertheless a constant occurrence on all *acropoleis* throughout their occupation. A particularly important vessel type in this regard is the *pignatta*, a cooking-pot with a conical body, more or less oblique walls, a flat bottom and two lumps of clay as knob-handles. This vessel is typical of indigenous Sicilian communities for the slow cooking of food, mainly cereal porridges, during the entire first millennium BC. It is widely documented in native domestic contexts (e.g. Spatafora 2003; Albanese Procelli 2005; Mühlenbock 2008), as well as in some Sicilian colonial situations, both

Greek (Vassallo 2002) and Phoenician (Delgado and Ferrer 2011b). Because of their simplicity and formal diversity, these handmade vessels are usually regarded as objects produced within the domestic sphere by those members of the family group—particularly certain women of the household—who take care of the daily cooking (Albanese Procelli 2005) (Figure 8).

The presence of *pignatte* on the *acropoleis*, their formal variety and the fact that most of them show evidence of having been previously used suggest that this kind of vessel, too, was brought to the *acropoleis* by some of the participants for the rituals performed there. This possibility becomes more plausible when we compare the size and volume of the *pignatte* documented in domestic contexts with those recorded on the *acropoleis*. This is an analysis that today can only be done at Monte Polizzo. Different *pignatte* registered in domestic contexts present a diameter that ranges between 13–34 cm (Mühlenbock 2008: 85). The same pattern appears on the *acropolis* of Monte Polizzo, where those *pignatte* fragments whose diameters can be measured present quite similar dimensions to those used in the household, with diameters that generally range between 12–36

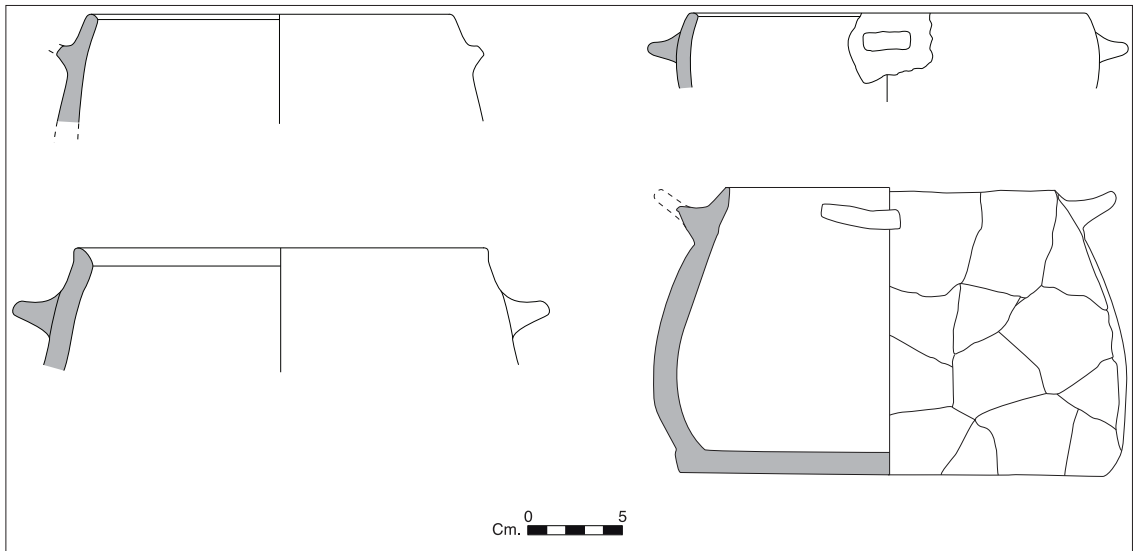


Figure 8. Some *pignatte* from the *acropolis* at Monte Polizzo (Ferrer 2012: fig. 8.18)

cm. In particular, of the 69 *pignatte* recorded on this *acropoleis*, 64 have a diameter that fits perfectly within the pattern documented in domestic contexts (92.25%), with only five pots on record that are larger (7.25%), having diameters between 42–48 cm and whose production and use could be considered as exceptional. The very close resemblance between the *pignatte* found in both contexts—domestic and ritual—suggests that the pots used in communal celebrations may have been brought from the homes themselves. These objects were probably taken along by the same individuals who used them in a domestic setting, that is, by the women who regularly cooked for the domestic groups that made up these settlements.

The possibility that some objects, principally those related to the consumption and preparation of certain foods, were brought by the participants themselves points to a close relation between the domestic and ritual spheres. The fact that participants could bring vases and vessels used regularly in the domestic sphere, and therefore of wide social access, reinforces the idea of equality and solidarity built into these ceremonies. Nevertheless it also materializes (for example, through the kind of vases used) the social differences and power dynamics that existed within these communities.

Conclusions

An analysis that considers ritual not as a mere religious manifestation but also as an action allows us to grasp the social and political dynamics of the Sicilian people during the first half of the first millennium BC. Likewise, a contextualized study of these *acropoleis*, as well as the successive ritual ceremonies that took place on them, enable us to highlight the agency of local populations and to demonstrate how these people—through their selection and appropriation of certain external elements and/or objects—endowed them with new meanings consistent with their own historical contexts,

social and political discourses, local practices and, especially, their understanding of the world.

In this case, the study of feasting practices during ceremonies on the Sicilian *acropoleis* clearly demonstrates the existence among these peoples of a continuum between the domestic and ritual spheres. In fact, the importance of collective commensality practices in the construction and legitimization of different processes of identification, both centrifugal and centripetal, do not seem to reside in the extraordinary nature of these events but, on the contrary, in the emphasis on and ritualization of one of the most important of daily actions: the act of eating and drinking together, in the same place and at the same time.

The accentuation and ritualization of this act, fully recognized by all participants, allowed all of them—regardless of age, gender, status or social class—to understand and accept immediately the idiosyncrasies of this act. Just as with the daily meals, feasting wove bonds of solidarity and represented an idea of community that joined together the various participants of these events, as well as the different households to which they belonged. Yet through other features of the same practices, such as the order of service, the amount of food or the part of the animal received, the kind of vase used and the position of each of the participants, the social and power differences that existed within the community were negotiated, constituted and represented. It is important, moreover, to note that the emphasis placed on these activities, the sensory dimension of food itself and its elaboration in spaces that were permanently visible to those who resided in these settlements, enabled the extrapolation, in time and in daily life, of the distinct identifications and dialectics of power created in the development of these ceremonies.

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Notes

1. In this paper I use the term 'acropolis' to refer to areas devoted to the recurring celebration of communal ritual ceremonies located in the most visually conspicuous areas of the Sicilian native settlements during the first half of the first millennium BC. The choice and use of this Greek word are made with full awareness of its strong historical, archaeological and, above all,

ideological connotations. On the one hand, I want to maintain the word traditionally used by archaeologists and, particularly, by people who currently live close to these sites to refer to the highest points of these hilltop settlements. On the other hand, I want to highlight the strong polysemy of words—and also of material culture, for that matter. This is one of the main issues in the study of cultural contact in general, as well as in this paper in particular.

2. In recent years several studies devoted to the ancient Mediterranean have revealed the complexity of the colonial phenomena as well as the existence of other histories that move beyond grand colonial narratives, enabling native populations to recuperate much of their agency. For other Mediterranean areas see, among others, Dietler 1995; 2005; 2010; van Dommelen 1998; Tronchetti and van Dommelen 2005; Delgado 2010; for Sicily see Antonaccio 2001; 2004; 2005; Spatafora 2009; 2010; Hodos 2006; 2009; 2012; Ferrer 2010; Domínguez Monedero 2012).
3. Up to now only one grape seed, probably of wild type (*Vitis sylvestris*), has been recorded in a household context at Morgantina; it is dated between the 10th–9th centuries BC (Leighton 1999: 244). The first domestic grape (*Vitis vinifera*) was found in Zone B's dump at Monte Polizzo, dated ca. 550–525 BC (Morris *et al.* 2003: 56).

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