Prehistoric pottery under the microscope:
Ceramic production, distribution and social interaction in Early and Middle
Bronze Age Cyprus

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A very small number of settlement sites and a larger, but still trivial, number of tombs manifest the full introduction of Cyprus into the Bronze Age, in the mid third millennium BC. This initial period of the Cypriot Early Bronze Age, is known in the archaeological literature as the Philia phase. Among the small number of Philia sites, Marki Alonia is currently the only settlement on the island that provides archaeological material from an uninterrupted sequence of strata, from the Philia phase, when the settlement was founded, to the Middle Cypriot Bronze Age, when it was finally abandoned.

In view of the limited evidence deriving from undisturbed settlement strata, an interdisciplinary project was put forward, setting research focus on contemporary pottery – the most abundant and well-represented material category – with the aim to explore production technology, provenance and possible types of interaction among the Philia communities. Moreover, the study of pottery from the successive strata of Marki Alonia allowed an investigation into technological continuity or change during the settlement’s various phases of occupation, and eventually a more enhanced understanding of the transformations that this prehistoric community underwent during the almost 700 years of its lifespan.

For the purposes of this research, an analytical agenda, which involved energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence, scanning electron microscopy – energy dispersive spectroscopy, and optical microscopy, was employed for the technological and compositional characterisation of tableware and cooking pots coming from Marki Alonia, as well as other Philia sites. In addition to information gathered about ceramic technology in prehistoric Cyprus, this paper discusses how pottery analysis contributes to the understanding of the evolution of the Cypriot social landscapes from the Philia phase to the Middle Bronze Age, in an attempt to further illuminate social processes during the earliest half of the Cypriot Bronze Age.