

Pottery Styles in Transition in Iron Age Crete

By Eleonora Pappalardo *

This paper presents the preliminary results of the study carried out by the author on a precise class of materials: Protogeometric B pottery from the site of Prinias, in central Crete. The pottery comes from the excavations conducted in the necropolis of Siderospilia, used from the end of XII century BC until the VII/VI century. A large assemblage of material has been so far analyzed, mostly consisting on figured specimens. Among this, a particular class of pithoi, characterized by straight sides and mostly used as cinerary urns, stands out for its quite unique features, finding comparisons just in Knossos and in few other Cretan sites. The impressive figured repertoire adopted in decorating PGB pottery (850-800 BC) does not find comparisons in continental Greece and it seems to reflect some sort of mixed tendency between Near Eastern influences, involving Crete in Early Iron age, and Minoan background.

Keywords: *Prinias, Protogeometric B, Pithos, Crete, Aegean*

Introduction

The term Protogeometric B refers to a very short span of time, occurring within the second half of IX century B.C. in Crete (850-800).

During these 50 years, however, several interesting features characterize different aspects of Cretan society and material culture, not only for what concerns craftsmanship and material production in general. In this period, in fact, social transformations occurred in association with the adoption of new burial costumes and space's organization, and probably connected with a general increasement of economy and trade activity throughout the Mediterranean basin (Pappalardo 2012).

Researches concerning Cretan Protogeometric period must be considered crucial for the comprehension of the more general socio-political dynamics involving Mediterranean Dark-Age, inasmuch as they focus into a period of reconfiguration of complex societies (Lemos 2002).

They rise issues concerning East-West relationships, new commercial routes and enterprises, meetings of cultures far from each other, formation and, then, transformation of social structures (Kotsonas 2006, Stampolidis 1998, Stampolidis and Karageorghis 2003).

This is the period in which the roots of the concept "Greek Polis" sink and the preparation of a precise social and ideological substratum takes place.

*Professor of Classical Archaeology, University of Catania, Italy.

The Cretan Protogeometric B period (PGB) chronologically coincides with mainland Middle Geometric, but differs from it for several stylistic features mostly concerning pottery production.

The central role of Crete in the renewed interconnections with Near East, starting from the early X century BC, determined an almost sudden adoption in the island of a handicraft production rich of figured features, strongly influenced by the composite Oriental repertoire (Pappalardo 2013). In this phase, indeed, the first experiments in figured art are performed, resulting from a mixture between Near Eastern, Egyptian and Minoan traditions (Pappalardo 2019). The PGB pottery, in this context, emerges for its distinctive shapes (in some cases totally different from the Protogeometric ones) and, mostly, for the richness of its figurative repertoire.

In this paper, I will present the preliminary results of a project I am carrying out thanks to grants awarded by the University of Catania and the INSTAP (Institute for Aegean Prehistory) of Philadelphia.

This project aims to provide, for the first time, a systematic analysis of the PGB pottery in Crete, which will start from the large, and, as yet unpublished assemblages from the site of Prinias, in central Crete (guide-site for the study of the birth of the Greek *polis* and the only one providing evidence both from settlement and from necropolis) so as to then compare it with the Cretan production of the rest of the island.

Part of PGB pottery found during the excavations of the necropolis of Siderospilia, in Prinias, started from 1973 (Rizza 1973, 1974), will be analyzed and compared with the one already known from the excavations of the Knossos necropolis of Fortetsa and North Cemetery (Brock 1957, Coldstream and Catling 1996). The work will be organized as follows.

1. Presentation and description of the material studied.
2. Typological and stylistic classification.
3. Comparison with the materials already published.
4. Analysis of specific features and figural stylistic patterns.
5. Interpretation of its meaning and function in its context of find.

Background and Literature Review

The second half of the IX century BC in Crete coincides with significant transformations in several aspects of material culture. An almost evident change in burial costumes and in architectural choices seems to be symptomatic of a new condition of Iron Age Cretan people.

For what concerns craftsmanship, in general, and pottery production, in particular, a general improvement of quality is detectable, and an increased use of figured decoration (Pappalardo 2011a, 2011b, Kotsonas 2013). This is the period in which near eastern figured bronzes and carved ivories start to spread through the Eastern Mediterranean, and Crete must be counted among the regions where hugest amount of both was found (Markoe 1985, Matthäus 1996, Pappalardo 2005, 2012, 2019, Stampolidis and Karageorghis 2003).

In this general picture, a new pottery production starts to appear, mainly in funerary contexts (Rizza 1974, Brock 1957, Coldstream and Catling 1996, Pappalardo 2015, 2019), apparently consisting of richly decorated straight-sided pithoi, used as cinerary urns, often covered by a clay lid recalling the decorative scheme of the vases. Their typological and stylistic originality, in the general panorama of the Protogeometric pottery, in particular the wide use of naturalistic elements (such as trees, birds, fishes and human figures) freely painted on the whole surface of the vases, has raised debates about the real meaning and origin of this production (Kotsonas 2013, Pappalardo 2015). Already at the times of the publication of the Fortetsa Cemetery near Knossos (Brock 1957) and, subsequently, of the North Cemetery of the same site (Coldstream and Catling 1996), the use of these vases was put in relation with social status of people buried in the cinerary urns: on one hand, the fact that PGB straight-sided pithoi were mainly found inside chamber tombs (in one case close to a Minoan figured Larnax), associated with rich funerary goods, brought to the interpretation of their use as symbol of a common membership to be linked with the glorious Minoan Past; on the other hand, their rich figurative apparatus, associated with the sudden increase of near Eastern imports in Crete, has been interpreted as a clear and intentional adoption of new (Oriental) artistic influences.

Materials and Methods

The increased number of new sites discovered in Crete (Englezou 2004, Kotsonas 2008) and, at the same time, the possibility to study the huge assemblages of PGB pottery retrieved from the excavations at Prinias, carried out either in the settlement on the Patela (for a synthesis see Palermo et al. 2017) and in the Iron Age cemetery of Siderospilia (Palermo 2019, Pautasso 2018, 2019, Rizza 2019, Pappalardo 2015, 2019), offer an important tool for investigating this enigmatic pottery production in relation with the respective contexts of find.

It is now possible, in fact, to firstly try clarifying the role of PGB vases in the transition from Protogeometric to Geometric period, trying to detect those features already present in the previous LPG (Late Protogeometric) pottery and those developed in the EG (Early Geometric) ones. On this respect, for example, the necropolis of Siderospilia provides important information about the adoption of that decoration, proper of PGB straight-sided pithoi, on bell kraters typologically belonging to Late Protogeometric period.

In the meantime, it is possible to compare PGB figured vases with the plain ones, in order to understand if PGB must be considered just a “pottery style” or a chronological phase, involving more than one aspect of material culture.

The macroscopic and microscopic study of the Prinias assemblages, furthermore, has to be compared with the evidence provided by other Cretan sites, in particular Knossos, by adopting a synergic approach. Then, the old hypothesis that Prinias must be viewed as a peripheral center of PGB production in comparison with Knossos could be confirmed or disproved.

A preliminary study of the material from the necropolis, kept in Prinias storerooms, as said above, has been carried out, by paying particular attention to the straight-sided figured pithoi; they were found mainly in tholos tombs J and F and in tomb W, while a large quantity of sherds was scattered in a wide area of the cemetery.

The analysis has already highlighted that a local workshop produced pithoi of high quality, slightly different in shape and style.

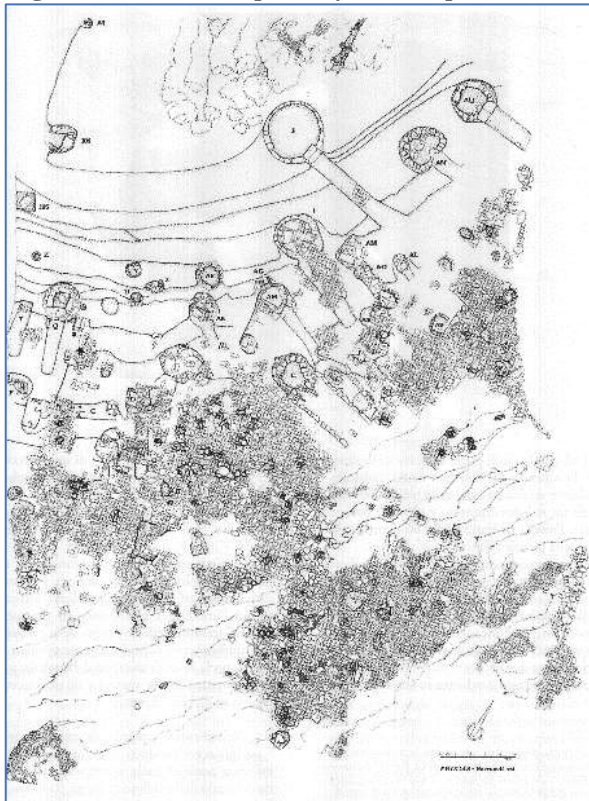
The recognition of internal differences is a fundamental step for advancing the hypothesis of an internal development (from the Late Protogeometric to the Early Geometric period).

In the meantime, the systematic analysis of the common pottery found in the same tombs where PGB figured vases were found seems to testify an internal development almost consistent with the one recorded at Knossos.

According to a preliminary counting of all the PGB pottery from the necropolis, almost 100 vases and big fragments from specific tombs have to be studied, while a huge amount of sherds from the superficial stratum covering the whole area of the necropolis must to be still documented (about 20 boxes). Another important assemblage is kept at the Heraklion Museum, mainly consisting in those vases integrally preserved and brought to the Museum at the time of their discovery.

Siderospilia necropolis seems to well reflect the new asset of the moment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *The Necropolis of Siderospilia (Prinias)*



Source: Archaeological Mission of Prinias.

PGB pottery is, in fact, well represented in the cemetery and characterized by a significative diffusion through the area, as Salvatore Rizza recently showed (Rizza 2019, 2020).

Generally speaking, the study of the tombs and offerings provides a complex mass of information concerning funeral architecture, burial costumes, craftsmanship, spatial organization, social and economic dynamics from the Late Bronze Age to the Orientalizing Period. It can be reasonably considered a unique study-case, inasmuch as the results of its study can be compared with the evidence emerging from the settlement and the sacred area. In this respect, the complete study of its features has given rise to some intriguing considerations concerning the role of the site in the general Cretan context and its direct involvement in dynamics of mobility and cultural exchanges (Palermo 2019).

The necropolis of Siderospilia was investigated by the Archaeological Mission of the University of Catania, directed by Giovanni Rizza, during ten campaigns from 1969 till 1978; several tombs of different kind were brought to light, providing a lot of funerary goods, in part kept in the Iraklion Museum (Rizza 1971, 1973, 2011).

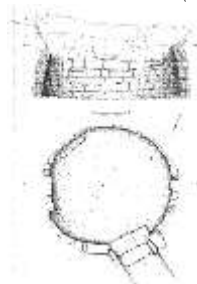
The necropolis extends over an area of 8000 m², on a low hill. The cemetery can be divided into two main phases of frequentation. The first phase starts at the very end of the Late Minoan III C period and is characterized by the contemporaneous presence of both inhumation and incineration funerary practices. The second phase starts in the IX century BC, and is characterized by incinerations only. With regard to the first phase of use it should be stressed that incineration seems to be linked with pit tombs carved in the rock, while inhumation, is specifically associated with chamber tombs of a “pseudo tholos” type, partially excavated into the rock. Both tomb typologies develop in parallel. At the North/North-East of the hill, close to the pit tombs, the tholoi were found. They share a circular and pseudo trapezoidal plan, covered by a flat roof of wide slabs.

As far as the largest amount of PGB straight sided pithoi was found inside two of the major pseudo-tholoi of the cemetery, tombs J and F, I’ll briefly describe them.

Both tombs were robbed and destroyed in antiquity as was demonstrated by the presence of fragments belonging to vases found inside them, just below the stones covering the second phase incineration tombs.

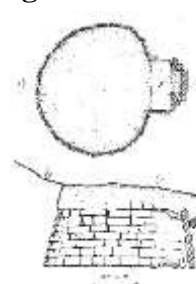
The roofs of both tombs were collapsed inside the chambers and unfortunately a big amount of depositions was found in the rubbles and in part outside the tomb.

Figure 2. Tomb F (Prinias)



Source: Archaeological Mission of Prinias.

Figure 3. Tomb J (Prinias)



Source: Archaeological Mission of Prinias.

Tomb F (see Figure 2) has a diameter of 3.80 m; excavated in high sector of the hill, it was accessed through a long corridor (dromos) with a South-East orientation. For what concerns tomb J (see Figure 3), placed at the south of F, it has a diameter of 2.75 m, entirely inlaid within the rock; the entrance was opened at the South-East, paved by a wide slab used as a threshold. Inside the tombs a stone sarcophagus was found, close to the wall.

The Pottery

As in Knossos or Eleutherna, in this period an improvement of metal depositions¹, local and of a foreign origin as well, is widely attested in the Prinias Necropolis, associated with PGB pottery, inaugurating a trend destined to continue in Geometric time.

In terms of shapes and types, the area provides an almost complete repertoire of the PGB pottery, starting from the vases of big dimension to the minor ones comprising also the miniaturist specimens.

From tomb J, a lot of pottery was found, mainly formed by a complete drinking set of bell-skyphoi and one-handed cups, plausibly to be connected with precise rituals performed in honour of the dead.

Figure 4. *Pithos from Tomb J (Prinias)*



Source: Photo by Author.

¹The metal objects found in the Siderospilia necropolis of Prinias were studied by Matthäus (2016).

Just one large portion of the upper wall of a PGB figured straight-sided pithos comes from this tomb, of an exceptional quality of clay, and painting as well, carrying along the rim a line of tiny “S” (see Figure 4).

On the main body two birds and the back of a third, all resting up on trees. Two birds have the arched body filled with chessboard motive; the body of the third, partially preserved, is, instead, empty. By observing the stylistic rendering of figures represented on these PGB vases, it can be noted that one bird, the one just partially preserved, differently from the others, has got the wings: a small arch filled with parallel lines recalling the decoration of the body rim.

Whereas the recurrent subjects of PGB pottery are usually birds and trees, it must be underlined that this vase provides the only example of decoration formed just by a paratactical series of trees surmounted by small birds, quite exactly recalling an example from Knossos (Coldstream, Catling 1996, Figure 133).

In this case, furthermore, a macroscopic observation of the clay, seems to show a different colour and texture, rather yellowish and finer than the rest of PGB pottery from Prinias, in general characterized by a reddish colour and a solid composition².

More numerous are the examples of PGB pithoi from Tomb F.

As well as for its dimensions, tomb F emerges for the nature of the finds: along with the figured PGB vases, in fact, a considerable number of metal objects and choroplastic was found inside it.

A big fragment of straight-sided pithos decorated with brown band at the base and three trees (see Figure 5): the trunk is rendered through two tiny lines to which spiral branches are attached. The representation scheme of the tree is very linear and simple. The trunk rises directly from the tiny lines decorating the base.

A second fragment presents slightly convex upper walls. On the shoulder a series of arches filled with small lines is painted; on the upper wall wide panel houses two big birds facing one with the other: the body is arched and recalls the decorative motive on the shoulder; in the centre a sort of spiral pinwheel.

The metope's rim is filled with zig-zag motive and, on the left a rosetta is inscribed in a circle.

Belonging to the same vase is a wide portion of wall and base richly decorated: the walls are unusually tiny and the profile elegant and concave (see Figure 6).

²An interdisciplinary project concerning iron age pottery from Prinias is actually in progress, stopped by the Covid Pandemic diffusion, involving the INSTAP Institute, in particular the colleague Heleni Nodarou. The project is aimed to provide a general picture of the clay composition of the vases coming from the excavation of the monumental building at the South of temples and B, sampled on the base of a stratigraphic criterion, and in the large assemblage kept in consideration, small fragments of PGB pottery are included.

Figure 5. *Pithos P. 246, from Tomb F*



Source: Photo by Author.

Figure 6. *Pithos P. 243, from Tomb F*



Source: Drawing by Orazio Pulvirenti.

Part of a frame is preserved on the left, in correspondence of the handle, and, in the main area, the lower portion of a big bird with arched body, completely filled with scales, a fan-shaped tail and tiny bent legs is represented. The rest of the vase surface is filled with stylised trees bearing spiral branches and crowned by small oval leaves.

Another fragment of straight-sided pithos (P244/244b) (see Figure 7) comes from the Tomb: a big portion of the convex walls and shoulder with inset rim; the attach of the double bar handle, very high, is posed at about the half of the vase's wall. Differently from the previous specimen, the decoration is organised onto three registers: the upper housing lozenges on a black ground, filled with chessboard decoration;

The central register bears vegetal stylized features characterized by peculiar elongated and sinuous petals filled with small lines, recalling sea plants; In the lower register, finally, is a chain of fishes, whose body is bounded by a double rim filled with zig-zag, while internally is decorated by parallel bands. The fish's face is trapezoidal, with round eye, while the tails are fan-shaped.

Figure 7. *Pithos P. 244, from Tomb F*



Source: Photo by Author.

Figure 8. *Pithos P. 251 A/B, from Tomb F*

Source: Photo by Author.

Probably belonging to same vase are other fragments (251A/B) (see Figure 8) carrying analogue decoration.

My opinion is that they belonged to the other side of the pithos, being characterized by a different disposition of the decoration. In fact, instead of the lozenges, you can see a row of fishes made in an almost different style from the previous ones, more nearly recalling the decorative scheme of the shoulder.

From tomb F comes another fragment of pithos (P242 + 253): a portion of the wall and shoulder, the double bar vertical handle directly attached to the base of the shoulder; inset rim for the lid; slightly convex profile. The vase is completely filled by chains of “S” filled with small lines; a sacred tree with spiral branches is instead painted under the handles. The same motive of the body is repeated and simplified on the shoulder; this last is unusually large.

On the base of the analysis made till now, some consideration can be made regarding iconographical and stylistic features of the Prinias PGB figured vases.

It can be restated what Brock expressed in 1957, i.e., that PGB lives up to its reputation as “the most remarkable phase in Cretan vase-painting” (Brock 1957, p. 143)³, and it can be stressed that Prinias adds more new evidence on this respect, also in considering the Knossos necropolis.

What is missing in Prinias, in comparison with the North Cemetery and Fortetsa, is the attention paid to human figures. The astonishing nature goddesses represented on both PGB pithoi from the Knossos area don’t find comparison in

³The same in Coldstream and Catling 1996, 416.

the Prinias production. Nevertheless, a small fragment of vase found in the superficial ground, carries the image of the lower portion of a female figure, wearing a long skirt filled with chess motive. The feet are represented in profile, exactly following the compositional scheme adopted on the pithoi from Knossos and on contemporaneous figured objects largely spread in Iron Age Crete.

In general, painted decoration on PGB vases consists in mat varnish often applied on a whitish slip, following a Protogeometric tradition. The guide-shape for pottery production is undoubtedly the straight sided pithos, which just originates in the second half of ninth century to continue in the Early Geometric period, in many cases maintaining the free decoration and adoption of sinuous lines, but arranged according to a more rigid scheme, often respecting the distribution on the vase through parallel registers. Among the shapes most used in Protogeometric B, it must be mentioned even the hydria and some kinds of aryballoi and oinochoai. The latter usually present a peculiar carinated structure where, on the upper part of the shoulder, triangles, filled with lines or empty, are painted.

As for the drinking vessels, the large cup with flat base, painted through immersion, appears, slowly substituting the bell-skyphos, whereas in the very first phase both shapes live together in the same tomb J. The kalathos is also maintained, reduced in dimensions, and often used as lid for cinerary urns as the conic specimens as well (these lasts, often produced just for this purpose, recalling the decoration of the corresponding pithoi).

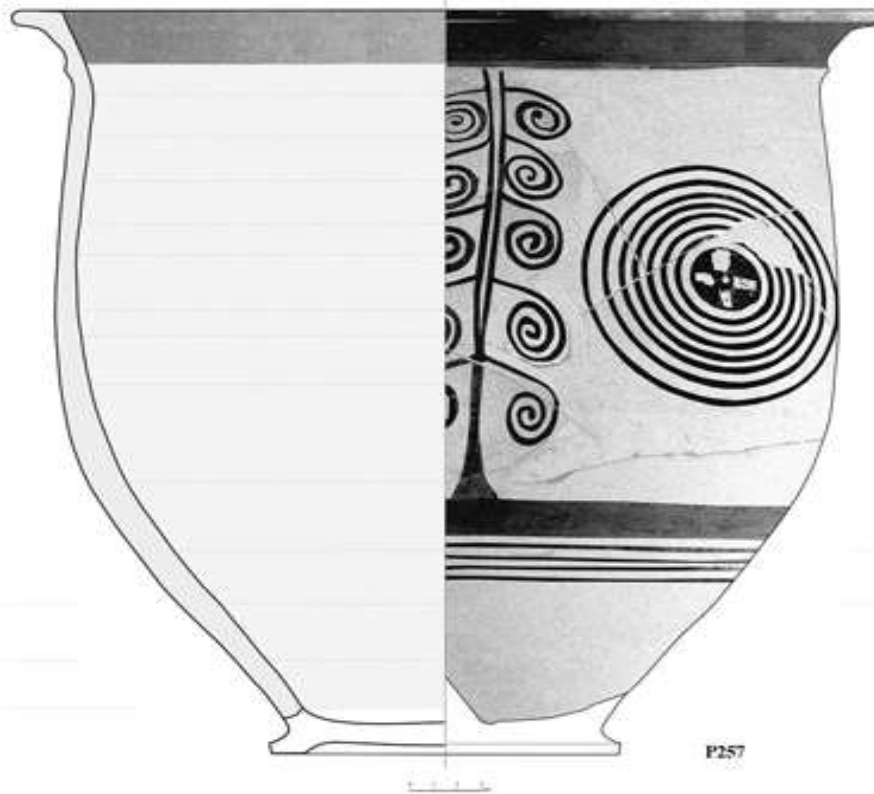
To the most conservative classes of material are confined the most traditional patterns, as concentric circles, inherited from the Protogeometric period. This phenomenon involves both kalathoi and kraters. The latter is particularly appreciated in Prinias, in both small and large dimensions. Probably for this reason, kraters from Prinias are particularly useful, in comparison with the ones from Knossos, in order to try to trace some sort of development of decoration.

The largest specimens, indeed, still carry the canonical arrangement of wide concentric circles between handles flanking a vertical or horizontal composition made of geometric and linear motives organized and grouped to form rich decorative panels.

The smallest ones, instead, show the passage between the rigid geometric criteria on decorating vases and the more freely distributed Protogeometric B one, where, between the groups of concentric circles, now smallest and simplest, a naturalistic element is drawn.

Almost two examples of this important evidence can be detected on kraters nos. P. 257 from tomb F (see Figure 9), and p. 835 from tomb W⁴.

⁴This last is not a pseudo-tholos tomb, but a pit tomb where the dead was buried into a large pithos and the pottery was placed all around it.

Figure 9. *Krater P. 257, from Tomb F*

Source: Drawing by Orazio Pulvirenti.

The first is a half preserved krater. It is characterized by an almost squat shape with quite convex profile in the lower portion and straight walls in the upper. The rim is everted and separated from the shoulder by a low, rounded rib. The circles are quite small and, differently from the Protogeometric prototypes, they are drawn more distant from the rim. At the centre of the circles, small empty crosses are placed on a dark ground. What is impressive on this specimen, is the presence of an elongated tree, resting on a solid triangle on the lower black band, with spiral branches, quite exactly recalling the trees represented on PGB contemporary straight-sided pithoi.

Tomb W was not a tholos, but a pithos burial host in a pit bounded by a wall made of regular blocks, whose entrance was emphasized by two vertical pointed stones. The tomb contained two children, whose bones were partially burned. The depositions include several miniature vases, mostly kalathoi, and small carinated PGB jugs.

Flanking the major pithos, the belly krater was deposited, its decoration consisting, as said above, in concentric circles flanking a stylised tree surmounted by a bird.

P. 835 consists in a integrally preserved vase. The shape is more squat and squared than the previous one, being the lower portion quite straight, and the upper walls quite converging. The rim is strongly everted and high. Two large groups of concentric circles decorate the main portion of the vase, their centre being filled by

a cross, as in the previous one. Even on this specimen, an elongated tree, with spiral branches, rises between the circles, on both sides, but, this time, two birds rest on it facing left. The krater is host at the Iraklion Museum and it has not been possible to analyse it macroscopically, but from the photos and drawings made at the time of the discovery it is possible to have a good general view of the specimen. On one side, the tree was clearly drawn down after the circles, and the painter had evidently to sacrifice the dimensions and correct shape of the branches in order to place the tree between them; on the other, instead, the circles are drawn down closer to the handles, so the space for the naturalistic scene is enough for the right representation of the plant. The birds are quite different from one each other, being the first completely filled with black mat paint, the second beaded by an empty band.

A third specimen of tree krater was reconstructed by me in 2015, starting from an inventoried fragment found in 1971 in the west sector of the cemetery in the superficial ground, and then associated with various sherds found in the storerooms of the Prinias mission (Pappalardo 2019, p. 464) (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. *Krater P. 476 (Prinias)*



Source: Reconstruction and Photo by Author.

Through evidence provided by the figured PGB craters it can be stated that conservative patterns, as concentric circles, are limited to the most conservative classes of material, following principles of symmetry. Nevertheless, differently from Knossos, Prinias offers the possibility to catch the very first step in adopting naturalistic decoration, as testified by the presence of trees and birds just between concentric circles.

For what concerns the large amount of figured straight-sided pithoi from the cemetery, it is evident that linear decoration is widely spread, maybe originating in the contemporaneous Geometric Attic production. Differently from continental Greece, however, Crete emerges for the use of linear decoration aimed to create and construct complex figurative scenes. Lines straight and curve are used and assembled into cables, current S, chains of lozenges, running spirals.

Additionally, the aforementioned complex motives, are used to create naturalistic figures: the body of the birds or fishes, the tree-trunks or branches, the sea vegetal are nothing but the free composition of the decorative patterns themselves, combined and mixed to create images.

The arches decorating the shoulders of straight-sided pithoi are used to create the bodies of birds or the fishes contours. Eyes, mouth, legs and tails are simply added to the combined decorative features.

With the aforementioned publication of Giovanni Rizza, the figured pottery from Prinias constituted the first significant comparison for the one found in the Fortetsa necropolis and published by Brock.

The typological homogeneity, together with the peculiar decoration, concurred in unifying the vases into a single group carrying the signature of the “Prinias Painter”.

The subsequent publication of the Knossos North Cemetery, by Coldstream and Catling, considerably improved information concerning this particular phase of the Cretan Protogeometric period, and led to the formation of a further ceramic group, the one of the “tree painter”.

With the recognition of the Protogeometric B pottery as distinct from the rest of pottery production, in Crete or in continental Greece, it has been postulated a precise chronological phase, coinciding with the second half of IX cent. And being characterized by discreet archaeological features involving several aspects of material culture. Just in this phase, then, we place a precise class of pottery production, which recognised in the straight-sided pithos the most suitable shape and identified in this peculiar figured decoration the media more opportune to convey messages about a defined group of individuals.

The analytical study of the PGB material from Prinias allowed to partially clarify some elements concerning the formation and development of this particular class of material which, at the moment, seems to place Prinias and Knossos as major centres of production, but whose presence is testified in the centre-northern region of Crete, by sites like Eltyna and Archanes, while at West by the important site of Eleutherna.

If one would try to preliminarily compare the production of Prinias with the one of Knossos, several significant differences can be detected as well as at an internal and external level, in figures rendering. The criteria adopted in rendering

birds, or trees are various and do not seem to testify the primacy of one hand on another.

Establishing the primacy of one site over the other in the elaboration of such a new style in the early Iron Age is difficult. Both centres, in fact, testify a certain skill in the experimentation of new shapes and decorations, by showing an eclectic taste, contaminated by features belonging as well as to the Minoan heritage and to the new influences coming from various parts of the Mediterranean basin, particularly active in IX cent Crete.

It rises, then, the issue of the reciprocal relationship between the corpus from Knossos and the one from Prinias, at the moment the more significant in terms of number and style.

As stratigraphic information is missing for the materials retrieved from tombs F and J, it must be attempted to trace some internal sequence based on a stylistic approach. The same criterion was adopted by Coldstream for the classification of the Knossos PGB pottery.

Results

Some differences can be detected between the two centres (Prinias and Knossos) after a first examination. In Knossos, straight-sided pithoi follow a development from more squat and stumpy shape to an increasingly slender and convex one, and the decoration evolves from a phase in which it was more freely applied, to a phase in which it was more rigidly organized in frames or registers. In Prinias the phenomenon is almost inverted: the patterns typical of PGB conceived according to the logic of the free hand drawing, independently from the tectonic of the vase, are organized into parallel register or inside frames just on those vases characterized by a squatter shape, quite convex walls and not large dimensions.

On the contrary, those pithoi of the Prinias school that show an accurate tapered shape and an elegant and sinuous profile, carry a decoration freely distributed, avoiding that organization into metopes or registers as for the more recent specimens from Knossos.

The metope housing birds on pithos P 243 from tomb F, in fact, has not the function of dividing and organizing the decoration into a geometric perspective; on contrary, it is just aimed to emphasize the subject. This last is repeated and enlarged on the vase's lower wall, freely standing on a ground of trees.

It is not easy establishing the meaning of PGB pithoi inside the largest tombs of Prinias. The easiest lecture would bring us linking their presence with social status, also in consideration of the general richness of funerary goods found inside them. But, nevertheless, we cannot exclude other exigencies at the base of this behaviour, as, for example, gender.

For what concerns the reciprocal relationships between Knossos and Prinias, the possibility of the existence of itinerant artisans, already assumed (Coldstream, Catling 1996, Kotsonas 2013), is not so much plausible.

The compositional schemes adopted by the Prinias' painters seem to maintain a proper originality, showing an use of figures different at all from the Knossian ones.

From a typological and stylistic point of view, it is evident that the figured pithoi from Prinias form a homogenous corpus.

The choice of the straight-sided pithos as cinerary urn and the experimentation of a so richly figured decoration constitute, without any doubt, a *trait d'union* between Knossos and Prinias.

Nevertheless, the variety of the decorative patterns and of the represented subjects allows to exclude that the corpus was the product of a single artisan. It seems more likely to surmise the existence of a workshop, or school operating on the wave of a stylistic current, whose characteristics had to satisfy, at a wider, or better, regional level, precise exigencies in the period of the passage from Protogeometric to the geometric in Crete.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out on the PGB assemblage from Prinias has not yet been completed. Several objects are still to be documented and chemical analysis carried out on selected specimens in order to better define clay and pigments composition.

The study, furthermore, has to be extended to the plane ware, dated to the same period and coming from the same tombs, in order to establish if we can consider Protogeometric B as an archaeological phase, involving all aspects of material culture, or, simply, a stylistic current.

Anyway, from the study till now carried out some preliminary remarks can be done.

1. The PGB straight-sided pithoi from Prinias are not dependent from the Knossian production. They follow a different development, varying their shape from a more slender with free decoration to a more squat decorated through registers according to a more geometric scheme.
2. For what concerns clay, the macroscopic observation showed that pithoi are all made with the same clay, except for the only one coming from tomb J (Figure 4) which presents a lighter, yellowish and fine composition, but very different from the one detected in the Knossos specimens (so that we can exclude an import).
3. The use of figured decoration, in Prinias, anticipate the one of Knossos, involving more conservative shapes as the kraters and being associated, in the early phase, with traditional decorative patterns, as the concentric circles.
4. At a first analysis, if compared with pottery found in the settlement, figured PGB vases seem quite exclusive of the necropolis, maybe produced just in order to be used as cinerary urns for the élites or specific groups.

References

- Brock J (1957) *Fortetsa. Early Greek tombs near Knossos*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Coldstream JN, Catling HW (Eds.) (1996) *Knossos north cemetery. Early Greek tombs, I–IV, Suppl. 28*. London: British School at Athens.
- Englezou M (2004) Η σχέση της Έλτυνας με την Κνωσό. (Eltyna's relation with Knossos). In G Cadogan, E Hatzaki, A Vasilaki (eds.), *Knossos: Palace, City, State. Proceedings of the Conference in Herakleion organized by the British School at Athens and the 23rd Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Herakleion*, 421–431. London: BSA Studies 12.
- Kotsonas A (2006) Wealth and status in Iron Age Knossos. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 25(2): 149–172.
- Kotsonas A (2008) *The archaeology of tomb AIK1 of Orthi Petra in Eleutherna. The Early Iron Age pottery*. Heraklion: University of Crete.
- Kotsonas A (2013) Orientalizing ceramic styles and wares of Early Iron Age Crete. Aspects of production, dissemination and consumption. In WD Niemeier, O Pilz, I Kaiser (eds.), *Kreta in der geometrischen und archaischen Zeit, Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums am Deutschen Archäologischen Institut*, 233–252. Abteilung Athen, 27-29 Januar 2006. München: Athenaia 2.
- Lemos IS (2002) *The protogeometric Aegean: the archaeology of the late eleventh and tenth centuries BC*. Oxford: University Press.
- Markoe G (1985) *Phoenician bronze and silver bowls from Cyprus and the Mediterranean*. Berkeley.
- Matthäus H (1996) Crete and the Near East during the early First Millennium B.C. – New investigations on Bronze Finds from the Idaean Cave of Zeus. In *Acts of the 8th International Cretological Congress*. Heraklion, 267–280.
- Matthäus H (2016) Kypriaka in der Siderospilia-Nekropole von Prinias, Mittelkreta. (Kipriaka in the cemetery of Prinias, central Crete). In *Hommage à Antoine Hermary. Colloque «Chypre et les grandes îles de Méditerranée»* Marseille, 16-17 October 2015. Paris: CAHIER 46, 175–200.
- Palermo D (2019) La necropoli arcaica di Prinias. Nuove ricerche per un progetto di pubblicazione finale. (The archaic necropolis of Prinias. New researches for a final publication). In *Proceedings of the 12th International Cretological Congress*. Heraklion, 21-25 September 2016.
- Palermo D, Pautasso A, Rizza S, Biondi G, Pappalardo E, Perna K, et al. (2017) Prinias. Scavi e ricerche degli anni 2006-2010. (Prinias. Excavations and researches). *ASAtene* 95: 427–496.
- Pappalardo E (2005) Avori Orientali da Creta. Il ruolo di Creta nella distribuzione degli avori nel Mediterraneo Orientale. (Naer Eastern Ivories from Crete. The role of Crete in the Ivory's distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean). *Creta Antica* 5: 207–247.
- Pappalardo E (2011a) Tra Cnosso e l'Antro Ideo. Iconografie e rapporti con l'Oriente. (Between Knossos and the Idaean Cave. Iconographies and relationships with the East). In *Identità e processi di trasformazione a Creta fra Dark Age e Arcaismo. Atti della Riunione Scientifica*. Atene, 9-11 Novembre 2006. Catania: CNR – Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 193–207.
- Pappalardo E (2011b) Cultural interaction between Crete and Near East in Early Iron Age: the case of the ivories. In *Proceedings of the X Cretological Congress*. Chania, 1-8 October 2006. Chania: Literary Society Chryssostomos, 397–407.
- Pappalardo E (2012) *Importazioni Orientali a Creta. I livelli dei contatti*. (Near eastern imports in Crete. The levels of contacts). Firenze: Le Lettere.

- Pappalardo E (2013) Il ruolo di Creta nel Mediterraneo di I millennio. In WD Niemeier, O Pilz, I Kaiser (eds.), *Kreta in der geometrischen und archaischen Zeit, Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums am Deutschen Archäologischen Institut*. (Crete in Geometric and Archaic periods. Proceedings of the International Conference at the German Archaeological Institute). Abteilung Athen, 27-29 Januar 2006, 455–469. Athenaia 2. München.
- Pappalardo E (2015) L'officina del Pittore di Priniàs. Considerazioni preliminari. (The workshop of the Priniàs' painter. Preliminary remarks). In S Nawracala, R Nawracala (eds.), *Polymatheia. Festschrift für Hartmut Matthäus anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages*, Shaker Verlag.
- Pappalardo E (2019) Urne figurate da Priniàs. Il Protogeometrico B tra Dark Age e Alto Arcaismo. (Figured urns from Priniàs. The protogeometric B between Dark Age and High Archaism). *ASAtene* 97: 183–204.
- Pautasso A (2018) "... The result can be bold and startling". Crateri figurati di età geometrica dalla necropoli di Siderospilia (Priniàs). ("... The result can be bold and startling". Geometric craters from the necropolis of Siderospilia (Priniàs)). *ASAtene* 96: 497–518.
- Pautasso A (2019) La ceramica figurata d'età geometrica dalla necropoli di Siderospilia (Priniàs): alcune riflessioni sul tema della mobilità. (Geometric figured pottery from the necropolis of Siderospilia. Priniàs). In *Proceedings of the 12th International Cretological Congress*. Heraklion, 21-25 September 2016.
- Rizza G (1971) Scavi e ricerche dell'Istituto e della Scuola di Archeologia negli anni 1968-71. (Excavations and researches of the Archaeological Institute in 1968-71). *Siculorum Gymnasium* 24: 11–18.
- Rizza G (1973) Nuove scoperte a Priniàs. (New discoveries in Priniàs). In *Πρακτικά του Γ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*. Ρέθυμνον 18-23 Σεπτεμβρίου 1971. Τόμος 1, Προϊστορικοί Και Αρχαίοι Χρόνοι. Athens, 286–289.
- Rizza G (1974) Ceramiche figurate da Priniàs. (Figured vases from Priniàs). *Cronache di Archeologia* 13: 153–160.
- Rizza G (2011) Identità culturale, etnicità, processi di trasformazione a Priniàs. (Cultural Identity, ethnicity, and processes of transformation in Priniàs). In G Rizza (ed), *Identità culturale, etnicità, processi di trasformazione a Creta fra Dark Age e Arcaismo*, 21–56. Catania, CNR – Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche.
- Rizza S (2019) Studio topografico della necropoli di Siderospilia. (Topographic study of the Siderospilia necropolis). In *Proceedings of the 12th International Cretological Congress*. Heraklion, 21-25 September 2016.
- Rizza S (2020) Tipologie tombali ed organizzazione spaziale nella necropoli di Siderospilia a Priniàs. (Tombs typology and spatial organization in the Siderospilia necropolis). In NChr Stampolidis, M Giannopoulou (eds.), *Eleutherna, Crete and the Outside World. Proceedings of the International Congress*. Rethymnon 3-5 June 2018. Athens. Rethymon, 262–269.
- Stampolidis N (1998) *B' Meros. Isagogì, 11os – 6os ai. P. Ch.* (Second part. Introduction). In NCHR Stampolidis, M Karetso (eds.), *Anatoliki Mesògios. Kypros – Dodekànisa – Kriti*, 102–134. Iraklion.
- Stampolidis NChr, Karageorghis V (2003) Sea routes. Interconnections in Mediterranean 16th – 6th c. B.C. In *Proceedings of the International Symposium*. Rethymnon 2002. Athens.