

Avlona-Alonia: A New Extra-Urban Sanctuary in Northwest Cyprus

HAZAR KABA*

Abstract

This study presents the initial examination of a recently discovered sanctuary at Alonia, situated in Northwest Cyprus. Unearthed during a rescue excavation in 2014, the site reveals diverse artifacts, including votive figurines, statues, and various architectural elements, primarily from the Cypro-Archaic to early Roman periods. The sanctuary's architecture and its strategic location on fertile land align with characteristics of extra-urban Cypriot sanctuaries, therefore offering insights into the socio-religious landscape of ancient Cyprus. Analysis of the artifact corpus highlights the shifts in the sanctuary's votive practices, suggesting transitions from elite ideological displays to more localized ritual activities that were eventually repurposed in the Roman era for secular functions. This paper underscores Alonia's role in regional religious practices and hints at broader political and social dynamics across Cypriot sanctuaries, thus paving the way for future investigations into its architectural and ritualistic evolution.

Keywords: Cypriot sanctuaries, terracotta votives, limestone statuettes, Great God of Cyprus, Ptolemaic ruler cult

Öz

Bu çalışma, Kuzeybatı Kıbrıs'ta bulunan Alonia'da yakın zamanda keşfedilmiş bir kutsal alanın ilk incelemesini sunmaktadır. 2014 yılında bir kurtarma kazısı ile ortaya çıkarılan alan, Kıbrıs-Arkaik'ten erken Roma dönemlerine kadar uzanan bir tarih dilimine ait, adak heykelleri, figürinler ve mimari öğeler gibi çeşitli eserler sunmuştur. Kutsal alanın mimarisi ve verimli topraklardaki stratejik konumu, yerleşim-dışı Kıbrıs kutsal alanlarının özellikleriyle örtüşmekte ve antik Kıbrıs'ın sosyo-dini manzarasına dair içgörüler sunmaktadır. Eser külliyatının analizi, kutsal alanın adak uygulamalarındaki değişimleri vurgulayarak, elit ideolojik gösterilerden daha yerel ritüel faaliyetlere geçişleri sunmakta ve bu uygulamaların Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde bir değişimle domestik işlevler kazandığını ortaya sermektedir. Bu makale, Alonia'nın bölgesel dini uygulamalardaki rolünün altını çizmekte ve Kıbrıs kutsal alanlarındaki daha geniş siyasi ve sosyal dinamiklere işaret ederek, alanın mimari ve ritüelistik evrimine dair gelecekteki araştırmalar için yol açmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıbrıs tapınakları, pişmiş toprak adaklar, kireç taşı heykelcikler, Kıbrıs'ın Baş Tanrısı, Ptolemaik yönetici kültü

Introduction

During the last five decades, archaeology in the northern part of divided Cyprus was mainly shaped by rescue excavations by the Department of Antiquities and Museums (DoAM) of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The few short-term rescue excavations that the

* Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hazar Kaba, Sinop Üniversitesi, Fen - Edebiyat Fakültesi, Arkeoloji Bölümü, B Blok, Sinop, Türkiye. E-mail: hazarkaba@sinop.edu.tr ; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3369-3363>

DoAM realized frequently gave way to important archaeological discoveries. Unfortunately, the excavated material remains unstudied or understudied for various reasons.¹

Among the latest discoveries of DoAM is a sanctuary site located at Alonia, also known as Harmanlar in common parlance, on the outskirts of the village of Gayretköy / Avlona in the Güzelyurt / Morphou region. The archaeological remains of the sanctuary at Avlona-Alonia,² hereafter simply referred to as Alonia, were discovered by chance in the spring of 2014 during the laying of a water pipeline. The Güzelyurt Arkeoloji ve Doğa Müzesi / Archaeology and Nature Museum of Morphou instantly initiated a rescue excavation at the spot of discovery.³ The excavation brought to light few architectural remains but many artifacts ranging from pottery and lamps to figurines, statuettes, or statues in terracotta and limestone with other materials. Apart from the excavation report,⁴ this is the first publication regarding this sanctuary.⁵

This article presents the results of the preliminary studies on the sanctuary, its architecture and finds. After providing a detailed description of the archaeological setting, the building remains are meticulously analyzed and contextualized within the framework of the hitherto known Cypriot sacral architecture. In the following section, the chronology of the sanctuary's emergence, development, and eventual decline is investigated through the study of the artifacts uncovered during the excavation. Drawing on the observations and discussions of the votive material, an attempt is made to identify the deity or deities venerated in this sanctuary.

Excavation and Find Contexts

The sanctuary is located north of the modern village of Gayretköy / Avlona in the northwestern part of the island (fig. 1). Initially, the rescue excavation of the sanctuary was limited to a small trench. Within this roughly square trench that measured 13.40 x 10.60 m, a rectangular building surrounded by other related remains was unearthed (fig. 2).

The architectural remains were embedded within a dense soil fill. This fill contained an assortment of broken and densely packed artifacts. Consequently, the architectural remains were unearthed by removing the packing of artifacts.⁶ The lowest stratum of the fill was considered the final occupation layer (-0.55 m from the surface / 152 m above sea level). The nature of the lowest occupation layer remains ambiguous. It is uncertain whether it constituted the original

¹ For a brief evaluation of these discoveries, the problems surrounding them, and the related studies, see most recently Summerer 2023, 40-43, 48.

² Cypriot sanctuaries are designated by scholars after the names of the villages / geographical locations followed by the name of the locality that they were found in or close to. Referring to the sanctuary as Avlona-Alonia respects this long tradition of naming Cypriot sanctuaries, a practice unconditionally adopted by practitioners of Cypriot archaeology, local or foreigner alike.

³ The excavation was directed by the Museum Director Emine Hilkat and assisted by archaeologist Mehmet Şöforoğlu along with the technical staff of the Museum. The rescue excavation lasted for 37 days between March and May of 2014.

⁴ KKTC Resmi Gazete 2016, 352-53.

⁵ Minor studies and research on the sanctuary and its material corpus are ongoing for publication as a comprehensive volume. The preliminary study on the sanctuary and its finds was funded by AKMED 2021 Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship program. The study took place between September and October of 2021.

⁶ Due to the salvage nature of the fieldwork, a comprehensive stratigraphic methodology could not be followed during the entire excavation.

floor⁷ or solidified over time under the weight of the fill. Various soundings conducted at different points within this layer exposed bedrock at -1.05 m from the surface (151.45 m above sea level). No architectural remains were observed beneath this level, indicating that the building was constructed in a single phase.

Within this building, three contexts with rich finds were documented. None was undisturbed since they were all formed by the accumulation of artifacts. The first and most significant of these three contexts (fill 1) is the earth fill that stretched between the space defined by two major north-south oriented walls and a third smaller east-west oriented wall. Formed of a hard-packed layer, fill 1 reflected a varied matrix. Some portions of it included cobble stones densely mixed with artifacts (fig. 3a), whereas others included only a small number of artifacts. The majority of the artifacts were recovered from fill 1. On the other hand, the less compact fill 2 with fewer artifacts was used to level up the southern side of the architectural remains. Thus, fills 1 and 2 supplied un-stratified secondary contexts of fragmented or intentionally broken / shattered artifacts. Other portions of the excavated trench also revealed artifacts. However, they were found as isolated objects without concentration at any specific location or depth. The third context originated from a pit on the excavated area's northeast cross-section. The pit measured 1 x 0.5 m and had a 0.90 m depth until the underlying hard layer of soil that was apparent throughout the excavation area. Unlike the previous two, it reflects the traits of a primary context as its matrix was constituted of a substantial amount of pottery and lamps, intentionally deposited and covered by a single river stone (fig. 3b). This deposition suggests a *bothros*.⁸

After the excavations were completed, the architectural remains were reburied, the area was fenced as a protection measure, and all recovered artifacts were transferred to the storerooms of the Güzelyurt Museum.⁹ The excavation area was registered as a 1st Degree Archaeological Site.¹⁰ The excavation trench presumably covers only 7% of the parcel, leaving a remarkable area with much archaeological potential for new discoveries.

The Setting

The sanctuary is situated on ridge-like terrain rising between two tributary streams that join one of the major streams watering the fertile Morphou Plain, the Peristerona River. Stretching in a northwest-southeast axis, the ridge on which the sanctuary is located widens towards the south. The ridge reaches a maximum width of 4 km at the southeast and opens to the plain that stretches until the distant outskirts of the Troodos Mountains. The borders of the ridge were drawn on the north by the tributary of Gayretköy / Avlonas, otherwise known as the Merikas River. Another tributary, the Akaça / Akaki River, borders the ridge on its western side and meets the Gayretköy / Avlonas River only to join the Persiterona River further towards the northwest.

⁷ Cypriot sanctuaries are known to have various types of "beaten" floors of lime (Gjerstad et al. 1934, 361-62; 1935, 652; Smith 1997, 83-84, 86), earth (Gjerstad et al. 1935, 652; Karageorghis 1977, 17; Toumazou et al. 2015, 210, 212) as well as pebble- and stone-chipped lime (Ulbrich 2013, 34).

⁸ For *bothroi* from other Cypriot sanctuaries, see Karageorghis 1971; Fourrier 2011, 126; Smith et al. 2012, 171, 176-78.

⁹ Preservation of the architectural remains, aerial documentation, and reburial of the site was supervised by Prof. Dr. Müge Şevketoğlu from the Center for Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Conservation of the Cyprus International University.

¹⁰ KKTC Resmi Gazete 2016, 354.

This micro-geographic location, watered by multiple rivers, places the sanctuary of Alonia at the center of a fertile plain blessed with rich alluvial soil. Today, numerous citrus orchards dominate the landscape around the sanctuary. In contrast, fertile fields stretch in all directions as far as the eye can see (fig. 4). The surrounding geography serves mainly for agricultural purposes with some animal husbandry. It is reasonable to assume that this landscape, abundant in agricultural and natural resources, was not significantly different in ancient times. The sanctuary must have had an outstanding viewshed over the landscape of its time since it sits on higher ground.

Such a location on higher ground with a viewshed over fertile wetlands corresponds to many Cypriot sanctuary sites.¹¹ The landscape surrounding the sanctuary must have been devoid of large settlements in antiquity since it was located within the Cypriot countryside and away from principal political centers (see again fig. 1). In the case of Alonia, this location suggests an extra-urban Cypriot sanctuary and necessitates its detailed handling in comparison with other extra-urban sanctuaries of the Cypriot Iron Age.¹²

Architecture

The sanctuary's architectural remains, as previously noted, were not entirely unearthed due to the excavation's rescue-orientation. Within the confines of the excavated area, a few wall sections forming an architectural space were observed. On the other hand, some other walls appear as alterations or detached applications from the main architectural framework. Additionally, some other built features are challenging to interpret regarding their type and function.

The walls are constructed from river stones of varying sizes that were bonded with earth. Two parallel walls, the north-south Walls 1 and 2, are connected by a third east-west aligned wall, Wall 3. Another less refined wall oriented east-west is Wall 4, which builds a corner with Wall 2 and appears to serve as an internal partition (fig. 5).

Wall 1 measures 7.5 m. Wall 3 initially continues southeast for 1.7 m without interruption. Two gaps of varying widths are observed in the course of this wall - the first from the west is 1.10 m while the second is 0.87 m. Each gap is framed by straight edges, achieved by the upright placement of single-piece rectangular stones or the proper alignment of multiple stone courses. The southeast corner, where wall 3 would have intersected with Wall 2, is not preserved, resulting in a significant opening at that specific point. However, it is evident that this opening was not intentionally created such as for a doorway, but instead resulted from the collapse or dismantling of the wall at this point. This conclusion is best supported by the condition of the ends of Walls 2 and 3: both are marked by damaged and distorted masonry rather than a clean, finished surface. The northern extremity of Wall 2 had been damaged during the pipeline construction works that prompted the rescue excavation; consequently, the preserved

¹¹ Wright 1992, 276; Papantoniou and Bourogiannis 2019, 146.

¹² Various scholars studying Cypriot sacred landscapes preferred using different designations for Cypriot sanctuaries such as extra-urban, rural, etc.; see Collombier 1999, Fourrier 2000, Ulbrich 2008. More recently Giorgios Papantoniou, through emphasizing the anachronistic nature of the term "rural" in the case of Cyprus, preferred to use the term "extra-urban" implying the more "flexible" usage of this terminology; see Papantoniou 2012a, 90. It is beyond the scope and intention of this study to discuss the pros and cons regarding the "proper" designation of Cypriot sanctuaries, and I do not intend to designate any term as scientifically "fit" or "not fit." The preference of using the term "extra-urban" throughout this study is simply due to my scientific concurrence with the arguments of Papantoniou (2012a, 90) related to its terms of flexibility of use within the context of Cypriot sanctuaries.

portion of Wall 2 measures 7.25 m. Except for Wall 4, the walls exhibit a consistent structural character and masonry technique. Nevertheless, minor changes are evident in their widths, which vary between 0.42 and 0.60 m. Similarly, varying measurements are also apparent in the height of the walls between 0.27 - 0.47 m.

Walls 1-3 show structural uniformity, including almost identical dimensions and masonry techniques. The walls in question also demonstrate structural integrity by aligning and joining each other at right angles. This indicates a coherent and planned architectural design. In contrast, Wall 4 and a few other architectural elements deviate from this pattern. Wall 4 is a substantial east-west-oriented structure that imperfectly abuts the southern terminus of Wall 2. It is 2 m long and 0.54 m wide. This wall, notably, was built using spolia, including terracotta figurines, limestone statuettes, and, an inscription. Furthermore, compared to the other three walls, Wall 4 exhibits a relatively less meticulous construction¹³ and departs from the actual axis of Wall 3, slightly tilting towards the north. Within Wall 4, a square feature was formed by the upright placement of various flat stones. Faint traces of pinkish hydraulic mortar on the inner walls of this square structure suggest a water-related function (a basin?). Based on these observations, I suggest that Walls 1, 2, and 3 constituted a room or an outdoor enclosure into which Wall 4 and a basin were incorporated later. The wall initially bordering this enclosed area to the north, presumed to join Walls 1 and 2 based on the continuation of both walls in that direction, remains unexcavated and buried beneath the soil.

Two circular structures, Feature 1 and Feature 2, are located at the northwestern edge of the enclosure. They are made by bonding river stones with earth, whereas some sculptural fragments are walled in. The central portion of both circular structures contains a substantial layer of soil with a few pottery sherds and fragments of figurines. They both measure 0.80 m in diameter and are only 0.16 m deep. The purpose and function of these circular enclosures remain enigmatic at present. The walled-in spolia suggests a somewhat later period when the votives of the sanctuary were already discarded and recycled as a building material. Consequently, both enclosures could have been sub-floor installations for storage or other purposes from the post-sanctuary period.¹⁴

Another feature identified in the filling compound towards the northwest side of the trench is formed by placing two ashlar blocks in an L-shape. The corresponding dimensions of the blocks measure 0.89 m in length, 0.43 m in width, and 0.25 m in height. Their current position, place, and burial under the filling indicate that they must have been subsequently dismantled and repurposed after the sanctuary had fallen into disuse. The exact function of these blocks within the sacred architecture is unclear. They might have been used in some kind of ashlar masonry,¹⁵ or more likely, as thresholds and then recycled as fill material.¹⁶

This architectural plan is partially revealed. Nevertheless, I will try to contextualize this incomplete plan by comparing it with other Cypriot sanctuaries, preferably with extra-urban

¹³ It is highly possible that the stones used for this wall were actually gathered from the missing southern portion of Wall 2 that must have formed a corner by joining Wall 3.

¹⁴ One possibility coming to mind is that they can be places reserved for the “sacred trees.” Such circular features, together with square ones, are not alien in Cypriot sanctuaries. However, all such similar features were formed outside of the closed spaces generally on the courtyards or open areas; see Gjerstad et al. 1935, 673; Karageorghis 1976, 100; 1977, 23.

¹⁵ The temple at Kition can be a good case study; see Karageorghis 1976, 82-83, 96-100.

¹⁶ Smith 1997, 83, 87, fig. 10; Smith et al. 2012, 175; Toumazou et al. 2015, 211.

sanctuaries. Ancient Cypriot sanctuaries appear in many different architectural plans.¹⁷ However, the *temenos* type was most prevalent. Cypriot *temene* constituted open-air sacred precincts enclosed by *peribolos* walls, occasionally housing small- to medium-sized interior structure(s) alongside one or more altar(s) serving as focal points for ritual activities. Their construction was, by means of mudbrick superstructures, raised on foundations of river stones and rubble, whereas sanctuaries with ashlar-built substructures are also known.¹⁸ The altars were rudimentarily constructed, often of stacked stones or rubble, with the latter being the preferred choice.¹⁹ This architectural characteristic persisted with variations until the late Hellenistic period when the first *in antis* podium temples were constructed on the island.²⁰

The bulk of known Cypriot sanctuaries were discovered either by “travelogue archaeologists,” which lack proper documentation,²¹ or were properly excavated and documented by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition.²² Nevertheless, all those sanctuaries are now “lost” since they were reburied by their excavators. Only recently excavated examples are able to accommodate more comprehensive studies by being still accessible.²³ Many other known sanctuaries were merely located by field surveys only.²⁴ Nonetheless, published comparative examples allow for the establishment of analogies for the architectural remains unearthed at Alonia.

Within the unearthed architecture at Alonia, three perpendicular and structurally similar walls (Walls 1-3) enclose an area measuring 55.25 m²,²⁵ forming a square building. The entrance of this building is found at the south, where two purposely created openings are evident. Based on current observations, the interior does not exhibit any divided spaces.

The construction materials and techniques observed at Alonia, such as walls built with river stones and mud mortar, closely align with the known characteristics of Cypriot sacral architecture.²⁶ However, it should be noted that the unearthed architecture highly represents the foundation and the immediate lower portions after that. The excavation yielded no evidence regarding the upper walls or roof.²⁷ The nature of the building’s floor also remains uncertain.

¹⁷ Gjerstad 1948, 17-23.

¹⁸ Gjerstad et al. 1935, 650; Karageorghis 1977, 17; Smith 1997, 83, 85; Toumazou et al. 2015, 209, 212. Among the most prominent examples are Tamassos-Phrangissa (Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893, 7-11, nrs. 4, 352), Agia Irini (Gjerstad et al. 1935, 643-50), Mersinaki (Gjerstad et al. 1937, 342-44), Soloi-Kholades (Gjerstad et al. 1937, 416-19), Meniko-Litharkes (Karageorghis 1977, 17), Athienou-Malloura (Toumazou et al. 2015, 209), Polis-Peristeries and Polis-Maratheri (Smith et al. 2012, 171-83). The “Phoenician” sanctuary at Kition is the best-known ashlar-built Iron Age Cypriot sanctuary; see Karageorghis 1976, 96-100.

¹⁹ Gjerstad et al. 1935, 651-52; Buitron-Oliver 1996, 2-4; Petit 2002, 293-94; Toumazou and Counts 2012, 77; Smith et al. 2012, 165-75, fig. 3.8.

²⁰ Papantoniou 2012a, 21, 74-75, 139-40.

²¹ For a general evaluation of the subject, see Ulbrich 2001.

²² Karageorghis 2005, 70.

²³ Karageorghis 1977, Ulbrich 2011a, Smith et al. 2012, Toumazou et al. 2015.

²⁴ For a general evaluation of this matter, see Papantoniou 2013a, 37-38. For specific cases on Vavla-Kapsales, see Morden and Todd 1994; for Sykhari-Lakkin see Kaba 2018; for Taşlıca-Mersincik see Kızılduman and Ögmen 2022; for Aphendrika see Kiessel 2023.

²⁵ Since the northern end of the building remains buried under the unexcavated soil, the interpretation of the exact point where this building ended or the actual dimensions of it are hard to interpret at the present.

²⁶ For instance, Tamassos-Phrangissa: Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893, 7-11, nrs. 4, 352; Voni: Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893, 3-5, 352-54, pl. 5; Agia Irini: Gjerstad et al. 1935, 643-50; Soloi-Paradisotissa: Gjerstad et al. 1937, 294-96; Mersinaki: Gjerstad et al. 1937, 342-44; Soloi-Cholades: Gjerstad et al. 1937, 416-19; Meniko-Litharkes: Karageorghis 1977, 17; Athienou-Malloura: Toumazou et al. 2015, 209; Polis-Peristeries and Polis-Maratheri: Smith et al. 2012, 171-83.

²⁷ Nevertheless, given the building’s consistency with the overall Cypriot sacral architecture, it can be reasonably suggested that the upper structure at Alonia was likely composed of mud-brick walls (see n. 18).

A hardened lump of yellowish soil mixed with lime, arranged in a roughly circular shape towards the northeastern edge of the site (see again fig. 5), was initially interpreted as the *pisé* altar of the sanctuary by the excavators. This was due to its distinct composition and the presence of the lower portion of a statue leaning against it.²⁸ Nevertheless, the fact that it included statuettes and figurine fragments argues against this interpretation. Cypriot Iron Age altars were formed in many ways, but none were reported with discarded votive inclusions.²⁹ Furthermore, Cypriot altars were typically positioned outdoors within the courtyard.³⁰ The accumulation of statuettes and figurine fragments within this soil matrix successively grew after the sanctuary fell into disuse. It is reasonable to interpret this yellowish soil mixed with lime as the remnants of the sanctuary floor, a well-known flooring method in Cypriot sanctuaries.³¹

Although the revealed architectural plan is incomplete, we may assume it is a single building. However, the abundance of retrieved votive statuary and figurines suggests the need of a more expansive space at Alonia, whether open or roofed, for the effective display of numerous votives. For it would not be feasible to display all of them within the confines of the building uncovered thus far.³² At this point, I want to emphasize an inscription used as spolia within Wall 4, which I will examine in more detail below. It attests to the presence of a *temenos* at the site, which must had a large architectural layout.³³

Understanding the function of this single building within the sanctuary is difficult because of the incomplete plan. The single room within a Cypriot *temenos* is generally understood to be the most sacred part of the sanctuary, the *naos*.³⁴ However, similar rooms are also known to be used as storerooms / treasuries³⁵ and even workshops.³⁶ In the case of Alonia, only artifacts, statuettes, and figurines retrieved within and around this room can provide clues for its interpretation.³⁷ Some of these artifacts were likely deposited as votives in the single building revealed so far,³⁸ but mostly outside within a close vicinity,³⁹ before being intentionally shattered and recycled as fill material. The incorporation of numerous artifacts into the fill suggests

²⁸ There is no example of an altar from any Cypriot sanctuary that had a statue positioned directly in front of it in a way to block its visibility and limit access for the realization of religious ceremonies. On the contrary all *in situ* votives from Agia Irini were found behind the altar in a semicircular order; see Gjerstad et al. 1935, 642-824.

²⁹ Indeed, altars can take a variety of forms within Cypriot sanctuaries depending on cultic, economic, and social factors. They can be constructed of stone and / or rubble (Buitron-Oliver 1996, 2-4; 1997, 32), limestone (Gjerstad et al. 1935, 651-52), and plastered ashlar (Smith et al. 2012, 155-65, fig. 3.8). The *pisé* altar in itself is a very rare type of altar paralleled only by a single specimen from Athienou-Malloura; see Toumazou et al. 2015, 208.

³⁰ Gjerstad et al. 1935, 651-52; Buitron-Oliver 1996, 2-4; 1997, 32; Smith et al. 2012, 155-65, fig. 3.8; Toumazou et al. 2015, 207-9.

³¹ See again footnote 7 for the types of floors within Cypriot sanctuaries.

³² This is a well-documented characteristic of Cypriot sanctuaries as shown by the discovery of numerous *in situ* statue / statuette bases positioned all around the courtyards or under porticoes; see Ohnefalsch-Richter 1891, 41-44, pl. 6; Smith 1997, 86, fig. 12. The best example of the visualization of this practice is probably given by Reinhard Senff (1993, pl. 2a-b) within the scope of his study to “re-enact” the votive display in the sanctuary of Apollon at Idalion.

³³ If so, the Polis-Peristeries sanctuary shows the closest layout for Alonia; see Smith et al. 2012, plans 1-2.

³⁴ Gjerstad et al. 1937, 482-93; Smith et al. 2012, 168, 181; Papantoniou 2013a, 34.

³⁵ Smith 1997, 86; Smith et al. 2012, 174.

³⁶ Smith 1997, 90-91.

³⁷ This is no exception since units of Cypriot sanctuaries are known to reflect more or less the same architectural shape and characteristics but different purposes; see Smith 1997, 87-88, 90-91.

³⁸ Ohnefalsch-Richter 1893, pl. 6; Smith 1997, 88; Papantoniou 2012a, 169; Smith et al. 2012, 176, 179-80.

³⁹ Papantoniou 2012a, 169. Evidence from Polis-Peristeries is very neat and clear that some of the artifacts were kept or displayed within the *naos*; see Smith 1997, 87-88.

that they were collected from a location not far away, likely from within or in its immediate vicinity. Based on this inference, I feel confident to propose that the single-room structure uncovered at Alonia originally functioned as the *naos* of the *temenos*.

As seen, due to its incomplete plan and poor state of preservation, the architecture can only be tentatively interpreted. Further research, more extensive excavation, and a study of its results are needed to reveal the type and function of the construction and ultimate fate of this *naos*, as well as any additional yet-to-be-revealed structures within the *temenos*.

Lifespan of the Sanctuary

Alongside their religious function, Cypriot sanctuaries were generally tasked with many other aspects, including the display and disposal of votive items, the ritual consumption of food and drinks, industrial activity, and storage of goods.⁴⁰ Consequently, they yielded a rich trove of material evidence, encompassing sculptures, terracotta figurines, pottery, and an array of miscellaneous objects such as thymateria, ash shovels, loom weights, small metal objects, etc.. Nevertheless, the focal point of devotion always centered on the practice of votive deposition. Therefore, limestone and terracotta votive statues with statuettes and figurines constitute a predominant portion of the extant archaeological assemblages from Cypriot sanctuaries.

Datable artifacts provide clues to the utilization of the site from the Cypro-Archaic era through to the Roman period. However, the inventory of artifacts is both numerous and of exceptional quality.⁴¹ Given the preliminary nature and limitations of the paper, it is not feasible to discuss all of the material comprehensively. As a result, a selective approach has been adopted for the analysis. Priority has been given to examining artifacts to draw the development of the sanctuary across time, to show how modes of votive practices changed over time, and to demonstrate how these changes can be interpreted within the historical context of the island. Although the paper lacks a detailed catalog, it instead supplies a selective presentation of artifacts to illustrate the above-mentioned scope.⁴²

The Beginning: Cypro-Archaic Period

The earliest datable evidence is from the Cypro-Archaic, which allows us to assign the earliest phase of the sanctuary to this period. Alongside the different types of pottery, lamps, and limestone incense burners, various types of votive statuary and figurines crafted from terracotta and limestone belong to the Cypro-Archaic inventory of the sanctuary. I will present a selected number of datable and significant artifacts below.

A limestone statue (fig. 6a) is preserved as the lowest portion of a figure standing on a square plinth, including the feet and hemline of the garment (preserved h: 45 cm, w: 49 cm). The only discernible details are the stylized toes. The statue is difficult to classify since the upper body and head are lacking.⁴³ It plausibly represented a male votary in a long garment

⁴⁰ Papantoniou 2012a, 94-95. On the economic aspect of Cypriot sanctuaries, see Fischer 2001, 54-60. For their relation to metallurgical activities further, see Kassianidou 2013, 56, 59-63, 65-69.

⁴¹ The total number of inventoried artifacts currently stands at 245. However, numerous additional artifacts, particularly terracotta figurines and statuettes, have been identified, many of which can be fully or partially restored through conservation efforts. These items have the potential to increase the number of inventoried artifacts by 50% more.

⁴² Still, basic measurements of the artifacts will be given in heights (h) and width (w) in any case needed.

⁴³ Generally, the garment details but mainly the headdress is taken into consideration for the establishment of typologies; see Sørensen 1994; Counts 2001; Senff 2016, 241-43.

(often referred to as a chiton), based on numerous contemporary examples.⁴⁴ Such statues with mostly stylized and shallowly executed details are dated to the first half of the sixth century BC.⁴⁵

The head of a beardless male votary with short hair topped by a conical cap is the second example that I will present (h: 16.5 cm; fig. 6b). The shallow detailing of the conical cap leaving the hair open on all sides, the voluminous short hair on the neck, small eyes, straight lips, and softened chin indicate a date towards the end of the sixth century BC.⁴⁶

Another remarkable votive dedication from this period is a life-size terracotta female statue, preserved in fragments from the face (h: 20 cm) and one foot (h: 16 cm, w: 21 cm; fig. 6c). The fragment from the head features an ovoid-rounded face with rounded cheeks and a prominent nose. The brows, lids, and irises of the eyes are slightly ridged. The ears are awkwardly modeled and placed too low on the head because of the low placement of the hair. The hair is rendered with overlaying layers of applied plastic spirals over the forehead. The fragmentary foot is bare with finely defined toes. The stylistic features of the statue can be assigned to the “Neo Cypriote Style,”⁴⁷ that is, the first half of the fifth century BC.⁴⁸

Some terracotta heads are mould-made. A unique example is a medium-size beardless male votary (h: 15 cm; fig. 6d). It represents a youth wearing an elaborately rendered plastic ivy wreath.⁴⁹ Traces of black paint are visible on the wreath’s leaves and the hair. The hair at the crown of the head is depicted by incised lines, while the sections of the wreath feature stamped circles. The features of the face with a rounded chin, a mouth formed by a horizontal incision, a prominent nose with indicated nostrils, ridged elliptical eyes, and eyebrows further accentuated with black paint allow its assignment to the Neo-Cypriote Style.⁵⁰ The wreath he wears is a key element that helps to narrow the dating to the late sixth century BC.⁵¹

Other terracotta heads and various body parts, as well as arm, leg, and foot fragments, provide evidence for a greater quantity of medium- and small-sized as well as life-sized terracotta statuettes. The elaborate modeling of the figures with richly detailed clothing corresponds, in terms of quality and style, to the regional votive tradition “Style IIA” from the sanctuary of Mersinaki, dated to the first half of the fifth century BC.⁵²

The terracotta votives include chariot models and horse-and-rider figurines, all preserved as highly fragmented. Other figurines portray standing male figures with conical hats. Some figurines were crafted using the “snowman technique” with coarsely modeled heads (Gjerstad

⁴⁴ Hermay 1989, 22; Buchholz 1991, 9, pl. 4b; Senff 1993, 26; Sørensen 2017.

⁴⁵ Hermay and Mertens 2014, 34, cat. no. 7; 36, cat. no. 11.

⁴⁶ Mylonas 1998, 124-27, 130, 157-58. The statue to which the head belonged can be assigned to the chronologically later examples of male votaries with conical caps dressed in various long garments; see Mylonas 1998, 124-31.

⁴⁷ For the Neo Cypriote Style, see Gjerstad 1948, 207-20.

⁴⁸ For a somewhat similar head, see Karageorghis 1993, 81, cat. no. 314, pl. 62.3.

⁴⁹ A head with more or less similar facial traits from Salamis-Toumba is designated as a “youth”; see Karageorghis and Kiely 2019, CM 4, pl. 10.4.

⁵⁰ For a similarly produced head but from a female statuette, see Karageorghis 1993, 49-50, cat. no. 148, pl. 33.7.

⁵¹ On the help of wreaths for dating the terracotta statues / statuettes into the late sixth century BC, see Karageorghis 1993, 88.

⁵² For Mersinaki Style IIA, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 386. For the dating of this specific coroplastic style, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 395.

Style 5) or plastically rendered “wig-shaped” hair (Gjerstad Style 6; fig. 7a), and mould-made heads (Gjerstad Style 7; fig. 7b-c). Such figurines are generally dated to the first half of the sixth century BC, whereas examples with mould-made heads are slightly later.⁵³

Limestone votary statuettes comprise small- to medium-sized examples that vary in style and iconography. Intriguingly, all small-sized limestone statuettes depict male votaries. Among these, examples from the so-called Cypro-Ionian tradition wearing chiton and himation with richly painted hairbands and occasionally wreaths made of finely executed leaves prevail. They appear in various iconographies, such as arms held at the sides (fig. 7d; preserved h: 31.4 cm), heads with locks of hair falling onto their front shoulders (ca. the mid-sixth century BC; fig. 7e) (preserved h: 17.5 cm),⁵⁴ or with long hair falling to the nape (ca. 600-550 BC).⁵⁵ Others carry offerings: an animal in one hand or held at the chest (ca. mid-sixth century BC; preserved h: 18.5 cm; fig. 7f).⁵⁶ Or one hand carries a goat while the other arm is held tightly at the side (ca. 550-525 BC; preserved h: 33 cm; fig. 7g).⁵⁷

Apart from the rich votary corpus of this period, numerous lamps of the locally produced Cypriot saucer-shaped type appear together with local pottery in various forms, including plates, bowls, juglets, and jugs.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the pottery corpus remains numerically smaller than the votive assemblage. The pottery consists of Plain White V and VI, with Plain White V being more prevalent. When analyzed within the chronological framework of E. Gjerstad, this distribution suggests a pottery-based date corresponding to Cypro-Archaic IIB (ca. 540-475 BC),⁵⁹ aligning with the chronological framework established by the votive corpus.

The beginning of the sanctuary site at Alonia, with no coincidence, happens at a time when extra-urban sanctuaries mushroomed across the island in the 7th / 6th centuries BC.⁶⁰ The first corpus of votives deposited in the sanctuary allows us to place it within the same framework as its contemporary counterparts. The presence of the life-sized sculpture within the corpus points to the competitive votive practice and social differentiation among the sanctuary's visitors. As generally suggested for other Cypriot sanctuaries, such dedications must have served as awe-inspiring symbols of authority and control, underscoring the sanctuary's importance. The dedication and public display of these life-sized limestone and terracotta statues took on a symbolic dimension, engaging in a sort of ideological rivalry among various polities vying for influence and dominance over their respective territories.⁶¹ Typically interpreted as representations of Cypriot royalty, elite members, or religious dignitaries,⁶² these statues also functioned as mediums for conveying the elite ideologies embraced by the upper echelons of society.

⁵³ For all those stylistic traits, see Karageorghis 1995, 3-6, 10.

⁵⁴ Hermary 2009, 140, fig. 7; Hermary and Mertens 2014, 75; Ulbrich 2020, 232, fig. 8.

⁵⁵ For a much worn similar from Amathous, see Hermary 1994, 122, pl. 35b.

⁵⁶ For a votary with similar dress, see Karageorghis and Vanchugov 2001, 86, cat. no. 158. For the possible designation of the animal held by the votary, see Faegersten 2003, 286, no. 39, pl. 31; Hermary and Mertens 2014, 72, cat. no. 58.

⁵⁷ For a similar from Kition, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, pl. 29.2. For other votaries similarly carrying goats, see Faegersten 2003, 286, no. 39, pl. 31; Hermary and Mertens 2014, 72, cat. no. 58.

⁵⁸ The Cypro-Archaic pottery inventory consists of 18 vessels whereas a total of 8 lamps were inventoried so far.

⁵⁹ Gjerstad 1948, 202-3, especially the related table.

⁶⁰ Papantoniou 2012a, 73-162; 2012b; 2013.

⁶¹ For further analysis of this statement, see Papantoniou 2013a, which builds greatly on (and modify) previous and more “influential” theories and interpretations on the subject matter.

⁶² Hermary 1989, 49; Maier 1989; Mylonas 1998, 125, 128, 145; Satraki 2008.

Their presence highlights the societal emphasis on status, power, and religious authority within Cypriot culture.⁶³ The inclusion of chariot models and horse-and-rider figurines, as astutely proposed by Giorgios Papantoniou, “should be related to the reception (and imitation) of elements of royal ideology by upper societal strata and probably by other non-elite groups to express a prevalent cosmological system.”⁶⁴ In this multifaceted manner, the sanctuary at Alonia transcended its role as a mere place of worship, as in all other Cypriot sanctuaries, evolving into a hub for the exhibition of elite ideologies and the negotiation of social identities.

The Floruit: Cypro-Classical Period

The votive and pottery inventory provides evidence that the sanctuary continued to exist throughout the Cypro-Classical period. The Cypro-Classical find assemblage surpasses its predecessor in both quantity and diversity, signifying a flourishing period of use for the sanctuary. The bulk of this inventory again consists of votary statuary and figurines in terracotta and limestone. Curiously, the Cypro-Classical votives lack any limestone or terracotta statues. However, it does reveal a notable increase in the number of medium-sized terracotta statuary. These sculptured votives - mostly preserved as heads with only a few accompanying bodies, arms, and hands - depict a wide range of subjects, including men, women, and even children. What separates these votives from the preceding Cypro-Archaic ones is the representations of deities presumably worshiped at the sanctuary.

The terracotta male heads are generally moulded and manually reworked in their details. They portray youthful, beardless men with oval and depressed heads, finely detailed facial traits, and various styles of short hair. Each head is consistently crowned with wreaths (fig. 8a-d). Traces of paint are rarely preserved. Pierced ears indicate further adornment of the heads with metal earrings. Some of the heads exhibit carefully crafted facial features that were undoubtedly inspired by the contemporary Classical styles of Greek sculpture.⁶⁵ A few heads stand close to the sculptural styles of the so-called “Temple Boys” with their childish and rounded facial features (preserved h: 20.2 cm; fig. 8d).⁶⁶ The male heads reflect striking similarities to the heads of Mersinaki Style IV but, to some extent, also show affinities to examples of the preceding Style III. Based on their stylistic characteristics, the Cypro-Classical heads can be dated to a period when Style III was still in use the new artistic concepts of Style IV were introduced, that is, roughly between 340-310 BC.⁶⁷

The female statuettes from this period typically portray veiled women with moulded faces adorned with intricate details (fig. 8e). The origin of this type of female figurine, represented in only a select number of centers with few examples from Cyprus, can be traced to the sculptural traditions of mainland Greece, where they were more prevalent.⁶⁸ However, unlike other Cypriot examples that closely adhere to Greek prototypes, the Alonia statuettes exhibit distinct local influences, particularly evident in their facial features. These stem from Mersinaki

⁶³ Sørensen 1994, 79.

⁶⁴ Papantoniou and Bourogiannis 2019, 141.

⁶⁵ Einer Gjerstad emphasized this characteristic of such similar heads from elsewhere; see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 356, no. 686, pl. 135.1.

⁶⁶ Karageorghis 1999, 163-64, cat. no. 75.

⁶⁷ For Mersinaki Style III and IV, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 386-87; for the dating of those specific coroplastic styles, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 395-96.

⁶⁸ Flourentzos 1994, 162, no. 22, pl. 34; Caubet et al. 1998, 468-69, no. 716.

Styles IV-V at the end of the fourth century BC.⁶⁹ Other fragments can be assigned to terracotta statuettes with coiled bodies, richly detailed garments, and various gestures: raised hands with palms facing out, arms bent from the elbow and stretched out, but more commonly hands holding separately made birds (fig. 8f-g).

The majority of the limestone statuettes are preserved as heads and primarily depict male votaries, with only one female statuette. Most of the heads are crowned with laurel wreaths. Fragments that maintain the body and lower legs typically depict male votaries wearing a chiton and himation while carrying branches with leaves (preserved h: 38.5 cm; fig. 9a).⁷⁰ In some iconographies, the lowered arm is attached to the side of the body, and the other is bent at the belly, with the hand grasping the thick fold of the dress (h: 58 cm; fig. 9b).⁷¹ In others, the votaries are shown holding a bird from the neck at waist level (preserved h: 17.5 cm; fig. 9c).⁷²

A head belongs to a rare type within the overall Cypriot corpus. Executed in plank shape, it depicts an oval face with protruding eyes, a well-executed prominent nose, and a mouth (preserved h: 6.5 cm; fig. 9d). The frizzy hair emerges from under a hood, and the forehead is additionally detailed with incisions. The hood is crowned with a laurel wreath and has an upright tip. Its lower parts fall behind the hair on both sides of the head. Traces of red paint are evident on it. On the base of iconographic / stylistic analogies, this head can be dated to the end of the 5th or beginning of the fourth century BC.⁷³

Two examples, one of terracotta and the other of limestone, represent deities. The mould-made terracotta with the badly worn surface depicts an enthroned female figure (h: 15.5 cm; fig. 9e). Despite lacking particular attributes, the throning posture suggests a goddess widely referred to as the Great Goddess within Cypriot iconography.⁷⁴ The throne is decorated with protruding spurs on top. Better-preserved specimens from other contexts of the fourth century BC allow us to identify these spurs as plastic palmetto adornments.⁷⁵ Parallels assign the Great Goddess from Alonia stylistically to the fourth century BC.⁷⁶

The second representation of a deity is a partial plank-shaped statuette. Preserved on it are two legs, pieces of a chlamys, and a stylized *lagobolon*. The *lagobolon* lies adjacent to the figure's right leg, indicated by minor punch marks (preserved h: 11.8 cm; fig. 9f). These characteristics readily associate this piece with the imagery of Cypriot Pan.⁷⁷ While the upper portions

⁶⁹ For Mersinaki Style IV and V, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 387. For the dating of those specific coroplastic styles, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 396.

⁷⁰ For similar statuettes, see Hermay 1989, 275, no. 558; Karageorghis et al. 2000, 120-21, no. 187; Ulbrich 2013, 49. For the dating of such statuettes to the second half of the fifth century BC through the execution of their clothing, see Counts 1998, 111-12, 162, cat. no. 22.

⁷¹ This iconography is indeed repeatedly attested in statuettes and statues from the second half of the fourth century BC; see Hermay 1989, 173, cat. no. 344, 178; cat. no. 354, 182; cat. no. 362, 241; cat. no. 487, 242; cat. no. 488, 243; cat. nos. 490-91, 258-59; cat. no. 521; Reitingen 2013, 150-51, E430, 160-62, E514.

⁷² This is another popular iconography of the fourth century BC; see Reitingen 2013, 108-10, E406, 148-50, E421.

⁷³ A head from a statuette of a male votary but with a "conical cap" from Mersinaki looks similar in iconography to the Alonia example; see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 351, no. 605, pl. 133.9. Interestingly, the closest parallel to the Alonia statuette in terms of the headdress is an unprovenanced statuette from the Cyprus Museum thought to represent a male in Persian attire; see Zournatzi 1989.

⁷⁴ Karageorghis 1998, 204-5; Caubet et al. 1998, 443; Ulbrich 2008, 93-97.

⁷⁵ For the similar decorations on the thrones of a group of seated deities, see Karageorghis et al. 2004, 179-82.

⁷⁶ Karageorghis et al. 2004, 179-82.

⁷⁷ Cofer 2012.

of the piece are missing, the stance of the lower limbs, along with the chlamys and *lagobolon*, allow us to categorize it as a representation of Category 1 Cypriot Pan (350-300 BC).⁷⁸

The votive inventory from Alonia shows that the dedication of medium-sized terracotta statuary gained prominence during the Cypro-Classical period. The prevalence of male votaries - depicted standing and carrying birds and sheaves of wheat / barley, representations of Cypriot Pan, and the Great Goddess of Cyprus - all point to a flourishing period compared to the preceding one. This is evident not only in the diversity of votaries but also in the character of the cult and rituals, as discussed in more detail below. The growing popularity in Alonia during this period is also reflected in its ceramic inventory, which became richer in its diversity of local forms and their quantity. A similar pattern is evident with the saucer-shaped lamps.⁷⁹ Pottery from this period is represented by specimens from Plain White VII-VIII and Red Slip IV(VI) wares, with a notable predominance of Plain White VI. This distribution, which includes examples from all wares of the Cypro-Classical period,⁸⁰ aligns well with the chronological framework established by the votive corpus.

The Alteration (?): Hellenistic Period

The Hellenistic period on the island commenced with the abolition of the autonomous Cypriot polities by Ptolemy I Soter.⁸¹ Eventually, Cyprus ended up becoming a Ptolemaic landscape with a provincial status⁸² in which the previously autonomous Iron Age polities were politically unified by the Ptolemaic *strategoi*.⁸³ In the initial decades of Ptolemaic rule on the island, Cypriot extra-urban sanctuaries continued to exist, with some experiencing a “renaissance” and a few even prosperity.⁸⁴ According to Papantoniou, continuity can be interpreted in various ways, either as the “outcome of various settlement and memory trends” or as related to “Ptolemaic ideological, political, economic, and administrative agendas.”⁸⁵ However, not long before, Cyprus underwent significant changes in its political structure, urban life,⁸⁶ and sacred landscapes.

Consequently, under the new unified political organization of the island, the *raison d'être* of extra-urban sanctuaries as centers for displaying royal ideologies and asserting territorial claims between different political powers became “meaningless.” Thus, as stated by Papantoniou, this period was defined by a transition from “full” to “half full” sacred landscapes.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, a considerable number of sanctuaries continued to serve as centers for displaying not royal but rather “elite” ideologies by still managing to attract the Cypriot elite who dedicated numerous votive statues in various forms with altered or “Ptolemaic” concepts.⁸⁸ To understand how

⁷⁸ Cofer 2012, 170, figs. 12.3, 5.

⁷⁹ The pottery from this phase of the sanctuary shows a great increase in numbers compared to the preceding Cypro-Archaic period (9 specimens) with a total of 25 specimens. Similarly, an increase is witnessed in lamps too, as their amount increased from 4 to 10 specimens during this period.

⁸⁰ Gjerstad 1948, 203; see especially the related table.

⁸¹ Papantoniou 2013b, 178-81.

⁸² Iacovou 2002, 75.

⁸³ Collombier 1993, 127; Papantoniou 2013b, 181-83.

⁸⁴ For the use and meaning of the expression, see Collombier 1993, 144. On the same issue further, see Papantoniou 2012c, 94.

⁸⁵ Papantoniou 2013a, 51-52.

⁸⁶ Mitford 1953; Mehl 2000, 698-712.

⁸⁷ Papantoniou 2013a, 51. The terms “full” and “half full,” referring here to the total number of extra-urban sanctuaries, were actually derived from Alcock 1994, 260-61.

⁸⁸ Papantoniou 2012a, 295-354.

Alonia and the nearby and distant communities associated with it fit into this context, we must once again examine the sanctuary's find assemblage.

Within the votive corpus of this period, there are only two terracotta statuettes, while figurines are absent. On the other hand, there is a noticeable increase in the number of limestone statuettes generally and in the quantity of small-size statuettes particularly. The most noteworthy are two life-sized statues preserved only as fragments. The pottery shows a remarkable decrease in amount compared to the previous period but exhibits variety.⁸⁹ Of particular interest is the significant increase in the number of lamps and the presence of imported products.⁹⁰ Two coins and an inscription from this period are the only numismatic and epigraphic evidence from the site.

Two male heads are exquisite examples of Mersinaki Style VI (280-200 BC), distinguished by their realistic portrayal of facial features in a nearly portrait-like fashion. They can be roughly assigned to the first half of the third century BC (fig. 10a preserved h: 31.4 cm; fig. 10b preserved h: 11.08 cm; fig. 10a-b).⁹¹ These heads represent the culmination of the long-standing coroplastic practice of producing votary-oriented figures rooted in the cultural sphere of Soloi-Mersinaki, a style evident from the Cypro-Achaic until the end of the Hellenistic period and strongly witnessed throughout the whole lifespan of Alonia. Being the latest datable examples of the Soloi-Mersinaki style at Alonia, these heads mark the final flourish of this tradition within the confines of the sanctuary.

Small-sized limestone statuettes, whether complete, partial, or just the heads, show known Hellenistic iconographies. They portray male votaries with various stances (fig. 10c preserved h: 31.5 cm; fig. 10d preserved h: 26 cm),⁹² all datable throughout the third century BC. The male figures commonly wear the traditional Macedonian *kausia* (fig. 10e-f).⁹³ An intriguing and relatively rare hybrid headdress, known as the wreath-*kausia*, occasionally appears on a few heads (fig. 10g).

Of exceptional interest among the small-sized votaries are the various male heads featuring long hair adorned with a fillet or diadem (fig. 10h). These heads belong to a distinctive category of small-sized statuettes and are commonly interpreted as representations of Apollon, based on their characteristic hairstyle and attributes.⁹⁴

The two life-sized limestone statues are particularly notable within the Hellenistic votive corpus of the sanctuary, both for their scale and for representing sculptural types that hold significant importance within Hellenistic Cypriot sculpture. The first of these statues is fragmented into four pieces: an arm with drapery, a fragmentary torso, and two head fragments with parts of hair (fig. 11a). Despite its incomplete state, this statue can be identified as a well-known type in Hellenistic Cyprus.⁹⁵ The fragmentary torso displays the weighty vertical folds of a himation, initially gripped by a now-damaged left hand. Additionally, the folds of the

⁸⁹ The inventoried pottery consists of 14 vessels.

⁹⁰ A total of 15 lamps were inventoried from this period.

⁹¹ Gjerstad et al. 1937, 396.

⁹² Myers 1946, pl. 21, nos. 532 and 535 on the lower photograph; Ulbrich 2013, 49, fig. 14a-b, 51, fig. 15a-b.

⁹³ For the popularity of *kausia* on especially the late fourth-third century BC male votaries, see Ulbrich 2013, 50-51. For other examples of male votaries with *kausia*, see Gjerstad et al. 1937, 756, pl. 240, no. 2197; Hermay 1989, 236-43, nos. 476-91; Senff 1993, pl. 40.

⁹⁴ For the most detailed evaluation of this matter, see Ulbrich 2013, 42-44.

⁹⁵ Connelly 1988, 1-4.

same himation can be observed running horizontally beneath the hand on the same fragment. This small but significant fragment finds its closest parallels in limestone statues discovered in Voni⁹⁶ and Mersinaki.⁹⁷ Drawing an analogy with the Voni example, which is closest to the Alonia specimen, I reconstructed the appearance of the original statue as a standing male figure attired in a chiton and himation. The latter of the two are wrapped into a wide roll running horizontally across the waist and drawn up from the behind over the left shoulder. The figure's right arm likely hung at his side, possibly holding an object, while the left arm was bent at the elbow, with the hand clutching the vertical fold of the himation. The preserved hair parts on the fragments display intricate, scalloped curls, a feature shared with many heads of the male statues of the Hellenistic period.⁹⁸ The stylistic characteristics of the drapery suggest a date to the late third century BC.

The second statue is smaller. It is preserved in fewer fragments: a torso part and chipped fragments, possibly from the drapery (fig. 11b). The torso fragment reveals that the figure had its right arm bent beneath the weighty folds of a himation, with the hand emerging from underneath the folds and held against the chest. A chiton worn beneath the himation is rendered with shallower detailing. Notably, the bent position of the arm and the hand resting on the chest corresponds to a popular iconographic convention of Hellenistic sculpture known as the "Arm Sling" Type.⁹⁹ While Cypriot limestone statues of this type are not numerous, they appear to be favored among male statuary,¹⁰⁰ with only a few examples featuring female figures.¹⁰¹ The Cypriot specimens and those from the Aegean region portraying women differ from the Alonia examples in terms of execution and drapery.¹⁰² The most well-known Cypriot male statue of the Arm Sling Type was unearthed in Mersinaki¹⁰³ and is tentatively dated between 250-150 BC.¹⁰⁴

The two bronze coins are tetradrachms of the same type and mint, and one is in better condition.¹⁰⁵ On the obverse, the diademed head of Zeus-Ammon facing right is depicted. The reverse features an eagle with closed wings standing to the left on a thunderbolt and a lotus flower at the left of the eagle. The reverse side also bears the legend ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ. The lotus flower is the characteristic sign of a specific coin type minted in Cyprus.¹⁰⁶ In particular, the heavily feathered legs of the eagle help to assign it to Series VII.2 of this coin type, dated to the late reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor, around 167-145 BC.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁶ Connelly 1988, 57-58, cat. no. 18, pl. 20, figs. 74-77.

⁹⁷ Karageorghis 2003, 257-58, cat. no. 294.

⁹⁸ Connelly 1988, 58, cat. no. 19, pl. 20, fig. 77; 59, cat. no. 20, pl. 21, fig. 79; 59, cat. no. 21, pl. 20, fig. 81.

⁹⁹ For an overview of this sculpture type, see Dillon 2011, 91-92.

¹⁰⁰ Vessberg and Westholm 1956, pls. 1-2; Karageorghis 2003, 255-57, cat. no. 293.

¹⁰¹ Hermay 1989, 200, cat. no. 406; 272-73, cat. nos. 552-55; Karageorghis 2003, 255-57, cat. no. 293. For statuettes in the same iconography, see Ulbrich 2011b, 198, cat. no. 14, fig. 14a-b with some comparanda.

¹⁰² Unlike the Alonia specimen, statues of women exhibit shallower drapery treatment and lack the deep V-cut located just at the top of the bent lower arm; see Dillon 2007, 91-92.

¹⁰³ Gjerstad et al. 1937, 352, 383, pls. 137, 138.1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Karageorghis 2003, 255-57, cat. no. 293.

¹⁰⁵ The better-preserved coin measures 3.5 mm in diameter and weighs av. c. 47 g. The second coin measures 3.6 mm in diameter and weighs av. c. 47 g too.

¹⁰⁶ Lorber 2001.

¹⁰⁷ For Series VII.2 coins of this type, see Lorber 2001, 48-50.

Another significant discovery is the fragmentary inscription enclosed into Wall 4. A complete epigraphic study of the inscription is still pending. Suffice to mention here its general information. The inscription refers to King Ptolemy and Arsinoe as “father-loving” (Φιλοπάτωρ).¹⁰⁸ Since Ptolemy IV was the sole known king to bear the title of father-loving and, at the same time, was married to an Arsinoe, this inscription can be connected with this Ptolemaic couple and assigned to their reign between 221 and 205 BC.¹⁰⁹ The inscription testifies to the presence of the Royal Cult within the *temenos* at Alonia. Unfortunately, the inscription neither preserve the names of the dedicator(s) or the gods (θεῶν) venerated within the *temenos*. It is, however, clear that the royal cult of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III Philopatores was introduced into the age-old sanctuary of a local deity.

An essential aspect of the study of Alonia is to understand how the Royal Cult was integrated into the existing cult and to what extent it affected the original layout of the *temenos*. This requires a holistic study of the inscription with the artifacts. While the inscription testifies to the ruler cult in the sanctuary, the circumstances of its introduction and alteration remain obscure. Was an entirely new altar erected in the name of the king and queen? Or did it happen through the modification or renewal of the existing altar? Were there any other changes in the sanctuary, e.g., its enlargement by adding new buildings? Another question is: who invested in the Royal cult? Unfortunately, due to the limited area excavated, no data is available to answer most of these questions. However, we can involve the two life-sized statues into the discussion in the case of the latter question.

Archaeological and textual evidence is firm that in Hellenistic Cyprus, the *strategos*, the Alexandrian garrison resident at the island, and the local elite erected statues and dedicated inscriptions to venerate Ptolemaic royalty.¹¹⁰ The extensive studies on various sculptural works similar to the Alonia specimens from other parts of Cyprus have demonstrated that these life-sized limestone statues were generic images crafted in local workshops. They depicted Ptolemaic local elite and accommodated aspects of the prevailing “Hellenized” culture and the ruling Ptolemaic power.¹¹¹ It is unlikely a coincidence that the date of the two statues corresponds to that of the inscription dedicated to the Ruler Cult. When this historical overlap is examined in conjunction with the socio-cultural context of such statues within Hellenistic Cyprus, valuable insights emerge concerning Hellenistic Alonia. Thus, it is tempting to interpret the two life-sized statues as representations of the local Ptolemaic elite who played a role in the dedication of the inscription and the integration of the Royal Cult within the sanctuary. The inscription must be the *texte narratif de la preuve* for honoring the royal house with this religious investment. The two statues, in this frame, can be viewed as emblematic of the local elite’s efforts to establish a politico-religious space within the sanctuary: a will shaped by the Ptolemaic ideology (circle of kings’ friends) and expressed textually by the inscription and

¹⁰⁸ Lâtife Summerer provided an initial transcription and translation of the inscription for the excavation report at KKTC Resmi Gazete 2016, 354: Βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου καὶ Ἀρσινόες θεῶν Φιλοπατόρων ὁ βομὸς καὶ τὸ τέμενος τοῦ θεοῦ (“For the sake of king Ptolemy and Arsinoe, the father-loving gods, this is the altar and the temenos of the god”).

¹⁰⁹ Huß 2001, 382-83.

¹¹⁰ Grabowski (2014, 31-36) handles this matter within a pan-Ptolemaic context whereas Mehl (2019) and Anastassiades (2019) treat the same subject within case studies from Salamis. For a pan-island evaluation of the matter further, see Papantoniou 2012a, 339-42.

¹¹¹ Connelly 1988, 111; Papantoniou 2012a, 309-54. For some exceptional cases, see Koiner 2012, 120, no. 10; Papantoniou 2012a, 312-14.

visually via the erection of statues.¹¹² In the words of Papantoniou, these statues, together with the inscription, would have been utilized by the members of the local elite circle to “communicate social ranks, strengthen vertical hierarchies, and reinforce linkages with the rulers and the foreign elite.”¹¹³

An evaluation of the Hellenistic period would be incomplete without an analysis of the pottery and lamps. The Hellenistic pottery discovered within the *temenos* originates from the fill inside the walled space and bothros and exhibits a diverse range. Locally produced ribbed bowls, cups, and storage vessels dominate the inventory, with vessels like liquid containers in various forms and even column kraters seen for the first time. The distribution of forms, which includes examples from the entire Hellenistic period, aligns well with the chronological framework established by the votive corpus. Lamps, which are easier to date, further confirm this dating. They come both in local plain examples (variations of Broneer Type IX from the third to second century BC) and higher-quality Ephesian imports (Broneer Type XIX from the second to first century BC).¹¹⁴

As revealed by the material analysis, the cult at the extra-urban sanctuary of Alonia persisted throughout the third century BC, likely extending until the first century BC. However, suggesting that this continuity occurred without any shifts or alterations would be inaccurate. Changes in trends are particularly evident through significant shifts in the iconography and styles of votive statuary and the pottery typology. The religious expression of the community that visited the sanctuary seems to have undergone a significant “Hellenization.” This transformation is evident in the iconographic types of votive figures, including hairstyles and clothing, which shifted towards Macedonian styles influenced by the Ptolemaic rule.¹¹⁵

A New Beginning: Roman Period

Architectural alterations and a notable absence of any sacred or votive artifact characterize the material evidence from Roman Alonia. Wall 4, with solid disparities regarding the rest of the architecture, is not contemporary with earlier walls and must have been built at this time when the site lost its intended meaning. The adjacent basin also dates to this period since it abuts the later Wall 4. Moreover, all votive offerings from earlier periods were broken or shattered and reused as floor or wall fillings. Even the inscription of the Ptolemaic cult was cut and reduced in size to fit in the new wall. The intentional breaking of votive objects, often for ritual purposes, is a common phenomenon in the archaeological record.¹¹⁶ However, the case of votive artifacts discovered in the sanctuary at Alonia presents a distinct situation. The limestone votives especially reflect deliberate cuts and straightened surfaces, indicating their intentional reworking to serve as building / filling materials.¹¹⁷

The find assemblage of the Roman period primarily comprises domestic items: No votive artifacts but daily pottery, a limited quantity of sigillata and other wares, and a smaller number

¹¹² Papantoniou 2013b, 189-91.

¹¹³ Papantoniou 2016, 344.

¹¹⁴ For Broneer Type IX see Broneer 1930, 47-49, and for Broneer Type XIX see Broneer 1930, 66-68.

¹¹⁵ Ulbrich 2013, 50-51.

¹¹⁶ Miniaci 2023; Chapman and Gaydarska 2023.

¹¹⁷ Athienou-Malloura exemplifies a good case study for similar modification of votives as spolia within a Cypriot context; see Toumazou and Counts 2012, 77.

of mould-made lamps.¹¹⁸ Both the pottery and the mould-made Roman lamps from the sanctuary widely date to the first century AD.¹¹⁹ The absence of religious or votive artifacts in this period's inventory suggests that the lamps were likely used for quotidian purposes.¹²⁰ A similar observation can be made for the little pottery present: all belong to consumption-oriented forms.

The absence of any later dated material suggests that the site was ultimately abandoned after the first century AD for reasons that remain unclear. Indeed, this is no coincidence, for the Roman period in Cyprus marked a significant shift in the sacred landscape, transitioning from the "half full" to the "half empty"¹²¹ as many extra-urban sanctuaries were abandoned. Only a few sanctuaries persisted in the coastal zones.¹²² Thus, Alonia fits well into this pan-island perishment of sacral sites, evident after the first century AD.

The Cult

Cypriot sanctuaries could be dedicated to male or female deities or both, latter often referred to as the "divine couple."¹²³ The archaeological evidence related to the cult recipient is absent in Cypriot sanctuaries. Thus, it is generally believed that the Cypriot sanctuaries did not house cult statues. Epigraphic sources on the Archaic or Classical Cypriot pantheon are relatively thin, too. Instead, sanctuaries were characterized by the frequent dedication of votive statues, statuettes, and figurines and the realization of rituals before the altar. Ultimately, scholars studying Cypriot sanctuaries formulated a simple method that relied on the gender and iconography of these offerings. Thus, if the worshiped deity was male, then male deity images and male votaries prevailed, whereas the opposite occurred if the deity was female. In the case of a divine couple, this distribution was more balanced.¹²⁴ Although current studies show that this hypothesis is correct to a great extent,¹²⁵ the lack of written evidence from most Cypriot sanctuaries still beclouds the unquestionable validity of the pan-island veneration of the divine couple. Alonia takes a somewhat different, and maybe slightly advantageous, position within this frame as its inventory supplies us both with votive artifacts and an inscription.

The inscription serves as significant written evidence concerning the gender of the central cult, at least during the Hellenistic period, by referring to the dedication of the *temenos* to a "God" rather than a "Goddess." Given the general conservatism in religious beliefs, the continuity of the cult of the male deity from the beginning to the end of the sanctuary appears self-evident.¹²⁶ The majority of the depictions of deities and votaries discovered at Alonia

¹¹⁸ For the prevalent lamp type is the so-called Loeschke Type IV, see Loeschke 1919, 225, fig. 5, pl. 3, nos. 365-579. Additionally, there are specimens belonging to Loeschke Type VII: Loeschke 1919, cat. nos. 648-50.

¹¹⁹ Loeschke 1919, 225, fig. 5, pl. 3, nos. 365-579, cat. nos. 648-50.

¹²⁰ On lamps of Roman date as votive offerings in Cypriot sanctuary sites, see Toumazou et al. 2015, 212-13.

¹²¹ Papantoniou 2013a, 36, 51.

¹²² Papantoniou 2020. This is reasoned with the "provincialization" of the island by the Romans and the establishment of a new unified political organization causing extra-urban sanctuaries to lose their "territorial" implication; see Papantoniou 2012c, 97.

¹²³ Beer 2009.

¹²⁴ On this issue, see Ulbrich 2013, 37.

¹²⁵ Ulbrich 2013, 37. However, it is worth considering whether the gender of the votives can sometimes be simply related to the gender of the dedicator rather than the deity they were dedicated to (see Ulbrich 2008, 60).

¹²⁶ This is perhaps best evident in the survey of Ulbrich that encompasses sanctuaries of the female deities from Cypro-Archaic to the end of the Cypro-Classical periods; see Ulbrich 2008.

seem to support this engendering of the cult by predominantly featuring male representations. However, it is important not to dismiss the possibility of a female consort associated with this male deity, especially considering the presence of a figurine depicting an enthroned goddess.

The definite identification of the cult recipient at Alonia remains open to discussion. If we accept that some of the fragmented male heads indeed depict “Apollon” in accordance with comparable examples (cf. fn. 94), an attribution of the sanctuary to this deity appears likely.¹²⁷ Furthermore, evident dominance of laurel wreaths and head adornments decorated with the plant of Apollon ossifies this argument. The number of chariot models and horse-and-rider figurine votives, otherwise attested for the Cypriot Apollon in relation to his martial character,¹²⁸ argue for this suggestion too. Nevertheless, for the time being, it is better not to name the god venerated in the sanctuary of Alonia.

What is clear about the male cult in Alonia is that its worship was strictly connected with vegetal fertility. The vegetal lustral wreaths, the predominant head ornaments of most male votaries, and the branches with leaves carried by many others clearly symbolize this aspect of the cult.¹²⁹ The statuette of the Cypriot Pan further enriches the nature of the male cult at Alonia. This deity is scholarly accepted as a rather unique Cypriot representation of the long-existing local cult of a male deity with pastoral and animal husbandry qualities. This minor deity played a pastoral role within Cypriot religion and was primarily worshipped in and around the Mesaoria Plain, solely within extra-urban sanctuaries.¹³⁰ Cypriot Pan protected the flocks of sheep and goats, simultaneously securing agricultural beneficence.¹³¹ Thus, through its existence within the votive repertory of Alonia, the Cypriot Pan enriches the male cult worshiped with additional aspects of pastoral safeguarding and prosperity.

The role of the divine consort in the male-oriented cult is also understandable. The birds carried by some medium-sized terracotta and medium- to small-sized limestone statuettes likely symbolized sacred animals of the Goddess who, by then, must have been worshiped in her Hellenized form, Aphrodite.¹³² Without any coincidence, the Great Goddess / Aphrodite is known to be the most popular consort (*parhedros*) of the leading male deity in Cypriot religion.¹³³ It is worth noting that at least some of the vegetal attributes carried by male votaries may have been intended for the Great Goddess at Alonia. This deity, too, was associated with agricultural prosperity, thus establishing a cultic bond with its counterpart.

The current analysis suggests the existence of a central cult dedicated to the Great God of Cyprus at the sanctuary of Alonia. The Great God of Cyprus was further associated with the Great Goddess, likely forming a divine couple under the roof of the sanctuary. Throughout the lifespan of the sanctuary, both deities must have been worshiped side by side to ensure

¹²⁷ On the association of Apollon as the leading male deity of the island (Great God of Cyprus), see Ulbrich 2008, 506-10, table 4a-b.

¹²⁸ On the symbolism and attributal character of Cypriot Apollonine cult, see Vernet 2024. Further see Young and Young 1955, 219.

¹²⁹ Hermay 1989, 112. On the vegetal and fertility aspect of the Cypriot Apollon, see Vernet 2011, 252-56.

¹³⁰ Ulbrich 2013, 40-41.

¹³¹ Cofer 2012, 174. Derek Counts (2004, 180-84) sees the Cypriot Pan as the last phase of the evolution of a male deity image what he calls the “Master of Animals.”

¹³² Ulbrich 2012, 189, fig. 12, n. 8.

¹³³ Ulbrich 2008, 498-504, table 2a-b; Vernet 2015.

the agro-pastoral richness of the land around. Apart from sacrifices or libations, worship to them must have involved communal feasts and libations, possibly in the form of sacred banquets, as the whole ceramic inventory testifies.¹³⁴ The more varied forms of the Cypro-Classical inventory testify to the enrichment of those rituals via the utilization of different vessels. In contrast, numerous large liquid containers and kraters of Hellenistic date hint at the potential occurrence of such rituals with a more significant number of participants in the following period.

Concluding Remarks

This paper presented a preliminary study on the newly discovered extra-urban sanctuary of Alonia from northwestern Cyprus. Alonia closely aligns with the characteristic site selection pattern of Iron Age Cypriot *temene*, being strategically positioned within a fluvial landscape, fertile soils, and grazing pastures. Material evidence leaves no doubt about the site's sacred use, with no concrete proof of significant architectural alterations over six centuries. Nevertheless, a Hellenistic inscription suggests the possibility of architectural modifications or developments within the *temenos* during this period. On the other hand, during the Roman period, there appears to have been a shift in spatial use from sanctuary to domestic space.

The votive corpus of the sanctuary is diverse in means of figural iconographies. The majority of the votive offerings exhibit distinct similarities with the Mersinaki styles prevalent in the region of Soloi, emphasizing, in the end, a strong connection between Alonia and this Cypriot Iron Age polity towards its northwest. Further detailed iconographic studies may reveal that various other votives could originate from the production spheres of additional political centers. The votives blend elements of long-standing traditions in Cypriot sculpture with new types of Hellenistic / Macedonian styles and nuances, which became more pronounced during the Hellenistic period. In particular, the pottery found at the site provides evidence of cultic activities that likely involved ritual communal drinking and feasting accompanied by libations.

The worship of the divine couple must have been venerated to ensure divine protection for the land surrounding the sanctuary, its crops and livestock. According to the preliminary spatial analysis, the sanctuary must have been a focal point for the intricate social, economic and, more importantly, political relationships among specific autonomous polities of Iron Age Cyprus. The presence of a Hellenistic dedicatory inscription and two life-sized statues bears witness to the continuing interest of the local elite in the sanctuary under Ptolemaic rule. This aspect of the sanctuary's history is particularly significant, since the dedication of a royal inscription underscores its political and territorial importance, even during the Hellenistic period, and promises to give new insights into the socio-religious landscapes of Hellenistic Cyprus.

The current status of scientific research at the partially unearthed sanctuary site of Alonia is promising in that it promises to provide additional fresh insights and research potential on the religious life of ancient Cyprus.

¹³⁴ Fourrier 2011, 130-31; Papantoniou and Bourogiannis 2019, 141.

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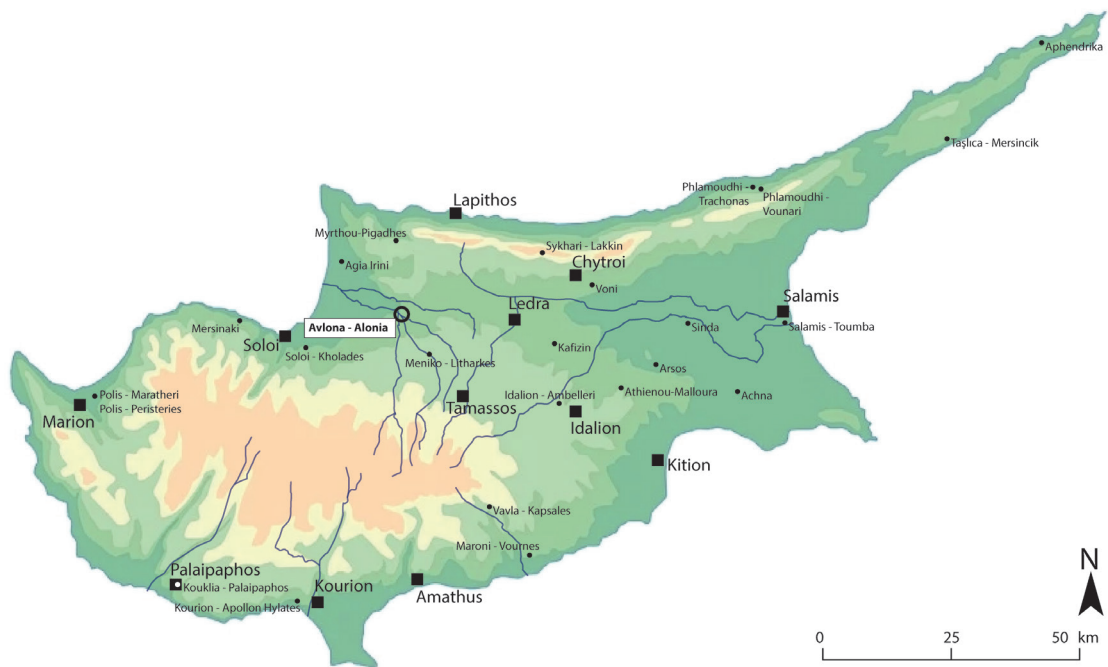


FIG. 1 Map of Cyprus showing the location of Avlona-Alonia with other major political centers and sanctuary sites (© Author).



FIG. 2 Aerial view prior to the re-burial (photograph by Thomas Sagory).



FIG. 3 a) Photograph from fill 1 (red-outlined Archaic finds, blue-outlined Classical finds, green-outlined Hellenistic finds); b) photograph of the bothros towards its mid-excavation process (courtesy of Güzelyurt Arkeoloji ve Doğa Müzesi).



FIG. 4 Aerial panoramic view of sanctuary's surroundings (photo by Erge Yurtdaş).

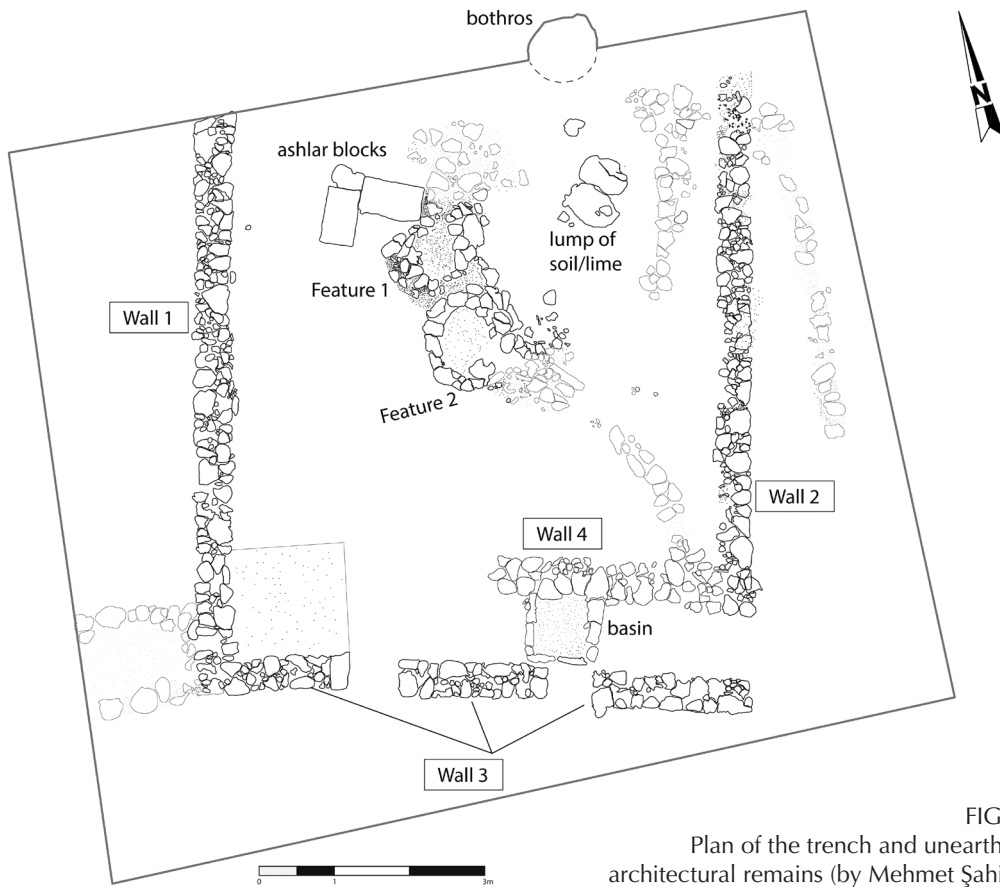


FIG. 5
Plan of the trench and unearthed architectural remains (by Mehmet Şahin).

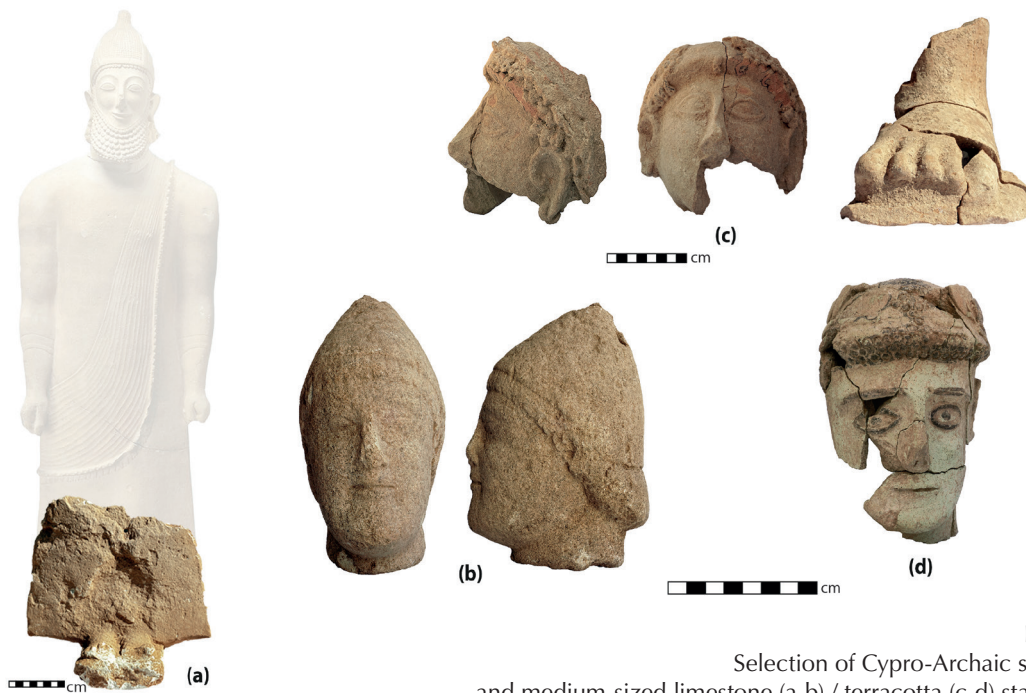


FIG. 6
Selection of Cypro-Achaic statues and medium-sized limestone (a-b) / terracotta (c-d) statuette fragments (photographs by Kadir Kaba, arrangement by the author).



FIG. 7 Selection of Cypro-Archaic figurines (a-c) and medium-sized limestone statuettes (d-g) (photographs by Kadir Kaba, arrangement by the author).



FIG. 8 Selection of Cypro-Classical medium-sized terracotta statuettes (photographs by Mehmet Şahin, arrangement by the author).



FIG. 9 Selection of Cypro-Classical medium-sized limestone / terracotta (e) statuettes (photographs by Kadir Kaba, arrangement by the author).



FIG. 10 Selection of Hellenistic medium-sized terracotta (a-b) / limestone statuettes (photographs by Kadir Kaba, arrangement by the author).



FIG. 11 Reconstruction of the two Hellenistic statues through the preserved parts (photographs by Kadir Kaba, arrangement by the author).