



## NEWLY EXCAVATED ARTIFACTS FROM HAGIOS CHARALAMBOS, CRETE, WITH EGYPTIAN CONNECTIONS

Philip P. Betancourt  
Temple University

### Abstract

*The Minoan ossuary at Hagios Charalambos is located in the upland plain of Lasithi in Central Crete. This article discusses eight items with Egyptian connections discovered in the excavations of the site in 2002 and 2003. Two pendants carved from hippopotamus ivory in the form of apes belong to classes already known from Minoan Crete. Six clay examples of the sistrum add to our knowledge of this musical instrument on Crete as only a single MM IA sistrum was known previously from this island. The artifacts increase the very small corpus of ‘Egyptianizing’ objects known from MM IA Crete, a period that is contemporary with the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. They point to a complex trade network reaching Cretan ports on both the south and the north coasts that was already present. These objects help document the distribution of exotic items with overseas connections to the interior of the Minoan island, well away from any coastal seaport or important population center. They also underscore the ambiguous nature of the connections between Minoan Crete and the East Mediterranean at this period when one cannot be sure if the overseas connections are direct or indirect. Within Crete, however, the distribution of hippopotamus ivory and objects made from it suggests that this trade from overseas is with South Cretan ports rather than North Cretan ports, because the distribution is densest in the Mesara and gradually diminishes away from this region.*

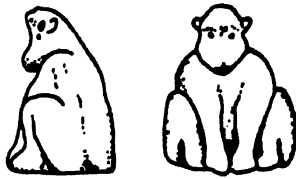
The recent excavations in the ossuary at Hagios Charalambos in Crete<sup>1</sup> have discovered several objects that bear on the problem of connections between Egypt and the Aegean. This paper examines eight of them, two hippopotamus ivory pendants with representations of apes and a series of six examples of the sistrum. All of these objects can be dated to Middle Minoan (MM) IA in Crete, a phase that is approximately contemporary with the beginning of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt. They are of interest, because Hagios Charalambos is located far up in the mountains of central Crete, far from any coastal location, so that they illustrate the type of Egyptianizing item that was circulating within the island of Crete, not what was being used at a coastal community with the possibility of direct overseas connections. As these items demonstrate, a taste for exotic materials and images was already well dispersed across the Minoan island at the beginning of the second millennium B.C., including to mountainous areas that were well away from any harbor.

Hagios Charalambos is a natural cave that was used for the deposition of secondary burials.<sup>2</sup> It is located in the Lasithi plain in east-central Crete. The cavern was filled with burials and artifacts within a short period of time in MM IIB, with pottery and other objects indicating that the original graves had spanned a long period of time, from Final Neolithic to the time of secondary burial. Bones and artifacts were placed in the cave at random, with little or no concern about keeping the original context intact.

Three classes of object are considered here:

1. Ape Figurine (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 13,907). Preserved height 2.2 cm; width 1.4 cm. Hippopotamus ivory, very pale brown (Munsell color 10YR 8/3-8/4). Frontal figure; seated on haunches with front legs between the back legs; flat base; pierced laterally through the back of the head; most of surface missing. Found in Room 7, washed in from Room 5.

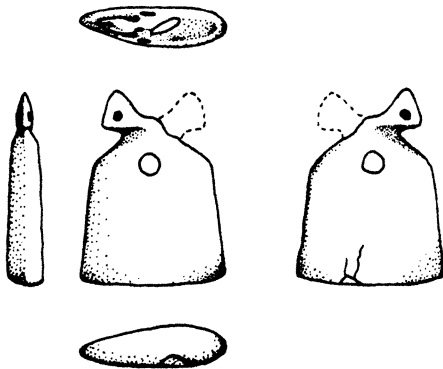
Surface eroded in antiquity. The figurine may have been intended as a seal, but the base is too eroded to preserve any motif. Date: MM IA.



HNM 13,907

Figure 1: Ape Figurine (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 13,907)

2. Double ape figurine (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 13,910). Double ape (baboons?) figurine, missing one of the heads. Height 2.5 cm.; width 1.9 cm. Hippopotamus ivory, very pale brown (Munsell color 10YR 8/3-8/4). Very abstract double figure with two opposed heads and featureless body area; incised eyes; pierced through the upper center for use as a pendant. Found in Room 5, area 1, level 4. Date: MM IA.



HNM 13,910

Figure 2: Double ape figurine (Hagios Nikolaos Museum no. 13,910)

3. Series of six sistra and eight sistrum discs (Hagios Nikolaos Museum nos. 13,876, 13,977, 13,978, 13,979, 13,984, unnumbered fragments [sistra] and 11,866, 11,887, 11,888, 12,400, 13,883, and unnumbered items [discs]). Heights vary from 15.7 cm. to 18 cm. Manufactured from a fine clay fabric (Munsell color reddish yellow, 5YR 7/8), Cretan but not local to the Hagios Charalambos region. Each sistrum consists of a small vertical handle with circular section supporting an elliptical strap frame with two sets of holes to support the horizontal rods for the disks. Traces of dark slip and of added white paint forming

horizontal lines on the frames are preserved on some examples. Found throughout the cavern; all but one intact specimen assembled from scattered fragments. Date: MM IA.

The items considered here can all be assigned a date in MM IA. Two of them are ape figurines carved of hippopotamus ivory, a material that was only imported into Crete for a short period, from EM II until MM IA.<sup>3</sup> The style of the carvings and the date of the seals carved on the bases of some of the artifacts in this class of ivory pendant indicate that the two figurines can be placed at the end of this period, in MM IA.<sup>4</sup> The third item, a series of six sistra, can be dated by comparison with the only other clay sistrum of this type known from Crete, a very similar example that came from a MM IA grave at Archanes.<sup>5</sup>

A few other Minoan sites have yielded Middle Minoan ape and monkey figurines made of ivory, bone, and other materials. The figures are mostly seals.<sup>6</sup> Examples of single animals come only from tombs in the Mesara in south-central Crete, the Lasithi plain in central Crete, and Archanes in north-central Crete: the Trapeza Cave,<sup>7</sup> Hagia Triada,<sup>8</sup> Platanos,<sup>9</sup> Marathokephalo,<sup>10</sup> and Archanes.<sup>11</sup> The example from Platanos is the closest parallel for the piece from Hagios Charalambos, because the proportions, the stance, and the position of the legs are very similar. The concept of the ape amulet is ultimately Egyptian,<sup>12</sup> but the image also occurs in the Levant.<sup>13</sup>

Double figures that squat back to back like the second pendant from Hagios Charalambos also come from several Minoan sites. Their style ranges from naturalistic to highly schematic. The most naturalistic examples seem to be either monkeys or baboons, suggesting that all figures should be identified this way. Examples come from the same geographic area as the single animals: the Trapeza Cave,<sup>14</sup> Lebena,<sup>15</sup> Marathokephalo,<sup>16</sup> Platanos,<sup>17</sup> and Archanes.<sup>18</sup> All of these sites are in central Crete. Lebena, Marathokephalo, and Platanos are at the south, Archanes is in the north, and the Trapeza Cave is in the mountains in east-central Crete. The concept is originally Egyptian,<sup>19</sup> but all of these images were made outside of Egypt, almost certainly in Crete itself (because the style is Cretan, not Egyptian).

In the Aegean, the distribution for these zoomorphic pendants or amulets is restricted to central Crete. Within the central part of the island, most of the examples come from near the south coast. A conclusion that either the raw material (hippopotamus ivory) or the concept of depicting an ape in the form of a small amulet or both entered Crete through one of the ports in southern Crete is the most likely conclusion from this distribution in south-central Crete. The South Cretan distribution is the most likely scenario because both the raw material (hippopotamus ivory) and the small seals in the form of apes made from it have a dense distribution only in south-central and a pattern of gradual dispersal to other parts of the island.<sup>20</sup>

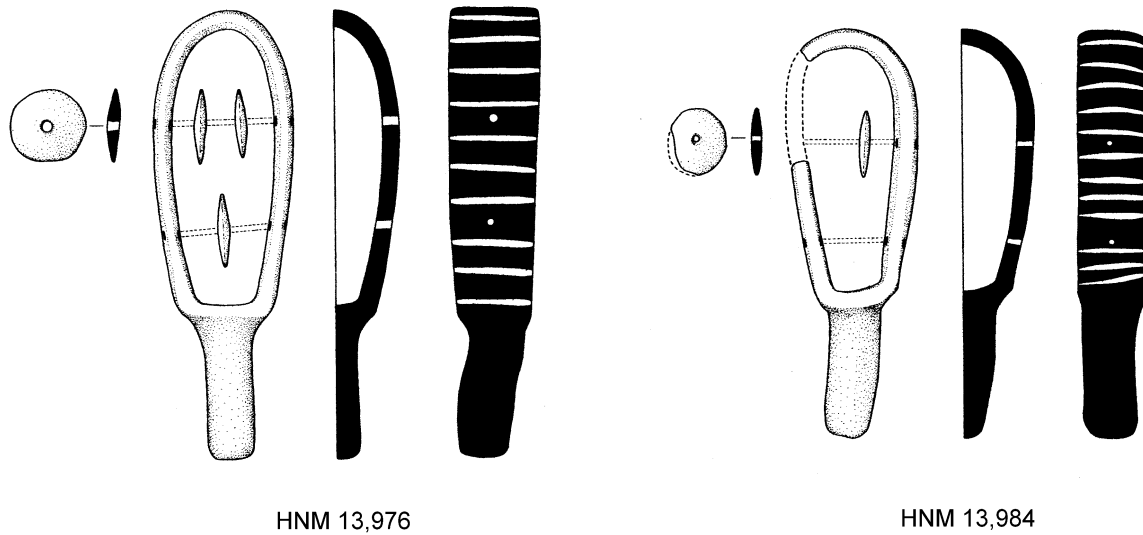


Figure 3: Series of six sistra and eight sistrum discs (Hagios Nikolaos Museum nos. 13,876, 13,977, 13,978, 13,979, 13,984, unnumbered fragments [sistra] and 11,866, 11,887, 11,888, 12,400, 13,883, and unnumbered items [discs])

Outside of Crete, parallels come from the Levant as well as Egypt. Whether the material arrived in Crete from Egypt or from the Levant is unknown, because the hippopotamus lived in both regions during the Bronze Age.<sup>21</sup> In either case, it is sea trade linking the East Mediterranean with southern Crete that is responsible for the arrival of the material as well as the way it was used.

The Middle Minoan sistra are a very different class of artifact. In addition to the one other complete clay example, which comes from Archanes in north-central Crete,<sup>22</sup> several isolated finds of contemporary sistrum discs are known from Crete but have gone unrecognized until now. Like the ones from Archanes and Hagios Charalambos, they are circular clay discs that are slightly thicker at the center where they are pierced with a single hole. Two clay discs from a sistrum come from a tholos tomb at Krasi, a site located in the part of the Pediada that adjoins the Lasithi Plain,<sup>23</sup> and discs also come from the Trapeza Cave in Lasithi.<sup>24</sup> Several discs from Quartier Mu at Malia may also be from sistra.<sup>25</sup> Like the ape images, the distribution of the MM IA sistrum is also limited to central Crete, but examples only occur in north-central and central Crete, not in the south of the island. If the known distribution reflects the ancient routes of trade, the sistrum is related to the northern Cretan ports, not the southern ones.

The distribution suggests a complex system of trade routes in MM IA. Exotic ideas and new raw materials that originated in the eastern Mediterranean were entering the Minoan island both through the south-central and through the north-central seaports. They were being disseminated to a number of inland sites, including some small and remote locations that were far from any major population center.

As these newly discovered artifacts demonstrate, our knowledge of the exact relationship between Minoan Crete and Middle Kingdom Egypt is still filled with unsolved problems. Hippopotamus ivory, the apes and monkeys represented on Minoan figurines, and the percussion instrument called the sistrum are not native to Crete. All of these items have potential connections with Egypt, but whether the Egyptian relations are direct or they were disseminated to the west via intermediaries in the Levant, Cyprus, or somewhere else cannot be determined from the presently available evidence.

The origin of this class of sistrum found in Crete is still unclear. The design of the sistra from Archanes and Hagios Charalambos has its best parallels in Egypt, and an especially close parallel from Thebes has been illustrated by Mikrakis,<sup>26</sup> but it is later than the Minoan instruments. During the Late Bronze Age and in later times, Egyptian sistra were so common that many examples survive.<sup>27</sup> They are not usual, however, before the 18th Dynasty. Unlike the instruments from Crete, Egyptian sistra usually had both frames and disks made of metal. They sometimes had several disks on a single horizontal rod, suggesting that skilled musicians could probably achieve several different sounds by varying the motions used to play the instruments. Since the MM IA instruments from Crete were locally made in the Minoan island (because the clay fabric appears Cretan, as does the use of white paint for decoration), it is the concept that was received from abroad, not these specific instruments.

In spite of these problems, however, some positive conclusions can be reached. It is important to note that in MM IA, just after the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, overseas influences and concepts that originated in Egypt were probably reaching Crete both through the southern ports (hippopotamus

ivory and ape imagery) and through the northern ones (sistra). This situation suggests a more complex trade pattern than a single port of entry (such as Knossos) would suggest. The exotic material, the use of a foreign musical instrument, and the new figural imagery represented by these artifacts appears in a remote part of Crete at a site with practically no Knossian pottery or any other signs of influence from the largest center on Crete. The depth of the penetration of a taste for exotic foreign concepts and unusual raw materials is also of interest. Well before the building of the Middle Minoan palaces, even Cretans living in remote parts of the island were familiar with goods and ideas that originated overseas.

The nature of the overseas connections is also of note. Whether the ships were Minoan or they originated in the Levant, Egypt, or somewhere else, none of the Eastern connections suggest any trade in major commodities such as metals at this period. The large Minoan effort to acquire copper and tin was not in MM IA, but later. The interest in an elite raw material for small trinkets and in exotic musical instruments must represent early efforts at establishing the links with the East Mediterranean that by MM IB to MM II would result in the acquisition of important quantities of metals and other commodities by the southern Aegean island.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Excavations were conducted in 2002 by P. Betancourt in collaboration with Costis Davaras and in 2003 in collaboration with Davaras and Eleni Stravopodi. For the project, see Betancourt, Davaras, and Stravopodi 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> For the complex treatment of Minoan secondary depositions, see Branigan 1987, 43–51. For the excavation at the Hagios Charalambos Cave, see Betancourt, Davaras and Stravopodi 2008, 545–546.
- <sup>3</sup> The distribution of hippopotamus ivory in MM IA Crete is discussed by Ferrence 2007.
- <sup>4</sup> Sbonias 1995, 36–37.
- <sup>5</sup> Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, 351–356, figs. 321–323.
- <sup>6</sup> Discussed by Boardman 1972, fig. 24, pl. 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1935–1936, fig. 21, no. 7; Pendlebury 1939, 87, fig. 13.2; Lambrou-Phillipson 1990, 270, no. 236, fig. 59; Boardman 1972, fig. 24; for a color photograph see Karetsou, Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and Papadakis, eds., 2000, 172, no. 154.
- <sup>8</sup> Banti 1930–1931, 216, no. 447 and fig. 120b; for a color photograph, see Karetsou, Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and Papadakis, eds., 2000, 172, no. 153.
- <sup>9</sup> Xanthoudides 1924, 114, fig. 13, no. 1040; Pendlebury 1939, 87, fig. 14, no. 1d; Zervos 1956, figs. 205, 207; Platon 1969, no. 249; for a color photograph, see Karetsou, Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and Papadakis, eds., 2000, 174, no. 156.
- <sup>10</sup> Xanthoudides 1918, fig. 8, lower left of double figure.
- <sup>11</sup> Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, II, fig. 690 lower right.
- <sup>12</sup> Aruz 2008, fig. 94.
- <sup>13</sup> For an example from Byblus, see Aruz 2008, fig. 95.
- <sup>14</sup> Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1935–1936, 97, 101, no. 10, pl. 14; for a color photograph, see Karetsou, Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and Papadakis, eds., 2000, 173, no. 155.
- <sup>15</sup> Alexiou and Warren 2004, 146–147, no. 29, pl. 133a.
- <sup>16</sup> Xanthoudides 1918, fig. 8, upper center.
- <sup>17</sup> Xanthoudides 1924, pl. 15, nos. 1026 and 1146; Branigan 1970, fig. 14, upper row center.
- <sup>18</sup> Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, II, fig. 690, second row no. 2.
- <sup>19</sup> Aruz 2008, fig. 103.
- <sup>20</sup> Ferrence 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> For Egypt, see Krzyszkowska and Morkot 2000, 326–327; for the Levant, see Horwitz and Tchernov 1990.
- <sup>22</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Marinatos 1929, 122, fig. 15, no. 45.
- <sup>24</sup> Pendlebury, Pendlebury, and Money-Coutts 1935–1936, pl. 19.
- <sup>25</sup> Detornay 1980, fig. 205.
- <sup>26</sup> 2000, 163, fig. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Aign 1963, 415–447; Klebs 1967, 60–63; Bonnet 1971, 716–720; Manniche 1991.

## References

- Aign, B. 1963. *Die Geschichte der Musikinstrumente des ägäischen Raumes bis um 700 vor Christus*. Frankfurt: Kassel.
- Alexiou, S., and P. Warren. 2004. *The Early Minoan Tombs of Lebena, Southern Crete*. SIMA 30. Sävedalen: Paul Åströms Forlag.
- Aruz, J. 2008. *Marks of Distinction. Seals and Cultural Exchange between the Aegean and the Orient (ca. 2600–1360 B.C.)*. Mainz am Rhein: Gebr. Mann Verlag.
- Banti, L. 1930–1931. “La grande tomba a tholos di Haghia Triada,” *Annuario* 13–14:155–251.

## Philip P. Betancourt | Newly Excavated Artifacts from Hagios Charalambos, Crete....

- Betancourt, P.P., C. Davaras, and E. Stravopodi, "Excavations in the Hagios Charalambos Cave," *Hesperia* 77:539–547.
- Boardman, J. 1972. *Greek Gems and Finger Rings: Early Bronze Age to Late Classical*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Bonnet, H. 1971. "Sistrum". In *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 716–720.
- Branigan, K. 1970. *The Tombs of Mesara*. London: Gerald Duckworth.
- Detournay, B. 1980. "Figurines et reliefs d'applique" and "Éléments de parure et de décoration." In *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia. Le Quartier Mu II. Vases de pierre et de métal, vannerie, figurines et reliefs d'applique, éléments de parure et de décoration, armes, sceaux et empreintes*, B. Detournay, J.-C. Poursat, and F. Vandennebece, eds. *Étcrét* 26. Paris: Bocard, 99–115 and 133–146.
- Ferrence, Susan C. 2007. "Hippopotamus Ivory in EM-MM Lasithi and the Implications for Eastern Mediterranean Trade: New Evidence from Hagios Charalambos." In *Krinoi kai Limenes: Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw*, P.P. Betancourt, M.C. Nelson, and H. Williams, eds. Philadelphia: INSTAP Academic Press, 167–175.
- Horwitz, L.K., and E. Tchernov. 1990. "Cultural and Environmental Implications of Hippopotamus Bone Remains in Archaeological Contexts in the Levant," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 280: 67–76.
- Karetsou, A., M. Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and N. Papadakis, eds. 2000. *Κρήτη-Αίγυπτος, Πολιτισμικοί δεσμοί τριών χιλιετιών: Κατάλογος*. Athens: Karon Editions.
- Klebs, L. 1967. "Die verschiedenen Formen des Sistrums," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* 67: 60–63
- Knappett, C. 1997. "Ceramic Production in the Protopalatial Mallia 'State': Evidence from Quartier Mu and Myrtos Pyrgos." In *TEXNH: Craftsmen, Craftswomen and Craftsmanship in the Aegean Bronze Age*, R. Laffineur and P.P. Betancourt, eds. *Aegaeum* 16. Liège: Université de Liège, 305–311.
- Krzyszowska, O., and R. Morkot. 2000. "Ivory and Related Materials." In *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, P.T. Nicholson and I. Shaw, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 320–331.
- Lambrou-Phillipson, C. 1990. *Hellenorientalia. The Near Eastern Presence in the Bronze Age Aegean, ca 3000–1100 B.C. Interconnections Based on the Material Record and Written Evidence Plus Orientalia. A Catalogue of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Mitannian, Syro-Palestinian, Cypriot and Asia Minor Objects from the Bronze Age Aegean. SIMA Pocket Book 95*. Göteborg: Paul Åströms Forlag.
- Manniche, L. 1991. *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*. London: British Museum Press.
- Marinatos, S. 1929. "Πρωτομινωικός θολωτός τάφος παρά το χωρίον Κράσι Πεδιάδος," *ArchDelt* 12:102–141.
- Mikrakis, M. 2000. "Μουσική στην Κρήτη και την Αίγυπτο. Ένα ιδιαίτερο πεδίο ανάπτυξης πολιτισμικών δεσμών." In *Κρήτη—Αίγυπτος, Πολιτισμικοί δεσμοί τριών χιλιετιών*, A. Karetsou, M. Andreadaki-Vlazaki, and N. Papadakis, eds. Athens: Karon Editions, 162–169.
- Pendlebury, J.D.S. 1939. *The Archaeology of Crete: An Introduction*. London: Methuen and Co.
- Pendlebury, J.D.S., H.W. Pendlebury, and M.B. Money-Coutts. 1935–1936. "Excavations in the Plain of Lasithi. I: The Cave of Trapeza," *BSA* 36:1–131.
- Sakellarakis, Y., and E. Sapouna-Sakellarakis. 1997. *Archanes. Minoan Crete in a New Light*. Athens: Ammos Editions.
- Sbonias, K. 1995. *Frühkretische Siegel. Ansätze für eine Interpretation der sozial-politischen Entwicklung auf Kreta während der Frühbronzezeit. BAR International Series 62*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Xanthoudides, S. 1918. "Πρωτομινωικοί τάφοι Μεσαράς, Μαραθοκέφαλον," *ArchDelt* 4: Parartema, 9–32.
- . 1924. *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesara*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Zervos, C. 1956. *L'art de la Crète néolithique et minoenne*. Paris: Editions Cahiers de'Art.