

THE POWER OF IMAGES.  
A FIGURED KRATER FROM THRONOS KEPHALA (ANCIENT SYBRITA) AND  
THE PROCESS OF *POLIS* FORMATION IN EARLY IRON AGE CRETE<sup>1</sup>

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*1. Introduction*

Published in 1998, *Art and Agency* by Alfred Gell had the merit of introducing into art history an anthropological approach based on the social context of art's production, circulation, and reception and the intricate network of relations that extend around the work of art. In this way Gell provided a new vision of the art object: he transformed it into a social object capable of mediating, and creating, social agency, and even went so far as to present it as a substitute for the individuals who produced it.<sup>2</sup> If it is stripped to its bare bones and extrapolated from its disciplinary context, the anthropological theory of art proposed by Gell coincides in many respects with the approach of a prehistorian – acquainted with the post-processual agenda and oriented towards contextual archaeology –<sup>3</sup> to the analysis and interpretation of 'special objects' with wide-ranging social implications, such as those endowed with a ritual value. What is new in Gell's approach, and has helped to renew the notion of context, is the fact that the value of agency he attributed to objects may escape the control of those who produced them.<sup>4</sup> The active vision of things and their material world, crediting them with an influence on the social context in which they occur, leads to the creation of a new contextual environment. This new space encompasses not only the objects themselves but also the ways in which they are able to innovate by influencing, if not indeed forging, the mentality of individuals and their multiple social relations.

A second innovatory element in Gell's approach lies in the method he proposed for carrying out artistic analysis, advocating a 'methodological philistinism' which,

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<sup>1</sup> The figured krater that is the subject of this work was discussed by the author in a Minoan Seminar held at the Danish Institute in Athens in November 2004, and in an Upper House Seminar at the British School at Athens in January 2005. Preliminary information on this vessel may be found in D'Agata, Karamaliki 2002; D'Agata 2006, 405; 2008, 221; forthcoming b. The drawings are by Giuliano Merlatti, the photos by Marino Ierman. Measurements are given in centimetres. On pottery sequence and terminology adopted here for the Cretan archaeological phases of the twelfth and eleventh century BC, including synchronisms between Crete and Mainland Greece, see D'Agata 2007, especially 96-97; 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For the reception of Gell, Harrison 1998; Gosden 2001; Whitley 2002; Bowden 2004; Gosden 2005; Osborne, Tanner 2007; Pucci 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Hodder 1982; 1986.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular Gosden 2005; Hoskins 2006; Malafouris 2008; Knappett, Malafouris 2008.



a



b

Fig. 1 a-b – THK02/1

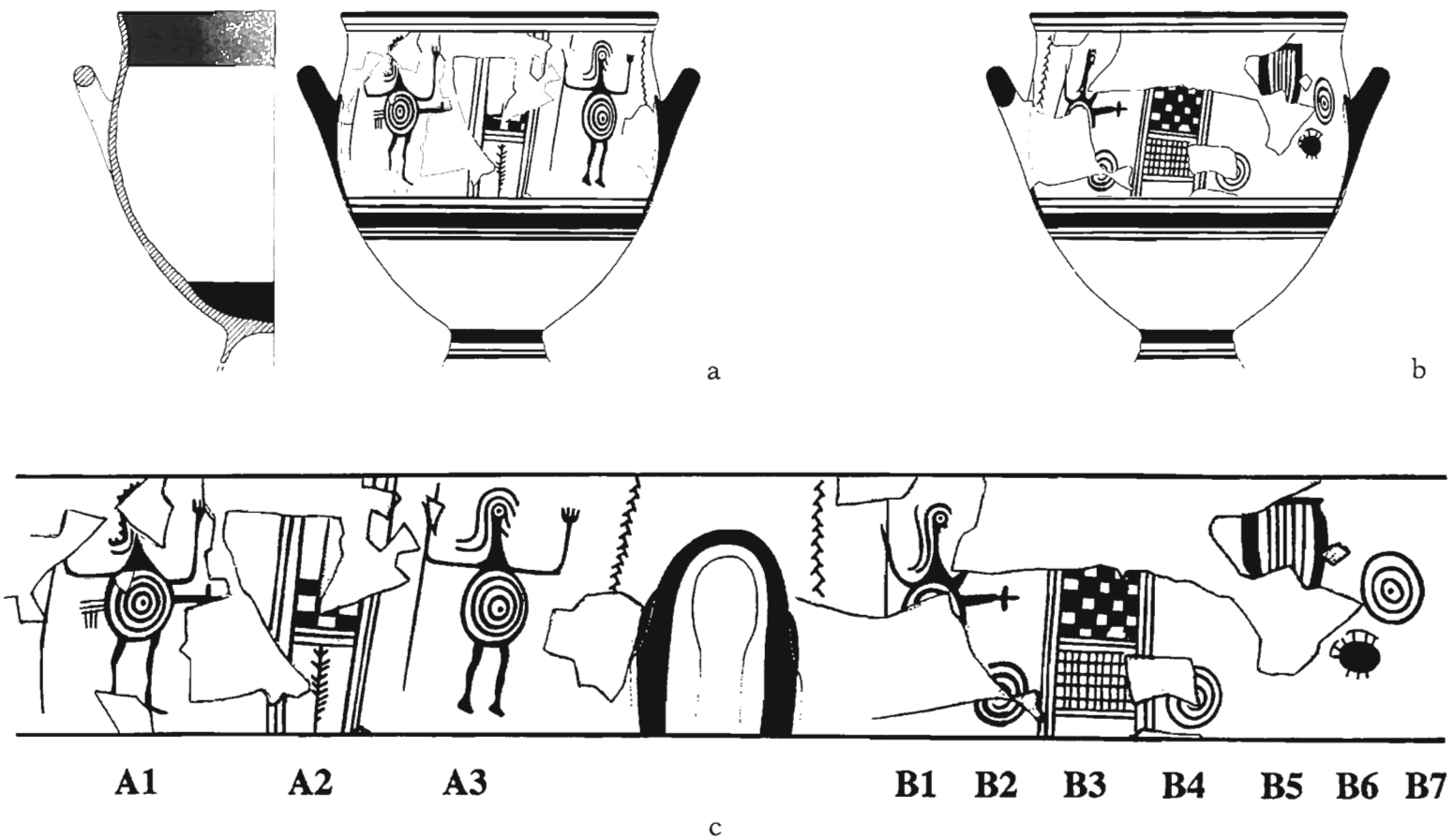


Fig. 2 a-c - THK02/1, a-b: scale 1:5

precisely on account of its extreme rigour, acquires the force of a consensus-based methodological proposal such as is rarely found in studies of antiquity. It explicitly minimises interest in the aesthetic value of the work of art, focusing instead on its agency and the identification of the matrix of power which such objects bring into being amongst producers, users and on-lookers. The analysis of the figured krater found in the settlement of Thronos Kephala on Crete in 2002 that I present here in detail was not directly based on Gell's artistic theory. I refer to the work of the British anthropologist in order to foster a holistic approach able to formulate hypotheses on the social agency and entanglement of a special ceramic artifact like the one presented here. Considering society as the upshot of the relationship between people and things<sup>5</sup> also means assigning to things, and in particular to art objects, an agency that *can* go beyond the intentions and control of the society that produced them. As a consequence, even though the stylistic analysis has to have a hermeneutic importance, it should nonetheless be carried out adopting the 'philistine' rigour invoked by Gell, making sure that it too contributes to reconstructing the social power which the object exercised on the society that produced it.

The clay krater found in the course of the 2002 excavation campaign at the site of Thronos Kephala (ancient Sybrita), on Crete, displays on its sides a figured painted scene. Side A exhibits two armed warriors on either side of a central panel (figs. 1a; 2a, c), side B a warrior and a set of objects, again at the sides of a central panel (figs. 1b; 2b, c).<sup>6</sup> Armed warriors are a common theme in pictorial pottery of LH IIIC Mid.<sup>7</sup> In the course of the twelfth century BC a quantity of vessels, especially kraters, appeared in the major centres of mainland Greece, decorated with different scenes which include warriors: fully armed marching in procession, spearmen on chariots, fighting on board ship.<sup>8</sup> The most famous of these vessels is the great krater found at Mycenae in the area of the Late Bronze Age house that was named after the vessel itself.<sup>9</sup> The appearance of these war-like themes has been associated with the emergence in those years of a warrior elite whose social identity, at the supra-regional level, appears to have been characterised by its association with objects of prestige and exclusive styles of behaviour.<sup>10</sup> In Crete the only figured vessel that can be associated with this group is the LM IIIC krater from Moulana, Tomb A, decorated with a warrior on horseback and a hunting scene.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter to find further examples of figured scenes

<sup>5</sup> Closely linked to the notion of agency is that of entanglement recently discussed in Hodder 2011a, b.

<sup>6</sup> Side A is the denomination used for the side where two similar elements flank the central panel, ensuring symmetry.

<sup>7</sup> Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, chapter XI; Crouwel 1999; Deger-Jalkotzy 1998; 1999; Crouwel 2006b, 17-18; Deger-Jalkotzy 2006, 174-75; Crouwel 2007, 74-75; Deger-Jalkotzy 2008.

<sup>8</sup> At Mycenae, Tiryns, Athens, Lefkandi, Kynos, Kalapodi, Volos: cf. Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, chapter XI; Sakellarakis 1992, nos. 24-52; Jakob-Felsch 1996, 146 no. 231, pl. 36; Güntner 2000, 196-97, pls. 7-8; Crouwel 2006a; Dakoronia 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Deger-Jalkotzy 2008; on the provenance of the krater, E. French in Andreadi 2003, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Deger-Jalkotzy 1998; Crieelard 1998; Eder, Jung 2005; Deger-Jalkotzy 2006; Crieelard 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Xanthoudidis 1905, 32, pl. 3. The vessel dates back to LM IIIC late (D'Agata 2007, 96), and is therefore roughly coeval with LH IIIC mid.

we have to leap forwards to the ninth century BC. Known to us mainly through a number of Knossian vessels – kraters, but also straight-sided pithoi and amphoras – the figured Cretan repertoire of the ninth century BC includes themes of oriental origin, such as lions attacking a hunter-warrior, or fantastic creatures in antithetic position, as well as others of Minoan derivation, including hunting scenes and long-robed female figures.<sup>12</sup> No representation of warriors in fighting mode has come to light at Knossos,<sup>13</sup> while three hunter-warriors are depicted on the shoulder of a fragmentary amphora recently published from Prinias.<sup>14</sup> All the Cretan figured vessels have been found in tombs, and most of their depictions appear to have been destined to emphasize the high standing of the deceased rather than his role in the community.<sup>15</sup>

When compared with these examples, the Thronos Kephala krater shows quite striking differences. In the first place, it pre-dates the ninth century BC, showing that figured scenes circulated even at the very beginning of the Protogeometric period, continuing on from the Late Bronze Age. Secondly, the subject depicted cannot be described as fantastic, nor can it be traced back to the Minoan tradition or to oriental influence. Thematically and stylistically, the armed warriors on the Thronos krater appear to provide the missing link between the LH IIIC warriors and those of the Protogeometric and Geometric period.<sup>16</sup> Structural and contextual analysis of the scene painted on the vessel, however, shows that the warriors of Sybrita can in fact be associated with neither of the two series. Rather, they should be seen as the manifestation of a different social and cultural context for which to date we lacked any explicit iconographic evidence.

The Thronos Kephala krater was found in a settlement, testifying that figured vessels played a role in contemporary society beyond their funerary employment. Actually it shows that information passed among the craftsmen who manufactured the piece and those who used or simply had the opportunity to look at the krater and its figured scene. The Thronos Kephala krater also implies that a visual language developed in Crete, or, better, in the central-western area of the island, and from this point of view too it constitutes a unique piece of evidence. In our presentation we shall begin with a brief summary of the archaeological context in which the vessel was found, and then go on to analyse it as an archaeological object, providing structural analysis and an interpreta-

<sup>12</sup> Coldstream 1980; 1991; for a list of the figured scenes on Cretan pottery, Coldstream 2006. A list of pictorial pottery discovered on the Greek Mainland, also including Euboea, and dating from LH IIIC Late to Middle Geometric may be found in Crouwel 2009.

<sup>13</sup> The fringed short dress, the plumed helmet and the spear of the hunters on the krater from Teke Tomb F (Coldstream 1980, 72, fig. 1) may be considered as typical of warriors, as is the sword held by the man fighting two lions on the krater from Teke Tomb E (Sackett 1976). Coeval depictions of warriors include archers on a hydria from Lefkandi (Popham, Sackett, Themelis 1980, 127, 348, pl. 106, 51.2; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2006a, 249, fig. 2), and two human figures engaged in a fight on a clay fragment from Tiryns (Papadimitriou 1987, pl. 19.1; Pappi 2006, 231, fig. 1); both are dated to the tenth century BC.

<sup>14</sup> Rizza 2011, 30, 39-40, fig. 26 (PGB).

<sup>15</sup> Whitley 2001, 96-97.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Fittschen 1969; Ahlberg 1971; Rombos 1988, 131-60. On warrior status in early Greece, van Wees 1998.

tion of the scene represented. Then we shall propose a reconstruction – albeit summary – of the socio-political context within which the vessel was manufactured and for which it was intended. Finally, the nature of the settlement of early Sybrita, with its likely social and political organization in the tenth century BC, will be discussed in the light of the results of the research done to date on this significant Early Iron Age centre squeezed in between the Psiloriti and the Amari valley.

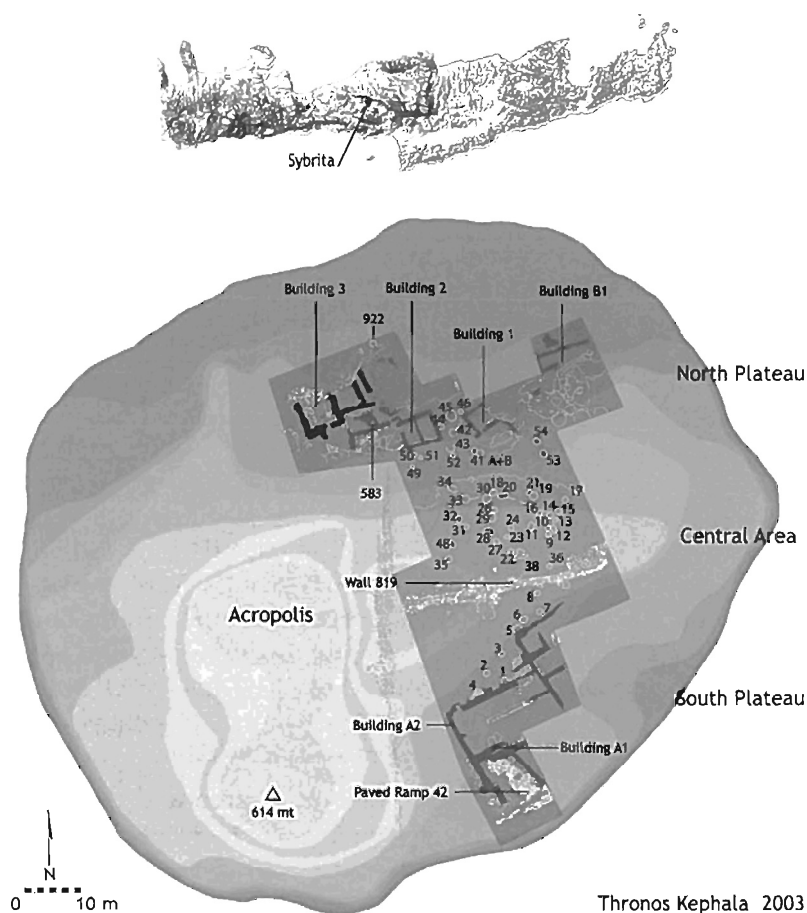


Fig. 3 – Map of the settlement of Thronos Kephala at the end of the 2003 excavation season.

## 2. Krater THK02/1

### 2.1 The archaeological context

Situated on the edge of the western slopes of the Psiloriti massif at the northern end of the Amari valley, the site of Thronos Kephala – located on the territory of the Greek and Roman city of Sybrita – has been investigated over the last twenty years in two cycles of excavations conducted by a joint mission of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Roma, and the ΚΕ' Εφορεία των προϊστορικών και κλασικών αρχαιοτήτων (fig. 3).<sup>17</sup> These researches have helped to fill in some of the topography and chronology of the settlement extending over the top of the hill of Kephala. It was founded at the beginning of the twelfth century BC and was inhabited uninterruptedly until the beginning of the seventh century BC. A characterising feature of the settlement are the 41 pits discovered in the central area of the hilltop, which served a ritual function.<sup>18</sup> The way in which they were made, the spatial organization – much of the central area occupied by the pits remained largely unbuilt over until the Roman period – and the ways in which the infill had been put in all indicate that the pits must have been the outcome of ritual activity practised by the inhabitants of Kephala without interruption at least from the twelfth to the ninth century BC. Evidently memory of this activity on the site was conserved over a long period of time. The infill represents the remains of collective meals which were held on Kephala during the centuries in question, endowed with a ritual value. In other words these were structured deposits which responded to specific modalities of deposition.

It was the north plateau of Kephala that was originally occupied in LM IIIC Early. Building 1 and the earliest ritual pits excavated in the central area of the hill date back to the same phase. The construction of Building 2 dates back to LM IIIC Late,<sup>19</sup> and Building 3, the latest structure on the north plateau, to SM II. The area which was later occupied by the buildings was in use from LM IIIC Early. Levels containing remains of hearths with ashes and fragmentary pottery mostly pertaining to cooking ware have been identified underlying the western room of Building 3. Its construction implied a levelling of the entire area and the building of two rooms, the west and the east room, leant against the bedrock. Building 3 suffered extensive destruction in the Early Protogeometric period.

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<sup>17</sup> Rocchetti 1994; Rocchetti, Prokopiou, D'Agata 1994; 1995; Rocchetti, D'Agata 1999; D'Agata 1999; D'Agata 1997-2000; forthcoming a; b; c; d; D'Agata, Karamaliki 2000; 2002; 2003.

<sup>18</sup> There are 55 pits on the top of Kephala but only 41, definable as structured deposits, have been attributed with a ritual value. For the distinction between ritual and waste pits on Kephala, D'Agata 1997-2000; forthcoming a; on the phenomenon of ritual pits, D'Agata 1997-2000; forthcoming a, c, d.

<sup>19</sup> On the Cretan pottery sequence of the twelfth century BC, D'Agata 2007.



Fig. 4 – ES 592

On the evidence of the many installations identified in it, a domestic function can be attributed to the east room: a large pithos stood originally on a slab in the south-west corner and a rubbish dump full of organic materials was identified in the north-west corner. The west room seems to have served for a different purpose, to judge, in the first place, by the existence of a huge stone base (fig. 4)<sup>20</sup> which was inserted along the north-south axis, and aligned with a door opening in the centre of the south wall. As the circular carving on the upper face makes clear,<sup>21</sup> the base was intended as the plinth for a wooden column that supported the roof, an installation that increases the architectonic quality of the room. A fragmentary stone object was found in an upper level of destruction of Building 3 (fig. 5).<sup>22</sup> Carved from a single limestone block and hollow, it has a squared shape and is elegantly decorated. On one side three bands are cut out in the shape of an H, and incised with vertical strokes and herring-bone patterns which recall the

<sup>20</sup> Height 40; width 44; length 36.

<sup>21</sup> Diam. 24.5; wall thickness 0.4/1.

<sup>22</sup> THK00/227 from US 344/358: height 22; width 38x29, inside 28x20.



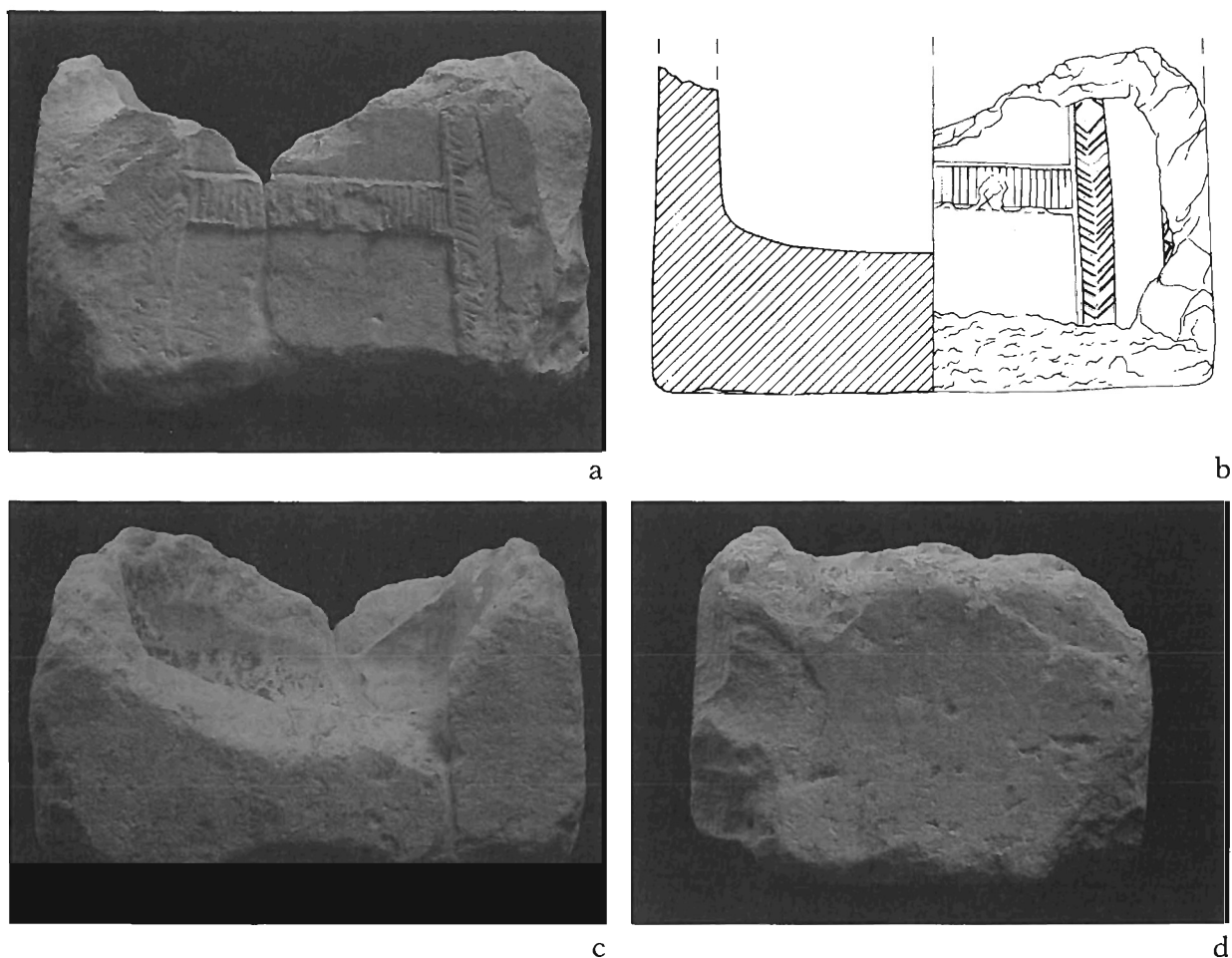


Fig. 5 – THK00/227, b: scale 1:5

contemporary EPG pithoi. This object, whose function is unclear,<sup>23</sup> may have been part of the furnishings of Building 3 in its earliest phase: intended to lean against a wall, it could have been set up in the western room or even in the open area to the south. Finally, a water reservoir (ES 922) dug in the bedrock to the north-east of Building 3 seems to have been intended to serve it. The earliest material collected within it has been assigned to EPG.

<sup>23</sup> It could be a stone *gourma*, i.e. a container for water originally installed within the building or in close proximity. A stone block recently published from Prinias, which is similar to the piece from Thronos Kephala, has been interpreted as a kind of seat or stool (Rizza 2008, 188 TF9, pl. CIX). The piece from Thronos Kephala, however, is hollow, and this detail is certainly more in keeping with its use as a container. I wish to thank Dario Palermo for bringing to my attention the stone object from Prinias.

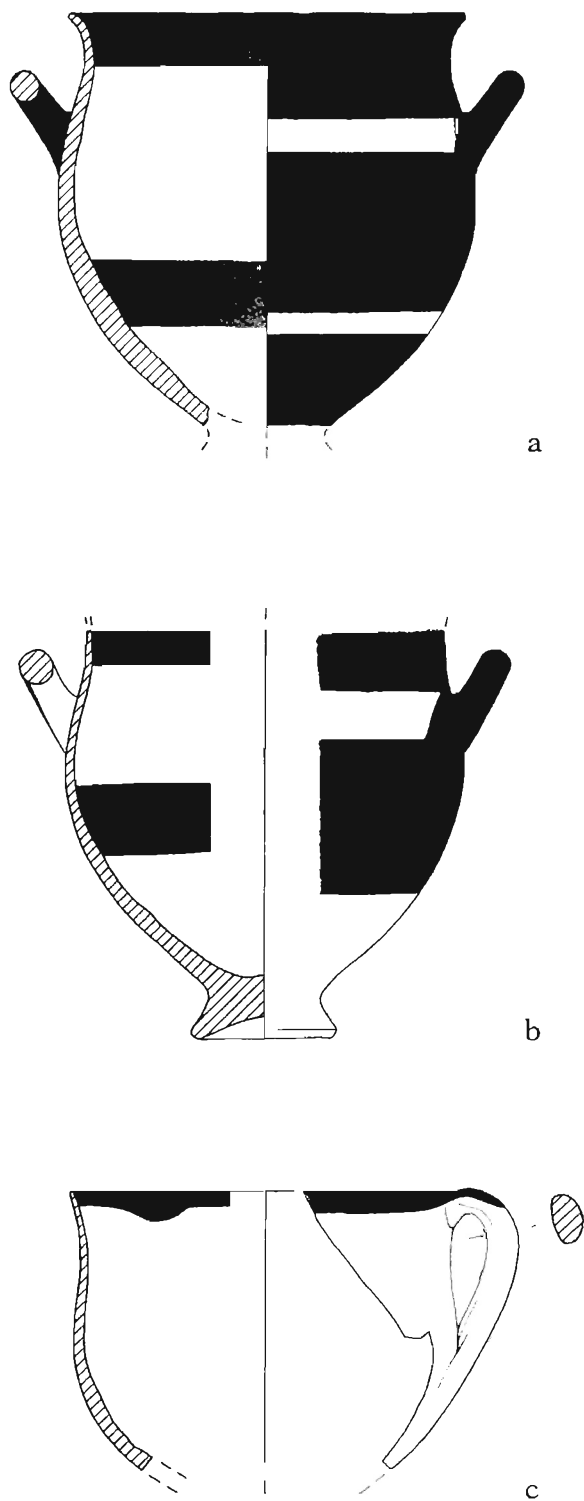


Fig. 6 – a: THK02/66; b: THK02/135; c: THK02/105. Scale 1:3

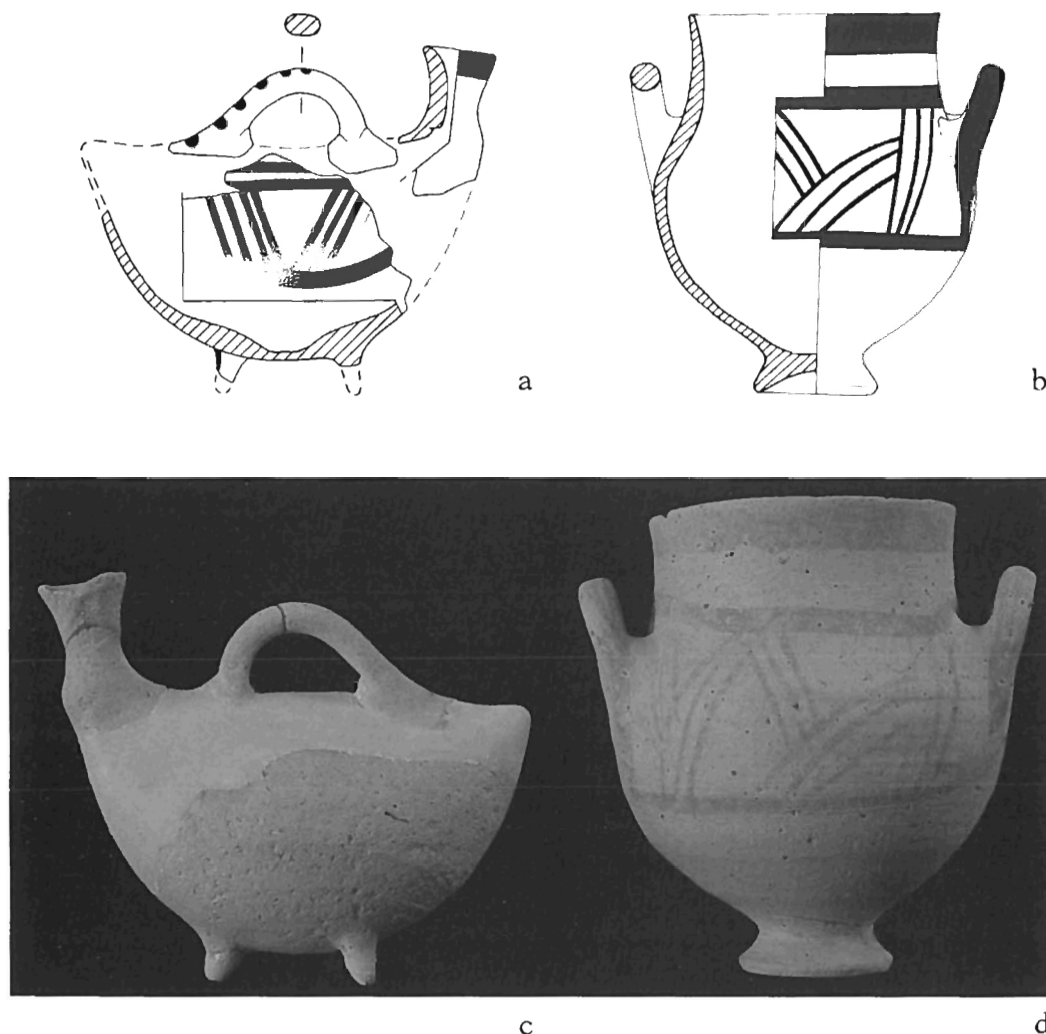


Fig. 7 – a: THK02/65, scale 1:3; b: THK04/43, scale 1:3; c: THK02/65; d: THK04/43

The floor level of the west room has only been conserved in a few portions along the east and south walls. The figured krater THK02/1 and a few other vessels – only a couple of them in a good state of preservation – were found here. The material recovered in the north-east area of the room includes skyphoi THK02/66 and 135 (fig. 6a-b), and cup THK02/105 (fig. 6c). Askos THK02/65 (fig. 7a, c) and amphoriskos THK04/43 (fig. 7b, d) were found on the south-east side of the room where krater THK02/1 was collected in fragments. THK02/1 belongs to a set of tableware typical of an early phase in Cretan PG, consisting essentially of skyphoi, cups and kraters,<sup>24</sup> examples of which were all found in the west room of Building 3.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Bell-krater and skyphos both disappear from the Cretan repertoire by the end of the ninth century BC.

<sup>25</sup> An arched fibula found above the southern wall of the room could have been part of the same context.

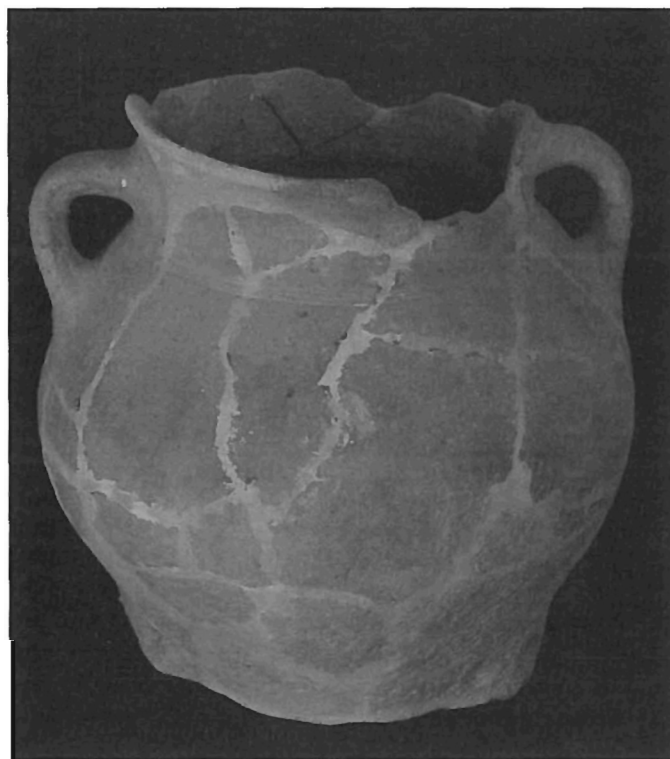
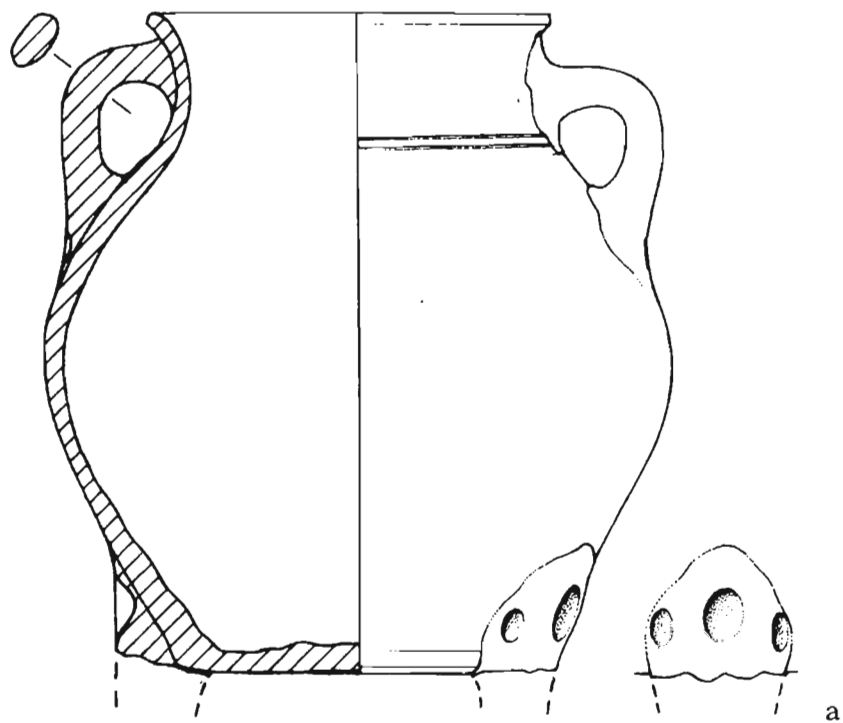


Fig. 8 – THK04/94, a: scale 1:4

The important role played by Building 3 within the settlement of Thronos Kephala is also emphasized by the foundation pit (47) partially located below its south wall. Inside it a tripod cooking pot had been set up in a vertical position, with stones to hold it in place (THK04/94, fig. 8a-b),<sup>26</sup> dating to SM II or EPG.<sup>27</sup> The vessel had been placed inside the pit after its feet had been removed. The architectural value of the building structure, the cooking pot used to mark its foundation, the ceramic set for banquets found in place in the west room, and the presence of a prestigious vessel like the figured krater, are all hints pointing in the same direction: the main function of Building 3 was clearly connected with the consumption of food and drinking and, thus, the celebration of special events. We have already mentioned the presence of an askos and an amphoriskos on the floor of the west room, small containers for storing and pouring out valued organic substances, either perfumed oils or *condimento*. Being a shape almost exclusively used as a burial gift, the presence of the askos has to be considered especially meaningful. They confirm the hypothesis that the floor level of the west room represents a context of furnishings for exclusive convivial events.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is borne out by the fact that from LM IIIC Early the area in which Building 3 was subsequently erected appears to be characterised by the presence of hearths with conspicuous remains of ashes and cooking ware. After destruction in Early PG, the building underwent some transformations but the area continued to play the same function, as is shown by the remains of ovens discovered on the bedrock which delimits its northern side.

## 2.2 Shape, decoration, provenance

THK02/1 (figs. 1-2). Krater. Height max. 22.4; rim diam. 20; foot diam. max. 6.8; th. 0.4/0.8. Light, fine clay (Munsell 10YR 8/4); slip of the same colour; brown paint. Imperfect firing. Recomposed from many fragments and reintegrated with plaster. Portions of rim and wall, the end of a handle, and the tip of foot are missing.

S-profile. Simple rim, two horizontal handles with circular section, high, hollow conical foot. Inside, large band on rim and lower body. Outside, lines on the rim; one band between lines beneath the frieze, on lower body; one band between foot and wall, lines on the foot; stroke of paint along the top of the handles, which continues as a vertical band on the wall, in correspondence with the linear decoration. Small bore hole, indicating the use of a multiple brush-compass, at the centre of the concentric circle motifs. Decorated with figured scene in the zone between the handles.

<sup>26</sup> All the soils recovered from the pit excavation were processed through a floatation machine and yielded no organic materials.

<sup>27</sup> On the archaeological definition of Subminoan, D'Agata 2011. Traditional chronology of EPG roughly covers the tenth century BC, cf. Coldstream, Eiring, Forster 2001, 22, but see Weninger, Jung 2009.

<sup>28</sup> The association between warrior status and communal eating is clearly documented in the twelfth century BC by kraters with figured representations of armed men.

Side A: two male figures facing right (A1, A3) on either side of a central rectangular panel (A2), slightly oblique, comprising three vertical lines at the edges, remains of check pattern in the upper half, and a schematic plant element in the lower half. A1: male figure shown with head in profile, arms raised laterally, elbows bent at right angles; torso frontal; legs and feet in profile. All that remains of the head is part of a pair of wavy parallel lines on the neck; the upper line probably indicates the crest of the helmet, with triangular projections along the edge; the lower line could allude to the hair. The neck is represented as a solid triangle, the central part of the body with a set of four concentric circles with a central dot indicating a shield; the left hand is open with palm facing forwards and fingers visible (two remain). The right hand holds a spear indicated with a simple oblique line. To the right of the shield a sword blade emerges with cross-shaped hilt, incomplete, and on the left three horizontal parallel lines cut off at the bottom by three vertical lines. A3: similar male figure but almost complete. Shown with head in profile, arms raised in front, elbows bent at right angles; torso frontal; legs and feet in profile. Head shown in profile, indication of nose and chin, eye shown by a blank area with solid dot in the middle. Two wavy lines with an S outline, parallel, above the head: they could allude to the helmet and the hair. Central part of the body shown with a set of four concentric circles with a central dot indicating a shield. The right hand holds a spear depicted with a simple oblique line; the left hand is open with palm facing forwards and fingers visible (four remain). A zigzag element hangs from the rim at the far right.

Side B: much more incomplete than the one described above, comprising a human figure on the left (B1), a rectangular central panel (B3) flanked by concentric circles (B2, B4), and a set of objects on the right (B5-7). A zigzag element hangs from the rim at the far left. B1: male human figure of which only upper part remains. The representation of head, neck, the two wavy lines above the head, and the body-shield are very similar to those in A3. In the right hand the figure holds a spear depicted with a simple vertical line, while a cross-shaped hilt and part of the sword blade emerge to the right of the shield. Right arm outstretched holding the spear, raised as is the left arm. Lower part of the body is missing, as is edge of the face and much of the left arm. B3: central panel comprises a rectangular element incomplete in the upper part, with three vertical lines on each side, a zone with check pattern in the upper part and a zone with net pattern in the lower. To the right of the panel: near the rim, a five-stringed lyre (B5); bottom right, concentric circles with central dot (B7), and just beneath a solid oval element, framed by hollow squares, with a wavy external edge (B6). One cannot rule out, although it is not visible, the presence of another element in the area immediately beneath the lyre.

THK02/1 corresponds to a type of krater common in central-western Crete in a very early phase of PG.<sup>29</sup> The decoration shows unequivocally that its artisan knew the scheme of concentric circles on both sides of a central panel that originated in Athens.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, it features elements typical of ceramic

<sup>29</sup> On EPG bell-kraters, Coldstream 1996, 369; 2001, 46-51.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g. Coldstream, Catling 1996, 31 K1, fig. 69.

production of the end of the LBA, i.e. the 'S' profile associated with medium-small dimensions, and the conical shape of the foot.<sup>31</sup> In its internal decoration the vessel shows how the Late Minoan practice of fully coating the interior had been abandoned, while the spattering which was to become almost ubiquitous on PG kraters was not yet common. The structure of the external decoration has an excellent comparison in krater 6.13 from Tomb 6 excavated by David Hogarth to the east of the North Cemetery at Knossos.<sup>32</sup> It is decorated on both sides with concentric circles drawn using a multiple-brush compass at either side of the central panel, but here the decorative scheme is very peculiar. Like the Thronos Kephala krater, the motif is oblique with respect to the vessel axis, showing a slight uncertainty in the manufacture, and is flanked by a cornice indicated by three lines. Inside the central panel, on one side there is a check pattern, on the other a fringed double axe that obviously derives from the Minoan figurative repertory. These decorative 'liberties' in the treatment of the central panel, which during the Protogeometric generally featured geometric motifs, are found only on kraters from the initial phase of the period,<sup>33</sup> evidently still under the influence of Bronze Age tradition.

As for the area of production, the petrographical analysis carried out on non-adjointing small fragments of THK02/1 was not decisive.<sup>34</sup> It *may* have been produced in the area of Kephala, and thus to be considered a local product, but this is not certain.

### 2.3 The figured scene (figs. 1-2)

The main peculiarity of the Thronos krater lies in its figured decoration. On side A the decoration consists of two figures at the sides of a central panel, while on side B the sequence consists of a figure – the central panel now being flanked by two circular elements – and a set of objects. On side A the elements at the sides of the panel are animated and transformed into human figures depicted performing an action. In other words, the original characteristics of the primary level of decoration (concentric circles + central panel) are maintained, but the representation takes on further complexity. On side B the symmetry of design is broken and objects are introduced that are extraneous to the decorative tradition of the LM IIIC and SM kraters.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. in particular Coldstream, Catling 1996, 96 56.6, fig. 89. The vessel (height 22.5, rim diam. 17.6) has been assigned to the SM/EPG transition. The linear decoration of the rim and foot is also found on a Knossian krater assigned to the EPG, Coldstream, Catling, 1996, 186 175.25, pl. 178. On it the decorative style is of Subminoan derivation, with the circles at the sides of the central panel being hand drawn.

<sup>32</sup> Coldstream 2002, 214 6.13, pl. XIII. Cf. also krater Z13, possibly from the same tomb. The archaeological context of 6.13, probably from a tholos tomb (Coldstream 2002, 212-15, Tomb 6), includes 23 whole vessels, the oldest group of which can be assigned to the EPG, and includes a krater and three skyphoi. Coldstream proposes to assign to this group also some pieces found by Hogarth, without context. Hogarth mentions in this tomb the presence of iron weapons, i.e. a spear head and sword.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. e.g. Coldstream, Catling 1996, 31 K1, fig. 69.

<sup>34</sup> The analysis was carried out by Marie-Claude Boileau and Vassili Kilikoglou.

In view of these observations we may consider the decoration of the Thronos krater in terms of two distinct levels:

a. what we might call the base – or merely decorative – level, which derives from the Late Minoan IIIC system of decorating both sides of deep bowls and kraters with a central panel flanked by two equal, antithetical elements;

b. the second level, consisting of the three human figures who appear to be performing a specific action, with certain associated objects which, as we shall see, provide a precise context for the figures. At this level we may, perhaps, also ascribe a meaning to the central panels that is not merely decorative, whereby the objects can be seen as connected with the scene depicted.

On side A, A1 is a figure of a warrior, shown in full silhouette, placed well above the base line, as emerges from comparison with the central panel, which rests firmly on that line. Head and legs are shown in profile, torso and arms frontally. Of the head only part of the helmet crest remains. Apart from the helmet, A1 bears a circular shield, covering his chest, and a sword, the hilt of which emerges on his left hip. He also holds a spear in his right hand, left arm raised high in the air, with the palm of his hand open. The legs are slightly parted, and at least one of the feet is oblique.<sup>35</sup>

On A1 the helmet is represented by an S shaped line, with regular projections that probably indicate tufts of animal hair: beneath, quite distinct, a similar parallel line.<sup>36</sup> This representation of the crest indicates the presence of a helmet. The sharp distinction made between the two S-shaped lines and that of the neck, stressing that the helmet does not fit close on the head, suggests that it was either a metal or a bronze-reinforced leather helmet.<sup>37</sup> In this case it would have been a cap made from animal skin with bronze fittings and elements projecting from the top.<sup>38</sup> In short, the second parallel line may represent the lower part of the helmet, in leather, and the top line the helmet in bronze. However, it is also possible that the second line represents the figure's head of hair. In Early Greece long hair was a symbol of masculinity and divine essence, and a prerogative of the ruling elite.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that while helmets dating from LH IIIC generally have a round profile and end at the base of the nape, on our warriors the line of the helmet – with projections on A1 – goes

<sup>35</sup> The legs and feet have a comparison in the hunter on the left on the main side of the krater of Khaniala Tekke, Coldstream 1980, 72, fig.1.

<sup>36</sup> In LH IIIC the crested helmet is quite common on pictorial representations of warriors: cf. for example Vermeule, Karageorghis 1983, XI.1b, XI.28, XI.42, XI.45, XI.46, XI.57. In particular, on a fragment from Volos (Vermeule, Karageorghis 1983, XI.57), the crest is distinctly separated from the line of the cap beneath, inducing the authors to conclude that "... this is in fact a leather cap with an inserted crest at the seam along the crown, for a reserved area along the top of the head separates helmet and crest" (p. 135).

<sup>37</sup> On the helmets in use in the Early Iron Age, Snodgrass 1964, 4-6; Borchardt 1977b; Snodgrass 1999, 42-43; Everson 2004, 37-41. According to Snodgrass (1964, 6), a leather helmet would not have been able to support a crest in such a way that it stood vertically.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. the remains of a helmet found at Tiryns in a PG warrior tomb: Verdelis 1963, 7-24, fig. 9, pls. 6-7; Snodgrass 1964, 4; Borchardt 1977b, 68; Lemos 2002, 124; Everson 2004, 39-40. The holes appearing on this piece show that it must have been applied to some headgear in another material, probably leather. On the importance of leather working on Crete in the Archaic age, Perlman 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Langdon 2008, 148.



down to the neck.<sup>40</sup> Finally it cannot be ruled out that the elongated form of A3's chin alludes to a chinstrap for the helmet, as it has been suggested for a figured ceramic fragment from Lefkandi.<sup>41</sup>

A1's waist is covered by a round shield, which we can only suppose must have hung on a bandolier to leave arms and hands completely free. The shield is decorated with concentric circles drawn with the help of a multiple brush with pivoted point,<sup>42</sup> as the central small hole left in the still fresh clay shows.<sup>43</sup> Small round shields were fairly common in Greece at the end of the Late Bronze Age and in the Geometric period.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, a bronze figurine from the sanctuary of Kato Symi, attributed to EPG, shows a similar type of round shield.<sup>45</sup> Thus the presence of circular shields on Cretan warriors in the Early Iron Age is not surprising. On the Thronos krater, however, the appearance of two elements represents a novelty with respect to the earlier tradition: the surface is decorated with concentric circles, and the centre of the shield is marked with an umbo.<sup>46</sup> The shields considered typical of the Early Iron Age were made of a perishable material, probably leather, in some cases reinforced with a metal boss.<sup>47</sup> Such bosses, presumably associated with shields, are also known from some Cretan tombs.<sup>48</sup>

A sword emerges on the left hip of A1, with a cross-shaped hilt.<sup>49</sup> The most common sword in the eastern Mediterranean from the twelfth century BC on is of

<sup>40</sup> In some figured representations of the Middle and Late Geometric the helmet crest extends down the shoulders below the base of the neck: Ahlberg 1971, 21 A15, fig. 19; 27 B3, fig. 30 (= the New York krater MMA 34.11.2); Langdon 1993, 120 no. 37. A comparison can be proposed with the archer who surmounts the central lion's head on the Hunt Shield from the Idean cave: here the crest and cap beneath it are clearly distinguished and suggested by two S lines, both alike, Blome 1982, 19, fig. 6, pl. 5.1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Crouwel 2006a, 240 B5, pl. 60.

<sup>42</sup> In Attica and Crete concentric circles drawn with a multiple-brush compass are the most characterizing decorative motif of EPG pottery: Desborough 1952, 49, 53, 298-99; Lemos 2002, 14; Coldstream, Catling 1996, 186 175.25, pl. 178; 369. On the appearance of this motif see also Papadopoulos, Vedder, Schreiber 1998; Lis 2009.

<sup>43</sup> In spite of the use of a specific tool, the brushstroke with which the circles were traced is very uncertain.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. for example Vermeule, Karageorghis 1983, 121 XI.1A-B, XI.28. On the round shields in use in the Early Iron Age: Snodgrass 1964, 37-68; Borchardt 1977a, 37-41; Snodgrass 1999, 43-44, 53-55; Everson 2004, 60-62.

<sup>45</sup> Lebesse 2002, 57-60, no. 10, pl. 10.

<sup>46</sup> It is worth recalling that on Cretan bronze shields from the ninth-seventh century BC there is a decoration in concentric registers on the main face, the centre being highlighted by the presence of a projection (Snodgrass 1964, 51-55). The oldest bronze shields known from Crete are the PGB examples from Eleutherna, with central lion head, used as lids for cinerary urns, Stampolidis 1998, 181-82, fig. 16; for the shields from the Idean Cave, Canciani 1970; Blome 1982; Pappalardo 2001; Sakellarakis, Sapouna-Sakellarakis 2011, 163-79.

<sup>47</sup> Snodgrass 1999, 43-4.

<sup>48</sup> Moulana, Tomb B (Xanthoudidis 1905, 46, fig. 11); Knossos, North Cemetery, Tombs 186 and 201 (Coldstream, Catling 1996, 191 186.6, fig. 163, pl. 274; 195 201.16, fig. 163, pl. 280). On the problem of interpreting the bronze discs with raised centres, found in various parts of Europe and the Mediterranean and variously interpreted as shield-bosses, cymbals, etc, see Snodgrass 1964, 38-49; Felmann 1984, 68-119; Catling 1996b, 522-24; Lemos 2002, 124-25.

<sup>49</sup> It differs markedly from the forked end found on some representations of swords from LH IIIC (Vermeule, Karageorghis 1983, 129 XI.39; 136 XI.59; Crouwel 2006a, 239) as also from the crescent-shaped hilt which characterises most of the Geometric representations.

the so-called Naue II Type, characterised among other things by the flanges at the top of the hilt, which might be reflected in the cross shape represented here.<sup>50</sup> PG swords are all of the Naue II Type. On the right of A1 what we may take to be the sheath of the sword is projecting from under the shield.<sup>51</sup> It is tripartite in form with a three-tassel fringe hanging vertically. A similar tassel fringe is known on the sheath worn by a warrior painted on an LH IIIC fragment of a krater from Lefkandi and on the figure of the warrior playing the lyre painted on a Cypriot kalathos.<sup>52</sup>

In his right hand<sup>53</sup> the warrior holds a long spear. Spear heads are quite commonly found in Early Iron Age warrior tombs, and unlike swords they continued to be manufactured in bronze until at least the ninth century BC, when they were replaced by iron.<sup>54</sup> Thus the spear being held by A1, and also by A3 and B1, may well have been tipped with bronze or iron.

The other two warrior figures – A3 on side A and B1 on side B – closely resemble A1.

A3, also shown well above the base line, is represented in full silhouette: the neck is long, while the face comes to a point, with only a circular eye marked out.<sup>55</sup> The figure bears a shield and spear, but has neither crested helmet nor sword. The double S-shaped line along the head could allude to a bronze helmet, and a leather cap beneath it, or, as we have suggested, could indicate the helmet and hair.<sup>56</sup>

B1 is the figure with most missing: he bears shield, spear and sword but there is no indication of anything projecting from the helmet. The lower part of the figure has not survived, but the arms, at least, are similar to those of the other two figures. We can note the very schematic representation of the hand holding the spear. The different way of rendering the right arm, here shown by a curved line, in A1 and A3 at right angles, is difficult to account for considering that the figure's arm is in any case raised and up-turned. It could indicate that the arm is outstretched almost vertically upwards, and not bent at the elbow, but it could also simply denote a mistake in gauging the available space: thinking he had less space, the painter may

<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to say whether the swords of the Sybrita warriors are to be seen as imitations of specimens in bronze or iron, for it was during the PG that iron swords replaced bronze ones. Since the krater is dated to a very early phase of the period, it is perfectly possible that bronze swords were still in circulation (Snodgrass 1964, 93-113; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993; Catling 1996b, 518-20; Snodgrass 1996, 577-78; more in general, Snodgrass 1999, 36-37; Lemos 2002, 117-20; Everson 2004, 63-65).

<sup>51</sup> Remains of a rich wooden and leather sheath were identified in a twelfth century BC warrior tomb at Krini-Drimalaika in Achaia, Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1994, 181-82, figs. 3-6, pls. 26b-c, 27b, 28a; see also Deger-Jalkotzy 2006, 157. A more sober wooden sheath, almost intact, still had its iron sword inside in the above-mentioned PG warrior's tomb of Tiryns (Verdelis 1963, 14, pl. 5.8); see also a LG example from Knossos, Snodgrass 1996, 578.

<sup>52</sup> Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, 129 XI.39; 136 XI.59; Iacovou 1988, 18 no. 29, 49, figs. 68-71.

<sup>53</sup> The hand is missing, cf. B1.

<sup>54</sup> Snodgrass 1964, 115-139; Snodgrass 1999, 37-39; Lemos 2002, 120-22; Everson 2004, 62-63.

<sup>55</sup> For the profile of face and head, cf. the figure of the hunter armed with a spear on the krater of Mouliana, Xanthoudidis 1905, pl. 3: the brush stroke used in the latter's execution is less precise, but also displays a greater naturalism with respect to the geometric schematisation of the figures on the Thronos Kephala krater.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. a pictorial fragment from Lefkandi, Crouwel 2006a, 240 B6, pl. 60.

have decided to further truncate the figure, eliminating the right angle that indicated the arm bent at the elbow. Nonetheless, in spite of its incomplete state the figure does seem to have had both arms raised and upstretched.

In short, the three warriors show considerable similarity, having in common spear and shield but differing in the accoutrements of crested helmet, sword and sword sheath. Of the three only A1 is equipped with a crested helmet.

On side A, the two warriors are situated at the sides of central panel A2 resting on the base line: the upper part is decorated with a check pattern, while a plant element is framed below it. On side B the central panel, B3, is very similar to the previous one. Here, too, it rests on the base line: it is framed vertically and horizontally by cornices and has the check pattern in the upper part. This structure appears slightly broader, the lower part being occupied by a net-patterned element that does not reach the ground.

Set at the sides of B3 are two circular elements (B2, B4) very similar to the shields borne by the warriors, but of smaller dimensions, consisting of three circles rather than four. They closely resemble B7, depicted amid the set of objects at the right end of side B. Since their interpretation is more debatable we shall return to them after analysing the set of objects just referred to.

Within this set, B5 shows a fairly clear representation of a stringed musical instrument, a phorminx or more probably a lyre.<sup>57</sup> It has two curved arms swelling more broadly at the centre, and a slender yoke with five strings attached. In general, this instrument appears to have undergone a gradual transformation from seven strings in the Bronze Age to three in the Geometric Period.<sup>58</sup> In the Aegean world males only had the task of playing the lyre, and moreover, with the exception of the fresco in the palace of Pylos where the player is in connection with a banquet scene, all the other lyre representations occur in cult contexts.<sup>59</sup> The association between lyre and warrior is already attested on the Cypriot kalathos from Kouklia, of the eleventh century BC, where a warrior armed with a sword is represented in the act of playing the lyre.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the representation on the Thronos Kephala krater has to be seen in the context of a process of secularisation, from the twelfth century BC onwards, in the use of music, evident in the recurrent association of music-making with the lifestyle of male elites.<sup>61</sup>

Close to B5 is represented B7, similar to the shields borne by the warriors but smaller, corresponding to the two elements, B2 and B4, at the sides of structure B3. Here, too, as with the shields, a central dot representing the umbo is indicated. The fact that an object very similar to a shield is shown close to the lyre suggests it might be a percussion instrument, very similar in shape to a round shield.<sup>62</sup> This

<sup>57</sup> On the lyre in ancient Greece, Paquette 1984, 135-172; Maas, Snyder 1989, 3-14, 79-112.

<sup>58</sup> Brand 2000, 46. But it has also been shown how this development does not have an absolute chronological value, so that the dating of a representation of a lyre cannot be based on the number of strings: Güntner 2006, 181. See also Younger 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Younger 1998, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Iacovou 1988, 18 no. 29, 49, figs. 68-71; 2006, 200.

<sup>61</sup> Mikrakis 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Snodgrass 1964, 37-51.

interpretation is borne out by the size of the objects, somewhat smaller than the shields. Bronze disks with a central element have been found on numerous Aegean sites, ranging from the thirteenth to the seventh century BC. These objects show wide variations in size and shape, and have been variously interpreted as shield umbos, belt or armour elements, remains of horse gear or bits, or indeed percussion instruments. Actually, no single interpretation can convincingly account for the entire series,<sup>63</sup> and the new iconographic evidence from Thronos Kephala may bear out the various functions which an object of the sort might have served. Its interpretation depends not only on shape and size but also on the context it occurs in. In our case, while there can be no doubt that the objects borne by the warriors are shields, B7 can – given the context – be interpreted as a musical instrument, and thus the identification may also apply to B2 and B4, given their similar shape and size.

Below the lyre and percussion instrument is depicted a third object, B6. Oval in form, and smaller than the two objects above it, it is characterised by a wavy edge and square spaces cut out along its border. B6 finds few comparisons in the iconographic repertory known to us. The interpretation I can offer is once again based on the context, as a musical instrument or an object with some musical connection. In fact we might see in it the schematic representation of a turtle shell viewed from above. The shape and the wavy edge, with decoration, recall the characteristics of the animal's carapace, which was used in Greece as the sound-box for lyres.<sup>64</sup> B6 might therefore be seen as ready to be hooked up to the arms and strings depicted above.<sup>65</sup> Remains of turtles, although rare, are known on Crete and indeed in Sybrita: pit 54, in an LM IIIC ritual context, yielded the remains of the plastron of at least one turtle.<sup>66</sup>

Finally we have to analyse the iconography of the two central panels, A2 and B3. In view of the figured character of the scene represented on the krater we have to consider the possibility that the two elements possess a heightened value with respect to the merely decorative function. Central panel A2 is enclosed, along the long sides, by a cornice, horizontally it is divided into two parts by a similar cornice: the upper central panel is decorated with a check pattern, which could indicate a masonry structure consisting of squared blocks of stone. Framed within the lower part of the panel is a branch or a stylised representation of a plant.

On side B, central panel B3 is much like the one we have just considered. In the place of the plant here we have a net-patterned element.

<sup>63</sup> Snodgrass 1964; Catling 1996b, 523; Lemos 2002, 124; Sakellarakis, Sapouna-Sakellarakis 2011, 172-79.

<sup>64</sup> For a collection of images of lyre sound boxes in the form of carapaces on Greek pottery, Paquette 1984, 151-69, L2-L43: see especially L37 at p. 166 for the pictorial rendering of a turtle shell similar to that on the Thronos Kephala krater.

<sup>65</sup> Tortoise shells, both complete and in fragments, were found in the LH IIIC sanctuary of Philakopi. The two whole shells are not perforated, but the fragments show distinct holes interpreted as serving to hook the shell onto the arms of a musical instrument, Renfrew, Cherry 1985, 325-26; Younger 1998, 17-18. For later examples of carapaces probably used as lyre sound boxes: Faklaris 1977; Courbin 1980, 114.

<sup>66</sup> In the form of remains, probably, of foodstuffs: cf. D'Agata, Karamaliki 2000; D'Agata forthcoming a; c; d. Numerous remains of turtle shells with burn marks, dating from the Mycenaean phase and immediately thereafter, come from the sanctuary of Kalapodi, Felsch 1999, 168-69; 2001, 197.

On the basis of the check pattern decoration which characterises the two central panels, they could represent an altar in ashlar masonry or mudbrick. In the Bronze Age the check motif was used figuratively to allude to square hewn stone blocks<sup>67</sup> or also to a structure in brick, in the latter case implying the presence of a lower stone course. However, the comparisons are not conclusive, above all because an altar is generally represented as a solid structure, not very tall, and without any openings.

A second possible interpretation of the central panels is a larnax: their conformation can in fact recall the typical sarcophagus of the Cretan Bronze Age, usually of clay and standing on feet.<sup>68</sup> A few elements, however, go against this interpretation. First of all, it is hard to believe that the short side, rather than the main, long side of the manufact, has been represented on the vessel. In the second place, the alleged sarcophagus is shown larger than the warriors, and not corresponding to reality. Lastly, and most importantly, larnakes are almost unknown in Crete in the tenth century BC,<sup>69</sup> and there is no evidence that they circulated in the settlements.

A third and final interpretation could be that the central panels represent a building. The structure appears to have been placed on the ground, indicated by the lower line, and standing firmly on it. Thus it could be a low, flat-roofed, building, with two antae and a doorway (?) surmounted by a two-part lintel.<sup>70</sup> A Protogeometric clay model from Knossos shows elements which recall this structure, namely a simple, quadrangular plan; the square door set into the short side, and the check-patterned decoration, possibly to indicate an ashlar masonry structure. Found in the tholos tomb of Khaniala Tekke,<sup>71</sup> this model has also been associated with a very simple type of Cretan cult building – namely the shrine characterised by a single room, of Bronze Age tradition, one example of which has been found *in corpore* at Kommos. Temple A on this site, with a simple rectangular groundplan, has been dated between the last quarter of the eleventh and the end of the ninth century BC.<sup>72</sup>

In practice, given the complexity and richness of detail in the scenes represented, it is possible that the central panels A2 and B3 on the two sides of the Thronos Kephala krater have a special value and should be considered as the figured repre-

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<sup>67</sup>According to Immerwahr 1990, 125-127, fig. 35b, checkboard is a shorthand for ashlar masonry in the Orchomenos frescos of the end of the thirteenth century BC. The Megaron frieze from Mycenae depicts a warrior falling down from a palace structure where checkboard is used to indicate ashlar masonry of a wall supporting a column (Immerwahr 1990, 123-25, pl. 65). A fragment of krater from Tiryns shows a soldier (?) in a checkboard structure (Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, XI.50). See also Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982, 135.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. e.g., although in stone, the sarcophagus from Ayia Triada: Long 1974, pl. 6.

<sup>69</sup> LM III larnakes are reused in the North Cemetery at Knossos not before the late ninth century BC, Coldstream 2000, 273.

<sup>70</sup> In this case the proportions between warrior and building would be falsified, the warriors being more or less the same height as the building, with the entrance door being lower than the warriors themselves.

<sup>71</sup> Hutchinson, Boardman 1954, 220-21, fig. 5, pl. 20.1; Boardman 1967, 64-66 no. 36, fig. 3; Hampe, Simon 1981, pl. 82.

<sup>72</sup> Shaw, Shaw 2000.

sensation of a structure – an altar, or more probably a building – where the scene represented took place. In this perspective it is worth pointing out the difference between the two panels: A2 is characterised by a vegetal element, whereas B3 features a structure decorated with the net-pattern. There are two possible explanations for this difference between the two panels: we may have, on the two sides, a representation of *the same structure* seen from two different vantage points, or they may be representations of *two different structures*.

#### 2.4 Syntax and meaning of the figured scene

The syntax of the figured scene situated on either side of the vessel is characterised by repetition of the two base or core elements: warriors and the central structure. Beside them, a set of objects offers elements regarding the context within which the action is to be imagined taking place. Side A includes a composition that is symmetrical but not enclosed, with two warriors at the sides of the central structure. Both are turned to the right, as if following through towards the space beyond the frieze. Side B shows an asymmetrical composition. On the left side, there is a third warrior, while a set of musical instruments, beside a structure much like the one on Side A, is located on the right. The third warrior is also turned to the right, right arm raised, with shield and spear as his basic equipment. The three figures are not shown in the act of fighting, as we can see from the spear held upright, nor advancing in procession, as indicated by the feet set obliquely well above the base line. The warriors are in fact shown in the act of leaping to the right. In the Late Geometric figurative repertory, figures with at least one arm raised and the palm of the hand open, and in some cases the feet taking off from the base line, are interpreted as being engaged in dancing.<sup>73</sup> The armed warriors on the Thronos Kephala krater may well be shown in the act of dancing, i.e. performing an armed dance. This interpretation also accounts for the presence of musical instruments on Side B.

It is important to emphasise that the three figures on the two sides of the vessel are represented in the act of performing the same action. In general, in Greek vase painting repetition of figures and objects on both sides of the same vessel indicates actions represented in sequence. If this is the case for the Thronos Kephala krater, then we have to ask which of the two sides shows the first stage in the action: which was the main side for the craftsman who painted the vessel? If the side we denominate A represents the beginning of the scene, then the action starts with the two warriors, followed by the third one on side B. The three are represented as they dance facing right, all moving in the same direction one after another in single file, or possibly moving in a circle. In the latter case we have to take as the ideal focus of the action the central panel on the two sides of the vessel, depicting the two opposite sides of the same structure. The musical instruments – placed at the end of the sequence if the three warriors are dancing in single file, or simply near the three if the dance is circular – provide information about a context for the action. There is,

<sup>73</sup> Tölle 1964, 77-79; Kaufman-Samaras 1972; Rombos 1988, 137-38; Ceccarelli 1998, 16.

however, another possibility. On red-figured kylikes it is quite common for a scene to be ordered from left to right on side A and continued on side B. This orientation of the vessel may be marked by the signature, or decorative filling, placed under the handle to the left on side A.<sup>74</sup> The signature can thus serve to mark the beginning and end when viewing the kylix. In the case of our vessel this marker function could be served by the two vertical fillings set symmetrically below the rim on the two sides of one of the handles. In this case the fillings would mark the beginning and end of the figured sequence. Thus the first side should be our side B, with the instruments set beside the central panel, and the second our side A, with the two warriors at the sides of the central panel. In this case the musical instruments would be included in the dance scene, and not situated at the margins. These two interpretations are not really in contradiction as far as the interpretation of the single elements and reconstruction of the scene's syntax and meaning are concerned. Adopting one or the other merely shows the painter placing a greater emphasis either on the context, if B is the first, principal side, or on the protagonists, if A is.

To sum up, on the Thronos Kephala krater we have the representation of three armed warriors performing a dance, possibly near a building which on side A is characterised by a plant. The action is performed in a musical context involving the use of a lyre and percussion instruments. Although quite rare, dance scenes were represented on clay vessels in the Aegean in the course of the Bronze Age up until the twelfth century BC,<sup>75</sup> and again in the Geometric period.<sup>76</sup> An armed dance was not an everyday action but must have been performed on special occasions, and is therefore to be attributed with ritual significance. Seen from this point of view, the scene represented on the krater must have been constructed as part of a narrative sequence,<sup>77</sup> in the sense that we find a single specific action (a moment in the dance) performed in a specific spatial context (close to a building, or at least a plant) and on a specific occasion (time span) which we cannot define. The warriors are shown in the act of leaping, which means that they started somewhere and sometime previously and will end later. Since it is an extremely specific act, the mere fact of leaping can allude to the whole sequence for anyone with prior knowledge or experience. "Thus, one can understand from the frozen action that further action will likely occur."<sup>78</sup>

If we adopt the parameters for reading a pictorial scene outlined by Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell, the scene represented on the krater from Thronos Kephala can be defined as pertaining to *generic narrative*, with an open-ended action as its object, where the three armed male figures shown in the act of dancing constitute three separate nuclei, or the agents of the action.<sup>79</sup> On both side A and side B the nuclei

<sup>74</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 154-55.

<sup>75</sup> German 2005, 53-71.

<sup>76</sup> Tölle 1964, 77-79; Kaufman-Samaras 1972; Rombos 1988, 137-38; Langdon 2008, 144.

<sup>77</sup> On the problem of the appearance of narrative on Greek pottery in the Geometric period, Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 35-44; Giuliani 2003; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2006b; *Alba delle città, alba delle immagini?*

<sup>78</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 19.

<sup>79</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 18-31, 48.

are linked by the central panel/building, which together with the weapons worn by the figures perform the dual function of *catalysts*, providing a connection between the protagonists, and *informants*, providing information about the collocation of the action in a spatial context. The instruments at the edge of side B evoke a type of context, featuring music, in which the action is to be placed. Thus they act not only as *informants* but also as *indexes*, suggesting a broader environment, external to the one shown on the vessel, to which the action refers, providing a link that goes beyond the tangible limits of the action. It is not easy to identify the exact connection between the two nuclei of side A and the third on side B, as we have discussed above. But it is appropriate to reiterate how, on the basis of some specific elements – repetition of the same characters on both sides, the same direction of movement, and the differences between the central panels – the representations on the two sides of the vessel appear to have a continuity and refer to the same spatial context.<sup>80</sup> The composition is directional, continuous, and not necessarily enclosed within the limits of the frieze. The warriors are all moving towards the right, which is the direction the heroes or victors depicted on Greek pottery invariably take.<sup>81</sup>

As we have said, an armed dance is classified as a ritual action which is not part of everyday life and which only occurs on specific occasions. Furthermore a special value has to be attributed to the depiction of warriors on an Early Iron Age vessel, whatever form this takes. The Early Iron Age tombs that yielded weapons at Knossos, Kerameikos in Athens and Lefkandi are among the richest in their respective necropolises, suggesting that during those centuries the possession of weapons was strictly linked to the display of wealth, and thus to high standing in the community.<sup>82</sup> In this respect too the Thronos Kephala vessel is to be considered an object of prestige which circulated among the exponents of a privileged social group.

But what prompted the genesis of this representation, and what value was ascribed to it by those who had the opportunity to view our krater or hold it in their hands? In Greek art figured representations constitute one of the research topics that has been most explored on account of the immense legacy of images we have inherited from the ancient world. Recent investigations have shown how important it is, in order to arrive at a global comprehension, to adopt a theoretical perspective able to clarify the criteria underlying their construction and to help reconstruct the *imaginaire* to which they refer. Special attention has been paid to the numerous vase paintings dating from the eighth century BC, generally considered to be the oldest examples of pictorial narrative in Greek art, seeking to identify place of origin and sources of inspiration.<sup>83</sup> More recently it has been suggested that examples of generic pictorial narrative occurred in the Aegean not only in the Geometric period<sup>84</sup> but already in the Bronze Age.<sup>85</sup> In spite of the great decrease in

<sup>80</sup> Cf. the schematic female figures with raised arms repeated on the whole extension of the neck of a PGB amphora from Knossos, Brock 1957, 339, pls. 24, 143; Coldstream 1980, 70.

<sup>81</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 82.

<sup>82</sup> Crieelard 1998; van Wees 1998, 338-43.

<sup>83</sup> Coldstream 1968; Carter 1972; Benson 1970; Coldstream 1991; Snodgrass 1998; *Alba delle città, alba delle immagini?*

<sup>84</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999; 2006a.

<sup>85</sup> Cain 2001.



the production of images that followed the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, and the explosion of image-making that occurred above all in Athens during the eighth century BC, the period between 1200 and 700 has to be seen as decisive for the formation of various figurative traditions in Greece. In fact the twelfth century BC marks a watershed in figured representation with respect to the previous period.<sup>86</sup> The two regions which have yielded the greatest number of items and for which the existence of a figurative pictorial tradition is well documented are Crete, first of all, and then Athens and Attica. For Crete important if extemporaneous factors in this formative process were the partial survival of the immense legacy of figured images created during the Bronze Age, a survival that took various forms and had a range of causes;<sup>87</sup> the fortuitous rediscovery of Bronze Age objects which, given the remarkable continuity of the island's population, we can imagine to have been already in progress within a few decades of the fall of the Palaces; early contact with the Near East; and of course also the peculiar dimension of 'socio-political laboratory' which characterised the island throughout the Bronze Age and up to the end of the second millennium BC. The few figured vessels to have come to light in Knossos over the last thirty years clearly prove the existence, in the ninth century BC, of a local tradition which drew inspiration from both the Bronze Age tradition and influences from further afield, notably the Near East. The Thronos Kephala krater now shows that, from a significantly earlier date, a figured tradition existed in the central-western area of the island, on the slopes of the Psiloriti massif.<sup>88</sup>

The action depicted on the krater is unique: it does not appear to originate in the Bronze Age tradition except, as we have seen, for individual details, and cannot be considered to be of oriental derivation. It can certainly be indicated as a stylistic link between the figured representations dating from the twelfth century BC and those of the eighth century BC, but this tells us nothing about its origins.

When the vessel was painted, the Greek alphabet had yet to make its appearance.<sup>89</sup> Stories of heroes, in narrative form, had certainly been circulating in Greece, probably for many centuries,<sup>90</sup> but the representation on our vessel finds no comparisons in the Late Bronze Age repertory. For the time being we must consider it an original invention on the part of the craftsman, who must have found inspiration in the context in which he lived.<sup>91</sup> Given that the scene represents a specific action performed in a ritual context, we must conclude that the genesis of the images on the Thronos Kephala krater came about as the visual response to an impulse from the social world to which the craftsman belonged, as well as being connected with the function which the vessel served in its original context. In short,

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<sup>86</sup> Vermeule, Karageorghis 1982; Langdon 1993; Rysted, Wells 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Coldstream 1984; Coldstream 1988; Maran 2005; Eder 2006; Maran 2006; Wedde 2006.

<sup>88</sup> In the Early Iron Age the important role played in the formation of the figured tradition by the region around Psiloriti is confirmed by the presence of figured vessels at Prinias (Rizza 1978; 1984; 2011) from at least PGB.

<sup>89</sup> Jeffery 1990; Powell 1991; 2002.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas 1989; 1992.

<sup>91</sup> On the theory of a 'tabula rasa' in relation to the origin of narrative, Hurwit 1985, 65-69; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 41-42; 2006a, 248 (with relevant literature at n. 6).

the scene is not purely decorative: it served some sort of social function, and as we have already suggested, there must have been a dynamic relation with the users of the vessel. It is important to add in this respect that craftsmen were not free to choose the topics to be represented, or even how to give them visual form. If it was to be successful, the representation had to be comprehensible to the public and contribute to forming a common visual language.<sup>92</sup> In fact figured representation in Early Greece appears to be based on a narrative discourse in which craftsmen and users, both fully recognised members of the community in which the images circulated, made a concrete contribution to the construction of the stories represented and their transmission.

In order to reconstruct the historical and socio-political context within which the action represented takes its place, in absence of coeval sources – neither iconographic nor literary –, we first have to analyse the action – the armed dance – in the light of the later literary and iconographic sources. Then we can go on to contextualize the action represented on the krater from Thronos Kephala in the sphere of the archaeological evidence available for the Early Iron Age.

### 3. *The armed dance*<sup>93</sup>

In the Greek world the armed dance, commonly referred to as the Pyrrhic, played a primary role in different contexts such as funerals<sup>94</sup> and initiation rites for youths. It was intended as a form of symbolic representation where the emphasis is on the capacity for waging war. None of the myths concerning the origin of the armed dance feature an opponent: the dance was performed to demonstrate personal ability. However, the significance of the Pyrrhic reaches well beyond the military sphere, as the myths connected with its origins indicate.

Iconographic and literary evidence for warrior dances goes back to the eighth century BC, and their main function seems to have been to educate youth.<sup>95</sup> As indicated in a passage of the *Iliad* (7.237-241), the young appear to have been initiated into the art of war with paramilitary exercises accompanied by music. They learnt to handle shield and spear, and acquire the agility needed in combat to fight side by side with fellow warriors.<sup>96</sup> The armed dance had an important function in the education of the young Cretans, who were gathered together into 'herds' (*agelai*) to prepare for adult life and the hardships of bearing arms,<sup>97</sup> after which they were promoted to full citizenship. This transition was marked by an annual ceremony during which the young were wedded<sup>98</sup> and presented with their

<sup>92</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 102.

<sup>93</sup> This paragraph has been largely included in D'Agata forthcoming b.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle (fr. 519R) says that Achilles was the first to have used the war-dance (*pyrriche*) at the pyre of Patroclus: so he takes the word *pyrriche* to derive from pyre. Cf. *Odyss.* 24.68-69, for the armed dance at the funeral of Achilles.

<sup>95</sup> Ceccarelli 1998, 16-18, 108-115.

<sup>96</sup> Lonsdale 1993, 138.

<sup>97</sup> Strabo 10.4.16 = Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F149.

<sup>98</sup> Strabo 10.4.20.

armour, in a symbolic sanctioning of the death of the youth and the birth of the new, armed citizen.<sup>99</sup>

A precise description of the Pyrrhic is given by Plato in the *Laws* (815a). Typical movements are sudden leaps in the air and crouching – movements that are appropriate not for hoplites fighting a regular battle but rather for small bands of warriors engaged in an ambush, representing a type of guerrilla warfare generally associated with Sparta<sup>100</sup> and the Cretan *poleis*.<sup>101</sup> In fact the Pyrrhic is a sequence of movements which rehearse the military manoeuvres typical of an ambush. The Pyrrhic dancers were naked and bore shield, helmet, and an assault weapon, or they would imitate the wielding of sword, spear or javelin. While the shield was a constant in the equipment of the Pyrrhic dancers, the offensive weapon could vary,<sup>102</sup> just as it does in the case of the warriors on the Thronos Kephala krater.

The armed dance was often thought to have originated in either Crete or Sparta, and some legends attribute the Pyrrhic to geographically-localised heroes and divinities. On Crete, they were the Kouretes. In the *Bacchae* (120-134) Euripides shows the Kouretes<sup>103</sup> creating a *byrsotonon kyloma*, or drum of tightened hide,<sup>104</sup> in a sacred cave of Crete in order to drown out the cries of the infant Zeus, lest his father Kronos should find and devour him.<sup>105</sup> Strabo wrote that the armed dance (*enoplios orchesis*) “was invented and made known by the Kouretes at first, and later, also, by the man who arranged the dance that was named after him, I mean the Pyrrhic dance.”<sup>106</sup> In the last decades of the first century BC, Dionysius of Halikarnassus, reporting “as legend has it”, identified the origin of the Pyrrhic with the fact that the Kouretes, “acting as nurses to Zeus, strove to amuse him by the clashing of arms and the rhythmic movements of their limbs.”<sup>107</sup> Whereas in the third century BC Callimachus described the Kouretes on Mount Ida as they lustily danced a war-dance (*prylis*) round the infant Zeus, beating their armour, so that Kronos might hear the din of the shields but not the noise of the infant.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Willets 1955, 15-17 and 120-23; Willets 1962, 46-53; Willets 1965, 112-18; Brelich 1969, 196-207; Lebessi 1991, 103-13; Perlman 1995; Chaniotis 1996, 21 and n. 83; Graf 2003, 10, 15-16, 20; Iles Johnston 2003, 155; Langdon 2008, 89-95.

<sup>100</sup> Vidal-Naquet 1986, 112-14; Lonsdale 1993, 139.

<sup>101</sup> On the similar economic and social background of military practice on Crete and at Sparta in the Archaic age, referring in part to the presence in both regions of servile figures (Helots, servants) who worked on the land and over whom their owner had the power of life and death, van Wees 2007, 274-76. On Crete the preference for guerilla warfare must also be linked to the difficult and prevalently mountainous nature of the island's terrain. Significantly, during the Second World War in the area between Psiloriti and Lefka Ori, the struggle between the local population and the Allies against the Germans took the form of guerilla warfare: see the evocative reminiscences of Iorgos Psychoundakis (1998).

<sup>102</sup> Lonsdale 1993, 144-147.

<sup>103</sup> Also called *trikorythes Korybantes* (thrice-helmed Corybantes): cf. Burkert 1985, 173-174.

<sup>104</sup> The tympanum or circular drum of ox skin: for the use of this object by the Kouretes, Strabo 10.3.11.

<sup>105</sup> Dodds 1960, 83. Cf. also Eurip. *Kretes* fr. 472.

<sup>106</sup> Strabo 10.4.16 = Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F149, Loeb transl.; cf. Strabo 10.3.8.

<sup>107</sup> Dion. Hal. *Antiquitates Romanae* 7.72.7, Loeb transl.

<sup>108</sup> Call. *Hymn.* 1.52-54. In the literary tradition, apart from some late variants, the Kouretes danced armed with shield and sword; in reliefs, dating above all from Roman times, in which they are shown dancing round Zeus, they beat their shields with their swords.

Starting from the seminal article by Jane Harrison (1908-1909), numerous scholars have attempted to define the complex daimonic nature of the Kouretes,<sup>109</sup> and on Crete there appears to be no doubt as to their close connection with initiation rites.<sup>110</sup> The Kouretes feature in the hymn to the Greatest Kouros, known to us from an inscription found at Palaikastro at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>111</sup> and associated not only with rites celebrating agricultural renewal but also with the coming of age of the young choristers.<sup>112</sup> The inscription, giving a fragmentary text of the hymn, can be dated to the Severan age, but the work's composition is usually attributed to the fourth or early third century BC. As for the circumstance in which the hymn was performed, Paula Perlman has plausibly identified it with an annual celebration held at the sanctuary of Zeus Diktaios, at the southern edge of the city of Itanos in eastern Crete: a crucial festivity in the city's political life, celebrating the renewal of the citizen body and inter-state relations.<sup>113</sup> The hymn was sung by choristers – the young initiates of Itanos – drawn up around the altar “walled so well” (*bomon euerke*) of the *Megistos Kouros*, and it seems highly likely that the singing was accompanied by the performance of an armed dance.<sup>114</sup>

The hymn comprises six strophes separated by a refrain invoking the Greatest Kouros, who has been identified with Zeus Diktaios. The first strophe contains indications concerning the hymn's performance. The next three strophes<sup>115</sup> narrate the myth of the birth and childhood of Zeus, followed by a description of a past golden age. Finally in the fifth and sixth strophes the choristers call upon the god to endow with fertility the cattle, flocks, fields, homes, and also the cities, ships, new (young) citizens and *themis*. The verb used to convey the concept of fertilising is *throsko eis*, meaning: leap into, impregnate, and by extension fertilise,<sup>116</sup> implying an action much like the Pyrrhic leap or sudden emergence from a bush.

Thus the hymn to the *Megistos Kouros* alludes to a number of rites, events, traditions and cults which were of paramount importance in the Classic and Hellenistic ages not only at Itanos but in other Cretan cities too.<sup>117</sup> Within a context that affirms the importance of the city, the youths singing the hymn<sup>118</sup> were the

<sup>109</sup> See especially, Harrison 1911, 22-29; Harrison 1922, 498-500; Jeanmaire 1939; Willetts 1962, 98-100.

<sup>110</sup> See e.g. Burkert 1985, 261-62.

<sup>111</sup> *IC* III 2.2; *SEG* XXVIII.751; *XLV*.1330; *LV*.1000; West 1965; Guarducci 1978. The second strophe of the hymn deals with the Kouretes; their name has been supplied in a lacuna of the text in *IC* III 2.2.

<sup>112</sup> Perlman 1995, 161 nn. 3-4.

<sup>113</sup> Perlman 1995. The identification is based on precise comparisons with the civic oath that all the inhabitants of Itanos aspiring to become full citizens were asked to swear (*IC* III 4.8).

<sup>114</sup> Ceccarelli 1998, 111-112; 2002, 200-201.

<sup>115</sup> The third is almost entirely lost.

<sup>116</sup> Perlman 1995, 161.

<sup>117</sup> The oath of the youths of Dreros (*IC* I 9.1) also provides interesting material, conserved in an inscription of the late third or early second century BC. The new citizens swear allegiance to their city and its allies, and during the ceremony they appear to cast off the clothes they wore as boys (ll. 99-100). The text concludes with some lines that are not very clear (ll. 154-164): according to Willetts (1962, 201), the winner in an ordeal of initiation, that took the form of a race, and his competitors were obliged to plant an olive tree.

<sup>118</sup> Ceccarelli (1998, 112) believes that the choristers, in a ritual *mimesis*, took on the role of the Kouretes when they sang the hymn to the Greatest Kouros.

protagonists of an annual festival of agricultural renewal which included the ritual of male initiation and the relative armed dance. One can hardly identify the social and political context of the Classical age – and even more of the subsequent Hellenistic age, especially from the second century BC<sup>119</sup> – with that of the Early Iron Age. We can nonetheless note that the initiation rite was performed within a collective dimension, as an expression of a political structure designed to ensure its own reproduction and the permanence of the ruling group.

In conclusion, the three warriors depicted on the Thronos krater can be identified as youths who had just been received into their social group as adults. They are dancing, possibly in the vicinity of, or around, a building, characterised by the presence of a plant – a fertility symbol. If we adopt the approach of Jane Harrison, rituals of this kind may have given rise to the myth of the Kouretes and their link with Mount Ida.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps more importantly, on Crete the hymn of Palaikastro and the archaeological evidence from the sanctuary of Kato Symi<sup>121</sup> confirm the existence of significant initiation rites on the island from an early date, and the important role that these rites played in the formation of some of the social and political institutions that were to be typical of the Archaic age. Thus, the evidence available from Crete legitimises the interpretation of the scene on the krater from Thronos Kephala as a reflection of an initiatory practice of young males. To take this line of reasoning further, the scene can be considered the first attestation of the rite of the armed dance on the island and an indication of the earliest formation, at the local level, of an aristocracy which over the next two or three centuries was to manifest itself in the *syssitia* and *agelai*.

Until the late 1980s in particular, it was common practice to trace the ritual of agricultural renewal, like that of male initiation, back to the Bronze Age society of the Neopalatial period, identifying its origins in the second half of the second millennium BC.<sup>122</sup> In the light of the important social transformations that took place on the island from the twelfth century BC, this interpretation appears restrictive. The problem of the ways in which the transmission of rituals took place over the long period which separates the mid-second millennium from the first attestations in the first millennium BC has never been seriously tackled. However, in recent years Angeliki Lembessi has convincingly shown that the system for educating the young typical of Crete in Archaic and Classical times originated in the Post-Palatial period. At the end of the eleventh century BC transition from the anonymous worshipper of the Bronze Age to real individuals – among whom the warriors make their appearance in the form of bronze figurines dedicated in the open-air sanctuary of Kato Symi – is documented.<sup>123</sup>

The identification of the warriors on the Thronos krater as males performing a dance also causes us to reflect on this representation in relation to the topic of the

<sup>119</sup> When the process of unification of the archaic (aristocratic) institutions in the Cretan *poleis* had been completed, Montecchi 2007.

<sup>120</sup> Harrison 1911, 13-22; see Graf 2003, 5-6.

<sup>121</sup> Lebessi 1985; 2002; Marinatos 2003.

<sup>122</sup> Willets 1962, 116-17, 211-14; van Effenterre 1985, 300-301; Koehl 1986, 105-06; 1997; Perlman 1995, 161; MacGillivray, Sackett 2000.

<sup>123</sup> Lebessi 2002, 279-282; Prent 2005, 582.

circular dance. In Crete above all, but throughout the Aegean basin from the Early Bronze Age to the Geometric period and beyond, this dance was a recurrent if not permanent practice which can be seen as an ideological tool, used to create a sense of unity and community identity, above all in contexts of growing social disparity.<sup>124</sup> On the contrary, the dance scene on the Thronos krater features an action carried out individually by the three armed warriors, who do not appear to have any physical connection between one another: they have not linked hands, nor are they touching each other, and their representation gives no sign of solidarity between them. In other words, the scene seems to refer to an exclusive social act, whose meaning is in all probability the contrary of the one referred to above and commonly attributed to the circular dance: the action shown is reserved for a few, and tends to distinguish one specific group within the local community, excluding rather than including.

#### 4. *The warrior dance krater and the settlement of ancient Sybrita in the Early Iron Age*

On the basis of form, decoration and context, our krater can be seen as an object of prestige, commissioned and used in the EPG by a specific group in the ancient settlement of Sybrita. Given the rarity of figured scenes on EIA vessels and the peculiarity of the representation from Sybrita, it must surely have depicted an action – the warrior dance – that was performed in the community. That is to say, by the tenth century BC, a ritual action had already been established in the settlement of Sybrita which was to become associated with the elite of the Greek city states, contributing to upholding the political system.

One social practice that is known to have taken place on the hill of Kephala from the twelfth century BC was the communal sharing of food, as is shown by the ritual pits.<sup>125</sup> This practice was concluded by the partial burial of the remains of the banquet in a pit excavated in the central area of the settlement (fig. 3), in a public space,<sup>126</sup> and can be interpreted as a kind of feasting that represents a direct precedent for the *syssitia* that would later take place in the *andreia*.<sup>127</sup> In the first centuries of the EIA the rituals connected with conviviality must have been a social practice embracing a range of elements in a manner that had not yet been formally codified, i.e. economic redistribution, ritual sharing, social interactions, and political interests. The most evident development to have been identified in the social

<sup>124</sup> Soar 2010, 152.

<sup>125</sup> D'Agata 1997-2000; D'Agata 2008; [www.sybrita.org](http://www.sybrita.org).

<sup>126</sup> For the concept of public and private in Ancient Greece, de Polignac, Schmitt Pantel 1998.

<sup>127</sup> Public feasting has a long history on Crete: in the central region, at Phaistos, remains of collective feasting have been identified in levels attributed to Final Neolithic (Todaro, Di Tonto 2008). Discussion on feasting in relation to Crete and the Aegean in general has acquired such importance that the relevant bibliography is too extensive to be summarised, cf. especially Wright 2004 and Hitchcock, Laffineur, Crowley 2008. On the identification of the *andreia* on Crete, Montecchi 2007, 95-108; Erickson 2010, 313-20.

conduct linked to the ritual pits on Kephala is the change during the tenth century to eating beef, accompanied by a diminution in the consumption of wild animals obtained by hunting.<sup>128</sup> This passage implies the formation of a different economic organization and a different exploitation of resources, and certainly meant the formation of an economic system which was more integrated with the surrounding territory. This was precisely the phase in which the warrior dance krater was in use at Sybrita.

Archaeological investigations carried out on the island in the last twenty years have confirmed that, in the centuries from the twelfth to the seventh BC, a series of transformations were in progress which in many cases contributed to the formation of the archaic *poleis*. Research has also shown that over this long period, which was not homogeneous, the tenth century BC marked a moment of transformation in the political and social organization of some centres on the island. These sites have been designed as *protopoleis*,<sup>129</sup> but their political structure remains obscure, in the absence of clear archaeological evidence able to support a reconstruction of their political institutions. One important conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of the above-mentioned changes is that political communities preceded the formation of the *polis* as an urban phenomenon.<sup>130</sup> Besides, what characterises the *polis* is not so much a territorial physiognomy in urban terms but rather, in a politico-social perspective, the ideology linked to the rise of the idea of citizenship,<sup>131</sup> and the definition of a privileged condition granted to the adult males in the community. This privilege developed within a social system based on age classes<sup>132</sup> and articulated round an aristocracy grounded in lineage, a system which on Crete more than elsewhere in the Greek world continued to characterise life in the cities right up to the Hellenistic age. One of the most significant features of the Cretan *poleis* in the Archaic period was the creation of new institutions based on the recognition of privilege for some social groupings: notably the *syssitia*, or common meals,<sup>133</sup> and the male initiation rites.<sup>134</sup> Hence we can identify processes of social discrimination whose origins are closely bound up with the birth of these institutions: processes which were set in motion to uphold the privileges of the ruling groups which emerged during the Early Iron Age.

The archaeological evidence from Thronos Kephala includes indications of how in the first centuries of the Early Iron Age the two founding practices of archaic Cretan society received here, on this site, an initial formulation. In particular, the production and consumption of the warrior dance krater must have been connected with a special occasion featuring a banquet. The scene depicted on the krater also documents a paradigm shift in the social ideals connected with manhood, which is not expressed in terms of violence or aggression or simply through elitar-

<sup>128</sup> D'Agata forthcoming a.

<sup>129</sup> Wallace 2006, 648; 2010a, 66-68; 2010b.

<sup>130</sup> Yoffee 1997, 261-62; Whitley 2001, 168; Hall 2007, 67-70.

<sup>131</sup> Whitley 2001, 165-68.

<sup>132</sup> Sallares 1991, 173.

<sup>133</sup> Jeanmaire 1939, 421-27; Willets 1955, 18-27, 138-140; 1965, 86-87, 111-23; Guizzi 1997; Chaniotis 1999, 193-194. See also Montecchi 2007, 86-90; Erickson 2010, 309-31.

<sup>134</sup> See *supra* n. 99.

ian behaviours.<sup>135</sup> If the krater was the defining shape and symbol of the banquet, the scene depicted codifies the ways in which a group in the community of Thronos Kephala assigned to itself the privilege of male initiation, and celebrated it with a ceremony which also included a banquet. The vessel may be considered as a kind of materialization of a ritual behaviour that enabled the society to ensure its continuation. Given a convivial context, the interpretation of the images painted on the krater must in practice have been designed to reinforce the identity-forming values of a new group and the mechanisms of social interaction associated with the ceremony.

We cannot yet say what was the size or territorial limits of Sybrita during the centuries of the Early Iron Age, just as we do not know much about the type of territorial organization that extended around the site. It is not clear whether we are dealing with a pattern of dispersal of settlements, like the one documented in the Kavousi area – where the landscape may be compared to that of Sybrita –, or rather with a phenomenon of early enucleated centres, like the one postulated for Phaistos and the western Mesara.<sup>136</sup> For the early centuries of the *polis* formation process, while the archaeological evidence from Sybrita does not for the moment provide indications concerning the territory, it is undoubtedly significant in socio-political terms. For the end of the eleventh and the tenth century BC we can reconstruct a scenario featuring a rise in social tensions linked to the redefinition of control over the territory and the exploitation of its resources, as well as fierce competition, meaning that “leaders of various co-resident social groups compete for power, and new arenas for competition are created to channel this struggle.”<sup>137</sup> In other words, the situation of tension seems to have had the effect of reinforcing the internal cohesion of single groups, favouring the formation of an aristocratic-like ideology in which manhood, warrior status and collective identity were, in all likelihood, redefined.<sup>138</sup> Archaeological research at Sybrita still has to give answers to many questions, but the clay krater that features the oldest representation of the warrior dance tells a story in pictures that for the moment is unique in Crete, and documents a crucial stage in the revolutionary processes of political and social transformations that took place on the island at the dawn of the first millennium BC.

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<sup>135</sup> D'Agata forthcoming d.

<sup>136</sup> Haggis 1993; forthcoming.

<sup>137</sup> Yoffee 1997, 261. See also Haggis, Terrenato 2011, 5.

<sup>138</sup> D'Agata forthcoming d.



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## ABSTRACT

*Discovered in 2002 in the settlement of Thronos Kephala in central-western Crete – usually identified with the predecessor of ancient Sybrita – the clay figured krater presented in this paper displays the oldest scene of armed dance in Greek vase-painting, therefore constituting an outstanding document of the Cretan Early Iron Age. The paper includes a brief summary of the archaeological context in which the vessel was found, an analysis of the vessel as an archaeological object, which also makes use of the concept of social agency, and a reconstruction of the socio-political context within which the vessel was manufactured and for which it was intended. Finally, the nature of the settlement of early Sybrita, with its likely social and political organization in the tenth century BC, is discussed in the light of the results of the research done to date on this significant Early Iron Age centre squeezed in between the Psiloriti and the Amari valley.*



## RIASSUNTO

*Rinvenuto nel 2002 nell'insediamento di Thronos Kephala in Creta centro-occidentale, generalmente identificato come predecessore della polis di Sybrita, il cratere fittile che qui si pubblica è decorato con una scena di danza armata, e costituisce un eccezionale documento della prima età del Ferro cretese. Nell'articolo sono comprese l'analisi del vaso, anche informata al concetto di social agency, e del suo contesto archeologico, e la ricostruzione del milieu socio-politico all'interno del quale il vaso venne fruito. È infine discussa la natura dell'insediamento di Sybrita nel decimo secolo a.C. alla luce dei risultati della ricerca effettuata finora su questo significativo centro della prima età del Ferro, compreso tra lo Psiloriti e la valle di Amari.*