

Norm and Deviance in the Funerary Practices of Iron Age Francavilla Marittima, Calabria

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Introduction

The way in which the human body, or rather corpse, is buried, is defined by many determinants: social as well as religious, hygienic, climatic, and cultural ones. Diverse ritual practices serve the purpose of overcoming grief and loss, but also of illustrating the relationship between the deceased and those left behind. Besides the burial event itself, these practices also strengthen the social and cultural cohesion of the funerary community. Thus, graves are complex semantic systems that must be read and interpreted as such¹. Often, however, this issue is addressed more superficially: from valuable gifts, conclusions are drawn about the high social position of the deceased, specific objects are related to his or her activity in life. An essential reason for this construction of a direct link between the deceased and their position in life is the uniformity of burial customs within individual necropolises or entire regions, suggesting a strong social and ideal standardization of the respective communities.

Corresponding concepts of funerary “norms” have also been shaping the methodological research approach to the necropolis on the Macchiabate terrace of Francavilla Marittima in Calabria². About two thirds of the known

183 inhumations can be assigned to the Iron Age, the others date to the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Inhumations are the rule throughout. In the Iron Age, large grave-pits lined with river pebbles and filled with stones, round to oval in shape, define the burial landscape. In most cases, the corpse was deposited in a crouched position³: with the legs bent, sometimes flexed tightly, sometimes less so, the upper body of the deceased was placed flat on its back, the arms were bent so that the hands came to rest on the pelvis. Andreas Kinne, in his manual of excavation techniques (2009), labels this specific type of burial, i.e., in a crouched position with the legs bent to the left or right and the torso being arranged in a supine position, the Beinhocker scheme (*posizione semiranicchiata* in Italian). As such, it deviates from the true crouched Hocker burial, where the body is positioned entirely either on the right or left side⁴.

Based on the grave goods, the different positioning of the lower extremities on the left or right side is generally understood as gender-specific, whereby men were buried with their legs bent to the right and women with their legs bent to the left⁵. In the near-complete absence of reliable anthropological data and the risk of circular reasoning, this distinction must, however, be met, with caution: while one may speak of a certain tendency with regard to the gender-specific arrangement of the burials in the Macchiabate necropolis, it should not be considered an over-

1 Hofmann 2013; Augstein 2013.

2 For a comprehensive overview of recent research on the Macchiabate necropolis see Guggisberg – Colombi 2021. For a more general discussion of the burial customs based predominantly on the graves excavated by P. Zancani Montuoro in the 1960s see Brocato 2011 and Brocato 2014. The vast majority of the known graves was excavated and published by P. Zancani Montuoro, see Zancani Montuoro

1970/1971; 1974–1976; 1977–1979; 1980–1982; 1983/1984. In her excavation reports, Zancani Montuoro published some photos but mostly sketchy drawings of the burials, which – although giving a good general impression of the archaeological context – are somewhat difficult to assess with regard to their accuracy and completeness.

3 Luppino et al. 2012, 651.

4 Kinne 2009, 59. For a detailed discussion of the terminology in the English-language research see Knüsel 2014, esp. 39–42.

5 Ferranti – Quondam 2006, esp. 583.

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arching norm. Among the significant exceptions is grave Strada 14⁶. Contrary to most female burials, in this case an adult woman, identified by both archaeological and anthropological criteria, was deposited with her legs bent to the right.

Burials of the Beinhocker scheme are widespread in indigenous contexts of Southern Italy and particularly along the coastal zone of the Ionian Sea, from the Iron Age onwards⁷. Next to Francavilla Marittima, the custom is attested at Torre Mordillo⁸. To the northeast of the Sibaritide, Beinhocker are the predominant burial scheme at Santa Maria d'Anglona⁹ and Incoronata¹⁰ in Basilicata as well as at Ascoli Satriano¹¹ and Ripacandida¹² in Apulia, the latter cemeteries dating from the 7th to the 5th century BC¹³.

In the Archaic period the crouched body position was gradually replaced in some areas, such as the Sibaritide, by an extended supine position. Despite such local developments and because of its popularity, the Beinhocker scheme represents, an “intrinsic” characteristic of the Iron Age communities living in present day Apulia, Basilicata and Northern Calabria. But how uniform is this burial custom, and can it really be viewed as a reliable “reflection” of social norms and supra-regional cultural identities? Or, to put it in another way, what is the significance of those burials that do not fit into this scheme, that, either consciously or unconsciously, seem to deviate from the “norm”¹⁴? It

is of course difficult to assess this question on a case-by-case basis; especially with regard to older excavations, such as those that Paola Zancani Montuoro carried out in the Macchiabate necropolis of Francavilla Marittima in the 1960s¹⁵. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to take a closer look at the burials of the Macchiabate necropolis regarding this topic. In this contribution, we focus on the graves of the Iron Age, dating between the 9th and the 8th centuries BC.

The anthropologic and taphonomic perspective

Similar to a life course approach – which draws the focus of research away from the moment of death towards an individual's entire life span¹⁶ – the interpretive methodologies of funerary taphonomy and archaeoanthatology allow the reconstruction of “biographies” of grave structures in their entirety¹⁷. By taking into account information beyond the archaeological findings themselves, a more nuanced reconstruction of mortuary contexts as well as the taphonomic processes affecting them becomes possible¹⁸, adding an additional layer of insight into the ancient community.

In the Macchiabate necropolis, most inhumations exhibit a high degree of fragmentation. Joints or fragile bones like the scapula, ribs, vertebrae or the bones of hands and feet are rarely observed and hardly ever recovered. These missing elements and the poor bone preservation in general limit the scope of archaeoanthatological analysis. Nevertheless, we can still gather valuable evidence on the taphonomic processes affecting burial and grave by observing placement, preservation and fragmentation

6 Guggisberg – Colombi 2021, 74–77 (S. Billo).

7 The burial custom is rooted in a longstanding funerary tradition attested from the late Bronze Age onwards in different parts of South Italy, possibly ultimately depending on influences from Epirus and the Western Balkans: Pacciarelli 1999, 67 (we owe this reference to Francesco Quondam, Basel). See also Kurtz – Boardman 1971, 308f.; Mercuri 2010.

8 Vanzetti 2014, 65–66.

9 Frey 1991.

10 Chiartano 1977; Chiartano 1994.

11 Laimer – Larcher 2006; Hoernes et al. 2019.

12 Heitz 2021.

13 For general remarks see Burkhardt 2013.

14 For a discussion of the problematic related to the concept of funerary norms see: Müller-Scheessel et al. 2020. Burials that do not correspond to the “norm” exist in many periods and cultures. From the end of the 20th century onwards they have become the focus of increased scholarly research: Shay 1985; Cunliffe 1992; Murphy 2008; Tsaliki

2008; Mastronuzzi – Tulumello 2016; Quercia – Cazzulo 2016; Nizzo 2015, 511–542; Nizzo 2018; Hoernes 2019; Hoernes et al. 2019; Betsinger et al. 2020.

15 The assessment of norm and deviance based on old excavations is of particular difficulty because of the often insufficient photographic or planimetric documentation. In Francavilla Marittima, the assessment is further complicated by the fact that the excavation reports were not published until 20 years after the excavation.

16 Sofaer 2006, 74–75.

17 Knüsel – Robb 2016.

18 Duday 2009.

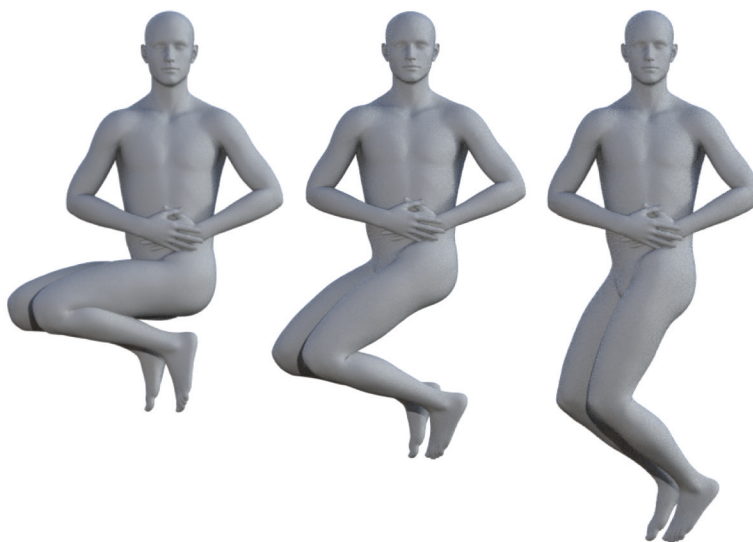


Fig. 1 – Three-dimensional scheme of the “narrow”, “medium” and “wide” flexed positions of burials in the Macchiabate necropolis of Francavilla Marittima based on the results of Paola Zancani Montuoro (Zancani Montuoro 1974–1976; 1977–1979; 1980–1982; 1983/1984) and the excavations of the University of Basel (Guggisberg – Colombi 2021).

of the human remains in their specific contexts. The detailed *in situ* analysis of the position of individual bones as well as of their location in relation to the skeleton and to other finds and features can hint at the presence of decomposed organic materials (e.g., wooden structures, clothing or wrappings) or the secondary deposition of human remains. Voids left by either decomposing flesh or the collapse of cists or coffins permit individual bones or the whole skeleton to rotate and “move” within the grave. Deviation of skeletal elements from their anatomical order, deposition of partial skeletons or aberrant preservation suggest multi-stage mortuary rituals and secondary depositions, where histological analysis may aid in recognizing prior exposure or mummification¹⁹. Identifying such anthropogenic and natural taphonomic processes allows us not only to envision the original set up of the grave at the moment of burial but also to reconstruct the biography/history of the mortuary structure since its construction²⁰.

Ideally this analysis should be conducted on site by a field anthropologist with extensive prior

training²¹. Retrospective archaeoanatomical assessments based on photographs or drawings are possible but usually pose many challenges even if excavations adhered to an up-to-date standard of documentation. Yet even in the case of older and less well documented archaeological excavations, such an approach may still deliver new insights. Overall, an assessment of the social determinants and meanings behind funerary and/or mortuary practices is only feasible after anthropogenic influences as well as the initial situation inside a grave are painstakingly reconstructed, as this will provide a more plausible view towards the cultural projection manifest in the archaeological structures.

Beinhocker in the Macchiabate necropolis

All but a few of the Iron Age adult burials in the Macchiabate necropolis for which anthropological data are available²² follow the Bein-

¹⁹ Booth 2016; Knüsel – Robb 2016.

²⁰ Knüsel – Robb 2016, 657.

²¹ Knüsel 2014, 27.

²² In many cases, the layout of the body is impossible to assess because of the lack of skeletal remains. Where bone was preserved, the original arrangement of the body can often only be approximated because of possible taphonom-

hocker scheme. In contrast to this apparent homogeneity, there is, however, considerable divergence regarding the flexion of the legs (Fig. 1). While in approximately one third of the burials the angle between the upper and lower leg is between 40 and 140 degrees (= medium flexed position), there are some cases in which the legs are clearly more narrowly angled and drawn close to the upper body (= narrow flexed position). In a few cases, the lower limbs are almost straight (= wide flexed position)²³ approaching an entirely stretched – or supine – layout of the body, which is also attested in a few instances among the Iron Age burials of the Macchiabate necropolis (Fig. 8)²⁴. This then becomes the rule in the entire Sibaritide in the subsequent Archaic period.

Detached from the question whether the positioning of the legs is of any significance in the burial customs in the Macchiabate necropolis, the arrangement of the body is clearly independent of the size of the burial pit. In most cases the burial pits themselves are much bigger than the corpses, leaving much space for the deposition of grave goods of all sorts. Because of its relation to the true Hocker scheme it is generally assumed that the legs of the Beinhocker burials were placed sideways. Although resulting in a somewhat “unnatural” twist between the upper and the lower body, this position can be physically achieved by a deliberate bending of the corpse once rigor mortis disappears. Positive evidence for such a treatment of the body is seen in grave Strada 14, where a slight inclination of the pelvis attests to the torsion of the body in the hip area (Fig. 2)²⁵.

While in most burials the parallel position of the long bones suggests that the legs lay on the ground from the start, there are a few cases where an upright position of the legs seems equally possible. This applies in particular to the X- and O-shaped arrangement of the leg



Fig. 2 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Strada 14 (photo Francavilla-project Basel).

bones in graves Temparella 86 and Uliveto 1, where the legs – still in articulation – might have fallen inwards and outwards²⁶. It cannot be excluded, however, that the unusual position of the leg bones is due to physical handicaps of the two adult individuals, as it was suggested by P. Zancani Montuoro²⁷. We must

ic dislocations of bones and the rather schematic character of the drawings published by P. Zancani Montuoro. We refrain therefore from giving exact numbers in this place.

23 For the terminology see Knüsel 2014.

24 Supine position: Temparella 27 and Strada 15: Zancani Montuoro 1980–1982, 88–91 fig. 32; Guggisberg – Colombi 2021, 77–80 pl. 60 (C. Colombi).

25 Apparently similar: Temparella 57.

26 If the joints of the upright legs had separated first, the long bones might have fallen on top of each other rather than sideways. See a burial (grave 347) with legs originally drawn to the body in an upright position from Apollonia Pontika: Hermary et al. 2010, 114 pl. 49 (we owe this information to Reine-Marie Bérard, Aix-en-Provence).

27 Temparella 86: Zancani Montuoro 1983/1984, 92–99 esp. 93 and fig. 29. Uliveto 1: Zancani Montuoro 1977–1979, 49: The excavator assumed that the two women suffered from natural deformations of the legs. With regard to grave Uliveto 1 she referred to the fragility of the tibiae and the fibulae. Moreover, she found two big stones be-

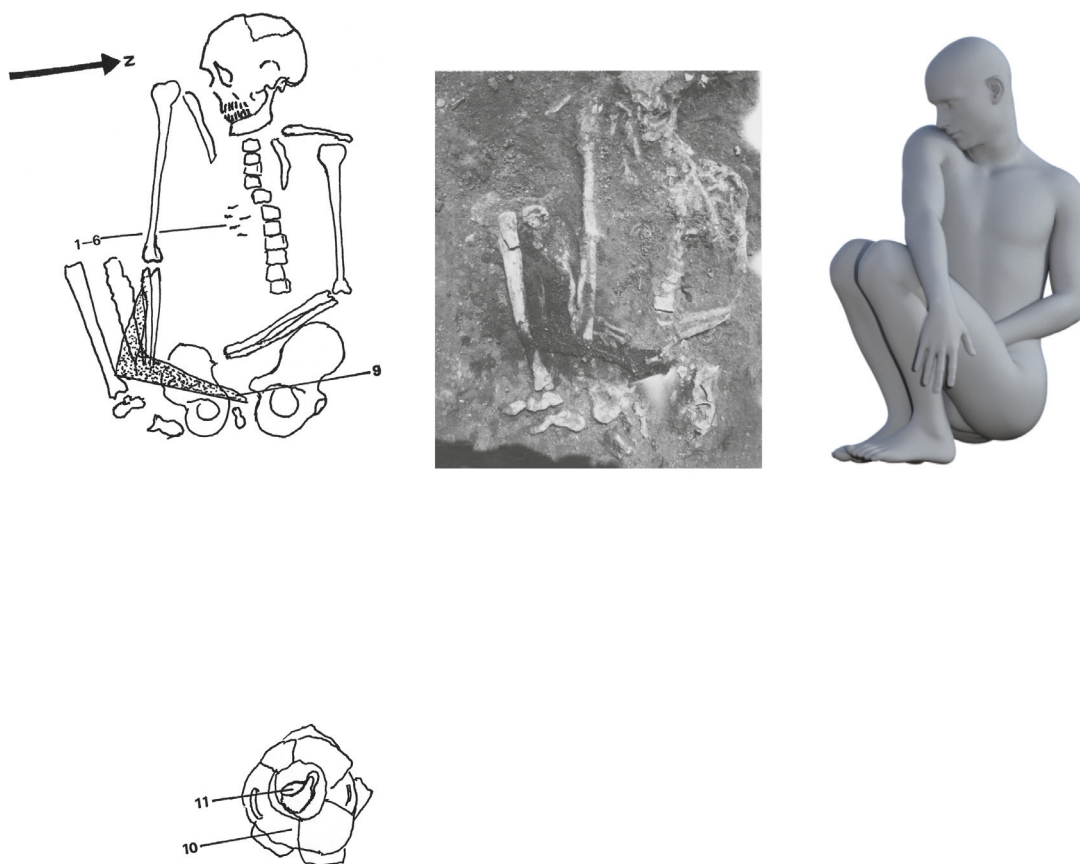


Fig. 3 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Temparella 40 (sketch and photo after Zancani Montuoro 1980–82, 108 fig. 38, pl. LXVII b; three-dimensional scheme based on the skeletal remains).

refrain therefore from a final classification of the two graves at this point.

Whatever the original setting of the lower part of the body of the Iron Age burials from the Macchiabate necropolis was, it seems evident that the legs were usually arranged freely and without the use of tight bandages or other physical restraints. No rule, however, is without exception, as is confirmed by the three graves Temparella 40, Lettere F and Strada 7, which differ considerably in their layout from the majority of graves just discussed.

tween the legs. Alternatively, she considered a ritual motivation for the unusual deposition of the corpse in grave Temparella 86.

“Deviant” burials in the Macchiabate necropolis

Graves Temparella 40 and Lettere F

Grave Temparella 40 was excavated by P. Zancani Montuoro in 1967²⁸. The skeleton was well preserved, much better than in most other instances in the Macchiabate cemetery (Fig. 3). The bones are quite robust, thereby supporting the conclusion based on the archaeological data that we are dealing with a male individual. Several iron fibulae were found in the area of the thorax, two iron objects, an awl and a knife, were deposited to the right of the body,

28 Zancani Montuoro 1980–1982, 107–112.

while a chain-like hanging made of countless small bronze elements came to light in the pelvic area. An analogous hanging is known from a warrior's grave at Guardia Perticara, where it apparently belonged to the baldric, which was stretched diagonally across the torso²⁹. The Francavilla Marittima hanging could have had a similar function, although the sword as such is missing. In any case the hanging would not have been deposited in its original position, as it was draped over the pelvis and the right forearm of the deceased. While the dress ornaments and grave goods correspond to the ordinary equipment of the dead in Francavilla Marittima, the arrangement of the corpse is most exceptional. It was buried in an extreme flexed position with an open torso and legs bent to the right and drawn close to the body. The left, slightly bent arm lies on the pelvis, as is customary in Francavilla Marittima, while the right arm is straight down to the hip. The extreme flexed position of the legs already prompted P. Zancani Montuoro to consider possible explanations. She pondered both a physical anomaly and a physical mutilation, but discarded the ideas based on the archaeological evidence. Rather she assumed, because of the oblique orientation of the right clavicle, the slight curving of the backbone as well as the asymmetrical position of the right and left arms that the corpse had been pushed "down" and "to the right" by the pressure of the stones of the backfill shortly after it was deposited and had thus been compressed.

As far as one can tell from the published photos and drawings, P. Zancani Montuoro's interpretation of the anthropological data seems convincing. There are no hints of a physical anomaly or mutilation of the body; the deceased was most probably buried in the traditional *Beinhocker* position with the exception of the legs that were drawn extremely close to the body. From the peculiarities of the upper body, it becomes evident that the torso was slightly bent. In particular, the oblique orientation of the clavicle and the asymmetrical position of the right arm are best explained

by a torsion of the upper body, most likely in connection with the adjustment of the corpse in a crouched position. Interestingly the right arm was positioned so as to overlap the legs in a rather unnatural way. Thus, the corpse is arranged in an extraordinary position. In contrast to the mostly freely draped bodies that predominate in the Macchiabate necropolis, the corpse in grave Temparella 40 must have been bound with some sort of bandages and straps made of organic material or other means.

The bereaved probably consciously distanced themselves from the funerary "norm" prevailing in the Macchiabate necropolis in this case, which they however adhered to in the deposition of the ordinary vessel set of olla and cup exactly where they were traditionally placed: at the feet of the deceased, in this case albeit at a remarkable distance from the body³⁰.

The reasons for the special treatment of the deceased from grave Temparella 40 can no longer be determined. However, this handling does not appear to have been singular. P. Zancani Montuoro reports at least one other case, grave F in Area Lettere, of a skeleton with particularly tightly bent legs turned to the right of the body (Fig. 4)³¹. Again, the deceased individual was presumably male, as suggested by the absence of bronze jewelry and the presence of two iron tools, one of them an iron sickle, deposited to the left of the head. Contrary to grave Temparella 40, the traditional ceramic set of olla and cup were in this case deposited below the hips. Unfortunately, the grave is documented only by a sketch in P. Zancani Montuoro's diary, which, however, underlines the extreme crouched position of the body. Despite the poor preservation of the burial and its sketchy documentation, it seems likely that the body was again fixed in this extreme position with bandages or straps of some sort.

29 Bianco 2011, 38. We owe this reference to Francesco Quondam, Basel.

30 In fact, the set was located where we would expect it to be in a *Beinhocker* funeral according to the "norm".

31 Zancani Montuoro 1977–1979, 18: "lo scheletro del deposito molto rattappito".

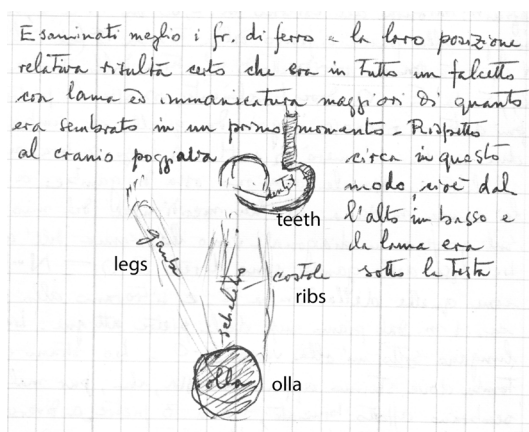


Fig. 4 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Lettere F (drawing, P. Zancani Montuoro diary 1963, courtesy of the Archivio dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei).

Grave Strada 7

A third grave, discovered more recently, is of particular interest: grave Strada 7, situated at the Southern edge of this burial plot (Fig. 5. 6). On an area of ca. 70 × 45 cm, the bones of an adult and, according to the anthropological analysis, presumably once again male individual, lay densely packed. The grave was a simple shallow pit filled with stones³². Grave goods are limited to two ceramic vessels, a jug and a cup lying next to each other.

Because of the poor bone preservation, the identification of the skeletal remains proved challenging (Fig. 7)³³. Clearly visible, however, are several long bones, arranged approximately parallel to and on top of one another. The skull, lying on its right side, emerged slightly below and north of the long bones. This peculiar situation warrants a detailed archaeoethanatomical analysis.

Among the long bones, the two femora and a tibia are readily identified, as well as an ulna

and a radius parallel to the tibia. In addition, remains of the pelvis and possibly a clavicle³⁴ are represented. No other parts of the upper body were identified³⁵.

The bone ensemble therefore consists primarily of long bones, the pelvis, and the skull. These all show considerable taphonomic change, as exemplified by the impact of the thick root visible in Fig. 5. The fact that the proximal end of the displaced femur came to lie above the skull is indicative of the forces involved in such processes, while at the same time suggesting a void, an empty space permitting of such movement.

In view of the dense packing of the skeletal remains, two funeral scenarios appear possible: either we are dealing with a burial crouched in the extreme, or the body was already partially or completely decayed upon deposition. In the latter case, grave Strada 7 represents a secondary funerary deposit. If not, then the relation of leg bones and pelvis may indicate that some articulation persisted at the time of burial³⁶. In that case, however, the position of the head near the pelvis is hard to explain, as this would come to rest facing the knees had the body been deposited in a narrow crouched position (cf. graves Temparella 40 and Lettere F).

If, however, the body was still intact at the time of interment, it would then have to have been seated upright, so that the head could descend onto the pelvis after decomposition³⁷. However, the lateral position of the skull and the fact that the mandible was still in an anatomical position, argue against this assumption.

34 Information by C. Alder in: Guggisberg – Colombi 2021, 209 note 1466.

35 Torso elements such as vertebrae and ribs are very rarely found in the Macchiabate necropolis due to poor bone preservation.

36 Histological analysis, carried out on a femur fragment, confirmed the poor bone preservation: the cortical surface is completely destroyed and only in the center of the bone some structures are still preserved. There are signs of intense bacterial degradation indicating that the corpse was probably not mummified prior to inhumation. Thus, in case of a secondary burial, one would have to assume, that the remains were already skeletonized when reburied.

37 In this scenario the arrangement of the legs remains unexplained.

32 The burial was just below the modern surface, covered by a layer of stone and approximately still ca. 30 cm deep.

33 Here we rely primarily on the anthropological report written by Negahnaz Moghaddam, who documented the skeleton in the field. Cornelia Alder later excavated the skull, which had been block lifted, and re-examined the skeletal remains in the lab.



Fig. 5 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Strada 7 (photo Francavilla-project Basel).

tion. Unless attached by external means, the mandible normally separates quickly from the cranium after death – especially in a situation where gravity comes to bear, such as when the corpse sits upright.

Also, the grave was located at only a shallow depth of max. 30 cm below the present-day surface. Had the body been in a sitting position, one might expect that the burial pit had to be at least 80 cm high, which in turn would have been covered by at least 20 cms of earth and stones. Although erosion on the Macchiabate terrace since antiquity is difficult to assess, it seems unlikely that the terrain at this point was eroded by more than half a meter, given the situation with the other graves in the cemetery.

As a consequence of these considerations, the thesis arises that the body in grave Strada 7 was at best partially articulated at the time it was deposited. The skull in particular seems to have been placed separately and with a certain degree of attention, so that the mandible did

not detach from the cranium. Likewise, the legs may still have been in partial articulation when they were placed in the grave. Alternatively, one could also imagine that the bones were deposited individually and with intention in the *in situ* arrangement, which could also explain why the skull was found somewhat underneath the long bones³⁸. Depending on the model assumed, the body would either have to have been buried dismembered or already skeletonized. If the latter, grave Strada 7 represents some form of secondary burial³⁹.

The decision between the various models presented here cannot be made unambiguously. Overall, however, the assumption of a sec-

³⁸ Similar “bone packages” are known from the younger graves of Ascoli Satriano, where the bones of older burials were neatly collected and deposited in pits before subsequent use of the grave: Grave AS06: Hoernes 2019, 62–63 fig. 11.12; Hoernes et al. 2019, 270 fig. 7.8. Grave AS16: Hoernes 2019, 80 fig. 25; Hoernes et al. 2019, 279 fig. 17.

³⁹ For a definition of secondary burials see Knüsel 2014, 47–50; Knüsel – Robb 2016, 3.

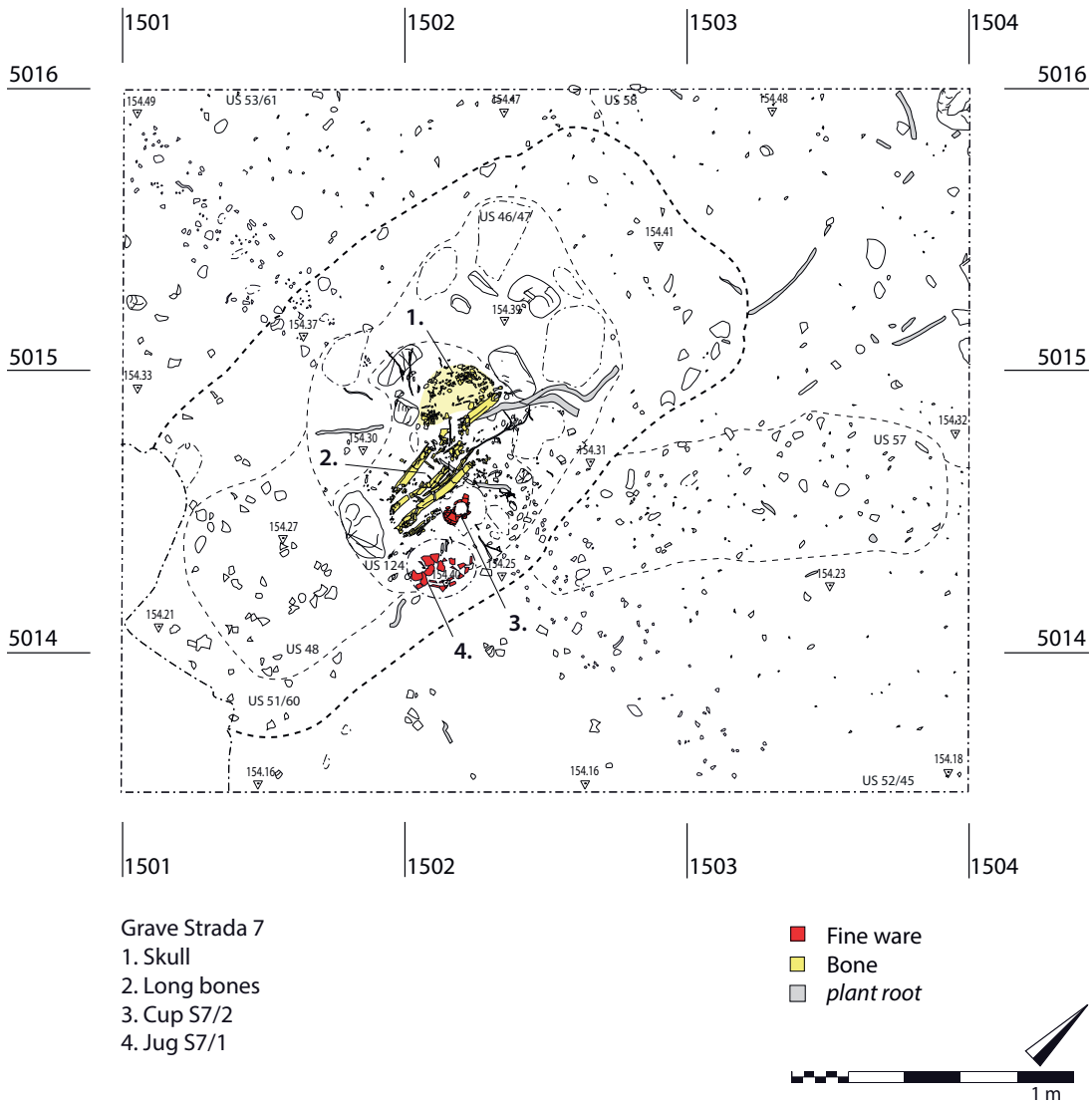


Fig. 6 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Strada 7 (drawing Francavilla-project Basel).

ondary burial appears more plausible, not least because there are no convincing comparisons in Iron Age Italy for either the seated crouched burial or that of the dismembered body⁴⁰. The closest similarity is with a grave at Inconora-

ta⁴¹. Its stone grave pit is divided by a “partition”. In the larger chamber, the skeletons of several adults and one adolescent individual lie in what appears to be a mess; in the smaller one, the remains of two more adults were found, again with evidence of post-mortem manipulation. Here, too, the exact mortuary process is difficult to assess, but the excavators

⁴⁰ See for instance the burials of young men in the ritual complex of Mont’e Prama, Sardegna: I riti della morte 2015; Rubino et al. 2018 (with further bibliographical references).

⁴¹ Grave 441: Chiartano 1994, 162–163 tomb 441 Taf. 23.

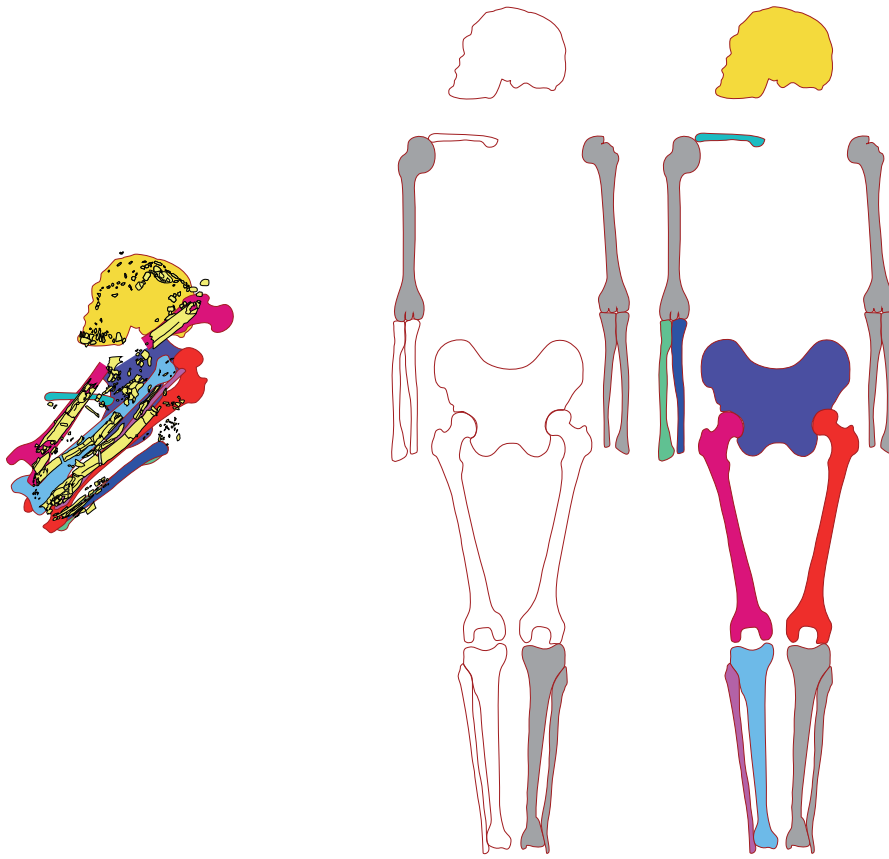


Fig. 7 – Grave Strada 7: Identification of the tightly packed skeletal remains (all coloured skeletal parts have been identified; the grey skeletal parts have not been identified) (drawings Francavilla-project Basel).

assume that the “mass grave” is connected with the redeposition of older burials, necessitated by a change in the use of the necropolis⁴².

If the thesis formulated here for grave Strada 7 is correct and the head and body were actually deposited separately, their different treatment deserves special attention. While the body was buried as a “package”, the skull seems to have been treated with special care and laid down in such a way that – following the custom for men’s graves on the Macchiabate – it lies on the right side and facing west. Whether specific ideas were behind this differentiated treatment of the skull must remain open. At least indirectly, however, the process is reminiscent of

the handling of isolated skulls to be observed both in native burial grounds as well as in the necropolises of various Greek colonies of Magna Graecia.

With regard to native contexts, grave T 4461 at Pontecagnano – dating to around 700 BC – is of special interest. In this case the skull is missing completely, while the bones of the body were deposited both on the floor of the grave and inside a bronze basin and a situla⁴³. In two Archaic children’s graves in the Southern necropolis of Pontecagnano, the skulls were separated from the bodies and placed in a bowl in the same

42 Chiartano 1994, 18.

43 Cerchiali 1984, 411–413. 418–419; Cerchiali 1985; Cuozzo 2004–2005. Although the grave was only partially excavated, the excavators assume that the skull was not deposited in the same grave, since any traces of it are lacking.

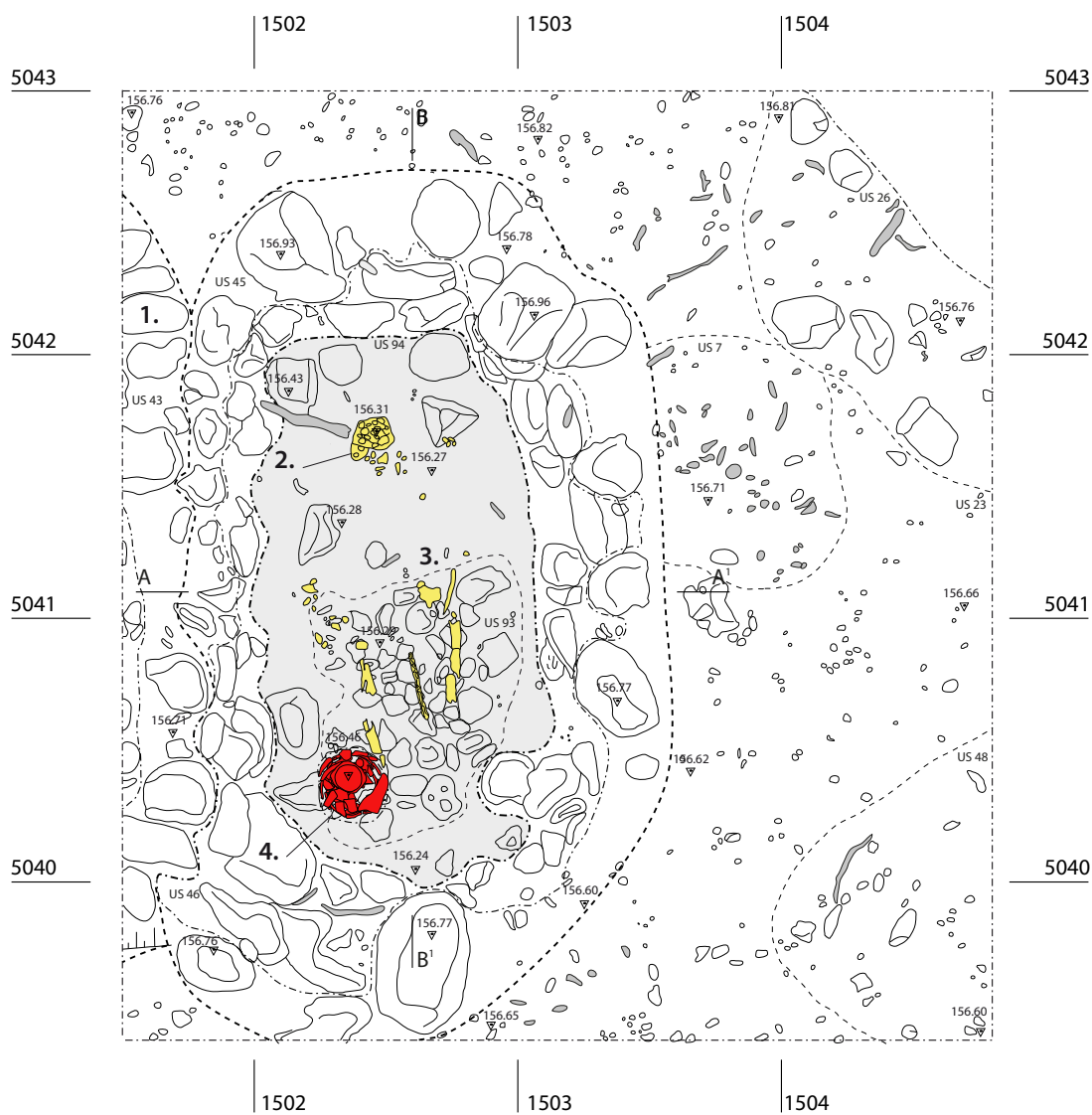


Fig. 8 – Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate, grave Strada 15 (supine inhumation; drawing Francavilla-project Basel).

grave in connection with secondary burial rituals⁴⁴. Among the hundreds of graves in Pontecagnano, the three cited findings form a small sample. They should therefore not be overinterpreted with regard to the Strada 7 grave. However, such findings do not represent an isolated phenomenon. Rather, as mentioned above, in various native as well as Greek sites, in Southern Italy and Sicily skulls may receive special treatment in mortuary rites, as recently pointed out by G. Shepherd and L. Mercuri⁴⁵. The phenomenon likely relates to the special perception of the human head, without necessarily suggesting an overarching ritual context. Rather, the various evidence shows that “deviations from the burial norm” are possible everywhere.

Norm and variance in Oinotrian burial customs

Like elsewhere, deviant burials represent a tiny minority in Francavilla Marittima. They add, however, to a funerary landscape which was much more heterogeneous than is commonly assumed, especially with regard to the positioning of the body and its extremities. As stated above, the medium flexed position predominates among the Beinhocker burials of Francavilla Marittima, followed by a smaller number of burials in a narrow flexed and some corpses deposited in a wide flexed position. To these three schemes we may add three smaller but still significant groups: burials in an extremely flexed position on the one hand, Beinhocker burials in a wide flexed position and supine burials on the other. Among these the extremely flexed position, attested by the two graves Temparella 40 and Lettere F discussed above, differ from the rest insofar as they required the use of bandages or straps made of textile or some other perishable material. Whether grave Strada 7, presumably a secondary deposition,

represents yet another variant of the Oinotrian Beinhocker scheme or should rather be excluded from considerations of burial typology on the grounds of being unique, remains open to debate. What becomes clear, however, is the considerable variability of the burial tradition itself, which corresponds with similar observations in other Oinotrian cemeteries such as Santa Maria d’Anglona and Incoronata. Interestingly, however, two of the six burial schemes just discussed are either largely or entirely absent in those two neighbouring burial grounds: there is just one supine burial at Incoronata and none among the graves of Santa Maria d’Anglona, while the Beinhocker wide position is so far unique to the Macchiabate necropolis.

The varied treatment of bodies in the three reference burial grounds of the Ionian coast may have diverse causes. Chronological differences may play a role as well as diverging social parameters. External impulses may also have shaped the burial customs of the three regions in different ways, if we think of the growing Greek presence and the subsequent change to burials in supine position. Especially in the Sibaritide, where the Greek presence is felt particularly early and strongly, this hypothesis seems quite plausible. However, we should not forget that the supine position is widespread in the Oinotrian culture as well, for example in the necropolises of Roggiano Gravina⁴⁶ and Torrano⁴⁷, in the hinterland of Sybaris, but also in more remote areas such as Guardia Perticara⁴⁸ in Basilicata. Rather than to attribute the supine burials to Greek influence exclusively, it seems reasonable to assume that indigenous burial traditions from the Tyrrhenian area manifest themselves in these instances too. The two cases from the Macchiabate cemetery, Temparella 27⁴⁹ and Strada 15⁵⁰ (Fig. 8), conspicuously lack any “Greek” markers among the grave goods, which on the contrary stand in a pronounced local or indigenous tradition.

44 Pellegrino 2004–2005, 177–178 fig. 7 (grave 8396). 192–197 fig. 19 (grave 8398); see also Pellegrino et al. in the present volume p. 71–72 fig. 6A. B.; Hoernes 2019, 6.

45 Shepherd 2005, esp. 123–129; Mercuri 2001; Mercuri 2010, 521. See also the particular case of Castiglione on Sicily, grave 12 where the skulls of seven individuals were aligned along the wall of the burial chamber: Di Stefano 2006; Duday 2006.

46 Carrara – Guzzo 1981.

47 de La Genière 1977.

48 Nava – Bianco 2000.

49 Zancani Montuoro 1980–1982, 88–91 fig. 32.

50 Guggisberg – Colombi 2021, 77–80 pl. 60 (C. Colombi).

Thus, the Macchiabate necropolis of Francavilla Marittima seems to be situated at the intersection of two indigenous burial traditions, the supine burials we know from inland and from the Tyrrhenian area, and the flexed bodies, which predominate along the Northern Ionian coast. This special placement, reflecting influences from different cultural areas, may have contributed to the community of Francavilla Marittima cultivating a comparatively liberal approach in burying the deceased. The suspected secondary burial Strada 7 differs from all other burials in the Macchiabate cemetery in probably having been transferred from an unknown primary burial ground to its final resting place at the Area Strada. In this context, it seems worthwhile recalling the observations made by Luca Cerchiali and Mariassunta Cuzzo with regard to this practice in the Greek and Roman world. In both cultural settings, according to literary evidence, the reburial of the mortal remains of actual or presumed ancestors and “heroes” served as a means of identity formation among the respective communities as well as constituting a self-affirming act by aristocratic elites to increase their own social cohesion and political power⁵¹. According to the Roman Twelfth Amendment the translocation of such remains was permitted only for relatives killed in war or deceased abroad⁵². In the case of Strada 7, we cannot assert either of these reasons, nor can an outstanding social status of the deceased be deduced from the grave goods. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned historical traditions provide an indication that the unusual treatment of the body deposited in grave Strada 7 can by no means be interpreted only as an expression of neglect and social inferiority, but just as well as an indicator of a special rank of the deceased individual.

Conclusion

Norm and deviance – this concept of majority and minority, of standard and deviation, of

rule and exception – discussed in the title of this article, seems to be only partially viable to explain the specific burial customs in the Macchiabate necropolis of Francavilla Marittima. Rather, the burial customs there are shaped to a greater extent than elsewhere by local and intersecting lines of tradition and cultural diversity. Against this background, it seems disproportionate to exclude Temparella 40, Lettere F and Strada 7 as “deviant burials” from the “standard graves” in the Macchiabate necropolis. Rather, it is precisely their distinctiveness in relation to the treatment of the body that gives them an exclusive status within the burial community.

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⁵¹ Cerchiali 1985, 29; Cuzzo 2005, 152–153.

⁵² Cic. Leg. 2,60. See: Das Zwölftafelgesetz – Leges XII tabularum. Herausgegeben und übersetzt von Dieter Flach, in Zusammenarbeit mit Andreas Flach (Darmstadt 2004) 150.

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