



Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project: Excavations at Pyla-Vigla in 2022

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Pyla-Vigla (Vigla), investigated as part of the Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project (PKAP), is a fortified settlement dating to the early Hellenistic period ca. 325–275 BCE. The site is located in southeastern Cyprus on the primary overland route between ancient Kition and Salamis (**figs. 1–3**). The largely ephemeral (ca. 50 year) nature of Vigla's occupation presents a valuable opportunity to shed light on a poorly understood period of ancient Cyprus. The early Hellenistic period saw the island transition from a political system based on semi-autonomous city kingdoms to the incorporation into an incipient imperial system. With a sound stratigraphic profile consisting of multiple undisturbed floor and subfloor levels, a homogeneous material assemblage, and discrete chronological benchmarks, Vigla represents an ideal case study to explore the imperial mechanisms of the earliest Hellenistic kings. These mechanisms were devised both to subjugate the island of Cyprus and to carve out their own spheres of influence within the remnants of Alexander the Great's empire during the late fourth and third centuries BCE.

The 2022 field season marks the 16th year of fieldwork for PKAP. Previous seasons have undertaken systematic excavation (2008, 2009, 2012, 2018, 2019), while others have focused on intensive pedestrian survey and geophysical prospecting. The 2022 season saw the continuation of excavation within the fortified plateau of two 5 × 5 meter excavation units: EU 20, first opened in 2019; and EU 23, immediately to the east of EU 20. These units serve to address two overarching research goals. First, to continue building a study collection of early Hellenistic pottery in order to address broader issues of chronology related to the early Hellenistic period. Second, to uncover structures within the fortified space and investigate the domestic functions and production areas of the site, as well as investigate the fort's potential ties to local networks.

Excavation of EU 20

EU 20 was first opened and partially excavated in 2019 (**figs. 4–5**). At the end of the 2019 season, the beginnings of several major floors and floor assemblages were exposed. The 2022 season's aims for EU 20 were largely directed towards broadening the understanding of the structures and assemblages uncovered in the previous season. The excavation of the unit

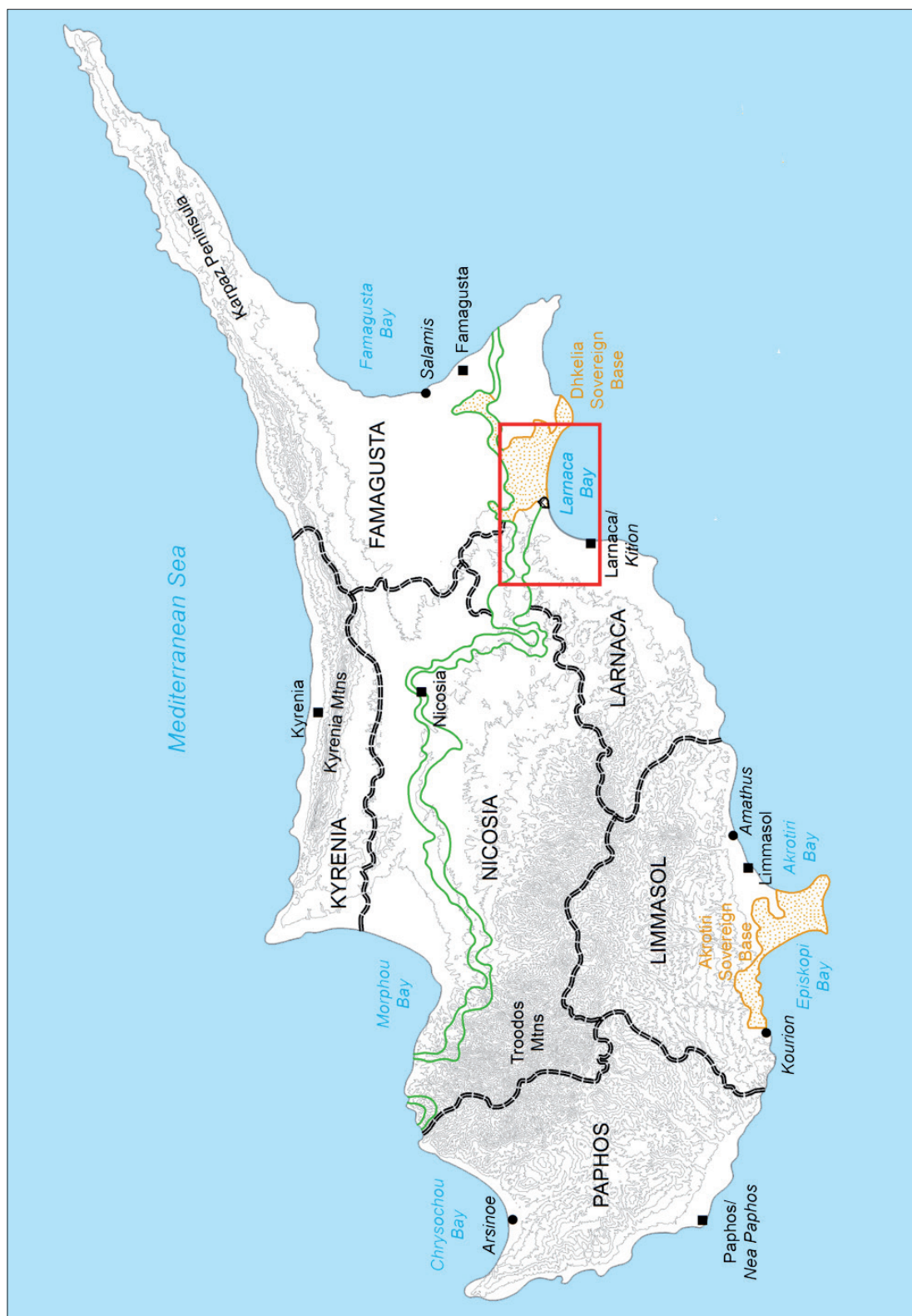


Fig. 1 : A map of ancient Cyprus showing the major urban entities with the PKAP survey area and Vigla alloted out on the western side of the Dhekelia Sovereign Base.



Fig. 2 : An image of the Vigla plateau looking north.



Fig. 3 : An image from the top of Vigla looking southwest towards the Mediterranean Sea.

confirmed its domestic nature, especially in the middle section of the trench where a wide and diverse material assemblage was revealed that appear to subscribe the impression of it being a food storage/preparation facility (**fig. 6**). The trench produced a vast amount of ceramic and metal artifacts. Aside from these materials, a large number of charred remains (olive pits) as well as loom weights (**fig. 7**) provide an interesting assemblage outlook into the material culture of this particular domestic context. The pottery recovered from the floor surfaces was largely from the early Hellenistic period. A small number of Iron Age pottery fragments were recovered while excavating a slab lined pit built directly over bedrock.



Fig. 4:
An orthophotograph depicting the close of excavations in EU 20.

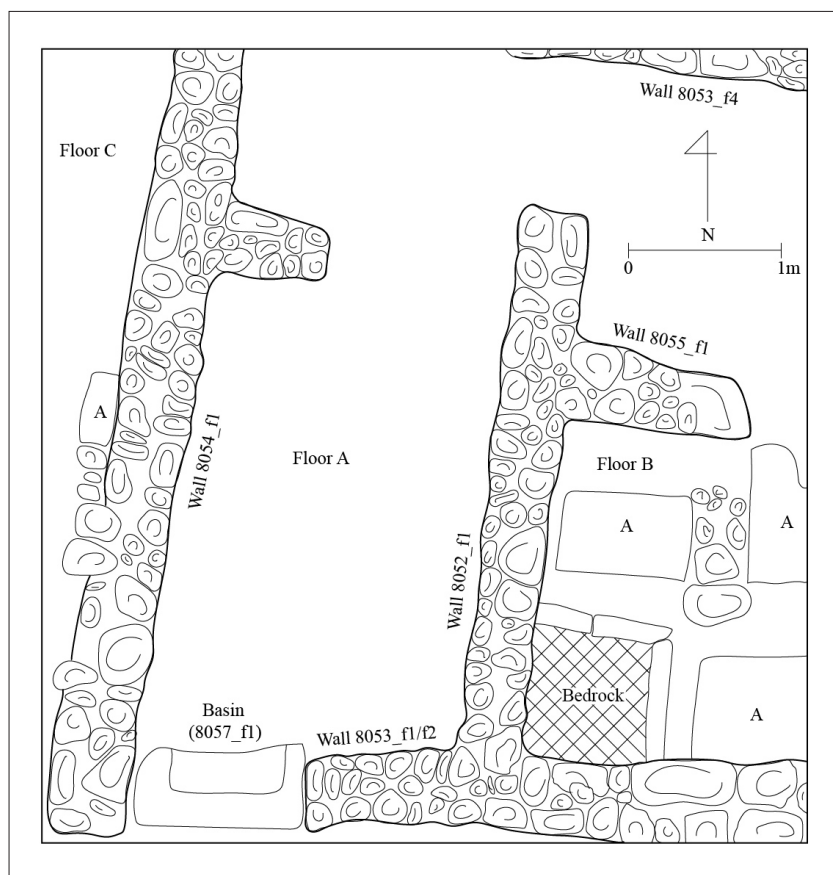


Fig. 5:
A top plan of EU 20 with relevant contexts labeled and all identified ashlar stones are marked with an ›A‹ on the plan.



Fig. 6 : A floor surface photograph showing artifacts denoting a domestic ceramic assemblage and a stone bread stamp.

The walls on the eastern section of EU 20 appear to be related to the western walls of EU 23, and the entire structure of EU 20 was within the mudbrick elevation that had been identified in previous seasons. The west baulk of the southeast corner of the trench contained a stone-lined pit constructed with rectangular ashlar. This pit had been built on top of the bedrock, which had itself been worked to a depth of approximately 25 cm. The pit produced sparse Iron Age ceramic remains, as well as a few bone fragments.

Finds

The excavation of EU 20 yielded sizable material assemblages on three distinct floor levels, designated ›A‹, ›B‹, and ›C‹ (figs. 4–5). Floor A yielded the most material, with Floors B and C being substantially less productive in terms of ceramic and metal finds. While the finds on Floors B and C were not as concentrated, they revealed equally interesting depositions.

Floor A yielded an in-situ assemblage of varied domestic materials with the most common being ceramic storage vessels and bowls, iron and bronze nails, bronze projectiles, iron blades, a stone bread stamp, a faience bead and two bronze coins (figs. 8–9). Other finds of significance included some intact semi-fine vessels (echinus bowls and a flask) and amphora fragments. The finds were scattered over a floor surface consisting of an admixture of plaster and compacted earth. The ceramic cluster found in the 2019 campaign, which included an intact plate, overlays almost perfectly with the southeastern corner of Floor A, where no wares were found. It would make sense, thus, to assume that they were part of the same assemblage and collapse event. The spatial distribution and concentration of iron objects (nails and blades) seems indicative of the presence of some structural element attached to the wall that collapsed



Fig. 8 : One of many in-situ ceramic floor assemblages from EU 20.



Fig. 7 : A collection of ceramic loom weights, including an unfired example (bottom right) found in EU 20.



Fig. 9 : A collection of bronze nails found in EU 20.



Fig. 10 :
A photograph of a
limestone figurine
findspot with
associated kitchenware
ceramics from Floor C.

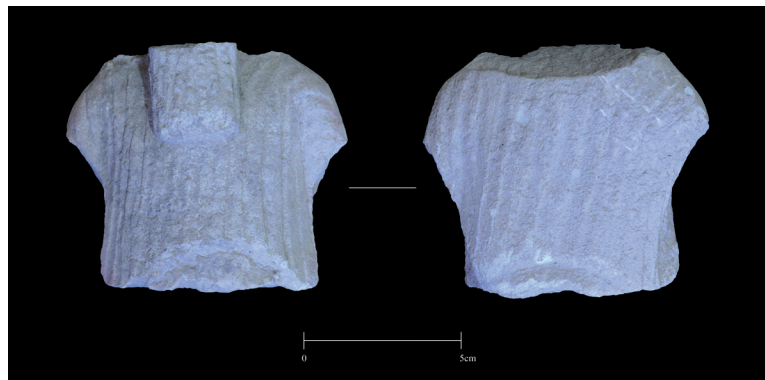


Fig. 11 :
An image of a
limestone figurine of
a bearded male from
Floor C.

on top of the whole assemblage. An unfired clay loom weight was also recovered, similar to those recovered in the 2019 season.

Floor B was largely excavated on the southern end. First exposed in 2019, the area covered by Floor B had two distinct floor phases, easily visible in the baulk after excavation. The second floor surface was exposed in 2019, and several objects were found in situ lying on this floor. This second, later phase of the floor is contemporary with Floor A. Beneath this floor, an earlier, first floor phase was exposed, along with several other features. The primary feature discovered was a slab-lined pit of ashlar blocks framing a partially excavated section of bedrock. The earlier floor phase seems to have abutted, but did not cover, the pit and the ashlars. Overall, the room did not yield many finds, with the exceptions of some Attic pottery fragments and, inside the feature, some Iron Age shards and a few animal bone fragments.

Floor C produced large amounts of well-preserved pottery and some special finds including a fragment of a limestone figurine (figs. 10–11) and a bronze Alexander the Great

issue coin. Given the small spatial extent of the unit, excavation efforts ceased as it became too difficult to safely work in the unit.

In addition to the extensive deposits on these floors, soil samples were taken in several places in Floors A and B. Five samples were taken of Floor A, in the four corners and in the center, and another sample was taken of a small section of the first phase of Floor B which had been sealed underneath ashlar block 8060_f1, first exposed in 2019. These samples were reserved for flotation and analysis at the Cyprus Institute.

Excavation Unit Interpretations

The excavation of EU 20 provided conclusive evidence regarding the relationship between the three floor surfaces. It became clear that Floors A and B represented a single occupational level. To a certain degree, some materials, such as the unfired loom weights (**fig. 7**), connect the last surface excavated in Floor B (excavated in 2019 and 2022) with the last surface uncovered in Floor A (excavated in 2022). While the northern wall seems to go inside the baulk in an E-W direction, and the eastern baulk has not yet revealed an eastern wall, it is safe to assume that both floors communicate the same domestic unit, as they are both bounded by the southern wall of the trench.

The excavation and articulation of the unit's extant architecture demonstrated that the plaster/earthen floor uncovered in the northwest corner of the unit (Floor C) is clearly connected to the domestic unit of Floors A and B, but is also structurally separated from it. While the northern baulk does not show any conclusive signs of another wall, the southern wall, which runs very clearly through both Floors A and B, is interrupted abruptly by the outside (western face) of the western wall.

Excavation of EU 23

Vigla EU 23 was excavated from July 6 – July 22, 2022 (**figs. 12–13**). The goals of this unit were to gain more data on the phasing of the fortified settlement and to learn more about the extent and functions of the structures identified in EU 20 in 2019. EU 23 is located directly to the east of EU 20, separated by a 1 m. baulk. Most finds consisted of ceramics and metals, but there were also some smaller quantities of bone and shell, worked stone, beads, and painted plaster. Three lead sling bullets found in EU 23 support the military nature of the site (**fig. 14**). During the course of excavation, seven features were identified, including five stone socle walls, one cut, and one plaster basin. The orientation of the stone socle walls demonstrated that EU 23 consists of two rooms that are distinct from the rooms identified in EU 20. Although the relationships between certain walls cannot be determined based on the available data thus far, it is clear that the north/south wall separating the two rooms was added at a later date than the two walls in the northern part of the trench since the north/south wall abuts the two other walls. The remains of a floor surface identified in the eastern room of EU 23, as well as the corners of the walls in the NW and SE corners of EU 23, suggest that these two spaces were interior rooms. The initial analyses of the ceramic assemblages and coins suggest an early Hellenistic dating of the EU 23 phases. These findings are consistent with the results of earlier excavations on the plateau of Vigla. Based on the large amount of amphora sherds, an in-situ amphora, a plaster basin, and interspersed cooking ware and plain wares (bowls and jugs), the rooms could have been domestic and/or industrial in nature (**fig. 15**).

Finds

Based on preliminary analysis of the ceramics in the field and in finds processing, most of the ceramics seem to date to the early Hellenistic period, which is consistent with excavation results from previous years. The uppermost layers may have some later Roman pottery (with combed decoration) and have some modern inclusions, as identified in the field; this will be

Fig. 12 :
An
orthophotograph
depicting the close
of excavations in
EU 23.



Fig. 13 :
A top plan of EU
23 with relevant
contexts labeled.

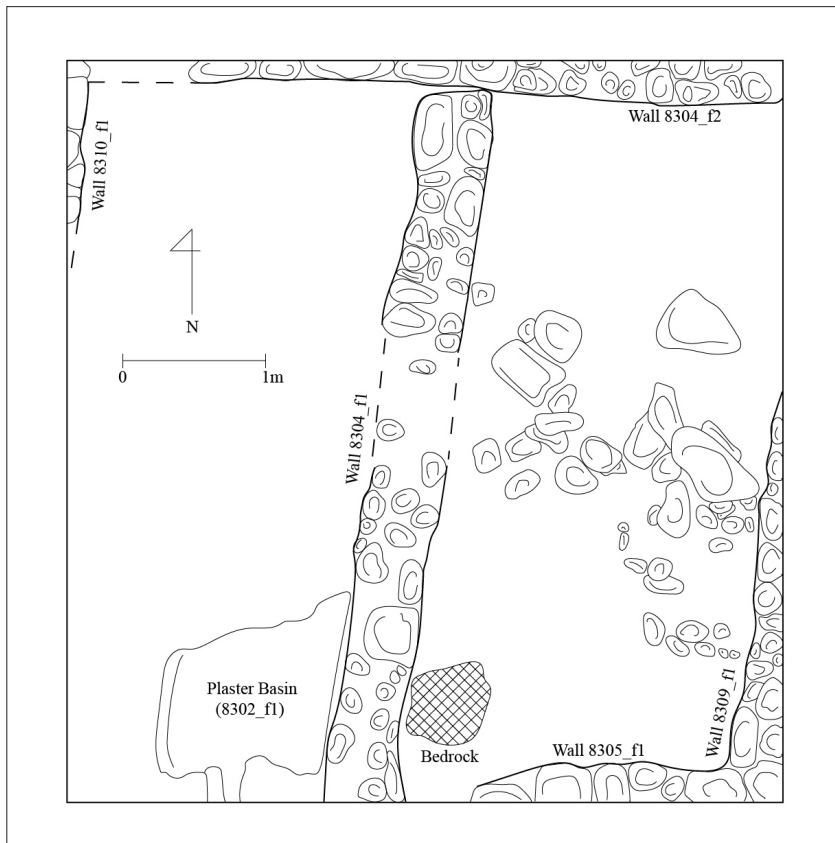




Fig. 14 :
A collection of
artifacts of a military
nature.
Top: a bronze
projectile,
Middle: two sections
of chainmail,
Bottom: three lead
sling bullets.



Fig. 15 :
An in-progress
photograph of
excavations in EU 23
showing the bottom
half of an in situ
amphora.



Fig. 16 :
An image of the silver
Alexander the Great
tetradrachm found in
EU 23.

confirmed with pottery analysis of these contexts, but this is also consistent with the nature of these modern disturbed contexts. The underlying units appear to be sealed within the early Hellenistic periods.

The most remarkable architectural find was an in-situ plaster basin, partially exposed in EU 23 and continuing into the south baulk (see **figs. 12–13**). The southern part of the plaster basin is preserved; the northern part of it is broken. Many chunks of the broken plaster were found within the surrounding fill (SU 8302) and later layers in the western half of the trench. A small channel, with one plastered stone in situ on the western side of the channel, runs into the south baulk of the unit; the stone for the eastern side of the channel is not preserved. The western edge of the basin slopes down but then breaks after about 10 cm. The eastern edge of the basin slopes up, indicating that it was plastered up against the mudbrick elevation of the north-south wall 8304_f1. One stone of wall 8304_f1 even appears to go underneath the basin, showing that it postdates wall 8304_f1. The plaster is a bluish-gray colour with small pebble inclusions. Future excavations in 2023 will determine what the basin is built upon and if it extends any more to the south.

The finds suggest that the rooms were domestic and/or industrial in use. In the western room, a very large deposit of amphora sherds was found up against the east-west wall 8304_f2, including at least one stamped amphora handle. A second, smaller deposit was found against wall 8304_f1. In the eastern room, an upright amphora appeared to be the only in-situ find in it, while the area around the amphora seems to have been disturbed by a large stone collapse that broke up the surrounding floor surface. A few fragments of painted plaster discovered in the fill provide insight into how the interior walls of the rooms were decorated, presumably plastered and painted over the mudbrick casing of the stone socle.

Non-ceramic finds in EU 23 included metal weapons and other materials: coins, faunal bone, shell, a few bone beads, painted plaster, and worked stone. The metal weapons consisted of three lead sling bullets and a piece of chain mail. Other special metal finds from the unit included a bronze pendant, six bronze coins, and a silver tetradrachm (**fig. 16**). However, these finds were found in the fill rather than in any in-situ context, while the plaster basin in the western room, the pieces of worked stone that appear to be parts of a basin in the eastern room, and the large amount of amphora fragments found in both the western and eastern room suggest that these rooms had some kind of production and storage functions.

Excavation Unit Interpretations

Excavation of EU 23 has found two adjacent rooms: one in the western half of the trench, one in the eastern half. The western room does not seem to be a continuation of the rooms found in EU 20 based on the corner created by walls 8304_f2 and 8310_f1 and the fact that wall 8305_f1 does not continue past the plaster basin 8302_f1. Excavation of the baulk between EU 20 and EU 23 will confirm this hypothesis. Although the western room with the basin does not appear to connect to EU 20, the elevation of the basin seems to be about the same as the western wall in EU 20, with the elevation of the basin at 57.317 (center) and the elevation of the wall being 57.44. The preliminary analysis of the finds suggest that the rooms were occupied and/or used during the early Hellenistic periods.

This collapse of the mudbrick superstructure occurred in both rooms. Finds in the collapse layer mostly relate to early Hellenistic pottery with scant traces of Iron Age material. Further pottery analysis will prove or disprove this initial finding, but if the pottery is from the Iron Age, this finding could be consistent with the finding of EU 19 in 2019 that Iron Age pottery sherds were used as temper in the production of mudbricks for the Hellenistic fortified settlement. Based on in-situ mudbrick that was found lining the southeastern corner of wall 8304_f1, the mudbrick collapse did not just come from the mudbrick superstructures, but also the lining of the walls. A stone collapse in the eastern room seems to have extensively damaged the floor in the area around the aforementioned in-situ amphora. A jumble of large, cut blocks was spread over the eastern room just above the floor.



Fig. 17 :
A representative collection of lead, bronze, and iron weapons found throughout Vigla.

At present, with the available data it can be proposed that the first phase of construction in EU 23 consists of wall 8304_f2 and wall 8310_f1 sometime in the early Hellenistic period. A later phase (but still within the early Hellenistic period) consisted of the construction of wall 8304_f1 to define the western and eastern rooms, and the floor with the amphora in the eastern room was constructed too during this time. The basin postdates the construction of wall 8304_f1, but by how much is not known. The status of the walls in the SE corner of the unit is less clear, whether walls 8305_f1 and 8309_f1 are contemporary with walls 8304_f2 and 8310_f1. This will be determined when more of wall 8309_f1 is exposed to see if it creates the NE corner of the eastern room with 8304_f2. The eastern room was presumably cleaned before abandonment and collapse, since only the amphora was found in situ. The function of the western and eastern rooms was likely industrial in nature due to the presence of the basin and the large amounts of amphora fragments found. Alternately, they could also be domestic spaces (or mixed use).

The occupation and use of the building represented in this unit are solidly early Hellenistic in date. While some sherds of Iron Age have been found, this does not, however, suggest any Iron Age contexts. Iron Age pottery was found in mudbrick collapse, while the in-situ amphora seems to be early Hellenistic. Further excavation will clarify the functions of these two rooms, but EU 23 confirms the early Hellenistic occupation of the fortified settlement and provides more insight into the activities of the people who lived at Vigla.



Fig. 18 : A typical domestic assemblage found throughout Vigla including three echinus bowls, a plate, iron and bronze nails, iron blade, bronze coin, and stone bread stamp.

Interpretative Conclusions

The continued excavations at Vigla shed light upon a period of great transition for Cyprus and the greater eastern Mediterranean basin. The representative material assemblages further our understanding of the likely community of soldiers and others that occupied Vigla (figs. 17–18). The 2022 excavations have suggested several avenues for future research. First, the material remains discovered in 2022 further substantiate the site's chronology (ca. 325–275 BCE), a likely military function, relative short life span, and the overall integrity of the stratigraphy. The site was occupied for less than half a century and the remains are not obscured by extant earlier remains or later deposits. Second, the large quantity of botanical remains and soil samples collected will support a robust palaeobotanical study that will further our understanding of local diet and perhaps trade. Finally, excavations in EU 20 and EU 23 demonstrate, through the presence of multiple in-situ floor surfaces associated with extant stone socles and mudbrick debris, the possibility of investigating the domestic functions of Vigla's inhabitants and imperial strategies of the Diadochoi.

Further Reading

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