MIDDLE AND LATE HELLADIC LACONIA





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MIDDLE AND LATE HELLADIC LACONIA

COMPETING PRINCIPALITIES?

edited by Corien Wiersma & Maria P. Tsouli



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Southern Laconia in the Middle and Earlier Late Bronze Age. Pottery from Pavlopetri and other sites

William Cavanagh, Chrysanthi Gallou, Ilias Spondylis & Jon Henderson

Abstract

The underwater site of Pavlopetri has most recently been investigated by the joint project of the Ephoreia for Underwater Archaeology and the British School at Athens which conducted field seasons in 2009, 2010 and 2011. In addition to a survey of the visible building remains using state of the art surveying methods, surface artefacts were collected from across the site and two small trials were also excavated. The unstratified pottery, often severely abraded and worn, has nevertheless revealed evidence for links both with nearby sites, such as Epidavros Limera, those on Kythera and Ayios Stephanos, and with areas further afield such as Crete and central Greece. This paper reports on a selection of finds dating from early Middle Helladic to Late Helladic II and discusses their contribution to our understanding of the period.

Keywords: Underwater Archaeology – Paylopetri – Ceramics – Settlement

The Town of Pavlopetri

On the western coast of the Malea peninsula just off the Pounta shore near the modern village of Viglafia opposite Elaphonisos, is located the – now submerged – harbour town at Pavlopetri.¹ The underwater architectural remains were first reported by Fokion Negris² and they were once more brought to public attention in 1967 by Nicholas Flemming. In 1968 an archaeological team from the University of Cambridge surveyed the site, and since 2009 the site has been surveyed and studied by the Pavlopetri Underwater Archaeology Project, a joint collaboration between the Ephorate of Underwater Antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports and the University of Nottingham, under the auspices of the British School at Athens.³ Three chamber tombs and an extensive cemetery of cist graves have been recorded underwater, while a large necropolis of rock-cut tombs lies on the Pounta shore. One of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) rock-cut tombs was excavated by the

¹ Henderson et al. 2011.

² Negris 1904.

³ Harding et al. 1969; Harding 1970; Gallou & Henderson 2011-2012.

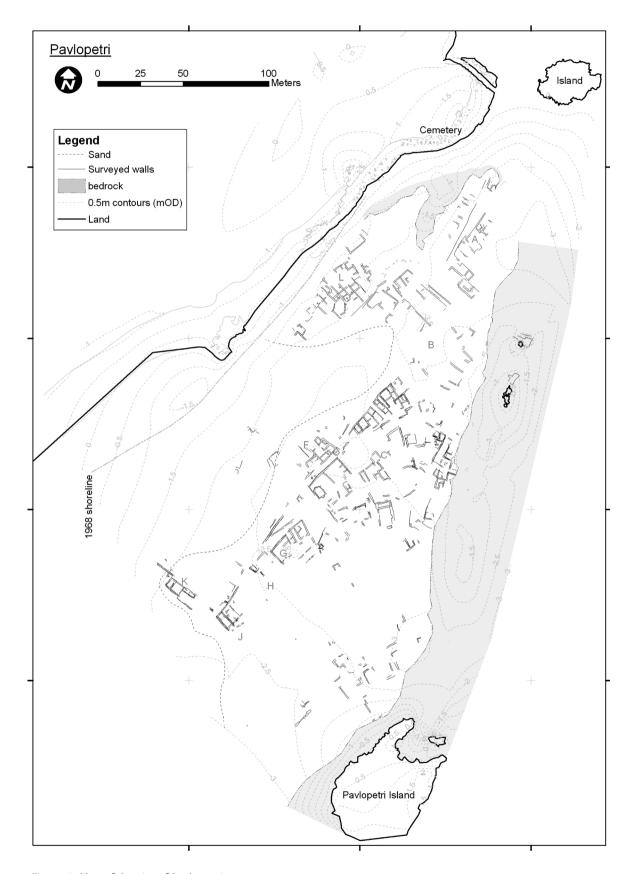
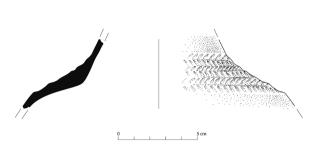
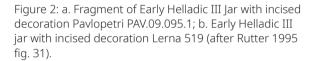


Figure 1: Plan of the site of Pavlopetri.



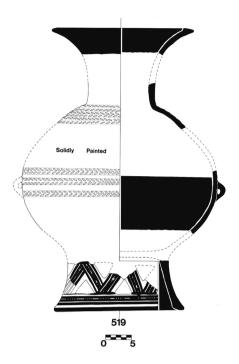
a PAV09.095.1



local Ephorate in 2004.⁴ The site was first occupied in the Final Neolithic and it continued to be used uninterruptedly until around 900 BC. Later pottery is also attested at the site.

Pavlopetri is one of a string of Middle Bronze Age (MBA) coastal sites in the southern Peloponnese⁵ including Kastri on Kythera to the south, Epidavros Limera, Las: Kastelli, Asopos: Boza, Ayios Stephanos and sites nearby to the north and continuing round the Laconian gulf (e.g. Vardies Mavrovouni). The rarity of MBA sites in Mani may reflect lack of research (note the recent finds from Passava), the finds from coastal Akovitika⁶ may well link in with Nichoria, and the major underwater site at Methoni continues the chain up the western coast of Messenia.

The survey of Pavlopetri (Figure 1) has revealed an underwater town extending over an area of at least 8 hectares; further remains of buildings are covered by sand-banks, so this is a minimum estimate of the town's extent. We cannot, as yet, clarify to which periods the house remains recorded in the survey belong, but judging from the diagnostic pottery recovered the site seems to have reached a climax in the late Middle Helladic (MH)-early Mycenaean period, and we would suggest, subject to further research, that the elaborate pattern of houses fronting on streets was established by this time. Contemporary settlements seem to vary in extent – the



b Lerna IV.519

precise figure for Kastri is not certain but it appears to have covered up to 11 ha,⁷ Ayios Stephanos has been estimated at 2.7 ha,⁸ Methoni up to 12 ha.⁹ For comparison Ano Englianos is thought to have covered about 5.5 ha in MH and 7 ha by Late Helladic (LH) I-II,¹⁰ and the area within the fortifications at Malthi is 1.12 ha.¹¹ These data are not at all robust but do suggest that maritime towns could be quite large (with populations of many hundreds, perhaps even thousands), that they were relatively stable, persisting over many centuries, and evidently secure in the sense that we have no evidence for defences beyond their natural siting.

Finds from Pavlopetri: A Miscellany of Pottery from Pavlopetri

Some 2000 artefacts were recovered over three field seasons, half from pick-up survey over the whole site and half from two small trials opened to investigate the stratigraphy of the site. It needs to be stressed that most of the finds have suffered from the action of sand, marine flora and fauna and sea water for three to four thousand

⁴ Zavvou 2011-2012, 22-23.

⁵ Banou 2000.

⁶ Engel et al. 2009.

⁷ Though some of the distribution of MBA sand-tempered wares may reflect burials rather than settled areas (Broodbank & Kiriatzi 2007, 259); the EBA extent is estimated at 2.3-3 ha.

⁸ Janko 2008, 568.

⁹ Spondylis 1999, 1028; 2012a.

¹⁰ Davis et al. 1997, 420.

¹¹ Worsham, Lindblom & Zikidi 2018, 7.

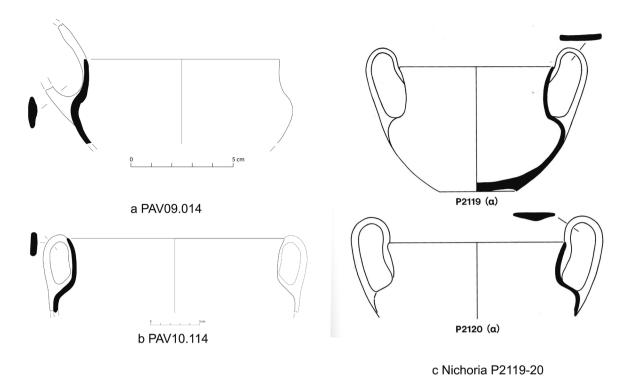


Figure 3: a. Middle Helladic I kantharos from Pavlopetri PAV09.014; b. Middle Helladic I goblet from Pavlopetri PAV10.114; c. Middle Helladic I kantharoi from Nichoria (after Howell 1992 fig. 3.6).

years; very often the original surface of a vase has not survived. The poor state of the pottery plainly makes typological identification that much more difficult; all the same, we have been able to make some progress. It must also be stressed that care needs to be taken in making comparisons between the sample from Pavlopetri and that from other contemporary sites for a number of reasons: firstly because these are unstratified finds which cannot be dated by context, secondly because the circumstances of collection, underwater rather than from on land, probably affect the relative visibility of different types of pottery, and thirdly the extreme surface abrasion seriously affects comparative analysis.

Early Helladic III

The earliest finds recognised belong probably to the 4th millennium BC, to the Final Neolithic period, and, from the following centuries, a wide range of Early Helladic (EH) I-II ceramics have been recognised. We shall start this review, however, with the EH III phase. This period has been seen as a time of cultural change and retrenchment in Greece, which some have linked with the so-called 4.2 ka climatic event. Pottery of this period has been found in Laconia, recently reported from the sites at

Karavas¹³ and Skoura¹⁴ near Sparta, Megali-Riza Vranas near Sykea,¹⁵ 35 km north of Pavlopetri and on the route from Epidavros Limera to central Laconia, and Armakas Cave near the harbour of ancient Zarax on the east coast.¹⁶ From Pavlopetri the clearest example of an EH III vessel is the jar PAV.09.095.1 with bands decorated with alternating impressions, compare Lerna 519 (Figure 2). There are other shapes possibly of EH III date, but the give-away features, such as handles on possible Bass Bowls, are missing.

MHI

Early MH is also recognisable. Thus PAV09.014 (Figure 3a) is what Howell has termed a Nichoria kantharos (Figure 3c)¹⁷ and the goblet PAV10.114 belongs to the same phase (Figure 3b). It is noteworthy that the EH III-MH I parallels so far cited belong to the "Helladic" tradition, in this respect closer to Ayios Stephanos than Kastri. To this extent Pavlopetri and Ayios Stephanos diverge from the pattern on Kythera, where 'As far as can be assessed, the indigenous pottery tradition had more or less vanished by the First Palace period (beginning ca. 1950 BC), and henceforth, Kytheran site assemblages are exclusively

¹³ Maltezou 2011, 198-199.

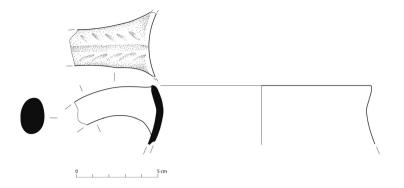
¹⁴ Banou 1999.

¹⁵ Vasilogamvrou & Maltezou 2010.

¹⁶ Efstathiou-Manalakou 2009, 11.

¹⁷ Howell 1992, 70, 83-84, fig. 3.6, pl. 3.5.

¹² Wiener 2013.





a PAV09.043.1

b Kastri γ24

Figure 4: a. Coarse jug with incised decoration PAV09.43.1; b. handle Kastri y24 (after Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 93 pl. 21:24).

based on Cretan models for some 500 years'. Recently there has been a tendency to emphasise the different trajectories followed by different sites in the way they embraced 'foreign' ceramics technologies and styles, ¹⁹ and the evidence from Pavlopetri also points in this direction.

Of course at Laconian sites Minoan and Minoanising pottery is common. For the early MBA, we have not identified examples of Minoan type high-footed goblets or "egg-cups", distinctive of EM II-MM I Kythera, though negative evidence is not to be over-emphasized; the type is, after all, found at Ayios Stephanos²⁰ as well as on Kythera. Several jugs with incised decoration (*e.g.* PAV09.043.1, Figure 4a) on the handles are closely paralleled by Kastri γ 24 (Figure 4 b).²¹ As far as we can judge, these jugs with incised handles are a local type, not quite looking to a specifically Minoan or Helladic tradition.

Middle Helladic II-Late Helladic I

Southern Peloponnesian Lustrous Decorated has been identified at Pavlopetri, such as polychrome decorated jars (Figure 5 a-b) which can be paralleled at Ayios Stephanos and Kastri and are found further afield on Aegina and at Lerna;²² the decoration clearly derives from Minoan prototypes. The conical cups from Pavlopetri (Figure 5) are like those from

Ayios Stephanos²³ and sites on Kythera.²⁴ Generally in the Aegean, the major expansion in use of the conical cup comes from MM III onwards.²⁵ At Nichoria it appears suddenly in LH I²⁶ and at the Menelaion perhaps even later.²⁷ Perhaps this token of Minoan influence worked its way gradually into the interior of Laconia, maybe changing its significance as it went. The skyphos PAV10-076.1 (Figure 5) decorated with tortoise-shell ripple is plainly related to Minoan cups, though the precise shape is not closely matched in Crete²⁸ and it may be a south Peloponnesian speciality - the shape is found at the peak sanctuary of Ayios Yeoryios on Kythera.29 A second skyphos is definitely made in Mudstone and Chert fabric, confirming local manufacture. Indeed a wide variety of shapes are made in this fabric, including the basin, conical cup, cups, wide-mouthed and narrow-necked jars, spouted jars, hole-mouthed jars, jugs and pithoi.

Dark Burnished, however, continues – the bowls with facetted rims such as PAV09.164.3 (Figure 6a), an unusually large example, no doubt belong to MH II; PAVE11.0138ip.001 (Figure 6b) has a MH III parallel from Ayios Stephanos.³⁰ The fabric persists into early Mycenaean at Ayios Stephanos,³¹ and from the transitional MH III-LH I into LH I in the chamber tombs at Epidavros Limera.³² Zavvou has also published evidence for Dark

¹⁸ Broodbank & Kiriatzi 2007, 268.

¹⁹ Lindblom et al. 2015.

²⁰ Zerner 2008, 202, 208.

²¹ Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 93 pl. 21:24, though this piece is problematic as it is described as 'red micaceous' and so might be intrusive. Note also the EH II horizontal handles from deposit α at Kastri (Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 80 pl. 17:56; Lindblom et al. 2015, 227, fig. 1 bottom right).

²² Zerner 2008, 205 with no. 184; Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 282.

²³ Zerner 2008, 209.

²⁴ Tournavitou 2014, 26-31; Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 280-281, 285, 294; Bevan et al. 2002, 74-75.

²⁵ Wiener 2011; Knappett & Hilditch 2015.

²⁶ Dickinson et al. 1992, 478-479.

²⁷ Catling 2009, 409-412, though note that LH I contexts were not isolated in the excavations.

²⁸ Cf. Betancourt 1990, 151 #1099.

²⁹ Tournavitou 2014, 49-51.

³⁰ R212 Rutter & Rutter 1976, 36, ill. 10.

³¹ Zerner 2008, 186.

³² Gallou 2020, 149-156.

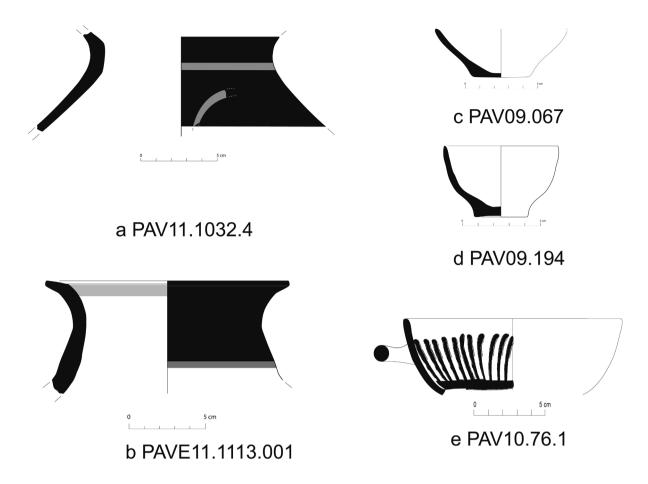


Figure 5: a-b. Middle Helladic III-Late Helladic I polychrome Lustrous Decorated jars PAV11.1032.4 and PAVE11.1113.001; c-d. conical cups in Red Micaceous and Buff wares, PAV09.067, PAV09.194; e. skyphos with in-and-out decoration PAV10.076.1.

Burnished ware from Bozas Asopos and from the region of Vatika. 33

In Red Micaceous the range of shapes includes a conical cup, basins, bowls, jugs, and, especially commonly, tripod cooking pots (Figure 6 c-d) and pithoi, much the same as are found in the settlement levels at Kastri and Ayios Stephanos, and in the chamber tombs at Epidavros Limera.

"Adriatic Ware" or Incised Plain Ware was common at Malthi and Asea,³⁴ and occurred regularly at Nichoria³⁵ but only occasionally at Ayios Stephanos and the Menelaion³⁶ (though it was found on several sites in the Laconia Survey)³⁷ and not at all at Kastri. "Adriatic Ware" is not common at Pavlopetri, though PAV10.039.1 is in Red Micaceous fabric, so locally made.

Several themes emerge from this very sporadic and incomplete overview of a few of the finds from Pavlopetri. In a broad sense the MBA pottery repertory is very similar to that from Kastri (and evidently sites on Kythera in general) and from that at Ayios Stephanos, though closer to the latter. In particular, classic MH forms and fabrics continue side-by-side with those of a Minoan tradition. Manufacture of the Mudstone and Chert and the Red Micaceous fabrics, and of Lustrous Decorated pottery, is agreed to have been carried out in the region, though this need not necessarily mean exclusively on the island of Kythera. Overwhelmingly these local pottery types mould the ceramic culture at Pavlopetri and more generally the sites in the region. Although strongly influenced by Minoan types they include decorative motifs, ceramic shapes and potters' techniques that are distinctly local - Minoanising is not the same as Minoan. We shall pick up this point in our Concluding Remarks, but before doing that we wish to look in detail at some other groups of artefacts.

³³ Zavvou 2010, 96.

³⁴ Valmin 1938, 259 ff.; Holmberg 1944, 106-110.

³⁵ Howell 1992, 45, 48, 49-50, 55, 64.

³⁶ Zerner 2008, 199-201; Taylour 1972, 265 fig. 38.10; Catling 2009, 329.

³⁷ Cavanagh et al. 1996, 23 type 16.

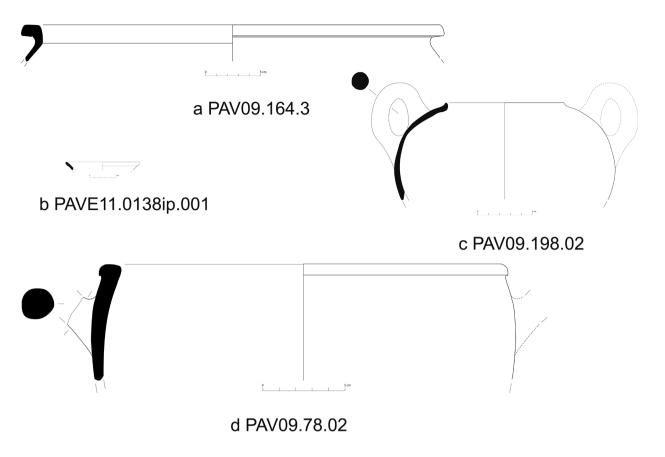


Figure 6: a. Middle Helladic II Dark Burnished bowl PAV09.164.3; b. Dark Burnished conical bowl PAVE11.0138ip.001; c-d. Middle Helladic III-Late Helladic I Red Micaceous globular and tub-shaped cooking pots PAV09.198 and PAV09.78.2.

Loomweights

Eleven discoid loomweights with a single hole and of Minoan type have been collected in the project (note that the underwater archaeological site is in fact strewn with them, many more than were collected). A similar number was found in the excavations at Kastri, mainly single-holed but also some with two holes.³⁸ At Ayios Stephanos one was recovered³⁹ and at Nichoria two.⁴⁰ Outside Crete they have a distinctly maritime distribution, with finds from Kea,⁴¹ Phylakopi,⁴² Thera and the east Mediterranean.⁴³ It is quite possible that purple dyed fabrics were produced at Pavlopetri: a large underwater midden made up of murex shells has been identified off-shore from the site, so the loomweights may point to a textile industry. An alternative suggestion, made to us by a local seafarer, is that the weights may have been used for weaving linen to make sails. This

brings to mind the point that ports must have had their ships' chandlers to supply many of the goods which do not survive archaeologically, from food to ropes and hawsers.

Pithoi

Pithoi and storage jars are such a common find from Bronze Age sites that they can almost be taken for granted. They are found from large to small on almost every site, and storage areas with pithoi have been reported from MH sites as varied as Mycenae, where a basement storeroom was filled with them together with barley, vetch and other seeds,⁴⁴ and the remote mountain site of Petroto, on the borders of Thessaly and Epirus, where large storage vessels were found.⁴⁵ Very large pithoi are attested in the burial mounds of Messenia; for example, pithos 1 at Kaminia measured about 1.75 m in height and pithos 3 at Ayios Yannis Papoulia 2.18 m.⁴⁶ These are quite as large as the giant pithoi in the palace at Knossos.

There were many fragments from both EH and MH examples at Pavlopetri, among which pride of place is

³⁸ Kastri $\zeta 156\text{--}7,\ \kappa 11\text{--}18$ (MM IIIB-LMIA), see Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 206-207, fig. 59, pls. 59-60.

³⁹ Banks & Janko 2008, 427-428.

⁴⁰ Carrington Smith 1992, 687-688.

⁴¹ Davis 1986, 98.

⁴² Atkinson et al. 1904, 214.

⁴³ Gleba & Cutler 2012.

⁴⁴ Shelton 2010, 60.

⁴⁵ Chatziangelakis 2010, 317.

⁴⁶ Boyd 2002, 117, 121.

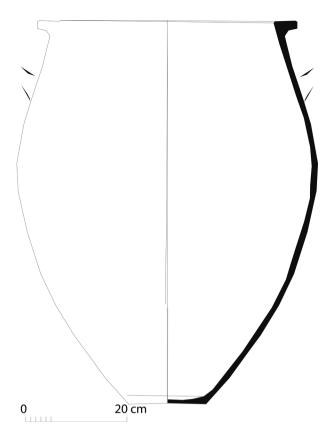


Figure 7: Pavlopetri pithos α1.

taken by a series of complete or almost complete examples. $\alpha 1$ (Figure 7) stands 0.75 m high has an ovoid profile and two handles set on the shoulder not far from the rim. This is a typical MH pithos, of a form widely paralleled on Mainland Greece. In understanding the design of pithoi Christakis' analytical observations are particularly helpful: in this case the relatively wide mouth of $\alpha 1$ makes for easy access to its contents down to the base of the vessel, and the shape is stable but can be tilted; if filled with grain to the rim its gross weight would have been over 100 kg and with just two handles it would be unwieldy to transport. So here we have a standard mainland jar probably used for domestic storage.

Pithos a2 (Figure 8) was $0.54\,\mathrm{m}$ in height and has a maximum diameter of $0.64\,\mathrm{m}$. So it is smaller than $\alpha 1$, with a capacity of around 85 litres rather than 120 litres, but it is more elaborately decorated, with the distinctive row of stamped spirals just below the neck and a band with impressed finger-tipping just below the belly. The five handles would have made lading much easier. Not quite globular, the general form of the vase is similar to

the globular pithoi in Christakis's typology,⁴⁷ but there are much closer parallels from Kastri on Kythera: vase ζ 150 from a deposit of MM IIIB-LM IA date is decorated with a similar row of stamped spirals, as is η 76 of LM IA⁴⁸ – the latter is made of "Oatmeal" fabric, that is to say the mudstone fabric typical of the southern Peloponnese. So we would suggest that this type of vase may have been used for transport, as suggested by its smaller size and easier handling; there is no evidence for what it would have contained, but the distinctive stamped decoration could have signalled in any transaction what the contents were. α2 was made from a clay fired reddish-brown with a black core with much quartz and other inclusions, so markedly different in fabric from Kastri n 76, and a rim fragment of very similar form from Pavlopetri, PAV09-199.4, was made in Red Micaceous fabric. These various jars/pithoi, therefore, are of different sizes, and evidently made with different technologies, but appear to be locally produced for trade.

The third example for consideration α 6 (Figure 9), has a preserved height of 0.7 m, though must have stood originally about 1 m high. This is an elaborately decorated pithos: it has four rows of applied cordons decorated with overlapping discs set immediately below the rim; at intervals along the bottom of these cordons are placed four little discs decorated with incisions. In the field below this, on the shoulder of the vessel, a further set of four similar cordons form a wavy band running horizontally round the body, while just above the widest diameter a third set of four cordons run horizontally round the vessel. The scars from heavy lugs, of which there must originally have been four, were found just above the lowest set of cordons, set into the shoulder zone. The vase is constructed of a hard orange clay with thick walls and was coated with a slip; there were traces of burnish marks on the lower body. This large, heavy and elaborate vessel is almost certainly of Minoan origin; parallels can be quoted from Knossos,49 Tylissos,50 Zakros,51 and Malia.52

Maritime Exchanges

If we still do not understand the full details of its manufacture and distribution it is plain that there was a complex system underlying the exchange of pottery in southern Laconia throughout the MBA. Likewise imports from outside the region are attested. There was also a wider trade in south Peloponnesian products, especially in the Late Phase. Zerner has observed that while it is not

⁴⁷ Christakis 2005, 13.

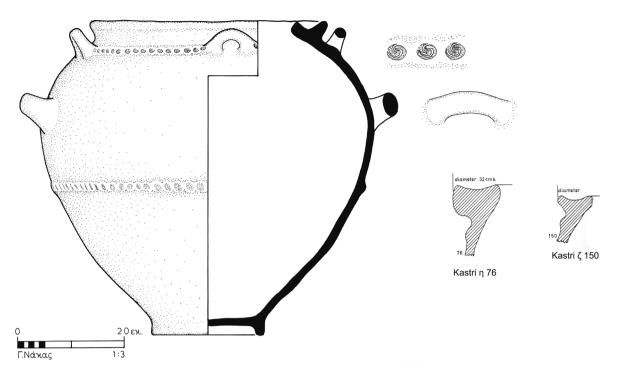
⁴⁸ Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 114; 120, fig. 40.

⁴⁹ Evans 1921-1936, vol. I, fig. 241B; vol. IV, 638 fig. 626.

⁵⁰ Chatzidakis 1912, fig. 3 centre, fig. 4.

⁵¹ Platon 1969, pl. 260y.

⁵² Pelon 1970, pl. 30 no. 302.



PAVLOPETRI PITHOS A2

Figure 8: Pavlopetri pithos α 2, Kastri η 76 and ζ 150 (after Coldstream & Huxley 1972, fig. 40).

distributed over so wide an area as Aeginetan, substantial amounts of Lustrous Decorated have been found in the Argolid, and smaller amounts in other areas.53 Vases in Red Micaceous ware were recognised by Zerner at Lerna, though not very common.⁵⁴ Dietz identified two examples from grave O in Grave Circle B55 which can be paralleled from Pavlopetri: the spouted jar O-199 close to PAV10-101.1 (Figure 10b) and the pedestalled jar, with a pedestal similar to PAV10-84.3 (Figure 10a) and a number of pieces from Kastri. At Tsoungiza⁵⁶ parallels can be found with material from southern Laconia, though it seems imports were not identified with certainty, so perhaps pottery from our region did not penetrate deep into the interior of the Argolid. We would, however, draw attention to Lindblom's comparison between the pottery from Kastri and that from the shaft graves at Lerna. He concludes that 'these potters and their products had been incorporated into the local society (through settling and transferring of technology in local contexts), so that the previously considered 'foreign' technologies became part of the local potting tradition'.57

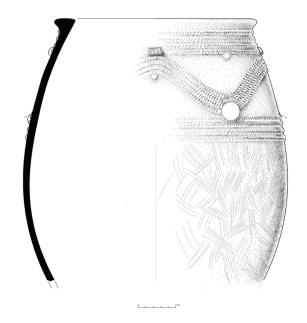


Figure 9: Pavlopetri pithos α 6.

⁵³ Zerner 1993, 50.

⁵⁴ Zerner 1993, 47.

⁵⁵ Dietz 1991, 216.

⁵⁶ Rutter 1990.

⁵⁷ Lindblom et al. 2015, 233.

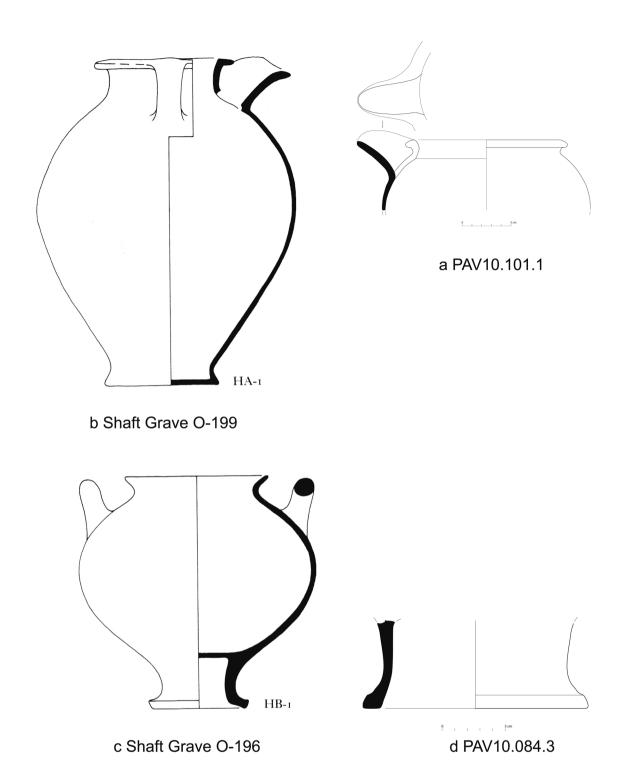


Figure 10: a-b. Red Micaceous Bridge-spouted jars PAV10.101.1 and Mycenae Shaft Grave O.199 (after Dietz 1991, 216); c-d. Mycenae Shaft Grave O.196 and Pavlopetri PAV10.84.3.

The discovery of a shipwreck of MM III-LM I date at Koulenti,⁵⁸ not far from Pavlopetri, serves as further evidence for the lively commercial contacts between Laconia and the Aegean.

Concluding remarks

The first centuries of the second millennium BC in Greece can no longer be partitioned simply into three homogeneous blocs: "Protopalatial Crete", the "Middle Cycladic" islands and the "Middle Helladic" mainland. Instead the pattern has been fragmented into many different cultural enclaves, each with its own history and its own response to an international world partly shaped by the small palatial states of Crete, partly by what seem to be small independent "city-states" (such as Kolonna on Aegina) and partly by what might be looser and more fissile groups of communities with some shared sense of identity, such as the "Tumulus Culture" of Messenia, and, we suggest here, the coastal communities of the southern Peloponnese.

How does the screenshot we have taken of MBA Pavlopetri fit into this MBA world? Its extent suggests a bustling maritime town with thousands of inhabitants. It was a long-lived settlement which had survived the ups and downs of Aegean prehistory for well over one thousand years. It was closely bound in with nearby ports such as Kastri on Kythera, but, unlike at Kastri, certain finds of EH III and early MH date suggest a slightly different trajectory and one which was that much less bound in with the big island to the south. The MH storage jars suggest that, notwithstanding its connection with the sea, this community was embedded in the peasant agricultural economy which underwrote the whole superstructure. The evidence that this was a trading community is inescapable – how far it was enmeshed in the economies and palatial polities of Crete is not clear; the Linear A inscriptions from Kythera⁵⁹ and Ayios Stephanos⁶⁰ are not from administrative texts and do not help elucidate this question. The possibilities might range from colony, tributary territory, vassal state, to independent community or free port – at this stage the question remains open⁶¹. We have argued that the absence, so far as we can judge, of defensive measures indicates that the inhabitants felt secure. What can be asserted more certainly is that Pavlopetri, and southern Laconia more generally, played a significant part in introducing those Minoan cultural influences which transformed the mainland, and it takes that process of transformation back to the very beginning of the MBA.

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⁵⁸ Spondylis 2012b.

⁵⁹ Coldstream & Huxley 1972, 205.

⁶⁰ Banks & Janko 2008, 441-443.

⁶¹ See the discussion in Janko 2008, 586-588.

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