

Polish excavations at the mountainous site of Karfi (Lasithi, Crete): a preliminary report on the 2023 and 2024 seasons



Abstract: Karfi is an important site located in a remote mountainous area of Crete at an altitude of 1140 m. It is distinguished by its large size and by its foundation during a widespread population shift that occurred throughout the Aegean –most clearly documented in Crete– around 1200 BC. A small part of the settlement was excavated in 1937–1939 by the British archaeologist John Pendlebury. Karfi is one of the best-preserved sites of the period in question and may therefore help to illuminate the much-debated problem of why a large part of the Cretan population moved to mountainous areas that had been rarely, if ever, previously occupied. Apart from its main period of occupation as a defensible settlement, Karfi also served during the Middle Bronze Age II (approximately 1800–1700 BC) as a ritual place. This article presents a short report with preliminary results from two excavation seasons conducted in three different sectors, each representing different aspects of the site's use and history. The excavations were carried out on behalf of the Polish Archaeological Institute at Athens under one of the first excavation permits issued by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport to a Polish academic institution.

Keywords: Karfi, Aegean archaeology, prehistoric Greece, Crete, 1200 BC crisis in the Mediterranean, defensive settlements, ritual places

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INTRODUCTION

This preliminary report presents the results of two excavation seasons at the Late Minoan IIIC (LM IIIC, approximately 1200–1000 BC) settlement of Karfi, situated at a uniquely high altitude (1100–1140 m) in the northern chain of the Lasithi Mountains in Crete [Fig. 1]. The excavations were carried out under a permit from the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport, granted for five years (2023–27) to the recently established Polish Archaeological Institute at Athens. The fieldwork and subsequent studies of the excavated material were directed by the authors under the supervision of the Ephorate of Antiquities in Iraklion. The assisting team of students came from Polish, Greek, British, Italian, and French universities. Detailed post-excavation studies of the material have been carried out at the INSTAP Study Centre for East Crete in Pacheia Ammos (Ierapetra).

Karfi represents one of the most dramatic chapters in Aegean history, characterized by the collapse of earlier settlement patterns, followed—especially in Crete—by unprecedented changes in settlement location. Widespread abandonments of Bronze Age settlements that had been continuously inhabited for many centuries, together with the possible destruction of all or part of some of these settlements in the second half of the 13th century BC across Crete, brought an end to the earlier, relatively stable Minoan and Mycenaean settlement system and shaped new political, social, and economic realities of a kind never previously observed. This phenomenon has been clearly identified by numerous intensive surveys conducted in Crete (e.g. Watrous 1982; Hayden 2004; Watrous, Hadzi-Vallianou, and Blitzer 2004; Haggis 2005; Watrous et al. 2012). The collapse around 1200 BC was part of a much broader crisis, well at-



Fig. 1. Karfi and the Koprana ridge from the north (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

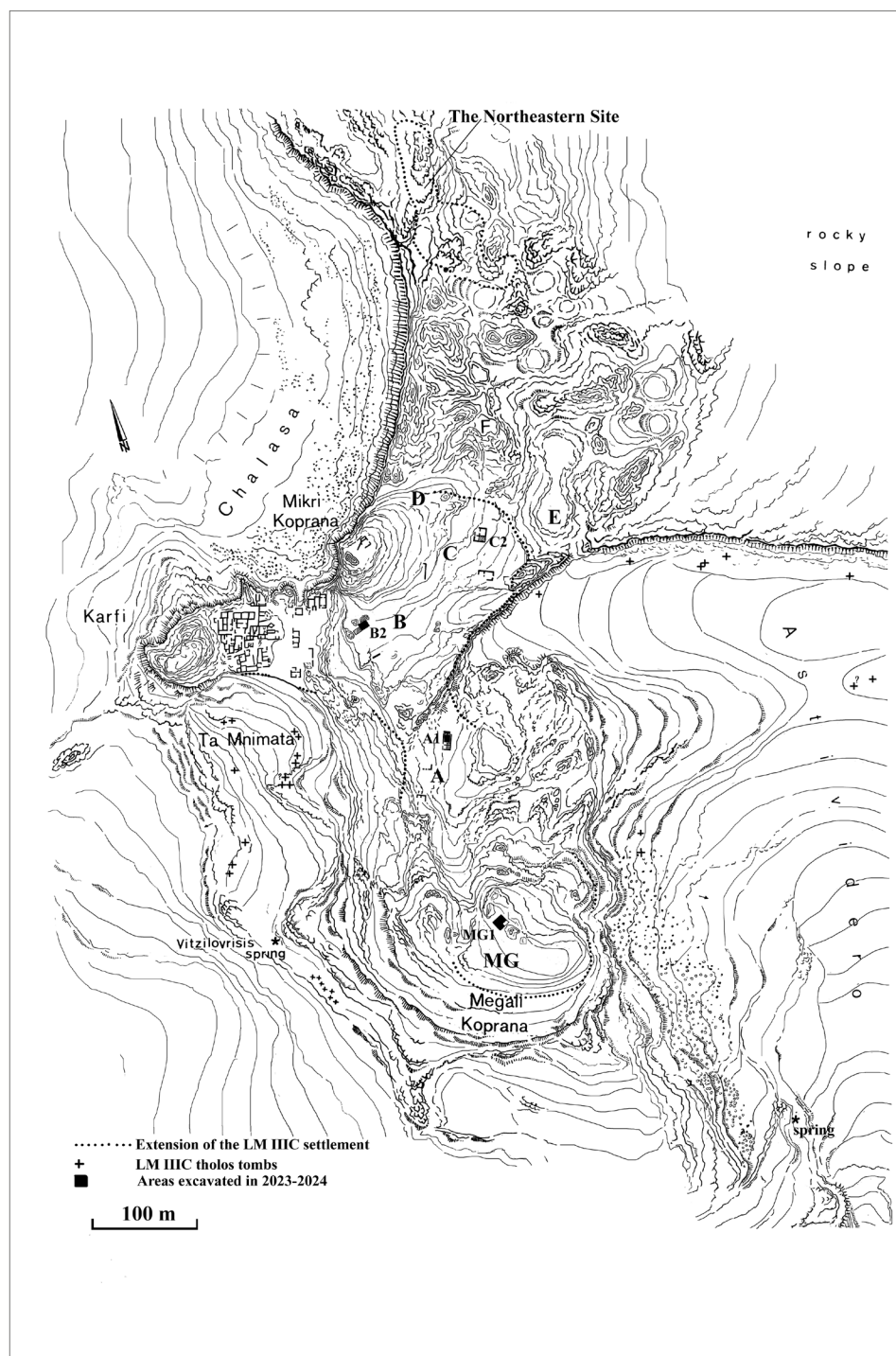


Fig. 2. Sketch plan of the archaeological site of Karfi (K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

tested in ancient texts from other regions of the eastern Mediterranean (Oren 2000; Karageorghis and Morris 2001; Cline 2014; Nowicki 2018; Middleton 2020). The site of Karfi has for many decades been at the center of debates concerning these historical problems.

Although the site is generally known under the name Karfi, the LM IIIC settlement in fact extended over three peaks, situated 200–350 m apart from each other [Fig. 2]. In addition to the most characteristic peak of Karfi itself, houses were built across the summits of Mikri and Megali Koprana, as well as on the saddles between them (Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1937–1938; Nowicki 1987). These mountain peaks form the western extension of the Selena ridge in the northern Lasithi Mountains and rise above the Gonies-Ambelos valley to the west, and the Krasi valley to the north [Fig. 3]. The community, located

in this dominant and strategic position, overlooked the most convenient routes leading from the outer valleys and the coastal plain of Malia to the Lasithi Plateau. This defensible location has numerous parallels in Crete, the closest being another LM IIIC site (unexcavated) at To Flechtron, on Louloudaki Mountain, just across the deep Ambelos valley west of Karfi (Nowicki 1995). Both settlements formed part of a more complex regional cluster, about 3 km in diameter, with several additional sites located at lower altitudes but also on naturally defensible ridges, such as Papoura, Porolios, Vigla, Siderokefala, and Armi [Fig. 4]. Our new research project includes a broader topographic analysis of the entire settlement pattern within a zone covering 60 to 90 minutes' walking distance from Karfi.

Karfi was identified as an archaeological site for the first time in 1896 by Arthur Evans, who was led there by lo-

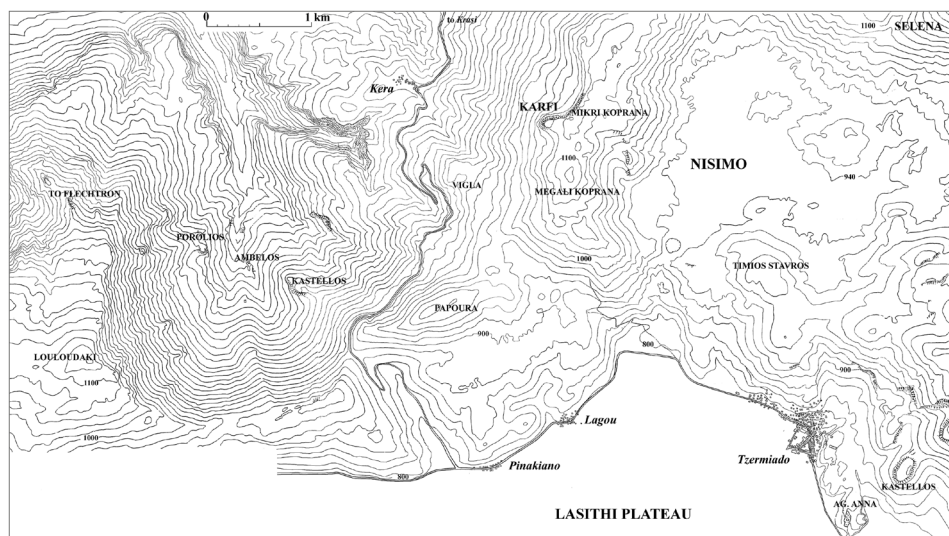


Fig. 3. Map of the northern part of the Lasithi Mountains between Selena and Louloudaki, showing the site of Karfi above the village of Kera (contours at 20 m intervals) (K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

cal inhabitants during one of his trips to the Lasithi Mountains (Evans 1896; Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1937–1938: 57; Brown 2001: 219). Later, it was chosen as a major excavation project by John Pendlebury (Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1937–1938) on behalf of the British School at Athens. Pendlebury also excavated a series of sites in the northern part of the Lasithi Plateau and in the surrounding mountains, dating from the Late Neolithic to the Archaic period (about 5000–600 BC) (Watrous 1980). Excavations at Karfi lasted from 1937 to 1939 but ended with the outbreak of World War II. Pendlebury was nevertheless able to publish a long and detailed excavation report (remarkably thorough for its time), including a schematic plan of the excavated area. For many dec-

ades, this remained the only source of information on the site's architecture and layout. In the early 1980s, a new topographical recording project was initiated by Nowicki (Rutkowski and Nowicki 1984: 190–192). A sketch plan was prepared for the entire site, including the extensive areas of Mikri and Megali Koprana that had not been excavated by Pendlebury (Nowicki 1987). The aim of this work was to reconstruct the detailed topography and extent of the settlement, which originally covered over 30 000 m² and comprised about 125–150 houses, of which Pendlebury had unearthed 25–30. Archaeological reconnaissance was then undertaken in the wider activity zone of Karfi's inhabitants — at least between the northern part of the Lasithi Plateau and the Krasi valley, and between the Selena Moun-



Fig. 4. Northern entrance to the Lasithi Plateau: 1 – Karfi; 2 – Papoura; 3 – To Flechtron; 4 – Krasi Armi; 5 – Krasi Siderokefala (Photo and processing K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

tain and the Kera-Ambelos valleys. This work led to the identification of a series of sites relevant to Karfi's history and its economic resources (Nowicki 1995; 1999). Further recording work, particularly the production of detailed state plans of selected buildings excavated by Pendlebury, was carried out in the early 2000s by Wallace (2005) and Day (2011). This phase culminated in a pilot excavation and detailed landscape survey project conducted by Wallace under the auspices of the British School at Athens between 2008 and 2012 (Wallace and Mylona 2012; Wallace 2020). The 2008 excavation targeted four buildings in areas unexcavated by Pendlebury, labeled on the 1987 sketch plan as Areas A, B, C, and MG [see *Fig. 2*]. The results of these excavations were promptly published and served as the starting point for our new excavation project (Wallace 2020).

Considering the physical difficulties of an excavation at such a high altitude (well above existing roads), which requires tiring climbing and often working under extreme weather conditions—particularly strong winds—the activities of the present project have been restricted to Areas A, B, and MG, leaving the easternmost Area C, close to the fortification wall, untouched for now. The excavation process is recorded using single-context planning, with each new stratigraphic context identified, registered, drawn at a scale of 1:20, and photographed upon identification before excavation. Each stratigraphic context, except topsoil and stone tumble, is sampled and floated (minimum sample 10 L) to retrieve archaeobotanical remains.

The conclusions from the 2008 pilot excavation, including the final destruction of the settlement by fire at the very end of the LM IIIC period, remarkable differentiation in architectural arrangements and building contents across different areas of the settlement, and the significant role of Karfi within the ritual landscape of the Middle Minoan II period (approximately 1800–1700 BC), have been confirmed and expanded by the preliminary results of the current project. New evidence obtained from all three excavated areas has raised a number of new questions regarding the settlement's origin, development, and final fate. Even more questions now concern the origins and character of Middle Minoan activity in Sector B, which after the 2008 project was interpreted as being directly related to the peak sanctuary identified by Pendlebury on the summit of Karfi, about 150 m west of our trench in Area B. New evidence from this sector has already prompted fresh questions concerning the nature of ritual in the mountainous landscape of Crete during the Protopalatial period (Middle Minoan IB–IIB), as well as various aspects of life under extreme topographical conditions at the turn of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. Preliminary results of our work are presented below, focusing on Area B, which lies immediately southwest of the Mikri Koprana peak and is the closest of the three new excavation areas to the portion of the site explored by Pendlebury. The very rich evidence revealed in Area MG is currently under detailed study, and a more comprehensive report on that part of the site will be presented in forthcoming publications.

AREA B, HOUSE B2

Area B was chosen for a test trench during the 2008 excavation because topographical studies conducted in the 1980s had revealed ancient architectural remains on the surface, only about 25 m from the complex of houses (termed the “Megarons”) excavated by Pendlebury (Nowicki 1987: 242). When a trench measuring 6.4 m × 4 m was opened here, the preserved remains confirmed the initial reconstruction, showing an almost total absence of ancient wall structures due to stone clearance associated with cultivation over the last several centuries, up until the mid-20th century. However, it was very surprising to discover that despite this poor preservation of walls, LM IIIC floor deposits were well preserved, containing a large number of almost complete (though broken) clay vessels [Fig. 5],

sealed by a fierce final destruction of the excavated house by fire (evidenced by extensive deposits of ash, charcoal, and burnt clay). The 2008 test excavation also revealed a well-stratified MM II deposit beneath the LM IIIC floor (Wallace 2020: 42–46). Pottery fragments from the two periods were mixed only in a few places, but in general, an undisturbed MM II layer was easily identified immediately after removing the LM IIIC stratum. The test excavation uncovered only a small area, exposing the southern part of an LM IIIC house (House B1). This structure probably consisted of at least two rooms (Rooms A and B), of which the eastern one (Room A) appears to have been the main living space, equipped with a hearth and a corner platform. A wide variety of clay vessels was also found here, includ-



Fig. 5. Floor deposit in House B1 excavated in 2008 (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

ing small cups, bowls, cooking pots, and large *pithoi* (Wallace 2020: 41). Although the 2008 pilot project revealed several important aspects of the site's history — proving it more complex than had previously been assumed— the very limited area excavated did not allow for clarification of the full orientation, size, and detailed plan of the LM IIIC house, nor of the character and precise chronology of the Middle Minoan activity in this area.

When planning the 2023 excavation in Area B, all the aforementioned factors were taken into consideration, and a trench measuring 5.5 m × 6 m (excluding the northeastern corner, which at the start of the excavation was covered by a large pile of architectural stones cleared for cultivation) was opened directly to the east of the 2008 trench [Fig. 6]. In 2024, the trench was further extended in the same direction (east) by an addition-

al 2.5 m. Altogether, the trench in Area B covered an area of 6 m × 8 m [Fig. 7]. Here we aimed to clarify the origins, extent, and character of both the LM IIIC house (House B1) and the earlier MM occupation at the location. After opening the 2023 trench, it became apparent that another house (House B2) adjoined House B1 (excavated in 2008) on the east. The general stratigraphy in the trenches opened in 2023 and 2024 proved to be similar to that recorded in 2008, with well-preserved LM IIIC floor deposits [Fig. 8] and an MM stratum immediately below them.

Regarding the LM IIIC phase, the 2023–2024 excavations allowed us to identify the complete extent of one large room, measuring 4.20 m × 5.60 m internally, with the southern wall (01570) forming a continuation of the southern wall of House B1 (01504) [Fig. 9]. The



Fig. 6. Area B prepared for excavation in 2023 (from the east) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

northern wall (01588) was exposed only along its inner face. The western wall (01583), which separates House B2 from B1, is poorly preserved and was built partly on a rocky outcrop running along the S–N axis. An interesting feature was identified on the inner side of the eastern wall (01619) — probably a stone-lined niche. A gap in the northern section of this wall may represent a doorway leading to another room to the east; however, to confirm this preliminary interpretation, the space east of 01619 must be excavated (scheduled for 2025). So far, only a narrow strip (1 m wide) has been partly excavated along the eastern side of 01619. Here, the uppermost stratigraphic sequence was similar to that recorded within the room described above — a layer of small and medium-sized stones (01621) lying beneath a thin topsoil stratum. An ashy

layer with at least twelve heavily burnt clay loom weights was found next to the aforementioned gap in wall 01619, beneath the layer of stones (01621). Another architectural feature — a raised platform with stone-built edges and a packed clay surface — was identified in the corner of the room between its northern and eastern walls (01646). An important element of this room's furnishing was a hearth (01603) located roughly in its center. It was a well-built structure consisting of three layers. The first was a burnt clay layer lying on, and contemporary with, the original LM IIIC floor level of the room. On the top of this was a layer of potsherds covering an oval area about 0.8 m × 1 m. Although almost all of these potsherds belonged to the LM IIIC phase of the site's occupation, at least two or three were of MM date, indicating that



Fig. 7. Aerial photograph of Area B after the 2024 excavation (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

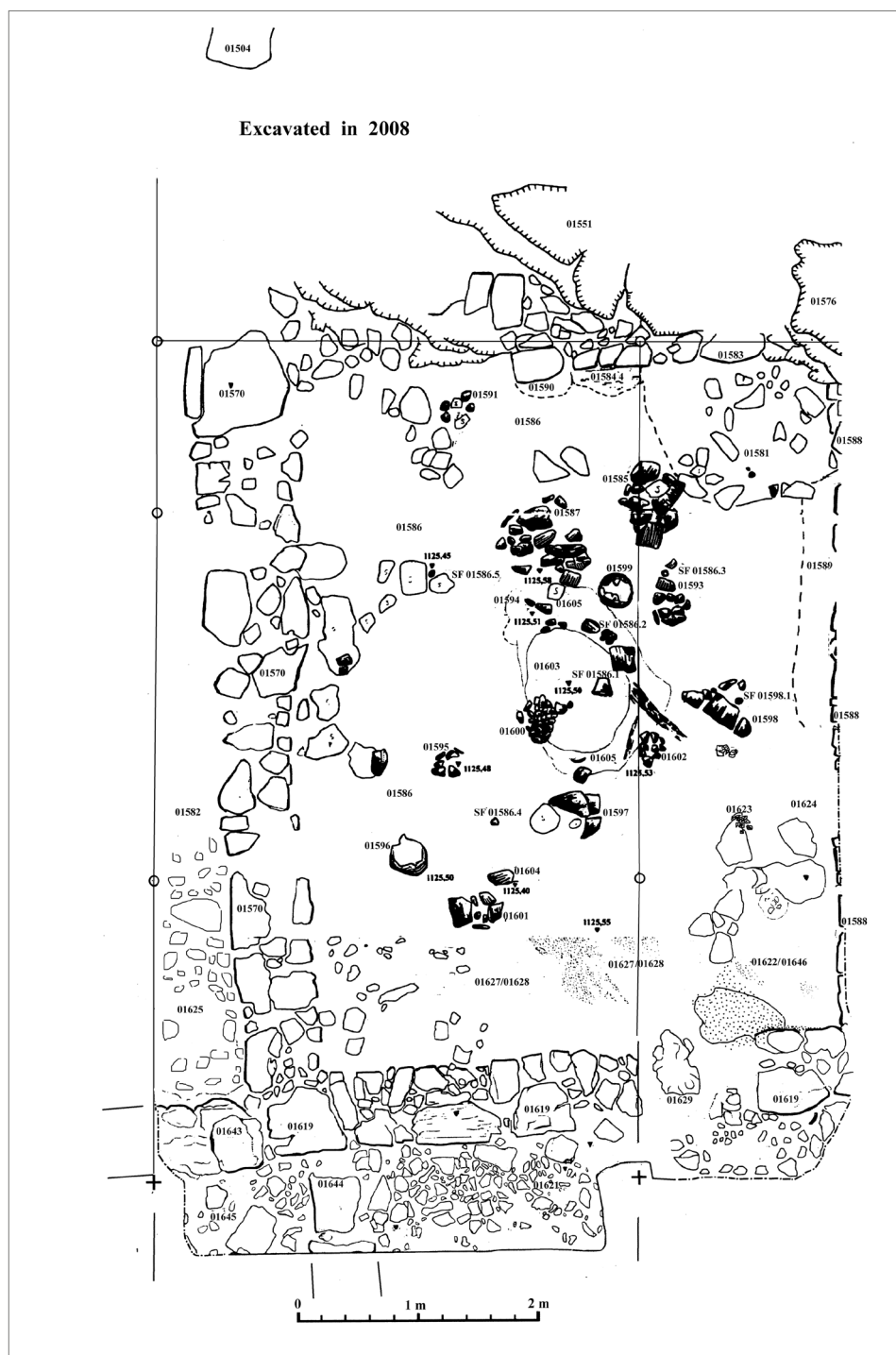
the LM IIIC occupants were aware of the earlier activity at the site and reused earlier material when constructing their hearth — an important point discussed below. The potsherds pavement was covered with a layer of hard, heavily burnt clay approximately 4–5 cm thick [Fig. 10]. This is the first sherd hearth recorded at Karfi, although this type is known from other LM IIIC sites — including the most recently excavated settlement at Orne Kastellos (Kanta et al. 2021: 750). The entire floor of the room was covered with pottery fragments or complete but broken vessels, with an especially dense concentration around the hearth [see Fig. 9]. These included cooking pots, storage vessels (including pithoi), stirrup jars, and thin-walled bowls [Figs 11, 12]. An interesting observation is that the LM IIIC hearth was constructed almost

exactly above an MM fireplace/hearth (01615, 01617). Was this location entirely coincidental, or were the inhabitants of the LM IIIC house consciously referencing details of their predecessors' activity here? To sum up, the combined 2023–2024 excavation seasons allowed us to uncover the main room of House B2, attached to House B1 on its eastern side. What is still missing —and was a standard element of the LM IIIC houses excavated by Pendlebury— is a proper storage room, which we expect to lie either north or east of the room excavated so far. The position of the main entrance to the house is also not yet clear, though it is hypothesized to have been on the southern side.

The interpretation of the individual Middle Minoan contexts is even more complicated due to the still very limited area opened in Sector B. The thickness



Fig. 8. Floor deposit in House B2 exposed during the 2023 excavation (from the north) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



of the MM stratum and the variety of pottery of this date excavated during the 2023–24 seasons are considerably greater than those recorded in 2008. For the first time, we identified an architectural feature that can probably be dated to the MM period: the corner of a structure—either a building, a platform, or an enclosure—uncovered in the southeastern corner of the LM IIIC room, beneath the LM IIIC floor stratum [Fig. 13]. The contexts in which MM evidence has been identified also show greater variety than those recorded in 2008. Traces of ash and small pieces of charcoal are now complemented by the remains of a fireplace or hearth beneath the LM IIIC hearth. The vast majority of MM potsherds represent cups, mostly straight-sided, though a few carinated examples were also found [Figs 14:8–21,

15:1–13, 17]. In addition to the cups, tripod cooking pots and smaller tripod vessels were recovered [Fig. 15:21–24]. These are complemented with various kinds of jars [Figs 14:1–3, 15:18, 20], but so far, no pithos fragments have been found. Fragments of two miniature vessels and one probable bull figurine, represented by a body fragment, were also discovered [Fig. 14:5]. When all the MM finds and the characteristics of the MM contexts are considered together, the question arises whether our initial interpretation of Area B's use during the MM period—as directly related to ritual activity on the neighboring peak sanctuary (for several decades within the 18th century BC)—is correct. If so, the longer duration of use would be of considerable interest. An alternative hypothesis is that the MM activity recorded in Area B had an in-



Fig. 10. Central hearth in the main room of House B2 (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

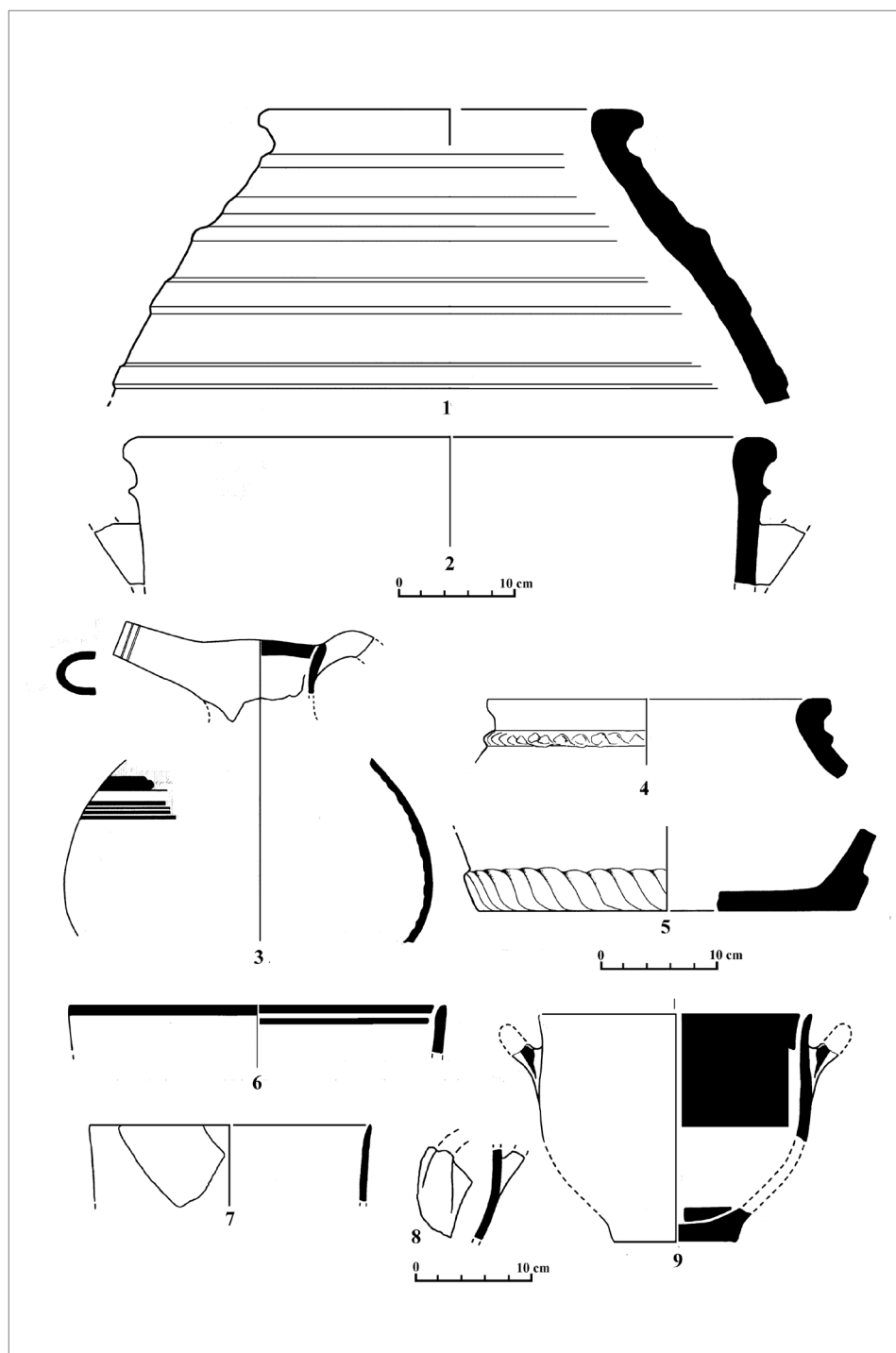


Fig. 11. LM IIIC pottery from the main room of House B2 (Drawings K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

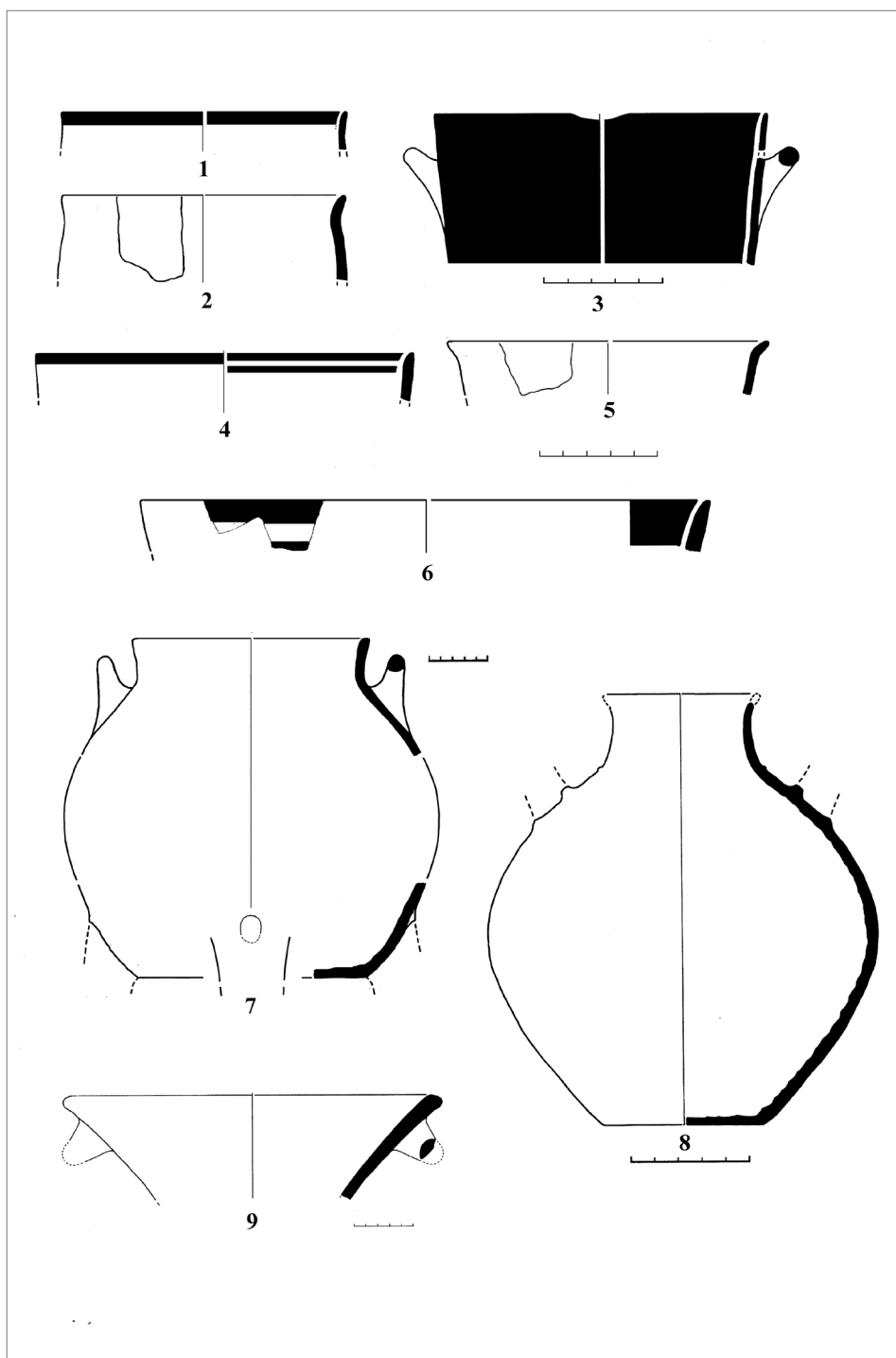


Fig. 12. LM IIIC pottery from the main room of House B2 (continued) (Drawings K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

dependent origin and history, associated with another kind of ritual rooted in the local community's tradition, possibly deeper than the ritual use of the summit of Karfi. Such earlier and longer ritual activity on the slope of Mikri Koprana

may not have been directly related to the phenomenon of peak sanctuaries. The latter, as Nowicki has suggested, likely had a Knossian origin, given the early date of the peak sanctuary at Iouchtas near Knossos (Nowicki 2019).

AREA A, HOUSE A1

Area A is located on the saddle between Mikri and Megali Koprana and includes a deep dell (*lakkos*), which forms a unique topographical feature of the ancient settlement [see Fig. 2]. House A1, occupying an isolated position directly above the aforementioned dell on its northwestern side, is an exceptionally large structure (about 12.7 m × 7 m), built of massive limestone blocks. The main research question here concerned the function and use of this building, which is clearly of a very

different construction and location from other houses at the site. The huge “cyclopean” blocks (up to about 2 m long) used in its construction make House A1 more similar to the so-called MM “forts” known from the northern slopes of the Selena ridge (north and northeast of the village of Krasi) than to other buildings at Karfi (Nowicki 2023). Topographical work in the 1980s suggested that the building either played a special role in the social organization of the LM IIIC



Fig. 13. Eastern part of the main room of House B2 with architectural remains of probable MM date in the corner (from the west) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

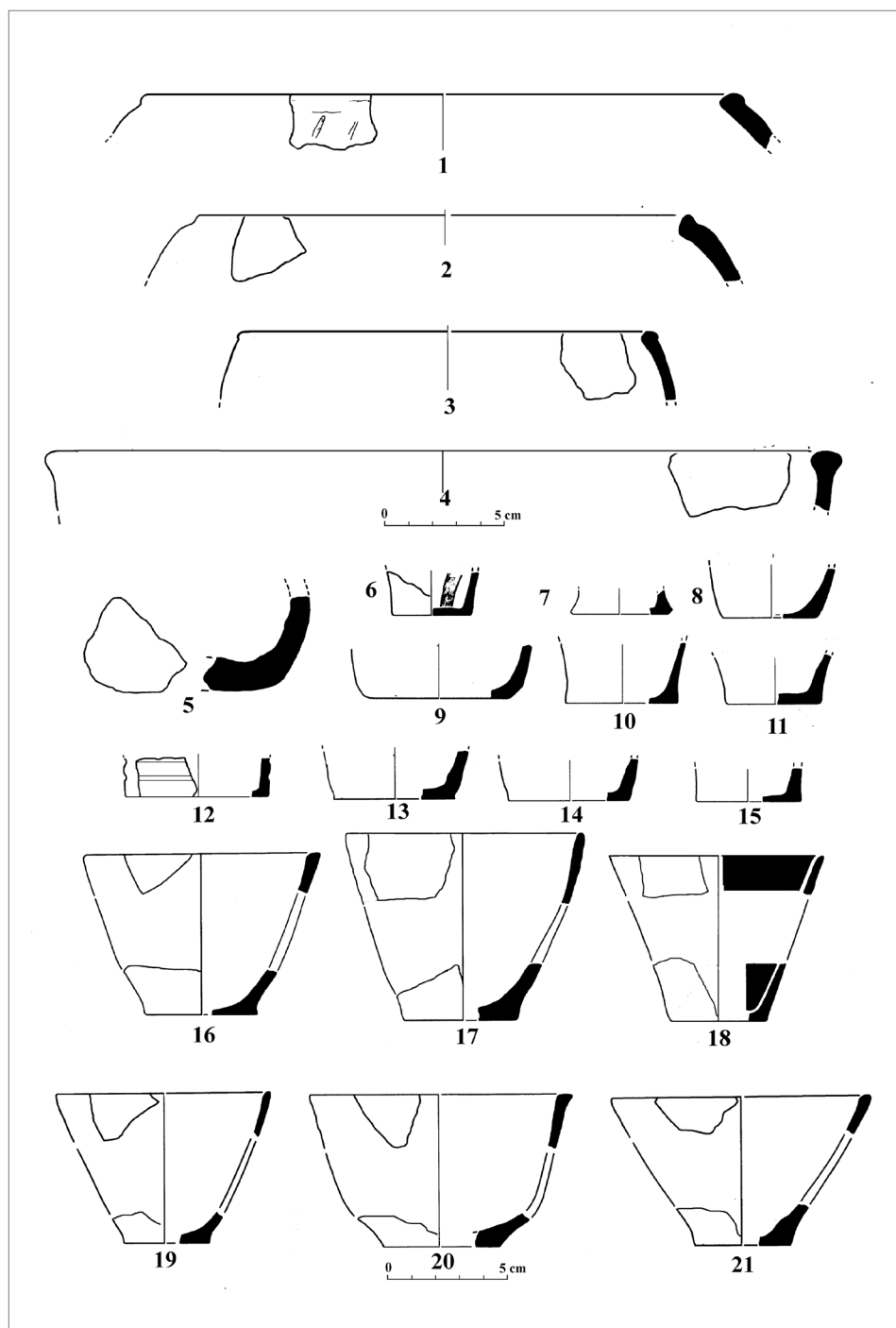


Fig. 14. MM pottery from the layer beneath the LM IIIC floor in House B2 (Drawings K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

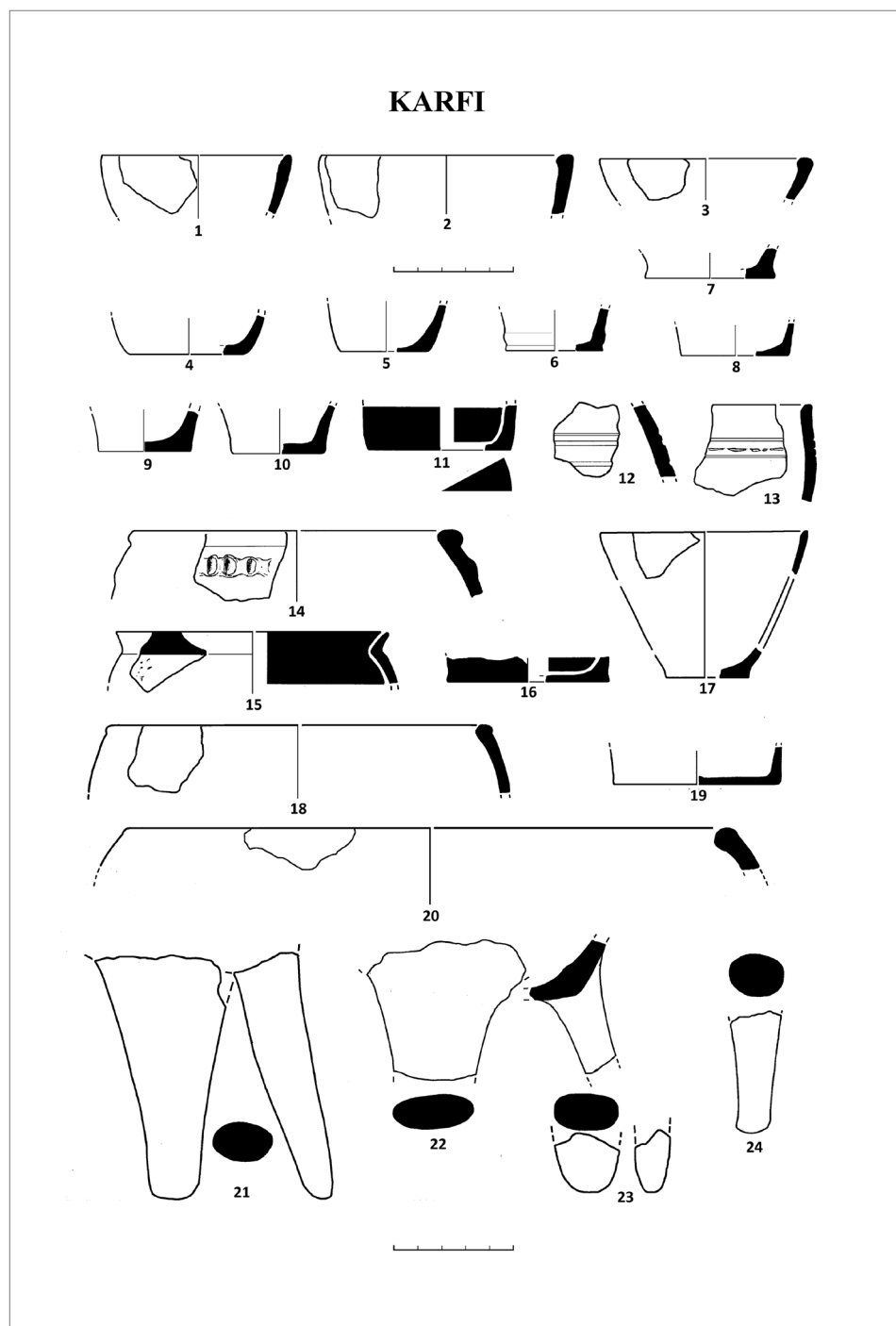


Fig. 15. MM pottery from the layer beneath the LM IIIC floor in House B2 (continued) (Drawings K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

settlement or was built earlier, in the MM II period. The test excavations in 2008 covered the southern corner of the building, approximately half of the southern rear room, and a small southern part of the large main room. Here, no evidence of the burnt destruction dated to around 1000 BC, observed elsewhere at the site, was found. Instead, the structure appears to have been abandoned and cleared midway through the settlement's occupation. Finds indicated its prior use for specific dining and drinking activities in a ceremonial setting, with high concentrations of fine wares—especially in the smaller southwestern room—numerous storage pithoi, including one exceptionally large example, and a number of fragments of specialized cultic or ceremonial stands (Wallace 2020: 37). At floor level, extensive deposits of yellow waterproof soil,

typically used for roofing in ancient and traditional architecture, suggest that the roof collapsed first over a trampled floor of red soil laid directly on bedrock. In some areas, traces of a gravelly leveling fill were found in bedrock crevices beneath this layer.

During the 2023 and 2024 seasons, when most of the main room of House A1 and a small area in front of it were excavated [Fig. 16], most of these stratigraphic characteristics were confirmed. However, a greater amount of ash and charcoal was found than in 2008, owing to the discovery of a hearth within the room. The major difficulty during the excavation of House A1 was the quantity and weight of the stones that had fallen from the walls into its interior. Clearing the surface and underlying deposits—which contained up to 70% stone rub-



Fig. 16. House A1 as seen from the northeast (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



Fig. 17. House A1 partly excavated in 2023, with a layer of large stones covering its interior (from the northeast) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



Fig. 18. Pottery deposit in front of the entrance to House A1 (from the north) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

ble, with some blocks measuring up to 1 m in length— was extremely laborious, so only part (though the majority) of the large main room was unearthed [Fig. 17]. In 2023, the northwestern part of the room was excavated, and in 2024 the southeastern part. A possible doorway was uncovered in the northeastern wall, on its central axis, although the original “frames” of this door appear to be missing. In its present state, the opening takes the form of a wide break in the wall — an unusual situation considering the scale and quality of the entire building.

Pottery within the excavated room appeared below approximately 0.7 m of stone tumble. It was found in quantity but without coherent groups of complete broken vessels *in situ*. Patches of yellow soil found above the pottery, and

interspersed with pottery clusters in layers, suggest roof collapse following a period of rough clearance after the building went out of use. Fire-preserved clay building material was very limited in quantity and may have derived from the hearth found in the floor layer or from other fire-exposed installations within the building during its occupation.

Two important discoveries connected with the building were made. The first was the hearth, located approximately in the center of the room, whose full extent has not yet been determined by excavation. No other interior built features have so far been identified within this large room. The second important find was the first extensive exposure of pottery-containing occupation deposits (dark red soil with occasional charcoal



Fig. 19. Megali Koprana seen from Area B (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



Fig. 20. Excavated houses in the northern part of Megali Koparana (Area MG) (from the south)
(Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



Fig. 21. Southern house in Area MG with a stone-built platform and an adjoining hearth (from the south)
(Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

and roofing material) outside the building. Removal of the topsoil in a trench measuring about 2 m × 4 m, northeast of the central doorway, revealed deposits of stony rubble. Approximately 0.6 m below the topsoil, this rubble was interspersed with large sherds, including fragments of pithoi, immediately overlying the bedrock [Fig. 18]. Our current interpretation of this material in context is that the externally deposited pottery

likely represents clearance and cleaning of the building at some point after its abandonment, i.e. around 1100–1050 BC, based on the latest dates of the fine pottery styles found within the building, which appear to be mid-LM IIIC. Because LM IIIC pottery continues into the northern section of the trench area (north of the building), a further extension in the same direction is planned for 2025.

AREA MG, NORTH

The high status of this particular residential zone within the MG settlement district [Fig. 19], and within the settlement as a whole, was first indicated by the 2008 excavation, which revealed special features within two buildings dating to approximately 1200–1000 BC, all excellently preserved by an extensive and intense conflagration (Wallace 2020: 56–69). The 2008 tests had investigated small parts of both buildings (three rooms in total). The excavations in 2023 and 2024 revealed the remains of three houses with at least six

rooms, extending between a rocky spur to the south and the northern edge of the summit [Fig. 20]. As in 2008, it was found that the extreme heat had blackened bone, carbonized entire beams and planks, semi-vitrified the large number of whole or restorable pots fallen on the floors, and preserved copious amounts of burnt clay. The latter, on the basis of its forms and ubiquity recorded in 2023, was likely widely used in the structures as lintels, wall facings, and wall packing. The buildings were separated by door-



Fig. 22. Metal objects found in Area MG (Photos K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)



Fig. 23. Broken pithoi in the storeroom of the northern house in Area MG (from the west) (Photo K. Nowicki, S. Wallace)

less spine walls running east–west. Special features identified in these houses included a loom with more than 40 loom weights; a concentration of large hollow animal figurines; and exceptionally impressive architecture of a character suitable for semi-public events. Two “hall”-type rooms, each about 10 m × 5 m, contained large central hearths and raised, square, stone-built column bases or work platforms adjoining the hearths [Fig. 21]. The rooms also yielded plentiful and diverse personal items of metal [Fig. 22], stone tools, and evidence of sea-

food consumption, as well as traces of later Iron Age revisiting of a ceremonial nature, including clay figurines of horses and a high density of cooking, storage, and fine consumption wares [Fig. 23]. A decorated krater of exceptional size, additional seafood remains, and a rich stone tool assemblage were already found in the southern building during the 2008 tests. At present, all these finds are undergoing conservation and detailed study, after which a more synthetic interpretation of the functions of the excavated houses will be presented.

SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR 2025–2027

Among the primary aims of the 2008 excavation project was the re-examination of areas of the site beyond Pendlebury’s trenches, previously identified only through topographic study and survey (Nowicki 1987; Wallace 2005; 2020). The 2008 project also addressed questions concerning the architectural diversity of individual districts and the organization of social and economic elements within a community that had been forced to adapt its way of life to such challenging environmental conditions. A major outcome of the 2008 project was the identification of the settlement’s final destruction by fire and the establishment of a more precise chronological range for its occupation, based on ¹⁴C dates indicating use between approximately 1200 and 1000 BC (Wallace 2020: 243–247). The results of that campaign convinced us that the work should be continued. The recent excavations of 2023 and 2024 have confirmed that the site of Karfi provides an enormous amount of important evidence,

which not only enriches our understanding of the transitional period between the collapse of the Bronze Age Minoan-Mycenaean world and the emergence of the later Greek poleis (Wallace 2010), but also reveals entirely new chapters of human activity in the mountainous zone of Crete during both earlier and later periods. The work covered by the present five-year permit will continue in the three areas mentioned above, including the southern part of Megali Koprana and, if possible, a return to Area C.

In Area A, the focus will be on further clarification of the origin and function of Building A1 and its immediate surroundings. Cleaning the area in front of this structure should shed light on the pre-foundation and post-abandonment history of the site. Cleaning the entire interior will also be essential for recovering all evidence that may help reconstruct its primary function. Since no MM pottery has so far been found in or around the building, we must assume —despite its

extraordinary construction— that it was built during the occupation of the LM IIIC settlement. The question remains, however, as to exactly when it was founded and why such “megalithic” blocks were employed in its construction.

Two important issues head the list of research questions in Area B. The first concerns the architectural structure and use of Building B2 and its immediate vicinity. As mentioned above, despite the poor preservation of walls, the floor deposits appear to be mostly undisturbed and rich in various types of finds, allowing for a reconstruction of the house’s arrangement at the time of its destruction and abandonment. So far, a complete western room of the house has been unearthed, with three possible doorways in the southern, eastern, and probably northern walls. Extensions of the excavated area to the north, south, and east should reveal the façade of the house and possibly its two adjoining rooms. A number of spools found along the inner face of the eastern wall suggest the presence of a loom in this neighboring room. Remains of looms were already found in Area MG, and comparison between these two assemblages will be very helpful for understanding the role of textile production

in the settlement’s economy. Uncovering the eastern room will certainly bring to light further evidence essential for comparative studies, both between individual rooms within a single house and between different houses. Area B, however, is particularly important for its rich deposits of MM date, which offer new insights into the origins and character of ritual activity in the Cretan mountains. The remains of walls predating the LM IIIC floor deposits in House B2 are especially significant in this context. If the walls uncovered in 2024 represent the northwestern corner of a larger MM structure, they would constitute the first architectural element of this date identified at Karfi. One further point deserves mention, although it is based so far on a single find — a rim fragment of a Neolithic vessel, well burnished and made in a fabric completely different from that of the MM and LM IIIC pottery. A detailed survey carried out by Nowicki in this part of the site over 20 years ago recorded a chipped stone and a few potsherds of probable Neolithic to Early Minoan I date about 15 m away from our present trench. Does our recent find of a Neolithic sherd support that earlier, uncertain identification of the surface material?

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