

Frerich Schön und Hanni Töpfer (Hrsg.)

# KARTHAGO DIALOGE

Karthago und der punische Mittelmeerraum –  
Kulturkontakte und Kulturtransfers  
im 1. Jahrtausend vor Christus



RESSOURCENKULTUREN Band 2



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PAOLA SCONZO

# The Archaic Cremation Cemetery on the Island of Motya

## A Case-Study for Tracing Early Colonial Phoenician Culture and Mortuary Traditions in the West Mediterranean

### 1. Introduction

According to the historical tradition (Thuc. 6, 2) Motya was one of the three main colonies founded by the Phoenicians in Sicily in the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. Lying off the coast on a small island surrounded by a shallow lagoon, the site was located a few miles north of Cape Lilyboeum, the westernmost headland of Sicily. Due to its location, only a short distance away from Carthage and North Africa, the insular settlement was an ideal place for Phoenician mariners during their maritime expansion in the West and undoubtedly played a relevant strategic role in their trading network across the Mediterranean.

This role has been generally confirmed by several archaeological features retrieved in the past, consisting of a number of monuments and artefacts which shed light on the urban structure and material culture of mostly Oriental tradition found on the island. In this regard, one of the best known sectors of an early period so far investigated on Motya is the archaic cemetery, which has been long considered one of the most relevant findings for the study of early Phoenician funerary customs in Sicily and in the West.

The burial ground, roughly dating from the late 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BC onwards, is characterised in its

earliest major phase by the almost exclusive practice of cremation, a rite that was introduced and largely attested in the Levant during the Iron Age<sup>1</sup>. The same rite was inherited from the Phoenician homeland and became widespread in the western colonial world, where it eventually survived until the Hellenistic period<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of the present paper is to re-examine briefly the archaeological evidence so far retrieved in the early island cemetery, stressing its main features and reviewing some of the current scholarly views and interpretations.

Due to the complete lack of historical sources, the rarity of epigraphic data and the shortcomings of past field research, today it is a difficult task to attempt to grasp what were the mortuary beliefs and to reconstruct the stages of the funeral and the various ceremonies and rituals performed. What was the size and extent of the burial ground? Why was a peripheral location chosen and how was it related to the living quarters of the settlement?

<sup>1</sup> Bienkowski 1982; Aubet 2004; Aubet 2010; Aubet 2013; Aubet 2014/2015.

<sup>2</sup> To cite just a few works about Phoenician and Punic burial customs in addition to the previous footnote, see Gras *et al.* 1989, 148–197; Díes Cusí 1995; González Prats 2004 (various conference papers); Ribichini 2004; and most recently Sader 2014/2015; on Carthage: Cintas 1976, 239–387; Benichou Safar 1982; on Sicily: Spanò Giammellaro 2004.



Fig. 1. View of the Motya archaic necropolis (photo G. Falsone, from SW).

Was the adoption of cremation mainly due to Oriental cultural heritage or to the particular insular environment? Do the density and distribution of burials suggest a particular scheme or spatial organization? Are there any clusters of graves suggesting family tombs or other social units? Were the different types of burials used to differentiate gender, particular classes of age or social status? Is there any trace of a pyre, was this an open-air stake or was it hosted in a proper built structure?

These are some of the questions which remain unanswered today. Since the present writer is now involved in a new excavation project on Motya, also concerning the funerary site under discussion, some fresh evidence will be briefly presented here aiming to elucidate some of the issues referred above<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. The discovery of the archaic cemetery

The 'archaic necropolis' was first uncovered (and named as such) in 1907 by Joseph Whitaker, the

excavator of Motya, who in a few years brought to light about 200 cremation tombs of an early period which he assigned to 750–600 BC<sup>4</sup>. It is located on the northern side of the islet, upon a raised sandstone platform enclosed between the seashore and the town wall. A low rocky cliff, of about 3 m in height, kept away the waters of the lagoon so that burials could not be flooded or damaged by tides or stormy sea (*fig. 1*).

The tombs usually consisted of cinerary jars, box-shaped stone cists and small rock-cut pits of round shape containing the burnt bones and ashes of the dead (*fig. 2*). A simple stone stele, though rarely found *in situ*, was also erected as a memorial above the grave<sup>5</sup>.

The jars usually include two main forms of Phoenician pottery tradition: (a) neck-less hole-mouth transport amphoras, most often undecorated, characterized by an ovoid body tapering at the base and by a tiny collared rim; (b) domestic necked jars of globular shape, with flat or concave base, often bearing a geometric decoration painted on the shoulder<sup>6</sup>. Two types of stone cists could

3 On the results of the first excavation season, undertaken by a team of Palermo University, see Falsone – Sconzo in press.

4 Whitaker 1921, 206–260.

5 Whitaker 1921, 217 f. 271 f. *fig. 50*.

6 Whitaker 1921, 248–256. 295 f. *figs. 36. 37–38. 72*.

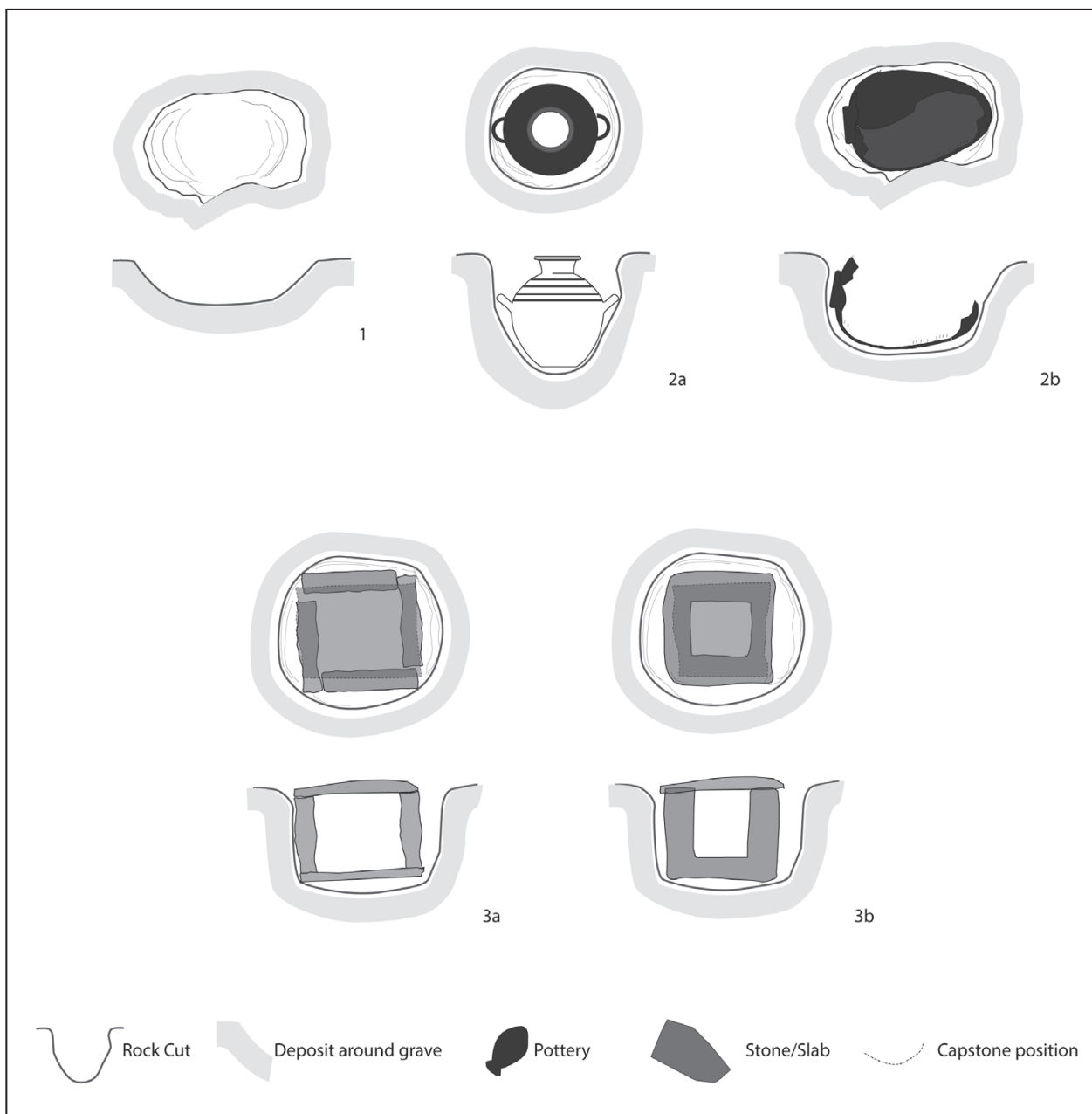


Fig. 2. Types of cremation burial attested in the archaic necropolis: 1: pits; 2: jars (a: amphora laid vertically, b (amphora laid horizontally); 3: cists (a: monolithic, b composite) (drawing by the author).

also be distinguished: a monolithic block of cubical shape, with a deep square inset carved on the top (fig. 2, 3b); and a composite structure of similar shape, built with multiple slabs (fig. 2, 3a). Both types of cists were sealed above by a slab used as a lid. In a few rare cases two burials were found superimposed, one above another: however, the excavator excluded ‘the existence of two distinct strata of tombs belonging to different periods’<sup>7</sup>.

Cutting a trench across the town wall, Whitaker found beneath it some more graves and realized that the wall had been built in a later period, approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC<sup>8</sup>. He also suggested that at this time, due to population growth and hygienic reasons, the early necropolis on the island was abandoned while a second, much larger, cemetery came into use on the opposite mainland at Birgi, where a large number of inhumations in

7 Whitaker 1921, 217.

8 Whitaker 1921, 208.

stone sarcophagi were unearthed, dating to the 6<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC<sup>9</sup>. However, as first proposed by B. Pace, some few cremation burials, identical to the ones discovered on the island, suggested the existence of an early horizon at Birgi, which preceded the turn of rite<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, the same change could be observed on Motya since seven stone coffins of the same type – datable to the last decades of the 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC – were also found by Whitaker on the western end of the early cemetery (*fig. 5*, to the left)<sup>11</sup>. These were clearly extra-mural interments, as they were located just outside the defence wall, which had been built all around the island sometime during the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC<sup>12</sup>.

Generally speaking, most of Whitaker's and Pace's reconstruction of funerary remains at Motya holds true until today. In his final monograph the British excavator gave a general description of the cemetery, describing in detail only a sample of ten cremations and the seven sarcophagi<sup>13</sup>. However, in spite of his major undertakings, he failed to provide a detailed full report. Neither a general plan of the necropolis, nor even schematic drawings of individual burials were given. Apparently no field records were kept, and the excavation method was inadequate according to modern standards. The worst shortcoming was due to the fact that the original closed finds of the burials were split to be exhibited in the local Museum according to object categories. Paper tags bearing the inventory numbers, usually glued on the funerary finds a century ago, have by now mostly

disappeared: apart from a few exceptions<sup>14</sup>, therefore, today it is a hard and almost impossible task to reconstruct the original context and association of finds.

In spite of the missing records, the earliest findings (both Phoenician Red Slip and Greek imports) were considered for long time as an evidence for the foundation of the Phoenician settlement into the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. The earliest Greek pottery (namely Late Geometric and Early Proto-Corinthian) has been dated to ca. 720–710 BC<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. Later Excavations (1962–1980)

Further work was conducted in the archaic cemetery from 1960s onwards. Besides a minor operation by P. Cintas in 1962, who brought to light eleven cremations of the usual types<sup>16</sup>, extensive excavations were undertaken in 1970–1972 by Soprintendente V. Tusa, who uncovered 162 graves mostly in the same area where Whitaker had operated<sup>17</sup>. These were very similar in typology, ritual and furnishings, thus belonging to the same cultural and chronological horizon. Side by side with the cremation burials, which were the overwhelming majority, very few child inhumations of the same period (mostly *enkytrismoî*) were brought to light (see also below), all lacking of funerary offerings<sup>18</sup>.

In the preliminary reports a catalogue of all tomb groups was presented, including an accurate description of the finds (pottery and other objects), general plans and photographic illustrations. These reports are extremely important since they

<sup>9</sup> It is to be recalled here that some of the Motya and Birgi excavations were conducted as a joint work by Whitaker and Salinas, Director of the Palermo National Museum. See Whitaker 1921, vii–ix (preface).

<sup>10</sup> Pace 1915, 443; also Whitaker 1921, 233. This has been fully confirmed by more recent excavations, as yet unpublished, conducted by Famà and Toti, who brought to light about 140 graves in 1996–1999: the oldest are secondary cremations kept in hand-made cooking-pots dating to the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. See the brief news given by Spanò Giammellaro 2004, 208 f.

<sup>11</sup> Whitaker 1921, 245–247 fig. 31. Two coffins (nos. 2–3) contained one skeleton each and intact vessel offerings, consisting of local Punic pottery and Attic black-figured and/or black-glazed vases. All the other sarcophagi were empty, as they had been previously robbed.

<sup>12</sup> On the Motya fortification system and its dating, see Iserlin – du Plat Taylor 1974; Ciasca 1976; Ciasca 1977; Ciasca 1978; Ciasca 1979; Ciasca 1980; Ciasca 1995; Ciasca 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Whitaker 1921, 248–256 figs. 32–38 (cremation burials); 245–247 fig. 31 (inhumation burials).

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to detailed records transcribed in the Museum Register of finds, only a few graves of the archaic cemetery and associated finds have been reassessed: see Cintas 1963/1964, 113 f.; more recently, Famà – Toti 2005, 618 figs. 2–6.

<sup>15</sup> Coldstream 1968, 388. These imports were later discussed and mostly illustrated by G. Falsone (1988) and A. Di Stefano (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Cintas 1963/1964; Cintas – July 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Tusa 1972, 7–81; Tusa 1973, 36–38; Tusa 1978, 7–98.

<sup>18</sup> Tusa 1973, 37 pls. 20,1 and 21, 2: Tombs 47–48; Tusa 1978, 57 f. Tombs 148, 154, 159. Two adult inhumations in earth pits of a much later period were found on the western side of the burial ground: Tusa 1972, 63 f. pl. 45 (Tomb 18, late 5<sup>th</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> cent.); Tusa 1972, 77 f. pl. 58 (T. 43, late 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC).



Fig. 3. Group of cremation burials discovered in 1980 (photo G. Falsone, from N).

provide for the first time a full account of archaic burials and their contents. However, an overall final study of the funerary evidence (including the pottery sequence) has never been accomplished<sup>19</sup>.

Later in 1970s A. Ciasca, while investigating the nature and structure of the Motya fortifications, excavated a group of eleven superimposed cremations inside a bipartite tower (*Torre 4*), standing further east of the cemetery and belonging to the first phase of the town wall (*fig. 5*)<sup>20</sup>. Immediately afterwards (in 1980), at a lower level nearby, during a cleaning operation of the slope, G. Falsone found eight more cist and pit burials above the bedrock (*fig. 3*), five of which still containing intact or partially preserved funerary assemblages<sup>21</sup>. The latter evidence clearly suggests

that the funerary site extended further east of the central sector, where previous excavators had operated. The published raw data gave Tusa and other authors the chance to produce specific contributions on various aspects of the archaic necropolis (dating, grave clustering, funerary goods and ritual, weapons, jewellery, etc.), which are not going to be treated here in detail<sup>22</sup>.

Just three issues, which will be relevant for later discussion, will be raised here.

(1) *Extent of the necropolis*. Apart from the shoreline to the north, the exact limits of the archaic necropolis remain so far mostly unclear. Excavating an industrial workshop inside the city wall immediately to the south<sup>23</sup>, Tusa managed to identify a stretch of the southern limit of the cemetery along a later East-West wall bordering the workshop (*fig. 4*)<sup>24</sup>; on the other hand, the crema-

<sup>19</sup> This task had been undertaken by the late A. Spanò Giammellaro, who unfortunately could not finish the research work due to her sudden demise.

<sup>20</sup> Ciasca 1979, 208–217 pls. 69–76, 1–4; Ciasca 1980, 247–248 fig. 10 pl. 85, 2–3; Ciasca 1990, 8–10 pls. 1–2. These graves have been recently revised by F. Spagnoli (2007/2008).

<sup>21</sup> Such graves, mostly unpublished, will be included in our preliminary report of the first two seasons (in preparation). Only two of them have been partially published very recently, although without permit and in a misleading way (Becker 2014).

<sup>22</sup> On the Motya cemetery, see Ciasca 1990; Spanò Giammellaro 2004; Delgado – Ferrer 2007; Spagnoli 2007/2008; Aubet 2010; Bartoloni 2010; Tusa 2012; Orsingher 2010; Orsingher 2013; Vecchio 2013.

<sup>23</sup> ›Zona Industriale‹, first labelled as ›Luogo di Arsione‹, then also as ›Zona T‹.

<sup>24</sup> Tusa 1972, fig. 5 pls. 22–23, 90; Tusa 1978, figs. 1, 4 pls. This late wall of uncertain function clearly overlies a whole

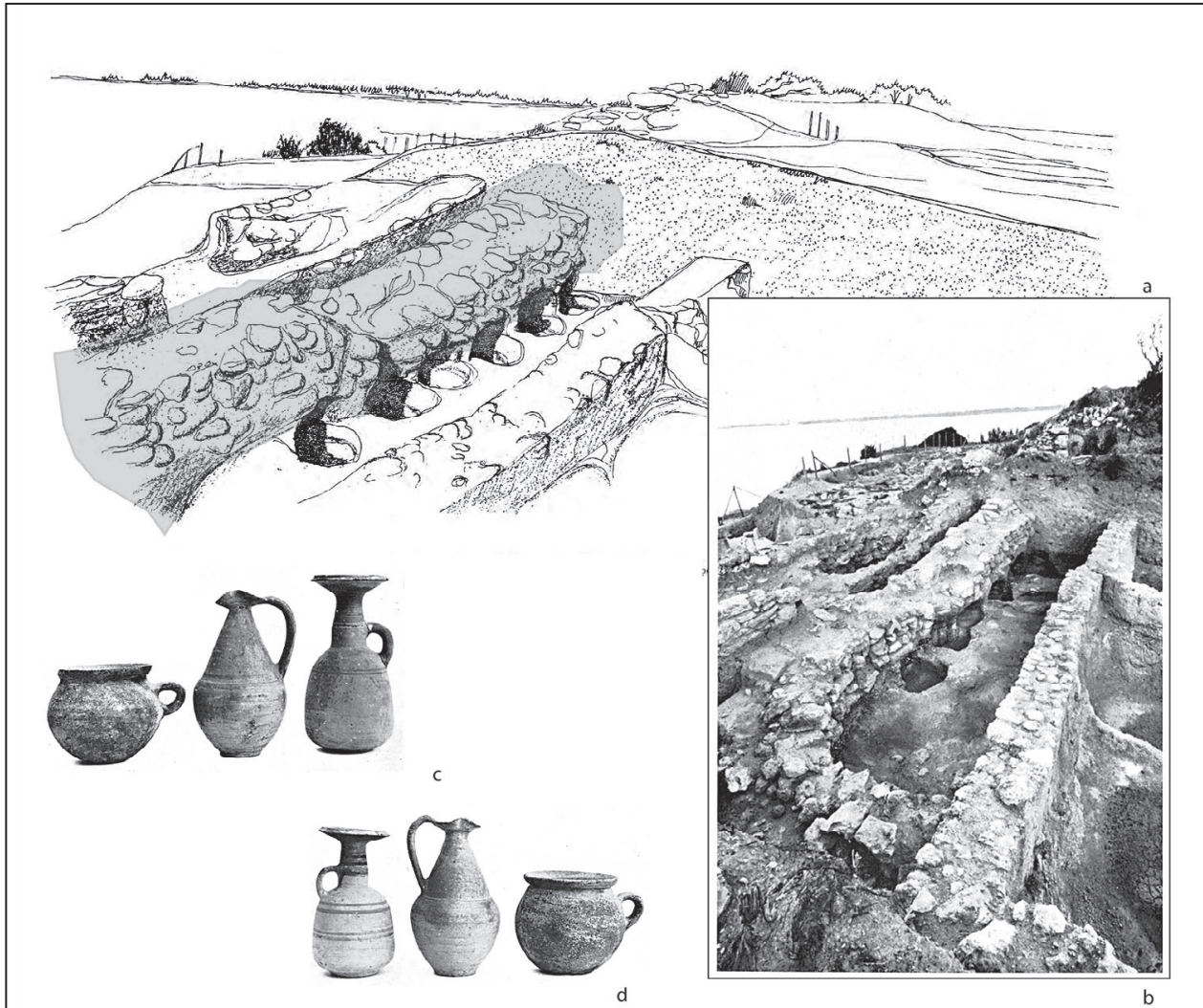


Fig. 4. Archaic graves discovered by Tusa below Wall A (after Tusa 1972, a: fig. 5; b: pl. 22; c: pl. 24, T. 1; d: pl. 25, t. 2).

tion tombs found inside Tower 4 and the ones excavated down below in 1980 suggest that the burial ground extends further to the east.

(2) *Chronology*. The lifespan of the early necropolis seems apparently fairly clear, ranging approximately from the late 8<sup>th</sup> to the early 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC<sup>25</sup>. In the almost complete absence of stratigraphic data, however, the chronology was established mainly on the basis of the Greek ceramic imports found in several funerary contexts. Sixteen burials inside the town wall contained exclusively Phoenician pottery without imports, for

row of archaic burials.

<sup>25</sup> In the light of too flimsy evidence it has been suggested that this northern district of the Motya island had also a funerary function at an earlier period (Middle Bronze Age): see Ciasca 1980, 249; Spanò Giammellaro 2004, 206–207.

which reason Tusa took them to be the oldest<sup>26</sup>. However, his dating of these burials into the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> cent BC has been later questioned<sup>27</sup>.

(3) *Physical anthropology*. The analysis of the human skeletal remains from the archaic necropolis has been mostly neglected in the past. The only evidence, very recently published by M. Becker, concerns the scanty burnt bones from two adult cremations unearthed in the 1980 salvage operation<sup>28</sup>. The same author has also examined: (a) about two dozen skulls of unknown funerary context and chronology, kept in the Whitaker Collection and coming from Motya itself, Birgi and

<sup>26</sup> Tusa 1972, 34, 53–55 Tombs 1–16.

<sup>27</sup> Falsone 1988, 40; also Vecchio 2013, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Becker 2014; in this paper three inhumations from the Area K excavation are also considered.

Lilyboeum<sup>29</sup>; (b) a few fragmentary cremated remains from the Area K excavations identified in a secondary funerary context of a late period<sup>30</sup>. Besides the scanty data from the archaic cemetery, other scrappy anthropological information concerns two burials excavated by the British expedition<sup>31</sup> and a stone coffin found below Tower 1 on the eastern side of the town wall<sup>32</sup>. By contrast, most relevant is the study of the child cremations and animal offerings from the Motya tophet<sup>33</sup>.

#### 4. Renewed excavations (2013 season)

The exploration of the island cemetery on Motya has just been renewed in June 2013, within the framework of a much wider and rather holistic investigation of the north-eastern quarter of the Phoenician and Punic town<sup>34</sup>. During a short season four probes were opened to tackle some of the issues discussed above. Sixteen cremation burials were brought to light under a thin topsoil, some of which had been already explored perhaps by Whitaker a century ago.

A major operation was conducted in Area N15, which had been untouched by the 1970s excavations (*fig. 5*)<sup>35</sup>. This is located on the eastern side of the central sector of the cemetery, west of the modern pathway, which today apparently marks its eastern border. The path runs above the high-line of the ancient town wall and slopes down

seawards across the empty foundation trench of a rectangular tower (D.2), linking in turn further east with the long ashlar wall (namely Wall D) previously excavated by Whitaker (*fig. 5*)<sup>36</sup>.

Two trenches were opened, one located outside, the other inside the tower<sup>37</sup>. Outside, to the North, at a distance of over 15 m from the sea-shore, two empty stone cists were visible above ground before the start of the fieldwork: one monolithic (T. 223), the other slab-built and partially destroyed (T. 224, *fig. 6*)<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, three shallow rock-cut pits of roundish shape and their funerary contents could also be clearly spotted on the surface nearby before the beginning of the dig (namely T. 213, T. 214, T. 215): this implies that since the 1970s excavations the upper part of the pits, together with the soft natural bedrock and the dark brown soil of the fill, obviously had been washed away by rain and wind erosion. These burial remnants, still *in situ*, consisted respectively of the bottom of a small jar (T. 213), of an iron spearhead (T. 214, *fig. 7a*) – a type already attested in the necropolis<sup>39</sup> – and of a pair of vases lying side by side in the same pit (T. 215, *fig. 7b*): a fragmentary Proto-Corinthian juglet (*fig. 7b, 2*) and a local two-handled Red-Slip cup, imitating a sub-geometric skyphos (*fig. 7b, 1*). Scanty traces of cremated human remains were only found in association with the latter grave.

Three jar burials, again only partially preserved, were uncovered at a short distance to the East: the first was a portion of an egg-shaped transport amphora laid horizontally, unfortunately rimless and empty (T. 222), while the others – smaller

<sup>29</sup> Becker 1985.

<sup>30</sup> Becker 1998; for the interpretation of this late context, datable to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC or later, cf. also Falsone *et al.* 1980/1981.

<sup>31</sup> News given in Becker 1985, 226.

<sup>32</sup> Note by A. Ciasca in Tusa 1984/1985, 553–555 pls. 69–70. Also Ciasca 1990, 8. The coffin contained the remains of an old man and the cremation of a young individual (female?) inside a cooking-pot (anthropological determination by R. Di Salvo).

<sup>33</sup> Di Salvo – Di Patti 2005.

<sup>34</sup> These new excavations, undertaken by the Palermo University expedition, were possible thanks to the permit granted by the Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. of Trapani and the collaboration with the Whitaker Foundation. For a broad outline of the field project, see Falsone – Sconzo in press.

<sup>35</sup> A new topographic reference grid of 10 by 10 m squares has been laid over the entire archaic necropolis (namely Area N). Each square can be further subdivided in four quadrants (5 by 5 m) or in trenches of variable size, more suitable according to the local archaeological features already visible on the ground.

<sup>36</sup> Whitaker 1921, 146–150 *fig. 9*; also Ciasca 1978, 228 f. 239. 243 *figs. 1. 3–6 pls. 55–57. 59.*

<sup>37</sup> The two trenches are referred here as N15 North and N15 South.

<sup>38</sup> Apart from the about 200 graves (unnumbered) found by Whitaker and the ones (11) by Cintas, all the burials excavated in 1970–1972 were given a continuous number by the excavator reaching up to 163 (Tusa 1971; Tusa 1972; Tusa 1978): actually only 162 tombs were excavated, since tomb no. 56 did not exist but was counted by mistake in the field diary (Tusa 1978, 9 n. 5. 14). This numbering system was later applied by others, especially in the series of 11 graves from Tower 4 (see Ciasca 1979, 207–217 graves 164–174). In 2013, in order to avoid confusion, we took the decision to adopt a new numeric sequence, which includes the burials found 1980 (see above) and starts from T. 201: each grave number is now preceded by capital T. (= tomb). All other burials found elsewhere on the island are obviously not considered in our sequence.

<sup>39</sup> For similar examples, see Tusa 2012, 135 f. *figs. 10–11.*

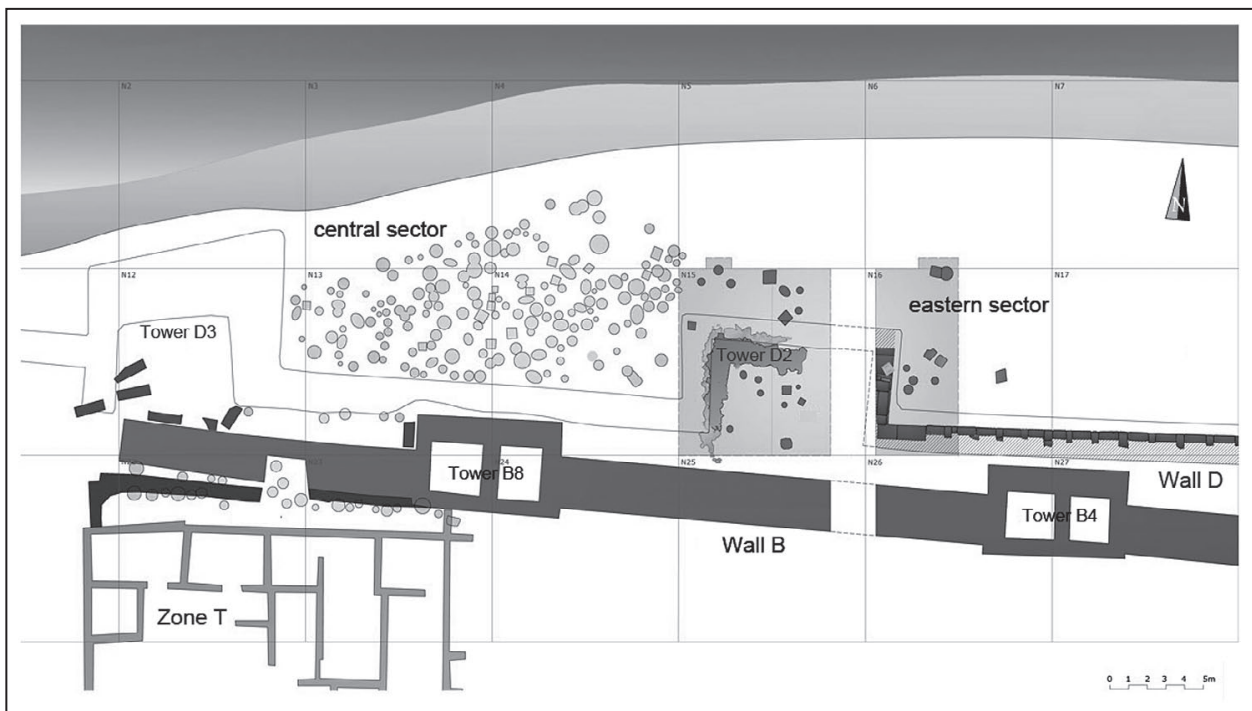


Fig. 5. Schematic plan of the archaic cemetery, including the fortifications, Zone T and the 2013 soundings (modified drawing, after Tusa 1978).



Fig. 6. Area N15 North. Jar burial T.212 (right) and cist burials T.223-T.224 (photo P. Sconzo, from S).



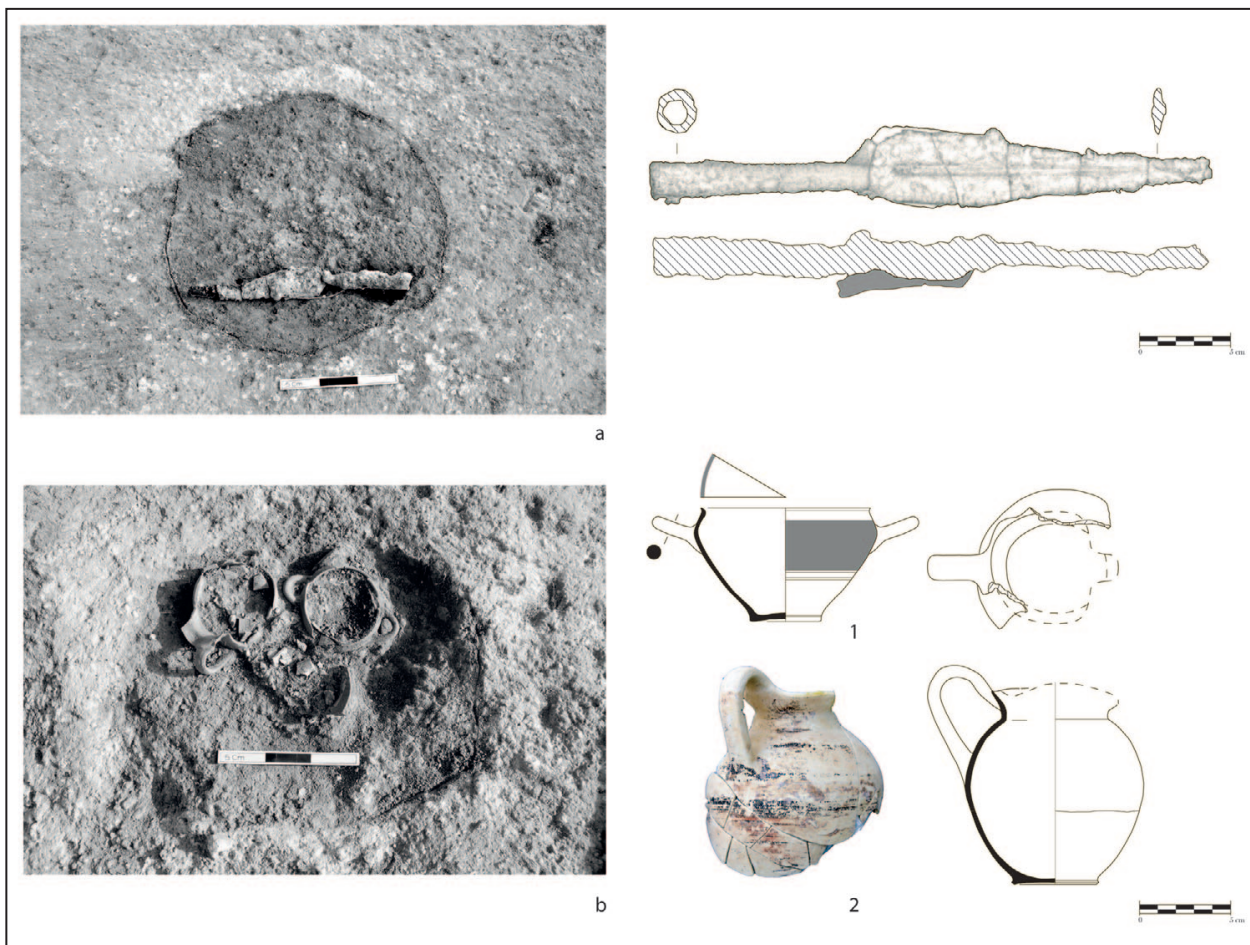


Fig. 7. Area N15 North. Pit burials T. 214 (a) and T. 215 (b), with corresponding funerary assemblages.

in size and missing the upper part – were set in a vertical stance: one (T. 217) contained only part of the rim of a Red-Slip plate of an early shape (fig. 8), rarely attested in the archaic cemetery<sup>40</sup>; while the other (T. 212), domestic in function, with a concave base, was decorated with a red-slip band, a feature typical of the early production on the island (see also below, fig. 14)<sup>41</sup>. The top of all the cinerary urns in this quadrant had been razed away, perhaps by improper excavation, leaving *in situ* the bottom or lower half of the vessels.

Most of the finds so far described are doubtless quite archaic in style and can be broadly attributed to the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC.

Even more intriguing, though a bit disappointing, was the evidence retrieved inside the tower. While the ashlar blocks of its outer face

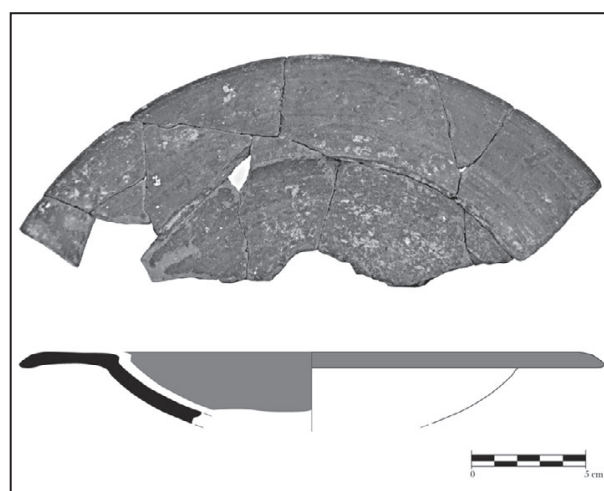


Fig. 8. Area N15 North. Red-Slip plate from T. 217 (photo G. Falsone).

<sup>40</sup> Archaic cemetery tomb 109b: Spanò Giammellaro 2000, 328 fig. 56; Bartoloni 2010, 59 f. fig. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Archaic cemetery tomb 103; Bartoloni 2010, 65 fig. 73.



Fig. 9. Area N15 South. Cist burial T. 220 (photo P. Sconzo, from W).

had been completely robbed in antiquity from its lowest course, its builders had created a kind of packed fill of rough stones still preserved on the inner side of the robbers' trench<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, the central area had been spared by the tower builders and contained a good number of secondary cremations lying above or dug into the bedrock. These were placed both in cists and cinerary urns, often encased inside a pit. Most of them had been emptied of their funerary offerings (fig. 9), while the jars were again partially preserved. It seems feasible that the people responsible for such disturbances, rather than the builders or the later robbers of the tower, were the excavators of modern times (Whitaker's crew).

As in the previous trench, the lower half of a few jars had been left *in situ*, but sometime jar rims or associated broken vessels were retrieved, providing a clue for the dating. An example is a fragmentary Phoenician oil bottle with disc-base (from T. 118), possibly dating to the early 7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC (fig. 10, 1)<sup>43</sup>.

While the soil around these funerary units was littered with a large quantity of potsherds and stray finds, possibly leftovers from the old excavations, large patches of ash and charcoal, mixed with bits and pieces of human bones, even containing intact soil, were detected in some spots

among the graves, thus suggesting traces of strong fire (*ustrina*?)<sup>44</sup>. A few charcoal samples, kindly examined by Dr. K. Deckers from Tübingen University, indicate that the burned wood is oak, pistachio and *rhamnus*<sup>45</sup>.

Turning to the eastern sector, east of the pathway, eight cremation burials, five of which only partially preserved, were found by G. Falsone in 1980 on a rocky outcrop, right in the corner of Wall D and the tower already described (fig. 3, above). The funerary gifts include a standard ceramic repertoire of Phoenician tradition, often bearing a Red-Slip decoration: mushroom-lip jugs, trefoil-mouth jugs (or oinochoai), cooking-pots, cups and bowls. The only Greek vessel from this lot is a Proto-Corinthian kotyle (T. 202), datable no later than mid-7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC (fig. 11)<sup>46</sup>. This repertoire, very common on Motya, finds a striking analogy amongst the archaic tombs excavated on the Byrsa Hill at Carthage<sup>47</sup>.

In 2013 we dug another trench (called N16) in the same area of the group of burials excavated in 1980. However, the evidence was somewhat disappointing: almost no trace of graves was found, since the hard limestone crust – which

42 In this regard it is to be stated here that both the robbers' trench and the inner stone rubble were visible at the start of the operations, thus suggesting that they had been clearly previously excavated in the early twentieth century: during our 2013 season we limited ourselves to clean the rubble and to remove the modern fill of washed-out soil inside the trench.

43 For this type of vessel, see Orsingher 2010, pl. 1.

44 Traces of other possible *ustrina*, although not recognized as such, are mentioned by Whitaker (1921, 228), who refers: »[...] here and there, in various parts of the necropolis, signs of the rogom having taken place on the spot may be seen, the ground being covered with the remains of charred wood and calcinated bones«. Other traces were identified also by Cintas (Cintas – July 1980, 36 fig. 2) at the corner between the bastion and the adjacent town wall.

45 Deckers, *pers. comm.*

46 For similar examples from Motya, sometimes bearing a central panel below the rim, see Di Stefano 2005, 157 f. fig. 4.

47 For others from Carthage, cfr. Lancel *et al.* 1982, 263–364, tomb B.708; A.190–192; A.195; A.183 etc.

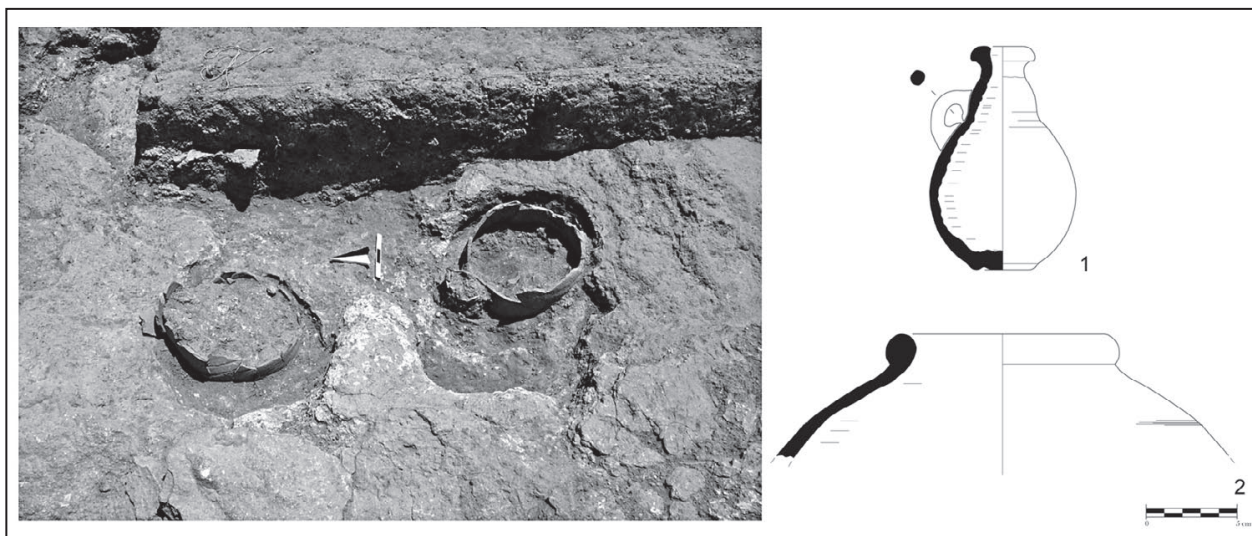


Fig. 10. Area N15 South. Left: jar burials T. 218-T. 219 (photo P. Sconzo from E); right: T. 218: rim of jar/urn and oil bottle.



Fig. 11. Funerary assemblage from T. 202 (photo G. Falsone).

usually characterizes the top layer of the bedrock along the northern shore – had been completely removed by later operations in antiquity (fig. 12). Only an empty square cist of the usual monolithic type (T. 211) appeared in the northern section, with its slab-lid lying on one side.

Surprisingly, a context of ash, burnt wood and bones (T.210) came to light on the other side, containing two fusiform *unguentaria* and a thin-walled ovoid beaker of Italic origin (fig. 13). This kind of funerary assemblage is widely attested in the Hellenistic tombs of Lilybaeum, the main Punic city founded on the mainland nearby in the

4<sup>th</sup> cent. BC<sup>48</sup>. T. 210 turned out to be an intact secondary cremation, datable to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC, suggesting that the same ritual had survived on Motya from archaic until Hellenistic times, more than two centuries after the fall and destruction of the Punic city in 397 BC.

<sup>48</sup> Bechtold 1999, 154 types B1–B2 nos. 267–269 (with further bibliography on distribution, typology and provenance of the beaker).



Fig. 12. Area N16, with T. 210 and T. 211 in foreground (photo P. Sconzo, from N).

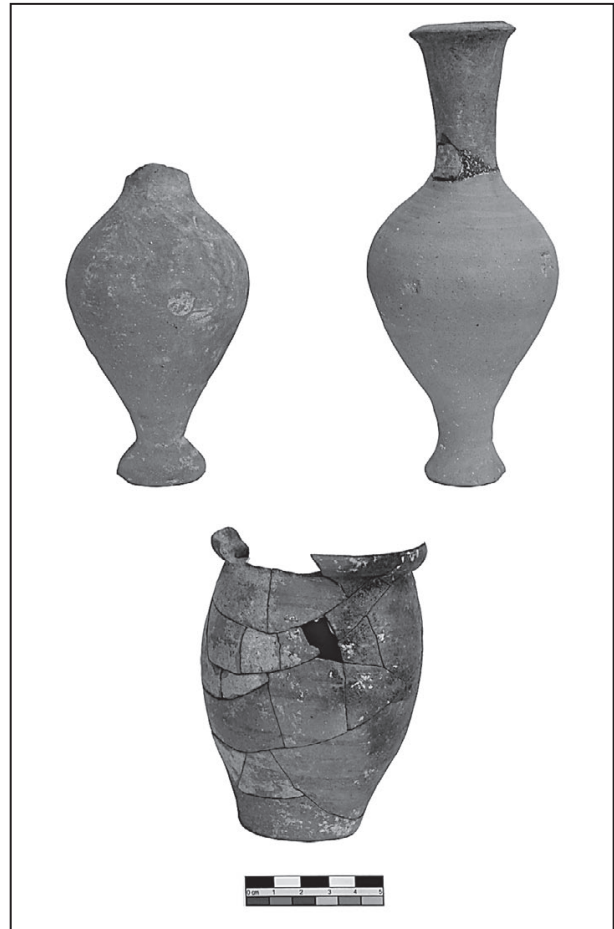


Fig. 13. Area N16. T. 210 funerary assemblage (photo G. Falsone).

## 5. The new anthropological data

A key aspect of the renewed excavations is the anthropological analysis of funerary contexts<sup>49</sup>. The findings of last season in the archaic cemetery shed new light on the cremation ritual and have an important bearing upon West-Phoenician mortuary practices<sup>50</sup>.

Most human skeletal remains come from ten burials (both urns and cist graves) uncovered in Trench N15. Moreover, burnt human bones were also identified in a number of other loci, often associated with lenses of ash and clear traces of fire.

<sup>49</sup> The anthropological analysis of our skeletal finds was conducted by Professor Luca Sineo and dott. Gabriele Lauria of Palermo University, to whom I am grateful for allowing me to refer here briefly their most relevant results.

<sup>50</sup> Some of them were presented in a poster at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies held in Carbonia/San Antioco, Sardinia.

In two instances the mixed association of corpses was noticed. While T. 221 contained two individuals, one adult and one *infans* in the same urn, a monolithic cist (T. 219) hosted two adults and one *infans*<sup>51</sup>. Two jars (T. 216 and T. 212) only contained the cremated remains of a single infant. In one of them (T. 212) the body was still buried in partial anatomical connection, lying upside down, with the skull at the bottom (fig. 14).

To sum up, in spite of limited number, these new data suggest that this sector of the Motya cemetery was not exclusively devoted to the incineration of adults, and that urns and cists could even contain multiple interments, even individu-

<sup>51</sup> Both funerary contexts (T. 221 and T.219) were not sealed: since the funerary goods had been previously removed, in theory we cannot now exclude that the bones came from different burials and were later mixed to be preserved inside the same container at the time of Whitaker's excavations. Whatever the case, it cannot be denied that two cases of cremated children can be identified here.



Fig. 14. Tomb T. 212 in different stages of the excavation (photo P. Sconzo, from W).

als of very different age: a feature, this one, which needs to be confirmed by further discoveries. If so, the idea that this funerary site was an adult cemetery and even that children were buried elsewhere on the island must be abandoned<sup>52</sup>. In the past a few infant inhumations mostly contained in a jar (*enchytrismoï*) were uncovered here, both by Whitaker<sup>53</sup> and by Tusa<sup>54</sup>. On the other hand, the four cases discussed above, including a fifth dubious one previously recognized by Cintas<sup>55</sup>, clearly suggest that individuals of very young age were cremated and buried in the same grave-yard side by side with adult interments.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, going back to the introductory issues, the location and environment of the site must first be considered in relation to colonial burial customs. Since Motya lies on a flat island

surrounded by a land-locked lagoon, the first Levantine colonists of the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BC did choose a peripheral rocky plateau near the seashore as a burial ground, away from the living quarters but protected from the sea. Moreover, the nature of the island subsoil, consisting of soft, very friable yellow sandstone<sup>56</sup>, was not at all ideal to allow monumental hypogea and rock-cut shaft tombs, quite common in Phoenicia, at Carthage, in Sicily and elsewhere in the West. The archaic cemetery, its location and the rite of cremation were therefore the best choice for the Phoenician mariners settling on the island. Later on, the growth of the Punic city, together with the lack of urban space and sanitary reasons must have caused the abandonment of the early cemetery, replaced by a second much larger funerary ground on the Birgi mainland, already existing, where inhumation in stone coffins became the dominant practice. Extramural burials of the same kind, dating to the late 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, after the construction of the city wall, have been found in the archaic cemetery and elsewhere to the North-East on the island.

Last, the fresh evidence brought to light in the island necropolis during last season is not enough

<sup>52</sup> Ciasca 1990; Delgado – Ferrer 2007, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Whitaker 1921, 252 f. fig. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Tusa 1973, p. 37 tombs 47–48 pls. 20, 1; 21, 2; Tusa 1978, 57 Tombs 148. 154. 159. Another jar burial (no. 152) was left *in situ*, unexcavated: according to the excavator it also contained the uncremated bones of a child.

<sup>55</sup> Cintas – Jully 1980, 37–38 pl. 3, 1–2 (*sepulture* 4).

<sup>56</sup> Whitaker 1921, 49; Isserlin – du Plat Taylor 1974, 19–24.

to make definite statements, and further work is necessary to reach more solid scientific results. For the time being, we may stress two aspects previously unknown and unsuspected: first, the use of cremation in the Hellenistic period, showing that the memory of the old burial ground survived on Motya until late times, even when the Punic town had been abandoned; second, the incineration of children, buried in a jar or a cist, alone or (possibly) in company of adults during the archaic period.

If the latter evidence is further confirmed in future seasons (in the sense that infant cremations are not isolated cases, but a consistent pattern), the exploration of the Motya archaic necropolis may bring an indirect proof (if not a key contribution) on the debated question of the function and use of another marker of Phoenician culture, such as the tophet.

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Die Expansion der mesopotamischen Staaten  
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