TYPOLOGY AND STYLE OF PREPALATIAL SEALS¹

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Since the last Marburg conference, there has been some progress in the dating and classification of early Aegean seals. At the Cretological Congress in 1976, Dr. I. Sakellarakis outlined a chronology for the early Cretan seals based on his own new dated groups from Archanes and those from Lebena; and Dr. I. Pini undertook the preliminary stylistic study of a group of the EM III–MM Ia period². I should like here to summarize the present state of our knowledge of the prepalatial seals, as it appears to me, and then to make some comments on relations among Crete, the Cyclades, and the mainland.

The unbroken development of Cretan seal-cutting from its beginnings, which we see still imperfectly, seems to show a period of expansion and experimentation starting sometime in EM II after an initial use in EM I of the very simplest forms and designs in soft stone³. Ivory or bone is introduced for more complex forms in EM II, still with simple designs, as we see in Lebena tholos II a ⁴. These complex forms include animal carvings (CMS II 1, 213, 216); it is worth noting that three-dimensional representation was already being explored in the EM I pottery of the rich Lebena II tholos ⁵. Two-dimensional representation seems to appear only in EM III (at Viannos; also in Archanes

¹ Sources of illustrations: figs. 1. 3. 5: photo C. Albiker – figs. 2. 4. 6. 7. 10. 17. 19: photo P. Gautel – figs. 8. 11: photo H. Tessmann – figs. 14–16: photo I. Pini – fig. 9: drawing author – figs. 12. 13: drawing A. Fäthke – fig. 18: drawing P. de Jong.

Abbreviations used: Coll. Giam.: Agnes Xénaki-Sakellariou, Les Cachets Minoens de la Collection Giamalakis, Études Crétoises X, Paris, 1958.

KMG: DFG-Forschungsbericht: Die kretisch-mykenische Glyptik und ihre gegenwärtigen Probleme, Bonn 1974.

Other abbreviations as in the CMS.

² Pepragmena of the IVth Cretological Congress, 1976: I. Pini, "Ein Beitrag zur Chronologischen Ordnung der Frühkretischen Siegel"; I. Sakellarakis, "Early Groups of Seals from the Tholos Tombs of Archanes". I should like to thank Dr. Pini for his kind permission to refer to his article in advance of its publication.

³ Lebena Tholos II lower level, CMS II 1, 195–200. 202–203, and in the lower levels of Archanes E, according to Dr. Sakellarakis (Pepragmena IV). Stone seals of simple design from Myrtos (P. Warren, Myrtos, pl. 77a and b) and Pyrgos (G. Cadogan, paper at annual meeting of Archaeological Institute of America, 1976).

⁴ Lebena Tholos II a lower level, CMS II 1, 210–216. Archanes Tholos E, I. Sakellarakis, Ergon 1975, fig. 165.

⁵ St. Alexiou, ILN 6/8/1960, 225ff. figs. 9 and 14. P. Warren, The Aegean Civilizations (The Making of the Past series), Oxford, 1975, 58. I am grateful to Dr. Alexiou for permission to examine the Lebena material in 1977.

tholos Gamma ⁶), possibly as early as EM II at Mochlos (CMS II1, 473. 477), and at Sphoungaras (469). The human figure appears on seals as early as does other two-dimensional representation, but much less commonly and less successfully.

It would seem to be in the EM III period, however we may define or date it, that seal-cutting blossomed into a great and fertile variety of shapes and designs. There is enough material from EM III/MM Ia for us to speak now, if only rarely of workshops or of hands, still of groups of stylistically associated material, not necessarily closely contemporary but connected in shape, material, motif, and principle of composition. Dr. Pini has identified one such group 7. Many of these seals are of soft stone or faience, the shapes often simple and roughly hemispherical ones (buttons, gables or the like) or discs, occasionally animals, rarely cylinders. The design is often organized into a symmetrical division of the space and is frequently bounded with a border line. The motifs include leaf forms, rosettes, volutes, a cross design, and occasionally animals or hieroglyphic signs.

I should like here to suggest a second group of EM III/MM Ia seals whose most characteristic shape is the cylinder with both ends carved and with triple borings. The ring of lions (Fig. 1, CMS II 1, 224, Marathokephalo) is the most familiar of its designs, nearly always on one end only, the other end bearing a simpler floral or spiral or swastika motif. The "lion-cylinder" appears in an EM III impression from the Royal Road at Knossos and is represented as well among the later Phaistos Room 25 seal impressions as an antique survival (CMS II 5, 281). It is commonest among the ill-dated Messara seals, above all at Platanos and Marathokephalo, where we should look for its origin 9, but it was badly imitated at Gournes (CMS II 1, 396, 399), and cleverly paraphrased at Archanes in the ostotheke group dated to EM III/MM Ia (CMS II 1, 382) in a seal which in other respects belongs to Pini's group. The lion-motif appears in many variants, and presumably is used over a period of time; at Archanes (CMS II 1, 385) and at Marathokephalo (222) human figures appear.

The lion-style group, if we may call it so ¹⁰, is executed chiefly in ivory, and includes also a number of seals of other shapes, chiefly animals and conoids ¹¹. It includes, besides, motifs which relate to Pini's group: the hatched palmette, the two-leaf, as well as the spiral-leaf. The two-leaf in particular, which is common as a fill as well as a border, is used in a related conoid from Archanes (*Fig. 2*, CMS II 1, 387) as the major component of the design, one which replaces the lions.

I should like now to turn from the identification of groups to composition. Even in the Archanes seal, where the concentric effect of the composition is so strong as to be

⁶ Viannos, CMS II 1 446 (three fish; man and woman). Archanes Tholos Gamma, I. Sakellarakis, Prakt 1972, 338 (three fish).

⁷ I. Pini, Pepragmena IV. For an example cf. Platanos, CMS II 1, 268.

⁸ M.S.F. Hood, BICS 13, 1966, 110.

⁹ Platanos: CMS II1, 248, 250, 251, 252, 295, 300, 311, 312, 321, 336, Marathokephalo, 222–225.
Others: CMS II 1, 3 (Drakones), 52 (A. Triada Vano L), 497 (uncertain origin); CMS XII 8; Coll. Giam. 45.

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10 Paul Yule in his doctoral dissertation for New York University, 1978. "Early Cretan Seals: A Study in Typology, Style and Chronology based on Stratified Finds", has identified such a group independently and named it "Parading Lions/Spiral Complex".

¹¹ Animals: CMS II 1, 237. 249. 253. 281. Coll. Giam. 2. Conoids: CMS II 1, 39. 51. 387. Other: CMS II 1, 63. 254. 282; CMS IV 34.





Fig. 1 CMS II1, 224.

Fig. 2 CMS II1, 387.

nearly static, the center motif introduces a sense of motion, a clock-wise twist. This Torsion, in Prof. Matz' expressive phrase 12, is a common and characteristic Cretan compositional principle, as we know, and particularly characteristic of the arrangements of lions on the cylinders 13. But there are at least two Cretan alternatives to Torsion, both of which appear frequently in the wealth of EM III/MM Ia designs. One is the Rapport (again Prof. Matz' term 14) in which the boundary of the seal is ignored and the repetitive design extends in our imaginations into the surrounding space (Fig. 3, CMS II 1, 60). We see this principle at least as early as EM III/MM I a in a seal from Vano F attached to Tholos A at H. Triada (CMS II 1, 62), and earlier perhaps at Mochlos in tomb VI (CMS II 1, 471) 15.

The other principle is one used in Pini's group, described by him as "schemes for dividing up the space"16. The seal surface is accepted as an unequivocally defined area, either symmetrically and statically arranged, as on a gable prism from Platanos (Fig. 4, CMS II 1, 287 c), or on occasion with a representational figure (Fig. 5, CMS II 1, 287 b)

¹² Matz, Siegel 156. 161.

¹³ Dr. Pini has pointed out to me that, strictly speaking, Torsion is a principle of three-dimensional art, demonstrated frequently, for example, in EM III/MM pottery (cf. EM III teapot, Evans, PM I fig. 78). I should prefer to extend the term to include two-dimensional design, especially since the principle can be seen on occasion both in three dimensions on the seals themselves and in two on their engraved faces. A type of cone, chiefly in soft stone, with deeply grooved Torsion markings, or with drilled holes over its surface, can be dated to the MM Ia period from examples at Lebena (IIa, CMS III, 206), Drakones (4), and Vorou (378). The latter two are listed in Pini's group together with a rare ivory example which survived into the time of the Mallia workshop (Pini, Pepragmena IV. Mallia Z beta, CMS II 2, 83). The Torsion principle is frequently expressed on the seal face as well in a border of slanting strokes, sometimes between line borders (CMS II 1, 40, ivory; 84, 149, 190, 220, 279, 418; 127 from Mallia Workshop, possibly another survival). Signets may also be marked with Torsion grooves (CMS II 1, 86).

¹⁴ Matz, Siegel, 136–139. 151–153.

¹⁵ Pottery from the Vani was said to be of EM III-MM Ia date: L. Banti, ASAtene XIII-XIV, 1930-1931, 178. ¹⁶ Pini, Pepragmena IV.

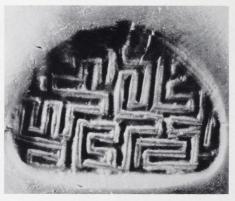


Fig. 3 CMS II1, 60.

or even with hieroglyphic signs. In this second case particularly, the area may be further defined with a border, as Pini has pointed out ¹⁷. The single figure here stands and exists in a world of its own, even on occasion on a ground line ¹⁸. We see this extraordinary development in several well-known and closely related seals which form the core of Pini's group: the third side of the Platanos gable-prism showing the single animal in a border which compares well with one on the H. Triada die, and with other animal compositions on the Archanes ostotheke triple die ¹⁹. These are certainly of the greatest importance for the development of later Cretan glyptic and mural art.

These three compositional techniques, then, – Torsion, Rapport, bordered space – may be said to characterize Cretan prepalatial seal-cutting in its most creative stage. They show us three different ways of dealing with the challenge of the empty field. The first, Torsion, sets up a perpetual motion within the boundaries of the space. The second, Rapport, denies the boundaries altogether. The last creates a world within the space and suggests for the first time a third dimension, a deliberately man-made and man-contemplated world. It is not unreasonable to see here some connection with other profound contemporary changes: the first appearance of script, and the social changes which are to culminate in the first palaces ²⁰.

It should perhaps be said at this point that these compositional types are not hard and fast delimitations. Elements of Torsion appear in all: in the grooves of the cones (e.g. CMS II 1, 4, from Drakones) and the scoring of other seal backs in Pini's group ²¹, as well as in the hatched borders and compositional arrangements. Motifs which belong to the Rapport are added to bordered designs or to lion-cylinders. The lion-cylinder

¹⁷ Pepragmena IV. The border, according to Pini, is especially characteristic of this period, and is not at all common at other times. It is also common among the contemporary Torsion cones: see note 13 above.

¹⁸ E.g. Archanes, CMS II1, 391 side B.

¹⁹ Platanos, CMS II 1, 287 side a; A. Triada, 64b and c; Archanes, 391 A–C. E. (Pini, Pepragmena IV nos. 18. 33. 49).

²⁰ Here I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of C. Renfrew (Emergence, especially chs. 18. 19 and 21) on the interrelatedness of facets of EBA cultures.

²¹ E.g. Pini, Pepragmena IV, no. 82; CMS IV 104. See also note 13.







Fig. 5 CMS II1, 287 c.

designs themselves, although their composition and motifs are generally torsional, sometimes emphasize strongly the static divisions of the circle (e.g. CMS II 1, 248, Platanos). This cross-fertilization of motifs and composition makes the typological task harder, but it is to be expected in such a creative period.

When we turn to other parts of the Aegean world, we are faced with questions of relative chronology. I take it that we have enough evidence, direct and indirect, to indicate that the period or culture which we call Early Helladic II is contemporary with Early Minoan II, and also with the Early Cycladic II (Renfrew's Keros-Syros)²², although we cannot say that the periods are coterminous or that they do not overlap at all with others. The implication would seem to be that the novel developments in Crete which we have just been looking at come about at a time on the whole later than those that are so well-known on the mainland, notably at Lerna. I want now to look at evidence from these other areas.

The conclusion that the mainland seals, of which the House of the Tiles group is the chief representative, are earlier than most of the Cretan, was supported by Prof. Matz in 1971²³. Certain of the Cretan seals he did attribute to an earlier stage on stylistic grounds, notably a number of spiral designs, and certain Wellenband or loop motifs, the latter related to many of the House of the Tiles motifs. He derived the Wellenband ultimately from an early Anatolian source, as yet unattested, and the running spiral from the Cyclades²⁴.

Matz' stylistic comparisons of Wellenband in Crete and at Lerna are profound. It seems reasonable to suppose that both areas were using, in very different ways, a stylistic motif which reached them both through some means and at some very early date which we cannot as yet identify.

²² C. Renfrew, Emergence. For EH material in Crete see P. Warren, AAA 1972, 392ff.

²³ F. Matz, "Bemerkungen zum Stand der Forschung über die frühen ägäisch-anatolischen Siegel", KMG 65. 74. 95. House of the Tiles: M.H. Wiencke, Hesperia 27, 1958, 81 ff; CMS V 28 ff.

²⁴ F. Matz, KMG 70ff. 88. 95 (Spirals: CMS II1, 133, 182, Wellenband: CMS II1, 68, 125, House of the Tiles: commonest type as CMS V 62, but especially 111.

The spiral designs may be a little less difficult to trace. Matz noted the rarity of the spiral among the House of the Tiles impressions ²⁵. It seems to be more common among the Lerna predecessors to the House of the Tiles group (CMS V 45–47. 49, Room DM), and also among the Kea impressions; certainly in the Cyclades, in stamp impressions and carved on stone pyxides ²⁶, but it is not uncommon also in Crete. How can one distinguish among these various forms?

It might be best to try to differentiate spirals according to the compositional treatment of the surface. For example, if we compare two Lerna impressions, one from Room DM (Fig. 6, CMS V 49) and one from the House of the Tiles (Fig. 7, CMS V 102) with another from Kea (Fig. 8, CMS V 463), we see that in the DM impression (Fig. 6) the spirals run along in a continuous if angled line, while in the other two cases individual spirals project from a border. Yet the over-all composition in each case consists in an emphatic repetition of the circular shape of the seal face; as the circle is endless, not to be transgressed, so is the revolution of the spirals around it.



Fig. 6 CMS V 49.



Fig. 7 CMS V 102.



Fig. 8 CMS V 463.

Another similar example is one from Lebena I (CMS II 1, 181) which Matz compared to the Lerna impression Fig. 7 and suggested might be a mainland import ²⁷. The two abbreviated hook or loop elements between the spirals, recalling the Lerna loop designs, indicate at least some connection. But it is the respect for the shape and boundary of the seal surface which is so un-Cretan. In this connection we may look at a few less familiar mainland seal designs, notably one on an impressed sealing found in the Cheliotomylos well near Corinth (Fig. 9) ²⁸. The context is entirely EH II, and the design, while

²⁵ F. Matz, KMG 78.

²⁶ F. Matz, KMG 83. Kea: CMS V 462–465. 467–469. Cyclades: see Zervos, Cyclades: House models pls. 28–30 (Melos and Naxos); vases: pls. 199–203. 212–217; frying pans: 204–205. 218–220. 223.

²⁷ F. Matz, KMG 79.

²⁸ Corinth Museum. F.O. Waage, Hesperia suppl. VIII, 421 pl. 63. My thanks are due to Prof. J.C. Lavezzi for his kind permission to show a sketch of this and to mention other impressions in the Corinth Museum, which are to appear in a forthcoming article in Hesperia.

not perfectly clear, is certainly of a row of spirals surrounding a central circle. Another tiny impression on the neck of a jar of apparently EH fabric, found out of context in Corinth²⁹, may be an abbreviation of this same type. It bears three connected but asymmetrical spirals. Then there is the better known stone seal from House E at A. Kosmas, again in EH II context, with three spirals growing from the edge³⁰. The shape of the handle has EM II parallels (Lebena IIa, CMS II 1, 210, for example), but the



Fig. 9 Sketch of impression from Cheliotomylos/Corinth.

design seems to me closer to the mainland bordering spirals we have been looking at. An unfinished stone seal at Asine with a similar handle suggests that this and the A. Kosmas seal may imitate early Cretan shapes (CMS V 525).

Certain other similar spiral compositions which respect the seal boundary may perhaps be of Cycladic or of mainland origin, either directly or by imitation. Matz suggested as Cycladic the impression found by Blegen in Troy II, six running spirals interlocked with a seventh in the center, and the rectangular Kouphonisi seal published long ago by Dümmler³¹. A partial impression of a seal very like the Kouphonisi example has been found on the pan of an EH II hearth fragment from Corinth³². The numerous spirals, interlocking, may form an expanded Rapport. On the rim of the hearth is a cylinder-impressed *Wellenband* closely paralleled at Zygouries (CMS V 508. 509) and Tiryns (571). All of these spiral designs are tightly adapted to their space, and rectangular ones have the added advantage of a wedge or Kerbschnitt border in the manner of the organized decorative schemes on many Cycladic vessels³³.

Matz further suggested as Cycladic motifs the two Lerna seal types CMS V 100 and 45, both essentially with four running spirals. To these he compared several Cretan seals: Lebena 182 and possibly A. Onouphrios 104³⁴. The latter is certainly close also to the spiral Asine pendant (CMS V 526) and to Kea 462. All of these are compositions of self-contained symmetrical running spirals, four or six.

²⁹ Corinth C-39-475; S.S. Weinberg, AJA 43, 1939, 592ff. See note 28 above.

³⁰ G. Mylonas, Aghios Kosmas (Princeton, 1959) pl. 166 no. 13.

³¹ F. Matz, KMG 87. C.W. Blegen, Troy I, pl. 408, 208a–c. Kouphonisi: F. Dümmler, AM 2, 1886, 15. Kerbschnitt: cf. Kea, CMS V 476.

³² Corinth Museum MF 76-66. J.C. Lavezzi, Hesperia 48, 1979, pl. 88, no. 10.

³³ See e.g. Zervos, Cyclades, pls. 203. 204. 200. 223.

³⁴ F. Matz, KMG 82-88.



Fig. 10 CMS II1, 25.



Fig. 11 CMS V 467.



Fig. 12 CMS V 51.



Fig. 13 CMS V 46.

In contrast to these *bound* or *close* spiral compositions, we have the loosely attached Cretan compositions named by Matz the hook-spirals (e.g. Koumasa, CMS II1, 134) ³⁵ loosely hooked together in their spiral connections, but also often in an ambiguous Rapport-like relationship with the outline of the seal face. In a related example from Vano F, A. Triada (*Fig. 10*, CMS II1, 25), we see a pair of opposing C-spirals on the rectangular base of an animal seal. The design conveys a sense of restless motion and incompleteness within the allotted space. If we compare similar C-spiral motifs among the Kea impressions (*Fig. 11*, CMS V 467, 468), and also in earlier Lerna impressions (the CA loomweight *Fig. 12*, CMS V 51, and a version from Room DM, *Fig. 13*, CMS V 46), we find compositions which are by contrast symmetrical, tight, and closed in ³⁶.

³⁵ F. Matz, KMG 89.

³⁶ A repeated version of this same compact motif is seen on the steatite pyxis from Naxos, Zervos, Cyclades, pl. 30. The C-spiral design on a seal from Archanes, Tholos E, Ergon 1975, fig. 165, appears to resemble the less confined design on the A. Triada seal.

We have seen one case of a seal which may well be a direct mainland import to Crete, and others which may be Cycladic, or at least show an awareness of Cycladic practise. Here I should like to point out two other cases of Cretan contact with the mainland or Cyclades. On one side and opposite face of the Asine pendant with the spirals (Fig. 14, CMS V 526e) are deeply gouged triangular wedges, related certainly to the Kerbschnitt border as we have just seen it on Cycladic objects. Similar decoration, together with zigzags, is found on another such pendant from the nearby site of Midea (CMS V 527e). Such wedges and zigzags are not particularly common among Cretan seals, but we do meet the wedges on a couple of rectangular buttons among the EM I Lebena II seals (CMS II 1, 202. 203) as well as on a steatite cylinder from Mochlos tomb XVIII (Fig. 15, CMS II 1, 477). At Lerna a small steatite button of the Lebena type (Fig. 16, CMS V 35) was found in pre – House of the Tiles context and bears

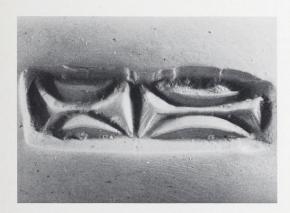


Fig. 14 CMS V 526e.



Fig. 15 CMS II1, 477.

the same wedges, with zigzags. I once suggested that this seal was a Cretan import ³⁷; I should now like to suggest that the entire group of seals with wedges be attributed, directly or indirectly, to a mainland or a Cycladic source.

The other case of contact with Crete has to do with the influence of the distinctive House of the Tiles designs. These, together with the Asine impressions, are quite certainly a local Argive product, with close cousins at Kea and imitators at Zygouries and Lefkandi³⁸. One seal from A. Triada is surely also an imitation of Lerna work: a triangular ivory pyramid (*Fig. 17*, CMS II 1, 54) with the familiar triple division, the loops poorly done, the T elements and even the border transposed to surround the loops. This seal is recorded among those from what seems to be the lower level of the Tholos A deposit, which includes a high proportion of EM II material³⁹.

Finally, there are certain parallels to be drawn between the compositional types of

³⁷ M.H. Wiencke, KMG 155, note 19. Discussed by Banks. Small Objects, 221.

³⁸ Kea: CMS V 460–478. Asine: 519–522. Zygouries: 502. Lefkandi: 423.

³⁹ M.H. Wiencke, "Tholos A at A. Triada and the Dating of Early Minoan Art", paper at annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, 1976.



Fig. 16 CMS V 35.

the blossoming Cretan glyptic and the earlier culmination on the mainland. When *Torsion* appears on the mainland (cf. Lerna *Fig. 18*, CMS V 71), the motion is generally sedate, and there is never any bursting of the frame as on Crete (as for example in Porti, *Fig. 19*, CMS II 1, 351). A kind of *Rapport* also occurs at Lerna (CMS V 104–108), but it respects almost without exception the boundary of the seal. The boundary is often in fact made more inviolate with a line border (105–106), as in Pini's later group. Perhaps the mainland work affected the Cretan to this extent. But perhaps we ought rather to see that once an artist begins to discover the possibilities of a space, he discovers a need to defend it against the tensions set up even in the simplest divisions of its surface, set up more strongly by curved lines which release the spring of motion, and, finally, by the depth of potential third-dimension created by the depiction of a living being.

The mainland and Cycladic work never seems to have reached this final development, but to have culminated in the style of the House of the Tiles before the full blossoming on Crete. Differences between the Cyclades and the mainland seem to have been less a matter of distinction between two broad areas than a series of smaller shifts in style between one site or small region and the next ⁴⁰. In Crete, however, a distinctive style developed in greater isolation. Our material is still not sufficient for us to trace the whole course of the Cretan discovery of surface decoration. But we can see, among the echoes, imports, and parallels that recall the rest of the Aegean, a highly individual choice and development of composition and motif which set the course of future Cretan glyptic.

 $^{^{40}}$ Further confirmation of this close relationship may be found in the lead seal discovered by N. Kontoleon in an E.C. II grave at Aplomata, Naxos (Prakt 1970, 151, pl. 195 β and γ). The design, though it appears to be badly preserved, shows, according to the excavator, seven trefoils with dots in the interstices. With the surrounding line border it is clearly, as he says, very close to Lerna CMS V 107. The connection has been pointed out as well by K. Branigan, SMEA 17, 1976, 159, 162, who suggests metal as the material for the Lerna seals.



Fig. 17 CMS II1, 54.



Fig. 18 CMS V 71.

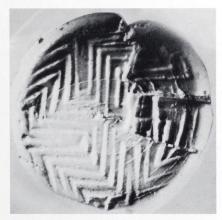


Fig. 19 CMS II1, 351.

DISKUSSION

- J.G. Younger: Die neuen Ausgrabungen von Phylakopi auf Melos erbrachten in den EB II-Schichten keinerlei kretische Importe, sondern eine Menge lokaler Keramik mit starkem festländischem Einfluß.
- I. Pini bemerkt, daß auf Kreta und dem Festland zur gleichen Zeit ähnliche Kompositionen entstehen. Direkte Abhängigkeiten aber, wie einige sie haben sehen wollen, sind unmittelbar nicht zu fassen.
- J.G. Younger und M.H. Wiencke meinen, daß der festländische Einfluß auf Kreta zu dieser Zeit stärker ist als der umgekehrte. Dies spiegelt sich auch in den Keramikimporten wider. Es gibt z.B. einige festländische »sauce boats « auf Kreta¹. Minoische Importe dieser Zeit auf dem Festland sind dagegen äußerst gering: J.C. Lavezzi zeigte der Referentin eine einzige Scherbe aus der Grabung von Korinth, die vielleicht dem Vassiliki-Stil zuzuweisen ist.

¹ P. Warren, AAA 5, 1972, 394ff. Abb. 7-8; J. Tzedakis, Delt 23, 1968 B, 415.