

## British Excavations at Souskiou-Laona

Excavations under the directorship of Edgar Peltenburg, Lemba Archaeological Research Centre, were carried out for 5 weeks in August and September 2003. The Middle Chalcolithic cemetery, c. 3000 BC, yielded unequivocal Early-Middle Bronze Age material inside some of the facilities. The Bronze Age peoples who inserted these objects made no changes to the shape of the Chalcolithic burial pits, and it seems unlikely that they interred additional bodies or interfered with earlier burial remains. There are no Early-Middle Bronze Age settlements in the vicinity of Souskiou-Laona, and the purpose of this later activity is unknown.

The occurrence of Bronze Age material raises questions about the dating of faience-like material from the necropolis. While well known in the Bronze Age in Cyprus, it is very rare before that time. A few objects occurred in preceding seasons at Souskiou-Laona, but it is so unusual for this period that chronological verification would be welcome. This year, undisturbed Tomb 158, typologically consistent with other Chalcolithic burial pits, yielded remnants of some four segmented beads in which the segments comprise ridges along a slightly grooved cylinder. They possess light matt blue surfaces and brighter blue cores. No separate glaze is visible. Blue cores suggest glass rather than faience, so analysis is warranted. They were associated with 2 cruciform pendants of picrolite, 1 bone pendant, 3 dentalia, a pebble, a Red-on-White flask and fragments of copper.

This is the first time copper has been recovered at Souskiou-Laona, and it ranks amongst the earliest metal objects from the island. One fragment is a cylindrical bead or pendant, made of a twisted metal band (Fig. 1). Inside the spiral is a mineralised grey strand, perhaps the altered material on which the spiral was hung. It is virtually identical with one recovered from Vathyrkakas in 1972 (Christou 1989, 93, Fig. 12.10). The outstanding material from Tomb 158 seems to be a coherent assemblage, and so we may conclude that the glassy beads are to be dated c. 3000 BC, and by extension, beads of similar material from other tombs.

Another tomb, Tomb 207, also possessed rich funerary furniture missed by the looters. This included an elaborate, squat cruciform pendant-figurine with centrally parted hair, squared ears in relief, two stranded necklace, two-stranded knobbed bracelets, two rows of knobs across midriff, and knobbed anklets. As the object is still concreted, more decoration may become visible. It was found together with an anthropomorphic pot and two closely associated knobbed pots.

It was our intention to complete the excavation of the cemetery in 2003, but the unexpected mass of material from intact burials precluded attainment of this goal. In particular, several tombs like Tomb 192 in Fig. 2, possessed fragile bone stacks that required special attention, some taking virtually the whole season to excavate. As a result, we are now gaining important insights into deposition practices in multiple inhumation burials. The age/sex relations will only become clear during post-excavation analysis, but we can see how bone stacks were created in order to make way for the principal/last interment. We cannot rule the possibility that secondary inhumations occur here. It is planned to complete excavation of the cemetery in 2004.

### Reference

Christou, D. (1989) The Chalcolithic Cemetery 1 at Souskiou-Vathyrkakas, pp. 82-94 in E. Peltenburg (ed.) *Early Society in Cyprus*. Edinburgh.