

A GEOMETRIC LOCATION IN PIRAEUS

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Abstract. A recent rescue excavation in Palea Kokkinia of Piraeus has revealed Protogeometric and Geometric settlements including PG ceramic kilns, remains of Geometric buildings, a road and a cemetery dating to the same period. The organization of the cemetery and the types of the graves are typically of the MG and LG period. The significance of these finds is important, because of the rarity of a PG workshop near the coast and the specialness of PG ceramic kilns. The Geometric finds offer us a new topographical evidence for the settlements and the organization of the society in this district of Attica, which was until now unknown.

The purpose of our presentation is the brief description of our finds from a rescue excavation located in Greece, at Palea Kokkinia which is a suburb of Piraeus. As the excavation finished recently, we are not allowed to reach safe conclusions regarding our finds, since their study is not completed yet. Nevertheless we are in position to conclude that our excavation can give a lot of evidence as well as interesting clues, of the existence and organization of the community which was developed at the district of Athens during the Geometric period.

At the area of Palea Kokkinia, a district in northeastern Piraeus, a geometric site dating to the 9th and 8th century BC was located at the '50s (Theocharis 1951). A few graves were excavated there and that was the only geometric site that we had located in the area, until now. Nowadays, because of the construction of many new buildings, we have the opportunity to locate and excavate more sites through.

The excavation (between Agion Anargyron and Mavrogenous str) lasted for more than 2 years and has revealed groups that belong chronologically to the Proto-geometric, Middle and Late Geometric period. Unfortunately an old building erected before the II World War destroyed an important part of this site.

The area of Palea Kokkinia

Palea Kokkinia is a district where the presence of water is intense. The ground is loamy as a result of the floods. During the geometric period it seems that above the natural rock there was not high filling, and the thickness of the ground was 0,50 to 1,00 m high.

In the greater area of Palea Kokkinia a few classical graves were found until now. We haven't located an organized cemetery of that period yet.

The road

A road (ph 1) is the basic element of the site. We have located two surfaces of it. They were made of pebble and clay. A wall made of stones holded the east side of the road. Along both sides remains of buildings were found, but we haven't been able to define their use yet. Groups of graves dating to the Middle and Late Geometric period were also located along both sides of the road. Above the surface a fill of sand was found. It seems that the road was abandoned after the LG period because many pits were filled with stones and pottery dating to the classical period, while a burial dating to the same period destroyed the surfaces of the road.

The cemetery

Along both sides of the road 3 groups of graves were found.

a) North group

To the west side of the road there are 5 graves organized in one group (ph 2). Two of them are surrounded of two small rectangular enclosures made of chiseled stones. The North group contains three inhumations and two cremation graves.

b) Central group

The central group stands east of the road (ph 3). A rectangular enclosure which was made of big stones encloses two inhumations. The outside face of these stones was very well chiseled. Four more inhumations are located very close to each other eastwards and southwards of the fence. Westwards of the fence and in conjunction with it there was one more fence which enclosed a cremation grave. Two more cremation graves without fence are located southwards of the above.

c) South group

The South group is located east of the road. There we found two inhumations (ph 4).

Cremation graves

The cremation graves founded here are of the trench and hole type. They are pits dug in the rock. Inside the grave there is another smaller pit in which is placed an urn amphora. Around the upper part of the urn amphora there are more offering vessels. Four stone plates ended the sides of crematory grave 1 (photo 3, 5) and separated the burial room of the pyre remains area. There we found ashes, remaining of half burned woods and pieces of burned clay.

Similar is the cremation grave 13 (photo 6). Here there are not stones, but there is a separate place for the remains of the pyre. We found there ashes, half burned woods and burned sherds.

Inhumations

The inhumations are pits dug in the rock or in the ground. Big stone plates based on the chiseled rock covered the graves (photo 7). We didn't find stone plates over three graves and probably, according to Kurtz and Boardman (Kurtz-Boardman 1971), in these cases there were wooden beams as cover. Over the plates the pit was filled in with earth. In some cases there were plates or big vessels (kraters) as marks.

The bodies were placed supine with their hands at their sides (photo 8). There wasn't a specific orientation. Offerings were spread or usually placed below the feet.

Grave no 17 of the South Group is a particular one. The body is placed supine but the right hand rests on an oinochoe, which is placed starboards, while the left hand rests on the belly (photo 9). Grave 17 and 18 (eastwards of Grave 17) were dug in the ground, there weren't any covering plates and the offerings inside were poor.

The richest inhumation is Grave 3, inside the enclosure of the central group. We found there 27 vessels. Probably this was the most important grave of the group, because, apart of the quantity of the vessels, it was marked by a rectangular stone plate, which was found in situ above of the grave.

Grave 15 probably contained a burial of a child. Teeth were the only organic remain in it. Small and miniature vases, 1 bronze bracelet, 1 object of ivory and beads were the offerings in it.

Grave Markers

Big vessels were used in north group as grave markers. Over grave 6 a krater was found in situ (photo 10). Parts of other were found in the same area above graves 9 and 11. Inside the fence of the central group a rectangular stone plate very well chiseled was found over the grave 3 (photo 7).

Finds-Pottery

We found offerings in all the graves. A few ornaments such as 1 bronze bracelet, a few beads, and two unidentified finds of bronze, probably earrings, a find of ivory and 1 clinquant ring were found too. We found the remains of 10 skeletons but we have not come to any conclusions about the sex, the age or other anthropological information yet.

The presence of pottery is intense: Neck-handled amphorae, oinochoae, puxides, high-handled kantharoi, cups, tankards, pitchers, high-rimmed bowls, plates are the usual types of pottery. There are also some miniature vases, kalathos, small double oinochoae, cups with horizontal and vertical handles, ariballoi. Hatched meanders and swastikas, leaf shaped lozenges, chains of lozenges, false spirals, chevrons, dogteeth, check patterns are the most typical linear motifs. There are also figured motifs like long neck birds and grazing deer.

The shape and the decoration of some vessels seems to belong to the MG II (like these of Funerary Grave 1, or Inhumation Grave 4), as they are conservative and other seems to belong to LG I period (photos 11, 12, 13, 14) (Coldstream 1968). The farther study of pottery will give us more conclusions about the dating and perhaps about the workshops as well as the duration of the cemetery and the social status of the people.

Kilns

Finally, we should mention that we uncovered the lower parts of 4 ceramic kilns dating to the Protogeometric period (photo 15). These constructions were made of clay mud. The upper part wasn't found and we assume that it was made of the same fabric. There was a separation between a firebox at ground level and a perforated shelf (grate) above, which formed the base of a separate kiln chamber for the pottery. Parts of the self-grate and protogeometric sherds of failed batches were found in a well very close to the kilns. The importance of this find is significant because we haven't found protogeometric kilns (or at least they haven't been published) yet. Beyond the rarity of the find, its importance lays on the evidence of a settlement near the coast during the PG period.

Conclusions

We believe that this excavation has offered many and significant information, as we confirm a geometric settlement in an area for which we did not have sufficient data until now.

The complexion that comes up of the organization of the cemetery, of the types of the graves and the offerings is similar with the ordinary organization and the finds of a geometric cemetery of Athens (Coldstream 1977, Kurtz-Boardman 1971). Two kinds of graves (cremations-inhumations) show the continuity of the settlement or the different social status of the dead. Good quality and quantity pottery found in some graves probably indicates the existence of important for the district genuses.

The dating of the cemetery to the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. seems to agree with the increase of population and settlements near the coast of that period (Coldstream 1977). The use of road is abandoned alike to the use of the cemetery at the end of that period.

This brief presentation finishes with the note that the conservation and study of the material of this excavation is not completed. We wait for the results of the detailed study of the pottery, the skeletal analysis, the petrographic analysis and the association with other groups from Piraeus and Athens. Otherwise we can't have safe conclusions and an accomplished reference. Except that, we have to search further the district so that we can have more information about the organization and the character of PG and Geometric settlements in this area of Piraeus.

Abbreviations

LG: Late Geometric
MG: Middle Geometric
PG: Protogeometric

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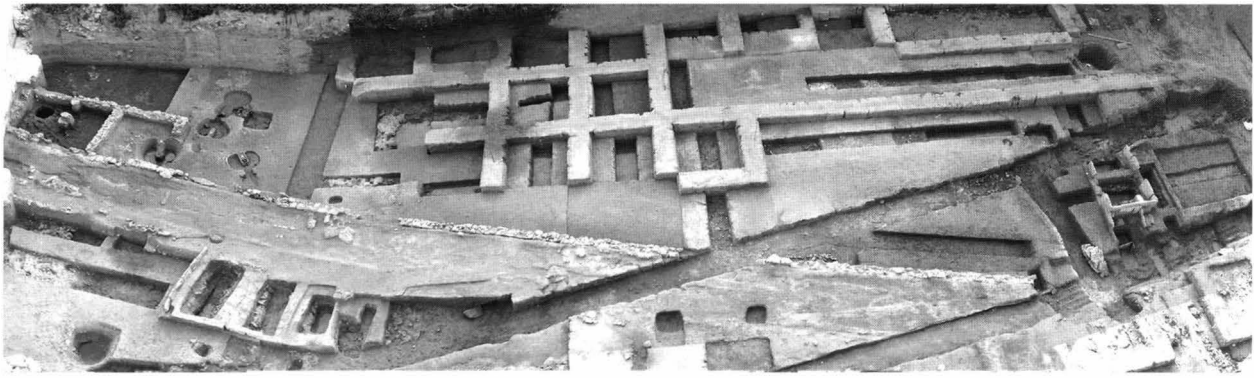


Photo 1: Road, north and central group of graves, ceramic kilns



Photo 2: North group of graves

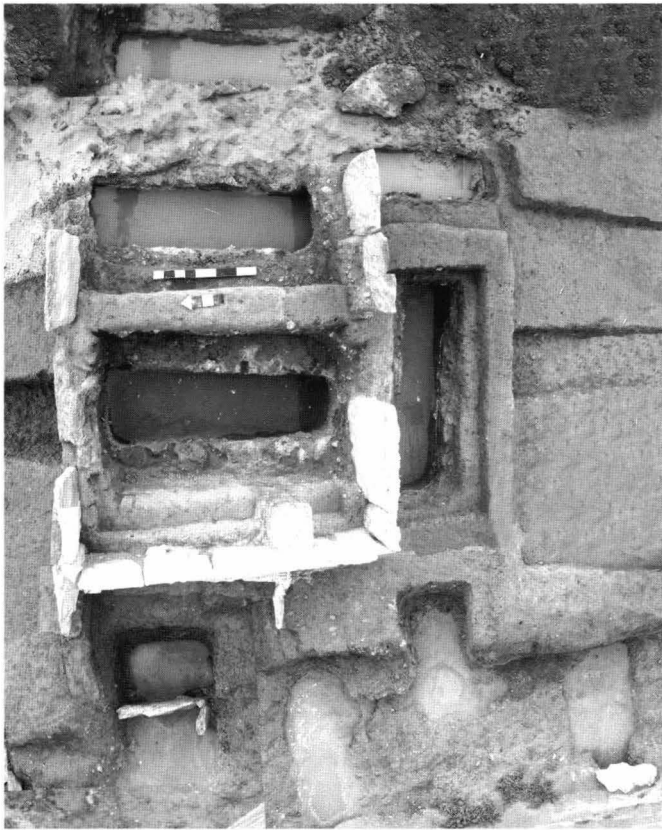


Photo 3: Central Group of graves



Photo 4: South group of graves



Photo 5: Grave 1



Photo 6: Grave 13: Pyre remains



Photo 7: Central group. Enclosure, marker and cover stones of grave 2, 3.



Photo 8: Grave 4



Photo 9: Grave 17



Photo 10: Grave 6: Krater as marker

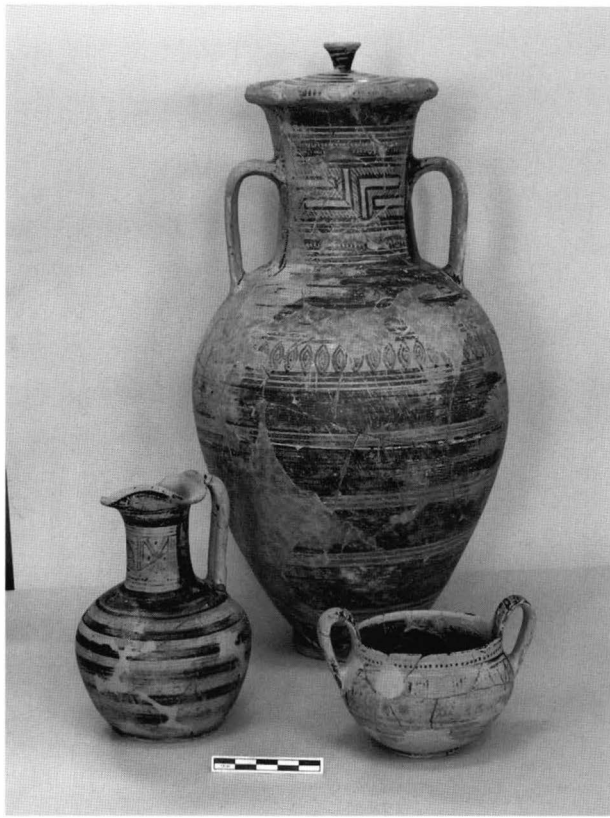


Photo 11: Grave 1: Pottery



Photo 12: Grave 4: Pottery



Photo 13 Grave 14: Pottery



Photo 14: Grave 15: Pottery



Photo 15: Protogeometric ceramic kilns