

## LA SICILIA E L'ARCIPELAGO MALTESE NELL'ETÀ DEL BRONZO MEDIO

BY DAVIDE TANASI, WITH ENGLISH SUMMARY. PP. XI + 141, B&W FIGS. 39, COLOR FIGS. 22. PROGETTO K.A.S.A. AND OFFICE OF MEDIEVAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF MALTA, PALERMO 2008. ISBN 88-88615-76-8 ([HTTP://WWW.PROGETTOKASA.NET/IMAGES/PDF/PUBBLICAZIONI/3.PDF](http://www.progettokasa.net/images/pdf/pubblicazioni/3.pdf)).

When I first heard about this book, which is available for free as a downloadable PDF, I thought it was time a specific study was devoted to the relations between Sicily and Malta during the Middle Bronze Age. Until now, this issue has been confined to brief papers in journals or conference proceedings or to brief chapters within studies centered on the Maltese evidence. This volume treats the ceramic evidence of Maltese imports to Sicilian (mainly southeastern) contexts and a few, yet important, Sicilian Middle Bronze Age imports to Malta. This latter aspect was previously unknown and emerges as one of the important features of the book.

Chapters 1–3 are a useful introduction to Sicilian-Maltese relations. The author's main goal, to confront that infrequently studied issue, is stated in chapter 1 (3–4). Chapter 2 sets the chronological boundaries of the study from both Sicilian and Maltese standpoints (5–6). The bulk of Maltese imports comes from Middle Bronze Age contexts (mainly funerary), ascribable to the so-called Thapsos culture, whose chronology traditionally spans ca. 1400–1250 B.C.E. The Maltese imports belong to Borg in-Nadur phases IIB 1 and early IIB 2 (ca. 1500–1250 B.C.E.). Chapter 3 then aims to summarize the main archaeological and cultural features of both Thapsos and Borg in-Nadur facies (7–22). Compared with the Thapsos section, the Maltese one is far more interesting, as it cleverly summarizes data spread over several publications, both old and new (14–22). A useful summary of the Borg in-Nadur pottery fabrics is provided as well (18–19).

Chapter 4 provides a catalogue of Sicilian sites with Maltese pottery (23–32). Most are situated in a roughly compact coastal area in

southeastern Sicily, with the exception of the last site on the list, Monte San Paolillo, near Catania, which is far north of the main cluster of sites. For each site, Tanasi provides a summary of the relevant archaeological features alongside bibliographical references. The entry for Thapsos contains an error whose emendation is necessary. The room of the so-called Complex A that yielded Maltese pottery does not lie within the squares LI/30, L/29, and L/30 of the site grid as stated (24, 82) but within XLIX/29, XLIX/30, and L/30 (cf. G. Alberti, "Minima thapsiana," *Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche* 57 [2007] fig. 31 n. 5). The slip is not the author's fault, since he probably relied on a mistake in one of his sources (e.g., F. Tomasello, "L'architettura 'micenea' nel siracusano. to-ko-do-mo a-pe-o de-me-o-te?" in V. La Rosa, ed., *Le presenze micenee nel territorio siracusano* [Padua 2004] 187–215).

The next three chapters comprise the analytic core. Chapter 5 contains the catalogue of Maltese vessels from Sicilian sites (33–53), which is organized according to find context. In the view of this reviewer, this choice could have been better pondered; since the volume aims to provide a typology for the Maltese pots, this catalogue should have been organized on typological grounds, using a separate section to keep track of each entry's provenance. Chapter 6 contains the brief list of Thapsos sherds found in Maltese contexts (55–6). The author gives a full description of morphology and fabric and identifies the sherds as fragments of pedestal cups. Chapter 7 is related to the previous two: it discusses each of the seven vessel forms identified by the author (57–67). Each pottery type is analyzed from a typological, morphological, and techni-

cal standpoint; comparanda with types from other Maltese contexts are discussed as well. A niggle that does not subtract anything from the importance of this section relates to jug Type IV, represented by a unique specimen from Thapsos Tomb D. It is hard to see the reason why the author considers it a Maltese import. He notes the lack of any close comparanda on Malta (58), and its decorative technique (incisions filled with white paste) is not sufficient, in my opinion (see below), to claim Maltese production. Two important sections are devoted to the chronology of the Maltese pots in Thapsos contexts (65–6) and vice versa (66–7). Interestingly, the latter can be ascribed to the later stage of the Thapsos period.

The last three chapters aim to bring the analysis to a higher level, offering wide-ranging cultural remarks. A comparison of Thapsos and Maltese ceramic technologies is provided in chapter 8 (69–73); the discussion of Thapsos technology, however, relies only on documentation from Monte San Paolillo. In my mind, the more interesting points concern the presence of marks (featured on Maltese pots as well) on Thapsos sherds from Monte San Paolillo (71) and the use of the potter's wheel on Thapsos sherds from the same context (71–2). The author claims an Aegean contribution to the origin of both features.

A point that does deserve critical remark is the presence, on both Thapsos and Maltese pottery, of engraved decorations filled with white paste. The author considers this technique an “index fossil” of Borg in-Nadur pottery and believes that Thapsos potters borrowed it from their Maltese colleagues (70). It must be noted, however, that this feature also occurs in a wider cultural area: in the Aeolian Middle Bronze Age Milazzese ceramic repertoire, as well as in the Middle Bronze Age Apennine assemblages of the Italian mainland (e.g., L. Bernabò Brea et al., *La Grotta Cardini, Praia a mare, Cosenza: Giacimento del bronzo* [Rome 1989] 132–33). A similar technique features in the preceding cultural horizons in both areas (Capo Graziano and Proto-Apennine), as well as on Malta (Tarxien

cemetery). Assessed against this backdrop, the claimed Maltese influence on Thapsos decorative technique turns out to be diluted, to say the least. Chapter 9 is devoted to reconstructing the distribution and function of Maltese pottery in Sicily (75–80). The author provides a series of interesting remarks, among which one stands out. He successfully identifies the presence of a ceramic set containing a jug, cup, and basin (77). The author puts forward two hypotheses to explain its presence in Thapsos contexts: first, the integration of a foreign set by high-ranking segments of local society as a means of displaying status (though references to recent available studies on the integration of valuable items in high-ranked tombs are indeed lacking); and second, the presence of Maltese middlemen actually living and operating in southeastern Sicily. This presence would have been aimed, in the author's mind, to connect Malta to the complex network linking Sicily and the Aegean. Finally, chapter 10 offers a summary of the relevant achievements of the study (81–6).

In summary, leaving aside the aforementioned criticisms, I believe that scholars will welcome Tanasi's work as a valuable tool for better understanding the typological and cultural facets of Maltese ceramic evidence in southeastern Sicily. His analyses of Maltese and Thapsos ceramic technology (though the latter rests on the evidence of just one site) are noteworthy. He succeeds in reconstructing an interesting framework for relations between Sicily and Malta during the Middle Bronze Age, providing grounds for further speculation on this interesting, important, yet often underestimated, topic.

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