

TWO UNUSUAL FUNERARY DEPOSITS FROM THE MIGRATION PERIOD AT THE HYPOGEUM D, MODICA-SCORRIONE W (PROV. RAGUSA, SICILY / I)

THE SITE

Scorrione W (Modica, prov. Ragusa, Sicily/I) is a catacomb cluster formed by at least six hypogea with different sizes and architectural features, as well as several minor structures such as isolated graves, arcosolia, water basins and postholes, all hollowed out of the stone walls of a small natural canyon. Two contiguous hypogea (C and D) had been previously detected and documented by Vittorio Rizzone and Annamaria Sammito on the eastern wall of the canyon¹. During the fieldwork associated with the 2020 excavations, two further chambers (hypogea F and G) were found a few metres north of the entrance to hypogeum C (fig. 1A-B). It is expected that systematic surface surveys and cleaning activities will unveil a far larger number of structures.

The site is located broadly halfway between the two major land roads in the area (fig. 1C), the via Selinuntina and the via Elorina, connecting Syracuse with Agrigento and with the southern coast of the island respectively². The geographical distribution of the hypogeal clusters in the region³, including the ones at Scorrione E and Scorrione W, suggests that they may have been located on both sides of a presumed ancient road linking the city of Mutica with Ibla and the via Elorina, to the north, and the ancient ports on the coast (Pozzallo and Santa Maria del Focallo) and the via Selinuntina, to the south⁴. Such a road may have been largely coincident with the present day provincial road no. 45.

As mentioned, comparable funerary clusters are widely attested in the region, especially along the canyon of Cava Ispica and around the city of Modica. The survey carried out by Annamaria Sammito and Vittorio Rizzone identified more than two dozen such clusters solely in the territory between Modica, Ispica and Pozzallo; about 200 such hypogea have been recorded in the territory of Modica alone⁵. The dating material from the best preserved sites point to chronologies of funerary use stretching from the late 3rd to the early 6th century⁶.

HYPOGEUM D

Hypogeum D was the subject of stratigraphical excavations in 2020. It is a trapezoidal chamber of 6 m length and 12 m width, fronted by an elliptical antechamber and an access corridor (fig. 2). The inner spaces of the main chamber are organized around a central baldachin hosting two graves. Comparable chambers, showing similar conceptions comprising access corridors, antechambers and baldachins are well known in the Ragusa province, as the finds from Cisternazzi and the »Grotta delle Trabacche« show⁷. The »hypogeum E« at Scorrione, known only from a plan kept in the archive of the Modica City Museum and not yet recorded by recent fieldwork, may have had a similar structure⁸, although that plan does not display an entrance corridor.

Much as the rest of the site, hypogeum D had been widely exposed to anthropic alterations, derived from its partial visibility and accessibility over time, and by strong erosive processes connected with the movement

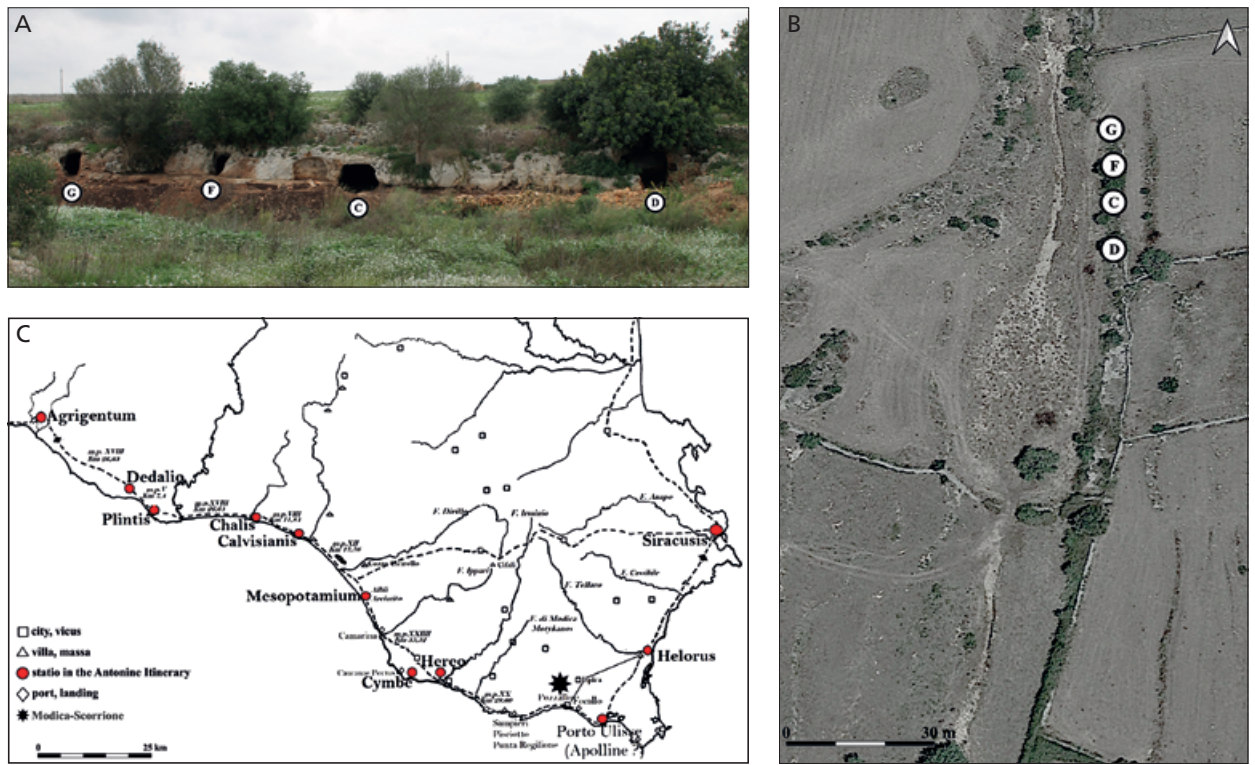


Fig. 1 Modica-Scorrione W. Location and general views of the hypogeal cemetery. – (A-B photos J. Pinar Gil; C after Cassarino/Scerra 2021, fig. 11).

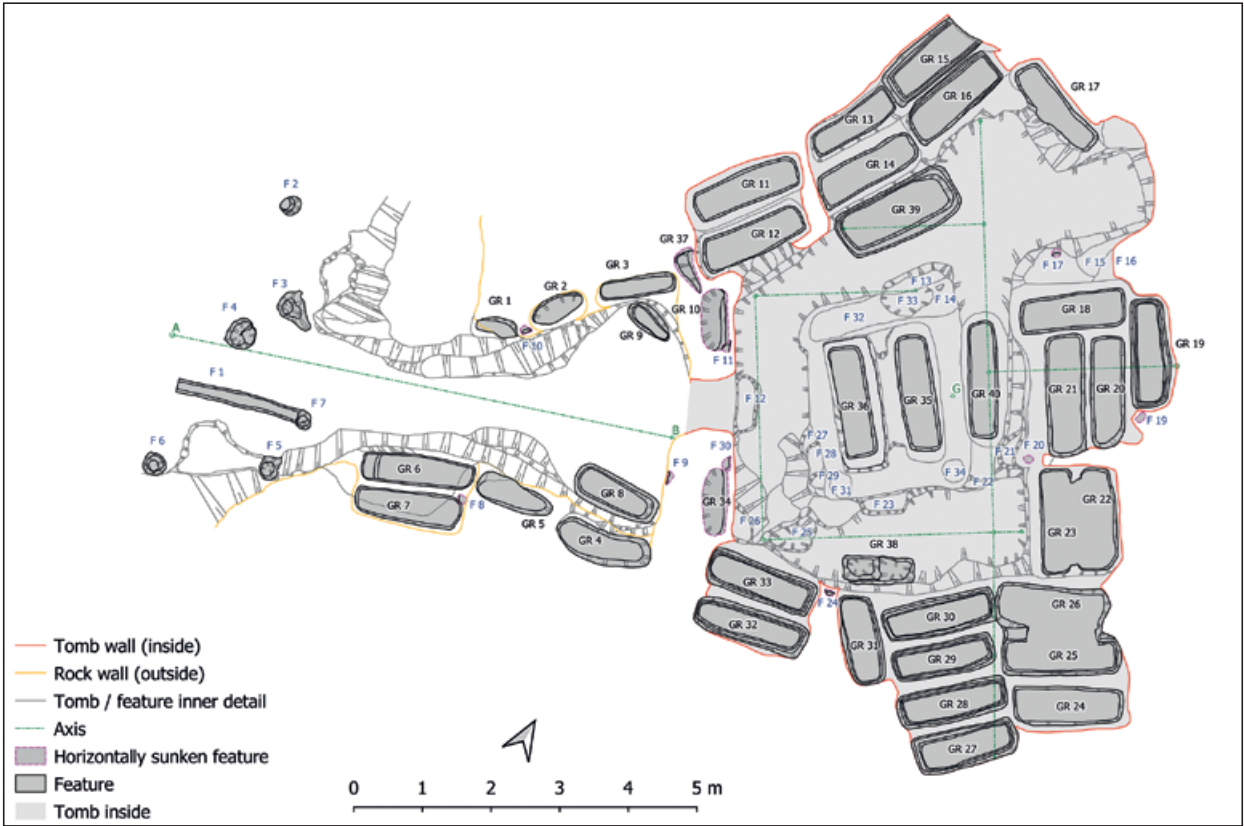


Fig. 2 Hypogeum D, ground plan. – (Plan M. Pleska).

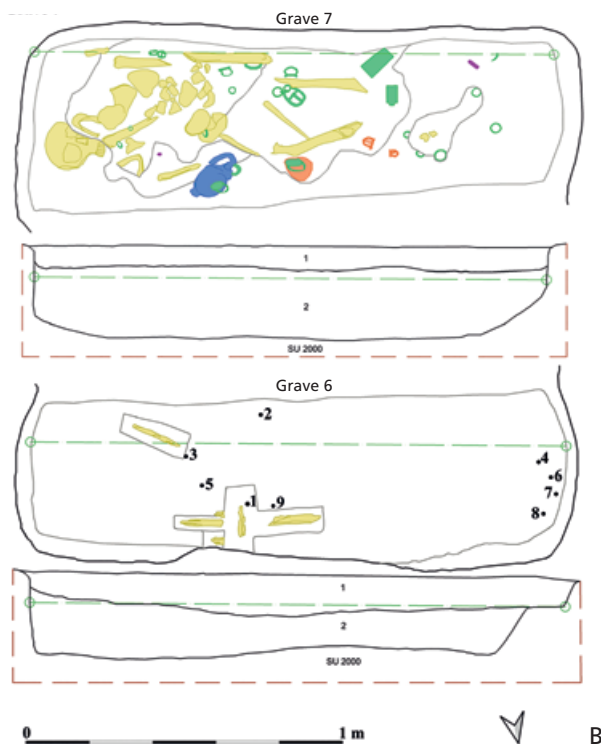


Fig. 3 Hypogeum D, graves 6 and 7. – (Photo and drawings M. Pleska).

and deposition of consistent alluvial sediments reaching up to the ceiling of the chamber after particularly strong seasonal rainfalls. 40 graves have been found either in the walls or on the floors of the antechamber and the main chamber, as well as in the walls of the corridor. The larger part of the wall graves remained visible after the abandonment of the site. As a consequence, they had been heavily looted and altered, to such an extent that most of them have been deprived of any trace of their contents and of their original capstones.

Two graves located next to one another in the southern wall of the corridor are among the rare exceptions (fig. 3). Although partially altered by the cyclical flooding of the chamber, they preserved several elements of their original contents, including osteological remains and part of the grave goods which accompanied them⁹. Likewise, the lower levels of the filling of some wall graves in the main chamber still contained *in situ* skeletal rests, as well as grave goods and fragments of capping slabs.

CATALOGUE OF GRAVE GOODS

Grave 6

Structure: Rectangular grave-pit hollowed out of the rock wall, capped by unworked stones.

Skeletal remains: Few, poorly preserved remains of a young individual.

Finds (fig. 4):

1. Rectangular belt buckle with straight pin. Iron. Buckle: 49 mm × 33 mm. Pin: 38 mm long.
2. Fragmentary kidney-shaped belt buckle. Iron with copper-alloy inlays, adhered to coin (no. 10). 42 mm × 26 mm.

3. Oval (purse?) buckle with straight pin. Iron. Buckle: 32 mm × 17 mm. Pin: 22 mm long.
4. Oval earring with open ends. Copper alloy. 20 mm × 23 mm.
5. Coin. Copper alloy. AE4. Dm. 14 mm.
- 6-8. Fragmentary burin. Iron. Larger fragment: 78 mm × 9 mm.
9. Fragmentary purse mount. Iron with mineralized textiles. 41 mm × 67 mm.

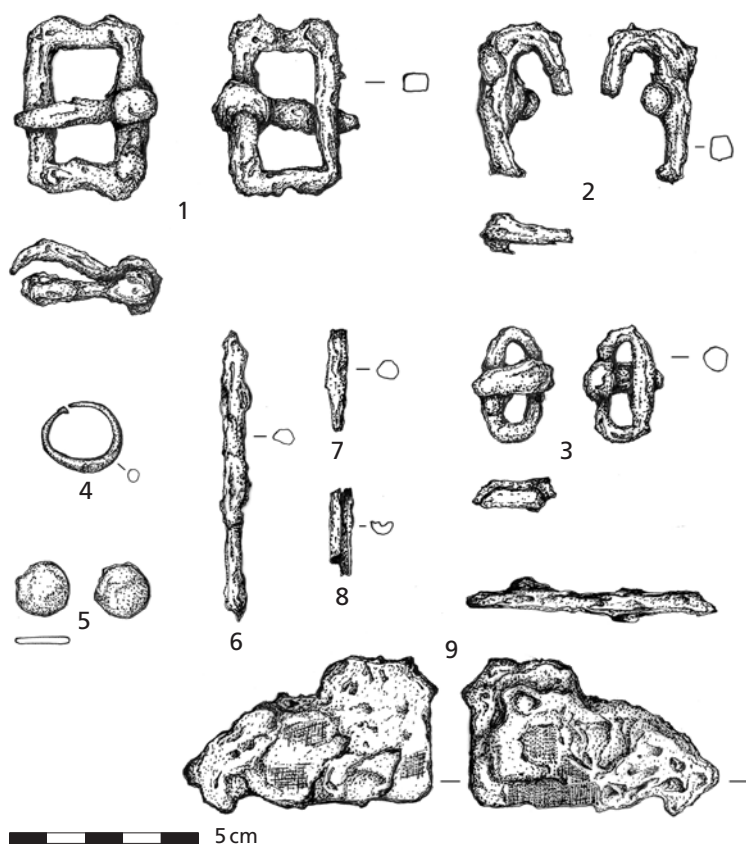


Fig. 4 Artefacts retrieved from grave 6. – (Drawings M. Pleska). – Scale 1:2.

10. Coin. Copper alloy. Nummus minimus. Adhered to buckle (no. 2). Dm. 8 mm.

11. Undetermined iron fragments.

12. Fragments of coarse pottery, light brown clay.

Grave 7

Structure: Rectangular grave-pit hollowed out of the rock wall, capped by two large fragments of a polished slab and unworked stones of small size, set between the slab fragments and the stone wall.

Skeletal remains: Poorly preserved remains of two young individuals.

Finds (fig. 5):

1. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 34 mm × 33 mm × 3 mm.
2. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 34 mm × 32 mm × 3 mm.
3. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 25 mm × 23 mm × 4 mm.
4. Oval ring. Copper alloy. 23 mm × 22 mm.
5. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 30 mm × 28 mm × 6 mm.
6. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 30 mm × 30 mm × 4 mm.
7. Circular finger ring. Copper alloy. 24 mm × 25 mm × 3 mm.
8. Circular ring. Copper alloy. 21 mm × 27 mm × 3 mm.
9. Oval belt buckle with straight pin. Copper alloy. Buckle: 60 mm × 40 mm × 5 mm. Pin: 49 mm long.
10. Rounded rectangular belt buckle with straight pin. Iron. Buckle: 53 mm × 36 mm × 7 mm. Pin: 40 mm long.

11. D-shaped belt buckle with rhomboid pin. Copper alloy. Buckle: 29 mm × 22 mm × 3 mm. Pin: 30 mm long.

12. D-shaped buckle, pin missing. Copper alloy. 21 mm × 22.5 mm.

13. Fragmentary (belt?) plate. Copper alloy, traces of silvering. 25 mm × 22 mm × 0.5 mm.

14. Rectangular belt plate. Copper alloy. 72.5 mm × 40 mm × 1 mm.

15. Rectangular belt plate. Copper alloy. 60 mm × 27 mm × 1 mm.

16. Two finger rings interlocked with a ring in sheet metal. Copper alloy.

- Finger ring a. Ring: 23.5 mm × 24 mm × 4 mm. Bezel: 12 mm × 17 mm.

- Finger ring b: 22 mm × 20 mm × 4 mm.

- Ring c: 12 mm × 13 mm × 4 mm.

17. Fragmented oval finger ring. Copper alloy. Ring: 20 mm × 22 mm × 2 mm. Bezel: 8 mm × 15 mm.

18. Oval finger ring with open ends. Copper alloy. 22 mm × 25 mm × 2 mm.

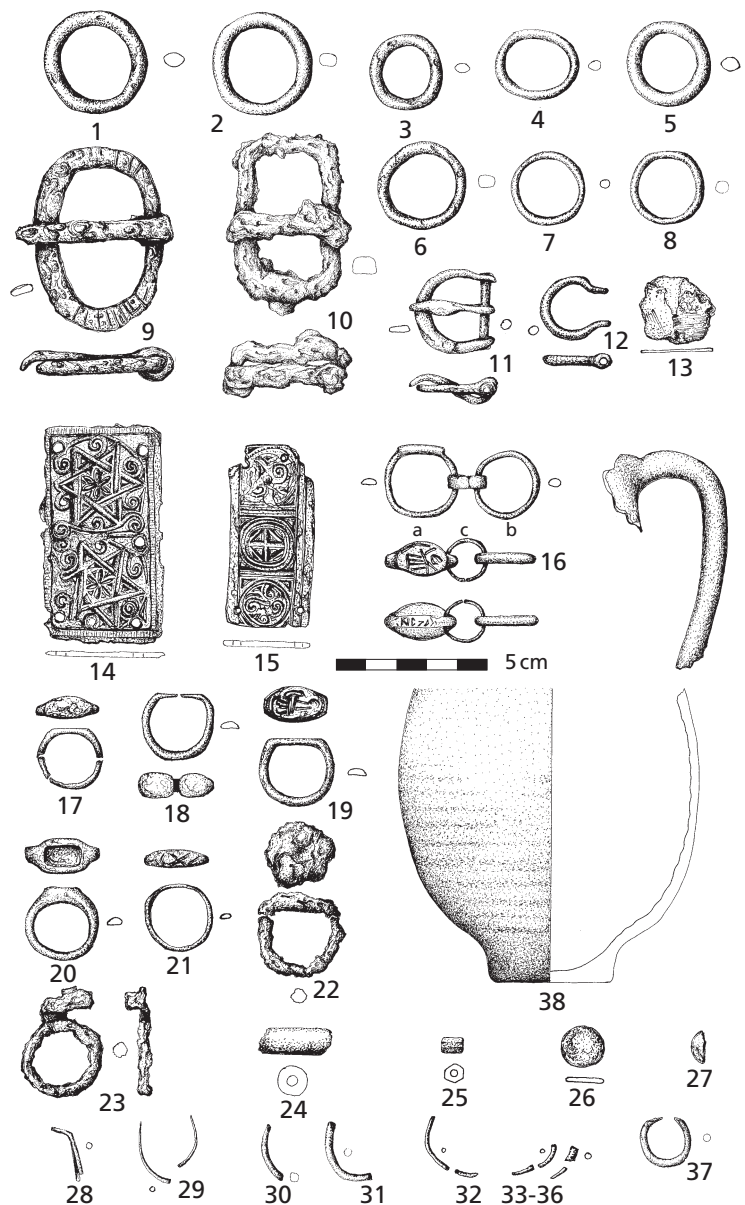


Fig. 5 Artefacts retrieved from grave 7. – (Drawings M. Pleska). – Scale 1:2.

- 19. Chip-carved oval finger ring. Copper alloy. Ring: 24 mm × 23 mm × 2 mm. Bezel: 12 mm × 17 mm.
- 20. Inlaid oval finger ring. Copper alloy. Ring: 24 mm × 24 mm × 3 mm. Bezel: 11 mm × 17 mm.
- 21. Chip-carved oval finger ring. Copper alloy. 22 mm × 22 mm × 2 mm.
- 22. Oval finger ring. Iron. Ring: 30 mm × 27 mm × 4 mm. Bezel: 22 mm × 23 mm.
- 23. Key with circular bow. Iron. Bow: 28.5 mm × 25.5 mm. Bit: 19 mm × 8 mm.
- 24. Cylindrical bead. Glass. 24 mm × 10 mm.
- 25. Prismatic bead. Emerald. 7.5 mm × 5.5 mm.
- 26. Coin. Copper alloy. AE4. Dm. 14 mm.
- 27. Clipped coin. Copper alloy. AE4. Dm. 12 mm.
- 28. Fragmentary oval earring. Copper alloy. 18 mm long.
- 29. Fragmentary oval earring. Copper alloy. Larger fragment: 21 mm long.
- 30. Fragmentary oval earring. Copper alloy. 19 mm long.
- 31. Fragmentary oval earring. Copper alloy. 20 mm long.
- 32. Fragmentary oval earring. Copper alloy. Larger fragment: 19 mm long.
- 33-36. Fragments of oval earring. Copper alloy. Larger fragment: 5 mm long.
- 37. Oval earring with open ends. Copper alloy. 17 mm × 16 mm × 2 mm.
- 38. Fragmentary jug. Fine, light brown clay. Dm. 100 mm.

TWO UNUSUAL FUNERARY DEPOSITS

Both deposits are truly exceptional in the context of Sicily and, as a matter of fact, of whole southern Italy, where only a handful of examples with comparable finds can be mentioned¹⁰. Comparative material is not particularly frequent in the closest African territories either, as Late Roman chip-carved belt sets seem to cluster more consistently in eastern Algeria rather than along the Tunisian coastal areas¹¹.

Grave 7 contained a minimum of two belt sets. Although their reconstruction remains largely hypothetical, it appears likely that they might have been fastened by a large copper alloy (no. 9) and an iron buckle (no. 10) respectively. A somewhat smaller D-shaped buckle (no. 11) could have acted as a fastener either of a belt set or, more probably, of a secondary strap, as seems to be the case at Pill'e Matta-Quartucciu (prov. Cagliari/I)¹², grave 100 (**fig. 6, 1-5**). The two chip-carved plates, as well as a fragmentary silvered bronze sheet (nos 13-15), may have been combined with the aforementioned fasteners. Judging from their position in the grave, clustered around what might originally have been the right pelvic area of the corpse, it can be assumed that the chip-carved plates and the large bronze belt buckle belonged to the same set. The recorded belt rings (nos 1-8) may have also fastened belt sets, although it is also likely that they originally formed part of one (or both?) of the above mentioned belt sets, as examples of Late Roman belts such as Hürth-Hermühlheim (Kr. Rhein-Erft/D) show¹³. The position of five of the rings at Scorrione, clustered together next to the iron buckle, supports the idea that they might have belonged to the same belt.

Be that as it may, the multiplicity of belt sets corresponds quite well with the preliminary anthropological observations, which suggest that the grave may have hosted two individuals¹⁴. Judging by the available dating material, these inhumations may have been interred during a short period of time, corresponding to the early to mid 5th century. The AE4 struck under Theodosius I recorded in the grave¹⁵, providing a *terminus post quem* of 379 CE, fits quite comfortably into the proposed time span.

The belt sets were hardly original products. The two chip-carved plates provide quite eloquent evidence of the recycling of belt components: judging by the cut on the proximal frame of the plate no. 14, it was originally part of a composite belt buckle belonging to a »wide belt set« of Böhme's type A or B¹⁶, detached from its original forepart to be used, apparently, as an autonomous belt plate; a secondary piercing through the central part may have had the function of reinforcing the attachment of the plate to the new belt. As for the plate no. 15, it has been clearly clipped on one of its edges, while an extra hole was pierced on the opposite side: this may have helped to fasten it to the belt after the loss of two of the original piercings at the corners of the plate. It is therefore probable that the belt sets recorded in grave 7 were but pastiches using »second-hand« belt components of the late 4th-early 5th century. In that case, the dating of the belt components should be regarded only as a *terminus post quem* for their reassembling and deposition. With this background, a circular, »buckle-shaped« earring (no. 37) may be of particular interest: a similar object was recorded *in situ* next to the skull of the individual buried in grave 97 at the cemetery of Estagel (départ. Pyrénées-Orientales/F) (**fig. 6, 29**), dating from the third quarter of the 5th century¹⁷; related earrings have been recorded also at the basilica of Hippo Regius (prov. Annaba/DZ) (**fig. 6, 13-15**), in burials probably dating to the second third of the 5th century¹⁸. The central decades of the 5th century seem therefore the likeliest date for the deposition of the bulk of objects attested in Scorrione D, grave 7.

The chronology of the rest of the non-functional adornments does not substantially refine this general frame: the finger rings and the earrings in bronze wire belong to types widely spread in the Mediterranean area during Late Antiquity¹⁹; the same applies to the prismatic emerald bead, widely used in jewellery sets from the 4th-5th century throughout the Roman Empire²⁰. The rather unusual interlocked rings (no. 16), consisting of two decorated finger rings joined together by a ring of sheet bronze, may mirror patterns of recycling and remounting of metal objects, comparable to those outlined by the belt fittings. The iron key

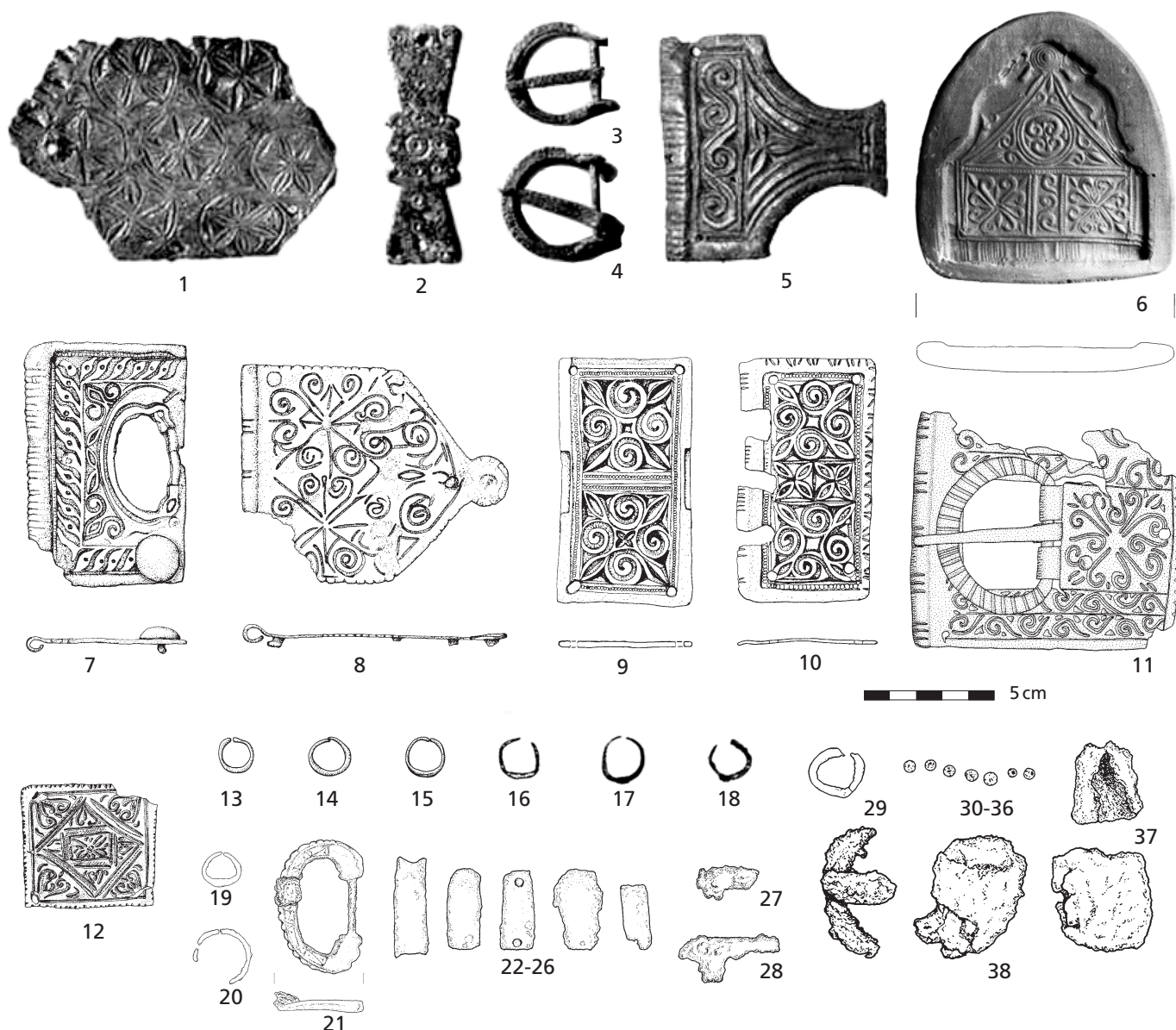


Fig. 6 Western Mediterranean parallels for the deposit from grave 7. – **1-5** Pill'e Matta-Quartucciu (prov. Cagliari/I), grave 100. – **6** »Central Tunisia«. – **7-8** Djemila (prov. Sétif/DZ). – **9-10** Tiddis (prov. Constantine/DZ). – **11-12** Tazoult (prov. Batna/DZ). – **13-15** Annaba (prov. Annaba/DZ), »great basilica«. – **16-18** El Ruedo (prov. Cordoba/E). – **19-28** Estagel-Les Tombes (dép. Pyrénées-Orientales/F), grave 93bis. – **29-38** Estagel-Les Tombes, grave 97. – (1-5 after Salvi 2015, fig. 6; 6-12 after Eger 2012, pl. 6, 10-11. 14; 13-18 after Jiřík/Pinar 2019, fig. 11; 19-28 after Pinar 2019, fig. 7; 29-38 after Pinar 2017, fig. 19). – Scale 1:2.

no. 23 is not a particularly time-sensible object, yet it appears to be closer, from a technological viewpoint, to the keys recorded in Sicily during the Late Roman rather than during the Byzantine period²¹. The two jugs identified in the grave, probably imports from northern Africa, may belong to or imitate coarse ware of type Bonifay 62, produced between the late 4th and the late 7th century²², which does not contradict the dates suggested by the metal objects. As no evidence of funerary activity in the hypogeum can be securely dated after the early 6th century, it seems likely that the »last datable usage« of grave 7 may not be much later than 450 CE. Therefore, the most likely interpretation of the grave is that it may have hosted two burials from the early to mid 5th century.

At least one of the burials should be connected to a female individual, as the necklace beads and the wire earrings suggest. It cannot be conclusively proved whether these ornaments were associated with any of

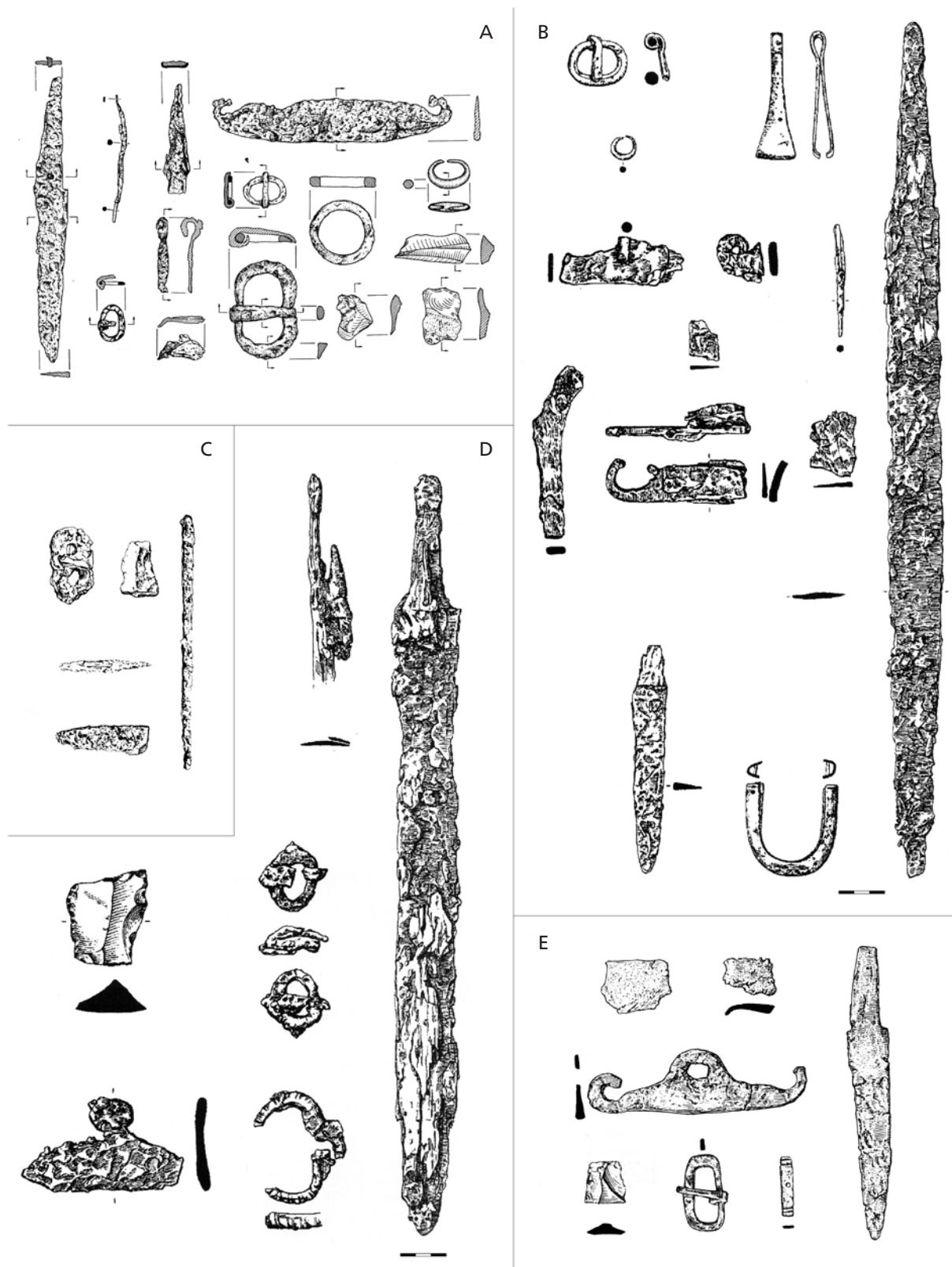


Fig. 7 Parallels for the deposit from grave 6 recorded north of the Middle Danube (D3 and E1 periods). – **A** Schletz (Bez. Mistelbach/A), grave 9. – **B** Proštějov-Držovice (okr. Olomouc/CZ), grave 2. – **C** Nový Saldorf (okr. Znojmo/CZ), grave 28/24. – **D** Proštějov-Držovice (okr. Olomouc/CZ), grave 4. – **E** Strachotín (okr. Břeclav/CZ), grave 70. – (A after Windl 1996, pl. 9; B, D after Čižmář/Tejral 2002, figs 7, 10; C after Tejral 1982, fig. 82; E after Čižmář/Geislerová/Rakovský 1985, fig. 3).



Fig. 8 Parallels for the deposit from grave 6 recorded in the Carpathian basin and south of the Alps (D3 and E1 periods). – **A** Ptuj/SLO, grave. – **B** Velikaja Bakta (Zakarpattia obl./UA), grave 4. – **C** Globasnitz (Bez. Völkermarkt/A), eastern cemetery, grave 11. – (A after Knific/Nabergoj 2017, fig. 17; B after Čerkun 1994, fig. 4; C after Glaser 2004, fig. 7).

the aforementioned belt sets. The same applies to the buckle-shaped earring, which may be attributed to a different burial than the wire earrings. Although hypothetical, the reconstruction of an association between this earring and one of the belt sets is supported by a number of comparable combinations recorded in the Western Mediterranean (fig. 6, 13-38). The composition of the Scorrione deposit and these parallel finds suggests that this hypothetical combination may have been connected with the burial of a male individual. The presence of female and male individuals at grave 7 seems to be further supported by preliminary anthropological observations.

As for grave 6, its combination of belt buckle, purse mount, burin and earring finds its best parallels in Central Europe. Striking similarities can be recognized among the grave goods recorded in male graves from the D3 and E1 periods in Moravia and Lower Austria: the finds at Schletz (Bez. Mistelbach/A), grave 9 and Prostějov-Držovice (okr. Olomouc/CZ), graves 2 and 4 (fig. 7A-B, D) are among the best examples²³. The latter contained no earring, but a belt buckle with a brass-on-iron damascened decoration that strongly recalls the Scorrione D, grave 6 example²⁴. Less exact combinations of iron belt buckles with either purse mounts, burins or other pointed tools (fig. 7C, E) are also recorded in this²⁵, as well as in the neighbouring regions²⁶. Among them, the combination of a »nomadic« earring, iron buckle and purse mount recorded at Velika Bakta (Zakarpattia obl./UA), grave 4 (fig. 8B) and, especially, the burial of a man with an artificial skull deformation and eastern Asian ancestry²⁷, equipped with a thin long seax, a »nomadic« earring and a set of iron objects including a copper-damascened belt buckle, a purse mount and a burin, unearthed at Ptuj/SLO (fig. 8A) are particularly noteworthy²⁸. These examples, dating from the second half of the 5th century, are quite consistent with the chronologies outlined by the illegible bronze coins: the AE4 (no. 5) can be broadly dated to the 4th-5th century, while the small size of the nummus minimus (no. 10) suggests that it may not have been minted prior to 450 CE²⁹. As far as the territories around the southern Alps are concerned, a comparable combination of two iron belt buckles and a gold »nomadic« earring from Imola-Villa Clelia (prov. Bologna/I), grave 162, certainly dating from before 500 CE³⁰, may be the only example recorded so far in mainland Italy. Examples of iron purse mounts have been recorded in broadly coeval male burials in the south-eastern Alps, as examples from Globasnitz (Bez. Völkermarkt/A), grave 11 (fig. 8C) and Ajdovski Gradec (obč. Sevnica/SLO), grave 27, associated with composite belt buckles from about 500 CE, show³¹. The inventory recorded in grave 14 at Vyškov (okr. Vyškov/CZ)³² shows that similar objects were combined in southern Moravia as well. The parallel from Globasnitz 11, however, stands particularly close to the contents of Scorrione D, grave 6, as shown by the presence of a burin among the likely contents of the purse. It may be worth mentioning that other contemporary graves at the Globasnitz cemetery delivered »nomadic« earrings and iron purse mounts.

THE SCORRIONE DEPOSITS AND 5TH CENTURY SICILY

As we have seen, the available chronological indices correspond to attributing the burials in graves 6 and 7 to a quite narrow time span, running approximately from the second quarter of the 5th to the first quarter of the 6th century. That corresponds fairly well with the approximate dating of the ground burials recorded both in the chamber (containing artefacts dating from the mid and late 5th c.) and in the antechamber (where floor graves were overlapped by a layer dating to the 6th-early 7th c.)³³.

The burials in graves 6 and 7 were thus performed during a very specific period in Sicily's history: that of the alleged sovereignty of the »barbarian« kingdoms over the island. Two regional authorities contended power and influence on the island during this period: the North African Vandal kingdom and the Italian kingdom of Odoacer first and Theodoric later. King Gaiseric's expeditions to Sicily started shortly after the Vandal conquest of Carthage, as early as 440 CE³⁴. Between 455-470 CE, the Vandals were raiding Sicilian coasts on an

almost yearly basis³⁵. It is, however, uncertain what the nature and effectiveness of the grasp of the Vandal kings over the island was and to which extent it implied the presence of regular garrisons and state agents on Sicilian soil. Referring to the period 455-476, Victor Vitensis mentions Sicily alongside Sardinia, Corsica and the Balearics as territories that Gaiseric »defended«³⁶: the chosen verb, rather imprecise, does not settle the matter. The immediately successive period is hardly better known: Sicily may have formally »returned« to Italy shortly after Odoacer's accession to power, in 476-477 CE, in exchange for a yearly tribute³⁷. Apparently, the island was safely anchored to Theodoric's Italy from the very beginning of his reign (491 CE); a panegyric from 506/507 CE proclaims that the Gothic king was not paying any tribute to the Vandals³⁸. In all likelihood, the more accurate way to look at this whole period of Sicily's history is to consider the island as a »middle ground« between the African and Italian powers, as Frank M. Clover suggests³⁹.

In this specific context, the grave goods from Scorrione may be regarded as material evidence linked to the political events in Sicily. As said, the combination of Late Roman and Pontic-Danubian objects from grave 7 finds reasonable counterparts in northern Africa, more precisely in eastern Algeria. The latter is one of the few territories in the Western Mediterranean where Late Roman chip-carved belts and circular »buckle-shaped« earrings seem to coexist about the mid 5th century (fig. 6, 7-15); among other possible candidates (southern Gaul, southern Spain), it is certainly the one best connected to southern Sicily both by seafaring routes and by political events. Although no direct Algerian origin for the finds in Scorrione D, grave 7 should be claimed in the current state of our knowledge, it is worth stressing that the region was at the very core of the Vandal realm up to the conquest of Carthage, i. e. between 430-439 CE, a chronology broadly contemporary with the burials in Scorrione D, grave 7: a transfer of such elements to southern Sicily during the early Vandal raids on the island, from 440 CE onwards, can be thus hypothesized. Although belonging to a type well attested in south-eastern Sicily⁴⁰, the likely African origin of the jugs recorded in the grave may underline the »Vandal connections«.

Much clearer seem to be the long-distance connections of the deposit retrieved from grave 6. The consistent parallel finds from Moravia and Lower Austria seem to indicate a connection with the territory controlled by the Rugii. It may be hypothesized that the presence in Sicily of individuals from that area might be connected with Odoacer's rule over the island, corresponding approximately to 477-489 CE. However, the grave goods from grave 6 may be connected to the immediately subsequent period: the presence in Syracuse of state agents such as the *comes civitatis* Gildilas, probably accompanied by a Gothic garrison, and the *censor* Witigisclus⁴¹, may have contributed to disseminating some elements of Danubian material culture in eastern Sicily. Epigraphic evidence for Germanic names in the cemeteries of Syracuse (fig. 9) may be regarded as a further material trace of the process⁴².

The stationing of military garrisons in Sicily throughout the Vandal and Gothic periods appears to be indeed a reasonable explanation for the unusual finds from Scorrione: the *militaria* from grave 7⁴³ and the frequent association of swords, on the one hand, and sets of iron objects such as the one in grave 6, on the other⁴⁴, support this hypothesis. The available written sources are not explicit about the military organization of Sicily in post-Roman times⁴⁵. A parallel situation to Sardinia can, however, be assumed: in spite of the fact that the control of the Vandal kingdom over that island is somewhat ambiguous and uncertain⁴⁶, it seems clear that it managed to keep a consistent presence in Sardinia, clustered around its main port, Cagliari⁴⁷. It is surely no coincidence that 5th century Late Roman *militaria*, slightly antedating the Vandal period, have been recorded in the surroundings of that city⁴⁸. A similar model of territorial control, implying the presence of agents of the Vandal kingdom, could have been the case in some Sicilian cities, especially along the southern and western coasts of the island, the ones more closely connected to the North African core of the kingdom. In the subsequent period Gothic garrisons are attested in cities such as Palermo⁴⁹ and probably, as seen, Syracuse. The available data thus suggest that the barbarian regna exercised control of the Sicilian territory by stationing a

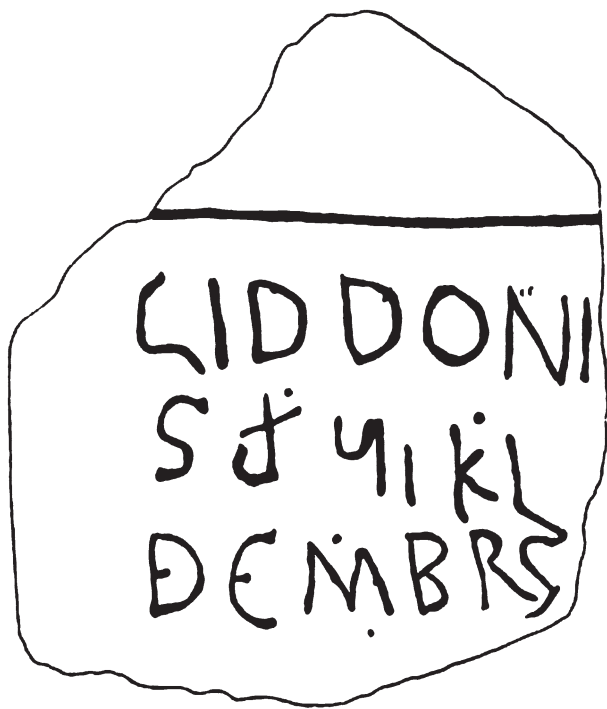


Fig. 9 Syracuse, catacomb of Saint John, gravestone of Giddo. – (After Orsi 1909, fig. 11).

limited amount of garrisons in particularly strategic places, corresponding to the main coastal cities and ports and their surroundings. That may be the case of the territory around the Scorrione cemetery, well connected with the nearby coast (just over 7 km to the southeast: **fig. 1C**). Both placenames and written sources suggest the presence of Byzantine military posts in this territory: Camardemi, barely 3 km south of Scorrione, and a »dromons' port« in Pozzallo⁵⁰. From this viewpoint, the deposits retrieved from graves 6 and 7 may outline a continuity of the stationing model throughout time. The evolution of the grave goods suggests that the location of the military stations may have experienced very few changes over time, whereas the »metropolitan territories« of recruitment of the garrisons shifted significantly in correspondence with the concurrent geopolitical transformations: from northern Africa to the Italian kingdom and its allied territories north of the middle Danube. The city of Marsala, contended by Vandals, Goths and Byzantines throughout the first three

decades of the 6th century⁵¹, can be regarded as an eloquent example of how garrisons sent by rival powers may overlap in one single spot over time.

A last consideration about the finds from Scorrione has to do with their immediate archaeological background. If our hypotheses on the allochthonous origins of the archaeological deposits retrieved in graves 6 and 7 are to be accepted, one must accept that the site provides a quite unusual and remarkable architectural background for these burials. As previously said, these kinds of funerary monuments are deeply rooted in local funerary and architectural traditions, and show a tight link with local forms of Christianity⁵². To the best of our knowledge, the finds from Scorrione are so far the first possible archaeological evidence for »barbarians« buried in the Sicilian countryside. One such find, although from an urban context, has been reported in the great catacomb of Saint John in Syracuse: it is the funerary inscription of a certain Giddo (**fig. 9**), usually attributed to about 500 CE⁵³. Pontic-Danubian portable objects in hypogeal chambers, however, are not exclusive to Sicily: the example of a gold »nomadic« earring retrieved from a vaulted tomb unearthed in one of the Late Antique cemeteries of Serdica (obl. Sofia-grad/BG)⁵⁴ is similar to the association of personal adornments and architectural features recorded at Scorrione (**fig. 10**).

The typology and intrinsic value of the objects forming the deposits in graves 6 and 7 do not indicate a particularly high status. To a certain extent, a correlation between the value of the deposits and the position and structure of the graves is apparent: located at a distance to the main chamber and its »privileged« central baldachin, the capping of the graves is rather unsophisticated, consisting of either unworked stones or of reused fragments of older grave slabs. There is, indeed, a chance that the graves had been emptied of their original contents and reused to host the burials of the mid 5th - early 6th century⁵⁵. Be that as it may, if our hypothesis about the connection between these burials and military garrisons is to be accepted, the individuals buried at Scorrione were most certainly not higher officers.

The last major consideration to be made is about the mutual position of graves 6 and 7 and its implications. As mentioned, the deposits are attributable to the late D2 or D2/D3 and to the D3 or E1 periods. That means

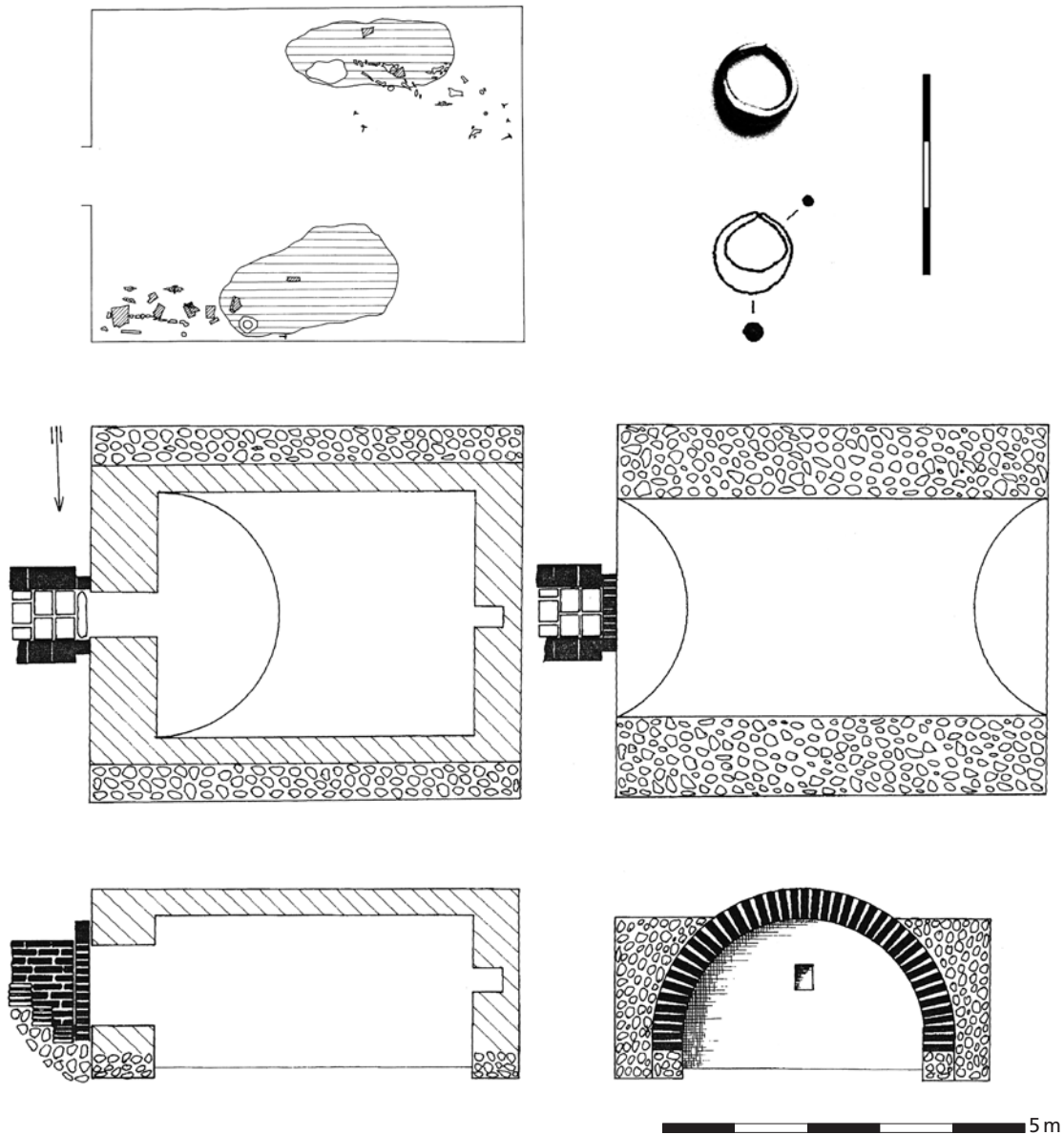


Fig. 10 Serdica, eastern cemetery. Vaulted hypogeal mausoleum and earring from the grave in the south-western corner. – (After Ivanov 2007, figs 4. 9. 13. 18).

that, although they might have been deposited roughly contemporarily during the 450-460s, it appears far more likely that they belonged to two distinct periods. The technological details of the purse mount, attached to the purse buckle by means of a rivet, and the type of damascened decoration displayed by the belt buckle in grave 6 support this impression, as both features find their best counterparts in graves of the E1 period⁵⁶, thus suggesting a phase of use not earlier than 470 CE.

Thus, graves 6 and 7 bring together a sort of stratigraphic sample of the geopolitical evolution in Sicily: a burial connected with the Italian kingdom may have been placed in a very specific location, next to a grave containing burials apparently connected with the African kingdom. If our hypothesis on the military background of these burials is to be accepted, it would appear that the hypogeum, or at least part of it, was turned into a sort of »military cemetery« at a certain moment of its use, perhaps after a short period of abandonment or plundering⁵⁷. The material attributes of the people buried there changed over time, appar-

ently depending on whose was the effective sovereignty over the territory at the time of burial. We do not have any element yet to reconstruct the nature of the relationships established between Vandal-period and later populations. It can, however, be safely said that the mutual position of graves 6 and 7 implies a picture of coexistence and »orderly transition« rather than of conflict. From this viewpoint, it can be stressed that the relative position of the deposits suggests an orderly occupation (or reoccupation) of the funerary space, the earlier burials (grave 7) being set deeper into the rock wall, leaving the outermost structures (in this case, grave 6) temporarily free for later use.

CONCLUSIONS

The deposits recorded at Scorrione are exceptional in their regional background and display clear connections with coeval European and Mediterranean finds of the Migration Period. In the specific context of a rural hypogeal cemetery from Late Antiquity, the finds create a number of new questions regarding the community of users of this kind of monument. Previous archaeological literature dealing with Late Antique rock-cut cemeteries has focused mainly on the religious identity of the users (Christians, pagans or Hebrews, laymen or clergymen)⁵⁸. The new finds from Scorrione open a discussion as to the professional status (military or civilians) and to the origins (locals or foreigners) of the people buried there, an issue that had previously been approached from an exclusively epigraphic viewpoint⁵⁹. To the best of the authors' knowledge, the still fragmentary and limited evidence from Scorrione may be the only material trace for phenomena such as the presence of military stations and of »barbarians« in south-eastern Sicily recorded so far. The position of the site, at the westernmost periphery of the Syracusan territory, may be significant for understanding the nature of the hold over the island and over its most important and strategic city during the reigns of Gaiseric, Odoacer and Theodoric. Be that as it may, it is expected that resuming the planned excavations and launching a systematic programme of bioarchaeological analyses will sooner than later produce new data to confront the hypotheses presented in this paper.

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Notes

- 1) Rizzone/Sammito 2001, 77-80; 2007a, 35.
- 2) Uggeri 1997/1998.
- 3) Rizzone/Sammito 2004, 85-86.
- 4) Cassarino/Scerra 2021, 57-58. 62. – Pinar et al. forthcoming.
- 5) Rizzone/Sammito 2004, 85-86.
- 6) Rizzone 2009.
- 7) Pennavaria 1891. – Agnello 1953. – Bruno/Scerra/Sirugo 2013. – Terranova 2013. – Rizzone/Sammito 2021.
- 8) Rizzone/Sammito 2007a, 35-36.
- 9) Pinar et al. forthcoming.
- 10) E. g. D'Angela 1989, 31. – Riemer 2000, cat. 141. – Arena et al. 2001, 176-177. – Salvi 2015.
- 11) Eger 2012, 118-149.
- 12) Salvi 2015, 195-198.
- 13) Gottschalk 1999, 85-86.
- 14) The anthropological observations are from Zuzana Hukelová and Dominika Schmidtová, to whom the authors are deeply grateful.
- 15) The authors are sincerely thankful to Amalia Criscione for her preliminary cleaning and reading of the coin.
- 16) Böhme 1974, 55-58.

- 17) Pinar 2019, 221-222. – Pinar 2020, 310-311.
- 18) Marec 1958, 52-60. – Koenig 1981, 303-306. – Jiřík/Pinar 2019, 459-460. 464-465.
- 19) E. g. Baldini Lippolis 1999, 88-89. 208-210. See also: Metaxas 2012, 43. – Chowanec 2019, 56.
- 20) E. g. Swift 2003.
- 21) Manganaro 2002, 555-556. – Metaxas 2012, 46.
- 22) Bonifay 2004, 293.
- 23) Čižmář/Tejral 2002. – Windl 1996, 377.
- 24) The preliminary observations on the decoration of the belt buckle no. 2 from Scorrione D, grave 6 are due to Amalia Criscione, to whom the authors are sincerely grateful.
- 25) E. g. Čižmář/Geislerová/Rakovský 1985, 286. – Tejral 1982, 208. – Neumann 1965, 114.
- 26) E. g. Straub 2001.
- 27) Štamfelj/Hitij/Leben-Seljak 2019.
- 28) Čerkun 1994, 94-95. – Knific/Nabergoj 2017, 22-23.
- 29) E. g. Troussel 1950/1951. – Morrisson 1980. – Hahn 1987. – Burrell 2007.
- 30) Manzelli/Pinar forthcoming.
- 31) Bachran 1975, 114. – Glaser 2002, 434-435. – Glaser 2004, 92-94. – Pollak 2020.
- 32) Tejral 1974, 51.
- 33) Pinar/Pleska forthcoming.
- 34) Hydatii Chronicon 16 (ed. Tranoy). Historians such as Ludwig Schmidt, Biagio Pace and Gina Fasoli considered that the first Vandal raids in Sicily may have started just before the conquest of Carthage, in 438-439 CE: Schmidt 1942, 66-67. – Pace 1949, 86. – Fasoli 1980, 98.
- 35) Prok. BV 1, 5, 18-25 and 1, 22, 13-18 (ed. Dewing). – Clover 1999, 236. – Caliri 2015, 991-992.
- 36) *Victoris Vitensis Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae* 1, 4 (MGH AA, III).
- 37) *Victoris Vitensis Historia persecutionis Africanae provinciae* 1, 4 (MGH AA, III). – Clover 1999. – Caliri 2016.
- 38) Ennod. pan. 70 (MGH AA, VII). – Clover 1999, 238-239.
- 39) Clover 1999, 240-242. – See also Caliri 2016, 147-149.
- 40) Rizzone/Sammito 2006, 502-503. – Di Stefano 2009, 25-26. – Sgarlata 2003, 153.
- 41) Cassiod. var. 9, 11-12; 9, 14 (MGH AA, XII). – See also Caliri 2005.
- 42) Orsi 1909, 351. – Manganaro 1993, 579. 583.
- 43) On Late Roman military belt sets, see most recently Böhme 2021.
- 44) Knific/Nabergoj 2017, 22-23. – Čižmář/Tejral 2002.
- 45) Clover 1999. – Kislinger 2014. – Caliri 2015; 2016.
- 46) Ibba 2010; 2017.
- 47) Prok. BV 1, 6, 8 (ed. Dewing).
- 48) Salvi 2015.
- 49) Prok. BG 1, 5 (ed. Dewing).
- 50) Fiorilla 2013, 149-150. – Fiorilla/Rizzone/Sammito 2020, 210. – Pinar et al. forthcoming.
- 51) Clover 1999, 241-243. – Caliri 2007, 582-587.
- 52) E. g. Rizzone/Sammito 2007b.
- 53) Orsi 1909, 351. – Manganaro 1993, 579. 583. – Sgarlata 2003, 38. – Rizzone 2009, 75.
- 54) Ivanov 2007.
- 55) Pinar/Pleska forthcoming.
- 56) Bachran 1975, 114. – Glaser 2004, 91-94. – Tejral 2005, 132.
- 57) Pinar/Pleska forthcoming.
- 58) E. g. Agnello 1957. – Sgarlata 1999. – Rizzone/Sammito 2014.
- 59) Manganaro 1993. – Sgarlata 2006.

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Zwei ungewöhnliche Grabausstattungen aus der Völkerwanderungszeit im Hypogäum D, Modica-Scorrione W (prov. Ragusa, Sizilien/I)

Die in den Jahren 2020 und 2021 durchgeführten Grabungskampagnen in der Hypogäen-Nekropole von Scorrione W (Modica, Ragusa, Sizilien) haben zur Dokumentation mehrerer architektonischer Strukturen geführt, die in die natürlichen Felswände eingetieft wurden, sowie von gut erhaltenen Gräbern und deren Beigaben. Darunter sind zwei Gruppen von Metallobjekten, die im regionalen Kontext einen außergewöhnlichen Charakter haben und aus mitteleuropäischer Sicht von besonderem Interesse sind. Das Depot in Grab 7 stammt aus der Zeit der Vandalenüberfälle und ihrer angeblichen Herrschaft über Sizilien, während das Depot in Grab 6 in die Zeit von Odoaker und Theoderich gehört. Beide Grabausstattungen weisen Verbindungen zu mitteleuropäischen Bekleidungs- und Bestattungstraditionen auf und könnten mit einem militärischen Umfeld in Verbindung stehen. Es wird argumentiert, dass die Funde von Scorrione eine militärische Stationierung im Randgebiet von Syrakus zwischen der Mitte und dem Ende des 5. Jahrhunderts widerspiegeln könnten.

Two Unusual Funerary Deposits from the Migration Period at the Hypogeum D, Modica-Scorrione W (Prov. Ragusa, Sicily/I)

The excavation campaigns carried out in 2020 and 2021 at the hypogeal cemetery at Scorrione W (Modica, Ragusa, Sicily) have led to the recording of several architectural structures hollowed out of the natural rock walls, as well as of well-preserved graves and their deposits. Among the latter, two assemblages of metal accessories show an exceptional character in their regional background and are of remarkable interest from a Central European perspective. The deposit in grave 7 dates to the times of the Vandal raids and alleged sovereignty over Sicily, whereas the one in grave 6 belongs to the period of Odoacer and Theodoric. Both deposits display connections with Central European clothing and funerary traditions and might be related to military environments. It is argued that the Scorrione finds may mirror a timeline of military stationing in the peripheral territory of Syracuse between the mid and late 5th century.

Deux mobiliers funéraires exceptionnels de la période des Grandes Migrations dans l'hypogée D, Modica-Scorrione W (prov. Ragusa, Sicile/I)

Les campagnes de fouilles menées en 2020 et 2021 dans la nécropole d'hypogées de Scorrione W (Modica, Ragusa, Sicile) ont permis de répertorier plusieurs structures taillées dans les parois naturelles, ainsi que des tombes bien préservées avec leurs mobiliers. Parmi ceux-ci, deux ensembles d'objets métalliques revêtent un caractère exceptionnel dans le contexte régional et présentent un intérêt particulier du point de vue de l'Europe centrale. Le mobilier de la tombe 7 date de la période des raids vandales et de leur prétendue souveraineté sur la Sicile, tandis que celui de la tombe 6 remonte aux règnes d'Odoacre et de Théodéric (le Grand). Ces deux mobiliers révèlent des liens avec l'habillement et les traditions funéraires de l'Europe centrale et pourraient se rattacher à des contextes militaires. On pense que les trouvailles de Scorrione reflètent la présence d'une base militaire sur le territoire de Syracuse entre le milieu et la fin du 5^e siècle.

Traduction: Y. Gautier

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