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Florence Gaignerot-Driessen

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From Communal Incorporated Shrines to Public Independent Sanctuaries in LM III Crete

AFTER THE COLLAPSE of the Palace of Knossos and the consecutive disappearance of a centrally-administered state religion, small cult places containing terracotta figures dubbed *Goddesses with Upraised Arms* from their distinctive gesture appear on Crete. They form part of ritual sets also including plaques, snake tubes, and kalathoi, often all made in the same clay. Such assemblages have been encountered on display on or evidently fallen from a bench in a number of independent architectural structures which have, for this reason, been labeled *bench sanctuaries*. But elements belonging to the equipment accompanying the Goddesses with Upraised Arms were also recovered on Crete in LM III cultic contexts where the figure itself was lacking¹.

In the present paper, I will first consider these cult assemblages without goddesses and the buildings from which they were recovered. From this examination I will suggest a changing dynamics in the use of cult spaces between LM III A-B and LM IIIC. Finally both the function and the identity of the feminine figure represented will be questioned.

The most recently excavated example comes from *Sissi*². On the summit of the hill, a large complex was constructed during LM III on top of earlier Neopalatial and Protopalatial remains (**fig. 1**). In the very core of this building is a small,

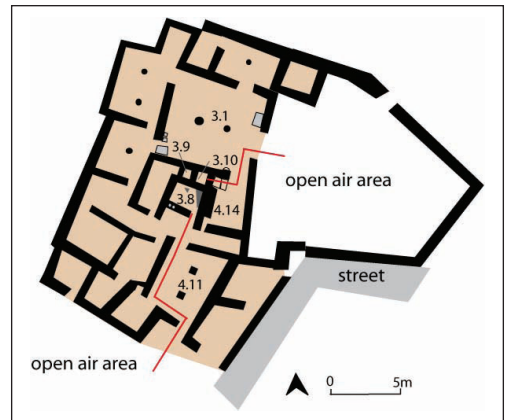


Fig. 1.
Plan of the Building
on the Summit at Sissi
in LM IIIB
(drawing by author).

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2. Gaignerot-Driessen 2011.

Fig. 2.
LM IIIB floor deposit
in Room 3.8
in the Building
on the Summit at Sissi
(photo by author).



Fig. 3.
LM IIIB floor deposit
in Room 3.8
in the Building
on the Summit at Sissi
(drawing by author).



rectangular Room 3.8 which we excavated in 2009. Along the north wall sits a triangular stone with a polished flat surface (**figs. 2-3**). In the narrow space between this stone and the wall were standing three kalathoi, while two other similar kalathoi were found to the west in front of the triangular stone. One of these most likely fell from the mouth of a snake tube found immediately west of it. Fragments of a sixth kalathos were found one meter further to the south. Another tubular stand, without handles but with three pairs of small horns of consecration

around its mouth, was recovered slightly further to the south, with next to it a worked deer antler tine. To the east of the triangular stone were lying a handle of what may have been a lamp or a brazier, a large triton shell, and an inverted tall conical cup (**fig. 3**). More to the south were found other vases and a fragment of another triton shell. Against the east wall runs a low bench in an oblique way. In the southwest corner of the room was a rectangular stone with two circular depressions and, in front of it, the bases of two conical cups and four lithic tools. Fragments of bone and shell were found scattered around it and may suggest that the stone tools served to crush certain substances in the depressions. On the basis of the nature, the association and the display of finds, it can be reasonably suggested that Room 3.8 represents a space specially designed to accommodate

ritual activities connected to a cult and may therefore be called a shrine. I prefer avoiding the label *domestic shrine* that creates confusion between architectural (domestic/religious) and social (private/communal/public) levels³. I would rather call Room 3.8 an incorporated shrine. And since this specific space forms part of a larger building complex with activities exceeding the frame of the household, in particular in the nearby spacious and monumental Hall 3.1, which allowed the gathering of at least three dozen of people, I would call it a communal incorporated shrine (**fig. 1**). The shrine opens to the south to a large room (4.11) with two square stone pillars and a central hearth, where a snake tube was also recovered. Two steps and a platform, giving access to Space 3.10, opened on Room 3.1 and its open air area.

Another example of such an incorporated communal shrine can be identified in *Quartier Nu*, a LM IIIA-B residential complex at Malia (**fig. 4**)⁴. In the small, square Room X2, was found a snake tube next to a slab in the south-east corner, as fallen from it, with nearby a brazier and a stone vase (**fig. 5**). More to the north were found a conical cup, a miniature vase, a pyxis and a kalathos whereas a second snake tube was standing against the east wall. The main entrance to the complex was from the east where a small porch with pillars gives access to the Main Hall X22 which has a central hearth between two column bases. In this hall too, at least two dozen people could potentially gather. To reach the shrine X2, one had to pass two spaces with industrial functions. It is not clear if Room X2 had a window on the central court in the north part of its west wall. If so, the shrine in X2 may be brought into connection with the pebble mosaic on which a large house model was found. From Room X2, it was also possible to reach the open-air space XII2.



Fig. 4.
Plan of Quartier Nu
at Malia in LM IIIB
(drawing by author).

3. For a discussion on *domestic shrines*, see Hallager 2009.

4. Driessen and Farnoux 1994.

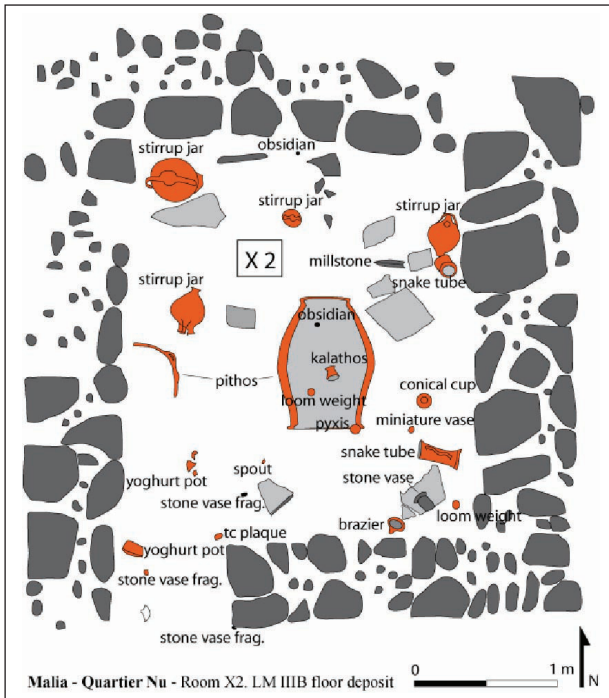


Fig. 5.
LM III B floor deposit
in Room X2
in Quartier Nu
at Malia
(drawing by author).

at least occasionally used for dining, while food processing went on in Room 12.

At Kommos again, in the small *Room X7* in *House X* a table was recovered with on it two milk jugs, a conical cup containing pebbles and a few shells, while two kalathoi, one of them full of ash, were tucked under the table. In front of it was lying a small slab with traces of ash and evidence of burning and next to it a scatter of pebbles and a triton shell⁷. To the north were found a brazier and an incense burner.

No snake tube was apparently found but one can note the similarities with the context in Room 4 in the *House with the Snake Tube* or in a small room in a LM III B house at *Katsamba* where two nearly identical red-painted snake tubes made in the same clay were lying in front of a stone platform under which was found an incense burner, a pyxis and two handleless cups⁸. Ash was found nearby. From the street, the house may have been accessible from somewhere to the south where a storage room was excavated.

At *Koumasa* too was found a room from which two snake tubes dating to

I do not have time here to discuss in detail all the other examples but most of them are already known and mentioned in Geraldine Gesell's book⁵. *Room 4* in the *House with the Snake Tube* at *Kommos* for instance has a cultic context with a snake tube decorated with birds standing on a slab and supporting a conical cup containing pebbles⁶. It is true that no other cultic material was recovered but the fixed installations as well as the variety and the arrangement of the material indicate that these objects were specially deposited, as convincingly shown by John McEnroe, and not only stored in Room 4, where no cooking was done. The room opens up on a large open-air area to the south. The material from the adjacent Room 6 illustrates that the room was at

5. Gesell 1985, 47.

6. McEnroe 1996 and Shaw 1996.

7. Shaw 1993.

8. Αλεξίου 1955.

LM IIIB were recovered and Xanthoudides reports that the room was included into a larger complex⁹.

The presence in a LM IIIA2 complex at *Kephali Chondrou* of various cult objects including a snake tube, a triton shell, cups, offering table legs, figurine head, and rhyta as well as their distribution in three adjacent but not communicating areas makes it very plausible that a shrine was located on an upper floor above Space N1¹⁰. The building housed activities exceeding the frame of the household and some of its rooms only communicated with the exterior. The alleged shrine above space N1 could have been reached through the paved corridors and from an open-air space to the North.

Room 1 in *Building 7* at *Palaikastro* also contained a cultic context with a tubular stand and a platform¹¹. The building was flanked to the southwest by a street but no doorway seems to have existed in this façade. Rooms 2, 12 and 5 preserved ample evidence for storage and a public function is suggested for Room 14.

All these examples comprise some common characteristics. They all represent shrines incorporated in buildings with communal functions that are dated to LM IIIA-B and a number of them were found in coastal sites. They are mostly formed by rather small and more or less square rooms. Even if some of these rooms were visible from the outside, this does not mean that the access to the shrine was uncontrolled. On the contrary, it seems that sometimes efforts were made to make access deliberately complicated, forcing the visitor to follow a narrow street or corridor. If the small dimensions of the shrines also imply restricted or controlled access, exterior spaces or larger rooms are always located nearby, allowing more public performances and processions. But the most obvious feature that these shrines have in common is the fact that they all lack figures with upraised arms, as well as plaques. Some may argue that the figures were removed before the sites were abandoned or destroyed. But these figures usually appear in groups, either within LM III shrines or as fragments scattered or deposited in their immediate vicinity: hence, at least 4 figures were found at Kannia-Mitropolis; 5 at Gazi; at least 6 in a deposit east of Temple A at Prinias; at least 30 in and around Building G at Vronda; at least 5 at Kephala Vasilikis; more than 5 in the Temple at Karphi and probably 16 in the cult building at Chalasmeno. It is thus very striking that not a single fragment such as a finger

9. Ξανθουδίδης 1906.

10. Πλάτων 1959. Platon 1997.

11. MacGillivray, Sackett, Driessen and Hemingway 1991.

or a piece of a tiara was found within or in the immediate vicinity of the shrines considered in this paper. This remark particularly applies for the recently and intensively excavated sites. Thus it appears that a series of shrines existed on LM IIIA-B Crete which contained elements belonging to the equipment of the GUA but which clearly did not comprise any of these figures.

Since the shrines where their presence is attested all date to the mature LM IIIB or LM IIIC period, we may suggest that these figures, together with the plaques, were a relative late addition to an existing cult and its equipment. One may object that a figure already formed the focus of the cult in the LM IIIA2-B Shrine of the Double Axes at Knossos. But the later figures differ from her in many aspects, both contextually and iconographically and may have a completely different meaning and function. We can then propose the following evolution: in LM IIIA-B, shrines formed part of communal buildings. They contained especially snake tubes and kalathoi, triton shells, lamps and braziers which were deposited on slabs and platforms. In LM IIIB-C, shrines were free-standing bench sanctuaries, containing figures with upraised arms with their respective sets of snake tubes, plaques and kalathoi. What could be the meaning of this development?

Considering the cult material from Vronda, Anna-Lucia D'Agata has proposed to see each ritual set as a dedication from one group in the community or from a regional group of sites¹². Metaxia Tsipopoulou has recently suggested a similar hypothesis for the different sets found in the LM IIIC shrine at Chalasmeno¹³: they would constitute votive offerings from different clans in a context of regional competition. These observations make it tempting to see the figures as a symbolic representation of the votaries themselves and not as cult images. The individual statues may be considered as emblematic for a votive group. In this regard, their distinctive attributes may be considered as a symbol of the group rather than a reference to a specific deity, different deities or a separate aspect of a deity, as has usually been suggested. This hypothesis is corroborated by the architectural context and the settlement structure: if the figures were indeed offerings representing votaries, it is not surprising to encounter this type of object solely in public buildings shared by different worshippers who used the figures to signal their identities. In instances where the identity of the votaries was obvious, as in the case of the earlier LM IIIA-B incorporated shrines, the so-called GUAs would simply not be needed. This hypothesis does not necessarily

12. D'Agata 2001.

13. Tsipopoulou 2009.

imply that these figures were images of the votaries. Indeed even if the figures were probably not cult images, it cannot be conclusively shown that they were not votives representing deities. But the crucial problem is perhaps not to know who precisely they are a representation of but what they are representative of. In a context of interconnection and competition, a clear identification of the votary may have been more important than that of the specific divinity. Metaxia Tsipopoulou suggests in particular that the pithoi recovered in the shrine of Chalasmeno were offered by different social groups who dedicated the figures and their usual sets¹⁴. Clearly here the Votives with Upraised Arms were involved in a strategy of ritualization strongly connected to social, economic, political and cultural interests. At the same time, a link with the wider population was created by the organization of public processions, as clearly illustrated at Chalasmeno where paved roads lead from the different building complexes to the shrine surrounded by large open areas. The same can be observed at Vronda where the shrine, also located at the edge of the settlement, faces a broad terrace allowing large gatherings¹⁵.

The LM IIIC and remote site of Karphi illustrates, however, an interesting case in the here proposed evolutionary process¹⁶. Small Room 58 in the large and complex Priest's House contains material and architectural elements which allow it to be identified as a communal incorporated shrine without figures. The number of sanctuaries and the variety of contemporaneous cults recorded at Karphi seem moreover to indicate that there was no single cult place and hence no centralized cult and therefore perhaps no central ruling organization. Still, all the Karphi shrines were reachable from streets and had thus an access to the Temple, where Figures with Upraised Arms were recovered. The Temple thus appears as a public place, where the offering of votives with upraised arms standardized or perhaps institutionalized an internal competition.

To conclude, it seems that after the collapse of the palatial system, a cult hosted in incorporated shrines was used to centralize members of local groups that constituted the new communal organization. When these groups were progressively integrated into larger collectives, in newly established sites, the shrine became externalized and the cult was modified to include female figures,

14. Tsipopoulou 2009.

15. Preston Day, Klein and Turner 2009.

16. Pendlebury, Pendlebury and Money-Coutts 1937-1938.

representative of the different coalescent groups. The next decisive step would happen with the appearance of the Greek city-state and the introduction of the hearth temple, in the eighth century BC, as attested for instance at Dreros. It remains to determine whether a continuous evolution can be demonstrated linking the LM IIIC bench sanctuary to the hearth temple of the Cretan polis. In this regard, most can be hoped from the work recently resumed at Dreros and its territory.

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