

Khirokitia, an idiosyncratic Neolithic settlement in Cyprus, its putative foreign relations, and integrity in archaeological research

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Abstract: This study enquires into a groundstone artefact from the Cypriot Neolithic site of Khirokitia, claimed by James Mellaart to have been found in the northern Levant. In doing so, it pursues the broader issue of integrity in archaeological research. The method followed here is to scrutinise the archaeological record available to Mellaart in the 1960s and 1970s, when the claim was made, followed by an examination of recent archaeological research conducted over the past half-century. Since there is no citation or physical evidence of the claimed item, or evidence that other Cypriot Neolithic materials were transferred to the mainland, it is argued that the piece never existed. The case is integrated into a register of suspect claims made by Mellaart over sixty years and concludes that the harm done in fabricating ancient societies' material culture – a pastime sometimes taken too lightly – is a serious matter which deserves more attention from the academic community.

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Introduction

This paper concerns a claim about the foreign relations of the Neolithic site of Khirokitia in Cyprus (ca. 7,000–6,000 cal BC) that centres on a single groundstone artefact. The existence of the object, ostensibly relating to excavations conducted in the northern Levant by Robert Braidwood in the 1930s, was asserted briefly by the archaeologist James Mellaart in two books published respectively in 1965 and 1975. The claim is suspect because the item cannot be found, and the likelihood is that it never existed. By itself this issue may seem to be a minor matter but it constitutes a new addition to a large body of dubious proposals that were advanced by Mellaart. They have been discussed and remained in the public arena over a period of eight decades, from the 1950s up to the published opinions of Woudhuizen (Zangger 2018) and Duru (2020). Overall, Mellaart's catalogue of claims may represent the most significant incident of academic misconduct in twentieth-century archaeology. Scholars had been searching for the origins of the idiosyncratic Khirokitia Culture on the Levantine or Antaolian mainland for decades, and if Mellaart's claim were true, it should have been heralded as something of a breakthrough. Apparently, however, the case provoked no comment in the literature at the time.

In his pioneering work on academic misconduct, Charles Babbage (1830: 175–181) differentiated 'forging' from 'hoaxing'. The latter term he applied to fabricated events that were later intended to be revealed to humiliate the gullible. He used the former term not to refer to the physical manufacture of artefacts or other items but to imaginary items or events. This is the situation that best applies to Mellaart's oeuvre because he never admitted that any of his suspect claims (none of which ever materialized) were other than true, even when he came under intense criticism about them. Occupying a secure academic position, and recognized as a leader in

his field, Mellaart gained nothing by his suspect claims. On the contrary, they were instrumental in damaging his international reputation.

Yet, Mellaart's achievements in the real archaeological world were prodigious. During the 1950s, when leading archaeologists still insisted that there could not have been any occupation in Anatolia during the Neolithic period (Özdoğan 2020: 201), Mellaart undertook systematic archaeological surveys in the region and located key Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites. In so doing he became an archaeological prospector without peer. In 1954, Mellaart found the Early Bronze Age site of Beycesultan, and went on to co-direct the excavations there and publish the site with his subsequent manager at the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Seton Lloyd (Lloyd and Mellaart 1965). In 1956, Mellaart discovered Chalcolithic Hacilar, directed excavations at the site, and subsequently published them (Mellaart 1970). In 1958, he discovered the unparalleled Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük, directed excavations there too, and published them in various places (e.g. Mellaart 1967). Mellaart virtually invented the genre of Anatolian prehistoric archaeology. As Özdoğan (2020: 189) put it, 'James Mellaart became famous by discovering evidence so important that it was reason to re-evaluate the configuration of the history of civilization.' By the close of the 1950s, Mellaart had taken up the role of assistant director at the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara (Burney 2012) and was already considered as one of Near Eastern Archaeology's brightest stars. He had made numerous discoveries that most young archaeologists could only dream of. The shadowy, alternative career he developed that stalked his genuine achievements becomes then all the more poignant, and represents a significant and probably unparalleled case in the history of twentieth-century archaeology.

Unravelling invented finds is more difficult than the investigation of physical counterfeits. The latter type can be inspected, analysed and considered by groups of experts but in the former case there is nothing tangible to evaluate. Freckelton (2016: 61) sums up the issue:

Outright fabrication, known as forging in the Babbage taxonomy of fraud, has proven to be the most successful form of misconduct for researchers because it provides a carte blanche of opportunities for complete faking of outcomes. This avoids the risk that others might detect research flaws such as inappropriate sampling, problematic methodologies or unjustifiable misinterpretation of data.

The method used here is to review the archaeological record of the region from which Mellaart claimed his find, utilising prevailing knowledge available in the mid-1970s.

The search is necessarily long and painstaking. To seek out parallels in the literature to a distinctive artefact type is to have a clear target in mind. But the contrary process, the search for an artefact type that may have never existed in the first place, could become a limitless quest. If Mellaart's object was an adventitious find, then one might expect further Cypriot examples to have turned up on the mainland in the past half-century when systematic archaeological research has been undertaken by professional archaeologists on hundreds of archaeological sites. Hence, these more recent projects are also examined below.

A putative Neolithic groundstone artefact from Cyprus, claimed from the northern Levant

In single sentences, Mellaart detailed the groundstone object in question in two books published a decade apart. The first one was his 1965 work, *Earliest Civilizations of the Near East*, and the second his 1975 textbook, *The Neolithic of The Near East*.

The 1965 mention ran:

It also points to Ras Shamra, another early maritime site in north Syria and to the Amuq (plain of Antioch) where a stone vessel of Khirokitia type was found in levels of the Amuq A period (Mellaart 1965: 53).

The second reference was somewhat different and its wording carries significant implications for the interpretation of Mellaart's claim:

This deficiency (of pottery at Khirokitia) was offset by some of the most elegant and striking stoneware produced anywhere in the Near East, and the discovery of a fragment of such a stone vessel in Amuq A shows that these products were occasionally exported (Mellaart 1975: 130).

In both cases, Mellaart provided no description of the alleged groundstone item and gave no citation for it in the



Figure 1: Selected northeast Mediterranean Neolithic sites cited in the text.

text. It was subtly but vaguely attributed to a provenance in the northern Levant. Yet, the assertion that it is ‘in Amuq A’ significantly limits the possibilities of its origins. Before following this line of evidence further, it is worth introducing the site of Khirokitia to explain its context and importance in Mediterranean prehistory.

Khirokitia, an idiosyncratic Neolithic settlement in Cyprus

Khirokitia (Khirokitia *Vouni*; also Choirokitia) is a Late Aceramic Neolithic village site located near Larnaca in southern Cyprus (Figure 1). Dating 7,200–5,800 cal BC, the settlement is large, at six hectares in area (Knapp 2013: 120–158; Le Brun 2021). The architectural pattern is marked by thick-walled round stone houses delimited by a series of stone perimeter walls that are unparalleled for this period in the eastern Mediterranean. Currently, the well-preserved site is considered noteworthy enough to be listed on UNESCO's World Heritage list (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2024), but from the period of its discovery in the 1930s until the 1980s, when earlier village settlements in Cyprus were discovered, Khirrokitia held an even more significant status as the earliest evidence for village life on the island. Its unusual buildings and other built features found no parallel in contemporaneous Neolithic settlements in Cyprus, or on the mainland, leaving Khirrokitia as something of an enigma.

Khirokitia was discovered by Porphyrios Dikaïos in 1934 (Dikaïos 1936a; 1953:1) and excavated by him from 1936 to 1946. Subsequently, Dikaïos published his final report on the site in 1953. Cultural sediments were immediately accessible below the surface, a circumstance which assisted Dikaïos in clearing broad areas and revealing a substantial portion of the village layout. Chronologically there were two aceramic phases



Figure 2: View of the excavations at Neolithic Khirrokitia, indicating its robust curvilinear architecture (photograph by author).

followed by a long break, before the site was re-occupied by occupants who introduced ceramics (the so-called Sotira culture). The aceramic period is the one of interest for this study, and the one which Mellaart refers to in his textbook. Three concordant radiocarbon dates of 7570 ± 125 BP, 7710 ± 160 BP and 7500 ± 160 BP for early layers of the site were subsequently obtained in 1960 (Östlund & Engstrand 1960: 194), which Dikaios (1962: 193) averaged to present an estimate of $5,630 \pm 150$ BCE. This was before the dendrochronological calibration of radiocarbon dates became established in the 1970s (unless otherwise stated, all further dates discussed below cited as 'cal BC' are dendrochronologically calibrated). These, then, were the main results known to Mellaart when he produced his textbook in the mid-1970s. It is useful to now provide further detail about the site and consider how it was regarded by scholars at that time.

Khirrokitia, as known in the mid-1970s

The houses of Khirrokitia were stoutly built with thick, lower walls of stone, sometimes doubled, which supported upper stages of pisé and perishable materials (Figure 2). They were understood to form beehive-shaped domes. Some of the circular buildings were arranged as multicellular units, associated with courtyards and covered passages (Dikaios 1953). The most unusual feature of the settlement plan was a broad, well-paved road which wended its way through the village. Indirect evidence in the form of flint sickle blades and numerous stone food-processing implements indicated the cultivation of crops. Sheep, goats and pigs were probably herded, although the means to demonstrate their domestication had not been established at the time of publication (King 1953). Evidence of fallow deer and other wild prey animals was also present, indicating the continuance of hunting.

The site's artefactual assemblages proved to be as distinctive as its architectural form and equally unlike anything found on the mainland. The flint industry lacked the bidirectional core reduction and fine finish of projectile points from the Levant. Conversely, the groundstone industry was sophisticated, comprising a variety of spouted bowls, dishes, and mortars, worked up from a variety of mafic stones, including andesite. The most elaborate pieces were embellished with relief decoration, which included raised dots and bands grouped into various motifs. Some of the vessels are unusually rectangular, whereas groundstone vessels of this period from Southwest Asia are invariably circular in form (Wright 1992). Most striking was the 'remarkable spouted bowl 813' (Dikaios 1953: 248), of which a photograph was included by Mellaart (1975: 132) in his book to illustrate Khirrokitia's groundstone industry (Figures 3 and 4).

Dikaios' field methods and reporting standards were exemplary for the period he worked in. He was one of the first archaeologists in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East to excavate the cultural deposits of large settlements stratigraphically, according to the slope and disposition of strata. He provided detailed plans and section drawings and conducted comprehensive analyses of all artefact categories and subsistence data. In reviewing the work, Weinberg (1957: 98) declared, 'No finer report of a prehistoric excavation exists, and the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus can be as proud of this first volume of its Monograph series as of its first departmental excavation at Khirrokitia.'

In an attempt to find antecedents to the distinctive groundstone tradition of Khirrokitia, Dikaios also undertook a literature survey of mainland Neolithic and



Figure 3: Shallow andesite bowl (No. 813) from Khirokitia, Phase 1A (after Dikaïos 1953, pl. 56).

later sites, commencing with the Nile Delta, working up the Levantine coast, and turning west along the Cilician coast of Türkiye. Notably, Dikaïos found no similarities in the Amuq Valley, and in fact did not mention the work of the Oriental Institute of Chicago in the region. He could find no parallels anywhere at all and he concluded (Dikaïos 1953: 334) that: ‘It is clear from this survey that in the countries adjoining Cyprus no cultural stage with an exclusive production of stone vessels comparable with that of Khirokitia has so far been discovered.’

Braidwood’s research in the Plain of Antioch and the ‘Amuq A’ phase

Mellaart referred to his claimed stoneware piece from Khirokitia as belonging to the ‘Amuq A’ phase in Syria. It is critical to understand that ‘Amuq A’, from the Amuq Valley of the northern Levant (equivalent to the ‘Plain of Antioch’, or Amik Ovasi in Turkish) was an archaeological phase constructed by Braidwood, rather than a place (Braidwood & Braidwood 1960; Yener 2005:5). Culturally and geographically a seaboard extension of ancient Syria, the Amuq Valley is located within the multi-ethnic Hatay Province, or Hatay *vilayet*. The region has a complex political history. During the period when the Braidwoods from the Oriental Institute (now the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa, Chicago) were working and issuing their initial publications, the region was either part of

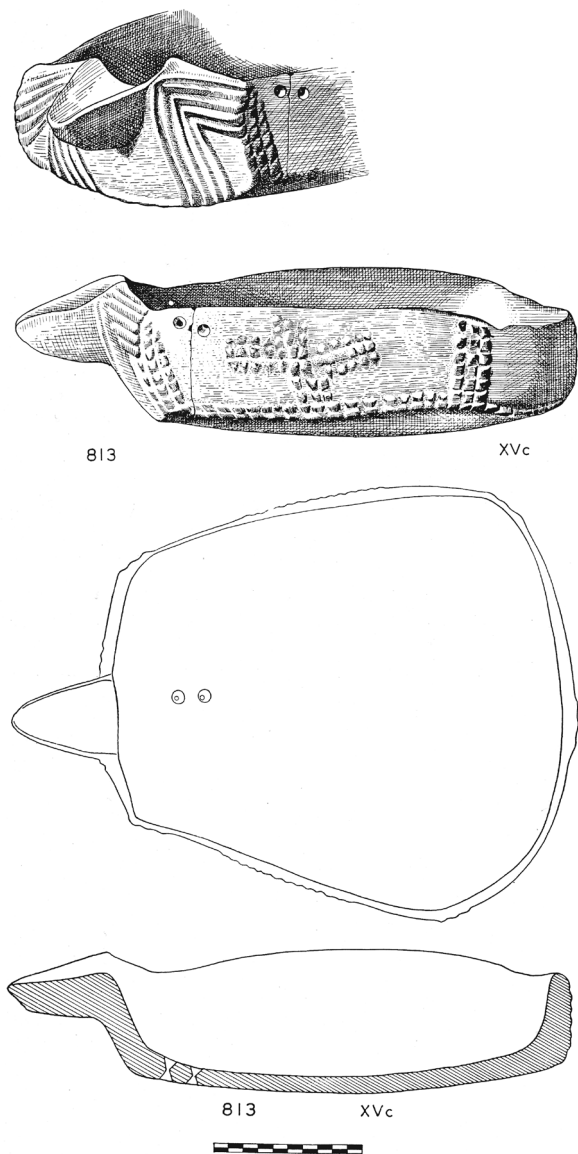


Figure 4: Shallow andesite bowl (No. 813) from Khirokitia, Phase 1A (after Dikaïos 1953, pl. 122).

the French-mandated State of Syria or the independent Sanjak of Alexandretta. It has politically been part of Türkiye since 1939 (Sanjian 1956). Notably, Türkiye is the country in which James Mellaart conducted his principal archaeological fieldwork, and in which he travelled widely.

The Amuq prehistoric sequence of ten prehistoric phases (Amuq A–J, was devised by Robert Braidwood after his survey of 178 settlement mounds and excavation projects in the Amuq Valley (Braidwood 1937; Braidwood & Braidwood 1960). The Amuq phases were specifically based on stratified evidence from his excavation of eight *tells* in the plain during the 1930s. The earliest one, the Neolithic Amuq A phase, was recovered only from the lower reaches of the great 30-metre-deep pit dug into Tell al-Judaïdah (Braidwood & Braidwood 1960: 46–47; McEwen 1937). Amuq A at Tell al-Judaïdah was not then (and is still not) dated radiometrically. Few other survey

finds were attributed to Amuq A, save for some items from O'Brien's (1933) excavations in a cave located about 500 metres away from Tell al-Judaiah. O'Brien describes and illustrates the finds clearly, and there is no groundstone item among them. Later phases of the Amuq sequence excavated in the 1930s were published somewhat later (Haines 1971). Following the work by the University of Chicago, Arik's team (1944) undertook a wide-ranging inspection tour, extending from central Anatolia to the Hatay. Arik visited some of the American sites and collected some pottery, but his team did not survey systematically or further excavate any of the Amuq Valley sites; neither did he illustrate or mention any groundstone artefacts. To the south in Syria's middle Orontes valley, Courtois (1973) collected potsherds and lithics stylistically dated to the Chalcolithic and Late Neolithic periods.

It is critical to note that, when either of Mellaart's books had appeared, these parties had been the only archaeological teams who had worked in the region. The Chicago researchers detailed all of the groundstone objects from the Amuq A assemblage. According to the Braidwoods (Braidwood & Braidwood 1960: 55) they included 21 artefacts of limestone and one of marble, but none of volcanic stone, and none were referred to as Cypriot types. Eight pieces belonging to Braidwood's Amuq A collection were deposited in the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum in Chicago, all of which were excavated from Tell Judaiah (University of Chicago 2024). A review of the raw materials involved has revealed that one piece (A125173) is limestone; one item (A125170) is not limestone as originally identified but calcite; five pieces (A125221 – A125223, A125258 – A125259) are greenstone, and a spouted vessel (A125224) is soapstone. Volcanic rock materials are absent.

It is now worth examining the later work done in the half-century after Mellaart's claim to ascertain whether Cypriot groundstone has since turned up on the mainland. To place the search in context, a review of later work undertaken at Khirokitia (and on the early settlement of Cyprus in general) is also provided to gauge how our understanding of Khirokitia has changed in the interim.

Research in adjacent regions: Cilicia and the northern Levantine coast

As the closest landfall to Cyprus, the Cilician coast of Türkiye in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean is of special interest for investigating cultural antecedents to the early occupation of Cyprus Yümüktepe (ancient Mersin) is one of the nearest ceramic Neolithic sites to the Amuq Valley, and it is also the nearest mainland Neolithic settlement to Khirokitia. Garstang's (1953) excavations of the site revealed no Cypriot Neolithic materials. The site was later dated from 7,000 to 6,100 cal BC (Brami 2014), contemporary with aceramic Neolithic Khirokitia. Goldman's (1956) excavations at Gözlükule (ancient Tarsus) located some 20km inland returned the same

negative result for the Neolithic layers. Soon afterwards, Seton-Williams (1954) made a comprehensive survey of 149 sites on the Cilician Plain, which revealed only three new Neolithic sites: Tarmil Höyük, Tatarlı Hüyük, and Şamşin Hüyük. They were all identified by flint or obsidian artefacts. Further south, ss Dikaïos had found in his literature survey, no parallels to, or examples of, Cypriot groundstone could be found at the two major coastal Levantine sites excavated at that time, Byblos (Dunand 1939, 1950) and Ras Shamra (Schaeffer 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1954).

Later work on Khirokitia and earlier Cypriot settlements

Soon after Mellaart released his textbook in 1975, a series of new excavations at Khirokitia was initiated, first by Stanley Price (1977) and then by Le Brun and colleagues from 1977 to 1981 (Le Brun 1984), from 1983 to 1986 (Le Brun 1989), from 1988 to 1991 (Le Brun 1994a) and from 1993 until 2009 (Le Brun 2021). They confirmed that the settlement was based largely on food production. Domesticated einkorn, emmer, barley, pea and lentils were raised (Steel 2004: 60; Waines & Stanley Price 1977), and domesticated sheep, goat and pig were herded (Davis 1984: 151; Davis 1989: 189–210), while hunting of Fallow Deer and other game remained important. The supposed road was reevaluated as a town wall bordering the western side of the settlement, beyond which built occupation had later expanded. A second perimeter wall had then been built in an attempt to contain the burgeoning settlement (Le Brun 1994: 33–42). The thick-walled houses were revealed as flat-roofed, rather than as beehive-shaped domes (Le Brun 1984a: 26–27; 1984b). Further radiocarbon dates adjusted the dating of the Khirokitia Culture to 6,800–5,200 cal BC (Le Brun 1989: 17–20; Le Brun 1994a: 27–29; Manning 2013: 504–507), and the site was reassigned to the Late Aceramic Neolithic phase. Perhaps the major change in understanding Khirokitia was the discovery that the site was not an exemplar of initial colonisation but the outcome of a long chain of prior settlement of the island, beginning around 11,000 cal BC (Knapp 2013: 48–119).

Isolation, contact and culturogenesis

The singular characteristics of Khirokitia have long prompted discussion about the isolation of Neolithic Cyprus from the mainland. Steel (2004: 45) encapsulates this view by noting that 'present interpretations emphasise the internal development of this culture, hermetically sealed from outside influence thereby losing many of the cultural and economic attributes of its early aceramic Neolithic antecedents and failing to acquire or assimilate innovations, most notably pottery production.'

This view has receded, not only because of the long history of prior settlement on the island that led to the formation of the Khirokitia culture, but because of the paradox that exotic materials such as Anatolian obsidian, carnelian from Afghanistan, and even the ostensible

stocking of mainland animals, had periodically arrived in Cyprus from the beginning of the Initial Ceramic Culture around 9,000 BCE, up until, and including, the occupation of Khirokitia (Dikaïos 1953: 303–306; 316; Knapp 2013: 87, 90). Throughout this entire period, the maritime route from the Levantine mainland never exceeded a day's journey using simple boats or rafts (Bar-Yosef et al. 2015). Evidently, the mainland was always in reach of Cypriot Neolithic communities. Indeed, some scholars have considered the early Neolithic villagers in Cyprus as representing an expansion of the network of interlinked Levantine mainland communities, connected by sea lanes rather than separated by them (Broodbank 2006; Finlayson 2004).

The recent recognition of the creative agency that societies employ to structure their cultural repertoires makes more sense of the distinctiveness of the Khirokitia culture in its island setting. Social groups may apply strong selective evaluations when deciding which cultural practices they absorb, repudiating certain productions that are often deemed useful, such as pottery. In developing the concept of 'creative transformation', 'cultural hybridity', or 'culturogenesis', Thomas (1991) explained how indigenous Pacific islanders in the eighteenth century carefully selected which items offered by technologically advanced European visitors were integrated into their culture. A striking example is the reconfiguration muskets by the Solomon Islands and Marquesan communities (Thomas 1991:104–106). Guns were modified by engraving and inlaying their stocks with nacreous shell, thereby converting them into high-status clubs. These kinds of rapid configurations may occur virtually instantly with respect to long-term archaeological timeframes. Because cultural systems bifurcate continually as a result of intersocietal contact, such cases are numerous and vary widely in time. The process has been documented for the engagements of Archaic Greeks with native South Italians (Papadopoulos 2002), and new cultural forms which resulted from the encounters of ancient Romans with indigenous European tribes (Dietler 1998; Hedeager 2000).

Culturogenesis may also occur when an émigré faction settles unoccupied territories, a process which may be termed 'diasporic identity' (Palumbo-Liu 1999). The phenomenon may explain the spread of the Lapita cultural complex into Near and Remote Oceania. The Lapita 'peoples' were the first Polynesian colonists of the uninhabited islands of the Pacific, spreading rapidly after 3,000 years ago, and yet the distinctively incised Lapita ceramics found on newly settled islands of the Pacific show few antecedent parallels in Melanesia and mainland Southeast Asia (Spriggs 2003). These considerations provide a frame of reference in which to view émigré or diffused archaeological cultures of the neolithic Levant into Cyprus. Not only Khirokitia but earlier Initial Aceramic Neolithic Cypriot settlements appear to be significantly different from their Levantine antecedents in many ways. While Parekklishia *Shillourokambos*

(ca. 8,400–6,900 cal BC) shares lithic traditions with antecedent Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic B cultures, its architectural form is quite different from them (Guilaine, Briois and Vigne 2011; Knapp 2013: 88–89). One of the reasons why émigré groups may depart rapidly from their antecedents in social form is that they are composed of individuals deriving from different families, tribes or polities, unified only by their mission of exploration. The new settlers then coalesce into new social alliances that produce novel cultural traits and fashions, ultimately signalling reconstituted identities as a means to maintain solidarity. Lydon (1999) describes such a case among the early Chinese community in Sydney, Australia, which welcomed immigrants from diverse parts of mainland China into networks of mutual dependence, producing new social and cultural forms.

Further work in the Plain of Antioch and neighbouring regions

If Khirokitia groundstone was exported to the mainland, as Mellaart claimed, one might expect the modern research carried out over ensuing decades to have turned up further examples of it. This review of more recent projects in the Plain of Antioch and surrounding regions investigates this possibility. After an interval of over half of a century, the Oriental Institute of Chicago brought the 'Amuq Valley Regional Projects' to the region, conducting excavations and intensive surveys from 1995 to 2002 (Yener 2005). Tell al-Judaïdah was re-excavated, and Amuq A flaked stone and ceramic artefacts were collected in a survey of the sites Tell Kizilkaya, Hasanuşağı, Tell Kurdu, Dutlu Höyük and site AS 290 (Yener 2005: 212–255). No groundstone artefacts were reported. Yener (2005: 5) placed the ten-phase Amuq sequence chronologically between 6,000 and 2,000 cal BC. Amuq A was accorded a 6,800–6,500 cal BC age range by Akkermans and Schwartz (2005: 102–108). A comprehensive survey of cave sites in the Hatay fleshed out the region's rich Palaeolithic heritage (Yalçinkaya et al. 1999) but did not encounter Neolithic sites or groundstone artefacts.

New Neolithic sites in nearby regions were excavated by other teams without Cypriot groundstone being retrieved. They include the University of Tsukuba mission which investigated 22 tell sites of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) and Pottery Neolithic periods in the Rouj Basin, located 40 km to the south of the Amuq Plain (Tsuneki 2012). The Pottery Neolithic period in this area is dated to 7,000–5,800 cal BC, overlapping the timespans of Khirokitia and the Amuq A phase. Further west on the Lebanese coast, Tabarja Wata Slam spans PPNB and Pottery Neolithic phases (Yazbeck 2020). There have been no vestiges of Cypriot Neolithic groundstone found in these sites. Caneva and colleagues (Caneva and Jean 2016) re-excavated the Neolithic layers of Yümüktepe in the twenty-first century without any Cypriot materials coming to light. Research on the Cilician plain has also been conducted more broadly by members of the Cilician Chronology Group (2017), with several occupation

mounds excavated. This work has included investigations of Neolithic deposits at Tarsus-Gözlükule and Tatarlı Höyük, with the same negative result. To sum up, present evidence indicates that not only were Cypriot Neolithic groundstone items not transferred to Southwest Asia, but that no Neolithic cultural materials at all were ever transported from the island to the mainland.

Alternative possibilities

Mellaart's descriptions of the Khirokitia-style groundstone item appeared ten years apart, with crucially different details involved in each case. Both narratives are examined in turn here, beginning with the more restricted 1975 version. It described a small fragment that might have been more easily lost or more difficult to notice than an entire vessel.

Regarding the 1975 version, the absence of any likely Cypriot groundstone fragments from Braidwood's Amuq A assemblage or elsewhere in the Amuq Valley or adjacent regions, leaves us with three possibilities:

1. Mellaart mistook a fragment in Braidwood's collection for a piece from Khirokitia,
2. Mellaart became aware of a fragment obtained from a non-permitted survey or excavation, or
3. Mellaart fabricated the existence of the piece.

In considering these possibilities in turn:

1. It is unlikely that Mellaart would make the elementary error of mistaking a small fragment of Levantine groundstone for the distinctive products of Khirokitia. Already by the end of the 1950s, Mellaart was established as a leading practitioner of Near Eastern prehistoric archaeology. During the 1950s, he had spent time excavating Pre-Pottery Neolithic deposits at Jericho (Kenyon and Holland 1981: ix; Mellaart 2020: 59). He also conducted his own surveys and excavations of Late Neolithic sites in the Jordan Valley (Kafafi 2011; Mellaart, 1956), and had participated in excavations in Cyprus (Davey 2021; Merrillees 2013). Mellaart knew the Neolithic material culture from Türkiye and Western Asia as well as any other practitioner. If we survey Mellaart's several books, articles and reviews on Middle Eastern material ranging in age from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (e.g., Mellaart 1956, 1962, 1965, 1966, 1975) we note that he rigorously cited the genuine sites and artefacts that he utilised as evidence.

It is the suspect additions that are passed over in a few words, without reference. For example, the 'Ortakaraviran Höyük II Hittite unbaked clay seal' (Mellaart 1954) received no mention in-text, but just a brief description in a caption, located in an appendix. When the 'Dorak Treasure' was first announced (Mellaart 1959), it was said to contain the cartouche of Sahure, second king of the Egyptian Fifth Dynasty. This was a key inclusion because it provided an absolute date estimate for the assemblage and the inscription is well known. Perhaps less well-

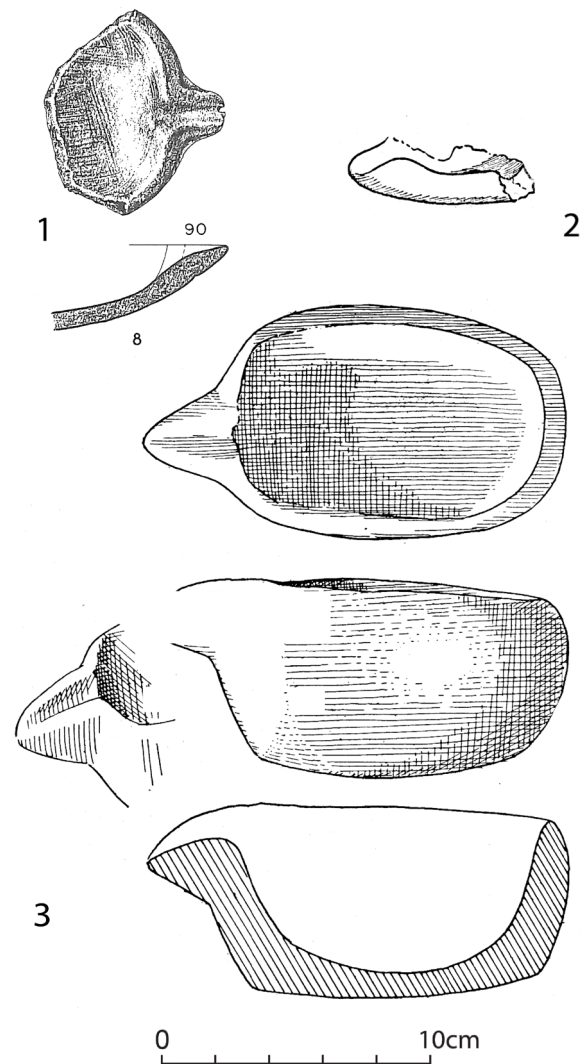


Figure 5: 1. Small soapstone vessel, Tell al-Judaidah, Amuq Phase A (after Braidwood & Braidwood 1960, 57; pl. 67.2); 2. Small spouted vessel, Yümüktepe, Neolithic phase (after Garstang 1953, 17; Fig. 9); 3. Spouted andesite bowl, Khirokitia, Phase 1A (after Dikaio 1953, pl. 115).

known is that Mellaart (1962: 405) subsequently added a second Egyptian king into the mix, claiming with just three words in his contribution to the *Cambridge Ancient History* that the name of Sahure's successor, Neferirkare, had also been found amongst the Dorak burials.

If we set aside for a moment Mellaart's mastery of Middle Eastern Neolithic material, it might hypothetically be objected that he was referring to a specific stone vessel in the Tell al-Judaidah assemblage (Figure 5:1) when he made his claim (Braidwood & Braidwood 1960: 57, Fig. 32. 8, pl. 67.2). Viewed in plan, this small item does have a roughly oblong shape like No. 813 (Figure 3) and some of the Cypriot vessels, and like them, it does have a spout but it would have made an unconvincing parallel. The Tell al-Judaidah example is a tiny, shallow vessel only 6.6 cm across, much smaller than the deep-walled Cypriot types (e.g. Figure 5:3). It is also made from soapstone

rather than igneous stone like the Cypriot ones. It is held in the University of Chicago under the registration number A125224 (University of Chicago, 2024; <https://isac-idb.uchicago.edu/id/8f828256-05b9-4582-ae1c-b9b2c4ce0a9f>), listed as a shallow, semi-hemispherical soapstone vessel fragment with flattened lip & short, open spout. Braidwood & Braidwood (1960: 57) originally ventured that the vessel functioned as an oil lamp. Tellingly, this type of lamp is absent from the Khirokitia range. On the other hand, it is known from the mainland Neolithic, for example at Yümüktepe. Here, Garstang (1953: 17) described a small, spouted, stone ‘oil lamp’ (Figure 5:2) of almost identical size to the Tell al-Judaidah example. The piece from Yümüktepe was found in the lowest Neolithic layers of the site. Mellaart, as one of the leading specialists of the Anatolian Neolithic, was well-versed in Garstang’s work completed in the 1950s (e.g. Mellaart 1975: 125–129). He had also conducted an intensive examination of the Amuq sequence by the mid-1950s, including some unpublished material from it, when reviewing the external connections of the Neolithic site of Ghrubba that he had excavated in Jordan (Mellaart 1956).

2. If Mellaart’s groundstone vessel existed, it would only be feasible that it was collected by a non-permitted project, or found by a local person, or noticed somewhere in a local museum. Mellaart did not survey in Syria or the Hatay region himself and had declined an offer from the Syrian antiquities authority to survey in the Aleppo region (Mellaart 2020: 85). Mellaart gave no details about who discovered the piece and when, and where the object resides. A reference to the whereabouts of the item would have simply clarified the case. It would enable us to decide whether the item is indeed a characteristic piece of the Khirokitia culture or just one of many vessel body sherds that would be indistinguishable from any normal worked piece of volcanic stone sourced from the mainland. We are not even told whether it was made of limestone, in which case it would be even less obviously Cypriot.

Although he gives no detail in the text, Mellaart does allude to the decorated groundstone types from Khirokitia by illustrating the rectangular bowl, No. 813, on the next page. He could have only stylistically attributed a groundstone item to Khirokitia if it were one of the minority of pieces which feature raised knobs and bands organised into various motifs. Only 24 of 275 stone bowls illustrated by Dikaïos (1953: Pls xli – lxxviii), or less than 10% of the output at Khirokitia resemble # 813 in shape, and only 12 per cent of vessels and fragments are embellished with raised decoration in relief. Even fewer examples of decorated groundstone vessels were unearthed in Le Brun’s subsequent excavation campaigns, and none of the elaborate nature of No. 813 were found. Of the 485 examples figured in Le Brun’s reports (Mouton 1984; Saliou 1989; Le Brun 1994b), only one deep bowl is decorated (Le Brun 1994b: 200, Fig. 84).

Had the piece been available, it would also have been available for geochemical analysis, which could have determined whether it was reduced from a Syrian volcanic rock (Trifonov et al. 2011) or a fragment from the complex array of Cypriot volcanic rocks (Portyagin 2005a, 2005b; Silantyev 2005).

The 1965 passage constricts the possibilities for the veracity of the groundstone object even further and renders it even less likely to have existed. Mellaart claimed that the groundstone piece was specifically excavated from Amuq A levels, and in those days, that was something that only Braidwood had done. The fact that an entire vessel is claimed also makes it harder to explain how it was overlooked by everybody but Mellaart, and deepens the mystery as to its whereabouts.

The publication venues for Mellaart’s groundstone item are also curious, given the object’s potential for establishing contacts between Khirokitia and mainland society. One might have thought that such a discovery merited a separate, high-profile paper. However, that choice, assuming the piece did not exist, would have left Mellaart in a quandary, because he would have had no details to discuss. On the contrary, the claim could not be more low-profile. It is made obscurely in one sentence in either book, sandwiched between other considerations.

In Mellaart’s encyclopaedic 1975 textbook, the piece’s short mention is left for the observant reader to find amidst a long volume crammed with data. It is not even placed within the section (Mellaart 1975:132) where the Khirokitia groundstone industry is described.

We also need to ask how Mellaart could feasibly link the tiny vessel from Tell al-Judaidah with Khirokitia when all of the experts (des Places 1963; Dyson 1961; Hanfmann 1961; Mellink 1962; Schaeffer & Courtois 1963; Tadmor 1964; Wright 1963) who scrutinized the Braidwoods’ *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch* missed such a connection? Schaeffer & Courtois (1963) focussed on the groundstone artefacts from the Amuq A phase and noted several resemblances to Tell Soukas and Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast, but made no mention of Cyprus. Schaeffer (1952) was familiar with the archaeology of Cyprus, having excavated there for several years. Mellink (1962) noted strong similarities between Amuq A and the archaeological record of Cilicia (as also noted in this article), but not to Cyprus.

Robert Braidwood demonstrated his intimate knowledge of regional links in his discussion of the Neolithic of the Near East (Braidwood 1957). In this study, he also marked his familiarity with Khirokitia. If his excavations in the Amuq Valley had yielded any reasonable connections to explain the origin of the Khirokitia culture, then he would surely have wanted to remark upon them before anybody else. Although the greater part of *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch* was completed by 1947 (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: vii), before the final report by

Dikaïos on Khirokitia in 1953, abundant details about the site and its groundstone industry had been available for many years. From the commencement of excavations until their completion Dikaïos kept up a steady stream of articles about the site (Dikaïos 1936a, 1936b, 1936c, 1940a, 1940b, 1946a, 1946b) and contributions to digests of recent work (Cook 1946; Megaw 1936; Payne 1934; Robertson 1939, Young 1937, 1938).

3. It is most likely that Mellaart fabricated the existence of the exported groundstone piece from Khirokitia. His method of explaining the item fits a pattern of similar unsubstantiated claims he forwarded, spanning some seven decades, from the 1950s to his death in 2012. The most notable of them was the so called ‘Dorak Affair’, for which Mellaart is best known (Pearson & Connor 1967; Schürr 2025). In brief, in the 1950s while visiting the house of a young woman in Izmir, who he had just met on a train, Mellaart claimed to have drawn and recorded a rich and varied assemblage of Early Bronze Age grave goods. The objects were said to come from elite burials originally found at the village of Dorak in northwestern Türkiye. Mellaart (1959) subsequently published the collection in the *Illustrated London News* (cf. Davey 2021, 38–39). Investigations could find no trace of the woman or her house (Pearson and Connor 1967) and further investigations in the village found no traces of Early Bronze Age tombs or materials (Özdoğan 2020: 218; TAY 2018;). The ‘Dorak Treasure’ never emerged into the light, whether on the antiquities market, or by other means.

Many of Mellaart’s other unsubstantiated claims have not been as well emphasized, and there may be some, like the one reported here, that still lie unrecognised. Some of the unsubstantiated claims were published directly by Mellaart. Others were noted by various authors, and some such as the Beyköy text were handed on to colleagues in the hope that they would publish them. Besides Dorak, they include the Ortakaraviran Höyük II Hittite unbaked clay seal, reported by Mellaart as having been discovered by him in 1951 (Hawkins 2024; Mellaart 1954). Others were a series of up to 70 wall paintings said to have been discovered during the excavations of the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in the 1960s, but first announced by Mellaart much later in the 1980s (Collon 1990; Czeszewska 2014; Lamberg-Karlovsky 1992; Mallett 1990; Mallett 1993; Mazur 2005; Mellaart 1989, 1991), advanced weaving techniques at Çatalhöyük, claimed as the remains of Turkish rugs (Mallett 1990, 1993), a corpus of inscribed Neolithic plaques in unbaked clay, claimed as excavated from the Deep Sounding at Çatalhöyük in 1963 (Collon 1990), 150 alleged engraved prehistoric beach pebbles from south-western Türkiye, near the Palaeolithic to Neolithic cave site of Beldibi (Muscarella 2000: 143; Mazur 2005), and the 29-metre-long stone ‘Beyköy Inscription’, supposedly commissioned ‘by the Great King of Mira, Kupanta-Kurunta, ca.1180 BC’, written in Luwian Hieroglyphic. This piece Mellaart baselessly

claimed to have been found in 1878 by the French antiquary, Georges Perrot (Hawkins 2024; Zangger 2018). Further supposed texts included ‘Assurbanipal’s Letter to Ardu’ and the ‘Hattusili III Annals’, both discredited by Zanger (2018) and Hawkins (2024).

To this catalogue can be added anthropomorphic ceramic vessels and figurines attributed to the Chalcolithic site of Hacilar, which Mellaart excavated from 1956 (Mellaart 1970). This is a significant case because some of the ceramic output from Hacilar was undoubtedly genuine and dated to the fifth millennium BCE but a second series of artefacts (48 out of 66 examples) was dated as recent by thermoluminescence and so the objects were established as fakes. Initially, Mellaart was suspected to have had a hand in the production of these pieces but, ultimately, he was exonerated and found not to have had anything to do with their production. However, there is one Hacilar figurine that is startlingly different from the others. The purported object is a ceramic figurine representing a human couple intertwined in coitus, described by Mellaart as ‘mating’ (Mellaart et al 1989 Vol. II: 52, pl. 14; Muscarella 2000: 140). It is known only from the publication, *The Goddess from Anatolia* and, as fits Mellaart’s invariant approach when issuing these dubious objects, it lacks a photograph, is known only from a drawing, and has no provenance. It is not a piece that made an appearance in the publication of the Hacilar excavations (Mellaart 1970). Even during the awkward period when he was suspected of forging Hacilar ceramics that had found their way onto the market, it seems that Mellaart could not quell his long-term habit of creating fabrications, and so he drew imaginary Hacilar figurines. The Khirokitia vessel completes Mellaart’s charge sheet. Its presence infills the period between his other claims of the 1950s and the 1980s, and creates a persistent series of fabrications that continued for seven decades. Together, these examples indicate a pattern of behaviour that did not cease throughout Mellaart’s entire career.

Reactions to Mellaart’s claims

Upon its publication, Mellaart’s groundstone artefact should have generated significant interest by shining new light on mainland connections to the enigmatic Khirokitia culture, which had remained a mystery for several decades. One might have expected it to have prompted some comment in the academic literature, but this did not happen at all. Specialist books on the island’s archaeology, such as those by Karageorghis (1982) through to Steel (2004) do not mention the find. Knapp (2013:152–53), in his comprehensive survey of the Cypriot Neolithic eventually did cite the occurrence, albeit without any sense of endorsement.

Scholars’ avoidance of Mellaart’s Khirokitia claim recapitulates the reception of the Dorak Treasure in publications on the Anatolian Early Bronze Age. Very few scholars ever included Dorak in reviews of the period, other than Lloyd (1967), Mellaart’s doctoral

student, Turhan Kiamil (1980: 133), and David Stronach, who wrote an unpublished metallurgical review of the purported finds. Even as he describes the Dorak collection Lloyd (1967: 19) betrays some apprehension about it, noting that some ‘mystery’ surrounds its circumstances and that it is dated ‘almost miraculously’ (Lloyd 1967: 32) by the inclusion of an Egyptian Fifth Dynasty cartouche. His doubts were remarkably pre-empted by the General Editor of the series in his preface to the book, who more or less warns the reader off the objects by remarking that ‘some of us would prefer to suspend judgment on them’ (Piggot 1967: 7), and these views are echoed by a reviewer of the volume, objecting to ‘much that is questionable’ in it (Mitten 1969: 328). Notably, both Lloyd (1986: 164) and Stronach (2020) later regretted their initial endorsement of Dorak. Most surprisingly, Mellaart failed to include Dorak in his own book on the Anatolian Early Bronze Age (Mellaart 1978), despite billing the site as the most important find in Middle Eastern archaeology since the discovery of the Royal Graves at Ur (Mellaart 1959). Most researchers have clearly not been prepared to take Mellaart’s unsubstantiated claims about Dorak seriously.

Research fabrications and codes of conduct

Freckleton (2016) notes several motives for indulging in academic hoaxes. They may be forwarded simply as an outlet for pranksterism or trickery, for financial advantage, as forms of swindlery or extortion, or performed out of malice in attempts to make other scholars look foolish. An obvious reason is also to obtain advanced academic recognition, or promotion for financial gain. Such a case usually involves the actual production of counterfeit artefacts. Shinichi Fujimura, for example, attempted to establish a Lower to Upper Palaeolithic sequence in Japan by planting fake stone artefacts (Normile 2001).

These alternatives do not capture the essence of Mellaart’s motivation. Although he was occasionally accused of creating forgeries such as the Beldibi pebbles (Mazur 2005) and was found to have prepared Neolithic images carved on schist pieces after his death (Jarus 2018), Mellaart was mainly preoccupied with inventing non-existent finds and publishing them. He rarely extended himself to making objects, and he did not benefit by trafficking in forged artefacts. Far from profiting from these efforts, Mellaart was criticised for them and consequently he incurred a loss of reputation. The interrogations undermined his status as one of the greats of Near Eastern archaeology, and so his motives remain unclear. It is notable that causes such as obsession or mental illness are not considered by Freckleton (2016) but they may have underlain Mellaart’s behaviour. He appears to have been unable to cease the practice of invention throughout his long career. Ian Hodder was a student of Mellaart’s at the Institute of Archaeology in London and succeeded him in excavating the matchless Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük (Hodder 2011). Hodder (2015: 4019) displays his affection for Mellaart: ‘As a person he was

engaging, generous and kind, a charming sparkling companion especially when downing his Scotch whisky and handling a Dutch cigar.’ He is also frank about his shortcomings: ‘In later years it became clear that Mellaart had a habit of imagining evidence’ (Hodder 2015: 415) and that he was possessed of ‘an ambitious drive to make spectacular and sensational discoveries that led him into a series of undocumented imaginings’ (Hodder 2015: 419).

Currently, most institutions, national governments, and even supra-national organisations require specific codes of research conduct for compliance. For example, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA 2023, Section 3.1) states that:

Research misconduct is traditionally defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism (the so-called FFP categorisation) in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results...Fabrication is making up data or results and recording them as if they were real.

No codes of research conduct were in place during the years that Mellaart worked at institutions such as the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara and University College London, so he did not officially transgress any regulations. To put Mellaart’s actions into context, it would be unthinkable in the current day that the director of an institute, when faced with claims from a staff member to have discovered unknown artefacts or even entire sites, would ignore the conflict of credibility that such a claim represented, or even permit their publication to occur (such as Seton Lloyd did with Mellaart’s proposal about the Dorak treasure), rather than disciplining or dismissing the employee. Another positive course of action that could have arisen if such codes and policies had then existed (and one which is rarely considered among the polarized opinions of Mellaart), is that he might have been sympathetically counselled and treated by health professionals.

Mellaart’s *modus operandi* is perhaps unparalleled in the annals of archaeology, but counterparts do exist in the social sciences. Diederik Stapel was a successful professor of social psychology, and the Dean of Tilburg University’s School of Social and Behavioural Sciences in the Netherlands. Popular, charismatic and influential, Stapel had a large corpus of genuine, influential scientific publications to his name. During his career, he simply began to fabricate evidence in scientific papers. As a result, Stapel was sacked from his job, had his doctoral degree revoked, and was prosecuted in court in 2013. A plea deal led to him serving 120 hours’ community service and forfeiting 18 months’ wages (Callaway 2011; Freckleton 2016: 75–80). When asked why he strayed into this kind of behaviour, Stapel explained: ‘I wanted too much, too fast’ (Kelland 2011).

Apart from the loss of prestige for an institution, economically this kind of behaviour constitutes a waste of valuable public funding, when practitioners utilise

salaried positions and research funds to fabricate data. Apologists for Mellaart have often employed understated expressions to mitigate the criticisms against him, such as that ‘he had gone too far at times’ (Milmo 2018), that he was ‘creative’ in order to ‘build a story’ (Alan Mellaart, in Ramirez 2020), or that ‘He might at times have been guilty of wishful thinking, but he was incapable of deliberate invention’ (Burney 2012: iii). These terms are euphemisms. The objective phraseology is that Mellaart fabricated scientific evidence. Commentators have sometimes countered that writing prehistory involves a certain amount of latitude and imagination. Admittedly, to engage in such speculations may not be as serious as a fraudulent medical scientist forwarding bogus cures for cancer (Oransky 2016). Yet, if it is countered that this is not a practical problem in reality, one can respond that ancient peoples, like modern societies, deserve to have their heritages recorded accurately. After all, the only thing at stake is the history of the world.

Conclusions

This study has contended that the archaeologist James Mellaart fabricated the existence of a groundstone artefact from the Cypriot Neolithic site of Khirokitia, supposedly found in the northern Levant. The claim for the find included neither a citation nor an illustration, nor any information about the finder or the whereabouts of the piece. The example forms an addition to many other cases of fabrication of archaeological evidence made up by Mellaart through his long career, beginning in the 1950s and continuing until his death in 2012. A genuine groundstone object from Khirokitia on the mainland would have constituted a significant discovery in its day, because of the obscurity surrounding the Levantine origins of the enigmatic Neolithic settlement. Nevertheless, Mellaart’s claim attracted no comment in the literature from specialist researchers on Cypriot archaeology, a consequence that can be attributed to a general, unstated scepticism among researchers about Mellaart’s unsubstantiated claims.

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