

UN FRAMMENTO CON RAPPRESENTAZIONE DI FELIDE DA CHALARA (FESTÒS)?

LUCA GIRELLA

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a MM IIIA ceramic fragment (F 7586) found in the southern sector of the Chalara quarter (located on the eastern slopes of the Phaistos palace hill). The vessel, of which only two joining sherds from a medium-large closed shape survive, comes from a rich homogenous fill created in an operation to fill MM III structures and construct a LM I house on top of them.

The sherd has a coarse fabric and its preserved part suggests that the original vessel was wheel-made. The decoration is typical of the MM IIIA painted pottery production at Phaistos, and consists of a painted polychrome decoration combining wavy running spirals in white and a rock pattern in red on dark background. The distinct aspect of the sherd is the dark coated plastic decoration representing the back of a mammal, of which part of one hind leg and the tail remain. It is argued that the sherd might be part of a medium-large vessel, such as a bridge-spouted jar or a pithoid jar. A strong parallel for the latter shape comes from the jar decorated with the plastic figure of a standing bull found at the Archanes/ Anemospilia shrine. There are two parallels from Phaistos: a conical rhyton (F 4029) from the same context at Chalara and a medium-large bridge-spouted jar from the area of the so called BastioneOvest (F 5509), both of which are decorated with an appliqué medallion that depicts a standing agrimi/wild goat surrounded by a rock landscape or a cave.

The iconographic analysis carried out in this article tries to evaluate comparisons with the bovid and felid families. The robust shape of the hind leg, as well as the position of the tail suggests that the animal was not standing, but running or in the so called 'flying gallop'. This scheme is particularly known for illustrating felids (both the felinae and pan-therinae subfamilies) from the MM II period, such as the lions reproduced on the sealings from room 25 at Phaistos. Useful comparisons can also be made with some extraordinary products from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae. The same scheme is also repeated on one fragment from the Taverna's bothros at Knossos, probably MM IIIA, on two terracotta rhyta from LM I Malia, as well as on a LM I sherd from Miletus (Period IV).

The iconographic analysis also takes into consideration the representation of griffins whose flying gallop scheme was attested in Neopalatial Crete (such as the griffins reproduced on Zakros sealings) as well as in the Helladic art of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae.

This article formulates the hypothesis that the vessel reproduced a felid (probably a lion) in a flying or jumping gallop. Nevertheless, it is also stressed that the representation of the tail was

not canonical as it lacks the characteristic dark tuft at the end. Therefore, it is suggested that the animal preserved on the ceramic relief is a lion with a non-canonical tail.

Finally, this new iconographical element is evaluated within the MM IIIA context of the Phaistos palace. This settlement remains the only one where a unique group of ceramic relief vessels is concentrated. All vessels have a MM IIIA date, but the sherd with the felid stands out for its larger dimensions. For this reason, it is suggested that the stucco relief art whose definition and first execution appears to be at home with a MM IIIA chronology may have been an influence. Because of the massive concentration of stucco relief fragments at Knossos, aspects of the relationship between Knossos and Phaistos at the beginning of the Neopalatial era are explored. As for the Chalara case, it is argued that the role of the palace at the beginning of MM IIIA, despite the attempts to reconstruct it after the MM IIB earthquake, was still crucial and that the use of power symbols on cultic vessels, such as the Cretan agrimi/wild goat and the felid, was the main mechanism of the elites to reinforce their power in such a transitional period.