

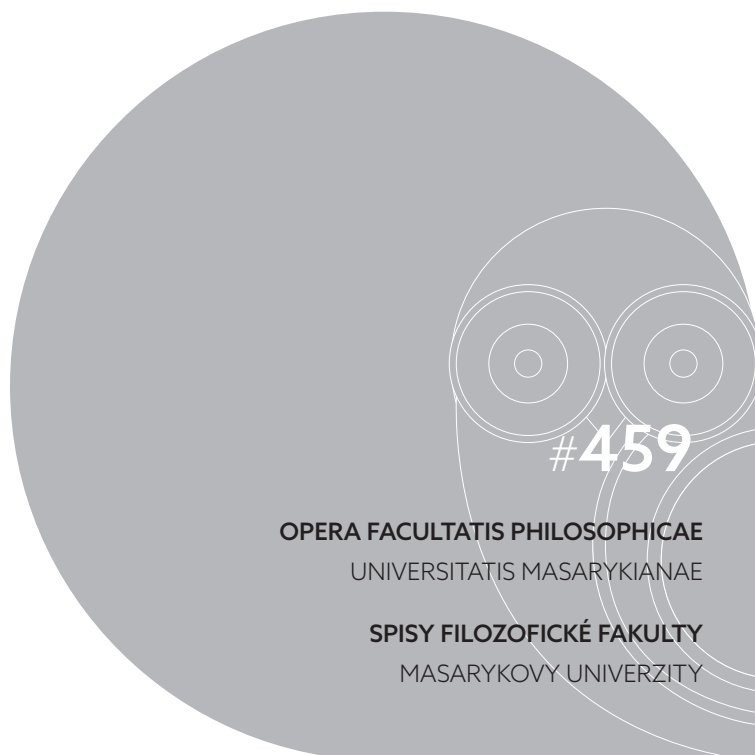
What's wrong?

Hard science and humanities – tackling the question of the absolute chronology of the Santorini eruption

Věra Klontza-Jaklová



FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
MASARYKOVA UNIVERZITA

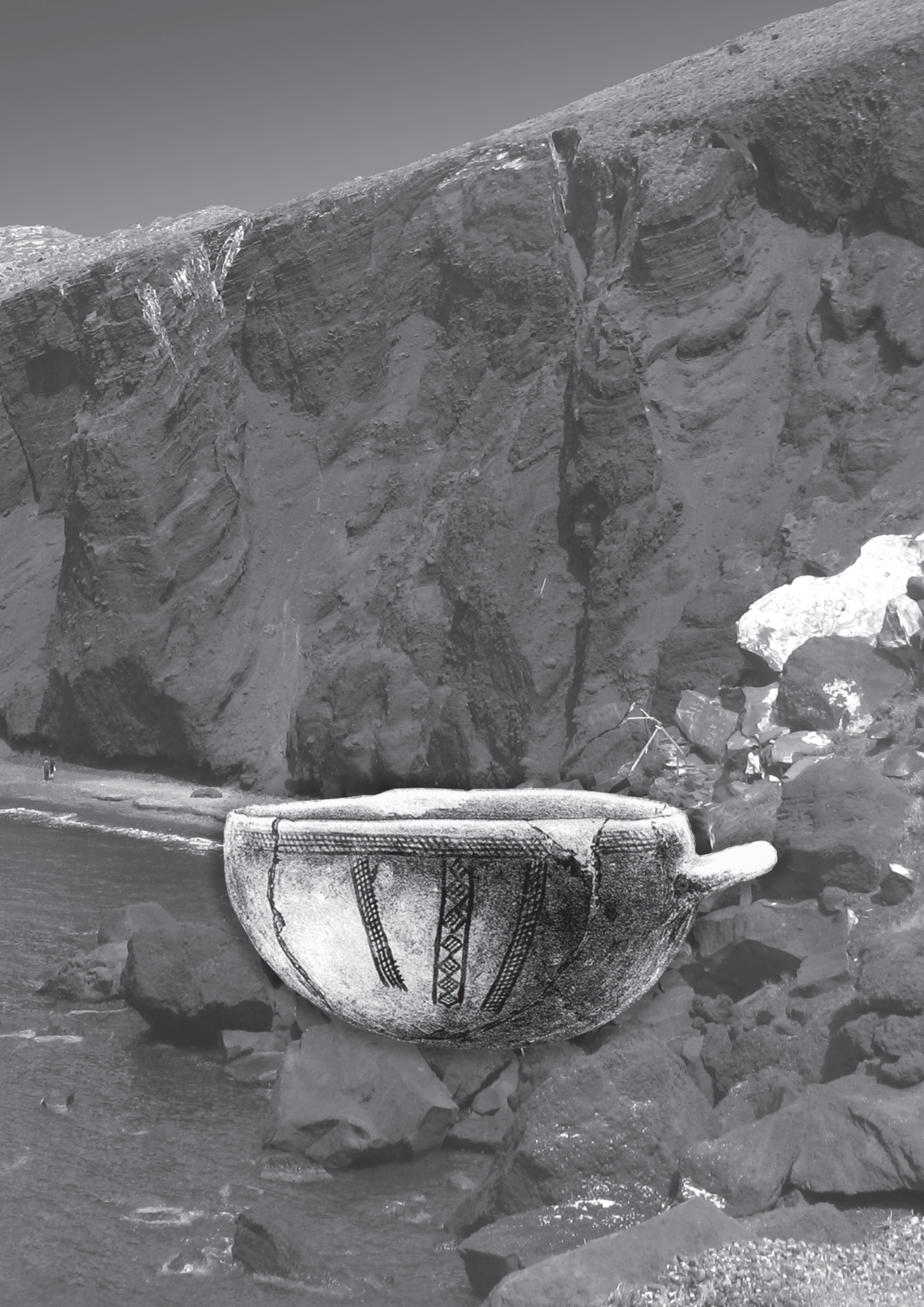


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PREFACE

The absolute chronology of the Late Bronze Age volcanic eruption in Santorini and its effects across the wider region has been a focus of my research since I studied archaeology at Charles University in Prague (Klontza-Jaklova 2008; 2012a; 2014). This topic, the problem of placing the event within the absolute chronology, is one of the most frequently discussed and studied topics of Aegean prehistory, especially since the mid 1970's, when the first radiocarbon dates from the region were published and the difference between those dates and archaeological/historical dates appeared. The debate is invariably lively and creative, sometimes even passionate. One particularly dramatic phase ended at the turn of the millennium when two monographs were published (Manning 1999; Friedrich 2000). In the subsequent few years several conferences dealt with the problems of assigning an absolute date to the Santorini eruption and absolute chronology in general (Cornell University 2006, Copenhagen 2007, Halle 2011¹) and, circa ten years later, both above mentioned authors reviewed and re-edited their monographs (Friedrich 2009; Manning 2014). The very intensity of the debate provided adequate reason to place it (or the most significant representations of each opinion) on the pages of *Antiquity* (2014: 88/339). (More on the history of research can be found in chapter 1.3). Albeit the bibliography of this volume is bulky (about a fifth of the text), and my own, admittedly heuristic, approach has been continuous and meticulous for years, it has proved impractical to collect all the publications related to the topic or even to establish with any degree of accuracy how many exist. Thus, for the purpose of this publication, I have, of necessity, created just a choice of illustrative books and articles.

What, you may ask, can I add to the work of so many esteemed scholars? What is the aim of this monograph? Obviously, it is yet another review of the opinions; one in which I do not even try to compare the results of each method or approach. I try instead to compare the methodologies and approaches, their limits and uncertainties and I examine mainly those scientific

methods which seem to make sense for use in archaeology. I use the critical methodology of 'hard' science for 'autocriticism' of the humanities, since I am primarily trained in the humanities. I am an archaeologist and, although I collaborate intensively with physicists, I don't feel competent to criticize their methods. I aim simply to underline the points where they may not be accurate or can introduce errors. I am, however, rigorous in criticizing archaeological results. I agree with David Warburton: "...it is not chronological debate but methodological debate. (...) There is a fundamental problem and it must be admitted that that problem is fundamentally archaeological." (2009, 295)

The problem of absolute chronology is not just a physical problem. Apart from the absolute and relative physical values (in Newtonian and quantum mechanics), time possesses a philosophical meaning which can vary in different periods, regions and societies, including our own. (Klontza-Jaklova 2011). Problems with chronology cannot be solved by physical science alone. It is also a part of human history and is one of the dimensions wherein human lives are realized. We need solutions to answer the historical questions we ask but we need to test our methods, their validity and accuracy.

One could argue that the problem of 120 years offset between the possible dating scales is not significant for the Late Bronze Age or that we should resign ourselves to this problem because, at present, it looks as though we are not in a position to find convincing arguments or reach consensus. However, I cannot agree with such opinions. Archaeology, as a part of the humanities, tries to explain the interactions between people, societies and their environments, the evolution and changes in their ways of thinking and understanding of the world around them, or us. We even try to define the regularities of human actions and interactions throughout time across the Earth. In this understanding of and approach to archaeology the time frame is crucial, even, or indeed especially, in the Late Bronze Age, when a large part of the Mediterranean was organized in states with characteristics