

KYTHERA

In July and August 1964 members of the British School at Athens in association with the Pennsylvania University Museum continued their excavations at Kastri (ancient Skandeia) on the southeastern coast of the island of Kythera. Trials conducted on the promontory at Kastri in 1963 had confirmed the presence of a Minoan colony in Kythera. The object of the work in 1964 was to establish the chronological limits of the colony and to study some of the houses in it.

The excavations on the promontory were supervised by Dr. R. Hope Simpson and Mr. J. Lazenby. In the lowest strata, at the present level of the Palaiopolis river, they found much Middle Minoan II and III pottery, and a few sherds of MM I type. Much of this pottery had been imported from Crete, but some sherds appear to be of local manufacture. The discovery of Middle Minoan I wares in the colony at Kastri suggests that the Cretan settlement in Kythera is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Minoan colony yet discovered, and that the origins of the Cretan naval empire, traditionally known to the Greeks as the thalassocracy of Minos, may well lie near in time to the beginning of the second millennium B. C. The latest Minoan pottery found in this area was of LM Ib date: it lay immediately beneath some late Roman walls which had greatly disturbed the upper Minoan levels. A Middle Helladic cup of red clay, rudimentarily decorated with porpoises, was found in an LM Ia context here. Close to the surface a classical black-glaze sherd came to light with the words *ΑΙΠΩΝ ΦΙΑΩΜΕ* scratched upon it.

In parallel with the trial trenches dug in 1963, and closer to the summit of the promontory, house walls of LM Ib date were excavated (P l. 157 d). Foundations of two houses were revealed with a narrow passage between them. Late Roman walling intersected the upper parts of the Minoan buildings and destroyed them, but the stratification was not damaged for at least a metre above their floors. At present it appears that the houses of the Minoan colonists were abandoned, without being destroyed by fire, in the second half of the fifteenth century B. C. Amongst the pottery found here, which included imported as well as locally-made wares, were both LM Ib and Late Helladic IIA

sherds. Some of the sherds were decorated with representations of double-axes (P l. 157 c). Other sherds of the same date were decorated with figure-of-eight shields (P l. 157 a). On some of them the telamon or strap for hanging the shield is illustrated, and others show the vertical bar for holding the two parts of the shield together and strengthening the whole. The rarity of metal objects, both in the houses and in the tombs nearby, is striking; at Kastri a small bronze pendant of Minoan type is one of the few pieces of metal found in the settlement. Some Early Byzantine coins uncarthed near the surface suggest that the late fortifications at Kastri may belong to the sixth century A.D.

On the Asprogas ridge to the north of Kastri Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey Trik completed the excavation of Tomb E begun in 1963. Much Minoan pottery of MM IIIb to LM Ia date was again found in the two remaining chambers, though most of it was badly broken. A notable discovery here was a fine cup of «Kamares» type with purple decoration (P l. 157 b). Three other plundered Minoan tombs in the ridge were also excavated; in one of them glazed Byzantine sherds of about 1000 A. D. with brown spiral decoration and light green colouring in patches were found.

Amongst chance finds made in the fields near Kastri and Asprogas were a Minoan greenstone bowl and an archaic Greek inscription cut in a limestone block. The inscription was of the late sixth or fifth century B. C. and had the single word *ΜΑΛΟΞ* upon it.

About 150 m. inland from Kastri, on the hillock known locally as Kastraki, trials revealed the foundations of a substantial Roman building with a thick cement floor; beneath the floor, and having no connection with it, was a circular pit, whose purpose is not clear. Inside the pit were Early Helladic sherds, including part of a sauceboat, and some Neolithic. Some of the Neolithic sherds were incised with chevron and zigzag patterns, and the incisions had been filled with a white paste. The Neolithic sherds are at present the only evidence for Neolithic settlement in the neighbourhood.

In the road from Kastri to Metata, another tomb (j) was cleared, under the direction of Mr. J. N. Coldstream. This was one of a series damaged during roadmaking in 1958. Late Minoan Ia and b and Late Helladic II pottery was found in the three chambers, one of which

had been reused in LH IIIb times, several kylix stems of the thirteenth century B. C. being found.

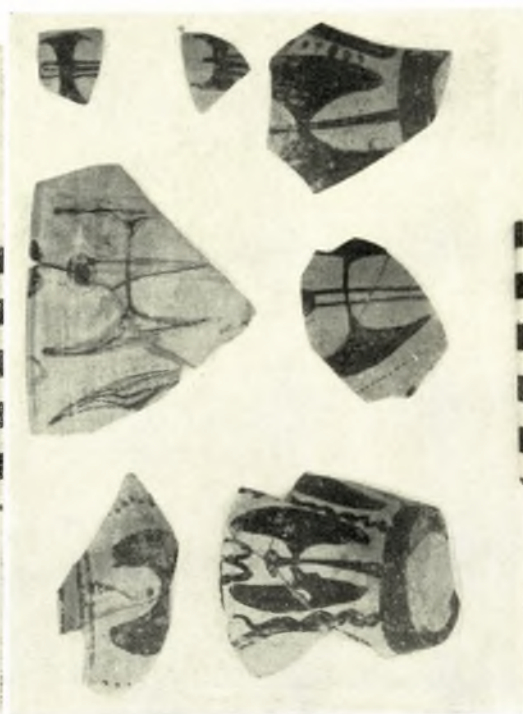
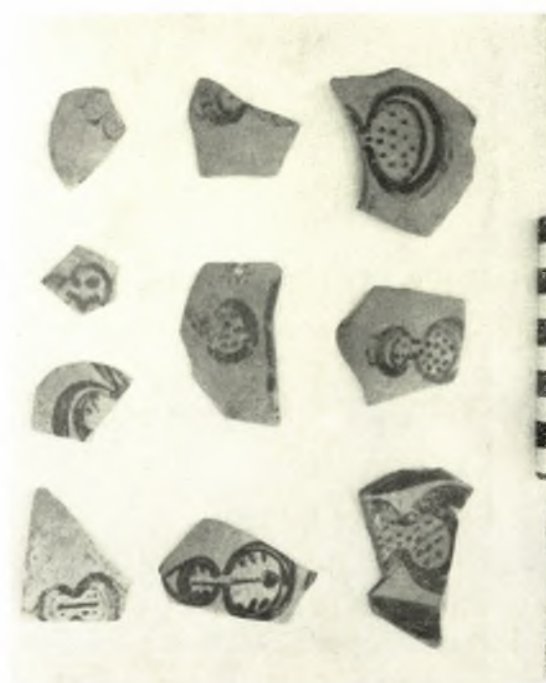
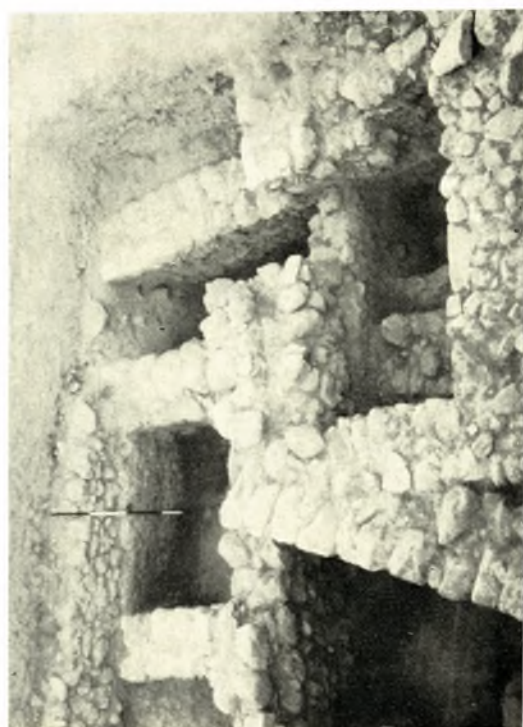
The survey of the Kastri area was completed by Mr. K. Minto and part of the Roman aqueduct which brought water from near Metata to Kastri was planned. The archaic or classical fortifications on Palaiokastros mountain inland from Kastri were mapped by Minto using a theodolite. He also drew the archaic Doric capitals and other architectural fragments built into the Church of St. Kosmas on the mountain. These pieces perhaps come from the sanctuary of Aphrodite in Kythera mentioned by Herodotus (1.105.3). Pausanias calls the sanctuary the most ancient of Aphrodite amongst the Greeks (3.23.1), and certainly the Doric capitals in

the Church of St. Kosmas do look very early indeed; the earliest are perhaps of the seventh century B. C.

Others who took part in the work were Mrs. G. L. Huxley, Mrs. R. Hope Simpson, and the Hon. Hector MacDonnell (drawing and cataloguing) and Mr. R. Watson (photography). The excavators are grateful to the Ephor of Antiquities in Laconia, Dr. Christou, to the Epimelitria of Antiquities, Miss A. Demakopoulou, and to Mr. Th. Petrocheilos, representative of the Greek Archaeological Service in Kythera, for their friendly co-operation. The work was throughout directed by the writer. All finds have been placed in the Museum at Chora, Kythera.

G. E. HUXLEY

★



Kythira, Kastri: a. LM Ib sherds, b. Cup of «Kamares» type from Tomb E, c. LM Ib and LH II a sherds, d. LM Ib house walls
G. L. HUXLEY