

METIOESSA

STUDIES IN HONOR OF ELENI MANTZOURANI

ΜΗΤΙΟΕΣΣΑ

ΜΕΛΕΤΕΣ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΙΜΗΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΕΝΗΣ ΜΑΝΤΖΟΥΡΑΝΗ

Edited by Giorgos Vavouranakis and Ioannis Voskos



AURA SUPPLEMENT 10 • ΣΕΙΡΑ ΜΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΩΝ AURA 10

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μητιόεσσα feminine: wise in counsel; masculine: *μητιόεις*

Also applied to Zeus in epic language; convoluted, but well-chosen and helpful.

Also applied to *φάρμακα*, the very effective ingredients of the drink that Helen prepares for Telemakhos, Nestor's son Peisistratos and Menelaos (Od. Δ 227).

Helen's *φάρμακα*, brought from Egypt, are *μητιόεντα* because they have been wisely chosen, and, also, because they reflect a combination of precision and efficiency, being exactly what is needed to nurture the pains in human soul.

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Katerina Boukala-Karkagianni

Editorial • Εκδοτικό Σημείωμα

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CONTACT • ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Department of History and Archaeology
University Campus, GR-15784 Athens, Greece

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Weapon-bearers at Middle Bronze Age Lapithos, Cyprus*

Jennifer M. Webb

La Trobe University, Melbourne and The University of Cyprus, Nicosia

ABSTRACT

Bladed weapons from Early and Middle Bronze Age Cyprus, most notably spears, have typically been regarded as status insignia rather than offensive weapons. This chapter addresses the issue of their functionality within the context of current research which suggests a more complex Middle Bronze Age than often assumed. It focuses on the large number of spearheads found at Lapithos and takes account of recent literature on use-wear studies and metric analyses of bronze weapons from other parts of Europe to suggest that they were probably used in a close-combat fencing style of fighting. Their prevalence at Lapithos further suggests that many if not most men in this community were weapon-bearers. This investment in instruments of aggression was likely directed outward to protect Lapithos' role in the management and distribution of copper and is viewed here in the context of increasing competition for control over mineral and other resources and signs of unrest across the island, including settlement abandonments and the construction of the earliest forts.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades there has been an upsurge of interest in the role of violence in prehistoric societies.¹ In Cyprus, despite the presence of bladed weapons from the beginning of the Bronze Age (ca 2500/2400 BC), the possibility of intergroup conflict prior to the Late Bronze Age (LBA, ca 1700/1650–1125/1100 BC) has rarely been explored. Over 50 years ago Stewart suggested that shifting alignments on the north coast involved “frontier feuds” and that the rise of Lapithos, in particular, was “not founded on peace and economics alone, but required that men could defend themselves and, if need be, attack others”.² Manning and Peltenburg argued for the emergence of hereditary elites on the north coast,³ while in a major study of the mortuary record, Keswani⁴ concluded that indications of wealth accumulation and status enhancement suggest prestige competition rather than rigidly hierarchical differences in status. These assessments were all based in part on the presence of weapons, more specifically spearheads, in north coast burials but take widely different views of their function. For Stewart spears were actual weapons, for Peltenburg and Manning symbols of an emerging status-conscious elite and for

* This paper is written in honour of the very significant contribution made by Eleni Mantzourani to the early prehistory of Cyprus, with apologies for the violent nature of its subject.

1 Among the most recent, Dolfini et al. 2018; Horn and Kristiansen 2018; Hansen and Krause 2019.

2 Stewart 1962, 297, 299.

3 Manning 1993; Peltenburg 1994.

4 Keswani 2004, 63–71; 2005, 362–78.

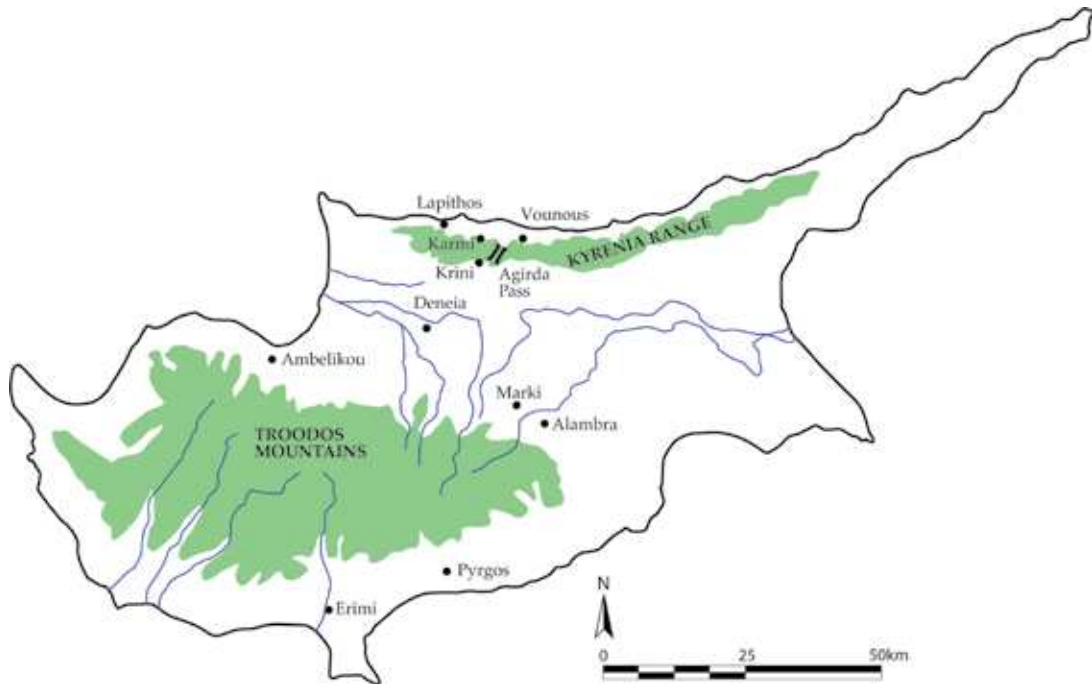


Fig. 1. Map of Cyprus showing sites mentioned in the text.

Keswani a form of widely shared status insignia. In one of few papers to address the subject of violence directly, Sneddon also suggests that weapons “represent ... symbolic behaviour and were never intended for use against other humans”⁵.

Elsewhere a view that weapons were mainly used to signify status and scepticism about their functionality has been debunked by metalwork wear analysis, which shows that swords, spears and halberds, for example, were used in combat.⁶ It may be time, then, to readdress this issue in relation to Cyprus, particularly as current research suggests a more complex Middle Bronze Age (MBA) than often assumed, with a level of socioeconomic inequality based in part on competition for control over mineral resources and metallurgical production and signs of unrest, including settlement abandonments and the construction of the earliest forts.⁷

WEAPONS IN PREHISTORIC BRONZE AGE CYPRUS

Spears were the only specialised metal weapons in use during the Early (EBA) and Middle Bronze Age in Cyprus (ca 2500/2400–1700/1650 BC). They appear on the north coast in the mid-third millennium BC and remained most prevalent in this region. While there are certainly excavation biases at work here, Bellapais *Vounous* and Lapithos (for site locations, see Fig. 1) currently account for more than 80% of over 300 spearheads recovered from EBA and MBA tombs across the island.⁸ At *Vounous* most were deposited in late EC III and MC I, coincident with a general increase in the deposition of metal; at Lapithos they occur in high numbers throughout the MBA and account for ca 40% by weight of metal in the mortuary record.⁹ Elsewhere spearheads

⁵ Sneddon 2014, 60.

⁶ E.g. Anderson 2011; Molloy 2011; 2017; O’Flaherty et al. 2011; Horn 2013; 2014; 2018; 2019; Dolfini and Crellin 2016; Horn and von Holstein 2017; Gentile and van Gijn 2019; Hermann et al. 2020.

⁷ See Webb and Knapp 2021 with references and Manning 2019.

⁸ Webb 2017, 133, fig. 4.

⁹ Keswani 2004, tables 4.7, 4.11; Webb 2016, 60, fig. 2a; 2018, 181, fig. 6.4a–b.

have been recovered across the island, but only one other site to date has produced more than a handful of examples (Kalavassos with 13).

Most analysed spearheads are of unalloyed or arsenical copper.¹⁰ Their blades are leaf-shaped with robust points and pronounced midribs and remains of an organic binding are often preserved in corrosion products on the hooked tang. They have been found exclusively in tombs, where poor preservation, the ancient displacement of remains and the fact that skeletal material was frequently not kept for osteological study limit analysis of their association with individual burials. Where reliable data are available, spearheads were found with adult males and placed alongside the upper torso with the point toward the skull.¹¹ Even where bodies had been disturbed, they are often found near skulls, perhaps in an attempt to preserve the relationship between individual and spear after decomposition. Burials with spears also frequently included knives, razors and tweezers, similarly placed near the head or hands.¹²

Length measurements for 210 spearheads from Lapithos range from 9.3 to 66.2 cm with the majority (74.8%) between 20 and 40 cm and a peak at 28–32 cm (Fig. 2a). While some variation within the 20–40 cm group may be due to differential access to metal and personal preference, this suggests a well-defined concept of the appropriate length of a spearhead and, if used in combat, an acceptable degree of variability within a prevailing combat style. Length data of 653 spearheads from bog sacrifices of the La Tène period in Denmark, considered to derive from a battle, show a similar bell-shaped distribution with a somewhat lower “optimum band” from 20–30 cm, few examples >42 cm and none >56 cm.¹³ Lapithos weight to length data (Fig. 2b), drawn from a smaller sample (no.=40), show a cluster from 20–40 cm with weights of 100–300 g and a small group of larger, heavier examples.

In a study of Bulgarian spearheads of the LBA, Leshtakov¹⁴ suggests that javelin heads, designed to be thrown, weigh less than 150 g and are between 6 and 15 cm in length, while the heads of hand-held spears weigh 300–500 g and are 20–50 cm long. A third group which could have been used both ways weigh 150–300 g with lengths from 15–20 cm. Our spearheads do not conform neatly to these divisions; with all but one of the 11 examples <150 g substantially longer than 15 cm and those between 150 and 300 g well over 20 cm long. The Lapithos spearheads are thus on average somewhat lighter than the Bulgarian examples, but few belong to a category considered small and light enough to have been thrown.

The earliest Bronze Age metal spearheads in Ireland are 15–20 cm long but rarely >150 g and also considered light enough to have been thrown.¹⁵ The size range expanded in the MBA, with examples from 10 to almost 60 cm and from 40 to >600 g.¹⁶ Experimental tests and wear analyses have demonstrated the combat functionality of these and similar spearheads, and tip wear and impact damage in the form of notches, indentations, blow-marks, curvatures and fractures.¹⁷

Evidence of use appears also to be present on spearheads from Lapithos.¹⁸ What follows, however, relies on macroscopic observation and is preliminary. On some examples the blade narrows sharply toward the point, possibly as a result of reworking to repair tip damage (Fig. 3a). Figure 3b has a blow-mark across the midrib corresponding to a slight curvature and has been roughly flattened by hammering 35 mm from the tip on both

10 Balthazar 1990, 308–9, tables 71–4; Charalambous and Webb 2020, fig. 9, table 3.

11 Webb and Frankel 2015, 120–2, figs. 9.2–9.3. For burial with a female, see Vavouranakis 2009.

12 Webb and Frankel 2015, 122, figs. 9.2–9.3.

13 Klimscha 2015, fig. 5.

14 Leshtakov 2011, 26–7.

15 Molloy 2017, 286.

16 Molloy 2017, 291–92.

17 E.g. Anderson 2011; Horn 2014, 2015; Molloy 2017; Hermann et al. 2020.

18 See also Webb 2020, 479–82, figs. 5.16–5.18.

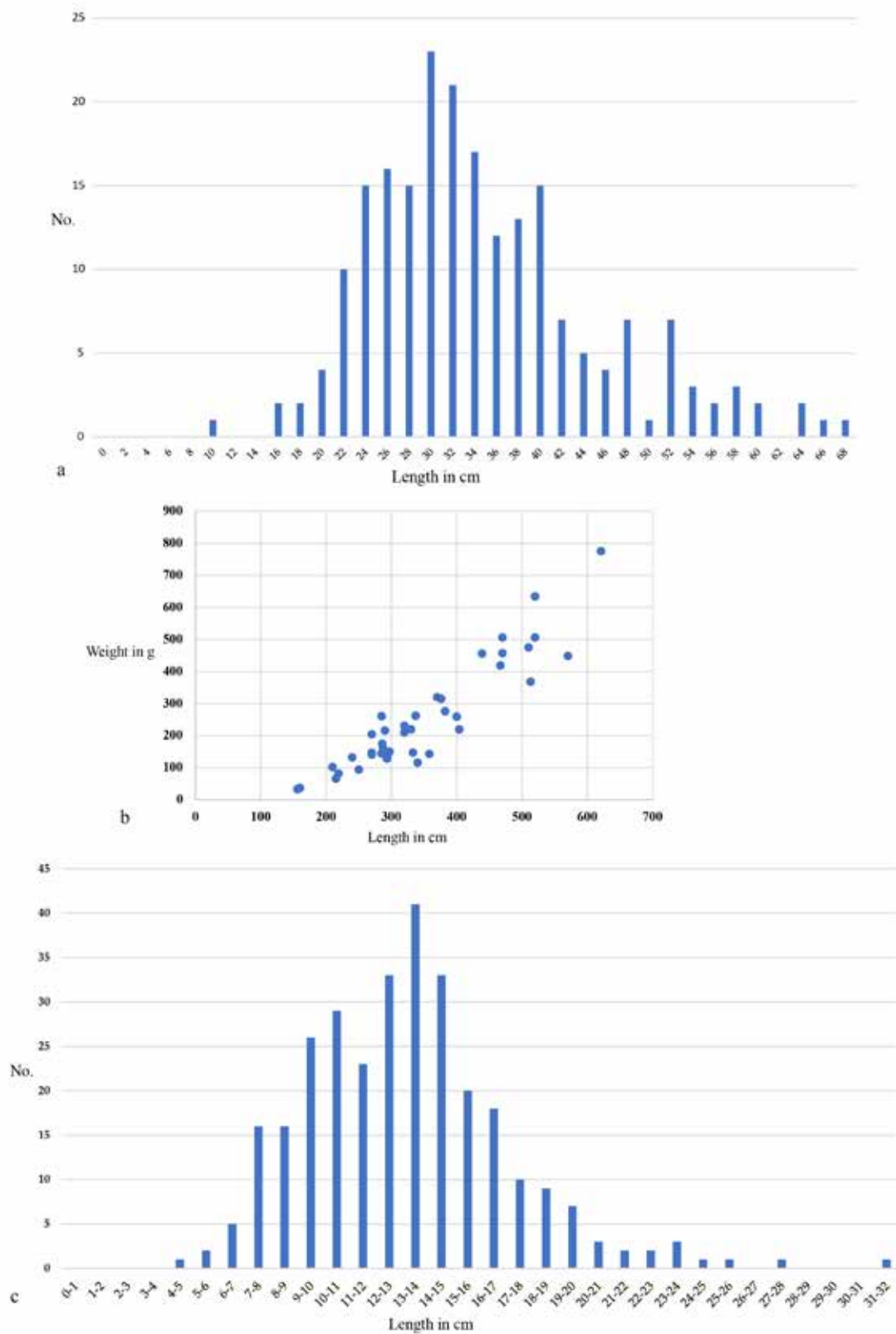


Fig. 2. a. Length data for 210 spearheads from Lapithos (in 2 cm intervals); b. Length and weight data for 40 spearheads from Lapithos; c. Length data for 303 knives/daggers from Lapithos.



Fig. 3. Spearheads (a–i), and daggers (j–k) from Lapithos unless otherwise indicated: a. Tomb 42.6; b. Tomb 15.22; c. Cyprus Museum Metal 671, 682, 739; d. Tomb 43B.17; e. Tomb 16.1; f. Tomb 18A.213; g. Tomb 21.136; h. Tomb 15.38; i. Tomb 18A.212; j. Tomb 18A.239; k. Tomb 12A.17. Photos by Rudy Frank.

sides.¹⁹ Other spearheads show compression, breakage, dislocation or bending of the tip (Fig. 3c).²⁰ Figure 3d has a deep, angled notch on the blade edge and Figure 3e a perpendicular fissure and metal displacement. Both may be a result of blade-on-blade contact.

Other spearheads have a curvature of the blade or tang. This form of damage has been viewed as intentionally designed to decommission or render the spearhead unusable.²¹ This is indeed likely where the curvature is extreme.²² Where the displacement occurs toward the point and is relatively slight (Fig. 3f) or corresponds with other evidence of impact (Fig. 3b, e), it may be a result of use.²³ Broken and partial spearheads and fragments reworked into knives (Fig. 3g–i) also suggest a cycle of use, breakage and repurposing of these objects, or/and differential treatment of artefacts ultimately destined for use as mortuary offerings.

Studies of similar weapons show that stab and thrust motions impact the tip of the spearhead (pressure, breakage), while cutting and slashing motions affect the cutting edges and blade body (notches, indentations, fissures, blow-marks).²⁴ Impact damage on the Lapithos spearheads, while in need of confirmation, implies both types of movement and, together with the length/weight data, suggests that they were thrusting and hacking or slashing weapons mounted on relatively short shafts, rather than throwing spears. This in turn suggests that they were used at close-quarters for person-to-person combat. While hunting might account for tip damage, edge-notches and fissures appear to be a result of blade-on-blade contact and hand-held spears deployed at close range are unlikely to have been intended primarily for use against wild animals.

Spearheads >40 cm in length have been considered “impractically large”.²⁵ Such spearheads are currently known only from Lapithos, where 21.3% of the assemblage is >40 cm long and 10% >50 cm. They would have required considerable expertise to make and indeed to use and lie at the heart of assumptions about non-functionality. While undeniably visually impressive, several examples for which evidence of use has been proposed above are >40 cm in length (Fig. 3e–f) and edge damage on spearheads from Ireland suggests that all sizes were used, including those 60 cm long and >600 g, previously thought to be “parade” weapons.²⁶

There is, however, a clear correlation between very large spearheads and the size and wealth of graves at Lapithos. Over half of the 21 examples >50 cm long, including the two longest (64.1 and 66.2 cm), came from two of the largest and richest complexes and the three tombs which produced gold also contained large spearheads.²⁷ While longer/heavier spears could have been used in a different way in fighting,²⁸ this suggests that size diversity was socially relevant. A high proportion of metal went into the manufacture of spearheads –the 42 examples for which weights are available account for 9.971 kg of metal– indicating a significant investment in violence and, in the case of the “oversized” examples, also in the “staging of warriorhood”.²⁹

Other potential weapons need also to be considered. Large spearheads have often been identified as “swords”,³⁰ but these were all shafted weapons and swords do not appear in Cyprus until the LBA. Similarly, there is no evidence for arrows. Flat axes, although rarely viewed as such in the Cypriot literature,³¹ could have been used as both tools and weapons. Knives properly identified (i.e single-edged) do not appear until the LBA but

19 Compare Horn 2013, 102, fig. 4h; 2018, fig. 5.1d.

20 See also Webb and Frankel 2015, fig. 9.5c, e, f–h. Compare e.g. Hermann et al. 2020, table 5.

21 Webb and Frankel 2015 with references.

22 E.g. Webb and Frankel 2015, figs. 9.6a–c, f, 9.7d; Webb 2020, fig. 5.18.

23 Compare Horn 2018, fig. 5.1c; 2019, fig. 5f. See also Webb and Frankel 2015, figs. 9.5c–d, i–k, 9.6d–e.

24 See e.g. Anderson 2011; Horn 2014, 39–40; 2019.

25 Keswani 2004, 69. See also Philip 1991, 68.

26 Molloy 2017, 292.

27 Tombs 18, 204, 313, 322A, 806A. Data from Keswani 2004, tables 4.11a–c; Webb 2020, 164–241.

28 As for example, horseman's weapons, Klimscha 2015, 94–5, 99–100.

29 Klimscha 2015, 99.

30 E.g. Sjöqvist 1934; Åström 1972, 136 (where spearheads >39 cm are classed as “swords”); Herscher 1978.

31 Catling 1964, 63–4; Kassianidou 2013, 243, but see Philip 1991, 78.

two-sided blades with flat, usually riveted tangs, more correctly identified as daggers,³² are relatively common. Examples from Lapithos range in length from 4.5 to 31.8 cm with the majority (61%) between 9 and 15 cm (Fig. 2c). Most were probably general-purpose cutting implements, but even the smallest (Fig. 3j) could have served as weapons when necessary and those >20 cm (Fig. 3k) were likely intended from the outset as weapons. Edge damage is difficult to detect, given the tendency of thin areas to corrode and frequent resharpener, which may indicate use primarily for slicing rather than stabbing. They are often found with spearheads and nine of the 14 examples >20 cm long came from the same tombs as “oversized” (>50 cm) spearheads.³³

Finally, stone maceheads appear occasionally in settlements and tombs.³⁴ Fischer³⁵ has argued, in regard to similar objects from Tell Abu al-Kharaz in Jordan, that the narrow perforation would not have been sufficient for the insertion of a handle and that they were used as bolas, with a rope or cloth. They are rare in the EBA and not common in the MBA. Over 150 excavated tombs at Lapithos produced 30 examples, primarily in later chambers where their incidence broadly matches that of bladed weapons.³⁶

WEAPON BURIALS AT LAPITHOS

How, then, should we interpret weapon burials at Lapithos? If fighting was involved, status and possibly economic advantage may have been gained not simply through ownership but also through use of a weapon. Razors and tweezers, elsewhere viewed as part of “a warrior appearance package,”³⁷ and possible differences in physique as a result of the training required to use bladed weapons,³⁸ further suggest that the physical identity of weapon-bearers extended beyond the mere possession of a weapon. Some spears, also, may have been viewed as intimately entangled with individual fighters, defining personhood through shared history and coincident burial.³⁹ The interment of a spearhead with a man at least 60 years old at time of death at Karmi⁴⁰ further suggests that the link between person and weapon extended beyond the period of “active service”, and thus that “warriorhood”, if such is signified, was not a temporary identity.

The term “warrior elite”, implying restricted status, appears, however, to be invalid in the Cypriot context. There are no instances of juveniles buried with weapons. While negative evidence, this suggests that whatever status “burial with a weapon” signified was achieved rather than ascribed. Weapon burials are also far from uncommon at Lapithos.⁴¹ Tombs assigned to the last phase of the EBA and the early MBA or wholly to the MBA contained an estimated minimum of 363 burials and 206 spearheads. While this is a measure of the number of spearheads (i.e. spears) in the mortuary population rather than among those living in the associated settlement, which has neither been located nor excavated, it is a surprisingly dense distribution, particularly if spears were primarily buried with males and we assume an approximate 1:1 ratio of males to females.

If the burial sample is divided into an earlier (EC III–MC I) and later (MC I–III) cohort, the situation is even more striking. In the first group 41% of all tombs contain at least one spearhead, in the second group this rises

32 See Kassianidou 2013, 236 on the problems of nomenclature.

33 Tombs 18A.226, 227, 18B.2, 313A.17, 20, 77, 313B.85, 313C–D.31, 322A.16, 802A.31.

34 Frankel and Webb 2006, 211–12 with references.

35 Fischer 2008, 359–60.

36 Tombs 8.40, FN B, FN 34, no FN, 18A.209–10, spoil, not inv., 21.125, 27 FN 14, 29.115, FN 198, 49.108–10, 50.294–301, 201A.33, 204.33, 316.113, 320.70, 702.45, 118, 135; 1917 Tomb 2.95.

37 Treherne 1995; Vandkilde 2018; Horn 2019, 58. See also Frieman et al. 2017.

38 See e.g. Molloy and Grossman 2007; Molloy 2017, 287, 293–94.

39 See e.g. Malafouris 2008.

40 Webb et al. 2009, 246–47, fig. 4.42, *Palealona* Tomb 11B.

41 A point also made by Keswani 2004, 65, 69.

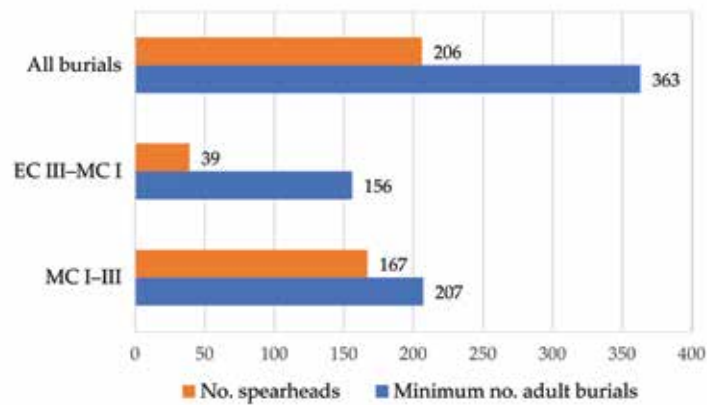


Fig. 4. Number of spearheads and estimated number of adult burials in EC III-MC I, MC I-III and both EC III-MC I and MC I-III tombs at Lapithos (data from Keswani 2004, tables 11b-c and Webb 2018, 2020).

to 69.8%. In the first group the spearhead to minimum number of adult burials ratio is 1:4, while in the MBA tombs it decreases to 1:1.24 (Fig. 4). Even if we multiply the number of burials by three and divide that number by two to account for the females, viewed on a per capita basis the ratio of spearheads to the (male) burial population would be 1:6 in the first cohort and as low as 1:1.86 in the MC I-III group. While some individuals may have been buried with more than one spear, the numbers for the MBA are hardly consistent with the presence of a segregated class of warriors, let alone a “warrior elite”, and they become, as Kletter and Levi⁴² have argued for the MBA Southern Levant, those of most of the adult male population.

If spears and the larger daggers were used in combat and if, for much of the MBA at Lapithos, many if not most able-bodied adult males were active weapon-bearers, against whom was this aggression directed? Given the volume of metal invested and the training needed to use bladed weapons, they are likely to have been more than occasional combatants.

I have argued elsewhere that the increase in the incidence of spearheads on the north coast coincides with the rise of Lapithos and the demise of *Vounous* and suggested that the shift in authority from *Vounous* to Lapithos in the early years of the MBA involved intense competition and probably the use of force.⁴³ Lapithos, located on the coast, was well placed to take advantage of a renewed foreign demand for Cypriot copper, perhaps allied with an increase in local “ceremonial demand”.⁴⁴ There is evidence also for considerable population growth at Lapithos in MC I and for the establishment of a procurement network which extended from the central north coast 35–40 km south to ore bodies in the northern foothills of the Troodos.⁴⁵

Signs of unrest continue, however, through the MBA. Cemeteries associated with hill villages at Karmi were abandoned by the end of MC II. One of the latest tombs was found empty and others had been broken into.⁴⁶ Across the island, settlements at Marki, Alambra, Pyrgos and Ambelikou had also been abandoned by the end of MC II and 22 partially constructed tombs suggest disruption and retraction at Deneia in MC III.⁴⁷ Burnt final deposits at Ambelikou and Pyrgos and in some of the latest buildings at Alambra and Marki, although not currently attributed to violent events, may also indicate that these presumed population movements were not

42 Kletter and Levi 2016.

43 Webb 2016, 2017, 2019.

44 Keswani 2005, 391.

45 See Webb 2019 with discussion and references.

46 Webb et al. 2009, 253.

47 For unfinished tombs at Deneia see Frankel and Webb 2007, 23–8.

wholly peaceful.⁴⁸ Other signs of inter-community tension include the installation of locking mechanisms in the textile workshop at Erimi and the construction of a circuit wall.⁴⁹

This phase of settlement restructuring may have involved conflict over territory and resources. Certainly, the loss of Marki, Alambra and the mining settlement at Ambelikou must have had an impact on Lapithos' copper procurement network. An obvious link between the prevalence of weapons at Lapithos and the construction of a much-discussed series of fortified sites has been hampered by limited information and a tendency to date all of the latter to the MC III/LC I transition.⁵⁰ In fact, three of the four forts associated with the Agirda Pass –located 12 km east of Lapithos and the only route through the central Kyrenia Range– have MC surface remains and may have served as guard posts for all or part of the MBA.⁵¹ They indicate an overriding concern with the defence and surveillance of this vital corridor from the Troodos ore bodies to the north coast.

Clearly, the MBA in Cyprus was not a time of uninterrupted peace and stability. The incidence of weapons at Lapithos and their increasing prevalence through this period may be related to a series of real or perceived threats to the security of allied settlements and communication routes on which Lapithos was dependent for shipments of copper and perhaps agricultural produce from the central lowlands. The presence of significant numbers of fighting men suggests that the technological and tactical capacity for small armed bands existed within this community. Similarly, the construction and operation of the “forts” would have involved a large number of people and a high level of organisation and leadership.⁵² Together with the investment in weaponry, this suggests a concern within the community at Lapithos to defend the source of their wealth against competing interests north and south of the Kyrenia Range.

CONCLUSION

Assumptions about the non-functionality of weapons are as problematic in Cyprus as they are elsewhere. Spearheads from Lapithos for the most part match the length and weight ranges of spearheads from elsewhere which have been shown to have been combat weapons. Together with the (preliminary) evidence for impact damage, this indicates that they *could* have been and probably *were* used as weapons in a close-combat fencing style of fighting. While no doubt also indicators of status and identity, they were not purely for show and many if not most men at Lapithos appear to have been fighters and some, at least, both “fighters and showmen”.⁵³

The effort put into producing ever larger spearheads at MBA Lapithos likely derived meaning directly from their functionality, even if outsized examples were not all fully functional. These instruments of aggression involved a major investment of resources –at once increasing the value of metal and helping to protect the source of metal wealth– and were not restricted to a narrow group. The construction of the earliest forts suggests that this investment in weaponry was not intended only for collective defence or as an avenue for negotiating internal status and leadership, though it no doubt served both purposes, but was rather directed outward to protect Lapithos' role in the management and distribution of copper by safeguarding alliances and monopolising the accumulation and transport of goods.

48 For a recent discussion of relevant site histories with references see Webb and Knapp 2021.

49 Bombardieri 2017, 350–51, 357.

50 See Webb and Knapp 2021.

51 Georgiou 2007, tables 10.1, 10.2, nos. 42, Bellapais *Kapa Kaya*, 91 Dikomo *Onisia*, 109 Krini *Merra*.

52 See also Manning 2019, 114.

53 Horn 2019.

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