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Reconstructing the history of Kition: new evidence from recent excavations¹

Sabine Fourrier

HiSoMA, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, Lyon

Abstract. *Adapted from the keynote lecture delivered on the occasion of the 18th PoCA conference in Basel, the article concentrates on three archaeological assemblages from recent excavations of the French Mission at Kition (Larnaka). Each assemblage corresponds to a transitional period: an infant jar burial illustrates the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age period; a fortification wall the late Classical-early Hellenistic period; a well with a water-lifting device the late Roman period. The three case studies give the opportunity to question the complex urban history of the city.*

Résumé. *Cette contribution est une version révisée de la conférence donnée en ouverture du 18^e PoCA de Bâle. Elle porte sur trois ensembles archéologiques récemment découverts lors des fouilles de la mission française à Kition (Larnaca). Chaque ensemble correspond à une période de transition : une inhumation de périnatal en jarre illustre la transition entre le Bronze Récent et le début de l'âge du Fer ; une courtine de muraille la fin de la période classique et le début de la période hellénistique ; un puits à roue élévatrice d'eau la fin de la période romaine. Ces trois études de cas invitent à revenir sur la longue et complexe histoire urbaine de Kition.*

Introduction

The title of this contribution can appear as a positivist proclamation to the glory of archaeology. It is rather meant as an echo to the title of a paper authored by Franz-Georg Maier and Marie-Louise von Wartburg, “Reconstructing history from the earth: excavating at Palaepaphos.”² Maier was an historian who knew that the reconstruction of history is not a straightforward process or, to put it differently, that archaeological evidence cannot be simply used as an illustrative companion to textual sources. This sound methodology was the result of his own experience as both an historian and a field archaeologist. He demonstrated it in an exemplary manner when, in 1985, he radically questioned the conclusions he had put forward

1 This article is a slightly modified version of the keynote lecture presented in the magnificent venue of the Skulpturhalle in Basel for the 18th PoCA conference. I sincerely thank the organizers of the conference, Pauline Maillard and Cheyenne Peverelli, for their kind invitation and for their warm hospitality in Switzerland, despite the times of strong sanitary uncertainties, which made their task very difficult.

2 Maier, von Wartburg 1985.

thirteen years earlier. At the Nicosia conference in 1972, basing his demonstration on pottery, he had reconstructed the successive waves of Mycenaean immigrants to Palaepaphos and their routes, tracking their path from their first settling in the Maa stronghold until their permanent installation in the city of Palaepaphos.³ At the Nicosia conference in 1985, he acknowledged the possibility of alternative narratives, and he methodologically deconstructed his previous historical reconstruction.⁴

Basel appears as the right place to pay tribute to the work of the Swiss-German mission at Palaepaphos and to its legacy; it is also the right place to acknowledge the renewed vitality of Swiss archaeological research in Cyprus, embodied by the two organizers of the PoCA conference, Pauline Maillard and Cheyenne Peverelli. I will follow the narrow methodological path defined by Maier, using archaeology to reconstruct history. While acknowledging the possibility of alternative narratives, I will build on hard evidence at hand, which, as masterfully demonstrated by Carlo Ginzburg, is not positivist naivety.⁵ I will not embrace the whole history of the city of Kition (**fig. 1**), but I will rather concentrate on three distinct historical moments that punctuate the long urban life of the ancient city, from protohistory to late antiquity. Thanks to archaeological research, what we know of the history of Kition has profoundly changed since the late fifties of the past century.⁶ Once a new city, founded by Tyrian colonists, Kition now stands on the map of major Late Bronze Age urban centers. The city eventually eclipsed all coeval settlements and became, on the eve of the Iron Age, the only urban center in the Larnaka Bay and the wider area (interestingly enough, in western Cyprus, Palaepaphos apparently experienced the same fate).

Results from recent excavations of the French mission at Kition (2016-2021) do not revolutionize historiography, like the results of the Cypriot excavations led by Vassos Karageorghis did, when they pushed back the founding of the city half a millennium earlier than previously thought, to the 13th century BCE. At their modest scale, however, results from our excavations shed new light on the long history of Kition. I gather in this contribution three distinct archaeological assemblages dating to three poorly documented periods that represent three turning points in the history of Kition (and more broadly in the history of the island and of the eastern Mediterranean): the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age (12th-11th centuries BCE); the late Classical-early Hellenistic period (late 4th century BCE); and the late Roman period (4th century CE). All three moments mark the end of an era and the inception of another. They appear as periods of crisis and disruptions in the written sources. All three archaeological assemblages were recently published in detail in three separate papers. They together show how change and disruptions were dealt with in a resilient city.

3 Maier 1973.

4 Maier 1986.

5 Ginzburg 2000, esp. pp. 43-56.

6 On this topic, the article published by Karageorghis in 1960 represents a milestone.

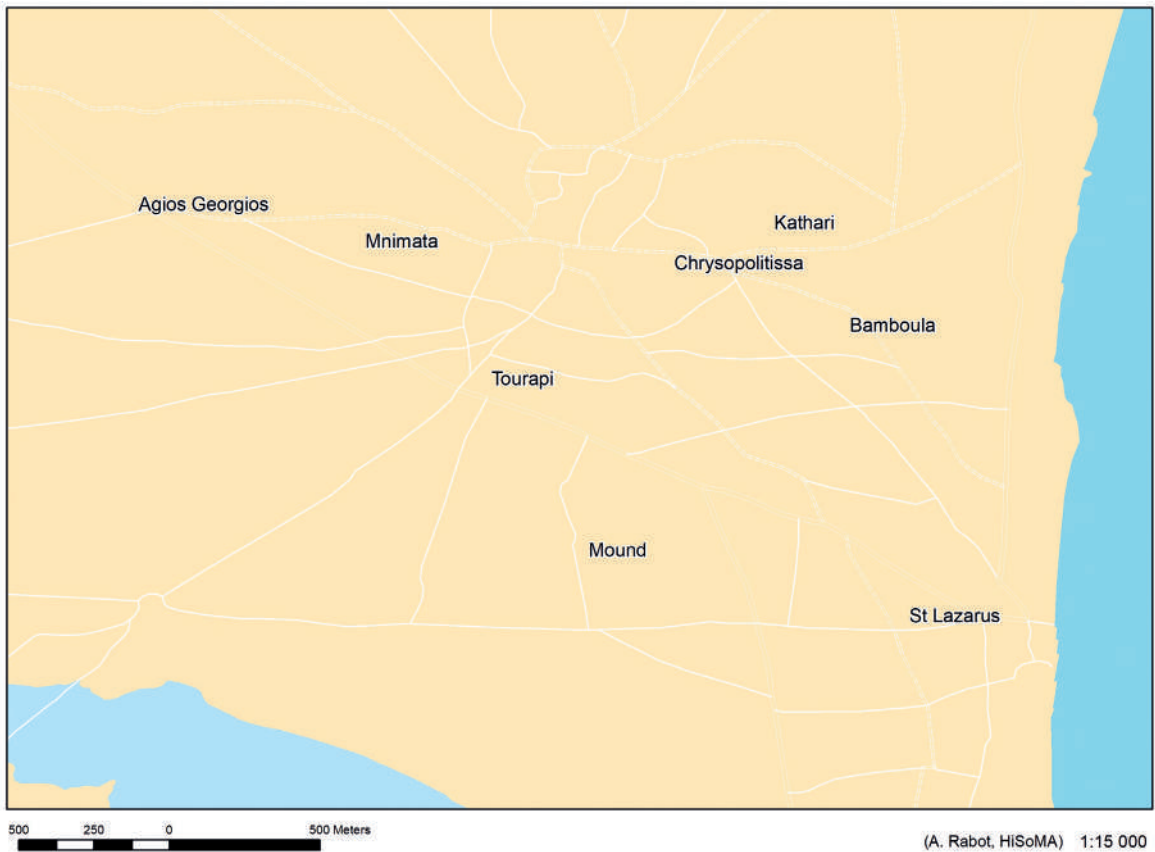


Figure 1 — Map of Kition with sites mentioned in the text (A. Rabot © Mission archéologique de Kition).

The death of infants: an old burial custom in a new world (12th-11th centuries BCE)⁷

Stuck between two archaeologically and – in part – historically highly visible periods (the Late Bronze Age and the Archaic period), the Geometric horizon has long been under-studied. An international archaeological workshop, organized at Nicosia by the University of Cyprus in 1998, reversed the traditional historiographical perspective, and made of the Geometric horizon in Cyprus the topic of the conference. The proceedings, promptly published, close on a

7 Fourrier, Georgiadou 2021.

seminal article, authored by Maria Iacovou.⁸ In this article, Iacovou convincingly argues that the 11th century BCE is not the last phase of the Bronze Age (as the terminology – Late Cypriot IIIB – suggests), but rather the first phase of the Iron Age: not the last moments of a dying era but the formative years of a new age. Among other arguments, she highlights three remarkable breaks in the archaeological evidence. The first break concerns urban topography. With a few exceptions (and among them Palaepaphos and Kition), Late Bronze Age urban centres were abandoned or they were displaced. A new topography emerged, with new cities.⁹ Conversely, this topographical break also explains the high archaeological visibility of Late Bronze Age sites, compared to the poor archaeological visibility of Iron Age settlements (which were to last until – at least – late antiquity and were buried and recycled in subsequent urban forms).¹⁰

The second break concerns burial grounds. A new type of tomb was introduced and, more significantly, all Late Bronze Age cemeteries and burial spaces were abandoned: “(...) not one site has given us Bronze to Iron Age continuity as regards burial practice”.¹¹ Moreover, as of the 11th century, tombs were expelled from the urban spaces of the city and strictly located in specialized areas, necropoleis.

The third break pertains to material culture, with the creation and wide adoption of a new pottery ware (which, however, did not circulate outside the limits of the island): Proto-White Painted. Contrary to the range of technics, decorations and shapes that characterised the 12th century BCE as an age of experiments,¹² the ceramic repertoire of the 11th century is comprised of a limited range of shapes and decorative schemes, and it is marked by the generalized and exclusive use of the fast wheel.

The innovations introduced in the 11th century BCE were to last. Most of the settlements which appear on the map of Cyprus in the 11th century became capital-cities of Iron Age kingdoms. As of the 11th century BCE, there remained a strict distinction between the cities of the living and the cities of the dead. Proto-White Painted, as the terminology makes it clear, was the immediate predecessor of White Painted, the hallmark of Cypriot Iron Age standardized ceramic industry. The Late Cypriot III period (roughly 12th and first half of the 11th century BCE) has therefore to be split up into two distinct moments: Late Cypriot IIIA (still attached to the international era of the Late Bronze Age), and Late Cypriot IIIB (already attached to the new era of the Iron Age).

During the same Nicosia conference, among other heads of archaeological missions invited to present the results of their excavations, Franz-Georg Maier presented the Papaepaphos evidence¹³ and Marguerite Yon the Kition (and Salamis) evidence.¹⁴ A late urban foundation of

⁸ Iacovou 1999.

⁹ Iacovou 1994.

¹⁰ Iacovou 2005, p. 24. What Purcell (2005, p. 266) aptly labels “autoparasitic” cities.

¹¹ Iacovou 1999, p. 148.

¹² With its shortcomings, abortive attempts and “unclassified horrors”: Georgiou 2018.

¹³ Maier 1999.

¹⁴ Yon 1999.

the 13th century BCE, Kition remained inhabited throughout the crisis years of the end of the millennium. The Early Iron Age urban occupation, brought out by the Cypriot excavations at the localities *Kathari* and *Chrysopolitissa* (Areas I and II)¹⁵ was further found by excavations of the French mission in the northern part of the *Bamboula* plot in 1976-1977.¹⁶ Though limited, the trench, explored during two successive field campaigns, revealed the existence of an Early Iron Age settlement, and of an associated infant jar burial.

We resumed excavations on the spot in 2016 (until 2021, **fig. 2**). The aim was to clear a larger surface of the settlement and to better understand the implantation of the latter in the framework of the general topography of the city. Further architectural units of the Early Iron Age settlement were laid bare, and an additional infant jar burial was found (**fig. 3**). The exploration also led to a revision of the narrative published in 1985. The final publication is in preparation and preliminary reports have already been published.¹⁷ Suffice it to say that the 11th century BCE settlement is the last preserved phase of a continuous occupation whose first phase lays directly on the bedrock. The latter is dated to the second half of the 13th century BCE (that is at the time of – or slightly later than – the foundation horizon of the city of Kition, which is dated, thanks to the results of the Cypriot excavations, to the Late Cypriot IIC period). *Bamboula* now stands, like the *Chrysopolitissa* and *Kathari* areas, on the topographical map of Kition in the 13th century. Conversely, the *Bamboula* 11th century BCE settlement is the last phase in a discontinuous occupation. The settlement was abandoned around the eve of the new millennium (interestingly enough, like the *Chrysopolitissa* area). This discontinuity does not affect the whole city, that was not deserted (as demonstrated, among other evidence, by early Cypro-Geometric tombs).¹⁸ But certain areas were abandoned, for reasons that escape us for the moment. One can object that the *Bamboula* Early Iron Age settlement was installed close to the harbour basin and that this part of the site suffered from subsequent interventions (most notably the British demolition of 1879).¹⁹ Admittedly, such interventions could have erased all successive developments. A close examination of the stratigraphy, however, conflicts with this assumption. One of the rooms excavated in 1976 was found with its furnishings left *in situ* (notably, a remarkable series of Canaanite jars). Moreover, in another room, we found stones fallen from the walls lying on a thick layer made of molten mudbrick from the superstructure, thus offering clear evidence that the architecture slowly crumbled (and was not violently destroyed). Finally, looters' trenches and pits from the late Geometric and Archaic periods show that the built structures were not reused (probably because of their ruined state of preservation), and that they were rather used as building material for new constructions.

The two infant jar burials, discovered at an interval of exactly 40 years (respectively in 1977 and in 2017), show a remarkable consistency. The burial container is an imported Canaanite

15 Karageorghis, Demas 1985.

16 Yon, Caubet 1985.

17 Georgiou, Georgiadou, Fourrier 2022-2023.

18 Georgiadou 2012.

19 Kiely, Fourrier 2012.



Figure 2 — General plan of the excavated remains at *Bamboula* (A. Rabot © Mission archéologique de Kition).

jar, horizontally placed in a shallow pit under the floor, outside the house, but close to one of its external walls. This spatial proximity links the deceased to the domestic unit, to the family living in the house. The jar contains the inhumated remains of a foetus or a new-born child. Slight variations occur: whereas there were no associated small finds for the jar burial found in 1977, we found associated vases and food remains for the second, and the body of the infant itself was adorned with jewellery. But the burial rite was obviously the same. The 1977 excavators, who had been active at Salamis before, rightly drew a parallel between the jar burial from Kition and similar findings from Early Iron Age Salamis.²⁰ At Salamis, a newly founded city of the Iron Age, this practice was interpreted as of Phoenician origin.²¹ The suggestion sounded attractive for Kition also, the Cypro-Phoenician city par excellence. However, at that early date, nothing singles out Kition as a Cypro-Phoenician city. The transformation of its material culture only occurred later, in the 8th century BCE.²² Moreover, we possess ample evidence at the Late Bronze Age city of Enkomi that this burial rite had been adopted well before, as of the Late Cypriot I period.²³ The rite can thus well be of ultimately Canaanite origin,²⁴ but it is definitely not Phoenician. This is further confirmed by the limited occurrence of this practice in the Iron Age: no infant jar burial can be safely dated to a period later than the Late Cypriot IIIB-early Cypro-Geometric I period (at Kition and Salamis alike).²⁵ Is the restricted spatial distribution of the burial rite meaningful? As a matter of fact, it is not attested in any other Late Bronze Age city than Enkomi (but which Late Bronze Age city has been so intensively excavated as Enkomi?). And it is not attested in any other Iron Age city than Kition and Salamis (but which Early Iron Age city has been – at least partially – excavated, other than Kition and Salamis?).



Figure 3 — Infant jar burial found in 2017 (© Mission archéologique de Kition).

20 Yon, Caubet 1985, p. 29.

21 Calvet 1980.

22 Fourrier 2019a, pp. 484-486.

23 References in Fourrier, Georgiadou 2021, p. 300.

24 Alpert Nakhai 2018.

25 The jar burials found at Salamis-*Cellarka* and dating to the Archaic period are of a different type: the deceased were apparently older (small children), and the jar was placed in the filling of the *dromos* of the collective chamber tomb, that is in cemeteries and not in domestic areas. Moreover, the type of the container is less consistent: amphora of local production or imported (from the Aegean and the Levant): Karageorghis 1970, pp. 231-232.

The conclusion is straightforward: the infant jar burials at Kition and Salamis are not a new burial rite, adopted under foreign influence, they are a continuation of a Late Bronze Age funerary practice. They demonstrate continuity at the same time when other funerary practices experienced a radical change (with the adoption of a new tomb type and a seclusion of tombs outside the settlements). Other evidence from our recent excavations at Kition-*Bamboula* points to continuity: the 12th-11th centuries BCE represent one architectural phase. This phase is neatly separated from the succeeding phase by a period of abandonment (see above) and from the preceding ones by a fill layer.²⁶ Material culture (first and foremost pottery) also shows many signs of continuity.²⁷ At the scale of Cyprus, the Late Cypriot IIIB period marks the advent of a new era. At the scale of the Kition-*Bamboula* settlement, the Late Cypriot IIIA-IIIB periods represent one transitional phase, which bridges the Late Bronze and the Early Iron Age.

Kition as an Antigonid stronghold (late 4th century BCE)²⁸

The question of the course and of the dating of the city walls of ancient Kition is a debated issue. Elements of the debate can be summarized as follows: on the one hand, we possess remains of a rampart, which can be easily – though discontinuously – followed through most of its western course (due to its visible impact on modern urban topography and to the existence of remaining stones from the substructure);²⁹ on the other hand, we obtain a reconstructed walled surface that is unparalleled among other Late Bronze Age cities.³⁰ The problem of the city walls was indeed further complicated when Vassos Karageorghis' excavations at the locality *Kathari* (Area II) established their dating to the Late Cypriot IIIA period.³¹ Late Bronze Age Kition would thus have had a walled urban surface that largely exceeded the walled surface of other Late Bronze Age cities (like Enkomi) and that only compared to the surface of Hellenistic cities, such as Nea Paphos. Conversely, Karageorghis' excavations proved that the city walls at *Kathari* were no longer in use after the Early Iron Age.³² The results were perplexing: on the one hand, a Late Bronze Age “walled megasite”;³³ on the other hand, a city whose Classical phase was everywhere highly visible, but whose walls remained archaeologically elusive (although their existence was attested in ancient sources).³⁴ Nicolaou suggested that the walls of the Classical city were dismantled in 315 BCE when the troops of Ptolemy conquered the city.³⁵ The hypothesis is admittedly convenient, but it is for the moment not supported by other evidence.

26 The so-called “pebble layer”, on which: Fourrier 2019b, pp. 400-406.

27 Georgiou, Georgiadou, Fourrier 2022-2023, pp. 128-135.

28 Fourrier, Rabot 2020a.

29 The course of the city walls was reconstructed by Nicolaou 1976, pp. 52-70.

30 Iacovou 2007, pp. 12-13.

31 Karageorghis, Demas 1985, pp. 86-89.

32 Karageorghis, Demas 1985, pp. 161-162.

33 Following the expression of Iacovou 2007, pp. 12-13.

34 For example at the time of Cimon's siege in 449 BCE: see the written sources gathered by Yon 2004, pp. 62-68.

35 Nicolaou 1976, p. 52.

On the contrary, other buildings of the Classical city, which can be considered symbols of the independent kingdom, such as the *Bamboula* sanctuary, show no sign of destruction, but rather undisputable signs of continuity into the 3rd century BCE.³⁶

Our survey of the city walls confirmed the accuracy of Nicolaou's topographic observations, especially as regards the extension of the rampart towards the south. Admittedly, the identified portions of the walls do not allow to draw a continuous line, as suggested by Nicolaou.³⁷ The discontinuous portions, however, are in alignment. Moreover, when stones of the substructure are preserved, they are of the same type: large blocks of sandstone, similar to the ones excavated at *Kathari* and stratigraphically dated there to the Late Bronze Age. To solve the conundrum, we decided in 2019 to excavate a portion of the rampart. We picked up the site of a small hill, known in the literature as the "mound". The site represents the southernmost extension of the walls.³⁸ Travellers to the city had suggested that the mound was the possible remains of a fort, which protected one entrance to the city. The existence of a bunker, probably erected during the 1964-1974 crisis years, confirms the topographical interest and strategic importance of the site.

The course of the wall was clearly visible on the surface, even before excavation (**fig. 4**). It was made of large blocks of sandstone. It followed a roughly north-south orientation, which had been cut on the northern side by the construction of the road and on the southern side of the



Figure 4 — Blocks from the wall on the surface at the "mound" site before excavation in 2019 (© Mission archéologique de Kition).

³⁶ Caubet, Fourrier, Yon 2015, pp. 59-60.

³⁷ Nicolaou 1976, p. 8 fig. 1.

³⁸ Nicolaou 1976, pp. 60-61. Nicolaou draws the line of the city walls further south, to encompass the Phaneromeni built tomb. However, we found no positive evidence to sustain this hypothesis.

plot by the construction of the above-mentioned bunker and of its associated ditch. Excavation disclosed that, except for the use of similar, huge blocks of sandstone, the structure of the wall was strictly different from the structure of the Late Bronze Age wall at *Kathari*. In particular, we observed ample use of fragmentary gypsum blocks and plaster: debris coming from constructions, pavement and roof structure, that were re-used as filling material. Such building materials are, at Kition, mostly typical of the Classical, late Classical and early Hellenistic periods. To take but one example, the shipsheds built on the southern shore of the harbour basin, at *Bamboula*, made ample use of plaster.³⁹ One can therefore assume that the wall was hastily constructed with debris coming from a near-by building dating to the Classical period. The identification of the building remains, however, elusive: nothing but a few tombs are known in the area.

We eventually made a deep sounding under the wall, until the bedrock, to assess the chronology of its construction. In the filling layer, which was placed on the bedrock to create an even surface, we were lucky enough to find two bronze coins (fig. 5). The latter belong to a well-known series, the so-called Alexander bronzes, that were widely spread in the Eastern Mediterranean towards the end of the 4th century BCE (and well after).⁴⁰ The conclusion is straightforward: the portion of the city-wall excavated at the mound dates to the late 4th century BCE.

What happened in Cyprus in the late 4th century BCE that can have prompted this hasty construction? The last part of the 4th century was a very troubled period, marked by the confrontation between Antigonos and his son, Demetrios Poliorcetes on the one hand, and Ptolemy and his brother Menelaos, on the other. The succession of events is well known:⁴¹ Demetrios put Salamis under siege and, although Ptolemy sent an impressive naval force to help his besieged brother, Menelaos was defeated. Immediately after the decisive battle of Salamis, in 306, Antigonos and Demetrios proclaimed themselves kings. They were soon to be followed by the other Successors. Between 306 and 294 (when Demetrios eventually left the island, making Ptolemy's comeback possible), the Antigonids reigned over Cyprus. Primary numismatic and epigraphic evidence sheds additional light on this period. Menelaos, Ptolemy's brother, was the last king of Salamis, as his coinage, masterfully studied by Evangéline Markou,⁴² unambiguously shows. The Macedonian used the same type as his predecessor, the last "indigenous" king of Salamis, Nicocreon. Moreover, he brought back



0 2cm

Figure 5 — Bronze coin found under the wall (© Mission archéologique de Kition).

39 Callot, Fourrier, Yon 2022, esp. p. 179.

40 Kremydi, Marcellesi 2019.

41 Yon 2004, pp. 85-88.

42 Markou 2011, pp. 294-295; Markou 2013.

the old syllabic abbreviation *pa-* (for king) that the last Salaminian kings had abandoned in favor of the more modern alphabetic abbreviation *BA*. Concerning Demetrios and his father Antigonos, they were the first kings of Cyprus, as demonstrated by a dating formular (“In the 1st year of Antigonos and Demetrios over Alashiya”) recently deciphered on a Phoenician ostrakon from Idalion.⁴³

Growing archaeological evidence suggests that, during the ten years or so of his reign, Demetrios made of Cyprus, and more specifically of the southern coast of Cyprus, an Antigonid stronghold. He undertook the fortification of the Cypriot southern coast, which had to be protected against a possible attack from Egypt. The fortification wall at the mound takes presumably place in a series of constructions of military purpose, at Kition itself and at Amathous. At Kition, the last phase of the military shipsheds is dated to this period (**fig. 6**). Olivier Callot convincingly argued that this last architectural phase (for which many debris from other constructions were used, like in the fortification wall at the mound) implied a substantial transformation of the building.⁴⁴ At Amathous, towards the end of the 4th century, it was probably Demetrios who was responsible for the construction of the harbour.⁴⁵ All constructions were of military purpose. All constructions mobilized a massive military investment (in expenses and in workforce). All



Figure 6 — The last architectural phase in the western part of the shipsheds (© Mission archéologique de Kition).

43 Amadasi Guzzo, Zamora 2018.

44 Callot, Fourrier, Yon 2022, pp. 191-195.

45 Empereur 2017, pp. 1715-1730; Empereur, Koželj 2017.

constructions also share another characteristic: they were short-lived. The reconstruction of the shipsheds was never finished, nor the harbour of Amathous. The fortification wall at the mound also probably never served its defensive purpose, as shown by the scarcity of ancient material found in the area. Demetrios hastily left the island, never to come back. Ptolemy, king of Egypt, had no interest in completing the huge works undertaken by his rival. He privileged other Cypriot cities, Salamis and Paphos. The short-lived reign of Demetrios left a strong imprint on the topography of the Cypriot cities of the southern coast precisely because it was short-lived: his considerable works were never completed or transformed and reused.

Like the Early Iron Age, the late Classical-early Hellenistic period represents a poorly archaeologically documented period of transition. Most studies have rightly stressed the disruptions caused by the elimination of the independent kingdoms and the integration of the island into the Lagid kingdom.⁴⁶ Archaeological evidence, however, gives a more nuanced picture. In a – admittedly – provocative way, one could even pretend that the last decades of the 4th century BCE and the Antigonid reign over Cyprus mark the climax of Cypriot kingship. Menelaos became a Salaminian king, prone to adopt archaisms to legitimize his kingship.⁴⁷ Antigonos and Demetrios realized the ambitions of another king of Salamis, Evagoras, when they became kings of Cyprus. It is striking to observe how easily Macedonian newcomers adopted the Cypriot royal customs, how easily they wore the clothes of the local kings, how easily they became Cypriot kings. The late 4th century was a time of crisis, but also of continuation or, to put it better, of renewed tradition, as shown, among other evidence, by the adoption of the local coinage (at Salamis) and of the local administrative practices (at Idalion).⁴⁸

Urban discontinuities: a late Roman well at *Bamboula* (4th century CE)⁴⁹

During our excavations in the northern part of the *Bamboula* plot (2017-2018), we accidentally discovered a Late Roman well (fig. 7). The floor level from which the well was accessed had since long been destroyed: there remained only the inferior part of the structure, that had cut through Hellenistic and Iron Age layers. As one can infer from its peculiar shape, this was no ordinary well. It was a well equipped with a wheel, a lifting device, of a type that is well known in Cyprus, in the present state of evidence, however, as of the 7th century CE only (fig. 8).⁵⁰ This type of hydraulic device, known in the Cypriot dialect as *alakati*, was widely attested in the island during the Medieval and Ottoman modern periods. The *Bamboula* well, which was dug

46 New studies nuance this traditional narrative, however, as demonstrated by Papantoniou 2012 and Michel 2020, who rightly insist on continuities and on the agency of local populations.

47 Likewise, the last indigenous king of Paphos, Nicocles, transformed the official syllabic script (another marker of Cypriot kingship) by using pseudo-Archaic signs: Halczuk 2020.

48 Fourrier 2021.

49 Fourrier, Rabot 2020b.

50 The closest parallels are wells from Amathous, which were abandoned in the 6th-7th centuries CE (according to the material assemblage from the fill) but whose construction phase is dated (on unknown grounds) to the 4th century CE: Empereur, Koželj 2017, pp. 133-149.



Figure 7 — The late Roman well at *Bamboula* (© Mission archéologique de Kition).

and filled in in the 4th century CE, is henceforth the first in a series. This specific type of well has raised much interest in recent academic literature: in addition to the Kition and Amathous publications, another recent article concerns another example of such a well, of a later dating and found at Nicosia.⁵¹ What interests us here, however, is not the well in itself but rather what its existence discloses about the cityscape of Kition in the 4th century CE.

Discovering a late Roman well at *Bamboula* was a surprise. As a matter of fact, the Roman period is archaeologically invisible on the site: there are no built remains dating to this period, and material evidence is conspicuously scarce: a handful of lamp and pot fragments, a handful of coins.⁵² One exception is a dump that was found during excavations in the harbour basin (during the exploration aiming at determining the total length of the shipsheds ramps).⁵³ Sandrine Marquié's thorough study disclosed that the pottery assemblage was made of fragments dating to a timespan extending over four centuries, from the 1st to the 4th centuries CE. She convincingly argues that this deposit, once interpreted as evidence of continuous use of the *Bamboula* harbour (for commercial purposes), was rather a dump, which formed progressively with rubbish thrown into what was already a silted-up lagoon. Paleoenvironmental analyses had reconstructed the existence of a lagoon, which was supposedly still navigable between the 1st and the 4th centuries CE. The turning point would have occurred only after the 7th century, when communication with the sea was eventually broken up and the lagoon was replaced by

51 François, Hadjichristofi 2021.

52 O. Callot in Salles 1993, pp. 56-57; T. Oziol, *ibid.*, pp. 304-305. According to Salles (*ibid.*, p. 31), the site was apparently deserted as of the beginning of the 2nd century CE.

53 S. Marquié in Callot, Fourier, Yon 2022, pp. 207-290.

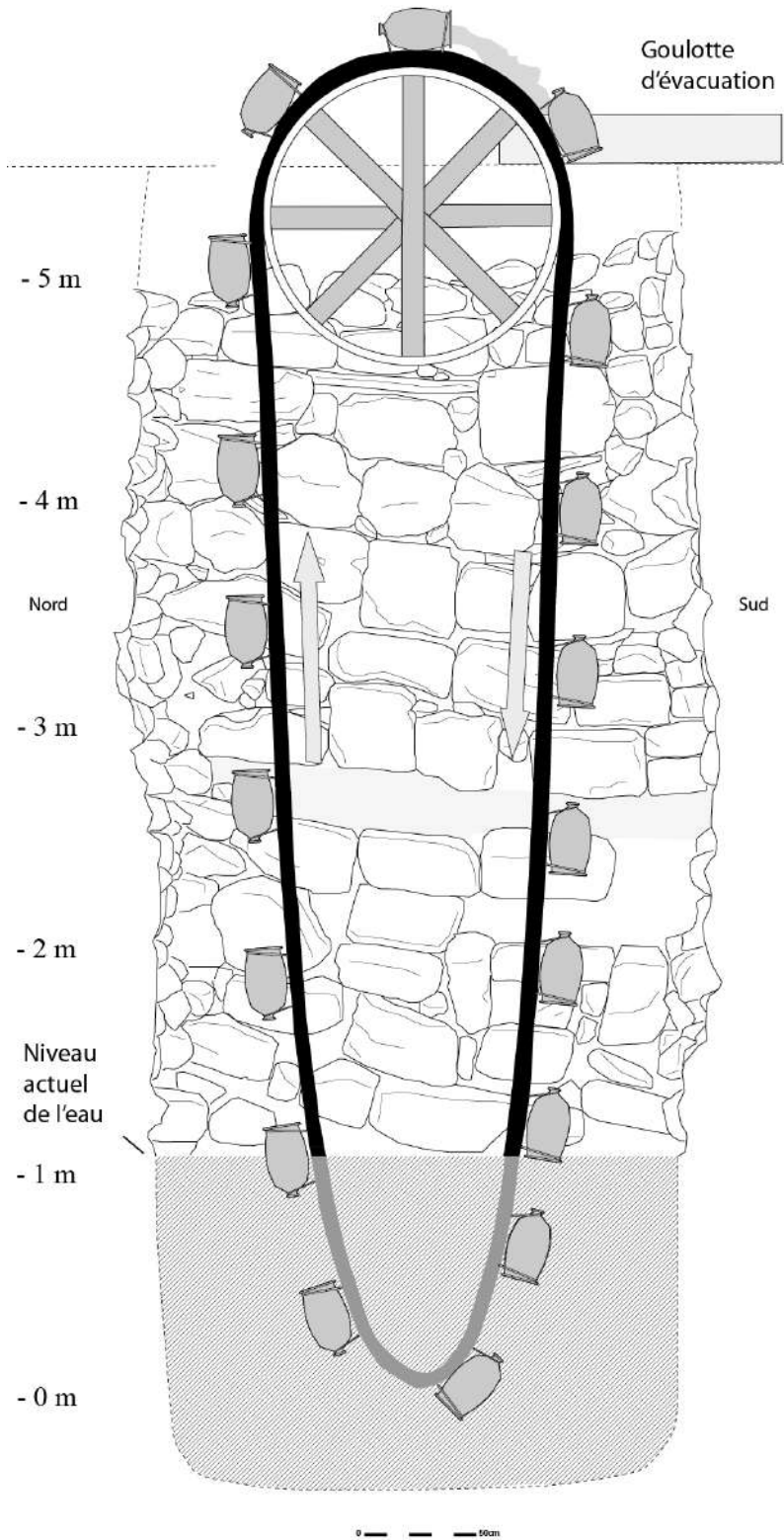


Figure 8 — Reconstruction of the late Roman well at *Bamboula* (A. Rabot © Mission archéologique de Kition).

a *sebkha*.⁵⁴ However, communication with the sea does not guarantee navigability, the more so as the *Bamboula* basin was shallow. In the Classical period already, at the time of the military harbour, the depth of the water was reconstructed at around 3,50 m.⁵⁵ This constraint triggered a complex handling of the triremes, whose equipment (oars, mast, rudder, etc.) had to be dismantled and stored away before the ships entered the basin and were hauled on the ramps. Even if the basin remained theoretically navigable in the late Roman period, was it effectively navigated? Topographical shifts are not necessarily (and not only) triggered by environmental shifts. Archaeological evidence at *Bamboula* suggests a possible disconnection (at least a possible chronological gap) between them. As of the late Hellenistic period, the *Bamboula* area, once an integral part of the city center, gradually became a half-deserted place, with a swamp that was used as a dump, and gardens that needed hydraulic devices, such as our well, for irrigation.

Relying on the available archaeological evidence, we get the picture of a suburban cityscape, with gardens and orchards, with dumps and abandoned buildings serving as quarries for construction materials.⁵⁶ Does this local picture fit into the global picture of ancient Kition in the Roman period? In the present state of published evidence, restricted domestic evidence pertaining to this period was found in Areas I and III (*Chrysopolitissa*) as well as II (*Kathari*).⁵⁷ They consist of poor remains of houses, and notably of a series of hydraulic devices. Such a variety of hydraulic devices was deemed necessary for agricultural purposes:⁵⁸ one can reconstruct irrigated gardens and orchards, a typical picture of peripheral, suburban areas. The mosaic floor with the Labors of Herakles, that was recently found in the same area and remains unpublished (it apparently dates to the 4th century CE), fits into the global picture: the remains probably belonged to a residential Roman villa. The funerary evidence gives no different results. One can find Roman tombs in the old Iron Age burial grounds, at *Mnimata*, *Agios Georgios* and *Tourapi*.⁵⁹ But the evidence is scarce. Moreover, most Roman tombs were not new constructions, they reused ancient Iron Age tombs. This is the case of the built tomb, found in the area of the so-called “royal necropolis” and which was probably constructed, like the other built tombs of the area, in the Classical period.⁶⁰ We can also assume that the so-called Tomb of Saint Therapon, from which the locality acquired its name of *Tourapi*, was originally used in the Classical period.⁶¹

54 Sourisseau, Goiran, Morhange 2003; S. Colin, J.-P. Goiran in Callot, Fourrier, Yon 2022, pp. 46-51 and fig. 10.5.

55 S. Colin, J.-P. Goiran, in Callot, Fourrier, Yon 2022, pp. 158-159.

56 The stones of the shipsheds were, for example, heavily looted, as of the 3rd century BCE: Callot, Fourrier, Yon 2022, pp. 108-137.

57 Karageorghis 2005, pp. 90-92 and pp. 106-107 (Floors C-A). Admittedly, the late levels were of minor interest to the excavator, who compiled the period extending from the late 4th century BCE to the late 4th century CE in one phase.

58 Karageorghis 2005, p. 101 also suggests a possible industrial purpose, “necessitating the plentiful use of water”.

59 Myres 1897, p. 153 mentions “Late Hellenistic or Graeco-Roman tombs” at *Tourapi*. For two recently excavated Roman tombs in the locality, see A. Satraki, A. Cannavò, S. Fourrier in Cannavò, Fourrier, Rabot 2018, pp. 335-352 (Tomb MLA 2065) and pp. 367-370 (Tomb MLA 2072). At *Mnimata*, a small number of funerary cippi attest the use of the burial ground during the Roman period (but no associated tomb was found): Hadjisavvas 2012, p. 219. A series of funerary inscriptions dating to the Roman period is published as *JG XV 2, 86-277*. Most are ancient discoveries with no precise provenance.

60 Karageorghis 1973, pp. 615-617.

61 Fourrier 2018a.

As of the imperial period (and perhaps as of the late Hellenistic period, from the 2nd century BCE onwards), there is a remarkable and general decrease of urban activity in the northern part of the city. The *Chrysopolitissa-Kathari-Bamboula* plateau, that represented the heart of the city, from the foundation horizon in the Late Bronze Age until the Hellenistic period, lost its urban primacy. An urban shift occurred, which probably led from the north to the south, from the *Bamboula* to the *Scala* bay. We lack precise chronological milestones to reconstruct this shift and its sequences. In the northern area, the *Bamboula* well is henceforth a milestone (4th century CE); in the southern area, the first architectural phase of Saint Lazarus church is another milestone (10th-11th centuries CE).⁶² We lack, however, other positive evidence, and notably for the period in-between, which spans the long late antiquity.⁶³

Such an urban shift is not without parallel. Other Cypriot capital-centers experienced topographical shifts. For example, at Salamis, the eastern plateau, which was the urban heart of the city during the Geometric and Archaic periods, was abandoned in the late Archaic, only to be reoccupied during late antiquity.⁶⁴ Paradoxically enough, Classical Salamis, that is so highly visible in the written sources, has no grounded materiality: we possess material from the period (pottery, terracotta figurines, rare inscriptions), but it comes from dumps. The city itself remains archaeologically invisible. Another documented example of urban shift is Paphos, that was abandoned towards the early Hellenistic period for Nea Paphos.⁶⁵ The site was not deserted, however, since its sanctuary remained the religious focus of the new city and Roman villas were built in its vicinity. Like Kouklia-Paphos, the old urban nucleus of Kition was apparently never deserted. The city developed into Larnaka and Scala/Marina, two disconnected villages or two districts of the same city (**fig. 9**). Ottoman sources disclose that their relationship and their respective administrative status remained ambiguous: Scala (Iskele) is sometimes registered as the harbour of Larnaka, sometimes as an independent village.⁶⁶

Conclusion

History, when reconstructed from the earth, gives a granular perspective that sheds a complementary light on the brutal course of events. Political and social disruptions are unevenly represented in the archaeological evidence. Some aborted attempts (an unfinished military port, a short-lived fortification) leave a strong imprint and they still inform the topography of modern cities; some long-term evolutions (a shifting environment that leads to the durable transformation of an urban quarter into a suburban area) are more difficult to grasp.

62 Papageorghiou 1998, p. 223. The same author argues that the church replaced a basilica (of which, however, nothing survives).

63 On this period, see Panayides, Jacobs 2022.

64 Fourrier 2018b, pp. 141-144.

65 The shift is alternatively attributed to the last king of Paphos, Nicocles, or to Ptolemy. On the topic, see the contributions in Balandier 2016.

66 Aymes 2005.

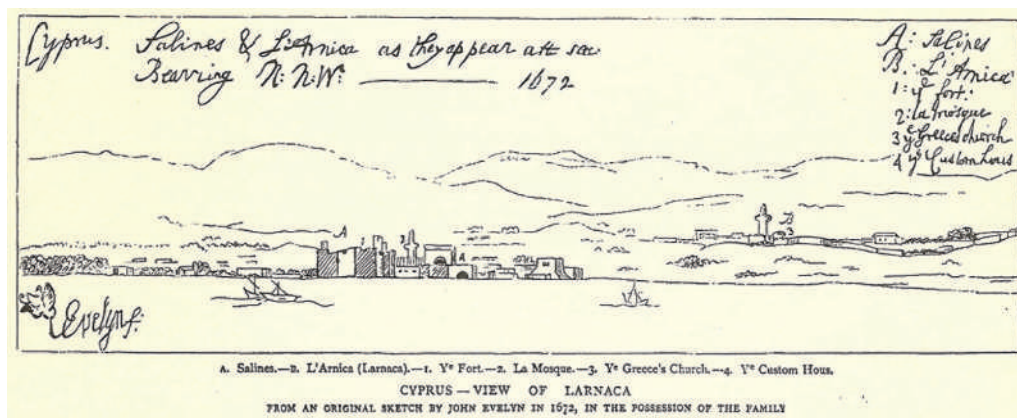


Figure 9 — Sketch of Larnaka, John Evelyn, 1672.

Archaeological visibility is a crucial issue that leaves many questions unanswered. One perplexing issue concerns the lack of archaeological visibility of Hellenistic and Roman Kition, a lack of non-funerary evidence and especially a lack of monumental evidence. The recent discovery of a well at *Bamboula* and of a house with a mosaic floor in its vicinity does not alter the overall picture. To the contrary, these discoveries disclose an episode of urban discontinuity, a possible shift of the city center. Because Kition certainly was, in the Hellenistic and Roman period, an urban center, well documented by ancient sources.⁶⁷ The Hellenistic and Roman city remains, however, archaeologically elusive. Where can we find a temple, comparable to the Zeus temple at Salamis, where can we find a theatre, like at Paphos, where can we find an agora, like at Amathous? Compared to other modern Near Eastern cities which inherited the main features of their urbanism from their Hellenistic and Roman predecessors, the contrast is striking.

The three archaeological assemblages presented above are snapshots in the long urban life of Kition. They compose a fragmented picture that, nevertheless, nurtures reflection on the history of ancient Cypriot cities and on the diversity of their respective developments. The long urban life of Kition is both original and paradigmatic of the history of other Cypriot capital-cities: this observation is a constant in the history and culture of Cyprus, which is made of common (parallel) and individual (regional) trajectories. At the scale of the city, at different times, we observe topographical shifts, nucleation and, conversely, urban decline. Some areas were successively living urban quarters, and then wastelands or suburban orchards. Archaeology suggests a complex picture of constant evolution, adaptation and resilience, far from a linear model of regular development. Reconstructed from the earth, the history of the city is more complex and discontinuous, as well as more vibrant perhaps.

67 On the possible location of the gymnasium, the theater, the stadium and the hippodrome, see Nicolaou 1976, pp. 131-142. No positive evidence concerning these monuments, which are attested in the written sources, has for the moment been found.

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