



Ceramic Bichromy in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 2nd and 1st millennia BC


Abstracts


“Better the devil you know”. Stable and evolving practices in ceramic technology

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In native American pottery, the red and black symbolise blood and death also rebirth - power, and strength. Though we avoid such references when dealing with ancient pottery of the old-world cultures, we cannot dismiss the technological similarities in ceramic decoration practices. The most ubiquitous practice of decorating ceramic vessels since antiquity (from distant China to America and Japan), still alive in traditional societies around the world is the combination of different clays to decorate the surface of clay vessels either as whole-body coatings or as painted motifs. By applying a ferruginous clay slip on a calcareous or kaolinitic (non-calcareous, low Fe) or smectite (non-calcareous, low Fe) clay body, one can achieve black or red colours on a whitish (pale coloured) substrate. In the same way, the application of slips from the three clay types above on a body made from Fe-rich clay, can produce upon firing, pale coloured coatings and decors on a brick-red or grey substrate depending on the firing conditions. This simple practice that leads to a limited colour palette: black, brown, red (wine / brick / coral red), white, and pale (yellow / cream / pinkish), can be enriched by using additional mineral pigments i.e., yellow, or red ochres (Fe-rich earth) for the purple and wine-red; umber (Mn-Fe earth) for the black and brown; talc or chalk, even lead white for the white. It is thus reasonable to assume that the ceramic technology study can be enhanced, through the analysis of the materials used for the surface decoration; the decoration practice, in general, bears a wealth of technical and technological information and in some cases even more than the ceramic body itself. However, both are subject to obvious constraints, especially with regard to the regional and temporal availability of raw materials.

In this paper, we'll focus on the production of bichrome black/brown and red colours, and we'll discuss technological matters of particular stylistic categories from Cyprus (bichrome WSI, Bichrome wheel made ware), Crete (Kamarea ware), and the Aegean (i.e. bichrome MBA and LBA Thera and Melos) during the 2nd millennium. During the 1st mill. BC the bichrome



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Cypriot ceramics do not present innovations with regard to the materials used for decoration while in the Aegean and mainland Greece (i.e. Cyclades, Corinth, and Attica) the ceramic technology undergoes a significant development, especially with respect to the materials used, their treatment and the firing practices. This will be discussed in relation to examples that have emerged from the production at the THETIS laboratory, sometimes accidentally, sometimes deliberately in an attempt to address issues related to the discovery of techniques by artisans/craftspeople.

Fifty Years Hence: Cypriote Bronze Age Bichrome Ware in Context


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The provenance of the so-called Bronze Age "Palestinian" Bichrome Ware was found by NAA analysis in the 1970s, to be of Cypriote production. Cyprus, thus, became the "omphalos", the center of its studies at the time. Already then, it became clear that the context of its appearance, distribution disappearance was more complex. At first, slight variations in the colors of members of the Cypriote White Painted V and VI families were associated with the Bichrome decoration. However, as time passed, several other Bronze Age candidates were associated with the Cypriote family. Nonetheless, most could not be favorably compared to the masterful specimens originating in Eastern Cyprus especially the Milia Graves. Bichrome decorations were in vogue in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 2nd Millennium BCE and Cyprus was the beneficiary. Its position as a trading center, it was also a distributor of the fashion.

Late Cypriot Bichrome Wheelmade ware on Cyprus

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Bichrome Wheelmade ware is considered to be one of the ceramic markers of the start of the Late Cypriot period (c. 1650 BC). It was exported widely around the eastern Mediterranean, with mainland variants also produced. It was initially thought to be a mainland product as it was not believed that the potters' wheel was used on Cyprus at this time but our understanding of Bichrome Wheelmade ware has benefitted immensely from extensive analytical studies over many years, particularly NAA undertaken by Michal Artzy and colleagues. Produced in a limited number of shapes, and decorated with figurative and/or geometric designs, the greatest number and variety has been found in the Karpas Peninsula

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and eastern Cyprus and it is considered to be a product of these areas. However, this has hampered our understanding of the development and demise of this ware as these sites are located in areas inaccessible to archaeologists since 1974. This paper explores the state of knowledge of the production and use of Bichrome Wheelmade ware in its Cypriot context, using evidence from well-dated contexts, particularly the settlement layers of Enkomi.

The Cypriot Bichrome Wheel Made Ware from the Bronze Age in Lebanon: State of Affairs

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Excavated sites in Lebanon have yielded a fairly small amount (less than 100 vessels) of Cypriot Bichrome Wheel Made Ware compared to other regions like Ugarit in the northern Levant, or Megiddo and Tell el-Ajjul in the southern Levant. So far, only four sites – two on the coast and two in the Bekaa Valley – have produced this ware. Strangely, this ware does not appear at important coastal sites such as Byblos, Sarepta and Tyre. This absence could be the result of other factors such as insufficient publication (as in the case of Byblos), misidentification (BCWMW was mistaken for a long time for a local Levantine production) or limited surface exposure (as in the case of Tyre where our knowledge of the Bronze and Iron Ages is still very restricted). Except for one occurrence in Sidon, tombs uncovered in both regular and salvage operations in Lebanon did not produce any BCWMW material.

BCWMW found in Lebanon is predominantly imported from Cyprus. However, local productions, restricted seemingly to globular jugs, were formally identified at Tell Arqa in the north and Sidon in the south. We must await results of chemical and petrographic analyses in order to identify the production regions of BCWMW vessels found in Lebanon. Carinated kraters are the most representative shape attested in the assemblage followed by globular jugs. Tankards and bowls are extremely rare perhaps because they did not have a recognized function on Levantine sites. Residue analyses might determine the function of these different shapes and whether they were decorative or were actually employed in the *service de table*.





Ceramic bichromy beyond “Bichrome ware” in Late Bronze Age Cyprus

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The use of two distinctive colours, black and red, for the decoration of ceramics produced in Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age has been associated with Bichrome ware, which is characteristic of the island’s ceramic industry of finewares during the former part of the period. Even though Bichrome ware did not continue as such in the latter part of the Late Bronze Age, ceramic bichromy continued to be employed as the decorative syntax within the production of certain pottery wares and terracottas. This phenomenon has seldom been addressed in previous scholarship.


This presentation aspires to shed light on two different case studies that demonstrate the intentional employment of the red-and-black decorative syntax to convey a bichrome effect, respectively in Cypriot ceramic vessels and terracotta figurines of the Late Bronze Age. The first case concerns the occurrence of bichromy within the so-called “White Painted Wheelmade III” ceramic production, that is the ceramic finewares that largely draw inspiration from the Aegean sphere, and which were produced on the island during the final decades of the 13th and throughout the 12th centuries BC. The second case concerns the application of red and black colours for the decoration of terracotta figurines of the so-called “Flathead type” and of the transitional examples featuring a bottle-shaped body, dating to the latter half of the 12th century BC. The contribution will outline the morphological characteristics of these two cases, their regional distribution within the island, their development in the subsequent phases and the disentanglement of associations with ceramic production in other regions, particularly in the Levant.

Philistine Bichrome Pottery

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Philistine Bichrome pottery is the common decorated pottery ware appearing in Philistine sites in the southern coast of Israel during the late 2nd millennium BCE (Iron Age I, ca. 1,200–1,000 BCE). This ware continues earlier, “Philistine Monochrome Ware” which is typical to the material culture of the initial settlements of the Philistines, which probably included immigrants from the Aegean region and Cyprus. In general, the Philistine decorated pottery is strongly influenced from the Aegean and Cypriot traditions of the 13th-12th centuries BCE, the Mycenaean IIC wares, both in forms and decoration motifs, and thus, differ from the local



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Late Bronze-Early Iron Age local Canaanite pottery. However, the somewhat later Philistine Bichrome ware also combines certain local Canaanite and Egyptian motifs and possibly forms in its repertoire. In particular the transition to a decoration in two distinct colors- red and black can also be seen as representing a southern Levantine tradition. In turn, this tradition reflects a long Middle-Late Bronze Age pottery decoration tradition combining influences from both Cyprus and other regions. Thus, in a certain way, the Philistine Bichrome pottery decoration style can be interwoven into the “long durée” Bronze and Iron Age Levantine Bichrome ceramic decoration customs.

Early Phoenician Bichrome Re-visited: development, Production Centers and Meaning

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For several decades, early Phoenician Bichrome ware (11th – 9th centuries BCE) has been considered a commercial calling card of Phoenician polities in Lebanon, especially Tyre, and when found in Cyprus, even an index of Phoenician colonization. In the last decade or so, much new data has been accumulated regarding the temporal evolution of this ware, its production centers, and distribution in the Levant and beyond. These will be presented, contextualized, and their possible meaning considered.


Traditions and particularities among Phoenician Bichrome wares over the Mediterranean

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Levantine pottery is logic and coherent. Types, their morphological characteristics, and decorative resources follow a series of patterns, maybe norms, that are deeply rooted in the culture of the region. Besides, their evolution can be traced back to the Middle Bronze Age, in some instances even before, and it display logical regional and sequential particularities.

Bichromy stands out among the paramount features of these ceramic products, and its presence is related to most of the ceramic array at all stages of the sequence. Furthermore, regularities linked to certain types or morphological features become recognizable despite



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the regional and sequential variations. These patterns, which are the result of the continuous combination of internal dynamics with external influences, also occurred in the Iron Age and represented the background of the first Phoenician potters overseas.


This presentation aims to offer a synthetic analysis of bichromy in the Levant during the Iron Age, its patterns, and their manifestations in the central and western Mediterranean. In this context, several aspects require consideration. First, the analysis cannot discriminate the ceramic production that frames the Phoenician bichrome wares. In general, bichrome wares are one manifestation of a wider array that also includes plain and red-slipped vessels. In addition, three aspects apply to all workshops: region of origin of the potters, location of the production centers, and moment of their foundation.

Regionality in Iron Age Cypriot Bichrome ware and the Salaminian pottery style

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At the beginning of the Early Iron Age (Late Cypriot IIIB and Cypro-Geometric I periods), the pottery craft of Cyprus is marked by continuities but also important innovations in technological and stylistic grounds, in comparison to the preceding period, the final phase of the Late Bronze Age (Late Cypriot IIIA). Whereas the new norms that define the Iron Age Cypriot pottery production were established already in the Early Iron Age and at an island-wide scale, the particular developments in pottery wares, shapes and decorative motifs can be assessed only from a regional perspective.

This paper aims at an examination of the regionality of Bichrome ware, in the context of the Cypriot Iron Age polities, with a special focus on the case of Salamis. A detailed documentation of Bichrome pottery production at Salamis, complemented by the compositional and technological characterisation of representative samples, is currently undertaken in the framework of the *MuseCo* project (EXCELLENCE/1216/0093). It is observed that during the Iron Age, the Salaminian workshops favoured a regular and increased use of two-colour decorations, in comparison to other pottery regions of the island, and, as a result, Bichrome ware evolved into a trademark of the pottery production of Salamis. Following a stylistic approach, this paper will provide an overview of the Salaminian Bichrome ware pottery throughout the Iron Age, considering the evolution of the shape repertoire, and the range of decorative motifs that were produced and utilised within this ware. This presentation will conclude with an appraisal of the distribution and consumption of popular Salaminian vessels in Bichrome ware, within and beyond Cyprus.

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Bichromy in the coroplastic art of Archaic Cyprus

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During the Cypro-Archaic period, production of terracotta figurines and statuettes experienced an unprecedented development: on the 7 volumes of the series *The coroplastic art of ancient Cyprus*, 5 are devoted to the corpus of Archaic terracottas. Decoration is not always well preserved, and we can observe only faint traces of a former rich painted decoration. Still, on many figurines and statuettes the painted decoration in two colors, black and red, is clearly visible. Used in all known terracotta workshops throughout the island, bichrome decoration shows some regional variations, however. On this aspect, comparison between ceramic (pottery) and plastic (coroplastics) productions in terracotta is instructive: decorative techniques and motives often show close affinities, that correspond to regional specificities. This paper will concentrate on the examination of some regional productions, in a comparative approach between pottery and terracottas.

Ceramic bichromy in the Aegean during the first millennium BC: in search of the (almost) invisible?

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Imports of Bichrome Ware reached the Aegean in modest numbers during the early first millennium BC. Their fabric and shape correspond primarily to types of the Phoenician Bichrome class. Their geographic distribution is rather limited and involves coastal sites situated along major maritime routes, mostly on Euboea, Crete and Rhodes. Such evidence, however, remains scanty and indicates that Bichrome imports never became a popular ceramic commodity in Aegean contexts of the Geometric period. Nevertheless, bichrome ceramic phenomena are not unknown in the Aegean of the geometric and archaic periods, where bichromy is traced primarily in the use of painted decoration in red and black or, white colour. This combination, originated in the eastern Mediterranean, penetrated the ceramic production of certain Aegean areas, such as Euboea, the Cyclades and east Greece. The paper aims at defining such occurrences of bichromy in the Aegean of the early first millennium BC, and to examine them in relation to their chronological and contextual setting, and in tandem with their possible Phoenician or Cypriot connotations.