

## THE FUNCTION OF THE PLAQUE IN THE SHRINES OF THE GODDESS WITH UP-RAISED HANDS\*

Among the best known Minoan religious buildings and objects are those of the shrines of the goddess with up-raised hands. All belong to the Postpalatial or Third Palace Period, most dating to LM IIIB or LM IIIC. They have been found at sites as diverse as the Palace of Minos at Knossos and the mountain settlement of Karphi. Although not all these shrines contained exactly the same architectural features and ritual equipment at the time of excavation, the best preserved ones had most of them. Some missing features may have been missing by chance.

The standard example, to which all others are compared, is the Shrine of the Double Axes at Knossos.<sup>1</sup> As seen in the photograph and on the plan, the room was square with a bench across the back wall, on which ritual equipment was arranged. A strip of plaster flooring was laid in front of the bench. In this was set a tripod offering table; several cups and small jugs were on this level. The rest of the floor was of tamped earth. On this stood larger containers including a stirrup jar, two-handled jars, a pyxis and amphorae. The ritual equipment on the bench consisted of a goddess with a bird on her head who was worshiped by two female votaries with hands on their breasts and by a male votary holding a bird. Two pairs of plaster horns of consecration, each of which held something—probably a double axe or a branch—in a hole between the horns, mark the area as sacred. A small stone double axe and a neolithic type figurine were the remaining objects on the bench. Both the bench and the plaster floor were strewn with water-worn pebbles.

Although this room in the palace gives a clear picture of a shrine, it is missing some of the ritual equipment and pottery shapes, particularly the snake tube and plaque, found in shrines located at Gazi, Gournia, Kannia, Karphi, Kavousi on the Vronta ridge, and Kephala Vasilikis. Snake tubes have been found in all these shrines except Karphi, but they may have been used there too, for fragments found elsewhere on the site may have washed down from the shrine; plaques were found in all shrines except the one at Gournia, where they may be missing by chance.

Since the shrine on the Vronta ridge at Kavousi has produced the most ritual equipment including the most plaques, it will be discussed first.<sup>2</sup> The building, dated to LM IIIC, contained two rooms, each with a bench along the interior side of its eastern wall; on the

\* I would like to thank the Greek Archaeological Service for permission to study the plaques from Gazi and Mathia; the British School at Athens for permission to study the plaque from Karphi; and the Director of the Herakleion Museum, Alexandra Karetou, and her staff for facilitating the study of these plaques. All the Kavousi plaques come from the Kavousi Excavations which are sponsored by the University of Tennessee under the directorship of Geraldine C. Gesell (Executive Director), William D.E. Coulson (Field Director of the Kastro Site), and Leslie Preston Day (Field Director of the Vronta Site). They are conducted under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens with the permission of the Greek Archaeological Service. They have been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities (an independent federal agency), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the National Geographic Society, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and private donors. At the University of Tennessee, the Office of Research Administration, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of Classics have supported the excavation. The work of Geraldine Gesell has also been supported by Professional Development Awards from the University of Tennessee.

1 *PM* II 335-344. For plan, see Figure 190; for photo, see Figure 189. Drawings of some of the ritual equipment are included in these pages. Evans dated the shrine LM IIIB, but G. RETHEMIOTAKIS ( *Ἀνθρωπομορφική πηλοπλαστική στην Κρήτη από τη νεοανακτορική έως την ύπομινωική περίοδο* [1998] 66-68) suggests LM IIIA on the basis of the style, shape, and decoration of the figures. This could make it the earliest shrine of the goddess with up-raised hands.

2 For the preliminary publication of the shrine (Building G), its plan, and artifacts, see G. GESELL, L. DAY, and W. COULSON, "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete, 1987," *Hesperia* 57 (1988) 289-290; G. GESELL, W. COULSON, and L. DAY, "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete, 1988," *Hesperia* 60 (1991) 161-163; G. GESELL, L. DAY, and W. COULSON, "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete, 1989 and 1990," *Hesperia* 64 (1995) 78-80.

exterior, another bench ran along the western wall of the building, suitable for exterior displays (Pl. LXXXIa). The area was disturbed by cist graves built in the Geometric Period. There was a row of them to the west and one in the shrine itself. The ritual objects (fragments of at least thirty statues of the goddess with up-raised hands, seventeen snake tubes, twenty-two kalathoi, and twenty-six plaques have been identified) were found primarily in two places, in front of the east bench in Room 2 and outside of the building in the area south and west of Room 1.<sup>3</sup> Room 1 itself, badly damaged by the grave just in front of the east bench, contained only a few sherds of statues and pieces of ritual equipment.

In Room 2 excavation revealed six snake tubes (2-7)<sup>4</sup> arranged almost in a line. One was upside down (3); two were tipped (2, 7); the sixth (6) was on its side. They were mostly intact, missing only a few sherds of their necks and rims; however, the cylinder of the tube on its side was broken. Slightly to the south and east was a large portion of a goddess statue (2). Her head and the bottom part of her skirt was missing. Most of the best preserved kalathoi (1-10, 14, 15, 16, 18) and six of the best preserved plaques (1-3, 6, 10, and 17) were also found in Room 2. The relatively complete condition of all these objects suggests that they were used or stored in this room.

However the situation at the excavation of Room 1 was different. The largest group of ritual equipment was found in the northeast corner of the room, north of the grave, but since a few sherds were found under the grave, in the walls of the grave and to the west of the grave, it is likely that most of the equipment originally in this room had been removed during the building of the grave.

All remaining ritual equipment came from the area to the south and west of Room 1. This included almost all the fragments of statues, many snake tubes, and plaques, but few kalathoi. These are most likely the objects removed from Room 1 when the grave was built.

It is important to consider the plaques in the light of this background, but first it must be determined what are the characteristics of a ritual plaque and how it differs from other plaques. Size, material, and distinctive features need to be considered.

Too little is preserved of many plaques to estimate their dimensions accurately. However the dimensions of two plaques are certain and two others can be estimated. Their size varies somewhat, but all four appear to be rectangular rather than square. Plaques 1 (Pl. LXXXIb-c) and 2 (Pl. LXXXId-LXXXIIa) are roughly 33 x 24 cm. However Plaque 4 (Pl. LXXXIb-c) is 38 cm long; its width can be estimated at 30 cm by assuming that its relief decoration is symmetrical. The width of Plaque 3 (Pl. LXXXIId-LXXXIIIa) is preserved at 33 cm; although its length is not preserved, it can be estimated at 41 cm in comparison with similarly constructed plaques.<sup>5</sup>

The clays used in the plaques are the same as those in the statues and the snake tubes. They are coarse except for one. The phyllite clay firing to a buff color, which was used for storage vessels like pithoi and jars, is the most common, but there are also micaceous clays in both buff with gold mica and red with silver mica.<sup>6</sup> The gold mica clay is fine. There is also a phyllite clay which fires red and black, often mottled, which was normally used for cooking pots. Each of these clays appears in statues, snake tubes, and plaques, suggesting that statues, snake tubes, and plaques in the same clay were obtained together as a set.

There are five significant types of features on the plaques—frames, suspension holes, horns of consecration on the top, relief decoration on the front of the plaque, and painted decoration. Although it is often not possible to be certain whether a plaque has a particular feature, the most complete plaques occur in two patterns. There are two styles of frames, a rounded frame of clay, probably pushed up by the roller, across the top of the front of the

3 For details on the architecture and ritual objects in this type of shrine, see G. GESELL, *Town, Palace, and House Cult in Minoan Crete* (1985) 41-56.

4 The numbers in parentheses are identification numbers given the individual ritual objects within their type.

5 Plaque 4 from Vronda (30 x 38 cm) and the plaque from Gazi (36 x 44 cm).

6 D. HAGGIS and M. MOOK, "The Kavousi Coarse Wares: A Bronze Age Chronology for Survey in the Mirabello Area, East Crete," *AJA* 97 (1993) 265-293. Buff phyllite Mook-Haggis Type XI, gold mica similar to but finer than Mook-Haggis Type XXII (not in article), silver mica Mook-Haggis Type XVI, red phyllite Mook-Haggis Type IV.

plaque and a flat frame of clay applied on the front edges around the whole plaque. At least eight, seven of buff phyllite and one of red phyllite clay, have the rounded frame across the top (1, 2, 7, 10, 11, 21, 22, 25). This type of plaque has two suspension holes on either side of the mid-point of the top (not preserved on Plaque 25). These holes are pierced on a diagonal from the front of plaque through the top of the frame in a manner which allows the plaque to hang neatly against a wall or straight down from the ceiling. Plaques with this type of frame are marked by a pair of horns of consecration on each end of the top (1, 2, 7, 10, 11, and 25). Only four plaques (3, 4, 9, and 26) have a flat frame. Two of these (9 and 26) are small fragments, one of phyllite clay and one of silver mica, about which little more can be said. The other two are the largest and among the most interesting. Both have suspension holes pierced near their top corners. Neither has a pair of horns of consecration on top. Plaque 3 is of fine buff clay with gold mica; Plaque 4 of red clay with silver mica. All plaques of both types which have their top frames preserved have suspension holes. From this evidence it is highly unlikely that the plaques were used as offering tables as has been suggested.<sup>7</sup>

Two interesting features of decoration remain. Relief decoration appears on Plaque 4 and traces of red paint on Plaque 17. The conservator cleaning Plaque 17 found red paint on the back of the sediment she was lifting off the plaque, but there was no way to remove the sediment without removing the paint. It was decided to leave the sediment on the plaque in the hope that some day a method would be discovered to separate the sediment from the paint. At this time it is not possible even to determine whether a picture was painted on the plaque or whether the whole plaque was painted red. Plaque 4 was the only plaque from Vronda with relief decoration. Although less than half of the plaque survives, there is enough preserved to make some hypotheses. The top edge curves up toward the center where the flat frame becomes rounded and is incised with a line suggesting hair. The front is somewhat modeled under this into what could be an indication of a chin line. There is a depression where the beginning of the eye should be, a circle in the area where the ear should be, and a relief line which could be an arm. Although it is not possible to be certain that the restoration is correct, it is possible to restore a goddess with up-raised hands on the plaque.

Next it is important to see how the plaques relate to each other and the rest of the ritual equipment. Room 2 contained most of the best-preserved equipment. Three of the plaques with horns of consecration (1, 2, 10) came from this room. Plaque 1 was found above Snake Tube 3, in an upper stratum of Room 2. Plaque 10 was found in the same upper level as Plaque 1, above the snake tubes. On the other hand, Plaque 2, Plaque 6 (no special features preserved), and part of Plaque 17 came from the same level below the snake tubes on the bedrock. The remainder of Plaque 17 came from south of Room 1 outside the building. Although the implication is that none of the artifacts was *in situ* as it was when in use, it is clear that the plaques belong with the assemblage of the snake tubes and kalathoi. Some deductions can be made. Probably Plaque 1 and Plaque 10 had hung on the east wall above the snake tubes. The plaques on the bottom could have been hanging from the beams across the ceiling and have fallen before the tubes. Most of Plaque 3 was found above the bench on top of rock fall together with two kalathoi (8 and 10), pebbles, and seashells. The plaque rested on a stone under which was more ritual equipment. Perhaps Plaque 3 had hung on the east wall before it fell.

In Room 1, most of Plaque 4 came from the northeast area where it was found on its side with the torso of a matching goddess (3). Sherds from a matching snake tube (11) came from the deposit west of Room 1 where they had been thrown from this room. It is puzzling that the most of Goddess 17 and Snake Tube 16, both of which were made of fine clay matching Plaque 3 from Room 2, came from this area in Room 1, although stray sherds of Plaque 3 and Snake Tube 16 were found in the same locus west of Room 1 and part of Goddess 17 was found farther west in the deposit. One plaque with horns of consecration (11) came from the western area of Room 1. Although the ritual equipment found in both Room 1 and Room 2 was not *in situ* on the floor, much of it came from the area in front of the benches along the east wall, suggesting that this was the display area of the rooms.

7 S. MARINATOS, "Αἱ μινωϊκαὶ Θεαὶ τοῦ Γάζι," *ArchEph* (1937) 283.

Plaques found in shrines at Gazi, Kephala Vasilikis, Kannia, and Karphi add further information. The recently found Temple at Kephala Vasilikis has eight rooms, in one of which were found parts of four goddesses, a throne, a snake tube, and a plaque.<sup>8</sup> The plaque, intact with suspension holes in the middle of its top, resembles many of the buff phyllite plaques at Kavousi, but it has no frame or horns of consecration. It was found in the fill along with fragments of two goddesses. The rest of the ritual objects were found on the north and east benches.

The shrine at Gazi contained five goddesses, two snake tubes, and a plaque, originally published as an offering table.<sup>9</sup> Its applied, flat frame with no horns of consecration is similar to that of Plaque 3 from Kavousi, but its suspension holes are in the middle (Pl. LXXXIIIb-c). No paint was recorded nor can any be seen now. This plaque (44 x 36 cm) is slightly larger than the Kavousi plaque. It was found at an almost perpendicular slant as if it had fallen from where it was hanging. It was found in front of goddess no. 9307 with a bird on her tiara. Both, made of the same clay, were part of a set. Although each goddess in this room had at least one piece of ritual equipment such as a snake tube or a cup nearby, no other plaque was found.

Several plaques were found in the large shrine complex at Kannia.<sup>10</sup> The main room for worship appears to be Room 1. More than four statues of the goddess, three snake tubes, and one plaque were found in this room. In relief on the plaque was depicted a female figure with up-raised hands, probably a goddess, although she is dressed in a flounced skirt instead of a hoop skirt. Her head is missing. The exact spot where the plaque was found is not recorded. Levi does say that the major group of goddesses and equipment came from above and in front of the paved "bench" on the west side of the room. This fits well with the findspots of ritual material in Room 2 at Kavousi. Two more plaques were found in Room V, an interior room with a hearth or altar and two benches. The room contained a small goddess statue, parts of many other goddesses, snake tubes, and other ritual equipment, some on the benches and some on the floor. The plaque with the "dancing sphinxes" and palm tree had fallen up-side down on the south bench. Also on this bench was the base of a goddess. The second plaque, found near a group of pottery, had only incised decoration with an element of braiding or inflorescence between rectangular panels. Suspension holes are not mentioned for either plaque.

The shrine at Karphi, called the Temple by the excavator, contained goddess statues and a plaque.<sup>11</sup> Some of the ritual material, including at least one goddess, was found in the annexes. The findspot of the plaque is not recorded. This plaque is particularly interesting (Pl. LXXXIVa-b). It is basically rectangular with a head attached to the top (40 x 22 cm). There are holes in the top of the shoulders for an attachment or something to suspend it with. Possibly the plaque was dressed and the holes were used for pins to keep the dress on. It is a unique object.

As forerunners of these plaques in shrines, there are the MM III Land Animal Plaques from the Temple Repositories in the Palace at Knossos.<sup>12</sup> These are faience plaques found together with the faience snake goddess statuettes and other ritual material. Though different

8 T. ELIOPOULOS, "A Preliminary Report on the Discovery of a Temple Complex of the Dark Ages at Kephala Vasilikis," in *Cyprus-Dodecanese-Crete* 301-313, Fig. 18. He gives the date of the construction of the temple as LM IIIC with use continuing into the Protogeometric period.

9 MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7) 278-291. Marinatos gives a date of LM III. S. ALEXIOU ("Η μυνωϊκή Θεὰ μεθ' ὑψωμένων χειρῶν," *CretChron* 12 [1958]191-192) discusses the date and chooses LM IIIB or early LM IIIC on the basis of the kylikes. RETHEMIOTAKIS (*supra* n. 1] 80-81) places the goddesses stylistically in early LM IIIC.

10 D. LEVI, "La Villa rurale minoica di Gortina," *BdA* 44 4<sup>th</sup> Ser. (1959) 245-249, Figs. 16a and 19. RETHEMIOTAKIS (*supra* n. 1] 70-72) discusses the date and concludes that the shrine belongs to the LM IIIA2-B period.

11 "Excavations in the Plain of Lasithi. III. Karphi: A City of the Early Iron Age in Crete," *BSA* 38 (1937-38) 75-76 and 140 where Karphi is dated to the Intermediate Period; ALEXIOU (*supra* n. 9] 192-195) dates Karphi to Subminoan period. RETHEMIOTAKIS (*supra* n. 1] 84, 87) suggests LM IIIC for three of the goddesses and Subminoan period for the two largest.

12 *PM* I 510-511, Figures 366 and 367. M. PANAGIOTAKI, "The Central Palace Sanctuary at Knossos" (*BSA Supplementary Volume* 31, 1999) 81-87, Figures 17 and 18.

in material and shape, they may have had the same function in the original shrine. The pictures of the suckling animals are in relief on the plaques, but have no frame or suspension holes. It has been suggested that they either hung on the walls or were plastered into the walls. The message of the nourishing mother is likely to have been important in the rituals of the cult of a mother or fertility goddess.

The tradition of the plaque with ritual picture continues after the fall of the Bronze Age civilization. A plaque not much later than the Kavousi examples was found at Mathia.<sup>13</sup> The plaque has a relief picture of a standing female figure with hands up-raised (Pl. LXXXIVc-d). The records of the Herakleion Museum say only that it was found in a pithos. Alexiou suggests that it came from a burial. The pose of the figure with up-raised hands recalls that of the goddess with up-raised hands.

To sum up, the plaque is an integral part of the ritual equipment of the shrine of the goddess with up-raised hands. It belongs to the set of ritual equipment including the goddess and snake tube. It was used in the same room as the rest of the set, probably hung on the wall or from the beams of the ceiling. Several had ritual pictures in relief on them. Most depicted female figures with up-raised hands, presumably goddesses or votaries in ritual pose. The suggested parallels for the dancing sphinxes are near eastern or Cypriote themes. Many other plaques had no relief pictures but were decorated on top with two pairs of horns of consecration. The surface of these plaques is badly preserved. Although they could have served just as sacred markers, I would suggest that a symbolic scene was painted on these plaques. The unique plaque from Karphi with the human head may have been used in a dressing ritual.

Geraldine C. GESELL

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13 ALEXIOU (*supra* n. 9) 284.



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Pl. LXXXIa	Plan of Shrine at Vronda.
Pl. LXXXIb	Plaque 1.
Pl. LXXXIc	Plaque 1 drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXId	Plaque 2.
Pl. LXXXIIa	Plaque 2 drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXIIb	Plaque 4.
Pl. LXXXIIc	Plaque 4 drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXIId	Plaque 3.
Pl. LXXXIIIa	Plaque 3 drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXIIIb	Gazi Plaque.
Pl. LXXXIIIc	Gazi Plaque drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXIVa	Karphi Plaque with Face.
Pl. LXXXIVb	Karphi Plaque with Face drawn by Roxana Docsan.
Pl. LXXXIVc	Mathia Plaque.
Pl. LXXXIVd	Mathia Plaque drawn by Roxana Docsan.