

The Jewelry of Cetamura del Chianti

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Abstract

This paper examines and discusses some of the jewelry recently excavated from the site of Cetamura del Chianti, in Tuscany, Italy. Cetamura del Chianti experienced habitation from the 4th c. BCE to the 1st c. CE, by both the Romans and the Etruscans. The material culture of Cetamura reflects these two cultures, and the jewelry discovered at this site is discussed in this paper includes several unpublished pieces (fig. 5, 7, 8, 10). The context of the pieces, comparable pieces from other sites, and what information can be gained about these pieces helps to place them within their wider cultural context.

1. Introduction

Jewelry is an important aspect of studying the material culture of the Classical world. It was an important part of life for people of all classes, rich or poor, and was worn by people of all genders, just as it is today. In the ancient world, jewelry was not merely decorative. Pieces of jewelry were produced individually by artisans rather than mass-produced and thus were very personalized to the preferences of the wearer, revealing details of their life and tastes. Again just as in today's society, pieces of jewelry may have also had individual religious and/or superstitious uses, such as good luck tokens or signifiers of devotion to a certain deity. Studying this aspect of jewelry can reveal information on wider cultural and religious trends. For comparable pieces, artifacts from Pompeii and the surrounding towns also destroyed by Vesuvius were examined. This is because of the vast quantity of jewelry and other small personal items found at the site, as well as the comparable time periods of inhabitation between the eruption of Vesuvius in 79CE and the period to which the Cetamura pieces are dated. Much of the Roman jewelry found at Cetamura is from the late Republic and early Imperial periods, as is much of the jewelry found at Pompeii. For comparanda for the carved gemstones found at the site, the search was broadened to Etruscan, Hellenistic, and Roman carved gems of a contemporary time period due to the wide variety of influences and traditions of this particular craft. There is a wide variety of jewelry that has been found at Cetamura, including rings, bracelets, earrings, and pendants crafted from various materials. The focus of this research is on several iron rings and a bone pendant recently excavated from the well at Cetamura.

2. Carved stones and Rings

There have been several examples of rings and carved gem-shaped stones found at Cetamura and published previously. They are all dated between the late Hellenistic Etruscan period and the early Roman Imperial period, between c. 200 BCE and c. 50 CE. All of the rings yet found are made of iron, in various states of preservation. No precious gems have been found; all of the carved pieces set in rings are either made of glass or various minerals and stones.

2.1: Previous finds



Fig. 1, 2: Iron ring with carved carnelian stone¹ Inv. # C-07-164 Prov. 54N/0.18.2 Building L, Room 3
Max. int. diam. 2cm, stone 1.5x1.1cm

This is an iron ring with a carved carnelian stone set into a bronze bezel. It was found in a Hellenistic Etruscan context (c.300-50BCE). It seems to have been a votive deposit, found by itself placed next to a wall. The carving seems to be three bird's heads moving out from the center, according to de Grummond, and she further states: "Numerous Etruscan-Italic gems of the second century BCE show a motif with one bird on a twig, or two separate birds facing in two different directions. Still others show two different animals joined together"⁸. This identification establishes this ring and its carving within a larger Etruscan and Italic artistic context, establishing the culture of this site.



Fig. 3: Iron ring with carved chalcedony stone² Inv. # C-06-341, Prov. 54N/0.10.3, votive feature 1A,
Max. int. diam. 2.5cm, stone 1x0.9 cm

This is an iron ring with an inset carved chalcedony stone. Chalcedony is a mineral which is partially comprised of quartz and other compounds. The surface of the ring is very smooth and uncorroded, and de Grummond notes that it may have been originally coated with silver. Half of the circle of the ring remains.

This piece was found as part of a votive feature, several different items all grouped together and left as a dedication to a deity. This votive feature dates to the Hellenistic Etruscan period of the site's occupation.



Fig. 4: Iron ring³ Inv. # Tracchi 1163, Prov. E-14 II NO/a (Zone II, north of structure A),
Max. int. diam. 1.6cm, setting 1.7x1.1cm

A heavily oxidized iron ring found before formal excavations had begun at Cetamura, so the date of this piece is uncertain. The setting is oval shaped, slightly convex, and heavily corroded, with no decoration apparent. The circle of the ring is incomplete, there is a gap opposite the setting, and the two arms would not meet if pushed together, indicating the gap is deliberate. The removal of a section of the band may have been a type of ritual destruction, or it may have been constructed that way.

2.2: Recent finds



Fig. 5, 6⁴ Inv. # C-2013-451, 5N/18W.99, 2.5 x 1.5 cm

This is a glass paste gem set into iron, and a magnification of the carving on the gem. It is oval in shape. The gem is dark grey, and has a figure inscribed onto it. The figure is naked, upright, and appears to be walking, as the legs are far apart, and the arms are bent at the elbows. The head, face, and hands are either badly damaged or were not carved with great skill in the first place; either way they are very hard to distinguish. The forearms and hands are too obscured to make out what the figure may be doing or holding. The figure appears masculine, based on body type and proportion, and there is some sort of shape near the pelvic area that may suggest a penis and testicles, but again it is very difficult to distinguish. This piece was most likely part of a signet ring, due to the fact that the gem is set into iron, but the rest of the ring is now lost.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of detail in or damage to the figure, it is not possible to accurately compare it to any other pieces, and we therefore cannot draw any conclusions about the exact identity of the figure carved onto this stone. The style of the carving has some visual similarities to other pieces, which are discussed in section 1.3, and this shows the influence of larger Hellenistic trends in the material culture present at Cetamura.



Fig. 7: Iron ring⁵ Inv. # C-2013-104, 5N/18W, 2.5 x 2.5 cm

This is a heavily oxidized iron ring. There is no decoration discernible, but the iron on one side is thicker, which may indicate possible decoration that has since rusted over. X-ray scans could reveal this obscured ornamentation. Due to the size, this was probably a finger ring, and would roughly correspond to a modern US ring size of 10. This would mean that it would fit a larger finger, potentially a man's.



Fig. 8: Iron ring on stone⁶ Inv. # C-2013-825, locus 100, Ring: 2.75 x 2.75 cm; stone: 5 x 4 cm

This is an iron ring that has oxidized onto a roughly square piece of grey stone. There is no decoration apparent, but any ornamentation that was originally on the piece would be heavily obscured by the rust. An x-ray of the piece could reveal some decoration.

Based on the size, which is the same as the ring in fig. 7, this ring was most likely a finger ring for someone with a larger finger, possibly a male. It was found in locus 100, which likely dates to the Republican period..

1.3 Comparanda for fig. 6



Fig. 9: Cupid figure on gemstone⁷ Unknown provenance, 10mm x 10mm

This is a garnet with a Cupid figure inscribed. His arms are raised, he is holding a bow in one hand, and he appears to be striding forward. Plantzos states that the shape to the left of the Cupid is "a mask standing on a rock", but may also be a bust or potentially a prophetic talking head, in the Etruscan tradition. There was not any information available about the time period or exact place of origin of this gem, but it was found in Italy. The position of the legs and torso are similar to fig. 6, but the arms in fig. 6 are down and bent at the elbows. They both have very active poses.



Fig. 10: Diomedes figure on gemstone⁸ Unknown provenance, 18mm

This is a cast of a gem showing Diomedes in a scene from the Iliad, the theft of the Palladium from the temple of Athena during the sack of Troy. Diomedes climbs up the steps to the temple to take the statue, having slain one of the priests, who lays dead beneath his feet. He is naked and holding a staff with a metal disc on the top and ribbons coming from it, perhaps a standard of some kind. The inscription beneath the scene is the signature of the artist.

The position of the arms and legs, the nudity, and the active nature of the pose are all very similar to the gem of fig. 6.

1.3 Conclusions about fig. 6

The comparable pieces do not provide any conclusive evidence about the identity of the figure carved onto this gem, nor can their artistic style assist with the dating of the piece, due to their unknown origins. The other carved stones found at Cetamura were both found in votive contexts, and it is entirely possible that the stone of fig. 6 was deposited in the well for a similar purpose.

2. Bone Pendant



Fig. 10: Bone pendant⁹ Inv. #, 5N/18W.98.1, 1.75 x 3.75 cm

This pendant is made of animal bone, type unknown. It is mostly white, but with some areas of brown and blue discoloration, likely water damage. The upper part has a hole drilled through so it can be strung up. The lower part of the pendant is a curved oval shape, with the top connecting to the flat cylinder of the upper portion. There is a curve that goes around the middle of the lower portion, and sections have been carved out of the sides to create a raised center stripe that goes from the middle down to the bottom, about 2-3mm thick at the top and narrowing to a point. This pendant was found in locus 98 of the well at Cetamura, which is a transitional locus between the Etruscan and Roman occupations of the site, although more Etruscan than Roman artifacts were found in this layer. There have been no other bone pendants found at Cetamura.

On the front of the top section, there are two circle motifs carved into the pendant, each consisting of a circle around a dot. The same inscribed circle motifs are present on the lower portion of the pendant, one in each of the carved away sections to the side, and one in the middle top of the section above the raised center stripe. There is also a single dot carved into the center raised stripe just below the middle circle. There is some damage to the lower right

portion of the pendant, and the area of damage has been discolored black. The damage partially obscures one of the inscribed double-circle motifs.

Several similar-looking pendants have been found at Hellenistic sites throughout the Mediterranean (fig. 11, 12). These other amulets depict a penis and testicles. Dr. Lora Holland, the lab director at Cetamura, made the initial identification of this pendant as a phallic amulet. The amulet of fig. 10 compares well with figs. 11 & 12. The shapes carved on the three amulets are very similar with the central section representing the phallus, the rounded sides representing the testicles, and a rectangular upper section which is pierced through for threading and wear on all three amulets. The circle motifs on these three pieces are also in similar places. Fig. 12 has two circle motifs on the rectangular top section just like fig. 10, but fig. 11 does not. However, these are the only places where the circle motif is present on fig. 12, they are not present on the penis or testicles. This is the only place they are present on fig. 12, however, with one on the shaft of the penis and one on each testicle, to either side of the penis. Fig. 10 has five total circle motifs, fig. 11 has three, and fig. 12 has only two.

2.1 Comparanda for fig.10

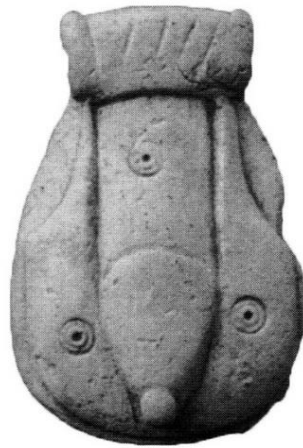


Figure 10. Amulet



Fig. 11, 12: Phallic amulets¹⁰, Ibiza and Egypt, c. 150-50 BCE

These amulets were found in Ibiza (fig. 11) and Egypt (fig. 12), and are carved from animal bone³. They are both dated to about 150-50 BCE. These amulets are phallic, depicting a penis and testicles. Fig. 11 has a double circle motif carved onto the upper shaft of the penis, as well as two on the testicles, on either side of the head of the penis, near the bottom of the amulet. Fig. 12 has the circled motif at the top of the amulet, above the phallus, on the rectangle which a hole is drilled through for threading and wearing. The shapes carved into them, the overall shape, and inscribed circular motifs make them strikingly similar to the bone amulet found in the well at Cetamura (fig. 10), and allow for a positive identification of the bone pendant from Cetamura as phallic, despite its worn condition.

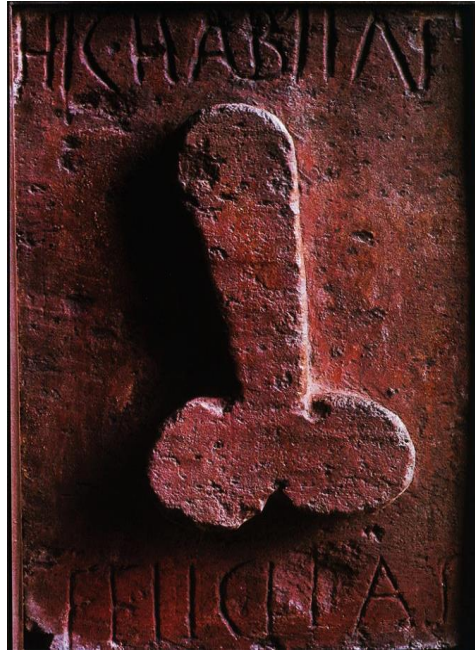


Fig. 13: Bas relief ¹¹ Pompeii, c. 70 CE

This is a travertine bas relief from a wall in Pompeii. The inscription reads: “Hic habitat felicitas” - “Here lives good fortune”. This inscription is accompanied by a phallus, indicating that there is a relationship between *felicitas* and phallus symbols. This association further demonstrates the possibility that these phallus amulets were intended to bring good luck to the wearer.



Fig. 14: Ivory die¹² Inv. # C-2013-455, 5N/18W.97

This die was carved from ivory, and was found in the well at Cetamura. It has the same double circle decorative motif incised on it as the bone pendant in fig. 10 does, but with two circles instead of one. It is in very good condition. Besides the similar design motifs, it was found in locus 97 of the well, close to locus 99 where the bone pendant of fig. 10 was found.

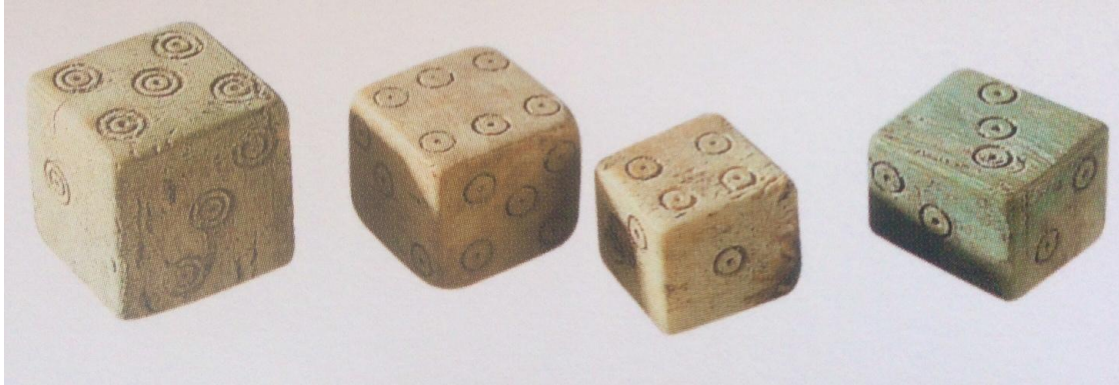


Fig. 15: Ivory dice¹³ Naples Archaeological Museum, unknown inv. #

These dice are from Pompeii, and they are all carved from ivory. Three of them have the same circle motif as the bone pendant of fig. 10, and one has a double-circle motif, just as in the Cetamura die from fig. 14 and the phallic pendants of figs. 11 & 12.

1.2 Conclusions about fig. 10

The bone pendant of fig. 10 is phallic, and was most likely a combination of a good luck charm and an apotropaic charm, meant to ward off evil and bring good fortune to the wearer. An association of the phallus with good luck can be seen in the example of the bas relief of fig. 13. The circle motifs found on all three amulets (fig. 10, 11, 12), as well as on the dice (fig. 14, 15), clearly have some association with luck as well.

3. Final Conclusions

The stone of fig. 5 and the carving of fig. 6 fall within the Hellenistic tradition of gem carving. Even though the figure depicted on the gem may be unidentifiable, it is still similar enough to other examples that it shows influence in the material culture of Cetamura from a wider Hellenistic culture. The inhabitants of Cetamura deposited other carved gems as votive offerings (fig. 1, 3), and it is known that the Etruscans often deposited votive offerings in wells and other bodies of water¹⁵. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that this ring was thrown in the well as a propitiatory or thank offering to a deity.

The bone pendant is firmly set within Roman beliefs of phalluses as bringing luck and warding off evil. The other examples are from very far afield, showing the pervasiveness of this idea and its connotations on other cultures throughout the Mediterranean.

Both of these artifacts show evidence of the influence of Hellenistic cosmopolitan culture on this very small rural settlement. This only further demonstrates the level of international influence on the Etruscan culture in the 3rd and 2nd centuries.

4. Notes

1. de Grummond, Nancy. *The Sanctuary of the Etruscan Artisans at Cetamura Del Chianti: The Legacy of Alvaro Tracchi*. Florence: Edifir, 2009, p. 58.
2. de Grummond, Nancy. *The Sanctuary of the Etruscan Artisans at Cetamura Del Chianti: The Legacy of Alvaro Tracchi*. Florence: Edifir, 2009, p. 123.
3. de Grummond, Nancy. *The Sanctuary of the Etruscan Artisans at Cetamura Del Chianti: The Legacy of Alvaro Tracchi*. Florence: Edifir, 2009, p. 122.
4. Images courtesy of Dr. Nancy de Grummond.
5. Image courtesy of Dr. Nancy de Grummond.
6. Image courtesy of Dr. Nancy de Grummond.
7. Dimitris Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), plate 69, object 528.
8. Dimitris Plantzos, *Hellenistic Engraved Gems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), plate 76, object 623.
9. Image courtesy of Dr. Nancy de Grummond.
10. Université Lumière Lyon 2. "Amulettes Phalliques." *Encyclopédie En Ligne Des Petits Objects Archéologiques*. (<http://artefacts.mom.fr/fr/result.php?id=AMP-3003&find=phallique&pagenum=1&affmode=vign>).
11. Thanks to Dr. Lora Holland for bringing these examples to my attention.
12. Travertine bas relief with phallus (Pompeii, c. 70 A.D). Retrieved from ARTstor. (<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8CJGczI9NzldLS1WEDhzTnkrX3kqeVBxfyY%3D>)
13. Image courtesy of Dr. Nancy de Grummond.
14. Joanne Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p. 232.
15. Jean MacIntosh Turfa, "Votive Offerings in Etruscan Religion," in *The Religion of the Etruscans*, eds. Nancy Thompson de Grummond and Erika Simon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 99, 103.

5. References

1. Berry, Joanne. *The Complete Pompeii*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007.
2. de Grummond, Nancy Thomson. *The Sanctuary of the Etruscan Artisans at Cetamura Del Chianti: The Legacy of Alvaro Tracchi*. Florence: Edifir, 2009.
3. Guzzo, Pietro Giovanni. *Tales from an Eruption: Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis: Guide to the Exhibition*. Milan: Electa, 2003.
4. Plantzos, Dimitris. *Hellenistic Engraved Gems*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
5. Turfa, Jean MacIntosh. "Votive Offerings in Etruscan Religion." in *The Religion of the Etruscans*, edited by Nancy Thompson de Grummond and Erika Simon, 90-115. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
6. Université Lumière Lyon 2. "Amulettes Phalliques." *Encyclopédie En Ligne Des Petits Objects Archéologiques*. January 1, 2012. Accessed December 3, 2014. (<http://artefacts.mom.fr/fr/result.php?id=AMP-3003&find=phallique&pagenum=1&affmode=vign>).