

**AEGAEUM 23**

**Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège et UT-PASP**

# **MONUMENTS OF MINOS**

## **RETHINKING THE MINOAN PALACES**

**Proceedings of the International Workshop "Crete of the hundred Palaces?"  
held at the Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve,  
14-15 December 2001**

**Edited by Jan DRIESSEN, Ilse SCHOEP and Robert LAFFINEUR**

Université de Liège  
Histoire de l'art et archéologie de la Grèce antique  
University of Texas at Austin  
Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory  
2002

# PETRAS, SITEIA: THE PALACE, THE TOWN, THE HINTERLAND AND THE PROTOPALATIAL BACKGROUND\*

## I. Introduction

The case of the palace of Petras (Pl. XXXVIII) presents certain idiosyncrasies. These peculiarities need to be stressed here in a more systematic fashion for the first time. The exposition should contribute some useful ideas to the general discussion on the nature of Minoan palaces.

The author, along with many others, would very much prefer to stop using the word "palace" to refer to these important Minoan complexes, that share many common features, both in the architecture and in the functions. The fact that this word is so loaded in meaning and nuances in other civilizations, both ancient and more recent, including our own, does not allow us to see all of the parameters of the subject. Yet such insight is crucial to the understanding of palatial as well as pre- and post-palatial Crete. The previous Symposium on the same subject, some 18 years ago, advanced the discussion on many levels, but it did not resolve the issue.<sup>1</sup> The problem is becoming more and more complex, especially since new buildings, such as Petras and Galatas, discovered in the last 15 years are now labeled as "palaces" and these claims have been accepted in a de facto fashion, because they share many architectural features as well as functions with the previously known examples. Moreover, recent attempts to propose other labels for these buildings, in the framework of our post-modern era, designations only superficially neutral, like "court-centered buildings," were not successful. They failed to be accepted universally, probably because the new terms do not deal with the essential problem of the functions of these structures that are not uniform, and not well, or completely, defined as yet.

The presence of a palace in the Siteia Bay region was expected and even predicted by the fieldwork of Nikolaos Platon and Costis Davaras. Platon himself, an extremely insightful archaeologist, did not doubt the existence of an important Minoan center in the area of the modern town of Siteia. One could also say that the unexpected find was not Petras, but Zakros. It was by chance, however, that Zakros was excavated first.

\* The author expresses her gratitude to the Greek Ministry of Culture for the permit of the systematic excavation, the expropriation of the land and various facilitations in the last 17 years; to the Institute for Aegean Prehistory for the generous funding of the excavations and the study of the material since 1987; to many distinguished colleagues and good friends, who visited the sites and discussed the various problems of interpretation with much interest; special thanks go to Prof. David Rupp for his constant moral assistance and encouragement in the last years, for his personal hard work at the site, for many stimulating discussions, and for correcting the english text; many thanks to D. Petsalakis of the 24<sup>th</sup> Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities for the help with the digitization of the plans and the photos of the present article. The plan of the palace is by the author, M. Wedde and M. Klontza. The topographical plans are by D. Rupp, K. Fisher and R. Klein. The photographs are by the author.

## II. The hinterland

The excavation at Petras started in 1985, as a small scale dig, and is conducted on a systematic basis since 1988.<sup>2</sup> The following evidence was available prior to the beginning of the excavation on the Siteia Bay area, regarding the Neopalatial phase:

First, there were the so called "villas," "country houses," or "mansions," in Greek also «κατοικίες τοπαρχών» ("houses of local chieftains"). These buildings were investigated by Platon in the 1950's, at Achladia, Zou, and Prophitis Ilias. Only two kms south of the present coastline, and less than 300 m. in a straight line away from the Petras hill, at Klimataria, Platon excavated another building, similar in architecture, but probably of different use.<sup>3</sup> All these structures seem substantial, due to their architectural features. They shared a whole series of functions, including storage, although not on a large scale. Further, they yielded evidence for domestic shrines, and also for certain industrial activities, such as wine making, and pottery production. In many aspects they appear very similar to the better-known Roman villas. Although the excavator had never the chance to investigate the areas around these buildings, because of the non-systematic nature of his research, he never doubted that they were not isolated in the countryside (with the only exception of Klimataria) (Pl. XLIC). He noted architectural remains surrounding the "villas," more extensive and better preserved in the case of Prophitis Ilias. This fact made them more like "central buildings" of medium size settlements than anything else. In the discussions that followed their discovery this fact was more or less ignored.

The term "villa" has been already used prior to Platon's investigations to designate other, much more important buildings in Central Crete, excavated by S. Marinatos, namely Vathypetro,<sup>5</sup> Sklavokampos,<sup>6</sup> Amnisos,<sup>7</sup> and Nirou.<sup>8</sup> It was a logical conclusion for Platon to assume that the structures in the Siteia Bay region fulfilled a function similar to those of Central Crete, only on a smaller scale. The first shortcoming of this model was that the specific functions of the Siteian "villas" were never clearly described. Platon's underlying assumption was that the cause for the smaller scale should be sought in the presumed more limited economic resources of Eastern Crete. It was never doubted though that the nature of the organisation of the settlement patterns in the Neopalatial period was the same in both areas, that is a firmly established hierarchical system, centered on a palace.

2 The then Ephor for Eastern Crete, Prof. em. C. Davaras, supported the initial application and the later research in many ways, over all these years.

3 For the bibliography on the Siteian "villas" see M. TSIPOPOULOU, A. PAPACOSTOPOULOU, "Villas' and Villages in the Hinterland of Petras, Siteia," in *Function Villa*, 203-214.

4 Contra see TSIPOPOULOU, PAPACOSTOPOULOU (*supra* n. 3).

5 S. MARINATOS, "Ανασκαφαί Βαθυπέτρου Αρχανών (Κρήτης)," *Prakt* (1949) 100-109; ID., "Το μέγαρον Βαθυπέτρου," *Prakt* (1950) 242-248; ID., "Ανασκαφή μεγάρου Βαθυπέτρου (Κρήτης)," *Prakt* (1951) 258-272; ID., "Ανασκαφή εν Βαθυπέτρω Κρήτης," *Prakt* (1952) 592-610; ID., "Βαθύπετρον," *Prakt* (1955) 309 ff.

6 S. MARINATOS, "Το μινωϊκόν μέγαρον Σκλαβοκάμπου," *ArchEph* (1939-1941) 69-96.

7 S. MARINATOS, "Ανασκαφή Αμνισού Κρήτης," *Prakt* (1932) 76-94.

8 S. MARINATOS, "Μινωϊκόν μέγαρον Νίρου," *ArchEph* (1922) 1-25.

Furthermore, especially after the discovery of the geographically isolated palace at Zakros, located far away from the Siteia Bay area, the necessity for local “chieftains” would seem well justified. These, reporting to the ruler of Zakros, controlled and administered in his name the agricultural production of the region. The fact that Platon himself in his preliminary reports stated that the use of the so-called “villas” ceased after the Late Minoan IA destruction, while the acme of Zakros was in Late Minoan IB, was ignored, or, at least, neglected in the subsequent discussions.<sup>9</sup>

The second significant fact regarding the region of Siteia Bay was the existence of two important sanctuaries, Piskokephalo and Prinias. As for the first, it was considered more relevant to establish that the sanctuary was situated on a low hill, in order to deny it the term “peak sanctuary.” Its exceptional finds, indicating that it should be connected to an important central place, were not stressed.<sup>10</sup> Prinias, on the other hand, a real “peak sanctuary” high on a mountain (803 m) is relatively unknown. The excavator, Davaras, did not fail to note in his preliminary report in *Archaeologikon Deltion*, that it “was apparently one of the most significant [peak sanctuaries] of Crete.”<sup>11</sup>

### III. The settlement (Pl. XXXIXa-b, XL1c)

This was the information available for the region when our excavation started in 1985. The general topography of the low coastal hill of Petras (no more than 50 m high) was similar to that of Gournia and one could propose easily a central building on its top, similar to the so called “palace” there (Pl. XXXIXa, XL1c). Yet, the strategy chosen for the research was to proceed very carefully resisting the allure of the probable palace. The primary goals of the excavations were, first, to document the stratigraphical sequence of the settlement, and second, to establish the chronology of the phases. As a consequence, the investigation of the large plateau did not start until five years later, and even then on a very small scale, using a 5 X 5 m grid module.

Three sectors of the settlement have been excavated to date, as well as the large plateau on the side of the hill, where the palace was located (Pl. XXXIXa-b, XL1c). It is essential to stress here that the development of the palatial economic organization and administration at Petras appears continuous and without great fluctuations.<sup>12</sup>

9 L. PLATON, “The Minoan “Villa” in Eastern Crete. Riza, Achladia and Prophetes Elias, Praisos: two different specimens of the same category,” in *Function Villa*, 187-202; ID. in *Knossos: Palace, City, State. Heraklion, 15-18 November 2000* (forthcoming).

10 N. PLATON, “Το ιερό Μαζά και τα μινωικά ιερά κορυφής,” *CretChron* 5 (1951) 124-140. Cf. B. RUTKOWSKI, *The Cult places in the Aegean* (1986) 115. Also D.W. JONES, *Peak Sanctuaries and Sacred Caves in Minoan Crete* (1999) 5, 16-17.

11 C. DAVARAS, *ArchDelt* 27 (1972) 651. Also RUTKOWSKI, *supra* n. 10. It is interesting to note that many of the finds from this peak sanctuary (unpublished, but on display in the Ayios Nicolaos Museum), are made of the local Petras clay.

12 For the bibliography of Petras cf. M. TSIPOPOULOU, M. WEDDE, “Διαβάζοντας ένα χωμάτινο παλίμψηστο: Στραματογραφικές τομές στο ανακτορικό κτίριο του Πετρά Σητείας,” *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Cretological Congress, Herakleion 1996* (2000) 359-377.

During Early Minoan IIB Petras was already an extensive settlement, occupying a large part of the hill. The many houses were built in small clumps with ample open space between them. They had red clay floors and plastered walls. In association with them were exterior bedrock-cut mortars and basins of various sizes, some of them as large as one m. in diameter. There is evidence for certain industrial activities, including wool processing and weaving<sup>13</sup> as well as obsidian blade production.<sup>14</sup> The settlement's ceramic assemblage indicates contacts with North Central and South Crete, as well as with the Ierapetra Isthmus and the Mirabello Bay area.

Early Minoan III/Middle Minoan IA was a phase of importance, during which larger buildings were erected in many places on the hillsides. For the first time there is evidence for social differentiation as well as for competing *elites*. The unique Middle Minoan IA/B conoid steatite seal, which was discussed at the recent Cretological Conference by David Rupp, could probably be interpreted as the earliest representation in Crete of a male figure holding a *skeptron* in a "gesture of command."<sup>15</sup> Approximately at the same time, at nearby Aghia Photia the mysterious court-centered building set within a defensive wall was constructed, probably by a group of immigrants coming from South Central Crete.<sup>16</sup> This intrusive structure should be understood within the framework of competition among different social groups in the indigenous communities.<sup>17</sup> Before the systematic abandonment of the structure, the interlopers at Aghia Photia kept their individuality for a short time, and subsequently they were probably assimilated into the community at Petras.

Unfortunately, due to the extensive quarrying and the very deep leveling of the plateau in order to accommodate the construction of the palace, no Middle Minoan I structures are preserved on it.<sup>18</sup> It cannot be excluded, nor can it be proved that on the plateau there was a large structure, similar to those at Aghia Photia and at Chamaizi, which functioned as a central building of the ever growing settlement. It is interesting to note though that evidence for the importance of Petras, especially as far as the question of the emergence of the palatial society there is concerned, comes from another area of the settlement, some 50 m to the north-east of the palace. On the northern part of the lower slope of the hill, in Sectors I and III of the excavation, a

13 Cf. B. BURKE, "A textile Workshop in House II at Petras, Siteia," *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Cretological Conference, Elounda 2001* (in press).

14 C. D'ANNIBALE, "Production and Use of Obsidian in the Siteia Bay Area: Final Neolithic through Late Minoan," *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Cretological Conference, Elounda 2001* (in press).

15 D.W. RUPP, "Political Power Posturing at Petras, Siteia? A New MM IA Conoid Stamp Seal from Sector III," *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Cretological Conference, Elounda 2001* (in press).

16 Cf. M. TSIPOPOULOU, "From Local Centre to Palace: The Role of Fortification in the Economic Transformation of the Siteia Bay Area, East Crete," in *POLEMOS*, 182-183.

17 One of the many possible explanations for the construction of this puzzling structure, yet so important for the understanding of the period, is to see it as an attempt of people from another part of Crete to establish themselves in the area, which was successful, although temporarily, because of a certain instability at neighbouring Petras.

18 Although some floors are preserved, see M. TSIPOPOULOU, "Before, During, After: The Architectural Phases of the Palatial Building at Petras, Siteia," in *MELETEMATA*, 848.

secondary deposit, our so-called "Lakkos," came to light and was investigated in 1995 and 1996. This extensive depression, measuring at least 10 X 5 m. and almost 2 m deep, was filled apparently with cultural debris from destroyed elite houses in another area of the site, probably the large plateau, where the later palace was erected, distant no more than 50 m from Sector III. Their destruction was part of the reorganization of the plateau preceding the building of the palace at the beginning of Middle Minoan IIA. The large quantity of the Lakkos material, about 2,500 kg of pottery, already studied for publication by Donald Haggis, is extremely significant not only for its chronological attribution, but also for its high quality.<sup>19</sup>

The assemblage demonstrates that during Middle Minoan IA/B Petras had all those elements which testify to its prominent position, as a central place in the area, including local production of pottery and imports from many other areas in the island, lacking it seems only the architectural expression, in the form commonly called "palatial." It is evident that one of the competing elite groups gained pre-eminent power, and used this advantage to destroy the existing elite structures and then build the first palace. The *Lakkos* assemblage offers a significant contribution to our understanding of the socio-political conditions of the period. The high quality of the pottery, the large number of the stone vase fragments, the cult vessels, and also the numerous potter's marks, an idiosyncratic feature of Petras comparable only to the corpus at Malia, indicate the level of complexity the community had achieved. The *Lakkos* deposit is also of importance as it supports the hypothesis that there was a gradual, uninterrupted development of the settlement. It is worth stressing here that the first palace at Petras and the accompanying hieroglyphic archive, by good chance the only one out of the four Cretan archives found in a primary deposit, did not emerge suddenly and without warning.

#### IV. The palace (Pl. XXXVIII, XLIc)

At the time of the foundation of the first palace at Petras, in Middle Minoan IIA, there were extensive works of re-organization and arrangement of the space, including the construction of the big walls. Most probably retaining walls, they could fulfill also a defensive role.<sup>20</sup> They were surely very visible especially for those coming from the sea, making the palace an impressive statement of power and propaganda (Pl. XLIa, XLIIa-b). What is preserved from the palace of Petras seems atypical compared to other examples of the same architectural genre, due to the fact that its largest part is protopalatial and not neopalatial. For this first early period, not many examples of important buildings with complete plans are available from Crete to be used as *comparanda*.

19 D.C. HAGGIS, "Cermamic Regionalism in Protopalatial East Crete: The Middle Minoan IB-IIA Wares from the "Lakkos" at Petras," *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Cretological Conference, Elounda 2001* (in press).

20 Cf. TSIPOPOULOU (*supra* n. 18) 183-185.



It is probable that the impressive massive walls of Petras belong to a network of similar structures constructed all over Eastern Crete as work by S. Chryssoulaki and N. Schlager have recently demonstrated.<sup>21</sup> Apparently the historical conditions prevailing in this mountainous and isolated part of the island were different from those in areas with large plains, such as Central Crete, both north and south.

After 17 years of research and study at Petras and the surrounding area, the author has no doubt anymore that the site was much more important during the first palatial phase, that is before the Middle Minoan IIB destruction, than in the neopalatial reconstruction.

The architecture of the protopalatial building, its administrative function, as expressed by the hieroglyphic archive,<sup>22</sup> and the dimension of the settlement constitute arguments toward this direction. Reinforcing this is the fact that the hieroglyphic script continued to be used, together with the Linear A, until the Late Minoan IB final destruction, as one hieroglyphic medallion found in the destruction deposit of the North magazines indicates.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, Middle Minoan II Petras lacks evidence for two important features of protopalatial society. K. Knappett and I. Schoep pointed out recently that only Phaistos of all the protopalatial palaces had a de-centralized polity, using evidence offered by Monastiraki, and that other palaces did not exercise their economic power, as opposed to the ideological one, on a very wide region.<sup>24</sup> On the present evidence we cannot decide whether Petras fits the first or the second category, i.e. that it had a centralized or a decentralized protopalatial polity. In the first case one should expect large storage areas, in the second peripheral smaller centers to account for secondary storage. As it often is the case, evidence does not conform to the available models of interpretation, yet it is not wise to proceed to interpretations using *argumenta e silentio* in the present stage of research.

First the protopalatial magazines will probably never be located, as they might have been in the same area as the large neopalatial North Magazines (Pl. XLIIb, XLIIc). An architectural detail seems to support this hypothesis: The wall supporting the "monumental staircase" leading to the protopalatial central court, which was in use until the Late Minoan IA destruction, coincides with the western wall of the magazines.

Second, we cannot assign to the first palace a hinterland analogous to that of the neopalatial central building. The evidence pertaining to the Middle Minoan II

21 S. CHRYSOULAKI, "Minoan Roads and Guard Houses – War Regained," in *POLEMOS*, 75-86 and N. SCHLAGER "A Town of Castles: an MM/LM Fortified Site at Aspro Nero in the Far East of Crete," in *POLEMOS*, 171-178.

22 M. TSIPOPOULOU, E. HALLAGER, "A new Hieroglyphic Archive at Petras, Siteia," *Kadmos* (1997) 164-167. Also M. TSIPOPOULOU, "A new Minoan Hieroglyphic Archive at Petras," in F. ROUGEMONT, J.-P. OLIVIER, *Semaine d'épigraphie créto-mycénienne organisée par l'Ecole Française d'Archéologie (Athènes, Mars 1998)*, *BCH* 122 (1998) 436-440.

23 M. TSIPOPOULOU and E. HALLAGER, "Hieroglyphic and Linear A Inscriptions from Petras, Siteia," *SMEA* (1996) 23-24.

24 K. KNAPPET, I. SCHOEP, "Continuity and Change in Minoan Palatial Power," *Antiquity* 72 (2000) 365-371.

phase, as far as the area of the Bay of Siteia is concerned is fragmentary. What is needed here, and this should be one of the priorities of the archaeological research in the area in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is to continue the investigation of the so-called villas and the surrounding settlements, especially with stratigraphical trenches. It is necessary to establish whether they preserve any phases earlier than the neopalatial, or they belong exclusively to a different system, which was formed together with the second palaces. It could well be that we are dealing here with an "excavation vacuum" and that the earlier palace had also a de-centralized hinterland identical or similar to that of the second, smaller palace. The small investigation at Achladia, ten years ago, showed that there was a protopalatial, probably small, settlement below the neopalatial one, at Platyskoinos, on a site different of that of the villa at Riza.<sup>25</sup>

Coming to the neopalatial phase of the palace and the settlement, it is essential to note the following:

After the destruction by fire in Middle Minoan IIB, the palace as well as all the houses excavated until now were immediately rebuilt on the same orientation. The palace, in particular, used the same main wall axes as the protopalatial predecessor, as well as the same central court. Noticeable are the abandonment of the entrance where the hieroglyphic archive had fallen, of the adjacent staircase leading to the upper floor, and of the external ramp leading to this entrance from the slope of the hill.

The building in the first neopalatial phase expanded to the East and was equipped with a stoa on the eastern side of the central court (Pl. XXXVIII). Above the stoa there was a second floor.

The construction of the large North Magazines, (Pl. XLIIb, XLIIc) is, presumably, assigned to the same first neopalatial phase, although, due to the Late Minoan IB destruction by fire, they contained only deposits dated to this late phase. For the construction of the North Magazines the bedrock was cut so deeply, that the all earlier remains in the area were destroyed completely, with the only exception of the Early Minoan bedrock-cut mortars.

Two areas of the first palace were abandoned and never occupied again in the new palace. Both of these areas seem to be of special significance. The first one is a small room at the southwestern sector of the preserved part of the building, with no access from the exterior but apparently only from the upper floor. This room had a plastered bench 4m. long, a flagstone floor and thin orthostats along the southern wall. The latter were also covered with plaster. It constituted in all probability the sacred space of the first palace (Pl. XLIa, XLIIa). Unfortunately, it was found empty, because, after the Middle Minoan IIB destruction this space was divided by a wall. The largest, eastern part was sealed and never used again. The smaller, western one continued to be used, probably as a shrine, until the end of the life of the palace in Late Minoan IB. A plaster offering table was found in this room, dated to this final phase.

25 M. TSIPOPOULOU and L. VAGNETTI, *ACHLADIA, Scavi e ricerche della Missione Greco-Italiana in Creta Orientale (1991-1993) (1995) 22.*



The second part of the first palace, which went out of use during the neopalatial reconstruction, was a massive rectangular building (Pl. XLa). This structure is intimately connected to the big retaining “cyclopean” wall, which defines the plateau to the east side. It may have been used for storage in the protopalatial period. It had no internal dividing walls and was found empty.

Generally speaking, as the author has already reported elsewhere, the major discontinuity in the history of the palace does not appear to happen after the Middle Minoan IIB destruction, but after the Late Minoan IA one.<sup>26</sup> At that time, large parts of the building, especially in the east-southeast section, which previously had careful laid flagstone floors, acquire new earth floors for use as pithos magazines. At the time of the final destruction in Late Minoan IB, pithoi were stored even in the atrophied second central court<sup>27</sup> (Pl. XXXVIII, XLIIb-c). The total capacity of the North Magazines of the Late Minoan IB building was ca 20,000 liters.<sup>28</sup> Further, the monumental staircase to the west of the north magazines was not repaired. In its place another storage space was built, using blocks from earlier buildings<sup>29</sup> (Pl. XLIIb, XLIIc). This storage area contained no pithoi at the time of the excavation and was disturbed by a 12<sup>th</sup> century AD refuge pit (Pl. XLIIb, XLIIc, XLIIId). The palace changed its orientation and had a new entrance to the East. Also this was the shortest way to reach the east magazines and the southern part of the palace, no longer preserved (Pl. XXXVIII). The impressive North Magazines continued to have their own entrance, toward the side of the main western landing place (Pl. XLIIb, XLIIc). This entrance was not connected any more with access to the central court by way of the monumental staircase. If we use terms borrowed from the behavioral theory, the last phase of the palace of Petras (Late Minoan IB) is characterized by insecurity and angst, expressed by the increase in storage space. At least the Siteia Bay area was a troubled one.

## V. Late Minoan IB and destructions

Before we examined the situation at the settlement in the last neopalatial phase, the evidence for literacy at the time, should be briefly presented. First, despite the long tradition starting in prepalatial times, as mentioned above, no Linear A archive came to light. Whether such an archive ever existed, it is not easy to establish. In the Late Minoan IB destruction deposit two Linear A tablets were found, and there are inscriptions on pithoi of the north magazines and on one found in the central court.<sup>30</sup>

26 TSIPOPOULOU, WEDDE (*supra* n. 12).

27 One of them with a Linear A inscription, TSIPOPOULOU, HALLAGER (*supra* n. 23).

28 The author is grateful for this estimate to Dr. C. Christakis, who in an e-mail of March 10<sup>th</sup> 2002 wrote: “The thorough volumetric study of the 36 pithoi recovered in the North Magazines of the palace of Petras is not possible, because the pithoi are under restoration. The proposed estimate is based on the average capacity of 550 liters for a pithos as those used in the North Magazines.”

29 One of them, a cubic ashlar block ca 80 X 80 cm. having a deeply cut mason’s mark, a double axe, M. TSIPOPOULOU, “Τεκτονικό σημείο από τον Πετρά Σητείας,” AAA 19, 1986 (1991) 171-177.

30 TSIPOPOULOU, HALLAGER (*supra* n. 23). More inscriptions are revealed from the pithoi of the North magazines, currently under restoration at the Instap Study Center, Pacheia Ammos.

Inscriptions on clay came also from House II.1.<sup>31</sup> In addition, in a Middle Minoan IIB basement excavated in Sector III, some 50 m. from the palace, a unique Linear A document was found in 2000. The basement was used for storage of cult vessels and contained more than 70 vases of various shapes, as well as 5 natural triton shells. The fragmentary Linear A document, looking more like a small clay "stele," was intentionally fired and contains no numerals.<sup>32</sup>

The situation in the settlement in Late Minoan IB times displays problems similar to those revealed at the palace. First, it seems that at least a part of it, although it is not possible at the present stage of the research to establish how large this part was, was abandoned after the Late Minoan IA destruction, not to be reoccupied again. (House I.1 and Sector III).<sup>33</sup> On the contrary the other large neopalatial house, which has been completely excavated (House II.1), its function changed, was transformed into an industrial area connected to the processing of wool and the weaving.<sup>34</sup> The fact that this house contained Linear A documents, indicates a probable connection to the palace.

## VI. Discussion

Platon suggested, following a preliminary study of the material from the so-called "villas" that these buildings ceased to function after the Late Minoan IA destruction.<sup>35</sup> Although it is dangerous to proceed to an interpretation of the socio-political situation before the final publications, one should point out that these buildings, in the interpretative model suggested by the author, some ten years ago, are assigned to the second of three levels in a hierarchical settlement system of the region.<sup>36</sup> They served as areas of secondary storage of the agricultural produce of the adjacent area, before this was transferred to the palace for permanent storage and possible redistribution. If these buildings really were destroyed before Late Minoan IB, the consequences to the whole system of storage and redistribution would have been extremely damaging. The palace would in this case need a significant increase of its own storage spaces in order to be able to cope with the new realities.<sup>37</sup> On a more theoretical level one can observe another form of angst from the perspective of

31 *Supra.*

32 This unique document has been studied for publication by Dr E. Hallager and will be published, in collaboration with the author, when the conservation of the rest of the ceramic material will be completed.

33 Only a very extensive excavation, which for many obvious reasons is impossible today, could determine whether this is true for the rest of the settlement of Petras. It is interesting to note though these houses were very close to the palace. See also M. TSIPOPOULOU, H. DIERCKX, "Υστερομινωικό ΙΑ Σπίτι στον Πετρά Σητείας. Δομή, λειτουργία και κατανομή των ευρημάτων," *Proceedings of the 9th International Cretological Congress, Elounda 2001* (in press).

34 TSIPOPOULOU, HALLAGER (*supra* n. 23), and also BURKE (*supra* n. 13).

35 TSIPOPOULOU, PAPACOSTOPOULOU (*supra* n. 3).

36 *Supra.*

37 It is necessary to note though that Dr. L. Platon who is studying the material of the Siteian "villas" believes that their use continued in Late Minoan IB. Cf. PLATON (*supra* n. 9); ID., this volume.

the palace, or, rather the leading elite group of the population that controlled it. This was related to the struggle to maintain the symbols of the central palatial authority, despite the changes and the difficulties.

The modification of the central court is to be seen in the same framework (Pl. XXXVIII, XLIIIb). Although there was a significant decrease of the original extent, the Late Minoan IB court, still maintained a large part of its original impact, as far as the architectural form, and also the symbolic meaning were concerned. This should be seen as an almost desperate effort to preserve some form of palatial authority in a time of exceptional crisis. The reason for this effort, which involved intensive human labour, and also some political/ideological power of a certain person or a leading group, is apparently connected to the function(s) of the palace, not clearly defined as yet, probably a combination of ritual, administrative and economic.

As it is well known, the extent of the hinterland of the neopalatial Petras was established even before the excavation proved beyond any doubt the existence of the palace there. In two articles the author suggested that in eastern Crete, because of the topographical barriers three territories can be postulated; one in the south, supposedly centered on Makryialos-Diaskari, one in the east, centered on Zakros, which included also the urban settlement of Palaikastro, and one in the north, centered on Petras.<sup>38</sup> This proposed tripartite division, did not address another issue, very significant for the "political geography" of neopalatial eastern Crete. This issue concerns the degree of political independence of the palace of Petras and, consequently, of its administrative system in relation to the other known centres. Unfortunately there is no any definite conclusion yet. Moreover, the same arguments can be used to prove opposite views. The only thing that seems rather certain is that there does not seem to have ever existed a hierarchical relationship between Petras and Zakros. All other suggestions, ranging from the complete independence to the close relations with other palaces such as Knossos and Malia seem open.

The data are the following:

1. During the protopalatial phase the author prefers to see Petras and its hinterland as an independent entity, having the palace as a center. Although, starting from the Early Minoan II phase there are many relations with other areas, especially within Crete, no dependence can be argued. The hieroglyphic archive corpus displays great individuality and on the sealings more than 40 different seals are impressed, including several gold rings. These seals do not have parallels in other known Cretan hieroglyphic archives.

2. As for the neopalatial phase one could suggest several hypotheses or rather scenarios:

38 M. TSIPOPOULOU, *Palace-Centered Politics in Eastern Crete: Neopalatial Petras and its Neighbors*, in *Aspects of Urbanism in Antiquity, from Mesopotamia to Crete* (1997) 263-277; TSIPOPOULOU, PAPACOSTOPOULOU (*supra* n. 3).

a) Petras was subjected to Knossos directly or under a status of semi-independence.

b) Petras continues to be independent, acting as an administrative center of the supposedly pre-existing hinterland, while at the same time the palace at Zakros is founded by the central political power of Knossos, for reasons related to the trade with the east. The fact that the extremely isolated area of Zakros was chosen for the establishment of the trading center, and not Petras, which had a large protected natural embayment, could be explained in a variety of ways. The most obvious, for geographical reasons, Zakros offered easier access to ships coming from the eastern Mediterranean.

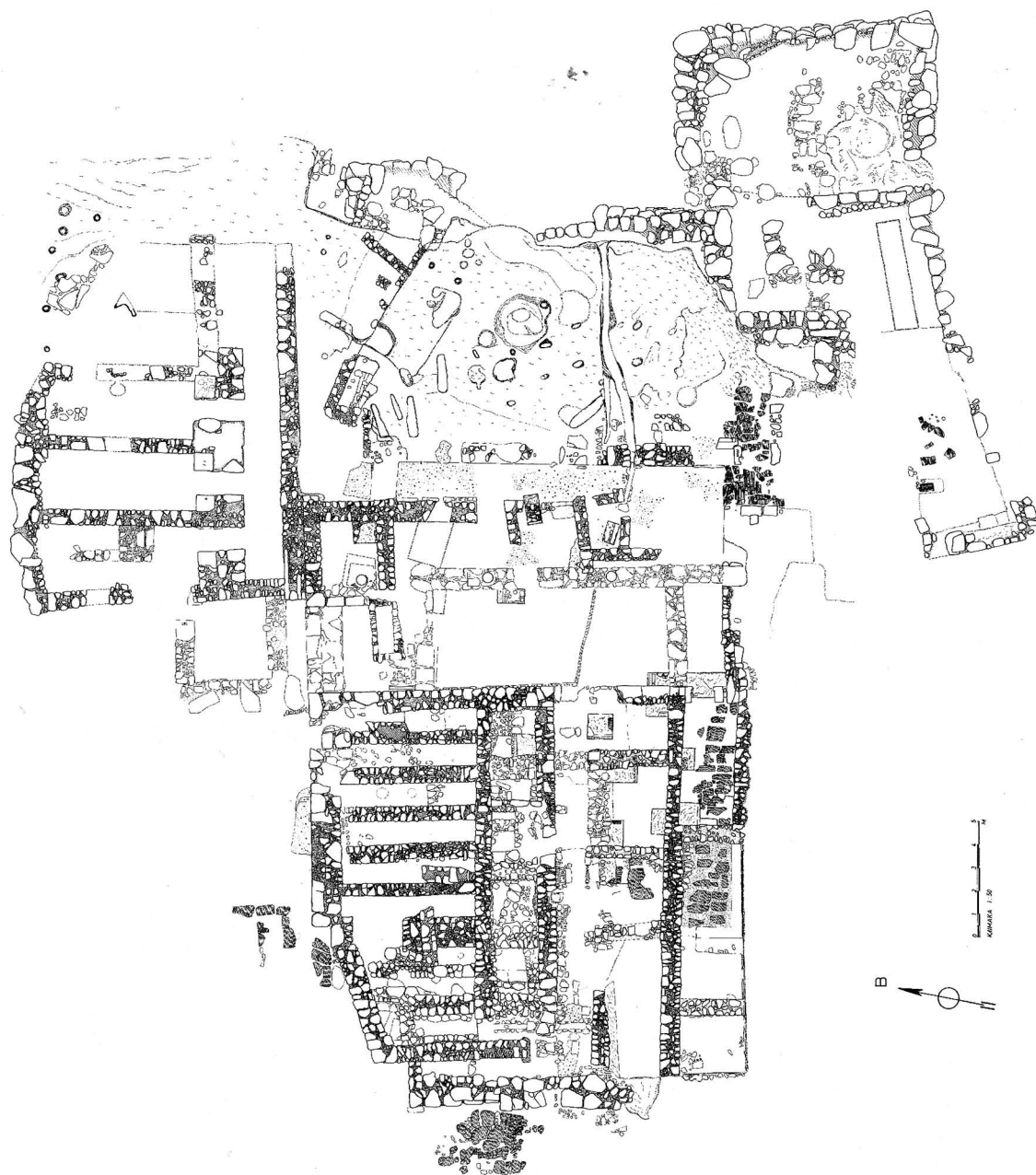
It is not easy to support the complete political control of Petras by Knossos, given the present artifactual evidence. Zakros, however, does have this evidence to support its close dependence on Knossos. For those who would like to see the unquestionable supremacy of Knossos over the whole of the island, maybe they could compare the proposed neopalatial Knossian authority and administrative system to that of the Ottoman empire over the Balkans. This empire, for reasons of more efficient administration permitted a certain semi-independence and partial self-administration to the various conquered populations of the region.

The picture available today on the Siteia Bay area does not allow any conclusions on the nature of the palatial administration or even the role of the palace within the established framework. The views presented above are merely notes on a work in progress. The case of Petras contributes, however, to the general discussion on the Minoan palaces. It offers us another way to read the word "palace" in the still unknown to us Minoan political language.

Metaxia TSIPOPOULOU

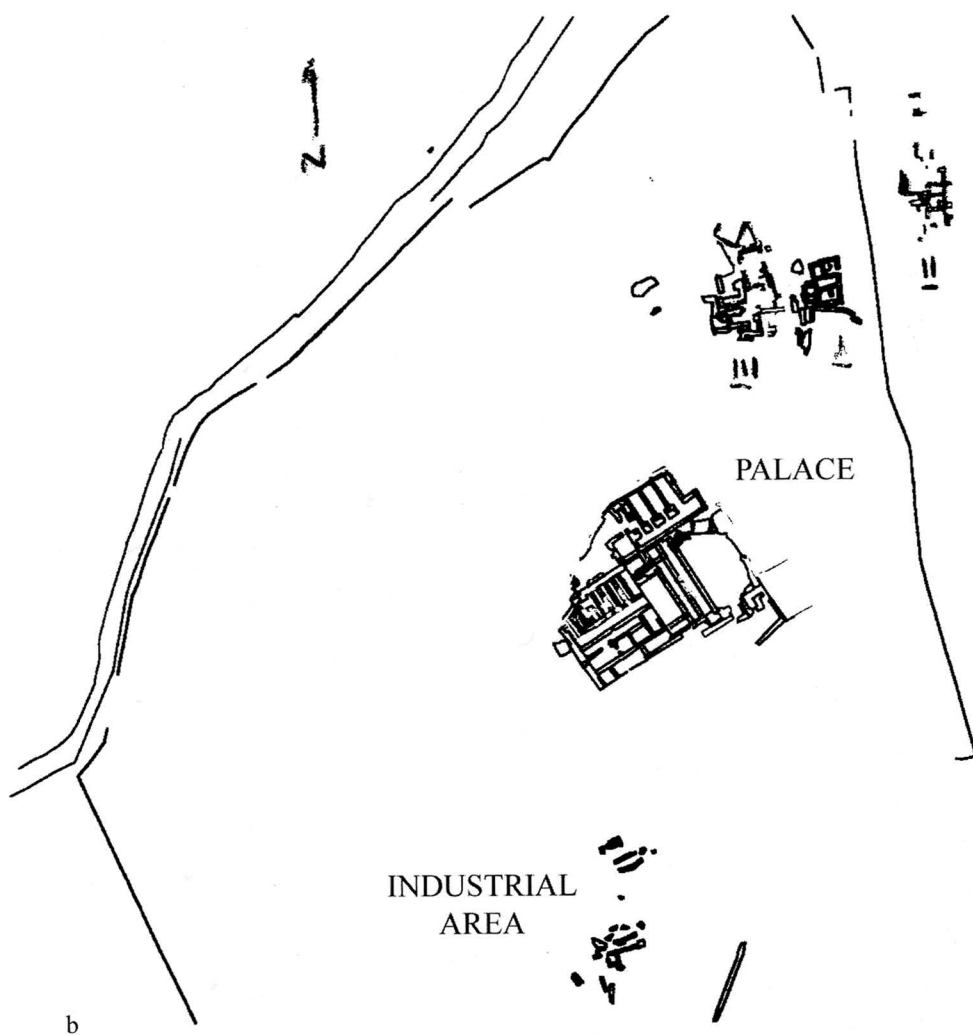
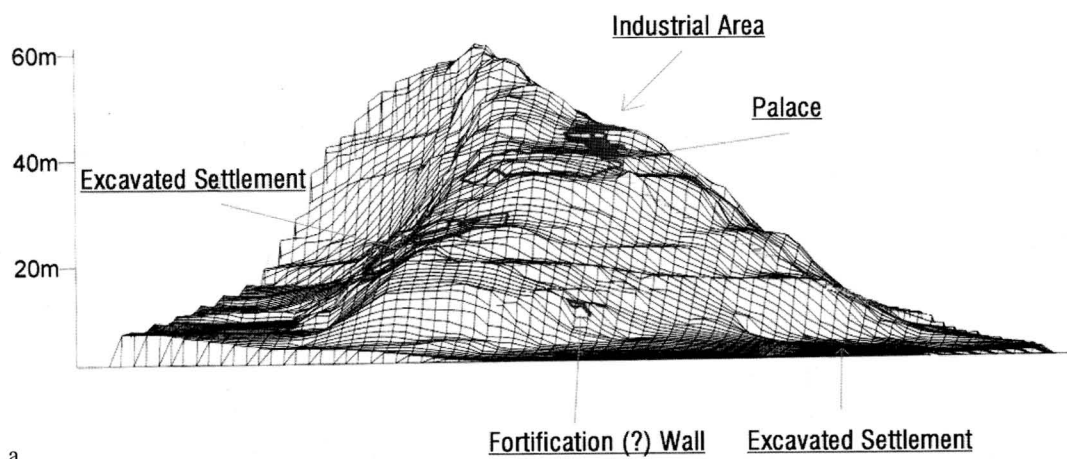
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

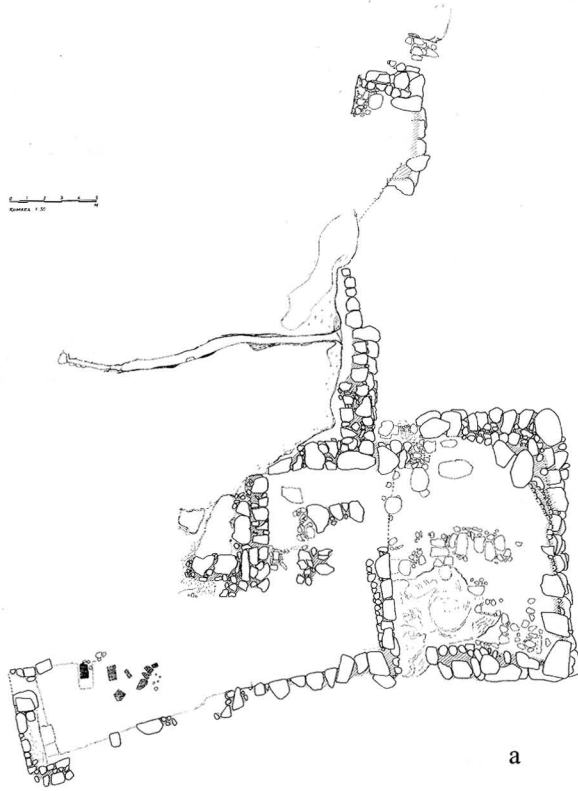
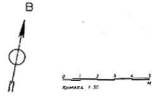
- Pl. XXXVIII Plan of the palace of Petras.
- Pl. XXXIXa Topographical map of Petras (plan produced by D. Rupp, K. Fisher and R. Klein).
- Pl. XXXIXb Topographical map of the excavated areas at Petras (plan produced by D. Rupp, K. Fisher and R. Klein).
- Pl. XLa Petras: Palace: The protopalatial retaining wall of the large plateau, the tower-like projection, and the rectangular building.
- Pl. XLb Petras: Palace: The protopalatial north-west entrance, where the hieroglyphic archive was found.
- Pl. XLIa Petras: Palace: The protopalatial room with the orthostats and the plastered bench.
- Pl. XLIb Petras: Palace: The neopalatial North Magazines.
- Pl. XLIc The excavations at Petras from the East.
- Pl. XLIIa Petras: Large plateau. MM II tower – like projection at the east side.
- Pl. XLIIb Petras: Large plateau. MM II tower – like projection at the east side, detail.
- Pl. XLIIc Petras: Palace: The neopalatial North Magazines from the west.
- Pl. XLIIId Petras: Palace: MM II room with plastered bench, orthostats and flagstone floor.
- Pl. XLIIIb Petras: Palace: Protopalatial – LM IA and LM IB central courts.
- Pl. XLIIId Petras: Palace: Stratigraphical trench at the east side of the LM IB central court. Two successive plaster floors are visible and below them large stones to level the ground, before the construction of the earlier court.
- Pl. XLIIId Petras: Palace: LM IB plaster floor to the north of the North façade, laid after the destruction of the monumental staircase (the supporting wall is modern restoration).



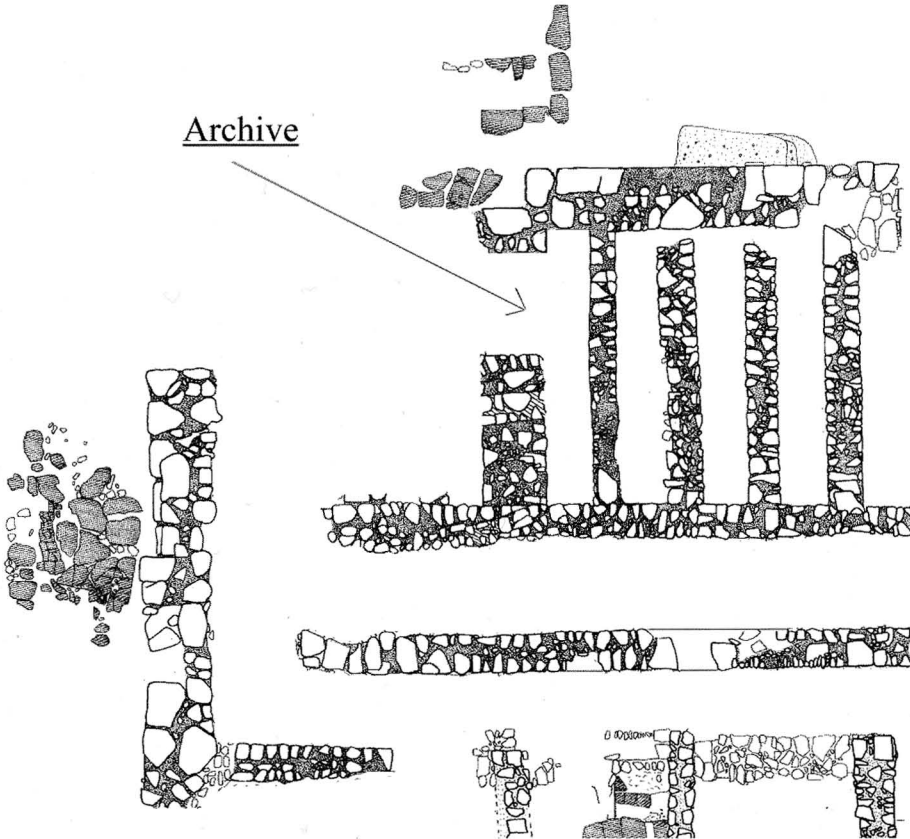


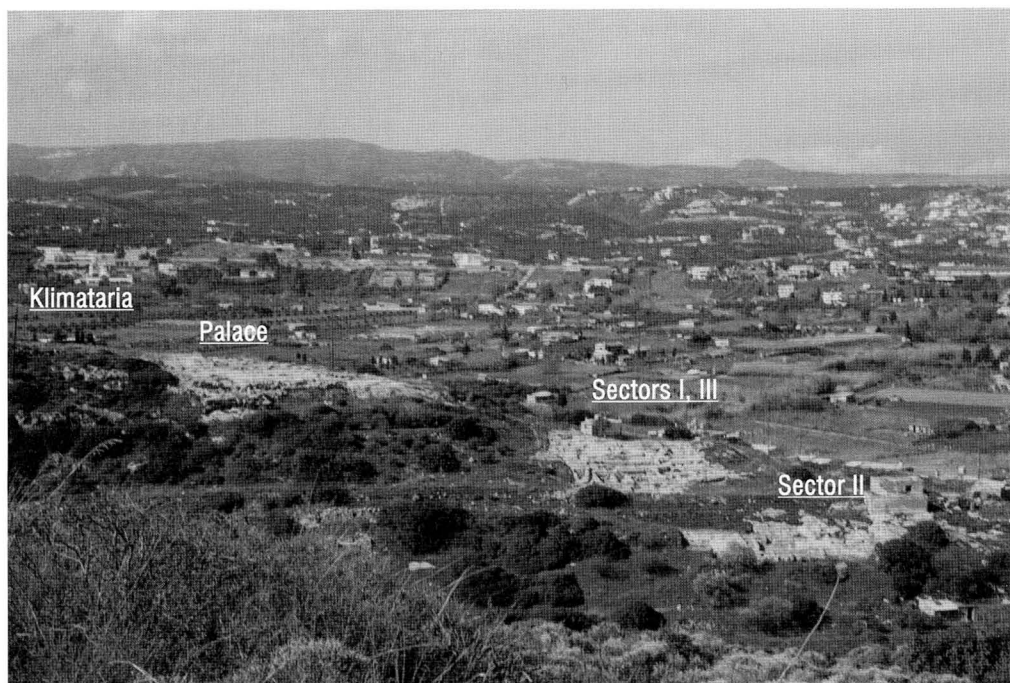
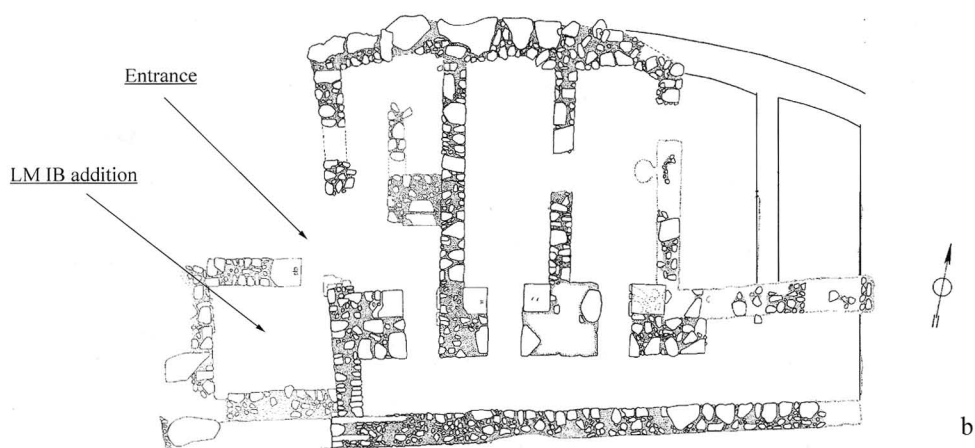
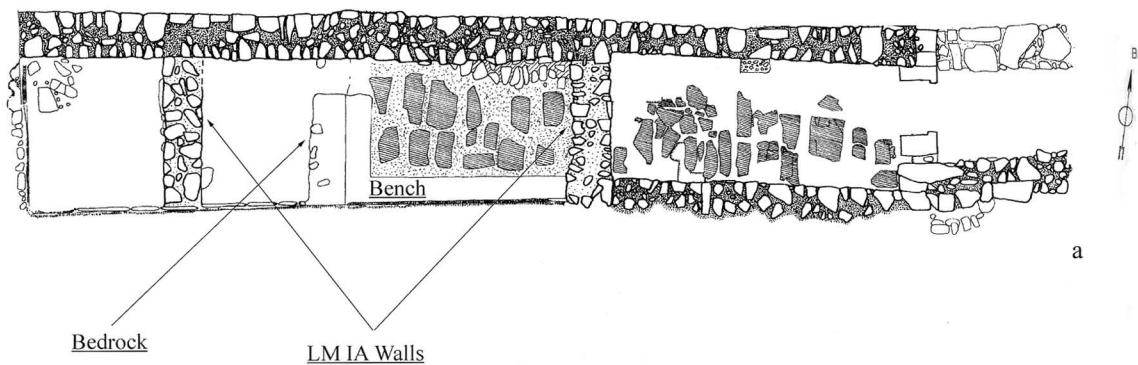
XXXIX





Archive







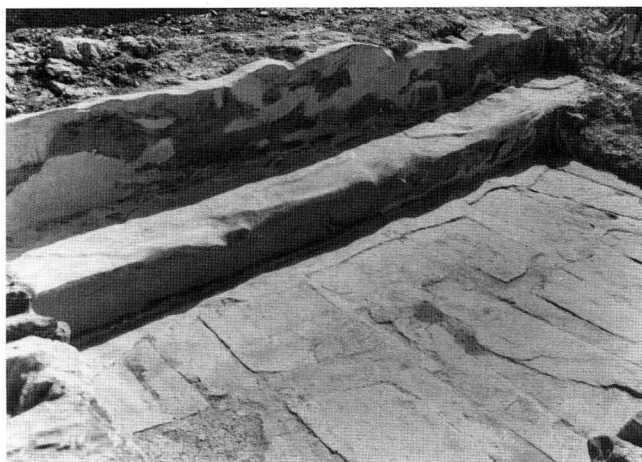
a



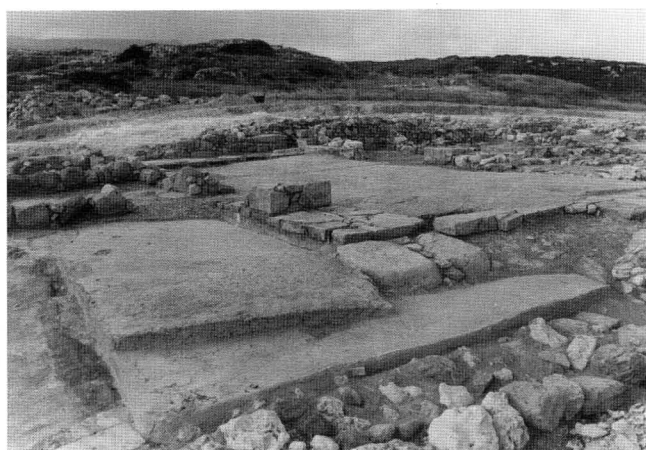
b



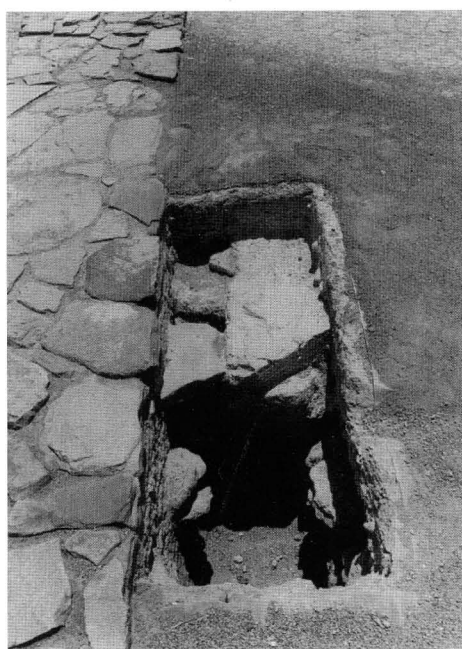
c



a



b



c



d