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Social Strategies, Ritual and Cosmology in Early Bronze Age Cyprus: An Investigation of Burial Data from the North Coast

Jennifer M. Webb and David Frankel

Early Bronze Age communities on the north coast of Cyprus developed a distinctive ceramic tradition with a rich array of forms, including ritual vessels with symbolically complex decoration reflecting the importance of horned animals and other phenomena in a local cosmology. These were deposited in tombs together with decorated drinking bowls and quantities of cattle bones, suggesting the high cost of funerary events. In addition, some tombs appear to have been the scene of ongoing ritual activities and possibly mortuary 'shrines'. These and other forms of patterned behaviour relating to death and burial served to promote new forms of authority through connections with ancestors. North coast mortuary ceremonial also played a key role in the longer-term development of ritual iconography and ritualized practices in Bronze Age Cyprus.

Keywords: Cyprus, Early Bronze Age, mortuary practice, ritual, cosmology

Introduction

The burial record of the Early and Middle Bronze Age in Cyprus (alternatively the Early Cypriot (EC) and Middle Cypriot (MC) periods) has long been viewed as offering a rich body of data, to some extent offsetting the comparative dearth of evidence from contemporary settlements. With the significant exception of recent work by Keswani (2004; 2005), little effort has been made to use this evidence to develop an understanding of social strategies associated with death and burial, and there have been few attempts to explore ritual practice and cosmology in the burial record. Drawing on a number of recent studies which view ritual as a distinctive kind of social strategy in which certain aspects of life are provided with added emphasis through particular kinds of performance (Bell 1992; 1997; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Bradley 2003; 2005, 33–34), this paper reviews current understandings of EC burial and presents new evidence to suggest that north coast funerary ceremonial played a key role in the early development of ritualized practices in Bronze Age Cyprus.

Jennifer M. Webb (corresponding author) and David Frankel, La Trobe University, Victoria 3086, Australia; email: jenny.webb@latrobe.edu.au

Tombs and cemeteries are places of deliberate, structured deposition and specific, repeated, formal activities which define transgenerational relationships between the dead and the living. On the central north coast of Cyprus tomb elaboration, feasting and other forms of patterned behaviour related to death and burial also served as vehicles for ideological exchange in contexts designed to validate emerging claims to social and ritual authority. This offers a useful set of data for exploring ritualized performance as social strategy and tracing the transmission of ritual iconography and cosmological beliefs over time. Two lines of argument are developed — one based on the structure of tombs and tomb assemblages, especially at Karmi *Palealona*, the other on the complex visual symbolism found on ceramic vessels in tombs at Bellapais *Vounous*.

In this paper we focus on the late 3rd millennium BC and the first centuries of the 2nd, where it is possible to identify significant chronological variation in ceramics. Stewart developed a fine-scale ceramic chronology some 50 years ago, largely based on pottery from tombs on the north coast (1962b). More recent stratigraphic evidence from settlements at Sotira *Kaminoudhia* in the south (Swiny *et al.* 2003) and the central sites of Alambra *Mouttes* (Coleman *et al.* 1996) and Marki *Alonia* (Frankel and Webb

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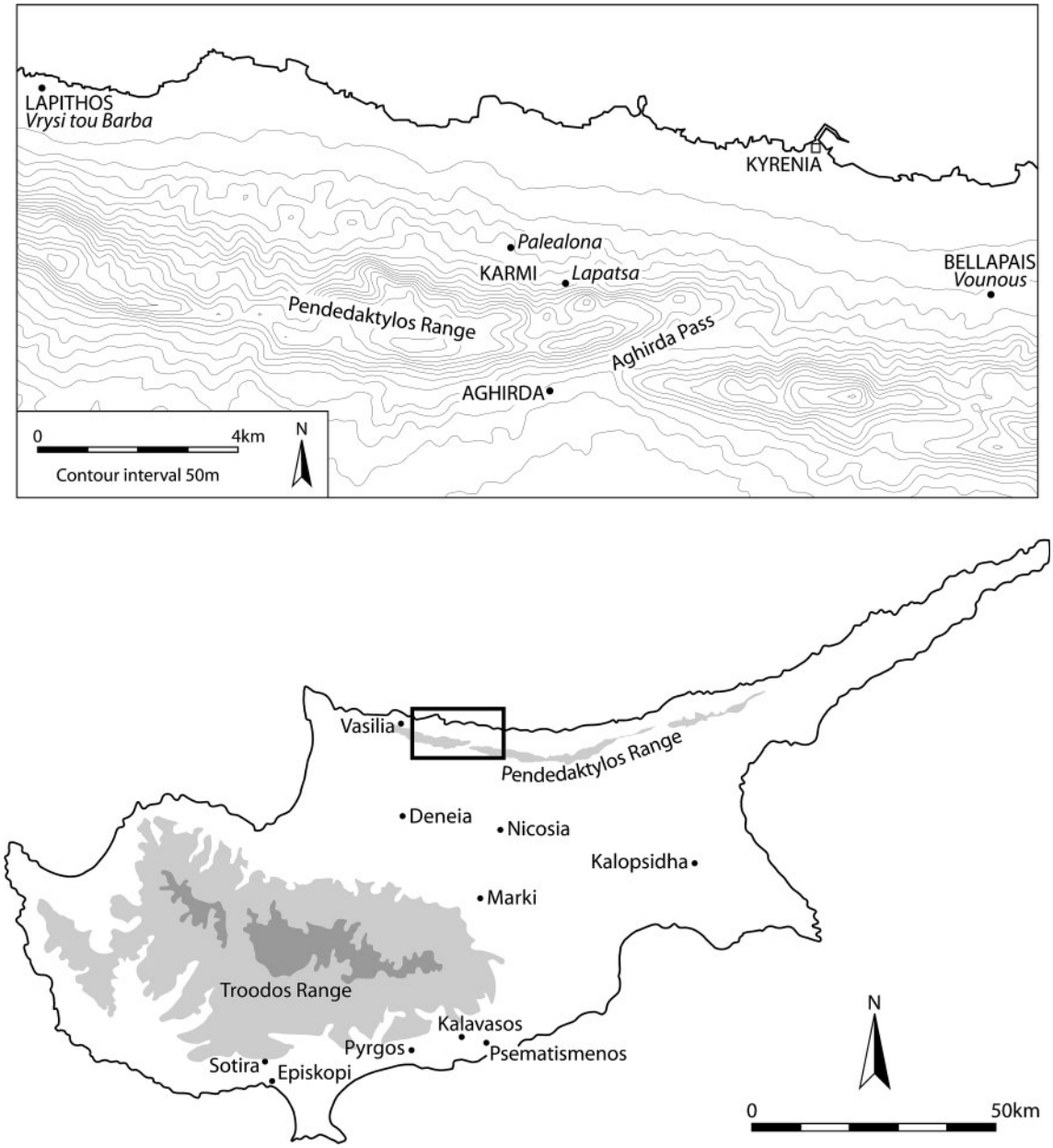

Figure 1 Map of Cyprus showing the location of sites mentioned in the text (drawn by D. Frankel)

1996; 2006) have confirmed the general sequence, still most often referred to by the well-established schema of EC I to III and MC I to III. As Stewart's finer distinctions cannot always be recognized, these are often grouped into two broader periods, EC I–II and EC III–MC I (Table 1). It is possible, however, to differentiate earlier and later material within these periods and to identify significant changes in material and behaviour.

Table 1 Chronological terminology used in this paper

		Approximate dates BC (+/−50 years)
Early Cypriot	Philia facies	2350–2250
Bronze Age	EC I–II	2250–2100
	EC III–MC I	2100–1900
Middle Cypriot	MC II	1900–1800
Bronze Age	MC III	1800–1700

Cemeteries and tombs on the north coast

Prior to the Turkish invasion of 1974, when this part of the island became inaccessible to the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, the focus of archaeological work in the north coast region of Cyprus was almost entirely on funerary sites (Fig. 1). Over 150 EC and MC tombs at Bellapais *Vounous* Sites A and B were excavated in the first half of the 20th century and have been fully published (Dikaios 1940; Stewart and Stewart 1950; Dunn-Vaturi 2003). Twenty-three

tombs investigated at Lapithos *Vrysi tou Barba* by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition appeared in Gjerstad *et al.* 1934. Another 73 tombs excavated at the same site by Myres in 1913, Markides in 1917 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1931 await full publication, but a considerable amount of information is available in preliminary papers and in Herscher's 1978 dissertation (Myres 1940–45; Grace 1940; Herscher 1975; 1978). Finally, some 27 tombs at Karmi *Lapatsa* and *Palealona*, excavated by Stewart in 1961 (Stewart 1962a), have now been fully published (Webb *et al.* 2009), adding considerably to our understanding of mortuary practice in the central north coast region, including the use of a previously poorly known facility in Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6. These chronologically overlapping burial grounds provide an extensive body of data from a bounded geographic region. The associated settlements, which remain unknown, are likely to have belonged to an ancient social territory, with the dominant centre located, as argued below, for most if not all of this period, at *Vounous*.

Rock-cut chamber tombs were in common use across Cyprus throughout the Bronze Age (Keswani 2004). In EC I and II, on the north coast, the entrance passages (*dromoi*) were square or oblong with vertical sides and flattened or concave floors, often sloping or stepped at the rear. Chambers were oval, somewhat smaller in area than the *dromoi* and sealed with large stone slabs and earth-packed stone blocking walls (e.g., Stewart and Stewart 1950, 47, 51, 62, 82, figs 7, 12, 24, 40; Herscher 1978, 712; Webb *et al.* 2009, 205). Most tombs were single-chambered. Additional chambers were occasionally cut from the *dromos* or chamber from late EC II while tombs cut in EC III and MC I were normally multi-chambered (Stewart 1962b, 272; Åström 1972, 6–7; Herscher 1978, 708). Small burial facilities cut into the walls of *dromoi* are a feature of EC III and MC tombs at Lapithos and Karmi. Generally referred to as 'cupboards', they were sealed in the same manner as the large chambers. The long-held belief that they were used for child burials receives some support from the recovery of sub-adult remains in Lapithos Tomb 804F (Herscher 1975, 40, n. 13; 1978, 703) and *Palealona* Tomb 10B (Pardoe 2009, 259).

The north coast mortuary record shows a marked preference for continued use of existing chambers over the construction of new tombs or burial grounds. This longevity, sometimes over two or three hundred years, suggests a strong emphasis on social continuity, probably based on kin groups, with tombs acting as tangible reminders of the past and of connections with ancestral spaces, events and beliefs.

Tomb elaboration

While most tombs are simple rock-cut facilities, some have unusual architectural elements (summarized here in Table 2). Most prominent among these are

Table 2 Summary of tombs with architectural features at Lapithos *Vrysi tou Barba* (Herscher 1978), Bellapais *Vounous* (Stewart and Stewart 1950) and Karmi *Palealona* (Webb *et al.* 2009)

Site	Tomb	Dromos	Chamber	Date of construction
Bellapais	114	Carved stomion façade		EC I
Bellapais	116	Carved stomion façade		EC I
Bellapais	117	Carved stomion façade		EC I
Karmi	2	Recessed pilasters on side wall, remnant carving on façade	Buttress	EC I–II
Karmi	6	Carved façade and sides, anthropomorphic figure	Buttress with horned pilaster	EC I–II
Karmi	15		Buttress in Chamber A	EC II
Lapithos	811	Carved pilaster and sunken floor forming an alcove; recessed entrance to Chamber B		EC I–II
Lapithos	812	Recessed entrance to Chamber B	Buttress in Chamber A	EC I–II
Lapithos	813	Recessed entrance to Chamber B	Buttress, recesses and raised semicircular area in Chamber A	EC II
Lapithos	817		Buttress in Chambers A and B	EC II
Lapithos	827	Carved pilasters on side walls; recessed entrance to Chamber B	Buttress and small recess with large jar in Chamber B	EC I–II
Lapithos	828		Shallow buttress in Chamber A	EC II?
Lapithos	829	Recessed entrance to Chambers B and C	Buttress and small recess with large jar in Chamber A	EC I–II
Lapithos	833		Two projecting piers, one grooved in Chamber A	EC II?
Lapithos	834		Buttress, horseshoe-shaped ridge and small recess in Chamber A	EC II
Lapithos	837		Buttress and small recess with large jar in Chamber A	EC II?

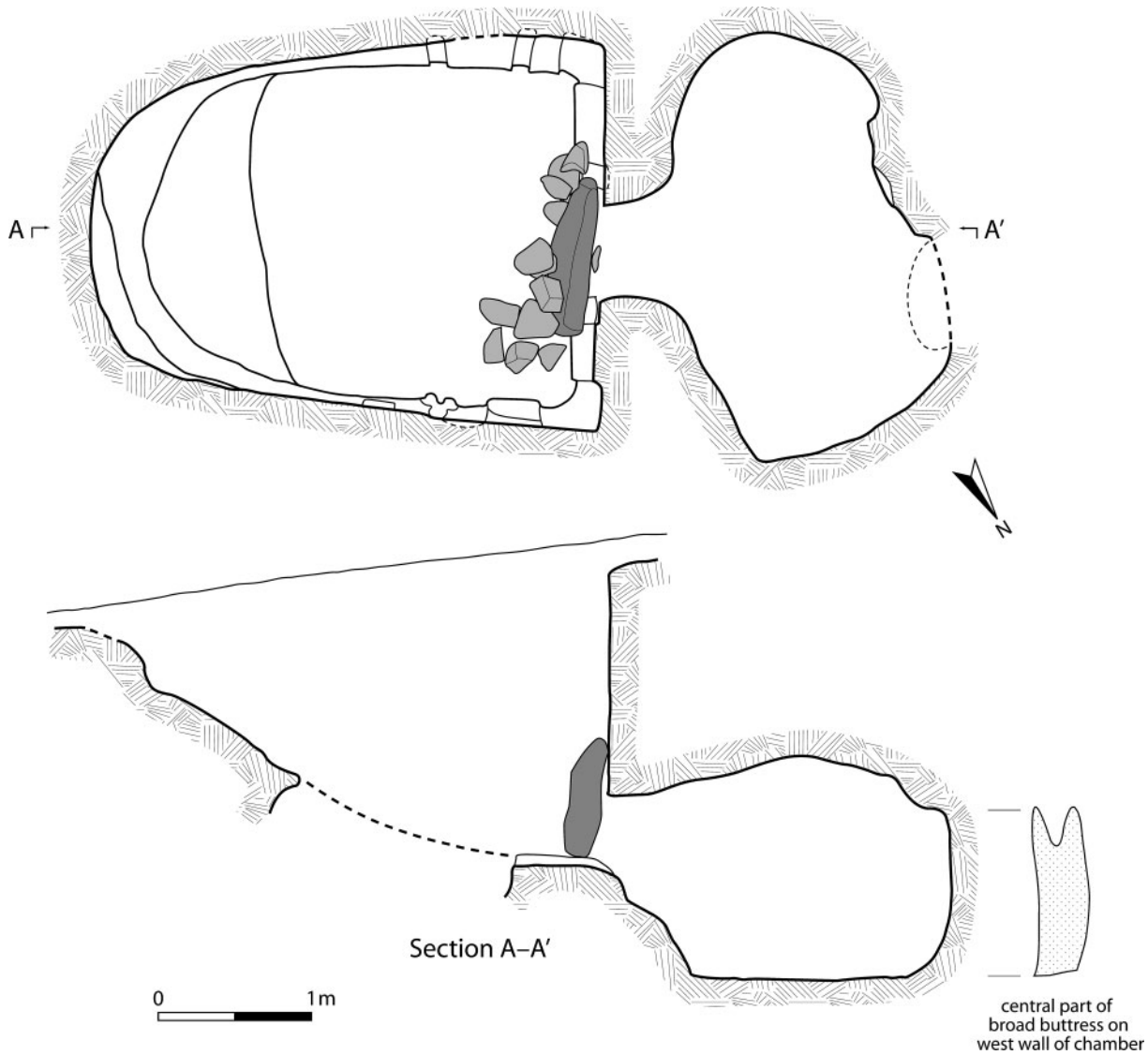

Figure 2 Plan and section of Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6, showing horned pilaster carved on the buttress at the rear of the chamber (after Webb *et al.* 2009, fig. 3·36)

carved *dromos* façades and buttressed chambers. In the case of Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6, these combine to suggest identification as a mortuary shrine.

Buttressed chambers

The chambers of Karmi *Palealona* Tombs 2, 6 and 15A have a shallow central buttress or rock-cut pier on the rear wall. That in Tomb 6 has a central carved pilaster topped by a pair of horns (Webb *et al.* 2009, 130, figs 3·36, 4·39; Fig. 2). Similar buttressed chambers occur in at least 14 tombs at Lapithos (Herscher 1978, 706), most if not all of which date to EC II. In some cases these project up to a metre and are thought to have been structural in purpose, helping to support the curved roof (Gjerstad *et al.* 1934, 86; Herscher 1978, 706). Most examples, however, were considerably smaller and Herscher suggests that these truncated pilaster-like examples had a ritual purpose. In Lapithos Tomb 813A a raised semicircular area bordered by a ring of small stones in front of the pilaster contained a mass of sherds mixed with fragmentary bones (Herscher 1978, 318, 321). Similarly, in Tomb 834A, a horseshoe-shaped ridge extending from the foot of the buttress 'in a loop from corner to corner' is said to have resembled a hearth (Herscher 1978, 642, 644, 789). Both features recall hearth surrounds found in EC and MC house compounds at Marki (Frankel and Webb 2006, 14–17, figs 2·3–2·4). In Tombs 827B, 829A, 834A and 837A truncated buttresses were associated with small recesses cut into the floor and back wall (Herscher 1978, 520, 570, 644, 685). In Tombs 827B, 829A and 837A these recesses contained large jars.

Figure 3 Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6 *dromos* figure and pilasters (after Webb *et al.* 2009, fig. 3·40)

The horned pilaster in the chamber of *Palealona* Tomb 6 is unique. Tomb 833A at Lapithos, however, was furnished with two short projecting piers, both with their tops broken away, at least one of which was decorated with two carefully finished wide vertical grooves (Herscher 1978, 623–25). The jar recesses and raised semi-circular areas associated with buttresses at Lapithos were not reported at *Palealona*. All three buttressed chambers at this site had, however, been considerably disturbed.

Carved dromoi

Three tombs at Karmi, three at *Vounous* Site A and several at Lapithos have carved features in the *dromoi*. The most remarkable are those associated with Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6 (Webb *et al.* 2009, 128–34, figs 3·36–3·44, 4·36–4·38). Here a standing anthropomorphic relief figure (116 cm high and 30 cm wide) is flanked by two relief pilasters to the right of the chamber entrance: the pilaster on the left is rectangular, that on the right is partly preserved or only ever consisted of an upper block aligned with the tops of the other two features (Figs 2–3). On the opposite wall are another two relief pilasters. The *stomion* façade is carved with three broader pilasters, each topped with a framed horizontal row of V-shaped incisions (Fig. 4). The tomb has long been attributed to MC I (Karageorghis 1962, 394; Frankel 1974, 23; Merrillees 1994, 38). It is now clear, however, that the construction, use and closure of Tomb 6 belong entirely within the EC I–II period (Webb *et al.* 2009, 131–32).

Tomb 2 at Karmi *Palealona* also has two rectangular pillar-like features on the north wall of the *dromos*, in this instance cut into the rock wall rather than carved in relief (Webb *et al.* 2009, 85, figs 3·14–3·20, Fig. 5). A small horizontal ledge above the *stomion* may be the remnant of a more complex feature associated with the *stomion* façade (Webb *et al.* 2009, 85, figs 3·17–3·19). Tomb 2, like Tomb 6, was constructed in EC I or early EC II. The excavated *Lapatsa* tombs did not exhibit such features, but they clearly existed in some *dromoi* at that site. The incised façade of a looted tomb photographed by Stewart in 1938 shows a double row of zigzag lines above the *stomion* (Stewart 1939, 462, pl. VII; 1962a, 217; Webb *et al.* 2009, 2, fig. 1·5).

The three tombs with decorated *dromoi* at *Vounous* Site A are located close together in the southern part of the cemetery (Fig. 6). Each has carving only on the *stomion* façade. Tomb 114 is described as having 'two square vertical pillars, one on either side of the

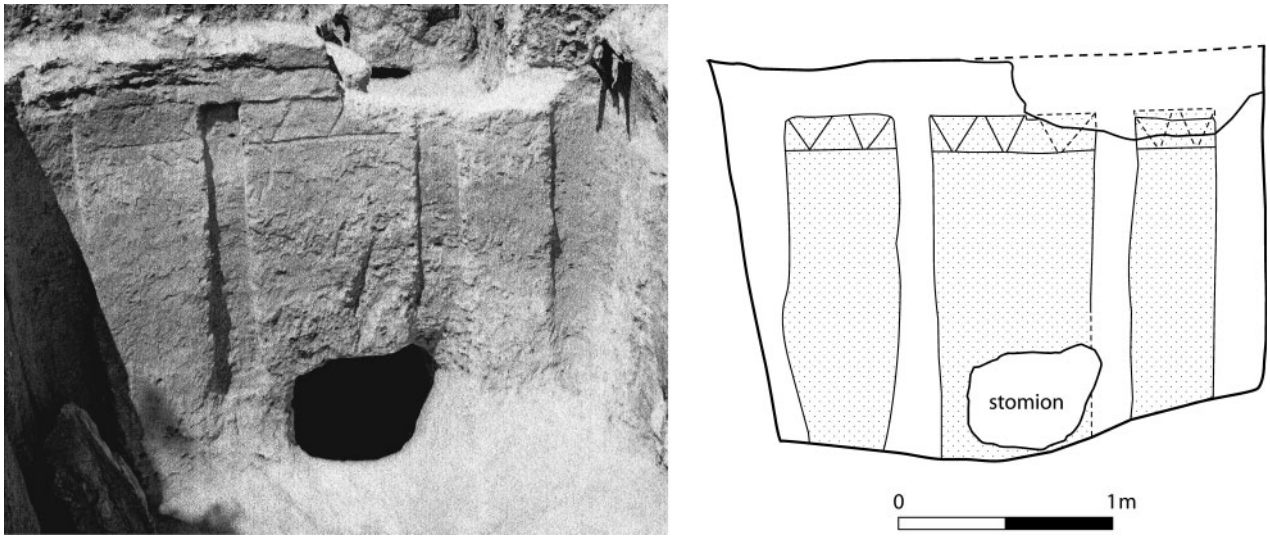

Figure 4 Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 6 *stomion* façade (after Webb *et al.* 2009, figs 4·36, 4·37)

entrance, with a horizontal lintel across the top' (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 152–55, figs 111–13, 124a). In Tomb 116 the carving shows 'two uprights, one on either side of the entrance, with a recessed lintel across the top' (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 158, figs 120, 124b). Similarly, in Tomb 117 the façade appeared to Stewart to represent two tall uprights and a lintel. The uprights, however, continue above the lintel, suggesting the presence of an upper storey and possibly a window. An obscure form on the left was thought to represent a bolt-slot (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 162–63, figs 123–24). The earliest burials in Tombs 114 and 116 date to EC I (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 155, 162; Stewart 1962b, 388). Tomb 117 had been robbed but remaining sherds indicate that it was also cut in EC I (Stewart and

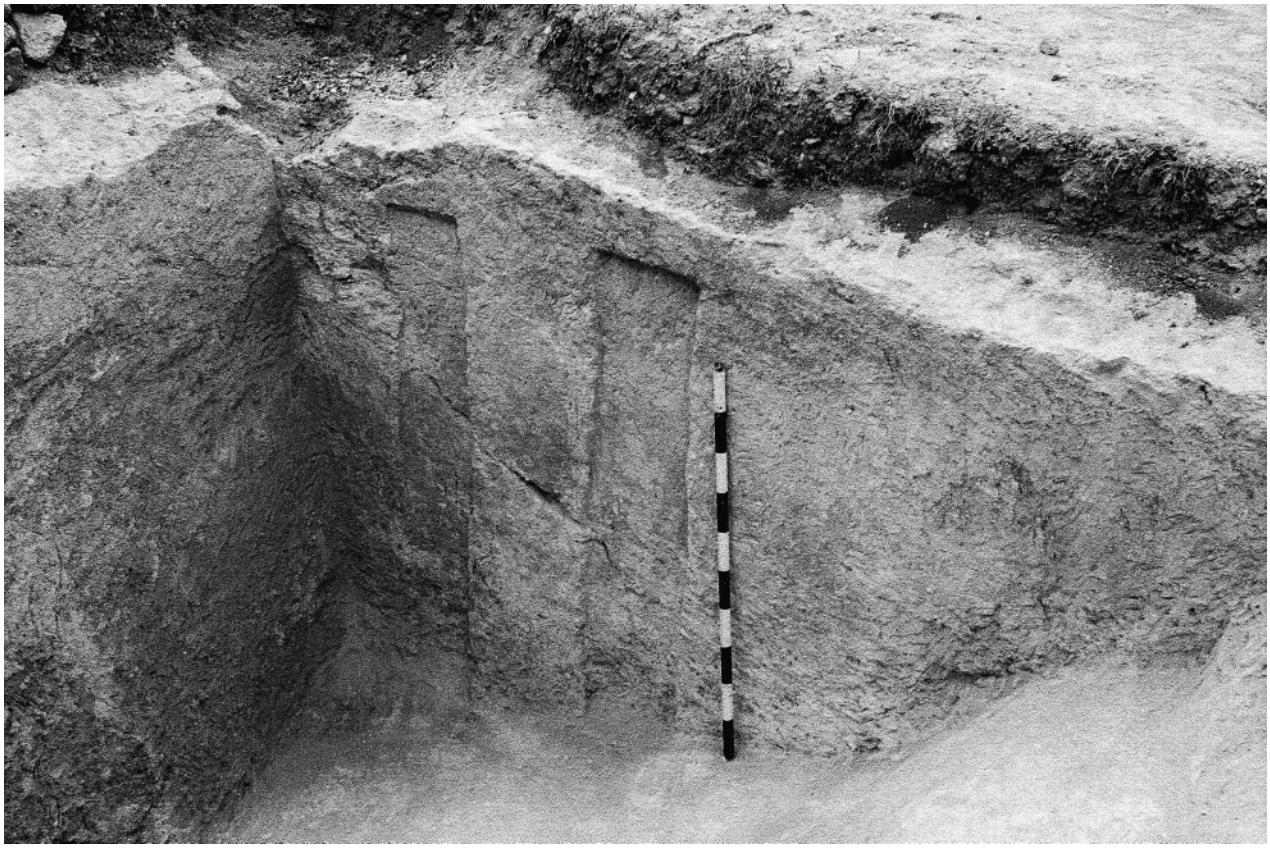

Figure 5 Karmi *Palealona* Tomb 2 *dromos* showing recessed pilasters (after Webb *et al.* 2009, fig. 3·20)

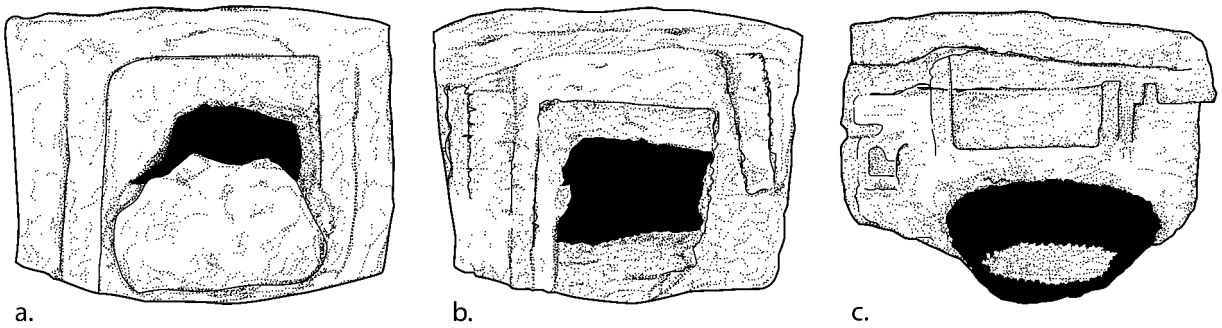

Figure 6 Carved *stomion* façades at Bellapais *Vounous* (after Stewart and Stewart 1950, fig. 124): (a) Tomb 114; (b) Tomb 116; (c) Tomb 117

Stewart 1950, 163). Stewart suggested (1939; 1962b, 217) that these *stomion* carvings represent door frames with jambs and lintels and thus that tombs were envisaged literally as houses for the dead (for similar concepts in the EBA Levant, see Chesson 1999; 2001; 2007). Keswani (2004, 56) has alternatively proposed that decorated doorways may mark these tombs as shrines.

The Lapithos examples are less elaborate and no plans or photographs have been published. A number of tombs are described as having recessed door frames, thought to have been both functional (to support the *stomion* block) and decorative (Herscher 1978, 705). In the large *dromos* of Tomb 827 a rectangular relief pilaster projecting 12 cm on the east wall to the left of the entrance to Chamber A is divided for most of its length by a vertical groove, creating the effect of two rectangular pilasters, one 38 cm wide and the other 49 cm wide (Herscher 1978, 518). Another pilaster on the opposite wall, immediately left of the entrance to Chamber B, aligns with the north edge of the first pilaster. In Tomb 811 a pilaster (27 cm wide and 7 mm thick) is said to have combined with an area of sunken floor to create the effect of a small alcove leading to Chamber A (Herscher 1978, 280, 705). Herscher attributed both recessed door frames and other façade decoration at Lapithos to EC III (1978, 709). Some of these decorated tombs, however, were in use in EC II and it is likely that these features date to their period of construction (as Herscher 1978, 709, n. 35).

Karmi Palealona Tomb 6: A possible mortuary shrine

Palealona Tomb 6, with its unique *dromos* and chamber features, is exceptional. It has a central location within the excavated area of the cemetery and produced some of the oldest and finest material. The *dromos* is relatively large (7 m^2) and deeper (1·9 m) than all other *dromoi* at Karmi except that of *Palealona* Tomb 2 (also 1·9 m deep). In both cases the greater depth is likely to be related to the intended carving of the *stomion* façade.

The carved *stomion* façade of *Palealona* Tomb 6 is quite different from those noted above at *Vounous*. At *Vounous* the carving is clearly intended to embellish the doorway leading into the chamber. The façade of *Palealona* Tomb 6, on the contrary, depicts three vertical panels, each topped by a horizontal band. The central panel is wider than the side panels. Within the horizontal band on the central panel are three incised Vs; within that on each side panel are two incised Vs. The *stomion*, which is now an irregular oval but likely to have originally been circular, cuts through the lower part of the central panel. Thus the façade appears to have been carved before the cutting of the chamber. This raises the possibility that Tomb 6 existed in its *dromos* form for some time before the associated chamber was constructed.

The anthropomorphic figure on the north wall of the *dromos* is the only relief carving known from Early Bronze Age (EBA) Cyprus. Indeed, anthropomorphic representation *per se* is otherwise entirely absent from the EC I and II record, with the (possible) exception of incised figures on two vessels from *Vounous*, discussed below. While its features suffered some damage during excavation, small breasts and a swelling in the pubic area are readily apparent. The posture is frontal with the arms bent at the elbow and resting on the chest wall. This gesture draws attention to the breasts and is associated with female figures in the EBA Aegean and elsewhere (Mina 2008, 219–20) and on local MC figurines of Karageorghis' Groups Bi and Bj (1991, 81–84, 88, figs 82–84, 90, pls XLVII.4–XLVIII, L–LI).

The Karmi figure has been identified as an image of the deceased (Frankel and Tamvaki 1973, 42), a person paying homage to the ancestors (Keswani 2004, 58) and the Cypriot 'Great Goddess' (J. Karageorghis 1977, 44). To this list may be added

Figure 7 Shrine model from Kotsiatis/Marki (courtesy of Cyprus Museum)

the possibility that she served as a particular or generic 'spirit ancestor', and thus as a material referent of communal or kin memory, to be appeased, supplicated or venerated (see Meskell 2003). Given the presence of the tripartite façade, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Karmi figure is to be equated with the female figure which stands in front of a large jar before a similar three-part façade on two well-known terracotta models (Fig. 7). Long identified as 'shrine models', these items were acquired from a dealer in the village of Kotsiatis, but probably derive from one of the cemeteries associated with the nearby EC and MC settlement at Marki (V. Karageorghis 1970; 1991, 142–44, pls CII.2–3, CIII.1–2; Morris 1985, 284–85, figs 496–97; Frankel and Webb 1996, 12). The role of the female figure in both cases appears to be that of attendant, supplicant or guardian.

Similarities between the *stomion* façade of *Palealona* Tomb 6 and the three uprights topped with horned animal heads on the Kotsiatis/Marki 'shrine models', as well as on a similar, poorly preserved object from Kalopsidha Tomb 5 (Åström 1966, 14–15, fig. 5) and the famous Vounous Model (Dikaios 1940, 118–25, pls VII–VIII), have been noted by many (Frankel and Tamvaki 1973; Åström 1988; 1996; Merrillees 1994). The conceptual links, however, extend beyond the presence of a tripartite façade. The incised Vs which top each pilaster may be intended as schematic representations of horned animal heads, matching those mounted on the uprights on the terracotta models. Such an association is reinforced by the horned pilaster carved on the buttress in the Tomb 6 chamber. A further association between the Kotsiatis/Marki shrine models and EC burial practice is suggested by the presence on the former of a large jar set on a low plinth before the horned uprights. While no jar was found in the *dromos* of *Palealona* Tomb 6, intact jars, as noted in more detail below, stood before the *stomion* in Tombs 87 (Fig. 8), 111 and 152 at *Vounous* (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 74, 139, 146, 183, figs 33, 36–37) and perhaps in *Palealona* Tomb 2, and in buttress recesses in the chambers of Lapithos Tombs 827B, 829A and 837A (Herscher 1978, 520, 570, 685).

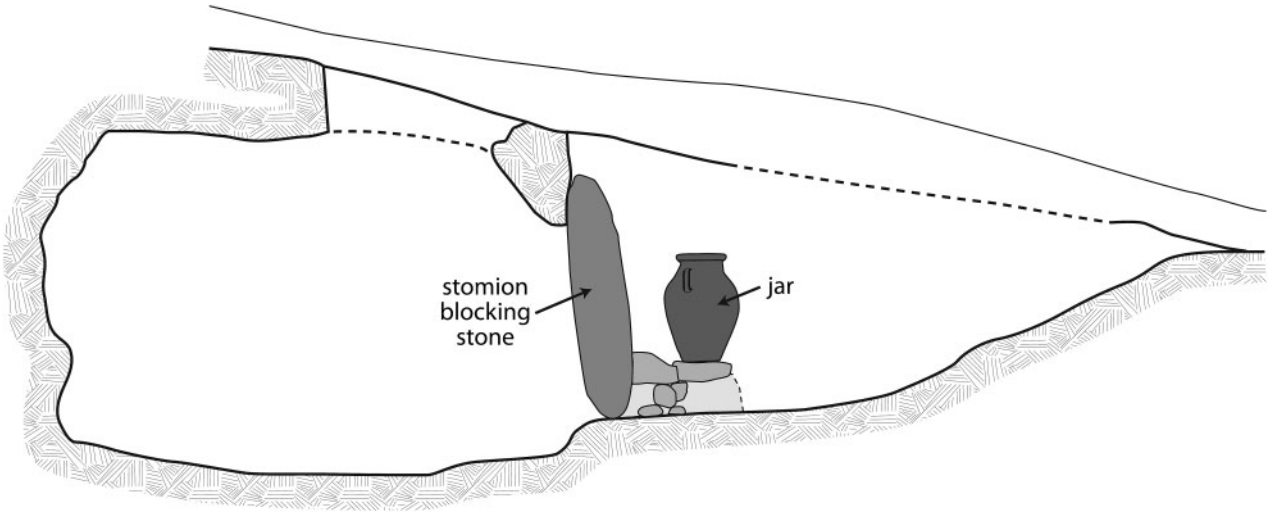

Figure 8 Section through Tomb 87 at Bellapais *Vounous* showing large jar in *dromos* (after Stewart and Stewart 1950, fig. 33)

It has frequently been suggested that the 'shrine models' depict a burial scene or ceremonies related to a funerary cult (Dikaios 1940, 118–25; Frankel and Tamvaki 1973; J. Karageorghis 1977, 43; Loulloupis 1979, 218–22; Merrillees 1980, 184; Peltenburg 1987, 40; Mogelonsky 1988, 222; O'Bryhim 1996, 9; Keswani 2004, 56). Åström (1988, 8–9) noted a resemblance between the projecting rectangular area in front of the vertical panels on the Kotsiatis/Marki and Kalopsidha models and a tomb *dromos*. Frankel and Tamvaki (1973, 42) suggested that the female figure on the Kotsiatis/Marki models is 'making offerings to, or bringing gifts for, the dead'. Keswani (2004, 56–58) proposes that the models represent 'a libation scene associated with the ritual veneration of ancestors'.

Why only certain tombs were permanently marked with carved *dromoi* is difficult to determine. The tomb contents are of limited help. *Vounous* Tombs 114 and 117 had been looted. The material which remained in their chambers and in Tomb 116 included both complex vessels and models but these items were relatively widespread across the cemetery (Keswani 2004, 197, table 4·7a). *Palealona* Tomb 6 had also been looted but the remnant assemblage included three of the finest decorated bowls found at Karmi (Webb *et al.* 2009, fig. 3·99, S16, S17, S20; Fig. 11b, d, f). *Palealona* Tomb 2, also with carved features, produced some of the earliest and latest material from the cemetery. This longevity and the substantial number of fine Red Polished I vessels left in the chamber, including a number of imports from *Vounous*, suggest that Tomb 2 also held a special position in the cemetery.

Those who constructed and were, presumably, later buried in Tombs 2 and 6 at *Palealona* may have held superior social or ritual status within the community. Alternatively (or in addition), given their early date, it may be suggested that they were 'founding tombs' and that their construction marked the establishment of both cemetery and settlement at *Palealona*, laying ancestral and future claims to territory and resources. The tombs (or *dromoi*) themselves may also have served as shrines, as indicated in particular for Tomb 6. Indeed, it is possible that Tomb 6 was originally an extramural shrine, located in an area which later became the locale for a cemetery. Given its clear connections with tomb architecture, however, it seems more likely that it was established as a ritual 'space' or '*dromos* shrine' within a cemetery, perhaps by the founders of the associated settlement, and subsequently used as a tomb by one or more of these founding groups. Too small to have been the scene of periodic communal ritual, activities within the *dromos* of Tomb 6 may have been restricted to ritual specialists (suggesting exclusiveness and mystery) perhaps during individual burial events.

The elaboration of *Palealona* Tombs 2 and 6 signals qualitative ritual differences in the use of these locales as well as probable chronological precedence. Their anomalous features also reference other tombs in the north coast region as symbols of competitive status, perhaps based on kinship links with particular buried individuals/groups at other sites. These may have been the graves of people of greater social importance or perhaps the founding members of the community whose remains became a focus of

memory and ritual activities involving the elaboration of physical 'space'. Such graves may have been linked with origin narratives or with rituals involved in the foundation of cemetery and settlement. The role of burial in constructing memory and marking place, in endowing a sense of ancestry and negotiating and legitimatizing rights to land and resources, is likely to have resulted in particular status being accorded the first tombs constructed and the first people buried in a cemetery (Parker Pearson 1999, 17. For similar arguments in relation to the 3rd millennium in the Levant, see Chesson 2001; 2007; Philip 2003; 2008; Schwartz 2007). Such burials and their physical surroundings may have been especially structured in order to facilitate veneration of founding ancestors, merging their personal histories with the longer-term history of the burial community.

Burial practice and mortuary ritual

Where burials and burial goods are well preserved, meaningfully structured recurrent practices range from the disposition and treatment of bodies and artefacts, through evidence for mortuary feasts and related performances.

Preservation and sequence of use

Primary inhumation was the main form of burial throughout the EBA. The majority of human remains, however, have not been recovered as articulated skeletons but rather semi-articulated, disarticulated or/and fragmented. In some cases this is due to disturbance by flooding, collapse, looting or other factors. In most instances, however, it occurred during the period of use of the cemeteries, as burials were either removed from chambers or gathered into pits or niches, and was itself a cultural process which must be viewed as a normative part of the burial programme (for a similar argument with regard to the Italian Neolithic, see Robb 2007, 56–65). The disarticulation of human bodies was thus a known and expected part of the history of the dead, probably taking place after 'the lapse of an interval of appropriate memory' (Robb 2007, 64). This presumes an understanding on the part of those who constructed, maintained and were themselves buried in tombs that primary burial was not a permanent deposition. Once the soft tissue had decayed, the bones assumed a different value and could be disturbed or removed. Whether this was associated with formal rites of secondary burial or with routine tomb maintenance and reuse is difficult to determine. In either case, long-term undisturbed deposition was the exception rather than the rule.

Most north coast tomb chambers were used for multiple sequential burials. This involved, in EC I and II, the full or partial clearance of earlier grave goods and skeletal remains. This is indicated by several lines of evidence, including the presence of fragmentary EC I and II vessels in almost all chambers with primary interments of EC III or MC date and the routine recovery of fragmentary vessels and sherds in *dromos* fill and sub-surface levels between tombs (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 80, 131, 162, 221; Webb *et al.* 2009, 239). Also suggestive of tomb clearance are two deposits found in shallow scoops to the north-west of the main group of tombs at *Lapatsa* (Webb *et al.* 2009, 16–18, 42–44; Webb and Frankel 2009). One contained 19 mostly incomplete EC III vessels and a spindle whorl, the other 14 more or less complete vessels of EC I and II, a whorl and a few bones. These deposits offer a rare glimpse into activities not otherwise recognized in the more common focus on primary burials, closed tomb-groups and specific acts of interment.

The presence of EC III material in one of the *Lapatsa* deposits and in *dromos* fill suggests that the practice of removing bodies and grave goods continued into this period. By late EC III, however, skeletal material and funerary assemblages were more often gathered up and retained in the chamber. This change in the treatment of earlier burials coincided with the addition of new chambers to existing tombs, the enlargement of chambers and the construction of niches, platforms and pits within chambers (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 146, n. 2; Herscher 1978, 708; Keswani 2004, 58). Herscher (1978, 782–83) also notes instances at Lapithos in which objects and bones were divided off by rows of stones or jugs, covered with pottery or a layer of silt or gathered up and placed in an enclosed circle of stones. This shift toward the long-term retention of human remains (and the growth in the size and number of chambers) suggests a change in the concept of a tomb as a temporary locale for an individual to one of permanent receptacle for a social group. It may have coincided with changes in the understanding of death itself — from a transitional state to one of permanent ancestorship, a concept elsewhere associated with burial in long-lasting tombs and mechanisms designed to ensure extended remembrance of the dead by the living (Helms 2004, 124).

The disposition of bodies and artefacts

There is a clear bias toward the right side of the chamber for the disposition of bodies (Grace 1940, 11; Herscher 1978, 784–85; Dikaios 1940, 98–100;

Stewart 1962b, 295; Dunn-Vaturi 2003, 178; Webb *et al.* 2009, 235). Where bodies were laid out in the centre or at the rear of a small chamber, the head was almost invariably placed to the right (Stewart and Stewart 1950, figs 8–9, 13, 34–35, 46, 70). If niches, recesses or benches were cut on one side of the chamber, this was also regularly the right side (Grace 1940, 11, n. 3, 21; Dikaios 1940, Tombs 3, 5, 6, 13, 15, 17, 29, 37; Dunn-Vaturi 2003, 178; Keswani 2004, 56). A preference for the right is indicated also for *dromos* features, including the figure in *Palealona* Tomb 6 and recessed panels in *Palealona* Tomb 2, stone-lined depressions on the right side of the *dromos* in *Vounous* Tomb 111 and a 'bothros' containing an ox bone to the right of the *stomion* in *Vounous* Tomb 101 (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 111–13, 139, 146, n. 1). In a number of tombs a small bowl or juglet was left just inside and to the right of the chamber, within reaching distance from the *stomion*. Examples include Karmi *Palealona* Tombs 1B and 10A and *Lapatsa* Tombs 4, 5 and 12 (Webb *et al.* 2009, 240), Lapithos Tombs 806A, 832A, 835A and 835C (Grace 1940, 21; Herscher 1978, 788–89) and *Vounous* Tombs 72 and 164A (Dunn-Vaturi 2003, 178; Stewart and Stewart 1950, 228, figs 165, 169a).

Large jars appear to have played an important role in mortuary activities, perhaps holding water for the washing of the dead, libations or offerings. At *Vounous* a jar stood to the right of the chamber entrance in the *dromoi* of Tombs 87 (Fig. 8), 111 and 152 (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 74, 139, 146, 183, figs 33, 36–37). The presence of fragments of a large jar in the *dromos* of *Palealona* Tomb 2 suggests that it originally stood there before being deposited in the chamber (Webb *et al.* 2009, 88). Gjerstad (1926, 73) notes an EC I tomb at Arpera in which a jar was also found in the *dromos* near the door slab. These vessels suggest ongoing activities in the *dromos* following the closure of the chamber and, by implication, that *dromoi* remained open for some time after or between burials. These *dromos* jars recall the large jars found in buttress recesses in Lapithos Tombs 827B, 829A and 837A (see above), the placement of bodies on 'beds' of jar (or pithos) sherds at Lapithos (Herscher 1978, 786–87, 792) and, as already noted, the scene depicted on the Kotsiatis/Marki 'shrine models' (Fig. 7).

Where undisturbed by subsequent clearance or reuse, a patterned arrangement of vessel types by size, shape and function is frequently evident in the chambers (Fig. 9). Storage vessels (primarily jugs and amphorae) were placed at the foot of the body and small bowls in discrete clusters separate from or alongside the larger vessels (e.g., Stewart and Stewart 1950, figs 18, 20, 34–35, 38c–39, 57, 102, 126, 128, 150–150bis, 187, 192, 211–12, 264–65; Herscher 1978, 788; Webb *et al.* 2009, 236, fig. 4·34). Small flasks were also regularly placed near the head and in several instances small bowls were held in the hand either close to the face or alongside the body (Stewart and Stewart 1950, figs 92, 118, 166; Dikaios 1940, 39, 43, 48, figs 16a, 17a, 18; Dunn-Vaturi 2003, 138, fig. 28; Herscher 1997, 32; Webb *et al.* 2009, 46, fig. 2·45). A similar arrangement is indicated by the occasional recovery of finger or wrist bones in small bowls (Webb *et al.* 2009, 11; Herscher 1978, 685, 694; Stewart and Stewart 1950, 227). This patterning of objects suggests that specific practices and beliefs governed the placement of grave goods in relation to the body of the deceased.

Feasting and social competition

Grave goods are likely to include personal possessions of the dead and to derive from rituals associated with funerals, which were frequently occasions of intense social investment involving feasting and other activities. Evidence for competitive feasting in relation to death and burial is particularly strong at *Vounous*. EC I–II funerary assemblages from Site A contain large numbers of decorated vessels, particularly small bowls, jugs, earlug pots and flasks, and complex, probably ritual vessels with elaborate incised and modelled decoration (Webb and Frankel 2008, 290–91, pl. LVIIb; Fig. 10). Assemblages show high artefact diversity with new object types, such as model knives, daggers, spindles and brushes, probably produced exclusively for burial. There is an emphasis on individually distinctive drinking vessels, most notably in the case of tulip bowls (Stewart 1999, 87–108), which show deliberate 'additive' variability, involving the accumulation and redundancy of elements of both form and decoration (Fig. 11). Incised motifs are diverse, symbolically complex and occur in intricate configurations (Webb and Frankel 2008, 291, pl. LIX). This use of selected vessels as vehicles of 'symbolic style' focuses attention on particular consumers and is likely to have been closely linked to the dynamics of identity negotiation.

The presence of medium and large bowls at *Vounous* suggests that food as well as drink was consumed during mortuary ceremonies. Tomb chambers also contained quantities of animal bones, often located at the feet of the skeleton (e.g., Stewart and Stewart 1950, 122, 130, 141). These were, unfortunately, not comprehensively collected, but a brief report identified cattle, sheep and goat (Stubbings

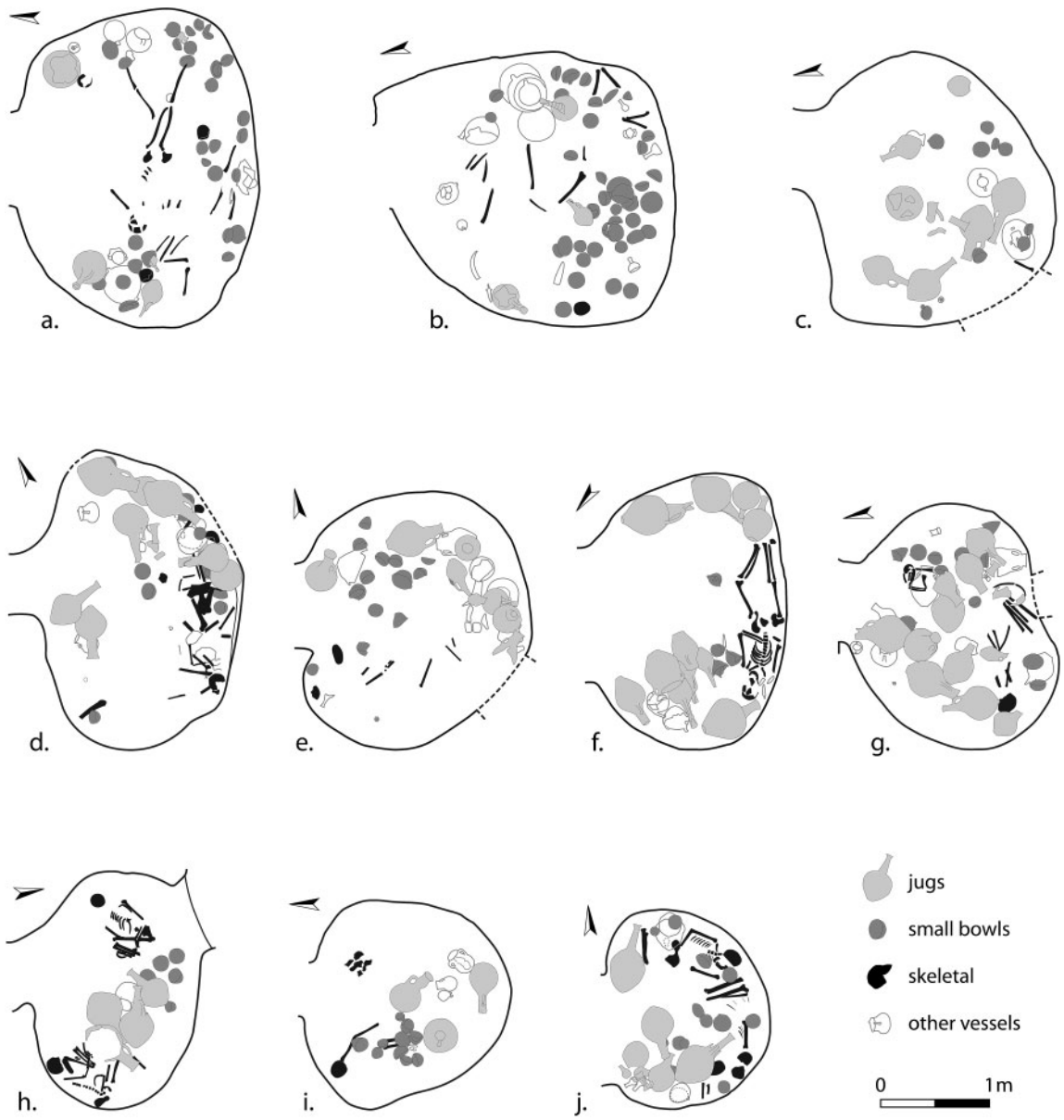

Figure 9 Disposition of bodies and artefacts in tomb chambers at Bellapais *Vounous* and Karmi *Lapatsa* (after Stewart and Stewart 1950, figs 34, 187, 211 and Webb *et al.* 2009, figs 2·7, 2·28, 2·38, 2·41, 2·45, 2·48, 2·54): (a) *Vounous* Tomb 124; (b) *Vounous* Tomb 132; (c) *Lapatsa* Tomb 11; (d) *Lapatsa* Tomb 1; (e) *Lapatsa* Tomb 12; (f) *Vounous* Tomb 87A; (g) *Lapatsa* Tomb 15; (h) *Lapatsa* Tomb 14B; (i) *Lapatsa* Tomb 7A; (j) *Lapatsa* Tomb 14A

1950, 374–80). Cattle bones, which were in the majority, were largely from adult animals. While all three species were present as cuts of meat, cranial and facial bones, mandibles and wrist and foot bones were also found. Faunal remains are likewise recorded from chambers at Lapithos and Karmi. These, too, were not retained or formally studied, but species identified (possibly erroneously) in the field include cattle, sheep, goat, deer, dog, bird and equid (Herscher 1997, 34; Webb *et al.* 2009, 239).

Funerary ceremonial at *Vounous* clearly involved the targeted slaughter and probably consumption of adult cattle and other animals. This suggests the high cost of funerary events and bears witness to sustained levels of economic surplus. Given the body parts represented, animals are likely to have been killed and butchered on site, with both meat-bearing parts and extremities deposited in tomb chambers. The presence (Stubbings 1950, 376), of articulated joints which were not fully defleshed or broken up for the removal of marrow suggests particular processing practices, which are likely to reflect the special nature of funerary consumption and to differ from those operating in non-funerary contexts (Horwitz 1987; 2001; Dietler and Hayden 2001, 3). An absence of pig bones in mortuary contexts has also been noted (Herscher

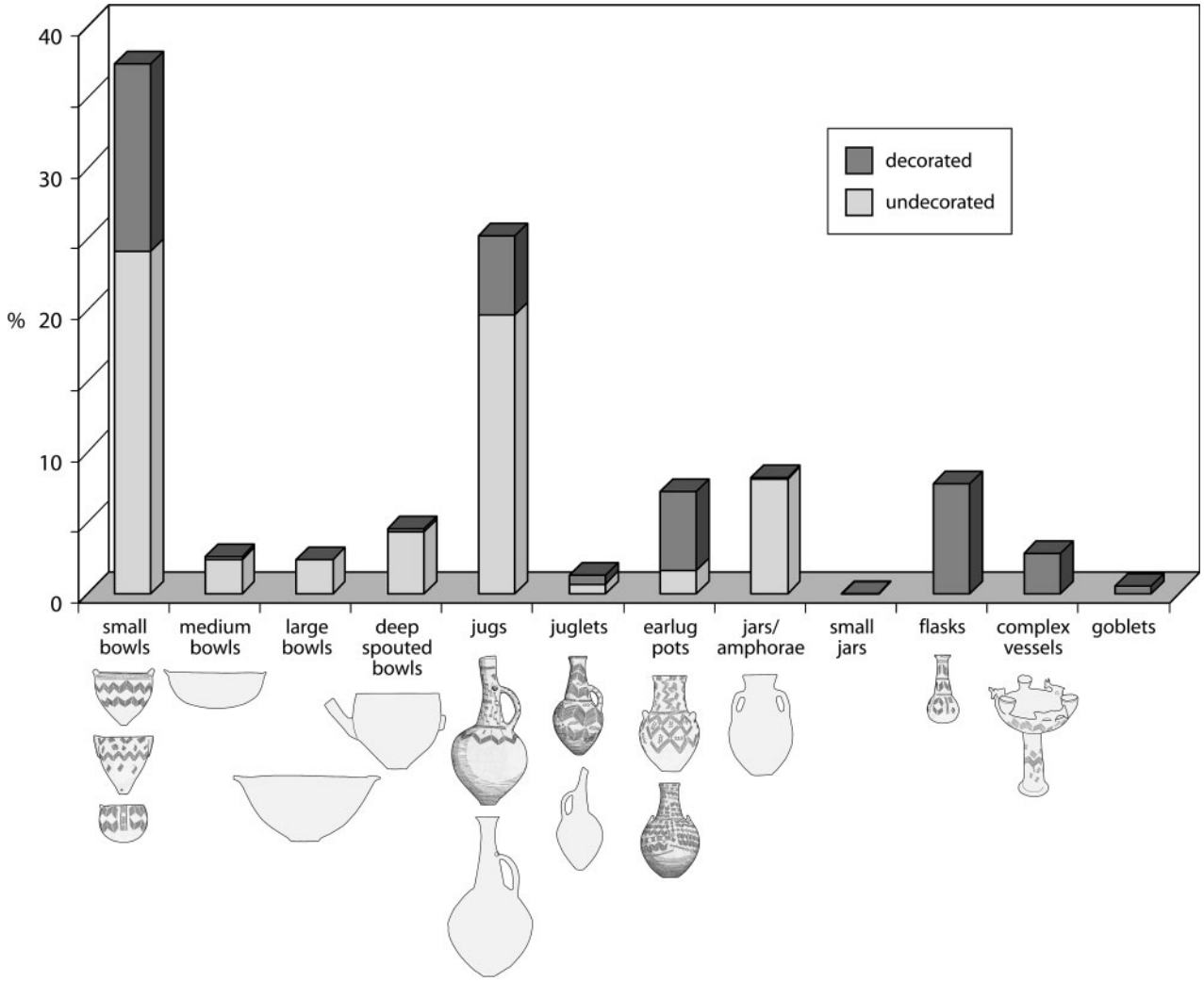

Figure 10 Incidence of EC I–II decorated vessels at Bellapais *Vounous* (after Webb and Frankel 2008, 292–93, pl. LVIIb)

1997, 34). This may, however, reflect the relatively low incidence of pig in the EC diet rather than deliberate avoidance (Croft 2006, 273–74, 279–80).

The presence of complex, probably ritual vessels in over a third of tombs and animal remains and prestige serving vessels in most chambers at *Vounous* Site A (Keswani 2004, 64, table 4·7a) implies widespread promotional feasting behaviour and creation of social debt at this site in EC I and II. The incidence of animal bones, decorated vessels and food presentation bowls at Karmi and Lapithos in EC I–II is markedly lower than at *Vounous* and complex (ritual) vessels are entirely absent (Webb *et al.* 2009, 209–211, tables 4·3–4·4, fig. 4·8; Herscher 1997, 32). This suggests that funerary events were smaller in scale and involved less overt manipulation of material culture, but there is no reason to doubt that mortuary feasting was also practised at these sites.

Assemblages from *Vounous* Site B suggest some changes in consumption practices in EC III–MC I (Webb and Frankel 2008, 292–93, pl. LXb, Fig. 12). There is a significant increase in the number of small bowls and juglets and a decrease in the number of jugs, amounting to a reduction in the size of vessels associated with the pouring of liquids. Earlug pots, tulip bowls and earlier types of special purpose vessels also disappeared, giving way to new complex vessels, comprised of multiple bowls or juglets. This investment in elaborate non-utilitarian vessels, involving high production costs and subsequent 'destruction' by burial, suggests a continuing emphasis on costly funerary ceremonial at *Vounous* in EC III. Animal bones are present in most tomb chambers, though not in the same quantities as in EC I–II.

The increase in the number of small bowls at *Vounous* in EC III and MC I–II was accompanied by a decrease in the number of bowl forms, the incidence of decorated bowls and the range and complexity of decorative motifs. These developments, which are matched at Lapithos and Karmi, suggest a

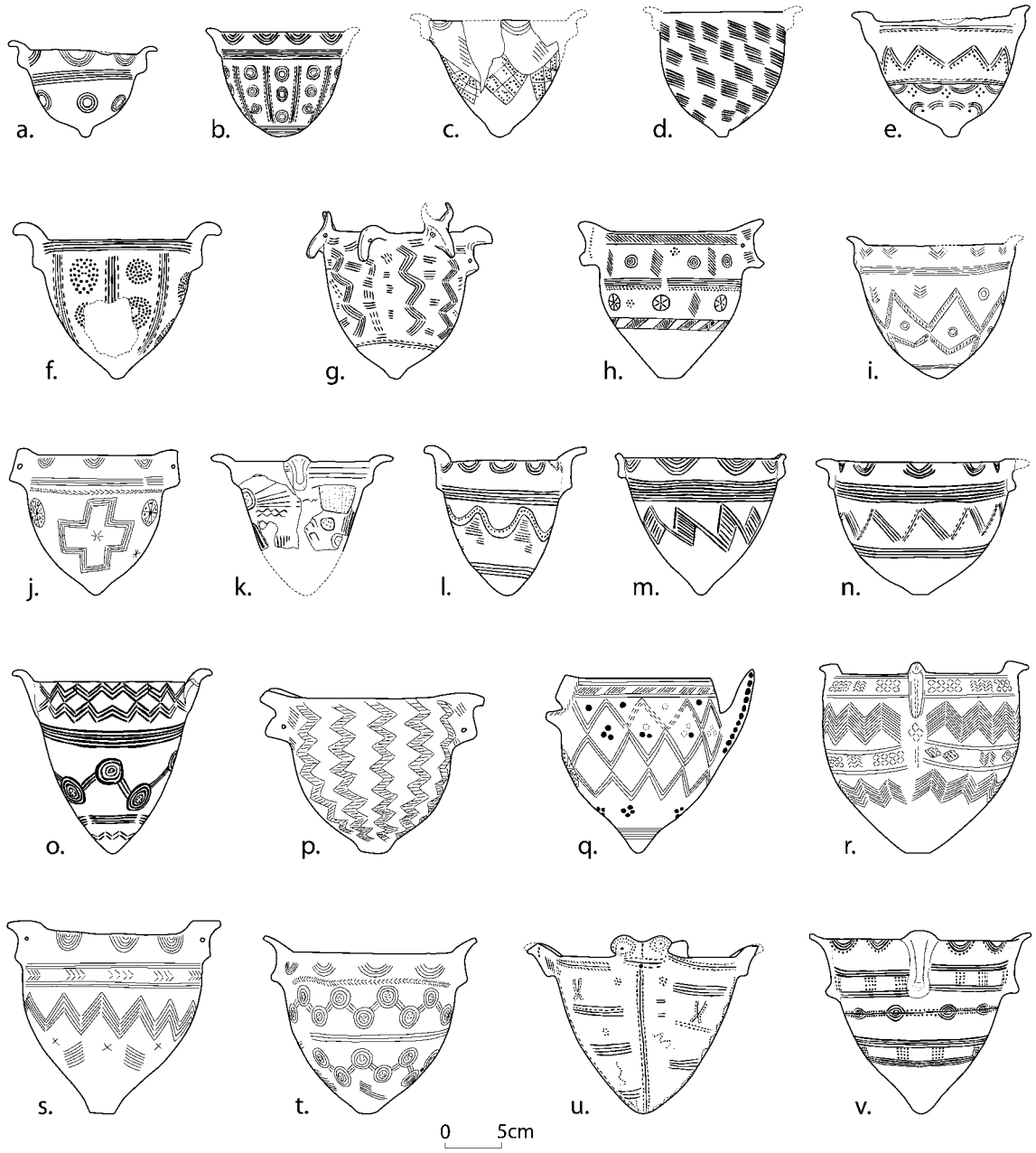

Figure 11 **EC I–II decorated tulip bowls from Bellapais *Vounous* and Karmi *Lapatsa* and *Palealona* (after Stewart 1999, figs 20·5, 21·5, 22·3–4, 23·2, 24·4, 25·2 and 6, 26·3, and Webb *et al.* 2009, fig. 4.15): (a) *Palealona* Tomb 3A·68; (b) *Palealona* Tomb 6·S17; (c) *Palealona* Tomb 3A·79; (d) *Palealona* Tomb 6·S16; (e) *Palealona* Tomb 12·6; (f) *Palealona* Tomb 6·S20; (g) *Vounous* Tomb 153·10; (h) *Vounous* Tomb 84·12; (i) *Lapatsa* Tomb 12·21; (j) *Vounous* Tomb 89·6; (k) *Palealona* Tomb 2·64; (l) *Palealona* Tomb 4A·1; (m) *Lapatsa* Tomb 15·26; (n) *Lapatsa* Tomb 15·21; (o) *Lapatsa* Tomb 15·12; (p) *Vounous* Tomb 120·13; (q) *Vounous* Tomb 155·8; (r) *Vounous* Tomb 141·19; (s) *Vounous* Tomb 111·45; (t) *Vounous* Tomb 111·36; (u) *Vounous* Tomb 161·34A; (v) *Palealona* Tomb 2·66**

diminution in the role played by small bowls in displays of social competition. At the same time, their increasing number may indicate participation by larger groups of people in funerary ceremonies in EC III and perhaps a shift in the focus of identity negotiation from individuals to sub-groups or more corporate entities. Such a trajectory toward the assertion of authority by sub-groups coincides with the changes in attitude toward the physical remains of ancestors noted above.

An emerging ritual iconography

The structure of burial facilities and assemblages provides one view of evolving ritualized behaviour in and around cemeteries. The symbolic content of grave goods provides another — and has the

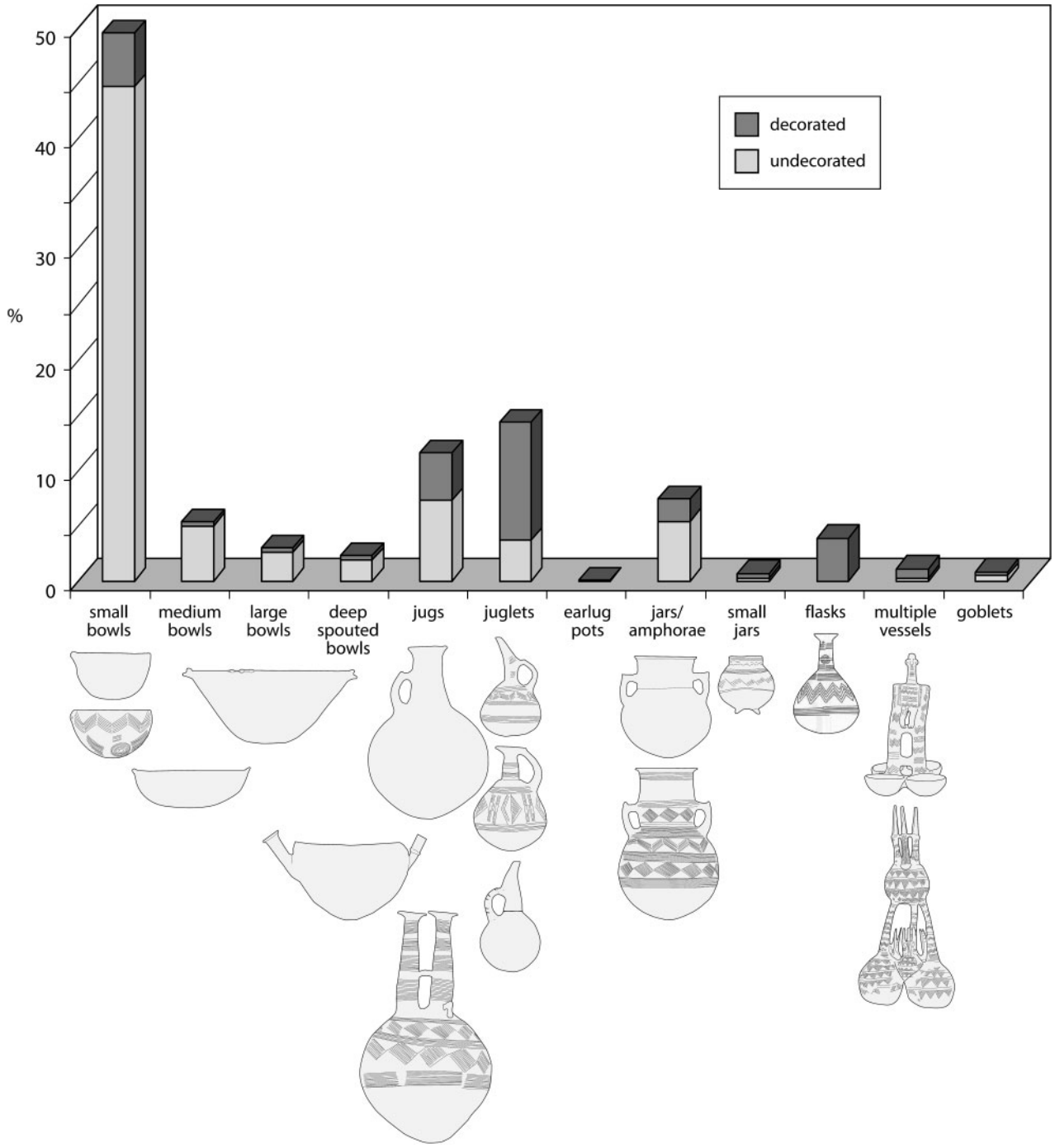

Figure 12 Incidence of EC III–MC I decorated vessels at Bellapais *Vounous* (after Webb and Frankel 2008, 292–93, pl. LXb)

additional potential to throw light on fundamental propositions about death and burial. This is especially so for *Vounous* Site A, which produced an exceptional array of elaborate ceramics. While some vessels were undoubtedly removed from household inventories for burial with the dead (Dugay 1996), others display a strikingly rich and dynamic iconography and are likely to have been produced specifically for use during mortuary and perhaps other ceremonies. This iconography is almost entirely concerned with horned quadrupeds which appear as whole animals or heads modelled on the rims of large pedestal bowls (up to 53 cm high) and as isolated heads on the rims of deep bowls, in both cases in conjunction with complex incised decoration (Stewart and Stewart 1950, pls LXXIX–LXXXV, LXXXIX–XCII, XCIX.l; Figs 13–14). Cattle are in the great majority, with sheep, goats, deer and perhaps moufflon also depicted, as well as birds and, very occasionally, pigs (Stewart and Stewart 1950, pls

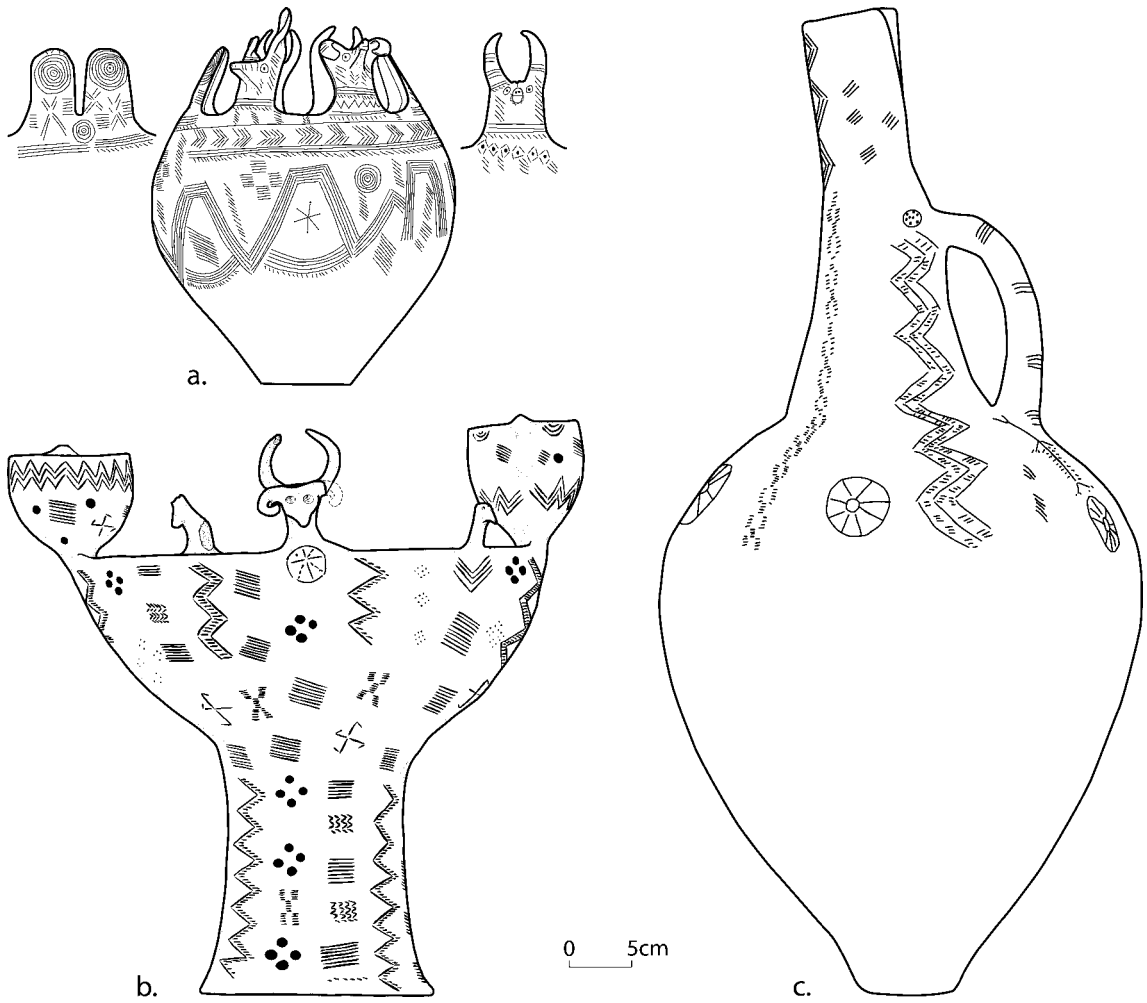

Figure 13 EC I deep bowl and jug from Bellapais *Vounous*: (a) Tomb 155·1 (after Åström and Merrillees 2003, fig. 3); (b) Tomb 160A.13 (after Hennessy 1974, fig. 1·1); (c) Tomb 160A.16 (after Hennessy 1974, fig. 1·2)

LXXXIV–LXXXV, XC.d, f; Karageorghis 1991, pls CXIII–CXVIII). On pedestal bowls animals alternate with decorated miniature tulip bowls. On deep bowls animal heads alternate with disks incised with concentric or rayed circles. Similar rayed circles, identified by Stewart as sun-disks (1962b, 293; 1999, 89), appear on the bodies of pedestal bowls, tulip bowls and large jugs, along with reversed swastikas, crosses, concentric rectangles, scrolls and carefully drawn zigzag, chevron, herringbone, dotted and other motifs. These vessels are widespread in EC I tombs at *Vounous* Site A (Hennessy 1974, 11–14, figs 1–5; Keswani 2004, 64, table 4·7a). With the exception of a large jug and a tulip bowl (Fig. 11k) from *Palealona* Tomb 2, none have been recovered elsewhere (Webb *et al.* 2009, 92, 94, figs 3·89–3·90, 4·11, 4·17, Tomb 2·42 and 64).

Most striking of all is the depiction on a deep bowl and a large jug (79·4 cm high) from *Vounous* of incised upright antlered, bull- and ram- or mouflon-horned cloven-hoofed figures, depicted frontally in an attitude of display or movement suggestive of dancing (Stewart and Stewart 1950, 97, 208, Tombs 91·14, 160A.16, pls Ib, La, LXXIX.c–d, LXXX.a–b, XCIII; 1988, 249, pl. IV.3; Hennessy 1974, figs 1·2, 2·1–2; Figs 13c, 14a, 15). Identified as animals 'in plan view' by Morris (1985, 217), these therianthropic depictions may instead represent supernatural beings, humans dressed in animal skins and skulls or masks (Stewart 1962b, 293; Belgiorno 1993; Åström 1997, 7–9) or the projected transformation of human actors into animals during ritual performances. Each of these possibilities suggests that funerals and perhaps other ritual events at *Vounous* were theatrically charged, involving feasting, dancing and other performances focused on horned animals. Such hybrid human/animal images no doubt reflect the complex and contradictory nature of EC human-animal relationships, in which the same animals were revered and at the same time hunted, slaughtered, eaten and otherwise manipulated (Green 1997, 909; Molyneaux 1989, 197).

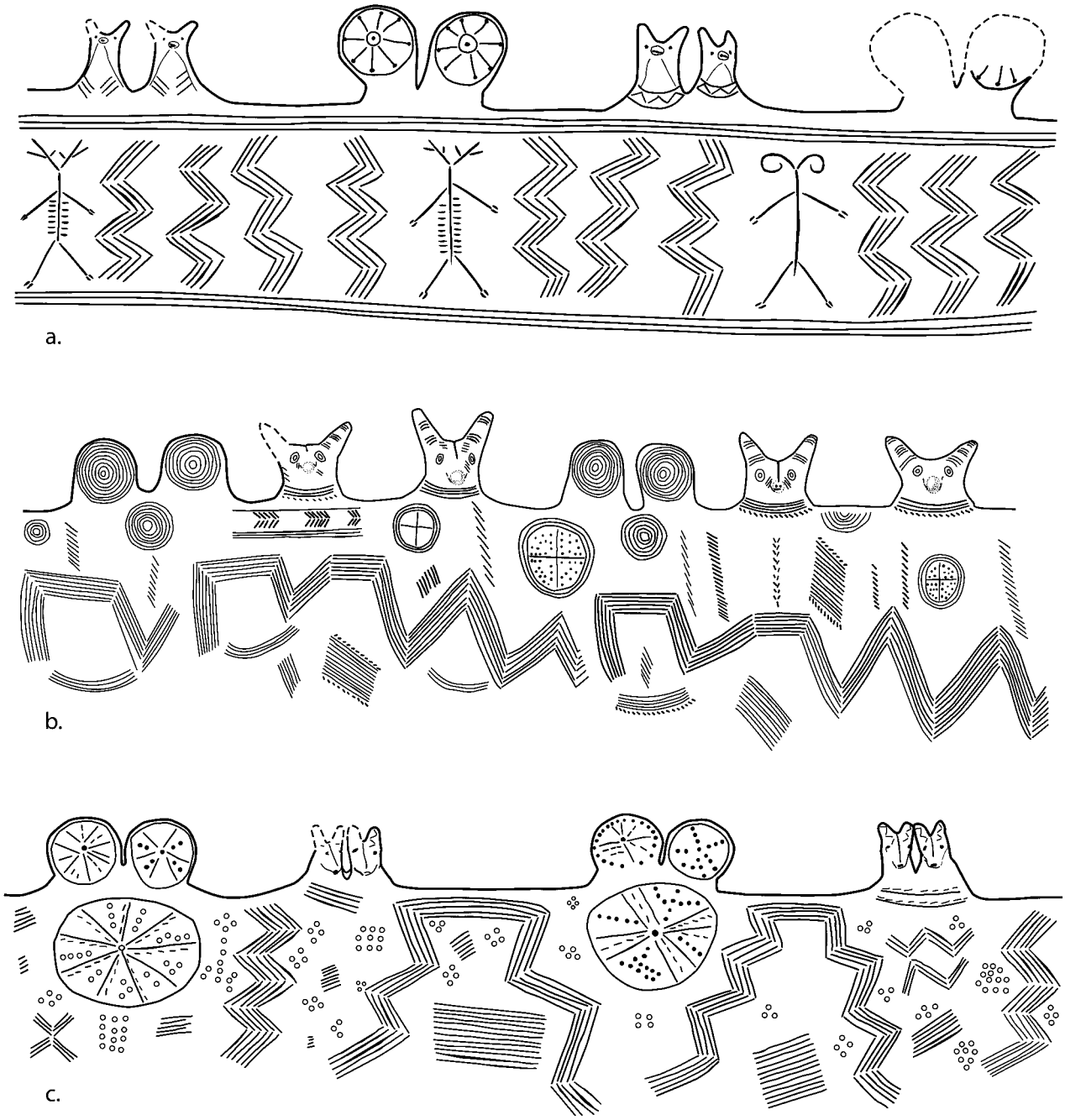

Figure 14 Incised motifs (expanded) on three EC I deep bowls from Bellapais *Vounous*: (a) Tomb 91·14; (b) Tomb 161·18; (c) Tomb 90·7 (after Hennessy 1974, fig. 2·1–3)

The horned animal head mounted on the central panel on the Kotsiatis/Marki shrine models is that of an ox, most probably a bull. The head on the right-hand panel also appears to be that of an ox, while that on the left has vertical horns and may be of a different species. Bovines account for almost all the small terracotta zoomorphs recovered in EC and MC settlement deposits at Marki (Frankel and Webb 2006, 157–58, fig. 5·4, pl. 50; Webb and Frankel 2001). An association with ritual or more broadly ceremonial activities is suggested by the fact that 60% show evidence of exposure to fire, a rate significantly higher than that of other object classes from the site. Cattle also constituted the most significant component of Cypriot animal economies during the later 3rd and earlier 2nd millennium (Croft 2003, 446–47; 2006, 279–80, text table 9·3). This mirrors the iconographic emphasis and highlights the socio-ideological importance of this species in prehistoric Bronze Age Cyprus.

The apparently exclusive role played by *Vounous* in the development of this iconography in EC I and II is remarkable. During the preceding Philia phase of the

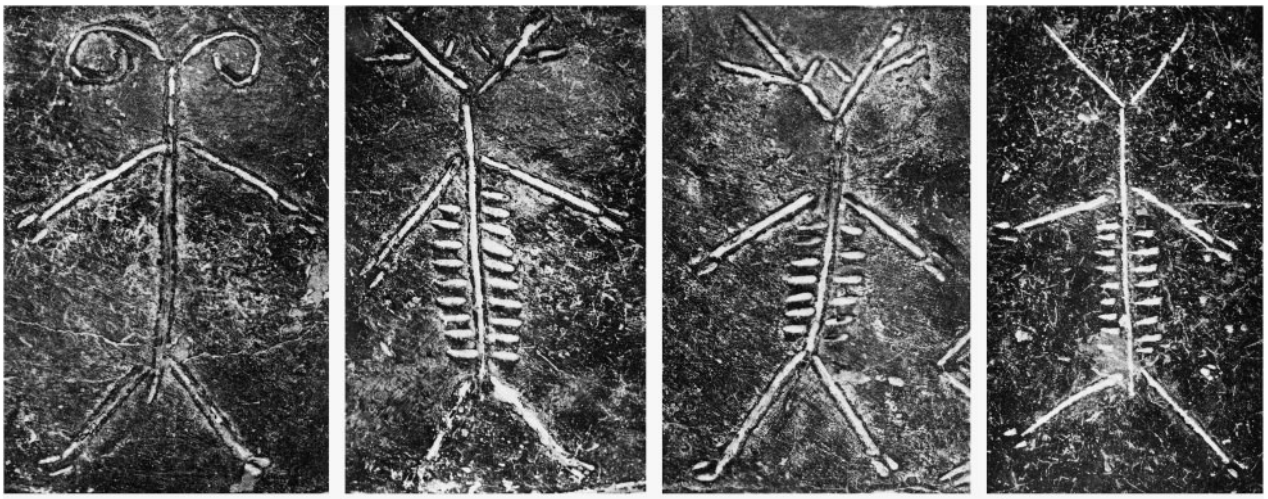

Figure 15 Therianthropic figures on two vessels from Bellapais *Vounous*: (a–c) Tomb 91·14; (d) Tomb 160A.16 (after Stewart and Stewart 1950, pl. XCIIIa–d)

EC period incised motifs in all parts of the island were simple, restricted in number and usually limited to particular parts of the vessel (Frankel and Webb 2006, 95, table 4·12; Webb and Frankel 2008, 289, pl. LIX). Developments at *Vounous* are also unrelated to indigenous Late Chalcolithic iconography, an observation underscored by fact that the core zoomorphic referents — cattle — were not present on the island at this time. The emergence of a complex cosmology based on cattle and other horned species and symbols probably representing solar, lunar and other natural phenomena, appears to have been a rapid *sui generis* development at *Vounous* which reached a considerable degree of iconographic complexity by mid EC I.

In the absence of contemporary settlement excavations on the north coast we cannot know whether the facilities in Tomb 6 at *Palealona* and the iconography found in EC I–II tombs at *Vounous* were exclusively associated with death and burial. There is some, albeit ambiguous, evidence, however, to suggest that by EC III related practices were not limited to cemetery locales. A substantial plaster installation in Unit CIV-4 in Compound 7 at Marki bears some resemblance to the tripartite form of the 'shrine models' and the *stomion* façade of *Palealona* Tomb 6 (Frankel and Webb 2006, 26, 75–76, figs 2·13, 3·7, 3·60, pls 16a–c, 32d). Built in EC III and damaged by erosion, it consists of a low rectangular platform set against a wall. Two post holes at the sides of the structure flank a narrow central slot within which were the remains of a mudbrick slab. The room was almost entirely devoid of finds and little can be said about the function of this feature, other than that it appears to have supported a rectangular mudbrick upright flanked by smaller posts. The 'shrine models' and an amphora fragment with relief decoration from Psematismenos, which depicts a fragmentary but apparently similar scene (Flourentzos 1993), are also probably of EC III or MC I date. The recovery of these objects in the centre (Kotsiatis/Marki), east (Kalopsidha) and south (Psematismenos) of the island suggests that key elements of ritual practice developed on the north coast in EC I–II had spread across the island by MC I.

Ritual as social strategy

The difficulties involved in distinguishing 'symbolic' or 'ritual' spheres of activity from those of the 'everyday' are well known, and made more difficult when the broader ritualization of practices is taken into consideration (Bell 1997; Rappaport 1999; Insoll 2004; Bradley 2003). If the household unit was a setting for ritual in EBA Cyprus, this may have been focused on the domestic hearth and involved the use of items not distinct from those in everyday use. There is no evidence for discrete ritual spaces or paraphernalia in the household record at EC and MC settlements — with the possible exception of the installation in Unit CIV at Marki noted above and a recently excavated complex at Sotira in the south (Swiny 2008). In small-scale societies with incipient leadership, burial is likely, however, to have been among the most visible forms of symbolic activity. In most communities there may have been few other integrating activities beyond the level of the household.

It is clear that on the north central coast of Cyprus, and particularly at *Vounous*, burial was a key arena for ritualized practice as well as for the creation of

social prestige and alliances (Keswani 2004, 82). At *Vounous*, behaviours and beliefs associated with death, burial and the ancestors gave rise to (or were closely linked with) a complex iconography and sets of symbolic artefacts, including ritual vessels, individualized drinking cups and modelled items. Tomb 6 at Karmi *Palealona* suggests, further, that particular architectural concepts and notions of dedicated ritual space were allied, though perhaps not exclusively, with cemetery locales. Butchering, feasting and other performances were also important aspects of mortuary practice. In societies without formal political roles or well defined status distinctions, ritual has considerable integrating potential and hosting feasts is often a means of acquiring and maintaining the respect and prestige necessary to exercise leadership (Dietler 2001, 79; DeMarrais 2004, 20). In societies where formal status distinctions exist but there are no fixed hereditary rules for determining who may fill them, hosting feasts is also often the means by which individuals assume and hold these roles. While the nature and extent of formal status distinctions at *Vounous* remain unclear, there can be little doubt that feasting and other practices related to death and burial served to promote new forms of social identity and authority in the EC period. As noted above, this appears to have initially involved a focus on individualized social confrontation with a subsequent shift toward more corporate entities by late EC III.

The iconography on unique sets of artefacts from *Vounous* is focused on horned animals (both wild and domesticated), planetary bodies and other natural phenomena. Animals, in all cases those of everyday experience, appear to have been embedded in a symbolically constructed view of the world and probably played important, perhaps predominant, roles in a wider cosmology. Similar complex animal symbolism is widespread in pre-state societies. Where visible through textual and ethnographic data, animals serve as performative or communication devices, act as metaphors for the seasons, social conditions or special circumstances, as emblems or totems of the soul, lineages or social groups, as sacrifices or food in redistributive or competitive feasts or/and as quantitative measures of sacredness, wealth or power for comparison between individuals and groups (Huntingdon and Metcalf 1979; Emery 2004; Douglas 1994; Willis 1994; Grant 1991; Keswani 1994).

While it is notoriously difficult to access prehistoric ideologies, there are some clues as to the nature of ritual and belief in EBA Cyprus. Animals, and in particular cattle, were clearly ritually as well as symbolically important. Judging by the, albeit limited, studies of the faunal data, animals were slaughtered at the tomb and processed and consumed in particular ways during mortuary ceremonies. Horned animal heads appear on cult vessels and mounted on tripartite structures, suggesting the special treatment of the heads of slaughtered animals. Clay ox horns with incised decoration appear singly or in pairs in a number of tombs at *Vounous* (Dikaios 1940, 22, 24, 76, pls XXXVIIIa–b, e, XLIa; Stewart and Stewart 1950, 236–37, 295, pl. XCVIa–b; Stewart 1962b, 347, fig. 91·8–9; Karageorghis 1991, 114–16, pls LXIII–LXIV; Dunn-Vaturi 2003, 145, pl. XCI). Usually identified as containers (Mogelonsky 1988, 256; V. Karageorghis 1991, 115–16), they have holes at the wider end and may, alternatively, have been attached to another object, recalling the 'isolated' horns which protrude from the panel between the uprights on both Kotsiatis/Marki shrine models (Fig. 7). Animal parts (hides, antlers, horns, hoofs, feathers) were perhaps also used as costumes or 'equipment' at funerary and other events. The therianthropic figures on the two *Vounous* vessels appear in both cases with rayed disks and vertical zigzags, suggesting a performative association with sky, sun and rain and by extension with rainmaking and fertility (see also Stewart 1962b, 293; 1988, 249). A similar connection between death and regeneration can be found in many societies, in which metaphors of fertility and rebirth serve to transcend the finality of death and the dead are effectively socialized as a source of recurrent fertility (Bradley 2005, 168–73, 204–07; Williams 2003; Parker Pearson 1999, 143–44; Bloch and Parry 1982; Harris 1982; Adam 1990).

Beyond this, the specifics of activities associated with burial remain conjectural in this prehistoric context. At a broader level, however, the evidence suggests an increasing dichotomy between secular and sacred in north central coast communities in EC I and II and the emergence of ritually specialized artefacts, structures, symbols and personnel. This was happening only in this region and primarily at *Vounous*. These developments are likely to have been associated with demographic expansion, agricultural surpluses and the adoption of innovative strategies of distinction. The use and deposition of high status and/or ritualized vessels was not, however, restricted to a small number of individuals or families. On the contrary, interaction, negotiation and the manipulation of material culture in the mortuary domain appear to have been relatively widespread. Emerging social identities may have sought expression in access to ritual knowledge and control of ceremonies and ancestral ritual facilities rather than in disparate distributions of material

wealth (van Dyke 2003, 183; Brandt 1977). Such attempts to naturalize authority make particular appeal to social memory (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 9), and may have focused on burial facilities as both tangible and symbolic reminders of connections with ancestors.

The organization of ritual elsewhere in Cyprus in the EBA is likely to have been more decentralized. Where settlement evidence is available, this appears to have been the case also with storage, tool production and food consumption as indicated, for example, at Marki (Frankel and Webb 2006). Even where some specialization is indicated (as for pottery), this seems for the most part to have been low level and house-based (Frankel and Webb 2001; 2006, 149–53). In this respect, as in so many others, *Vounous* is an exception. Here the demands of ritual performance appear to have underwritten the specialized production of elaborate skilfully made items with a diverse and esoteric visual symbolism. Such items are likely to have had considerable spiritual power (Spielmann 1998, 153; 2002). This specialization of craft activity took place alongside the growth of ritual specialization more generally and the elaboration of particular tombs, some of which may have operated as mortuary shrines.

The singularity of the central north coast

The singular nature of the central north coast in EC I and II is thrown into sharp relief by our growing understanding of contemporary material culture in the south and central regions of the island. Where some north coast communities developed a diverse array of pottery forms and a complex visual symbolism, southern and central ceramic assemblages from both burial and settlement contexts are distinguished by a relatively restricted range of shapes and minimal decoration of limited or no symbolic content (Frankel and Webb 2006, 104–05, 148; Webb and Frankel 2008, 290, pl. LVIIa) — with the notable exception of a number of incised complex vessels from the south-west, none of which has yet been found during formal excavations (Lubsen Admiraal 1999). In general, south coast clays are less finely prepared and assemblages are more homogeneous. With the exception of small flasks, there is little attempt to elaborate particular types of vessels, even in funerary contexts. Similar discontinuities between the north coast and south/central regions are visible in tomb architecture. While EC I–II tombs on the north coast sometimes have a monumental character, those at Sotira, Pyrgos, Psematismenos, Episkopi, Kalavasos, Marki and elsewhere are relatively simple chamber or pit tombs with small *dromoi* and few internal features (Herscher and Swiny 1992; Swiny and Herscher 2003; Belgiorno 2002; Todd 1985; 2007; Georgiou 2000; Duryea 1965; Frankel and Webb 1996; Vavouranakis and Manginis 1995; Manginis and Vavouranakis 2004). They contain few objects other than pottery vessels and show little evidence of multigenerational use.

Communities in the centre and south of the island thus appear to have been subject to lower levels of social pressure than those in the north. Neither the tombs themselves nor the vessels used in funerary ceremonies served as overt vehicles for differentiating participants, claiming prestige or negotiating status. Social approval may have been won through conformity rather than competition, suggesting the existence of more egalitarian community structures or, alternatively, that avenues to social and ritual authority did not involve the same degree of investment in burial display or ceramic innovation. These radical differences in levels of stylistic investment between ceramic style zones in EC I–II indicate significant disparity in cross-island trajectories toward social complexity and major differences in the intensity with which ancestral links were used to validate competing claims to authority and place. This dichotomy between developments in the north and elsewhere was recognized over a decade ago by Peltenburg (1996, 27), who proposed a deeply divided society with stratified groups emerging in the north while elsewhere an older ethos with an aversion to hierarchical behaviour prevailed.

Although the associated settlement or settlements have not been excavated, there can be little doubt that *Vounous* was the paramount centre in the central north coast region during most if not all of the EC period. The Karmi and Lapithos villages were founded somewhat later and remained substantially smaller in size until the ascendancy of Lapithos in EC III. While the embellishment of particular tombs at all three localities may be seen as evidence of the rise of a new category of political individuals, Karmi and Lapithos were clearly operating at some social distance from *Vounous*. Most EC I–II tombs at both sites contained few valuables, the elaborate ritual vessels found in over a third of the tombs at *Vounous* are entirely absent and they did not produce the same abundance of high utility cuts of large animals. The elaboration of Karmi *Palealona* Tombs 2 and 6 and the high quality of their EC I–II grave goods, leave little doubt, however, that these settlements were founded by individuals or groups fully conversant with the material culture and status referents current at *Vounous*.

The narrow north coastal strip of Cyprus is flanked to the south by the Pendedaktylos range (Fig. 1). This constrained the spread of settlement and channelled the movement of people and goods between the north and centre of the island through the Agirdha pass, which served as the main route from *Vounous* and Karmi to Deneia and Nicosia *Ayia Paraskevi* in the central plain and copper production sites such as Marki in the Troodos foothills (Georgiou 2007, 443–44; Frankel and Webb 2007, 157–58). Use of this pass allowed north coast communities to acquire metal for their own needs during EC I and II and there is some evidence for a selected array of pottery and perhaps other goods moving south (Frankel and Webb 2006, 110–12, 119). The sharp stylistic boundaries in material culture, however, suggest the existence of relatively limited networks of communication at this time, with the mountains serving as a social as well as a physical boundary and limiting the north coast communities to a pattern of linear east–west expansion.

Such physically defined regions are obvious candidates for ancient social territories. While the poverty of the settlement record precludes certainty, it is possible to suggest that a ranked settlement system, dominated by *Vounous*, operated within the spatially limited territory of the north coastal plain in EC I and II. Ceramically, the primacy of *Vounous* is expressed through elaboration, innovation and the emergence of a complex iconography, particularly in the ritual sphere. The dominance of *Vounous* may in fact have been based on religious authority, as long ago suggested by Stewart (1962b, 293; also Merrillees 1974, 47), and maintained through the production and manipulation of ritually charged objects. There is little in the mortuary record to suggest that metal was a commodity of intense value prior to late EC III, when the quantity of metal deposited in tombs dramatically increased at both *Vounous* and Lapithos (Keswani 2004, 64–71, tables 4·7a, 8–9, 11a–c, 12). The emphasis in the earlier phases of the EC appears to have been on display and action rather than accumulation, and on the appropriation of social position rather than material power, through commensality, the manipulation of ancestral ties and the elaboration of ritual symbols.

The uniqueness of the north central coast in EC I and II may also have been a deliberate expression of territorial exclusivity related to population density and size, privileged access to resources and the emergence of corporate identities, the latter evident in the embellishment of tombs and cemeteries and their continued use across hundreds of years. The presence of metal in some burials leaves no doubt that north coast communities were involved in wider intra-island networks of communication and appropriation, but while both local and external demand for metal was low and population expansion could be accommodated within the well-watered coastal plain and adjacent hill slopes, these communities could afford to function largely within this geographically bounded region. The physical barrier of the Pendedaktylos at least potentially provided the means of both manipulating and maintaining that exclusivity.

The inflationary social logic visible at *Vounous* in EC I–II may have been inherited from the previously dominant Philia coastal centre at Vasilia, 21 km to the west. The early development of social hierarchy in this region may also have been driven, at least in part, by indirect contact with the Aegean, Anatolia and the Levant. Although evidence of such contact is rare before the MC period, extra-island relationships may have been maintained in some form throughout the EBA. The absence of clear concentrations of prestige ceramics at *Vounous*, however, suggests that even at this site EC I and II communities were still relatively decentralized, with social relationships governed by kinship and personal interactions rather than stable or ascribed hereditary institutions.

In the last phase of the EC period (EC III) the focus appears to have shifted from relatively fluid intra-community relationships to a more static system with an increasing emphasis on sub-group identity, inter-community networks and control of production and related signalling. This is likely to have accompanied a renewed external demand for Cypriot copper and a reinvigoration of the metal industry, led by an emergent Lapithos (Keswani 2004, 67–71, 74–78; 2005; Knapp 2008, 81, 84–87). One argument developed by Peltenburg (1994, 159) is that this involved the appearance of weapon-bearing elites in northern Cyprus at this time, and was accompanied by an increased elaboration of religious symbols as special interest groups consolidated their power and attempted to stabilize the new system through the use of ritual authority. The well-known Vounous Model, recovered from a tomb of EC III or MC I date, has been interpreted as an attempt to legitimize this new hierarchical order, giving rise to new social conventions and more widely recognizable symbols of power and exclusion (Peltenburg 1994. See also Manning 1993, 45–46; Bolger 2003, 39–41; Steel 2004, 146; Knapp 2008, 87–88). The investment in compartmentalized and multiple vessels at *Vounous* and Lapithos in EC III may reflect such

moves toward more formalized practice, perhaps involving prescribed rites of libation or offering rather than shared consumption (Webb and Frankel 2008, 293). Similarly, the appearance of standardized ceramic motifs at this time suggests an increasingly formulaic kind of communication and a decrease in the role played by small bowls, in particular, in individualized social interaction (Webb and Frankel 2008, 293).

Conclusion

The materialization of ideas, beliefs, stories and concepts in concrete form allows them to be shared broadly (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996; DeMarrais 2004). We have suggested here that the same set of ideas, beliefs and concepts is manifested in the *dromos* arrangements of *Palealona* Tomb 6, dated to EC I or early EC II, and the EC III or MC I Kotsiatis/Marki and Kalopsidha 'shrine' models. In Tomb 6 these concepts are expressed in architecture and ritual practice; in the models the same well-defined set of elements (female figure, jar, tripartite façade, horned animal heads) appear as miniature representations or symbolic doubles, perhaps standing as a substitute for actual bodily practice. The true nature and purpose of the scene depicted will no doubt forever elude us. There is a clear link, however, with death and burial, although this may not have been the only ritual context in which these elements were combined. The enigmatic plaster feature in Unit CIV at Marki suggests that similar facilities were located in the domestic sphere in EC III. Ritualized practices associated with veneration of ancestors may have expanded into the household arena during the course of the EBA or existed in cemetery and domestic locales from the beginning. Spatial separation of burial and domestic facilities, although a defining feature of the EBA, is unlikely to have involved an entrenched polarity between notions and imagery associated with life and death.

In one of the only previous discussions of the evolutionary trajectory of Cypriot ritual, Peltenburg (1991, 104–08) traced the development of formal cult structures and paraphernalia from non-utilitarian features and symbolic fittings of houses of the Chalcolithic period to the temples of the Late Bronze Age. It is clear, however, that any discussion of the emergence of religious institutions in Cyprus should be extended to include the mortuary record. The evidence presented here, and summarized in Table 3, can leave no doubt that burial was a key setting for ritual discourse during the EBA, involving a well-defined set of equipment, facilities and symbols. It is also clear that these developments in iconography and practice emerged at *Vounous* during EC I and spread to other areas of the island, along with many other aspects of north coast material culture, in EC III and MC I. Prior to this the communities of the north central coast and those of the centre and south of the island were on radically different symbolic trajectories.

The apparent emergence of ritual authority at *Vounous* is a remarkable phenomenon. Funerary ceremonial at this and closely associated sites on the central north coast was clearly a critical factor in the promotion of ritually sanctioned behaviour through the development of an associated iconography and the manipulation of ancestral burial facilities. The lack of related settlement excavation at any of these sites presents major problems. The data now available from this region, however, allows us to trace the birth and development of an iconographic tradition,

Table 3 Summary of developments at Bellapais *Vounous* from EC I to MC I

EC I–early EC III	EC III–MC I
Sequential burials in single-chambered tombs; external elaboration of some tombs	Multiple burials in multi-chambered tombs; internal fittings (benches, niches, pits)
Death a transitional 'physical' state; bones and grave goods removed	Death a permanent 'physical' state; bones and grave goods retained
Promotional feasting; cult vessels for shared consumption; individualized drinking vessels	Integrative feasting by larger groups; multiple vessels for libation, offerings; diminution in role of individualized vessels; reduction in size of storage and serving vessels
Focus on personal identity, action, display and assertion of individual social position	Focus on sub-group identity and assertion of lineage-based social position
Status achieved through commensality and elaboration of ritual symbols; fluid intra-community relationships	Status achieved through inheritance, material power and control of ritual symbols; structured inter-community relationships
Ritual specialists; ritual performances; symbolic dynamism and complexity; exclusive to *Vounous*	More formalized ritual; less complex iconography; spread of north coast material culture to centre and south; renewed demand for Cypriot copper

key elements of which (the ritual display of horned animal heads, the wearing of bucranial masks and possibly horned divinities) are visible in the highly formalized ritual practices of the Late Bronze Age (Knapp 1986; Webb 1999). This longevity of material symbols suggests that the institutionalization of ritual was well under way on the island before the exposure of Cyprus to the wider world in the early Late Bronze Age and that some elements of ancient belief survived the restructuring associated with urbanization and state formation.

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