

Miscellanea from Late Bronze Age Cyprus

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I. On 'baetyls' in Cyprus

The representations of 'baetyls' on Aegean seals and sealings of the second millennium B.C. and baetyls themselves are the subject of a recent article by Peter Warren (1990). Baetyls are natural stones or boulders, rounded or oval in shape, which Warren rightly connects with cult. They embodied the power of the divinity, and their 'adoration' by men and women brought the power of the divinity to humans with the aim of promoting fertility.

This note draws attention to the occurrence of 'baetyls' with a 'cultic' meaning in Cyprus. Evidence for such 'sacred' stones from Cyprus (Karageorghis 1977, 42) comprises one from the Chalcolithic settlement of Philia, a second from the sanctuary of Erimi which probably dates to the Late Cypriote period, and a third from the late Archaic sanctuary of Meniko. All three objects are of grey diabase and are relatively small, oval to globular in shape, with a smooth surface. A much larger sacred stone from Cyprus, the well-known conical stone of micragabbro from the 'Sanctuary of Aphrodite' at Palaepaphos, may have been used in the original sanctuary of the Late Cypriote period (Maier and Karageorghis 1984, 99, fig. 83).

During excavations at Kition an irregular, roughly conical stone of dark grey diabase (Fig. 3) was overlooked. It was found on bedrock in Temple 1 and probably dates to the Late Cypriote period (for the lack of stratification in Temple 1 see Karageorghis and Demas 1985, 44). The stone measures 50 × 52 × 36 cm. in maximum length, width and height. It does not belong to any of the structures within the courtyard of the temple where all architectural elements are of sandstone or limestone. Its size and weight exclude the possibility that it was an accidental intruder in the débris above bedrock. It seems likely that it had some specific function within the courtyard of the temple. Its present position near the south-east lateral entrance may not have been the original one though, in view of its weight, it may not have been located too far away. It now rests on bedrock but may originally have stood on an elevated base.

If we exclude the 'baetyl' from the Chalcolithic settlement at Philia, all other 'baetyls' found in Cyprus are connected with sanctuaries and more particularly with sanctuaries of divinities of fertility. The Ayia Irini

sanctuary may have been dedicated to such a divinity during the Late Cypriote period.

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II. Enigmatic tubular clay objects of the Late Bronze Age

A tubular object of clay from a Late Bronze Age tomb at Enkomi (Fig. 4) was tentatively called a 'snake-house' when first published (Karageorghis 1972, 109-12). A similar object found at Athienou in a thirteenth-century(?) B.C. context (Fig. 5) has similarly been labelled a 'snake-house' by the excavators (Dothan and Ben-Tor 1983, 53). D. C. Drummond (1983, 199f.) examined both these objects and proposed a completely new interpretation, namely that they are mouse-traps (Fig. 11). A similar object from a Late Bronze Age palace context at Emar in Syria was published by J. Margueron as a mouse-trap, following Drummond (Fig. 7), though he did not reject completely the possibility that some of these objects could be snake-houses. He rightly challenged Drummond to test the mechanism which he had proposed for the Enkomi specimen on the Emar example (Margueron 1985, 143-5). A third fragmentary specimen from Cyprus but of uncertain provenance (Fig. 6) was also published as a mouse-trap (Karageorghis 1987, 97). The Cypriote specimens are more or less the same, with a flat base, a door (on two of them), a loop handle (on at least two of them) and small holes through the body. The Emar example is slightly different, with the terminal opposite the door being pointed and ending in a single narrow hole.



Figure 3. *Kition Temple 1: baetyl in situ.*

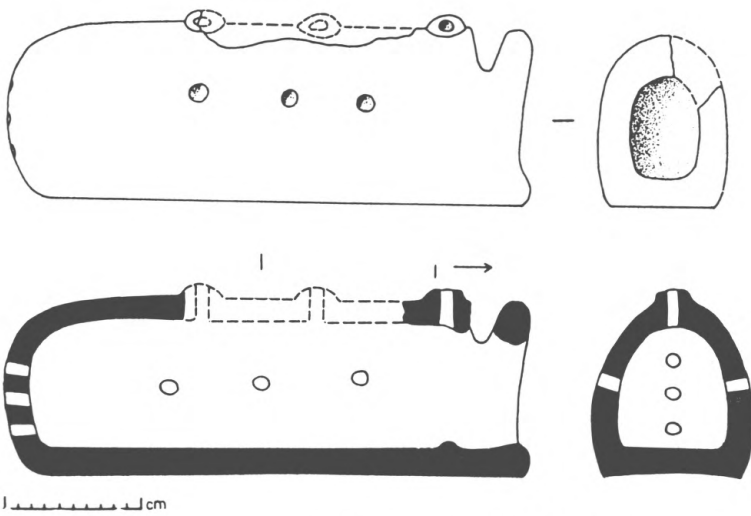


Figure 4. *From Enkomi Tomb 10 (Karageorghis 1972, fig. 1).*

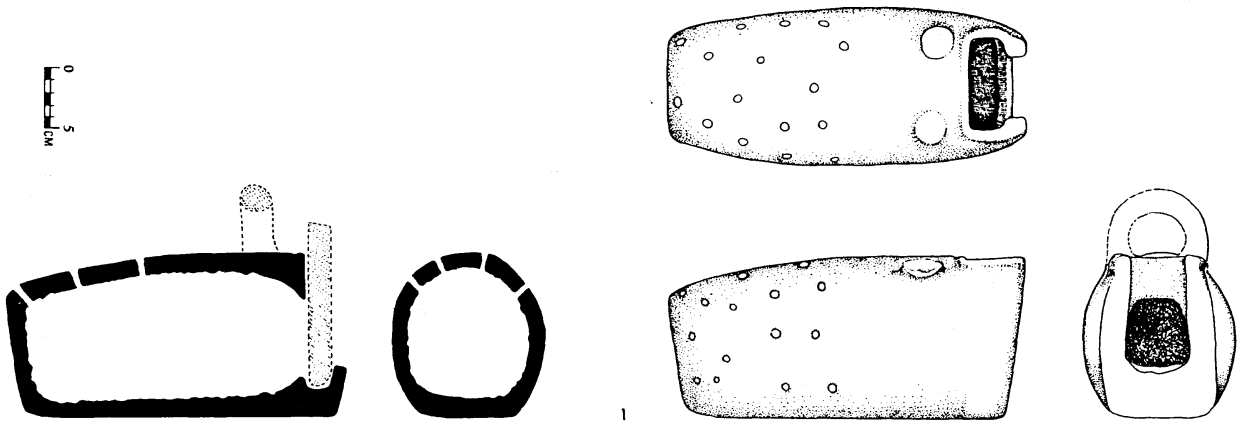


Figure 5. From Athienou (Dothan and Ben-Tor 1983, fig. 16:1).

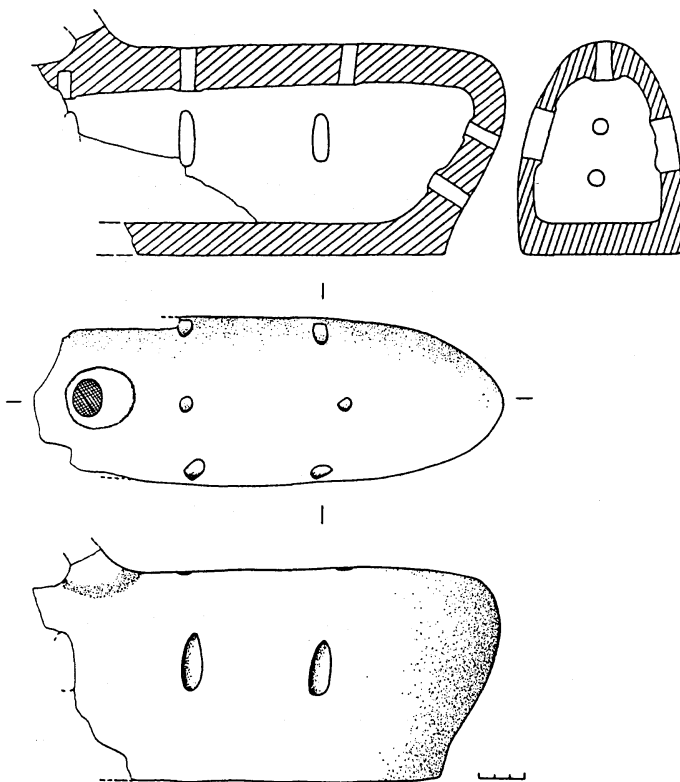


Figure 6. From Cyprus, Cyprus Museum A68 (Karageorghis 1987, fig. 1).

The mechanism proposed for the Enkomi example by Drummond (Fig. 11) seems convincing, but it is uncertain whether it is applicable to the other known examples from Cyprus and Emar. Though Drummond's identification as a mouse-trap is attractive, there

are certain reservations, not only because it is not applicable to all specimens but also because of the scarcity of such objects in the Late Bronze Age world. The three examples from Cyprus and the one from Syria are not enough; mouse-traps should have been placed in every house, or at least in every storeroom. It is not a delicate object (the walls are usually very thick) and would have been preserved. The mechanism, as proposed by Drummond, seems too complicated for such an 'instrument'. Why would it have been made of such thick clay or why of clay at all when it could have been more easily and effectively constructed of wood and/or metal? Why are they so large? Half the length of the existing specimens would suffice to hold several mice. Moreover, once such a utilitarian instrument had been invented, it would have continued into later periods with its form only slightly altered, but none is known in Cyprus from a post-Late Bronze Age context.

The issue has become more complicated with C. Davaras' publication of similar (but not identical) examples from Minoan Crete (Neopalatial Zakro, Phaistos, Knossos and Ayia Irini) (Figs. 8–10). He identifies them as instruments for 'smoking' bees and refers to the Enkomi example in the same way (Davaras 1989).

H. Georgiou, commenting on the Cretan clay tubes, dismisses the idea that they are 'snake-tubes' and refers to them as enigmatic (Georgiou 1981, 87). She suggests that tubes with a wider open end were meant to rest on a plate. The fact that the base of others bears signs of burning suggests that they were placed upright. This is not the case with the examples from Cyprus and Emar. Does this mean that the Cretan tubular objects functioned differently from those of the Eastern Mediterranean? This seems improbable but the idea should not be entirely rejected. If true, then the

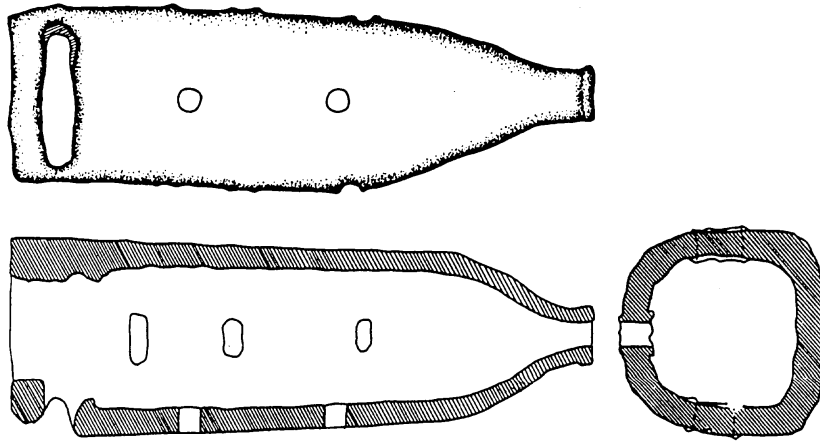


Figure 7. From Emar (Margueron 1985, fig. 1).

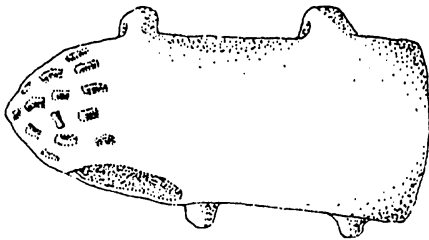


Figure 8. From Zakro (Davaras 1989, fig. 2).

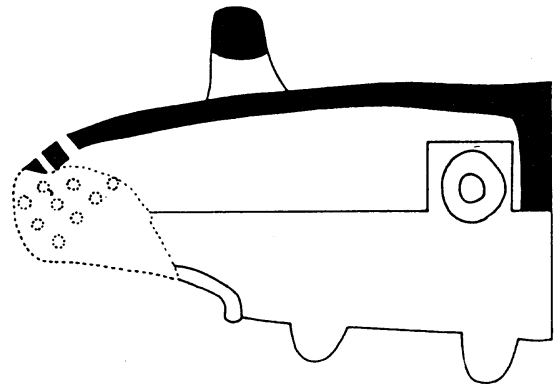


Figure 9. From Zakro (Davaras 1989, fig. 1).

typological similarity between the examples from Crete and the Levant may be accidental.

There is a major difficulty in associating all these objects with burning or 'smoking'. The Cypriote specimens do not have any traces of burning, either on the floor or through the holes. The Emar example is not reported as bearing any traces of burning either. Smoking bees, a method used also today, demands quite a lot of smoke which is blown into the beehives by means of bellows containing the burning substance. The tiny holes of all the clay examples could hardly have provided the amount of smoke necessary to repel bees. The volume of smoke released would have been greater in the case of some of the Cretan examples (e.g. Davaras 1989, figs. 1, 2) if they were placed upright. But if placed in an upright position, why should they have legs on one of the long sides and loop handles on the opposite side?

It is difficult to envisage placing a heavy clay object on its flat base near a cavity high on a tree trunk or near a cavity on the side of a steep rock where wild bees usually swarm. A much simpler method could have been

employed, such as placing the burning substance in a metallic bowl and suspending it near the place where the bees were swarming.

Thus the enigma surrounding these clay objects remains. What seems certain is that such objects could be transported and placed on their flat base in specific places. Holes were for ventilation or to allow fumes from inside to spread outside. The opening (or 'door') could enclose something or through it one could look in at a particular moment. The holes do not follow any fixed arrangement. The three Cypriote examples differ slightly from the example from Emar and all four differ considerably from those from Crete. The Cretan examples are also different from each other. If they were connected with burning or smoking, then those from Cyprus and Emar were probably used in a different manner. Finally, it is possible that they housed a small

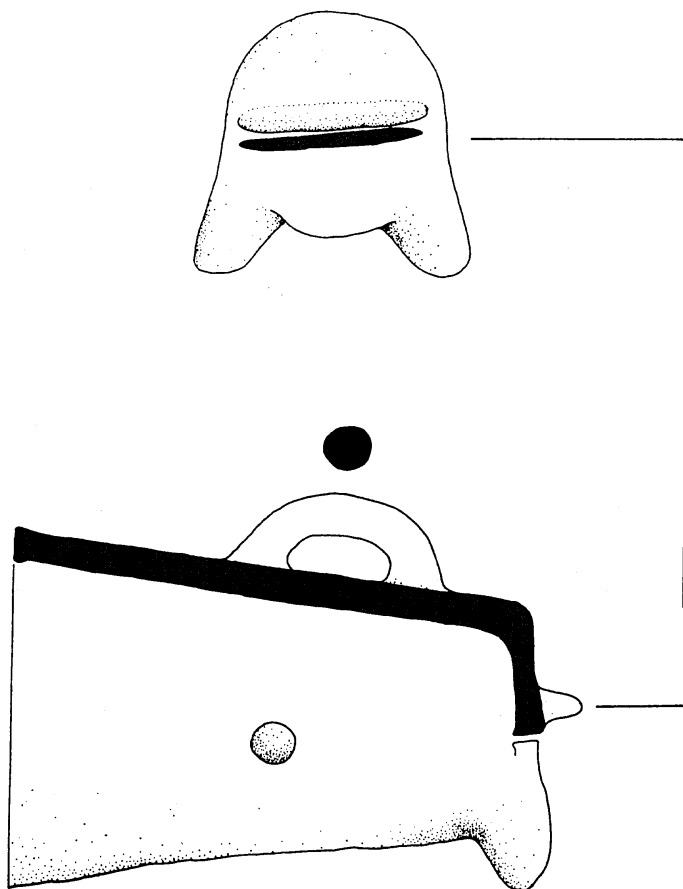
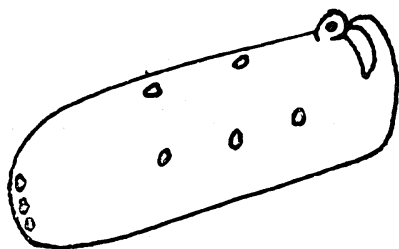
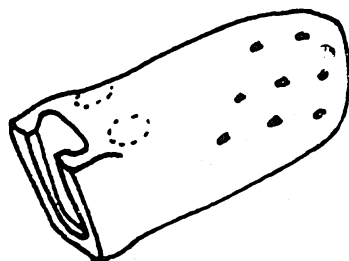


Figure 10. From Knossos (Davaras 1989, fig. 3).



a. Object from Enkomi.



b. Object from Athienou.

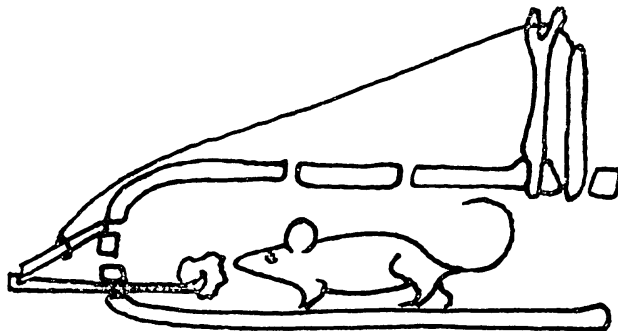


Figure 11. Suggested reconstructions of a mouse-trap (Drummond 1983, fig. 1).

living animal such as a snake or a 'pet', though the mouse-trap suggestion is still the most attractive.

Postscript

We sent the above note to Dr Drummond who very kindly commented on it, sending at the same time an article of his and others shortly to be published in *MDAIK* (*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*). We quote, with his permission, the most relevant points from his comments:

1. Emar example: '... I have recently made a pottery replica of the Emar object and although the diameter of the single rear hole is somewhat greater than that of other pottery traps, when supplied with a thick bait stick it works perfectly well as a trap, using the same release mechanism as modern N. African traps (except that from Ouarzazarte) (see *MDAIK*, figs. 1 and 2). In fact, with a heavy pottery door, it works better than the Agadez trap with its lightweight wooden door!' (This article has now been published in *MDAIK* 46 (1990), 91–98.)

2. 'The mechanism option I originally chose for the Enkomi trap was that of the modern Ouarzazarte trap. This mechanism is akin to that of many European traps of the middle ages. I now believe that the somewhat less sophisticated mechanism proposed for the Kahun trap (*MDAIK*) is the most appropriate for the Enkomi trap and in fact is probably the mechanism in all early pottery traps that enclose the animal by means of a drop-door. It seems to be the only one that fits the Emar trap (comment 1).'

3. 'I am afraid that I used the phrase "mouse trap" in a rather loose way, as many people still do, to signify a trap for any smallish rodent. Clearly both the Enkomi trap and the Athienou trap are unnecessarily large to catch a house mouse. The only pottery trap of an appropriate size for this purpose that I know of, is the smaller version of the Djerba trap (*MDAIK*). All others must have been made to catch larger rodents or other animals of about the size of *Rattus rattus*.'

4. 'There are rather more ancient rodent traps than you mention here. Nevertheless I too am surprised by their scarcity. Although no doubt a few remain unidentified, such as those in the Baghdad museum, I

think the most likely explanation is that other types of traps were much more widely used. Such traps might well have included for outdoor use snares or nooses consisting of little more than a bendy stick and a piece of cord and would not have survived. Others, although surviving, would never be identifiable as traps, such as a pot into which mice fell, or which fell over an animal when dislodged, or a heavy flat object such as a stone carefully balanced on an arrangement of three interlocking and baited sticks.'

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Dr Drummond for the above comments as well as for his unpublished text. We hope he will be able to examine and test all other Late Bronze Age examples of 'mouse-traps' from Cyprus. In the meantime we quite agree with the concluding remark in his unpublished article, with which he urges all museum curators to be on the look out for unusual pottery fragments which could have been parts of actual rat traps.

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