

EXCHANGE BETWEEN CYPRUS AND CRETE IN THE 'DARK AGES' ?

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This paper intends to discuss different kinds of exchange between Crete and Cyprus during the so called Dark Ages, referring respectively to the Subminoan period (Crete) and to LC III B (Cyprus). In comparison to the Late Bronze Age with its interregional system of exchange throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, the Dark Ages has traditionally been seen as a period of regression and retreat, especially in regard to interregional communication. Because the archaeological data post-dating the collapse of the Late Bronze Age system is scarce and because no texts have been preserved, many studies concerning the Dark Ages have been based on the idea of regionally isolated societies in economic retreat and lacking in any standard of interregional communication. New finds, however, and changing perspectives have shed light on this picture and partly revised the idea of complete isolation. In line with this revised theory on the state of art in the Dark Ages, the following essay will investigate the question with respect to finds on Crete and Cyprus.

All material evidence indicating exchange through import and in the form of stylistic parallels has been examined against the background of the development of settlements and of changes in the material culture on both islands. In order to prevent a bias of interpretation, theories of migration have been ignored. Regarding the question of an exchange of goods, all possible imports on Crete and Cyprus, those of Cypriote and Cretan origin, as well as those of other regions in the Eastern Mediterranean have been taken into account. The phenomena of down-the-line trade and trade centres rules out the option of restricting the material base of evidence to Cretan and Cypriote finds only.

The Cretan artefacts often considered as imports have been less useful in trying to determine interregional exchange, since their context is either

unknown or unreliable or cannot be exactly dated. In some other cases the poor state of preservation has prevented a stylistic or any other kind of examination as to the artefacts' place or date of origin. Under better circumstances, a transfer of ideas or materials can be proven if the stylistic or scientific characteristics of the imports and the find context are able to be dated within the examined time frame. Things are more promising in the case of Cyprus. Here there is clear evidence for an LC III B archaeological context for some of the imports. One-handed and two-handed lentoid flasks of South-Levantine origin have been found in Salamis Tomb 1¹ and in the tombs of Alaas,² Lapithos,³ Kourion⁴ and Palaepaphos-Kouklia.⁵ A scarab from Enkomi,⁶ dated stylistically to the 19th or 20th dynasty, should also be taken into account. Some exchange, especially with the Southern Levant is therefore to be assumed. CG I vessels from Israel, furthermore, support this assumption.⁷ But what do these artefacts say about the range of this system of exchange? Was it restricted to Cyprus and the Southern Levant, or is it part of a far-reaching network ranging throughout the Eastern Mediterranean?

The extant data regarding imported goods on Crete is too minimal to allow an adequate assessment of the island's involvement in an Eastern Mediterranean communication system. Stylistic and thematic parallels in the local Cretan and Cypriot production do, however, hint at some kind of exchange. Quite similar to the Late Bronze Age, common stylistic and thematic elements in the different material cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean are also characteristic for the Dark Ages. Local production on Crete and Cyprus falls under this category. The most popular examples of stylistic and thematic parallels are the characteristics of

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¹ YON 1971, 45–48, No. 93, 94, 104, 105, 106, pl. 27.

² KARAGEORGHIS 1973, 57, Tomb 15, No. 13, Tomb 17, No. 26.

³ PIERIDOU 1965, pl. XIII, 10, Tomb P. 74, No. 79, 98.

⁴ DANIEL 1937, 73, 26, 66, 86, 57, 49, pl. I, IV.

⁵ KARAGEORGHIS 1967, 20, figs. 8, 17.

⁶ COURTOIS 1971, 328.

⁷ MAZAR 1994, 39–59.

the Proto-White Painted ware of Cyprus and the Subminoan ware of Crete.⁸ But the question remains: in which cases can they be accepted as genuine proof of an exchange of style and decoration during the Dark Ages?

Such parallels are to be considered as valid indications only if they cannot otherwise be explained in the context of their local ceramic tradition. So, for the present example of Cretan and Cypriot ware, it is necessary to rule out all common features already shared by the ceramic styles of both islands in the Late Bronze Age. Most of the vessel shapes, in particular, had shown up on both islands during the flourishing Late Aegean Bronze Age, so their appearance in the Proto-White Painted and the Subminoan repertoires cannot be taken as proof of materials transfer or artistic communication. I.e., the possibility of a separate development rooted in the genuine tradition of either island cannot be ruled out.

The exclusion of the above mentioned examples is methodologically necessary, but there are other parallels between the two islands, which still have to be considered in light of the question of a system of exchange:

As Desborough already recognized, the pyxis with vertical handles, rising from the flat base, is one such example.⁹ On Crete this special pyxis shape became popular from LM III C onwards¹⁰ and is comparable with the few Proto-White Painted pyxides on Cyprus, as the examples from Salamis and Palaepaphos show.¹¹ A singular pyxis with a ring base from a III B stratum of Enkomi was classified by DIKAIOS as local LH III C and can be seen as a forerunner of the Cypriot type.¹²

Also, the painting on one Proto-White Painted example, showing a goat, a bird and a person carrying a kylix seems to have affinities to the closed style of LM III C pottery on Crete.¹³ Pieridou particularly emphasizes the depiction of the goat, painted in silhouette, as a Subminoan inspiration for Cypriot animal depictions.¹⁴ However, the LM III C ceramic from Crete shows a preference for the open style, nor

could YON find a suitable comparison in LM III B ceramic.¹⁵ The earliest example on Crete is, in fact, a goat in silhouette on a Subminoan crater of the Giamalakis collection, and IACOVOU showed clearly that this manner of representation had been known in Cyprus since the Late Bronze Age and that the Cretan goat in silhouette more likely traces back to Levantine or Cypriot prototypes.¹⁶ On the one hand, then, we have a transfer of the shape and perhaps even some features of the painting from Crete to Cyprus, while it is assumed, on the other hand, that the goat in silhouette was passed from Cyprus or the Levant on to Crete.

Another parallel is the duck vase with a basket-handle, a simple spout instead of a head, and three small elevations like legs. This vessel form appears on both islands in the course of the Subminoan and LC III B periods.¹⁷ Even if we accept that duck vases in general already existed on Cyprus, the variant considered in this study differs from its earlier counterparts.¹⁸ The extreme similarities in shape and manner of the examples from both islands rule out the explanation of independent development in their respective local cultures. Therefore it must be assumed an influence between the two islands, no matter which direction—in opposition to Desborough and Pieridou, who support the idea of a one-way transfer of the duck vase from Crete to Cyprus without, however, presenting an argument for their opinion.¹⁹

The same results in the case of the amphoriskos with false spout. The shape is quite popular in the Proto-White Painted ware of Cyprus²⁰ and there are few Cretan examples.²¹ The shape cannot be traced back earlier than to the Subminoan and LC III B periods. The apparent spout, which is closed and eventually became a rudimentary element, is such a characteristic feature of this vessel that its separate development on each island is hardly probable, though it must be admitted that the direction of influence cannot be determined.

The shape of the so called *kantharos* in the repertoire of Subminoan pottery is so similar to the exam-

⁸ FURUMARK 1944, 194–265; DESBOROUGH 1972, 112–133.

⁹ DESBOROUGH 1972, 62.

¹⁰ SEIRADHAKI 1960, 18, fig. 12; SACKETT POPHAM 1965, 289; POPHAM 1967, 337–351, pl. 90b, c; HALL 1914, pl. 30; KANTA 1980, 282, 4–5.

¹¹ YON 1971, 41, pl. 25, 79; MAIER 1969, pl. III, 2; KARAGEORGHIS 1965, 73, 1–7; PIERIDOU 1973, 64.

¹² DIKAIOS 1969, pl. 82, 27.

¹³ DESBOROUGH 1972, 62, 56, fig. A.

¹⁴ PIERIDOU 1973, 64.

¹⁵ YON 1970, 311–17.

¹⁶ IACOVOU 1988, 81.

¹⁷ PIERIDOU 1973, 68/69; HALL 1914, fig. 92, 1–2; DESBOROUGH 1972, 61.

¹⁸ LEMOS 1994, 229–37.

¹⁹ DESBOROUGH 1972, 60–62; PIERIDOU 1973, 68–69.

²⁰ PIERIDOU 1973, 20, pl. 7, No. 4–8.

²¹ KANTA 1980, 286.

ples in the Proto-White-Painted ceramic that it is also interpreted as evidence of a certain connection between the two islands.²² It can be considered as a sub-group of the earlier amphoroid crater, which had been popular on both islands in the period preceding the Dark Ages. The Subminoan²³ and Proto-White Painted examples,²⁴ however, are smaller in size than their predecessors and have a biconical body, a broad conical foot, and the wide type of handles. The striking similarity in development of this shape, resulting in a smaller variant in both repertoires, is not explainable without assuming some kind of inter-regional communication.

Another parallel is the depiction of a triangle enclosing semicircles on the shoulder of a stirrup jar (FS 177). This characteristic decoration system is restricted to Cretan and Cypriot ceramic repertoires originating in the period under study,²⁵ so that some form of influence – regardless of the direction – is probable. Even if the decoration system plays a significant role in the Cretan context, Desborough's assumption of a Minoan origin is not necessary.

All these ceramic features appear on both islands in the course of the Dark Ages. Even if an analogous vessel form or a kind of decoration can be traced back to similarities in the respective repertoires of the Late Bronze Age, a characteristic item of the Dark Ages example enable to distinguish it from the forerunner. The idea of a one-way influence from one island to the other cannot be confirmed. The uncertainties in chronology are the greatest hindrance in determining the direction of transfer. There are a few exceptions, for which the direction of transfer seems clear, but they do not seem to be homogeneous. The example of the pyxis, for instance, suggests that a Cretan shape influenced the development of a Cypriot analogy, while the painting of a goat in silhouette suggests a transfer the other way around. Based on some aspects of the actual archaeological context, there seems to have been a situation of mutual influence.

The interpretation of an exclusive system of transfer between Crete and Cyprus in the Dark Ages seems too limited. At the very least, vessel shapes like the bottle-shaped vase, the kylix with swollen stem, and the belly-handled amphora and amphoriskos, which appeared on both islands in the course of the Dark Ages, have to be regarded in a wider context. The bottle-shaped vases from Karphi²⁶ and a Sub-Mycenaean example of the Kerameikos in Attica²⁷ stand opposite the broad spectrum of Cypriot Proto-White Painted vessels, whose prototype is assumed to be from the Levant.²⁸ In none of the areas is the shape documented earlier, so at least some form of exchange must have taken place among these regions during the period analysed in this study.

Also the shape of the kylix with the swollen stem,²⁹ as mentioned above, is represented in all three areas during this period and it can be even traced back to the LH III C ware.³⁰ The same applies for the belly-handled amphoras³¹ and amphoriskoi.³² Desborough's interpretation of the Minoan belly-handled amphora as influenced by Cypriot ware³³ does not represent the whole spectrum of interpretations. The possible interpretation of an exchange is much wider, and the Greek mainland has to be considered in the context of such kind of exchange.

An interpretation based solely on imported goods does not allow the reconstruction of a system of exchange including both islands. An exchange of goods can be established to some degree for Cyprus and the Southern Levant, but there is no clear evidence for Cretan involvement.

But how can we account for the mutual assimilation of elements not able to be explained as independent developments out of similar Late Bronze Age ceramic traditions? Examples for the assimilation of stylistic elements in the Late Bronze Age are plenty, but in this period the high number of imports, which could have inspired them, explain the phenomena easily. It is not possible, however, to explain the sub-

²² DESBOROUGH 1972, 57.

²³ SEIRADAKI 1960, 1–37, fig. 14, 7, pl. 11b; KANTA 1980, 274.

²⁴ PIERIDOU 1973, 34, pl. 23, 4–9.

²⁵ SEIRADAKI 1960, 1–37, fig. 11, 1, 3.; HALL 1914, 150, fig. 89; HOOD, HUXLEY, SANDARS 1958/59, 194–262, fig. 27; PIERIDOU 1973, 67/68.

²⁶ SEIRADAKI 1960, pl. 11b.

²⁷ KRAIKER, KÜBLER 1939, pl. 27.

²⁸ PIERIDOU 1973, 69.

²⁹ KLING 1989, 143, fig. 9d; PIERIDOU 1973, 58; KANTA 1980, 264.

³⁰ MOUNTJOY 1986, 172, fig. 222.1.

³¹ MOUNTJOY 1986, 202; PIERIDOU 1973, 61, pl. 19, 4–6; HOOD, HUXLEY, SANDERS, 1958–59, 241, Fig 27: VII 2

³² MOUNTJOY 1986, 121, 124; fig. 150, KANTA 1980, 166, PIERIDOU 1973, 60, pl. 18, 6–11, COLDSTREAM, CATLING 1996, 303, fig. 73; SACKETT, POPHAM 1965, 295, fig. 15: P 23; SEIRADAKI 1960, 21, fig. 14, BOYD 1901, pl. II, 8; HALL 1914, 146, fig. 86d; BROCK 1957, pl. 3, 3.

³³ DESBOROUGH 1973, 59.

sequent assimilations without assuming some kind of exchange, regardless of whether the artefacts showing these characteristics were imported or the exchange of stylistic parallels occurred otherwise.

But what kind of system of exchange can we assume for the Dark Ages? The palatial system of the Late Bronze Age disappeared or at least decreased, but this does not seem to have been the only level of exchange conducted. The texts of Ugarit hint that traders attained a certain independency from the redistributive palatial system in the course of the Late Bronze Age.³⁴ Furthermore, the different descriptions of traders in Ugarit are interpreted by Liverani as indications for the existence of official and private kinds of traders.³⁵ The private traders must have been free to regulate their administrative duties themselves and must have had enough economic freedom to carry on the transfer into the Dark Ages.

The decrease in palatial exchange also led to alterations in the character of the exchange. The palatial demand for luxury goods from far away places stopped, which resulted in the decrease of an important archaeological source of evidence.

Cyprus, in particular, contains the potential for an

active participation in an interregional exchange during this period. It is true that many changes are obvious in the local material culture of Cyprus, but nonetheless it is also true that the settlement shift occurring at the end of the Late Bronze Age resulted furthermore in an orientation to the sea. Either this happened out of habit, in spite of any possible dangers, or the sea remained an indispensable factor for the maintenance of subsistence level.

In conclusion, any study into the range of a system of exchange involving Cyprus and Crete in the so called Dark Ages must widen the perspective to include the Eastern Mediterranean area and account for the development on Cyprus. That done, the stylistic and thematic parallels evident in the material cultures of both islands must be interpreted as scant archaeological remains of a much broader spectrum of exchange ranging throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Unfortunately the types of exchange, the organizational structures, and the goods transferred, all of which triggered the sort of artistic and material assimilation described in this article, cannot be determined on the basis of the present state of art.

³⁴ RS 16.238: 1–11.

³⁵ LIVERANI 1962, 86.

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