



# MONASTIRAKI KATALIMATA

Excavation of a Cretan Refuge Site,  
1993–2000



View of Terrace C looking southwest over the Cha Gorge with Chalasmenos in the distance (photo by W. Krassowski).

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# MONASTIRAKI KATALIMATA

Excavation of a Cretan Refuge Site,  
1993–2000

*by*

Krzysztof Nowicki

*with a foreword by*

Metaxia Tsipopoulou



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*In memory*  
*of*  
*William D.E. Coulson*



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## Foreword

The Late Minoan III period, and in particular its second half, after the fall of the Mycenaean palaces, has deeply preoccupied many of the archaeologists working in Crete during the last 15 to 20 years. Many studies from western, central, and eastern parts of the island have gradually begun to shed light on this still imperfectly known period: from Chania, with the research of Birgitta Hallager; from the region of Rethymnon, with that of Anna Lucia D'Agata, and of Maria Vlasaki and Eleni Papadopoulou; from Central Crete, with the work of Eleni Hatzaki at Knossos and of Giorgos Rethemiotakis in the Pediada District, and the publication of older, unpublished material by Athanasia Kanta; and on to the eastern extremity of the island where there exist many new excavations and surface surveys as well as studies of insufficiently known old material, such as the reexamination of the pottery from Karphi by Leslie Day. Parallel to this, many younger scholars are excavating and continuously presenting new finds from this period or publishing older assemblages.

A particularly interesting fact in Eastern Crete is that at several sites we have stratigraphical continuity from the end of Late Minoan IIIB—and, more commonly, from Late Minoan IIIC—into the earlier or more advanced phases of the Early Iron Age. Characteristic examples are illustrated by the excavations at Kavousi and Vrokastro in the Mirabello Bay area. In the first case, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, under the direction of Geraldine Gesell, William Coulson, and Leslie Day, not only restudied the material from the excavations conducted by Harriet Boyd at the beginning of the 20th century, they also reopened the excavations both at Kastro, with continuous occupation from Late Minoan IIIC to Orientalizing, and at Vronda, with a chief Late Minoan IIIC phase in the settlement but with continued use of the tholos tombs until the end of Protogeometric or Protogeometric B. At Vrokastro, Barbara Hayden restudied and recently published the material from the early 20th-century excavations of Edith Hall, and likewise presented in weighty tomes the survey of the wider area, which she directed together

with Jennifer Moody. In addition, Metaxia Tsipopoulou recently published a large volume of material dating to the Early Iron Age from Eastern Crete.

On account of these studies, for the first time the limits between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age ceased to be impermeable, and there began an osmosis of ideas between scholars active in the final phase of the Minoan period and those working in the immediately succeeding period—a development which opened up new vistas for research, particularly concerning the understanding and interpretation of the essence and the institutions of the Greek city states in Crete, establishing without doubt that their roots extend back to the end of the Bronze Age, into that peculiar amalgam that could have come into being only in Crete, given the historical progression of the island in the Bronze Age.

Only recently, significance has been given in research to the existence of Mycenaean outside Knossos, both as a physical and, chiefly, a cultural presence. The previously cherished stereotypes are being questioned as, with the growing number of studies, either isolated or within the framework of symposia, the extent and the degree of “Mycenaeanization” of the island, independently of the existence of a Mycenaean palatial system, is detected.

The publication of the tholos at Achladia near Siteia by Metaxia Tsipopoulou and Lucia Vagnetti, the excavation of the settlement and the graves at Mochlos by Costis Davaras and Jeffrey Soles, and the excavation at Palaikastro by J. Alexander MacGillivray, Hugh Sackett, and Jan Driessen show that the “Mycenaeanization” of Eastern Crete was both early and probably quite extensive. At Petras near Siteia, where excavation has brought to light rather limited remains of Late Minoan III, with the scanty architecture dating to Late Minoan IIIA–IIIB, ongoing research in the last three years has unexpectedly provided significant new data. Of particular importance is a double fortification wall, unique to Crete, which came to light in a test excavation near the Minoan seaboard and most likely dates to Late Minoan IIIB. On the Kephala hill at Petras, in a topographical situation analogous to that at Palaikastro Kastri, there has, in addition, been excavated an extensive settlement of Late Minoan IIIC date, producing pottery of exceptional quality, as well as more than six rectangular buildings.

A large question mark is still to be placed next to the question concerning the extension, and therefore the significance, of the Late Minoan III town of Gournia. It is hoped that excavation will soon be continued at this site and that significant data will result. Nonetheless, the existence at Gournia of one of the best (and most Mycenaean) megara of Late Minoan III Crete, as well as the early sanctuary of the “goddesses with upraised arms,” indicates that the site was a significant center of the more or less “Mycenaeanized” Crete.

The reasons that led to the construction of new settlements at the end of the LM IIIB or at the beginning of the LM IIIC phase are not yet completely understood, but they are no doubt connected with the instability in the Aegean after the fall of the administrative system represented by the Mycenaean palaces that had been in a position to guarantee the safety of the seas and thus also of the coasts. There is no consensus among scholars regarding the origin of the people who built these new settlements. I consider it more probable that they came from large Late Minoan IIIB settlements in flatland and/or coastal regions that were already culturally, and probably ethnically, mixed (Creto-Mycenaean), and which were strengthened by new arrivals from Mainland Greece.

In any case, it has become generally admitted that the old term “refuge settlements” is overly simplistic and cannot encompass all the settlements constructed

during Late Minoan IIIC at various razed sites in Crete. It is characteristic that many of the new settlements are found on rather low hills (less than 250 m high), are sufficiently well protected, possess a good view of the sea, and are close to a plain. Others are particularly well fortified naturally and exceedingly difficult to access; to these sites alone can the term “refuge settlements” be applied in all honesty.

The surface surveys of Krzysztof Nowicki and his many publications—above all the monumental *Defensible Sites in Crete, c. 1200–800 B.C.*, which will remain the standard reference for this period in Cretan history—constitute landmarks in the research of the last 15 years of the 20th century. At the same time, quite a number of sites were systematically examined throughout Crete. What was lacking, however, to supplement our scattered knowledge, was the excavation of a refuge settlement of truly difficult access. The reason for this gap in the research is connected more to the natural stamina of excavators and not so much to the actual scholarly interest of such an undertaking. Nowicki, in contrast to the rest of us, ventured and succeeded in such an excavation, producing the results we now have in our hands. I consider myself lucky and proud that this research came to fruition within the framework of our cooperation.

In 1990, on two different occasions, inhabitants of Pacheia Ammos Ierapetra showed Donald Haggis and Krzysztof Nowicki, and then myself, evidence of a new settlement, quite extensive according to the surface finds, of the Bronze Age, located on the northern end of the Ierapetra Isthmus at the site of Chalasmenos, northeast of the small village of Monastiraki and immediately south of the imposing Cha Gorge. Concurrently, Haggis and Nowicki visited another settlement of the same period in the area, frankly difficult of access, stretching over three narrow terraces on the cliff face at the entrance of the gorge, known to local shepherds and hunters by the name of Katalimata.

Contrary to Chalasmenos, which was unknown to archaeologists until 1990, discovered only when a fire in 1989 removed the thick shrubbery that covered it, Katalimata has been known since the beginning of the 20th century when local shepherds showed some sherds from there to Harriet Boyd, at the time excavating at Kavousi. Boyd never ascended the inaccessible, almost vertical, side of the gorge because she suffered from vertigo (as does, unfortunately, the present writer), but she sent her trusted aid Aristeidis Pappadias to examine the site. Boyd considered the sherds shown to her to be “typical of the geometric style of Crete.”

One hundred years later, it has, thanks to Nowicki, been elucidated that Katalimata was inhabited during various difficult and unsettled periods in Cretan history—the Final Neolithic, Middle Minoan II, Late Minoan IB–IIIA1, Late Minoan IIIC (which constitutes the main phase), as well as during the Middle Ages—but not during the Geometric period.

The pointer to Chalasmenos was for me a discovery and a splendid scientific occasion because, having completed a few years earlier my doctoral dissertation at the University of Athens on the Early Iron Age in Eastern Crete, I was actively dreaming about excavating a settlement with the basic purpose of testing the stratigraphical sequence of phases that I had, based on stylistic analyses, determined in my research, in order to verify by excavation the existence of the Subminoan phase—a phase whose existence is still doubted by many people. After 13 years of excavation and study at Chalasmenos, our site has offered most significant new data concerning the end of the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age and yielded extremely interesting finds, both architectural and moveable, but there is no indication of a Subminoan phase.

The excavation at Chalasmenos began in 1992 as a Greek-American *synergasia*, with the late William Coulson (at the time director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens) as co-director, and continues after his death as a systematic Greek excavation. Coulson brought with him many years of experience and an immense knowledge of the area that he gained through the excavation at Kavousi, which had commenced more than 10 years earlier.

Chalasmenos proved to be one of the most significant settlements in Crete during the final stage of the Bronze Age, and it appears to constitute a special case among the other sites in the region. The differences with the neighboring and contemporary settlement of Vronda at Kavousi, already adequately well known and published, are impressive. The extent of the settlement is at least five stremmata, or 5,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Features largely unknown elsewhere include the following:

1. The certain urban planning, with dirt and stone-plastered streets, as well as open areas that assure but also control circulation among the parts of the settlement;
2. The noteworthy diversity of house plans, particularly since different types of houses are concentrated in different parts of the settlement. Entirely characteristic are the three parallel and adjacent megara in Sector A, but there are also megara in Sectors A and C;
3. A large public shrine of the “goddesses with upraised arms,” megaron-shaped in plan, in Sector C;
4. The existence of a significant building at the center of the site.

In 1993 we had the fortune of being able to add Nowicki to our team, and he began his research at Katalimata. He worked alone, with the drive, the insistence, the belief, and the endurance that characterizes him, because it was extremely dangerous for the excavation workers to ascend to the site and work there. It is a great joy and honor to introduce the present monograph, which represents the publication of the first excavated site in Crete that may claim, *à juste titre*, the term “refuge settlement.”

There are probably numerous archaeologists in Crete who have not had the fortune of knowing Krzysztof Nowicki in depth. I do, however, believe that there cannot be many shepherds, priests, teachers and *kafeneion* owners in the mountainous hamlets who do not know and admire him. It would be more correct to say that there are in Crete no mountain-tops, inaccessible flanks, gorges, abrupt cliffs, or even stones who do not know him, for all that he has walked, studied, and understood. My knowledge, friendship and cooperation, both official and unofficial, with Krzysztof—*Christophoros* to his numerous friends throughout the Cretan mountains and particularly in the Lasithi Plain (and not forgetting their wonderful women)—goes back at least 20 years. He had already begun, with great fortune and with admirable results, to identify numerous new sites dating to the end of the Bronze Age and to the Early Iron Age, to examine them, and to present them in an exemplary manner. Common interests brought us together, as is natural, but it was also his unique, open-hearted, and so generous character.

Many things have changed over all these years in the archaeology of Crete, in our personal histories, but also in History in general, of which our brief lives are but a small part and a pale reflection. We have spent endless hours, generally evenings, after exhausting days filled with many hours of work, having no connection to anything like an official timetable, discussing and exchanging opinions on the problems concerning the end of the Bronze Age in Crete and the transformation into the Iron Age.

Christophoros belongs to that oh-so-rare category of people and scholars who have embodied, and will continue to embody, I am sure, for many years to come, our science with his very being. He found success where no one else of our generation did, because others did not possess his capabilities and his determination, or his endurance under difficult circumstances. I am certain that no one else knows the Cretan mountains equally well, nor has anyone discovered so many unknown archaeological sites in such inaccessible locations.

Thus, one may say in full consciousness of the fact—and I do not believe that there exists anyone who, knowing his work, would disagree with the affirmation—that the Archaeology of the end of the Bronze Age would have been much the poorer without Krzysztof Nowicki. His articles of the 1980s and 1990s have contributed numerous new data concerning new sites and the relationship between them and the organization of settlements.

His way of life, but also the traits of his character, enabled his relationship with the locals, most of whom had never encountered other archaeologists but nevertheless often harbored a great and often justified distrust of the “official” representatives and functionaries of Archaeology, to which is to be counted the present author. Christophoros has the unique faculty of instilling confidence in all who meet him, and this trait provided the catalyst for the happy outcome of his lonely and obstinate studies, which, it should be noted, were undertaken without the protective aegis of an accredited organization, either a foreign school or institute.

I hope and wish that others, those younger than we, will follow this road “there where there are no paths.”

Metaxia Tsipopoulou  
December 2005



## Acknowledgments

The excavation at Katalimata was an extraordinary experience, probably the most memorable one of my fieldwork on Crete. The endeavor took place only thanks to the scholar and friend, the late William Coulson, to whom I owe more than the dedication of this book can express. I am sorry that there was not enough time to acknowledge my gratitude in a proper way when Willy was among us: I only hope that he would be glad to see this publication as a tribute to his work on Dark Age Greece. It was Willy's provocative but always friendly attitude towards my research that pushed me up the Cha cliff to find the answers to a series of questions that could not be solved through theoretical debate. The right moment came in 1992 when Willy and Metaxia Tsipopoulou started excavation at the mouth of the Cha Gorge at Chalasmenos and invited me to participate in the project. I am very grateful to Metaxia, the co-director of this project, for all her encouragement and support in digging Katalimata, as well as for her friendship and other collaboration through all the years since our first meeting in the early 1980s.

Katalimata proved to be a difficult and well-hidden target when I first tried to find it in the mid-1980s. Fortunately, however, soon after the first unsuccessful attempts to locate the site, I met Donald Haggis. Together, Donald and I (and thanks to our guide Manolis Zygakis) were able at last to rediscover Katalimata, nearly a hundred years after the site was first recorded (but not visited) by Harriet Boyd Hawes. Working with Donald at Katalimata in 1990 and 1991 was an unforgettable experience. I wish to express my special thanks to Donald Haggis, as well as to L. Vance Watrous, for sharing with me their collective experience and knowledge of the Cretan pottery and settlements, particularly in regards to the area between Kavousi and Gournia. They have been, and continue to be, much appreciated teachers and close friends. I would like to warmly thank Saro Wallace who excavated during some seasons and assisted with some of the material processing. She also contributed to the analysis of the LM IIC settlement pattern and to the editing of the text and correction of its English.

It was a great pleasure to work in the conditions offered by the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete in Pacheia Ammos, and it was an even greater pleasure to be welcomed and helped by the friendly staff employed by the Center. I am very grateful to Thomas Brogan and Eleanor Huffman for all the help and assistance they provided, both day and night, from Monday through Sunday evening. Doug Faulmann drew some of the pottery and was always helpful with his comments and advice. Stefi Chlouveraki and Klio Zervaki helped with conservation. Object photographs are partly the work of Kathy May.

Many colleagues and friends contributed much to this publication through their comments and discussions either in the INSTAP Study Center or elsewhere in Crete. I wish to thank them all, but a few should be particularly mentioned: Barbara Hayden helped me to extend my archaeological knowledge to the other side of the Mirabello Bay; Harriet Blitzler and Jenny Moody stimulated many questions concerning not only the people but also the environment; Carl Knappett contributed much to the discussion on the MM II pottery; and Leslie Day, Gerry Gesell, Margaret Mook, Philip Betancourt, and James Muhly (as well as other members of the Chrysokamino and Hagios Charalambos teams) shared their knowledge of Cretan archaeology and made the material from their excavations available for comparisons with that from Katalimata.

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# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this volume:

approx.	approximately	<b>KTS</b>	stone catalog number
<b>B</b>	Byzantine	<b>KTSL</b>	sealstone catalog number
ca.	circa	L	length
cm	centimeter	LH	Late Helladic
d	diameter	LM	Late Minoan
EB	Early Byzantine	LN	Late Neolithic
EM	Early Minoan	m	meter
est	estimated	m <sup>2</sup>	square meters
FN	Final Neolithic	masl	meters above sea level
G	Geometric	max	maximum
g	grams	MM	Middle Minoan
h	height	pers. comm.	personal communication
<b>KP</b>	pottery catalog number	PG	Protogeometric
KT	pottery group number	pres	preserved
<b>KTB</b>	bone catalog number	th	thickness
<b>KTG</b>	glass catalog number	V	Venetian
<b>KTM</b>	metal catalog number	w	width