

Press Release

Excavations at Kissonerga-Skalia, Pafos District, 2016

The Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works, announces the completion of the 2016 excavation season at the Bronze Age settlement of Kissonerga-Skalia near Paphos. The excavations are conducted under the direction of Dr Lindy Crewe of the University of Manchester. The site of Kissonerga-Skalia demonstrates a long Bronze Age sequence, and earlier Late Chalcolithic occupation, beginning before 2,500 BC until the site was abandoned around 1600 BC.

The final phase at the site is characterised by the construction of a large complex of over 1100m² devoted to industrial activities, including beer production and large-scale cooking or firing. Other activities undertaken include spinning fibres and grinding grain. This complex was built over the ruins of earlier Bronze Age houses and appears to indicate a community-wide effort of construction. This included preparing a horizontal land surface by cutting the higher northern areas of the site and dumping soil and stones in the lower southern side. A 45m long 1.2m wide wall forms an s-shape, with the main arc of the wall enclosing a large open space (270m²) with a plaster and mud plaster floor. This unusually large open space may have been used for community gatherings or another unknown function. There are very few finds in the centre of the space but a broken copper axe was found just above the floor.

An important discovery made during the 2016 season is evidence for Bronze Age solutions to environmental problems at the settlement. At some point after the building of the complex, the occupants seem to have realised that they had a problem with flooding or rain water running into the area. Their creative solution was to dig a series of six soak pits (drainage features) into the floors along the northeastern edge of the structure, on the side where the natural land surface sloped upwards. Five large pits of up to 1.5m x 2m and up to 0.50m deep were dug and immediately filled with rubble and stones (see Figure 1). The sixth feature was constructed from a large pithos with the base and rim removed. Excavation of the interior of the pithos (0.82m deep) revealed that the base had been roughly removed, the pithos inserted upright into the deposits and the rim, upper neck and upper handles chipped off to create a surface level with the floor (see Figure 2). Taken together, this alignment of features at the higher northeastern side of the excavation area is strongly suggestive of deliberate planning to alleviate a problem of flooding or water runoff from upslope, which may have been interfering with the integrity of the floors or structures of the final phase complex. Soak pits have been attested in many parts of the world as a rudimentary solution to drainage or sewerage problems and are still used as an effective measure to divert ground water or human waste. They have not previously been recognised at prehistoric Cypriot settlements.

Excavations continued in the west of the site, where the team have defined a room to the west of a large courtyard. There are interior benches along the walls, made with a base of small stones and an upper packing of mud brick or mud plaster. The room contains a high concentration of fine ware pottery and animal bones that appear to be the debris of eating and drinking activities. To the northwest the team excavated an area between two parallel walls to find perfectly preserved wall collapse overlying the latest floors. The lower walls were built from stones nearly 1m high, which had collapsed flat onto the floor, with the upper mudbrick collapse sealing the remainder of the floor. It is likely that the roof collapsed first, pulling the walls inwards. Further work is required to fully remove this collapse and examine the ashy deposits lying on the floor beneath.

The Kissonerga-Skalia 2016 season has considerably moved forward our understanding of the site and it is now verified as the longest-lived excavated Bronze Age

settlement on the island. Area B2 contains the only indication of possible domestic activities in the final phase complex but even here the deposits are unusual. The remainder of the areas exhibit either industrial activities or large-scale cooking/working and we have yet to establish a possible purpose for the large open spaces around the large curving walls. The goal over the coming season is to fully expose the final phase.



Figure 1: Two soak pits located on the eastern side of the large s-shaped wall (the end visible at the top of the photo) at Kissonerga-Skalia. The one on the left is shown after removing the stone fill and the one on the right with the stones in place.



Figure 2: A pithos reused as a drainage feature.