

## Review of:

**Vianello, A. 2005. *Late Bronze Age Mycenaean and Italic Products in the West Mediterranean*. BAR International series, Oxford: Archaeopress, ISBN 1 84171 875 0.**

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Before discussing Andrea Vianello's *Late Bronze Age Mycenaean and Italic Products in the West Mediterranean*, I would like to offer my apologies to readers of PIA. A review coming about five years after the issue of a book cannot claim to fulfil one of the most important requirements as far as reviews are concerned, that is, being timely. Yet despite this shortcoming I would argue that Vianello's book has not so far received the attention it deserves and therefore this review might still be of some help.

The main reason why this book is important is because it's one of the very few monographs that has been produced in English in the last twenty years dealing with the discussion of a particularly important category of evidence for the Late Bronze Age Western Mediterranean, which is Aegean type (also known occasionally as Aegean derivative) pottery. During the second half of the second millennium BC, this wheel-made, fine-painted pottery constituted the very first truly 'international' class of material, reaching a Mediterranean wide diffusion and being imported, copied and consumed in regions as far away as Spain and the Levantine coast. The last twenty years in particular have been extremely important for fieldwork, revealing a good number of new sites presenting large quantities of this material, thus reshaping completely the characterisation of a phenomenon that until the late 1980s could still be considered marginal (e.g. Snodgrass 1989, but see also the recent take of Blake 2008).

New data sparked new analyses, which were however mostly written in languages other than English (e.g. Bettelli 2002 and Jung 2006), possibly a corollary of the relative lack of interest from Anglo-American archaeologists working on the Bronze Age Mediterranean for the 'less-developed' areas to the west of the *Mare Nostrum*. These works were mainly aimed at the systematisation of new and old data (Bettelli 2002) as well as at highlighting the connections between different chronological systems (Jung 2006). However, if we exclude a few broad-brush attempts (e.g. Sherratt 1999 and many short papers in Laffineur & Greco 2005), there have been very few attempts to investigate the social implications of the pattern of consumption of these exotic products. A remarkable study by Van Wijngaarden (2002) tried to do this with detailed contextual analysis of a few well-studied sites, and also attempted to achieve a greater degree of theoretical sophistication in broad agreement with recent trends in Mediterranean archaeology (e.g. Blake and Knapp 2005). Vianello's work instead appears to be more traditional, with a broader focus than that of the Dutch scholar, whereby it is concentrated primarily

on the study of macro-trends in the distribution of evidence, with heavy use of maps. While he deals with the western Mediterranean as a whole, there is some incongruence in the selection of his spatial sample, which also includes some areas far away from the Mediterranean such as the sites of Aunjetitz and Bernstorf in Germany, while others (most notably the eastern shore of the Adriatic sea) have not been considered, and no reason for these choices have been given (p. 19). The main focus of the analysis is however the territory of the current Italian state and in particular Sicily.

The general organization of the volume is that of a PhD thesis (of which the author openly acknowledges this is an adaptation), with chapters not following a thematic or chronological order, but rather a 'logical' one with a stark separation between theory and methodology, analysis of the evidence and discussion. The first chapter is devoted to a comprehensive history of studies in which roots and development of Aegean type pottery have been traced (pp. 1-15). While Vianello's analysis is overall quite 'traditional' this does not mean that it is completely 'theory free,' and the second chapter named 'Methodology' (pp. 17-30) is dedicated to the definition of the theoretical directives pursued by Vianello. The chosen framework concentrates on the study of consumption (p. 30), and also incorporates some inductive-analogical reasoning in the discussion (p. 27). The main focus is on what could be termed the 'agency' (although this word is not openly used) of Western Mediterranean people (p. 17), albeit the reiteration of a simplistic notion of 'Italics' vs. 'Aegeans' which is used throughout the whole book, and a focus on exclusively 'Aegean type' and 'Aegean derivative' products clashes strongly with this intention. A great deal of attention is dedicated to the definition of the sample and issues related to the analysis (pp. 17-20), but strangely this section comes before any discussion on models, thus completely severing any logical connection between theory and method, and creating the impression that theory is just an overlay not integrated with the analysis.

The third chapter analyses patterns of usage of Mycenaean pottery in the so-called Minoan/Mycenaean heartland, a geographical notion that in recent years has proved to be somehow fallacious (Kiparisse-Apostolika and Papaconstantinou 2004). The observations are drawn from both the comparison of real assemblages from selected sites, and the analysis of the scant information available in the Linear B record. In this chapter Vianello also introduces the functional organisation of Aegean type pottery (drawing on the work of Tournavitou 1995) which although helpful as a tool for comparing assemblages with broad chronological differences, presents some minor problems (one is left to ask, for instance, what the point is in considering deep bowls as 'bowls' in later palatial times when they became the chief drinking vessel).

Chapter four (pp. 43-60) contains the real 'meat' of the book, as it constitutes the main analytical section, dedicated to a functional analysis of Aegean type wares. Here unfortunately also lie some of the major limitations of the study. The main one resides in the chronological order used by the author in order to discuss the evidence. For analytical purposes, Vianello subdivides the evidence from the entire western Mediterranean into only two main chronological intervals, encompassing periods of up to three hundred years in length (p. 43). This choice produces problems because even

with the low chronological resolution allowed by Italian archaeological dating, only a limited number of sites here considered together in the same grouping were actually contemporary. The Problems increase in particular for the second period identified, which covers the last three and a half centuries of the second millennium BC, as this not only removes the possibility of discussing some of the most interesting conclusions put forward by recent literature (e.g. Bettelli's suggestion of the existence of a slow process of 'site selection' in Southern Italy through the Recent Bronze Age - see Bettelli 2002) but also limits the possibility of investigating the effects and reactions in the western world of the important social dynamics occurring in the Aegean at that time, and which led to the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces (Iacono forthcoming).

Another major problem stems from the methodology adopted in order to identify general trends in the evidence (pp. 46-50). To do so Vianelli has separated a number sub-regions (for analysis by simple measures of similarity such as Pearson's index), bringing together contexts of very different kinds (e.g. settlements, tombs, ritual areas). This *modus operandi* would still hold some heuristic validity if Aegean type pottery was distributed uniformly along the entire spectrum of contexts in each region of the western Mediterranean, but one of the main features of the consumption of Aegean wares in this area (noted since from the earliest studies on this subject), is precisely that in some zones these are consumed in the main only at specific kinds of sites (e.g. in Sicily they are mainly concentrated in tombs, while in Apulia chiefly in settlements). As a consequence it is not entirely clear whether regularities Vianello finds in the consumption of Aegean type pottery are the effect of regional choices or whether they are simply the outcome of different depositional patterns. Chapter five, 'Context of Usage and Deposition,' tries to grapple with this problem by also taking into consideration Aegean-inspired architecture, such as apsidal buildings in Apulian settlements and multi-chambered buildings in Eastern Sicily, which he rightly considers to be largely autonomous developments (pp. 65, 75). This discussion does not however induce the author to rethink the regional clusters he has created.

Chapter six integrates the functional and contextual aspects dealt with in the previous sections, discussing again in an exhaustive, though also somewhat also repetitive way, all of the evidence both generally and for each sub-region, also adding consideration of other archaeological sources such as metals, glass, amber and so on. The development of western Mediterranean cultures following the Mycenaean period and well into the Iron Age is also briefly sketched (pp. 97-99) offering a glimpse of the aftermath of Late Bronze Age East-West connections.

The conclusions that Vianello draws from the analysis are largely in line with those suggested through the years by previous scholars, that is of the 'zonal' nature of the distribution of Aegean type wares with only a few important 'gateway' sites, most notably Lipari and Taranto (Bettelli 2002; Bietti Sestieri 1988; Smith 1987; Vagnetti 1999). The suggestion that there is a substantial difference between the usage of the fine wares in the Aegean and the Western Mediterranean represents an interesting novelty, which however needs to be further developed, also incorporating a less naïvely uniformitarian notion of the Aegean world.

The appendices are the real highlight of the book. Here Vianello summarizes a vast amount of literature often not easily retrievable, offering an essential and comprehensive (perhaps at times too much so) bibliography. As for illustrations, graphs with few exceptions are always simple and clear and the only serious criticism relates with the quality of the maps, which are not very legible. Overall, despite a number of evident shortcomings, Vianello's book can be considered a valuable reference resource, particularly as it collects a large quantity of information and summarizes a wealth of data coming from the most disparate sources. Some additional editorial care would have done more justice to the immense amount of work behind this book.

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