

The Mycenaean acropolis (Ajax's capital)

The systematic excavation by the Unit of Archaeology of the University of Ioannina has been progressing, under the direction of Professor Yannis G. Lolos, since 2000 in the area of Kanakia, on the southwestern coast of Salamis. It has been supported financially by the University of Ioannina, and also by various bodies, institutions and private sponsors: the Municipality of Salamis, the Ioannis G. Kostopoulos Foundations, the Psychas Foundation, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), the Mediterranean Archaeological Trust (MAT), the Society for the Promotion of Salaminian Monuments "Akamas", Michalis and Mytro Pateras and Salaminian sponsors.

Of all prehistoric settlements known on Salamis, the acropolis-site at Kanakia on the southwestern coast shows the longest record of habitation, documented already from the Final Neolithic period (4th millennium B.C.). Like other Mycenaean palatial sites of the Greek Mainland, this island centre appears to have reached its floruit in the 13th century B.C. and to have been abandoned at the beginning of the Late Helladic III C Early period, i.e. shortly after 1200 B.C.



Kanakia. View of the coastal acropolis, from west. © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.



Kanakia. View of the heights of the acropolis, from southwest. © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.

On the upper terraces of the coastal acropolis, a series of large compounds of palatial character, apparently planned and controlled by the local Late Mycenaean elite, have been revealed by the excavations of the University of Ioannina. In these are included: the Central Building (Gamma), occupying, on present estimates, an area of 750 m² and incorporating a maze of rooms and corridors, a twin megaron and a small shrine, and the Eastern Complex, with a main access through an unusual fortified gate, probably serving a variety of functions in the public sector. Between the two complexes extends Building Delta comprising

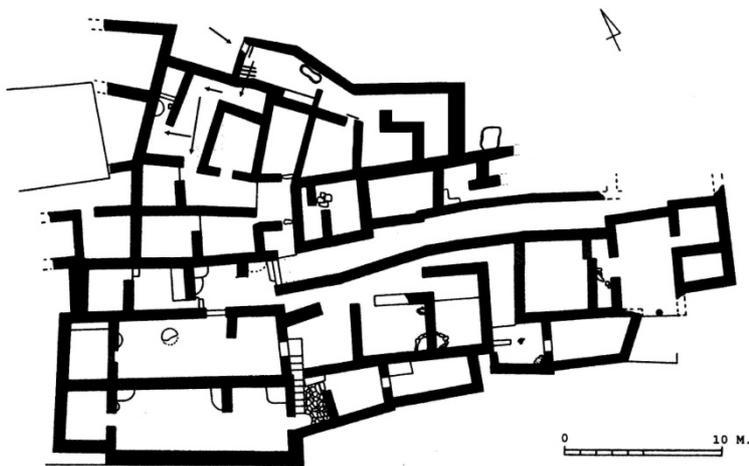
storage and other areas.



Kanakia. Central Building Gamma, with the twin megaron. © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.



Kanakia. View of Central Building Gamma, from west. © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.



Kanakia. Plan Central Building Gamma (2012). © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.

A unique find, with wider dimensions, is a bronze plate from a scale-corselet of Near-eastern type, stamped with the cartouche of Ramesses II (1279-1213 B.C.).



Kanakia, Building ID. Bronze plate from scale armour, stamped with the cartouche of Ramesses II. © University of Ioannina Excavation Archives.

On the basis of the location, size and function of the acropolis, in conjunction with the evidence for its external relations and maritime contacts, this major Mycenaean settlement-site at Kanakia can be identified with the “ancient city”, i.e. the older capital of the island, mentioned by the geographer Strabo (IX.1.9.) and also in an inscription of the late 1st century B.C. from the Acropolis of Athens.

It is the plausible seat of the naval kingdom of Salamis, well-known from epic tradition, and flourishing under the legendary Aiacid dynasty and Ajax, son of Telamon, and also the metropolis of the city of Salamis in Cyprus, whose legendary founder was Teucer, half-brother of Ajax.