

## **For the Director of Antiquities: BCH Chronique contribution**

The Lemba Archaeological Research Centre of the University of Edinburgh carried out excavations from 26<sup>th</sup> Aug to 16<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2001 at Souskiou-Laona under the directorship of Professor E. Peltenburg with Field Directors L. Crewe and S. Spanou.

### The Site

Souskiou-Laona is located on a narrow ridge between the Dhiarizos River and the Vathykakas stream, near the abandoned village of Souskiou in the Paphos District. The Middle Chalcolithic (c. 2800 - 3400 BCE) site comprises a settlement which the team investigated in 1992<sup>1</sup> and a cemetery located on a prominent limestone outcrop at the neck of the ridge. The cemetery is not to be confused with another one of roughly the same period at Souskiou-Vathykakas.

### Research Aims and Excavation strategy

Full-scale excavation of the discrete burial site of Laona will for the first time provide a plan of a chalcolithic cemetery. This is of particular importance as extra mural burials of this period are extremely rare and there is no existing typology for Chalcolithic cemeteries or tomb groups. Since the majority of the tombs are looted, focus is on analysis of architectural tomb-types. Finds overlooked by looters will provide extra information on artefact types and the likelihood of locating further intact tombs will enable us to associate the artefacts with skeletal remains and architectural type. Finally, in the resulting publication, the Laona cemetery will be placed into the general burial landscape of the Souskiou area.

### Results of the 2001 season

We have excavated an area of 15 x 20 m, or approximately one third of the visible cemetery. Past looting of the site was not thorough. There is a substantial amount of topsoil over the outcrop (up to 70cm deep over some parts of the site) and it would appear that tomb density is extremely high. Tombs are situated close together and in some cases one tomb encroaches on its neighbour. In one particularly crowded area, the density of tombs was one tomb per 2 m<sup>2</sup>.

The primary alignment of the tombs is in a general north-south direction but with no strict adherence to alignment. Although many of the tombs so far investigated have been emptied by the looters, we investigated two partially looted tombs with undisturbed burials and two intact tombs, complete with capstones. These provide evidence that Souskiou funerary traditions included both single and multiple inhumation burial. Sieving of the spoil heaps left by the looters has yielded picrolite pendants, dentalium shell beads and substantial amounts of human bone.

A total of 42 tombs have been excavated as well as several features of unknown purpose cut into the bedrock. Three circular posthole-like features were also cut into the bedrock near the western edge of the outcrop, adjacent to three tombs. Complete excavation of the site should reveal distribution patterns of these features which may relate to the geological composition of the outcrop and aspects of Chalcolithic technology.

Several distinct tomb types occur within the cemetery, but not all tombs adhere closely to a rigid typology. The variable quality and depth of the *kafkalla* limestone outcrop affected tomb shape, depth and size. The most characteristic type was that of rock cut straight-sided shaft graves belling out at the base with an oval, round or rectangular shaft and an upper depression for the reception of a capstone. Tombs range in maximum width from 1.2m x .6m to .6m x .3m and depth from 2.5m to only .5m deep. Some tombs have well-cut, sharply defined rectangular shafts (sometimes with circular capstone cuts), widening gradually from the shaft to an oval base of approximately 1m x .6m. Another distinct type has a small sub-rectangular shaft of approximately .4 x .7m and a depth of .5m. The two intact tombs found with capstones were of this type. Both tombs had grave goods. One contained a small bowl, one faience beads. The only osteological evidence found in these sealed tombs was a single infant tooth so it is possible that the smaller oval types were for infant burials.

Intact burials were recovered from two partially looted tombs with deep, sub-rectangular shafts and expanded oval-shaped bases. Both tombs demonstrate Chalcolithic re-use. The first interments had been displaced to the northern end of the tomb, along with associated grave goods, and other burials were subsequently inserted in a crouched position.

Mortuary goods from the 2001 season provide some idea of the character of grave goods and the original, atypical wealth of the cemetery. They include approximately 20 small picrolite pendants of cruciform and other types (Pl. 1), several whole Red-on-White pots, dentalium shell beads and what is probably the earliest known imported faience on Cyprus and, for that matter, any Mediterranean island.

Results from our pilot excavation demonstrate that information exists to evaluate mortuary practices at an exceptional site of Erimi culture. This potential will only be realised after a sufficient database is recovered, a goal which we hope to achieve in a second season of excavations scheduled for 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> Souskiou-Laona, in D, Christou, Chronique des fouilles..... Chypre en 1992, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 117, 1993, 730-2.