‘RICH IN SILVER’ POTS: SOURCES AND CIRCULATION NETWORKS OF COARSE RED SILVER MICACEOUS FABRICS IN BRONZE AGE SW AEGEAN

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Ceramic vessels of coarse red fabrics, particularly rich in silver mica, found in many sites of central and southern Aegean, throughout the Bronze Age, are traditionally associated with an origin in the Cyclades. Nevertheless, a similar type of a very distinctive fabric (known as Red Silver Micaceous, RSM) becomes very common on the island of Kythera, in SW Aegean, during the Second and Third Palace Periods, as proven by excavations at the coastal site of Kastri and the Kythera Island Project intensive field survey. Additionally, the RSM fabric is also recognised in a wider region, particularly in sites in southern and eastern Peloponnese and western Crete, relating to plain or white-painted vessels, such as storage and cooking pots as well as table ware. These vessels had been variably associated with a Cycladic, Laconian or Kytheran origin.

The defining characteristics of the RSM fabric, are its hard, red, dense clay matrix and inclusions of micaceous metamorphic rocks with quartz, muscovite, orthoclase and plagioclase occurring as major minerals.

Ceramic petrology coupled with geological prospection has located the source of this pottery to the region directly surrounding the modern village of Potamos, north-central Kythera. Here, lenses of orthoclase-bearing orthogneiss are intercalated with the glaucophane-chloritoid-phengite schists of the Phyllite-Quartzite Unit (PQU). These represent ancient (c. 300 Ma) basement metamorphosed at amphibolite facies, and subsequently suffering a mild overprint during the (lower grade) high pressure, low temperature metamorphism affecting the PQU at c. 55 Ma. The lithic fragments observed in the RSM sherds bear a strong textural and mineralogical affinity to these orthogneisses and are consistent with being collected from a sedimentary deposit primarily sourcing these rocks with an additional minor input from the PQU.

The juxtaposition of these lithologies is unique in this region and therefore has lead to a precise identification of Kythera as its production centre. Furthermore, comparisons with similar rocks in the Aegean region indicate

the textural and mineralogical distinctiveness of the Potamos Orthogneiss in relation to the assemblages of granitoids in the Cyclades and East Crete, and provide firm distinguishing criteria for ceramic fabrics originating in the 'hot' metamorphics of the Cycladic islands and the 'cold' metamorphics of the PQU in the Greek mainland and Crete. In the light of this new evidence, the distribution of the RMS ceramic vessels both within the island of Kythera and beyond it, and their affiliation with 'Minoan' potting traditions, provides a better understanding of the interaction and trade networks in SW Aegean during the Second and Third Palace Periods.