

## THE POTTERY FROM THE MYCENAEAN SITE OF PALIA STANE-PROSPHOLEIKA, KEPHALONIA. A PRELIMINARY REPORT

The site of Palia Stane-Prosp holeika (P. Tsilimidos property) is located at a short distance south of the modern town of Argostoli, and occupies a commanding position on the lower slopes of the hilly zone overlooking the alluvial plain and the bay of Koutavos to the ENE. Four short excavation campaigns have taken place (2010, 2013, 2014) under the direction of Andreas Sotiriou of the 35th ΕΠΚΑ. The excavation of the plot has not been completed. Preliminary results were presented at the 2014 Conference on the Archaeological Work in NW Greece and the Ionian Islands (Σωτηρίου et al. 2018).

The architectural remains revealed to date, which are part of a larger settlement, stretch across ca. 55m<sup>2</sup>. They consist of a main rectangular structure with NW-SE orientation (**Pl. 1a**) defined by two parallel walls, the largest of which (Τχ. 1) is preserved at a length of 11 m and the other at 5 m (Τχ. 5). In its interior there are two parallel spurs of cross walls at almost right angles to the walls. To the NW of the main buildings, a 5.5 m long wall (Τχ. 2) probably belongs to a structure with a different orientation. The excavators believe that the area between the two buildings was an open-air space with possible ‘firing installations’ suggested by the presence of charcoal and mudbrick. Smaller segments of walls have been excavated close to the boundaries of the excavated areas. The large volume of pottery, fragments of copper alloy and a lead artefact, stone tools and lithics, whorls, steatite “buttons” and a couple of figurines testify to the variety of activities at the settlement. The inhabitants’ diet is witnessed by the presence of numerous animal bones and a large number of mollusk shells.

The study of the pottery by the first author of this contribution is still at a fairly early stage. This preliminary report gives a short overview and presents a selection of diagnostic pottery from two areas of the site where the excavation has progressed: the SE (T8 and T12) and the NW (T10 and T14), as marked on **Pl. 1a**. The material examined comes from the destruction layers and disturbed horizons, and a large part of the pottery is very fragmented<sup>1</sup>.

### *The Mycenaean pottery*

The largest proportion of the pottery (an average of ca. 80% across the units examined) is consistent with the usual Mycenaean fine calcareous fabrics with visible non-plastic (red, brown and black) inclusions. It is typically soft, a characteristic of the local production, and commonly reddish yellow, light red or pale yellow. The paint which ranges in colour from red to brown and black, is sometimes lustrous, but mostly semi-lustrous or dull.

No complete profile of any of the shapes can be reconstructed so far. Domestic vessels predominate and include basins (**Pl. 2a**), large bowls, amphoras and hydrias (see below), and large jugs. There are numerous flat bases that would belong to these shapes. There are plain, and solid painted sherds and examples with linear decoration including several with sets of broad parallel bands on the body or around the base. The neck of two large closed vessels bears patterned decoration (**Pl. 2b & 2c**). To next category belong the kylikes, stemmed bowls, deep bowls and kraters (see below). The large majority of these open shapes have a fully painted interior. Several of the kraters, which are plentiful, have medium size painted bands on the rim, but are broken below and do not preserve (or never had) any handle-zone decoration (eg. **Pl. 2r**). Most bowls have everted rims and apart from a few with handle-zone decoration the

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<sup>1</sup> The only assemblage so far found in situ was a possible ‘decanting installation’ found resting on Τχ. 4, and consisting of a large bottomless vessel within which was contained a coarse handmade amphora (Σωτηρίου et al. 2018).

rest are painted inside and outside. Further study of these shapes combined with the evidence of closed deposits would be necessary before we can understand the local sequence of these forms, which does not seem to follow the developments of the core Mycenaean areas. High stemmed kylikes are rare. Among the small closed vessels there are some fragments from possible small stirrup jars. There are isolated examples of other shapes: the piriform jar, the kalathos, the mug and the small jug (see below). There is a single example of an alabastron but several divided legs (**Pl. 2v**), as well as double (**Pl. 2s**) and triple rolled legs that should belong to this or related shapes. Common motifs are: the spiral, semi-circle, wavy line, zig-zag, foliate band, chevron, multiple stem, U and V patterns and the lozenge.

#### ***Coarseware pottery***

The bulk of the coarseware pottery belongs to the standard local ware, usually handmade, with calcareous and non-calcareous inclusions, some chert-like being quite large. A few sherds from the site, which were recently analysed by thin-section petrography, have shown that the paste contained grog-tempering like some of the Early Bronze Age pottery on the island (see Souyoudzoglou et al. 2017). The common shapes are medium size storage and cooking pots, including some tripod pots. A readily recognisable shape is the local two-handled amphoroid jar with a low plain neck and a body with plastic decoration consisting of pellets or coils, often amorphous (**Pl. 1g**), or, alternatively, with vertical grooving. The complete example from Prospheleika is illustrated elsewhere (see n. 1). These jars are usually regarded as LH IIIC or later<sup>2</sup>, but their presence at Prospheleika with LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB pottery strongly suggests an earlier appearance of the type. This ware also occurs at Tris Langades on Ithaki at the same time (see Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 107). The connection of the coarse handmade pottery from the central Ionian islands with the technologically related pottery of the Peloponnese, Epirus and further afield needs to be investigated with further archaeometric analyses<sup>3</sup>. A small number of sherds from the site (including a leg from a cooking vessel) are from imported vessels. Pithoi are not numerous. One fragment with a raised band decorated with incised herring-bone pattern (**Pl. 1c**) is an Aegean type that has even found its way to the Italian peninsula<sup>4</sup>. Semi-course wheel-turned wares are present, but are a small minority.

#### ***Matt-painted pottery***

A small number of body sherds with the characteristic decoration of wavy or crossing bands in matt brown-black paint belong to this ware (**Pl. 1e**). Similar examples from a Mycenaean context in the region come from Tris Langades on Ithaki (Benton and Waterhouse 1973, 14, pl. 4). This handmade pottery has been compared with the matt-painted wares of western and north-western Greece where they appear in LH IIIB (Σουέρεφ 1999, 16; 2001, 81, n. 14) and continue to be produced in the Iron Age (Wardle 1977, 177-178).

#### ***Diagnostic pottery from squares T12, T8 and T10 - T14.***

**Square T12 (Pl. 1b).** The triangular area between the eastern wall of the main building (Tχ. 5) and the short, incomplete Tχ. 6 was excavated in 2013 and 2014 to the depth of 46.60 m, with the removal of layers of fallen stones, at which point there was a burnt layer and the stones thinned out. In excess of 1500 potsherds were recovered from this small area. The Mycenaean pottery accounts for 80% of which 65-70% were open vessels. There were no significant

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<sup>2</sup> I. Moschos (2009, 247) has even suggested an EPG date for the examples from funerary contexts on the island.

<sup>3</sup> Possible connections on morphological grounds between the so-called “pellet ware” of Epirus and that of Kephallonia and Ithaki were suggested some time ago (Wardle 1977, 187). Recent petrographic analysis carried out on samples from two Epirote sites (Γιούνη 2017) has identified grog tempering on similar handmade pottery suggesting further technological connections between the two regions.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of pithoi with incised raised bands are known from Zakynthos (Wijngaarden & Pieters 2017, 379, Pl. CXXXVIe), the Greek mainland (Tiryns, Corinth), Crete as well as S. Italy (see Bettelli 2002, 107, fig. 50: 10-11).

differences in the quantity or the quality of the pottery from the units at the top level of the walls and those at the base of the walls. The diagnostic pottery included the following:

1. Closed shape (amphora or hydria). Chevrons (FM 58). **Pl. 2c**.
2. Piriform jar (small), FS 48. **Pl. 2f**.
3. Alabastron (square-sided). V pattern (FM 59). **Pl. 2h**.
4. Krater. Lozenge (FM 73), chain. **Pl. 2d**.
5. Krater (ring-based). **Pl. 2r**.
6. Bowl (stemmed?). Curvilinear motif (spirals?). **Pl. 2g**.
7. Goblet or kylix (FS264). Monochrome. **Pl. 2j**.
8. Kylix, worn surface. **Pl. 2i**.
9. Cup, FS 214/215. U pattern (FM 45). **Pl. 2t**.

Among the examples listed above **nos 2, 3 and 9** can be dated to LH IIIA2-III B. The large goblet/kylix **no. 7**, a likely import, may be earlier than LH IIIA2, and if so the earliest diagnostic piece from the site so far. None of the pottery listed needs to be later than LH III B, although **no. 4** and **no. 6** could well be LH III C Early. It is possible that this area was an open space between structures where material was discarded.

**Square T8.** The square was excavated in 2013 and in 2014, when the “μεγάλος λιθοσωρός” in the SE was also cleared revealing a poorly preserved wall (not on the plan **Pl.1b**). At the NW corner of the trench the south cross wall of the building (Tχ. 9), of which one course only was preserved, rested on a layer of clay 20 cm higher than the foundation course of Tχ. 5. An area of harder gravelly soil (at a depth of 46.23 m), which extended across the width of the square south of the area of Tχ. 9 may have served as a floor given that this would have been the interior of the structure. The excavation concluded upon the removal of this layer.

T8 yielded over 5000 sherds. In the units examined there was a similar proportion of open to closed shapes to that of Sq. 12, but a somewhat lower percentage of coarse pottery: 13-15% instead of 20%.

Diagnostics from the square included the following:

1. Stemmed bowl, FS 305. V-pattern (FM 59). **Pl. 2m**.
2. Stemmed bowl, FS 305. Linear. **Pl. 2o**.
3. Mug (large), FS 226. Linear. **Pl. 2k**.
4. Deep bowl, FS 285. **Pl. 2q**.
5. Open shape (deep bowl?). **Pl. 2n**.
6. Rope handle (vertical). **Pl. 1h**.
7. Open shape. Isolated semi-circles (FM 43). **Pl. 1f**.
8. Matt-painted bowl or jar. **Pl. 1e**.

There are no definite LH IIIA2 diagnostic pieces among the material examined so far from this square. There are, however, several examples of completely monochrome bowls with both short and long everted rims, which are difficult to date at present, but potentially could be quite early. Stemmed bowls **no. 1** and **no. 2** are likely LH III B pieces, although **no. 1**, with its unusual rim could be LH III C Early and so could the mug (**no. 3**). Rim fragments such as **no. 4** are likely to be from LH III C deep bowls, and the tall base **no. 5** (one of two) cannot be earlier than LH III C. The small rope handle **no. 6** should also be LH III C and could be later. Among the patterned sherds, the finely decorated example (**no. 7**) stands out among the sherds from this square, which otherwise bear roughly painted patterns (spirals, semicircles, zigzags). Whether the matt-painted vessel (**no. 8**) belongs with the earlier or later pottery of the square is uncertain. There is no stratigraphical connection between the LH III C (or later) pottery and the added cross wall (Tχ. 9), but its general vicinity to it is suggestive.

**Squares T10 and T14.** The area across these two squares to the E and SE of Tχ. 2 has been designated as open space. The S and SW part of square 10 had a shallow fill and the excavation reached bedrock. The type of pottery from this area does not differ significantly from the other

two squares. The coarseware amounts to almost 20% and includes examples from tripod cooking vessels as well as the rim of a pithos. Among the fineware the percentage of closed vessels is slightly higher than that from the other squares (40-45%), but the significance of this is unclear. A characteristic of T10 is the presence of a number of well-preserved large parts of pots, some consisting of joining fragments from different excavation units. The following is a selection of diagnostic sherds from both squares:

1. Closed vessel, probably jar, FS 69 or hydria, FS 128. Wavy line (FM 53). **Pl. 2b.**
2. Hydria or belly-handled amphora. **Pl. 2e.**
3. Conical kylix. Plain. **Pl. 2i.**
4. Bowl. Isolated semi-circles (FM 43)/ U-pattern (FM 45). **Pl. 2p.**
5. Open shape. Multiple stem (FM 19). **Pl. 1d.**
6. Kalathos, FS 291 or conical bowl, FS 254. Chevrons (FM 58) on rim and spiral? **Pl. 2u.**
7. and 8. Legs of tripod vessels, probably alabastra. **Pl. 2s and 2v.**

The pieces listed here span the period LH IIIA2 (**no. 5**) to late LH IIIB or possibly LH IIIC Early (**no. 6**). **No. 1** has a close parallel in a vessel from Tris Langades with the same decoration on the neck (Benton and Waterhouse 1973, 10 no. 105, 11 Fig. 6), and both should be LH IIIB<sup>5</sup>. **No. 3** is a conical lipless kylix preserved in two large joining fragments. Its narrow and straight-sided shape is reminiscent of the LH IIIC Late conical kylix (FS 275), but it is completely unpainted and its fabric is of superior quality suggesting an earlier than LH IIIC date<sup>6</sup>. The possibility that it is a semi-finished product cannot be excluded. Assignable to LH IIIC are some much worn sherds (not illustrated here) of small shapes with traces of decoration which includes narrow regularly spaced bands.

### **Conclusions**

Palia Stane-Prospholeika is an important site for our understanding of the Mycenaean pottery styles and repertoire from a settlement context on the island. For the first time we have a substantial volume of pottery that includes the palatial periods. The earliest pottery with a certain chronological attribution so far is LH IIIA2. This date is compatible with the earliest pottery from the chamber and tholos tombs in the area of Krane-Livatho. Among the diagnostic pottery, several pieces can be assigned to LH IIIB and some to LH IIIC Early. At present the pottery assignable to LH IIIC-Submycenaean has a much lower visibility, but this could be due to several factors, including the material's greater fragmentation, and more common monochrome decoration. The fact that two areas from which material was examined (T12 and T10-T14) may have served as dumping grounds after clearance of indoor spaces may also be a contributing factor to the higher visibility of the earlier pottery. The more precise assignation of the material to pottery periods will be greatly helped if undisturbed deposits are identified in the future. The inevitable conclusion nonetheless is that the periods from LH IIIA2 to the end of LH IIIB were a significant part of the lifespan of the settlement of Prospholeika, or at least of the excavated area of the site. An isolated Protogeometric sherd (Souyoudzoglou et al. 2017, Pl. CXLIIId) must be regarded, at this stage of the study, as an intrusion.

The range of shapes represented at Prospholeika naturally differs from the most common shapes from the Kephalonian tombs of the district (the bulk of which is LH IIIC). The stemmed bowl, however, a popular shape at the settlement, is well attested in the tombs in its LH IIIC Late incarnation. Settlement and tombs also share the popularity of some motifs (isolated spiral, semi-circle, chevron and zig-zag). Notable affinities exist between the pottery

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<sup>5</sup> The same pattern is present on necks of jars from Karou (Lefkada) (Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 34 and Pl. 1) and Nichoria (Messenia) where it is dated LH IIIA2 (McDonald & Wilkie 1992, P3700, Fig. 9-46).

<sup>6</sup> Differences between an earlier more rounded kylix of FS 274 and a later lipless shape with straighter sides has been noted at Mycenae (Mylonas Shear 1987, 72 n. 29). Changes in the shape of the undecorated kylix over time are also evident at Pylos (Blegen and Rawson 1966, 366-37, Figs 360-364), although none of the examples has such a narrow bowl.

shapes from Prospheleika and those from the long-known settlement of **Starochorafa**, a few kilometers on the other side of the plain (see Souyoudzoglou et al. 2017, 386-387) of which, unfortunately, very little material has survived. They include the everted rims of open shapes and the frequency of open shapes that are completely monochrome as well as the popularity of divided legs. A difference between the two sites is the greater popularity of the kylix at Starochorafa compared to Prospheleika. Outside the island, the pottery from the recent investigations at Lithakia -Kamaroti on Zakynthos has produced similar vessel shapes<sup>7</sup>. Finally, the material has numerous elements in common with the LH IIIA - late LH IIIB pottery from **Tris Langades** on Ithaki (Benton & Waterhouse 1973). Apart from the parallels mentioned above, these include the scarcity of high-stemmed kylikes, the popularity of kraters and bowls with everted rims, the stemmed bowls, the divided and double rolled legs, and common patterns in the decorated pottery. The two sites also share the same type of coarseware and the presence of matt-painted pottery. It is evident therefore that the close cultural connections between the two islands, which have been known for some time for the LH IIIC period, were already underway in the palatial period.

We hope that the continuing study of the pottery in combination with further excavation will help us improve our understanding of this significant site, adding more detail to its chronology, development over time and articulation in the western Mycenaean periphery and the Adriatic zone during the Late Bronze Age.

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<sup>7</sup> Van Wijngaarden & Pieters 2017, 378-379.

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