



## BETWEEN MYCENAEAN CULTURE AND MINOAN TRADITION: SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN CRETE AT THE END OF THE BRONZE AGE

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### ABSTRACT

During the Mycenaean rule of Knossos the island of Crete underwent a deep cultural change that involved every aspect of social life. After the destruction of palace of Knossos, in LM III A2, we can see a decentralization of economical and political power, previously monopolized by this centre. The new centres tried to legitimise their own power by adopting the Mycenaean burial customs. Starting from LM III C, the situation in Crete changed. Refugee-settlements were founded and new necropoleis were established. The burial ritual in some areas of the island shows a renewed link with Minoan tradition. The use of tholoi, burial caves and older buildings, the return in fashion of some methods of burial, the presence/absence of some objects amongst the burial furniture represent, chiefly in Eastern Crete, a will to continue the traditional culture, departing from the strong Mycenaean culture of the previous period and still present on the island. The presence of different rites in Crete in this period could be the sign of strong competition between the insular centres or of an attempt to affirm different cultural identities.

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**KEYWORDS:** burial customs- *tholos*- enclosure- burial caves- cremation- Minoan religion- cultural identity.

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### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to re-examine Cretan burial customs in LM III C (about 1200-1070 AC) and Subminoan (about 1070-1000 BC). Since LM III C, in fact, there was a

diversification in the funerary rituals that had assumed a strong Mycenaean connotation. After the destruction of the palace of Knossos, in LM III A2 (Driessen 1990 and 1992; Palaima 1992-1993; Olivier 1996; Popham

1997), there was a political and economical decentralization. The new centres adopted Mycenaean funerary customs which were tangible and recognizable symbols of power and wealth on an ideological plane (Perna 2001).

The emergence of an administrative centre like Chanià and of political entities that tried to create their own space of power consequently produced the assumption of features typical either of the Mycenaean élite of the island that had been destroyed, or of those still flourishing on the mainland.

This phenomenon can be seen in the areas that were previously subordinate (Chanià, Armenoi and many centres in Western Crete) or marginal – this is the case of the eastern centres whose toponyms didn't appear in the Linear B tablets (Bennet 1985 and 1987) and that seem to develop independently of Mycenaean power (MacGillivray 1997). The evidence shown by the necropolis of Armenoi and Chania, by the centre of Haghia Triada and by the monumental *tholos* of Achladia, to cite some examples, can be interpreted in view of a stronger ideological link with the Mycenaean world.

Nevertheless, during LM III A-B, Minoan tradition likewise strengthened. This happened through the re-use of Minoan tombs – this is the case of *tholoi* B and C of Archanes (Sakellarakis 1966, 1971), of the tombs of Mavro Spilio at Knossos (Forsdyke 1926-1927), of the *tholos* of Kamilari (Cucuzza 2002) and of the *tholos* of Valis (AJA 31)- in contexts where the adoption of a complex and particular ceremony such as the Mycenaean one still prevailed; through the creation of funerary architecture of Minoan type such as those of Apodoulou (Pologhiorgi 1987) and Sata (Prokopiou *et al.* 1990).

Since LM III C, when the citadels of the Mainland fell and also the whole Mycenaean palatial political system with them, Cretan society underwent a deep change that expressed itself through a new territorial,

political and economical organization. On the general plane, the whole Aegeum was involved in a process of redefinition of economical and cultural equilibrium that produced the prevalence of regional "microcosms" (Kilian 1986). Groups of different cultural and ethnic extraction kept in contact through trade or the settlement of some of them in foreign countries. We can't, in fact, exclude migration in this period, even if archaeological evidence often offers controversial data. The presence of foreign peoples in Crete in this period has often been hypothesized and it is very probable, in view of the vital commercial and cultural relations with Cyprus (Coldstream and Catling 1996; Kanta 1998; Matthaus 1998), mainland Greece and, perhaps, with the Near East (Shaw 1998), that some groups of foreigners were present on the island. We can't exclude that these relations influenced some aspects of burial customs on the island.

Nevertheless, we mustn't forget that burial customs are often the product of social strategies carried out by the groups involved in complex social, economical and political processes (Hodder 1986; Morris 1992) and that, also during Mycenaean rule on the island, some groups had interests in underlining their connections with Minoan tradition, a cultural substratum which had always been present and strengthened through the continuity of religious cults (Gesell 1980 and 1985).

## FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE

In continuity with the funerary culture of the previous period, chamber-tombs, shaft-graves, pit-caves (Archanes, Knossos, Kollyva Metochi, Festos) and hypogeous *tholoi* (Erganos, Panaghia, Arkades and Prinias) were built in the central area of the island.

Grave types peculiar to this period (*tholoi* with a square layout) or which, more or less explicitly, recalled Minoan funerary architecture had been found in some areas of Crete. They were attested, above-all, in the area

of Lasithi, in the northern part of Ierapetra isthmus and in the extreme eastern corner of the island (just one is attested in the Amari valley, in Western Crete)

In particular, the *tholoi* built on some sites - Karphi (Pendlebury et al. 1937-1938), Sidero Kephala (Taramelli 1899) and Pantanassa (Tegou 2001)- recalled the Minoan ones in their construction. These *tholoi*, of small size, were built above ground and had rather low, trilithon doorways (often less than 50 cm), which were probably not functional, such as the Minoan ones. Nevertheless, the LM III C and Subminoan *tholoi* differed from the Minoan ones in that they didn't have rules in their orientation.

A diachronic link with Minoan tombs could have been constituted by postpalatial *tholoi* of Apodoulou and Sata, which were also of small size and built above ground, following the Minoan funerary tradition typical of the nearby plain of Mesara (Kanta 1997) where some *tholoi* were reused during the neopalatial age (Drakones?, Hagia Irini, Haghia Triada B, Kamilari) and postpalatial age (Valis). A further example at the end of LM III C was of an EM *tholos*, at Valis, which was reused to bury a cremated child placed into the "kalpis" (Davaras 1973).

The sites mentioned above were far from the Mesara plain. Nevertheless, these *tholoi* were unique in Crete in this period and the architectonic conception derived from Minoan tradition.

We believe that the square enclosures around the tombs referred to the same tradition. These enclosures were in Karphi, Kavousi and Kritsa. The *tholoi* of Karphi (Ta Mnimata 1-2, 5, 7-8 and Astividero 2) were "enclosed" by walls that created distinct areas around the tombs (fig. 1).

At Kavousi Vronda, parallel to the eastern side of the tomb IV there was a wall that was probably part of a "temenos" (Coulson et al. 1983) and perhaps the structures around

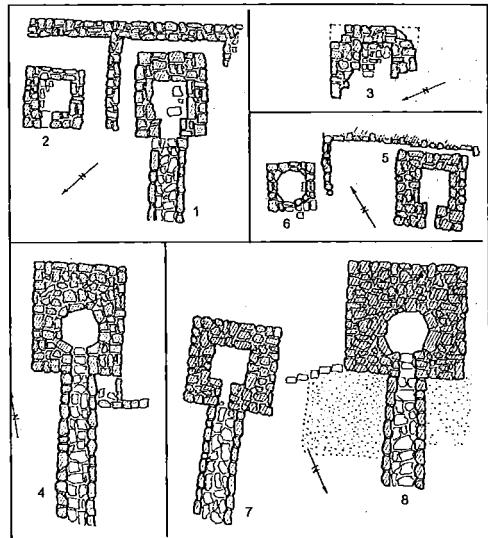


Fig. 1: The enclosed tombs of Karphi - Ta Mnimata

tomb 18 (Gesell et al. 1991) could be interpreted as annexes to the tomb. Square enclosures surrounded the *tholoi* A and B of Kritsa, even if they were described as "tumuli" (Tsipopoulou-Vagnetti 1997).

The idea of defining spaces around the tombs didn't appear in LM III A/B funerary practices, but recalled an older tradition, when the *tholoi* were connected to enclosed spaces and annexes, which were often used for graves or rituals.

There were enclosed areas around EM *tholoi* of Koumasa, Platanos (Xanthoudides 1924; Pelon 1976) and Siva (Paribeni 1913) and around MM *tholoi* of Apesokari (Pelon 1976), Kamilari (Levi 1961-1962), Archanes (Soles 1992), Porti (Xanthoudides 1924) and Vorou (Marinatos 1930-1931). An enclosed area, probably used for ritual aims, was in relation with the chamber-tombs of Mochlos (Soles 1992). A LM I enclosure, which contained a pyre, is attested in the necropolis of Smari-Livaditsa (Chatzi-Vallianou 1980).

Burials and ritual activity in the enclosed areas are also attested in the necropoleis mentioned above. In Karphi, in the necropolis

of Ta Mnimata, outside *tholos* 4, a corpse accompanied by a vase was placed in a square, paved, enclosed space between the tomb and the *dromos*. In the enclosed area of *tholos* 8 in the same necropolis there was a deposit of black earth. It was also in part of the *dromos* and under the wall of the *tholos*. There were potsherds and fragments of iron, small clay female and animal figurines and a clay altar in black earth. Some structures were in the area of the *tholos*, (some potsherds, a bulls-head and some archaic objects were found near these walls).

A corpse, accompanied by a vase and a fibula, was buried in the area of *tholos* A of Kritsa, outside the enclosure.

Drinking vases, probably used during a ritual, were found in the area in front of tomb IV of Kavousi and *tholos* A of Kritsa.

There were no such similar structures outside of Crete. The LM III A-C *tholoi* of Nichoria (Choremi 1973), in Messenia, were built above ground because of the sandy nature of the soil, but they were of Mycenaean type as shows the presence of a circular enclosure which contained a tumulus. The SM-PG *tholoi* of *çömleki* (Boysal 1967), in Anatolia, were later, although they resembled those of Karphi.

The *tholos* with a square layout is characteristic of this period. This type was present at Karphi, Mouliana (Xanthoudidhis 1904), Pefki (Nowicky 1994), Praisos (Platon 1960) and Skopi (AD 27) in LM III C and at Chamaizi (AD 27), Dreras (Van Effenterre 1948), Kavousi (Coulson *et al.* 1983; Gesell *et al.* 1991), Krya (AD 29, 31-33), Panaghia (Levi 1927-1929), Prinias (Rizza 1978) and Pantanassa in Subminoan, but they had precedents in LM II at Knossos (Royal tomb of Isopata, Evans PM IV, 1921-1935), in LM III A at Praisos (Bosanquet 1901-1902), in LM III B at Maleme (Davaras 1966) and Phylaki (AD 36) and, perhaps, in MM III at Kallergi, a place north of Kastelli Pediada (Pendlebury *et al.* 1935).

Furthermore, in Karphi, there was a mix of two different layouts which had already been experimented within burial building 19 of Archanes-Phourni (Sakellarakis 1976), in the early MM. The majority of tombs, in fact, had a square layout outside and a round inner layout.

In the necropolis of Karphi some tombs formed pairs. Two of these (Ta Mnimata 16-17) were united structurally. They were, in fact, two square rooms agglutinated. A similar

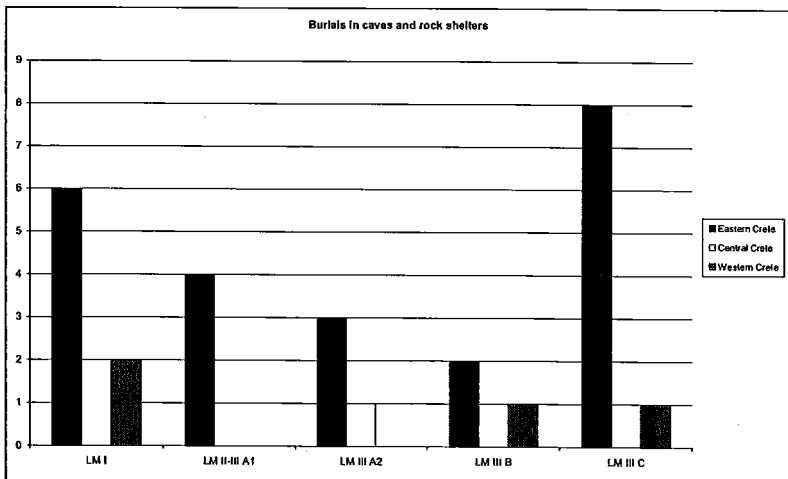


Fig. 2: Burials in caves and rock/shelters during LM

case could be that of tomb  $\delta$  at Kophinà (Levi 1927-1929), made up of two square rooms which were probably roofed. They seem to call to mind house-tombs, typical in Eastern Crete since EM (Soles 1992).

We can see a link with the Minoan past in the re-use of older buildings (houses or religious buildings) for funerary aims. In fact, we can see that in LM III B, at Gournia (Boyd 1904), a corpse in *larnax* had been inserted in a LM I house. In LM III C, at Kroussonas (AD 1985), a corpse was placed in a LM I house; in the same period, at Mallia, a Minoan building-the *Maison des mortes* (Van Effenterre 1963) - was reused for funerary aims and a corpse was placed in an MM inverted *pithos*, with only a *pyxis* as burial goods.

Another characteristic that may be found in the culture of this period is the use of caves and rock shelters as burial places (fig. 2).

Since the Neolithic, the Cretans had exploited similar places to bury their dead. This practice was very common during EM and MM until LM I (H. Nikolaos, Gournia, Mochlos, Gazi, Iraklion, Haghia Triada Chania, Pachyammos, Zou). In LM II-III A1, the only burials in caves or rock shelters were found at Roussolakkos, Sarandari, Petsofà and Plako, in the area of Palaikastro. Since LM III A2 (H. Spyridon, Pachyammos, Palaikastro, Haghia Triada) and during LM III B (Elounda, Melidoni, Pachyammos), these places were used occasionally, but they became common in LM III C (H. Spyridon, Elounda, Gournia, Kavousi, Krya, Iraklion, Piskokephalo Berati, Zakro, Mallia-H. Pelaghia).

The choice of not using caves and rock shelters as tombs between LM II and LM III A was linked to the complex ritual system that involved Cretan burial customs after the Mycenaean conquest of the island whereas, on the contrary, the return in fashion of this practice is linked to the more ample recovery of Minoan traditions (a different interpretation in Faure 1964). On the other

hand, caves had always had a sacred value in Minoan religion as the continuity of the cults which were celebrated in them shows, in spite of the changes in religious practices, during the whole LM III (Tyree 2001).

## METHODS OF BURIAL

Between the end of LM III B and SM the rite of cremation was widespread. This burial rite had already been present on the island since LM III A2, at Olous on the gulf of Mirabello (Van Effenterre 1948). Many scholars had often referred to Anatolia (Davaras 1973) as the place of origin of this rite even if cremation was generally an occasional occurrence inside the necropoleis of inhumations and inside structures typical of the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures such as the *tholoi* and chamber tombs.

Unfortunately, the majority of the cremations (that were found during excavations made in the early nineteenth century) weren't analysed adequately, the correct analysis of which could have cleared up some aspects. At Kritsa, for example, the analysis showed that a corpse had been burnt when the body was already decomposed (Tsipopoulou-Little 2001), a practice perhaps carried out in the necropoleis of the island in a previous age (Gheorgoulaki 2001).

The cremated corpses were kept inside *pyxides* (Kritsa, Praisos, Zakro Palaimylos, Atsipades), kraters (Mouliana), stirrup-jars (Pantanassa, Vrokastro IV), *amphoras* (Knossos NC t. 112, Atsipades), *pithoi* (Vrokastro Chavga, Elounda, Knosso NC t.2?, Atsipades), stone urns (Archanes Kato Lakkos) and bronze vessels (Pantanassa, Tylissos Atzoulou). Cremations were also found in shafts (Prinias tt. BA, K and 207) or placed on the floor (Vrokastro IV e V, Knossos Isopata, Knossos North Cemetery tt. 186, 200 and 201).

In these cases the cremations could have been contained in urns made of perishable material, as hypothesized by Iakovidis about

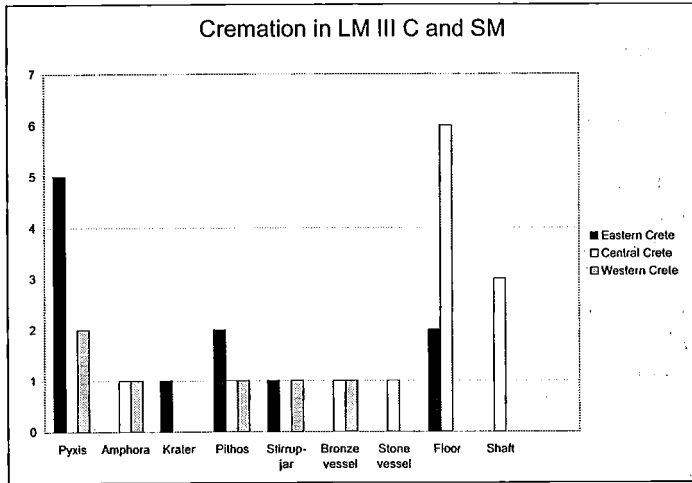


Fig. 3: Urns with burnt corpses

the cremations of Perati (Iakovidis 1970).

Therefore, there weren't any shapes that were specifically linked to cremation (fig. 3) or the sex of the dead as happened, for example, in Attica in the following period. However, a datum emerges: in Eastern Crete, apart from the cremation in the krater of Moulia (Xanthoudides 1904) and the ones of Vrokastro (Hall 1914) and Elounda, cremations were placed inside *pyxides*. The only other site where the *pyxides* were used as urns was Atsipades.

It's strange that the only two burial sites up to now found in the western part of the island, Atsipades and Pantanassa, have some features that link them to the ones in the eastern part.

As mentioned earlier, inhumation was also prevalent in this period. The inhumed corpses were placed in the *larnakes* or on the floor, but the *pithoi* were also often used as burial containers. They were placed inside *tholoi*, caves and old buildings. At Atsipades *pithoi*, as well as *pyxides* and an *amphora*, were used as urns. They were buried in the ground and surrounded by stones (Petroulakis 1915; Mavriighiannaki 1975; Agelarakis *et al.* 2001). A *pithos* buried in the ground and surrounded

by stones, but containing an inhumation, is also attested at Maroulas (AD 37).

Some burial containers were inverted. This custom is attested at some EM sites (Vorou) and MM sites (Porti, Sphoungaras, Pachyammos, Mochlos), and it is verified in LM III at Sitia (*KretChron* 11) and in LM III C at Mallia, Berati Piskokephalo (Platon 1952), Vrokastro-Chavga (Hall 1914) and in tomb AI of Prinias (Biondi 2002), the only example in which the inverted vase covered a cremation. The only inverted burial container, a *larnax*, in the neopalatial age is attested in LM III A at Palaikastro (Bosanquet-Dawkins 1923), necropolis where there was a continuity with the MM cemetery, as shows the custom of removing the jawbone from the skull during the secondary burial as happened in *larnax* 3 (Currely 1903-1904).

As respects the previous period, a new custom was to introduce the dead into the *tholoi* through the removal of the cap-stone. In this way, the *stomion* lost some of its use. A similar practice was perhaps typical in some *tholoi* of the Mesara, but the matter is controversial (Xanthoudidis 1924; Branigan 1970; Pelon 1976).

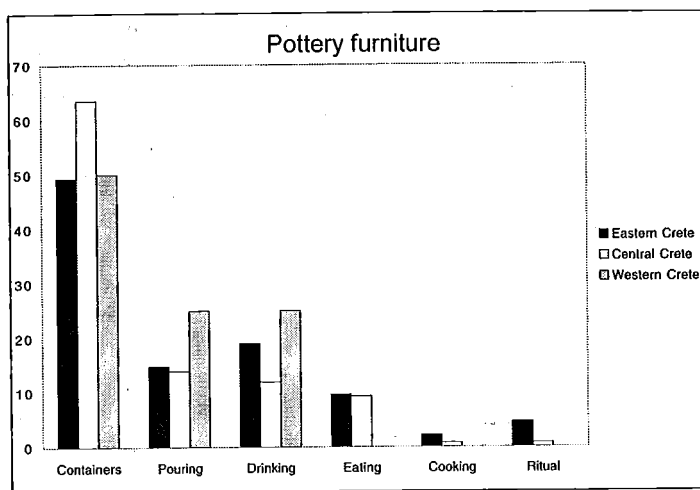


Fig. 4: Pottery furniture in the LM III/CSM tombs

**POTTERY**

The LM III/CSM pottery is homogeneous in all parts of the island. It shows continuity with earlier periods, in spite of some changes in shapes and decorative syntax (Betancourt 1985).

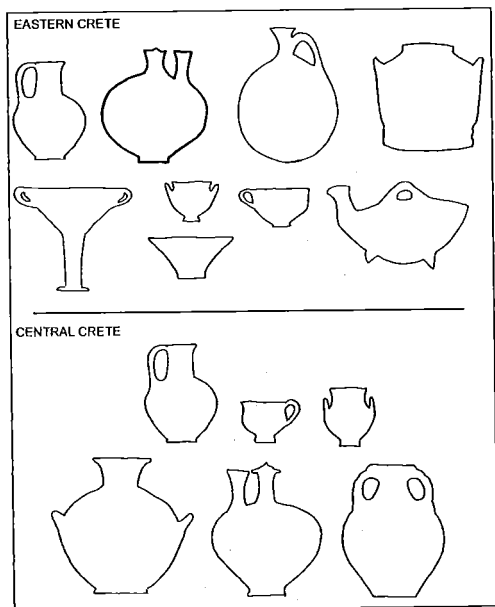


Fig. 5: More common shapes in the tombs of Eastern and Central Crete

However, some differences concern the presence/absence of some shapes in some areas or in some types of tombs and the function for which some shapes were destined (fig. 4-5).

The most widespread container vase was the stirrup-jar that was often the unique container in the tombs of eastern area. There was, instead, a conspicuous presence of three other container-shapes in the furniture of the tombs in the central area: the neck-handled amphora, the belly-handled amphora and the amphoriskos, almost absent in the tombs of the eastern part of the island.

These shapes were rather widespread in the necropoleis on the Mainland (Iakovidis 1970; Piteros 2001; Styrenius 1967).

The straight-sides pyxis, whose Minoan origin was frequently underlined (Furumark 1941; Kanta 1980; Coldstream et al. 2001), was rarely present in the central area, whereas it was rather widespread in the eastern one. It was used as a jewel-case or a burial urn. Some exemplars, like the one from Kritsa (fig. 6) and the one from Halasmenos (Coulson and Tsiopoulou 1994), were decorated with symbols linked to the Minoan religion (consecration horns, double axes, pomogranates).



Fig. 6: Straight - sides pyxis from Kritsà

The jug was the most common pouring vase in the eastern area, followed sometime by the *thelatron*, and it seemed to be complementary to the *hydria* in the central area. At the end of LM III C the *oinochoe* substituted both shapes in the central area. The *hydria* was absent in the necropoleis in the eastern area, whereas the *tankard*, which was rarely present there, was totally absent in the central area.

Drinking vases were present in 30% of the tombs in the eastern area and in 20% of the ones in the central area. The prevalent shape in Eastern Crete was the cup, but the *kylix* was also represented. The latter seemed to be the alternative to the cup. It was very rare in the tombs of Central Crete.

Eating vases, above all the bowl, were more common in the eastern necropoleis. The bowls were often associated with cups. The *kalathos* was present in the tombs of eastern area, whereas it was rather rare in the central area. This shape was often the only open vase in the tomb. It could be linked to the religious sphere (Kanta 1980), as its association with the Minoan Goddess showed- as we can also see from the Karphi and Kavousi (Gesell *et al.* 1991) examples -.

The discovery in some necropoleis of

drinking vessels outside tombs and of animal bones either in or outside them (Karphi, Vrokastro, Kavousi, Kroussonas and Prinias) lead us to suppose that following the Minoan and Mycenaean burial traditions the offer of food or drink to the dead or the celebration of funerary meals could have had an important part in burial rituals (Hamilakis 1998).

Another type of vase which was absent in the tombs of the central-occidental area was the bird-vase (Desborough 1972). This shape (fig. 7) was common in the necropoleis of Eastern Crete (but it wasn't at Mouliana and Myrsini). Bird vases, which were in any case typologically different, were part of the grave goods of some Minoan *tholoi* (Koumasa, Platanos) and, therefore, it is possible that the importance of the symbolic value of this vase was continuous.

The bird is an animal which has been traditionally linked to the Minoan religion (Nillsson 1950). It was represented by clay figurines or with the Goddess with the up-raised hands, at Gazi and at Karphi, or with the most important symbols of the Minoan religion - for example the objects of the "Dove Goddess" shrine at Knossos (Evans 1921-1935) and the bronze lamina from Psycro's cave (Boardman 1961)-. Perhaps, the shape of bird vase could have favoured a ritual use of it.

Some objects which were probably linked to the religious sphere came from the *tholoi* of Karphi. There were some clay figurines and

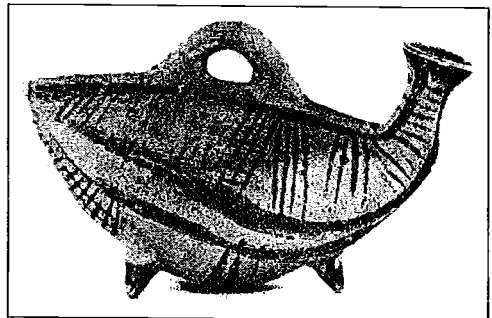


Fig. 7: Bird vase



altars (or stands), found either inside or outside *tholoi*. An altar, that seems to be a simplification of the model in the temple of Kaphi with two consecration horns and birds, was found in *tholos* 8. They recall the MM models from the palace of Knossos (Loom-weight Room, Evans 1921-1935). Similar altars/stands were found at Kavousi (Gesell *et al.* 1991), and Vasilikis (Eliopoulos 1998), Kato Syme (Kanta 1991).

In Kaphi, clay figurines and altars were only found in the *tholoi* surrounded by enclosures. These tombs were the only ones in this period in Crete to contain similar objects. The vases with a human head, which were found in tomb 11 of Kaphi and in tomb XI of Kavousi (Coulson *et al.* 1991), perhaps, had ritual value too.

Despite the partiality of the data, the necropoleis of eastern part of the island seem to be characterized by a greater complexity of the burial ceremony.

## WEAPONS

The weapons are the objects that, perhaps, more than others indicate the *status* of the dead. A sword, for example, could be the symbol of military activity carried out by the dead person during his life, but it also indicated his social position. The ownership of the sword, in fact, implied economical means and a definite position in the social body. Weapons, which had been so common previously, were rather rare in LM III C tombs but more numerous, even if not always present, in the Subminoan. In LM III C the swords were only present at Knossos, Mouliaana and Myrsini (BCH 1984), whereas in the successive period they were also present at Prinias (Rizza 1996) and Kavousi (Gesell *et al.* 1983). The swords were associated with the spear-heads, but never with the dirks that, therefore, were an alternative to the sword or not linked to military activity. Spears, which were very offensive weapons, were more

widespread. They were found at Mouliaana, Myrsini and Knossos (Coldstream and Catling 1996) in LM III C and at Vrokastro, Archanes (Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1990), Knossos, Prinias, Tyliossos (Marinatos 1931) and Pantanassa (outside tomb) in SM. The tombs of Mouliaana and Myrsini and tombs 186 and 200 of the North Cemetery in Knossos could be interpreted as "warrior-graves", due to the presence of a panoply.

The warrior-graves were, chamber tombs, shaft-graves and pit-caves, with the exception of the *tholos* of Mouliaana.

Therefore, apart from the ones of Mouliaana and Myrsini, the tombs of the Eastern part of the island didn't contain weapons before the SM.

The absence of weapons in the tombs could have been caused by a social and political change that didn't make the representation of the status of a warrior necessary, typical of Mycenaean palatial society (Matthäus 1980) and assumed by some centres of the island until LM III B. The few examples of "warrior graves" which were attested in this period could be connected with groups on the island still linked to the Mycenaean ideology or connected to a military activity (on the military use of later swords see Sandars 1963 and Kilian Dirlmeier 1993). Links with Cypriot burial customs had been also underlined (Coldstream-Catling 1996).

## PERSONAL OBJECTS

There were fibulae, finger-rings and spindle-whorls among the more common personal ornaments (fig. 8). They were present in the majority of the *tholoi* in Eastern Crete and in almost all the chamber tombs and pit-caves in Central Crete.

In the eastern necropoleis there was a higher percentage of gold objects, above all gold rings. These objects were often associated with seals that, no longer used in an administrative and palatial context, were

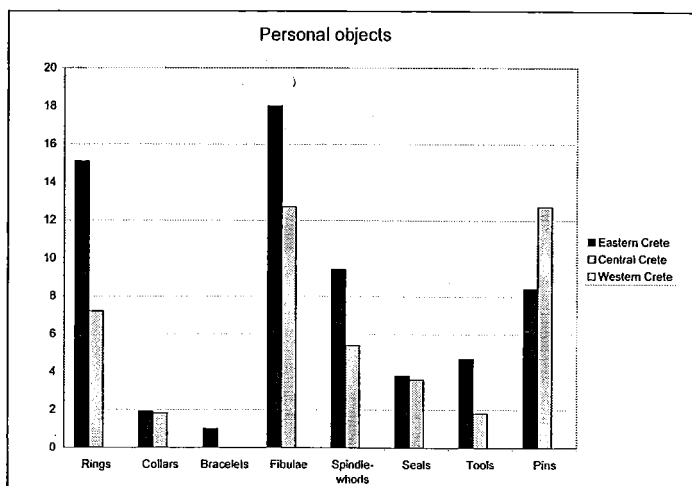


Fig. 8: Personal objects in the LM III C/SM tombs

probably used as ornaments (Younger 1977). The spindle-whorl was also probably used as an ornament. Fibulae were quite common. They were alternatives to pins. Evidently the two objects were worn with different types of clothes. The pins, however, were more common in the eastern part of the island.

Some ivory objects were found at Praisòs (a handle of a dirk), at Mouliana (fragments) and in tomb 200 of North Cemetery at Knossos (comb). The comb was an object which was often present in the tombs with furniture of Mycenaean type.

Obsidian blades were found in a tomb at Vrokastro. Similar objects were often present in Minoan tombs.

## DISCUSSION - CONCLUSIONS

It's very difficult to split the cultural components belonging to the Mycenaean or Minoan traditions, considering the degree of syncretism achieved by the two cultures. Nevertheless, in a very complex period like the end of the Bronze Age it is, perhaps, helpful to underline every element of idiosyncrasy to be able to understand the social dynamics produced by the historical processes. The analysis made about the LM III C/SM

necropoleis had individualized some peculiar features of Cretan culture in this period with the aim of interpreting them by comparison with the strong Mycenaean culture of the previous period still present on the island. Examples of a link with Minoan tradition don't lack on the island during the whole LM III. Nevertheless, we have focalized our attention on Eastern Crete because the presence of Minoan features was more conspicuous there.

Above all, the *tholos* was preferred in the eastern area of the island. On two sites it was built above ground, in following with Minoan tradition. The element of continuity between these late *tholoi* and those Minoan could be represented by the *tholoi* of Apodoulou and Sata that could have also influenced the building of the *tholos* of Pantanassa, in the Amari valley, and by the continuous use to which some Minoan tombs were submitted, such as the *tholos* of Kamilarì, used until LM III A2, and the one of Valis, used until SM.

Many *tholoi* in the eastern part had a square layout and rather low, trilithon doorways, even when they were hypogeous. The corpses were often introduced into them through the removal of the cap-stone. All these

features were typical of insular tradition and not connected to the Mycenaean one. Some centres adopted *tholoi* with elements that were typically Minoan such as enclosures. Added to this, in Eastern Crete, we have the presence of burials in rock shelters and caves and in old Minoan buildings, and the use of inverted burial containers, which all recall Minoan burial customs.

On the contrary, in the central part of the island the most common funerary architecture continued to be Mycenaean chamber tombs, pit-caves and shaft-graves.

The peculiarity of the choice carried out in the funerary sphere by the people on the island assumes yet more importance if we think of the Aegean where, to sum up, the burial tradition remained the Mycenaean one and where the *tholoi* only remained in fashion in peripheral areas (Belli 1991).

The use of *pyxides* as urns indicate another demarcation with the central area where, in line with what happened on mainland Greece, cremations were mostly placed on the floor or inside clay or bronze vases, but never inside *pyxides* (and this is also true for the cremations of Pantanassa).

The presence of different shapes in the two areas was the sign of different burial rituals. The vases with human head, bird-vases and clay female and animal figurines were only placed in the tombs of the eastern necropoleis and principally in the *tholoi*. The presence of objects evidently linked to the religious sphere in these tombs could be the sign of a strong link between the religious and funerary spheres which was wanted perhaps, at the moment of death, by the social groups involved.

A more complex burial ceremony, the presence of more drinking and eating vases (the *kylikes* were probably linked to the ritual activity, Hallager 1997) and of the *kalathos* in the tombs of the eastern area were, perhaps, due to the same need.

The scanty presence of weapons in the tombs, in our opinion, was linked to the indifference by the people to represent themselves during the funeral like powerful warriors, according to Mycenaean custom. Whereas, the "warrior graves" above mentioned could be the expression of a link which was still strong with Mycenaean burial ideology. The concentration of these graves in the areas previously influenced by Mycenaean culture could be interpreted as a sign of cultural continuity. Perhaps, it isn't by chance that the tombs of Mouliana and Myrsini, the only graves of Mycenaean type in the eastern part of the island, were in the area where buildings of Mycenaean type such as the *tholos* of Achladia (Belli 1995) were attested in the previous period.

As mentioned above, there weren't substantial differences in the material culture in the various parts of the island and different burial rites coexisted on many sites. It seems that there is a communal cultural background (this supposes a remarkable cultural fluidity in Cretan centres) inside of which some groups aimed to differ from each other.

If these hypotheses are right, the question is why these groups choose to differ from each other. A look at the settlement patterns of the island in this period is sufficient to realise that the end of the Bronze Age coincided with a crisis of the Mycenaean political and economical system. The abandoning of many sites and the birth of the refuge-settlements (Nowicky 2000) was perhaps the macroscopic sign of a territorial reorganization and of an attempt to control the productive areas and to create a new equilibrium on the island. Many refuge-settlements arose nearby MM shrines (Kavousi, Kophina, Korifi, Karfi, Vorizi) or along roads connecting the most important cult places. This re-occupation could be by chance. Nevertheless we can't exclude that in the choice of a settlement, the vicinity of a cult place played a role.

Some zones could have had a particular role in controlling the routes of communication for commercial reasons and probably also had interests in the management of relations between important sanctuaries (Kanta 1994).

The religious sphere also seems to be characterized by the presence of different features (D'Agata 2001). In the central part of the island, the traditional cult was put side by side with cults of alien origin- for example at Prinias (Palermo 1999), perhaps, two cults coexisted; at Haghia Triada fantastic animals were introduced together with Minoan and Mycenaean bulls (D'Agata 1997); at Gortyna female figurines of Mycenaean type coexisted with Minoan figurative elements (Rizza-Scrinarì 1968). In many centres in Eastern Crete, at Gazi, Gournia, Kavousi, Karphi, Kephala Vasiliki, Kalamafki and Halasmenos the prevalent cult was, instead, the one of the Minoan Goddess, represented by the statues with up-raised arms. The only site in the Mesara where this goddess was worshipped was Kannia (Levi 1959).

The main sacred caves on the island also continued to play an important role in Cretan religion at the end of the Bronze Age, to testimony the continuity of cult through the centuries.

The sites where the necropoleis with tombs with Minoan characteristics were found correspond with settlements that, because of their nature, were probably interested in the control of the surrounding territory and its economical resources and, perhaps, they were a point of reference for the nearby settlements that were less protected. Karphi dominated the whole plateau of Lasithi and the routes of communication towards the south, from its position; Kavousi was in a favourable position to control the roads that connected the Ierapetra plain and the Siteia area; the settlement relative to the *tholoi* of Kritsa could have controlled an arable plain.

On the rest of the island, centres such as Knossos, Prinias, Sybrita and Festos controlled the main sea and land routes of communication of the island. Therefore, we can't exclude the existence of a strong competition between centres (and perhaps amongst some groups inside them) to control some territories better by exploiting the natural barriers provided by the island or to defend themselves from internal enemies (Godart 1986). If this historical picture is exact, so the recovery of some Minoan traditional elements, supported by a strong Minoan connotation of the cult, could be functional to the definition of a cultural identity to differ and characterize a group.

If this cultural operation really took place, it would have been run by the elites.

However, we must note that the wealthier graves were the *tholoi* in the eastern part and the tombs of Mycenaean type in the central part (chamber-tombs, pit-caves and shaft-graves). They could have been chosen by groups that followed different traditions. We can't exclude, however, that burials in caves and rock-shelters were a custom or a tradition which had nothing to do with the élites.

The presence of foreign people on the island as has been hypothesized many times, or of groups that explicitly recalled the Mycenaean burial culture, such as the people buried at Moulia and Myrsini, could have contributed in making this phenomenon acute.

The Minoan tradition coexisted with cultural influences that came from foreign countries in a cultural syncretism that, objectively, had been characteristic of the island since the age of the Mycenaean rule of Knossos.

Also the rite of cremation, even if it had been effectively introduced from outside, became incorporated inside local cultural tradition.

Nevertheless, the eastern area of the island

which before had been marginal as regards Mycenaean Knossos and which will be later the seat of the Eteocretans, seems to be more conservative. In reality, if the hypothesis previously made is true, the recovery of the Minoan tradition wasn't the fruit of conservatism or of isolation, but was due to a wider cultural operation. The centres of the eastern area, in fact, were inserted into the circuit of Aegean trade, they exchanged goods

and ideas with the Mainland, Cyprus, the island of Dodecanese. Moreover, the presence of a communal material culture also confirms that there were relations between the various centres of the island.

Nevertheless, some groups could have chosen to use older cultural elements in an attempt to affirm their cultural identity in this way, as in the wild country East of Dikte, which is still so mysterious today.

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