

Infinite Attention to Detail: A Slice of Sicily in the Third and Second Millennia BCE

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More than four thousand year ago, a master craftsman surveyed the painted cups and vessels produced by a workshop and community of artisans in the river valley. This was a workshop less of a specific physical space, although that was certainly required, and more of shared design information across the community of potters and painters. Many of the objects were uniquely painted, others echoed patterns painted on similar pots, and still others attempted to replicate the master's own work; none could achieve the originality and technique his pots displayed. Many of the painted motifs reflected the glorious woven baskets and woven cup holders hanging from hut roofs and common rooms. The pots from the workshop and others like them would find their way to the regular gathering of communities at the head of the salty river, upland from the sea, below the limestone cliffs where the ancestors rested their bones; others were used to hold unguents and other precious materials. Some of the vessels might well have come from another community closer to the setting sun where minerals used for lustral practices were harvested and traded. In the same community the production of pots was organized among a number of painters for each pot. The master potter might know that his vessels would eventually be broken but could not know that one of them would be painstakingly reconstructed from hundreds of fragments during long winter nights four thousand years later to serve as proof of the talents, capabilities, and achievements of these people. With knowledge of the related pots, people millennia later would begin to appreciate the complexity and sophistication of this federation of communities in southern Sicily and would turn to study artisan colleagues farther west on the island.

West toward Agrigento and north to Caltanissetta there were other groups of people related to the master and his fellow craftsmen. In this area families joined other families in small communities, and the relationships grew into federations. They built and lived in villages of huts with

stone foundations; used everyday pottery of cups, jars, and mixing craters and bowls; created and used intricately decorated painted pottery, cups, large storage vessels, and the ubiquitous footed pot; and traded among themselves. They had bone tools, loom weights, and spindle whorls that argue for weaving and manufacture of clothing. Their periodic gatherings, apparently for religious ceremonies, were quite possibly tinged with commercial purposes. When travelling long distances toward the breaking sun some wore a bone-carved amulet suspended from a cord around their necks as a token of identification in a world where people were bound by ties of guest-friendship even if thousands of mile away.

At the site of La Muculufa, the probable home of our master potter and vase painter, the gathering place faced east. Behind it were towering limestone bluffs in whose rock-cut chamber tombs the people and their ancestors were interred. These chamber tombs were prepared well before death by a small group of people whose job it was to cut tombs, and, in a climate in which the body was reduced to a skeleton in a short period of time, they allowed easy reuse of the space for a new body as old bones and grave goods were swept aside. Bronze was known to them although precious enough that it was closely guarded and little of it left behind. Their remains are largely some whole pots and broken pottery, chipped stone tools and a burned bone plaque, the latter clear testimony of travels far beyond Sicily. At La Muculufa the high craftsmanship of the master artist and other artists attempting to replicate his work and the evidence of multiple hands on pots from the group in the Agrigento areas, along with the evidence of sulphur extraction and refining, speak of complex organizations more suggestive of later times or more eastern Mediterranean peoples. West of La Muculufa, Monte Grande, Grotta Ticchiara, Piano Vento, and Ciavolaro in the Agrigento area are some of the recently excavated sites from which we can begin to reconstruct the way of life representative of this

group of sites belonging to the Castelluccian culture, which takes its name from a site southwest of Syracuse excavated by the great Paolo Orsi before 1900.

Centuries later descendants of these people had an elaborate nexus of trading relationships and warehouses specifically designed for commercial purpose. Experience with sulphur mining and the commerce associated with it had propelled them to far more elaborate and long-range trading opportunities such as manufacture, sale, and transport of copper ingots. One community (I Faraglioni di Ustica) on another Bronze Age site, though of slightly later date off the northern coast, developed a fortified citadel complete with dressed stone – evocative of eastern neighbors – on the seaward side. The citadel and the group of houses and shrines located within it show clear evidence of successive destruction and rebuilding; some of the destruction occurred during rebuilding, offering argument of attack or sack. A few standard pieces of pottery served for food storage, cooking, serving, and drinking. A coarse sack-shaped vessel burnt on the inside was probably a stove, with another vessel resting on the rim, its contents heated or reheated by the coals beneath. Pedestalled bowls permitted diners seated on the ground or on the low benches to have their food at a convenient level. The inhabitants in these early days of sea commerce chose the long-standing occupation of pirate, luring vessels sailing north of the island to crash on the shore. Fires lit on the natural stone tower of I Faraglioni suggested at night that the Sicilian coast was quite close; instead shallow rocks off the island captured the vessel and its occupants, allowing the pirates to remove the goods on board, reason enough for future sacking of the site. Counters or jetons speak of a need for “bookkeeping” perhaps dictated by their commerce. Offerings to spirits or gods were made before meals through a hollow ceramic goddess stand-in (*alare*), a very local development whose origins are found on the Sicilian mainland; a miniature *alare* worn on a cord around the neck sufficed for offerings when travelling on a boat. These people evaporated salt from sea water to use medicinally, to tan animal skins, and for dietary purposes. A sculptor fashioned from local stone the only known surviving piece of stone sculpture of the second millennium BCE (Italy, Sicily, and neighboring islands), a standing clothed goddess with upraised arms. She speaks directly of the monumental handles on footed vessels from southeast Sicily. And these folks cast small bronze objects and left other remains showing additional rare but clear examples of contact with the eastern Mediterranean. This was a sophisticated settlement of the late second millennium BCE.

“Historians tell stories. That is their profession. And the goal of storytelling is to impose order on a disorderly array of facts” (Grimes 2007, E9). It is part of the archaeologist’s job to acquire or reveal facts and then to tell a story. The great Scotsman Thomas Carlyle is purported to have said,

“Genius is the capacity for infinite attention to detail.” If there is any single hallmark of a successful archaeologist, whether genius or not, it is attention to detail and the subsequent ability to move from detail or microscopic view to the wide lens in which fragments of history are seen in the context of the whole. Closely identified with an archaeologist’s tasks is the identification and scrutiny of excavation strata, the fall of rocks, and the construction traces left in building foundations and remains, activities that are closely identified with archaeologists’ abilities to interpret events thousands of years ago as well as the relationships within a site and possible relationships to other sites. In addition to analysis of the strata and buildings, close study of other remains yields enormous insight into activities and relationships of the site. The detailed study of these materials and the understanding of them in the context of their times directly develop our understandings of how prehistoric peoples lived, the social organizations they formed, the material goods that display significant levels of achievement, and even some events and activities that shaped their lives. How can we take the often meager remains from prehistoric sites and turn them into a story, an explanation of the past, not a simple catalogue of objects? Some of the material studies discussed here help us do just that, demonstrating how we can reconstruct the lives of people many millennia dead with no written records, how we “impose order on a disorderly array of facts.”

Attempts to understand prehistoric times have existed as long as there has been a curiosity about the events and activities preceding the availability of written records. From the Greek side, prior to the works of Herodotus and Thucydides, Homer’s songs constitute a record, albeit an oral one later transcribed. Homer also has provided us with some remarkable descriptions of daily life and objects, enormously useful in helping interpret remains found from comparable periods. And his work presents strong support for the concept of families becoming villages becoming federations. Homer’s world also knows the process of families.

And this is the village-state of Italy and Sicily, as it was remembered in the Homeric tradition, the Phaeacia of Nausithoos or the town of the Laestrygonians. This is a community where leadership is unstable because leadership belongs to the most dynamic leader in a body of citizen peers. This is a community that is never so large that the every citizen peer cannot participate directly in government. This situation gave vitality first to the village and then to the ancient city-state, and to endure as a city-state, the city-state could never grow past the limits of citizen participation in government. The ancient city-state remained a village. (Holloway 1997, 5)

If we consider later Sicilian prehistory, we see also that our understandings may be based on ancient legend, as in many other fields of later prehistory. In this instance, and from more contemporary times, we have the various fantasies

that have been woven around Daedalos and Cocalus or the migration led by King Morgetes. Heroic legends, Erik Sjöqvist suggests, complete with narrations of specific heroes and their “proper names and specific genealogies and more or less precise geographic indications,” may “very well contain a seed of truth because the oral tradition reaches right up to the heroic age itself, to the Bronze Age of the Aegean areas” (Sjöqvist 1973, 2). In his essay Sjöqvist discusses in detail the evidence of both the legends and the archaeology, reminding us that the absence of archaeological confirmation may simply be a lacuna waiting to be filled by future excavations. His detailed discussion of the myth of Cocalus, the first king of the Sicans, and his relationship with King Minos of Crete and with Daedalus helps to appreciate their possible veracity as well as how the legends came to serve political purposes. In the end, however, attempts to present history based on myth alone simply become pseudohistory. The relationship between current or known historical place-names and myth may be the site to which the myth (story) was attached rather than the site where actions occurred that became mythical.

If myth is a treacherous guide to prehistory, what does archaeology have to offer by itself? Turning very briefly to presentations of Sicilian prehistory based simply on excavated evidence, we see far too many catalogues of objects, divided sometimes into chronological order, sometimes related to specific sites and structures (huts and tombs), and even others to functionality (tools for daily life, vessels for food preparation, or war-faring items). Objects and structures are singled out for comparison with other materials. While these catalogues may purport to offer a reconstruction of the prehistoric period in question, ultimately they are simply a survey of materials excavated with little or no attempt to place the objects recovered in the wider lens required for writing prehistory. The limitations of these approaches may be overcome by meticulous and imaginative, but not fanciful, examination of the material evidence, that is, infinite attention to detail.

Let us focus for a moment on the proposals for the contemporaneous existence of regional federations with sanctuaries put forth independently by Holloway (La Muculufa) and Castellana (Monte Grande). Both proposals are based in large part on meticulous examination of the evidence individually as well as the ability to place all of it in what I call a wider lens of the times. Turning first to La Muculufa and the publication of the excavations of 1982 and 1983, we can see that evidence includes presentation of the excavation, analyses of the structures, pottery, chipped stone industry, fauna and vegetal remains, and radiocarbon dating. Without belaboring the analyses of the individual parts, I offer the summary, dependent on the attention to detail as well as an ability to step back and look at the wider implications based on knowledge derived from other areas.

It requires little imagination to recapture the scene when the folk of La Muculufa and their neighbors from other villages of the Salso Valley associated in the cult gathered under the cliffs of this Sicilian Delphi. The identification of this site as a sanctuary and our hypothesis that it served as the seat of a religious league are not mere speculation. During the rites practiced here, lambs and kids were cooked and eaten. The age of the meat eaten in itself constitutes an important distinction between the sanctuary and the village, where the average age at death of the caprines was noticeably higher.

The study of the pottery also suggests a significant functional difference between the two areas of excavation. The Sanctuary has a high percentage of decorated pottery, and among these are masterpieces of Castelluccian vase painting. Moreover there are close connections, extending to the possibilities of workshop identity, between vessels from the Sanctuary at La Muculufa and the pottery of other Castelluccian sites in the lower valley of the Salso. The same varieties of decoration are not found in the material from the Village. The presumption is therefore strong that among the participants in the cult of the Sanctuary at La Muculufa there were people from other Castelluccian villages in the valley. (Holloway et al. 1990, 17–18)

Supporting these conclusions is the evidence from the floral remains that reveals a clear distinction between the village and the sanctuary and the radiocarbon dates that confirm that the Castelluccian remains of the village and the sanctuary are contemporary. People from different villages in the river valley visited the sanctuary for purposes different from the village life and they did so contemporaneously. And that some of these people travelled far is documented in the discovery of the burned fragment of a bone plaque at La Maculufa (Holloway et al. 1990, 48). Bone plaques (*c.* 10–15 cm long), decorated with a line of knobs occupying the entire length, sometimes emphasized by a steplike design surrounding the object at their base, others bearing a crosshatched background, have been recovered from Troy, Lerna, southern Italy, and Sicily. As Holloway has written,

The home of the plaques is in the Castelluccian Culture of Sicily, where a score of examples is known and one unfinished piece proves local manufacture. The revision of Castelluccian dating made possible by the C14 dates from La Muculufa now places these bones exactly contemporary with the Aegean pieces. . . . The plaques, in the long and universal tradition of amulets and religious medals, may well have been talismans. But along the sailing route from west to east they would also have served admirably as tokens of identification, a protection in a world in which the stranger was shielded only by the gods of hospitality and by men bound to him by ties of guest-friendship. These plaques thus would have played the role of the Masonic ring and the Rotarian’s lapel pin in the commerce of the third millennium BC. (Holloway 1997, 4)

Monte Grande on the south coast of Sicily in the vicinity of Agrigento is a second and larger sanctuary of the same

time frame as La Muculufa. It was excavated by Giuseppe Castellana beginning in 1987 (Castellana 1998). As at La Muculufa, its upper area is defined by similarly constructed terrace walls. Within megalithic walls, Castellana found small terracotta features that he interpreted as sacrificial platforms. The defining artifact of this site is the *cornofittile* or terracotta horn ubiquitous from Castelluccian sites and always interpreted as a fertility symbol. In addition to the horn, idols, alari, and terracotta models of temple huts attest to the sacred nature of the site. Besides his interpretation of the site as a sanctuary, Castellana also proposes that the site was used for industry, specifically for the extraction and refining of sulphur. He presents evidence for the production of sulphur and related activities, including furnaces with remains of waste materials produced by the reduction of sulphur-bearing rock, an ingot of reduced sulphur found in a stratum with Castelluccian ceramics, and even sedimentary deposits of the site that contain sulphur, thus explaining the choice of the site itself. That it is located on a coast with excellent landing capabilities strengthens the possibilities of commercial trade with the Aegean. The combination of a sulphur-refining industrial location with a sanctuary is natural, given the use of sulphur for lustral and therapeutic purposes.

The close connections to commerce are strengthened by the rich array of Aegean ceramics, or those of Aegean type, from the Middle Helladic through Late Helladic I/II present on the site. Imported pottery also included unpainted Middle Helladic ware suggesting that the objects were not traded but rather part of the everyday goods travellers brought with them. The presence of stone and terracotta counters underscores the existence of some system of computation directly related to activities of the site. We need only consider the long history of ritual and commercial sites throughout the ancient world where sanctuaries became gathering places and then subsequently commercial sites. It is fitting that this site's commercial activity centered around a product used in sacred ceremonies, and opens up the considerations of specific routes of this traffic as well as other materials commercially traded in the Mediterranean Bronze Age. Maniscalco (1989) discusses the evidence for Neolithic and Early Bronze Age trade in ocher, a highly prized powder, and her arguments complement those made by Castellana. Indeed both these discussions highlight the need to consider commercial trade for objects beyond the obvious (copper ingots, fine ware), to allow the less obvious and certainly less stable materials such as minerals, oils, and herbs.

Castellana proposes a bold hypothesis about the development of the Thapsos culture, gathering evidence from his and other excavations (Castellana and Pitrone 2000). He argues that the Thapsos culture, a Middle to Late Bronze Age culture, found in the Syracusan region and southern Sicily developed from the Early Bronze Age Castelluccian because of the mercantile mentality acquired from Monte

Grande's contact with their Aegean partners. His volume offers specific details of Aegean, Cycladic, and Mycenaean pottery found in Sicily, from Late Helladic IIB/IIIA discovered in late Castelluccian contexts to Late Helladic IIIA ceramics found in Cannatello in Middle Bronze Age contexts to Late Cycladic IIIA discovered at Pantelica Nord in the phase of Sicilian prehistory immediately following the Thapsos culture.

Castellana weaves a series of excavations and their materials into his proposal for a transition from the Castelluccian pastoral/agricultural society to the commercial Thapsian sites. He suggests that the first contacts with the Aegean world must have profoundly transformed the economic and social character of the coastal, closed communities of the Castelluccians, with an organization based on groups of blood relatives into a transmarine culture open to the mercantile dynamics of the Mycenaean world. In short, he not only surveys the sites and material in detail but boldly and imaginatively places them in the context of the developing world of Late Bronze Age Sicily.

Directly related to the commercial activities discussed is the development of models for pottery production that move beyond the household potter and vase painter to a world of specialization. Within the sphere of La Muculufa is the recognition of the hand of a master potter/painter (Lukesh 1993). While we know too little at this stage to state definitively that potter and painter were one or two, or that they had interchangeable roles as some did in classical Greece, we can suggest, on the evidence available, that some were more talented than others, that some attempted to replicate pots fashioned by a master, that others shared in the attention to very specific decorative motifs, and that the production of painted pots was at times, if not regularly, an effort shared by multiple vase painters in the interests of production. The concept of workshop among Castelluccian potters arose from the detailed study of Castelluccian material recovered from the sanctuary at La Muculufa. This material demonstrates the presence of a very talented "hand" responsible for certain specific motifs and finely crafted painted pottery vessels. The original study of this master considered design composition or structure, including the number and shape of partitions; the basic symmetry and the juxtaposition of specific motifs; the selection and interpretation of specific motifs, that is, form or morphology; and the technical execution of specific motifs including the level of ability and attributes of motor performance (Lukesh 1993, 12). It was argued that "because the style of Castelluccian painted pottery is geometric and leaves less room for individual variation in morphology or technique, the identification of an individual will require our attention to structure or design composition as well" (Lukesh 1993, 13).

The identification of the Muculufa Master takes us closer to an understanding of prehistoric craft specialization and

distribution networks in general and parallels early-twentieth-century studies of classical vase painters. Sir John Davidson Beazley (1885–1970), an archaeologist and art historian, concentrated his studies on Attic vase painting and, with an eye for style and a strong visual memory, succeeded in his goal of isolating individual styles and tying painters and potters to one another. Philippe Rouet offers an analysis of Beazley's development of the concepts of schools, workshops, and circles directly applicable to these concepts in Castelluccian pottery. He quotes Beazley's predecessor Hartwig, "Even if the name of the master who painted the cups . . . is not undisputed, nonetheless, as we shall see, his individual personality will become clearly apparent to us from his works" (Rouet 2001, 96), and acknowledges the handicap faced in understanding the actual production: "even today we are very short of precise information about the conditions in which vases were produced in the workshops of the Kerameikos" (Rouet 2001, 98). That in the twenty-first century we are still somewhat in the dark about fifth-century BCE ceramic production underscores why we are not close to understanding the pottery production in the late third millennium. Yet, with the vase paintings of the Salso River Valley Castelluccians, at least one individual personality comes through, one who impressed some other artisans to emulate his works.

While we may remain in the dark about the actual production of pottery, we can firmly place the geometric design patterns of many Castelluccian vases in context. Rather than argue as Sluga Messina (1983) does for parallel motifs drawn from the eastern Mediterranean, whose very expanse of the area and the lack of precise chronological connections mitigate against drawing any significant conclusions, I have argued previously (Lukesh 1999) that to account for apparently spontaneous appearances of geometric motifs one must turn to common, nonornamental inspiration, such as textiles, basketry, and wickerwork. Clear connections between long-standing traditional basketry and woven patterns not only provides a source for the motifs but also strengthens our understanding of the textiles and baskets available to these people.

Our understanding of prehistoric craft specialization is greatly amplified by study of Castelluccian material from Grotta Ticchiara, excavated and published by Castellana (1997). Here we need simply compare the external and internal designs of footed pots from Grotta Ticchiara (see Lukesh 2006, figs. 15–17). This analysis was facilitated by the development of a digital archive of prehistoric pottery that allows for easy review of images of each item, access to detailed information for each item, selection of subsets of items (based on size, pot shape, site, etc.), and, of critical importance, comparison of up to eight items on a single screen. In essence, this archive facilitates the direct comparison of objects, whether pots or coins. One of the features built into the software allows the selection and

display of like material (based on a variety of variables, e. g., shape, decoration patterns, and assemblage type). Selection of classic Castelluccian footed vases and further display of eight of them on a single page presented some very interesting information. The first three pots show little similarity in the decoration schema or style and technique when we look at external decoration. When we select the second image for interior views, the first three pedestalled pots show a remarkable similarity of the internal decoration, both in overall design, individual components, and reflections of a specific hand. It is possible to hypothesize that while the interiors were painted by one craftsman, the outsides were painted by a series of other craftsmen. Similarly one could hypothesize that the interior mattered and the outside didn't. Both such hypotheses give us a basis for further studies and understandings of the Castelluccian potters and way of life and argue for a complex pottery manufacturing environment.

Evidence for workshops of potters and pot painters who share decorative motifs and emulate one another's work (La Muculufa), as well as for potters and pot painters who split the responsibilities for pot decoration (Grotta Ticchiara), expand our knowledge of the social and economic organization of these people and support the concept of confederations proposed by both Holloway and Castellana for the Sicilian Castelluccian peoples. These examples underscore the criticality of the pottery evidence in understanding the dynamics of the populations, not only as one site relates to another, not only as evidence of food and household goods, but also as evidence of organized social and economic structures and relationships among sites and workers. There remains much to be done with the study of Castelluccian pottery manufacture, which we argue was directly related to the commercialization of the world at that time. If we consider the much later world of Etruscan pottery manufacture, we can see possible parallels to the statement of Nijboer: "I will argue that a redirection of the production facilities is an intrinsic component of the centralization processes occurring in Italy from 800 to 400 BC. They are embedded in the transition from village to town, from communal to private property and from tribal to state formation" (1998, x).

That geometric-painted handmade pottery could be attributed to individual artists, that these potters of handmade vessels and painted decoration might form into workshops, sharing decorative motifs and imitating one another, had not previously been widely considered. While up to this point we've been looking at Castelluccian Sicily, if we consider now some wider considerations of Italian and Sicily prehistory we can see that the attribution of pots to specific artists is a development parallel to the close study of prehistoric pots from Southern Italy. In this effort, the mathematical distinction between Protoapennine and Subapennine pottery was developed in the late 1970s using

material derived from Holloway's excavations at Tufariello (Holloway *et al.* 1975) as well as measurements of other materials gathered during the summer of 1976 (Lukesh and Howe 1978). What it indicated, as Jean-Claude Gardin wrote in a personal note to one of the authors (Lukesh), is "the claims of hand-made pottery to pattern determinants as much as wheel-made." In effect, it was proven that analysis of the measurements of the pots of very similar aspect could determine which group of pots was under analysis. The early and later Apennine potters (separated by close to a thousand years) produced visually similar pots but with finely distinguished, different mental templates, ones that mathematical analysis of measurements is required to firmly differentiate. In other words, those working in the earlier times produced pottery visually similar to but mathematically differentiable from the later material. These results are a confirmation not only of the individuality of the people but also of strong cultural/temporal distinctions underlying the manufacture of the pottery. And, like the attribution of pots to specific hands, are another step in demonstrating the social complexity of these peoples.

Teglie, thin-bottomed vessels with coarse thick walls whose use is not immediately apparent, offer another window on the possible industries of the Late Bronze Age people (full discussion with references is found in Holloway and Lukesh 1995, 33–36). A review of possible uses and like objects brought the conclusion that these vessels, found on an island in close proximity to salt water, were used to collect salt. The *teglie* from Ustica show no evidence of having been placed on the fire, and the fragility of the *teglie* bottoms argues against this, but they do demonstrate sure evidence of having been placed near fire. One examination of salt in a study of economic prehistory (Nenquin 1961) shows how it can be evaporated with the assistance of indirect heat, not requiring a pot to be placed on an open fire. Analysis of the amount of salt available from evaporation, given the size and number of such vessels, shows it was more than adequate for consumption as well as medicine, animals, food preservation, and tanning of skins. In the Mediterranean climate salt is a necessary part of the diet, since an imbalance or absence can lead to death through a rapid evaporation of water in the body causing dehydration. While we cannot know with this evidence alone the use these people had for salt, close study of the vessels and an understanding of their use in acquiring salt lead us to a better understanding of some of the possible industries during this time.

Another example of developing a broader interpretation of an early culture is the study and subsequent analysis of alari. These objects, well known throughout Sicily and the Mediterranean and found in abundance at Ustica and Monte Grande, are named for a device used to hold wood in a fireplace, yet it is clear that this is not the function. For some time they have been referred to as cult or votive objects

with no attempt to suggest how they may have functioned. Efforts following the recovery of a miniature version on Ustica led us to a number of objects recovered in Sicily that helped interpret the history of these objects as well as appreciate their ritual importance (see the final publication of *Ustica II* for full discussion and illustrations; Holloway and Lukesh 2001, 51–53). A female figurine from Camuti attributed to the Castelluccian period has two stubby arms thrust forward and two slight protuberances on the "head," one on each side. Another object, identified as a female alare, no longer has a cylindrical body but a conical body, and has added a handle to its back. Between the two protuberances at the top is a small hole. It is a small step from this figure to the development of the alare as we know it from Bronze Age Sicily. I have suggested that the alare, ubiquitous across Bronze Age sites, easily picked up and set down, open from top to bottom, and continuing in its fashion the long-standing shape of a female figurine, had indeed the commonplace but ritual use of a vessel for offering food to the gods, specifically the outpouring of wine or another liquid before a meal. The miniature alare, worn as an amulet, allowed its wearer to perform a libation, with the familiar goddess shape known from home, perhaps even on the open sea, where carrying the larger alare would be burdensome. That libations could clearly have been made without an alare suggests strongly either the importance of the shape – derived from and evocative of the female figurine – and/or the possibilities of additional ritual activities associated with the alare. Ceremonies associated with the correct positioning of the alare, the order of diverse libations, and even phrases invoked are just a few possibilities that might have enriched the ritual of libation but are lost to us today. There is, unfortunately, at this time no more evidence from which to draw conclusions. And yet, once again, attention to detail has allowed us to move beyond the object to the larger context of the world and the relationships in which it originated.

Round disks made from potsherds were evidently used as counters and routinely found in Bronze Age excavations across Sicily. Such pieces can be used in complex arithmetic operations, and in Europe the counting board or exchequer remained in use well into the seventeenth century. The development of counting using small clay objects modelled in various forms has been argued by Schmandt-Besserat, who helps place their use in the context of the times: "The multiplicity of the counters argues that the first farmers mastered the notion of sets or cardinality but counted concretely. In other words they had no conception of numbers existing independently of measures of grain and animals that could be applied to either without reference to the other" (1999, 191). The quantities found in Bronze Age sites across Sicily, specifically Ustica and Monte Grande, lend strength to the arguments for complex commercial transactions undertaken by these peoples. Those recovered

on Ustica were carefully counted and tied to specific findspots. Numbering close to six hundred, they were recovered concentrated along the row of buildings below the site of the hypothesized ruler's headquarters. Most notably, they also become scarce in the strata associated with the latest phases of the site, the period of siege, capture, abandonment of houses, and frenetic repair of the walls, when administration and record keeping had obviously broken down.

The conclusions drawn from these examples are directly related to the serious attention to details as well as to the use, from initial excavations undertaken by Holloway and Lukesh, of the capture of data in computer format, detailed records tied to find locations, and subsequent analysis. Obviously without the easy digital access to measurements and the use of statistical techniques, the existence of templates for handmade pottery could not have been proven. Without the computer records of fine-grain decoration patterns, the amassing of sherds with like patterns for study would have been far more difficult. And in the example of interior and exterior pottery decoration discussed just above, the digital archive – developed directly from the database used and developed over time – provided the ability to easily pull together like material and display it side by side for easy visual comparison.

Finally, without the record keeping of all objects recovered and their findspots across the site, it would not be possible to discuss the implications where counters are found, for example, or of negative evidence – that is, material whose remains are not found or which are found in far more limited parts of the excavation. Here again the underlying systems augmented the archaeological research. While archaeologists look to make contributions to the larger picture of understandings of prior lives, hoping to write chapters if not books on the social history of mankind, in all cases, this can only be done by the attention to the small and mundane, whether broken pots turned into counters, or undecorated pots, whose measurements demonstrate three thousand years later their common bonds, or geometrical motifs, whose individual parts and workmanship speak of a common hand. I end this piece quoting the man we are honoring in this volume:

[W]e must also avoid limiting our vision of the past only to the surviving material evidence without acknowledging that the objects are also pointers to technology – and thus to verbally transmitted knowledge – to traditions – and thus to social continuity – to both utility and display – and thus not only to the working life of a community but also to creativity and the diplomacy of men's relations with neighbors and gods at home and foreigners over the horizon. To keep in mind what is superficially missing in the physical record but was present in its creation opens our eyes to many things that in a literate society would be recorded but that with the judicious use of imagination can be recaptured even in the absence of the written word. (Holloway 2000, 2).

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