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Tri-Nodal Social Entanglements in Iron Age Sicily: Material and Social Transformation

William Balco

Abstract: Indigenous Iron Age Sicilian populations underwent a series of complex social transformations following the establishment of neighboring Greek and Phoenician trade posts in the eighth through fifth centuries BC. This paper employs the theory of cultural hybridity to explore indigenous Iron Age Elymian responses to the socially entangled atmosphere. Prolonged contact and interaction with foreigners fostered numerous alterations to Elymian pottery, architecture, and language. Such archaeologically visible changes are discussed, accounting for the development of a complex social middle ground encompassing the Elymi, Greeks, and Phoenicians. Additionally, this paper offers an agenda for future research focusing on the development of mixed-style material culture within complex social entanglements.

Key words: Cultural Hybridity, Sicily, Elymi, Iron Age, Social Transformation

Social Interaction Theory

Sophisticated contact and interaction between different populations remains the object of intense research and debate among contemporary social theorists. Such contact has facilitated economically- and socially-entangled relationships affecting a number of spatially and socially diverse populations. These economic and social stimuli have dynamically contributed to multidirectional social transformation, affecting indigenous and colonial agents and cultures in different ways. Local responses to sophisticated social and mercantile contact/interaction often facilitate changes in material culture, architecture, language, and lifeways, modifications which remain visible within the archaeological record. Previous studies have explored indigenous and colonial social transformations from a variety of perspectives, yet few critically evaluated the role of the indigene during periods of intense contact and interaction. A number of recent theoretical contributions have addressed this deficiency, significantly contributing to the study of local reactions to contact and entanglement with foreign migrants and merchants (Gosden 2004; Hill 2001; Hodos 2006; Millett 1990; Stein 2005; van Dommelen 1998). One of these theories, growing in both popularity and applicability, is the theory of cultural hybridity. This theory highlights the creation of a “third space” (Bhabha 1990; Soja 1996:56) or “middle ground” (Malkin 2005; White 1991) which is neither indigenous nor foreign but rather a cultural amalgam of the two forged from social entanglement and the concomitant mixing of ideas and materials. It is well suited for the study of colonial interaction in which cultures break social binary oppositions following initial contact (Antonaccio 2003:60; Counts 2008:12). Socially hybridized populations occupy the middle ground, incorporating elements from any number of social agents, a mix of material and social styles characterized as a cultural conglomerate resulting from complex social entanglement. Potentially hybridized cultures remain archaeologically visible through mixed-style material culture, architecture, and written language. This study aims to move beyond a gap in current research, employing the theory of cultural hybridity to consider the processes of social transformation initiated by indigenous Iron Age western Sicilians during the period of Greek and Phoenician colonial expansion (734-500 BC).

The theory of cultural hybridity has been applied to several studies of material culture transformation initiated by colonial interaction throughout the western Mediterranean (Antonaccio 2003; Hodos 2006; Hodos 2000; Leighton 2000; van Dommelen 1998; van Dommelen 2005; van Dommelen 2006). Few early studies characterized indigenous social transformation as multidirectional, a reciprocal adoption of foreign styles and culture (Dunbabin 1948; MacIver 1931). For example, Dunbabin suggested that eastern Sicilian sculptures “express a spirit which is un-Greek and may be assigned to the Sikel element in a culture and society formed by a fusion of Greek and Sikel.” (1948:174). These preliminary theories relied on the material culture record to account for culture contact, yet largely ignored the social processes accounting for the development of complex social entanglements.

The theory of cultural hybridity provides an excellent approach for the study of social and stylistic transformations. While it has been applied to binary social entanglements which perpetuated a colonizer/colonized dichotomy, the theory of cultural hybridity has yet to parse a multi-nodal colonial entanglement; one involving indigenes as well as two different foreign colonial cultures, not simply multiple colonies established by one foreign culture. For example, many studies of Mediterranean social entanglements focus on the interaction between indigenes and multiple Phoenician *or* Greek colonies, not the dynamic contact and communication between indigenes, Phoenicians, *and* Greeks.

Trade and interaction between ancient Mediterranean populations rarely facilitated deeply entangled multi-nodal colonial entanglements. Intense multi-faceted interaction between indigenes and Greek and Phoenician colonists occurred at few locations in the Mediterranean, specifically in eastern Spain (Rouillard 2009:131) and western Sicily (Kolb and Speakman 2005:795; Montana, et al. 2009:87). Western Sicily is the location of one such multi-nodal colonial entanglement, enveloping indigenes, Greeks, and Phoenicians as agents of social transformation. Irregular and intermittent mercantile contact with foreigners from the eastern, northern, and western Mediterranean had slowly transformed indigenous Sicilian cultures during the Copper and Bronze Ages (approx. 3500-900 BC). This social transformation intensified following the establishment of Greek colonies and Phoenician emporia on Sicily beginning in the eighth century BC. The indigenous Iron Age Elymi of western Sicily were one such participant; agents of social change while interacting with the neighboring colonies. The geographic proximity of both Phoenician and Greek colonial mercantile centers embedded Elymian population centers (Figure 1) within a heavily entangled social environment, facilitating the social transformation of all three parties. This study focuses on the transformation of Elymian pottery and, to a smaller degree, architecture and language.

Western Sicily

The social transformation of indigenous Sicilian populations has been the focus of many studies because of the geographic importance of Sicily in relation to maritime trade. Sicily constricts nautical mobility between the eastern and western Mediterranean, resulting in a unique cultural confluence fostering deeply entrenched social entanglements. Of the three main Iron Age Sicilian ethnicities, the Elymi remain the most enigmatic; an ethnicity described by few ancient authors to characterize the indigenous Iron Age populations of western Sicily. Iron Age

Elymian lifeways are thought to be a continuation of earlier Bronze Age traditions (Hodos 2006:92), which subsequently developed into autonomous polities (Forte, et al. 1998:292; Kolb and Speakman 2005:795) similar to the indigenous Iron Age populations in central and eastern Sicily (Hodos 2006:93; Maniscalco and McConnell 2003:171).

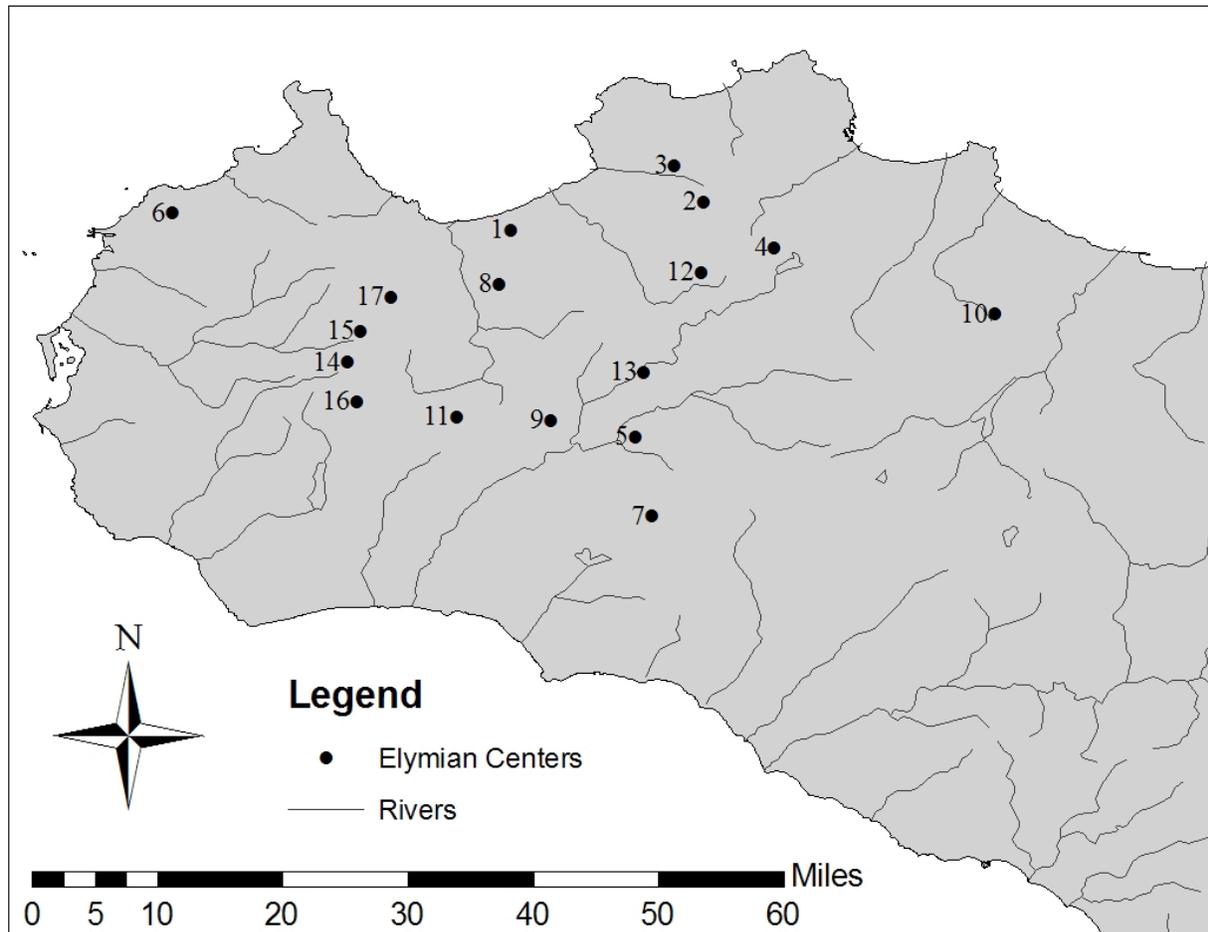


Figure 1. Late Iron Age Western Sicilian Population Centers (1 Calatubo; 2 Castellaccio di Sagana; 3 Conca D'Oro; 4 Cozzo Papparina; 5 Entella; 6 Eryx; 7 Monte Adranone; 8 Monte Bonifato; 9 Monte Castellazzo di Poggioreale; 10 Monte Falcone; 11 Monte Finestrelle; 12 Monte Iato; 13 Monte Maranfusa; 14 Monte Polizzo; 15 Poggio Roccione; 16 Salemi; 17 Segesta).

Following the establishment of permanent colonial mercantile centers at Mozia, Panormus, Solunto, Himera, and Selinus, the Elymi underwent significant cultural transformation. Relations between the Elymi and their Sicilian-Greek and Phoenician neighbors resulted in displays of their extreme political complexity by the fifth and fourth centuries BC (Hodos 2006:93; Kolb, et al. 2008:33; Maniscalco and McConnell 2003:170). Alterations to domestic and public architecture, urban landscapes, religion, pottery production, and mercantile consumption attest to the important role foreign merchants fulfilled in enabling Elymian social transformation. The frequent presence of imported Greek, colonial Sicilian-Greek, and Phoenician pottery within Elymi households represents the degree to which foreign goods were incorporated alongside indigenous goods; serving as archaeologically visible evidence of the

developing social entanglement. For instance, imported Greek, Phoenician, and Etruscan pottery found in sixth century BC Elymian domestic contexts atop Monte Polizzo (Morris, et al. 2003; Morris, et al. 2001; Morris, et al. 2002; Mühlenbock 2008; Tusa 1972:405) suggests the domestic incorporation of foreign goods into indigenous lifeways. Numerous other Iron Age Elymian population centers throughout western Sicily exhibit a similar pattern, socially incorporating Greek, Sicilian-Greek, and Phoenician material culture (De Cesare and Gargini 1994; Kolb, et al. 2007:197; Spatafora 1991:10; Spatafora 1996:1208; Tusa 1972), attesting to widespread social alterations throughout western Sicily.

Three sources of evidence for the development of cultural hybridization among the indigenous Elymi are discussed here: pottery, architecture, and language. These components reveal social transformation among the western Sicilian Elymi as the result of intense social interaction and entanglement with foreign agents following the arrival of Greek and Phoenician colonists. Archaeologically visible changes to Elymian culture provide a means to enhance our understanding of social transformation within complex social entanglements, especially when considering the dynamic ability of multi-faceted colonial situations to facilitate the development of social middle grounds.

Changes to Indigenous Society

The theory of cultural hybridity has frequently been applied to studies of the relationships between colonizer and colonized in the western Mediterranean, often considering the use of foreign style goods in indigenous contexts. Style remains an important component of archaeological discussion because stylistic variation might reflect changes to individual or group identities. Style serves as a form of non-verbal communication, expressing either assertive (associated with individual identity) or emblematic (associated with group identity) perspectives through material culture form and/or decoration (Wiessner 1983:257-259; Wiessner 1990:106). Archaeological studies of material culture must recognize the duality of style and function that is present throughout artifact assemblages (Sackett 1977:371) because dividing style from function divorces the social meaning of style (Dietler and Herbich 1998:238). As a result, style must be further divided into “style of action” and “material style” (Dietler and Herbich 1998:236) because no single definition can cope with the nuanced social mechanisms driving stylistic transformations of manufactured goods, including pottery. Fired clay vessels are one of the most ubiquitous forms of material culture, an important medium reflecting individual and social transformations. For this reason alone, pottery is an excellent material to study stylistic change and the concomitant process of social transformation.

Indigenous Elymian pottery changed significantly following the arrival of permanent Greek and Phoenician settlers. Elymian pottery assemblages included a variety of vessels for liquid storage (*amphorae*, *hydriai*, *pithoi*) and consumption (*tazze*, *atingittoi*, *capeduncole*, *coppe*). Greek vessel forms such as the *krater*, absent from the Elymian assemblage but common among Greek sites, first appear in indigenous contexts after the establishment of Hellenic colonies in the seventh century BC (Mühlenbock 2008; Stibbe 1989; Tardo 1999; Trombi 1999). These vessel forms were not only used by the indigenous Elymi, but were imitated by Elymian production centers. Ten *kraters* discovered in domestic contexts at Monte

Maranfusa attest to Elymian material culture hybridization. Constructed of local materials and decorated in typical Elymian form with red and black painted geometric designs, these vessels attest to the complex processes of cultural interaction between Indigenes and Greeks (Campisi 2003:188). Unlike Greek material culture, Phoenician cups and bowls do not appear to have been imitated by Elymian potters.

Local imitation of foreign, colonial vessel forms is not limited to one population center but is evidenced at several other sites across Sicily. Excavations at Entella have identified locally produced imitation *kraters* and *kylikes* decorated with indigenous painted motifs (Guglielmino 2000:706). Excavations at Monte Polizzo have uncovered locally produced tronco-pyramidal loomweights, a shape commonly associated with the Sicilian-Greek colonies and absent from Elymian sites prior to the sixth century BC (Balco and Kolb 2009:179). Excavations at Salemi have uncovered locally-produced loomweights with shapes representative of Elymian, Sicilian-Greek, and Punic cultures (Balco and Kolb 2009:179). Such mixed-style pottery incorporated both local and foreign forms/decoration, therefore representing changes to Elymian social contexts. Locally produced pottery incorporating a mixture of indigenous and foreign decorative motifs and vessel forms could suggest a transformation in emblematic material culture styles resulting from intense social contact with foreign settlers.

In addition to changes in ceramic material culture, the Elymi began to construct architectural monuments representing Greek cult practice. The construction of a Doric temple at Segesta during the fifth century BC attests to the incorporation of Greek architecture and possibly cult practice (Mistretta 2002:75). The temple was never completed; therefore, it cannot be positively attributed to any Greek or Elymian deity. The techniques employed in the construction of the temple however suggest the employment of laborers who were either Greek or trained by Greeks (Burford 1961:93). The erection of an emblemically Greek structure at Segesta suggests a pronounced and rapid shift in social ideology, thus providing additional evidence of Elymian social transformation.

The final component discussed in this brief study examines linguistic evidence for social change among the Elymi. Such evidence is preserved in the graffiti and inscriptions recovered in archaeological excavations across western Sicily. No complete texts or alphabet associated with the indigenous Elymian language have been discovered. Instead, short anhellenic inscriptions, mainly found scratched on cups, utilized Greek script to express a non-Greek language (Hodos 2007:108). Such anhellenic inscriptions and graffiti have been identified across Sicily and can seldom be translated. Changing socio-linguistic contexts among the Elymi are particularly visible through numerous onomastic inscriptions identified in both Greek and anhellenic scripts on cups found at Segesta (Agostiniani 1977:3; Biondi 2000:135; Tusa 1975:214).

Changes in material culture, architecture, and language are three of the many archaeological components demonstrating Elymian social transformation. Prolonged economic and social interaction between the Elymi, Greek, and Phoenician cultures socially entangled elements of foreign lifeways, developing a social middle ground. The development of tri-nodal hybrid cultures in western Sicily is only now being considered both because of recent advances in the theory of cultural hybridity as well as due to what Morris (2002:181) describes as a previous lack of adequate detail from research excavations in western Sicily prior to the 1990s.

Numerous questions regarding the development, dispersion, and scale of hybrid cultures in western Sicily remain to be investigated that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex cultural transformation processes. For instance, we do not know: 1) if the indigenous Elymi developed hybrid cultures based on Greek, Phoenician, or a mixture of influences; 2) if indigenous population centers adopted cultural hybrids independently or as a social complex; or 3) if hybrid cultures developed at the same time among all Elymian population centers.

Conclusion

The impetus for material and/or social hybridization has been recently debated. Earlier interpretations employed acculturation, assimilation, Hellenization, and orientalizing as mechanisms driving social change, emphasizing the role of the Greeks in shaping indigenous social developments. Such approaches devalue indigenous developments, as demonstrated by past characterizations in which the consumption of emblemically Greek artifacts by indigenous Gauls was seen as a “clumsy attempt to imitate Greek culture” (Dietler 2010:60). The multitude of social transformative theories employed in earlier studies remains inadequate because the Elymi faced contact and interaction on multiple social fronts, not simply with one foreign culture. As a result, the theory of cultural hybridity is better suited to explore the complex mechanisms of social transformation emanating from multi-nodal social interaction. Current post-colonial approaches examine social change from an indigenous, de-colonized point of view, elucidating the motivations for social transformation. The indigenous Elymi may have retained elements of their own indigenous culture in order to preserve their social identities as distinct from those of the colonizing Greeks and Phoenicians. Social transformations may have preserved indigenous Iron Age cultural identities by combining indigenous and foreign emblematic elements. The division between material and social hybrids is most apparent here. If material hybrids developed as a form of resistance to foreign social stimuli, then the retention of indigenous emblematic style attributes, such as vessel form or decoration, should be observable among domestic artifacts with low public visibility. If material hybrids developed as a means to emulate foreign cultures, then mixed-style pottery should have remained readily visible in public use contexts. Such considerations add to material culture studies by exploring the social processes responsible for the development of mixed-style goods.

Exploring the stimuli responsible for the development of hybridized cultures entails similar considerations. If indigenous culture became hybridized as a result of emulation, then the consumption of emblematic foreign material should be publically visible. Additional lines of evidence, including architecture and language, could provide independent lines of evidence to test the material and social hybridization of the Elymi. Recent investigations have exposed a general absence of evidence regarding: 1) the scale of cultural hybridization in western Sicily; 2) the rate at which emblematic hybrid material culture was adopted in western Sicily; and 3) identifying the social stimuli responsible for indigenous Elymi cultural hybridization. Divergent approaches complicate the situation. On the one hand, Hodos (2006:105) suggests that cultural adoption accounts for the social changes indigenous Sicilian populations experienced, resulting in the formation of a middle ground incorporating material, social, and political elements (2006:152). Alternatively, Bratton (2010:89) has suggested that hybridization was a form of resistance to Greek influence, noting that western Sicilian imitation skyphoi combined elements

of both Corinthian and Attic emblematic styles. Such opposing models demonstrate the importance of defining cultural hybrids, examining the social stimuli involved in the development and spread of hybridity and investigating how hybridity can have an impact on social change and development in a tri-nodal colonial entanglement context.

To answer these questions, future research must continue to examine the social impetus for the development and spread of hybridized cultures and material culture. Western Sicily is an ideal region to study tri-nodal complex social entanglements in archaeological contexts because the indigenous Elymi encountered Phoenician culture to the north and west as well as Sicilian-Greek culture to the south and northeast. Mixed-style vessel forms, decorations, and/or contexts have the potential to elicit evidence of changes to Elymian social behavior. Additionally, archaeometric pottery analysis can provide data on the production and distribution of indigenous and mixed-style pottery throughout western Sicily between the eighth and fourth centuries BC. Previous studies have independently examined hybridization (Hodos 2010) and pottery exchange (Kolb and Speakman 2005; Montana, et al. 2009; Montana, et al. 2003) among indigenous Sicilian polities; however, such a study incorporating the two would be the first of its kind to try to understand the social impetus for hybridization. The development and spread of emblematic mixed-style pottery is best examined through both stylistic and archaeometric analyses.

No previous studies in western Sicily have attempted to combine both stylistic and elemental analyses of vessel form and decoration in order to examine the process of cultural hybridization. Pottery which incorporates indigenous decorative schemes on foreign Greek or Phoenician vessel forms is one possible example of mixed-style or hybridized material culture. The incorporation of mixed-style pottery within domestic contexts, supplemented by architectural and epigraphic evidence, attests to the development of social hybridization among the indigenous western Sicilian cultures. However, the presence of mixed-style material culture may not necessarily indicate hybridized culture, since such artifacts could have been acquired through exchange. Conversely, the absence of materially hybridized (mixed-style) artifacts may not necessarily indicate the absence of social hybridization. A study of the incorporation of foreign emblematic material styles within indigenous domestic contexts requires considering the context of use. For instance, van Dommelen (2006) has noted that the incorporation of Phoenician emblematic oil lamps in cult practice reflected social alterations in Nuragic Sardinia due to indigenous developments. The indigenous Nuragic people began using Phoenician lamps in their cult practice, indicating that Nuragic culture hybridized the style of use but did not hybridize the material style. The appearance of mixed-style or emblematically foreign style artifacts may be unrelated to the development of social hybridization. Exchange with socially hybridized or foreign communities could account for such material within non-socially hybridized domestic assemblages.

Overall, Iron Age Elymi social entanglement and transformation has previously been modeled as Hellenization, acculturation, or orientalizing, but is here examined under the rubric of cultural hybridization. Perhaps Elymian populations emulated foreign lifeways in a process which gradually transformed indigenous culture, selectively incorporating social elements such as feasting behaviors. The appearance of indigenous imitations of Greek *kraters* and *kylikes* facilitates such an interpretation, suggesting that indigenous social transformation was a complex process of selective adoptions. It remains important to note that mixed-style material culture is

but one facet of multidirectional social transformation. A study of the social development and uses of mixed-style material culture would make it possible to further understand the exchange of hybridized material and the concomitant processes of cultural transformation among the Elymi, a particular Iron Age Mediterranean culture that faced a complex contact scenario. Such an approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development, spread, and adoption of hybridized pottery, specifically drinking cups, within the increasingly complex economically motivated social entanglements of the late Iron Age and Classical periods.

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