

WHO WERE THE RESIDENTS OF THE ASHLAR BUILDINGS IN CYPRUS?

Sophocles HADJISAVVAS

Former Director of Antiquities, Cyprus

The Cypro-Minoan evidence from Ashkelon, combined with domestic architecture, hearths, « bath-tubs », Aegean-style pottery, and other aspects of Aegean material culture, tips the balance toward Cyprus as the interim or long-term home of the Philistines before they settled in coastal Canaan, early in the twelfth century BCE.

(Moore and Stager 2006, p. 150)

ABSTRACT

A limited number of LCIIIC and/or LCIIIA sites on the island preserve some of the elements, which dictated Moore and Stager's statement for the Syro Palestinian littoral. Alassa Palaiotaverna is perhaps the most obvious candidate for the model as suggested above. In other occasions, I have emphasized the presence of Aegean elements, or the apparent influence of the Aegean in the architecture and the iconography of some of the finds from Alassa (Hadjisavvas 2001, p. 61-68). However, never in the past had I even dared to investigate the delicate question of who were the occupants of the impressive ashlar buildings and the least to trace their ethnicity.

Based on the evidence gathered thus far we may suggest that towards the end of the LCIIIC period a group of Achaeans, forming part of the coalition of the so-called Sea Peoples settled on Cyprus and for some time became the masters of the island. Although a number of students of Cypriot archaeology agree with this model, others disagree (Knapp 2008, p. 249-58 for discussion). The elite of the newcomers re-used the ashlar buildings as their residences, undertaking at the same time some modifications to suit their homeland traditions. Some factors beyond our knowledge resulted to the abandonment of their new settlements and caused their immigration to coastal Canaan, which later on became known as Philistia after the name of the new settlers. What they left behind are some novelties in everyday life documented by tangible evidence and above all the Greek language, which is one of the most important factors determining the ethnical identity of any people. Among our Israeli colleagues, the discussion related to the Philistine penetration in Canaan and the Cyprus connection is central. The provenance of the so-called Philistine pottery with the apparent relation to the Aegean and Cypriot ceramic tradition became the object of lively discussions. In this presentation, I will try to put together some recent information relevant to our subject, which eventually could outline the origins of the inhabitants of the ashlar buildings in Cyprus. Socio-economic, political and ideological questions will be investigated within the frameworks of this presentation. Architectural forms, remains of everyday life and the limited iconography will be compared with that of other regions, in order to trace the identity of the last people to have used the LBA Ashlar buildings of Cyprus.

Introduction

In the early history of Cypriot independent archaeology, shortly after the colonial rule the view from the West was strongly emphasized in contrast to the obvious link with the East. This trend was intended either to please the emerging political aspirations of people fighting for the union of the island with Greece, or simply following the views of influential scholars and politicians such as Spyridakis. The organization of conferences such as *The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean, Crete and Cyprus* and others fulfilled this tendency. Usually after such an event the interpretation of architectural and other finds were seen through the eyes of reputable Greek, archaeologists such as Marinatos or Platon to mention but a few. The usual interpretation was based on similarities from the Aegean or, more likely as direct influences from the Mycenaean world. There are many examples in Cypriot archaeological literature about cyclopean walls, megara and others used to define Cypriot architectural forms, which were common in the East Mediterranean region (Dikaos 1969, p. 48). This policy was followed for a few decades and had a negative impact especially on the Phoenician studies. Cyprus, being the first stop of the Phoenicians during the process of their expansion to the West, preserves the earliest evidence outside their homeland. This fact, in combination with the lack of archaeological research in the Lebanon, fulfilled all requirements for Cyprus to become a centre of Phoenician studies. It was only during the late 1990s, that the Department of Antiquities dared, for the first time to co-organize an exhibition related to the Phoenician routes along the Mediterranean and name the objects by their name (Hadjisavvas 1998, p. 95-100). I am not going to elaborate in this delicate political rather than archaeological matter, but this reference will give some thoughts for the discussion to follow.

Searching for the origins of the Ashlar Buildings

In other occasions, I have discussed the role played by the Ashlar Buildings in Cyprus, the socio economic aspect and their geographical location in relation to the natural resources of the regions related to them (Hadjisavvas 2003a, p. 31-34). In this paper, I will try to trace the identity of the inhabitants of the LBA Ashlar buildings based on a variety of evidence but mostly on the remains of their material culture. Most students of the Late Cypriot Bronze Age agree that the Ashlar buildings appear as the most obvious manifestation of the status of the elite after the accomplishment of the long process of urbanization occurred some time during the early LCIIIC period. The foreign demand for Cypriot copper is usually emphasized as the cause of labour specialization which led to the urbanization of the society. This process however is more complex and other factors should be taken into consideration to explain it. Emphasis should be given to the intensification of agriculture and above all the direct contacts of Cypriots escorting the valuable cargo of copper along the Syrian coast and Egypt.

Before going into any detailed discussion related to the last occupants of the Ashlar buildings we should trace their origins, beginning with the techniques of construction which in no way implies the ethnicity or the background of the occupants. The way of living is mostly associated with the architecture of the buildings. A recent search I undertook in the Near East in order to locate the source of tin and chloride brought me to Tel Mardikh, the Early and Middle Bronze Age Syrian town of Ebla.

The Italian excavations undertaken since 1964 at Tel Mardikh have revealed the extensive defences of Ebla, dating to the Middle Bronze Age (2nd millennium BC, and some earlier of the Early Bronze Age (3rd Millennium BC). Architecturally, the use of orthostats in a number of public buildings, as well as the so called Damascus gateway (fig. 1), anticipates their prolific use in buildings at many Syrian sites during the subsequent Late Bronze and Iron Ages, illustrating a continuity of building tradition in the second millennium BC. Several centuries after its destruction by the Acadians, Ebla managed to recover some of its importance, and had a second apogee lasting from about 1850 to 1600 BC.



Fig. 1. The Damascus Gateway at Ebla



Fig. 2. Built tomb at Ugarit

The next development, which in many ways resembles the Eblaite architectural tradition is followed in coastal Syria. The shell-wall technique with the use of ashlar orthostats standing on a plinth, initially observed at Ebla is present in Late Bronze Age Ugarit with some modifications justified by the strong Hittite influence. In the more conservative tomb architecture, however, the Ugaritic tombs of the LBA are identical to the Middle Bronze Age ones at Ebla (*fig. 2*). The same tomb architecture is met at Enkomi during the LBA and this fact led some scholars to suggest an Ugaritic presence at Enkomi in the form of either trade agents or metal workers. The Ugaritic building techniques in general are known at Enkomi at the

beginning of the LBA. In other sites, of namely LCIIIC foundation, like Kalavassos, Kition, Palaipafos, Maroni and Alassa the building techniques are closer to the original Eblaite techniques, but certain details, such as the drain systems are closer to the Ugaritic architecture. This is a paradox, which could only be explained with direct contacts with the Syrian interior excluding the port of Ugarit, which for some long period became part of the Hittite empire.

Whatever the case most students of Cypriot archaeology agree that from Syria the building techniques mentioned before, came to Cyprus as a result of direct contacts between the island and the mainland (Hult 1983). This event happened some time during the LC IIC period at a time when urbanization was accomplished on most major sites of the island. The first obvious manifestation of the process of urbanization appears at Enkomi, situated some 180 kilometres west of Ugarit.

The three ashlar buildings recently excavated at Maroni, Kalavassos and Alassa share some common characteristics which could justify a special classification (*fig. 3*). All three stand out of the ordinary settlement architecture. They are built on high commanding positions at the northern end of the settlements somehow resembling the Aegean acropolis. In addition they are provided with some spacious rooms and considerable storage facilities. In at least two cases the buildings are one way or another related to production of olive oil while all of them were storing this most precious commodity. The thickness of the walls in all cases is suggestive of, at least, a second storey. The construction techniques are similar all over the island although in certain regions, thanks to the availability of stone with good carving properties, the blocks differ considerably in size (Hadjisavvas 2000, p. 387-398).



Fig. 3. Building II at Alassa

While the ashlar buildings found earlier in the coastal towns have been identified as residences or sanctuaries, the recently discovered buildings were identified as administrative centres for the control of certain agricultural products but also related with copper production (Cadogan 1989, p. 43-51; South 1984, p. 14-41; Hadjisavvas 2003, p. 31-34).

Certainly the building techniques used for the habitation units by themselves could not give any hints towards the identification of their residents. Turning now to the architecture of the ashlar buildings in coastal towns and those of the hinterland we observe some basic conceptual differences. These differences are mostly confined to the presence or the lack of large storage facilities in the main buildings or in associate buildings mainly housing workshops, which to a certain degree could clarify the nature of the economy of the site. In this

instance the information retrieved may help towards the better understanding of the customs of the inhabitants, somehow related to their identity.

The everyday life of the inhabitants including the diet, sanitation and other habits as reflected in utensils, pottery and paraphernalia left behind may hint to their origins if properly interpreted. Taking Alassa as a case study we observe some critical innovations in the last habitation period which indicate directly to new inhabitants in both the common houses and the large ashlar buildings. The innovations occurred during the very beginning of LC IIIA period and include a free standing hearth in the central and larger room of the south wing of Building II and the presence of a bath tub in a close by bathroom.

Building II in its original shape was erected during the Late Cypriot II C period (Hadjisavvas 2003b, p. 431-436). It seems that the building was abandoned towards the end of the same period. Its cemented floors and ashlar were subsequently covered with alluvial washed down from the adjacent hill slopes. Some parts of Building II were reoccupied soon after by people who used red mortar and mud bricks made of terra rossa. The interior of the building was remodelled to resemble Aegean prototypes. The super structure was built of mud bricks, a material also used to raise the eastern part of the north wing which was used as a storeroom for a double row of large pithoi standing on stone bases. The reddish layer covering the south wing and the storeroom is the only distinction showing the two different occupation periods of Building II.

The extremities of the south wing are occupied by a pair of small rooms, attached to the north wall. The divisions are made of much thinner shell walls otherwise unknown elsewhere in Building II. They are not tied to the thick original walls and they do not stand on a plinth or on any kind of foundations. It is obvious that these walls and therefore, the subdivision of the south wing are chronologically later than the original building founded during the LC IIC period. The two pairs of rooms open into a court-like rectangular space. The easternmost was used as a bathroom furnished with a clay bath-tub a plain amphora and a large pithos situated just outside the entrance. The whole planning of the south wing of Alassa resembles the West House in Mycenae and the Pylos Palace, mostly in the arrangement of the bath rooms (Hadjisavvas and Hadjisavva 1997, p. 143-8). Smaller bath tubs were found also in Building III closely related with Building II. Bath tubs are found for the first time on the island during the LC IIIA period and their association with newcomers is obvious.

The central space between the two pairs of rooms is occupied by the Hearth Room, the largest single room excavated in Building II. The most significant feature of this room is a square hearth in the middle of a stylobate, formed by a row of finely worked stones of even sizes preserved at floor level and connecting the hearth to the south and north walls. Fragments of slender pillars, roughly semicircular in section and decorated with drafted margins, were found in this room. This type of pillar is thus far unique in the Mediterranean, but the whole arrangement of the hearth surrounded by pillars strongly suggests Aegean associations.

The highly sophisticated drainage system of Building II closely resembles the system at the Palace of Knossos. Such resemblances are the open channel around the staircase, the collecting lowest stones, and especially the spouted stones incorporated in the plinth of the outer wall.

All features described here, but above all the architectural concept of a central hall with a freestanding hearth surrounded by pillars and associated with small secondary rooms, recall Aegean prototypes. The appearance of this type of architecture at Alassa is not an isolated phenomenon as it is also present at Enkomi and Maa-Palaeokastro. During the 12th century it also appears in the Levant where Amihai Mazar excavated a hearth room in a large public building at Tell Qasile (Mazar 1986, fig. 3). He considers his discovery to be a foreign architectural feature introduced by the Philistines. There is little doubt that the appearance of this new architectural concept in the eastern Mediterranean was due to a migration of Greek tribes from the Aegean world, most probably associated with the Sea Peoples.

This innovation is accompanied by the presence, for the first time, of strainer jugs used in wine production as well as the recovery of a wine press housed in Building III at Alassa (*fig. 4*). The positioning of Building III just opposite Building II justifies its interpretation as an auxiliary structure to house the industrial requirements of the elite residing in Building II. There is little doubt that the owners of the winery were the inhabitants of Building II, who could afford to wait several years for the first vintage before recovering their heavy investment

in land, facilities and labour. Another approach in our effort to trace the identity of the inhabitants of the ashlar buildings is the iconography of the residents themselves. This last approach deals with any object preserving figures, dresses, weaponry and anything related to the appearance of people. Comparing all these images with relevant records from other regions, we may establish the common characteristics which could help towards the identification of the people involved. Human figures, however, are rare during this period and most of those discovered are confined to seal impressions on the shoulders of pithoi as well as on cylinder seals and more



Fig. 4. Wine press in Building III at Alassa

rarely on pottery. From the collection of seal impressions found on the island of Cyprus the largest harvest comes from Alassa. Apart from their large number, the Alassa sealings illustrate a number of human figures engaged in combat or hunt. Some of them, due to the paraphernalia accompanying the figures, have been interpreted as heroes fighting beasts (Hadjisavvas 2001, p. 61-68).

Let us now try to identify these figures based on the way they are dressed, the weapons they carried and the whole approach of the iconography, starting with the hunting scenes. This is a common presentation known from both the east and the Aegean. The Cypriot scenes are more or less common, though they present some variations in the size, the way they are hunting and the number of animals involved. The Alassa scenes have their own identity and there is little doubt that they have been produced on the site. The human figure on the chariot box is dressed, thus excluding the possibility of a hero. Some details of the chariot such as the number of spokes could provide hints for its origins. In this case the four-spoke wheel is not presenting any conclusive evidence as similar wheels are known both from the Aegean and Ugarit. The second impression is more relevant to our subject.

The frieze represents a double combat between humans and beasts. The left part of the composition is occupied by a standing warrior stabbing a rampant griffin. On the right another warrior is stabbing a rampant lion which places its right foot on the left leg of the warrior. It seems that the double combat takes place in front of an olive tree. The two human figures are presented naked as heroes are, beardless with very long cascading hair strands. Both of them are wearing a belt around their waists while the right figure wears the winged shoes. The whole iconography is a combination of the well known scenes represented on two ivory mirror handles, one from Enkomi and one from Kouklia now in the British and Cyprus Museums respectively. A third ivory mirror handle found recently in a tomb at Amathus combines the two representations known from Enkomi and Kouklia (Hadjisavvas 2002, p. 83-88).

The third frieze is a more complex one. The central part of the composition is occupied by a kneeling figure facing a lion. Behind the central figure is a bull followed by another standing figure. The whole composition is more static compared to the previous two. The central figure is naked kneeling on his right knee and holding a dagger in his right hand. With the left hand he is holding a round shield with a central boss. In front of him a lion, his mouth open, is ready to attack. The left side of the composition shows another naked standing human figure. He is holding a spear in his left hand along with an object, probably a net. His left leg is protruding, showing some forward movement. A bull follows, its head lowered towards the kneeling central figure. The whole posture of the bull also shows its readiness to attack. All figures stand on an uneven surface indicated by pellets in relief.

Both on the Alassa pithos fragment and on the Amathus mirror handle the human figures hold a long sword, and the olive tree is used as a supplementary element to fill the empty spaces and, in a way, to separate the two scenes. Perhaps the most significant difference between the iconography of the Amathus handle and that of the Alassa sealing is based on ideological grounds. At Alassa the human figures are naked and one of them wears winged shoes. In that case the figures could be interpreted as heroes.



Fig. 5. The Amathus mirror handle

In the case of the Amathus example the human figures are heavily armed (fig. 5). The curvilinear stripes on the conical helmet resemble the ivory head from Mycenae chamber tomb 27, the actual helmets from Spata and Armenoi (near Rethymno), an ivory head from the Apokoronos prison tholos tomb. The long sword with double grooves point to a Naue II type weapon is known from Anthia but also on a sealing from Alassa and the ivory mirror handle from Amathus. The circular shield, although shown from inside, resembles the shield with a central umbo from the same Alassa sealing. Porada suggests a Syrian origin of this type of pithos decoration in Cyprus and accepts J. Aruz's hypothetical East-West interaction that had a special dimension at a time after the fall of Knossos when Cretan artists may have sought work abroad and when Cyprus enjoyed growing prosperity and contacts with the East Mediterranean World (Porada 1998, p. 301-313).

The Mycenaean connection of the Cypriot ivories has long ago been established, considered by Kantor as hybrid Mycenaean-Oriental works (Kantor 1960, p. 14-25). The iconography of the Cypriot ivories was certainly influenced by Aegean elements and it is well known that the combination of the olive tree with animal themes is very common in the later phase of the Mycenaean ivory carving. Both the ivory mirror handles and the seal impressions are dated to the LC IIIA period, which coincides with the last habitation period of the ashlar buildings in Cyprus.

In conclusion, the evidence presented here could possibly justify the initial suggestion that an Aegean tribe, most probably the Achaeans, moved to the island of Cyprus as part of the coalition of the Sea Peoples and after gaining power inhabited for some time the ashlar buildings as a manifestation of their superiority over the remaining population. Towards the end of this period, under unknown circumstances they abandoned the island and moved to the Levant (Moore and Stager 2006, p. 150). The ashlar buildings, once the symbol of their power were destroyed by fire and the accumulated wealth, mostly in the form of olive oil, contributed to that destruction. It is however impossible to believe that all of them left the island. The supremacy of the Greek language over the original dialect of Bronze Age Cyprus was established a few centuries after the final abandonment of the ashlar buildings and the associated LC settlements. Is this an indication that a considerable number of these people remained on the island and contributed to the formation of the Greek Cypriot identity?

REFERENCES

- DIKAIOS P. 1969, *Enkomi Excavations 1948-1958*. Mainz am Rhein.
- CADOGAN G. 1989, « Maroni and the Monuments », in E. Peltenburg (ed.), *Early Society in Cyprus*, Edinburgh, p. 43-51
- HADJISAVVAS S. 1994, « Alassa Archaeological Project ». *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*, p. 107-114.
- HADJISAVVAS S. 2000, « Ashlar Buildings and their Role in Late Bronze Age Cyprus », in *Acts of the third International Congress of Cypriot Studies*, Nicosia, p. 387-398.
- HADJISAVVAS S. 2001, « Seal Impressed Pithos Fragments from Alassa: Some Preliminary Thoughts » in P. M Fischer, (ed.). *Contributions to the Archaeology and History of the Bronze and Iron Ages in the Eastern Mediterranean. Studies in Honour of Paul Aström*, Wien, p. 61-68.
- HADJISAVVAS S. 2002, « An Ivory Mirror Handle from Amathus » *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*, p. 83-88.
- HADJISAVVAS S. 2003, « Dating Alassa » in M. Bietak (ed.). *The Synchronization of Civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C. II. Proceedings of the SCIAM 2000 EuroConference, Haindorf 2nd May 7th of May 2001*, Wien, p. 431-436.
- HADJISAVVAS S., I. HADJISAVVA 1997, « Aegean Influence at Alassa » in *Cyprus and the Aegean in Antiquity. Proceedings of International Archaeological Conference. Nicosia 8-10 December*, p. 143-148.
- HULT G. 1983, *Bronze Age Ashlar Masonry in the Eastern Mediterranean: Cyprus, Ugarit, and Neighbouring Regions*. *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology* 66, Göteborg.

- KANTOR J. H. 1960, « Ivory carving in the Mycenaean Period », *Archaeology* 13/1, p. 14-25.
- KNAPP A. B. 2008, *Prehistoric & Protohistoric Cyprus. Identity, Insularity and Connectivity*, Oxford.
- MAZAR A. 1986, « Excavations at tell Quasile 1982- 1984 », *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, n° 1-2.
- MOORE F., L. E. STAGER 2006, « Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions Found in Ashkelon », *Israel Exploration Journal* 56, n° 2, p. 129-159.
- PORADA E. 1998, « Relief Friezes and Seals from Maa- Palaeokastro », in V. Karageorghis, M. Demas, *Excavations at Maa- Palaeokastro 1979-1986*, Appendix 1, Nicosia, p. 301-313.
- SOUTH A. 1984, « Kalavasos- Agios Dimitrios 1983 », *Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus*, p. 14-41