

'RHYTOID' DIGRESSIONS FROM THE MESARA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on some rhytà from Phaistos, Ayia Triada and Kommos, which date mainly to the MM III period. After a brief review aimed at clarifying some major typological and functional issues of this category of evidence, the various types identified in the three sites are contrasted with one other with the aim of identifying meaningful patterns in their geographic and chronological distribution. This comparison highlights (a) that rhytà are only scarcely attested in the MM II period, with a concentration of evidence at Phaistos, which was the location of a palace; and (b) that in MM IIIA Kommos is the only site where all the types known (globular, conical, ostrich-egg, alastroid/piriform, bull's head) are attested, with an overall number of specimens that exceeds by far those of the other two sites, although the bull-head type seems to be specific to Ayia Triada and Phaistos. This pattern of distribution allows a relationship to be hypothesised between the rhytà and the structures of power, and suggests that during MM IIIA and the first part of MM IIIB Kommos and its building T became the administrative capital of the Mesara, while at the end of that period the baton was passed to the villa at Ayia Triada. A symbolic-psychoanalytic interpretation of the different types of rhytà is also proposed, assuming that their main function of pouring could somehow symbolise the vital course of the individual, from a perspective of gender representation.