



A Late Protogeometric Attic crater in the centre of Crete

Giacomo Biondi
ISPC - CNR, Catania

The crater

Considerable sherds of a large (c. 950-900 BC) Late Attic crater (diameter at rim 53 cm) were found in the Iron Age necropolis of Siderospilia in Prinias, at the geometric centre of Crete, approximately 500 m from the settlement on Patela. The shape and decorative scheme of the Siderospilia crater - with bucranium handles and a central panel with geometric motifs between two sets of vertical concentric circles - match those of the crater in the 'Museum Antiker Kleinkunst' in Munich (purchased on the art market in 1908) that is probably older. The syntax of the decorative motifs - chequered panel between two bands of vertical zigzags and alternating oblique lines between vertical zigzags - and especially the loose manner in which these are painted, link the Siderospilia crater to another large late Attic crater of a different shape found on a pyre in the cemetery of Nea Ionia, just outside Athens. This affinity suggests that the vase from Siderospilia is attributable to the same workshop that produced the one from Nea Ionia, the 'Jewel Workshop' according to B. Bohen.

The Siderospilia sample is the third large Attic protogeometric krater whose shape and decoration are well preserved (or at least reconstructible) and the only one that preserves the profile of the foot (missing in the one from Munich and restored in the one from Nea Ionia). Only one sherd of what might be a vessel of the same type was found in the urban area of Knossos. The fragments of two other examples from the Cyclades (Naxos and Paros) may belong to locally produced vases. Other late proto-Geometric Attic shapes, however, were widely exported (and imitated) to many sites in the Aegean. Lefkandi and Knossos were the most receptive. The causes of this distribution are a matter of speculation (gift exchange practices, mixed marriages, trade...).

Concerning the necropolis of Siderospilia, the recipients of the crater and other precious metal objects imported from Egypt and Cyprus must have been members of the wealthy local aristocracies. Their need to exhibit these products as part of expensive funerary practices, in use among the Aegean elites at the beginning of the first millennium, was the main reason for attracting such prestige goods from the outside world. Such practices at Siderospilia also

included the killing of horses and dogs and the laying of weapons and jewellery among the grave goods. The settlement's central location on the Patela plateau along the route connecting the northern and southern coasts on the eastern slopes of the Ida massif facilitated contacts with the Aegean world. In Crete, imports of proto-Geometric Attic pottery are distributed along this route between Knossos in the north and Gortina in the south. An Attic protogeometric vase fragment found in the sanctuary of Hermes Kranaios in Patsos testifies that this type of pottery also travelled along the Amari valley, along the road that connected the north and south coasts of the island to the west of the Ida Mountain.

Picture captions

The P266 Crater shards from Priniàs

The 6157 Monaco Crater

The 18114 Athens (Nea Ionia) Crater