

Pseira VI

The Pseira Cemetery 1. The Surface Survey

The archaeological excavations at Pseira, Crete, were sponsored by Temple University, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by the Archaeological Institute of Crete, and by the Archaeological Society of Crete.

INSTAP ACADEMIC PRESS MONOGRAPH 5

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The Pseira Cemetery 1. The Surface Survey

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Published by

INSTAP ACADEMIC PRESS

Philadelphia, PA

2002

Design and Production
INSTAP Academic Press

Printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data.....

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Philadelphia
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Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

Cemeteries in Minoan Crete were always outside the towns. Both adults and children were buried in communal graves in the early centuries of the Minoan era, but individual burial, often in jars or other containers, gradually became more popular during the Middle Minoan period. In eastern Crete, as elsewhere on the Minoan island, the cemeteries were an important aspect of Bronze Age culture. They provided the society with an essential part of its self-cognition, and those who had their final repose there were clearly a focus of community life both at the time of burial and in later years.

Because cemeteries were such an essential aspect of Minoan culture, they provide a useful series of documents in the reconstruction of Minoan belief-systems. The evidence demonstrates their persistent role in Minoan life, and it shows that the religious practices that occur in the towns of the Late Bronze Age were often a development from practices that had been associated with cemeteries in earlier periods. Many of the most persistent Minoan religious symbols, like

horn-shaped objects, women holding snakes, and humans grappling with bulls, are first known to us through objects found in cemeteries.

Investigation of the cemetery was an important aspect of the research plan for Pseira Island. Although Richard Seager almost completely excavated the burial ground in 1907, the absence of a final publication on the early work has seriously hampered our understanding of the island's history. The settlement on Pseira Island can only be understood if the important evidence from its cemetery is described as fully as possible, so that the information it provides can be integrated with the other knowledge we have about the site's people and their history. The cemetery investigation was conducted over a period of several years, and it involved work by many individuals. In addition to the excavation of the tombs, the methodology required an intensive examination of the surface of the cemetery and the collection and recording of objects visible above ground. This volume presents the results of that surface survey.

Philip P. Betancourt

Acknowledgments

The archaeological investigation of the cemetery on Pseira Island was a part of the Pseira Project, an American-Greek collaboration (*synergasia*) directed jointly by Philip P. Betancourt and Costis Davaras. The project was sponsored by Temple University, the Archaeological Institute of Crete, and the Archaeological Society of Crete, under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Culture and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Additional financial assistance for the work published in this volume was given by the following: the Institute for Aegean Prehistory; the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency; The Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada; the Society for the Preservation of the Greek Heritage; the Arcadia Foundation; the Mellon Corporation; Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario; The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; and other donors.

Thanks are extended to all those who assisted with the project: the Directors for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Ministry of Culture of Greece, Yannis Tzedakis (1985–90, 1993–99), Ios Zervoudaki (1990–92), and Katerina Romiopolou (1992–93); Nikos P. Papadakis Director of the Ephorate for Eastern Crete (1985–89 and 1995–2002); and to the Directors of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Stephen G. Miller (1985–87), William D. Coulson (1987–97), and James D. Muhly (1997–2002).

The survey of the cemetery began with preliminary examinations of the island of Pseira in 1985 and 1986, followed by an intensive walking survey carried out in 1988 and 1989. Mapping and

surveying was by David D. Day (1987–88) using a Topcon DM-A2 EDM (Electronic Distance Meter) generously loaned to the excavation by Don Anderson, of the Anderson Instrument and Supply Company, Canton, OH, to whom the project is greatly indebted.

In 1993–94, a team of surveyors prepared a topographic map of the cemetery site. Participants included Joan Beaudoin (Supervisor, 1993), Hilary Brown (1993), William B. Hafford (1994), Leigh-Ann Bingham (1994), Sheila Lin (1994), James L. Wilson (1994), Katherine May (1993–94), George Mitrakis (1993–94), and Lada Onyshkevych (Supervisor, 1994). Field photographs are by Michael W. Betancourt (1986–91), Philip P. Betancourt (1986–94), and Richard Hope Simpson (1986–91). Profile drawings are by Michael W. Betancourt (1990), Leigh-Ann Bingham (1994), Senta German (1989), Krista Gustafson (1990–91), Jenny Hope Simpson (1989, 1991), Teresa Howard (1986–91), Sheila Lin (1994), Marie T. Naples (1990–91), Jeanne Pond (1990), Sharon Rathke (1989), Chrysostomos Theodorou (1989), Eleni Velona (1990), and Philip P. Betancourt. Assistance with editing was provided by Joan Beaudoin, Hilary Brown, Katherine May, Andrea Powers, and Louise Langford.

Several staff members participated in the walking survey of the cemetery, under the direction of Richard Hope Simpson: Diane Dunn (1989–90), Tom Fleming (1989), George Harrison (1990), David Marko (1988), George Mitrakis (1988–90), Meryn Scott (1988–90), and Catherine Wolfitt (1988).

Additional survey and data processing was accomplished by Harrison Eiteljorg II, Katherine May, Lada Onyshkevych, and William B. Hafford. Data processing was conducted at the Department

of Art History Archaeological Laboratory, Temple University, and at the Center for the Study for Architecture, Bryn Mawr College. Louise Langford prepared the graphic layouts.