From the Aegean to the Ionian Sea: Pottery, Technology and People in the Plain of Sybaris in the Late Bronze Age

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Abstract: The Plain of Sybaris, in north-eastern Calabria, is one of the most important regions in Italy where it is possible to study the interactions between local people and Aegean-area traders and craftsmen in the Middle and Late Bronze Age. The combined use of systematic archaeological and archaeometric analyses, carried out especially on pottery from Broglio di Trebisacce and Torre Mordillo, has been fundamental for the investigation into the development of a local production of Mycenaean-type pottery. This Italo-Mycenaean production is oriented towards tableware that is often organised in sets of drinking vessels. There is no doubt that this is a specialised type of pottery production; one of the most controversial and challenging issues is how to connect the development of this specialised craftsmanship to the general organisation of local communities. Many studies concerning the introduction of technological novelties and craft specialisation, especially in the field of pottery production, propose that they arose not for practical or techno-economical convenience but for symbolic and social reasons connected to demand from the elite. It therefore seems necessary to analyse the phenomenon of Italo-Mycenaean pottery – and other Aegean-inspired wares – within a discussion which takes into account the political economy of local communities.

Keywords: Late Bronze Age; Aegean; central Mediterranean; pottery; technology transfer; specialisation; political economy

Introduction

The Plain of Sybaris is located in the northeastern part of Calabria, facing the Ionian Sea, close to the border with Basilicata (Fig. 1). It is one of the most important regions in the central Mediterranean where it is possible to observe the development of Mediterranean interrelations between the local Middle and Final Bronze Age (MBA, FBA) (17th–11th centuries BC). Thanks to the pioneering work of Renato Peroni, Lucia Vagnetti and Richard Jones, carried out since the early eighties of the last century – and continued in the field by Alessandro Vanzetti and Flavia Trucco, we now have an appropriate framework within which to place various pieces of archaeological evidence.

The combined use of systematic archaeological and archaeometric analyses has undoubtedly been fundamental; these analyses have been performed on different classes of pottery of Aegean origin or Aegean type substantially from Broglio di Trebisacce and Torre Mordillo, the two sites in which systematic and long-lasting excavations have been carried out.

As is known, these settlements occupied small plateaus with steep sides, spreading over several hectares, which offered a commanding view over the coastal plain and the Gulf of Sybaris. According to this parameter, the extension of the Bronze Age site at Broglio should correspond to approximately 11ha. The geomorphological unit is composed of a system of well-isolated terraces, placed at different levels, facing the plain and separate from the hills behind. Archaeological remains of a Bronze Age village are on the highest terrace,
They were part of a larger and complex system characterised by human occupation of the first line of hills surrounding the plain. The life cycle of these villages began from an early stage of the MBA (17th–16th centuries BC) and developed without apparent interruptions, but with important changes, until the Early Iron Age, just before the foundation of the Achaean colony of Sybaris at the end of the 8th century BC.\(^6\) Within this very long timespan interrelations with the Aegean took place, giving rise, over centuries, to significant phenomena that went beyond the simple exchange of goods.

Aegean Pottery in the Plain of Sybaris: Imports and Local Products

According to Lucia Vagnetti, the earliest examples of Aegean pottery in the Plain of Sybaris are a few sherds from Torre Mordillo, dating to LH I–II.\(^7\) They belong to both open and closed shapes: two cups and the shoulder of a closed vessel. One fragment, a cup handle, was analysed and determined to be an import from the Aegean, probably from the Peloponnese\(^8\) (Fig. 2.1). It is worth noting that the other, earlier sherds have also been identified as probable imports by Lucia Vagnetti, considering the high quality of their fabric\(^9\) (Fig. 2.2–3). Despite the amplitude

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\(^6\) Peroni 1994.
\(^7\) Vagnetti 2001b, figs. 95.36; 98.99; 100.121.
\(^8\) Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.76.TM15.
\(^9\) Vagnetti 2001b, 323.
Fig. 2  LH I–II Mycenaean pottery from Torre Mordillo (1–3); LH/LM IIIA Italo-Mycenaean pottery from Broglio di Trebisacce and Torre Mordillo (4–9); LM IIIA cup from Rocavecchia, locally produced (10); ratio between imports and local products at Roca Vecchia (11) and in the Plain of Sybaris (12); proportion of imports and local products in the periods LH I–II, IIIA, IIIB and IIIC in the central Mediterranean (13) and in the Plain of Sybaris (14). 1–5, 8–10 scale 1:4; 6–7 scale 1:6 (after Vagnetti 1982; Vagnetti 1984; Vagnetti 2001b; Bettelli 2002; Guglielmino et al. 2010; Bettelli – Levi 2014)
and intensity of research in Broglio di Trebisacce, it has not yet been possible to identify Aegean pottery of such early dating.

One of the characterising points of the Plain of Sybaris in the history of relations between the central Mediterranean and the Aegean is the early beginning of the local production of Aegean-type pottery. Chemical analyses have pointed out that local clay was used to model Aegean-type vases starting from MBA 3. Findings in MBA levels, both Italo-Mycenaean and wheel-made Grey Ware which are not necessarily typologically diagnostic, must be distinguished from vessels exhibiting stylistic traits of the period LH/LM IIIA which have been found in later layers, together with Aegean pottery LH/LM IIIB or IIIC in date as well (Fig. 2.7). These last cases—in addition to the possibility that several examples might be residual—could be interpreted as precious items preserved through the years or as the lingering of decorations belonging to an older tradition in peripheral contexts, marginal to the creative and productive ‘core’ of this type of ware. This last hypothesis, although possible, seems less credible considering, on the one hand, the continuity of direct relationships between local communities and traders and craftsmen from the Aegean, shown by imports, and, on the other hand, the constant updating of the formal and especially decorative repertoire of Italo-Mycenaean pottery.

Among the oldest local products, dating from LH IIIA1, there is a jar FS 77, decorated with a stipple pattern (Fig. 2.4), the shoulder of a closed vessel decorated with wavy line from Broglio di Trebisacce (Fig. 2.5), and—even if typologically more ambiguous—a fragment of small closed vessel from Torre Mordillo, possibly decorated with a version of foliate band (Fig. 2.8). Other elements that may be datable to the same phase are two closed vessels from Broglio and Torre Mordillo decorated with a scale pattern (Fig. 2.6, 9). This decorative motif, although not unknown in subsequent periods, is undoubtedly very common during LH IIIA.

The same may also be true regarding Grey Ware. As Clarissa Belardelli and Isabella Damiani have proposed, in both Broglio and Torre Mordillo it is possible to recognise some open and closed Grey Ware shapes similar to impasto types datable to a final stage of the MBA, or Grey Ware vessels painted with motifs popular in LH IIIA2. Besides this, as mentioned above, we must not forget the presence of plain and undiagnostic sherds of Italo-Mycenaean pottery and wheelmade Grey Ware from layers dating to the end of the MBA at Broglio di Trebisacce. These are locally produced and, according to their stratigraphic position, may help to date the beginning of the local production of Aegean-type pottery in the Plain of Sybaris towards the end of the MBA.

Moreover, such a phenomenon also seems to apply for Roca Vecchia, in southern Apulia, in the same period. The earliest example of Aegean-type pottery locally produced at this site is, in fact, a cup which finds excellent correlations in the LM IIIA repertoire (Fig. 2.10). The sherd comes from one of the hypogean cavities at least in part coeval to the earliest settlement walls, which are datable towards the end of the MBA.

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10 Broglio BW 3B; DE 3B1b, Belardelli 1994, pl. 52.1–2; Vagnetti – Panichelli 1994, 377, 27.
11 Broglio DW 3, Vagnetti – Panichelli 1994, pl. 76.1; Jones et al. 2014, fig. 4.70.A30.
12 Vagnetti 1982, pl. 24.2; Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.64.A3–BT702.
13 Vagnetti 1984, pl. 47.8; Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.68.A22.
14 Vagnetti 2001b, fig. 95.38; Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.76.TM21.
15 Jones et al. 2014a, figs. 4.74.BT 714; 4.76.TM70.
16 Belardelli 1994, 319, fig. 109.1–2; Damiani 2001, 255, figs. 47.20; 58.14.
17 Peroni 1994, 838.
18 Guglielmino et al. 2010, fig. 10.74; Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.50.RO74. A further, possible, evidence for the beginning of a local production of Mycenaean pottery in southern Italy in the MBA 3 is a sherd from Porto Perone, with pictorial decoration (Taylour 1958, 140, 7; Lo Porto 1963, fig. 69.2; Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.52.PP20). Taylour provided a dating of this sherd to LH IIIC, but a LH IIIA2 chronology can’t be ruled out; see a fragment, possibly from a krater, from Termantino with a similar decoration (Vagnetti 2001a, 108, fig. 1). Important observations about this topic have also been made by R. Jung, who convincingly proposed, on stylistic grounds, a possible ‘local’ production for two Aegean-type vessels from Milazzese levels at Lipari (MBA3): Jung 2005a, 477, pl. CV a–b; Jung 2006a, 75, taf. 1.7.
The similarities between the Plain of Sybaris and Roca Vecchia stop here. Unlike the Apulian settlement, in the Plain of Sybaris we have a very scarce presence of imports from the Aegean, even if they are distributed throughout all phases until LH IIIC, as in the case of Torre Mordillo20 (Fig. 2.11–12).

This phenomenon is even more remarkable if compared to the general trend of the ratio between imports and local production in the central Mediterranean considering all phases (Fig. 2.13–14). Starting from LH/LM IIIA, Italo-Mycenaean pottery continues and increases progressively over time, although its precise evaluation is hampered by the difficulty in many cases of distinguishing LH IIIB from IIIC sherds. In any case, while we can see the high level of local production in LH IIIC, there is the same proportional increase between LH IIIA, IIIB and IIIC: c. 20%.21 Such a gradual progressive increase from the time of its first appearance undermines the traditional view that connects the increase in local production during LH IIIC to the collapse of the Mycenaean palace economy, but rather considers the phenomenon as linked to the dynamics of what was taking place within Italy.

Thus the interests of the palatial elites may have played a role in the earliest phase of local production, but over time other different actors sought to expand their spheres of action. It also seems clear that the importance of the role of local communities and their demand for specialised and valuable ceramics increased over time.22

It is worth noting that at Broglio and Torre Mordillo tableware is the majority among both imports and local products, with very few exceptions;23 for instance, among local products, the presence, albeit scarce, of vases for storage/transport such as stirrup jars or alabastra must be mentioned.24 As was already pointed out, especially in the Recent Bronze Age (RBA) and FBA (13th–11th centuries BC), Italo-Mycenaean production is oriented towards tableware, dominated by drinking vessels, but includes storage/pouring and pouring; there is a scarcity of transport vessels (Fig. 3.8).25 The manner in which these three functions – drinking, storage/pouring and pouring – continue in much the same proportions throughout LH IIIB to IIIC26 suggests the existence of a strong, definable tradition of specific standardised shapes inspired by Aegean models, but with several local characteristics.27 This trend concerns not only the Plain of Sybaris, but is confirmed for other areas as well, such as Apulia and Basilicata.28

Such a standardisation in the field of pottery production is highlighted by specific and repetitive shapes, inspired by Aegean models but with some major local innovations. A good example is the two-handled necked jars widespread in the Plain of Sybaris (Fig. 3.1–3). They are extraneous to the Mycenaean tradition, and although they can find some prototypes in several Late Minoan necked jars, as Lucia Vagnetti has suggested,29 a local legacy connected to some specific closed shapes of the local impasto pottery and also adopted in wheelmade Grey Ware cannot be ruled out.30 These vases have a shoulder decorated with motifs belonging to Cretan and Mycenaean repertoires. If we consider that the earliest decorative motifs on these vases date back to LM IIIA,31 the hypothesis of a possible derivation from Late Minoan models becomes more plausible. This Cretan legacy in the Plain of Sybaris is well attested only among Italo-Mycenaean productions; differently from Roca

20 Bettelli – Levi 2014, 411–413, figs. 6.3 a–d.
22 Jones et al. 2014b, 452–453.
24 Jones at al. 2014a, fig. 4.68.A22; 4.74.BT714; 4.76.TM 21, TM 43, TM70.
26 Both not considering the sherds of uncertain chronology and subdividing them between LH IIIB and IIIC.
29 Vagnetti – Panichelli 1994, 407–408. See also Preve 2011, figs. 5–6.
30 Bettelli 2002, 100–104; Castagna 2002; Castagna 2004; Castagna 2006; Bettelli et al. 2015, 16, 21. R. Jung has proposed interesting comparisons with Achaean specimens for this shape: Jung 2005a, 477; Jung 2006a, 18, taf. 7.1.
31 Jones et al. 2014a, fig. 4.70, A30.
Fig. 3 LH/LM IIIB and IIIC Italo-Mycenaean tableware from the Casa Centrale at Broglio di Trebisacce (1–5, 7); Italo-Mycenaean krater from Rocavecchia (6); number of examples of Mycenaean and Italo-Mycenaean pottery according to shapes in the central Mediterranean (only analysed vessels) (8); 1–3, 6 scale 1:6; 4–7 scale 1:4 (after Vagnetti 1982; Vagnetti 1984; Guglielmino et al. 2010)
Vecchia, where Late Minoan elements are equally present among imports and local products, even though the former, according to the present state of knowledge, are not in the form of tableware.\textsuperscript{32} This could mean that, on the one hand, traders and craftsmen circulated along different routes\textsuperscript{33} while, on the other, we must consider the different functions of sites like Roca Vecchia and Broglio or Torre Mordillo. It is clear that the geography and morphology of the site at Roca promoted its role of trade port suitable for the interception of important routes within the Late Bronze Age international networks.

In the Plain of Sybaris, at present, there is no comparable situation in terms of imports. In this region an important phenomenon of technology transfer in the field of pottery production took place, which soon introduced new techniques of ceramic production and, to some extent, styles; this technological package of Aegean legacy will never be abandoned by the local communities.\textsuperscript{34} This kind of technology transfer and its scale must necessarily have required the presence of experienced potters from the Aegean, at least in the beginning. The new technologies – fine clay, wheel-throwing or wheel-fashioning, complex firing structures, painting – were complex enough to require the presence in Italy, if only temporarily, of craftsmen who were in a position to offer training.\textsuperscript{35} That was surely the case in contemporary Macedonia or during the introduction of the potter’s wheel from the Levant to Cyprus at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, as many studies suggest.\textsuperscript{36}

Of course, it is possible that, over time, native artisans also joined them.\textsuperscript{37} This last idea is further strengthened by the consideration that Italo-Mycenaean pottery is often stylistically inconsistent with the Aegean repertoire, with the introduction of a number of novelties in shapes and decorative patterns. Moreover, the strong variability observed among the ceramic corpora of the various sites where local production is predominant must be taken into account.\textsuperscript{38}

\section*{Towards a Political Model}

So, as we have seen, contrary to several comparable situations which arose in other regions of the Mediterranean and the Near East even in much earlier periods,\textsuperscript{39} in the Plain of Sybaris the potter’s wheel was not a local invention. One of the most controversial and challenging issues is how to connect the development of this specialised craftsmanship to the general organisation of the local communities, namely at what level of social interaction Aegean or Aegean-trained potters were acting. Differently from other historical or archaeological contexts, in fact, regarding the central Mediterranean Bronze Age it is still difficult to infer precise relationships between specialisation, exchange and social complexity according to the current models elaborated by anthropology and social archaeology.\textsuperscript{40}

According to Elizabeth Brumfiel and Timothy Earle, specialisation can be expected when natural resources are unevenly distributed or when the production process involves some gradually acquired skills. Specialisation involves economic differentiation and interdependence: the existence of individuals who produce goods or services for a broader consumer population. It involves a number of dimensions: the affiliation of the specialist (independent or attached); the nature of the product (subsistence goods, luxury items or services); the intensity of specialisation (part-time

\textsuperscript{32} Guglielmino et al. 2010; Jones et al. 2014a, figs. 4.46–50.
\textsuperscript{33} Bettelli 2002, 71.
\textsuperscript{34} Levi 1999.
\textsuperscript{36} Mommsen et al. 1989; Kiriatzi et al. 1997; Jung 2002a; Buxeda i Garrigos et al. 2003; Crewe 2007; Andreou 2009.
\textsuperscript{38} Jones et al. 2014b, 454.
\textsuperscript{39} Roux 2010.
\textsuperscript{40} Brumfiel – Earle 1987b; Roux 2010.
or full-time); the scale of the production unit (individual industry, household industry, workshop industry, village industry or large-scale industry).

The results of our research suggest some answers and considerations: the local production of Italo-Mycenaean pottery, as we have seen, implies the introduction of new and sophisticated skills from the Aegean which were probably acquired gradually by local people as well; the innovative character of Italo-Mycenaean pottery in comparison to the motherland repertoire could be an indication of this.

It is reasonable to assume that, because of its technological complexity, sophistication and exoticism, Italo-Mycenaean pottery belonged to the category of luxury items.

Sara Levi and Richard Jones propose a consideration of this kind of production at the level of workshop industry,41 and this is an important notion as it implies relationships between masters and apprentices,42 again with the very probable inclusion of local people in the manufacturing cycle.

Some points remain to be clarified: even where the socio-economic structures able to maintain specialised craft productions exist, part-time or full-time intensity of specialisation may depend on the fluctuations in supply and demand, so it is difficult to consider it as a priori. It is even more difficult to establish the specialists' affiliation. According to the models proposed in the above-mentioned studies, independent specialists produce goods or services for a broad crowd of consumers that vary according to economic, social, and political conditions. They operate within a framework with an increasing population density, in which urbanisation and market development can also be present. Attached specialists, instead, usually produce goods for a patron, either a social elite or a government. In this case specialisation arises from the explicit desire of the ruling elites to control the production and distribution of certain politically significant commodities. Attached specialisation develops largely as a function of elite coercive control and elite income.43

It seems that the figure of a specialised potter who, either full-time or part-time, produced Italo-Mycenaean pottery doesn’t fit well with this very general classification of specialists. It is difficult, if not impossible, to consider them as independent specialists in the sense described above, given that the socio-political and socio-economic framework of the Late Bronze Age Plain of Sybaris was far from concepts such as ‘market’ or ‘urban society’. The definition of attached specialists working for the needs of a patron member of the social elite is undoubtedly more fitting, although it would need to be further clarified in the light of specific socio-economic contexts.

So, what we really can observe is the existence of a specialised pottery production, realistically the result of the work of specialised artisans. There is an almost general agreement in considering this pottery as used for social display purposes.44 Despite this, it is still controversial to define the specific character of the segment of the community – possibly the socially emerging groups – that acted as a customer for this commodity.45 It is also difficult to determine whether and to what extent there were relationships of dependence between producers and consumers, especially at the beginning of the local production of this pottery, when the craftsmen came from the Aegean and were therefore not integrated in the native social systems.

It is worth noting that in terms of the acquisition of prestige goods, patron/client relationships may also be formed in simple societies, not necessarily in the presence of specialisation, as ethnographic studies suggest46. That is to say, that structures of patronage of this type may also exist in societies which are not extremely hierarchical, or in which a process of social stratification has only recently begun.

42 Roux 2010, 223–224, with quoted literature.
43 Brumfiel – Earle 1987b. See also Roux 2010.
45 See, for example, Bietti Sestieri 2008, 22–27; according to this scholar, Italo-Mycenaean pottery would have been produced by Aegean craftsmen who moved to the central Mediterranean and settled in the local communities, for their personal consumption only. For a critical discussion of this issue see Bettelli 2011, 113–114; Jones et al. 2014b, 453–454.
The link between technological innovations and social organisation has also been suggested by other studies concerning pottery production. Valentine Roux proposes that, in traditional societies, discontinuous innovations — such as the wheel-coiling and the wheel-throwing techniques — are promoted by individuals having some form of religious, political or financial power; they are actualised not for practical or techno-economical convenience but for symbolic and social
reasons connected to the elite’s demand. In other words, these kinds of technological innovations take place in an elitarian context and only later may spread to other social components; this is because only elites can have the material margins necessary to face the possible failure which a new practice always implies.\(^{47}\)

A possible example of the so-called ‘attached specialisation’ in Bronze Age Europe could, as suggested by Kristian Kristiansen, be the Nordic facies\(^{48}\). In this region local elites would have regulated metallurgy and the production of metal artefacts in order to control access to their social entourage. According to Kristiansen, the circulation of swords, daggers and metal vessels were restricted to a small segment of the population. Within the elite stratum, wealth, power and prestige were concentrated in a few key positions; these key positions were the subject of intense rivalry among the elite. To be successful in such a competition the formation of coalitions and alliances between elites was necessary, and it is probable that elite wealth mediated many of these relationships. According to Kristiansen, ritual and feasting were probably central to the creation of alliances, as attested by a number of archaeological sources of the Nordic Bronze Age, such as imported bronze vessels and golden drinking cups.

A similar phenomenon may have taken place among the Late Bronze Age elites in the Plain of Sybaris and beyond: the high incidence of tableware in Italo-Mycenaean pottery and Grey Ware – especially the former, which varies according to different local styles – can be explained as necessary equipment for ceremonies and feasting in which common drinking between members of the elite, and possibly their followers, took place.\(^{49}\) Antonia Castagna has proposed the presence at Broglio of true ceramic sets in Italo-Mycenaean pottery and Grey Ware probably used to this end, at least in an advanced phase of the RBA\(^{50}\) (Fig. 4). Wealth and prestige in the Nordic Bronze Age were obviously focused on precious or strategic metal artefacts. In the Plain of Sybaris – as well as in other regions where Italo-Mycenaean pottery is attested – the same could be true for this new, sophisticated pottery technology, used to produce exotic-type vessels.

At Roca Vecchia a RBA ritual context was recently identified, with the presence of LH IIIC kraters, dippers and deep bowls together with sacrificed animals.\(^{51}\) It is worth noting that in this case the assemblage of kraters and deep bowls which forms the Aegean drinking set typical of the period is attested.\(^{52}\) Francesco Iacono, who has studied this important context at Roca, highlights the difference between this context and the above-mentioned, more or less contemporary, drinking assemblages discovered in the Casa Centrale at Broglio. In that case, as already mentioned, pottery sets included large-necked jars together with cups and bowls of different sizes, mostly carinated, in Italo-Mycenaean pottery, Grey Ware and impasto pottery (Figs. 3.1–5, 7; 4).

The different behaviour adopted by native groups in the use of Mycenaean- or Aegean-inspired pottery, including that witnessed in coeval sites which shared many characteristics, such as Roca Vecchia and Broglio di Trebisacce, may also be justified by the constant construction and negotiation of identities which took place among local communities, or even just in certain sectors of those communities. This is even more important as it happened in a period in which local communities had come into possession of exotic artefacts, technologies and socio-ritual practices. All of these features may have had a restricted circulation, but certainly no community in the regions under consideration could boast – in this late phase of the Bronze Age – an exclusive knowledge and use.

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\(^{47}\) Roux 2010, 225–228. In this regard, see also the important considerations by R. Peroni concerning the production of Italo-Mycenaean pottery and Grey Ware in the Plain of Sybaris (Peroni 1994, 846–847).

\(^{48}\) Kristiansen 1987.

\(^{49}\) Peroni et al. 2004, 169, 175.

\(^{50}\) Castagna 2002; Castagna 2004; Castagna 2006.

\(^{51}\) Iacono 2015.

\(^{52}\) On the central role of the krater in Mycenaean feasting, the composition of Mycenaean drinking sets and their change in the time, see: Jung 2002b; Borgna 2004; Steel 2004; Wright 2004b; Jung 2006b; Podzuweit 2007, 57–69, 191–197.
In the Plain of Sybaris, the use of Italo-Mycenaean vases, possibly inspired by local tradition (e.g. necked jars and carinated cups), together with the large amount of Grey Ware also presenting a strongly local appearance in terms of shapes, suggests the firmly entrenched presence of a well-structured local identity which could almost be called conservative. This appears even more clearly in comparison with other sites, such as Roca Vecchia and Scoglio del Tonno in Apulia, where – as we have seen, especially in the first case – the reception, use and manipulation of Aegean vessels and, to some extent, of symbolic and ideological attitudes, suggest a much more dynamic and fluid situation, both at the level of the whole community and of specific segments thereof.

**Final Remarks**

A version of the so-called ‘political model’ in explaining relationships between specialisation, exchange and social complexity, suggests that both the control and the manipulation of wealth can come into play in the initial stages of social ranking, and an individual may establish superior social rank by displaying the symbols associated with a foreign, already established elite. From this point of view, we can imagine that the communities in the Plain of Sybaris, starting at least from the end of the MBA, had undertaken a process of social hierarchy, as suggested by R. Peroni, with the establishment of structures able to manage relationships with people from overseas and in faraway countries. At a certain stage in their relationship with the Aegean they started to be interested not only in imported vases, but more and more in their production technology. In this way local elites could be increasingly able to directly control the production, circulation and consumption of this specific sign of social distinction without depending on the fluctuation in supply that might occur when relying exclusively on overseas trade. This model – based primarily on acquisition of exotic technologies for the production of specialised fine ceramics, according to a neo-evolutionary perspective – is consistent with the general reconstruction proposed by R. Peroni and A. Vanzetti concerning the organisation of local communities in the Plain of Sybaris, according to which social structures based on leading families and client followers were present by the Late Bronze Age. Such a reconstruction is founded on the thorough, combined, analysis of a large spectrum of archaeological evidence including settlement patterns, the primary economy, exchange networks, socio-cultural aspects and, of course, major changes in strategic craft production. In this field the development of a local production of specialised pottery of Aegean legacy is considered strictly linked to the elites’ social strategies.

The possibility of an early involvement of native potters in the productive chain of Italo-Mycenaean pottery suggested here, but already proposed, does not necessarily contrast with the

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53 See also Jung 2006b, 417–418; Borgna 2012, 145.
54 Bettelli et al. 2015. In order to explain these phenomena, the concept of the ‘contact zone’ may be also introduced (Maran 2012, with quoted literature). In times of intense intercultural entanglement such as the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age, the presence not only of objects from abroad but also of people originating from more or less distant areas must be considered, as is the case of Aegean traders and craftsmen in the central Mediterranean. The appropriation by local people of objects, technologies and, to some extent, lifestyles proposed by foreign groups didn’t necessarily follow identical trajectories in all the sites concerned. As Joseph Maran writes ‘…in a contact zone identities, values, and meanings were negotiated between groups of different origin, the forms and the content of appropriation must have differed significantly from group to group.’ (Maran 2012, 121).
56 Peroni 1994, 838, 842.
previously proposed model of Aegean craftsmen transferred, even temporarily, to central Mediterranean communities. As mentioned above, this obviously must have happened at the beginning of the technology transfer phenomenon; but also, in the course of the long-lasting production of Italo-Mycenaean pottery, the continuous updating of shapes and decorative motifs – although in certain cases locally ‘interpreted’ – as well as the development of a pictorial style in local productions, suggest a steady exchange of information between Aegean craftsmen and specialised potters operating in the central Mediterranean. On the other hand, a major role of local potters with an Aegean training in workshops producing Italo-Mycenaean pottery may also better explain the well-rooted and long-lasting relations of production that were at work within local communities in the field of specialised pottery production and beyond.

The scarce or very restricted circulation of Italo-Mycenaean pottery, together with the development of specific local styles, may also be explained as an attempt to avoid procuring said pottery through local exchange networks, which could be managed by rival elitist groups.

Moreover, the elites’ interests rapidly went beyond this kind of social display: the new technological knowledge in the field of pottery production was soon also used to manufacture large ceramic containers, inspired by Aegean models, able to meet more efficiently the needs of a new, incipient, productive economy based on specialised arboriculture.

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Bibliography

Androu 2009

Belardelli 1994

62 Vagnetti – Panichelli 1994, pl. 74.4; Vagnetti 2001a, figs. 3, 7, 18, 20; Vagnetti 2006; Vagnetti et al. 2009, 178, fig. 11.4–5; Jones et al. 2014a, figs. 4.59 ST 22, 62; 4.61 T39–40; 4.68 A20. In this regard, see also the important considerations in Jung 2005b, 60.
64 Peroni 1994, 846–847.
65 The important results of chemical analyses of the Aegean pottery from the Bronze Age site of Punta di Zambrone (Vibo Valenzia) suggest the presence at this site, located in Tyrrhenian Calabria, of Italo-Mycenaean vases possibly produced in the southern Plain of Sybaris. This should be the first case in which a circulation of Italo-Mycenaean pottery outside the production area is well attested (Jung et al. 2015, 459–460, fig. 2). Actually, the few sherds from northern and central Italy previously considered as possible imports from the southern Italian peninsula (Jones et al. 2002, 233–242; Bettelli et al. 2006, 403; Salzani et al. 2006, 1156) are now viewed as probable local products (Jones – Levi 2014, 273–275).
66 According to R. Peroni the production of Italo-Mycenaean pottery was promoted by local elites in order to better manage the complex dependence relationships with other social groups of lower rank (Peroni 1994, 847, 852).
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