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DECENTRALISED COMMERCIAL STRATEGIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AFTER 1200 BC AND THE ROLE OF CYPRUS

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The spectacular collapse of the majority of the palatial and imperial political regimes in the eastern Mediterranean ca. 1200 BC, and the disintegration of the centralised commerce that characterised interregional connectivity in the previous centuries, had a profound impact on the Cypriot communities, whose prosperity relied heavily on the extra-insular bulk transshipment of copper. The transformations of the island's settlement pattern and material culture notwithstanding, the 12th century BC in Cyprus does not correspond to the disruption of the island's idiosyncratic politico-economic forms. For instance, the persistence of the indigenous syllabic writing system indicates an impressive level of continuity. More importantly, it was during this transformative era that the Cypriot communities rose to the forefront of the emergent interregional commercial strategies in the Mediterranean, which were characterised by entrepreneurship in smaller and regional spheres.

The presentation will elaborate on the transformed character of copper trade in the eastern Mediterranean, aggregating new data from contexts within Cyprus and beyond. The study will also focus on the commercial links between Cyprus and the Levant, as evidenced by the deposition of Cypriot finewares in Levantine contexts. Finally, a critical indicator of the uninterrupted trading connections between Cyprus and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean are the large numbers of imported Maritime Transport Containers recovered in Cypriot contexts of the 12th century BC. The sheer quantities of these ceramic containers, predominantly "Canaanite Jars" produced in various centres of the Levant, but also Egyptian Jars and Minoan Transport Stirrup Jars, are indicative of the scale of maritime trade during the post-"crisis" era. The contribution ultimately aspires to address the transformations in the character of interregional connectivity in the Mediterranean after ca. 1200 BC, and to highlight the role of Cyprus as an important nexus within the emergent decentralised commercial strategies.

Keywords

Cyprus, Interregional Trade, 1200 BC, Canaanite Jars, Maritime Transport Amphorae

Note/comment