

## **Relation of Music to Cultural Identity in the Colonies of West Greece: the Case of Selinus**

### **Batı Yunanistan Kolonilerinde Kültürel Kimlik ve Müzik İlişkisi: Selinus Örneği**

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#### **Özet**

Bu makale müzikoloji ve arkeoloji metotlarını birleştirerek, müzikle bağlantılı arkeolojik bulgulara uygulamaktadır. Bu uygulama ile, bulguların keşif noktalarını ve kullanım bağlamlarını değerlendirerek müzik aktivitelerinin bölgelerinin belirlenmesi sağlanmaktadır. Bu şekilde, müzikal performansların kültürel dini ve sosyal anlamlarının yorumlanması sağlanmaktadır. Bu araştırma Batı Yunanistan özelinde bir müzikal geleneğe odaklanarak Selinus bağlamında müziğin rolünü açıklamayı hedeflemektedir: Kalıntılar Batı'daki Yunanlıların anakarının müzikal mirasını kullanarak kültürel kimliklerini nasıl güçlendirdikleri ile ilgili görüşler ortaya koymak için olanak sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Selinus, Telestes, vurmali çalgılar, aulos, kymbala, dans, Antik Yunan müziği

#### **Abstract**

This paper combines the methods of musicology and archeology and applies them in the study of archaeological remains of musical interest, considering their findspot and original context of use in order to place musical activities in a well-defined space and occasion; and to interpret the cultural, religious and social meaning of musical performances. The research will bring out a particular musical tradition of the Western Greeks and will reconstruct the role of music in the specific context of Selinus: the remains offer the opportunity for a reflection on the way in which the Western Greeks reworked the musical heritage of the motherland, and reinforced their cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Selinus, Telestes, Percussion Instruments, Aulos, Kymbala, Dance, Ancient Greek Music

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## Introduction

Studies on Ancient Greek music often concentrate on evidence from Athens or Sparta, two sites for which we have both textual and visual evidence. However, Athenian or Spartan musical activity may not be typical of other areas of the Greek world, particularly the Western Greeks, as indeed is evident from other areas of social, artistic, and political activity. This approach has only recently been incorporated into the study of ancient music, thus bringing into focus the field of Archaeomusicology: it is based on the analysis of ancient depictions of music and finds of musical instruments in their archaeological context, rather than in isolation.<sup>1</sup> This approach offers an innovative research method to the study of Ancient Greek music, not only with its contextualization of both the textual and archaeological evidence, but also with its interdisciplinary, anthropological approach, and by making connections between architecture, visual arts, and ritual actions, and by investigating their form, meaning and social function. Through this approach, we will be able to analyze the visual and archaeological documentation of Selinus (modern Selinus): the polis, located on the southwest coast of Sicily, was one of the most important Greek settlements in the West during the Archaic and Classical periods (see Image 1). The survey aims to analyze the musical performances in sacred places and their relationship with the cults and rituals of this Western Greek city. Based on this approach, it will allow a wider and original reflection on the way in which the Western Greeks reworked the cultural heritage of the motherland.



**Image 1:** Selinus is located on the southwest coast of Sicily.

<sup>1</sup> This is the research methodology of the work-in-progress for the TELESTES project that has been funded by the Marie Curie Actions program of the European Commission. The project is dedicated to the musical culture of Selinus, one of the most important of the western Greek cities. [http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/185858\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/185858_en.html)

### **A Greek Polis in the West**

Founded by Megara Hyblaea in the second half of the seventh century BCE, lying on two hills (the so-called Acropolis and the Manuzza Hill) connected by a narrow isthmus and bordered by rivers, Selinus commanded an extensive, fertile plain, which was a source of considerable prosperity. The wealth of the foundation is reflected in the impressive urban and building policy of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, when Selinus made a systematic effort to monumentalize its sanctuaries with the construction of a remarkable series of large and expensive stone temples, which served as powerful symbols of the colony's wealth, power, and public devotion (Marconi, 2007, pp. 61-76).

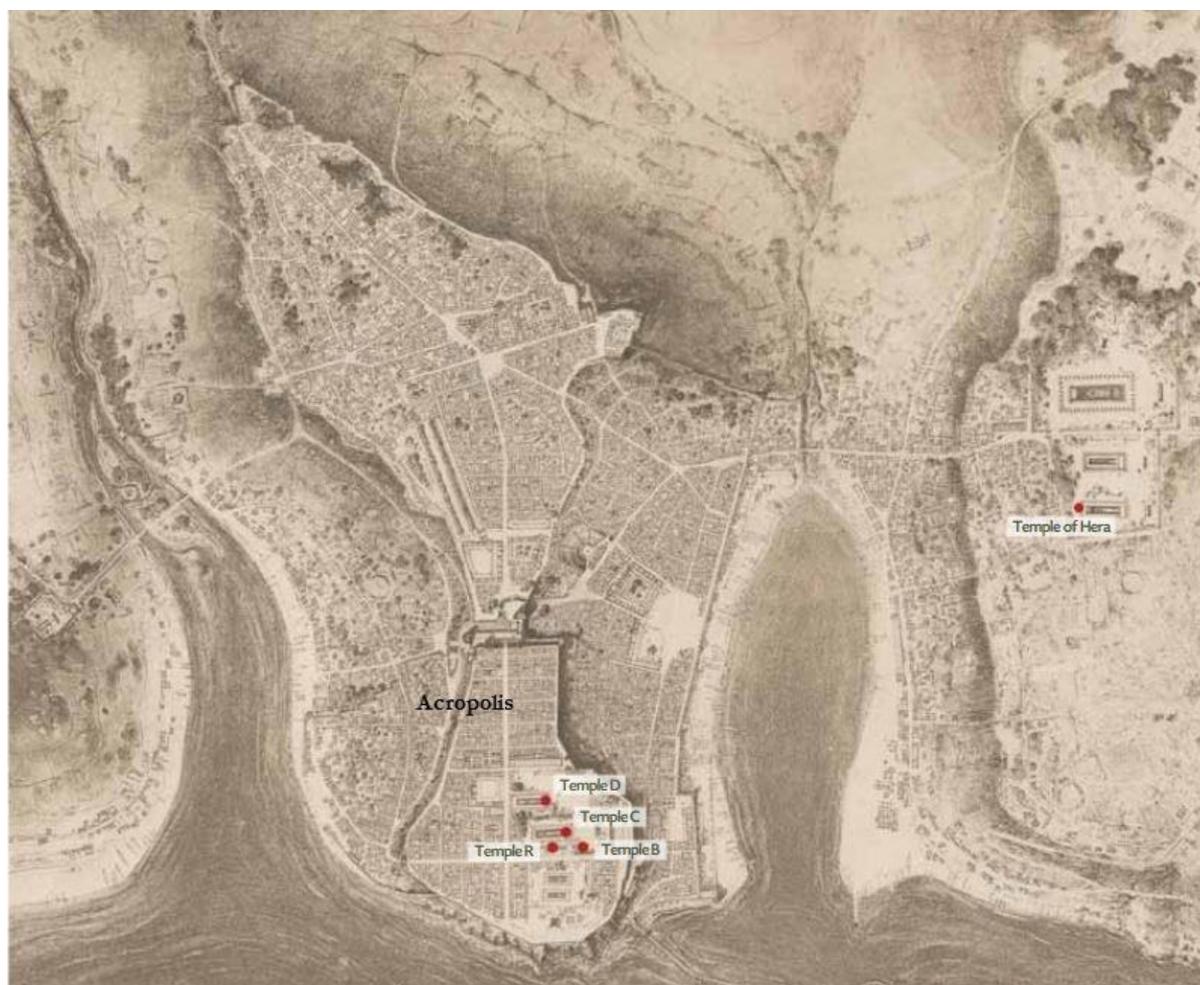
As the westernmost Greek city in Sicily, Selinus had intensive and complex relationships with the non-Greek populations in this part of the island, namely the Phoenicians and the Elymians. Indeed in 480 BCE, at the battle of Himera, where Greeks from Syracuse and Agrigento fought the Carthaginians, Selinus sided with Carthage. Years later, hostilities between Selinus and Segesta brought Athenian intervention in Sicily (415 BCE). In 409 BCE, on the occasion of the Carthaginian invasion, Selinus was taken and sacked by Hannibal. A few years later, with the consent of Carthage, refugees refounded Selinus. Between the early fourth and the first half of the third century BCE, the city remained mostly under Carthaginian control, and was inhabited by a mixed Greek and Punic population. Characteristic of this period were the massive fortifications surrounding the Acropolis, which point to the significant strategic role assumed by Selinus during the wars between Syracuse and Carthage (De Vido, 2009, pp. 111-128). Because of their proximity to communities of non-Greeks, the colonists of the Greek polis would have felt the need to build monumental temples more frequently and on a larger scale than the Greeks at home.

Finally, in 250 BCE, on the occasion of the first Punic War, Selinus was abandoned, its walls dismantled, and its inhabitants transferred to Lilybaion.

### **Selinus and the space of the performances**

The ancient site of Selinus is recognized today as one of the most important archaeological sites of the Greek period in Italy. From its foundation as a Greek colony around the second half of the seventh century through the middle of the third century BCE, Selinus enjoyed a prosperous existence as reflected in its notable sanctuaries, temples, fortifications, and houses, which span the Archaic (600–480 BCE) through the Early Hellenistic (323–250 BCE) periods and are remarkably well preserved. By the first two decades of the sixth

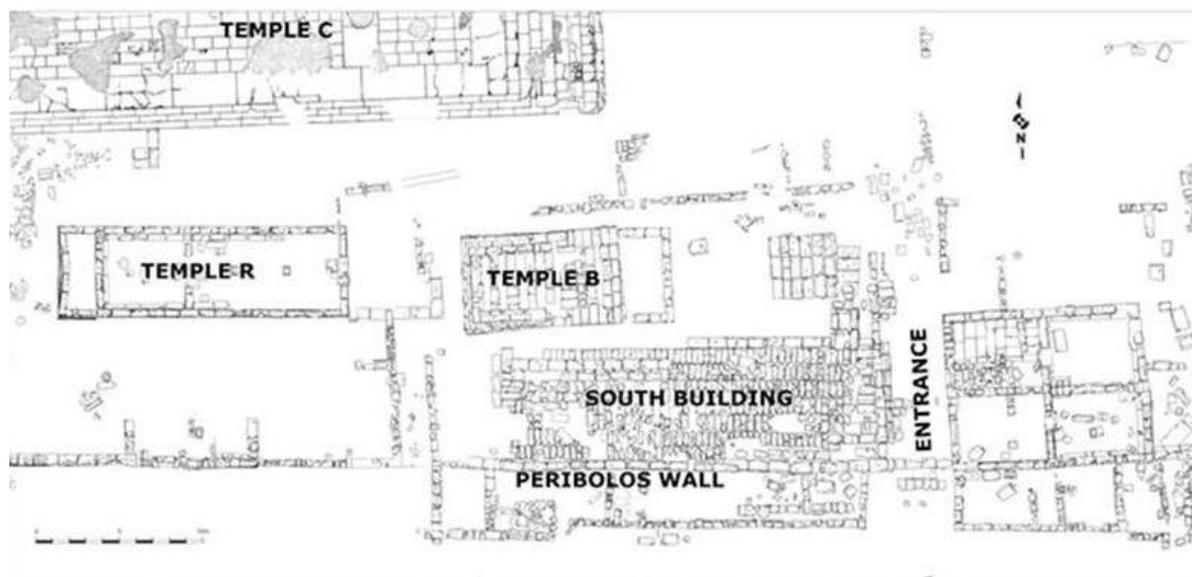
century, the second generation of Selinuntians began the process of transforming the urban space and the major sanctuaries through the construction of temples. Most were built on the Acropolis, a large area located at the center of the city's southern hill and surrounded by a precinct (see Image 2). The Acropolis housed two sanctuaries: the south sanctuary, which included Temples A and O, and the north sanctuary, the more important of the two, which included Temples R, C and D. Later, in the Hellenistic period, Temple B was erected in the southern area of the north sanctuary. Its architectural remains, especially significant structures in the southern sector of the main urban sanctuary on the Acropolis still have much to reveal to us concerning the history of the Greeks and the Phoenicians in the Western Mediterranean (De Angelis, 2003, pp. 101-116).



**Image 2:** Acropolis of Selinus.

In 2006, the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University (IFA-NYU) began a research project on the Acropolis of Selinus, under the direction of Professor Clemente Marconi and in collaboration with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Culturali ed Ambientali of Trapani and the Archaeological Park of Selinus. The project consists of a new, systematic and

interdisciplinary study of the archaeology and architecture of the main urban sanctuary on the Acropolis, beginning with its southern sector, analyzing Temples B and R, their decoration, topographical context, and the significant alterations made to the area during the Hellenistic period (see Image 3).



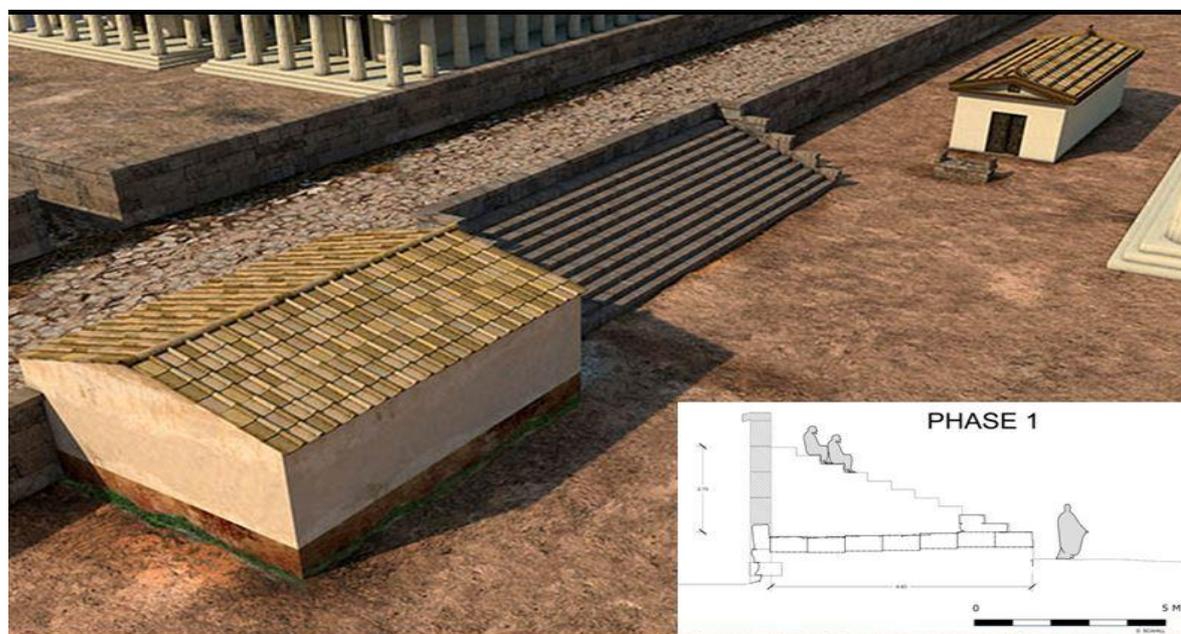
**Image 3:** State plan of area of investigation. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

Temple B is one of the most important examples of sacred architecture in Hellenistic Sicily, and its location within the main urban sanctuary of Selinus is particularly prominent, placed beside Temple C, the old, venerable temple of Apollo. In addition, Temple B raises interesting questions about cultural identity and how it is reflected in architecture and ritual practice. Although Temple B was erected at a time in which Selinus was under Carthaginian control and inhabited by a mixed Greek and Punic population, it appears as a purely Greek cult building. The investigation of this series of historiographic, architectural, and archaeological problems was the motivating force behind the first three years of research of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University (Marconi, 2008, pp. 59-91).

The survey also consisted of the investigation of the South Building: it is located at the southern edge of the main urban sanctuary, bordering the peribolos wall, which delimits the boundary of the east-west axis Avenue SB. The South Building owes its designation to the uncertainty of its function. A large structure with a north-south orientation, it has generally been identified as an altar in relevant literature. Both the orientation of the South Building and its structure, however, bring into doubt this traditional interpretation. As can be seen in other Greek cities, the architecture of the sanctuaries at Selinus could reflect the kind of spatial organization that was necessary for both choral and instrumental practices, as well as

for ritual performances (Bosher, 2012, pp. 1-16). These particular manifestations could be the result of the high degree of interaction between Greeks and non-Greeks, an interaction that had taken place since the time of the earliest colonial foundation of the polis.

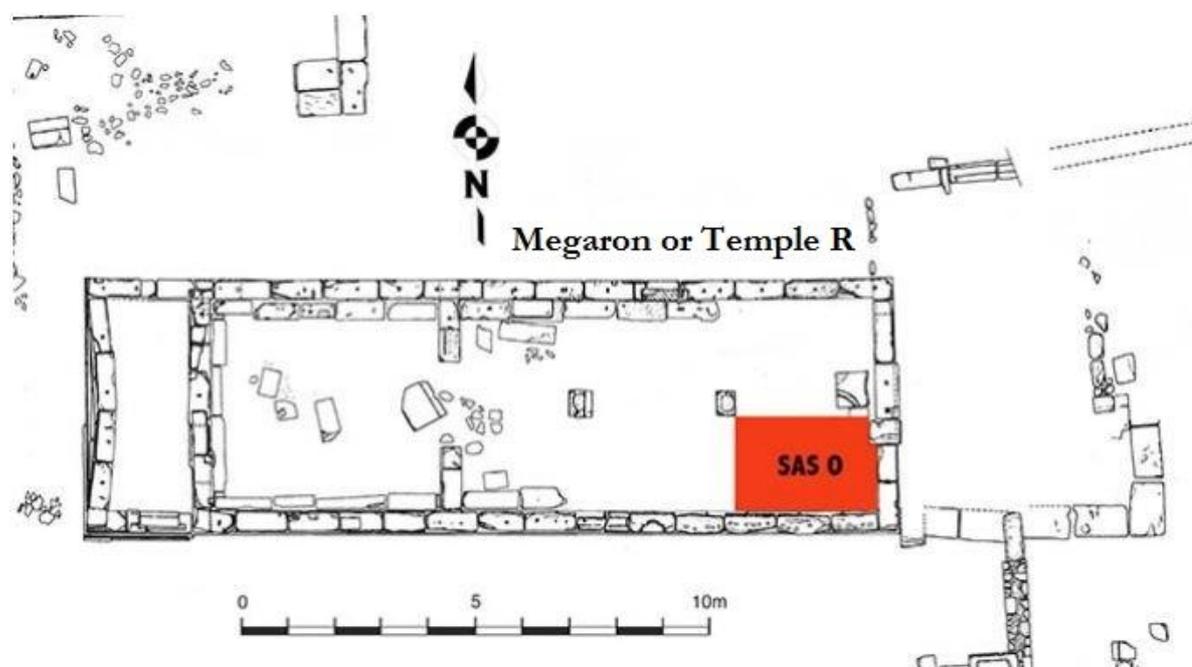
Most likely, the South Building should be identified as a rectilinear theater (see Image 4). As Clemente Marconi has argued, “the building belongs to that interesting group of theatral structures (meaning, simple, non-canonical theaters, with linear and non-circular theatra and/or orchestras) found in close association with local sanctuaries and/or agoras in various regions of the Greek world” (Marconi 2014, p. 110). These structures were in close association with sacred spaces: it would seem safe to assume that they functioned to accommodate an audience during sacred festivals and celebrations. It is important to take into account the possibility of multiple functions and of different activities taking place on different occasions (Marconi-Scahill, 2015, pp. 281-294): they contributed to the effort of ritual performance, which would have included the various acts of worship in the sacred space, like processions and ritual dramas. Given the scarcity of literary sources attesting to that practice or material evidence, it is not always easy to tell if the spectacle offered to this audience was, specifically, a ritual drama. But drama of some kind surely must be considered as a possibility, along with the performance of hymns, sacrifices, music, and choral dances (Nielsen, 2002, pp. 142-148).



**Image 4:** Virtual reconstruction of the area of investigation in the Archaic and Classical periods.  
© Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

The excavations in the area of the foundations of the South Building provide a safe archaeological dating for this structure to the Late Archaic period. In the Classical period, the South Building was partially transformed, and by the Hellenistic period, it was probably dismantled (Marconi, 2014, pp. 105-116).

In the southern sector of the Main Urban Sanctuary is located the so-called Megaron, or Temple R (see Image 5): it is situated south of Temple C and with the same eastern orientation. Constructed in the first quarter of the sixth century BCE, this nonperipteral building consists now of a deep cella and adyton, similar to the roughly contemporary Temple S, as well as a third room with a separate southern entrance, which was added in the Late Classical period, within the context of a renovation of the building after its destruction by fire during the Carthaginian sack of Selinus in 409 BCE.



**Image 5:** Megaron or Temple R. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

In the levels of Temple R dated to the Late Classical period, there was the particularly significant discovery of a group of terracotta sculptures. This series of terracottas is best understood as votive offerings associated with Temple R, and they seem to suggest the identification of this building with a Temple of Demeter (Marconi, 2013, pp. 263-271): her cult shared by the Greeks and Punics that formed the local population. A good, local

equivalent with the discoveries in the Temple R, are those in the Sanctuary of Malophoros: the shrine, located in the west hill of the acropolis of Selinus, had a connection with a female cult (see Image 6).

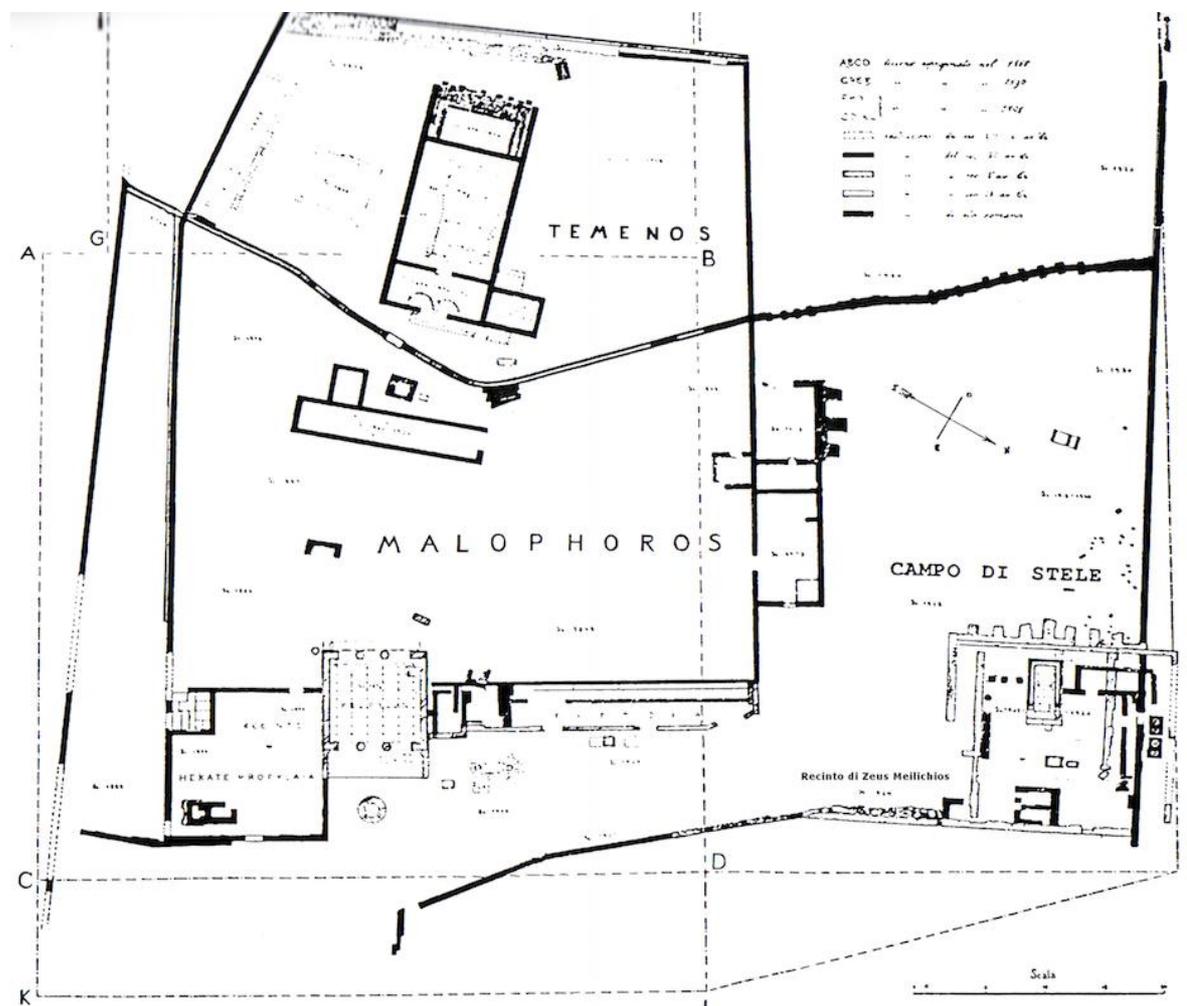


Image 6: Sanctuary of Malophoros.

### The aulos from Selinus

In the summer of 2012, the IFA–NYU Selinus Mission began to explore the interior of the cella of Temple R. This excavation showed that the Classical and Archaic level had been sealed by a deep fill of the Hellenistic period and left untouched by earlier archaeological research at the site. Among the discoveries were a series of votive depositions against the walls, dating to the sixth century BCE. One of the main striking finds among those votive depositions, was the discovery of two parts of a bone aulos, which can be dated to 570 BCE, based on its association with a Corinthian amphoriskos interred next to it (see Images 7-8) (Marconi, 2014, pp. 105-116).



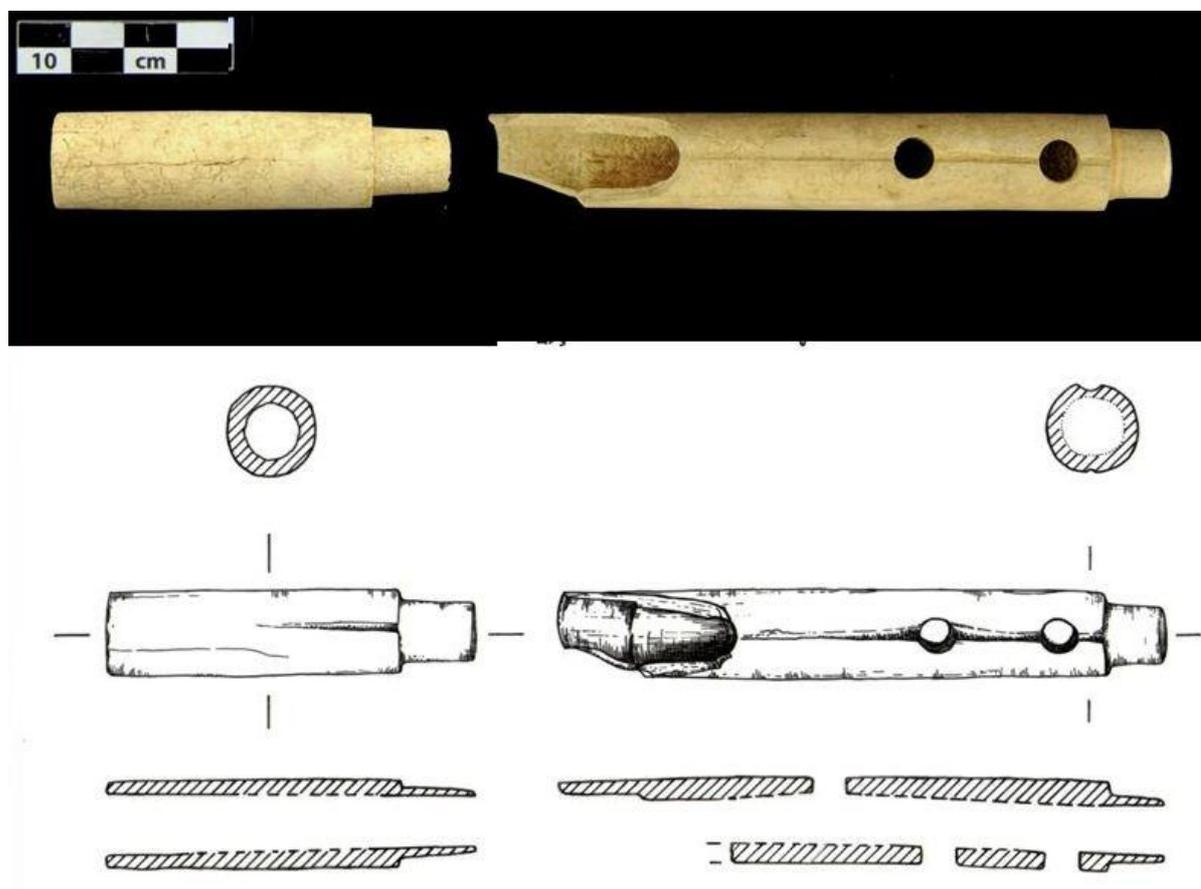
**Image 7:** Interior of the cella of Temple R. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.



**Image 8:** Votive offerings along the walls of Temple R. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

This aulos conforms to an “Early type” (see Image 9) because of its similarity to the auloi found in the sanctuaries of Artemis Orthia at Sparta (dated to the end of the seventh century

BCE) Dawkins, 1939, pp. 236-237, CLXI-CLXII) and Artemis at Brauron (dated to the sixth–fifth centuries BCE) (Landels, 1963, pp. 116-119); the examples found at Aegina in the sanctuary of Aphaia (Furtwängler, 1906, p. 429); and the examples from the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri Epizephyrii (Lepore, 2010, pp. 428-430; Bellia, 2012a, pp. 46-47, fig. 12; Bellia, 2012b, pp. 92-93).



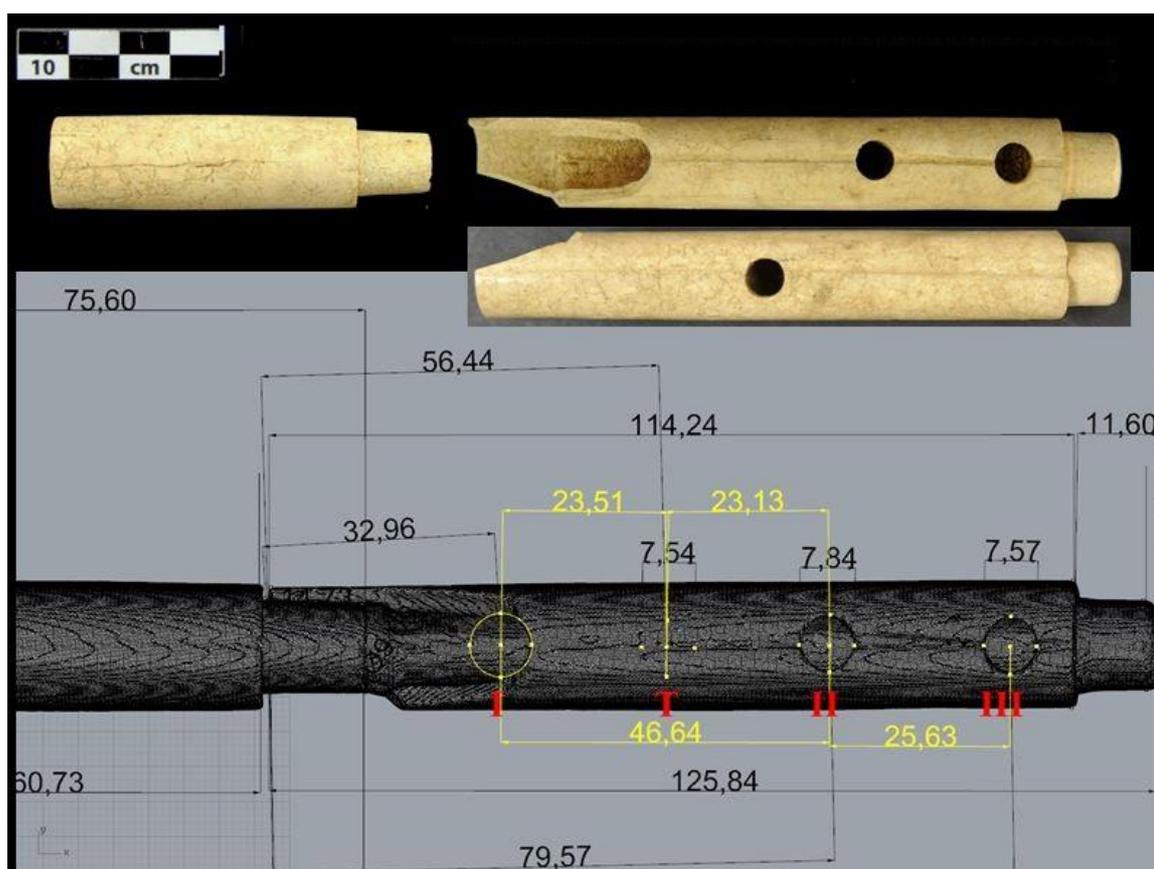
**Image 9:** Bone aulos of Temple R. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

The preserved aulos from Selinus has to be subjected to closer examination that will determine its original pitches based on comparisons with the other similar instruments already noted. It is especially similar in form and date to an aulos found in a tomb at Poseidonia in southern Italy, and that dates from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It too is a well preserved ‘Early’ type Greek aulos made of deer bone (see Image 10) (Bellia, 2012b, pp. 98-99; Psaurodakēs, 2014, pp. 107-129).



**Image 10:** Aulos of Poseidonia. From Psaurodakēs, 2014, p. 129, fig. 13.

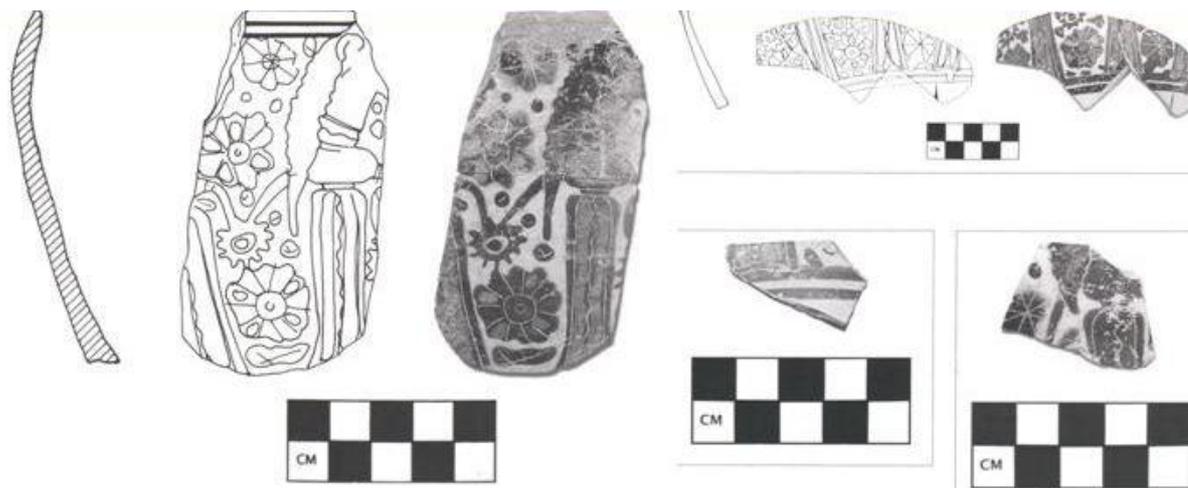
The exterior surface of the aulos from Selinus retains the natural shape of the bone from which the instrument was made, including the grooves present on both pieces and the cutting directly across the finger-holes and the thumb-hole on the longer piece. The two sections fit together, but the tube itself is incomplete. The lost portions would include the mouthpiece and the lower section with additional finger-holes (see Image 11).



**Image 11:** Aulos of Selinus. © Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.

The aulos, as a particular votive gift, would be in relationship with the cult of the Temple R: the practice of dedicating musical instruments by either worshippers or musicians is well

attested by numerous sources (Papadopoulou, 2004, pp. 347-362). This discovery at Selinus is very significant, particularly with regard to the performance of music and ritual dancing associated with the sacred activity of Temple R. According to Clemente Marconi (Marconi, 2013, pp. 263-271), the performance of choral dancing in this part of the main urban sanctuary of Selinus is also suggested by the discovery in the area of Temple R of a series of fragments of Corinthian vases featuring chains of dancing women that conform to the so-called *Frauenfest* iconography (see Image 12) (Pemberton, 2000, pp. 85-106).



**Image 12:** Fragments of Corinthian vases of Temple R (From Marconi, 2013, figg. 5-8).

These discoveries show the importance of music and dance at Selinus which already existed in the Early Archaic period: since its foundation. We do not know whether the musical and choral activities at Selinus were related to those of Megara Hyblaea, one of the two mother cities of Selinus, along with Megara Nisea, in Mainland Greece: the possibility of such connections should be investigated, in order to understand how Greek colonists had maintained or transformed and adapted the original musical culture of their mother cities, and whether this musical culture had contributed to their social and political identity. Furthermore, we do not know how the colonists' musical and cultural heritage interacted with the non-Greek populations, namely the Phoenicians and the Elymians. However, the discovery in the Greek polis of two cymbals, musical instruments used for the rhythm and dances, dated to the VI c. BCE (see Image 13) (Bellia 2012b, p. 13), is very interesting because they are belonging to the "phoenician-punic type". The kymbala seems testimony to the fact that the musical performances of Greek colonists and of the other people living at Selinus were closely intertwined.



**Image 13:** Cymbals from Selinus. Photo author.

### **The terracotta figurines with musical representations at Selinus**

At Selinus the importance of instrumental and choral activities is indicated by the discovery of terracotta figurines that feature musical representations, and musical instruments from sanctuaries. This is a body of evidence that is undergoing analysis from a musicological perspective, as well as from a religious perspective related to local cults.

The terracotta figurines of female aulos players (Bellia, 2009, pp. 134-137) and a little fragment of an aulos (see Image 14) were found in the sanctuary of Malophoros (Gasparri, 2014, p. 76), testifying to the existence of ritual musical performances around a well in front of the propylon of the sanctuary that may have been connected to ritual sacrifice (Jameson & et al., 1993, pp. 42-43), perhaps in the presence of the goddess herself (or of her statue?), and in association with a procession of worshippers, presided over by the priestess. These would be activities dedicated exclusively to women, presumably in association with thesmophoric rites (Bellia, 2015, pp. 90-118).



**Image 14:** Female aulos player and fragment of aulos from the sanctuary of Malophoros. Photo author.

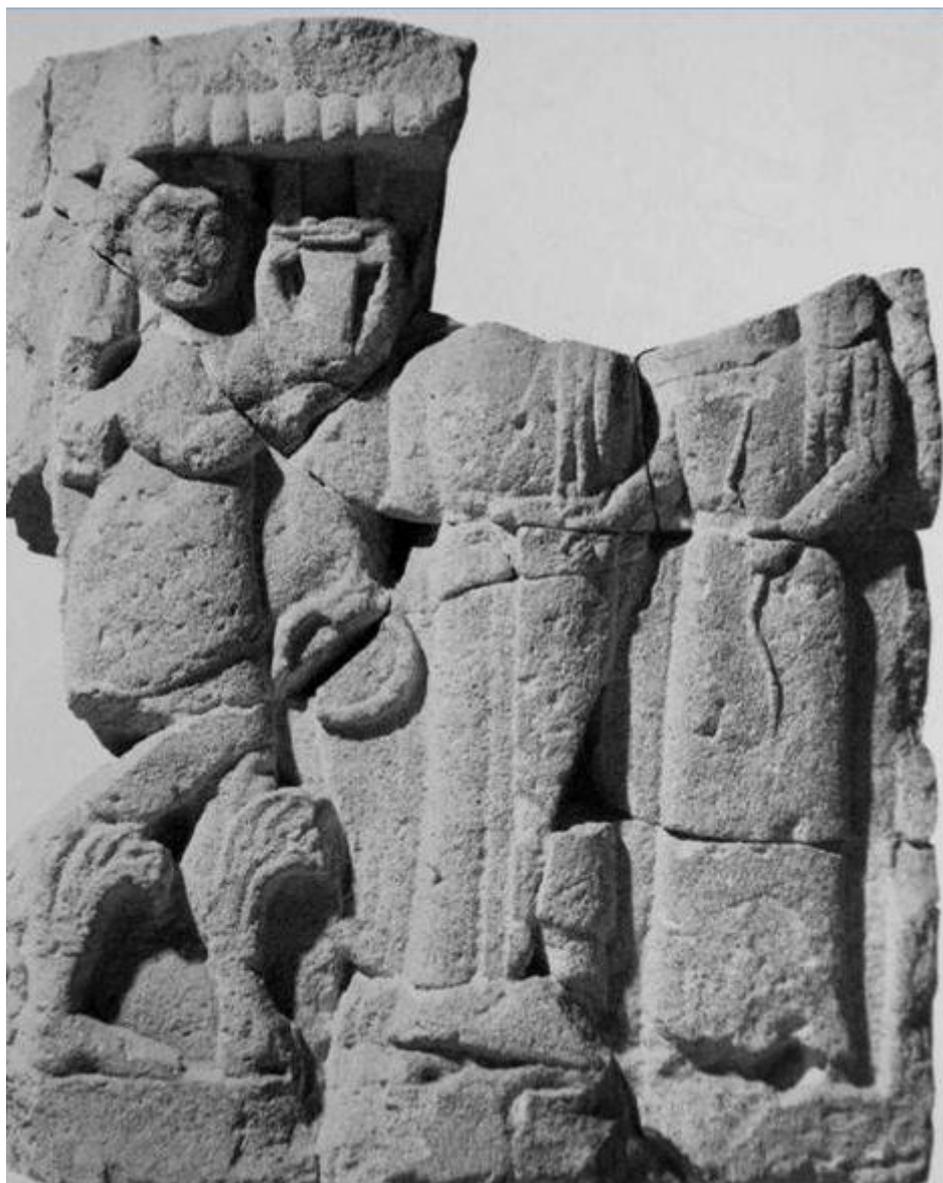
Other coroplastic evidence suggests that these rituals may not have been conducted exclusively by women. In the sanctuary there also may have been male-oriented rituals, in which music might have formed an important part. Terracotta figurines representing a reclining banqueter holding a lyre (see Image 15), and sometimes other objects as well, were brought to light at the sanctuary. If the banqueters with these instruments represent participants in ritual communal meals and sacrifices, then these banqueters might be viewed in connection with rituals in which men and boys celebrated their first entry into society and their status with music; showing their belonging to the community and reinforcing their cultural identity.



**Image 15:** Reclining banqueter holding a lyre. Photo author.

### **Toward an interdisciplinary perspective**

The importance of music at Selinus emerges from the archaeological record, which points to its significance in relation with the sacred sphere. Callimachus *Iambus*, 11) expressly mentions the public character of theatrical performances at Selinus and we cannot exclude that such performances played a major social and political role in strengthening the cultural and social identity of the population. These performances could be connected with cult ceremonies and with the public dramatization of the myths of the gods in sacred areas (Calame, 2001, pp. 34-37; Nielsen, 2002, pp. 9-19). The performance of music is explicitly depicted on the Archaic metopes of Selinus, featuring divine and heroic subjects (see Image 16) (Marconi, 2007, pp. 99-102). Likewise the poems by the Siceliote poet and mousikos Stesichorus offer the occasion to reflect on the relationship between music, literature and sacred architecture among the Western Greeks (Ercoles, 2013, pp. 12-17).



**Image 16:** Metope of Selinus. The Delian Tried. (From Marconi 2007, p. 101, fig. 43).

To the archeological data can be added the written sources on the poet and mousikos Telestes. He was active at Selinus toward the end of the fifth century BCE. The mousikos was a composer of dithyrambs, and perhaps he also included the Dionysiac element in the paeon, the song for Apollo. Telestes defended strongly the aulos as an ancient, sacred and noble musical instrument (Berlinzani, 2008, pp. 109-140): his ideas about music may be connected with musical performances in the sanctuaries of Selinus. Telestes is remembered for his many travels to Magna Grecia (perhaps Locri and Reggio) and for victory in a musical competition in Athens under the archonship of Micon (402-401 BCE). After the destruction of Selinus by the Carthaginians, he left the city and had relations with the tyrants of Syracuse. He may have played a role in Syracuse, contributing to the musical and theatrical

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life of that metropolis with the experiences and skills learned during his musical activities at Selinus.

The information provided by the written sources contributes significantly to our understanding of the archaeological finds related to music from Selinus in connection with its social and political development. These connections, in comparison with other sites in Sicily, Southern Italy and Mainland Greece, are still in need of investigation, through a systematic and interdisciplinary study that would bring together archaeology, architectural history, and scholarship on musical and choral activities.

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