

# Imported Exotica and Mortuary Ritual at Perati in Late Helladic IIC East Attica

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The study of maritime trade in Late Bronze Age Greece often focuses on the analysis of imported exotica, which are usually interpreted as luxury goods used by elites to express or entrench social difference. A contextual analysis of exotica from the 12th-century cemetery at Perati does not support the notion that imports from the Postpalatial Aegean fit such an interpretation. I examine the context, distribution, and characteristics of imported objects at Perati and argue that the cemetery was the setting for a wide-ranging array of mortuary rituals that involved the deposition of exotic objects with members of the community across spectra of wealth, age, and gender. Exotica at Perati, instead of indicating elite strategies or economic exchanges, might best be understood as the residue of diverse mortuary beliefs and rituals operative within a culturally heterogeneous resident community.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The Late Bronze Age in the eastern Mediterranean was a time of intense interaction between major and minor states from Italy to the Nile delta.<sup>2</sup> Within the literature on Late Bronze Age cross-cultural interaction, maritime trade has most frequently been cast as an economic and political institution through which objects and commodities were transferred among elites and empires.<sup>3</sup> Textual evidence and the archaeological remains of shipwrecks provide ample evidence that this sort of exchange was a feature of the Late Bronze Age world system.<sup>4</sup> Archaeological artifacts found far from their apparent place of manufacture also provide fodder for detailed considerations of the nature and intensity of political and economic interaction.

During the 12th century B.C.E., the continued appearance of imported exotica has traditionally been taken as evidence that, although pan-Mediterranean trade contacts had been disrupted because of the collapse of Late

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<sup>2</sup> A sample of work related to Late Bronze Age trade in the Aegean from the last several years includes Betelli 2011; Gates 2011; Bell 2012; Sauvage 2012; van Wijngaarden 2012; Tartaron 2013; Babbi et al. 2015. For general and relatively up-to-date summaries, see Dickinson 2006, 196–218; Burns 2010a.

<sup>3</sup> Liverani 2008; Heymans and van Wijngaarden 2011, 124. See critique in Brysbaert and Veters 2013, 175–78.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the relevant texts are collected and reviewed in Moran 1992; Beckman 1995. On shipwrecks, see Bass 1967; Pulak 1997, 2008.