

The Aegean Stone Tripod Mortar

Adopting a foreign tool during the Bronze Age

Introduction

If Aegean ground stone tools – i.e. any stone tool whose shape has been created or modified by grinding, abrasion, or polishing – are rarely included in the 'global' interpretations of Aegean societies, they nevertheless represent the daily 'toolbox' of Minoan and Mycenaean individuals. While most of the ground stone tools are produced locally for specific needs, imports are also found. As such, these imported stone tools are enough to demonstrate the existence of trades but neither their nature nor their purposes can be easily defined.

The stone tripod mortar is widely represented in the whole Eastern Mediterranean Sea, but differences are visible between the different areas. This poster will only focus on the Late Minoan I mortars, *circa* 1600-1450 BC.

Analyses

Production

- Establish the **typologies**, through morphological analyses
- Estimate the level of **standardisation**, through the coefficient of variability

Distribution

- Preliminary **sourcing**, through raw materials description
- Geographical **balance** of findings, through GIS database

Consumption

- Definitions of **use activities**, through macroscopic traces
- Definition of **the value**, through contextual analyses

Results

First Aegean specimens only appeared at the beginning of LMI, when the high number of mortars found in Thera suggests that the island was the main LM I production centre. In Akrotiri, most of the houses contained at least one or two tripod mortars (1).

At the same time, numerous tripod mortars made of a volcanic rock unknown in Crete are found in domestic and palatial Cretan workshops (1), suggesting that exchanges happened between the two islands (2).

This, and others analyzes such as the level of standardization, show that Theran tripod mortars may therefore belong to a "specialized" production type (3), meaning they were also made for the exchange and not only for a locally limited utilization.

Therefore, a market system seems plausible thanks to :

- (1) a homogeneous distribution within various structures,
- (2) inter-regional contacts,
- (3) a relative specialization of artisanal production.



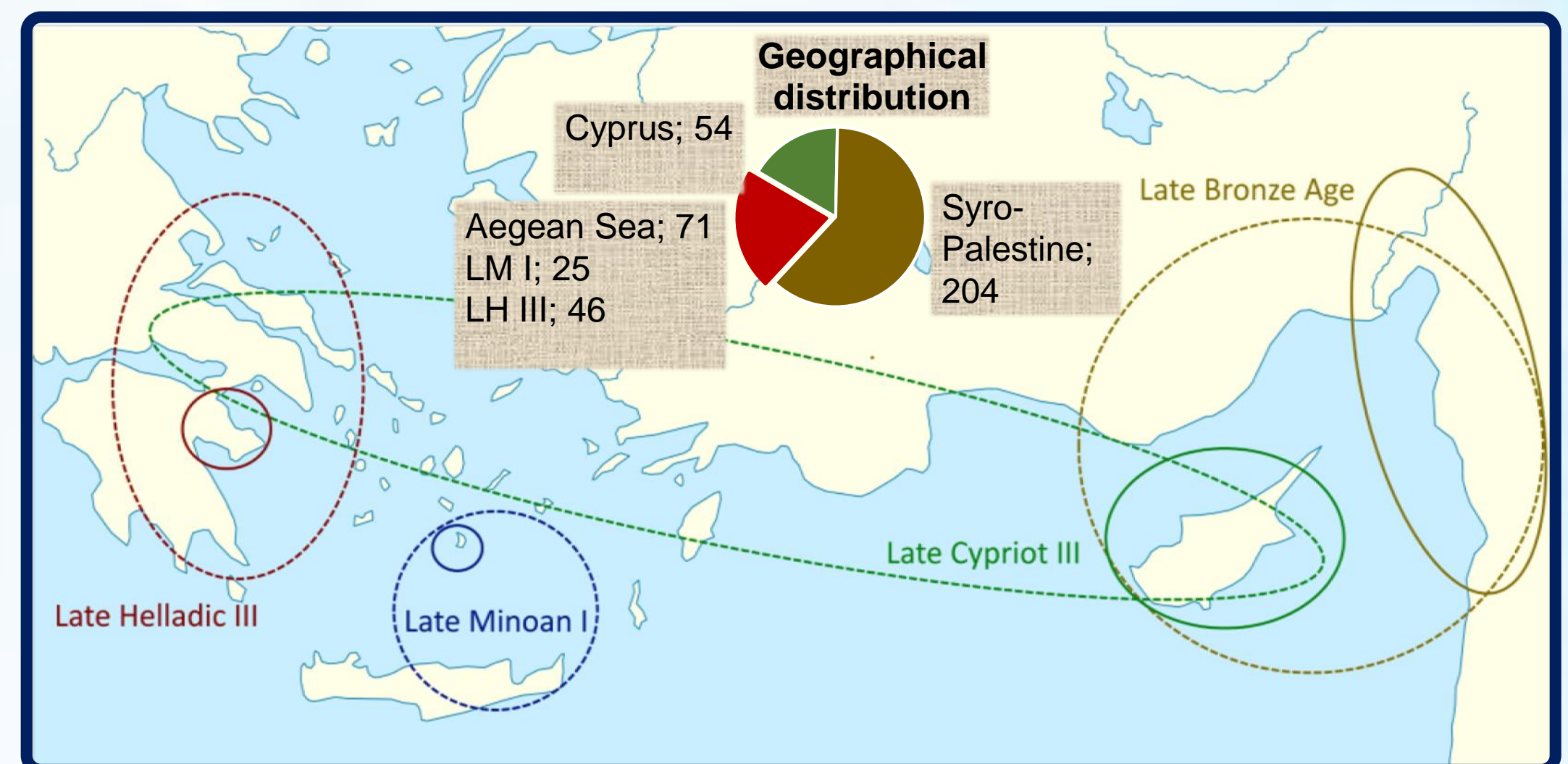
LMI stone tripod mortar found at Gournia (Crete). penn.museum

However, since this specialization is not as important as for other contemporary products (e.g. like the LMIA conical cup), the market system was probably not dedicated to tripod mortars : these latter were exchanged along existing trade routes. Meanwhile, thanks to their provenance and quality hitherto unknown in Crete, Theran mortars acquired a stronger value than local ones.

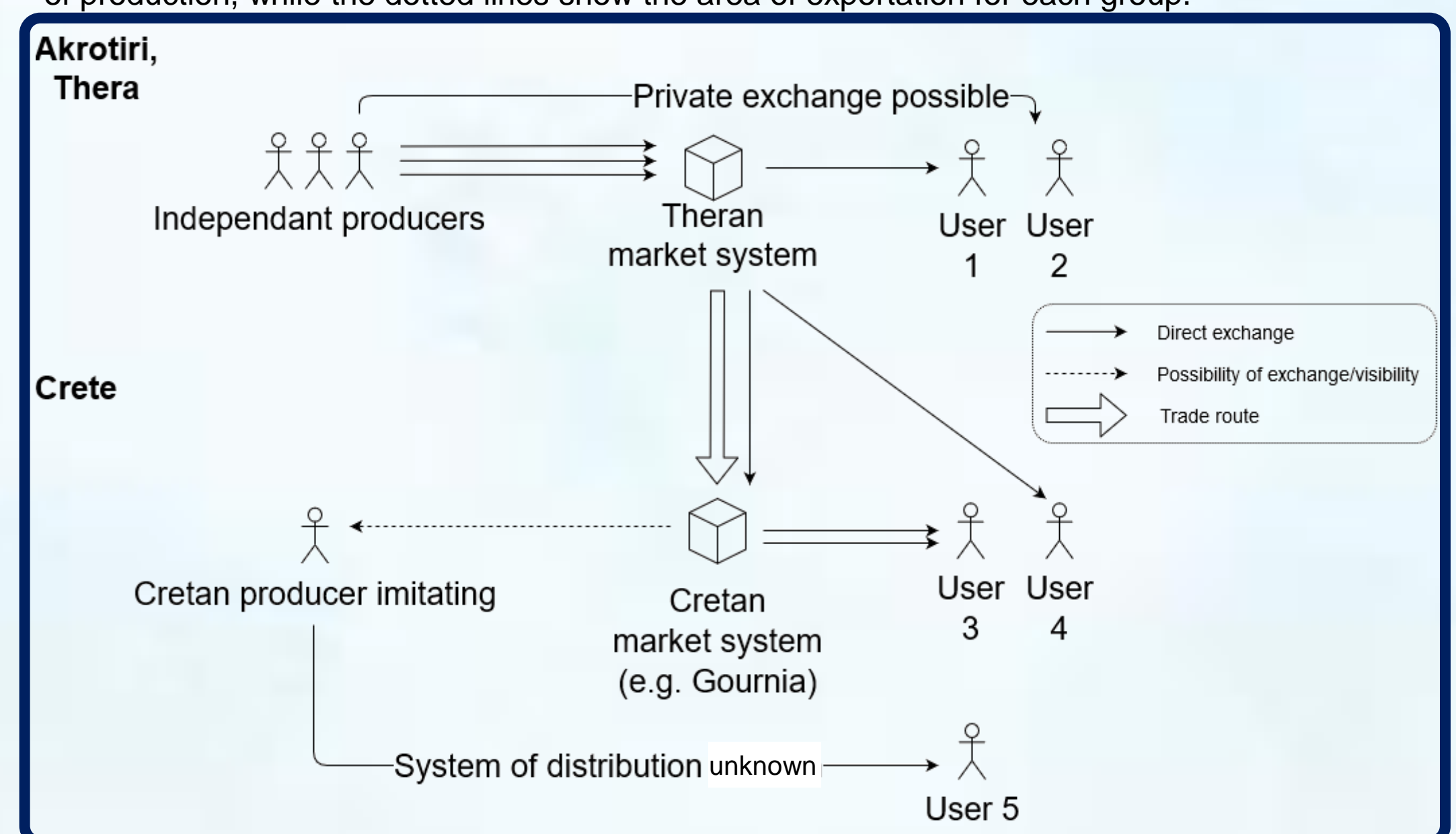
In other words, Theran producers and Cretan users could interact within elite's interaction (the market systems), but without their direct control.



LMI stone tripod mortar found at Akrotiri (Thera). Dourmas, 2017.



Map showing the four groups created for this research. The continuous line show the main place of production, while the dotted lines show the area of exportation for each group.



Schema summarizing the exchanges between producers and users of the stone tripod mortar during the LMI.

Conclusion

This reconstruction of this *chaîne opératoire* might nuance the standard model of a specialized production within a palatial society that implies dependent producers subject to elites' demand: here, no direct link connect the production of the tripod mortars with the elites.

The current definition of the term "specialist" is generally based on socio-cultural criteria that force the recognition of a social hierarchy. In doing so, such a socio-economic approach generally tends to polarize the social entities of the elite and the people. By contrast, LM I tripod mortars might reflect independent exchanges taking advantage from well-established commercial networks and highlight a way for the people to connect and interact without the direct control of the elites.

More about

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