

Cyprus' maritime connectivity before and during the transition to the Late Bronze Age. The case of the north and northwest

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Following the early years of the Early Bronze Age, which saw major changes in almost all aspects of society and economy as a result of sustained contact with Anatolia, Cyprus re-entered maritime networks in c. 2000 BC at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA). This is best understood in the context of a long-distance trade in raw metals, conducted along sea routes which linked southeast Anatolia and the Levant to the Aegean Basin—and most clearly visible at Lapithos on the north coast, where tomb assemblages include imported goods and show a significant use of imported tin.

Most MBA settlements across the island were abandoned by or before the end of this period and replaced at the MC III/LC IA transition by new coastal 'gateways' and a new set of maritime connections. The most celebrated trade networks at this time operated between eastern and southern Cyprus and the Levant and Egypt. Foreign pottery now appears regularly in Cyprus and late MC III and LC IA pottery—mostly in the form of small container vessels—was reaching Egypt and the Levant in some quantity.

Among the problems associated with this eastern export horizon is the regional nature of MC III/LC I pottery fabrics. Specifically, the White Painted (WP) wares which serve as markers of the eastern 'take-off', primarily Pendent Line Style and Close Line Style, developed in the eastern Mesaoria in MC III. They are different to the WP wares in the north and centre of the island and the chronological relationship between them is unresolved.

The issue of relative chronology can, I believe, be addressed using data from Lapithos. The cemetery at Lapithos *Vrysi tou Barba* was in use from EC II–MC III. Two tombs at *Kylistra* in the modern village contained material of slightly later date in MC III. This suggests that settlement continued at a reduced level at Lapithos after *Vrysi tou Barba* went out of use.

A Syrian Red Burnished ware juglet from *Vrysi tou Barba* is a MB IIA type, which appears in the Levant in contexts which predate levels with imported Cypriot pottery. A Syrian Black Burnished juglet from *Kylistra* is, however, of a MB IIB type found with Cypriot pottery abroad, suggesting that the *Kylistra* tombs are contemporary or near contemporary with the eastern export horizon. Nine lentoid flasks from *Vrysi tou Barba* were classified by Åström as WP III–IV Pendent Line Style (PLS) and grouped with a quite different series of juglets from eastern Cyprus, which are among the earliest exported vessels. This has caused considerable confusion. The Lapithos flasks should not in my view, however, have been classed with the eastern juglets; they are not imports from the east of the island and tell us nothing about the relative chronology of eastern and northern ceramic sequences.

The second major WP marker of the eastern export horizon is the Close Line Style (CLS). A CLS jug was found at *Vrysi tou Barba* but is clearly an early example. It is an import from eastern Cyprus but different in fabric and decoration to the CLS juglets found in Egypt and the Levant. The latest tombs at *Vrysi* appear, then, to be contemporary with the early production of CLS in the east but not with the export horizon.

In sum, the ceramic indicators of the eastern export horizon are not present at *Vrysi tou Barba*, but the slightly later tombs at *Kylistra* may be contemporary. This suggests that settlement at Lapithos downsized prior to final MC III and *before* the eastern export horizon.

People from Lapithos may have been involved in the establishment of new settlements in the north and northwest toward the end of MC III, including Kazaphani on the north coast, Dhiorios and Myrtou at the base of the Panagra Pass, Ayia Irini and Toumba tou Skourou on Morphou Bay and Pendayia close to the copper ore bodies at Skouriotissa. Imports of PLS and CLS suggest that the earliest phase of these settlements was contemporary with the eastern export horizon, while other ceramic data suggest a link between the closure of the cemetery at *Vrysi tou Barba* and population movements which led to the founding of these settlements.

The northwestern settlements were well connected with the Aegean, the Levant and Egypt from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (LBA). LC I tombs at Toumba tou Skourou and Ayia Irini have produced Aegean vessels, Egyptian razors, imported seals, ostrich eggs and objects of faience, ivory, silver, gold, carnelian, amethyst and rock crystal. Connections with Tell el Ajjul further suggest that Proto White Slip and White Slip I reached this site from northwest Cyprus, with Ajjul a likely port of entry for Cypriot copper into Canaan.

Of equal interest is the evidence which the northwest coastal settlements have produced for commerce and metalworking in LC I—in the form of haematite balance weights, bronze scale pans and styli, along with metalworking equipment and debris. This suggests a significant engagement in both economic transactions and metal production in LC I, with some individuals conversant with economic practices which involved accurate weights and measures and record-keeping within a commercial system common to Egypt, the Levant and the Aegean. The use of balances, seals and styli and the evidence for metalworking here is as early if not earlier than currently known from other coastal settlements in LBA Cyprus, including Enkomi.

Connections between the earliest material from settlements founded in the northwest in late MC III and pottery from Lapithos have long been recognised and a general movement from the north coast to Morphou Bay was suggested long ago. The inhabitants of Lapithos may then not have been ‘left behind by the new forces of Late Cypriot IA’, as proposed by Astrom, but instead moved to establish new coastal outlets closer to ore sources in the northwest Troodos, building on existing external connections and internal alliances. This may explain the high level of extra-insular connectivity here in LC I, with the northwest among the first regions in LBA Cyprus to establish trade links with the emporia of the eastern Mediterranean.

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