
At the end of 2014 the sea of **Gela**, ancient rhodium-Cretan colony founded in the early seventh century. to. C., returned **one of the most important treasures** in the sandy seabed in front of the **coast of Bulala** district, where already **three Greek era wrecks have been found**. **The discovery was made by Francesco Cassarino and volunteers of the "Mare Nostrum"**. The **investigations and recovery were coordinated by the Superintendent of the Sea** with the collaboration of the **Harbor Office of Gela**, the team of the **Coast Guard divers of Messina**, the divers core of the **Financial Corp of Palermo**. The discovery is part of a precious cargo transported by an old wrecked ship a few hundred meters from Gela coast to a depth of about five meters, consisting of eighty-six ingots of a particular metal, called "**orichalcum**", **an alloy of copper and zinc similar to our brass, considered a precious metal in ancient times**, the third highest commercial value after gold and silver.

The discovery is among the most important in recent years because it is the first time that this kind of alloy is so far found.

The oldest item is a brass ring from **Ugarit** of the thirteenth century B.C. ; two other relics are kept in the British Museum: a fibula dated to the sixth century B.C. and a base of the fifth century BC boxer statuette.

In later times, thanks to some Latin sources, we know that this metal was used.

In fact **in the Roman Empire with the orichalcum they were minted coins like gold.**

Who gave more luster to this metal giving it an aura of legend was Plato in the Critias; about the orichalcum he wrote in relation to the legendary and **mysterious island of Atlantis**, the sacred island, a sort of paradise on earth.

The **ingots have various shapes** and have weight and different lengths: from a minimum of 17 cm and a weight of 254 gr to a maximum of 32 cm.

In addition to ingots, the **sea has returned several artifacts , a large part of them is intact** that could light on the age of the ship wreck. Among the most significant one **exaleiptron¹ (cothon)** dating back to the second half at the end of the sixth century BC, an Attic black-painted **kylix²** dated to the late sixth or early fifth century BC. To the workshops of Corinth, who produced and traded extensively around the Mediterranean its products, you can attribute the **amphora with globular body** intended to contain wine or oil. There are also amphorae with ovoid body of the end of the fourth century B.C., coming from the **colony Massalia** (Marseille), destined to the wine conservation that could belong to an earlier wreck sunk nearby.

Always **the sea in front of the ancient Greek colony of Gela**, because of its particular position, **we find traces of wrecks dated to different periods**. Therefore, even though most of the items can be attributed to the late sixth or early fifth century BC, only a systematic excavation will allow us to have a more accurate view of the entire environment and provide more valuable information of great historical and commercial significance to update the economic history of Sicily.

The ingots and the aforementioned materials found in the vicinity are on display in the main hall of the **Archaeological Museum of Gela thanks to the interest of the Superintendent of the Sea and the Director of the Museum of Gela.**

Sebastiano Tusa

Courtesy of the Superintendent of the Sea, Prof. Sebastiano Tusa.

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¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kantharos>

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kylix>
