



THE IMPACT OF CYCLADIC SETTLERS ON EARLY MINOAN CRETE

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ABSTRACT

Substantial evidence exists for Cycladic influence in Crete during the Early Bronze Age. This evidence ranges from what must be actual Cycladic settlements on Cretan soil, as at Hagia Photia, to imported Cycladic objects, to Cretan items that have various degrees of Cycladic influence. The Cycladic presence begins in Early Minoan I, when we know both of settlements whose character is almost exclusively Cycladic and of many imports of Cycladic objects. By Early Minoan II to III, the Cycladic presence is no longer within separate settlements, but within towns which are primarily Minoan (as, for example, at Archanes where most of the Phourni cemetery is Minoan but where one section betrays a strong Cycladic presence). Cycladic traditions exerted important influences on the formative periods of Minoan culture in many areas, including artifact classes, technological knowledge, and abstract concepts.

KEYWORDS: Figurines, Chrysokamino, Hagia Photia, Koumasa, Archanes, Hagios Charalambos

INTRODUCTION

The earliest evidence for Cycladic residents in Crete begins in Early Minoan I. The best evidence comes from the cemetery at Hagia Photia, east of Siteia in northeast Crete (Davaras 1971; Day, Wilson, and Kiriati 1998). The site has so much Cycladic material that it has usually been regarded as a Cycladic colony (Doumas 1976; Branigan 1993, 35). The cemetery is extremely large. A total of 262 tombs were excavated, and additional examples had

been destroyed before the cemetery came to the attention of the Ephoreia.

Except for a few simple pits, the tombs were of a Cycladic design that consisted of an anteroom and a burial chamber. The anteroom was cut into the sterile semi-consolidated kouskouras that forms the soil at Hagia Photia, forming a circular or rectangular cavity. A doorway from the anteroom provided access to the burial chamber itself. Within the burial chamber, one or more bodies were deposited

along with the grave offerings, and the door was closed with one or more vertical slabs. The anteroom was then filled with stones, blocking it up to the surface.

The objects in the Hagia Photia cemetery included pottery, copper tools and weapons, jewelry, and a few other objects. Substantial quantities of Melian obsidian were present (for the attribution of this class of obsidian to the Cycladic island of Melos, see Cann and Dixon 1964; Renfrew, Cann, and Dixon 1965). More than 90% of the pottery consisted of Cycladic imports from the Kampos Group, a pottery phase that is transitional between Early Cycladic I and II (Warren and Hankey 1989, 22-23; Manning 1995, fig. 2; Rambach 2000, 229-247; Broodbank 2000, fig. 98). Among the Cycladic objects were pyxides, kernoi, frying pans, chalices, incised bottles, and other clay containers. Other Cycladic objects included marble bowls, copper daggers, saws, pendants, and two crucibles.

The links between Hagia Photia and the Cyclades are not only with the objects. The burial customs and the form of the graves also have northern parallels (for the tombs, see in particular the discussion of Cultraro 2000; for the burial customs at Hagia Photia, see Davaras 1971; for burial customs in the Cyclades, see Dumas 1977). These links are so close that an ethnic relationship seems highly likely. Cretan burial customs in this period always require communal graves (Branigan 1990 a; 1990 b; 1993), while the residents of Hagia Photia buried only a few individuals in any single grave. In addition, the extensive evidence for later veneration of graves (altars, platforms, offerings outside tombs) that is so prevalent at Minoan cemeteries (Branigan 1993) is completely missing from Hagia Photia. Social practices are a much better indication of ethnicity than portable goods or stylistic similarities, and burial practices are a particularly good indicator of cultural affinities. The cemetery at Hagia Photia was almost certainly a community with ethnic ties to the Cyclades.

Less than 5% of the Hagia Photia pottery was Minoan. Like the Cycladic pieces, the date is EM I-IIA. The local Minoan pieces included pattern-burnished chalices (Branigan 1970 a, 21-22; Betancourt 1985, 26-29), vases decorated with red linear designs in the Hagios Onouphrios Ware of southern Crete (Branigan 1970 a, 23-27; Betancourt 1985, 29-31; Wilson and Day 1994; Day Wilson and Kiriati 1997, 284-285), both of which are assigned to EM I, and a few vases in Fine Gray Ware, usually regarded as EM IIA (Branigan 1970 a, 29; Betancourt 1985, 40; Day, Wilson, and Kiriati 1997, 284-285).

Similar Cycladic material also comes from a few other places in northern Crete, including the harbor-town of Poros, near Knossos (for the site, see Demopoulou 1997; for the Cycladic material, see Day, Wilson, and Kiriati 1998, 138-139).

DISCUSSION

What was the motivation for this movement of population? Traditional reasons for emigration include population surplus, desire for more land, and a need for increased economic opportunities. The smaller Aegean islands have a limited land area, and it is not surprising that some of their residents would move to larger islands where more land was available. The Cycladic settlement patterns have long been recognized as characterized by sites which were inhabited for relatively short periods (see the extensive discussion in Renfrew 1972, *passim*, where this characteristic is a prime motivation in the division of the Cycladic Early Bronze Age into phases called Cultures in preference to the sequential tripartite system used in Crete). Crete, the largest of the Aegean islands, is easily accessible.

In addition to settlement, however, trade seems to have been an important factor in the relationship between Crete and the Cyclades (Broodbank 2000, fig. 98). Enough Cycladic objects exist in EM Crete to demonstrate that by the transition between EM I and EM IIA, several parts of the north coast of Crete were

in constant communication with the Aegean areas to the north. Among the most easily recognized imports are several distinctive ceramic shapes that must have been imported for different reasons. The spherical pyxis, the spool-shaped pyxis (Fig. 1, no. 1), the conical pyxis, and the small kernos are all small boxes

desirable of the commodities the Cyclades had to offer. Cretans may have imported both finished objects and the copper to make their own tools. Among the many objects made of this metal, the long dagger is particularly noteworthy (Branigan 1976, pls. 1-8). The local Minoan daggers of the Mesara are triangular

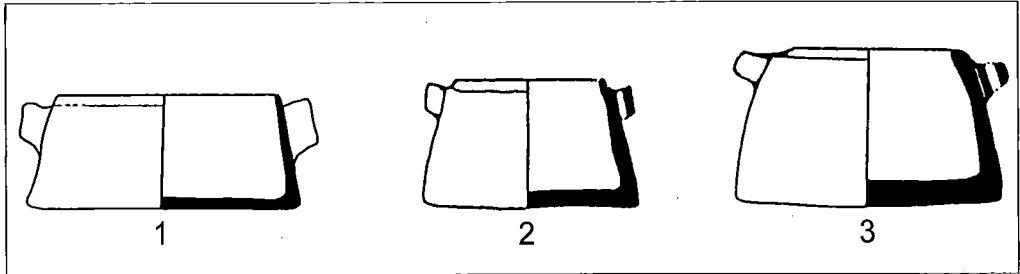


Fig. 1: Incised Cycladic vases from Hagia Photia, Crete. 1. Spool pyxis (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 2570/2571). 2. Bottle (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 2568). 3. Bottle (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 3444).

with wide mouths and tightly fitting lids. They must have been shipped as containers for something that was removed with the hand, like unguents or honey. The incised bottle (Fig. 1, nos. 2 and 3), a small shape with a constricted neck designed to accommodate a stopper, must be a container for a liquid. Its small size suggests the liquid was something precious. The chalice, on the other hand, is an open vessel. It will have been desired as a vessel, not as a container for something else. The rather wide Cretan distribution of ceramic objects in Cycladic designs (Figs. 2 and 3) indicate a lively trade pattern that was already well established at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. That many of these clay vases were also of Cycladic manufacture is shown by the fabrics, which are not of local Cretan origin (Day, Wilson, and Kiriati 1998), as well as by their distinctive Cycladic shapes. They also occur along with obsidian, which has been shown to have all come from Melos (Cann and Dixon 1964; Renfrew, Cann, and Dixon 1965).

Copper must have been one of the most

and short (Branigan 1968, 21-27). The Cycladic type, with its long blade and central midrib, is superior in many ways, both because of its length and because of the presence of a central midrib to provide stability. It first appears in Crete at Hagia Photia, at the end of EM I (Davaras 1971). By the end of the Middle Bronze Age, it is the dominant Minoan dagger (Branigan 1968, 12-20; 1976, 8-14).

Some of the ores of copper may also have been imported. The Final Neolithic to Early Minoan III smelting workshop at Chrysokamino was engaged in smelting copper ore (Betancourt et al. 1999). Although small amounts of copper are known from several locations in Crete (Branigan 1968; McGechan Liritzis 1996, 387), none of these are close to Chrysokamino. Lead isotope analysis indicates the copper prills in the slag at the site match the pattern of Lavrion and Kythnos, and either case suggests the ore was brought in to Crete from the north. Some of the slags from Chrysokamino have prills with lead isotope ratios that are like copper ores collected from Lav-

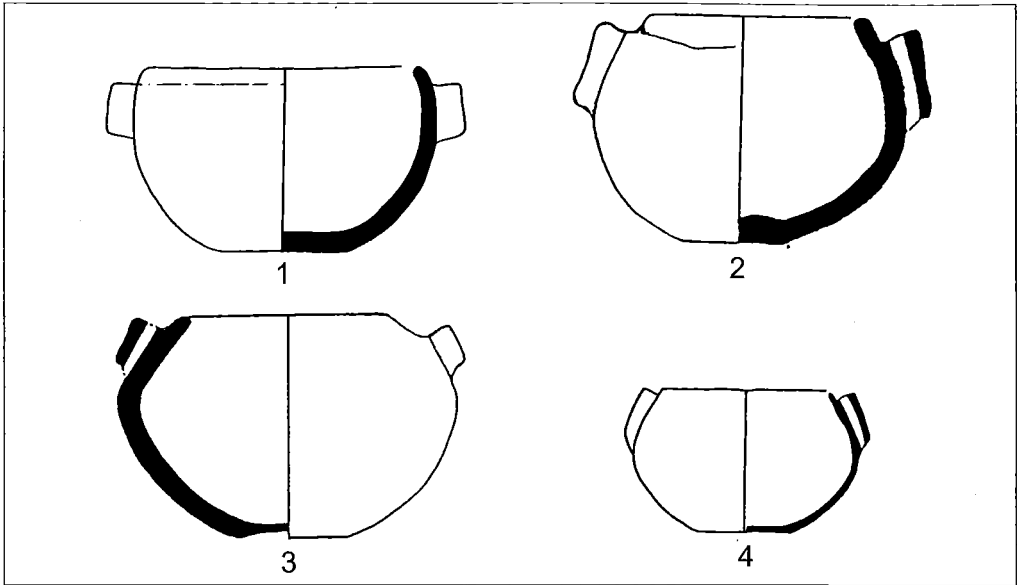


Fig. 2: Imported Cycladic spherical pyxides from Crete. 1. Hagia Photia (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 3672, unpublished). 2. Pyrgos Cave (Herakleion Museum no. 7472, Karantzali 1996, fig. 70:10). 3. Kanli Kastelli (Herakleion Museum no. 10,832, Karantzali 1996, fig. 76b:4). 4. Amnisos Cave (Herakleion Museum no. 9449, Betancourt, Marinatos, et al. 2000, fig. 13:48).

rion (for the data, see Stos-Gale *et al.* 1996); other copper prills from Chrysokamino have isotope compositions that match copper slags and ores from the Cycladic island of Kythnos (Gale *et al.* 1985; Gale and Stos-Gale 1989; Stos-Gale 1998). It cannot be a coincidence that many Cretan copper tools are also made of copper from the same places (Stos-Gale 1989, 288; 1993, 122-123).

Similar conclusions can be reached about the origins of Cretan lead and silver. The two metals are intimately related because in the Aegean during the Early Bronze Age, silver was probably mostly acquired as an integral part of the smelting of lead ores (Branigan 1976, 58). Lead isotope studies show that Aegean sources for these metals were not in Crete (Gale, Stos-Gale, and Davis 1984), so that silver objects from EM I, like a small pendant in the shape of a quadruped from Hagia Photia, must have come from the north along with the other Cycladic objects imported into this site.

The trade continues during the later periods of the Early Minoan period (Warren 1984), suggesting that Cycladic settlers were still in Crete managing the northern links, but the pattern seems to change during the middle phase of the Early Minoan period. Instead of separate Cycladic settlements, as at Hagia Photia, the pattern for EM II and EM III was for a Cycladic presence to exist within selected Minoan towns. At Archanes, for example, one part of the Phourni Cemetery yielded numerous Cycladic-style figurines (either made in the Cyclades or made in Crete but closely following Cycladic models), while other tombs are entirely Minoan in their character, as if a small Cycladic or Cycladic-influenced enclave had its own section of the local cemetery, while the other residents were buried in different tombs (Sakellarakis 1977).

What was the impact of this foreign presence on the local Minoan culture? It may have been considerable. If one compares the situa-

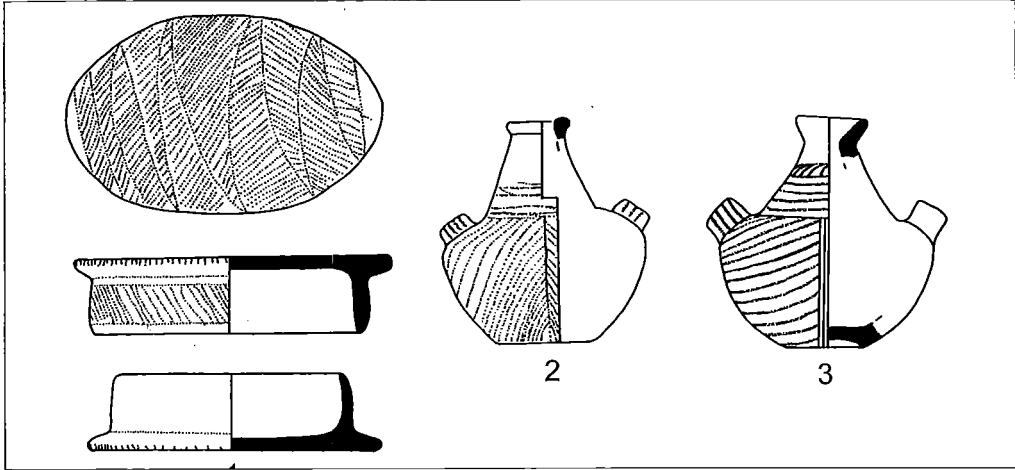


Fig. 3: Imported Cycladic conical pyxides from Crete. 1. Hagia Photia (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 3753, unpublished). 2. Pyrgos Cave (Herakleion Museum no. 7471, Karantzali 1996, fig. 70:3). 3. Kanli Kastelli (Herakleion Museum no. 10,835, Karantzali 1996, fig. 76b:1).

tion in the local Final Neolithic of Crete with the situation at the end of EM I, the differences are enormous. Foreign ideas must have played a large role in the transformation of Minoan society, awakening the desire for a whole range of new products.

In addition to the raw materials and finished products that entered Crete at this time, new ideas can be identified. Tracing the transmission of concepts is difficult because they only survive in the archaeological record as implications in the physical remains, but occasional glimpses of the process can be discerned.

The female figure, for example, plays only a small role in Cretan imagery before the Early Bronze Age (Ucko 1968; Branigan 1971, 57-58). Anthropomorphic imagery arrives in the Early Minoan I to II period at the same time as other Cycladic influences, and some of it can be clearly traced to the Cycladic culture. Among the northern images are both abstract and schematic human forms, especially of women, that represent new symbolic concepts that used the human figure as a focus for the conceptualization of abstract ideas.

Nude female figurines were an important part of the Cycladic culture during the Early

Bronze Age (Renfrew 1969). Nude figurines were present in the Cycladic Neolithic as smooth, abstract forms, and by the middle phases of the Early Bronze Age, the concept had developed into a series of established traditions with specific ways of depicting the human body, including the use of specific gestures. The repetition of the imagery of a particular stance and a specific gesture in many figures executed over a period of time must signify a specific female personage, whether she is a goddess or series of related goddesses, a human being, or an abstract symbol for a station in life, a quality, or a stage in a particular ritual. Although we cannot decipher the meaning, we can be sure that when details are represented repeatedly, a specific meaning must have existed.

The adoption of Cycladic models in Crete at a time when Cycladic colonists lived in Crete implies that the local population was aware of the meanings behind the imagery, whether the local population chose to adopt the foreign belief-system or not.

Three stages can be identified in the transmission of the Cycladic imagery of the nude female figurine to Crete.

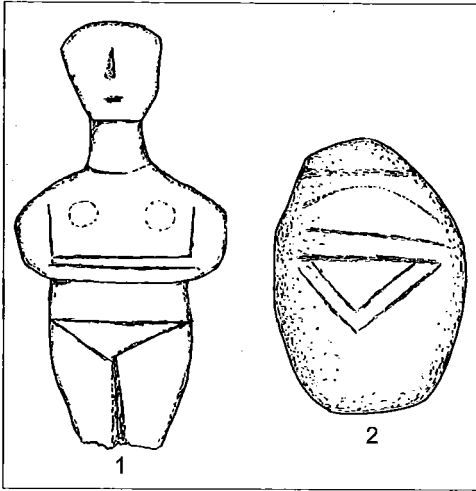


Fig. 4: Nude female figurines from Crete. 1. Koumasa Type figurine, from Koumasa (Herakleion Museum no. 123). B. Figurine from Hagios Charalambos (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 11,845).

1. Importation of actual Cycladic figurines and very close copies

Imported or closely copied Cycladic figurines occur at a number of Cretan sites. The longest series comes from Archanes, where over 25 come from the cemetery at Phourni (Sakellarakis 1977; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, I, 339349). They come from more than one Cycladic tradition (the Spedos type and the Dokathismata type), as well as from the local Cretan tradition (the Koumasa type), indicating that the Cycladic influence is not from a single source in the north.

2. Manufacture of local Minoan versions of Cycladic figurines

A group of nude female figurines from Koumasa in southern Crete is a good example of a class of figurine made in Crete but based on Cycladic models (Xanthoudides 1924, 122127, pl. 21; Renfrew 1969, Group IV, Koumasa variety; Branigan 1971, 61-63). Koumasa

figurines belong to a class of standing figures with the legs straight and with the arms folded horizontally across the body below the breasts, with a general but not exact correspondence to Cycladic predecessors. (Fig. 4)

3. Adaptations that use the Cycladic concept without copying the original form

A figure from the Lasithi Plain, in a high and mountainous part of Crete that is far removed from the northern coast, can illustrate the depth of the penetration of Cycladic ideas. The Green Goddess is a stone figurine found in a burial cave at Hagios Charalambos in Lasithi. She is an oval, polished form, incised with details that derive from Cycladic ancestors. The gesture of the folded arms, shown in horizontal lines across the body, and the incised pubic triangle show that the figure derives from Cycladic prototypes, but the material, which is a green igneous stone, and the overall form, which is much rounder and fuller than in the originals, are very different. The artist has used the Cycladic concept of a standing, nude female figure with a specific arm gesture, but has added these concepts to a different class of figurine. It is the Cycladic idea that survives rather than the artistic details.

Like the Cycladic figures and their derivatives, earlier Cretan figures (from the Neolithic) also often appear to be nude (Ucko 1968), but they do not have the same stance and gesture associated with Cycladic Folded Arm Figurines. The Cycladic women and their Cretan copies and derivations stand apart because of a specific and repeated gesture and stance. The concept of a specific stance and gesture, derived from the Cycladic cultures, allowed the Minoans to give visual expression to a particular abstract concept. That the concept could be copied either with or without its Cycladic iconography implies more than a casual borrowing of stylistic form. It shows that the Minoans were adopting a foreign concept that they could either adopt or integrate within their own belief system. These

influences seem to have arrived in Crete at a time when the Minoans were expanding their economy rapidly, and their society was undergoing substantial social changes (Renfrew 1972, Chapter 3), so that they were perhaps receptive to foreign ideas that they could use within their own cultural development.

The use of a specific gesture repeated through time, implying a specific meaning, is an abstract notion that would become part of later Minoan artistic expression. Gestures became especially important in Minoan sculptural representations beginning in Middle Minoan and continuing into the Late Bronze Age. The many later sculptures in bronze and other materials illustrate several specific stances and arm positions, including a vertical stance with arched back and one hand at the forehead, a similar stance with the hand at the mouth, a position with both hands at the chest, and others (Verlinden 1984, *passim*). Almost all of the figures from MM II and later are clothed, leaving the Early Bronze Age figures as a separate category because of their nudity, the fact that they have a vertical standing position with

the head to the front and the legs straight (though they cannot stand freely without support), and the fact that they have a clearly defined gesture with the two arms folded across the body below the breasts. The figures clearly had a meaning that was not related to Cretan Neolithic concepts.

In addition to the example illustrated here, figures copying the Cycladic stance and gesture without its iconography also exist from other sites (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, II, fig. 496), but the class did not extend past the period of strong Cycladic presence in Crete, as manifested by a trade in Cycladic products and by the presence of strong Cycladic influences. It seems highly likely that if the concept expressed by this class of figure were a native Minoan one, it would either exist before the EM I arrival of Cycladic objects or it would have persisted into a later period. Especially, the fact that it did not last into later times strongly argues for a Cycladic meaning that could only endure in Crete during the period when it was reinforced by continuing strong contacts with the Aegean islands to the north.

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