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THE MINOAN VILLA AT KANNIÀ: PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A NEW PROJECT

NICOLA CUCUZZA

Riassunto. Si presenta una sintesi dei risultati della revisione dei dati di scavo e dei materiali rinvenuti nel corso dell'indagine archeologica che nel 1958 portò alla luce la Villa di Kannià presso Mitropolis. Lo stato di pubblicazione solo parziale dello scavo ha spinto a intraprendere dal 2008 un esame dell'intera documentazione disponibile e dei rinvenimenti in vista della edizione complessiva. L'edificio, costituito da circa 30 vani, venne costruito sul sito di un insediamento neolitico; i resti architettonici indicano l'esistenza di due differenti fasi costruttive, databili entrambe al periodo neopalaziale. Dopo la distruzione del T(ardo) M(inoico) IB, pochi frammenti ceramici indicano una frequentazione nel TM II-III A. Durante il TM III B alcuni vani del settore orientale furono risistemati per ospitare delle attività cultuali, come indica il rinvenimento di diversi esemplari di statuette fittili del tipo delle "dee dalle braccia alzate". Qualche ulteriore rinvenimento (un frammento di *kernos* fittile, una statuetta ed alcuni vasi fittili miniaturistici) di epoca arcaica ed ellenistica testimoniano qualche saltuaria deposizione votiva anche in epoca storica.

Περίληψη. Παρουσιάζεται μια σύνθεση των αποτελεσμάτων της επανεξέτασης των ανασκαφικών στοιχείων που προέκυψαν κατά τη διάρκεια της αρχαιολογικής έρευνας που το 1958 έφερε στο φως την Έπαυλη στα Καννιά κοντά στη Μητρόπολη. Η μόνον μερική δημοσίευση της ανασκαφής με ώθησε να αρχίσω το 2008 μια εξέταση όλης της διαθέσιμης τεκμηρίωσης και των ευρημάτων για μια συνολική έκδοση. Το κτήριο, αποτελούμενο από περίπου 30 δωμάτια, κατασκευάστηκε στον χώρο ενός νεολιθικού οικισμού. Τα αρχιτεκτονικά κατάλοιπα υποδεικνύουν την ύπαρξη δύο διαφορετικών οικοδομικών φάσεων, που ανάγονται και οι δύο στη νεοανακτορική περίοδο. Μετά την καταστροφή της Ύ(στερης) Μ(ινωικής) IB, λιγοστά θραύσματα κεραμικής υποστηρίζουν μια χρήση κατά την ΥΜ II-III A. Κατά τη διάρκεια της ΥΜ III B μερικά δωμάτια του ανατολικού τομέα τακτοποιήθηκαν εκ νέου για να φιλοξενήσουν λατρευτικές δραστηριότητες, όπως δείχνει η εύρεση διαφόρων πήλινων αγγαματιδίων του τύπου της "θεάς με τα υψωμένα χέρια". Μερικά περαιτέρω ευρήματα (θραύσμα πήλινου κέρνου, ένα αγγαματιδίον και μερικά πήλινα μικκύλα αργεία) της αρχαϊκής και της ελληνιστικής εποχής μαρτυρούν κάποια αποσπασματική απόθεση αναθημάτων και κατά την ιστορική εποχή.

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to offer a brief outline of the archaeological evidence uncovered in the excavations carried out in 1958 at Kannià near Mitropolis, where the remains of a large Minoan building – dubbed the Minoan Villa – were brought to light. The report of this excavation was not fully published: therefore, in 2008 a project was started with the aim of publishing all the archaeological evidence available about the site. The Villa, built on a Neolithic settlement, consists in approximately thirty rooms. The architectural remains suggest the existence of two different Neopalatial building phases. Destroyed in the L(ate) M(inoan) IB period, the Villa was quite abandoned through LM II-III A. In LM III B the East area of the building was rearranged to house some cult rooms, as the discovery of clay figurines of the so-called "goddesses with up-raised arms" testifies. Few later findings (a fragment of a clay *kernos*, a female figurine and some miniature vessels) suggest some ritual activities also during the Archaic and Hellenistic periods.

INTRODUCTION

The remains of a large Minoan building at Kannià near Mitropolis were discovered in the autumn of 1957; the building was then excavated in the summer of 1958 by the Italian Archaeological School at Athens (hereafter, SAIA) under the direction of D. Levi.

Despite the importance of the finds, the report on this excavation was not fully published, apart from some preliminary notes by S. Alexiou (referring to the 1957 works)¹. The bibliography on the excavations carried out in the building (very rapidly dubbed as a "rural Villa"²) consists primarily of an article by D. Levi (1959)³, while accounts of some finds – in particular, of the snake tubes and the anthropomorphic clay figurines – were published by G.C. Gesell, G. Rethemiotakis and S. Alexiou⁴.

¹ ALEXIOU 1957a and 1957b.

² MCENROE 2010, 93, 171 fn. 31 (with bibliographical references) for the misleading use of the term *Villa* in Minoan archaeology.

³ LEVI 1959.

⁴ GESELL 1976; RETHEMIOTAKIS 1998 and 2001, *passim*; ALEXIOU 1959, 195-202. See also GESELL 1985, 77-79 and 2010, 135-136. On the terracotta figurines discovered at Kannià, more recently also CUCUZZA 2015b and forthcoming c.

In 2008 a project with the aim of publishing all of the archaeological evidence available about the site was drawn up by myself, as director, under the supervision of the Italian Archaeological School at Athens (SAIA)⁵. The project, which benefitted of the financial support of the INSTAP, was made possible thanks to the agreement and cooperation of the 23rd Ephoria of the Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion.

The existing records of the excavation (mainly notebooks and photographs) have been examined: they are currently stored in the SAIA archives. The study included material from the Heraklion Museum as well as from the Haghioi Deka and Phaistos storerooms (just a couple of vases remain at the original site). Finally, in the spring of 2011, a new geo-referenced plan of the building was made by M. Ricciardi (Fig. 1).

The work carried out by the team has enriched our knowledge of the Villa with new and more precise information. The members of the team and the areas of studies consisted of; myself (architecture, LM III pottery, clay figurines), D. Puglisi (Neopalatial pottery), S. Privitera (pithoi and storage activities), O. Palio (stone vessels) and C. Sorrentino (animal bones and shells). In the following article, I offer a preliminary account of our results.

In his paper D. Levi stated that the Villa was built by cutting into older stratigraphic layers, dating back to the Neolithic period⁶. According to Levi, there were just two architectural phases:

- a) a first phase, documented by the existence of walls discovered under the most recent floors in rooms XI, XIII and XIV, belonging to a MM III building (a predecessor of the Villa);
- b) a major architectural phase, testified by the Villa itself. The finding of many vessels indicated LM IB as the date of the destruction of the Villa.

However, as S. Alexiou correctly argued, the easternmost part of the building was used also in LM III⁷. This most recent activity was testified by the discovery of the well-known terracotta figures of the so-called “goddesses with up-raised arms” (hereafter GUAs).

1. THE «KANNIÀ PROJECT» AND THE VARIOUS CHRONOLOGICAL PHASES

Our new research, which at present excludes the older (i.e., Neolithic) phase, has enabled us to gain a more precise knowledge of the chronological phases already identified during the excavations. The architectural complex, consisting of 30 rooms, covers an area of about 500 square meters, extending for a maximum length of 24 meters E-W and 19.5 meters N-S (Fig. 1).

Neolithic pottery was found in the area to the west of the Villa as well as in the southern part of the building (rooms XXVI-XXVII, XVII, XXIV and X-south) and in room I. The poorly preserved remains of a wall and a small paved area in the rooms X-south and XXIV may belong to this period; S. Di Tonto and S. Todaro will be carrying out a special project to study the material contained therein. The precise dating of the Neolithic material has yet to be ascertained; moreover, the possibility that human occupation may have lasted until the Early Bronze Age should be further examined⁸. Only a few ceramic sherds found belong to the Protopalatial period.

Leaving aside the Neolithic phase, the archaeological evidence allows us to distinguish at least four different chronological phases:

- a) Middle Minoan IIIB
- b) Late Minoan I
- c) Late Minoan IIIB
- d) Post-Minoan.

⁵ CUCUZZA 2009.

⁶ LEVI 1959, 242; on the Neolithic levels at Kannià, VAGNETTI 1973, 1-5. More recently see TODARO 2013, 269-271 and CUCUZZA forthcoming b with further bibliographical references.

⁷ ALEXIOU 1959, 198; see KANTA 1980, 91.

⁸ A marble idol and a fragment of a Kampos bottle have been identified in addition to few EM sherds; see CUCUZZA forthcoming b.



Fig. 1. Plan of the Villa (drawing by M. Ricciardi).

1.1 MM IIIB

The architectural remains discovered beneath the floors of the Villa can be dated to the period of MM IIIB⁹. In particular, there are three walls, built with huge blocks, which were detected in rooms XIV, XI and XIII; these walls have the same orientation as the Villa.

The MM IIIB architectural remains found in rooms XIII includes a threshold, which seems to be *in situ*: it shows the entrance to one of the four rooms belonging to the oldest architectural phase. It is very probable that the lowest part of the East wall of room XI belongs to the same period: it was re-used as a foundation for the later wall. It is certain that some MM IIIB vases found in room XI relate to these older architectural remains; most are conical cups, some are of a type very common in LM I, while others have a ledge-rim (Figs. 2-3). Mention should also be made of a cup with vertical strokes in dark-on-light (C.17-20-34. 27), three straight-sided cups (C.17-20-34. 23-25) and two bridge-spouted jars in light-on-dark (GO 1159/MH 15227; GO 1168/MH 15219).

It is very probable that a straight-sided cup with a dark-on-light spiral, recovered during the excavation of room XV, can be ascribed to the same phase (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, there is no evidence that helps us to understand the causes of the destruction of these rooms: the Villa was built above their remains and had the same alignment as the older structure. Further investigations will clarify whether these older remains belong to a previous building or to an early architectural phase of the Villa itself. Again, the evidence is not enough to make out any specific function of the MM IIIB rooms: a tripod cooking pot testifies to some cooking activities in the north-eastern room. Storage activities could be suggested, with the assumption that the single pithos GO 1206 (among the 60 pithoi) decorated with a rope pattern, found in one of the later storerooms, was first used in this building (or during this first phase of the Villa).

⁹ GIRELLA 2010 for the difference between MM IIIA and MM IIIB.

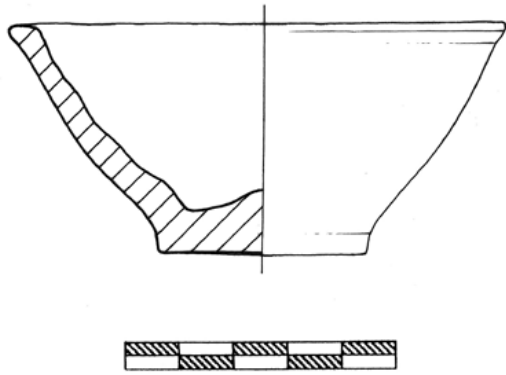


Fig. 2. Conical cup C.17-20-34. 10 (drawing G. Merlatti).

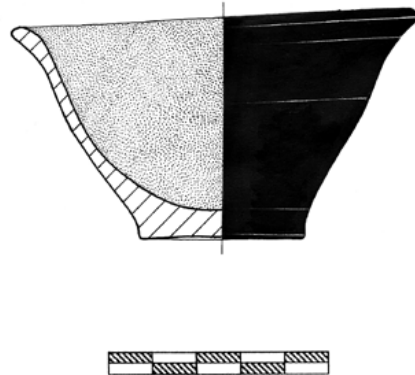


Fig. 3. Conical cup C.17-20-34. 14 (drawing G. Merlatti).

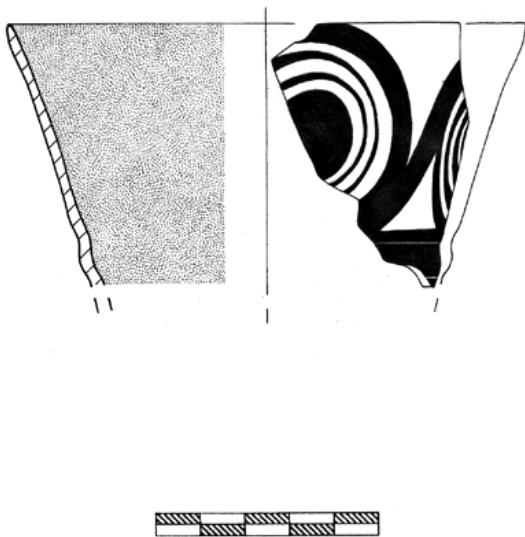


Fig. 4. Cup 76/7.VII.2 (drawing G. Merlatti).

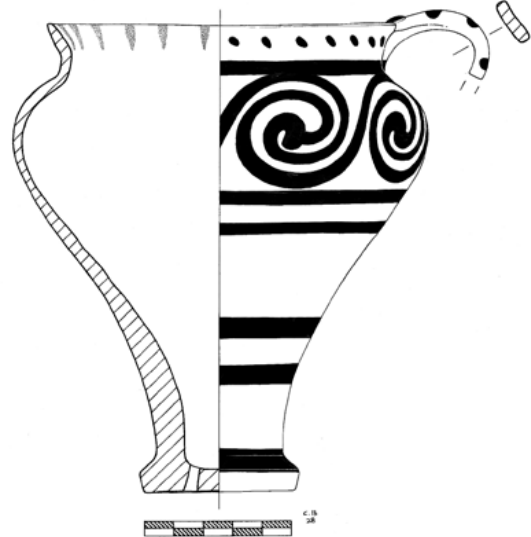


Fig. 5. Cup-rhyton 13/III.2 from room XVI (drawing G. Merlatti).

1.2 Late Minoan I

The walls of the MM IIIB building, found in rooms XI, XIV and XIII, were taken down in order to build the Villa. A cup *rhyton* (13/III.2: Fig. 5) was discovered under the floor in the north-western corner of room XVI: this vase (perhaps a foundation deposit) provides a very good *terminus ad quem* for the construction of the building, which could be assigned to LM IA. The destruction of the Villa, which occurred in LM IB, was marked by a fire which must have at least affected the storerooms XI-XIV, as the vessels discovered in these rooms reveal traces of fire damage. The excavations also uncovered some ceramic sherds belonging to the «Special Palatial Tradition»¹⁰.

The Villa had perimeter walls of ashlar masonry (Fig. 6) and fine stone thresholds. There is no evidence of stone door jambs or column bases. Entrance to the building was through a large door in the southern wall and was highlighted by the existence of a raised walkway. It is very likely that there was another entrance, more suitable for the storerooms, in the northern wall of the Villa. A huge stone block, which was carefully cut and found shifted from its original position, now extant in room IV (Fig. 7), could have been the original threshold of the northern wall of the room. This second entrance would have allowed direct access to the storerooms.

Storage was one of the main functions of the Villa at Kannià in LM I: this activity is testified by about 60 pithoi, kept in five rooms: IV, XI, XIV, XVI and XXI (Fig. 8)¹¹. Two of the storerooms, XI

¹⁰ CUCUZZA 2011b, 113 fig. 8.

¹¹ CHRISTAKIS 2005, 72-74 and 2008, 69-70.



Fig. 6. Northern façade: ashlar masonry (in the background room XIV; photo by the A.).



Fig. 7. Room IV from North: in the foreground the stone block, interpreted as a possible threshold (photo by the A.).

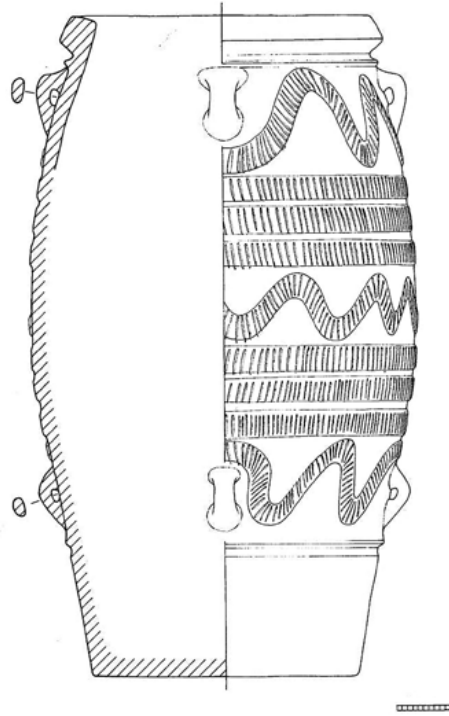


Fig. 8. Pithos GO 1227 (room XI; drawing G. Merlatti).



Fig. 9. Room XI: northern *gournia* (photo by the A.).



Fig. 10. Terracotta figurine GO 1145/HM 15133-15140 (room XVII-XVIII; photo by the A.).



Fig. 11. The western façade of the Villa (on the right), the North-South road along the wall with pillar bases on the left (courtesy of the SAIA).

and XIV, very likely had a special function; access to them was through a large door with a monumental stone threshold. The two storerooms not only have a large number of pithoi but also stone *gournes*, each with a hemispherical cavity at the bottom (Fig. 9). No such items are present in the other rooms of the Villa.

Some cultic activity was also performed inside the building, as testified by a group of terracotta figurines, found primarily in room VI (Fig. 10)¹². A ceremonial function may also explain the large number of cups-*rhytā* (8 entire specimens) found in the Villa. The various bridge-spouted jars and cups-*rhytā*, mostly found in rooms XI and XIV, may also have had the same ceremonial function. Some of the bridge-spouted jars have a light-on-dark painted decoration; the reoccurrence of this old-fashioned technique, which was also found on some vessels from other LM IB contexts in Mesara (Haghia Triada, Phaistos) could be explained by assuming that the vases may have been used for cultic purposes¹³. The discovery of a stone core drill indicates the production of stone vases in the area.

The western side of the building was flanked by a 1.5/1.7 meters wide road, the western boundary of which is a massive N-S wall at least 15 meters in length. The remains of a second wall, perpendicular to it, suggest that the N-S wall was not a simple terrace wall: it could have belonged to another building contemporary to the Villa¹⁴. Some photographs taken during the 1958 excavations reveal the existence of some blocks placed at regular distances from each other on the top of the N-S wall (Fig. 11). We can speculate whether

¹² LEVI 1959, 251, 259 figs. 31-32; GESELL 1985, 77-79.

¹³ See PUGLISI 2013, 93-94 for the light on dark decoration on some ewers found at Haghia Triada (with reference also to some vessels with a light-on-dark decoration found at Knossos in the LM II destruction layer in the “Unexplored Mansion”). Compare CUCUZZA 2015a, 186 and tav. II.2.

¹⁴ See HITCHCOCK-PREZIOSI 1997 and McENROE 2010, 94-95 for comparisons (Tylissos: Villa A + Villa B; Knossos: Little Palace + Unexplored Mansion): the Villa at Kannià could be a building specifically used for storage and industrial activities of a wider architectural compound.



Fig. 12. Pillar base on the North-South wall West of the Villa (photo by the A.).



Fig. 13. Room XV from North. In the middle the razed eastern wall of room XVI (photo by the A.).

these blocks (some of which are still extant: Fig. 12) may be pillar bases belonging to a portico that was part of the other building to the W of the Villa. In the excavations carried out in the southern area between the Villa and the N-S wall, some LM II and LM III ceramic sherds were found¹⁵: it is an intriguing possibility to suggest that this second building could have been used after the destruction of the Villa in LM IB.

1.3 Late Minoan IIIB

The eastern part of the Villa was used in LM III to house shrines containing GUAs. The set of entire GUAs, snake-tubes (or tube-vases) and *kalathoi*¹⁶ enables us to identify rooms I, V and XV as the cult rooms of the religious complex. LM III occupation involved some building works (more extensive than previously thought), clear evidence of which is found in these three rooms. Room I was the result of the

¹⁵ CUCUZZA 2009, 929 and 2011b, 113 and forthcoming a.

¹⁶ See especially HALLAGER 2009 and CUCUZZA 2015b.



Fig. 14. Hut urn C.26N1 (room V; photo by the A.).



Fig. 15. The door of the hut urn C.26N2 (room V; photo by the A.).

rearrangement of a wider room (including room IIIA), which was probably a storeroom with a central pillar. The western wall of room I (with at least two different architectural phases) and the still extant stone-paved area are later than LM I: it is possible that some refurbishing occurred in this room more recently than the Bronze Age. In room V the passageway to room VIII was closed. Furthermore, benches were built against the northern and southern walls, while other architectural features (a hearth, a cubic stone base and another bench) took up the whole length of the eastern wall. The western wall of room XV has no well-defined side to the west: it was undoubtedly built when room XVI was already filled with ruins. The LM I eastern wall of room XVI is indeed still extant beneath the floor of room XV and room V (Fig. 13).

Some new features have expanded our knowledge of the LM III shrine. In room V a circular hut-urn (C.26N1), with a door (C.26N2), was found along the southern bench (Figs. 14-15)¹⁷. In the same room, some interesting *kalathoi* were found, which had a tubular termination, the purpose of which was highly likely to make them more stable on the snake-tubes or tubular-vases¹⁸. Moreover, on the floor a large

¹⁷ According to HALLAGER 2009, 119-120, the association between GUAs figurines and circular hut-urns is not documented elsewhere; on the hut-urns, HÄGG 1990, MERSERAU 1993, PETRAKIS 2006, PRESTON DAY 2011, 288-290. For a more ancient architectural

model representing a circular building, RETHEMIOTAKIS 2009. On the findings of room V, CUCUZZA forthcoming c.

¹⁸ GO 1106; GO 1193/MH 15191; GO 1194/MH 15180. See CUCUZZA 2009, 929-931 fig. 5 and forthcoming a.

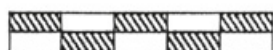


Fig. 16. "Pinax" GO 1134/HM P 26404
(room V; photo by the A.).

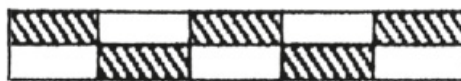


Fig. 17. Clay figurine (photo by the A.).

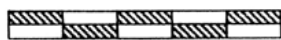
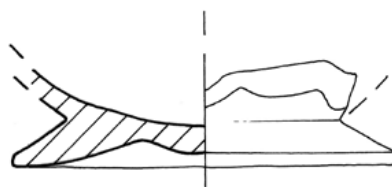


Fig. 18. Foot of a black glazed cup (drawing G. Merlatti).

group of shells together with a triton were found¹⁹. Besides the terracotta figurines, which include the so-called warrior (whose left hand we believe that we have discovered in the Haghioi Deka storerooms)²⁰, the small *pinax*, or possibly the door of a hut-urn, GO 1134/HM 26404 with engraved decorations was found (Fig. 16).

With regards to room XV, mention has to be made of the stone offering table. Similar to other comparable offering tables discovered at Psychro, Lygortino, etc., it has engraved marks along its outer rim²¹. The signs are certainly not a form of Aegean writing, but they are reminiscent of the Linear A inscription engraved on the rim of stone vases (particularly the offering tables). A small terracotta tablet found in this room (GO 1135/HM 15160) could be a *pinax* or, more likely, the door of another hut-urn: the two small clay projections could be the hinges as suggested by a Neopalatial architectural model from Galatas, recently published by Rethemiotakis²².

A beautiful stone threshold marks the entrance to room XV from room XIX. This very small last room (just south of room XV) is square in plan and has a stone bench along its western wall. The entrance to room XIX was undoubtedly through its southern side. It is interesting to note the similarities between this albeit very small complex and the well-known Building G at Kavousi Vronda, characterized by the presence of a small entrance room with a bench²³.

The LM IIIB stirrup jar (GO 1107) discovered at the entrance to room V is very useful for deducing the date of the shrine at Kannià²⁴. The *kalathoi* with tubular termination could indicate an advanced stage of the period, as a close comparison with Karphì seems to suggest²⁵.

1.4. Post-Minoan

Some sporadic ritual activity is also testified for later periods, as suggested by notable find such as a cup, from room VII, belonging to a type of *kernos* which is well documented in the Acropolis at Gortyn²⁶. Just south of room XIX a clay female figurine dating to the 7th century BC was found (Fig. 17)²⁷. Another couple of clay figurines are also likely to be post-Minoan.

The small stretch of wall now dividing room XXVI from room XXX can be dated to the late Classical-Hellenistic period, as some Hellenistic sherds were found here. The foot of a black-glazed cup (Fig. 18) dating to the first quarter of the 4th century BC is a good chronological clue. During the Hellenistic period the area was sometimes used for cultic activities, as suggested by the discovery of a group of miniature vessels near room I, together with a clay appliqué representing a female head. Another discovery along the northern wall of room I was a roof tile (GO 1251), which definitively dates to no earlier than the 2nd century BC²⁸. Probably of the same date are some miniature vessels as well as a zoomorphic figurine (C.6.V), representing perhaps a female boar²⁹. The archaeological evidence of the Hellenistic period discovered around room I makes us wonder whether this date can be ascribed to room XXX, with its eastern tripartite end. In spite of the poor quality masonry of the walls, this room is very regular in plan. The alignment of the northern wall of room XXX with that of the Villa can be easily explained given that the last one (i.e. the northern wall of the Villa) was surely visible for a long time after the destruction of the Minoan building. The gradual demolition of the Villa's northern wall was certainly due to the desire to make use of its beautiful ashlar blocks. The demolition activity, testified by a block of the upper course in room IV, slightly lifted and shifted, can be dated from the Early Iron Age through to the Hellenistic and Roman periods based on the basis of some ceramic sherds, found in room XI, the northern wall of which was almost completely razed.

A couple of sherds dating to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD are the most recent materials thus far known in the area of the Villa at Kannià.

¹⁹ See CUCUZZA 2011a, 375-377. BINNBERG 2013 for an analysis on function of the triton (specific reference to Kannià room V at p. 17).

²⁰ LEVI 1959, 247-248, fig. 16b; RETHEMIOTAKIS 1998, 39, fig. 46, tav. 28.

²¹ LEVI 1959, 253, fig. 24; WARREN 1969, 62-64. More recently, D'AGATA 2015, 70, 79, fig. 14 (II.27), 90, 94-95.

²² RETHEMIOTAKIS 2010.

²³ KLEIN 2004; KLEIN-GLOWACKI 2009.

²⁴ LEVI 1959, 264 fig. 37a. See above, fn. 6.

²⁵ See above, fn. 16. For the Karphì specimen, PRESTON DAY 2009, 140; 2011, 47 fig. 3.1, 270 fig. 9.5. See also CUCUZZA forthcoming a.

²⁶ JOHANNOWSKI 2002, 22-38 (especially NN. 209-211); on the Gortynian *kernos* also PALERMO 2002 and 2004.

²⁷ For comparison, RIZZA 1967/68, 223 fig. 6 (N. 40a from Axos); 275 fig. 41 (n. 60a from Gortyn).

²⁸ ALLEGRO-RICCIARDI 1999, 258-259 (NN. 345-346; 362-364).

²⁹ For bull figurines in the same technique, KANTA-DAVARAS 2011, 140.

2. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Kannìa Project has allowed a better knowledge of the different chronological phases of the architectural complex, which will be fully presented in the forthcoming publication. It is now possible to date the walls which were discovered beneath the north-western quarter of the Villa to the MM IIIB. Moreover, LM IA was likely the period in which the Neopalatial building gained its most recent architectural form. Building activity with the aim of housing the LM IIIB shrines – in the easternmost part of the Villa – was more complex than previously thought. Finally, some sporadic re-use of the remains belonging to the Minoan building for cultic activities was likely during the historical period (particularly in the Hellenistic age).

In a local perspective questions need to be asked about the relationship between Kannìa and the settlement on the Acropolis of Gortyn³⁰. In a broader perspective it is important to recall that the Villa is currently the best preserved Neopalatial (and LM III) building known between Phaistos and the palatial building at Protoria Dimantri. It offers interesting data on land use during the Late Bronze Age including the expansion of the Knossos polity in this period³¹. The archaeometric analyses we intend to carry out will undoubtedly provide further data – especially for the Neopalatial period – about pottery production and use in Mesara.

Only the resumption of excavations at the site will clarify the stratigraphy of the site, allowing us to gain more precise information about the Neolithic settlement as well as about the MM III rooms. It will also enable us to verify the existence of other Minoan buildings contemporary with the Villa.

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³⁰ For a thorough account on the subject, DI VITA 2010, 15-34.

³¹ WARREN 2004.

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