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### Tracing the potter's wheel: investigating technological trajectories and cultural encounters in the Bronze Age Aegean

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**Publication date**

2018

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

TMA: tijdschrift voor mediterrane archeologie

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[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Hilditch, J. (2018). Tracing the potter's wheel: investigating technological trajectories and cultural encounters in the Bronze Age Aegean. *TMA: tijdschrift voor mediterrane archeologie*, 29(58), 54.

[https://www.academia.edu/35993039/Tracing\\_the\\_potter\\_s\\_wheel\\_investigating\\_technological\\_trajectories\\_and\\_cultural\\_encounters\\_in\\_the\\_Bronze\\_Age\\_Aegean](https://www.academia.edu/35993039/Tracing_the_potter_s_wheel_investigating_technological_trajectories_and_cultural_encounters_in_the_Bronze_Age_Aegean)

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TMA 58, 2018  
29ste jaargang  
Prijns los nummer: €12,-

Het *Tijdschrift voor Mediterrane Archeologie* is een onafhankelijk tijdschrift dat aandacht besteedt aan actueel archeologisch onderzoek in de mediterrane wereld, in het bijzonder verricht vanuit Nederland en België. Het overnemen van artikelen is toegestaan mits met bronvermelding. Bijdragen van lezers kunnen al dan niet verkort door de redactie worden geplaatst.

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*Adres:*  
Tijdschrift voor Mediterrane Archeologie  
Poststraat 6  
9712 ER Groningen

*Bankgegevens:*  
Stichting ter Ondersteuning Oudheidkundig Onderzoek  
IBAN: NL14INGB0005859344  
BIC: INGBNL2A

KvK: 41014777

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– [tijdschrift@mediterrane-archeologie.nl](mailto:tijdschrift@mediterrane-archeologie.nl)  
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*Ontwerp omslag:* Siebe Boersma  
*Opmaak binnenwerk:* Hannie Steegstra

TMA komt tot stand in samenwerking met Barkhuis Publishing, Eelde

ISSN 0922-3312  
81999/SOOO

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## Tracing the potter's wheel: investigating technological trajectories and cultural encounters in the Bronze Age Aegean

*Vidi Research Project (NWO, UvA), Jill Hilditch (project leader)*

The *Tracing the Potter's Wheel* (TPW) project is designed to identify and assess the appearance of the potter's wheel as a technological innovation within the Bronze Age Aegean (2500-1200 BC). Our approach uses the potter's wheel as a prism through which to investigate the transmission of craft knowledge during this exciting period of social, cultural and technological development, and consider the ways Aegean (potting) communities were configured and connected through time. The Bronze Age Aegean offers a valuable arena for assessing the dynamics behind past cultural encounters and interaction networks. A key project objective is to better understand the multi-scalar material and technological and social interactions that facilitated the transmission of the potter's wheel in this region. In the case of the Aegean, terms such as Anatolianization, Minoanization or Mycenaenization carry tacit indications of cultural contact, yet the technological dimension of such interactions remains poorly understood. How did the use of the potter's wheel develop over the Bronze Age Aegean? Was it adopted or adapted differently, or at different times, within the Aegean?

Investigating the potter's wheel and the development of wheel-coiling and wheel-throwing techniques within the Bronze Age Aegean is addressed across three interwoven sub-projects. Our methodology integrates theoretical perspectives on social interactions, technological processes and innovation, with experimental, 3D digital and analytical methods for visualising and interpreting ceramics. This combination of theory and analysis will address how we can move from static dots representing diagnostic artefacts for early wheel use towards socially and technologically constituted 'communities of practice' that are instead linked by dynamic and relational connections. Dr Jill Hilditch (principal investigator) will focus on compositional and technological analysis to determine the provenance of wheelmade vessels within key diachronic ceramic assemblages of the Aegean, allowing trajectories

of technological knowledge transmission to be mapped through time and the relationship with broader cultural encounters within this arena to be assessed. Dr Caroline Jeffra (postdoctoral fellow) will investigate the *chaîne opératoire* of ceramic production using the potter's wheel. A systematic programme of experiments replicating production techniques will be integrated with the macroscopic identification of those wheel traces over a range of Aegean vessel types. Through this, she will refine the identification of wheel-use strategies within the archaeological assemblages under study and subsequently assess the development of these strategies throughout the Bronze Age Aegean. Finally, Loes Opgenhaffen (PhD) will investigate the potential of 3D scanning techniques and digital analytical tools to record and identify wheel production traces on ceramic surfaces. She will also develop digital archiving and printing techniques to visualise our research results and promote public engagement with technological approaches to material culture.

The TPW project will shed new light on technological innovations and trajectories within the ancient Aegean, and offer unique archaeological perspectives for how the humanities can address human-object-technology interactions within complex societies.

For more information visit our website: [www.tracingthewheel.eu](http://www.tracingthewheel.eu) and follow our progress in the field and in the lab at [www.facebook.com/tracingthewheel](https://www.facebook.com/tracingthewheel).

Jill Hilditch is an Associate Professor within the Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA) at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests focus on the Bronze Age Aegean to anchor scientific data within broader approaches to material culture, and address broad questions of human interaction and technological transmission in the past.



Figure 1. Experimental, visual and analytical techniques are integrated to investigate the potter's wheel in the Bronze Age Aegean (figure author).