

Prehistory and Protohistory

Corien W. Wiersma, Dimitris Agnousiotis, Evangelia Karimali, Wietske Prummel and H. Reinder Reinders. *Magoula Pavlina. A Middle Bronze Age site in the Sóurpi Plain*. pp. 189, 43 col. ill. incl. maps + 58 b&w and 1 mixed, 4 tables. 2016. Groningen: Barkhuis (Groningen Archaeological Studies Vol. 31). ISBN 978-9-4914-3197-5, hardback, €49.

Magoula Pavlina is a slight elevation, about 1.9 m high and 4 hectares in area, less than 1 km from the beach ridge of an inlet from the Pagasitic Gulf and close to the Salambrias river that runs into the inlet, in a well-watered area of eastern Thessaly that used to be marshy but was drained for agriculture in the 1930s. It is not actually clear that it is a magoula, that is, an artificial mound built up from the remains of ancient settlement debris (p. 18, bottom), like several important sites in the neighbourhood such as Zerelia (Wace and Thompson 1912, 150–66); but some prehistoric pottery was noticed on its surface in 1978. Ploughing for the first time (in the modern era, at least) in 1996 brought a mass of artefacts to the surface, and the Groningen Institute of Archaeology, which was conducting a survey in the region in partnership with the Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in Volos, quickly made an arrangement with the land-owner to give the site a survey. In two days over 9000 items were collected, predominantly pieces of pottery; a sample consisting of pottery, stone and clay artefacts, and mammal and mollusc remains was reserved for close study. This volume publishes the results, replacing earlier partial reports.

What is immediately striking about the material is that the bulk of the diagnostic pottery is Middle Bronze Age in date, including a considerable sample of Grey Minyan ware. It is reported that the only notable feature about the artefact distribution on the surface was that there was a particular concentration of Grey Minyan at the highest point of the site, indicating that the settlement was centred there. There is also some material attributable to the Early Bronze Age, and a scatter of potsherds that suggest activity at various points in Classical, Roman, Byzantine and near-Modern times. But the material strongly suggests that the site flourished most in the Middle Bronze Age, and it is likely that the other artefactual material and the animal remains come mainly if not entirely from layers

belonging to this period. The absence of evidence for any Neolithic occupation suggests that this was not a natural place for a settlement; it might well have been a satellite of one of the more significant settlements in the region, like Zerelia.

The material is covered in three chapters, of which by far the longest is that on pottery; the others are on the stone artefacts and the animal bones and mollusc shells. There is nothing very remarkable about the pottery itself except that it includes much of relatively fine quality, especially Minyan; this is a feature that can be paralleled at other more substantial Middle Bronze Age settlements in the region and also at Pefkakia Magoula further north, where a series of Middle Bronze Age levels provides a local sequence for the period that supports dating many Minyan and Matt-Painted pieces at Magoula Pavlina to particular phases. The division of the pottery into groups used at Pefkakia forms the basis for the division here into Painted, Minyan (with subsidiaries of Dark Burnished and fine plain), Utilitarian, and Coarse. The study season devoted to the pottery was only four weeks, and this may explain some omissions in the otherwise exemplary presentation of the pottery, in which all catalogued pieces are illustrated with a drawing (coloured in the case of the painted sherds), and the fabric, features of manufacture and surface condition are carefully described. But the figures have no scale and the descriptions do not specify sherds' thickness or the method of production (e.g. wheel-turned, wheel-finished but coil-made, handmade). One reference indicates that the Grey Minyan was thought to be wheel-turned (p. 21), but that is exceptional. Admittedly, where the surface is abraded or encrusted, as in many cases, evidence for manufacture method might be difficult to find; but how soon and to what extent the potter's wheel and the technique of wheel-throwing vases were adopted in the different regions of the mainland during the Middle Bronze Age is a question that has attracted much attention in recent years, and it would have been interesting to have some local evidence from a relatively ordinary settlement site.

There is much Minyan, of fine and coarser varieties, and some fine plain ware; the shapes include early, mature and late forms. Here the reviewer would comment that the Dark Burnished sherd no. 133 (fig. 2.20, p. 70) is unlikely to be from a Vapheio cup type, since the high attachment of the handle-base is quite uncharacteristic, and the strongly flaring rim is not an early feature. However, it could indeed date in the transitional period from Middle to Late Bronze Age, like some of the finest pieces in pale fabrics (especially nos. 148-9, fig. 2.22, p. 74), which would

therefore belong to the latest Bronze Age phase represented on the site. The plain ware, here called Utilitarian (Gebrauchskeramik at Pefkakia), includes the range of standard domestic shapes, while truly coarse ware consists mainly of cooking and storage vessels (pieces of pithos size seem to be very rare). Fragments of painted vessels are least common and have a wide range including some likely EH Urfinnis and others of open shapes, but more belong to quite large closed vessels decorated in Matt-Painted styles, including quite a number that are bichrome and a few that are attributed to the Δ1β style that is associated particularly with the Spercheios valley. This class could well include other pieces from central Greece, a possible source for some of the best Minyan also, but only two may come from beyond the mainland, a small piece of a large closed bichrome-decorated vessel of a distinctive fabric that might be Cycladic (no. 15, p. 35), and a bowl fragment of fine slipped ware that might be specifically Kean (no. 150, p. 74). Most of the pottery was probably supplied from larger neighbouring sites; it may be questioned whether the range of pottery represented could have been produced in a local potter's workshop, though some domestic material might have been (this is a topic that has not been much explored, as far as the reviewer knows).

There is nothing very remarkable about the few clay and stone artefacts (all illustrated in colour), which belong to the usual domestic categories that might be expected on a settlement site, but together with the animal bones and mollusc remains (examples again shown in colour) they help to give a picture of settlement activities. The animal material is heavily dominated by domestic cattle, which might suggest that the site's local economy involved specialisation in cattle breeding, making use of the probably abundant pasture in the area (which is still used for cattle grazing), but sheep/goat and pigs are also represented. Gnawing marks on animal bones demonstrate the presence of dogs, not represented among the bone material, and red deer and other bones (1 boar, 1 aurochs) indicate hunting. A stone sickle element and pounders, grinders and querns relate to crop growing, a few clay items to spinning and probably weaving, and stone axeheads and a piece of sawn antler to craft work. The abundance of mollusc shells suggests that the sea supplied a proportion of the settlement's food, though no fishbones are reported; there probably was fishing, however, for cockles and oysters could have been found in a shallow lagoon, but fresh *Spondylus* shells must have been hacked off rocks in deep water.

Overall, Magoula Pavlina seems to have been a medium-sized village near the coast, but not

particularly oriented to the sea, that did have quite substantial external contacts. It is placed in its setting by the discussion in Ch. 5 of what is now known about the Middle Bronze Age sites in the Almyros region (here the reviewer must correct a misapprehension. The authors of Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979 did not conduct survey activities at Almyriotiki Magoula or Sourpi Magoula (pp. 163, 169); only Hope Simpson visited the former, neither of us visited the latter. The entry in the *Gazetteer* makes no reference to Middle Helladic at Almyriotiki Magoula, which must be deduced from Halstead's comment about the site, mentioned on p. 163). But the total absence of evidence for occupation in the Mycenaean period suggests that, although occupied over a long period (continuity is not demonstrable, but likely for the Middle Bronze Age at least), it was not a necessary node in the settlement pattern. Of course, conclusions drawn on the basis of surface material, however abundant, must always be considered provisional; but this volume helpfully publishes a range of material from a site that was surely smaller and more 'ordinary' than Pefkakia, for a period that is poorly known in Thessaly in comparison with the Neolithic phases.

Altogether, a volume that specialists in the Middle Bronze Age on the mainland should find useful.

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Hope Simpson, R. and O.T.P.K. Dickinson, *A gazetteer of Aegean civilization in the Bronze Age, Vol. I: the mainland and islands*. Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 52. Göteborg: Åström.

Wace, A.J.B. and M.S. Thompson 1912. *Prehistoric Thessaly*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.