

## **EXCAVATIONS AT AYIA VARVARA-ASPROKREMNOS, 2009**

The Ministry of Communications and Works, Department of Antiquities, announces the completion of the 2009 excavations at the site of Ayia Varvara-Asprokremnos conducted under the direction of Dr. Carole McCartney with the support of the University of Cyprus. This fourth small scale season of excavation was carried out as part of the EENC (Elaborating Early Neolithic Cyprus) Project, an international collaboration between the Universities of Cyprus, Cornell University and Trent University, which focuses on excavation and landscape survey of early prehistoric archaeological remains dated to the early Holocene, when the transition from hunting to farming economies was taking place throughout the Middle East. This year's excavations saw the unearthing of the earliest currently known structure belonging to the Neolithic period of Cyprus.

The site of *Asprokremnos* provides the first dated site illustrating the occupation of Cyprus during the beginning phase of the Neolithic, documenting evidence of an Early Neolithic or Pre-Pottery Neolithic A as it is known in mainland sequences. This very early phase of the Neolithic shown at *Asprokremnos* is currently dated by radio-carbon to between 8,800-8,600 BC cal predating previously known Neolithic sites on Cyprus by between 400-600 years.

Excavations during 2009 continued to unearth evidence of significant manufacturing activity associated with the production of lithic tools including beautifully made arrowheads and a large array of ground stone tools used for the processing of ochre pigment and the likely processing of plants for subsistence. Of major significance was the uncovering of parts of a substantial curvilinear semi-subterranean structure that dominates the northern end of the site. This structure, cut into the re-deposited havarra sub-strata forming the base to overlying Neolithic deposits, runs north to south across the gentle east-west slope of the site, spanning over 5 meters in length. The straight cut walls of the structure hollow extend down to a gently sloping trampled earth surface that provides the floor of the structure.

Associated with this floor was an array of objects including a large hemispherical stone mortar and two rectilinear stone vessels, one of which was broken in situ during the apparent destruction of the structure by fire and subsequent burial

complete with all of its contents. Beyond these unique stone vessels a range of stone tools including grinding tools and querns illustrates the domestic character of the equipment left in place with the abandonment of the structure. This assemblage is completed by a carefully carved human figurine deposited into the burnt orange soil that entombed the abandoned habitation. This figurine, which is currently the earliest known example of human representation on Cyprus marks the end of a complex abandonment phase of this highly significant structure, though the site itself was re-occupied during at least two subsequent phases of habitation.

The character of both the structure and its unique assemblage of finds provide significant parallels to other Early Neolithic sites across the Near East, establishing important links between Cyprus and the Levant during the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium cal BC and crucial evidence concerning the development of the Neolithic both on Cyprus and across the Near East.



Stone mortar from the excavations  
at Ayia Varvara- *Asprokremnos*