

MORTUARY PRACTICES IN THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS DURING THE PRE-POTTERY NEOLITHIC PERIOD

KIBRIS ADASI'NDA ÇANAK ÇÖMLEKSİZ NEOLİTİK DÖNEMDE GÖRÜLEN ÖLÜ GÖMME UYGULAMALARI

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ABSTRACT

The oldest human remains known from Cyprus, dating back to the 8th millennium cal. BC, were uncovered at Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, in the southern coastal zone of the island, and at the western site of Kissonerga-Mylouthkia. Various mortuary practices including collective and single burials as well as primary and secondary deposits have been recognized. Other burials dating to the 8th millennium were found at Kalavassos-Tenta, in southern Cyprus. Many primary burials were also discovered at the later sites (7th - early 6th millennium cal. BC) of Khirokitia Vouni, not far from Kalavassos-Tenta, and at Cap Andreas-Kastros in north-eastern Cyprus. The comparison between funerary practices at the various Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites (8th and 7th - early 6th millennia) reveals an evolution to primary, single burials of both adults and subadults. Furthermore, the comparisons of funerary practices observed at Cypriot sites dating back to the 8th millennium with those described for the PPNB mainland sites highlight

ÖZET

Kıbrıs'ta bilinen en eski insan kalıntıları adanın güney kıyı bölgesindeki, MÖ 8. binyıla (cal. BC) tarihlenen Parekklisha-Shillourokambos'ta ve batıdaki bir diğer yerleşim olan Kissonerga-Mylouthkia'da ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Toplu ve tekli mezarlarla birlikte, birincil ve ikincil birikintileri içeren çeşitli ölü gömme uygulamaları bulunmaktadır. Bunların yanı sıra Güney Kıbrıs'ta Kalavassos-Tenta'da 8. binyıla tarihlenen mezarlar bulunmuştur. Ayrıca Kalavassos-Tenta'dan fazla uzak olmayan Khirokitia Vouni ve Kuzeydoğu Kıbrıs'taki Cap Andreas-Kastros'da bulunan, MÖ 7. bin ve 6. binyılın başlarına (cal. BC) tarihlenen yerleşimlerde birçok birincil mezar açığa çıkarılmıştır. Çeşitli Çanak Çömleksiz Neolitik yerleşimlerdeki (MÖ 8.-7. bin ve 6. binyılın başları) ölü gömme uygulamalarının karşılaştırılması, hem erişkin hem de erişkin olmayan bireyler için birincil, tekli gömmelere doğru bir gelişimi ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, MÖ 8. binyıla tarihlenen Kıbrıs yerleşimlerinde gözlenen ölü gömme uygulamalarının anakaradaki PPNB yerleşimlerinde tanımlanmış olanlarla karşılaştırılması, birkaç ortak noktayı ve yalnızca Kıbrıs'a özgü uygulamaları ortaya koyması açısından önem taşımaktadır.

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, investigations of the early prehistory of Cyprus have brought to light numerous new data that profoundly changed our understanding of the neolithization process both in Cyprus and the mainland (e.g. Guilaine and Le Brun 2003; Peltenburg and Wase 2004). Until the end of the 1980s, it was commonly assumed that there was no clear evidence of a human presence in Cyprus before the 7th millennium cal. BC, when a civilization of farmers, well illustrated by the site of Khirakitia Vouni, appeared (Le Brun 1989a). Mainly due to the discovery of three sites (Akrotiri-Aetokremnos, Parekklisha-Shillourokambos and Kissonerga-Mylouthkia), the situation has changed dramatically.

The earliest evidence for human presence in Cyprus, which dates back to the 10th millennium BC, comes from the small rock shelter of Akrotiri-Aetokremnos, on the southern coast of the island. The site produced lithic artefacts and animal bones (Simmons 1988, 2004). Further excavations at the southern site of Parekklisha-Shillourokambos and at Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, in the western part of the island, provided evidence of farmers in Cyprus from the 9th millennium cal. BC (Guilaine et al. 2000; Peltenburg et al. 2000; Guilaine 2003; Peltenburg 2003b; Guilaine et al. 2011). At Parekklisha-Shillourokambos and Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, the many artefacts, as well as vestiges of constructions, show very strong links with the contemporary cultures of the Levant, especially the end of the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic B and the Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (Guilaine et al. 2000; Peltenburg 2003b; Guilaine et al. 2011).

Regarding mortuary practices of the first Neareastern farmers, the numerous Pre-Pottery Neolithic burials uncovered in Cyprus, as well as the excavation of most of them using the methods of "archaeoethnology" have led to new results. The innovative approach of "archaeoethnology" devoted to a better understanding of human deposits, based upon field anthropological observations (Duday et al. 1990; Duday 2005, 2009), was developed in France in the early 1980s when rescue archaeology was being established attempts to reconstruct the attitudes of ancient populations towards

death by focusing on the study of the human skeleton and analysing the acts linked to the management and treatment of the corpse.

PRE-POTTERY NEOLITHIC BURIALS IN CYPRUS

Two Cypriot sites, Parekklisha-Shillourokambos and Kissonerga-Mylouthkia (Fig. 1), have yielded human remains dating back to the 8th millennium cal. BC (Guilaine et al. 2002, 2003; Crubézy et al. 2003; Fox et al. 2003; Peltenburg 2003a; Le Mort et al. 2011), the oldest known from Cyprus. According to the reappraisal of the site of Kalavassos-Tenta (Fig. 1), and to the location of the burials within the structures at this site, most of them might also be attributed to the 8th millennium (Todd 1987, 2003; Moyer 2005). It has to be noticed that fragments of human bones dating to around 10,000 years ago were recently discovered at Akanthou-Arkosykos, but no burial has been uncovered at this site (Şevkeoğlu 2008).

Many burials also were discovered at the later sites of Khirakitia Vouni and Cap Andreas-Kastros (7th - early 6th millennium cal. BC) (Fig. 1) (Dikaïos 1953; Le Brun 1981, 1984, 1989b, 1989c, 1994a; Massei Solivères 1981; Le Mort 1994, 2000, 2003, 2008). Fragmentary remains representing at least four individuals have also been found at Kholetria-Ortos (7th - early 6th millennium cal. BC), in western Cyprus, but evidence for human burials is scant (Simmons 1996, 2003).

Various mortuary practices have been evidenced at these sites, allowing us to attempt an analysis of the evolution of Pre-Pottery Neolithic mortuary practices in the island of Cyprus in order to understand diversity and changes in 8th - early 6th millennium burial practices.

MORTUARY PRACTICES DURING THE 8TH MILLENNIUM

PAREKKLISHA-SHILLOUROKAMBOS

The site of Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, located in the Limassol District (Fig. 1), has produced evidence for a succession of Pre-Pottery Neolithic

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domestic occupations and installations dating between 8500 and 6900 BC (Guilaine 2003; Guilaine et al. 2011). A collective burial and eleven individual burials were discovered at the site (Guilaine et al. 1999, 2002, 2003; Crubézy et al. 2003; Le Mort et al. 2008; Le Mort et al. 2011). They are divided into two groups corresponding to two different parts of the site (sector 1 and sector 3).

Sector 1

In sector 1, a large cavity (St 23) six meters in diameter and more than six meters deep was discovered that was initially used as a well and filled in between about 7800 and 7300 BC. This fill produced, interspersed in between different strata of rubbish, three individual burials and a collective burial containing both human and animal remains. An individual grave containing the remains of an infant of perinatal age had moreover been brought to light in this sector.

In the St 23 cavity, from top to bottom, the human remains are distributed in the following manner (Guilaine et al. 1999; Crubézy et al. 2003; Le Mort et al. 2008; Le Mort et al. 2011) (Fig. 2):

- the individual burial of an adult lying on its left side, in a highly flexed position, in a narrow "gutter" grave;
- At a depth of 3 m, over a minimum surface of about 7 m², a layer very rich in human remains, whose maximum thickness was 20 cm. This layer can be subdivided into two sub-groups: the deposits anterior to the collapse of the ceiling in the northern half of the cavity, which contain the largest number of human bones, and the deposits posterior to this collapse. The human remains in both areas consist of complete or sub-complete articulated skeletons (with or without the skull) in addition to portions of articulated skeletons and commingled bones. The arrangement of these different elements shows that these deposits were collected over a period time, implying that the cavity served for a while as a collective grave. The preservation of the unstable articulations (those that become disarticulated the earliest during decomposition) indicates primary deposits. The position and the organization

of the human remains in the two sub-groups show that these primary deposits were followed by post-mortem manipulation of the bones after partial or total soft tissue decomposition. The burial layer revealed the remains of at least sixteen individuals (four immature individuals and twelve adults). The age at death of the immature individuals is between 3 and 14 years.

- the individual burial of an adult lying on the right side in an extended position, back against the wall;
- the partially burnt remains of an adult. The distribution and disposition of the bones indicate a skeleton initially articulated, which then decomposed in the cavity without being covered by sediment. It was not possible to assess the time when the bones were burnt from natural or perhaps human causes.

The fill sediment of this large cavity contains many skeletal remains of animals, some from earlier deposits but mostly having fallen or having been thrown into the cavity, which was used continuously as a rubbish pit with varying intensity. Because of this, all the deposits of human remains are more or less accompanied by animal remains. The only case of animal remains very probably intentionally associated with human remains is the collective burial, which contains three principal categories of faunal remains (ram horncores and fallow deer antlers, pig bones and skulls, sheep or goat complete limb bones) (Le Mort et al. 2008).

Sector 3

The less-eroded lower part of the site (sector 3) has produced seven individual human burials, all dated between the middle and the end of the 8th millennium (Guilaine et al. 2002, 2003). The graves contain two infants, one child, and four adults. One infant burial and one adult burial were situated in the remains of small earthen constructions, but no clear link between the burials and the habitations could be established. All of the bodies in this sector are buried in contracted positions, although various body orientations were observed. Rarely were the deceased accompanied by grave goods.

Nevertheless, one of the graves (St 283) exhibits

several unique features (Guilaine et al. 2002; Vigne and Guilaine 2004; Vigne et al. 2004). This primary burial was situated in the remains of a small circular earthen construction, as noted above. The deceased, an adult male, lay on the right side in a tightly flexed position. This burial contained ten objects: small polished axes, pendant in black stone, shells, an unusual discoid end-scraper, rough blades and bladelets in flint, sharpened flint blade, pumice stone, and a fragment of ochre. Less than 40 cm from the human skeleton, a small circular depression no more than a few centimetres deep was found. The depression contained 24 shells of small marine gastropods grouped around a rough fragment of microlith.

Furthermore, another grave, situated 20 cm from the edge of the human grave (St 283), contained a sub-adult cat of large size. It must be emphasized that this complete cat skeleton is the only still-articulated animal ever found in eleven years of excavation at Shillourokambos.

The association between this human grave and the burial of a cat can thus be understood as evidence of a strong relationship in death and after death between these two beings. It seems reasonable to see here proof of a certain form of familiarity between the man and the animal, which does not necessarily indicate domestication, but at least appropriation of the animal by the human.

KISSONERGA-MYLOUTHKIA

The coastal site of Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, in the Paphos District (Fig. 1), has been severely eroded. Nevertheless, archaeological features, mainly wells filled in during the 9th and 8th millennium were found (Croft 2003a; Peltenburg 2003a). The incomplete remains of at least six individuals were recovered from two of the wells (Fox et al. 2003; Peltenburg 2003a). Bones from an individual of late fetal age were found in well 116 in fill dating back to the 9th millennium, but the conditions of its deposition remains unclear. The 8th millennium fill in the well 133 yielded the incomplete remains of at least three adults and two immature individuals; the human remains, described as secondary deposits, were found associated with animal remains together with a polished, pink conglomerate macehead.

Nine whole sheep, of which eight were immature individuals, and fourteen whole goats, of which twelve were immature, were identified (Croft 2003b).

KALAVASOS-TENTA

The Pre-Pottery Neolithic village of Kalavassos-Tenta (Larnaka District) in the southern coastal zone of the island (Fig. 1) was made of circular or curvilinear domestic structures, enclosed in the early phase of the settlement by an encircling wall (Todd 2003). Fourteen burials containing a minimum of eighteen individuals were discovered at the site (Todd 1987; Moyer 2005). The deceased were buried either within the habitations in subfloor grave pits or in open areas outside of the domestic structures.

At Kalavassos-Tenta, the dead usually are buried singly but a pit containing the remains of four infants was found, possibly deposited during two separate episodes, as well as a burial described as secondary that includes the remains of two adult individuals. Apart from this grave, the burials are primary, consisting of bodies in a contracted position. The analysis of the burials does not reveal any clearly defined orientation or age-related mortuary practice. Material goods are very rare in the graves; only a small piece of worked red ochre was found associated with a child burial (Todd 1987; Moyer 2005).

The comparison between Parekklisha-Shillourokambos and Kissonerga-Mylouthkia causes convergences to appear. At the two sites, human remains have been deposited in wells and associated with animal remains. The site of Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, which was occupied over a long period (between 8500 and 6900 BC) reveals an evolution resulting, during the second half of the 8th millennium, in funerary practices, which included primary burials of a single individual deposited in a pit, in a contracted position. The mortuary practices observed at Kalavassos-Tenta can be compared to those described at Parekklisha-Shillourokambos in sector 3. It thus seems that funerary practices were diverse at the beginning of the 8th millennium that eventually solidified into a homogenous burial custom of pit burials usually containing a single burial by the end of the millennium.

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MORTUARY PRACTICES DURING THE 7TH - EARLY 6TH MILLENNIUM**KHIROKITIA VOUNI**

The site of Khirokitia Vouni (Larnaka District), situated on a hill about 6 km as the crow flies from the present southern coast of the island (Fig. 1), illustrates the late phase of the Cypriot Pre-Pottery Neolithic, 7000-5500 cal. BC. (Dikaïos 1953; Le Brun 1984, 1989c, 1994a; Le Brun and Daune-Le Brun 2009). The Late PPN village covering an estimated 1.5 hectares, of which only a part (about 4,000 m²) has been investigated, consists of houses composed of several round-shape buildings. In the course of recent excavation, nine stratigraphic levels (A to H, J) have been recognized in the east sector and three (I to III) in the west sector.

The site has produced a large series of burials, one of the largest in Neareastern Pre-Pottery Neolithic. In the part explored by Dikaïos between 1936 and 1946, the burials are distributed in all excavated areas (Dikaïos 1953). In the recently excavated areas (from 1977), they were found in all levels except for the oldest three (levels G, H, J) but it has to be noticed that these levels have seen limited exploration (Le Brun 1984, 1989b, 1989c, 1994a, as well as personal communication; Le Mort 1994, 2000, 2003, 2008). It is difficult to establish the exact number of graves found during the old excavations for two reasons: first, some of them have not been published in the final report (Niklasson 1991)¹, and second, the analysis of the published data made us hypothesize that the few burials considered by Dikaïos as including more than one individual actually correspond to superimposed single burials (Le Mort 2003). Thus the total sample size is 146, estimated on the basis of descriptions published by Dikaïos. During the soundings carried out in 1972 in the part of the site previously investigated by Dikaïos, some human remains were found but their burial treatment is not clearly described (Stanley Price and Christou 1973). Recent excavations have yielded at least 108 individuals more. The proportion of juveniles to adults in the available skeletal sample of 243 individuals is of 56%.

The burials from Khirokitia Vouni are primary burials; there is no indication of secondary treatment of

human remains. The individuals are buried singly, with the exception of one double burial. The only case of double burial recorded at Khirokitia Vouni comes from a building where one adult grave (level Ia) (Le Brun 1984) and twelve perinatal burials (levels Ib and Ic)² were found. In this building, one of the pits contained the remains of two individuals deceased perinatally. According to the biological features brought by these remains, the two individuals appeared very close in individual age (circum birth), and the hypothesis of perinatal twins can be put forward (Le Mort and Tillier 2009).

The burial pits were dug into the floors of houses while those houses were occupied. A few burials could not be related to any building; nevertheless, as they were close to the surface, the erosion could have destroyed the building and floor under which they were buried. The shape and dimensions of the grave pits vary but they are usually small, resulting in the bodies being interred in a contracted position (Fig. 3).

All categories of age and sex are present in the sample, suggesting individuals were not buried differently based on age. Most of the buildings yielded one or several burials, belonging either to single or to various stratigraphic levels (Le Brun 1984, 1989b, 1989c, 1994a). There is no special part of the house reserved for graves. A high variability in the body orientation was observed within all age groups.

Grave goods only accompanied a few of the deceased, usually consisting of a rough or shaped stone or a quern covering part of the body, and/or one or several stone vessels. This practice was used indiscriminately for infants, children and adults, men and women (Dikaïos 1953; Le Brun 1989b, 1994b). Less than a quarter of the burials include a stone on the body; stone vessels are even rarer. Adult and juvenile burials also contained a total of six necklaces as well as rare flint and bone tools (Dikaïos 1953; Le Brun 1984, 1989b, 1989c).

At Khirokitia Vouni, as at the earlier site of Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, purposive animal burials as well as faunal remains deposited in human burials have been discovered. Of the entire faunal inventory that includes caprines, deer, pigs, dogs, cats, and foxes, only caprines and deer have been

found in this context. Human-animal relations within a funerary context have two forms. One type is characterized by burial of one or several animals, caprines in the three examples known, and treatment of the animal as a human. The other four examples have only part of an animal, in these cases caprines or deer, included in the burial. The part of animal, an antler, horn, or scapula, is treated as an object similar to a stone, stone vessel, or ornament (Le Mort et al. 2008).

CAP ANDREAS-KASTROS

At Cap Andreas-Kastros, which is located at the tip of the Karpas Peninsula (Fig. 1), the remains of eight individuals were unearthed either from pit burials or as isolated bones (Le Brun 1981; Massei Solivères 1981). As at Khirokitia Vouni, the deceased were buried singly in pit burials as primary deposits. Nevertheless, at Cap Andreas-Kastros, the only burial that has clear stratigraphic context is not situated under a house floor (Le Brun and Daune-Le Brun 2003).

During the 7th - early 6th millennium, funerary practices look quite homogeneous in the Cyprus Island. Burials are all primary. Burial pits, usually dug into the floor of the houses, contain a single individual in a contracted position, with the only exception of a double burial at Khirokitia Vouni.

DIVERSITY AND CHANGES IN 8TH - EARLY 6TH MILLENNIUM MORTUARY PRACTICES IN CYPRUS

It thus appears that no age-related funerary practices could be evidenced from the available data regarding Pre-Pottery Neolithic populations in Cyprus. It is notable that infant and/or child remains have been reported from all the Pre-Pottery Cypriot sites that yielded burials. Data regarding infant and child burials from the 8th millennium are available but scarce. At Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, infant and child remains in addition to adults were recovered from wells (Fox et al. 2003; Peltenburg 2003a). At Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, the collective burial found in the St 23 cavity included adults and juveniles but no infant remains. In the part of the site where the St 23 cavity was discovered (sector 1), no other burial was found except for an infant of perinatal age buried in an individual grave. In sector 3,

which produced later burials, from the available data (that is only seven burials) no age-related practices seem to have existed. At Kalavassos-Tenta as well, no clearly age-related mortuary practices could be evidenced from the fourteen excavated burials.

The 7th - early 6th millennium site of Khirokitia Vouni, with its huge number of infant burials (more than one hundred), displays a clear homogeneity in burial practices by age. Furthermore, contrary to what is commonly observed in ancient populations (e.g. Coqueugniot et al. 1998; Duda et al. 1995), no specific funeral treatment devoted to infants who had been stillborn or had died shortly after birth and no reserved funeral area for these very young individuals seem to have existed.

On the other hand, the comparison between funerary practices at the various Pre-Pottery sites reveals changes in the location and type of the burials. During the 8th millennium, the deceased were interred either in wells or in any location within the settlement, while during the 7th millennium they have been systematically buried within habitations, with the only exception of one burial at Cap Andreas-Kastros.

There also appears to be a shift in the number of deceased buried together from the 8th to 7th millennium. The dead are usually buried singly during the 7th millennium while 8th millennium examples include a collective burial containing a minimum number of sixteen individuals (Parekklisha-Shillourokambos) and graves containing up to four individuals (Kalavassos-Tenta).

Secondary deposits are rare, apart from the 8th millennium remains uncovered from the wells at Kissonerga-Mylouthkia described as secondary deposits by Peltenburg (Peltenburg 2003a) and one burial from Kalavassos-Tenta (Moyer 2005), the Pre-Pottery Neolithic burials in Cyprus are primary.

Most deceased were interred in a contracted position, in cases where the original position of the body could be observed. The one exception is the individual burial excavated in the St 23 cavity at Parekklisha-Shillourokambos (Le Mort et al. 2011), which was extended. A high variability in the body orientation was observed, whatever the period.

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The Pre-Pottery Neolithic graves from Cyprus rarely contain material grave goods. On the other hand, the presence of animal burials as well as of faunal remains deposited in human burials through the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period has been noted by scholars. This funerary practice suggests a preferential relationship between humans and certain animals and possibly a specific status for the buried animals. It has parallels in 8th and 7th millennium sites in the Levant and Central Anatolia such as Kfar Hahoreh (Kolska-Horwitz and Goring-Morris 2004) and Çatalhöyük (Russell and Düring 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Careful excavation and analysis of burials in Cyprus provided important evidence for the evolution of mortuary practices in the island during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period.

The comparisons between funerary practices observed at the Cypriot sites dating back to the 8th millennium with the PPNB sites on the mainland reveals several commonalities in the variety of burial practices, such as the co-occurrence of single and collective burials on the same site, at the same time highlighting uniquely Cypriot practices such as the use of wells to bury the dead. At Parekklisha-Shillourokambos, these similarities with the mainland are clearer in Early and Middle PPNB sites e.g. Abu Hureyra (Moore and Molleson 2000), Dja'de el Mughara (Coqueugniot 2000) and Tell Aswad (Contenson et al. 1995) in Syria and Çayönü (Yılmaz 2010) in Turkey compared with the Late PPNB.

This shift could reflect decreased connection between the island and the continent, as seen in other aspects such as lithics (Briais 2003). During the 8th millennium, a trend towards more homogeneous practices could be observed at Parekklisha-Shillourokambos. During the 7th -early 6th millennium, the homogeneity of burial customs, as well as many other features (Le Brun and Daune-Le Brun 2003) confirm the specificity of the late phase of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in Cyprus.

Over the past 20 years, the picture of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in Cyprus has completely changed; its relationships with the neighbour mainland are now better understood but many aspects have still to be investigated.

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NOTES

¹ The reappraisal of the skeletal remains stored in the Cyprus Museum allowed us to confirm the presence of remains from burials the number of which does not

appear in Dikaios' publication (Dikaios 1953).

² Alain Le Brun, personal communication.

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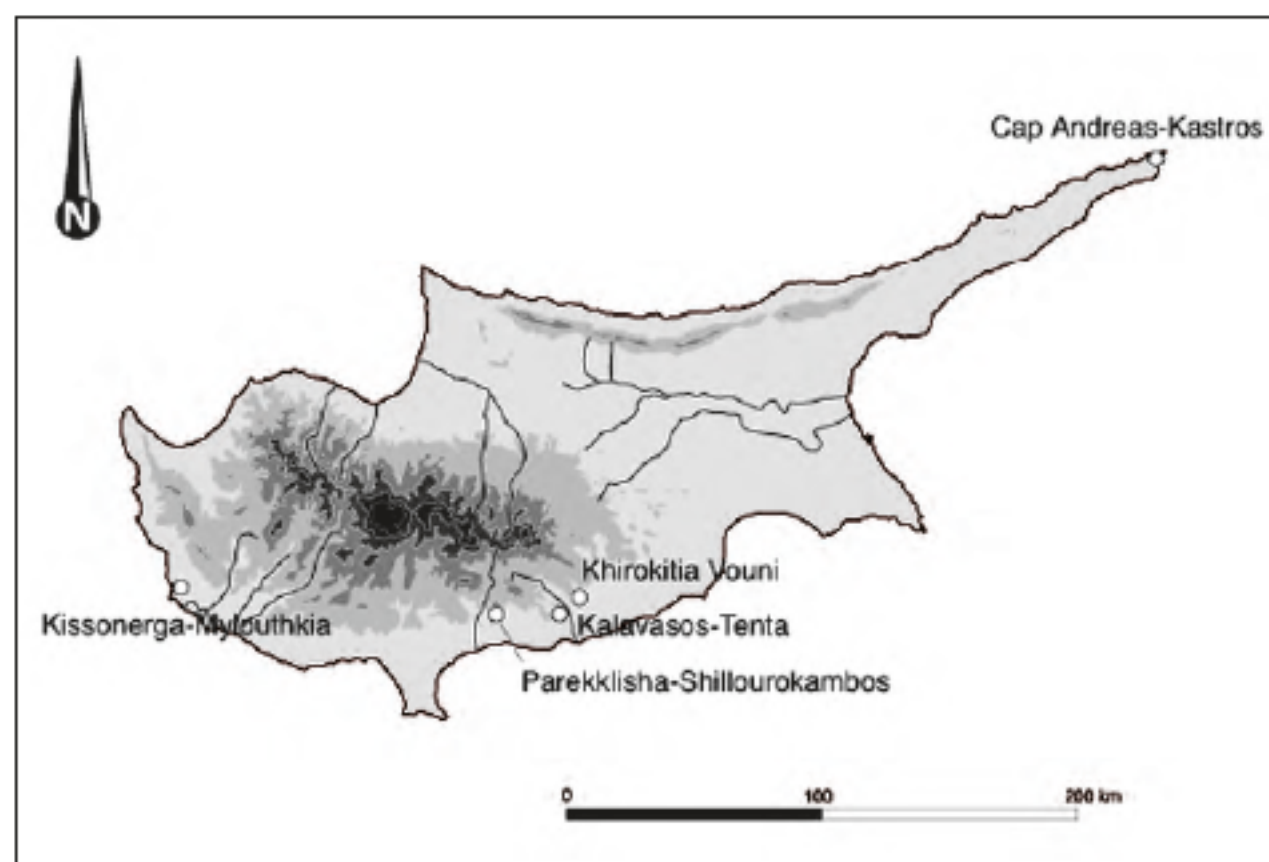


Fig. 1 - Cyprus. Location of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites with human burials (map by the Service Cartographies of the Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée - Jean Pouilloux)

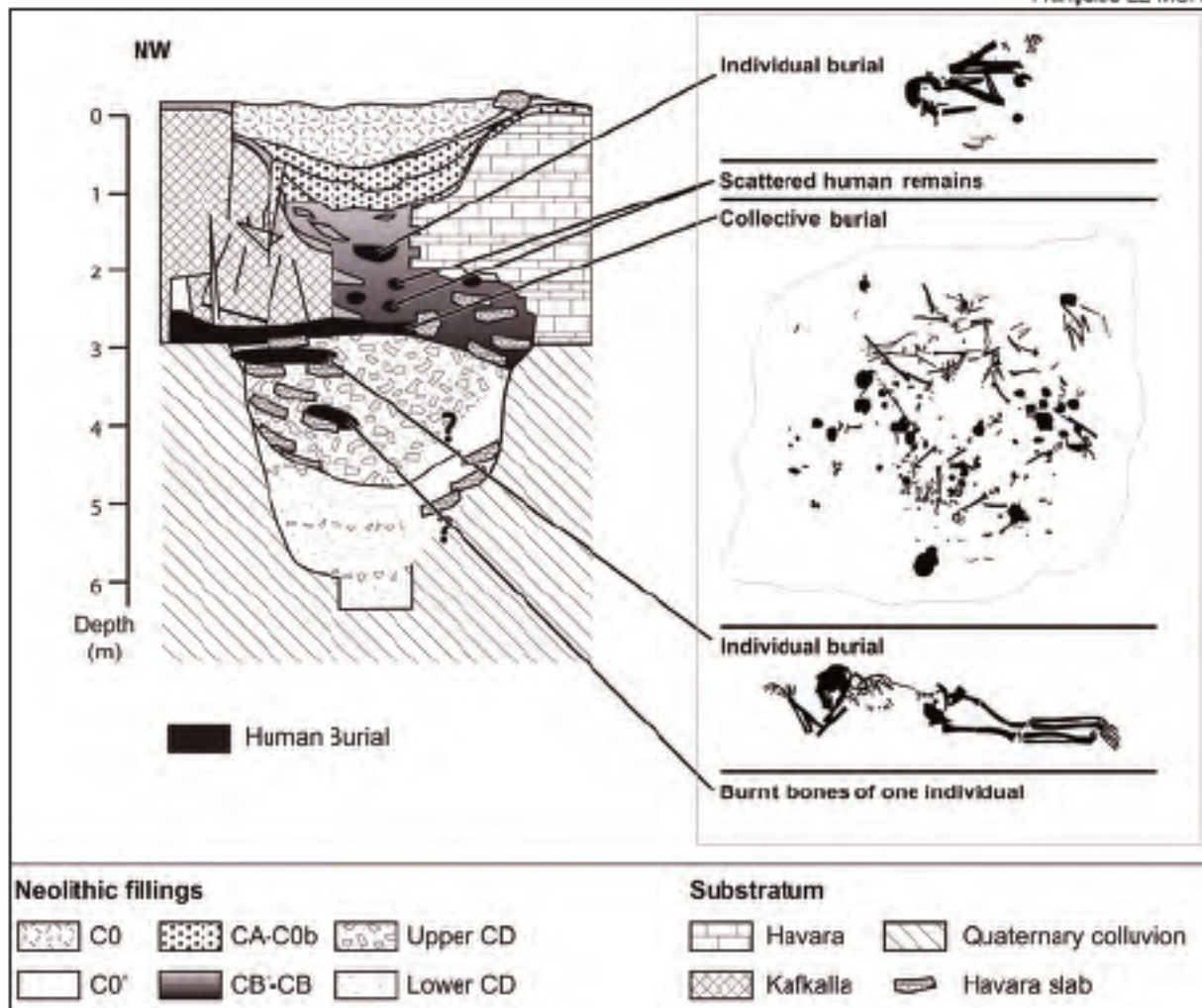


Fig. 2 - Shillourokambos. Succession of graves in the stratigraphy of structure 23 (drawing by P. Gérard and J.-D. Vigne; from Le Mort et al. 2008).

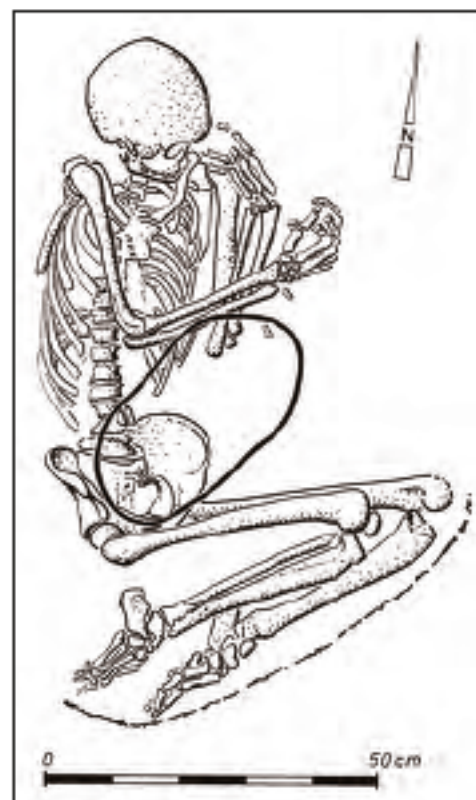


Fig. 3 - Khirakitia. Adult burial 641 including a quern on the body, structure 126, level B3, east sector (drawing by O. Le Brun, French Archaeological Mission at Khirakitia).