Review Article

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Sicily Before the Greeks. The Interaction with Aegean and the Levant in the Pre-colonial Era

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Abstract: The relationship between Sicily and the eastern Mediterranean – namely Aegean, Cyprus and the Levant – represents one of the most intriguing facets of the prehistory of the island. The frequent and periodical contact with foreign cultures were a trigger for a gradual process of socio-political evolution of the indigenous community. Such relationship, already in inception during the Neolithic and the Copper Age, grew into a cultural phenomenon ruled by complex dynamics and multiple variables that ranged from the Mid-3rd to the end of the 2nd millennium BCE. In over 1,500 years, a very large quantity of Aegean and Levantine type materials have been identified in Sicily alongside with example of unusual local material culture traditionally interpreted as resulting from external influence. To summarize all the evidence during such long period and critically address it in order to attempt historical reconstructions is a Herculean labor.

Twenty years after Sebastiano Tusa embraced this challenge for the first time, this paper takes stock on two decades of new discoveries and research reassessing a vast amount of literature, mostly published in Italian and in regional journals, while also address the outcomes of new archaeometric studies. The in-depth survey offers a new perspective of general trends in this East-West relationship which conditioned the subsequent events of the Greek and Phoenician colonization of Sicily.

Keywords: Sicily, Bronze Age, Aegean, Cyprus, trade

In memory of Sebastiano Tusa

1 Introduction

The earliest contacts between Sicily and the Aegean dates to the very end of the Neolithic period and the beginning of the Copper Age, when elementary metalworking practices gradually emerged alongside the circulation of artefacts with symbolic value, such as stone idols, and influences on the local pottery production. However, such elements have been interpreted as connected to “non-structured exchange networks and movements of small groups of people through short distances without direct contacts between the eastern Mediterranean and Sicily”, recognizing the Balkan region’s important mediating role (Cazzella & Maniscalco, 2012).

It is with the beginning of the Early Bronze Age that a direct relation between Sicily, Aegean and the Levant is established for the first time, being destined to become tighter and stronger in the course of the Bronze Age and to last until the dawn of history (Leighton, 1999).

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Table 1: Comparative chronological chart for Aegean, Sicilian, Southern Italian and Maltese Bronze Age with indication of the main cultural facies (Aegean chronology after Manning, 2010).

Chronology	Aegean	Sicily	Aeolian islands	Southern Italy	Maltese archipelago
1700/1675– 1635/00	LH I	Castelluccio (Early Bronze Age)	Capo Graziano (Early Bronze Age)		Tarxien Cemetery
1635/00– 1480/70	LH IIA	Castelluccio (Early Bronze Age)	Capo Graziano (Early Bronze Age)	Middle Bronze 1–2	
1470/60– 1420/10	LH IIB	Castelluccio / Thapsos	Capo Graziano/Milaz- zese		
1420/10– 1390/70	LH IIIA1				Borġ in-Nadur
1390/70– 1330/15	LH IIIA2	Thapsos (Middle Bronze Age)	Milazzese (Middle Bronze Age)	Middle Bronze 3 / Late Bronze 1	
1330/15– 1200/1190	LH IIIB	Thapsos / North Pantalica	Milazzese/Ausonian I	Late Bronze 2 / Final Bronze 1–2	
1200/1190– 1075/50	LH IIIC	North Pantalica (Late Bronze Age)	Ausonian I (Late Bronze Age)		

Attempting to summarize the main aspects of the near millennium long relations in order to sketch up a narrative that will help us to better understand later Greek and Phoenician colonial strategies is definitely hard. A key difficulty derives from a broad chronological arc that implies issues of absolute and comparative chronology, which can be tentatively summarized in Table 1, although an alternative ‘low’ chronological comparative sequence has been recently proposed (Wiener, 2018). Another issue is represented by the multitude of geographic, ethnic, cultural and socio-political variables hiding behind labels such as ‘Sicily’, ‘Aegean’ and ‘Levant’, variables that for the most part are unfathomable. An additional problematic factor is given by the incredibly vast amount of evidence, never fully taken into account in previous literature, that must, once and for all, be gathered in critically discussed in order to hypothesize any interpretative narrative.

The first organic attempt to critically summarize all the pieces of this puzzle was made twenty years ago by the late lamented Sebastiano Tusa, founding father of the contemporary Sicilian prehistoric research who tragically passed away in 2019. In his essay *The Sicilian society and the contact with center-eastern Mediterranean from the 2nd to the beginning of the 1st millennium BC*, Tusa tackled the issue with great merit (Tusa, 2000). However, during the last two decades new excavations and studies, revisions of old context and innovative archaeometric analyses brought out novel evidence which has changed partly the terms of the problem and offered new perspectives. This contribution attempts to sum up the nature of the contacts between Sicily and the Aegean through the main phases that marked the Aegean prehistory, Late Helladic I–II (the formative period of the Mycenaean civilization), Late Helladic IIIA–IIIB (the Mycenaean heyday), and Late Helladic IIIC (the collapse of Mycenaean palatial system), building on the valuable heritage left behind by Sebastiano Tusa. In this analysis, the role of Cyprus and the Levant will also be investigated as well as that of the Maltese archipelago, which, due to geographic proximity and cultural assonance, orbited Sicily during those phases. Throughout the text terms like “Aegean type”, “Mycenaean type”, “Late Helladic type”, “Cypriote type” and “Levantine type” will be used, out of abundance of caution, with respect to pottery resembling Aegean, Mycenaean, Late Helladic Cypriote and Levantine prototypes found in Sicily, as their true nature, imports or local imitations, has not been determined via specific archaeometry analyses.

2 LH I–IIA: The First Contacts

During the course of the last century of the 3rd millennium BCE, for the first time Sicily enters into the radar of the Aegean travelers sailing westward. As consequence of this initial interaction, materials of Aegean type appear in several sites of eastern and southern Sicily and the Aeolian archipelago and, as an echo of that interaction, the same materials are attested in Malta.

2.1 Sites

With respect to Sicily, the picture shows the site of Monte Grande, in the territory of Agrigento, taking the lead as the main local player in the exchange system with the Aegeans, while on the eastern coast evidence of interaction is represented by single finds in a series of funerary contexts in the areas of Siracusa (Castelluccio, Cava Cana Barbara, Cava Secchiera) and Catania (Maccarrone di Adrano, Coste di Santa Febronia, Valsavoia). Further isolated examples are attested in the Messina (Fiumedinisi), Gela and Enna (Pietraperzia) regions (Gennusa, 2015).

The excavations at Monte Grande of Palma di Montechiaro (Agrigento) brought the most groundbreaking discoveries in the recent history of Sicilian archaeological prehistoric research: a well-structured sanctuaries area comprising large enclosures for public gatherings and mass rituals connected with a factory-like establishment for mining sulfur and smelting ingots (Vincinzina area) and a commercial post by the sea with buildings designed with innovative rectangular modules (Marcatazzo area) (Castellana, 1998, 2000). The size of the sacred spaces, the novel evidence of industrial exploitation of mineral resources and the interesting connection between the religious sphere with the industrial/commercial sphere makes Monte Grande unique (La Rosa, 2005).

Very different evidence is offered in the Sicilian isles, such as Pantelleria and the Aeolian Archipelago. At the site of Mursia on Pantelleria flourishing settlement was excavated showing significant traces of foreign contacts (Cattani, 2016). In the Aeolian Archipelago, major settlements are documented on five of the seven islands: Lipari, Filicudi, Salina and Panarea and Stromboli (La Rosa, 2002).

In the Maltese Archipelago, the site offering the most significant data is the Neolithic temple of Tarxien, which in this period is in part reconfigured as a cremation cemetery.

2.2 Material Culture

With respect to the material culture (Tab. 2), the circulation of Aegean type pottery in Sicily is strictly limited to Monte Grande with a large variety of different wares across a wide chronological spectrum such as Middle Helladic Matt-Painted Ware of Aegean and Levantine type, LH I–II type pottery, Aegina Gold mica ware, Coarse Transport Jars and Canaanite type Storage Jars. The quantity and variety of Aegean and Levantine type pottery in a site mainly characterized by production of sulfur ingots clearly indicates the specific interest of the foreign travelers for that mineral and how it was at the center of the trade system. More contentious are the sets of weights and inscribed signs of Aegean origin documented at Monte Grande (Militello, 1998). The abandonment of the site at the end of the Early Bronze Age coincides with the end of the Aegean goods. The presence of a LH IIB–IIIA1 type pottery fragment in the nearby site of Madre Chiesa represents the latest example for this period. On Sicilian minor islands, examples of Canaanite type Storage Jars are also attested in the settlement of Mursia at Pantelleria, together with Middle Helladic Matt-Painted Ware of Aegean and Levantine type.

MH and LH I–II pottery is well attested in the Aegean Archipelago, especially in Capo Graziano and Capo Graziano/Milazzese layers of settlements in Lipari Castello, Filicudi, Salina Portella and Serra dei Cianfi, Milazzese cape at Panarea and San Vincenzo di Stromboli. The presence of few LM I–II materials documented at Lipari Castello is also significant.

The Early Bronze Age marks the beginning of metalworking in Sicily with a limited initial circulation of copper artefacts (Maniscalco, 2000). Due to the lack of any metal ores in Sicily, such activity must have been triggered by the import of raw materials by foreign agents, likely from the Aegean. Besides the patchy evidence of copper daggers and axes of local type, the discovery of a bronze cup of LH I–II type, the composition of which has been ascertained

chemically, at the Grotta Maccarrone at Adrano, informs us about imports of Aegean metal artefacts. The presence of Aegean-type metal scales found in the funerary contexts of Cava Secchiera, Fiumidini and Castelluccio, from which also come an iron ring, all traditionally considered to be of Aegean origin, pairs with that evidence.

The incipient Sicilian metallurgy does not focus on copper only, as the remarkable evidence of bronze working offered by Mursia at Pantalleria shows. This implies the capacity to also procure tin ore. The occurrence at Mursia of Aegean type artifacts such as weights and glass and faience beads and semi-precious beads with silver and gold plating and several examples of ivory bracelets, suggest an Aegean role in that procurement. Other examples of similar exotic items are documented in the funerary contexts of Maccarrone di Adrano, Coste di Santa Febronia, Valsavoia and Cava Cana Barbara.

With respect to domestic architecture, the sudden appearance of massive defensive walls with towers, better represented by the examples of Petraro and Thapsos in the territory of Siracusa, has been traditionally interpreted as the result of Aegean influence, although similar contemporaneous fortifications systems are attested in Malta, Spain and Portugal (Cazzella & Recchia, 2013; Terranova, 2015). While more remarkable is the evidence of the funerary context, where we find the first example of built tholos tombs in the Bagni di San Calogero at Lipari, which strongly suggest a more permanent presence of skilled Aegean people.

In the Maltese Archipelago, the data are rather limited for this period. The main source of information is the partial reoccupation phase with an incineration cemetery of the Neolithic megalithic temple of Tarxien with a very high number of exotic items in the burials, such as faience and ostrich shell beads. The discovery in the same context of a fragmentary sulfur ingot could inform us about Sicilian mediation for the arrival of those Aegean-type goods to Malta (Zammit, 1930, p. 60).

3 LH IIIA1–LH IIIB: The Commercial Escalation

The geographic proximity of Sicily with the Maltese Isles, just 82 km, and their intertwined cultural history during Prehistory (Tanasi & Vella, 2014), suggests that one must frame Aegean interaction together with Sicilian and Maltese indigenous communities.

3.1 Sites

During this period, Sicilian areas with major concentrations of evidence are the territory of Siracusa and that of Agrigento, mainly represented by the coastal sites of Thapsos and Cannatello, naturally open to transmarine contacts. The former is located along the route towards Southern Italy through the Strait of Messina and the other along the western route towards Sardinia and Spain. A third major geographic district is represented by the Aeolian Isles. To these can be added further patchy isolated cases.

In the Siracusa area, in a geographic district of approximately 30 km in diameter, ranging from the coast to the hinterland, seven funerary context sites offered Mycenaean-type material or indirect proof of exposure by the local communities to Mycenaean culture: Cozzo Monaco (Orsi, 1893b, 1902), Cozzo del Pantano (Orsi, 1893a; Tanasi & Vella, 2019), Plemmirio (Orsi, 1891, 1899; Genovese, 2015), Siracusa – Neapolis (Voza, 1993–94, p. 1289), Majorana di Buscemi (Gentili, 1951b), and Tabaccheddu di Floridia (Orsi, 1909). Thapsos is also in the same district, the eponymous site of the main Middle Bronze Age culture. The chronological extent of Thapsos culture, traditionally interpreted as structured in three phases covering the Middle, Late and Final Bronze Age, has been soundly reassessed and re-articulated into two phases over the course of the Middle Bronze Age (see Recchia & Cazzella, 2011 *contra* Alberti, 2007). The site, the only one with a well investigated domestic and funerary context in this period, brought to light through a series of excavations between the end of the 19th century (Cavallari, 1880; Orsi, 1895) and the 50s (Gentili, 1951a), the 70s and the 80s (Voza, 1972, 1973, 1976–77, 1980–1981, 1984–1985). The settlement was likely set between the isthmus of the peninsula and its north-western side, where the majority of the uncovered structures are found, and was protected by fortifications, as two portions of chronologically sequential massive walls along the south-western side testify. It definitely developed through two main phases. The first phase is characterized by groups of circular, sub-circular and oval huts laid down

Table 2: Materials of Aegean Origin in Early Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Evidence	Bibliography
Monte Grande	Domestic	MH Matt-Painted Ware of Aegean and Levantine type; LH I–II type pottery; Aigina Gold mica ware; Coarse Transport Jars; Canaanite type Storage Jars (fig. 1a–d)	Castellana, 1998, 2000; Marazzi, 2016
Madre Chiesa	Domestic	LH IIB–IIIA1 type pottery	Castellana, 2000
Maccarrone di Adrano	Funerary	LH I–II type bronze cup, amber and glass beads (fig. 2d–e)	Cultraro, 2007b; Pappalardo et al., 2012
Coste di Santa Febronia	Funerary	Jadeite bead	Gennusa, 2015, p. 21
Valsavoia	Funerary	Amber beads	Cultraro, 2017
Castelluccio	Funerary	Iron ring and metal scale and set of weights (fig. 2a–c); metal tweezer; metal pins	Crispino & Cultraro, 2015; La Rosa, 2005
Cava Cana Barbara	Funerary	Amber beads	Cultraro, 2017
Cava Secchiera di Melilli	Funerary	Metal scale	Crispino & Cultraro, 2015
Fiumedinisi	Unknown	Metal scale	Crispino & Cultraro, 2015
Manfria	Domestic	Metal pin	La Rosa, 2005
Mursia	Domestic	Glass and rock crystal beads; with silver and gold plating; metal earrings; ivory bracelets; Aegean type balance weight; evidence of bronze metalworking; MH Matt-Painted Ware of Aegean and Levantine type; Canaanite storage jars (fig. 1e; fig. 2f–g)	Ardesia et al., 2006; Ardesia et al., 2012; Carannante et al., 2012; Giardino et al., 2012; Marazzi, 2016
Lipari	Domestic and funerary	LH I–II and LM I–II pottery imported from Peloponnese; glass and amber beads (fig. 1f); Built tholos tomb of Bagni di San Calogero (fig. 2i)	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Bernabò Brea et al., 1990; Taylour, 1958; Taylour, 1980; Van Wijngaarden, 2002, pp. 207–227
Filicudi	Domestic	LH I–II type pottery	Taylour, 1958
Salina (Portella and Serra dei Cianfi)	Domestic	LH IIB–IIIA1 type pottery	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Taylour, 1980
Panarea – Milazzese	Domestic	LH IIB–IIIA1 type pottery	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Taylour, 1980
San Vincenzo – Stromboli	Domestic	LH I–II type pottery (fig. 1g); glass beads	Levi et al., 2011
Tarxien	Funerary	Silver sheet; silver bead; lead cylindrical object (weight?); faience beads (fig. 2h); ostrich shell beads; cylinder bead with gold inlay	Evans, 1959; Evans, 1971; Zammit, 1930
Skorba	Out of context	Bronze saw	Trump, 1966

Figure 1: a) Middle Helladic and Late Helladic I–II pottery from Monte Grande (after Castellana, 2000); b) Canaanite type storage jar from Monte Grande (Marazzi, 2016); c) Coarse transport jars of Levantine type from Monte Grande (Marazzi, 2016); d) Late Helladic I–II and other Aegean type pottery from Monte Grande (after Castellana, 2000); e) Aegean and Levantine pottery from Mursia (Marazzi, 2016); f) Late Helladic I–II from Lipari (after Voza, 1985); g) Late Helladic I–II pottery from San Vincenzo di Stromboli (after Levi et al., 2017).

Figure 2: a) Metal scale from tomb 22 of Castelluccio (Crispino & Cultraro, 2015); b) Iron ring from tomb 23 of Castelluccio (Orsi, 1893); c) Stone weight set and elements of metal scale from tomb 22 of Castelluccio (Crispino & Cultraro, 2015); d) Glass and amber beads from Grotta Maccarrone di Adrano (Cultraro, 2007); e) Late Helladic I–II type bronze cup from Grotta Maccarrone di Adrano (Cultraro, 2007); f) Ivory bracelets from Mursia (Ardesia et al., 2012); g) Bronze earrings, necklace of glass beads, glass beads coated in gold and silver sheet and rock crystal beads (after Marazzi, 2016); h) Glass beads from Tarxien Cemetery (Trump, 2002); i) *Stufa Termale* di San Calogero (tholos) at Lipari (Bernabò Brea et al., 1990).

without any pre-defined spatial organization plan. The second phase in the isthmus area incorporated the structures of the previous one in an innovative architectural framework with two large building based on square modules arranged around an open cobbled court (Complex A and B). Contemporaneous to the second phase is also the establishment of a new area of the settlement organized according to a plan with blocks comprising circular huts distinguished by a system of narrow streets. The necropolis presents three burial areas. The chamber tombs (Tomasello, 1995–1996), located on the northern rocky slopes of Magnisi facing the sea, are the largest group with over 300 examples estimated at the time of the earliest excavation. Around 50 vertical shaft graves (Orlando et al., 2018), are arranged in two clusters in the central and southern part of the peninsula. A small cemetery with 21 *enchytrismos* burials (Veca, 2014) was also adjacent to the central cluster of shaft graves.

Major evidence of interaction with Aegean people is concentrated in the coastal area comprised by Licata and Agrigento, or in the immediate hinterland of that area, with funerary (Monte San Vincenzo di Caldare at Aragona: Orsi, 1897, p. 8, 20; Mosso, 1907, coll. 573–610; Milena – Monte Campanella: De Miro, 1968; La Rosa, 1979) and domestic contexts (Madre Chiesa: Castellana, 2000; Milena – Serra del Palco: La Rosa & D'Agata, 1988). The major site in this district is represented by Cannatello, on Agrigento's coastline. Named after the popular seaside area where it is placed, Cannatello appears to be a fortified outpost comprising a series of buildings based on circular and rectangular modules arranged without any specific spatial plan in a circular area with a diameter of roughly 70 meters encompassed by a massive fortification line composed by two sequential walls. The site was identified for the first time in 1897 and explored a decade later (Mosso, 1907), with more regular excavations thorough the 80s and 90s (De Miro, 1991, 1999). The settlement, currently under study by a team of The Sapienza University of Rome, presents one large apsidal circular structure, surrounded by three smaller circular and three rectangular buildings, with residential and storage function. The site was active for the all duration of the Thapsos facies and up to the half of the 12th century BCE, with at least three main occupation phases: (Phase 1: ca. 14th century BC; Phase 2: ca. 13th century BC; Phase 3: ca. 12th century BC) (Levi et al., 2017).

The Aeolian Islands played a major role during Prehistory due to their strategic geographic location bridging Sicily with Italy (La Rosa, 2002). The islands of Lipari, Filicudi, Salina and Panarea seem to have taken the leadership with respect to interaction with the Aegean people. Major settlements for this period, all later destroyed by devastating fire events at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, are Lipari Castello (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1980), Milazzese cape of Panarea (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968) and Portella of Salina (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968; Martinelli, 2005) and Filicudi (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1991). The identification of a large dump yard area at Serro dei Cianfi of Salina could testify to the presence of another settlement on the islet (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 138–143).

Besides those three main districts, other isolated yet relevant domestic contexts are those of Monte San Paolillo of Catania (Tanasi, 2010a, 2015; Magro & Vacirca, 2017), Erbe Bianche di Campobello di Mazara (Ingoglia et al., 2006) and Selinunte (Cultraro & Marconi, 2017) in the territory of Trapani and the settlement of Faraglioni on the islet of Ustica (Spatafora, 2016).

With respect to the Maltese Isles, the two majors sites bearing the most significant evidence are the Neolithic megalithic temples of Borġ in-Nadur (Tanasi, 2018) and Tas-Silġ (Cazzella & Recchia, 2012), located along the Marsaxlokk Bay in southern Malta, both were reoccupied for residential purposes in this period. The only funerary context is represented by the cave site of Ghar Mirdum in western Malta (Tanasi, 2014).

3.2 Material Culture: Pottery

Examples of interactions between Aegean people and local communities can be traced in every facet of material culture production: pottery, non-precious and precious metals, coroplastics, objects in ivory, amber, precious stone and faience as well as domestic and funerary architecture.

About 100 examples of Mycenaean-type pottery, mostly dated between LH IIIA and LH IIIB, have been found at 14 different sites in Sicily. In the district of Siracusa, contexts of provenance are strictly funerary: the necropolises of Thapsos, Cozzo Monaco, Siracusa, Cozzo del Pantano, Matrensa, Majorana di Buscemi, and Tabbaccheddu di Florida. In the district of Agrigento they are instead predominantly domestic: Cannatello, Madre Chiesa, Milena Serra del Palco, Monte Campanella di Milena and Marina di Agrigento. Outside of the two main districts, a few further examples are attested at Monte San Paolillo di Catania, Erbe Bianche di Campobello di Mazara, Selinunte and Faraglioni di Ustica.

The repertoire of ceramic shapes found in those sites is rather large and reflects the most popular types in the Mycenaean production. Particularly popular are the stirrup jar, the three-handle jar, the alabastron, the kylix and the shallow cup. The relatively high amount of LH pottery recovered at Cannatello, which is essentially a settlement, initially led its principal investigator to label it a 'Mycenaean emporium' (De Miro, 1999a; 1999b). Similar terms, such as 'port of trade' have been used for Thapsos (Militello, 2004, 2005), where Mycenaean pottery come exclusively from the necropolis.

More numerically significant is the evidence offered for this period by the Aeolian Islands. At Lipari only, among a group of 318 Late Helladic ceramic forms, 87 are dated between LH IIIA and IIIB. A good quantity of material, from less certain stratigraphic contexts, comes from Salina – Portella and Salina – Serro dei Cianfi and at the village of the Milazzese cape at Panarea.

The contemporaneous presence of different classes of Aegean pottery at Thapsos and Cannatello could shed light on the role that they played in the interaction system. Cypriote type Base-Ring II juglets were found in tomb 7 and D of Thapsos and Cypriote type White Shaved juglets come also from tombs D and A1 at the same site. A further example of a Base-Ring II juglet is attested at Siracusa in the tomb by the Altar of Hieron II at Siracusa with LH IIIB type materials and another example of White Shaved juglet was possibly part of the Collezione dei padri Benedettini di Catania (Tanasi, 2010a). The context of provenance of such examples – Levantine, Cypriote or Aegean – has been at the center of a long debate (Voza, 1973; Vagnetti, 2001; Vianello, 2005) which ultimately seems to lean towards a Cypriote provenance (Alberti, 2008, 2015). However, it is currently hard to say whether they represent imports of local imitations as hypothesized (Karageorghis, 1995, 2002; D'Agata, 2000). In the Agrigento district, Cannatello offers evidence of a White Slip II fine ware and of the so called Pithos Ware, both traceable to Cypriote productions. Furthermore, a class of coarse ware stirrup jars with handles displaying incised Cypro-Minoan signs is also attested at the same site.

In the last decade, a large-scale campaign of archaeometric analyses has focused on the Mycenaean type pottery from Sicilian contexts with the aim of establishing their foreign or local origin (Jones et al., 2014). Most of the materials sampled, a statistically representative group, yielded a foreign provenance (Jones et al., 2014, pp. 222–234). Ceramics from Thapsos, Cozzo Monaco, Majorana di Buscemi, Madre Chiesa and Milena – Monte Campanella and Agrigento (Marina di Agrigento) resulted to be imported from the Peloponnese. The provenance of the Pithos Ware from Cannatello and Salina – Portella was confirmed to be from South Cyprus as well as the provenance of the Coarse Ware Stirrup Jars, which were identified to be from central Crete. One sample only, that of an amphora from Milena – Monte Campanella was interpreted as local and possibly produced in Calabria, and therefore belonging to the so called Italo-Mycenaean class, of more problematically considered as imported from West Crete (Jones et al., 2014, pp. 228, 266).

This almost complete lack of locally made Aegean pottery stands in sharp contrast to the situation that has been encountered in peninsular Italy and in Sardinia (Jones & Day, 1987; Jones et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2014, p. 453), considering the large popularity of the so called ceramic 'Aegean derivatives', including shape imitations of Mycenaean ceramic prototypes in local style and technology (Russell, 2017), also known as 'mixed products' (Jones et al., 2014). Such a phenomenon, primarily observable in the sites of the district of Siracusa and elsewhere, provocatively called 'Sicanian-Mycenaean pottery' (Tanasi, 2005a), represent a distinctive feature of the Thapsos culture, encompassing the imitation of a large variety of shapes which are not attested even among known imports (D'Agata, 2000). Such practice is also attested with quite a fortune for the shapes of Cypriote origin (Alberti, 2004, 2005, 2006). In a few cases documented at Thapsos, the imitation goes beyond the simple shape and entails also the decoration as testified by examples of the local reproduction of subjects of the Mycenaean Pictorial Style and Cypriote Pastoral style (Vagnetti, 2000–2001), which represents the apex of an emergent figurative decoration (D'Agata, 2000; Cultraro & Crispino, 2015). A part of the repertoire of inscribed signs and symbols occurring on the Aeolian pottery of the Milazzese phase are also contentiously attributed to Mycenaean origin (Bernabò Brea, 1952).

With respect to the Maltese Isles, the distribution of Aegean type pottery is rather limited but nonetheless very relevant. One fragment of a LH IIIB kylix comes from the domestic area of the reoccupied megalithic temple of Borġ in-Nadur and a fragment of a LH IIIB closed shapes was found at Tas-Silġ South. Recent archaeometric analyses via portable X-Ray Fluorescence Spectrometry demonstrated that those two examples were made with clays from a Maltese source, showing a pattern similar to that attested in Southern Italy and surprisingly not very popular in Sicily. These first two cases of 'Maltese-Mycenaean' pottery, indicate that the relationship with the Maltese people with the Mycenaean agents was not necessarily or always mediated by the indigenous communities of Sicily.

Table 3: Pottery of Mycenaean and Cypriote Origin in Middle Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Evidence	Bibliography
Thapsos	Funerary	LH IIIA–B pottery imported from Peloponnese (fig. 3a); Base-Ring II type and White Shaved type pottery (fig. 3c); Aegean derivatives (fig. 4a–c); local imitations of the Pictorial Style (fig. 4d)	Graziadio, 1997, pp. 683–684; Pelagatti & Voza, 1973; van Wijngaarden, 2002, pp. 231–236; Vianello, 2005, p. 179; Voza, 1973: pp. 36, 41, nn. 85–87, 118
Siracusa	Funerary	LH IIIA–B type pottery; Base-Ring II type	Voza, 1993–1994, p. 1289
Cozzo Monaco	Funerary	LH IIIA–B pottery imported from Peloponnese	Orsi, 1893, 1902; Tylour, 1958
Cozzo del Pantano	Funerary	LH IIIA–B type pottery (fig. 3b)	Orsi, 1893; Tanasi, 2005b; Tanasi & Trapani, 2019
Matrensa	Funerary	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Tanasi & Trapani, 2019
Majorana di Buscemi	Funerary	LH IIIA–B pottery imported from Peloponnese	Gentili, 1951b; Tylour, 1958
Tabbaccheddu di Floridia	Funerary	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Orsi, 1909; Tylour, 1958
Monte Campanella di Milena	Funerary	LH IIIB pottery imported from Peloponnese and Italo-Mycenaean pottery (?) or imported from Crete (?)	La Rosa, 1988
Marina di Agrigento	Funerary?	LH IIIA–B pottery imported from Peloponnese	Tylour, 1958
Cannatello	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery imported from Peloponnese; White Slip II ware and other Levanto-Mycenaean pottery (fig. 3d–e); Pithos Ware type imported from Cyprus (fig. 3g); Stirrup Jars with Cypro-Minoan signs imported from Crete (fig. 3f)	Alberti, 2008; Day & Joyner, 2005; De Miro, 1995, 1999; Graziadio & Guglielmino, 2011, p. 317; Levi et al., 2017; Vagnetti, 2001
Madre Chiesa	Domestic	LH IIIA–B pottery imported from Peloponnese	Castellana, 2000, pp. 70–74
Milena Serra del Palco	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery	D'Agata, 2000, p. 63; Jones et al., 2014, pp. 45–50
Monte San Paolillo	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Magro & Vacirca, 2017; Tanasi, 2010a
Erbe Bianche di Campobello di Mazara	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Ingoglia et al., 2012, pp. 864–865
Selinunte	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Cultraro & Marconi, 2017
Faraglioni di Ustica	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery	Ross Holloway & Lukesh, 1995, p. 57
Lipari	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery imported from Peloponnese (fig. 3 i)	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Tylour, 1958; Tylour, 1980; van Wijngaarden, 2002, pp. 207–227
Panarea	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery (fig. 3h)	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Tylour, 1980
Salina	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery; Pithos Ware	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 186–192; Tylour, 1980
Filicudi	Domestic	LH IIIA–B type pottery (fig. 3j–k)	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1991
Borg in-Nadur temple	Domestic	LH IIIB pottery locally produced (fig. 3l)	Evans, 1953, p. 72; Pirone & Tykot, 2017; Tanasi, 2011a, pp. 139–142
Tas Silġ South	Domestic	LH IIIB pottery locally produced (fig. 3 m)	Sagona, 2011, p. 410; Tanasi et al., in press

Figure 3: a) Late Helladic IIIA–B pottery from Thapsos (Tanasi, 2009); b) Late Helladic IIIA2 kylix from tomb. 7 of Cozzo del Pantano (Tanasi & Trapani, 2019); c) Base Ring juglet and White Shaved juglet of Cypriote type from tomb D. of Thapsos (Tanasi, 2009); d) Levanto-Mycenaean bowls from Cannatello (Graziadio & Gugliemino, 2011); e) White Slip II ware from Cannatello (Alberti, 2008); f) Handles displaying incised Cypro-Minoan signs from Cannatello (Day & Joyner, 2005); g) Pithos ware from Cannatello (Alberti, 2008); h) Late Helladic III A–B pottery from Hut no. 16 Punta Milazzese settlement at Panarea (after Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968); i) Late Helladic IIIB–C pottery from Lipari (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1980); j) Late Helladic IIIA–B pottery from Hut no. 6 of Capo Graziano settlement at Filicudi (after Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1991); k) Late Helladic IIIA–B stirrup jar from offshore Filicudi (after Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1991); l) Late Helladic III B kylix from Borg in-Nadur temple (Tanasi, 2018); m) Late Helladic IIIB body sherd from Tas-Silg south (Tanasi, 2018).

Figure 4: **a)** Thapsos type spouted jug and bowl of Aegean origin (D'Agata, 2000); **b)** Thapsos type pyxis and squat bowl of Aegean origin (Alberti, 2004); **c)** Thapsos pottery shapes imitating Cypriote prototypes (Alberti, 2005); **d)** Local imitation of Mycenaean Pictorial Style on Thapsos pottery (Vagnetti, 2000–2001); **e)** Plan of Thapsos settlement (Tomasello, 2004); **f)** Plan of Faraglioni di Ustica settlement (Spatafora, 2016); **g)** Plan of the tholos tomb complex at Gazzi di Messina (Bonfiglio et al., 2019); **h)** Tholos tomb no. 4 from Cozzo Monaco on the Molinello river (Tomasello, 1995–1996).

Table 4: Metals Artefacts of Mycenaean origin in Middle Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Evidence	Bibliography
Thapsos	Domestic	Oxhide ingot (fig. 5a)	Lo Schiavo et al., 2009
Cannatello	Domestic	Oxhide ingot	Lo Schiavo et al., 2009
Lipari	Domestic	Oxhide ingot (fig. 5b)	Lo Schiavo et al., 2009
Ognina	Domestic	Oxhide ingot	Alberti, 2008; Bernabò Brea, 1966, pp. 44–45
Faraglioni di Ustica	Domestic	Oxhide ingot	Ross Holloway & Lukesch, 2001, pp. 20–21
Cefalù (offshore)	Shipwreck	Oxhide ingot (fig. 5c)	Purpura, 1975
Għar Mirdum	Religious/Funerary	Oxhide ingot (fig. 5d)	Tanasi et al., 2019
Monte San Vincenzo di Caldare	Funerary	Metal basins (fig. 5k)	Lo Schiavo et al., 1985, pp. 30–35; Tanasi, 2010b; Vagnetti, 1968, pp. 129–138
Monte Campanella di Milena	Funerary	Metal basins (fig. 5j)	La Rosa, 2000; Lo Schiavo et al., 1985, pp. 30–35; Tanasi, 2010b; Vagnetti, 1968, pp. 129–138
Thapsos (t. 28)	Funerary	Metal basin (fig. 5i)	Tanasi, 2010b
Thapsos (t. 57)	Funerary	Metal basin	Tanasi, 2010b
Plemmirio (t. 48)	Funerary	Metal vessel	Tanasi, 2010b
Matrensa (t. 6)	Funerary	Metal vessel	Tanasi, 2010b
Borġ in-Nadur temple	Funerary	Metal vessels (fig. 5h)	Tanasi, 2010b
Għar Mirdum	Funerary	Metal vessel	Tanasi, 2010b
Thapsos (t. 48)	Funerary	Bronze discoid weights	Bergonzi, 1985, p. 377
Thapsos (14)	Funerary	Bronze discoid weight (fig. 5u)	Orsi, 1895, col. 127
Thapsos (t.48)	Funerary	Iron rods	Orsi, 1895, col. 127
Thapsos (t. D)	Funerary	Golden jewelry (fig. 5r)	Pelagatti & Voza, 1973
Borġ in-Nadur temple	Domestic	Golden jewelry (fig. 5t)	Murray, 1929, p. 15

3.3 Material Culture: Non-precious and Precious Metals

The emergence of metallurgy during Middle Bronze Age Sicily was definitely triggered by interaction with Aegean people, who for the first time introduced to the island raw materials as attested by the remarkable presence of the typical Mycenaean oxhide copper ingots (Sabatini, 2016).

Fragments of copper oxhide ingots were found at the residential quarter of Thapsos, at Cannatello, in a large metal hoard at the multiphase Lipari settlement on the Castello hill, at Ognina and Faraglioni di Ustica. The discovery of a portion of a copper ingot, cut in antiquity in a truncated conical shape of 27 kg found in association with fragments of sulfur ingots from an underwater context off the coast of Cefalù (Palermo), is also extremely interesting.

A significant class of materials is represented by the metal basins documented at Monte San Vincenzo di Caldare and Monte Campanella di Milena, in western Sicily. On the eastern coast, similar examples are present at the Thapsos cemetery and smaller vessels also occur at Plemmirio and Matrensa cemeteries. Fragmentary metal vessels made of copper and lead are also attested in Malta at the temple of Borġ in-Nadur.

A more contentious class of artefacts is represented by bronze swords, appearing in Sicily for the first time during this period. Traditionally considered of Mycenaean origin, they were later interpreted as belonging to the Italian group of Pertosa and then recently defined as an independent ‘Thapsos type’ (Bettelli, 2006; Veca, 2019). One example in particular, the long sword from tomb 10 of Plemmirio, has been interpreted as an import. All the others, mostly coming

from sites in the districts of Siracusa and Agrigento, were classified as local products influenced by Cypriote or Aegean metalworking (Militello, 2004; Tanasi, 2010b; Veca, 2019).

The necropolis of Thapsos also offers the rather puzzling evidence of bronze disks, found in tomb 14 and 48 interpreted as possible Aegean units of measure for weight (Bergonzi, 1985, p. 377, app. 19.6, n. 9, 1996, p. 1532) and square section iron rods, again from tomb 48, which are definitely foreign imports.

With respect to precious metals, the only evidence for this period, is offered by the golden jewelry elements found in tomb D of Thapsos and the gold-plated earrings from Borg in-Nadur temple at Malta.

3.4 Material Culture: Coroplastics and Exotic Items

Regarding terracotta figurines, a female Mycenaean idol was found in Hut γ III at Lipari, while examples of Mycenaean influence on local production has been suggested for the production of miniature furniture elements attested at the Thapsos necropolis (Tanasi, 2004b).

Numerous artefacts, made of elephant's ivory were attested in funerary contexts such as the ivory combs at Plemmirio, Marcita di Castelvetro, Torre Donzelle and other smaller elements at Cozzo del Pantano and in domestic contexts, such as the undecorated example of an ivory comb, still unpublished, coming from the north-central area of the Thapsos settlement. Noteworthy is the discovery, largely underestimated in the literature, of an elephant's tusk in the area of the possible location for the settlement of Plemmirio.

Amber, glass and semi-precious stone beads and elements of jewels are largely attested in the territory of Siracusa at the Plemmirio and Thapsos cemeteries, but also at Monte San Paolillo and at the Portella settlement on the island of Salina. Noteworthy too are two examples of seals in semi-precious stones, attested at Siracusa and Lipari.

In the Maltese archipelago, the discovery of an agate crescent is extremely remarkable, found in a disturbed context in the southern sector of the Tas-Silġ sanctuary with a Middle Babylonian cuneiform inscription dated to 1330–1230 BCE. Although it is possible that the artefacts was imported to Malta much later during the centuries of Phoenician occupation, the hypothesis that it could have been brought to Malta in this period by Cypriote or Levantine agents cannot be fully excluded.

3.5 Material Culture: Domestic and Funerary Architecture

Evidence of a different nature is offered by the domestic and funerary architecture, where the distinction between an external input and a local re-elaboration cannot be simply ruled out using archaeometry.

The new emergence of proto-urban master plans with blocks of houses, grid of streets and designated public areas observable at Faraglioni di Ustica and Thapsos, in discontinuity with the previous tradition, have been interpreted as a possible outcome of the interaction with Aegean people. At the latter site, the construction of peculiar buildings (Complesso A and B), with complex plans and series of rectangular rooms articulated around a central cobbled courtyard and advance masonry techniques and metrological solutions, has suggested the application of an architectural blueprint of Mycenaean type if not the agency of 'Mycenaean architects'.

Incontrovertible evidence of Aegean influence and possible indicators of a more permanent presence of Aegean people would be the built tholos tombs discovered along the Gazzi stream south of the Messina harbour, showing metrological architectural features attributed to skilled Mycenaean builders.

Local re-interpretation of the built tholos tombs is demonstrated instead by the tholoid chamber tomb, widespread in the Siracusa and Agrigento district and showing an array of technical features interpreted as the result of the imitation of Aegean models, allegedly facilitated by the work of foreign "experts" guiding local workers (Militello, 2004). Although, according to some scholars, its origin could still be derived from the contamination of traditional domestic architecture on tomb models (Albanese Procelli, 2003; Vianello, 2005; Nicoletti & Tusa, 2012).

No influences of Mycenaean origin have been identified so far on the Maltese domestic or funerary architecture.

Figure 5: a) Ox hide ingot from Thapsos (Lo Schiavo et al., 2009); b) Ox hide ingot from Lipari hoard (Lo Schiavo et al., 2009); c) Ingot from off shore Cefalù (Purpura, 1975); d) Copper ingot from Ghar Mirdum (Tanasi et al., 2019); h) Fragment of bronze and lead vessels from Borg in-Nadur temple (Tanasi et al., 2019); i) Metal basin from tomb 57 of Thapsos (Tanasi, 2010b); j) Metal basin from Tholos B of Monte Campanella di Milena (Tanasi, 2010b); k) Metal basins from Monte San Vincenzo di Caldare (Tanasi, 2010b); l) Glass beads necklace from tomb 48 of Plemmirio (Voza, 1985); m) Amber beads jewel from tomb D of Thapsos (after Voza, 1985); n) Ivory comb from tomb. 48 of Plemmirio (after Voza, 1985); o) Semi-precious stone necklace from Hut F of Portella di Salina (Martinelli, 2005); p) Late Helladic IIIA Proto-phi terracotta idol from Lipari (after Voza, 1985); q) Amber spacer beads from tomb 10 of Plemmirio (Cornaggia Castiglioni & Calegari, 1978); r) Golden jewel elements from tomb D of Thapsos (Militello, 2004); s) Agate crescent from Tas-Silġ South (Mayer, 2012); t) Bronze earrings with golden coating from Borg in-Nadur temple (Tanasi, 2018); u) Bronze disks from tomb 14 of Thapsos (Orsi, 1895).

Table 5: Terracotta and Luxury Artefacts of Mycenaean Origin in Middle Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Evidence	Bibliography
Lipari (Hut γ III)	Domestic	Proto-phi type 1 terracotta idol (fig. 5p)	Tirloni, 2015
Plemmirio (t. 48)	Funerary	Ivory comb (fig. 5n)	Albanese Procelli & Chilardi, 2005; Genovese, 2015
Marcita di Castelvetro (t. C)	Funerary	Ivory comb	Tusa, 1986, pp. 133–140, 1997, pp. 52–55
Torre Donzelle (t. C)	Funerary	Ivory comb	Conte & Tusa, 2016, pp. 721–722
Thapsos (north-central district)	Domestic	Ivory comb	Genovese, 2015
Cozzo del Pantano (t. 23)	Funerary	Ivory applique & bead	Albanese Procelli & Chilardi, 2005; Veca, 2019
Plemmirio (settlement area?)	Domestic	Ivory tusk	Lazzarini et al., 1965
Plemmirio (t. 10)	Funerary	Amber spacers (fig. 5q)	Cornaggia Castiglioni & Calegari, 1978; Cultraro, 2007a
Plemmirio (t. 11)	Funerary	Amber beads	Cultraro, 2007a
Plemmirio (t. 48)	Funerary	Necklace with amber, glass, jasper, and alabaster beads (fig. 5l)	Harding, 1974; Genovese, 2015; Matarese et al., 2015
Plemmirio (t. 49)	Funerary	Amber beads	Harding, 1974; Genovese, 2015
Plemmirio (t. 53)	Funerary	Amber beads	Harding, 1974; Genovese, 2015
Thapsos (t. D)	Funerary	Necklace and jewel elements with with amber, steatite and glass beads (fig. 5m)	Orsi, 1895; Matarese et al., 2015; Pelagatti & Voza, 1973: nn. 105–106
Thapsos (t. 61)	Funerary	Amber beads	Orsi, 1895; Pelagatti & Voza, 1973: nn. 105–106
Monte San Paolillo (Hut 1)	Domestic	Amber bead	Ciliberto & Manuella, 2010; Tanasi 2010a
Thapsos (t. 29)	Funerary	Serpentine bead	Matarese et al., 2015
Thapsos (T. A1)	Funerary	Steatite and glass beads	Matarese et al., 2015
Portella (Hut F) necklace	Domestic	Necklace with amber, carnelian and rock crystal beads (fig. 5o)	Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1968, pp. 163–167; Matarese et al., 2015
Għar Mirdum	Religious/Funerary	Glass bead	Tanasi, 2014
Siracusa (tomb by the Altar of Hieron II)	Funerary	Steatite seal	Cripino, in press; Tusa, 2000;
Lipari (?)	Unknown	LH II–IIIA Jasper seal	Cucuzza, 2006
Tas Silġ South	Domestic	Agate crescent with cuneiform inscription (fig. 5s)	Cazzella et al., 2011; Mayer, 2012

Table 6: Architectural elements of Mycenaean Origin in Middle Bronze Age Sicily.

Site	Context	Artefacts	Bibliography
Thapsos	Domestic	Proto-urban master plan (fig. 4e)	Doonan, 2001; Tomasello, 1996, 2004
Thapsos	Domestic	Aegean blueprint for buildings (Complesso A and B) (fig. 4e)	Militello, 2004; Tomasello, 1996, 2004
Faraglioni di Ustica	Domestic	Proto-urban master plan (fig. 4f)	Doonan, 2001
Gazzi	Funerary	Built tholos tomb (fig. 4g)	Bonfiglio et al., 2019; Tigano, 2012
Siracusa district (Thapsos, Cozzo del Pantano Cozzo Monaco)	Funerary	Tholoid chamber tombs (fig. 4h)	Militello, 2004; Tomasello, 1995–1996, 2004
Agrigento district (Milena)	Funerary	Tholoid chamber tombs	Militello, 2004

4 LH IIIC: A New Model of Contact

The collapse of the palatial system in Greece definitely had an impact with respect to the interaction between Sicily and Aegean, yet at the same time it marks an interruption in the relationship, while the Maltese Isles at least do not seem to participate any longer in the exchange system.

4.1 Sites

With respect to Sicily, at the turn between the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the geographic dimensions of the interactions appear to have changed drastically. The vast majority of the sites relevant for the previous period fall into abandonment, especially those located by the coasts. While Thapsos is certainly abandoned (Alberti, 2007), Cannatello undergoes its third occupation phase, but without providing any new evidence of contacts with the Aegean world. In fact, some Aegean type materials related to this period found there could have introduced from Sardinia (Levi et al., 2017).

The sites offering the most significant evidence are upland rock cut necropolises located in south-eastern Sicily, in a range of 40–70 km comprising the territories of Siracusa, Catania and Gela. Pantalica (Siracusa), in the high valley of the Anapo river, comprises a vast multiphase necropolis of about 3,700 chamber tombs and a major residential building, the so called *anaktoron*, set on the top of a massive plateau (Leighton & Albanese Procelli, 2019). The tombs in the Northern and North-Western sectors of the necropolis are dated to the local Late Bronze Age, while the others are related to later phases. Explored between 1895 and 1910 and subsequently in the 1960s, it names the main culture for this period (North Pantalica). Montagna di Caltagirone (Catania) with its 1,500 chamber tombs and the quality of the assemblages of artefacts retrieved is the second most relevant funerary site for this period (Tanasi, 2006). Monte Dessucri (Gela), is a vast site comprising a necropolis of at least 4,000 chamber tombs and a settlement set on the hill of Monte Maio. When it was first explored in 1910, it is now the only site of this period that has been regularly excavated in recent decades (Panvini, 2019; Nicoletti & Panvini, 2019). All three sites show a long uninterrupted occupation from the middle of the 13th century BCE to at least the beginning of the 8th century BCE.

Outside of Sicily, the evidence offered by the Aeolian Islands is still very remarkable, with a major role now taken by the settlement of Lipari Castello, which in this period shows new strong cultural nuances derived from the Italian peninsula, which contribute to the emergence of the Ausonian I culture, contemporaneous to North Pantalica (Bietti Sestieri, 2013).

4.2 Material Culture: Pottery

With respect to pottery, in this period Mycenaean type pottery is limited to a few examples. No imports at all are attested in Sicily, while LH IIIC materials are still present at the settlement of the Lipari Castello, in Ausonian I contexts. However, their distribution and the quantity are drastically different than before, with pottery fragments exclusively concentrated in huts Beta X and Beta IV.

Locally made Mycenaean pottery is instead documented at Pantalica with three examples, a jug and two amphorae, identified just on the basis of cogent stylistic and technical parallels with LH IIIC and Sub-Mycenaean prototypes. Another example, rather contentious though, would be a cup of Late Cypriote III type found in the cave site of Capreria at Sant'Angelo Muxaro (Agrigento).

In this period the production of 'Aegean derivatives' further develops, with six new Mycenaean ceramic prototypes locally produced for the first time with the application of the potter's wheel and of a and of the red burnished slip treatment of surfaces, but features possibly related to a new level of interaction with Aegean people (Tanasi, 2004a, 2005). Such production also entails, for the first time, the imitation of ultra-specialized, shapes such as and the askos (Furumark Shape 335) (Tanasi, 2005a) and the strainer spouted jug (Furumark Shape 155), the Aegean-Levantine origin of which is undisputable (Leighton, 1981).

Rather remarkable is the presence at Malta of several local examples of strainer spouted jug at the settlement of Bahrija, although it is not currently possible to determine the dynamics by which this new shape entered the local pottery repertoire, either through direct contact with Mycenaean agents or through mediation of Sicilian people.

Table 7: Pottery of Mycenaean and Cypriote Origin in Late Bronze Age Sicily.

Site	Context	Artefacts	Bibliography
Pantalica (t. 133N, Lo Curzio, 8NW)	Funerary	Italo-Mycenaean pottery; Aegean derivatives (fig. 6b–c, f)	Orsi, 1889, p. 174, 1899, pp. 50–51; Tanasi, 2005a, p. 565, 2009a
Capreria	Funerary	LC III type pottery (fig. 6d)	Castellana, 2000
Lipari	Domestic	LH IIIC pottery imported from Peloponnese (fig. 6a)	Jones et al., 2014; van Wijngaarden, 2002
Bahrija	Domestic	Aegean derivatives	Peet, 1910

Table 8: Metals Artefacts of Mycenaean Origin in Middle Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Artefacts	Bibliography
Pantalica (t. 8N, 48N)	Funerary	Mycenaean type bronze duck-head hilted dagger; Sandars type F Mycenaean type bronze sword (fig. 7c)	Tanasi, 2004a, p. 342
Pantalica (t. 3N, 37N, 23NW, 140N, 173 SW)	Funerary	Mycenaean type bronze mirrors (fig. 7b)	Tanasi, 2004a, p. 342
Capreria	Funerary	Metal basins (fig. 7a)	Castellana, 2000
Unknown	Museum of Palermo's collection	TC III type bronze ring	Cucuzza, 2008
Pantalica	Funerary	Golden signet rings (fig. 7d)	Tanasi, 2004a
Montagna di Caltagirone	Funerary	Golden signet rings (fig. 7e); simple ring; beads; sheet; dagger rivet	Tanasi, 2004a, 2006
Monte Dessucri	Funerary	Golden signet rings, silver dagger with golden rivet	Panvini, 2019, p. 188; Tanasi, 2004a
Anguilla di Ribera	Funerary	Golden pin	Alongi & Gulli, 2008, pp. 123–125
Monte Campanella	Funerary	Simple golden rings	Militello, 1991

4.3 Material Culture: Non-precious and Precious Metals

As opposed to the paucity of ceramic evidence, more significant is the quantity and variety of non-precious and precious metal items of Mycenaean type occurring in main sites of eastern and western Sicily.

The production of Thapsos swords continued unchanged (Bettelli, 2006), alongside some new shapes of daggers and swords that clearly recall Mycenaean models attested at the necropolis of Pantalica, where large tanged and tangless bronze mirrors appear for the first time. More controversial is the interpretation of the sudden appearance and distribution of the bronze plain violin-bow fibula in the burials of Pantalica, Montagna di Caltagirone and Monte Dessucri. Although this type already occurs in Mycenaean contexts of the end of the LH IIIB, such as tomb 61 of the necropolis of Mycenae, a possible Italian origin for this class cannot be excluded (Tanasi, 2004a, p. 343). Examples of metals basins are still attested from the funerary context of Capreria of Sant'Angelo Muxaro, in the territory of Agrigento. This continuation of the 'Cypriote input' seems to also be supported by the identification of a Late Cypriote IIIC type bronze ring from an unknown context in the collection of the Museum of Palermo.

The presence of items made in gold is now much higher, including such items as signet rings, attested in three major sites of Pantalica, Montagna di Caltagirone and Monte Dessucri. Simple rings, jewelry items, and small garment implements are also well documented. A novelty is the presence of silver jewels and exotic items, such as the miniature

Figure 6: **a)** Late Helladic IIIB-Pottery from Lipari (Voza, 1985); **b)** Late Helladic IIIC type juglet from tomb 133 North of Pantalica (Tanasi, 2009); **c)** Sub-Mycenaean type amphora from Lo Curzio tomb at Pantalica (Tanasi 2009); **d)** Bowl of Late Cypriote III type from Capreria (Castellana, 2000); **e)** Terracotta model of a pair of horns inspired by Late Minoan prototypes from the territory of Catania (La Rosa et al., 2002); **f)** Shapes from the North Pantalica pottery repertoire (left: amphora, strainer spouted jug, hydria, askos) and their Aegean models (on the right) (Tanasi, 2005a).

Figure 7: a) Metal basins from Capreria (Tanasi, 2010b); b) Bronze mirror from tomb 37 North of Pantalica (Tanasi, 2004a); c) Dagger with duck-head shaped metal and ivory hilt and miniature sword of Sandars type F from Pantalica (Tanasi, 2004a); d) Golden signet rings from Pantalica (Tanasi, 2004a); e) Golden signet rings from Montagna di Caltagirone (Tanasi, 2008); f) Multi-phased plan of the Anaktoron of Pantalica (Tanasi, 2004a); g) Tholoid chamber tomb 8 from Castelluccio Group at Montagna di Caltagirone (Tanasi, 2008).

Table 9: Terracotta and Luxury Artefacts of Mycenaean Origin in Late Bronze Age Sicily and Malta.

Site	Context	Artefacts	Bibliography
Catania?	Funerary?	Terracotta model of a pair of horns (fig. 6e)	La Rosa et al., 2002, pp. 247–53
Pantalica (t. 3N; 68N)	Funerary	Ivory hilt of a mirror; duck-head ivory hilt of a miniature sword	Albanese Procelli & Chilardi, 2005
Pantalica (t. 74N)	Funerary	Glass star-shaped bead	Orsi, 1899

silver dagger with a golden rivet and ivory hilt from Monte Dessucri, which makes a pair with another miniature bronze example with golden rivets. Both should be interpreted as ceremonial and symbolic luxury goods.

4.4 Material Culture: Exotic Items

In the very poor record of coroplastic production of this period, the only noteworthy example is represented by a terracotta model of a pair of horns from a private collection interpreted as inspired by Late Minoan prototypes but definitely made with clay sources in the territories of Catania as ascertained by chemical analyses (La Rosa et al., 2002, pp. 247–53). Definitely resulting from the direct interaction with Aegean people is the presence of two ivory objects in the tombs of the North Pantalica phase at Pantalica, one related to a bronze tangless mirror and the other, a duck-head hilt belonging to a small sword comparable with the above mentioned bronze example. In sharp contrast with the previous period, during the North Pantalica phase there is no evidence of circulation of amber artifacts, a clear indication that the collapse of the Mycenaean palace economy at the end of the 13th century BCE coincided with the end of the supply to Sicily. With respect to faience, just one controversial case is documented at Pantalica.

4.5 Material Culture: Domestic and Funerary Architecture

The data on spatial organizations of settlements and domestic architectural features, although partial and limited to few sites of central and western Sicily, seems to mark a return to traditional practices with circular and sub-circular huts organized in clusters without any zoning masterplan, as for the cases of Sabucina and Mokarta (Doonan, 2001). The only exception is represented by a building not strictly interpreted as residential, discovered at Pantalica and named *anaktoron* (the palace of the prince), under the assumption that its peculiar features were an indication of a higher authority operating in it. Built in megalithic masonry, it comprises eight large rooms, one of which alone (Room A) has a surface area of 68 m². Metrological studies ascertained that its design was based on the adoption of a standard unit of measurement, 30,57 cm. Such features together with the peculiar masonry were considered to interpret it as in relation with the Middle Bronze Complexes A and B of Thapsos and to consider it as a local example of ‘Mycenaean architecture’ (Tomasello, 1996, 2004; Tanasi, 2004a). The *anaktoron* of Pantalica has been recently subject to new thorough investigations and the published point to its clear prehistoric chronology (Borgna, 2012; Militello, 2017; Militello & Zebrowska, 2017; Castagnino Berlinghieri & Militello, 2019; Tomasello, 2019). Its reoccupation in the Medieval period has been also reassessed (Arcifa, 2019) rejecting the hypotheses of the building being of Medieval chronology (Messina, 1993, Leighton, 2019).

With respect to funerary architecture, the phenomenon of the excavation of tholoid chamber tombs continues without major changes. Excellent examples of tholoid chamber tombs with grandiose dimensional scale and refined architectural details can now be found at Montagna di Caltagirone and in the territory of Ragusa, but surprisingly not at Pantalica. More contentious are the continuation in the construction of tombs with circular plan and ogival profile described as tholoi and distributed in the territory of Catania (La Rosa, 2007), and the emergence of pluricellular chamber tombs with a large number of internal chambers arranged in multiple levels that has been also interpreted as a possible Aegean derivation (Tanasi, 2011b).

Table 10: Architectural Elements of Mycenaean Origin in Late Bronze Age Sicily.

Site	Context	Artefacts	Bibliography
Pantalica	Domestic	Anaktoron (fig. 7f)	Bernabò Brea, 1990; Tanasi, 2004a; Tomasello, 1996, 2004
Montagna di Caltagirone	Funerary	Tholoid chamber tombs (fig. 7g)	Tanasi, 2006
Ragusa territory	Funerary	Tholoid chamber tombs	Rizzzone et al., 2004

5 For a Long *Durée* History of the Relationship Between Sicily, the Aegean and the Levant

The presence of the variety of Aegean cultural elements in Italy, including certain imports, local imitations and influences, is still at the center of the debate among scholars invested in the interpretation of their significance in the grand scheme of the Mediterranean interrelations (Jung, 2005; Jung & Mehofer, 2013). Judging all the evidence gathered so far, it appears that the Maltese Archipelago played a minor role in the relationship with the Aegean and the Levant. The strong connection with Sicily, definitely framed in a model of permanent Maltese settlers in the island (Tanasi, 2011c), and the limited number of Aegean elements identified in the Archipelago suggests that the introduction of such elements mainly occurred through the mediation of Sicilian agents (Blakolmer, 2005; Tanasi, 2010c). Although, the presence in Malta of locally made Mycenaean pottery, absent in Sicily, opens to alternative perspectives, it seems more appropriate to defer such discussion to another venue and focus this paper on the role played by Sicily. The multi-vocal pool of interpretations about such roles can be summarized by the position of those scholars emphasizing an Aegean presence in order to convey the message of a strong Aegean interest towards Italy as harbinger of the future colonial era, and those downplaying it as a simple outcome of sporadic commercial exchange.

5.1 The Two Routes

Regarding the forms and patterns of interaction between Aegean people and indigenous communities of Sicily in the period preceding the formation of the Mycenaean palatial system, they can be translated to three different cases.

The large quantity and variety of classes of Aegean pottery at Monte Grande, where specialized production, extraction, and smelting of sulfur was in place informs us about a targeted interest by Aegean peoples towards that rare mineral ore, which could be applied to a variety of fields (La Rosa, 2005). It is hard to say whether a specific Aegean group was responsible for the introduction of all the different pottery classes or if there were multiple competing groups at play. Of interest is the long duration of the contact with the Monte Grande area and the presence of the Matt Painted Ware of Levantine type and the Canaanite storage jars that may suggest the involvement of Cypro-Levantine agents (Marazzi, 2016).

The concentration and good distribution of Aegean pottery in the Aeolian Archipelago shows that the islands were all directly involved in contacts with foreign peoples and the isolated presence of LM I–II pottery alongside LH I–II/IIIA1 indicates either a plurality of Aegean agents or the capacity of those Aegean agents to re-distribute goods from various geographic locations. The strategic position of the Archipelago, an ideal stopping station for any routes directed towards the Tyrrhenian coasts, made the islands over time an ideal partner for everyone doing business there.

The rest of Sicily does not offer any evidence of Aegean pottery, but several examples of amber, glass and semi-precious stone beads alongside metal items of clear imported origin, which cannot be explained in the framework of a commercial interaction but more as example of gift-exchange. Furthermore, the limited number of objects could be the result of a very low number of contacts. Hard to say where those contacts took place and what drove the foreign players to them

Figure 8: Outline of the main east-west maritime routes between 17th and 15th century BCE (after Marazzi, 2016).

Finally, the evidence from Mursia, a remote island about 153 km south of Sicily, is very interesting. Here the same luxury jewelry items, even in silver and gold, are accompanied by clear evidence of bronze working, with Aegean type weights. An evidence this different from Monte Grande and the Aeolian Archipelago, not just for the absence of LH I–II pottery but for the involvement of foreign metalworkers in the interaction. On the other hand, the presence of Matt Painted Ware of Levantine type and of Canaanite storage jars at Mursia draws a parallel with Monte Grande that cannot be ignored.

Through connecting the dots, the hypothesis suggested by M. Marazzi (2016) of two separate routes along which the Aegeans and Cypro-Levantine operated in their forays to the West finds further support (Fig. 8).

Cypro-Levantine agents would have operated along a North-African route, stopping regularly at Monte Grande and Mursia, and would be responsible for the introduction of the Canaanite storage jars and possibly of all the other foreign goods and cultural elements. The presence at Tarxien of luxury items similar to those found at Mursia and of a fragment of a sulfur ingot seems to suggest that Malta was part of this route and the three sites were part of the same network. On another note, the discovery of Canaanite storage jars at Vivara, shows the terminus of such route was in the lower Tyrrhenian coasts and that the network was even wider. On a parallel route, Aegean entrepreneurs, from the Peloponnese and Crete – through the Peloponnese – targeted directly the Ionian and lower Adriatic coasts of Italy and the lower Tyrrhenian coasts as well as through the strait of Messina, using the Aeolian archipelago as a main stopping station. This would explain well the multifaceted evidence described above.

5.2 Escalating Connections

The school of thought in favor of a major investment by Mycenaean people in Sicily is mainly represented by Italian scholars, who produced two decades of solid literature on this subject. In it, the wide spread circulation of foreign goods and their presence in local contexts as part of complex evolutionary social dynamics has been used to support the notion of Mycenaean people settling in local communities (Bietti Sestieri, 1988, p. 30; Vagnetti, 1993, p. 152; 1999, p. 194). The large scale and multifaceted phenomenon of the ceramic Aegean ‘derivatives’ and in a minor scale that of the Italo-Mycenaean pottery production, the extent of which is nowadays better known thanks to the growing contribution of archaeometry, have been used as compelling evidence of an intense interaction between Mycenaean and local people (Bettelli, 2002). The overall reappraisal of the elements of Mycenaean origin in the Sicilian Middle and Late Bronze Age, carried out by the group of Vincenzo La Rosa (Cultraro, 1988; Alberti, 2004; Tomasello, 2004; Tanasi, 2004a, 2005; Militello, 2005) suggested the concept of ‘Mycenaeanization’, as an acculturation phenomenon where the local people absorbed over time elements of Mycenaean material culture to which they were massively exposed (La Rosa, 2004). This further supports the theory of an intensive, systematic contact and a semi-permanent presence. The ‘center-periphery’ model has also been used to characterize the interaction of Mycenaean people with Sicilian communities, whereas elements of the center would have permanently resided in the periphery to guarantee the process (D’Agata, 2000). The mainstream idea common in this literature is that Mycenaean imports triggered the acceleration towards a non-egalitarian society in local contexts at the transition between the Middle and Late Bronze Age. In this frame, local imitations and adoption of foreign cultural traits were subsequent phenomena of this process by which indigenous elites tried to distinguish themselves affirming a superior rank displayed by possession of exotic or exotic-like artefacts and adoption of foreign practices (La Rosa, 2000). At the same time, contact with foreigners stimulated the self-awareness of the local people of being part of the cultural and ethnic group, a phenomenon described by Vincenzo La Rosa as ‘ethnogenesis’ for the specific case of Sicily (La Rosa, 1999). In such a narrative, the role of the indigenous people has been often defined as passive, according to traditional views of acculturation. This perspective has been at times criticized for being too ‘hellenocentric’ and for not having put the emphasis on the role of the indigenous component in the interaction and in the production of the original cultural outcomes, a trend that more recently has changed towards the recognition of its crucial importance especially for the creation of certain original local outcomes in architecture (Cultraro, 2010; Militello & Zebrowska, 2017; Militello, 2018).

Opposed to the ‘Italian’ school of thought are scholars who focused on the quantitative aspects of the Mycenaean presence in Italy. In her essay *The Mycenaean in Italy: A Minimalist Position*, Emma Blake (2008), reassess the significance of the Mycenaean pottery in Italy, discussing quantity and distribution over the long lifespan covering the second half of the second millennium BC. Blake (2008) compared such ‘limited’ phenomenon with the large scale circulation of Mycenaean ceramics in the Eastern Mediterranean. According to the authors, the available data do not support an ‘intensive’ or ‘systematic’ trade with Italy. This assumption undermines any hypothesis of forms of permanent presence but leaves rooms for a seasonal and short-term presence strictly connected with pottery production. The authors also downplay the role that the interaction with Mycenaean agents may have played in triggering socio-political changes in the local communities, pointing to an increase of interrelations among the communities themselves as responsible for a competitive ‘race’ for more developed social structures. However, Blake’s analysis does not take into consideration the evidence offered by the other classes of materials and by the unquestionable Mycenaean influences on funerary and domestic architecture especially characterizing the Sicilian scenario. More recently, Russel (2017) focuses specifically on the Sicilian evidence, reappraising the overall group of Mycenaean cultural traits discussing the active role of the local communities as opposed to the traditional concept of ‘Mycenaeanization’ as acculturation process where the indigenous people are mere passive actors. The approach is once again quantitative and considers mostly pottery and metal items, emphasizing the limited number of examples and geographic distribution. The author spins significance of the data themselves, criticizing the way in which they were traditionally interpreted: “The arguments for a deep, penetrative Aegean influence on the island are based upon a remarkably small amount of data, much of which comprises subjective interpretations of influence, rather than unequivocal, empirical evidence of contact (Russell, 2017, p. 62)”. Tholoid chambers tombs and ‘anaktora’ are also discussed but the arguments for a Mycenaean origin or influence are dismissed without solid proof. Definitely significant is the discussion of local pottery imitating Mycenaean shapes in the Middle and Late Bronze Age, the so called ‘Aegean derivatives’, where he attributes a leading role to local people in selectively choosing certain aspects of Mycenaean pottery production and using them to give birth to a new creative

artistic expression more in line with local market demand. This is definitely an acceptable argument which does not go against any more intensive interaction between Mycenaean and indigenous people. Russell is also critical towards the traditional views about the circulation of Cypriote goods in the central Mediterranean (Russell & Knapp, 2017).

The current state of knowledge does not really allow us to shed light on such contentious matters to the extent of supporting one school of thought or the other, but to focus on certain aspects of some still open issues will definitely help us to better understand the essential features of the interaction between Mycenaean and indigenous people of Italy.

There are no doubts, in the light of the evidence for this period, that the relationship between Mycenaean and indigenous communities had become commercial in nature. One of the most puzzling question about the relationship with Italy is what were on the Mycenaean motivations for trade and exchange. The traditional explanation for Mycenaean presence in the Western Mediterranean was to seek metals (Cline, 1994), with central Italy and the Alps as possible providers through local intermediaries. However, the limited distribution of Mycenaean type goods in those areas and the lack of definitive proof does not allow us to embrace such a hypothesis. Sardinia and Iberia would have been other possible destinations, for which Sicily and the Aeolian archipelago would have served as ideal stopping stations, but the involvement of the Cypriotes in the exploitation of the Sardinian resources and the overall poor documentation of Mycenaean type goods in Spain does not fully support such a theory (Blake, 2008).

More interesting is the hypothesis that Mycenaean people were after goods which would not leave a clearly readable trace – if any trace at all – in the archaeological record, as for example inferred by Knapp (1991) for the Bronze Age trade of organic goods in the eastern Mediterranean.

With respect to Sicily, for the earliest periods, the evidence of Monte Grande strongly suggests a Mycenaean interest for Sicilian sulphur, one of the few mineral resources, together with rock salt and alum, with which the island is rich (Castellana, 1998). For the period corresponding to LH IIIA–IIIB, a provocative hypothesis about slave trade has been pitched (Bernabò Brea, 1985) but only weakly sustained by few anthroponymic correspondences in the linear B palatial archives (La Rosa, 2011). A further example of a possible mobility of people from Sicily eastward is given by the Thapsos-Pertosa sword found in the late 14th century shipwreck of Ulu Burun (Pulak, 1998; Graziadio, 2016), which turned out to be made with Cypriote copper and possibly interpreted as “produced in the east for some warrior with a migration background from the central Mediterranean travelling aboard the ship” (Jung et al., 2011, p. 242). Such evidence has also been used to support the hypothesis of indigenous mercenaries recruited by Mycenaean forces (Georganas, 1999). A hypothesis advanced with stronger arguments for a later period, between the last decades of the 13th at the beginning of the 12th century BC (Eder & Jung, 2005).

The recent extraordinary discovery of an Italian haplotype, identified analyzing mitochondrial DNA on a mandible of a pig, dated via C14 to 1350 BC ca. from Tiryns in Argolis, the first of this kind outside of Italy, proves that livestock was transferred alive from Italy to mainland Greece, in particular to a palatial context (Meiri et al., 2019). According to the authors of this revolutionary study, the fact that the bone specimen was from a cranial section suggests that pigs were traded alive, rather than their products, in which case cranial parts would be unlikely to be transported (Meiri et al., 2019, p. 101). Such a discovery shows the reality of a trade which leaves traces in the archaeological record that are very hard to identify, at least until now, and that very likely such trade was more situational than oriented towards specific goods (Militello, 2005).

The argument of the commercial agenda is intertwined with the problem of the involvement of the palatial authorities in the Western Mediterranean commercial operations and of the geographic provenance of the commercial agents. The Mycenaean structure of exchange is still open to debate, with scholars inferring a leading role of the palaces (Galaty & Parkinson, 2007) and others more in favor of private enterprise model (Manning & Huln, 2005, p. 284). While currently there is no evidence strong enough to support one of the two theses, some interesting arguments have been offered. The very limited distribution of Mycenaean terracotta figurines in Sicily and Southern Italy, largely attested in Argolis and in the eastern Mediterranean, has been used to hypothesize that they were connected with institutional forms of trade promoted by the palatial authorities and that their relative poor distribution in the western Mediterranean results from the major role played by independent Mycenaean entrepreneurs (Borgna, 2013–2014). According to Militello (2005), more emphasis should be given to the interplay between the palatial authority and the independent entrepreneurs: “Mycenaean palaces exerted their influence on trade with the West first of all creating a growing demand influencing the total volume of trade ... This demand exploited the decentralized maritime trading activity”. Such a model is completely driven by the law of demand where the socio-political role of the players fades into the background.

With respect to the geographic provenance of the goods and of the entrepreneurs dealing them, the former archaeometric analyses on pottery and typological comparisons point in the direction of the Peloponnese, especially the western side, and more rarely Crete, while for the latter the role of Cyprus becomes particularly important to discuss.

The Cypriote component of the Mycenaean presence in Sicily is an irrefutable fact testified by several factors. With respect to pottery, most notable is the circulation of classes such as Base-Ring II and White Shaved wares and the local imitations of Cypriote shapes of decorative motifs of the Cypriote Pastoral style at Thapsos and of White Slip II and Pithos wares at Cannatello – the latter chemically traced back to South Cyprus – where also examples of Cypro-Minoan signs were found. The evidence offered by the distribution of oxhide ingots and metal basins of clear Cypriote origin in the districts of Siracusa and Agrigento is also very important. Therefore, all indications support the suggestion that during the course of the 14th and 13th centuries BC, Cypriot traders participated, even if sporadically, in maritime trade with Sicily in addition to Aegean merchants distributing both Cypriot and Mycenaean products, as they did at the Levantine sites (Graziadio & Guglielmino, 2011; van Wijngaarden, 2002). From this perspective, such traders were basically the heirs of those Cypro-Levantine forerunners who, in the Early Bronze Age, opened the North African route towards Malta, southern Sicily (Agrigento area), Pantelleria and Vivara.

Consequential to the discussion on provenience is the role of those entrepreneurs when in Italian grounds. A permanent residence of Mycenaean people has been excluded for the cases of Thapsos and Cannatello, whereas the two sites have to be considered more as local commercial hubs than as Mycenaean outposts (Militello, 2005; Levi et al., 2017). However, the emergence of the Aegean ‘derivatives’, and possibly also of the Italo-Mycenaean pottery, and local metal productions of Mycenaean type and the strong presence of Aegean influences on funerary and domestic architecture suggest that not all of the Mycenaean people interacting with the indigenous communities were simple ‘unskilled’ mariners or professional commercial entrepreneurs, on the contrary it appears clear that at least among them there were potters, metalworkers, architects and masons (Militello, 2005). Those Aegean visitors or ‘seasonal settlers’ definitely revolved around Thapsos and Cannatello but possibly also elsewhere. In the light of the examples of built tholos tombs of Molini Gazzi and Lipari or the case of the tomb 7 of Cozzo del Pantano necropolis, where an isolated individual was buried with a Mycenaean kylix as its only grave good (Tanasi, 2005b), the hypothesis that some Mycenaean individual died and was buried in those sites cannot be fully excluded. Ultimately, the gender of those visitors cannot even be given for granted. In fact, if we consider the possible participation of women to the *chaîne opératoire* of Mycenaean pottery production, the hypothesis that Mycenaean male and female potters operating in Sicily were responsible for the production of locally made Mycenaean pottery and other examples of derivatives cannot be excluded (Hruby, 2011).

The last issue left to be addressed is that of value appreciation and function of the Mycenaean goods in the indigenous societies, on which G. J. van Wijngaarden focused his work of 2002 (van Wijngaarden, 2002, pp. 249–259). Mycenaean pottery was definitely an interesting novelty for the indigenous people and its limited availability and lack of accessibility made it even more desirable. It is difficult to say whether such desirability was due to its content, in the case of the closed shapes for example, or if it was due to its superior technical and stylistic quality. In the absence of appropriate chemical analyses, it is not possible to speculate on the contents, although the presence or large storage jars at Cannatello definitely demonstrate that the goods inside of the vessels were at the center of trade.

Focusing on Mycenaean pottery as artworks and status symbols, there are several variables which have to be considered. Not all the typical ceramic classes (matt-painted ware, coarse ware, dinner ware, storage jars, wheel made grey ware, Italo-Mycenaean) are attested everywhere or at the same time. That could depend on the type of contexts where they were found or may be due to the choice of the local people, who selected what foreigners offered according to their cultural background or socio-political agenda. The fact that different classes, characteristic of various areas of the Aegean occur in the same period or site in Sicily and Italy possibly testifies to the above-mentioned situational commerce model. The occurrence of open and closed shapes is not even homogenous, whereas for example the majority of shapes attested at Lipari are open as opposed to the majority of those found at Thapsos, which are closed. In this case, the explanation could be in the context itself, domestic at Lipari and funerary at Thapsos. Although at Cannatello the number of closed vessels is higher than the open ones. But the exclusive presence of storage jars at this site only in Sicily testifies to its special role. The lack of ceremonial shapes and of specialized pictorial decoration, known just through local imitations, is also an indication of a strong selective attitude of the local people towards the external inputs. Furthermore, while in certain sites, such pottery was more widely distributed, it appears clear that in general its concentration is linked with the presence of specific groups exploiting its symbolic significance to advance a social agenda.

5.3 The Reconfiguration of the Relationship

At the turn of the middle of the 13th century BC, with the collapse of the palatial system in Greece, the interaction between Mycenaean and indigenous people of Sicily is drastically reconfigured but nonetheless is continued in different forms (Tanasi, 2009a). The most relevant data is the reduced distribution of Mycenaean pottery now limited to one isolated case at Pantalica and a handful of ceramic fragments from Lipari. Cypriote pottery is still attested at Cannatello, the only major Middle Bronze Age settlement not abandoned in this period. Opposed to this evidence is instead the popularity of the ceramic ‘Aegean derivatives’ with a newer and larger number of Mycenaean pottery shapes locally imitated in the North Pantalica repertoire, definitely suggesting further external inputs (Tanasi, 2005a). The scenario of non-precious and precious metals and exotic luxury items, although resized in quantity of examples, is not very different from before, with the exception of the predictable disappearance of the oxhide ingots and the appearance of the bronze mirrors as new Mycenaean cultural imports. The Aegean influence on the funerary and domestic architecture observed in the previous period evolves into more mature developments without suggesting any novel element (Militello, 2018). In this period, more than before, Mycenaean type goods are used by emerging elites for their strategies to distinguish themselves from their peers and consolidate a hierarchical model of society (van Wijngaarden, 2002, p. 256).

The evidence suggests that the contact between Mycenaean and indigenous people was maintained but with a decisive shift from a commercial framework, characterized by frequent and periodic contacts, to a situational one, marked by more sporadic and occasional interaction. Definitely, the agenda of Aegean players, their provenance and role are now changed, so are the Sicilian areas showing signs of those contacts.

Against this picture, the quantitative rise of Italo-Mycenaean LH IIIC pottery in Southern Italy, definitely fueled by a new specialized class of indigenous potters proficient in the local production of Mycenaean pottery, could also be the indication of Mycenaean people taking up permanent residence in Italy, escaping from the crisis in Greece (Blake, 2008, p. 23), while the consolidation of the Cypriote presence registered in Sardinia in this period could signal the loss for Sicily of that relevant role as trampoline for the westernmost routes (Graziadio & Guglielmino, 2011).

6 Conclusions

The contact with foreign Mediterranean people – mostly Aegeans – and indigenous community of Sicily is the defining phenomenon of the Sicilian Bronze Age. An event with important cultural implications and ramifications that have changed forever the trajectory of the local civilization firmly pulling it in the orbit of Greece.

The presence of isolated examples of contact, during the Iron Age, in contexts predating the official beginning of the Greek colonization testifies that such interaction was somehow maintained also during the centuries of the Dark Age. Bronze artefacts, Euboeic-Cycladic pottery, and even Egyptian scarabs found in sites of the territory of Catania and Siracusa echo the intense frequentation of those areas by Aegeans and Mycenaean and points to the future arrival of the colonists (Albanese Procelli, 1997). An indirect link between the Aegean and Sicily in this period is the reference to the island in the *Odyssey*, where it becomes the land of the Cyclops and the man eating Lestrigons, of the seas monsters Scylla and Charybdis, of Aeolia the floating island surrounded with a bronze wall ruled by king Aeolus dispenser of the winds (Bernabò Brea, 1957).

But the contemporaneous presence of artefacts of Levantine origin – jewelry, luxury goods and pottery – in Western Sicily clearly bridges the gap between the last Bronze Age entrepreneurs sailing west and the first Phoenician colonists (Falsone, 1993, p. 55; De Cesare, Gargini, 1997, pp. 371–374; Mühlenbock, Prescott, & Dixon, 2004, p. 168). The same precocious Levantine presence in Sicily is likely responsible for the introduction of materials of Cretan origin in the Maltese archipelago, before the official beginning of the Phoenician occupation of Malta, in a time when Phoenicians had flourishing outposts in Crete such as Kommos (Tanasi, 2009b).

Such evidence, together with the difficult labor of reconstructing a picture of the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages, offers the historical justification for the Greek colonization of Sicily and Magna Grecia and for the Phoenicians’ colonial presence in Malta, western Sicily and in far off Sardinia, becoming in this perspective consequential steps of centuries of contact.

In conclusion, the history of the relationship between Sicily, the Aegean and the Levant during the Bronze Age is just one episode of a millennium-long journey to explore the remote West in pursuit of knowledge, where knowledge brings opportunities, wealth and power. The quantity of variables in an interaction that lasted for so long and which took place on such geographic magnitude is simply unfathomable and therefore not constrainable in any absolute framework. Further excavations, discovery of new shipwrecks and advances in the archaeometric study of material culture and skeletal remains will definitely add more colorful nuances to this canvas but at the moment the narrative presented here, well anchored to meticulously gathered evidence, renders at best one of the most fascinating stories of ancient Mediterranean history, untold by any historian.

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