

MARKS, MARKETING AND MARKETS

Investigating the intersection of marking practices and commercial strategies in the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age eastern Mediterranean

An international, hybrid workshop organised in the frame of the research project
CompPAS (ERC Starting Grants, No. 947749)

Archaeological Research Unit, University of Cyprus
14–15 March 2024

Organizers: Cassandra M. Donnelly and Artemis Georgiou

Thursday, 14 March

18.00-18.30 Welcome addresses

18.30-19.30 Plenary lecture: ‘Babbling Pots’
Nicolle Hirschfeld (Trinity University, Texas)

19.30 Reception

Friday, 15 March

9.30-10.15 Opening lecture: Marks, transactions and entropy in Bronze and Iron Age economies
Andrew Bevan (University College London)

10.15-10.45 Pre-firing pot marks and marking practices in Early and Middle Bronze Age Cyprus
Jennifer Webb (LaTrobe University and University of Cyprus)

10.45-11.15 The potmarks from Ein Zippori, an Early Bronze Age site in the southern Levant
Ianir Milevski (Israel Antiquities Authority and the National Scientific and Technical Research Unit, Argentina), Atalya Fadida, Anat Cohen-Weinberger and Nimrod Getzov (Israel Antiquities Authority)

11.15-11.45 Coffee break

11.45-12.15 ‘Brand’ identifiers and trade during the 2nd millennium BC in Crete
Artemis Karnava (University of Crete)

- 12.15-12.45 Writers who mark or markers who write? The interface between writing, marking, and trade on Late Bronze Age Cyprus**
Cassandra Donnelly (University of Cyprus)
- 12.45-13.15 Discussion**
- 13.15-14.30 Lunch break**
- 14.30-15.00 Scripts of Land and Sea: marks and signs in maritime context in the southern Levant ca. 1500-1200 BCE**
Assaf Yasur-Landau (University of Haifa)
- 15.00-15.30 Marking practices of Late Bronze Age Anatolia**
Ekin Kozal (Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University)
- 15.30-16.00 The International Age in pharaonic Egypt: aspects of trade, exchange and marking systems**
Julia Budka (LMU Munich)
- 16.00-16.30 Coffee break**
- 16.30-17.00 Marks, marketing and markets in the Greek world of the Early Iron Age**
Antonis Kotsonas (New York University)
- 17.00-17.30 Stamped jars from Iron Age southern Levant**
Ido Koch (Tel Aviv University)
- 17.30-18.00 Discussion**



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List of abstracts

Marks, transactions and entropy in Bronze and Iron Age economies

Andrew Bevan

Institute of Archaeology, University College London

Information disorder is both a problem-to-face and an opportunity-to-grasp in any exchange system, prehistoric to present-day, depending on who you are and what you are doing. Some economic practices, for instance, are clearly anti-entropy strategies (in the sense described by Shryock and Smail 2018), such as Bronze Age pottery containers, textile packages or metal ingots that were all sometimes sealed, standardised and marked in ways that controlled the integrity, reliability and accessibility of the transacted product. However, such strategies were also opportunities to invent new product identities and ignore or erase more complicated economic supply chains. Anxieties about secrecy, risk and trust are, and were, commonplace in such situations. Exactly *which* interventions (by producers, distributors and consumers inking, painting, incising, stamping, moulding and weaving marks on things) survive archaeologically is also highly variable. No wonder, then, that the marking practices we observe in the archaeological record often remain elusive, partial, coded or otherwise ambiguous. This talk will revisit some of the key commodity types we find in the Bronze and Iron Age eastern Mediterranean -- ingots, textiles, added-value foods -- and consider the marking practices sometimes associated with them from the perspective of what we might call 'orderly transaction' and its alternatives. I will also try to place such practices in wider Eurasian context, from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE.

The International Age in pharaonic Egypt: aspects of trade, exchange and marking systems

Julia Budka

LMU Munich

The Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age in ancient Egypt, the so-called New Kingdom (c. 1550-1070 BCE), is famous for the pharaonic state's role in the game of powers in the International Age traceable in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and the Near East. Influenced by the abundance of written sources about Egypt's position in trade and exchange, non-textual marking systems like pot marks, seals, and tags have not gained the same attention.

This presentation will provide a fresh look on various marks, especially on pot marks, from New Kingdom Egypt to address questions about production, trading, exchange and diplomacy. Material from selected sites (Elephantine, Thebes, Abydos, Amarna, Memphis and Qantir) will be presented in a diachronic order to discuss potential developments and changes within Egyptian marking practices and trade activities. Apart from trading to the Levant and Near East, some patterns of exchange towards the south, to modern Sudan, will also be discussed.

Writers who mark or markers who write? The interface between writing, marking, and trade on Late Bronze Age Cyprus

Cassandra Donnelly

Archaeological Research Unit, ComPAS project, University of Cyprus

Writing on pots constitutes over 40% of the surviving Cypro-Minoan inscriptions. Wherever Cypro-Minoan writing is found, so too are potmarks. Potmarks are not writing *strictu sensu* but their connection to the script is clear from their findspots and from the repertoire of marks, some of which are borrowed from the script. Found in mercantile contexts and on widely traded vessel types, potmarks would have been created, handled, and seen by individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds with differing knowledge of script in general and Cypro-Minoan in particular. Neither the writing nor marking on vessels is systematic, suggesting that the information conveyed by the writing and marks was not primarily transactional or functional. As such,

potmarks challenge distinctions between marks, writing and decoration, illiteracy and literacy, and economic versus personal spheres in ways that anticipate modern branding strategies. Through a comparison of potmarks from Cyprus and abroad, the present lecture analyzes the communicative potential of mercantile writing and potmarks and explores how mercantile strategies could have influenced the interpretation of marks across changing linguistic, cultural, and visual landscapes.

'Babbling Pots'

Nicolle Hirschfeld

Trinity University

More than in any other region of the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean, the inhabitants of Cyprus handled ceramic vases branded with information that was meant to be seen during the use or trafficking of the pots. The different kinds of potmarks drawn, painted, incised, or impressed into the rims, handles, shoulders, bodies, or bases of a variety of shapes and wares are our remaining clues to intentional communications about owning, controlling, counting, tracking, perhaps celebrating, wishing, or asking. In the late 19th and through the 20th century, scholars focused on the potmarks as signs of writing, specifically the Cypro-Minoan script. Since the turn of the millennium, attention has both shifted and broadened: in the first instance, to consider who might be writing, in what circumstances, and why. In the second, to consider non-script systems on their own terms. This talk presents a brief overview of the history and state of knowledge, but its focus will be on specific ways forward. The material at hand presents many puzzles and some obvious directions of inquiry.

'Brand' identifiers and trade during the 2nd millennium BC in Crete

Artemis Karnava

University of Crete

The Bronze Age Aegean is known to have been a sea of connectivity. Our studies have reserved the term “the era of the ‘international’ spirit” already for the 3rd mill. BC. But it is during the 2nd mill. BC that all areas in and around the eastern Mediterranean adopted writing of one form or another and standardized their stamping habits. Writing and seals complemented one another and became the vehicles of administrative practices for the purpose of controlling the movement of products, ideas, and even people.

This contribution will follow a specific stamped document type that seems to have been crucial for the execution of commercial transactions in the 2nd mill. Aegean, the *nodulus*, an unassuming small lump of clay that bore one or two seal impressions. The *nodulus* is certain to have traveled. In fact, it was produced exactly for that reason, to function as an identifier (of people or their office) and as a testimony of commercial transactions somewhere outside where they were made. The *nodulus* first appeared in the Old Palatial administration but continued to be used during the multi-layered administration of the New Palaces. Evidence from both periods will help us lay out its utility, and especially to investigate what it was about it that turned a piece of clay into a mark of guarantee in the course of economic transactions.

Marks, marketing and markets in the Greek world of the Early Iron Age

Antonis Kotsonas

Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University

The 8th century BCE has long been considered as a watershed for Mediterranean interconnections. My paper lends support to this idea by approaching the understudied topic of marks on Early Iron Age Aegean transport amphorae and by reflecting on their relevance to broader discussions regarding marketing and markets in the Greek world. I will review the broad range of alphabetic and non-alphabetic marks which are attested on Early Iron Age vessels, and the problems of their interpretation. Particular attention will be given to the types of marking which occur on specific, regional amphora types, and on the questionable connection of the marks to the morphological and – debatably – volumetric standardization of the vessels. Notwithstanding notable

uncertainties, I will argue that the widespread production and distribution of different types of Aegean transport amphorae in the 8th century BCE, and the introduction of marks on them, can be connected – however loosely – to the marketing of the vessels and the commodities they carried. These developments should be appreciated in the context of Greek colonization, which opened up new markets for Greek and other trade in the Aegean and the Mediterranean.

Marking Practices of Late Bronze Age Anatolia

Ekin Kozal

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University

In Anatolia, before-firing marks appear on ceramic vessels, terracotta loom weights and spindle whorls in small amounts and with no functional distinction from their unmarked counterparts from Early Bronze Age III to the Late Bronze Age. The present paper investigates the practices of these before-firing marks with regards to production and distribution. A hypothetical production model will be tested here according to which unmarked objects represent large producer/clients and marked objects the smaller producers/clients. Specifically, it examines whether mark meaning was limited to the production or post-production stages related to the producer (e.g., potter, workshop), the client (e.g., owner, merchant) or other characteristics such as quality, quantity, or content. The study will include an analysis of mark type vis à vis the commodity's typology, chronology, context, and regional distribution. Drawing on previous studies of Late Bronze Age Anatolian potmarks by Marie-Henriette Gates and Claudia Glatz, which only consider marks on Plain wares and not Red Lustrous Wheelmade wares (RLW-m), the present study will incorporate RLW-m wares in the light of the recent developments concerning their provenance and significance for Late Bronze Age Anatolia. In sum, this paper aims, on one hand, to give an overview of the marking practices since the Early Bronze Age and, on the other, to present a more thorough analysis of the Late Bronze Age evidence on local Plain and RLW-m wares.

The potmarks from Ein Zippori, an Early Bronze Age site in the southern Levant

Ianir Milevski^{1,2}, Atalya Fadida¹, Anat Cohen-Weinberger¹ and Nimrod Getzov¹

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Potmarks have been found in abundance in several sites of the Early Bronze Age (EB) in the central and northern southern Levant. At Ein Zippori, a large EB site located in the Lower Galilee, a collection of approximately 700 potmarks was found, most of which were incised on the handles and several on the body of the vessels. The great majority belong to the EB IB while few to the EB II. Several seal impressions were also found similar to impressions from the western Jezreel Valley and the Sharon plain (EB IB) and the Galilee (EB II).

This lecture will examine the potmarks of Ein Zippori based on various parameters such as: division into typological groups, types of tools with which the marks were done, petrographic groups and parallels from Israel, the Ancient Near East and beyond. We will discuss potmarks as a semiotic and social phenomenon. We propose for now that the potmarks are part of a visual communication system related to the production process of pottery done by potters and perhaps other craftsmen. The expansion of the use of these marks in the early days of urbanization in the southern Levant indicates a connection to the social and technological developments within the first urban centers in the region. With the change in the size of communities and the division of labor, the residents also required the expansion of visual communication.

Potmarks from Lebanon: New insights into the marking practices of the eastern Mediterranean

Metoda Peršin

Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa

Potmarks located on Levantine vessels found in foreign contexts, especially those on transport jars, are often interpreted as signs created for trade and exchange purposes. The new potmark data from Bronze Age Lebanon exhibit a much wider use of potmarks documented across a variety of contexts, including residential areas, palaces, temples and burials, located on vessels of various types and wares, including cooking pots used in domestic settings. This paper offers an overview of potmarking practices in Lebanon during the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages. It examines their interactions with the foreign markets to which the vessels produced in Lebanon were exported, as well as with the marked foreign vessels imported to Lebanon. It analyses many characteristics of potmarks and their ceramic carriers, their frequency and distributions across sites and their use in various archaeological contexts and proposes new ideas on the use of potmarks in Lebanon and the wider region.

Pre-firing pot marks and marking practices in Early and Middle Bronze Age Cyprus

Jennifer Webb

La Trobe University and the University of Cyprus

Pre-firing pot marks appeared in Cyprus in the initial phase of the Early Bronze Age and are found throughout the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Arguably, this earlier usage needs to be investigated if Late Bronze Age marking systems are to be fully understood within their Cypriot context. The frequency and complexity of pot marks at *Vounous*, for example, where 125 vessels, including over 50% of large jugs, are conspicuously marked, leave little doubt that local potters developed a self-contained system of recording at this site in Early Cypriot I–II. Elsewhere, hundreds of marks documented across the island also seem to be concentrated on particular vessels (undecorated jugs, small bowls and cooking pots) and wares in particular periods and places, constituting variable localised practices across time and space. This paper will examine the corpus of marks on prehistoric Bronze Age Cypriot pottery and review previous interpretations. It will investigate connections between the use of marks and pottery production, distribution and consumption and consider the extent to which they may have served as precursors to marking systems in use in the Late Bronze Age and beyond.

Scripts of Land and Sea: Marks and Signs in Maritime context in the Southern Levant ca. 1500-1200 BCE

Assaf Yasur-Landau

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Underwater surveys at the coast of the Carmel have yielded at least six cargoes of the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age containing inscribed or marked objects, from ingots to tools and pottery vessels, as well as additional concentrations of anchors and ingots, some of which are marked. While published in at least initial forms, these marks are yet to be systematically collected and their contribution to the understanding of Late Bronze Age trading systems is still far from clear. This lecture will present an attempt to compare some of the marks to those found on vessels, ingots and tools retrieved from land excavations in Cyprus and Israel, as means to understand their role in the dynamics of maritime trade. A special attention will be given to marks that bear close similarity to the Cypro-Minoan script, and to evaluation of past theories on the involvement of Cypriots in maritime trade reaching the coast of Canaan. I will examine the hypothesis that some of the signs reflect a situation of multiple ownership of cargoes, pieces of ship and personal gear, and that Cypriot merchants and captains were at least semi-literate or knew enough signs in Cypro-Minoan to use them to mark their belonging.