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**EASTWARDS VIA CYPRUS?
THE MARKED MYCENAEAN POTTERY
OF ENKOMI, UGARIT, AND TELL ABU HAWAM**

Nicolle HIRSCHFELD*

ABSTRACT

Based on her study of distribution patterns, Vronwy Hankey suggested that Cyprus or Cypriots played some role in the trade of Mycenaean pottery eastwards to the Levant. She also noted that some of the Mycenaean pottery which reached both Cyprus and the Near East carried marks incised on handles or painted on bases.

This paper examines the possible relationships between the marks, Mycenaean pottery, Cyprus, and the trade in Late Bronze Age ceramics. Special reference is made to the evidence from the sites of Enkomi, Ugarit, and Tell Abu Hawam.

RÉSUMÉ

À partir de son étude sur les schémas de répartition, Vronwy Hankey a suggéré que Chypre, ou des Chypriotes, avaient joué un rôle dans le commerce de la céramique mycénienne en direction du Levant. Elle avait aussi remarqué qu'une partie de la céramique mycénienne qui était arrivée tant à Chypre qu'au Proche-Orient portait des marques incisées sur l'anse ou peintes sur la base des vases.

Cette communication examine les liens possibles entre ces marques, la céramique mycénienne, Chypre et le commerce de céramique à l'âge du Bronze Récent. Une attention spéciale est portée aux données fournies par les sites d'Enkomi, Ougarit et Tell Abou Hawam.

I first met Vronwy Hankey in the shadows of the Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem. She had interrupted her duties as guide for a tour group in order to meet me, a graduate student whom she knew only through the introductory letter I had written to her. She had made time to write fulsome answers to my queries and furthermore had volunteered a personal conversation and then arranged for that meeting to happen. All of this was above and beyond any possible call of duty. Our paths and work crossed several times in the following years and she continued to volunteer her time and knowledge and even the hospitality of her home. Vronwy Hankey was a direct, enthusiastic, gracious and kind mentor.

Our point of intersection was the marks painted and incised on Mycenaean pottery, and that is the topic addressed in this paper. I had become drawn to the subject in reading Hankey's seminal article on the Mycenaean pottery of the Levant.¹ Based on her study of distribution patterns, Hankey suggested that Mycenaean pottery reached the Levant via Cyprus. She also noted that some of the Mycenaean pottery

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1. Hankey 1967.

which reached both Cyprus and the Near East carried marks incised on the handles or painted under the bases.

Three decades later, Vronwy Hankey met me in Jerusalem and encouraged me to take up the examination of marks on the Mycenaean pottery. I began with the incised potmarks, and I concluded that these were made by traders who used a Cypriot method of marking their wares.² In brief, the reasons for my conclusions were as follows:

—Potmarks are not ubiquitous. They were used for specific purposes at specific times and places, and these discrete uses are reflected in the archaeological record. Within the Late Bronze Age (LBA) eastern Mediterranean, a habit of marking pottery is evidenced only in Cyprus and Egypt. The potmarks of Egypt were made for and circulated almost exclusively within the pharaonic heartland.

—Incising highly visible marks on the handles, shoulders and bases, especially of large, closed containers, was regular practice on Cyprus, and was applied to imported as well as locally made and circulating pottery. Most Mycenaean vases with incised marks have been found on Cyprus.

—Most of the incised marks on Mycenaean vases are simple in form and cannot be definitely associated with any particular writing system. But a few complex marks can certainly be identified with signs of the LBA Cypriot script. (The Cypriot script has not been deciphered).

—Thus, incised marks on Mycenaean vases were made by people using Cypriot marking systems.

—The isolated signs cannot be “read”. The only clues to their function(s) are contextual. The incised marks on Mycenaean vases are generally made after firing, they are highly visible, and they appear on large, closed containers. There are no other patterns to indicate any particular function for these marks: there are no consistent correspondences between any particular mark and specific vase shapes or decoration, container sizes, or general or specific archaeological contexts. One explanation that satisfies all these observations is that the marks were made by individuals handling these vases in the process of exchange.

My continuing research focuses on other marked pottery exchanged within the LBA eastern Mediterranean: Mycenaean vases with painted marks, “Canaanite jars” and Cypriot vases with incised marks, Red Lustrous Wheelmade vases with marks made before firing, for example. Towards the eventual goal of a synthetic treatment, my method has been to start by analyzing the data in terms of individual sites. This paper discusses the potmarks from three sites: Enkomi, Ugarit, and Tell Abu Hawam. All three were important centers of exchange in the LBA eastern Mediterranean and marked pottery circulated through each of them. Enkomi serves as the starting point for an eventual island-wide study of how the Cypriots marked pottery. Ugarit, because of its geographical proximity and diplomatic and commercial ties with Cyprus, is the obvious initial place for an examination of ties in potmarking practices between the island and the mainland. The material from Tell Abu Hawam, interpreted as the debris of exchange (*frainte*), provides good testing ground for the hypothesis associating potmarks with the processes of trade. None of these sites necessarily provides fair representation of potmark use in general. Nor is the material presented here necessarily representative for each site since it is essentially a restudy of materials excavated several decades ago and published with varying degrees of completeness. The discussion here is intended as an initial foray into presenting the present state of our knowledge and the potential of further study.

The paper published here summarizes the most important points presented in the oral version given in March 1999. In the intervening years, full discussions of the material from Enkomi and Ugarit have appeared elsewhere (references below), and those sources should be consulted for complete documentation.

2. Hirschfeld 1992, 1993, 1996.

One point needs to be emphasized before launching into detailed discussion of the potmarks: potmarks are rare! Even at these sites, chosen partly because of the “abundance” of potmarks (ca. 18-250), the marked vases comprise only a fractional percentage of the (tens of) thousands of ceramic vases and sherds uncovered during excavation. In addition to the questions presented below about the use of potmarks, the bigger question that also needs to be addressed is why most pots were *not* marked. Throughout the LBA eastern Mediterranean, most vases were circulated, used, and deposited without being marked.

ENKOMI³

More marked LBA vases are found on Cyprus than anywhere else in eastern Mediterranean except Egypt. Almost every exploration of a LBA tomb or habitation or industrial or religious area on the island yields marked pottery. This is especially true of the large, wealthy, cosmopolitan coastal sites. Of these, Enkomi has yielded the greatest quantity and variety of marked vases.⁴ Excavations by British, Swedish, French and Cypriot expeditions have brought over 250 marked vases to light, including local products and foreign imports, found in all areas of the site and in all LBA levels. Enkomi was among the wealthiest, largest, and most powerful of the centers on the island during much of this time, and these factors surely played some role in the abundance of marks. This is being explored in a larger research project analyzing the marked vases from various sites on the island. Enkomi is a starting point, chosen because the quantity and range of artifacts and the variety of contexts excavated makes it likely that the material from this site, better than any other single location, illustrates a maximum of the kinds and numbers of marked vases in circulation on LBA Cyprus.

The marks found on vases at Enkomi come in a great variety: pre- or post-firing; painted, incised, or impressed; sequences of multiple signs, repeated signs, or single signs. By far the most common are post-firing, incised, single marks. This is true not only at Enkomi but also throughout LBA Cyprus. The marks themselves cannot be “read” or readily understood as numbers or abbreviations. But their patterns of use, ductus (method of application), and forms offer clues to their function(s).

Marks made for purposes of the manufacturing process are usually cut when the clay is soft and easily incised, or painted before firing. Manufacturers’ marks also tend to be unobtrusive—small in size and discretely placed. Most of the marks incised and painted on Cypriot vases do not have these characteristics and they are probably associated with some aspect(s) of distribution, use, or deposit of the vases.

Context may offer some indication. The marked vases were found scattered throughout the site, in both funerary and the complete spectrum of non-funerary contexts. Three times as many marked vases were found in non-funerary contexts as in burials. But the only correlation that can be detected between marks and context concerns tombs and Mycenaean vases with painted marks. 36 of the 39 vases with painted marks found at Enkomi were found in tombs. The same is true generally in Cyprus: 74 of the 80 vases with painted marks² whose contexts can be identified were found in tombs. The remaining 35 painted marks, without provenience, were all found early in the century and most likely came from tombs. These figures suggest some sort of connection between painted marks and funerary ritual. But there is nothing in the tomb deposits that could clarify the nature of that connection. Most tombs had no marked vases. Those with marked pottery are scattered across the site and they include a variety of burial types and assemblages.

3. A fully documented discussion of the marked pottery from Enkomi is now published in Hirschfeld 2002.

4. But the potmark corpus of Hala Sultan Tekke may rival Enkomi’s (study in progress).

The painted marks are distinctive in ways other than their context. They occur almost exclusively on Mycenaean pottery, whereas incised marks are also found on “Canaanite jars” and a variety of Cypriot wares. Painted marks occur on a much wider range of shapes than the incised marks, which are almost always associated with large, closed containers. Shapes with painted signs include kraters, cups, bowls, and small stirrup jars. Finally, painted marks are usually located under bases and in the interiors of vases, while incised marks tend to be located in highly visible places on the vase—handles and shoulders. None of these features immediately clarify the nature of the association between painted marks and funerary contexts, but it is the observation of such patterns of deposition and application which must form the basis of any attempt to understand the purpose(s) for marking.

The forms of the marks themselves also provide information. There is a great variety and very little repetition. The 250 marks from Enkomi include at least 89 different signs, of which only a handful are repeated in any quantity.⁵ Some signs are universal but there also seem to be distinct sign repertoires on different sorts of pottery. The marks painted on Mycenaean pottery correlate with the marks incised on Mycenaean vases, even though their applications are very different. These marks and the marks incised on local vases have some connections with the Cypro-Minoan writing, and all three marking systems are closely connected with Cyprus. But the marks incised on “Canaanite jars” hardly overlap with the marks on local and Mycenaean vases, and the pre-firing marks incised into the bases of Red Lustrous Wheelmade spindle bottles are altogether different from any of the post-firing incised repertoires. Any explanation of how the marks functioned will have to account for the overlaps and divergences in the application of different marking repertoires.

The practice of marking vases drops off markedly in the LC IIIA levels of Enkomi, and the only marked vases found in LC IIIB levels are “Canaanite jars”.

UGARIT⁶

At first glance, the potmarking situation at Ugarit mirrors that at Enkomi: there are (relatively) many, they are varied and occur on a wide range of pottery. Excavations at Ras Shamra, Minet el-Beidha and Ras Ibn Hani have yielded at least 120 potmarks. Two-thirds of the marked vases are Aegean, one-quarter is identified as local, and “Canaanite jars” and a few Cypriot vases comprise the rest of the corpus.

Many of the potmarks were found during excavation campaigns that remain poorly documented and this hinders the analysis of chronology and context of the marks. Context is best considered at Ras Shamra, although even here find-spots are known for only a third of the marked vases. As at Enkomi, marked vases are found scattered in all areas of the site. One pattern is distinct: marked Mycenaean vases were found mostly in tombs, and may even be exclusively associated with funerary contexts. The predominance of painted marks in tombs at Enkomi and throughout Cyprus led me to hypothesize some association between these marks and funerary ritual; I admit that I am not sure how to interpret the similar pattern at Ras Shamra and that it does throw great doubt on my interpretation of the Cypriot evidence.⁷ “Canaanite jars”, as at Enkomi, are found only in non-funerary contexts. Beyond this, there are no strong correlations between any marked vases and any particular context. It is not clear whether this is

5. Hirschfeld 2002, p. 69-72, table 1.

6. Hirschfeld 1999, 2000.

7. It does not seem likely that the deposition of painted marks in tombs at both sites can be explained by similar funerary rituals. Note that at Enkomi, the association with funerary contexts was specifically in terms of Mycenaean vases with *painted* marks; at Ras Shamra, *all* marked Mycenaean vases are associated (almost) exclusively with tombs.

due to inadequate data, or if this is an indication that the marks are unrelated to the use or deposition of vases at Ras Shamra.

Marked pottery found at Ugarit shares other characteristics with that from Enkomi.⁸ The Aegean imports to Ugarit are marked in the same ways as those in Enkomi, and the same distinction between incised marks on the handles of large, closed containers and painted marks on other shapes holds true. Only (pictorial?) kraters may carry both types of marks. Not enough marked “Canaanite jars” have been found at Ras Shamra to determine whether there is a difference in the repertoires of incised marks on amphoras and Aegean vases, as seems to be the case at Enkomi. There is a tremendous variety of marks at Ugarit, and not much repetition: the ca. 120 vases display 75 different signs. The forms of the marks are in general like those found at Enkomi; there are many parallels, and the Ugaritic potmark corpus includes some which certainly are derived from the Cypro-Minoan script. None of the marks, on the other hand, bear any relation to cuneiform, the script used in Ugarit.

In summary, the potmarks of Ugarit and those of Enkomi are very much alike. The difference is that Enkomi’s potmarks fit into an island-wide pattern of marking, whereas Ugarit’s use of potmarks is unique among excavated Canaanite sites. The number and types of marked Aegean pottery at Ugarit far exceeds those found elsewhere in the Levant where there is no attested local potmarking tradition. Thus, the potmarks suggest especially strong connections between Ugarit and the neighboring island. There are, of course, other indications in the archaeological record of close interaction between these two regions, including the presence of documents in the Cypriot script among the official archives of Ugarit.⁹ The presence of Aegean vases marked in the Cypriot manner suggests, as Hankey proposed, that these vases arrived on the shores of Syria via Cyprus or through the agency of Cypriots. I would add furthermore that the very practice of marking pottery may in itself be evidence of associations with Cyprus.¹⁰

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Ugaritic potmark corpus is the large number of local vases with potmarks. The marks on Mycenaean and Cypriot imports may have been marked en route from/through Cyprus or Cypriots, but how can marks on local pottery be explained? Was the practice of marking pottery an independent, native tradition, or was it influenced (and to what extent?) by contact with Cypriot products, Cypriot traders, or even perhaps resident Cypriots? To answer these questions it is important to understand the details of the local potmarks: What shapes of vases are marked? In what sorts of contexts (date, function) are they found? Unfortunately, the data is at present insufficient to attempt to address any of these questions. Potmarks on local vases received minimal attention in their publication: shapes and contexts are badly recorded, if at all, and the designation “local” remains unconfirmed in most instances.¹¹ Clearly the locally made and marked pottery found at Ugarit deserves attention—especially when one considers the rich history of scripts and alphabet at Ugarit and the possible connection between potmarks and writing systems.

8. One difference between the two sites is the relatively high percentage of marked Aegean vases (compared with other types of pottery) found at Ugarit; the relative quantities of marked Aegean, “Canaanite jars”, and local vases are much more balanced at Enkomi (Hirschfeld 2002, p.74-76, table 2). But this difference between the two sites may be more apparent than real. The preponderance of Aegean marked vases at Ugarit may be partially due to the special attention given to this import.

9. Masson 1974; Yon 1995, p. 439-41, fig. 7a-b.

10. Hirschfeld 1992, 1999.

11. The present provenience of most of these vases is at this time unknown.

TELL ABU HAWAM¹²

Ugarit was exceptional. In general, potmarks are rarely found in LBA Canaan. Although new excavations and (re)publications of older excavations continue to yield scattered examples of marked LBA vases, they are never found in quantity. My preliminary study of marked LBA ceramics recovered from sites in Israel revealed only 23 Mycenaean vases, 68 "Canaanite jars", a single Cypriot vase, and just over two dozen local vases.¹³

In most respects, the potmark assemblage from Tell Abu Hawam is typical of LBA Canaan. Hamilton's excavations yielded eighteen marked LBA vases: fifteen Mycenaean vases, two Canaanite jars, and one Cypriot jug. The marked vases are characteristically closed and large, including a Cypriot jug, two "Canaanite jars", three large coarse-ware stirrup jars, four or five large fine-ware stirrup jars, and three large piriform jars. Three vases with painted marks can only be identified as closed shapes. This is somewhat unusual, as painted marks in particular tend to be associated with open shapes, but these are not the only exceptions to that generalization. All except one of the marks from Tell Abu Hawam were made after firing. Fifteen of the marks from Tell Abu Hawam are incised and the other three are painted. Both the painted and the incised marks are simple in form and there are many parallels for each. The only mark with any degree of complexity is incised into the handle of a Mycenaean piriform jar, and it can be identified with Cypro-Minoan sign no.55.¹⁴

This assemblage of potmarks is exceptional, however, in the proportionally large number of marked Mycenaean vases.¹⁵ Marked Mycenaean vases are rarely found in Israel: four were discovered at Deir el-Balah, and single examples were recovered from Ashdod, Beth Shan, Lachish, and Ta'anek. The size of Tell Abu Hawam's assemblage (fifteen!) suggests something unusual. It is difficult to be more specific. The marked vases were found in many different contexts, so it is not a matter of a single cache. There must be some recurring reason for the appearance of Cypriot-marked Mycenaean vases on the site. Balensi's hypothesis of the Tell Abu Hawam sherds as transit refuse (*frainte*)¹⁶ fits well with my understanding of the role of the marks in trade.

CONCLUSIONS

A small percentage of the Mycenaean pottery exported to Cyprus and the Levant was marked at some point after firing by means of large signs incised on the handles or sometimes shoulders, or painted under the bases or in the interior. Painted or incised, these marks are a Cypriot habit and their presence on a vase indicates that that vase travelled through Cyprus or was handled by someone accustomed to Cypriot ways. As excavations uncover more marked Mycenaean ceramics, the accumulating evidence strengthens Vronwy Hankey's hypothesis of the transshipment of Mycenaean goods to the Near East through Cyprus or Cypriots.

The exact function(s) of the marks (and, therefore, the role of Cyprus/Cypriots) are still not clear. The signs are generally isolated single marks and thus they cannot now be "read". The script upon which the marking system(s) are based remains undeciphered. Thus, the ancient meaning(s) of the marks must

12. Hamilton 1935; Balensi 1980; I am grateful to Jacqueline Balensi for the opportunity to examine firsthand the potmarks from Tell Abu Hawam.

13. Those numbers have increased slightly in the years subsequent to the oral presentation of this paper, but not significantly.

14. Masson 1974, p 14, fig. 3.

15. At the oral presentation of this paper, I also suggested that Tell Abu Hawam was special because of the unique find of a Cypriot marked vase. Other instances of marked Cypriot vases have now been brought to my attention and it is now clear that marked Cypriot vases outside Cyprus are very rare, but Tell Abu Hawam no longer provides the only example.

16. Balensi, this conference.

be deduced from their distribution, findspots, the types of vases marked, and the visibility of the potmarks. Accounting for all these features is part of a long-term research strategy which is proceeding by examining the material site by site. The potmarks found at Enkomi, the kingdom of Ugarit, and Tell Abu Hawam illustrate both the difficulties and the potential of the study of potmarks. In particular, the conflicting theories generated by observation of the patterns of deposition of painted marks at two sites illustrates the importance of a broad view.

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