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ISLAND OF SALAMIS
The Topography of Ginani

A topic of particular interest for archaeologists working on the Early Iron Age is undoubtedly the Ginani plateau on the island of Salamis in the Saronic gulf.

As a matter of fact the investigations of the late prof. Pallas initially (Πόλλας 1994), and a little later those of prof. Y. Lolos (Lolos 1996) have brought to the forefront remarkable finds of the LHIIC – Submycenaean period. More recently, the latter announced at a lecture in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens the results of his excavations on the southern side of Salamis which laid bare the foundations of a megaron type edifice which substantiates the existence of a small kingdom in the Late Helladic III period. Thus he renders tangible the mythical figures of Telamon, Ajax and Teucer, personalities connected directly to the expedition against Troy as Homer sings in the Iliad, (B 577 etc).

The last of the three is regarded by later written tradition of the early Classical period as the founder of the most famous Cypriot city, Salamis, which he named after his native island, (Hadjoannou 1971, 47 ff).

This being so, it always acted as an incentive for me to investigate further what the connections were at this crucial period of the 12th – 11th century between Salamis in Cyprus¹ and the island of Salamis. Thus, I found my way to the island of the Saronic gulf in order to see for myself the new very interesting finds on the Ginani plateau.

What follows is my personal experience as regards the topography of the area (Fig.1, from Lolos 2001, p.118, fig.3). I arrived at Salamis in

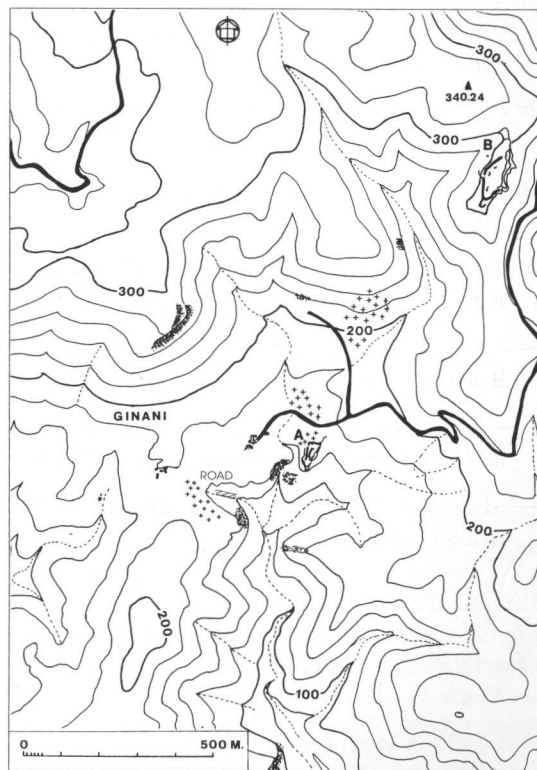


Fig. 1. Showing concentration of surface sherds according to Lolos.

1. My home town in Cyprus is Famagusta, modern day successor of ancient Salamis, and it is natural for humans to search for their fathers and forfathers.

early November 2005. The time was perfect for surface survey, because the area which was arable was tilled, the cereal seeds were almost dormant and the task of observing and collecting potsherds was very easy. I criss – crossed the plateau from Castle ‘A’ which lies to the south of the foothills of

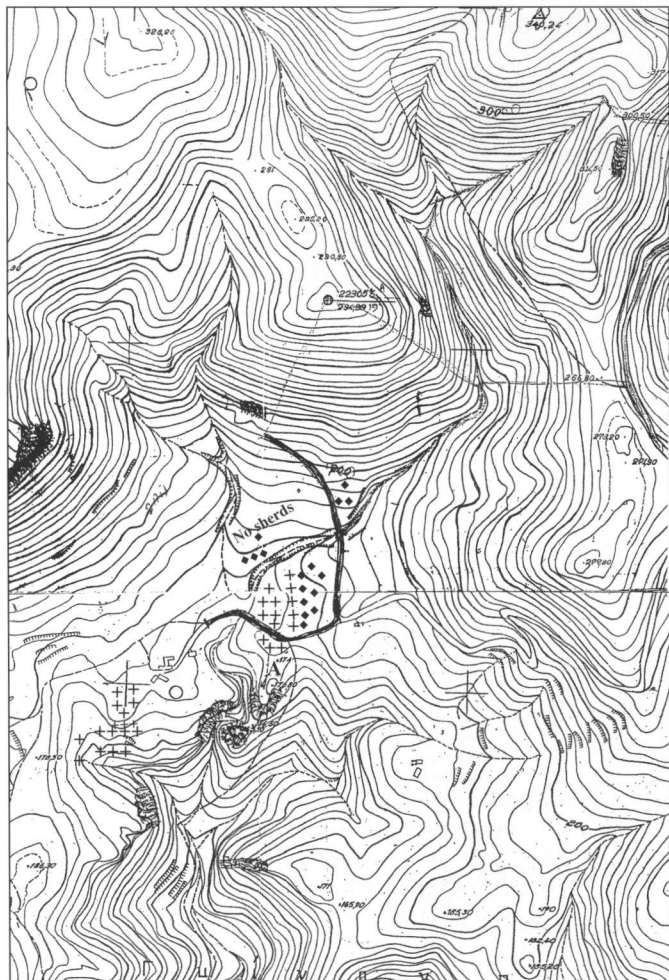


Fig. 2. Concentration of surface sherds according to our observations. + =plentiful, ♦ =rare

A = Castle A

Scale, 1:5.000

Venista, the latter lying north, a distance of less than three hundred meters as the crow flies. Then I moved southwest from the castle, near where a part of a paved road is mentioned by Lolos. From there I walked in northeasterly direction towards the south eastern wedge-shaped flank of Venista. From there I headed towards Castle B on Aspri Rachi. I must say that the thick bushy thickets were a great hindrance in reaching Castle B and the same applied good for the southernmost area I visited, that is the paved part of the road mentioned above. In fact I was unable to reach the exact spot of the road and I saw it from a higher ground, just above it to the west.

On this higher ground, which is immediately to the south west-north west of the "paved" road, and in an area of about 120 m² [this area is southwest of a stockyard with a circular threshing floor (Fig.2)], which showed relatively rich surface material, sherds of various periods were present and two of them bore dark paint and dating most probably to the Geometric period (pl.Ia).

Moving north, that is to the west of the stockyard, and then in a north easterly direction, there was not even a single sherd in the freshly cultivated fertile fields, where the cereal crops just ventured to peep through the soil.

The only place of the plateau that is truly rich in surface material is the one north of the rural road that runs north of Castle A, at a distance of about 35 metres. In between the road and the castle lies the partly surviving apsidal house, by Lolos regarded Dark Age - Geometric (Lolos 2001, 121 n.2), and between this house and the strong north wall of Castle A there is an almost rectangular

enclosure with thin walls built almost in the same way as the Castle. Inside this enclosure, whose southern wall is the northern strong wall of the castle, although I searched very carefully, I could detect not a single sherd. The floor was hard and slightly elevated on the eastern side. It seems that this side was dug out of the cliff in order to make its face almost vertical. In addition to this, a wall was constructed on the edge and it moved all along the eastern and northern sides, while on the west side another wall was built making it a perfect enclosure save a small gate next to the northern wall of the castle, (fig. 3, after Lolos 2001, p.119, fig.4). Of this western wall very little survives. One wonders why this enclosure was built. The only plausible explanation I would venture to give is that it was used as a good refuge for their domestic animals in case of danger. It measured about 20x25m and its whole area was in the range of archers in case of an attacker venturing to drive their livestock away.

This enclosure could have been used up to relatively recent times by shepherds as stalls for their flocks.

Returning to the area where the sherds are plentiful, this is circumscribed by the rural road to the south and the little dry stream coming down from a north-easterly direction, that is from the peak of mount Akamas. In all, this area is about 50x70m and the concentration of surface sherds is really plentiful. The vast majority of them is of the so-called Handmade Burnished ware of 12th –early 11th century date (pls. Ib, IIa) but sporadic pieces of later periods occur as well.

The soil of this area is rather poor, as it suffers from erosion and for this reason there are two low dry stone walls built in a north south direction in order to protect the soil from being washed away. Towards the east of this area, and walking for another fifty meters we meet a second rural road, vertical to the first one, moving north and ending at the mouth of something like a quarry at the higher foothills of Venista. While walking towards this second rural road the potsherds were becoming fewer but never vanished.

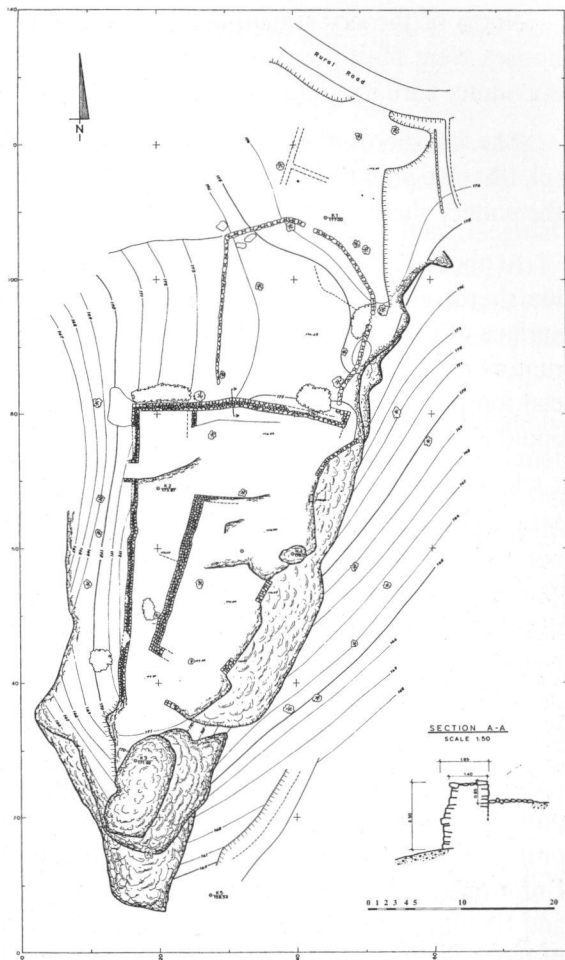


Fig. 3. It shows Castle A, the almost rectangular structure at the north, two walls of the apsidal building meeting at right angles, and the rural road running east-west further north.

North of the dry stream-bed, few pieces were traced next to its banks and in our opinion no houses were built there as the soil is very shallow, a couple of inches deep, and below this we encounter hard rock. So if there were any foundation walls they could have easily been traced.

The few sherds of surface pottery that found their way on the northern bank of the dry stream-bed (pl. IIb) owe probably their existence to peasants, who moving in the fields south of the stream where the pottery sherds are abundant, have thrown them, for whatever reason, on the other side of it.

At about 20 metres north of the stream-bed from where the foothills of Venista start rising gently, the sherds are non-existent and no trace of any tombs, looted or unlooted, is present. In fact the surface of the earth is very hard and to my view not suitable for cemetery area in antiquity, despite rumors mentioned by Pallas and repeated by Lolos, that many years ago tomb robbers have rifled cist tombs in this same area. (Πάλλας 1994, p.182; Lolos 2001, p.123). Far better as a graveyard could have been the hill west of Venista.

The second rural road we mentioned earlier bridges the little dry stream that comes down from Mt. Akamas and separates Venista from Aspri Rachi on a peak of which Castle B is built. Moving northwards on this second rural road, about fifty metres away from its junction with the previous one, and after crossing over the little bridge, we are on the south-eastern, lower wedge-shaped foothills of Venista. According to Lolos, (Lolos 2001, 123), here we have a succession of terrace walls running east-west, one of which was for a road. He also discerned remnants of peribolos walls or strong structures "associated with much surface pottery of good quality, and belonging to the Dark Ages and the Geometric period".

From our observation there must have been only one retaining wall for a short road, which was probably built to assist access to higher grounds. There was also a circular one-room house and probably something of a defensive structure of which little survives on the edge of the ravine. Unfortunately, very few potsherds were present, contrary to what Lolos mentions (Lolos 2001, 123 and 118, fig. 3) and it seems to me that the erosion of the place has left very little for the excavators to discover. In fact, below the brink of the ravine, we have vestiges of use of the area by shepherds in recent times, who were watering their animals in a little trough-like pond, where there was probably a perennial spring. Luckily enough, one of the three sherds I came across in this area was probably part of a skyphos of ripe Protogeometric (pl.IIIa). The interior of it was covered with dark paint and on the exterior we have on the buff yellowish surface of the reddish clay, which must have been well sieved, one at least threefold compass-drawn concentric circle. A good parallel to our fragment is the decoration of an Attic skyphos with a fivefold concentric circle [Desborough 1952, pl. 10, 525 (A)]. The other two pieces are of Handmade vessels. Their clay is red with big particles of mica being seen on the inside (left piece), while the exterior is polished and covered with red slip (right piece).

For one to walk to Castle B on Aspri Rachi, he has to carry on upwards on the eastern flank of Venista and then move right, on another chain of hills, and so we did. After a very tiresome effort, we ended up in the castle. On the way, nothing remains of the ancient path and very little of the one used until 1964, which was the only artery leading from north to south Salamis, when the rural roads we use today had been opened up. Nature, especially thickets of bushes have taken over everywhere.

Castle B is of an elongated ovoid shape and bigger than Castle A. Both were built in the same dry stone technique. Very little survives in its interior and its greatest dimensions are 75x25m, though its northern half is 12 metres or less in breadth. It looks as if the two castles were contemporary and they were built by the same people. Castle B was most probably used as a watch tower as it commands a superb view of the Saronic gulf from a height of 314m above sea level.

In comparison, Castle A lies on a spur of the Ginani plateau, 177m above sea level. It is triangular in shape, very small, the greatest breadth and length being 30x50m. (fig. 3, after Lolos, 2001, 119). The wall of its northern side, which is the most vulnerable, was the strongest and even today is standing at a height of 2-2,5m., while its greatest thickness reaches 1,40m. The other two sides of the castle, especially the eastern one, were easily defensible because of the abrupt terrain.

The enclosed area was about 750m² but out of this, the useful area must have been considerably less because of the existence of many big rocks with uneven surface. There was also an inner peribolos wall running almost parallel and at a short distance from the western outer wall of the castle. This extra wall was of larger stones than the walls of the castle and on both ends it bends to the east creating obtuse angles.

Despite our efforts to spot any potsherds, this was impossible save for one piece around 10 cm long of reddish colour and a smaller one of similar fabric (pl.IIIb) which is none-else than the ubiquitous red Burnished ware with dark core, which may be ascribed to around 1100 B.C. The bigger piece was found on the foundation of the very small rectangular room just inside the western gate of the castle. It was clearly a product of a trial dig by Lolos himself. Our view is that even a dig inside the castle will allow us to recover very little archaeological material due to its rocky ground almost everywhere.

In conclusion, we agree with Lolos that the two defensive Castles A and B along with the few remnants on the south eastern tip of Venista are contemporary and their establishment coincides chronologically with the turbulent times of the later 12th and the beginning of the 11th century B.C.

We also agree with him that there was a shift of local population to a safer place and as such they found it convenient to move to the Ginani plateau. This movement to the new location did not allow them eye contact with the sea except for Castle B which was used more or less as an observation outpost with defensive capabilities. It seems that those people, along with other inhabitants that remained on the island, were not in isolation (Wide 1910; Styrenius 1962).

Certain imports or pottery shapes support contact with the outside world in the Submycenaean period. Here we can mention the metallic hemispherical bowl recovered by Kavvadias at the arsenal area (Matthäus 1985 no. 416-8, pl.49), but also the one handled pilgrim flask which shows Cypriot influence (Demetriou A., SIMA 1989, p. 40, n. 26).

A contemporary reciprocal movement is shown because of the presence of the Handmade burnished ware and the shape and decoration of the little one handled lekythos. Both found their way to Cyprus (Demetriou, SIMA, 1989, p.46 and p. 14) and they denote, especially the former, the arrival of people as emigrants.

It is true that the former's fabric is encountered at Maa in Cyprus as early as 1200 B.C. (Karageorghis 1985, p. 246) but also elsewhere (Pilides Despina, SIMA 1994, p. 107) It seems that it is connected with the continuing influx to Cyprus of Greek emigrants and their pottery styles (Pilides, *ibid*).

The archaeological picture we have from Enkomi and Salamis in Cyprus is the following: Towards the end of the 13th century B.C. there is a widespread destruction at Enkomi (Dikaios P., 1967, 511-514).

Those who undertook the task of rebuilding the town were using Myc. IIIC1b pottery, therefore we can surmise that they were coming from the Greek mainland as fresh colonists. A century later human and natural calamities befell it, which forced the inhabitants to abandon gradually Enkomi and move a couple of kilometres eastwards on the shore, where they built a new city which they named Salamis. Therefore, if we can venture to accommodate together the picture we have of Ginani and Enkomi-Salamis in Cyprus, we may support the view that the end of the 12th century, plausible time for the Salaminians to move to Ginani from some seaside area of the island, coincides well with the foundation of Salamis in Cyprus. In other words, it seems probable that after these Salaminians moved to Ginani, the area being poor and unable to sustain the population influx, part of this population sailed to Cyprus where they built their new homes on the eastern shores of the island. Traces of contact of the two areas are not lacking and the legend ascribing Teucros of the Salaminian island as the founder of Cypriot Salamis may echo true movement of people who kept their contacts to the ancestral land through commercial visits that left us the few tangible vestiges we have today (Demetriou A, 1989, p.92).

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Τα τελευταία χρόνια εντοπίστηκαν στο μικρό οροπέδιο της τοποθεσίας Γκίνανι, στο νησί της Σαλαμίνας, σημαντικά κατάλοιπα του τέλους του 12ου και του 11ου π.Χ. αιώνα. Τα κατάλοιπα αυτά οφείλονταν σε μετακίνηση ντόπιου πληθυσμού, ο οποίος θα ζούσε στα παράλια και κατέφυγε στο εσωτερικό για περισσότερη ασφάλεια.

Κατά την ίδια περίοδο θεμελιώνεται και η Σαλαμίνα της Κύπρου. Νοούμενου ότι η τοποθεσία Γκίνανι είναι φτωχή, γεωργική περιοχή και δεν μπορούσε να διαθρέψει τον πληθυσμό που κατέφυγε εκεί, φαίνεται πως ένα μέρος του πληθυσμού αναζήτησε την τύχη του αλλού και την βρήκε στα ανατολικά παράλια της Κύπρου, από όπου συνέχισε να έχει επαφή με την πατρώα γη.

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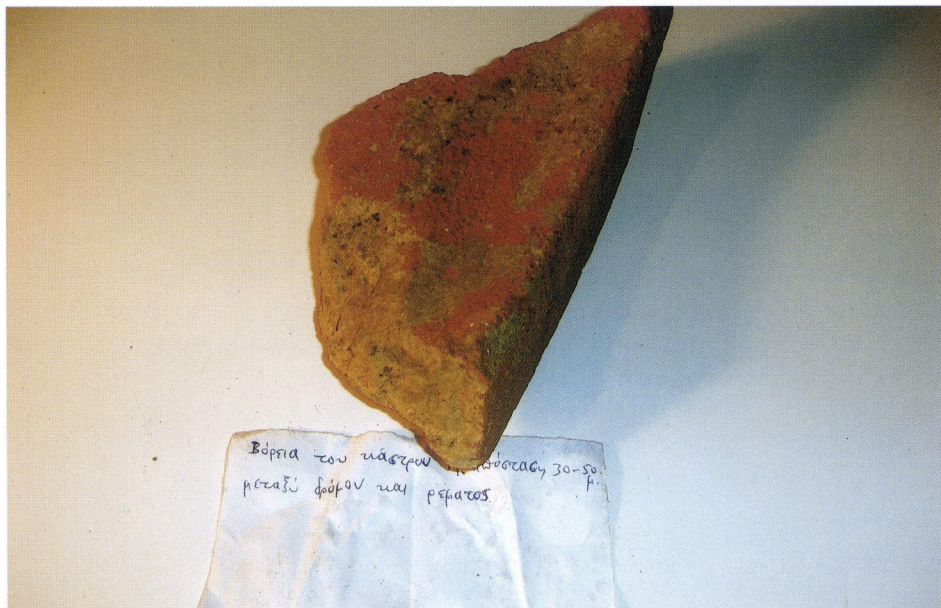
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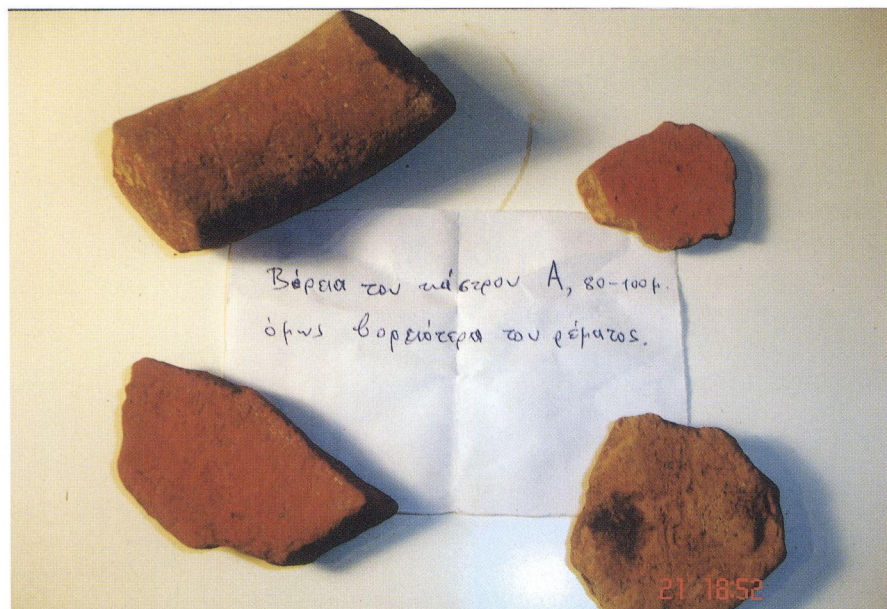
a. Ginani: surface sherds from southwest of Castle A and circular threshing floor.



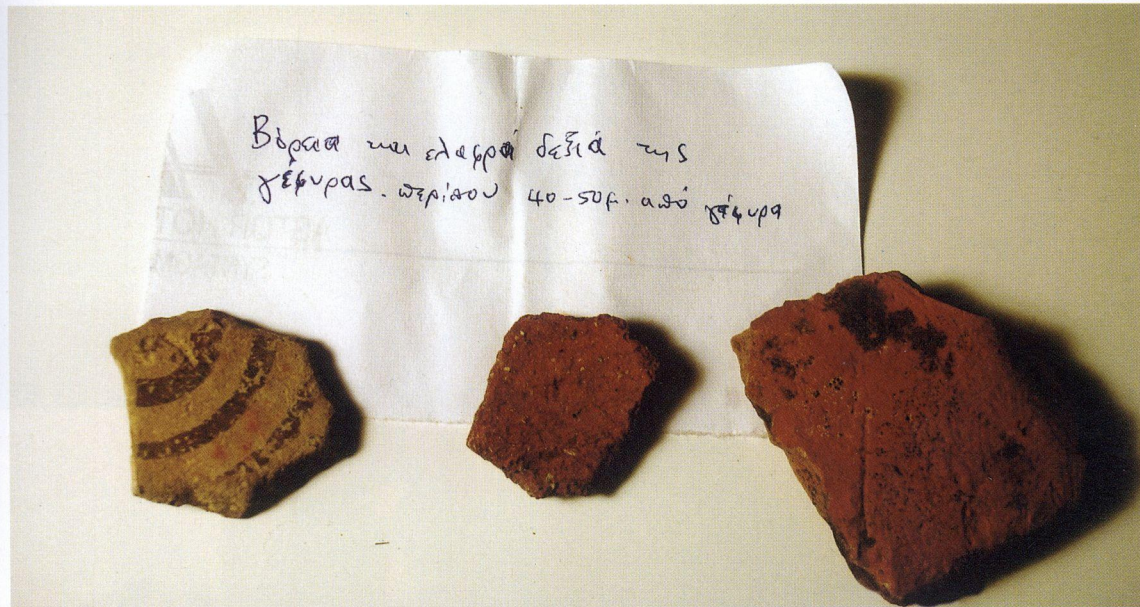
b. Ginani: surface sherds from north of Castle A, in the area enclosed by the rural road to the south and the stream to the north.



a. The biggest sherd shown also on pl.2. It is estimated that the handmade uessel to which it belonged had a mouth diam of 26 cm. Breadth of upper side of lip is between 3,5 to 3,7 cm. Its overhanging part is 1,2 cm.



b. Ginani: surface sherds collected next to the northern bank of the little stream in the middle part of central plateau.



a. The few surface sherds collected on the southeastern flank of Venista, which is about 40 m. northeast of a little bridge on the rural road running south-north.



b. The two sherds collected from just inside the western gate of Castle A. The big one was lying on the foundation wall of a tiny room.