

5 MATERIA E ARTE

Alessandro Pace

Immagini di Gela

**Le necropoli e il profilo culturale
della *polis* tardo-arcaica.
I materiali della collezione
e del predio Lauricella**





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Tecnografica Rossi

Ai miei genitori

«Da mia madre: [...] la semplicità di vita e l'avversione per le abitudini dei ricchi. [...] Da mio padre: [...] l'indifferenza verso quelli che sono considerati onori; l'amore per il lavoro e l'assiduità»

MARCO AURELIO, *Pensieri*, 1.3-16.

«E Johnny entrò nel ghiaccio e nella tenebra, nella *mainstream* del vento. L'acciaio delle armi gli ustionava le mani, il vento lo spingeva da dietro con una mano inintermittente, sprezzante e defenestrante, i piedi danzavano pericolosamente sul ghiaccio affilato. Ma egli amò tutto quello, notte e vento, buio e ghiaccio, e la lontananza e la meschinità della sua destinazione, perché tutti erano i vitali e solenni attributi della libertà».

BEPPE FENOGLIO, *Il Partigiano Johnny*

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Prefazione

The past few years have seen a renewed scholarly interest in the cemeteries of the poleis of Sicily during the Archaic and Classical periods, including new excavations and the publication of earlier fieldwork. In the first category comes the work led by Stefano Vassallo on the cemeteries of Himera, including the remarkable finds from the Western Cemetery, such as the burials associated with the battle of 480. The present book by Alessandro Pace on the predio Lauricella Cemetery in Gela fits into the second category, which also includes the study by Claudia Lambrugo of the other cemetery of Gela at the Borgo and the work by Roberta Salibra on the 1972–1973 excavations by Paola Pelagatti in the Passo Marinaro Cemetery at Camarina.

The Lauricella Cemetery is located in the western half of the Vallone di S. Ippolito, a depression between the Borgo Cemetery to the east and the Capo Soprano Cemetery to the west. Used for funerary purposes primarily from the end of the sixth to the middle of the fifth century, this relatively small piece of land belonged, toward the end of the nineteenth century, to a local notable, Emanuele Lauricella, who conducted a series of excavations in the area – some in concert with British archaeologist Arthur Evans – which led to the formation of a private collection of antiquities. Ironically, Lauricella was a member of the Commissione Comunale di Antichità established in Gela in 1891, but he apparently did not see any conflict between these activities, forbidden by a law dating back to the early nineteenth century, and his own role of controller of the local archaeological heritage.

In 1900, Paolo Orsi, the first officer in the archaeological service of Sicily to take serious action against the looting of Gela's archaeological heritage, acquired the Lauricella Collection for the Syracuse museum. This was followed, in January–February 1905, by Orsi's archaeological excavation in the predio Lauricella, which led to the discovery of several new tombs.

This book presents a new, detailed examination and thorough interpretation of the archaeological evidence from the predio Lauricella, including both the materials from Lauricella's private collection, now in Syracuse, and the results of Orsi's excavations. Pace's new study, which required a significant amount of work in the archives in Syracuse (the one of the "Paolo Orsi" Museum and the one of the local superintendency), adds considerably to the evidence published by Orsi in his 1906 monograph on Gela, starting with the determination of the detailed topographical location of this funerary area.

This reassessment of old and new evidence allows Pace to provide a fresh, new interpretation of the predio Lauricella Cemetery, which is key to our understanding of the development of funerary practice in Gela between the Archaic and Classical periods. The special significance of the predio Lauricella Cemetery in this regard comes from the particular location of this funerary area within the general topography of Gela, which, as already suggested by Orsi and now confirmed by Pace, appears to be transitional, both topographically and chronologically, between the mainly Archaic cemetery of Borgo and the mainly Classical cemetery of Capo Soprano. From a larger historical perspective, this period of use of

the predio Lauricella Cemetery corresponds to dramatic changes within Gela's society, including the end of an oligarchic regime, the rise of tyrants, and an aggressive policy of territorial domination in eastern Sicily which led to Gela's prominent role on the Siceliote political stage, through the efforts of, first, Hippokrates and then Gelon and the Deinomenids. As such, the evidence from the predio Lauricella Cemetery through the new interpretive work by Pace contributes to a better understanding of the development of funerary practices and more generally of the society and culture of Gela at a critical stage in its development.

Regarding the general picture of the cemeteries of Gela, Pace's work, together with that of Lambrugo, offers a more nuanced image than the one put forward by Orsi more than a century ago. Thus, in terms of chronology, the critical reexamination of the evidence from the Borgo, Lauricella, and Capo Soprano cemeteries shows that we should avoid a rigid dichotomy between an Archaic phase, represented by the Borgo Cemetery, and a Classical phase, represented by the Capo Soprano Cemetery. If it is true that most burials at Borgo date from the Archaic period, some belong to the later Classical period, and the reverse is true for Capo Soprano. Similarly, there are tombs from predio Lauricella earlier than the late sixth century and later than the mid-fifth century. This more complex picture shows how within Gela's society, not everyone participated in the westward progression of occupying land for funerary purposes, including the "jump" in the mid-sixth century that led to the area of Capo Soprano. We have to take into account the possibility that some members of the population emphasized their local ancestry, burying their relatives in the Borgo Cemetery well into the fifth century. Another important nuance introduced by Pace vis-à-vis Orsi concerns the plausible identification of elite burials in the area in and around the predio Lauricella, which speaks against Orsi's suggestion of the exclusive use of Capo Soprano for aristocratic burials in Gela between the sixth and fifth centuries.

Concerning specifically the predio Lauricella Cemetery, the detailed new analysis of the evidence from the Orsi excavation allows Pace to formulate a number of hypotheses concerning the topographical and social organization of this funerary area, including the division of the land into family plots, the existence of pathways connecting the different areas of the cemetery, the location of the burials of higher status in proximity to the main east-west avenue running along the ridge of the Gela hill, and the presence in this last area, which gave access to the cemetery, of a place rich in votive materials (pottery and coroplastics) pointing to rituals (involving the use of perfumes and the consumption of alcoholic beverages) directed to the dead and/or the chthonic deities. These activities would not have taken place, in the predio Lauricella Cemetery, in correspondence with individual tombs but rather in this communal area.

In terms of demography, one of the main contributions of Pace's new study is pointing out the low number (32 percent) of sub-adult burials attested in the predio Lauricella Cemetery, which finds comparanda in other Greek centers on the island but is

very different from other cases (such as Himera) where subadult burials account for 50 percent of the total, more in line with pre-industrial societies.

Probably the most interesting contribution of this new study by Pace concerns social history, particularly the significant changes that one sees in funerary practice between the Archaic and Classical periods.

Considered first is the heterogeneity in the orientation of the bodies and the relative expensiveness of the burial rituals (including an increased use of incineration in comparison with Borgo) and offerings (generally quite poor in Gela, except for Attic vases) attested in the last quarter of the sixth century. This trend is convincingly explained by Pace as reflecting social competition among the members of the local elite, arguably the same rivalry that led to the end of the oligarchic regime, with the rise to tyranny of Kleandros in 505.

This is followed by an opposite tendency toward standardization in the placement of the bodies and less expensive burial forms, including a sharp decline in the use of incineration and a further reduction of grave offerings. This new trend takes place in the first quarter of the fifth century. It is a dramatic change that Pace links with the establishment of the new tyrannical regime, which would not have been keen on social ostentation on the part of members of the elite, including in the funerary sphere.

This general picture of change at the transition from the sixth to the fifth century, emerging from Pace's new analysis of the evidence for funerary rituals and grave offerings, is somewhat reflected in the subjects featured on the Attic black- and red-figure vases from the predio Lauricella Cemetery. In particular, there is a decrease in the number of images featuring warriors and horsemen, both easily understood as markers of high status, which are documented in far larger numbers within the imagery of the predio Lauricella Cemetery before the close of the sixth century. This aspect of Pace's analysis belongs to a new, welcome trend in the study of Greek painted vases, which, far from being limited to connoisseurship and to a narrow focus on the intention of the painters, looks at the wider reception history of the vases, starting with their use and meaning at their final, ancient destination. This is worth saying because, in fact, connoisseurship occupies a significant place in this book, particularly in chapter 6. Here Pace reviews the status of scholarship concerning each of the painters whose hands are identified in the vases from the Lauricella collection and the cemetery – especially Attic black- and red-figure vase painters – and contributes to the discussion through new attributions or new suggestions concerning already attributed vases, as in the case of the Painter of Syracuse 19861, whose work is reassigned to the Ethiop Painter. However, on the one hand, Pace is fully aware of and takes into full account recent discussions about John Beazley's method, from both within and outside traditional connoisseurship. And on the other hand, Pace does not let connoisseurship be a means to its own ends.

Obviously, particularly regarding sociohistorical analysis, a fair amount of interpretation is in order in this study, and in the case of Gela, an additional problem comes from the very limited amount of information provided by literary sources concerning the political history of the city in this period, besides a handful of names and dramatic events. Yet this is precisely the value of Pace's study, which, through its combination of different

methodological perspectives, from connoisseurship to sociohistorical analysis, contributes significantly to our understanding of Gela at a critical juncture of its history.

A study of an ancient cemetery in Gela offers an opportunity to discuss the systematic looting to which this site has fallen prey since the eighteenth century – especially after Unification – and the efforts by Orsi to fight against it. After Orsi's strong words stigmatizing this phenomenon in his monograph on Gela, it could hardly be different. Archives are, of course, the best resource for investigating this aspect of the archaeology of Gela in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Pace has made good use of documents in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome, the Archivio Storico Comunale in Gela, the Archivio Storico of the Superintendency in Syracuse, and the Sir Arthur Evans Archive in Oxford.

Especially important in the case of the predio Lauricella Cemetery are, first, the private, illegal excavations carried out by the owner of the land, a plague documented on the island since the eighteenth century and which became illegal after the promulgation of ad hoc legislation by the Reign of Naples in 1822.

Next comes, starting in 1887, the purchase of vases and other antiquities from the Lauricella and other local collections (including those owned by Nicola Russo and Aldisio Saunito) by Arthur Evans, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, in search of Greek vases to implement the collection in Oxford. This effort included, in 1890, an excavation undertaken with Lauricella on his land.

Evans decided to focus on Gela, taking a cue from George Dennis, the British consul in Palermo, who in 1863–1864 procured for the British Museum around three hundred objects excavated in the Scicolone property, not far west of the predio Lauricella. This was accomplished by abusing Britain's power on the international stage vis-à-vis the new Italian state and through bribery, a "legal" yet despicable job that should never be forgotten by those who care for the protection of Sicily's rich cultural heritage and about which Pace can add significant new documentation from the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome.

By 1897, Orsi was systematically involved with the supervision of the antiquities of Gela, including, in 1900, the mentioned purchase of the Lauricella Collection for the museum in Syracuse. This was the result of a complex negotiation (started in 1894) between Orsi and Lauricella, the various steps of which Pace has managed to reconstruct in detail with admirable clarity through archival sources, including a detailed catalog of the objects made by Orsi. The same goes for Orsi's fight against the illegal excavations then widespread in Gela, mainly directed against Russo. The reconstruction of this activity through archival sources allows Pace to highlight the careful approach taken by Orsi in dealing with the plundering of Gela's archaeological heritage, highlighting his deep sense of duty, his strong advocacy of the law, but also his pragmatism when required by the situations.

This volume represents the most recent chapter in the long-standing relationship between the Università degli Studi di Milano and the archaeology of Gela, initiated by Piero Orlandini and continued with renewed energy by Marina Castoldi and Claudia Lambrugo. Gela's rich archaeological heritage certainly deserves such attention, and we can hope that the future will see further studies as important as this work by Pace.

Clemente Marconi