Follow that sherd! Tracking pottery exchange paths in Prehistoric Cyprus using Geochemistry

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Provenance in Late Bronze Age Cyprus...

Late Bronze Age Cyprus (1.600 - 1.200 BC) is a complex cultural landscape, representing a period of major socio-economical changes on the island. Studying the ceramic record reveals the relationships and cultural affinities between the different communities of the island and, furthermore, outlines exchange routes with their Eastern Mediterranean neighbors.

...using isotopes

The Pb and Sr isotopic composition of clay materials relates to the specific geological background through which they formed. This fingerprint carries over to pottery and becomes a robust link between ceramic groups and geographical regions (Figures 1,2) since, in this case, clay mixing, tempering or post-burial alterations can be more easily modeled (Figure 3).

From plots to potters

Isotopic analysis can create reference groups for the distinction of ceramic sherds in terms of both geographical and technological factors. These groups can be compared to sherds of unknown provenance to determine their origin. They can, moreover, be used to track transfer of know-how on an intra-island scale and demonstrate how potters adjusted their recipes according to the availability of raw materials.

As part of this on-going study, more samples from clay materials will be analyzed, in order to enrich the geochemical understanding of the Cypriot landscape. Additional ceramic material will include samples from Mycenaean contexts, suspected to be Cypriot imports, as well as material from earlier Cypriot periods, to investigate the evolution of ceramic tradition overtime.