

A NEW LATE MINOAN IIIC SHRINE AT HALASMENOS, EAST CRETE*

The Late Minoan IIIC site of Halasmenos lies near the modern village of Monastiraki at the North end of the Ierapetra Isthmus.¹ It nestles on the saddle and gentle north slope of a steep-sided hill (240 m.a.s.l.) extending out from the vertical wall of the Siteia Mountains at the southern edge of the mouth of the Ha gorge (Pl. XXVIIa-b). Together with the attached refuge settlement of Katalimata it is part, with Kavousi and Vasiliki-Kephala, of a triad of significant Late Minoan IIIC sites in the area.

The investigations started in 1992 in the form of a Greek-American synergasia under the direction of the author and William Coulson, then Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Annual campaigns until 1997 uncovered part of what was an extensive settlement, excavated in two sectors, A and B, totaling some 2500 m², as well as a tholos tomb in the vicinity, probably part of a cemetery.²

In May 2000 Sector Γ, which is situated on a slightly lower plateau to the north, was investigated for the first time (Pl. XXVIIc). There, a sanctuary containing large figures conventionally called “goddesses with upraised arms” was discovered, and partially excavated.³ Halasmenos thus becomes the third site in the immediate area, after Kavousi-Vronda and Vasiliki-Kephala, to produce Late Minoan IIIC “goddesses.”

The shrine is rectangular in plan, measuring c. 5.5 X 13 m and has an internal dividing wall, making it similar to a megaron. Far from intrusive, this plan is also known from a further three buildings on the northern edge of Sector A, overlooking the shrine, and connected with the latter by a ramp (Pl. XXVIIb). All four “megara” are characterized by a common plan, the interior wall dividing the building on a 1:2 ratio, with the doorway along one wall, and not in the center. The shrine is equipped with a series of short benches, always placed in a corner. Initially it appeared to be a free standing structure, but on the last day of the season it proved attached, on its south-east corner, to another substantial construction, probably containing a magazine with pithoi.

Previous evidence for ritual practice at Halasmenos has been restricted to deposits of a domestic nature, three in number, consisting of a clay bull figurine,⁴ a male lead figurine, and a burnt kalathos with pomegranate decoration in Sector A;⁵ a female figurine with a miniature jug, placed inside a bowl under a floor slab in B; a clay bull figurine accompanied by some very schematic anthropomorphic figurines, also in B.

* The author, who did not attend the conference for lack of suitable material, is most grateful to Prof. Robert Laffineur for the opportunity to present this brief note on the new finds from Halasmenos. They came to light less than a month after the conference. It is hoped that the co-director, Dr. William Coulson, is soon able to resume his activities at the excavation. My warmest thanks to Dr Michael Wedde for helping with the english translation.

1 On Halasmenos, cf. D.C. HAGGIS and K. NOWICKI, “Khalasmeno and Katalimata: Two early Iron Age Settlements in Monastiraki, East Crete,” *Hesperia* 62 (1993) 303-338; W.D.E. COULSON and M. TSIPOPOULOU, “Preliminary Investigations at Halasmenos, Crete, 1992-93,” *Aegean Archaeology* 1 (1994) 65-97; M. TSIPOPOULOU and K. NOWICKI, “Χαλασμένος και Καταλείματα Ιεράπετρας: Μινωίτες και Μυκηναίοι στο τέλος της Εποχής του Χαλκού στην Ανατολική Κρήτη,” in *Β' Διεθνές Συνέδριο Η Περιφέρεια του Μυκηναϊκού Κόσμου, Λαμία* 1999 (in press).

2 The site is dated to the middle phase of Late Minoan IIIC. It is abandoned by the end of this phase, and partly reoccupied in Protogeometric, to which are dated one of the “megaron” structures and a tholos tomb intrusive in Sector B (not to be confused with the tholos tomb excavated to the south of the site).

3 The shrine was excavated by the students of the Brock University Archaeological Practicum under the leadership of Prof. David W. Rupp.

4 COULSON and TSIPOPOULOU (*supra* n.1) pl. VII.2.

5 For the near-identical kalathos from the tholos tomb, cf. ID. 84 fig. 18.1 and pl. XIII.2.

Finds, both “goddess” fragments and vessels of various types, came from every trench excavated within the shrine and also outside of it, at the south west corner. Many objects were clearly on the benches, or fallen from them, but fragments of the same vessel or figure were found at a distance of a few meters. The material was very fragmentary, but otherwise in a good state of preservation and particularly well fired, except for one statuette. It is not yet known how many “goddesses” the shrine contained.

Although the assemblages from Kavousi-Vronda and Vasiliki-Kephala have yet to appear in final publication, and the Halasmenos figures are in the process of excavation and restauration, it is nonetheless possible to make some initial comparisons. The Halasmenos figures share a number of features with those from Kavousi-Vronda (similar approaches to rendering hairstyles, ears and fingers) (Pl. XXVIIId, XXVIIIa-b) It may also be noted the plaques with “horns of consecration” are of very high quality, larger and better-made than those of the other two shrines (Pl. XXVIIIc).

Further finds of ritual nature included at least five or six snake tubes, (Pl. XXVIIId) plaques or pinakes with suspension holes decorated with “horns” on their upper part, and plain kalathoi. These latter appeared in much lower numbers than at Kavousi-Vronda, for example, although the shape is well-established in the settlement. Generally, vases are rare in the shrine. Unlike other shrines, the Halasmenos structure also contained at least two big pithoi. Very interesting is also a rectangular stand of the so-called “altar type” with incised decoration, similar to one found at Karphi, but unique in its details (Pl. XXVIIIe).

It is also interesting to note that the finds from the shrine are made in different fabrics, as has been observed by Geraldine Gesell at Kavousi-Vronda, thereby suggesting the possible existence of sets of offerings.⁶ This observation may also be valid for Vasiliki-Kephala.⁷

The site of Halasmenos was the home of a fair-sized village community engaged in agricultural activities and animal husbandry on the plain and along the edges of the Siteia Mountains. Similar sites are being studied at Vasiliki-Kephala, Kavousi-Kastro and Vronda, and Vrokastro. They are part of a settlement pattern of the outgoing Bronze Age characterized by the resorting to defensible settlements in elevated positions that still retained access to the plain, and visual control over a large area, including the coast. The attached site of Kataleimata allowed, in addition, a line of sight out over the Libyan Sea at the southern approaches to the Isthmus of Ierapetra.

The new finds from Halasmenos, here presented in a note most brief, will – by necessity – require facing the issue concerning the nature of ritual practices in Crete at the end of the Bronze Age, in particular whether they are to be termed “Minoan” or “Mycenaean”, and the question whether the origin of the “goddess with up-raised arms” is to be sought in a representation of a Minoan deity or in that of a Mycenaean “Potnia”.

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6 Cf. G.C. GESELL and T.C. SAUPE, “Methods used in the construction of ceramic objects from the shrine of the goddess with up-raised hands at Kavousi”, in *TEXNH* 123-125.

7 For a preliminary report, cf. T. ILIOPOULOS, “A Preliminary Report on the Discovery of a Temple Complex of the Dark Ages at Kephala Vasilikis,” in *Cyprus-Dodecanese-Crete* 301-313.

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