
Archaeologia Cypria Publica

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.

Dr Maria M. Michael and Demetra Ignatiou

Mining Heritage & Public engagement: The Case of South Mathiatis Mine-*Strongylos*, Nicosia

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Abstract

The Mathiatis area in the Nicosia district, renowned for its abundant mineral deposits, has a longstanding history of mining activity. Early 20th century operations exposed ancient copper mining activity, revealing an unknown part of the local history, as was the case in other mining areas in Cyprus. In 2016, modern mining interest resurfaced for the South Mathiatis Mine-*Strongylos* -a candidate UNESCO site- which became a focal point of public debate. This paper stresses the meaning of mining heritage and public engagement, outlines the history of mining heritage in Cyprus, and examines how a local initiative engaged in protecting and showcasing *Strongylos* as a mining heritage site, and itssignificance for the local Cypriot identity.

Keywords: Mining Landscapes, Cyprus Heritage, UNESCO, Local Communities, Local Identity, Mathiatis

Introduction

How do mining heritage and public engagement correlate?

To address this question, it is necessary to clarify how mining heritage and public engagement are understood within heritage studies. Mining heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible features resulting from mining activities from Prehistory to modern times, including physical remains such as underground workings, processing installations, and extraction machinery, as well as socio-cultural elements such as archival records, miners' narratives, and oral traditions associated with mining landscapes (Jelen and Kučera, 2017: 321–328). Public engagement, or public participation, is defined by Rowe and Frewer (2005: 253) as *the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming processes within organisations and institutions responsible for policy development*. These two concepts are closely linked: mining heritage provides the material and cultural foundations of community identity, while public engagement enables this heritage to be acknowledged, safeguarded, and reinterpreted over time.

During the last decade, the intertwining of mining heritage with public engagement has been a recurring subject in Cyprus, reflecting the island's enduring

connection to its mineral-rich landscapes and the communities' ongoing efforts to safeguard this heritage. In terms of how public engagement and mining heritage correlate, the case of South Mathiatis Mine-*Strongylos* (Nicosia district), stands as a noteworthy example of how local initiatives and/or communities can mobilise to protect their heritage. The role of public engagement in this instance proved to be crucial, as will be discussed in greater detail below.

Linking modern and ancient mining activity in Cyprus

Mining activity played a significant role in the shaping the island's historical, environmental, and socio-economic development. The exploitation of its mineral deposits from Prehistory until Late Antiquity, and later from the late 19th century until the early to mid-20th century, shaped its natural and cultural landscape, thus its heritage.

The Cypriot copper known as *aes cyprium* in Antiquity, was the basis for international trade, the extent of which is testified by the numerous ancient slag heaps found around the Troodos Ophiolite; slag being the waste material that occurred through the metal-smelting processes (Fig. 1). In particular, many locations/toponyms in Cyprus bear the name *Mavrovounia*, meaning 'black mountains', due to the concentration/presence of slag and/or slag heaps; an indicative example being that of the Mavrovouni village (Fig. 2), close to Skouriotissa, on the northern foothills of Troodos (Christodoulou and Konstantinidis, 1987). Various ancient written sources refer to the quality of the Cypriot copper and its important role in the ancient trade around the Mediterranean (Kassianidou 2017: 111-112). Certainly, the natural and mineral abundance of the island favoured the exportation of various raw materials; through the international trade, raw materials like tin, gold, silver, and lead were brought to Cyprus (Kassianidou, 2022: 73-74). Following the Late Roman/Early Byzantine periods, little is known about the archaeometallurgical activity on the island, and it is generally believed that it probably stopped sometime around the 8th century AD (Kassianidou, 2012: 76-79).

Around the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century, the interest on mineral extraction mainly for sulphur and chalcopyrite around the eastern Mediterranean resurfaced, leading to mining activities on the island after almost a thousand of years (Kassianidou, 2025). The interest came mainly from foreign companies, which were aware of the extensive ancient mining activity on the island, locating the mineral deposits where the ancient slag heaps were. That was also the case for Cyprus Mines Corporation (acronym CMC, Greek: '*Κυπριακή Μεταλλευτική Εταιρεία'*), an American company that was founded and based in Cyprus around 1916, after geologist Charles Godfrey Gunther located abundant deposits of copper and other minerals at Skouriotissa area. CMC became one of the largest modern mining companies on the island, based at Skouriotissa mine, operating in various locations around the Troodos Ophiolite (Lavender, 1962).

Around the 1930s-40s, various local and foreign companies began mining at known deposits that were used in ancient times, or at new locations around the Troodos Ophiolite. The discovery of *devil's mud* first at Skouriotissa and later in other areas, increased the mining activities in Cyprus; a soft, grey clay that was found above the massive sulphide bodies, enriched in gold and silver, '*that looked dry but when squeezed in a man's hand turned to liquid slime*' (Lavender, 1962: 124); the name was given by the miners because of its character, but also due to its corrosive nature (Fig. 3).

The extensive modern mining activity of CMC and other companies, brought to light the remnants of the ancient mining activity (Bruce, 1936); galleries, shafts and adits were re-opened, still preserving various tools and equipment (wooden supports, stone tools, lamps, pottery, ropes, etc) from the later phase they were used, indicating the working methods of mining. This marked the first attempt at recording and documenting data regarding the ancient mining activities, since by the end of the 19th century-beginning of the 20th century, the knowledge of ancient Cypriot metallurgy was absent. Notably, modern miners, geologists, and mining topographers acknowledged the fact that the ancient miners knew how to locate the ores and extract the copper deposits. Photos from the companies' archives that operated around Cyprus through the 20th-21st centuries, geological and topographical maps (Kassianidou, 2018), and the aforementioned discoveries have been the subject of various research projects, enhancing the information of the mining heritage of Cyprus (e.g. *Metallon Topoi* II at Kalavasos-Asgata mining areas, Kassianidou, 2021).

The extreme poverty of the early 20th century led locals to seek work at the mines, and to eventually became part-time farmers-miners working in day and night shifts (Maradi, 1996: 118-124). Working conditions in mines (both underground and open-cast) have been examined in numerous publications, offering insight into miners' perspectives through interviews and oral traditions (Varnavas, 1988, 1993).

Around the mid-late 20th century, many of the modern mines were abandoned once again, mainly due to the vast exhaustion of the minerals. The only mine still in operation until today is the one of Skouriotissa (Constantinou and Panayides, 2013: 207). Commonly, mines are recognised by the opencast pits or the entrance of underground workings, and in some cases by the industrial infrastructure that is preserved until today. Regardless, during the last 20 years, the practice of metal recycling led to the dismantling of these remnants.

On ecological terms, the mining companies of the first half of the 20th century were not obliged to restore the areas they operated, leaving behind an immense environmental issue for the communities and the Government of Cyprus to deal with. Efforts have been undertaken to face this issue, with numerous discussions and environmental restoration proposals by the responsible governmental departments. Restoration activities require a long-term and sustainable projection as well as a significant financial budget. The only example of an environmental restoration is that

of the Amiantos mine, which was restored between 2009 and 2017 (Forest Department, 2018-2019).

Reaching the 21st century, the global economic crisis, and the local one of 2013, increased gold's market value, leading to the intensified quest of its deposits. It was after that period that mining companies from Cyprus and abroad showed interest in the abandoned mines on the island and gave the opportunity to start prospecting for possible exploitation of gold and other mineral deposits (Saefong, 2013). A prime example is the South Mathiatis Mine-*Strongylos*, also known through oral tradition as a *gold mine*, which was abandoned around the end of the 1930s. Prior to describing the case in relation to the public engagement, *Strongylos* is presented within Mathiatis' mining landscape through a brief historical and archaeological overview.

Mathiatis and its mining landscape

The village of Mathiatis lies on the northeastern foothills of the Troodos range and forms part of the semi-mountainous region of the Nicosia district (Fig. 4). It is located near the ancient polities of Idalion and Tamassos, as well as other important archaeological sites such as Marki–*Alonia* and Alambra–*Mouttes*. The village is situated approximately 35 km from ancient Kition and 40 km from the archaeological site of Dromolaxia–*Vizakia*, better known as Hala Sultan Tekke. Geologically, the area falls within the Upper and Lower Pillow Lavas, where significant deposits of copper, pyrite–iron pyrite, gold, and silver and other minerals are found. Numerous *gossan* formations –rusty, iron-stained concentrations of weathered sulphide mineral deposits– are also present, displaying distinctive red, yellow, and orange hues (Gass, 1960: 101-102).

Within Mathiatis, substantial deposits of the above-mentioned minerals are found in two locations: the North Mathiatis Mine and the South Mathiatis Mine–*Strongylos*. The initial modern prospecting in the area took place in 1912, when Gunther first arrived in Cyprus. Gunther embarked on a field prospecting expedition to locate the ancient slag heaps around Troodos Ophiolite beginning from the area of Lythrodontas-Mathiatis villages (Lavender, 1962: 61-62). As Lavender mentions (1962: 61-62), '*There were slag heaps here and others near Mathiati, a few miles away […] Gunther spent three days zigzagging back and forth through the area, examining the stained rocks, marvelling the slags, poking around the collapsed entrances to the ancient workings*'. The copper deposits he located did not look promising at first, since it appeared that the ancient mining activity exhausted most of the ore (Lavender, 1962: 63).

Around the mid-1930s, CMC was prospecting the area again, this time to locate deposits of '*devil's mud*'; the quest became successful in May 1935, when a worker of CMC, Christoforos Frangeskides, accidentally discovered substantial quantities at the North Mathiatis area (Fig. 5) (Lavender, 1962: 246). From this period onwards, the

mines of Mathiatis became one of the main locations for CMC's mining operations (Lavender, 1962: 247).

South Mathiatis Mine-Strongylos

Strongylos mine lies about 300 m south of *Mavrovouni* locality, where numerous slag heaps were once located (Christoforou, 2022: 101-103). Its name appears as *Strongylon* on Kitchener's map (1885), and later as *Strongylos* in subsequent cartography (Department of Lands and Surveys Portal, n.d.); the name is likely linked to the mountain's rounded form. Mining at *Strongylos* began in 1936, and gold extraction ceased by 1939, as deposits were depleted (Fig. 6). The mine became particularly known for its gold-bearing ore, although copper and silver were also extracted (Gass, 1960: 102). Despite its short-lived operation, CMC left behind a small open pit and large amounts of waste spoil heaps on the northwest of the mine. Numerous mining companies explored the *Strongylos* mine over the years, but their efforts proved unfruitful; the only operations that took place were sometime in the 1980s, when a small amount of waste dump from the northwest of the opencast pit was removed for further processing at the Mitsero area. As the mine was abandoned, natural regeneration gradually transformed the area into the pine-forested landscape seen today.

Mining operations exposed ancient galleries that can also be seen today, and various finds, confirming earlier phases of mining activity (Christoforou, 2022: 105-108). Some of these finds were submitted to the Department of Antiquities by CMC, while others remained in private collections; the material is dated from the Iron Age to the Roman period (Christoforou, 2022: 105-108). In 1996, archaeological research recorded a smelting furnace of the Cypro-Archaic II period, which is the earliest evidence of *in-situ* ancient mining activity until today (Fig. 7) (Fasnacht and Georgiou, 2006). In 2002, owing to its exceptional geological and archaeological character, *Strongylos* mine was nominated as a candidate UNESCO World Heritage Site, in the category of Natural and Cultural Landscape (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2002); hitherto, it remains the only mine in Cyprus under UNESCO nomination. Recent research, through the States Archives of Cyprus, brought to light important information regarding the ancient mining activity that appeared due to the modern opencast activities between 1935 and 1939 (Kassianidou, 2018).

21st-century mining interest and the local community

In 2016, Hellenic Copper Mines, a Cypriot mining company based at Skouriotissa mine, applied for the re-extraction of gold among other secondary valued minerals, at *Strongylos* opencast mine and its surrounding environs. The company requested permission to extract the remaining gold deposits firstly within the opencast pit by going 5 m deeper from today's surface, enlarging the pit further to today's size; secondly, by removing the waste dumps on the north of the opencast for the environmental restoration of the area, and continuing with an extractive activity as

well, 5 m deeper after removing the waste (Fig. 8). The company's interests became known through the process of public consultation, which the company was obliged to organise and inform the local community, following European Union's legislation. In 2017, a local initiative named 'Historical and Environmental Protection Group of Mathiatis' (also mentioned as Mathiatis HEP Initiative) was formed by a small group of local residents, opposing the project on the basis of the environmental and cultural damage that was threatening the monument itself, and its surrounding area. What became clear overtime was that such operations would have led to the destruction of all archaeological remains (ancient galleries, or remnants of any other archaeometallurgical activity), the forest that surrounds the opencast pit together with its own ecosystem (flora and fauna-namely three endangered species of bats which live in the abandoned mining galleries), and its UNESCO nomination as a Cultural and Natural Landscape.

In its initial phase, the Mathiatis HEP Initiative faced significant challenges in addressing the *Strongylos* case, which appeared impossible to win. Nevertheless, the Initiative took various actions to prevent the project from being approved. From February 2017 onward, the Initiative was actively participating in public consultations, parliamentary discussions, and environmental committee meetings. The Initiative organised and joined numerous public events, such as protests, educational tours, and community presentations, to raise awareness about the area's natural and cultural heritage. It also engaged with various stakeholders, including political parties, government departments, environmental organisations, and international groups, to advocate for the protection of the site. Moreover, the Initiative promoted community involvement through clean-up activities and other symbolic actions.

Overall, consisted efforts by the Initiative focused on preserving and promoting the mine's historical and environmental value, on a local and international level. In regards to raising awareness for the mining heritage and more specifically for *Strongylos* mine, the Initiative used social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to inform the public on the case, but also to promote any other activities, like walking tours, presentations, etc. One of the Initiative's first and main activities was its participation in the European Heritage Days celebrationsin 2017, an event in which it has continued to participate almost every year since then (Fig. 9).

Following public opposition and legal challenges—spearheaded by the Initiative—the company's applications for further extraction were restricted; the company was granted permission for the second application, only to remove one of the three waste dumps, on the northwest of the opencast pit, with subsequent tree planting as indicated by the official final permission.

Later, on August 2021, the Department of Environment of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, issued an Appropriate Assessment Report on the Action Plan for the Abandoned Mines of Cyprus according to which the reactivation of the mining industry in eight abandoned mines, among which *Strongylos*

mine, may have a significant impact on protected species and habitats of rare and threatened bats, the shelters of which include abandoned mining galleries. The report was rejecting the 2008 proposal by the Geological Survey Department, issued as the National Strategy for the Restoration of Abandoned Mines.

Bridging the gap: raising awareness through the walking tours

Since 2017 and to date, the Initiative organises tours at *Strongylos* mine; these tours serve not only as recreational outings, but as inshtful, informative experiences that highlight the unique natural and cultural significance of the mine. What became evident from the beginning was that the public lacked knowledge of the mining heritage not only of the Mathiatis area, but most importantly of the island as a whole. Nevertheless, in time, the tours proved to have become the bridge between the participants and the mine's rich, but often overlooked history, effectively closing the gap created by the public's limited awareness of Mathiatis mining history.

Through immersive, on-site experiences, visitors have been introduced to the unique geological and archaeological features that define the area—from ancient galleries to remnants of metallurgy—thus turning the site into a living classroom where history comes to life. The guides, often drawing on expert knowledge and local oral histories, contextualise the significance of the site within both Cyprus's broader mining heritage and the local community's cultural identity, stressing its nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well. Such engagement not only fosters an appreciation for the historical value of the mine but also encourages dialogue and reflection on the importance of preserving these sites for future generations, to locals and foreigners (Fig. 10). By directly connecting people with tangible heritage and histories that might otherwise remain hidden, the tours empower participants to become advocates for conservation and stewards of Cypriot heritage, ensuring that the mining legacy is not only remembered, but actively cherished and protected.

Through the years, the case of *Strongylos* mine became well-known; as a result, people contacted and still reach out to the members of Mathiatis Initiative asking for information regarding future tours and other associated events.

Mining Heritage ft. Public Engagement: preserving the local Cypriot identity

As outlined throughout this article, mining heritage and public engagement not only correlate but also create further possibilities for preserving part of the local Cypriot identity. Today, numerous possible development projects all over the Troodos Ophiolite threaten the island's unique mining heritage, placing increasing pressure on historically significant mining landscapes. In the face of these ongoing challenges, the proactive involvement of local communities—through advocacy, education, and stewardship—remains crucial to ensuring that the island's mining past is not overshadowed by modern development in favour of private interests.

In conclusion, the case of *Strongylos* mine illustrates the above, demonstrating how the interplay of natural resources, archaeological legacy, and community engagement shapes both local identity and landscape. The efforts of Mathiatis HEP Initiative underscore the value of collaborative action in safeguarding cultural and environmental assets for future generations, ensuring that the island's mining history remains a vital part of its collective memory and ongoing narrative. These actions proved the significance of stakeholders, including local communities or groups, in shaping heritage management strategies. The collaborative efforts between local residents, environmental advocates, and heritage professionals have demonstrated the power of grassroots mobilisation in safeguarding sites of national importance. By integrating educational programmes, participatory events, and ongoing dialogue with policymakers, these initiatives have cultivated a sense of shared responsibility and pride. This holistic approach to heritage conservation not only protects physical remnants but also reinforces the intangible values and stories that shape Cypriot identity for generations to come.

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The core of this paper lies in the collective efforts of many individuals, both from within the local community of Mathiatis and beyond, who contributed to the safeguarding of *Strongylos* mine. Their commitment, passion, and efforts have been invaluable in safeguarding part of the legacy of the island's natural and cultural landscape, and ensuring that the stories of its people and places continue to inspire future generations. This paper is dedicated to them.

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Captions

Fig. 1: Map of Cyprus. Red pins indicating the slag heaps around Troodos Ophiolite. Credits: Created by the author with Google Earth Pro. Data from *Eratosthenis*, Geological Survey Department.

Fig. 2: Photo taken by John Lindros for the Swedish Cyprus Expedition in Cyprus. Photograph number: Csn3063. Description: *Cypriote Mining. Skouriotissa. View from Foukassa Hill, showing "Pre-Roman" slag (foreground) and part of "Roman" slag (right centre)*. Credits: Carlotta, Picture Archive website, Accessed: 13 January 2026.

Fig. 3: Photo from Cyprus Mines Corporation archive. Description: *Turkish Cypriot women miners sacking devil's mud in Mathiati. Photo by D. M. Creveling*. Credits: Lavender 1962: 331, Fig. 1.

Fig. 4: Map focusing in the area of Mathiatis and its surrounding environs. Red pins indicating the slag heaps around Troodos Ophiolite. Orange polygons indicating the *gossan* formations. Credits: Created by the author with Google Earth Pro. Data from *Eratosthenis*, Geological Survey Department.

Fig. 5: Photos from the Cyprus Mines Corporation archive, showing the first mining activity when *devil's mud* was discovered at North Mathiatis Mine, in May 1935. Credits: from the archive of geologist Giorgos Maliotis.

Fig. 6: Photo from the archive of Cyprus Mines Corporation with the description: *The opencast mining of gold ore, or devil's mud, at South Mathiati. August 1937*. Credits: Lavender 1962: 334-335, Fig. 2.

Fig. 7: The ancient copper smelting furnace at *Strongylos* mine at the time of discovery in 1995. Credits: Fasnacht and Georgiou 2006: 199, Fig. 1.

Fig. 8: Maps of Hellenic Copper Mines, indicating the requested areas for mining activity at *Strongylos* mine. Left: 1st Environmental Assessment, submitted in October 2016. Right: 2nd Environmental Assessment, submitted in April 2018. Credits: Hellenic Copper Mines.

Fig. 9: Photo taken during the European Heritage Days tour at *Strongylos* mine opencast, in October 2017. The galleries, probably of the ancient mining activity, are visible in the *gossan* formation, revealed by the mining activities of Cyprus Mines Corporation in 1930s. Credits: Mathiatis HEP Initiative.

Fig. 10: Photo from a group tour given for local and international volunteers of Young Friends of Earth of Cyprus, in October 2018, at *Strongylos* mine. Credits: Young Friends of Earth, Cyprus.