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| Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2014.08.07 **Jennifer M. Webb, David Frankel, *Ambelikou Aletri. Metallurgy and Pottery Production in Middle Bronze Age Cyprus. Studies in Mediterranean archaeology, 138*.   Jonsered:  Åströms Förlag, 2013.  Pp. xx, 245.  ISBN 9789170812507.  €76.00.** **Contributors:** Myrto Georgakopoulou, Thilo Rehren, George Constantinou and Ioannis Panayides.**Reviewed by Thomas Kiely, British Museum (tkiely@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)**The commonly evoked metaphorical relationship between archaeology and mining becomes quite literal when, in the course of searching for metal ores, modern prospectors come across traces of their ancient forebears. Among the many entrepreneurs who flocked to Cyprus in search of economic opportunities following its occupation by Britain in 1878 were those who hoped to revive its eponymous metallurgical wealth. But if the island’s reputation as a mine of archaeological riches was maintained to an almost embarrassing degree, commercially significant ore bodies eluded successive mining syndicates until the 1920s. Only then did direct traces of ancient mining and metallurgy come to light, such as those found by the Cyprus Mining Corporation. Their important discoveries (along with those of several others) were published in the third volume of the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (SCE) in 1937.[1](https://owa.latrobe.edu.au/owa/redir.aspx?C=uFLvmVq9RUCPTi-n8bOZLosA2nOQhNEIAfHQDwytLHHHvV7I0eCEatzaJ3Muy2nJFYH0akj8BdI.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fbmcr.brynmawr.edu%2f2014%2f2014-08-07.html%23n1" \t "_blank) The impressive volume under review here is the final report of excavations at a Middle Cypriot Bronze Age settlement with metallurgical and pottery production workshops discovered in 1942 by another commercial mining venture and excavated the same year by the Department of Antiquities. The opening chapter outlines how the Hellenic Company of Chemical Products and Manures—later known by the somewhat less odiferous title of the Hellenic Mining Company—opened a mine west of the village of Ambelikou in the copper-rich foothills of the north-western Troodos range (p. 6-7, also xix-xx). Traces of ancient mine workings, tools and sherds of Red Polished ware characteristic of the Early or Middle Bronze Ages (2500–1650 BC) were found in some of the modern mining shafts. Fortunately, the company’s manager C.P Manglis—who contributed to the essay in the *SCE* volume mentioned above—alerted the Department of Antiquities to these finds and to a large scatter of Red Polished ware sherds on the hillside (known as *Aletri*, “Plough”) to the west of the mine workings. Its then acting Director Porphyrios Dikaios—a renowned pre-historian who virtually single-handedly discovered the pre-Bronze Age cultures of the island between the 1930s and 1950s—conducted excavations in two small areas of the ancient settlement between March and August of 1942. A broadly contemporary cemetery near the modern village was also explored, though the chamber tombs were almost completely looted. Subsequent ceramic and radiocarbon analysis in the 1970s and 1980s respectively refined the date of the site to the early phases of the Middle Bronze Age (Middle Cypriot I and early Middle Cypriot II), a few generations or so to either side of the turn of the 20th century BC (pp. 9–10). Ambelikou was immediately recognised as an important site in early preliminary reports for the light it cast on early metallurgy on Cyprus (though much less so for its equally significant insights into pottery production). Indeed some of the finds—including significant individual items such as a melting crucible and a casting mould—have been widely discussed in many subsequent publications. Yet Dikaios never published a comprehensive account of what was an admittedly small-scale excavation conducted in the difficult conditions of the Second World War. The main authors relate the subsequent but unsuccessful attempts to put this right, acknowledging the key role of both Robert Merrillees—who was able to interview the original foreman of the work, Kakoullis Georgiou—and Anne Dunn-Vaturi in the production of this volume. Their efforts to publish the finds began over thirty years ago and have only now been fully realised thanks to the sterling work of the main authors themselves (pp. 7–8). This scholarly modesty should not overshadow the impressive achievement of the authors in creating a model site report that is as meticulously documented and illustrated as it is carefully argued and contextualised. The accessibility of the writing, including on technical matters—and for lay-readers, the claims and counter-claims made by specialists over the years have often been confusing—is also admirable and recommends the book to a wide scholarly audience. In addition to the historical background summarised above, Chapter 1 also surveys the topography and broader natural and human landscape context of the site (aided by numerous high quality maps and satellite images) and outlines its chronology in relationship to contemporary excavated sites (especially Dhenia, Marki and Alambra). A useful—and, for the uninitiated, necessary—preface, Chapter 2 (Constantinou, Panayides) provides a very accessible overview of the geology of the island and of its metal deposits and defines the nature of the copper ores exploited in the Ambelikou area in antiquity (22-23), more emphatically stated to be copper sulphide ores than in the main authors’ own more cautious discussion (see p. 204). In Chapter 3, the meagre recording of ancient mining features in 1942 occupies just a few pages (pp. 25–28, though this subject is reprised with some valuable comparative material on p. 206). The results of some initial soundings and trial trenches, including some purely domestic material, help to define the extent and function of the settlement, fleshing out the predominantly industrial picture represented in the two main excavated areas, numbered 1and 2. By contrast, the short concluding section on the nearby looted cemetery demonstrates how little evidence was salvaged from this potentially important part of the site. Areas 1 and 2 are fully treated in Chapters 4 and 5. Meticulous accounts of the architectural remains, industrial features and finds are accompanied by many photographs of the original excavations—some of which could perhaps have been reproduced at a bigger scale— and carefully redrafted and reinterpreted original plans and sections. The value of this exercise can be illustrated by one example: a feature containing ash and burnt animal bones simply described as a pit located in the metal workshop in Area 1 has now been identified as a rarely-surviving casting pit (p. 209–211 and fig. 11.6, t). Also intriguing is figure 5.7 showing the scatter of pots on the floor of the pottery workshop in Area 2, perhaps the last load of the kiln, nicely colour-coded to show the degree of burning which suggests a catastrophic end for the site which was abandoned in a hurry and never reoccupied. Chapter 6, on the ceramic finds, opens with a useful characterisation of the overall assemblage, including the problems of dealing with the less than ideally stored sherd material (some 11,700 items in total). This obscured the precise findspot of many pieces, and in some cases mixed up the settlement and tomb material. The following analysis and catalogue of ceramic fabrics restricts itself to 108 more or less complete vessels registered in 1942, together with 25 carefully selected fragments from the sherd trays. Colour images are selective, but the catalogue provides high quality drawings of virtually every item. The contrasting distribution of ground stone items— almost exclusively locally-sourced diabase—between Areas 1 and 2 described in Chapter 7 matches that of the ceramic finds, reminding us how the presence of implements for heavy duty grinding and pounding across the architectural units of Area 1 are key to identifying this zone of the site as a metallurgical complex for the roasting and refining of copper ore. Yet, the small finds (Chapter 8)—including domestic items such as spindle whorls and loomweights and the only complete plank figurine ever found *in situ* in a settlement context—support the contention (more fully developed in Chapter 11.5) that the site was not necessarily an isolated, seasonal or transitory location for metalworkers and potters but accommodated a range of domestic activities. In all three chapters, the analysis of the object types is exhaustive. The wealth of comparative material, from Cyprus and further afield, helps to explain the technical and functional significance of many of the finds to non-specialists. The relatively concise (26 pages) but substantial concluding Chapter 11 provides a superlative reading of the significance of the excavated material. Section 11.1 addresses the vexed question of what types of copper ores were being processed at Middle Cypriot Ambelikou. The detailed and nuanced survey of the entire island concludes with the argument that the more technically demanding copper sulphide ores were probably being used (though not necessarily exclusively)—the main question now being the date of the earliest mining of sulphide ores in this part of the island. (On this subject, see also the short contribution by Georgakopoulou and Rehren (chapter 10) on the re-analysis of some of metallurgical samples from the site, identified as ore rather than slag). The following two sections of the conclusion stress the importance of the site as a crucial source of evidence both for metallurgical production—‘all stages in the *chaîne opératoire* from mining, ore beneficiation and smelting to the casting of ingots were carried out at Aletri’ (p. 206)—and pottery making. The ceramic workshop is the only pre-Bronze Age installation of this type yet discovered on Cyprus and is really brought to life by the colour-enhanced plan and convincing computer reconstruction. Equally valuable is the consideration of issues of scale and standardisation of pottery production, which was clearly beyond household level. This ‘elementary specialisation’ (p. 219) had previously been suggested for the period based on ethnographic parallels, so it is nice to find archaeological confirmation, especially as this kind of widespread ‘mobilized local production’ (p. 223) commonly falls below the radar of much archaeological fieldwork. One of the few debatable conclusions in the volume emerges when ‘regional and extra-regional relationships’ are discussed (chapter 11.4). Ceramic analysis (see also Chapter 9, pp. 194–5 on the pXRF analysis) places the site in the immediate ambit of the nearby Karkotis Valley, but also highlights significant contacts further afield to the south-west of Cyprus through the occurrence of Drab Polished wares, possibly brought by sea (see p. 220). The possibility that the Drab Polished wares arrived indirectly, via the much nearer Polis region (perhaps in return for copper), could also be stressed here. More problematical is the claim that ‘[t]he strongest of *Aletri’s* extra-regional connections…appear to have been with the north coast, in particular with the coastal settlement of Lapithos’ (p. 220). Although admittedly hindered by the absence of intact funerary deposits from the cemetery, where imported pottery would be expected to be more numerous if present, this argument is not actually based on significant evidence for ceramic imports from the settlement. Apart from the plank figurines (see pp. 170–172), the authors can only suggest that the comparatively finer Red Polished vessels were probably imported from the north (see p. 195) and in fact here they modify their previous claims for significant overland contacts with the nodal Dhenia area lying between Ambelikou and Lapithos. Their argument is based on the more general assumption that by the MC period the Lapithos area controlled much of the trade in metals from the northern Troodos, including the Ambelikou area, though we know much less about the much larger, and in antiquity more heavily-exploited, deposits around Skouriotissa less than ten miles to the south-east (p. 221). That Lapithos was at the centre of an important socio-economic (or even political) entity at this time is widely accepted by scholars, but the authors underplay the possible role of the nearby Karkotis valley—and indeed the broader lower Morphou Bay area, much of which remains unexplored and inaccessible to legal excavations for political reasons (see pp. 4–5)—as a regional centre and distribution-hub for copper produced in the north- western Troodos and then not necessarily in the direction of Lapithos. Arguably, both uneven exploration and regional variations in mortuary rituals obscure the true nature of power relationships between the two areas. Finally, as the ores of the north-west Troodos (especially the Skouriotissa mines) underpinned the wealth of the later kingdom of Soloi, can we not at least suggest that the area functioned in an analogous way at a much earlier date? This book is a major contribution to our understanding of metallurgy and pottery production in Bronze Age Cyprus and further afield. Yet Webb and Frankel stress that ‘some of the many problems associated with our understanding of the earlier periods of metallurgy in Cyprus could surely have been resolved and channelled in more helpful directions’ (p. 225) if only the report of *Aletri* had appeared much earlier and more of the original information had been preserved. The same can be said of many other unpublished excavations, on Cyprus and throughout the Mediterranean, but this is especially the case given the peculiarly fragile and at times contentious nature of the ancient metallurgical record. All the more impressive then that the authors—well-known for speedily publishing their own fieldwork—and their colleagues have achieved so much with this re-excavation of a much older excavation. **Notes:** [1.](https://owa.latrobe.edu.au/owa/redir.aspx?C=uFLvmVq9RUCPTi-n8bOZLosA2nOQhNEIAfHQDwytLHHHvV7I0eCEatzaJ3Muy2nJFYH0akj8BdI.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fbmcr.brynmawr.edu%2f2014%2f2014-08-07.html%23t1" \t "_blank) Einar Gjerstad *et. al*., *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition Volume III* (Stockholm: The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, 1937), p. 639-672.  |

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