

ENGENDERING CYPRIOT ARCHAEOLOGY: FEMALE ROLES AND STATUSES BEFORE THE BRONZE AGE

BY

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Abstract

Recent excavations in Cyprus are beginning to yield evidence concerning the structure of pre-Bronze Age society, although little attention has been given to female status and gender roles during the fourth and third millennia B.C. In this paper female status is considered from the perspective of women's roles in pottery production, microlite exchange, and fertility ritual during the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Preliminary results suggest that the monolithic notion of "female status" cannot be supported by the evidence at hand, and that a multiplicity of statuses were held by women as society became increasingly complex. Contextual evidence from sites of the Chalcolithic period demonstrates close associations between women and the production/exchange of ceramic vessels and microlite pendants. In addition, widespread manufacture of pottery figurines attests to the development of fertility rituals as a means of coping with high rates of infant mortality. With the development of sedentary agriculturally-based economies, women may have forfeited some of their former central roles in food production; but by the same token they contributed fundamentally to the creation and development of other economic and religious spheres.

INTRODUCTION

Gender roles and female status have become important focal points for feminist and post-processual archaeologists, as witnessed by the increasing numbers of books and articles devoted to these topics in recent years.¹ The re-evaluation of androcentric conceptions of sex-based division of labor during the Paleolithic, for example, has already exerted a decisive impact upon the interpretation of early hunting and gathering societies.² The role of women in the formation of prehistoric state societies has been the subject of several important papers, and increasing emphasis is being placed upon the role of women in the economies of prehistoric stateless societies.³ Many recent gender studies are based upon contextual analyses of artifactual and non-artifactual material; the main objective is not to "find women" in the archaeological record—a task which is no less difficult than finding men—but to scrutinize the evidence, incomplete and recalcitrant as it often is, for traces of behavioral patterns that throw the dynamics of gender relations into relief. In any investigation, we can answer only those questions we have chosen to ask. The point, then, is to ask new questions.

The conspicuous lack of gender-based approaches in Cypriot archaeology is by contemporary standards a rather curious phenomenon which can be attributed to a traditional lack of scholarly interest in social theory rather than to the absence of written records or readily identifiable "female" artifacts. Although it is hoped that the publication of a recent international conference, *Early society in Cyprus*,⁴ will serve as a point of departure for new, socially-based approaches to our understanding of the island's earliest civilizations, it is nonetheless indicative of the current state of affairs within the field that none of the conference participants chose explicitly to address the question of female status or gender roles. Without little exception, in fact, the treatment of women in Cypriot archaeology has been confined to the

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I would like to thank Dorothy Lunt for providing information on the aging of human skeletal remains from Kissonerga-Mosphilia used in Table 2; and Dr. E.J. Peltenburg for his critical reading of an earlier version of this paper. Drawings of figurines were made by Gordon Thomas.

Abbreviations

ANeo	Aceramic Neolithic
CNeo	Ceramic Neolithic
LNeo	Late Neolithic
EChal	Early Chalcolithic
MChal	Middle Chalcolithic
LChal	Late Chalcolithic
RW	Red-on-White ware

¹ For several important examples, see M.W. Conkey & J.D. Spector, 'Archaeology and the study of gender', *Adv. Archaeol. Method and Theory* 7, 1984, 1–38; I. Hodder, *Reading the past: current approaches to interpretation in archaeology*, Cambridge 1986; *idem*, *The domestication of Europe*, Cambridge 1990; and *Engendering archaeology: women in prehistory*, eds. J.M. Gero & M.W. Conkey, Oxford 1991.

² See *Woman the gatherer*, ed. F. Dahlberg, New Haven 1981; and L.M. Fedigan, 'The changing role of women in models of human evolution', *Ann. Rev. Anthropol.* 15, 1986, 25–66.

³ I. Silverblatt, 'Women in states', *Ann. Rev. Anthropol.* 17, 1988, 237–460 (with references); see also contributions by J.M. Gero, R.P. Wright, E. Brumfiel, and P.J. Watson & M.C. Kennedy in *Engendering archaeology: women in prehistory* (supra n. 1).

⁴ *Early society in Cyprus*, ed. E.J. Peltenburg, Edinburgh 1989.

description and interpretation of female anthropomorphic figurines. It was this pronounced gap in the archaeological record that Paul Åström addressed in a paper several years ago at an international conference on Cypriot archaeology in Gothenburg.⁵ In order to demonstrate the contributions made by women to the development of complex society in Cyprus, we need to consider not only superstructural phenomena such as ritual activity and supernatural belief, but the more mundane activities of day-to-day existence, since the images of women projected within the religious sphere are often refracted, not reflected, by women's actual economic and social position within society. As noted in the paper by Åström mentioned above, the role of women in Cypriot archaeology is potentially a vast subject; approaches to the subject likewise numerous, and many classes of artefacts can be taken into consideration. I would like to offer this brief paper as a preliminary response to Åström's call for research on this important topic, and as a tribute to his long-standing contribution to all aspects of archaeology in Cyprus.

Despite the absence of gender studies in Cypriot archaeology, we are fortunate to have recourse to the results of several recent excavations which over the course of the last twenty years have yielded, and are continuing to yield, detailed evidence of habitation and burial customs from scientifically excavated strata (see map *Fig. 1*). These are the excavations of the French team (director A. Le Brun) at Aceramic Neolithic site of Cape Andreas-Kastros and, currently, at the Aceramic/Ceramic Neolithic site of Khirokitia-Vounoi; the Vasilikos Valley Project (director I. Todd) at Aceramic/Ceramic Neolithic Kalavassos-Tenta and Chalcolithic Kalavassos-Ayious; the Lemba Archaeological Project at Neolithic/Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Kissonerga-Mosphilia, Early Chalcolithic Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, and Chalcolithic Lemba (director E.J. Peltenburg); and Peltenburg's previous excavations at Ceramic Neolithic Ayios Epiktitos-Vrysi. To these we should add the much earlier endeavors of Dikaïos at Khirokitia, Sotira-Teppes and

Erimi-Pamboula. Dikaïos stands out among an earlier generation of archaeologists in Cyprus for his thorough and methodical methods of excavation, and for the careful records and judicious results which are still instrumental today in any discussion of Cypriot prehistory.

THE ECONOMIC BASIS

The villages of Neolithic and Chalcolithic Cyprus were horticulturally based, consisting of communities of simple farmers who cultivated small-scale plots without the aid of the plow and who had begun to domesticate certain selected species of mammals. Paleobotanical remains have provided evidence for increasing variety of wild and cultivated plant types throughout the period: emmer, einkorn, lentils, wheat and two-row hulled barley have been recorded at the Aceramic sites of Khirokitia, Cape Andreas and Kalavassos-Tenta; wild figs at Cape Andreas; olives and grapes at Late Neolithic Vrysi. The botanical record also has some evidence to indicate the growing instances of cultigens with the passage of time; at Lemba, for example, bread wheat, vetch, and six-row cultivated barley have been identified.⁶ Gathering was probably never totally abandoned at these early sites, and it is still common today in rural areas for items such as capers, mushrooms and snails.

The evidence of mammalian fauna demonstrates parallel developments in farming techniques, for there is a marked increase in domesticated species of mammals, notably the pig in the west and caprids elsewhere, with the passage of

⁵ P. Åström, 'Approaches to the study of women in ancient Cyprus', in *Acta Cypria: acts of an international congress on Cypriote archaeology held in Göteborg on 22-24 August 1991*, Part 2 (SIMA-PB, 117), ed. P. Åström, Jonsered 1992, 5-8.

⁶ S. Colledge, 'Comments on the plant remains', in *Lemba Archaeological Project I: Excavations at Lemba-Lakkous 1976-1983* (SIMA, 70:1), ed. E.J. Peltenburg, Göteborg 1985, 297f.

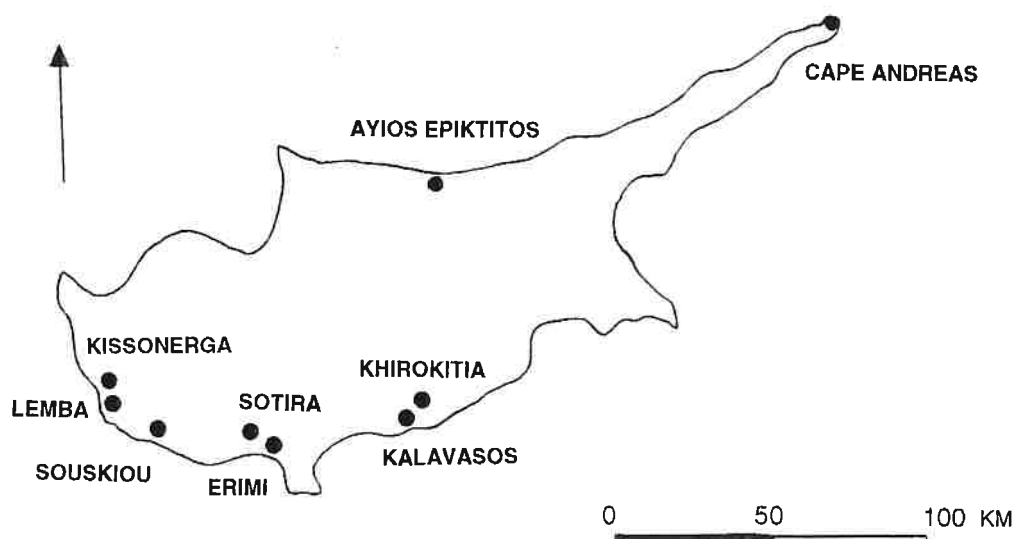


Fig. 1. Map of Cyprus showing locations of principal sites mentioned in text.

time. At the same time, there appears to have been a steady decline in the exploitation of traditional managed/hunted species, in particular the fallow deer, *Dama mesopotamica*.⁷ Statistics calculated by Croft of faunal remains at several sites of the Ktima lowlands show that the faunal patterns noted at Lemba are paralleled at the regional level and preliminary results from sites in other regions in Cyprus appear to indicate the recurrence of these patterns island-wide.

Two other aspects of settlement at this time are relevant to the present discussion and thus deserve note. First is the horizontal shifting of settlements. Shifting settlement patterns help to account for the shallow stratigraphy observed at many prehistoric sites in Cyprus and resulted in short-lived occupational sequences and shallow stratigraphical deposits. This phenomenon may be attributable to horticultural practices developed as a result of the cultivation of plants in nutrient-poor soil.⁸ The second aspect of the settlement pattern for the periods in question is the noticeable formation of sites into groups or clusters. The sites clustered in and around the modern villages of Kalavassos in the east and Lemba in the west are typical well-documented examples. The possible correlations between the cluster phenomenon and patterns of shifting cultivation and evolving settlement hierarchy during the Chalcolithic need further investigation. Whatever the reasons for shifting settlements and settlement clusters, however, they serve to characterize the initial stages of agriculture and sedentary life on the island as provisional at best.

SUBSISTENCE STRATEGY AND FEMALE STATUS: A FALSE CORRELATION?

Subsistence strategy serves as a useful point of departure for an assessment of gender roles and statuses since many anthropologists today account for cross-cultural variations in female status through correlation with differential patterns of economic production. According to the standard interpretation, female status tends to be "high" in hunter-gatherer and horticultural societies where women contribute substantially, but not exclusively, to the collection or production of food resources. Here, gender relationships constitute but one facet of a relatively egalitarian social structure similarly characterized by low levels of social stratification, the absence of formal hierarchical offices, and a minimum of personal ownership of property or goods. With the advent of intensive cultivation, permanent towns and cities, and the development of social and political hierarchies, female status is believed to have undergone a rapid and dramatic decline. Upper echelons in hierarchical structures such as political and religious offices tended to fall into the control of men, and it became the business of men to produce and exchange goods, defend property, and wage warfare. As a consequence, women were obliged to forfeit their previous, central roles in economic production and ultimately lost a voice in the important political and social workings of the community. According to this view, the evolution of complex society witnessed the gradual emergence of separate

gender-based spheres of activity. Female participation in subsistence activities shrank to the confines of household tasks and production became largely a matter of reproduction; male and female roles became sharply differentiated, with "woman/nature" eternally opposed to "male/culture".⁹

Gender studies since the mid-1970's have begun to erode the traditional anthropological view, however.¹⁰ A generalized view of "female status" now appears a simplistic concept that can no longer adequately explain differential and often contradictory gender roles within single societies.¹¹ Recent work among the Hua, one of the extremely male-dominated cultures of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, provides a powerful example. The existence there of male cults that secretly covet female power and make manifest deep-rooted beliefs in female superiority is but one instance of the multiplicity of statuses actually held by women in most societies.¹² The wide range of statuses and social identities observed by ethnographers here and elsewhere is now being regarded as an important function of gender ideology as a socially constructed phenomenon. If the concept of female status cannot be defined monolithically even within a single culture, universal notions of "female status" and simple correlations to subsistence strategy can no longer be plausibly entertained.

What factors, then, *can* explain differential patterns of male and female roles? In a comprehensive study of female status in pre-industrial societies, Whyte considered ninety-three societies and hundreds of correlations in an attempt to answer just that.¹³ His results demonstrated a high degree of independent variation in aspects of female status—so high, in fact that he termed "inappropriate" any ethnological comparisons of "female status" per se.¹⁴ Although no single factor in the study could be isolated as a prime determinant of the overall status of women in a given society, one cluster of factors emerged that appeared to exhibit strong correlations with several specific aspects of female status. In societies which practiced intensive plow agriculture and/or large scale herding of animals, Whyte noted significantly lower levels of female domestic authority, a lesser degree of ritualized female solidarity, and greater restrictions on women's sexual freedom.

⁷ P. Croft, 'The mammalian fauna remains: summary and conclusions', in *Lemba Archaeological Project* (supra n. 6), 295f.

⁸ N.P. Stanley Price, *Early prehistoric settlement in Cyprus: 6500–3000 B.C.* (BAR-IS, 65), Oxford 1979, 70–77.

⁹ S. Ortner, 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?', in *Woman, culture and society*, eds. M. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, Stanford 1974, 67–88.

¹⁰ C. Mukhopadhyay & P.J. Higgins, 'Anthropological studies of women's status revisited: 1977–1987', *Ann. Rev. Anthropol.* 17, 1988, 461–495.

¹¹ *Beyond the second sex: new directions in the anthropology of gender*, eds. P.R. Sanday & R.G. Goodenough, Philadelphia 1990.

¹² A. Meigs, 'Multiple gender ideologies and statuses', in *Beyond the second sex: new directions in the anthropology of gender* (supra n. 11), 99–112.

¹³ M.K. Whyte, *The status of women in preindustrial society*, Princeton 1978.

¹⁴ Whyte (supra n. 13), 116.

Returning to our economic portrayal of Cyprus before the Bronze Age, we might begin by exploring a corollary of Whyte's results—not with the premise of high "female status", but rather with the hypothesis that women in the earliest societies on the island possessed relatively high levels of domestic authority and ritual female solidarity, and that few restrictions were placed on their choices of sexual partners or husbands. Gradually, with growing social complexity during the third millennium B.C., female prerogatives in these areas may have begun to erode as new social identities emerged that were in keeping with changed economic circumstances.

In order to test the validity of Whyte's correlations or indeed to propose an alternative model, we must examine the archaeological record for specific evidence of gender roles as they emerged and developed during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. This will be undertaken by considering some of the evidence for women's contribution to economic production and exchange; human skeletal evidence as it relates to differential life expectancies of men, women and children; and symbolic evidence of women's roles in reproductive ritual. Key to an understanding of gender roles in all of these areas is the eschewing of monolithic, static conceptions of "status" and the search for evidence which might be indicative of a multiplicity of statuses, both in space and through time. This involves recognition of multiple gender roles for women in a single community or among contemporary communities as well as an appreciation of changes in the construction of gender roles within a social context of increasing complexity.

WOMEN AS CULTURAL AGENTS: THE EVIDENCE OF CERAMICS

We cannot hope in a brief introductory article to consider the role of women in all aspects of the island's prehistoric economy. Discussion has therefore been limited to the contribution by women to the manufacture and distribution of two very different products, pottery vessels and picrolite pendants. The former, consisting largely of coil-built bowls and jars for everyday use, are found in great numbers and in a wide variety of contexts from the Ceramic Neolithic onward. The latter, pendants made of a soft bluish-green stone known as picrolite, are much rarer, rare enough perhaps to be deemed luxury items. Differences in the production, distribution, use and access to these two classes of artifacts can illuminate various aspects of the relationship between gender roles and economic production during the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. In both cases it is assumed that women played a central role in production and/or exchange. Although it may never be possible to prove this positively, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to justify its adoption as a working hypothesis.

When pottery began to be produced in Cyprus at around the middle of the fifth millennium B.C., women would already have been involved in long-standing traditions of craft and tool production which included such items as bas-

kets, clothing, stone tools, and stone vessels. As with the earliest ceramics, these products were manufactured domestically as part of small-scale household industries for private use rather than as part of market economies in which goods are mass produced and exchanged or sold for cash. Pottery production thus took its place among the more traditional crafts, but its impact was more far-reaching. Among the advantages provided by the adoption of ceramics were greater adaptability to daily needs through an increase in potential forms, greater ability to store and preserve surplus food, large-volume storage of water, greater variety and efficiency in food producing techniques, and even improved health.¹⁵

Although a considerable degree of time, energy and skill would have been required to become a skilled potter, there is little need to postulate professional, full-time status for the makers of these relatively simple hand-made wares. Ethnographic evidence bears that out and evinces a clear preference for production at this level by women, who would have been in the position to accommodate it into the schedule of their daily activities more easily than men. Evidence of domestic pot-making—ochre on grinding stones, pottery burnishers, possible firing pits near houses—is recorded at many sites of the period, and the strength of the domestic basis of pottery production on the island is still felt today among the few remaining traditional potters in the villages of Kornos and Phini, all of whom are women.¹⁶

During the earliest phases of ceramic production on the island, only a limited number of shapes were produced; chief among these were bowls, jars and holemouth vessels.¹⁷ The repertoire of shapes expanded somewhat during the Early Chalcolithic period when a number of new forms appear: platters, flasks, bowls with tubular spouts, and coarse ware trays.¹⁸ Then, beginning at about the middle of the third millennium (the start of the Late Chalcolithic

¹⁵ D. Arnold, *Ceramic theory and cultural process*, Cambridge 1985.

¹⁶ Techniques of chalcolithic potters have been outlined in D. Bolger, 'From typology to ethnology: techniques of the Erimi potters', *RDAC* 1986, 22–36; for an ethnoarchaeological study involving close observations of modern Cypriot potters, see G. London, 'Ethnoarchaeological evidence of variation in Cypriot ceramics and its implications for the taxonomy of ancient pottery', in *Cypriot ceramics: reading the prehistoric record*, eds. J. Barlow, D. Bolger & B. Kling, Philadelphia 1991, 221–236.

¹⁷ See chapters on Khirokitia, Sotira and Troulli in P. Dikaios & J.R. Stewart, *SCE IV.1A: The Stone Age and Early Bronze Age in Cyprus*, Lund 1962; for Ayios Epiktitos-Vrysi, see E.J. Peltenburg, *Vrysi: a subterranean settlement in Cyprus*, Warminster 1982, figs. 70–82; for published information on ceramics from Kalavassos-Tenta, see S. Kromholz, 'A preliminary report on the earlier prehistoric ceramics of the Vasilikos Valley', in *Studies in Cypriote archaeology*, eds. J.C. Biers & D. Soren, Los Angeles 1981, 17–55.

¹⁸ For Kalavassos-Ayios, see Kromholz (supra n. 17) and D. Baird, 'Ceramics', in *Excavations at Kalavassos-Ayios*, ed. I.A. Todd, Göteborg forthcoming; for Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, see E.J. Peltenburg, *Recent developments in the later prehistory of Cyprus* (SIMA-PB, 16), Göteborg 1982, 51–66; and for early chalcolithic pottery from Maa-Paleokastro, see D. Bolger, 'Chalcolithic Maa: the pottery', in V. Karageorghis & M. Demas, *Excavations at Maa-Paleokastro 1979–1986* (Text), Nicosia 1988, 290–300.

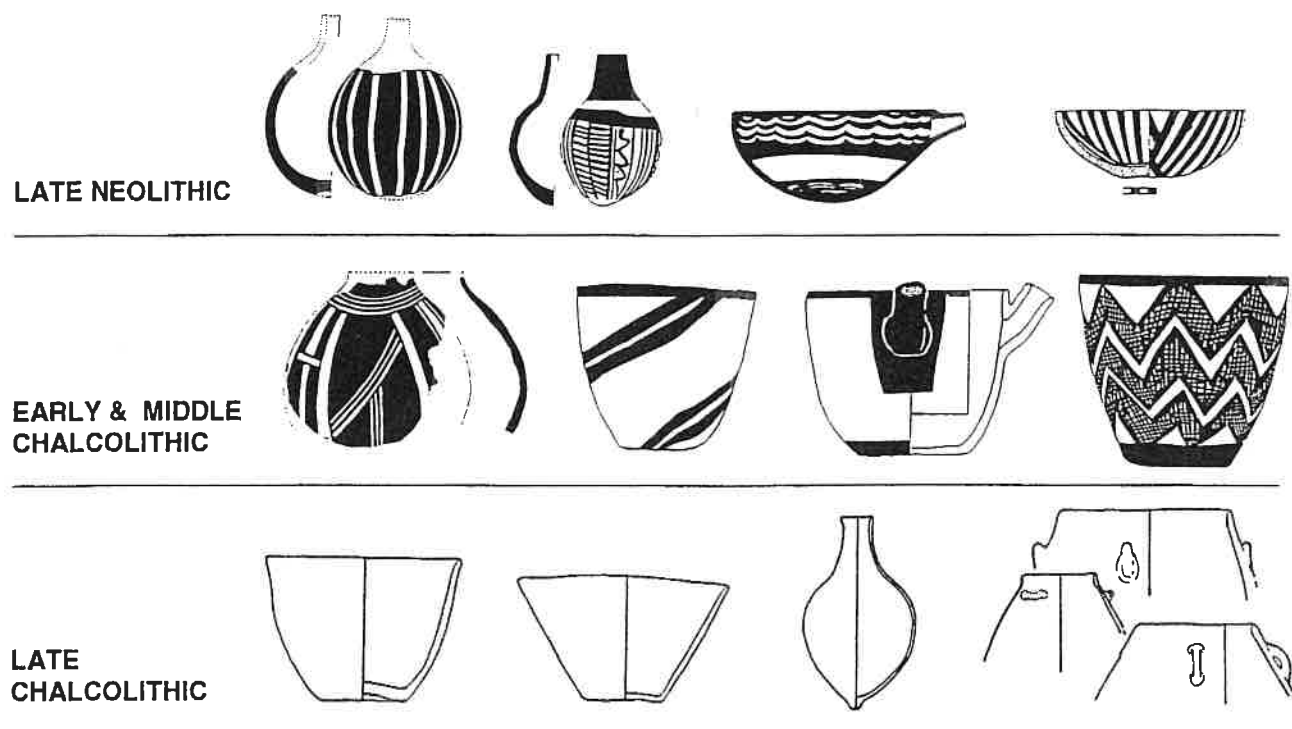


Fig. 2. Pottery of Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic Cyprus.

period), there appears to have been a significant expansion in morphological types. Perhaps the most important new type from a social standpoint was the large holemouth storage jar. Whereas the largest vessel at Sotira was a holemouth jar 48 cm high,¹⁹ pottery vessels at Lemba, Mosphilia and Erimi during the Middle and Late Chalcolithic include vessels of close to a meter in height.²⁰ Greater vessel size indicates a growing demand for surplus storage and perhaps the beginnings of redistributive economies. Building 3 at Kissonerga-Mosphilia, apparently a storeroom containing empty pots and storage vessels, may provide evidence that pottery itself was being produced in surplus for redistribution during the Late Chalcolithic period.²¹

Other technological advances in pottery production at this time include LChal vessels with thinner walls and harder, sturdier fabrics which were far more durable than the softer fabrics of LNeo-MChal; exploitation of new clay and temper sources and evidence of improvements in firing techniques; greater standardization of vessel sizes and wall thicknesses; increased levels of production; and innovations in coil building techniques for the construction of larger vessels. Taken together, the technical advances in vessel manufacture over the period 4500–2500 B.C. represent considerable achievements and the ability of the practitioners of the craft to develop and innovate according to societal needs, and suggest the advent during the mid-third millennium of domestic workshops and craft specialization.

The manufacture of elaborately painted fine-wear pots during the Middle Chalcolithic period may be significant, especially as many of them have been found in structures that are larger than neighboring structures or that contain special features lacking in others. Examples are Erimi Hut IXA: 19;²² Lemba Building 1;²³ and Kissonerga-Mosphilia

Building 206.²⁴ This appears to mark a departure from Neolithic traditions where, for example, Le Brun reports uniformity of building size at Khirokitia, and Todd has expressed skepticism about the possible correlation of building sizes with status or wealth at Kalavassos-Tenta since relevant buildings, such as the structure 14 complex, lacked sufficient accompanying artifacts with which to interpret building functions.²⁵ There is thus some indication that a relatively unstratified social structure during the Neolithic period was beginning to undergo change during the Chalcolithic. In ceramic terms, increasing social hierarchy would have created a demand for the production of “special” pots, which in turn would have fostered the development of craft specialization.

Changes in methods of vessel production are paralleled by marked developments in decorative styles during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (Fig. 2). Analysis of motif selection and design construction on Red-on-White ware,

¹⁹ P. Dikaios, *Sotira*, Philadelphia 1961, pl. 87.8.

²⁰ For Erimi, see P. Dikaios, ‘Excavations at Erimi-Pamboula, 1933–1935’, *RDAC* 1936, pl. 26.19; for Lemba-Lakkous, see *Lemba Archaeological Project* (supra n. 6), figs. 47, 56; for preliminary notes on pottery from Kissonerga-Mosphilia, see D. Bolger, in E.J. Peltenburg & Project members, ‘Excavations at Kissonerga-Mosphilia 1986’, *RDAC* 1987, 6f.

²¹ See Bolger (supra n. 20), 6f.

²² Dikaios (supra n. 20), 19.

²³ E.J. Peltenburg in *Lemba Archaeological Project* (supra n. 6), 35, 317.

²⁴ Peltenburg & Project members (supra n. 20), fig. 1.

²⁵ A. LeBrun, *Fouilles récentes à Khirokitia (Chypre) 1977–1981*, Paris 1984; *Vasilikos Valley Project 6: Excavations at Kalavassos-Tenta*, vol. 1 (SIMA, 71:6), ed. I.A. Todd, Göteborg 1987, 81.

the principal fine ware of these periods, demonstrates some of the ways in which both artistic ideals and communal ties may have developed. Although the generic, geometrical design motifs that comprise the painted style preclude assignment to individual hands or even workshops, evidence of pottery styles can provide insights into ceramic production and exchange which the more utilitarian evidence of vessel shapes and clay composition cannot.

Preliminary study of design structures on RW vessels of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods has shown increasing complexity and diversity with the passage of time.²⁶ The early regionally-based pattern of the Neolithic, whereby painted (Red-on-White) pottery was favored in the north, and monochrome (Combed) ware predominant in the south, was succeeded by a period of relative island-wide uniformity during the Early Chalcolithic. Motifs on RW of that period consist of simple positive and reserve bands which occur primarily on the bodies of flasks and on the interiors of open bowl shapes. During the MChal, the number of elements comprising designs increases significantly (there are twenty-five frequently recurring motifs at Lemba and Mosphilia, for example). Moreover, it is virtually impossible to classify MChal RW design structures on a region-by-region basis, since sites within a region, and even within the same cluster, do not necessarily produce similar design structures: local preferences appear to override wider cultural influences. Design structures on RW vessels from Mosphilia, for

example, appear to correspond more closely with those at distant Erimi than with those of nearby Lemba. This is significant, for stylistic links may signify actual affinities between groups, and through exogamy local design conventions may have been transmitted to distant settlements.²⁷ These developments may in turn have accelerated the construction of inter-regional exchange mechanisms. Women, who are more likely to have "married out" of their native villages, should not simply be regarded as pawns in an increasingly intricate game of patriarchal politics, but as agents in the transmission of important cultural knowledge and technical skill and, as we shall soon propose, in the formation and maintenance of exchange networks.

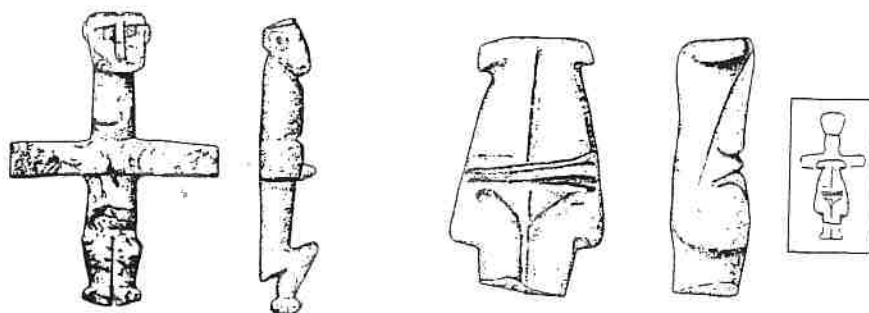
WOMEN AND ECONOMIC EXCHANGE: THE EVIDENCE OF PICROLITE

Picrolite is a soft, pale green or bluish-green stone found among the serpentinite regions of the island where it formed as the result of hydrothermal alteration of ultrabasic rocks. As these rocks are eroded, picrolite is carried down from the

²⁶ D. Bolger, 'The evolution of the chalcolithic painted style', *BASOR* 282–283, 1991, 81–93.

²⁷ P. Rice, *Pottery analysis: a sourcebook*, Chicago 1987, 191–200.

PICROLITE



CERAMIC

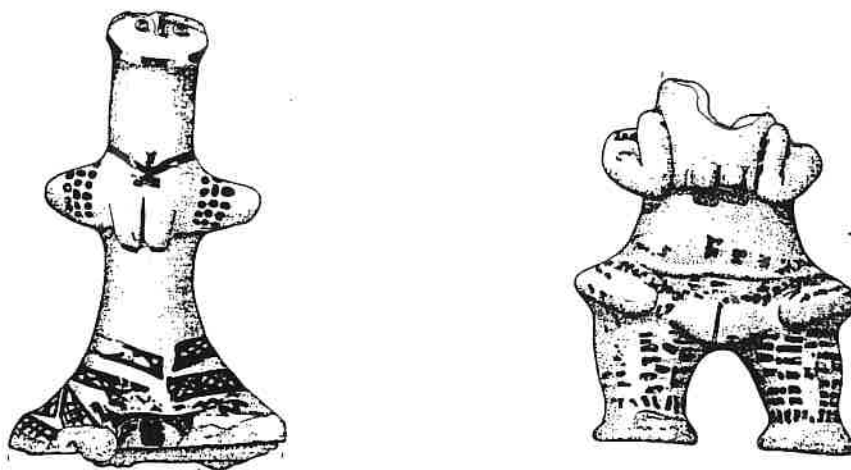


Fig. 3. Anthropomorphic figurines from Lemba-Lakkous (picrolite) and Kissonerga-Mosphilia (ceramic).

mountainous regions in riverbeds, such as the Kouris by Erimi, where rounded nuggets can easily be picked up today, as no doubt they could have been by individuals in prehistoric times.²⁸ The softness of this material (3.5 Mohs scale) and its attractive color made it ideal for the carving of small pendants and figurines manufactured in great numbers during the Chalcolithic period. The discovery of several beads at the site of Akrotiri-Aetokremmos may extend the first known use of the material back to the eighth millennium, but the contexts of these finds must be secured before we can be certain. During the Aceramic Neolithic, at sites such as Cape Andreas,²⁹ Kalavassos-Tenta,³⁰ and Khirokitia-Vounoi,³¹ simple pendants of curvilinear and elongated shapes are known, and at Khirokitia there is intriguing evidence of intra-mural caches or hoards (Le Brun personal communication). Judging from the numbers of artifacts recorded at Neolithic sites, its use at that time was limited, especially when compared to its occurrence during the Chalcolithic period when the range of morphological types appears to have risen dramatically.³² Chief among the new Chalcolithic types was the anthropomorphic cruciform variety, well known from sites such as Souskiou, Lemba and Kissonerga.

The similarity between the picrolite cruciform figurines and female figurines made of clay has long been recognized. Recently they have been interpreted as birthing figurines on the evidence of the Kissonerga ritual deposit, in which pottery figurines representing women in various stages of pregnancy, including a figurine giving birth, occur.³³ That these pendants were worn by women is deduced from the evidence of female figurines from a number of sites which are shown wearing small anthropomorphic pendants. A further link between the pendants and childbirth may be evinced by the frequent burial of the pendants with infants and children. Thus, evidence from Chalcolithic sites in the west demonstrates strong contextual links between pendants, women, children, and childbirth.

One need not take a great leap forward to the proposition that women were closely involved with the procurement of picrolite and the manufacture of at least some picrolite pendants. As with pottery production, the manufacture of picrolite would logically have taken place as part of household-based units of production for the purpose of private use. The occurrence of the overwhelming majority of pendants, as well as numerous picrolite wasters, in general habitation levels supports this proposition. Unlike the construction of a pottery vessel, the manufacture of a pendant would not have required a considerable amount of time or skill and could have been accomplished by just about anyone who could obtain the raw material. Unlike the raw materials of pottery, however, the supply of picrolite was limited and remote and its procurement is unlikely to have been achieved by all groups within society. Indeed, recent evidence from graves at Kissonerga suggests the use of pendants as burial items in the graves of selected children and argues for their use as prestige items by privileged groups.³⁴

Who comprised these groups? We eagerly await the results of osteological work planned in the near future for the sexing of skeletal material from the Lemba and Kissonerga

sites in order to secure tighter correlations between picrolites and gender among adults, but the contextual evidence already cited suggests strong links between women and picrolite pendants. At the very least, there is no reason to exclude women either from the production of picrolite pendants or the procurement of the raw material, presumably from the Kouris riverbed. Numerous instances of female control of or participation in exchange networks are attested in the ethnographic record, and female participation is likely to be higher where reciprocity and redistribution are primary modes of exchange, as for example has been observed among the Enga, the Kewa, and the Trobrianders.³⁵ Likewise, the evidence suggests that women in early Cypriot society, or at any rate certain women—were instrumentally involved in the production of this highly valued commodity.

LIFE EXPECTANCY AND BIRTHING RITUAL BEFORE THE BRONZE AGE

The importance—and risk—of childbirth in prehistoric communities can be measured from a very different set of data, namely the incidence of mortality for infants and childbearing women. Health risks to mothers in developing nations today have been dramatically portrayed in a recent World Health Organization report citing infection and other post-partum complications as the primary cause of death for up to 50% of third-world women.³⁶ Data available on average life expectancies of adults and children during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods are unfortunately limited, owing to the unfinished or unpublished state of relevant osteological analyses (see *Tables 1* and *2*). Apart from Dikaïos' excavations, in fact, there is little published information available on the gender of deceased adults; or on their estimated ages of death. On the basis of preliminary analysis, however, several patterns emerge which are pertinent to the present discussion.

The first major trends suggested by the statistics in *Tables 1* and *2* are the roughly equivalent life expectancies

²⁸ D. Bolger, *Erimi-Pamboula: a Chalcolithic site in Cyprus* (BAR-IS, 443), Oxford 1988, 14f.

²⁹ A. LeBrun, *Un site néolithique précéramique en Chypre: Cap Andreas-Kastros*, Paris 1981.

³⁰ I.A. Todd, 'Vasilikos Valley Project: third preliminary report, 1978', *JFA* 6, 265–300.

³¹ P. Dikaïos, *Khirokitia*, Oxford 1953.

³² E.J. Peltenburg, 'Local exchange in prehistoric Cyprus: an initial assessment of picrolite', *BASOR* 282–283, 1991, 107–126.

³³ E.J. Peltenburg & Project members, *Lemba Archaeological Project II.2: A ceremonial area at Kissonerga* (SIMA, 70:3), Partille 1991.

³⁴ E.J. Peltenburg, 'Birth pendants in life and death: evidence from Kissonerga grave 563', in *Studies in honour of Vassos Karageorghis*, ed. G.C. Ioannides, Nicosia 1992.

³⁵ D.K. Feil, 'Women and men in the Enga tee', *American Ethnologist* 5, 1978, 263–279; L. Josephides, *The production of inequality: gender and exchange among the Kewa*, New York 1985; A.B. Weiner, *Women of value, men of renown: new perspectives in Trobriand exchange*, Austin 1976.

³⁶ Reported in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 5 Juni 1991, 1.

Table 1. Life expectancies of adults, Neolithic & Chalcolithic periods.*

Period/Site	Average Life Spans		Fem Adult Burials	
	(Male)	(Female)	(%)	n =
NEOLITHIC				
Khirokitia-Vounoi (Dikaioi)	31.2	31.1	23.0	6
Sotira-Teppes	38.6	31.0	25.0	2
CHALCOLITHIC				
Kissonerga-Mosphilia	27.4	21.9	25.0	17

* As of this writing, only the few sites listed here have provided relevant published data; age/sex information of material from Kalavassos, Lemba, and Le Brun's excavations at Khirokitia are still unpublished; the results from Kissonerga are preliminary and based on Domurad (1986) and recent pre-publication work.

Table 2. Neolithic & Chalcolithic: data on infant/child mortality.

Period/Site	Infant Deaths*		Child Deaths	
	(%)	n =	(%)	n =
NEOLITHIC				
Cape Andreas	0	0	25	1
Kalavassos-Tenta	39	7	11	2
Khirokitia-Vounoi (Dikaioi)	0	0	4	1
Khirokitia-Vounoi (Le Brun)	31	9	6.8	2
Sotira-Teppes	0	0	12.5	1
CHALCOLITHIC				
Kissonerga-Mosphilia	27.5	19	25	17

* Infant = less than two years old.

of males and females during the Aceramic Neolithic period and a marked decline in female life expectancy during the Ceramic Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Evidence is needed from other sites to corroborate the trend, but there clearly exist sizeable gaps at Sotira-Teppes (7.6 yrs) and Kissonerga-Mosphilia (5.5 yrs). Male life expectancy increased from the Aceramic to Ceramic Neolithic, and then subsided to a slightly lower level during the Chalcolithic, but female life expectancy during the Chalcolithic dropped sharply—from 31+ yrs at Neolithic sites to about 22 yrs at Kissonerga. Some of the discrepancies can no doubt be ascribed to the small sample sizes; nevertheless, a decline of nine or more years in women's average life spans from Aceramic Neolithic to Late Chalcolithic (to which most of the Kissonerga skeletons belong) cannot easily be explained, and an average age of twenty-three implies that many women died during childbearing years. Statistics on infant mortality from several of these sites indicate a decline from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic (close to 40% of all skeletons at Aceramic sites were infants, whereas infants formed just 30% of the burial population at Lemba). Even so, 30% is no mean figure and signifies a continuing threat to community survival prior to the Bronze Age.

If the data presented here can be validated by future work, they will bear important implications for the role of women in pre-Bronze Age society and for the development

of birthing ritual during the Chalcolithic period. Taken jointly, the serious risks to the lives of childbearing women and the high incidence of infant and child mortality may have provided the impetus for the manufacture and use of the numerous birthing figurines and other related objects. During the Neolithic period such figurines are not attested; similarly, we have taken note of the absence of microlite anthropomorphic pendants in Neolithic contexts. The figurines that do date to the Neolithic are schematic and abstract; at times they show signs of gender (male and female) although no specific iconographical references to childbirth are apparent. In contrast, a number of sites of the Chalcolithic period have produced multiple examples of what we now know to be birthing figurines.³⁷ Although most examples, including those from Erimi, Lemba and Souskiou, are fragmentary, the recently discovered deposit at Kissonerga has established beyond a doubt that these artifacts were manufactured and used for birthing rituals.³⁸

Who made these objects? Who had the right to use them? From a technical standpoint the pottery objects in the deposit occur in fabrics readily classifiable as MChal RW, although the painted style of some of the pots is not in keep-

³⁷ Peltenburg & Project members (supra n. 33), fig. 8.

³⁸ See E. Goring, 'The anthropomorphic figurines', in Peltenburg & Project members (supra n. 33), 39–60.

Table 3. Size and longevity of major sites of the Neolithic & Chalcolithic periods.

Site	Period(s)	Chron. Range	Area (m ²)	Stratigraphic Depth (m)
Kalavassos-Tenta	ANeo/CNeo	?–5500/4600	1600/3000	3.7/?
Cape Andreas	ANeo		1700	.6–.9
Khirkitia	ANeo/CNeo			
Ayios Epiktitos-Vrysi	CNeo–? EChal	4500–3900	5000	6.0
Sotira	CNeo	4500–4000	4000	1.5
Kalavassos-Ayious	EChal	3500	12,000	2.3
Kissonerga-Mylouthkia	EChal	3700–3500	60,000	2.5
Lemba-Lakkous	MChal–LChal	3500–2500	30,000	1.5
Erimi-Pamboula	MChal	3500–3000	150,000	5.5
Kissonerga-Mosphilia	CNeo, EChal, MChal, LChal, EBronze	4200–2300	120,000	3.0

ing with standard motifs and designs from non-ritual contexts.³⁹ The standard repertoire of vessel shapes in Unit 1015, however, and the generic similarity of fabrics and decoration on the figurines would appear to suggest that they were made by regular potters rather than by a specialist group of craftspersons. Since it has been proposed above that women were the principal manufacturers of pottery vessels, and since the iconographical details of the objects within the deposit relate directly to events within the female life-cycle, it is highly likely that the figurines were both made and used by women. The pattern of occurrence of the figurine types in the south of the island replicates the pattern of RW design links cited earlier and once again may be based on kinship ties.⁴⁰ Recent ethnological interpretations of reproductive rituals which ascribe exclusively to men the manipulation and control of ritual objects for political purposes may therefore be far from universal.⁴¹ In the light of the evidence we have just described, can we justifiably exclude women from this process?

It has been suggested that the location of the Kissonerga ritual deposit in a public outdoor area between the largest buildings of the MChal settlement may be significant for the determination of who was involved in the ceremonies.⁴² Little is known about the degree of private ownership or the acquisition of property in Chalcolithic society, but the burial of special objects in the vicinity of special buildings may indicate differential access to wealth and the growth of social hierarchies. Ethnographic analogy would provide no reason to exclude the participation of women in such hierarchies, which in pre-industrial societies as a rule are based on descent groups rather than on alliances of unrelated individuals. If special objects such as birthing figurines did in fact achieve the level of status symbols, there is compelling reason to believe that the elite groups who succeeded in acquiring those symbols of status were comprised of women as well as men.

In conclusion, women in Chalcolithic society appear to have enjoyed high levels of domestic authority and ritual solidarity—thus fulfilling two of Whyte's three cluster factors. What emerges from the preliminary results presented in this brief report, however, is the need to avoid a mono-

lithic treatment of "women". With the development of complex society, it appears that not all women were "created equal", and recognition of a multiplicity of statuses must be coupled by the recognition of a multiplicity of ranks.

One of the chief results of those developments is the possibility that women of all ranks may have forfeited much of their traditional input in key areas such as communal subsistence and political decision-making. Yet, even as this occurred, some women appear to have been gaining status in other spheres: economically, through production of pottery and acquisition of picrolite pendants; and ritually, through the possession and use of birthing objects. These developments may in the end have provided adaptive strategies which contributed to greater settlement stability during the Chalcolithic period. Sites that display evidence of greater material wealth (was measured by quantities of fine wear, opulence of buildings, numbers of picrolites) and which have yielded the finest and greatest quantities of birthing figurines (Erimi-Pamboula, Kissonerga-Mosphilia) are also marked by greater stratigraphic depth, longer chronological expanse, or larger areal extent (*Table 3*). Further work is needed to test the validity of these correlations, but the preliminary work presented here provides compelling arguments for the placement of women into the mainstream of the economic, political and social developments during the fourth and third millennia that led ultimately to the complex state societies of the Cypriot Bronze Age.

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³⁹ D. Bolger, in Peltenburg & Project members (supra n. 33), 32–34.

⁴⁰ Bolger (supra n. 26).

⁴¹ K.E. Paige & J.M. Paige, *The politics of reproductive ritual*, Berkeley 1981.

⁴² E.J. Peltenburg, 'The beginnings of religion in Cyprus', in *Early society in Cyprus* (supra n. 4), 108–126.

