

POTTERY PRODUCTION IN THE PREPALATIAL MESARA:
THE ARTISANS' QUARTER TO THE WEST
OF THE PALACE AT PHAISTOS

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies on Prepalatial ceramics, which have used integrated analytical approaches, have demonstrated that Prepalatial pottery exhibits many of the technical features used to indicate specialisation of production, and hints at large movements of products between different regions of the island. This reassessment has concentrated on pottery excavated at Knossos and has revealed that part of the drinking and serving vessels used at this site in EM IIA were manufactured in south central Crete, by several production groups that used similar raw materials and production techniques. The most remarkable discovery was that a good portion of the pottery traditionally considered to be one of the outcomes of the establishment of the palatial elites – Kamares ware – was also imported to Knossos from the western Mesara, and had the same fabric identified in the imports of the Prepalatial period. This acknowledgment led to the suggestion that Kamares ware, rather than being the product of workshops established with the First Palaces, developed within pre-existing production groups. Thus far however, apart from Patrikies whose identification as a workshop specialised in the production of teapots has been controversial due to the lack of kilns and of proper working areas, none of the other excavated sites in South Central Crete has proved to have been a pottery production centre in both the Pre and Protopalatial periods.

The resumption of excavation in the area to the west of the West court of the palace at Phaistos allows a reconsideration of the issue of pottery production in south central Crete on the basis of the discovery that the pottery kiln attributed by Levi to the Neopalatial period had actually been built within the MM IIB period, in an area characterised by a large amount of misfired and vitrified vessels spanning from the EM IIA to MM IA periods.