



Report to the Honor Frost Foundation

Excavation and survey of the ancient port landscape at Akrotiri-Dreamers Bay (*Nissarouin*), Spring 2018

Between 30 March and 16 April 2018, the Ancient Akrotiri Project conducted a fourth season of archaeological fieldwork and public outreach activities at Akrotiri, Cyprus, generously funded by the Honor Frost Foundation, at and around Dreamers Bay (*Nissarouin*) on the southern shores of the peninsula, within the confines of the UK's RAF airbase.

As in 2015, 2016 and 2017, excavation focused on remains of stone buildings of apparent Roman/early Byzantine date close to the shoreline, partly exposed by marine erosion. This year's excavation, informed by new geophysical survey (conducted in January when vegetation and soil conditions were most favourable), continued to explore the extent of the still part-buried ancient buildings. It also comprised surface geological and archaeological survey of ancient cliff-top quarries to the east. All the archaeological remains on land are apparently linked to an ancient harbour in the bay below. Taken together, these components appear to represent one of the best-preserved ancient port sites in the Mediterranean.

Some years ago the buildings, spread along c.0.5km of relatively low shoreline—the only low ground on an otherwise cliff-bound coast—underwent initial investigations by the University of Buffalo, and were believed to comprise elements of a late Roman/early Byzantine (4th-7th century AD) port facility, perhaps serving the major Greco-Roman city of Kourion c.13km to the north. Connections between these onshore structures and submerged archaeological remains in the bay to the east, including a masonry breakwater, remained unclear.

The present programme of work, planned to last five years, is conducted by the Ancient Akrotiri Project led by the University of Leicester in collaboration with the Universities of Southampton and Cyprus, and specialists from other institutions. It is intended to document and record the endangered shoreline structures, to establish their nature and date, and to characterise and date other apparently associated archaeology, including a building complex on the hill overlooking the shoreline, the nearby quarries, and the submerged remains. The Leicester-led dry-land fieldwork forms part of a wider collaborative effort with the University of Southampton leading on the marine and geomorphological aspects. The overall objective is to build up a fuller picture of the ancient port as part of the ancient settlement landscape of the Akrotiri peninsula, in the context of the southern coast of Cyprus and eastern Mediterranean seaways.

As previously, in 2018 the Spring fieldwork was undertaken by professional excavation staff from University of Leicester Archaeological Services, and academic staff and undergraduate students of the University of Leicester's School of Archaeology & Ancient History, this year assisted by graduate students from the University of Cyprus. It was conducted with the approval of the Republic of Cyprus

Department of Antiquities and the UK Sovereign Base Areas Administration, and with the support and assistance of RAF Akrotiri, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, and the Western Sovereign Base Area Archaeological Society.

The shoreline structures had been found to be more extensive and more complex than the simple rectangular 'warehouses' hitherto presumed. Several are now seen to have internal subdivisions, and/or to possess adjacent walled courtyards containing evidence of activity in the form of pits containing burned deposits, perhaps indicating industrial processes. The structures also broadly share a common orientation, the entire layout giving the impression of a single, large-scale, planned episode of layout and construction.

Provisional assessment of the sealed pottery groups recovered from the shoreline buildings, kindly undertaken by Prof Stella Demesticha of the University of Cyprus, indicates that they were constructed far earlier than hitherto assumed from scatters of ceramics on the surface. They were in use perhaps during the second century, and certainly during the third and fourth centuries AD, most appearing to have been destroyed by the earthquake which devastated nearby Kourion around the 360s.

In 2018 excavations were resumed in Area 8 at the western end of the known extent of shoreline structures, and in Area 4 at the eastern end facing the Dreamer's Bay harbour where complex stratigraphy had been initially explored in 2015-17. In between, several test pits were opened to ground-truth geophysical anomalies.

Area 8 revealed the southern end of another long, subdivided building with a courtyard to its east. Unfortunately, it was eroded to below floor level, but ceramics which had washed down-slope were sampled for analysis.

To the east of this complex, a test-pit over a geophysical anomaly and other surface indications confirm existence of a further long, subdivided building on an east-west orientation, probably with a courtyard on the south side, now largely lost to the sea.

In area 2 midway along the shoreline, more test pitting of geophysical anomalies showed that the previously-investigated structure 5 was considerably longer than hitherto realised, apparently running for c.50m and joining a second structure making it part of an especially large complex.

In the east, Area 4 comprised a complicated pattern of walls, occupation levels and burnt deposits. In contrast to other explored structures, Area 4 is now seen to contain probably three phases of activity, beginning with a rock-cut ditch, succeeded by a stone-founded building attested by truncated foundations, some of which had been robbed out; one resulting trench contained on excavation in 2017 c.250kg of freshly broken pottery, largely amphorae. This material is provisionally interpreted as representing clearance of the site following destruction by the postulated earthquake which seemingly led to abandonment of the other buildings. However, in Area 4, significantly the part of the shoreline complex closest to the harbour, the debris was cleared for rebuilding on the same orientation, though to a different layout. The pattern of new wall foundations now seen would therefore represent a post-earthquake phase, belonging to the later fourth century AD. After abandonment of this later building, surface scatters of ceramics apparently indicate continued use of the area for movement of goods down to c.AD600, albeit apparently without use of durable structures.

The ancient cliff-top quarries apparently associated with the port were also surveyed this year. These exploited marine conglomerates of various grades, some cut as squared blocks presumably for constructional purposes, others for millstones. Associated features including buildings and what

seems to be a ceramic-piped water channel suggest that at least some of this quarrying activity is Roman, but confirmation must await planned excavation and if possible scientific dating in 2019.

A vital part of the Ancient Akrotiri Project is using the field activities and academic research as means of promoting public interest in, knowledge of and respect for the maritime archaeological heritage of the peninsula. The unusual circumstances of a high-security UK airbase on Cypriot soil provide challenges for the project, but also opportunities to help promote good Anglo-Cypriot intercommunal relations through the interest many adults and children in both communities share in the historical past. The AAP operates a substantial outreach programme alongside the fieldwork, in close collaboration with other key stakeholders including UK Ministry of Defence and the Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre. This engages with local schools, both British and Cypriot, through archaeological programmes at the AEEC. It also arranges public events like open days. In April it was possible to arrange for a bus-load of local villagers to enter the normally-inaccessible airbase to visit the excavation, an event covered by Forces TV. The HFF is also kindly helping fund key heritage resources, including new interpretive signage at Dreamer's Bay and other sites, and associated web pages.

Future work for the Ancient Akrotiri Project will include detailed study of the submerged remains of the harbour, (work commenced in September 2018, and subject of a separate report), and continued work to assess the nature of the marine environment at Dreamers Bay and around the former Akrotiri island. This is led by Dr Lucy Blue from the University of Southampton, in collaboration with Cypriot colleagues. The results will build a fuller picture of the Dreamer's Bay area in its wider setting, of the Akrotiri peninsula and the island of Cyprus.

Fuller details of the Spring 2018 field season may be found in the *Interim Report*:

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/ancient-akrotiri/images/DreamersBay2018MarAprinterim.pdf> (6Mb)

Simon James

Pictures and captions:

Image ADB15_758 Excavation of two successive Roman-era port buildings in Area 4 at Akrotiri-Dreamer's Bay. The contemporary anchorage was in the bay in the distance. (photo (c) University of Leicester)



Image ADB15_735 copy Excavation of a Roman-era port building in Area 8 at Akrotiri-Dreamer's Bay. This southern end of a long stone-built structure is slowly eroding into the sea, with pottery probably from its floors scattered down the slope to the water. (photo (c) University of Leicester)



Image IMG_5856 A detail of one of the quarries on the cliff overlooking Dreamer's Bay harbour. Here the quarry workers have stripped off overlying rock strata to expose a c.2.5m-deep deposit of conglomerate which they have exploited for building blocks, leaving this 'saw-tooth' pattern. (photo (c) University of Leicester)

