

Early Society in Cyprus

edited by
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EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS
in association with
THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF SCOTLAND
and
THE A.G. LEVENTIS FOUNDATION

© Edinburgh University Press 1989
 22 George Square, Edinburgh
 Set in Lasercomp Plantin
 and printed in Great Britain by
 Redwood Burn Limited,
 Trowbridge, Wilts
 British Library Cataloguing
 in Publication Data
 Early society in Cyprus.
 1. Cypriot civilisation. Archaeological sources
 I. Peltenburg, E. J. (Edgar J.)
 939'.37
 ISBN 0 85224 633 1 (cased)
 0 85224 659 5 (pbk)

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The Chalcolithic Cemetery 1 at Souskiou-Vathyrkakas

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The presentation of the discoveries of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities in the Chalcolithic Cemetery 1 at Souskiou-Vathyrkakas and their deeper meaning and significance in connection with other finds from regular and illicit excavations at the same cemetery are the main objectives of the present paper. Most of these discoveries have already appeared in various publications¹ but several details concerning certain important aspects of the material and the overall picture of the site remain for further discussion.

The Vathyrkakas Cemetery 1 lies in one of the most picturesque and impressive landscapes of the Paphos Region in southwestern Cyprus. It is ca 1.5 km southwest of the ex-Turkish village of Souskiou and 2 km northeast of Kouklia-Palaepaphos (Fig 12.1). It occupies a commanding position near the edge of a rocky plateau overlooking the step ravine of the homonymous Vathyrkakas stream and the nearby fertile valley of the Dhiarizos river. Two other Chalcolithic cemeteries have been located in the same area: Cemetery 3 on a prominent hillock at the Laona locality and ca 700 m northeast of Cemetery 1, and Cemetery 2 which is closer to the village of Kouklia and ca 400 m southwest of Cemetery 1. Opposite Cemeteries 1 and 2 a large settlement of the same Chalcolithic period has been traced, which is so far the only one known in the vicinity (*cf* Hadjisavvas 1977, Fig 2). The proximity of the three cemeteries at Vathyrkakas and Laona in combination with the architectural similarity of their contemporary tombs, lead to the plausible suggestion that they constitute a common cultural unity belonging to this settlement.

Cemetery 1 was discovered in 1951 by the British Kouklia Expedition after the excavation of three tombs of the Chalcolithic period which produced some exceptional specimens of Red-on-White pottery, two necklaces of dentalium embellished with cruciform pendants of microlite, several

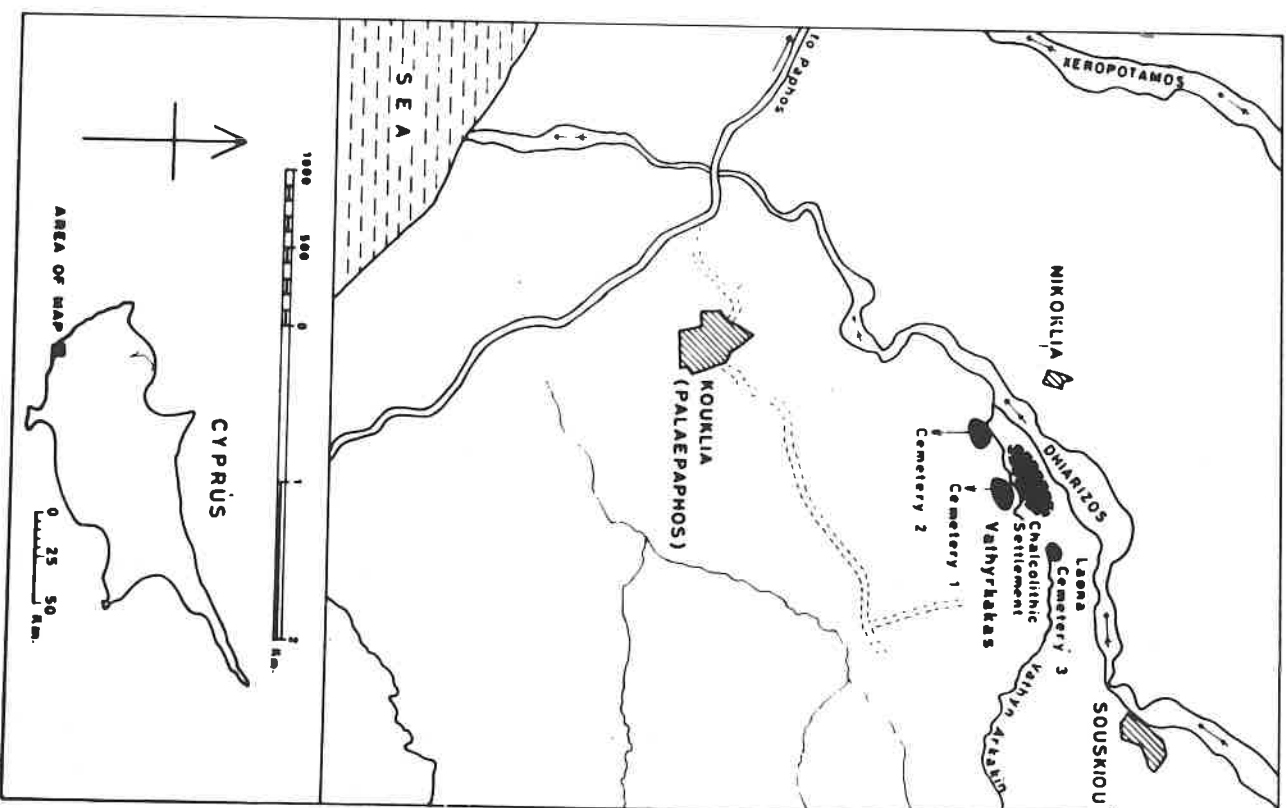


Figure 12.1 Plan of the Souskiou-Vathyrkakas area.

stone axes and a pestle (Iliffe & Mitford 1951; Mitford 1951; Iliffe 1952, 50-1).

In August 1972 seventeen rock-cut tombs, similar to those excavated by the British Kouklia Expedition, were looted in Cemetery 1. In the middle

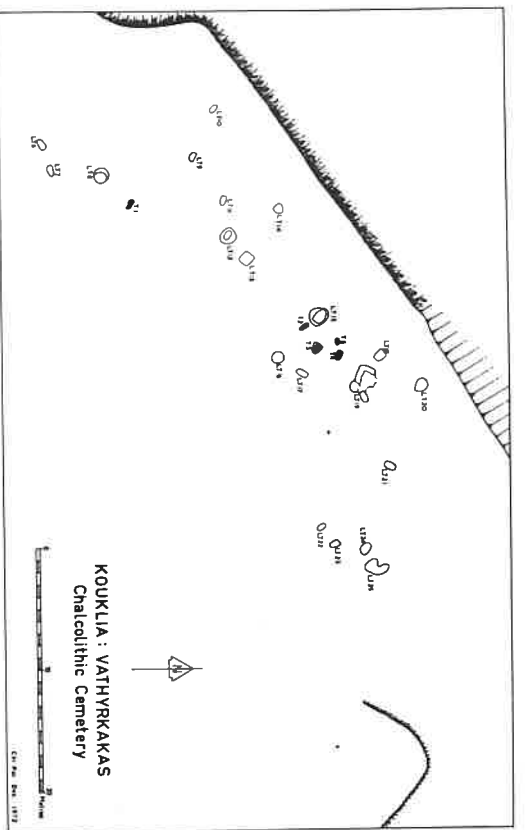


Figure 12.2 Site plan of the uncovered tombs in Cemetery 1.

of the same month all these tombs were thoroughly investigated by the German Mission at Kouklia, headed by Professor F.G. Maier, and they yielded various sherds of Red-on-White and Red Lustrous pottery and seven cruciform picrolite pendants (*Chronique* 1973, 680-1; Maier 1973, 193-4; 1974, 41-3).

The excavations of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities in the same cemetery lasted from December 4 to 10, 1972. They resulted in the discovery of five other tombs (*Chronique* 1973, 680-1). In addition to the excavation and planning of these five tombs, numbered 1-5, a separate site plan was prepared showing the exact position of all the looted and regularly excavated tombs in Cemetery 1, numbering 25 in total (Fig 12.2). Tombs 1, 2 and 3 were intact and produced several selected funerary offerings (Fig 12.3). Tomb 4 was found unfinished, having been abandoned at a depth of 50 cm and Tomb 3, apart from some fragmentary bones of a child, produced no finds at all.

Like all the others in Cemeteries 2 and 3 the excavated tombs in the Vathyrkakas Cemetery 1 are in the form of deep bottle-shaped shafts entirely cut into the hard limestone rock. Their depth varies from 1.50 m to 2.20 m and the diameter from 1.20 m to 1.50 m at the bottom and 75 cm to 90 cm at the *stomion*, which is ovoid or circular in shape. The tombs were used for one or more burials. The dead were buried in a contracted position accompanied by various offerings. After each burial the *stomion* of the tomb was sealed with a large limestone slab and small rough stones. In the fill of the intact Tombs 1, 2, and 3 thick layers of ash mixed with animal and bird bones were found, indicating the existence of certain sacrifices before burial in honour of the dead. The architectural type of the Vathyrkakas shaft tombs is so far unique in the whole of Chalcolithic Cyprus. It differs

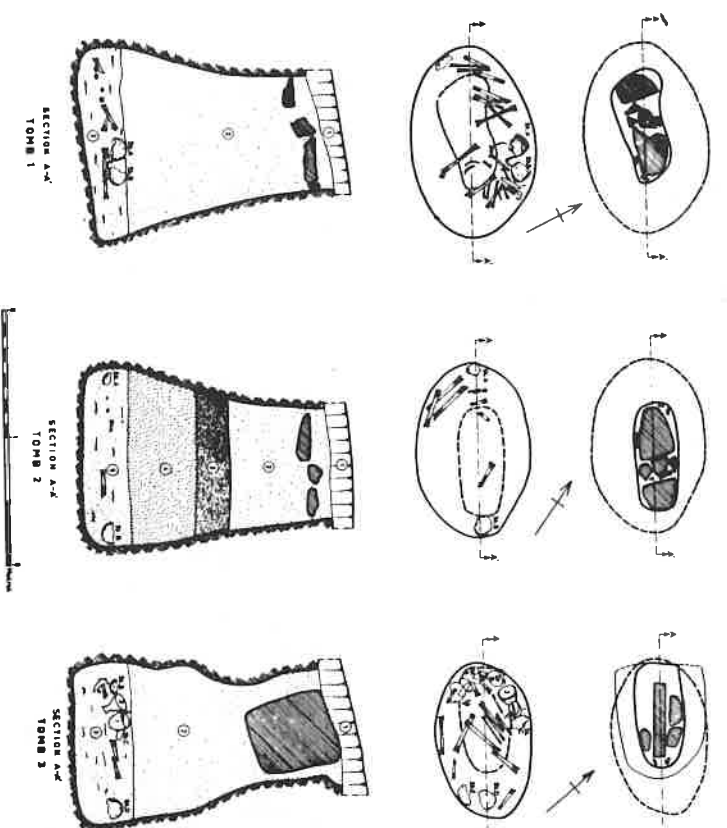


Figure 12.3 Plans and sections of Tombs 1, 2 and 3.

considerably from the type of pit-shaped tombs at Erimi in the Limassol District and is closer to one of the tombs at Lemba-Lakkous in the Paphos District, which however, like the tombs at Erimi, is much smaller and lies within the settlement area (Peltenburg 1977, 1980; *Chronique* 1977, 740-6). This type of tomb, together with evidence of sacrifices before burial in honour of the dead and the distinct separation of cemetery from settlement, recorded only at Souskiou-Vathyrkakas and not elsewhere in Cyprus, constitute important new evidence for the study of Chalcolithic settlements and burial evidence in Cyprus.

The funerary offerings from the three intact tombs excavated by the Cyprus Department of Antiquities in Cemetery 1 comprise several specimens of pottery, necklaces of dentalium shells decorated with small pendants of various types and several other objects of extreme importance and particular interest. The pottery types include small deep handleless bowls of Red-on-White ware, the decoration of which is strictly geometric in orange to red paint applied on a whitish or buff-pinkish slip. One of these bowls with curved sides and flattened base is decorated with an encircling thick line below the outer part of the rim and dotted triangles all over the surface. Another similar but smaller bowl of Red-on-White ware, bearing the same characteristic encircling line below the outer part of the rim and

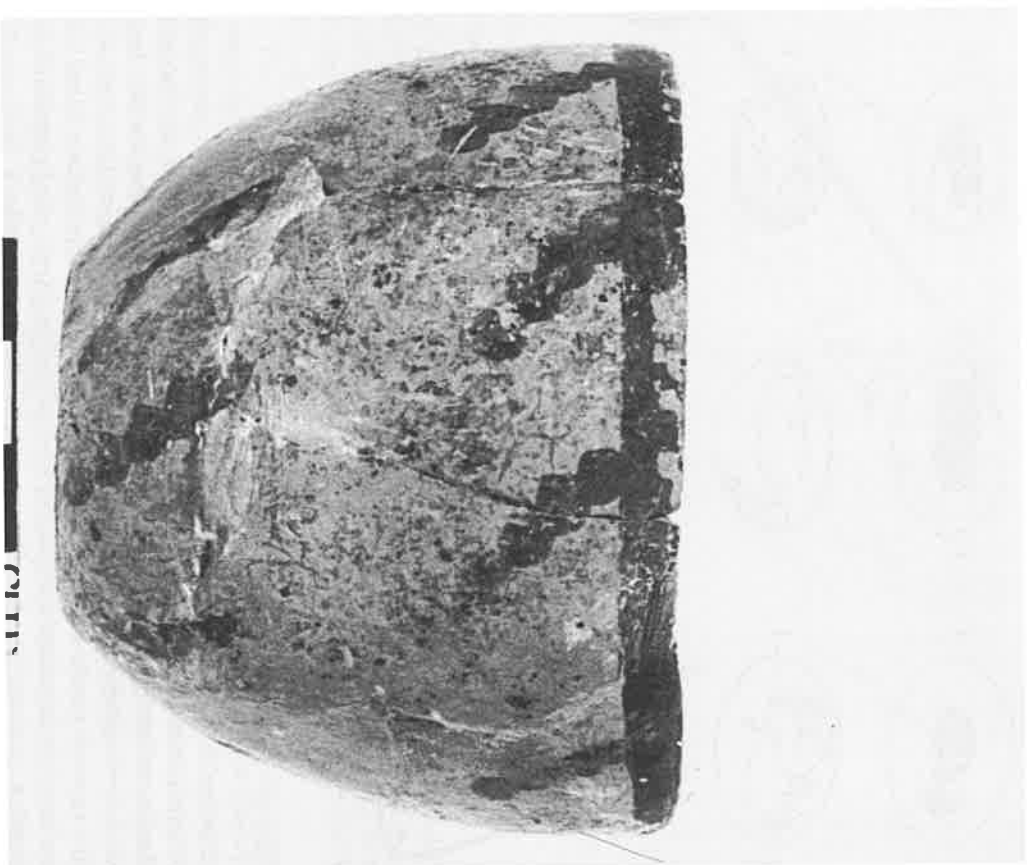


Figure 12.4 Red-on-White handleless bowl resembling bowls from Erimi.

oblique zig-zag lines on the body resembles the style of the Chalcolithic I bowls found in the pit-shaped tombs at Erimi (Fig 12.4). A third bowl of medium size with slightly curved sides and low splaying foot with flat base is definitely not of Red-on-White ware but its ware is difficult to determine since no traces of paint exist on the worn surface of the vase. It may be classed either as Plain White ware or Coarse Ware. The same problem of ware determination appears on a fragmentary small bottle with globular body, flattened base and wide neck tapering upwards, the upper part of which is missing. The gritty clay and rough surface of this vase suggest a Coarse Ware, but some traces of obliterated reddish paint all over its worn surface may justify a Red Lustrous Ware designation. In fact a few sherds

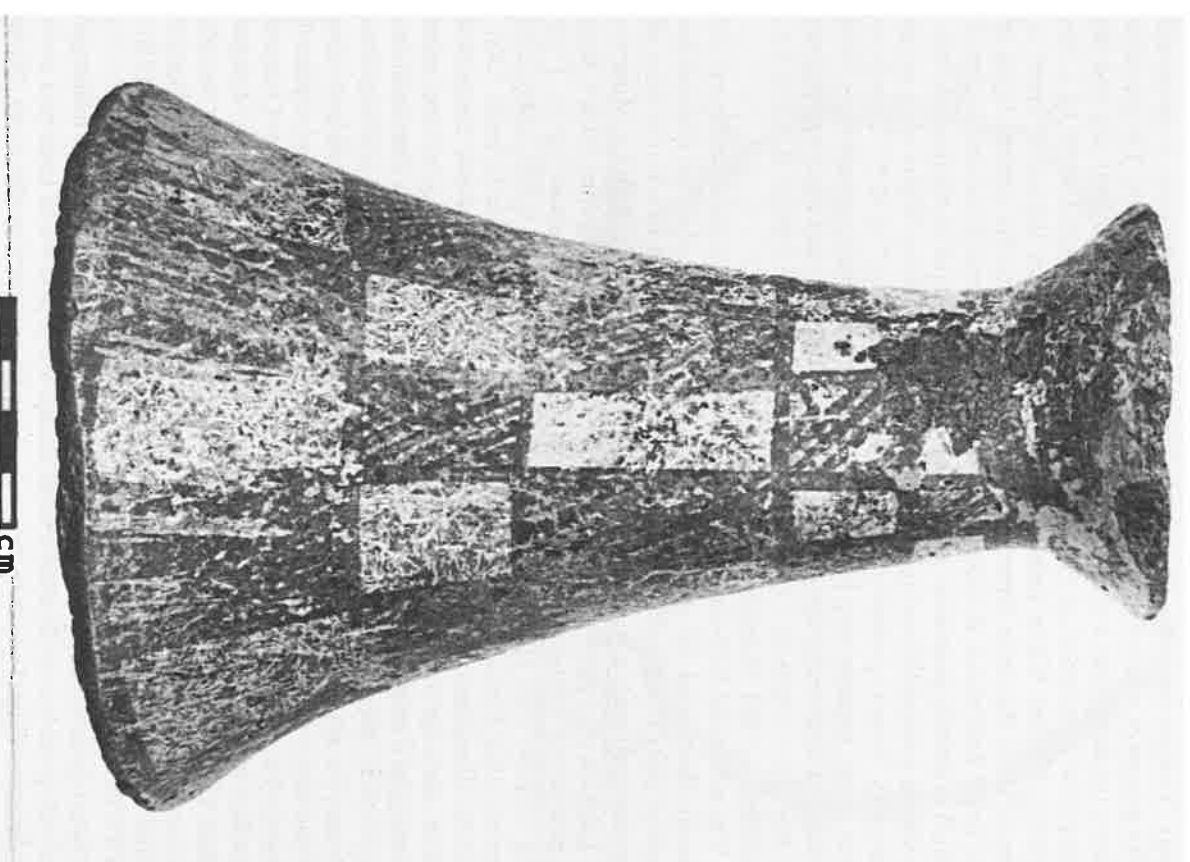


Figure 12.5 Neck of Red-on-White bottle.

a Red Lustrous Ware, similar to those collected by the German Mission and mentioned earlier, were found in Tomb 3. Another restored bottle with slightly curved sides, conical lower body, pointed base, irregular depressed shoulder and short concave neck is an unusual type and a unique example of Red-on-White ware. A composite decoration of alternate dotted and plain triangle framed by thick reddish lines covers the lower part of its

body. The rest of the surface, excluding the neck of the vase, is decorated with groups of vertical double lines in the same reddish paint. The peculiar shape, the fairly fine, soft, buff clay, the elaborate white creamy slip and the composite decoration of this bottle indicate an advanced form of Chalcolithic Red-on-White pottery, obviously later than the usual types of vessels from the same cemetery which correspond to the pottery types of the Erimi first phase. A wide concave neck from Tomb 3, the decoration of which is strictly geometric and symmetrically arranged in chequered compositions is an additional specimen of developed Red-on-White ware in the cemetery. It most probably belonged to a third bottle (Fig 12.5). This same neck shape appears on a bottle with globular body and pointed base. It is decorated with broad wavy bands all over the surface and was found in one of the three tombs in Cemetery 1 excavated by the British Kouklia Expedition in 1951 (Karageorghis 1985, 45, 6).

The advanced Red-on-White ware from the Vathyrkakas Cemetery 1 is mainly illustrated by a rich variety of pottery revealed in clandestine excavations. The types represented include an unusual vase in the form of a quadruped with a human face, now in the Pierides Foundation Museum in Larnaca (Karageorghis 1981, 25, 11). It has been identified with a kind of prehistoric 'centaur' which may have parallels in the Balkan region. They also include vase specimens of stemmed and mastoid bowls, askoi and several other forms which have not yet been found at other Cypriot Chalcolithic sites. Among these forms worthy of presentation is a composite bottle, now in the Hadjiprodromou Collection, consisting of one main bottle with a long cylindrical neck and two other small bottles communicating with it (Karageorghis 1981, 23, 8). No doubt this Red-on-White vase heralds the appearance of the homogeneous composite Red Polished vases in the Early Bronze Age and indicates a late date in the Chalcolithic I period. This indication, in connection with the fact that neither Combed nor Red Polished wares exist among the pottery known from the Vathyrkakas Cemetery 1, suggests that the relative chronology of the vessels presented could be assigned to the last phase of the Chalcolithic I period which Dikaios, using C-14 dates, placed between ca 2700 and 2500 BC (SCE IV.1A, 184-7; cf also Catling in CAH³ 551-5).

Apart from pottery, Tomb 3 produced various other objects of minor art including numerous dentalia and 28 miniature picrolite and bone pendants of different shapes some in the form of anthropomorphic figurines. Eight of the pendants are made of bone and the other twenty of picrolite. The picrolite pendants comprise sixteen similar types with cruciform body, two types with triangular body, one type with bottle-shaped body. Ten groups of dentalia, eight cruciform pendants and the unique animal-shaped pendant have been selected to create one of the restored necklaces (Fig 12.6, left). The animal-shaped pendant is made of grey-green picrolite and measures 1.85 cm in height and 3.4 cm in width. The miniature cruciform pendants are made of grey picrolite and they are less than 2 cm in height.



Figure 12.6 Restored necklaces with dentalia, cruciform and animal-shaped pendants and pendants with triangular and bottle-shaped bodies.

Both these pendant types have a perforated head for threading. The cruciform pendants are characterized by an oval or square head, long neck, out-stretched arms and triangular or crescent-shaped feet. The second necklace consists of similar cruciform pendants and pendants with triangular and bottle-shaped bodies (Fig 12.6, right). The feet of the triangular pendants are denoted by two small diverging appendages and the bottle-shaped pendants have a conical lower part ending in a disc-shaped base instead of feet. The bone pendants have more or less the same shape consisting of a long shaft ending in a flat quadrangular perforated appendage. Their lower part is usually conical (Fig 12.7).

Miniature pendants of the cruciform type have also been found in the looted tombs of the Vathyrkakas Cemetery 1 by the German Mission. The largest of these pendants, 3.4 cm in height and 2.35 cm in width, presents some technical details not observed on the contemporary pendants yielded by Tomb 3. It has a perforated quadrangular head with rounded angles, surrounded by a square incision, out-stretched arms and hands represented in the swastika position, fingers indicated by incised lines, drawn up knees, legs divided by a deep incised line and feet with a schematic indication of toes (Fig 12.8). Excluding the hands the other general characteristics of this pendant appear on the well known picrolite figurine from Yialia, in the Paphos northern region, and on the small cruciform pendant hanging on the necklace round the neck of the figurine (Karageorghis 1976, 52 Fig 25). Therefore, it is obvious that the small pendants from the Vathyrkakas

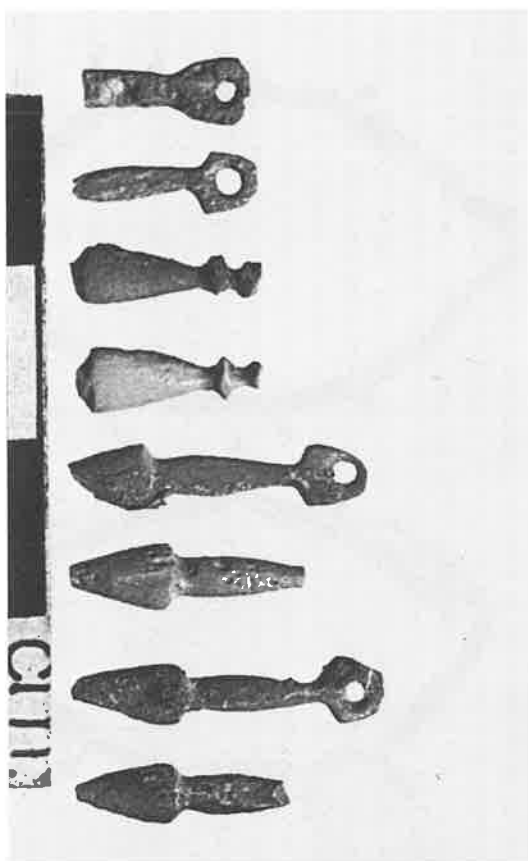


Figure 12.7 Bone pendants.

Cemetery 1 copy the type of larger picrolite cruciform figurines and that they were also worn as amulets (Budge 1961; J. Karageorghis 1977, 26–8). Since all the Paphian picrolite cruciform figurines have been correctly interpreted as cult images of a female or a mixed female and male divinity connected with fertility (J. Karageorghis 1977, 25–32; Reiter 1960–3), no doubt the contemporary pendants constitute miniature reproductions imitating the same cult images and religious beliefs.

The dating of the Vathykakas picrolite cruciform figurines and pendants could be assigned to the same period as the pottery produced in Cemetery 1. This conclusion is entirely based on some parallels with similar stratified examples from Erimi and Kythrea (Dikaio 1936, Pl 29; SCE I, Pl 13.1) which fall into the second phase of Erimi, i.e. around 2600 BC. Moreover, it is apparent that there are certain similarities with pendants from the Amug valley in North Syria (Braidwood & Braidwood 1960, 513–9, n. 52) and that there are also a few affinities with Cycladic marble idols (Renfrew 1969, 8, 9, 30) which are dated approximately to the middle of the 3rd millennium BC.

A phallic representation from Tomb 3 is another notable discovery (Fig 12.9). Measuring 13.6 cm in length and made of limestone, this phallic-shaped object is elongated and rounded and has a rough and irregular surface. Its presence among picrolite cruciform pendants and especially bone pendants in the same tomb, (the conical body of which is in fact reminiscent of the phallic shape), could be interpreted as having the same symbolic character, possibly connected with the divinity of fertility. No other phallic representations of the Chalcolithic period are so far known in Cyprus, but a similar symbol, originally identified with an idol's head, has



Figure 12.8 Cruciform pendant found by the German mission.

been found at the Khirokitia Neolithic settlement and two others at Ayios Epiktitos-Vrysi (*Chronique* 1969, 452–3 Fig 33a–b; Peltenburg 1975, 29 Fig 5, Pl 5 lower). The famous clay statuette of a nude male figure seated on a low four-legged stool with hands holding the head and elbows on the knees, purchased in Switzerland by the Pierides Foundation Museum, was labelled as coming from Souskiou (Karageorghis 1981, 29.15; 1985, 47.7; Karageorghis & Vagnetti 1981). At the top of the statuette's head there is a perforation through which a liquid could be introduced. It could then exit from the erected penis. If its Souskiou provenance were to be confirmed, the statuette could be considered not only as the first and unique specimen of its kind in the whole of Chalcolithic Cyprus but also as having possibly immediate connections with certain ritual ceremonies taking place in southwestern Cyprus in honour of the fertility female or male deity. However, similar figures dated to the end of the Neolithic period were found in Thessaly (Wace & Thomson 1912, 163 Fig 110) and Romania (Gimbutas 1982, 232 Figs 247–52) and therefore these regions may have a more just claim on the origins of this important statuette.

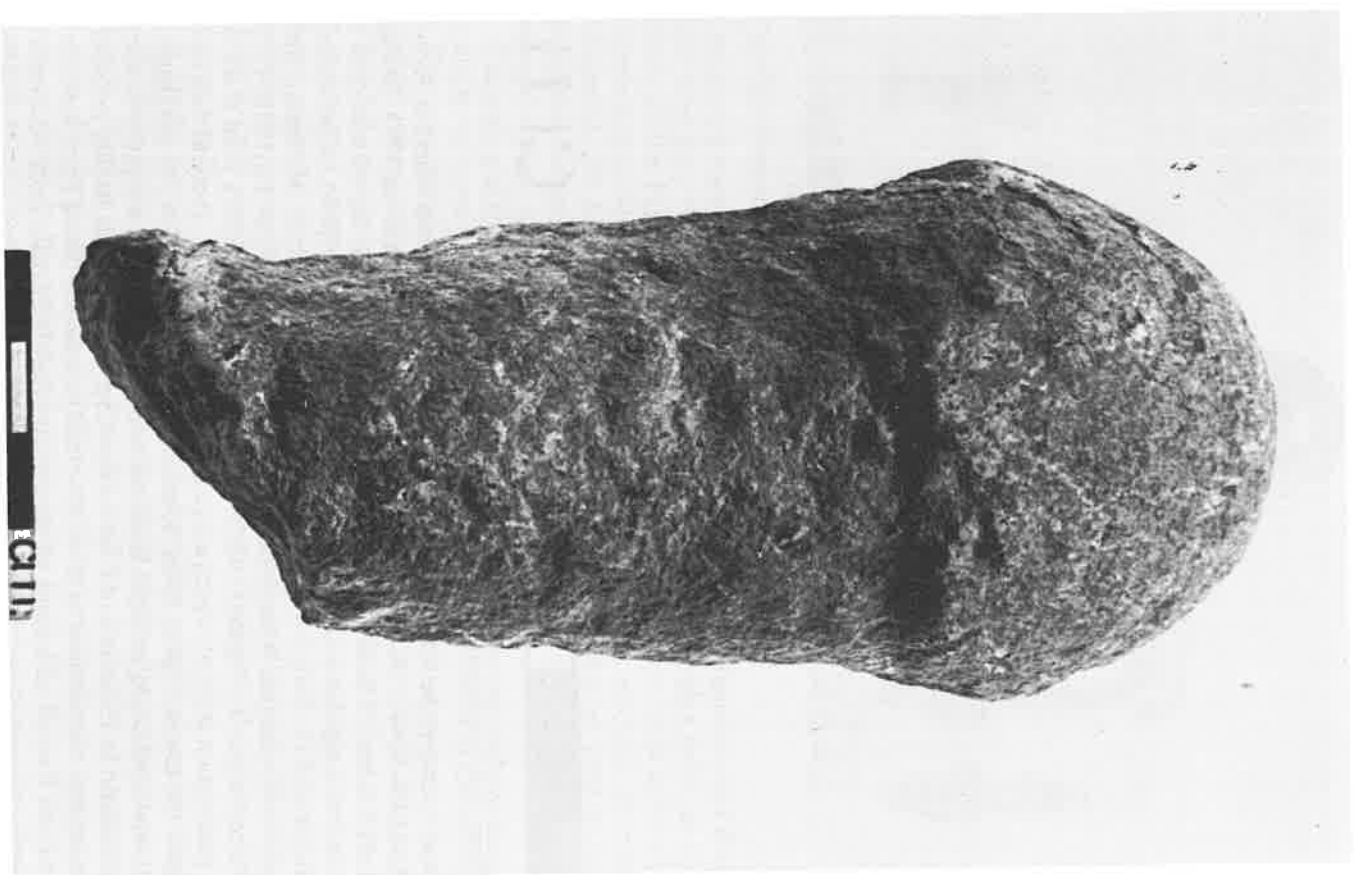


Figure 12.9 Phallic representation from Tomb 3.

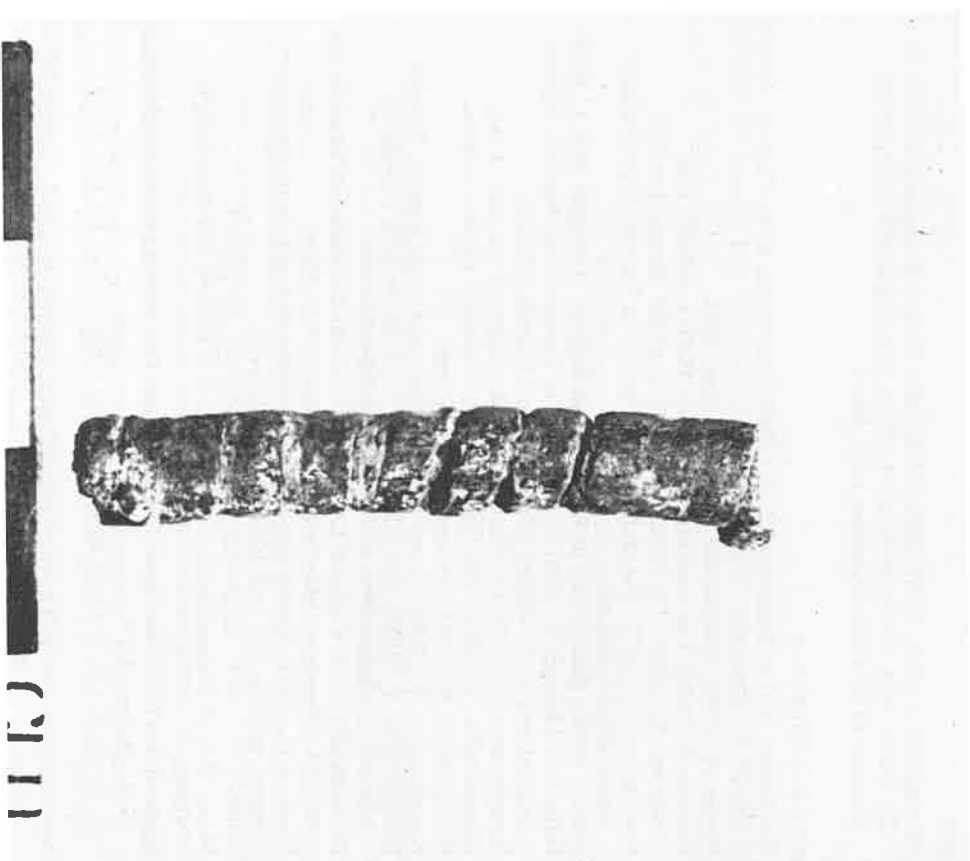


Figure 12.10 Copper ornament with incised spiral pattern.

An elongated and rounded ornament made of pure copper and decorated with spiral incised patterns (Fig 12.10) is the last, but not the least discovery, made in the Vathyrakas Cemetery 1. This is the second copper object to be found in the whole of Chalcolithic Cyprus. The first one is a chisel found by Dikaïos at Erimi in 1935 (1936, 50 Figs 13, 14). After the Souskiou copper ornament three other copper objects, a chisel, a fish-hook and an awl were found respectively by E. Peltenburg at Lemba-Lakkous, Kissonerga-Myliouthkia and Kissonerga-Mosphilia (1985a, Pl 48.11; 1981, 27 Fig 6; 1985b, 62 Fig 4).

In summary, these are some of the results of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities excavations in Souskiou-Vathyrakas Cemetery 1 and other activities on the site. Hopefully, much more light will be shed on tomb architecture, burial customs, religious beliefs and the cultural substance of Paphos in particular and Cyprus in general by future excavations.

NOTE

- ¹ Karageorghis 1976, 32–57; 1981, 23–9; 1982, 35–6; J. Karageorghis 1977, 22–30; Maier 1973, 193–4; 1974, 41–3; Maier & Karageorghis 1984, 24–30; Vagnetti 1975; 1980; *Chronique* 1973, 680–1.

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13 Death in everyday life: aspects of burial practice in the Late Bronze Age

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'All discussion of prehistoric material, where it goes beyond the mere descriptive, ventures into the unknown and the unverifiable. Our interpretations can be no more than the product of contemporary experience broadened by some awareness of ethnographic data so that the sole test of our conclusions, assuming no basic distortion of what passes for archaeological fact, must be their plausibility for the reader' (Clarke, Cowie & Foxon 1985, 229).

Studies of prehistoric burial practice must venture firmly into the realm of the unknown and the unverifiable once they depart from the purely factual evidence and embark upon interpretation. Notwithstanding the problems involved, in recent years there has been a great development of interest in the analysis of funerary remains as one means of establishing the nature of ancient social systems. This interest has stemmed largely from New Archaeology, with extensive research emanating principally from the United States and from Cambridge.¹ A positive outcome of this research has been the feeling that, with appropriate methodology, an awareness of the potential problems and conceptual pitfalls, and with a degree of circumspection, it is indeed possible to use burial evidence in the interpretation of ancient social systems. One reason for this optimism seems to be the general acceptance of the principle that burials do at least represent deliberate rather than accidental depositions. O'Shea, for instance, writes

'Mortuary evidence is an extremely valuable archaeological resource, since it represents the direct and purposeful culmination of conscious behaviour, rather than its incidental residue' (in Chapman, Kinnes & Randsborg 1981, 39–40);

and again, in a later work,

'Since the time of Worsaae, archaeologists have recognized the uni-