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During, B.S.; S. Gimatzidis and R. Jung

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# Chapter 5

## Crafting Values in Chalcolithic Cyprus and Anatolia



Bleda S. Düring

**Abstract** In the Chalcolithic of Cyprus and Anatolia, we can document the emergence of exchange networks that were centred on highly standardized craft products. These exchange systems, organized around figurative items crafted from stone, set the stage for the later development of long-distance exchange networks of ‘prestige goods’ made from metals and gemstones of often distant provenance. This earliest exchange of figurative stone objects, which occurred in egalitarian societies, remains poorly investigated. Why were such objects considered desirable in the first place? How can we understand the rise of the shared *regimes of value* that they objectify? In this paper, I will present some first ideas to understand this problem in relation to anthropological studies on value, and I will argue that the initial creation of value was rooted in shared cultural repertoires of craftsmanship.

### Introduction

When it comes to the study of economic systems of the past, archaeology faces an important challenge. Along with history and anthropology, it constitutes one of the few disciplines, that can provide data on societies whose economic systems were based on radically different parameters. Yet, recent scholarship abounds with studies suggesting that today’s economic principles were equally pertinent to the deep past. Scholars such as Graeber (2011), Scott (2017) and Scheidel (2017) have recently reconstructed Bronze Age Mesopotamian economies as being not dissimilar to contemporary economic systems: having class societies, private property and exploitation and enslavement of workers by elites and state institutions. Further, they pushed the emergence of private property and competition over scarce resources back into the Neolithic, a view that is also held by some colleagues in archaeology (Mattison et al., 2016). In doing so, they not only legitimize modern economic and social practices by suggesting that they are part and parcel of human history from

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B. S. Düring (✉)

Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden, The Netherlands

e-mail: [b.s.during@arch.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:b.s.during@arch.leidenuniv.nl)

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the very beginning, but they also ignore the work of scholars who have studied these ancient societies up close and argue that ancient states were extremely weak and incapable of modern forms of exploitation (Richardson, 2012), and that there is no evidence for persistent (intergenerational) social inequalities in many Neolithic and Chalcolithic (that is pre-urban) societies (Price & Bar-Yosef, 2010; Hodder, 2014; Kohler et al., 2018).

Thus, a reconsideration of the nature of ancient economies is a desideratum, and the topic of the symposium at the origins of this volume was well chosen. However, if one studies the archaeological discourse of ancient economies, there is remarkably little to work with. Up to the 1980s the polemical debates between *formalists* and *substantivists*, initiated by Karl Polanyi and Moses Finley, on the degree to which exchange in the ancient world was or was not socially embedded, continued to determine the discourse of eastern Mediterranean archaeology (Polanyi et al., 1957; Finley, 1999; Warburton, 2011). The subsequent, and related, approach of distinguishing between *inaliable objects* and *commodities*, deriving from the seminal work of Appadurai and Kopytoff (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; Appadurai, 2013), has been used mainly by Aegean archaeologists and has limited impact beyond (Voutsaki, 1997; van Wijngaarden, 1999). In recent years, however, with the exclusion of network analysis (Knappett et al., 2008; Ibáñez et al., 2016), relatively little work on ancient exchanges and economies has taken place.

Remarkably, discussions on ancient economies have focused almost exclusively on the nature of exchange systems, and more particularly, on how exchange was organized in relation to society. The *things* that were exchanged and *why* these things were exchanged has not been the focus of much research, and neither has their production and consumption received much attention, although this situation has started to change in recent years (Wilkinson, 2014; Massa & Palmisano, 2018). Thus, we have arrived in the paradoxical situation that the very objects that were central to exchange have often been regarded as epiphenomenal, and the study of ancient economies has been largely bypassed by the new materialism that has transformed so much of archaeology (Boivin, 2008). Here instead, I want to focus on what was being exchanged, what type of material and technology went into its production, and why these objects might have been considered worth pursuing. In other words: why were these objects considered valuable?

## Setting the Scene

In the middle of the third millennium BCE a remarkable development occurred in the eastern Mediterranean, which could in effect be labelled the first globalization episode in this region of the world (following earlier globalization episodes in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf) (Frank & Thompson, 2005). Between about 2600 and 2200 BCE, the eastern Mediterranean witnessed the emergence of remarkably far-flung exchange networks, in which relatively modest places such as Troy were obtaining exotic substances such as *lapis lazuli* or amber from distant regions

such as Afghanistan and the Baltic. Exquisitely crafted objects made from valuable materials were used by elites to distinguish themselves from commoners. Whether or not these elites were successful in their attempt to establish a class society at this time is a matter of debate. Although much work remains to be done to understand how economies worked in particular Early Bronze Age societies, *the prestige goods model* (Frankenstein & Rowlands, 1978; Kristiansen, 1987; but see Kienlin, 2017)—in which valuable objects, often made of exotic materials, were used by elites to underline their aspirations—has been more or less universally accepted (Bachhuber, 2009, 2015a).

Around the same time as the floruit of the EBA trade networks, ca. 2400 BCE, we can date the so-called ‘Philia’ horizon in Cyprus—which is often interpreted as an Anatolian colonization of groups bringing a distinctly Anatolian set of practices to the island, including ploughing, textile industries and rectangular buildings. Many scholars argue that these groups came to exploit Cypriote copper ores (Webb & Frankel, 2007, 2011; Bachhuber, 2015b). If we accept this hypothesis, this development further underlines the importance of trade, especially that in metals, in the mid-third millennium BCE.

The question how this interconnected, perhaps even globalized, world came into being has not been addressed much, as if the co-development of elites, crafted objects made from valuable materials and long-distance trade networks is self-evident and does not require further scrutiny. Some scholars have argued for a World Systems approach, in which these developments were triggered by a more developed Mesopotamian core (e.g. Bachhuber, 2015a: 150–151). This argument is problematic, however, as there is no substantial evidence that can be marshalled to demonstrate that a site like Troy was a Mesopotamian satellite of sorts. By contrast, there is much evidence that the emergence of trade networks, metallurgy and elites, are to be understood primarily as indigenous developments (see Stein, 2005 for a similar critique of Upper Mesopotamia as a World Systems dependency in the Uruk period). Of course, these local developments were connected to broader networks, and Anatolian societies did appropriate existing technologies and ideas from Mesopotamia (Rahmstorf, 2006), but this should not be construed as representing a relation of dominance.

Exchange networks have a long and dynamic history in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. Well known, for example, are Neolithic exchange networks through which obsidian ended up as far as 2000 km away from its source of origin. The reconstruction of these obsidian exchange networks and modelling the mechanisms of exchange, has been one of the great success stories of archaeology (Düring, 2014; Ibáñez et al., 2016). Remarkably, these obsidian exchange networks can be documented alongside entrenched cultural differences between exchanging groups, for example, between central Anatolia and upper Mesopotamia. At the obsidian processing site of Kaletepe we even find Levantine knapping technologies (naviform cores), which are completely absent otherwise in Asia Minor, suggesting a production specifically for export (Binder & Balkan-Atlı, 2001). Subsequently, in the Later Neolithic and Chalcolithic (sixth and fifth millennia BCE) we see much less evidence for exchange networks in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as an increasing fragmentation of cultural traditions in Asia Minor and Cyprus (but a very

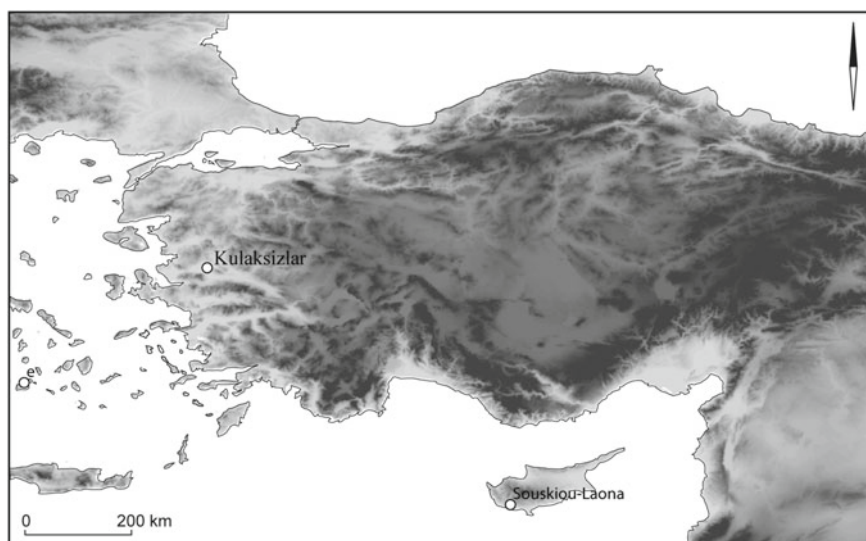
different trajectory occurs in Mesopotamia, with the rise of the Halaf and the Ubaid) (Düring, 2013).

It is only in the Chalcolithic that we see the re-emergence of exchange networks in the Eastern Mediterranean. Interestingly, we have evidence for what I think are the earliest traded craft objects: stone figurative objects that circulated in Chalcolithic Anatolia and Cyprus. In Anatolia, the earliest objects of this type are the so-called Kilia figurines, dated to the mid-fifth millennium BCE. On Cyprus, they take form of cruciform figurines, and date to the second half of the fourth millennium BCE. What these object types have in common is that they do not appear to be ‘useful’, and one wonders why these objects were exchanged by prehistoric people. Why and how were they of value to people?

## The Kilia Case

I will focus first on the site of Kulaksizlar located in western Turkey, where a marble working workshop has been investigated by Turan Takaoğlu (2002, 2005, 2016, 2017; also Dinç, 1996) (Fig. 5.1).

Two types of marble objects were produced at this workshop: Kilia figurines and pointed beakers with perforated handles. Kilia figurines depict a stylized humanoid, most likely female, with a long neck, round sloping shoulders, arms folded upwards in front of the chest and a lozenge-shaped lower body and legs, with incisions to



**Fig. 5.1** Map of the northern part of the eastern Mediterranean showing the two main sites discussed in this paper. Produced by the author

indicate the legs and the pubic triangle (Seeher, 1992). Whereas the bodies are flat, the necks are cylindrical and the heads are much broader than the body and have raised facial features. The beakers are conical in shape and have two vertical lugs with piercings near the rim (Fig. 5.2).

Both the pointed marble beakers and the Kilia figurines have been found over large areas. While there may have been other production centres besides Kulaksızlar, the distribution of such artefacts does tell us something about prehistoric exchange patterns and cultural preferences. Similar pointed marble beakers have been found on



**Fig. 5.2** Kilia figurine currently at the Getty Museum (object 88.AA.122). Reproduced with permission under CC-BY arrangement

the Aegean islands of Samos, Keos and Naxos; in the Troad, at Kumtepe and Beşik-Sivritepe; at Demircihöyük in the Eskişehir Region, at Çukuriçi Höyük in Aegean Turkey and at Varna in western Bulgaria (Takaoğlu, 2002: 78–79; 2004: 3; Schwall, 2018: 243).

By contrast, Kilia figurines were found across western Anatolia, but seemingly not in the Aegean: at sites in the Troad such as Beşik-Yassitepe, Hanaytepe and Troy; and in western Turkey, at Yortan, Alağaç, Selendi, Gavurtepe and Aphrodisias. Kilia figurines are mainly found at sites dating to the Middle Chalcolithic. The EBA Kilia figurines, for example at Troy, are probably heirlooms (Seeher, 1992: 163; Takaoğlu, 2002: 80).

A large number of blanks, waste by-products, manufacture rejects and stone working tools were found at Kulaksızlar. These constitute about 90% of the surface assemblage at the site, with the remainder consisting of more ordinary domestic artefacts (Takaoğlu, 2002: 72). The marble raw material for these stone vessels and other rocks used in the manufacturing process such as gabbro, basalt and sandstone were located within walking distance of Kulaksızlar. The stone vessels and figurines were produced with a combination of hammering, drilling and grinding techniques. Notably, the raw material used for the production of the pointed beakers and Kilia figurines is present in many localities within the exchange networks.

I want to draw attention to two key aspects of these objects. First, they are objects of skilled craft. The Kulaksızlar workshop was clearly pushing the limits of what is possible in marble. The remarkable thing about both the pointed beakers and the Kilia figurines is that they have features that are very difficult to produce in stone: the beakers have perforated vertical lugs, and the figurines have round protruding heads set on a narrow and fragile neck. It is likely, that the consumers of these objects appreciated this aspect of craftsmanship. This is plausible given a pre-existing tradition of stone artefacts in Asia Minor.

The production of stone bracelets has been documented at Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites, such as Orman Fidanlığı and Kanlıtaş (Baysal et al., 2015), where numerous blanks and broken fragments were found. Stone bracelets are found at many late prehistoric sites in Asia Minor, such as Köşk Höyük, İkiztepe and Mersin-Yumuktepe. The ubiquity of these artefacts meant that people were familiar with producing stone artefacts and knew that they could easily break during production and use. Undoubtedly, this knowledge fed into the appreciation of the pointed beakers and the Kilia figurines. On another level, there is a rich tradition of figurine production and consumption in Anatolian Prehistory, although none of the types can be regarded as immediate predecessors of the Kilia figurines.

The second remarkable thing about the Kilia figurines is how standardized they are. There are a few small details that differ from one object to the other, such as the shape of the backward protrusion of the head, but overall they can be classified as variations of a type (Lesure, 2017 talks of *logos*). This is a point I will return to later in the discussion.

## The Cruciform Case

In Cyprus, there is a tradition of cruciform stone figures that is completely unrelated in its development (no Kilia figurines were found on Cyprus and no cruciforms were found in Anatolia) (A Campo, 1994; Peltenburg & Webb, 2013; Lesure, 2017; Crooks, 2018). They are predominantly made of *picrolite*, a type of stone of green colour that is relatively soft and unique to Cyprus, occurring in seams in the Troodos Mountains. Picrolite blocks and pebbles range in size from a few centimetres to about 30 cm (maximum outlier). The smaller cruciforms are often pierced and show evidence of having been strung on a necklace or armlet, while the larger objects may have been stationary. Variations in ceramics and stone of cruciform figurines have also been found (Fig. 5.3).

Like the Philia figurines, the cruciforms are characterized by a high degree of stylistic standardization. All have outstretched arms, bent knees and parallel legs,



**Fig. 5.3** Small picrolite figurine from the site of Chlorakas-Palloures (667\_M1). Palloures excavation archives, photo by Ian J. Cohn



and tilted/protruding heads on elongated necks. Additional elements, such as facial features, occasional breasts or arms, which also form a figure, are optional extras adding a unique twist to a standard icon. It appears that, as for the *Philia* figurines, the intercomparability of these objects was of great importance.

As was the case for the *Philia*, there is a workshop site at *Souskiou-Laona* (Bolger, 2016; Peltenburg, 2019), but it is unlikely that the standardization of this type was the result of the centralization of production, and it is more likely that these objects were produced by multiple craftspeople at a variety of locations.

The cruciform figurines developed out of older types of figurines, made of other materials, such as stone and ceramics that existed in the Late Ceramic Neolithic on Cyprus (Peltenburg, 1982a). In the Early Chalcolithic, we see the earliest picrolite figurines that resemble cruciform. The type becomes common in the Middle Chalcolithic (3500–2900 BCE); hundreds are known from across the island. In the Late Chalcolithic they are still found, but it is not clear whether the production of this type continued. It would appear therefore that cruciforms developed out of a pre-existing figurative tradition in prehistoric Cyprus.

If we focus specifically on the use of picrolite as a raw material, we can trace its use back to the Late Aceramic Neolithic. There are various little ornaments and hooks dating to this period that were produced from this material (Peltenburg, 1991). The same types were made in the Ceramic Neolithic. It is plausible, that they were made of pebbles found in the stream beds of the Kouris and Karyotis rivers. Indeed, Picrolite pebbles have been found at a number of Neolithic sites. These pebbles are relatively small, and this is reflected in the limited size of these artefacts.

In the Chalcolithic, however, larger objects started to be produced from picrolite, and it is likely that picrolite was in part mined from its sources, where it occurs in veins, or plates in the rock. Peltenburg (1982b, 1991) has even suggested that this might have led to the first exploitation of copper. Interestingly, the cortex of the veins of picrolite is frequently visible in the cruciform figurines, as for example on the famous figurine from Yiali, where the cortex is visible on the knees. Indeed, the very shape of the cruciform, with its bent knees, outstretched arms and tilted head, is inherently problematic in a material that occurs in small sizes and plate-like veins. I think this was the point. Like in the *Philia* figurines, the Chalcolithic figurine makers were deliberately pushing the edge of what was possible in this particular material, and the products would have been appreciated as such because people knew what sizes and forms picrolite occurred in.

## A Matter of Value

How then did these Chalcolithic trade networks start, and when and how did objects acquired through trade start to function as a means for social distinction? In my opinion, this leads to the question why these objects were considered valuable, which is worth pursuing.

What is value? In scholarship it is often defined as consumer value (what one is willing to exchange or pay for a product) or production value (how much labour went into the production of an object). While these two types of value can help to establish a relative exchange value, neither does actually do much to explain the *why* question. Why is an object desirable? Or, to use the terminology of Appadurai how does it fit into a culturally specific *regime of value*? The concept of *regimes of value* foregrounds how objects circulate in specific cultural horizons (Appadurai, 1986: 4; 2013: 60).<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have found the *regimes of value* concept useful to discuss how goods are meaningful in specific cultural settings (Myers, 2001; Flad, 2012; Papadopoulos & Urton, 2012: 17). Archaeologically, the *regimes of value* concept has not been explored much, but I believe it has much potential.

I would like to illustrate why I find the concept of *regimes of value* useful by considering an example from fieldwork in Turkey I executed about a decade ago, at the site of Barcın Höyük. At this excavation, we employed a group of Kurdish migrant workers hailing from southeastern Turkey, working as day labourers in agriculture and construction. They were magnificent workers, the best I ever encountered. They had curious collective habits I could not understand at the time. All the senior workers had packages of Marlboro cigarettes, instead of the much cheaper Turkish alternatives. Why, did these men, who earned very modest incomes, insist on smoking expensive cigarettes? (actually they seldom smoked them, but they did produce them at key moments). Then, a year later, these men had completely abandoned smoking. Instead, they all brandished fancy mobile phones (not smartphones, as these did not yet exist). Again, they rarely used these phones but they displayed them as often as they could.

Obviously, for these workmen the mobile phones substituted the purpose previously taken by the Marlboro cigarettes. Both clearly were important as markers of social identity: a serious man marks his achievement by an act of conspicuous consumption of an expensive product. The Marlboro cigarettes and phones were of key importance in the articulation of being a man, and it was particularly important to communicate ownership of these goods to peers.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue that this type of ‘social value’ has two characteristics. First, it builds on people’s previous knowledge and experience. Second, standardization of objects facilitates the communication of values (this is why the workmen insisted specifically on Marlboro).

If we now compare this example to the Kilia and cruciform cases, we can note these two aspects. In the Philia and Cruciform exchange networks, we see that craftsmanship is important in that the limits of what was possible in stone production were deliberately pushed. In both cases, these objects reference older craft traditions and

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<sup>1</sup>Graeber is very critical of this concept, arguing that the *regimes of value* as used by Appadurai is concerned mainly with power, or how elites manipulate the flow of goods to serve their own interests, and that there is little cultural content in the concept (Graeber, 2001: 32–33; also van Binsbergen & Geschiere, 2005: 19), although Graeber does not provide any such cultural content himself in his *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2011).

<sup>2</sup>These are not what economist call ‘positional goods’ (e.g. Brighouse & Swift, 2006), as the point was to signal membership of a collective rather than to communicate and individual status.

iconographic repertoires through which consumers could connect to these objects and appreciate their craftsmanship. Thus, these objects clearly linked to culturally specific knowledge of materials and craft technologies and, to a more limited degree, iconographic repertoires.

Further, in both the Philia and Cruciform exchange networks stylistic standardization was apparently of key significance. Thus, it was important not simply to have a well-crafted stone object that referenced previous cultural repertoires, but that object had to be a variation of a type, an iconic object. Thus, these objects most likely served to signal membership of a collective rather than individual status.

Thus, I argue that Chalcolithic regimes of value revolved around: first, referencing older categories of material culture; second, referencing widespread craft traditions; and third, required a substantial degree of standardization. Of course, we will never know the meaning that Philia and cruciform figurines had in Chalcolithic Asia Minor and Cyprus, even if it is highly likely that, like the Marlboro cigarettes and mobile phones of my dig workers, they would be important in the constitution and negotiation of social identities.

What is clear is that these are among the earliest craft objects exchanged in Asia Minor and Cyprus. Once the idea of exchanging craft products had caught on, and probably the use of these craft products for creating social distinctions, a new world opened up. In the wake of the Philia and cruciform exchange networks we see a marked increase in connectivity, reflected in the increased evidence for contact in ceramics, trade in craft products (such as imported faience beads and spurred annular pendants in Cyprus) (Peltenburg, 2018), and the emergence of metallurgy and the trade in metals and metal artefacts, as exemplified in a copper axe recently found on Cyprus to be dated around 2600 BCE (Düring et al., 2018). Arguably, this process led towards the first globalization episode of the eastern Mediterranean which I have already introduced and which, as I am convinced, was rooted in the earlier development of exchange networks of crafted objects in the Chalcolithic.

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