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The Athienou Archaeological Project has been carrying out excavation, survey and a wide range of analytical and community engagement activities in the Malloura Valley in central Cyprus since 1990. This engaging and very readable book provides detailed summaries and preliminary analyses of all of this very varied work. Because each chapter gives a careful explanation of the period background, the Cypriot context and the history of research, the book as a whole serves as an up-to-date and wide-ranging introduction to the archaeology of Cyprus, which links the broader picture to a close engagement with a specific landscape.

The 28 chapters by a team of 23 authors present the environmental and historical background, well-explained methodologies of excavation and survey, a wide-ranging series of artefact reports with some very interesting argument and interpretation, spatial analyses at the scale of both site and landscape, and thematic studies of the role of archaeology in the present.

In period terms, the main results of the project concern the Cypro-Archaic period onwards, though there are three lithic scatters that may be Aceramic Neolithic (pp. 116–17). The extensive material from the historical periods includes a major Cypro-Archaic to Roman sanctuary, Cypro-Archaic to Roman tombs, a Roman–Byzantine settlement, and a Venetian-period settlement. The presumed Cypro-Archaic settlement associated with the tombs and the sanctuary has not been found.

In spite of the ‘integrated approach’ proclaimed by the title of Chapter 1, I found reading the whole work rather a fragmentary experience. The impressively wide-ranging work at the sanctuary, for example, is reported in Chapters 6 (methodology and summary), 9 (pottery), 10 (figurines), 11 and 12 (sculpture), 13 (inscriptions), 18 (faunal remains), 23 (spatial analysis) and 24 (phosphate analysis). Nowhere are this highly pertinent and interesting analyses brought together. The four-page conclusion mentions the main themes with cross-references, but does not try to integrate the analysis or make connections, nor to evaluate the relative merits of conflicting interpretations.

So I will structure this review in the way that the book itself does not: by addressing in turn the survey, the sanctuary, the tombs and the Venetian material.

The survey discovered 30 sites, mostly ranging from the Cypro-Archaic to the Ottoman and Modern periods. It was carefully organised and carried out, with some attention to off-site counts and systematic gridding or sampling of sites (p. 91). Moore and Gregory’s analysis of the pottery was clearly limited by the diagnostic rather than representative collection strategy (p. 210), though that was standard policy when most of the survey was carried out in 1991–1992 (p. 89). One interesting observation is that there were relatively few imported wares, even in well-connected periods such as the Late Roman and Late Medieval (p. 211). This conflicts with other chapters which, as we shall see, celebrate the connectedness of the area. Massey and Kardulias’ GIS analyses of the spatial distribution of threshing sledge flints and the clustering of the sites (Chapter 22) would benefit from a consideration of post-depositional processes and period-specific buffer analysis respectively. They do, however, make an interesting suggestion that a series of Late Roman/Early Byzantine and Medieval/Ottoman sites on hilltops with wide viewsheds may have been watch posts in times of threatened invasion (p. 208).

The sanctuary flourished in the Cypro-Archaic II period, with walls, two rectangular structures with hearths, and a wide range of material culture including an important series of limestone sculptures. It was reorganised at the end of the 4th century BC, when a new peribolos wall incorporated older sculpture fragments. A mudbrick platform served as an altar, associated with burning and animal bones; this identification is further corroborated by phosphate analysis (Chapter 24).

The best discussion of the character and role of the sanctuary comes in Fourrier's chapter on the pottery (Chapter 5). She sees the sanctuary not as isolated or 'rural' but rather as 'extra-urban': it was closely linked to the centre, and played an active role in gathering the wider community together round a common cult and celebration (p. 131). Judging by the style of the pottery, this centre was in the Cypro-Archaic period most likely Idalion. The terracotta figurines, mainly chariot groups, support that association (p. 135), and Averett's study of them (Chapter 10) uses the same 'extra-urban' tag (p. 143). The regional analysis is continued in Counts' interesting examination of the 'Athienou school of sculpture' (Chapter 11), a prominent regional workshop using local limestone quarries that lasted from the late 7th century to the Hellenistic and perhaps Roman period.

In spite of extensive looting and 19th-century excavation, Blackwell and Johnson's spatial analysis of the finds from the sanctuary is very valuable, and will presumably be even more so when the sculptures and figurines are included (Chapter 23). A distinct clustering of ritual objects suggests regular, focused activities by ritual specialists. This is balanced by significant flexibility and heterogeneity in the use of space, suggesting a range of participants operating more autonomously, not just under the tight control of the ritual specialists. These rituals clearly included animal sacrifice. Reese's examination of the faunal remains (Chapter 18) showed a marked preference for sheep/goat, and as at the sanctuary of Apollo Hylates at Kourion there are a good number of hind limb bones, several of them burnt.

Most of the Cypro-Archaic to Roman tombs in the area had been looted, but the project's excavations found many useful and revealing finds that the looters had missed, especially in four late Cypro-Archaic II to Cypro-Classical I tombs (p. 79). Of particular interest for the tombs' outer appearance were well-preserved cuttings over the tombs for grave stelai, and fragments of the stelai themselves. Gordon's publication of the lamps (Chapter 14) argues for their religious role, in lighting the way to the underworld for the deceased and rekindling their spirits during anniversary tomb feasts by the mourners (p. 192). Harper and Tung analysed a series of non-metric traits in the surviving teeth to establish whether the burials were organised according to kinship (Chapter 19). The interesting and scrupulously analysed results show that two of the ancient tombs have very distinct family groupings, while two others share a single grouping. The Venetian-period tombs are clearly distinct from the ancient ones.

The project's commitment to later historical periods is best shown in its excavation of the substantial Venetian-period settlement of Malloura. This included the excavation of the home of a wealthy family with its own well, and a series of burials of at least 57 individuals (pp. 83–83). A highly intriguing industrial building was in use from the second half of the 15th century into the 16th: its foundations consisted of a series of cross walls lined with gypsum slabs and capped with wooden planks (p. 81). In a very engaging study, DeMasi gives a helpful overview of flax production, and notes that Malloura provides the perfect environment for winter flax growing (Chapter 16). On this basis she argues that the building's system of water-proofed cross walls was used as a series of retting tanks. This is supported by Harper's analysis of the teeth of the Venetian-period human remains (Chapter 20): five individuals show artificial grooves on their teeth consistent with textile workers drawing the thread through their teeth to moisten it, making it easier to spin.

The identification of the Venetian industrial building as a flax-retting workshop conflicts with Spigelman's argument that it was a granary with the characteristic parallel foundation walls for support and ventilation (Chapter 17). In principle it is no bad thing to present alternative interpretations, and the two arguments are carefully cross-referenced, but nowhere does the volume attempt to adjudicate between them. The case for flax retting is certainly argued more persuasively, especially as the granary theory does not explain the hydraulic plaster and gypsum slabs.

These diverse studies are neatly drawn together by the 'crossroads and boundaries' theme of the volume title, and in particular by a concern with the relation between the Malloura Valley and the world of Cyprus and the Mediterranean beyond it. Most of the papers managed to link their interpretation to this, though in some cases, such as Sarris' discussion of the geophysical survey (Chapter 21), the connection was rather strained (p. 279). 'Connectedness' as measured by artefact provenience studies is something of an archaeological construct: did people know that their table ware, for example, came from North Africa, or did they just associate it with the pedlar's visit or the local market town? What do 'connected' and 'isolated' actually mean in terms of a community's world view, rather than as an archaeological expression of an abstract trading network?

The theoretical approach outlined in the editors' introduction on 'Research by design' (Chapter 1) argued for a cultural ecological approach which viewed culture as an adaptation to changing environmental conditions; this is a rather restrictive view which leaves little space for human agency (p. 3). The volume's other theoretical strand was world systems theory, slightly nuanced so that non-state peripheral societies can play an active role (p. 5). The centre/periphery approach was certainly productive at many points in the volume, but the affirmation of the 'vibrant, innovative nature of village life' (p. 6), while a welcome refinement of world systems theory, could have been developed much further in the contributions and the conclusion to the volume.

Kardulias, Toumazou and Counts' chapter on archaeology and community relations was a welcome contribution to a much-neglected area of Mediterranean archaeology (Chapter 27). Its theoretical discussion of cultural materialism, however, seemed almost totally irrelevant to the celebratory account of the close links between the project and the local community that followed it. There is no doubt that those relations were very close and beneficial to both sides, to a degree unusual in foreign projects working in the Eastern Mediterranean; that is one of the real strengths of the Athienou Archaeological Project. But the chapter missed the opportunity for wider reflection on archaeology and community engagement in his part of the world.

This is a thoroughly interesting, readable and appealing volume. The careful background sections to each chapter make it much more than a simple project report, and it should, for example, feature highly on undergraduate reading lists on Cypriot archaeology. It is very well produced, with colour illustrations inserted where relevant in the text rather than relegated to a separate section of plates, and I spotted no typos whatsoever. All its readers will certainly look forward to the series of volumes that will be the final publication of this important project (p. xx), particularly because they will provide the integrated analysis that this preliminary volume does not.