Alambra:
From “a Middle Bronze Age settlement in Cyprus” to a Royal District

Abstract

The Middle Bronze Age settlement of Alambra, Cyprus, was excavated by the Cornell University in the 1970s and was subsequently published (by the director of the mission, Professor John Coleman) in 1996 in an exemplary monograph that contextualized the archaeological data of the site into the pre-urban Prehistoric Bronze Age society of the island. A Greek Cypro-syllabic inscription on a bronze tablet, issued by king Stasikypros of Idalion in the 5th century BC made reference to a royal “district of Alampriates”, and it thus firmly located Alambra inside the region of this inland kingdom.

The present contribution will attempt to identify the processes that led to the incorporation of Alambra and its wider area (namely the upper Tremithos drainage) inside the political and economic regions of the Late Bronze and Iron Age city-states of Cyprus (1700 - 310 BC). This endeavor will serve as a case-study pertaining to the research of the formation and development of the island’s territorial polities (composed by networks of secondary sites attached to an urban centre) from the Late Bronze Age to the end of the Cypro-Classical period. Evidence such as the physical landscape, inscriptions, coins, the topography of the extra-urban sanctuaries and the diffusion of terracottas and monumental stone sculpture will be evaluated in order to approach this subject. Emphasis will be given to the complexities and obscurities of this issue when studying inland areas as opposed to coastal-oriented site networks.

It is anticipated that the present study will demonstrate that the area under discussion did not form part of a single polity throughout this long period as was the case for other areas of the island. Instead, it was being constantly negotiated as a result of the fluctuating political geography of central Cyprus. It will also be argued that the shifts in power relations in this area do not pertain exclusively to the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age but they are a diachronic phenomenon characterizing the long period of autonomous Cypriot statehood (1700-310 BC).