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Milesian imports and exchange networks in the southern Aegean

In this paper ceramic imports are used to reconstruct the possible role of Miletus within southern Aegean exchange networks. We identify Cretan and other imports to Miletus, characterise the main local fabrics at the site, and then show some recently discovered evidence for Milesian imports at Knossos, Akrotiri and Ayia Irini. These Milesian imports are quite diverse, ranging from conical cups, to jugs and amphoras, to loomweights. They appear to indicate a richly-textured set of connections across the Aegean, rather than a network geared solely towards the circulation of metals and exchange of commodities. We argue that the emergence of this particular network configuration in the Neopalatial period is significant, as it coincides with the rising importance of Knossos and the diversification of links across the Aegean.

Miletus as gateway

Miletus, at the mouth of the Meander, invites us to imagine it as a gateway towards the resources of the Anatolian interior. The pioneering excavations of Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier and his team have revealed traces of what must surely have been a sizeable trading emporium throughout much of the Bronze Age, though now difficult to reach beneath the overburden of later periods of occupation, and much affected by heavy alluviation from the Meander itself. And though these factors mean that we will probably only ever see but a tantalizing fraction of the full extent of Bronze Age Miletus, the field owes a collective debt of gratitude for these considerable efforts to put Miletus firmly on the Bronze Age map.

The argument for Miletus as a significant gateway site is based on both supply and demand: it was well placed to join together the supply of metal resources from the Anatolian interior with the demand from the growing palatial economies of MBA Crete.¹ Though this makes good sense intuitively, positive evidence is very sparse, such as the lobed silver kantharos from Gournia, and some arguable similarities in administrative practices between Anatolia and Phaistos in the MBA.² Direct evidence for metal trade or administrative links does not improve much in the LBA. So we are obliged, as is often the case, to turn to the proxy evidence of ceramics. Some caution is called for in our interpretations, as there are many sites in much ‘worse’ positions with considerable influence, and sites in much ‘better’ positions with less. Does the ceramic evidence

¹ Niemeier 2005, 4.

² Weingarten 1992.

support our assumption that Miletus was an important node in Bronze Age exchange networks? And does it allow us to track changes in the character of its connectivity over time?

Ceramic evidence: Imports to Miletus

We should look at the ceramics from as wide a range of perspectives as possible: compositionally, functionally, and technologically. Here we will first give an overview of Aegean imports to Miletus, before presenting evidence for Milesian imports across the Aegean. These have only recently been recognized, initially at Knossos,³ but now also at Iasos,⁴ Akrotiri on Thera, and Ayia Irini on Kea.⁵ We will examine the chronology of these finds, and the types involved, with a view to shedding light on the position of Miletus in intra- and inter-regional networks.

The principal source of ceramic imports to Miletus is the island of Crete. Reports have already described these imports in both the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods.⁶ The finds concern a wide typological range, from cups to jugs, jars and pithoi. Some of the earliest imports are straight-sided cups found in levels of Miletus III; they are datable to MM IB and are almost certainly from the Knossos region. As well as other kinds of imported Cretan cups in Miletus III, and some small closed vessels for pouring, such as bridge-spouted jars, we see oval-mouthed amphoras, some of which are in fabrics that can be traced back to the Mesara region of south-central Crete. In the Neopalatial period, or Miletus IV, we again find imported Cretan cups, pouring vessels, and amphoras, as well as more specialised vessels such as rhyta, and also much larger storage vessels (pithoi). As in Miletus III, most of these Cretan imports seem to derive from central Crete (both north and south), though there are also the occasional examples from east Crete, such as a possible pithoid jar from the Mirabello region, and rare decorated dark-on-light pieces that could be from the far east of Crete, such as Palaikastro or Zakros. These are only preliminary indications pending full publication, which will include data from our petrographic sampling.⁷

Although the focus does tend to fall on these Cretan imports, not only because they are the dominant class of imports but also because scholars have long been able to identify them, we should not overlook the other imports at the site. There are a handful of Cycladic imports, though really very few. These include fragments of a Middle Cycladic polychrome ‘snake jar’ that can be clearly paralleled in the Pillar Pit deposits from Akrotiri on Thera,⁸ and manufactured using the calcareous volcanic fabric so dominant within the Akrotiri MBA levels.⁹ Closer to Miletus, the Dodecanesian islands that are just a hop away see rather more presence, with Koan imports particularly visible,¹⁰ and to a lesser extent Rhodes too.¹¹ There are a number of other imports we can-

3 Knappett 2006.

4 Hilditch et al. 2012.

5 Hilditch, in prep.

6 Raymond 2001; Raymond 2009, 150; Niemeier 2009, 15; Kaiser 2009, 159–61; Knappett & Nikolakopoulou 2005, 179–81.

7 Hilditch and Knappett, in prep.

8 Nikolakopoulou, forthcoming.

9 Hilditch 2009.

10 Marthari et al. 1990 identify Koan imports at Akrotiri; for Koan imports at Iasos, see Momigliano 2005; 2009.

11 See Marketou 2009, 89, Fig. 21, for Rhodian coarse wares with streaky paint, and mentioning find of Rhodian imports at Iasos; see also Hilditch et al. 2012 for Iasos.

not yet securely identify, potentially reflecting multiple production units across the Dodecanese and the Anatolian coast/interior.

This is the general situation that holds in part for Miletus III, though principally for Miletus IV(a). But the situation is dynamic over time. The Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age periods also see imports, though evidently from different areas. Initial indications from petrography are that the majority of the Miletus I and II imports are potentially Anatolian (coastal and probably inland too) as opposed to a wider range of Aegean sources evidenced within the later periods. Interestingly, there are several non-locally produced Kastri Phase shapes (including one-handed tankards and depas cups) in highly micaceous fabrics found within Miletus II levels, which are consistent with the 'Anatolian-type' imports found within the Cyclades during this period.¹² However, as yet there has been little fabric analysis (either detailed macroscopic or microscopic characterization) on the earlier Bronze Age wares of the coastal Anatolian region and therefore few opportunities to securely identify compatible regions with respect to available potting raw materials.

For the later, 'Mycenaean' periods, the situation changes again, with the Greek mainland seemingly a significant contributor of imported wares from Miletus IVb onwards, that is to say LM IB and LH IIA to LM III. This is based on macroscopic study and chemical analysis by Hans Mommsen, supplemented by our petrographic analyses, which are still in progress.

Tracing the local potting tradition at Miletus

Before we turn to the identification of Milesian imports across the Aegean, we should describe the major macroscopic trends observed within the local pottery sequence. The ongoing fabric analysis programme is designed to characterise the exploitation of locally available raw materials from a diachronic perspective (Chalcolithic to Submycenaean periods), to identify which sources might have been used and how the processing of those materials changes over time, as well as provide a clearer picture of the range of imported ceramics and their respective sources throughout the Bronze Age occupation of the site. The detailed typo-stylistic study of the multiple period assemblages at Miletus has provided a clear, compositionally sensitive picture of the development of pottery fabrics. In general, the fabrics of the earliest levels (I and II) are easily distinguished in hand specimen by their darker red or grey/black colour,¹³ highlighting the lower firing regimes and grittier textures typical of Chalcolithic to Bronze Age sherds. A major shift in fabric colour and firing regime occurs with the beginning of Miletus III, with two major clay types dominating the assemblage: a 'buff', silver mica-bearing fabric and a 'brown' fabric dominated by white and grey crystalline inclusions.¹⁴ These macroscopic categories persist throughout the later Bronze Age occupation levels too, though some minor variations can be observed. The buff group first appears in Miletus III as a semi-coarse to coarse fabric, becomes finer in period V and then suddenly coarsens again during the final period Miletus VI, while the brown group does not appear to change in coarseness but, after period III, becomes gradually richer in micaceous schist-derived inclusions, replacing the mica-poor, quartz-type crystalline inclusions of the earlier levels. There are also many sherds that appear to fall between the two groups with respect to fired colour and inclusion types: these vessels are called 'buff transitional' within the

¹² For Dhaskalio-Kavos see Hilditch 2013 and Hilditch, in press.

¹³ Kouka, pers. comm.

¹⁴ Raymond 2009, 149–50.

ongoing fabric study and they form a crucial link for understanding the development of raw material exploitation at Miletus. To supplement the fabric analysis, a small geological sampling of potential potting raw materials was carried out within the vicinity of the site, including the pale Neogene deposits and darker schists to the east of Miletus. After processing, a number of the collected sediments were mixed together, formed into briquettes and fired to specific temperatures to establish comparanda for assessing exploitation and processing techniques for local raw material sources. The results of this work will also appear within the full publication.

Towards the end of Miletus III new macroscopic groups appear, including the characteristic pink-purple lime-spalled fabric (Fig. 1) and a distinctive buff and red ‘marbled’ fabric (Fig. 2), with the latter, if not both, indicative of varying degrees of mixing between a pale and a dark clay. Petrographic analysis of sherds in the typical spalled Milesian fabric at Iasos found that this fabric contains predominantly metamorphic-derived inclusions with trace amounts of sedimentary, volcanic and biogenic inclusions (similar to the local fabric suite of Iasos – Groups I–III), though fewer calcareous inclusions than typical Iasian fabrics.¹⁵ The spalled inclusions with prominent calcareous/salt haloes are characterised by grey, non-optically active clay pellets and streaks (from rounded grains to elliptical aggregates with extended tails and large amorphous streaks) suggesting the possibility of the addition of pale calcareous clay to red, iron-rich clay.¹⁶ It is also during this phase that Minoan imports become a prominent feature within the Milesian ceramic repertoire, perhaps suggesting a link between the Cretan tradition of clay mixing,¹⁷ and the appearance of such a processing behaviour using locally available clays at Miletus.

During period IV the spalled fabric (Fig. 1) becomes dominant,¹⁸ seemingly at the expense of the marbled or mixed fabric (Fig. 2) (is this because the mixing becomes more pronounced leading to a fully ‘blended’ recipe which spalls with firing?), with the mixed fabric disappearing completely within period V and only reappearing again during the final period VI assemblage. Period V heralds the start of locally produced fine decorated buff wares,¹⁹ presumably imitating the growing number of fine Mycenaean imports appearing within this level and throughout the later period VI, though ‘buff’, ‘buff transitional’, ‘brown’ and ‘lime spalling’ still persist throughout levels with LH III material. Chemical work on a range of period V and VI sherds suggests the existence of at least one workshop within the vicinity of Miletus (NAA Gruppen A and D),²⁰ responsible for producing a range of local wares, including fine decorated buff, buff, buff transitional, red wash and the lilac spalled ware. We hope to integrate the chemical analysis with the diachronic petrographic study to link together the ware groups across different periods at the site and offer new insights to the development of specific production units within and around Miletus. This brief summary of the local Miletus ceramic tradition from a fabric perspective provides a useful means to start assessing Milesian imports beyond the Anatolian coast.

15 Hilditch et al. 2012, 74–7; Pl. 1 – 02/22; Pl. 4a.

16 Ibid. 104.

17 Hein et al. 2004; Day et al. 2006.

18 Kaiser 2009, 159.

19 Zurbach, pers. comm.

20 These come from Hans Mommsen’s unpublished report, which will be included in the final publication of the Miletus pottery and other finds.

Imports from Miletus

Imports from Miletus have only quite recently been identified at sites across the Aegean. One of the authors (CK) was fortunate to recognise the distinctive Milesian lilac spalled fabric in some pottery from Knossos, having just returned from his first research trip to Miletus in 2002. Working on largely unpublished MM III ceramic material from Evans's excavations in the palace, what stood out was a large, thick-walled, cylindrical base and lower body of an unknown shape, uncovered by Evans in the Cists Beneath the Central Stairs, which should probably date to MM IIIB (Fig. 3).²¹ In the same project of reanalysing MM III deposits from Evans' excavation,²² sherds of Milesian origin were also identified in levels associated with the North Entrance Passage (Fig. 4) and the Olive Press Room (Fig. 5), both also from coarse, thick-walled vessels of uncertain type. These all date to MM III, which is also the period when other exotic imports are found within the palace, such as the unguent jars from the North Lustral Basin (of unknown origin, but somewhere volcanic, perhaps east Aegean), and the jars from various contexts, initially thought to be Cycladic,²³ but which also could be east Aegean.²⁴ There are also numerous fragments of jars from the Olive Press Room fills (MM IIIA), and in all likelihood imports from Rhodes.²⁵

Imports from Miletus are not currently known from any other sites on Crete. We have to move to the Cyclades for our other examples. At Akrotiri on Thera a fabulous, complete amphora was recently recognised, and we are grateful to Irene Nikolakopoulou for allowing us to mention it here. It is from Sector Delta, and has a biconical form with double roll handle (Fig. 6).²⁶ Its fabric is of the distinctive Milesian lilac spalled type. In addition, a round-mouthed jug and a beaked jug in the lilac spalled fabric have also been discovered from rooms 6 and 9 within the LC I Sector Delta complex, alongside a significant number of conical cups (type H1, H2, M1 and L1²⁷) and discoid loomweights²⁸ in the same distinctive fabric.²⁹ Ayia Irini on Kea also has a range of Milesian imports, in both the lilac spalled fabric and the mixed red/buff fabric. Although most are body sherds of unidentified closed vessels, a few distinctive sherds from a fine-walled lid(?), a beaked jug and an open vessel have also been found. There are no Milesian conical cups at Ayia Irini and very few, if any, examples of potentially Milesian discoid loomweights (perhaps a single example in the mixed fabric, K6.90, seen by the author – JH). These sherds were found mainly within the Dining Room complex of the Northern Sector, which appears to have been founded during the earlier phase of Period VI (LM IA) and was in use until the earliest phase of Period VII (LM IB) when it fell into disuse.³⁰ At both Akrotiri and Ayia Irini the Milesian sherds occur within contexts that also contain recognisable imported vessels from other southeast Aegean locations, such as Kos and Rhodes.

21 It could perhaps be a lamp stand, on the basis of comparisons with Milesian material – I. Kaiser, pers. comm.

22 See Knappett et al., in prep.

23 MacGillivray 1984.

24 Knappett 2006.

25 Knappett et al., in prep.

26 Under study by Nikolakopoulou, Mathioudaki, and the authors.

27 Typology after Davis 1986, Fig. 5.3.

28 There may also be discoid loomweights in the crudely mixed fabric that practically disappears within the later period IV levels at Miletus (Nikolakopoulou, pers. comm.).

29 Nikolakopoulou, pers. comm.

30 Indications from the ongoing study of the Ayia Irini Northern Sector Project (AINSAP), courtesy of Gorogianni and Fitzsimons.

The shapes appearing in Milesian fabrics at Ayia Irini and Akrotiri do show some marked differences. Despite the large number of potentially imported discoid loomweights at Ayia Irini,³¹ very few show macroscopic affinities with the Milesian suite of fabrics. This is in sharp contrast to Akrotiri, where the LC discoid loomweights from Building Beta and Sector Delta reveal numerous examples of the lilac spalled and Milesian mixed fabrics.³² The conical cups display a similar picture, with numerous examples of Milesian imports (in multiple types) appearing at Akrotiri but none within the Ayia Irini assemblage. In general, the conical cups display a far narrower range of provenance at the latter, interestingly in contrast to the loomweights from the same site.

The Milesian imports at Knossos, Akrotiri and Ayia Irini thus hardly present a consistent picture in terms of the kinds of products that are circulating. At Knossos we find what could be a lamp stand in the Cists Beneath the Central Stairs at Knossos. The base sherd from the Olive Press Room could be from a similar shape, and the body sherd from the North Entrance passage is from some kind of thick-walled jar. At Ayia Irini, the sherds are mostly from closed vessels, though we also see a lid, a jug, an open vessel, and possibly one loomweight. For Akrotiri, though, the picture differs again, with conical cups and loomweights both well represented, in addition to an amphora and two jugs. This is not the range of imports one typically finds at Bronze Age sites, whether amphoras containing consumables, or fine tablewares for conspicuous consumption. If we return to the argument with which we started, that Miletus was an important trading hub that could link Cretan demand for metals with a supply in Anatolia, then what could explain the sorts of Milesian imports we find at Knossos, Akrotiri and Ayia Irini? They suggest something more, something beyond exchange relations between trading emporia. They could indicate a more richly textured set of connections, especially when considered in tandem with other evidence. For example, other imports from the south-east Aegean in the Knossos palace at this time are the unguent jars from the North Lustral Basin, a unique cache suggestive of special oils or perfumes imported from afar for use in palatial cultic ceremonies. One might also consider W.-D. Niemeier's argument that Miletus IV has evidence for Minoan cult practice.³³ The conical cups at Akrotiri suggest participation in ritual feasting – but why not just make do with locally made conical cups, or indeed imports from Crete – did vessels from Miletus hold special significance, or did they travel with other items? The loomweights offer another angle, as they are tied up with female labour and may point to yet another kind of inter-regional contact.³⁴ There is no reason why we should imagine only certain kinds of mobility in these periods – there were likely many different motivations for mobility, and many different kinds of travellers.³⁵ Other less far-reaching networks were important too, perhaps with travel possible within a single day, such as to nearby coastal Anatolian sites like Iasos, and those in the Dodecanese, like Trianda on Rhodes and Seraglio on Kos.

What is perhaps most striking though is when these Milesian imports appear: according to present evidence, they occur only in Neopalatial contexts. This is actually part of a broader pattern whereby imports from the south-east Aegean in general, including Kos and Rhodes, show up across the Aegean region in the Neopalatial period. What can explain this? Was it a narrow

31 A macroscopic study of the loomweights at Ayia Irini has been undertaken by one of the authors (JH) as part of a larger study on the textile evidence, in collaboration with E. Gorgianni and J. Cutler.

32 Nikolakopoulou, pers. comm.

33 E. g. Niemeier 2005, 6–7.

34 Cutler 2011; Gorgianni et al., in press.

35 See contributions in Fitch workshop on mobility – Kiriati and Knappett, in prep.

window of opportunity when sites like Knossos, Akrotiri and Ayia Irini were looking to source their metals from the Anatolian interior? This does not make a great deal of sense for Ayia Irini, with its own close proximity to the metal sources of Lavrion. Is it instead a result of more kinds of interactions, occurring more regularly? Imports do seem to take off in MM IIIA, the early Neopalatial period, just when Knossos emerges as the dominant centre on Crete and expands its presence in the Aegean.³⁶ This expansion may have set the conditions and given the incentive for a wider range of mobilities in the Aegean. But whatever the exact explanation is, these conditions do not appear to last long: these Milesian and other south-east Aegean imports peter out after LM IA. The increased transport costs that may have arisen in the aftermath of the Thera eruption,³⁷ and indeed the changing conditions on Crete through the course of LM IB (leading up to the widespread destructions there at the end of the period),³⁸ could certainly have destabilized and weakened some of the networks responsible for these distributions.

Of course it would help a great deal if we knew more about the area close to Miletus – not only sites like Tavsan Adasi, Ephesus, and Cesme-Baglararasi, but also Kos, Rhodes, Kasos, and Karpathos. Otherwise it is hard to gain much purchase on networks until we know more about sites at these and other locations, both mainland and insular. New work on Samos by O. Kouka and W.-D. Niemeier is of course promising. Nonetheless, despite the ongoing ceramic analysis at various sites that slowly but surely builds our understanding of Bronze Age Aegean regional interactions, the coverage remains extremely uneven. There are hotspots and Bermuda triangles.

Conclusions

Miletus is evidently an important exchange node throughout much of the Bronze Age, for some two millennia. But its role does not remain constant, as the networks around it evolve, taking in different areas with variable resources and needs, and of course with changing maritime technologies. What is most striking though is that in the early Neopalatial period we start to see the movement of products *from* Miletus *to* other parts of the Aegean. This brief moment when we can recognise Milesian imports abroad seems to indicate that for a short time Miletus was caught up in broader networks that allowed for more textured and complex relations between diverse areas of the Aegean, perhaps in no small part through the stability provided by the increasingly dominant site of Knossos. However, this may only have lasted a century or so between c. 1700 and 1600 BC, before the networks of power and influence again shift.

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³⁶ Knappett & Nikolakopoulou 2008.

³⁷ Knappett et al. 2011.

³⁸ Driessen & Macdonald 1997.

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Fig. 1: Lilac lime-spalled fabric from Miletus



Fig. 2: Buff and red 'marbled' fabric from Miletus



Fig. 3: Lamp stand(?) in Milesian fabric, found in Cists Beneath the Central Stairs, Knossos



Fig. 4: Body sherd in Milesian fabric, found in North Entrance Passage, Knossos



Fig. 5: Base sherd in Milesian fabric, found in Olive Press Room, Knossos



Fig. 6: Biconical amphora in Milesian fabric, found in Sector Delta, Akrotiri, Thera