

# Excavations at the Agia Aikaterini Square, Kastelli, Khania 2005 and 2008:

*a preliminary report\**

MARIA ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI  
& ERIK HALLAGER

In January 2005 the Greek–Swedish Excavations and the Danish Institute at Athens were approached by the 25<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical antiquities to assist the excavations conducted by the Ephorate in connection with the construction of a protective roof over the Agia Aikaterini Square, where the Greek–Swedish Excavations had been going on since 1969. The proposal was gratefully accepted. The excavations were carried out during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2005. Altogether 46 trial tests (marked on Fig. 1) were made. Apart from the trial tests, an area in the eastern part of the square was also included in the excavation programme (Trenches 34–36, cf. Fig. 1). Here, three Linear B tablets were found *in situ*, in 1990. The field directors of the excavation were Dr. Maria Andreadaki-Vlazaki and Dr. Erik Hallager.<sup>1</sup> In 2008, when the drawings for the protective roof had finally been approved by the Ministry of Culture, more trial tests were carried out together with cleaning in Trenches 34 and 35. This work took place during the period 1<sup>st</sup> September to 15<sup>th</sup> December and was conducted by the 25<sup>th</sup> Ephorate under the direction of Dr. Maria Andreadaki-Vlazaki.<sup>2</sup>

Chronologically the excavation covered a period of c. 5000 years of continuous history of the town of Khania.

It will be presented stratigraphically from top to bottom, that is, from the present surface down to bedrock.

## 1. The Post-Roman Period

Dated to the Post-Roman period, two structures were absolutely dominant. The wall foundations of the Venetian Cathedral were built soon after the Venetian takeover of Crete after the Fourth Crusade in 1204. The other structure was an Early Christian Basilica discovered for the first time in a rescue excavation in 1990.<sup>3</sup> In Figure 2 are seen the wall foundations of the two churches to the right the Venetian Cathedral and to the left the Basilica. The figure furthermore shows a little of the complicated stratigraphy of the site, in that the Basilica was set on top of a wall of the Late Minoan IIIB period, while the Cathedral partly used an LM IIIC wall as part of its wall foundation. In the trial trenches in the northern part of the square, large parts of the wall foundations of the Cathedral were exposed, and in the trial trench B<sub>1</sub> the floor of Venetian cathedral was found, which had been laid with hexagonal tiles, probably a construction of the Turkish period (Fig. 3). Just outside the entrance to the church

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\* This report was written in 2005 and updated with information on the 2008 excavation in 2010.

1 Other archaeological participants on the site in 2005 were Eftihia Protopapadaki, Heleni Goula, Heleni Mathioudaki, Georgos Daskalakis, Elin Vanting, Sidsel West Hansen, Anna Gustafsson, and Kristina B. Petersen. The Museum work was led by Birgitta P. Hallager, assisted by Anders Melander and for shorter periods by Solvejg Hansen and Sascha B. Olinsson. We wish to thank the Institute for Aegean Prehistory and the Carlsberg Foundation, without whose generous financial support in 2005 it would not have been possible for the GSE and the Danish Institute at Athens to participate. We wish to warmly thank Professor Peter Warren for correcting the English text.

2 At the site she was assisted by Angeliki Tsingou and Eftihia Protopapadaki.

3 Hallager & Tzedakis 1988, 50–4.

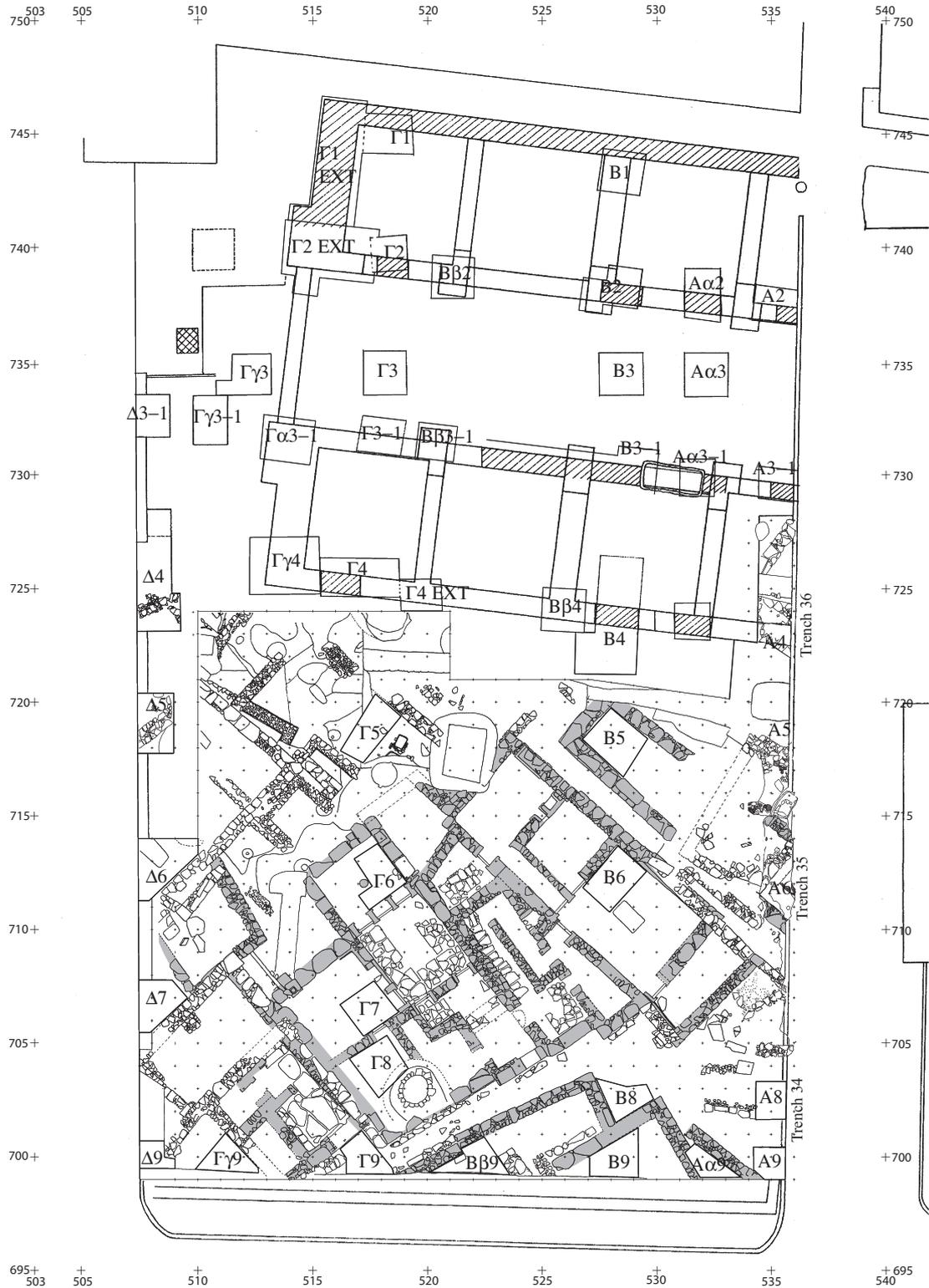


Fig. 1. The Ag. Aikaterini Square with the Greek–Swedish excavations in the southern part (LM I settlement marked on plan) and the foundations of the cathedral in the northern part.



**Fig. 2.** Trench 36. The upper right wall is the foundation of the Venetian cathedral built over an LM IIIB:2/IIC wall and the wall to the left is the foundation of the Early Christian basilica built over a wall of the LM IIIB:1 period.



**Fig. 3.** The floor of the Venetian cathedral (found in the very northern part of the Agia Aikaterini Square). Facing north.

two very humble Christian burials were found in  $\Gamma\gamma 3$ . Furthermore, in  $\Delta 3-1$  and  $\Gamma\gamma 3-1$  the possible foundation for a minaret was discovered. It was built when the Cathedral was turned into a mosque during the Turkokratia. From the Basilica fragments of multi-coloured mosaics in red, white and blue tesserae were exposed (Fig. 4). It was furthermore noted how very well the floor of the Basilica was constructed, with a heavy layer of small rubble stones at the bottom covered with white plaster and then the orange plaster into which the mosaic was laid. A tiny fragment of mosaic in trial trench B $\beta 2$  showed that the Basilica extended further west than originally thought.<sup>4</sup> Just outside the Basilica in a pit in trial trench  $\Delta 5$ , for the first time a small complete jug from the period was discovered (Fig. 5). Among other Post-Minoan structures the very heavily constructed east wall of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “Gazoseria” should be mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. The Post-Minoan Period

From the Post-Minoan periods, that is from after the end of the Bronze Age until the end of the Roman period, there were – as in the previous excavations – scattered finds only. Most notable was the large amount of fragmentary Hellenistic roof tiles from a large pit in the northern part of Trench 36, and some Late Geometric pottery, also from pits, mainly in  $\Delta 5$ .<sup>6</sup>

## 3. The LM IIIC and LM IIIB:2 Settlements

From the LM IIIC settlement both well-known features and important new information were achieved. In previous excavations it was found that the floors of this period were virtually empty of finds except for a few scattered broken vases. There were no signs of fire and destruction. People had obviously collected their belongings and left for somewhere else, probably the more safe mountains.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See plan in Hallager & Tzedakis 1988, fig. 29.

<sup>5</sup> See GSE I, 86-94.

<sup>6</sup> See further in the 2001 report pages 175-178 and in the 2010 report, page 211.

<sup>7</sup> GSE II, 193.



Fig. 4. Fragment of mosaic floor from the Early Christian basilica found in trial trench Aa3.

In Room A,<sup>8</sup> however, there was more than one floor level; and connected to the lower one a structure and some very well-known finds from the period came to light. But the combination of these two things will probably raise a debate on almost established facts. The objects are the so-called clay spools. They are traditionally considered to have been used in the textile industry either as loom weights or spools.<sup>9</sup> But here they were found in quite another context, next to an oven with clear traces of fire. Next to the oven was a small hearth and scattered on the floor there were many fragments of more or less complete bricks. Between the bricks next to the oven or kiln a concentration of ten “spools” was found (Fig. 6). There are still many investigations to be carried out, but this discovery in a good closed context has raised the question of a multiple function of the traditional interpretation of the “spools”. In addition the north corner of a room from the LM IIIC settlement was discovered in the south extension of trial trench Δ4.



Fig. 5. Early Christian jar discovered in trial trench Δ5.

From the Late Minoan IIIB:2 settlement many floor fragments belonging to the Courtyard Area in the eastern part were found.<sup>10</sup> In trial trench A4 were found extensive remains from a room constructed on top of the destruction debris of the LM IIIA:2/B:1 Building 2. This room,<sup>11</sup> which is part of a larger building,<sup>12</sup> continued in use in the LM IIIC period. On the original floor of the room were found the only almost complete cylinder-shaped stand discovered in the GSE (Fig. 7).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore the northwestern wall of the large Courtyard F was found in trial trench Δ5. In the courtyard was a kiln (destroyed by Late Geometric pits) combined with a very well constructed hearth, about which some more information was revealed in 2005 in trial trench Δ6.<sup>14</sup> The courtyard thus seems to be an area with industrial activities in the LM IIIB:2 settlement.

8 For an LM IIIC site plan see GSE II, 33, fig. 1.

9 See, for example, GSE II, 177-78.

10 GSE III, 86-91.

11 For a plan of the room, see the 2010 report in this volume, page 212, fig. 3.

12 See plan in Hallager & Tzedakis 1988, fig. 22.

13 Hallager & Hallager 2013.

14 For Courtyard F which functioned both in LM IIIC and LM IIIB:2, see GSE II, 62-71 and GSE III, 79-85.



**Fig. 6.** LM IIIC, Building 2, Room A, lower floor. In the upper right part is the clay/kouskouras-lined oven, in the lower right corner is seen the bedding of the hearth, while the spools were found behind the large brick seen to the left of the oven.

#### 4. The LM IIIB:1 Settlement

The Late Minoan IIIB:1 settlement was destroyed in a minor conflagration around 1250 BC. There were great hopes for the investigation of this level since in rescue excavations in 1990 it had revealed three Linear B tablets *in situ* on the floor of Building 2, Room E.<sup>15</sup> The building with the Linear B tablets (Fig. 8) had previously revealed other good finds and closed floor deposits with complete or restorable vases. On the first tiny floor fragment (the very northern part of Room F, Fig. 8) from the building excavated in 2005, an unusual decorated steatite bead (Fig. 9) and a small intact juglet decorated with Minoan flowers on the shoulder were found. From the same layers other interesting finds in the form of three simpler steatite beads, a reasonably well preserved clay figurine and a gaming piece with an incision on the upper surface were excavated.

In Space H, where also only a little of the floor could be excavated, a rich deposit of finds was discovered (Fig. 10). One item was an almost intact large decorated cup imitating the local Kydonian workshop. Inside this cup a unique bone object of ivory which could have been a handle for something, was found together with a large



**Fig. 7.** The cylinder-shaped stand found in the west extension of trial trench A4 in 2008.

animal's tooth. On the floor was a large collection of well preserved bones, which have not yet been analysed. Also on the floor was the major part of a bronze pin (M 049) and, more interestingly, a broken piece of carved ivory (B 015). Its position is right on the edge of a later pit (the Hellenistic pit with the roof tiles mentioned above), which damaged the object. The ivory (Fig. 11) has incised decoration on all sides and even relief decoration on the narrow edge. Where it is broken along the length axis it has a groove which does not run all the way through the object. The function of the object is not known, but one possibility is a handle for a bronze mirror.

After the 2005 excavation the building with the Linear B tablets is much better understood, and Figure 8 gives a conjectural reconstruction. The shaded areas indicate the undisturbed floors. Most of the building is as yet unexcavated, and it is promising because everywhere where excavations were conducted there was an undisturbed destruc-

<sup>15</sup> Hallager, Vlasakis & Hallager 1992, 61-87.

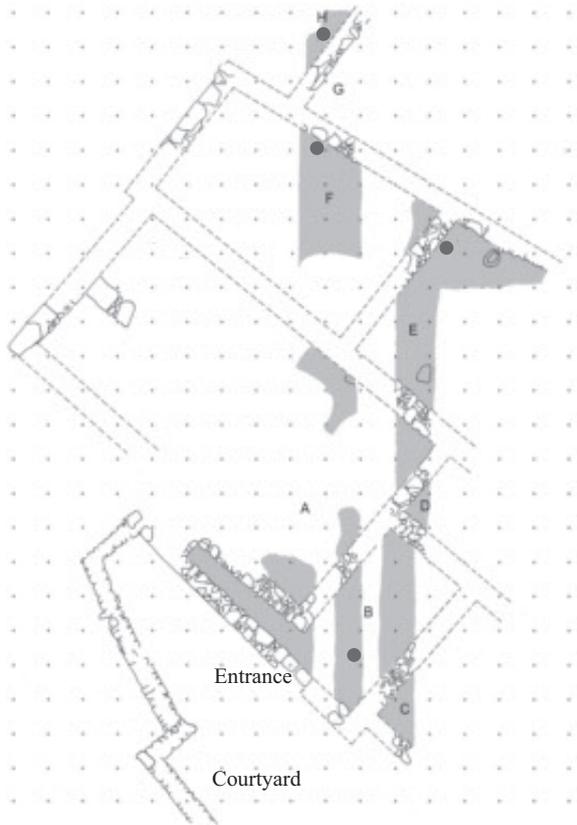


Fig. 8. Plan of LM IIIA:2/B:1 Building 2, the "Linear B House". The dot in Room B is the find spot of the Inscribed Stirrup Jar, the dot in Room E is where the Linear B tablets were found, the dot in Room F is where the steatite bead was found, while the dot in Room H gives the find spot for the carved ivory. Crosses indicate 1 m squares.

tion layer above the floor with a thickness of 20-30 cm. The rooms seem to have been rather large and impressive for the period. Thus Room A, for example, would have measured 6 m by at least 5 m. The floor of the room is the best constructed from the LM IIIB period, with very small tightly packed pebbles. The extent of the building is still unknown, but obviously it is large and important. The upper dot shows the find spot of the ivory handle, the dot below the find spot of the juglet and the decorated steatite bead, while the upper dot to the right indicates the find place of the Linear B tablets.



Fig. 9. Steatite bead decorated all over with circles with dots.

The 2005 excavation did not reveal more Linear B tablets, but in Room B, which is an entrance hall from the courtyard with many floor levels, an almost intact large transport stirrup jar was found in a pit below the latest floor. Only the spout is missing. This stirrup jar proved to be quite exceptional in that it carried a Linear B inscription (Fig. 12).<sup>16</sup> The inscription, found on the body of the stirrup jar, reads *ze-ta-ro*, which is probably a personal name not previously attested in Linear B. Thereafter follows a word divider and an isolated sign which can only be interpreted as a *wa*, which is the accepted abbreviation for the word *wa-na-ka-te-ro* (royal). The clay of the stirrup jar is local west Cretan and this find thus gives us another strong piece of evidence that at least one king and with him also an administrative centre existed in Crete at the time. Where and how is yet too early to say. In the LM IIIB:1 deposit excavated in trial trench B4 the fragment of a Linear A tablet, KH 99, was also found.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. The LM IIIA:2, LM IIIA:1, and LM II Settlements

The Late Minoan IIIB:1 period sealed three other separate phases, LM IIIA:2, LM IIIA:1 and LM II. From these

<sup>16</sup> Andreadaki-Vlasaki & Hallager 2007, 17-20.

<sup>17</sup> Andreadaki-Vlasaki & Hallager 2007, 11-13.



**Fig. 10.** Trench 36. Floor deposit of Room H, with several bones, a complete vase, a bronze pin, and a piece of carved ivory (B 015).

periods several fragments of architectural details were found. They greatly extended our knowledge of the architecture from these periods as, for example, walls which were built in the re-occupation phase of LM II and reused in the LM IIIA:1 period. The most exciting small find was a fragment of a Linear A tablet, KH 98. It was discovered in Trench 34, where it had been washed down into an LM II street from the neighbouring destruction debris of the Neopalatial period. It is the upper right corner of a large Linear A tablet where three lines of inscription are preserved (Fig. 13).<sup>18</sup> Both fragments of Linear A should probably be dated to the LM IB period.

## 6. The Neopalatial Settlement

The Neopalatial settlement produced much new and valuable information in relation to House III and the open square between the Houses I, II, and III. In House III (Fig. 14) a large, well-preserved part of an inner wall was exposed in Trench B5 and Trench 35, while the same wall was also found in the 1990 excavations. The floor of Room A is notable, being well constructed with 4 cm of hard plaster. It was in the room surrounding a structure thought to be a raised platform, placed exactly in the middle between the two walls. We do not yet dare to guess



**Fig. 11.** Broken decorated ivory object. Preserved length 5.5 cm.



**Fig. 12.** Inscribed transport stirrup jar, KH Z 43 with the reading *ze-ta-ro, wa*.

<sup>18</sup> Andreadaki-Vlasaki & Hallager 2007, 10-11.



Fig. 13. KH 98. Fragment of Linear A tablet from trial trench B4 with part of three lines inscribed.

what it was and unfortunately the room was re-used in the following LM II period so there are no original finds to help us with its interpretation. Just outside this room at the entrance to the narrow street/lane between Houses I and III another impressive architectural detail was noted. Here two blocks were seen which might have been bases for wooden posts, suggesting a constructed entrance from the open square to the narrow lane between the houses; just inside this entrance some impressive slabs stones were also found. Most of the area is still unexcavated and it is too early to suggest any final interpretation of the finds.

In the square outside House III was discovered what looks very like cover-stones for a drain (Fig. 14), which might have been connected to the main drain found a little further towards the southwest. In the square were found remains from the collapsed Houses II and III (Fig. 1), as well as objects deposited in the square. There was the usual quantity of the most frequent vase from the LM I period, the small conical cup, one of which had a potter's mark at its base – a phenomenon very rarely seen in West Crete, but usual in Eastern Crete. At the other end of the size-scale a very well-decorated pithos lying on its side was discovered. The bottom of the pithos was missing, and an upright slab-stone was placed there. Of other finds from the Square a small bead in red stone – jasper(?) can be mentioned. A complete but rather small

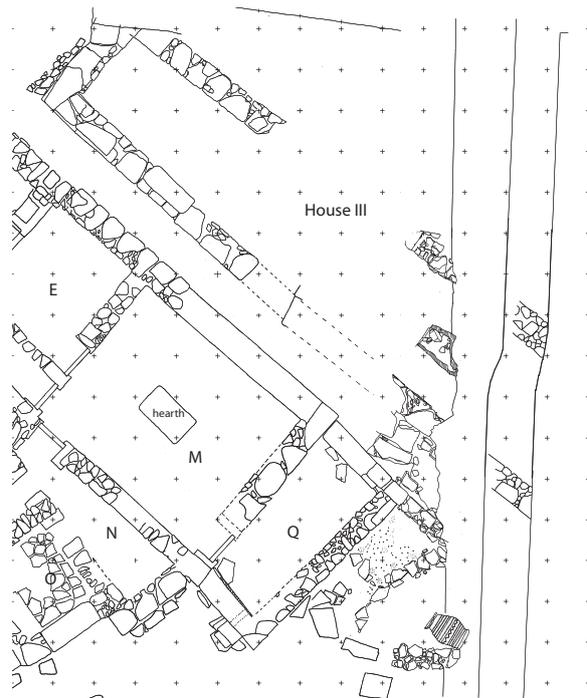


Fig. 14. Plan of the north-eastern part of the Late Minoan I settlement (including also the excavations in Parodos Kanevaro) with parts of Houses I and III. Crosses indicate 1 m squares.

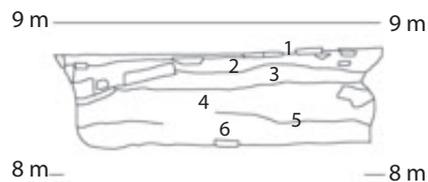


Fig. 15. Section from trial trench B8, which proved typical for a greater part of the LM I settlement. 1. Paved floor of court outside House II; 2. Floor packing with many sherds; 3. Floor packing with many small stones; 4. EM III deposit; 5. Traces of EM III floor; 6. EM II/III deposit. Scale 1:50.

loom weight, the fragment of a crucible, which gave evidence of metal working at the site, and the fragment of a clay sealing which had been pressed over a lid covering the rim of a pithos were also found. Similar fragments had been discovered in the same area in 1984.<sup>19</sup>



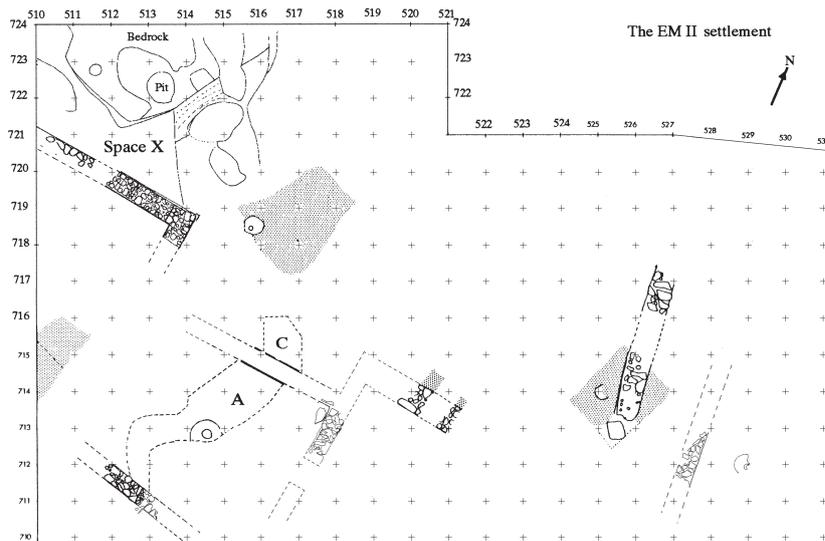
**Fig. 16.** Section in trial trench A6 showing the same stratigraphy as Figure 15 with two layers of packing below the LM I floors and walls. The exposed wall is the outer wall of House III.

In all trenches excavated inside the old excavations, a consistent pattern concerning the construction of the Neopalatial settlement was discovered. It was everywhere based on a thick levelling deposit consisting of smaller stones and an incredible amount of pottery. More than 500 kg were collected. This gives witness to the care that was taken with the construction of this settlement. The pottery in this levelling deposit dated to the MM III, probably early MM IIIB period, and it consisted almost exclusively of broken coarse ware pottery. Figure 15 shows



**Fig. 17.** Collection of Prepalatial pottery. The complete cup in the upper left corner is probably of the early Proto-palatial period.

the profile in trial trench B8 where the two upper layers clearly display the smaller stones, while in Figure 16 from trial trench A6 two layers in the levelling deposit are also seen, with the lower one consisting exclusively of potsherds. One other comment may be made on the stratigraphy in Figure 15 namely that – what proved to be another consistent pattern – immediately below the constructions of the Neopalatial settlement we came straight onto the levels of the Prepalatial settlement, soon after 2000 BC. The Old Palace Period did exist on the



**Fig. 18.** Plan of the excavated parts of the Early Minoan II settlement with well-constructed architecture. Crosses indicate 1 m squares.



Fig. 19. Finds from the Prepalatial settlement: an arrowhead, a fragment of a mould, and the rim of a large vessel decorated with a bird's head.

site, but its remains were removed when the buildings of the Neopalatial period were constructed.

## 7. The Prepalatial Settlement

The pottery of the Prepalatial period is extremely fine. Figure 17 gives some examples, mainly characteristic of the later part of the period, EM III and MM IA: the typical egg-cups, the protobarbotine, the fine incised ware and brush ware of the EM II period, which itself gave much new and valuable information on the architecture.

The walls of the period were extremely well constructed. They were usually 45 cm in width and usually coated with *kouskouras* and/or plaster on both sides. One wall fragment discovered in trial trench Γ6 gave us an idea of the size of Room A with a centrally placed small circular hearth with a sunken centre (Fig. 18). Another wall in trial trench B6 is of the same construction. Also in this room was discovered one of the circular hearths with a sunken centre. In trial trench A8 another typical example of the Early Minoan plastered walls was found and in addition a small patch of virgin soil was discovered. In all other places excavation stopped at the bedrock.

Of finds from the Early Minoan period we may mention an unusually fine arrowhead in light brown chert, the



Fig. 20. Trial trench Γ5. Early Minoan I pots in situ, placed in cavities in the bedrock and kept in place by wedges of *kouskouras*.

fragment of a bird figurine attached to a handle of a larger vessel and, most importantly, the fragment of a mould which probably dates to the Early Minoan I period and which is thus the earliest evidence for metal-working in Western Crete (Fig. 19). Also interesting were two complete murex shells from the Early Minoan levels, which may perhaps be evidence for an early purple dye industry in west Crete.<sup>20</sup>

In 2005 the excavation seemed to show for the first time secure evidence for architecture from the Early Minoan I period in trial trench Γ5 represented by a floor mainly consisting of bedrock into which small cavities were deliberately cut to keep larger vessels *in situ* by the help of wedges in *kouskouras* (Fig. 20).

The 2005 and 2008 excavations supplemented the old excavations with many details, while five major new results were obtained. The first two concern the northern



*Fig. 21. View over the site in 2009 after the protective roof had been constructed.*

part of the Ag. Aikaterini Square with the two churches. It became possible for the first time to draw a relatively detailed and correct plan of the western part of the Venetian Cathedral. Thanks to the finds of fragments of mosaic floor it also became clear that the earlier church/basilica on the site was somewhat larger than originally estimated. Except for the trial trenches A4 and B4, the wall foundations of the early church were not excavated. Concerning the Late Minoan III period major new results were obtained in a much better understanding of ‘The Linear B House’, which proved to be a sizable, well-constructed building, the importance of which is not only testified by the Linear B tablets and the inscribed stirrup jar, but also by the finds of complete vases, bronzes, jewellery, and ivory. Concerning the Neopalatial settlement the many trial trenches excavated inside the old excavation provided for

the first time ample evidence for the construction of the buildings both in relation to the architecture and the chronology. Our previous estimation that it began in MM III (and not at the beginning) and that the construction was a major engineering work was fully confirmed in 2005. Finally, the many trial trenches within the old excavations gave us a much better understanding of the Prepalatial period, where we can now start to see the shape of a large well-built settlement with several houses and streets from the EM II period constructed upon an earlier settlement of the EM I period. Finally in 2009 the protective roof over the Greek–Swedish Excavations was constructed and provided with informative posters on Minoan Kydonia and the excavation, including a reconstruction of the Neopalatial buildings (Fig. 21).

MARIA ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI

*Ministry of Culture and Sports*

*Bouboulinas 20-22*

*106 82 Athens*

*Greece*

*mvlazaki@otenet.gr*

ERIK HALLAGER

*Østerøgade 4*

*8200 Aarhus N*

*Denmark*

*klaeh@hum.au.dk*

GSE II

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GSE III

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## Abbreviations

GSE I

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