LATE BRONZE AGE KOMMOS:

IMPORTED POTTERY AS EVIDENCE FOR FOREIGN CONTACT

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After nine years of excavation (1), it has become apparent that the site of Kommos on the south coast of Crete was not another Minoan palace centre. Rather, it is a major port site which fed the nearby urban centre at Phaistos. Consequently, the sequence of imports at the site assumes considerable historical interest. The geographical range and number of imported trade items at Kommos is, to my knowledge, unmatched at any Aegean site excavated since World War I.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the imported Bronze Age vessels at Kommos, and to suggest some of the broader implications of these finds. For the present my remarks should be regarded as provisional.

Kommos is located at a natural harbour site, about an hour's walk from the palatial settlement at Phaistos. Excavation at the site since 1976 has concentrated on three sectors: the settlement on the hilltop and on the hillside, and the monumental complex below to the south. The total number of foreign vessels found in Middle Minoan (MM) contexts at Kommos is, according to Professor P. Betancourt, no more than a dozen. There are two jug fragments, probably from Cyprus, from an MM IB context, a Cyproite White Painted IV juglet from an MM III level, and a Nipped Ewer from Thera or Melos, also from an MM III deposit.

The number of imported vases from LM I contexts at Kommos is relatively small. An important exception to this situation is a Late Minoan (LM) IB deposit of vases which fell down into the southern staircase area of Building J in the lower complex. This deposit contained a Red Lustrous Spindle Bottle which was probably from Cyprus. The site also produced five fragments of medium-sized vessels (circa 40 to 70 centimeters in height) whose clay appears to be Near Eastern.

The next phase of the settlement is, in ceramic terms, LM II - LM IIIA1. Late Minoan II as a period is represented at the site by one large deposit, and several other small ones. I know of no actual foreign imports which can be dated to LM II, but the Ephyraean goblet -- which appears at Kommos at this time -- may be Mainland in origin.

Beginning in LM IIIA1, relatively large numbers of foreign ceramic imports arrive at Kommos. From the Mainland comes an LH II goblet. From Cyprus, there are seven fragments of
White-Slip II milkbowls in secure LM IIIA1 contexts. Near Eastern imports include a pilgrim flask rim and five fragments of the biconical type of Canaanite jar made of coarse red to buff clay as well as a white-slipped rim from a medium-sized jar.

Our first imports from Italy apparently date to LM IIIA1. There are at least eight in all, and they belong to two separate wares: the first is a wheelmade grey ware whose fabric is usually quite fine, light grey in colour and burnished. The second is brown impasto ware which is always coarse and usually black or dark grey, although it can be various shades of brown or even red. It is normally handmade and usually burnished with heavy vertical or horizontal marks. The grey ware cup in the slide is an imitation of the Minoan flat-based LM IIIA1 cup. In Italy, wheelmade grey ware vases are regarded as having their ultimate origin in Greece. Italian archaeologists do, however, acknowledge that some grey ware vessels were made locally in Italy. Grey ware vases also occur in Crete in Aegean shapes (e.g., askos, jug, kylix). For the moment, I would prefer to regard our grey ware vases at Kommos as Italian imports, although this is not certain. Four examples of open impasto ware vessels, perhaps dishes, with relief discs on their exteriors come from LM IIIA1 contexts. This kind of plastic decoration can be paralleled in Apennine pottery.

The final Bronze Age phase of the site is LM IIIA2 - IIIB. The settlement, according to the pottery, is abandoned in the third quarter of the thirteenth century B.C., at a time when LM IIIB2 style pottery has appeared.

Beginning in LM IIIA2, the number of foreign imports at the site doubles. From the Mainland, the commonest import is the stirrup jar. There are also examples of deep bowls and a stemmed bowl. We have been able to identify two pithoi of characteristic central Cycladic clay, probably from Naxos. Ethnographic research by Blitzer has shown that pithoi were traded widely in the 19th century eastern Mediterranean, so their finds should not come as a surprise. Cypriote White Slip II milk bowls continue as a popular import item at Kommos. We also have found one White Shaved Jug, and the neck of a large Plain White Pithos.

In LM IIIA2, Canaanite jars of a different type of clay first appear at the site. This clay is finer than that of the earlier jars and tends to have a greenish or buff surface. There are two Canaanite jar shapes represented in Kommos: the biconical and the angular.

Finally, the single largest group of foreign vases at Kommos in the LM IIIA2 - IIIB period is Italian. Most are of the coarse impasto ware. Large impasto vessels such as the collared jar, and dolio appear in this period. Parallels for these vessels exist in Southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia.

The bulk of the vases imported into Kommos before ca. 1370 B.C. is from Cyprus and the Levant. Taken together, these vessels suggest a trade route with goods moving from Syria to Cyprus and then on to Crete. One of the most heavily travelled trade routes in the Bronze Age Mediterranean was between copper-producing Cyprus and the Syrian coast, where eastern tin could be obtained. The recently discovered early fourteenth century B.C. shipwreck near Kaş, on the southern coast of Turkey, was part of this trade. Loaded with copper and tin ingots, pithoi
(one of which was filled with WSII milkbowls, Base Ring and White Shaved vases), and Canaanite jars, this ship was apparently wrecked on its way to the Aegean after having been in Levantine and Cypriote ports. It is tempting to see a substantial portion of our foreign vessels in LMI - IIIA1 Kommos as evidence for the Aegean leg of this east-west route. One would therefore connect them with the ingot and pot-bellow fragments, crucibles, charcoal and metal prills from the southern complex at Kommos which indicate that metals were being melted there at that time. Analysis of the metal remains would help to clarify our understanding of this trade.

If we interpret literally the number of vases imported during LM IIIA2, it is during the second half of the fourteenth century that trade contacts with Cyprus and the Levant reach their peak. The presence of large vessels, like the pithoi and the Canaanite jars, also suggests an increased bulk in the trade. Again, I would see these vessels as evidence of trade with Cyprus, probably at sites such as Kition, Enkomi and Hala Sultan Tekke, which become large copper-producing centres in the fourteenth century. In many ways, Kommos is an Aegean version of these Cypriote commercial settlements.

Given this build-up of eastern contacts at Kommos in IM IIIA1 and IIIA2 it is surprising to find that by the thirteenth century foreign trade contacts at the site seem to have changed substantially. The number of Cypriote imports trails off almost entirely in LM IIIB. Levantine vessels are still found in LM IIIB levels at Kommos, but they are less in number than before. The foreign imported pottery from this period suggests that Kommos's eastern trade contacts were replaced or at least supplemented by commercial connections with the west. The pottery from Kommos suggests that:

1) Italian pottery was already arriving in the Aegean in some quantity before Late Helladic IIIB, and

2) that this trade with Italy, at least in the case of Kommos, probably involved, in part, the exchange of Cretan oil for bronze.

Finally, I would like to point out that the foreign pottery is only an inconsistent subset of the actual trade carried out there. To reconstruct the foreign trade at Kommos as fully as possible, we need to draw upon and integrate many different kinds of information from the site.

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NOTES

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**DISCUSSION**

Paul Yule:
How certain is it that the tuyère [a device used in connection with heating metal: Ed.] from Kommos is from the Near East and why should it be imported? Something like that is very easy to produce.

Watrous:
The answer to that, Paul, is that it is not certain it is a tuyère. The shape is similar to the shape of tuyère published by Schaeffer at Ugarit. Its provenience is suggested by the fabric. Of that I am fairly certain. Maybe I was being a little too coy, but it seemed to me that one might make a case for this kind of an import coming in MM IB as being part of an inherited technology coming in at that time.

Jennifer Moody:
I was wondering: last summer Birgitta [Hallagher] and I were discussing the Adriatic ware at Chania and it looks like a lot, well not a lot, but some of the fabric, anyway, that has this Italian treatment to it, is local, that it is being made in Chania in this way, and I was wondering if you find anything like that in the Messara.

Watrous:
That's a good question. What I showed you today was our impasto ware pottery, which is different from the kind of corded ware, which is being called "Barbarian" ware in the Mainland. Now, the reason for this, I suspect, is because our Italian pottery is earlier -- it is at least one hundred years earlier, at least when it begins -- than anything that has been found so far in the Aegean. We do know that later on, both at Chania, Tiryns and some other mainland sites, the kind of Italian pottery which I showed you from Kommos occurs with the later handmade "Barbarian" ware. We apparently do not get it, because, I assume, our material is earlier.

The ware that you were referring to is the wheel-made grey ware. This is a problem. The problem is that Italian archaeologists think it is one thing, Aegean archaeologists another thing. Birgitta put out the suggestion in the symposium at Cambridge that these vases were made locally. The evidence for that is the fact that a number of these vases occur in local shapes. I alluded to that.
I have to say I do not believe it. I would rather see this pottery being made in Italy or somewhere outside of Kommos for foreign consumption. The reason why I suggest this is that grey ware begins at a time when the wheel is introduced into Italy from the Aegean and that most grey ware comes from the Gulf of Taranto area.

Ian Begg:
Your last map made me wonder, how does the evidence from Pylos fit into this? Pylos is on the same route that you're talking about between Kommos, Chania, and Italy.
Watrous:
Well, in what respect?

Ian Begg:
The pottery - any evidence for trade? How does it fit in with trading patterns in LM IIIA and LM IIIIB?

Watrous:
Well, I will tell you a small story. I took some of the sherds from one of the stirrup jars that I showed you, which is Mycenaean. I also took sherds from the stemmed bowl up to Athens and I showed them both to Hector Catling and George Korres, who were digging in Lakonia and Messenia, respectively. They both said those sherds are -- well, they did not say -- "are" probably mine; but they did say "they would not cause any surprise on my site." So I suspect that in the late period we have a lot of Mycenaean pottery; but you know, it is funny, it all seems to be in this very yellowish soft clay which is definitely not from the Argolid. In terms of a trade route which goes through Chania the next step obviously is the southern Peloponnese. So it looks as if one or more sites in the southern Peloponnese are involved in this, what I would take to be a trade route which then goes further west to Italy.

James Weinstein:
I have two questions actually: first, since you have brought up the subject of metals trade, I am wondering what you have been doing about any metals you have found at the site.

Watrous:
We hope to have an analysis made of some of the ingots and some of the metal fragments. This, I think, is tremendously important because with these analyses we can at least eliminate some of the possibilities. In other words, are these things coming in from Cyprus, are they coming from the mainland, are they coming from the west? I think it seems to me vitally important to have that kind of knowledge.

James Weinstein:
Second, I am curious. There was no mention of Egypt, of Keftiu or Egyptian pottery. Is that to come in a future talk or would you like to say anything about that in terms of trade patterns and the question of a direct route from Crete to Egypt?

Watrous:
For a while last year we thought we had a few sherds that might be Egyptian. Alas, people who have looked at them and who know Egyptian pottery have dashed our hopes. They are not Egyptian. So we have no pottery from Egypt that we can recognize. I think we would recognize it; Nile clay apparently is very distinctive. We do have a few bits of faience. Beyond that I do not think that I can say very much. Given the evidence that we have, we don't seem to have anything which indicates a direct route.
James Weinstein:
Thank-you.

Elizabeth Fisher:
I hate to anticipate my paper for tomorrow ["The Trade Pattern of the Mycenaeans in Southern Italy" (see AJA 89 [1985] 330): Ed.] but to go to the question of the trade route between western Greece and Italy, it does seem that certain sites in Greece, in the western area of Greece, in Achaia, in the Ionian Islands, in Messenia, and in western Crete, were linked to southern Italy; but, they tended to be linked, I think, on a one-to-one basis. So that at Termitito, for instance, which is in Basilicata, we have a lot of pottery that seems to be Messenian, or could have Messenian parallels. And at Tarento, I disagree that it is fourteen per cent Minoan. I've looked at it for the past two years. I think it is mostly Minoan or western Cretan from the Chania region. So I think that it is much more complex than simply coast hopping from, say, Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, Pylos, Achaia, Kephallenia, Italy. I think that there were business contacts set up and that trade went back and forth one-to-one.

Watrous:
This is just the kind of evidence that we need more of. But let me interrupt. Has not anybody seen those poor transport amphorae? Surely in this group here there must be somebody who has seen one of these vessels on one of their sites, or run across them. I would very much like to find a home for these things. We have a lot of them. They are not apparently being made on the site. We even have, I think, a large type of clay stopper, a large clay stopper which may have been made for them. So that they are coming in presumably with something in them or going out with something in them.

Guenther Kopcke:
Vance, do you suggest that there is a change in the emphasis on the prominence of copper supply? You said something - that there is a decline in Cypriote or Eastern imports at the same time when your western wares come in or western connections come in. And that sounded somewhat as if you suggested that, you know, one source dries up, and the other one opens up. Can we say this at this point? Because you continue to have Eastern material and I think that with Mycenaean pottery, no, really pottery from the Argolid … [inaudible section] … imported, although to a lesser degree and at the same time, I do not know whether we have an emphasis of the western connection, but the western connection continues strongly at the same time. So that is somewhat of a parallel here.

Watrous:
Let me try and answer this. Two points on that: one is a point of methodology. It seems to me, given a site like Kommos, as Professor Shaw says, we are obligated to speculate about its role. That is what it is, it is speculation. On the other hand, look at the site; it is not a major centre in itself, it is part of a larger regional complex, part of a larger trade pattern if you will. So that you could regard it almost as a barometer of Aegean trade which is the spirit I have taken it in. And so I have begun by describing the various types and amounts of imported pottery at the site and then I have tried to infer what I can from the evidence. Now the second point; the reason why I believe that the
trade from the east was replaced to some extent by the trade from the west is that I tend to see it as part of a much larger picture in Crete involving Knossos, and the fact that beginning in LM IIIA2 and IM IIIB you get a sudden flood of Chania pottery all over the island, and I tend to see this change that we get from east to west as perhaps being involved in some sort of conflict between two centres. And the point of the conflict might be bronze. So that it does not surprise me when you say that the eastern imports, for instance, continue in Mycenae, say, or up in the mainland. That is what I would expect; but I think that in LM IIIB we have got a period when we may have two centres which in a sense are competing with two commercial outlets so to speak.

Jim Muhly:
You know that Hector Catling has argued that with the fall of Knossos there is a great decline both in the Minoan and also in the Mycenaean metal industry. How would you react to Catling's thesis in the light of your evidence from Kommos?

Watrous:
The problem is of course that the lights go out at our site roughly around the third quarter of the thirteenth century, somewhere between 1250 and 1225. And, if I am not mistaken, that is the time that I would assume the final destruction takes places at Knossos. The two in fact may be synchronous.

Jim Muhly:
I am talking around 1375. There is a real collapse of the metals industry in the fourteenth and thirteenth century following the rich [period] that you have just prior to the fall of Knossos around 1400.

Watrous:
I think we have to be careful with that. Obviously he is arriving at that kind of characterization based on numbers.

Jim Muhly:
Based on the numbers of metal objects found in excavation.

Watrous:
The numbers go way down. Based on what we find at Kommos in the LM IIIB period, that site is a beehive of metal working.

Harriet Blitzer:
Since I am the one who is working on the metal finds [at Kommos] perhaps I can add some light on this question. Professor Muhly has asked a very important question since we have concentrated on the ceramic remains here we have to consider we are dealing with a site that has produced not only ceramic remains but other things as well. Kommos in LM I has a substantial metal-melting industry down in the southern complex area with massive crucibles of the size of about ten inches across - massive crucibles. We are talking about a really substantial industry. This is going on down in the
southern complex and we have all kinds and bits of remains from it. In the IM IIA2 - LM IIIB
period, however, we have evidence for metal-melting at two establishments, up on the hilltop and
hillside. These are carried out in a much more scrappy way. They are carried out in and around
establishments which are both living and working establishments, and what the people are
producing is shaftbolt axes - double axes. They are producing them in clay molds, the evidence for
which we have. We also have a very different kind of crucible being used in LM IIA2 - LM IIIB,
much smaller, of a type which begins in Crete in LM II and does not occur before that time. The
people who are producing the double axes are themselves using in their homes *handflaked* axes.
They are using stone axes. They themselves are not using the metal axes. They are clearly being
produced for some other reason. Part of the furniture, part of the tools contained in all of the
houses where people live in LM IIA2 - LM IIIB at Kommos, almost every one of those houses, has
one of these hand-flaked axes made of a very hard stone. So you have a cultural change going
on at Kommos in LM IIA2 - LM IIIB which matches whatever is going on with the pottery. So we
have very distinctive kinds of metal industries in each of those two separate periods.

**Watrous:**
Just on this same question I wonder if our Near Eastern colleagues here could throw any light on
the situation. Is there any evidence in the Near East that could suggest that the sources [for metal]
might be drying up?

**Jim Muhly:**
This is the great age of the Levantine bronze industry, in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries.
We have a wealth of metal from sites like Ugarit in this period. There is no evidence that there is a
shortage of metal, that things are drying up. And there certainly is no such evidence from Cyprus
itself. I think the more we learn of the Late Bronze Age in Cyprus the more we come to appreciate
the existence of a local metal industry in Cyprus during the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries.
Again, the idea of Catling that the Cypriote bronze industry was something brought to the island by
Aegean colonists at the end of the Late Bronze Age is now becoming increasingly difficult to
defend. So I see no evidence for shortage of copper in the eastern Mediterranean during this period.

**Watrous:**
Yes, I agree with you. And I think also that we might search for this apparent lack of bronzes in the
political and social changes that are taking place, at least in Crete. I think that things are happening
which are skewing our sample so to speak, and I think conflict is one of them.

**Joseph Shaw:**
I think we should perhaps stop there, although come back to these central themes, I am sure we
will, as time goes on.
Joseph Shaw:
Our second speaker, Professor Maria Shaw, might be called a "founding mother," having lived with
the idea of excavation at Kommos since 1965 when I first visited the site, and having been an active
participant in the logistical planning of all aspects of excavation since then, year after year, whether
is was selection of personnel or complex negotiations concerning aspects of expropriation. She has,
as trenchmaster, exposed the remains and set the style of excavation and standard of recording
more than anyone else. She will now speak about our ashlar buildings, their definition, use and
significance.