Tracing the foundation horizon of Palaepaphos: New research on the early history of the Paphos region

The period spanning the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age in Cyprus (around 1650/1600 BC) coincides with a time of major island-wide transformations. This transitional period saw the gradual abandonment of the Early and Middle Bronze Age agro-pastoral inland villages and the foundation of coastal centres, while copper production and trade were established as the new economic basis on the island.

The site of ancient Paphos, situated within the municipal boundaries of the modern-day village of Kouklia on the south-west coast of Cyprus, was one of these coastal establishments founded during this transformative period, along with Enkomi, Hala Sultan Tekke, Toumba tou Skourou and Episkopi-Bamboula. This site, which became known as Palaepaphos after the 4th century BC when the last king Nikokles moved the administrative capital to Nea Paphos, became a thriving urban centre in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Its ability to control manpower and resources is epitomized by the construction of the monumental temenos early in the 12th century BC. However, the series of events that led to Palaepaphos’ establishment, as well as the character of the foundation horizon remain largely unknown.

This contribution aspires to discuss issues pertaining to the earliest urbanization episode in Cyprus at the dawn of the Late Bronze Age, addressing the particular case of the Paphos region. The aim of the presentation is to provide a preliminary interpretation to the changes born by the settlement pattern in the hydrological zone of Paphos during the Early, Middle and Late phases of the Bronze Age. The contribution will focus on the distribution of small inland sites, which date to the transitional Middle Cypriot III-Late Cypriot I period, and will address the possible economic developments that caused their gradual abandonment and the establishment of Palaepaphos as a regional gateway centre. The study aims to elaborate on the nucleation process in the Paphos region during the early phases of the Late Bronze Age, and the gradual development of an urban emporium, in relation to the procurement and the export of copper.