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I

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L'INSEDIAMENTO DI SELÌ DI KAMILARI NEL TERRITORIO DI FESTÒS



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SUMMARY

Seli is located a little south of the village of Kamilari, near Phaistos. The discovery of Minoan archaeological remains was made possible by the widening of the road leading to Siva in the 1970s. The excavations were conducted by the Italian Archaeological School of Athens under the direction of V. La Rosa in 1973 (plot Volakakis), 1975 (plot Sifakis) and in 1976 (plot Papadospiridakis) in spots not very far from one another.

During the 1973 excavation the remains of a neopalatial house called Volakakis house from the name of the owner of the land on which it was found were brought to light. Slightly to the North two other walls were discovered (M/2 and M/3) of the same period but not relating to the same structure: the rooms that these delimited (rooms *b-g*) were lacking in furnishings. The scantiness of the earth in the whole area made the excavations more difficult. The house consisted of at least four rooms (*a-d*) arranged in pairs along a long wall oriented north-south. South of room *d*, the presence of rock cuttings and a Greek pi arrangement, probably set against a wall which has now disappeared, made us assume the existence of a fifth room (*f*). East of the room *d* was an open air area (*e*) in which the bottom and the feet of a bronze tripod plunged in earth (XXX-4) were found. In the north-east corner of room *a*, in a pit excavated under the pavement, there was a bridge-spouted jar (XXIII-1): it is probably a votive deposit in relationship with the construction of the house. In the same room, along the north wall there was a niche (probably a cupboard), where some vases were found (deposit XXI). The stair-well *c* make us assume the existence of a second floor. There must have been a pithos placed in the regular pit dug along the south wall of room *d*. The presence of different storage vessels make it very probable that one of the functions of the house was storage. Apart from the bronze tripod in the house other metal objects were found: the little knife XXVII-22, the handles XXVII-24, XXX-5, XXX-6 and XXX-7 (relating to the tripod XXX-4 and to a hydria) and the pins XX-34 and XXVII-23. These objects testify in some manner to the level of wealth of the owners of the house. The pins, again with the bird's nest vase XXVII-25 and the rhyton XII-1, show also the possible existence of religious activities inside the structure: to these activities is certainly related also the little head I-2, a male figure with its hair gathered back.

The construction of the house is datable to the MM IIIB/LM IA, as is shown by the bridge-spouted jar XXIII-1 relating to the deposit foundation discovered in room *a*. The house was abandoned towards the end of LM IA. This chronology is based on the vases found in the house, in particular the rhyton XII-1 (imported from oriental Crete, maybe produced in the ceramic workshop called of Gournià C 58) and the cup XXI-3. The decoration of cups and bowls is principally with spirals in dark on light; however there are also sherds again with rippled decoration and there also survive, among the materials in use in the last phase of the house, some vases decorated in light on dark, as small jar XX-18. Some sherds discovered during the excavation show already a vegetal decoration (between those XXV-10), but could not be related to a moment in which the house was already destroyed. Fire traces – in particular in room *a* – let us assume that the structure was destroyed by a fire.

With the 1975 excavation a neopalatial house was brought to light, which took the Sifakis, characterized by the presence of a corridor (I) which divides two groups of rooms (V-VI to the east and II, IV to the west). In this case too the presence of a stair-room (IV) testifies to the existence of a second floor. As with the Volakakis house, in this house too one of the functions was storage, as shown by the pithoi found; there were also a considerable number of basins. Also in this case a bronze tripod (XXXVII-1) was plunged in earth in the area immediately east of room V. This tripod, better preserved than the one in the Volakakis house, displays a slightly convex bottom: it is however not possible to detect the function of the vase from the discovery conditions, because no fire traces were found inside or under it. So we have to exclude use as a cooking pot near flames. The vases found inside this structure are not numerous; compared to the Volakakis house the attested forms are very few. We have to point out, however, the presence of a stirrup jar (B-2), but in a mixed level.

In levels more ancient of the foundation of the house were recovered sherds of cups decorated with foliate bands. So we can infer that the Sifakis house was constructed in an advanced or final phase of LM IA, maybe when the Volakakis house was already abandoned. Anyway, the use period of the structure was not very long: during the LM IB period the house was abandoned. In this case it is not possible to advance a hypothesis about the causes of abandonment: in the excavations no traces of fire destruction were found. The absence of vases decorated in the characteristic ceramic styles of LM IB (in particular the marine one) makes it also difficult to define precisely the abandonment of Sifakis house. The presence of cups decorated with foliate band and with triple wavy line permit however – according with the examination of other deposits in the same area – to fix this event during the LM IB, probably at the end of the period.

In the 1973 excavations as well as in the 1975 ones some materials datable to historical period were also found. A real architectural structure referring to historical period was brought to light during the 1976 excavation. The structure consisted of four rooms of nearly square plan arranged along the same axis (1-4). A strange arrangement with a lithic small basin placed inside a pit and protected by a small dry-stone wall was brought to light north of room 1. The small basin, empty, was covered by a stone slab: the function of the setting is uncertain. This strange arrangement should be datable to late archaic period, given the fact that the latest sherds discovered in the filling are datable to beginning of the V century B.C. During the IV century B.C. the house of rooms 1-4 was constructed, abandoned about the middle of II century B.C., at the same time of the destruction of the Phaistos *polis* by the Gortynians mentioned by Strabon (X, 4, 14). The materials recovered (in particular the pithos sherd with relief decoration LXIV-5) testify also a frequentation in the orientализing period. Archaic sherds are also numerous; among these we have to mention some imported vases, such as a piece of a Laconic crater (LXXX-6), a rim of an oriental amphora (LXX-7) and three attic sherds (LXXII-1, C-3, C-4). In the same 1976 excavation a little wall, less thick than the walls of the Hellenistic house, has been associated to the minoan levels, but without the possibility of determining more precisely their chronology. Among the Minoan materials, apart from the different neopalatial sherds, we have to mention particularly the green stone seal C-1, of the historical period.

For a quick summary of the data it is necessary to go over again the different frequentation phases of the area, pointing out, where possible, the characteristics of this frequentation. The scanty evidence of EM period (including however the probably local seal) enable us to place at Selì of Kamilari one of the numerous prepalatial settle-

ments of the area around Phaistos. From diffusion and richness of the numerous communities of the plain, devoted principally to agricultural activities, will start the formation processes of the oligarchies destined to found and control the Phaistian palace. An echo of demographic and productive vivacity of the land in its first phase of life of that power structure is evident also from the MM IB frequentation of our district: this is moreover the moment of the construction of the big Grigori Koriphì tomb, distant as the crow flies less than 1.5 km from Selì.

The few MM II sherds are not sufficient (as an *argumentum ex silentio*) to let us assume a reduced frequentation of the district; the numerous MM III materials let us instead glimpse a certain renewal, which has to be read together with the feverish transitional period in the Phaestian settlement and with the numerous depositions in the Grigori Koriphì and Milonà Lakko tombs, not to mention the big house with pithoi along the slope of the hill of Kommos or the different Haghia Triada ceramic deposits.

The neopalatial phase represents the most intense frequentation moment of the area: to the structures brought to light in the excavations conducted in the 1970s correspond, all around the saddle, rough-shaped stones and ceramic sherds, which lead us to think of a real rural settlement, to put within the 'big triangle' Phaistos-Haghia Triada-Kommos. The different chronology of the Volakakis and Sifakis houses covers, as in the big centres nearby, the whole period of the second palaces; the Selì settlement represent on the contrary, with its agricultural connotation, another specificity model inside the Phaistian *chora*. Our evidence, although fragmentary, has a greater weight than the up to now single buildings of Koussés and Pitsidia, or to the sites discovered with the recent Survey.

The planimetries of the two houses reflect well known typologies and ensure the unwinding of the typical functions of an agricultural reality: the cubicula at the second floor, the storage rooms for the food-stuffs, the working spaces, the open-air area are detectable in both buildings; and we must hypothesize also the presence of kitchens, even although the excavation evidence is lacking. The better articulation of the Sifakis house due to the presence of the corridor could testify to a new stage in Minoan domestic architecture, and confirm the main requirement, that of storage. The existence of both wide mouth piriform pithoi and globular ones with narrow mouths and the evidence (as far as isolated) of the stirrup jar let us see, as far as food-stuffs are concerned, the further development of commerce (oil more than grain): the rython of the Gournia workshop proposes one of the possible terminals of these traffic ways. The couple of tripods (both placed at the exterior) and the different bronze objets inform us about the relative richness of the Selì farmers; the quoted rython XII-1, the terracotta little head I-2 and some other vase sherds document that domestic holy-liturgic sphere, quite steady in the neopalatial structures. More vanished is instead the documentation for handicraft activity, excluding the presence of lithic pestles; another type of evidence is provided in this respect by the nearby Pitsidia mansion.

From the material point of view, the single archaeological level of Volakakis and Sifakis houses increases the number of deposits and the variety of associations for the neopalatial period in the Messarà plain. The local handmade products, together with the imported material, confirm a trend known from the greater centres and repropose the leading rule of the Oriental Cretan workshops during the LM I period, as stressed by Banti, trying to characterize the contemporary Phaistian production.

Very interesting is the attempt to correlate the chronology proposed for the construction and abandonment periods of our structures with the destruction levels and

the events known in the territory. The massive use of the quoted Grigori Koriphì and Milonà Lakko tombs in the MM IIIA represents likely, for the Seli settlement, a *terminus post quem*. If the hypothesis that another earthquake at the end of the MM IIIA puts an end to the reconstruction attempt of the second Phaistian palace is right, and that with consent or under Knossian control it was constructed, immediately afterwards, the Haghia Triada Villa, the flourishing of the Seli settlement probably reflect a restored balance in the Phaistian *chora*. And it seems significant in that respect that the construction of the Volakakis house corresponds from a chronological point of view to the Haghia Triada Villa one, while the construction of the Sifakis house probably accords with the new urban plan of that center and with the realization of the second Phaistian palace. For the synchronisms with the abandonment moments it seems likely to reconnect the end of the Volakakis house (and that of the nearby Kousés and Pitsidia country houses?) with the events (probably seismic) that caused the remakings of the Villa and the reconstruction of the Haghia Triada center: the ceramics of the relative destruction levels correspond, it is useful to recall, to that of the volcanic destruction level at Akrotiri. For the abandonment of the Sifakis house, the more interesting aspect is the possibility of synchronism with the destruction (without sack) of the Haghia Triada Villa, but also of the Phaistos palace and the monumental buildings at Kommos. If this abandonment were placed a little before these events, it could perhaps testify to conditions of insecurity and danger, and strengthen the hypothesis that the end of the second palaces could be due to war events.

The moment subsequent to the end of LM IB period is practically absent; it is little represented at Phaistos and H. Triada too. Scanty also are the remains of the LM III, entrusted to the few ceramic sherds discovered in plots Fitzakis and Papadospiridakis. From this excavation comes the more significant evidence for the late geometric, orientalizing and archaic periods, which find in Kommos materials more similar comparisons. But it is perhaps worthwhile mentioning that the end of the VII century B.C. represents a phase of authentic revival of the old Phaistian palatial center, probably under the Gortynian hegemony: this is the moment of the workshop which produces big pithoi with relief decoration, of the construction of the temple identified now with the Letoon mentioned by Antoninus Liberalis, of the sanctuary on the Acropoli mediana, but also the moment in which isolated *ex-voto* (as the statuettes of the so-called «libici») are dedicated in the piazzale dei sacelli at Haghia Triada.

Also the Hellenistic structures of our district could fit very well in the topographic, archaeological and historical tissue of the Phaistian *chora*: the wide Phaistos settlement, the monumental arrangement of the Kommos sanctuary, the Velchanos small aedícula, the altar and the last depositions in the area of the Piazzale dei Sacelli at Haghia Triada, but also the Askidia necropolis with *Hadra* vases in the same Kamilari district, are data which it is enough only to mention.

Such a long period of time as suggested here, in spite of the inevitable *hiatus* in the documentation, finds its reason for being in the rural characterization of the Seli settlement, and could give a chance for verifying the more important phenomena which involved the big nearby centres. A practically steady presence in the anthropography of the neighbourhood raises finally the problem of organization, not only from the economic and political point of view, but also simply topographic of the land in which our settlement is placed. The Seli location may be a good starting point to examine the problem of the communication roads in the Phaistian *chora*, with special reference to the way in which was possible to reach the sea from Phaistos settlement.