

# Economy and Cultural Contact in the Mediterranean Iron Age. Perspectives from East and West

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In the past decades, the study of cultural contacts in the Mediterranean has tested an ever-increasing number of theoretical models to describe the exchange between people from different backgrounds, and, as one of the outcomes of the still ongoing discussion, the basic concept of culture, as a monadic entity has been questioned.<sup>1</sup> A growing discomfort has been felt in dividing the people of the Mediterranean into distinct cultural entities, which then can come into contact with each other. As an alternative, in the panel “Economy and Cultural Contact in the Mediterranean Iron Age”, an approach was chosen, that turns away from the discussion of theoretical models and instead tries to understand economy as a basic driving force of cultural exchange: Which commodities and objects were shifted from one place to another, and which were not? In our introductory contribution we will concentrate on the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC and develop two perspectives on the east and the west, both involving traders from the Aegean.

## The East: Sources, Spoons, and Seals

For the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC in the east, cuneiform sources are at hand to illustrate the encounters between sea-faring westerners and the local population. The designation used in the Assyrian documents for these westerners is “Yau(m)nāya”, a term that is etymologically linked to the later Ionians.<sup>2</sup> In two letters from ca. 740 BC an Assyrian official, stationed on the coast, reported to his king on incursions of Yaunāya and military measures against them.<sup>3</sup> A city of Yauna, near a snow mountain and in the reach of the Assyrian governor is mentioned.

These are important sources, which make it safe to assume some kind of physical presence of westerners in the northern Levant. But there are no indications where exactly the western shipmen originally came from, and Yaunāya is to be understood as a generic designation. Their homeland could lie anything west of Cyprus, with Euboea being nothing more than an educated guess.

The use of the term “Yaunāya” in cuneiform sources can be compared to similar practices in the western sources, especially of Homeric epics, where the terms “Phoenicians” or “Sidonians” are used to describe easterners only in a most generic and stereotypical way.<sup>4</sup> In the following, the evidence of products and colonization originating from the proper Phoenician cities like Sidon or Tyre<sup>5</sup> will be neglected, and instead, a small spotlight will be thrown on the exchange system along the southern coast of Turkey and between the Aegean and the northern end of the Levant.<sup>6</sup> It is proposed, that this exchange system existed to a large extent separately from the Phoenician market.

Of course, the (until 738 BC) partly independent kingdoms of Hamat, Kinalua, and Que at the northern end of the Levant had much to offer for traders from the west: reported commodities are metals, gemstones, wood and ivory as raw materials or carved into luxury furniture, textiles of wool and linen, cattle and sheep.<sup>7</sup> As typical products of the region, two categories of finds both made from one and the same material will be discussed in more detail: stone vessels and the seals of the so-called Lyre Player group, both made of metamorphic gemstones like steatite or serpentine.

Approximately 100 steatite bowls have been found in excavations throughout the northern Levant (fig. 1) and some 100 more are known through the art market.<sup>8</sup> They come in two basic shapes: round boxes and small bowls or spoons with a lion handle. The dating of this group of vessels has been determined as ca. 850–600 BC. The raw material is mostly a dark soft stone, serpentine or steatite, which in the Levant is available only in the mountain ridge along the northern coast,<sup>9</sup> to a lesser extent such vessels are also made from other similar stones like red jasper, Egyptian blue, or marble.<sup>10</sup> Their distribution is mainly restricted to northern Syria (fig. 1). 67 pieces from the antiquities market are labeled to come from Rasm el-Tanjara.<sup>11</sup> The largest group from legal excavations consists of 49 pieces from Chatal Höyük in the Amuq plain. Only one example is reported from Samos,<sup>12</sup> and additionally, one ivory vessel was found in the Idaean cave on Crete.<sup>13</sup> Recently a detailed analysis of the 49 such vessels at the site

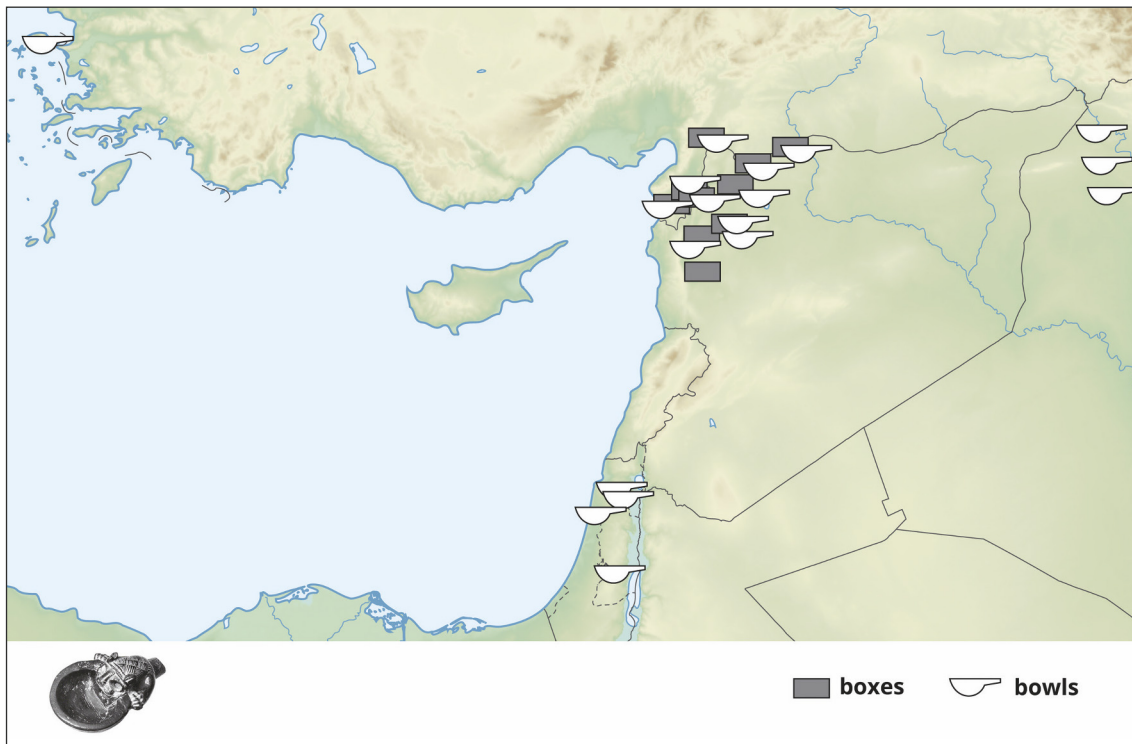


Fig. 1: Distribution map of steatite boxes and bowls.

of Chatal Höyük has been published:<sup>14</sup> Two unfinished objects demonstrate that they have been produced at the site. The products from Chatal have several stylistic features in common, which separate them from the other productions in northern Syria, but already within the group a large stylistic variation is encountered – facts that point to household production.

In the same general region another type of artistic production has been localized: the seals of the so-called Lyre-Player group.<sup>15</sup> The mostly scaraboid seals have been made from the same steatite and serpentine stone as most of the vessels discussed above. By their iconography, the material, as well as the find distribution, this class of seals has been assigned to Cilicia, that is the Iron Age kingdom of Que. We know today some 365 examples with a wide distribution from Vetulonia in the northwest to Karkemish in the east (fig. 2). Produced in a short span of time at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC in a very homogenous style, they most probably originated in a single but very productive workshop exclusively producing for the international market. Different than the steatite vessels that circulated locally, this specialized seal production was destined for the western markets in the Aegean and Italy.<sup>16</sup>

Looking at these pieces of evidence from the perspective of economy, there is a household production that was destined for local consumption and a specialized production in single larger workshops that was destined for the international market and

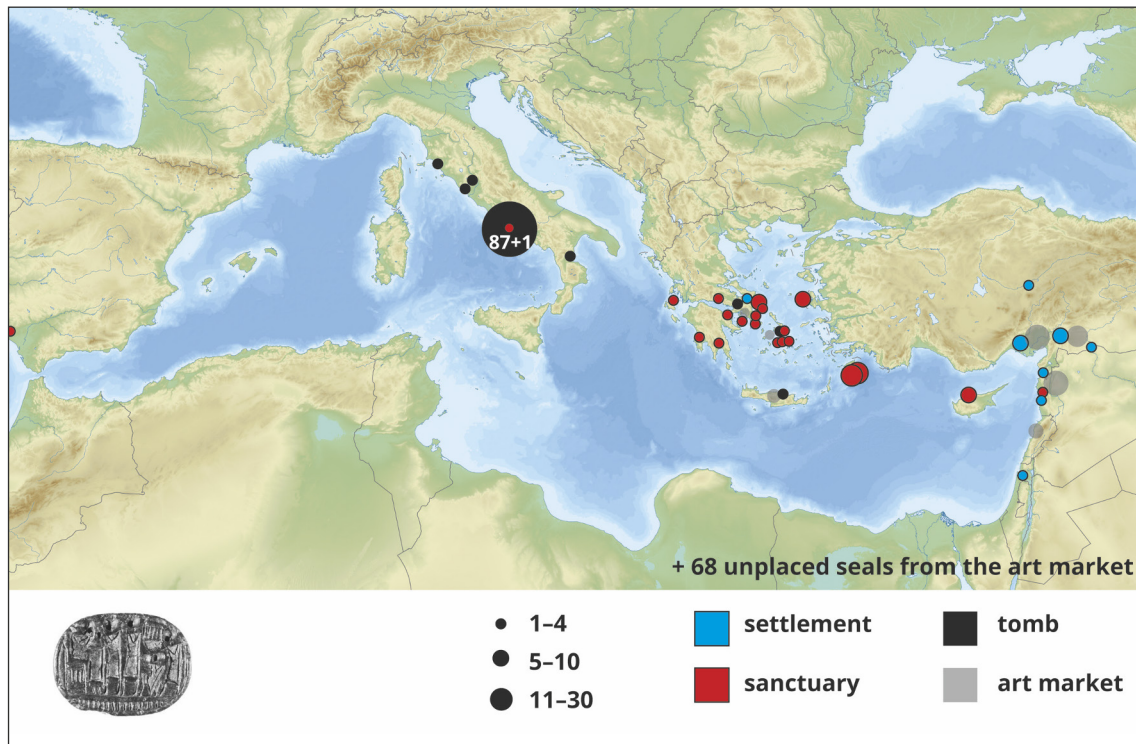


Fig. 2: Distribution map of the lyre-player group seals.

was distributed through a distinctive northern exchange system that included the Dodecanese islands, the Aegean and reached up to the shores of Italy, in contrast to the Phoenician exchange system, including the southern coast of Cyprus and Crete and reaching to the far west up to the Atlantic coast.

### **The West: Women and Weaving?**

While there is evidence of a large number of oriental goods in the western Mediterranean since the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, the other way around, the transfer of goods from west to east is difficult to prove archaeologically. Western prestige goods, as one would expect from the ritualized exchange of gifts, are virtually unknown in the east. Research usually limits itself to the conclusion that eastern merchants were compensated for their exotic gifts with raw materials that have left no traces in the archaeological record. In order to pursue the question of economic development in the western Mediterranean during the Iron Age, we must, therefore, concentrate on archaeological remains and findings from local contexts. It is not trans-Mediterranean trade, but local and inter-regional economic networks that are the central focus of the following paragraphs. A spotlight will be thrown on the Iron Age centers of southern Italy and the question of possible indicators of economic changes in the period from the 8<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Research usually assumes that pre-colonial Iron Age cultures worked on the basis of a subsistence economy. According to this view, many production processes are placed within the domestic domain with the individual families. Agriculture and livestock breeding are seen as foundations of this economic system. Handicraft products are localized in the environment of the individual households, whereby the production of pottery and clothing are assigned to the women and the processing of metal and wood, etc. to the men. The emergence of proto-urban settlements in the course of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC leads to more complex and more stratified societies and thus to an increasing specialization of the production processes.<sup>17</sup>

The frequent discovery of tools in the tombs of the male elite, particularly in the regions of the Gulf of Naples and the coastal area of the Ionian Sea, which are particularly affected by contacts with the Greek and oriental worlds, is remarkable in this context.<sup>18</sup> The tools can be assigned primarily to two functional areas. Sickles are used for agriculture. Files, scalpels, and adzes are used for carpentry. Although it cannot be ruled out that the aristocratic leaders buried in these tombs were well versed as carpenters, the sickles, in particular, speak for the fact that by adding burial gifts of tools not the craftsmanship of the deceased, but their power of disposal over specific resources, agricultural products and wood should be expressed. The presumption follows that the men distinguished by tools could delegate agricultural and forestry work to people of lower social status. They may have used the generated surplus to consolidate their social superiority, either through redistribution or through profit-driven transactions.

While the share of the men for profit-oriented production of goods is therefore out of the question, the role of women in the economic production chain does not appear to be sufficiently clarified. The assumption that the tasks of the women in Iron Age Italy were limited to the tending of the home and the care of the family, is based on conditions of later and culturally differently structured societies, such as e.g. that of Classical Athens. In early Italy in particular, there are growing numbers of indications that women fulfilled a more active role in the communities.<sup>19</sup> In this context, it is useful to turn the attention to the processing of wool and the textile trade, which is traditionally assigned to the women. In the archaeological record, this connection is most visibly expressed in the tombs. Spindle whorls and loom weights are standard funerary gifts in rich (and less wealthy) women's tombs in many regions of Italy.<sup>20</sup> As an example, we will now concentrate on the conditions in the Oenotrian culture in southern Italy.<sup>21</sup> Here, spinning and weaving utensils belong to the regular funerary equipment of female burials in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. They are commonly regarded as women's work tools, an interpretation that is plausible at first, but which raises the question of the relation to the grave goods of tools in male burials. If the latter are not to be considered as ordinary work tools, but as symbols of the power over resources, would we not then also have to consider the spinning and weaving utensils of the women as symbolic funerary goods? As attributes that demonstrate not only the women's social role as caretakers of house and family but also their active involvement in the process of textile production?

Various aspects seem to confirm this interpretation. This includes the circumstance that in the debate about spinning and weaving the production process of the raw material itself is often ignored: herd ownership, wool processing (according to different qualities, etc.), the trading of the wool and the dyeing of the yarn, but also the cultivation of flax and its processing into spinnable linen are inextricably connected with the final steps of textile production, the spinning and weaving of the yarn. A woman who wove elaborate garments in the house could not have done so without at least partially controlling the production process of the wool.

An affirmation of this broader understanding of the role of the women in the context of textile production stems again from the grave finds. Often the textile attributes are not limited to the simple spindle whorl, which along with the spindle could be regarded as the woman's personal work tool. In fact, in many graves, spindle whorls were found in larger quantities, often accompanied by one or several loom weights in different formats.

As an example, the recently found grave Est 12 in the Macchiabate necropolis at Francavilla Marittima in Calabria could be mentioned, in which a young woman of about 15 to 20 years, was buried (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> She was equipped with the extraordinarily high number of more than 30 impasto spindle whorls and at least three loom weights with incised labyrinth decoration. The spindle whorls were aligned along the right side of the body including a cluster of about two dozen pieces deposited at the haunch (fig. 4), possibly in a purse or a basket of perishable materials. Close by, one of the



Fig. 3: Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate necropolis, grave Est 12, spindle whorls and loomweights are marked in purple.



Fig. 4: Francavilla Marittima, Macchiabate necropolis, grave Est 12, cluster of spindle whorls next to the pelvis.

loom weights was deposited while the other two were found at the head and feet of the deceased. Through these attributes, the young woman is associated with textile production in a way that goes far beyond the average and everyday handicraft. According to Margarita Gleba, who has repeatedly insisted on the special significance of burials with multiple spindle whorls, the presence of multiple textile implements often of different shape and size attests of the specialization of their owner's craft and consequently of their high social status.<sup>23</sup>

Within a cultural context where social status is defined to a considerable degree by the control over material resources and working processes, it seems equally possible, however, to interpret the multiplicity of spindle whorls and loom weights in the graves as an indicator for the involvement of their owners into more profit oriented forms of textile production.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it seems conceivable, for example, that the women concerned presided over households disposing of servants and other workforces engaged in the making of garments.

Consequently, the finding in grave Est 12 raises the basic question as to the extent of household textile production. Did the households merely cover the needs of the nuclear family or did they produce for bigger consumer groups, possibly even for selling?

For the Iron Age, this question is difficult to answer. However, this leads us to the colonial period, where a huge concentration of loom weights is attested from a neighboring settlement of Francavilla Marittima: Amendolara. Hundreds of simple pyramidal loom weights have been found in the settlement area. They have given rise to the assumption that a specialized textile factory under the control of Sybaris was located here.<sup>25</sup> Would this be the proof of a new, market-economy based form of textile production that replaced older, household-oriented production methods in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC? And thus, specific evidence for the transition from the native 'household production' to the colonial 'market economy'?

This must not necessarily be the case, for on the one hand, there seems to be no evidence for industrial textile factories in pre-Roman times. Instead, textile production in the Greek world is generally located within the private domain. But beyond the mere household production, textiles were equally manufactured for the 'market' in private contexts. In Olynthus and Eretria, for instance, different houses are known, in which according to the distribution of the loom weights, several looms were simultaneously in operation and textiles were apparently made for sale.<sup>26</sup> The situation of Amendolara seems to fit in with this pattern, with the only difference being that the weaving took place in several houses of close proximity.

Is this market-oriented 'household economy' an innovation of the polis culture characterized by increased demand and socio-economic specialization? Or does it result 'on its own accord' from the process of textile production itself, beginning with livestock breeding and running full circle through the processing of the wool to its spinning and weaving and finally to the sale of the processed product? The fact that both the findings of Archaic Amendolara and the spindle whorls and loom weights from the Iron

Age tombs of Francavilla concordantly underline the surplus oriented nature of textile manufacture from a very early time onward, points to the second hypothesis: due to the complexity of the *chaîne opératoire* textile manufacture run by single households tended to operate under market based considerations long before the elaborate market-orientated economy was established by the Archaic and Classical poleis.

### Economy and Cultural Contacts

In conclusion, comparing the evidence from east and west, we acknowledge, that in the east a distributed household production existed in order to meet the needs of the local market, including the local palace. At the same time, the production of few specific commodities in single production centers was destined for the international market and possibly even especially for the western market. In the west, archaeology has mainly focused on the small-scale exchange, and it has been argued that the foundation of Greek colonies had an intensifying effect on the local production. In the wake of the colonization, we see the rise of a more specialized production in larger centers like the weaving ‘studios’ of Amendolara. A look at the graves from Francavilla has demonstrated, however, that the roots for this development are located earlier in the Iron Age period. It was not the establishment of Greek colonies alone, but an overall increase in the mobility of people in east and west that triggered the transition from ‘household’ to ‘market economy’.

As soon as commodities moved from one place to another, ‘cultures’ changed. This is true not only for the indigenous cultures of southern Italy but also for the Aegean world, where imports from the east as well as from the west led to changes in the cultural behavior of the Greeks themselves. Contrary to the eastern goods consisting mainly of artistic luxury goods, the commodities fed into the system from the west must have been, to a larger extent, raw materials and organic products, among them metals and amber, both of which are the topic of subsequent contributions in this volume.

If culture can be regarded as the “shared beliefs, rituals and social behaviors of a certain community”,<sup>27</sup> then the exchange of objects and commodities across the Mediterranean must have profoundly changed each of the participating ‘cultures’. To end this introductory contribution, a short consideration is given to just one of the communities involved in the exchange:

The material record available for Eretria on Euboea in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC clearly demonstrates what we just have argued for. Apart from exceptional ‘historical’ goods like the famous horse blinkers of King Hazael of Damascus dedicated to Apollo in the city’s main sanctuary,<sup>28</sup> the Eretrians were confronted with imports of a more generic character, such as the widely distributed Lyre-player seals and bird beads. To date, no less than six seals of the Lyre-player group are known from Eretria.<sup>29</sup> Contacts with the west are attested by at least two Italic bronze fibulae, two bronze chainlets and



two small bronze buttons, identical to those found by the hundreds in Italian Iron Age graves, where they once decorated the garments or scarves of indigenous women.<sup>30</sup> As all these objects were found in sanctuary contexts, it is difficult to determine their original function in the Eretrian community. Were they simply admired for their exotic allure? Or are we to assume a more personal relationship between the imports and their owners? At Pithekoussai and elsewhere in the Italian world, seal stones and bird beads were worn by children and women as personal ornaments and amulets. It is quite possible that similar traditions were practiced by the Eretrian elite and that exotic objects like the oriental seals and beads but also the textiles and fibulas from the west were actually worn by upper-class Eretrian women as part of their personal accessories. The case of an 8<sup>th</sup> century BC tomb at Thebes, that was reported to have contained not only several Boeotian fibulae but also one seal of the Lyre-Player-Group may hint in this direction.<sup>31</sup> Of course, we will never know exactly how these objects were included in the daily routine of the Eretrians, but it is beyond doubt that their integration into the local material culture changed what we might call the original ‘Eretrian’ or even the ‘Greek’ culture. By using such objects, the Eretrians shared a common practice with people on Italian soil as well as with people from Cilicia or the northern Levant: Rising market systems and increased mobility not only led to a cultural and social change of the communities, that produced for the international market and organized it, but also of the communities, that bought the traded goods. In this way, ‘economy’ led to profound cultural change through the production of commodities as well as through the influx and integration of foreign materials and objects.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Dally 2000; Hall 2002; Dougherty – Kurke 2003; Lund 2005; Hodos 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Rollinger 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Saggs 2001, 164–167 ND 2370 and ND 2737; cfr. Lanfranchi 2000; Yamada 2008; Rollinger 2017, 276 f.

<sup>4</sup> Winter 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See i.e. Phoenician transport amphorae: Ballard et al. 2002; Gilboa et al. 2015; cfr. Gilboa 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Outlined by the distribution of Euboean SOS-Amphorae: Pratt 2015, 220 fig. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Historical overview: Hawkins 2000, I 38–44; II 361–363. 398–401; Bagg 2011. On tribute and booty from there to Assyria: Bär 1996, 29–50; Bagg 2011, 129–149.

<sup>8</sup> Mazzoni 2001; Mazzoni 2005; Pucci 2017; Squitieri 2017, 40–42 all with further bibliography.

<sup>9</sup> Squitieri 2017, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Squitieri 2017, 40–42.

<sup>11</sup> Athanassiou 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Braun-Holzinger 2005, 152 K 39.

<sup>13</sup> Braun-Holzinger 2005, 155 f. S 8.

<sup>14</sup> Pucci 2017.

- <sup>15</sup> Blinkenberg 1931, 161–168. 172–174 nos. 521–535; Porada 1956; Boardman – Buchner 1966; Boardman 1990; Poncy et al. 2001, 11–14; Huber 2003, 91 f.; Rizzo 2007; Giovanelli 2008; Serrano Pichardo et al. 2012.
- <sup>16</sup> The same pattern of distribution is shown by the so-called bird beads, cfr. Huber 2003, 84–86 pl. 138.
- <sup>17</sup> Nijboer 1998, 187.
- <sup>18</sup> Iaia 2006; Stöllner 2007.
- <sup>19</sup> The topic has been amply debated in recent years. For a selected bibliography: Rallo 1989a; Rallo 1989b; Amann 2000, 210; Bartoloni 1988; Bartoloni 2007, 13–23.
- <sup>20</sup> Gleba 2008; Gleba 2012; Gleba 2013, 2–18.
- <sup>21</sup> Gleba 2015. See also Kleibrink 2016.
- <sup>22</sup> Guggisberg et al. 2019.
- <sup>23</sup> Gleba 2008, 177; Gleba 2015, 110 f. On the contrary to this interpretation A. M. Bietti Sestieri (1992, 108) suggested on the basis of the finds from the Osteria dell’Osa necropolis a differentiation between spinners (one spindle whorl) and weavers (several spindle whorls).
- <sup>24</sup> As the objects are currently restored, nothing can be said with regard to possible differences in shape and size of the spindle whorls, which might be indicating specialized working processes including the treatment of different qualities of raw material etc.
- <sup>25</sup> de La Genière – Nickels 1975, 496; de La Genière, 1973, 152 f.; de La Genière 1978, 351.
- <sup>26</sup> Cahill 2002, 250–252 (House A VIII 7/9); Martini 2015, 69. See also the concentration of loom weights in archaic and hellenistic houses in Kaulonia and Siris-Heracleia, suggesting again a private surplus production of textiles in a domestic context: Meo 2014; Luberto – Meo 2017, 233–239.
- <sup>27</sup> Bates – Plog 1991, 4; cfr. Tylor 1871, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Braun-Holzinger 2005, 30 nos. 4. 5.
- <sup>29</sup> Huber 2003, 91 f.
- <sup>30</sup> Huber 2003, 78–80. 82 f. nos. O47. O48. O50. O51. O104. O105; Guggisberg 2018.
- <sup>31</sup> Collignon 1895, 161 fig. 3. Cfr. Hampe 1936, 6. 108 nos. 131–134.

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