

Georgios Bakalakis and Agnes Sakellariou, *Paradimi*. Heidelberg Akademie der Wissenschaften, Internationale Interakademische Kommission für die Erforschung der Vorgeschichte des Balkans, Monographien 2. Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz 1981. 85 pages, 73 plates, 61 figures.

In the years 1929 and 1930 excavations were carried out by E. Pelekidis and S. Kyriakidis at the settlement mound of Paradimi near the town of Komotini in Thrace. The rich collection of neolithic pottery which they recovered has since then been a significant but sadly undocumented feature of the prehistoric archaeology of northern Greece, and hitherto there has been no adequate publication of it. In 1965, therefore, the senior author, Professor Georgios Bakalakis of the University of Thessaloniki undertook new stratigraphic excavations at this important site, making a stratigraphic sounding 7 m long and 1.7 m wide adjoining the larger trench of the original excavators. Natural soil was reached at a depth of 4.35 m, and above this was a sequence of strata which Bakalakis was able to divide into 17 layers. This volume is therefore the publication of his excavation with its resulting finds. It includes also the complete documentation of the much richer material of the excavations of 1929–30, illustrated with excellent drawings and good photographs which supplement the systematic inventory compiled by Mrs. Agni Xenaki-Sakellariou and completed by Professor Bakalakis. Students of Aegean and Balkan prehistory will henceforward be indebted to both authors for this exemplary publication of an important body of material.

Unfortunately there is no record of the stratigraphic context of the abundant material from 1929–30, and any conclusions about its date must be made on typological grounds alone. That is where the more recent stratigraphic investigations are so useful, and they make clear that most of the material comes from a fairly homogeneous body of material which earlier scholars have termed the Paradimi Group. In the 1965 excavations this material is seen in the earliest material of phase I (from a pit or 'bothros' in layer 17) up to layer 8 (Phase IIIb) without the appearance of any painted pottery.

The material includes black polished ware and 'black-topped' ware, and a paler fabric ('red-yellow-brown'), the most diagnostic forms being the four-footed bowl (with high cylindrical legs), the biconical carinated (Knickwand) bowl and the knobbed or horn handle. There are also some sherds with incised decoration, generally with white infilling, and there are fragments of the small, three-footed 'altar' tables which are known from Sitagroi (Photolivos) phase I and from various Balkan sites, notably Vesselinovo and Karanovo III.

In level 6 (phase IIIc) a sherd with black-on-red painted decoration occurs (pl. 10, b: 4; Beilage 5, 3) which the author rightly compares with material from Galepsos. Abundant finds of this fabric have been found at Dikilitash and Sitagroi III in East Macedonia. Layer 5 (Paradimi phase IV) contains several graphite-painted sherds and other pottery characteristic of the East Macedonian and Balkan chalcolithic (i. e. Sitagroi III, Gumelnitsa etc.).

The levels above unfortunately yielded no clear stratigraphy and no well-associated groups, although a small supplementary excavation (trench EG) was opened to investigate the upper levels. Much of the material is clearly bronze age in date, and is appropriately compared by the senior author with material from Thermi in Lesbos. It should be noted, however, that the phases Va and Vb which are shown on the synoptic diagram, Beilage 15, are not specifically defined in the account of the excavation given in chapters I and IV: they are based on typological, not stratigraphic observation.

From this useful and systematic presentation of the material it is clear that the site was first occupied by settlers whose pottery has been conveniently designated the Paradimi Group. The assemblage has many resemblances with the East Macedonian finds, now well represented by the earliest levels at Dikilitash and Sitagroi (Sitagroi I). So far this assemblage represents the earliest known neolithic material of the north Aegean littoral. No radiocarbon dates are reported for Paradimi, but the material, like that of Sitagroi I is almost certainly a thousand years later in date than the earliest neolithic material of Crete (Knossos), of the Peloponnese (e. g. the Franchthi Cave), of Thessaly (e. g. Sesklo or Argissa Maghoula) or of central Macedonia (Nea Nikomedeia). It is likewise later than the earliest neolithic material of the Balkans to the north, represented by the Karanovo I culture, and by the Starčevo culture in Yugoslavia.

The author rightly recognises that the Paradimi Group is not in every way identical to Sitagroi I or to Karanovo III, while acknowledging the numerous close resemblances and relationships which indicate a strong affinity between all three. In his general discussion in Chapter III he lists three different possibilities:



1. That the groups developed in a parallel way, without necessary genetic connection;
2. That the culture of Karanovo III expanded at this time to the Aegean coast;
3. That both the Paradimi and Karanovo III groups have an origin 'elsewhere', either in the north Aegean neolithic, or in the Anatolian coastal area.

His preference is for the third possibility, with frequent reference to the nebulous concept of a 'Balkan-Anatolian culture complex', drawn from the writings of Professor M. Garašanin. It remains true, of course, that the earlier prehistory of north-western Anatolia is still little understood. But the 'unknown precursor' argument, while always possible, is rarely a strong one: in this case it requires the author to dispute Professor G. I. Georgiev's arguments for the local evolution of the Karanovo III culture out of Karanovo I-II. Until we have clearer evidence for it, the third possibility, advocated here, seems to me the weakest.

If the origin of the Paradimi Group remains a matter for discussion, so too does its end. The question which I wish to pose here is whether there really is continuity of occupation between Paradimi phases III and IV. The material of Paradimi III clearly belongs to the Paradimi Group. That of Paradimi IV has a significant component of graphite-painted ware and other sherds characteristic of Karanovo VI and of Sitagroi phase III. At these two sites there are intervening periods (namely Karanovo IV and V, and Sitagroi II with its rich repertoire of painted wares, seen also at Dikilitash) which are not represented at all at Paradimi. (The unstratified sherds here recognised as Maritsa Ware [Pl. 26,b, 1-3] seem to be of early bronze age date.) Either the Paradimi Group persisted in Thrace for very much longer than its related neighbours to west and north, or the site may have been abandoned in the later neolithic, to be reoccupied in the chalcolithic period. In the absence of radiocarbon determinations or of much larger assemblages of well-associated materials it is probably very difficult to decide.

The bronze age finds from the site are fewer in number, since all the relevant levels seem to have been seriously disturbed by farming activity. It is worth noting, however, that in addition to several features seen in the material of Sitagroi phase V, the one-handled cup with grooved decoration, one of the most characteristic forms of Sitagroi IV, is also seen (Pl. XI,2).

The excavation was undertaken with the prime aim of bringing order to the earlier finds of 1929-30, and there is no report on the animal bones recovered, nor is there any mention of the finding of carbonised grain, although this is documented from the earlier excavations (see p. 26). Although there were a few finds of flint and other materials, the focus of the report is upon the pottery.

The volume is handsomely produced, the only minor irritation being the numeration of the plates, which run from Tafel 1 to 73, and then again from Tafel I to XLV, and then from Beilage 1 to 16. A single system of numeration would have been easier to use.

The real value of this most admirable work of documentation will come when we have the relevant assemblages from East Macedonia and indeed from Bulgaria, published to a standard as thorough as this. Although no quantitative data are offered here, the excellent illustrations present a corpus of pottery which will afford the basis for many more detailed assessments and comparisons in the future. No excavation is finished until the work is fully published, and Professor Bakalakis with Dr. Sakellariou, is to be congratulated upon the successful completion of this project.