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BOOK REVIEW

Italo-Mycenaean Pottery: The Archaeological and Archaeometric Dimensions

By Richard Jones, Sara T. Levi, Marco Bettelli, and Lucia Vagnetti (Incunabula Graeca 104). Pp. 588, figs. 179, color pls. 12, tables 38. Istituto di Studi sul Mediterraneo Antico, Rome 2014. Price not available. ISBN 978-88-87345-20-9 (paper).

Reviewed by [Gert Jan van Wijngaarden](#)

This book is the result of an analytical research program on Mycenaean-type pottery in Italy, which has spanned several decades, since the first presentation by Jones at the conference *Traffici micenei nel Mediterraneo* in 1984 (*Traffici micenei nel Mediterraneo: Problemi storici e documentazione archeologica. Atti del Convegno di Palermo, 11–12 maggio e 3–6 dicembre 1984* [Taranto 1986] 205–14). Several of the results of the research program have already appeared in a range of publications. This volume brings together the different parts of the research program and provides a synthesis and reflection on the results. As such, it provides evidence of the stamina of the scholars involved to continue the research over such a long period and, especially, offers a challenging overview of the current state of affairs in the field of Italo-Mycenaean relationships in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (ca. 1600–1000 B.C.E.).

Relations between Italy and the Mycenaean world have been a field of research since the late 19th century when scholars such as Mauceri and Orsi discovered foreign objects and influences in tombs on Sicily. Taylour, in his landmark study *Mycenaean Pottery in Italy and Adjacent Areas* (Cambridge 1958), applied his detailed knowledge of the ceramics of Mycenaean Greece to those in Italy. Since then, pottery studies have constituted the core of the field of Italo-Mycenaean

relations. All the editors of the book under review have made important contributions to the study of Italian prehistoric and Mycenaean pottery. Vagnetti in particular has established the framework for the present study, which acknowledges, on the one hand, chronological differentiation of Mycenaean-type pottery in Italy and, on the other, the great variability within this general class with regard to morphology, decoration, raw materials, and technology. Both of these two fundamental parameters are expanded and elaborated on in the present volume.

The book contains six chapters, several of which are coauthored by the editors themselves. In addition, there is a section with several databases of analytical results and an extended appendix by Jones on the methods used. As a whole, the book is well integrated, not least because the editors provide an introduction and synthesis in which they discuss conclusions for the field as a whole. An additional bonus is the extensive bibliography (33 pages in small print), which will bring anyone interested in the wider field of Italo-Mycenaean relations immediately up to date. As such, the book will be of importance for scholars of prehistoric Mediterranean interconnections, as well as for those interested in the archaeometric and social dimensions of pottery.

The core of the research program consists of more than 1,000 analyses on pottery samples from roughly 100 sites in Italy to determine the provenance of the vessels. Due to the long period of research and the organic growth of the project, different analytical techniques have been used: atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS), instrumental neutron activation analysis (INAA), and inductively coupled plasma emission spectrography (ICP-ES). The authors acknowledge the limitations of interpretation caused by the changes in techniques and the impossibility of resampling older material (107–8). One of the great strengths of the program is the fact that research into the chemical composition of pottery is integrated with petrographic analysis by microscope of pottery fabrics. Also, many samples are illustrated and discussed according to traditional typo-morphology. The research even incorporates an experimental component in which modern potters tried to reproduce several of the pottery types (393–401). The combined results are presented by site per region within Italy. This presentation, which covers a full 262 pages (ch. 4), constitutes the core of the book and will prove indispensable for further research. The relatively limited use of INAA and the absence of x-ray fluorescence (XRF) as an analytical technique in the project is cause for some concern, since these techniques have now become important in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean for investigating the provenance of Mycenaean pottery. Consequently, the results of this project will not easily be compared with similar research elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

The result of the integrated approach is a detailed assessment of the various classes of Aegean, or Aegean-derived and -inspired pottery in Bronze Age Italy. Pottery imported from the Aegean, Aegean-style pottery made in Italy, and local pottery classes with Aegean affiliations appears to vary not only in decoration and clay composition but also in aspects such as manufacturing techniques (365–75) and firing and baking technology (377–92). The presence of local versions of Mycenaean pottery in Italy has put emphasis on the important role of craftsmen in Italo-Mycenaean relations. The enormous diversity in the variety of Aegean-inspired pottery in different parts of Italy that emerges from this book suggests that relations between indigenous and foreign potters must have been highly complex. The authors begin to address this complexity, but they limit themselves mostly to technical aspects (202–305). However, the technology transfer that is becoming visible must have operated not only on the level of craft specialists (454–60) but also on a variety of social scales, which are not fully addressed in this book.

The most striking aspect of the production of Aegean-inspired pottery in Italy is the extent of geographical differences. The sites in this study are presented and analyzed regionally, but even within one region nearby sites may present an entirely different picture regarding the presence of different classes of Aegean-type pottery. Consider, for example, the fragments in Mycenaean pictorial style at Termitito in Basilicata (164–66, 320). Pictorial pottery, relatively abundant in the eastern Mediterranean, is virtually absent from the central Mediterranean, with the exception of the Termitito examples. Surprisingly, these are locally made. Is this an idiosyncrasy of one individual potter, or does it have to do with the process of technology transfer? Particularly curious is the fact that Italo-Mycenaean pottery does not seem to have circulated

regionally. Whereas Aegean pots imported from Greece are found in many parts of Italy (414–19), there is, as yet, no evidence that Mycenaean-type pots made in Italy were brought to other parts of the peninsula (453–60). The significance of this localism for the proposed model of technology transfer based on the circulation of foreign and local craftsmen surely will inspire further research.

The book reaches several important conclusions that will force us to address fundamental issues in the field of Italo-Mycenaean relations. One of these conclusions is that there is no clear break in the technology transfer from the Aegean to the central Mediterranean between the later parts of the Bronze Age and the earlier phases of the Early Iron Age (458). Effectively, this forces us to think about the role of existing contacts in the developing precolonial relations of the Early Iron Age. Most importantly, the editors claim in the introduction that they feel justified in acknowledging the existence of a class of “Italo-Mycenaean pottery” (9). In archaeological terms, this is clearly the case: the detailed research by the editors and their collaborators has resulted in a rich data set, which will inspire further research. In historical terms, however, one may wonder at the technical variety and complexity of this class of archaeological material. The extent to which this class of pottery is the result of comparable social and cultural phenomena is clearly in need of further research and incorporation in social and historical theory. This landmark study enables us to address precisely these sorts of theoretical issues.

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Book Review of *Italo-Mycenaean Pottery: The Archaeological and Archaeometric Dimensions*, by Richard Jones, Sara T. Levi, Marco Bettelli, and Lucia Vagnetti

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