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Modelling Regional Networks and Local Adaptation: West-Central Sicilian Relief Louteria

Andrew Farinholt Ward

- 1 Despite the crucial role played by the movement of objects and artists in the crosscultural exchange so characteristic of the Iron Age Mediterranean, modeling these networks has proven difficult. West-central Sicily, a territory roughly separated from the eastern portion of the island by the Imera meridionale, is an ideal case study thanks to the proximity of independent indigenous (Elymian and Sikan) and migrant (Greek and Phoenician) polities. Whereas previous network analyses utilizing ceramics contend with unwieldy large samples, and sculptural or architectural exchange is often limited to the anecdotal, an ideal yet underutilized corpus is the region's "cylinder stamped" terracottas (Fig. 1).¹ Noted as a characteristic feature of the region's terracotta production already in 1884,² examples brought to light in excavations have since demonstrated that the technique was popular and readily adapted outside of the major Greek *apoikiai* of Selinus, Akragas, Gela, and Himera. In a dissertation-in-progress, I argue that careful analysis of the reliefs themselves and the archaeological assemblages of the terracottas on which they are found across western and central Sicily offers an unparalleled opportunity to track transcultural mobility and local appropriation.³ Through this, we may begin to move beyond anachronistic theories and develop a more nuanced understanding of how communities in "colonial" areas were connected through sub-elite mobility and exchange.

Fig. 1. Basin rim fragment with processional frieze of Sphinxes and Pegasi, from Gela

Author photo

Theoretical Framework

- 2 Despite the complexity of this contact zone, the prominence of the Greco-Roman classical tradition skewed study of ancient Sicily decidedly towards the Greek *apoikiai*. For the Phoenician and indigenous peoples of Sicily, Thucydides' simplifying account of the island's pre-Greek peoples remained the primary frame of reference; the author's definition of these groups only by their relation to the Greeks has persisted in modern scholarship.⁴
- 3 The resultant narrative is now familiar. As Greek identity — and modern concepts of ethnic superiority — were integrated into various European national debates, the attendant popularity of Orientalism and Imperialism further distanced the Phoenician and indigenous “other.” Greeks were the benefactors of the benighted indigenous and Phoenician populations through the process of Hellenization. An intellectual reassessment began with the collapse of European colonies across the world, with classical archaeologists and art historians beginning to argue that the preceding model was a figment of the imperial imagination. The postcolonial approach that developed saw multicultural regions such as west-central Sicily as a place of contested meaning and hybridization.⁵
- 4 Postcolonialism is still very much thought of as new theory for the field, as indicated by recent publications like Gabriel Zuchtriegel's *Colonization and Subalternity in Classical Greece*.⁶ In reality, both Hellenization and Postcolonialism suffer from the same fundamental issue, subscribing to what has been described as “colonial dualism.”⁷ While postcolonialism recognizes alterity, it still assumes originally homogenous cultural groups. Even as it acknowledges hybridity, the theory assumes that there is some original pure “Greek,” “indigenous,” and “Phoenician” identity from which heterogeneity may arise.
- 5 The globalist turn has similarly flattened our discussion of regional dynamics. Network theory from Horden and Purcell's now influential volume to Irad Malkin's *A Small Greek World* promote concepts of Mediterraneanization and Glocalization that preference global phenomena over local specificity.⁸
- 6 Rather than simply furthering this debate, the dissertation summarized in this notice seeks to challenge the very paradigms upon which these contentions are based. Scholarly consensus in recent years reconstructs ancient identity as far more fluid than colonial dualism allows. Communities across the region enjoyed a complex network of

associations that often did not follow abstract boundaries, and the evidence for the coexistence of multiple sub-elite identities within polities continues to grow. To understand the complexity of these associations, one must focus on the objects themselves. The distribution and resultant adaptations of “Greek” material culture across the region, rather than showing allegiance to an abstract concept of Mediterranean identity, was a means by which communities in western and central Sicily could promote local difference by making subtle changes to shared regional material culture.

Modelling through cylinder matrices

- 7 Systems analysis and assemblage theory have been applied to questions of transcultural exchange with some success in the western Mediterranean and in western Sicily particularly. The difficulty arises in determining an appropriate sample group of material culture. Focusing on formal typology as the metric for such analyses is the fundamental limitation. Small geographic samples cannot replicate the high degree of contextual variation across western Sicily, while larger geographic samples collect such large numbers of objects that fine-grade analysis is cumbersome, and connections are difficult to prove.
- 8 Rather than formal typology, this dissertation focuses on surface, and specifically the use of cylinder stamps across west-central Sicily. Cylinder matrices (Fig. 2), used by craftspeople to create continuous friezes across the terracotta surfaces, were especially popular in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Large terracottas with such reliefs were traded and adapted irrespective of cultural boundaries in Greek, Elymian, Sican, and Phoenician communities. The stamps, with figural, vegetal, and abstract iconographies, were used on the surfaces of what might be considered “terracotta furniture,”⁹ ranging from the common footed basins to altars, trapeza, pithoi, wellheads, and sarcophagi.

Fig. 2. Lotus and Palmette cylinder matrix, fifth century BCE, from Gela, workshop assemblage

Photo. Orsi 1906

- 9 Whether inspired by Corinthian or Cretan production, the continuous reliefs across the region conform to a distinct style. Impressed terracotta fragments appear prominently in the collections of major international museums and the galleries of regional museums.¹⁰ Their regional specificity was such that, when Paolo Orsi sent characteristically Sicilian material to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, he included five fragmentary terracottas impressed with the most common cylinder frieze iconographies.¹¹ Despite this popularity, and dozens of newly discovered fragments, scholars still largely rely on a single article by Nunzio Allegro from 1982.
- 10 The very nature of cylinder matrices makes them excellent for modelling networks of regional distribution and adaptation. A cylinder matrix, over hundreds of uses, will continue to produce the same stamped frieze with consistent measurements that can be identified with a more consistent surety than a painter's hand. To create a new matrix, a craftsman need only roll a soft clay cylinder along an impressed surface. When fired, this new matrix will contract and be of a slightly smaller dimension, allowing for the reconstruction of distinct generations. This process may be seen in three fragments found at Phoenician Mozia impressed with progressively smaller friezes of Nereids bearing the arms and armor of Achilles (Fig. 3). It is often easier for a craftsman to travel with matrices rather than to transport heavy objects, like terracotta sarcophagi, and so the appearance of identical impressions at both Agrigento on the coast and Monte Raffe (Fig. 4) in the island's interior speaks not only to trade, but also of human mobility on the part of itinerant craftspeople. Comparison of hundreds of impressed fragments identified to date allows us to precisely reconstruct the variety of associative networks that connected the communities of west-central Sicily.

Fig. 3. Three basin rim fragments impressed by three succeeding generations of the Nereids bearing the armor of Achilles iconography, from Mozia

Author photos and drawings

Fig. 4. Sarcophagus fragment with chariot and Nike frieze, Monte Raffè

Author photos and drawing.

Distributed serial production

- ¹¹ For brevity's sake this notice summarizes the results of analysis only in terms of cylinder reliefs found on terracotta "louteria."¹² The variety of subject matter for these reliefs is strikingly homogenous, and may be broken into more than twenty categories ranging from the quadriga and Nike composition with dozens of distinct series to the surprisingly infrequent depiction of Herakles. These impressed basins were traditionally thought to have been produced in the major production centers of Selinunte and Agrigento, with more limited production at Imera and Gela. This production would then be distributed into the hinterland, where it might be reproduced in occasionally barbarized styles.¹³
- ¹² Even the distribution of this coastal production was less regimented than the colonial model would suggest. A louterion rim with a Selinuntine lotus relief found at Monte

Saraceno in the heart of Agrigento's "territory" is one of many examples of trade in these terracottas that does not conform to the traditional boundaries drawn by modern scholars.

- 13 The inclusion of materials newly excavated from interior sites, as well as from regional storerooms, further complicates this narrative. The quadriga and Nike iconography appears at roughly two dozen sites (Fig. 5, 6). On the surface, its distribution seems to corroborate the control of the Greek apoikiai over a *chora*. Yet, if we look at the actual reliefs, a narrative of local production becomes clear. From sites including Monte Raffè, Monte San Nicola di Butera, Manfria, Monte Saraceno, Vassallaggi, Gibil-Gabib, Sabucina, Terravecchia di Cuti, San Angelo Muxaro, and even Phoenician Mozia, we find reliefs variations on the standard iconography ranging from the subtle to the extreme. Unsurprisingly, it is the most distinctly Greek elements, the Doric framing elements, the Nike, the framing patterns, that become abstracted, or that are deleted entirely. The Greek quadriga is at times replaced by the Italic biga, and other deviations from the Selinuntine and Agrigentine "standard" demonstrates that an important element of local production was the ability to reference regionally popular motifs while still retaining a demonstrably local flair.

Fig. 5. Louterion fragment with chariot and Nike frieze, from Selinunte

Author photo

Fig. 6. Selection of louterion fragments with local adaptations of the chariot and Nike iconography

Author photos

- 14 A survey of the available unpublished and published relief fragments from the island's interior reasserts the prominence of centers like Vassallaggi and Terravecchia di Cuti in distribution networks independent from the major coastal urban centers. At Vassallaggi, imported series from multiple Greek centers is found alongside locally produced iconographies in styles both consistent with and divergent from those imports (Fig. 7). Vassallaggian series are found at many nearby indigenous sites as well. They reproduce iconographies that would resonate with this audience, with the representation of aristocratic deer hunts especially popular (Fig. 8).¹⁴ Terravecchia di Cuti to the north seems to have played a similar role as a central node in interior distribution networks.¹⁵

Fig. 7. Louterion fragments with combat scene (left) and stylized animal procession (right), from Vassallaggi

Author photos

Fig. 8. Louterion fragments with hunting frieze, from Vassallaggi, Capodarso, and Gibil-Gabib

Author photos

- 15 That Phoenician Mozia imported impressed louteria by the dozen from both Selinunte and Agrigento is well known, but we may also note examples of local production including the aforementioned quadriga series, as well as a lion-smiting scene whose closest parallels are in Phoenician depictions of Melqart (Fig. 9).¹⁶

Fig. 9. Louterion fragment with lion smiting scene, from Mozia

Author photo

- 16 The local variation that characterizes cylinder relief production over the sixth and fifth centuries comes to an end sharply in the fourth century. Changing tastes favored the use of multiple small relief, and western and central Sicilian production becomes largely indistinguishable from that of the east. Differences between coast and interior lessens, to the extent that identical reliefs are found not only in Gela but also at fourth century fattoria at Manfria, Monte Raffè, and Monte Dessusino. It is no surprise that this trend coincides with the destruction of coastal Greek settlements, major shifts in indigenous demographics, and the formalization of hegemonic control by Carthage and Syracuse across the island.

Context and function

- 17 A key component of understanding the popularity of the impressed louterion across the region of western and central Sicily is the appreciation of its adaptability through contextual analysis. Differing assemblages across localities is the only way to recognize variance in the reception of formally similar objects, while louteria that share sharply divergent forms or iconographies in geographically distant contexts may be used in a similar manner. For footed terracotta basins, scholarly consensus suggests that in Greek contexts they could be used as basins in domestic and civic contexts for bathing (becoming louteria) or for ritual lustration (becoming perirrhanteria).
- 18 Analysis of the available contextual information from the Greek *apoikiai* supports this theory, although earlier in the sixth century basins are found almost exclusively in ritual contexts before being found across sacred and domestic contexts in the fifth century. Contextual analysis in “non-Greek” communities is essential, as the assemblages that louteria are found in suggests that these “Greek” objects were transformed and

translated to conform to local practice, just as the reliefs on their surfaces were adapted. The earliest impressed louteria are found in indigenous-style house shrines, as at Monte Saraceno and Sabucina, where they stood in for traditional basin forms (Fig. 10). They could also appear in novel contexts as in Vassallaggian grave assemblages.¹⁷

Fig. 10. "Indigenous" production louterion, Sabucina, Settore D.

Photo Guzzone, Panvini, and Congui 2008

- 19 At Mozia, relief-impressed basins appear in the most distinctly Phoenician ritual site — the *tophet* — as well as part of assemblages in the Kothon sanctuary recently excavated by La Sapienza, and in large numbers around the shrines marking the entrance to the settlement at Porta Nord. The importance of water in Phoenician ritual is well known, but the appearance of burning on fragments, not only at Mozia, but also at several sites across the region, suggests alternative uses for these large terracottas.¹⁸
- 20 Traditional analysis and the digital humanities Combining formal and iconographical analysis with a more archaeological approach allows for these terracottas so characteristic of the region to be seen in a new light. Rather than being “Greek” objects, whose distribution across the island can be used as a metric for Hellenization, hybridization, or another modern term, these terracottas and their reliefs are markers of a diverse web of relations. Understanding the full extent and variability of these networks is difficult, and the relatively large dataset invites analysis with modern digital techniques. To understand the full extent of the distribution, a kriging analysis of our data sample modeled through a global information systems (GIS) was performed. Using the Geostatistical Analysis plug-in in QGIS’s ArcMap software,¹⁹ a map is developed that indicates that cylinder-stamps were distributed and adapted across western Sicily in what indeed appears to be a multimodal network. Studies of Greek imports in other regions have utilized this approach to great success, best exemplified by Justin Walsh’s reconstruction of Attic fine wares in France and Spain.²⁰ The resultant maps show not

only how distribution in certain areas of the interior followed major topographical features like river valleys, but also highlights the disparity between the high production and consumption in the interior east of the Monti Sicani and the areas of the Belice valley traditionally associated with the Elymians.

- 21 Statistical and graphic means of visualizing the dataset can produce similarly provocative results. Simpson's Index of Diversity has proven to be especially efficacious in the comparison of variation at many sites concurrently,²¹ and while our dataset at slightly less than one thousand attestations is on the smaller side we may conclude from the preliminary results that production was diverse at both major centers like Agrigento and Selinunte and secondary centers like Gela and Vassallaggi. Graphically, the complexities of the network work particularly well with Small-world analysis,²² and allow us to visualize the multi-nodal nature of west-central Sicilian production, as opposed to binary colonizer-colonized relationships predicated on the assumed power of Greek "spheres of influence."

Conclusion

- 22 The local diversity attested to in this region as evidenced through formal, contextual, and digital analyses should not be confused with local independence on all levels of regional interaction. There is not space in this summary to discuss the larger issues of political domination and ethnic affiliation that integrated the polities of western and central Sicily as peers or subordinates. However, the networks of terracotta production reconstructed here give us insight into the "sub-elite" associations of trade and itinerancy that connected communities even as the many conflicts evident in our literary sources raged across the island over the sixth and fifth centuries.

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ENDNOTES

1. While using a cylinder matrix, and thus not a stamp in the traditional sense of the term, the phrase appears in Anglophone scholarship largely as a translation of the Italian (Allegro 1982; Pieraccini 2003).
2. Kekulé 1884, 46–50.

3. Transculturality is used here in the sense promoted by Fernando Ortiz and championed by Monic Juneja. While “intercultural” or “crosscultural” implies the simple transition from one well-defined culture to another across a liminal point, transculturality properly conveys the heterogeneity of real-world society and the variance in local contexts within circuits of exchange.
4. Thucydides 6.2; Asheri 1992, 603.
5. Tusa 1962; Sjöqvist 1973; Loomba 1998; van Dommelen 1997, 305–323.
6. Zuchtriegel 2017
7. De Angelis 2003, 145.
8. Horden and Purcell 1999; Malkin 2013a; Malkin 2013b. For discussion of the dangers of suppressing regional difference through globalizing theoretical frameworks like Mediterraneanization, see particularly Morris 2003.
9. The term “terracotta furniture” is used here specifically, but the corpus is also referred to as “terracottas” in brief elsewhere in the text. Terminology is crucial here as it has important hermeneutic implications (discussed at more length in the dissertation). Here, the terms are used in order to follow the categorization by the Soprintendenza of louteria as terracotta.
10. Examples of these relief fragments can be found within the display of Sicilian materials at the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, The Louvre, The Badischen Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, the Martin-von-Wagner Museum, the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, and the University of Auckland collection, to name a few. They appear prominently also in the regional museums of Sicily, as well as at the Museo A. Salinas in Palermo and the Museo P. Orsi in Syracuse.
11. Sorge 2010, 82.
12. The term “louteria” is used here in its most neutral sense. For a discussion of the terminology and interpretation of this shape, see Ginouvès 1962; Iozzo 1981; Pimpl 1997; and Krauskopf 2005.
13. Allegro 1982, 135.
14. For the popularity of deer-hunting and aristocratic hunting in Sicily across cultural boundaries, see Marconi 1997, 1071–1120.
15. For a brief reference to some fragments, see Vassallo 2015.
16. There are several iconographical parallels for the rearing lion and smiting figure in the wider Phoenician diaspora. Combat scenes with lions were prerogatives of the gods and of kings, appearing most famously in Assyrian iconography most but also reproduced in the public arts of the Levantine city-states. A long running series of coins produced in Sidon reflect this, depicting on their obverse a smiting king, sometimes identified as the Persian Great-King and at other times identified as the Priest-King of Sidon or the mythical “King of the Sidonians,” grappling with a rearing lion. The line between living political leaders and the Phoenician pantheon was often blurred in both epigraphy and representation in the context of the eastern mother cities.
17. Orlandini 1998–1999, 309–310.
18. This hypothesis was first proposed by Ettore Gabrici in a seminal 1946 article (Gabrici 1946, 5–29). While his thesis was generally not followed in later scholarship, the impact of the article was such that still to this day in museums louteria fragments are often identified as, “bracieri.” Burning is attested on fragments from Mozia, Sabucina, and Selinunte, although it is often not clear if the burning was from primary use or from damage during or following deposition.
19. Banerjee, Carlin, and Gelfand 2004.
20. Walsh 2014, 134 ff.
21. Walsh, 102 ff.
22. Watts and Strogatz 1998, 440–442.

ABSTRACTS

The consumption and adaptation of Greek material culture by non-Greek peoples in ancient western Sicily, and the wider Mediterranean, has been an ongoing point of contention in scholarship: do Greek objects influence the peoples that use them, and by their movement and trade are these objects and their figured surfaces active agents of Hellenization? Acknowledging that framing future discussion through postcolonialism only perpetuates the anachronistic colonialist model, this dissertation applies the materialist theory of transculturality to an understudied class of terracotta objects distributed and adapted through Ancient Sicily: *louteria*, *arulae*, and other ritual furniture impressed with cylinder-roll matrices. This announcement summarizes the results of an interdisciplinary methodology combining technical and iconographic analyses of the stamp series, reconstruction of the then-stamped terracottas' contexts, and spatial and statistical modelling of their distribution patterns. This holistic approach to material study reveals a highly complex network of exchange, adaptation, and local production in sixth and fifth century Sicily far more dynamic than the simple binary of colonizer and colonized.

INDEX

Keywords: Hellenization, network analysis, cylinder stamp, terracottas, *louterion*, *arula*, relief

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