11. Borġ in-Nadur pottery abroad: 
a report from the Sicilian necropoleis of Thapsos and Matrensa

Davide Tanasi

1. Introduction

The Middle Bronze Age (15th-13th century BC) is without doubt the most relevant period in the history of the interconnections between Sicily and the Maltese archipelago in prehistory. The survey of all the Borġ in-Nadur-type pottery in eastern Sicily (Tanasi 2008), the identification of Thapsos-type pottery in Maltese contexts (Tanasi 2010), and the recent archaeometric definition of the Maltese ceramic imports and the recognition of the first examples of Maltese-style pottery produced in Sicily (Barone et alii, this volume, chapter 4) have shown the importance of re-visiting the old assemblages of archaeological material stored in the museums using modern techniques of analysis. Moreover, the complete publication of the Borġ in-Nadur-type pottery from tombs 13 and 23 of the Cozzo del Pantano necropolis, partially published and discussed by Orsi in 1893 (Orsi 1893), together with the local Thapsos pottery with which they occurred in context, has demonstrated the importance of a new autoptic study of the ceramics, never photographed or classified before, in terms of the identification of potential imports versus local products (Tanasi 2011b; Tanasi 2014b). The present contribution has to be seen in the context of this research strategy. It considers the Borġ in-Nadur-type pottery from other excavations and fieldwork, namely the material from tombs 6, 22, 23, 34, 64 and E at Thapsos, from tomb 6 at Matrensa, studied between 2010 and 2012 at the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse (Fig. 1). Furthermore, some ceramics from Cannatello and Ognina will be presented and discussed.

2. The Thapsos necropolis: pottery from Orsi’s (1895) and Gentili’s (1951) excavations

The site of Thapsos, on the Magnisi Peninsula, located a few kilometers north of the suburbs of Syracuse, is the pivotal site for the Sicilian Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 2). The necropolis, comprising rock-cut shaft graves and chamber tombs mainly located on the northern and eastern sides of the peninsula was explored by Orsi in 1894 (Orsi 1895), after it was discovered by Francesco Saverio Cavallari in 1879 (Cavallari 1880). Subsequently, further tombs were explored in the early 1950s by Gino Vinicio Gentili (Gentili 1951), on behalf of Bernabò Brea, and intermittently by Voza during the 1970s and 1980s (Voza 1972; 1973a; 1973b; 1980-1981; 1984-1985). The settlement, located by the isthmus was extensively excavated between the sixties and eighties and the scientific results have been published only in preliminary fashion.

Since the materials from the settlement are not yet available for study, this study focused on the artefacts from the excavations by Orsi and by Gentili at the necropolis, amongst which were several red lustrous vessels, typical of the Borġ in-Nadur facies. In his publication of 1895, Orsi published nine examples, collected in the looted tombs 1, 6, 22, 26, 27, 38 and 64 (Tanasi 2008), but on display at the museum there was another piece, a juglet (inventory number 14735) coming from tomb 34, that is a tomb not described in the publication. The vessels from tombs 1, 26, 27 and 38 are no longer present in the collection, but during the study a new example, not recognized before, has been identified in tomb 22 (inventory number 14710). This makes up a total of six Borġ in-Nadur-type vessels.

The fieldwork carried out by Gentili is still an open problem, since no notebooks are known to exist and the only preliminary publication (Gentili 1951) is totally unhelpful. Skimming the entry book of the museum, it appears that there a certain number of objects collected by him at Thapsos in a series of tombs labelled progressively with letters of the alphabet. The only assemblage on display is that found in the unpublished tomb E, a context that produced four Borġ in-Nadur-type pots, very few Thapsos ceramics, and a LH III A2 Mycenaean three-handled jar (Taylor 1959, 58). Nothing else is known that could throw light on the tomb typology and the tomb’s internal setting.

Since the material coming from the Thapsos necropolis lacks sufficient contextual detail, the discussion that follows will focus on the pottery alone.

Figure 1. Map of southern eastern Sicily with indication of the sites of Thapsos and Matrensa.
2.1 Catalogue of pottery from the Thapsos necropolis

Tomb 6 - no inv. number (Fig. 3)
Axe-shaped edge of the handle of a dipper cup. Incised decoration: three multiple angles with point down, below series of four horizontal lines. Purified hard fabric, unslipped; body color 5 YR 7/8; surfaces encrusted; dimensions: 6.7 x 5.7 x 1 cm.

Tomb 22 - inventory number 14709 (Figs. 3-4)
Conical cup with everted square section rim, flat base, a pair of vertical strap handles. Cut-out decoration: row of four horizontal lines crossed by three pellets in a vertical series with impressed dots at the centre; pairs of three dots in vertical series at sides of both handles. Purified soft fabric, slipped inside and out; body color 2.5 Y 8/3; slip color 2.5 YR 4/6; half of the body missing, restored; h: 9.4; Ø [diameter] mouth 7.7; Ø base 8.5; th:ickness handle 0.8; th. wall 0.9 cm.

Tomb 22 - inventory number 14710 (Figs. 3-4)
Miniature jar with globular body, flat base, low distinct neck, straight square section rim, a pair of vertical strap handles with passing holes. Undecorated. Soft coarse fabric with fading slip and limestone grits (25% fine); body color 5 YR 7/6; slip color 2.5 YR 6/8; encrusted surfaces, intact, handles missing; h: 11; Ø mouth 9; Ø base 4.5 th. wall 1 cm.

Tomb 22 - no inventory number (Figs. 3-4)
Pedestal basin with conical body, indistinct everted square section rim, hollow conical foot, a pair of thick strap handles. Cut-out decoration: row of four horizontal lines crossed by two pellets in a vertical series with impressed dots at the centre, above a plastic angled rope band. Purified soft fabric, slipped inside and out; body color 2.5 Y 8/3; slip color 2.5 YR 4/6; a large wall not matching sherd belongs to it, pedestal and half of the body missing, fading slip, restored; h: 24.5; Ø mouth 28.5; th. handle 1.1; th. wall 1 cm.

Tomb 34 - inventory number 14735 (Figs. 3-4)
Juglet with globular squat body, high distinct neck, rounded rim, flat base, vertical strap handle between shoulder and neck. Undecorated. Soft fabric, slipped, with volcanic and limestone grits (15% fine); body color 5 YR 7/6, slip color 10 R 5/8; intact, handle missing, encrusted surfaces; h: 14; Ø mouth 9.8; Ø base 4.5; th. handle 0.9; th. wall 0.6 cm.

Tomb 64 - inventory number 14816 (Figs. 3-4)
Juglet with ovoid body, high distinct neck, round rim, flat base, vertical strap handle between shoulder and neck. Undecorated. Purified fine very soft fabric, slipped; body color 2.5 Y 8/3; slip color 2.5 YR 4/6; top part of the body and handle missing; h: 14.2; Ø mouth 8.9; th. handle 1; th. wall 0.7 cm.

Tomb E - inventory number 63773 (Figs. 3-4)
Miniature jar with globular squat body, high distinct neck, rounded rim, flat base, thick vertical strap handle between shoulder and neck. Undecorated. Purified fine very soft fabric, slipped; body color 5 YR 7/3; slip color 2.5 YR 4/6; top part of the body and handle missing; h: 10.2; Ø base 5.4; th. handle 1; th. wall 1 cm.
Tomb E - inventory number 63777 (Figs. 3-4)

Juglet with ovoid body, low distinct neck, straight square section rim, surmounting vertical handle between rim and shoulder. Undecorated. Very hard, porous coarse unslipped fabric with limestone grits (50% fine); body colour 5 YR 5/6; Half of the body missing, restored; black blotches; h. 17.5; Ø mouth 13; Ø base 6.5; th. handle 1.5; th. wall 1.1 cm.

The pottery considered here show interesting features in terms of shape typology, decoration, and fabric that can provide useful data for their interpretation. The axe-shaped appendix from tomb 6, directly comparable with a similar example found at Ortigia (Orsi 1919: 486), can be related to the class of dipper cups of type 1 (Tanasi 2011a, 115; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3). The two cups 14709 from tomb 22 and 63775 from tomb E correspond to the rather ubiquitous type 1C of the Borġ in-Nadur shape repertoire (Tanasi 2011a, 102;
Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3); while the pedestal basin finds a better match in the features of type 1C (Tanasi 2011a, 102; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3). On the basis of the typology of the neck and the body, the juglets 14735 from tomb 34, 14816 from tomb 64, and 63773 and 63774 from tomb E recall type 3A (Tanasi 2011a, 112) and are similar to the examples attested in other necropoleis of south-eastern Sicily (Tanasi 2008, 119). The juglet 63777 from tomb E belongs to type 2B, comparable with the examples known from the Borg in-Nadur temple (BN/P105) and the village (37368) (Tanasi 2011a, 112; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3). A novelty is represented by the miniature jar 11267, which is directly comparable with its equivalent (11267) from tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano (Tanasi 2011b, 325), the other archaeological context that produced a considerable amount of Borg in-Nadur pottery. This shape, probably a container of precious liquids, as suggested by a complex system of closure documented by pairs of holes on the handles (possibly for passing string to keep the lid firmly in place), does not have comparisons in the Borg in-Nadur repertoire but neither in the Thapsos one. However, the peculiar red lustrous treatment of the surface so specific of the Borg in-Nadur pottery suggests that it can be a new shape.

**Figure 4. Borg in-Nadur-type pottery from Thapsos, tombs 6, 22, 34, 64 (Orsi excavations) and E (Gentili excavation) (drawings by C. Veca).**
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hitherto unidentified; future archaeometric analyses could help in confirming this hypothesis.

About the decoration, the linear motifs of the pots from tomb 6, 22 and E are very common in the Borġ in-Nadur pottery repertoire, but it is important to remark that the motif with the row of four horizontal lines crossed by a series of vertical pellets with impressed dots at the centre, occurring on the basin and the cup from tomb 22, is a novelty without comparisons; the same can be said for the rope band occurring on the same basin. Moreover, finding the exact decorative concept on both vessels could suggest the same production. On the other hand, the decoration of cup 63775 from tomb E, with a row of four horizontal lines with a large impressed dot in the middle of the row, does not find any precise comparisons.

Dealing with such well-preserved pots, it is possible to observe the very slight difference in height dimensions – ranging between 14 and 14.5 cm – in the juglets, in particular 14735 from tomb 34, 14816 from tomb 64 and 63773 from Tomb E. Again, this suggests that the pots were probably made by the same artisan. Jug 63774 from tomb E, is only preserved in part, its height should also be in the range of about 14-14.5 cm. It is also useful to recall the height of the juglets from tombs 13 and 23 of Cozzo del Pantano, namely 13 cm for pot 11224 from tomb 13, and 14.5 cm and 15.5 cm for 11264 and 11263 respectively, both from tomb 23. This allows us to suggest that a standard height probably existed for this shape ranging between 13 and 15.5 cm.

With regard to fabric features, since no specific archaeometric analyses have been carried out on these specimens, not much can be said beyond the treatment of external surfaces. Besides the axe-shaped handle from tomb 6 and juglet 63777 which are unslipped, all the other pots have the typical red slip of the Borġ in-Nadur ware. It is interesting to point out that juglets 14816 from tomb 64 and 63777 from tomb E also show the peculiar back blotches characteristic of the production of Classic and Late Borġ in-Nadur pottery (Copat et alii 2012: 54-60; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3). Finally, it is extremely important to point out the existence of volcanic grits in the fabric of juglet 14735 from tomb 34. If the igneous nature of the grit is confirmed scientifically, this would question the identification of this sample as a likely import from Malta.

In terms of chronology, all the Borġ in-Nadur pottery from Thapsos considered here seem to be related to the phase of Classic Borġ in-Nadur as recently defined (Copat et alii 2012: 54-60; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3), with the exception of the two pots from tomb 22, the cup and the basin. In these two cases, the pellets and the plastic rope band could point to a later moment of that phase if not to an initial moment of the subsequent Late Borġ in-Nadur phase. However, the presence of a Mycenaean three-handled jar and of an alabastron, dated to LH III A2-B in tomb 64 (Orsi 1895, 135-136; Taylour 1959, 56, 58) and of another three-handled jar dated to LH III A2 in tomb E (Taylour 1959, 58) gives a terminus ad quem for the phase of Classic Borġ in-Nadur around the middle of the fifteenth century BC and the beginning of the fourteenth.

3. The Matrensa necropolis: pottery from Orsi’s excavations (1898)

The site of Matrensa, located south of the mouth of the Anapo river and west of the Maddalena Peninsula, in the southern territory of modern Syracuse, was explored by Orsi in 1898 (Orsi 1903), after a shaft grave containing local and foreign pottery was accidentally discovered in 1871 (Orsi 1889; Vagnetti 1999) (Fig. 5). During the excavation, Orsi discovered a small necropolis comprising six shaft graves and collected a significant number of Thapsos pottery but also Mycenaean vessels and Borġ in-Nadur-type ceramics.

Figure 5. Map of the southern territory of Siracusa indicating the find spot of the Matrensa necropolis (Vagnetti 1999).
The reappraisal of Orsi’s publications and of the artefacts kept in the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse has revealed the importance of tomb 6 with its group of seven Borġ in-Nadur-type vessels. This ranks it as the second most relevant funerary assemblage of Maltese-type pottery found abroad, after tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano (Tanasi 2011b). The context of this tomb at Matrensa is rather significant and it is worth recalling the description of the tomb provided by Orsi:

300 meters from the first [tomb] there was another circular chamber (diam. 1.80 x height 1.22 m) with a flat ceiling, accessible thought an elliptical shaft (1.50 x 0.90 m; depth 0.80 m). Although plenty of artefacts were found, it is not possible to consider the tomb sealed, since the closing slab was found broken in two pieces and shifted from its original position. In the shaft there were the disarranged bones of two skeletons, together with pieces of small vessels. The chamber was filled with earth up to the ceiling; the skeletons were at least twenty, organized in layers, more frequent on the lower layer. It was the same for the vessels, none of which were found lying on the bedrock. The first inhumations were placed on a layer of earth, then they were covered with more earth and afterwards other dead individuals and vessels were gradually added until the ceiling was reached. (Orsi 1903, 146-147).

To the first layer of depositions Orsi connected a group of objects comprising small finds, flint and obsidian blades and a portion of a typical Castelluccio dipper cup, painted in black on red, all related to the Early Bronze Age (Orsi 1903, 147). The rest of the finds was represented by the seven Borġ in-Nadur-type vessels and by five undecorated open vessels not easily classifiable at a glance.

Furthermore, the typology of the shaft grave is rather rare in the Middle Bronze Age and apart from a few cases reported at Thapsos (Orsi 1895) and at Cozzo del Pantano (Tanasi 2011b), this type of shaft grave does not occur elsewhere in Sicily in this period. It view of this it seems reasonable to suggest that the tomb had at least two phases of use, one in the Early Bronze Age and another one in the Middle Bronze Age. This cultural deposit is so interesting that besides the presentation of the Borġ in-Nadur-type vessels, it is first worth listing all the artefacts collected (Table 1).

3.1 Catalogue of pottery from Matrensa necropolis

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18704 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical basin with straight indistinct square section rim; a pair of vertical strap handles. Undecorated. Hard fabric, slipped with black blotches, with limestone grits (5% fine) and irregular voids (2%); body colour 2.5 YR 8/4, slip colour 10 R 4/8; intact, restored, base unslipped; h. 27; Ø mouth 41.5; Ø base 13; th. handle 1.3; th. wall 1 cm.
Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18705 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical cup with straight indistinct square section rim, high conical foot with indistinct rounded edges, a pair of vertical strap handles. Incised decoration with white inlay: row of five horizontal parallel lines above a series of seven multiple angles; the motifs are centrally intercepted by a vertical dash sided by two impressed dots; the same pattern occurs in the front and in the back of the vessel; at the sides of the handles two pairs of vertical dashes with impressed dots at the edges; on the foot, row of five horizontal parallel lines. Hard fabric, slipped with black blotches, with fine limestone grits (5% fine); body colour 2.5 YR7/6; slip colour 10 R 4/8; intact; h. 35; Ø mouth 28; Ø base 20.5; th. handle 1.2; th. wall 1 cm.

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18706 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical cup with rounded indistinct rim and flat base, couple of vertical strap handles. Incised decoration: horizontal line above a series of irregular impressed square and circular pinpoint nicks. Hard porous fabric, slipped, with limestone grits and voids (5% fine); body color 5YR 7/6; slip color 2.5 YR5/8; intact, one handle missing, flaking slip, spalled surfaces; h. 11.8; Ø mouth 21; Ø base 8.2; th. handle 1; th. wall 0.8 cm.

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18707 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical cup with rounded indistinct rim and flat base, pair of vertical strap handles. Undecorated. Hard fabric, slipped inside and out with black blotches, with many voids (40% fine); body colour 5 YR 7/6, slip colour 10 R 4/6; intact; h. 8.5; Ø mouth 17; Ø base 7.5; th. handle 1.1; th. wall 0.8 cm.

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18708 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical cup with straight square section rim and flat base, a pair of thick vertical strap handles. Undecorated. Hard fabric, slipped, with limestone grits (5% fine); body colour 2.5 YR 8/4; slip colour 10 R 4/8; intact, encrusted surfaces; h. 9.5; Ø mouth 15; Ø base 7; th. handle 0.8; th. wall 1.2 cm.

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18709 (Figs. 6-7)

Conical cup with indistinct square section rim, flat base, probable pair of vertical strap handles. Incised decoration: irregular row of
three horizontal lines, crossed by pairs of vertical dashes sided by two impressed dots. Hard fabric, slipped, with limestone grits (5% fine); body colour 7.5Y 7/4, slip colour 2.5 YR 6/8; intact, fading slip, largely restored, an attachment of a vertical strap handle still visible; h. 7.3; Ø mouth 11.9; Ø base 4.5; th. wall 0.6 cm.

Tomb 6 - Inventory number 18710 (Figs. 6-7)

Juglet with ovoid body, high distinct neck, indistinct thinned rim, embossed base, vertical strap handle between neck and shoulder. Undecorated. Soft porous fabric, slipped, with limestone grits (10% fine); body colour 2.5 YR 8/4; slip colour 10 R 4/8; intact, encrusted surfaces; h. 15; Ø mouth 10.5; Ø base 4.5; th. handle 1.1; th. wall 0.6 cm.

Before discussing in detail the Borg in-Nadur-type pottery, it is important to define precisely the chronology of the other ceramics and items found in tomb 6 (Fig. 8). Leaving aside the dipper cup portion 1903/6/4 with its typical and clearly recognizable Castelluccian black paint on red slip, the greyish-beige matt undecorated surface of pieces 18712, 1903/6/1, 1903/6/2, 1903/6/3 are quite different from the usual treatment of the Thapsos pottery. More similar to this usual treatment is the burnished greyish surface of examples 18711 and 1903/6/4. However, their typology does not find any comparison in the Thapsos pottery repertoire.

The dipper cup 18712 recalls directly the example from tomb 19 of the Early Bronze Age of Bernardino of Mellili,
north of Syracuse (Orsi 1891, 71-72, pl. 5.19), as well as the dipper cup 1903/6/3 is identical to the vessel found in tomb 2 of Castelluccio (Orsi 1891, pl. V.27). The two dishes 1903/6/1 and 1903/6/2, showing an uncommon shape type, are comparable with a very well preserved example from tomb 13 of the Early Bronze Age necropolis of Valsavoaia, in the territory of Catania (Orsi 1902, 113, pl. 2.28). It is harder to find a comparison for pot 18771, which shares with 1903/6/3 the same surface treatment and body profile, because of the peculiar type of handle, but it seems reasonable to ascribe it to the same cultural group. Stone and bronze smalls finds similar to those collected in tomb 6 can also be found in both the necropoleis of Bernardina and Valsavoaia, pointing to a certain chronological uniformity for all this assemblage of artefacts related to burials prior to those connected with the Borġ in-Nadur pottery. In this scenario, tomb 6 of the necropolis at Matrensa seems to be the only burial with a set of grave goods exclusively composed of Borġ in-Nadur-type pottery, a fact that will be brought up in the discussion below.

With regard to shape type of the ceramic assemblage from tomb 6, cup 18707 recalls type 1A (Tanasi 2011a, 101; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3), whereas the simple cups 18708 and 18709, the pedestal cup 18705 and the basin 18704 belong to type 1B (Tanasi 2011a, 102; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3). Cup 18706 can be considered as a type 1C (Tanasi 2011a, 102; Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3), while juglet 18710 is comparable with the piece 63773 from Thapsos tomb E and consequently with the other examples mentioned earlier.

About the decoration, beside the very typical linear and simple geometric style decoration typical of Borġ in-Nadur vessels 19709 and 18705, very significant is the motif of the series of dots below the horizontal line of cup 18706 that finds precise comparisons in cups BRG/010/127 from the Borġ in-Nadur temple (Tanasi 2011, 106), 37280 from the Borġ in-Nadur settlement (Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3), and MRD64/P/750 from Ghar Mirdum (Tanasi 2014a, fig. 15).

The height of 15 cm of juglet 18710 fits perfectly within the range given for such a shape (above).

The study of the external surface treatment of the pottery has revealed the existence of large black blotches on vessels 18704, 18705 and 18707, as is common on Borġ in-Nadur pottery of the Classic phase. A very unusual feature is the spalled surface of cup 18706, which seems to be related to a technical problem never identified before on Borġ in-Nadur pottery from the Maltese archipelago. Significant could be the tendency of the slip to flake easily on that same example.

With regard to chronology, if it is assumed that during the Middle Bronze Age the small necropolis of Matrensa developed in the same lapse of time, with the two Mycenaean three-handled jars of tomb 1, dated to the LH IIIA (Taylour 1959, 63-63) providing the same terminus ad quem to the Borġ in-Nadur Classic phase, to which the ceramics from tomb 6 belong.

4. Concluding remarks

This study of a group of Borġ in-Nadur-type pots discovered a long time ago turned out to be an extremely useful exercise in gathering new data to set out new research directions. The study for the first time of the unpublished context of tomb E of Thapsos, moreover, represents an important development in showing that before new fieldwork is planned, the material ‘forgotten’ in museum stores should be looked at again. The study contributed to the identification of what might be new shape of the Borġ in-Nadur pottery repertoire and to confirm the chronological concurrence of the Classic Borġ in-Nadur phase and the Thapsos II and III sub-phases, running in parallel with LH IIIA2-B (Tanasi, this volume, chapter 3).

This study also allows us the opportunity to put forward – by way of provocation and in preliminary fashion – a distinction between possible imports from the Maltese archipelago and products imitated in Sicily, going by the external surface
treatment and the fabric observed macroscopically. The black blotches occurring only on two vessels from Thapsos (juglets 14816 from tomb 64 and 63777 from tomb E), and three from Matrensa (18704, 18705 and 18707), ought to be considered as the distinctive trait of the typical mottled surface of the Borg in-Nadur pottery of the Classic phase. On the other hand, the evident volcanic grits present in the fabric of the juglet (14735) from tomb 34 raises the issue of whether some of the Borg in-Nadur pots were actually made in Sicily, using local clays and tempers. Having said this, it must be noted that the presence of volcanic tempers in Borg in-Nadur phase pottery produced in the Maltese archipelago has been verified using petroarchaeometric analyses (Barone et alii, this volume, chapter 4), proving that basalt imported from Sicily was used in pot making.

In order to shed light on this complicated matter, specific archaeometric analyses consisting of petrographic examination of thin sections and a chemical study of major and trace elements by X-ray fluorescence spectrometry, were carried out on two selected pieces from tomb 6 at Matrensa: cup 18709 without any black blotches on its surface and basin 18704 showing black blotches. The results (Tanasi 2014b; Barone et alii, this volume, chapter 4; Raneri et al., in press), have confirmed the initial hypothesis, namely that the cup without black blotches on the surface was made used Sicilian clays whereas the basin with black blotches was made using Maltese clay; the former was clearly a local imitation where the latter was an import.

This datum begs the question of the nature of the connections that existed between Sicily and Malta at this time and also questions the facile equation that all Borg in-Nadur-type vessels found in Sicily are necessarily imports. The mobility of humans must be considered alongside the mobility of goods (Tanasi 2014b).

The process of the imitation of foreign pottery assumes a thorough knowledge of the ware, a process that can be justified through the agency of foreign potters in Sicily or through an exchange of know-how between Maltese and Sicilian potters. In both cases, it presupposes the presence of foreign craftsmen in Sicily and not just of the products of their work. If the quantity of local imitations of this pottery increases through further analyses, then it will be justifiable to ask whether a certain appreciation of Borg in-Nadur ceramics existed amongst Sicilian natives or whether the need was felt by Maltese immigrants in Sicily to have their own pottery for reasons that could include a particular attachment their traditional customs and lifeways.

But by positing migration phenomena one is forced to consider the matter of the occupants of tomb 6 of Matrensa: who was buried in that grave? Where there Maltese immigrants living in the small community of Sicilian natives settled at Matrensa? During the excavation Orsi did not take notice of the association between artefacts and the skeletal remains, nor did he investigate the context stratigraphically. Nonetheless, the indication he gave about the location of the portion of Castelluccio dipper cup and of the small finds as found closer to the bedrock, and the recognition of all the ‘not Borg in-Nadur type’ artefacts as dated to the Early Bronze Age, suggest that the majority of the burials dates to that period. Consequently, just the limited number of burials associated with Borg in-Nadur type pottery dates to Middle Bronze Age and specifically Thapsos sub-phases II and III. However, it has to be underlined that the tomb was ransacked in past times and that the Middle Bronze Age deposition could have been altered somehow. In any case, it seems unlikely that looters could have removed only the Thapsos pottery and not the other objects, that were in a very good condition. Ultimately, the lack of Thapsos pottery can be explained by bringing in the hypothesis made earlier that this was a deposition of exclusively Borg in-Nadur-type pottery. Although the context was not intact, it can be helpful to recall that the association between a pedestal basin, a simple cup and a juglet (18705, 18708 and 18710) occurs also in tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano (Tanasi 2011b, 304) and also in the so-called Double Chapel at the temple of Borg in-Nadur (Murray 1929, pl. 25; Tanasi 2008, 77, fig. 59c). This suggests that the commensality ritual which depended on such a funerary pottery set was deposited at tomb 6 in Matrensa as well (Tanasi, Vella 2014, 64-65).

The evidence from tomb 6 is in a certain way comparable with that of tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano, possibly more significant in terms of understanding the complexity of the interaction between Sicilian and Maltese. Without any specific anthropological model of reference, it can be possible to infer just as a provocative hypothesis dictated by common sense that for tomb 6 it would be possible to imagine a scenario where the individuals buried in the only depositional phase of the Middle Bronze Age consisted of Maltese immigrants. This can be compared with the case of tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano, about which it has been suggested that among the 22 individuals, buried in tomb 23, there were Maltese persons accompanied by Borg in-Nadur-type vessels, Sicilian persons accompanied by Thapsos vessels, both participating with their own pottery shapes in the ritual of the funerary feast (Tanasi 2011b, 305) as a result of an ethnic and cultural hybridization resulting from intermarriages between Maltese and Sicilian natives (Tanasi 2011b, 307).

In this view, the absence of Thapsos pottery could indicate a scarce level of interaction with the community of natives of Matrensa further supported by the need of reusing an ancient Early Bronze Age tomb instead than exploiting a freshly excavated one. In fact, it might not be mere coincidence that it is only tomb 6 in the entire necropolis at Matrensa that has an earlier burial deposition. Furthermore, the practice of inhumating the dead in already excavated chamber tombs is culturally to bury the dead in caves as in the emblematic case of Ghar Mirdum (Tanasi 2014a).

In conclusion, the interpretation put forward here allows us to suggest a sort of relative chronology for this interaction. In fact, it seems reasonable to place the evidence from tomb 6 of Matrensa at an earlier stage, while that from tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano has to be considered as a later development. Possibly, even tomb 22 of Thapsos, with its assemblage of Thapsos and Borg in-Nadur pottery so typologically similar to
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that of tomb 23 of Cozzo del Pantano, and tomb E of Thapsos with its mixed Thapsos, Mycenaean and Borg in-Nadur-type grave goods can be also considered as a later development. The other funerary contexts of Thapsos, Molinello, Plemmmirio, where single Borg in-Nadur-type vessels appear with Thapsos pottery, exotic items and ceramics of Mycenaean and Cypriot type, are indicators of a completely type of interaction, where Sicilian natives resorted to the use of any type of foreign goods available on the local market in order to assess their superior rank (Tanasi 2008).

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Bionote

DAVIDE TANASI holds a Ph.D. in Archaeology and is Professor of Archaeology at Arcadia University, The College of Global Studies – Arcadia Sicily Center. His research interests include Mediterranean prehistory, island archaeology, archaeometry of ancient ceramics, computer graphics in archaeology, and digital communication of cultural heritage. He has authored a hundred scientific papers in these fields and produced 3D documentaries about Sicilian archaeology and cultural heritage. His publications include La Sicilia e l’arcipelago maltese nell’età del Bronzo Medio (Officina di Studi Medievali, 2008) and Site, artefacts and landscape. Prehistoric Borġ in-Nadur, Malta (Polimetrica, 2011, co-edited with N.C. Vella). He is the director of the Field School in Archaeology of Arcadia University in Sicily and editor of the international journal Open Archaeology (De Gruyter).