

**THE CEMETERY OF
PACHYAMMOS,
CRETE, VOL. VII, NO. 1**

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The cemetery of Pachyammos, Crete, Vol. VII, No. 1 by Richard B. Seager

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been employed in the text.

A.J.A.	American Journal of Archaeology.
B.S.A.	Annual of the British School at Athens.
Gournia	Gournia, The American Exploration Society, Philadelphia, 1909.
Isopata	The Prehistoric Tombs of Knossos, by A. J. Evans.
Mochlos	Explorations on the Island of Mochlos, American School of Classical Studies, 1912, by R. B. Seager.
Phylakopi	Phylakopi, Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, London, 1904.
Pseira	Excavations on the Island of Pseira, Crete, Anthropological Publications, The Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Vol. III, No. 1.
Sphoungaras	Excavations in Eastern Crete, Sphoungaras, Anthropological Publications, The Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Vol. III, No. 2.
Vasiliki	Excavations at Vasiliki, 1904 and 1906, Transactions, Department of Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania, Vol. I, Part III, 1905, and Vol. II, Part II, 1907.
E.M.I.	Early Minoan I.
E.M.II.	Early Minoan II.
E.M.III.	Early Minoan III.
M.M.I.	Middle Minoan I.
M.M.II.	Middle Minoan II.
M.M.III.	Middle Minoan III.
L.M.I.	Late Minoan I.
L.M.II.	Late Minoan II.
L.M.III.	Late Minoan III.

THE CEMETERY OF PACHYAMMOS, CRETE

In Eastern Crete at the head of the gulf of Mirabello lies the Isthmus of Hierapetra. The mountain chains of the Lasithi group and the Triptite range, further to the east, are sharply divided at this point by an almost level valley which stretches from the northern coast on the gulf of Mirabello across to the plain of Hierapetra facing the southern or Libyan sea. The island is only about seven miles wide at this point and this narrow valley must have formed in all periods an important highway between the north and south coasts. To a maritime people this must have been especially useful as the voyage by sea to and from Hierapetra around the eastern end of the island with its far-flung rocky capes was, at best, a hazardous one in this land of sudden gales where places of shelter for shipping are so few and far between.

The Isthmus offered an easy means of avoiding this circuit as merchandise could be carried across from north to south or vice versa and re-shipped to its final destination.

The Hierapetra plain is the most fertile portion of Eastern Crete and, as it lies at the point of the island nearest to Egypt, must have had a considerable amount of trade with the latter. The Greek coinage of Hierapetra and the numerous remains still extant of the Roman city show its importance in the classical period when it ranked as the chief town of this part of the island.

It seems clear from our knowledge of the Minoan civilization that, in certain stages of its development, it was in close touch with Egypt. From Egyptian art it borrowed much and,

in turn, gave much. We find both Cretan objects on Egyptian sites and vice versa. It is therefore not unlikely that, in Minoan times, this trade route across the Isthmus played its part in the communication between the two countries which would account for the numerous Minoan settlements that are constantly coming to light at the head of the gulf of Mirabello.

In 1902-1904 Mrs. Hawes and her expedition excavated the prosperous and well-preserved town site of Gournia on the coast and another site, Vasiliki, which lies a mile or so inland on the Isthmus.

In 1907 Pseira, a settlement on a small rocky island lying in the gulf opposite the Isthmus, was cleared and since then evidence has accumulated which shows that villages of more or less importance existed in the Kavusi valley, at Vraïka, Monasteraki and Pachyammos with which last this report is chiefly concerned.

These sites, Gournia, Pachyammos, Vasiliki, Monasteraki, Vraïka and Kavusi all lie within a radius of three miles on the northern end of the Isthmus while Pseira, the island site, is also close at hand. The land along this part of the coast is not particularly fertile and suffers greatly from winter storms which drive the salt spray far inland thus blighting the crops. Today only three of these sites are inhabited villages, Kavusi, Vasiliki and Monasteraki. The first two contain roughly 800 and 400 people respectively. Monasteraki can boast of only a dozen families. Pachyammos is the modern port and when I saw it first in 1903 it consisted of a few warehouses and a couple of roadside inns though it now contains ten dwelling houses.

It is clear therefore that the present day population of this district is less than in Minoan times and the fertility of the soil does not seem to warrant a larger one. We must infer that its

ancient importance was principally due to a road crossing the island at this point more useful in the days of small sailing craft than in our era of steamships.

There is no real harbor at the northern end of the Isthmus. The Tholos of Kavusi and Gournia are both open roadsteads. The rocky point at Pachyammos offers a partial shelter for small craft in all but the worst storms. In Minoan times, before the subsidence of the coast so noticeable in this part of the island, the shelter may have been better as the reef of rock stretching out from the end of the point may have then broken the force of the waves whereas today it is almost completely submerged. At any rate, Pachyammos, poor harbor as it is, must have been the principal northern port of the Isthmus and it has always seemed odd that there were such scanty traces of a Minoan settlement at this point.

The shore at Gournia, which lies about twenty minutes walk to the west of Pachyammos over two hilly ridges, could offer no shelter of any sort for shipping. In Minoan times Gournia was the principal town of the district and, for lack of anything better, seemed to have been the starting point of our supposed trade route across the Isthmus.

Owing to recent discoveries we can now correct this error and Pachyammos assumes its natural position as a place of importance in ancient times and the site of a Minoan port.

In October, 1913, the northern villages of the Isthmus suffered severely from one of the torrential rains which sometimes visit the island of Crete. In such a bare mountainous land these storms can work a vast amount of damage in a very short space of time. Owing to the lack of vegetation on the mountain sides, there is nothing to check the torrents of water which, in their struggle to reach the sea, tear great channels

through the terraced fields and the level land along the coast. A similar storm at Zakro in Crete is graphically described by Mr. Hogarth in his "Accidents of an Antiquarian's Life."

In the storm of 1913 the hamlet of Pachyammos suffered severely. The water rose to the height of a metre in the low-lying houses and only by tearing down a long piece of wall between the two village inns were the houses saved from destruction. The mass of water thus released tore its way to the sea some 150 metres distant leaving a broad channel twenty metres in width and a metre in depth to mark its course. When the water finally subsided it was seen that part of a Minoan cemetery of jar-burials had been brought to light in this channel. Some twelve jars were standing along the edge of the eastern bank formed by the torrent while fragments of others strewn the ground showed that a certain number had been broken up by the rush of water.

As soon as the weather permitted, excavations were begun which lasted from April 8 to May 9, 1914. On my return to Crete work was resumed for a fortnight in January, 1915, in order to make sure that the limits of the cemetery had been reached and that no more jars remained in the vicinity.

This burial ground lies in the broad sand beach which gives Pachyammos (Deep Sand) its name. The space occupied by the cemetery was roughly a parallelogram, 150 metres long by 40 metres wide, and lying some 20 metres back from the sea.

The cemetery furnished additional proof to that already gained at Pseira (Pseira, p. 16) and Mochlos of the subsidence of this part of the Cretan coast. Fully half the burial jars were found standing in sea-water and it seems hardly probable that this was the case at the time of interment. Every one knows the difficulty of digging a pit in wet sand and it is not

likely that the Minoans undertook the difficult task of placing their jars in holes which filled with sea-water when ten metres further back from the sea they would have had a dry sandy soil in which to place their dead.

The cemetery seems to have continued in use from very early times down to the L. M. I period. The discovery of child burials in E. M. III pots, a small oval larnax of apparently the same date and a few stone vases of the early type sufficed to show that the first burials were contemporary with those discovered at Mochlos, Pseira and the Gournia cemetery at Sphoungaras. (Seager, Mochlos, and Hall, Sphoungaras.) Whereas at Mochlos and Pseira the greater number of graves dated from the E. M. period, here the M. M. I, M. M. III and early L. M. I periods play the most important part in the history of the cemetery. The Sphoungaras burials also dated chiefly from these same periods and there one was struck by the paucity of small objects placed with the dead in contrast with the profusion of jewelry, weapons and vases that accompany Early Minoan interments. (Sphoungaras, p. 66.) In point of small objects the Pachyammos cemetery was even less productive and the majority of burial jars contained nothing but fragmentary human remains. In a few cases some clay cups and small vases were found in the jars, but this was the exception rather than the rule. Unlike Sphoungaras no seal-stones occurred with any of the interments and yet, judging by the quality of the burial jars themselves, one would have supposed the people buried at Pachyammos to have been superior in point of worldly wealth to those buried at Sphoungaras.

The Pachyammos cemetery produced in all 213 burial jars and six larnakes, whereas at Sphoungaras only 150 jars and one larnax were found, but the latter site had suffered more