

PRESS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Akrotiri- Dreamer's Bay, 2017

The Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works, announces the completion of the 2017 excavations at and around the locality of *Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay) on the southern shores of the Akrotiri peninsula, Cyprus, in the Lemesos (Limassol) District. The excavations were conducted between 6 and 25 April 2017, under the direction of Dr. Simon James, University of Leicester. This was the University of Leicester's third season of work at the site.

As in previous years, investigations focused on the remains of stone buildings close to the shoreline and exposed by winter storms, and on a further masonry structure on the hilltop above, all within the confines of the UK's RAF Akrotiri airbase. These structures had undergone earlier initial investigations by the University of Buffalo, and were believed to comprise elements of a late Roman/early Byzantine port facility, perhaps serving the major Greco-Roman city of Kourion c. 13 km to the northwest. Connections between these onshore structures and submerged archaeological remains in the bay to the east, including a masonry breakwater, remain to be investigated. The present programme of work, expected to last five years, is intended to document and record the endangered shoreline structures, to establish their nature and date, and to characterise and date the hilltop remains. This forms part of a wider collaborative effort with the University of Southampton working on the marine and geomorphological aspects, and with other partners. The overall objective is to build up a fuller picture of the ancient port as part of the ancient settlement landscape of the Akrotiri peninsula, in the context of the southern coast of Cyprus and eastern Mediterranean seaways.

Walls of buildings are visible on the surface close to the water's edge at various points along the entire c. 0.5 km of low shoreline at *Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay), on the southern coast of the peninsula which otherwise entirely comprises very steep slopes or vertical cliffs up to 120 m high. In 2016 the visible remains and their surroundings had been cleaned for examination and selective excavation initiated. The structures were found to be more extensive and more complex than the simple rectangular 'warehouses' they were hitherto presumed to be. Several are now seen to have internal subdivisions, and/or to possess adjacent walled courtyards containing evidence of activity in the form of pits with burned deposits, perhaps indicating industrial processes.

Excavations continued in a building in Area 2 midway along the scatter of structures, where in 2016 complete vessels buried under collapsed walls suggested possible destruction by earthquake. Opening a larger area confirmed this picture, revealing a stone-founded building probably with mud-brick superstructure but no evidence of roofing materials. A number of complete amphorae and cooking vessels were recovered, some virtually intact. The working hypothesis is that this building may have been destroyed in the mid-4th-century AD earthquake which also destroyed Kourion, and was thereafter abandoned undisturbed.

Excavations continued in part of another building in Area 4, at the eastern end of the low ground facing into the bay, where complex stratigraphy had been initially explored in 2015 and 2016. This comprised a complex pattern of walls, occupation levels and burnt deposits. In contrast to the Area 2 building, Area 4 is now seen to comprise probably three phases of activity, beginning with a rock-cut ditch, succeeded by a stone-founded building attested by a robber trench containing 250 kg of freshly broken pottery, largely amphorae. This material is yet to be studied, but it may be that it represents destruction by the earthquake thought responsible for the collapse of the Area 2 building. However, in this area the site was cleared for rebuilding on different lines, the earlier foundations robbed for construction stone, and the shattered building contents used to pack the robber trench. The pattern of wall foundations now seen would therefore represent a late, post-earthquake phase. In this area, the entire sequence still appears to belong to the later Roman to early Byzantine periods.

Other finds from the buildings this year included more copper alloy objects, comprising nails thought to come from boats, a small square weight and a large (sailmaker's?) needle.

Work in Area 7 on the hill crest c. 650 m north of the shoreline buildings, at a point offering panoramic views of the coast almost from Cape Gata to the east round to Kourion in the north west, saw extensions of the excavated area to locate and characterise the west and north limits of the masonry building complex initially investigated in 2015 and 2016. The site appears to be defined by substantial, but not defensive walls. The northern extension revealed an area on terracotta flooring, and part of what may be a half-octagonal apse. The nature, sequence and dating of the complex remain under investigation, but it is clearly from late Antiquity.

During the season, colleagues from the University of Southampton continued work to assess the nature of the marine environment at *Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay) and around the former Akrotiri island, especially ancient sea level. This is projected to be the first stage in a collaborative investigation of the maritime part of the *Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay) area and its wider setting, the Akrotiri landmass, which appears to have turned from an island to a peninsula during early historic times.



University of Leicester archaeology students excavating the western end of a long, subdivided port building of late Roman date at Akrotiri-*Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay), Cyprus (© University of Leicester)



University of Leicester Archaeological Services excavator Donald Clark cleaning in preparation for photography of an inverted cooking pot. This lay intact inside a port building apparently brought down by a late Roman earthquake at Akrotiri-*Nisiarouin* (Dreamer's Bay), Cyprus (© University of Leicester)



University of Leicester excavators recording the western end of a late Roman port building at Akrotiri-Nisiarouin (Dreamer's Bay), Cyprus, apparently destroyed by an earthquake (© University of Leicester)