



New light on old data: Toward understanding settlement and social organization in Middle Bronze Age Aeolian Islands (Sicily) through quantitative and multivariate analysis



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ABSTRACT

Settlement and social organization in Middle Bronze Age Sicily (ca 1490–1250 BCE) have received scant attention compared to that devoted to broader cultural processes during the same period. In spite of some limitations, this work aims at filling the gap building on published evidence from Capo Milazese settlement (Aeolian Archipelago, north-eastern Sicily), which is taken as case study. On the basis of a preliminary yet necessary study of deposits' formation process, and by means of quantitative and multivariate analyses, this work seeks to pinpoint the activities performed within the settlement, and to understand their material and spatial correlates. For the first time, this work identifies habitations and utilitarian huts highlighting differences in terms of artefacts inventories and floor area. Evidence hinting at huts' functional changes, and at special activities such as pottery production, is located. The material culture patterning brought to the fore by the analysis provides grounds to infer traits of households' socio-economic, architectural, and spatial organization, and to open a window into local processes that may account for the social meaning of food consumption practices, and for the incorporation of foreign pottery into local ceramic inventories.

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1. Introduction

Scholars have devoted attention to Middle Bronze Age (MBA, ca 1490–1250 BCE) Sicily because of the evidence of different cultural processes taking place during this period (overview in: Leighton, 1999; Tusa, 1992). Although limited evidence is known about key sites such as Cannatello and Thapsos (De Miro, 1999; Voza, 1999), ceramic evidence shows that the island was part of a network of maritime connections tying Sicily to the Italian mainland (Bernabò Brea and Cavalier, 1968, 1980; Di Gennaro, 1997; Macchiarola, 1987, 1995), Late Bronze Age Greece (Cavalier and Vagnetti, 1984; Smith, 1987b; Taylour, 1958, 1980; Vagnetti, 1991; Van Wijngaarden, 2002; Vianello, 2005), Cyprus (Alberti, 2008, 2015a; Karageorghis, 1995; Vagnetti, 2001), and Malta (Tanasi, 2008; Tanasi and Vella, 2011). Aspects of burial practices and the adoption of foreign cultural traits, both in the domestic and funerary architecture, at Thapsos indicate that overseas relations went hand in hand with the development of social asymmetries at some sites (Alberti, 2006; D'Agata, 1997; Doonan, 2001; Tomasello, 1997, 2004).

Compared to the attention paid to overseas contacts and to their broader chronological and cultural implications, the interest in settlements layout and material culture patterning at the site level has been

comparatively smaller. Questions regarding aspects of settlement organization have remained unaddressed, even though the very presence of foreign materials should have strongly called for a better understanding of the contexts in which they were used. While this could be accounted for by the lack of fully published evidence from key MBA sites, the availability of sufficiently detailed data from the Aeolian Archipelago (north-eastern Sicily) should have been made this endeavour feasible. Still, this type of research has been long overlooked (Section 3).

This work aims at filling the gap. It focuses on the Aeolian Archipelago and takes the site of Capo Milazese on the island of Panarea as a case study (Fig. 1). This is done since the archaeological evidence for this site has been published in sufficient detail, and because the site has no later disturbances. The MBA evidence from Filicudi and Lipari is examined to assess whether patterns inferred analysing the case study site hold true beyond it. The evidence from Portella on the island of Salina (Bernabò Brea and Cavalier, 1968; Martinelli, 2005, 2011) is not considered since it was possibly used for specific non-residential tasks (Alberti, 2012; Cazzella and Recchia, 2009). In a bottom-up perspective that seeks to understand the spatial distribution of the material remains of past activities, Correspondence Analysis (CA) is used to explore the relation between functional classes of objects and huts. Once possible functional differences among huts and groups thereof are isolated, the relation between huts' function and size, and the extent to which functionally different huts may relate spatially, is considered. The material

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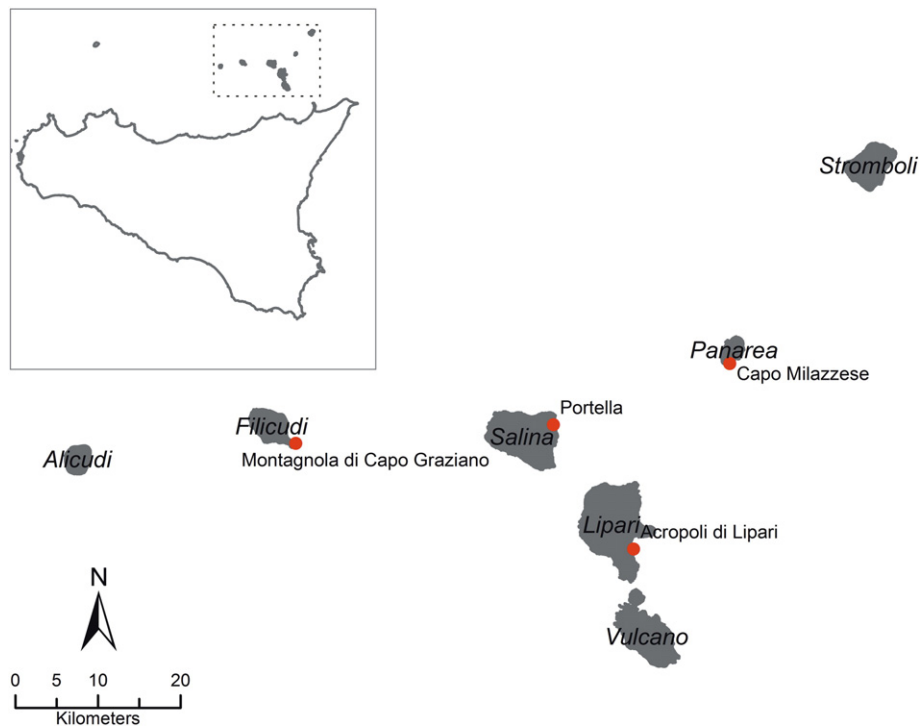


Fig. 1. Aeolian Archipelago. Red dots represent the Bronze Age sites cited in the text. The inset shows the position of the Archipelago relative to Sicily. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

culture patterning brought to the fore provides the basis for an interpretation of the spatial organization of activities in order to backtrack the socio-cultural processes that generated them. While an earlier work (Alberti, 2013) was merely focused on the application of CA, the present study marks a sharp departure since it widens the focus, at the same time seeking to provide a comprehensive analysis and discussion of relevant topics that were beyond the scope of the earlier study.

2. Geographical and archaeological setting

The Aeolian Archipelago lies off the north-eastern coast of Sicily, in the Tyrrhenian sea. It is a cluster of volcanic islands comprising Alicudi, Filicudi, Salina, Lipari, Vulcano, Panarea, and Stromboli. The islands range in size from 3.4 (Panarea) to 37.6 km² (Lipari). Volcanic activity is still present at Stromboli and Vulcano, while elsewhere (e.g., Salina) it ceased well before the Bronze Age, in a period that has been estimated between 24 and 13 kyr BP (Ferlito, 2005). Remains of a MBA settlement have been unearthed in two main excavation areas on the Acropolis of Lipari (Bernabò Brea and Cavalier, 1980) (Fig. 2A). 19 huts characterized by MBA material culture were sandwiched between a bottom layer, featuring architectural structures dating to an advanced stage of the EBA, and two superimposed layers corresponding to two later habitation phases dating to the Late and Final Bronze Age. At Filicudi, a settlement was discovered on a terrace lying on the western flank of the Montagnola of Capo Graziano (Bernabò Brea and Cavalier, 1991) (Fig. 2B). A habitation phase dating to an advanced stage of EBA is documented. The use of some huts continued into the MBA, with new floors superimposed to the EBA ones, while some other structures were built afresh. At Panarea, the MBA settlement is located on the flat cliff-edged promontory of Capo Milazzese, where 21 huts were unearthed (Bernabò Brea and Cavalier, 1968) (Fig. 2C). Some of them were only partially preserved due to the erosion of the promontory's cliffs.

The archaeological research has succeeded in retrieving interesting evidence of MBA material culture, like for instance ceramic inventories featuring typical brown handmade vessels either in fine or coarseware fabric, stone and clay tools (e.g., millstones, handstones, mortars,

pestles, spindle whorls), and the mentioned fine-ware pottery from mainland Italy and the Aegean area. With few exceptions, huts were mainly sub-circular in plan and delimited by dry-stone double-skin walls built with roubles. In some instances, the main room was coupled with one or two annexes, resulting in a structure having a sub-rectangular plan (e.g., Capo Milazzese hut 02, 09, and 20). While main rooms must have had some form of roofing, it is uncertain whether annexes were given a shed roof or, more likely, were just bounded open spaces joined to the main rooms (Albore Livadie et al., 2002; Doonan, 2001; Holloway and Lukesh, 1995). The excavators identified the huts' floor level in a dark earthy layer, rich in cultural material, overlaying the rocky bank, and often covered by a layer containing materials from the walls and roof collapse (e.g., Panarea hut 02, 03, 04, 05, 16).

3. Review of previous works

A review of all the works that have dealt with the MBA Aeolian Archipelago is beyond the scope of this study since the majority focuses on the overseas connections linking Sicily to the Aegean and Near East (Alberti and Bettelli, 2005; Bernabò Brea, 1985, 1992; Bietti Sestieri, 1988, 1997, 2003; Blake, 2008; Cavalier and Vagnetti, 1986; D'Agata, 1997; Jung, 2005, 2006; La Rosa, 2002; Marazzi, 1997a, 2003; Militello, 2004; Tusa, 2000; Vagnetti, 1991). Rather, in this paragraph, I review the few studies that have tackled aspects of material culture and settlement organization.

Smith's (1987b) study of contacts between central Mediterranean and Late Bronze Age Greece provides a cursory analysis of the Aegean pottery distribution in the Aeolian MBA contexts. She stresses the predominance of Aegean open (i.e., dinner) vessels in the Aeolian settlements (see already Taylour, 1958) and their non restricted occurrence across the huts. Associated local materials and/or architectural types are not examined. Kilian (1990) stresses the absence of any clustering of Aegean pottery in MBA contexts of the Aeolian archipelago, and in the Capo Milazzese settlement in particular, again without any deeper analysis of the archaeological data. He argues that the exchange of foreign materials was not restricted to any high-ranking class. Yet, the existence of high

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