

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN AEGEAN GROUPS AND LOCAL
COMMUNITIES IN SICILY IN THE BRONZE AGE
THE EVIDENCE FROM POTTERY *

by ANNA LUCIA D'AGATA

“A pot may mean that I, as the ancient owner of this vessel, belong to *this* group and believe to *these* things; that I have *this* level of wealth, and *this* much status. I am also of a specific sex and perform these labours defined by my sex, and this vessel correlates with this sex and this status.” So much was argued by James F. Strange in 1989¹, reasserting in elementary but clear terms the idea that pottery artefacts represent not only one of the major elements in the material culture of a given group, but also a means by which the group and individuals exchange information and express, although not necessarily settle, problems of a social nature². To grasp the symbolic significance attributed to certain classes of vessels within a community sharing one and the same culture it is first necessary to single out the formative elements behind the pottery system they belong to, and then go on to reconstruct the basic features and variability of the model itself³. For the final stage of this sequence a – to some extent consequent –

* The text of this article is a slightly modified version of the Mycenaean Seminar which I held at the University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, in December 1999. I would like to thank Dr. P. Mountjoy for supplying me with copies of the vase drawings reproduced at figs. 4, 4-5 and 6. The drawings of Sicilian Middle Bronze Age pottery included in figs. 2-5, have been re-worked for publication by G. Merlatti. Material included in figures is not to scale.

¹ Strange 1989, 26.

² On style as an active means of communication cf. Wobst 1977; Conkey 1978; Wiessner 1983; Wiessner 1990; see also D'Agata 1999 for an Aegean case-study.

³ There exists a vast bibliography on the approaches – traditional or otherwise – to the study of pottery. In general, of the texts best encompassing the manifold nature of these approaches and their potential, see Van Der Leeuw, Pritchard 1984; and, more recently, Orton, Tyers, Vince 1993.

investigation can be launched into the external elements, i.e. those acquired outside the original context, which can have been absorbed by the local culture. In fact, there are indeed few cases of radically different styles adopted for the crafting of objects attributable to the same functional category by neighbouring groups, and at the same time imported material or close imitations are found⁴. One example of synchronous pottery productions within a community sharing the same culture, where main differentiations are apparently based on forms of social interaction with outside cultural environments, is offered by the Thapsos culture in Sicily⁵.

As is well known, the end of the Early Bronze Age in the central Mediterranean area was marked by the massive expansion of groups of Aegean-Mycenaean culture which, in the latter half of the second millennium, created a network of intensive exchange primarily finalised to the search for raw materials between the Aegean, on the one hand, and southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia on the other. It was at this time, about the middle of the second millennium BC, that Sicily took on an important role in the contacts between the eastern and western parts of the Mediterranean. Here the Middle Bronze Age covers a period of about two hundred years, ranging over from the last quarter of the 15th century to the second half of the 13th century BC – a period when major changes can be observed in the social and economic organisation of the local communities. Hierarchic differences in the scale and role of single sites, protourbanisation, increasing social diversity and craft specialisation were part of these changes, and a key factor was played by the contact with the eastern Mediterranean groups which reached the coasts of Sicily.

These transformations have been mainly detected for the site of Thapsos, which lies on the small peninsula of Magnisi, on the eastern coast of Sicily close to the modern town of Syracuse. Here the largest settlement of the local Middle Bronze Age has been found, surrounded by a large cemetery and provided with a small harbour. Thapsos is a very complex site with several phases, and a site that to our present knowledge is to be considered an example of the protourban centre. In the habitation area the earliest Middle Bronze Age phase consisted of circular huts, which could also be supplied with a rectangular room located inside the compounds and delimited by pathways. To a later phase, starting in the early 13th century BC, certain elaborate buildings including Complex B, showing a U-shaped arrangement facing a central court, have been attributed.

⁴ Cazzella 1989, 204.

⁵ On this phase of the Bronze Age in Sicily, D'Agata 1997; Leighton 1999, 147-186.

In other words, documentation is to be found at Thapsos⁶ not only of the inflow of Aegean material, but also of the absorption and adoption of cultural models and modes of behaviour that can be traced to the eastern Mediterranean.

Leaving aside other many and various aspects of the interaction between Aegean groups and local communities of the Middle Bronze Age, I shall focus on the local pottery, and I shall try to show how, following the contact with the Aegean people who regularly visited the site, the local repertoire of the Thapsos culture in the eponymous site suffered a change, as probably did also certain models of behaviour which must be connected with the use of specific pottery forms.

CERAMIC CLASSES OF AEGEAN ORIGIN

Among the vases found in the sites of the Thapsos culture there are at least three ceramic groups to be recognised as being of Aegean origin.

The *first group* consists of imported vessels of Aegean production⁷. Most of them, i.e. about 85 per cent, come from the cemetery of Thapsos where the chronology of the imported material ranges between LH IIIA and early LH IIIB. It is not easy to identify a single source for the material found at Thapsos, at least optically. Most of the imported vessels – mainly piriform jars, stirrup jars and alabastra – were widely exchanged in the Mediterranean in the 14th and 13th century BC⁸: they are typical forms of the

⁶ See below.

⁷ To the 26 LH IIIA and B vessels collected in Taylour 1958, 56-64 are to be added: Thapsos (Syracuse): 10 LH III vessels and a small jug of the White Shaved type from tomb D, 1 LH III alabastron and 1 White Shaved type small jug from tomb A1 (Voza 1973), LH III fragments from the built-up area (Voza 1972, 205); Syracuse: 1 LH III alabastron from a tomb on the slopes of the Temenite hill (Voza 1993-1994, 1289); Milena/Serra del Palco: LH IIIA fragment of a closed vessel (La Rosa, D'Agata 1988); Milena/Monte Campanella: LH or LM III krater from tomb A: De Miro 1968; Jones, Vagnetti 1991, 135; Jones, Vagnetti 1992, 235; Cannatello/Agrigento: numerous fragments of Aegean vessels (LH, LM and LC) from the settlement area (De Miro 1996; Deorsola 1996, pl. VI) among which at least a transport stirrup jar from Central Crete has been identified through petrographical analysis (Day 1999, 66); Scirinda/Ribera: fragment of a LH III (?) closed vessel from a Middle Bronze Age hut (Castellana 1993-1994, 57, pl. III, 1, fig. 1; Castellana 1993-1994 a, 748-749); Madre Chiesa (Gaffe, Licata): three fragments of closed vessels, probably LH III, from the settlement area (Castellana 1993-1994, 48-49, pl. III, 1, fig. 1); Erbe Bianche/Campobello di Mazara: at least two fragments of LH IIIB (?) vessels from a hut in the Middle Bronze Age settlement area (Tusa forthcoming).

⁸ A summary of the connections between Cyprus and the western Mediterranean is to be found in Graziadio 1997.

international trade characteristic of this age and aimed at local consumers, who were developing a social identity founded on common bases on the many shores of the Mediterranean.

The *second group* of ceramic material of Aegean origin includes close imitations of Aegean vessels, which were probably produced locally. They certainly include at least three small Base-Ring II type jugs – two from tomb D at Thapsos, the third from the Temenite hill tomb at Syracuse – which have been identified as of non-Cypriot production by V. Karageorghis⁹. To these a LH III B type amphora from Milena/Monte Campanella, in the central-southern part of the island, may be added¹⁰.

While local production of Mycenaean vessels is very well attested in southern Italy, it is still very limited in Sicily, but this may also be due to the scant clay analyses so far carried out on the foreign-looking pottery. However, the Aegean material from Thapsos looks like imported ware, while there are a few recently found pieces from settlement sites of the central-southern part of the island, like Madre Chiesa close to Licata, which appear to be strict imitations of Aegean vases. Thus, we may consider the hypothesis that imported ware circulated fairly freely in the centres which had a direct link with the Aegean groups responsible for trade, while imitations arose more easily in peripheral centres where the circulation of imported material was probably limited. Judging from the case of Milena/Monte Campanella along the valley of river Platani, where our amphora was found, the circulation of this group of pottery occurred mainly in inland sites.

The *third group* of ceramic material of Aegean origin, which is the one we are mostly interested in, includes vessels imitating forms – or making use of formal elements – of Aegean derivation, but crafted in the local, hand-made pottery class.

Paolo Orsi had already deduced the existence of this group of material¹¹, asserting that a small jar with pointed handles from Thapsos tomb 7 was to be interpreted as a local imitation of a small Mycenaean three-handled jar. More recently, it has been suggested that a type of cup with M-shaped

⁹ Cf. Karageorghis 1995, 94. To these may possibly be added two Base-Ring type fragments, cf. Guzzardi 1996, 26.

¹⁰ For the amphora from tomb B at Milena/Monte Campanella, see La Rosa 1982; Jones, Vagnetti 1991, 135; Jones, Vagnetti 1992, 235. Another piece that may possibly belong to this group is the «coarse Minoan-type stirrup amphora» found in hut 4 in the Madre Chiesa built-up area (Gaffe, Licata), Castellana, Tusa 1991-1992, 571, fig. 1; Castellana 1993-1994, 49. Imitation of Aegean pottery is better attested in Sardinia and in Southern Italy, cf. Vagnetti, Jones 1988; Vagnetti 1994.

¹¹ Orsi 1895, 103, fig. 8.

handle, which is well documented on the Thapsos site (fig. 3. 4), imitates Cypriot models¹².

As we pointed out above, the first step towards the identification of vessels referring to this third group is to achieve a clear definition of the pottery repertoire belonging to the Thapsos culture, including recognition of elements attributable both to the local tradition and to external influences. Before going on to outline the problems involved with local vessels of Aegean derivation we must therefore take a brief look at the general features of the local pottery repertoire, with particular reference to the basic forms and to the tableware¹³.

THE POTTERY REPERTOIRE OF THE THAPSOS CULTURE

It was between the late 16th and early 15th centuries BC that the hand-made pottery class with burnished, brown surface, typical of the Sicilian Middle Bronze Age, finally took over from the matt-painted class most widespread on the island in the first half of the second millennium BC, roughly corresponding to the local Early Bronze Age and known as Castelluccio pottery.

In the last few years an important contribution to our understanding of this process of transformation has been offered by discoveries made in central-southern Sicily. Here between the Early and Middle Bronze Age, on the sites of Milena/Serra del Palco and Ciavolaro at Ribera, the gradual rise of the highly-burnished ware at the expense of the matt-painted ware is documented stratigraphically and may be attributed to a strong influence spreading from communities responsible for trade links on the Tyrrhenian coast of Southern Italy. If, therefore, one of the main features of the pottery class of the Thapsos culture derives from the absorption of an external element, it is also true that the basic forms of its pottery repertoire appear to derive fundamentally from the Early Bronze Age shapes typical of the Castelluccio culture. Important evidence on this point is offered by the site of Milena/Serra del Palco, which may be ascribed to an early phase of the Middle Bronze Age¹⁴. Here the pottery repertoire appears to be based mainly on very simple forms which include a type of dipper; a bowl with or without foot; a simple basin, with or without foot (cf. fig. 1). The general features may be summed up thus:

¹² Karageorghis 1995; see also Leighton 1999, 174.

¹³ On the pottery repertoire of the Thapsos culture, Adamo *et al.* 1999.

¹⁴ La Rosa, D'Agata 1988. The evidence offered by Serra del Palco now seems largely borne out by that of Cannatello: cf. Deorsola 1996.

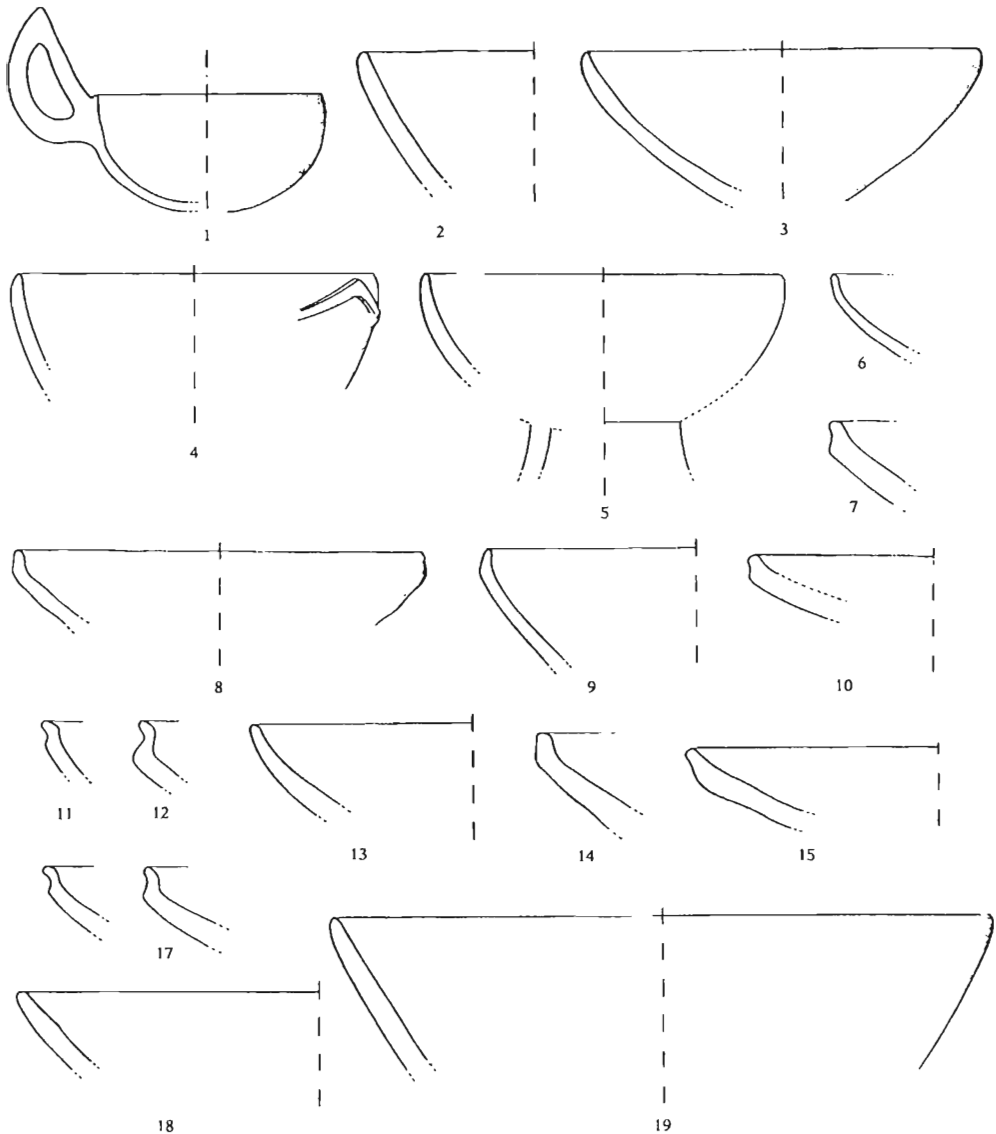


Fig. 1 – Middle Bronze Age local pottery shapes from Milena/Serra del Palco
(after La Rosa, D'Agata 1988, pl. VII).

- a distinct prevalence of open forms;
- resort to typologically elementary shapes, characterised by semi-globular body with simple rim or carinated body with everted rim;
- frequent occurrence of non-functional handles;

- very scant application of motifs and decorations, usually limited to applied cordons;
- decoration applied solely to the medium and large open forms.

More plentiful evidence is offered by the cemeteries on the east coast of Sicily, which have yielded a large quantity of local ware and where both typological and functional assessment have yet to be made.

While allowing for the limitations of material excavated in the late 19th century from chamber tombs containing multiple burials and often plundered in ancient times, we may say that the grave goods appear to follow the pattern of the table set, which must have included a one-handled bowl and/or a dipper-cup (fig. 3. 1-3); a monumental pedestal basin with vertical handle (fig. 2. 1-2); and at least one footed basin (fig. 2. 3). Paolo Orsi noted on various occasions how the way the dead body itself was arranged in the chamber and the vessel forms mostly recurrent in tombs of Thapsos culture seemed both to allude to a banquet or a funerary banquet. Suffice it to recall here the explicit observation in conclusion of his publication of the Thapsos cemetery: “There was not one tomb, we may say, that did not yield remains of a huge basin for liquids, cups with tall handles to draw from it, and basins on tall stems before the dead”¹⁵. Indeed, to Orsi’s eyes the dead – usually in large numbers ranging from 2 to 49 – within the funerary chambers appeared to be arranged in circles in seated positions or with legs bent at an acute angle, heads facing towards the centre of the chamber. In many cases the centre of the chamber was occupied by a large, pedestal basin with vertical handle¹⁶, and some smaller basins decorated with ribbing or incisions. Smaller vessels were arranged along the walls or close by the skulls of the dead. In other words, it seems clear that the vessels in the centre of the chamber were meant as property common to all the dead within the tomb, and probably set there – at least the pedestal basin – at the same time as the first burial, while the vessels found in proximity to the individual dead might reasonably be interpreted as their particular property and, to a large extent, tableware.

Among the vessels recurrent in the tombs of Thapsos, Cozzo Pantano and Plemmirio – which are the largest cemeteries of the eastern coast of Sicily in this phase – the most common forms are basins, dippers or bowls, and what Orsi defines as small jars (fig. 3. 5-7; 5. 1-3), although they include

¹⁵ Orsi 1895, 142-143; see also Maniscalco 1999.

¹⁶ D’Agata 1987.

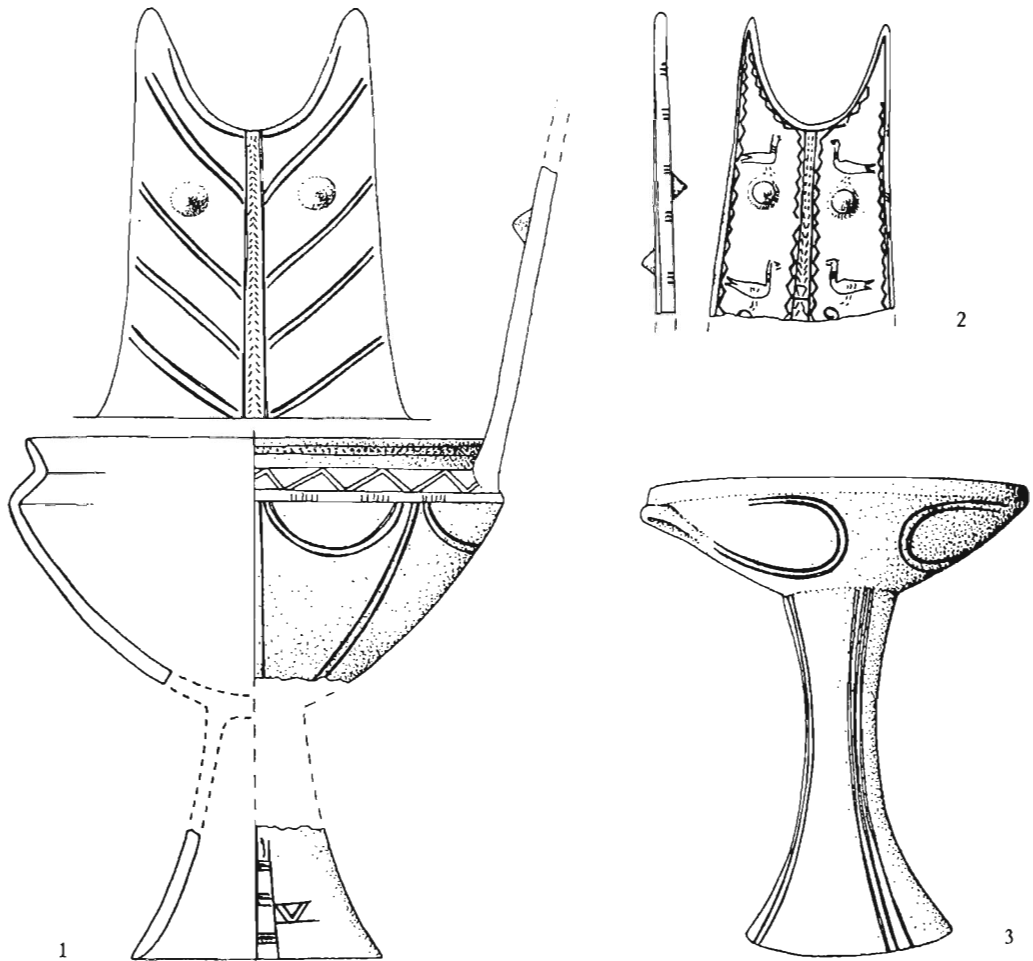


Fig. 2 – 1. Pedestal basin with vertical handle from Thapsos (after Voza 1973 a, 145, fig. 6);
 2. Handle of pedestal basin from Thapsos (after Voza 1973, 48, no. 155); 3. Footed basin
 from Cozzo Pantano (after Orsi 1893, pl. I, 19).

a range of diverse forms, some with lids. The finer vessels were decorated with incised motives and/or applied cordons. At Thapsos, incised representations of birds, animal and fish also occur occasionally.

The shape that Orsi defined as small jar included at least a vase of small dimensions, narrowing in diameter from the broadest point of the body to the mouth (e.g. fig. 3. 6-7), a two-handled bowl with a more or less wide mouth (fig. 5. 2), a two-handled bowl on raised base, which we shall be

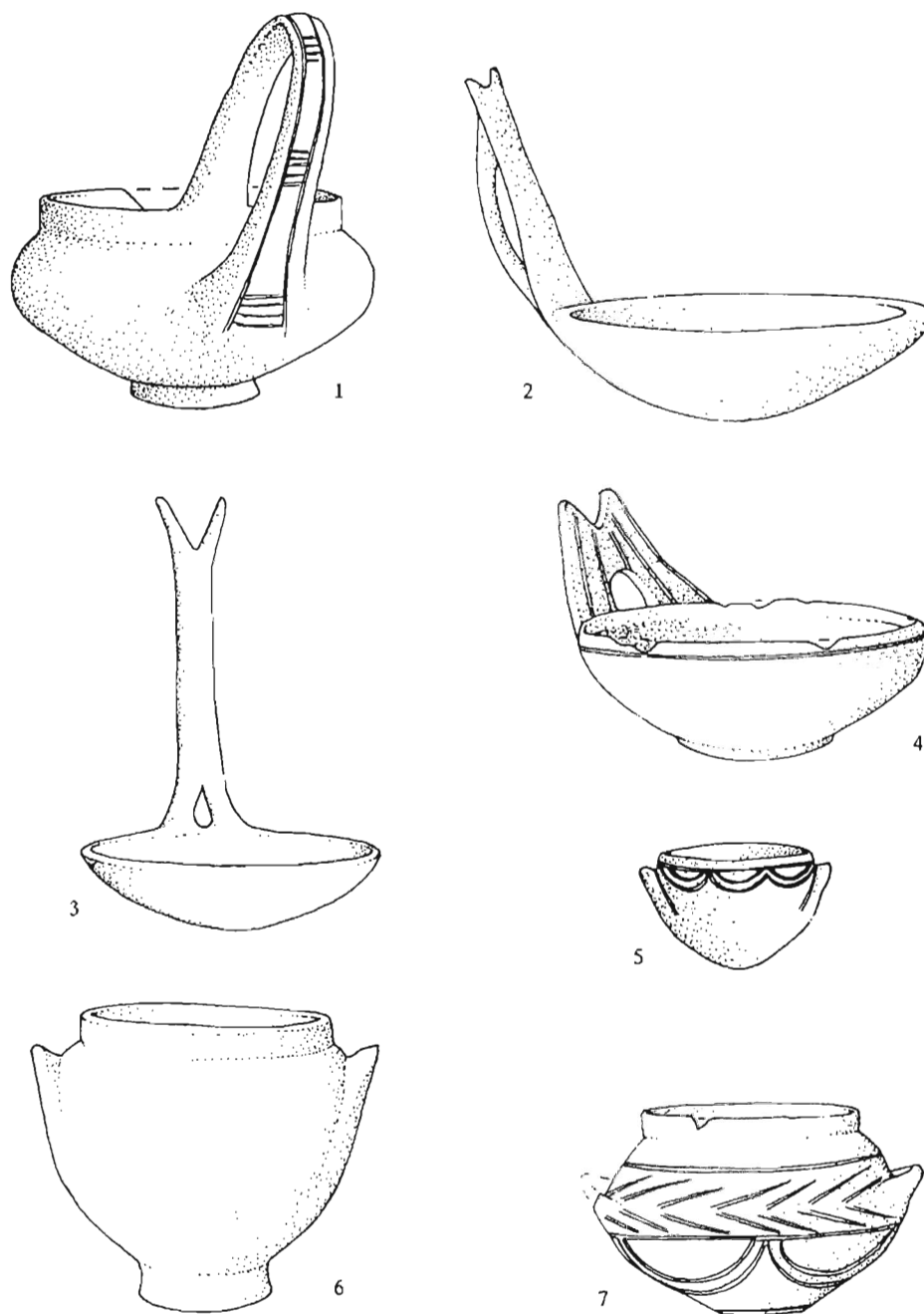


Fig. 3 1. One-handed bowl from Thapsos (after Orsi 1895, pls. IV, 6); 2-3. Dipper-cups from Thapsos and Cozzo Pantano (after Orsi 1893, pl. I, 15; Orsi 1895, 132, fig. 48); 4. Cup with M-shaped handle from Thapsos (after Orsi 1895, pl. IV, 20); 5-7. Small jars from Thapsos and Cozzo Pantano (after Orsi 1893, pl. I, 9; Orsi 1895, pl. IV, 10, 2).

considering shortly (fig. 5. 1, 3)¹⁷. It seems quite likely that Orsi's "small jar", at least in the open variety, represents *par excellence* the vessel for eating or drinking.

Exclusive to the Thapsos cemetery are a two-handled bowl with bird decoration (fig. 5. 2-3), a cup with M-shaped handle, which we mentioned before (fig. 3. 4), and a small jug with tubular spout on the shoulder (fig. 4. 2-3).

Difficult as it is to ascertain precisely on the scant excavation data, correspondence between the funerary and domestic sets seems to be borne out by the evidence available on the built-up area of Thapsos, where pedestal basins with vertical handles and two-handled bowls formed part of the furnishings of some rooms belonging to Complex B¹⁸.

As compared with the evidence in central-southern Sicily, the eastern coast shows a wider typological range in terms of both form and decoration, particularly evident in the types of cups and bowls, in the introduction of small closed forms and in the occurrence of incised decoration¹⁹, alongside decoration with applied cordons, apparently not only reserved to the open, footed forms.

Actually, rather than appanage of all the communities of eastern Sicily, these features are above all characteristic of the material from the site of Thapsos. The pottery evidence from cemeteries like Cozzo Pantano and Plemmirio appears very scant, and as such may be associated with that of central-southern Sicily, showing as it does few apparently anomalous elements²⁰ departing from the features of this area described above, and for most of which might well be argued derivation from the main site of this phase. Significant in this respect is the occurrence of incised decoration, which would merit a whole treatise of its own. Here we must confine our attention to some basic points: 1) incised decoration is a feature adopted some time after the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age²¹; 2) its introduction

¹⁷ For example, discussing the many small jars found in tomb 1 at Thapsos, Orsi cites for comparison three vessels from Cozzo Pantano that do not seem to belong to a single type: Orsi 1893, pl. I, 9 is a variant of the undecorated two-handled bowl; Orsi 1893, pl. II, 9 is a small jar with lid, lug-handles and raised base; Orsi 1893, pl. II, 21 is a small biconical four-handled jar on a conical base.

¹⁸ Voza 1973, 45-48.

¹⁹ Apparently now documented, although scantily, at Cannatello, cf. Deorsola 1996, 1035, pl. IVc.

²⁰ For example, the use of incised decoration limited to just a few vessels, occurrence of the flask and pyxis, or the small biconical jar decorated with incisions, all elements which should be of Aegean origin.

²¹ In this connection, cf. also the evolution of the pedestal basin with vertical handle and incised decoration traced out in D'Agata 1987.

seems to be attributable to production units at Thapsos itself; 3) it may possibly be traced back to the eastern Mediterranean.

As we have seen, a further feature contributing to the diversification of the site of Thapsos from the other communities sharing the same culture is the occurrence of forms which find no documentation in other centres, and which thus seem to constitute a specific production of the site. I have chosen two shapes, one open, the other closed, which are possibly the most striking examples of imitation of Aegean forms made in the pottery class of local tradition. They are the small jug with cylindrical spout on the shoulder and the two-handled bowl on raised base.

TWO FORMS OF AEGEAN DERIVATION: THE SMALL JUG WITH TUBULAR SPOUT ON THE SHOULDER AND THE TWO-HANDLED BOWL ON RAISED BASE

There are at least six examples of the small jug with tubular spout on the shoulder from the Thapsos cemetery (fig. 4. 2-3). It is documented for the first time in Sicily in this period, and shows typological affinity with another, tall-necked type which Orsi defines as a flask (fig. 4. 1), and which also makes its first appearance in Sicily during this phase. The vessel displays a vertical handle set between shoulder and rim and is generally devoid of decoration. Exceptions are the example from tomb D at Thapsos and the one from tomb 48 of the same cemetery, both decorated with a structure dividing up the body of the vessel vertically (fig. 4. 3)²².

Small jugs with a tubular spout on the shoulder are attested in the Mycenaean fine-ware repertoire²³ (fig. 4. 4-5), at least as early as LH IIIA1, and in the White Painted VI Ware class of pottery made by hand and documented in Cyprus in the local Late Bronze Age (fig. 4. 6-8)²⁴. Both classes include plain and painted examples. The fundamental differences between the Mycenaean and Cypriot forms lie in the type of handle and decoration structure. The Mycenaean type shows a bridge handle, while the Cypriot version has a vertical handle, often surmounting. Again, the decoration is developed horizontally in the Mycenaean type, while the Cypriot type displays a vertical structure dividing up the wall of the vessel. Thus it appears quite evident that in creating the form the Thapsos potters imitated the Cypriot model fairly closely. The same Cypriot model might

²² Voza 1973, 37, no. 91, pl. VIII; Orsi 1895, 128, pl. V, 12.

²³ FS 159-161; cf. Mountjoy 1986, 61, 77, 104, figs. 69, 90, 126; Mountjoy 1999, 122, 138, 220, figs. 27, 33, 70.

²⁴ Åström 1972, 61-62, pl. XLI, 4-9.

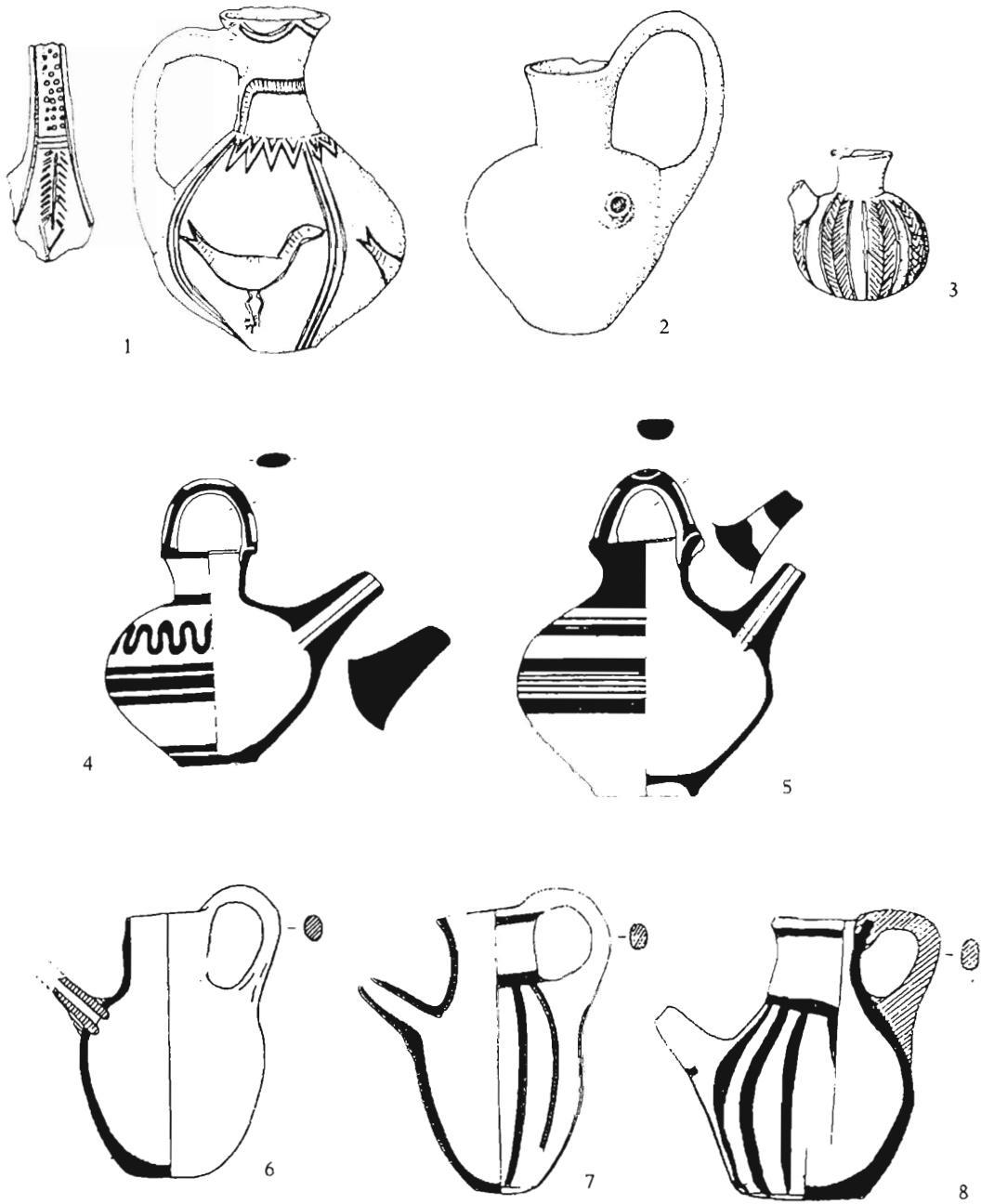


Fig. 4 – 1. Flask from Thapsos (after Orsi 1895, pl. IV, 14); 2-3. Small jugs with tubular spout (after Orsi 1895, pls. IV, 11; V, 12); 4-5. 'Feeding bottle' FS 160 (LH IIIA2) from Mycenae and 161 (LH IIIB) from Zygouries; 6-8. Cypriot 'feeding bottles' in White Painted VI Ware (after Åström 1972, fig. XLI, 6, 8-9).

also account for the origins of the decoration structure displayed by the vessels from Thapsos tomb D and tomb 48 which, as we have seen, was based on sets of lines dividing up the body of the vessel vertically and recurs on other local types of Aegean derivation.

As for the function of the vessel, it is clearly a specialised form used in pouring out liquids. In the Aegean area the vessel seems to occur most frequently in funeral contexts, and it may well have retained its original significance in the West. In terms of both form and decoration structure the Thapsos examples stand as the precedent for the teapot or strainer-jug, which should be linked to a special kind of drink and which are widely attested in the 12th century BC from west to east²⁵, in Sicily, in cemeteries of the phase of Pantalica Nord, and in the Aegean, where they are especially common in Rhodes and Cyprus. Finally, the connection of the Thapsos vessel with a foreign origin is further borne out by the fact that three of the six Thapsos tombs it was found in, also yielded imported Mycenaean material.

The *two-handled bowl* on a raised base, whose diameter ranges between 11 and 16 cm is, by contrast, an open, table vessel characterised by low cylindrical collar, raised base and two handles set symmetrically at the broadest point²⁶. Again, this vessel is not known outside Thapsos²⁷, where it is documented by at least 6 examples – of which 5 were found in a funerary, and 1 in a domestic, context (fig. 5. 1, 3). The vase is generally decorated with incisions and 3 of the 6 examples show figured decoration including representations of birds.

The form appears unknown to local tradition, while showing more affinity with a well-known shape of Mycenaean table-ware, namely the two-handled bowls with short everted rim and ring base FS 279, 283 and 284 (fig. 6)²⁸. Here, however, we do not find a faithful transposition. Formal features, hard to imitate without the help of a wheel but essential to the

²⁵ On which see Leighton 1981.

²⁶ At Thapsos it is present in tombs 1, 5, 38, 61, A1 (Orsi 1895: 97, pl. IV, 2; 100; 123, pl. V, 5; 133, fig. 49; Voza 1973, 42-43, no. 126, pl. VIII) and in the built-up area (Voza 1972, 183, fig. 6). Birds are depicted on the bowls from tombs 38 and A1, and on a fragmentary bowl from the built-up area.

²⁷ With the possible exception of Cozzo Pantano: cf. Orsi 1893, pl. I, 9, although what we see here is a variant of the type attested mainly at Thapsos.

²⁸ Known to us in LH IIB and IIIA, FS 279 is not a particularly common type, and it is therefore all the more interesting to find an example at Thapsos itself, cf. Voza 1973, 36, no. 84, pl. VI. FS 283 is mainly attested during IIIA2, FS 284 between the end of IIIA2 and IIIB. It is worth noting that imitation of FS 284 can be seen in the grey ware of Broglio di Trebisacce, Belardelli 1994, fig. 91.

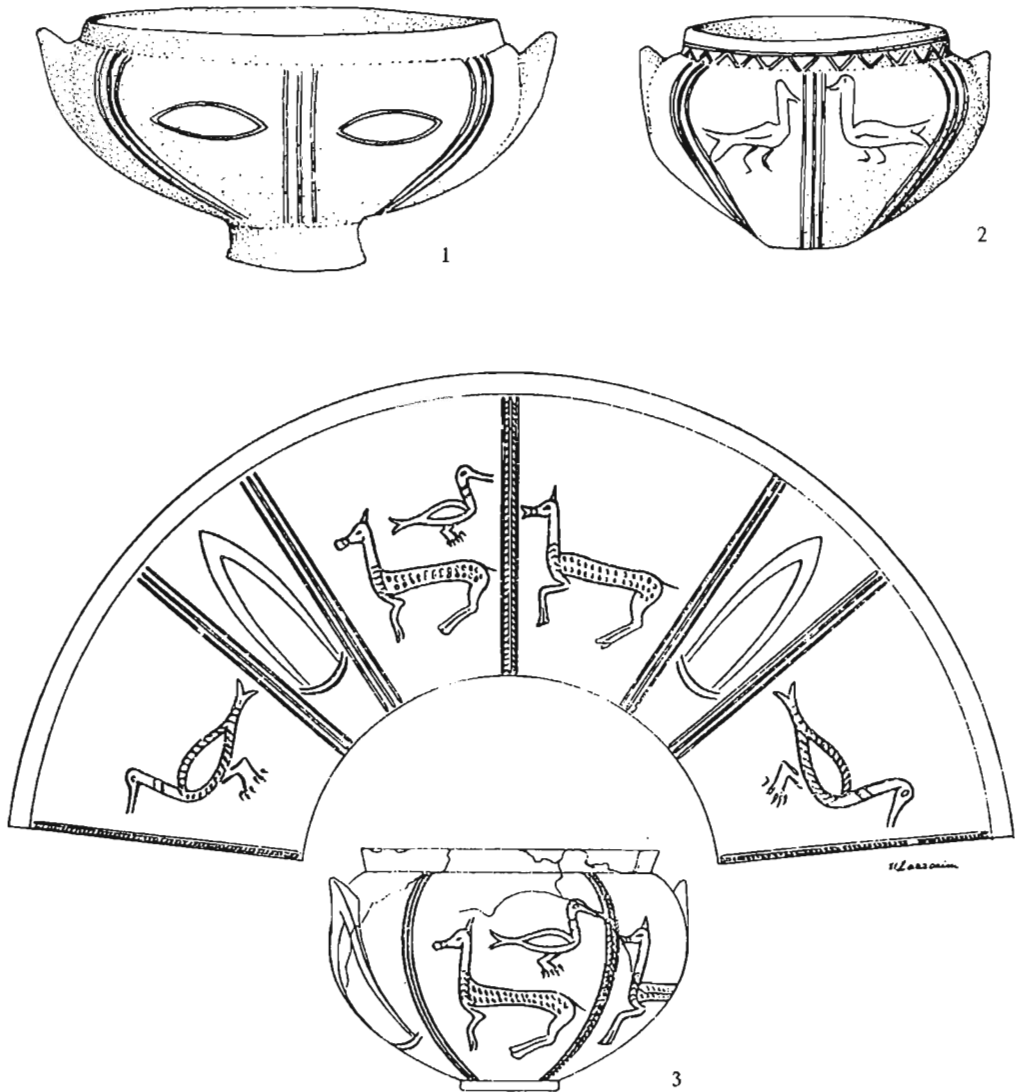


Fig. 5 – 1-3. Two-handled bowls from Thapsos (after Orsi 1895, 133, fig. 49; pl. V, 5; Voza 1973, 43, no. 126).

identification of the form, were in fact “translated” with the application of formal elements already in use in the local pottery system. Thus the everted, distinct rim of the Aegean model becomes a low cylindrical collar; the two

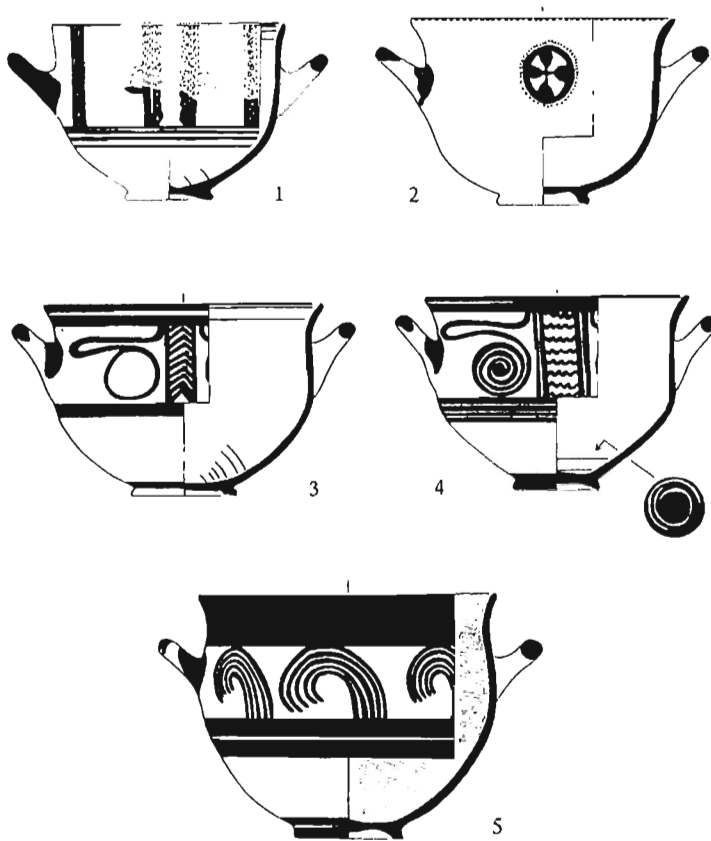


Fig. 6 – LH IIIB deep bowls FS 284: 1, 5 from Mycenae;
2 from Tiryns; 3, 4 from Prosymna.

horizontal, rounded handles are transformed into lug-handles, with nothing like the functionality of their prototypes; the ring-type base becomes a raised base or a low foot which may extend to show a conical profile. Such transpositions are not isolated cases, but can be found in other vessels of Aegean imitation at Thapsos²⁹, thus attesting to an inner consistency in the recurrence of what we might call anomalies in the basic pottery system.

²⁹ Cf., for example, in terms of bases, the cups with 'M-shaped handles', also of probable Aegean derivation (see above, note 12): Orsi 1895, pl.s IV, 15, 20; V, 19, and the one-handled cup: Orsi 1895, pl. IV, 6.

In terms of decoration, the body of the vessel is generally split up vertically, as in the case of the jug with tubular spout. Particularly complex decoration is displayed by the bowl from tomb A1 (fig. 5. 3), with an animal appearing within each panel and figures arranged symmetrically on each side. Here we have on one side two birds facing one another, separated by a herringbone motif³⁰, while the other side shows two quadrupeds, one being surmounted by a small bird. The birds are shown standing on both feet in profile view, their heads facing forward. The body is loop-shaped, the head a simple rounded form at the end of the neck with a single dot for eye and a flat beak. The feet are separately added. The quadrupeds are also very schematic, shown in profile view, the body being filled out with regular rows of short strokes indicating the hair of the animal.

At Thapsos depiction of birds is not limited to the two-handled bowls but also appears on other forms³¹, including a flask from Tomb 10 (fig. 4. 1) and the vertical handle of a pedestal basin from Complex B (fig. 2. 2)³², which also suggests a chronological placing for this decorative motif. As we said above, Complex B belongs to the second phase of the Thapsos built-up area and thus its construction cannot be placed before the first half of the 13th century BC³³. As all the vessels displaying birds show a fair degree of stylistic uniformity, it seems quite likely that they belong to the same period and should be placed somewhere in the 13th century BC.

Considering that figurative design is unknown in the pottery decoration of Early Bronze Age Sicily, the concentration of a fair number of animal depictions at Thapsos looks like a completely new phenomenon, limited to this site and this phase, and for whose origin we might reasonably hypothesise possible links with the Aegean area.

Although the motifs are fairly common in the eastern Mediterranean area it is by no means a simple task to pick out the specific prototypes for these animal representations. Considering first of all the birds, which are a recurrent theme in Late Minoan and Mycenaean iconography, the

³⁰ A very similar pattern can be seen on the bowl from tomb 38, see above, note 26.

³¹ Birds are depicted on the flask from tomb 10 (Orsi 1895, pl. IV, 14), the small jar and the small, two-handled vessel from tomb D (Voza 1972, 195, fig. 13a; Voza 1973, 37, 39, nos. 90, 101); the small vessel from tomb A1 (Voza 1973, 42, no. 125) and the large, vertical handle of a pedestal basin from Complex B (Voza 1973, 48, no. 155; Voza 1973 a, 143, fig. 5). To these may be added, as examples of figurative design, a fragment with a quadruped from tomb 53 (Orsi 1895, 129-30, pl. V, 11) and the fragment with fish from a tomb in the central part of the peninsula (Voza 1980-1981, 679-680, pl. CXX, 2) together with the basin with human (?) depiction from tomb 6 (Orsi 1895, 102, pl. IV, 7).

³² See above, note 31.

³³ Voza 1979, 27; see also D'Agata 1987, 189, 191.

Sicilian representations appear very schematic and hardly comparable with either the very naturalistic renderings typical of Crete in the 14th and early 13th century BC, or the often extreme stylisations that – albeit in a variety of stylistic traditions and individual hands – associate Cyprus, Rhodes and the mainland in the late 14th century and the first half of the 13th century BC³⁴.

At the same time, at least three features can be discerned on the decoration of the bowl from tomb A1 that, in association, suggest not only Aegean derivation but also, once again, a precise connection with the Cypriot world.

The features in question are the rendering of the birds, the train of quadrupeds and the very particular motif of the bird associated with a quadruped. All these features – which are however frequent in the Aegean repertoire – appear in Cyprus as from the mid-13th century BC marking products in the style defined as Rude, or Pastoral, which developed over a somewhat limited range of forms – kraters, bowls and jugs, or in other words tableware – and which in fact appears to have specialised in depictions of quadrupeds (bulls, deer and goats) and birds³⁵.

As for the theme of the quadruped, feeding goats, depicted in trains, are rather common in the 13th century BC. They are often represented in heraldic pairs on the mainland, often feeding in flocks in the pastoral style of Cyprus³⁶. In particular, a krater from Enkomi³⁷, probably produced around 1220/1210 BC, compares very well with the bowl from Thapsos: one side displays two birds facing one another, separated by a stylised herringbone motif, while the other shows at least one quadruped, probably belonging to a procession of such animals. As in the case of the Sicilian vessel, the birds are traced in outline, the body being blocked out and filled in separately. Over and above the different means employed (paint in one case, incision in the other), there can be little denying some connection between them, while the

³⁴ In general, Furumark 1941, 250-254 (FM 7); Slenczka 1974; Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982; Crouwel, Morris 1985; Åkerström 1987; Crouwel 1988; Crouwel 1991, 22-23; Benzi 1992, 113-114; Sakellarakis 1992 (especially 71-109); Crouwel, Morris 1995. Reporting the find of the two vessels at Thapsos in 1972, G. Voza suggested that the local decorators had in mind the late Minoan and late Mycenaean decorations from Crete and Rhodes, Voza 1972, 183, note 11.

³⁵ Karageorghis 1964, 231-256; Anson 1980; Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, 59-67.

³⁶ Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, pl. VI. 8-9.

³⁷ Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, 66, no. 36, pl. VI, 28, 36; Anson 1980, 18, no. 33: the vessel has been attributed to a workshop in Enkomi and dated to the Late Helladic IIIC: 1. On representation of birds in the Mycenaean IIIC: 1b at Cyprus, Kling 1984. A useful repertoire of bird representations from the 12th to the 7th century BC is to be found in Lenz 1995.

slight chronological gap – the Thapsos vessel could be somewhat earlier than the Cypriot krater – does not pose a real problem.

First of all, the roots of the Rude Style reach down to the earlier pictorial tradition, the first examples appearing in the course of the 13th century BC. Moreover, it seems quite probable that Cypriot craftsmen were active at Thapsos given the deposition of Cypriot-style vessels that may well be of local production³⁸, nor can we rule out the possibility that individuals were in circulation here acquainted with the techniques and figurative traditions of a pictorial style that constituted one of the most prized good by the Cypriot elites between the 14th and 13th centuries BC. Such individuals may therefore have directly inspired the local production of vessels displaying animal figures³⁹.

Turning, now, to the function of the two-handled bowl in local ware, we might reasonably suggest that, together with the form, the original vessel also conveyed its significance, namely that it was used as or taken to represent a piece of fine tableware. A bowl of this type was found in the built-up area of Thapsos, and thus within a domestic context. To this may be added the important evidence from tomb D. Although this is a case of multiple burial, the fact remains extremely significant that tomb D – to our present knowledge alone among all the cemeteries of the same culture in this respect – has yielded a set of Aegean-Mycenaean tableware⁴⁰, including a bowl of FS 279 type which, as we have seen, stands as a possible prototype for the two-handled bowls imitated in local ware. No less remarkable than this exceptional presence is the, surely, significant absence from the material in this tomb of pedestal basins. Apparently, in other words, the vessels found in tomb D provide evidence relating to a family group and its table habits showing the presence, or at any rate the assimilation, of a mode of behaviour other than the model socially approved among the communities of the same facies. It is therefore in terms of this phenomenon – undoubtedly also connected with the need for

³⁸ See *supra*.

³⁹ On the role the Cypriots played in relations between the Aegean and Italy, Vagnetti, Lo Schiavo 1989. We have also to remind, just in passing, that in the 14th and 13th century BC there was a circulation of imported pottery depicted in pictorial style in Southern Italy, and that at least a fragment depicted in Rude Style has been recorded from Montedoro di Eboli in Campania (Vagnetti, Lo Schiavo 1989, fig. 28, 1). The possibility of local imitations of a later date has also to be kept in mind. Cf. Vagnetti forthcoming, where a LH IIIC date for the Thapsos bowl with representations of birds is also suggested: I thank L. Vagnetti for letting me read a draft of her text ahead of publication.

⁴⁰ Comprising a two-handled bowl, a kylix and a cup: cf. Voza 1973, 35-36, nos. 82-84, pl. VI.

status display – that we can find explanation for both the imitation of the two-handled Mycenaean bowl and its deposition as part of the grave goods replicating the set of tableware.

PRODUCTION AND SPECIALISATION

I should like to conclude this short examination of pottery shapes of Aegean origin in the local repertoire of Thapsos culture by taking a brief look at the people in charge of the manufacture of imitations of foreign pottery on the site.

As we have seen, circulation of foreign goods on the site was responsible for stimulating the local production. In other words, imported and related pottery probably obtained the status of prestige goods and encouraged a demand to start on local production.

According to the model devised by Prudence Rice⁴¹ for levels of specialisation, the evolutionary degree of organisation in pottery production revealed by Thapsos culture appears to correspond to phase 3, which the American scholar defines as specialised production parallel to the emergence of an elite. It also entails – as we have seen at Thapsos – an uneven distribution of vessels and the presence of pottery intended for a closely circumscribed social group, which is also distinguished by the greater complexity its decoration displays.

On this evidence we may suggest that there were in fact various levels within the social organisation of production. In this context the manufacture of material of Aegean imitation, which does not seem to stand out from the rest of the production in terms of general crafting features, was probably not carried out by special production units, but was rather a collateral activity for a very restricted number of potters closely connected with the elite, enjoying access to information on exotic pottery.

Anna Lucia D'Agata
Istituto per gli Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici (CNR)
Via Giano della Bella, 18
I – 00162 Roma

⁴¹ Rice 1981; 1984; 1984 a.

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