

Figurines and figurative vessels at Early Cypriot Bellapais *Vounous*

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Abstract

When James Stewart and his team excavated at the Early Cypriot necropolis at Bellapais *Vounous* they uncovered a wealth of material that shaped our understanding of this formative stage of the island's Bronze Age. Amongst this material was a curious collection of figurative objects, including elaborate vessels decorated with animal and object protomes, and life-size clay models of inanimate objects. These generally well-preserved and visually attractive objects have since become emblematic of Early Cypriot art and ideology and, since many forms are still known exclusively from this influential context, of the site of *Vounous* itself. This study draws on a comprehensive program of iconographic and contextual analyses to offer a new interpretation of this fascinating yet enigmatic corpus. Calling on a diverse range of evidence, including spatial analysis within the cemetery and the study of Early Cypriot figurative material from elsewhere on the island, it presents a re-evaluation of the function and significance of the figurines and figurative vessels from *Vounous*. The chapter concludes by presenting the implications of these new interpretations for our understanding of the changing nature of burial rituals at *Vounous* and the manifestation of individual and group identities within the cemetery.

Introduction

This volume stands as testament to the numerous contributions made by James Stewart to many different sectors of archaeology on Cyprus and beyond. For those researchers whose focus is the rich body of prehistoric iconography on the island, however, Stewart's name will forever be synonymous with the Early Bronze Age necropolis at Bellapais *Vounous* (Stewart & Stewart 1950). At the time of his excavations in 1937–1938, it was already clear that the site would be particularly important for our understanding of Early Cypriot (EC) society. Now, almost 80 years later, *Vounous* remains of unparalleled

significance, not least for our knowledge of figurative imagery during this period. Almost all the provenanced figurative objects known from the EC I–II periods (ca. 2250–2100 BC) originated at *Vounous* and the vast majority were uncovered by Stewart's excavations. It is no exaggeration to state that without his endeavours at the site, our understanding of the figurative landscape of that period and our ability to use that material to explore EC society would have been severely reduced. This chapter pays tribute to Stewart's contribution by presenting the results of a new, systematic investigation into the figurative corpus of EC I–II. After outlining the nature of the surviving material, it discusses patterns within the corpus and considers their symbolic and ideological implications for our understanding of EC society, both across the island and at *Vounous*.

EC I–II figurative objects

There are 50 provenanced figurative objects known from the EC I–II period on Cyprus. The material and form of an additional 22 unprovenanced examples suggest that they are contemporary. The majority of these (43) are large vessels decorated with miniature figures in the form of animals or inanimate objects, usually placed around the rim or on the shoulder (hereafter cited as decorated vessels). There are also 27 independent figurines in the form of life-size representations of inanimate objects that would normally be found in other materials (hereafter cited as object models). In addition, there are two freestanding, miniature representations of animals (hereafter cited as zoomorphic figurines). These three broad categories and their sub-types were defined as part of a recent study of all figurative objects from the Cypriot Bronze Age (Knox 2012). Each type in use during EC I–II is described below.

Figurative objects from *Vounous*

The rich corpus of figurative material from EC I–II *Vounous* comprises 45 objects, including 29 decorated

vessels and 16 object models (**Table 1**). The types into which these objects fall are described below with reference to Stewart's own categorisation in *Swedish Cyprus Expedition* Volume IV, Part 1A (Stewart 1962) and the final volume of the posthumous publication of Stewart's *Corpus of Cypriot Artefacts of the Early Bronze Age* (Webb & Frankel 2012).

The decorated vessels were all produced in Red Polished ware and can be divided into two major types:

(1). *Decorated deep bowls*: These large, deep bowls stand an average of 19cm high on flat bases and support multiple, outward-facing zoomorphic protomes and discs around their rims (**Fig. 1**). Some examples also have a hilt-shaped projection (or handle), pointing diagonally upwards from the side of the vessel, just below the rim. All are covered with incised geometric decoration over the body of the vessel and the projection (Stewart 1962: 344–345, Type XXV Aa–c, Ba–b; Webb & Frankel 2012: 108–109, figs 22–24, pls 16–17).

(2). *Bowl/animal vessels*: These are usually bowls with long, cylindrical stems, although a single example has only a high ring base. Miniature bowls and animal figurines or protomes alternate around their rims. Incised geometric decoration is also present on the bodies and stems of the vessels and the rim projections (Stewart 1962: 345, Type XXV Ca–c; Webb & Frankel 2012: 109, pl. 18).

In addition, there are several examples of protomes or miniature figurines that have become detached from their parent vessel (Stewart & Stewart 1950: 102, 142, 162–163, pls XI.c, XCI.e, LXXVla–e, XXIVa; Karageorghis 1991: 102, 150–151, 153, G.2–3, X.6a–b, XI.13a–b, XI.14a–c, pls LVII.2–3, CXVI.2–4), one decorated vessel that could not be categorised

due to its fragmentary state (Karageorghis 1991: 153, XI.12, pl. CXVI.1), and a further three singular decorated vessels which do not lend themselves easily to categorisation (Stewart & Stewart 1950: 79, 319, pls VII.15, XXXVIIIa.19, LXXXVe, XCIIb, fig. 233.19). Finally, an ovoid jug with a quadruped on either side of the handle (Stewart & Stewart 1950: 217, pls LI, XCII.e) is an early example of a decorated jug type which continues into EC III–MC I at *Vounous* and elsewhere.

The object models fall into three, generally self-explanatory types:

(1). Knife/sheath models depict metal knives and their (likely) leather sheaths and are usually found together (**Fig. 2**). Knife models are solid with a flattened, triangular hilt and protruding hilt guards. A cylindrical shaft leads to a leaf-shaped blade with prominent midrib. Incised geometric decoration covers the hilt, hilt guards and shaft but the blade is plain. Sheath models are hollow cones covered in incised geometric patterns. Most also have horizontal or vertical ridges and their open ends are elliptical in section (Stewart 1962: 347, Type XXXVII.1–9, figs 90.7–9, 91.1–7; Webb & Frankel 2012: 118, fig. 24.9–10, pl. 20.4).

(2). Spindle models are long solid cylinders, an average of 20.5cm in length, tapering to a point at one end. They are covered with incised geometric decoration and are similar to an extant bronze spindle of Early–Middle Bronze Age date from Cyprus (Webb 2002) (Stewart 1962: 347, Type XXXVI, a–b, fig. 90.6; Webb & Frankel 2012: 117–118, fig. 24.8, pl. 20.3).

(3). Horn models are hollow and roughly conical with geometric decoration. Their open end is circular in section and two small holes are pierced through the edge just below it. Most curve to some extent and the

Decorated vessels		Miscellaneous		Object models	
Type	Tomb/no.	Type	Tomb/no.	Type	Tomb/no.
Decorated deep bowls	81B.9	Zoomorphs and protomes detached from decorated vessels	33.20	Knife/sheath models	29.51
	87A.16		33.21		45.14 and 15
	90.7		96.6		51
	91.14		96.7		114.9a and b
	105.17		96.8		132.32b
	111.40		111.8		132.56
	160B.12		117 (311a)		145.6a and b
	161.18		117 (311b)	Spindle models	29.52
	161.19		160A.11		92.6
Bowl/animal vessels	111.1	Decorated vessels (indefinable)	160A.22		164B.41
	153.1		33.11	Horn models	164A.41
	160A.13		87A.15		70B.9
Decorated jug	160A.17		141.19		
	161.8		153.10		

Table 1. EC I–II figurative objects from Bellapais Vounous



Figure 1. Decorated deep bowl from Vounous, Tomb 91, no. 14 (© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge)

shape is clearly intended to imitate bull horns (Stewart 1962: 347, Type XXXVIII, A 1–4, B 1–3, C 1–7, fig. 91.8–9; Webb & Frankel 2012: 118–119, fig. 24.11, pl. 20.5).

Vounous appears to have been the epicentre of the tradition of making and using decorated vessels and object models during EC I–II. As far as is currently known, all the decorated vessel types found at Vounous were exclusive to that site and only one object model has been found elsewhere in an EC I–II context (Webb *et al.* 2009: 123, fig. 3.97). At the end of this period, decorated deep bowls, bowl/animal vessels, knife/sheath models and spindle models appear to have fallen out of use. During EC III–Middle Cypriot (MC) II, horn models and decorated jugs continued in use at Vounous but also spread to the centre of the island. The former have been found around Dhali (Karageorghis 1991: 181, WHP.Hd.2) and at Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* (Karageorghis 1991: 114, Hd.8, fig. 109, pl. LXIV.3; Brennan & Karageorghis 1999: 41, 58–61, nos 5–6, 16; Karageorghis *et al.* 2004: 78, no. 142) and the latter in the area of Marki and Kotsiatis (Karageorghis 1991: 146, 159, VIII.2–3, XII.14, pls CV.2–3, CVI.1–2, CXXVI.4; des Gagniers & Karageorghis 1976: 27–28, pl. XXIV.4).

Figurative objects from other sites

Only a handful of provenanced EC I–II figurative objects are known from sites outside the necropolis at Vounous. Early explorations by Ohnefalsch-Richter at Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* produced two animal protomes in the form of a bull and a stag, probably detached from a vessel (Brennan & Karageorghis 1999: 35–36, nos 12 and 16; University of Pennsylvania Museum,



Figure 2. Knife and sheath models from Vounous, Tomb 156, nos 6a–b (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; photo D-K. Knox)

MS.69 and MS.70). It is presumed that these were uncovered from a tomb but little detail is available on their findspots.

A single sheath model was excavated in Tomb 5 at Karmi *Palealona* on the north coast of the island (Webb *et al.* 2009: 123, fig. 3.97). This remains the only object model attested outside Vounous during EC I–II and suggests that the iconographic traditions of that site had spread to neighbouring communities (Webb & Frankel 2010: 204–206).

Two small animal figurines were recovered from the settlement at Marki *Alonia* (Frankel & Webb 2006: 157–158, table 5.2, P8455, P15432, fig 5.4). These are roughly modelled and undecorated fragments that comprise a detached horn and the body of a quadruped with horns and legs broken off. They are securely dated to Phase D (EC II) and are the only figurative objects known from a settlement context in the EC I–II period. They represent the earliest examples of a tradition of making small, simple animal figurines that continued at Marki into the MC period (Frankel & Webb 2006: 157–158).

A double-necked jug in Red Polished South Coast I ware with what appears to be a sheep (or a dog?) standing erect from the shoulder to a low bar joining the two necks, said to come from Episkopi, was acquired by the Cyprus Museum in 1935 (Stewart 1962: fig. LXXIII.3; Karageorghis 1991: 150, X.2, pl. CXL.2–3, Cyprus Museum 1935/III-4/1). This is the only provenanced example of its type but there are eight similar vessels and one fragment in the Zintilis Collection, which may also be dated stylistically to EC I–II (Karageorghis 1991: 154, 160, XI.23, XII.18–21, pls CXIX.2, CXXVII.4, CXXVIII.1–3;

Lubsen-Admiraal 2004: 58–62, nos 59–69). All are multi-necked jugs with animal figures or protomes attached to bars that join the necks and all are of Red Polished South Coast I ware, a fabric characteristic of southwest Cyprus during the Early Bronze Age. Three additional examples, also unprovenanced and in private collections, are probably of later EC or MC date (Karageorghis 1991: 155, 159, 161, XI.24, XII.12, 23, pls CXIX.3, CXXVI.1–2). There is no record of the contexts in which any of these vessels were found, but all are in very good condition and it is likely that they came from looted tombs. Although this collection of decorated multi-necked jugs is poorly documented, it bears witness to a tradition of figurative imagery in the south of the island that probably continued into the Middle Bronze Age.

The corpus of figurative objects from outside *Vounous* is limited but it is particularly useful for two reasons. Firstly, it underlines the significance of Stewart's work at *Vounous* for our knowledge of the figurative objects of the EC I–II period and, secondly, it provides a counter-balance to the wealth of evidence from *Vounous* and allows consideration of Cyprus' figurative landscape as a whole.

Regionalism and the islandwide corpus

The amount of typological and contextual information available for the figurative objects from *Vounous* greatly outweighs what is known of those from other sites. Nevertheless, when the entire corpus of figurative objects from the EC I–II period is considered, some patterns become apparent in what was chosen for depiction, how it was depicted and in their contexts of use and deposition. This section considers whether these patterns suggest regional differences in iconographic representation during this period.

On the surface, there is considerable homogeneity in three-dimensional figurative representation in EC I–II. Emphasis was placed on the miniature portrayal of animals, vessels and, at *Vounous*, the life-size depiction of tools. Anthropomorphic imagery is attested in the Philia facies by a figurine of uncertain date and provenance in the Cyprus Museum (Stewart 1962: 347, fig. 92.1; Karageorghis 1991: 45, fig. 61, pl. XVIII) and by several fragments from Marki *Alonia* (Frankel & Webb 2006: 155, fig. 5.1, pl. 50). The human form is, however, very rare in the figurative imagery of EC I–II and does not appear with any frequency until the plank figurines and anthropomorphic vessels of EC III. The only anthropomorphic representation known from the period is a figure carved in relief on the wall of the *dromos* of Tomb 6 at Karmi *Palealona*, dated to EC II (Webb *et al.* 2009: 128–134, figs 3.37–3.42, 4.38). Whilst it is possible that anthropomorphic representations existed in other, less durable media, their absence from the ceramic corpus is striking and whatever

symbolism was conveyed by figurative objects in the ceramic repertoire of EC I–II, anthropomorphic images appear to have had no part in it.

With the exception of the sheath model from Karmi *Palealona*, the depiction of inanimate objects during EC I–II is currently known only from *Vounous*. Whilst it is possible that this is an illusion caused by the large corpus of excavated material from this site, it is striking that the special association with object models continues at *Vounous* in the succeeding EC III–MC II period. One new type, the comb model (Karageorghis 1991: 45–49, pl. XIX), is found exclusively at *Vounous* and others, including horn models, which began in the earlier period are still predominantly found there (Karageorghis 1991: 114–116, pls LXII–LXIV). The longevity of this association suggests that the portrayal of inanimate objects in clay at *Vounous* represents a genuine regional peculiarity.

Similar regional preferences are also evident in the type of animals chosen for depiction. At *Vounous*, the vast majority of animals which appear in figurative representation are quadrupeds, with horned cattle in the majority (Fig. 3). What little is known of representation in the centre of the island at Marki *Alonia* and Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* also shows a preference for quadrupeds (see also Georgiou, this volume). By contrast, in the south of the island, 14 of 20 animals depicted on the decorated multi-necked jugs are birds. Ornithomorphic imagery is virtually unknown in the rest of the island before EC III. A handful of protomes in the EC I–II corpus at *Vounous* were identified as birds by Stewart but in most cases this interpretation can be called into question. The only example on a decorated deep bowl which has been identified as a bird is of particularly ambiguous

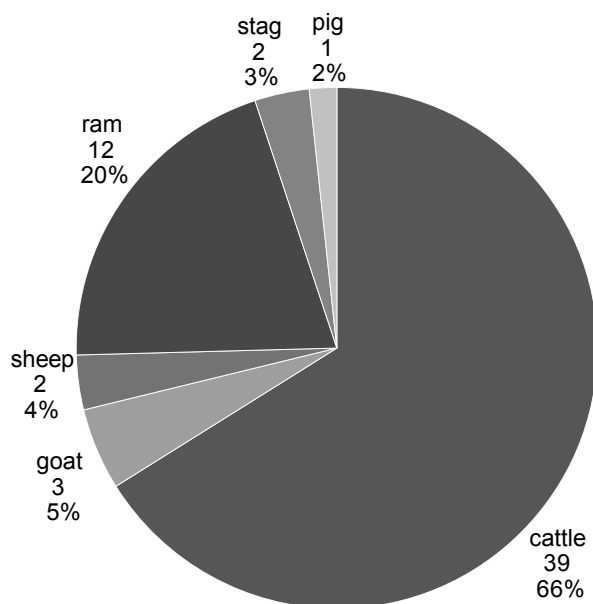


Figure 3. Proportions of animals depicted on figurative objects at EC I–II *Vounous*

shape (Stewart & Stewart 1950: 209, Tomb 160B.12, pls XXIV.12, XCIIb, XCIIa; Webb & Frankel 2012: 108, fig. 23.5). Whilst it may represent a bird, it also bears a resemblance to the upper end of a plough handle, as depicted on the well-known ploughing model from *Vounous* (Karageorghis 1991: 141–142, VII.2, pl. CII.1). Similarly, the ‘bird heads’ on some of the so-called ‘cult chalices’ (e.g. Webb & Frankel 2012: 109, pl. 18.3) may in fact be projections used to fasten strings to suspend the vessel. At the very least, the rarity of birds in the EC I–II *Vounous* corpus demonstrates a lack of interest in depicting them at this site. The high incidence of birds on decorated multi-necked jugs from the south, however, suggests a preference particular to the site or area where these unprovenanced vessels originated.

These regional preferences may be matched by differences in contexts of deposition. All but two of the extant figurative objects appear to have been deposited in burials. This is certainly the case for all those excavated at *Vounous* and the very good condition of the unprovenanced examples suggests that they also come from tombs. The zoomorphic figurines from Marki *Alonia*, however, were discovered in a settlement and attest to the use of figurative objects outside the burial arena at that site.

We need to remember, however, that very few settlement deposits of EC I–II date have been excavated and published. The recovery of the two zoomorphic figurines at Marki *Alonia* is the result of thorough investigations at that site (Frankel & Webb 1996, 2006). Excavations at other settlements of this period may produce similar objects, attesting to a wider tradition of making and using figurative objects in domestic contexts. Nevertheless, these small undecorated zoomorphic figurines are very different to the large elaborate figurative vessels and objects deposited in the tombs at *Vounous*. This once again suggests considerable inter-site disparity in the nature of iconography and the way in which it was used in domestic and burial contexts.

The fact that no figurines were found in EC I–II levels at Sotira *Kaminoudhia* (Swiny *et al.* 2003), the only other extensively excavated settlement of this period, should perhaps caution against projecting a pattern of hidden figurine use in domestic contexts across the island. At Sotira *Kaminoudhia*, EC I–II burials also produced no evidence for the use of figurative objects and it is possible that there was no figurative tradition at this site during this time. Similarly, the contemporary cemeteries at Marki are heavily looted but careful investigation of what remains showed no signs of the use of figurative objects outside the settlement during EC I–II (Sneddon 2002).

It is impossible to be certain what, if any, figurative objects were used by those buried at *Vounous* as part of their daily lives. Nevertheless, the figurative corpus of the EC I–II periods clearly demonstrates that different areas and sites across the island were using iconography in distinctly local ways. Examples from

Marki *Alonia* attest to the use of small, undecorated animal figurines in a settlement context. In the south, the multi-necked jugs of Red Polished South Coast ware bear witness to the use of both horned animal and bird imagery, probably in a funerary setting.

These regional preferences in iconographic representation may reflect highly localised ideologies among dispersed and largely disconnected regional communities across Cyprus. A very different picture emerges in the succeeding EC III–MC II period when variations on island-wide traditions of representation were used to express local group identities to external communities. During EC I–II, the distribution of similar figurative object types is restricted to one or several closely related sites. In EC III–MC II, on the other hand, communities across the island made use of common forms of representation, most notably plank-shaped and related representations of the human form. These occur variously as independent figurines in clay and stone, as miniature figurines attached to decorated vessels and as two-dimensional figures incised and in relief on vessels.

Communities across much of Cyprus adopted plank-shaped and related imagery but each chose to represent the trope in locally specific forms (Knox 2012: 139–154). Most vessels adorned with miniature plank-shaped figures, for example, have been found at *Vounous*, which, as already noted, had a strong tradition of making and using decorated vessels. Similarly, most stone figures have been found in the south at sites such as Kidasi *Foutsia* (Lubsen-Admiraal 2009), a region connected with the Chalcolithic manufacture of stone figurines and pendants and the only area to continue the production of representative imagery in stone on a substantial scale into the Bronze Age (see e.g. Swiny 2003: 233–238 on the high concentration of worked picrolite at Sotira). Innovation in the composition of plank and related figurines is particularly apparent at sites such as Marki *Alonia* and Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* in the centre of the island, where 13 of 19 examples with modelled arms and seven of eight examples with relief decoration have been found (Karageorghis 1991: 77, 82–84, 86, 88, 91, 171, figs 79, 84, 90, Bg.8, Bi.4, 5, 10, Bj.8, 16, 17, D.3, WHP.Bj.3, pls XLVIII.4, 6, L.3, LI.5, LIII.4, CXXXVI.5; Coleman *et al.* 1996: 204, fig. 49, pl. 30; Frankel & Webb 2006: 156, P5039, P10712, P10822, P15701, P15760, fig. 5.3, pl. 50; Knox 2012: 139). Although it has been suggested that these variations are a result of chronological development (e.g. Karageorghis 1991: 93), extant examples date from the whole of the EC III–MC II period and regional preference is a more likely explanation.

These regional preferences, however, were not rigid. Two stone plank figures, for instance, are known from *Vounous* (Dikaïos 1940: 8, pl. XXXIIa) and an example with arms has been found in Limassol (Karageorghis 1991: 85, Bj.2, pl. XLIX.1). Lapithos *Vrysi tou Barba*, which seems to have been the centre

of the plank tradition, has at least one example of each identified sub-type (e.g. Gjerstad *et al.* 1934: 150; Karageorghis 1991: 128, 175, I.7, WHP.D4, fig. 115, pl. CXXXIX.2). Rather than diminish the evidence for stylistic regionalism, however, this suggests that communities were connected, with objects and probably people travelling around the island. It is this connectedness that is likely to have led to the use of iconography to display local identity during EC III–MC II. In this period, communities appear to have exploited particular stylistic preferences as visible markers of identity within a common, island-wide language of anthropomorphic imagery. In EC I–II, on the other hand, the iconographic disjunction between regions suggests that there was little interest in using figurative objects to communicate identity. Thus the figurine record supports recent arguments that communities in the north and south of the island were pursuing distinctive and separate regional trajectories during EC I–II and did not establish regular social and economic contacts until EC III (Webb & Frankel 2013).

The figurative landscape of *Vounous*

Thanks to the efforts of James Stewart and his team, the figurative object corpus of *Vounous* is the largest and best documented of the EC I–II period. When considered in a comprehensive and socially situated manner, it holds great potential to inform our understanding of life and death at *Vounous*. The following section discusses the function and significance of these figurative objects and what these suggest about ritual practice and social organisation at *Vounous*.

Symbolism and ritual practice

There is every reason to believe that the figurative objects recovered from the cemetery at *Vounous* were intended specifically for use in the mortuary arena. The condition of these objects is telling. Although many were mended from fragments, likely broken as a result of taphonomic processes that occurred after deposition, their decoration is well preserved and there is no obvious wear to suggest use prior to burial. This stands in contrast to most other grave goods of the period, which were in long-term use prior to deposition (Dugay 1996; Webb & Frankel 2010: 197), and underlines their ‘special’ nature and specific association with burial. Moreover, the awkward, fragile form, particularly of decorated vessels, and the considerable effort invested in their manufacture and decoration make quotidian use unlikely.

A practical function for object models is also difficult to conceive. It has been suggested that the horn models may have been used as vessels (Mogelonsky 1988: 256) but their heavy weight, thick walls and limited interior space make this unlikely,

and the lack of wear on both rims and suspension holes also argues against it. Object models are perhaps better understood as belonging to a tradition of ritual imitation, in which the act of creating the replica imbued it with symbolic power and its subsequent deposition in a tomb confirmed the importance both of the object and the deceased (see e.g. Ionesov 1999). Such imitations are commonly objects important in the everyday life of the community. The hilt projections on some decorated deep bowls might represent knife models or metal knives. The disc projections on the rims of decorated deep bowls have been identified as sun discs (e.g. Stewart 1962: 293; Webb & Frankel 2010: 200). Given the contemporary tradition of object modelling, however, together with the fact that they generally appear in pairs, they might equally be identified as wheels. The re-interpretation of the supposed bird protome on the decorated deep bowl from Tomb 160B as a plough handle (see above) would also fit with a tradition of the ritual representation of everyday objects in burial.

Overall, then, it appears that the figurative objects of EC I–II *Vounous* were created specifically for deposition in tombs and it is likely, therefore, that their imagery also relates to the symbolism of burial. The form of the decorated vessels may offer further clues regarding their role in funerary ritual. Many have rim decoration which appears to be deliberately self-reflexive. The decorated deep bowl from Tomb 153 at *Vounous*, for example, has four miniature decorated deep bowls on the rim (Stewart & Stewart 1950: 186, pl. LXXXIX.b; Karageorghis 1991: 154, XI.17). This decoration may refer to the parent vessel and its part in mortuary activities and the zoomorphic protomes and miniatures depicted on decorated vessels might be interpreted in a similar vein.

Figure 3 above shows the proportions of different species that can be identified on the figurative objects from EC I–II *Vounous*. It is clear that images of cattle were most popular but other quadrupeds, especially horned animals, were also present. The faunal material found at *Vounous* was not examined in detail but it appears that cattle bones were most numerous with sheep and goat also attested (Stubblings 1950). This corresponds with the proportional representation of different species on decorated vessels at the site and supports the idea that the latter portray elements of the burial ritual. Webb and Frankel (2010: 195–198) have interpreted the faunal remains as evidence for funerary feasting. Each of the animals and objects depicted on the decorated vessels, therefore, is likely to represent elements of the ritual practices which surrounded burial at *Vounous* in EC I–II.

During the following EC III–MC II period, decorated vessels continued to be deposited at *Vounous*. Many also show little or no use-wear and their often elaborate and impractical shapes suggest that they, too, were produced specifically for use in the funerary arena. The decorated vessels of this later

period depict a similar range of objects, including miniature vessels and dagger hilts, but they combine these with a strikingly different set of animals (Fig. 4). Whereas EC I–II zoomorphic imagery was dominated by quadrupeds, in EC III–MC II the emphasis shifted to the depiction of birds (Fig. 5). Birds now constitute 74% of all animals attached to decorated vessels (42 of 57 identifiable animals). This striking transformation in focus is also evident in the concurrent appearance of ‘bird askoi’ (e.g. des Gagniers & Karageorghis 1976: pl. XLVII.2).

Stewart (1962: 293) also observed an increase in ornithomorphic imagery in the later EC period and considered that it indicated a new spiritual emphasis connected to Aphrodite. Whilst it is possible that this change in iconography marks a new religious belief, it may also imply an alteration in the burial ritual depicted by these vessels. The limited faunal information available for *Vounous* shows no perceptible change in the amount or type of animal bones found inside burial chambers between EC I and MC II (Keswani 2004: 67). Small, fragile bird bones, however, are unlikely to have survived in significant numbers or to have been recognised in the rudimentary study conducted on the *Vounous* material (see Croft 2006: 275 on the difficulties of recognising bird bones). It is possible, therefore, that this iconographic shift represents an added or altered element of the burial ritual.

The beginning of EC III saw significant changes in burial practice on the north coast. There is some debate over the nature of these changes, but transformations in the treatment of corpses are evident (Webb *et al.* 2009: 239–240; Webb & Frankel 2010: 194, table 3; Keswani 2004: 42–49). At Lapithos *Vrysi tou Barba* a number of small, shallow pits appeared to pre-date many of the chamber tombs (Herscher 1975: 40). It has been proposed that these are agricultural features with no connection to the tombs (Herscher 1975: 40;

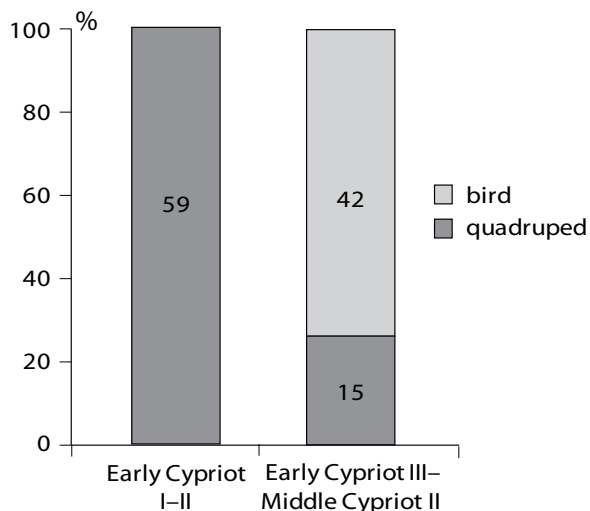


Figure 4. Proportions of quadrupeds and birds represented at *Vounous* in EC I–II and EC III–MC II



Figure 5. Decorated bowl from *Vounous*, Tomb 5, no. 16 (Karageorghis 1976: no. 40; reproduced with permission from V. Karageorghis)

Webb *et al.* 2009: 239). Keswani (2004: 45), however, has suggested that they may have functioned as temporary burial sites. She also argues that the corpse was defleshed and disarticulated prior to permanent interment within the chamber tomb (Keswani 2004: 42–49). If this was the case, this process could have been expedited by exposing the corpse to the actions of scavenging birds, perhaps in a shallow pit similar to those at Lapithos. In this context it may be noted that many of the ornithomorphic depictions on EC–MC decorated vessels have S-shaped necks and bear a strong resemblance to Cyprus’ native, crag-dwelling Griffon vulture (Morris 1985: 233).

It is evident that figurative objects at *Vounous* were intimately connected to burial symbolism during the EC and MC periods. Changes in the iconography of these objects suggest concomitant changes in the ideology and possibly also the practicalities of burial at this north coast site.

Spatial patterns and social identity

Despite the association between figurative objects and the symbolism of burial, it is important to note that their deposition was not part of any formally prescribed funerary ritual at *Vounous*. Even taking into account the effects of tomb looting and taphonomic processes, it seems that not all tombs contained a figurative object. Of the 69 excavated tombs in cemeteries A and B at *Vounous* dated to EC I–II, only 27 (39%) produced a figurative object or objects. A consideration of why certain tombs contained these objects and others did not may shed light on the way in which figurative imagery was used at this site.

Overtly, there is little to distinguish tombs that contain figurative objects from those that do not.

Tombs with figurative objects are not spatially segregated in a manner that would suggest use by certain kinship or ethnic subgroups. Nor do they stand out as a result of their size, wealth or architecture, as one might expect if they belonged to people of a higher social standing in the community. There is, however, a clear separation of particular figurative object types. This suggests, specifically, that the deposition of decorated vessels and object models was mutually exclusive as no burial contains both forms of figurative object (**Fig. 6**). Moreover, most burials (20 of 27 with figurative objects) contained only a single object type. Tomb 91, for example, contained only a decorated deep bowl and Tomb 51 only knife and sheath models. Of the seven tombs that contained more than one type, Tombs 36 and 71 were in use over a long period of time and included figurative objects from later periods, and Tombs 29, 111 and 132 were used for two or more burials and it is possible that each figurative object was part of a chronologically distinct assemblage.

Given this separation of figurative object types at *Vounous*, as well as the fact that not all burials included material of this type, it seems that figurative objects were neither part of a standard set of burial items nor selected at random. Instead, they appear to have been chosen for their relevance to individual burials. The criteria on which this choice was made are difficult to determine. Detailed examination of the skeletal remains was not conducted; thus no differentiation according to age, gender, occupation or even manner of death can be discerned. Examination of objects found with particular figurative object types shows no obvious correlations and the number of tombs containing each type is too small to allow statistically valid observations. Furthermore, the choice may have been based on unknowable factors such as the day on which the death or burial took place, the person(s)

who organised the burial or even individual taste.

The objects themselves may offer some insight. It is tempting to consider simplistic associations for the object models. Spindle models may have been appropriate for those involved in the creation of textiles, for example, or knife/sheath models for those who used such tools in everyday life. It has been proposed that knife/sheath models were deposited as a cheaper substitute for their more valuable metal originals (Morris 1985: 256; Karageorghis 1991: 113–114; Merrillees 2009). This would suggest that tombs containing object models belonged to less well-off occupants. There are several difficulties, however, with this interpretation. First, the existence in Tomb 45 of a copper alloy knife alongside a ceramic model undermines the suggestion that the ceramic objects stood in for their metal counterparts. Secondly, knife/sheath models were part of a wider tradition of object models. Whilst these and spindle models might be representations of valuable metal objects, the same cannot be said for horn models or the later models of brushes, tables and footstools that occur at *Vounous* and elsewhere.

Webb and Frankel (2010: 201) have suggested that the enactment of the burial ritual itself and the display of symbolism were primary indicators of wealth and social standing within the community of *Vounous* at this time. If this was the case, perhaps the presence of the figurative object may have been enough to determine the status of the occupant and the choice of different figurative object types may have been determined by the position of the deceased within the community. It has been suggested that the depiction of tools as replicas indicates the increasing social importance of manufacturing for status differentiation (Ionesov 1999: 89). As tools became more important economically, so did their images become more symbolically loaded. Thus it is possible that the tools

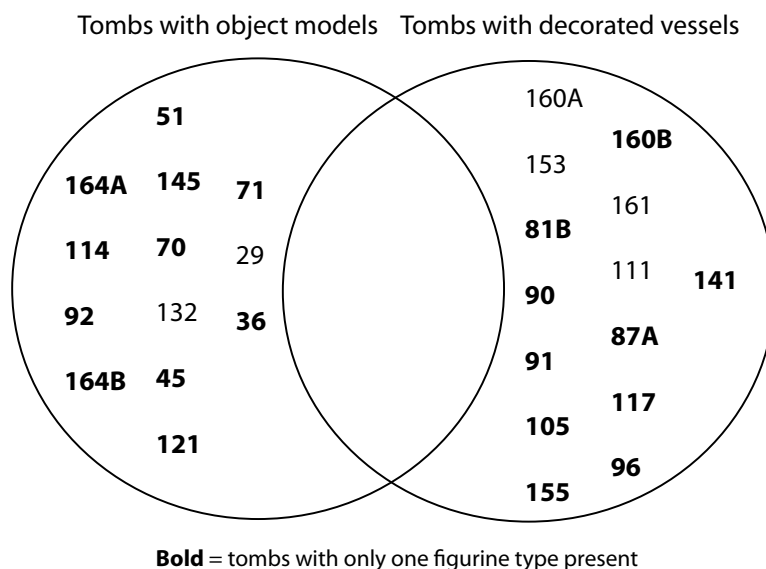


Figure 6. Diagram showing EC I–II tombs at *Vounous* containing figurative objects

of a person's trade might serve as a badge of honour at the time of his/her burial. Just as the tool itself helped that person gain social standing, the clay model may have marked their identity and status during the funerary ritual.

It is evident that the deposition of figurative objects at *Vounous* was part of a complex system of social differentiation made manifest within the burial arena. It demonstrates the desire to mark differences and social identities within the cemetery and stands in contrast to the lack of impetus to do the same elsewhere on the island (Webb & Frankel 2013: 70). The connection between figurative objects and the display of identities is evident only at *Vounous* in EC I–II and was clearly operating within a much smaller geographical focus than in later periods.

Iconographic exclusivity and the figurative legacy of *Vounous*

Vounous is frequently considered to have been of singular importance in the sociocultural development of the EC period (e.g. Webb & Frankel 2010: 200–201). But was this really the case? The figurative record of EC I–II outside *Vounous* is limited and poorly documented. Yet such evidence as does exist suggests that *Vounous* was not the only centre with a complex system of making and using figurative objects during this period. Although the two fragmentary figurines from Marki *Alonia* cannot demonstrate a developed tradition on their own, they represent the beginning

of a distinctive local practice of using small, roughly modelled quadrupeds in a domestic context which is best attested at that site in the following EC III–MC II period. Crucially, however, it is now clear that a singular, localised tradition of figurative imagery contemporary with that of *Vounous* existed at an as yet unidentified site (or region) in the Episkopi area in the south.

These variant traditions of image-making correspond well with current understandings of the regional development of Cyprus during EC I–II (Webb & Frankel 2013). In addition, the development of these traditions into EC III–MC II exemplifies the breakdown of regional boundaries and the transition towards a more integrated island society. It may be suggested that external traditions influenced changes within the figurative corpus at *Vounous* at this time. The sudden appearance of birds in EC III, for example, may reflect ideas derived from the south of the island, the only area in which ornithomorphic imagery is conclusively known in EC I–II. Much better attested is the influence of *Vounous* on the figurative landscape of the EC III and MC periods. In EC I–II a complex, local tradition of using object models and decorated vessels in burial ritual was established. The period that followed saw a significant expansion in the number and variety of figurative objects as well as the geographical spread of figurine use. *Vounous* was no longer the conspicuous outpost it once had been, yet it remained the originator of many of the new styles (Fig. 7). Comb models and a new type of

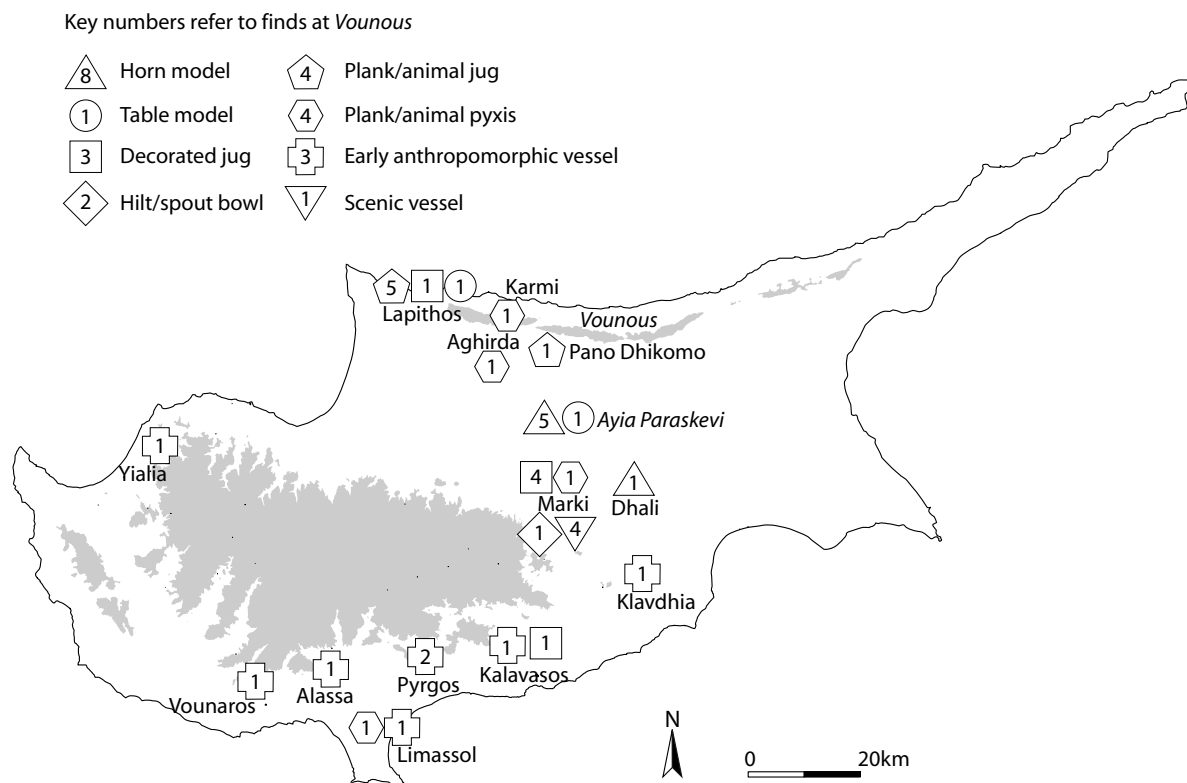


Figure 7. Map of EC III–MC II figurative objects which also occur at *Vounous*

decorated bowl with birds and miniature bowls on the rim are known only from *Vounous*; horn models and decorated jugs introduced at *Vounous* in EC I–II now appeared at sites across the island; and two new types—table models and large bowls decorated with birds and animals on the rim and hilt projections—are a clear development of the object models and decorated vessels known earlier at *Vounous*. *Vounous* also shows more variety of representation during this period than any other site on the island, as 12 of the 16 types of figurative object in use during EC III–MC II have been found there. Amidst the sweeping changes occurring in the figurative landscape of these periods, *Vounous* maintained its key position within the island’s iconographic development.

Conclusion

This study has brought together the corpus of figurative objects from the EC I–II period and explored the unique contribution of *Vounous*. Through this, it has been possible to examine one manifestation of regionalism, as well as the changing nature of burial ritual at *Vounous* and the role of this site in the development of Cyprus’ prehistoric iconography. Since none of this would have been possible without the material uncovered at *Vounous*, it is no exaggeration to conclude that the rich and complex symbolic world of Cyprus during this early part of the Bronze Age is known to us almost entirely through the work of James Stewart.

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