

Core, Periphery and Ideology in Aceramic Cyprus

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Abstract: The enigmatic Aceramic Neolithic of Cyprus is viewed here as a coherent ideological system. This ideology consisted of a code of conduct which clearly opposed the norms of the contemporary mainland Neolithic. It is suggested that insularity was chosen as a means of maintaining cultural isolation, while fending off outside influences. Insularity encouraged, to some extent, a biological isolation as well. Aceramic cultural identity was successfully maintained for some two millennia. Subsequently, changes were introduced and the Aceramic lifeway was gradually undermined until its final demise in the Early Bronze Age. The evidence at hand indicates that the colonizers came to Cyprus with their ideological system fully developed. It follows that the settlers must have been a cultural isolate, practicing their particular beliefs prior to settling in Cyprus. It is suggested that the settlers emerged in their homeland as an opposition group which countered the socio-political and ideological transformations concomitant with the onset of food production in the Early Holocene. The newly emerging order was opposed by adherence to the old norms, or fundamentalism. Aceramic Cypriots thus constitute the oldest religious sect, and the oldest sociopolitical opposition known in human history.

Key words: Cyprus, Early Holocene, Aceramic Neolithic, Sectarianism, Religion.

„Since the record of the past is in the present, it must be interpreted by means of present — not past — methods and concepts“ (Held 1990,26).

Introduction

The earliest known colonization of insular environments took place some 60-40 ka ago and was confined to SE Asia (Held 1989; Shutler 1991). There is no evidence of seafaring between that episode and the Holocene. In the course of the latter episode, Cyprus was the first island to have been reached by humans (Held 1989, 1990; Cherry 1990; Simmons 1991b).

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, after Sicily and Sardinia, being slightly larger than Crete. It is 222 km from west to east and 97 km from north to south. Only some 70 km separate Cape Andreas from Turkey (Fig. 1), and some 120 km between Cape Andreas and Latakiya in Syria (Karageorghis 1982, 12). Visible from the mainland on a bright day, Cyprus is almost a part of the mainland. Yet despite its proximity, Cyprus is at the same time a real oceanic island: it has always been separated from the mainland, and there is no pre-Quaternary fauna on it (Sondaar 1977, 677).

The oldest site presently known in Cyprus is Akrotiri-Aetokremnos or Site E, on the southernmost tip of the island (Swiny 1988; Reese 1992a). Site E dates from ca. 8,500 bc (uncalibrated, Simmons 1991b).

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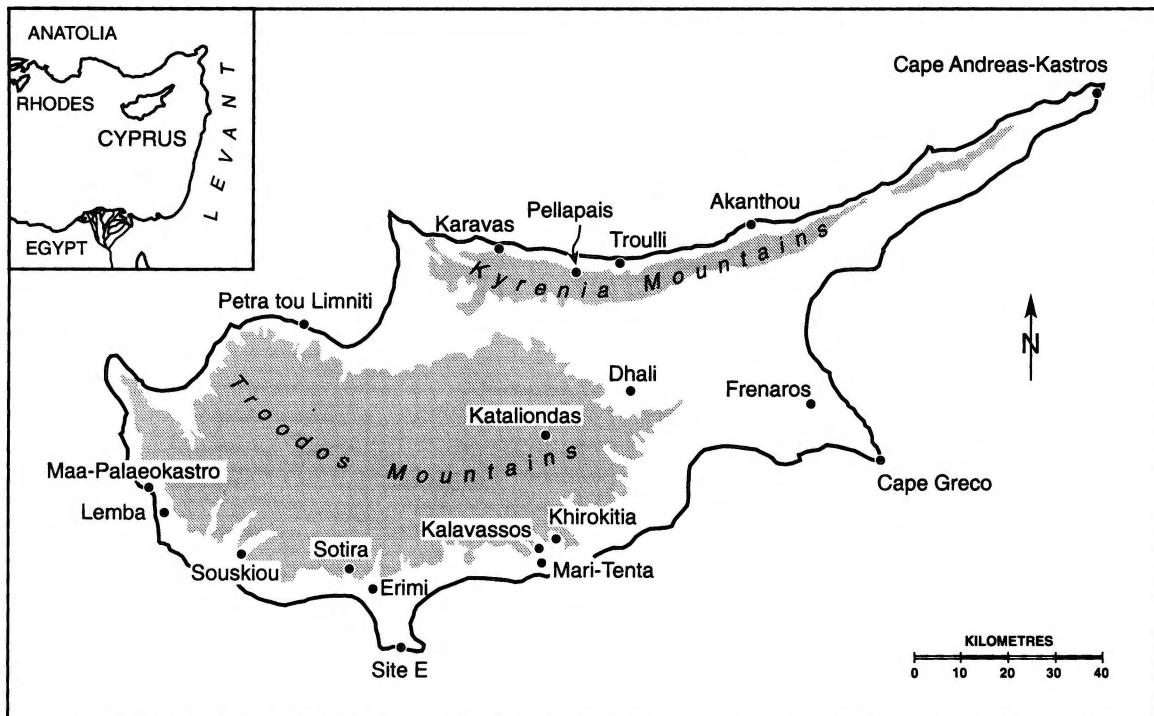


Fig. 1. Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in Cyprus.

Located in a rock shelter, Site E has thousands of dwarf hippo bones accumulated in a series of occupations (Simmons 1988). Along with a few grooved bone objects (Reese 1992b), the small lithic assemblage is composed mainly of thumbnail end scrapers, burins and retouched flakes and blades (Simmons 1991b). The site is dated to the transition from Natufian to PPNA Khiamian in the Levant, yet its tool assemblage resembles neither: Site E has almost no microliths, no borers and no arrowheads. The site's function is not clear, nor is its relation to the successive phase of occupation clear (Cherry 1990). Site E will not be treated in the present paper.

The following occupation in Cyprus is the Aceramic Neolithic phase (the Khirokitia culture, Held 1989), known all over the island through numerous excavations (Todd 1989; Le Brun 1989a). The oldest ^{14}C dates for the Aceramic are $9,200 \pm 130$ BP and $8,720 \pm 400$ BP for Kalavassos-Tenta (respectively P.2972, KT18 and P.2785, KT15, Todd 1987), and $8,850 \pm 650$ BP for Khirokitia (Ly 4785, Le Brun et Evin 1991). The Aceramic seems to begin around 7,000 bc (uncalibrated), some 1,500 years after Site E and several centuries after the onset of PPNB on the mainland. The end of the Aceramic is dated by several ^{14}C measurements to about 5300/5200 bc (Todd 1987; Le Brun et al. 1987, 284; Le Brun et Evin 1991). Thus, the Aceramic phase may have spanned some 1500-2000 years.

The Aceramic phase was apparently followed by a gap of a few centuries, during which the island was either abandoned (Todd 1989; Cherry 1990) or at any rate largely depopulated (Held 1990), before the Ceramic Neolithic (or Sotira Culture, Peltenburg 1978) was established in the middle of the 5th millennium. This was followed by the Chalcolithic and, in the beginning of the 3d millennium, by the Early Bronze Age (Table 1). The subject of this paper is the Aceramic culture and its later influences.

Table 1. Dates 14C bc for Cyprus and the Levant (* Calibrated).

	CYPRUS	LEVANT
Early Bronze Age		
	2800*	3200/3000
Chalcolithic		
	3800*	
Pottery Neolithic		5000/4800
	4500*	6000/5800
GAP (?)		
	5200	PPNB
Aceramic Neolithic		
	7000	7300
Akrotiri-Aetokremnos (E)	8500—	8300
		Natufian
	10300	
PLEISTOCENE		

Sources: Ben Tor 1992: 2; Le Brun et Evin 1991; Peltenburg 1990; Simmons 1991b.

The Aceramic culture has been previously described as a catalogue of contradictions (e.g., Le Brun et al. 1987). Some characters are shared with the contemporary mainland, for example, agriculture and the domesticated plants and animals. Other characters are unique, for example the material culture, art/cult objects and burial customs. Some Aceramic traits look technologically „advanced“, as the manufacture of hard stone bowls, while other traits seem „impoverished“ or „anachronistic“, for example, the round house at a time when rectangular houses dominate on the mainland, the absence of pottery and the „expedient“ lithic industry. These apparently conflicting aspects of the Aceramic culture were remarkably stable during its 1500-year history. Thus, the interpretation of the Aceramic and cultural comparisons still remain puzzling questions.

The Aceramic phenomenon is most frequently explained by assuming that a rapid cultural adaptation and transformation followed the initial colonization (Stanley Price 1977a, 1977b; Watkins 1980; Held 1990). But this theoretical assumption leaves major aspects of the Aceramic culture poorly understood. For example:

The Cypriot circular house is viewed by some as due to „Insularity and conservatism“ (Karageorghis 1982, 18), which amounts to a tautology.

Assuming a cultural transformation, the absence of pottery in Cyprus was explained as follows: „perhaps the colonists brought with them some elementary knowledge (of making pottery) which was subsequently ‘lost in transmission’“ (Karageorghis 1982, 26), the meaning of which is rather obscure.

Cattle were absent among the Aceramic food animals (Stanley Price 1977b), which is peculiar not only in comparison with the mainland but also with Neolithic Crete, where both cattle and the rectangular house are present around 6000 bc (Evans 1971). As Cherry has remarked, Cyprus and Crete had „radically different colonization histories and settlement strategies which require some explanation“ (1990, 161), but no explanation was offered.

The last example consists of an odd contradiction between expected and observed behaviours. The favourable geographical location of Cyprus „encouraged maritime connections with all her neighbors“ (Karageorghis 1982, 12) from the Bronze Age on. In spite of the favourable location, however, the Aceramic peoples apparently „did not maintain relations with the mainland after they had settled in Cyprus“ (Karageorghis 1982, 25), with no explanation attempted.

Thus, the Aceramic culture remains an unsolved riddle. „Insularity“, „conservatism“ and an occasional „poor transmission“ do not explain, they merely describe the impression conveyed by the Aceramic archaeological record. It is precisely the cause of this impression that ought to be explained. In the following pages the major components of the Aceramic culture will be discussed to show, first, that there has been no post-colonization cultural adaptation in Cyprus, and second, that the Aceramic constitutes a coherent cultural system which remained hitherto unnoticed.

House and settlement: is there anachronism?

Settlement location

Some 30 Aceramic sites and findspots are known all over Cyprus (Cherry 1990, 154-5). In the Eastern part of Cyprus the sites are typically located on rocky knolls and strategic hilltops (Todd 1989, 6). Consideration for protection and visibility seems to have taken precedence over water supply or proximity of fertile land. Similarly, in North-Western Cyprus, both Aceramic and Ceramic Neolithic sites prefer a mid-slope location with an easy access to the wooded plateau (Adovasio et al. 1975). In later periods, from the Chalcolithic onward, the proximity to low lying arable fields seems to have been the major factor determining site location (Swiny 1989). In addition to their strategic location, Khirokitia and Kalavasos-Tenta were encircled by walls. This has been interpreted as an indication of insecurity or fearfulness on the part of the aceramic population (Todd 1989, 6).

The House

Aceramic houses are invariably circular and built of dried mud bricks, stone, pisé or a combination of these. The roof may have been flat or domed, made of wood, branches/reeds and pisé. The floor of the house was most frequently soil, occasionally it was paved (Le Brun et al. 1987, 292; Todd 1989, 4). The structures vary from 1.40 to 4-5 m in diameter. In Khirokitia the circular structures are arranged in compounds around a central space or „courtyard“ (Le Brun et al. 1987, 292). Equipment for food preparation is found in this central space, while cooking took place in hearths in the individual houses (Khirokitia) or outside the houses (Tenta). Plaster floors which are common in the Levantine PPNB are

rare in Cyprus: among the hundreds of aceramic floors excavated, only the floors of a few exceptional buildings in Tenta (Todd 1987, 45) and a single case from Khirokitia (Le Brun 1989a, 164) were plastered and red painted.

The circular form dominated Cypriot architecture for some 4,000 years, from the beginning of the Aceramic Neolithic to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (Dikaios and Stewart 1962, 204). This was interrupted only once, with the appearance of rectangular structures beside circular ones in the Pottery Neolithic period at Sotira (Dikaios and Stewart 1962, 73; Stanley Price 1979), 4,500-3,800 cal. BC (Peltenburg 1978, 65). These rectangular houses have rounded corners, and thus are reminiscent of the circular form. After the Pottery Neolithic, the circular house became again the sole house type encountered in Cyprus during the entire Chalcolithic period. Thus, the semi-rectangular houses in Sotira were a temporally and spatially restricted phenomenon.

Cypriot Aceramic architecture is conceptually related to the oldest tradition of house building in the Levant, the circular structures of the Natufian/PPNA era. At the onset of PPNB in the first half of the 7th millennium, the rectangular house with plastered floor became prevalent among food producers of the Mediterranean climatic zone (Cauvin 1978, 57). This was a very different house concept and required a larger investment of energy and resources in thicker walls and the labor-intensive plaster (e. g., Ronen et al. 1991). The rectangular house was carefully maintained and was generally kept cleaner than the round house. Under these circumstances, the Cypriot round house of the 7th millennium is considered out-of-place, a „cultural archaism“ (Cauvin 1989, 15). Cauvin has attempted to explain it by his theory of „recapitulative experience“ (1978, 61), meaning that during the initial experience of sedentism, any group at any time will progress through the same stages as the original process. This model leaves unanswered the question why, then, was the next phase of house form never attained in the Aceramic (Le Brun 1989a, 162).

In fact, though, the Cypriot round house was not entirely archaic, since the curvilinear house continued to exist on the mainland side by side with the rectangular one throughout the 7th and 6th millennia. In the arid zone of the southern Levant, the curvilinear house prevailed without interruption until the 2nd millennium. The survival of circular structures is clearly recorded also in the Mediterranean climatic zone: in the PPNB sites Tel Ramad, Ghoraife and Aswad (Cauvin 1978, 61). In PPNB Ain Ghazal all the houses are rectilinear but for a single semi-circular wall (Banning and Byrd 1987, 317; 1989). In Gritille, a circular house was built inside a rectangular one (Aurenche and Calley 1988). In Nemrik 9 a residence compound made of two circular and one rectangular buildings surrounded a „yard“ containing domestic utensils (Kozlowski and Kempisky 1990, 356), similar to the inner yards at Khirokitia mentioned above. The association of the two house forms continued in the late Pre-Pottery Neolithic and in the Pottery Neolithic. At Abu Nekheileh (Kirkbride 1978) the contemporaneity cannot be clearly demonstrated, but in Sheikh Hassan, Tel Eli, Munhata III (Cauvin 1978, 61) and Jebel Abu Thawwab (Kafafi 1985) the co-existence is well documented.

Thus, Cyprus is not unique in its house form. The question is not from where the Cypriot house could have come, because candidates are relatively widespread. The important question is, rather, why this lingering tradition so dramatically and totally caught on in Cyprus? Why, as Stanley Price has put it (1977a, 33), did a reversion to a compound pattern of organization occur? To understand this, clarifying the social meaning of the house may prove a promising line of enquiry.

The social meaning of the house

In his pioneering study, Flannery (1972) argued that circular and rectangular house types were distinct phases in the process of sedentism. Circular dwellings are correlated with nomads and semi-nomads with

a polygynous family structure, while rectangular dwellings are correlated with sedentary societies with a nuclear family. An illuminating insight has since been added by Duncan (1981), who argued that the degree of social „collectivism“ or „individualism“ is also reflected in the house. Collectivistic societies are polygynous, more or less egalitarian and kinship is all-important. Men and women generally live in separate houses. A man's status is established through all-male, inter-kin activities which take place in special houses or public areas where women are not allowed. Women are considered polluted and are largely confined to their house, which effectively becomes a „container of women“ (Duncan 1981). With practically no outsider admitted to the house, its content and maintenance have no importance. In individualistic societies, inter-kin ties are weakened and the individual takes precedence over the family (Kent 1991). Social interaction turns toward non-kin peers and colleagues. A person's status now has to be gained outside his kin group (Duncan 1981). The house becomes progressively more accessible to outsiders and becomes the focus of social interaction and display in which women become more or less involved. Maintenance and cleanliness of the house become important.

„Collectivistic“ and „individualistic“, simple and complex are model societies, the extremes of a continuum along which intermediate forms exist. As society becomes more complex (i.e., segmented and individualistic), the residential space becomes progressively more activity-restricted, gender-specific and age-segregated (Kent 1991, 454). „Buildings are ways of ordering behavior“ (Rapoport 1979, 15).

The change of house form and society

The main difference between the circular and the rectangular house form is that the latter has corners. Corners offer protection (Appleton 1975) and privacy. The rectangular form can be more readily subdivided than the circular. It is true that the circular house and the single-cell rectangular house share a common pattern of access and movement (i. e. a common pattern of „linkage connectivity“, Banning and Byrd 1989, 155), but they largely differ by the degree of individual privacy each of them can offer.

In a general way, the house changed gradually in its form, function and energy investment (Abrams 1989; Rapoport 1979, 1980; Kent 1991). In the Near East, circular houses always preceded rectangular ones. The energy invested in the den-like Natufian architecture, although quite modest, greatly exceeds that invested in the „invisible architecture“ of the Pleistocene Near East. The thin oval alignment of small stones in the Natufian may not have been much more than an advanced tent, with daily refuse more or less freely accumulating on its floor, but its iconic value was enormous, because for the first time humans purposefully left their permanent mark on the land, a sign of occupation even with the occupants absent. Modest as they were, these structures signaled an 'eternal' territorial claim. The fact that Natufian society was no longer a simple egalitarian one but had clear status differentiation (Wright 1978) suggests that, as expected, the house form followed social change and not vice versa. However, no simple correlation should be drawn between social organisation and the archaeological house form alone; other relevant traits of the archaeological record must also be considered.

The transition from the curvilinear to the rectangular house appears to have been gradual, with a late 9th millennium (PPNA) intermediate form. While still circular, the new house had a more elaborate plan, sometimes with rectilinear partitions (in Mureybet Ib, Aurenche 1977), or with a pair or two pairs of low pillars (Aurenche and Calley 1988; Özdogan and Özdogan 1989; Rosenberg and Davis 1992; Watkins 1990, 337). This more advanced form of circular house appears to have fulfilled a wider variety of functions. Notably, a symbolic/cultic function is possibly suggested by the pillars, which were too low to have supported the roof (Watkins 1990). Significantly, the intermediate house had a plastered floor

(Özdögan and Özdögan 1989; Watkins 1990; Rosenberg and Davis 1992) which was as properly maintained as that of the succeeding rectangular house. This intermediate house may be the oldest representative of the present concept of „home“ (Watkins 1990). It constitutes the closest parallel to the Cypriot Aceramic house of a millennium later.

The rectilinear house of the PPNB had a larger floor area and a higher energy investment in the plaster, for which an advanced pyrotechnology was needed. The burial of plastered ancestor skulls beneath the floor signifies an amplification of the cultic meaning of the house. Finally, the complex multicellular house appeared in the 6th millennium (Banning and Byrd 1989, 156), reflecting increased social complexity and segmentation (Kent 1991, 454). Individualism in human society, then, may apparently date back to the PPNB, long before it is generally thought to have appeared (e. g. Macfarlane 1978, 196).

By now it should be evident that the Aceramic people did not live in round houses because they were isolated from outside information, nor was the round house an adaptive strategy to the Cypriot environment. Aceramic society knowingly preferred the circular over the rectangular house form. This would suggest that aceramic society was less complex and more collectivistic than most contemporaneous mainland communities. Further lines of evidence tend to corroborate this impression.

Subsistence

The Plants

Aceramic Cypriots grew a large variety of plants: emmer wheat, einkorn wheat, barley, lentils, pistacio, plum, olive, fig, and grape (Todd 1989, 8; Le Brun et al. 1987, 310). No wild progenitor of any of these cultigens is known in Cyprus, except perhaps for a wild form of barley which may have been a native plant (Le Brun 1989a, 162). Hence, the settlers arrived in Cyprus bringing all their plant food species with them, probably after having been domesticated on the mainland. The same seems to be true for the animal species as well.

The Animals

The Pleistocene fauna of Cyprus was comprised of dwarf elephants, pygmy hippopotamus, two Murid mice and a soricid shrew (Davis, in Le Brun 1984, 148). The elephant and hippo became extinct shortly after the earliest contact with humans in the 9th millennium, prior to the arrival of the Aceramic settlers (Simmons 1988, 1991a; Held 1989). Contrary to the Pleistocene large fauna (Sondaar 1977; Reese 1992a), none of the animals associated with the Aceramic is likely to have crossed by swimming (Davis 1989); hence all must have been transported by the settlers from the mainland. The simultaneous introduction to Cyprus of cereals, legumes and animals leaves no doubt that a mixed farming (Lewis and Boag, nd) was practiced on the island from the very beginning.

Humans, animals and plants thus arrived together to an empty Cyprus at a known moment. Aceramic Cyprus thus provides laboratory-like conditions rarely encountered in the archaeological record. My hypothesis is that the species brought by the settlers reflect a cultural preference. This hypothesis is central to the thesis argued in this paper, namely that the Aceramic group was a cultural isolate. Therefore, the faunal composition will be treated in some detail.

The non-food animals associated with the Aceramic, dog, cat and fox, are extremely rare. Each of these species is in fact represented by a single bone (Davis 1989, 194-5). The dog will be further treated below. The cat and the fox, less important for our discussion, may have been brought to the island as tamed animals (Davis 1989).

The Aceramic food animals consisted of fallow deer, goat, sheep and pig. This animal association was previously discussed mainly for its implication to the possible origin of the settlers and the time of colonization, which may be summarised as follows: the fallow deer brought to Cyprus, no doubt wild, is the Levantine species *Dama mesopotamica*. The European deer *Dama dama* reaches as far south as southern Anatolia. This would point to the Levant as the probable source of the Aceramic food animals, and perhaps also the settlers. Indeed, an anatomical resemblance has been observed between the Aceramic population and the PPNB population of Atlit-Yam, on the coast of Israel (Hershkovitz and Galili 1990). As to the time of the crossing, Davis has pointed out (1989, 197) that the Aceramic pig represents an initial phase of domestication, being of an intermediate size between Levantine wild boar and the fully domesticated form of the 5th millennium. The pig is said to have been domesticated between the PPNA and PPNB, ca. 7000 bc (Clutton-Brock 1979). Goats and sheep were no doubt brought to the island domesticated, as seen at Tenta, where ca. 90 % of the identifiable remains of adult caprines were female, which fits an economy of milk and meat production (Croft 1991, 73). Caprines were domesticated on the mainland some time during the 8th millennium (Kolska-Horwitz 1989), prior to the domestication of the pig. Thus, the Aceramic assemblage of food animals and food plants converge, with the available radiocarbon dates, to indicate a colonization in the beginning of the 7th millennium (Stanley Price 1977a; Davis 1989; Le Brun et Evin 1991).

Beyond these considerations of place and time, however, the composition of the aceramic fauna is in itself strange, a fact which hardly received any attention. When compared to the mainland, the Cypriot faunal association is outstanding for both what it contains and for what it lacks. I shall start with the latter.

Cattle, Gazelle and Dog

First and foremost, there are no cattle. The nonintroduction of cattle to Cyprus may have been caused by any one of the reasons given below:

1. The settlers were unaware of the existence of cattle.
2. *Bos* was not domesticated.
3. It was not possible to transport cattle across the sea.
4. Conditions on the island were not favourable for cattle.

Table 2. Natufian Faunal Assemblages, Minimum Number of Bones (%).

	Gazelle	Fallow Deer	Cattle	Pig	Caprine
Mean Med. Zone	83.16	7.12	3.16	2.21	0.61
Mean Arid Zone	48.70	0	3.16	0	35.60

Med Zone — Mediterranean Climate zone, weighted average of 13 assemblages. Arid Zone — weighted average of 5 assemblages (Adapted from Byrd 1989: 176. One assemblage with a total of 27 bones was omitted here).

1. Cattle are present in almost every Natufian site in the Levant (Table 2). In Early Neolithic sites, between the 8th and the 6th millennium, *Bos* was recorded, albeit in small frequencies, in the eastern Near East (Bökonyi 1978, 60) and, in larger numbers, in the western Near East (Ducos 1969, 1978; Galili et al. 1993). Thus, there can be no doubt that cattle were known to the settlers.

2. It is very unlikely that the settlers would have transported wild aurochs. However, there are good indications that *Bos* was domesticated around the time of colonization. It is widely agreed that *Bos* was domesticated in the course of the 7th millennium (Ducos 1969, 271, 1978, 55; Clutton-Brock 1981, 66; Davis, 1987; Hemmer 1990, 66), although some advocate a later domestication in the 6th millennium (Grigson 1989, 90). Thus, the settlers may have had access to domesticated aurochs right from the onset of settlement or, at the latest, by 6000 bc, when cattle were successfully transported to the island of Crete (Evans 1971, 103).

3. The introduction of cattle to Crete along with the earliest settlement on the island (Evans 1963, 1971) proves that the beast could have been transported with the seafaring technology of the time.

4. Could cattle survive in Cyprus? Pleistocene aurochs are generally said to have been grazers (e. g. Zeuner 1963; Davis 1987, 65), like their domesticated descendants. A wider adaptation is, however, advocated by Clutton-Brock: „The aurochs was a browsing and grazing ruminant that inhabited forests but could also flourish in open scrub“ (1981, 63). This view is corroborated by the observation that at present, cattle have among the widest tolerance of terrain and vegetation types (Jewell 1980, 362).

Cyprus is part of the climatic zone of the NE Mediterranean, which includes the northern Levant and southern Anatolia (Wigley and Farmer 1982; Le Houeron 1992) where cattle were abundant. Cyprus was apparently heavily forested in the early Holocene, especially in the mountainous areas, until the major deforestation in the Classical Period (Meiggs 1982, cited in Held 1989, 17). Admittedly, some open grass areas had existed on the plains and the shores. Cattle could have lived in the Cypriot forest edge, occupying the empty niche left by the extinct dwarf hippos and elephants. These endemic Cypriot species were adapted to leaf eating (Sondaar 1977, 689) and to locomotion on rugged terrain (Sondaar 1977, 687). As a forest-margin dweller, cattle would have occupied a different ecozone than the caprines.

Even as grazers, there is no reason to suppose that cattle could not have lived alongside the other ruminants brought to Cyprus. In Neolithic Crete, cattle subsisted side by side with sheep (Evans 1963, 1971). A similar co-existence is widely documented, for example, caprines and cattle are raised together by the Nuer (Cranstone 1968, 251); it has been shown that wild animals complemented, rather than competed with domestic livestock in Kenya (Jewell 1980, 375) and in Israel (Baharav 1974, 40); and it was suggested that integrating cattle and game animals could give optimum meat yields (Jewell 1980, 375). Furthermore, for the settlers to learn that cattle were not suited to the Cypriot environment cattle had to be introduced there first. The last argument is that cattle were successfully introduced to Cyprus at a later date, in the 3d millennium Bronze Age, when they formed 30 % of the bone remains (Swiny 1989). Hence, the non-introduction of cattle requires some explanation.

The issue was addressed in the most explicit way by Stanley Price, who argued (1977a, 84) that in view of the cultic significance of cattle in Anatolia, its absence on the island makes the Levant the more likely origin of the settlers. This argument is no longer tenable because according to current knowledge, cattle have acquired symbolic and cultic significance broadly in the Levant, not only in Anatolia. The bovid became a house cult object in Mureybet II by ca. 8,000 bc (Cauvin 1977). At Hatula a complete bovid's skull was incorporated in a human burial at about the same time (Lechevallier and Ronen, 1994, 326). In the PPNB Ain Ghazal, the symbolic significance of *Bos* is clear from the fact that, of the 71 reported animal figurines at the site, 25 % represent bovines despite the fact that bovines form only a minority, and goats form the majority of the faunal remains. A cache of 23 animal figurines in Ain Ghazal apparently contained only bovines (Rollefson 1983, 35). In my opinion, the interesting point in Stanley Price's observation is the religious, not the geographic context. The most significant fact is that at a time

when the bull is worshiped as an icon or a male god on the mainland (Cauvin 1972, 1989), it is absent in Cyprus. There is thus reason to suspect that this absence was a human choice, to be understood on ideological grounds. This choice furthermore was maintained for some 4000 years (Croft 1991).

Another significant absence in the fauna of aceramic Cyprus is the gazelle. Looking for a wild animal for the Aceramic Ark, by far the most likely candidate would have been the gazelle. Epi-Palaeolithic and early Neolithic peoples were specialised gazelle hunters. During the millennia preceding caprovine domestication, gazelle constituted the major food animal of the Levant (Davis 1982, Byrd 1989) (Table 2). Current observations in Israel show that gazelle attained a mean annual density of 32 individuals per sq. km with an estimated biomass of 389 kg (Baharav 1974, 41). And yet, this reliable staple, which was readily available at the time of crossing, was not included in the Ark. The fallow deer was preferred instead.

The last animal apparently missing from the Aceramic Ark is the dog. In Aceramic Cyprus a single dog bone, a phalanx, was identified in the site of Cap Andreas (Davis 1989, 195). It is certainly true that this was „not a surprising find since the dog was probably man's earliest domestic animal“ (Davis 1989, 194). At the time of crossing, the dog had already been domesticated in the Levant for some 4,000 years (Davis and Valla 1978). What is indeed surprising is the extreme scarcity of dog in the Aceramic. As there is no evidence for a different post-mortem treatment of dogs, the dog must be considered for all practical purposes as absent in the Aceramic. The absence is further supported by the fact that small regurgitated bones partially digested by dogs, of the type identified in Hatula (Davis 1985), were not identified in the Aceramic (Davis, pers. comm.).

In my opinion, dog was domesticated in the Natufian for the primary purpose of guarding territory and property such as wild cereal stands. The association with the hunt, which is generally considered the main reason for the domestication of the dog (Clutton Brock and Jewell 1993; Davis 1987; Hemmer 1990) is not documented in the archaeological record. The composition of hunted species remains unchanged between the Kebaran and Natufian, in spite of the presence of the dog in the latter period. Dog is not generally seen as contributing to the catch of the r-selected species, fish and (mainly water) fowl, which made their appearance in the Natufian diet (Davis et al., 1994; Byrd 1989). On the other hand, the growing importance placed on territoriality in the Natufian is clearly evidenced by the appearance of „permanent“ stone structures, storage facilities and a large number of graves. With growing competition exacerbated by rising sea levels (Galili et al. 1988), secure access or ownership of resources becomes a major concern. Guard dogs fit into this model of Natufian subsistence well, and would fit as well into the Aceramic. Given the generally held picture, mentioned above, of an insecure and fearful aceramic society, enclosed behind walls on prominent hilltops, the absence of man's best friend and most aggressive guardian of territory is indeed odd. It is worth noting also that dogs continued to be scarce in Cyprus during the Ceramic Neolithic (Davis 1989, 193; Croft, pers. comm.), and became better represented only in the Chalcolithic (Croft 1979, 40, Croft, in Peltensburg 1985, 207; Legge 1982, 76).

Fallow deer

Among the animal species which are present in the Aceramic, the most important and most enigmatic is the fallow deer. From an economical perspective, the introduction of deer to Cyprus constituted a sound choice. Fallow deer are woodland browsers (Clutton-Brock 1981, 170) and grazers (Hemmer 1990, 169) who thrive well on marginally productive lands. Hence, in contrast to the gazelle, deer could exploit a different ecozone from that of sheep and goat. The fallow deer is a useful animal because of its long life,

high fertility, ease of giving birth, low feed requirements, high meat yield and excellent meat quality (Hemmer 1990, 169). Fallow deer has a very high slaughter yield (measured as the percentage of animal's live body weight remaining after subtraction of slaughter loss like the head, feet, coat, intestines and blood): 57 % for a one-year-old male, equal to the slaughter value of meat cattle and calves, compared with 50 % for fattened lambs. Pigs have the highest slaughter value, 70-75 % (Hemmer 1990:169).

Fallow deer constituted around 50 % of the bone remains in the Aceramic, followed by 20-30 % pig and 20 %-30 % caprines (Todd 1989, 8; Le Brun et al. 1987, 301). These numbers may represent the pattern of human consumption rather than the real composition of the fauna (Redding 1992). There was some variation in deer consumption between Aceramic sites, but this should not concern us here. The temporal variations are more interesting: at the end of the Aceramic a strong decrease of deer occurred (Croft 1991, 73). This was followed by an increase in the Ceramic Neolithic to return to almost 50 % of the remains found in the Chalcolithic (Croft, in Peltenburg 1985, Croft 1991, 75). Deer then declined but continued into the Early Bronze Age of the 3rd millennium (Croft 1991, 72), when it still formed ca. 20 % of the fauna (Swiny 1989). Thus, there was a considerable reliance on fallow deer between 7000 and 3000 bc, which Croft termed a „deer-oriented economy“ (1991: 63).

An economic importance does not, however, exclude other considerations, and several lines of evidence tend to show that deer indeed played a special role in Aceramic Cyprus. These are:

1. The Aceramic preference for this animal.
2. The continued high consumption of deer over a long time.
3. How the deer were hunted.

1. The very fact that the fallow deer was chosen by the Aceramic people raises some interesting problems. By the time of crossing *Dama mesopotamica* had almost completely disappeared from mainland food refuse (Clutton-Brock 1979; Davis 1982). For example, in the Late Natufian and PPNA site of Hatula a single bone of a fallow deer was found among thousands of remains (Davis 1985); in the 6000 bc, PPNB site of Atlit-Yam, of 322 identifiable bones only a single one was „probably a fallow deer“ (Kolska-Horwitz 1993), a mere 0.3 %. Deer was already of relatively little importance during the Kebaran and Natufian periods (Davis 1982) (Table 2). As already mentioned, gazelle were far more common and more readily available at the time of crossing. Choosing the fallow deer, therefore, was an unmistakable cultural preference, a quest for rarity.

2. It is most unusual for an economic system based on domesticated caprovines to draw the major meat supply from a wild species, as the Aceramic Cypriots did with the deer. Once domesticated, caprovines generally constituted the major part of the meat diet in the Levant (Davis 1982). In Jericho, for example, the diet shifted from 54 % gazelle in the pre-domestication Sultanian to 50 % caprines in the PPNB (Clutton-Brock 1979). The high relative frequency of deer bones in the Aceramic faunal remains is therefore outstanding. The persistent high consumption of deer is no less significant. Under normal exploitation, it may be expected that this low-breeding ruminant (Clutton-Brock 1979) would become extinct fairly rapidly. Its long survival and continued importance suggest a special treatment. Domestication is not at issue, as deer were not domesticated in the ancient Levant (Clutton-Brock 1981; Davis 1987). Also, the 37 %-53 % of adult males among Aceramic deer remains suggest a random culling (Croft 1991, 75). It follows that the deer may have been subjected to some sort of a „conservationist policy“ of exploitation (Croft 1991, 73). A „controlled management“ indeed seems to be indicated in layer B of Khirokitia, at least, where many more female than male deer were culled (Davis nd). We may conclude at this point that choosing the fallow deer, its importance in the diet and its apparent management, all tend to suggest that in the Aceramic, the deer was more than just food. The „deer-based economy“ may hide a deeper meaning.

3. An intriguing question, all too often ignored, is how the deer was hunted. Aceramic culture is distinguished by the absence of hunting or fighting equipment (Le Brun et al. 1987, 289), as will be

discussed below. This implies that in Cyprus, deer must have been hunted in a different way than on the mainland, where various projectile points could have been used.

All things considered, I suggest that taming and feeding might have been key elements in the Aceramic treatment of deer. Deer can become very tame and are easy to attract with feed (Hemmer 1990, 169). A useful analogy may be found in New Guinea, where pigs forage freely during the day and return to the settlement each night to be fed by women (Sillitoe 1979; Rosman and Rubel 1989, 27). In some cases special fields are made just for the feeding of pigs, and in other cases pigs are allowed to feed on old gardens (Rosman and Rubel 1989, 33). New Guinea pigs are important for both ceremonial and economic purposes, and pig hunting is more important ritually than economically (Rosman and Rubel 1989, 34). Without pushing the analogy too far, this model may provide some guideline to the possible relationship between humans and deer in Aceramic Cyprus.

With an old fashion house, then, the settlers brought to Cyprus an old fashion food animal which in all probability had an ideological significance. The round house, the avoidance of cattle and the preference for deer were cultural choices, if any were ever seen in the archaeological record.

Material culture

The material culture is the most original aspect of the Cypriot aceramic. It shows a high technological level coupled with some „clumsiness“ with no parallel known anywhere or anytime on the mainland. Comparing the aceramic material culture with the Levant seems pointless, „infructueuse“ (Le Brun 1989a, 167).

Aceramic knapping technology is largely based on flakes, most of them with smooth butts. The cores are small, generally with smooth striking platforms. The majority are globular cores with a single platform, only a few have two opposed platforms. There are rare Levallois cores (Le Brun 1989a, 164). This reduction procedure is more or less comparable with the early neolithic (PPNA) of the Levant, also characterised by smooth platforms and small cores (Lechevallier and Ronen, 1994, 169), but in the PPNA bladelet production was still important. In the following PPNB, while the smooth platform remains the leading type, the size of the cores increases considerably and, most characteristically, blade cores and blades become numerous. The aceramic of Cyprus, then, is technologically unlike the former or the latter.

The modified tools of the aceramic Neolithic are extremely simple, a „low key“ industry. The most frequent tool type is a flake whose irregular edges, variously retouched or sometimes unretouched, have a gloss. In addition there are small and mostly irregular blades, rare awls, and a few Levallois points (Le Brun et al. 1987, 299). It has been shown that the glossed-edge flakes were used for cereal and reed cutting (Coqueugniot, in Le Brun 1984). The toolkit described above is far simpler and monotonous than anything known from either PPNA or PPNB lithic assemblages in Anatolia (M.C. Cauvin 1988) or the Levant (Lechevallier and Ronen, 1994, 141). Aceramic is best described as an expedient industry, lacking virtually all that characterises the contemporary mainland: blades and blade products such as sickles, knives and arrowheads; pressure flaking; chipped axes and other celts; nor are there banal tools like grattoirs, burins or denticulates (Le Brun et al. 1987, 299). Most strikingly, points and other possibly hunting equipment are absent from this toolkit. The suggestion that Levallois points and symmetrical blades could have been the weapons of the aceramic (M.C. Cauvin in Le Brun 1984) is at best tenuous; but even so, it would not alter the picture in any significant way due to the very small number of those artifacts.

In a marked contrast with the extreme simplicity of the lithics, aceramic Cypriots developed original products in which they excelled. They made axes of stones or pebbles, not by flaking but by hammer-dressing (piquetage) followed by complete polishing (Le Brun et al. 1987, 299). But their most elaborate production was ground stone vessels made of hard stone in a variety of forms, sometimes decorated with incised or relief patterns which indicate a highly expert workmanship (Todd 1989, 7; Le Brun et al. 1987, 299).

The bone industry includes points, pins, pendants and other jewelry (Todd 1989, 7). Small crescent- or horseshoe-shaped bone objects occur only in the aceramic culture (Le Brun et al., 1987).

Pottery was found only in one case, in Khirokitia, a poor quality „Gray Ware“. It has been assigned to an unsuccessful local attempt to make ceramics (Le Brun 1989a, 166), perhaps after a possible contact with the mainland (Held 1990, 22). Apart from this isolated incidence, pottery manufacture was not taken up in the aceramic culture even though for most of its existence it was contemporaneous with pottery-producing cultures on the mainland.

Exchange with the mainland is hardly evidenced not only as pottery is considered, but also by the paucity of exotic materials. Only a small quantity, about 100 pieces, of obsidian was found on the entire island, all from one source in central Anatolia (Le Brun 1989a, 162; Todd 1989, 8), and some 40 carnelian beads were imported from southern Israel or Sinai (Le Brun et al. 1987, 314). Obsidian of Anatolian origin is found in numerous sites in the PPNB of the southern Levant (Mellaart 1975). The obsidian objects in Cyprus could have come, therefore, from either Anatolia or the Levant. These meagre indications of exchange are surprising for, as Stanley Price has remarked (1977b, 84), movement by sea actually facilitates rather than impedes the distribution of items. Furthermore, all the carnelian beads were found in Khirokitia and almost all of them came from two necklaces (Le Brun 1989a). As Karageorghis has proposed (1982, 25), the entire small collection of exotics may have been introduced to the island with the original settlers, with no influx at a later date.

The dissimilarity between the material cultures of the aceramic and the mainland was assigned to a process of adaptation to new environmental conditions (Stanley Price 1977a). In view of the apparent lack of remains from the period of adaptation, a particularly rapid cultural adaptation was argued for, simultaneously involving „innovation and deviance“ (Le Brun 1989a) from the parent culture. Once the process of deviance completed, however, the innovative capacities have disappeared and a marked stagnation set in (Held 1990). This stagnation has again been explained by the environment, this time arguing for a population too preoccupied with „seasonal adaptive responses“ (Held 1990, 25). Thus, the environment struck twice: first, causing a rapid change, then acting as a major retardant; a cunning Cypriot environment.

Exactly when and where the pre-Aceramic adaptation occurred in Cyprus remains unknown. The Holocene rise of sea level in the last 10,000 years covered only 1 to 2 km of Cypriot coastal plain (Gomez and Pease 1992), and it is highly unlikely that an entire phase of occupation was confined to that narrow strip. Furthermore, Cyprus is part of the Mediterranean climate zone of the Levant (Le Houeron 1992) and colonization would not have necessitated a major adaptation. More importantly, no relationship has ever been demonstrated between a Cypriot culture trait and the environment. In fact, an attempt to do so „would be problematic“, as Stanley Price admitted (1977b, 83). Indeed, why would the ecosystem favour the disappearance of hunting gear in an economy based on deer hunting? or the disappearance of fighting gear when fortifications were so vital?

At this point of the discussion aceramic culture already emerges as a different concept altogether, as Todd once felt (1989, 8). As argued above, the Cypriot Aceramic house and the animal species were culturally, not environmentally determined. I suggest that a post-colonization adaptation never took place in Cyprus. Rather, aceramic culture was brought to the island complete as we know it. When this system is evaluated as a coherent whole, a simple, largely egalitarian and non-violent society is most strikingly

indicated. In the context of the 7th millennium Near East, a non-violent code of behaviour appears to me as the most plausible interpretation of the absence of arrowheads and dogs. This hypothesis would explain the survival of the Aceramic culture for some 2,000 years with no signs of competition or conflict (Held 1990, 25). It follows that the walls surrounding some aceramic settlements might have had a different function than defence, as will be discussed below.

Referring to the very long and marked cultural stagnation, Held made the interesting observation that the early population of Cyprus seems to have been „too remote, and too poor in human resourcefullness for a deviation-amplifying cultural process to come into play“ (Held 1990, 25). This statement may be taken to imply a biological isolate to some extent inbred. All converge to depict a Cypriot society culturally and biologically isolated by its own choice, and behaving according to its own ideological system. This system will be further revealed by its „non-material“ aspects.

Cult and symbol

The subject „cult“ as distinct from other aspects of life is the product of the compartmental modern mind. In the world view of traditional societies, cult and daily life were probably intimately combined. In the ancient world religion must have been everywhere and was the only means to give meaning to life and to man's place in nature (Rapoport 1979, 1980). While it seems to be true that in ancient cultures things are either utilitarian or religious (J.Karageorghis 1992), even as purely utilitarian objects as the house may have acquired religious significance, for example the circular Navajo Hogan which symbolises the sacred cosmos (Kent 1991, 454). Accordingly, even though the aceramic cultic/symbolic manifestations will be discussed here under a separate heading, the symbolic constituents of „mundane“ objects or behaviour will also be considered. The aceramic data will be discussed under two headings: symbolic behaviour and symbolic objects.

Symbolic behaviour: Burials

Aceramic Cypriots manifest an unparalleled respect for their dead. Thus, in spite of the long and intensive habitation of Khirokitia, the 201 graves found there were almost never dispersed or damaged by later burials or by building activities (Le Brun 1989b, 72). As Le Brun has suggested, it implies that the placement of burials was marked or memorised, and a conscious effort was made not to disturb them. The burials are always single, in a flexed position and, in Khirokitia, all are inside structures (Le Brun et al. 1987, 294). At Tenta half of the burials occur inside and half outside structures (Todd 1989).

A gender differentiation is manifested in the orientation of the corpse: men mostly lie with the head to NE, while females lie with the head to either NW or SE. The data on 22 men and 26 women burials (Le Brun 1989b: 72) show that the W-SW segment is the most distinctive: 23 % of the females are here oriented but not a single male (Fig. 2).

On the mainland, gender differentiation is not attested in Natufian (Wright 1978) or PPNA (Le Mort 1994, 56) burials. In the PPNB, contemporaneously with the Cypriot aceramic, a gender differentiation emerges and is attested both in the location of the burial (for example in Çatal Hüyük, Hodder 1987) and in the new custom of plastered skulls which, in all known instances, were male (Arensburg and Hershkovitz 1989; Hershkovitz, pers. comm.).

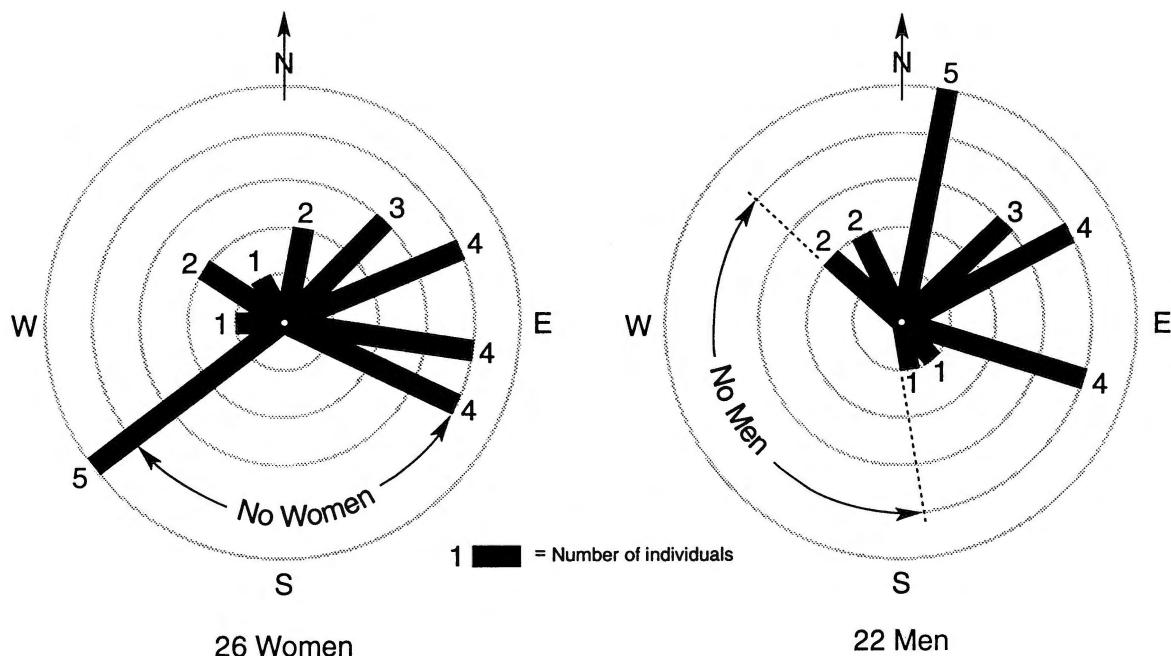


Fig. 2. Orientation of burials in Khirokitia, by gender (data from Le Brun 1989b, 75).

Stone querns and bowls are typical aceramic grave goods. These items accompanied 14 % of the 201 graves in Khirokitia, one case among the three burials unearthed at Cape Andreas, but none among the 20 graves of Tenta (Le Brun et al. 1987, 294; Le Brun 1989b, 72; Niklasson 1991). Beside these ground stone implements, beads, flint tools, bone tools and pebbles were also deposited in graves (Niklasson 1991, Table 27). A certain type of ground stone was only found in graves, and hence seems to have been specially manufactured for this use. Stone bowls were deliberately broken at the time of interment (Karageorghis 1982). Querns occur twice as frequently with males as with females, whereas necklaces of stone beads or dentalium occur solely in female tombs. The querns were most often placed on the head and chest of the dead, almost always with the concave side downwards (Niklasson 1991, 90). Among the 35 querns recorded in burials in Khirokitia, 74 % were placed on the head (Le Brun 1989b, 76). Both the location and position of these querns resemble a Levantine tradition going back to the late Geometric Kebaran grave of Neve-David, in Mount Carmel, where three (deliberately?) broken grinding stones were incorporated in a male burial, one of them placed, concave side down, over the head (Kaufman and Ronen 1987). This tradition continued in the Natufian, where a few burials were accompanied by stone slabs and broken grinding stones (Garrod and Bate 1937, 13; Wright 1978, 211). Some Natufian burials were accompanied by the cylindrical „pipe“ grinding stones (Noy 1989) which in all likelihood were specifically manufactured for that purpose.

Hence, Aceramic burial customs in Cyprus combine old and new: the Kebaran-Natufian tradition of incorporating grinding stones with the PPNB gender differentiation. Significantly, the marked status differentiation of the Natufian and the differential treatment of skulls in the PPNB were not adopted by the early Cypriots. While some kind of status differentiation in the aceramic may be hinted at by the grave goods, it is not as clear as in the Natufian (Wright 1978). No status differentiation is evidenced by

the Aceramic Cypriot houses or the material culture (Le Brun et al. 1987, 297), and the overall impression is of a largely egalitarian society.

Symbolic behaviour: skull deformation

Aceramic burials indicate in-vivo skull deformation. Opinions vary, however, as to the incidence of this custom and its age and sex distribution. Originally, about 40 % of the population at Khirokitia were said to have had their skulls shaped, with a stronger preference among females (50 %) than among males (29 %) (Angel 1953, cited in Domurad 1989), and with practically all the children affected (Angel 1961, cited in Niklasson 1991, 60). But a recent study lowered the total incidence of deformation to around 30 % of the population, with an almost equal distribution between the sexes and an almost total absence among children (Niklasson 1991, 60).

On the mainland, skull deformation is present in the PPNA and PPNB, 9000-6000 bc: in the southern Levant it was reported to have affected a small (13 %) part of the population of Jericho (Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981), a few cases in Abu Gosh (Arensburg and Herskovits 1988) and five cases in Byblos (Domurad 1989). Rather infrequent in the southern Levant, skull deformation is reported to have been widely practiced in the north-eastern Middle East, apparently with no age, sex or cultural orientation (Miklejohn et al. 1992, 94). Domurad (1989, 67) suggested that in Cyprus the skull deformation resulted from the use of cradleboards. Arguing for a childhood deformation is, however, not compatible with the observation that aceramic children apparently showed no signs of skull shaping (Niklasson 1991, 60). An aceramic stone figurine from Petra tou Limniti shows bandage-like, crossed stripes on the head (Stanley Price 1977b, 76), which may perhaps depict a mode of skull deformation.

Aceramic deformation invariably consisted of flattening the occipital, thus creating a short skull (Domurad 1989, 67). In the Northeastern Middle East various forms of deformation are reported (Miklejohn et al. 1992, 89). In Byblos, the few deformed cases were all women (Miklejohn et al. 1992, 89) and, in contrast with Cyprus, all had the skull elongated (Domurad 1989).

Jericho is of a special interest here. The 28 deformed skulls (out of 206 sufficiently preserved) were distributed in all the layers from late PPNA through PPNB and in all the areas of excavation. However, there was a clear spatial separation: in the northern and southern areas of the tell, elongated skulls (*tabulae erectae*) were the only deformation present, whereas in the central area solely the short skull (*tabulae obliquae*) was found (Kurth and Röhrer-Ertl 1981, 497). It seems that in Jericho, social, ethnic or otherwise distinguished groups occupied specific quarters. It is important to note that the Cypriot Aceramic type of deformation is found in the centre of Jericho, where the tower, wall and ditch were also found (Kenyon 1981).

Symbolic objects: cult centre

Three superimposed houses in Tenta (Houses 36, 17 and 14, superimposed in that order) are unique in their large size, the prominent location and the care with which the floors were made (Todd 1987, 45). Nowhere else were such buildings found in the Aceramic of Cyprus. Had these buildings in Tenta served for habitation, the inhabitants would have clearly been of a special status. However, the overall impression conveyed by the archaeological record is that of a largely egalitarian Aceramic society, without indications of rank. An interpretation of these buildings as cult centres is therefore preferred. This interpretation finds support in other conceptually similar early cult centres.

Clear and unambiguous cult centres are rare in the pre-Neolithic and early Neolithic Levant as well as in Egypt (Bard 1992, 17). Early cult centres did not have a definite plan or a specialised equipment, as Renfrew's principles (1985) would require. Early cult centres may be recognised by more discrete signs such as size, setting or decoration (Rapoport 1979, 10). The semi-circular Natufian house at Eynan, where some cultic activity seems to have taken place (Valla 1991), is outstanding in its large size and architectural design. In Çayönü, a group of „exceptional“ houses is distinguished from „ordinary“ houses mainly by the special care with which the floors were made (Aurenche and Calley 1988, 17). The fact that one of these exceptional houses, „the skull building“, had 70 skulls deposited in it (Ozbek 1988, 129) adds credence to the sacredness of them all. The hilltop houses at Tenta were also outstanding by the care with which their floors were made. The floor of building 17 was particularly elaborate, with two layers of small stones covered by several layers of red-painted plaster (Todd 1987, 45). As in Çayönü, the outstanding buildings at Tenta were very probably cult centres.

Symbolic objects: paintings and figurines

Two categories of objects are commonly assigned a „symbolic“ meaning in the Aceramic: the wall paintings and the figurines.

Two cases of wall paintings were found, at Khirokitia and at Tenta. The Khirokitia paintings were in a bad state at the time of discovery and the theme is unrecognisable. At Tenta, two human figures were found painted in red, with their hands raised in a position which resembles that of the „Mistress of the Animals“ from Catal Hüyük (Todd 1987, 49). A similar image is perhaps hinted on a decorated stone bowl from Khirokitia (Le Brun 1989b, 79, Fig. 11.4) The Tenta figures were painted on a pillar in house 11, which in all other aspects is an ordinary house, whence the excavator's reluctance to give the figures a religious meaning (Todd 1989). This position was questioned by Peltenburg (1989, 110), and Le Brun et al. (1987, 295) consider these painted figures as part of the iconography.

But exactly whose iconography do they represent? Upon entering house 11, a Tenta inhabitant would not have seen the unique figures because — a fact rarely mentioned — they were covered by plaster, which the excavators had to remove laboriously in order to expose the paintings (Todd 1987, 47). Whether right from the outset, then, or at some later point in time, the figures were covered by plaster and put out of sight, in what may perhaps be interpreted as an act of „desecration“. An original intent of painting for the sake of covering finds support in the fact that there has been no over-painting, and no other wall paintings were found at Tenta in spite of the presence of numerous whitish walls suitable for painting (Todd 1987, 47, 185). The poor state of preservation of the Khirokitia images could perhaps reflect a purposeful destruction in a similar act of desecration.

So whose iconography was it? The Tenta representations no doubt formed part of the mainland symbolic system, but that system was apparently rejected by Aceramic ideology. A diametrical opposition between the Aceramic and mainland ideological systems is clearly attested by the figurines as well. Numerous figurines were uncovered in aceramic sites, mostly in Khirokitia. Only three represent animals (none of them a food animal), while the majority depict humans (Le Brun 1989b, 78). All the figurines are made of stone with a single exception made of clay, even though clay was very widely used for bricks, pisé and walls (Lebrun 1989a, 165). The dominant symbolic representation in the aceramic, then, is a human figurine made of stone.

The highly schematised Aceramic human figurines are considered, alternatively, as non-religious objects (Todd 1989, 6), as house divinities (Peltenburg 1989), or as having had various uses and meanings, depending on their size and form (Le Brun 1989b, 79). The context in which the figurines

were found suggests that they were dumped after use, some were even re-used as construction stones (Le Brun 1989b, 80). Whether animal or anthropomorphic, aceramic figurines differ from those of the contemporary Levant (Le Brun 1989a, 165). By far the most important difference is that, with but a single exception, in the Cypriot figurine the sex is neither shown nor alluded to (Le Brun 1989b, 80). This is a marked contrast with the mainland, where a female statuette complete with sexual details prevails from the Sultanian phase of the PPNA, ca. 8,200 bc (Bar Yosef 1980) onward. This female figure marks the appearance of a new, post-Khiamian ideological system in the Levant (Cauvin 1972, 30; 1989, 8). The female fertility goddess closely followed on the cult of the bull, which appeared somewhat earlier, in the Khiamian phase of the PPNA, as attested in Mureybet II (Cauvin 1977, 23), in Hatula (Lechevallier and Ronen 1994, 326) and at Hallan Cemi Tepesi (Rosenberg, nd).

Thus, between the Natufian and the Early Neolithic, a major change had occurred in the Levant involving the ideological, the social and the economical domains (Watkins 1992, Lechevallier and Ronen 1994, 296). In the PPNB, Pottery Neolithic and later periods, human imagery became progressively obsessed with female sexuality, pregnancy and birth-giving (Cauvin 1972; Rollefson 1983; Bolger 1992; J. Karageorghis 1992). It is significant that both the bull and the fertility-female, early Neolithic icons of the mainland, are non-existent in the Aceramic of Cyprus. Not only is the image of the bull absent, but the beast itself was not brought onto the island, as already noted above. The opposition to mainland iconography is clear, and coincides with the suggested desecration at Tenta of a mainland symbol. The unmarked sex does not necessarily mean that women were not represented in the Aceramic imagery. On the contrary, there is a hint that at least a part, if not most of the aceramic human figurines, represented women. A deposit of Chalcolithic ritual objects from Kissonerga-Mosphilia is associated with fertility and birth giving (Peltenburg 1991; Bolger 1992). Beside clear female and birth-giving figurines made of pottery, the deposit included eight stone figurines with no sex indicated, similar to those of the Aceramic. The context of these asexual stone figurines in the ritual pit favours their interpretation as females and, by analogy, Aceramic figurines of a similar shape and size may have been also female representations. Bolger's hypothesis (1992) that the Kissonerga figurines did not represent gods, but were aids in ceremonies of fertility and birth-giving may equally apply to the aceramic period, which may explain their having been apparently discarded after use (Le Brun 1989b). Giving birth must have been as critical and dangerous in the aceramic as it was in the Chalcolithic (Bolger 1992) or even more so, as may be inferred from the higher rate of infant mortality in the Aceramic (Niklasson 1991). It may be concluded that according to the Aceramic ideology, representing women was apparently lawful but depicting their sexual organs was not. In view of the rejection of all the symbolic representations of the mainland — the female fertility organs, the male-bull and the figure with raised hands, the consumption of cattle may have been banned by a dietary law.

Symbolic objects: The defence walls

Considered above as part of Aceramic architecture and site setting, the defence walls should now be re-examined. The function of the mighty wall around Khirokitia (Le Brun et al. 1987, 289) and the wall and ditch which apparently surrounded Tenta (Todd 1989, 5) is not clear. Assuming a military use is inconsistent with not possessing any arms, which would render the defence against an armed offender impossible. Beside, was Cap Andreas safe without a wall? Furthermore, the island's population is estimated to have been small. The population of Khirokitia, the largest site, is estimated between 300 and 600 inhabitants, possibly closer to the lower figure (Le Brun et al. 1987, 312). There are no signs for population pressure on the island, nor are there signs of conflict, destruction or any other aggressive act throughout the Aceramic period (Held 1990). Yet in spite of this apparently peaceful existence, the walls

grew mightier with time. At Tenta the wall reached the thickness of 1.64 m in the final phase (Todd 1987, 159). In the final phase of Khirokitia the wall reached the formidable thickness of 3.5 m and a height of 4 m (Le Brun et al. 1987, 289). Furthermore, contemporary sites on the mainland were not fortified. The parallels frequently cited, Jericho and Beidha VI (Todd 1987, 45), are older than the Aceramic and themselves constitute problematic cases.

In view of the preceding discussion it is clear that defence in its simple meaning could not have been the function of the aceramic walls. The walls, and possibly also the hilltop location, must instead be seen as part of the aceramic belief system. Consequently, I suggest that they constituted mythological defences. The large communal effort involved in these defences was aimed, as Le Brun et al. pointed out (1987, 289), to divide between the built and the unbuilt areas. The walls could also have separated a „pure“ inside from a „polluted“ outside, or a sacred, humanized space inside from the witches and demons around, as the circular house of the Temne people of Africa is perceived to do (Rapoport 1979, 10).

We may briefly recall in this context the problematic wall, ditch and tower of PPNA Jericho. Like the walls of the Aceramic, the Jericho wall also grew with time: from a width of 1.6-1.8 m at the outset it attained in its final phase a width of 3.5 m and a height of 3.6 m (Kenyon 1981). Incidentally, these are almost the same measures as the Khirokitia wall. The initial hypothesis was that Jericho had fortifications to defend from human aggressors (Kenyon 1981). Recently this hypothesis was reaffirmed, and the need for defence was related to a growing warfare in the early Neolithic (Watkins 1992, 69). But basic questions remain unanswered: what was there to defend in Jericho? Who was the potential aggressor? Why was the tower built inside, and not outside the wall in accordance with strategic considerations? Rejecting the idea of military fortifications, but still compatible with techno-environmental determinism, it was suggested that the massive wall was built to stop mud-flows (Bar Yosef 1986). Even if this task is accepted for the 3.5 m thick wall, the position and function of the tower remain unsolved. I suggest that Jericho really had a defence complex, but it was not aimed against humans or mud. Like the Cypriot Aceramic walls, the Jericho defences also functioned within the realm of mythology. Viewed in this way, the location of the tower and the burials in its entrance make sense.

Discussion

We may now sum up Aceramic behaviour and ideology. Previously the Aceramic seemed amorphous and „senseless“ because, in spite of numerous efforts, no contemporary analogous system could be found. Our aim is to try to recognize a patterned system in the Aceramic and to tie it into the structural conditions which may have generated it. In the following pages an interpretation is offered which is based on a recent analogy. Are we allowed to „translate“ events ten millennia old and to render them in modern concepts? I contend that we are, because the only thing we can do is to use our own judgement upon the other's behaviour. We do not think about past societies using their concepts, nor do we speak about them in their language. We can only use our language and our concepts (e. g., Fulton and Anderson 1992, 607). Any culture different from our own as well as cultures of the past must be translated (Sperber 1985, 44-49) or, better yet, mapped (Blackwood 1984, 40) into ours. Therefore we are in fact incapable of recognizing the past in any other way than through the present, as critical theorists maintain (e. g. Gero 1985, 347).

There may be a danger of translating the untranslatable, either for the depth of time involved or for unbridgeable conceptual differences. In the Aceramic of Cyprus, however, we are dealing with a time span only twice as long as written history. Human behaviour written over the past 5000 years is entirely intelligible to us. This fact, and the similarity between behaviour patterns seen in Early Holocene Levant

and non-technological modern society, allow us to at least try to historicize, so to speak, this recent prehistoric past. The translation of those events into the modern analogy proposed here, and the present-day concepts involved, will be tested by their capacity to create out of the „chaotic“ Aceramic a meaningful system, successfully relating the phenomenal and the ideational orders (Goodenough 1964, cited in David 1992).

The most outstanding characteristics of the Aceramic system are simplicity, conservatism and non-violence. Aceramic Cypriots systematically rejected and opposed mainland norms: maintained the circular compound pattern of housing, did not make pottery nor any other clay firing; preferred recipients made of hard stone, and did not have the icons of the mainland, the female sexuality and the male bull. There does not seem to have been a class or status differentiation (Le Brun 1989b). An aceramic puritanism is perhaps seen in the non-depiction of the female sex. Cattle and gazelle were not consumed, nor were they allowed onto the island. Translated to our language, this probably means a taboo on eating or even touching these animals. For a very long time no object had been imported to Cyprus which contradicted the Aceramic belief system. Hence, either no ties were maintained with the outside world or, alternatively, ties were maintained with a strong discrimination against unwanted items. Whether desired or imposed, isolation is evident.

Similar contemporary patterns of behaviour are unknown, as mentioned above. But close parallels exist with modern or historically known sectarian groups. Consequently I suggest that Aceramic Cypriots were a sect. To avoid an excessive use of such terms as Puritans, Reformers, Fundamentalists, etc. for a society as yet not too well known, the Aceramic Cypriot sectarians will be called Asprots for convenience. In the following section sectarian movements in general, and Anabaptist groups in particular, will be discussed and compared with the Asprots. The Anabaptist sectarian movement, including the Hutterites, originated in the early 16th century as a product of the Protestant Reformation. Their early history is marked by numerous persecutions and frequent migrations. They presently live in isolated communities in different countries.

Sectarian ideology

Sectarians are united, above all, by a radical condemnation of the existing social order (Talmon 1962, 145). They develop an ideology different from that of the parent group (Hostetler 1963, 35) and in order to maintain it, the world outside the sect is avoided as far as possible. The sect separates itself from the outside world both physically — by geographical isolation and distinctive appearance — and mentally, by specific patterns of behaviour.

Avoiding the outside world and its objects, Amish have literally adopted the principle of „Be not conformed to this world“ (II Corinthians 6:14, Hostetler 1963, 146). Similarly, avoiding the world and becoming „the hidden man“ are Hutterite ideals (Peters 1965, 77, 171). These sects have adopted an agricultural way of life which enables out-of-the-way, hidden settlements offering the desired isolation and avoidance (Deets 1975, 9).

Asprots found the ultimate isolation in the insularity of Cyprus. Their ideal isolation made them, in Redfield's terms, an ideal folk society, „composed of persons having communication with no outsider“ (Redfield 1947, 296). We certainly owe it to the laboratory-like conditions offered by this perfect isolation that the oldest sect of the world is so clearly discernible through its archaeological remains. Following the Asprots' initial experience, „Islands were natural sites for hermitages and small colonies of ascetics“ (Morris 1989, 107).

In addition to geographical isolation, sectarians effectively isolate themselves also by the erection of mental or social boundaries (Bennett 1980, 268). Appearance and faith isolate as effectively as do

surrounding walls (Peters 1965, 183). Amish and Hutterites in North America are remarkable by their language (German), beards, black clothes and hat. Not using buttons, Hutterites are also distinguished as the „hooks and eyes“ people (Deets 1975, 13). Similarly, Asprots successfully isolated themselves not only physically, but also mentally, by a specific religious system and strict dietary laws. The preference for deer and the taboo on cattle and possibly on gazelle diametrically oppose the customs on the mainland, where gazelle has been the main food animal and cattle were clearly consumed. Studying ethnicity among neighbouring groups in the Andes, Osborn has concluded that „the strongest ethnic boundary is that made on the basis of food“ (1989, 153). The role of dietary laws in the great religions of the present hardly needs to be mentioned. Thus, dietary laws seem to have been used as efficient inter-group barrier already ten millennia ago.

Sects view themselves as pure, relative to „others“. The Amish single out a divine sphere from a satanic present world (Hostetler 1963, 48), „Our sort of people“ against „Other people“ (Hostetler 1963, 138). „Other people’s“ objects like ordinary clothes, cathedrals or television sets are to be avoided (Hostetler 1963, 146). For the Hutterites, nature is God-made, the city is man-made and hence evil and sinful (Deets 1975, 11). Television is for Hutterites „the Devil’s own instrument of temptation“ (Peters 1965, 137).

Avoiding the world naturally means turning against the ruling political and religious systems, plainly evidenced by many aspects of Asprots’ behaviour described above. Amish have no flag, motto or totem (Hostetler 1963, 147), and their charter forbids them to engage in war, politics or business partnerships with non-Amish (Hostetler 1963, 9). They resist the ruling authorities to the point of consistently refusing government aid of any kind, claiming it infringes on their religious freedom to provide for their own house and to care for their old people (Hostetler 1963, 21). Rejecting the existing social order may turn into a more active disobedience; for example, an Amish father stood trial for breaching the law of school attendance (Hostetler 1963, 145). Recently Hutterites in the USA were sentenced to 60 days of imprisonment for refusing to pay war taxes (Mosley 1989).

The sectarian answer to a sinful and polluted present is to embrace the past, to go back to origins. In sectarian ideology „il faut revenir à la source, il faut partir à zéro“ (Chery 1959, 386). Striving for the purity of an idealized past gave rise to the following widely held sectarian principles:

1. The rejection of violence. Opposition to armed force is an almost universal trait of sectarianism (Talmon 1962, 133).

2. A communal holding of property. Since sectarian groups believe they have a special mission in the world, their resources are dedicated above all for the „cause“ and belong to the group. Personal wealth and excessive consumption are taboo (Bennett 1980).

3. Live simply. Humility before God and sometimes before Nature (Bennett 1980; Deets 1975, 22).

Asprot back-to-origins tendency is clear from their circular houses, the Natufian-style sexless human figurines and the deer-oriented economy. Asprots’ non-violence is equally clear. While a communal way of life cannot be demonstrated in early Cyprus, simplicity is certainly conveyed by the scarce ornaments and exotic materials, the simple grave goods and by the material culture as a whole. Visual characteristics such as dress, etc are also impossible to demonstrate for the Asprots, but skull shaping may have served such a role.

How sects originate

Sectarian cleavages occur when a socio-political system collapses (Talmon 1962, 138), a response to fundamental social and economic changes (Hostetler 1963, 24). These crises cause intellectual unrest,

doubts and a general loss of faith in traditional institutions (Hostetler 1963, 24). The likelihood that sectarianism will appear is greater when the social and economic factors are combined with severe hardships and suffering following disasters like plagues, fires and droughts (Talmon 1962, 136).

The religious minorities of the Early Modern period were formed after the disastrous Black Death, which was followed by stressful socio-economic conditions: the growth of towns, the rise of a bureaucratic state power, and a growing economic diversification and competition. Likewise, the Asprot sect originated at the Pleistocene/Holocene transition, a time of tremendous change. Environmentally, there was the rise of sea level which, over a long period, submerged coastal land and settlements (e. g., Galili et al. 1988, 1993). This long series of catastrophic events accompanied drastic social, economical and ideological changes which constituted the agricultural revolution:

1. A rapidly changing pattern of subsistence, from hunters almost completely gazelle-dependent (Davis 1983) through a transitional stage in which a dwindling gazelle population had to be supplemented by low-return species of fowl and fish (Davis et al. 1994), finally to the successful replacement of the gazelle by domesticated goat and sheep (Clutton Brock 1979). These transitions must have required specific technological adaptations (Hayden, 1981; Ronen et al. 1994), and they must have had social repercussions.

2. The change in settlement pattern in the Levant from the small, Late Palaeolithic site with its „invisible architecture“ and rare burials to the village with a large population, stone architecture and numerous graves.

3. The new habitation pattern, accompanied by the appearance of sophisticated hunting/fighting gear, discloses a growing tendency for territorial demarcation, as shown by the appearance of „permanent“ stone structures and numerous burials. Conflict and warfare, although not directly attested in the Levant, would logically follow (Watkins 1992).

4. There is a clear movement toward economic diversification and a growing division of labour. Agrotechnology makes its appearance with sophisticated grinding stones of basalt. Technological expertise is attested, for example, by the production of lime plaster for building (e. g. Ronen et al. 1991) and for a complex treatment of skulls (Hershkovitz et al. 1993).

5. Social stratification becomes archaeologically visible from the Natufian (Wright 1978) onward. Newly rising bureaucratic chiefdoms or hierarchies could have monopolised the supply of goods — shell, obsidian, etc. — necessary for social reproduction (Peregrin 1991).

The combined environmental and socio-economical stress could well have generated the disintegration of primary groups and the acute frustration capable to give rise to religious sectarianism (Talmon 1962, 145). Asprot origins should be sought in this context. In the 16th century, the loss of faith in established institutions meant above all opposing the Roman Catholic Church (Hostetler 1963, 24). As a result, sectarian religious practice is extremely simple. Thus Amish have no fixed ceremonial centre, and services are held in turn in host households (Hostetler 1963, 102). Nor do Hutterites have a ceremonial centre. Worship normally takes place in the school and, occasionally, in the communal dining room (Peters 1965, 79). But in spite of the absence of clearly demarcated cult activities according to Renfrew's principles (1985), the entire life of these groups is immersed in religion. All Hutterite social norms — the communal way of life, non-violence and the preoccupation with farming — have become religious beliefs (Peters 1965, 75).

There are hints that, even with the absence of clear cult centres, Asprots were also driven by what may be termed religious beliefs. The more obvious traits are the rejection of the ruling iconography of the time and the creation of original ones. Less obvious, but arguably of possible religious significance, are the encircling walls and the dietary laws. The unifying force of a religious system has to be assumed for the Asprots also because religion is the only force known in history that could maintain socio-ideological systems for the length of time of the order involved here (Deets 1975, annex).

The hypothesis advanced here implies that the Asprot sect had originated prior to the colonization of Cyprus, perhaps during the PPNA. The sect must have existed on the mainland for quite some time. The problem of recognizing Asprots on the mainland lies beyond the scope of this paper. We may note, however, that the archaeological presence of an Asprot minority in a mainland site may be blurred by the conforming majority. Recognizing Asprots would perhaps be possible if isolated Asprot settlements had existed, or, in mixed settlements, through a minute analysis at the household level. A round house with an absence of arrowheads, cattle remains and detailed female figurines may point in that direction. For example, PPNA Jericho may have had an Asprot community living in the centre of the tell, as perhaps indicated by the wall and the Asprot type of skull shaping. Ain-Ghazal may be another case in point. Two distinct groups of human figurines were found here (Rollefson 1983): one group consists of clear „Venus“ mother-goddesses (i. e., with the sex indicated) while the other contains „non-descript models of humanity“ (Rollefson 1983, 37), implicitly with the sex not indicated. The two types of figurines could have been made for different purposes, but they could perhaps reflect different ideologies. One may recall here the outstanding burial of a woman in Ain Ghazal, „involving a lack of respect after death“ possibly due to a „violation of cultural norms in the community“ (Rollefson 1984, 12). These are hints which require further study.

Conclusions: the Asprots in Cyprus

Whether Site E is due to early Asprot activity must remain an open question. It is worth noting, however, that the accumulation of thousands of dwarf hippo bones at Site E is still largely unexplained (Simmons 1991a, 1991b), and the possibility that it may have been a place of sacred activity, a deposit of cultic offerings, can not be ruled out. The colonization of Cyprus around 7000 bc may have been the Asprots' initiative, as a response to a growing economic and social stress in the Levant; alternatively, as „regimes view diversity of belief and practice with the greatest reluctance“ (Hepburn 1979, 6), the possibility of the exodus having been a forced one should be borne in mind. On the island, Asprots had a monolithic existence for some 2,000 years, seemingly in a nearly complete isolation and avoidance of outside influences. Early Holocene knowledge of seafaring made Cyprus readily attainable, as amply indicated by repeated visits to Site E in the mid-9th millennium bc (Simmons 1991b) and by the wide commercial network manifested in Cyprus from the 3d millennium on. It is significant, then, that for about two millenia of Aceramic existence the island became virtually, or near-completely, isolated. This can only be understood as a purposeful isolation and a conscientious effort to bar outside influences.

During the two millennia of Aceramic existance no change in their socio-cultural system is discernible. Some differences between sites are apparent, though, in architectural details and burial customs (Todd 1987). Thus Khirokitia is more densely built inside its wall, and its house walls are thicker, than in other Aceramic sites. In Khirokitia burials and hearths are confined to the interior of houses while in Tenta, burials are about evenly distributed inside and outside houses and the hearths are mostly outside the house (Todd 1987, 1989, and pers. comm.). Contrary to Khirokitia, there are practically no grave goods at Tenta. Cap Andreas-Castros has no outer wall and is quite sparsely built, with only very few hearths (Le Brun et al., 1987, 293). These inter-site differences may be due to a change through time, or perhaps to colonizing groups originating in various places on the mainland, each with its own tradition. In view of the apparent contemporaneity of Tenta and Khirokitia (Le Brun et Evin 1991), the latter hypothesis is preferable.

Aceramic sites were suddenly abandoned, and the culture collapsed, for causes which are unknown (Le Brun et al. 1987, 315) and the transition from the aceramic phase (Khirokitia Culture) to the ceramic phase (Sotira Culture) is unclear. An occupation hiatus is commonly believed to have separated the two

cultures, variously estimated at 1,500 years (Le Brun et al. 1987, 284), 1,000 years (Todd 1989) and less than 1,000 years (Cherry 1990). Held is of the opinion that the island has never been entirely depopulated, but post-Aceramic settlements were impoverished and archaeologically less visible (Held 1990). Whatever the situation, it is clear that habitation pattern and settlement intensity radically changed between the Aceramic and Ceramic phases. In view of the long and apparently successful isolation of the Asprots from the outer world, the prospect of inbreeding should be considered. Inbreeding does not affect the genetic composition of the population, but the frequency of homozygots is increased in an inbred population, and the frequency of heterozygots is reduced, relative to random-mating populations (Hendrick 1985, 84). Inbreeding in endogamous groups derived from small founder populations may be expected to occur in conditions of insularity and biological isolation (Provine 1989), which is precisely the case of the Asprots. Inbreeding is even more likely to occur when biological isolation is accompanied by cultural isolation (Lerner, 1968, 266). Inbreeding may cause depression and other detrimental effects (Provine 1989). Among modern isolates, Old Order Amish, for example, have acquired a high incidence of founder-effect genetic characteristics (Lerner 1968, 245) some 300 years, or 10-15 generations, after the small founder population. In Aceramic Cyprus inbreeding may have occurred for some 70-100 generations. Hence, a genetic cause can not be ruled out for an otherwise unexplained end (Le Brun et al. 1987). Degradation of the land's carrying capacity and a strong reduction of the deer population (Croft 1991) may result from a human mismanagement linked, perhaps, to the detrimental effects of inbreeding, not necessarily to a climatic cause.

In the Ceramic Neolithic ties with the outside world were resumed and there occurred, in all probability, a population influx. The newcomers brought new ideas: pottery and a rectangular house, albeit geographically restricted and with „conforming“ rounded corners. We may note here that a similar house plan, rectangular with rounded corners, existed in Layer V of Beidha (Kirkbride 1968: 269). Were there ties between the Dead Sea area and Cyprus? further research in this direction is needed. It is remarkable that no attempt has been recorded in the Ceramic Neolithic of Cyprus to introduce Bos, either in-vivo or its image in stone or clay. Similarly, there is no attempt yet to represent female sexuality (J. Karageorghis 1992). The special role of deer in the food continued, and it seems that the dog was still largely kept out of the island. These facts would suggest that the newcomers had some respect for the old ideology. This in turn raises the possibility that they came from a mainland Asprot community which had become less conservative than the islanders. Pottery making was no longer resisted in Cyprus, but after a relatively short period, the rectangular house was again rejected.

The introduction of the sexed female fertility goddess in the Chalcolithic (J. Karageorghis 1992, 17) demolished one of the most important principles of Asprot ideology. The dog, too, is now well represented on the island. But again, not all has changed. The aceramic ideology is still manifested in the circular houses, which again dominate in the Chalcolithic (Peltenburg 1990). Most significant is the continued total avoidance of the goddess' male companion, the bull. Together with the new type of female figurine, the former, asexual type continued to be used (Bolger 1992). Rank is somewhat better indicated in the Chalcolithic society than before, and ceremonial centres now clearly exist (Peltenburg 1991).

The end of the Asprot sect seems to have been brought, finally, by economic modernism: bronze products and international commerce. Cattle and the rectangular house came to Cyprus at the same time, ca. 2800 cal. BC. Bull figurines of terracotta now became prevalent ritual objects (Hajjisavas 1989, 41). Avoidance of the bull and of the rectangular house plan, then, were maintained longer than any other trait of Asprot ideology (Fig. 3). The occasional continuation in the Bronze Age of the Aceramic head deformation (Karageorghis 1982, 26) may be viewed as a persistent habit, perhaps among Asprot descendants. Thus ceased to exist, some 4000 years after its appearance in the archaeological record, what I consider the oldest sect in history.

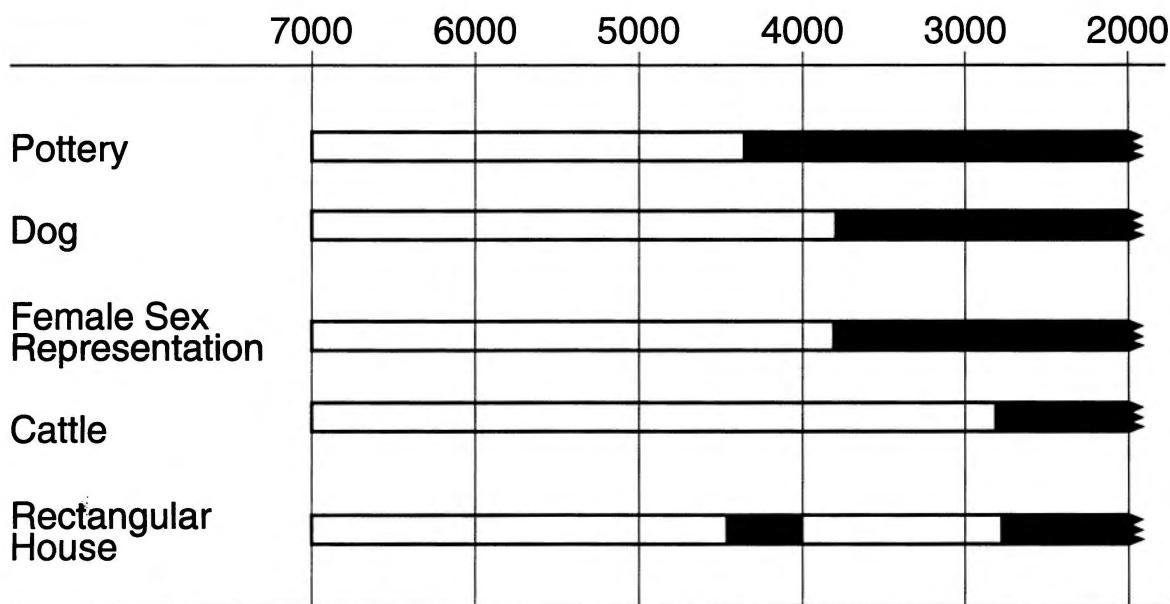


Fig. 3. Duration of the major Asprot principles.

The model proposed here reveals a coherent and meaningful Aceramic system, with its different components reliably integrated. If the ancient sect argued here is accepted as a sound possibility (rather than „true“, Barcelo 1991), its relevance would reach beyond Cyprus and the Levant in two important matters. First, it would convincingly show once again that human behaviour cannot be explained primarily by techno-environmental factors (e. g. Freed and Freed 1981, 489; Kent 1989, 130; Gamble 1993, 241). Second, it would indicate that ten millennia ago there existed patterns of human behaviour familiar to us in almost every detail, including the truism that change generates opposition. Whether this pattern had originated then or previously remains to be seen.

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