

The Mycenaean settlement on the island of Salamis in the Saronic Gulf (c. 1390–1190 B.C.)

Yannos G. Lolos

Among the bigger islands of the Saronic Gulf, Salamis, with an area of 93.5 square km, lies nearest to Attica. Its fame derives mainly from the great sea battle that took place in the historic Straits in 480 B.C., when a united Greek fleet destroyed a much bigger Persian armada. Great figures from Salamis, connected with local hero-cults lasting in strength until the end of Antiquity, were Kychreus, the first mythical king, Ajax son of Telamon, perhaps the most illustrious member of the local Mycenaean dynasty, and the tragic poet Euripides.

The site of Classical Salamis, on a promontory just opposite the west coast of Attica, is well established on the evidence of the accounts of early travellers and from continuing excavations in the area of the modern village of Ambelakia. This city, apparently the urban centre of the island until Late Roman times, is described by both Strabo and Pausanias. In a somewhat intriguing phrase, Strabo also refers to the “old polis” of Salamis as lying “towards Aigina and the south wind” and being “desolate” at his time (*Geographica*, IX.1.9)

In 2000, during site-centred survey work in southern Salamis by a team from the University of Ioannina, an extensive Mycenaean settlement, preserving visible architectural remains, was identified at the site of Kanakia on the southwest coast of Salamis. This is the first large Mycenaean settlement to be located on the island, presenting excellent prospects for excavation.

On the basis of the evidence from the 2000 intensive survey and of the results of the 2001 systematic excavation, it appears to be a major centre, of wider dimensions, in the area of the Saronic Gulf, with a flourish in the 13th and in the early 12th century B.C. and, very probably, with a vital role in the maritime economy of the region.

The Mycenaean settlement at Kanakia extends over two contiguous heights, rising to 67 m. and 91 m., just above the coast, and has access to two natural harbours. The whole settlement system comprises a main quarter (on the acropolis) and at least two smaller quarters or hamlets in the immediate neighbourhood.

The clearing works of 2000 on the acropolis were carried out in twelve sectors (A1–A3, B–I). The architectural elements uncovered during the first survey at the site include: plans of houses of at least four different types, parts of two

building complexes, two stone bases of columns, small tower-like structures, successive retaining walls, and a main road, partly paved with stones, on the north slope of the acropolis, that led from the harbour to the higher terraces.

Systematic excavation, conducted in September–October 2001, brought to light two large adjacent buildings, founded at the higher levels of the acropolis, and containing ceramic evidence of destruction or abandonment in the LH IIIC: early phase. They were thought to belong to an extensive building complex, perhaps one of the most important compounds at the site, with well-organized central functions. Access to it was possible through an impressive entrance functioning as a check-point.

Industrial Unit IA, measuring 11.5 × 18 m., is a “corridor-type” building, with architectural parallels at Mycenae, Tiryns and Menelaion. It comprises workshops and rooms for storage, arranged at two successive levels. Among the contents of the workshops in the upper wing are: clay vases, numerous stone implements of various types, masses of mineral pigments and large parts of two clay bath-tubs (*asaminthoi* in Homeric Greek), one of which has remnants of lime-plaster on its inner surface.

Incorporated in the architectural plan of Building IB are a massive tower-like structure and a strong composite entrance of unusual type, flanked on the one side by a guardroom or porter’s lodge. It is a twin triangular gate that has no Late Mycenaean parallels on the Greek Mainland or Cyprus.

The presence of archers and slingers among the last guard of the gate can be surmised by the discovery, in the destruction layer, of a sling-stone and an “arrowshaft straightener” of stone, near the large threshold of the gate, in addition to a complete bronze knife from the uppermost filling of a nearby room or passage certainly destroyed by fire. The involvement of archers and slingers in warfare is documented from passages in the *Iliad*.

Evidence for the external relations and trade contacts of this major Salaminian settlement is already provided by a number of finds including likely imports (fine vases) from the Argolid; pieces of grey andesite from Aigina; a painted jug with strainer spout, a ceramic type with a notable diffusion in the Aegean and very much in evidence on Rhodes in the LH IIIC period; and also a large fragment of

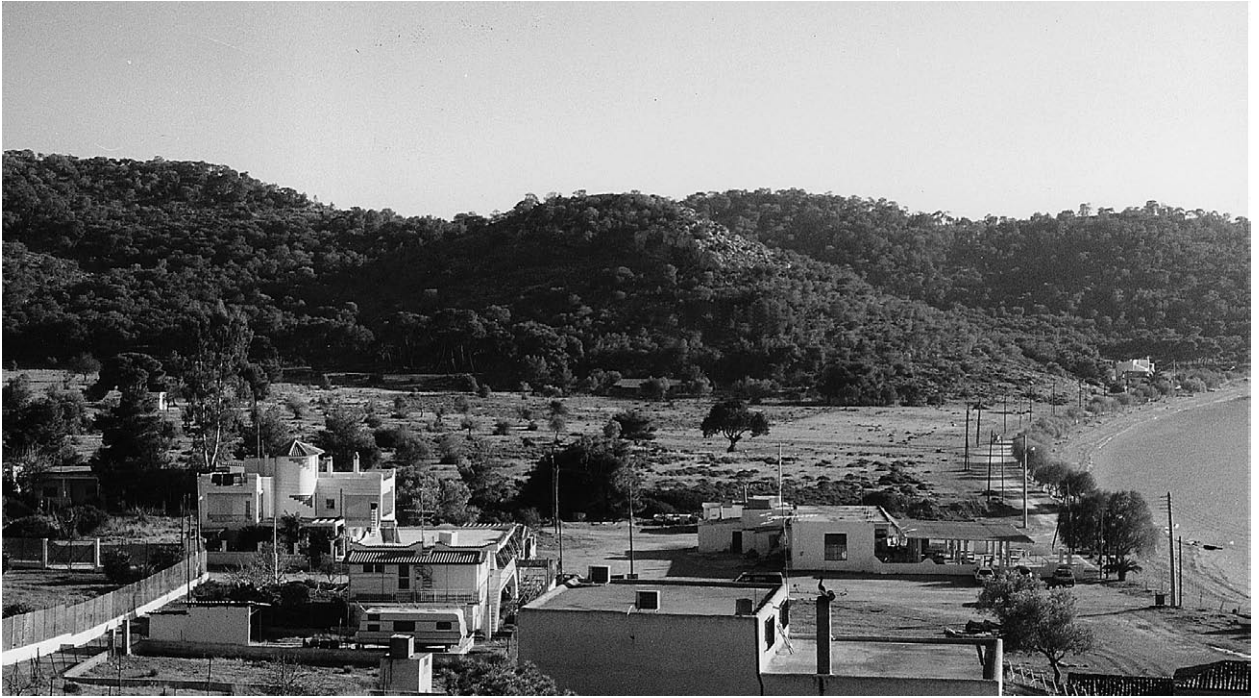


Figure 1 ???



Figure 2 ???

a copper ingot of certain Cypriot provenance, of the standard “oxhide” type.

On all evidence, the Mycenaean polis at Kanakia, placed among the states of Athens and the Argolid, is “Old Salamis”, “deserted” in Strabo’s times. Its total desolation, soon after ca. 1200 B.C., is vividly reflected in the archaeological record.

Excavations, 2002

In 2002, a new building, designated Iota Delta, was excavated immediately south of Building IA and east of Building IB. It is a strong structure, of impressive size, with rooms arranged at three or four levels on the slope. Architecturally and functionally, this building is connected to both IA and IB. All three of them form a solid industrial compound, comprising 41 rooms and other areas (workshops, storerooms, auxiliary rooms, corridors and passages), with a main access from the northwest. Excavation also progressed in sectors Delta and Gamma, further west, where rooms and other areas of two large adjacent compounds, apparently comprising living quarters, were cleared.

Excavations, 2003

In 2003, work was mainly concentrated in sector Gamma on the acropolis. A substantial part of the large oblong building, located in previous years, and set on an east-west axis, was investigated. The excavated part of the building, west of the propylon, comprises rooms in two parallel rows or wings with an east-west orientation, arranged at slightly different levels. Two architectural phases were discerned in

the building. The initial plan (first phase) is characterised by entrances of unusual form, on the east and south side, functioning as check-points. The second phase, apparently associated with the final use of Building Gamma at the beginning of LH III C: early, is marked by hastily built walls, blocking both entrances and corridor. Among the numerous finds retrieved from Buildings Delta and Gamma are objects of Cypriot provenance, including two large “prestige” spindle whorls of black steatite, with elaborate incised decoration.

Excavations, 2004

The most important result of the 2004 campaign at Kanakia was the clearing of an impressive double megaron within the limits of Building Complex Gamma. This complex, one of the two largest on the upper levels of the acropolis, comprising at least 20 rooms and other areas and now achieving a length of ca. 45 m., has yielded ample ceramic evidence for its final abandonment at the beginning of the LH III C: early phase. The double megaron, oriented east-west, consists of two contiguous elements at different levels, each one measuring 14 × 4 m. and comprising a large hall and a rear room, with an entrance on the east side.

The presence of the twin megaron inside Building Gamma, in conjunction with the location, size and lay out of this complex, may be regarded as additional evidence for the identification of the group of compounds on the Salaminian acropolis as the seat of the local ruling dynasty, well-known from ancient tradition.

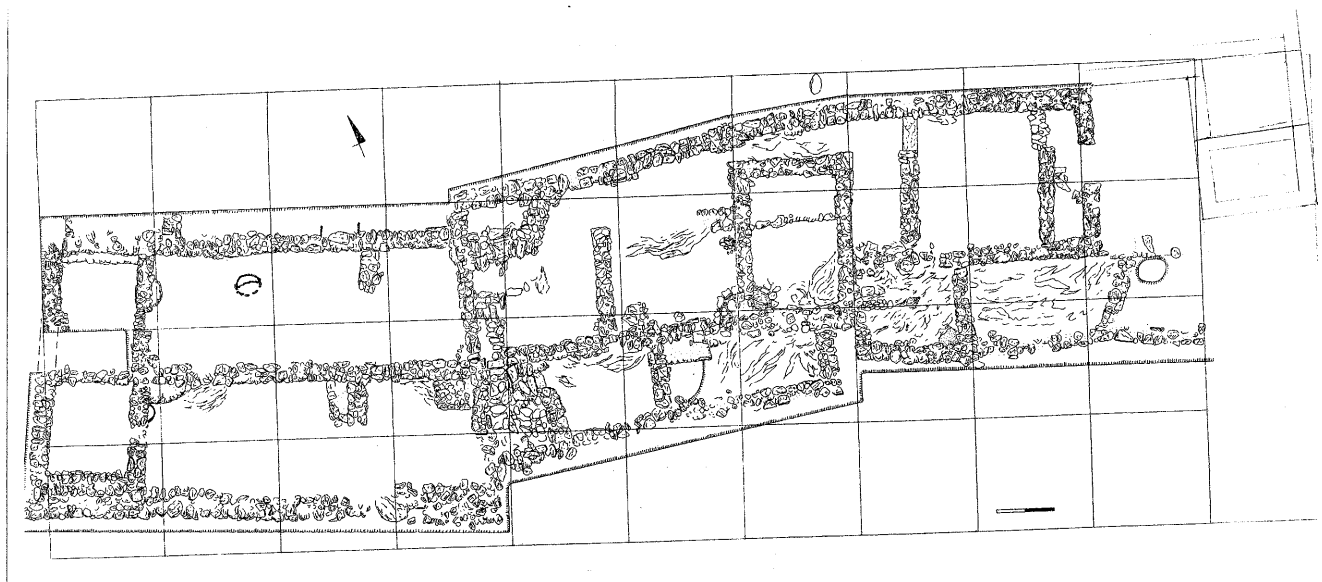


Figure 2 Salamis, Kanakia. Plan of building complex Gamma, after the close of the 2004 campaign (drawn by Y. Nakas, 2004).

SALAMIS***Catalogue Entries***

Note: Most of the vessels listed below formed part of the Exhibition. Each of these has the original *précis* of its organic residue results listed as a separate section in its catalogue entry.

EUM 746 Exc. Inv. No. 99.IIE.6

COOKING POT, flat slightly raised base

Organic Residue Analysis
Vegetable stew.

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find,
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: D, base: 6.2 cm.
Description: Plain. Aeginetan? Coarse fabric (reddish yellow, 5YR 6/8), with gold mica and other tiny, white stone inclusions.

EUM 748 Exc. Inv. No. 00.IIE.50

KYLIX, wall and stem fragment

Organic Residue Analysis
A herbal extract or richly flavoured wine/liquor (e.g. blackberry wine would be an example of a richly flavoured wine)

Chronology: LH III B–III C Early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: Max. pres. H. 6.2 cm.
Description: Plain goblet. Fine fabric (yellow, 2.5Y 7/6).

EUM 750 Exc. Inv. No. 99.IIE.9

COOKING PAN, large, base and wall fragment

Organic Residue Analysis
Vegetable content.

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: Max. pres. H: 5.5 cm.
Description: Plain. Semi-coarse fabric (yellowish red, 5YR 5/8), with gold mica and many white stone inclusions. Gray core.

EUM 751 Exc. Inv. No. 5.00.IIE.37

PIRIFORM JAR, base and lower body fragment

Organic Residue Analysis
Meat, rather than vegetable products, was stored.

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: D: base, 13 cm.
Description: Concave underneath. Originally decorated. Fine fabric (reddish yellow, 5YR 7/8), with some non-plastics.

EUM 756 Exc. Inv. No. 00.II.32

JAR/HYDRIA, base and lower body fragment

Organic Residue Analysis
Vessel used for preparation of vegetable products

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC Early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: Max. pres H: 7.5 cm.
Description: Flat base. Plain. Semi-coarse fabric (reddish yellow, 5YR 6/8), with many white and gray grits.

EUM 758 Exc. Inv. No. 00.IIE.92

TRIPOD COOKING POT, wall fragment, with part of foot

Organic Residue Analysis
Vegetables. Residues of fruit waxes (skins & leaves) and fruit acids.

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC, early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: Max. pres. H: 15 cm.
Description: Finger impressions on the inside. Plain. Aeginetan? Coarse fabric (strong brown, 7.5YR 5/6), with many gold mica and tiny white stone inclusions.

EUM 760 Exv. Inv. No. 00.Z.16

PIRIFORM JAR, base and lower body fragment

Organic Residue Analysis
Very low levels from vegetable sources, perhaps from dried leaves of herbs.

Chronology: LH IIIB–IIIC early (c. 1200 B.C.)
Provenance: Settlement of Salamis; surface find.
Present location: Piraeus Museum
Dimensions: Max. pres. H: 7 cm.; D: base, 6.5 cm.
Description: Narrow ring base, fully painted. Fine fabric (pink, 7.5YR 8/3).

Profiles of sherds: Chr. Marabea
Drawings of types of vessels: Alex. Mari