

REVISIONI FESTIE II

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ABSTRACT

I. THE SO-CALLED BASTIONE OVEST

This article continues the programme of revision of the stratigraphies, chronologies and functions of the Protopalatial spaces and buildings uncovered by Levi at Phaistos, and focuses on the so-called BastioneOvest. This is a building located on the N-W border of the west court, which represented the ceremonial area par-excellence in MM IB-MM II. Re-examination of the excavation notebooks and of the materials associated with the various architectural structures of which it is comprised has allowed us to detect two major phases of use characterised by a distinct plan and internal articulation, both within MM II. The position of the building, its relationship with Vasca XXX in both phases, and the composition of the scarce floor assemblages, suggests that BastioneOvest should be attributed to the same liturgical sphere as Vasca XXX, and Levi's hypothesis that its main function was to host a group of soldiers so as to defend the palace should be rejected. Although it was destroyed after the MM II earthquake, the N-W corner of the building was partially re-used in the so-called *fasedeiSacelli* as a modest service room. One of the most important outcomes of this research is a new proposal for the plan and function of the later building, the back wall of which coincided with the eastern wall of the earlier building. Stratigraphy and a few materials attributable to the new structure (building CIV) allow a chronology to be proposed within MM IIIA, and suggests that it had inherited the function of the Protopalatial building.

The strategic position of the MM II building is proved by its location, which defied the steep cliff of the bedrock, and by the complex events related to the activities performed in Piazzale I in MM II. It seems important that its functions and position were perhaps inherited by building CIV, in a period in which the ceremonial activities had probably diminished. The hypothesis that the building had another phase in the first part of LM I (a phase to which a few rooms excavated by Levi must be dated) is suggestive, especially on the basis of a few ceramic shapes that recur in the floor assemblages, such as the footed bowls and the numerous skoutelia. Building CIV seemingly marked the conclusion of rites and ceremonies which were radically modified by the reconstruction of the palace at the beginning of LM IB, when the level of Piazzale I was substantially modified and the theatre staircase was consequently diminished.

The MM II phases of use reflect a substantial coincidence with the use of Vasca XXX and of the Kouloures, but also with the more modest phase of the Sacelli. The constant relationship with Vasca XXX in both phases, exemplified by the double level of white stucco and

strengthened in the second phase by the opening of a doorway in the southern wall, is surprising. The strengthening of this connection could be interpreted as the expression of a kind of conservatism within distinct but not necessarily opposite groups that re-organised the Kouloures and the related ritual activities. The raising of the level of the second phase would, in any case, be in agreement with the construction of the nearby theatre staircase, which was recently re-assigned, although with some doubts, to the phase of the Kouloures.

It seems plausible to hypothesise that Vasca XXX, the lower ramp of white stucco, the western limit of the Strada Nord and BastioneOvest were part of the same building project, which probably started with the construction of BastioneOvest so as to mask the sheer cliff of the bedrock, but also to guarantee a privileged point of view or display from its terrace. It is this the moment in which the golden age of the Phaistian palace started. It therefore seems reasonable to wonder how this rocky area was organised in MM IB, when the palace already had a west court, a *façade* and a paved ramp leading up from Piazzale LXX, and when the walking level of the Strada del Nord was remade several times.

Regarding the internal articulation of the so-called BastioneOvest, it is necessary to stress the neat difference between the west and east wings of the building, as the western wing was subsidiary to the eastern one. According to our reconstruction the north-east room had the crucial function of access room, both for the entrance from the outside and the communication with the south-east room (first phase), and for ascending to the terrace (second phase). The south-east room is probably the most important from a ceremonial point of view. For the second phase it is possible to hypothesise a real route with a complex internal-external dynamic. The entrance from the corridor seemingly allowed a double possibility, which was probably reserved for different groups: a simple passageway through the north-east room to reach the terrace, or a stop in the paved south-east room (a kind of shrine?) to proceed through the threshold of the south-west room towards the stuccoed ramp and Vasca XXX.

The almost total lack of floor assemblages in the first and second phases (the vases found above the slabs of the floor of the building have only been hypothetically attributed to the building) is highly limiting when ascertaining the functions of the building. The few vases found on the stuccoed floor of the south-east room, are not particularly prestigious, and thus suggest that the building was depleted after the first destruction. It is in any case necessary to bear in mind that the sheer north-south slope along the eastern wall of the south-east room suggests a partial collapse of the building following the natural profile of the rock. Regarding the second destruction, if the attribution of the vases found on the floor to the destruction level of the building is correct, it is interesting to stress the analogy of the ceremonial set (jar and cup), which is largely represented in numerous contexts within the palace.

Another important issue is related to the nature of the double destruction as identifiable on the basis of the few excavation data available. Traces of burning and animal bones interpreted as food remains were recorded above the floor of the corridor and the south-east room (which represented the focus of the building) in the first phase. The large quantity of animal bones on the one hand excludes that the building was destroyed by fire, but on the other suggests that they were purposely spread within the building at the end of episodes of communal feasting that had taken place within it. The animal bones, in other words, could be interpreted as part of a rite of re-consecration of a building that had been violently destroyed and partially depleted of its floor assemblages prior to the raising of the floor level. This hypothesis could explain both the presence of the carbon (remains of the hearths for the cooking of the meat?) and the lack of proper floor assemblages. The nature of the event that ended the first phase of use of the

building remains to be ascertained, as there is no archaeological evidence for seismic events at either Phaistos or Kommos during MM II. A possible explanation could be a violent destruction by man, as a result of internal conflicts between factions, which led to the complete obliteration of the ruins of the previous phase with a layer of earth. The continuity evident in the plan of the two phases might, in this case, indicate that the internal articulation of the building was so strictly related to its functions as to remain unaltered by the varying of the groups that were in charge of it.

The fact that Vasca XXX was accessed directly from this building, as hypothesised, could be explained as the outcome of the new direction. This would also lead to the supposition that the functions of the building had been augmented once the possibility of access from the Strada del Nord had been reduced. In this picture it is important to ascertain the real function of Vasca XXX, which Pernier had compared with the Caravanserai of Knossos. The use might be suggested by Pernier's remark concerning visible encrustations and corrosions on the bottom and walls caused by water. That the unit represents a sort of transition ring between the rituals performed around the baetyl and those performed around the Kouloures has been demonstrated in a previous article. That the BastioneOvest represents, at least from a chronological point of view a trait d'union between the Vasca and Kouloures, we hope is clear from this contribution. The location of baetyl and Kouloures in the ceremonial space is practically identical, and it would seem that the latter were built close by the baetyl and, preserving it, might have inherited ideologies and liturgies (baetyl-tree?).

The Vasca, in its isolated position on the border of the ceremonial space, clearly represents something different. Regardless of its visibility, depending on data which are no longer verifiable (such as the height of the walls on the southern side or the underpinning of the paving), it is safe to say that it was accessed in both phases exclusively through door-ways that opened up into stuccoed ramps. This would suggest that the liturgies related to Vasca XXX belonged to a restricted circle of people, while the liturgies related to the baetyl and the Kouloures belonged to a much larger circle, also in consideration of their location and visibility.

A discussion of the liturgies that took place in Piazzale I cannot ignore the so-called sacrificial pit, which was opened in the bedrock to the east of the northern end of the orthostate*façade* of the first palace. The materials found within it are easily attributable to a final stage of the MM II period: its position close by the earlier *façade* of the palace (dated to MM IB), suggests a use prior to the construction of the orthostate*façade*, and therefore in an open space, located to the north-east end of Piazzale I. In theory, this could have been the area within which the animals, the bones of which were then disposed within the floors of BastioneOvest, were prepared and cooked.

Regarding the final destruction of the building, it is necessary to recall that Levi believed that it was hit by a landslide at the end of his third Protopalatial phase: a landslide very rich in sherds that would have fallen above a building deprived of floor assemblages! No doubt exists about the seismic nature of that destruction, which was probably in coincidence with the first of the two events that we have dated to the end of MM II. The second earthquake would instead have ended the re-use of the north-west room. The fact that traces of burning were also noticed on the floors of building CIV could be proof of a continuity of functions between this building and the so-called BastioneOvest, functions of a liturgical and ceremonial nature.

II. OBSERVATIONS ON THE MM IIIA PERIOD

In the second part of this work, and taking inspiration from a recent workshop held at Knossos, all the structures and ceramic deposits of Pernier's and Levi's excavations which can be attributed to the period under discussion have been re-examined.

The quality and quantity of material to be re-examined is best demonstrated by the House South of the Ramp (Casa a Sud della rampa), whose construction date, the blocking up of Rooms LXXXVI and LXXXVII, the addition of Room XCIII and three likely foundation deposits, all enable us to define a certain sequence, at least architecturally, within the MM IIIA period. Although the items pertaining to the three architectural phases set out on the basis of stratigraphic soundings are quantitatively quite different, they still enable us to suggest an internal sequence within the MM IIIA period.

The data concerning the Lustral Basin XLIV-38 are then commented upon, together with the deposits under Rooms 50, 18 and 10, and in particular the stratigraphic and chronological position of the well-known sealing inscribed *su-ki-ri-te-ja* found in Room 10. In Room XLV-22, the latter's superposed walls and elevation of the two internal pillars point to the possible existence of an MM IIIA dirt floor located between the first palace's paving and the walking surface belonging to the second palace. In the nearby area, beneath Room 25, a recent re-examination of old excavation records, including the field diaries, has enabled us not only to assign the sealing archive to the final destruction of the first palace, but also to highlight the existence of wall structures on the east side of the room, oriented differently to the others and stratigraphically overlying them. The layer that contained them may be dated back to MM IIIA. This fact becomes highly important if we consider that the wall in question proves to be aligned exactly with the row of 14 column bases on the west side of the Central Court, a row that is different from both the Neopalatial and Protopalatial *façades*.

Specific attention must be paid to the partition wall between Room 47 and Court XXXV-48, in the northern sector of the palace, whose lower line was formed by a succession of orthostates lying on plinths. We can suggest, on the basis of cleaning works executed in 2008, that the partition wall could have been erected precisely in the MM IIIA period, and that no passage doorway towards Room 47 would have originally existed.

We have suggested a reuse of Room XXXVII-88 during this same period. The chronology of Stairway 6-XXXI which leads to Upper Court 94 still appears questionable. The re-examination of the various structures located in that sector allows us to state that the Theatre and orthostate *façade* were built at the same time, but Stairway 6 was built after the orthostate *façade* and its rooms, and in turn created prior to Great Stairway 66. In addition, the west retaining wall of Stairway 6, joined with the west-east terracing wall, was built after the rear Theatre wall. This leads us to conclude that Stairway 6 was started immediately after the destruction of the first palace and the laying of astraki, that is, during the MM IIIA period.

As to the group of buildings situated in the north-east sector of the palace hill, it is still to be established whether the building where the Disc was found (101) had palatial functions or was ancillary. However, it cannot be considered in the same manner as the other buildings. For convenience's sake, the only accurate data can be summarized as follows:

- 1) building 101 is precisely oriented with the palace walls, including those that Pernier considered to be related to the oldest building. The orientation also coincides with nearby Building 102, but is different to that of Buildings 103 and 104;

- 2) there was no real floor deposit;

3) the Disc was found embedded in a collapsed layer at 0.55 m. above bedrock level, together with tablet PH 1 in a room to the South of the range of mudbrick «casselles»;

4) the collapsed layer had also been burnt, since it yielded ash, charcoal, and bovine bone, some of which was burnt in turn;

5) the description of the associated sherd context («coarse, monochrome and painted vessels from the last phase of the First Palace» as described by Pernier) proves to be generic and slightly ambiguous, since Pernier, like Levi, considered the MM IIIA period to still be Protopalatial. In other words, the dating of the Disc and associated tablet cannot rely on any stratigraphic basis;

6) the excavator's interpretation that the deposit is the result of a fallen-in upper storey seems more reasonable, although we cannot exclude the existence of shelves on the ground floor;

7) the whole area in Building 101 above the collapsed layer only yielded Mycenaean or Historical Age material.

The date of the destruction layer of Building 101 (which Pernier considered to be the palace archives) remains problematic. However, it is useful to note that the destruction-collapse context of Building 101 definitely appears to differ from the others in the same north-east sector, characterized by the presence of an abundant floor deposit that can be attributed to specific episodes of destruction. This circumstance would enhance the uniqueness of Building 101, which is already represented by the mudbrick «casselles». The orientation of Building 101, which is identical to that of the first palace, enables us to assert its earlier date compared to Buildings 103 and 104, and maybe 102. The level of destruction of Building 104, which is older than that of Building 103, is likely to be dated to MM IIIB. In our opinion, this could provide a valid argument in favour of dating Building 101 as early as MM IIIA.

Only complex 103-104 was originally a unit and can be assigned to MM IIIB, and only the hypostyle Hall was re-used in the Neopalatial period. In this manner we may justify the later date of the deposit in Building 103. We would thus have to re-date this latter building to at least the MM IIIB phase, excluding its backdating to the erection of Building 101, due to the aforementioned difficulty of orientation. The data provided so far in relation to the MM IIIA period allow us to assume that the palace was somehow rebuilt in the same area as the previous one, with some slight modifications in plan, as is the case of the west border of the Central Court, or with additions as in the case of the Disc Building, but with a western *façade* that re-proposed the original line of the building, later confirmed in the second palace. Hence, we can safely say that a MM III A palace existed at Phaistos.

A provisional conclusion can be drawn from a couple of key expressions. The first is from earthquake to earthquake, to indicate that at Phaistos our period proves to be explicitly and stratigraphically determined by two precise catastrophes. The first earthquake refers to the two events, which in a brief span of time ended life at the first palace, a period that we refer to as the «shrine phase», on the basis of the small buildings hastily added to the magnificent orthostate *façade*. The second event, also seismic, is represented by the destruction layer in the House South of the Ramp and also perhaps in the Disc Building. Moreover, the partial destruction revealed in that House means that we should not exclude intermediate interruptions within the period, which may have affected the restoration project of the whole palace.

The second key expression is retrenching in continuity (which does not mean a lack of innovations), in the sense that as far as the architecture, culture, ceremonies and administration are concerned, the MM IIIA period represents a falling back in the history of the site, in which

activities and available resources were concentrated on following in the foot-steps of the great Protopalatial tradition. In an attempt to reconstruct the palace on a vast scale (with the addition of the Disc building), which must have spanned a certain period of time, the houses in the peripheral quarters were neglected. The House South of the Ramp, which was hastily built during the «shrine phase», represents the only important exception. In this context, the expression «New Era» can be applied more from the point of view of stratigraphy, but less so from a historical-cultural point of view, although we should not forget new architectural elements such as the lustral basin, the changes in pottery decoration or innovative experiments in wall-painting.

The introduction of new elements may have been the result of an ancient local tradition, or else it could attest to the increasing Knossian presence in the Mesara area which would be consolidated in the building of the Royal Villa at AyiaTriada and the leaving of the palace in a ruined state for a long time.

The retrenching in continuity could also explain a type of topographical (and maybe also functional) concentration represented by the House South of the Ramp, the houses in the Chalara quarter and by those on the Central Hill, not to mention Building XLVII underlying the Greek temple, or the house with Rooms LXXV-LXXVI, immediately West of the ascending ramp discovered beneath the Geometric quarter. It is no coincidence that the first structure lies beside the ceremonial area par excellence, which remained in use as revealed by our Building CIV. The Chalara quarter, which had been continuously inhabited since the Neolithic Age, was the focus for farming on the plain, without excluding, however, ritual practice or the existence of fine artefacts, such as ceremonial pottery and stone vases. The Houses on the Central Hill confirm the use of an area that had already been previously settled, with structures on the southern slope that were almost certainly public.

The Disc Building, which we consider to be part of the palace, in turn occupies an apparently new area, but immediately behind the part which, for its height, proved to be less damaged. The mudbrick chests, which were perhaps never filled in, can recall only palatial features. The rich ceremonial sets and the storage areas at the House South of the Ramp appear to contrast the almost complete absence of deposit in Building CIV. However, both buildings refer to the ceremonial area in the West Court and both inherited the functions of previous ones.

The people who used Building 104 may have represented the conservative descendants of the «palatial» dwellers, who had to defend the sacredness of the location while referring to the surviving Central Court of the palace.

As a third consideration, it has already been observed that at Phaistos and AyiaTriada no stratigraphic superposition of MM IIIA and MM IIIB levels and structures have so far been discerned. A different reconstruction strategy was probably applied during the two phases. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore a likely reduction of the area dedicated to structures related to the organization of power, following a tendency that would lead to the foundation of the Royal Villa at AyiaTriada.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the MM IIIA period represents a sort of watershed in the history of the district of Phaistos and hence of the whole Mesara plain. The decline of a great capital, the extension towards the sea as documented at Kommos, the substantial stalemate of centres of ancient tradition such as AyiaTriada, the demographic increase in the surrounding countryside as illustrated by the Kamilari tomb, but also a reduction in the number of settlements, as demonstrated by the recent survey, all seem to support our suggestions.