

## WORLD HERITAGE LIST

### Choirokoitia (Cyprus)

No 848

#### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Choirokoitia
<i>Location</i>	District of Larnaca
<i>State Party</i>	Cyprus
<i>Date</i>	26 September 1996

#### Justification by State Party

Choirokoitia constitutes the first stable human occupation of Cyprus. It illustrates one aspect of the expansion of Neolithic culture in a special environment, that of an island. The long occupation of the village and the ample documentation of its cultural phases facilitates the study of the evolution of a society and a civilization within an island environment. In this sense Choirokoitia may be considered as a unique laboratory.

##### Criterion i

It has exerted considerable influence on both contemporary and subsequent developments. It is the earliest reference and type site for the study of the Cypriot Pre-Pottery Neolithic in its apogee.

##### Criteria ii, iii, and iv

It is a characteristic example of a significant human settlement, fragile as a result of its great antiquity and its location in a rapidly changing environment.

##### Criterion v

It is associated with ideas and beliefs of historical importance as manifested in several aspects of the material culture. Burial customs, for instance, and the use of figurines provide evidence for ritual and religious practices.

##### Criterion vi

#### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

#### History and Description

##### History

During the Proto-Neolithic Period (*c* 8100 BC) there was ephemeral settlement by hunter-gatherers on Cyprus, but they are believed to have abandoned the island after a short time. Permanent human occupation began in the Aceramic (Pre-Pottery) Proto-Neolithic Period,

starting around 7000 BC, when the site at Choirokoitia was founded, probably by people from Anatolia or the Levant, on a hill overlooking the Maroni river. They were sedentary farmers, cultivating cereals and herding sheep, goats, and pigs - all introduced from the mainland of Asia Minor.

For some reason not yet understood, Choirokoitia and other Aceramic Proto-Neolithic sites were abandoned abruptly in the mid 6th millennium BC and were not reoccupied until a thousand years later, in what is known as the Ceramic Neolithic Period. There is less monumental evidence of occupation in the form of the remains of buildings from this period at Choirokoitia, but new forms of plant and animal life, as well as the characteristic pottery, have been identified, suggesting that the new inhabitants were members of a fresh immigrant group. Their way of life was, however, once again based on agriculture and the raising of domestic animals. The site was finally abandoned in the early 4th millennium BC.

##### Description

The settlement is located on the slopes of a hill in a meander of the Maroni river overlooking the fertile Vasilikos valley, about 6km from the sea. It covers an area of *c* 1.5ha. The earliest occupation, consisting of circular houses built of mud-brick and stone with flat roofs, was on the eastern side of the hill. It was protected by a massive wall, more than 180m of which has been uncovered, barring access from the west (the other sides were protected naturally by the curve of the river and by very steep slopes).

A second defensive wall, of which a length of 60m is known, was erected to protect a later extension of the village to the west. The walls, built of large boulders, were 2.50m thick and still survive to a height of more than 3m. Both of the enceintes were pierced by gateways, an impressive example of which came to light in recent excavations. A staircase with three flights of steps was built within the thickness of an external stone bastion in the form of a parallelepiped 10m long and 1.60m deep, and still standing to a height of 2.50m.

Some twenty houses have been excavated. They vary between 2.30m and 9.20m in external diameter, with walls of varying thickness. They were constructed directly on the ground, without foundations, of undressed limestone blocks, mud-brick, and rammed clay. The outer surfaces are frequently of stone and the inner of clay or unfired brick. Impressions in the debris have made it possible to deduce that their roofs were flat, made of branches and reeds topped with clay. In some places there is evidence of the internal surfaces of the walls having been painted. Associated with the houses were the remains of hearths, cereal querns, and other domestic and agricultural equipment. A number of the houses had human burials beneath their rammed earth floors, showing evidence of inhumation rituals having been practised.

The finds from the settlement include many objects in stone and bone and, later, pottery, along with vegetable materials such as burnt grain (early forms of wheat and barley, lentils). Animal bones include domesticated

species such as sheep, goats, and pigs, along with fallow deer, which were hunted using techniques so far not identified. The tools are diversified, ranging from bone needles to agricultural implements such as sickles. However, the most noteworthy finds are undoubtedly the anthropomorphic figurines in stone (and one in clay), which point to the existence at this early period of elaborate spiritual beliefs.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The entire site is protected under the basic Antiquities Law of 1931, Chapter 31, as amended in 1964 and 1973. This legislation requires sanction to be sought from the competent authority (the Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Communication and Works) before any intervention may take place. Severe penalties are prescribed for breaches of the legislation.

The site is owned by the Government of Cyprus, having been acquired in accordance with the provisions of the 1931 Law.

### *Management*

The Department of Antiquities is responsible for the management of the site, which is open daily to the public. The official Cyprus Tourist Organization collaborates with the Department in its work.

The Choirokhoitia Master Plan provides for the protection of both the site itself and its immediately surrounding natural environment. This constitutes an effective buffer zone, as required by the *Operational Guidelines*.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The site was discovered in 1934 by P Dikaios, who excavated there from 1936 to 1946. Since 1977 excavations have been in progress under the direction of Alain Le Brun (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris).

The only conservation work carried out on the site itself has been confined to the consolidation of the fragile construction materials. There has been no attempt at reconstruction on-site, but reconstructions of five houses and a section of the defensive wall have been erected off the site, based on excavated evidence, to assist visitors in understanding it.

### *Authenticity*

Since this is an excavated archaeological site where no reconstruction has been undertaken on the excavated remains, its authenticity may be deemed to be total.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Choirokhoitia in February 1997. ICOMOS also consulted a leading

specialist on the archaeology of Cyprus from the University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom) on the cultural significance of the property.

### *Qualities*

Choirokhoitia is the most important Neolithic archaeological site in Cyprus. In view of the importance of the island in prehistory it is therefore of exceptional importance in studying and understanding the evolution of human cultural in this key area of the eastern Mediterranean.

Excavations since the site was discovered have revealed only a small proportion of the total area. It is therefore a precious archaeological reserve for future generations

### *Comparative analysis*

There is no comparable site for the crucial Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period anywhere in Cyprus.

## **Brief description**

The Neolithic settlement of Choirokhoitia, occupied from the 7th to the 4th millennium BC, is one of the most important prehistoric sites in the eastern Mediterranean. Its remains and the finds from the excavations there have thrown much light on the evolution of human society in this key region. Only part has been excavated, and so it forms an exceptional archaeological reserve for future study.

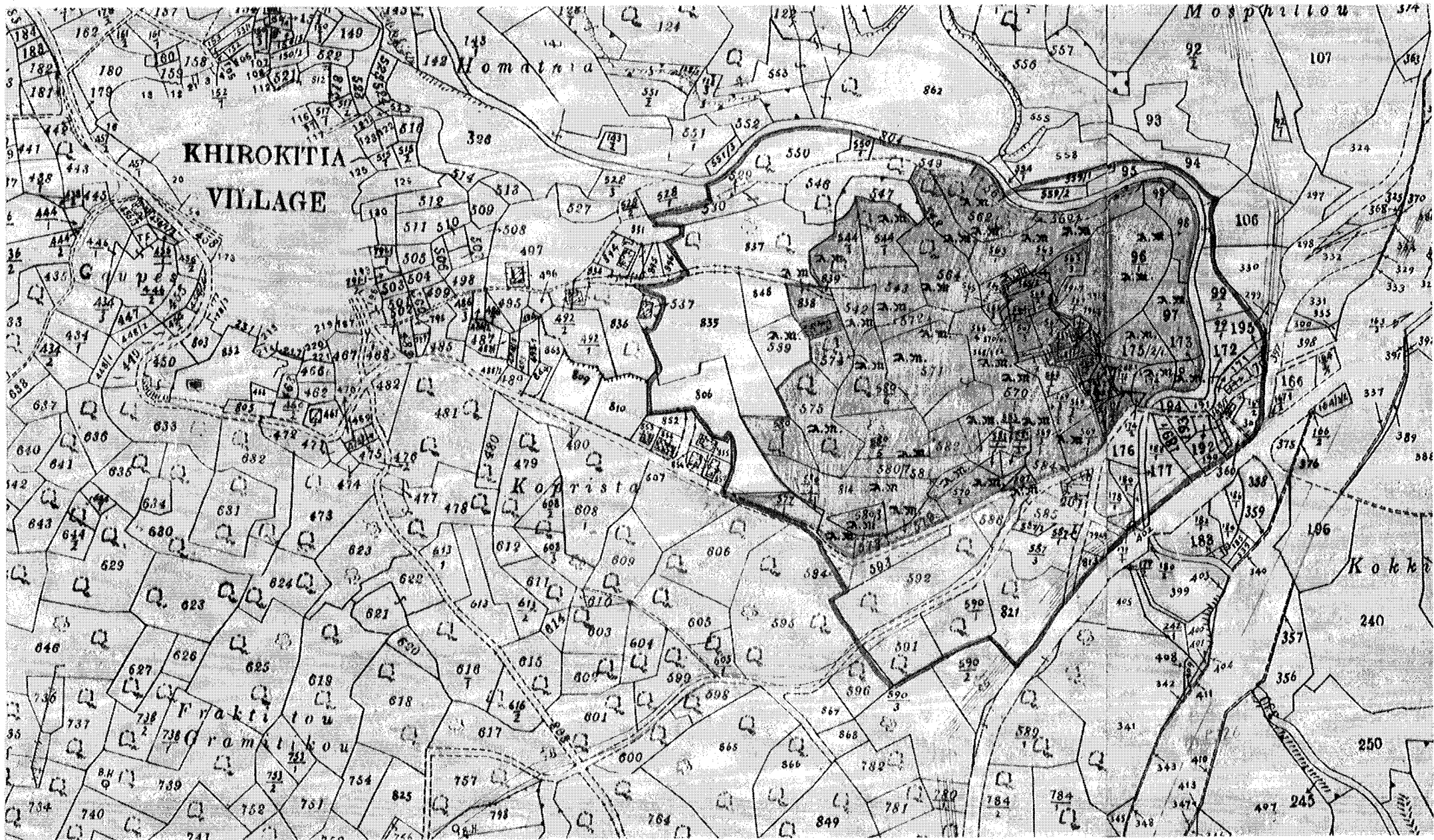
## **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

*Criterion iii*: Choirokhoitia is an exceptionally well preserved archaeological site that has provided, and will continue to provide, scientific data of great importance relating to the spread of civilization from Asia to the Mediterranean world.

*Criterion iv*: Both the excavated remains and the untouched part of Choirokhoitia demonstrate clearly the origins of proto-urban settlement in the Mediterranean region and beyond.

ICOMOS, October 1998



**Choirokoitia :**

**Plan indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon / Map showing nominated property and buffer zone**

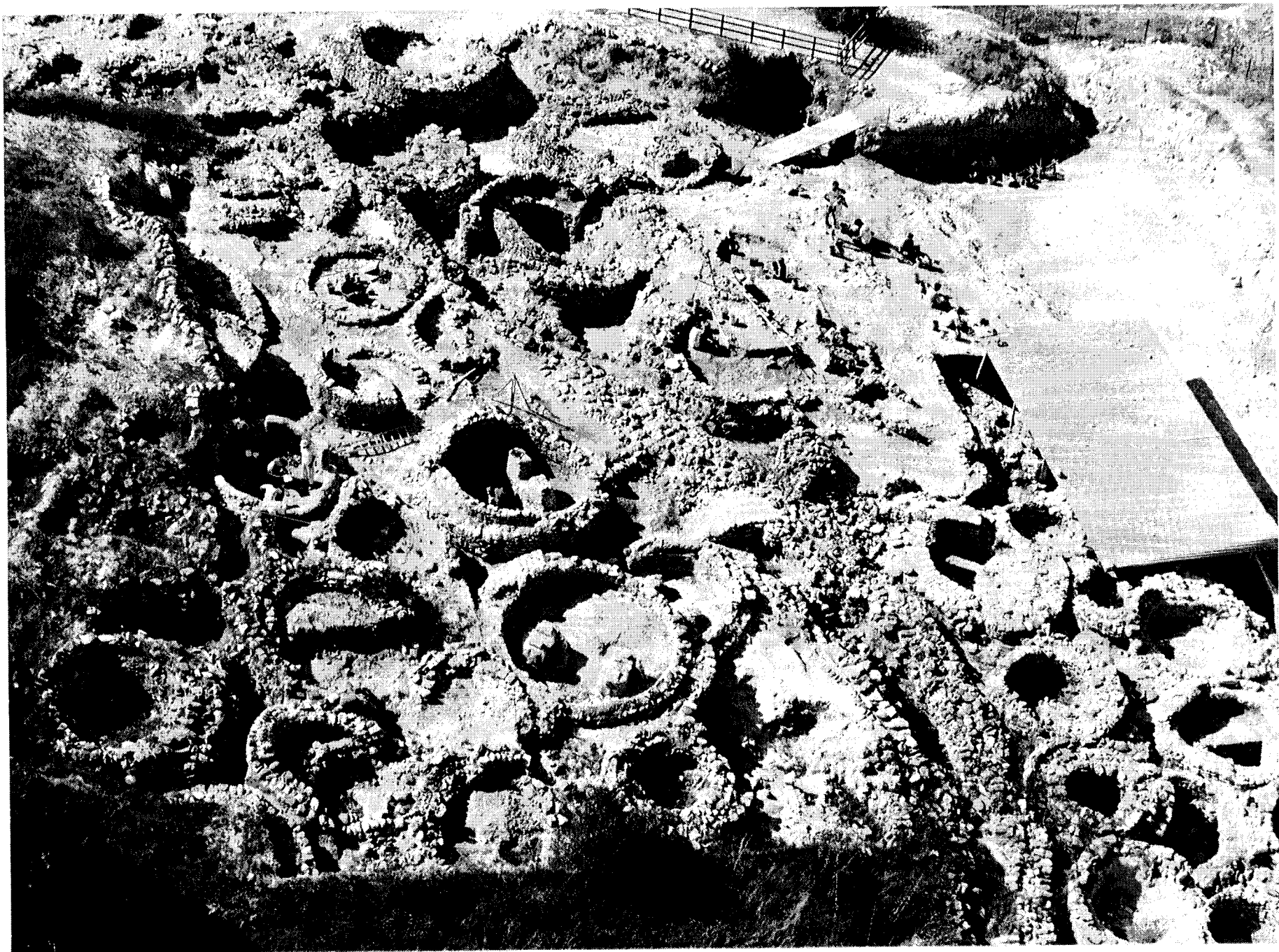


- 1: Limits of Archaeological Site
- 2: Parking Space
- 3: Archaeologist's Office
- 4: Guard's Office
- 5: Pedestrian Walkway
- 6: Pedestrian Access to Archaeological Site.
- 7: Open Area
- 8: Observation Point
- 9: Pedestrian Walkway
- 10: Reconstruction of Part of Neolithic Settlement and Wall.

**Chirokoitia :**  
**Plan du site / Site plan**

Ministry of Communications and Works Department of Public Works SENIOR ARCHITECT		
SETTLEMENT OF CHIROKOITIA	SITE PLAN	
Architectural Project: <i>[Signature]</i>	Senior Architect: <i>[Signature]</i>	DATE: DECEMBER 1994
Design: <i>[Signature]</i>	DIRECTOR P.W.D.	SCALE: 1: 500
Checked by: <i>[Signature]</i>		No of plan: A/A-1721-2





**Choirokoitia :**  
**Vue du site durant les fouilles / View of site during excavation**