

# Kamilari – a historical statement by

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The earliest signs of human habitation within the area of Kamilari are traces of settlement datable to **Final Neolithic** period (4000-3300 BC). Phaistos was probably the largest settlement in the region, however smaller sites are traceable westward situated close to perennial water source, like spring, and to productive soils. Two possible settlements have been located 350 m NW and 600 m NW of modern Kamilari in the proximity of the church of Zoodochos Pigi, whereas a larger site has been identified 1,200 m NNE of Kamilari, where a small natural source of chert was used as a habitation and knapping site. This site was still in use at the beginning of Early Bronze Age (**Early Minoan I-II**, 3300-2300 BC) together with another one, located 800 m NNW of Kamilari and 150 S of a smaller tholos tomb (Kamilari C) dug by Alexiou and explored by Branigan. The phase preceding the construction of the first palace at Phaistos (**Early Minoan III-Middle Minoan IA**, 2300-1900 BC), although quite long, was apparently poor settled. The main settlement was enucleated at Phaistos, other traces of habitation are at Haghia Triada and Patrikies, however the number of MM IA settlements in this area dropped radically. Worth of noting is the identification of Prepalatial ceramic material on the Grygori Koryphi hill preceding the construction of the big tholos tomb (Kamilari A).

The **Middle Minoan IB-II** (1900-1700 BC), known also as Protopalatial era, was a watershed period for this area. The construction of the palace of Phaistos and its subsequent monumentalization attracted small farms and settlements around. In the light of the large and increasing population and land use, it seems relatively certain that farms along the Kamilari ridge must have contributed food to the Phaistian centre. Thus, the Kamilari area knew a sudden grow as it is shown by the construction of settlements and tombs. The two main settlements have been located respectively 1,200 m NW of modern Kamilari in the valley immediately W of the big tholos tomb and 1,150 m SW of Haghios Ioannis, on the floor of the valley between Kamilari and Phaistos. Likewise, the growth of the area is testified by the cemetery of tholos tombs directly NW of the modern Kamilari. This was composed at least by three tombs. The first one and the larger (A) located on the top of a small hill, Grygori Koryphi, the second one, smaller and only half preserved, was located about 200 m to the NE at the site of Mylona Lakko.

Both the tombs were built at beginning of MM IB. A third tholos tomb (C), still visible, 150 metres to the ESE of the larger tomb, is placed into a steep side of a flat plateau.

At least the first two tombs have been used for centuries as communal tombs. The bigger tholos, still well preserved, was the focus of large ceremonies devoted to dead by means of plentiful grave offerings (clay and stone vessels) and drinking ceremonies taking part on the external spaces. A selection of these offerings is exhibited at the Herakleion Archaeological Museum.

In the Neopalatial period (**Middle Minoan III-Late Minoan IB**, 1700-1450 BC) big centres, like Phiastos and Kommos, shrunk in size, and the number of small villages and settlements dropped off, probably as a result of movement of population and concentration of groups in larger settlements. Kamilari Tholos A and continued to be used throughout the MM III and LM I period, without interruption. The area of Kamilari also experienced some changes, such as the birth of villas and country houses. Several of these farms are in the area of Kommos, such as Apothestres, Kalamaki, Aspendilias and Plakoures, whereas that one of Kannia was located close to Gortyn/Mitropoli. Around Kamilari worth of noting are the mansions of Kouses and Seli, S of the modern Kamilari. At Seli three different mansions have been discovered (Sifakis, Volakakis, Papadospiridakis plots). These houses are spaced across a wide region and each seems located to take advantage of a separate valley or plain.

Following the disruption caused by the LM IA Thera eruption, Knossos seems to have assumed a leader role over much of southern Crete which then coincide with the arrive of Mycenaean groups and their integration with the local population. During the **Late Minoan II-IIIB** (1450-1200) period the area around Kamilari is not clear settled thus far. Tholos A was the only one of the old cemetery to be re-used for few centuries more by restricted groups. Furthermore, works conducted by the Greek Archaeological Service have brought to light a large house directly on the western low slope of the Grygori Koryphi hill, but its date is still questionable. In addition, a cemetery site discovered in 1986 S of Sivas seems to have functioned from LM IIIA through the Protogeometric period.

Subsequent periods are not clear. **Late Minoan IIIC** (1200-1100) was for the whole Mesara a time of retrenchment of settlements, with the only area around of the palace of Phaistos somehow inhabited. Furthermore, at Haghia Triada during the LM IIIC-Orientalizing period an open-air shrine set on the upper court attracted many votives. Signs of slow change and growing are visible during the **Protogeometric** and **Geometric** periods; however, the evidence is largely represented by tombs and burial and two main settlements at Phaistos and Petrokephali. Several PG and G tombs have been identified N and SO of the palace hill, and far SE, close to Petrokephali. The SO nucleus, close the Haghios Ioannis village, comprehends both cremation in *pithoi* and inhumations in small chamber tombs with single or double *dromos*.

Also for the area of Kamilari it is meaningful the presence of Geometric pottery left, probably as a sign of ancestors or ruin cult, outside the big tholos on the Grygori Koryphi hill. Therefore, it is likely that the whole area from Phaistos down to Haghios Ioannis and westward to Kamilari was slowly reoccupied in the first centuries of the I millennium BC.

Settlement around Phaistos grew appreciably during the **VII century BC**. Pottery from rural sites indicates that the real increase came during the period circa 625 to 550 BC. Again, the most important data come from Phaistos which had grown substantially in size and was a large nucleated settlement with religious and domestic buildings, and an artisan quarter specialized in the production of *pithoi*.

**Archaic** period remains largely in the shadow; however scanty remains suggest the existence of a settlement at Phaistos, probably autonomous from the nearby Gortyn. Worth of mentioning are the inscription datable at the end of VI century found in the quarter of Chalara and a unique Doric capital whose echinus was decorated with a vegetal decoration.

The **V and IV centuries** experimented new changes, namely the increase of farms and rural settlements, especially within the Kamilari-Haghios Ioannis-Siva triangle, that may reflect a growth in population and the intensification of land use. Slightly far away, at Kalamaki, in the area of the church Panagia Evangelistria, the Greek Archaeological Service has brought to light traces of a large artisan quarter dated to IV century. A rural shrine, probably dedicated to Demetra and Kore, was established at Kamilari tholos tomb C, excavated by S. Alexiou, ca. 150 m SW of the big tholos tomb. The shrine seems to have been placed at the Minoan tomb to emphasize the local worshipper's ancestral connections and a kind of legal claim to the surrounding land.

The material recovered from the tomb consisted of ca. 400 clay figurines datable from the first half of V to III century BC (including Demetra type, children, female *kistophorai*), probably till the constitution of the Roman province (67 BC). Aside from the small sanctuary, the area west of the palace of Phaistos was intensively settled, probably as a natural consequence of socioeconomic changes and to positive response to economic factors that make having bigger families desirable. Many of the farmsteads were equipped with massive stone presses, whose size signals the commercial production of wine and oil. The Mesara produced also transport amphorae and high quality painted decorated vessels (Hadra Ware) found at many sites in central Crete and exported abroad to Alexandria and Cyrenaica.

Aside from Phaistos, Gortyn took also part of this economic expansion, but it is still a matter of debate whether the two cities were joined in some form of political alliance (an early form of *synpoliteia*) or Phaistos was a community under the Gortynian control, at least until the Hellenistic period.

Both the cities produced their own coins and the Gortynian Code Law of ca. 475 BC reflected significant social and economic changes in the territory. Anyhow, during the V century the territory is characterized by several cults: aside the rural sanctuary at Kamilari dedicated to Demetra, the Gortynian Code Law mentions the existence of Amyklaion (the sanctuary or a *polis-hormos*?) whose sanctuary is still not unanimously identified (Kommos? Or along the coast further East?), at Haghia Triada is documented a cult to Zeus *Velchanos*, whereas at Kommos between V and IV century a sanctuary with several buildings is established. Furthermore, the Code Law of Gortyn indicates the existence of another sanctuary, of Artemis *Toxia*, close to the Amyklaion, and doubtfully identified at Kalamaki in the area of the church Panagia Evangelistria.

This situation probably reflects a territorial tension between the two major cities and the fact that Gortyn probably controlled the Amyklaion makes it more likely that the Kamilari shrine belonged to Phaistos.

Sign of rivalry between Phaistos and Gortyn increased during the **Hellenistic** period. Each city had its own sanctuaries and wall fortification, but in the middle of the II century Gortyn destroyed Phaistos and took over its territory. Before the destruction and along the III century, Phaistos was probably a large city organized *kata komas*, with several quarters located on the southern slopes of the palace hill, namely in the area of Haghios Ioannis.

Several parts of a paved road, bordered on both sides by domestic buildings, have been identified respectively N to Hagios Ioannis, towards the palace hill, and E of Kamilari, a possible connection between Phaistos and Matala. Here, a long wall whose upper surface is provided with cuttings for *stelai* probably marked the line road between Phaistos and Matala as early as Classical period.

Cemeteries of chamber tombs have been identified N of Phaistos, at Phalangari, and SW in the vicinity of Loures, towards Kamilari. The region between Phaistos and Kamilari appears now to be more transformed into a busy patchwork of small farmhouses and agricultural fields. Several funerary inscriptions have been identified as early as IV century down to III century AD in the area between Hagios Ioannis and Kamilari. A recent survey has brought to light a unique farmstead in this area. Its boundaries were marked with walls made of fieldstones and enclosing a space of 150 x 25 m, roughly equal to 313 Dorian square feet, a size that falls within the range epigraphically described fields in Crete.

During this period the settlement of Matala grew far more than any other site of Phaistian territory, reaching approximately an area of 3 to 6 ha. The port was connected to Phaistos by a road that runs S from Phaistos, through the Kamilari valley and then SW to Pitsidia and Matala. Such an expansion was probably connected to the increase in international maritime trade, particularly with Ptolemaic Alexandria.

After the destruction by Gortyn, Phaistos was largely abandoned, but, following the Romans takeover of the region, parts of the settlement were gradually reoccupied. The Kamilari area remains substantially unchanged, but a quite large settlement has been identified 900 m NW of the modern village and immediately SW of tholos A, occupying the valley between three hills. Furthermore, recent survey and excavations conducted by the Greek Archaeological Service have brought to light several cut rock chamber tombs (some with multiple chambers, wall niches, *dromos* and stone slabs used as doors) belonging to the **Roman** period, along the road connecting Kamilari to Kalamaki. What was the sort of this area during the Roman period, however, is still a matter of debate. Apparently, while Gortyn, as the provincial capital, expanded in the Roman period, it was not at the expenses of the countryside, which continued to be densely settled. At Phaistos, after the destruction of the second half of II century BC is likely that the life did continue till the III century AD, as it is demonstrated mainly by the discovery of objects (loomweights, lamps and a few coins) in the area of the palace. Less clear remains the identification of buildings.

At Haghia Triada there are, at least, two buildings: a farm with a wine press of I century AD (located above Stoa 10 and the so called Bastion), and a building, of a questionable chronology, NE of Tholos A. At Kalamaki, the modern church of Panagia Evangelistria, sits on the remnants of podium of a roman temple; near the church, an inscription of the I BC-AD century reports the dedication to Artemis by L. Antonios Inbentios. In addition, the discovery of parts of late classical and Roman marble statues suggest that as early as IV century BC down to the Roman period a cult of Artemis was active in the area. Further evidence of an Artemis cult comes from two dedication of Roman Imperial period: the first one, found close to Kamilari is dedicated by T. Iulius Parmon, the second one is the base of a statue, dedicated by a Artemis priestess during the III century AD and found near Matala.

During the **Late Roman** period Gortyn continued to be the seat of the Cretan provincial governor, the administrative centre of the island, and the market centre for the Mesara. However, our knowledge of the other urban centres in the Mesara is less detailed, especially in the **Early Byzantine** period when the Arab attacks of the mid-seventh century created serious problems. Although the Phaistos region shows a number of small occupation sites, the situation of the period from about the mid-seventh century to 827, the Arab conquest, seems to be one of reduced population, a reduced number of habitation sites, abandonment of coastal settlements, withdrawal to defensible sites, and an intensive local military presence. In this context the presence of settlement at Kamilari is confirmed up to the first Byzantine period (400-828 AD). The archaeological evidence suggests that the settlement around Phaistos consisted of several units. Cist tombs have been discovered on the upper court of the palace as well as directly on the Minoan ruins of the palace itself. A large building, likely a private house, was found directly on top of the Great Propyleum of the Second Palace, whereas the first excavators identified a small church (of a not clear chronology) on top of the Christos Effendi hill, W of the Palace hill. In addition, the early Byzantine settlements had two propagations towards Chalara, on East, and Haghios Ioannis, on the South. At Chalara, already inhabited in the Minoan and Hellenistic periods, two buildings, likely interpreted as a farm, insisted on top of the precedent houses and have been occupied during the VII-VIII and end of VII-beginning of IX century AD, when after the arrival of the Arabs the settlement was abandoned. Finally, ca. 100 m SW of Haghios Ioannis, in the locality called *Loutra*, are still visible the rests of a probable bath (consisted of at least 4 rooms), whose final use is the V-VI century AD. Composed as such, Phaistos looks, before the raids of the Arabs, a characteristic rural built-up area, a sort of hamlet, dependent from a larger nucleus to identify at Haghios Ioannis.

After the Byzantine period, Haghios Ioannis will continue to be settled till the modern era and it will definitely replace the settlement on the Phaistos palace hill.

The outcome of the Arab conquest is something of mystery. The church of St. Tytus at Gortyn does not show any sign of definitive destruction; likewise, Mitropolis continued as village. Contemporary written sources provide no direct evidence for settlement of the Mesara during the **second Byzantine period** (827-1210). The 'Life and Testament of St. John Xenos' refers to Siva, the birthplace of the saint, during the period 970 to 1030; however, written sources do not provide complete list of villages, so that the number of X-XII century settlements must have been greater. After the first Byzantine period the name of Phaistos probably disappeared and substitute by the name *Mèlika*.

Successively, during the **Venetian period** (1210-1669) Kamilari is attested in XIV and XVI century written sources. As for the last period, the list of settlements by Castrolibata (1583) mentions Kamilari in the province of Pyrgiotissa with a quite detailed data. In fact, not only we have the total number of inhabitants, but the population of each settlement is also broken down into four categories: *homini da fatti* (i.e. men 14 to 60 years old age), *putti*, *vecchi*, *donne*. Therefore, the number of inhabitants at Kamilari is 77 (29 of which are men, 25 young, 22 women, and only 1 old man). Meaningful is to compare the data with nearby villages from which Kamilari turns out to be a relatively small community: Siva had 156 inhabitants, Haghios Ioannis 89, Kouses 76, and Falandra only 41. One important nucleus of settlement has been identified 350 m NW of Kamilari, on the site of the Virgin of the Life-living Spring (Zoodochos Pigi) church, which has already tested traces of prehistoric occupation. The church of Hagios Pavlos at the SW edge of Haghios Ioannis village was built at the beginning of XIV century (1303-1304). The name of the toponymus likely derived after the arrival of the monk John the Xenos on the X century, grew up in the nearby village of Siva and in charge of the foundation of the first nucleus of the monastery of St. George Falandras.

At the beginning of XIV also the small church of St. George Galatas was partly located upon the area of the Minoan Villa at Haghia Triada. This area was as early as XIV century down to XVIII century place of cemetery. The tombs were organized either in the portico adjacent to the church or North of it. Recent archaeological excavation have also brought to light a building, interpreted as a sort of *kylikeion*, used for ritual of parting in which food and drinks were shared.

The **Ottoman period** (1669-1898) starts with a new census, in 1671, which mention the Kamilari village. This one can be identified with the group of scattered houses located 150 m below of Kamilari at the N base of the hill on which the village of Kamilari sits. This nucleus continues down to mid-XIX century when another census, in 1881, reports 312 inhabitants. The population today is estimated around 340 inhabitants. During the Venetian-Turkish war and the following Turkish occupation, vine cultivation decline significantly due largely to the destruction of vineyards, heavy taxation and the Ottoman indifference to wine. Conversely, cultivation of olive trees and production of oil, quite small in the Byzantine period, come into its own, partly due to an increased demand of olive oil. In XIX century an olive oil mill is attested at Kamilari, together with other nearby villages, Haghios Ioannis, Kouses, Siva, Pitsidia.

One of the most important institutions to be considered as early as Byzantine period, is the monasteries. Often, they could be autonomous or become dependency of other monasteries. A dependent monastery was commonly called *metochi*. In the XIX century documents Kamilari is attested as *metochi* with the church of the Panagia Marmargianas; however, it is not clear to which monastery it did depend. One of the largest and important monasteries of the area was that one of St. George Falandras, standing on the site of X-XI century St. George Douvrikas, but first mentioned in the XVI-XVII century. It functioned during the Ottoman period till the War of Independence (1821), when it was destroyed and burned down. The documents of XVII century report that the income served the upkeep of the monastery, 3 priests, 16 monks and 6 servants.

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