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Exotica and the Early Minoan Elite: Eastern Imports in Prepalatial Crete

CYNTHIA S. COLBURN

Abstract

Eastern imports, including finished products, raw materials, and technologies, first appear in Crete in the Early Minoan (EM) II period. The relative inaccessibility of imports to Crete, and that they are found in clusters—sometimes in monumental tombs or associated with ritual objects—suggests that they were used in the creation and continued negotiation of elite identity. Although found primarily in mortuary contexts, these imports often show evidence of wear and sometimes repair, indicating that they were used during the lifetimes of their owners before being deposited in tombs. As many of these imports were used as bodily adornment, they were highly visible and may have taken on a performative role, especially during ceremonies or rituals. Several of the imports also draw on Eastern power symbols. Thus, as emblems, exotic imports were likely used by the Cretan emergent elite to distinguish themselves from the general population of the island and perhaps to align their new status with that of the ruling elite from powerful Eastern centers.*

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an increase in studies of interconnections between the Aegean and the Near East in the Bronze Age.¹ Frescoes identified as Minoan in

style, subject matter, and medium have been found in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and Syria, and Minoan pottery has been discovered at sites throughout the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean.² These discoveries have led many scholars to redefine Crete's place in the diplomatic relations and cultural interaction of the Middle and Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean.³ Yet little light has been shed on the role that access to distant lands played in the construction and maintenance of social boundaries in the formative Prepalatial period. Rather, most studies of Crete's extra-island interaction at this time, particularly with the Near East and Egypt, use exotic imports primarily as evidence for Early Minoan chronology.⁴ Their social significance is generally ignored.⁵

This article brings to the fore the critical role played by exotica, including finished products, raw materials, and technologies, in the social and political development of Prepalatial Crete.⁶ Specifically, through a contextual analysis of Eastern imports found in secure Prepalatial contexts, I argue that exotica were used and displayed as emblems⁷—often as bodily adornment—in the creation and continued negotiation of an elite

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¹ See, e.g., Kantor 1947/1997; Stevenson Smith 1965; Merlillees 1974; Hägg and Marinatos 1984; Laffineur and Basch 1991; Cline 1994; Davies and Schofield 1995; Cline and Harris-Cline 1998; Burns 1999; Karetsou and Andreadaki-Vlasaki 2000; van Wijngaarden 2002; Laffineur and Greco 2005; Feldman 2006.

² For Tell el-Dab'a (ancient Avaris) in Egypt, see Bietak 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997; Marinatos 1994; Bietak and Marinatos 1995; Morgan 1995; Cline 1998. For Tel Atchana (ancient Alalakh) in Turkey, Tel Kabri in Israel, and Qatna in Syria,

see Niemeier 1991. For Miletus, see Niemeier and Niemeier 1997; Niemeier 2005.

³ See Feldman 2006.

⁴ Warren 1980; Cadogan 1983; Warren and Hankey 1989.

⁵ For notable exceptions, see Krzyszkowska 1983; Branigan 1991; Warren 1995, 2000; Schoep 2006.

⁶ Although extra-island imports from other areas such as the Cyclades arrived in Crete in the Prepalatial period, this article is concerned only with imports from the Near East, Egypt, and Anatolia. I have made this distinction because the numerous examples of Cycladica on Crete suggest that they were not perceived as exotic in all cases. The presence of what appears to be an EM I Cycladic settlement at Hagia Photia in eastern Crete (Day et al. 1998, 147) and the burial caves of north-central Crete and Poros-Katsambas (Dimopoulou 1997) seems to confirm this view. While this assessment of the significance of Cycladica in Crete may not apply to all examples, the social significance of Cycladic imports is beyond the scope of this article. For a discussion of Crete's interaction with the Cyclades, see Sakellarakis 1977; Karantzali 1996.

⁷ By "emblem," I mean any object that plays an active role in signifying personal or social identity.

identity in the period preceding the first Minoan palaces.⁸ The Cretan elite readily exploited Eastern imports and power symbols to set themselves apart from the general population of the island and perhaps to establish connections to the ruling elite from important Eastern centers (fig. 1).⁹

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The role of extra-island influence in the development of palatial society in Crete has been debated among Aegean and Near Eastern prehistorians since the early 20th century.¹⁰ It is generally agreed that Crete was first settled by immigrants from Anatolia during the Neolithic period in the eighth millennium B.C.E.¹¹ Scholarly opinion, however, varies as to the significance of Crete's foreign interaction during the millennium preceding the first Minoan palaces. Sir Arthur Evans first argued for a continuity of tradition in Crete from Neolithic through Geometric levels.¹² This evolutionary view prevailed until the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, when Childe's work brought diffusionist models to the forefront of Aegean and eastern Mediterranean studies. He hypothesized Near Eastern influence on the Aegean civilizations, specifically on Crete, at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age,¹³ and he was followed by several scholars who argued that a new wave of immigrants arrived from Anatolia at this time.¹⁴ These models held their ground until the early 1970s, when Renfrew, pioneering the New Archaeology in the Aegean, argued instead that the transformation from the Cretan Neolithic to the Early Minoan period was the result of

indigenous development.¹⁵ According to Renfrew, the decisive factor for the "emergence" of Aegean civilization was the development of a redistribution system for subsistence commodities and the production of new crops, specifically grapes and olives, which served as the economic foundation for palatial civilization.¹⁶

The idea of indigenous development of the palatial civilization of Crete continued to gain support among scholars, and it was not until the work of Cherry in the early 1980s that the evolutionary model came under fire. He questioned the standard opinion that "the birth of palatial society on Crete was the inevitable outcome of inexorably slow growth and cumulative development during the very long gestatory EM period."¹⁷ According to Cherry, the lack of evidence of "central persons operating from central places (as later in the palaces)"—as well as the lack of any "obvious indications of social ranking or stratification," the absence of "unambiguous signs of craft specialization or of the institutionalized division of labour," and the lack of "economic links beyond the local residential unit" throughout the Early Minoan period—suggests that the transition to a palatial society in ca. 2000 B.C.E. was not the result of a slow, evolutionary process. Rather, it was a "discontinuous quantum leap" unlike anything the island had seen before.¹⁸ While Cherry did not argue in favor of exogenous stimuli as the impetus for the palatial society of Crete, he refused to accept the popular evolutionary arguments because of the lack of supporting archaeological evidence.

Since Cherry's work, numerous studies of Prepalatial cemeteries, seals, and pottery have brought to

⁸ I use the term "elite" very broadly in this article to refer to individuals or groups that actively attempt to distinguish themselves from the general population of Crete by establishing themselves in positions of power based on wealth, politics, or religion. I do not, however, see the defining features of the elite as static but rather as fluid, especially during this early stage of development; see also Shore 2002.

⁹ Because identity can be layered and multivalent, Eastern imports could mark other kinds of identity—ethnic, gender, and religious.

¹⁰ For a recent overview, see articles in Laffineur and Niemeier 1995.

¹¹ Affinities between the material culture of the Cretan Neolithic and that of Neolithic and Chalcolithic Anatolia have long been recognized. Sir Arthur Evans (1921, 14) thought that Neolithic Crete should be regarded as an insular offshoot of an extensive Anatolian province. This view is echoed in the later work of Furness (1953, 134), who, after an in-depth analysis of Neolithic pottery from the early excavations at Knossos, suggested an Anatolian derivation of Cretan Neolithic culture. The material culture brought to light by J.D. Evans (1963) through excavations at Knossos seems to corroborate this argument. Later studies, based not on pot-

tery but on economic models (esp. the appearance of imported domesticated plants and animals), also suggest the arrival of Near Eastern or Anatolian immigrants on Crete during the Neolithic period (Renfrew 1972, 50; Broodbank and Strasser 1991, 236–37; Broodbank 2000, 97).

¹² Evans 1906; see also Hawes and Hawes 1909, 2. Note that Evans' scholarship is somewhat contradictory on this issue. In some cases, he was a strong proponent of the "ex oriente lux" theory, which saw Near Eastern and Egyptian influence on Early Minoan Crete.

¹³ Childe 1925, 1950, 1958.

¹⁴ Pendlebury 1939, 53; Weinberg 1965, 308; Caskey 1970, 800; Warren 1974, 41–2. The diffusionist model prevalent at this time is still largely evolutionary in scope when it comes to explaining the rise of the palaces in Crete 1,000 years later. Most scholars who argue for outside influence on EM I Crete are opposed to the idea of later foreign influence and treat the Minoan palaces as an "organic" development.

¹⁵ Renfrew 1972.

¹⁶ Renfrew 1972, 480.

¹⁷ Cherry 1983, 33.

¹⁸ Cherry 1983, 33.

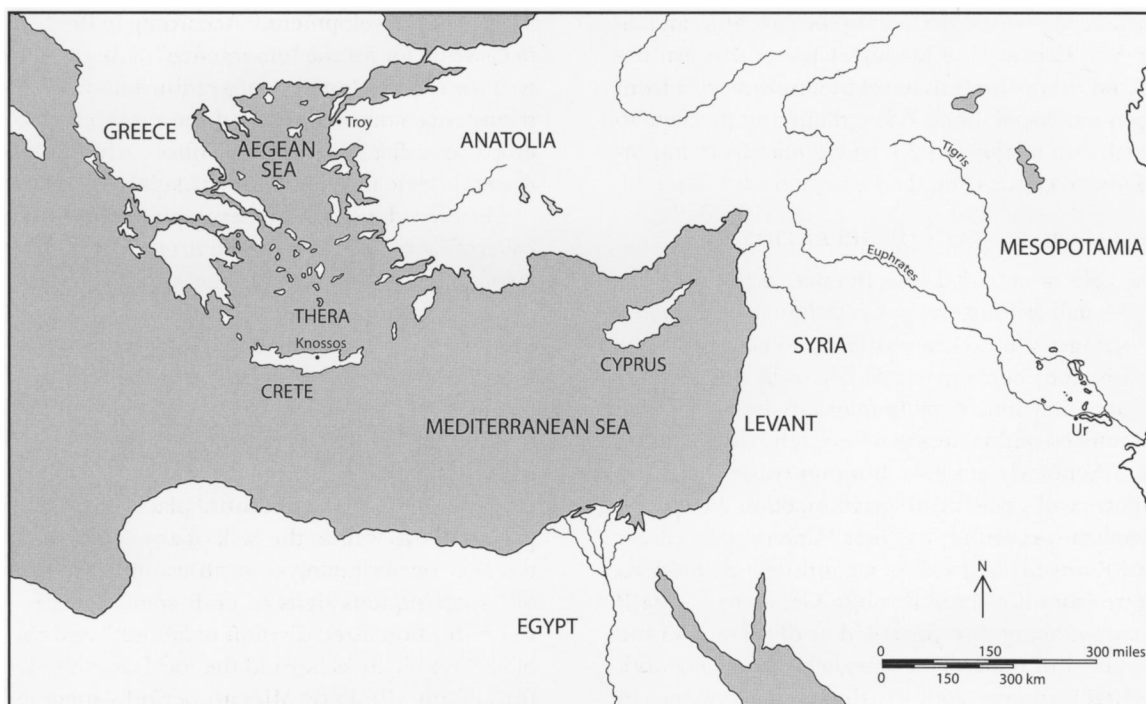


Fig. 1. Map of the Aegean, Egypt, and the Near East.

light evidence of social ranking in Prepalatial Crete.¹⁹ The evidence provided by exotic imports, however, has been virtually ignored.²⁰ It is not the intention of this study to resurrect earlier diffusionist views that argued for the development of a palatial civilization on Crete as the result of Near Eastern influence. Rather, by drawing on recent scholarship on social identity and distance value, this article explores how certain inhabitants of Prepalatial Crete actively transformed

their knowledge of and access to distant lands into powerful symbols of elite status.²¹

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS: DISTANCE AND SOCIAL STATUS

Identity is generally viewed as fluid and dynamic, with certain characteristics selected as distinguishing an individual or group from others.²² In the development of complex societies, as in the transition from

¹⁹ Soles 1988; Wilson 1994; Sbonias 1995; Karytinis 1998; Maggidis 1998; Day 2004.

²⁰ This is perhaps due to the backlash of the New Archaeology against diffusionist models, which were so prevalent in the mid 20th century. As a result, many Aegeanists since the 1970s have argued for cultural continuity in Bronze Age Crete, emphasizing an evolutionary development of the EM I society through the rise of a "palatial" civilization (see, e.g., Renfrew 1972; Warren 1974, 1987; Branigan 1988, 180). Notable exceptions include Davis 1977; Watrous 1987, 2001; Aruz 1993, 1995; Schoep 2006.

²¹ See, e.g., Sherratt and Sherratt 1991; Knapp 1998. Although other studies of Crete's foreign contact in the Prepalatial period exist, most use the evidence for overseas interaction to refine the chronology of the Prepalatial period. While these studies are important, the examination of exotic objects in context provides valuable information about Prepalatial society by according agency to the population that acquired and

displayed these imports. For a detailed discussion of the benefits of an agency-oriented local perspective, see Goldstein (2000), who promotes this model over what he calls globalist colonial or clientage models. Van de Mieroop (2002) applies this methodology to Early Dynastic Babylonia. Specifically, he argues against the dominant theory that the impetus for interaction with distant lands was the need for resources that were unavailable close to home. He states that "southern Mesopotamia had the natural resources required to be self-sufficient in its basic needs" and that "imports from the surrounding areas were primarily luxury goods desired by elites to enhance their social status as distinguished from that of the general population" (Van de Mieroop 2002, 125); see also Berg 2002.

²² Jenkins 1996, 3–4; see also Barth 1994; Jones 1997. Although the work of Barth and Jones is concerned primarily with ethnic identity, their framework can be applied to other collective identities. See Jenkins (1996, 90–103) for a discussion of this as it relates to Barth's work.

Prepalatial to Palatial Crete, class or status is arguably the most salient type of identity. Class in this context refers not solely to economic wealth but more generally to one's social worth. Veblen laid the theoretical groundwork for the study of class by identifying the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption, whereby both the quantity and quality of material goods are used lavishly to enhance social prestige and to mark status.²³ The mere acquisition of goods is not enough, for beyond obtaining and possessing such elite goods, knowledge of how to consume them in such a way as to advertise elite status is essential. Through this process, goods are converted into distinctive signs or symbols of one's position within society.²⁴ In order to be accepted into a specific social class, one must display the appropriate symbols. And although wealth is needed to obtain class-specific symbols, wealth alone without the symbols does not guarantee entry into the class.²⁵ This approach to understanding class and status has long been utilized by archaeologists, art historians, and cultural anthropologists who see certain types of material culture, usually designated luxury goods, as evidence of social ranking. The consumption of these items serves to legitimize or naturalize systems of inequality.²⁶

Exotic imports often belong to the category of luxury goods.²⁷ In traditional societies, access to distant places, peoples, objects, and ideas is frequently used by individuals and groups in the negotiation of power.²⁸ This is due, in part, to the costliness of long-distance travel and the economic benefits that long-distance travel brings to an individual or group.²⁹ More recent scholarship, however, has focused on the additional ideological or symbolic value assigned to objects acquired from distant lands.³⁰ When traveling to faraway places, one may encounter locations and people that are in some way

"foreign" or unknown, and they may be seen as "supernatural, mythical, and powerful."³¹ Moreover, there is some uncertainty associated with distance, which is often seen as an obstacle to be overcome. One who overcomes such an obstacle by traveling to or accessing distant places may be considered to have special power or control within a given society.³² The materialization and confirmation of such power was accomplished through the acquisition of exotic goods, which provided tangible proof of one's access to distant places and people.³³ Such materialized ideology is an important source of power that both strengthens horizontal ties between elites and reinforces vertical relations between elites and nonelites.³⁴ In premodern societies, exotic or nonlocal goods were often given considerable visibility because of their use in the creation and continued negotiation of elite identities. This was the case in Prepalatial Crete, where many Eastern imports were made into jewelry to be displayed on the body.

EXOTICA IN CONTEXT: EASTERN IMPORTS IN PREPALATIAL CRETE

Eastern imports found in secure Prepalatial contexts in Crete include raw materials such as ivory, gold, amethyst, chalcedony, carnelian, sard, and ostrich eggshells, as well as finished products such as Egyptian stone bowls, Egyptian scarabs, and Near Eastern seals (figs. 2–4; table 1).³⁵ Most, if not all, the ivory reaching Crete in the Prepalatial period is hippopotamus ivory. Hippopotami inhabited Egypt until relatively recent times and also lived in certain swampy areas of Syro-Palestine.³⁶ The source of the gold reaching Crete in the Prepalatial period is uncertain; however, it probably originated in Egypt or Nubia, where it is found in abundance, or perhaps Syria, where there is alluvial gold.³⁷

²³ Veblen 1899, 71.

²⁴ Bourdieu 1984. For a more thorough discussion of consumption as primarily social and active, see Veblen 1899; Appadurai 1986; Douglas and Isherwood 1996.

²⁵ Fitts 1999, 40.

²⁶ I concur with Appadurai (1986, 38 [emphasis original]), who defines luxury items as "goods whose principal use is *rhetorical* and *social*, goods that are simply *incarnated signs*. The necessity to which *they* respond is fundamentally political."

²⁷ Helms 1988, 2–4; Earle 1990, 81.

²⁸ Helms 1988; see also DeMarrais et al. 1996; Broodbank 2000.

²⁹ See, e.g., Webb 1975, 179–80.

³⁰ Using numerous ethnographic examples from a wide variety of spatial and temporal contexts, Helms (1988) demonstrates the widespread association of political elites with foreign or distant goods and information. For the Aegean, specifically the Cyclades, see Broodbank (2000, 290), who argues that "the practice of long-range voyaging" is a "status accruing activity."

³¹ Helms 1988, 4.

³² Helms 1988, 59.

³³ Helms 1988, 9–10. The consumption of raw materials through local crafting could also play an important symbolic role in the creation and negotiation of social boundaries (Helms 1988, 1993; DeMarrais et al. 1996, 16; Burns 1999, 115).

³⁴ DeMarrais et al. 1996.

³⁵ Only imports found in secure Prepalatial contexts are discussed here, unless indicated otherwise.

³⁶ Krzyszkowska 1988, 227–29, pls. 24–30; Reese 1998, 140–42.

³⁷ Higgins 1980, 9–10. There are also gold sources in the northeast Aegean and in the Balkans. It is notable, however, that the Greek word for gold, *chrysos*, which occurs as early as the Minoan period, is of Semitic derivation. Regarding sources of gold and goldworking in the Bronze Age Aegean, see articles in Betancourt 1983. Copper and tin were also imported to Crete during the Prepalatial period, although their distribution is much wider than that of gold. For the sources of metals found in Bronze Age Crete, see Stos-Gale 2001, esp. fig. 10.2.

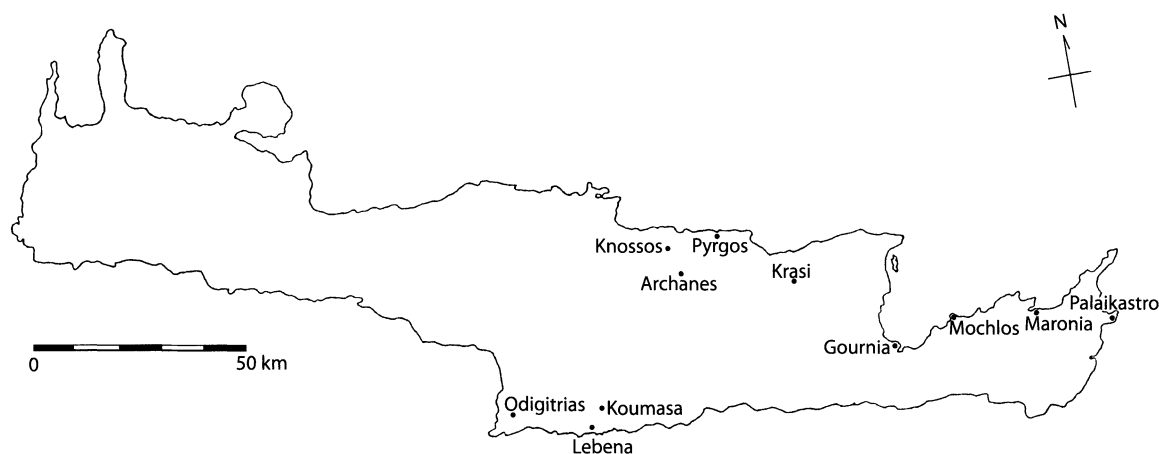


Fig. 2. Map of Crete, showing sites where Eastern imports have been found in secure Prepalatial contexts.

There are several sources for amethyst in Egypt, such as in the Western Desert, which was exploited starting in Old Kingdom times.³⁸ Chalcedony occurs in Egypt as well, where it was used to make beads, pendants, and scarabs from the Predynastic period. It was also used in the Near East in the late prehistoric period. According to a text from Mari, the source for *pappardillû*, which is sometimes translated as chalcedony, was located in northeast Iraq.³⁹ Carnelian is found in the Eastern Desert of Egypt and Nubia and was exploited as early as the Predynastic period.⁴⁰ Numerous carnelian beads and seals were found in Mesopotamia. The barrel shape of some of these beads and seals suggests that the original source for the Mesopotamian examples was India, as similar beads were discovered near the Indian source.⁴¹ However, Near Eastern sources of carnelian have been found in Iran, western Arabia, Oman, and Anatolia, and small pebbles of carnelian are fairly common in alluvial deposits, so the exact source of simple carnelian beads is difficult to pinpoint.⁴² Sard, a red-brown variety of chalcedony, was available in the Eastern Desert in Egypt, where it was exploited in the Predynastic period.⁴³ Finally, Ostrich eggshells were valued in both Egypt and Mesopotamia. In Egypt, the shells were used to make beads, pendants, and vessels.⁴⁴ In Mesopotamia,

ostrich eggs, ostrich egg vessels, and imitations of ostrich egg vessels in precious metals were found at sites such as the Royal Cemetery of Ur.⁴⁵ In prehistoric



Fig. 3. Two Egyptian faience scarabs from Archanes: *top*, from Funerary Building 7; *bottom*, from Funerary Building 6 (drawing by M. Zakian).

³⁸ Lucas and Harris 1962, 389. There are no known sources of amethyst in Mesopotamia, although it was used for beads and pendants from the fourth millennium B.C.E. onward. Moorey (1994, 94) suggests that Near Eastern sources likely exist, perhaps within the highlands of Anatolia or Iran; see also Higgins 1980, 36.

³⁹ Moorey 1994, 96 (with references); see also Lucas and Harris 1962, 392; Andrews 1990, 41.

⁴⁰ Andrews 1990, 41.

⁴¹ Collon 1990, 35

⁴² Moorey 1994, 97–8 (with references); see also Lucas and Harris 1962, 391.

⁴³ Lucas and Harris 1962, 391–92; Higgins 1980, 37; Andrews 1990, 50; Moorey 1994, 96. Although sard is rarely mentioned in existing literature from Mesopotamia, some examples were found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur (Moorey 1994, 96).

⁴⁴ Evans 1928, 1, 222, fig. 127; Phillips 1991, 182–83.

⁴⁵ Hansen 1998, 70–1.

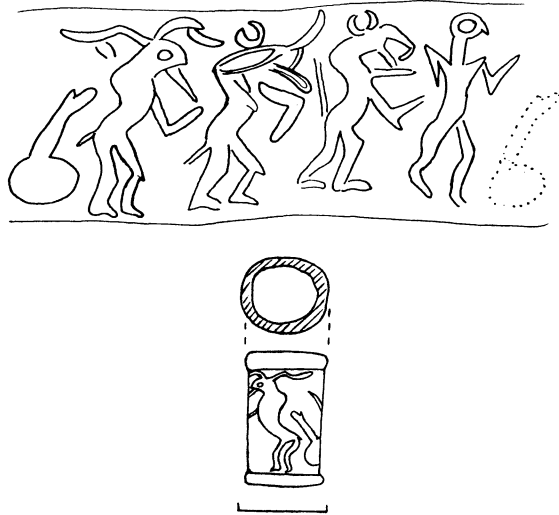


Fig. 4. Drawing of a Near Eastern silver tube seal from Mochlos, Compartment I of Tomb I/II/III (Aruz 1984, fig. 1).

times, ostriches lived in Saharan North Africa, including southern Egypt and the Sudan. They moved into the Saudi peninsula and Syria around the late fourth millennium B.C.E.⁴⁶

Turning to finished products, there is debate over when the majority of Egyptian stone vessels first reached Crete, since most were found in contexts postdating their date of creation by several hundred years. Even in Egypt, stone vessels were often saved as heirlooms or

reused at later dates. However, fragments of two Egyptian stone bowls were found in secure Prepalatial contexts in Crete.⁴⁷ Four Egyptian scarabs have also been found in secure Prepalatial contexts in Crete at Lebena, Archanes (Phourni), and Gournes. Typologically, they date no earlier than the very late Old Kingdom or First Intermediate period in Egypt, which coincides roughly with Middle Minoan (MM) IA.⁴⁸ A Near Eastern silver tube seal was found in secure Prepalatial contexts in the cemetery at Mochlos, while a Near Eastern lapis lazuli cylinder seal was found at Archanes (Phourni). However, the date of deposition of the lapis lazuli seal is contested and may be as late as the Protopalatial period.⁴⁹

It is also likely that objects made of faience (e.g., a bowl and beads from Mochlos)⁵⁰ and pendants or beads decorated with granulation⁵¹ were initially imported as finished products to Crete. However, it appears that the technologies for producing faience and granulation, which may have had ideological value in Minoan society because of their association with Eastern centers, were soon imitated and mastered by Cretan craftsmen.⁵² It is also notable that several types of exotic objects such as foot amulets, Egyptian scarabs, and Egyptian stone vessels were imitated by Cretan craftsmen during the Prepalatial period, as was exotic iconography, including ape and lion imagery.⁵³

Most Eastern imports to Prepalatial Crete appear rather suddenly in EM II (fig. 5),⁵⁴ yet their importance has been downplayed in studies of social and political organization on the island. Wilson states that “Near

⁴⁶ Laufer 1926; Finet 1982, 69–77; Phillips 1991, 181–83; Hansen 1998, 70–2.

⁴⁷ Warren 1969, 110, 182; 1972, 394, no. 3; 1980, 493; 1981, 630, 633–35, figs. 3, 5, pl. 205b; Phillips 1991, 35, 496, cat. no. 116. For a recent analysis of stone vessels in the Mediterranean, see Bevan 2007.

⁴⁸ Phillips 1991, 397, no. 40; 423, no. 58; 643–46, nos. 270–71.

⁴⁹ Seager 1912, 22, 111, fig. 36 (Ln); Sakellarakis 1967, 159; Aruz 1984, 186–88; 1995, 3, 5–6; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1991, 106.

⁵⁰ The earliest faience products found in Crete come from Mochlos and date to EM II. By this time, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Syria were major centers of faience production (Foster 1979, 27). According to Peltenburg, these early examples, which are beads in the form of discs, are typologically identical to contemporary examples from Cyprus, the adjacent mainland, Egypt, and Asia Minor, and they should be considered imports because they fail to exhibit local production criteria such as diversity and frequency of product (Peltenburg 1995, 39).

⁵¹ The only examples of granulation found in Prepalatial contexts in Crete come from Tholos B at Koumasa, which dates from EM I to MMIA. The examples include a gold animal pendant, possibly a lion, the mane represented by granules,

and a small gold pierced disc with granulation work around the hole (Xanthoudides 1924/1971, 29, nos. 386, 388). Since these are unique in Prepalatial Crete, it is likely that they were imported. However, if made locally, the technology for the difficult process would have been imported from the Near East. Notably, granulation is not found in Egypt until the 12th Dynasty, more than half a millennium later than its first appearance in Mesopotamia—more-or-less contemporary with MM IA (Andrews 1990, 88). For the spread of the granulation technique throughout the Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean, see Wolters 1983, 68–73. For a detailed discussion of granulation as a prestige technology, see Politis 2001.

⁵² Knappett’s analysis (1999, 101–29) of the adoption of the fast potter’s wheel shows the ideological significance of importing a foreign technology to Crete from the Near East; see also Schoep 2006, 52–4.

⁵³ Warren 1969 (stone vessels); Branigan 1970 (foot amulets); Yule 1981, 128–29 (lion imagery); Crowley 1989, 298 (lion imagery); Phillips 1991 (scarabs, ape imagery); Vander-vondelen 1994 (ape imagery).

⁵⁴ This, coupled with the complete lack of imports in secure EM I contexts, suggests that Eastern imports began to arrive on the island in EM II, rather than having been kept as heirlooms from an earlier period.

Table 1. Eastern Imports Found in Secure Prepalatial Contexts in Crete.

Import	Archanes	Gournia (Sphoungiras)	Knossos	Koumasa	Krasi	Lebena	Maronia	Mochlos	Odigitrias	Palaikastro	Pyrgos
Amethyst	EMIII- MMIA?	-	-	-	-	-	-	EMIIA; EMII-III; EMII- MMIA	-	-	-
Carnelian	-	-	-	-	-	EMII- MMIA	-	EMII-III; MMIA	-	-	-
Chalcedony	-	-	-	EMI- MMIA	-	-	-	EMII-III; EMIII	-	-	-
Egyptian scarabs	MMIA	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA	-	-	-	-	-
Egyptian stone vessels	-	-	EMIIA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Faience	EMIII- MMIA; MMIA	-	-	EMII-III/ MMIA	-	EMII- MMIA	-	EMIIA	EMI-MMIA?	-	-
Gold	EMIIA; EMII- MMIA	EMII-III	-	EMI- MMIA	EMI- EMII	EMII; EMII- MMIA	EMIIIB-III	EMIIA; EMIII; EMII- MMIA	EMI-MMIA?	-	EMI-II
Granulation	-	-	-	EMI- MMIA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ivory	EMIIA; EMIII- MMIA	EMII-III	EMIIA	EMI- MMIA	EMI-MMIA?	EMII? EMII- MMIA; EMIII- MMIA	-	EMII? EMIIA? EMII-III	EMI-MMIA?	-	-
Lapis lazuli	-	-	-	EMI- MMIA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Near Eastern seals	EMIII- MMIA?	-	-	-	-	-	-	EMII-III	-	-	-
Ostrich eggshells	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	EMIIB/III	-
Sard	EMIII- MMIA? MMIA	-	-	EMI- MMIA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

	EM I	EM II	EM III	MM IA
Amethyst				
Carnelian				
Chalcedony				
Egyptian scarabs				
Egyptian stone vessels				
Faience				
Gold				
Granulation				
Ivory				
Lapis lazuli				
Near Eastern seals				
Ostrich eggshell fragments				
Sard				

Fig. 5. The first appearance of Eastern imports in Crete. Dotted lines indicate the terminus post quem for the imports. Solid lines indicate that the items were found in contexts dating to these periods.

Eastern imports are so rare that for the moment they are better viewed as exotic oddities rather than as evidence for even the most sporadic eastern contacts,” and Branigan suggests that “the quantity of inorganic objects of trade surviving to us is so small as to be of little significance.”⁵⁵ One could argue, to the contrary, that the relative rarity of Eastern imports in Prepalatial Crete or, perhaps more accurately, the limited access to such imports supports their identification as emblems of elite identity because prestige items are defined by their novelty and their relative inaccessibility.⁵⁶ Further, imported raw materials such as gold, ivory, and semiprecious stones are often overlooked in studies of Eastern imports to Crete, yet their inclusion increases the quantity of imports dramatically.

The archaeological context of imports to Prepalatial Crete provides further evidence of their role as emblems in the negotiation of social boundaries. First,

imported objects and materials often appear in clusters. At the Prepalatial cemetery at Mochlos, three of the 28 tombs (Tombs I/II/III, IV/V/VI, and XIX) contained most of the exotica found at the site (fig. 6).⁵⁷ Furthermore, different types of imported objects and materials are often found within the same tomb (table 2). For example, Tomb I/II/II at Mochlos contained (1) gold jewelry, including beads, diadems, bands, hoops, small leaf-shaped pendants, leaves from sprays, and double-link chains; (2) ivory objects, including inlay strips and seals, one of which incorporates imported ape iconography; (3) carnelian beads; (4) amethyst beads; and (5) a Syrian seal made of silver (see fig. 4).⁵⁸ In other words, almost all the types of imported objects, materials, and iconography imported to Crete from the Near East and Egypt during the Prepalatial period are represented in this single tomb, suggesting that the occupants of this tomb exercised considerable

⁵⁵ Branigan 1988, 180; Wilson 1994, 43. Notable exceptions include Krzyszkowska 1983; Warren 1995, 1–18; Karetsou and Andreadaki-Vlasaki 2000, 24–8.

⁵⁶ Miller 1985.

⁵⁷ Only two of the hundreds of imports from the Mochlos

tombs were found outside Tombs I/II/III, IV/V/VI, and XIX.

⁵⁸ For Tomb I/II/III and its contents, see Seager 1912, 18–40; Aruz 1984, 187–88; 1995, 3; Soles 1992, 42–51.

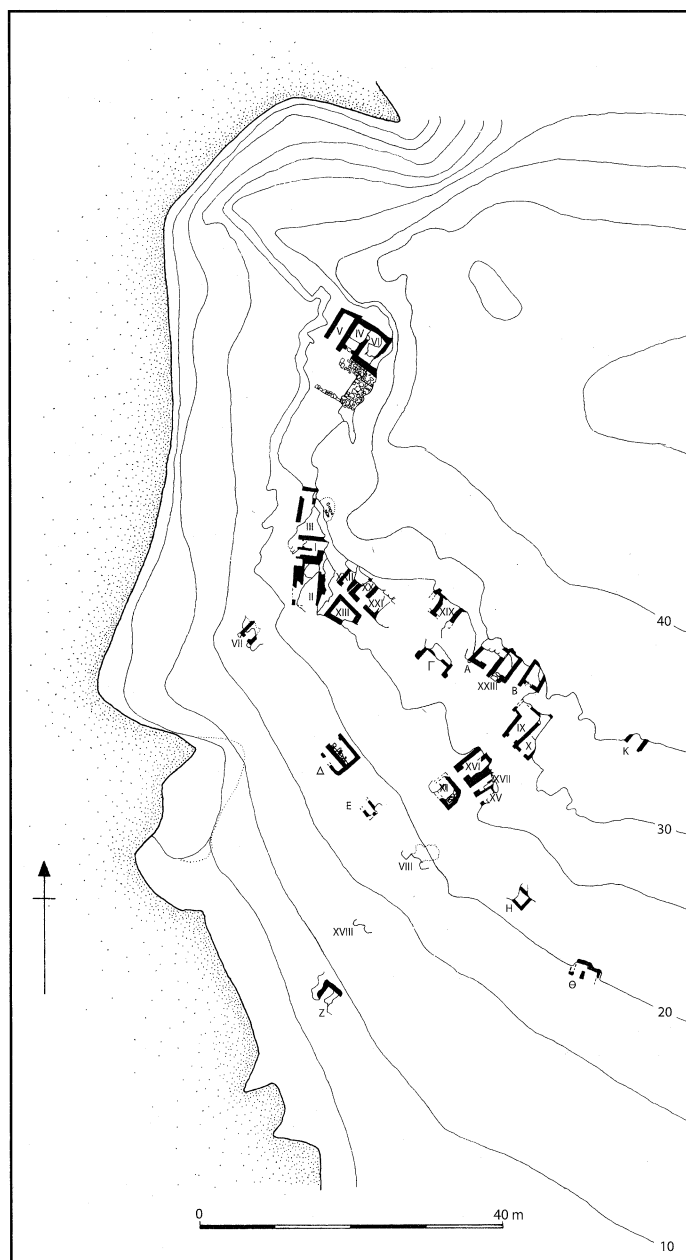


Fig. 6. Prepalatial cemetery at Mochlos (Soles 1992, plan 3).

control over access to distant lands or served as the local contact for foreigners. Similarly, Tombs IV/V/VI and XIX at Mochlos contained several varieties of exotica.⁵⁹

Clusters of exotic imports were also found in Prepalatial contexts at the cemetery at Archanes-Phourni, nine miles inland from Knossos (table 3);⁶⁰ in Tholos Tomb

⁵⁹ Seager 1912, 40–56, 70–4; Soles 1992, 51–62, 64–77.

⁶⁰ For a recent overview of the excavations of Archanes, see Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997. For Tholos Tomb Γ, see Papadatos 2005. For Tholos Tomb E, see Panagiotopoulos 2002. The chronology of Burial Building 5 at Archanes, which contained a Near Eastern lapis lazuli cylinder seal, is contested. The excavators dated the tomb to the end of the Prepalatial period, but other scholars, including Watrous

(2001, 208 n. 411), argue that the tomb contained Protopalatial pottery as well. Based on the Minoan designs on the Near Eastern seal, a late Prepalatial date is more likely for its recarving on Crete (e.g., Yule 1981, pl. 12, motif 19[6, 7]), although it may have been deposited in the tomb at a later date. For the lapis lazuli cylinder seal, see Aruz 1995, 5–6, fig. 3a; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997, 350, fig. 320.

Table 2. Eastern Imports Found in Secure Prepalatial Contexts at Mochlos.

Import	Tomb I/II/III	Tomb IV/V/VI	Tomb VII	Tomb XVI	Tomb XIX
Amethyst	EMI A	—	EM-MMIA	—	EMII–III
Carnelian	MMIA	—	—	—	EMII–III
Chalcedony	—	EMIII	—	—	EMII–III
Egyptian scarabs	—	—	—	—	—
Egyptian stone vessels	—	—	—	—	—
Faience	—	EMI A	—	—	—
Gold	EMI A; EMIII	EMI A–III	—	EMII–MMIA	EMII–III
Granulation	—	—	—	—	—
Ivory	EMI A?; EMII–III	EMII?; EMII–III	—	—	—
Lapis lazuli	—	—	—	—	—
Near Eastern seals	EMII–III	—	—	—	—
Ostrich eggshells	—	—	—	—	—
Sard	—	—	—	—	—

B at Koumasa in the east Mesara plain (table 4);⁶¹ and at Lebena on the south coast of Crete, south of the Asterousia Mountains (table 5).⁶²

The architectural context of many of these imports further confirms their role as symbols of power and elite identity. This is the case at Mochlos, where two of the three tombs in which exotica were ubiquitous (Tombs I/II/III and IV/V/VI) are substantially larger and better built than the rest of the tombs on the island.⁶³ Furthermore, they are located on the more prominent west terrace, which commands views of the sea and the mainland of Crete.⁶⁴ The west terrace tombs are also more visible from the mainland than are the tombs on the south slope below; Soles has demonstrated that the west terrace tombs consist of three compartments, each with walls built entirely of stone, whereas most of the walls of the south slope tombs consist of mudbrick on stone socles. The west terrace tombs also incorporate large colored orthostat stone slabs of gray-blue limestone with white chlorite veins, green schist, and purple schist.⁶⁵ Although all these stones were available locally, it seems clear that extra care, work, and resources went into the construction

of these tombs relative to those along the south slope. Adding to the monumentality of Tomb IV/V/VI is the forecourt, where funerary rituals or ceremonies may have taken place. This area incorporates a paved court and open-air altar and, like the west terrace tombs themselves, includes a variety of colored stones in its construction.⁶⁶

The association of imports with ritual objects provides additional evidence for the use of exotic imports as emblems by an emergent elite in Prepalatial Crete. For example, inside Funerary Building 19 at Archanes, imported ivory seals and pendants, as well as other pieces of jewelry, were found among a group of skulls placed on and around an altar.⁶⁷ As noted by Maggidis, who recently published on this tomb, these objects were retained with the skulls during secondary burial, rather than being looted, swept aside, or discarded, which often occurred. This suggests that these objects may have been used as emblems or identity markers.⁶⁸ The presence of liquid and food offerings and an anthropomorphic clay figurine on or near the altar further supports the elevated status of the individuals associated with the tomb.⁶⁹ In the case of ostrich

⁶¹ For Koumasa, see Xanthoudides 1924/1971, 3–50.

⁶² Alexiou and Warren 2004.

⁶³ Soles 1988, 50–1; see also Soles 2005, 438.

⁶⁴ Soles 1988, 50–1; 2005, 438.

⁶⁵ Soles 1988, 50–1; 2005, 438; see also Soles 1992, 42–62.

⁶⁶ Soles 1992, 56–7.

⁶⁷ Maggidis 1998, 94–5.

⁶⁸ Maggidis 1998, 93.

⁶⁹ Maggidis 1998, 95.

Table 3. Eastern Imports Found in Secure Prepalatial Contexts at Archanes-Phourni.

Import	Tholos Tomb			Burial Building No.								
	I ^a	B ^b	E	3	5 ^c	7	8	12	13	16	18	19
Amethyst	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Carnelian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chalcedony	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Egyptian scarabs	-	-	-	-	-	MMIA	-	-	-	-	-	-
Egyptian stone vessels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA	-
Faience	-	-	-	-	-	MMIA	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA	-
Gold	EMIIA?	MMIA	EMIIA	-	EMIII- MMIA?	MMIA	MMIA	MMIA	MMIA	-	-	-
Granulation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ivory	EMIIA?	MMIA	EMIIA	MMIA	EMIII- MMIA?	MMIA	-	MMIA	MMIA	MMIA	EMIII- MMIA	MMIA
Lapis lazuli	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Near Eastern seals	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ostrich eggshells	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sard	-	-	-	-	EMIII- MMIA?	MMIA	-	-	-	-	-	-

^a Stratum III^b Tomb complex^c Chronology contested

Table 4. Eastern Imports Found in Secure Prepalatial Contexts at Koumasa.

Import	Tholos Tomb B
Amethyst	–
Carnelian	–
Chalcedony	EMI–MMIA
Egyptian scarabs	–
Egyptian stone vessels	–
Faience	EMII–III/MMIA
Gold	EMI–MMIA
Granulation	EMI–MMIA
Ivory	EMI–MMIA
Lapis lazuli	EMI–MMIA
Near Eastern seals	–
Ostrich eggshells	–
Sard	EMI–MMIA

eggshell fragments found in Prepalatial settlement contexts at Palaikastro in eastern Crete, Sakellarakis argued that they may have had a cultic or religious function, based both on their association with triton shells and the fact that later examples were fashioned into rhyta.⁷⁰ Notably, although from a mixed Pre- and Protopalatial context, the ostrich eggshell fragments from the Vat Room deposit at Knossos were found within the later central court sanctuary complex.⁷¹

It is also significant that raw materials, many of which were imported to Crete from the East, were locally crafted into objects that mirrored Eastern high-status objects and power symbols. For example, diadems made of hammered gold, often with repoussé dots

defining the circumference and punched holes at each end for fastening around the head, were found in Crete, Mesopotamia, and the Troad.⁷² Gold flowers and leaves, perhaps used as hair ornaments or attached to the diadems, as well as beaded jewelry of gold, faience, and semiprecious stones, were discovered in Prepalatial Crete and Mesopotamia.⁷³ Finally, it is possible that ostrich eggshells from Crete were made into rhyta imitating similar vessels from Mesopotamia, which were sometimes copied in gold and other precious materials.⁷⁴ The association of these objects with a distant, and in some cases more established, elite might have augmented their meaning and value as prestige goods and symbols of authority in local Cretan society while allowing the newly emergent Cretan elite to compete with or at least emulate elite groups beyond their realm.

USE AND DISPLAY OF EXOTIC IMPORTS IN PREPALATIAL CRETE

The fact that most of the exotic objects from Prepalatial Crete were found in funerary contexts in no way negates their potency as emblems of elite identity.⁷⁵ Just as material culture can be used to negotiate and manipulate social identities in other aspects of daily life, burials and the rituals that accompany them can throw light on social dimensions such as power struggles, class, and ideology.⁷⁶ One might argue that funerary offerings differ because they were probably not seen after the actual burial ritual was completed. However, ancient funerary rituals or ceremonies (such as those that perhaps took place in the paved courts fronting Prepalatial tombs at Mochlos, Koumasa, and Archanes) were likely powerful public events that would have had a profound impact on the participants and spectators involved⁷⁷—the performances and objects that accompany ceremonies such

⁷⁰ Sakellarakis 1990, 289–90, 295, fig. 23. Also worth mentioning is a suggestion by Rehak that Aegean natives believed that imported ostrich eggs were laid by griffins. This suggestion is based primarily on the fact that “griffins can be shown leashed like pets, they occur as both male and female animals, and they reproduce babies, evidently from eggs” (Rehak 1994, 83 n. 31).

⁷¹ Evans 1921, 171.

⁷² McCallum 1983.

⁷³ McCallum (1983) also notes that in spite of these similarities in form, the techniques of manufacture were quite different. The workmanship of the pieces from Mesopotamia and the Troad is very complex, incorporating hammering, casting, repoussé, wireworking, filigree, granulation, and inlay, whereas the techniques used in the earliest goldwork from Crete is far simpler, consisting only of hammering, repoussé, and wireworking (McCallum 1983, 21).

⁷⁴ A true ostrich egg vessel, an imitation in silver, and an-

other in gold with lapis lazuli, red limestone, and shell decoration on the upper portion were found in a single tomb dating to Early Dynastic IIIA in the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Hansen 1998, 70–1).

⁷⁵ The relative scarcity of exotica from Prepalatial settlement contexts is due, primarily, to the fact that few Prepalatial settlements have been thoroughly excavated because they were generally built over during subsequent periods. Furthermore, because of the value assigned to imported objects, they are rarely left behind or discarded in settlements.

⁷⁶ Brown 1971, 1–2; Morris 1992, 2. See also Binford’s (1971, 6–25, esp. 18–25) seminal article, in which he argues for a relationship between mortuary ritual variations and structural complexity.

⁷⁷ See Branigan (1988, 94), who suggests that ritual performances such as dancing may have taken place in these paved areas. For the significance of performance in Minoan religion, see Warren 1988; Berg 2004, esp. 27–8; German 2005.

Table 5. Eastern Imports Found in Secure Prepalatial Contexts at Lebena.

Import	Tomb I (Papoura)	Tomb Iβ (Papoura)	Tomb II (Gerokampos)	Tomb IIα (Gerokampos)	Tomb III (Zervou)
Amethyst	—	—	—	—	—
Carnelian	EMII–MMIA	—	—	—	—
Chalcedony	—	—	—	—	—
Egyptian scarabs	EMIII–MMIA	—	—	EMIII–MMIA	—
Egyptian stone vessels	—	—	—	—	—
Faience	EMII–MMIA	EMII	EMII–MMIA	EMII–MMIA	—
Gold	EMII	EMII	EMII–MMIA	—	EMII?
Granulation	—	—	—	—	—
Ivory	EMII–MMIA	—	EMII–MMIA	EMIII–MMIA	EMII?
Lapis lazuli	—	—	—	—	—
Near Eastern seals	—	—	—	—	—
Ostrich eggshells	—	—	—	—	—
Sard	—	—	—	—	—

as funerals could be used to manipulate and enhance social memory.⁷⁸

Most of the exotic imports found in mortuary contexts in Prepalatial Crete were made into adornment for the body. This suggests that they were used during the lifetimes of their owners, since, according to ethnographic parallels, body ornaments are more often the personal property of the deceased rather than funerary gifts.⁷⁹ Both physical and iconographical evidence seems to confirm this view.⁸⁰ In the past, it has been suggested that the gold diadems found at Mochlos and other sites, which some recognize as symbols of authority based on contemporary parallels from the Near East, show evidence of wear.⁸¹ This is corroborated by Hickman's analysis of the Mochlos gold, which revealed evidence of use and repair on much of the jewelry.⁸² For example, attachments were repeatedly added to the "eye diadem" from Compartment II of Tomb I/II/III. Similarly, antennae were torn off the top of a diadem decorated with animals in dot repoussé, which

shows evidence of repair on its right side;⁸³ and a gold drum bead from Compartment I of Tomb I/II/III shows evidence of wear at the edges.⁸⁴

The discovery of a gold diadem in 1971 among a hoard of jewelry found in a silver vessel associated with Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos provides further evidence that these diadems were used before being deposited in tombs (fig. 7). This diadem has a piece cut away at the bottom. According to Davaras, "people—not just common grave-robbers but perhaps relatives of the dead—may have thought it excessively wasteful to consign the whole jewel to the tomb, and preferred to diminish the quantity of gold buried by cutting or wrenching off parts of it."⁸⁵ The antennae attachments for this diadem were also removed and then buried with the rest of the diadem. Neither of these acts makes any sense if the diadem had been made explicitly for funerary use. An ivory seal from Compartment II of Tomb I/II/III at Mochlos also shows signs of wear and repair (fig. 8).⁸⁶ This suggests that

Although the size of these courts would likely limit access, this potential hierarchy of space could also be significant in establishing social boundaries and influencing social memory.

⁷⁸Connerton 1989; see also Day et al. 1998, 140. The word "manipulate" is used deliberately here, as one must keep in mind that such performances and their accoutrements are not always a direct reflection of reality but rather the projection of an ideal.

⁷⁹Pader 1982, 58; Marcus 1996, 45.

⁸⁰Seager 1912, 27; Higgins 1980, 54; Branigan 1988, 170.

⁸¹Seager 1912, 27; see also Higgins 1980, 54.

⁸²Hickman 2004.

⁸³Seager 1912, 26–7 (II.5 and II.4, respectively).

⁸⁴Seager 1912, 22 (I.m). I am grateful to J. Hickman (pers. comm. 2003) for providing me with this information, which is based on her dissertation research.

⁸⁵Davaras 1975, 110.

⁸⁶Seager 1912, 34, fig. 12 (II.41).

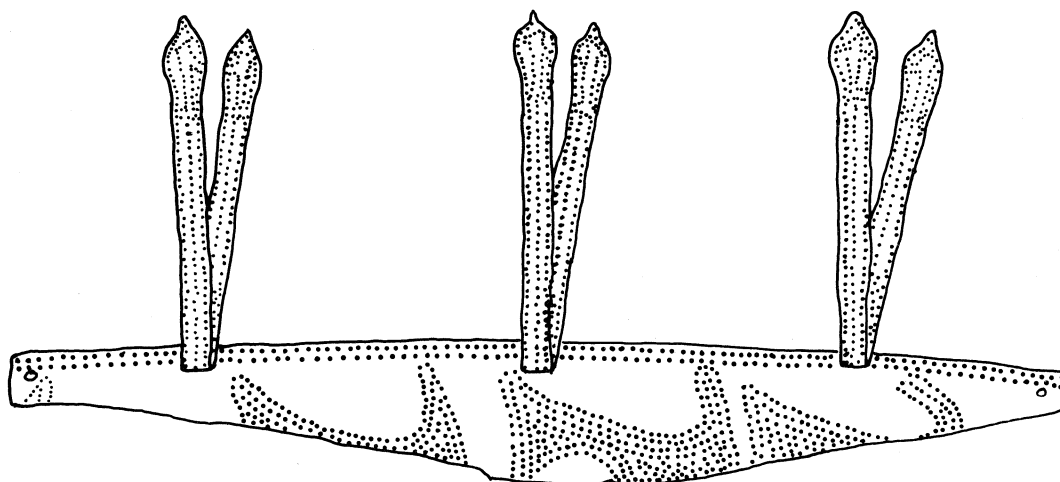


Fig. 7. Drawing of a gold diadem associated with Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos (after Davaras 1975, fig. 3).

the seal was used during the life of the owner and, when broken, was considered valuable enough to be riveted back together.

Iconography on later frescoes provides further support for the use of exotic imports as adornment for the body while their owners were still alive. This evidence is somewhat more speculative because all the depictions come from later periods; but it should not be omitted, especially in view of the lack of contemporary iconographical evidence. Images give us some idea of what Connerton calls “embodied practices,” performances that are dependent on the action of an individual body and, therefore, have spatial and temporal limitations.⁸⁷ Such depictions are abundant on Crete, Thera, and in Thebes, Egypt. There are several examples of diadems or bands worn around the head, as seen on acrobats from the bull-leaping frescoes from Knossos. Cretans who are depicted in Theban tombs in Egypt also wear diadems with decorative antennae that are similar to those on Prepalatial examples (fig. 9).⁸⁸ Other types of exotic imports adorn individuals in depictions from Knossos: the women depicted in the “Ladies in Blue” fresco wear several beaded necklaces and bracelets, some with beads in the form of lilies or other types of flowers (fig. 10). The beads are either blue, which may represent silver or faience, or red, perhaps representing carnelian or sard.⁸⁹ Finally, in the frescoes from

Akrotiri on Thera, several figures wear jewelry made of exotic materials: gold and silver necklaces, bracelets, armlets, and earrings, as well as necklaces and bracelets with beads that are also often blue or red.⁹⁰ One of the saffron gatherers from Xeste 3 wears a string of red beads around her neck and a gold band or diadem around her head with red beads attached to it (fig. 11). Most heavily adorned with jewelry, however,

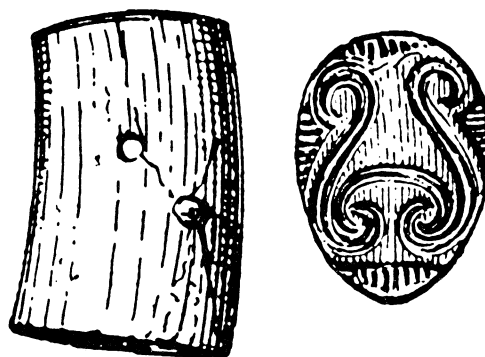


Fig. 8. Drawing of an ivory seal from Compartment II of Tomb I/II/III, Mochlos, showing repair (after Seager 1912, fig. 12).

⁸⁷ Connerton 1989, 72–104; see also Joyce 2000, 9; German 2005.

⁸⁸ Wachsmann 1987; Panagiotopoulos 2001.

⁸⁹ Silver was likely imported to Crete from the Greek mainland or the Cyclades (Stos-Gale and Macdonald 1991, 280).

⁹⁰ Doumas 1992.

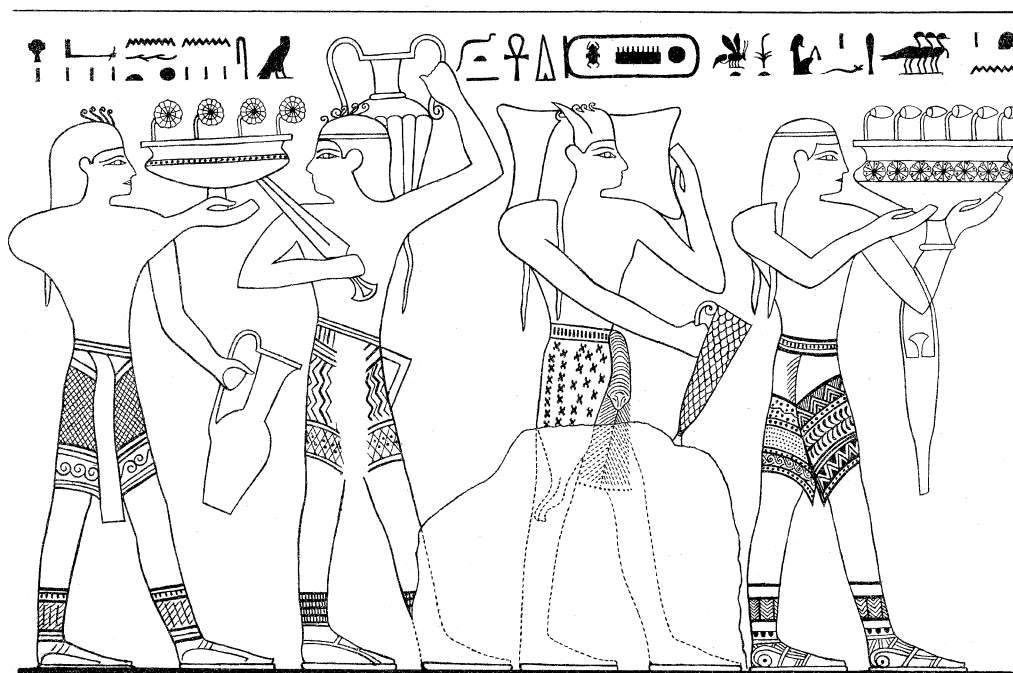


Fig. 9. Cretans bearing tribute, from the Tomb of Rehmire, Thebes, Egypt (© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

is the enthroned goddess or priestess from the upper level of Xeste 3, who is flanked by a griffin and a blue monkey and wears a red-beaded hair ornament and necklaces, some of which incorporate bird pendants similar to one of chalcedony found in Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos (fig. 12).⁹¹

Although later in date, the depictions of individuals adorned with what arguably represents jewelry made from imported materials such as gold, carnelian, and perhaps faience may provide some insight into how such objects could have been displayed on the bodies of living individuals during the Prepalatial period. Notably, most of these people seem to be involved in some kind of ritual or activity that is closely associated with the palatial administrative or religious centers of Crete or Thera, such as bull-leaping at Knossos, diplomatic ceremonies in Thebes, and what appears to be a rite of passage ceremony in the Xeste 3 frescoes from Akrotiri.⁹²

⁹¹ Seager 1912, 48, fig. 20 (IV.7).

⁹² In the examples from Akrotiri, females are shown at various stages of development, some collecting crocuses for a goddesslike figure. Marinatos (2003, 205–11) has suggested that the crocuses were used for their medicinal value in alleviating menstrual cramps.

⁹³ Regarding the cultural meaning of the body as symbol,

EXOTICA AND THE BODY: ADORNING POWER IN PREPALATIAL CRETE

Recent research contends that the body is not a fixed, biological entity but rather is culturally variable—a “social metaphor.”⁹³ I argue here that the human body can also be viewed as a dynamic canvas that conveys social identity. Bodies can simultaneously create and negate or obliterate boundaries, as well as communicate across them, demonstrating the complexity and plurality of the body and its capacity for overlapping identities.⁹⁴ Therefore, the body and how it is presented can be used to negotiate a multiplicity of disparate identities in social contexts.⁹⁵ As the body is dynamic, performative, and highly visible, it can be a more powerful and convincing form of language than, for example, verbal communication. However, just as the body can reveal information about a person or group within a society, it can also be manipulated

artifact, medium, or metaphor, see Montserrat 1998; Hamilakis et al. 2002. For a recent overview of theoretical approaches to the body, particularly the body as a site of lived experience, see Joyce 2005.

⁹⁴ Montserrat 1998, 1–2.

⁹⁵ Fisher and Loren 2003, 225–26.



Fig. 10. "Ladies in Blue" fresco, Knossos (© Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

to conceal certain facts or exaggerate others. Indeed, representations of the body are often more indicative of discourse regarding identity construction than of actual lived experience.⁹⁶

To build an understanding of identity through ancient embodied practice, one must rely heavily on the remains of material culture. Although there are several ways in which the body can communicate identity, I focus primarily on dress or adornment.⁹⁷ In societies throughout space and time, personal adornment such as jewelry and clothing expresses differences or communicates across such boundaries as age, gender, wealth, and social status. According to Warwick and Cavallaro, who emphasize the paradox of dress both as a margin and a boundary, "the language of clothes and

bodily adornment generally experiments relentlessly with ways of defining and redefining the boundaries between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside."⁹⁸ Thus, beyond the aesthetic response that adornment can evoke, it serves a key social function in a dynamic system of communication within societies.⁹⁹

For adornment to be effective in communicating status, the objects or materials must be relatively rare or difficult to obtain, since it is rarity that prompts social admiration.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the use of exotic objects, materials, and production techniques as adornment of the body in Prepalatial Crete was a powerful way to convey social status. Since long-distance overseas travel was necessary to procure these imports, their accessibility was limited to people with economic resources, a high level of orga-

⁹⁶ Fisher and Loren 2003, 227; see also Loren 2001.

⁹⁷ Others include gesture and posture.

⁹⁸ Warwick and Cavallaro 1998, xviii.

⁹⁹ See Cordwell and Schwarz 1979; Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979, 8; Schwarz 1979, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979, 8–10. Meskell (1998, 141) has argued that focusing on notions of control or power ignores the individual and is, in essence, androcentric: "Archaeology has been seduced by Foucauldian notions of control, where power relations are mapped on the body as a surface which can be analyzed as a forum for display. . . . All this mapping and elaborated treatment of the body may reflect the post-modern predilection for surface, but it still

represents a separation from our bodies and our identities as individuals." I suggest, however, that in the case of Prepalatial Crete, the focus on power is justifiable since social status or power is highly relevant during this transitional period preceding the construction of centralized administrative centers on Crete. Furthermore, the study of individual identities or bodies is problematic for Prepalatial Crete because we have no textual evidence to accompany the archaeological remains. Although I agree with Meskell (1998, 141 [emphasis original]) that the "reclamation of *individual* bodies" is critical for archaeology, I also recognize the difficulties inherent in this approach for the prehistoric period. In the two examples Meskell provides to show how archaeologists can ac-



Fig. 11. Saffron-gatherer from Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera (Doumas 1992, fig. 130).



Fig. 12. "Goddess" from Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera (Doumas 1992, fig. 125).

nization, and a certain technological ability. As a result, the elite could maintain a monopoly on these symbols to differentiate themselves from the wider social group while forging ties with Eastern rulers.¹⁰¹

Social status is defined very broadly here to mean one's social worth. Thus, adornment may be used to indicate prestige on many levels—wealth, political power, or religious power. In the case of religious power, adornment may protect a priest or priestess in an encounter with the supernatural world, it may prepare one to act as celebrant of a religious rite, or it may be a means to assume the power of the supernatural.¹⁰² Many of the figures in later Minoan iconography who are adorned with exotic imports appear to be acting in some kind of ritual or sacred context. Such religious roles may have been a crucial element in the identities of the emergent elite in Prepalatial Crete as well.

CONCLUSION

Exotic materials can be interpreted as evidence of social ranking because of the economic resources and

level of organization needed to obtain them, as well as their symbolic significance due to their origin in distant lands. This appears to have been the case in Prepalatial Crete, where such imports were relatively rare and found in clusters, sometimes in more prominent tombs or with ritual objects. Although most of the extant imports to Prepalatial Crete were found in mortuary contexts, there is often clear evidence of wear and, in some cases, repair, meaning that the imports were used before being consigned to the tomb. Similar types of objects are depicted in Minoan iconography from later periods, which supports the view that exotic imports, most of which took the form of jewelry or seals, were not created only as funerary offerings but were used before being deposited in tombs.¹⁰³ As adornment of the body, they were highly visible and therefore would have been extremely effective in communicating identity. Moreover, they may have taken on a performative aspect, especially during ceremonies or rituals. Such public events and the objects and costumes accompanying them can exert a profound

cess individuals in the past, the individuals discussed were named and accompanied by written histories (Meskell 1998, 155–57).

¹⁰¹ Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979, 12.

¹⁰² Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979, 18.

¹⁰³ Seager 1912, 34 (II.41); Higgins 1980, 54.

influence on social memory and were likely used by an emergent elite to establish boundaries between themselves and the wider local population of Prepalatial Crete while simultaneously forging provocative and powerful connections with Eastern elites.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the theories of indigenous evolution and exogenous influence regarding the rise of a palatial civilization in Crete need not be mutually exclusive.

The relatively limited number of exotic imports in Prepalatial Crete has caused them to be overlooked in studies of social and political organization on the island. It has been argued instead that prestige items are defined by their novelty and relative inaccessibility. One point not yet mentioned, however, is the propensity of such prestige items to inspire imitation.¹⁰⁵ The fact that Early Minoan craftsmen imitated some types of exotica, such as Egyptian scarabs, Egyptian stone bowls, and borrowed ape iconography, suggests that a model of competitive emulation was at work.¹⁰⁶ It is also notable that some types of Eastern imports or imitations thereof that were prevalent in the Prepalatial period, such as ivory, gold, and Egyptian stone vases, became less prominent in the subsequent Old Palace period. This fits within the model of competitive emulation as well: once exotic objects become more readily available, they lose their role as symbols of elite identity. Luxury status is not essential to individual objects or types of objects; the concept of luxury is instead created through a "social process" whereby the value of material goods is dependent on their "relative inaccessibility."¹⁰⁷ Applying this to Crete, the virtual disappearance in the Old Palace period of certain types of exotic objects that were prominent in the Prepalatial period suggests the need for innovative and perhaps more prominent symbols of power in the subsequent Old Palace period. Rather than focusing on acquiring small, easily transportable exotica from the Near East and Egypt, the more established elite began to channel their energy into the built environment, specifically the construction of palatial or administrative centers throughout the island.

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¹⁰⁵ Miller 1985; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 146.

¹⁰⁶ Veblen 1899; Miller 1985.

¹⁰⁷ Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 145; see also Douglas and Isherwood 1996.

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