

# Producing food, children, and music: an ecofeminist perspective of Archaic Cyprus

Produciendo comida, hijos y música:  
una perspectiva ecofeminista sobre Chipre en época Arcaica

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## ABSTRACT

The Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology (University of Reading) houses a small collection of Cypriot objects, which includes 9 terracotta figurines holding different attributes: bread, shields, animals, and musical instruments, that is why they have traditionally been interpreted as ex-votos, created by a farming society to please gods and ensure prosperity. Unsurprisingly, most of them have been classified as female, while those with a shield and conic headgear have been recognised as male soldiers. This paper focuses on how these female figurines embodied the different roles assigned to women in the agricultural-based economy and religion of Archaic Cyprus. It also analyses the local economy from a gendered perspective, studying how women from a farming community faced domestic demands, complied with institutionalised religious and public roles, while providing children to secure descentance.

**Keywords:** Cypriot figurines. Exvotos. Women in Archaic Cyprus. Agro-feminism. Cypriot archaeology. Clay. Cypriot sanctuaries. Statuettes.

## RESUMEN

El Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology (University of Reading) conserva una pequeña colección de objetos chipriotas, entre los que destacan 9 figuritas de terracotta que sujetan distintos atributos: pan, escudos, animales, e instrumentos musicales, los cuales han sido tradicionalmente interpretados como es-votos creados por una sociedad agrícola para complacer a los dioses y asegurar las cosechas. La mayoría de estas estatuillas han sido clasificadas como femeninas, mientras que aquellas con escudo y tocado cónico han sido identificadas como masculinas. El presente estudio se centra en cómo estas terracottas encarnan los diversos roles asignados a la mujer en la sociedad y religión de Chipre en época Arcaica. Asimismo, analiza la economía local desde una perspectiva de género,

aproximándose a las demandas domésticas, institucionales y religiosas a las que se enfrentaban estas mujeres, sumando la responsabilidad de asegurar la descendencia.

**Palabras clave:** Figuras chipriotas. Exvotos. Mujeres en Chipre Arcaico. Agro-feminismo. Arqueología chipriota. Arcilla. Santuarios chipriotas. Estatuillas.

## SUMARIO

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### *1.—Introduction*

There are around 100 objects of Cypriot provenance housed in the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology (University of Reading) displayed on thematic cases along with artefacts from ancient Greece, Egypt, Etruria, and other Mediterranean civilisations to convey an overview of what life was like in Antiquity. This Cypriot collection consists of a number of loans, recent acquisitions, bequests, and donations, including 9 terracotta figurines usually understood as mere ex-votos. These figurines were formerly in the possession of Gore Skipworth, who claimed they had come from old tombs in Cyprus, providing no information about the location of those graves (Smith, 2015:vii).

A formal analysis of the objects revealed that they could have been produced in Kition (modern Larnaka), a Phoenician foundation on the south-eastern coast of the island, and that they might date to the Cypro-Archaic period (750-480 BC). Most figurines present a mixed technique of moulded faces and wheel-made bodies, usually associated with the “Kamelarga style”, linked to the sanctuary and workshop of the same name (Pickup, Bergeron, Webb, 2015). Kamelarga was the richest sanctuary within the city limits: discovered by accident, it was excavated by J.L. Myres and some of the figurines found there were shipped to European institutions, although most of them were deposited at the Nicosia and the Ashmolean museums (Myres, 1897:164-169; Fourrier, 2007:55). Many more of the same style were eventually discovered in other Cypriot sanctuaries and tombs; apparently they were well-regarded and extensively imported (Fourrier, 2007:116). All Kamelarga figurines are represented holding different attributes, but their miniaturisation and varied conservation state have hindered their identification: a rounded object has been understood as a bread loaf or a tambourine; a conical shape, as a head-gear or shield. Birds, lambs, and animals in general seem to be less difficult to pinpoint.

Vassos and Jacqueline Karageorghis, celebrated archaeologists and researchers of the Cypriot coroplastic production, published numerous museum catalogs and encyclopedic corpora that chronologically covered a great variety of typologies and

styles. Their oeuvre showed that the island of Cyprus received influence not only from the Greek and Phoenician colonisers, but also from North Africa with Egypt at the head. There is, however, a sense that Cyprus was more than a Mediterranean “melting pot”, that it had its own style and symbolic system (Karageorghis, 2002). Around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, coroplastic workshops around the island were in full production of figurines of a wide range of sizes, shapes, techniques, and qualities. Although they all shared an iconographic and symbolic repertoire, some scholars affirm that certain stylistic particularities might imply different cultural identities (Fourrier, 2007:14). In any case, terracotta figurines constitute the most important archaeological evidence of Archaic Cyprus, given the scarcity of epigraphic evidence (Leriu, 2017:525). All scholars seem to agree that the statuettes with a pointy cap are male—and some even have a beard—(Fig. 1) whereas those with a rounded veil over their hair are, in fact, women (Fig. 2) (Karageorghis 1993:64; 1995:132).

Kition was inhabited since the Middle Bronze Age but reached prosperity with the Phoenicians, especially from the city of Tyre, who transformed it into a harbour that exported primarily copper and timber to Egypt and Greece (Karageorghis, 1973; Yon and Childs, 1997; Smith, 2008; Iacovou 2008:643-644). Around 750BCE, the Phoenician influence became more evident, the occupation of the countryside



Fig. 1. Male figurine Ure Museum access number 47.2.27. ©Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading.

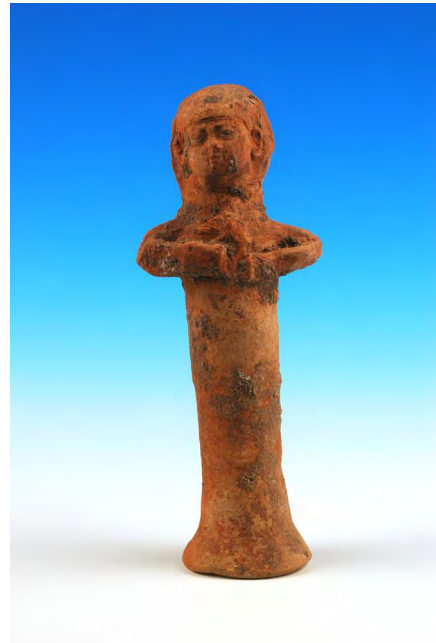


Fig. 2. Female figurine. Ure Museum access number 47.2.35. ©Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading.

was more noticeable and sanctuaries and new foundations multiplied (Fourrier, 2007:13). Kition was not, however, one of the largest political autonomous entities of Cyprus, but was perhaps one of the most influential, given the presence of locally-produced figurines in other Cypriot territories, such as Idalion and Tamassos (Fourrier, 2007:116). The territory was articulated by sanctuaries, which were located at the heart of the urban and political centre but also scattered in the countryside, playing a key role in the organisation and constitution of the community, drawing people to participate in the religious life of the community and, thus, creating a sense of identity (Fourrier, 2007:121).

Archaic Cypriot sanctuaries consisted of an open space with altars, which surely were the centre of ritualistic activity, accompanied by small rectangular roofed structures of unidentified functions (Leriu, 2018:100-101). As noted above, J.L. Myres exhumed the terracotta figurines, which were possibly deposited by the local community linked to the so-called Kamelarga shrine, in an escarpment to the SW of the urban centre (Myres, 1897:164). The sanctuary was named after the camel stable which used to occupy the area, and although it had been pulled down years earlier, locals still remembered large stones in situ, probably from Kition's walls (Myres, 1894:164). The large number of these *ex-votos* —not only in this sanctuary but all over the island— suggests that these were cheap, mass-produced objects that could have been offered by all members of the society, ensuring their partaking in the religious and public life of the kingdom (Leriu, 2018:100).

According to Karageorghis' classification, the Ure Museum has 5 female models and 1 male: those figurines with conical heads and pointed chins would represent men, while the absence of these features would hint to a female figure (Karageorghis, 1999). The faces show more or less detail depending on the state of the moulds used in their manufacture (generally over-worn), but they are characterized by long eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, a prominent nose and a small mouth, and in some cases, a smile. Traces of colour are preserved: red on faces and black and white highlight the eyes (Fig. 3). Female representations from the Cypriot Archaic period show three basic types depending on the way they place their arms: (1) extended to the sides of the body (2) hands rest under the chest, in the centre (3) holding offerings. The figurines at the Ure Museum belong to the third category, with terracottas carrying different objects, such as musical instruments, small animals, etc. These representations hint to the role of women in the Cypriot Archaic society as active producers from an eco-gendered perspective, securing food, care, religious stability and descendants.

## 2.—*Women as food producers*

Scholars have traditionally agreed that from the moment that agriculture became a primary activity in the Levantine Neolithic, it was mainly carried out



Fig. 3. Female figurine (detail). Ure Museum access number 47.2.31. ©Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading

by men. Although it was accepted that women performed secondary tasks, such as de-weeding or fruit-gathering, the sowing and threshing were considered eminently male — or at least until men decided to engage in more exciting enterprises, such as commerce and conquering new lands (Prados Torreira, 2011:45). A gendered-perspective of work division has been present in archaeological scholarship since 1970s, when the American school encouraged by feminist movements focused on the role of women in ancient societies. Females became associated with harvesting, pottery and food production and its preservation, in line with the contemporary interests of Processual Archaeology and the increasing presence of Environmental Studies (Prados Torreira, 2011:40; Bolger, 2003:6-12).

Agriculture, farming, and food production constitute powerful spaces of social representation and power negotiation, especially in a pre-numismatic economy such as Archaic Cyprus. Cooking, preparation, consumption, and religious offering of food and drinks —and the objects used for it— have a great potential to unlock the social dynamics and interactions of any given community, since conviviality seems to be present in private and public spheres, from weddings to funerals, from festivities in sanctuaries to domestic life (Delgado Hervás, 2008:163; Xella, 2017-2019:195; Bolger, 2003:38-43). The presence of amphorae in the archaeological

record is frequently used as a measuring parameter to study the agricultural development of a site, as these vases were prominently used to store and transport grain, but so far there has not been a systematic scientific analysis in the case of Cyprus (Lawall and Lund, 2013:170). In addition, most of cooking ware from Archaic and Classical times comes from graves, as domestic units have not been yet excavated (Fourrier, 2015:246).

Some of the Kamelarga figurines appear to fill in this void of archaeological data associated with farming in Archaic Kition. These terracottas, currently displayed in many museums, represent worshippers offering food (Fig. 4; Fig. 5), which include breads and cakes (Ashmolean AN1896-1908.C.319,422), and animals, such as birds and lambs (Ure Museum 47.2.28; 47.2.30; Ure Museum 47.2.30; Ashmolean AN1896-1908.C.319). Although some figurines could be identified as “male” (Ashmolean AN1896-1908.C.313,322), the great majority of these votives are female. According to Myres, most of them were found in the lower and middle layers of the excavated heap, along with those catalogued as warriors (Myres, 1897:167-168; Ure Museum 47.2.27).



Fig. 4. Female figurine. Ure Museum 47.2.30. ©Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading.



Fig. 5. Female figurine. Ure Museum 47.2.28. ©Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading.

Studies focused on the economic activities from Late Bronze to the Classical period in Cyprus show evidence of urban sanctuaries —such as Kamelarga— managing metal workshops, city harbours and agricultural production, although the latter is usually overlooked in favour of the other two (Papantoniou, 2012:94). Recent publications have stressed the need to develop “holistic and diachronic” ecologic approaches including climate, land productivity, access to natural resources, and population dynamics to better understand historic developments on the island of Cyprus (Iacovou, 2103: 18). Despite being described as “blessed” by Pliny when referring to its crops (*NH*, 5.35.129), Cyprus possess a semi-arid climate and irregular rain patterns, with patches of well-developed agricultural soils, while its copper-rich ores of the Troodos massif (centre of the island) proved to be the gift that kept on giving throughout its history (Iacovou, 2013:19-21; Kassianidou, 2013:133). The interaction of the population with their physical environment led to Kition’s success from the Bronze Age to Classical times, which could be summed up in three premises: (1) it was originally founded as an emporium, which (2) provided the inland metallic resources with access to the Mediterranean trade routes, and (3) produced sufficient food to support its workforce (Iacovou, 2013: 32).

The large number of offerings linked to farming and arable lands in Kamelarga can be interpreted as an expression of the population consolidation in the urban settlement, which might have been accompanied by a rise in the crop production and animal exploitation inherited from earlier times: goats and sheep provided meat and milk (and wool), while cereals, nuts, fruits, and olive oil completed the diet (Knapp, 2008:165-166). By the beginning of the Bronze Age, Cypriot famers had already adopted the draft plough system, which allowed them to harvest large quantities of wheat, barley, and other grains (Yerkes, 2000:25). According to the archaeological record, wine and oil production was also known by then —and got extremely popular in Classic times— despite the lack of evidence during the Archaic era (Hadjisavvas and Chanotis, 2012:160). Although these statuettes could be studied as mere illustrations of a real ritual —offering first fruits to the gods— they could also be acting as symbolic substitutes of much more expensive originals: clay-moulded shapes of a lamb or bread were undoubtedly cheaper than the real thing (Leriu, 2017:533).

All female terracottas have been traditionally explained as evidence of a cult to Astarte or Aphrodite in Kition and other Cypriot kingdoms (Myres 1897:169). Scholars, however, seem to have missed the opportunity to transcend their ritual function and study them as tangible evidence of the role of women in domestic and urban economy performing agro-pastoral activities. Female-led labour can re-position women within the productive side of the economy beyond the familial sphere: preparing food for the household and for the whole community to be offered in a ceremonial ritual —and possibly, later consumed by the group— implies a much more active role for women in a supposedly male-dominated society of

seafarers and traders. Collective consumption of food and drink outside domestic environment carries a cultural and symbolic meaning: women were in charge of controlling and distributing foods (Steel, 2002:107). It also suggests that women possessed a wide range of knowledge and skills to ensure these offerings: collecting the grain at the right time, transforming it to make it edible, preserving it, feeding animals, caring for them, etc.

Kition's Archaic tombs at the necropolis of Pervolia, recently excavated by French archaeologists, are shedding a new light on funerary practices and social interactions around 750-600BCE. The so-called "tomb 398", a collective burial which included 4 women, has revealed one of the few well-preserved marmite of rounded bottom from that era. The cooking pot shows traces of fire on its surface, evidencing that it was extensively used before its second deposition in the grave. (Cannavò, Fourrier and Rabot, 2019). Recent anthropological analysis of bones (whenever possibly, and usually of much more modern tombs) show certain impact of physical activity both in male and female bodies, although women show a more intense activity in the upper limbs and lumbar area, possibly linked to grinding grains and food preparation (Cannavò, Fourrier and Rabot, 2019; Karligkioti et al, 2019). In addition, the study of seeds and fruits found in "tomb 398" has found charred grains of hulled barley, among rests of pine, holly oak, grass, flowers, etc. Archaeologists, however, are still unsure whether the grains were placed there as part of a ritual or if the grave was contaminated, as barley was a very popular cereal in the area (Cannavò, Fourrier and Rabot, 2019). In any case, communal meals in funerary contexts were part of elite practice during the whole Cypriot Iron Age (Fourrier, 2015:246).

### 3.—*Women as children producers*

Despite the interest in sexuality and body image in ancient societies from the gender-focused European scholarship (Prados Torreira, 2011:40), the role of women has been traditionally understood as a passive one, opposite to the more active role of men as adventurous conquerors of new lands (Hendon, 2005). Women as mothers and carers have been addressed almost as a natural phenomenon: women as an undifferentiated collective have the capacity to give birth and thus, to nurture the new-born and the whole family. This approach not only excludes non-cis women, but also overlooks biological complexities and age of the individuals, as not all of them can become mothers. They still can, however, perform the role of carers within the household and community.

Terracotta figurines holding infants, also known as the "kourotrophos type", have been documented all over Cyprus (Fourrier, 2007: plate VII), even though only a few come from Kamelarga (Yon and Caubet, 1989:30). Myres exhumed one in his excavations while a second one has been associated with the sanctuary following



stylistic criteria (Ashmolean AN1896-1908.C318; Louvre AM177)<sup>1</sup>. Understood as a variant of the suppliant type by some, children appear schematically represented (Myres, 1897:167). The presence of this iconography has been linked to female divinities on the island or their priestesses and followers, but according to some authors, their proper identification and denomination was not particularly intended (Morstadt, 2017-2019: 101). These goddesses incarnated a wide range of powers, although they all could be associated with a single great goddess, with many names in all corners of the Mediterranean world (Xella, 2017-2019:199). In Kition, the interaction between Ashtar and Aphrodite was evident and the production of female votives was understood by archaeologists as a reference to natural cycles (Bonnet, 1996:69ff; Budin, 2004). Matching female fertility to the soil's resources, however, not only excluded women of a certain age-group, but it also capitalised on females as assets, as active and productive units of the society, assuring descendants and nourishing them.

Some authors have attributed the Phoenician diaspora in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE —linked to Kition's foundation— to the need of finding females beyond the metropolis to secure offspring (Delgado Hervás and Rivera Hernández, 2018:55-56). In spite of the fragmentary archaeological record, scholars affirm that the rates of female mortality were higher than that of male, possibly due to the number of deaths associated with pregnancy, during and after child-birth (Vandervondelen, 2002:143). Certain Phoenician graves, containing remains of gestating females and their children or unborn, have been found in differentiated spaces within the necropolis and show that mothers-to-be were cared for but, at the same time, secluded from the rest of the collective space. Texts from the Levant affirm that after childbirth, women were placed in certain areas of the house and could not partake in the public and religious life until their bodies were purified (Rueda Galán et al, 2021:231-232).

While these figurines can provide a glimpse into the role of women in Ancient Cyprus from religious, economic, and social perspectives, the presence of children among these terracottas have been understudied. In the specimen housed in the Ashmolean Museum, the child is depicted from a frontal perspective and only partially rendered: just the arms and the face were modelled. It is possible that the rest of the body was painted on the mother herself, but since the polychrome is lost, it can only be hypothesised. According to the museum display, the child places the hands on the mouth “in a gesture of awe”, which would make the infant a participant of the worshipping rite. On the other hand, the infant's head from the Louvre is severely damaged, but appears to be represented in profile, looking

1. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010120272>  
[https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per\\_page/25/offset/0/sort\\_by/relevance/object/87185](https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per_page/25/offset/0/sort_by/relevance/object/87185)

at the mother in a more intimate attitude. In this case, there is no trace of ritual action from the infant, no arms are indicated and perhaps the lack of details could imply a younger child, still too young to partake in any religious celebration. The schematic representations of children hinder their identification as boys or girls: the former were undoubtedly preferred in heavily patriarchal societies of the Eastern Mediterranean, since they were considered the rightful heirs and keepers of family traditions (Zamora López, 2016: 20-22; Vandervondelen, 2002:144). With the intensification of the economy, reproductive strategies could have evolved in accordance with the newly productive forces: children were valued as labourers and as assets in potential marriage alliances. Thus, they were considered as commodities (Bolger, 2003:62). In any case, infants are never pictured along a male figurine, which definitely suggests that nourishing, guarding, and care-giving were understood as female activities.

Nevertheless, young children appear accompanied by adults of both sexes in Kition's necropolis of Pervolia. In the already mentioned Archaic "tomb 398", 17 individuals were successively buried in a dromos-chamber tomb, of which 5 were under the age of 8. Jewellery, scarabs, and ceramics have been found among the grave goods in the chamber, especially deposited on children's bodies, conspicuously protecting them in their journey to the afterlife. Fragmentary Kamelarga figurines were exhumed in the dromos: two female heads (given the absence of beard or conical headgear) and a torso showing the arms resting on the chest. The dromos, the passage that led to the chamber where the bodies were laid to rest, was a ritual space, where families and friends gathered to offer sacrifices. The figurines were probably deposited to grant the deceased a peaceful passage to the underworld (Cannavò, Fourrier and Rabot, 2019; Carstens, 2005).

#### 4.—*Women as music producers*

The coroplastic industry in Archaic Cyprus has lavishly portrayed dancing and music-making figurines, being them eminently female in different sizes and styles. Around 115 figurines have been identified as tambourine players, while 89 hold the lyre and only 23 the aulos or double pipes (Karageorghis, 1995:36-43; 1999:191-120; Leriou, 2017:530). Most musicians are female and are rendered playing a frame drum, which is usually held vertically, with one hand grasping the frame from below while the other one is striking the membrane (Averett, 2002-2004; Meerschaert 1991). Lyres – both of Levantine and Greek provenance (triangular and symmetric) are frequently poorly preserved, while the aulos is usually missing: only the stripes to attach the pipes to the mouth and hands remain (Ashmolean AN1914.796). Beyond the preservation state of the musical instruments, it is noticeable the large number of drumming figurines in the archaeological record when compared with the other ones, perhaps an indication of the strong emotional

impact of percussion. All of them are female, which surely might allude to the role of Cypriot women in the public and religious sphere (Leriu, 2017:530).

The drummers preserved in the Ure Museum show two variants: one completely mould-made (47.2.32; 47.2.33; 47.2.34) and the other one of mixed technique (47.2.29; 47.2.31). The instruments in the mould-made terracottas are much simpler and smaller, while the ones hand-made are larger and clearly rounded (Fig. 6; Fig. 7; Fig. 8). Tympana —the name that frame drums receive in specialised scholarship— were very popular in Antiquity among women, especially in rituals linked to fertility, labour, and regeneration. The rhythmic repetition of the sound facilitated interaction, encouraged group exercises, and set the pace of a wide range of activities: weaving, harvesting, running into battle, pacing in a parade, dancing, and even breathing (Koloutorou, 2005:184-185).

Although they first appeared in Mesopotamia, tympana were quickly disseminated around the Eastern Mediterranean by the Phoenicians (Leriu, 2017: 530). These instruments were made out of local natural resources: animals' skins (sheep, goat, bovines) were nailed, glued or laced onto wooden or metal circular frames and stretched to produce a characteristic sound (Koloutorou, 2005:188). As already noted, copper was Cyprus' major export, with timber following closely, especially to fabricate ships, although locally —and in a more domestic environment— to fuel pottery kilns and hearths (Kassianidou, 2013:133). While scholarship has emphasised the key role that cedar played in Cypriot economy —especially its trade with Egypt and Greece— from the Late Bronze to Ptolemaic times, there is not much information regarding this resource around 9<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Rich, 2017:82). The forested mountains of the Troodos massif provided with long and straight trees of flexible and strong wood (*cedrus brevifolia*), but apparently some rulers avoided cutting the cedars off and “took great care of them” (Rich, 2017:83; Burnet, 1997:62). In the case of the Kamelarga figurines, wood-frame instruments appear to be small portable hand drums, so it is possible that alternative, less precious woods (pine, holly oak, shrubs, etc.) were used to produce them. New research lines linked to Organology (the study of ancient musical instruments and their production techniques) are analysing different methods of cutting, shaving, and dyeing animals' skins to be used as drum membranes (Sánchez Muñoz, forthcoming) —and since women were the ones playing them, one can only wonder if they were also in charge of their manufacture.

All figurines at the Ure Museum were covered in a clear orange slip, with details in black and red highlighting certain patterns on the dresses and the frame of the instruments (still visible on 47.2.32 and 47.2.29). Female musicians and dancers in Mesopotamia and the Levant from the Bronze and Iron Age were pictured wearing long, colourful, tunics and flamboyant headdresses over the shoulders. While they lack any attribute, gesture, or posture, expressing their divine nature, the interest in the ornamentation of the garments and jewellery could be an indication of their status in the community, perhaps as priestesses in charge of



Fig. 6. Female figurine. Ure Museum 47.2.32.  
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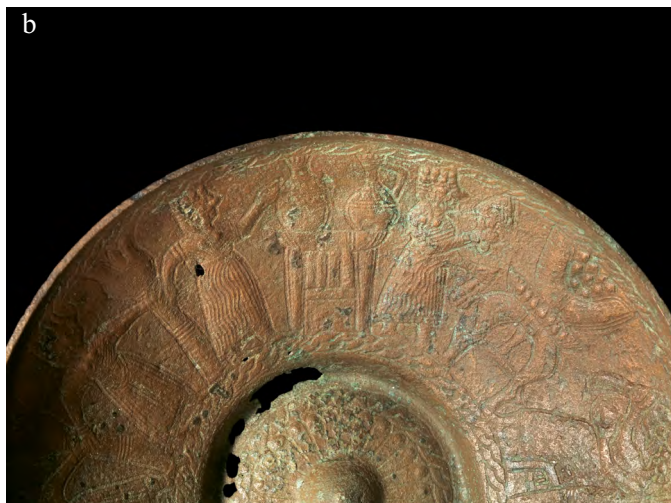
Fig. 7. Female figurine. Ure Museum 47.2.29.  
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Fig. 8. Female figurine. Ure Museum 47.2.31.  
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performing music in temples and sanctuaries (Averett, 2002-2004:19; Sørensen, 2002:123-128).

Small terracotta groups of dancers and musicians in a circle and ring-shaped platforms in many Archaic Cypriot sanctuaries seem to suggest that body-movements in a special order at a certain rhythm was part of their set of rituals (Leriu, 2017:528-529). A series of so-called Cypro-Phoenician phialai that date from the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (MET MMA74.51.5700; Athens NM7941) appear to evoke the circular movement of worshippers by displaying them in a register that covers the inner rim (Fig. 9a; Fig. 9b). These small ritual plates used to pour wine, milk, etc. on altars or drink from them, show female goddesses receiving a wide range of offerings: food (fruits and animals), drinks, vases, flowers, while



Figs. 9a and 9b. Cypro-phoenician phiale, Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York. (MMA74.51.5700) MET Open Access API.

accompanied by dancers and musicians, all female (Karageorghis, V. 1999:15; Karageorghis, Mertens and Rose, 2000:186-189). Music-making and dancing should be considered another valid offering to the divinity, one that would nurture and appease just as much as local produce.

While figurines playing music have been found mostly in sanctuaries, drummers appear in funerary context as well. Although these terracottas hold the instrument in a different position (flat on their chests), it is possible that the sound of these instruments was perceived as an apotropaic one, linked to ctonic divinities such as the Kuretes, Bes, Dionysos, Cybeles, etc. (Leriu, 2017:530-1), and thus, would favour the passage of the deceased into the afterlife.

### 5.—*Conclusions*

Given the lack of textual and archaeological data from Iron Age Cyprus, the coroplastic production on the island should no longer be analysed as mere ex-votos, but as tangible evidence of the social, economic, and religious impact of the local community on their natural environment around 750-500 BCE. The overwhelming presence of female representations in the Kamelarga sanctuary has been traditionally linked to the local cult of fertility goddesses, reducing women's role to their biological function. The examination of these artefacts, however, has shown that their symbolical levels of meaning should be re-addressed, expanded and enriched, especially when contextualised with contemporary representations and new data from recent excavations.

It is difficult to assess if gender had an influence in the behaviour towards the environment in Archaic Cyprus. It is possible, however, to appreciate that Kamelarga figurines show women clearly associated with managing certain natural resources. Controlling certain aspects of the environment — such as preparation of the soil, administration of water supply, feeding and butchering animals, disposal of waste, etc., were tasks probably shared with men, although obsolete ecofeminist positions have assigned women a limited nurturing role, in connection with the soil's riches.

Most Kamelarga figurines offering farming gifts have been found in the lower levels of the heap, along with male ones dressed as warriors. These iconographic themes constitute the largest group, which could represent the fundamental strata of the local community. Females were in charge of producing and ensuring food consumption for their households, community, and even the gods. This role clearly exceeds the domestic sphere and repositions women at the centre of economic synergies. It should be emphasised that a gendered division of work did not imply a distinctive hierarchy in the society: any suggestion of male-driven commerce and sailing was better regarded than female-led household management has been nothing but self-projections of male scholars from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A quantitative analysis of the Kamelarga deposit shows a reduced number of the “kourotrophos” type, which seems to contradict the theory of being a sanctuary linked to fertility goddesses. In any case, providing, nurturing, and bringing-up descendants were probably key aspects of women in the community, as in any other society in Antiquity. Traditional cataloguing criteria of these figurines as “female” should not be understood as a monolithic category without addressing class, status, ethnicity or gender constructs. There is, however, an understudied aspect of these terracottas: their age. As noted, women’s life span was limited by maternal mortality, so it could be concluded that any representation of women implied one in her reproductive years, unless they were portrayed as children.

Contemporary representations of female musicians corroborate the importance of music and dancing along with food offerings in religious celebrations. The large amount of drum-players in the Kamelarga deposit seem to recreate the scenes represented in the so-called Cypro-phoenician phialai, in which female goddesses are the receptors of gifts. If these terracottas were indeed a medium to communicate with the gods and gain their favour, they were deposited in a self-referential way: they mimicked and embodied a ritual to please the divinity. In the case of the figurines recovered from “old tombs”, the musicians played the drums to provide the deceased with a safe passage to the afterlife. Clay, being a non-perishable material, ensured that worshippers, or their symbolic representations, continued to perform their tasks in perpetuity.

These hand-size figurines were made of an abundant and natural resource, which might have invited to a lively interaction with the divinity: they are not static, hieratic cultic images, they are easy to carry and cheap to produce, so everyone in the community might have partaken in the deposition of these artefacts. In addition, all of them represent actions: praying, music-making, food offering, child nurturing; they all perform an activity of paramount importance that contributed to express the different roles of women in the Archaic Cypriot society.

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