



Neolithic Chirokitia

CYPRUS TOURISM ORGANISATION

The Chirokitia Neolithic settlement is located near the village of Chirokitia in the Larnaca district and has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list since 1998. The settlement dates from the Neolithic period (7500–5200 BC) and is the best-preserved of all such settlements not only in Cyprus, but also in the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean. With its successive phases, it spans the Neolithic period history in Cyprus and is a source of valuable information regarding the spread of the Neolithic civilization in the area.

Introduction

To understand the criteria applied by the ancient inhabitants of the island when selecting a place to settle, what tools to use, what to include in their diet and how to live their daily life, we need to travel back in time.

Already in the Miocene epoch, the island of Cyprus became separated from the continent on which man made an early appearance and where, sometime in the 10th or 9th millennia, one can trace the transition from the societies of hunters-gatherers to the first agro-pastoral civilizations, the establishment of the first villages, the domestication of animals, the cultivation of plants and the attainment of new technical skills. Man appears on the island during the 10th millennium, as attested by the Akrotiri-Aetokremmos site and the archaeological finds at the “Roudia” locality at the Troodos foothills. Recently discovered evidence confirms human presence on Cyprus during the 9th millennium as well, at the Ayia Varvara-Asprokremmos and Ayios Tychonas-Klimonas localities, for instance. Modifications to radiocarbon data resulting from the application of dendrochronology, i.e. tree-ring dating, place the earliest Neolithic villages in Cyprus sometime between 8400 BC and 8300 BC, approximately. During that period, vibrant village communities appear on the island with people engaging in agriculture, animal husbandry, and exploitation of domesticated animal and plant species, although the wild ancestors of those species were not known on the island.

This civilization is called Cypro-Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Pre-pottery denotes that the techniques of pottery production were not yet known. That aceramic civilization is represented by Chirokitia and another twenty or so settlements spread across the island: from the Apostolos Andreas-Kastros cape at the

northeastern extremity, to the Choletria-Ortos, on the southwestern side, and from Troulli and Petra tou Limniti, in the north, to Kalavastos-Tenta and Pareklisia-Shillourocambos, in the south, without forgetting the centre of the island with the settlements at the Idalion-Agridi locality and at Kataliondas-Kourvellos, to name but sites which have been archaeologically researched.

Origin of the Name Chirokitia

According to the Great Encyclopedia of Cyprus, the prevailing opinion is that “Chirokitia” is a compound name consisting of the words “Khiros” (meaning ‘pig’) and “Kiti” (meaning ‘pen’), thus denoting a place where pigs were raised. Others suggest that the place may originally have been called “Siditokitida” (an area rich in iron) or that the origin of the name may be the word “khirogitia” (*chiro-* deriving from *cheir* = hand + *gitia* = spell, divination), which implies the practice of palmistry. Another view is that the original name may have been “Ierokitida” (a sacred place). There are those –more imaginative– that claim the name was a combination of the words “gyros” (= round) and “oikia” (= house), because the prehistoric dwellings discovered there were round. Tradition also has it that the name came from “Khere Kitia”, a greeting addressed by the legendary and mysterious “rigena”, i.e. queen, of Cyprus to some lady from Kition, the ancient Larnaca. Yet another –highly unlikely– view is that the name may have derived from the fruit of the plant “anona cherimola”, cultivated in Cyprus under the simpler name “cheromolia”. Whatever the case may be, the village is marked as *Cherochetica* and *Chierochitia* on old maps.

Archaeological Research

The site was discovered in 1934 by archaeologist Porfyrios Dikaios who, on behalf of the Department of Antiquities, conducted excavations during a ten-year period, from 1936 to 1946, whereas the exploration was resumed in 1977 by the French Archaeological Mission sponsored by the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique – National Centre for Scientific Research) and the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, under the direction of Alain Le Brun. The village is marked by the extensive presence of archaeological evidence dating from the dawn of history in Cyprus. The

excavated ancient settlement, which dates back to the 7th millennium BC, lies on a hillside to the east of the modern day village of Chirokitia. Its discovery in 1934 placed Chirokitia on the international map, thanks to the important findings and information about the Neolithic era of prehistoric Cyprus and of the wider area.

Location

The picturesque village of Chirokitia is located in a hilly part of the Larnaca district, around 33 kilometers from the city of Larnaca. It connects with the villages of Ano and Kato Lefkara on the north, with Limassol and Nicosia on the southeast through the motorway, and with the village of Vavla on the northwest.

Chirokitia is at an average altitude of 220 metres and its landscape is fragmented by the Agios Minas River. The area receives an average annual rainfall of approx. 450 millimetres and its climate favours the growth of citrus trees, olives, carobs, cereals, forage plants, vegetables and a few fruit trees.

The Chirokitia water treatment plant lies to the northeast of the village and is fed with water from the Lefkara and Dipotamos dams. Once distilled, the water is channelled to the areas of Nicosia, Larnaca and Famagusta through a network of pipes.

The settlement is built on the steep side of a hill on the western bank of the Maroni River, about 6 km from the coast. A 185 m long narrow stone structure crosses the settlement from north to south. When he first discovered it, Dikaios considered this structure as a “main road”. It was subsequently established, however, that it was part of the perimeter wall which has been traced to a length of 260 metres. It is one of the most impressive early samples of permanent settlement on the island. Its construction assumes a collective effort, which in turn assumes a complex social organization. When the settlement spread beyond its original boundaries, a new stone wall was built which is traced to a length of more than 100 metres, of which 60 have come to light.

Climate and Environment

Scientific findings testify that around 6200 BC the climate in Europe and the Near East underwent a major change. Archaeological and hydro-geomorphological research in Chirokitia has proven that the soil was violently eroded as a result of a series of several torrential flows of water. Subsequent to that period, climatic conditions seemed to stabilize in a mild Mediterranean pattern similar to today's climate. Anthracological studies reveal a similar pattern. Trees like olives and figs, and leguminous plants thrived during the early phase of the settlement, whereas in later phases specific trees became less common and the presence of species like pines gradually became more pronounced.

Dwellings

People in Chirokitia lived in circular houses with exterior diameters varying from 2.3 m to 11 m, while interior diameters were between 1.4 m and 7.5 m. Only the lower part of the walls, made of stone, survived. The upper part was made with adobe, rammed clay, mud-bricks and stone. The roofs were flat, constructed with rafters, branches, straw and mud. At the centre of the house there was a hearth. Excavations have shown that each house consisted of several circular units built around a small courtyard where there was a mill for the grinding of grains. Most Neolithic houses had a loft, probably used as a storage area. Doors were narrow and it seems that houses were built in such a way so as to protect the interior spaces from flooding by means of high thresholds. The interior faces of walls may have been decorated with murals, but the state of very poor repair does not allow researchers to conclude whether the decorative drawings were geometric designs or depictive representations.

Initially it was believed that the houses had corbelled roofs, but the data recovered by the French Archaeological Mission have shown that the roofs were flat and horizontal. Such a roof, which had collapsed during a fire and was found on the floor of a small house, was restored to its original state. Mud-bricks bear clear impressions of branches and reeds supported by horizontal rafters and covered with a thin coat of mud. Another significant

discovery of the French Mission in the northwestern extremity of the excavated area is the presence of house walls with two or three skins of which the inner is adobe with mud plaster, whereas the outer skins are entirely of stone. This new architectural type, which chronologically dates from the early 7th millennium, brings to mind the early Palestinian houses of the Natufian Neolithic period, dating from the 9th and 8th millennia, which proves some direct or indirect cultural relationship.

The swift increase in the number of visitors during the 1980s and the adverse impact of such increase on ancient monuments and archaeological sites posed the urgent need to protect Cypriot antiquities. In an effort to safeguard the island's archaeological wealth and simultaneously to upgrade the level of services offered to visitors, the Department of Antiquities drew up general plans for the conservation and management of archaeological sites. Thus, in 1994 the Department implemented a plan for the conservation and promotion of the Chirokitia site.

To help visitors better understand the site, the Department of Antiquities in collaboration with the French Archaeological Mission proceeded with the reconstruction of five circular buildings and of part of the enclosure with its entry point. Only traditional materials and construction methods were used, whereas all raw materials came from the surrounding area and from Maroni River, which flows by the site. Replicas of Neolithic objects were placed inside the houses.

People and their Beliefs

Burial customs in the Chirokitia settlement largely reveal the religiousness of its inhabitants, stemming from their respect for the dead and from the relevant cult. Graves contained single burials and the dead were usually entombed in a contracted position in small pits under the floors of the round houses. The complex burial ritual was deduced through the excavation of a grave which allowed archaeologists to reconstruct some of the steps involved in the inhumation of an adult woman.

Burial gifts were placed in some graves, depending on the sex of the deceased. In several cases the dead were accompanied by everyday objects such as whole or broken stone vessels and necklaces made with sea shells or stone beads. Another burial custom observed in some cases was the placement of a large stone on the body. It is assumed that people believed that the stone would prevent the dead from coming back to life. Another funerary object is a small woman's head of unfired clay with naturalistic features and hair represented with vertical wavy lines. That figurine is unique and the earliest sample of Cypriot plastic art.

Murals found on site are scant and in very bad repair, to the point of being unintelligible. A clearer mural found in Kalavassos-Tenta shows the remains of a composition. At least two human figures are depicted, one with raised hands in a posture seen in the case of a figure ornamenting a stone cup found in Chirokitia which is strongly reminiscent of certain figures from Catal Hüyük in Anatolia. This leads to the safe conclusion that the human figure was part of the depictive representation themes.

The human figure is also the prevailing theme in the case of figurines, which shows some similarity with Near East cultures. With the exception of the clay head displayed in the Museum of Cyprus in Nicosia, all Chirokitia figurines are of stone. Some figures are carved on small pebbles with slanted incisions which are sometimes complemented with a vertical incision to denote the legs, whereas other figurines are more abstract. There have been cases with more detailed depictions. Such examples can be found in Room 1 of the Nicosia Museum, but also in the Larnaca District Archaeological Museum (also Room 1, on the right).

The absence of the female figure from the aceramic Neolithic Cypriot iconography is a remarkable element, especially when one considers that in the Near East already in the 9th millennium BC the female figure prevails in the numerous depictions of the human body.

More than 240 burials have come to light in the excavated part of the settlement. Most burials belong to infants and children, which suggests a high mortality rate in that age bracket. Scientific investigation of skeletons and

skulls leads to the conclusion that the average life expectancy in Chirokitia was 35 years for men and 33 years for women. The special craniological and anthropological studies conducted showed that most Chirokitia inhabitants had brachycephalic heads. This phenomenon in conjunction with the presence of obsidian, cornelian, haematite and other precious stones among the portable finds has been the subject of many debates with regard to the origin of the first inhabitants of the island and the development of the Cypriot Aceramic Neolithic civilization. Theories stemming from the presence of these stones (which are not found in the geological stratification of the island, but in the central region of southwest Asia Minor – Anatolia, in Palestine and in the island of Delos) suggest that the first inhabitants of Cyprus came mainly from Palestine, whereas some ethnic groups may have come from Asia Minor, bringing these stones with them. In the Museum of Cyprus there are obsidian tools, which may come from Asia Minor or Delos. However, these theories too are questionable since according to other views, these materials in Aceramic Chirokitia may be the result of trade relationships between Cyprus and neighbouring countries. It has been suggested that the Aceramic Neolithic civilization of Chirokitia and of Cyprus in general developed from some earlier civilization. This last suggestion seems to be corroborated by the differences in the basic features and elements of the corresponding cultures of Cyprus, on the one hand, and of the neighbouring countries in Asia Minor-Anatolia and Palestine, on the other hand, in the 7th millennium. The round houses in Chirokitia of that period bear closer resemblance to the 9th and 8th millennium Natufian houses in Palestine, but they are totally dissimilar to the 7th millennium houses in Jericho or Eynan, which were quadrilateral and had floors covered with glossy red plaster. If indeed the first inhabitants of Cyprus had been colonists from Palestine, they should have built their first houses in accordance with their own standards and not the Natufian ones, which were much older. We cannot rule out the possibility that future excavations in prehistoric Cypriot sites could reveal a Proto-Neolithic period coinciding chronologically and culturally with the Natufian period in Palestine. Such new elements could shed light on the hitherto obscure identity of the first inhabitants of the island.

Tools and Utensils

The inhabitants of Chirokitia made tools from flint, limestone, diabase and animal bones (usually, fallow deer metatarsals). The tools were used to find and process food and to manufacture various objects. Among the tools found there are sickles for cereals and reeds, woodworking tools, and hide shaving blades. Most bone tools, including perforators, were used in manufacturing various objects. Other tools included hand mills, hammers and a few beaters.

The human figure prevails in the figurines found in the Neolithic settlement of Chirokitia. All figurines, with the exception of the clay head, were carved in stone.

The islanders worked diabase, a hard stone, to manufacture stone tools – a distinctive feature of the Cypriot aceramic period (7500–5200 BC). They must undoubtedly have had pots made from perishable materials as well (wood, reeds and leather), but no traces have survived. On the contrary, there are stone vessels of various shapes made from slabs or conglomerate or hard limestone. Fine cups and bowls were also made from soft limestone.

For the manufacture of jewels they used picrolite, a greenish soft stone abounding in rounded pebble form on the bed of Kouris River, to the west of Limassol. A crypt was found in Chirokitia containing about twenty unfinished pebbles, an indication, according to archaeologists, that there was a picrolite supply network across the island since picrolite objects were also found in the small fishing village of the Ayios Andreas-Kastros cape, at the eastern extremity of Cyprus. Jewels made from dentalia (sea shells), cornelian, haematite, andesite and other precious stones are indicative of fine taste and confirm the aesthetic culture of the inhabitants manifested in the decoration of stone vessels as well.

Occupations and Way of Living

The inhabitants' dietary needs were mostly met by livestock breeding, hunting, agriculture and collecting wild nuts. Nevertheless, it seems that people used sophisticated fishing methods, carefully-woven nets or lines with sturdy hooks. This is deduced from the kinds and sizes of fish they

caught, such as bream, grouper, and mullet. Agriculture was mainly centered on cereals, lentils and legumes. Chirokitia inhabitants enriched their diet with nuts and fruits collected from wild trees such as pistachio nuts, figs, olives and prunes.

In areas outside the village they bred sheep, goats and pigs. They also hunted deer, but we do not know the methods they applied. No arrow heads were found, hence it is surmised that their weapons were elemental, for instance traps and wooden spears with fire-hardened tips. The French Mission discovered various charred grains (wheat, einkorn, and barley) and legumes, an element which proves that in addition to meat and bread, the diet of Chirokitia inhabitants included beans, peas, chick peas and olives, which they cultivated in the neighbouring valley.

An abrupt break is detected in the Aceramic Neolithic civilization of Chirokitia around the middle of the 6th millennium. For reasons unknown, the settlement was abandoned for almost 1,000 years and was inhabited again during the 5th millennium BC.

In parallel with Chirokitia, the Cypriot Aceramic Neolithic civilization was also developed in Kalavassos-Tenta, in the Troulli locality of the district of Kyrenia, in Petra tou Limniti and in the Kastros locality of the Karpas peninsula, close to the Apostle Andreas monastery. However, the Aceramic Neolithic civilization lacuna detected in Chirokitia seems to be a general phenomenon, given that it was detected in those settlements as well.

5000 BC, when the Chirokitia settlement was inhabited again, marks the beginning of the second phase of the Cypriot Neolithic civilization, known as Neolithic II or Ceramic Neolithic, which continued until 3900 BC. This new cultural phase is represented mainly by the Sotira settlement. In addition to Chirokitia, the phase is detected in the upper layers of settlements in the Vryssi locality of Agios Epiktitos in the district of Kyrenia, in the Drakos locality in Philia, and in Kalavassos A.

Although there is a marked change and development in domestic architecture during the Ceramic Neolithic period, no architectural traces survive in

Chirokitia. Stone vessels are largely replaced by red-varnished pottery, especially pottery with “combed” decoration discovered in bigger volumes in Sotira. Milk bowls with semi-circular spouts were the most representative samples of that technique. Simple, undecorated stone vessels from andesite continue to be manufactured, but their style maintains its aceramic features. There are no significant changes with regard to burial customs, tool manufacture, agriculture and animal husbandry, whereas the general economic and cultural levels of the Chirokitia inhabitants are almost the same with the corresponding levels of the people who had abandoned the settlement approximately 1,000 years earlier.

There are no surviving architectural traces of the new settlement. Elements at the disposal of archaeologists are not sufficient to explain this sudden abandonment. Pollen analyses do not reveal climatic changes during that period which might have disrupted the ecological balance of the island causing a dramatic fall in critical resources for the sustenance of people. There are no traces of natural disasters, epidemics or devastation caused by enemy action.

The vagueness that marks the end of the Aceramic Neolithic phase is also characteristic of its beginning. Indeed, no signs have been found in Cyprus itself to indicate the emergence of a civilization so organized and, in many respects, so different from other known civilizations of Asia Minor. Nonetheless, a series of indications seem to support the hypothesis that there was communication between Cyprus and the mainland, and a part of the island’s population may have been the result of colonization, which assumes traversing a sea corridor. We know that already in the early Paleolithic period, Eastern Mediterranean peoples had mastered the art of navigation. A first indication is the presence in Cypriot settlements of raw materials such as cornelian and obsidian which were unknown on the island, hence imported. A second indication is the appearance of new animal species on the island: fallow deer, sheep, goats, pigs, but also cats, dogs and foxes replace pygmy hippopotami and dwarf elephants native to Cyprus in the Pleistocene epoch. Deer and pigs certainly possess the theoretical capacity to swim across the

sea corridor separating the island from the continent, but such a capacity can hardly be attributed to sheep and goats, much less to cats.

Furthermore, cereals and legumes found in Cypriot archaeological sites allow us to assume these species were imported into the island, since even if they existed earlier in the wild, only cultivated versions were found in the Neolithic villages. In other words, even if colonists did not import those cultivated plants, surely they must have brought along the knowledge and the processes required for their cultivation. Lastly, the art of frescoes and the stone working and weaving techniques place Cyprus within a general cultural tradition.

All these indications may point to a probable colonization of the island; however they are not sufficient to trace the origins of those colonists with any degree of certainty. Thus, if we assume that the natural habitat of *Dama mesopotamica*, a subspecies to which the Cypriot fallow deer belongs on account of its morphology, had not undergone significant modifications over time, then the animal introduced into Cyprus must be of eastern origin. If we accept that the beginning of the aceramic phase in Cyprus dates from the 9th millennium BC, placing the island within a general tradition leads us to interpret the settlement in this new area along the lines we interpret settlements on the temperate coastal zone of the continent, the barren banks of the Euphrates, the inland oases in Syria and Jordan, and in the Sinai, i.e. as one of the episodes in the diaspora of the Neolithic man, one of the incidents of the phenomenon which has been termed "Neolithic exodus".

Let us now see what lies along the visitor's path in the archaeological site. The first spot we come to is the warden's office, where visitors can obtain some literature and the site guide which facilitates orientation.

About 100 metres farther up, we see the identical circular structures, a section of the village enclosure and an entry gate, exactly as they were revealed during excavation, on the top of the hill. The Maroni River flows nearby.

Walking up the ramp, we climb the hill side and enter the site. It has been divided into four sectors, which do not correspond to the Neolithic period data.

In sector A, we see on our right the remains of the perimeter wall, which continues up to the hilltop. We also see the bases of the circular structures. A central large building (IA) stands out, with an outer diameter of 8 m and the two massive stone pillars which once supported the loft. It should be noted that four buildings seem to have been constructed on top of one another, a fact that shows that habitation was uninterrupted. In some of them we can still see the hearth, where food was obviously cooked.

Continuing uphill, we walk along sector B and come to the ruins of the first building (XX), which is similar to the previous one: massive, with stone pillars as well. In addition, it contains two mills on a semicircular bench. Building XXIX features a circular paved threshing floor, indicative of the inhabitants' occupations.

Climbing farther up, we enter sector C, where the first buildings we come across do not display any particular features. The Department of Antiquities has done some work to protect the round walls of the structures. However, building XLV featured three concentric walls and its two pillars were positioned differently. Seven adult burials were also found in that building. In one of the graves, the dead man held ten bone tools in his right hand. The uninterrupted use of the buildings is again confirmed in building XLVII, which features eight consecutive floor layers.

Beyond building XXIII starts sector D, where we can see the extension to the perimeter wall. The most impressive ruins in this zone are the remains of one of the settlement's access points, a complex stairway with three flights incorporated within a stone structure, a system unique not only in Cyprus but in the Near East as well. A reconstruction of the access point can be seen at the entrance to the site. Building "S" is also noteworthy, as it seems to have been uninterruptedly inhabited over a prolonged period and it features some barely visible remains of murals.

Platforms have been constructed at various vantage points within the settlement, facilitating visitors wishing to take photographs.

After the visit to the archaeological site, if you like hiking you may wish to follow the nature trail leading to the village of Chirokitia. The starting point is located immediately after the parking area, across from the exit of the Tochni village and the churches of Agios Fanourios and Agios Nektarios.

This is a category 2 trail, i.e. of medium degree of difficulty, featuring sudden changes in gradient (uphill and/or downhill), and/or course along narrow or rough terrain. The first 800 meters are paved with asphalt, whereas the last 800 metres are over a rough, narrow and steep dirt road. The overall trail length is 2 km.

Nature Trail

The 2 km long nature trail starts at the village central square. Walking through Chirokitia one can admire the picturesque community with the flagstone roads and the traditional houses. Two of those houses straddle the road, forming a small passage.

Walking downhill, you see the Agios Minas River to your left, with its wild vegetation. The rocky landscape is uniquely beautiful. Halfway along the trail there is a cave where according to tradition villagers used to take refuge fleeing pirate attacks and natural disasters. Above the cave there are benches where hikers can rest their heels before tackling the mountain ridge.

Reaching the ridge, you can see the Neolithic settlement, the Limassol-Nicosia motorway, and in the background, the sea of Zygi. The trail terminates at the Chirokitia archaeological site, where you can admire the magnificence and the art of our ancestors. There has been no human intervention at any point along the trail, the vegetation is totally natural. People say that if one can cover the trail from start to finish without feeling any tiredness due to the changes in gradient, then one has absolutely no health problems.

The village of Chirokitia offers great opportunities for carefree holidays, in the company of Tradition and Nature. It has been included in the Agrotourism programme, implemented by the Cypriot Tourism Organization in 1992. Anyone wishing to convert existing houses into tourist lodgings, traditional taverns, tourist shops and cultural centres may participate in the programme.

All these activities must integrate with the community's traditional environment. Chirokitia meets this requirement in all respects.

The village enjoyed an important status in the Middle Age. Again according to the Great Encyclopedia of Cyprus, Frankish authorities had granted it to the Order of the Knights Templar, and subsequently to the Order of the Knights of St. John, who maintained Chirokitia as a second Commandery. The Tower, i.e. the main building of the Chirokitia fief, is very close to the site of the church of Panagia tou Kampou. It was destroyed by the Mamelukes after their 1426 victory and subsequently became known as Seraen. Only scant traces of that Tower have survived.

The population of the village has undergone great fluctuations. In 1881, it had 337 inhabitants, whereas in 1891 they increased to 384. By 1901, they had further increased by a mere 11 individuals to 395. In 1960, they reached 406, and in 1976 their number reduced to 383. In 1982 they were even fewer, 369, and in 2001 they increased to 650. The population of the village seasonally includes the archaeologists and archaeology students working from time to time at the excavations of the Neolithic settlement. Two factors have contributed to the increase of the population over the recent past: Chirokitia's position on the motorway connecting the island's three big cities, Nicosia, Limassol, and Larnaca, and better job opportunities due to the operation of the water treatment plant and of the Vassiliko Cement Works.

The image of the village is enhanced by marked historical elements dating back to the distant past of Cyprus. In addition, it has a number of significant churches and chapels:

Agios Iakovos o Persis (St. James the Persian)

The church was built at the beginning of the 19th century, in the village square. It is made of stone, with its north wall measuring 2 m in thickness. It is a single aisled gothic style church with a tiled roof. The icon of the Saint is the work of Cretan painter John Cornaro. The Saint is depicted frontally, from the thighs up, flanked by two angels. The lower part of the icon depicts his martyrdom. The Great Martyr lived in the Persian city of Vithlava, in the land

of Elouzeesion, in late 4th – early 5th centuries (395–421 AD). He was a proud and honourable man, and greatly loved by Isdigerdis, King of the Persians. So strong was the bond of friendship, that it led St. James to deny Christ and accept the King's love and friendship. His mother and his wife, both devout women, persuaded him to revert to the Christian faith. The King considered this change of heart as a breach of loyalty and ordered that the Saint be put to death by cutting up. St. James's memory is honoured on 27 November.

Agia Paraskevi

The church of the Great Martyr Agia Paraskevi is located to the northwest of the village, off the Nicosia-Limassol motorway. It was built of stone in mid-19th century and was restored around 1997. Agia Paraskevi's memory is honoured on 26 July.

Chapel of Agios Georgios Tropaeoforos (St. George the Trophy-Bearer)

The chapel is situated to the west of Panagia tou Kampou, at a distance of 4 km from the village. It is stone-built, with a wooden ridge roof. The interior south wall is adorned with a large fresco depicting the Saint on horseback, slaying a dragon with his lance. In the chapel courtyard there is a large round stone with a hole in the middle. Many Christians who experience health problems pass through the hole believing that St. George will intercede with God on their behalf and their problem will be overcome. The Saint's memory is honoured on 23 April and on 3 November.

Panagia tou Kampou

The church of Panagia tou Kampou is situated in the western part of the village. Medieval records refer to it as Nostra Dame des Campos, i.e. our Lady of the Plain as it is associated with the plain of Chirokitia, a strategic area for the defence of the island in medieval times which in 1269 had been granted to the Knights of St. John by King Hugo III. Subsequently the area passed under the ownership of the Templars, who are credited with the construction of the fortified tower located to the northeast of the church. The

tower, the church and the land reverted to the jurisdiction of the Knights of St. John in 1313.

In its main phase, the church is of the domed inscribed-cross type. It has an overall length of 13.2 m, of which 4.2 m are taken up by the nave, a later addition to the west side. The initial length was approximately 9 m, without the 2.8 m projecting semicircular apse. The width was 6 m.

The outer perimeter of the apse preserves two even older consecutive phases of polygonal apses which belong to earlier architectural and structural phases. The oldest belongs to a three aisled church with inscribed lateral apses, most probably dating from the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th century. The precise architectural type has not yet been defined. It had outbuildings, both on the north and the south sides, of which the south-side one seemed to be of a funerary character. During the Arab raids (after mid 7th century), the church was limited to the central nave of the initial phase, exploiting the existing apse, with minor modifications. The façades of the church were dressed with large limestone slabs, which created the impression of a strong structure, but they were just a siding. The small single aisled and possibly domed church collapsed, probably in mid-8th century, as a result of a powerful earthquake and the site was abandoned for some time. Using the material lying around, it was reconstructed as a domed inscribed-cross at the end of the 10th century, in all likelihood shortly after the end of the Arab raids. Towards the end of the 15th century, or the beginning of the 16th, the church was expanded to the west and received new painted ornamentation, which preserves the dates 1509 and 1514. A very characteristic part of that phase is the western pointed arch gate with a finial in the form of a human face surrounded by vine leaves, a design which has been identified with the Frankish "*tête de feuilles*" (*foliate head* or *Green Man*).

The perimeter of the church was used for burials, some of which disturbed the earlier strata of the Byzantine period, whereas to the west a courtyard was formed with cloisters on the north and east sides. The foundations of an oil press were uncovered at the northwestern extremity of the compound.

Two layers of murals are preserved in the church. The first layer murals are not visible, whereas the second layer ones belong to different periods and are the works of different painters. These murals as well as those adorning the arches of the eastern section display western influence.

On the arch there is a mural depicting *Platytera* (i.e. the Theotokos – “More spacious than the heavens”, since she contained the Creator of the Universe in her womb) flanked by the Archangels, and below it the Communion of the Apostles. Four hierarchs and the head of a saint are depicted on the upper part of the semicircular wall of the arch. According to the priest of the church, all frescoes were covered by “salt deposits, soot and lime-wash”. The apex of the dome preserves a part of a Pantokrator image, whereas on the drum we see standing prophets. A large part of the spherical triangles of the dome is taken up by the Evangelists. Smaller parts of murals have been painted on other parts of the church.

One of the most important murals in the church is the one depicting St. George. It is on the blind arch of the northern wall –a part of the initial church– and is preserved in good repair. It is surrounded by scenes of the Saint’s martyrdom. It is a votive mural, painted by an icon painter by the name of Symeon. The style indicates that it was not the work of Symeon Axentis. It was painted in 1509 and financed by a certain Savvas and his family. The other votive mural is on the newer blind arch, which supports the western part of the dome and depicts St. Ilarion. On the lintel of this arch there is a dedicative inscription as well as the date 1552.

It is only proper that we should conclude this narrative by reiterating the opening lines. The Chirokitia Neolithic settlement has been included on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list because the archaeological findings have shed more light on the development of society in this key area. The significance of those findings has established Chirokitia among the best known prehistoric sites in Cyprus and worldwide.

It is an excellently preserved site which will continue to provide valuable scientific data. Given that it has only partly been excavated, this site constitutes a first-class deposit of archaeological material for future studies.