

Shellfish Desires - Aquatic animals in the material culture of Bronze Age Cyprus

Purpose and aim

Academically, Bronze Age Cyprus is most often known as the main supplier of copper to the eastern Mediterranean, and studies on marine interaction through long-distance trade and exchange have been immensely prominent in the field of Cypriot archaeology for almost 100 years. It is only in the past 20 years or so that an interest in the local aspects of marine interaction has become more popular. This project intends to be part of that emerging field by studying one of the material categories that is often left out, aquatic animals. Aquatic animals are, as the name suggests, animals that spend their lives in a water environment. It is a wide category of animals that includes the fish, molluscs and marine mammals dwelling around the coast of Cyprus. This project collates and summarises the different published assemblages of aquatic animals dating to the Bronze Age on the island with the aim of contextualising the finds both within their respective sites and in an island-wide perspective in order to gain further understanding of how the ancient Cypriots incorporated marine life into their material culture.

This study combines three complementary approaches: the Maritime Cultural Landscape (MCL), seascape archaeology, and an object itinerary methodology. Together, these provide a multi-layered perspective that moves from spatial and chronological mapping, through a reconstruction of the materials' trajectories, to cultural interpretation. By following the introduction of aquatic animals into the human cultural sphere through acquisition, what changes and modifications were made to them in preparation for their use and consumption, before their removal from social circulation through deposition, a greater understanding of their role in the ancient Cypriot society can be reached.

Chapter 2 acts as both a review of previous research, focusing on the study of aquatic animals on Cyprus, as well as an archaeological background on the sites included in the study. The aim is to highlight how different each site has been excavated, reported and discussed in the wider field. Assemblages of aquatic animals are often treated equally when compared, whereas there are often significant differences in how they are collected, studied and published. This is based not just on taphonomic processes but also on archaeological methodology, interest, and documentation. The chapter highlights how these archaeological aspects affect the assemblages of aquatic animals on Cyprus.

The chapter ultimately concludes with a model to approach these, sometimes vastly different, assemblages while, at the same time, acknowledging and accepting their problematic past. Specifically, identifying what questions an assemblage can be asked and what questions it can't.

Chapter 3 serves as the main overview of the material included in the study, separated into two parts. The first discusses the different species of animals identified and what their zoological characteristics can indicate in terms of where they were caught along the Cypriot coast. It specifically discusses the habitation of the different species and how that correlates to the island's settlements and their coastal geography.

The second part presents the material and their archaeological contexts, showcasing the differences in available contextual resolution. Depending on the available documentation and publications, the material can be discussed on three levels: recorded presence, spatial distribution and closed contexts. The most superficial level, recorded presence, primarily discusses the nature of small or problematic assemblages, which would be challenging to draw major conclusions from. Nevertheless, the mere presence of aquatic animals at some sites serves as an indication of choice. A choice to incorporate the material at that site.

The second level, spatial distribution, discusses the intra-site nature of the assemblages. It relies on the stratified fill layers. Fill layers constitute the main part of most excavations and are not always discussed specifically in publications. They are, however, most often defined spatially, usually bound by walls or other fixed installations. Finds from these layers are, where possible, mapped out with distribution maps, showing how widespread or localised the material is within a specific site.

Last are the closed contexts, the fills of features or depositions that contain aquatic animals. These contexts rely on the availability of documentation of not just the aquatic animals but also other finds to fully understand the specific context. The finest level of context resolution.

Chapter 4 is the main analysis, where the material is brought into the model of itineraries. The chapter is separated into four parts, discussing the acquisition, modification, consumption and deposition of the material. Each step puts focus on the different questions that the assemblage can answer.

In the *acquisition* section, the zoological characteristics are further discussed and connected with the other archaeological finds related to the catching and gathering of the animals, as well as the knowledge required. It discusses what methods were utilised, where the acquisition took place, and how the animals began their itineraries. For this chapter, the physical characteristics of the material are the main focus.

The section on *modifications*, like the previous section, focuses on the characteristics of the material. It overviews how the animals were processed, changes or converted into food, objects and ornamentations, while at the same time discussing the required skillset. It is primarily a thematic overview, but chronological aspects are incorporated as well. It maps out the different ways aquatic animals were modified before intended use.

This is followed by a section on *depositions*, which discusses the specific contexts which contain aquatic animals. Chapter 3 introduces the three levels of context resolution: recorded presence, spatial distribution and closed contexts. This chapter dives deeper into the analysis of contexts with solid and available documentation.

Last is the discussion of *consumption*. While perhaps an illogical order at first glance, the idea is to utilise the above analysis on acquisition, modification and deposition to understand the consumption. The consumption stage is least visible archaeologically and relies on both characteristics of the material as well as the contexts where it was found. The section showcases what questions can be asked to which part of the material. Few, if any, finds can demonstrate a full itinerary, but each incorporates a part of it.

Ultimately, these parts are collected in **Chapter 5**, which displays a suggested whole for how aquatic animals moved through the Cypriot society and were incorporated into the material culture on the island. This is then placed in the wider framework of the eastern Mediterranean. Finally, **Chapter 6** serves as the final summarising chapter of the dissertation.