

ΒΡΥΣΙΝΑΣ ΙΙ

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Η ΚΕΡΑΜΕΙΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΑΣΚΑΦΗΣ 1972-1973

Συμβολή στην Ιστορία του Ιερού Κορυφής



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ENGLISH SUMMARY:

The Pottery of the 1972-1973 Excavation. Contribution to the history of the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary

The pottery from the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary is, almost in its entirety, crumbly, fragmentary and therefore hard to access. Of the huge mass of sherds (measuring tonnes), few provide a recognisable vase shape, very few are thought worth illustration, and only a handful are intact. This enormous quantity of material, in this condition, is hard to place in a typological and chronological context. On the contrary, this very condition is a testimony in itself. Rather than being a random aggregate of broken parts, the pottery from Vrysinas may be considered as a meaningful assemblage.

The main feature of the pottery is that it comes from a special site, a ritual place where ceremonies took place. This requires a special consideration of the material, following the perspective of exceptional behaviour. Thus the questions posed right from the start took their coordinates from the particularity of the site. This meant that researchers were less occupied with typological elements, on which the Vrysinas material could in any case shed only limited light, and focussed more on issues concerning the use and historical evolution of the area, issues of quantities and densities, issues of vessel ratios or fragmentation (thrausmatology) – matters which the pottery, despite or because of its poor condition, could better illuminate.

Consequently, the main methodological choice was to approach the pottery as a whole rather than just by isolating specific pieces, because the important testimony it has to offer lies in the functions which it served and of which it forms a part. As material remains, the pottery is the most visible and comprehensible trace of human activities indicating the ceremonial ritual according to which the vases with their contents were transported in their hundreds to the narrow mountain-tops. Moreover, the finds, remains of the activities of a sanctuary, also provide another kind of information, appearing as they do in different proportions to other types of site, such as settlements. In other words, the internal numerical composition of the whole also provides evidence on the nature of the activities that took place there. These aims have somewhat modified the priorities in the presentation of the material, putting use before production and distribution.

Aims

Three research aims, or rather guidelines, were followed from the outset. We tried not to lose sight of them throughout the course of our investigation.

A. The first aim was, generally speaking, temporal: the intention was to map the inner evolution and sequence of *the history of human presence at the site*. It was the quest for the diachronic course of human presence on the hill and its environs. The study of the sherds must document the temporal dimension, the sequences, the gaps or densities of human activity according to period. This would reveal the use of the site in different periods, possible differentiations in its use, and its inevitable association with contemporary local events. Mapping the typology and connecting it to the chronology was a difficult and ambiguous aim. Rendering the broken fragments in temporal slices in order to fit the succession of phases was a

slippery effort, and one that often risks enforcing an interpretation on the data.

The periods, as indicated by the pottery, either typologically or as densities of sherds from specific periods, did not succeed one another smoothly; there were gaps, and the typology did not always match the standard Knossian sequence. There were difficulties in establishing the successive phases, i.e. the diachrony, and especially the phases which could be seen as synchrony. Which vessels, which fabrics were used simultaneously with which? Diachrony is an easy concept to grasp; however, the synchrony that will provide a window onto the cult ritual is harder to map. The distinction between “living” pottery, that is pottery in use, and “dead” pottery, pottery already discarded, is crucial to the definition of a ritual, especially in complex depositional situations as is often the case at Peak Sanctuaries. The establishment of synchronicity carves diachrony up into slices, but is also in a way interlaced with it. Of all the questions arising from the ceramic material of a Peak Sanctuary, this is the one that counts more, for this is the one that sheds light on the ritual.

B. So the second, equally important aim, is predicated on *synchrony*. This is the *investigation of functions*, the attempt to comprehend the activities of the sanctuary in a finite, clearly delimited present. Only thus can appear the functions that presuppose the simultaneous, the co-functioning, the chain of use and distribution in a limited space, human motions, needs, in this case relationships, through the ceramic vessels used. For this to occur, the whole range of possible uses of a vessel must be ascertained: how it was placed upright, how it was tilted, how it was emptied, how it was held, what its capacity was, how it was transported; even what and how many things one could do with it.

For a Peak Sanctuary this is an issue of vast importance, as it is the investigation of the reason people visited the site, the gatherings there, its very existence. This, however, presupposes the definition of synchronous horizons that can be identified with a specific historical period or even events, for example refuge settlements. Concepts have been elaborated, such as the exceptions and peculiarities in the pottery that presuppose a regularity (also under investigation), regionalism that presupposes a centre, the rarity of parallels at regional level, human mobility. This brings us close to our third aim, the geographical area served by the sanctuary as it is reflected in the pottery.

C. The third aim is *geopolitical*. To understand the nature of the sanctuary we must understand the origins of the visitors, which in turn entails an understanding of the area it serves, the distances from the surrounding settlements and any groupings. Not only as a unit, not only with regard to geographical boundaries, contours and watersheds, but also with regard to the human catchment area. This will allow us to comprehend its wider role, insofar as the densities and communications between settlements are reflected, the roads and paths. A site of social gathering such as the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary also reflects the environs and the environment in both natural and human terms, having been shaped by those parameters. The choice of this site as a gathering-place is a historical and cultural phenomenon in itself. The basic source of information is the investigation of where the visitors came from, through pottery analysis. The fabrics were analysed using archaeometric methods. By means of successive examinations (mineralogical, chemical, petrographic), the ways in which clay, the raw material, was acquired are reconstructed along with the construction process of the vessel. The composition of the clay of a vase bears the imprint of the local geology, meaning that it is very likely to also bear the seal of the geographical origin of the vases that reached Vrysinas together with the people who brought them. The place of fabrication of a vessel is never far from the place of provenience of the clay, and so neither are the users.

This archaeometric examination of the ceramic deposits of Vrysinas has given rise to many important observations. The most significant may be that there is

a wide variety of ceramic traditions, which shows that visitors came from many different places, bringing with them their local pottery and their traditions too. The existence of many villages, hamlets and komai, the network of relationships linking them and the fact that people from various places of origin gathered at the sanctuary are all unarguably borne out by the pottery. Whereas most settlements only use one or two fabrics, 12 different types are present at the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary. Another significant fact is that the visitors did not come from very far afield – just 20 kilometres as the crow flies. The villages and townships lie around the foothills of the Vrysinas range or a little further away, but within a relatively limited radius. The main point of origin is to the south and southeast, the direction in which the sanctuary faced. These issues are analysed in the appendix on fabric analysis by Georgia Kordatzaki.

Shedding light on ritual. The periods of cult

Shedding light on the ceremonies of the past through material remains is a difficult and slippery business. As we know from other periods with written, oral or representational records, such a ceremony is a complex ritual consisting of the performance of scenic acts, the recital of speeches, the execution of dance movements accompanied by music and gestures, all absolutely predetermined, in strict and unvarying order. It is a fixed web of conscious or unconscious enactments. There is always a content, some sort of representation or invocation. There is always a scope and a repetition. Spoken and unspoken beliefs, oaths and prayers are expressed, and events both visible and invisible are represented by symbols, masks and dances in a prominent space. These rites are held in the context of community relationships which they reinforce or temporarily break in order for them to be magically renewed. All those belonging to a community are involved, whether by participating or by being excluded, wholly or in part. Everything happens repetitively; this, with their communality, is perhaps the main element of ritual ceremonies.

We have evidence for two periods of cult. The *first period of cult*, roughly corresponding to the Old Palace period, is the period when the cultic ceremonies as well as the communal gatherings took on their main traits. Archaeologically this is visible in the multiple types of animal and human figurines, considered to be votive offerings, and the presence of hundreds of broken vessels. The material belonging to this period forms almost 30% of the whole. The *second period of cult* follows without a break and corresponds to the Neopalatial period. The basic features of cult remain the same but some categories of vase prevail over the others. There are always hundreds of figurines, including some made of copper. The *third period of cult* comes after a break of almost two centuries and corresponds roughly to the Postpalatial and Protogeometric period. The material is numerically much reduced but some vessels related to cult, such as the snake tubes, support the idea of a third period of cult.

Numbers, categories, communal meals, fragmentation

The analysis of the vessel categories and their relative numbers has indicated a part of the human activities on the hill. Drinking and serving vessels predominate, as do those used for large-scale communal meals generally, in every period. These numbers were compared with those from settlements, where fewer such vessels are found, illustrating the differences in their use at the Peak Sanctuary. Communal meals are known from all periods of worship. However they present small but significant differences between the first and second periods. In Middle Minoan times there are slightly fewer drinking vessels and more pouring vessels, while in the second period there are more drinking vessels and far fewer and more uniform pouring vessels. In the first case, it is as though the banquet involved a serv-

er, a mediator (an act depicted on vases and seals, and familiar from mythology). In the second period, large communal meals may have involved a large vessel (like the large cooking pots of Vrysinas) from which participants helped themselves.

The fact that the pottery is so fragmented led us to investigate the way in which this fragmentation came about. The main question was whether the vessels were shattered deliberately or accidentally. Unfortunately this proved impossible to decide. The accidental breakage theory is supported by the lengthy exposure of the sherds to the elements. On the other hand, a deliberate act of fragmentation is indicated by the fact that a vast amount of pottery was shattered into unusually tiny pieces, the fact that only few pieces of the vessels can be joined, and also the phenomenon of consistently missing parts. This is particularly striking in the pithoi, where only a very small part of each pot is preserved, in spite of their great durability and discernibility.

A communal gathering-place

Mainly due to the finds, among many other elements, the hilltop of Vrysinas is interpreted as a place of ritual ceremonies and also a place of communal gatherings and worship. With the symbolic character they acquire over time, gathering-places in ancient Greece coexist and meld with cult spaces. The communal, collective aspect of places of worship predominates. The symbolisms and ritual promote and display equality and communality. The interpretation of Minoan society as one promoting communality and solidarity around the palaces was proposed by Driessen (2015) mainly with regard to the towns. A basic premise underlying the analysis of the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary, of which this volume forms a part, is that peak sanctuaries form a phenomenon of social life based on communality. They are places of political decision-making, like the amphictyonies of ancient Greece. An amphictyony was not only a league of ancient cities but also a gathering-place of clans, a place of worship and a place marking the political and religious unity between people of the same nation (ethnos). Peak sanctuaries could be thought of as an early form of amphictyony in Minoan Crete.

Due to its location alone, Vrysinas could be compared to a no-man's-land set among pastures and mountain paths. It would not have been the hinterland of any specific village or township. By definition, it would have stood at the edge of several, perhaps radially, forming a place where kin groups or clans could gather at a spot where the hinterlands of the settlements, the chorai, converged, near natural passes. It is a natural meeting-place, albeit selected by long-standing tradition as the place where neighbours, extended family members and kin groups would gather at regular intervals. Relationships were confirmed, conflicts resolved or at least cooled, the dead numbered and remembered. We must not imagine this as something fixed. Kin groups would increase or decrease, there would be movement, people might have multiple rather than exclusive relationships depending on family ties, age and so on. It was also a meeting with supernatural powers, the irrational, the hereafter, which all the visitors invoked and attempted, by words, small figurines and perhaps movements, to speak to and tame. Often, indeed almost always, these places are found next to springs and watercourses, like the ancient Greek sanctuaries. The same is true of Vrysinas.

The archaeological material forms part of the material remains, insignificant paraphernalia of the high events that included communal meals, wine-drinking and probably singing and dancing.

From the vessels we can extrapolate some of the visitors' movements and aims; this is the contribution of the pottery to our knowledge of the ritual, and also the contribution of the present volume. The movements inferred from the shape of the vessels are the most basic human motions, the most tangible, where physiology meets ergonomics. At the same time, they are the most deeply shaped by culture,

reflecting as they do human relationships with the natural and cultural environment in their most spontaneous expressions. How one drinks, how one raises the cup to one's lips, how one takes one's food from the dish; these are all among the deepest cultural elements that have come to seem natural although they are not.

Catalogue of diagnostic sherds

The actual picture of the pottery is provided by a catalogue of diagnostic sherds. The text, i.e. the catalogue itself and the comments, is followed by illustrations. Every effort was made to ensure that the catalogue is representative of the pottery as a whole, not just the best-quality or best-preserved pieces. The material is presented in chronological order: Neolithic, Early Bronze Age and Middle Minoan I, followed by the three periods of cult, the Protopalatial, Neopalatial and Postpalatial. A catalogue of the few sherds from historical times is also provided. The vessels are not ranked exclusively by shape (not always possible, in any case) but also by use categories. In some cases, such as conical cups, miniature vases and beehives, the types are treated in separate chapters as autonomous groups.

Issues of representation and display. Pottery and figurines

All the level areas on the peak of Vrysinas were chock-full of small human and animal figurines (the largest human ones measuring 20 cm at the most, the animal figurines a little larger), in a variety of shapes and colours. There were also dozens of vessels. They were everywhere, in the rocks and among the bushes, placed on natural supports or on bases of different materials, upright or shifted by the wind, rain or human intervention. They called attention to themselves, contributing to the formation of the landscape of the peak; both the brightly-coloured, most recently deposited examples, and the older ones, largely similar in outline.

Everywhere among them were vases with appliqué human and animal figurines which, above and beyond their chief function, also participated in the construction of this pictorial universe. They bore decorative representations consisting of polychrome clay applications, placed on the wide inner and outer open surfaces, on the rim, on the handles or inside the bottom. The iconography is varied: either landscapes with rocks, branches, birds and small snakes, in a wide range of attitudes and movements, or human figures, mainly female but also a few male. These vases with the multitude of applied clay depictions are one of the unique features of Protopalatial Vrysinas, coinciding with the first period of cult at the site.

Highlighting historicity. The beginning and end of the Peak Sanctuaries

Human presence on the peak of Agio Pneuma was discontinuous. From the pottery we learn about the sporadic and limited presence in Neolithic times and the almost total absence of humans in the Early Bronze Age. There followed the two periods of intense visitation associated with the two periods of cult. The first, in general lines, was in the Protopalatial period. The second was in the Neopalatial. The ritual was essentially shaped then, presupposing the participation of large groups of people. These two periods, the First and Second Period of Cult, succeeded each other without major changes to the ritual. Then there is a gap (LMIB, LMII, LMIIIA). This was probably followed by a third period of worship at the end of the Bronze Age (LMIIIB-C), quite different in character, that continued within Early Geometric and Geometric times. Thereafter human presence was extremely rare. There are a few Hellenistic sherds and even fewer from the Roman period.

The issue highlighted by the evidence is the discontinuity of human presence and, consequently, worship. Usually it is continuity that is stressed. Here, discontinuity emerges in the sense of chronological gaps. The reoccupation of the area in different periods may be seen as a revival, a resurgence. The cult, the large gatherings at

the Vrysinas Peak Sanctuary, is a historical phenomenon: it appeared around 1900 BC, sometime in the MMIB period, and came to an end circa 800 BC, towards the end of the Geometric era. In between, human presence was uneven: there were periods of intense visitation interspersed with gaps. The sanctuary was connected to urbanisation in Crete, followed the development of the towns and waned with the flourishing of the Minoan cities. When it reappeared for a while, it was associated with refuge settlements in the LMIIIC period, when populations moved to mountainous areas like Vrysinas, as the surface survey shows.

Translation by Rosemary Tzanaki