

ANGELA BELLIA *

A Female Musician or Dancer of Iron Age in Southern Italy?

The excavations conducted by Paola Zancani Montuoro between 1963 and 1969 in the necropolis at Macchiabate (Cosenza), an anonymous city that in the archaic period gravitated under Sybarite rule, brought to light the Tomb T.60 that belonging to a woman that dated back to the VIII century B.C. The things that were found, were distinguished, from other burial places in the same necropolis, for the exceptional nature of the findings. This led to the theory that the dead woman was a person of importance in that community. The funeral equipment, now kept in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale della Sibaritide, consisted of ceramics, ornaments and bronze objects that were either worn by or placed around the skeleton; among these were musical instruments and objects.

Under the dead woman's elbow was a 'ladden sistrum' (19,8x11,3x1,8 cm) made up of 15 spirals held together by two plates that terminated in a lateral volute. Above the musical instrument there was an object consisting of seventeen little tubes (average diameter 7 mm and maximum length 96 mm) which, in comparison with similar integral examples that had bells with clapper, found in Sicily, must have formed the extremity of a rattle made of big rings, probably to be worn around the neck. Above there was a musical object consisting of nine concentric elements (H. 40 cm.) which turned around an internal support that has been lost. Above all these objects were two cymbals and a 'raschiatoio' made of forty one rings. It was found in perfect condition which probably meant there had been a support inside the object along which the rings could slide. It was probably made of perishable material. These objects were probably produced locally and seemed to have been influenced by oriental handicraft.

At the moment there were no studies which give an interpretation of the presence of musical instruments and objects in this part of Southern Italy which, on one hand, could be proof of cultural and commercial exchanges in the Iron Age between the local population and the Orient. This is widely documented by archaeological findings. On the other hand, it is evidence of a particular funeral rite and a precise cultural sphere, to which the woman of Francavilla seems to have belonged and whose sacred status is also denoted by the musical objects found among the funeral equipment.

Between 1963 and 1969, Paola Zancani Montuoro conducted excavations in the necropolis of Macchiabate at Francavilla Marittima near Sibari (Fig. 1). The city was inhabited between the IX and the VII centuries B.C. by an Italic people that the Greeks called the Enotri. In the necropolis they discovered the tomb T.60 that dated back to the VIII century B.C. and belonged to a woman.¹ The burial place was situated beneath a great barrow that had protected the interior. The objects were still in the same place as they had been put at the moment of their placement, except for a few changes due to the decomposition of organic matter. The findings recovered from the tomb are kept at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Sibaritide in Calabria. The exceptional nature of the findings makes it stand out above the other tombs in the same necropolis. In the tomb there were ceramics, bronze objects, a basin and cruciform fibulas, amber, bronze ornaments and jewels worn or placed either around or on the skeleton of the dead woman who was of very small build (Fig. 2).

* A previous version of this paper has been given in Rome, on the occasion of the CIMCIM Annual Meeting 2009 and Joint Meeting of the American Musical Instrument Society, Galpin Society and Historic Brass Society Florence – Rome, 6th-12th September 2009. I would like to thank the Keeper of Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Sibaritide, Dr. Silvana Luppino for granting me permission to examine, to study and to photograph the musical instruments and objects kept in the Museum. I also thank and express my gratitude to the archaeologist Prof. Ernesto De Miro for his help.

¹ Paola Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', *Atti e Memorie della Società Magna Grecia* n.s. XV-XVII (1974-1976), pp. 9-106.

Under her right elbow there was a bronze ladden *sistrum*² nineteen centimetres long, eleven centimetres high and one centimetre thick. It was made up of fifteen elements held together by two plates. The plates had small incisions and terminated in volutes. Around the edge of the two plates were fifteen holes. Each hole in the upper plate was probably connected to the bottom one by means of small fine wooden sticks stuck into the holes. Some fragments of the wooden sticks were found inside small spiral tubes wound around the sticks. Each spiral formed 21 turnings and terminated in rounded tips, free to bend without moving around the wooden sticks. The absence of clasps for chains or other means of suspension leads to the assumption that the instrument must have been held in the hand (Fig. 3).³

Besides at Francavilla, fragments of similar instruments were found in the necropolis at Incoronata-S. Teodoro⁴ and S. Leonardo⁵ (Pisticci. Matera), Valle Sorigliano⁶ and Contrada Conca d'Oro (Tursi. Matera),⁷ and Torre del Mordillo (Spezzano Albanese. Cosenza).⁸ In some examples, the plates present big volutes, in others they are much smaller or absent. In some cases, the instruments were hooked to the dead woman's belt.

In the tomb, above the ladden *sistrum*, there was an object consisting of seventeen small tubes, in medium 7 millimetres in diameter and 9 point six centimetres long at the most. From a comparison with similar complete examples provided with clapper bells found inside other women's tombs, it formed the extremity of a rattle neck-lace. The sound object was made up of big rings and was probably worn around the neck (Fig. 4).⁹ In Sicily similar objects have been found in the necropolis at Molino della Badia (Mineo. Catania) (Fig. 5),¹⁰ Cugno Carrube (Carlentini. Siracusa).¹¹ The small hollow

² The instrument is also called Apulian *sistrum*. See Lucia Lepore, 'Il sistro italico: strumento, attributo, oggetto di culto', *Imago Musicae* VIII (1991), pp. 95-108. The name was given because the instrument is represented on Apulian pottery (IV c. B.C.). Given the chronology of the example of Francavilla (VIII c. B.C.), it is preferable to use the term ladden *sistrum*, with reference to the form rather than the diffusion of the instrument in a region called 'Apulia' centuries later. See Angela Bellia, 'Strumenti musicali e oggetti sonori dell'Età del Ferro in Sicilia e nell'Italia Meridionale (IX-VII sec. a.C.)', *Sicilia Antiqua. An International Journal of Archaeology*, VI, 2009, pp. 14-24.

³ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', pp. 27-40, n. 59, tavv. IX-XI, fig. 8; Angela Bellia, 'Strumenti musicali e oggetti sonori dell'Età del Ferro in Sicilia e nell'Italia Meridionale (IX-VII sec. a.C.)', *Sicilia Antiqua. An International Journal of Archaeology*, VI, 2009, pp. 14-24.

⁴ Bruno Chiartano, 'La necropoli dell'età del Ferro dell'Incoronata e di S. Teodoro (Scavo 1970-1974). Metaponto II', *Notizie e Scavi* (1977), pp. 41-42; Bruno Chiartano, *La necropoli dell'età del Ferro dell'Incoronata e di S. Teodoro (Scavi 1978-1985)* (Galatina: Congedo, 1994), pp. 50-51; Ettore M. De Juliis, *Magna Grecia. L'Italia meridionale dalle origini leggendarie alla conquista romana* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1996), p. 70.

⁵ Felice Lo Porto, 'Metaponto. Tombe a tumulo dell'Età del Ferro scoperte nel suo entroterra', *Notizie e Scavi* XCIV, (1969), p. 168.

⁶ Mina Andriani, 'La necropoli di Valle Sorigliano', in *Il Museo nazionale della Siritide di Policoro. Archeologia della Basilicata meridionale*, edd. Salvatore Bianco and Marcello Tagliente (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1985), p. 55; Otto-Herman Frey, *Eine nekropole der Fruhen Eisenzeit bei S. Maria d'Anglona* (Galatina: Congedo, 1991), pp. 9-16; *Greci, Enotri e Lucani*, ed. Salvatore Bianco (Napoli: Electa 1996), pp. 52-53.

⁷ Salvatore Bianco, 'Tursi-Santa Maria d'Anglona', in *Trésors d'Italie du Sud. Grecs et Indigènes en Basilicate* (Milano: Skira, 1999), p. 239.

⁸ Angelo Pasqui, 'Scavi nella necropoli di Torre Mordillo nel comune di Spezzano Albanese', *Notizie e Scavi* 1888, p. 473. See also Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 30.

⁹ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', pp. 40-41; Bellia, 'Strumenti musicali e oggetti sonori', pp. 45-47.

¹⁰ Luigi Bernabò Brea, 'Mineo - Grammichele - Necropoli della Madonna del Piano (Mulino della Badia)', *Archeologia nella Sicilia Sud-Orientale* (Napoli: Centre Jean Bérard 1973), p. 66; Luigi Bernabò

tubes with holes, presumably of equal length, must have been hung up by means of with threads and strings. The tubes were free to move and hung from the small bronze plate. This had small holes in it and its ends were bent at right angles.

Above the two instruments was a *sistrum* with rings made up of nine concentric elements in the form of a ring. Each of them was four centimetres in high and had a decreasing diameter. The single elements were mobile and could revolve around an internal support, that is no longer to be found (Fig. 6).¹² Similar but much smaller instruments have been found and in southern Italy, in women's tombs at Incoronata-S. Teodoro,¹³ Valle Sorigliano (Tursi. Matera),¹⁴ Chiaromonte (Potenza)¹⁵ and in Sicily at Adrano (Catania) and S. Cataldo (Caltanissetta).¹⁶ In most cases the instruments were placed on the dead woman's stomach.

At Francavilla, two cymbals were also found placed on the dead woman's stomach. The biggest had the shape of a hollow frustum of cone; the smallest was concave and dome-shaped. Altogether, the shape was similar to that of a convex disk with a polished exterior and a rough interior. The two parts must have been held together by string threaded through the dome-shaped element that could have been inserted upside down inside the ring-like element. According to this suggestion, the instrument was played by beating the two parts. The theory that the instrument could be played by a non resounding device, perhaps made of wood, is not to be ignored (Fig. 7).¹⁷ Similar instruments were found at Castiglione di Paludi (Cosenza),¹⁸ Adrano (Catania) and S. Cataldo (Caltanissetta).¹⁹

In the disposition of Tomb T.60 a scraper (or perhaps a stick *sistrum*) 40 centimetres long, dominated all the objects. The instrument was placed under the dead woman's

Brea, Elio Militello, Scolastica La Piana, 'La necropoli del Molino della Badia: nuove tombe in contrada Madonna del Piano', *Notizie e Scavi XXIII* (1969), p. 241. See also Luigi Bernabò Brea, *La Sicilia prima dei greci* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1958), p. 172, fig. 42, b, i; Paolo Orsi, 'Necropoli al Molino della Badia presso Grammichele', *Bollettino di Paleontologia italiana XXXI* (1905), pp. 128-129, figg. 35-36.

¹¹ Massimo Frasca, 'Caracausi, La necropoli di Cugno Carrube in territorio di Lentini', *Cronache di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte XXI* (1982), pp. 25-26.

¹² Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 42.

¹³ Bruno Chiartano, *La necropoli dell'età del Ferro*, pp. 175-176.

¹⁴ Salvatore Bianco, 'Tursi-Santa Maria d'Anglona', pp. 239-240; *Greci, Enotri e Lucani*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁵ Salvatore Bianco, 'La Preistoria', in *Il Museo nazionale della Siritide di Policoro. Archeologia della Basilicata meridionale*, edd. Salvatore Bianco and Marcello Tagliente (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1985), p. 43.

¹⁶ Luigi Bernabò Brea, *La Sicilia prima dei greci*, p. 197 and p. 199.

¹⁷ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', pp. 83-92; Bellia, 'Strumenti musicali e oggetti sonori', pp. 11-14.

¹⁸ Pier Giovanni Guzzo, 'Paludi (Cosenza): località Castiglione. Necropoli dell'età del ferro', *Klearchos XVII* (1975), p. 144, n. 29; Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 89, footnote n. 19.

¹⁹ Luigi Bernabò Brea, *La Sicilia prima dei greci*, pp. 196-198; Hermann Müller-Karpe, *Introduzione alla preistoria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1979), tavv. 11-12, nn. 11-13; Rosa Maria Albanese Procelli, *Ripostigli di bronzi della Sicilia nel Museo archeologico di Siracusa* (Palermo: Accademia nazionale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1993), p. 103. See also Bruno Chiartano, 'La necropoli dell'età del Ferro dell'Incoronata e di S. Teodoro', pp. 50-53; Bruno Chiartano, *La necropoli dell'età del Ferro dell'Incoronata e di S. Teodoro*, pp. 56-58; Bruno Chiartano, *La necropoli dell'età del Ferro dell'Incoronata e di S. Teodoro (Scavi 1986-1987)* (Galatina: Congedo, 1996), p. 25; Luigi Malnati, *Tombe arcaiche di S. Maria d'Anglona (Scavi 1972-1973)*, in *Studi e ricerche archeologiche in Basilicata*, edd. Marina Castoldi and Luigi Malnati (Milano: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1984), pp. 87-88; Salvatore Bianco and Marcello Tagliente, 'La prima Età del Ferro', in *Il Museo nazionale della Siritide di Policoro. Archeologia della Basilicata meridionale*, edd. Salvatore Bianco and Marcello Tagliente (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1985), p. 52; Otto-Herman Frey, *Eine nekropole der Fruhen Eisenzeit bei S. Maria d'Anglona*, pp. 25-27; Antonio De Siena, 'Rinvenimenti archeologici a Ferrandina', in *Ferrandina, recupero di una identità culturale*, edd. Nuccia Barbone Pugliese and Franco Lisanti (Galatina: Congedo, 1987), p. 60, figg. 78-79.

right elbow. It was made up of 41 rings of equal dimension placed in a row between two bronze spirals found in perfect state. Such a circumstance suggested there must have been an internal support, probably made of wood.²⁰ The rings could slide along it and be stopped by the spirals at the two ends (Fig. 8). At this point of studies, there is no further knowledge of other examples of similar objects in Southern Italy.

The musical instruments in the tomb at Francavilla Marittima were situated on the right side of the skeleton. Probably they had fallen when the support of perishable parts failed. Both simple and multiple small cones and a ring were found under the instruments; given the context and the circumstance of their discovery, Paola Zancani Montuoro suggested that the bronze elements might belong to another musical instrument. Perhaps a string instrument?²¹

It is not easy to trace the place of production of the musical instruments found in the necropolis at Macchiabate. Similar examples identified up to now, come from a restricted area of Southern Italy and Eastern Sicily. With regards to the latter Luigi Bernabò Brea who made the discovery near Catania, said he has recognised the influence of the Phoenicians. Since the X-IX centuries B.C., they had carried on an intense trade with Sicily as can be seen from the presence of particular types of vases and metals among the funeral things.²² In Southern Italy, where an Italic people had settled, barricaded in the hills not far from the Ionic coast, the import of craftmade and industrial products from the South East of the Mediterranean can be confirmed as beginning in the IX-VIII centuries B.C. In the necropoli of Southern Italy, Egyptian and Sirian scarabs, pendants and objects in faïence, bronze Phoenician cups and seals have been found. Amongst the latter, the most important is the so-called 'gruppo del Suonatore di Lira'.²³ Paola Zancani Montuoro first took into consideration but then rejected the possibility that the musical instruments were produced locally. She suggested they come from Asia Minor.²⁴

At this point, the representation of one of the instruments found in Tomb T.60. the ladden *sistrum* is documented for the first time in the ritual scene of the ivory ciborium from Nimrud in Iraq of the IX-VIII centuries B.C. today this is preserved in the British Museum in London. Two female musicians, represented holding the instrument in their hands and three female musicians, one with tambourine and two with double pipes, form a procession heading toward a person sitting in front of a priestess, who is followed by a female figure. The ladden *sistrum* musicians can be recognised because they are seen full faced, are taller and their dress is more sumptuous.²⁵

As is well-known, the ladden *sistrum* is alien to the musical iconography of the Attic ceramics, where it is never represented. However it can be frequently seen in representations on the ceramics from Magna Grecia of the IV century B.C., where it takes up the models of the VIII century B.C. in funeral or gynaeceum ritual scenes. The function and symbolic value of the instrument is generally connected with the erotic-eschatological sphere, regarding the cult to Aphrodite and marriage on one hand and to

²⁰ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', pp. 43-46; Bellia, 'Strumenti musicali e oggetti sonori', p. 52.

²¹ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 48.

²² Luigi Bernabò Brea, 'Mineo – Grammichele – Necropoli della Madonna del Piano (Mulino della Badia)', pp. 66-67.

²³ Emanuele Greco, *Archeologia della Magna Grecia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004), pp. 13-14, fig. 11.

²⁴ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 34.

²⁵ Subhi Anwar Rashid, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern. Mesopotamien* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1984), p. 108, fig. 122; Martin L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 126-127.

widespread Orphism in Southern Italy on the other.²⁶ The relationship to the cults and ritual of this geographical area could explain the presence of the ladden *sistrum* also in other figurative fields, specially in coroplastics,²⁷ in reliefs on small votive altars²⁸ and in votive disks. In the latter, the instrument is represented in association with other symbolic object, amongst which there are also musical instruments.²⁹

The examples of the VIII century B.C. were found in the tombs of adult women, never in those of young girls. Wherever it has been possible to verify, the contents of these tombs are distinguished for their richness as compared to others. All of the objects found in Tomb T.60 in the necropolis at Macchiabate, some of which were real «sound jewels»,³⁰ contributed to the theory that the woman held a place of distinction in that community. Through movement and dance, such instruments had to make whoever wore them assume the appearance of a «woman rattle».³¹

The status of a dead woman can also be determined by the presence of a bronze basin placed over her head. This might be a sacred vessel referring to rites of purification.³² The presence of five, or maybe six musical instruments, infers that the woman may have been a musician or a dancer in public festivities or ritual ceremonies, if not really a priestess, assigned to the objects of cult.³³ The kind of music and dancing and the occasion on which they took place remain unknown. Probably they were religious ceremonies of which we know nothing about. It is well known that in all the ancient world, bronze was considered having a special power of purification and that bronze musical instruments were used during religious rites. The eventual apotropaic character of the bronze musical instruments³⁴ placed in the woman's tomb at Macchiabate must not be ignored. The extraordinary frequency of sound objects in women's tombs in this geographical area can be related to the noise, made by musical instruments, that is

²⁶ Anna Maria Di Giulio, *Iconografia degli strumenti musicali nell'arte apula, La musica in Grecia*, edd. Bruno Gentili and Roberto Pretagostini (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988), pp. 115-116; Lucia Lepore, 'Il sistro italico: strumento, attributo, oggetto di culto', pp. 98-99; John K. Papadopoulos, 'Musical Instruments', *Bollettino d'Arte* II, 1 (2003), pp. 110-117; Monica de Cesare, *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum. Italia. Museo Archeologico Regionale di Agrigento, II* (Roma: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 2005), pp. 27-28.

²⁷ Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 39, tav. XV, e-f; Concetta Masseria, 'Una piccola storia di insolita devozione. Baubò a Gela', *Ostraka* XII, 2 (2003), p. 185, fig. 14.

²⁸ Gina Salapata, 'The 'Apulian Sistrum'. Monotone or 'Melodic'?', in *Studien zur Musikarchäologie III*, edd. Ellen Hickmann, Anne D., Kilmer, Ricardo Eichmann, (Rahden: Leidorf, 2002), p. 427, fig. 7.

²⁹ Simone Mollard-Besques, *Catalogue raisonné des figurines et reliefs en terre-cuite grecs, étrusques et romains, IV/I. Époques hellénistique et romaine. Cyrénaïque, Italie Méridionale-Sicile-Sardaigne* (Paris : Éditions de la Réunion des Musée Nationaux, 1986), p. 104, tav. 104, D 3921.

³⁰ Katerina Kolotourou, 'Rattling Jewellery and the Cypriot Coroplastic', *Archaeologia Cypria* V (2007), pp. 79-89.

³¹ André Schaeffner, *Origine degli strumenti musicali* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1978), p. 50.

³² Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 15; Marcello Tagliente, 'La donna nell'ideologia funeraria. Mondo greco e mondo indigeno: le diversità', in *Ornamenti e lusso. La donna nella Basilicata antica* (Roma: De Luca, 2000), pp. 26-27.

³³ Curt Sachs, *Le sorgenti della musica* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1982²), pp. 69-148; André Schaeffner, *Origine degli strumenti musicali*, pp. 48-79; Klaus P. Wachsmann, *Gli strumenti musicali primitivi*, in *Storia degli strumenti musicali*, ed. Anthony Baines (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1995), pp. 13-29.

³⁴ Arthur B. Cook, 'The Gong at Dodona', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* XII (1902), pp. 14-15; Claude Bérard, *Anodoi. Essai sur l'imagerie des passages chthoniens* (Roma: Institut Suisse, 1974), pp. 79-80.

capable of driving away negative influences and so protect their houses,³⁵ their actions and especially the fertility of woman.³⁶



Fig. 1

Southern Italy. Francavilla Marittima (Sibari)

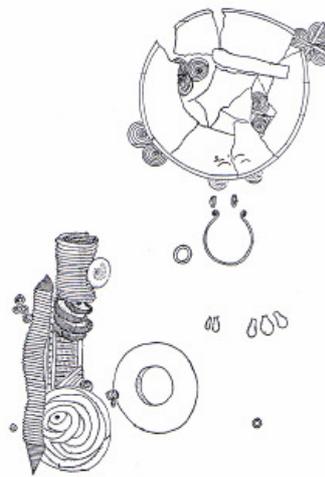


Fig. 2

The Tomba T. 60. From Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', p. 14, f. 2.

³⁵ Zozie D. Papadopoulou, 'Musical instruments in cult', *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* II 4 c (2004), p. 351, n. 33.

³⁶ Alexandra Villing, 'Cult Instruments', *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* V 2 b, 2006, pp. 382-384.

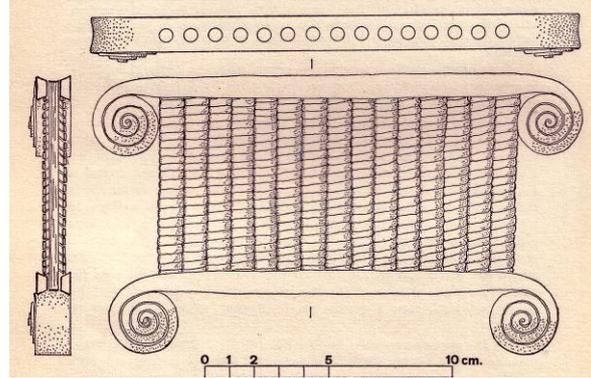


Fig. 3

The ladden sistrum. Photo by Angela Bellia



Fig.4

The extremity of a rattle neck-lace. Photo by Angela Bellia

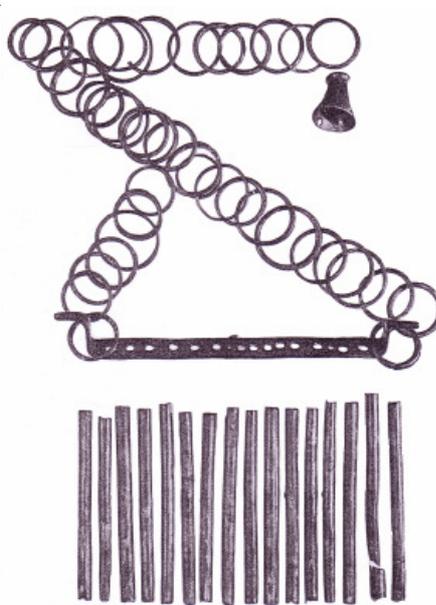


Fig. 5

The rattle neck-lace. Photo by Angela Bellia

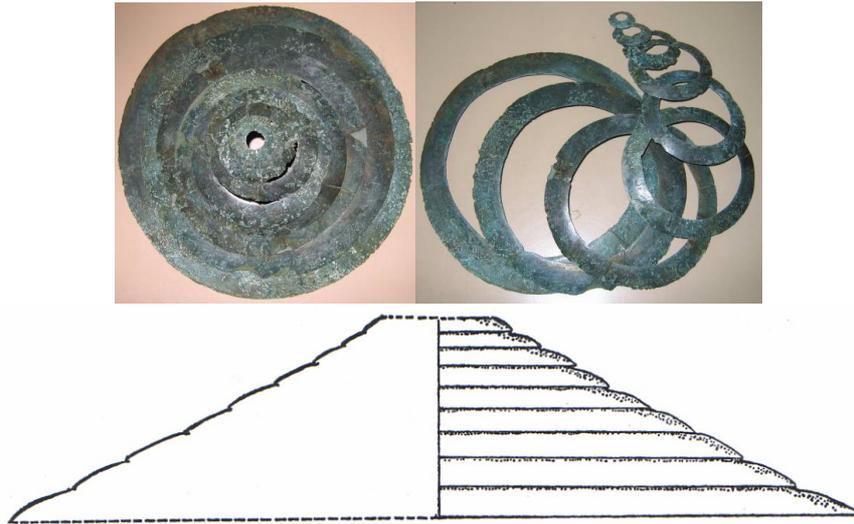


Fig. 6
The sistrum with rings. Photo by Angela Bellia

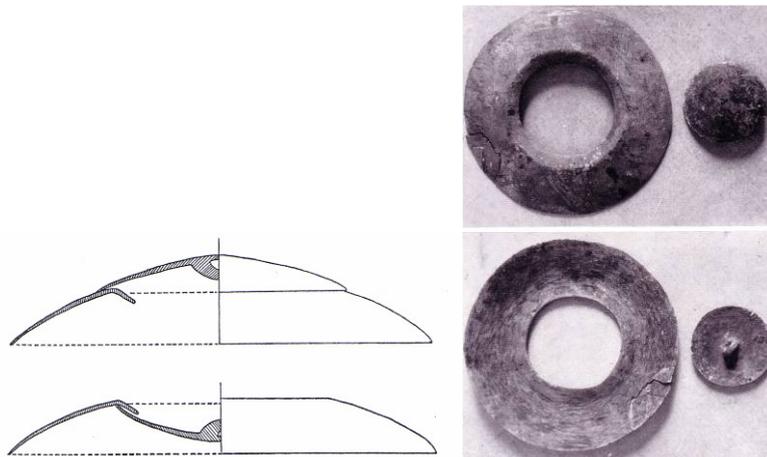


Fig. 7
The cymbals. From Zancani Montuoro, 'Necropoli', tav. VII

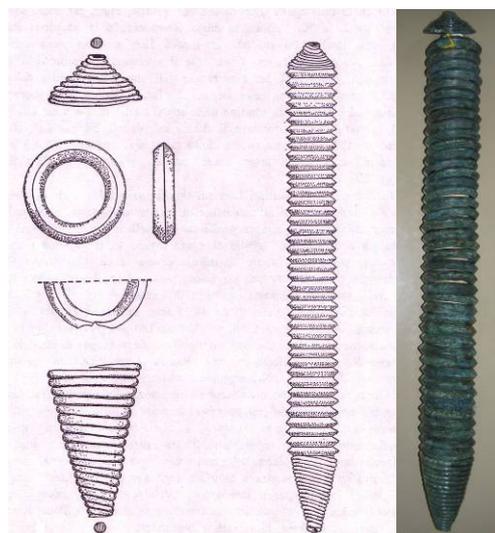


Fig. 8 *The scraper or a stick sistrum.* Photo by Angela Bellia