

RELIGION, SOCIETY AND ETHNICITY ON CRETE AT THE END OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE. THE CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LM IIIC CULT ACTIVITIES*

1. Introduction

The significant methodological shift undergone by the study of Aegean religion over the last few decades has cogently shown that cult evidence cannot be considered in isolation, and at the same time that it can also help reconstruct of social, political and even ethnic patterns.¹ It follows that a model constructed on the idea of cult institutions reflecting different levels of socio-political integration on scales of increasing complexity may prove useful.² This approach – which requires the recognition of specific assemblages among the artefacts associated with cult activity – facilitates understanding of variations in the material evidence for cult and also affords the opportunity to distinguish oppositions, of any nature, in the pattern of distribution of the material culture. The many difficulties inherent in any enquiry which also takes ethnicity into consideration need no further stressing. However, we should bear in mind that it is in conditions of marked competition over resources that cultural discontinuities may be related to the boundaries of ethnic groups.³ As far as Crete is concerned, a striking case is offered by the central area of the island during LM II - LM IIIA1 – a case upon which the focus first came to bear in my research on ethnicity, or better on pottery and ethnicity.⁴ We have to leap forward to the close of LM IIIB and the beginning of LM IIIC to find a marked degree of interaction and competition once again, which justifies starting our enquiry on religion, society and ethnicity in the LM IIIC period.⁵

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Abbreviations other than those adopted by *Aegaeum* include:

Late Minoan III Pottery = *Late Minoan III Pottery. Chronology and Terminology. Acts of a Meeting held at the Danish Institute at Athens (August 12-14 1994)* (Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens 1, 1997).

Minoans and Mycenaeans = *Minoans and Mycenaeans. Flavours of Their Time, Catalogue of the Exhibition, Athens, National Archaeological Museum, 12 July-27 November 1999* (1999).

The Greek-Swedish Excavations II = *The Greek-Swedish Excavations at the Agia Aikaterini Square, Kastelli, Chania 1970-1987. The Late Minoan IIIC Settlement (Acta Instituti Atheniensis Regni Sueciae 4°/XLVII:II, 2000).*

1 See C. RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult. The Sanctuary at Phylakopi* (1985); ID., "Towards a Cognitive Archaeology," in *The Ancient Mind. Elements of Cognitive Archaeology* (1994) 3-12; ID., "The Archaeology of Religion," ibidem 47-54; J.C. WRIGHT, "The Spatial Configuration of Belief: The Archaeology of Mycenaean Religion," in *Placing the Gods* 37-78; ID., "The Archaeological Correlates of Religion: Case Studies in the Aegean Bronze Age," in *POLITEIA* II, 341-348. See also P. BEGG, *Late Cypriote Figurines: A Study in Context* (1991); L. CARLESS HULIN, "The Diffusion of Religious Symbols within Complex Societies," in *The Meanings of Things. Material Culture and Symbolic Expression* (1989) 90-96; A.L. D'AGATA, "Late Minoan Crete and Horns of Consecration: A Symbol in Action," in *EIKON* 247-255; P. GARWOOD, D. JENNINGS, R. SKEATES, J. TOMS (eds), *Sacred and Profane. Proceedings of a Conference on Archaeology, Ritual and Religion (University Committee for Archaeology Monograph no. 32, Oxford, 1991)*; J.M. WEBB, *Ritual Architecture, Iconography and Practice in the Late Cypriot Bronze Age* (1999).

2 Cf. WRIGHT, *The Spatial Configuration* (*supra* n. 1) 63.

3 I. HODDER, "Economic and Social Stress and Material Culture Patternings," *AmerAnt* 44 (1979) 446-454; ID., *Symbols in Action* (1982) 55-57.

4 A.L. D'AGATA, "Hidden Wars: Minoans and Mycenaeans at Hagia Triada in the LM III Period. The Evidence from Pottery," in *POLEMOS* I, 48-55.

5 For cult activity in Crete during LM IIIC see R.V. NICHOLLS, "Greek Votive Statuettes and Religious Continuity ca 1200-700 B.C.," *Auckland Classical Essays Presented to E.M. Blaiklock* (1970) 1-38; G.C. GESELL, *Town, Palace, and House Cult in Minoan Crete* (1985) 41-56; RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult* (*supra* n. 1) 393-444; D'AGATA (*supra* n. 1) 254-255; A.L. D'AGATA, *Statuine minoiche e post-minoiche dai vecchi scavi di Hagia Triada (Creta)* (Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente XI, 1999) *passim*.

2. Crete in the 12th century BC

After the collapse of the regional system mainly founded on autonomous polities that had characterised the 13th century,⁶ what emerges in the 12th century B.C. is a rather different scenario. There are three factors that leave their particular mark on the new era. Firstly, there is the breakdown of the traditional settlement pattern and a marked instability that includes both the moving of people from low-lying to defensible sites and the establishment of new sites.⁷ Secondly, radical changes in the ceramic repertoire⁸ are accompanied by a high degree of cultural homogeneity to be recognised all over the island.⁹ This means that a communication flow at the regional level must be hypothesised, in spite of the disintegration of the previous political system. Finally, the presence of cultural elements deriving from non-local sources - some dating back to LM IIIB - must be signalled, consisting of kitchenware of a type unknown to the Late Minoan tradition,¹⁰ hand-made burnished ware¹¹ and PSI-type figurines.¹² In other words, an extensive restructuring of the Cretan settlement pattern, which now shows marked differences between the individual areas, and also the adoption of foreign cultural elements may be inferred from the archaeological evidence for the 12th century B.C.

- 6 The latter half of the 13th century B.C. was a period of great upheavals for Crete, see e.g. A. KANTA, *The Late Minoan III Period in Crete. A Survey of Sites, Pottery and Their Distribution* (1980) 324-325: a pattern of "slow abandonments and destructions" of many individual sites, mainly in Central, Southern and Eastern Crete, is one of the hallmarks of this phase, and the rise of what may be defined as a concern with religion - now happily dubbed 'crisis cults' by J. DRIESSEN, this volume - can also be considered a strong indicator of increased contact between the local communities and hostile groups. A different picture is perhaps offered by the western part of Crete. In LM IIIB late, the town of Khania was rebuilt: here Cypriot and Italian pottery has been found and the local Kydonian workshop proved to be still active, cf. E. HALLAGER, "Khania and Crete c. 1375-1200 B.C.," *Cretan Studies* 1 (1988), 115-123; ID., "Architecture of the LM II/III settlement in Khania," in *Crète Mycénienne* 181. In the same part of the island centres like Armenoi and Kalami - KANTA (*supra*) 213-214, 238; Y. TZEDAKIS, in *Minoan and Mycenaean* 56, 110-116, 174-177, 232-258 - were fully alive, while sites as Voliones in the valley of Amari (M. POLOGIORGI, "Δύο ταφές της ΥΜΙΙΙ περιόδου στο χωριό Βολιώνες επαρχίας Αμαρίου," *AD* 36 [1981] 82-105) point to contact with Khania. In conclusion, the picture to be reconstructed for this region is of a fairly well populated, interacting area, possibly in contrast with the evidence available for most of Crete.
- 7 On this phenomenon see K. NOWICKI, "A Dark Age refuge centre near Pefki, East Crete," *BSA* 89 (1994) 235-268; ID., "Economy of Refugees: Life in the Cretan Mountains at the Turn of the Bronze and Iron Ages," in *From Minoan Farmers to Roman Traders. Sidelights on the Economy of Ancient Crete* (1999) 145-171. A summary of LM IIIC sites is to be found in A.L. D'AGATA, *Defining a pattern of continuity in Central Western Crete during the Dark Age: Ceramic evidence from Thronos/Kephala (ancient Sybrita)* (1999) 181-218. An up-dated and overall view of the LM/LH IIIB-C period is now offered by S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, "Innerägäische Beziehungen und auswärtige Kontakte des mykenischen Griechenland in nachpalatialer Zeit" (forthcoming).
- 8 The degree of novelty to be ascribed to the LM IIIC early ceramic repertoire obviously depends on what is to be understood as typical of LM IIIB late, a still little known phase in the life of Crete and a matter of debate; see the discussions included in *LM III Pottery*. Some elements of distinction between LM IIIB late and IIIC early, based on material from stratified layers found at Khania, have been highlighted by B.P. HALLAGER in *Late Minoan III Pottery* 106, 108-109 although, until more evidence is published, little can be said. Nevertheless, in LM IIIC early one of the most significant changes is represented by cups and "champagne cups" being largely replaced by deep bowls (cf. e.g. P.P. BETANCOURT, *The History of Minoan Pottery* [1985] 177-184) - a change that can be considered revolutionary in the Cretan repertoire where the cup had for centuries been the dominant shape.
- 9 Sites such as Palaikastro/Kastri, Kavousi, Knossos, Thronos, Chamalevri and Khania show an extremely high degree of ceramic homogeneity; see also the observations by P. WARREN, in *Late Minoan III Pottery* 405.
- 10 I.e. cooking jars with flat bases (similar to FS 74) to be placed on stands: to the group of LM IIIC sites where cooking jars were found, listed in B.P. HALLAGER, "The Late Minoan IIIC Pottery," in *The Greek-Swedish Excavations II*, 160, is to be added Thronos/Kephala, A.L. D'AGATA, "The Pottery," in *Ricerche greco-italiane in Creta occidentale III. Thronos/Kephala (antica Sybrita): le fosse rituali in prossimità dell'insediamento sulla sommità* (IG, forthcoming).
- 11 Handmade burnished ware has been found in LM IIIB late layers at Knossos, Tylissos, Ayia Pelagia and Khania, and in LM IIIC early layers at Knossos, Kastelli/Pediada, Khania (B.P. HALLAGER, "Crete and Italy in the Late Bronze Age III Period," *AJA* 89 (1985) 293-305; HALLAGER [*supra* n. 10] 165-166), and Thronos, D'AGATA (*supra* n. 10).
- 12 *Infra* § 2.1.

Considering the continuity of occupation in LM IIIB and early IIIC, the strong links with the Greek mainland and the international profile, it is tempting to suggest that the Khania area played a specific role in the formation of the Cretan material culture of the early 12th century BC, allowing for the inclusion of non-local influences and the formation of certain peculiarities encapsulated in the contexts, which can be defined new, of early IIIC.¹³ Such a role might also have had something to do with the ethnic composition of the population, possibly including a considerable foreign component arriving in the town during the 13th century B.C.

2.1 LM IIIC early/late¹⁴

We start our survey of cult activity as from LM IIIC early, when the island shows no common religious system, although this might also be a matter of archaeological visibility. It is not my intention to discuss here the evidence for domestic cult contexts, but mention must be made of some sites where PSI-type figurines were discovered which could be associated with a domestic level and also referred to LM IIIC early. In this respect an important predecessor for connection with mainland Greece in terms of cult activity is found in an LM IIIB2 house at Khania, where two figurines were discovered on the floor still *in situ*, close to a fixed circular hearth – an association which can be considered typically Mycenaean.¹⁵

The LM IIIC sites which have yielded PSI-type figurines are Phaistos and Gortys in Central Crete, and probably Chamalevri¹⁶ in the western part of the island. If nothing can be said of the scant remains of the settlement on the Acropolis of Gortys, which were largely superseded by later structures,¹⁷ Chamalevri was abandoned before LM IIIC late¹⁸ while Phaistos shows a peculiar pattern both as a settlement and in terms of cult evidence,¹⁹ which does not seem to include an urban cult building.²⁰ It might be worth stressing that during

13 As for pottery, on the mixing of Minoan and Mycenaean elements in LM IIIC early, see M. POPHAM, "Some Late Minoan III Pottery from Crete," *BSA* 60 (1965) 334. More recently, the same author expressed the opinion that for major Cretan development in LM IIIC pottery the "present evidence, admittedly sparse, points elsewhere (*scilicet*: than to Knossos), perhaps to east and south of Crete, regions whose turn had then come to make their contribution to the final creative stage of Late Minoan pottery:" ID., "Late Minoan II to the end of the Bronze Age," in *Knossos. A Labyrinth of History. Papers in Honour of Sinclair Hood* (1994) 101. On the correlation between LM IIIC and LH IIIC the issues raised by P.A. MOUNTJOY, "Late Minoan IIIC/Late Helladic IIIC: Chronology and Terminology," in *MELETEMATATA* II 514-516 – although the present writer does not agree with all the ideas expressed – help in some cases (see pp. 514-515) to clarify some usually misunderstood LM IIIC matters.

14 In terms of pottery the distinction is fairly clear between an early and a late phase of LM IIIC on Crete, now shown by the stratigraphical evidence from Kavousi (M.S. MOOK, W.D. COULSON, "Late Minoan IIIC Pottery from the Kastro at Kavousi," in *Late Minoan III Pottery* 337-365), the sequence identified in the ceramic material from the ritual pits at Thronos/Kephala, D'AGATA (*supra* n. 7), D'AGATA (*supra* n. 10), and the LM IIIC early material from Khania, HALLAGER (*supra* n. 10). For main features of LM IIIC late pottery see D'AGATA (*supra* n. 7) 197-201, and HALLAGER (*supra* n. 10) 173 n. 340.

15 HALLAGER, *Khania* (*supra* n. 6) 117; HALLAGER, *Architecture* (*supra* n. 6) 181. The two figurines belong to the PHI-type: one is a Mycenaean import, the other locally made, cf. M.L. WINBLADH, in *The Greek-Swedish Excavations at the Agia Aikaterini Square, Kastelli, Khania 1970-1987* III (forthcoming).

16 Phaistos: L. PERNIER, "Scavi della Missione Italiana a Phaistos 1900-1901. Rapporto preliminare," *MonAnt* 12 (1902) 121-122, fig. 52. 1, 2, 4, 5; E. FRENCH, "The development of Mycenaean terracotta figurines," *BSA* 66 (1971) 136; Gortys: G. RIZZA, V.S.M. SCRINARI, *Il santuario sull'acropoli di Gortina (Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente* II, 1968) tav. VII. 27, 28, 33, and probably 24; Chamalevri: the head of a PSI-type (?) figurine comes from an LM IIIC early context; for bibliography on the site see D'AGATA (*supra* n. 7) 183 n. 7. As for Khania, the group of figurines published in M.L. WINBLADH, "The terracotta figurines and the stone vases," in *The Greek-Swedish Excavations* II, 183-184, does not include any certain example of PSI-type from a LM IIIC early level.

17 RIZZA, SCRINARI (*supra* n. 16).

18 *Supra* n. 16.

19 For discussion on the LM IIIC occupation and evidence for cult activity, D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 236-237. For recent bibliography on the site see D'AGATA (*supra* n. 7) 182 n. 7.

20 It has to be stressed that the remains of "a Karphi-like statuette ('goddess with upraised arms' type)" has been reported from the summit of the hill of Christos Effendi, in the Phaistos area: cf. L.V. WATROUS, *The Cave Sanctuary of Zeus at Psychro. A Study of Extra-Urban Sanctuaries in Minoan and Early Iron Age Crete* (1996) 102.

LM IIIC, at least apparently, in none of these sites was an urban cult building created with large clay female figures, of the type of the so-called Goddess with Upraised Arms.²¹

2.2 LM IIIC late

It is in LM IIIC late that a common system of cult becomes evident on the island. The almost ubiquitous Cretan urban cult place is the *bench sanctuary*, associated with ritual sets of cult objects including large clay female figures with upraised arms, stands or snake tubes, plaques, and kalathoi.²² Bench sanctuaries and clay figures with upraised arms are known from the LM III period, although the formation of a specific, recurrent cult assemblage seems to be a LM IIIC phenomenon. This assemblage shows that at the elite level a coherent system of ritual architecture and cult symbols and behaviours had then been formed across the island. Nevertheless, the cult evidence from sites such as Karphi, Kavousi/Vronda and Vasiliki/Kephala, all of them new IIIC foundations located in eastern Crete, displays significant differences, also implying different organisation at the social, political and, possibly, ethnic level.

There are at least five bench sanctuaries²³ in the excavated part of the settlement at Karphi,²⁴ among which three have yielded large clay female figures with upraised arms. They are Room 1 or the Temple;²⁵ Room 16-17 with its annex Room 70;²⁶ Room 116.²⁷ The Temple and Room 16-17 are located on the fringes of the settlement, and can be entered from communal areas. These complexes are of varying dimensions and the clay figures discovered inside them hardly exceeded six items. The absence of a central authority at Karphi, evident in

- 21 On the cult of the "Goddess with Upraised Arms" S. ALEXIOU, "Η Μινωική Θεά μεθ' υψωμένων χειρών," *CretChron* 12 (1958) 179-299; GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 41-56; A. PEATFIELD, "After the 'Big Bang' - What? or Minoan Symbols and Shrines beyond Palatial Collapse," in *Placing the Gods* 19-36; H. WHITTAKER, *Mycenaean Cult Buildings. A Study of Their Architecture and Function in the Context of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean (Monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 1, 1997)* 42-61.
- 22 GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 45-56; G.C. GESELL, "The Goddess with Upraised Arms from Kavousi, Ierapetras," in *Πεπραγμένα του Ζ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου* A1 (1995) 349-351.
- 23 GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 45-46, 79-82.
- 24 H.W. PENDLEBURY, J.D.S. PENDLEBURY, M.B. MONEY-COUTTS, "Excavations in the Plain of Lasithi. III: A City of Refuge of the Early Iron Age in Crete," *BSA* 38 (1937-1938) 57-141, and plan at fig. IX. The traditional date for the occupation of Karphi is LM IIIC advanced, cf. POPHAM, *Some Late Minoan Pottery* (*supra* n. 13) 334, however the existence of more phases in the development of the town has been often pointed out, see PENDLEBURY *et al.* (*supra*) 135-137; K. NOWICKI, *The History and Setting of the Town at Karphi* (1987) 235-256. For the existence of an LM IIIC early phase see the remarks by HALLAGER (*supra* n. 10) 173-174 n. 343.
- 25 PENDLEBURY *et al.* (*supra* n. 24) 75-76, pls. XXXI, XXXV.1, XXXIV. 5; M. SEIRADAKI, "Pottery from Karphi," *BSA* 55 (1960) 11-12, 14-15, 29; figs. 7. 4, 19; pls. 4b, 14; GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 74, 79; WHITTAKER (*supra* n. 21) 188-189. Pendlebury assigned the Temple to his second phase. In SEIRADAKI (*supra*) the vases from the Temple have been assembled in pl. 4b: they include five, badly shaped, pieces in fine "blue ware" and a group of kitchen pots. Judging from the high bases displayed by the fine vases, a date late in IIIC is to be maintained for them and, similarly, for use of the cult building.
- 26 PENDLEBURY *et al.* (*supra* n. 24) 78, 86; SEIRADAKI (*supra* n. 25) 29, figs. 8. 4, 13, pl. 55c; GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 79-81; WHITTAKER (*supra* n. 21) 188. Room 70, where clay goddesses and snake tubes were found, represents a later addition: it also yielded the upper part of a jar with twisted handles.
- 27 PENDLEBURY *et al.* (*supra* n. 24) 88-89; SEIRADAKI (*supra* n. 25) 6, figs. 3-10; 26, fig. 18. 3; GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 82; WHITTAKER (*supra* n. 21) 190. Rooms 89 and 79 are probably part of the same complex. In Room 116, among many vases which were not illustrated, there were an amphoriskos decorated with wavy band, and a conical kylix with swollen stem: both the vases belong to types unusual in LM IIIC early contexts. In M. POPHAM, "The Late Minoan Goblet and Kylix," *BSA* 64 (1969) 304, the swollen stem is regarded as a result of 'poor potting.' A similar feature, i.e. a pronounced swelling, can be observed on the legs of LM/LH IIIC wheel-made animals where it is intended to show the knees, cf. M.A. GUGGISBERG, *Frühgriechische Tierkeramik. Zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Tiergefäße und der hohlen Tierfiguren in der späten Bronze- und frühen Eisenzeit (c. 1600-700 v. Chr.)* (1996), taf. 10. 1 (Amyklai), 28. 392 (Phylakopi), 34. 2 (Yalisos), 44. 3-5 (Phaistos). Considering that a stem of kylix and a leg of wheel-made animal may have been shaped in a similar way, i.e. as long, narrow and pierced clay cylinder to which a disc base was added, I would conclude that swellings on stems of LM IIIC late kylikes are intentional features.

the settlement pattern, can also be deduced from the large numbers of sanctuaries in relation to the size of the exposed area of the settlement.²⁸ Each of them could be related to diverse competing groups unable to monopolise the local resources, including ritual power.²⁹

Cult material from the Temple³⁰ is characterised by symbols which frequently occur in earlier cult contexts of Minoan Crete (birds, disks, horns of consecration, the conical cap). They fit in well with the attributes displayed on the ritual objects from the LM IIIB bench sanctuary of Gournia,³¹ implying local derivation and a notable continuity in cult iconography at the regional level.

The attributes of the ritual sets including large clay figures found in the other bench sanctuaries at Karphi are not known, while they could prove useful to assess the presence or absence of oppositions of any nature between the single cult buildings, evidenced by the use of specific symbols.

Different evidence is found in the settlement of Kavousi/Vronda.³² Building G is the only cult building discovered in the habitation area, and the excavators regarded its large size and axial arrangement as unusual.³³ Here again the cult building was erected on the edge of the settlement to facilitate access. A large amount of cult material has been discovered in the area of the shrine (more than thirty goddesses, twenty-seven plaques and seventeen snake tubes) and ritual sets – including one statue, one snake tube, and one plaque – identified. On the evidence of the handles on the goddesses, serving to carry them, we may well imagine the processions during which such ritual objects were borne in parade.³⁴ In consideration of the large number of cult items, each ritual set could have been a dedication from one social or family group in the community, or from a group of sites in the cluster, considering the peculiar settlement pattern reconstructed for this region.³⁵ This also means that the Vronda building could include facilities for a more extensive area than the settlement itself.

Even though ritual sets were dedicated by diverse groups, the existence of a single cult building, situated in a special location close to the most important private building in the settlement – namely building A/B³⁶ – suggests that a central authority was in force at Vronda, whose connections with the Minoan past are borne out by the Minoan attributes on cult objects and figures, such as the birds on the tiara of one clay female figure, and the horns of consecration on the rim of a plaque and a kalathos.³⁷

28 Cf. GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 79-82, for a review of areas where cult material has been found. The settlement pattern analysis made by NOWICKI, *Economy* (*supra* n. 7) and the existence of many large houses of megaron type confirm the absence of a central authority on the site.

29 A similar case is to be found in Late Cypriot IIC/IIIA Enkomi, WEBB (*supra* n. 1) 292-294.

30 PENDLEBURY *et al.* (*supra* n. 24) 75-76, pls. XXXI, XXXV. 1; SEIRADAKI (*supra* n. 25) 29, pl. 14; GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 79.

31 GESELL (*supra* n. 5) 72, fig. 119.

32 G. GESELL, W.D.E. COULSON, L. PRESTON DAY, "Kavousi 1982-1983: The Settlement at Vronda," *Hesperia* 55 (1986) 355-388; IID., "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete 1987," *Hesperia* 57 (1987) 279-301; IID., "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete 1987," *Hesperia* 60 (1991) 145-178; IID., "Excavations at Kavousi, Crete 1989 and 1990," *Hesperia* 64 (1995) 67-120; G.C. GESELL, "The Late Minoan IIIC Period at Kavousi," in *Πεπραγμένα του ΣΤ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου* A1 (1990) 316-332; GESELL (*supra* n. 22); L. PRESTON DAY, "The Late Minoan IIIC period at Vronda, Kavousi," in *Crète mycénienne* 391-406; G.C. GESELL, "Ritual Kalathoi in the Shrine at Kavousi," in *MELETEMATA* I, 283-287, and G. GESELL, this volume. See also WHITTAKER (*supra* n. 21) 191.

33 PRESTON DAY (*supra* n. 32) 401-402, and plan of the site at fig. 2.

34 *Minoan Religion* 228.

35 D.C. HAGGIS, "Intensive survey, traditional settlement patterns and Dark Age Crete: The case of Early Iron Age Kavousi," *JMA* 6/2 (1993) 131-174.

36 PRESTON DAY (*supra* n. 32) 393-394; L. PRESTON DAY, "A Late Minoan IIIC Window Frame from Vronda, Kavousi," in *MELETEMATA* I, 185-190.

37 The bench sanctuary discovered at Khalasmenos in spring 2000 seems to include many features similar to the Vronda example, as reported by M. TSIPOPOULOU, e-mail posted to *AegeanNet*, 27 June 2000. On the site, W. COULSON, M. TSIPOPOULOU, "Preliminary Investigations at Chalasmenos, Crete, 1992-93," *Aegean Archaeology* 1 (1994) 65-86.

The temple complex recently found at Vasiliki/Kephala³⁸ seems to represent a third, different case of socio-political integration. Set in the highest area of the Dark Age settlement on the summit of the hill, this large and independent structure includes eight rooms.³⁹ The main hall (Room 6) displays two columns along the main axis, a central hearth, and a stone-lined pit in the N-W corner. A large group of cult objects was found in Room 4, in the southern wing, including at least two large clay female figures, two fenestrated stands, a plaque, and some pottery, among which cups, kalathoi (some with a horned projection) and a jug were recorded. More female figures and kitchenware were gathered in the fill of the room.

The basic features of this complex comprise elements unknown to the Minoan tradition, and which should be considered of Mainland derivation. Among the architectural features, the axuality of the main hall with columns and central hearth finds an excellent parallel in House G at Asine.⁴⁰ As for the iconography, the enthroned goddess reconstructed by the excavator⁴¹ can be considered a Mainland-derived cult image,⁴² while the absence, if real, of actual Minoan symbols is hardly offset by what seem to be two Minoan heirlooms, a seal and a serpentine bowl, found in Room 4 along with pottery. Finally, the large quantity of kitchenware and at least one "close style" krater gathered in the same room point to the ritual consumption of food – a traditional Mainland practice.⁴³

To conclude with the cult complex at Vasiliki/Kephala, the scale, size and complexity of this impressive structure, which probably included facilities for more than one cult, suggest the existence of a strong centralised local authority, which monopolised essential ritual activities in a territory probably larger than the settlement.

Little can be said in this respect of the other sites known where large clay female figures have been found – Kipia, near Praesos in Eastern Crete,⁴⁴ Prinias in Central Crete⁴⁵ and Ayios Ioannis, close to Apodhoulou, at the southern end of the valley of Amari⁴⁶ – while urban cult buildings are still lacking. However, the evidence from Prinias merits further attention: the large number of items discovered, and also the later evidence of a large number of cult buildings in the Archaic town, could indicate the existence of more LM IIIC cult places, suggesting a political organisation similar to that hypothesised here for Karphi, which also implies the absence of a central authority. It is also worth stressing that a recurrent attribute

38 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.

39 ELIOPOULOS (*supra* n. 38) 305-306, and plan of the site at fig. 9.

40 R. HÄGG, "The House Sanctuary at Asine Revisited," in *Sanctuaries and Cults* 92-94, fig. 1. For analysis of the sanctuary plan, G. ALBERS, *Spätmykenische Stadttheiligtümer. Systematische Analyse und vergleichende Auswertung der archäologischen Befunde* (1994) 112-115; WHITTAKER (*supra* n. 21) 163-164.

41 ELIOPOULOS (*supra* n. 38) 307-308, figs 13-17.

42 P. REHAK, "Enthroned Figures in Aegean Art and the Function of the Mycenaean Megaron," in *Ruler* 95-118.

43 R. HÄGG, "The role of libations in Mycenaean ceremony and cult," in *Celebrations* 185-197; ID., "The Religion of Mycenaeans Twenty Four Years after the 1967 Mycenological Congress in Rome," in *Atti e Memorie del Secondo Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma-Napoli, 14-20 ottobre 1991* (1996), 599-612, especially 610-611.

44 An LM IIIC clay female figure is recorded from the large site of Kipia, in the area of the archaic and classical town of Praesos, J. WHITLEY, "From Minoans to Eteocretans: The Praesos Region," in *Post-Minoan Crete. Proceedings of the First Colloquium, London 10-11 November 1995 (British School at Athens Studies 2, 1998)* 33 n. 5. Considering the extension of this site and its apparently urban character, the existence of at least one sanctuary with clay figures with upraised arms does not come as a surprise.

45 S. WIDE, "Mykenische Götterbilder und Idole," *AM* 26 (1901) 247-257, pl. XII; F. HALBHERR, in *RendLinc* 14 (1905) 401-404; L. PERNIER, "Vestigia di una città ellenica arcaica in Creta," *Memorie R. Ist. Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere* 22 (1910) 58; G.C. GESELL, "Minoan Snake Tube: A Survey and Catalogue," *AJA* 80 (1976) 253, 258-259, figs. 19-21; D. PALERMO, "Il deposito votivo sul margine orientale della Patela di Prinias," in *ἐπὶ πόντον πλαζόμενοι. Simposio italiano di studi egei* (1999) 207-213.

46 For the site see S. HOOD, P. WARREN, G. CADOGAN, "Travels in Crete, 1962," *BSA* 59 (1964) 78. Here remains of clay figures with upraised arms and a wheel-made animal rhyton have been discovered by L. Godart and Y. Tzedakis: the date proposed for these finds is the end of the 12th century B.C., see L. GODART, this volume.

of the cult objects known from this site is the snake, which is also documented on four of the LM IIIB clay figures from Kannia,⁴⁷ a site on the Mesara plain only a few kilometers far away. Again, just as in the case of the settlements in the Lasithi district, this evidence could point to a cultural continuity and diachronical iconographic links within the same region.

A different type of cult place rather common on Crete in the LM IIIC is the *open-air sanctuary*, which is often regarded as linked to the rise of popular cults. Strikingly diverse in Crete, these cults cannot be associated with a single class of sanctuary, but rather may be grouped on the basis of the level of integration they show with the social-political system they belonged to. Of these, the one which displays somewhat unique features, for Crete and the Aegean too, is the sanctuary of Ayia Triada.⁴⁸

Re-established on an important Bronze Age site thenceforth reserved exclusively for use as a sanctuary, the open-air shrine on the *Piazzale dei sacelli* at Ayia Triada was situated in the most important area on the site which, at least as from LM I, had been the traditional centre of social, political and religious power in the settlement.⁴⁹ It is characterised by three classes of offerings: wheel-made bulls, horns of consecration and fantastic animals, all of which represent new types of clay figures and objects for Crete and are the results of somewhat complex manufacture.⁵⁰ Besides these, the cult assemblage includes: elaborately decorated composite vessels, such as an unusual type of rython, kalathoi and small TAU-type figurines from the rim of open vases;⁵¹ a half ingot of metal, now lost, which might indicate monopoly on the supply of raw materials;⁵² and the remains of large clay objects, which may possibly be interpreted as a double axe and large horns of consecration.⁵³ These two objects must have been visible to people approaching the sanctuary, possibly therefore representing cultic symbols serving a heraldic function. It follows that the open-air shrine of Ayia Triada can by no means be interpreted as expression of a popular cult. Its salient features – open-air setting, large painted figures as cult statuary, and location outside a settlement – may also be found in the open-air shrine at Amykle in Lakonia.⁵⁴ However, the parallel is rather superficial: Ayia Triada is very close to Phaistos, a central place, while in the surroundings of the site of Amyklai no major centre has been identified. Indeed, in the Lakonian shrine the emphasis on ceremonial drinking may support the interpretation proposed for it by James Wright as a main focus of regional ritual activity, shared by a number of communities scattered about the territory.⁵⁵ Moreover, at Ayia Triada neither pottery nor personal effects such as jewellery or weapons were found, and it cannot therefore be regarded as a regional gathering point where local chiefs met and displayed their wealth; nor, for that matter, does the settlement pattern known for the Mesara lend itself to an interpretation of the sort.⁵⁶

47 D. LEVI, "La villa rurale minoica di Gortina," *BdA* 44 (1959) 245, figs. 14c-d, 34; 247, fig. 36a; 249, figs. 14b, 35b. See also GESELL, *Ritual Kalathoi* (*supra* n. 32) 284.

48 A.L. D'AGATA, "The Shrines on the Piazzale dei Sacelli at Ayia Triadha. The LM IIIC and SM material: A Summary," in *Crète Mycénienne* 85-100; D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5).

49 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 228-231.

50 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 38-105.

51 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 99-105. Cf. a similar figurine from the rim of an open vase from Khania: WINBLADH (*supra* n. 16) 183 (70-TC 032) pls. 55, 79f:3, 93, 109a:14.

52 D'AGATA, (*supra* n. 5) 218 n. 606, 234.

53 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 101, 103-104, 234 (C4.5 - C4.6).

54 K. DEMAKOPOULOU, *Τό μυκηναϊκό ιερό στό Αμυκλαίο και η YE IIIΓ περίοδος στη Λακωνία* (1982).

55 WRIGHT, *The Spatial Configuration* (*supra* n. 1) 65; see also B. EDER, "Continuity and Change in Dark Age Lakonia: The case of Amyklai and Sparta," paper read at the *International Conference "Lighten our Darkness: Cultural Transformations at the Beginning of the First Millennium BC," Birmingham 9-6 January 2000*.

56 The survey of the western part of the plain, L.V. WATROUS *et al.*, "A Survey of the Western Messara Plain in Crete: Preliminary Report of the 1984, 1986 and 1987 Field Seasons," *Hesperia* 62 (1993) 191-248, has shown that there was little activity during the Dark Age, and no real dispersal of settlement accompanying the two large nucleated centres identified for LM IIIC, namely Phaistos, and a site close to the modern village of Siva: it follows that at Phaistos, a central town had emerged early in the Dark Age.

Applying Francois de Polignac's model of a sanctuary with territorial sovereignty, the cult place at Ayia Triada may be interpreted as an expression of the control exercised over the territory by the ruling power settled at Phaistos.⁵⁷ It cannot simply be interpreted as a sort of pre-packaged import from the Greek mainland, but should rather be seen in terms of the ways in which the ruling groups responsible for the new territorial plan asserted their identity. Many features combine into the formation of the cult iconography created by this new ruling class including, notably, Minoan symbols as double horns, new types of cult objects - the most striking example being the fantastic animal with human head and legs - and Mycenaean elements associated above all with warlike iconography, to be seen in the shin-guards worn by some fantastic animals.⁵⁸

As in the case of the Vronda settlement, domination by the group controlling the Ayia Triada sanctuary came to an end somewhere in the 12th century, a circumstance that must surely have had to do with the shaky political balance obtaining on the island, and in this particular case between the main centres of Mesara.⁵⁹

The many other Cretan sanctuaries located in the open air or in caves, or linked to natural features such as springs, cannot be analysed in detail here, but an aspect that needs stressing is the differences they show according to the roles played in the social-economic systems they belonged to.

The shrine areas identified in the cave of Mount Ida or on Mount Juktas⁶⁰ could belong to the Ayia Triada category given the presence of material such as clay horns of consecration (at least in the former) and fantastic animals in form of clay statues.⁶¹ Yet another category applies in the case of the open-air sanctuary at Kato Symi,⁶² where wheel-made animals and clay vessels represent the most common offerings, showing an emphasis on ritual consumption of drinking and/or food which suggests interpretation of the cult place as a gathering point for the local communities as well as the Lakonian shrine of the Amyklaion.⁶³ Judging from the absence of any architectonic structure, the cult performed under a rock shelter at Patsos,⁶⁴ in central western Crete, should correspond to a locally well-enrooted rural shrine of small dimensions. Finally, in the Lasithi district, on the northern slopes of Mount Dikti, the cult in the Psykro cave⁶⁵ included mostly the offerings of personal objects, such as fibulae, pins and rings, or razors, spear heads and knives, all found here. Considering that the organisation of the sacred area shows little structuring and that offerings other than individual are rare, it may well be supposed that these are personal dedications, and that the cult was hardly likely to have been organized by a local central authority.⁶⁶

57 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 236-237.

58 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 64-86 (see especially 66 and C2.1, C2.2, C2.4b), 235. As for the composition of the population, also in the Mesara the mixing of local and non-local groups of population should have been considerable, cf. *supra*.

59 D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 236-237.

60 For LM IIIC material from the Idean cave see J.A. SAKELLARAKIS, in *PraktArchEt* (1983) 488, pl. 278a; ID., in *Ergon* (1987) 134, fig. 167, see also ID., "The Idean Cave. Minoan and Greek Worship," *Kernos* 1 (1988) 207-214. For the sanctuary on Mount Juktas, A. KARETSOU, "The Peak sanctuary on Mount Juktas," in *Sanctuaries and Cults* 137-153; see also EAD., in *PraktArchEt* (1984) 608-609.

61 Lists of sites where the three main votive objects of open-air shrines were found are in D'AGATA (*supra* n. 5) 45 n. 29 (wheel-made bulls), 73-74 (fantastic animals), 91 n. 255 (horns of consecration). Fragments of at least three clay, wheel-made animals have been found at Knossos, in the Stratigraphical Museum Excavations and could suggest the existence of an open-air sanctuary (P.M. Warren, pers. com.).

62 A. KANTA, "Cult, Continuity and the Evidence of Pottery at the Sanctuary of Syme Viannou, Crete," in *La Transizione dal Miceneo all'Alto Arcaismo. Dal Palazzo alla Città. Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 14-19 marzo 1988* (1991) 479-505.

63 WRIGHT (*supra* n. 1, 1994) 65.

64 F. HALBHERR, "Scoperte nel santuario di Hermes Craneo," *MusItAntClass* 2 (1888) 913-916; N. KOUROU, A. KARETSOU, "Το ιερό του Ερμού Κραναίου στην Πατσό Αμαρίου," in *Sybrita. La valle di Amari tra Bronzo e Ferro* (IG XCVI, 1994), 81-164.

65 D.G. HOGARTH, "The Dictaeon Cave," *BSA* 6 (1899-1900) 92-116.

66 Cf. HOGARTH (*supra* n. 65). The sanctuary appears to have developed around a waters cult and was probably traditionally frequented by the inhabitants of the Mirabello bay settlements.

In conclusion, mention must be made of the appearance of a new phenomenon destined to last at least through to late PG and to our present knowledge attested only in western Crete, and that is the *phenomenon of the ritual pits*. On the site of Thronos/Kephala, in the valley of Amari,⁶⁷ a large number of pits have been discovered, carefully dug in the plateau of calcrete on the summit of the hill. All the pits constitute closed contexts whose chronology ranges over the period between LM IIIC and PG. Their fillings, which were clearly deposited at the same time and were not the result of gradual accumulation, consist mainly of fragmentary pottery and animal bones. They seem to correspond to a peculiar behaviour of local communities during the Dark Age, which can be explained in terms of ritual deposition of rubbish, as the remains of an activity focusing on food preparation and communal consumption.⁶⁸

3. The contextual framework of LM IIIC cult activities

We can now attempt to reconstruct the contextual framework of the Cretan sanctuaries at the end of the Bronze Age.⁶⁹

Neither a common religious pattern nor a coherent iconography are detectable in the island before LM IIIC advanced, although this could be a matter of archaeological visibility. The socio-political organisation detectable for LM IIIC advanced is that of autonomous entities, offering no evidence of subordination to a central authority. However, a kind of stratified society is to be recognised – at least on some sites – also on the basis of the cult evidence, which in cases such as Vasiliki /Kephala may be assumed as indicating the existence of a locally based central authority.⁷⁰

Leaving aside cult activity at the domestic level, at least four broad categories of sanctuaries may be recognised:

- 1) *Urban cult buildings* or complexes, controlled by local elites. Cult assemblages include elaborately made pottery and ritual objects which should correspond to elite involvement in the organisation of cult, and perhaps also to an increase in the importance of ritual specialists.
- 2) *Open-air sanctuaries* controlled by local elites. Also in this case, cult assemblages reflect elite involvement in the management of the sanctuary.
- 3) *Rural cult centres* located in open-air settings, such as Kato Symi, which seem to have acted as regional meeting points and were probably established on a basis of peer polity interaction.
- 4) *Small-scale rural shrines* set up in natural locations like Psykro, which appear to have been visited on an individual basis, and were probably detached from any significant level of social organisation.

As our knowledge of LM IIIC is still largely unsatisfactory, it remains unclear if the absence of cult buildings with large clay female figures in the Mesara reflects an ideological choice, or if it is due to a default in archaeological research.⁷¹ As a matter of fact, newly founded sites display cult buildings with clay figures, which do not represent a novelty for Crete, while old sites with strong continuity of habitation, like Phaistos and Knossos,⁷² show new cult patterns. It is also worth noting that where a sanctuary was monopolised by an elite, non-local features openly emerge, as is the case of Vasiliki/Kephala and Ayia Triada. It follows

67 On the site, HOOD, WARREN, CADOGAN (*supra* n. 46) 71-72; Sybrita (*supra* n. 64); D'AGATA (*supra* n. 7); L. ROCCHETTI, A.L. D'AGATA, "L'insediamento di Thronos/Kephala (antica Sybrita) e la Dark Age nella valle di Amari a Creta (XII-VII a.C.)," *PdP* 54 (1999) 209-228.

68 On the phenomenon of the ritual pits, A.L. D'AGATA, "Ritual and Rubbish in *Dark Age* Crete: the settlement of Thronos/Kephala and the pre-classic roots of a Greek city," *Aegean Archaeology* (forthcoming); *Ricerche* (*supra* n. 10). Similar pits have been discovered in the neighbour site of Chamalevri: see *supra* n. 10 and 16, and M. ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI, in *Minoans and Mycenaeans* 62.

69 See also the typological framework reconstructed for Late Cypriot cult places, WEBB (*supra* n. 1) 297.

70 This process, which also includes reorganisation of the religious system on a regional basis, may possibly be interpreted on the basis of chaos theory which states that, after the fall of a political system, reorganisation of the network of connections requires a period of experimentation of organisational principles before the inter-regional network can be re-established: cf. T. STONE, "The chaos of collapse: disintegration and reintegration of inter-regional systems," *Antiquity* 73 (1999) 110-118.

71 *Supra* n. 20.

72 For Knossos, *supra* n. 61.

that the ruling elite *also* had some interest in connoting themselves with elements of mainland derivation, but at the same time it remains undeniable that there was indeed a certain material culture mixing and a relative lack of clearly stressed identities, which should imply a low level of social competition.

In conclusion, even if we are to assume the arrival of groups from abroad, and mostly from the mainland during LM IIIB and early IIIC, by IIIC late opposition of an ethnic nature seems to have been superseded by the formation of an elite at the supra-local level clearly showing that it shares a common symbolic system. The cult assemblages of urban cult buildings and open-air sanctuaries controlled by elites, diverse as they may be, indicate that the ruling groups succeeded in establishing a common ideological structure, also founded on the use of common ritual objects, which constituted the material symbols of membership of this group. This flow of contacts and interest in communication is confirmed by the emphasis assigned to communal feasting, which was functional to the definition and maintenance of relationships at both the local and the regional level.

However, the essential ideological-cultural unity shown by the island in LM IIIC late, created by the ruling class that had emerged from the collapse of the previous system and so evident in the integrated cultic contexts, was indeed a short-lived phenomenon destined to peter out in a matter of decades: the strong regionalism of the Cretan Dark Age was already in the offing.

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