

## **The archaic Cemetery at Motya. A case-study for tracing early colonial Phoenician culture, trade relations and interconnections in the West Mediterranean.**

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Generally speaking, it is usually assumed that burial customs from a colonial environment provide evidence of close links with the culture and tradition of the homeland. While on the one hand funerary gifts, rituals and ceremonies often betray a pedigree from the native land, on the other hand some of the offerings, especially luxury goods, may indicate foreign relations and trade routes connected with neighbouring or far distant regions. Such phenomena must have affected early Phoenician colonization, which created a network of trading posts across the Mediterranean and beyond and came into contact with different regions and peoples in the early first millennium BC.

In the attempt to test such issues a case-study is discussed here concerning the archaic cemetery at Motya, which has been long considered one of the best findings for the study of early Phoenician burial customs in Sicily and in the West. This cemetery, uncovered in the early 19th century by J. Whitaker and later re-excavated in 1960s/70s, has revealed a rich number of cremation tombs (about 380), mostly dating to the late 8th/7th BC. In addition, over a dozen burials of the same kind were excavated last June by a team from the University of Palermo, and this fresh evidence will be briefly examined here.

Three main types of burials can be distinguished, namely stone cists, cinerary urns and rock-cut pits: they usually contain burnt human bones and ashes and are sometime associated with a stone stele of simple type, rarely found *in situ*. Anthropological data, previously neglected, have been now retrieved, showing that adult and child interments occur side by side in the same sector of the cemetery. The funerary offerings include a standard set of pots containing food, drink and ointment for the deceased: fine Red-Slip ware of pure Phoenician tradition as well as lamps, oil bottles, transport jars and other vessel types betray their oriental pedigree, while high-quality imports, mainly Proto-Corinthian vases, suggest close trade relations with the Greeks. Coarse hand-made kitchen-ware as well as painted geometric pottery of local manufacture may indicate possible connections with the Elymians: as also suggested by ancient sources, the interaction between the Motya colonists and this neighbouring indigenous folk of western Sicily must have been very strong. Moreover, a few rare imports from central Italy (metal fibulae, spiral amphorae, bucchero) indicate a Tyrrhenian trade route towards Etruria. Other grave goods, such as faience vessels, scarabs, luxury personal ornaments indicate contacts with Egypt and eastern Mediterranean. Since similar funerary finds have been unearthed in archaic tombs at Carthage, it is clear that in early times Motya was a major trading post close to the North African coast and played a major role in the cultural exchange and interconnections between the East and West.