

SLIDE 1

Good morning. Today I am presenting an analysis and critical evaluation of Lindy Crewe's paper 'Feasting with the dead? Tomb 66 at Enkomi'. This paper tackles very vital aspects of Bronze Age Cypriot society: mortuary rituals and elite identity.

Enkomi is a very important Bronze Age archaeological site and modern village in Northern Cyprus. As Louise Steel mentions in 'Enkomi and Egypt: Exploring the third space', Enkomi is a thriving cosmopolitan hub where new material values and social practices were shared, exchanged and experienced between local Cypriots and other peoples. The British Museum excavated the site, which included around a 100 tombs, in 1896 and naturally, two-thirds of the finds from the tomb were allocated to the British Museum and a third to the Cyprus Museum. The article pulls from a volume published by the British Museum called 'Excavations in Cyprus' which was published in 1900, but also draws on the field notebook of excavators, such as Percy Christian, the work of Veronica Tatton-Brown and the subsequent excavations by the Swedish and the French, which totals the tombs excavated to 185.

Lindy Crewe makes a conscious effort to break away from the ways of 19th century archaeologists, who often approached archaeological sites simply, by taking an interest in artefacts that were seen as wealthy or worthy, and ignoring artefacts that were deemed unimportant such as local pottery. Crewe's objective is to reconstruct the physical ritual acts that were performed inside the tomb.

Her research question explores how grave goods and spacial organisation can reveal information about ritual acts and belief systems during an economically exciting time at Enkomi. Over the next 20 minutes, I will be delving into the complex data of Tomb 66, while also pulling from other academic research into feasting and funerary rituals of Bronze Age Cyprus.

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To fully understand the importance of Tomb 66, it is important to explore the broader socio-political and economic environment of the Late Bronze Age Cyprus.

This era experienced a shift from an isolated and rural island to being well connected with urban centres. One of these urban centres was Enkomi, which is situated on the eastern coast of the island, and became an important site for international trade.

In this paper, Crewe draws from Louise Steel's work, who describes Late Bronze Age Cyprus as a vibrant 'third space'. Third spaces are cosmopolitan hubs where different cultures, values, beliefs and material practices intersect, and not just a place where two cultures intertwine.

Cyprus was positioned between palatial societies of the Hittites in Anatolia, Mycenaean Greece, New Kingdom Egypt and the Levant. Within this network, it allowed the Cypriots to trade their raw materials for luxury goods and to absorb the ideological concepts of other cultures.

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Before delving into Tomb 66, we must look at the environment in which much of the data was collected and recorded. In 1896, the British Museum excavated around a 100 tombs in the Enkomi Region during the Turner Bequest expedition. The campaign resulted in a volume named 'Excavations in Cyprus' and its purpose was to illustrate and describe a representative sample of the "important finds" that were excavated at Enkomi. Unfortunately, by modern standards, this volume and the excavation is highly problematic. With the "important finds" being mostly items of

raw value, such as gold, silver and bronze, many “uninteresting” items such as local pottery was left unrecorded.

To form a fuller picture of funerary practices at Enkomi, Crewe draws from the work of Veronica Tatton-Brown as well as the original handwritten field notebooks of Percy Christian, who was the excavator on ground in 1896. Crewe manages to explore questions surrounding funerary rituals and feasting activity by looking at museum records, analysing text and notes, even though the original data is compromised.

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Let us look at the data. Out of all the tombs excavated by the British Museum in 1896, Tomb 66 represents the wealthiest and most intact tomb recorded. Unlike other nearby tombs that have been looted or damaged by natural causes, Tomb 66 serves as a time-capsule of Bronze Age funerary activity.

As you can see here, the concentration of materials is staggering, especially the concentration of gold items. The field notebook records 283g of gold weight, although Crewe explains that the figure is closer to 325g as it did not include the gold pin, the gold encased bead or the gold bowl which was attached to its mount. Alongside this goldwork, there were fine copper ware, semi precious stones and faience vessels.

Although the data is focused on wealthy tomb gifts, Crewe makes sure to focus on the importance and relevance of the diversity of items. The assemblage contains local utilitarian vessels as well as exotic and luxury items which were placed to project status to the funeral attendees.

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One of Crewe's most acute interpretations involves the biographies of objects within Tomb 66, and focusing on the how the grave gifts were treated at the moment of interment. In traditional summaries, the scattered beads would be listed as 'necklaces', although Percy Christian's notebook states that the beads were found scattered and individualised on the tomb floor. It is also a possibility that the beads were scattered on purpose during a ritual, and weren't interred as a part of a complete set. This is called ritual fragmentation and is a theory of modern archaeology where by breaking a precious item during a ritual, the living are not just destroying wealth but are transforming it, with the broken pieces linking the living to the dead.

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With regards to the physical space of the tomb, Crewe reconstructs the layout to understand its structural purpose. The field notes describes a large underground rectangular cut chamber. The tomb is measured as approximately 11ft in length and 8ft wide, with three flat stones as the roof, and a stone platform along the end opposite the door.

Crewe suggests one of the most intriguing details of the tomb within the field notebooks is the presence of five copper nails driven into the chamber walls. In past reports, they have been dismissed as being structural items or for the use of tools. Crewe reinterprets them as being functional features. It is possible that they are for the use of organic offerings or for decorative textiles, to transform a dark space into a lavish chamber.

The distribution of artefacts also supports this theory of life within the chamber. There are clay bowls and a clay lamp, which suggests that the tomb was actively lit by living people. There is also evidence of furniture which could be used to replicate life above ground, perhaps making the chamber an intentionally built space for hospitality, such as a banqueting hall.

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To fully understand the purpose of this chamber, Crewe explores the cultures of the Levantine coast. She draws links between the funerary actions of Enkomi and the actions of Near Eastern urban centres such as Ugarit, Minet el-Beida and Qatna.

In these cultures, cuneiform texts document a funerary ritual called kispum. The kispum was a formalised funerary feast where the living would physically enter and interact with the tombs of their ancestors. They would partake in feasting, sharing food with the dead, as well as pouring libations and conversing. They believed that this secured blessings of the ancestors but also to secure political power.

However, there is a distinction between Enkomi's feasting and the kispum of the Levant. At sites such as Ugarit, tombs were built with infrastructure for the dead. This included vertical clay pipes designed to channel liquid libations from the surface into the chamber. This suggests that kispum could have been a ritual performed from outside of the tomb. The tombs in Enkomi on the other hand, possesses no external piping.

Although the wider settlement of Enkomi boasts advanced drainage grids and wastewater systems, they are not included in any of the tombs. This suggests that any ritual feasting that was performed at Enkomi was performed inside of the tomb. Rather than pouring liquids into the tomb from the surface, the drinking and pouring would have been carried out within the chamber. The tomb would become an indoor venue where it is possible to connect with your ancestors through a multitude of funerary rituals.

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To prove that ritual feasting occurred within the tomb, it is important to look at the direct physical evidence of consumption, which is ceramics and food waste. Within Tomb 66, there is an exceptionally high proportion of pouring and drinking vessels. Crewe notes the significant amount of local Cypriot Base Ring Flasks and White Slip bowls alongside imported Mycenaean flasks.

Many of these vessels feature elongated spouts with some exhibiting depictions of animals. This implies that these are not ordinary kitchen pots, but they are used as status-driven tools for theatrical pouring and the consumption of liquids.

Although animal bones were not found in Tomb 66, other tombs in Enkomi which were excavated by the French and the Cypriots have presented evidence of sheep, goat and cattle bones, which seemed to have been routinely deposited alongside the drinking and serving vessels. Some of these bones bear butchery marks, suggesting that the meat was consumed during the interment. The presence of drinking vessels and animal bones side by side is solid evidence for the act of ritual feasting in Enkomi tombs during the Bronze Age.

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Now, it's time for the critical evaluation of Crewe's paper. What are the strengths of her methodology? One of her greatest strengths is the ability to move away from processual summaries that focus on the amount of grave goods. Crewe has taken the incomplete data of the 'Excavations in Cyprus' and has turned Tomb 66 into a dynamic and humanistic space that is lost in the records of 20th-century archaeology.

She presents convincing theories on how the emerging elites of Enkomi use mortuary tombs as a way of guiding the community through a period of intense urbanisation and change. By adopting Near Eastern kispum, it has given the families a way of framing their new found wealth within a traditional system of ancestral respect.

Also, the way Crewe draws from Percy Christian's field notebooks to make sense of the recorded data is impressive. The paper has shown that both modern archaeological tools and paper archives can coexist and be as useful as each other.

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However, as mentioned earlier, the limitations of the data must be addressed. Due to Crewe being bound to the records from the 1896 excavation, there are major gaps that can not be filled.

The absence of any organic residue makes it increasingly hard to confirm whether any liquids or food were consumed within the tomb, and if so what kind. The presence of organic residue would halt any questions regarding whether feasting did or did not happen, as the presence of vessels only suggest an element of feasting, it is only possible to present an educated guess.

The lack of stratigraphic and soil sampling data makes it incredibly difficult to determine how long a tomb was open for. Without the modern excavation tools, it cannot be said how long the feasting went on, how often and for how long the tombs were open for, and how much time there was between interments.

As the 1896 excavators focused on grave gifts, they largely ignored any human skeletal remains. As they were not collected, archaeologists are unable to find out more information on the interred. They cannot determine the sex, age, health or geographical origins of the skeletal remains. This information would be able to give us a fuller picture of who was buried within these tombs.

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This leads onto the broader debate within modern archaeology. How to balance interpretations of processual data with modern scientific data? This paper shows that it is possible to provide detailed and important analysis even when some data is missing or when scientific testing is impossible.

Artefacts lose around half of their interpretive value when taken from context, as it is impossible to note its stratigraphic location and its context with regards to other finds.

Crewe's work is a great example of interpretive framework that can be used to understand modern excavations and scientifically controlled excavations, especially in the wider Mediterranean.

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To conclude, Lindy Crewe's analysis of Tomb 66 at Enkomi is an important and informative piece of spatial and mortuary archaeology. Although there are certain limitations to the dataset, the careful research of archival papers allow her to present the complex and active life of Bronze Age Cyprus.

Crewe provides clear evidence that feasting with the dead was a cross-cultural tool that was used to express political power and spiritual communication. This ritual was an important part of the development and urbanisation of Enkomi, during its intense transition into a place of status, wealth and power.

Crewe reminds us that tombs were not only a way to hide the dead, but they were a place of celebration, ritual and unity.

Thank you for listening. Do you have any questions?

