

Crete : Excavations.

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Report on Excavations at Præsos in Eastern Crete. By R. C. Bosanquet,
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Præsos, the ancient capital of the aboriginal Eteocretans, lies high on the central plateau of eastern Crete.

The excavations which were conducted in the spring of 1901, with the aid of Mr. J. H. Marshall and Mr. R. D. Wells, architect, did not bear out the expectation that the Eteocretan capital would prove to have been a centre of Mycenæan culture. It is true that the Acropolis yielded a product of pure Mycenæan art under singular circumstances. A large lentoid gem, with the representation of a hunter and a bull, was found embedded in the mud-mortar of a late Greek house; it must have been plastered in unseen along with the earth from an adjacent rock-cut tomb which had evidently been emptied by the Hellenistic builders.

But no other vestige of Mycenæan occupation was found upon the site of the later city. The waterless ridge, encircled by deep ravines, offered nothing to primitive settlers. The earliest remains lie a mile away in a lateral valley near a spring. Here are several groups of megalithic walls, the chief of which was shown by excavation to be a sub-Mycenæan homestead. Its strictly rectangular plan, its massive thresholds, the spiral ornamentation of large jars in its cellars, show that, whatever fate had overtaken the cities on the coast, a certain standard of good workmanship had been their legacy to the people of the hills. Nearer the city two tombs of the same period were discovered: the one, a square chamber with a *dromos*, yielded parts of two painted *larnakes*, thoroughly Mycenæan in design, a gold ring, a crystal sphere, parts of a silver vase, and a quantity of iron swords. The other was a well-built bee-hive tomb, differing from the usual type in being entered through a vestibule; it contained an enormous mass of geometric pottery, an openwork gold ring, a bronze fibula and other objects in gold, ivory and Egyptian porcelain. In the same neighbourhood a number of later tombs were opened, ranging from the Geometric period to the fourth century. Among the numerous geometric vases there are several new types, in particular a vessel in the form of a bird and a slender jug painted with delicate white patterns on a black ground. The later graves yielded jewellery in gold, silver, and crystal.

Prominent among the considerations which caused Præsos to be put upon the programme of the Cretan Fund was the fact that an inscription in an unknown tongue, presumably the Eteocretan, had come to light there and the hope that others might be found. It was dug up at the foot of the Altar Hill, a limestone crag precipitous on three sides which dominates the south end of the site, and had probably fallen from the level summit, long known to the peasants as a hunting-ground for "antikas." More fortunate than Professor Halbherr, who made a small excavation here with the same object before the Cretan Revolution, we obtained a second and longer inscription of 17 lines and apparently in the same non-Hellenic language, close to the entrance steps of a *temenos* on the hill top. It must have been a frequented place of sacrifice, for the rock was covered several feet deep with a deposit of ashes, burnt bones, and votive offerings of bronze and terra-cotta. The terra-cottas, ranging from the sixth to the fourth century, are important as giving a glimpse of a local school of artists working in clay (for Crete has no marble of her own, and Præsos at any rate imported none) and possessed of an independent and vigorous style. The great prize is the upper part of an archaic statue of a young god, half the size of life; the head and shoulders are intact, the remainder had disappeared. An equally well-preserved head, with fragmentary body, of a couchant lion is a further revelation of early Cretan sculpture. The bulky fragments of another lion, life-sized, later and feebler in style, prove the persistence of the local method. Among the bronzes there is a noteworthy series of

votive models of armour, especially helmets, cuirasses, and shields. The pottery shows that the Altar Hill was frequented from the eighth century onwards.

By this time Præsos had probably become the religious and political centre of the district, a primacy for which it is admirably fitted by its position at a meeting place of valleys midway between the two seas. The Acropolis was fortified, the water of the distant spring brought to its foot in earthenware pipes, and a small temple built on its summit. The upper slopes of the Acropolis, though much denuded, yielded two archaic bronzes. Trial pits in the deeper terraces below revealed only Hellenic things, plainly built houses of limestone, roadways and cisterns, and a rubbish pit full of terra-cottas. A building larger and more massive than the rest was completely excavated; it contains eight rooms and has a front 75 feet long. Outside the town two minor sanctuaries were investigated; one adjoining the spring already mentioned contained large terra-cotta figures of a goddess of quite new type. A survey of the whole site was made by Mr. Wells, and a systematic exploration of the surrounding country by Mr. Marshall.

Although Præsos was barren of Mycenæan remains they are evident enough at Petras on the modern harbour of Sitia seven miles to the north. I made some trials here in June. Nine-tenths of the site had been ruthlessly terraced by its Moslem owner and would not repay a large excavation. The remaining tenth is occupied by cottages, and here under the roadway it was possible to uncover one side of a large building containing pithoi and "kamarais" vases. On the hill-top there remain a few foundations of a large mansion, and outside the walls—for Petras is unique among early Cretan sites in possessing remains of fortifications—was found a rubbish heap of the now familiar type, yielding whole cups and lamps and sherds of earthenware and steatite. Ten miles east of Petras, across the Itanos peninsula, is another early site, Palaiokastros, which has been sadly mauled of late years by clandestine excavation. In the course of one of his exploring journeys Mr. Marshall made a remarkable discovery here. Heavy rains—the same that flooded Mr. Hogarth out of his quarters on the beach at Zakro—had exposed the corner of a very fine larnax; the native diggers had not noticed it, and he lost no time in securing it and some vases for the Candia Museum. One of its four picture panels represents a double axe planted upright upon a column, an important illustration of the axe and pillar cults discussed by Mr. Evans in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*.]