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The Divergent Development of Cyprus in the Early Aceramic Neolithic

The archaeology of Cyprus has always been somewhat of an enigma. The excavation of Khirokitia-*Vouni* (commonly called Khirokitia) in the 1950's revealed a Neolithic culture lacking cattle, pottery, and rectilinear architecture—in sharp contrast to contemporary mainland cultures and seemingly developed in isolation. From this so-called Khirokitia Culture (c. 7000 BCE) through the Ceramic Neolithic and Chalcolithic (end 3<sup>rd</sup> mil. BCE), Cyprus displays a largely homogenous material culture that, although belatedly adopting pottery, remained isolated from mainland culture; with a continued preference for circular architecture, a mixed hunting-farming subsistence strategy, and a unique emphasis on stone vessels and figurines. This has led many to categorize Cyprus as a culturally and technologically impoverished offshoot of mainland Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) culture. Indeed, Cyprus has fallen prey to what Paul Rainbird describes as a biased view of islands in western thought, which sees them as inherently isolated, and their inhabitants suffering from this isolation; however, statements about Cyprus' inferiority wrongly assume a unilinear social evolution and do not take into account the Cypriot point of view.<sup>1</sup> The more recent discovery of both a PPNA and PPNB culture on Cyprus allows for a new window into the development of Cyprus, one that takes Cypriot agency and choice into consideration, and moves beyond simple functionalist statements regarding the insularity of Cyprus. The insular, and idiosyncratic culture of Cyprus can clearly be seen in the Khirokitia Culture, but its roots lie earlier in the Aceramic Neolithic. This divergent culture was not the result of simple isolation

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Rainbird, "Islands out of Time: Towards a Critique of Island Archaeology," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 12, no. 2 (1999).

arising from insularity, but was constructed through economic and social adaptations to the Cypriot environment.

For many years, Khirokitia (c. 7000 BCE) was the earliest known site on Cyprus. Being so different from contemporary sites and employing a subsistence strategy most similar to the Early mainland PPNB, the island was, somewhat inevitably, written off as a backwater—a strange insular culture frozen in time within an evolving Eastern Mediterranean. However, perceptions of Cyprus changed abruptly with the discovery of a Late Epipaleolithic human presence at the site of Akrotiri-*Aetokremnos*, located on the steep cliffs of the island's southern peninsula. This site has been dated to around 10,000 BCE, pushing back the earliest known date of human activity on Cyprus significantly.<sup>2</sup> *Aetokremnos* seems to have served primarily as a kill and butchery site for pygmy hippopotami, and has sparked a debate about the role of humans in the extinction of endemic Cypriot fauna. In the last few decades, the discovery of sites on Cyprus dating from between 9000 and 7000 BCE has bridged the gap between the sporadic, early Akrotiri phase visits to the island and permanent settlement. This has led to the designation of a Cypro-PPNA (9000-8400 BCE) and Cypro-PPNB (8400-7000 BCE), contemporary with the mainland Late PPNA and mainland PPNB respectively.<sup>3</sup> Sites from these two periods provide an opportunity to examine the early development of Cyprus and the beginnings of its divergent and insular culture.

Before delving into Cypriot development, however, it is necessary to examine the theoretical themes important in discussions of insularity and island identity. John Robb

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Simmons, "Ais Giorkis: An Unusual Early Neolithic Settlement in Cyprus," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 37, no. 2 (2012): 86.

<sup>3</sup> Louise Steel, *Cyprus before History: From the Earliest Settlers to the End of the Bronze Age* (London: Duckworth, 2004).

brings up some important ideas in his analysis of Neolithic Malta, another culturally divergent island in the Mediterranean. He sees insularity as culturally constructed in the process of identity formation; a conceptual rather than physical reality. Robb rightly rejects the simple functionalist explanation of Maltese cultural difference—that it was caused by insularity—and focuses on Maltese agency and choice in his discussion.<sup>4</sup> He was working with different evidence from a different culture, but this emphasis on agency and choice is equally important in the case of Cyprus. To understand how Cyprus' divergent culture developed, we must move away from the traditional view of Cypriot society as passively drifting away from the mainland Neolithic. This cultural divergence is often described in the negative—Cyprus lost cattle, it lacked pottery and rectilinear architecture—when in actuality it was the product of active choices by the islanders themselves, and should be viewed as such. On Cyprus, We see these choices and the creation of difference in adaptations to the environment and the construction of space.

Cyprus lacks the rich symbolic and ritual record provided by the megalithic structures of Malta that forms the basis of Robb's argument. Instead, we must rely on more mundane cultural expressions and architecture, which are equally important in the establishment of identity.<sup>5</sup> Important in this is Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which is roughly equatable to everyday social experience, and involves "internalized dispositions

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<sup>4</sup> John Robb, "Island Identities: Ritual, Travel and the Creation of Difference in Neolithic Malta," *European Journal of Archaeology* 4, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>5</sup> Joanne Clarke, "Insularity and Identity in Prehistoric Cyprus," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre: Actes Du Colloque International Organise Par Le Departement Des Antiquites De Chypre et L'Ecole Francaise D'Athenes Nicosie 17-19 Mai 2001*, ed. Jean Guilaine and Alain Le Brun (n.p.: Bulletin De Correspondance Hellenique, 2003), 204.

towards certain perceptions and practices that may generate patterned behavior.”<sup>6</sup> On Cyprus in the PPNB, shared adaptations to the environment and their sociocultural implications formed a shared *habitus* on the island. While it would be wrong to suggest the existence of a common Cypriot ethnicity, over time this *habitus*, as it was continually reconfirmed and perpetuated, led to a shared sense of identity which then could be “consciously appropriated and given form through existing symbols or other material resources”.<sup>7</sup> This appropriation seems to have taken place on Cyprus by the Khirokitia Culture, whose insularity and shared culture reveal the existence of a cultural identity deliberately differentiated from mainland groups. In the earlier development of the island, we can see a shared culture and identity beginning to emerge.

So far, only two sites from the earliest permanent occupation of Cyprus in the PPNA have been discovered: Ayios Tychonas-*Klimonas* and Ayia Varvara-*Asprokremnos*, both dating from between the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> millennia and uncovered recently. *Klimonas*, located on the southern coast east of the Akrotiri peninsula, is notable for the earliest circular architecture on Cyprus, a feature that would become characteristic of the Khirokitia Culture much later. The site consists of one large circular building, about 10 m in diameter, surrounded by smaller rounded buildings with hearths and work areas. This is consistent with contemporary mainland settlement layouts.<sup>8</sup> The site’s inhabitants cultivated a primitive mainland wheat and hunted wild boar, the sole ungulate on the island, extensively.<sup>9</sup> The dating of the site is in line with

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Bernard Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus: Identity, Insularity, and Connectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Denis Vigne et al., "First Wave of Cultivators Spread to Cyprus at Least 10,600 Y Ago," *PNAS* 109, no. 22 (2009): 8445-8446.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8445.

the mainland L-PPNA, and activities on the site closely parallel those on the mainland. The age of the site, as well as the presence of cat and dog remains, shows that Cyprus was involved in experiments in domestication and mixed hunting-farming subsistence along with the mainland.<sup>10</sup>

Uncovered in the center of Cyprus, *Asprokremnos* is similar to *Klimonas*, but reveals more about Cypriot material culture in the PPNA. Again, the faunal assemblage is dominated by boar remains, but there is little evidence for plant domestication.<sup>11</sup> The lithic assemblage consists of mainly blades from unidirectional cores consistent with those at *Klimonas* and on the mainland. The presence of a baked clay figurine (the earliest form of human representation on Cyprus), ochre decorated stone vessels, arrowheads, and shaft-straighteners all point to close connections with the mainland.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, the Cypro-PPNA seems to have been an offshoot of the mainland Neolithic which remained close to its origins. The Cypro-PPNB (8400-7000 BCE) is in many ways a more diverse and interesting period, and although sites show close connections with the mainland, the beginnings of a divergent culture can be seen. PPNB Sites are typically small and somewhat varied, with mixed hunting, farming, breeding, and sometimes partly marine based economies. Several important developments can be seen during the period, which reveal the emergence of a unique and insular Cypriot culture.

One of these developments is the evolution of a characteristic Cypriot subsistence strategy, a clear adaptation to the environment. This can be seen most clearly at

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8448.

<sup>11</sup> Sturt Manning et al., "The Earlier Neolithic in Cyprus: Recognition and Dating of a Pre-Pottery Neolithic A Occupation," *Antiquity* 84 (2010): 698.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Parekklishia-*Shillourokambos* (8400-7000 BCE), the largest and perhaps most comprehensively studied PPNB site. Farming was important on Cyprus by the PPNB, as was meat production. Over the course of its occupation, fallow deer, pigs, goats, sheep, cattle, dogs, cats, and foxes were all introduced to the site.<sup>13</sup> Deer and goat were both brought over wild, and deer continued to be hunted throughout the period and beyond. Goats were originally hunted at the site, and then managed more intensively in the middle phases of occupation before showing morphological changes in the late phases.<sup>14</sup> Over time, the way in which animals were managed changed. This was probably influenced in part by developments on the mainland, which were transferred to *Shillourokambos* along with new lineages of domesticates, but Cypriot experimentation and responses to local pressures were also important. The skilled breeding of pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle seems to have been motivated by the early overexploitation of deer and probably an increasing human population.<sup>15</sup> The general history of meat production at the site—an early opportunistic combination of hunting and breeding followed by more intensive management of domesticates—is comparable to that of the mainland PPNB.<sup>16</sup> Ties with the mainland probably provided important support to the site as it developed, allowing new lineages and new ideas to come over, and compensating for any breeding failures.

In the L-PPNB, however, the faunal remains at *Shillourokambos* show a clear divergence from mainland norms. The hunting of fallow deer, always an important source of meat, began to increase in importance once again after a phase of apparent

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Denis Vigne et al., "The Early Process of Mammal Domestication in the Near East: New Evidence from the Pre-Neolithic and Pre-Pottery Neolithic in Cyprus," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. S4 (2011): S258.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, S259-262.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, S266.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, S267.

overexploitation in the M-PPNB. Cattle, never a large part of the faunal assemblage, disappeared entirely.<sup>17</sup> These trends are seen across Cyprus at this time. The faunal assemblage at Kritou Marottou-*Ais Giorkis* (50% fallow deer, 30% pig, 16.9% Caprines, 2% cattle, with some dogs and cats) is similar to that of *Shillourokambos*.<sup>18</sup> Kissonerga-*Mylouthkia*, a site apparently lacking cattle and whose faunal remains are dominated by deer and caprines, shows an increase in deer between the Early and Late PPNB.<sup>19</sup> Cattle are completely gone by the beginning of the Khirokitia Culture<sup>20</sup>, and remained absent for around 5000 years.<sup>21</sup> Cyprus' reliance on deer continued to increase during the Khirokitia Culture and Ceramic Neolithic (c. 4000 BCE) and persisted well into the Chalcolithic (3500-2000 BCE).<sup>22</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the mainland in the L-PPNB and beyond, where hunting was diminishing and domesticates were becoming increasingly important.

From the mainland's perspective, Cyprus appears to have become "stuck" in an E-PPNB mode of subsistence. The Cypriot islanders seem to have not felt the same pressures driving agricultural intensification on the mainland, nor did they have a significant negative effect on their environment.<sup>23</sup> Right from the start of the PPNB, Cyprus itself was instrumental in the development of a unique mode of subsistence. The archaeology of the Cypro-PPNB reveals that Cyprus was not simply handed down a

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, S257.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Simmons, "Ais Giorkis: An Unusual Early Neolithic Settlement in Cyprus," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 37, no. 2 (2012): 97.

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Peltenburg, "Identifying Settlement of the Xth-IXth Millenium B.P. in Cyprus from the Contents of Kissonerga-Mylouthkia Wells," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Wasse, "Climate, Economy, and Change: Cyprus and the Levant during the Late Pleistocene-Mid Holocene," in *On the Margins of Southwest Asia: Cyprus during the 6th to 4th Millenia BC*, by Joanne Clarke (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007), 60.

<sup>21</sup> Steel, *Cyprus before History*.

<sup>22</sup> Wasse, "Climate, Economy, and Change," in *On the Margins*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

mainland package, from which certain elements were lost over time because of isolation. Rather, the island developed alongside, and in connection with the mainland while responding to internal factors. By retaining what worked, such as deer hunting, and abandoning what did not work, such as cattle breeding, Cyprus adopted a subsistence strategy well adapted to its environment. The long-term sustainability of this strategy is a testament to how well suited it was for the island.

Over time, practices that had begun as pragmatic adaptations would have important sociocultural implications as part of a shared *habitus*. Different subsistence strategies imply different ways of doing things and looking at the world. Eventually, these practices and perceptions would lead to a feeling of difference between Cypriot and mainland culture. For example, a hunting ethos of some kind may have developed on Cyprus by the L-PPNB/Early Khirokitia Culture. This would have been very different from dispositions on the mainland, and could have contributed to the creation of a divergent island identity. Due to their low numbers on Cyprus, it is not clear whether cattle were kept primarily for meat or for ritual purposes.<sup>24</sup> Either way, their disappearance and continued absence represents a divergence from mainland culture based on an adaptation to the dry Cypriot environment, within which cattle were likely just too inefficient and difficult to raise.

Wells are another important Cypriot development during the PPNB also stemming directly from environmental adaptation. These wells are found at both *Mylouthkia* and *Shillourokambos* and consist of deep cylindrical shafts dug down into the *havara* (a decayed limestone soil) to access groundwater.<sup>25</sup> The wells at *Mylouthkia* are

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<sup>24</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 97.

<sup>25</sup> Peltenburg, "Identifying Settlement of the Xth-IXth," in *Le Néolithique De Chypre*, 18-21.



better known, and were used for the duration of the 8<sup>th</sup> mil. during the PPNB occupation of the site. Out of the many wells found so far at the site, only wells 116 and 133, dating from the E-PPNB and L-PPNB respectively, were in a state of good preservation.<sup>26</sup> These wells predate similar examples on the mainland at Atlit Yam by over 1000 years, and not only reveal the nature of subsistence and activity at the site, but are also significant in and of themselves.<sup>27</sup> As their early dates show, these wells were a uniquely Cypriot invention, totally removed from mainland developments. On a practical level, they allowed for sedentism in a dry environment, but they also seem to have had a deeper symbolic importance.

The extensive remains in the wells consist of a small usage phase below a much larger abandonment fill. Both abandonment fills contained many artifacts, including large numbers of stone vessels and hammerstones, and the L-PPNB well 133 contained an intriguing burial. A group of human skulls along with some other disarticulated human bones representing a minimum of three adults, one adolescent, and one child were buried beside the remains of 23 complete, unbutchered caprines. A unique pink macehead was also found beside the group of skulls.<sup>28</sup> Such a large expenditure of both animals and artifacts paired with this burial in the abandonment fill suggests that the wells had significant cultural importance. As the site excavator notes, they are more than “elaborate risk buffering measures...they are transmitters of cultural knowledge: they are replicative devices as well as stabilizing forces on culture.”<sup>29</sup> The precocious

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

development of wells on Cyprus was another source of cultural divergence that could have contributed to the creation of an island identity.

The well 133 burial is interesting even when viewed alone. The special treatment of the skulls and secondary burial are reminiscent of Near Eastern practice, but its combination with a uniquely Cypriot feature and such a profusion of animal remains is peculiar. This burial is certainly the most dramatic yet found on the island in the PPNB, but the human-animal connection expressed in the burial has parallels elsewhere. Burials at *Shillourokambos* (mainly secondary deposits) involved funeral offerings of piglet, goat, and sheep heads.<sup>30</sup> While two complete caprine burials at Khirokitia echo these earlier practices.<sup>31</sup> Lack of evidence precludes any comprehensive assessment of burial customs in the PPNB, but this human-animal connection points to larger Cypriot perceptions of human-animal relations, no doubt influenced by Cypriot experiments in domestication, and provides more evidence of diverging culture. This trend can perhaps also be seen in a sculpture of a half-feline half-human head found in well 66 at *Shillourokambos*; although this might simply point to Anatolian influences on the Cypro-PPNB.<sup>32</sup> At Khirokitia, a more complex burial culture would arise, but the fact that it was preceded by burials in PPNB already displaying uniquely Cypriot elements is indicative of a funerary culture that was moving away from mainland models.

Unlike burials, the extensive lithic remains on Cyprus present a largely uniform material culture with close ties (at least initially) to the mainland. Across *Mylouthkia*,<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Vigne et al., "The Early Process of Mammal Domestication," S263.

<sup>31</sup> Paula Louise Jones, *Moving Heaven and Earth: The Aceramic Neolithic of Cyprus* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Guilaine and Francois Briois, "Shillourokambos and the Neolithization of Cyprus: Some Reflections," *Eurasian Prehistory* 4 (2006): 172.

<sup>33</sup> Carole McCartney, "The Mylouthkia and Tenta Chipped Stone Industries and Their Interpretation within a Redefined Cypriot Aceramic Neolithic," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre*, 135.

*Shillourokambos*<sup>34</sup>, and *Ais Giorkis*,<sup>35</sup> lithic industries are dominated by blade production from bidirectional cores that mirrors that of the mainland. Mainland type Byblos points are also found across the island in the early and middle PPNB.<sup>36</sup> An exhaustive examination of PPNB lithics would be exhausting, but certain changes in the L-PPNB are important. The relatively uniform lithic industry of Cyprus moves away from the mainland model with an increased emphasis on flake tools over blades and a shift towards more moderate quality chert.<sup>37</sup> At *Mylouthkia* there is also a switch to unidirectional blade production as well as the disappearance of Byblos points.<sup>38</sup> The changes in *chaîne opératoire*'s within the lithic industry again reflect differing practices and ideas on Cyprus, which contributed to a divergent Cypriot *habitus* in the L-PPNB.

Another important aspect of Cypriot lithic assemblages is the presence of Anatolian obsidian at many sites, including *Shillourokambos*, *Mylouthkia*,<sup>39</sup> *Ais Giorkis*, and *Akanthou-Arkosykos*<sup>40</sup>. A substantial trade network for this obsidian seems to have existed, but in the L-PPNB, obsidian begins to disappear from sites before vanishing entirely by the Khirokitia Culture.<sup>41</sup> Overall, these changes in the lithic industry show the emergence of new traits alongside increased isolation from the mainland.

Other aspects of the artifactual culture of Cyprus show signs of divergence in the L-PPNB. An emphasis on human figurines, ground stone vessels, and picrolite are all

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<sup>34</sup> Guilaine and Briois, "Shillourokambos and Neolithization," 167.

<sup>35</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 93.

<sup>36</sup> McCartney, "The Mylouthkia and Tenta Chipped Stone Industries," in *Le Néolithique De Chypre*, 135. Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 94.

<sup>37</sup> Edgar Peltenburg et al., "Neolithic Dispersals from the Levantine Corridor: A Mediterranean Perspective," *Levant* 33 (2001): 53.

<sup>38</sup> McCartney, "The Mylouthkia and Tenta Chipped Stone Industries," in *Le Néolithique De Chypre*, 135-140.

<sup>39</sup> Peletenburg et al., "Neolithic Dispersals," 51.

<sup>40</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 93.

<sup>41</sup> Peletenburg et al., "Neolithic Dispersals," 53.

part of the Khirokitian cultural repertoire, and as with other aspects of the Khirokitia Culture, they have their beginnings in the PPNB. The presence of a half-feline half-human figurine at *Shillourokambos* has already been mentioned, and other quadruped figurines as well as the beginnings of a picrolite industry have been found at the site.<sup>42</sup> At *Ais Giorkis*, several picrolite objects including a plate, numerous ground stone vessels, a bone-carved bird, and a larger female figurine unusual for the period have all been unearthed.<sup>43</sup> The large number of stone vessels found in both wells 116 and 133 at *Mylouthkia* was brought up above,<sup>44</sup> while stone vessel and picrolite industries, slightly different from the later Khirokitia culture, are attested at *Kalavassos-Tenta*.<sup>45</sup> Together, these finds presage the cultural developments of later periods and form another part of the emerging Cypriot culture.

Due to a lack of ritual evidence and overt symbolism, domestic architecture looms large in discussions of Cypriot identity. The island's characteristic circular architecture is an important indication of insularity, as this architectural form persisted for millennia after the rise of rectilinear architecture on the mainland. Circular architecture is one of the main characteristics of the Khirokitia Culture, but it was also widespread by the Middle to Late PPNB. Also located on top of a low hill, the site of *Kalavassos-Tenta* most closely parallels the site of Khirokitia itself, with similar structures and delineation of space. *Tenta* has five periods of occupation which conform with the general progression from timber to stone construction seen throughout the PPNB.<sup>46</sup> By the L-PPNB, *Tenta* consisted of closely packed circular domestic structures of stone and

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<sup>42</sup> Guilaine and Briois, "Shillourokambos and Neolithization," 172.

<sup>43</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 95-96.

<sup>44</sup> Peltenburg, "Identifying Settlement of the Xth-IXth," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Ian Todd, "Kalavassos-Tenta: A Reappraisal," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre*, 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

mudbrick encircled by a substantial wall and ditch.<sup>47</sup> This is highly reminiscent of Khirokitia's densely arranged circular domestic structures and surrounding wall.<sup>48</sup> In fact, habitation at *Tenta* continued into the Khirokitian Culture, and the close proximity of the two sites suggests that *Tenta* may have directly influenced the architecture of Khirokitia.

While less similar to the specific layout of Khirokitia, other PPNB sites have the same circular domestic architecture. *Shillourokambos* by 7600 BCE was dominated by circular houses of stone and earth with narrow trenches delineating space.<sup>49</sup> *Ais Giorkis* was also surrounded by a significant ditch and consisted of circular structures of plastered stone very similar to those of the Khirokitia Culture.<sup>50</sup>

While less impressive than the megalithic structures of insular Malta, these apparently standardized structural forms would have been just as important in the construction of an island identity. The built environment both constructs and is constructed by social practice. The shared architecture and emphasis on domestic space throughout the island was part of a shared social experience and way of life, which was solidified into a shared identity in opposition to mainland culture. This resulted in Cyprus holding to these basic architectural standards long after they had disappeared on the mainland. Many have recognized circular architecture as a sign of resistance to cultural change on Cyprus.<sup>51</sup> The excavation of PPNB sites on Cyprus has shown that these characteristic architectural forms were already in place by the L-PPNB.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-43.

<sup>48</sup> Joanne Clarke, *On the Margins of Southwest Asia: Cyprus during the 6th to 4th Millennia BC* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007), 113.

<sup>49</sup> Guilaine and Briois, "Shillourokambos and Neolithization," 164-166.

<sup>50</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 89-91.

<sup>51</sup> Clarke, *On the Margins*, 110.  
Steel, *Cyprus before History*, 48-50.

Bernard Knapp, personal communication.

To summarize the Cypro-PPNB, we see the emergence of a divergent Cypriot culture across many elements of Cypriot society. A characteristic subsistence strategy, architecture, tradition of well digging, as well as burial, lithic, ground stone, figurine, and microlite industries alongside a general breaking of ties with the mainland can be seen. Together, all of these elements formed a Cypriot *habitus* which by the L-PPNB had taken on unique traits different from mainland culture.

In many ways, the Khirokitia Culture is the culmination of these PPNB developments. The insularity of Cyprus during this period is largely undisputed. A homogenous material culture emphasizing figurines, microlite, and elaborate stone vessels reveals a cultural unity and shared identity that goes beyond the many similarities among sites in the PPNB.<sup>52</sup> During this time, imported carnelian is the only evidence for contact with the outside world.<sup>53</sup> The diminishing contacts in the L-PPNB as seen in the obsidian trade seem to have dwindled to a point of almost nonexistence. This insularity is reflected in the strict organization of space present in the walled and tightly packed settlement of Khirokitia; a clear cultural ordering of space which encoded certain social perceptions and practices, many of which may be beyond our ability to read today.

It should be noted that Khirokitia is no longer the type-site for the culture that bears its name; in fact, its size, relatively closed access, and number of burials make it somewhat atypical. However, regardless of the variances in site type, a homogenous material culture is present across the island. The site of Kholetria-Ortos, though significantly damaged by modern activity, shows signs of having a very different type of settlement layout with a greater emphasis on impermanent architecture, and yet it still

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<sup>52</sup> Steel, *Cyprus before History*, 48-59.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

displays the same economy and material culture as contemporary sites, including “incised cobbles” previously only found at Khirokitia.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the site of Cape Andreas-*Kastros* on the northeastern-most tip of Cyprus has the same type of circular architecture as Khirokitia, but these structures are more broadly spaced around open areas.<sup>55</sup> The Khirokitia Culture was not entirely uniform, but it did have a shared culture and identity.

Identity is created at least in part through difference, and “involves the marking of symbolic boundaries.”<sup>56</sup> It is through this deliberate differencing that the shared and divergent *habitus* of the L-PPNB solidified into the insular identity of the Khirokitia Culture as well as later periods. Shared cultural elements were consciously appropriated and emphasized over mainland influences. The continued resistance to widespread aspects of mainland culture such as pottery, cattle, and rectilinear architecture and emphasis on a homogenous, uniquely Cypriot culture despite some contact with the outside world provide convincing evidence for the creation and maintenance of a differentiated identity. The peculiar architectural and artifactual forms of the L-PPNB, which are elaborated on in the Khirokitia Culture, made up the symbolic boundary between Cyprus and the outside world.

If adaptation to the Cypriot environment and social identity formation are the mechanism by which Cyprus diverged into an insular culture, the question of why this particular island identity emerged is still up in the air. Some point to the collapse of the so-called “PPNB interaction sphere” in the east Mediterranean, which perhaps led to reduced mainland engagement with Cyprus.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Cypriot culture may have

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<sup>54</sup> Alan Simmons, "Villages without Walls, Cows without Corrals," in *Le Neolithique De Chypre*, 64-65.

<sup>55</sup> Clarke, *On the Margins*, 120.

<sup>56</sup> Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> Wasse, "Climate, Economy, and Change," in *On the Margins of Southwest*, 61.

coalesced around certain established elements to fill the void. This could account for the relatively rapid crystallization of L-PPNB elements to forge the insular Khirokitia Culture around 7000 BCE. However, this explanation focuses too heavily on external factors. As has been shown, divergence from mainland origins involved deliberate adaptation and choice. During much of the PPNB, Cyprus was well connected to the mainland, allowing settlers, animals, obsidian, and ideas to cross over. This suggests that Cypriotes had the ability to maintain closer contact with the mainland had they wanted to.

The inhabitants of Cyprus were not just reacting to a withdrawal of outside engagement; they probably felt no need for such engagement. As previously mentioned, Cyprus did not suffer any significant ecological degradation as a result of Neolithic habitation, and the “de-intensification” of the economy overtime suggests an absence of the pressures driving agricultural intensification on the mainland.<sup>58</sup> In opposition to mainland norms, Cypriotes adopted a subsistence strategy whose sustainability is attested by its survival into the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium.<sup>59</sup> The developments of the PPNB show that islanders had been developing their own pragmatic and cultural adaptations to their surroundings from an early date, and by the end of the PPNB, a shared *habitus* was present throughout Cyprus. These developments, as well as the large size and apparently low population of Cyprus, could have led to an ethos of self-sufficiency on the island, and a feeling of difference compared to an outside world whose practices were growing increasingly different. The collapse of the PPNB interaction sphere may well have further enabled Cypriot insularity, but the conservative cultural forms of post-PPNB Cyprus imply a deliberate rejection of outside influence.

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<sup>58</sup> Simmons, "Ais Giorkis," 98.

<sup>59</sup> Wasse, "Climate, Economy, and Change," in *On the Margins of Southwest*, 61.



An intriguing aspect of Cypriot insularity is how long it persisted—from the Khirokitia Culture to the end of the Middle Chalcolithic, a period of around 4500 years.<sup>60</sup> This far exceeds the duration of Malta's insularity.<sup>61</sup> Again this probably stems, at least in part, from an ethos of self-sufficiency. Malta and Gozo make up a small chain of islands dependent on the outside world for many resources, and even during its most insular period, significant numbers of foreign items flowed in.<sup>62</sup> On Cyprus, there was little apparent desire or need to seek outside contact or goods, and so connections with the mainland were kept to a minimum, which provided less of an opportunity for foreign influences to creep in. Furthermore, as the social practices that made up the divergent Cypriot identity were repeated and reaffirmed, feelings of difference from the mainland would only increase, reinforcing the divergent identity in a kind of positive feedback loop. It is important to note that Cypriot culture was not stagnant between the Khirokitia culture and the end of the Chalcolithic. Besides the belated technological adoption that gives the Ceramic Neolithic its designation, changes in settlement layout and patterns, funerary practice, material culture and other areas did occur while certain elements (circular architecture, absence of cattle, figurines, faunal assemblages) persisted.<sup>63</sup> The lack of external influence did not cause an end to change and innovation. Insular Cyprus evolved along its own trajectory, keeping in place certain archaic elements.

The apparently anachronistic elements of the Khirokitia Culture that have taunted archaeologists for years are now being unraveled. A bizarre culture seemingly springing from nowhere now has a past. The excavation of Cypro-PPNA and especially PPNB

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<sup>60</sup> Steel, *Cyprus before History*, 48-103.

<sup>61</sup> Robb, "Island Identities: Ritual, Travel," 178.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>63</sup> Steel, *Cyprus before History*, 48-103.

sites reveal the origins of an insular culture. By moving away from traditional conceptions of Cyprus as a backwater of the mainland Neolithic and focusing instead upon Cypriot agency, choice, and identity formation, we can see how these earlier cultures led to the insular Khirokitia Culture. Beginning as a society closely tied to, and reliant on the mainland in the PPNA and Early to Middle PPNB, Cypriot culture developed in response to its particular environment to become something different. Over time, pragmatic adaptations to the environment, such as a mixed hunting-breeding strategy, the practice of well digging, and the emergence of divergent cultural forms across the island created a shared *habitus*, or social experience. This crystallized into a unique Cypriot identity differentiated from the mainland, which, while remaining just as intriguing, is no longer as perplexing.

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