

C. PASCHALIDIS, *The LM III Cemetery at Tourloti, Siteia. The 'Xanthoudidis Master' and the Octopus Style in East Crete*, with a contribution by P. J. P. McGeorge. BAR Int. Ser. 1917, Oxford 2009. ISBN 978 4073 04007, pp. 1-59, pls. 4, figs. 100.

The title of the volume by Constantinos Paschalidis (henceforward P.) refers to an important necropolis of the LM III period in Eastern Crete, Tourloti, identified by Richard Seager in 1900, and to one of the most significant ceramic productions – the stirrup jars decorated in the so called Octopus Style – found on Crete at the end of the Late Bronze Age. A knowledgeable reader would thus expect to find here at last the definitive publication of the Tourloti tombs, relating to the settlement situated on the slopes above Mochlos, active from the 15th to the 12th century BC, and also a comprehensive, even if not innovative, analysis of one of the major stylistic and commercial phenomena from the end of the Cretan Bronze Age.

Small, fine-ware stirrup jars decorated with an octopus appear for the first time at Chania in the 13th century BC, and, by the end of the 12th century BC, thanks to the widespread circulation of Cretan vases and a series of local productions, they had become the most popular vase in grave goods throughout continental Greece and the Aegean as whole (Tzedakis 1969; Kanta 1980; Betancourt 1985, 183-185; MacDonald 1986; Benzi 1992; Mountjoy 1999; Tsipopoulou and Little 2001; Vlachopoulos 2006). As far as Crete is concerned, in LM IIIC the production of stirrup jars decorated with an octopus seems to be concentrated in the eastern regions of the island. Thus far, everyone is in agreement. But there is still no corpus of the Cretan stirrup jars on which this peculiar decoration was applied. They have not been ordered typologically, whether according to profile or decoration, and attributed to typological-regional families, nor have they been assigned – on archaeometric grounds – to specific production centres, with the identification of a main production centre or regional variants. Nor, again, has a network of connections been reconstructed in detail, showing the corresponding exchange of associated goods, primarily between production centres and sites on the island in which the vases circulated. In fact this is a subject which is still to be explored in detail, and one which is of crucial complexity for the reconstruction of the Cretan economy and intra-island patterns of exchange at the end of the Bronze Age.

In spite of the title, the volume in question does not deal with any of these topics. In just 33 pages of text distributed in two chapters, P. presents some of the material found in two tombs, together with a small group of vases from Tourloti acquired by the Museum of Siteia. He then assigns one of the latter vases, decorated in Octopus Style, to the workshop of a craftsman he calls the Xanthoudidis master. The volume also features 10 pages of bibliography, summaries in Greek and Italian, 4 colour plates and 100 figures, and ends with a chapter of physical anthropology contributed by Tina MacGeorge.

Chapter 1 (*The LM III Cemetery at Tourloti, Siteia*) presents the materials from the two tombs and the group of vases from Tourloti. Only two of the vases from a chamber tomb excavated by Metaxia Tsipopoulou are published, because the rest of the material yielded by that excavation was dispersed. They are dated to different phases of LM IIIA. From a tomb excavated by Papadakis at Plakalona four stirrup jars, a lid, the remains of a stamnos (which contained the burnt bones of a man and child), two whorls and a faience bead are published. The fact that the excavation report (which records three stirrup jars) and the inventory of the Museum of Siteia (which mentions four) do not correspond makes it difficult to evaluate the material from this tomb. Of the four stirrup jars, one is dated to LM IIIB-IIIC early, one to LM IIIC early, and the other two are regarded as imports from the island of Rhodes and dated to LH IIIC early. The same chapter includes five out of seven vases from the LM III period probably found at Tourloti and apparently consigned to the Museum of Siteia between 1958 and 1962. These are two jugs, assigned respectively to LM IIIB and early IIIC, and three stirrup jars, which P. assigns to LM IIIB, to LM IIIC early and to 'the LM IIIC, possibly to its middle stages' (p. 23).

In chapter 2 (*Stirrup Jar SM 4206, the 'Xanthoudidis Master' and the Octopus Style in East Crete*) P. starts from the stirrup jar SM 4206, decorated in Octopus style, which is part of the last group he has presented in chapter 1. Not surprisingly, the Tourloti vase is very similar to the two stirrup jars from tholos B in Mouliana. In fact the two sites are very close to each other. Together with a vase from the Goulandris Museum, the two pieces from Mouliana are well known: their resemblance has often been pointed out, and they have been tentatively ascribed to a single workshop in Eastern Crete. P. adds the stirrup jar SM 4206 from Tourloti to this group, and on exclusively stylistic grounds attributes the whole group to a single craftsman, whom he calls the 'Xanthoudidis master', held to have been active in the 'middle LMIIIC.' Finally, he attributes two stirrup jars from Yalisos (T 87/3 and T15/2) – variously considered of Cretan or Rhodian derivation, and attributed to different stages of LM/LH IIIC – to a different hand than his 'Xanthoudidis master', assigning them to LM IIIC early.

The fact is that an attribution on stylistic grounds involves a variable degree of arbitrariness which can become unacceptable. If the criteria of stylistic analysis are made explicit and the analysis is based on a rigorous typological investigation permitting the reconstruction of *that* production centre for *specific types* in *that* area and *that* period, then the degree of arbitrariness is kept within limits and the results can constitute a useful contribution to our knowledge. If, on the other hand, the fundamental tool of analysis becomes an extemporary comparison of *single* manufactures on the basis of a superficial resemblance and/or criteria which are not made explicit, accompanied by the unjustified repetition of statements, themselves unjustified, made by other scholars, then we are witnessing a purely impressionistic exercise doomed to generate *clichés* and perpetuate the lamentable criterion of *ipse dixit*. P. seems to favour the latter approach.

In this respect his treatment of such a well known vase as the figured crater of Mouliana is emblematic. On the question of dating, relegated to a note (p. 17 note 117), P. cites the chronology proposed by Costis Davaras thirty years ago in *Antichità cretesi. Studi in onore di Doro Levi* (1973), where it was attributed to LM IIIC-SM, or 12th-11th century BC. The vase does undoubtedly date from these two centuries, and in the 1970s such a statement was perfectly legitimate. Today, however, such an attribution no longer has any sense since we now possess a considerable amount of information on Cretan pottery from these two centuries. Moreover, on the grounds of precise typological criteria, the Mouliana vase has been linked to a type of continental crater from the LH IIIC middle developed, characterised under the rim by a raised band with white-painted strokes. This type is found in some sites of Eastern Crete (Mouliana, Tourloti, Kria) and represents a production that can be assigned to a phase contemporary with the LH IIIC middle developed (D'Agata 2007), which in terms of absolute chronology can conventionally be identified as from 1150 to 1100 circa (Mountjoy 1999, 17). Thus the Mouliana crater can be dated to a period covering no more than fifty years, although P. seems unaware of this.

In fact the whole approach to chronological attribution is a constant shortcoming of P.'s volume. Leaving aside the repeated use of terms like 'early' and 'mature', which once again are not made explicit and thus remain at the level of subjective observations, P. seems to take it for granted that the LM IIIC has to be divided up into three phases followed by the Subminoan. Yet in most cases he dates the vases to the first or second part of the period, assigning them either to a phase defined as 'early-middle' or to the subsequent one defined 'middle-late', or even, as in the case of a jug from Atsipadhes, to the 'middle-late IIIC – Subminoan period', which implies a date between 1150 and 1000 BC! Certainly, prudence in attributing a vase to a certain phase is legitimate and comprehensible, but here such uncertainty becomes systematic, and the criteria of attribution do not go beyond the application of labels which are not made explicit. No reconstruction of a historical type can be feasible without a clear underlying chronological grid.

Lastly it is disappointing that in this volume important historical problems are liquidated in the space of a few lines: this is the case of the beak spouted jug typical of Eastern Crete and the problem of ceramic regionalism. The definition of a ceramic region in relation/opposition to a geographical region, and the identification of multiple regional levels, is one of the most significant developments in Aegean archaeology from the 1990s to the present: in a volume which deals with a specific ceramic production of a single Cretan macro-area it really should have been tackled. On the contrary, here the presence of local types alongside types which are defined as belonging to the 'Creto-Mycenaean repertoire' is rapidly dismissed as an example of 'different aesthetic approaches and tastes of Mycenaean Crete during this period' (*sic*, p. 9). But, above and beyond the deficiencies I have indicated, we are left asking whether it was really necessary to publish a volume of 33 pages to describe some LM III vases of Eastern Crete? In my opinion the answer is not in doubt. The publication of the necropolis of Tourloti and the history of the Octopus Style and its fortune in Crete and the Aegean is still in search of an author.

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