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VALUE, POWER AND ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE EASTERN AND CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE

Francesco Iacono

Summary

Value is a topic that has attracted a considerable interest in Mediterranean archaeology over the last few years. Despite the ubiquity of situations of interaction and cultural contact in the ancient Mediterranean, the confrontation and re-negotiation of notions of value in such contexts has been seldom the focus of scholars. This paper will examine this aspect in the context of encounters occurring as a result of long-range interaction in the 2nd millennium BC. At this time, the Middle Sea connected people from societies that were profoundly different, such as the states of the eastern Mediterranean and the (often small) communities in the central portion of the sea. Through a diachronic contextual analysis of one of the most important indicators for inter-societal interaction in the region, *i.e.* Aegean type pottery, as well as of other categories of evidence, I will investigate the relationship between value, power, and encounter, suggesting some potential transformations occurring to broad ideas of value at the interface between the eastern and central Mediterranean.

INTRODUCTION

Value is one of the dominating aspects of social life which influences profoundly relations between people and objects across space and time (Bevan 2007; Graeber 2001; Papadopoulos 2012; Voutsaki 1997; van Wijngaarden 1999). It is, after all, bound with the spirit of our times where economic indicators have come to govern our action and perception of current events. Uncritically extending a similar modern outlook is not without issues and investigating the full variability of value paradigms has been one of the main tasks that archaeologists, historians and anthropologists have set for themselves, resulting in the development of important sub-fields in each of these disciplines (Earle 2002; Graeber 2001; Polanyi 1944; Sahlins 1972; Schneider 1974). Although it is widely acknowledged that value is profoundly affected by social relations throughout history and prehistory, value has often been employed by actors coming from different societies and who therefore responded to the influence of different social relations. This is a case of value judgements operating in what we can describe as intercultural social encounters, hybrid contexts created when people from different cultural backgrounds came together to entertain more or less precarious relationships, often entailing economic transactions in which ideas about things had to be confronted and re-negotiated (van Dommelen, Rowlands 2012).

In this paper, I will examine a possible example of this type of situation occurring in a critical context for human history, the Mediterranean of the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, when the sea put in communication people from societies that were profoundly different, such as the early states of the eastern Mediterranean and the small communities of the western part of the basin (Broodbank 2013, 345-348; Iacono 2015). Such differences translated into different concepts of value that were, particularly by the 13th and 12th centuries BC, frequently put in communication with each other, resulting in their directional change. An important element in shaping the way in which this change operated was power of a specific kind, what I will call hegemony, borrowing a key-concept used by the philosopher Antonio Gramsci (Iacono 2016). After reviewing some ideas about value, I will try to make sense of the specificities of their use in intercultural interaction. I will then put at work the concepts introduced, analysing over time the value of Aegean type pottery, a fine ceramic particularly diffused in the 2nd millennium BC Mediterranean. Finally, I will expand this perspective to see what kind of transformations it is possible to recognise in broader value conceptions across the central Mediterranean beyond pottery.

WHAT IS VALUE TO BEGIN WITH?

Surveys of the various uses of the concept of value (*e.g.* Bevan 2007; Miller 2008; Papadopoulos 2012) reveal that the sheer variability of value solidifies in broad clusters of meaning. According to Graeber (2001, 2-3), these include regularly three main concepts which are not mutually exclusive but tend to weight differently in different situations.

The first is value as good/bad (that is moral) judgement: these are so-called values with a capital V, *i.e.* those values that in human societies should not need further specifications, *e.g.* religious values, family values, humanity and so on. The second is value as meaning (or 'linguistic') and in this sense value is what allows us to distinguish and make sense of various aspects of things and relationships. The last is economic value, the one with which we are more accustomed nowadays, *i.e.* value as difference in quantity and I will focus in particular on this concept. Quantity value in the sense used here, besides the (more or less precise) comparison of different amounts of substances belonging to the same category, entails the creation of a hierarchy of different materials, which are the by-products of the whole spectrum of activities (from subsistence to display) performed by members of a community. In assessing these materials and their relative importance, action is central and, as noted by Graeber (2001; see also Munn 1986), this is unsurprisingly not too different from Marx's labour theory of value, although labour need not be intended in a strictly production-oriented form but rather its semantic field needs to be expanded as to encompass much of what we would put under the label of 'action' or 'effort'. In this undifferentiated cauldron, value can come close to encompass: "food, women [and men, I might add], children, possessions, charms, land, labour, services, religious offices, rank – everything is stuff to be given away and repaid. In perpetual interchange of what we may call spiritual matter, comprising men and things, these elements pass and re-pass between clans and individuals, ranks, sexes and generations" (Mauss 1966, 10-12).

In a sense, value is a mirror image of social capital (*sensu* Bourdieu 1986) and serves as a token for the ability of individuals and groups to reproduce socially, including biophysical, cultural and moral aspects. If we consider value as something critical for orienting actions of individuals, it is safe to assume that the acquisition of either valued objects or some other kind of valued social currency will be crucial, translating into the ability to control the means through which this social reproduction occurs, known as the Means of Production.

Naturally enough, not all individuals and groups within a community are the same and/or start from the same initial conditions; *i.e.* they are not equally well positioned in relation to Means of Production. A polarisation would emerge as a by-product of such diversity. A better position in relation to use and exploitation of these critical 'value' assets within the community (Means of Production) would hence create an unbalance in what are called Relations of Production. Because of this, we would thus tend to have two groups or classes: one that create surplus (surplus-givers) and one that appropriates surplus created by others (surplus appropriators). In the approach here adopted class is not something emerging from the fog of 18th century England but rather class-differentiation is a relative property that has always existed in human societies to various extents (Saitta 2005; Wolf 1997). Value thus is a cultural aspect that sits in the middle between the dynamics of relationship between different social groups/classes. It decides what form social surplus is going to take and regulates the way this can or cannot be disposed of. It is nevertheless a cultural feature like others and we shall see the possible consequences of this later on.

If value defines the 'form' of class relationships, its outcome can be described in terms of hegemony. This concept, famously theorised by Gramsci for whom hegemony was a combination of coercion and consent (Anderson 1976, 21; Gramsci 1977, 1591), has since gained a certain currency in Anthropology and Archaeology (Crehan 2002; *e.g.* Wesson 2008). It is important to highlight that, contrary to its current most frequent common-sense meaning, here the term hegemony does not necessarily entail political submission or decisive influence in the decision making process. Rather, it indicates a vague form of influence whose effect is extremely variable and negotiated between non-hegemonic and hegemonic actors. Hegemonic classes exert such influence on non-hegemonic ones and phenomena of cross-class cultural appropriation often develop as a by-product of these relations (Iacono 2016).

VALUE IN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

If value is socially created, then, inter-societal contact, the defining aspect of the Mediterranean, is something that plays a crucial role in regulating how notions of value were mediated in the Middle Sea during trans-cultural social encounters. In order to assess this role, it will be necessary to begin by making sense of how interaction basically works.

Firstly, it is essential to highlight that interaction is never enacted by entire communities but rather by segments of them. Encounters between groups with different cultural backgrounds create a new hybrid context which does not belong completely to either of the parties involved, a third space that responds to its own rules (Bhabha 1994; van Dommelen 2005). In this case, class-relations are shuffled and recombined and two new groups (or classes) are created (Iacono 2016). The dynamic between these two new classes and the hegemony of one upon the other is defined by the ability of individuals and social groups involved to control and/or master the means through which interaction occurs. Such means, here named Means of Interaction, can include 'things' like the physical tools through which movement over landscapes and seascapes is achieved, or more 'immaterial' (but no less important) aspects such as a general attitude towards travel (Sherratt, Sherratt 1998), or the 'membership' in a small international club as for instance in the case of the groups of peoples mentioned in the Amarna letters in the 14th century BC (Liverani 2002; for a more in-depth introduction to this general framework see Iacono 2016).

Within this general scheme, as with class relations in each society, processes of selective appropriation of social practices and related material culture can occur, and these tend to follow a certain directionality: from the group hegemonic in Relations of Interaction (that is, the one that controls the Means of Interaction) to the non-hegemonic (Cox 1983). The rationale behind this is that appropriation on the part of the non-hegemonic emphasises to all those not taking part in the interaction the closeness with an external partner, an aspect that is able to help improve the position of individuals or groups in internal Relations of Production (Schortman 1989; Stein 1999). In short, appropriation is a strategy aimed at legitimising/reinforcing the position of a group within its social *milieu* through the exhibition of external connections.

How does value and its re-negotiation in intercultural contexts fit this general framework? One possibility is considering value as a cultural feature like others. This means that notions of value, similarly to the social practices in which they are embedded, can be appropriated in the way previously suggested. At the same time, being deeply imbued with moral and religious connotations that permeate many interpersonal and group relations, value is more resistant to transformation as an effect of cultural interaction than other aspects. After all, we are often reminded of how incompatible certain 'fundamental' values are with certain others, while other elements are more easily detached and incorporated in different cultural contexts, assuming new meanings. The decisive factor is the existence of effects on internal Relations of Production, that is value notions are appropriated from one context to the other only if social encounters are able to modify relationship between classes within each social context.

The advantage of assessing processes of mediation of ideas about value through archaeological sources lies in the fact that, although immaterial and social in nature, value is always "realized through some kind of material token" (Graeber 2006, 73), and many of these material tokens circulated between Aegean and central Mediterranean societies during the 2nd millennium BC when societies as different as the Mycenaean palaces and the small scale, arguably kin-ordered, communities of the Apennine peninsula came into contact (Blake 2014; Iacono 2015). The material that I will focus on is Aegean type pottery, a ceramic class normally considered an important marker for interaction in the region. We will see how interaction over the long-term produced a gradual incorporation of non-local conceptions of value in southern Italian communities. The discussion will start from the specific (in this case the value of Aegean type pottery), and will then sketch in the second part what possibly happened more generally.

AEGEAN TYPE POTTERY AND ITS VALUE

Aegean type pottery is a wheel-thrown fine ware with dark on light painted decoration¹ that, as suggested by its name, originates in the Aegean during the 2nd millennium BC (on Crete and on the mainland in Laconia) and gradually became extremely wide spread in much of the Mediterranean (for a brief introduction to the development of this pottery see Mountjoy 1993). This class of material has been the object of a considerable interest over the decades because of its high variability which makes it a sensible tool to explore both chronology and functional/social differences over the *longue durée* (Bettelli, Alberti 2014; Jung 2006; Jung, Weninger 2009; van Wijngaarden 2002). Aegean type pottery has traditionally been considered key evidence for Aegean trade in the central Mediterranean and, although local production in many areas, including sites in the central Mediterranean, starts relatively early, the fact that local products maintain stylistic linkages with the general development occurring in Greece indicates that there is some validity to this use (see Table 1; Bettelli 2002; Bettelli, Alberti 2014; Jones *et al.* 2014; Vianello 2005).

Southern Italy Cultures	Southern Italy	Mainland Greece	Crete
Protoapennine	MBA 1	LH I-LH IIA	LM IA-B
	MBA 2	LH IIA-IIB	LM IB-II
Apennine	MBA 3	LH IIIA1	LM IIIA1
		LH IIIA2	LM IIIA2
Subapennine	RBA 1	LH IIIB1	LM IIIB1
		LH IIIB2	LM IIIB2
		Trans. LH IIIB2-LH IIIC	
	RBA 2	LH IIIC early	LM IIIC early
Protovillanovan	FBA 1	LH IIIC middle	LM IIIC
	FBA 2	LH IIIC late/ Submycenaean	LM IIIC

Table 1. Comparative chronological table of the Southern Italy and the Aegean (based on Jung 2006). MBA = Middle Bronze Age; RBA = Recent Bronze Age; FBA = Final Bronze Age.

As I will focus on ‘value as quantity,’ frequency of attestation of this class of material will be the main dimension to be explored, with the scarcity of this material being related to a high perceived value and vice versa. Before commencing the discussion on Aegean type ceramics, it is important to highlight that it is to some extent misleading to consider pottery as a monolithic category, as we are aware of the variety of roles these goods can play (Arnold 1985; Crielaard 1999; Skibo, Feinman 1999; van Wijngaarden 1999). This simplification is to an extent dictated by the quality of the documentation from the Central Mediterranean, which allows for distinction within this broader category only in a limited number of contexts (Jones *et al.* 2014; van Wijngaarden 2002; Vianello 2005). In order to overcome such a limitation, I will critically compare the attestation and frequency of open and closed shapes in the contexts discussed. Indeed, as has been also observed by many (*e.g.* Bettelli 2002, 58-64), these two macro-categories are likely to refer to different dynamics, with closed shapes hinting at an appreciation of content as opposed to open shapes suggesting interest in ceramics (and social practices of their use) *per se*. Such a distinction is more useful than one based on subclasses within the broader set of Aegean type material *e.g.* transport versus fine ware, as the latter category had a much wider distribution in the central Mediterranean while transport containers are attested only at a handful of sites. Besides, pottery

¹ Aegean type pottery can be subdivided in a number of classes with different uses and technological choices, but for the purpose of the topic here addressed we can comfortably consider them all together. There are sub-groups with different stylistic and technical choices (*e.g.* unpainted, or coarse, see Mountjoy 1993) but their circulation in the central Mediterranean is so minute to be practically irrelevant (*e.g.* in the case of true Minyan wares and transport stirrup jars; see Guglielmino 2013; Haskell 2011).

provenance has clearly shown that closed shapes in fine wares have also been shipped over long distances fulfilling a function similar to transport ceramics (Jones *et al.* 2014, 156).

As highlighted a few years ago by Susan Sherratt (1999; 2001), despite some exceptions (*e.g.* amphoroid craters; see van Wijngaarden 1999), Aegean type pottery in the eastern Mediterranean was definitely a mundane product, characterised by a relatively low value. This is confirmed not only by its diffusion but also by its constant absence in the list of prestige goods sent around as gifts by Kings and Great Kings. Extending such a consideration to the Aegean

does not appear particularly problematic as the sheer amount of unpainted and pattern decorated pottery recovered at many palatial sites on the mainland as well as on Crete advises us that this material was probably widely available and not in any shortage. Again, in her influential model Sherratt (2001) suggested that pottery-trade was undertaken by non-elite or sub-elite individuals and that the circulation of this item was less subject to palatial control than that of other goods. The low-value of pottery in the Aegean is an aspect not unanimously accepted. Michael Galaty (2007) suggested that certain pottery vessels such as for instance the mass-produced kylix, the cup that is recovered in thousands of specimens in Mycenaean palaces, might have actually been a valued object. While it is certainly possible to agree with the overall argument that kylikes had different values in different contexts (see also van Wijngaarden 1999 on this), this does not invalidate the basic consideration that if we had to quantitatively assess pottery in a hypothetical value-ladder of the Aegean world, it would definitely not score high. This is particularly true in the light of the range of precious and exotic materials recorded both by archaeology and the Linear B record alike (Duhoux, Davies 2011; Graziadio 1991; Voutsaki 2010).

Was the value attributed to Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean similarly mundane?

One aspect that must be highlighted before delving into the contextual details of the argument is the absolute visual distinctiveness of Aegean type vessels when compared to those traditionally produced in Bronze Age Italy (Fig. 1). The first (Fig. 1.2) are realised with levigated clays fired in high temperature kilns and present light surfaces and painted decorations ranging in colour from red to dark brown (Mountjoy 1993). Impasto (Fig. 1.1), instead, the pottery of local tradition in southern Italy was handmade, fired at low temperatures and normally presented a dark-surface exhibiting various levels of finishing (Levi 1999).

EARLY ENCOUNTERS (LH I-LH IIIA)

Contextual data in the central Mediterranean able to highlight whether the visual difference was accompanied also by different notions of value related to Aegean type pottery are not particularly abundant. Early findspots are very heterogeneous in quality and quantity. Some areas such as the Tyrrhenian produced considerable concentrations (Vianello 2005; van Wijngaarden 2002), while for others, such as Adriatic Apulia (Bettelli 2010), the amount of material retrieved is very small. At some leading sites like Lipari (Fig. 2.1), for which contextual information is available, the in-depth analysis of Gert-Jan van Wijngaarden (2002, 212) has suggested that despite Aegean type pottery not being restricted to certain areas of the settlement, it seems to have been concentrated more in certain dwellings and less in others, suggesting that its distribution, although not exclusive, was not homogeneous over the whole settlement. Tablewares, and in particular open shapes like cups, are extremely popular, and this suggests that these are the very vessels (along with the exotic social practices connected to them) which are valued.

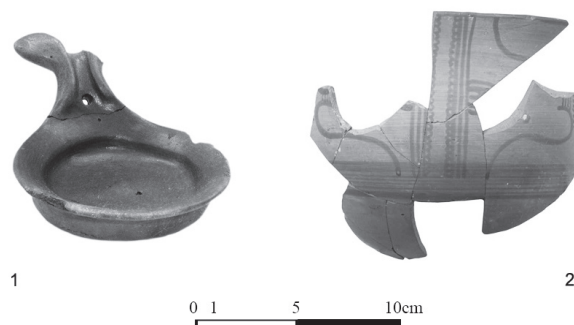


Fig. 1. Examples of pottery classes discussed in the paper from Roca. 1. Impasto (a shallow dipper, courtesy of Teodoro Scarano); 2. Aegean type pottery (a deep bowl, courtesy of Riccardo Guglielmino).

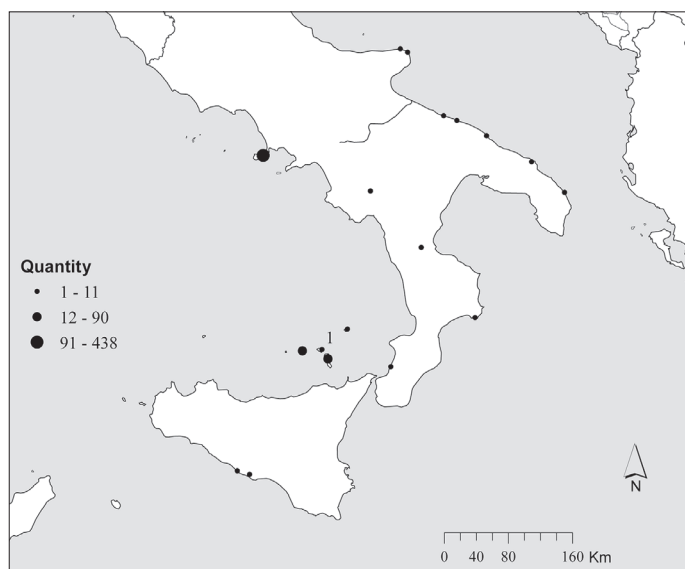


Fig. 2. Sites with finds of Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean during the Protoapennine (data after Jones *et al.* 2014, updated and integrated). 1 Lipari.

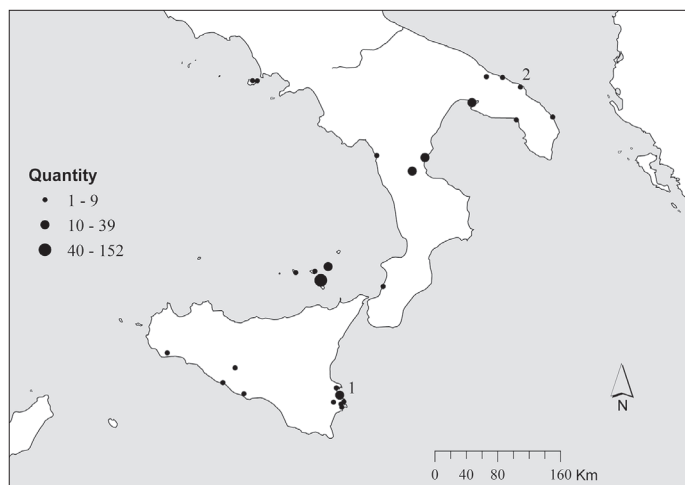


Fig. 3. Sites with finds of Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean during the Apennine (data after Jones *et al.* 2014, updated and integrated). 1 Thapsos; 2 Torre Santa Sabina.

More importantly, the occasional introduction of Aegean type vessels in tomb contexts, suggests that towards the end of the Bronze Age, when interaction begins on a noticeable scale also with areas such as south-eastern Sicily, Aegean type pottery already had some sort of 'special' value (Alberti 2006).² In Sicily the influence of the Aegean and Levantine worlds seems also to be profound and Aegean type pottery is actively selected as a grave good in many tombs at the cemetery of the site of Thapsos (Fig. 3.1; see La Rosa 2004; Militello 2004; van Wijngaarden 2002, 229-36). In this case we are dealing primarily with closed shapes whose significance was arguably deeply connected to their content but this seems not always to be the case. For instance, in another funerary context, *i.e.* the burial mound of Torre S. Sabina near Brindisi (Fig. 3.2) on the other side of the Central Mediterranean, pottery included (along with closed shapes) also a cup. In this case access to Aegean type goods (including this time also a bronze knife) was effectively controlled by the founder of the tumulus whose central tomb was the only one to produce these kinds of items (Lo Porto 1963; Onnis 2010).

By the end of the Italian Middle Bronze Age, Aegean type pottery seems to have acquired a certain value in southern Italian societies and to have been actively employed in strategies of social-representation in the burial arena. According to the proposal here suggested, this has primarily to do with dynamics of confrontation between Aegean and Apennine social groups that were meeting at various southern Italian locales. In these dynamics,

there was an element that conferred to the Aegean part an undoubted advantage in what I have defined as Relations of Interaction. I am obviously referring to the sailing ship, a means of transportation that was unknown in the central Mediterranean and that was instead well established in the Aegean world and that made much of the long range trade of Aegean polities of the LBA possible. Indeed, by the 14th century BC or LH IIIA, the extensive network of Aegean trade which included the whole span of the Mediterranean from Egypt to Sardinia, was only possible

² Although Borgna (2013) has highlighted the substantial dearth of Aegean type pottery finds from tomb contexts in southern Italy, these are not completely absent, especially considering that Bronze Age tombs for which we possess reliable data on grave goods are remarkably scarce. It is possible to add to the examples quoted in the main text also the two stirrup jars recovered in the area around the modern town of Oria and now at the Louvre, likely coming from one or more funerary mounds (Vianello 2005, 140).

because of the in-depth knowledge of sailing technology available to seafarers of Mycenaean times (Tartaron 2013). In light of this, it does not appear too hazardous to suggest a hegemonic role for the groups navigating westward. At this time, Aegean type pottery was primarily a token of the ability of such groups to move over a distance and with a rapidity unprecedented in Central Mediterranean societies.

To sum up, we have a hegemonic role of Aegean seafarers sustained by the adoption of a specific technology of travel that was lacking in the west, namely the sail. Naturally enough the technological element went hand in hand with other cultural ones that can be tentatively identified in a more active attitude toward long-range travel and trade, as we know these activities were well rooted in the Mycenaean world since at least the shaft grave period, and even earlier on Crete.

RECENT BRONZE AGE (LH IIIB-LH IIIC MIDDLE)

During the subsequent period, that is the Recent Bronze Age (approximately 13th-12th centuries BC), the quantity of Aegean type pottery recovered in certain parts of southern Italy, like the Adriatic and Ionian areas increased dramatically (Bettelli 2002; Jones *et al.* 2014; Vianello 2005).

Aegean type pottery findspots are widespread and some relatively remote (from a southern Italian perspective) sites, such as Cisterna di Tolentino (Fig. 4.1) in the Marche region, featured relatively large quantities of pottery (Vagnetti *et al.* 2006). RBA is when the amount of material recovered at the site of Roca in Salento (Fig. 4.2) boomed and the evidence of Area IX, Phase 2, represents the individual context with the largest assemblage of Aegean type pottery ever recovered in Southern Italy (counting some 270 vessels over a relatively small area; see Iacono 2015; Pagliara *et al.* 2008). Here, Aegean type pottery still maintained a special role as it was used in public feasting which involved the participation of a vast portion of the local population. This event, or better these series of events, were repeated over time and involved the sacrifice of a number of animals plus the consumption of wine, a practice that I have argued was explicitly related to the use of Aegean type cups and craters.

A similar situation is also attested at Broglio di Trebisacce (Fig. 4.3) in Calabria, where although we do not have evidence for feasting on the same large-scale attested at Roca, Aegean type pottery was abundant and concentrated primarily in area D and D west, in the so-called *Casa centrale* (Belardelli 1994; Castagna 2004; Masneri 2006). Besides possible ritual connotations which hint at a special value for Aegean type ceramics, what matters here is the wide availability of this material in quantities previously unattested in the central Mediterranean.

The fact that Aegean type pottery was gradually changing its specific value is suggested at Roca by other developments. Most notably, while in Phase 2 Aegean type materials seem to be used almost exclusively in one area of the settlement *i.e.* Area IX, in the subsequent Phase 5 these are abundant also in the other zone of the site explored in the RBA, namely Area X (see Guglielmino in Pagliara *et al.* 2007; Iacono in Guglielmino *et al.* forthcoming).

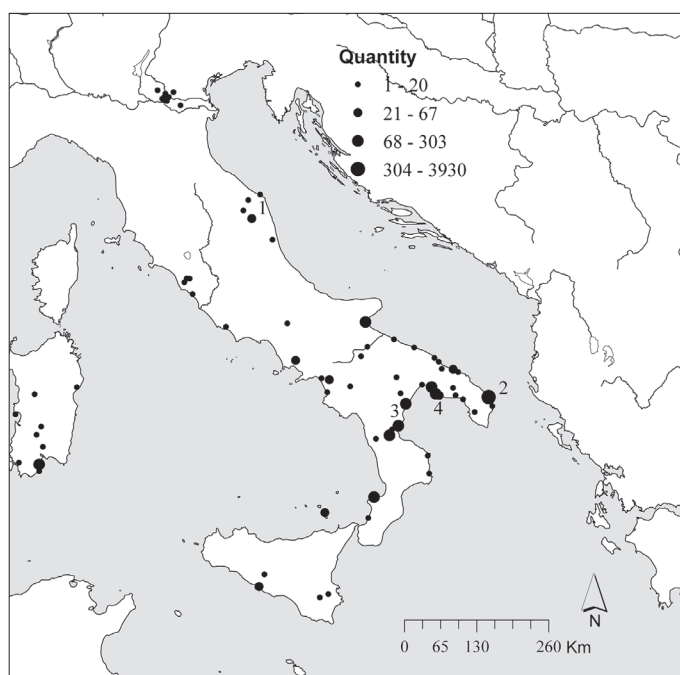


Fig. 4. Sites with finds of Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean during the Subapennine (data after Jones *et al.* 2014, updated and integrated). 1 Cisterna di Tolentino; 2 Roca; 3 Broglio; 4 Scoglio del Tonno.

The material excavated does not differ substantially in kind from that retrieved in the previous phase, suggesting also here similar practices connected to wine consumption. The fact that the pottery was abundantly available also in Area X, suggests that Aegean type pottery was perhaps starting to become more plentiful and less exclusive.

The material from the famous site of Scoglio del Tonno (Fig. 4.4), near the ancient city of Taras, makes the perfect complement to Roca and Broglio. Here Aegean type ceramics start to be attested at the end of the MBA and continue to be recovered in considerable quantities for much of the RBA. The amounts, already at the end of the MBA, are unparalleled at other sites of the region. Unfortunately, the settlement was excavated only briefly at the beginning of the 20th century, and thus very little contextual information is available (Quagliati 1900). However, the nature of the material is rather telling. Although open vessels are far from absent, the shapes more attested are closed containers and this prevalence is revealing of an interest for content over form, and a lack of interest in pottery itself (Bettelli 2002, 58-62; Coluccia, Iacono 2015, 49; Fisher 1988, 47-131).

Another feature critical in shaping our understanding of notions of value connected to Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean is local production. This had already started at the very end of the MBA but reached a considerable scale only in the subsequent RBA period. At this time the majority of vessels recovered in southern Italy were likely to have been locally made and not imported (Jones *et al.* 2014). This fact has important consequences that are rarely fully considered. What was at the beginning the appropriation of exogenous social practices entailing the use of a specific category of material culture becomes, with local production, fully part of internal Relations of Production of southern Italian communities, with the value of objects involved becoming subject to the local framework of comparison and hierarchy. Therefore, although at this time Aegean type pottery can no longer be considered simply as an exogenous – more precisely Aegean – cultural feature, paradoxically its value-meaning becomes closer to what it was in the Aegean towards the end of the palatial period.

Finally, there are hints suggesting that over the course of the 2nd millennium BC, Aegean type pottery production altered the very nature of concepts of value attached to ceramic containers (*i.e.* it altered the perception of their quality-value). Indeed, it is well known that in many pre-modern societies people thought of objects and substances in ‘human’ terms (with different meaning nuances given to these terms; see Gell 1998; Godelier 1999; Gregory 1982; Mauss 1966). As traditional impasto production of the Early and Middle Bronze age was probably the product of the household, it likely represented some sort of ‘inalienable possession’ (either by itself or in combination with food and other kinds of content; see Weiner 1992). On the contrary, specialised production on the wheel, characterising Aegean type vessels, with its ability to reproduce nearly identical shapes, reduced the amount of variability and thus individuality possessed by ceramic vessels (Levi 1999). As a consequence, these were less and less considered as unique ‘beings’, becoming increasingly objectified.

FINAL BRONZE AGE (LH IIIC MIDDLE - SUBMYCENAEAN)

After the end of the RBA, Aegean type pottery was definitely disappearing from Southern Italy, being replaced by a purely local class of fine painted pottery named Southern Italian Protogeometric (Iacono 2016; Vagnetti 1979) (Fig. 5). This gradual abandonment was probably due not only to this process of import replacement (after all local production of Aegean type pottery was also a form of import replacement, already earlier when this material was widespread) but rather to a declining hegemony, and thus, influence, of Aegean groups in southern Italy. It should be remembered that by now the Aegean polities of the Mycenaean world did not exist anymore and also that post-palatial centres that enjoyed a relatively long period of growth after the fall of the palaces were finally shrinking in size, possibly losing the ability (or the resources) to be as effective in long distance interactions as they were before (Dickinson 2006, 88; see *e.g.* Tiryns: Mühlenbruch 2009; or Athens: Papadimitriou 1998).

At the same time, it is possible that western centres were now starting to play a more proactive role in long-range interaction as attested for instance at Roca by connections that were established during the RBA and continued over much of the FBA, not mediated by the Aegean element, that was now less and less present in the

archaeological record. This probably meant that certain southern Italian communities had a more effective control of what I have defined as Means of Interaction, with a more intense maritime activity perhaps driven by southern Italian communities. The consequent general re-balancing of hegemony with the Aegean partners, is witnessed by the spread of some cultural elements of western / southern Italian origin that become quite popular in the post palatial Aegean (D'Agata, Boileau, De Angelis 2012; Borgna 2013; Iacono 2013). As previously stated, similar phenomena of cultural appropriation normally occur directionally: from the hegemonic to the non-hegemonic.

BROADER REPERCUSSIONS

The discussion so far has highlighted how interaction has affected the trajectory of the value of a specific category of objects. It is perhaps now legitimate to ask whether the relationship between central Mediterranean societies and the Aegean world had other implications for broad conceptions of value. Were the ways central Mediterranean societies compared and categorised things dramatically influenced by interaction?

In order to assess this, it will first be necessary to identify some of the defining characteristics of broader notions of value in the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean world, to see if similar ideas can be recognised also to the west of Greece, in areas connected with the Minoan/Mycenaean world. Although this point is far from being universally accepted, over the last few decades a number of scholars (*e.g.* Monroe 2009; Warburton 2003; *contra* Liverani 2003), have highlighted that in the broad eastern Mediterranean, although power structures such as the palaces were able to exercise a considerable control over much of the economic activity, situations in which “economic calculation appears to match or outweigh social or cultural, *i.e.*, substantive concerns” were far from being rare (Monroe 2009, 22). The main aspect of this trend is convertibility: the possibility to compare and convert different goods (see also the somewhat related concept of ‘fungibility’; Renfrew 2012). In this perspective objects are no longer unique and irreplaceable but can be transformed into others with a similar perceived value. The notion of equivalence and convertibility, although stemming from a basic property of value as quantity (*i.e.* its ‘comparative’ nature, see above), is actually strictly connected to long-range intercultural interaction. As suggested long ago by Sahlins (1972, 191-204), we behave in a different way with people with whom we have on-going linkages, *i.e.* that are socially close, and with people with whom we have no attachment, *i.e.* that are socially distant (see also Nakassis *et al.* 2016 on this). Social distance is often associated with spatial segregation as people living in the same space will eventually establish some form of social relationship. With people with whom we have no or few ties, our behaviour tends to be more oriented towards what has been defined as balanced reciprocity (Fig. 6). We try to ‘make things square’ and avoid leaving any outstanding debt. The very idea of ‘making things square’ presupposes the existence of a common measure able to assess the existence of such an equivalence. Therefore, in a sense, it is the very existence of social distance that puts in motion a mechanism ultimately leading to equivalence, money and more market-oriented forms of transaction. Inter-societal interaction, that is interaction with agents that are socially distant from us, represents the ideal situation for a similar development and this is all the more valid for long-range interaction which is arguably repeated less frequently than short- and medium range interactions, producing weaker social ties. As Graeber (2011, 386) puts it: “Calculation demands equivalence. And such equivalence specially when it involves equivalence between human beings (and it always seems to start that way, because at first, human beings are always the ultimate values) only seems to occur when people have been forcibly severed from their contexts, so

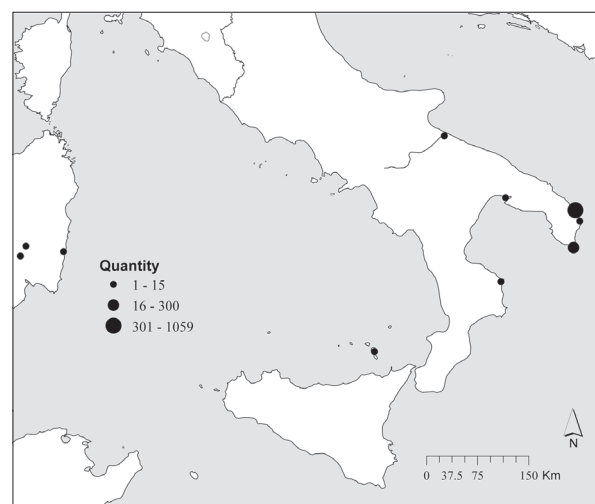


Fig. 5. Sites with finds of Aegean type pottery in the central Mediterranean during the Protovillanovan (data after Jones *et al.* 2014, updated and integrated).

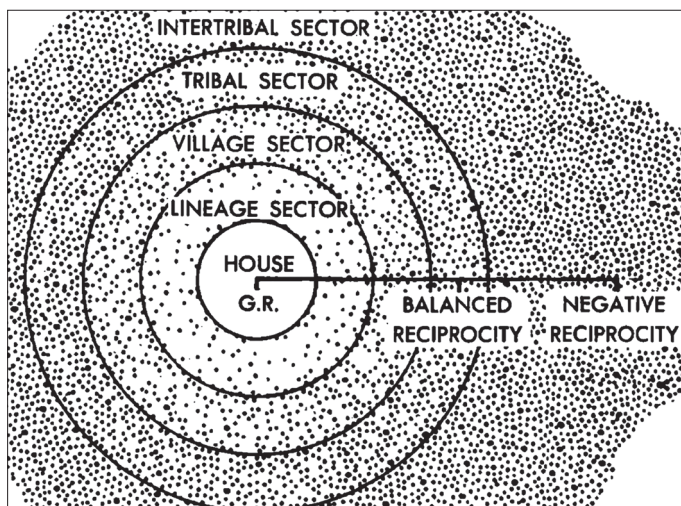


Fig. 6. Scheme describing the different kinds of 'reciprocity' (after Sahlins 1972, 1999).

much so that they can be treated as identical to something else."

This point is of course made in relation to the ultimate 'de-valuation' of human beings, that is slavery. However, as I have tried to explain, in many ancient contexts the difference between people and things is far from being unambiguous, and thus these considerations can be equally applied to objects detached from their original social context.

According to Monroe, in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, increased convertibility seems to be accompanied by a greater attestation of weighing implements (both real objects and references to them in the historical and mythical/religious record; see Fig. 7; Monroe 2009, 39-47). Of course, it is not possible

simply to generalise for the Mycenaean world what has been suggested for the broader Levantine area, although certain elements, *e.g.* the attestation of scales and weights in tomb contexts, suggest the existence of a certain symbolic significance attached to these objects (Alberti 2006; Bergonzi 1996). Nevertheless, the attestation of weights does not simply equate with the presence of market-transactions and there are a number of possibilities for explaining the attestation of these artefacts, like the need to mix a fixed ratio of certain substances to obtain a certain result (for instance in metallurgy, at least when activities were conducted on a large scale; see Pare 2013; Rahmstorf 2006). Other elements also suggest the existence of broad equivalences such as for instance the interpretation of certain (admittedly numerically not overwhelming) elements of the Linear B record. Interestingly, these bits of archival record seem to relate either to goods that had to be sent outside of the palace to different shrines (Hruby 2013), or that were acquired as finished products from *damoi* or to transactions entailing slaves (Montecchi 2007; Sacconi 2005). This confirms the more commoditised/detached and 'balanced' (that is "negatively reciprocal", Sahlins 1972 *sensu*) nature of economic relationships external to the palace and/or that involved individuals distant (at least socially if not also in geographic/kin terms) from the palace and its elites. The existence of what we have described as convertibility is also independently confirmed by the evolution of the weighing system of the Aegean that, as effectively highlighted by Parise and Alberti, experienced a gradual increase in the attestation of Levantine units through the Late Bronze Age (Alberti 2009; 2011; Alberti, Parise 2005). This suggests the gradual growth of the range of convertible goods in the Aegean, which increasingly included also goods acquired through interaction with the eastern Mediterranean. Finally, it is likely that presence and importance of convertibility within Aegean societies became more, rather than less, marked after the fall of palatial polities. In the absence of established central authorities, previous equivalences represented an important reference although undoubtedly were prone to fluctuations dictated by the fluidity of the new ephemeral political/economic relations (Borgna 2013, 134).

Can we see anything like that in the record of the areas of the central Mediterranean which had been interested by interaction with the Aegean world? The obvious thing to look for are weights, scale parts and related implements, categories of objects virtually unattested in Protoapennine Southern Italy as well more broadly in the whole peninsula. Some potential exceptions come from Sicily and are represented by a scale beam recovered at Castelluccio (perhaps accompanied by some stone weights), and later, MBA metal discs from Thapsos. Both sites however presented traces of interaction with the Aegean and Levantine area in EBA/MBA (Cardarelli *et al.* 2001; Cardarelli 2004; Crispino, Cultraro 2015; Pare 2013). Overall the evidence is remarkably poor and related to early eastern connections. On the basis of this, we can cautiously argue that notions of equivalence and convertibility as we had them in the east Mediterranean were not independently present in southern Italian societies before contact with the Aegean world.

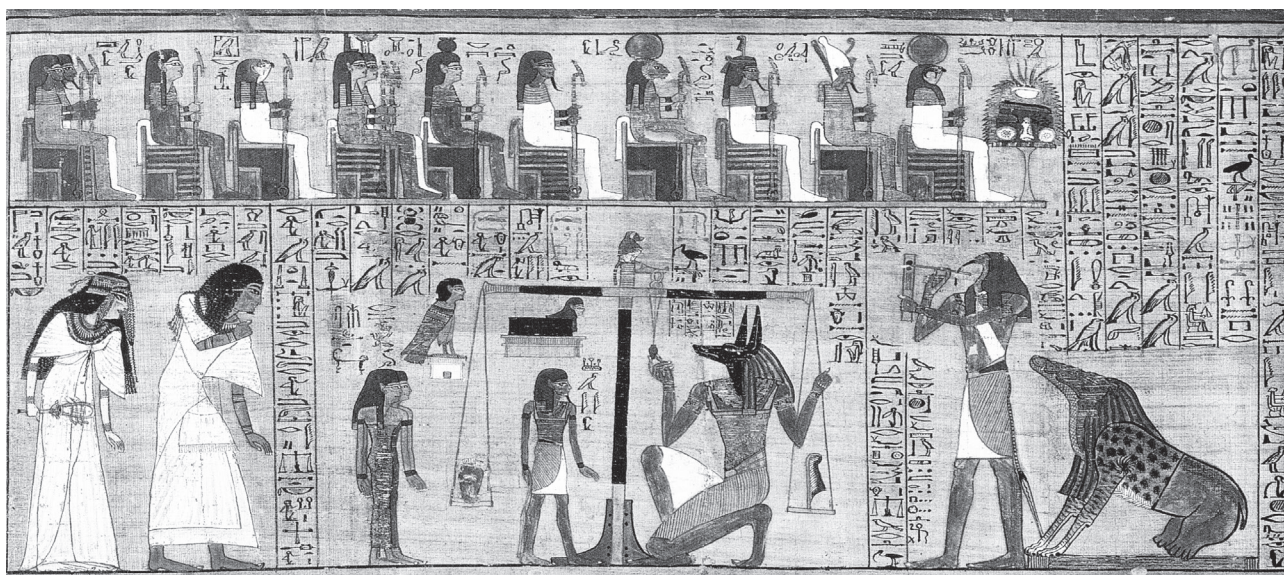


Fig. 7. Anubis weighing the heart of the dead in the *Papyrus of Ani* (19th dynasty) at the British Museum (public domain image from Wikimedia).

This situation is transformed with the end of the MBA and the start of the RBA. Interestingly, the area that first exhibited some signs related to weights and convertibility was the Adriatic and specifically the north around the so-called Terramare area (Cardarelli *et al.* 1997). This evidence is constituted by a category of weights named *pesi ad appiccagnolo*. The Terramare zone was connected to the Aegean world possibly through the mediation of communities of south-eastern Italy and this is suggested by the considerable similarities in material culture between the two zones (including both pottery and metalwork, see Iacono 2013; 2015). As we saw above, this relationship between Italy and the Aegean in this phase is attested not only by Aegean type pottery in the west, but also by a variety of material cultural elements of western origin found in the Aegean. The main focus of this relationship was probably metal, as attested by the circulation of certain types at some of the main sites of southern Italy that will become widely diffused also in the Aegean and the broader eastern Mediterranean (Borgna 2009; 2013; Cardarelli 2009; Jung, Mehofer 2013; Iacono 2013). Some of the ‘*pesi ad appiccagnolo*’ typical of the Terramare region have been also found in post-palatial Greece, most notably at the site of Lefkandi, providing an interesting confirmation of the trend indicated by the distribution of pottery and metal types (Evely 2006, 275, fig. 5.5.4).

Besides weights, there is another category of evidence potentially able to inform us about convertibility and notions of value in the LBA central Mediterranean: hoards. I have previously suggested that by the end of the RBA southern Italian communities were starting to take a more pro-active role in interaction in the central Mediterranean and that Aegean groups were no longer hegemonic in these connections. Hoards suggest that Protovillanovan communities were becoming some of the most important actors in the area, being involved and mediating exchanges focusing on metals which extended to the whole Adriatic area including Trentino and the Balkans (Bietti Sestieri 2008; Borgna 2009). In the FBA, 2 hoards were recovered at Roca, deposited in the large building belonging to this phase. One of them, the so-called hoard of the bronzes, was largely composed of fragments of items of mostly northern Adriatic and Balkan type (Maggiulli 2009). The site possessed also evidence of Aegean connections related to metals, most notably in the form of moulds reproducing many Aegean types (Guglielmino 2006), but it is interesting to note the limited overlap between the items in the hoards and those attested in the moulds,³ as if Roca acted as a sort of crucial linkage between chains of exchange otherwise separated.

3 Apart from the hammer (Guglielmino 2006, 39-41; Maggiulli 2009, 313 no. 1.28; see also Bietti Sestieri 2008), the knife (Bietti Sestieri 2008; Guglielmino 2006, 41-43; Maggiulli 2009, 313 no. 1.34), and the 2 Scorrano axes (from a total of more than 70 axes and axe

Roca was not the only site to present hoards or traces of interaction with the Balkans. Bronze Age hoards are fairly widespread in Apulia (Fig. 8.1), particularly in Salento (10) and their number is even larger (12, 11 in the Salento) if we include also those containing material to be dated to the earliest part of the Iron Age (*e.g.* Salapia and Soletto; see Bietti Sestieri 1973; Peroni 1996, 362-364). The composition of these contexts can vary considerably but among those are hoards containing only one type of object (such as that from Salapia), or a considerable number of objects of the same type as in the case of the hoard of Manduria which contained some 117 axes (Quagliati 1903, 109).

Shaft hole axes (Fig. 8.2) seems to have been extremely popular in these hoards. A trans-Adriatic identity was postulated long ago for the shaft-hole axes of non-italic type recovered at Reinzano near Taranto (Bietti Sestieri 1969; König 2004, 98-99) in a hoard

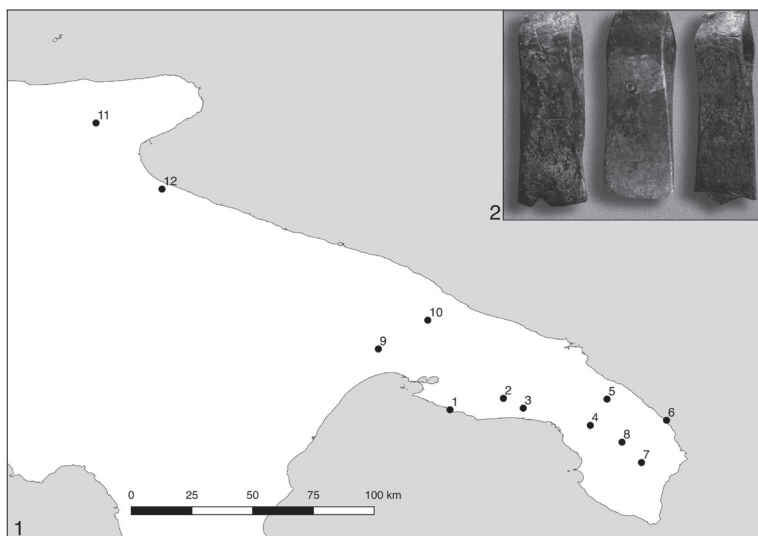


Fig. 8. 1. Distribution of hoards in Final Bronze / Early Iron Age Apulia: 1 Torre Castelluccia; 2 Manduria; 3 Avetrana; 4 Copertino; 5 Surbo; 6 Roca (2 hoards); 7 Scorrano; 8 Soletto; 9 Mottola; 10 Reinzano; 11 Montenero; 12 Salapia; 2. Shaft-hole axes from Salapia (after Bietti Sestieri 2010).

possibly dated to a mature Final Bronze Age horizon. Since then, the circulation of metal types between the two shores of the Adriatic has proved to be a consistent phenomenon. Analogies have been identified between types attested in hoards recovered in southern Italy (Manduria, Soletto, Copertino, Reinzano) and Croatia (Sitno), Albania (Torovicë and Melgushë), Bosnia-Herzegovina (Debelo Brdo) as well as Montenegro (Spič and Ostrelj), with a specific focus around the region of Shkodër in northern Albania (Bietti Sestieri 1969; Bietti Sestieri, Lo Schiavo 1976; Gori 2006 with bibliography; Korkuti 1985). According to Carancini's (2004) proposal, these axes were a pre-monetary medium destined for exchange, as suggested by the fact that they preserved features which made

their functional use unlikely (*e.g.* extensive presence of casting burrs or a shaft-hole too small for effective hafting). Similar features are present also in Balkan hoards and, on this basis, Gori (2006, 211) has suggested the existence of similar dynamics and trade in metal likely undertaken autonomously by southern Italian and Balkan groups. The majority of the metal types involved in these dynamics have no direct connections with the coeval material culture of the Aegean world, from where some of the ideas related to convertibility were probably appropriated. However, previous relations with the Aegean, in which Aegean actors had a hegemonic role for a long time, affected the structure of southern Italian societies who were now ready to engage directly with trade and maritime activities, transforming their Relations of Production. The end result of this overall process was the appropriation of the 'new' notions of convertibility on the part of southern Italian communities.

Overall, although in southern Italy traces of weighing implements remain relatively rare, the spread of shaft-hole axes in hoards in south-eastern Italy and beyond in the neighbouring Balkan areas indicates that convertibility had become a factor to be taken into account also in central Mediterranean societies at the end of the Bronze Age.

fragments, see Guglielmino 2006, 43-44; Maggiulli 2009, 312 no. 1.16-17), no other items are attested in both contexts, *i.e.* there are no Manduria axes, northern Italian ones, sickles or ingots among the moulds. The first two of these three exceptions are also, together with a double axe (Pagliara, Guglielmino 2005, 315 II.217), the items more clearly of Aegean inspiration in the whole repertoire of bronzes dating to this phase of the Bronze Age at Roca while, as noted by Guglielmino (2006, 45 n. 79), a spearhead similar to that of the Roca mould is recorded in Achaia.

Similar dynamics are not unique to south eastern Italy and during the same period can be recognised to a greater or lesser degree and with different features in various other areas at the fringes of the former Mycenaean palatial world. For instance, this is the case with a specific typology of ingots (*pani a piccone*) with an extremely wide geographic distribution and for which a possible specialised production for exchange has been suggested (Borgna 1992, 50). Likewise, a recent analysis of Sardinian hoards has shown that items of the most disparate categories were purposefully fragmented so as to adhere to certain weight units, thus increasing their convertibility (Ialongo *et al.* 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Value notions powerfully shape our lives and yet we rarely pay attention to how these multifarious and apparently immutable concepts are influenced by dynamics of encounters between groups of people with different origins and backgrounds. The Late Bronze Age Mediterranean represents one of the earliest contexts in which such an encounter assumed a critical importance and its study might help us to understand better the ways this affects value transformations nowadays. After briefly reviewing different ideas about value, I have argued that in order to understand value in intercultural encounters it is necessary to take into consideration the confrontation between different groups (or classes) beyond the boundaries of the same community and that the hegemony of the means through which encounters occur (Means of Interaction) is a critical feature that produces phenomena of cultural appropriation. Given this, I have suggested that value concepts function like other cultural features, being appropriated in this exchange, with the main difference that such an appropriation occurs only after encounters and interactions basically modify the internal Relations of Production of a community.

To illustrate this point, I have discussed two interlinked examples dealing with the central Mediterranean of the 2nd millennium BC: one dealing with the value of a specific material category, namely Aegean type pottery, and another exploring the broader repercussions of encounter beyond pottery and the appropriation of notions of convertibility, *i.e.* the possibility to establish equivalence between different categories of goods. I have surmised that at the beginning of the phase of intense contact between central Mediterranean societies and the Aegean world, Aegean type pottery was a relatively precious exotic material, a token of the ability of Aegean sailors to rapidly travel by sea with the aid of their mysterious sailing technology. With the inception of local production and the concomitant decrease of hegemony of Aegean travellers in their relations, Aegean fine wares started to be less regarded, in line with their value in their original context of production. Besides this decrease of value of pottery, the analysis of the archaeological record (or the lack thereof) connected to weights in the central Mediterranean in EBA/MBA suggests that exact equivalences between different materials started to feature in local societies only after the beginning of intense interaction with the Aegean world, *i.e.* in the LBA. This is also confirmed by the appearance in metallurgy in this same broad region of objects which possibly had a pre-monetary function.

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