

A GREAT MINOAN TRIANGLE: THE CHANGING  
CHARACTER OF PHAISTOS, HAGIA TRIADHA, AND KOMMOS  
DURING THE MIDDLE MINOAN IB-LATE MINOAN III PERIODS

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Kommos, Hagia Triadha, and Phaistos hold many of the clues to the historical interpretation of the Messara in the second millennium B.C. I have benefited from discussions with numerous persons in the formation of these observations, especially my Italian colleague Vincenzo La Rosa. Phaistos, at the western end of the fertile Messara Plain, is strategically situated to administer the plain's rich agricultural production. Hagia Triadha is on the last hill between Phaistos and the Libyan Sea. Kommos, located to the south, lies at an excellent harbour near a good fresh water spring, with a productive hinterland of small plots and hills.

The preeminent position of these three sites in the second millennium may be contrasted with the situation in earlier times. The first known settlement of this part of Crete dates to the Final Neolithic.(1) Phaistos and Kommos were already settled by this period, along with many other small raised hills used as open village sites. The earliest habitation of Hagia Triadha is less well known, but certainly by the Early Bronze Age it was settled as well because its residents were buried in two nearby tholos tombs (Banti 1930-31). Before Middle Minoan IB, we have little archaeological evidence to single out these three sites as among the most important sites of southern Crete. It is possible we are misguided by the clearing and levelling operations of MM I-II that may have destroyed much of the earlier remains, but it is clear that wealth was shared more generally within the Messara in EM and MM than it was in later times. Abundant evidence for this situation exists in the richness of the EM to MM I locations like Koumasa, Platanos, and other tholos tomb sites.(2)

By the end of MM I, however, several changes have occurred. These changes are part of a general pattern that can be traced at many points in Crete. Within the period EM III/MM I, coastal settlements are expanded, palaces are built or enlarged, and many new villages are built. In the Messara, there is evidence for either an increase or a redistribution of population. Some old sites are expanded, and many new ones are founded. At about the same time, some very fundamental changes occur in the production of manufactured goods like bronzes and pottery. These changes can be traced most easily in the ceramics industry where an increase in quality and quantity is accompanied by basic technological improvements including the introduction of the potter's wheel and a new type of clay preparation.(3) In addition, we have a gradual increase in the number of

foreign products found in Crete. Finally, one can trace the emergence of architectural focal points, with the largest centre located at Phaistos.

Within these changes, it is difficult to distinguish cause from effect. Did a more efficient resource management centred at Phaistos lead to a general increase in population, or did the pressure from more population create a need for a more centralized authority? Did a desire for trade require technological improvements and a larger production, or are they the result of new ideas brought in by overseas contacts? The truth may lie in a complex interrelationship of many factors, what Colin Renfrew has called the "multiplier effect" (Renfrew 1972: Chapter 3).

There is no doubt that Phaistos was the largest and most influential site in southern Crete from MM IB until the end of LM IB.(4) Its monumental architecture, brilliant arts, and fine manufactured products were imported or imitated throughout the Messara. Its palace was surrounded by a substantial town, and it was surely politically and economically preeminent. Although it suffered partial or complete architectural damage after MM IIA, MM IIB, and MM III, it was always rebuilt until the destruction of IM IB.

Other sites with important histories at this time surely owed their prosperity to decisions made at Phaistos, decisions that distinguished one site from another for Phaistian-centred reasons. Hagia Triadha was already important by this period, and by MM III to LM IB it had fine ashlar buildings and turned out art objects like the well-known series of carved stone vases of the highest quality.(5) Farther down the coast, Kommos was very greatly enlarged in MM IB, and its prosperity continued to increase during the period (Shaw 1984, with earlier bibliography). By LM I it boasted a large building of ashlar masonry with a central(?) courtyard, a sizeable town, and a general aura of industry and prosperity. Finds of crucibles from metalworking and of wasters from ceramic kilns suggest manufacturing at the local level.

The picture changes radically in LM II to LM III. Phaistos and Hagia Triadha were destroyed at the end of LM IB, and Kommos was damaged.(6) Substantial architectural changes occurred in the next period. While only houses have been found at Phaistos from this time, both Hagia Triadha and Kommos have revealed a sequence of large and well-built structures, clearly too large and too specialized to be private dwellings. At Hagia Triadha these buildings are joined by an axial construction of the "megaron" type, by a shrine, and by a number of well-built houses, constructed more splendidly than at Kommos.

Although architectural phases at Kommos may be recognized for LM II, LM IIIA1, LM IIIA2, and LM IIIB, the most fundamental change is the one that occurs after the middle of IM IIIB. By the end of IIZB Kommos is abandoned, Phaistos is nearly deserted, and Hagia Triadha has only a remnant of its earlier population. LM IIIC is rare in this part of Crete, attested mainly by a few scraps of wall, some shrines, and a few tombs. Apparently most of the population has abandoned the coast.

Perhaps the most important part of a workshop like the present one is the generation of a series of questions for general discussion, both in this forum and elsewhere. Several of these questions emerge from this briefest of historical sketches:

1. Where did the increase in population in MM IB come from? Where did the population go in LM IIIB?
2. If Kommos was a port by MM I, what does this imply about the specialization of the Cretan economy by this period? Could a town exist without being an agricultural centre?
3. If Kommos was the harbour-town for the Messara during much of the second millennium B.C., should it be regarded as a dependency of Phaistos until the end of LM IB and a dependency of Hagia Triadha during LM IIII?
4. How can Kommos have been raised to importance as a port if the quantity of imports only becomes large in the Late Bronze Age, well after it was already a significant town? Can it have been a palace in its own right during LM I, perhaps subservient to Phaistos, but drawing its wealth from the rich grazing lands to the south and from the many small fertile plots in the hills south of the Messara?

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#### NOTES

1. For the relation to the Late Neolithic and to other Final Neolithic sites see Vagnetti 1972-1973; Vagnetti and Belli 1978.
2. Xanthoudides 1924; Branigan 1970; for a recently excavated example see Blackman and Branigan 1982.
3. For evidence of a fundamental change see Myer 1984:62-63.
4. For the excavations of Levi, and for earlier bibliography for the entire region centred around Phaistos, see Levi 1976.
5. For the early bibliography see Pernier and Banti 1947; for LM see Halbherr et al. 1977.
6. The damage at Kommos may be documented from Building J/T, for which see Shaw 1984:272.

## DISCUSSION

Joseph Shaw:

Let me just make a few comments here. One thing is, when we are talking about port I think we should have a sense of what we mean. We are not talking about a great emporium, a Pozzuoli or a Portus, let us say, like what you would find along the coast of Roman Italy. We are talking about a town which would serve ships: fishing ships; ships which would go beyond the islands; and to the East and to the West; serving a number of purposes, I think. So we are thinking of "harbour", which is not going to become a major port in our own sense. Is that fair, Phil?

Betancourt:

Exactly right.

Geraldine Gesell:

I was wondering what your definition of "palace" was? When you talk about pinpointing Kommos as a palace in its own right, what really do you have in mind?

Betancourt:

Well, of course this is at the heart of the "palace" has been probably defined more often ways than any other building in antiquity. I how one defines the word "palace". In the Near East often means the seat of a king. I raise it as an issue. I think there is a move among many people in the Aegean to define palace as something almost synonymous with a complex redistribution centre, whatever that, in its turn, may mean. I think that we are generally thinking of a seat of power, something which is administering a substantial area geographically, or politically, or population-wise, or all three, and which may or may not be subservient to another seat of power. I hesitate to use the word "palace", but I am posing it as a question, and I think, if one is considering the relationships between sites, one has to at least raise the issue for discussion. And that is my intent.

Guenter Kopcke:

Could you restate the last question because I wish to answer to it, but I am not sure that I completely understood?

Betancourt:

Fine. How can Kommos have been raised to importance as a seaport or port if the quantity of imports only becomes large in the Late Bronze Age well after it was already a significant town? Can it have been a palace in its own right during IM I, perhaps subservient to Phaistos but drawing its wealth from the rich grazing lands to the south and from the many small fertile plots in the hills south of the Messara? Basically, I am posing the question of can it have had an economic base aside from its function as an outlet for another site to the sea?

Elizabeth Barber:

I am concerned about a certain matter as well. My own interest has been in textiles, and I find all the time that we tend to forget about the things that do not leave much evidence behind them and yet which, for what little evidence we have, had to have been economically very important. What strikes me here is that in order to develop shipping one presumably develops it on the local level first or develops ships. And I am thinking about fishing as possibly, a very major industry. Could this have been originally a fishing port supplying very large quantities of protein to the interior? And it has then gradually shifted over to an import - export kind of port? One might think about the vanishing evidence as well. Thank you.

Betancourt:

Let me address that. Yes, I think there is no doubt that there is a shift either in the quantity or the type of goods that are brought in, or in the way, or in the basic reason for bringing the goods in. I think Vance Watrous has clearly demonstrated that there is a distinct shift in the type of foreign object that we get at the site through time. Fishing is something that must have been important in the Bronze Age. This requires ships, and, of course, this requires an outlet to the sea. I am struck more by the suddenness of the expansion of the site in MM IB. We have virtually no evidence at all for EM II, EM III, or MM IA. It is very scanty. We have abundant evidence for MM IB, as if a conscious decision was made: "this site shall be expanded". I think this prompts us then to ask why and, to get at this, we have to address what the economic reasons were for expanding sites at the beginning of the Second Millennium. And certainly trade and fishing are things to be considered, but I think an administration of an economic base of agricultural or animal husbandry has to be considered also, if not as the main focus, at least as one possibility.

Joseph Shaw:

I would address a question to Professor Betancourt. Hagia Triadha has been said by many people, including Sinclair Hood, to be a port in its own right, in which ships sailing up the Geropotamos River, which goes right next to it, would have docked; or, according to another scenario, that there is a broad, deep alluvial deposit which, according to Bintliff, was not there during the Late Bronze Age, which is, of course, the period that we are considering. Therefore, does he think it is a possibility? Then to bounce the question that he himself asked back at him, to what extent does he think Hagia Triadha, seeing what we have learned there through the excavation, could serve as an administration centre for what we have found at Kommos?

Betancourt:

On the question of Hagia Triadha as a sea port, I think it is not impossible. I think it is quite likely that, at least at some period in its history, Hagia Triadha functioned in this way. I do not see any real evidence that would prohibit this. We are then, I suppose, to question the existence or possibility for two sea ports for the southern Messara, and this makes us wonder, of course, precisely what the situation might be. But it is not unparalleled in Crete. For example, from Knossos one can go north and find Katsamba and Amnisos, which have already been mentioned today as two outlets on the sea. On the other hand, certainly Hagia Triadha is more conveniently situated in relation to Phaistos to function as a sea port, because it is closer than Kommos, if for no

other reason. As to the question, you know ... we just wonder.

Vance Watrous:

I wonder if I could not supplement what Phil has said. We, this summer, myself and some Greek students with a Greek co-director, began what we hope to be a three-year survey project to the north of Kommos, roughly in the area between Hagia Triadha, Phaistos, and Kommos. I want to second what Phil said about the beginnings of Kommos in MM I. We found, somewhat to my great surprise anyway, thirty-three sites that had MM I occupation in the area that we worked which is roughly nine to ten square kilometres. It is an incredible explosion of population in MM IB. Well, I think that is enough.

Guenter Kopcke:

I wonder whether it is true. I have the impression that the megaron, or so-called megaron at Hagia Triadha, is the one architectural undertaking in the fourteenth century that can be called a substitute for the earlier palaces on Crete. I know of no other architectural enterprise of a comparable order. And I find, if this were true, then this alone should make one think that Hagia Triadha had an organizing priority in the area. The other question that I just wanted to briefly address is the validity of pottery in terms of arguing export and foreign connections and so on. It is of course our most obvious tool. But, I will not comment on the Middle Bronze Age, but on the fact, for instance, that in Egypt, and this is well known to most of you here in the audience, we have the emissaries from Crete, and I think they are emissaries from Crete, while we have hardly any Cretan pottery. And this has been observed in the latest publication on this whole question as being a paradox. It is a paradox. But it shows us that pottery is not necessarily a reliable indicator. On the other hand, the other side of the medal, when you have expansive Mycenaean export to the Middle East at a later date it must not necessarily mean that the Aegean trade was more intensive. I know this sounds rather heretical and really could lead into another extensive discussion. I just want to say here with particular regard to Kommos, I think that Vance Watrous has mentioned that the later foreign pottery, that means fourteenth/ thirteenth century, is found in the private houses. I hope I understood this correctly. It is the majority. Now what this means is really very little in terms of trade. What this means is that the people who live there, and these houses we heard about today too, compare not too well with the large establishment in the harbour area itself. What this may mean is that the mariners, the seamen, or whoever it was, who lived in these houses, which were not that splendid anymore at that time, that these in some way brought with them or had access to this kind of foreign material. But this may be a very limited level in society. It really, when you analyze it, may not give you very much on the foreign evidence. I also will mention here the fact that you have the spread of Mitanni seals which is really our most valid evidence for Aegeans being involved in trade at this time. Over all of Greece I think twenty-two is the number now. These are cheap things and everyone had access to them. You have these in just common contexts. So, what you have here is ... evidence that really points to a low level where the pottery does not really tell you very much of what goes on in the, you might call it, "palatial" or "organizing level". It is just that quantity does not weigh very heavily in the balance when you want to know about the intensity and the quality of the exchanges.

Betancourt:

Yes, let me come to the first part of that first. On the relationship between Kommos and Hagia Triadha which was raised earlier by Professor Shaw, I see a real correspondence in some architectural techniques used in LM IIIA at the two sites. It is a shame that Professor La Rosa was not able to be here because I am sure that he would have shared with you some of the slides of his current excavations which have clarified greatly the chronology and sequence of these buildings, and have added new buildings to our knowledge of the site, and have shown really that, besides the megaron, there are substantial modular buildings at the site, contemporary or nearly so with those at Kommos, and with many similarities of architectural design, such as the use of timber within stone walls. As to the question of pottery as an indicator of trade, I think of course you are right. The pottery, however, shows that we do have a change that occurs. The entire western connection is new in the Late Bronze Age and the intensity of connections with the East I do not think can be denied. We have pithos-sized large jars, for example, and even though they may show up in a domestic context, this still says something for contact, I think, between the two regions of a type which was not present before.

Jennifer Moody:

I would just like to go back to the point that you made about Kommos perhaps having the agricultural hinterland in the mountains or the hills around the area there and towards Matala, in that general region. And I think that this is something that is neglected often when talking about the Messara in that people focus on the valley itself and forget that those hills are perfectly usable as an economic base, and that it could have formed a subsistence base to this town, and that nothing more than a political tie need really be established for the connection between the major centres and the Messara, of Hagia Triadha and Phaistos.

Betancourt:

Yes, I would agree. And I really do feel that for a site of substantial size to exist, in certainly the Middle Bronze Age, it must have had an economic base. We see the growth of focal points like Knossos and Malia centred near the sea coast with a substantial agricultural region beyond them and behind them, and often an area which can be defined on the basis of, for example, pottery style which is related to the major site. If one then duplicates this in miniature with the villas, one can find again an architectural centre of population at places like Pyrgos Myrtou, again surrounded by a smaller, but no less arable, section of land which will have contributed the living substance of food and raw materials for the villa. Perhaps I see Kommos as a mid-point between villa and palace, as a regional manifestation that still required an architectural focal point, which was something less than Phaistos or Hagia Triadha, and something more than a villa like Pyrgos Myrtou. But I certainly feel that during the course of the Second Millennium, if its function did not change, at least it underwent some metamorphoses, and we see a gradual increase, for example, in the quantity of foreign goods that occur at the site. We see a gradual expansion in the size of the site. We see a culmination really in the fine ashlar buildings that we have looked at today.

Vance Watrous:

Just one small point. This summer we also had the services of a Greek geologist who worked with us, who spent some time following the watercourse of the Geropotamos river from Phaistos down to the coast. And he claims (I have not actually seen this, but there is no reason to disbelieve him) that he actually found bedrock not too far from the sea, in the actual river bed of the Geropotamos. If this is true, this would cast real doubts on those people, myself included, who argue that the coastline must have been tremendously closer to Hagia Triadha.

Betancourt:

That is a very interesting point and one I had not heard before. It is certainly something that will have to be taken into consideration. I think what we really need for the region is a series of coring operations that could nail this situation down once and for all.

Dick Hope Simpson:

In the survey of the Kommos region it is also noted that the expansion was not actually as sudden as MM IB, though we had one or two very good MM IB sites, but steadily throughout MM, there are far more sites than during EM, and in fact a lot more sites than the Late Minoan. So, in fact, you have perhaps a peak in MM II and MM III. You can not really tell from the survey evidence, because there may be more NM IB than one thought, but certainly an expansion in MM II parallel to what Vance Warrens had further north.

Betancourt:

Yes, I think that I perhaps simplified the case a bit for want of time today. Kommos, as you know, is also expanded in MM III substantially, and there are smaller and perhaps less dramatic shifts and changes that occur as well during the periods in question. There is certainly a shift between LM II and LM IIIA1 at the site. There is certainly a shift between IN IIIA1 - beginning of LM IIIA2 and the end of LM IIIA2 and IN IIIB, coinciding with the destruction level at Knossos that Vance Warrens has brought out, and these are indeed probably mirrors of important, perhaps dramatic, political events or population shifts that may have occurred.

Roger McCleary:

This has to do with Professor Watrous's point about the apparent major shift to the west of the trade in metals and I am wondering if the agency that was causing disruption in the eastern Mediterranean may in fact be these otherwise unknown folk referred to in the Amarna tablets from the period of Tutankhamun Year IV approximately, that refer to people who are vagabonds of the sea, who are disrupting the area of Captor and Alasia and points in the eastern Mediterranean, whether this may in fact be the agency that is disrupting all of the established trade patterns of the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age period which had been established at that time.

Vance Watrous:

That is a very large question; it is beyond my competence to tackle this question. I will point out though that Nancy Sanders has suggested pretty much the same thing for them, certainly in the Late IIIB and IIIC, but earlier than that I don't think I would like to hazard a guess.



Guenter Kopcke:

What intrigues me in this picture that Dr. Betancourt just painted for us is that there seems to be a shift from Phaistos to Hagia Triadha or maybe a shift from Phaistos to Hagia Triadha and Kommos, but, in any case, Phaistos seems to some extent to be sidelined, and one would say unexpectedly; because, after all, here you have a major centre of operations and all of a sudden one should abandon it in favour of another place, and one has to ask oneself why this other place. I wonder whether it might not have been economic consideration, but it indicates the importance of Hagia Triadha, pace Watrous, too. I wonder if whoever came in as a new ruler found it simply expedient to move the mansion or what it was, to that very spot.

Betancourt:

Although we shall surely never know the precise reasons for a shift away from Phaistos, I think we can discern some of the ingredients within the decision, in that they also involve Knossos, because Knossos also is not abandoned. It flourishes. It has a very dynamic pottery style, and in fact both at Hagia Triadha and at Kommos the pottery of LM II to a certain extent, but especially the pottery of LM IIIA and LM IIIA1 - LM IIIA2, is heavily dependent on Knossian style. Whatever decisions were made, and wherever they were made, Knossos is a crucial part of the decision making.

Joseph Shaw:

Well, I have learned something today. That mention by Vance of the bedrock that apparently appeared in the Geropotamos is quite new and quite interesting. My asking Professor Betancourt that question was slightly provocative, because I think Hagia Triadha is too high to have been close to the water at the time, especially when one has to work in a sea level change, a relative sea level change of at least 2.50 meters between now and then. So, I personally believe it was some distance from the sea, which, however, does not mean that it was not approachable from the sea, but you would need a road in order to do so.

Notes on a few things pointed out: the charting of the variables through the periods I think is most interesting and then the shifting away from Phaistos of, apparently, the population; the loss of palatial form after LM I when Phaistos is destroyed. We do not have at Hagia Triadha a nice, little Minoan palace; its really quite different from the architectural point of view and certainly reflects different habits and, I think, different aims. The shifting of centre and relationship therefore is something we certainly must spend more time on. As far as Kommos is concerned, these buildings on the south, these great ashlar buildings still need a great deal of thought, and we must publish what we have found out about them. Certainly we are not going to have the solution right away. On the other hand, during the coming summer when we are excavating down into those areas that Maria was talking about, the question of shipsheds, of commerce, of space for the keels, sizes of ships and whether they fit, are certainly going to be raised again and again. A very productive seminar, therefore, at least from my own point of view, and I would like to thank you very very much for your attention and participation, and if you are in the area, please come and visit us next summer. Thank you very much.