

Seeking the Cypriot Merchant

Personal objects as indicators of identity?

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ABSTRACT

The subject of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean littoral during the Late Bronze Age and the role of Cyprus in these exchange networks, have received significant scholarly attention over the past decades. However, the identification of the physical presence of the Cypriot merchants outside Cyprus has yet to be discussed in detail, primarily due to the methodological problems and limitations of such a research questions. This paper suggests it is possible to acquire a sense of the whereabouts of these merchants outside Cyprus, especially in the Aegean and the Levant, by attempting to identify personal belongings that can be used as identity indicators. For this purpose, selected material culture from Cyprus, which was found outside the island, is discussed together with contemporary textual evidence, where available. A contextual examination of clay bull-shaped vessels, female figurines (Type A and B), and large pithoi can provide useful insights as they may be considered personal objects of Cypriots. This combined study of material culture and textual evidence showed that it is possible to identify certain areas, both coastal and inland, where Cypriot merchants could have resided, leaving behind them traces of their presence.

The aim of this paper is to present some methodological considerations concerning the identification of the physical presence of the Cypriot merchant outside Cyprus, within the Late Bronze Age (17th to 12th century B.C.E., henceforth LBA) Eastern Mediterranean littoral and especially in the Aegean and the Levant. Despite a large number of publications and research projects on trade and exchange in the Late Bronze Age east Mediterranean,¹ the presence and status of the merchant, i.e. the individual who travels and resides for the short-or long-term in foreign lands, creating business relationships and forming part of a complex trading mechanism, is not yet fully understood. It is proposed that a) there are certain Cypriot artifacts found across the water that may be considered as personal belongings, and b) these items may contribute towards the

¹ The list of publications on this matter is enormous, thus it is not the aim of this paper to present an exhaustive and detailed list of them. Knapp has written extensively on the subject of trade in the LBA Eastern Mediterranean and the role of Cyprus. Some of his latest publications (2014a and 2018) focused especially on seafaring and seafarers, after having discussed aspects of the role of Cypriot merchants (2008). Monroe (2009) discusses all aspects of maritime trade, with frequent references to the merchants, based primarily on the available textual evidence. Sauvage (2012) discussed in depth the LBA long-distance maritime commerce, while Papadimitriou (2017) provides a synthetic work comparing Aegean and Cypriot trade in the 2nd millennium B.C.E. In these publications (as well as in many others) the Cypriot merchant is frequently mentioned and his activities around the Mediterranean are highlighted, without further investigation.

identification of the Cypriot merchant in specific areas and regions outside the island (especially with the additional data from contemporary written sources). This study is by no means exhaustive, but focuses on selected indicative case studies concentrating on these objectives.

MERCHANTS AND (CYPRIOT) OBJECTS IN THE LBA EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

During the LBA, trade networks via land and sea routes facilitated the movement of people, raw materials, finished products, and subsequently ideas, technologies and beliefs. Major powers, such as the Hittites and the Egyptians, systematically controlled routes and lands, and exercised power through taxation over lesser powers, polities and states who benefited from the protection that these super-powers provided (see Knapp 2009, Ch. 7; Papadimitriou 2017, 161–62). Well-studied shipwrecks, such as those at Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya off the southern coast of Turkey, Point Iria near the Argolid and several more at Modi, Kimi, Pseira, Kouleri, Haifa and a recent discovery at Antalya, reveal the extent of international trade activities in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean (see Papadimitriou 2017 for bibliography; also Pulak 2008, 289–305; Öñiz 2019, 3–14). Sailing boats were following the sea routes, typically with several stops between the departure point and the destination and with cargo collected from several places.

The importance of Cyprus as a copper supplier and distributor during the LBA and its strategic location within the trade networks have been the focal point of several studies over the years (Papasavvas 2017; Kassianidou 2017, 2018). Cypriot copper, extracted from the island's mines, such as those at Skouriotissa and Apliki, was smelted locally by metalsmiths and sent abroad in the form of ingots from the various harbors along the coastline of the island. The new excavations at Hala Sultan Tekke have brought to light more finds highlighting the role of the island as a recipient, consumer and distributor of foreign imports, e.g. fine Mycenaean pottery, including several chariot kraters with truly unique and remarkable pictorial scenes, or imports from other regions such as Egypt and the Levant (see for example Fischer and Bürge 2018, 2019). Cyprus (as Alashiya) is referred to in the records of the Syrian palatial administration (Mari and Alalakh) already from the 19th – 17th century B.C.E. (Knapp 1996; see also Kassianidou 2017, 114; Papadimitriou 2017). One could argue that perhaps Cypriot merchants and seafarers received ceramic cargoes from the Aegean and transported them eastwards or, alternatively, that they distributed them to Levantine harbour towns from the island of Cyprus.

However, it is essential to define a “merchant” as this could allow further investigation into the activities of such individuals. It would also impact on the ways in which modern scholarship understands the organization of Cypriot society and economy, as well as the organization of international trade. A common dictionary definition of the merchant is a person *who can be a buyer and seller of commodities for profit (trader)* (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary). This means that potentially any seafarer could perform this role and the same applies to officials, such as emissaries and/or ambassadors travelling from one place to another. Judging from the Amarna Letters, this differentiation is hard to identify (see Bell 2012). According to Artzy (1998), members from the fringes of the society could become mariners and actively participate in these exchange activities for long periods of time (see also Maran 2004). The individuals engaged in maritime commerce are almost invisible in the archaeological record unless they are recorded in state or private archives, as in the case of Ugarit (see below, p. 243). Apart from the movement of objects for sale, tribute or gift exchange, which usually form the cargo of a boat or caravan, one should bear in mind the possessions of mercenaries, emissaries, administrators and traders (Bevan 2007). The major question, however, is whether it is possible to identify personal items amongst Cypriot finished products and raw materials that were exported outside the island.

CYPRIOT MATERIAL CULTURE OUTSIDE CYPRUS: SEEKING PERSONAL PROPERTY

In discussing the contents of the Uluburun shipwreck, Pulak (2008, 300–2) recognized the presence of two Mycenaean emissaries on the basis of certain objects, primarily everyday utensils, such as three bronze knives, two swords, five razors and two relief-bead necklaces, which appear to be distinctively Mycenaean. Despite the well-known problems involved in using material culture as a direct reflection of ethnic identity (as discussed later), seeking the background of the owner(s) of these utensils using the available data can be a fruitful exercise. This section of the paper takes Pulak's suggestions as its starting point and attempts to identify items that might be considered as personal belongings. For this purpose, a survey of the exported Cypriot material culture is presented briefly.

Wall brackets

Certain objects have been considered candidates for personal belongings and even ethnic identity indicators, albeit not without problems. The well-known Cypriot wall brackets were items of trade, since they were included, for example, in the contents of the Uluburun ship; in three of the ten pithoi on board, Cypriot pottery included wall brackets. According to Hirschfeld (2005), these pieces show clear traces of burning on the bowl and the back plate. It has been suggested that they were the property of Cypriots in the Aegean, e.g. at Tiryns; equally, it has been suggested that these finds represent Cypriot individuals at sites such as Ugarit, Tel Dan, Tell Abu Hawam, Akko and Ashdod in the Levant (see Rahmstorf 2014 for discussion and references). However, arguments have been made against the use of wall brackets as ethnic indicators, especially in the light of new analyses showing that some wall brackets were locally made in the Aegean (see Maran 2004; Vettors 2011). Rahmstorf (2014, 193) is “not inclined to accept that every find of a wall bracket hints at the presence of a person of Cypriot origin”, although he agrees that it is “perfectly plausible that individuals from Cyprus were present in Late Bronze Age Tiryns”, based on other forms of evidence. As a result, wall brackets do leave open the possibility for Cypriots in the Aegean.

Balance weights

Balance weights are a special group of items, the “tools of trade” according to Petruso (1992), and they have been considered to be the personal property of merchants on board ships. Monroe (2009, 39–56) and Pulak (2008) have dedicated much of their research to the study of these items, and, once again, the Uluburun ship has provided extremely useful data. Four sets of balance weights have been identified, with one standing out as the weights are zoomorphic and were most likely associated with the chief merchant or captain of the ship. Despite being widely recognized as personal belongings of merchants, balance weights cannot, or at least should not, be used as ethnic indicators. Stylistically similar, almost identical, objects can be identified in the Aegean, Cyprus and the Near East. While different measuring systems may have been used in different regions, it seems that there were no visually distinctive shapes (e.g. zoomorphic); for example, the form of the recumbent bull is a type common in Cyprus, Egypt and the Levant (Pulak 2008, 369–70 for a full discussion). Thus they are excluded from the discussion.

Female figurines and bull-shaped vessels

In her study of Cypriot figurines (human and animal), Knox (2012, 162) highlights their scarcity in the Levant and suggests that “it seems likely that these few objects were not specifically traded but may have travelled outside of Cyprus as gifts or souvenirs collected by foreign traders or as the personal possessions of Cypriot

merchants who sailed to the Levant². According to her, the random distribution of these figurines and their predominant presence in burial contexts that contain several other Cypriot objects suggests that these items “may have travelled with Cypriot people, perhaps merchants, working temporarily overseas, or more permanent migrants who settled outside the island but retained certain objects from their homeland” (Knox 2012, 171–72). Some figurines, such as the rare Base Ring horses (as opposed to bull figurines), do not seem to have been popular in Cyprus, but they fit the iconographic symbolism of the Levant, suggesting they were made in Cyprus to be exported.

A relatively small number of Late Bronze Age Cypriot female and zoomorphic figurines and vessels have been identified outside Cyprus (Knox 2012, 205, table 20).² Knox records a total of 86, comprising ten different types, although she does not include two bull vessels from Tell el Hesi in modern Israel. This is an ongoing project conducted by the author in collaboration with the Palestine Exploration Fund, London (see Papadopoulos 2017, 2022). These objects are never found in large quantities at single sites, with the exception of fourteen found at Ugarit. Unlike the Base Ring juglets, no local Levantine imitations of these Cypriot types have been found, at least to this day, perhaps indicating a lack of interest by the locals in this type of object. Base Ring bull figurines outside Cyprus appear in contexts with many more Cypriot imports, such as Tomb 216 at Tell el Duweir, which is indeed a rather unusual case study (Tufnell 1958). According to Nys (2001) and Knox (2012, 205–6), this may suggest that Cypriot figurines occur outside the island as the personal belongings of Cypriot individuals.

On the same grounds, the handmade Base Ring female figurines that are so prominent on the island, both in mortuary and settlement contexts, appear rather randomly in the Levant and this clearly shows either that there was no great demand from Levantine clientele or that they were indeed personal belongings of their Cypriot owners. A key set of artifacts is that of the clay female figurines, especially Types A (Bird-faced) and B (Normal-faced) (Knapp 2009).

During the Late Cypriot (LC) II period, only a very small percentage of tombs in Cyprus contained figurines and during LC III only one. Alexandrou, following Webb, notes that this means that the figurines do not constitute a consistent or necessary element in funerary practices and that the same can be suggested for residual cult assemblages; Alexandrou (2016, 43, for references as well) considers the rare appearance of these figurines in both mortuary and sacred contexts as indicative of their use as votives or as valued possessions of the deceased. Knapp (2009, 140), in his thorough discussion of the problems regarding the contextual analysis and subsequent interpretations of Cypriot Type A and B female figurines, concludes that “they would have been used in life as well as in death, and may be regarded –at the very least– as valued possessions of those who owned them”.

Cypriot terracotta figurines (Types A and B) (Alexandrou 2016, table 1, 321–22; see also Knapp 2009) appear outside Cyprus in a handful of sites. Alexandrou (2016, 45) has identified figurines at Ugarit, Tyre, Tell Abu Hawam, Deir el Balah, Tell ta’annek and Tel el Hesi (for Tell el Hesi, see Papadopoulos 2017, 2022). For the latter site, one more unpublished figurine (Fig. 1) should be mentioned, making two from Tel el Hesi. Although their function is not very clear even in their place of production, the fact that they are extremely rare outside the island, in addition to the fact that they are not expensive items, i.e. made of metal or a precious stone, supports the hypothesis that they were appreciated only by a few individuals, who were able to appreciate their symbolism and (perhaps original) use. These individuals could have been from Cyprus who had these items with them during their journeys.

² Ugarit–14, Lachish–10, Alalakh–10, Tell Abu Hawam–9, Gezer–9, Hebron–5, Tell el Ajjul–5, Quibjbeh–3, Megiddo–3, Heliopolis–2 and Ialysos Mavra-Vouno–2, while Beth Shemesh, Deir Al-Balah, Jaffa, Shiqmona, Tel Batash, Tel Mor, Tell Abu Zureiq, Tell es-Safi, Tell Kazel, Tell Ta’Annek, Tell Zakariya, Tyre, El Amarna have yielded one example.



Fig. 1. Base Ring female figurine A02916 from Tell el Hesi, Israel (© A. Papadopoulos/ Palestine Exploration Fund).

Pithoi

A rather special category of pottery that found its way outside the island is that of the Cypriot pithoi (for the Cypriot pithoi, see also Knapp and Demesticha 2017). Several medium and large storage vessels were discovered on the Point Iria and Uluburun shipwrecks and at certain sites in the Levant (Pulak 2008; Papadimitriou 2017; Shai et al. 2019). Ten pithoi were found on the Uluburun wreck, three of them containing smaller Cypriot vessels, one filled with whole pomegranates and one with mixed cargo (pottery and pieces of tin ingots). At Point Iria, five pithoi were found, four of them definitely from Cyprus, all of them empty, perhaps because they contained liquids or were themselves the actual trade product. Although not originally published, later work has shown that pithoi were also present on-board the Cape Gelidonya ship. It is evident that pithoi were used extensively during maritime trade as containers of products. Additionally, pithoi made in Cyprus and/or fragments of them have been found at Kommos in Crete, at Ugarit and Minet el-Beida and along the Carmel coast.

The export of Cypriot pithoi outside Cyprus was not a new practice, as Middle Bronze Age Plain White Handmade pithoi have been identified in Late Hyksos contexts at Tell el-Dab'a, Ugarit and also Tell el Ajjul (Crewe 2012, 237). As we might expect, all these finds are associated with sea routes and harbors, since they were primarily containers. According to Shai et al. (2019), Cypriot pithoi are quite rare in the southern Levant, with only a few known fragmentary examples possibly originating from the island (from 'Ara, Ashdod, Tel Batash, and Lachish). The recent discovery of two petrographically-confirmed Cypriot pithoi at Tell Burna, deep inland in modern Israel, creates an “enigma” in terms of how and why these objects were transported and deposited there.³ It has been suggested that when pithoi are identified in coastal sites, they may have served as

³ It is perhaps indicative, although of a later period, that an ethnographic study has shown how valuable pithoi were in recent times in Cyprus. “When house ownership passed from one generation to the next, or if sold to strangers, it included the transfer of procession of the jars, unless otherwise stipulated. When dismantling an old house, the jar remained in the family, or were sold within the village or to strangers” (London 2020, 48). I am grateful to Dr. Lindy Crewe for bringing this to my attention.

containers of smaller vessels or other goods (Tomlinson et al. 2010), but when found in the hinterland, away from coastal or other trade routes, their value should be re-estimated and re-interpreted, as there must have been a good reason to move these large and heavy storage vessels over large distances on land. Even considering that they were large vessels and the result of many hours of labour, including the firing process, and therefore important possessions, this does not fully explain their transportation inland, risking breakage, when at the same time local storage jars were in use. Perhaps they were important to the owner, beyond their material value, as a large-scale reference to his/her place of origin, Cyprus in this case.

According to Marschall (2019) “The term ‘memory objects’ is introduced to denote possessions without obvious mnemonic function that develop mnemonic characteristics over time and in this case through the experience of mobility and migration, hence distinguishing them from souvenirs and mementoes”. “Personal objects” are defined “as cherished favourite things that an individual is attached to”, including souvenirs, gifts and valued utilitarian objects. The latter category is of special interest, as the pithoi, objects of value, yet difficult to transport, could be characterized as “personal objects”, worth the considerable effort of transportation for personal use.

Copper

In search of further items that can be associated with Cypriot individuals, the consideration that a piece of an ingot mould discovered at Ras Ibn Hani at Ugarit (Bell 2006, 2) can be associated with a Cypriot metalsmith who worked there, is a rather bold one. Admittedly, already from the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C.E. (the transition from the Cypriot Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age), the Cypriots had the ability to extract copper from the local sulphidic ores (Kassianidou 2017). Large quantities of copper were exported from the 16th century B.C.E., and throughout the entire LBA Cyprus must have been prominent in the maintenance of economic and political networks since it was the main source of copper that was needed for the production of tools and weapons, required by the armies of the superpowers (Papasavvas 2017). Sherratt (2003, 42–5) has even suggested that “Cypriot commercial enterprise fuelled the forces of globalization”. Ingots from Cyprus have been found all around the Mediterranean and the ten tons found in the 13th century B.C.E. Uluburun boat clearly show the size of this enterprise and the importance of the maritime distribution of copper around the Eastern Mediterranean (Pulak 2008). Nonetheless, the trade of copper –apart from the rich textual information that shows the demand for this metal by Eastern Mediterranean rulers– does not really offer much help with the identification of the Cypriot individuals involved.

Clay vessels

It is noteworthy that Cypriot handmade pottery seems to have been another major export of the island, including significant quantities of Base Ring and White Slip pottery identified at Syro-Palestinian sites (Maguire 2009; Papadimitriou 2012, 2017). Already from the late 18th century B.C.E., Cypriot ceramics were transported in limited numbers to Egypt and the Syro-Palestinian coast, but later, during Late Cypriot II B–C, the exports number thousands in the Levant and hundreds in Egypt. The ceramics exported included vases, bowls, tankards, flasks, jugs and juglets. These Base Ring and White Slip vessels cannot be associated easily with Cypriot individuals, as they were widely imported, used and deposited in Levantine contexts.

In terms of quantity, certain types and shapes of Cypriot ceramics appear frequently in the Levant as burial gifts. Bushnell’s synthetic work (Bushnell 2013) shows, for example, that the small Base Ring juglets functioning as liquid containers (probably for perfumed oils) and vessels of the White Shaved type appear in large quantities in the Syro-Palestinian coast.

IDENTIFYING CYPRIOTS IN THE DOCUMENTARY RECORD

In several cases, evidence from texts and administrative documents has yielded significant information regarding the ethnic origin and/ or geographic provenance of peoples (and objects or raw materials). In the case of Cyprus, no local archives of economic transactions and mercantile activities have yet been found. Administrative documentation and participation in the diplomatic correspondence of the LBA Eastern Mediterranean was not unknown, however, judging from analyses of the clay of the Alashiya tablets found at Amarna, which suggest that the clay used originated from the areas of Kalavassos and Alassa (Goren et al. 2003).

Cypro-Minoan script

Hirschfeld (1992, 317, 319) has suggested that “Either local Mycenaean pottery-dealers, much experienced in handling Cypriot trade, may have adopted the foreign notational system from, and for the benefit of, their customers. Or Cypriot traders may have come to the Argolid and marked their purchases by means familiar to them”, based on the study of signs of Cypro-Minoan script on Mycenaean ceramic vessels, especially at Tiryns. The engraving of the signs must have taken place before firing and the transfer of the vessels on ships with pre-determined destinations. What is very intriguing is the suggestion by Hirschfeld (1996, 297) that “the marked vases may be evidence that Cypriot merchants took substantial initiative in the administration and handling of that trade”. Veters (2011, 21) reached a similar conclusion in her study of a clay ball with a Cypro-Minoan sign found at Tiryns, suggesting that “either a small number of individuals native to Cyprus were resident in Tiryns, or persons, who had been exposed to living the ‘Cypriot way’ for a prolonged period of time and maintained such a habitus, i.e. Cypriot practices, in certain realms of their daily life, left the material evidence”.

Archives and documents from Egypt and the Near East

The name *Alashiya* is now widely accepted as referring to the island of Cyprus in the Amarna tablets, the diplomatic correspondence between eastern Mediterranean elites – although it is not clear if it applies to the entire island or a part of it (see Papadimitriou 2017, 161; see also Mantzourani et al. 2019). *Alashiya* is frequently mentioned in this correspondence and of great interest are certain tablets that mention Cypriot merchants. For example, in EA 39 the *Alashyan* king, after a series of greetings, requests the safe passage of certain messengers that he calls “his merchants” and concludes the letter with the words “my merchants in my ship” highlighting the status of these individuals (Moran 1992). Bachhuber (2006) discusses the words “messenger” and “merchant”, noting that the Amarna Letters refer to “messenger” as *tamkar*, or merchant and that “ambassador” is synonymous with “merchant” (Rainey and Schniedewind 2015).

Bearing these letters in mind, is it possible to trace these merchants, identify their physical presence outside Cyprus and evaluate their role in the societies in which they resided? As Knapp argues, “whereas one impetus for regional or international trade was the procurement of foreign goods and raw materials, another was to create or maintain the social relationships upon which such exchanges relied” (Knapp 2014a, 89). These relationships were most likely maintained by seafaring merchants who knew the maritime routes, the foreign lands, the local people and their habits. After all, as tablet EA 39 and the Ugaritic archives indicate, it was not uncommon for rulers and elites to use private entrepreneurs as state officials to serve their administrative purposes (see also Bachhuber 2006). Therefore, the presence and status of these merchants, in this case of the Cypriot traders, have to be evaluated within a certain social context.

According to Knapp (1983, 43), “Alashiyans or people named after Alashiya, participate in the activities of the town and palace at Ugarit such as craftsmen, shepherds, temple officials and royal personnel”. Monroe (2009, 245), referring to the extent to which a central authority could monitor the activities of Cypriot merchants

working abroad, suggests that “seals, pottery, and Cypro-Minoan tablets found at Ugarit signify a Cypriot presence there... plausibly a Cypriot quarter”. This is based on the textual evidence, although the presence of Cypriot figurines supports the suggestion that a number of Cypriot individuals resided at Ugarit.

Aegean Linear B

Despite the fact that *ku-pi-ri-jo* and *a-ra-si-jo* have received major attention from Linear B experts and other specialists, the scholarly world is still not in agreement regarding the relationship between these two words and the island of Cyprus. It is quite possible that *ku-pi-ri-jo* refers to the origin of a given product, while it is far from conclusive that *a-ra-si-jo* derives from *Alashiya*. Himmelhoch (1993) has suggested that a certain individual named Maron is related to a shipment of oil to Cyprus (see also Sacconi 2009 and Cline 2009). *Ku-pi-ri-jo* appears on tablets from Knossos and Pylos and, although the general feeling is that it refers to a person or product from Cyprus, little more can be said.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AS INDICATORS OF IDENTITY: A USEFUL EQUATION?

After discussing the possibility that certain objects may have been the personal property of individuals, then surveying briefly the textual data referring to Cypriots outside Cyprus, I will attempt to combine the two datasets and ask if such an approach allows us to identify the physical presence of the Cypriot merchant. Bearing in mind the “fluid nature of ethnic identity” (Voskos and Knapp 2008, 677), it is clear that ethnicity is a thorny problem in discussing Bronze Age societies, and has been addressed by many scholars who suggest caution when dealing with this issue (see for example Knapp 2014b, 38, where he underlines Joffe’s comment that “capturing ancient identities is like trying to drive nails through blobs of mercury”, a statement that is worth repeating; also Knapp 2008, 35–47). However, two major points are taken into account for the purposes of this paper:

a) Knapp (2014b, 37) suggests that “constructing an ethnic identity might involve the intentional use of specific material features as identifying markers, which can be reflected in household organisation, ritual or mortuary practices” [...], and

b) Frankel and Webb (1998, 1) propose that “where textual evidence is available, archaeologists and historians appear to be more comfortable in discussing group identities, accepting those recognized in antiquity” [...]. They also highlight the difficulty in establishing individual identity in the prehistoric Bronze Age of Cyprus, despite many attempts to associate sets of pottery with certain groups (Frankel and Webb 1998, 4).

Attempts to identify the ethnicity of an individual based on associated material culture are not new. One can refer to the suggestion that a Cypriot merchant was buried in Ialysos-Makri Vounara tomb 86 in Rhodes; or to the hypothesis that painted boars’ tusk helmets served to identify certain individuals as Mycenaean mercenaries on an Egyptian papyrus; or to the Syrian merchants who were described as such (Syrian merchants) based on their clothing on Egyptian wall paintings (for a discussion on the Rhodes material: Mee 1982, 22; also MacDonald 1986, 125–51; papyrus: Schofield and Parkinson 1994; Syrian merchants: Davies and Faulkner 1947). The view that ethnicity is reliably expressed through cultural indicia is a rather traditional approach, which has been criticized in recent years based on data from related ethnographic cases (for a detailed discussion, see Antonaccio 2009). Pithoi, and especially the collared rim pithos type, have been used as ethnic markers before, especially with reference to the expansion of Iron Age Israelites (see Wengrow 1996). Tomlinson et al. (2010, 219) propose that “the distribution of Cypriot pithoi at coastal emporia further to the west in Sardinia, Sicily, and northern Egypt suggests that Kommos was simply a convenient stopover for Cypriot entrepreneurs engaged in long-distance exchanges with regions in the central Mediterranean, most notably Sardinia”.

Wall brackets, in general, are not considered reliable ethnic markers, because of the various local imitations, suggesting that there was a certain external demand for them, making it difficult to identify the owners of the occasional examples found abroad as Cypriot. Nevertheless, in the case of Tiryns and together with the presence of Cypriot script, these items strongly suggest that there may have been Cypriot merchants in the area.

A useful approach may be to consider the rarity of certain objects, in conjunction with their contextual information. The extremely limited number of items outside Cyprus, that are also well established as cultic objects within Cyprus, should receive attention as they may suggest the physical presence of individuals with specific ideologies and beliefs. Specifically, the bull rhyta and female figurines may have acted as cult items connecting their owner to Cypriot practices. Admittedly, this was an era of international trade and communication, and when these items are found in coastal sites, they may have been used as exotic items by non-Cypriots as well. However, it could be suggested that when found inland, away from the routes these objects generally traversed, it is likely that they were not easily recognisable as exotic imports and may have indeed been the personal belongings of Cypriots. The reason why Cypriot individuals, perhaps merchants, made their way deep into the hinterland, away from the traditional trade routes, is as yet unclear. It may not be accidental, however, that the majority of the female figurines were found in domestic contexts, suggesting their use in daily life.

In Table 1 I have attempted to gather all relevant data for comparative purposes. It is not easy to identify a clear pattern in order to suggest which sites are likely to have been the temporary or long-term residences of Cypriot merchants. However, a number of sites (marked in light green) are strong candidates for hosting Cypriot merchants.

At Ugarit, the textual data confirms the presence of Cypriots in various positions and the material culture is indicative of their presence. The relationship of this town with Enkomi is well attested. Tell Abu-Hawam lacks the textual data, but it is a harbour town with large quantities of Cypriot imports and female and bull figurines, so it quite plausible that a number of Cypriot merchants resided at this center, perhaps to facilitate the further distribution of Cypriot imports inland.

Unlike Ugarit and Tell Abu-Hawam, the sites of Tell el-Hesi, Lachish and to the north, Tel Batash, are inland towns and not too far away from each other. Excavations at Tell el-Hesi have yielded two female figurines and one or possibly two bull rhyta (as well as some wall brackets), impressive numbers given the scarcity of these objects in the region. Bull rhyta and pithoi were found at the other two sites.

Tiryns in the Peloponnese is a strong candidate for hosting a number of Cypriots who were marking (perhaps after a selection process) Mycenaean pottery that was to be exported from the Argolid to the east. Although no bull or female figurines have been identified, the site has produced other categories of Cypriot material.

Cypriot merchants were certainly travelling in the Eastern Mediterranean during the LBA. Their physical presence at various towns and harbors, whether short- or long-term, is difficult to identify, but not impossible. The aim of this paper has been to show that by attempting to identify personal belongings that may have served as identity indicators, it is possible to acquire a sense of the whereabouts of these merchants outside Cyprus. This has been attempted through a combined study of the available material culture and textual evidence. It seems that these individuals might have occasionally travelled inland beyond the Levantine coastal towns, perhaps for profit, and left behind limited indications of their presence. Further research on clay sources and local imitations, and more detailed contextual analyses may shed additional light on the issues discussed here.

Site	Coastal Y/N	Female figurines	Bull vessels	Pithoi	Textual data incl. CM signs
Ashdod	Y			U/ Ft	
Deir el-Balah	Y	1			
Shiqmona	Y		1		
Tell Abu Hawam	Y	1	4		
Tell el Ajjul	Y		4		
Tel Mor	Y		1		
Tell Ta'annek	Y	1			
Tyre	Y	1			
Ugarit (& Minet el-Beida)	Y	1	7	Several	•
Kommos	Y			4?	
Tiryns	Y				•
Tell el-Hesi	N	2	2?		
Alalakh	N		10		
'Ara	N			U/Fr	
Azekah	N			3?/Fr	
Beth Shemesh	N		1		
Gezer	N		5		
Hebron	N		5		
Qubejbeh	N		1		
Lachish	N		9	2?/ Fr	
Megiddo	N		3		
Tell Abu Zureiq	N		1		
Tell Batash	N		1	U/Fr	
Tel Burna	N			2	
Tell Kazel	N		1		
Tel Zakariya	N		1		

Table 1. Aegean and Levantine sites and their association to Cypriot material culture and textual references to Cyprus and Cypriots. Numbers correspond to the amount of items, U= Uncertain, Fr= Fragmentary, dots= present. (Source: author, with data from Alexandrou 2016, Knox 2012, Papadopoulos 2017, Shai et al. 2019 and Tomlinson et al. 2010).

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