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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Review Editor: Andrew Devereux (History: University of California San Diego)

Editorial Assistant: Aaron Stamper (History: Princeton University)

Iacono, Francesco. *The Archaeology of Late Bronze Age Interaction and Mobility at the Gates of Europe: People, Things and Networks around the Southern Adriatic Sea*. London; NY: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2019. ISBN 9781350171060. 9 x 6 inches, 286 Pp., 68 bw illustrations. Formats: pb, hb, ebook, epub. \$39.95 pb list price

Reviewed by:

Barbara Mendoza: Art Department, Santa Monica College (Santa Monica, California)
(mendoza_barbara@smc.edu)

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Inter-societal connections, interaction and mobility during the Late Bronze Age of the ancient Mediterranean region has been a well-studied topic; however, in recent years, in particular, scholarship on the Late Bronze Age in the Southern Italian region (the middle Adriatic Sea) has garnered keen interest. Francesco Iacono's study on the archaeology and inter-societal connections of the Southern Adriatic fills the void in Late Bronze Age Mediterranean scholarship that in the past focused on the ancient Greek/Ionian region, the western coast of Italy, or the ancient Near East. Iacono conducts a study of three stages of encounters in the region, with an aim to "reconstruct and analyze the history of these different encounters, through both the micro-anthropological and macro-economic dimensions, highlighting in particular aspects such as 'inequality' and 'social differentiation'- terms that resonate with broader issues of contemporary society."(2) In analyzing these encounters, he adopts a theoretical approach that combines what he calls 'radical social theory' and archaeological theories (including network methodologies), which he thoroughly explains in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2 he sets the stage, providing an overview of the Bronze Age region, including its social geography, and a survey of earlier research, outlining pre-Late Bronze Age connections (i.e., Early and Middle Bronze Age in Europe). Chapters 3 to 5 are divided by chronological period, and sectioned by different societal levels: Individual Communities; Small-Scale Networks; and the Wider Mediterranean Context. The last chapter is a synthesis of his study. The result of Iacono's work is a carefully laid out diachronic study of the time (between the Late Bronze Age and the present) and place (the Middle Adriatic region). Lastly, Iacono illustrates how contact was made between the regions, and the wider Mediterranean, as a whole.

What is noteworthy, aside from his focus on a somewhat unfamiliar region that in and of itself is teeming with valuable information for Bronze Age Mediterranean archaeology, is the methodological approach Iacono takes to shed light on the people living in this region. First, in Chapter 1, he states the problem and draws the analogy of contemporary issues in the Southern Adriatic (the gates of Europe). Immigration, conflict, nationalism are all still very much at issue here today. With that interest, Iacono not only uses archaeological theory and method but also what he refers to as 'radical social theory' (to be discussed). He starts, however, by stating that the primary concern of Mediterranean archaeology has been on the material culture and remains

of the powerful (the elite, the nobles, and the like) and not on other strata of society.¹ He goes on to say that there is a lack of tools to analyze inter-societal interaction, and critiques various theories by asserting that they are limited in scope: classical World-System approach, postcolonial theory, etc., and argues that if we do not “assess the two aspects (social differentiation and interaction) through a general theoretical approach, we lose our ability to make apt comparisons with the present” (7). He adds that we must also look at context, and this is where archaeological theory comes in. Iacono uses a network theory methodology including the ‘micro-ecological’ approach for short-range interaction, and the ‘world systems’ approach for long-range interaction (8). He also applies what he calls radical social theory (Marxist thought) (13) to his study, explaining how this can elucidate our knowledge of interaction, trade and mobility. Iacono acknowledges “the important role of trade and interaction in the ancient Mediterranean and, at the same time, the fact that this was embedded in societies” (14). The author outlines the definitions of Means of Production, Relations of Production and Modes of Production and how they are useful for the study of interaction and mobility. He then divides space into individual communities, small-scale networks and wider scale networks. This preliminary work provides the framework for chapters 3 to 5 of his study. These specific networks are outlined in Chapter 2, and illustrated in Fig. 2.7: Adriatic Islands distances.

There is no one source that can give us an accurate chronology of Bronze Age Europe or the Bronze Age Near East. Most useful for the reader is Table 2.1, Comparative chronological table of Southern Italy and the Aegean during Bronze Age (67), based on C14 dating. The chart gives ‘Absolute’ dates in BC for the Apulian Cultures, Southern Italy and Mainland Greece, and so for this reviewer who is familiar with Middle Bronze Age dating and Late Helladic (Mycenaean) dating, this chart is extremely useful. Iacono’s work covers archaeological evidence from the dates 1700 – 1040 BC.

After his brief introduction to the Southern Adriatic region, review of prior studies and setting the stage with an explanation of the Middle Bronze Age archaeology of the region in Chapter 2, Iacono unfolds his study over three chapters: Early Encounters (1750-1300 BC) (Chapter 3), From Direct Contact to Brownian Motion (1300-1100 BC) (Chapter 4), and Old Connections and New Equilibria at the End of the Southern Adriatic Bronze Age (1100-1000 BC) (Chapter 5). These dates are not arbitrary or random, as each major time period has cultural markers that indicate that they are from this particular time. They also indicate the similar cultural and social markers of local communities. While these three chapters cover the same community types (local, small-scale and wider scale), each section elucidates the findings and analysis of the material evident from these major time periods.

In Chapter 3 “Early Encounters” the author details and delineates the distribution of the Protoapennine and Apennine settlements of the Middle Bronze Age of Apulia, analyzing coastal and inland sites, and drawing connections between those sites. He also highlights where Aegean-type materials were located. Iacono goes on to analyze small-scale networks using stylistic analysis and network nodes such as Apennine *Impasto* pottery. In discussing the wider Mediterranean context, he looks to common features between pottery and metal styles from the Balkans and Northern Apulia. It is at the end of this chapter that he pieces together the components of the interconnected Adriatic community, both in trade and artistic motifs.

¹ Perhaps this comment is specific to the Italian region, as archaeological studies of non-elite individuals of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean have been conducted prior. For example, studies have been conducted before for non-elite individuals from ancient Egypt.

Iacono provides a nice 'slice' of the social interaction between the seafaring Aegean visitors to the communities of Apulia in Southern Italy.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, is a more detailed analysis of the archaeology of the Southern Adriatic. As we get more recent in the archaeological record, the result is more material than in prior temporal layers. Tombs, burials, fortification sites, as well as the material culture of the archaeological record are present. The section on the wider Mediterranean context of the Recent Bronze Age begins with an interesting question: Was there a small-scale Subapennine network in the north? This question arose due to the large number of sites and material culture found in the north which begs the question, was the population native to the region or did the Apulians migrate north? The material culture (pottery, motifs) indicates native *Impasto* pottery with 'northern' influences, and Aegean pottery with Adriatic influences. In his summary of the chapter, Iacono details the Mode of Production and Interaction for this time period. He notes that traces of interaction increase, both at the regional and long-range levels. Regional interactions give way to long range or widespread interaction. In other words, regional interactions carry less weight (157).

In the last century of the Final Bronze Age (Chapter 5), the processes of prior time periods reach their mature stage. At this point, settlements are in a state of equilibrium, and much of the Aegean influences of prior periods have been incorporated into the Southern Italian style, whether in pottery, motifs, or metalwork. Influences from the Balkans and Cyprus are also evident. What this means for the hegemonic Adriatic is that larger groups mean more consumption of product, and larger surpluses (195) and as such, the circulation of ideas and influences also increases. Thus, the Mode of Production and the Means of Interaction intersect.

In all, this is not to say that these processes are limited or unique to the southern Adriatic region; rather, the current study reveals the processes of inter-societal connections and interactions at these Adriatic sites. Iacono skillfully presents each level of analysis of interaction, production and trade networks in the preceding chapters, while also indicating outliers to the main points made. His original goal of reconstructing and analyzing the history of these inter-societal encounters is clear, by use of new methodologies and the material culture from archaeological sites in the middle Adriatic Sea region. Overall, I would highly recommend this book to scholars and students alike who are interested in the archaeology of the Mediterranean region or the Bronze Age, more broadly. Iacono's clear and engaging writing style, as well as his expertise and attention to detail, make this a valuable contribution to the field of Mediterranean archaeology. While the book focuses on the Bronze Age processes, its findings and implications are useful for understanding the broader context of the Mediterranean world, including the Medieval period particularly in the aspects of social networks, cultural exchange and mobility.



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Author's Response:

The author was provided with an opportunity to respond to the review, but declined.