Sew long: A seamstress buried at medieval Polis, Cyprus

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Introduction
Mortuary practices of the early medieval period (late first millennium AD) in Cyprus are known from only a handful of sites. At Polis Chrysochous, excavations conducted by Princeton University since the mid-1980s have uncovered numerous burials clustered in and around two early sixth-century basilicas. The location of graves in relation to the basilicas and the type and presence of grave goods indicate differences in high- and low-status interments. All individuals interred at Polis from this time period tend to be placed in extended, supine positions, with their feet to the east and their head toward the west, which typifies Christian practice (Fig. 1).

Grave Context
- Located 10 to 12 meters south of the E.F2 basilica (Figs. 1 and 2)
- In an area reconstructed as a hub of workshops during late antiquity, prior to construction of the basilica.
- The body was placed in a pit covered with limestone slabs alongside a late Roman drainage pipe (Fig. 3)
- Suggests the area was no longer used as a production center by the time of interment between the late 7th and 11th centuries AD.
- Distance from the church, lack of stone lining for the grave, and paucity of grave goods indicate an individual of low status.

The Individual
- A woman who died in her 30s. A bone needle (Fig. 4) located by the right femur suggested during excavation that she may have been a seamstress.
- Alterations to the teeth and bones support this initial hypothesis (Table 1).
- Grooves on the interproximal surface of both maxillary lateral incisors indicate repetitive use of these teeth for drawing thread.
- Malocclusion and wear on the anterior mandibular dentition suggest she pulled material with her anterior teeth (Ronchese, 1948; Merbs, 1983).
- Muscle attachments and facet development on her hand bones are consistent with occupational stresses attributed to tailors (e.g., Lane, 1888; Merbs, 1983).
- Lesions identified in the hips, legs, and feet indicate habitual kneeling, sitting or squatting (Thomson, 1889, 1890; Charles, 1893-1894; Singh, 1959; Kostick, 1963; Wells, 1967; Ubelaker, 1978).

Interpretations and Implications
Weaving and lacemaking have a long history in Cyprus, and participants in textile production have been identified previously through dental grooves, notches, and wear at 5th to 16th-century Malloura (Harper, 2005, 2006), related to use of the mouth in spinning (Fig. 5). The observation of an identical pattern of dental involvement and additional skeletal indicators in this individual from Polis extends the direct evidence for textile production and/or tailoring of clothing into earlier centuries, ca. 650-1100 AD, and across the island. It appears that this occupation was practiced largely by women, based on our identification of this woman and Harper’s data (where sex was largely indeterminate but included two females). Systematic study of the skeletal remains...