

Material vs. immaterial evidences of interrelations. Population size, mating networks and technological transfer in Sicily during Early and Middle Bronze Age

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Abstract

Introduction:

The evaluation of indigenous community development in southern Italy, through the analysis of the dynamics of interaction with the eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze Age, is one of the most significant issue in the later prehistory of the central Mediterranean. A long tradition of studies (Vagnetti, 1983; Peroni, 1983; Bietti Sestieri, 1985; Kilian, 1983; Smith, 1987), influenced by the World System Theory and the concept of peer polity interaction, claimed a socio-economic interdependence in structuring indigenous complexity. The preliminary results of on-going research, here presented, provide a complementary perspective, focused on indigenous behavioral patterns development in structuring socio-cultural complexity in Sicily, since the later Early Bronze Age. Through the analyses of settlements and specific ceramic assemblages as well as observations on exploitation of raw material sources, hypothesis on interaction patterns between indigenous communities are suggested.

Materials and methods:

Typological analysis carried on RTV-style ceramic assemblage from Mursia, as well other works, showed coexistence of different stylistic pottery assemblages within the same context, as in Serra del Palco di Milena (Palio, 2006), Manfria (Orlandini, 1960). Settlement/household spatial analyses have been personally conducted (e.g. Mursia). Other datasets concerning settlement dynamics have been acquired from well-preserved multiphase sites, as Muculufa, by bibliographical tool. Site catchment analysis by buffering technique permitted to identify presumably exploited raw material sources.

Results:

Typological analysis results suggest remarkable interaction phenomena, especially in central-southern Sicily, on the base of co-occurrences of different pottery assemblages within the same site. Mursia datasets show that Pantelleria has been involved. Spatial analysis showed increasing complexity in organizing spaces both between households and within them. Progressive population growth, even if difficult to point out, can be proposed for such dynamics. Similarly, scholars hypothesized population growth trends both in the Etna district (Cultraro, 1997) and in southern central Sicily at La Muculu-

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fa (McConnel and Bevan, 1999) in the same chronological framework. On the other hand, buffering zone elaborations demonstrated that several and different sites (La Muculufa, Serra del Palco, Branco Grande) could have had easy access to local raw material sources for pottery production.

Conclusions:

Although population growth and ceramic assemblages suggest interaction patterns, site catchment analysis results do not appear to support this hypothesis. As provenance studies on pottery vessels from Ramacca district demonstrated, indeed, previously identified RTV - style imported objects were produced by using surrounding clay sources (Agodi *et al.*, 2006). Taking into account population dynamics and typology results, this aporia can be solved by hypothesizing interactions involving not only objects but potters and mating strategies. Type-groups variability in ceramic assemblages within the same site shall be interpreted as innovative products of “outlander” potters – likely married to local people – forced to deal with new exploitation strategies. In this perspective, technological changes in pottery production shall be useful to explain socio-cultural complexity by extrapolating behavioural patterns developments related to them.