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Source: *British School at Athens Studies*, Vol. 2, POST-MINOAN CRETE: Proceedings of the First Colloquium on Post-Minoan Crete held by the British School at Athens and the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 10-11 November 1995 (1998), pp. 19-26

Published by: [British School at Athens](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960139>

Accessed: 05/12/2013 05:35

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Changing patterns in a Minoan and Post-Minoan sanctuary: the case of Agia Triada

Anna Lucia D'Agata

Since the appearance of Luisa Banti's long article 'I culti minoici e greci di Haghia Triada (Creta)' (Banti 1941–43), the relevance of Agia Triada as a place of worship in Minoan and post-Minoan times has been recognized (Nicholls 1970; Desborough 1970; Kanta 1980), even though neither the great amount of material nor the excavations in the area have been properly published. Banti claimed that the votive material found at the beginning of the century by Halbherr and Paribeni in the Regione dei Sacelli, to the E of Agios Georgios chapel (Halbherr 1902; Paribeni 1903; Halbherr 1903; Halbherr 1905a; Halbherr 1905b), belonged to a single, widespread and superficial deposit, dating from LM III to the beginning of G.

The analysis which I have carried out on the clay and bronze statuettes from the site, has allowed me to assign those from the Regione dei Sacelli to three different periods corresponding to different phases in the use of the site as a sanctuary. They are: LM IIIC to SM; PGB to EO; HL. At the same time, following the excavation notebooks of Halbherr and Paribeni, it has been possible to make some hypotheses on the layout of the sacred area in the course of this long period (D'Agata 1993; D'Agata forthcoming a; D'Agata forthcoming b).

In this paper I will focus on the post-Minoan shrines which were set up in the Regione dei Sacelli, especially those of the PG and G period: as a matter of fact this seems to have been the most important phase in the life of the site as a sanctuary. I will also consider its geographical context, which is essential to understand the relationship between Agia Triada and the neighbouring site of Phaistos.

RECONSTRUCTING THE SANCTUARIES

1. *The Protogeometric B–Early Orientalizing Phase.*

The name Regione dei Sacelli was assigned by the first excavators to the area—sloping from S to N—which was limited by the LM III *kiosk*, the E wall of Megaron ABCD, the N wall of the Minoan road, the monumental staircase, and the area to the E of it (FIG. 1.1). According to Halbherr, the enormous amount of material found here seemed to belong to diverse historical periods, and a large part of it appeared to have been dedicated later than the LM period, consisting

mostly of small clay human figurines—with their arms stretched forward—and bronze bulls. The material was scattered all over this region, but concentrated chiefly in two sectors:

- i. the Piazzale dei Sacelli (FIG. 1.1), i.e. the esplanade, partially paved, which appeared to be bounded by an altar to the E and the *kiosk* to the W, and especially the strip to the S of the stepped structures (FIG. 1.1 [5]) obliquely marking the edge of the paved area;
- ii. the area between the N wall of Stoa FG and the N limit of the Minoan road.

The stratigraphic sequence on the piazzale turned out to be very complex and still in 1913 Halbherr was trying to clarify the date of the stepped structures (FIG. 1.1 [5 a]). The only certainty is that the easternmost of its elements (FIG. 1.1 [5 d]) was cut during the construction of the altar, thus showing that it was set up before the Hellenistic period. On the other hand the recovery, among the blocks of the structures (FIG. 1.1 [A]), of bronze bull figurines, Geometric pottery and at least one LG male clay figurine (FIG. 1.3), does not help determine when the structures were built, but shows that they were in use in the eighth century BC.

Among the material gathered between the N wall of Stoa FG and the N wall of the Minoan road, which also included bronze bulls and clay kernoi, I have been able to identify a Geometric clay head (FIG. 1.4) belonging to an anthropomorphic figure of the type known from Gortyn, Axos and Kavousi; two small clay figurines, one of which holds a cup in his right hand (FIG. 1.5); and an EO aryballos (FIG. 1.6). A bronze human figurine (Zervos 1956, pl. 759) and a bronze cow feeding a calf (Zervos 1956, pl. 475) were also found on the monumental staircase close to the rear room of Stoa FG. Immediately to the E a large pit, containing remains of burned animal bones and fragments of clay kernoi, was located (FIG. 1.1 [3]); it was aligned with the rear room of the Stoa, and seems to have been dug with the orientation of the large LM III building in mind.

Finally, in the area between the Stoa FG and the Minoan road (FIG. 1.2 [3]), the votive deposit turns out to have been obliterated by a small stone HL building, to which remains of clay tiles, a sima, three stone pal-



Fig. 1.1 Agia Triada. Plan of the Regione dei Sacelli. PG-EO phase: (1) Stoa FG, (2) Room added to Stoa FG, (3) reconstructed position of earth-cut pit, (4) Monumental Staircase, (5 a-d) stepped structures, (6) drain pipes, (7) kiosk, (8) Megaron ABCD, (9) Minoan road, (A-B) tests made by Halbherr and Stefani in 1913, \\\ area in which statuettes belonging to PG-EO phase were made).

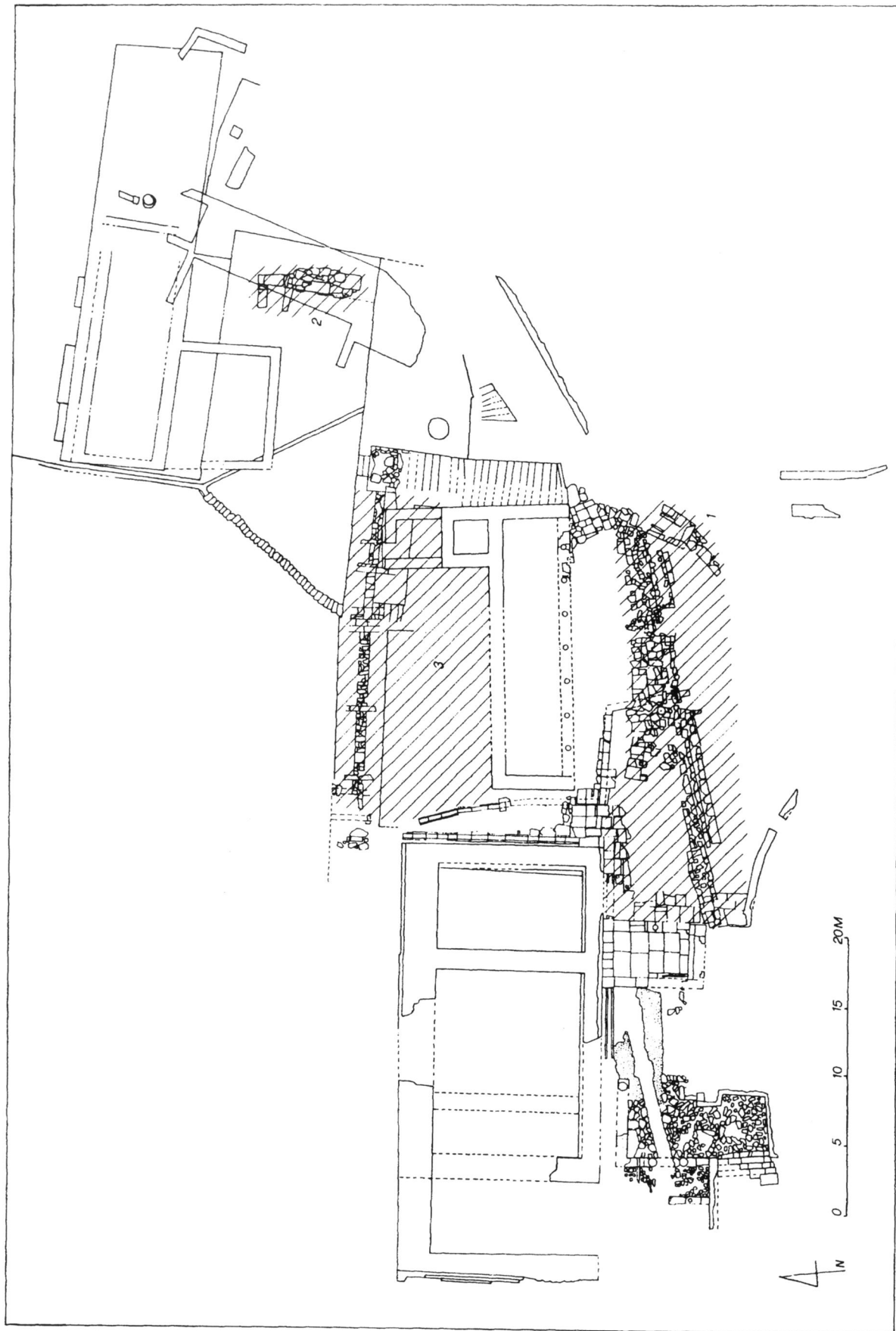


Fig. 1.2 *Agia Triada. Plan of the Regione dei Sacelli. Hellenistic phase: (1) altar, (2) area where HL material from a small stone building was found, (3) Aedicola of Velchanos, \\\ area in which figurines belonging to HL phase were found.*



Figs. 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 (left) Agia Triada. LG clay figurine. Scale 1:1; (centre) Agia Triada. G clay head. Scale 1:1; (right) Agia Triada. G clay figurine. Scale 1:1.

mettes, and a gutter in the form of a lion head, together with black glazed pottery, have to be attributed.

According to Halbherr and Paribeni—and later to Banti—the dispersal of the votive material over such a large area was due to its slipping down from the terrace of the piazzale; in other words, after having been deposited on the piazzale, the mass of figurines was thought to have rolled down the hillside, also as a consequence of the re-arrangements of Greek and Roman date.

But if so, it seems rather strange that LM IIIC and SM material, which according to the notebooks was found in great quantity just to the S of the paved area of the piazzale, did not also come out in the area to the N of it. As a matter of fact, no piece assignable to these periods is mentioned from this area. Moreover, many of the Geometric figurines were recovered just outside the N wall of the Stoa FG, and they were so numerous that during the excavation the LM building was considered as dedicated to the cult.

It can be ruled out that the inner space of the Stoa was reused for the deposition of votive material: no

figurines or cult objects are recorded as coming from here, and the recovery of fragments of paintings fallen from the walls gives the impression that it was in a state of abandonment.

It is tempting to suggest, however, that the votive material was intentionally deposited close to the building and that the huge E and N walls of the Stoa played a central role in the spatial organization of the sanctuary in the post-Minoan period. It is not possible here to adduce all the available evidence; it is enough to mention that the construction of a room leaning against the back room of the Stoa (FIG. 1.1 [2]) shows clearly that after its abandonment the back wall was still standing. Moreover, as noted above, bronze figurines were found on the monumental staircase, close to the room added later and in proximity to the pit filled with animal bones and fragments of clay keroi. From this point of view the pit could be interpreted as a foundation pit, filled during the ceremony which instituted the new cult function of the LM building's remains (*cf.* for similar evidence De Polignac 1993).

In Crete such a pattern of reuse is confirmed at the sanctuary of Zeus Thenatas at Amnisos, flourishing since the ninth century BC around an *Aschenaltar* leaning against the wall of a Minoan building (Schaefer *et al.* 1992). It should also be stressed that in the sanctuaries on Juktas and at Kato Symi the Minoan structures were visible at least until the Archaic period. Finally, at the site of Agia Triada itself, the presence of two LG or EO bronze bulls in the vicinity of the Great Tholos could testify to similar behaviour when confronted with the monumental past of the site (D'Agata forthcoming b).

The votive offerings dating from the ninth to the beginning of the seventh century BC mark a radical transformation in comparison with the previous phase, which, as remarked above, goes back to the end of the LBA.



Fig. 1.6 Agia Triada. EO aryballos. Scale 1:1.



Fig. 1.7 Agia Triada. G clay figurine (front and side views). Scale 1:1.

In the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC three different kinds of wheel-made clay offerings predominated in the sanctuary. Bulls, fantastic animals, and horns of consecration, elaborately made, usually with complex painted decoration and in some cases of large dimensions, reveal features which can be assigned to different regional/chronological traditions: namely LM, LH and Aegean. These help to demonstrate the composite *milieu* of the sanctuary (D'Agata 1993; D'Agata forthcoming a, b).

During the succeeding phase, small clay, hand-made human figurines and bronze bulls constitute the most common votives. The human figurines are usu-

ally represented with a band round the head and are not sexually defined. Only in very rare cases has it been possible to recognize hunters.

Even though many fewer, a number of diverse votives is also attested: wheel-made human figures; bronze human figurines; clay animals; bronze and clay wheels; and clay objects and vases, among them a model of ship, askoi, lids probably used as votive shields, kernoi and at least one pithos decorated with plastic animal heads.

As at many Greek sanctuaries, so at Agia Triada the votives reflect the recipient much less than the dedicant. In order to single out special aspects of the dedications which may allow the identification of the main divinity worshipped at the site, it is, therefore, necessary to rely on types which appear to be unusual or unique. In this respect I can cite: two figurines of naked women with raised arms, which should have been seated side-saddle on a quadruped (FIG. 1.7), two human figurines which seem to be fragments of erotic couples (FIG. 1.8–9), and half of what seems to be nothing less than a *kourotrophos* (FIG. 1.10). Comparable offerings have been found in the near-by sanctuary of Tsoutsouros/Inatos which was dedicated to Eileithyia, as confirmed by the numerous representations of women in labour (Davaras 1963). This kind of votive is unknown at Agia Triada, so that the goddess of childbirth cannot be entertained as the divinity to whom the sanctuary was dedicated. In mainland Greece, on the other hand, the statuettes which the two Cretan sanctuaries have in common frequently appear in sanctuaries of Artemis. Moreover, the common types shared by Agia Triada and the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta should be recalled, even if it is not possible to discuss them here analytically (D'Agata forthcoming b).



Fig. 1.8 Agia Triada. G clay figurine (front and side views). Scale 1:1.



Fig. 1.9 Agia Triada. G clay figurine (front and side views). Scale 1:1.



Fig. 1.10 Agia Triada. G clay figurine (front and side views). Scale 1:1.

In conclusion, the Geometric sanctuary of Agia Triada seems to have been dedicated to a divinity who, judging from Mainland standards, could have been Artemis and have constituted the antecedent of Lato Phytia, the vegetation goddess honoured at Phaistos in Classical times (Willets 1962). Her cult fits in well with a sanctuary site which does not seem to have included a temple and, according to de Polignac's categories (de Polignac 1991, 1994), enjoyed territorial sovereignty.

To sum up, in this phase, an expansion of the sacred area is attested. It was no longer limited to the paved esplanade of the piazzale, and the offerings were also deposited in proximity to a still visible Minoan building. All this suggests that the relationship with the past and its remains developed on the one hand as 'memory' of the earliest cult practices performed on the site, and on the other as result of specific political interest. It is not necessary here to list the reasons for such activities which have recently been summarized (Alcock 1991; see also Nixon 1990). Rather it is important to stress that the second phase of the sanctuary of Agia Triada corresponds to the date—fixed between the late ninth and the early seventh century BC—of the settlement to the w of the Palace of Phaistos (Rocchetti 1974–1975).

This implies that, during the second phase of the sanctuary, a relationship was probably established between two of the most important centres of the Messara, which can be traced back to the LBA and seems to have been founded on the primary importance that the control of territory held for Phaistos. In other words, Phaistos reoccupied the site of Agia Triada in order to use it as a sanctuary site, so asserting clearly its rights over an area to which neighbouring centres were making claims. If so, the slow abandonment of the sanctuary in the course of the seventh

century could have its roots in the indifference with which the new leading community—to be identified with Gortyn—regarded it after the defeat of its rival at the beginning of the same century (Palermo 1992). On the other hand the impressive growth during the seventh century of the Gortynian sanctuary of Athena, on Prophetis Ilias, comes as no surprise; nor does its abandonment at the end of the same century when the *polis* as such developed, and civic cults and sanctuaries rose, starting with that of Apollo Pythios.

This reconstruction could help to explain why, in the Archaic and Classical periods, Phaistos did not bring the sanctuary at Agia Triada once more into use: at Phaistos, as at Gortyn, cult seems now to be chiefly a civic matter and a temple was built on the s slope of the hill of the Palace.

2. The Hellenistic Phase.

After three hundred years, at the beginning of the Hellenistic age, Agia Triada, under the control of the *polis* of Phaistos, was re-established as a worship place. There are at least two shrines in use on the site in this period: the altar (La Rosa 1988–89) on the piazzale,



Fig. 1.11 Agia Triada. HL female protome. Scale 1:1.

which had been re-paved; and the *aedicula* installed over a Minoan stoa and dedicated to Velchanos. To my mind, the small stone building to the N of Stoa FG could also have been destined for cult (FIG. 1.2).

The few votives pertaining to this phase seem to reflect the existence of more shrines.

The re-establishment of the site as a sanctuary site should be linked to the divinity to whom a fine female protome (FIG. 1.11) and a 'Tanagran Figurine'—which for this phase represent the earliest material—were dedicated (D'Agata forthcoming b). Even if they both constitute very common, if not ubiquitous, offerings in Greek sanctuaries, it is also true that the female figurine holds in her right hand a small animal, and that among the HL vases from the site there are a miniature hydria and a small kantharos (La Rosa 1988–89, fig. 10). On the basis of the Knossian material from the sanctuary of Demeter (Coldstream 1973), I should suggest that this goddess could also have been worshipped at Agia Triada.

If this identification is correct, the choice of a female goddess of vegetation and fertility could be seen as an element of continuity with the previous phase of the sanctuary. In any case, as the evidence from Gortyn and Kamilari show (Karo 1909; Englezou 1988–89), the cult of Demeter is well known in the Messara in the fourth and third centuries BC.

Among the animal figurines a bull protome, probably not earlier than the second century BC, was found on the stairs to the E of the so called Bastione and can be attributed to the shrine of Velchanos (D'Agata forthcoming b). The connection of this god with bovines is confirmed by the Phaestian coins on which the representation of the young god is associated on the reverse with the image of the bull (Le Rider 1966).

It has to be stressed, in conclusion, that both the altar and the *aedicula* were set up on LM ruins. This means that the pattern of the reuse of a Minoan site for cult practices, as in the previous phase of the sanctuary, also pertains in the Hellenistic period when it can be detected elsewhere in the Messara (Watrous *et al.* 1993).

3. The Decline of the Site as a Sanctuary.

It is in second century BC that the site of Agia Triada seems to have been abandoned, probably following the new destruction that Phaistos suffered at the hand of Gortyn around 150 BC (*IC* i 269; *IC* iv 25; Le Rider 1966; Callaghan 1981; Portale 1994).

After the Roman conquest of the island in 69 BC, the small farm set up on the so-called Bastione (La Rosa 1988–89) gives evidence for the transition to a new agricultural organization of the territory of Phaistos (Sanders 1976; Sanders 1982; Watrous *et al.* 1993; Alcock 1993) and also for the decline, in classical antiquity, of our site as a sanctuary.

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