



BOOK REVIEW

Ilaria Matarese, *Vaghi, pendenti e sigilli dell'età del Bronzo in Italia meridionale. Pietra, materiali vetrosi, ambra e metallo*. BAR International Series 3173, 2024, BAR Publishing, 276 pp., 32 figs., 38 pls., 7 tabs.

"Bronze Age beads, pendants and seals in Southern Italy. Stone, glassy materials, amber and metal"

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Ilaria Matarese is an archaeology officer at the Italian Ministry of Culture for the Sicily region. This book is the result of the author's doctoral research, completed at the University of Naples l'Orientale (PhD in Archaeology, Mediterranean and Asian Prehistory and Protohistory).

The present publication offers a comprehensive study of beads, pendants, and seals made of amber, vitreous materials, gold, copper-alloy, and lithic materials, coming from 64 Bronze Age contexts of Southern Italy, Sicily, and the islands of the southern Tyrrhenian Sea, comprising a total of approximately 3,000 artefacts. Ornaments of biological origin (shells, bone) are not included in this catalogue, as the doctoral project focused on the analysis of ornaments made from "precious" materials.

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The book, structured into six chapters, includes a general catalogue and a chrono-typological framework, organized by raw material type. Seven typologies have been established: three for lithic materials, one for vitreous materials, one for amber, one for copper/bronze, and one for gold. Comparisons are provided with Central-Northern Italy, the Aegean, and the Near East.

The study concludes with a reflection on the socio-cultural and economic significance of the examined artefacts, also attempting to reconstruct, where possible, the function of the objects, particularly in relation to their excavation contexts (e.g., their position in relation to the body of the inhumated individual in burial contexts). In most cases, the artefacts come from funerary contexts. Indeed, there is still a significant bias between funerary and dwelling contexts: small finds are easier to recognize in graves than within settlements, especially if the excavated material is not sieved. This issue is often matter of discussion among the scholars working on personal ornaments.

For the lithic artefacts, a macroscopic petrographic analysis was conducted, while for some amber and vitreous artefacts archaeometric analyses were carried out, thanks to the collaboration with specialized laboratories. Of course, the selection of what to sample was influenced by the availability and permission granted by official institutions, particularly when micro-destructive analyses were required. Nevertheless, the result is a significant newly edited *corpus* of analyses.

Among the appendices at the end of the volume, there is the petrographic report by Paolo Pallante (for the lithic ornaments from the "P. Orsi" Archaeological Museum in Syracuse) and an appendix presenting the results and discussion of the FTIR spectroscopy conducted on the amber samples, by Sarjit Kaur, Edith Stout, and Gaviella Kaplan.

During the Bronze Age, the areas considered for this work were involved in a complex web of maritime traffics that crossed the Mediterranean Sea from East to West and *vice versa*, but also between North and South. And body ornaments were part of these movements too.

The analysis of such a large number of contexts and objects has enabled the author to highlight a progressive change in the meaning attributed to personal ornaments over time, following aesthetic, economic, and socio-political logics. It enabled her to formulate robust hypotheses for historical reconstruction and, by cross-referencing typological data with archaeometric results, to gather information on the provenance of certain raw materials.

Technological issues are addressed only to a limited extent, as they were not the primary focus of this work, since they would require dedicated, large-scale studies of their own.

The bibliography is extensive and allows readers to explore specific sites or topics in greater depth.

This monograph by Ilaria Matarese fills a significant gap and will undoubtedly become a fundamental point of reference for those studying this class of materials, and beyond. At present, no comparable catalogues exist. Indeed, the polysemantic nature of these artefacts makes them not only of interest to specialists in personal ornaments but also essential for reconstructing exchange dynamics in antiquity, both for Bronze Age Italy and for the whole Mediterranean context.

In the bibliography below, you will find references to articles by I. Matarese (and colleagues), which focus on specific topics (e.g., vitreous materials, lithic materials) and that are frequently cited throughout the volume.

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