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Ritual Communities and Local Identities in Iron Age Sicily

Introduction

Shared meanings, symbolisms and material culture between various Mediterranean populations have allowed particularly the extended worlds of Greece and Rome to be regarded through the lens of the contemporary idea of globalisation. Globalisation refers to the current sense of global compression in which the world is increasingly regarded as a coherently bounded place. With today's world technologies and communication abilities, it has become much more difficult for states or cultures to avoid the consequences of a sense of one-placeness that has been generated by the increased volume and decreased dissemination time of money, goods, people, information, technology and images[1].

The idea of globalisation may be anathema to scholars of the ancient world today, though, for we have been schooled by the postmodern movement, which has emphasised diversity. The variety of approaches to articulate different aspects of the social past - like gender, age, class, or individuals as agents - is one facet of the wider postmodern movement, which has been prevalent in Western intellectual thinking since the 1980s. The name itself - 'postmodernism' - implies a development beyond the modernist framework of metanarratives and world systems. In contrast, postmodernism emphasises the fragmentation of these former master narratives to articulate diversity, otherness, and, as a consequence, the local, so that pluralities can be placed alongside each other without hierarchical distinction[2], and give voice to those who were previously labelled in modernist discourse as ‘the other’.

The social and microcultural diversities highlighted by postmodern scholarship seem to direct us away from a single world or systemic view of the world toward a more fragmented outlook that accentuates collective individualities - groups of varying size - that diverge from the socio-cultural metanarratives. This would appear to stand in sharp contrast to globalisation, which is actually a process whereby the world increasingly becomes seen as one place and also encompasses the processes in which we are made conscious of this idea of one placeness[3]. While it might seem so, this is not a contradiction in perspective. Rather, this seeming discrepancy between postmodern diversity and contemporary concepts of globalisation is a misunderstanding of the nature of globalisation, which should not be taken to imply that there is a unified world society or culture[4]. Instead, we should consider two aspects of the process of globalisation. The first is that any global culture is comprised of sets of practices, or bodies of knowledge, that transgress national or cultural ideas. But shared practices are not the same as identically replicated practices, and this is the important element. The regionally diverse expressions of Greek culture across the areas of the Mediterranean the Greeks inhabited nevertheless still maintained a number of shared traits, beliefs, customs and practices that allow us to conceive of a global Greek culture while also acknowledging regional variations.

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[1] FEATHERSTONE 1995, 81. For an extended discussion of the applications of globalisation theories to the ancient world, see HODOS 2010.

[2] LYOTARD 1984; HARVEY 1989; FEATHERSONE 1991; 1995.

[3] ROBERTSON 1992.

[4] FEATHERSTONE 1995, 114.

The second aspect of the process of globalisation is that one result of growing intensity of contact and communication at the global level can be a clash of cultures, which leads to heightened attempts to draw the boundaries more strongly between different groups. Thus, changes that take place as a result of intensified contact may also provoke reactions that seek to rediscover particularity, localism and difference. This is, in fact, one of the paradoxes of the process of globalisation: that, instead of cultural homogeneity, it actually serves to highlight and reinforce cultural heterogeneities[5].

Usually, a local culture is perceived as being a particularity which is the opposite of the global, although this is not always the case. Rather, a sense of local belonging returns us to ideas behind community identity, which may be but are not exclusively physically bounded. Instead, it is the taken-for-granted, habitual and repetitive nature of the everyday culture of which individuals have a practical mastery[6] that creates a sense of social belonging. Within a globally-engaged community, these may include reinterpreted ideas and materials that originated externally but have blended with existing customs, traditions, and forms, alongside indigenous continuity. More, the sense of distinction from others often can be found in identifying what makes the other, and many societies have defined themselves explicitly by contrast with others, with the unifying elements instead serving as the substratum rather than as the highlighted elements of unified identity. The Greeks distinguished themselves from others based upon language, for anyone who did not speak Greek was a barbaros, a distinction has given rise to our term barbarian to mean someone who is uncivilized (although this is actually closer to Roman notions of the differences between Romans and non-Roman)[7]. Nevertheless, when defining what it was that made the other, past cultures were at the same time defining themselves and their own identities: what made them them. This was replicated in practice by individuals through their choice of material items of use, religious beliefs and actions. Town planners, architects and their patrons articulated it through the forms of buildings they designed and constructed. Classical authors recorded it in their written histories and described it in their literature, though which it was played out for audiences to share.

Local and global Sicily

So in one sense it can be argued that globalisation produces an emphasis on diversities in local contexts. This process can be seen very clearly in Sicily between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE (fig. 1). This is the period of Greek and Phoenician colonisation on the island, and these foreigners had a profound impact upon the various Sicilian populations, who adopted and adapted many elements of Greek culture, in particular. At the same time, however, a strong adherence to certain traditional elements by the Sicilians can be seen during this period, aspects that may be regarded as a mechanism of shared expression of identity articulated expressly as a result of and in contrast to characteristics shared with the global Greek culture. One example of this is the development in architecture associated with Sicilian religious practices. The heterogeneity of building forms and the material culture of ritual may be interpreted as reflections of the localised practices that developed in individual communities as part of that community's engagement with discrete conditions while at the same time it was interacting in more global cultural arenas.

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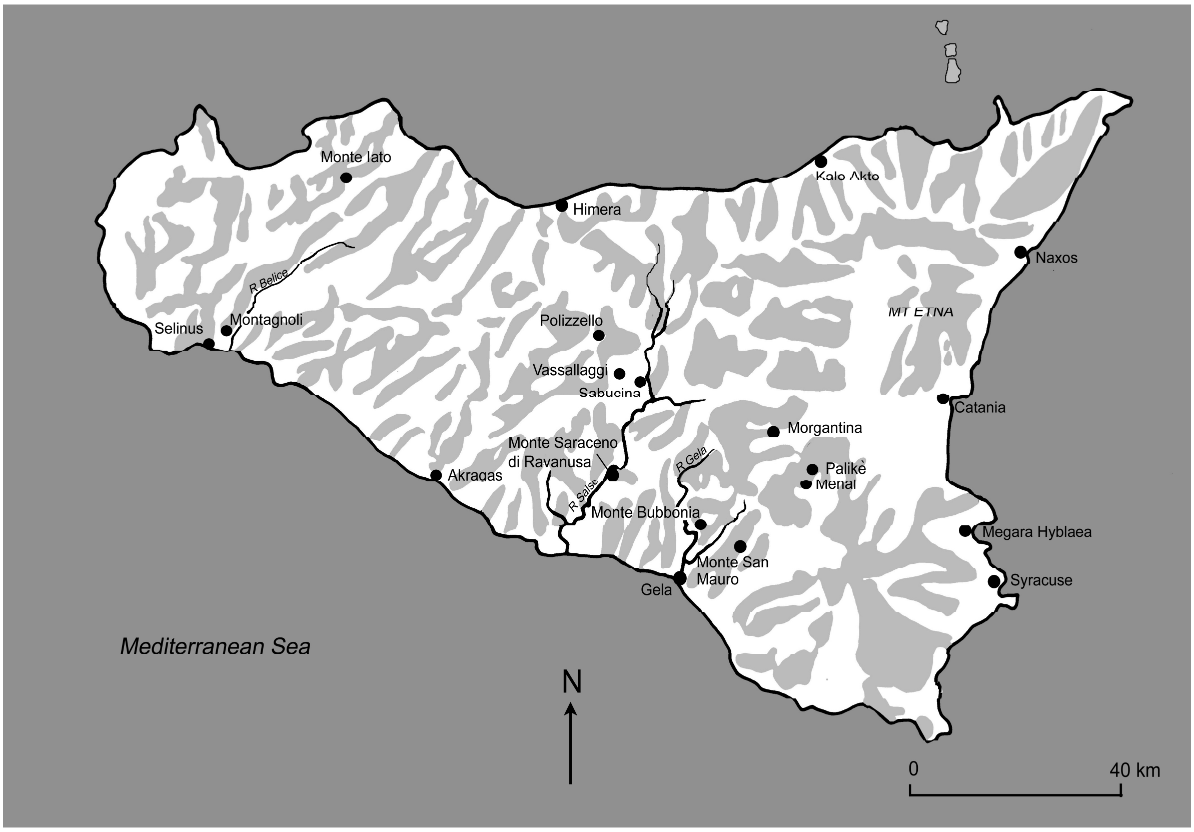
[5] HODOS 2010; papers in HALES, HODOS 2010.

[6] BOURDIEU 1977.

[7] E.g. HINGLEY 2005, 61 with references.


Monte Iato
Himera
Kalo Akto
Naxos
MT ETNA
R Belice
Selinus
Montagnoli
Polizzello
Vassallaggi
Sabucina
Catania
Morgantina
Monte Saraceno
di Ravanusa
Akragas
R Gela
R Salso
Palikè
Menai
Monte Bubbonia
Megara Hyblaea
Monte San
Mauro
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Mediterranean Sea
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Fig. 1 - Map of Sicily with sites mentioned in the text.

Circular structures had been the characteristic building form of Bronze Age settlements throughout Sicily, and they continued to be used by the Sicilian populations during the eighth and seventh centuries, even among recently-founded Sicilian settlements. Round structures have traditionally been called huts when translated into English, but their internal area sometimes far exceeds the square houses used by the Greeks. At Montagnoli in western Sicily, for instance, they range from 12.5m^2 to 19.6m^2 (fig. 2). At Polizzello, in central Sicily, the circular houses had an area of c. 18m^2, while those at nearby Sabucina ranged from 12.5m^2 to 28m^2. In contrast, the early square house forms at Naxos, Syracuse and Megara Hyblaea, at 4m x 4m square, were only 16m^2 in area[8].

During the sixth century BC, many communities began to adopt more formal urban elements that were already widely in use in the Greek colonies. Monte Saraceno di Ravanusa, in the hinterland of Gela, is one such example (fig. 3). Originally, the settlement had consisted of circular houses, some of which were quite sizeable and may have served a religious or community function. During the sixth century, the settlement was redesigned with a more regular layout of multi-roomed rectilinear houses constructed along orthogonal roads. The lower terrace was organised with regularised blocks along major avenues and minor cross streets. A city wall encompassed the lot[9].

Monte Bubbonia, another hilltop site, strategically placed to manage the valley routes down to the Gela plain, also underwent rapid transformation during the sixth century in the adoption of aspects of Greek urbanism. A more formal, orthogonal layout was designed, encompassed by a city wall and accessed through a

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[8] HODOS 2006, 100–101 with references.
[9] CALDERONE *ET AL*. 1996.

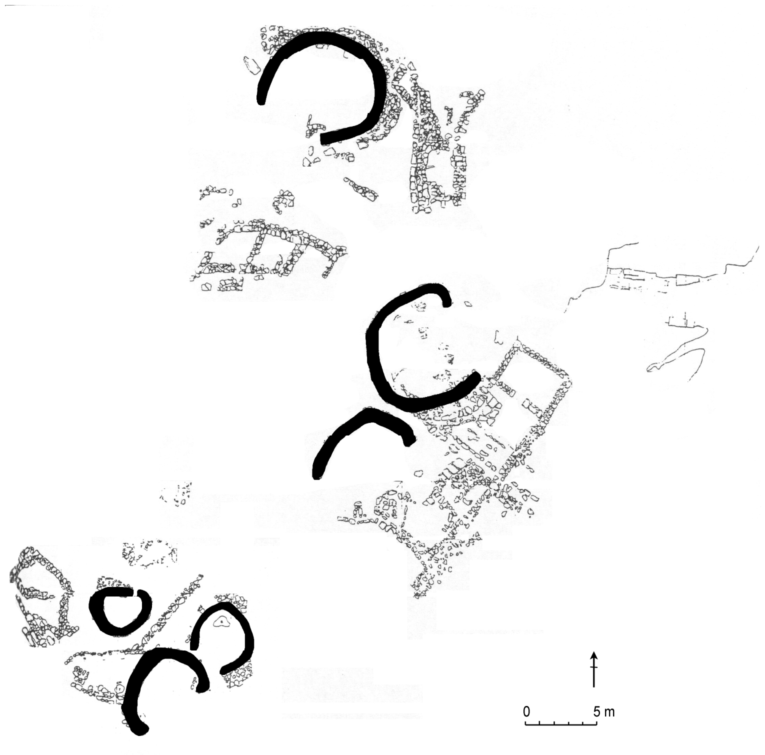

Fig. 2 - Circular houses at Montagnoli (HODOS 2006, fig. 3.5, modified from CASTELLANA 2000, pl. 25).

major artery[10]. Monte Iato, Vassallaggi, Sabucina, and Morgantina also were redeveloped during the sixth century to include city walls, and large and narrow streets divided into blocks. Granted, the development of a city wall implies a period of perceived threat and tension to result in a necessarily defensive construction, but previously settlements had been able to successfully defend themselves by their planned geographical setting: high hilltops with restricted access. The addition of a city wall, therefore, while no doubt serving a defensive purpose, must also be interpreted as an expression of urbanism and urban development, which alongside orthogonal layouts represent accepted expressions of contemporary urban traits that arise from engagement with the colonial Greek and ultimately the global Greek arenas.

At Monte Saraceno, one of the new sixth century buildings has been identified as a temple (fig. 4). Its plan is rectangular and bipartite, and the remains of two portable altars and a terracotta statuette of an offerant holding a piglet from nearby implies a strong influence of Hellenic practices. This temple utilises a particular Greek architectural form known as oikos, a rectangular plan with an entrance along the short side of the solid wall. Oikos itself refers to a house which was dedicated to or inhabited by a god. Architecturally, it generally has a closed façade, rather than a protruding antis, but it can have one or more rooms and be with or without a porch. In other words, the basic idea is a simple

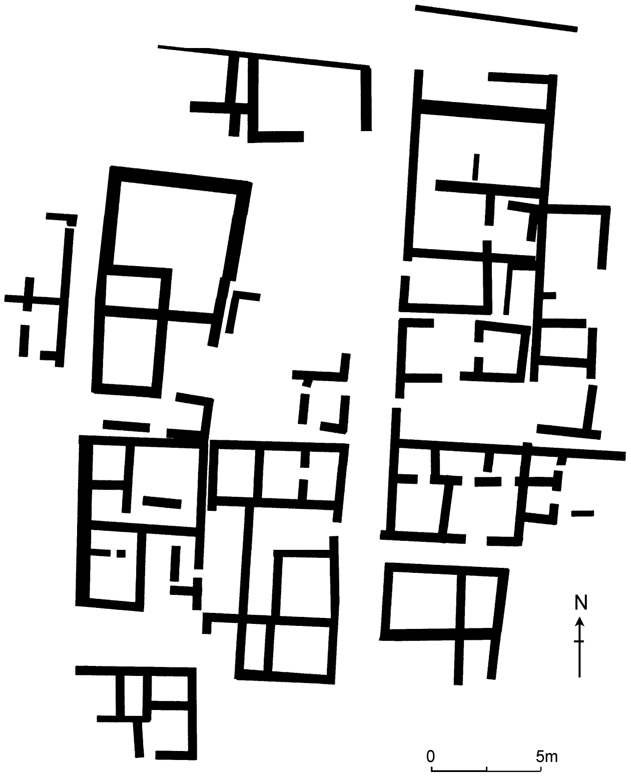

Fig. 3 - Sixth-century town plan of Monte Saraceno di Ravanusa (HODOS 2006, fig. 3.8, modified from CALDERONE *ET AL.* 1996, fig. 5).

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[10] PANCUCCI, NARO 1992.

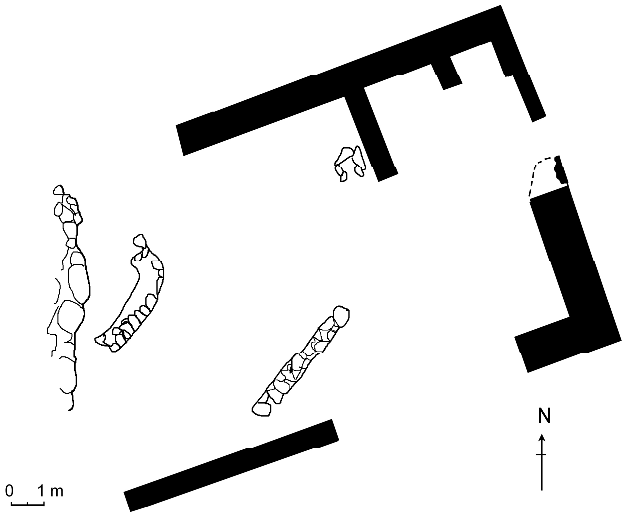

Fig. 4 - *Oikos* plan of Monte Saraceno di Ravanusa (HODOS 2006, fig. 3.9, modified from CALDERONE *ET AL.* 1996, fig. 13).

rectangular building, variously subdivided and without a peristyle. Variations of the oikos form appear in various Greek and non-Greek contexts in Sicily[11]. In some examples, the first room acts like a vestibule, like here at Monte Saraceno di Ravanusa, as well as the South temple at Megara Hyblaea, Temple C at Himera, and the Anaktoron of Monte San Mauro. Elsewhere, however, the first room is bigger and the second room lies deep within the first, functioning more like an adyton, where the cult image is housed in Greek temples. This type can be seen at Building VI at Gela, Tem-ple A at Himera - colonial contexts - the Aphrodite temple at Monte Iato, and the Archaic shrine at Vassallaggi - Sicilian contexts. Yet another variation does not seem to show any such hierarchy in the subdivision of the building, like Building VII on the Gela acropolis, the Archaic shrine of Monte Bubbonia, another shrine on the upper terrace at Monte Saraceno di Ravanusa, or the little temple with spiral akrotiri at Selinus. Again, however, these variations occur in colonial contexts as much as Sicilian ones. This is not to say that explicitly Greek religion was practiced in all of these contexts. Certain elements, however, especially in regard to architecture, were adopted, and this adoption likely reflects the multi-layered nature of interaction and exchange of ideas between the local and global arenas.

The sanctuary at Palike created by *Ducetius*, a Sikel hegemon during the middle of the fifth century, provides another such example. The site itself had been the home of a cult centred around a geyser lake possibly since the Bronze Age, although the specific location of a *sacellum* during the Archaic period suggests that heavenly divinities were worshipped as well as chthonic ones[12]. By the time of *Ducetius*, Palike had become a centre dedicated to the divine Palikoi, twin brothers sacred to the Sikels. It also served as a place where war-spoils could be dedicated, similar to one of the functions of pan-Hellenic sanctuaries in Greece.

A massive banqueting hall, a *hestiaterion*, was constructed at Palike during the time that the associated city served as *Ducetius*' confederation seat (fig. 5). The plan of the core of the building – three rooms on the north side

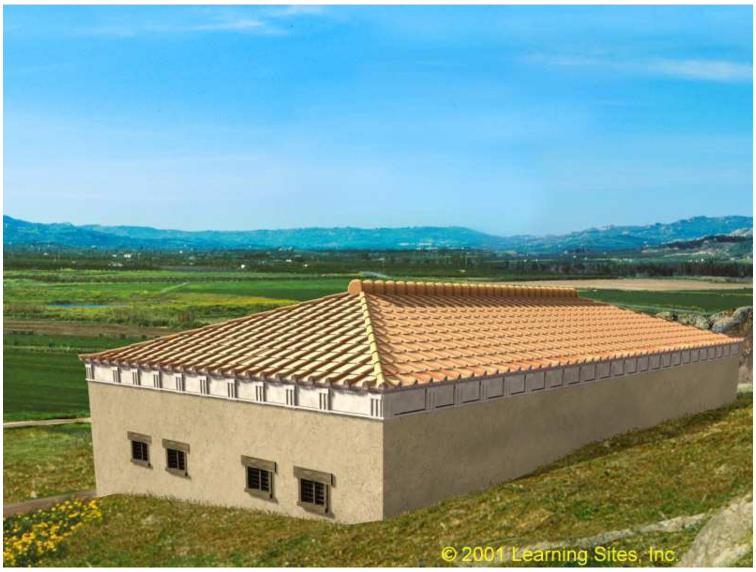

Fig. 5 - Computer-modelled reconstruction of the *Hestiaterion* of Palike (© Learning Sites and reproduced with permission; data provided by the Soprintendenza per i BB.CC.AA. di Catainia, Assessorato BB.CC.AA., Regione Siciliana).

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[11] SIRACUSANO 1989, 55, notes 15 and 16 with references. See also HODOS 2006, 106–107.

[12] MANISCALCO, MCCONNELL 2003.

of a central court - imitates that of the *Hestiaterion* of Megara Hyblaea, with the addition of two extra rooms along the court on the east and west sides. The physical setting of the sanctuary had strong resonance with the Sikel communities, for *Ducetius* aligned the monumental on an axis running from the nearby town of Menai, his own birthplace, through the natural sanctuary of the boiling lakes to the built sanctuary. Concurrently, the expressions of this vision - the architecture itself - resonated with those engaged with the more global elements of Mediterranean culture, especially those cognisant of Greek colonial forms and ideal Greek cultural architectural expressions.

These examples serve to demonstrate that there were varying levels of engagement with Greek ideas. None of these are wholesale adoption of Greek traditions. Rather, within them there are still examples of continuity of traditional Sicilian practices, in terms of religious architectural form and practice, as well as new, hybrid expressions. The boundedness to older forms and ideals, in particular, may be viewed as indicative of a deliberate focus on self-identity that is articulated as a direct and contemporaneous response to the shared traits and practices that have arisen from their engagement on the global Greek level.

In terms of religious architecture, this is reflected most dramatically in the use of circular structures as temples, particularly notable during the seventh and sixth centuries. On the acropolis of Polizzello, a series of circular and semi-circular structures used for ritual observance during the seventh century reflects local cult practice, with votive deposits inside and outside the buildings[13]. The offerings include bone, ivory, amber, turquoise, and silver jewellery, eastern Mediterranean scarabs, figurines made of bronze, bone or clay in the form of rams, bulls and dedicants, and ceramics of traditional Sicilian and Greek types. Bronze and iron knives found may have been used in the ritual sacrifice of animals, which is attested by herbivore jawbones and deer antlers. These particular religious structures are distinguished from previous circular buildings by their larger dimensions, for these had internal areas of $50m^2$ and $78.5m^2$. The sacrificial rams and bulls and the variety of votive offerings suggest broad-based cult practices, probably chthonic in nature, and the presence of loom weights, weaving tools and a crude lamp imply the participation of women. That a number of expensive imported objects were dedicated - notably the silver, turquoise, ivory and amber, the scarabs - suggests a local elite that was not only wealthy enough to afford such objects, but also was cognisant of and participated in Mediterranean-wide notions of value. During the sixth century, other rectilinear structures were constructed on the *temenos*, replacing the circular ones. Nevertheless, the use of large circular buildings for cultic practice here during the seventh century is significant as it reflects a considered continuity with the past tradition of circular architecture that by this period has been elevated specifically to religious structures - and articulated by their immense size, which would have been psychologically imposing as much as practical to support the community. This is echoed by circular shrine models from the area of the necropolis of Polizzello, tying the places of worship in the urban contexts to the rituals observed by the graveside in honour of the dead[14].

At Sabucina, the settlement founded during the early seventh century had multi-roomed rectangular buildings organised around yards with integrated drainage channels and water cisterns, which suggests some sort of concerted effort in planning the layout of the settlement, although it was not aligned orthogonally because of its terraced location on the slopes of the hillside, which could not allow for a strictly regular plan. Nevertheless, the settlement was organised to a degree that it had a dedicated sacred area, where one building maintained a circular form and was used as a temple or shrine to a chthonic cult alongside other rectangular structures (fig. 6)[15]. Interestingly, the building itself had a vestibule in antis, the entrance to which was flanked by two columns. Architecturally, it reflects a uniquely local adherence to the Sicilian circular form while adopting the notion of a pronaos of a Greek religious structure.

Even more interesting in this regard are the temple models from Sabucina. One example comes from the area of the circular building[16]. Unlike the real structure, however, the model was of a rectangular temple

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[13] De Miro 1999. See also Hodos 2006, 122–3.

[14] Hodos 2006, 123; De Miro 1988.

[15] Mollo Mezzana 1993.

[16] Sedita Migliore 1981, fig. 58.

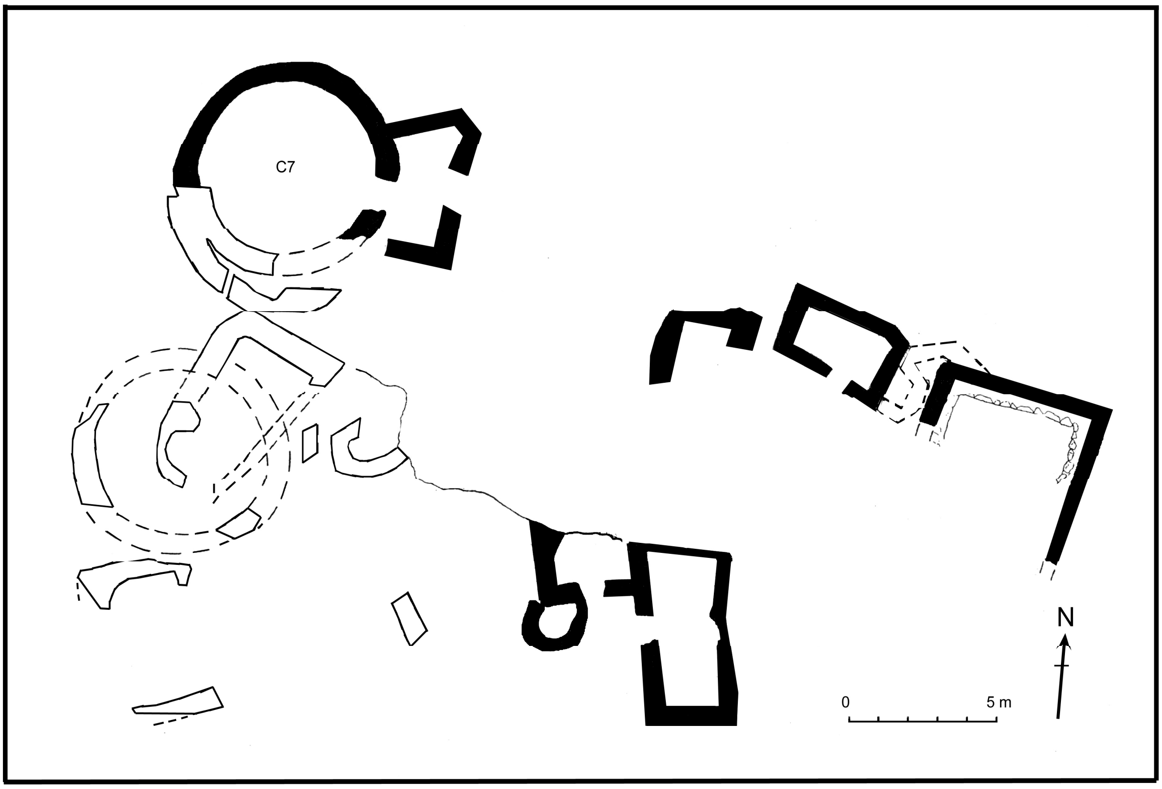

Fig. 6 - Sabucina cult building (C7) (HODOS 2006, fig. 3.20, modified from MOLLO MEZZANA 1993, fig. 10).

mounted on a high-footed circular base. The model temple resembles more closely Greek structures, with two columns in the pronaos; the building itself is decorated with representations of Selinus and a gorgon, and equestrian akroteri sit atop a barrel-shaped roof with painted tiles. In another sector of the site, however, a domestic area, nestled between a house and the city wall, a number of Demeter statuettes were found adjacent to a small shrine, alongside an incense burner, offering cups, bronze jewellery, a ram figurine, and another model temple, but this one of a pitched form, which evokes traditional Sicilian architectural forms.

This raises extremely interesting questions about who was practising what in this context: it has been argued by many that the synergy between Demeter's chthonic nature and the agro-pastoral aspects of traditional religious cults in Sicily facilitated the widespread adoption of Demeter cults in local Sicilian contexts. While synergy between Demeter and other chthonic cults may be accepted, how worship of Demeter was actually practised by them, and if it even was worship of Demeter, is less apparent. Take this Sabucina example, in which we have a locale within a residential area of the settlement where Demeter worship has been interpreted based on the presence of Demeter figurines. The figurines stand in direct contrast with other sacred areas within the settlement, where no other such statuettes have been found. Furthermore, the ram figurine and the circular temple model not just recall but shout out traditional cultic rituals, so one cannot argue that this is straightforward Demeter worship. In fact, it is not clear if the community members utilising this shrine were worshipping Demeter in a manner heavily influenced by local religious traditions, or a local deity for whom Demeter's physical form and attributes had been reinterpreted and reassigned in practice.

Conclusions

Global cultures may be viewed as providing an enabling role to encourage local integration and incorporation in the global arena, and many local populations and individuals were able to capitalise upon global concepts to their own benefit. The example of expressions of urbanism serve as a case in point. Sicilian communities derived inspiration from what they saw in the nearby Greek colonies, in terms of rectilinear house forms, orthogonal road systems, and encompassing city walls. In turn, these concepts were also articulated more globally across the Greek world: virtually every Greek city of the sixth century boasted a city wall and orthogonal layout, and rectilinear homes. Similarly are the variations of oikos temple forms found during this time. These examples all foster a perspective of a Sicily integrated with the Mediterranean, with shared understanding and mutual accommodation.

Equally important, but in the past often little understood or explored, are the occasions in which communities deliberately adhere to traditional sets of material culture and practises. These may be regarded as the articulation of self-identity in response to the shared traits of global practises. One example for Iron Age Sicily is the continued use of circular architecture - one of the primary architectural forms for all building during the Bronze Age and early Iron Age in a number of cases - and which becomes used exclusively and explicitly during the seventh and sixth centuries in some settlements for religious purposes, even when other contemporary buildings, domestic and religious, had adopted more direct Greek forms as part of their processes of urbanisation. This reinforces Sicilian cultural ideals and values, articulated through the use of particular styles and forms that remain exclusive to these communities over time.

This interpretation of concurrent multiple interplay and expression differs from most conclusions about the development of Sicilian architecture, which often frames the argument oppositionally between Greek colonial and Sicilian, arriving at a middle ground to accommodate the hybrid development that expresses equality[17]. While no doubt the single form of something new to both communities - the hybridity element - did emerge, restricting ourselves only to developments that are hybrid masks the multiple layers of engagement between the Sicilian populations and their Greek colonial neighbours, and the Mediterranean world at large. This is not to say that explicitly hybrid developments are not important - they are, extremely - but they need to be contextualised back into the bigger picture, for these kinds of representations represent only one means of expression.

It is the globalisation framework that helps to draw out those multi-faceted interactions within and between various communities in Sicily during this time, especially those that combine elements or adapt elements, rather than just those elements that emerge as a new expression to the involved communities. The case of the residential area at Sabucina with the Demeter statuettes, ram figurine and pitched temple model demonstrates this: here, we have evidence of some form of ritual practice. The cult of Demeter became extremely popular in regions where Greeks were resident, and a degree of culturally mixed communities must be assumed for many Sicilian sites by the sixth century. Yet the elements of traditional cultic practice - the ram figurine and the temple model - reflect continuity of practice. So what role exactly did those Demeter statuettes play in the practice of ritual?

In Punic Sardinia, a series of shrines has been recorded from the interior of the island that were apparently dedicated to Demeter. Their contexts were all previously abandoned nuraghi. Analysis of the associated finds illustrates a mix of objects associated with specifically Punic and Sardinian cult practices, such as incense burners and lamp forms[18]. While elements of similarity to the practice of Demeter cult can be found in these contexts, they are not replicated Greek practices, which suggests reinterpretation of cult, its practice and material culture forms. For instance, the ritual of lighting or offering of a lamp was significant in these contexts, but the type of lamp necessary to perform the ritual act appears to have not been exclusive, and even incense burners may have served the same or similar function. In other words, the original meanings behind the objects were replaced by new significance and symbolisms in the colonial environment. A similar interpretation may therefore be applied to the example of the Demeter statuettes from Sabucina, where they represent a form of ritual informed by the contemporary environment. While this can be regarded as a hybrid form of ritual practice, it has emerged through interplay between the local and global.

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[17] Middle ground: WHITE 1991, 52; Sicilian architecture: FITZJOHN 2007.

[18] VAN DOMMELEN 2006, 119–120.

Such engagement between local and global arenas is probably best highlighted by the often-cited example of Ducetius. During the middle of the fifth century, Ducetius established himself as leader of a Sikel confederation after leading a successful Sikel-Syracusan alliance against Catania in 461 BC as revenge for having stolen Sikel territory (Diodorus Siculus 11.76.3). In 459 BC, he founded Menai, above Palike, redistributing the surrounding territory to his settlers in a manner akin to those of earlier Greek colonists and subsequent Greek colonial tyrants. In the same year, he destroyed the city of Morgantina ostensibly for being too overtly Greek, occupying the city in its refoundation. In 451, he moved against Inessa, and thereby threatening territory in the region of Akragas. In a protective military maneouver, he was forced to flee and did so by entering Syracuse, heading for the marketplace and sitting down in the altars of the gods. He was exiled to Corinth - at the fiscal expense of Syracuse - and remained there for three years, when he escaped and returned to Sicily, pardoned and armed with an oracle from Delphi instructing him to found a new settlement, which he did at Kale Akte.

Ducetius's Hestiaterion at Palike reflects the duality of the global and the local that I have been advocating. War spoils were displayed here and it was a venue for public banqueting. In terms of architectural form, it concords perfectly with contemporary structures throughout the Greek world - especially at Megara Hyblaea. This would have resonated with the colonial Greeks. However, the prominence accorded to the Hestiaterion in its physical setting differentiates this sanctuary from Greek ones, where one might expect a temple to hold such prominence, not a public banqueting hall. But it is this aspect that has significance to the Sikels.

Ducetius's actions themselves also work on multiple levels at the same time. Diodorus's descriptions of his deeds match exactly those of an oikist or tyrant, as noted by many, for he obtains foundation oracles, refounds cities, and parcels out lands. His actions are, in fact, very Greek, albeit in the name of Sikel hegemony, or rather, his actions have been described in a manner that would have been understandable to the readership of Diodorus. Nevertheless, this must indicate some form of action that Diodorus, himself, could recognise. At the same time, Ducetius uses his understanding of Greek ways to manipulate the political situation in Sicily during this time. His return from Corinthian exile armed with a foundation oracle, in particular, demonstrates his deep understanding of Greek myth-politics, heroization and political control, which collectively enabled him to engage with the Greeks through concepts they would understand. In other words, Ducetius in this sphere forms part of the global sense of Greek culture prevalent in Greek colonial Sicily during the fifth century through shared practices. At the same time, his focus on Sikel hegemony provides the counterpoint of globalisation through the articulation of Sikel identity at a local level. The balance between the two is reflected in Ducetius' assimilation of Greek notions and styles, which he then transforms - seen very physically in the architecture of Palike - to result in a reassertion of Sikel identity. The global and the local concurrently come together and pull apart, much like the plural social and cultural tensions prevalent in Sicily throughout the Iron Age.

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