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UNITED BY CONTEXT, DIVIDED BY COLLECTION

The Nineteenth Century Collecting of Prehistoric Artifacts
from Villafrati (Sicily, Italy)

Abstract

In the historical framework of the newly unified Italy (1861), in parallel with the collection of the classical age materials, paleoethnological collections came to be defined following different dynamics of formation. Compared to the former, which traditionally occupied the field of the humanities, prehistoric artefacts struggled to be included among the sciences of antiquity, finding their place among the natural sciences instead. Particularly, natural caves proved to be exceptional archaeological contexts offering much more scientific data than the open-air sites about the definition of the most ancient history of Man and, for this reason, privileged places for the recovery of artifacts. The article aims to present the collecting history of the prehistoric materials coming from the caves of Mount Chiarastella, whose collection and formation practices fit into the framework of the Sicilian collecting history of the second half of the 19th century. Many actors were involved as well as purposes for the recovery of the artifacts, a fact that has led to an inevitable consequence, the dispersion of the artifacts in three public museums and the loss of their traces among private collections. Nevertheless, the multidisciplinary approach adopted in the research has made it possible to overcome the problems linked mainly to the lack of documentary sources, allowing the reconstruction of the entire history of research on the site, as well as the first faithful reading of the original archaeological context.

Keywords: collecting, Prehistory, 19th century, caves, Sicily

INTRODUCTION

The contents of the research presented here are the result of a deviation in the study path of artefacts from the funerary caves of Mount Chiarastella. The preliminary scientific assumption was indeed to reconstruct the archaeological context of the well-known Villafrati's Bell Beaker, but the lack of documentary sources oriented the research from its earliest stages towards the reconstitution of the 19th century collecting events related to it. Although it is the methodological practice of archaeology per se to focus on the broad life cycle of artefacts from production to post-depositional transformations, the biological metaphor of artefacts does not end with their recovery, it rather continues in other contexts without their fate can be considered ended.

THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Located inland from Palermo, about 15 km from the coast and along the north-south road axis linking the cities of Palermo and Agrigento (Fig. 1), the site of Villafrati entered into the archaeological literature in the 1860s thanks to the discovery of the above-mentioned Bell-Beaker (Fig. 2), a particular type of clay artefact, which is part of the delicate transition period from the Final Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age, still much debated in the scientific world in terms of meaning and function. It was among the first discovered on the island, but it immediately seemed to have those distinctive features that were similarly emerging in the rest of Europe and that led Émile Carthailhac to coin the first definition of *vase caliciforme* in 1876.

Mount Chiarastella is a dolomitic limestone rock rising 668 metres above sea level in the Milicia River Valley.¹ One of the many geological factors that make it peculiar is the presence of several karst cavities on the north, north-east

1 The elevation lies within the "Cefalà Diana Baths and Mount Chiarastella Natural Reserve", set up on 20 November 1997 to protect the fragile fauna and flora (there are as many as six habitats), especially the thermophilic algae in the thermal water ducts, and the underground hydrogeological system consisting of a hot thermal water spring, which gushes out at a temperature of about 35.8–38°C. The area is also subject to archaeological constraint to protect the caves, the indigenous Hellenised settlement and the Arab-Norman settlement that includes the remains of the castle and the 'Cefalà Diana Baths'.

and south-east slopes. Although there are many other caves, modern sources mention only three, the Porcospina, the Buffa I and the Buffa II, which, judging by the evidence of material culture found in them, were used from the end of the Copper Age (2700–2300 BC) to the late Antique period (5th–6th century AD). The frequentation of the mountain and the surrounding area continued in alternate phases even in later centuries, as can be seen from the presence of the Islamic baths, the ruins of the 11th–12th-century castle and the 16th-century farm, located respectively at the north-western feet, on the summit and on the northern side of the hill. The only archaeological investigations, however, have focused on the caves and that is where the collecting has started.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH AND FORMATION OF THE COLLECTIONS

The first group of materials must have been discovered by chance by one of the members of the Filangeri family or, probably, by some peasants working on their estate. Indeed, Mount Chiarastella was part of the “Villafrate” barony, one of the numerous properties of the noble family of Norman descent. Whoever made the discovery, what is certain is that in 1864 Giuseppe Antonio Lanza Filangeri, Baron of Villafrati, Prince of Mirto and Count of San Marco, donated some prehistoric artefacts found into the Porcospino Cave to the Royal Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts of Palermo (Salinas 1873: 31–32; De Gregorio 1917: 109; Bovio Marconi 1944: 89; Bovio Marconi 1962: 6–7)².

Once they had been brought to the attention of the President of the Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts of Palermo, Francesco Di Giovanni, he immediately recognised their prehistoric nature and their scientific potential for more general considerations on the “antiquity of the human race on Earth”. Between 1864 and 1865, he therefore decided to carry out “diligent investigations” in the grottoes, in which a new group of archaeological and anthropological material was recovered. Only a final report on the work carried out by the Commission of Antiquities in Sicily in the years 1863–1865 is preserved (Di Giovanni

2 “In 1864, the Royal Museum of Palermo received as a gift from the Prince of Mirto some shapeless clay vases, hand-worked, without the aid of a wheel, and not fired in the kiln, which had been found in the caves of the Chiaristella hill to the north of Villafrati” (Di Giovanni 1866: 30, 31).

1866: 31), but there is no documentation about the finds, topographical references or the state of the site at the time of their discovery. However, there is a reason to believe that the research was concentrated inside the Porcospino cave, the very place of provenance of the Mirto Collection materials.

It was at the end of the first excavation campaign that Francesco Di Giovanni, Giovanni d'Ondes Reggio (Director of the National Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts) and Gaetano Giorgio Gemmellaro (Professor of Geology and Mineralogy at the Faculty of Physical and Mathematical Sciences at the University of Palermo) visited the site of Mount Chiarastella on 28 and 29 December 1865³. The shortness of the trip suggests that it was a reconnaissance trip, most likely conducted for showing the site to Professor Gemmellaro, who in those years, from 1865 to 1868, was busy searching for Pleistocene mammal bones (especially elephants and hippopotamuses) in several caves around Palermo. The caves of Mount Chiarastella must have been of some interest, as in the following years he undertook several excavation campaigns in the Porcospino cave. However, his essays, which already rarely engaged in literary speculation reducing themselves mostly to long and plain lists of finds, include neither diaries nor excavation reports. Nevertheless, a small group of ceramic and osteological material was recovered, generating a third set of collections. The 19th-century period of archaeological investigations at Mount Chiarastella ended with Baron Ferdinand Von Andrian-Werburg's excavation of the Buffa II cave. A geologist in the service of the Austrian Crown and co-founder of the Vienna Geographical Society and the Vienna Anthropological Society, he came to Sicily with the intention of clarifying the dynamics of the appearance of man on the island. In effect, since the beginning of the 19th century Sicily was a point of reference for geologists and naturalists from all over Europe interested in acquiring both scientific data and finds to increase their national collections. The most popular scientific themes on the continent in that period insisted on reconstructing the technological advances of the 'ancient inhabitants'. Austrian scholars, in particular, were especially interested in investigating the supposed relationships between the chipped stone tools and the existence of large mammals (Cultraro 2014: 317–318).

3 The mission is known thanks to a document belonging to the Archival Fond of the Regional Archaeological Museum "Antonio Salinas" (n.682. File "Villafrati 1866–1874"). It is a request for reimbursement of expenses incurred during the visit to the site of Mount Chiarastella; it is dated 9 January 1866, signed by the Museum Director Giovanni d'Ondes Reggio and addressed to the new President of the Antiquities Commission Francesco Paolo Perez.

The debate was not new, rather it was part of the branch of studies concerning Sicilian palaeontology, begun by Francesco Minà Palumbo (1869), but a summary was still lacking. Baron von Andrian's stay on the island lasted a year (1876–1877), facilitated by the kind hospitality of several members of the island's noble and aristocracy, including Prof. Gemmellaro and the Prince of Mirto (Andrian-Werburg 1878: 1).

The Baron knew about the caves of Mount Chiarastella by viewing the collections of both museums in Palermo and through “friendly communications with Mr Gemmellaro” (Andrian-Werburg 1878: 36). Carried out between the summer and autumn of 1876, the research at the Buffa II cave represented one of his most successful activities on the island, together with those carried out on the Syracuse coast, a sort of “methodological laboratory” that allowed him to experience the scientific benefits of a multidisciplinary approach⁴. However, as he was at the same time occupied with the exploration of other caves in the Palermo area, the conduction of the excavations was assigned to Domenico Reina, an employee of the Cabinet of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at the University of Palermo. That means that the information about the cave contained in his work *Prähistorische Studien aus Sicilien*, despite their great detail, provide “second-hand” results, therefore less reliable⁵. Baron Von Andrian's return to his homeland put an end to the season of archaeological research at Mount Chiarastella, which in the following century was only affected by brief explorations on the other slopes and on the summit for different research purposes.

4 Although through the whole 19th century archaeological activities in Europe were mainly limited to the recovery of objects and the highlighting of buildings, the same century saw the natural sciences develop the laws of superposition and faunal succession, which were crucial in defining the method of geological and then archaeological excavation. At Villafraati, Von Andrian was able not only to apply the most modern research methods of the time by relating, in terms of stratigraphic succession and anthropic processes, the presence of large mammals to the chipped stone industry, but also by making use of the specialised knowledge of the anatomist Emile Zuckerkandl and the observations on faunal remains by Friedrich Joseph Teller.

5 They were the result of descriptions by Domenico Reina, the field guards serving the Prince of Mirto and Prof. Gemmellaro (Andrian-Werburg 1878: 36).

THE SOCIOECONOMIC SCENARIO IN SICILY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

With the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in March 1861 with Turin as the capital, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was abolished, feudalism was formally ended and Sicily became part of a new nation under the reign of Victor Emmanuel II. However, the long-awaited autonomy under the new nation translated into the annexation of Sicily to the legislative, administrative and bureaucratic apparatus of Piedmont, which did not take account of local conditions. This opened a deep rift between the new Italian State and the Sicilian people, fuelled by the economic crisis and the tightening of the tax system, which favoured the birth and growth of criminal phenomena such as the Mafia and banditry. Added to that, there were inadequate infrastructure, illiteracy, language difficulties, malaria, infant mortality and a high rate of emigration. It is certain that in the years after the Unification, Sicilians did not feel Italian and rejected the innovations of the new government. The central power reacted to their dissatisfaction by carrying out, on the one hand, several military repressions and, on the other hand, by sending officials to the island (prefects, subprefects, police chiefs, headmasters, teachers) with the specific task of 'civilising' the communities, perceived as barbaric and underdeveloped (Militello 2019: 181). The Risorgimento in Sicily also started a process of modernisation (construction of the first railway lines on the island, strengthening of maritime and road links, communication services such as the post office, start of the first investments in the industrial sector of sulphur refining and salt extraction), but it was not enough to counterbalance the difficult situation.

Among the many problems the new Italian state had to deal with there were those related to cultural heritage. In the slow process that led to the creation of a national archaeological system, three main issues were discussed at length: the model for teaching archaeology in the Italian educational system, the management of the archaeological and historical-artistic heritage of the united regions, and the definition of the legal status of archaeological finds and sites. On this latter point in particular, there were already conflicting opinions in the aftermath of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy: on the one hand there were supporters of the freedom to hold, export and sell cultural goods, on the other, supporters of the inalienability of cultural goods belonging to the Nation.

A first real law protecting cultural heritage actually arrived only in the June of 1902 (enforced since 1909) on the basis of which the most important cultural

goods had to be catalogued and their exports forbidden if they caused great damage to artistic property and history⁶. This difficulty in reconciling liberal ideology with public interest led, in the forty years between the Unification of Italy and the law of 1902/09, to the adoption of episodic temporary or emergency provisions, such as the expropriation of monuments of private property if they were left in ruins due to neglect (law no. 2359 of 1865) or the alienation of 'works of art' and antiquities for the exclusive benefit of the State (law no. 1461 of 1883). Given the lack of a clear, definitive and national law to protect cultural heritage, the Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts attempted to protect its own heritage by not granting authorisations and study permits, especially to foreigners; the rest was handled by the guardians of the island's museums with imaginative obstructionist solutions⁷. When the Commission was set up in 1827, it was precisely to prevent any repetition of episodes such as that of William Harris and Samuel Angel at Selinunte, who attempted to transfer the metopes of Temple C to the British Museum.

In the philosophical and scientific field, the Unification was achieved through the massive spread of Positivism, which conceptually united Italians from all regions and provinces, whether moderate or progressive. Positivism represented the culture of the bourgeoisie, firmly installed in the power of the new State, but also of the Sicilian nobility, who perceived the decline and aimed at new forms of survival, protecting their authority and at the same time contributing to the construction of a new citizenship made up of shared ideals.

Numerous illustrious figures became active protagonists of change in Sicilian institutions and culture; many of them had the opportunity to study and work in the most important European capitals: one thinks of Francesco Saverio Cavallari and his Arabist friend Michele Amari, who shared an unshakeable revolutionary and anti-Bourbon creed; of equal depth and civil passion were the disruptive modernist and liberal approaches of the archaeologists Antonio Salinas and Paolo Orsi. Even some Sicilian antiquarians, such as Barons Corrado and Ippolito Cafici, had international standing. No less important were the

6 The Nasi Law of 12 June 1902 no. 185 later modified and formalised by Law no. 364 of 20 June 1909 (Rosadi-Rava Law) on the inalienability of Antiquities and Fine Arts (G.U. 28 June 1909, no. 150).

7 An exemplary case of the difficulties encountered by foreigners in order to gain access to the study of materials in Sicilian museums is that experienced by the German archaeologist Otto Benndorf, in the company of his colleagues Richard Schöne and Eugen Bormann, on their brief trip to Sicily in 1867, reported with great lucidity in Szemethy, Militello 2019.

Sicilian scholars who worked in the field of natural sciences, including Gaetano Giorgio Gemmellaro, Francesco Anca, Francesco Minà-Palumbo, Filippo Parlatore, Francesco Tornabene, Nicolò Pietro Calcara, Enrico Pirajno di Mandralisca and many others.

THE 19TH-CENTURY COLLECTIONS

The “Mirto gifts”

In addition to the lack of knowledge about who discovered the prehistoric site of Mount Chiarastella, it is also unknown how long the artefacts remained in the Filangeri family collection before being donated to the National Museum (ex-Real Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts) of Palermo. The possible hypotheses for this are: 1) the vessels were discovered in 1864 and shortly afterwards given to the museum; 2) the vessels were added to the Filangeri family's private collection between 1694 and 1863⁸, and only in 1864 they were made part of the museum's collection.

In the second case, it is likely that the materials were brought to the city in the historical residence of Palazzo Mirto in Palermo to be displayed in the showcases of one of the large, elegant rooms on the first floor; indeed, this was the noble floor where the official ceremonies and festivities that marked noble life took place, exalting the indisputable prestige of the family and reiterating membership to an exclusive class. However, it is not excluded a priori that these archaeological materials may have remained in the small rural settlement of Villafrati within the baronial residence built in the first half of the 18th century by Vincenzo Filangeri Cottone, used mainly for administering business and hunting parties. However, some more fragmentary or less representative prehistoric vases from the caves of Mount Chiarastella had to remain in the family collection, at least until 1917⁹.

8 The purchase of the Farmhouse ‘de Villafrades’ by the doctor Don Vincenzo Spuches dates back to 1596. In 1694, his daughter Francesca De Spuches married Don Pietro Filangeri, beginning a dynasty that survived until 1982 (Oddo 1986: 19–24).

9 “Many objects I believe the Prince of Mirto also has” (De Gregorio 1917: 109); “The Count of S. Marco and Prince of Mirto [Ignazio Lanza Filangeri] has a few and various archaeological objects in his palace and some prehistoric ones [...]. The Count of S. Marco and Prince of Mirto [Ignazio Lanza Filangeri] possesses in his palace a few and varied archaeological

The “Mirto gifts” constituted the first entirely prehistoric collection of the National Museum of Palermo, which at that time still included few other core collections: the “Salnitriana” of the Jesuits, the “Martiniana” of the Benedictine Fathers of Palermo, and the “Astuto” of Noto¹⁰. The artefacts were physically brought to the Museum of the Royal University of Palermo, located in the former House of the Theatine Fathers of San Giuseppe in Maqueda Street. It occupied two exhibition halls on the ground floor; in other rooms of the same building, locked in crates, the rest of the material was stored.¹¹

At the current state of research there is no documentary source that clarifies whether the Mirto collection was exhibited or temporarily kept in the warehouses. Even the precise amount of the donation is not known; however, among the inventory folders from the 1940s compiled by Jole Bovio Marconi, Director of the Museum, three of them have an annotation written in pencil: “Mirto gifts”¹². Matching research between the current inventory and the one from the 1940s has isolated three vases: a small globular cup and two globular jugs. However, the idea that only three vases were donated seems unconvincing; it is likely, rather, that the research she carried out at the Museum's Historical Archives could not fill all the gaps and that, prudently, she wrote “Mirto gifts” only on those cards she was certain of¹³.

objects and some of them even prehistoric [...] Finally, the Prince possesses a broken vase from the Porcospino Cave of Villafrate, of which I have illustrated in this iconography some much more important and better-preserved artefacts housed in the University of Palermo” (De Gregorio 1917: 154, 155).

- 10 Some protohistoric artifacts were already present, mainly bronzes, from the ‘Salnitrian’ collection of the Jesuits in Palermo and from the Astuto collection in Noto (Bovio Marconi 1963: 6, 7).
- 11 “Until 1866, it only occupied two badly organised and dimly lit rooms on the ground floor of the University building, where the objects it owned before the new acquisitions were confused and bundled up. All these objects, still closed in their boxes, were stored in different rooms with the danger of deteriorating or dispersing. Nothing was more urgent, therefore, than the choice of a capacious and suitable room to the need” (Cavallari 1872: 12).
- 12 Ufficio Catalogo of the Archaeological Regional Museum “Antonio Salinas” of Palermo, “Villafrati” in Bovio Marconi-Museo Nazionale Files (drawer 18 B) and Form 32. The lettering “Mirto gifts” or “Mirto collection” is however inappropriately used, being more correct to call it “Filangeri Collection”.
- 13 The General Registers of Entry kept in the Museum’s Archival Fund, indeed, date from 1869, so nothing is known about acquisitions between the establishment of the National Museum in 1860 and the creation of the first Register of Entry.

Research into the Mirto collection has also been carried out inside the historical residence in Palermo, which is still perfectly preserved in terms of layout and furnishings. On the first floor, the so-called “Saletta dei reperti” (Room of the finds) houses ninety-one typologically heterogeneous archaeological finds from the 6th century BC to the Islamic period, whose provenance is known only for a few specimens found on the family's property or purchased on the antiques market. However, none of them is prehistoric or protohistoric, suggesting a specific collecting choice made by the Filangeri family in the 20th century.

The Collection of the National Museum of Palermo

The “diligent investigations” carried out in the Porcospino Cave between 1864 and 1865 by the Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts of Palermo led to the creation of a second nucleus of material which also flowed into the National Museum (formerly the Royal Museum of Antiquities and Fine Arts) of Palermo. The findings from Villafrati were still housed in the rooms of the Royal University Museum until 1867, when, following the suppression of the religious orders and the confiscation of the church endowments, the museum was finally moved to the 16th-century house of the Filippini Fathers in the church of S. Ignazio all'Olivella¹⁴. Once the work of adapting the building to the museum's needs was completed, all the art objects, antiquities and the Picture Gallery were transferred¹⁵. The passage from one seat to the other, however, was not without consequences: a new inventory of the finds was made, which cancelled out the previous one and confused the material recovered during the Commission's excavations with those of the Mirto Collection¹⁶ (Fig. 3).

14 The ecclesiastical complex was confiscated and assigned as museum space by operation of the Law dated 7 July 1866 (De Vido 2001: 744; Pelagatti 2001: 610; Palazzotto 2015: 72). Since its transfer, the museum institution has acquired greater prominence and independence, becoming a reference point for the collection of antiquities not only from the city, but also and mainly from the whole western Sicily. Still today, the former house of the Philippine Fathers is the seat of the Regional Archaeological Museum “Antonio Salinas” of Palermo.

15 The National Museum finally became an archaeological museum only in 1954, when the medieval and modern collections were separated from the archaeological ones, and the 15th-century Palazzo Abatellis, formerly a monastery, was elected as the new seat of the Gallery of Medieval and Modern Art of Sicily, inheriting the Picture Gallery, the prints, the drawings, the Islamic collection and the medieval and Renaissance works of art.

16 This is confirmed by the typological uniformity of the first inventory labels stuck on the vessels' surfaces.

The fate of Villafrati's prehistoric collection at the National Museum of Palermo became known a few years later, when the new President of the Commission of Antiquities and Fine Arts, Gaetano Daita, decided to exhibit the most representative finds of Sicilian prehistoric antiquity at the first Italian Exhibition of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology¹⁷. The exhibition was held in Bologna in the autumn of 1871 collaterally to the 5th International Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology, which had the merit of showing how, in Italy too, prehistoric archaeology had by now reached a scientific level not inferior to that of other European countries and how the process of national unification had been completed also on a cultural level (Cavani 2008: 204). The importance of this scientific event was confirmed by the participation of the greatest anthropologists, geologists, specialists in prehistoric archaeology, scientists and naturalists from seventeen European and two non-European countries. Among the more than fifty collections on display, representative of all Italian regions, the section of prehistoric antiquities from Sicily was curated by the leading exponents of Sicilian palaeoethnology of the time, the Professor Gemmellaro and the Baron Francesco Anca¹⁸. Unfortunately, the exhibition report (Exhibit 1871) does not include the photographic catalogue, so at the present stage of the research it is not possible to identify exactly the individual artifacts that were chosen.

The Collection of the Geological Cabinet of Palermo

The ceramic and osteological materials recovered from inside the Porcospino cave during the excavations of Professor Gemmellaro between 1865 and 1868 were incorporated into the museum annexed to the Institute of Geology of Palermo, which continued to occupy a large hall on the second floor of the University Palace in Maqueda Street¹⁹.

17 "The Commission took care that these very ancient remains [from the caves of the Chi-aristella hill] were included in the Bolognese exhibition of prehistoric antiquities" (Salinas 1873: 32). From the report of the Exposition we know that the artifacts chosen to represent Sicily belonged largely to the Dalla Rosa Collection, made up of objects heterogeneous in material, chronology and origin. The rest of the materials came entirely from the collections of the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Geology and Mineralogy of Palermo (Exhibit 1871: 13–15, 32, 33).

18 For further information about the contributions given to the discipline by Baron Francesco Anca – see Cultraro 2020.

19 It inherited the collections of the former Cabinet of Natural History of Palermo, which were reorganised and expanded thanks to the clever purchases and frantic field research by

Research carried out in the storerooms of the present Geological Museum of Palermo has led to the identification of a small corpus of material consisting of three fictile objects (a small jug with painted geometric decoration (Fig. 4a); a small saucepan (Fig. 4b) and an ovoidal achromatic beaker) and a large quantity of human bones belonging to five individuals. All the artifacts have stickers referring to an inventory from 1880, but there is no trace of the entry register for previous years, so it is not clear whether these materials represent only a part or the whole original collection.

It is quite likely, however, that the materials from Villafrati kept in the Geological Cabinet of Palermo appeared together with those from the National Museum at the Bologna Exhibition of 1871; several factors lead one to believe this: one of the curators was Gaetano Giorgio Gemmellaro, who was responsible for the excavation that led to their discovery; the jug is one of the very few of all the fictile objects to bear a painted decoration, constituting one of the most diagnostic pieces from the Mount Chiarastella site; among the human osteological materials from the Porcospino cave there are two skulls curiously embedded in the limestone *breccia* (Fig. 5), index of specific methodological choices of excavation and preservation of the finds²⁰.

The Von Andrian Collection

At the end of his explorations in Sicily in the winter of 1877, Ferdinand von Andrian returned to Austria with a lot of about 350 pieces (including pottery, lithic and bone industry, not to mention human and animal osteological remains) from all over the island²¹. Their legal status is not known, but it is quite likely

Gaetano Giorgio Gemmellaro. In just a few years, the result was one of the most prestigious geological and paleontological museums in Europe, to the point of being ranked second after the British Museum in London by scholars of the time. It was not until 1970 that the Institute of Geology moved to Corso Tukory 131, which is still the site of the "*Giorgio Gemmellaro Geological Museum*" of Palermo.

20 A comparable limestone concretion containing ceramic fragments and flints, extracted from a cave on the island of Favignana by Marquis Guido Dalla Rosa, is mentioned in the *report on the Italian Exhibition of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology* (1871: 14): [...] *the Jury praised in a particular manner the care taken to dig in such a way that, where possible, the worked flints and pottery sherds from those caves were preserved, at least in part closed in the breccia where they were wrapped, as to maintain intact that seal which confirms with the greatest evidence the antiquity and origin of the objects themselves.*

21 In his *Prähistorische Studien aus Sicilien*, the author himself mentions some pieces of his collection; in 1917 the Marquis Antonio De Gregorio quoted the materials from Monte Chi-

that the collection remained private, although available to the anthropological societies of Vienna and Berlin, on whose behalf the mission was carried out.

The same years saw the realisation of Ferdinand von Hochstetter's scientific project of the new Museum of Natural History in Vienna, which included not only the reunification of the great zoological, mineralogical and botanical collections of the Imperial Court assembled between 1851 and 1876, but also the creation of a new department of Anthropology, Ethnography and Prehistory (Feest 1995: 122–126).

At different times the artifacts from Villafrati were added to the collections of the newly established museum: the animal remains were added to the already existing zoological collection inherited from the Cabinet of Natural History of Vienna; the osteological material was acquired by the museum in 1890 and ended up in the Anthropology Department (Szilvássy, Kentner 1978: 32), while the pottery, lithic and bone industry were acquired by the Naturhistorisches Museum only in 1909 and assigned to the Prehistory Department²².

The relevance given by Von Andrian to the excavation of Grotta Buffa II can be deduced from the number of illustrative plates he dedicated to it (five out of eight). According to what is reported in his work, the total amount of artifacts from Villafrati would amount to about 60–70 ceramic sherds, 22 stone tools, some chips, three gems and a small amount of faunal remains. However, a count of the materials mentioned in the text suggests that there are many more of them and not only in a fragmentary state of preservation²³.

The De Gregorio Collection

A private collection containing prehistoric artefacts from the caves of Villafrati had to be in possession of Antonio De Gregorio, Marquis of the Royal Park,

arastella under the heading “Sicilian prehistoric collections from outside Sicily” in his *Iconography* (De Gregorio 1917, p. 24); in the 1940s, Bovio Marconi noted that “Objects from Buffa II seem to have been in the possession of von Andrian” (Bovio Marconi 1944: 89). Recent reviews of archival documents and archaeological materials by Veneroso (1994) and Cultraro (2014) conducted at the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna finally confirmed the export of these materials to the Austrian capital.

22 The sale took place in a personal capacity; it was indeed the same Baron von Andrian to sell the collection for the sum of 1,700 crowns, 1,300 less than what he had asked for at the beginning of the negotiations (Cultraro 2014: 321).

23 Two almost intact bell beakers for instance are documented in the Historical Archive and the storerooms of the Natural History Museum of Vienna (Veneroso 1994: 475, 476, fig. 8–10; Cultraro 2014: 322, fig. 3).

Prince of San Teodoro. The illustrious Palermitan geologist and palaeontologist, Professor Gemmellaro's former assistant, acquired the collection in a different way from the others; at the present state of research there are no documents attesting excavations carried out at Monte Chiarastella under his direction. Rather, we must think of donations, friendly exchanges (with Ferdinand von Andrian²⁴ or Giorgio Gemmellaro), or purchases on the Sicilian antiquities market.

Notes on the existence of the De Gregorio collection can be found in his *Iconografia delle collezioni preistoriche della Sicilia* (De Gregorio 1917)²⁵. Here, Mount Chiarastella is mentioned in four sections, which are of fundamental importance to the reconstruction of the original collection nuclei today:

- Section “Prehistoric collections of the National Museum of Palermo,” within which we find the entry “Palaeolithic remains of Chiarastella (Villafrate).” (Tables XXVII and XXVIII)
- Section “Prehistoric collections of the Royal University of Palermo” [Geological Museum] and within it “Palaeolithic clays of the Porcospino cave of Villafrate” (Table LV)
- Section “Collections of the Prince of Mirto in Palermo”
- Section “Prehistoric collections from outside Sicily”

In the work, the most representative artefacts are described and illustrated, both operations done by observing the materials from the showcases of the National Museum²⁶; unfortunately, there is no graphic representation of those in his possession.

While the palaeontological collection was donated by his son Camillo De Gregorio to the Royal Geological Cabinet of Palermo in the years immediately following the marquis's death, the De Gregorio archaeological collection con-

24 “I remember vividly that around 1876 Baron von Andrian came to Sicily with his wife (daughter of the famous author of *Robert the Devil*). I was then in the Geology Department as assistant of Professor Gemmellaro together with Professor Di Blasi. The foreign scientist, who was kindly received, came to the University for several days with his wife; he sat next to me in the Museum lecture room, precisely next to the first window on the right as you enter. He wrote part of his work (*Prähistorische Studien*) here, drawing himself the fossil remains he had collected in various parts of the island” (De Gregorio 1917: 62)

25 “I also possess some objects from the same locality”; “I also have a few specimens” (De Gregorio 1917: 47); [...] I own some material from Chiaristella in my cabinet; I have other pieces in my private cabinet (De Gregorio 1917: 67).

26 Looking at them from such a distance inside the cabinet, where they are located, it is not easy to evaluate [...]. (De Gregorio 1917: 47).

tinues to be owned by the family, kept at Palazzo De Gregorio al Molo in Palermo, still the residence of the heirs.

The collection currently consists of 892 artefacts, heterogeneous in type and origin, covering a chronological span from Prehistory to the Middle Ages²⁷. Research carried out in the halls of the piano nobile did not reveal the presence of any prehistoric material, but since the death of the Marquis in 1930, most of the finds were deposited in the attic and it is there that the artefacts from Villafrati are most likely to be stored.

CONSIDERATIONS

The remains from the caves of Mount Chiarastella are therefore traceable in three archaeological collections today:

- 1) Collection of the Regional Archaeological Museum “Antonio Salinas” in Palermo, containing pottery and lithic tools from the Mirto/Filangeri donation and the excavations by the Commission of Antiquities.
- 2) Collection of the Gemmellaro Geological Museum in Palermo, containing pottery and human remains from the excavations conducted by Professor Gemmellaro.
- 3) Collection of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, containing pottery, lithic tools, human and faunal remains from the Von Andrian mission in Sicily.

In all three cases, these collections are public, although they were made up of initially private nuclei (the Mirto and Von Andrian collections) which then changed their legal status once they were acquired by the national museums. Instead, there is no tangible evidence of the De Gregorio and Mirto prehistoric collections from Villafrati kept in the family's possession, remaining only attested in the documentary sources (De Gregorio 1917: 47, 67, 109, 154, 155).

At this point, it is necessary to consider the reasons behind this dispersal, which are largely to be ascribed to the socio-political conditions in which collectors and institutions of the time operated.

The donation made by Giuseppe Antonio Lanza Filangeri to the National Museum of Palermo can be explained by his desire to make a personal contribution to the cultural formation of the country, following in the footsteps

27 For an early catalogue of the De Gregorio collection – see Aleo Nero, Ferruzza 1997.

of many other illustrious exponents of the nascent entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and of the cultured and refined aristocracy, who saw in the Unification a hope of change and social affirmation²⁸; other factors, however, may have been added to this main reason, such as family circumstances²⁹ or friendly relationships.

The dynamics that led the finds recovered by the Commission of Antiquities and Professor Gemmellaro to end up respectively in the National Museum and the Cabinet of Natural History of Palermo are, on the other hand, inherent in the nature of the research activities and of the public places designated for the conservation of the materials. Anyway, it is odd that the only three clay artefacts housed in the Geological Museum were not transferred to the Archaeological Museum, as already pointed out in the 1940s by the former director, later Superintendent of Western Sicily Jole Bovio Marconi³⁰. It means that the historical nature of the collection, rather than the archaeological character of the artefacts, have prevailed in the museum choices.

The reasons behind Ferdinand von Andrian's expedition to Sicily are different, although always of a scientific nature. Taking into account the aims pursued and the way in which the trip was carried out, it is possible to classify the mission within the erudite-naturalistic typology: the Baron was in fact motivated by a strong palethnological curiosity that resulted in the drafting of a technical report of the data acquired, shared with colleagues and incorporated into the work *Prähistorische Studien aus Sicilien*. The mission could be considered a joint one, since in the year of his departure he was a member of the board of both the Vienna and Berlin Societies of Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory. It is likely that he undertook this expedition on behalf of both, in the name of renewed scientific collaboration and friendship between them: the archaeological materials in fact remained in Vienna, but the work was published in the Berlin journal *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*.

Whether the real intention of his trip was to increase the collections of the Natural History Museum in Vienna cannot be stated, since the pieces were acquired by the museum only in 1909, but it could be closer to the truth if we refer

28 It does not seem, however, that the Filangeri family have been affected in a determining way by the change of government. Despite the abolition of feudalism, as a matter of fact, the members of the family were indeed able to integrate into the municipal administration continuing to manage their properties.

29 In 1864, the same year as the donation, Donna Vittoria Filangeri, the mother of Giuseppe Antonio, died.

30 "[...] and it is regrettable that the material at least of the Porcospina is not all at the Museum" (Bovio Marconi 1944: 89).

to the collections of the Anthropological Society of Vienna. It is then unclear whether the Baron negotiated the sale with the Naturhistorisches Museum as the owner of the collection or as the legal representative of the Vienna Anthropological Society. As for the fact that the Baron succeeded in taking the artefacts out from Italy, in legislative terms there was not yet a law establishing the inalienability of the nation's Antiquities and Fine Arts, which would only come about thirty-one years later (Law No. 364 of 20 June 1909). From this point of view, it is questionable whether it is a coincidence that the Von Andrian collection was sold to the museum of Vienna in the same year that this law was passed.

A further oddity occurs in the way Von Andrian mentions in his work the artefacts he brought with himself to Vienna. In effect, in the illustrative tables he chose to represent, with the sole exception of four ceramic fragments, all the materials from the National Museum's collection of Palermo; on the other hand, it is known that he took with him at least two other almost intact bell beakers (Veneroso 1994: 475, fig. 8; 476, fig. 10; Cultraro 2014: 322, fig. 3).

A similar tendency can be read between the lines of the work of Marquis Antonio De Gregorio, who, despite being more explicit than Von Andrian in claiming the possession of artefacts from Villafrati, in Tables XXVII, XXVII and LV he limited his depiction to those kept in the National Museum and in the Geology Cabinet of Palermo³¹.

An explanation for these omissions is in part provided by the authors themselves, who found in the better state of conservation of the archaeological remains housed in the Palermo museums the motivation for such a graphic choice, only referring in the text to the typological similarities of these materials with those in their possession³². Although these reasons may be considered realistic, it is also assumed that the omission of the real extent of these collections might be a veiled attempt to protect them from possible expropriation by the State, especially at such a delicate time as that following the Unification, which was animated by the heated debate on the fate of public and private Cultural Heritage.

31 De Gregorio (1917: 154, 155): [...] *Porcospino cave of Villafrate about which I have illustrated in this Iconografia some much more important and better-preserved artifacts belonging to the University of Palermo.*

32 Andrian-Werburg (1878: 38): [...] *the collections preserved in Palermo, considerably richer in well-preserved clay remains; Idem (1878: 40): The Buffa II, provided the same forms as those of the Porcospina Cave.*

CONCLUSIONS

This physical separation has inevitably resulted in the impairment of the archaeological evaluation and the distorted reading of the context. This research must be considered as a preliminary to the achievement of a broader aim, the creation of a digital catalogue bringing together the various collections from the caves of Mount Chiarastella.

The case study of the prehistoric collections of Villafrati has shown how fruitful the research can be if it is carried out from a multidisciplinary perspective. In the absence of excavation reports and other technical-scientific documentation functional to the reconstruction of the original archaeological contexts, in fact, the overall revision of the published bibliography, consultation of the archival documentation, photographic and cartographic material (historical and modern), a new translation of Baron von Andrian's work, the study of artefacts, inventories and repeated surveys in the site have allowed the definition of the collecting events, which has become a method allowing the reconstruction of the history of studies and excavations at the site. From the combination of the data obtained, a rather complex archaeological picture emerges, which requires a new reinterpretation of the use of caves in a diachronic key and of the Bell Beaker phenomenon in the area in question, and which could contribute to shed new light on the understanding of Sicilian Prehistory.

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List of illustrations

- Fig. 1. Localization of Villafrati's archaeological site on the map of Sicily (above) and the elevation of Mt. Chiarastella on the topographic map (below) (from D'Angelo et al. 1983: 12).
- Fig. 2. Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo. Bell Beaker with bands of impressed oblique dotted lines decoration from the Porcospino Cave, Mt. Chiarastella, Villafrati (image used by permit of the Regional Archaeological Museum 'Antonino Salinas' of Palermo).
- Fig. 3. Regional Archaeological Museum of Palermo. Fictile spoon and mug from the Porcospino Cave, Mt. Chiarastella, Villafrati, on whose surfaces it is possible to notice the different types of inventorial marks, tags and plates affixed from 1864 to the 1970s (image used by permit of the Regional Archaeological Museum 'Antonino Salinas' of Palermo).
- Fig. 4. Geological Museum of Palermo. Small jug with painted geometric decoration (at left) and two-handled pot (at right) from the Porcospino Cave, Mt. Chiarastella, Villafrati (image used by permit of the Geological Museum 'Gemmellaro' of Palermo).
- Fig. 5. Geological Museum of Palermo. Limestone breccia with embedded human bones from the Porcospino Cave, Mt. Chiarastella, Villafrati (image used by permit of the Geological Museum 'Gemmellaro' of Palermo).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5