

EXCAVATIONS AT HALA SULTAN TEKKE IN
CYPRUS

An important Late Bronze Age settlement is situated in a field called Vizakia immediately to the west of the famous mosque Hala Sultan Tekke near Larnaca at the shores of the Salt Lake¹. The ancient name of the site is unknown.

Two expeditions sponsored by the British Museum excavated a great number of chamber tombs (fig. 1) at the site in 1897 and 1898. H. B. Walters dug at the site for about a week in December 1897. He recorded the contents of ten tombs. J. W. Crowfoot excavated for eight days in April 1898. He emptied fifty or sixty chamber tombs and several wells. He described the contents of thirteen tombs. The tombs contained many imported Mycenaean vases (fig. 2), some Minoan fragments and a Canaanite jar. The finds also include objects of gold, silver, bronze, glass, ivory and faience. A cylinder seal is one of the finest ever made in Cyprus and an ivory disc is engraved with an exquisite rendering of a bull. A clay ball inscribed with Cypro-Minoan signs was also found. White stone vessels, faience bowls and glass bottles were imported from Egypt.

The tombs are from the Middle Cypriote III and Late Cypriote IA-

1) Annual reports have appeared in V. Karageorghis, *Chronique des fouilles*, in *BCH* XCVI, 1972 onwards. Final excavation reports have been published in *Hala Sultan Tekke* 1-3 in *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology* vol. XLV: 1-3, Göteborg 1975-77.

IIC, from about 1600 B. C. to 1190 B. C. Strangely enough, Late Cypriote III was not represented among the British finds².

Casual finds were made at the site from time to time³. Professor Arne Furumark observed a giant pithos in the field in 1948 and a small excavation was made around it⁴. It proved that there was a settlement of Late Cypriote III at the site, although this was only recognized later.

In 1948 Dr Vassos Karageorghis excavated two circular chamber tombs of the Late Bronze Age with openings in the middle of the roof⁵. These contained a wealth of local pottery and Mycenaean IIIA2 to late IIIB vases including amphoroid kraters with chariot scenes. There were also some Rude style kraters, possibly an Anatolian vase, and a few kraters, stirrup jars and a bowl of Late Minoan IIIA and IIIB. Some Egyptian faience objects and three cylinder seals were found; one of these shows a hero brandishing an axe, probably menacing a griffin on the other side of a sacred tree (fig. 3). Ostrich eggs and objects of faience, gold, silver, bronze, lead, ivory and carnelian were also found. Skeletons of *equus asinus*, *equus caballus* and *bos taurus* were discovered in the tombs. A study of the human bones has shown that all the individuals had been subjected to at least one form of cranial deformation. One side of the head was flattened resulting in a concomitant swelling or bulging-out of the other side, called "plagiocephaly". According to the anthropologist J. H. Schwartz the infant was bound to its cradle-board while lying on its stomach. Another category of cranial deformation consisted in flattening of the skulls of only females. Cranial deformation has been observed in Neolithic Khirokitia and in modern populations of the Near East⁶.

When I published a handle of a wine jar stamped with the cartouche of the Egyptian pharaoh Seti I, I made a general survey of the finds from the site⁷. Realizing the importance of the place as witnessed by the rich

2) A description of the British finds is given in *Hala Sultan Tekke* 1, pp. 1-34, 39-69.

3) *Hala Sultan Tekke* 1, pp. 34-39, 57, 60-61.

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

5) *Ibid.*, pp. 68-111.

6) *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

7) *Opuscula Atheniensia* V, 1965, pp. 115-121. Cf. also O. Masson in *BCH* LXXXI, 1957, pp. 25 ff.

finds I became interested in excavating at Hala Sultan Tekke.

A topographical survey was made and trial trenches were dug in the field Vizakia in 1971. The survey suggested that the town extended for about 600 metres in a west to east direction and about 450 metres from north to south. It is bordered by the Salt Lake to the north, by a late irrigation channel to the east, by a scarp in the south and by raised ground in the west. A town wall is nowhere visible, but there are large boulders scattered about in the field; these may have come from a town wall.

Three trenches were dug in 1971. Trench 1 struck a deposit of pottery which was found above and in a well. The Mycenaean pottery is abundantly represented by three-handled jars dating from about 1375 B. C. There were also many Base-ring II, White Slip II and some Red Lustrous Wheel-made vases. It may be assumed that the pots were broken in connection with an earthquake, of which there is evidence at this time at Enkomi.

Some walls were found in Trench 2, also a rectangular stele. On the surface east of the trench a limestone stele with rounded top was also recorded.

A rubbish pit (figs. 4-5) was encountered in Trench 3 which was excavated in the eastern part of the field near the irrigation channel. The pit contained copper slag, fragments of tuyères, pottery of the 13th century B.C., pumice, stucco fragments, mudbrick, animal bones and pieces of charcoal. An iron handle from a vessel is of particular interest in view of the early date. The osteological material includes caprovines, cat, weasel, house mouse, garganey, mallard, tunny, bass, mullet and shark or ray. The charcoal pieces were identified as quercus ilese, populus, palm and cypress⁸.

Full scale excavations have been carried out at the site since 1972 to date with exception of 1974, when the work was interrupted because of the war. The main results of the excavations will be summarized below. The Late Bronze Age town lies buried underneath a thin surface layer.

Prior to the excavations in 1972 a proton magnetometer survey was made with the assistance of the Director of the Lerici Foundation in Ro-

8) For details see *Hala Sultan Tekke* 1, pp. 112-119, 123-129.

me, Mr R. E. Linington. This was the second time such an investigation was made in Cyprus after M. J. Aitken's survey of Enkomi in 1958⁹. Linington's survey suggested that areas with lower-than-average anomalies contain architectural remains and that areas with higher-than-normal anomalies are courts or open spaces. A number of large building complexes surrounded by open areas are probably buried in the investigated area. Subsequent excavations have so far proved that this interpretation of the magnetic prospecting is correct.

Area 6 in the north west has yielded a strong wall, 1.20 m. thick, perhaps built for fortificatory purpose at the border of the town. Two ash layers of the end of Late Cypriote IIC (c. 1190 B.C.) and Late Cypriote IIIA1 (c. 1175 B. C.) have been found here. Many pieces of faience vases were discovered, also some fourth century sling bullets with signs in the Classical Cypriote syllabary.

Area 8 in the middle of the town is the most important part discovered so far. It was excavated at the suggestion of Mr Linington to test the results of the magnetic survey. A large building, to which access was made from a wide staircase, consists of a courtyard, a room with a well, a storeroom, another room of uncertain function and a well built room with ashlar floor and orthostat plaques (fig. 6). In the latter room, probably a bathroom, there is a framed receptacle for water, about 3 metres deep. The building was probably built around 1190 B. C., at the beginning of Late Cypriote IIIA1. There is evidence of a period of squatters in Late Cypriote IIIA2 or IIIB. Heaps of crushed murex shells were found in the courtyard showing that purple was produced (fig. 7). Lumps of red ochre were also discovered suggesting dyeing activities in the area. Fragments of clay and stone larnakes were found in this building complex. A reused stone found in a wall is a model of a house or sanctuary with a door and windows (fig. 8). The well contained very fine cups in Mycenaean IIIC1 style, locally made. A sceptre of blue faience from the room with the well has a cartouche of the pharaoh Horemheb on the top; it preserved remains of an ivory rod. An ivory comb was found in the same room.

Many rooms built at different terraces on a slope were found in area

9) See Aitken's report in *Alasia I*, Paris 1971, pp. 1-6.

8. A room contained a Late Minoan IIIB stirrup jar and Canaanite jars. A fisherman's netweights were found in another room. Many stelai were found suggesting religious activities. A clay ball and a stone weight inscribed with Cypro-Minoan signs were discovered in this area which dates from about 1190-1150 B. C.

The study of animal bones from the settlement carried out by Jan Ekman and Leif Jonsson has shown that the caprovines (sheepgoat) were the most common species at the Tekke forming not less than about 75% of the remains.¹⁰ Cattle was the second most common species (19%). The pig (4%), the horse and the donkey (2.7%) are rare. The dog and the cat can also be considered as domesticated. Fragments of red deer and possibly also fallow deer are evidence of hunting. In addition to the fish bones mentioned above parrot fish, dragon fish, sea perch, pike-perch and others have been identified.

The birds include duck (e.g. green-winged teal) and dove.

Carbonized olive and grape pips have been found in the wells.

Several wells have been emptied reaching as far down as 15 metres. Evidence of copper working and ivory industry was found in the wells which also produced much charcoal, carbonized grains, fish and other animal bones. A basin with a bucranium in relief is a rare specimen of sculptural art from the 12th century B. C.

Some plundered tombs have also been investigated. These date from the 14th and 13th centuries B. C. and are thus older than the excavated settlement. A fine cylinder seal was found in one of them (fig. 9).

The pottery is mainly plain wares and locally made Mycenaean IIC ware (called White Painted Wheel-made III). Fragments of Mycenaean IIIA-B pictorial kraters have been found, including chariot vases and bull vases (fig. 10), also an unusual fragment of a bull-leaper making a somersault over the back of a bull.

Underwater archaeological investigations have also been made in the sea near Cape Kiti outside the town. Vessels (fig. 11) and anchors

10) See *Hala Sultan Tekke* 3.

dating from the Late Bronze Age to the Byzantine period have been found, also sites of possible shipwrecks¹¹.

Many stone anchors have been found in the town itself showing its maritime connections. The finds suggest widespread connections with Mycenaean Greece, Crete, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Perhaps ships from these areas once anchored in a harbour, which has later silted in forming a salt lake.

11) See O. T. Engving and Paul Åström, *The Cape Kiti Survey, An Underwater Archaeological Survey, (Hala Sultan Tekke 2, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology XLV: 2, Göteborg 1975)*.