"Evidence for trouble and social transformation at Middle Minoan III Malia, Crete. A view from Area Pi"

Langohr, Charlotte ; Alberti , Maria Emanuela ; Pomadère, Maia

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The topic of our paper today is the new evidence for Middle Minoan III occupation at Malia.

* This evidence comes from Area Pi.
* There the recent excavation programme has brought to light a Neopalatial building. This is notably packed with massive fills deriving from a Late Minoan IA destruction, the phase to which belongs the architectural layout of the building as it is still visible today.

Contrary to the prosperous MM IIB settlement at Malia, violently destroyed at the end of that phase, the Middle Minoan III period and its internal phasing are remained poorly understood at the site, due to the scarcity of fully published assemblages dated to this phase. Indeed earlier excavators assumed that « little MM III reconstruction is seen in the town » and related the major architectural developments to LM IA.

* The three MM III contexts from Area Pi that we will present here concern different depositional processes:
  * a huge fill in room 24,
  * a primary destruction deposit in room 19
  * a large pit: pit 1
They are related to two sub-phases of the Middle Minoan III period of occupation in this area.
This opens a small window on the changes experienced by the inhabitants of Malia during this long period of Minoan history, possibly spanning as much as two centuries, as recently suggested by Alexander MacGillivray. This will also allow us to locate Malia on the MM III map as depicted in the recent Intermezzo volume.

The fill dumped in room 24 and the content of pit 1 are both characterized by a huge and homogenous assemblage of pottery. In both cases, ceramic analysis suggests rapid secondary deposition of the material, resulting from a major destruction of surrounding spaces, in MM IIIA and MM IIIB respectively (we will come back to that in a minute).
The examination of the pottery of the destruction deposit in room 19 at the light of the two distinct MM IIIA and MM IIIB repertoires that I just mentioned suggests a MM IIIA destruction horizon for it.
Let’s give some more details.

* Room 24 is part of a complex of rooms built during the MM II period in the north of area Pi. It was abandoned at the end of MM IIB, except for room 24, a basement reused as a dumping area. Indeed the huge ceramic deposit of 13,000 sherds excavated in this room consists of whole cups stacked together and almost complete broken
pots, but mostly of partially mendable vessels. We interpret it as the secondary deposition of the material resulting from the destruction of one or more nearby MM IIIA building(s).

- Handleless cups dominate the drinking repertoire and include three types: * broad and shallow, with pronounced rilling marks, including a variation with a large ledge-rim / * broad and conical, with sometimes a slight ledge-rim/ * tall and conical, sometimes bell-shaped and monochrome.

- Broad straight-sided cups with a wide base and a large flat handle complete the drinking repertoire – they are mainly monochrome or possibly LOD decorated but the decoration has not been preserved. *They differ from the hundreds of narrow-based straight-sided cups with a roll handle of MM IIB quartier Mu.

- Ovoid wide-mouthed vessels of different sizes (called ‘brocs’ at Malia) prevail in the coarse ware storage repertoire. They are in clear continuity *with the MM IIB examples from Quartier Mu, in terms of shape, but also fabrics and technical features.

- Tripod cooking pots, featuring either ovoid -’broc’ profiles; *or a large shallow shape, *in this case light-slipped on the interior, are also * in clear continuity with MM IIB.

- Cooking dishes on the contrary have a different typology from the previous period: most of them have a short thick rim, triangular in section, a squared spout and a deep body.

- Some examples with a shallow body and inward rim can, however, still be ascribed to the MM II tradition.

- The production of tripod flaring bowls also continues from MM II well into this later phase, * as well as the coarse ledge-rim bowls, often painted on the interior.

- Oval-mouthed amphoras covered with a thick layer of paint are quite common, which resemble the numerous examples from Quartier Mu.

- Part of a beehive which also follows the MM IIB tradition, showing a pattern of internal incisions that is specific to Malia and its wider region throughout time.

- Two pattern-painted pots complete the deposit, a fine cylindrical bucket decorated with ripple and featherwave, with parallel at MM IIIA Knossos,

- and a miniature tripod vessel, which has a twin in Quartier Epsilon.
* Finally, it is worth noting that we excavated other massive fills in 2014, in the west part of Area Pi. Among them was a huge assemblage of about 13,000 sherds weighing 230kg. The preliminary analysis of the pottery, especially the quantitative variation of the most distinctive types of handleless cups, also points to a MM IIIA horizon.

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*Room 19 is located in the eastern wing of the Neopalatial building Pi.* And you can see here the primary destruction deposit on its floor (and keep in mind already that Pit 1, that we will discuss in a minute, had been dug into the layers covering this floor deposit).

The deposit of room 19 only contained a handful of handleless cups*, but they are of the same three types evidenced in the MM IIIA assemblage from room 24: broad and shallow/ broad and conical with a slight ledge-rim/ and tall and conical. These types, but also the various fabrics used in their manufacture, differ strongly from the MM IIIB repertoire evidenced in pit 1, as we will see in a minute.

* A monochrome broad straight-sided cup also belongs to the deposit.

The rest of the repertoire shows, again, important continuity with the MM IIB repertoire from Quartier Mu.

* With these coarse trefoil-mouthed plain jugs,

* and a plain trefoil-mouthed juglet.

* But also with a few jars with an ovoid, wide-mouthed profile and an incurving rim,

* as well as a coarse ledge-rim bowl, similar in profile, fabric and manufacture to examples from room 24.

* Finally this MM IIIA destruction deposit also yielded this lentoid flask with DOL decoration of ripple and spirals, that we previously dated to MM IIIB on stylistic ground. Its fine light buff fabric differs clearly from the rest of the assemblage and it is most probably an import.

* MM IIIA lentoid flasks have been found at Zakros, decorated in LOD, *or in a MM IIIA context at Akrotiri, with relief decoration, probably an import from Crete.

* In LM I, dark-on-light lustrous examples are better-known, with evidence at Gournia, Palaikastro and Khania.

* However on our flask, the ripple effect is produced by what Eleni Hatzaki has described as a quick rubbing of the vessel's surface with some tool, when the strokes of paint are partially dry;

* this technique is typical of MM IIIA, and seems not to survive into MM IIB at Knossos.
The combination of spirals and tortoiseshell ripple in DOL lustrous ware is seen on a MM IIIA bridge-spouted jug from Akrotiri and on a closed vessel from Zakros found in a context linked to the middle of MM III.

**SO:**

What appears interesting is that these two MM IIIA assemblages from Area Pi show clear signs of continuity with the MM IIB pottery repertoire at Malia, especially for the storage and cooking vessels. However they also demonstrate important changes. Mainly, the large MM IIB repertoire of drinking vessels is much more simplified. We should keep in mind that we compare here MM IIIA material from a domestic context to the MM IIB assemblages from the wealthier Quartier Mu. However, in our opinion, the important changes and simplification appearing within the drinking repertoire during MM IIIA may rather be linked to the disappearance of skilled potters at work at MM IIB Malia than to the sole choice of changing this repertoire. In other words, the fine decorated *hemispherical cups, *straight cups and *carinated cups *disappeared, when the omnipresent *MM IIB straight-sided cup remained in a different version (with a wide base and a flat handle), and the *handleless cups just grew dramatically.

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Moving to the next occupation phase in Area Pi, we turn to our last context, the large homogenous assemblage which had been thrown in Pit 1 and for which we suggest a MM IIIB horizon.

The handleless cups still show an important heterogeneity in profiles; they are small, thick-walled, irregular, and significantly differ from the MM IIIA repertoire as just discussed. Indeed the profile already tends towards the short and compact profile typical of LM IA.

however, the LM IA conical cups from Malia are clearly distinct from the MM IIIB horizon, with homogenous compact convex profiles, often with an incurving rim, but also in terms of fabrics.

the new tall convex cup and *S-profile cup also announce the *LM I repertoire.

Among coarse wares, the Middle Minoan tradition is still strong,

* with the large majority of jars and cooking pots still related to the ovoid, wide-mouthed type with an incurving rim,
* large conical ledge-rim bowls
*and oval-mouthed amphorae.

*However, jars with a short marked rim are now common; this makes an important difference with the previous phases and compares well *with MM IIIB assemblages from other Minoan sites.
This ewer, a new shape at Malia as well, has also good MM IIIB parallels.

This uncommon lékanê with gadroons finds some comparison at MM IIIA Anemospilia and MM III Pseira.

Now

*how do these MM IIIA and MM IIIB deposits relate to the architectural history of the Neopalatial building excavated in Area Pi?

Building Pi was constructed in an area with evidence of occupation from EM II onwards. Protopalatial remains point to the existence of an earlier building, with a different layout, that seems to have been deeply transformed after the MM IIB destruction (and you can see in yellow the MM IIB structures which had not been reused).

The earliest Neopalatial unit has to be located in the eastern part*, with evidence for a MM IIIA building phase (here in green), ending with a destruction:

*first, a MM IIB or MM IIIA trefoil-mouthed juglet inserted in a small cavity of a wall as a foundation deposit;
*second, the MM IIIA primary destruction deposit in room 19, a clear terminus ante quem for this part of the Neopalatial building.

*We also suggest that the huge secondary deposit dumped in room 24 comes from this MM IIIA building, which seems to have been thoroughly cleared out after an important destruction and before a new construction phase.

After this MM IIIA destruction, MM IIIB architectural activity remains enigmatic.

* This phase is mainly evidenced by the redeposition of a large destruction deposit in Pit 1. Dug and filled in from the much higher floor of room 4 (above room 19), Pit 1 and its associated stratigraphy suggest that an MM IIIB destruction episode was followed by a large operation of cleaning, dumping of debris and then rebuilding. This new building phase occurred early in LM IA. It most probably concerned the east wing and the large central unit: Pi alpha (here all in blue). Indeed in Pi alpha, no clear MM III deposit has been found above the protopalatial levels; MM III sherds have only been found in the fills underneath the LM IA floors. It seems then reasonable to place the construction of this whole architectural unit at the beginning of LM IA.

* Finally, a last and again widespread destruction, possibly by earthquake, struck the neopalatial building in mature LM IA, * indirectly attested by the massive fillings of rooms 2, 3, 10, 11, 13.
Based on these different observations, we suggest that a major occupation actually took place in Area Pi during MM III. This is characterized by two different chronological horizons, but for which we have only clear primary traces in the case of the MM IIIA sub-phase. The huge MM IIIA fills underline the importance of the cleaning operations that had followed and provide indirect evidence for the following building activities, most probably within MM IIIB. The MM IIIB phase seems also to have ended with an important destruction, debris of which seems to have been rapidly cleared out as well. We may link these two MM III destructive horizons to important earthquakes, that in both cases would have necessitated a thorough rebuilding.

*At the intra-site level, in the area northeast of the Palace of Malia, the excavators have considered that this zone may have been totally abandoned between the MM IIB destruction and the major LM IA rebuilding programme. Evidence for MM III pottery in large fills laid at the beginning of LM IA may however point to activities similar to those identified in Area Pi, that is large cleaning and levelling operations following at least one MM III destruction but for which no primary evidence has been preserved.

*The abundant MM III handleless cups collected in the construction fill of esplanade 26 for example show a typological repertoire close to the MM IIIA examples from Area Pi;

*these are however mixed to fine wares decorated with thin ripple which suggest MM IIIB or even LM IA intrusions.

*Evidence for a MM IIIA destruction inside the palace is suggested by a large deposit of handleless cups in room III.8 showing again the association of broad and shallow and broad and conical types; this deposit is probably contemporary to the Hieroglyphic deposit found at the entrance of this room.

*Finally, in Quartier Epsilon, we think we have good stratigraphical and ceramic elements to suggest that the occupation phase II of this large dwelling includes evidence for two distinct MM III horizons: MM IIIA primary destruction deposits corresponding to Olivier Pelon’s layer 9, and MM IIIB destruction levels in layers 8 and 7, possibly in secondary position.

*Broadening our horizon, recent work by Colin Macdonald and others gathered strong evidence for a massive earthquake destruction in MM IIIA, at Knossos but also in its wider region, from Zominthos to the west to Galatas to the east, including Alonaki and Archanes in between. These sites were immediately rebuilt and continued until the next major destruction horizon, another massive earthquake in LM IA. Our archaeological and historical reconstruction of Area Pi follows this scenario, and this includes the evidence of massive MM IIIB fillings, also attested within these north-central Cretan settlements but all lacking, like at Malia, clear primary traces for a MM IIIB destruction.
Contrary to Knossos which was not destroyed in MM IIB nor affected by the destruction of other sites, and which recovered quickly after a major MM IIIA earthquake, with elements of greatness without precedent as Colin Macdonald has shown, Malia’s population suffered. The material culture at MM III Malia, as seen through the prism of the pottery from Area Pi for the moment, suggests important transformations in MM IIIA with lower technical skills and a significant simplification of the fine wares in comparison with MM IIB practices. However, an important typological and technological continuity with MM IIB traditions is also clear.

In MM IIIB, more changes appear in the repertoire, which have a more island-wide diffusion, and prepare the cultural homogeneity of the LM IA period.

In conclusion, if we already knew that Malia had lost its Protopalatial splendour forever after the violent MM IIB destruction, this did certainly not provoke a gap of more than a century in its history. As we have shown, its population not only managed to pick itself up again but also endured and recovered from at least one if not two massive earthquakes during the next generations of the Middle Minoan III continuo.