

CULTI E SANTUARI A FESTÒS IN EPOCA ALTOARCAICA.
PER UN'ANALISI FUNZIONALE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to attempt a functional analysis of the three sanctuaries built at Phaistos (Messara) during the rise of the *polis*. The first urban shrine was consecrated to the *Mater* and housed a temple in use from the end of the 7th century B.C. onwards; it was associated with performances of initiation rites for young aristocratic men (see shields and cauldrons – by the end of the 8th century B.C.) The second sanctuary, whose traces are actually very scanty, is located on the Phaistian hill known as the *Acropoli Mediana*. Finally, the *poros* head of lion (7th century B.C.), found near the HaghiosGeorghios in Falandra monastery, attests the existence of a third shrine, situated at the borders of the town, next to the future hellenistic fortification wall.

Outside the polis of Phaistos, there are some important extraurban sanctuaries. A cult area was found at HaghiaTriada: it is a sanctuary built on top of the abandoned BA settlement, which maybe was already consecrated to Velchanos (and Aphrodite?). The nature of the votives offerings suggests the periodic visits of the farmers coming from the surroundings (*woikeis?*): the worshippers asked for the protection on their herds, on their descendants, and on the human and animal fertility. Finally, at the close port of Kommos, a sanctuary of special interest for the *polis* of Phaistos was discovered; it is a genuine «santuariemporico». The presence in the temple B of the tripillar shrine, which corresponds to a phoenician symbol, reveals the importance of the interaction between inhabitants of this area and Levantine people, despite the scarcity of archaeological evidence. It is likely that, at the time of the rise of the *polis*, Phaistos used the port of Kommos to be involved in the Mediterranean trade routes. Ritual dinings, mostly performed near the temple B, were the occasion for the Doric elite of Phaistos to strengthen their relationships with traders coming from the Levant and the Aegean; it is likely that these foreign people were allowed to establish a trading post under the protection of the deities represented by the tripillar shrine. The aniconic aspect of the shrine furthered the interpretation of the symbols according to the different beliefs of the worshippers (Cretans, Levantines, Aegean populations).