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AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROTOPALATIAL IMPRESSED FINE WARE FROM PHAISTOS AND SOME COMPARISONS WITH THE PHAISTOS DISC*

ALESSANDRO SANAVIA

Riassunto. Il presente contributo intende offrire una panoramica su una classe di materiali ceramici MM IIA-IIB caratterizzata da decorazioni impresse tramite stampini. La ricca evidenza archeologica offerta dagli esemplari recuperati nel sito di Festòs, in gran parte inediti, e la notevole varietà dei motivi impressi testimoniano a favore di una specificità del centro festio in queste produzioni. Lo studio si propone inoltre di sottolineare alcune significative analogie dal punto di vista tecnologico, stilistico e iconografico con i segni impressi sul Disco di Festòs, la cui iscrizione risulta realizzata mediante dei punzoni virtualmente simili a quelli impiegati nella decorazione di queste ceramiche. Alla luce di queste similitudini il dibattuto Disco di Festòs appare a mio avviso ben inquadrabile come un manufatto originale Medio Minoico, verosimilmente di origine festia.

Περίληψη. Το άρθρο αυτό έχει ως στόχο να προσφέρει ένα πανόραμα μιας κατηγορίας MM IIA-IIB κεραμικού υλικού που χαρακτηρίζεται από έντυπες διακοσμήσεις με τη βοήθεια τύπων. Ο πλούτος των αρχαιολογικών ενδείξεων που μας προσφέρονται από τα δείγματα που έχουν βρεθεί στη Φαιστό, σε μεγάλο μέρος αδημοσίευτα, και η σημαντική ποικιλία των έντυπων διακοσμητικών θεμάτων συνηγορούν υπέρ μιας εξειδίκευσης της Φαιστού στις συγκεκριμένες παραγωγές. Η μελέτη προτίθεται επίσης να υπογραμμίσει κάποιες σημαντικές τεχνολογικές, τεχνοτροπικές και εικονογραφικές αναλογίες με τα έντυπα σημεία του Δίσκου της Φαιστού, η επιγραφή του οποίου έχει γίνει με τύπους εξαιρετικά όμοιους με εκείνους της διακόσμησης της συγκεκριμένης κεραμικής. Στο φως των ομοιοτήτων αυτών ο, τόσο συζητημένος, Δίσκος της Φαιστού φαίνεται, κατά τη γνώμη μου, ότι μπορεί να θεωρηθεί αυθεντικό τέχνηρο της Μέσης Μινωικής, φαιστιας, κατά πάσα πιθανότητα, παραγωγής.

Abstract. This paper presents an overview of the MM IIA-IIB vessels recovered at the site of Phaistos, characterized by decorations impressed by stamping devices. The high number of vases collected, mainly unpublished, and the great variety of impressed motifs suggest a strong local specialization for this approach to ceramic ornamentation. Some stylistic, technical and iconographical aspects also offer some interesting comparisons with the signs that compose the stamped inscription of the much-debated Phaistos Disc, a clay artefact impressed with similar stamping devices. In my opinion, although some virtually unparalleled features do exist, these relevant affinities with the Impressed Fine Ware strongly argue for the rehabilitation of the Phaistos Disc as a Middle Minoan and genuine artefact, and one that is specifically Phaistian.

When the Italian archaeologist L. Pernier reported in 1908 the discovery of the Phaistos Disc (hereafter PD), he immediately noted the most prominent characteristic of that clay disc: the presence of stamped signs (Figs. 1a-b, 2). As is well-known, this artefact, due to its uniqueness, has fuelled an enormous debate about its authenticity during the century or so since its discovery, right up to today². This brief note is not intended to offer a new reading and explanation of the 45 different signs that compose the stamped inscription of the PD; my arguments will concern iconographic, stylistic and technical parallels between it and a group of Protopalatial fine vases impressed with similar stamp devices. In my opinion, although some virtually unparalleled features do exist, these relevant affinities strongly argue for the reappraisal of the PD as a Middle Minoan and genuine artefact, and one that is specifically Phaistian³.

* This study is adapted from the author's PhD thesis (SANAVIA 2014a) presented at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari. I am indebted to F. Carinci and J. Weingarten for their stimulating comments and to E. Papi, Director of the Italian Archaeological School of Athens (SAIA) for allowing me access to the archives. My thanks are due also to the two anonymous referees of the *Annuario* for suggestions and to D. Evely who kindly corrected the English translation. Abbreviations: Middle Minoan = MM; Late Minoan = LM; Herakleion Archaeological Museum = HM.

¹ L. Pernier, excavation daybook 1908: «[...] un trovamento importantissimo è stato fatto [...] un disco intatto con una faccia coperta di segni pittografici minoici, impressi con stampini [...]». The disc was found on 1908 in one of the eastern brick cists (compartment 8 in Building XL/101) in the northeast sector of the Palace; along with a Linear A

tablet (PH 1) and Kamare Ware (MM III). See for the context CARINCI-LA ROSA 2013; MILITELLO 2014.

² The PD (diam. 15.8 to 16.5 cm) is now exhibited at the HM (Inv. N. 1358). For a selection of the most relevant works, following the *editio princeps* (PERNIER 1908), see DELLA SETA 1909; EVANS 1909, 273-293; OLIVIER 1975; DUHOUX 1977; GODART 1994; GODART 2009; HNILA 2009; LA ROSA 2009; *EAGLL* 3 s.v. «Phaistos Disc», 62-63 [A. Karnava] and CUCUZZA 2015. Prof. J. Younger promotes an on-line debate on the PD and related topics: <http://www.people.ku.edu/~jyounger/PHDisc>.

³ On the PD authenticity, see also recent studies by M. Anastasiadou (ANASTASIADOU forthcoming) and G. Baldacci (BALDACC, in this volume). Both scholars propose a MM II-III date for the artefact.



Fig. 1. a) PD, face A (left) and B (right) (after PERNIER 1908); b) PD, modern cast of the face A (Inv. N. 84331), The National Archaeological Museum of Florence (courtesy of the *Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo - Polo Museale della Toscana*).

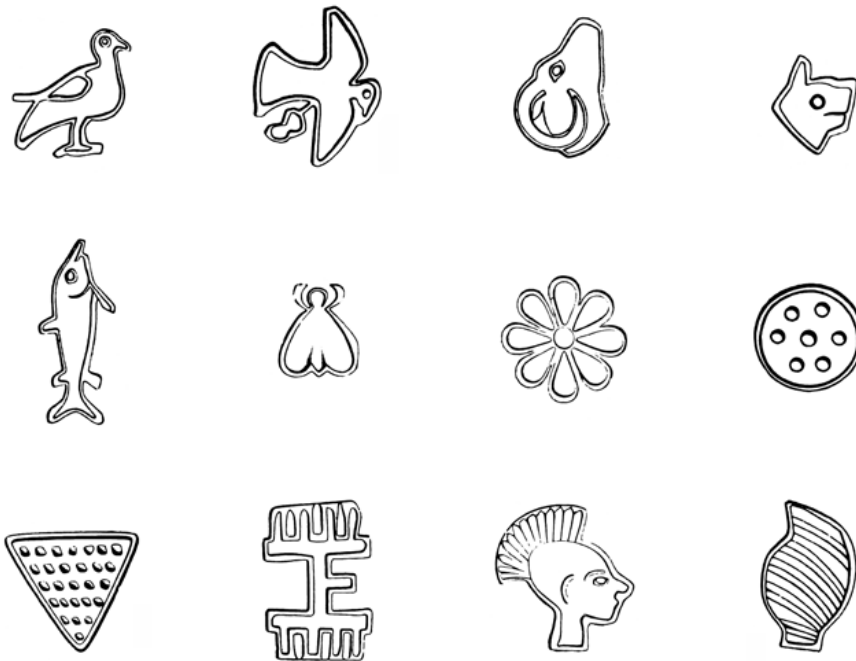


Fig. 2. A selection of stamped signs from the PD (after PERNIER 1908; not to scale).

1. THE PROTOPALATIAL IMPRESSED FINE WARE FROM PHAISTOS: AN OVERVIEW

Rarely in PD studies has an appropriate emphasis been placed on similarities with other classes of clay artefacts impressed by similar stamp devices, such as clay tables of offering⁴ (Fig. 3a-c) and an interesting group of Protopalatial vases (MM IIA-B)⁵ recently reconsidered by the author (as part of a dissertation project related to Protopalatial pottery) that imitate metal wares⁶.

⁴ See the offering table found *in situ* on Room VIII at Phaistos in a MM IIB context (PERNIER 1935, 230-232, figs. 106, 108), which is impressed by two (metal?) stamps: one in the form of an S-spiral (CMS II 6, N. 253), the other a standing bovine figure facing left (CMS II 6, N. 252). Fragments of another offering table with S-spiral impressions were recovered on a dump-level (*i.e.* the *Grande Frana* [cf. below n. 22]) over the Middle W Court (PERNIER 1935, 214, fig. 93).

See also MUHLY 1984, pl. 26 and below NN. 78-79 for other examples from Phaistos. See WHITTAKER 2005, 32.

⁵ DUHOUX 1977, 15, figs. 23-25 compare the PD sign N. 12 with a motif stamped on a “teapot” from Knossos (see below). That parallel was reconsidered also in GODART 1994, 102 and 2009, 198. See also EVELY 2000, 295.

⁶ SANAVIA 2014a and *Id.* forthcoming.

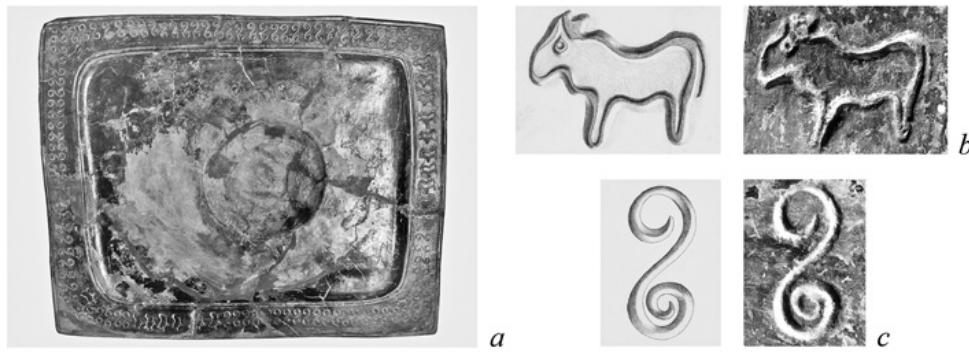


Fig. 3. Offering table (a) from Room VIII at Phaistos, with bovine figure (b) and S-spiral (c) impressions (after *CMS* II, 6; images courtesy of the *CMS* Heidelberg; not to scale).

Protopalatial impressed pots are largely represented by fine ware vessels, characterized by an array of stamped decorations of a single element repeated in sequence, against a background of dark paint often associated with a polychrome decoration (Kamare Ware). In some cases these decorations, once stamped, were filled with a white paint, which makes the ornamental patterns stand out better. Both for the PD and for the Protopalatial impressed pottery decorations, the nature of the stamp devices employed remains an open and debated question (cf. below). This class, called “Stamped and Impressed Ware” by A. Evans and A. MacGillivray, includes a series of bridge-spouted jars and other hybrid shapes and, as far as open shapes are concerned, straight-sided and carinated cups, along with rounded cups also common in the so-called Egg-shell Ware⁷.

The recurrence of shapes for pouring and drinking liquids, possibly wine and/or other intoxicating substances, permit us to assume that these impressed vessels were involved in some rituals, most likely communal, incorporating group feasting and drinking.

According to the preliminary research carried out on the major Middle Bronze Age Cretan sites, these products would not appear to have been very widespread. With the exception of Phaistos, the greatest number of specimens comes from Protopalatial deposits at Kommos⁸, a site that shared the same ceramic tradition of Phaistos⁹, and from Knossos¹⁰. Much rarer are published examples recovered at Mallia¹¹, Palaikastro¹², Gournia¹³, Apodoulou¹⁴ and in the sanctuary at Kato Symi¹⁵. No impressed vases were recovered from the Kamare Cave, one of the major rural sanctuaries on Minoan Crete, and this is surprising, given its very special relationship with the Palace of Phaistos, as is witnessed by the similar and superb polychrome pottery recovered at the cave as votive gifts or cult implements¹⁶. Some fragments even reached the Cyclades¹⁷ and Egypt during the Middle Kingdom: specimens excavated at the sites of el-Haraga and Kahun present concrete evidence for contacts between the Minoan world and the Egyptian one¹⁸.

A careful revision of all the Protopalatial deposits from Italian excavations at Phaistos and Ayia Triada have greatly increased the number of vases of these fine wares, which correspond now to a corpus of ca. 600 different items, represented mainly by cups of different types and bridge-spouted jars, as pouring shapes¹⁹. In a few cases it is also possible to detect the presence of similar or near similar vases (Fig. 4a-b), “twin vases”, probably part of ceramic sets. The Impressed Fine Ware comes both from the Palace and the

⁷ EVANS 1921, 242-247 (dubbed as “Stamped Ware”); MACGILLIVRAY 1998, 57; MACGILLIVRAY 2007, 124-125. See also CALOI 2009, 410, 426 for the Phaistian materials.

⁸ BETANCOURT 1990, NN. 108, 353, 375, 376, 380, 382, 1011, 1027, 1029, 1161, 1180, 1181, 1188, 1192, 1194, 1337.

⁹ See SHAW-SHAW 1985.

¹⁰ EVANS 1921, 242-247, figs. 182-183, 185; DUHOX 1977, fig. 23; MACGILLIVRAY 1998, 57; MACDONALD-KNAPPETT 2007, 112, N. 560. A rounded cup from Poros-Katsambas is now to be seen at the HM and a cup fragment (MM IIA) recovered in a Monastiriako Kephali tomb is published in PRESTON 2013, 25, C159, fig. 3.12.

¹¹ VAN EFFENTERRE 1980, 540, fig. 781; STÜRMER 1993, 149, N. 93.

¹² BOSANQUET-DAWKINS 1923, 16, fig. 11b.

¹³ BETANCOURT-SILVERMAN 1991, 26, N. 417, fig. 9, pl. 7.

¹⁴ GODART-TZEDAKIS 1992, 64, pl. LXIV, 1-2.

¹⁵ LEMBESI 1994, 101, fig. 96.

¹⁶ Aleydis Van de Moortel (personal communication). See the recent study, VAN DE MOORTELT 2011.

¹⁷ PAPAGIANNPOULOU 1991, 89, 91, 365-66, 368, NN. 347-48, 358, figs. 27, 29, pls. 37-38.

¹⁸ KEMP-MERRILLEES 1980, 10, Ha.5, fig. 3 from el-Harageh; KEMP-MERRILLEES 1980, 77, Ka.29, fig. 29 from Kahun. The hypothesis that some of the Kamare imports from the Middle Kingdom may have originally reached Egypt from the Mesara plain, possibly via the Knossos area (see CARINCI 2000; *contra* VAN DE MOORTELT 2007, 180-182) is now supported by chemical analyses, see FITTON *et alii* 1998.

¹⁹ The complete catalogue appears in SANAVIA 2014a, except specimens from following excavations, see below.

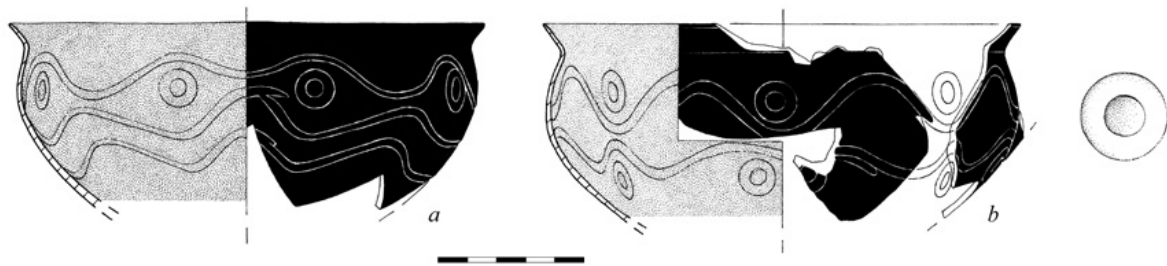


Fig. 4. a) Cup fragment from the *Canale Minoico* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a);
b) Cup fragments from the *Canale Minoico*.



Fig. 5. a) Cup fragments from Room 11 at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a);
b) CMS II, 5, N. 198 from Room 25 at Phaistos (image courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg; not to scale).

town area around the Phaistos hill, and is distributed across all quarters (*Acropoli Mediana*, Quarter to the W of the Palace, Houses to the S of the Palace, Chalara and Ayia Photini)²⁰. Although some of these vases were found in palatial rooms, which are likely to have served as a setting for ceremonial activities, their distribution outside the palatial area attests to the circulation of this kind of ware at various levels, among different groups²¹. A large number of fragments come from the so-called *Grande Frana*, the enormous dump identified W of the Middle W Court (I) that may have originated from one or more cleaning operations inside the Palace area, as a consequence of various episodes of seismic nature²². Some interesting specimens were also retrieved at the nearby site of Ayia Triada, including two fragments of a straight-sided cup and a spouted jar, which bear the same impression of a stylized *bucranium*²³.

From a chronological point of view, the presence of Impressed Fine Ware fragments inside the lower fill of Room CVII of the *Acropoli Mediana*, containing a homogeneous group of MM IIA pottery, places this ware within this period²⁴, although it would only appear to have been produced on a wide scale in the MM IIB period²⁵. The rare MM IIA examples show a limited range of decoration, mostly geometric, compared with the remarkable variety of the MM IIB specimens (from stratigraphical contexts sealed by final destruction levels and on stylistic grounds criteria) that evidently follow the contemporary and lively increase of pottery polychrome painted decorations and developments in glyptic²⁶ (Fig. 5a-b). Subsequently, for the beginning of the Neopalatial period (MM IIIA), only some poor examples have been identified, bearing witness to an attempt to resume this elaborate production²⁷. Another slightly later subgroup (MM IIB-MM IIIA) is the so-called Precision Stamped Ware that shows more standardized motifs (usually concentric circles, spirals and marine shell-like motifs) which appear to be embossed on

²⁰ The published vessels are in PERNIER 1935, fig. 231 and LEVI 1976, figs. 245, 543, 570, 683, 747, 930, 931a-b, 932, 1018, 1093; pls. 28k, 32c, 107k, 113a-b, 128q, 131p, 133e and colour pls. XLII, LIc, LXII, LXIIIe-f, LXXb. Other fragments (see below) were found in the excavations to the S of the Palace (FIANDRA 2000; FIANDRA 2011), which contained mixed materials, among which a good amount can be assigned, on stylistic grounds, to MM IIA.

²¹ On the relationship between the central building and the surrounding area, and between the groups acting in them, see SCHOEP 2006 and MILITELLO 2012, 263-266.

²² See LEVI 1976, 561-594; LA ROSA 2011. The deposit is also known as *Colmata Medio Minoica*.

²³ I am grateful to G. Baldacci for the permission to study some un-

published fragments from Protopalatial deposits at Ayia Triada (BALDACCII 2013a) and from Rooms CV-CVII on the *Acropoli Mediana* at Phaistos (BALDACCII 2017).

²⁴ LEVI 1976, 602-629. See now BALDACCII 2017 and CALOI 2009, 426.

²⁵ D. Levi's Phases Ib-II (=MM IIB), see CARINCI-LA ROSA 2001. For a chronological sequence of Protopalatial Phaistos, see MILITELLO 2012, 237-240 and Tab. 8.1.

²⁶ For similar MM II "petaloid loop" motifs, see CMS II, 5, N. 198 from Room 25 at Phaistos and some examples from Knossos: CMS II, 8, N. 26 from Kato Gypsades cemetery (?) and CMS II, 8, N. 49 from the "Hieroglyphic Deposit".

²⁷ GIRELLA 2010, 189, 348, fig. 56.



Fig. 6. Jar fragment from the Lower W Court (LXX) at Phaistos with potters' fingerprints on the interior side (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1).

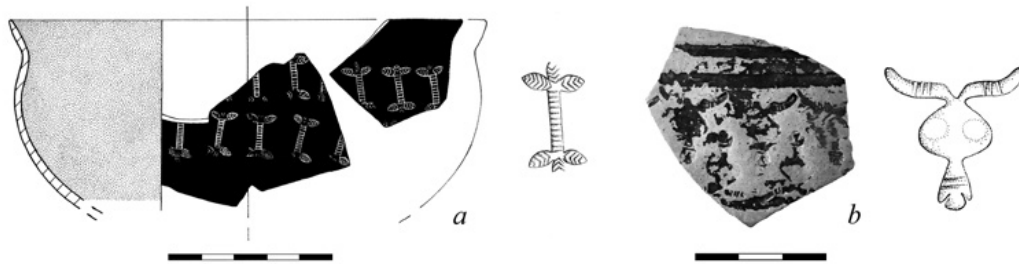


Fig. 7. a) Cup fragments from the *Canale Minoico* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1); b) Jar fragment from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1).

the vase's surface, having been applied by a form, and being carefully impressed from the interior²⁸. On both ware-types we can frequently recognize potters' fingerprints on the interior side of the vase: for the Impressed Ware (Fig. 6) these are the result of internal supporting of the pot area selected to be impressed during the exterior stamping process; in the case of the Precision Stamped Ware, the fingerprints are a consequence of the fingertip pressure from the interior, usually leaving also the nail-marks²⁹.

As far as the syntax of decorative solutions is concerned, impressed motifs, mainly intended for ornamental purposes, appear usually in a single or double rows in repeated sequences (Fig. 7a), often combined in a complementary and staggered way (Fig. 7b), simply applied to the wet clay surface, before the application of spout and handles, slips and polychrome decorations³⁰. We can probably identify several workshops: some vases represent a highly-skilled level of craftsmanship which combines the thinnest of walls with a mastery of sensitively-made impressions and polychrome decoration, but other specimens are of a more standardized production with less carefully made vases and more clumsily impressed decorations³¹. In some rare examples, impressions are associated with a simple dark and glossy surface that gives an overall metallic aspect to the vase, one that probably is intended to recall precious metal prototypes, decorated with the *repoussé* technique³² (Fig. 8). Very rare are the examples, which show the same stamp employed on two separate but identical pots ("twin vases"). Probably this illustrates the relative ease with which one could make these stamp devices. The same is suggested by the presence of similar, look-alike motifs, and related variants, such as the case of the rosette impressions on two jars from the *Grande Frana*³³ (Fig. 9a-b). We frequently encounter different motifs impressed on the same vase, usually arranged in distinct rows³⁴.

²⁸ MACGILLIVRAY 1998, 57-58; SANAVIA 2014a. MACGILLIVRAY 1987, 277 wonders if potters borrowed the same implements as were employed for decorating metal wares. See as a likely similar type of mould device, a seashell-shaped clay mould employed for making relief appliqué decorations, from Ayia Triada (HTR 1663), and dated to MM IIB/MM IIIA: CARINCI 1995. See also a clay mould from Sitia (CMS IV, N. 59) dated to MMI, but probably later.

²⁹ Those details were noted in EVANS 1935, 120, fig. 87. See also EVELLY 2000, 295.

³⁰ See e.g. the single/multiple (Figs. 8, 12), the metopal/triangular (Fig. 26a) and the eccentric compounds (Figs. 5a-b, 14).

³¹ Interestingly we can detect also some cases of mistakes in the stamp-

ing, such as an interrupted row of arches on a jar shoulder, substituted with another motif: SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 68.

³² See SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 362.

³³ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. NN. 77-78. Similar phenomena (but with different implications: i.e. seals which look so much alike that they must have been made intentionally so, in order to assert some similar authority within some closed group) was observed on some Zakros sealings and dubbed by J. Weingarten as the result of "look-alike" seals, see WEINGARTEN 1983 and also PINI 2006. See RELAKI 2012, 308, fig. 10.8-10 for some cases on Phaistos sealings.

³⁴ Up to a maximum of three different motifs: SANAVIA 2014a, cat. NN. 68, 187, 584.

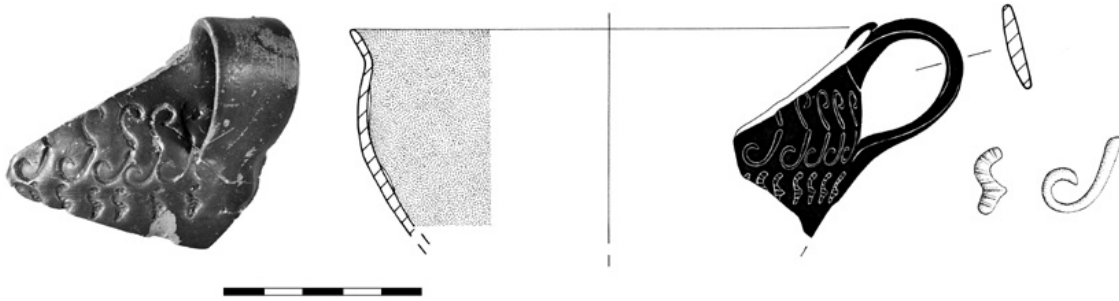


Fig. 8. Cup fragment from Room LI at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motifs at scale 2:1).

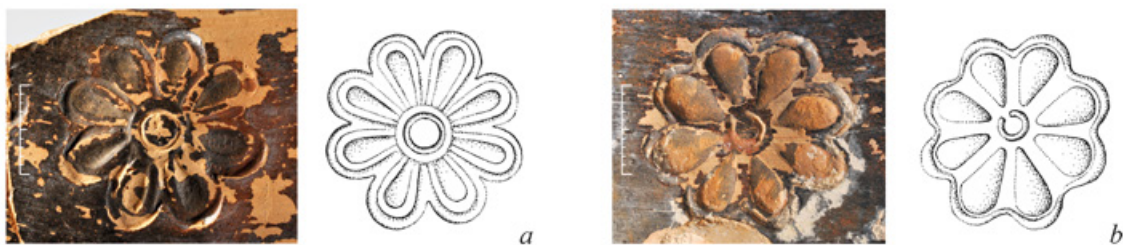


Fig. 9. a-b) Two rosettes on different jars from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a).

As noted above the majority of subjects appear closely related to contemporary repertoires of signaries and symbols, particularly in those seen decorating painted pottery and also by seal designs³⁵. Vases and fragments recovered at Phaistos and Aya Triada show some 200 different signs (Fig. 10) mainly of a geometric type (arcs, circles, lunettes, triangles, lozenges, stars, zigzag, chevrons, coil spirals, C-spirals, S-spirals, J-spirals, etc.) and others borrowed from the natural world such as plants: palmettes, ivy leaves, quatrefoils, paisleys, papyrus and rosettes flowers, but also exceptional zoomorphic representations (*agrimia*, bull heads/*bucrania*, bovine figures, dogs, dolphins) and various types of seashell-like patterns. Furthermore, it is possible to detect some representations of special objects: tools or ceremonial implements such as figure-of-eight shields, double axes and the so-called “trowel” designs. The remaining part of the corpus is made up of abstract signs or unspecified subjects. Impressed designs may take the form of a simple and linear profile or of a bordered *silhouette* and can be filled with various patterns such as horizontal and vertical hatched motifs, fishbone venation, different types of crosshatched (grid patterns) designs and points. Toothed decorations may be present, on the outer or inner side or at the ends, as well as internal chevron-like patterns (Fig. 11). Relevant parallels for those decorative motifs are commonly offered again by the Minoan glyptic repertoire, specifically by the Phaistian one.

For the assumed secondary use of script signs as markers of status, for use in religious display, or as ornamental motifs, some impressions may be observed that find parallels in the Cretan hieroglyphic script and Linear A syllabary³⁶. This is the case for the pedestalled and spouted vase impressed on a carinated cup from the *Grande Frana* deposit³⁷ (Fig. 12). This vase type, which develops from Prepalatial “teapots” but now has a piriform shape and a collared neck, was also employed as a sign on some inscriptions³⁸, and appears specifically to be connected with ceremonial ceramic assemblages at Phaistos and in general with Minoan pouring rituals³⁹. Another carinated cup from Palace Room LX presents a further example where we can probably recognize part of a “libation formula” or a pseudo-inscription, with the representation

³⁵ See WALBERG 1986, 6-56 and WENG 2002 for relations between Minoan seals motifs and vase-paintings. Cf. *CMS* II, 5 for Phaistian seals/sealings and ANASTASIADOU 2011 for the corpus of MM II three-sided prism seals. For the “symbolic transference” of designs between various media during the Protopalatial period, see HAGGIS 2007, 762-770, figs. 28, 31. Some parallels are possible also with potter and mason’s marks, see EVELY 2000, 641-650.

³⁶ For the Cretan hieroglyphic script, see OLIVIER-GODART 1996 (= *CHIC*) and *EAGLL* 1 s.v. «Cretan Hieroglyphic Script», 398-400 [A. Karnava]. For the non-utilitarian functions of writing in Crete during the Palatial period and for “pseudo” inscriptions, see WHIT-

TAKER 2005; 2013. A few examples from the *Quartier Mu* at Malia show single impressions of the “eye” sign (*CHIC* 005) on utilitarian vessels, see GODART-OLIVIER 1978, NN. 82-84, pls. XXX-XXXI. About the modes of display and perception of Minoan writings, see also FLOUDA 2013.

³⁷ F. 6190 (= SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 218).

³⁸ As a vase symbol on hieroglyphic signs, see *CHIC* 052 and JASINK 2009, 81, 131-132. As a Linear A sign, see the MM II clay tablet (PH 7a, 3) from Phaistos: GODART-OLIVIER 1976, 294.

³⁹ See PUGLISI 2010, 66-70.

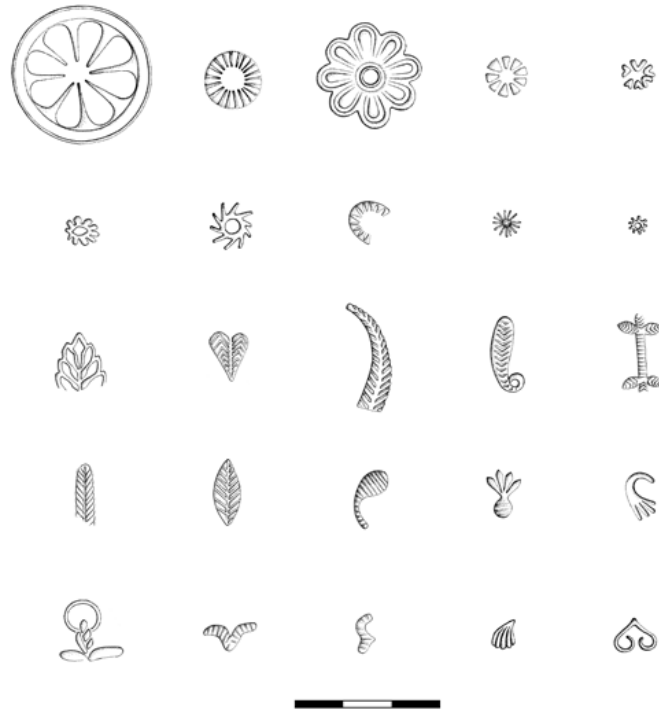


Fig. 10. A selection of motifs on the Impressed Fine Ware from Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a).

of an S-spiral and a probable *bucranium*: it is as a consequence a vase with a special function⁴⁰ (Fig. 13). Possible other occurrences are represented by a straight-sided cup from the *Grande Frana*, on which an eccentric compound of two different signs, a chain of four circles in a row and a star-like image, create a motif that recalls the hieroglyphic sign *CHIC* 031 (Fig. 14), and again by another cup from the so-called *Canale Minoico* with two horizontal rows of a toothed V-shaped motifs that evoke the *CHIC* 028 sign⁴¹. Some of these examples may recall a sort of “formulaic patterning”, similar to those painted or incised on the “Chamaizi jugs”, with an evocative symbolism expressed by the choice of peculiar themes such as double axes, *bucrania*, horns of consecrations and jugs. As previously noted these formulaic uses of religious iconographies could distinguish and legitimize the power of ambitious élites group during ritual display and ceremonies enacted principally in the palatial courts⁴².

Except for these rare examples that deserve further study, due to the presence in them of specific signs or unusual arrangements, the bulk of impressed motifs appear to have but an ornamental function. The majority of the decorative arrangements were organized in simplified syntactic patterns with the reiteration in one or more rows – usually on the shoulder or the body of the vase – of a single stamp device that creates a seamless decoration (Fig. 15a-b); probably inspired (or vice-versa) also by wall-paintings⁴³ and textile patterns⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 224. For the sign/symbol of a *bucranium* (*CHIC* 011), see also the sealing *CMS* II, 8, N. 36 from the “Hieroglyphic Deposit” at Knossos (MM II), and HALLAGER 2012, 266, fig. 2 for the “Petras doodle” pebble (with incised *bucrania* and S-spirals), which does suggest a non-scribal Hieroglyph. Similar syntaxes of signs, painted or incised, are present on few conical cups from the *Grande Frana* (MILITELLO 1990); one of these preserves two painted signs, one of which is the “pot” sign (*CHIC* 052), similar to the one impressed on Fig. 12. On the “Libation Formula” (usually on ritual stone vases [e.g. DAVIS 2014]), see CIVITILLO 2016 and KARNAVA 2016, 347-350.

⁴¹ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. NN. 212 and 283. The *Canale Minoico* is a drain-water channel, which runs under the Lower W Court (LXX) and under Rooms LIX, LX and LXIV of the SW quarter of the First Palace (LEVI 1976, 127-129; FIANDRA 1980). E. Fiandra dated materials from the dump inside the channel to MM IIA, before the final

destruction levels at the end of MM IIB; however a further study of the pottery has demonstrated that a good amount is typologically and stylistically similar to those of the final destruction levels at Phaistos, see LEVI-CARINCI 1988, 326.

⁴² On the religious symbolism on Minoan pottery, see NIKOLAIDOU 1999, 2016.

⁴³ See WALBERG 1986, 57-88 and BLAKOLMER 1999, for the relation between polychrome pottery and wall paintings.

⁴⁴ For the decorative schemes on Kamares Ware: CARINCI 1996. For the connection between textiles and Kamares Ware motifs: MACGILLIVRAY 1998, 59; KNAPPETT 2005, 146. It was suggested that the decoration of some vases from Kültepe (early 2nd millennium BC) – which combine shiny ‘metallic’ surfaces and geometric patterns, as possibly mimicking textile bands – could represent an echo of metal vases adorned with fabrics: WILKINSON 2014, 268, figs. 27.5-6.

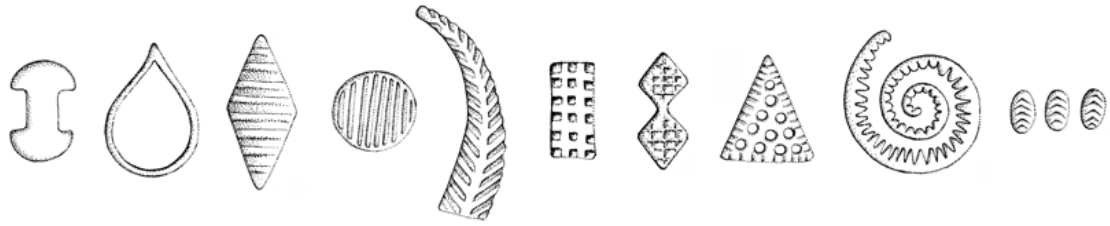


Fig. 11. A selection of impressed motifs with different patterns (drawings by G. Merlatti; not to scale).

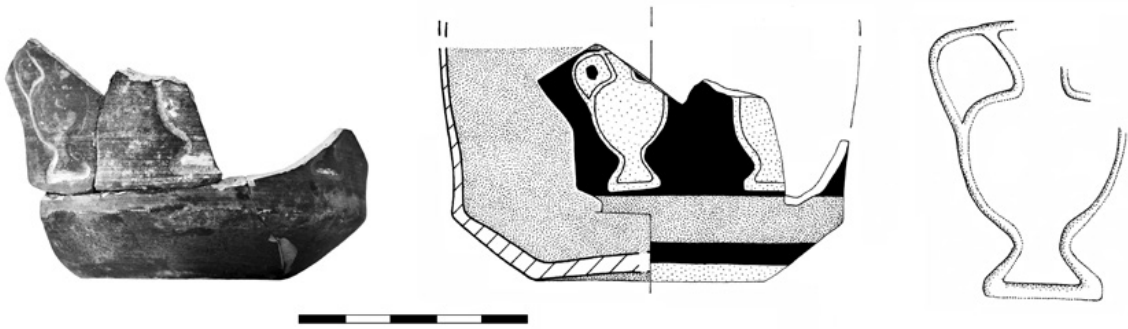


Fig. 12. Cup fragment (F. 6190) from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1).

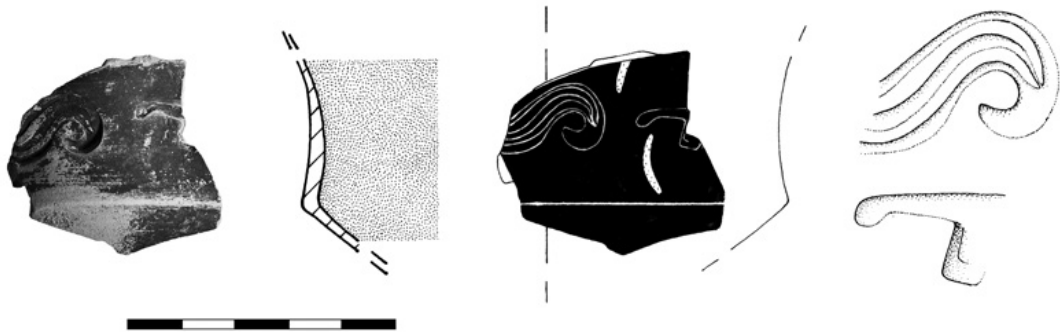


Fig. 13. Cup fragment from Room LX at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motifs at scale 2:1).



Fig. 14. Cup fragments from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motifs at scale 2:1).



Fig. 15. a) Cup fragment (F. 8244) from the area W to the *Rampa Ellenistica* at Phaistos (drawing by G. Merlatti; motifs at scale 2:1); b) Cup fragment (F. 2183) from Room LXIII at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a).

2. RECONSIDERING THE PD IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROTOPALATIAL IMPRESSED FINE WARE

The Impressed Fine Wares represent a remarkable subject, of interest for a number of iconographic and technical parallels with contemporary archaeological *realia*, such as clay offering tables, seals and sealing iconographies, ritual and ceremonial implements, and also for the enigmatic PD.

The 45 pictorial signs that are combined in the inscription of the PD depict various images from the natural world as well as other subjects, variously interpreted⁴⁵. As is well known, some of the symbols appear vaguely comparable to signs of the Cretan Hieroglyphic or Linear A⁴⁶, and the repetition of certain combinations of signs appears as the strongest indication that the inscription probably renders a text of a religious or magical nature⁴⁷. The almost unique spiral layout structure of the inscription and the fact the disc was fired intentionally make it more likely that this was an artefact intended for display. Since many of the signs on the PD are pictographic, it has been posited that the maker of the disc had a pictorial script in mind and that the inscription was intended to imitate Egyptian hieroglyphs, made by someone who knew that Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was iconic in character and consisted of recognizable pictures of natural or man-made objects⁴⁸.

Silhouette-style representations of animals on the MM II Phaistian Impressed Fine Ware – that probably carry also symbolic and religious values, beside their decorative purposes⁴⁹ – appear as one of the most striking *comparanda* to similar images stamped on the PD. We can gainfully compare examples such as the Cretan wild goats (*agrimia*) impressed on a rim jar fragment from the area of the Lower W Court (LXX)⁵⁰ with the PD sign N. 30 (Fig. 16a-b) or the dog figures squatting on their haunches, arranged vertically with their muzzles towards the rim, with another jar fragment from the *Canale Minoico*⁵¹ with the “cat head” sign N. 29 (Fig. 17a-b). Remarkable too is the parallel between the superb leaping dolphins impressed as stamped motifs on the straight ledge of a jar rim sherd⁵² – to which an identical image stamped on a rounded cup fragment is surely to be added⁵³ – and the PD representation of a fish on sign N. 33 (Fig. 18a-c). Noticeable appear also the similarities between two types of rosette flowers impressed on the shoulder of two different jars⁵⁴ from the *Grande Frana* with the rosette on the PD sign N. 38 (Figs. 9a-b; 19a-b) and, last but not least, the enigmatic sign of a fringe-bordered triangle filled by dots impressed on a cup, again from the *Grande Frana*⁵⁵, with a similar motif on the PD sign N. 43 (Fig. 20a-b). Most of the PD signs seem to be much more finely executed than those impressed on Phaistian vases: they present sharper profiles, usually look more detailed and generally are stamped by exerting a stronger pressure⁵⁶. The bovine figure impressed on a rounded cup fragment from the area of the *Tempio Ellenico*⁵⁷, represented at a larger scale than other animal depictions on the Impressed Fine Ware, appears near identical to those stamped on the contemporary offering table from the Protopalatial Room VIII (Fig. 21a-b). Also very similar are some S-spiral impressed signs, present on a few vase decorations, with those stamped on the same clay table⁵⁸ (Fig. 22a-b). The bovine image on the cup represents another clear parallel for the animals stamped on the PD, mainly in the indication of the eyes, a naturalistic detail which is lacking on animal figures impressed on pots.

But an even more remarkable parallel is now offered by the recent discovery of several small fragments of a rounded cup with a row of stamped human figures⁵⁹ (Fig. 23a-b). The impressed decoration, outside and at the top of the wall, near the rim area, appears distributed on two registers: in the upper part there was a series of female figures arranged in a processional pattern, in the lower one runs a series of purely

⁴⁵ See GODART 1994, 2009.

⁴⁶ There are no conclusive resemblances between the two existing Cretan writing systems, see GODART 1994, 143-144.

⁴⁷ WHITTAKER 2005, 33; FLOUDA 2015, 80.

⁴⁸ WHITTAKER 2005, 32.

⁴⁹ See above n. 42.

⁵⁰ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 23. For the *agrimia* iconography, see BLOEDOW 2003 and SIMANDIRAKI 2006.

⁵¹ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. NN. 24-25, very probably two different jars. For the dog motif, see HICKMAN 2011, 95-96.

⁵² FIANDRA 2000, 476; FIANDRA 2011, 105, 172. On fish and dolphin iconographies, see VOLORIO 2004; SANAVIA 2014b. Cf. also *CMS* II, 8, N. 34 from the “Hieroglyphic Deposit” at Knossos and the MM II seal impression on the handle of a vase from Pyrgos (*CMS* II, 6, N. 229 = *CHIC* #133) for a similar depiction of a dolphin (?) with three hieroglyphic signs: JASINK 2009, 48; FERRARA *et alii* 2016, 94, fig. 4a-b.

⁵³ From 2015 excavations to the W of the *Rampa Ellenistica*, see report by CARINCI-MILITELLO 2014-2016.

⁵⁴ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. NN. 77-78.

⁵⁵ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 288. The sign represents probably a strainer with sieve, see GODART 1994, 117.

⁵⁶ See *e.g.* the colour plates in GODART 1994.

⁵⁷ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 463. Mention of this fragment is made in LA ROSA 2005, 145, n. 39.

⁵⁸ See *e.g.* the straight-sided cup F. 2395 from Room LXIV (SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 282). Cf. also the motif on a sealing from Room 25 at Phaistos: *CMS* II, 5 N. 186.

⁵⁹ F. 8232 (dim. biggest fragment: 3.5×5 cm) now stored at Phaistos (storeroom 7, box 1003). Fragments were recovered during the 2016 excavations in the area to the W of the *Rampa Ellenistica* (see above n. 53), in a layer (US 58) interpreted as a MM II floor with some rare occurrence of MM II pottery fragments.

ornamental hatched-drop elements. The larger fragment shows three impressions and two others only partially preserved; the remains of two figures are present on two small fragments, portraying respectively the bottom and the top of the figures. Of particular interest is the stamp itself with the female figure (h. 1.7×0.7 cm), but this is rather weak and faintly revealed, owing to the different intensity of the individual impressions: thus it is not possible to describe the details clearly. The outlined figure, depicted in profile and facing right, wears a long bell-shaped and peak-backed garment, fastened at the waist with a tasselled belt: it appears very similar to the female votaries/terracotta figurines from the peak sanctuary of Petsophas⁶⁰. The dress reveals the feet and the arms that appear to be positioned at right angles in front of the chest, in the well-coded gesture of the worshippers. The head has some facial features emphasized, particularly the nose, and a kind of peculiar pointed hat. Excellent parallels exist also in MM II glyptic for the type of the long belt with two tassels, mainly concentrated in MM II⁶¹. As far as it is known, it is the only stamp, except those of the PD (sign N. 6), with a representation of a human figure⁶². The same size (and thus status) of figures with comparable gestures, garments and the way they encircle the sides of the vase – which gives them a sort of dynamism, emphasized by the representation of the feet pointing right – tantalizingly recall the MM II clay model from Ayia Triada, with five figurines arranged in a circle⁶³, and evokes analogous rituals or performances. If a procession involving female figures, in a ritualized and ceremonial activity, is represented on the stamped sherd from Phaistos, it is possible to suggest the existence of an original prototype image already existing in the Protopalatial period for the well-coded procession scenes that are attested in the LM I period, especially on glyptics⁶⁴. The representations of three stylized female figurines painted on the *Dea dei gigli* ceremonial stand are in some way also comparable: they too are portrayed in a row, in a ritualistic gesture that we can likely interpret as a sort of dance⁶⁵. Probably this sequence of impressed female figures could be read as an iconographic reference to a small ceremony of worship, an *excerptum* of a more complex Minoan ritual taking place in that area of the Phaistos palace. Clearly this is a peculiar vase, which played a prominent role inside the hierarchy of some ceramic assemblage; but unfortunately the find context, a MM II level in a disturbed area to the W of the *Rampa Ellenistica* near the Lower W Court (LXX), does not offer any clues⁶⁶. Nevertheless this vase increases the number of those very few examples – all found, interestingly, in the SW wing of the Protopalatial Palace – with anthropomorphic depictions, whereon allusions to worship and rituals are evident⁶⁷.

Other details like the hatched decoration that characterize some of the PD stamped signs (such as the inner part of the sign N. 20, currently interpreted as a marine shell⁶⁸, or the “plumed” crest of the masculine head in profile on the sign N. 2) find parallels in several impressed motifs⁶⁹ (e.g. Fig. 11), such as the drop-like sign on the lower register of the cup with the female figures (Fig. 23a).

Study of the Phaistian impressed pottery has shown that this approach fits well into the artisanal milieu of the glyptic tradition⁷⁰ and other classes of material characterized by the same use of stamping devices⁷¹. Many Protopalatial stamp impressions are very similar, but not identical and only in very few cases is the same impression registered on two different vessels or on the same vase type (“twin vases”). This technique, with a mainly decorative but also some symbolic function, appears therefore a widely-employed practice at the site; the manufacture of these stamps is assumed to be easy enough, regardless whether they were made of metal, bone, or ceramic materials. Although there is no definitive proof here as to the

⁶⁰ See e.g. RUTKOWSKI 1991, 81, pls. B.4 and XXVII.1-3. For this type of dress, see JONES 2012 and 2015, 27-49, 227-239 with other parallels. See also ANASTASIADOU 2011, 169, pl. 10 (Motif 3).

⁶¹ See CMS VI, N. 92a and the impression CMS II.8, N. 39 from the “Hieroglyphic Deposit” at Knossos. Additionally, the motif comes close to a new seal stone from House Tomb 2 at Petras, see KRZYSZKOWSKA 2012a, 152-153, fig. 7a.

⁶² D. Levi reported the finding from the Room LII of a very fine cup fragment with a row of stylized human figures (LEVI 1976, 160), but I was not able to find it inside the *Museo Stratigrafico* boxes (09/08/2017).

⁶³ HTR 2157-2159: LA ROSA 2010, 193, n. 29, fig. 18.4. On ritual actions in Minoan religion: WARREN 1988.

⁶⁴ On Aegean procession scenes and related gestures of participants on various *media*, see WEDDE 2004; BLAKOLMER 2008; KRZYSZKOWSKA 2012b, 744-745.

⁶⁵ F. 65+786 (LEVI 1976, pls. LXV-LXVI). See also CARINCI 2011, 108-109.

⁶⁶ I would like to thank F. Carinci and E. Messina for sharing informa-

tion about the archaeological context.

⁶⁷ CARINCI 2014, 42-43, n. 91 and see above n. 65. This part of the Protopalatial Palace was an area concerned with special functions, probably preparatory to ceremonial activities, and specifically controlled by a group of people performing ritual practices, see GESELL 1985, 124-127; CARINCI 2011, 113; MILITELLO 2012, 254-255; SANAVIA 2014b, 31; 2014c, 545.

⁶⁸ The sign is interpreted as a *Dolium* shell (GODART 1994, 106-107), but it could recall also a triton shell (with a truncated apex?). Specimens of both shells types (and imitations of arts) are known in MM IIB Phaistos, see SANAVIA 2014c; SANAVIA-WEINGARTEN 2016.

⁶⁹ See GODART 1994, 89-93.

⁷⁰ Approximately 6.500 sealings were found in Room 25 at Phaistos: FIANDRA 1968. See also RELAKI 2012, 299-313 for a study on sealing practices at Phaistos, with previous bibliography.

⁷¹ See for the Protopalatial low relief potmarks: BALDACCIO 2013b and for the impressions on clay “weights”: MILITELLO 2002, 88-89, figs. 23-27. On uses of seals on clay objects as decorative, administrative, and amuletic: ARUZ 1994, 2005.

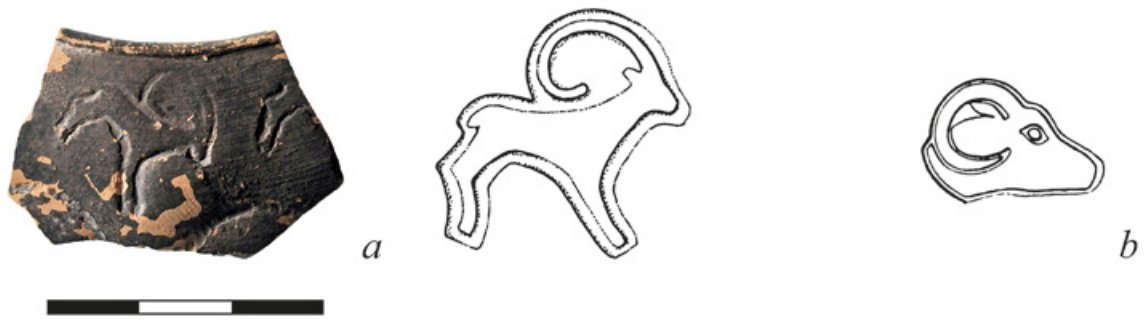


Fig. 16. a) Jar rim fragment from the Lower W Court (LXX) at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1);
b) PD sign N. 30 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

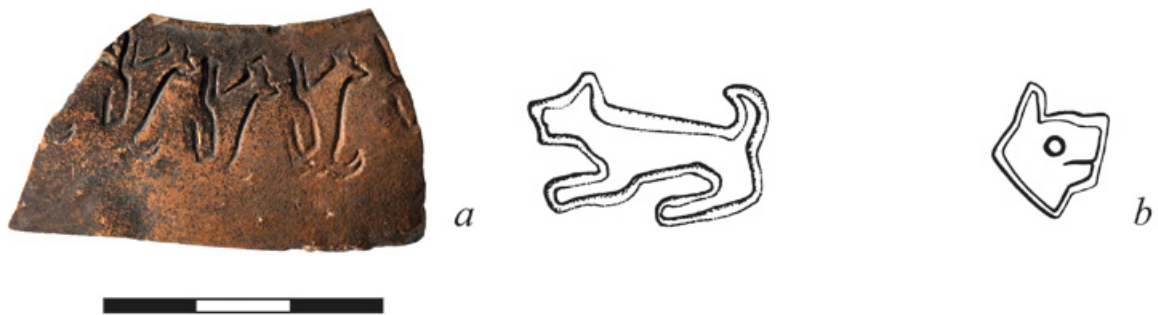


Fig. 17. a) Jar rim fragment from the *Canale Minoico* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1);
b) PD sign N. 29 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

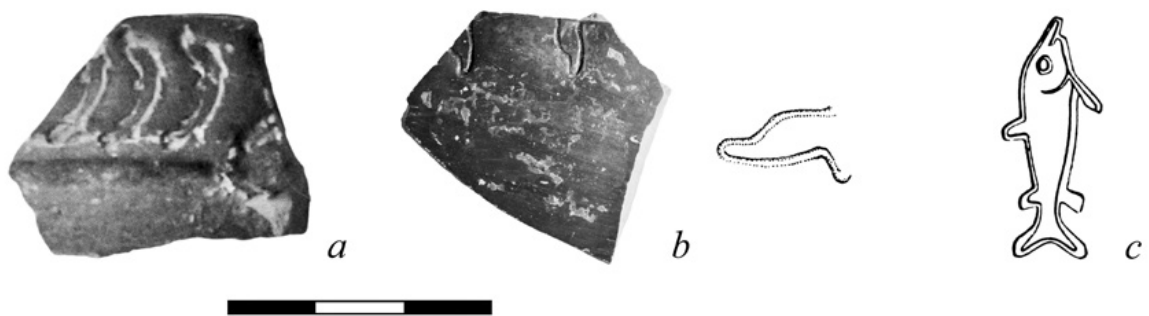


Fig. 18. a) Jar rim fragment from excavations to the S of the Palace (after FIANDRA 2011); b) Cup fragment from the area W to the *Rampa Ellenistica* (photo by the A.; drawing by G. Merlatti at scale 2:1); c) PD sign N. 33 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

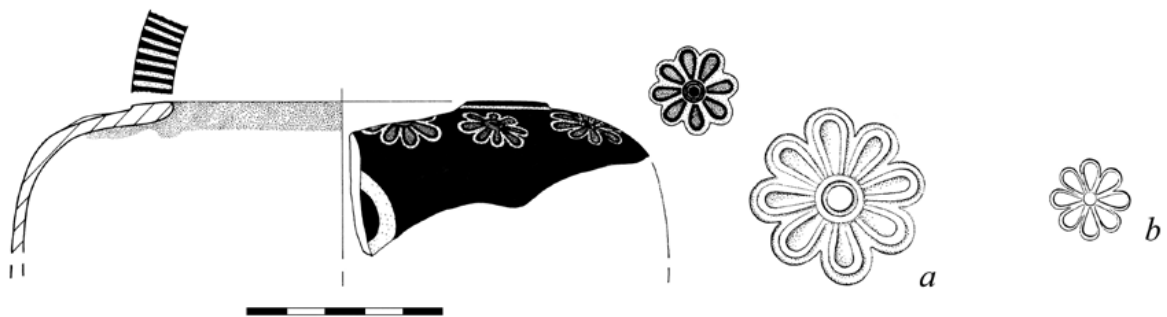


Fig. 19. a) Jar rim fragment (F. 6111) from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1);
b) PD sign N. 38 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).



Fig. 20. a) Cup fragment from the *Grande Frana* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; motif at scale 2:1); b) PD sign N. 43 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

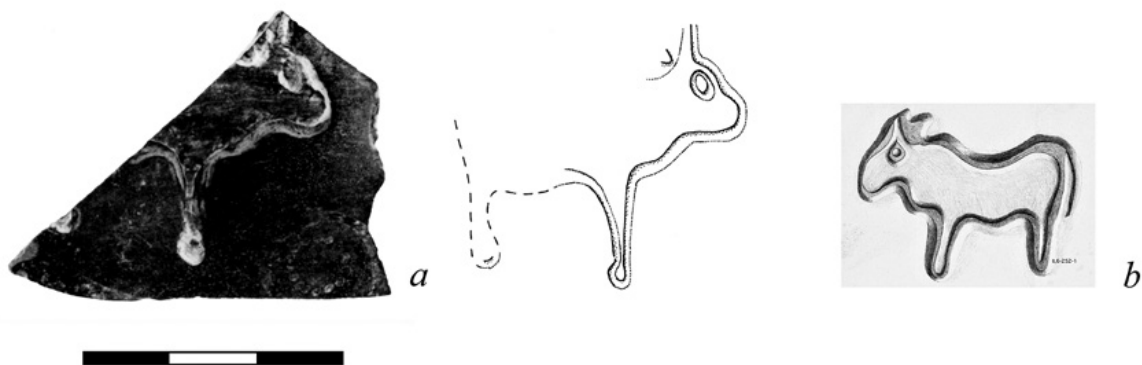


Fig. 21. a) Cup fragment from the *Tempio Ellenico* at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a); b) bovine figure impression on the offering table from Room VIII at Phaistos (see above fig. 3; image courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg; scale 1:1).

authenticity of the PD, these striking similarities with Phaistian MM II Impressed Ware – from the iconographic, stylistic and technical points of view – deserve to be added to the current body of items evincing the most relevant verification for the PD’s authenticity. Until now the strongest parallels proposed for the PD as a genuine Minoan artefact are: the spiral layout of the engraved Linear A inscription on the bezel of a gold ring from the Mavrospilio cave near Knossos⁷², the “plumed” head as signs incised on the Arkalochori axe⁷³ and represented on some figurines from Traostalos near Kato Zakros⁷⁴, a Protopalatial seal impression from the Arsenal Deposit at Knossos with the representation of two folded “animal skins”⁷⁵ (Fig. 24a-b) and the sealing HM 992 from Phaistos⁷⁶. This last was the only known iconographic parallel to PD sign N. 21 (the “comb”), until the identification, again from a Phaistian context, of a similar sign as a low relief potmark by G. Baldacci⁷⁷. The sealing, with the strongest iconographic parallels to the PD, was found in 1955 under the floor of the Room 25 in an archaeological *stratum* dated at the very end of MM IIB – *i.e.* it was found after the discovery of the PD – and also after the greatest part of the Protopalatial impressed pottery had been produced: it was recovered during the years of D. Levi’s excavations (1950-1966). During the first campaigns of excavations at Phaistos (1930-1934) by L. Pernier, only a few impressed fragments were discovered, but they display no relevant iconographic parallels with the PD signs. Merely the aforesaid offering clay table from the *Sacello* Room VIII (Fig. 3), recovered in the Middle W Court (I), represents a parallel for the technique of stamping and for the style of the animal depictions.

⁷² Inv. KN Zf13. See GODART 1994, 60-62, fig. 12.

⁷³ See FLOUDA 2015, 50. See also the MM II human head clay appliqué from the Quartier Nu at Malia: SCHÖEP-KNAPPETT 2003, 82, N. 67, fig. 29.

⁷⁴ DAVARAS 1967.

⁷⁵ See GODART 1994, 113. CMS II, 8, N. 31 is an impression stamped on a pyramidal hanging nodule (a type no earlier than LM IB), but

using an undoubtedly Protopalatial seal, possibly of hard stone. The skin is presented whole on PD sign N. 27 and folded in Hieroglyphic (*e.g.* also CHIC #048 from Knossos) and Linear A signs (*e.g.* MA 4: GODART-OLIVIER 1976, 272-273). I am indebted to J. Weingarten for this communication.

⁷⁶ See CMS II, 5, N. 246 and PINI 1970. See also J. Younger above, n. 2.

⁷⁷ BALDACCI, in this volume.

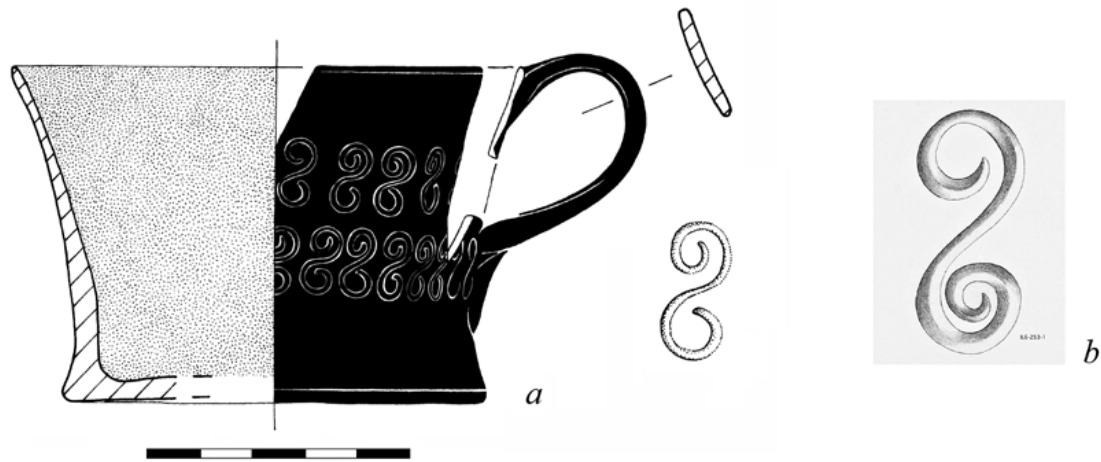


Fig. 22. a) Cup (F. 2395) from Room LXIV at Phaistos (after SANAVIA 2014a; drawing by G. Merlatti); b) S-spiral impression on the offering table from Room VIII at Phaistos (see above fig. 3; image courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg; scale 2:1).

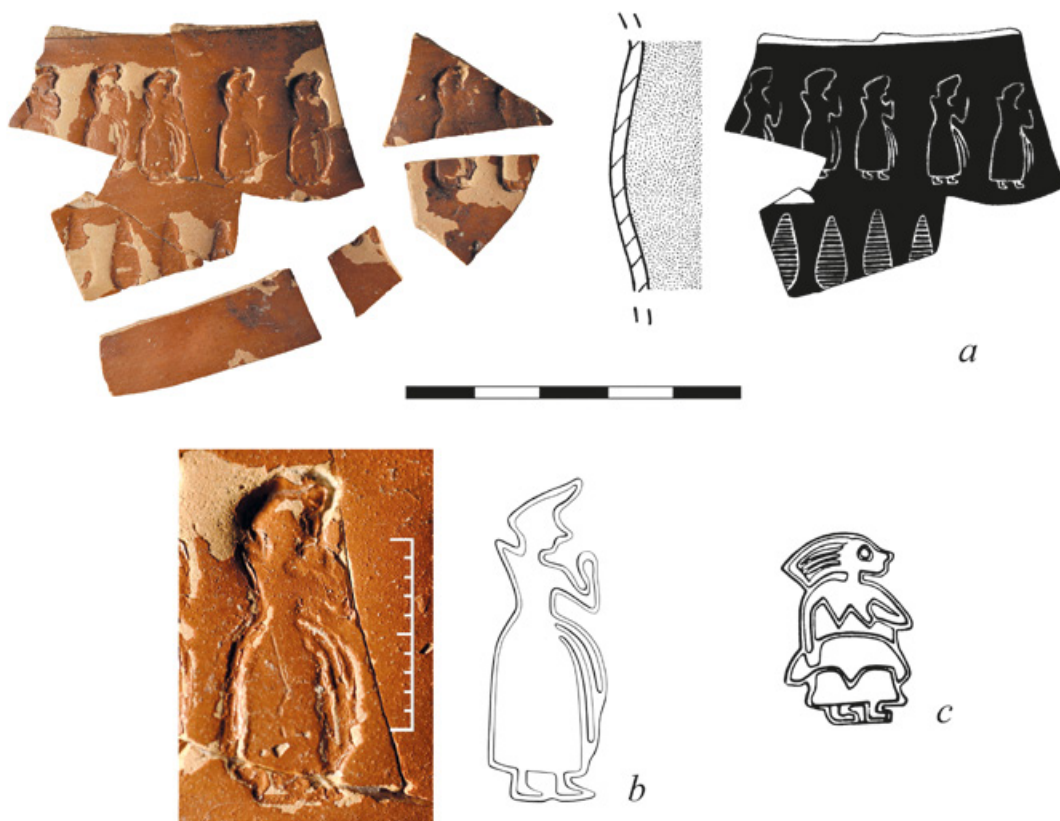


Fig. 23. a) Cup fragments (F. 8232) from the area W to the *Rampa Ellenistica* at Phaistos (photo by the A.; drawing by G. Merlatti); b) Macrophotograph and drawing of the impressed female figure (by the A.); c) PD sign N. 6 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

Leaving aside the question of the (likely) ritual value of such objects, those types of clay implements at MM II Phaistos result frequently decorated by stamped impressions on the raised border, as shown also by another fragment from the area of Room LXXXIII⁷⁸ and by a very notable circular example from the area of the Room CIX⁷⁹.

As noted above, items of Impressed Fine Ware were unearthed also in Knossos but in a smaller quantity. One of the best-preserved examples is worthy of careful attention. It is a “teapot” with a tubular spout

⁷⁸ F. 4594: LEVI 1976, pl. 165c; LEVI-CARINCI 1988, 269, pl. 115a-b. ⁷⁹ F. 7279: LA ROSA 2001, 65, figs. 83-84.

(Fig. 25a), unfortunately without a precise find context⁸⁰. This interesting vase presents a double row of alternating impressions on the shoulder, the lower one stamped at the centre of some deep circular depressions. These stamps are composed of a ring of small dots which surrounds a composition of seven larger ones; a peculiar motif that represents the first stamp on a pot that was rightly proposed by Yves Duhoux as an iconographic parallel with the PD sign N. 12 (*kernos*/shield), to support the authenticity of the disc⁸¹ (Fig. 25b). Recently I have had the opportunity to examine the vase and, as is the case of other Protopalatial specialized vases from the site⁸², it represents probably another import of an high-quality (ceremonial) vessel from the Mesara area: this is suggested by strong parallels in the painted decoration and shape, virtually unknown at Knossos but quite common at Phaistos on MM IIA examples⁸³.

Moving outside Crete, another possible stylistic link with the Mesara plain area, and with these markedly Phaistian types of decorations, is offered by the impressed pottery from Middle Kingdom Egypt⁸⁴. These fragments bear witness not just to the import of exotic Kamares ware, but also to the impact of such ware on the local production, as shown by an Egyptian-made cup from Kahun⁸⁵. That vase is characterized by a clearly Minoan-inspired impressed decoration, with a row of alternating concentric circle and cross-shaped motifs, finding some parallels with MM IIA fragments from Phaistos⁸⁶.

3. THE NATURE OF THE STAMP DEVICES: SOME APPROACHES TO MISSING EVIDENCE AND A SUGGESTION FOR FOREIGN INFLUENCE

Just as for the PD, so too for the Impressed Fine Ware from Phaistos: none of the stamps employed to decorate these vessels has been found until now. We can postulate about the nature of these tools only by a careful inspection of the details of the impressions they leave. Here the study, with the aid of light-contrasted macro photographs and silicone rubber casts of all impressed motifs, should prove most instructive: both approaches are still in progress for the complete publication of the items (Fig. 26a). So far, the preliminary work on the manufacture of the Impressed Fine Ware at Phaistos appears to yield rather variable results, and in some aspects ambiguous. Most of the motifs have been fashioned in a rather simple way: their quantity and variety seem to suggest a relative ease in creating the implements responsible; probably we can suppose the employment of pieces of shell and plants, sections of reeds and possibly also seeds. It is possible that, in many cases, these were made *ad hoc* and then discarded⁸⁷. On the other hand, one must assume that the much finer and more complex impressions were made with a stamp of metal, ivory or bone, due to the sharp and elaborate profile of some depictions (*e.g.* the *agrimi* on Fig. 16a), while others present details which suggest that less effective materials such as wood were used (Fig. 26b). Nevertheless in all the cases these stamp devices were specifically created for decorating the vases. The only exception is seen on a rounded cup fragment, unfortunately badly preserved, where we can recognize the impression of a true seal, bearing a geometric motif with angular components resembling a star-of-David (Fig. 26c)⁸⁸. Unlike most seals and metal rings that are engraved/worked on the surface to give intaglio patterns – resulting, *e.g.* on the *cretulae*, in a relief image in the impression, our motifs clearly appear in intaglio on the clay surface. The stamp dies used by the maker of the PD and by artisans who embellished the Protopalatial Impressed Ware are virtually the same: they both bore raised patterns which projected from the body of the stamp⁸⁹. In view of the delicacy of some of the designs it is unlikely, whatever material was employed, that the cut surfaces were raised very far from the supporting ground, yet the artisan responsible for the PD – and

⁸⁰ HM 14276. See above n. 5.

⁸¹ A near identical motif appears on some gold roundel appliquéés from Tell Hariri/Mari (Early Dynastic I-II, ca. 2900-2550 B.C.) and it is considered a local creation with a probable astral value, see NICOLINI 2010, 327-328, 420, 442, NN. 159-160, pl. 524-525, 527-528.

⁸² DAY-WILSON 1998, 355-356.

⁸³ See MACGILLIVRAY 1998, 104. A similar tubular spout with a creamy-white slip comes from a MM IIA deposit under alabaster slabs on Room CVII at Phaistos: BALDACCIO 2017, 228, N. 686, pl. 63. A similar decoration with a row of impressions, framed by a white painted band, is shown by the MM IIA teapot (F. 1928) from the *Bastione II*: LEVI 1976, 164, pl. 32a-b; LEVI-CARINCI 1988, pl. 42g and also pls. 43-46 for similar hybrid shapes.

⁸⁴ See above n. 18.

⁸⁵ KEMP-MERRILLEES 1980, 70, Ka.20, fig. 28. See also BARRETT 2009 and ASTON 2015.

⁸⁶ For the motif of concentric circles, see a MM IIA cup from *Bastione II* at Phaistos (SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 235) and for the cross-shaped motif a MM II jar fragment from Room IL (SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 109). See also a MM IIB cup from Kommos with a similar white paint line around impressed crosses (BETANCOURT 1990, N. 353, pl. 17).

⁸⁷ SANAVIA 2014a, pl. C. A detailed study is being undertaken for the complete edition.

⁸⁸ SANAVIA 2014a, cat. N. 465 from Chalara Sud Room *iota*. See MILITELLO 2000, 229-234 for considerations about the star-of-David as a specific Phaistian motif.

⁸⁹ See BRADSHAW 1976; GODART 1994, 80-83. On metal seals and stamps, see also PINI 2005.

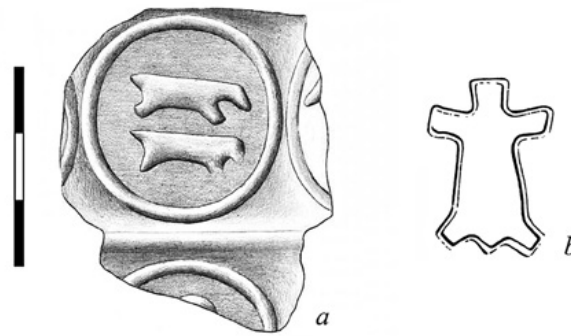


Fig. 24. a) Sealing impression from the Arsenal Deposit at Knossos (*CMS* II, 8; image courtesy of the *CMS* Heidelberg); b) PD sign N. 43 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

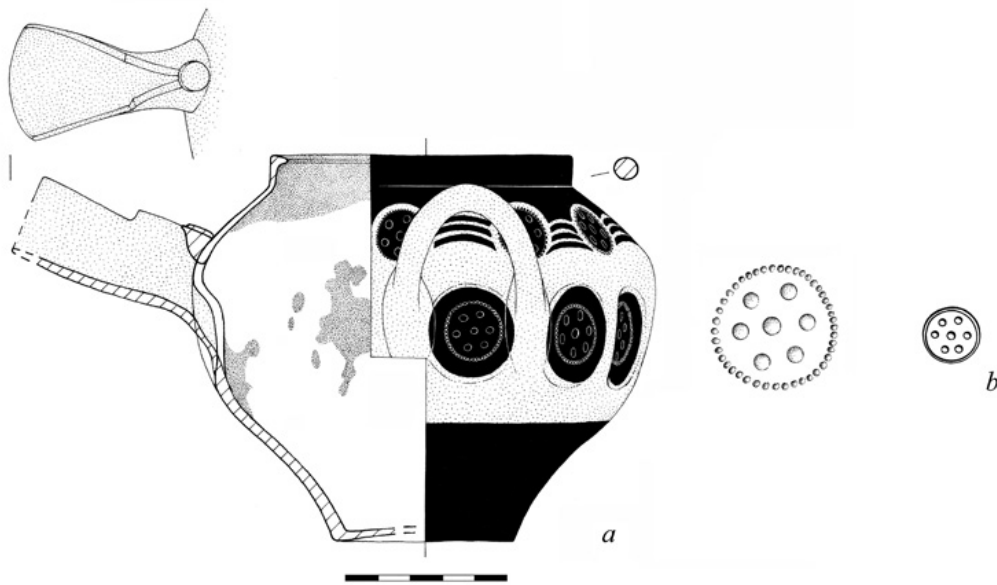


Fig. 25. a) "Teapot" vase (HM 14276) from Knossos (drawings by G. Merlatti; motif at scale 2:1); b) PD sign N. 12 (after PERNIER 1908; scale 2:1).

similarly the potters working on Impressed Ware – always managed to use them without allowing the stamp's edges to touch the clay.

To find arguably similar types of objects we must turn to some Bronze Age stamp devices from Western Central Asia and Near Eastern sites, widely used there also for non-sphragistic purposes, as amulets and personal adornments, but also employed for decorating clay vases⁹⁰ (Figs. 27a, 28a-c). Inside these heterogeneous groups we note some interesting parallels in a class of copper alloy and bronze openwork stamp seals, often called "compartmented" seals. These are cast both in geometric (with patterns based on the cross or the circle), floral and figural patterns (human and animals); with the imagery constructed in compartments defined by metal strips. This is a distinctive and widespread class in the cultures of the Bactria-Margiana region and the Sistan area on the Iranian plateau (ca. late 3rd-early 2nd millennia BC), with some rare examples which even reached the site of Mari and the Anatolian area⁹¹. It is curious to note that some "compartmented"-type details employed to outline the profile of the breast and the skirt

⁹⁰ For the earlier EC and EBA Anatolian group of metal seals in-positive (usually stalk-handled), see TONUSSI 2007, 293-306; ARUZ 2008, cat. N. 199, fig. 11 (=CMS V, 1 N. 202) from Euboea and figs. 12a-b from Alishar Höyük. See two seal designs on a jar fragment from Poliochni at Lemnos, impressed by a probable Egyptian metal seal (6th Dynasty) – or copied from an Egyptian one – with its stamping face in relief: HOOD 1997. See also WEINGARTEN *et alii* 1999 and WILSON 1999, 50-60, pls. 56-60 for stamped impressions from Geraki in Laconia and Ayia Irini on Keos. An interesting case of metallurgical

stamps are those offered by the identical stamped libation jugs on the surviving rim (and presumably also the Minoan Genii figures on the handles) of a bronze krater in the Nicosia Museum (LM IA, or even possibly MM IIIB), see WEINGARTEN 2010, 96, 99, fig. 1.

⁹¹ See examples from Shahr-i Sokhta (TOSI 1983, 157, fig. 74 = Fig. 28a), and the impressed pictogram on some vessels from Shahdad: HAKEMI 1997, fig. 44 (Period III = ca. 2500-1900 BC). Stamp seals of this kind are reported from the site of Mari (AMIET 1988, 169) and from the Central Anatolia area (TOSI 1983, 165-166).

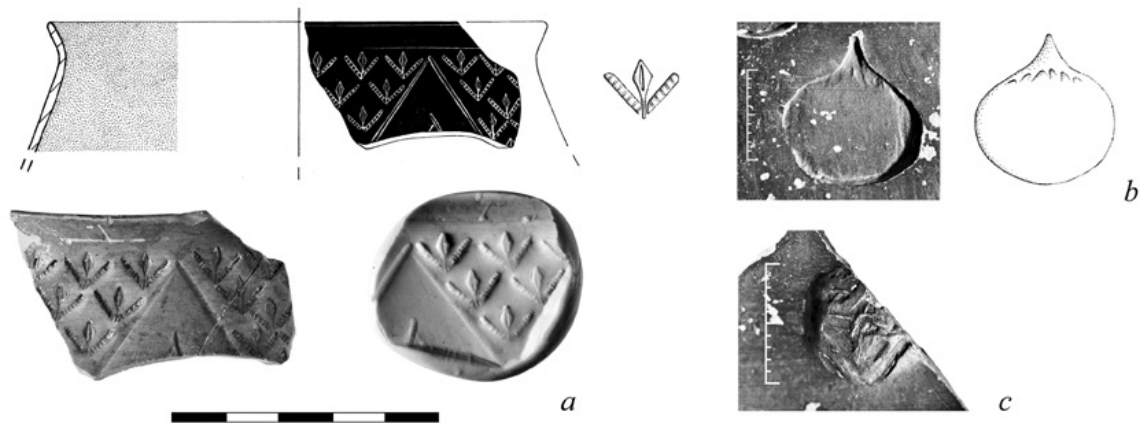


Fig. 26. a) Cup fragment from Ayia Triada (after SANAVIA 2014a; courtesy of G. Baldacci);
 b) Macro photograph and drawing of a drop-like motif probably made with a wood stamp (photo by the A.; drawing by G. Merlati);
 c) Cup fragment from Chalará with a seal impression of a probable David-star motif (after SANAVIA 2014a).

of the female figure on the PD or those present on the sign N. 24, interpreted as a beehive or a wooden structure⁹², recall similar features expressed on human and animal depictions on the more complex compartmented stamp seals (Figs. 27a-b, 28a). Obviously, parallels with such far-off eastern and early cultures are only interesting for technical reasons. Perhaps it might be worth searching MBA Anatolian sites where some stamp impressions, like the star-shapes on crescents loom weights from Karahöyük, could be positives⁹³ and where the widespread stone moulds for the metal industry⁹⁴, in particular for jewellery, may represent a source of inspiration or influence⁹⁵. During the Protopalatial period traces of a local metal-working tradition related to small finds are extremely rare but promising as testified by the recovery of a fragmentary MM II stone mould from the *Canale Minoico*, in Palace Room LX, probably related to the manufacture of metal earrings⁹⁶ (Fig. 29).

FINAL REMARKS

This overview on the features of some products of the Phaistian Protopalatial pottery workshop(s) producing Impressed Fine Wares has shown that some remarkable iconographic, stylistic and technical comparisons can be proposed with the much-debated PD; which would certainly seem to fit the skilled artisanal context of the sphragistic practices of stamping designs at the site.

The creation of stamp devices at Protopalatial Phaistos has a consistent tradition – as the *corpora* of seals and sealings from the Palace area has thoroughly illustrated – and as the quantity and variety of these Impressed Fine Wares has likewise shown. Some similarities between the PD and the Impressed pottery should be highlighted to support the authenticity of the former, as any supposed forger would not have had access to these archaeological artefacts as a model, since they were mostly recovered from Levi's excavations at the site during the 1950s and 1960s.

Impressions are employed on vessels generally with ornamental purposes in mind, thus depriving them of any specific meaning – as the wide spread of some motifs on painted pottery too would also demonstrate: even if the pervasive religious symbolism in Protopalatial Minoan culture may have directed the choice of certain motifs within the iconographical system⁹⁷. This is very likely so for some polyvalent images, such as animal depictions and the female worshipper figures, which inject a strong symbolism into some selected pottery artefacts, making them particularly suitable for the expression of status and power

⁹² GODART 1994, 108-111.

⁹³ See ALP 1968, 221, NN. 212-214, pl. 157/480-482, figs. 174-175 and pls. 184-191 (Level I = c. 1830-1700 BC). See a silver stamp seal from Kültepe/Kanesh (Level I): ÖZGÜÇ 2003, NN. 321-322.

⁹⁴ See ÖZGÜÇ 1986, pls. 80.7; 87.4, 7 with examples from Kültepe/Kanesh and TONUSSI 2007, 112-134, pls. 1-3.

⁹⁵ ARUZ 1998, 1999.

⁹⁶ FIANDRA 1980, 194, N. 2, pl. 53; FIANDRA 2009, 55. The mould

shows a lightly incised channel for the pouring of molten metals: probably it represents a broken and discarded tool. For a catalogue of (later) stone moulds for jewellery from Crete, see EVELY 2000, 411-415, fig. 161, pls. 91-93. Metal objects and tools related to the production from Phaistos and Ayia Triada are now under study by M. Figuera, see for a preliminary report: FIGUERA 2015.

⁹⁷ See above n. 42.

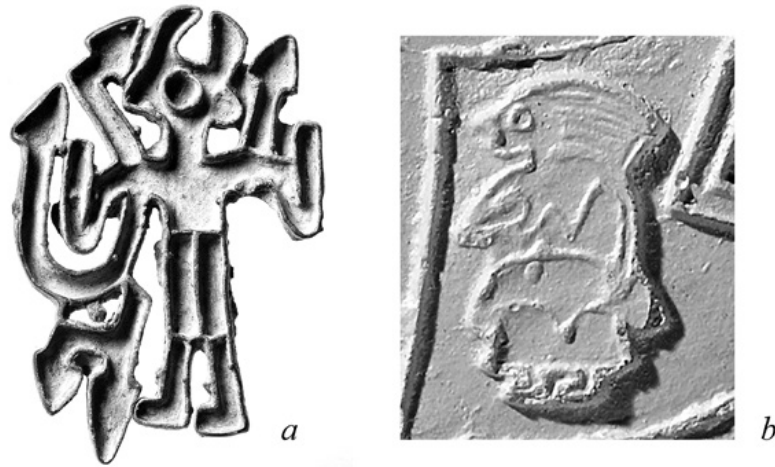


Fig. 27. Technical parallel between a compartmented stamp seal (a) from the Bactria-Margiana area (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1984.4) and the PD sign N. 6 (b) (see above Fig. 1b; not to scale).

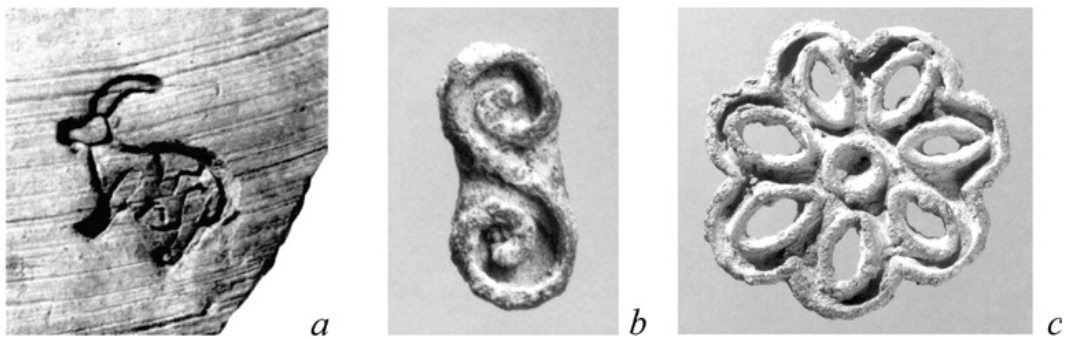


Fig. 28. a) Compartmented stamp seal impression on a vase from Shahr-i Sokhta (after Tosi 1983);
 b) Metal stamp seal from Bactria-Margiana area (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1983.535.113);
 c) Compartmented stamp seal from Bactria-Margiana area (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1983.535.45; not to scale).



Fig. 29. MM II stone mould for small metal objects (earrings?) from the *Canale Minoico* at Phaistos (photo by the A.).

in a ceremonial context, thus materializing the relations between the élite and the divine world. It might also be possible that some images and ornamental compositions could play a distinct role as emblems, namely “badges”, used to represent individuals or social groups, as is proposed for some interesting cases of recurrence of certain Prepalatial motifs from the Mesara cemeteries in the MM IIB sealings assemblages at Phaistos⁹⁸.

As has emerged by virtue of the above technical and iconographical parallels, the enigmatic clay artefact, known as the PD, appears to belong most happily to that definitely Phaistian sphragistic *koine*, which also produced the Protopalatial Impressed Ware. This conclusion represents a most encouraging argument in favour of the PD’s authenticity and, as an important chronological consequence, a relevant *terminus ad* or *post quem* for its dating.

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⁹⁸ WEINGARTEN 1994, 289-290; RELAKI 2009, 360-361; 2012, 293-296.

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- CHIC = J.-P. Olivier - L. Godart, *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae*, Paris 1996.
- CMS = *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Berlin – Mainz 1964-
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