



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

The Point of Picrolite: Appreciating the Materiality of Cypriot Chalcolithic Cruciforms

DE KONING E. ^{1,2}*

¹ University of Graz, Graz, Austria

² University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Studies of the emblematic picrolite cruciform figurines of Chalcolithic Cyprus tend to focus on their iconography and symbolism as birth figures, whereas studies of picrolite limit themselves to technology and distribution networks without considering the final product. The impact of the choice for picrolite on the functioning of the figurines within society, however, remains underexplored. This contribution aims to unite both strands of thinking. Working from a perspective of materiality and material affordances and using the concept of the life-history, it attempts to trace the influence of the material picrolite on several pivotal points in the figurine's life. This ranges from the exchange networks implicated in the acquisition of the raw material to the opportunities and limits its softness imposes on the carver, and includes also the scratches and discoloration the piece accumulates as a physical expression of its deep bond to its owner, and the risk of breakage and the opportunity for rework this presents. Through this survey, it will become apparent that the choice to make these figurines in picrolite is not only deeply intertwined with their iconography, but fundamentally shapes the interactions between figurine and person, thus becoming central to the figurine's functioning within Chalcolithic society.

Keywords

Cyprus, Chalcolithic, Cruciform figurines, Picrolite, Material affordance

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