From early site discoveries to the most recent publications on the island’s prehistory, there is a general agreement amongst researchers, which frames our understanding of the Cypriot Bronze Age. Copper is Cyprus’ most important resource and by the end of the Middle Bronze Age, it catalyzes the formal introduction of the island’s village-based economy to the international economic sphere of the Mediterranean. Intense networking, wider economic opportunities, exposure to and interaction with institutionalised Near Eastern social and politico-economic structures, fuel the ambitions, and influence the material expressions of competitive groups, commonly referred to as elites. In the Late Bronze Age, globalisation and its socio-economic impacts are materially more discernible, and settlement patterns are typified by distinct tiers of sites, which channel precious Cypriot resources into international markets. Finally, while elites profit from the management and control of production, distribution and export systems, non-elites work in the background.

This paper employs a different perspective. It explores the role of communities to assess the applicability of the above interpretive frames, seeking to answer: Who are these elusive “non-elites”? What is their material trace and local character? How formally do they interact in these systems? Is a Cypriot Bronze Age parallel market a sustainable concept?

This investigation favours a multi-scalar, comparative methodology, juxtaposing elements from the Kouris, the Vasilikos and the Maroni valleys of southern Cyprus. The small scale explores community-level, statistically unique material assemblages as possible indicators for economic-professional identities. The medium scale contextualises these assemblages in the aforementioned geographically distinct regions, to discern their impact on local settlement patterning. Finally the large scale compares these patterns to produce materially grounded insights into island-wide practices. These include individuals and groups interacting in intertwined formal and informal networks, referred to as parallel economies from local to global scales.