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A MATTER OF QUANTITY? SOME NOTES ON LATE BRONZE AGE  
EXCHANGE MODES IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN\*

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*The aim of this paper is to illustrate the potentially multiple modes of trade and exchange that existed during the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean (with a special focus in the Aegean) and to consider the identity of those receiving particular categories of goods, the motivations behind particular modes of exchange and the processes by which certain 'foreign' or 'exotic' objects finally came to be deposited some considerable distance from their initial place of manufacture. Examples from a variety of sites will be presented and analysed. It is proposed that by considering each object as an artefact in its own right, a unique item rather than merchandise or a symptom of mass production, may help modern archaeologists to understand the reason why certain artefacts were found outside their original cultural context.*

**Introduction**

The principle aim of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of those various features surrounding prehistoric exchange and consumption as reflected in the archaeological record. Although the methodological elements presented herein primarily concern the distribution, acquisition, and reception of manufactured artefacts and other goods in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, it is the Aegean which will form the focus of this research and, particularly, how objects produced in this region were adopted, and adapted, by consumers elsewhere. It is the intention of the author to illustrate the potentially multiple modes of trade

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and exchange that existed during this period and, perhaps more importantly, to consider the identity of those receiving particular categories of goods, the motivations behind particular modes of exchange, and the processes by which certain 'foreign' or 'exotic' objects finally came to be deposited some considerable distance from their initial place of manufacture. For the purposes of this paper, artefacts published as 'exotic' and 'foreign' are considered as 'non-local' with respect to their final depositional context when provenance has been securely established by typological, stylistic, or scientific analysis. In order to allow meaningful study, it is, of course, necessary to adopt a more systematic distinction between trade and exchange by analysing each artefact, or group of artefacts, with reference both to the particular idiosyncrasies of their recovery and to those various contextually sensitive elements which affect the way in which an object is experienced. One thinks particularly of the influence of social ideology on the reception and manipulation of 'foreign' artefacts and the distinction made between objects of symbolic significance, such as iconographic motifs, and those intended to serve a more practical purpose, such as ceramic containers for liquids. Indeed, in those instances in which 'exotic' objects are adopted into the socio-political and economic structures of prehistoric society, the question of the significance of 'otherness' becomes even more important.

### **Modes of Exchange**

The fundamental question posed by the study of prehistoric exchange mechanisms is simple: *how did things move around?* Anthropologist Karl Polanyi (1957) suggested three different types of exchange: reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. Of these three processes, reciprocity refers to the (reciprocal) exchange of goods between individuals of equal status (i.e. the 'gift-exchange mechanism'); redistribution refers to those forms of exchange which require some form of centralised authority responsible for the movement of goods, objects, and products to a central place and their redistribution to other members of the group; while market exchange refers to the mercantile exchange of products at a central place, a process that can prove particularly complex in pre-monetary societies.

With exotic goods apparently circulating principally within the upper strata of prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean society, it seems likely that their production, transportation, and consumption were the result of either reciprocal or market exchange. While numerous genuine Late Bronze Age imports have been identified, locally-made variants were also widely circulated. These local products are, for the most part, clearly distinguishable from those objects to which they owe their inspiration. The distinctive 'Pastoral Style' Mycenaean-style pottery, for example, began to circulate on Cyprus and across the Eastern Mediterranean after the collapse of the Mycenaean palatial administration, in imitation of ceramic types previously imported from the Aegean<sup>1</sup>. The Aegean-style wall paintings at

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<sup>1</sup> See Papadopoulos 2011 for a discussion.

Type	Explanation
Direct Access	<b>A</b> being able to move directly to source and/or <b>B</b>
Reciprocity (Home Base)	<b>A</b> moves closer to <b>B</b> and exchanges their products/objects
Reciprocity (Boundary)	<b>A</b> and <b>B</b> meet at their respective regional boundary
Down-the-line Trade	An object may move from <b>A</b> to <b>B</b> to <b>C</b> and so forth
Central Place Redistribution	<b>A</b> and <b>B</b> (and others) bring their products/artefacts to a central place and receive goods or raw materials that they themselves lack
Central Place Market Exchange	<b>A</b> and <b>B</b> meet at a central place for direct exchange
Freelance Trading by a merchant acting as middleman	<b>A</b> and <b>B</b> give their produce to merchants who meet at a neutral location and carry out exchange
Emissary Trading	<b>A</b> sends an emissary/ambassador to <b>B</b> for the exchange
Port of Trade	A central place where emissaries or independent merchants meet and exchange goods

*Types of transport of artefacts and their explanation (source: author, after Renfrew/Bahn 1991, 322)<sup>2</sup>.*

Tel Kabri in Israel and Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> in Egypt, similarly, were evidently created *in situ*<sup>3</sup>, although the identity of the artisan remains problematic.

The processes by which portable artefacts were transported over distance during the Late Bronze Age, however, are potentially far more complex.

The foregoing constitutes a brief overview of current theoretical models of prehistoric exchange. They account for potential exchanges at multiple socio-economic scales and various geographical locations. Nevertheless, the question remains: is it possible to trace, archaeologically, the practical and symbolic function of those materials and objects being transported during the Late Bronze Age?

### **Movements of goods**

Substantial research on the distribution and consumption of Mycenaean pottery has been carried out by Van Wijngaarden (2002) who has argued persuasively that similar Aegean-made ceramic shapes were used and viewed very differently in different social contexts, and specifically by groups in southern Italy, Cyprus, and on the Syro-Palestinian coast. Not all ceramic types held the same symbolic significance and, of those shapes in circulation within these regions, it seems that the pictorial *kraters* were considered the most significant of all (Van Wijngaarden 2001; 2002. See also Steel 1998).

In order to characterise the role of Aegean exports to the island of Cyprus, it is crucial that material be examined with reference not only to its depositional and geographical context, but also diachronically, in order to make clear the histori-

<sup>2</sup> By **A** and **B** a person/group of individuals/representatives of a societal group are implied.

<sup>3</sup> Niemeier/Niemeier 2000; Bietak 2000; 2005.

cal trajectory of interaction, establishing the earliest appearance of Aegean material on Cyprus and allowing analysis of Aegean processes from an Eastern Mediterranean perspective. Currently, the earliest Aegean ceramic material discovered in Cyprus belongs to the Kamares-ware group of the established Middle Minoan period on Crete<sup>4</sup>. Although analysis is ongoing, it seems clear at this point that very low numbers of genuine Cretan exports were reaching Cyprus by MM III-LM IB, in a development perhaps symptomatic of a limited desire to exploit the commercial opportunities of the Orient in combination with a slow increase in the popularity of Cretan imports in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Egypt, both open and closed ceramic shapes of MM IB to LM IB inclusive, have been recovered from a limited number of sites between the Nile Delta and the First Cataract (Kemp/Merrillees/Edel 1980). Very few Middle and Late Bronze Age exports have been identified in Syro-Palestine<sup>5</sup>, although Kamares-ware has been identified at both Ugarit and Byblos, while in Anatolia (Momigliano 2009; Raymond 2009) the sites of Miletus and Iasos have also produced Minoan pottery. It is clear from this distribution that the same trade routes and market places were utilised for exchange transactions several centuries prior to the beginning of the Palatial period. However, although both the trade routes and harbour towns through which Mycenaean pottery was moved were long established, the activities taking place were limited exchange modes and not established trade mechanisms<sup>6</sup>.

### Quantities of objects

The well-known Late Bronze Age shipwreck at Uluburun, off the southern coast of modern Turkey, is fundamentally important for our understanding of the quantity and quality of objects circulating in the Eastern Mediterranean at the time at which it was sunk (Pulak 289-380, in Aruz *et alii* 2008). The issue of whether it was crewed by Canaanite merchants (*idem* 366) accompanied by two Mycenaean officials is, for the purposes of this paper, irrelevant, as is the question of whether their direction of travel was toward the Aegean via Cyprus from the south or not (Bloedow 2005; Cline/Yasur-Landau 2007). Rather, the key point is that this ultimately tragic event has provided modern scholars with an unparalleled dataset which clearly demonstrates an ‘international’ nexus of contacts and the movement of a huge volume of goods. There is no question that luxury goods were moving across the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age, but the

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<sup>4</sup> Sørensen 2006, 175, cat. no. 2 (Sørensen gives a date of MM IB-IIA).

<sup>5</sup> Sørensen comments that the MM Kamares-ware “has been recognised in 20 instances” (2009, 20). See also Walberg 2001, 17 who notes that “much of the Kamares Ware from outside Crete has been found in tombs and settlements and not in palaces which would have been expected if we were to use a model of a wider range of gift exchange and diplomatic foreign relations to explain the distribution pattern”.

<sup>6</sup> As it would be unwise to discuss about trade during that period, it would be more proper to discuss about exchange. Cline (2009b, 163) comments that “trade was primarily directional to the major palatial centres of the Aegean, with secondary redistribution from those centres”, a much later socio-political structure. See also Papadimitriou, this volume.

fundamental questions which have yet to be adequately addressed are to whom and for what reason?

The MM II Kamares-ware cup and faience bead recovered from the Karmi tomb on Cyprus (Stewart 1962, 204; Webb *et alii* 2009) suggested to the excavator “[a] man [who] probably walked down to the sea of Lapithos and took service with one of the vessels trading between the Syrian ports and the Aegean” with his grave goods serving as mementos of his travels. Stewart named his discovery ‘The Tomb of the Seafarer’ as a result; however Merrillees, with reference to the Kamares cup, argues that “there is no reason to discount the possibility that it, like the other Minoan vases encountered in the Levant, was simply sold by a merchantman plying the eastern Mediterranean basin” (Merrillees 2003a; 2003b, 139). At the same time, the rather small quantities of Minoan and Mycenaean material recovered from Toumba tou Skourou in northwest Cyprus, led the excavator to comment that “Toumba tou Skourou has nevertheless proved, we think, to be an important and unusual site, since it demonstrates a consistent Cypriote link with the Aegean world, particularly Crete, from the 16th to the 17th century B.C.” (Vermeule/Wolsky 1990, 397).

Yet, what are we to think of Tomb Rho at Mycenae? Does the recovery here of a scarab and an ivory artefact with the dead (Mylonas 1972-1973, 211-225, pl. 192-202, fig. 25: Tomb Rho) give us cause enough to construct a similar narrative to that of the individual buried at Karmi? The excavator notes similarities between the architecture of this tomb and those of contemporary Ugarit ones excavated by Schaeffer, but is it possible to characterise the deceased as of Syrian origin, and are these ‘exotic’ offerings evidence enough to propose an Eastern Mediterranean connection?

### **Quantifying the problem**

The difficulty highlighted here is that to which the title of this paper refers: *A matter of quantity?* How many objects are needed in order to securely identify the burial of a traveler or merchant? An emporium or a trading post? An international trading centre or an established port or market? The uncertainty evident in modern scholarship over the systems of measurement and quantification applied to the movement of, for example, Mycenaean stirrup jars, or indeed, on the movement of goods in general, is problematic. In the discussion which followed Vassilis Petrakis’ recent Minoan Seminar at Athens<sup>7</sup>, it was suggested that a single engraved *pithamphora* marked with the Linear B sign for ‘*Wanax*’ could have functioned as a ‘representative’ vessel in a much larger cargo of unmarked *pithamphorae*<sup>8</sup>. If such were the case, then a single vessel would have sufficed to communicate the origin or the intended destination of perhaps 50-100 vessels. But how can we ever hope to be sure?

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<sup>7</sup> Minoan Seminar, 28 January 2011, held at the Archaeological Society at Athens.

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Vassilis Petrakis for his willingness to share valuable information. For further information, see Petrakis 2010.

Manning and Hulin (2005) have highlighted the problems faced when using statistical analysis and the methodological limitations of trade studies in general. In their analysis of Eric Cline's truly most useful catalogue (Cline 2009a) which was originally printed in 1994, they note that while his total of 1,118 Eastern imports in the Aegean might initially seem large, these items were travelling over a period of some 600 years. Indeed, with 227 of Cline's artefacts derived from the shipwrecks at Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya, this equates to "only about 1.4 objects per year for the rest of the six centuries at stake" (Manning/Hulin 2005, 283; Cline 2009a). Similarly, with reference to Van Wijngaarden's work, they identify a "hardly overwhelming" (*idem*, 284) average of 2.5 foreign imports per year at Ugarit.

With the context of this paper now established, we shall now turn to a case study in order to demonstrate how similar objects may have reached their final destination without leaving clear evidence of the exchange process in the archaeological record, and the functions that such objects fulfilled. To restate a well-worn, but nonetheless accurate, trope, *absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*. Naturally, one can never hope to work solely from hypotheses without the introduction of at least some actual material, yet for our purposes, it is important that we direct discussion of commerce and trade toward a category of artefact for which, almost by definition, very little evidence exists: perishable goods.

The substantial volume of resin (Pulak in Aruz *et alii* 2008) recovered among the cargo of the Uluburun shipwreck suggests that products which, under normal conditions of preservation, leave no trace in the archaeological record, were bought, sold, and exchanged in quantity, together with their non-perishable ceramic containers and other more durable categories of artefacts. Indeed, it has recently been demonstrated that fish were transported over distance during the Late Bronze Age, with evidence for the movement of *Lates Niloticus* from the Nile to the Cypriot sites of Apliki and Hala Sultan Tekke<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the recovery of land snails from Uluburun suggests their movement as cargo, although Welter-Schultes has recently cautioned that "[the] accidental transport of empty shells is expected to have occurred even more frequently" (Welter-Schultes 2001, 86).

With the Linear B texts attesting to the manufacture of dyed linens in the Aegean as early as the Neopalatial period, the possibility exists that equally decorative examples of painted canvas or wood may also have circulated without leaving any archaeological trace. Wooden furniture was also produced in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age and is, of course, attested archaeologically in several unique examples from the well-known site of Akrotiri by early Late Cycladic I<sup>10</sup>. With many apparently inlaid using carved ivory elements,

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<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Tatiana Theodoropoulou for this information.

<sup>10</sup> Plaster 'negatives' of beds and stools have been made by skilled conservators working on site. While the wood itself has long decomposed, the shape was preserved by the introduction of wet plaster into the void.



of which some still survive, they are frequently referred to in the texts as prestige objects, and were no doubt a product of elite exchange<sup>11</sup>.

### **An alternative approach? Selection systems, adoption, local manipulation**

A small number of carved ivory heads have been excavated in the Aegean which depict males wearing boar's tusk helmets and which date to the LH IIIA-B period. They are unevenly distributed across the mainland and Crete and most were discovered as single pieces, with the exception of those from Archanes which survive attached to their torsos and which are accompanied by 'figure-of-eight' shields, also in ivory. These heads most likely formed the inlaid elements to several distinct items of wooden furniture. Two further ivory heads have been discovered beyond the Aegean, at the sites of Enkomi in Cyprus and Decimoputzu in Sardinia. Their presence here is somewhat easier to understand in the light of numerous studies conducted in recent years on exchange networks, prehistoric sea routes, the Late Bronze Age ivory trade in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the diplomatic protocols that must have had as their main focus the giving and receiving of expensive gifts, of which elaborate furniture must surely have constituted one element. As noted elsewhere (Papadopoulos 2008-09), it is not clear whether these heads alone functioned as elite gifts beyond the Aegean. It has been suggested that within the Aegean cultural sphere, these heads, and the objects to which they were originally attached, were items of prestige, perhaps exchanged between, or made for, members of the upper social strata. Quite apart from the intrinsic value of the ivory of which these heads were carved, warrior iconography in the Aegean was utilised as a symbol of authority and prowess by Aegean elites. For those examples found outside of the Aegean, it is possible that they were acquired by individuals who were aware of this symbolic value and who came to consider them, similarly, as exotic items of prestige. Regardless, it can be suggested that both the Enkomi and Decimoputzu heads were, at some point, separated from their original whole and kept as expensive and unusual items in their own right, perhaps by a wealthy merchant or similar, rather than by a member, or members, of an elite. These areas from which these finds derive lack a strong iconographic tradition comparable to the rich and established Aegean pictorial repertoire of warriors and hunters. These ivory helmeted heads, a symbol of authority and military prowess in the Aegean, could have been perceived as exotic items, still valued, but lacking symbolic potency outside of the socio-political context in which they were manufactured.

There are, of course, occasions whereby specific categories of object might be introduced into a culture as a product of cultural filtering. A clear example of the adoption and likely manipulation of a 'foreign' artefact type, and its inherent

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<sup>11</sup> See Papadopoulos 2008-09, 16, note 4 for the views of Krzyszkowska and Sakellarakis on the function of footstools as luxurious items.

symbolism, can be identified in the use of the so-called ‘figure-of-eight’ shields (Papadopoulos 2010). The motif constitutes a robust and pervasive *insignium* of authority, and perhaps also divine protection, throughout the Aegean during the Palatial Late Bronze Age (Daniilidou 1998; Papadopoulos 2006). It appears first on Cyprus during Late Cypriot II, in extremely low numbers, principally on gold beads or as relief decoration on diadems, as in the examples from Enkomi, Hala Sultan Tekke, Dhenia, Pyla, and Agios Iacovos. Before Late Cypriot II, the figure-of-eight shield is virtually unknown in the Cypriot repertoire and, to the author’s knowledge, neither does it appear in Egyptian or Near Eastern art. Despite the influx of Aegean pottery and other material culture, and the ideological, artistic, and technological influences which accompanied it, this motif seems to have never found widespread favour with the upper echelons of Late Cypriot society, nor is there any compelling evidence to believe that it was imbued with the same symbolic meaning. On the contrary, its appearance, or lack thereof, is most likely the result of selective processes practised by prehistoric societies when receiving (or not receiving) non-local symbols.

A similar model can most likely be applied to the appearance in the Aegean of armed bronze figurines of the so-called Reshef or ‘Smiting God’ type<sup>12</sup>. Based on the extremely limited number of examples thus far recovered, it seems that metal statuettes never rose to become an object of desire in the local military artistic repertoire. Published Aegean examples are known from Tiryns and Phylakopi, while the last comprehensive study into their distribution recorded literally hundreds of examples from Syro-Palestinian contexts (Seeden 1980). Most likely this situation is symptomatic of the selection processes to which foreign objects and iconography are subject by other elites, individuals, and groups after careful filtering according to local societal convention and specific socio-political and economic needs.

These mechanisms of selection, adoption, manipulation, hybridization, influence, cross-craft interaction, and eventually consumption are not limited to prestige items in precious materials. The exceedingly common Aegean stirrup jar has been imitated by various cultural groups in the Eastern Mediterranean, including those of Egypt and Israel. At Beth Shean (Zukerman 2009), these vessels were manufactured from local clays, while rare examples are also known in blue faience (as at Enkomi, British Tomb 80: Jacobsson 1994, no. 232, and the Egyptian sites of Buhen and Gurob) and alabaster (Gurob: Kelder 2010). This distribution evidences the organised production of hybrid artefact types in response to a need, driven by particular social beliefs, and influenced by technological practicalities, to copy and imitate this Aegean shape in various materials across different regions<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Canby 1969: see for example pl. 38. Also Gallet de Santerre 1987.

<sup>13</sup> For another imitation (sc. of a Proto-White Painted Ware stirrup jar from Gastia Alaas), but of later period, the Cypriot early Iron Age, that is conventionally called Late Cypriot IIIB (ca. 1125–1050 BC), see Voskos/Knapp 2008, 673–674.

It is, of course, more than likely that some objects were made as unique pieces, created at the specific request of a patron. The silver 'Battle *Krater*' and 'Siege *Rhyton*' from Shaft Grave at Mycenae, unique in their decoration and crafted from precious metal, are strong candidates for this type of commission<sup>14</sup>. The same applies to those pictorial *kraters* exported from the Argolid to Cyprus, decorated with unique scenes such as those of the famous 'Chariot bell *krater*', on which griffins rather than horses are harnessed to the chariot<sup>15</sup>. Could these objects have been created to meet the artistic or social requirements of an individual, rather than owing their 'rarity' to taphonomic processes? The archaeological record of the Bronze Age East Mediterranean is full of 'unique' objects, and it is worth remembering that even during those periods in which certain categories of object were being produced en masse, there was still opportunity for the expression of individuality and personal taste (albeit, for a price). With this in mind, how might we interpret the presence of the two modest, but still extremely rare, clay boat models in two Late Cypriot tombs at Kazaphani and Maroni<sup>16</sup>, or the identification of heirlooms such as the recently recovered Bronze Age ivory mirror handle in an Iron Age burial at Amathous<sup>17</sup>?

On rare occasions, exceptional objects appear out of context which hint at the long distance movement of artefacts, but which cannot be considered in the absence of secure provenance. One such example is the Tell el-Yahudiyeh juglet now exhibited at the Museum of Prehistoric Thera at Fira, Thera. This vessel originated from a private collection and, although it seems to be a *unicum* in the Aegean, cannot be factored into any analysis of inter-regional contact between Thera and the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>18</sup>.

### Conclusions

Bronze Age trade in the Aegean and beyond is an exceptionally rewarding field in which to conduct research, but it is one that cannot be adequately covered by a single paper. As a result, let us conclude by reiterating three points that are crucial to our understanding of the character and function of those various imports and exports recovered to date. Each 'exotic' object, imported from another

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<sup>14</sup> Papadopoulos 2006 (94-95, cat. no. III.8) and Blakolmer 2007 for the 'Battle *Krater*'. Sakellariou 1975 and Papadopoulos 2006 (93, cat. no. III.7) for the 'Siege *Rhyton*'.

<sup>15</sup> Now at the British Museum, Greek and Roman Department, inv. no. 1897, 0401.927. For a discussion see Vermeule/Karageorghis 1982, 43, 202, V.27; also Papadopoulos forthcoming.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolaou/Nikolaou 1989 (for Kazaphani); Johnson 1980, nos. 15 and 60 (for Maroni).

<sup>17</sup> Hadjisavvas 2002. For heirlooms, see also Van Wijngaarden 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Of three juglets of the same type discussed by Åström 1971, only this example survives. The others are lost and, to date, no similar objects have been recovered in the Aegean, although they remain fairly common in Cyprus, Egypt, and the Levantine coast. For a review of the circulation of the Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware, see Kaplan 1980. However, Bichta (2003, 550) considers these three juglets as evidence of relations between Thera and the Eastern Mediterranean during the Middle Bronze Age. An ongoing research project by the author is currently focussing on this very issue.

region, polity, or cultural unit should be examined carefully in order to allow meaningful comment on its 'biography'<sup>19</sup>. In addition to an understanding of its artefactual properties and contextual data, it is fundamental that these objects be positioned within the greater nexus of intra- and inter-regional imports. Understanding that the same object may have multiple meanings and symbolic characteristics depending on the context of its use is essential in order to appreciate its function and the motivation behind its production, transport, and consumption. Even as part of a wider socio-cultural demand for a certain category of artefact (one thinks of the market for Aegean-made pictorial *kraters*, or the tendency toward weapon burials and conspicuous consumption, for example), there is always room for the incorporation of individual preferences and private values or beliefs. Unique objects, from pictorial ceramics to the silver vessels of the Shaft Graves in the mainland could have been used by individuals who wished to project their own ethos, prowess, or experience into a wider social setting. Considering each object as an artefact in its own right, a unique item rather than merchandise or a symptom of mass production, may help modern archaeologists to understand the reason why certain items appear so far from their place of manufacture. Finally, an awareness of the limitations of study regarding the movement of goods and people will assist greatly in the avoidance of the frequent traps of enthusiasm.

We will likely never know if the Kamares cup from Karmi was acquired by a seafarer at a Syrian port during a life of maritime adventure, or by a peace-loving farmer from a Cypriot market to which it was transported by one or more nameless middlemen, but somebody would eventually see enough of that person in this object for it to be considered a fitting gift for whatever afterlife would follow, and this, perhaps, is the only thing of which we might be absolutely certain.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of object 'biographies' and the cultural significance of imported items, see Bennet 2004; Knapp 2006; Panagiotopoulos 2012. See also Maran 2004 where he discusses the will of societies to integrate foreign traits to their world view.

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