

## British Excavations at Souskiou-Laona Cemetery

Excavations under the directorship of Edgar Peltenburg, Lemba Archaeological Research Centre, were carried out for 5 weeks in August and September 2004. The cemetery on the rocky outcrop of the Laona spur immediately south of the Dhiarizos River between Nikoklia and Souskiou is dated to the Middle Chalcolithic period, c. 3000 BC. So far, we have investigated a total of 137 tombs and features cut into the outcrop (Fig. 1).

In our last report, I mentioned the recovery of some vitreous beads with blue cores that looked like glass rather than faience<sup>1</sup>. More were recovered in 2004, especially from T. 221. This tomb appeared to be looted since a thin capstone slab was found vertically in loose material in the upper part of the bell-shaped shaft. However, below this the fills became more compact and looters probably did not penetrate much below the bottom edge of the capstone. Here lay a single articulated inhumation with Red-on-White pedestal cup, cruciform pendant, three dentalia and 14 fragments of segmented vitreous beads. Analysis of a near identical example from Souskiou-Vathyrkakas strongly suggests that all the Laona vitreous beads were self-glazed faience beads. Their glassy, well-preserved appearance is due to large amounts of residual interstitial glass in the whitish cores and perhaps elevated quantities of tin in the glaze mix. While the origins of these beads are unknown, their very early date of c. 3000 BC seems assured.

The occurrence of Bronze Age material inside tombs was also noted in the last report. We were unable to account for its presence, and in 2004 further evidence for later activity was encountered once more. About 0.74m. below the lip of the *stomion*, stones recurred in the fill of T. 201 and amongst them some bones and teeth of a sub-adult, Roman sherds, a glass unguentarium, iron, stone adze and fibre. Not enough bones were present for a complete body, but extensive bioturbation is unlikely to account for them, so it is possible that the tomb was re-used in Roman times for a partial burial. Alternatively, the bones may have been disturbed from an articulated Chalcolithic burial (and perhaps others) lower down on the floor of the tomb, in the same manner as the stone adze. It is unlikely to be a Roman object and is typically Chalcolithic, even if such objects are only occasionally placed in tombs then. While this late intrusion was more closely associated with humans than in 2003 examples, further analysis is required to see if it represents a later burial.

Partially preserved tombs occur along the eroded edge of the outcrop, suggesting that originally the distinctive burial zone may have been somewhat larger than at present. Fills may be very disturbed but looters are not always responsible for these conditions. For example, T. 216 now consists of a 1.41 m deep oval pit with stony fill including capstone fragments low down. In spite of this upheaval, abundant finds and human bones were found in disarray. They include over 1400 dentalia, 11 cruciform pendants, other pendants and five miniature Red-on-White compartmented vessels (Fig. 2). Apart from one, the latter consist of pairs of cups fixed to a mutual flat base. Their unique character emphasizes how pottery production comprised two traditions, the one producing conventional vessels, the other idiosyncratic and highly imaginative works.

Excavations of the Laona cemetery are nearly finished and we now propose to integrate these results with investigations of the settlement and studies of other cemeteries in the Souskiou complex.

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Peltenburg, British Excavations at Souskiou-Laona, *BCH* \*\*\*\*\*