

CYCLADIC SAUCEBOATS IN THE DEPOSIT OF THE CAMERETTE IN AYIA TRIADA¹



ABSTRACT: The increased Cretan participation in overseas markets during Early Minoan II led to the introduction of new pottery shapes. One of the most distinctive vessels was the so-called ‘sauceboat’ of the Early Cycladic II Keros-Syros Culture. In Crete, this shape developed in the local Minoan styles. Even if it spread less widely than in the Mainland, it was assimilated by the local material culture, and some examples are even documented in periods succeeding Early Minoan II. The Deposit of the *Camerette* in Ayia Triada, south of *tholos* A, illustrates this phenomenon. The Middle Minoan IA deposit was dug in 1998–1999 and has revealed 434 vessels and thousands of pottery fragments, dating from Early Minoan III to Middle Minoan II. It comprises the most common shapes of Prepalatial Minoan pottery in the Mesara plain: bowls, baking plates, buckets, miniature winepresses, plates, jugs, tankards, sauceboats, cups, conical cups, teapots, cooking pots, *pitharakia*. This contribution will offer preliminary results of the typological and contextual studies on the Deposit of the *Camerette* and will focus on possible imitations of Cycladic models. This evidence may be particularly useful to understand the significance of Ayia Triada towards the end of the Prepalatial period.

KEYWORDS: Deposit of the *Camerette*; Ayia Triada; Minoan; Cycladic; Bronze Age; Pottery; Sauceboat.

Between 1997 and 1999, by means of the Universities of Venice and Catania, the Italian Archaeological School at Athens conducted new soundings in the necropolis of Ayia Triada (Fig. 1).² In south-central Crete, the archaeological site lies on the western slope of the hill where the Palace of Phaistos is located, 3 km away. The excavations of the 1990s concerned different structures dated from Early Minoan (EM) to Late Minoan (LM): the Tomb of the Painted Sarcophagus, the *tholos* B and the ossuary behind it, the *tholos* A and its annexes. Also excavated was the area of the so-called *Camerette*.³ Placed 7.50 m south of *tholos* A, these were two blocks of rooms separated from the tomb: named respectively 1–10 and a–c. The two groups of rooms were located on the eastern side of a wall enclosing two *baetyls* and overlooking an open paved area (Fig. 2).⁴

The area of the *Camerette* had been partly discovered for the first time in 1904 by the Italian Mission in Crete, directed by Pernier and Halbherr.⁵ In 1933, Stefani and Banti published the data regarding the structures and the finds.⁶ The *Camerette* were probably used to collect the equipment for ceremonies performed in the nearby open area. These were focused on *tholos* A,⁷ conceived as an ancestors’ tomb and a point of reference for the ritual activities of the community. Indeed, in Late Prepalatial Ayia Triada, the population was dispersed in several dwelling areas, and the only recognisable architectural structures of this period are in the necropolis.⁸

In 1998, a pottery dump was uncovered southwest of *Cameretta* a: the so-called Deposit of the *Camerette*. This was located in an ellipsoidal pit, bordered by a semi-circular structure perpendicular to the wall

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2 DI VITA 2001.

3 DI VITA 2001; LA ROSA 2013.

4 LA ROSA 2001, 222–225, pls. LXXIIc, LXXIIIa; 2013, 171–251, pls. I, X, XII, XXIX, XXX.

5 PARIBENI 1904.

6 BANTI, STEFANI 1933.

7 CULTRARO 1994; 2003.

8 CARINCI 1999; 2003; 2004; CULTRARO 2000; TODARO 2011.



Fig. 1 The Ayia Triada site (TODARO 2003, 9).



Fig. 2 The area of the Camerette and the Deposit of the Camerette (LA ROSA 2013, 307).



Fig. 3 The Ayia Triada sauceboat (LA ROSA 2013, 217).

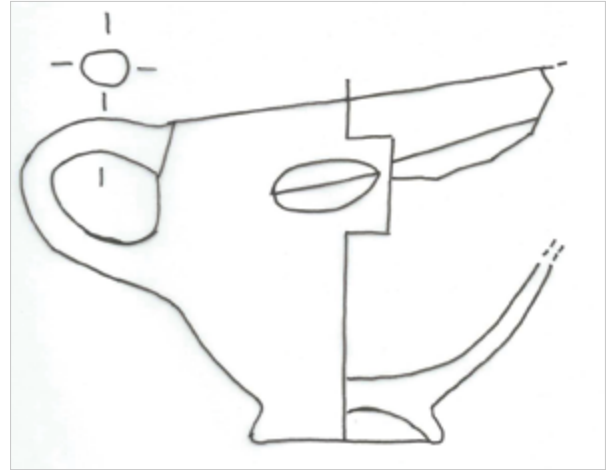


Fig. 4 The Ayia Triada sauceboat (drawing by G. Fatuzzo).

with *baetyls*.⁹ The two-year excavations in 1998 and 1999 revealed mostly pottery but also two obsidian blades, a sandstone grindstone, some stone weights, and a small burnt bone. The finds were mainly dated to the Late Prepalatial period, between EM III and Middle Minoan (MM) IA. The materials of the Deposit of the *Camerette* likely represented the first set of contents of the *Camerette* 1–10, removed to make room for the new ones, discovered during the 1904 excavations. Several vessels were intact or were easy to mend. In the Deposit of the *Camerette*, a total of 434 vessels were recovered, along with thousands of other pottery fragments. The deposit comprised the most common shapes of the Late Prepalatial period: conical cups, jugs, shallow bowls, teapots in Patrikies style, jars, several sherds of baking plates, bowls, buckets, miniature wine-presses, tankards, cups, cooking pots, *pitharakia*, a vessel with horns, a clay engraved sheet, and the so-called ‘sauceboat’.¹⁰ Conical cups and jugs were the most documented.¹¹

The sauceboat was mended from 11 fragments but is still missing the spout, except for a sherd impossible to reunite (Figs. 3–4).¹² The Ayia Triada sauceboat is globular-ovoid, with an opening on the side opposite to the handle to insert the spout, semi-ellipsoidal in cross-section, probably ending with an open beak. The rim is simple and thin, raised in the last part near the break. Underneath it, there is a rod-like vertical handle. Two amygdaloid lugs are placed underneath

the rim too, perpendicular to the handle and to the spout. The ring base has a conical shape on the exterior and is concave on the underside. The sauceboat is 9.1 cm tall, with a base diameter of 5.1 cm and a rim diameter of 8 × 10 cm. The surface is more polished on the exterior and in the upper part of the interior. The vessel is painted on the exterior and on a horizontal band under the interior rim with a red/dark red paint (HUE 2.5 YR 6/8 red – 4/2 dusky red). The fabric is pale yellow (HUE 10 YR 8/6 yellow): granular and with a lot of grits in the lower part of the body, finest in the ring base, the upper part, and probably in the handle. La Rosa identified as parts of sauceboats other fragmentary ring bases found during the 1997–1999 excavations in the area of the *Camerette* 1–10 and a–c, and in the Deposit of the *Camerette*.¹³ From their discovery, the Ayia Triada sauceboats were considered as a local variation of the original Proto-Helladic type, one of the most distinctive vessels of the Early Cycladic (EC) and Early Helladic (EH) II cultures.

The closest comparison to the Ayia Triada sauceboat was uncovered at Moni Odigitria, at the beginning of the Ayiopharango Valley in southern Crete.¹⁴ The vessel resembles a shallow sauceboat in form and surface treatment, even if the form is not entirely clear from the surviving fragment. It has the shape of a shallow bowl, probably with a low pedestal. The Moni Odigitria sauceboat was uncovered in the environs of *tholos* A and could be dated to EM IIB.¹⁵

9 The Deposit of the *Camerette* was 3.70 m wide in NW-SE direction and 3 m long, with a depth of 2.45/2.65 m; LA ROSA 2013, 209–226.

10 Inventory no. HTR 98 3079; CARINCI 2003; LA ROSA 2013, 209–226.

11 The recognisable conical cups are 268 and the catalogued jugs are 92.

12 The fragments of the sauceboat were found between the 21st and 23rd of July and the 3rd and 5th of August 1998; LA ROSA 2013, 217–218.

13 LA ROSA 2013, 198, 226.

14 BRANIGAN, VASILAKIS 2010.

15 BRANIGAN, CAMPBELL-GREEN 2010, 95, P127.

A fragmentary EH sauceboat was also found in the Platyvola Cave, on the west side of a gorge above the plain of Kerameia, 25 km east of Chania. The site was first mentioned by Faure in 1962¹⁶ for the finding of sherds dated from the EM till the Hellenistic period, and in 1965, under the direction of Tzedakis, the local Archaeological Service started stratigraphic excavations. The archaeological research identified four chambers in the cave. In one of these, a significant number of human bones was found, suggesting the funerary purpose of this part of the cave. The bones could not be dated accurately, but the use of the cave as a burial place seemed related to the EM times. In the other chambers, a large amount of pottery was discovered and dated from the Middle Neolithic to the Post-Palatial period. The EM pottery originated from different regions of Crete and was uncovered with imitations of Cycladic models, such as a frying pan vessel¹⁷ and cylindrical pyxides with decoration of horizontal grooves on the body,¹⁸ a marble Koumasa style figurine, and two fragmentary sauceboats.

These were discovered in several fragments, first during the 1966 excavations.¹⁹ The two restored sauceboats have a globular body with a straight and rounded rim, raised to the spout. The round cross-section handle is beneath the rim. The handle is vertical on one sauceboat and horizontal on the other one. Both sauceboats have a conical and flaring pedestal base, hollow on the underside. The sauceboats have a black-greyish slip, mostly faded to dark red. The surface is polished, as it is visible on the exterior and on the interior of the vessel, and the fabric has a lot of grits of medium and small size. One mended sauceboat is 17 cm tall, including the spout, and 24 cm wide.

The Platyvola sauceboats are different from the Ayia Triada one, not just in their dimensions. The body is neatly globular and the handle is smaller. The bases are not comparable: the Ayia Triada one has a base ring and the other is a pedestal. The restored spouts could have been different because that of the Deposit of the *Camerette* vessel could have been wider. Tzedakis²⁰ hypothesised a local origin for the sauceboat found in the Platyvola Cave, and he conceived it as a Cretan reproduction of off-island models. Moreover, other EM II vessel shapes from the Platyvola Cave had foreign connections, such as the pyxides, very common in the Cyclades. Betancourt²¹ agreed and asserted

that it could be considered as the prototype of Minoan sauceboats, different from the EC and EH ones because of its evident globular shape and the small pedestal base. Two golden vases were proposed as models, but they are both suspected of being fakes. The archaeologist also recognised another model for the Platyvola sauceboat in the vessels realised from gourds.

The Cretan origin of the vessels is not accepted. Their shape and bright decoration recall the EH Urfirnis sauceboats of the Mainland, as Protopapadaki has pointed out.²² In his analysis, Wilson²³ referred to Caskey's type IV and paralleled the pedestal base of the Platyvola ones with those of the vessels present in Attica, Boeotia, and Cyclades. If the Urfirnis sauceboats found in Crete were from Mainland Greece, they would be the only imports from the Mainland in EM II. Wilson underlined that it could have been possible that several Mainland artefacts arrived in Crete via the Cyclades and Kythira, where the first signs of Minoan presence are dated to EM II.²⁴ The origin of these materials could also be identified in Attica and not in the Argolid. The finding in various Cretan sites of cups with *barbotine* decoration similar to those uncovered at Kastelli Chania and at Kastri on Kythira could confirm this hypothesis. Many elements with possible connections with off-island contexts were found in western Crete. In this region were indeed uncovered EM I–II cemeteries with Cycladic resemblances, such as NAMFI beach and Nea Roumata, and the Nopigeia one, with an intramural *pithos* burial similar to the ones on the Mainland. However, our knowledge of this region is so far less complete than of those in Crete.²⁵

Several fragments of sauceboats were also found in the Lera Cave. First described by Faure in 1960,²⁶ this cave is located close to the top of the hill which overlooks the natural port of Stavros, at the north-western end of the peninsula of Akrotiri Kydonias. The Lera Cave has three rooms, in which have been found artefacts dated from the Neolithic to the Hellenistic period but no human bones. The stratigraphy, however, is unclear. Amongst the most common EM II fine wares, some fragments of Urfirnis sauceboats were uncovered. These sherds have a burnished surface, almost black, comparable to the Urfirnis examples. In particular, one of the restored sauceboats recalls the Caskey type IV, and the other can be paralleled with the Platyvola Cave vessels. The Lera Cave fragments

16 FAURE 1962, 44.

17 PROTOPAPADAKI 2017, 445, fig. 32.

18 TZEDAKIS 1968, pl. 376β; PROTOPAPADAKI 2017, 443, fig. 28.

19 TZEDAKIS 1966, 428; 1967, 505; 1968, 415, pl. 376γ; 1984, 6, pl. I, 3; PROTOPAPADAKI 2017, 443, fig. 31.

20 TZEDAKIS 1968, 415–416.

21 BETANCOURT 1985, 38–39.

22 PROTOPAPADAKI 2017, 443.

23 WILSON 1984, 303–304.

24 BROODBANK 2004, 73–81.

25 LEGARRA HERRERO 2014, 137–140, 303.

26 FAURE 1962, 46–47.

are insufficient to determine their origin. They have been found together with some sherds of Urfirnis pyxides and fine vessels of unknown origin. Because of the lack of human bones in it, the cave is supposed to have been used as a refuge or as a temporary dwelling, but not for burial purposes.²⁷

Fragments of EC and EH sauceboats have been attested in Knossos too. The EC ones have a painted decoration and were found along with some horizontal handles of *pithoi* in the West Court House. Both pottery shapes were uncommon in Knossos, but fine ware sauceboats with a yellowish slip and dark-on-light decoration were typical of the EC II production. One of the fragments uncovered in Knossos is considered by Wilson as a local copy of a Cycladic prototype. Moreover, Broodbank connected the painted sherds directly to those found in the looted area of Kavos, in Keros, later designated as the Special Deposit North,²⁸ and to those of Ayia Irini II.²⁹

Some Urfirnis sauceboats have also been documented in Knossos. Several fragments from at least eight sauceboats were found by Warren³⁰ in the area of the Royal Road, south of the EM IIA building. None of them was restorable to a complete profile, but the spouts could correspond to Caskey's types II or IV, attested in the middle and late phases of Lerna.³¹ Considering the fabric and the Urfirnis type surface decoration, Warren proposed the Argolid as the place of origin of these Knossos vessels. Wilson³² hypothesised a comparison between the sauceboats and those found in Ayia Irini, with a grey core and red surface, and dated to EM/EH II. The fabric and finish of the Cretan artefacts are indeed comparable with the West Cycladic examples, including those from Ayia Irini II–III. In that period, Kea had contacts with the Mainland, mainly with Attica, not with the Argolid.

Only one yellow mottled ware fragment of a sauceboat has been documented in Knossos. The yellowish slip and the fine painted decoration, both on the interior and on the exterior, were typical of the EC II production, especially on Kea and on Keros.³³ On the contemporary Mainland sauceboats, the painted decoration occurred usually on the interior.³⁴

Cadogan also refers to two rims with the Cycladic-type decoration from Knossos, and he considers one

as an example of the frying pan style and the other as a fragment of a basket-shaped vessel or *kalathos*.³⁵ These sherds confirm the presence of several off-island imports in EM IIA Knossos. The sauceboats represent one-fifth of these materials, with many parallels in the EC II Keros-Syros assemblages, including Ayia Irini II and III, and Phylakopi A2.³⁶

Sauceboats were also present in Poros,³⁷ the neighbouring site of Knossos. They occur mostly in Urfirnis ware, in the same fabric as those uncovered in Knossos, Ayia Irini, and Phylakopi. The others were in dark-on-light and mottled wares. Altogether, the sauceboats represented about 10% of the off-island imports in the EM IIA Poros pottery assemblages.

On the northern coast of Crete, another sauceboat has been uncovered in the house tomb cemetery of Petras.³⁸ The vessel was part of an EM IIA deposit excavated underneath Room 4 of House Tomb 3. It mostly comprised drinking and serving shapes but also small storage vessels and cooking pots. Among several imports identified, there is the sauceboat whose origin is supposed to be in the East Aegean.

The sauceboats attested in Crete are from EM IIA contexts. It was a period of dynamic interactions between Crete and the Aegean, as documented by several discoveries: Cycladic figurines in the necropoleis of the island, EH and EC amulets and seals, Cycladic pottery in EM contexts, and occasionally Minoan pottery in the Cyclades.³⁹ They actually have been found in regions that maintained contacts with the off-island territories. The sauceboat from Moni Odigitria represents an exception: it was dated to EM II B, even if information about the vessel is uncertain, and it was uncovered in an area poorly connected with other regions during EM II.⁴⁰

The Ayia Triada sauceboat was found in a pottery dump, with sherds closely comparable with those discovered in the Phaistos phases VIII, IX, and X, corresponding to EM II and MM IA.⁴¹ In the same excavations in the Deposit of the *Camerette*, several fragments of EM vessels were found, namely Pyrgos and Ayios Onouphrios pottery.⁴²

The Ayia Triada sauceboat is very similar to the EH II examples: the shape and decoration recall the Urfirnis artefacts.⁴³ The vessel could be connected to the finds

27 GUEST-PAPAMANOLI, LAMBRACKI 1976.

28 SOTIRAKOPOULOU 2007, 33–35, 93–94, 209; 2016.

29 BETANCOURT 1985, 20; WILSON 1985, 358–359, P466, pl. 58; 1999, 231–235; BROODBANK 2000, 223.

30 WARREN 1972A, figs. 7, 8.

31 CASKEY 1960, 290–292, fig. 1, I–IV.

32 WILSON 1999, 72, 231; 2007, 69.

33 ZAPHEIROPOULOU 1975; BROODBANK 2007, 148–150, 187–188, fig. 6.5; SOTIRAKOPOULOU 2007.

34 WARREN 1972A; WILSON 1984, 310–304; 1999, 76–77; 2007, 69.

35 CADOGAN, HOOD 2011, 258–260.

36 WILSON 2007, 69–70.

37 DAY *et al.* 2004, 72, fig. 4.2 m.

38 TSIPOPOULOU 2017, 74–75, fig. 25 h.

39 LEGARRA HERRERO 2014, 144–149.

40 DÉDERIX 2017, 24–31.

41 TODARO 2013, 188–195.

42 LA ROSA 2013, 210–211, 220–222.

43 FAHY 1962, 36–37.

from Lerna III,⁴⁴ in particular those of Caskey's type I/type II, with a hemispherical body and a rising spout. The sauceboat of the Deposit of the *Camerette*, however, differs from these because of the vertical and bigger handle, and the presence of amygdaloid lugs on its sides.⁴⁵ Moreover, the surface is less burnished and has a lighter paint than the Urfirnis examples. In other Mainland regions, such as Attica or Boeotia, it is not possible to find direct parallels either.

The Ayia Triada sauceboat could be instead considered as a local evolution of the Cretan reproductions of the off-island prototypes. The vessel is different from the Minoan sauceboat model, corresponding to the vessel found in the Platyvola Cave. The sauceboat from the Deposit of the *Camerette* could be interpreted as a combination of external influences and Cretan tradition.

The local models of this artefact could be identified in two vessels from southern Crete. One is a bowl from Myrtos,⁴⁶ uncovered in room 91 and attributed to the period II of the settlement. The vessel has an open rim spout, opposite to the vertical rod-like handle, and a pedestal foot. It has a grey-brown buff fabric with tiny white, dark, and gold mica grits. It is burnished and covered with a buff slip and a red-brown paint, inside and outside. It is 10.1 cm tall with a spout, with a diameter of 15.6 cm and 20.9 cm wide. This spouted bowl of Vasiliki ware type recalls the Ayia Triada sauceboat but with some differences: a more flattened body, an everted rim, a smaller handle, and a spout which is not elliptical in cross-section.

Another parallel could be identified in a miniature vessel uncovered in the EM II levels of the Archanes necropolis. Only the body, with a typical pedestal base, concave on the underside, and the rod-like vertical handle, recalls the Ayia Triada artefact. The spout with a beak, similar to the sauceboats, has some waves on the rim.⁴⁷

The vessel of the Deposit of the *Camerette* could be compared to a find with no direct parallels from the area of Room 35 of the Palace of Phaistos, uncovered during the first excavations at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴⁸ This polychrome spouted cup, with a cylindrical body and a spout opened in the upper part, is 6.5 cm tall. On each side of the rim there is a lug. The rod-like vertical handle is opposite to the spout, and the base ring is concave on the underside. The exterior is decorated with black paint and thin white stripes around the spout, and, on the sides of the body, some stripes of red paint form a crescent band filled with white dots. The vessel was made of fine and yellowish clay, probably using a wheel. The cup has no direct comparisons and was dated to MM IB. Todaro, however, associated the vessel with some sherds from the nearby areas in the Palace and dated it to the Phaistos phase X, corresponding to MM IA.⁴⁹ The handle and the ring base are evidently similar to the Ayia Triada sauceboat, and even the cylindrical lower part of the body recalls it. The Phaistos vessel could be considered as an evolution of the Ayia Triada sauceboat or as another local development of the EC and EH prototypes.

The forthcoming scientific analysis of the pottery of the Deposit of the *Camerette* will help to clarify the origin of the sauceboat. At present, the macroscopic analysis of the vessel only allows it to be compared to the majority of the pottery from the dump. The more accurate definition of the provenience of the sauceboat will be useful to complete the knowledge of Ayia Triada during the Late Prepalatial period. This could help to define the possible presence or not in the site of artisans capable of making this uncommon vessel with an external derivation. The study will be useful in order to obtain a broader comprehension of the role played by Ayia Triada and the nearby area in the inter-regional contacts during the Late Prepalatial period.⁵⁰

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44 WIENCKE 2000, 584–592, fig. II. 92.

45 CASKEY 1960, 290–293, fig. 1, I–IV.

46 WARREN 1972B, P313, 122, fig. 59, pl. 44D.

47 SAKELLARAKIS, SAKELLARAKIS 1972, pl. B, 2.

48 PERNIER 1935, 134, fig. 59, 8.

49 TODARO 2013, 82–83, 210–211, fig. 27b.

50 BRANIGAN 2010, 25–30; DÉDERIX 2017, 9–10, 24–31.

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