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CRETAN PEAK SANCTUARIES: DISTRIBUTION, TOPOGRAPHY AND SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF RITUAL

ABSTRACT. *The phenomenon of cult places located on hills and mountains in Crete has attracted so much attention during the last fifty years that one might think the subject is well researched and nothing new can be contributed anymore. After intensive field investigations in the 1960s, 70s and 80s it seemed that the general role of those sites in contemporary settlement patterns and their topographical characteristics were well-known, enough to propose solid explanations about the origins and history of peak sanctuaries, and the character of cult behind their origin. Excavations, first at Iouchtas, then Atsipades Korakias and Traostalos, Vrysinas, and more recently at Anatoli Stavromenos, yielded evidence which may help to illuminate these problems. However, each of the excavated sites has its own peculiarity, and all of them suffered much destruction due to the natural elements, as well as ancient and modern human activity. We are eagerly waiting for the excavation publications to be able to put the puzzles together, but it should be clarified here that, however helpful that material will be, many questions will stay unanswered. The central and dominant position of the sanctuary on Iouchtas is beyond doubt, but when exactly the first worshippers came to the place is still an open matter. This is, however, a crucial point for the reconstruction of the spread of the idea throughout the rest of the island. Is the curious distribution pattern, with the circle of peak sanctuaries around Iouchtas in Central Crete and a dense sanctuaries concentration in East Crete, meaningful for the understanding of the expansion of Knossian influence after the EM II destruction horizon? Is the concentration of peak sanctuaries in the Rethymnon district comparable in date and characteristics to the one in East Crete? Are the blank spots on the map of the Cretan peak sanctuaries really regions lacking such type of cult place, or is this the result of less intensified fieldwork? What was the role of the highest mountains, some of which show very poor evidence of Bronze Age activity of non-domestic character which resembles sometimes evidence known from cult places? What was the role of very small sites with only one element of a peak sanctuary “votive offering packet”—pebbles? What was the role of hilltop sites located in the obvious visual relation to the sanctuary on Iouchtas, with a “votive offering packet” lacking pebbles? What was the function of auxiliary sites to peak sanctuaries and were they common feature of all sites? These questions will be addressed in the paper and the arguments will be supported by new evidence from fieldwork undertaken during the last twenty years. Also, new data for the reconstruction of the ritual itself will be discussed in a broader context of the location and arrangement of Minoan peak sanctuaries.*

KEYWORDS. *Crete, Bronze Age, religion, ritual, peak sanctuaries*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of cult places located on hills and mountains has been for the last hundred years among the most attractive subjects of the Bronze Age archaeology of Crete.¹ Unfortunately, much of this

attraction was focused on speculative interpretation of very poor quality archaeological evidence rather than on searching for new evidence itself and putting

¹ My fieldwork on the subject in Crete (from 1983 onwards) was possible due to the kindness of the Greek archaeological authorities, the Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Service of Crete: the Ephorates of East, Central and Western Crete. I would

like to thank all the Ephors and members of the Archaeological Service, and especially those who were particularly supportive throughout all those past years: Costis Davaras, Villi Apostolou, Maria Vlasaki, Charalambos Kritsas, Alexandra Karetsou, Georgios Rethimiotakis, Metaxia Tsipopoulou, Adonis Vasilakis and Chrysa Sofianou. The fieldwork related to the subject of this paper was possible thanks to the grant of the National Science Centre (NCN, Poland) no. 2012/07/B/HS3/03436.

this evidence into a broader settlement context. Post-WW II primary studies were restricted to a few scholars only. The most intensive archaeological research on the subject took place in the 1960s through 1980s, with field-walking done by Faure,² Rutkowski³ and Peatfield,⁴ and a long series of rescue excavations mostly by Davaras⁵ and Alexiou.⁶ Also during that period Karetsou⁷ started a completely new excavation at the most important Cretan peak sanctuary at Iouchtas (Fig. 1: 1) – the site which was first dug by Evans.⁸ An obvious “copy” of Cretan peak sanctuaries was discovered by Sakellarakis on Kythira.⁹ The 1980s ended with the excavation by Peatfield and Morris of Atsipades Korakias (Fig. 1: 39) – so far a unique case of a small peak sanctuary not destroyed by human agency after its use during the Bronze Age.¹⁰

The last two decades brought some important discoveries and debates as well. Watrous proposed a farther distinction between different types of peak sanctuaries and suggested the term of “hilltop shrines” for sites which might be somewhat similar to the previously used, but now apparently abandoned, category of “sacred enclosures.”¹¹ Some attempt was also made to bring the debate closer to the theoretical discussion which dominated the Aegean archaeology in the last decades of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty first century.¹² This does not seem to be very successful considering that the conclusions of the most important publications in this group did not offer any new solutions to the most important questions regarding the Cretan peak sanctuaries.

Continued excavations at Iouchtas, then Traostalos (Fig. 1: 21),¹³ and more recently at Vrysinas (Fig. 1: 43),¹⁴ Gournos Krousonas (Fig. 1: 10),¹⁵ Gyristis (Fig. 1: 44),¹⁶ and Anatoli Stavromenos (Fig. 1: 16),¹⁷ have produced new evidence which may help to illuminate the chronological problems and those related to the organization of ritual at the sites. However, each of the excavated sites has its own peculiarity, and all of them

suffered much destruction due to natural elements, as well as ancient and modern human activity. We are eagerly waiting for these excavation publications to be able to put the puzzles together, but, however helpful that material will be, many questions will stay unanswered. Nevertheless, a rich scope of data yielded by all those projects allows some of the earlier hypotheses to be challenged. This challenge should be based on firm knowledge of the archaeological evidence, and not on purely theoretical negation of earlier research¹⁸ or somewhat accidental and superficial observations on some of the sites without any broader context.¹⁹ Almost every aspect of the peak sanctuary phenomenon suffers from mistaken information and/or misinterpretation, not even mentioning dozens of websites contaminated with false data. In this paper I would like to review evidence based on comprehensive primary observations and will then try to make some order in its interpretation. In addition, new evidence will be presented, which on one hand may clarify some of the problems, but at the same time will certainly open new questions for further research.

ORIGINS

The first problem addressed in this paper concerns peak sanctuaries’ origins. As I have pointed out elsewhere, hypotheses about very early roots of this phenomenon (putting it back even to the end of the Final Neolithic (FN), i.e. the end of the fourth millennium BC) have missed an important point related to the character of FN settlement patterns.²⁰ The locations of two sites discussed in this context, namely Branigan’s Site 23 in the Lamnoni valley²¹ and Atsipades Korakias,²² need clarification. Both sites were occupied during the FN period, but only one – Korakias – was also an MM peak sanctuary. In the Lamnoni case there was no find that might indicate ritual activity, neither during the FN period nor afterwards. The only argument for a cult function was the site’s hilltop location. That characteristic, however, is meaningless in the period during which hundreds of defensible settlements were founded on rocky ridges and hilltops all over the island. FN habitation sites were located on hills for defensive reasons, whereas MM cult places were situated on elevated summits due to different factors related to the character of a deity/ies and landscape characteristics of the region. Until recently, these general topographical similarities

² FAURE 1963; 1965; 1967: 115–128; 1969: 174–194; 1972: 390–402.

³ RUTKOWSKI 1985; 1986; 1988; 1991.

⁴ PEATFIELD 1983; 1987; 1990; 2009.

⁵ DAVARAS 1971a: 264–265; 1971b: 302–303; 1972: 651–653; 1973: 592; 1976: 380.

⁶ ALEXIOU 1963a; 1963b.

⁷ KARETSOU 1974; 1978; 1981; 1984; 1985.

⁸ EVANS 1921: 151–163.

⁹ SAKELLARAKIS 1994.

¹⁰ PEATFIELD 1992; MORRIS, PEATFIELD 1995; MORRIS, BATTEN 2000.

¹¹ WATROUS 1995: 394.

¹² KYRIAKIDIS 2005; SOETENS 2009.

¹³ CHRYSSOULAKI 2001.

¹⁴ TZACHILI 2011.

¹⁵ RETHEMIOTAKIS 2001–2004; 2009.

¹⁶ KONTOPODI *et al.* 2015.

¹⁷ Excavated by Y. Papadatos, no published data available yet.

¹⁸ See, for example, BRIAULT 2007.

¹⁹ BARBER 2010.

²⁰ NOWICKI 2001.

²¹ BRANIGAN 1998: 57–59.

²² MORRIS, BATTEN 2000.



Fig. 1. Distribution of peak sanctuaries in Crete: 1. Iouchtas; 2. Maza; 3. Sklaverochori sto Mameloukou; 4. Liliano Kefala; 5. Demati Chousakas; 6. Kofinas; 7. Tylissos Pyrgos; 8. Gonies Filiirimos; 9. Keria; 10. Krousonas Gournos Korfi tou Tarou; 11. Kera Karfi; 12. Anavlochos Vigla; 13. Miliarado Koupa Mikro Kastellos; 14. Chondros Anginara Roukouni Korfi; 15. Anatoli Pandotinou Korifi; 16. Anatoli Stavromenos; 17. Petsofas; 18. Palaikastro Lidia Kefala; 19. Modi; 20. Kalamaki; 21. Traostalos; 22. Zakros Vigla; 23. Sfaka Korakomouri; 24. Ziros Plagia; 25. Ziros Rizoviglo; 26. Korfi tou Mare (?); 27. Xerokampos Vigla; 28. Etiani Kefala; 29. Katelionas Xykefalo; 30. Kalo Nero Alona; 31. Pervolakia Koutsouvaki; 32. Pervolakia Vitzilokoumi; 33. Lithines Katsaroli; 34. Prinias; 35. Faneromeni Trachilos; 36. Mavrou Korfi; 37. Samitos; 38. Spili Vorizi; 39. Atsipades Korakias; 40. Xiros Oros Ag. Pneuma; 41. Preveli Mesokorfi; 42. Plakias Paligremnos; 43. Vrysinas; 44. Gyristis; 45. Kryos (Ag. Kyriaki) Gremnakas

seemed to be the only factor behind the occasional coexistence of FN or EM I sites and MM peak sanctuaries. However, a series of new discoveries during the last few years, when confronted with the detailed analysis of the peak sanctuaries known earlier, sheds new light on the problem and indicates a scenario more complicated than that. In an article published in 2001 I pointed out that apart from the above mentioned sites of Lamnoni and Atsipades Korakias, there were several other MM peak sanctuaries with an earlier – usually FN and FN/EM I – phase of occupation.²³ Since that time the number of sites where such early evidence was identified has grown up significantly and several new sites, crucial for understanding the phenomenon, were discovered.

In the East Siteia region, FN occupation at Traostalos has been well known since the recent excavation by Stella Chryssoulaki,²⁴ but another, less known, is Petsofas (Fig. 1: 17) with a small FN settlement located on the same massif, about 200 m to the south of the peak sanctuary.²⁵ Modi (Fig. 1: 19) too has evidence of occupation in the latest FN (and perhaps the earliest EM I) on the summit.²⁶ A few FN sherds were recorded on the top of Kalamaki Kefala (Fig. 1: 20), which shares the characteristics of FN settlements in East Crete, including the neighbouring sites of Alatopatela and Cape Mavros.²⁷ A concentration of MM cup

fragments, together with numerous pebbles, on the very southern summit of the FN fortified settlement on Ziros Rizoviglo (Fig. 1: 25) strongly suggests that here, too, a dominant hill was reused in the MM period for a different purpose.²⁸ A small peak sanctuary has been recently identified at the site of the FN settlement of Zakanthos Patela/Kastellos,²⁹ and a similar one on the hill of Kefala on the western outskirts of the Palaikastro plain, next to an FN II/EM I site.³⁰ Another example of an MM peak sanctuary at the site of an FN settlement is Anatoli Pandotinou Korifi (Fig. 1: 15), above the southern coast, between Ierapetra and Myrtos.³¹ In West Crete, apart from Atsipades Korakias, there is a probable peak sanctuary at the northern edge of the promontory ridge of Plakias Paligremnos (Fig. 1: 42), which overlooked a small MM–LM settlement of Xerochorafi.³² The same ridge had been occupied already in the FN period. For similar topographical reasons some of MM peak sanctuaries were later occupied by LM IIIC defensible settlements, with Karfi (Fig. 1: 11) in the Lassithi Mountains being the best known site of this kind.

In all the mentioned cases there is no evidence that there was any continuity of sites' use between the end of the Neolithic and the end of the EM period. Archaeological evidence, as visible on surface, clearly indicates that the FN and/or EM I early occupation

²³ NOWICKI 2001.

²⁴ CHRYSSOULAKI 2001: 63.

²⁵ NOWICKI 2002: 20–21; 2014a: 88.

²⁶ NOWICKI 2014a: 92.

²⁷ NOWICKI 2002: 20; 2014a: 82–85.

²⁸ NOWICKI 2014a: 141.

²⁹ KALANTZOPOULOU 2017.

³⁰ NOWICKI 2014a: 243.

³¹ NOWICKI 2008a: 17; 2014a: 173–176.

³² NOWICKI 2008a: 28–29; 2014a: 211.

was of a domestic character and was related to the early territorial organization of FN II–EM I early communities.³³ Some doubts may arise in the case of Atsipades Korakias, where the FN finds do not look like a standard “occupation” assemblage of a habitation site. Yet, also this site should be analyzed in a broader regional settlement system of FN date, which consisted of a number of different elements scattered between the southern coast and the Agios Vasilios valley. Korakias is not the only small FN site located on a protruding peak in this region. Another site of this type was probably located on the summit of Kirimianou, above Myrthios.

To sum up, the available evidence does not allow – at present – to move the date of peak sanctuaries’ origin to the transition between the FN and EM I period, and thus to link this event with the dramatic changes in settlement patterns and the beginning of the processes which led to the emergence of the Bronze Age civilization in Crete. Nevertheless, it is possible that some early form of an external cult place existed in indigenous Neolithic Crete or, alternatively, was introduced to the island from the Near East by the late FN and EBA I immigrants. Probably already in the FN or EM I periods, pebbles – so important in later funeral and ritual contexts, also at Minoan peak sanctuaries and Archaic-Classical hilltop shrines – had some special symbolic meaning that may have been linked to the religious sphere rather than to the material world. Pebbles, especially of white quartz, appear more than occasionally on the surface of many FN settlements. However, until reliable archaeological evidence is found of isolated hilltop cult places of FN or EM I–II date, the origins of Minoan peak sanctuaries should be placed in the next key period of social and political changes, that is between the end of the EM II and the beginning of the MM I period, during the last centuries of the third millennium BC.

Although the FN date for the origins of peak sanctuaries seems to be out of discussion, my earlier statement about a pure coincidence in the location of the FN sites and MM peak sanctuaries, as being the result of similar topographic characteristics of the chosen place, may be also not entirely correct. It is possible that the remains of earlier (beyond the memory of local communities) human activity on some hilltops may have influenced the process during which the remote past was mythologized, and thus some of the earlier occupied sites got a cult status. This process may have been initiated at Iouchtas already towards the end of the third millennium BC, but elsewhere in Crete it took place probably several centuries later, during the MM IB–II periods.

To test such a scenario, the context and character of the earliest evidence from Iouchtas should be clarified. The matter of when exactly the first worshippers came to the place, whether already in EM II or as late as EM III, remains open. The EM II pottery from Iouchtas is very scarce and cannot be interpreted with certainty as representing ritual activity.³⁴ On the other hand, if it does not have a ritual character, the question arises: what kind of EM II site was located on Iouchtas? Another intriguing question is whether there was on Iouchtas an FN and EM I early occupation, at the site of the sanctuary or nearby, as in the case of Petsofas and Traostalos? A few pottery fragments seen on the surface by the author seem to indicate that it may have been the case. The precise dating and interpretation of the earliest phase at Iouchtas are crucial points in searching for the origin of this earliest Cretan peak sanctuary and the spread of the peak sanctuary idea throughout the rest of the island during the MM I and MM II periods.

DISTRIBUTION

I discussed the problem of the peak sanctuaries distribution elsewhere in the early 1990s.³⁵ I argued then that the presence or lack of peak sanctuaries in some regions may have reflected, to some degree, a cultural and/or political division of Crete during the last Pre- and Proto-Palatial periods (EM III–MM II). Such a territorial division may have had even deeper roots in the early history of Crete, going back to the dynamic population changes and early territorial organization during the latest Neolithic (FN II) and the EM I period. The pattern of MM peak sanctuaries was characterized by the following factors (Fig. 2).

- 1) The dominant central position of Iouchtas.
- 2) A series of sanctuaries around Iouchtas, in Central Crete, on the edges of the mountainous regions of Lasithi (Karfi, Liliano Kefala, Koupa Mikro Kastellos, Roukouni Korfi), Psiloriti (Tylissos Pyrgos, Gyristis) and Asterousia (Kofinas, Demati Chousakas) – Region 1.
- 3) A dense concentration of peak sanctuaries in the East Siteia region (Region 2), including Petsofas, a sanctuary which copied some of the natural and architectural elements of Iouchtas. This group was geographically isolated from the Central Cretan group by the West Siteia Mountains, the Mirabello area and the East Lasithi Mountains, where no single peak

³³ NOWICKI 2014a: 376.

³⁴ Karetsou’s paper presented at the international conference *Cretan Peak Sanctuaries: Distribution, Topography and Spatial Organization of Ritual*, Dublin 2010.

³⁵ NOWICKI 1991: 143–145; 1994a.

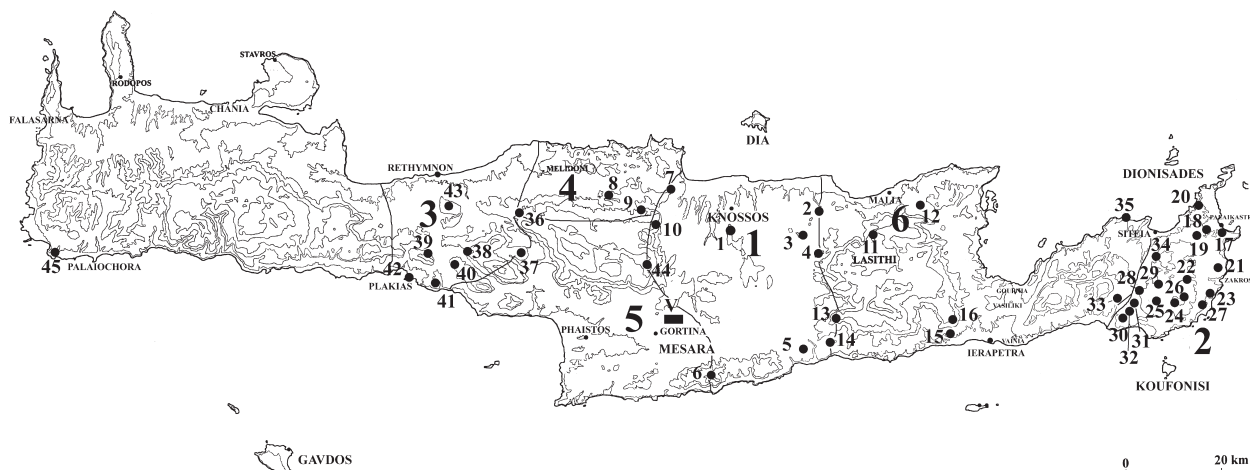


Fig. 2. Zones related to the distribution of peak sanctuaries

sanctuary has been identified so far, apart from a few ephemeral founded late in MM II.

4) A group of peak sanctuaries in the Rethymnon region (Region 3), with a dominant site on Vrysinas and the largest cluster of sanctuaries in the Agios Vasilios valley. This group was connected with the Central Cretan group through the Mylopotamos valley group (Region 4), with Gonies Filiarimos (via Pyrgos) and Mavri Korfi giving visual links with Iouktas, on the east, and Vrysinas, on the west.

5) A lack of this type of sanctuaries in the “palatial” regions around Faistos (Region 5) and Malia (Region 6).

Since the publication of the aforementioned papers the map of the peak sanctuaries distribution has been complemented with several new sites identified by surface finds and by excavations.³⁶ A small site of Gremnakas (Fig. 1:45) shows that the idea spread out as far as the very southwestern end of Crete.³⁷ Regarding rather poor quality and quantity of finds at Gremnakas, which indicate either the late MM II or even MM III period, it seems that the site represents the latest episode of the Proto-Palatial expansion of the peak sanctuaries, which was followed by an obvious decline of provincial sites of this type. Several new sites were also recorded in the Rethymnon isthmus, indicating that the idea of peak sanctuaries in this region was probably as common as it was in East Crete. After discovering of two peak sanctuaries in the inland Spili – Agios Vasilios region (Atsipades Korakias and Spili Vorizi, Fig. 1:39 and 38), two certain and two probable peak sanctuaries were further identified on the summit of Samitos (Fig. 1:37), in the Amari valley, on the mountain of Xiros Oros (Fig. 1:40), between Spili and Preveli, and in the Plakias – Preveli coastal area, on the summit of

Mesokorfi, above Preveli (Fig. 1:41, Fig. 3:1), and on Paligremnos (Fig. 1:42), on the southeastern border of Plakias Bay.³⁸ The latter two sites are characterized by numerous MM II potsherds of small vessels, mostly cups, absence of other “domestic” pottery shapes, and a large number of pebbles concentrated within small areas next to the cliffs which face main MM settlements in the region; however, no figurines have been so far identified.

Discoveries of certain peak sanctuaries on Pandotinou Korifi (Fig. 1:15 and Fig. 4)³⁹ and on the summit of Stavromenos (Fig. 1:16), northwest of Ierapetra,⁴⁰ suggest that revisions are needed concerning the problem of peak sanctuaries in the so-called Malia–Myrtos territory. It is possible that the peak sanctuary idea spread from Central Crete, first to the western ridges of the Lasithi Mountains (Karfi, Koupa Mikro Kastellos and Chondros Roukouni Korfi) and then around the northern and southern slopes of the Lasithi Mountains farther to the east, towards Malia and Mirabello, and Myrtos. This process took place late in the Proto-Palatial (MM II) period, during the final decades of the probably violent reshaping of the territorial organization in Crete, around or after the destruction of Quartier Mu in Malia and the construction of a defensive citadel at Monastiraki Katalimata.⁴¹ The same dating can be proposed for the ephemeral peak sanctuary on Anavlochos Vigla⁴² and perhaps Thylakas.⁴³

³⁸ NOWICKI 2008a: 27–29.

³⁹ NOWICKI 2008a: 17.

⁴⁰ The site has been recently excavated by Y. Papadatos.

⁴¹ NOWICKI 2008b: 77–80.

⁴² NOWICKI 1994a: 48; the cult function of the site has been recently confirmed by Zografaki’s and Gaignerot-Driessen’s excavation (personal information).

⁴³ Thylakas was an Archaic–Hellenistic open-air cult place, as a vast majority of its surface finds indicates. The site was thoroughly discussed by Davaras, who removed it from the list of Bronze Age peak sanctuaries (DAVARAS 2010). However, in

³⁶ NOWICKI 2008a; RETHEMIOTAKIS 2009; 2012; KONTOPODI *et al.* 2015.

³⁷ NOWICKI 2008a: 10–13, fig. 7.



Fig. 3. View from Xiros Oros to the south; (1) the peak sanctuary on Preveli Mesokorfi, (2) an EM and MM settlement northeast of the Preveli beach



Fig. 4. Anatoli Pandotinou Korifi (1) from east

A cult place on the western edge of Faneromeni Trachilos (Fig. 1:35), west of Siteia,⁴⁴ allows the northwestern border of the East Cretan territory (Region 2 on Fig. 2) to be moved towards the west, at least along the northern coast. This “foundation” can be related to the expansion (probably contemporary with the Knossian intrusion into the Malia “state”)

the light of new excavations at Anavlochos Vigla and Anatoli Stavromenos, and after my most recent visit to the site, I consider that there was here a very short-lasting MM II peak sanctuary which may have marked the Knossian expansion towards the Ierapetra isthmus.

⁴⁴ NOWICKI 2001: 36.

of the Petras territory into the West Siteia region, along the coast towards the Papadiokampos area. In the same region (Region 2), the peak sanctuary of Xerokampos Vigla (Fig. 1:27 and Fig. 5),⁴⁵ at last, makes more sense in the Xerokampos coastal plain than an alternative candidate on the promontory of Trachilos Kefala at Ampelos.⁴⁶ Substantial changes in the southern group of peak sanctuaries in Region 2 must be proposed due to the discovery of four new sites in the region between Kalo Nero and Lithines. These are

⁴⁵ NOWICKI 2008a: 13–16.

⁴⁶ RUTKOWSKI, NOWICKI 1984: 180; RUTKOWSKI 1988: 78; SCHLAGER 1991–92.



Fig. 5. Xerokampos Vigla from northwest



Fig. 6. Peak sanctuaries on Pervolakia Vitzilokoumi (1) and Kalo Nero Alona (2)

extensive peak sanctuaries of Kalo Nero Alona and Pervolakia Vitzilokoumi (Fig. 1: 30, 32 and Fig. 6) and two small sanctuaries of Pervolakia Koutsouvaki (Fig. 1: 31 and Fig. 7: 1) and Lithines Katsaroli.⁴⁷

Considering all those recent additions to the peak sanctuaries gazetteer, I still support my earlier hypothesis that the pattern of the peak sanctuary distribution reflects, to some degree, the political division of Crete in the Pre- and Proto-Palatial periods,⁴⁸ especially competition between the strongest palatial centres of Knossos, Faistos and Malia, with the peak sanctuary

idea being closely related to Iouchtas – the main cult place of Knossos. The above mentioned newly discovered sites, which brought some modifications to the peak sanctuaries distribution map, do not contradict the hypothesis, but add a new element to the analysis, regarding a dynamic expansion of Knossian rule and/or influence during the transition between the Proto- and the Neo-Palatial period. A strong “demonstrative” role of some of the provincial peak sanctuaries, located on the expanding borders of the Knossian territory and without deeper roots in local beliefs, might explain a phenomenon of the very short life of these sites during the late phase of MM II and their sudden decline still in the same

⁴⁷ NOWICKI 2014b: 168–170.

⁴⁸ NOWICKI 1991: 144–145; 1994a: 46–48.



Fig. 7. Peak sanctuaries on Pervolakia Koutsouvaki (1) and Etiani Kefala (2)

period or in early MM III. Once the territorial division of Crete had been reorganized, with Knossos being the winner in the competition, there was no need to demonstrate the control of the “outer” territories because there was no other centre which would question this control.

In the model proposed in my 1991 and 1994 papers the idea of a cult place on mountain peaks was born in the Knossos – Iouktas region either during the EM II or in the EM III period and then, between MM IB and MM II, spread to some, but not all, Cretan regions, with the last stage of expansion occurring towards the end of the Proto-Palatial period, in late MM II and the beginning of MM III. The strongest competitors of Knossos – Malia and Faistos – may have resisted for some reasons the uptake of this element of Cretan religion. Was it because the peak sanctuaries were originally dedicated to a specific deity affiliated to the town of Knossos? Or, was it an alien feature for the culturally different EBA population of the Mesara and the Malia – Mirabello – West Siteia Mountains regions? This problem is even more complicated by the fact that until recently three categories of sites which were probably related to the peak sanctuaries were completely absent in the discussion of the subject. These are 1) the sites with less dramatic location, but with a curious visual contact with one or more “proper” peak sanctuaries, and very poor evidence, sometimes restricted to only one category of “votive offerings” – pebbles, 2) ritual sites with similar topographic characteristics as the previous group and with cups and figurines, but no pebbles recorded on their surface, and 3) the sites on the highest mountains, with scarce traces of non-domestic Bronze Age activity – mainly cups.

TOPOGRAPHY

The term topography refers here to the natural characteristics of the place chosen for ritual activity. It is not restricted, however, to the sanctuary itself, but extends to the large area around it and includes other elements of the settlement pattern, especially habitation sites responsible for the origin and use of the sanctuary. Topography is the most important element in peak sanctuary classification, but it should be analysed together with other aspects of Cretan religion and the history of settlement in Crete. Each sanctuary was founded and used in its own geographical and settlement contexts. The isolation of cult places from landscape and settlement history in analysis leads to misunderstanding, not only of the concept and nature of this type of site, but also of the character of religion. The best (or rather worst) examples of such misunderstandings are the papers by Henriksson and Bloomberg, Briault and Barber.⁴⁹

The hypothesis of Iouktas being the first peak sanctuary in Crete, which is well supported by the available evidence (published and visible on the surface), has further implications for the understanding of the peak sanctuaries’ location and topography. If Iouktas was the first site of this type, it may have become “a model sanctuary,” and the same or similar topographical characteristics decided about the location of other peak sanctuaries. Because each mountain and hill, however, is a unique landscape formation, there must have been a kind of preference hierarchy,

⁴⁹ HENRIKSSON, BLOOMBERG 1996; BRIAULT 2007; BARBER 2010; additionally, all these papers contain numerous factual mistakes which make most of the authors’ arguments groundless.



Fig. 8. Iouchtas as seen from north–northwest

with some elements being essential ones, and other less required.

The most important feature of Iouchtas is that the mountain is an outstanding landmark, well visible not only from Knossos, but also from a large area of Central Crete, and is especially remarkable from the north (Fig. 8). This isolated mountain offers as well a splendid view all around Central Crete, between Psiloritis and the Lasithi Mountains. The northern summit, where a cult place was located, gives visual contact with Knossos. This visual contact between settlements and sanctuaries, as stressed by Peatfield,⁵⁰ was the first and foremost requirement for the location of this and many other (but not all) peak sanctuaries; the best example of such a topographical “rule” is Petsofas. The Iouchtas summit is very steep on one side (west) and slopes gently down on the other side (east). Again, the same characteristics can be seen at Petsofas and many other peak sanctuaries, including Prinias, Kalamaki, Sfaka Korakomouri, Kalo Nero Alona, Tylissos Pyrgos, Spili Vorizi and Preveli Mesokorfi. Location of a cult place next to a cliff or a very steep slope was the pattern which continued long after the peak sanctuaries’ decline; it can be found in the LM IIIC “temple” at Karfi,⁵¹ at a probable LM IIIB–C cult place of Pefkoi Kastello-poulo,⁵² and an Archaic–Classical hilltop sanctuary above Sougia.⁵³ The “heart” of the peak sanctuary of Iouchtas seems to have been a chasm, which opens in the highest point of the rocky summit, and an altar built directly besides it. A natural chasm or a deep crevice was not easy to copy elsewhere, but

the problem may have been solved in other way, for example by marking the “holiest” spot with a baetyl, a pithos or a large jar.

The importance and a long history of the peak sanctuary on Iouchtas caused the original appearance of the summit to be substantially changed in several stages between the EM III and MM III periods, with natural elements incorporated into, or covered by, an architectural complex consisting of buildings, built terraces and enclosure walls. A similar process can be reconstructed at Petsofas, although here the chronological gradual development of the stone structures, as proposed by Rutkowski,⁵⁴ cannot be proved by stratified archaeological evidence. Published material seems to indicate only that the structure may have been built in the MM II or even MM III period when it enclosed or covered the original focus point or the “holiest” spot of the sanctuary, on the highest rocky terrace facing the Bronze Age town of Palaikastro below, as it was chosen in MM I, evidently following the Iouchtas’ topography.

The name peak sanctuary can be confusing, especially for those who are not very familiar with archaeology of Crete. The name describes very well the location of some of the sites, for example Iouchtas, Vrysinas, Kofinas, Prinias (Fig. 9), Karfi (Fig. 10), and Koupa Mikro Kastellos (Fig. 11), but not so other sites located on hills or rocky ridges hanging above lower valleys or coastal plains. However, it is unjustified to use this argument to neglect altogether the existence of a special extra-urban type of sanctuary, located on an elevated landmark above an

⁵⁰ PEATFIELD 1983: 275.

⁵¹ PENDLEBURY *et al.* 1937–38: 75; RUTKOWSKI 1987: figs. 3 and 6.

⁵² NOWICKI 1994b: 249–255.

⁵³ NOWICKI 2008a: 17–23.

⁵⁴ RUTKOWSKI 1991: 17–21.



Fig. 9. Peak sanctuary on Zou Prinias (1) from east



Fig. 10. View from Megali Koprana towards the peak of Karfi (1) and Iouchtas (2)



Fig. 11. Koupa Mikro Kastellos from northeast

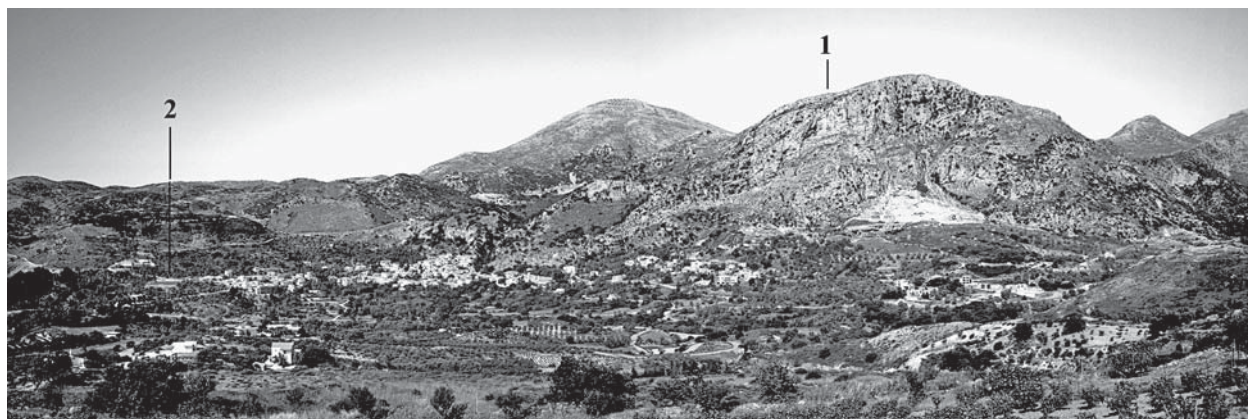


Fig. 12. Peak sanctuary on Spili Vorizi (1) and the MM–LM settlement of Spili Kefala (2)

inhabited area.⁵⁵ Cretan peak sanctuaries were located on the hilltops or mountainous summits which dominated the region below. Altitudes depend on the general location of a site, whether in inland mountainous massifs or on coastal hills and ridges, and the circumstances in which the cult place was founded. The most important factor for the main peak sanctuaries' location was, as I mentioned above, Peatfield's factor 3, i.e. visual relation with a settlement or settlements where the pilgrims came from, in other words, "to see the settlement and to be seen from it."⁵⁶ The fact that there was also inter-visibility between peak sanctuaries themselves was the consequence of the sanctuaries' elevated location rather than the feature *sine qua non* for any sanctuary's location. However, the recent identification of several peak sanctuaries, which apparently marked territorial borders, indicates that in some cases the location was not determined by a visual relation between a cult place and habitation sites where the pilgrims came from, but by a symbolic dominance of a peak sanctuary over an "enemy" territory. That was the case of Samitos in the Amari valley and probably of Anavlochos Vigla, between Malia and Mirabello Bay.

The interrelation between the sanctuary and its settlement or settlements depended on the rank of the former one in the entire settlement system. There were peak sanctuaries which probably played an interregional role, and other which may have served only a single settlement or even a single house (as, for example, Sfaka Korakomouri⁵⁷). In the first case, the mountain where the peak sanctuary was located was an important landmark clearly visible from afar, but the peak sanctuary itself may not have been seen from all the settlements which used it. The walking time between a habitation place and its peak sanctuary could range from several tens of minutes (Petso-

fas) up to three or four hours (Prinias, Gyristis?). In most cases, however, the peak sanctuary overlooked the habitation site/s and was between several tens of minutes and one hour away. In some cases, the direct relationship between the settlement and its peak sanctuary is so obvious that it was this relation itself which either led to the identification of a peak sanctuary (where the settlement was already known, e.g. Spili Vorizi [Fig. 12] and Plakias Paligremnos), or produced a new settlement identification in the "window" of visibility from the peak sanctuary (Preveli Mesokorfi [Fig. 3]). The topographical relationship between the peak sanctuary of Kryos Gremnakas and an MM–LM I settlement in Ag. Kyriaki,⁵⁸ in the very western end of Crete, resembles in a miniature the pattern of Palaikastro – Petsofas at the other end of the island. The topographic relationship between Bronze Age peak sanctuaries and settlements they belonged to is echoed in the common present-day pattern of a village and a hilltop chapel which is usually dedicated to Afendis Christos, Profitis Elias, Timios Stavros or Stavromenos (Fig. 13).

A few sanctuaries were located on peaks or ridges which form natural territorial borders, giving their location an additional significance. This feature of Cretan peak sanctuaries was discussed in the past, but the problem is especially difficult because the territorial division of Crete during EM II through the MM II period is poorly understood. Prinias, above Zou, overlooks entire Siteia Bay (Fig. 14) and only from this area it appears as a dominant landmark. When seen from the inland East Siteia plateau, the summit looks like a rocky terrace on the edge of the plateau (Fig. 9). Prinias has been sometimes viewed as the peak sanctuary belonging to Petras – the largest and most important settlement in the region. Petras is indeed clearly visible from Prinias, but the walking time between the two is between three and four hours.

⁵⁵ As, for example, BRIAULT 2007.

⁵⁶ PEATFIELD 1992: 60.

⁵⁷ SCHLAGER 1995.

⁵⁸ NOWICKI 2008a: 10–13.



Fig. 13. Stavromenos church (1) above the village of Pefkoi (2)



Fig. 14. View from the peak sanctuary on Zou Prinias towards Siteia; (1) Petras, (2) the “peak sanctuary” of Faneromeni Trachilos

Even if Prinias became the major extra-urban cult place, laid within the Petras territory, it never turned into a shrine with a role comparable to that played by Petsofas for the Palaikastro town. The origins of the cult place on Prinias must be placed in the initial phase of the peak sanctuary phenomenon in East Crete, when some mountains, thanks to their outstanding appearance and dominance over large areas of land and sea, were chosen as interregional or border-marking cult places. Prinias and Traostalos

may have been given such a role. An even more plausible border marking function can be applied to the site located only about 40 m above the sea on the western edge of the Faneromeni Trachilos promontory (Fig. 15). The reconstruction of such a clear territorial demarcation of the East Siteia peninsula by peak sanctuaries was for long disturbed by an absence of sites comparable to Prinias on the southwestern flank of this region. Identifications of a series of peak sanctuaries in the Kalo Nero – Pervolakia – Lithines



Fig. 15. Faneromeni Trachilos

area a few years ago shed new light on this problem and support the above proposed hypothesis.⁵⁹

A similar – territory marking – function may have applied to two peak sanctuaries on the western edge of the Lasithi Mountains: Karfi and Koupa Mikro Kastellos. Both seem to date late in the Proto-Palatial period (MM IIB–IIIA?) and both overlooked in a dramatic way the northwestern and southwestern entrances to the Lasithi Plateau (Figs. 10 and 11). The rocky knolls of Karfi and Mikro Kastellos tower over the strategically important plains of Gonies – Avdou and Mochos (Karfi), and the Upper Mesara and Viannos (Mikro Kastellos).

The location of peak sanctuaries on a hilltop or mountainous summit, dominating the region and/or overhanging habitation site/s, was without doubt a decisive element in founding this type of cult place. Peak sanctuaries, however, constituted only a part of the Cretan Bronze Age religious system/s and no wonder that the set of items used in the ritual at peak sanctuaries was similar to that known from other (non peak sanctuaries) cult places. Briault's argument against the differentiation of peak sanctuaries as a special type of cult place,⁶⁰ therefore, seems wrongly addressed, since the character of religious ritual is not determined solely by the movable objects associated with this ritual. It is also linked to the topographical characteristics of the place. In the same way, in the present Greek Orthodox pattern of sanctuaries, churches located on hills and mountains are not much different from those in villages and towns, but – as it has been mentioned above – they are

usually dedicated to Afendis Christos, Timios Stavros, Stavromenos, and Profitis Elias. The worshippers are highly aware of these different dedications as were, probably, the Bronze Age Cretans when choosing the locations for their peak sanctuaries. Thus, the peak sanctuaries' location expressed an important message of Cretan religion in the Middle and Late Bronze Age, a message probably known to all the Cretans, but respected only by part of the population. A strong attachment of gods/goddesses to particular territories/towns, which was also a common factor in Bronze Age Near Eastern religions, may have been some obstacle in distribution of peak sanctuaries throughout the entire island, especially within the territories controlled by Faistos and Malia.

Now I would like to turn to another site type which may have had something to do with peak sanctuaries, though this is a very preliminary and tentative interpretation of the problem. The sites in question are marked by a large number of pebbles and very few potsherds (mostly cups), usually badly eroded. At present, the phenomenon is best recognized in the East Siteia area, where four such sites have so far been recorded. Each of these sites has different topographical characteristics, but all have one common feature: good views towards one or more peak sanctuaries. Some additionally command views of contemporary settlements, which themselves are not in visual contact with peak sanctuaries. The significance of this feature should become clearer as more sites of the above type are identified.

The first site is located on a rocky spur rising on the eastern edge of the Xerokampias gorge, about 200 m north of the gorge's mouth. A concentration of pebbles can be seen on the spur's rocky summit

⁵⁹ NOWICKI 2014b: 168–170.

⁶⁰ BRIAULT 2007.



Fig. 16. View from a ritual site above Xerokampos Alona towards the peak sanctuary of Xerokampos Vigla (1)



Fig. 17. Location of the "pebble site" above Epano Zakros (2) with the peak sanctuaries of Zakros Vigla (1) and Traostalos (3)

within an area c. 2 by 1 m in size. Numerous pebbles, together with a few MM potsherds, are also scattered at the base of the spur on the south, over a distance of about 20 m. No habitation places contemporaneous with this "pebble site" have so far been identified in the vicinity on the neighbouring plateau. A small settlement on the eastern side of the gorge's mouth (in a distance of 150 m to the south) is of FN–EM I date. The closest MM habitation place is located lower on the coastal plain, at Katsounaki, about 300 m southeast of the gorge's mouth. From the top

of the spur one can see the peak sanctuaries of Xerokampos Vigla (Fig. 16) and Zakros Vigla. The visual relationship of the "pebble site" with these peak sanctuaries may not be accidental, but the explanation of this fact awaits further investigations.

A similar visual relationship with a peak sanctuary is shown by another "pebble site" situated on a mountain immediately west of Epano Zakros and east of Mavro Kampos (Fig. 17). The site lies on a rocky spur hanging over the Zakros basin and offers an excellent view to the peak sanctuaries of Zakros



Fig. 18. View from the “pebble site” above Epano Zakros to the peak sanctuary of Zakros Vigla (1)



Fig. 19. Pebble scatter at the site above Epano Zakros

Vigla, to the south (Fig. 18), and Traostalos. A very dense concentration of pebbles of various sizes and colours (Fig. 19) appears in a rocky hollow next to the cliff facing Zakros village and the Traostalos massif at a far distance. Over 90 pebbles were recorded here within an area of c. 1.5 m in diameter. In a distance of up to 5 m from the pebble feature three MM–LM potsherds were found, but these were too few to indicate cult activity similar to that at proper peak sanctuaries. The Zakros “pebble site” may have had something to do with the peak sanc-

tuary ritual related to its location between Zakros Vigla and that part of the Zakros basin (north of Zakros village) which is hidden from the direct view from the peak sanctuary. Both sites, the peak sanctuary on Vigla and the “pebble site,” are well visible from the MM site at Stous Athropolitous and from the LM villa at Epano Zakros.

The next two “pebble sites” are even more difficult to explain since their location is less spectacular than the previously described Xerokampias gorge and the Epano Zakros peak. One of them is located on



Fig. 20. View from the “pebble site” on the northern side of the Karoumes gorge towards the peak sanctuary of Traostalos (1)

a gentle hill-slope above the eastern entrance to the Karoumes gorge, on its northern side. The site faces the peak sanctuary on Traostalos (Fig. 20) and it offers a good view to Zakros Vigla. Numerous pebbles and a few MM–LM potsherds are scattered over an area c. 15 m in diameter. A small stone construction (2 by 3 m in size) may belong to the phase represented by pebbles. The second site is situated above an EM II (–MM I?) settlement south of Langada, on a rocky ridge also facing Traostalos. A large number of pebbles and a few eroded potsherds (of MM–LM date) were seen in an area about 10 by 20 m in size, covering the top of the ridge and its southern slope, but erosion on the steep slope may have increased the original size of the deposit.

The above described four sites represent presumably a small part of a hitherto obscure group of sites related to the phenomenon of peak sanctuaries: their function, however, is still unclear. Because of their small size, and the only occasional appearance of pottery (if at all), the sites of this type can be easily missed by archaeological prospection, including intensive surveys. The key to understanding of these sites’ function is the role played by pebbles in the Bronze Age ritual in Crete. This role is, however, also unknown in the case of proper peak sanctuaries, where pebbles are recorded in much better contexts. The second important feature of the sites in question is their topography. All sites have good visual links with one or more peak sanctuaries and, to lesser

degree, with contemporary habitation places. Is this of any importance for the interpretation of the discussed sites as part of “the peak sanctuary ritual”?

The fact that this site type is currently best identified in the East Siteia peninsula may be due to the dense network of peak sanctuaries and habitation places in this part of Crete. However, more intensive field research in Central and West Crete may change this picture. The characteristics of the site on the summit of Kopida (once identified as a probable peak sanctuary) above Agios Mamas, on the southern side of the Mylopotamos valley,⁶¹ are more similar to the Siteian “pebble sites” than to proper peak sanctuaries. The Kopida site abounds with pebbles, but has very few potsherds visible on the surface around them.

Analysis of the peak sanctuaries’ distribution and topography should also include evidence (however scarce) of a non-domestic character from the peaks of the highest mountains. The material is very poor, and no systematic research has been carried on this subject. In the Lasithi Mountains such evidence, restricted to a few potsherds and occasional pebbles, has been recorded on the summits of Spathi, Afendaki and Selena. In the West Siteia Mountains (where no proper peak sanctuary has been claimed so far) finds of this type were mentioned from the summit of Afendis Kavousi.⁶² In the Rethymnon district an

⁶¹ NOWICKI 1994a: 37–38.

⁶² Vance Watrous’ personal communication.



Fig. 21. View from the peak sanctuary of Preveli Mesokorfi towards Xiros Oros (1)



Fig. 22. View from Xiros Oros to the west; (1) the peak sanctuary of Atsipades Korakias, (2) Plakias Paligremnos

interesting site has been identified on Xiros Oros, about 30 m southeast of the ruined chapel of Ag. Pneuma, immediately below the peak of the mountain, on the slope facing the south (Fig. 21). Several fragments of MM II–III cups (including two bases), a fragment of a hollow bull figurine, and a few pebbles were recorded around the remains of a rectangular building of an unknown date. The view from this mountain is spectacular, with the peak sanctuaries of Vrysinas, Atsipades Korakias, and Preveli Mesokorfi clearly visible (Fig. 22). The scarce evidence may indicate a very short-lasting or occasional use of the place for cult activity, probably at the very end of the MM II or in the MM III period, and in its character it recalls the material from a small peak sanc-

tuary at Kryos Gremnakas, in the very southwestern corner of Crete. The question arises of whether the mountains, such as Xiros Oros, Spathi, Selena and others, were only randomly visited by individuals (those more familiar with this kind of landscape), with the votive offerings here being the result of purely private initiatives, or were incorporated into the “officially consecrated” network of cult sites acknowledged by the local inhabitants and religious authorities?⁶³

⁶³ The most recent visit to the site yielded two more bull figurine fragments and two fragments of architectural(?) models. This new evidence indicates that Xiros Oros was a proper peak sanctuary, however short was its lifespan.

CULT ORGANIZATION

Peter Warren pointed out in his University of Gothenburg lectures concerning ritual in Minoan Crete, over 30 years ago, that the attention of scholars was focused more on the material evidence for identification of cult places than on ritual actions which might speak better about the nature of Minoan religion.⁶⁴ This was partly caused by lack of relevant written sources and very limited archaeological evidence interpreted as of religious character. The interpretation of ritual actions was based solely on iconographic sources, often ambiguous in the understanding of their symbols and symbolic scenes.⁶⁵

However, some attempts were made at the reconstruction of the ritual actions at peak sanctuaries, using archaeological evidence, too. Rutkowski focused on the significance of a temenos wall, terraces and a sacred rock,⁶⁶ as the main elements of different stages of the ritual performance. Unfortunately, temenos walls have not been confirmed at peak sanctuaries, and the idea of sacred rocks has not been supported by archaeological evidence either. Another reconstruction of ritual actions at peak sanctuaries was proposed by Peatfield, who based it on the topographical characteristics and finds distribution at Atsipades Korakias.⁶⁷ Despite the title of Kyriakidis' book, suggesting that the problem of cult and ritual action(s) were to be addressed together with the geographical nature of the sanctuaries,⁶⁸ a rather different direction was followed with no real reconstruction of the spatial and ideological structuring of cult. Unfortunately, no written sources exist concerning cult ceremonies in Bronze Age Crete, such as those known from the Hittite, Mesopotamian and Syrian archives, which sometimes describe ritual actions in great details. Linear B texts are of little or no help in reconstruction of the topographical arrangement of cult places in the later part of the Late Bronze Age. No texts exist at all for the end of the third millennium and the first centuries of the second millennium BC, when the early peak sanctuaries flourished in Crete. The reconstruction of ritual at peak sanctuaries must be, therefore, based almost entirely on the interpretation of archaeological evidence, but some analogies, cautiously used, from later periods, in particular from the Geometric–Archaic–Classical hilltop cult places, may be helpful in filling the gaps in the Bronze Age evidence.

Now, I would like to present, in brief, two categories of evidence (topographical and archaeological) which may be helpful in understanding some elements of the ritual actions during religious ceremonies performed at peak sanctuaries. This should not be used, however, as a replacement for the proper (archaeologically-based) reconstruction of these actions.

A. *Topographical*

1. Evidence for the location of a peak sanctuary in a dominant position over the inhabited area, and in particular over the settlement or house where the pilgrims came from, may indicate that the ritual action included turning up to the sky, but also down towards the inhabited area/settlement/house; or alternatively, some ritual action may have taken place in the settlement or near it, which would require turning up, towards the silhouette of the peak sanctuary. In the case of Spili Vorizi there is no doubt that the peak sanctuary lay at the edge of the mountain overlooking the major settlement in the area (Kefala) (Fig. 12: 2); in the same way, Korakomouri overlooked the building/s of Kokkino Froudi, immediately below it. A much later (Archaic–Classical) hilltop shrine above Sougia shows a similar pattern.⁶⁹ Interestingly, at the Sougia site square and rectangular rock cuttings were found on the upper surface of outcrops along the edge of the ridge facing the settlement.⁷⁰ If these simple “platforms” were designated to hold clay or wooden statues, these must have been placed in such a way that they “looked” at the settlement from the cult place above.

2. Evidence for the existence of a focus point for the peak sanctuary – a pebble feature and/or altar – suggests a special attention paid towards this point at some moments of the ritual performance. Was it a culminating moment of ritual or there were several moments which required the attention (and celebrants' faces) to be turned towards the focus point? At Iouchtas an altar was built next to the chasm, indicating that the culminating act was indeed performed at this very spot, which was marked elsewhere, at small provincial sites, by a pebble feature.

3. The location of the focus point close to a cliff or steep slope (Figs. 23 and 24) may have intentionally restricted the access to it and thus may have shaped the assembly pattern with all or most of the pilgrims standing below the focus point and/or on its one side only. At present there is no evidence that the focus point was chosen according to the astral bodies and cardinal points, or according to the location of other peak sanctuaries. It seems that its placement was often (but not always) determined by the

⁶⁴ WARREN 1986.

⁶⁵ RUTKOWSKI 1972: 180–181.

⁶⁶ RUTKOWSKI 1986; 1988: 77.

⁶⁷ PEATFIELD 1992: 79–80.

⁶⁸ KYRIAKIDIS 2005.

⁶⁹ NOWICKI 2008a: 17–18.

⁷⁰ NOWICKI 2008a: figs. 20–23.

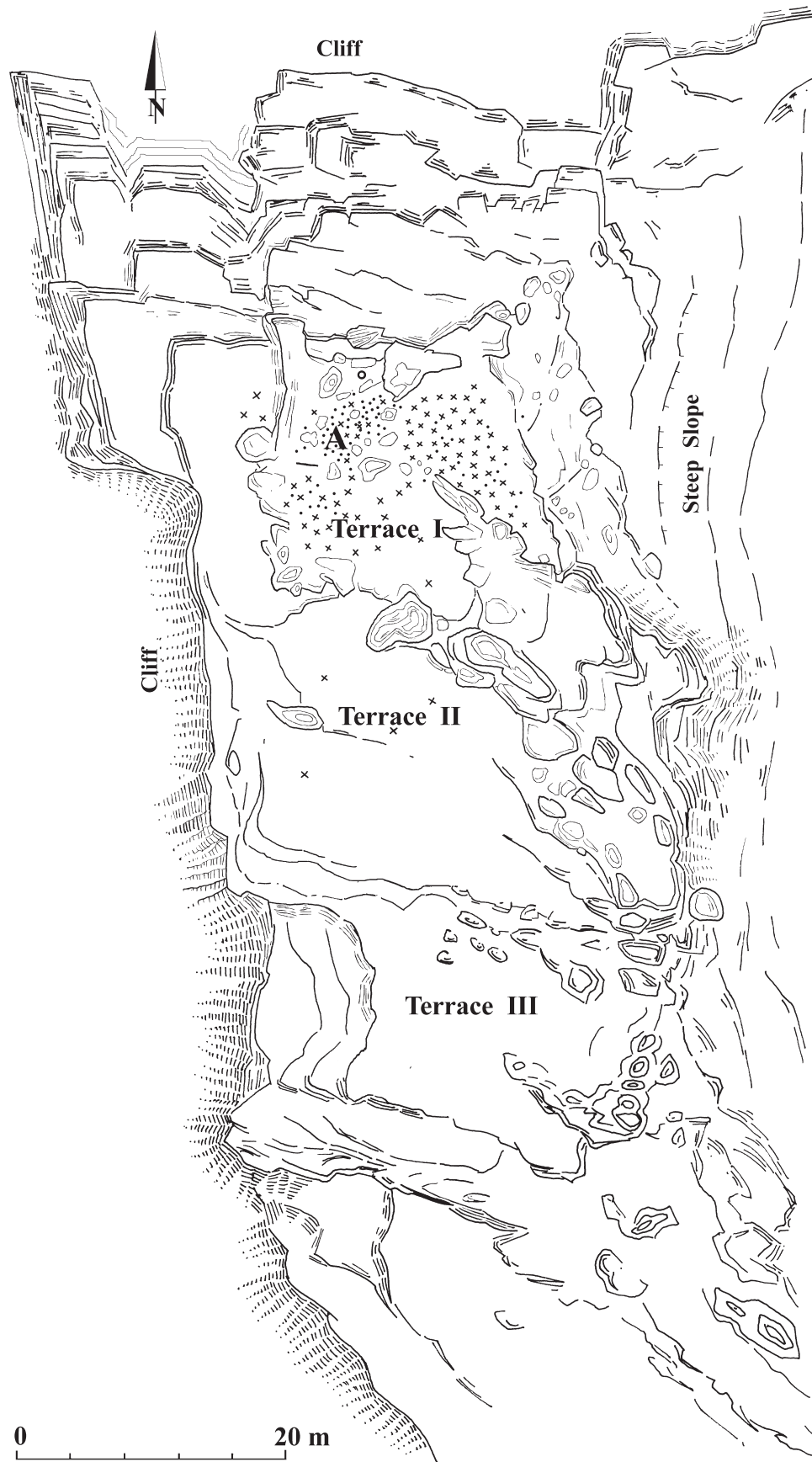


Fig. 23. Plan of the peak sanctuary of Zou Prinias; (A) “the pebble feature”

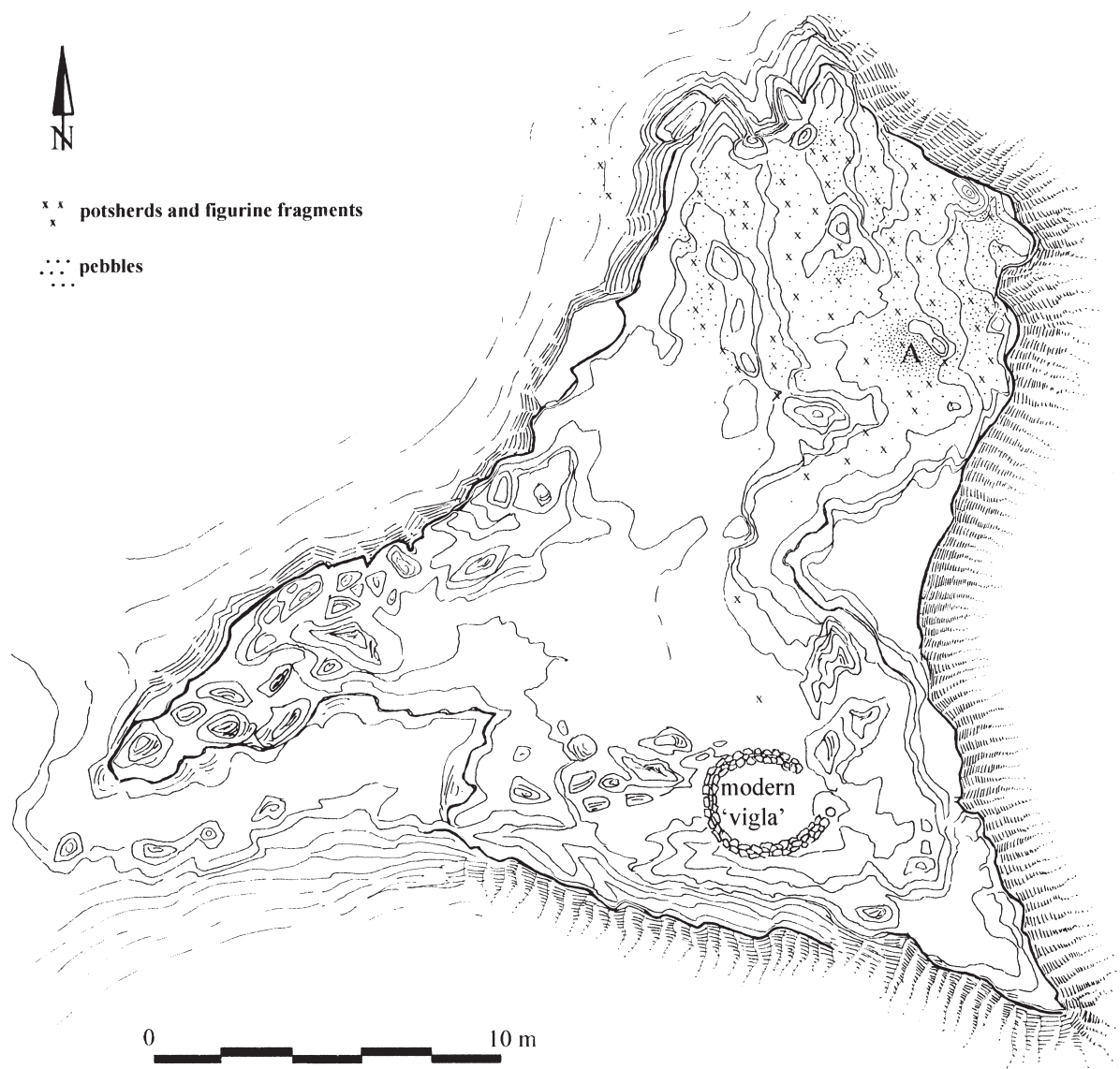


Fig. 24. Plan of the peak sanctuary of Xerokampos Vigla; (A) "the pebble feature"

topographical characteristics of the summit (Iouchtas) and the visual relationship with inhabited areas below the peak sanctuary (Prinias [Fig. 23], Spili Vorizi, Xerokampos Vigla [Fig. 24]). In some cases both elements may have been equally important (Petsofas).

4. The location on an elevated summit required often a long and tiring walking, which was an initial part of ritual ceremony. This pilgrimage time, however, may have been very different for different peak sanctuaries. The walk from Petras to Prinias or from the Upper Mesara settlements to Kofinas was an event to talk about and to remember for a long time; climbing Petsofas from Palaikastro could have been some people's daily routine. The frequency of visitors may have been related as much to the walking distance between the peak sanctuary and the habitation place as to the feast calendar, the phenomenon very well attested in modern times in mountainous chapels in Crete.

B. Archaeological

1. A pebble feature is the most distinguished characteristic of a peak sanctuary, but what was the role of the pebbles themselves? Was a pebble a material confirmation of a pilgrim's attendance in the ceremony or his/her visiting the cult place, or was it connected with a particular wish: can it be regarded as the cheapest and easiest to obtain votive offering? Alternatively, the pebbles could have had a similar meaning to those used for floors in EM tholos tombs. The question of pebbles is even more intriguing at the sites, like those mentioned above, which are visually related with proper peak sanctuaries, but lack several other characteristics of this type of cult place.

2. Clay figurines and small vessels seem to be votive offerings. Past debates have focused on several issues which still remain open questions: 1) was there any organized pattern of votive offering deposition and any hierarchy in the distribution pattern?;

2) were the votive offerings left complete at the spot after the ceremony or were they intentionally broken during it?; 3) was the cult place periodically cleaned of votive offerings and other remains, or did subsequent ceremonies simply ignore the items deposited earlier?; 4) were offerings in cups more common than figurines?

3. Larger vessels, such as jugs, jars and cooking pots, are not very common, but they appear at all peak sanctuaries; they may indicate either different sorts of votive offerings, including also a larger amount of liquids and food, or feasting. Their number at small and provincial peak sanctuaries is as a rule very low. That might indicate the first possibility. However, it has been noticed at several sites that these types of pottery were scattered around the main peak sanctuary, either on its edge (Xykefalo) or in a some distance from the main cult place (Kalamaki, Vigla Zakrou, Modi, and most recently Karfi⁷¹), and such distribution may suggest that feasting (whatever scale such an event had) was taking place nearby, but not at the very cult place.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I tried to present several, mostly topographical, aspects of the Cretan peak sanctuaries, some of which have been observed during my recent field investigations postdating the paper published in 1994.⁷² New finds helped to shed light on some problems, but at the same time have raised several crucial questions concerning for instance: 1) the organization of ritual space at the peak sanctuary, generally, 2) identification of other elements of ritual around (in sense of place and time) the main cult activity at peak sanctuaries, 3) the role of peak sanctuaries in building up territorial identity and how this identity can be explained in the term of politically fractioned structure of Proto-Palatial communities in Crete, and 4) continuation of physical/material elements linked to Bronze Age peak sanctuaries after the Bronze Age.

Recent field investigations seem to indicate that ritual and non-ritual activities, related to peak sanctuaries, were more complex than previously thought. They were not restricted topographically to the area of the peak sanctuary itself, but took also place around it. Some rituals could have even been performed at locations distant from the main cult place, which were nevertheless seen as a part of the same religious landscape. More fieldwork is needed, however, to explain this complexity in the topographical

and functional sense. On topographical ground, there is very little doubt that the visual aspect (domination over the inhabited territory) of peak sanctuaries determined their location. However, location must have primarily been selected in connection to the character of the deity/ies worshipped at peak sanctuaries. The astral or cardinal orientation of peak sanctuaries, and the impact of these elements on the arrangement of the cult space, has not been proved yet, with previous attempts to do so based on wrong or at least non-conclusive data.⁷³ Similar remarks apply to the theory about the role of peak sanctuaries for sign-communication.⁷⁴ Although intervisibility between peak sanctuaries may have been of some significance during the religious ceremonies, this fact is a logic consequence of the high location of most sites. There is no evidence that peak sanctuaries served in any way as bases for interregional signaling, albeit the possibility of signaling during religious ceremonies remains open.

Cretan peak sanctuaries were well defined cult places with unique topographic characteristics associated with the dedicated deity's character. The origin of peak sanctuaries must be searched for in the little known Early Bronze Age phase of religion's development in Crete, when the pantheon of deities was given a more advanced structural and functional shape. It would not be surprising if the idea were born first in the Knossos region, which had the longest settlement continuity and the largest population

⁷³ As it is presented in HENRIKSSON, BLOMBERG 1996.

⁷⁴ BARBER 2010. Barber's paper starts with the argument that the MM building at Chamaizi might have been erected for the sign communication. However, as in many other cases discussed in Barber's paper, the site has been isolated from the archaeological and geographical context which indicates a very different function for Chamaizi. Several factual mistakes make Barber's arguments weak: for example, Tapes Epáno Kastello is not the place where A. Peatfield recorded a figurine and suggested the existence of a peak sanctuary – this was the much lower Kato Kastello ridge, not as prominent in the East Lasithian landscape as Epáno Kastello. The entire discussion about Tapes Kastello and Karfi intervisibility is based on wrong information and the misidentification of sites. Maps at the scale used by the author are not very helpful; therefore, there is no unbroken "intervisibility" along the line of Petsophas – Modi – Chamaizi – Tapes – Karfi – Iouchtas, as proposed by Barber. Also, there are other problems with the interpretation of the sites mentioned by Barber as "west of Akoumia" and "Kopida" (for the Ag. Mamas Kopida identification as a possible peak sanctuary see NOWICKI 1994a: 38–39). There are further topographical and chronological problems concerning Barber's reconstruction of the "southern line" of peak sanctuary communication. The site mentioned in this context near Sykologos may well be one of many small MM–LM habitation sites identified in this region; Roussos Dethis is not the right toponym of the peak sanctuary on the Koupa ridge (which is Mikro Kastello); Katalimata above Ierapetra is an extensive LM IIIC settlement, and intensive habitation activity, including MM, can be seen around this mountain; the location of the Etiani Kefala peak sanctuary is uncertain.

⁷¹ WALLACE 2012: 24–26.

⁷² NOWICKI 1994a.

potential in the island. The beginning of the cult at Iouchtas may have been directly or indirectly related to the settlement history of the Knossos–Iouchtas region during the EM II period or even before. Then, during the MM period, the peak sanctuary idea spread, probably being the result of growing political (and cultural?) influence, to some, but not all, regions of Crete. Whether this somewhat puzzling distribution of peak sanctuaries in Crete reflected political and/or cultural differences related to the territorial division is still the subject to be investigated.

As is well evidenced by a series of sites in the East Siteia peninsula and the Rethymnon isthmus, peak sanctuaries formed an important element in settlement patterns during the MM period (especially MM II). They were outstanding landmarks which contributed strongly to defining regional settlement and in some areas may have delimited outer borders of political territories. Why, therefore, was it so important to stress this particular element of Cretan religion at one particular historical moment, in the early second millennium BC? Was the idea of a peak sanctuary a concept shared by all the Cretans or was it related primarily/exclusively(?) to the Knossian religion and pantheon? The Knossian origin of the peak sanctuary

idea is supported by the earliest origin and the latest decline of the sanctuary on Iouchtas, as well as by its most elaborate material form. The expansion of “provincial” peak sanctuaries in the MM II period and their decline at the end of MM II or in MM III may have had something to do with substantial changes in settlement patterns in Crete, which presumably reflected political development, not always of a peaceful character, at the end of the Proto-Palatial period. The peak sanctuaries’ use through the LM I period, when elements of political unification in Crete seem stronger than ever before, was limited to a few sites. By LM III, the idea seems to be dead, except perhaps at Iouchtas. However, the Archaic–Classical hilltop cult place at Sougia, with all the topographic and archaeological characteristics typical of the Bronze Age peak sanctuaries, suggests that more still remained alive in the Cretan religion than just the concept alone of a cult place’s location on an elevated point.

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