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English Summary

New light on prehistoric Nicosia: evidence from recent excavations

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The modern capital city of Cyprus is built on top of the remains of a prehistoric settlement. A Chalcolithic village, founded at the area of Nicosia around 3000 BC, developed into an important settlement during the Bronze Age (figs. 1–2). As the Bronze Age settlement is buried deep under the remains of the Medieval town, the most prolific source of information for prehistoric Nicosia has proven to be its cemeteries. Tombs excavated by the Department of Antiquities at the area of Agia Paraskevi during the last decades (figs. 6–7) have yielded important new evidence. This paper presents a summary of the most recent excavations (Tombs 25–54), with special focus on Tomb 50.

Among the artefacts found in Tomb 50, the abundance of terracotta figurative art is what adds special importance to the assemblage. Two plank-shaped human figurines (fig. 9a–b) indicate close relations between Nicosia and the northern coast of the island. Two large hollow boar figurines (fig. 10) are a remarkable addition to the extremely rare representations of this animal in prehistoric Cyprus. However, two terracotta models (figs. 13, 16) are by far the most important finds from Tomb 50. Their relation to the – until now unique – model from Bellapais-Vounous Tomb 22 (fig. 15 bottom) is readily recognizable. Both Agia Paraskevi models represent circular architectural structures, in which a communal event is taking place. Although parts of the models are missing, enough has survived to preserve the essence of both.

In Model 1 (fig. 13), the four surviving human figures are rendered in larger scale than the building, which has an entrance with a raised lintel. The centre of the scene is occupied by a hob, a peculiar cooking utensil of a type (fig. 14) that has been excavated in Early Bronze Age settlements. Three figures – a man and two women – are standing around the hob facing each other. A smaller fourth figure, standing by the entrance, seems to be guarding it. The differential scale, the raised lintel and the 'guard' of the entrance, the prominent male figure overseeing the whole scene, all features definitely connect Model 1 with the Bellapais model (fig. 15).

Model 2 (fig. 16) is a basin, which represents a circular building. Almost half of its interior wall is occupied by a bench, where a group of men is seated in a hieratic posture. A second group of figures, situated opposite the men-group, seems to be the focus of the whole scene. The figure standing on its centre seems to be the most important one, due both to its size and to its rendering as a plaque – in contrast to the cylindrically rendered bodies of the rest. On the wall, behind the plank-shaped figure, a peculiar oval feature in relief has a bullhead in its centre (fig. 17). This amplifies the impression of a ceremonial composition. Model 2 seems to offer a decipherment key to the longstanding problem of the plank-shaped figurines. An older proposal for interpreting them as miniatures of *xoana*, i.e. plank-shaped statues used in rituals, can now definitely be confirmed.