

## Marki Alonia: a prehistoric Bronze Age settlement in Cyprus

DAVID FRANKEL & JENNIFER M. WEBB\*

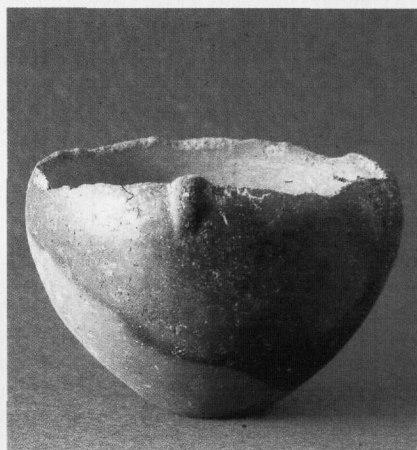
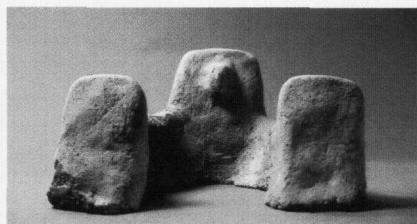
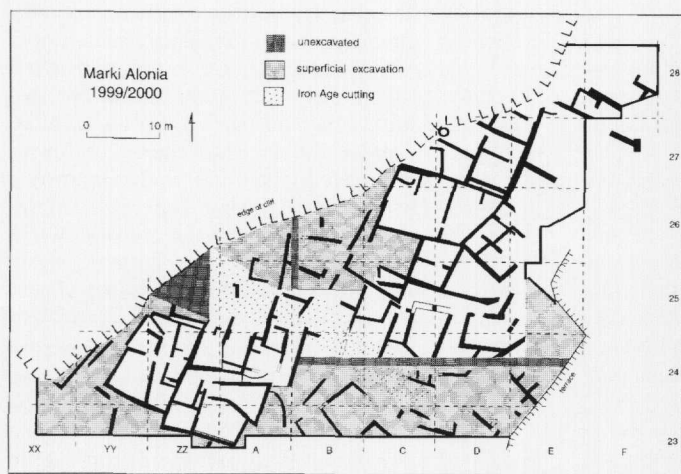


FIGURE 2. General view of part of the excavations.

FIGURE 1 (above left). Plan of the excavated area at the end of the 1999/2000 season.

FIGURE 3 (above right). Clay pot-stand or hearth surround.

FIGURE 4 (below right). Early Cypriot I-II Red Polished Ware bowl.

The Australian Cyprus Expedition recently completed its seventh major excavation season at the Early and Middle Bronze Age settlement site of Marki Alonia in central Cyprus. About 1500 sq. m of this 5-ha site have now been fully excavated, and another 500 sq. m cleared to the top of the uppermost surviving walls (FIGURE 1). This is by far the largest exposure of any site of the period in Cyprus. It has produced an unparalleled stratigraphic and architectural sequence from the earliest manifestations of the Early Cypriot Bronze Age (known as the 'Philia facies') through to the earlier part

of the Middle Bronze Age — that is, a period of some 500 years from about 2400 BC.

The buildings at Marki were constructed of mould-made mud-bricks laid on lower courses of stone. Although few mud-brick walls survive in place, the stone footings are commonly preserved to well over 1 m (FIGURE 2). Architectural households can be defined as multi-roomed rectilinear structures. Repeated rebuilding led to the frequent renovation or larger-scale demolition and replacement of structures, and complex patterns of use, abandonment and re-occupation can be traced.

\* Department of Archaeology, La Trobe University, Bundoora 3083, Australia. d.frankel@latrobe.edu.au  
jenny.webb@latrobe.edu.au

For the latest phases of occupation (Early Cypriot III to Middle Cypriot I) this allows the definition of individual households and a fine-scale recognition of their changing configurations and relationships. Open spaces were progressively filled in with new structures and older buildings fell into disuse and disrepair before being demolished and rebuilt. This complex landscape has required the development of new analytical structures to present and explain excavated data and site formation processes (Frankel & Webb 1996; Frankel 1998).

Philia facies material from the site has been particularly important in considering the nature and significance of this archaeological entity, and in developing models to explain the rapid transformation of technology and economy which marks the introduction of the Bronze Age in Cyprus. A significant discovery in the last season was the burial of a young child in a large storage jar. A missing handle and use-damage on the base show that the vessel itself had previously been in normal use, before being buried up to the rim to form a container for the body. Urn burials are rare in Cyprus, and this is the clearest example known. The practice is one among many cultural elements which characterize the earliest Bronze Age in Cyprus. Other aspects of this transformation include the introduction of new animal species, specifically cattle and donkeys, new agricultural and domestic technologies, such as the sole-ard plough, the vertical warp-weighted loom, low-whorl spinning, direct fire-boiling vessels and clay pot-stands or hearth surrounds (FIGURE 2), as well as rectilinear architectural systems, extra-mural burial and new ceramic forms. The majority of these derive from an Anatolian source and are now believed to signal the arrival of Anatolian migrants to the island in the mid 3rd millennium BC (Webb & Frankel 1999; Frankel 2000).

Excavations at Marki *Alonia* have also contributed significantly to our understanding of ceramic types and architecture of the Early Cypriot I-II period. A free-standing, two-roomed house uncovered in 1998/99 is the first architectural unit of this period to be excavated on the island (Frankel & Webb 1999). Internal features, well preserved beneath mud-brick wall collapse, include a raised hearth with a square plaster surround, four sub-floor pebble and clay-lined pot emplacements, a stone bowl set into the floor inside and to the left of the doorway and a large clay oven. A complete Red Polished Ware bowl found upside down in debris above the floor belongs early in the Red Polished series (FIGURE 4). Other ceramic material from the floor, although highly fragmentary, is of considerable importance, as it provides for the first time a firm stratigraphic basis for documenting the development of attributes through time in the main Red Polished Ware tradition.

The broad horizontal exposure and deep stratigraphy available at Marki allow investigation of a number of issues which impact beyond the immediate context of the prehistoric Cypriot Bronze Age. In particular, an estimate of the number of households in use through time within the excavated area, combined with an estimate of the minimum number of vessels broken and discarded in this part of the site, has significant implications for understanding ceramic consumption rates and, in turn, the intensity and context of pottery production. Such estimates suggest an average annual replacement rate of between five and twelve vessels per household. With such low replacement rates, it is unlikely that every household found it economically viable to manufacture its own pottery. More probably, some potting households were engaged in ceramic production at a level of elementary specialization, producing the relatively small number of vessels required for their own use and for exchange with neighbours.

Substantial amounts of well preserved animal bone from Marki provide by far the largest faunal assemblage from any Bronze Age settlement on the island. Dominant food species include ovi-caprids, oxen, equids (probably donkeys), pigs and *Dama mesopotamica* (Persian fallow deer). Of particular interest is the presence of screw-horned goats, which may constitute another species introduced to the island at the beginning of the Bronze Age (Croft in Frankel & Webb 1996: 217-22). Ground stone artefacts of both curated and expedient types and substantial quantities of chipped stone have also been recovered (Webb 1998; Smith in Frankel & Webb 1996: 102-9).

The first four seasons of excavations and survey (1991-1994) and all related finds have been published in Frankel & Webb 1996. Substantial preliminary reports of subsequent seasons appear in the *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*. The last major excavation season is planned for November/December 2000.

#### References

- FRANKEL, D. 1998. Constructing Marki *Alonia*. Reflections on method and authority in archaeological reporting. *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 11: 242-56.
2000. Migration and ethnicity in prehistoric Cyprus: technology as *habitus*. *European Journal of Archaeology* 3(2): 167-87.
- FRANKEL, D. & J.M. WEBB. 1996. *Marki Alonia. An Early and Middle Bronze Age town in Cyprus. Excavations 1990-1994*. Jonsered: Paul Åströms Forlag. *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology* 123.
1999. Excavations at Marki-Alonia. 1998-9. *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*: 87-110.
- WEBB, J.M. 1998. Lithic technology and discard at Marki, Cyprus. Consumer behaviour and site formation in the prehistoric Bronze Age. *Antiquity* 72: 796-805.
- WEBB, J.M. & D. FRANKEL. 1999. Characterising the Philia facies. Material culture, chronology and the origins of the Bronze Age in Cyprus. *American Journal of Archaeology* 103: 3-43.