The Iron Age topography of Kition

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Introduction: The city beneath the city

The ancient city of Kition lies beneath the modern city of Larnaca [Fig. 1]. This location impacted on the history of its archaeology. On the one hand, ancient remains have long been known, recorded by travellers and “excavated” by amateurs;\(^1\) due to construction works, many more sites and remains have been found over the last decades in the course of rescue excavations.\(^2\) On the other hand, regular excavations are confined to the artificial limits of non-constructed plots: Areas I-III (Chrysopolitissa) and II (Kathari) of the Department of Antiquities’ excavations;\(^3\) Bamboula (Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine);\(^4\) and more recently Mantovani (Department of Antiquities) and Pervolia (Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine). Despite this fragmented perception of the city’s ancient topography, excavations have nevertheless revealed a vast array of contexts (funerary, domestic and sacred) that cover the whole lifespan of the city, from its foundation to the end of the independent kingdom.

Founded as a major urban centre, protected by impressive walls, late in the Late Bronze Age (end of the 14th century BC), Kition experienced a monumental renewal in the 12th century, at a time of major disorder in the Eastern Mediterranean. The ‘crisis years’, which profoundly impacted Cyprus (abandonments and shifts in settlements), were apparently ‘expansion years’ at Kition. The cyclopean rampart, whose line is still visible to the south of modern Larnaca [Fig. 1, red line], at a great distance from its northern limits exposed at Kathari, encompassed a vast surface (which was presumably not continuously constructed).\(^5\) The sanctuary complex discovered at Kathari, with its monumental Temple 1 and its rich finds, testify to the prosperity of the harbour city. No recession, no gradual shift like in other regions of Cyprus: the transition from Bronze to Iron Age (at the beginning of the 11th century BC) is archaeologically attested in the excavated northern part of the city by a continuous succession of occupation layers.

No “Dark Age”: The Early Geometric period (11th and 10th centuries BC)

Some topographical shifts occurred, but at the scale and in the limits of the city. The Chrysopolitissa area (Areas I and III of the Department of Antiquities’ excavations) was
progressively abandoned in the course of the 11th century BC. At Bamboula, a house (which may have belonged to a larger unexcavated settlement complex) was constructed in the first half of the 11th century close to the Late Bronze Age city-wall, which was still in use. In the northernmost part of the city, at Kathari, a massive destruction occurred approximately in the middle of the 11th century BC, but the site was immediately reoccupied with minor rebuilding.

A major topographical change occurred though: new burial grounds were added on the outskirts of the city. In the Late Bronze Age, tombs were located within the supposed limits of the city: they were part of the settlement, the city of the living. From the beginning of the 11th century BC onwards, tombs were cut in the rocky plateaus that surround the northern and western parts of the city (on its eastern side, the city was bordered by the sea, Fig. 1, blue line): they were part of the necropolis, the city of the dead. Less than thirty tombs can be attributed to the Early Geometric period [Fig. 1, in blue]. They were found at various locations from the southwest to the north of the city. They comprised the core of the cemeteries that were to be constantly used and expanded in the Iron Age. An isolated enchytrismos (but there may have been more) was placed in the first half of the 11th century BC in the Bamboula settlement. It was no exception to the rule: small infants had no access to formal burial in Iron Age Cyprus like in many other Mediterranean regions. They were often buried in the inner side of city-walls, as for example in Early Iron Age Salamis. This was apparently the case at Kition too.

The urban expansion (9th-7th centuries BC)

From the 9th century onwards, Kition experienced a gradual urban development, which was especially apparent in the remodelling of the Kathari and Bamboula areas. This urban development (creation and improvement of public spaces, such as sanctuaries and streets) points to the existence of a state power. However, Kition is not attested (at least under this name) as an independent Cypriote kingdom in the contemporaneous Assyrian texts. The identification of Kition with the Archaic Cypriote kingdom of Qartihadasti (“New City”) mentioned in the Assyrian lists, though tentative, is thus tempting.

In the 8th century BC, the Kathari sanctuary was reconstructed. This renewal affected the Late Bronze Age Temple 1, whose ashlar walls were reused. Two major phases of reconstruction are attested. The second one emerges as particularly monumental. At Bamboula, after an apparent hiatus, a sanctuary was erected in the 9th century BC. It also went through successive architectural phases. The most impressive, dated to the Cypro-
Archaic I period, may be contemporaneous with the monumental Temple 1 at Kathari (Floor 2A). At Bamboula, the sanctuary was located to the north of a street and was separated from it by a temenos wall. A courtyard occupied its central part. It was bordered on its eastern side by a paved portico; on its western side by a series of rooms and open spaces apparently devoted to artisanal activities (textiles and metallurgy). This disposition echoed the plan of the Late Bronze Age sanctuary at Kathari with its textile and metallurgical workshops. Other cultic pieces of equipment, like the limestone bathtub and the anchors placed on the floor of the Bamboula sanctuary courtyard, also have parallels in the Late Bronze Age Cypriote cultic landscape. These testify to some continuity in the rites practiced at Kition. They may also result from a conscious reference to the past, whose monumental remains were still visible everywhere in the city (cyclopean rampart and temples). The same archaizing trend may be observed in other Cypriote kingdoms during the 8th century BC, a period that has been adequately described as their “consolidation horizon”. Cult places were implanted on the monumental ruins of Late Bronze Age buildings at Enkomi and Maroni, for example. It is perhaps no coincidence that the first series of votives found in the Palaepaphos sanctuary date from precisely the same period: the Late Bronze Age temple at Palaepaphos may have been remodelled at the same time as the Late bronze Age temple at Kition-Kathari.

No settlement is surely attested for this period: the Chrysopolitissa area remained apparently abandoned until the Hellenistic era. But some of the buildings excavated to the southeast of the sanctuary at Kathari may be interpreted as houses, at least from the 8th century BC onwards. They are poorly preserved and they were not extensively excavated. Nevertheless, their apparent regular layout, and their location to the south of a street, point to the probable existence of an urban grid.

In contrast to the above-mentioned evidence, which shows beyond doubt that Kition was an important city, the funerary evidence is poor. Less than forty tombs are known, and we may, thus, safely presume that they don’t reflect the density of the population. The majority were, like in the previous period, rock-cut tombs. But two were built tombs. One was found quite recently in the garden of a private house, to the south of the city, inside the supposed limits of the Late Bronze Age walls. Unfortunately, the human bones were badly preserved. They apparently belonged to a single inhumation (in contrast to the collective rock-cut tombs). Few objects had been deposited in the chamber: vases imported from the Levant, and precious jewellery. Horses’ skeletons were found in the fill of the dromos. This kind of elite burial was well known during this period in other Cypriote kingdoms (for example at Salamis). We may presume that this (for the moment)
unique Kition tomb was not isolated and that it belonged to a larger “royal” necropolis. If true, this necropolis was located on new ground. It was probably not located *intra muros*, but we possess no evidence concerning the possible extent and line of the archaic city-walls.

All rock-cut tombs were collective tombs, like in the Early Geometric period. They were found at the same locations as the Geometric tombs, testifying to the continuous use of the same burial grounds. Some of them were furnished with gypsum slabs on which wooden coffins presumably stood. This innovation may announce the later use, during the Classical period, of gypsum coffins.

Over this period of about three centuries, a gradual evolution of the material culture of the city took place. To put it simply, the material culture of Kition slowly became a “Cypro-Phoenician” culture. This evolution is exemplified by the transformation of the ceramic repertoire (with the adoption of new shapes and new manufacturing techniques of Phoenician origin), as well as by the dominant use of the Phoenician script and language [Fig. 3]. This gradual “phoenicisation” cannot have been prompted by an isolated colonisation episode: it affected the whole city, with no separate settlement, no separate burial ground, no separate sanctuary for newcomers. But this Phoenician crystallisation at Kition was possibly amplified by the arrival, throughout the whole Early Iron Age, of Levantine people.

Be that as it may, except for the dominant use of the Phoenician language and script and the profound Levantine influence on the local craftsmanship, which are part of the kingdom’s cultural individuality, the archaic city of Kition did not profoundly differ from other Cypriote capital cities. Its sanctuaries find counterparts among other Cypriote urban sanctuaries, for example at Idalion (open-air sanctuary type with portico, like at Bamboula, Fig. 2) and at Palaepaphos (monumental ashlar temple, like at Kathari). Its burial grounds and funerary rites can be compared with other Cypriote *necropoleis* (for example at Salamis). One may even suggest that this was the time when the kingdom, like other Cypriote (Greek-speaking) kingdoms, elaborated its foundation legend, connected to the *Nostoi*.

A capital city (6th-4th centuries BC)

This last period of Iron Age Kition is amply documented by archaeological, as well as textual evidence. Thanks to inscriptions and coinage, a complete list of kings can be established
from *circa* 480 to 312 BC, when Ptolemy ordered the execution of the last king Pumayyaton. All known kings of Kition had Phoenician names. Besides, in the first half of the 5th century BC, the kings of Kition became kings of Kition and Idalion. Discoveries made at Idalion (anciently in the Apollo-Reshef sanctuary and more recently in the palace) show that from that time, the kingdom had two capital cities, Kition and Idalion.\(^\text{16}\)

In the sanctuary of Kathari, in the northernmost part of the city, new rebuilding occurred, which profoundly transformed the plan of Temple 1. The changes were even more radical in the Bamboula area. There, the centuries-old sanctuary courtyard was covered by a huge terrace in the 5th century BC, which served as a supporting structure for shipsheds constructed immediately to the north. These harbour facilities were designed to shelter war ships.\(^\text{17}\) An inscribed trophy base recently discovered at Larnaca confirms the efficiency of the Kition fleet: in the inscription, king Milkyaton glorifies himself for having defeated his Salaminian enemies and their Paphian allies (392/1 BC).\(^\text{18}\) To the south of the sanctuary terrace, a long and narrow building was constructed, which possessed a complex system of water drainage. Many imported Attic vases, parts of drinking services, point to the repeated practice of feasting. In the central courtyard, a gypsum platform and a limestone altar testify to the continuous ritual use of the space. Moreover, this association of a low and a high structure (platform and altar) continues a cultic layout attested steadily at Bamboula since the 9th century BC.

A Phoenician inscription on a gypsum plaque (5th century BC) records wages given to various people who were active in the service of the sanctuary (or of the king’s court).\(^\text{19}\) Two deities are mentioned: Ashtart and Mikal. The male deity was represented as a smiting god, master of the lion: many statuettes of this type (commonly called “Heracles-Milqart”) were found by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition in a *bothros* dug in the first half of the 3rd century BC at the heart of the sanctuary. The sculptures date from the Late Archaic and Classical periods. Some examples [Fig. 4] may even date from the Early Hellenistic. The same deity is figured on the royal coinage. Thus, the Bamboula sanctuary was apparently consecrated to a patron deity, which was intimately linked to the royal dynasty. It may have been a royal sanctuary (but royal consecrations are, in the current state of documentation, absent).

Other sanctuaries were implanted during the Late Archaic and Classical period in the city and in its immediate vicinity. Their layout is poorly known: the existence of most of them is only documented by the discovery of votives, on the western limits of the city, at Kamilarga, as well as in the area of the Chrysopolitissa, and maybe on the eastern limits of the city, in the Lyceum area (but the evidence, in this case, is not conclusive). Suburban sanctuaries are attested, for the first time, in the Late Archaic and Classical periods. They were all located
to the south of the city, and especially on the northern, eastern and south-eastern shores of
the salt lake: Artemis Paralia, Phaneromeni, Batsalos and Hala Sultan Tekke. 20

During this period, private buildings are as poorly documented as during the preceding one.
The settlement in the southern part of the Kathari area continued to be in use. Moreover,
several trenches made in the course of construction works in the northern part of modern
Larnaca have revealed a dense occupation in the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods.
These explorations were very limited and thus, we cannot gain a comprehensive view of the
city’s organisation. Current excavations by the Department of Antiquities in the Mantovani
area, to the south of Kathari, will hopefully shed new light on this crucial issue.

The urban expansion is also apparent in the development of the burial grounds. More than
three hundred tombs can be assigned to this period [Fig. 1, in yellow]. They were found at
the same locations as in the previous periods. Their density suggests the existence of a
continuous necropolis that bordered the city from its western to its northern sides [Fig. 5].
The Aghios Prodromos necropolis, located to the north of the city, is an exception: it
appears to have been a new burial ground, founded in the second half of the 4th century
BC. 21 Contrary to the other burial grounds, where the implantation of tombs did not seem
to follow a plan but was apparently designed to make the best use of the rock surface, all
rock-cut tombs found at Aghios Prodromos were neatly aligned. Some of them, which were
already furnished with gypsum coffins, even seem to have never been used. Does this
discrepancy result from a different legal status of the plot (which was perhaps managed by
a state authority in the case of the Aghios Prodromos cemetery)? We lack written sources
that could help answering this perplexing question.

Another new burial ground was implanted, probably at the beginning of the 5th century BC,
in the Sotiros area, to the south-west of the city [Fig. 1]. Five built tombs have been found
in this area. Due to modern constructions, the general layout of the necropolis is not
known. Besides, most of the tombs were looted in ancient or recent times. But the royal
status of this new burial ground is obvious. It appears from the architecture of the tombs, as
well as from the quality of the findings: the two recently discovered marble sarcophagi,
which were probably displaced from their original location and stocked in a simpler rock-cut
tomb, show the refinement of the Kitian court. 22 Through their different styles (one
“Sidonian-style” anthropomorphic sarcophagus and one “Greek-style” architectural
sarcophagus), they are good representatives of the culture of the Kitian kingdom in the
Classical period. The same applies to the few gravestones that were found in other
necropoleis, at Tourapi and at Mnimata. 23 Some gravestones, with a pyramidion on the top,
belong to a Levantine tradition, others, with an anthemion, follow Greek (probably Attic)
prototypes. The relocation of the royal necropolis may reflect a (dynastic?) change in the Kition kingship -if the assumption that the archaic built tomb found to the south of the city actually belonged to a royal necropolis is right-. The importance of this relocation should not be over-interpreted though, all the more so as it is not an isolated phenomenon, specific to Kition. At Salamis, tombs found in the “royal” necropolis are of archaic date and the location of the Classical royal necropolis is unknown. The only evidence is thus a negative one: like at Kition, the Classical royal necropolis of Salamis was not located in the same area as the Archaic one.

Kition after the end of the kingdom: A slow urban shift

The brutal end of the local dynasty was not reflected in the urban topography by massive destructions or brutal abandonments. On the contrary, excavations at Bamboula have revealed a continuous stratigraphic sequence from the 4th until the late 3rd century BC. However, the northern part of the city seems to have been progressively less densely occupied. Fragmented testimonies (Roman amphorae found in the fill of the ancient harbour at Bamboula, Hellenistic baths in the Chrysopolitissa area, isolated Hellenistic and Roman tombs found in the centuries old necropolis at Tourapi and Mnimata, and so on) testify to some kind of continuity. But the heart of the city seems to have slowly shifted towards the south from the 3rd century BC onwards.

Despite its commercial and political importance, despite many discoveries made in the course of rescue excavations, Hellenistic and Roman Kition remains even more poorly known than its Iron Age predecessor. Its topography has still to be studied.
List of illustrations

The images that follow are available in the digital version of the present article in the website *Kyprios Character*. You can view the images by following the link: kyprioscharacter.eie.gr/en/t/AY

Fig. 1: Topographical map of Kition (© Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine, extract from the Kition GIS, A. Rabot).

Fig. 2: Restitution of the Cypro-Archaic I phase in the Kition-Bamboula sanctuary (© Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine, O. Callot).

Fig. 3: Phoenician inscribed *ostracon* (with economic content) found in the Kition-Bamboula sanctuary, 8th century BC. © Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine, Archaeological Museum of the Larnaka District, KEF-803.

Fig. 4: Early Hellenistic statuette from Kition-Bamboula, Stockholm Kit.130 (Courtesy Medelhavsmuseet, © O. Kaneberg).

Fig. 5: Aerial view of part of the Kition-Pervolia necropolis, 2012 excavations (© Mission archéologique française de Kition et Salamine, A. Rabot).

Glossary

*bothros*: votive pit.

*enchytrismos*: infant burial in a ceramic vase.

*Nostoi*: stories of the return of heroes back home after the Trojan War (the best known is Ulysses’ return, related by Homer in the *Odyssey*).

*ostracon*: fragment of a ceramic vase used as a scribing support.

*temenos*: sacred enclosure.
Endnotes

1 Nicolaou 1976, 9-51; Yon 2011.
2 Hadjisavvas 2012 and 2014.
3 Kition I-VI.
4 KB I-VI.
6 Kition V, 21.
7 KB III; Georgiadou 2012, 325.
8 Iacovou 2008, 642-643.
9 Kition VI.
10 KB VI, 35-96.
11 Iacovou 2002, 80-83.
12 Leibundgut Wieland, Frey-Asche 2011.
13 Kition VI, 93.
14 Hadjisavvas 2014, 1-33.
16 Fourrier 2013, 113-117.
17 Yon 2000.
19 KB V, no. 1078.
22 Georgiou 2010.
23 Hadjisavvas 2012, 219-223, with references.
24 KB IV, 25-31; 348-350.
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