

Stone grinding in Bronze Age Cyprus, what it reveals about habitus and organisation of the household in Bronze Age Cyprus.



¹Image 1, Louvre model.

The Louvre model is currently being held in the Louvre Museum, France, in the department of Oriental Antiquities (inventory number: AM 816)² and has been dated to Middle Cypriot 2000 – 1600BC, discovered in Cyprus, Levant. The red brown slip terracotta model depicts (with applied and incised details) of 7 characters either around a pool or a trough. The artefact holds the same rectangular neck and head, pronounced nose and ‘surprised’ eyes and mouth which belongs to the provenance of other Chalcolithic and Bronze Age Cypriot figurines. The Louvre model gives us a self-depiction of social capital cemented in clay with the characters either making bread, beer or wine.

The depiction of this communal domestic task is very significant to aid in our understanding of social praxis of Bronze Age Cyprus. Although the article has no practical or suspected ritual use (unfortunately we have no details to the context of where the article was excavated) the creation of this aesthetic item depicting a specific task such as grinding cements how integrated such tasks were to these communities, with Knox arguing that such items are ‘...created, developed and used as part of the socio-cultural environment of a specific place in a specific time.’³

Titti poses the question ‘was there a relationship of social, technological and spiritual values between grinding... during the European Bronze Age’⁴? Regarding the relationship between gender, habitus and organisation in Bronze Age Cyprus through a socio-archeological lens, what can we gage from this scenic composition?

¹ <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010118436> <Accessed on 18/12/2023>

² IBID

³ Knox, *Making Sense Of Figurines In Bronze Age Cyprus, A Comprehensive Analysis of Cypriot Ceramic Figurative Material from EC 1 – LC IIIA (c.2300BC – c.1100BC)*, The University of Manchester, 2012, Pg. 62.

⁴ Fendin, *Grinding Processes and reproductive metaphors, Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives Origins, changes and interactions*. Nordic Academic Press, 2006, P.159.

Grinding is one of the many 'activities required for the maintenance and reproduction of the family unit.'⁵ It is responsible for feeding the population of that household and wider community when used in preparation for ritual feasting.

The simple activity of grinding is no easy task, the entirety of the process is time consuming and physically demanding by using heavy stone equipment. When grinding grain, no matter the species used, removing the husk for the purpose of consumption other than brewing beer (husk aids in the fermentation of beer so complete removal is not necessary)⁶ is arduous.

Besides the physical task of grinding, Fendin in her paper *Grinding processes and reproductive metaphors* delves into the metaphors of grinding, not just with the physicality of the task but also taking into account the ethnohistorical relationships to grinding.



Grinding has a beginning and an end, starts with a 'whole' and ends in fragments, the action simultaneously creating and destroying with Fendin highlighting these themes as transformative, with the human body and time being fundamentals for social and cosmological order.⁷

The tool kit also has two parts which which are non-identical but make a whole, such as the human body with two sexes or relationships between generations, becoming a symbol of reproduction and ageing⁸ as the stone over time wears down.

⁹ Image 2, an example of a saddle quern, Ireland, suspected Bronze Age.

This seems to be the consensus of thought regarding stone grinding when looking at cross-cultural comparatives within archeology and anthropology in pre-history. Holmberg also supports this theory of reproductive metaphors in discussion to saddle querns found in Mid Central Sweden at Early Neolithic sites, describing the items as being 'materially associated with sexual bodies in a lifecycle, and the ideal preproduction of gender relations.'¹⁰

However, is this delving too far into a task which was necessary to survival? Prehistoric tools kits weren't initially created for any other purpose other than being practical, with whatever metaphorical theories (despite the parallels) being coincidence.

⁵ Pg 93-4 ENGENDERING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY IN PREHISTORIC CYPRUS

⁶ Hayden et al. Brain Hayden, Laurie Nixon-Darius, Logan Ansell, *Our 'daily bread'? The origins of grinding grains and bread making, Exploring the Materiality of Food 'Stuffs' Transformations, symbolic consumption and embodiments*, 2013, Pg. 58.

⁷ Fendin, *Grinding Processes and reproductive metaphors, Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives Origins, changes and interactions*. P.159.

⁸ IBID, Pg. 161.

⁹ <https://breeheritage.com/2015/04/07/the-coolteigue-saddle-quern/> <Accessed on 08/01/2024>

¹⁰ Pg. 231. Holmberg.

Subsequently ritual feasting from the products created from grinding would have been consumed through Bronze Age Cyprus, such symbolic practices would have innovated and strengthened social bonds among kinship groups. However why can't the preparation of food in general and not just for the purpose of feasting, be considered ritualistic? After-all, the Levant model is depicting a scene of food preparation, not of the feast itself.

Grinding itself has often been described as ritualistic, with its repetitive rhythmic movements, the postures and gestures that are performed lead to communal memory, in turn becoming a ritual performance.¹¹ Singing and gossiping while sat together in a group doing a laborious task such as grinding is inevitable, leading to the action being 'a very social & socialised activity that undoubtedly bound together members of the household, most probably female, in a variety of embodied activities.'¹²



This leads to the question if grinding was a gender-exclusive praxis. The Levant model portrays both genders, figures with and without breasts, however is this an accurate portrayal of participants?

Bickle in *Thinking Gender Differently: New Approaches to Identity Difference in the Central European Neolithic* argues that the concept of assemblages and its constant use in archaeology encourages the existing interpretative hierarchies in which how humans interact with materials and objects.¹³ Ethnographically quern grinding is considered female practice, leading to the notion of grinding in prehistory to be justifiably women based as well.¹⁴

¹⁵ Image 3, Cyprot-Archaic II clay model of female grinding.

The inclusion of a mother holding a child in the Levant model is significant, it reveals how 'individual action as primarily determined by unconsciously internalised structures.'¹⁶ Social actors are a product of being integrated at young ages into certain social fields, continuing socio reproduction of specific tasks.

Diachronically, households and their contents in the Middle Cypriot period reveal that they were 'the primary unit for domestic production and maintenance.'¹⁷ Multiple sites such as Marki support that specific spaces were reserved for organised socio-economic activity with the finds of stone querns,

¹¹ Connection, 1989.

¹² Steel, 2016, P. 87.

¹³ Penny Bickle, *Thinking Gender Differently: New Approaches to Identity Difference in the Central European Neolithic*, Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 203.

¹⁴ Pg.203 Holmberg.

¹⁵ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/241198> <Accessed on 05/01/2024>

¹⁶ Doria essay for Giddens section.

¹⁷ Webb, *ENGENDERING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY IN PREHISTORIC BRONZE AGE CYPRUS*, Pg. 92.

clay spindle whorls, metal and bone needles and vessels which are clearly non-professionally made.¹⁸ Grinding tools were not restricted to organic materials such as bread making but can also be applied to the grinding of non-organic materials such as pottery, bone, wood, pigment and sherd.¹⁹ Women, following Bourdieu's social field theory, have their own social and physical field within the household allows them to perform their social positions of primary agents for the transformation of raw materials into products of consumption and storage, whereas men are engaged within the animal husbandry and agricultural fields.²⁰ This sexual division of labour systemically cements gender identities and habitus of productive roles²¹ within society

Although these divisions are clear evidence of household organisation with physical spaces being dedicated to economic production and reproduction, it's not to say that between related household groups that regular collaboration took place despite little to no evidence of production and storage.²² Due to the weight of objects such as stone querns, it makes practical sense that such items would remain in one place and be close to where consumption and storage takes place for efficiency and reduction of further labour. The relationship of stone kernels is also apparent to being multi-generational objects, some being deposited as grave goods which were assumed to be used within the family unit.

In conclusion, items such as the Levant model self-illuminate the nature of societal praxis²³ within their contexts (BA Cyprus), with Morris calling such items 'representations of familiar activities drawn from daily life.'²⁴ The article is indicative of the importance of socialisation in the form of necessary habitus for social-economic capital in Bronze Age Cyprus. The task of grinding itself, in many societies, was seen as 'critical for sustaining networks of interpersonal relations through its role in processing and socialising'.²⁵

It's also clear that grinding as a general held importance on a social economic level due to its essentialism in diet and enforced gender identity in Cyprus with 'the repeated portrayal of women in secondary food processing activities'²⁶ and the fields present within households where the task is performed. 'Daily praxis embedded in food production therefore might be viewed as a creative process which shaped social reproduction and lived experiences in the Bronze Age Cypriot household.'²⁷

¹⁸ IBID, Pg. 92.

¹⁹ Titti Fendin, *Grinding Processes and reproductive metaphors*, P. 160.

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²¹ Pg 93, ENGENDERING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY IN PREHISTORIC CYPRUS

²² IBID, Pg. 93.

²³ Daisy-Kate Knox, *Making Sense Of Figurines In Bronze Age Cyprus, A Comprehensive Analysis of Cypriot Ceramic Figurative Material from EC 1 – LC IIIA (c.2300BC – c.1100BC)*, The University of Manchester, 2012. Pg.

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²⁵ Shoemaker, Davies & Moore, *Back to the Grindstone? The Archaeological Potential of Grinding-Stone Studies in Africa with Reference to Contemporary Grinding Practices in Marakwet, Northwest Kenya*, African Archaeological Review, 2017, Pg. 418

²⁶ Pg 93, ENGENDERING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY IN PREHISTORIC CYPRUS

²⁷ Steel 2016, 87.

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- Image 2: <https://breeheritage.com/2015/04/07/the-coolteigue-saddle-quern/>
- Image 3: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/241198>
- Image 4:
- Image 5:
- Image 6: