

MOCHLOS - AN EARLY AEGEAN 'GATEWAY COMMUNITY' ?

The Minoan settlement on the offshore island of Mochlos was first visited by American archaeologist Richard Seager in 1907. He returned the following year and in a ten week campaign excavated the Early Bronze Age cemetery on the west side of the island and made extensive soundings in the Early-Late Bronze Age settlement on the southern slope, facing the mainland of Crete. His summary account of the latter was published in 1909 (Seager 1909), and his detailed account of the cemetery in 1912 (Seager 1912). Since that time, the scale and significance of Seager's discoveries have occasioned comment from many Minoan archaeologists, but the only subsequent excavation work on the island has been a period of cleaning and consolidation undertaken by Dr. Davaras on behalf of the Greek Archaeological Service (Davaras 1975) and the excavation of an LM.I cemetery in 1986 (Catling 1987, 58). New excavations have recently begun under the direction of Dr. C. Davaras and Dr. J. Soles.

Mochlos is a roughly circular island, a little over 300 m wide at its greatest extent. On the north side its limestone cliffs rise steeply from the sea to a height of about 50 m, and the cliffs on the east and west sides of the island are almost as steep; only on the southern side does the island slope more gently to the sea (Pl. XXV, a). There is little depth of soil on the island, except on the lower southern slopes where Seager reported that hill-wash had created soil depths up to 4 m in places. Although it is now recognised that the history of changing sea levels around the coast of Crete is more complex than once thought, around the Gulf of Mirabello there is good evidence for a general lowering of land levels since the Minoan period and it seems certain that, at least in the Early Bronze Age, Mochlos was joined to the mainland (now some 150 m or so distant) by a narrow spit of land which is now submerged 2 m and more below sea level. As Seager noted in his summary report "Mochlos must have possessed the best harbour on the coast" (Seager 1909, 274).

The earliest occupation on Mochlos dates to Final Neo/EM I; some pottery of this period was found in the lowest levels in the town, but nowhere it seems in a pure deposit of that period, although Pendlebury claims that some of the house walls on the island belonged to EM I (1939, 47). There was also some Final Neo/EM I material from the cemetery area, and in particular sealed in a deposit below tomb V. This deposit seems to have comprised small vessels of a non-domestic type, suggesting that the cemetery area was already used for burials or other ritual use in EM I. The limited quantity and distribution of Final Neo/EM I pottery is in marked contrast to the EM II material which was found in most of the tombs in the cemetery, and was also found throughout the settlement area. The mention of fine grey ware by Seager confirms occupation early in EM II, but it could well be that the great expansion of occupation came later in EM II for the bulk of the stone vases and bronzework from the tombs are unlikely to be earlier than EM IIb and there is little pottery of distinctly EM IIa type. An EM IIb date for the main period of development would also explain the continued use of the EM II houses through the EM III period at Mochlos (Seager 1909, 278-9). Seager believed that EM III was

"the most prosperous time in the history of the town", and refers to the masses of EM III pottery. Certainly the cemetery continued in use and many of the grave goods could as well belong to EM III as EM II; the small quantities of pottery in the tombs makes distinction between EM II and EM III difficult in many cases. References to EM III houses below MM Ia deposits (Seager 1909) suggest that there was a rebuilding in MM Ia, but the MM Ia buildings seem to have suffered from later, Roman, building activity. According to Seager Mochlos saw destruction in MM Ia (1909, 275), but having referred to this Seager never once describes the evidence for this destruction. From MM I onwards, however, occupation seems less intense. There was MM III occupation which was continued in LM I but brought to an end by a destruction which appears to belong to the general LM I destruction horizon in eastern Crete. Occasional re-use of graves in the EM cemetery in MM III and LM I and the discovery of an LM I cemetery confirm continued occupation on the island. In the Roman period a substantial settlement again occupied the southern slopes of Mochlos, and late in the Roman period a fort was constructed on the high ground looking north into the Gulf of Mirabello. Since the period of most intense prehistoric settlement and activity is late EM II-early MM I it is probably to that period that the "many Minoan house walls" recorded by Seager (1909, 274) on the adjacent strip of mainland belong.

On present evidence, Mochlos was one of the largest Early Minoan settlements in Crete, much smaller than Knossos or Mallia, but comparable to Phaistos and perhaps Palaikastro, and certainly much larger than Myrtos, or Vasiliki. The quantity and quality of the gold jewellery and stone vases recovered from the EM cemetery also identify it as one of the richest sites in Early Minoan Crete. Yet its significance has remained unexamined and largely unrecognised, although Whitelaw (1983, 337) and Soles (1988, 50-51) have briefly discussed the evidence for social ranking provided by the settlement and cemetery respectively, and in a review of EM goldwork I suggested that the nature and status of the EM community on Mochlos needed closer scrutiny than hitherto accorded to it (Branigan 1983, 180). This present paper is a somewhat belated attempt to follow up that suggestion.

Population and Social Ranking

The discovery of substantial quantities of EM II-III pottery throughout the settlement area investigated by Seager, and often associated with remains of buildings, has suggested to Whitelaw an occupied area of more than 0.8 hectares (Pl. XXV, a) and thus a population of between 220 and 330 persons (based on between 4 and 6 persons in a nuclear family). We have no idea as to how many houses stood on the mainland (and it is no more than probable that they are EM II-MM I), but even if we allow only a further 20 houses in this area, we must envisage a settlement with a total population of between 300 and 470 persons. The evidence of the cemetery provides little useful data for population estimates, but we might note that tomb I contained "at least thirty skulls" (Seager 1909, 18). Tomb I seems to have been used only in EM II (Warren 1965, 21-2) and probably the latter part of EM II. In this case the 30+ burials would have been deposited over probably no more than two or three centuries, and would represent a contributing population of two to three nuclear families. If the same size of contributing live population held for the other built tombs in the Mochlos cemetery, then we would be looking at the burial ground of a live population of between 240 and 360 persons. This would be a minimal figure since the number of burials in tomb I is itself a minimal figure, and equally Seager was convinced that many tombs had been totally destroyed.

Although Soles is correct in warning us that large populations do not always mean socially ranked societies (1988, 50) Whitelaw is equally right in arguing that communities of this size have crossed social thresholds which in most cases require new modes of social organisation and also the need for a social hierarchy (1983, 339).

Soles (1988, 1990) argued that better evidence for social ranking at Mochlos is provided by the nature of the tombs. Tombs I-III and IV-V occupy the dominant positions in the cemetery, the latter backed by a wall of rock, flanked by a steep cliff and looking across the rest of the cemetery, and the former flanking the approach to IV-VI. These tombs are also by far the largest in the cemetery, and they are the best constructed too, with walls entirely built of stone, including some very substantial blocks, and with carefully constructed recessed doorways. They are also embellished, with slabs of green or purple schist, or grey limestone, set as orthostats at the base of wall facades. In addition tomb IV-VI is fronted by a paved court and a small altar-like structure, unique in the cemetery. The paving and altar recall similar features found outside some of the Mesara tholoi, and the appearance of rooms in both of the two main tombs (left hand room tomb I, and room IV in tomb IV-VI) which seem to have been kept free of bones and grave goods and were perhaps used as places of primary burial also recalls funerary practices in the Mesara (Branigan 1970, 130-4, 95). A recent re-appraisal of funerary practices in the Mesara suggests that we can detect practices of manipulation of skeletal material of a kind commonly associated with secondary burial practices and these in turn with ranked societies (Branigan 1987, 50).

The contents of the tombs also point very strongly to a ranked society in which access to imported products and materials, and to the products of highly skilled craftsmen was restricted to a small number of families. Tombs I-III and IV-VI produced the two largest and most impressive collections of gold and silver jewellery and stone vases from the cemetery, and from tomb II came the superb decorated dagger which is perhaps the finest from EM Crete (Seager 1912, fig. 31). We shall comment further on the various finds from the tombs below. Overall, however, there does seem to be a convincing body of evidence to suggest that the EM II-III community at Mochlos was a ranked society.

Production and Exchange

Evidence that the community at Mochlos was engaged in craft production is difficult to discover because we have only the brief interim report on the one season of exploratory excavations in the settlement. We should not expect to find direct evidence of production from the cemetery, but it is there that we have to seek for such evidence as is available.

The stone vase assemblage from Mochlos is the fourth largest from Crete (Warren 1969, 123) and has always presented a somewhat distinctive appearance. A perusal of Warrens type/site concordance (1969, 117-123) confirms this distinction, and highlights the concentration of certain types at Mochlos. As examples, we can mention the bowls with lugs (Warren type 10, p. 28), the cups of type 17 A3 (p. 38), the small carinated jugs (type 22A, p. 47), the miniature goblets (type 29, p. 72) and the teapots (type 41, p. 98). It is difficult to see where these vases were made in EM II-III if they were not made at Mochlos (Pl. XXV, b). An unfinished bowl and a gabbro core from the settlement are probably of MM or LM date, but Seager (1912, 20) recorded an unfinished breccia bowl from Tomb I and the miniature goblet illustrated by Warren (1969, P. 630) also appears to have been unfinished. The place of manufacture of the famous dog-lid pyxide is a matter of some importance in view of the discovery of two near identical examples at Zakro and Ayia Triadha (Warren 1969, 82). The type belongs alongside the other EBA relief-carved pyxides (type 33A), of which eleven examples are known. The distribution of the two types presently favours production in the northeast of the island rather than the Mesara (ten in the north/east, four in the Mesara), and the decorative relief spirals with their Cycladic affinities might be expected to appear in the north and east, with their well-known Cycladic connections (see below), rather than in the south.

The goldwork assemblage from Mochlos is again quite distinct from that found in the Mesara tholoi. Diadems of Branigan (1974) type IA, and diadem attachments of types I and III,

are almost exclusive to Mochlos. The same is true of leaf pendants of type IXA, and bangles of type VI. The combination of distinction and quantity of goldwork found at Mochlos make it almost certain that the jewellery was actually made there. It is difficult to be so certain about the thirteen silver and lead artifacts found at Mochlos, but none of them is of distinct Cycladic type and it therefore seems likely that the items were made at Mochlos from imported Cycladic raw material. Of other products found at Mochlos such as bronzework and pottery, it is impossible to argue any well-founded case either for or against local production of the general assemblage, although we shall comment briefly on particular items below.

If one accepts the argument that Mochlos was a centre of production for EM II-III stone vases and goldwork, then it is possible to tentatively identify products from Mochlos at other sites, particularly in eastern Crete. Warren (1972, 267) has already suggested that the goblet found in the EM II settlement at Myrtos came from Mochlos, and I would propose a similar origin for the miniature amphora from Pseira, a handled cup of type 17A from Sphoungaras, and an alabaster jug from Vrokastro (Hall 1914). Since Mochlos is also the only settlement in eastern Crete to produce a concentration of silver and lead products, it is possible that the odd items found elsewhere in the region at Ayia Photia, Vrokastro, and Palaikastro were produced at Mochlos.

Items produced elsewhere in Crete and brought to Mochlos may also be tentatively identified. One wonders if the "masses of very fine" EM III light-on-dark decorated pottery recorded by Seager (1909, 278) from the town deposits were made here or at Gournia. Seager notes that the quality of the pottery is above that from Vasiliki and Psiera and from the description and the few pieces illustrated the Mochlos EM III pottery would fall into place in the Gournia assemblage. Amongst the metalwork from Mochlos the triangular daggers stand out as a form normally associated with the Mesara, although at least two of the Mochlos examples are easily the largest of their type. Equally amongst the mass of goldwork from the Mochlos cemetery, four hollow vase-shaped beads (Branigan type VI) stand out as unusual here but at home in the Mesara. At least one of the raw materials much favoured at Mochlos may also have been brought here for manufacture, and that is the banded tufa (or alabaster) of which the nearest known sources are between Heraklion and Mallia (Warren 1969, 126-7).

Other raw materials used on Mochlos in the Early Bronze Age clearly point to an inflow of materials from elsewhere in the Aegean or even further afield. The most prolific of these materials is gold, for which no plausible source in Crete can be proposed; it is still most likely to have come from the northern Aegean area - perhaps Euboea or Macedonia (Branigan 1974, 63). Although silver and lead are not plentiful in EBA Mochlos, they are more plentiful there than anywhere else in Crete. Thirteen silver/lead artifacts are now recorded from the site including the only two silver vessels surviving from EM Crete. As a result of the Gales programme of research, we now know that at least some of the EM silver/lead artifacts from Mochlos were made of raw material from Siphnos (Z. Stos-Gale 1985, 369), and it seems likely that in fact all were made of Cycladic or possibly Attic metal. An extension of the Gales programme to copper artifacts and sources has demonstrated that some EM copper was also being imported from Attica (Gale, forthcoming), although we cannot yet identify with certainty the source of the copper used for artifacts found in the Mochlos cemetery. Finally, of the eight copper/bronze artifacts analysed from Mochlos by the Stuttgart laboratory, three appear to be deliberate tin alloys, although only one approaches a good tin bronze (Branigan 1974, 150-1). Tin must certainly have been imported from beyond the Aegean, although the sources are still hotly disputed.

Other imported raw materials from EM Mochlos are perhaps less certain since they have not been examined and identified in recent times. Carnelian and chalcedony beads from tombs VI and XIX are most likely to have come from Egypt if the materials are correctly identified by Seager. The ivory of which 5 inlays from tomb II were made must have come from the east

Mediterranean if ivory it was. Neither of the two seals from the same tomb, however, seem likely to have been of ivory (although Seager claims them as such) to judge from Krzyszkowska's study of Aegean ivories (1989). Alongside imported materials there may be two or three imported artifacts from the Mochlos cemetery. Tomb VI produced a much damaged bowl and some necklace beads of faience, which were most likely of east Mediterranean origin, and there has been continued debate over the date and place of manufacture of the silver cylinder seal from Tomb II. It too seems likely to have originated in the Near East. A second Near Eastern cylinder has recently been found on Mochlos in Dr. Soles new excavations.

Finally, we should take note of the four miniature amphorae and one cylindrical jar with everted rim and base found in EM Mochlos. Both types appear to be imitations of popular Egyptian forms (Warren 1969, 71, 74) and in that case must be indicative of Egyptian contact with Mochlos, direct or otherwise, in late EM II-III.

Although our picture of production and exchange in EM Mochlos must lack definition due to the uncertainties which remain about the identification of several groups of material, it is still possible to fairly claim that Mochlos was a centre of both activities. High quality stone vases and goldwork were produced, in quantity, at Mochlos and some of these products reached other settlements in eastern Crete and possibly beyond. Gold, silver, faience, tin and perhaps chalcedony, carnelian and ivory were acquired from the Aegean and the east Mediterranean.

The Wealth of EBA Mochlos

Although Mochlos has always been noted for its quantity of goldwork and stone vases of EBA date, its richness relative to other Early Minoan sites has not perhaps been fully appreciated. The only other EBA sites which might be compared to it in terms of wealth are Platanos and Arkhanes. In the latter case it is difficult to make a close comparison because excavations still continue at this prolific site and there is thus no definitive publication as yet, although there are regular and full interim reports. Platanos and Mochlos do bear comparison however; both were excavated early this century, and were published by their excavators. Both were located and/or disturbed before excavation. In comparing the material from the two sites, it should be noted that most of the material recovered from Mochlos came from tombs of EM.II-III, whilst at Platanos the tombs were used from EM II to MM I (and IB). The Platanos material may thus have accumulated over a period which, whatever its absolute length, was probably about twice as long as the period of usage/accumulation at Mochlos. We can make a comparison of the goldwork, silver/lead and stone vases from these and other contemporary sites.

I first drew attention to the relative value of the goldwork from Mochlos in 1983 (Branigan 1983, 18-19), when in order to compare the quantities of goldwork found at various EM sites I utilised a rough-and-ready value table ranging from a value of 1 for foil beads, small sheet discs and pendants to 6 for wire bangles and 8 for diadems. I reproduce the table with additions for goldwork from Mochlos and Arkhanes discovered and published since then.

SITE	NO. ITEMS	VALUE
PLATANOS	80	130
KOUMASA	10	25
KALATHIANA	10	50
AY. TRIADHA	55	80
PORTI	5	40
LEBENA	24	40

SIVA	2	5
AY. ONOUPHRIOS	17	30
PYRGOS	12	35
KRASI	3	10
ARKHANES	*82	*105
TRAPEZA	7	15
SPHOUNGARAS	3	5
MOCHLOS	* 200	*550
PALAIKASTRO	5	20
MARONIA	1	0

* Figures for Arkhanes based on information from interim reports only; figures for Mochlos are minimal making no allowance for many beads of types I and IX. Value figures, being estimated, are rounded to nearest 5.

Although goldwork is recorded from sixteen EM sites, and it occurs in reasonable quantities at several sites in the Mesara, the outstanding feature of the table is the domination of Mochlos as a single focus of goldwork. This is seen even more graphically in the histogram (Pl. XXVI). In terms of individual items Mochlos provides almost 40% of the total for the whole of EM Crete and in terms of value (that is, quantity of raw material) it provides almost 50%. It must be noted that this material was deposited over a relatively short period of time, EM II-III, and that it does not represent a single chance find of a hidden cache, but rather the goods deposited with many burials in at least ten or a dozen tombs or graves.

The quantity of silver and lead artifacts found in EM Crete is too small to make a similar table worthwhile for these materials, but of the 38 items recorded to date, Mochlos has yielded by far the largest number (13).

The same degree of domination does not manifest itself in the stone vase assemblage, but given the relatively short span of time and restricted number of burials with which they were associated (relative to the Mesara tholoi), Mochlos still stands out as a focus of stone vase usage in EM Crete.

SITE	NO. VASES
PLATANOS	431
MOCHLOS	187
KOUMASA	167
PORTI	50
APESOKARI	26

(Figures from Warren 1969, with additions for Mochlos from Davaras 1976 and Foster 1979. Only sites with little post MM I stone vase material are listed. The figures include in each case a few post-MM I vases)

The concentration at Mochlos of products made of imported raw materials, a small number of imported products themselves, and of high quality stone vases of local materials, is such that it requires explanation. That explanation must take account also of the evidence discussed above for a large, ranked, population in EM Mochlos and for both production and exchange activities there in the EBA.

The Status of Early Minoan Mochlos

The northern coastal strip of Crete from Palaikastro to Knossos has been previously identified as an area particularly susceptible to Cycladic influence; in 1968 I referred to it as the Cycladic province of EM Crete (Branigan 1968, 226). Since that time, excavations at both Arkhanes and at Ayia Photia have greatly strengthened the case for Cycladic contacts with northern/eastern Crete in the EM II-III period. In particular the ceramics, metalwork, and grave types at Ayia Photia are all strongly Cycladic in character (Davaras 1971; 1981, pls. 3-12). In this context it is tempting to explain the anomalous concentration of imported raw materials and wealth at Mochlos in terms of settlement by Cycladic seafarers, contemporary with the appearance of large oared ships in the Cyclades. But Mochlos, of all the EM sites along the north coast of Crete, is the least dominated by Cycladic influences. The pottery, stone vases, bronzework and jewellery are all distinctively Cretan, and even amongst the silver and lead artifacts there is none that can be confidently labelled Cycladic even though the raw material surely came from or via the Cyclades.

The evidence of EM Mochlos discussed above suggests to me that it fits well the type of settlement described by Carol Smith (1976) as a monopolistic market, controlling exchange within and into and out of a region, including that to and between elite sites. This is the type of site which Hirth (1978) calls a gateway community. We can summarise the attributes of a gateway community as follows:

- a) it occurs particularly on the periphery of world systems.
- b) it occurs at a passage point for a cultural or natural region.
- c) it is located on a line of communication between areas with good mineral or agricultural resources, or high craft production.
- d) it supports a limited elite hierarchy.
- e) the elite manipulate the social system by control of exchange and of prestige products.
- f) imported products are plentiful at the site, scarce elsewhere.
- g) craft specialism/production increases at the site.
- h) the site draws on a zone for its subsistence.

Mochlos appears to possess all of these attributes. The Aegean in the second half of the third millennium BC was on the fringe of the world system represented by the civilisations of the Near East and their exchange network. Mochlos, with its natural harbour facilities, located towards the eastern end of Crete, was exceptionally well-placed on the line of communication between the mineral resources of the Cyclades and Macedonia, and the craft producing resources of the Near East. It was also an obvious entrepot for the communities around the Gulf of Mirabello, if not for eastern Crete as a whole. We have seen that both the tomb architecture and the grave-goods from the EM cemetery suggest the existence of a limited elite at Mochlos, who were able to dominate the distribution and acquisition of gold and silver, high quality stone vases and bronzework, and a small number of imported artifacts. The occurrence of imported materials elsewhere in eastern Crete is scarce indeed - nine items of gold, six of silver/lead, none of faience, carnelian or chalcedony. Almost certainly there were specialist goldsmiths and lapidaries at Mochlos, making the distinctive range of products found in the cemetery. On the other hand, Mochlos seems unlikely to have been able to support its subsistence needs itself. Certainly the island (as it became) was unable to contribute to the subsistence diet at all, and although the adjacent area of mainland is insufficiently endowed with natural resources to have produced food for a population of 300-470 persons or more, we do not know what other settlements in the area may have made demands on it. Mochlos'

acquisition of adequate food supplies presumably hinged upon its success as a “gateway community”.

It is a pity that we know so little of the settlement at Mochlos (as opposed to the cemetery) since it is there that one might expect to find the confirmatory and additional evidence to support our identification of Mochlos as a gateway community for whom trading activities were of essential importance. Hopefully Dr. Soles new excavation may produce some further evidence. One would like to know more about the possible harbour works underwater, noted by Platon (1955, 564) although these are more likely to be Roman than Early Bronze Age. There is too the intriguing comment by Seager that “clay boats are very common in the EM II-III levels at Mochlos” (Seager 1909, 290). Since they are almost unknown from any other site in EM Crete their abundance here is of great interest, and may be a briefly glimpsed contemporary reflection of the unusual status which Mochlos enjoyed in the centuries shortly before 2000 BC.

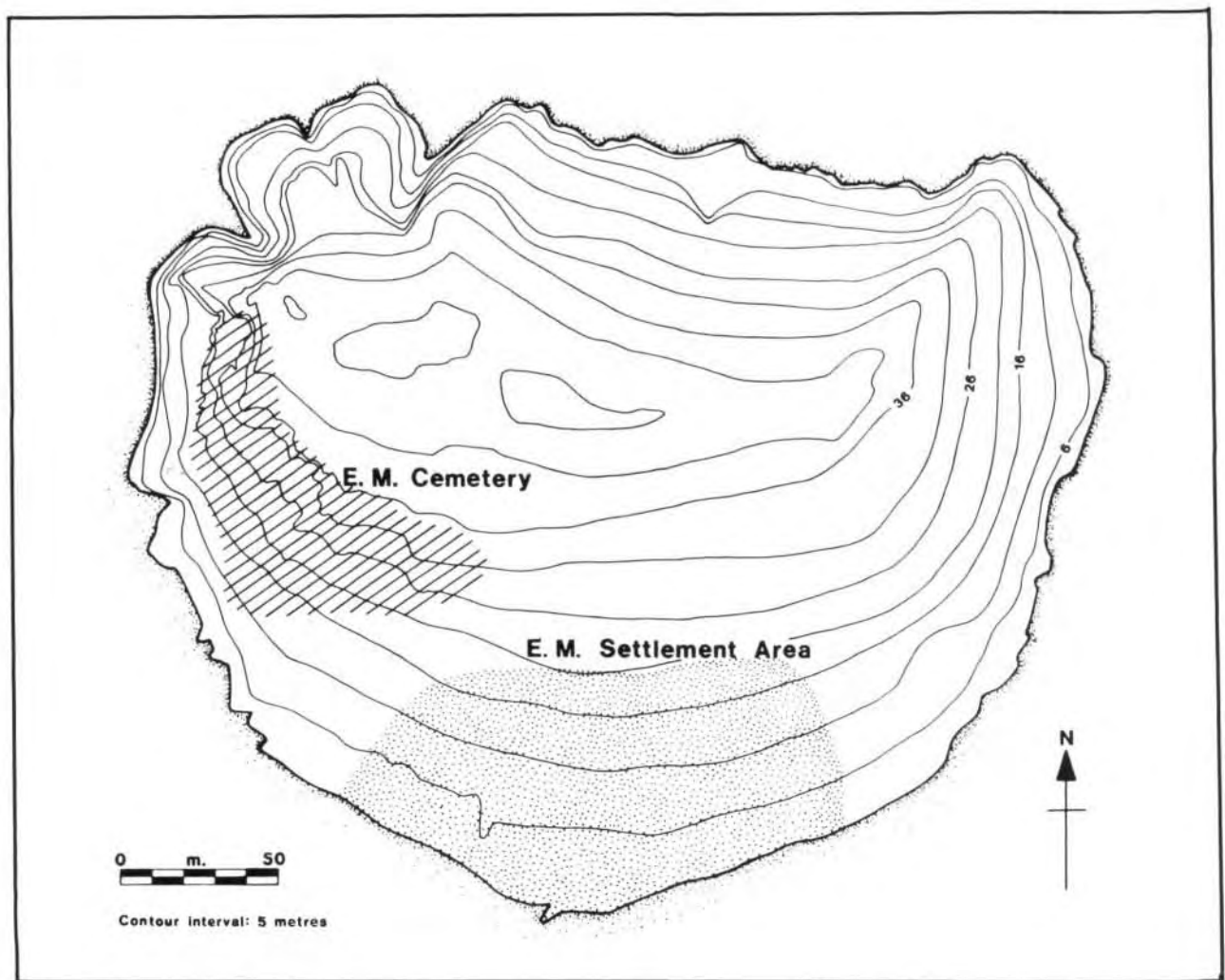
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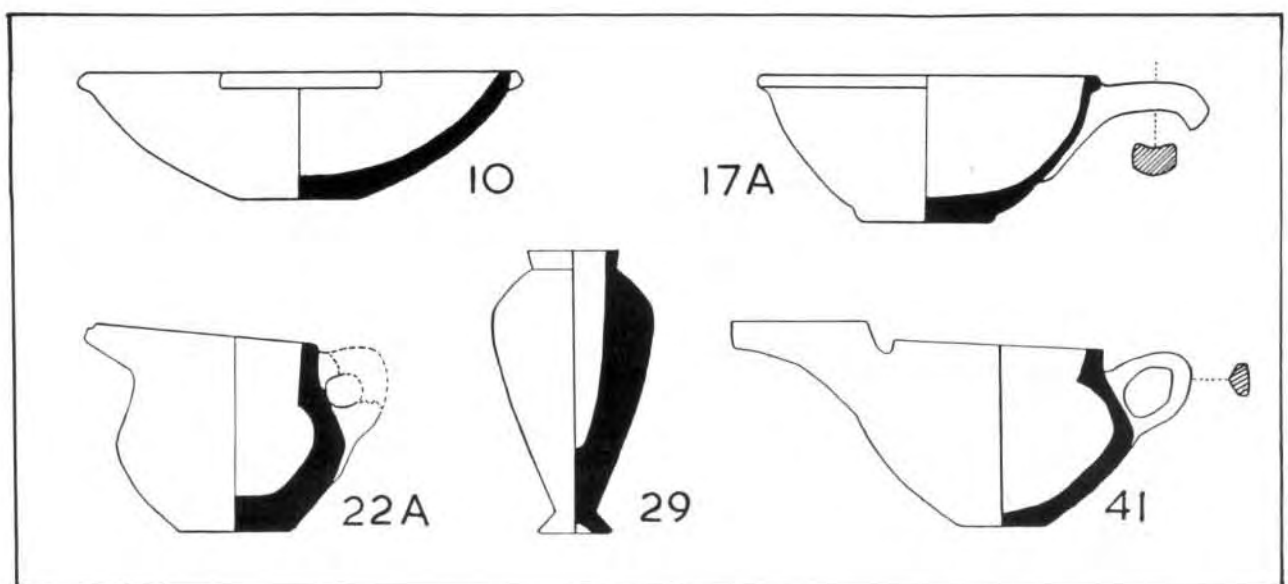
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. XXV, a : Mochlos : the location of the E.M. settlement and cemetery (after Whitelaw).
 Pl. XXV, b : Distinctive stone vase types from Mochlos (Numbers refer to Warren's 1969 type series).
 Pl. XXVI : The 'value' of goldwork from 16 Early Minoan sites.



a



b

