



## **Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project: Excavations at Pyla-Vigla in 2018**

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The island of Cyprus has long been characterized as a cultural crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>, due to its multiethnic population of Greeks, Phoenicians, and Eteocypriots; its strategic location at the intersection of trade routes between Egypt, the Levant, Asia Minor, and points further west; and its resulting heterogeneous culture, as cultural groups intermingled and control of the island shifted between local groups and various imperial powers throughout its history. Scholarly attention on Cyprus has traditionally focused on the Bronze and Iron Ages, when Cyprus was largely an independent if minor player in greater Mediterranean politics. The Hellenistic period on Cyprus, lasting from the conquest of Alexander the Great to the final annexation of the island by the Roman Empire (332–31 BCE) has been chronically understudied despite being a period of political and cultural upheaval. Hellenistic material culture is poorly understood to the point that it is difficult to even identify Hellenistic sites or levels of occupation with any level of chronological specificity<sup>2</sup>. This is a notable deficit.

The Pyla-Koutsopetria Archaeological Project (PKAP) has focused on this crucial period in its excavations at the site of Vigla (**figs. 1, 2**), located on a plateau overlooking the main coastal road between Kition (modern Larnaca) and Salamis (near modern Famagusta)<sup>3</sup>. Over the course of three prior field seasons (2008, 2009, 2012), PKAP conducted a series of soundings that demonstrated the presence of significant Hellenistic period occupation. Based on an extensive deposit of pottery discovered in 2012, occupation of the site appears to have been limited to at most 350–250 BCE, from the end of independent Cypriot rule to the early Hellenistic, when two rival dynasties (the Ptolemies and Antigonids) contested for control of the island. The site is strongly associated with material culture that is likely indicative of mercenaries or other military personnel, such as lead sling bullets, small-scale weapons manufacture, and fortifications. The limited occupation is extraordinary: most Hellenistic sites continued to be occupied well into the Roman period (mid-1st c. BCE to 7th c. CE). The site thus presents a unique opportunity to examine a wholly Hellenistic site, largely undisturbed by earlier and later occupation. That the site dates to the early Hellenistic period, during the transition on Cyprus from a political landscape of independent city-kingdoms to a subject

1 E.g. HADJISAVVAS 2010.

2 For recent attempts to address this issue, see: BERLIN 2003; GORDON 2012; KEEN 2012; PAPANTONIOU 2012.

3 CARAHER ET AL. 2005; CARAHER ET AL. 2007; CARAHER ET AL. 2008; CARAHER ET AL. 2014; CARAHER ET AL. 2017; OLSON ET AL. 2013.



Fig. 1 : Location of PKAP study area (B. R. Olson).



Fig. 2 : View of Vigla plateau looking north (T. Landvatter).

province of a Mediterranean empire, makes Vigla particularly important for our understanding of the material consequences of Hellenistic period imperialism.

The 2018 field season of PKAP at Vigla constituted both excavation and study of material from earlier seasons. Excavation continued with a small, 2 x 5 m sounding, with a view towards establishing priorities for a larger excavation season in 2019. This sounding served to address three overarching goals: 1. to ascertain whether a fortification wall discovered in 2012 continued across the northern edge of the plateau; 2. to determine the date and construction of

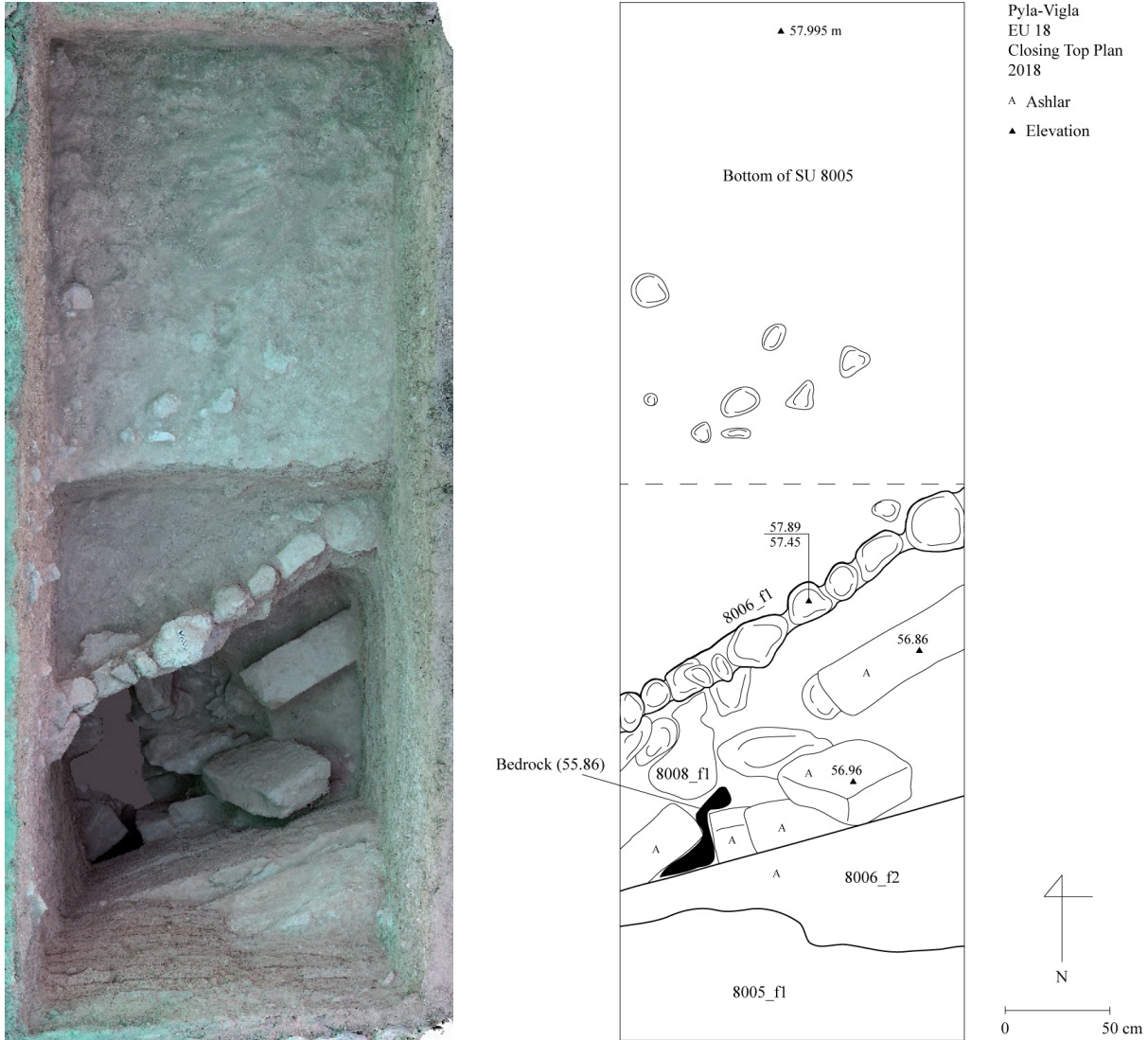


Fig. 3 : Overview image and final plan of EU18 (B. R. Olson).

the fortification system; 3. to collect a study collection of early Hellenistic pottery to address a broader chronology problem related to the early Hellenistic period.

The sounding, EU 18 (**fig. 3**), was in an area that spanned the ridge that marked the northern edge of Vigla, approximately 10 meters east of a sounding (EU 16) that initially exposed a fortification wall and that included the major deposit of Hellenistic pottery. Along with the sounding, during the 2018 season there was also continued study of ceramics produced during earlier seasons of excavation, with a particular focus on the above-mentioned deposit of early Hellenistic pottery discovered in 2012. This study involved preparing a catalogue for formal publication and illustrating select artifacts. Finally, there was also continued study of the metal finds from 2008, 2009, and a newly conserved assemblage from the 2012 excavation season. This study involved a typological assessment of the metals, mostly consisting of lead and bronze weapons, jewellery, coins, and implements. Particular effort was spent assessing the coins which, combined with the stratigraphy and pottery, will help refine our dating of the site's chronology.



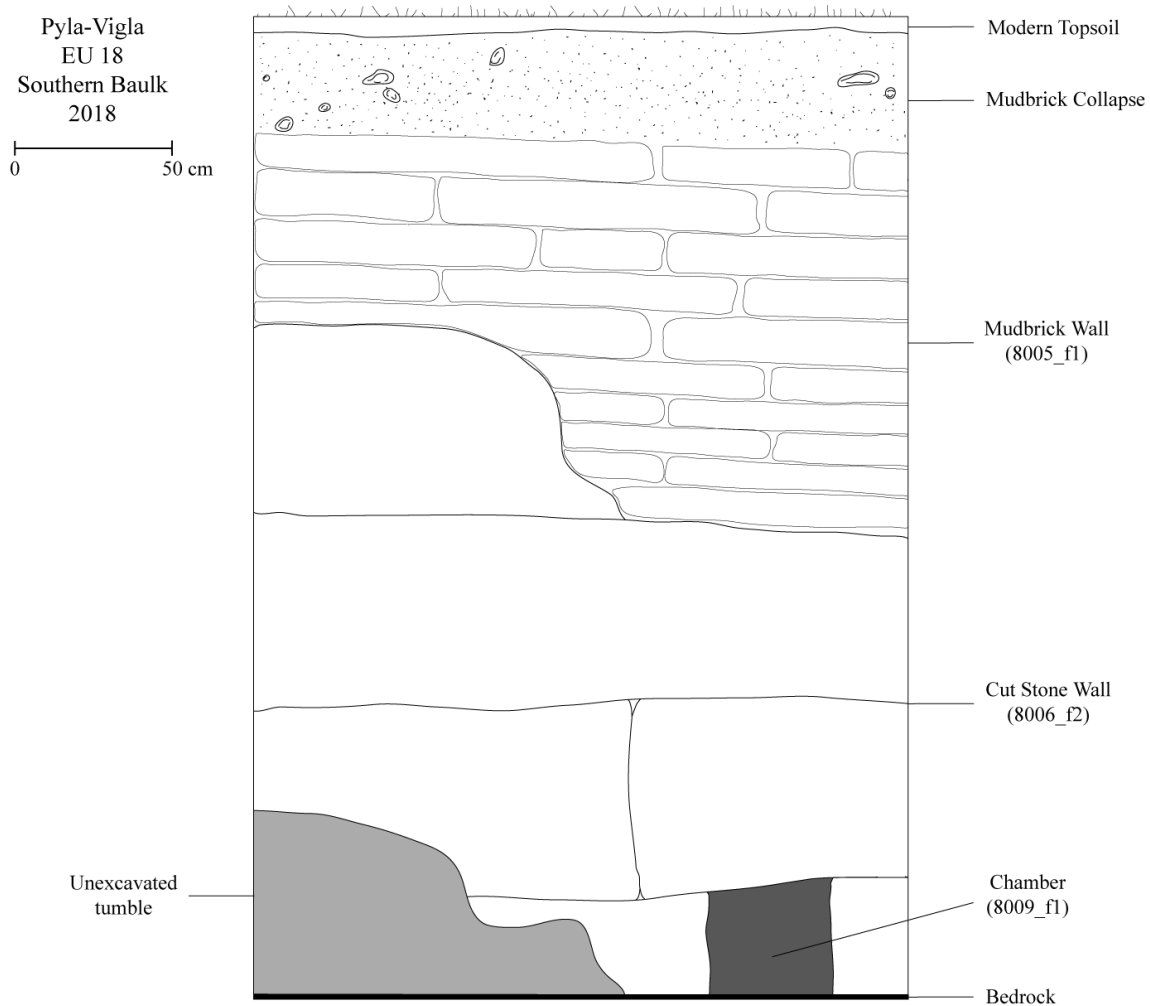


Fig. 4 : Drawing of south balk (B. R. Olson).

### Excavations of EU 18

Vigla EU 18 was excavated from May 23–June 7, 2018. The unit produced an assemblage of artifacts consisting of varied ceramics, metal weapons, and a bronze ring. The stratigraphy of EU 18 is relatively simple, consisting largely of collapsed mudbrick and stone / mudbrick architecture, which belong to several cohesive strata and represent stratified natural and cultural deposits. The relation of the wall(s) revealed in this unit and that from EU 16 remains unclear. The main features uncovered in the trench were all in the south balk (fig. 4). These were an in situ mudbrick wall (8005\_f1) constructed on top of a large cut stone wall (8006\_f2) that appears to be distinct both in size and construction from a sizeable field-stone constructed wall excavated in EU 16 in 2012. At the base of this wall was a small, purposefully constructed chamber (8009\_f1) containing pottery fragments and faunal material, possibly the remains of a foundation deposit. A brief description of the main features and a proposed phasing follows.

### Features

*Mudbrick wall (8005\_f1):* This was located immediately beneath the first layer of mudbrick collapse and founded on the stone cut masonry wall (8006\_f2). It is unclear whether the mudbrick wall is a distinct later construction, or was conceived as the upper courses of the masonry wall from the start. The thickness of the wall could not be determined as it was impossible to distinguish in situ mudbrick from the surrounding collapse, so the wall only became apparent in the south balk of the trench. In situ mudbrick could be observed thanks to



Fig. 5 : In-progress view of south balk with visible mudbrick wall (8005\_f1) over cut-stone wall (8006\_f2) (T. Landvatter).

the use of distinct dark red mud mortar between courses of mudbrick and vertically between individual bricks (**fig. 5**). Due to this mortar, 11 courses of mudbrick could be observed, ranging between 12 and 15 cm thick, all of which spanned the entire south balk of the trench. We were unable to determine the total dimensions of a given mudbrick. The mudbrick wall completely enveloped the uneven first block of the stone-cut masonry wall, with the dark red mud mortar following its contours and either partial mudbricks or mud patches used to level off the stone for individual courses of mudbrick. The mudbrick may have faced the lower courses of wall 8006\_f2 as well based on the presence of mudbrick mortar on the face of the masonry, but this was less clear than on the first course. The mudbrick was largely a consistent colour, Munsell colour Light Yellowish Brown (10 YR 6/4), with some harder Very Pale Brown (10 YR 8/4) near the east balk of the trench.

*Stone cut masonry wall (8006\_f2)*: Located below the mudbrick wall (8005\_f1) and immediately atop bedrock, four courses of stone masonry were evident; it was impossible to determine the extent of any given block, as all ran into both the east or west balk. There were at minimum five large blocks evident in the trench, and they were demonstrably monumental, ranging from 46cm to 52 cm thick. At the base of the wall, there was a small chamber, 8009\_f1, purposefully constructed as part of the wall. The exact relationship between 8006\_f2 and 8005\_f1 is unclear, whether the former served as a socle for the latter, or the walls represent two distinct phases of occupation.

*Chamber 8009\_f1*: This is a small, L-shaped chamber built into the base of 8006\_f2 and sitting above bedrock, constructed of cut blocks and mortar. From the base of the third course of 8006\_f2, the chamber extends 84 cm back. The chamber is between 50 and 60 cm wide in the front; 50 cm back there is a small niche to the E, increasing the chamber's width to between 70 and 80 cm. The chamber was clearly purposefully constructed as part of the wall and appears to have been blocked by a stone, which at some point became disarticulated from the wall, exposing the entrance to the chamber. The soil within the chamber was significantly different from the levels of mudbrick collapse, consisting of a loose, moist soil matrix with significant mortar inclusions, likely fallen from the ceiling of the chamber. This level included a distinct layer of ash that contained about 250 unburnt animal bone fragments, mainly of a rather complete unmodified adult dog skeleton and a smaller number of adult sheep or goat bones, with several cut in food processing. There were also some seeds and other plant

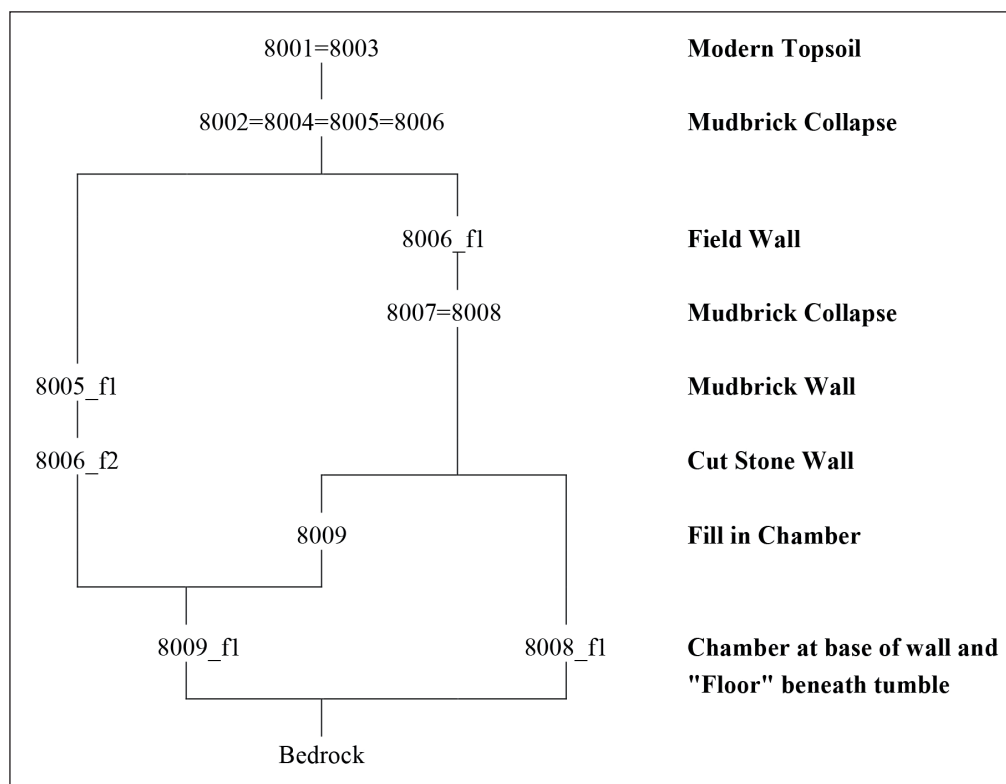


Fig. 6 : Harris matrix for EU 18 (T. Landvatter).

remains. Ceramic finds were few, but yielded some cookware fragments and two special finds, an Attic bowl (FS 8009\_1001) and a Hellenistic amphora toe (FS 8009\_1002) which had joins with several large amphora fragments. Both of these finds were near the top of the level and near the entrance to the chamber. Ten bags of approximately 20 L of soil each were retained for flotation in future seasons.

### *Phasing (fig. 6)*

*Phase 1:* The first phase of EU 18 is the construction of a floor (8008\_f1), the chamber (8009\_f1), and the stone wall (8006\_f2). The floor is too poorly understood to establish its relationship to other features in this phase. The chamber (8009\_1) was clearly built as part of the stone-cut masonry wall (8006\_f2), possibly as a purpose-built chamber for a foundation deposit. The construction of a monumental stone wall (8006\_f2) reveals a more intentional, permanent presence on the Vigla plateau than previous excavations indicated.

*Phase 2:* The second phase is the construction of the mudbrick wall (8005\_f1). It is impossible to determine at present how much the mudbrick wall 8005\_f1 postdates the stone wall 8006\_f2. The mudbrick may represent a later phase of wall construction, or it may have been purposefully built as the upper courses of stone wall 8006\_f2 from beginning. The mudbrick wall (8005\_f1) enveloped the uppermost course of the stone wall (8006\_f2) and apparently (though not definitively) faced the lower courses as well, based on the presence of the red mudbrick mortar on large portions of the face of the lower stone courses. The exact relationship between the mudbrick wall (8005\_f1) and the stone wall (8006\_f2) will need to be determined in future excavations.

*Phase 3:* The third phase is the first collapse episode. This level almost certainly represents the at least partial collapse of the mudbrick wall (8005\_f1), as the collapse layer and in situ mudbrick wall are the same Munsell colour (10YR6/4 – Light Yellowish Brown) with

the easily identifiable red mud mortar present throughout the collapse layer. Masonry and mortar tumble at the bottom of the trench sits on bedrock and may indicate an earlier collapse event, though this cannot be known for sure at present. In particular, it is not clear from what structure the large cut blocks in the tumble came. Future excavations will be needed to clarify this phase.

*Phase 4:* The fourth phase is the construction of a small field wall (8006\_f1). This wall was unevenly founded on top of the mudbrick collapse represented in phase 3. Nothing in the ceramic finds, however, indicates that this wall was constructed that much later than the original wall; all finds were consistent with a Hellenistic date.

*Phase 5:* The fifth phase is the second mudbrick collapse episode. The Munsell colour of this level was the same as that below (10YR6/4 – Light Yellowish Brown), but it differed in that it was more compact, had more chalky inclusions, and did not include the same amount of red mudbrick mortar. While the lower level of collapse can be confidently connected with the in situ mudbrick wall (8005\_f1), given the intervening foundation of the field wall (8006\_f1) the same cannot be said of this layer of collapse. Again, further excavation is necessary to clarify the architecture in this area.

*Phase 6:* The sixth and final phase is the modern topsoil layer represented. Numerous bullet casings and clips are indicative of the recent activity at the site.

### Conclusions

EU 18 has challenged some of our assumptions about the nature of the occupation at Vigla. Architecture found up to this point has been small in scale, mainly consisting of roughly-hewn field stone socles with mudbrick superstructures; the mudbrick and stone wall (8005\_f1/8006\_f2) in EU 18 dwarfs what has been found before. Based on the ceramic finds, this new wall dates to the same period as the smaller walls (i. e. the early Hellenistic period), indicating an interest in establishing a more permanent and potentially monumental presence on the plateau. Future seasons of excavation are needed to clarify the nature of this structure, its relationship to the wall discovered in EU 16, and better understand the interior side of the EU 18 wall.

The study season component of the 2018 season consisted of specific studies regarding the recently conserved metals discovered in 2012 and the ceramic assemblage collected in that season. Based on a preliminary analysis of this material, two observations can be made. First, the metal assemblage from 2012 continues to demonstrate that the site of Pyla-Vigla is one of a military nature. Several weapons in various forms were discovered, including sling bullets, catapult bolts, an arrowhead, a dagger, and unspecified iron projectile points. Second, the identifiable coins (five of the seven discovered) attest to the relatively short occupation history. All five coins come from the same Alexander the Great issue that includes Heracles on the obverse with a club, quiver, bow, and the name of Alexander on the reverse. The issue dates to the last quarter of the 4th century BC and the type was minted in both Salamis and Kition. The 2012 coins follow a similar pattern as the 2008 and 2009 assemblages, one that saw bronze coins of different sizes dating to the latter half of the 4th century BCE.

The ceramic analysis of the 2018 assemblage yielded little new information. Previous excavations units often produced great quantities of pottery with several diagnostic forms. EU 18 failed to do so, as the quantity and quality of the assemblage declined. Generally speaking, the majority of the ceramics consisted of heavily encrusted small sherds. It became readily apparent that EU18 was situated outside of the structure associated with the mudbrick / stone-cut wall uncovered in the southern side of the trench. The collected pottery represents mudbrick temper. The fabric, shapes, and forms all conform to the occupation assemblages found in previous seasons, which included small incurved rim bowls of various fabrics, kitchen wares, transport amphora, and medium-coarse vessels.



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