

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

EFSTRATIOU (N.), KARETSOU (A.) and NTINOU (M.) *Eds.* **The Neolithic Settlement of Knossos in Crete. New Evidence for the Early Occupation of Crete and the Aegean Islands** (INSTAP Prehistory Monographs 42). Philadelphia: INSTAP Academic Press, 2013. Pp. xxiv + 217, illus. £55. 9781931534727.
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Ever since systematic excavations began at Knossos in 1900, it has been clear that beneath the famous Bronze Age Palace, there lay a very long-lived Neolithic settlement. Although Neolithic remains are a regular occurrence in the hundreds of tests that have since been excavated, they are most completely preserved, documented and understood in the landmark excavations of the late John Evans (1957–1960 and 1969–1970), to whose memory this volume is fittingly dedicated. Thanks to Evans and his collaborators we can trace the evolution of a single community, without apparent interruption, from its origins as one of the very earliest farming communities in the Aegean (ca. 7000 BC), throughout the Neolithic and into the Bronze Age.

This volume, which reports on the findings from a small trench (Trench II) excavated to bedrock in 1997 in the Central Court, represents a very welcome addition to previous knowledge, not only because it supports conclusions drawn in earlier work, but also because it applies new or improved lines of enquiry (for example archaeobotany, sedimentology, phytoliths, anthracology, AMS radiocarbon dating). A great deal of information has been extracted from this small trench and much of value learnt about the sequence and contexts within it. Particularly welcome are the charcoal study, which sheds new light on the natural habitat around Knossos and how it evolved during the Neolithic in response to climate change and/or anthropogenic intervention, and the archaeobotanical report, which is the first detailed discussion to be published on assemblages from Neolithic Knossos.

While the insights gained are valuable, problems arise when interpretation moves from

the specific to the general. The extent to which one can draw more general conclusions about the Neolithic community at Knossos on the basis of the small diachronic sample available from Trench II depends on detailed integration with the results of previous excavations in the Central Court (i.e. Area ABCD-KLMN-RST). Unfortunately this is not something that the volume does as well as necessary. Thus, while it is commendably ambitious in attempting to address major research questions, mainly Neolithization, and while this generates some useful general discussions, these often have very little to do with the Trench II data, which remain isolated from previous work and suffer from several unresolved issues regarding their stratigraphy and phasing.

It is surprising that the volume does not present the stratigraphy of Trench II directly alongside that of Area ABCD, not just because of the latter's proximity (<1 m from Trenches I–II), but also because its stratigraphy and phasing has recently been reviewed and revised (P. Tomkins, 'Neolithic: Strata IX–VIII, VII–VIB, VIA–V, IV, IIIB, IIIA, IIB, IIA and IC Groups', in N. Momigliano (ed.) *Knossos Pottery Handbook Neolithic and Bronze Age (Minoan)*, Athens 2007, 9–48). Instead the south and west sections of Trench II are presented in isolation; and even these do not match each other having apparently been drawn separately. When the sections from ABCD and Trench II are cross-related, two obvious problems emerge. First, it becomes apparent that the deposits assigned to EN II in Trench II are stratigraphically equivalent to those dated to late EN I–II in ABCD (= LN I–II; Strata VIA–IV). Given that the phasing of ABCD is based on the study of large, well-preserved deposits of pottery, this discrepancy is most likely to result from an error in phasing the far smaller quantities of pottery available from Trench II. It is thus regrettable that the volume does not present any pottery and thus prevents independent evaluation.

The second problem concerns the radiocarbon samples from the lowest four metres of ceramic Neolithic deposit in Trench II (Levels 21–37). These same levels in ABCD (Strata IX–V) comprise a very long and complex sequence of

buildings and open areas, characterized by three ceramic phases, which ceramic study and radiocarbon data show to be directly equivalent to EN, MN and LN I in mainland Greece (i.e. 6500–4900 BC). However, the new radiocarbon dates from this part of the sequence in Trench II cluster in the final quarter of the sixth millennium BC (i.e. *ca.* 5300–4900 BC). Unfortunately, this problem is not adequately discussed and no satisfactory solution is presented. Such imprecision regarding the chronology and wider relations of the deposits from Trench II inevitably limits the extent to which the results of the specialist analyses can be integrated with previous work and thus achieve wider significance. In addition, chronological clarity is by no means helped by the fact that the volume uses the old Cretan Neolithic chronology but fails to make sufficiently clear that its Early

Neolithic phase is equivalent to EN, MN and LN on the Greek mainland (see Tomkins 2007 for a discussion and alternative Cretan Neolithic chronology).

Nevertheless, these are all issues that can be addressed by future research and to dwell on them would be to overlook the fact that the volume represents a major advance in our knowledge of Neolithic Knossos. Its contributors are to be congratulated for the speed and detail with which they have presented their results and the volume will be of particular value to those currently engaged on the publication of previous Neolithic excavations at Knossos.

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