

British Excavations at Souskiou-Laona Settlement, 2011

By Edgar Peltenburg

A joint Lemba Archaeological Research Centre – University of Edinburgh project under the directorship of Edgar Peltenburg conducted a seventh season of investigations for four weeks in May 2011 at the Chalcolithic settlement of Souskiou-*Laona*, Paphos District.

Excavation resumed in Operation A on the lower slope of the Laona East Ridge. This area contains the best preserved stratigraphic sequence on the otherwise severely eroded Chalcolithic site. During the 2011 season the team investigated the earliest deposits in this area. They consisted of fire installations and shelters in bedrock, a spread of midden material and the first attempts at built architecture.

Initially, occupants carved hollows and pits out of the soft marl. The hollows seem to be for living purposes since they possessed hearths and had plastered surfaces. Their surviving curvilinear arcs suggest diameters of up to 5m. In one case builders fixed a large hearth on a shoulder of marl that they had left intact. External activities are evident by the construction of varied fire installations in the redeposited marl immediately above the harder chalk bedrock.

Unusual midden-like fills comprise dumps or prolific hillwash from specific areas that came to rest on rocky ledges. Contents comprise a different artefactual assemblage from that found elsewhere in association with buildings. Chief amongst the objects are bone and antler objects, miniature pottery goblets on stands, and terracotta figurines. Most representations bear traces of painted decoration. Remains of picrolite-working also occur in these basal Operation A deposits where some 80 production wasters were recovered this season. Wasters include an unfinished leg of a cruciform figurine, and incomplete pendants.

The first attempts at creating a built environment above the hollows occurred in Building 1149. Its circumference was delimited by a partly natural raised plinth, the inner edge of which was coated with plaster that rose from the floor. There was no evidence for postholes or other enclosing structural elements. Abandonment fill suggests that an earthen wall of pise may have stood here. The broad surrounding plinth is similar to an example at Erimi where it too occurs at the base of a sequence of structures that subsequently were stone-based.

Although these investigations dealt with the earliest known deposits in Operation A, ceramic evidence suggests that yet earlier occupation existed elsewhere on the Laona ridge, but *in situ* remains of that period still elude us.