

**Jan Driessen and Alessandro Vanzetti (eds), *Communication Uneven. Acceptance of and Resistance to Foreign Influences in the Connected Ancient Mediterranean*. Aegis 20. pp. 210, with col. and b/w ills, maps and tbls. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2020. ISBN 978-2-39061-087-8, paperback €32.50.**

As dynamic and malleable territories in this sea of connectivity, islands in the Mediterranean – a large number with estimates of about 10.000 islands and islets – are complex geographical spaces that knew very early significant human settlements. Open to the horizon and the neighbouring continental coasts, and relatively closed and isolated at the same time, ancient Mediterranean island groups present a number of paradoxes: communications are multiform and, through connectivities and networks, human and non-human actors and relations include or exclude, link or unlink, defend tradition or innovate. Moreover, the scale of connections remained significantly different, with some areas tied to other regions at different tempos and at different rates. Then human societies manipulated insularity in distinctive manners. Interactions and communications modified social, political and economic developments in *uneven* and often unpredictable ways.

Questioning these paradoxes was the main topic of a session at the 24th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists held in Barcelona in 2018, of which the 20th volume of the Aegis collection is the outcome. As the title indicates, the 14 contributions, written by 27 authors, attempted to understand the shifting character (*unevenness*) of Mediterranean islands and coastal communities' *connectedness* beyond circularity properly speaking (i.e. "simple commercial routes"). They offer an unprecedented opportunity to attempt these issues over a considerable period of time (from the Neolithic to the expansion of Macedonia under king Philip II, i.e. from the 5th-4th millennium to the 4th century BC) and in a wide geographical area, extending from the Central Mediterranean to the Levantine coasts. Specific attention to Cretan and Mycenaean groups has been warranted since those areas are dear to the editors. On a wider scale, this book contributes to current research trends and issues related to *Island studies*, which have attracted huge interest across a wide spectrum of research applications in social science, but also in literature and natural science.

In the *Preface*, the volume is presented as containing four main sections, the first three corresponding to the main geographic and cultural areas under study (Central Mediterranean, Crete and Greece, Cyprus and Levant) and the fourth considering a sector of the trading economy, the figures involved in the seaborne interactions process in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean area during the Late Bronze Age (including warriors and merchants). The introduction by the editors provides a thorough presentation of the colloquium's scope, as well as useful summaries of the main scientific results of each paper.

The editors call for a reconsideration of the concepts of communication and interaction. They and the contributors, collectively, point towards a theory of communication and interaction with the following two components. First, rather than restricted to trade (i.e. exchange of materials), communication is an interactive activity that links things, people and societies, but also drives information and messages. The present studies acknowledge the huge varieties of mechanisms of contacts and interactions, which run the gamut of cultural relations (for instance public ceremonies, marriage alliances, pottery design, etc.). Then, secondly, at an inter-societal level, communication cannot be divorced from questions of agents actively interacting. Third, directionality must be considered in the flow of knowledge; interactions reflect a variation guided by conceptual schemes that direct the exchange in a particular direction. These create certain opportunities and exclude others: the result is *unevenness* in exchanges and contacts.

In an exclusively epistemological and theoretical introduction of the topic, Vanzetti presents a synthesis of thoughts and methodological currents and attempts to answer the broad question: *How does connectivity relate to communication?* The purpose of this preface is to present a synthetic description of the transformations that the theories of interaction and communication have undergone in the archaeological discipline since the 1960s, mainly in the Anglo-American academic world. Pointing out the methodological difficulties of each conceptualisation of human interaction, the author outlines how these approaches have been productively modified for a much better understanding of human-thing entanglement and social interaction as a dynamic social process composed of a dialectic of causalities; it is an exchange of cognitive matter between the cultural agents taking part in the interaction in certain circumstances – which experience some degree of directionality, of choices and of possibilities.

The first two essays make a convincing case for expanding our focus from assemblage to interactions and seaborne connectivity, in order to generate new insights into directional communication, especially in the Central Mediterranean.

A line of thought is offered by a stylistic and petrographic analysis of ceramic sets coming from Aeolian sites during the Sicilian Early Bronze Age. The Aeolian islands were the scene of artistic exchanges at the origin of a homogenous cultural background during the Capo Graziano period (c. 2300-1500 BC). The present project by Levi *et al.* led to the individualization of several distinct geochemical groups which, crossed with a traditional classification of shapes and incised decoration (abstract and figurative, defined as narrative and geographic), highlighted two major complex networks of production and circulation in this area of the Mediterranean, one eastern and short-distance (a “core-centred network” from Lipari) and the other western and mid-distance (from Filicudi/Stromboli, later opening towards the Aegean). It is unfortunate that the interesting “narrative” motif, probably representing a tale of the Aeolians’ maritime identity (p. 31), is not as well developed as the “geographical” motif: we look forward to the semantic study of Capo Graziano’s decorative repertoire currently being prepared by the same team. The results obtained reveal the prominent role of the Lipari and Filicudi sites in terms of ceramic craftsmanship, while at the same time unveiling specific sets of behavioural patterns: the great variability according to the sites of either imported storage ceramics or stylistic components of local productions (what is transmitted and what is not, what changes and what does not) questions individual or collective behaviour (meaning directional communication) and what were the conditions of transfers. The possibility of matrimonial networks for explaining the variability of the ceramic decoration, seems reasonable and doable.

Militello continues this thread about the Central Mediterranean, referring to the trade relationships visible in the archaeological record of south-eastern Sicily during the second millennium BC, with punctual evocations of the southern area for comparisons (i.e. Monte Grande). Trends in manufactured goods show changing directions of trade over the second millennium BC between Sicily and other Mediterranean areas; from the end of the 15th century BC, for example, trading agents from the Thapsos/Milazzese culture received mainly pottery and goods from Malta, the Aegean and Cyprus and rarely from Crete and Sardinia.

Mustering and comparing a great deal of recorded finds, the author then considers the layout of the trade between Sicily and the Aegean in particular, and reviews distinctions between importations, imitations and transfers of know-how – calling for a more holistic and broader perspective of the various mechanisms involved in the cultural interactions. In a conclusion, the factors’ variability influencing cultural interactions are considered, assuming that local groups make decisions regarding external cultural *stimuli*, in a social, cultural, economic and political nexus. The presence of a legend for the first map (p. 40) could have made even clearer the distribution of archaeological sites and therefore the various local and long-distance trade routes.

The following five chapters examine ties and connectivity in the Aegean realm from the Late Neolithic to the 4th millennium BC. Irregular migration by sea in its multistranded dimensions, raising cultural issues related to the influx of foreign interactions, is being considered. Todaro presents a coherent, synthesized view of 5th-4th millennium BC human activities and earliest settlement in southern Crete, by gathering up insights from her prior numerous studies, but also from geological and archaeological results from peer research, and on the whole from re-evaluation of Phaistos hill remains. It is argued here that discussions on the settlement history of central southern Crete have seemed to ignore the broader colonisation phenomenon that occurred across the Cycladic islands between the 6th and the 4th millennium BC, which have not followed a regular rhythm (i.e. short-lived occupations). In identifying parallels among material culture and stratigraphy between southern Crete and numerous Cycladic sites, the author posits a new chronology of the Phaistos human settlement (in the “late 6th or early 5th millennium BC” instead of in the last quarter of the 4th millennium) with the establishment of a “place of encounter” by seafarers, where stone tools and ochre were produced.

Driessen addresses the problem of absence, common to all archaeological approaches and all chronocultural areas, in this case concerning imports (exotica) into Minoan Crete; although this problem necessarily arises in an underlying manner, it is rarely treated as such. There is, however, much to be said about archaeological silences and the misinterpretations they engender (here: the number of exotica seems to be overestimated), as well as about possible solutions to remedy them. Archaeology cannot simply study the tangible remains (the “positive evidence”) of past societies; it must therefore attempt, through indirect evidence,

to define and explain these incomplete records and “absent variables”, or even to fill them. Absence or “scarcity” in archaeology is often the result of multiple and intertwined factors: methodological biases and research orientations are possible obstacles when it comes to going beyond the simple observation; but, in some cases, it may be “a conscious action” of a cultural, political or social nature. Driessen’s approach is then to question the representativeness of the available data on the subject of exotica, which, according to the author, are over-interpreted for Early and Late Bronze Age Crete. The presence of imported finished products is nuanced in a critical and reflective manner, with reference to the local settlement hierarchy of Crete compared to off-island sites. The dearth of imports in certain major sites is recast as variant social behaviour between Minoan groups for the distinction and protection of local cultural values.

The aim of Gheorghiadē’s study is to address the regional and inter-regional connectivity and interactions in Late Bronze Age Crete, based on imported ceramics (especially Late Minoan II-III B, c. 1440/1430-1190 BC) from the sites of Kommos and Palaikastro, through the identification and study of local imitations of vessels, the circulation of imported objects (routes and nature of exchanges), and by clarifying the place and role of imported models and their imitations within the contexts of discovery. Following on from the doctoral research of Charlotte Langohr published in 2009, whose thesis publication is cited in the bibliography without mention in the text, the aim is to relate the production of different classes of vases, from prototypes to local imitations, in order to understand the role of these products in similar or different contexts. Gheorghiadē here takes a different view of the objects and the contexts in which they were found, and provides some answers regarding the functional, ritual and ideological practices associated with these objects, whether they were imported or made *in situ* (acquiring value through the technique of manufacture or the exotic character to which they refer).

The urbanisation process and form of Mycenaean Greek mainland towns during the so-called Palatial period (Late Helladic IIIA-B, c. 1390-1185/1180 BC) is the subject of Zeman’s essay. A long and gradual socio-political process reached its peak at this moment, with developments of more powerful regional centres such as Mycenae and Pylos – which are the foci of the study, along with considerable transformations and innovations at multiple levels (administrative, craftsmanship, ideology, etc.). An important element of the author’s analysis is the

conceptualisation of the town through a relational approach of urbanism, which engages the settlement with the regional built environment by relating urban sites to economic and political landscapes. Early stages of urbanism have been excavated in Middle Helladic sites such as Thebes in Boeotia,<sup>1</sup> but following this complex concept the author stresses that only 14th century BC regional polities are urban centres strictly speaking – because of their radically new kind of architectural features, and because they subdued smaller settlements, turning them into administrative districts, in a relational and regional way. The author recognizes, following the opinion of many scholars, the fundamental influence of Minoan culture in the Mycenaean Palatial phenomenon which has been adapted to each palace’s individual and social identity. The Mycenae and Pylos case studies are fascinating, but some – the population density of cities – are a little clumsy and not as well integrated with the overall argument as they might be. Some bibliographical references are missing or may have been badly cited (“Hodder 2012”, p. 102).

Coenaerts *et al.*’s *Transforming the Landscape* presents the influence of the economic activities and topographical determinism on the geographical distribution and patterns of settlements in south-east Cyprus during the first half of the second millennium BC. At the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age (i.e. c. 1700-1450 BC), integration to broader trade networks with East Mediterranean, exchanging goods for Cypriot raw copper, is concomitant to forms of social inequality (related to an emerging elite controlling prestige goods and symbols), changing human-environment interactions (a stronger environmental impact is visible) and the growth of proto-urban settlements. For the latter, the authors demonstrate that the majority of proto-urban settlement clusters occur in particular topographic regions, across rivers and on the coast, as well as close to copper mine areas. In this regard, they provide a detailed picture of the Tremitis valley, in south-eastern Cyprus, where several towns developed in an integrated trading network that permitted groups of interrelated communities to exploit and move raw copper across the landscape – smaller sites serving as a gateway for regional trade between larger settlements (such as Hala Sultan Tekke). Inequalities arose from these exchanges: tapping into Near Eastern exchange, elite ruling groups reinforced their status and

<sup>1</sup> See Anastasia Dakouri-Hild’s work on this subject: Dakouri-Hild, A. 2000. Plotting Fragments: A preliminary Assessment of the Middle Helladic Settlement in Boeotian Thebes, in K. Branigan (ed.) *Urbanism in the Aegean Bronze Age*: 103-118. London: Sheffield Academic Press.

strengthened a Near-Eastern-influenced *ideology through funerary discourse, such as militaria* – to which we could personally add beauty equipment like bronze mirrors of Near-Eastern type as well.

The collective contribution of Kallintzi et al., which constitutes the final chapter on the Aegean area, gives a thorough view of the history of the colony of Abdera in ancient Thrace in the 7th-6th century BC, by combining documentary evidence and archaeological excavation data. The port city of Abdera was settled by Ionian Clazomenians in the middle of the 7th century BC under the leadership of Timesios. Despite its strategic position on the coast, this first fortified city, probably facing hostility from the neighbouring Thracians, declined and was refounded by Ionian settlers from Teos (Clazomenai's neighbouring city), who sought to escape Persian influence, in 545 BC. Thus the authors, in a postprocessual approach, investigate the coexistence of people with different ethnicities (native and Greek colonial groups) in the city and most likely the sociocultural relationships and dynamics thereof. Even if internal relationships between Greek settlers and Thracians were conflicting (for resources of the rich neighbouring valley of Xanthi), material remains reveal a trade mostly seen through metal imports from the Rhodopi mountains (controlled by the Thracians) to Abdera. Although the evidence of Greek imports to the Thracians is scarce and uneven, trade has not been unidirectional but mutually beneficial, but also probably reflects a cultural resistance to Greek influence. In this way, Greek and Thracians at Abdera presents both a coherent and interesting view of comparative archaeological research between metropolis and colony.

Moving towards the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, Pucci et al. give a well-illustrated overview of interregional and overseas relationships of the Late Bronze and Iron age Amuq Plain – the classical plain of Antioch or the modern Turkish region of Antakya – especially within the Mycenaean and Cypriot cultural spheres. Located at a critical crossroads, this case study thus provides researchers with a unique opportunity to study acceptance or rejection, reception or prohibition in cultural processes between societies. With close attention to ceramic assemblages excavated in Tell Alalakh and Chatal Höyük, where various political shifts occurred during the period of the study (from the mid-15th to the mid-10th century BC), the authors give a thorough account of pottery and products-related circulation, tracing the changing table habits under Mycenaean and Cypriot influences. Proposed responses to ceramic

production and distribution variables include political and economic impacts within the Amuq, the Aegean, and East Mediterranean regions. Interestingly, the archaeological data indicate an asymmetric trade, as much as export evidence from the Amuq to the Aegean and Cyprus islands is tenuous.

Through a study in comparative iconography, Papadopoulos tackles the issue of cultural influences affecting the pictorial motif of the armed human figure in the Aegean (i.e. the warrior, the hunter and the charioteer), common in the 14th-13th century BC in the artistic repertoires of the Mediterranean area, and embedded in the flourishing networks of trade between Minoans, Mycenaeans and the eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Cyprus and the Levantine coast). Aside from foreign influences discernible in certain Aegean themes (such as the chariot or battle scenes), the author convincingly shows strong differences in the treatment of war-like themes, linked to context variations, political beliefs and cultural perceptions, as being local traditions. An example of this may be the representation of captured enemies, popular in the eastern Mediterranean area as propaganda (well documented in Egypt), that seemed to be disregarded by the Aegean groups as a motif they did not have any affection with. Another one, with which we are familiar, is the absence of hunting or warrior scenes on mirror handles, although they were commonly engraved on Cypriot ivory mirror handles.<sup>2</sup> Despite a corpus limited on the one hand, and a Mycenaean international artistic koine of the period on the other hand, the study identifies patterns of inter-regional variations inside the Aegean cultural sphere which are related to social and ideological identities.

The volume then switches its focus from the interaction of societies at multiple levels to the structure and social complexity of Late Bronze to Early Iron age commerce and economic markets across the Mediterranean sea. Who were the economic agents and intermediaries that linked producers and customers by moving goods across this wide multicultural landscape? What role(s) did they have and how did they operate? These are the main issues of the two closing papers.

The history of early overseas connectivity inevitably passes through coastal settlements and ports which, with their projections to a hinterland, have been

<sup>2</sup> Stärz, B. 2015. Late Bronze Age Ivory Mirror Handles from Cyprus: Aspects of Representation and Cultural Exchange, in H. Matthäus, B. Morstadt, C. Vohnhoff (ed.), *PoCA (Postgraduate Cypriot Archaeology)*: 220-239. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.

focal points of political economic studies at multiple levels. In his paper for the Bronze age Aegean, Pullen emphasizes that, behind a highly socially localized long-distance exchange of prestige items (through the medium of elite administration), lay important traits of trading mechanisms as it took place in markets controlled by merchants. However, there is little direct empirical evidence corroborating the idea that markets were more likely to create a wide range of opportunities of connecting people, objects and ideas, and how social variations are also rooted in limited-scale interactions (and aside elite control). Weight standards, for example, provide new views into the existence of markets and a regulation system of trading in the Late Bronze age Mediterranean. Assuming the strategic importance of seaports and markets, this essay aims to explore how trade and the movement of goods and people were organized, by presenting some considerations based on a few key-concepts and referring to case studies of seaport towns in the Saronic Gulf. The presentation of the coastal settlement of Kalamianos, which is currently covered by a study project by the author, gives a taste of future papers concerning seaport dynamics in Late Bronze age Mediterranean.

Beneath a palatial surveillance apparatus attested by accounting and writing systems, second and first millennium BC non-monetary economic frameworks and forms of transactions might vary overly, and difficult to understand from the viewpoint of our contemporary world's economy, as Murray finally states. Non-palatial (during palatial state) and Postpalatial Late Bronze and Iron age Mediterranean organisations (after the collapse) structuring economies were working on market principles, and ordered by mutual adjustments of many individuals. An integrated market at a Mediterranean level is witnessed to by customary regulation and value ratios seen, for example, in written sources and weight systems. Rarely explored because of the lack of archaeological evidence, Murray refers to economic and social sciences theories from various schools of thought to attempt a theoretical framework for the trading behaviour of agents in the context of a political evolution from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age in the Mediterranean – putting forward insights through these theoretical explanations.

Overall, this new Aegis volume is of the highest quality and the editors and contributors have produced a landmark achievement in the understanding of the past communicative practices and interaction patterns in ancient times, by merging traditional archaeological questions about

trade and exchange with contemporary issues of agency, connectivity unevenness and the social agents involved. The contributions offer a variety of approaches to these themes, all of which give a better look at the concepts of communication and interactions (of people, of artifacts and of ideas). Most of the case studies span the Mediterranean world from the fourth millennium BC until the end of Greek antiquity, with a heavy concentration on the Mycenaean period, and combine multiple strands of evidence in an interdisciplinary manner. The last two papers are highly theoretical and refer to the individual commercial agents and initiatives apart from political authorities. For anyone seeking to improve their understanding of the ancient Mediterranean as an area of multiple cultural interactions, this book is definitely compulsory reading.

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