

LANDSCAPES OF POWER IN PROTOPALATIAL CRETE: NEW EVIDENCE FROM GALATAS, PEDIADA*

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INTRODUCTION

A series of complex socio-economic changes led to the emergence of the first polities on Crete at the beginning of the 19th c. BCE (Watrous 1994; Manning 2008). The social and political organization of these early political formations was, and still is, the focus of vivid discussion, especially after the integration of relevant theoretical thinking. According to a long-established narrative, during the 150 years of the Protopalatial period these polities strengthened their position and formed a complex ideological, economic, and cultural setting over extensive territories (Cherry 1984; 1986). The distinctive materialization of this new socio-political order was the monumental court-centred building generally known as a 'palace'. Palaces used to be regarded as seats of centralized hierarchies, integrating and controlling economic, political and ritual activities. This narrative has now been questioned, and it has been argued that the political landscape of palatial polities was less hierarchical than hitherto assumed, with socio-political affairs influenced by different elite groups operating around the palace (Schoep 2006).

A common feature of all these attempts at understanding the political landscape of the Protopalatial period is their focus on the organization and functioning of the economic, political and social institutions within the territories of the 'First Palaces'. Economic analyses and/or spatial distribution of material culture have been used to reconstruct the extent of the political and cultural domains of the great Protopalatial polities of Knossos, Phaistos and Malia, as well as smaller centres such as those of Petras and Amari (e.g. Cadogan 1994; 1995; Haggis 2007; Knappett 1999a; Schoep 2006; Carinci and La Rosa 2007).

But is the political landscape of Protopalatial Crete made up solely of political systems operating in the context of palace-centred domains? Can narratives of socio-political development drawn from data from these domains be considered representative of the complex political, social, economic and ideological processes taking place in the Protopalatial period? We will attempt to answer this question

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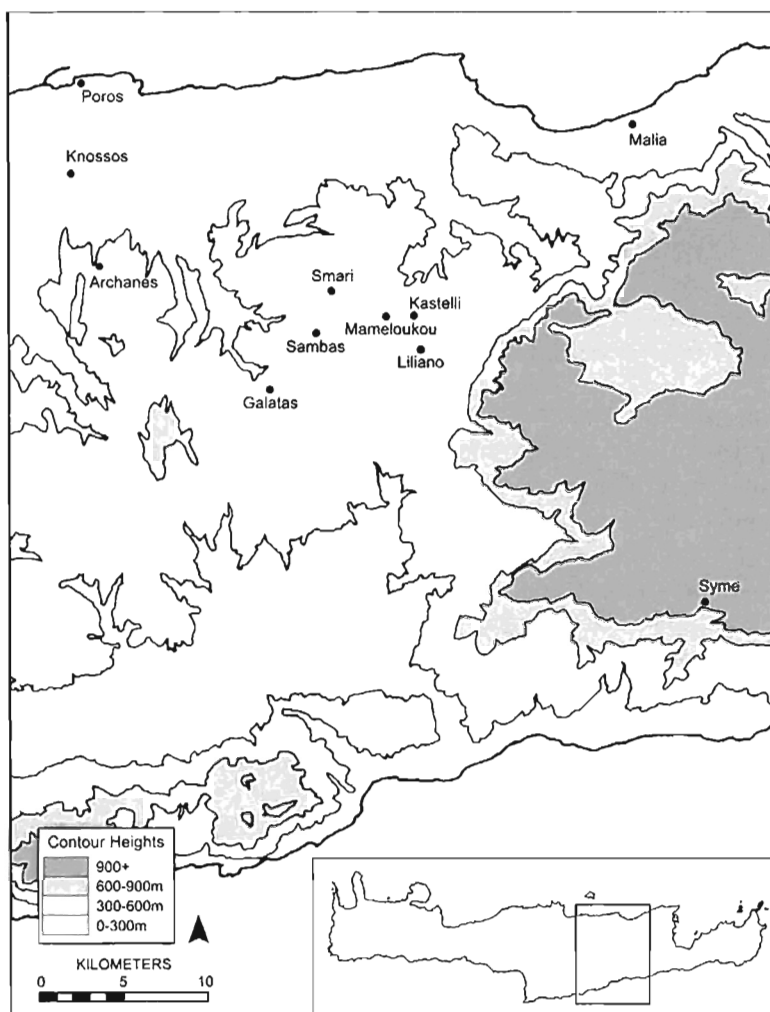


Fig. 1 – Map showing the principal sites of the Pediada and relevant sites in the surrounding regions mentioned in the text.

based on the results of our research in the area of the Pediada, in north-central Crete. The Pediada, a previously neglected region in such a thoroughly dug-over and surveyed island, has become in recent decades the field of intensive archaeological reconnaissance (Fig. 1). Excavation and survey projects have revealed a dense network of settlements and small sites, lacking, however, a court-centred building and the central authority this is assumed to represent (Dimopoulou 1986-7; Rethemiotakis 1988; 1990; 1992; 1991-3; 1993-4; 2002; Rethemiotakis and Christakis 2004; Rethemiotakis and Christakis, in press a; Whitley 2003-4, 79-80; Hatzivallianou 2006, 166-211; Panagiotakis 2003; 2004; Watrous, in preparation). Furthermore, archaeological excavations have brought to light pottery assemblages whose production and distribution are deeply rooted in a local cultural tradition quite distinct from that of the major Protopalatial potting centres (Rethemiotakis

and Christakis 2004). Potters not only produce unique ceramics but also disdain any innovation from other potting centres, persisting in an innate conservatism.

The aim of the present article is the investigation of the socio-political dynamics that developed during the Protopalatial period within the geographical framework of the Pediada. The study of the political, economic and ideological mechanisms operating in this region, in the vicinity of the great state-level polities, will contribute substantially to a better understanding of Protopalatial political organization. We address the above issue by discussing the results of the excavation of the Protopalatial centre at Galatas, the community that flourished during Middle Minoan IB, before the establishment of the Neopalatial town, while also incorporating information from the other centres of the region. We will show that the picture of a political landscape – at least during the Early Protopalatial period – dominated exclusively by groups active around the palatial centres must be revised, and argue for the co-existence of palace-centred and non-palace-centred polities.

THE PROTOPALATIAL CENTRE OF GALATAS

The Protopalatial settlement of Galatas is located on a hill, known as Galatiani Kefala, in the southwest part of the Pediada plain, in north-central Crete (Figs. 1-2). The hill dominates the natural pass along the Karteros river, leading from the north to the south eastern area of Central Crete. Fertile arable land extends across the surrounding area. Visual communication from the hilltop with the region of Knossos and the peak sanctuary of Juktas to the north, the Lasithi uplands to the east, and the Mesara and the peak sanctuary of Kophinas to the south, makes Galatiani Kefala one of the most strategic landmarks of the Pediada. The ruins of a previous settlement inhabited from Early Minoan I to Middle Minoan IA, with some gaps during Early Minoan IIB and Early Minoan III which may, however, be due to the limited extent of the excavation – although of course the site may have been abandoned – were levelled for the foundation of the Protopalatial settlement.

The visual impact of the hill on the topographic scenery of the Pediada would have been enhanced by the architecture of the settlement itself. Its actual size and layout are unknown; the settlement must have extended across the whole area on which the palace was later built, with the exception of the Central Court (Fig. 2). No traces of buildings were found there, perhaps because they were razed in order to lay the stone paving of the court. Middle Minoan IB vases carefully placed in the cavities of the bedrock, possibly remains of ritual offerings, were excavated in the area south of the palace, where the monumental platform with the baetyl was installed in the Middle Minoan III period, while dumps of Middle Minoan IB debris were found below the foundations of the Neopalatial Buildings 6 and 7, also located south of the palace.

These deposits, actually heaps of rubbish from Protopalatial buildings, were moved here to level the area prior to the construction of the Neopalatial complexes. The excavated area covers approximately one hectare, although there are indications that the settlement must have been larger. The best-preserved remains, in

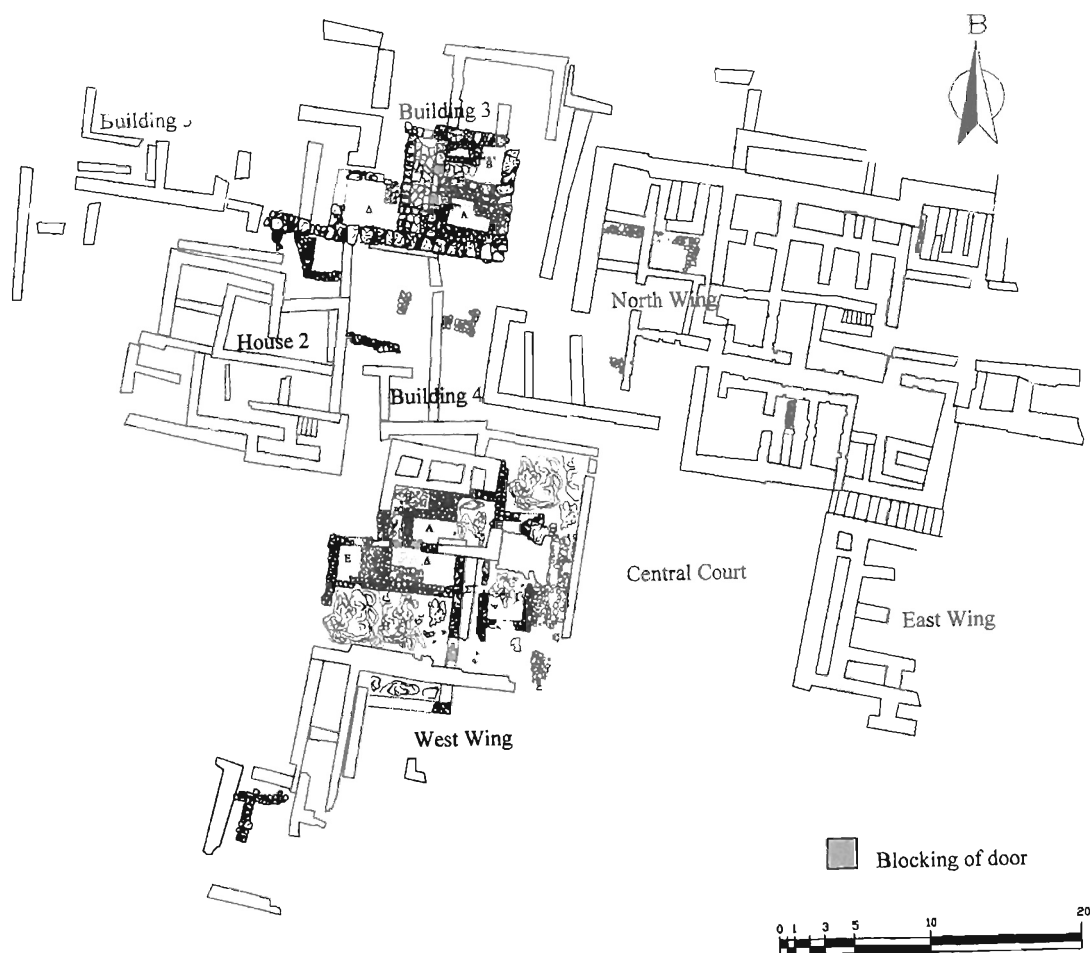


Fig. 2 – State plan of Protopalatial buildings below the foundations of the palace.

terms of architecture and artefactual assemblages, were those of the complex below the West Wing of the palace and Building 3.

The Building in the area of the West Wing of the palace

The remains of a complex, covering a total of about 272 sq. m., have come to light below the foundations of the north section of the West Wing of the palace (Figs. 2-3). The preserved part includes eight spaces; the original complex, however, was considerably larger. Architectural remains in the southwest area of the West Wing may have formed part of the complex. Based on this evidence, albeit incomplete, the Protopalatial building would have originally covered a total of 450 sq. m.

The basic feature of the preserved part of the building is the long north-south corridor (Room ΣΤ) leading to the rooms on the east (Room Ζ) and north-west

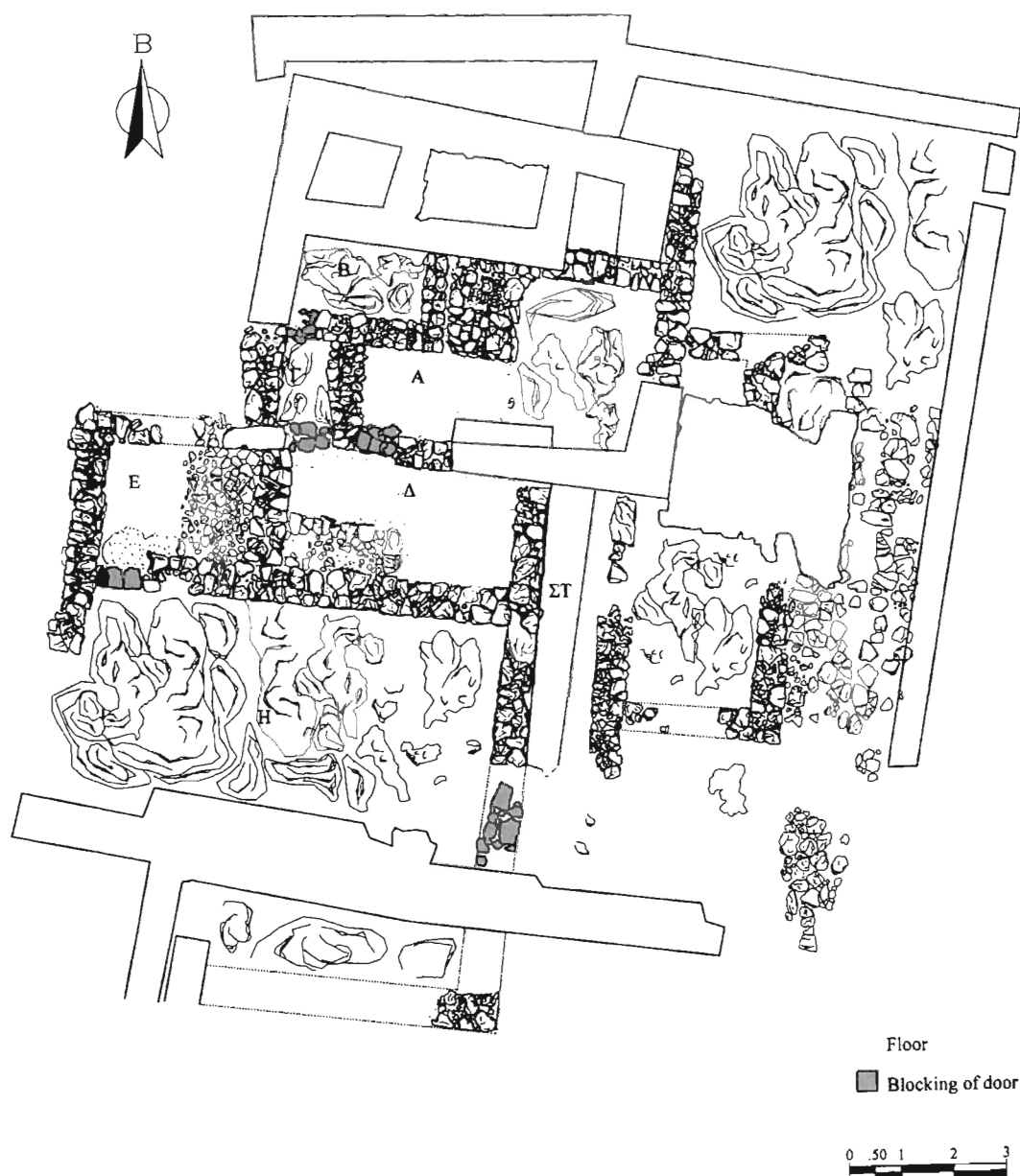


Fig. 3 – State plan of the Building under the West Wing of the palace.

(Rooms A, B, Γ, Δ and E) (Fig. 3). The south part of the corridor is only indistinctly preserved due to Middle Minoan IIIA building activity. However, there would have been a doorway opening onto a large open-air space, Court H, which was walled on its north, east and south sides, and must have been open towards the west. A door in the north-west corner led to a small room, Room E. There were built stone platforms in Rooms A, Δ and E. Those in Rooms E and Δ are low, built of undressed stones along their outer sides and small pebbles inside. The platform in Room A is higher than the others and its upper surface is carefully laid with cobblestones and



Fig. 4 – The Building in the area of the West Wing: platform with stone mortar in Room A (from the south).

disused querns, with a stone mortar placed approximately in the centre (Fig. 4). These structures were probably used for various activities, including grinding of cereals. Four grinders and sixteen querns were mounted carefully against the east wall of Room Δ. The platform in Room A was evidently used for a similar purpose.

The complex suffered an earthquake destruction in the Middle Minoan IB period: ground-floor spaces were abandoned, floors cleared out – only the stone tools in Room Δ were left in situ – and all the doors built up to reinforce the stability of the upper storey. The heap of plaster found in Room E was certainly connected with these architectural alterations. The layout of the upper storey is unknown; it is very likely, though, that the design corresponded to that of the ground floor. A fierce fire at the end of Middle Minoan IB destroyed the building, which was subsequently abandoned. The area was deserted and remained uninhabited until Middle Minoan IIIA, when the West Wing of the newly-designed palace was built.

The artefactual assemblages fallen from the upper storey into the abandoned spaces of the ground floor during the final destruction provide important information on the activities of the people using the complex, activities over and above those of meeting the simple everyday needs of a household, and closer to the level of buildings housing multiple and specialized uses and functions. A large assemblage of intact and partly preserved vessels was kept on the upper storey; tumblers, conical cups, tall tumblers, straight-sided cups, carinated cups, bridge-spouted jugs, jugs, kalathoi, amphoras, and a large beaked jug were the commonest



Fig. 5 – The Building in the area of the West Wing: Room Γ, upper-floor ceramic deposit.

shapes (Fig. 5). Many tumblers were carefully placed inside one another, usually two or three together, while in other cases tumblers had been placed inside bridge-spouted jars and carinated cups. The overall picture suggests that the vases were stored in a cupboard. Besides these shapes, ceramic assemblages also comprise plates and saucers, bowls, cooking trays, cooking-pots, basins and storage jars, though in a very fragmentary state of preservation. Fragments of three pithoi, with an overall capacity of about 320 litres, fallen into Room B show that the corresponding area of the upper storey was devoted to storage. The pronounced traces of fire in the upper floor collapse, where the pithoi were found, may have resulted from the combustion of goods stored in these containers.

Angular body profiles, strap handles, thin walls, undulating rims, monochrome coated surfaces with red slips, and the rarity of painted patterns are the main features of drink-serving vessels at Galatas (Rethemiotakis and Christakis 2004; Figs. 6-7). Despite the simplicity of shape and decoration, this pottery shows a considerable investment in skilled work. Potters were experts in using wheel technology, and some products, not illustrated here, approach eggshell fineness. It is worth noting that wheel technology was introduced to the Pediada in Middle Minoan IA: wheel-thrown pottery imported from the Pediada was found at Knossos in well-stratified Middle Minoan IA contexts (Knappett 1999b). The discovery of fine wheel-thrown pottery in such an early context is especially significant, demonstrating that important technological innovations occurred not in palatial domains – as it is generally argued – but in ‘provincial’ areas.

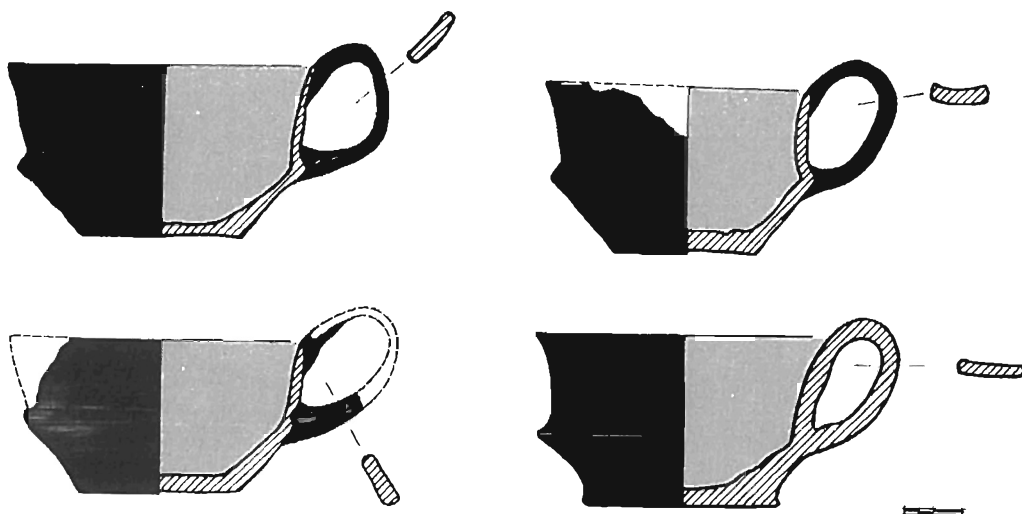


Fig. 6 – Carinated cups from the Building in the area of the West Wing of the palace.

Vessels were made in local clays from the area east of the site – in the territory of the modern village of Thrapsano and its surrounding alluvial basin (petrographic analyses have been carried out by C. Knappett and E. Faber, the latter on polychrome ware; we would like to thank them for the information). A small percentage of tableware was made of a deep-red clay from the area of the neighbouring Protopalatial centre of Kastelli. Beside local clays, there are also others, represented in smaller percentages, which seem to have come from areas outside the Pedia-da such as north-central Crete, the Mesara, and the south coast (Macdonald and Knappett 2007, 156; Faber *et al.* 2009).

An ivory seal and the pommel of a sword or dagger (Fig. 8), products of high craftsmanship, were found in the upper floor deposit. The seal is conical with a sealing surface depicting spiral motifs and it could be attributed, on stylistic grounds, to an Archanes workshop (E. Papatsaroucha pers. comm. 2002). The pommel of the sword or dagger is made of hippopotamus ivory. Its size, 5.2 cm. in diameter, and the precious material used, clearly show that the weapon it once decorated would have served as a symbol of authority and prestige.

The destruction deposits have produced a significant number of querns and grinders, indicating that processing of staples also continued into the last phase of use of the complex. Of course, the fact that the built grinding installations of the ground floor had fallen into disuse indicates changes in the organisation and scale of those activities. Blades, shards and cores of Melian obsidian suggest that some spaces were used as ‘workshops’. Of particular interest are the two shards of bovid bones, which have been sawn across, similar to those excavated in the Atelier de Sceaux at Quartier Mu at Malia (Poursat 1996, 121, pl. 45). These two finds from Galatas indicate the existence of a ‘workshop’ for making bone tools or other objects.

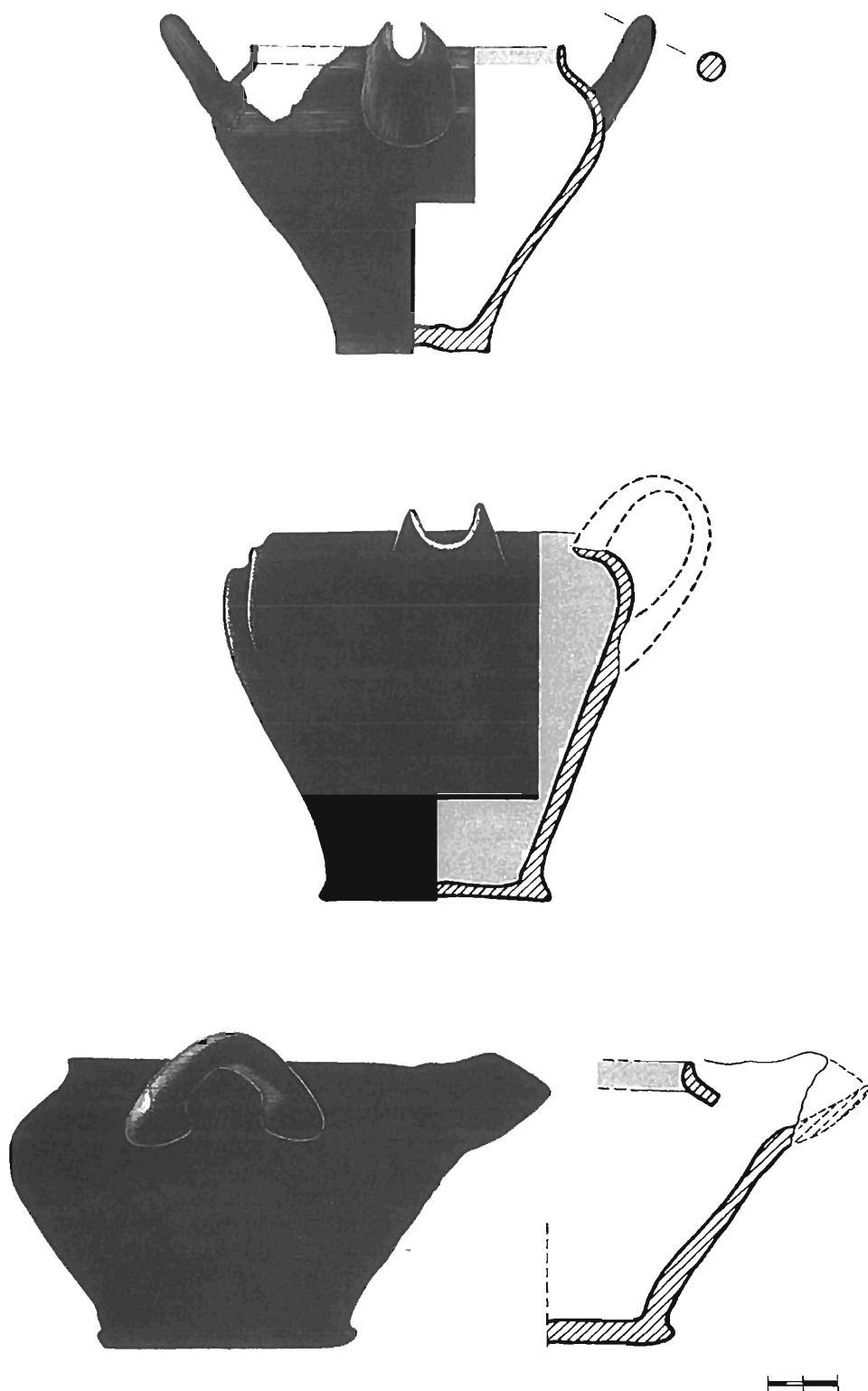


Fig. 7 – Bridge-spouted jars from the Building in the area of the West Wing of the palace.

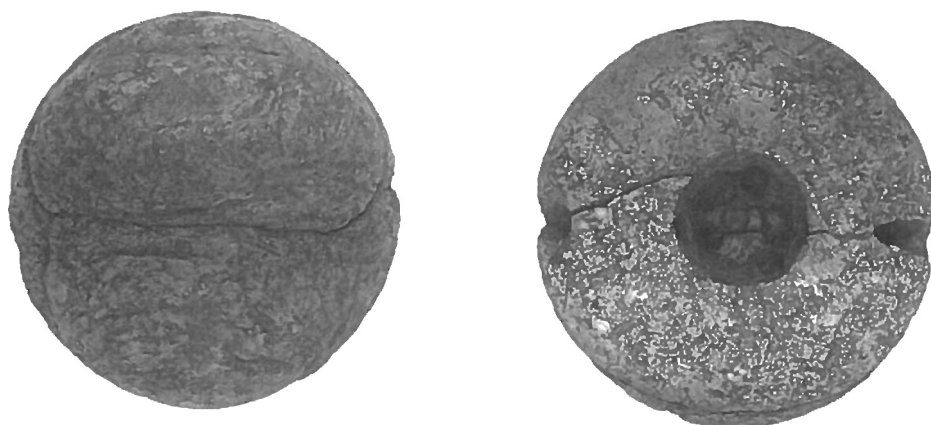


Fig. 8 – The pommel of a sword or dagger: front and back view (diameter 5.2 cm).

Building 3

The second complex of the Protopalatial settlement, Building 3, was built at the northwest end of the hill, west of the North Wing of the palace (Figs. 2, 9-11). A Middle Minoan IA building was levelled for its foundation. Building 3 was destroyed by fire in Middle Minoan IB, like the complex in the West Wing of the palace, and its ruins must have remained undisturbed for many decades until Middle Minoan IIIA, when the complex was radically rebuilt and extended westwards, assuming its final form and function as a probable annex to the North Wing of the palace (Building 3/5 in the nomenclature of the Neopalatial complex). The architectural layout suggests a considerable investment of labour for the construction of the complex. The outer walls – of which only the east and south, 7.50 and 16.10 m long respectively, survive – are solidly built of large blocks forming a level surface for the foundations of the superstructure. The inner walls, also solidly constructed of roughly dressed large blocks, would have supported the heavy superstructure and the loads of the floor and roof. The existence of an upper floor is also attested by the finding of many fragments of schist slabs in the fill of Rooms A and B, presumably from the paving of the upper floors. The pavement of the preserved spaces was of painted plaster (Room A) or of large stone slabs (Rooms B and Γ; Fig. 11).

Rebuilding activities during the Neopalatial period were so extensive that only four rooms of the Protopalatial complex (Building 3), covering a total area of approximately 88 sq. m., were preserved in the new building program (i.e. Building 3/5), while the rest was drastically modified. Two of the ground-floor spaces, Rooms A and B, were not functionally incorporated into Building 3/5, thus preserving their Middle Minoan IB deposits undisturbed while the other two, Rooms Γ and Δ, were cleared of the Middle Minoan IB debris and reused.

Building 3/5 underwent many modifications in its lifespan, until its final destruction by fierce fire at the end of Late Minoan IB. The richness of artefactual assemblages, including many large storage containers, fine tableware and prestig-

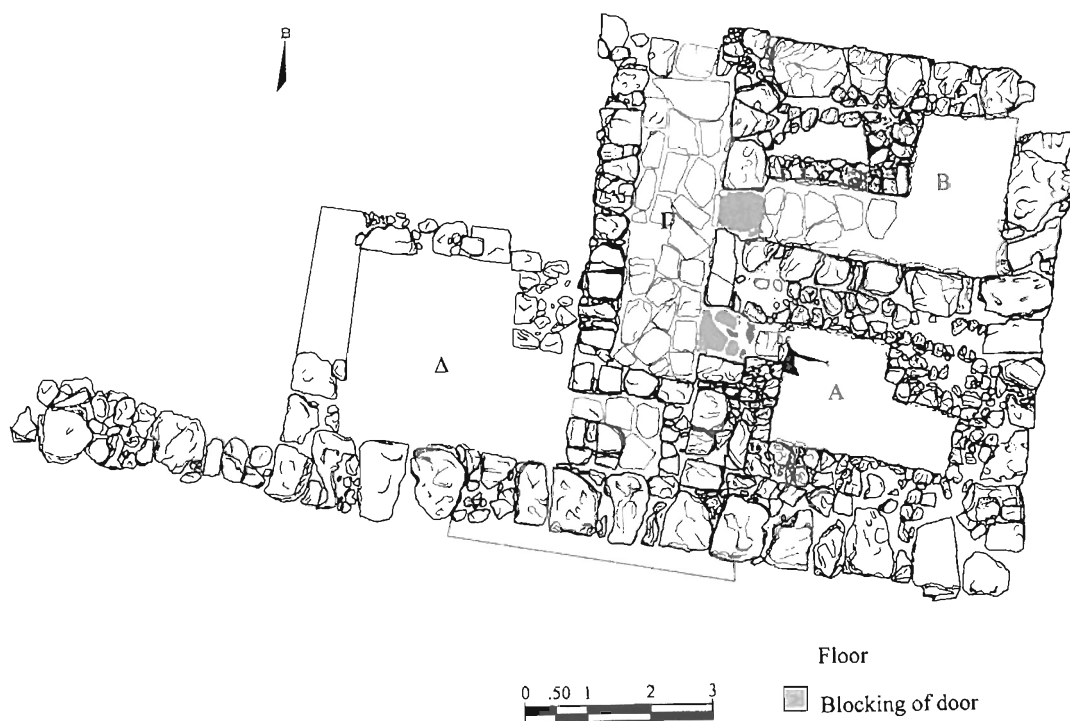


Fig. 9 – State plan of Building 3.



Fig. 10 – North-east section of Building 3 viewed from east.



Fig. 11 – Building 3: Room Γ viewed from north.



Fig. 12 – Animal figurines (frontal view: length 3.8; width 4.5; h. 3.5).



Fig. 13 – Drawing of the seal imprint on the handle of an amphora. Scale ca. 3:1.



Fig. 14 – Building 3: Room A, channel and animal figurine viewed from the north.

ious artefacts, shows that, at least in its final period of use, Building 3/5 was used by an eminent group of Galatas society (Christakis and Rethemiotakis, 2011; Rethemiotakis and Christakis, 2011).

Room A is the best preserved of the rooms of the Protopalatial phase. Four high benches, preserved to a height of up to 60 cm, run along the walls of the room, while a rectangular structure (a pedestal) was built opposite the doorway. The room had two floors, both laid in plaster, the lower painted red while the upper remained white. A narrow, shallow channel was cut into the upper floor before the plaster dried (Fig. 14). It runs east to west, from the centre of the room to the south door-jamb of the entrance, where a shallow depression was formed in the plaster. A group of five small, joined horned animal figurines was deposited in this cavity, while tumblers and carinated cups were found in the southeast corner of the space (Fig. 12). The architecture and finds indicate that Room A had been used for domestic cult purposes.

A synopsis

Having briefly presented the evidence from the Protopalatial settlement at Galatas, we may now attempt to summarize the main points. The data are certainly fragmentary, especially compared to those from other centres of Crete. This is due to the complex taphonomic history of the site on the one hand, and to limited archaeological investigation on the other. There is no doubt, however, that the evidence to date highlights the importance of Galatas as a peripheral centre within the Pediada. The foundation of the settlement on a hill overlooking extensive fertile lands and which provided lines of sight to regions beyond the narrow geographical confines of the Pediada, was surely a well-planned choice made by the group that settled Galatas. Galatas was also strategically positioned at a crossing of routes linking the north, south and east regions of north-central Crete, regions of important political and cultural authorities centred on Knossos, Phaistos, and Malia.

In the present state of knowledge, it is hard to see how the two Protopalatial complexes excavated so far fit into the plan of the settlement (Fig. 2). The site and architectural layout of Building 3, however, were certainly not determined by chance. The extent of the area covered by Building 3, the impressive block masonry construction and its original great height, deduced from the thick and sturdy foundations, would have given it a tower-like appearance, impressive from afar. This may be exactly why it was set at the northwest end of the hill near the cliff, making it visible at a great distance, particularly from the roads running north and south, which would have passed through the valley west of the hill (Rethemiotakis and Christakis, in press). Building 3, therefore, was a landmark for both the settlement itself and the surrounding region. The architectural layout and construction of the building below the West Wing of the palace were not as elaborate as those of Building 3. The building material is modest, the architectural layout simple, and the complex is positioned in a less visible location on the hilltop. Is the Building of the West Wing an independent unit of the town, or might it be connected to some other complex? It is difficult to answer this question based on the available excavation data. However, it seems very likely that two buildings were complementary in func-

tion, Building 3 being the seat of the most eminent elite group of the settlement, and the building of the West Wing being a complex used by this group and its retainers for the processing and storage of staples, workshop activities and gatherings.

An important parameter in the development and flourishing of the settlement at Galatas was direct access to highly productive agricultural land. This is the case with most settlements in the Pediada, the most fertile region of central Crete after the Mesara (Christakis 2008b, 166, 174). The growth of sites, especially those near arable land, from the Prepalatial to the Protopalatial periods points to the increased importance of dry farming and probably stock-raising (Panagiotakis 2004; Watrous, in preparation). Galatas in particular is surrounded by arable land whose carrying potential could easily cover the subsistence needs of its inhabitants and provide the capital required to establish and maintain social and political power. The survey carried out in the environs of Galatas shows a considerable increase in small village, hamlet and farmstead numbers during the Protopalatial period, proof of intensified exploitation of natural sources (Watrous, in preparation).

The large number of querns and mortars found in the building below the West Wing of the palace points to systematic cereal processing and, indirectly, to well-organized agricultural exploitation. So do the built grinding platforms, tangible evidence of a desire for better organization and use of the staple processing area. This picture is predictable, since cereal consumption was the cornerstone of subsistence in the pre-industrial Aegean (Christakis 2008a, 19-20).

The scale of cereal processing would have surpassed the subsistence needs of a simple household and met those of an extended household/group. Processing activities would have required control and programming, both for the collection of cereals and for the processing and successive distribution of flour, in order to cover dependents' needs and gain a surplus. It is worth noting that processing and consumption of cereals was also a stable economic basis for the development and welfare of Galatas in the following centuries. Large assemblages of querns and grinders were found in the palace itself and the buildings of the Neopalatial town (Rethemiotakis 2002).

Access to the produce of such extensive fertile lands would provide the ruling group with the staple capital to consolidate and maintain its political power and finance its enterprises within intra-settlement, regional and intra-regional frameworks. The degree of exploitation exerted by a local authority on its hinterland is determined by its interest in the mobilization and consumption of certain commodities and the specialization of minor centres in the production of certain types of goods (Christakis 2008a, 143). Of course, the existence of other major centres in the Pediada, such as those of Kastelli, Sambas and Smari, as well as smaller ones, and the need to cover both the subsistence requirements of their inhabitants and the political aspirations of local rulers, would inevitably have created a competitive political landscape (Fig. 1).

In this competitive framework we can better understand the strategies of consumption of material wealth adopted by the ruling group at Galatas. The large assemblages of tableware from the complex in the area of the West Wing definitely indicate the organisation and material support of banquets. Feasting, as has been widely discussed in the recent literature, is a dynamic social process, which vali-

dates, legitimizes and maintains political, social and ideological power (e.g. Dietler 1996; Hamilakis 1996; 1999; Wright 2004; Hitchcock *et al.* 2008). The act of feasting is a strongly symbolic one, stressing and maintaining status by a variety of means including the food, drink, clothing and vessels used. These last are especially important prestige objects whose status symbolism is dependent on their origin, quality, skilled labour investment, imitation of rare goods, and significance in ritual and exchange of gifts. The distinctive and standardized morphological features of the tableware produced and used at Galatas highlight the drinking 'etiquette' imposed by the local ruling authority. The display of emblems of rank at such events of intense social interaction enhances the dynamic of feasting, confirming and consolidating political and social status (e.g. Wason 1994, 103-26). Perhaps the rich sword or dagger, whose pommel was found in the destruction layer, may have been one of the objects involved in this strategy. A corresponding practice has been noted at the palace of Malia, where similar swords have been discovered in rooms adjacent to ceremonial spaces (Chapouthier 1938).

Lastly, the archaeological data regarding the economic relationships between Galatas and the other centres within the Pediada, or even far distant regions, are also of interest. Pottery from the Protopalatial town of Galatas is our principal source of evidence. Small amounts of tableware were imported from neighbouring Kastelli, an important potting centre of the region, whose output is distinctive for its high quality. Tableware imported from potting centres outside the Pediada is also represented in low percentages. These are mainly straight-sided cups, tall tumblers and bridge-spouted jars, all decorated in simple polychrome patterns (Fig. 15). These imports represent about 9% of the total pottery assemblages excavated at Galatas. Petrographic analysis suggests provenance from north-central Crete and the Mesara (Macdonald and Knappett 2007, 156; Faber *et al.* 2009). The low percentages of pottery imported from outside the Pediada are indicative of the strict and conservative trend in the production, distribution and consumption of tableware, which places emphasis on pottery produced according to regional cultural idiosyncrasies. This strictness and conservatism become yet more obvious if we consider the high semiotic value of imported ware.

Imports of medium and large vessels (amphoras, whole-mouthed jars and pithoi) from areas outside the Pediada, such as north-central Crete, the south coast, and the Mesara, are represented in higher percentages than those of tableware. This picture is indicative of the intra-regional movement of vessels, either as merchandise or as goods containers (for the movement of storage containers, see Christakis 2005, 57-8). Among the imports is an amphora, probably from north-central Crete, of which only the handle is preserved, with a seal imprint depicting a human figure (Fig. 13). There are also correspondingly high percentages of cooking pots imported from Kastelli, an important potting centre of cooking ware whose output was also exported to nearby regions.

The evidence for obsidian working from the building below the West Wing of the palace, places Galatas among the network of centres which acquired and processed this imported material. If we consider the significant role of Poros in importing and working obsidian (Dimopoulou 1997; Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2004), and the relationships which had developed between Poros and the Pediada, as the considerable imports of Pediada pottery to Poros and Knossos convincingly prove

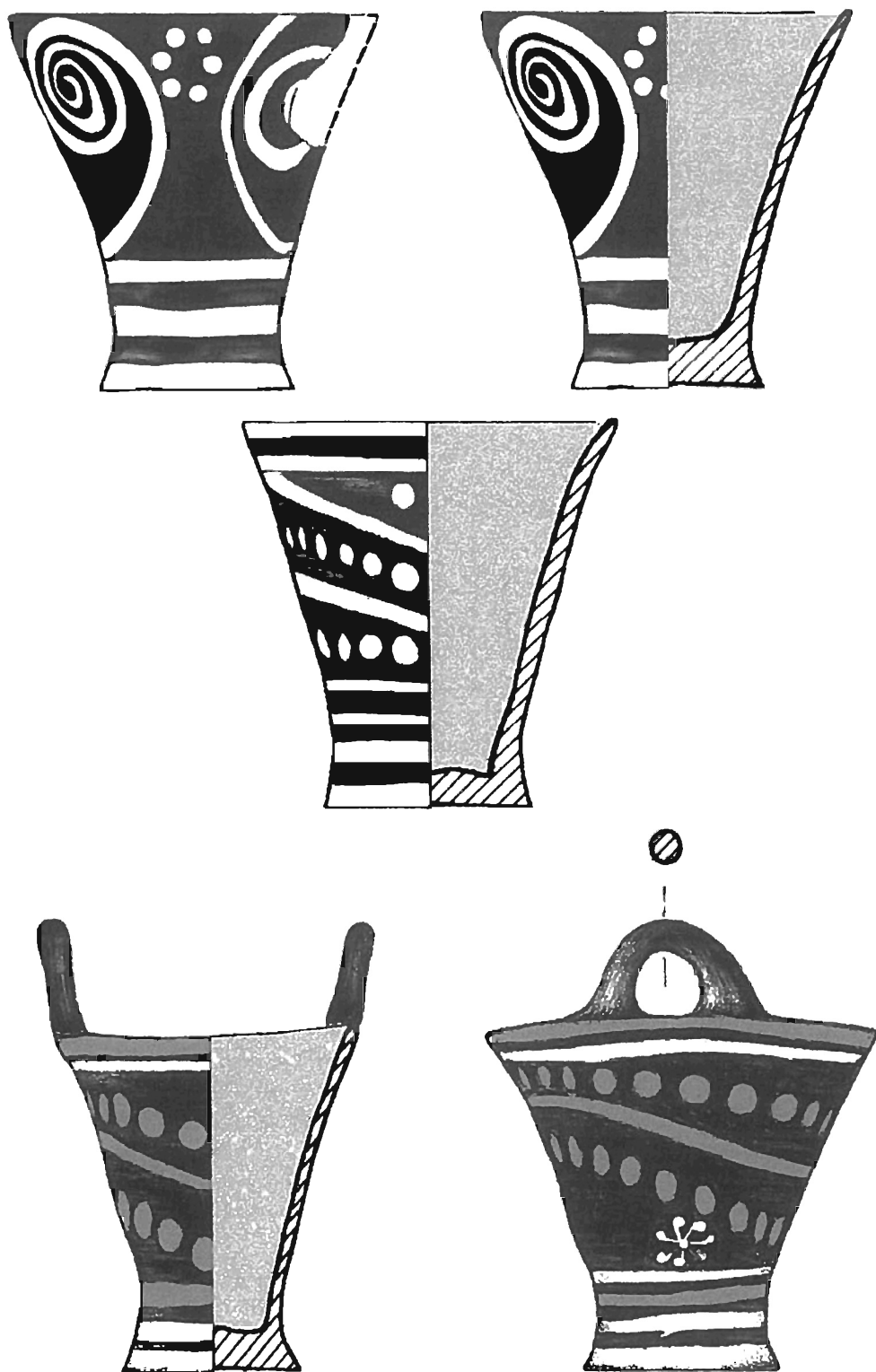


Fig. 15 – Imported pottery from the area of north-central Crete.

(Rethemiotakis and Christakis 2004), it is reasonable to suppose that the obsidian at Galatas comes from Poros. On the subject of obsidian, it is worth mentioning the obsidian 'workshop' discovered at the 'Stou Mamaloukou' peak sanctuary, close to Kastelli (Whitley 2003-4, 79-80). The rescue excavation brought to light a circular building dated to Middle Minoan IA, from which large assemblages of flakes and cores were collected. The 'workshop', whose production was probably intended for the nearby settlement of Kastelli, was active during Middle Minoan IA, before the establishment of the peak sanctuary in Middle Minoan IB. The location of the 'workshop' on a hilltop is rather unusual, especially considering that obsidian working usually took place in spaces within urban centres (Evely 1993, 128-34). It is also interesting that the peak sanctuary was subsequently installed on the same hill. Evidence from Bronze Age Crete and the Aegean, as well as Egypt and the Near East, provides numerous references linking the production and consumption of obsidian with ceremonial or ritual behaviour, while obsidian itself has medico-magical properties and cosmological associations (Carter 2004; Aufrère 1991; Decourt 1998).

GALATAS WITHIN ITS REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

Galatas is an important centre of the Pediada and the only one to have been investigated extensively, but it was certainly not unique. Evidence from surveys illustrates that the Pediada was densely populated during the Protopalatial period (Panagiotakis 2003; 2004; Watrous, in preparation). Occupation spread across the lowland area overlooking the north coast of the island, along the west branch of the river Karteros, and across the large plain in the south part of the region. Some of these sites had existed since Prepalatial times and many others arose during the Protopalatial period. The growth of sites witnessed in the Pediada is replicated in survey data from other regions of the island (e.g. Haggis 2005, 69-70; Hayden 2004, 81-122; Watrous and Hatzivallianou 2004, 277-91). Expansion, however, was not the only development in settlement patterns, as site numbers in others regions remained stable or even decreased (Tsipopoulou 1989; Moody *et al.* 1996; Blackman and Branigan 1977).

Kastelli was also a major ceramic centre of the region. Its tableware follows the potting tradition of the Pediada (Rethemiotakis and Christakis 2004). The potters, however, used a distinctive red-brown clay, and vessels are coated with a highly-polished red slip that tends to assume the gleam and feel of metal. Painted, mostly simple geometric patterns, and incised decorative motifs also occur frequently (Dimopoulou 1986-7, 31-2, 36; MacGillivray 1998, pl. 46, nos. 143-5; Pendlebury *et al.* 1935-36, 60, fig. 14, nos 524, 526; Momigliano 1991, pl. 30.21). The distribution of this pottery is quite restricted, as is that of the metal vessels it imitates. It is worth noting, for example, that there is little imported pottery from Kastelli in Galatas. Only small amounts of pottery produced at Kastelli were imported to the sanctuary of Syme, which, as we shall see, was directly linked to the Pediada. Small amounts were also imported to Knossos. In the extremely competitive and internally complicated social landscape of Protopalatial Knossos, the ceramic production of Kastelli, due to its overstressed resemblance to metal vessels, seems to have constituted a

reference point for defining the meaning and content of social status, and also for stressing the limits and levels of social hierarchy (Rethemiotakis and Christakis 2004).

Linked to Kastelli were two peak sanctuaries, complementary in terms of their spatial and temporal associations; they belong to the same centre, they exhibit coherency in the composition of the cultic assemblages and continuity in use (Rethemiotakis, *in press*). The first, on the 'Stou Mamaloukou' hillock, flourished during Middle Minoan IB. Offerings include numerous human and animal figurines and clay models of buildings and mountainous landscapes. In Middle Minoan IIA the sanctuary was abandoned and replaced by a new place of cult located on the prominent peak of 'Kephala Lilianou'. The pattern of cult retains its essential characteristics; the most frequent finds, beside pottery, are the animal figurines, though smaller in size, mostly bovids but also some goats or ibexes.

There are also types of rectangular models or vessels, some of which would have been surmounted by horns of consecration, a new element in cult judging from its almost total absence from 'Stou Mamaloukou'. The total volume of artefactual assemblages, however, is far smaller than that of the previous sanctuary, demonstrating a remarkable decline of cultic activity in Middle Minoan IIB. The sanctuary was abandoned early in Middle Minoan IIIA. Despite intensive survey-work, no evidence was found to suggest dissemination beyond the environs of Kastelli, or the continuity or revival of peak sanctuary cult in the entire Pediada region.

The abandonment of the 'Stou Mamaloukou' sanctuary and the foundation of a new one at Lilianou may be connected to the political upheavals which are believed to have taken place in the Pediada area during the Middle Minoan II period. The occurrence of models of structures surmounted by horns of consecration at 'Kephala Lilianou', a type of votive offering not attested at the 'Stou Mamaloukou' peak sanctuary, suggests changes in cult. These changes may indicate Knossian involvement in Pediada affairs, since horns of consecration are probably connected to Knossian official cult (D'Agata 1992).

The patterns of socio-political hierarchy within the Pediada are unknown due to gaps in the evidence, though new excavations can and will help us to address the question. Did one of the settlements mentioned above dominate the Pediada, or was each an independent entity with its own sphere of influence? The excavated records available to date do not confirm the supremacy of a particular settlement over the entire region. Observed differences in natural setting, urban organization and architecture, and production and consumption of ceramics between Galatas and Kastelli suggest that these two centres made their own strategic choices. Evidence that one of the neighbouring palace-centred polities controlled the Pediada or was involved in local affairs during MM IB is also lacking, and the limited amount of imported pottery throughout the Pediada argues against this. It seems more likely that different local centres of power with separate spheres of influence were active in the region. Local elites followed their own agendas in order to acquire, maintain and legitimize power, and in doing so would have inevitably created a landscape of ever-increasing competition.

The natural wealth of the Pediada, combined with the fact that pivotal communication routes crossed the region, provided the necessary conditions for prosperity. Of course, prosperity was not guaranteed, being largely determined by the deci-

sions of the ruling groups and the rationale and ambitions of their members. The dynamism of the Pediada centres is most obvious in the role they played in the establishment of the sanctuary at Syme. Stylistic, decorative and technological features as well as clay technology prove that a high percentage of pottery excavated in Building V – the first monumental complex built at Syme in Middle Minoan IB – was produced by potting groups active in the Pediada (Christakis, *in press*). A small fraction of this pottery was imported from the Kastelli area, while a few vases, mostly cups, were imported from north-central Crete. The overall picture is reminiscent of the patterns of pottery distribution observed at Galatas. The large amounts of pottery imported from the Pediada make a strong point about the close relationship between the sanctuary and that region. Thus the role of groups from the Pediada in the foundation of this important cult centre seems to have been highly relevant.

NON-PALACE CENTRED POLITIES IN PROTOPALATIAL CRETE

The current prevailing view is that palace-centred institutions dominated the landscape of power in Protopalatial Crete. These polities are presumed to have arisen and developed across the whole island – they have been postulated even in regions where research has failed to provide relevant data (e.g. Cherry 1986; Cadogan 1994) – forming an integrated cultural and political horizon with only minor regional variations. The socio-political organization of these domains has been, as we have seen, the subject of much discussion, whose validity is largely determined by the qualitative and quantitative distribution of the testimonies, and the methodologies used in interpreting the archaeological record.

We would argue that the body of evidence from the Pediada, briefly presented above, challenges the picture of an island divided into palace-centred domains. Varied and intensive archaeological research has failed to detect the socio-political developments that could have led to the rise of palace-centred polities, such as those which emerged in the neighbouring areas of Knossos, Malia and Phaistos. On the contrary, independent groups, sharing common cultural idiosyncrasies, were active in the Pediada during the early Protopalatial period. The common cultural horizon does not, of course, necessarily indicate that these centres also shared an identical socio-political organization. Each urban centre in the Pediada should be assessed within its own specific setting. Local ruling groups, indeed, might have followed their own political, social, economic and ceremonial strategies. Competition among the major centres of power over material and social resources – especially considering the fact that they operated within the same regional setting – would inevitably promote an unstable political landscape. Competition was probably intense in areas close to the territorial borders of various sub-zones.

The case of the Pediada demonstrates the complexity of the Protopalatial political landscape, which cannot be reduced to simplistic models of socio-political development. Local groups can and do differ quite widely in their socio-economic choices and attitudes, breaking away from what we see as the cultural 'mainstream'. The question comes down to why none of the local polities was transformed into a palace-centred political institution. This question becomes yet more imperative if

we consider that the Pediada met all the requirements necessary to become the centre of a state-level polity; the geophysical wealth of the area, for example, is far greater than that of Knossos and Malia. There is, of course, no obvious answer given the limited excavated data to hand. The evidence, though, shows that something interrupted socio-political developments in the region. The end of Middle Minoan IB coincides with a series of violent fire destructions of most centres of the Pediada. Did these widespread destructions follow an earthquake – as is usually assumed – or were they the result of human action? Evidence from Galatas, Kastelli and Smari does not support the scenario of massive natural disaster, and we would argue that the only convincing explanation for the conflagrations is human action. Bearing in mind that in MM II there does not appear to be any evidence for significant changes in the material culture – which would indicate the presence of groups with a different cultural idiom to that of the Pediada, or the adoption/imposition of a different culture on the residents of the Pediada, though it must be stressed that excavation data from this period are scanty – the causes must be sought in the relationships between the different groups active in the Pediada rather than foreign intervention. Might ever-increasing competition between local elites explain the destruction horizon at the end of Middle Minoan IB? The period that followed was a time of decline, unrest and uncertainty. So far, no sufficient evidence on a Middle Minoan II occupation can be made out for Kastelli, while Galatas seems to have been abandoned until Middle Minoan IIIA, and Smari until Late Minoan IIIC. The erection of cyclopean terrace walls found at many sites and the complex system of signal stations, spectacular features for the symbolic demarcation of space, are all indicative of the security fears that beset the inhabitants of the Pediada (Panagiotakis 2004).

Coherent evidence on the issue arises from the quantitative comparison of the assemblages from the two Pediada peak sanctuaries; as we have said, the material from 'Kephala Lilianou' is far less than that from the 'Stou Mamaloukou' peak sanctuary, suggesting, as it does, a general decline of open-air cult after Middle Minoan IB. This may be the result of an abrupt decrease in population and general unrest, which affected mass-scale popular cult. In a way, this picture matches the almost total absence of MM II ceramic material from the Pediada settlements, as indicated by the excavated record today; this in turn indicates the disruption of the pre-existing dense habitation pattern.

Political and social instability seriously affected the mechanisms of distribution of Pediada pottery outside the geographical limits of the region. Imports to the sanctuary of Syme decreased (Christakis, *in press*). They consisted mainly of cooking pots and trays, vessels for which the Pediada was a well-known centre of production and distribution. The relationship between the sanctuary and the Pediada was clearly weaker than it had been in the past. Imports of Pediada ceramics also decreased dramatically at Knossos (e.g. Macdonald and Knappett 2007, 154). We would argue that this picture is surely due to the problems facing the Pediada. It is also possible that the semantic advantage of these vessels, in the context of a specific type of ostentatious feasting behaviour, was nullified or superseded by the impressive variety of pottery in the fashionable Kamares Style.

It is very likely that the situation of political and social instability during MM IB – which resulted in the non-establishment of a palatial political system such as

those already extant at Knossos, Phaistos and Malia in MM IB, and that arising at Petras in MM IIA – was exploited by an external political power which began to penetrate the Pediada, an area rich in natural resources. We believe that this external power may have been that of Knossos, not only because Knossos was one of the major political forces during the Protopalatial period, adjoining the Pediada, but also because its presence there during the Neopalatial period is indisputable.

Yet although Galatas may have lost its political influence in this time of shifting allegiances, it retained its strategic importance. In a time of intense conflicts, fuelled by claims and events which, if they did not provoke the destruction of the first palace-centred polities, at least formed part of it, and in this game of strategic balances, the Knossians sought an outlet in an area they had been hitherto unable or unwilling to penetrate (Rethemiotakis 1999). This may explain the choice or 'comeback' of Galatas, which had the natural privilege of dominating the pass between the northwest region and the fertile plains of southeast central Crete. It was then that the ruined Building 3, the seat of the previous authority, was rebuilt and symbolically restored, converted into an annex of the North Wing of the palace. The road to the Pediada was open once more, but now Knossos had the upper hand.

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