



Instead of an editorial

Public archaeology has emerged as a significant field within contemporary archaeological practice and research, focusing on the relationship between archaeology and the wider public. Rather than remaining confined within academic institutions, archaeology increasingly engages with communities, cultural stakeholders, and diverse audiences, fostering dialogue and participation in the interpretation and stewardship of cultural heritage.

In Cyprus, interest in this field, particularly through community engagement initiatives, has been gradually increasing in recent years. Recognising this development, as well as the need to further promote the involvement of non-specialists in archaeological practice and discourse, the Board of Directors of the Association of Cypriot Archaeologists (ACA) initiated the present project. Its aim was to gather reflections and responses from local experts involved in relevant initiatives and to highlight the work of emerging scholars and young professionals across the broader field of archaeology. By doing so, ACA seeks to support and promote their contributions while encouraging further participation in community engagement activities in order to engage and empower local communities through interaction with the island's archaeological heritage and experiential learning

The result is this digital repository of short reports, designed to document and disseminate recent initiatives focusing on public engagement in Cypriot archaeology. The repository aims to showcase emerging voices and fresh perspectives on the ways archaeologists connect with broader audiences, whether through community-based projects, educational activities, digital media, museum programmes, or forms of heritage activism. The choice of an online open-access format reflects a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, allowing the work of early-career scholars and professionals to reach not only the Cypriot archaeological community but also a wider local and international audience.

The collection of original reports presented here was collected by invitation, based on the Board's knowledge of ongoing or recently completed projects in Cypriot archaeology that place public engagement at their core. Together, these five papers represent important contributions to the developing field of public archaeology on the island and reflect the work of recent graduates and early-career archaeologists. They explore different approaches through which Cypriot archaeology engages the public and enhances the dissemination of archaeological knowledge. In doing so, they demonstrate how meaningful interaction between archaeologists and society can contribute to a deeper understanding of, and commitment to the protection of, cultural heritage.

The submitted papers underwent minimal editorial intervention and formatting by ACA's President, Dr. Maria M. Michael, and Vice-President, Demetra Ignatiou, in order to ensure coherence and consistency across the collection. The visual icon and the layout design for the repository's online presentation were created by ACA member Phivos Poullos.

ACA welcomes further contributions from its members whose work involves initiatives related to community engagement in Cypriot archaeology. It is anticipated that this repository will continue to expand, serving as a growing platform for collecting and sharing innovative approaches to public archaeology on the island.

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Public Archaeology of Smelting in Cyprus and the Cyclades

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Abstract

This paper presents public-archaeology activities which were implemented within the framework of “Metal Places – Crossroads of Culture in the eastern Mediterranean” project in Asgata (Cyprus) and the Cyclades. Two small-scale experimental trials of copper/silver smelting, conducted under a safety plan, and a bilingual digital museum game developed with the CYENS Centre of Excellence engaged local communities, school groups, and visitors. Through contact with natural materials and step-by-step tasks, participants experienced first-hand the scale and effort of ancient production and reflected on human–nature relationships. Overall, these public-archaeology actions translated complex metallurgical processes into accessible hands-on and digital experiences, strengthening public understanding and engagement with mining heritage.

Keywords: Public Archaeology; Mining Heritage; Smelting; Experimental Archaeology; Digital Museum Game; Greece–Cyprus.

Introduction

Within the framework of the Interreg V-A Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Greece–Cyprus 2014–2020, the project “Metal Places – Crossroads of Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean” was implemented. The partnership comprised the NCSR “Demokritos”, the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades (Hellenic Ministry of Culture), the Municipality of Sifnos, the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus, and the Community of Asgata (Cyprus). The project was co-funded by the European Union (ERDF) and by national funds from Greece and Cyprus.

The project ‘Metal Places – Crossroads of Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean’ is implemented on the Greek islands of Sifnos, Serifos, and Kythnos, and in the Community of Asgata in Cyprus. Its core focus is the utilisation, safeguarding, enhancement, and promotion of the ancient mining and metallurgical heritage of these areas, building on their shared cultural past. A broader aim is to support tourism development in the selected locations and enrich the local tourism product through the ‘culture–tourism–development’ nexus, with a view to long-term sustainability and viability.

As part of the collaboration among the project partners joint actions were designed and implemented to enhance and promote the selected areas and to strengthen their networking at national and cross-border level.

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The project aimed to showcase and promote the rich ancient and contemporary mining heritage of Cyprus, Sifnos, Serifos, and Kythnos. This objective was achieved through a series of actions implemented both in the Community of Asgata (Cyprus) and on the partner islands in Greece. The project's public-archaeology activities were designed to reach a broad, heterogeneous audience, including local communities, school pupils, and visitors. For this reason, both the educational material produced and the delivery of the activities were planned from the outset in a bilingual format (Greek–English). The on-site guided tours aimed to support in situ understanding of the mining/metallurgical landscape and its connection to local experience and place memory; the small-scale experimental smelting trials were intended to foster an experiential engagement with the smelting process; and the digital educational game was developed specifically to reach children and disseminate the project's content in an engaging and sustainably reusable way.

Participation in the activities was open to the public and took place following information and invitations disseminated by the project partners. Outreach was conducted through announcements and informational material (in Greek and English), via the local community, as well as through the networks and communication channels of the collaborating institutions.

Guided tours were organised to geoarchaeological points of interest, enabling visitors of all ages to explore mines and slag heaps² (Fig.1). Activities included the study of rocks, the documentation of metal remains from mining equipment, and the presentation of ancient miners' artefacts discovered by modern miners and now exhibited at the Mining Heritage Museums of Asgata and Sifnos.

Actions & Methodology

Experimental-archaeology trials

To enhance understanding of the ancient metallurgical process of copper and silver smelting, two experimental-archaeology trials were conducted in Asgata and on Sifnos. In each location, the relevant preparatory stages were followed, as derived from the literature and excavation finds documenting the process. For safety and environmental stewardship, the experiments were conducted with personal protective equipment (PPE)—goggles and gloves—under a safety plan and with controlled firing. Residues (slag and clays) were collected and responsibly disposed of. The small scale of implementation minimised environmental footprint and risk.

The trials were structured as a sequential learning process, during which the key stages of smelting were introduced and applied: preparation of raw materials and clay, construction/shaping of the furnace³, bellows⁴, and tuyères⁵ controlled firing/heating and charging of the system, and finally observation of residues and discussion of results. This staged presentation was framed as a public-archaeology

² Slag heaps are accumulations of smelting waste.

³ Furnace is a small smelting structure/kiln used for heating and melting metal-bearing materials.

⁴ Bellows are air-pumping devices used to increase airflow and raise the furnace temperature.

⁵ Tuyères are ceramic nozzles through which air is introduced into the furnace.

activity, enabling participants to connect hands-on experience with the traces observed on site (slag heaps, etc.).

Public participation & learning

Experts and interested members of the public were involved throughout, wishing to learn about this metallurgical craft. Participants were able to take part in almost every stage of the preparations, learning from the experts and experiencing this ancient and highly significant process first-hand. With enthusiasm and dedication, they prepared the clay and constructed the furnaces and tuyères (Fig.2). The exercise was both intellectual and physical—an experience they felt keenly in practice (Fig.3). Subsequently, they could better appreciate the challenges, the effort involved, and the importance of successfully completing this stage.

As in the earlier phases, so too in the subsequent ones, participants learned something distinct and new each time, which—like pieces of a puzzle—completed the smelting process. They engaged with natural materials—soil, straw, rocks, and ores—and came to appreciate the importance and contribution of nature to completing the process. The experiment also encouraged inventiveness and interaction among participants, fostering collaboration on essential tasks and the devising of solutions wherever the outcome required further strengthening (Fig.4).

The process was time-consuming and demanding. It was carried out over multiple days, allowing different people to take part each time, while those who participated throughout gained a comprehensive picture of the full smelting sequence, from preparation to the observation of residues. Certain stages required dexterity and particular care, which is why participants closely observed the experts (Fig.5). Each person, in their own way, contributed to every stage, eager for the experiment's completion. The outcome delighted everyone and rewarded their hard work, while also making clear how time-consuming and arduous the process is for both people and nature. Finally, it should be noted that the experiment was deliberately conducted at a very small scale for the purposes of the activity (Fig.6); thus, participants perceived how truly demanding the process is and how many further insights and iterations are still needed to mentally grasp the scales and magnitudes of production in antiquity.

Digital museum game

To extend public engagement to younger audiences and create a tool that could be used beyond the on-site activities, an interactive digital 'museum game' focusing on the stages of smelting was developed. The game was designed and produced digitally in collaboration with the CYENS Centre of Excellence and in consultation with archaeologists, so that its narrative and step-by-step tasks correspond, in an accessible way, to the logic and sequence of the metallurgical process. The approach is bilingual (Greek–English), serving both local and international audiences and reinforcing the project's cross-border character.

The game was designed to engage children across different age groups. It was developed primarily for primary-school pupils, with adaptability for use in lower-

secondary education. Accessibility and appeal were prioritised through short, clearly structured levels, simple terminology, strong visual cues, and step-by-step guidance via on-screen prompts. Interactions were kept intuitive so that the game can be used both independently by children and in facilitated school-group settings.

The narrative features a robot travelling in its spacecraft; when a malfunction occurs, it lands in Cyprus and Greece to repair a component. As the component is made of copper in Cyprus and silver in Greece, the robot follows the smelting sequence step-by-step to remake it. Guided by on-screen prompts, children direct the robot—learning and experimenting themselves—until smelting is completed and the object is produced. In this way, children learn playfully both about the smelting process for each metal and about the countries themselves. The museum game is offered bilingually and is accessible to children from countries other than Cyprus as well.

Although no standardised quantitative evaluation was conducted, qualitative impressions were gathered through informal discussions with participants, observation during the activities, and feedback from local stakeholders. Responses indicated increased interest in mining and metallurgical heritage and a clearer understanding of the complexity and demands of smelting, particularly through hands-on engagement and interaction with natural materials. In parallel, the bilingual digital game functioned as a tool for continuity, enabling the project’s educational content to be reused beyond the timeframe of on-site activities.

The digital game is available on USB drives procured through the project and distributed to schools following their visit to the Asgata Mining Heritage Museum. In addition, it is installed on dedicated computers purchased for this purpose and available on-site at the Museum.

Conclusions

Overall, the activities designed and implemented as part of the Metal Places project strengthened public engagement with mining and metallurgical heritage across Cyprus and the Cyclades. They also highlighted the mining heritage of Cyprus and the islands of Sifnos, Serifos, and Kythnos, showcasing their rich ancient and contemporary histories. Importantly, the project’s outputs—on-site interpretation, hands-on demonstrations, and the bilingual digital game—form a reusable set of resources that can support continued outreach and educational use beyond the project’s formal duration. Through experimental-archaeology trials and the digital museum game, the public experienced first-hand the difficulty, scale, and significance of ancient processes, gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between people and nature. The public acquired knowledge and experiences they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to gain. In parallel, cross-border cooperation between Greece and Cyprus underscored the value of knowledge exchange and built bridges for future actions. With this legacy of tools, partnerships and educational content, the project lays the groundwork for continued outreach and further enrichment.

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Online resources to learn more about the project:

Asgata community website, 2026. Available at: <https://www.asgata.com/>.

Metal Places digital platform (Greek), 2026. Available at: <https://metalplaces.ims.forth.gr/el>.

Project video channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@websitevideos962>.

Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (2026). Digital Herodotus – “Cyprus: A journey” (Kalavassos). Available at: <https://www.digital-herodotus.eu/archive/video/items/1042/kupros-ena-taksidi-kalabastos/?page=>.

Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (2026). Digital Herodotus – “So far from the sky...” (film on former miners of Kalavassos). Available at: .

Figure captions

Fig. 1. Children and adults visiting the Platies mine, Asgata. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.

Fig. 2. Construction of the furnaces. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.

Fig. 3. Preparation of the clay. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.

Fig. 4. Experimental archaeology on Sifnos: reconstructing an ancient furnace and conducting a smelting experiment using traditional techniques. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.

Fig. 5. Participants watching copper melt in a crucible within the charcoal bed during the smelting process. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.

Fig. 6. Ceramic tuyères connected to bellows with clay-sealed joints for air supply, with slag fragments produced during the experiment. Credit: Savvina Hadjipanteli / Metal Places project. © 2022.