

A Mycenaean Sanctuary on Methana

by
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Abstract

On the hill of Ayios Konstantinos on the east coast of Methana, the remains of a Late Helladic settlement were uncovered in an excavation of the 2nd Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in 1990. One of the excavated rooms has the main architectural features of a shrine, i.e. an entrance to the east, a stepped bench in the north-western corner opposite the entrance, a low platform running along its south wall and a hearth set in its south-eastern corner. This room has yielded a large number of terracotta figurines, along with some pottery that can be interpreted as cult equipment. The figurines were mostly bovinds, but some very rare categories were also represented in surprising numbers: chariot groups, horses with helmeted riders, ridden oxen groups, and driven oxen groups. The absence of the common Phi and Psi figurines is a striking feature of the assemblage, which suggests the cult of a male deity, perhaps accompanied by a female one in a subordinate role. As this deity seems to be closely connected with bulls and horses, the cult of a precursor of Poseidon and Hippolytus, preceding the foundation of their sanctuaries at Calaureaia and Troezen, is a possible interpretation.

Methana¹ is a small, mountainous peninsula in Troezenia (in the north-eastern part of the Peloponnese), projecting far out into the Saronic Gulf, between the islands of Aegina and Poros (ancient Calaureaia). On the hill of Ayios Konstantinos, lying on the east coast of the peninsula, opposite Calaureaia, at

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My special thanks are due to Dr Vassileios Petrakos, Honorary Ephor of the Antiquities of Attica, for having supported the excavation presented here and having facilitated my study in every possible way.

The investigation of this important site will be continued in the future as a regular excavation for which I have a personal permit, granted by the Archaeological Council, thanks to the warm support of the Director of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Dr Yannis Tzedakis, to whom I express my deep gratitude. I am also indebted to the Institute for Aegean Prehistory for having generously provided the funds that will enable me to continue my work.

I am extremely grateful to Dr K.A. Wardle, who is supervising my Ph.D. thesis on this sanctuary at the University of Birmingham, for the very important role that he has played in the whole progress of my study. I am obliged to the British School at Athens for having enabled me to attend a British university by awarding me a Centenary Bursary.

My warmest thanks go to Dr E.B. French, to whom I owe a great deal. She has unfailingly offered me invaluable advice, useful suggestions, critical remarks and moral support at every stage of my study, the preparation of this paper included.

a distance of 1.5 km to the north of the modern port of Methana, a recent excavation (still in progress) of the Greek Archaeological Service² has brought to light architectural remains of the Mycenaean period.

Abbreviations

In addition to the customary abbreviations, the following are also used:

- Celebrations* *Celebrations of death and divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 11–13 June, 1988* (ActaAth-4°, 40), eds. R. Hägg & G.C. Nordquist, Stockholm 1990.
- Problems* *Problems in Greek Prehistory. Papers presented at the Centenary Conference of the British School of Archaeology at Athens, Manchester, April 1986*, eds. E.B. French & K.A. Wardle, Bristol 1988.
- SCABA* *Sanctuaries and cults in the Aegean Bronze Age: Proceedings of the First International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 12–13 May, 1980* (ActaAth-4°, 28), eds. R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, Stockholm 1981.

¹ Archaeological research on Methana had in the past been rather poor and the available bibliography was meagre, but the situation has recently changed and relevant studies are now being rapidly produced. See E. Meyer, 'Methana', *RE* XV.2 (1932), 1375–1379, with refs. to previous bibliography; N. Pharaklas, *Troezenia, Calaureaia, Methana* (Ancient Greek cities, 10), Athens 1972; R. Hope Simpson & O.T.P.K. Dickinson, *A gazetteer of Aegean civilization in the Bronze Age*, Vol. I: *The mainland and the islands* (SIMA, 52), Göteborg 1979, 55. Brief reports on the work of the Greek Archaeological Service (2nd Ephoreia) have been published in *ArchDelt* 34, 1979 (pr. 1987), 71f., 109f.; 35, 1980 (pr. 1988), 95; 37, 1982 (pr. 1989), 51; 38, 1983 (pr. 1989), 64; 39, 1984 (pr. 1989), 58f. The most important work was the intensive surface survey conducted by the University of Liverpool under the direction of C.B. Mee and H.A. Forbes for the British School at Athens in 1984–86; see the preliminary reports in *AR* 31, 1984–85, 21f.; 32, 1985–86, 28; 33, 1986–87, 19f.; 34, 1987–88, 22f. See now the final publication of the results of the Methana survey project, C. Mee & H. Forbes, *A rough and rocky place: The landscape and settlement history of the Methana peninsula, Greece*, Liverpool 1997, with further bibliography.

² The excavation, conducted on behalf of the 2nd Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, was started after the local priest applied for permission to extend the modern church of Ayios Konstantinos and Eleni. See report in *ArchDelt* 46, 1991 (pr. 1996), *Chronika*, 71–74, with pls. 40–42. A paper on this topic was presented at the Mycenaean Seminar of the University of London on 1 December 1993 (see the abstract in *BICS* 40, 1995, 242). The present paper is only a preliminary presentation of the results of the excavation so far, as digging has not yet been completed and the material is still being studied. All the unpublished finds presented here in brief will be more extensively discussed in my forthcoming thesis, based on this material, and in the final publication.

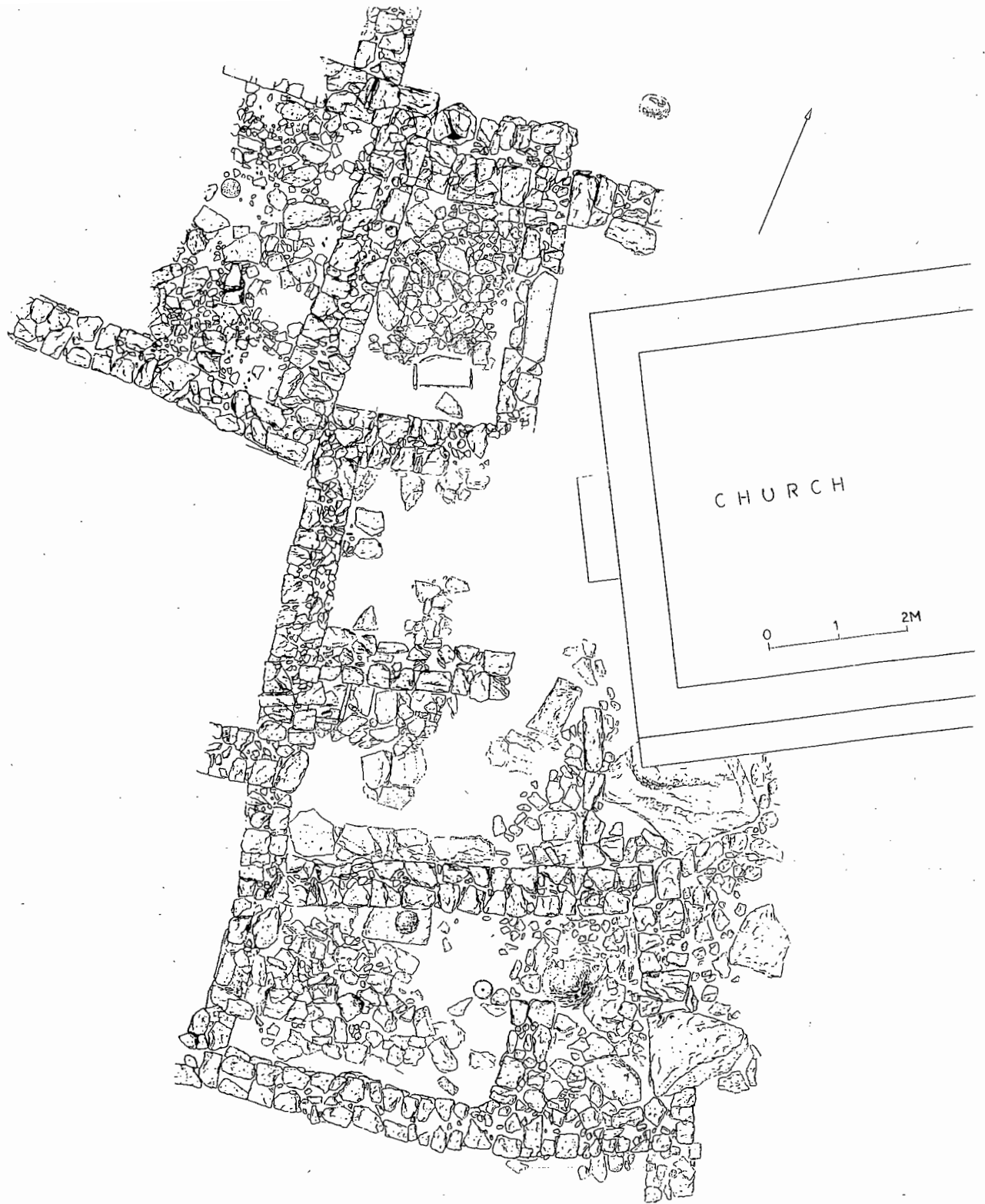


Fig. 1. Methana, Ayios Konstantinos. Plan of excavated rooms.

The excavated structures are sited in the courtyard of the church of Ayios Konstantinos and Eleni, occupying the south-western part of the top terrace of the hill, and are situated within a larger, prehistoric settlement. Surface remains of what appear to be prehistoric walls can be traced in the

neighbouring fields within a range of c. 150 m around the hill's summit, which is 114 m above sea level. The shore below forms a natural inlet, which would be quite convenient for the anchorage of small boats, but the rocky land, rising rather steeply at its back, does not provide easy access inland.

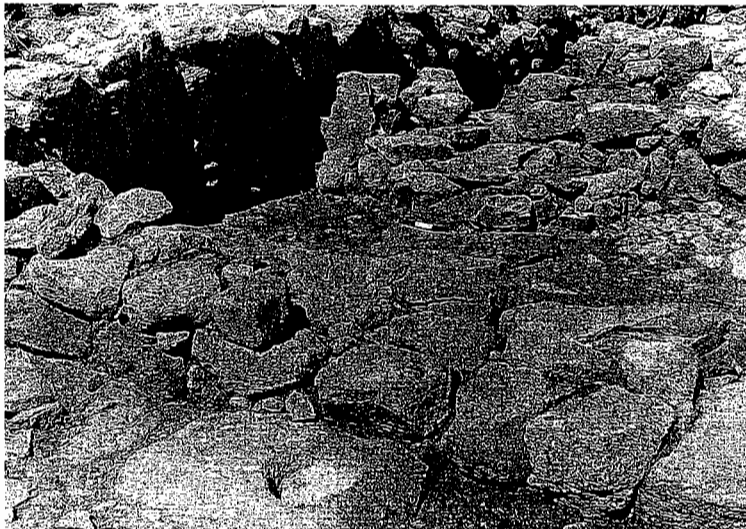


Fig. 2. Methana. The cult room with the bench, viewed from the south.

The LH remains lie below a very shallow, surface layer (at a depth ranging from 10 to 20 cm) and they rest on the natural bedrock, which has been roughly levelled off in the interior of the buildings. Outside the excavated rooms, occasional outcrops of rock project above the surface of the ground and some of these have been incorporated into the Mycenaean walls.

Up to 1993, digging was completed in four rooms,³ located to the west of the church (Fig. 1). One of these (the second one from the south in the plan, Fig. 1) seems to have had a primarily cultic function. It displays distinctive architectural features of a Mycenaean bench shrine⁴ and has yielded a very large number of Mycenaean terracotta figurines, along with some pottery and some other special objects, which may be interpreted as cult paraphernalia.

This room (Fig. 2) measures internally c. 4.30 m by 2.60 m, its main axis running east-west, and is entered through a door-

way, indicated by a long block apparently serving as the threshold, at the northern end of its east wall. The north wall ends to the east in a gap 1.00 m wide. This cannot be considered as a doorway, because the LH layer was here disturbed by a large pit with mixed black soil, presumably dug during the construction of the modern church, which has destroyed completely the north-eastern corner of the Mycenaean structure.

Directly opposite the entrance, in the north-western corner of the room, there is a small, roughly square construction, which is 0.70 m high and measures 0.60 m across. This square construction has upright stone slabs on its eastern and southern sides and is supplied with three low steps, made out of rubble and earth, abutting against the north wall. All the figurines were found either on the steps or in the immediate vicinity of this construction (Figs. 3–4). It is therefore legitimate to assume that this served as a bench,⁵ upon which the terracottas were displayed.

³ The room to the north-west is illustrated in the plan (Fig. 1) before the final stage of clearance.

⁴ For a recent thorough review of Mycenaean shrines, see K. Kilian, 'Mykenische Heiligtümer der Peloponnes', in *Kotinos: Festschrift für Erika Simon*, eds. H. Froning, T. Hölscher & H. Mielsch, Mainz am Rhein 1992, 10–25; for the material found before 1967, see also R. Hägg, 'Mykenische Kultstätten im archäologischen Material', *OpAth* 8, 1968, 39–60; for an illuminating comparison with Minoan shrines, see *idem*, 'Mycenaean religion: The Helladic and the Minoan components', in *Linear B: A 1984 survey* (BCILL, 26), eds. A. Morpurgo Davies & Y. Duhoux, Louvain-la-Neuve 1985, 203–225, esp. 212, focussing on the features of mainland cult buildings; *idem*, 'Degrees and character of the Minoan influence on the Mainland', in *The Minoan thalassocracy: Myth and reality. Proceedings of the Third International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 31 May to 5 June, 1982* (ActaAth-4°, 32), eds. R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, Stockholm 1984, 119–121. The older material has also been treated by G.E. Mylonas, *Mycenaean religion: Temples, altars and temenea* (Πραγματεῖαι τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν, 39), Athens 1977 (with Greek and English text); for the Cult Centre at Mycenae in particular, see *idem*, 'The cult center of Mycenae', *ProcBritAc* 67, 1981, 307–320; W.D. Taylour, 'New light on Mycenaean religion', *Antiquity* 44, 1970, 270–280; E.B. French, 'Cult places at Mycenae', in *SCABA*, 41–48; for a full discussion of the "Temple" and the "Room with the Fresco" complexes, see A.D. Moore, *The cult rooms from the "Citadel House"*

excavations at Mycenae, unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Manchester, 1988; for the sanctuary at Phylakopi, see C. Renfrew, *The archaeology of cult. The sanctuary at Phylakopi* (BSA, Suppl., 18), London 1985; see also the comprehensive review of Aegean sanctuaries, *ibid.*, 404–413. For a broader treatment of Mycenaean cult buildings in the context of Bronze Age sanctuaries, see B. Rutkowski, *The cult places of the Aegean*, New Haven 1986; J.C. van Leuven, 'Problems and methods of Prehellenic naology', in *SCABA*, 11–25; *idem*, 'The Mainland tradition of sanctuaries in Prehistoric Greece', *World Archaeology* 10, 1978, 139–148.

⁵ The stepped type of altar/bench is mainly known from Minoan religious architecture and iconography, cf., for example, the stepped altar in the inner courtyard of the "villa" at Nirou Khani (see illustration in B. Rutkowski, *Frühgriechische Kultdarstellungen*, Berlin 1981, pl. 4.1); the altar in the north-western corner of the Central Court at Phaistos is illustrated especially well in *MonAnt* 14, 1904, pl. XXXI.2; for the clay model from Piskokephalo, see Ch. Zervos, *L'art de la Crète néolithique et minoenne*, Paris 1956, fig. 597; for the stepped altar depicted on the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus, see C.R. Long, *The Ayia Triadha sarcophagus. A study of Late Minoan and Mycenaean funerary practices and beliefs* (SIMA, 41), Göteborg 1974, fig. 52. On the mainland, it is only the "Temple" and the "Room with the Fresco" at Mycenae that provide examples of similar benches; see the depictions, for instance, in French (*supra* n. 4), figs. 1, 4, 7 and 9.

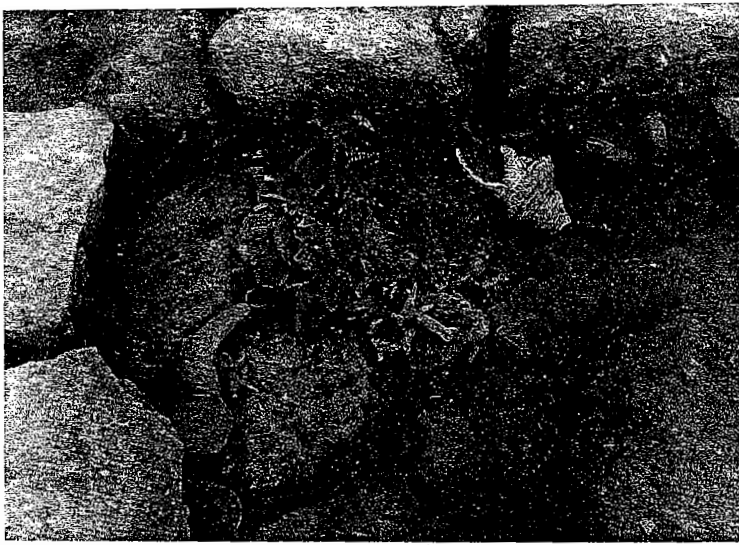


Fig. 3. Methana. Figurines, kylikes and triton shell deposited on the bench, seen from the south.



Fig. 4. Methana. Figurines uncovered to the south of the bench.

Opposite the bench, there is a very low platform, made of stone slabs *c.* 5 cm thick, running along the south wall of the room (Fig. 5).⁶ A small, central area between the platform and the stepped bench is also paved with stone slabs forming a low dais or podium,⁷ whereas the floor of the rest of the room consists of a layer of beaten earth mixed with pebbles, overlying the levelled bedrock.

⁶ The protruding, broken edge of the slab set in the south-western corner seems to indicate that this platform also occupied part of the length of the west wall. A similar arrangement is to be seen in the benches/platforms of the "Temple" at Mycenae; see the illustrations in French (*supra* n. 4), figs. 1, 4 and 7.

⁷ Cf. the dais of the "Temple" at Mycenae; see the depictions in French (*supra* n. 4), figs. 1, 4 and 7.

⁸ The study of animal bones has been undertaken by Dr Yannis Hamilakis, of the University of Sheffield. The bone assemblage in this room displayed a heavy preponderance of juvenile pigs, whereas the bone waste retrieved from other rooms contained mainly ovicaprids (oral communication).

To the left of the doorway, in the south-eastern corner of the room, a small hearth was revealed, filled with ash and burnt animal bones,⁸ providing evidence of animal sacrifice.⁹ The hearth is constructed with a few rough stones placed near the corner and is paved with flat stones, set rather irregularly at its bottom (Fig. 6). A spit stand, made of trachyte, was set to the right of it, and a saddle quern, made of the same mate-

⁹ On animal sacrifice in the Creto-Mycenaean world, see J.A. Sakellarakis, 'Das Kuppelgrab A von Archanes und das kretisch-mykenische Tieropferitual', *PZ* 45, 1970, 135–219, esp. 193–198; see also G.E. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean age*, Princeton, N.J. 1966, 163–165; for evidence of animal sacrifice at Tiryns, see K. Kilian, 'Zeugnisse mykenischer Kultausbübung in Tiryns', in *SCABA*, 49–58, esp. 53. Hägg 1985 (*supra* n. 4), esp. 210, considers animal sacrifice to have been an indigenous cult practice on the mainland; see also *idem* 1984 (*supra* n. 4), 121; for the corresponding evidence offered by the Linear B texts, see, for instance, E. Vermeule, *Götterkult* (= *ArchHom*, Kap. V), Göttingen 1974, 67f.



Fig. 5. Methana. The cult room with the bench, the platform and the dais, viewed from the east.



Fig. 6. Methana. The hearth in the south-eastern corner of the room.

rial, was set to the left. Tripod cauldrons and other cooking pots found near the hearth attest to its use for cooking meals, as well as animal sacrifices. Food residues, such as small pieces of animal bones, fish bones and a large number of limpet shells,¹⁰ were also found scattered all over the room.

Near the south-western corner of the room was found a segment from the upper part of a large jar, resting on the floor

with its neck turned to the ground (Fig. 7). This may have been used as a device for libations, since there is sufficient evidence of similar fragmentary pots that have been plausibly interpreted as cult vessels serving this purpose¹¹ at some other sites where cult practice has been assumed. The pottery associated with it consisted of a plain dipper, a plain, two-handled cup, a straight-sided alabastron and an animal-head rhyton¹² of ex-

¹⁰ Limpet shells were found in abundance, both in the cult room and elsewhere on the site. A similar distribution pattern of limpet shells occurred at Phylakopi; see Renfrew (supra n. 4), 326.

¹¹ R. Hägg, 'The role of libations in Mycenaean ceremony and cult', in *Celebrations*, 177–184; *idem* 1985 (supra n. 4), esp. 221, n. 34; Å. Åkerström, 'Cultic installations in Mycenaean rooms and tombs', in *Problems*, 201–209, esp. 201f.

¹² On the typology and functions of Bronze Age rhyta, see R. Koehl, 'The functions of Aegean Bronze Age rhyta', in *SCABA*, 179–187 with a chart of the typological development in fig. 1. Animal-head rhyta, in contrast to the other types that were also used for domestic purposes, have not occurred in non-religious contexts; see

Kilian (supra n. 9), 58; *idem*, *AA* 1982, 403. For animal-head rhyta of the Mycenaean period in particular, see Ch. Doumas, 'A Mycenaean rhyton from Naxos', *AA* 1968, 374–389, with refs. to previous bibliography. As Doumas remarks, "It may, perhaps, be of importance that the vessels of this group were found at sites which lie on the route from the Greek mainland to the east and viceversa: Tiryns, Naxos, Carpathos, Cyprus, and Ras Shamra". Methana lies on the same route and this may not be without significance for its possible role in the maritime trade, as postulated below. On the eastern origin of the cultic function of the Cretan animal-head rhyta, see K. Tuchelt, *Tiergefäße in Kopf- und Protomengestalt* (Ist-Forsch., 22), Berlin 1962, 39.



Fig. 7. Methana. Floor deposit with jar neck, cup, animal-head rhyton and alabastron in the south-western corner of the room.

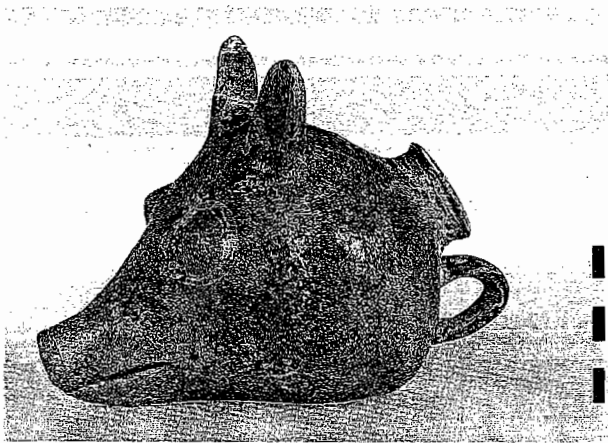


Fig. 8. Methana. Animal-head rhyton found next to the jar neck.

¹³ The fact that we have a rhyton in the form of a pig's head, combined with actual evidence of the selective sacrifice of pigs, provides strong confirmation of the hypothesis that there was a close ritual connection between animal sacrifice and libation, as suggested by Hägg 1990 (supra n. 11), 183f., with n. 54; on the use of animal-head rhyta for blood libation, see also R. Laffineur, 'La mer et l'au-delà dans l'Égée préhistorique', in *Thalassa. L'Égée Préhistorique et la Mer. Actes de la troisième Rencontre égéenne internationale de l'Université de Liège, 23-25 avril 1990* (Aegaeum, 7), eds. R. Laffineur & L. Basch, Liège 1991, 231-237, esp. 236f. with further refs. in n. 56.

¹⁴ I wish to thank J. Sakellarakis for his critical remarks on the religious symbolism of this animal, on account of its mixed features, and for drawing my attention to the example of the animal head incised on the dagger found on the human sacrificial victim at Archanes; see E. & J. Sakellarakis, *Archanes*, Athens 1991, 154; Renfrew (supra n. 4), 23f., also stresses the religious character of composite animals showing features of several, different, living species.

¹⁵ On the use of the conical rhyton, see E. Specht, 'Zum trichterförmigen Rhyton', *AA* 1981, 15-19. The suggestion that rhyta of this type were not intended for liquids but for grain is very interesting, but the example from Methana is a miniature and its aperture is too narrow to have served for this purpose.

¹⁶ For the use of kylikes and ordinary drinking cups as libation vessels, see Hägg (supra n. 11), 183f.

¹⁷ The function of alabaster was usually to contain oil, perfumed oil,

ceptional quality (Fig. 8). The animal head displays mixed features of a pig¹³ and a fox, thus being more of a fantastic than a real beast.¹⁴ The fragments of another rhyton, a small, conical¹⁵ one decorated with a symmetrically arranged octopus, were retrieved near the bench. The practice of libation is strongly supported by the presence of two rhyta in the proximity of the jar neck. The cup and the dipper could also have been employed for the same purpose¹⁶ and the alabastron would fit in as a possible container of honey.¹⁷

Taking into account the total number of figurines found on or near the bench (c. 150) and the very limited space that the whole of the stepped construction would provide for their display, we should presume the existence of supplementary wooden shelves or niches on the wall above, to provide storage for old offerings and cult equipment.¹⁸ With the possible exception of a most unusual, hollow (coil-made) bovid with

ointment or unguent. This interpretation does not provide an adequate explanation for the curved bottom, which is quite unpractical for steady standing and must have been necessitated by a special use. I think that their contents might well have been a thick, sticky liquid, such as honey, which would need a curved surface to flow out more easily when a small quantity was left at the bottom; otherwise, it would remain stuck in the angle between the vertical sides and the base of the vessel. Oil is thin enough to be poured out without any difficulty, and ointment could be extracted by hand; for a different view, see R. Hägg, 'The last ceremony in the throne room at Knossos', *OpAth* 17, 1988, 99-105, esp. 103f., who favours the use of alabaster for the mixing of perfume with oil. On the use of honey in the cult, see K. Davaras, 'Μινωικό κηριοφόρο πλοιάριο της Συλλογής Μητσotάκη', *ArchEph* 123, 1984, 55-95, esp. 87-92, with further refs.; for supporting evidence offered by the Linear B tablets, see M. Ventris & J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1973, 131, 309.

¹⁸ Cf. Room 19 ("Room with the Idols") and the Room 18 alcove at the rear of the north wall of the "Temple" at Mycenae, in which older offerings and cult equipment were stored (see illustrations in French [supra n. 4], figs. 1, 4 and 16); also cf. the niches of the West Shrine at Phylakopi and Room A at the rear of it, where cult paraphernalia of a remarkable standard were stowed, Renfrew (supra n. 4), 112-115, with figs. 4.9 and 4.10 and pls. 16a-b. In the present case, the presence of storage facilities in the same room is more likely, as there is no direct evidence of intercommunication with the adjacent rooms.

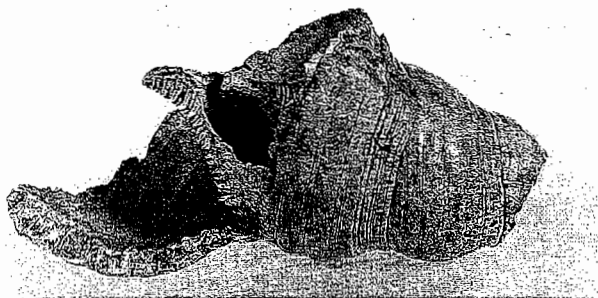


Fig. 9. Methana. Triton shell found on the bench.

a human figure attached to the top of its head,¹⁹ all the remaining terracottas should rather be interpreted as votive offerings, as none of them would have been large enough to be marked out as a cult image.

The majority of the figurines were simple bovids, ranging from earlier, naturalistic to later, schematized types.²⁰ In ad-

¹⁹ Illustrated here (Fig. 13); see discussion below.

²⁰ On the typology and the development of terracotta figurines of the Mycenaean period, see E. French, *The development of Mycenaean terracotta figurines, with special reference to unpublished material from Mycenae*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis presented to the University of London, 1961; *eadem*, 'The development of Mycenaean terracotta figurines', *BSA* 66, 1971, 101–187, esp. 151–164 for animal figurines; *eadem*, 'Mycenaean figures and figurines, their typology and function', in *SCABA*, 173–178.

²¹ For examples of the type, see French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 165f.; *eadem*, 'The figures and figurines', in Renfrew (*supra* n. 4), 209–280, esp. 258 and 260; A. Tamvaki, 'Some unusual Mycenaean terracottas from the Citadel House area, 1954–69', *BSA* 68, 1973, 207–265, esp. 236–242.

²² For the type, see French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 166f.; Tamvaki (*supra* n. 21), 242f.

²³ A small group of other known specimens is recorded by French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 162f.

²⁴ For a complete list of Mycenaean terracotta models of chariots, horses and horsemen, see J.H. Crouwel, *Chariots and other means of land transport in Bronze Age Greece* (Allard Pierson Series, 3), Amsterdam 1981, 161–163, with refs. to previous bibliography; for a general discussion of the type, see French 1961 (*supra* n. 20), 211–220; *eadem* 1985 (*supra* n. 21), 252–259.

²⁵ For a discussion of the type, see French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 164f.; the best preserved example was, until now, the well-known "cavalryman" from Mycenae, on which see M.S.F. Hood, 'A Mycenaean cavalryman', *BSA* 48, 1953, 84–99. This figurine, compared with the new ones found on Methana, is more likely to represent a "driven ox" than a horse and rider. The animal, the head of which is missing, may well be a bovid and the position of the figure mounted on it is rather awkward for horse-riding. The strip of clay that has been interpreted as a sword may be the tip of a rein, the other end of which was attached to the animal's head, as seen in the Driven Oxen groups; for other fragmentary examples of horsemen, see Crouwel's list, Crouwel (*supra* n. 24), 161–163.

²⁶ One of these is similar to the complete example found by Tsountas on the acropolis of Mycenae (National Museum, Athens, Inv. no. 2721), illustrated by G.M.A. Richter, *The furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans*, London 1966, fig. 21; the other two belong to an unrecorded type with long, tripartite legs and a pair of animals applied to their top surface.

²⁷ Type B, according to the classification introduced by G.E. Mylonas in 'Seated and multiple Mycenaean figurines in the National Museum of Athens, Greece', in *The Aegean and the Near East. Stud-*

dition, there were Driven Oxen²¹ and Ridden Oxen²² groups, two single horses,²³ as well as horses belonging to chariot groups²⁴ and horses with helmeted riders.²⁵ The repertoire of terracottas also included clay models of three tripod tables,²⁶ two thrones with latticed backs,²⁷ one bird²⁸ and a fragmentary boat.²⁹ One female figurine alone, of the uncommon, Hollow Psi type,³⁰ was contained in the assemblage of this room, thus occupying an outstanding position in the context. No other human figures occurred, except for those represented in association with horses (charioteers and horsemen) and bovids (Driven Oxen and Ridden Oxen groups). The dearth of the ubiquitous Phi and Psi female figurines was a striking feature of the deposit.³¹

The pottery found on the bench consisted of eight kylikes, a deep bowl, a rounded alabastron, a miniature flask and a miniature dipper.³² The bench deposit also contained a big triton shell (see Fig. 3), which is broken at both ends but seems to have been modified at the apex (Fig. 9). This could have been employed as a musical instrument,³³ as shown on the well-known sealstone from the Idaean Cave (Herakleion

ies presented to H. Goldman, ed. S.S. Weinberg, New York 1956, 110–121, esp. 114; for a comprehensive list of all recorded examples, see P. Amandry, 'Sièges mycéniens tripodes et trépied pythique', in *Φίλια ἔπη εἰς Γεώργιον Ἐ. Μυλωνᾶν* I (Βιβλιοθήκη τῆς ἐν Ἀθῆναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας, 103), Athens 1986, 167–184.

²⁸ The bird has modelled eyes and an ovoid, hollow body, thus being more akin to a miniature askos in bird shape (although it lacks a stomion and a handle) than to a bird figurine like those described, for instance, by French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 160; cf. the head of a similar bird found at Haghia Triada, Klenies, on which see K. Kilian, 'Patterns in the cult activity in the Mycenaean Argolid: Haghia Triada (Klenies), the Profitis Elias cave (Haghiios Hadrianos) and the citadel of Tiryns', in *Celebrations*, 185–197, esp. 190, with n. 16 and fig. 1, 2.

²⁹ On terracotta models of boats of the Mycenaean period, see French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 173f.; Tamvaki (*supra* n. 21), 256, with nn. 60 and 61; an extensive list of prehistoric models of boats is provided by Davaras (*supra* n. 17), 59–63; see also L. Basch, *Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique*, Athens 1987, esp. 140–154 for Mycenaean boats.

³⁰ On the typology, see French 1971 (*supra* n. 20), 126–128.

³¹ Cf. the total absence from the sanctuary at Phylakopi of small, female figurines earlier than the Late Psi form, despite the presence of almost the full range of animal figurines, a fact which is considered to be the result of a functional difference; see French 1985 (*supra* n. 21), 276. Normal-sized, female figurines, as well as animal figurines or figures, were also conspicuously missing from the "Temple" and the "Room with the Fresco" at Mycenae; see Moore (*supra* n. 4), 445.

³² Cf. the cultic use of miniature vessels at Pylos and Mycenae, on which see Hägg 1969 (*supra* n. 4), 58; *idem* 1990 (*supra* n. 11), 183, with n. 52 and fig. 9.

³³ On the cultic function of triton shells, see P. Åström & D.S. Reese, 'Triton shells in East Mediterranean cults', *JPR* 3–4, 1990, 5–14, with a list of examples from eastern Mediterranean sanctuaries and graves. As noted by P. Åström, the triton shell is a well-known cult object in the eastern Mediterranean, particularly in the Minoan and Cypriot region, but until now has been absent at mainland sanctuary sites. Åström suggests that this may be another difference between Minoan and Mycenaean religion; cf. the two triton shells found in the sanctuary at Phylakopi, which have also been interpreted as trumpets; see Renfrew (*supra* n. 4), 327, 383f., with pl. 62. M.P. Nilsson, *MMR*², 154, assigns both a secular and a religious function to triton shells (drinking vessels and ornaments in daily life, votive objects and trumpets in the cult); for many examples of the ritual use of conch trumpets in other cultures, see J. Montagu, 'The conch in prehistory: Pottery, stone and natural', *World Archaeology* 12, 1981, 273–279.

such a conch.³⁴ Its use as a rhyton for the performance of a special libation rite is also probable.³⁵

The floor deposit contained, in addition, a small number of fine stone objects, some of which were of intrinsic value. Two lentoids of black steatite with representations of goats, a rectangular steatite bead decorated with incised circles and a steatite button were found near the platform. Would these have adorned and fastened the drapery of a wooden cult statue, possibly placed on the platform or the dais?³⁶ No organic remains of such a statue were retrieved during the excavation and we do not have enough evidence to enable us to draw conclusions, but we may at least raise the question.

Between the floor and the surface level, there was only one destruction layer, 0.30 to 0.40 m deep. Joining pieces of the same figurines, found both at the top and at the bottom of this layer, confirm its unity. The mass of material left in position and the nature of the deposit give the impression of a sudden destruction and an immediate abandonment of the building.

The whole of the material deposited in this room appears to cover a time span of about 200 years, from the early 14th to the late 13th century B.C., namely the LH IIIA–B periods. A date as early as LH IIIA1 may be proposed for very few of the finds, e.g., a pair of naturalistically rendered figurines of bovines and the animal-head rhyton (Fig. 8), which is painted with a stipple pattern (FM 77) imitating the animal's skin.³⁷ As to its modelling, this rhyton is a close parallel to the fox-head rhyton in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Inv. no. AE 298), reported as coming from Tiryns.³⁸

The majority of the finds can be ascribed to LH IIIB. The prevailing shape amongst the fine-ware vessels was the plain, carinated kylix (FS 267).³⁹ The presence of a deep bowl (FS 284) of the so-called Group B⁴⁰ in the destruction layer points to a date near the end of LH IIIB2. Distinctive LH IIIC pottery is missing, but other rooms have yielded types suggesting a transitional phase.

Before concluding whether we are indeed justified in interpreting the structure under consideration as a shrine, we can classify the main arguments in favour of this interpretation under the four broad categories established by Renfrew in the publication of the sanctuary at Phylakopi.⁴¹

Attention-focussing Features

The structure is a separate, special building, orientated to the East.⁴² and equipped with the following attention-focussing features:

A stepped bench, placed directly opposite the entrance, is used for the display of figurines.

A platform, placed symmetrically in relation to the main axis of the building, runs along the wall opposite the bench.

The central space, between the platform and the bench, is occupied by a low dais.⁴³

The triton shell may also be interpreted as an attention-focussing device, as one of its possible functions is in the provision of music.

The special aspects of the 'liminal zone' are reflected:

In the evidence of burnt sacrifices and libations.

In the artefacts serving as cult equipment (cooking, eating and drinking vessels, two rhyta and a potential musical instrument).

In the special objects with symbolic representations, which may be interpreted as offerings deliberately displayed on a bench.

³⁴ For example, see A.J. Evans, 'Mycenaean tree and pillar cult and its Mediterranean relations', *JHS* 21, 1901, 99–204, esp. 141–143 with fig. 25; this interpretation has been disputed by C. Baurain & P. Darcque, 'Un triton en pierre à Malia', *BCH* 107, 1983, 3–73, esp. 54f. with fig. 35, mainly on the grounds of the sharp, unmodified apex of the shell depicted on this gem and its exact position in relation to the mouth of the figure carrying it. Baurain and Darcque, who offer a complete list of skeuomorphs, favour the interpretation of the triton shell as a libation vessel.

³⁵ It has been suggested that rhyta in the form of triton shells served in the practice of libation with the use of sea water; see Laffineur (supra n. 13), 236, with further refs. in n. 53.

³⁶ Van Leuven (1981 [supra n. 4], esp. 14) suggested that low platforms or podia indicate the place of a standing statue or priest. Finds of beads were also made near the platforms in the sanctuary at Phylakopi and were supposed to have adorned cult images or votives placed on the platforms; see Renfrew (supra n. 4), 372. On the possible use of wooden cult statues in the Mycenaean and the Minoan religion, see *idem* (supra n. 4), 302; Hägg 1985 (supra n. 4), 212f.; E. and J. Sakellarakis (supra n. 14), 139f., with figs. 118 and 119; M.E. Caskey, 'Ayia Irini, Kea: The terracotta statues and the cult in the temple', in *SCABA*, 127–135, esp. 134, and the discussion following the paper, 135–136; cf. French (1981 [supra n. 20]), esp. 174), who suggests that the recipient of the offerings on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus is a draped, monochrome, sexless figure, similar to those found at Mycenae, which might well have been clothed.

³⁷ Cf. the use of stippling inside animal bodies in the LM II-III A1 pictorial decoration, on which see A. Furumark, *MP*, 442f.

³⁸ See, for instance, Doumas (supra n. 12), 384–386, with fig. 19. The rhyton from Methana is more naturalistically painted and must be earlier than the example from Tiryns.

³⁹ E.B. French, 'A group of Late Helladic IIIB2 pottery from Mycenae', *BSA* 64, 1969, 71–93, esp. 87, considers the absence of painted kylikes as indicating an LH IIIB2 date, but we should also take into account the scarcity of painted pottery in the whole assemblage of this room. Painted kylikes of LH IIIB1 date have occurred in other areas of the excavation; cf. Moore 1988 (supra n. 4), 244, on the same phenomenon in the "Temple" at Mycenae.

⁴⁰ P.A. Mountjoy, *Mycenaean decorated pottery: A guide to identification* (SIMA, 73), Göteborg 1986, 121, 129–131, with fig. 161.

⁴¹ Renfrew (supra n. 4), 18–21.

⁴² On the orientation of cult buildings, see van Leuven (supra n. 4), esp. 15, with fig. 3; N. Fernandez, 'Cult places of the Bronze Age: The identification problem', in *Problems*, 229–234, esp. 234, concludes that a cult function must be seriously envisaged for some buildings whose entrances are orientated either to the east or to the west.

⁴³ On the possible interpretation of this feature as indicating the standing place of a statue or a priest, see above, n. 36; its function as a slaughtering table for juvenile pigs, the selective sacrifice of which is well attested by animal bones, is also to be considered as a possibility. In this case, the platform to the south of it would have been used for cutting and preparing the meat, which was cooked on the nearby hearth. As no figurines were found on this platform, its use for the deposition of food offerings seems very likely.

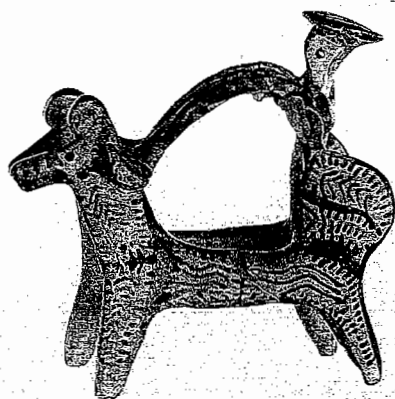


Fig. 10. Methana. Chariot group with two occupants and a parasol.

Presence of the Transcendental and its Symbolic Focus

The discovery of so many terracotta figurines, in conjunction with valuable objects, all together in a single room, is certainly out of the ordinary, and we may suggest that it indicates the involvement of the transcendental, as no other plausible explanation can be offered. This room continued to function as a repository for rare items over a considerable period of time, which does not allow us to propose the idea of a shop⁴⁴ or any other utilitarian function. Its religious character is, on the other hand, strongly supported by its architectural features, its general layout and its whole context.

The recurrence of special features and special types that are rare or non-existent elsewhere can be claimed as the strongest evidence for the practice of a specific cult associated with a specific transcendental being. The symbolic repertoire includes the following:

Chariot Groups

The type comprises ten examples, most of them with two occupants. In four cases, there is also a parasol covering the figures' heads. It has been suggested, on the basis of other published examples, that the presence of a parasol implies a higher rank.⁴⁵

A special feature, which apparently has a symbolic significance, is the posture of the human figures, who are mainly shown in pairs, one of them with his arms round the other. This embrace is also seen in some other group figurines, the religious character of which is fairly well established, e.g. in the well-known ivory trio from Mycenae,⁴⁶ in a clay figurine of a man embracing a woman from the Cave of Patso in the Cretan Collection in Oxford⁴⁷ and in one of the chariots (SF 1558) found in the sanctuary at Phylakopi.⁴⁸

One of the chariot groups (Fig. 10) is a very close parallel to NM 2262, found by Tsountas in a chamber tomb at Myc-

enae.⁴⁹ The resemblance is so close that they may well have been produced in the same workshop. Another chariot group has a striking similarity to an unpublished figurine found recently on Aegina in an excavation carried out by the 2nd Ephoreia.⁵⁰ A common provenance is also highly probable in this case.

Horses with helmeted riders

Five, almost complete, figurines of helmeted riders on horseback throw new light on the intriguing subject of Mycenaean "cavalrymen", thoroughly discussed in the past by S. Hood, in connection with the LH III B example from Mycenae.⁵¹ The number of these figurines is surprising, considering the scarcity of the type, and their prominence here must be associated with the special nature of the deity venerated in this shrine. A divinity perhaps considered as the creator, the tamer or the "Master of the Horses"⁵² is most probably involved.

In one example (Fig. 11), the manner of riding suggests a special skill in mounting horses. Whether the riders are mere "cavalrymen" or effigies of the divinity is uncertain. In any case, the horse is, in this period, a symbol of high status and raises the figure riding it above the routine of daily life.⁵³

⁴⁴ "Petsas' House" at Mycenae, which has also yielded a large number of terracotta figurines, has been interpreted as a potter's shop, but the situation there was totally different. Apart from the figurines, the building contained 700 unused vases of different shapes stacked by categories along the walls and lacked any evidence of cult practice. See J. Papadimitriou & Ph. Petsas, *Prakt* 1950, 203–233; 1951, 192–195; Kilian (supra n. 4), esp. 14, assumes that "Petsas' House" was a store-room for cult paraphernalia, if not a building of cultic function.

⁴⁵ See H.G. Buchholz, *Ägäische Bronzezeit*, Darmstadt 1987, esp. 521, with further refs. in nn. 128 and 129.

⁴⁶ Nat. Mus., Athens, Inv. no. 7711. See illustration, for instance, in Vermeule (supra n. 9), pl. IIIa, b.

⁴⁷ J. Boardman, *The Cretan Collection in Oxford*, Oxford 1961, fig. 34c.

⁴⁸ French 1985 (supra n. 21), esp. 256, fig. 6.25, pls. 44 and 49.

⁴⁹ A. Xenaki-Sakellariou, *Οἱ θαλασσοτοῦ γάρφοι τῶν Μυκηναίων: ἀνασκαφῆς Χρ. Τσουντα (1887–1898)*, Paris 1985, 132f., 162, pl. 63.

⁵⁰ I am indebted to my colleague Eleni Papastavrou, who kindly provided me with this information and let me examine the figurine at the Piraeus Museum.

⁵¹ See supra n. 25; for a more recent discussion of the subject, see J. Wiesner, *Fahren und Reiten* (= *ArchHom*, Kap. F), Göttingen 1968, 110–118; cf. Crouwel (supra n. 24), 45–51, arguing against the idea of military riding in Bronze Age Greece.

⁵² L.R. Palmer has suggested that the word *i-go* on the Linear B tablets PY Ea 59 and PY Fa 16 denotes a horse god named *Hippos*, instead of real horses (*The interpretation of Mycenaean Greek texts*, Oxford 1969, 220, 277f. and 488); see also *idem*, 'Some points for discussion', in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies*, eds. L.R. Palmer & J. Chadwick, Cambridge 1966, 275–284, esp. 276f. Cf. the so-called "Herr der Pferde", depicted on an LH III B amphoroid krater from Ras Shamra-Ugarit; Buchholz (supra n. 45), 212, fig. 66a–b, with refs. to previous bibliography.

⁵³ See Crouwel (supra n. 24), esp. 40; cf. M. Voyatzis, 'Votive side-saddle riders at early Greek sanctuaries', *BSA* 87, 1992, 259–279, esp. 275.

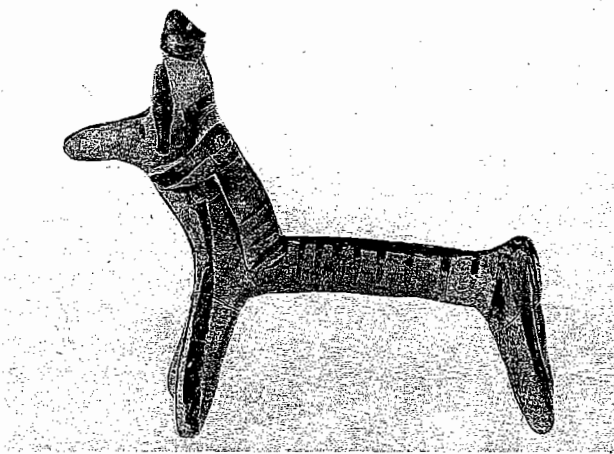


Fig. 11. Methana. Helmeted rider on horseback, seated on the animal's shoulders and grasping its neck with his arms.

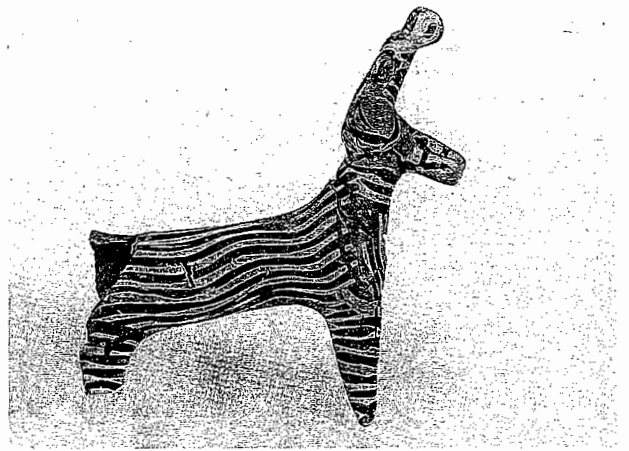


Fig. 13. Methana. Hollow bovid with human figure attached to the top of its head.

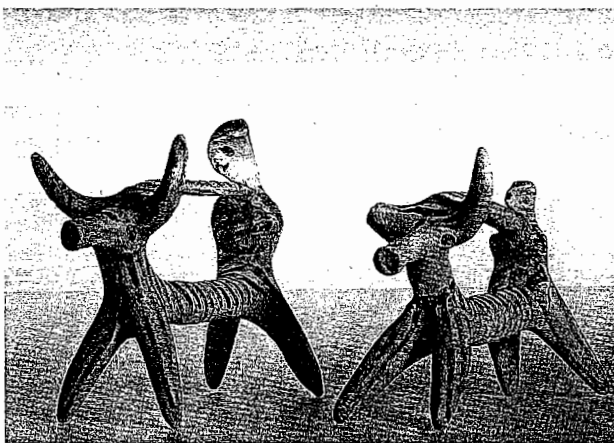


Fig. 12. Methana. Pair of "Driven Oxen".

Driven Oxen (Plough Groups)

The uncommon type of group figurines known as Driven Oxen or Plough Groups⁵⁴ is remarkably represented by seventeen examples, two of which are depicted in Fig. 12. The unusually large number indicates a deity involved not only with horses but also with cattle. This is otherwise implied by the heavy preponderance of bovids amongst the votive terracottas, constituting a main characteristic of the assemblage.

Ridden Oxen (Toreador Groups)

Three new, substantially complete examples of this very rare category of Mycenaean figurines provide new evidence for the recognition and the interpretation of the type. Nikolaou has in the past interpreted as a toreador one complete example in the Cyprus Museum⁵⁵ and this view has also been supported in more recent studies.⁵⁶ Bull-leaping remains a much stronger possibility than ox-riding, but the new examples found on Methana provide this type with an additional dimension.

One of these examples is a large, hollow (coil-made) bovid with a human figure attached to the top of its head and clasping its horns firmly with outstretched arms (Fig. 13). The composition was most probably inspired by bull-leaping scenes.⁵⁷ However, in this specific example, the symbolism of the representation is focussed upon the human figure, which is clearly shown in a dominating position in relation to the animal. Despite his diminutive size, his gesture displays power, which would seem inappropriate in a votive.⁵⁸ At least in this case, the portrayal of a divinity, a "Master of the Bulls", would be a more reasonable interpretation than the depiction of a popular game with religious associations.

This bovine figure⁵⁹ was contained in the destruction layer

⁵⁴ See supra n. 21; Crouwel (supra n. 24), 56f., favours their interpretation as plough groups; some of the examples found on Methana point clearly to bovid-drawn vehicles, as proposed by R.V. Nicholls, *Greek gods and goddesses in miniature: An exhibition of the Chesterman terracotta collection*, Cambridge 1978, 9, no. 15.

⁵⁵ K. Nikolaou, 'Mycenaean terracotta figurines in the Cyprus Museum', *OpAth* 5, 1965, 47-57, esp. 51, with pl. 6. Another complete example of this type, in the Art Museum, Princeton University, has been published by F.F. Jones, 'Three Mycenaean figurines', in *The Aegean and the Near East: Studies presented to H. Goldman*, ed. S.S. Weinberg, New York 1956, 122-125, esp. 124f., with pl. XVI, 5,6. Jones also sees "a bull and a torero" but questions the religious significance of the representation. Two fragmentary examples, recorded as bulls with riders, have been found in the sanctuary of Aphaia on Aegina; see A. Furtwängler, *Aegina*, München 1906, 374, nos. 16-17, fig. 302.

⁵⁶ Tamvaki (supra n. 21), esp. 242; Crouwel (supra n. 24), 53, with n. 52; Buchholz (supra n. 45), 522.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, J.G. Younger, 'Bronze Age representations of Aegean bull-leaping', *AJA* 80, 1976, 125-137.

⁵⁸ Gestures displaying power are assumed to be an indication of the deity by Renfrew (supra n. 4), 23; see also Crouwel (supra n. 24), 53, with n. 52, stressing that, if and when bovid riding is attested in antiquity, the riders are usually deities or mythological figures.

⁵⁹ On the distinction between figures and figurines, see French 1981 (supra n. 17), 173.

covering the uppermost step of the bench and may have originally stood on the top of the square construction, occupying asymmetrically the most prominent location in the room, a case in which it could even have played the role of a cult image.⁶⁰

Miscellaneous items with symbolic significance

The symbolic repertoire is further enriched by a bird, three tripod tables, two thrones and a boat. Such a number of items with religious significance can hardly be explained in secular terms, and the whole context offers quite strong arguments in favour of the presence of the transcendent.

Participation and Offering

Both are well documented. The offering and consumption of food and drink are indicated by the bone waste and by the pottery in use, consisting mainly of cooking and drinking vessels.⁶¹ Offering is also suggested by the nature of the assemblage, including unusual and valuable objects, which cannot be interpreted as fulfilling an ordinary, functional purpose.

The above features provide adequate evidence for cult practice and, taken together, they meet all the basic criteria for identifying the structure as a shrine. In addition, some of the finds display interrelations with the wider area of the Argolic peninsula and the Saronic Gulf, as they have close parallels coming from Mycenae, Tiryns and Aegina. They also reflect an indirect Cretan influence,⁶² albeit less strong than that observed in the Early Mycenaean deposit under the later *temenos* of Apollo Maleatas on the Kynortion hill, above Epidaurus.⁶³

The nature of the divinity venerated in this sanctuary seems to be reflected in the offerings, which display selectiveness and redundancy. The human representations highlight the primary cult of a male deity,⁶⁴ associated as much with chariot-driving and horsemanship, as with bovids and farming. The model of a boat among the offerings also implies a connection with seafaring. This male deity was perhaps accompanied by a female one in a subordinate role.⁶⁵ The latter's presence is suggested by the single, Hollow Psi, female figurine, marked out by its uniqueness in the context and by the pairs of embracing figures in the chariots, if these are to be seen as a man and a woman, like the double figurine from the Cave of Patso. A potential precursor of Poseidon "Hippios" and "Taureios" of the Greek religion,⁶⁶ with a female counterpart,⁶⁷ would be a very likely candidate.

The two major cults of Troezenia in the historic period were those of Poseidon and Hippolytus,⁶⁸ both of whom were closely connected with bulls, horses and chariots, as well as with each other, according to the relevant myths.⁶⁹ We may, therefore, justifiably assume that we are dealing with a pre-Greek cult, from which the most prominent cults of Troezenia originated. The healing water of the hot sulphur springs of Methana⁷⁰ and the frequent earthquakes caused

⁶⁰ On the criteria for distinguishing a cult image, see Renfrew (supra n. 4), 22–24.

⁶¹ On the selectiveness of cooking and drinking vessels in the range of pottery shapes as evidence for cult practice, see Kilian (supra n. 28), esp. 193, with nn. 21, 22 and 23; J. Caskey has also stressed the importance of wine in the cult; see M.E. Caskey (supra n. 36), esp. 127 and n. 2.

⁶² On the degrees and stages of Minoan influence on the Mycenaean religion, see Hägg 1984 (supra n. 4); *idem* 1985 (supra n. 4); K. Kilian, 'Mycenaean up to date: Trends and changes in recent research', in *Problems*, 148f.

⁶³ See V. Lambrinoudakis, 'Remains of the Mycenaean period in the sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas', in *SCABA*, 59–65; *idem*, 'Staatskult und Geschichte von Epidaurus', *Archaiognosia* 1, 1980, 39–63, esp. 43f.

⁶⁴ Except for the Hollow Psi female figurine, no other human figure displays sex attributes, but at least the helmeted horse-riders and the figure mounted on the hollow bovid are to be seen as males. Their chests, which are clearly shown, bear no indication of breasts and their general appearance suggests males. If we take into account the principle of homology, according to which votive figures share the attributes of the deity to whom they are dedicated, we must assume the prominence of a male divinity. The differentiation between males and females is not possible in the figures riding in chariots or mounted on driven oxen, because in these the chest is mostly covered by the breastwork of the chariots and the reins. In the sanctuary at Phylakopi, a chariot group and a driven ox, as well as animal figurines, accompanied the human males on the north-western platform of the West Shrine, whereas there were no such figurines on the south-western platform or in the niche or in Room A, where female figures and figurines were found. The East Shrine had animal figurines, plus a chariot group and a driven ox, but no human figures or figurines whatever and the situation there was less clear-cut.

⁶⁵ Cf. the duality observed in the West Shrine at Phylakopi, where the north-western platform had male associations, whereas the south-western platform had female associations; see Renfrew (supra n. 4), 370f. A possible indication of duality in the sanctuary of Methana is the pairing of certain figurines, e.g. the two Driven Oxen that are illustrated here in *Fig. 12*, and the pair of naturalistic bovids, mentioned above: for a similar pairing of figurines at Phylakopi, see French 1985 (supra n. 21), esp. 277, with table 6.2 and pl. 46.

⁶⁶ On the ancient links between Poseidon and the horse, see S. Langdon, 'The return of the horse leader', *AJA* 93, 1989, 198–201. A fundamental study on Poseidon, with special emphasis on his connection with the horse, has been provided by F. Schachermeyr in *Poseidon und die Entstehung des griechischen Götterglaubens*, Salzburg 1950; for the connection of bull-leaping with Poseidon's festivals, see L.R. Farnell, *The cults of the Greek states*, Oxford 1907, vol. IV, 25f.

⁶⁷ A female counterpart of *po-se-da-o*, *po-si-da-e-ia*, is known from the Linear B tablet PY TN 316; see J. Chadwick, 'What do we know about Mycenaean religion?', in *Linear B: A 1984 survey* (BCILL, 26), eds. A. Morpurgo Davies & Y. Duhoux, Louvain-la-Neuve 1985, 191–202, esp. 196; cf. the Linear B tablet PY AN 1281 referring to *po-ti-ni-ja i-qe-ja*, interpreted as designating a horse goddess or a mistress of horses, who was the female counterpart of the horse god *i-qa*; see Ventris & Chadwick (supra n. 17), 548; Palmer (supra n. 52), 422. For female goddesses associated with horses, see the recent article by Voyatzis (supra n. 53), esp. 274–279.

⁶⁸ For cults and sanctuaries at Troezen, attested by epigraphical evidence and ancient literary sources, see G. Welter, *Troizen und Kalau-reia*, Berlin 1941, 62f.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, W. Burkert, *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual* (Sather Classical Lectures, 47), Berkeley 1979, 111–118.

⁷⁰ See M. Deffner, 'Altertümer von Methana', *AM* 34, 1909, 341–355, esp. 341; Meyer (supra n. 1), 1376f. In the vicinity of Ayios Konstantinos, there are actually two such springs, both of which are situated on the coast, one at Ayios Nikolaos, at a distance of 800 m to the south and the other in the bay of Pro, about 600 m to the north. The former has been incorporated into modern bath installations, whereas the latter has been left unexploited.

of the Poseidon would constitute excellent reasons for venerating here, from very early times, the god who was the personification of the watery element and was known to Homer as the Earth-shaker.⁷² We should also bear in mind that the sanctuary of Hippolytus at neighbouring Troezen was founded at a site with a healing spring.⁷³

Additional support for a pre-Greek cult of Poseidon on the Methana peninsula is provided by archaeological evidence attesting his cult there in the historic period, although there is no such testimony in ancient literary sources. A rock-cut inscription bearing the name of Poseidon Phytalmios (in the genitive) has been observed by H. Forbes at the site of Oga,⁷⁴ also located on the east coast of Methana, about 3 km to the north of Ayios Konstantinos. Poseidon Phytalmios was a god of nature, protecting vegetation and fertilizing the earth with his streams.⁷⁵ His cult as a god of fecundity is reasonably believed to have originated long before he entered the Olympic Pantheon, in which his sphere was confined to the domain of the sea.⁷⁶ The presence of a *temenos* of Poseidon Phytalmios in the vicinity of Ayios Konstantinos cannot be without significance for the interpretation of the site.

Finally, there is one last crucial question that needs to be answered. Why would such an important Mycenaean sanctu-

ary have been founded on Methana and specifically on its east coast? If this had been an insignificant local shrine, it would most probably have been located within or near the main prehistoric settlement on the acropolis of ancient Methana, on the west coast of the peninsula.⁷⁷ The presence of an important LH sanctuary on the east coast, at a place that has hardly ever been known to be a Mycenaean site of note,⁷⁸ cannot be sensibly explained unless it is correlated with the wider area of the Argolic peninsula and the Saronic Gulf, as the finds, in their own right, seem to imply. The site of Ayios Konstantinos lies in the heart of the Saronic Gulf, on the sea route from the islands to the mainland and in the proximity of Calauria, where a similar cult, also with a wider range of celebrants, was based in the historic period. I have the impression that the much-debated "notion" of a Mycenaean origin of the Calaurian Amphictyony⁷⁹ did not deserve to die a peaceful death, as Thomas Kelly stated about thirty years ago.⁸⁰

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⁷¹ See Meyer (supra n. 1), 1376f.; Deffner (supra n. 70), 343–345.

⁷² On references to Poseidon by Homer and relevant evidence from Linear B texts, see Vermeule (supra n. 9), 60, 62f., 65–68, 83f. and 110f.; see also I. Chirassi, 'Poseidon-Enesidaon nel Pantheon Mice-neo', in *Atti e memorie del 1° Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma 27 Settembre–3 Ottobre 1967* (Incunabula Graeca, 25), Roma 1968, 945–991.

⁷³ See Welter (supra n. 68), 26–28 and 35f.

⁷⁴ A sanctuary site of the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period has also been identified by Mee & Forbes above Oga (MS 68); see AR 34, 1987–88, 23. The actual site of Oga (MS 67) has been recorded as one of the three main LH sites on Methana, the other two being the acropolis of ancient Methana (MS 10) on the west coast, inhabited continuously since the Neolithic period, and the promontory of Ayios Yeoryios (MS 124) in the north-east of the peninsula (see *ibid.*, 22).

⁷⁵ Under this epithet, pointing rather to a deity of fecundity than to a sea divinity, Poseidon was venerated at Troezen, one of his oldest strongholds. According to Plutarch (*Thest.* 6), the first-fruits of the season were offered to him at Troezen and his sanctuary outside the

walls of the city was contiguous to that of Demeter Thesmophoros; pigs, usually offered to Demeter, were also sacrificed to Poseidon, as is attested by inscriptions from Rhodes (*IG* XII, 1, no. 905) and Laconia (*IG* V, 1, no. 1218).

⁷⁶ On the associations of the sea and the marine world with deities of fecundity and ideas of fertility, see Laffneur (supra n. 13), esp. 235f.

⁷⁷ See supra n. 74.

⁷⁸ The site of Ayios Konstantinos (MS 13) has been recorded by Mee and Forbes as an EH site with LH sherds as a minor component (see AR 31, 1984–85, 22; 34, 1987–88, 22). A settlement of the 12th–15th centuries was also located in this area (see AR 34, 1987–88, 23). Hope Simpson and Dickinson (supra n. 1) report an LH and later settlement by the plain of Throni, near the village of Vromolimni, situated c. 1.5 km to the south-west of Ayios Konstantinos.

⁷⁹ See P. Harland, 'The Calaurian Amphictyony', *AJA* 29, 1925, 160–171, with refs. to previous bibliography; *idem*, *Prehistoric Aigina: A history of the island in the Bronze Age*, Paris 1925, esp. 101–109.

⁸⁰ T. Kelly, 'The Calaurian Amphictyony', *AJA* 70, 1966, 113–121, esp. 114.

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