

THE EDGES OF THE WORLD

Stéphane Verger – The story begins with the tomb 660 from Megara Hyblaea, which contained the remains of a rich Greek woman who lived at the end of the 7th century BC in Eastern Sicily. She was buried with a necklace made of bronze pendants coming from the Balkans, Macedonia and the Danube valley. I was able to demonstrate that a few of these objects came from Gaul, namely from Southern and Central France. For example, there was a small button from Languedoc, identical to those worn by the women of Agde at the end of the 7th century BC, where the Greeks first roamed the coasts of Gaul before the founding of Marseille. Another item is a wheel-shaped pendant from either Burgundy or Franche-Comté. Therefore trade routes were already forming between Sicily and Gaul, even before the founding of Marseille. Sicilian Greeks went as far as Languedoc, landing in Agde where indigenous communities collected metal. The metal was directly extracted from the mines of the Montagne Noire, but was also collected through a form of recycling. Recycled metal came from women's jewelry manufactured throughout Gaul, from the Massif Central to Burgundy and Franche-Comté. Indeed, large stocks of metal that include these fragments of women's jewelry coming from all over Gaul, can be found in Languedoc in what are known as "launacien" hoards. These same fragments of jewels can also be found in a dozen sites in Sicily. The metal was used to make weapons, for example, or metal vases in Greek workshops, but it was also used by Greek Sicilian women for ritual practices.

The woman buried in the tomb 660 of Megara Hyblaea also wore a necklace of amulets, which came from the outer limits of the known world at that time: Macedonia, the Balkans and the Caucasus, known as the lands of the rising sun in summertime. Some of these Eastern artifacts were associated with objects crafted in the West – Gaul, Languedoc and Burgundy –, where the sun sets in summertime. According to legend, it was said that the Heliade sisters, daughters of the Sun, lived there. The Heliades mourned the death of their brother Phaethon on the shores of the Eridanos River, and the legend tells us that their tears turned into amber as they fell into the river. There existed a kind of invisible link between the Greek woman of Megara Hyblaea and other women living elsewhere, from Gaul to Macedonia. They all had ways of protecting themselves and their children with these very important metal ornaments that came from the edges of the known world, and the woman of Megara Hyblaea wore these same jewels. These objects thus held religious signification, for the Greeks thought they were relics of the Sun's offspring, relics of these extraordinary women who lived in far-off countries.

This story is really a short story! Most of this trading began at the end of the 7th century B.C. and stopped around 540 B.C., when maritime commerce in the

Mediterranean became more difficult. In fact, several maritime powers were competing at that time: Marseille in the South of France, Carthage, Sardinia and Western Sicily, as well as the Etruscan State of Northern Italy. Ritual practices within Greek sanctuaries also underwent several transformations during this period. To conclude, there remain no traces of these multiple exchanges in the history of maritime trade in the Mediterranean. That is why this is such a short story: it has long been forgotten and only archaeological research has enabled us to reconstruct it, through the analysis of small metal fragments.

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