



Book Reviews

FIGURINE MAKERS OF PREHISTORIC CYPRUS: SETTLEMENT AND CEMETERIES AT SOUSKIOU BY EDGAR PELTENBURG, DIANE BOLGER AND LINDY CREWE

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Cyprus followed a somewhat different path than its regional neighbours during the Chalcolithic period (c. 3900–2400 BC). According to the late Professor Peltenburg (2014), circular architecture reminiscent of the preceding Neolithic periods, an essentially deer-focused subsistence economy, the absence of urbanism, and a lack of tell-based living, were mainstream cultural characteristics distinguishing the island of Cyprus from its Chalcolithic neighbours. What we know of Chalcolithic Cyprus is primarily the result of the sterling work of Edgar Peltenburg and his team, first in the north, and after 1974, in the south-west of the island. The volume under review here is another exemplar contribution, the final one with Peltenburg at the steering wheel, but definitely not the last one to follow the path that he established in the field of prehistoric archaeology.

Figurine Makers of Prehistoric Cyprus: Settlement and Cemeteries at Souskiou is a detailed synthesis and presentation of the archaeological research conducted in the area of Souskiou, in southwestern Cyprus, during the past twenty years. The volume is composed of 21 chapters grouped in four different parts that cover a broad range of topics about site chronology and the natural environment, the settlement's built and open environment, the cemetery and human remains, as well as a series of integrated studies about all the materials recovered at Souskiou. This book is a collective effort by a prominent team of experts on Chalcolithic Cyprus to present aspects of the everyday and mortuary lives of the inhabitants of Souskiou, who must have been dexterous figurine makers. This is a volume equipped with colourful photographs, figures, tables, plans, maps and charts in the course of running text, as well as 124 plates at the end of the book that provide a wealthy corpus of information, in support of the volume's main content. Two appendices (A: list of small finds cited in the text; B: list of objects from buildings, features and trenches) and a substantial list of references complement the volume.

As Peltenburg writes in his introduction to the volume, the settlement at Souskiou holds a prominent position, on a steep hillside that dominates the entrance to the Dhiarizos River valley, in southwestern Cyprus, overlooking both the Troodos Mountains to the north-east and the

Mediterranean Sea to the south (p.3). It is perhaps the most exceptional site among its Chalcolithic peers, strategically located on major routes, serving as a frontier community between the southwest and the rest of the island (p.5). What's more, the burial grounds at Souskiou are 'the first clear examples of cemeteries since the beginning of human colonisation' of Cyprus (p.4) and together with the outstanding evidence for the local craft of picrolite, have made research in the area, and the publication of its results in this particular volume, a milestone for archaeological investigations into prehistoric Cyprus.

Following the introduction, a rather dense chapter about Chronology (C. Paraskeva) discusses data issues related both with relative and absolute dating. Considering site stratigraphy, ceramic classification and radiocarbon dating, the site has been chronologically divided to Periods I (earlier to later Middle Chalcolithic), I/II (later Middle Chalcolithic), and II (early Late Chalcolithic) (p.28). In terms of absolute dating, occupation at the settlement started within the first half of the 33rd century BC (p.42), and it seems that the site was occupied until 2700/2675 BC (p.42).

The third (K. Deckers & D. Sewell) and fourth (J.E. Dixon & T.C. Kinnaird) chapters provide expository narratives about the landscape and geological setting of Souskiou. The size of the site must have been approximately 6 ha (p.48), and at a distance of only 2–3.5 km from the ancient coast (p.49). The ancient landscape zones, bedrock and superficial geology are explained so that the reader can comprehend the discussions about the Souskiou inhabitants' daily activities and how they interacted with their surrounding environment, what was the palaeoclimate, and how the landscape evolved through time.

In addition to the excavations conducted at the settlement and cemeteries of Souskiou, an attempt was made to trace the eroded surface materials with site survey and surface collection (A. McCarthy). The landscape was divided into 17 transects that in their turn provided spatial references for all those artefacts collected from surface soils. This task was important as it allowed the Souskiou team to comprehend 'the density of site occupation, chronological drift, functional zones, and areas of taphonomic disturbance' (p.68). A summary of the transect finds is provided, including ceramics, chipped stone, ground stone and other small finds, coupled with inferences about human activity, settlement expansion and periods of hiatus, as well as the impact of erosion.

The sixth chapter (E. Peltenburg) explains the various constituents of the settlement at *Laona*, including landscape features and structural components, accompanied by colour plans and maps in plates. Four partially preserved roundhouses were used as the focus of a geoarchaeological study (M. Dalton), for the study of stratified floors and occupation surfaces and the assessment of architectural technologies and other human activities within the investigated buildings.

A second interdisciplinary study is mentioned in Chapter 10 about pottery (D. Bolger). Specifically, nine ceramic samples were studied in thin section and were mineralogically characterised (by A. Robertson) with the use of ceramic petrography. This small study has indicated that the majority of samples were made with the same fabric, suggesting that the potters were exploiting the same or similar clay sources during Periods I and I/II (p.171). It was also concluded that other observed macroscopic differences, especially differences observed in the colour of clay are plausibly a result of differing firing conditions rather than the exploitation of different raw material resources (p.170–171). An additional small number of samples indicated that, in Period II, new raw material resources were exploited, and new harder and more durable fabrics were introduced, as part of an evolving pottery industry (p.171). It would be very useful if photomicrographs of the various recorded ceramic fabrics or of the sampled ceramic sections were included in the volume, for comparative studies by other researchers working on ceramics, in the broader Paphos region.

The analytical work conducted on Souskiou material is completed with a third interdisciplinary investigation that can be found in Chapter 16 (V. Kassianidou & A. Charalambous). A chemical study of copper objects and faience beads was conducted with the use of portable X-ray fluorescence technology. This study was particularly important in our understanding of faience and copper technologies during the Middle and Late Chalcolithic period, the local evolution of copper working, as well as the extent of the community's interaction with the surrounding world, considering that the faience beads and some of the copper artefacts were imports to the settlement and to Cyprus.

Following the description of the settlement features, Chapter 8 (L. Crewe) designates the cemetery excavated at *Laona*, including all 137 tombs, and non-tomb features. It is important to note that the cemetery at Souskiou-*Laona* is one of those rare occasions, when a burial ground has been excavated almost in its entirety (p.97), providing a much sought-after opportunity for the assessment of mortuary practices looking at an almost fully exposed site. This makes the site as important in methodological terms, as it permits researchers to appraise issues often encountered in partially explored sites and related to sampling/segmentation biases. Another fact that makes the excavation and publication of the cemetery even more important is the uniqueness of the extramural cemeteries at Souskiou at this early date. A thorough discussion about mortuary practices is contextualised within a regional setting, considering the tombs at Souskiou *Vathyrkakas*, and underlines that valuable archaeological data can be extracted from looted environments (p.134), and hence, that these should not be undermined or neglected.

Chapters 9–15, 17–19 present the various material categories recovered at the Souskiou *Laona* settlement and cemetery, including human (K. O. Lorentz), plant (L. Lucas) and animal (P. Croft) remains, mollusca (J. Ridout-Sharpe), pottery (D. Bolger), figurines and figurative pendants (E.

Goring), and other body ornaments and objects (E. Peltenburg), and the ground stone (J.E. Dixon, R. Palakumbura & E. Peltenburg) and chipped stone (C. McCartney) assemblages. These chapters are not mere catalogues with the finds recovered; contrarily, they host, at different levels, discussions about material procurement, artefact manufacture, and the associated technologies. Chapters 11 (E. Goring) and 13 (E. Peltenburg), dedicated respectively to the figurines and figurative pendants, and the procurement, manufacture and use of picrolite, justify the title given to the Souskiou inhabitants as the *Figurine Makers of Prehistoric Cyprus*. Adding to *Laona's* unique features, a significant quantity of picrolite artefacts at different stages of manufacture was recovered at the *Laona* settlement and cemetery, opening a wide window into the material's entire chaîne opératoire, from different contexts. The Souskiou team did not disregard the archaeological materials recovered and dated to later periods, and Chapter 20 provides a concise presentation of Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery (L. Graham), Late Classical to early Byzantine ceramics (A. Dobosz) and the glass assemblage (P. Cosyns).

Throughout the volume, there is a clear effort, especially by the three main authors (E. Peltenburg, D. Bolger & L. Crewe), to integrate the results of the excavation and subsequent material studies within the broader, regional setting, and compare them with data that derived from other neighbouring and more distant Chalcolithic sites. This effort is particularly applaudable as it allowed the generation of archaeological inferences about the society and its evolution at a diachronic level, and it allowed an enhanced understanding of traditions, changes and transformations at the Souskiou settlement and cemeteries. The Souskiou team's quantitative approach on the study of material evidence has allowed the identification of patterns and differences within various features in the settlement and cemetery, leading to discussions about the organisation of the society, social transformation and evolving degrees of social inequality, shared and distinguished identities (p.206, 322). A number of challenges such as the steepness in the landscape and erosion, looting, and the absence of radiocarbon dating from the tombs were all properly addressed, with systematic documentation and in search for alternative solutions.

Figurine Makers of Prehistoric Cyprus: Settlement and Cemeteries at Souskiou is a volume that will attract the interest of scholars working specifically on Chalcolithic Cyprus, but also of those working on contemporary periods in other areas of the eastern Mediterranean and Near East, as well as of researchers working at other parts of the world, in search for good practices for site excavation, the identification, documentation and study of archaeological materials derived from settlement and mortuary contexts, as well as integrative approaches for data and material contextualisation and archaeological interpretation. The long-term experience of the excavating team and their exceptional knowledge of the region and chronological period are well reflected in the volume, which has become part of the rich heritage that the late Professor Peltenburg has left for Cyprus, the Mediterranean and the world.

References

Peltenburg, E. 2014. Cyprus During the Chalcolithic Period. In A. E. Killebrew and M. Steiner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant: c. 8000-332 BCE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199212972.013.018)

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