

A HIPPODAMOS FROM LM IIIC PHAISTOS?

VINCENZO LA ROSA

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a Mycenaean sherd from the Florence Museum, which was published a few years ago without provenance. It depicts a human figure who holds the reins of two horses in a heraldic pose. Analysis of the archival documentation kept at the Soprintendenza alle Antichità at Florence has shown that the sherd has a Cretan provenance, and it is suggested that it was found at Phaistos.

From an iconographic point of view, the scene is interpreted as a simple hippodamos or hippophorbos (a horse tamer or keeper of horses), rather than a potistheròn, (master of animals), which could be dated to a middle-mature phase of LM IIIC. In other words, the warrior connotation is discounted as being less probable.

A hippodamos in LM IIIC Crete might represent, at the level of *imagérie*, not only a new iconographical input, but also an ideological one. The typology of the chariot with charioteer and warrior, which is connected to the apex of palatial power, had in fact developed into two different strands during LH IIIC: the knight on the one hand, and the hoplite (in file) on the other. The horsetamer does not seem to be identifiable with either of the two strands. The currently available documentation has led to the supposition that the new iconographic scheme may have been introduced to Crete from the coast of Palestine. In Crete the scene might have lost its plausibly religious meaning (as it has in the famous craters of Ugarit), in favour of a socio-political interpretation more correspondent to historical conditions in the island.

This new iconographical element is therefore inserted within the Cretan LM IIIC context, re-proposing the basic issue which is represented by the coexistence and variegated inter-twinings (in the various sites) of the local component with typologies, ceremonial uses and human groups of Mycenaean mainland provenance. The Mycenaean component or tradition, within which the hippodamos can be easily located, represents in any case one of the interpretative keys for the understanding of the historical dynamics of the Cretan Dark Age. It is finally noted that the new iconographical proposal can be inserted into a numerous series which is passed with minimal variations from the Mycenaean *imagérie* of LH IIIC (with a few examples in LH IIIB) to the Geometric period.

The introduction of the iconography of the hippodamos to Crete is probably linked to a new economic and socio-political reality, in which the owners of horses are close to becoming the members of a nascent oligarchy, at the same time as a true change occurs in the cultural history of the island.