

British Excavations at Souskiou-Laona Settlement, 2008

By Edgar Peltenburg

A fourth season of Lemba Archaeological Research Centre/University of Edinburgh investigations at the Chalcolithic settlement of Souskiou-Laona was conducted for 4 weeks in March-April 2008 under the directorship of Edgar Peltenburg. The c. 3000 BC settlement is ringed by a number of higher cemeteries, and this year a fifth, looted cemetery was located on the West Ridge of Laona. Only a few rock-cut pit graves remain along the cliff edge since this side of the ridge was sharply truncated by the Dhiarizos River. To the south, additional examination of the Vathyrkakas plateau opposite the settlement brought to light more looted graves between Vathyrkakas cemeteries 1 and 2, suggesting that burials had once been placed continuously along the lip of the plateau for a distance of c. 450 m¹.

It has always been assumed that the Laona settlement was confined to the south slopes of the East Ridge, occupying c. 1.23 ha, and that as a consequence the settlement was too small to have generated the number of individuals recovered from associated cemeteries. This season, more detailed survey of the narrow, severely eroded West Ridge led to the discovery of more fragmentary Chalcolithic buildings. We had suspected that the few artefacts recovered in survey from this part of the site in earlier seasons were the result of specific, non-residential tasks, but it is now clear that buildings extend over a much larger area than we had supposed. Their location on the precipitous edge of the ridge means that a considerable part of the site has been lost to erosion. Further work is now required to determine if the settlement was sufficiently large to account for all the individuals in the cemeteries.

Three, possibly four, newly discovered West Ridge buildings are located along the 140 m. contour, at the same height and 200 m. from excavated settlement in Operation A (Fig. 1)². Two of these circular structures that were partly excavated demonstrate that this area is no mere subsidiary extension of the main settlement, but that it included substantial structures. Building 800 once had a diameter of c. 7 m., making it the largest building recovered from the site so far. All that remains is a crescent of plastered stone wall foundation 6 courses high and part of the floor, but enough is present to reconstruct the original diameter with confidence. Abutting its western wall is a smaller annex, Building 915. Both structures belong to the Middle Chalcolithic period according to the pottery lying on their floors.

The West Ridge produced further surprises this season. Picrolite wasters continued to occur, but with much less frequency than on the East Ridge. However, some 100 m. beyond Buildings 800 and 915, a dense concentration appears to indicate the former presence of a workshop for the production of the celebrated cruciform figurines and large pendants. The assemblage mainly consists of the raw picrolite material, possibly quarried from the Troodos Mountains rather than imported in pebble form from the Kouris River valley, many waste chips flaked from that raw material in order to reduce it to convenient form and a roughout for a probable figurine. The roughout bears a multitude of tool marks that show how the artisan began to fashion what was probably meant to be a cruciform figure. Many chipped stones occurred together with these picrolites. More investigations are required, but it is already clear that for the first time we will be able to reconstruct the stages of production of remarkable prehistoric Mediterranean artwork, from procurement to near-finished product. The upper part of a delicate, cruciform figurine that still needed to be finished comes from another part of the West Ridge and it gives some idea of the capability of these Souskiou artisans (Fig. 2).

Nearly 2 m. of slopewash was excavated in a c. 50 m² area in Operation A on the East Ridge. As a result, several buildings and activity foci are now in a state ready for investigation.



Figure 1. Laona West Ridge from Vathyrkakas to the south. Black arrow indicates location of Buildings 800 and 915.

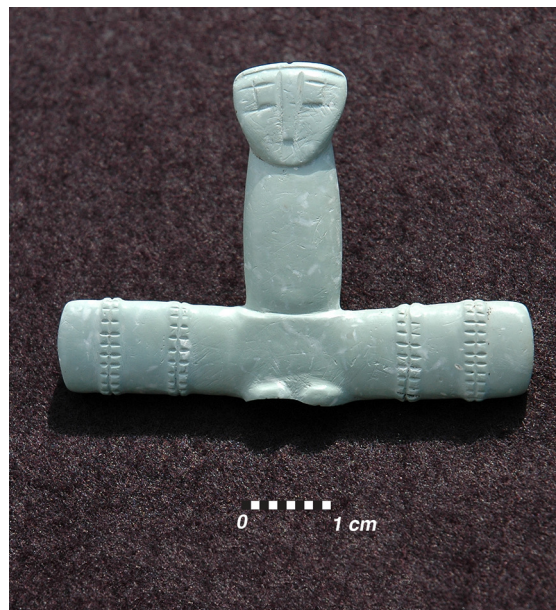


Figure 2. Upper part of picrolite cruciform figurine, its head still retaining work marks. SL 1692, Ht. 3.8 cm.

¹ For the location of these Vathyrkakas cemeteries, see E. Peltenburg (ed.) 2006 *The Chalcolithic Cemetery of Souskiou-Vathyrkakas, Cyprus. Results of the Investigations of Four Missions, from 1950 to 1997*. Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, Pl. 1.3.

² For the location of Operations, see Edgar Peltenburg, Diane Bolger, Mark Kinsey, Andrew McCarthy, Carole McCartney and David A. Sewell, Investigations at Souskiou-Laona settlement, Dhiarizos Valley, 2005, *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus* 2006: 79, Fig. 2. Note that “Northeast” and “Southwest” Ridge on that Figure are now referred to as East and West Ridge.