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GAMES AND ORACULAR PRACTICES AROUND THE HEARTH: THE "TABLE OF OFFERINGS" FROM THE SO-CALLED TEMPLE 4 AT KITION-*KATHARI* (CYPRUS)[1]

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Abstract. In the sanctuary of Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), a building with benches, identified as a temple ("Temple 4"), is characterized in its centre by a hearth pit next to a trapezoidal stone construction, constituting "Altar E". The platform's surface comprises a series of little cup-holes. Once labelled "table of offerings", it has recently been interpreted as a gaming table. Besides clay gaming stones, this area has yielded knucklebones as well as several deposits of incised scapulae linked with divination practices. This Cypriot context gives us the opportunity to explore and also to put in light the influences and interactions between different regions of the Eastern Mediterranean at the turn of the 1st millennium BC.

Gaming table, gaming stones, hearth, altar, merchant-mariners' context

Περίληψη. Στο ιερό της Καθαρής Κιτίου (Κύπρος) ένα κτίριο με θρανία που ταυτίστηκε με ναό (Ναός 4), χαρακτηρίζεται στο κέντρο του από μια εστία πλησίον λίθινης, τραπεζοειδούς κατασκευής που αποτελεί τον «Βωμό Ε», η άνω επιφάνεια του οποίου περιλαμβάνει μία σειρά

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[1] Since this paper was given for publication, *Around the Hearth*, an edited volume dedicated to symbolic and ritual practices in association with fireplaces, has been published: LAMAZE – BASTIDE 2021.

μικρών κοιλοτήτων. Αρχικά θεωρήθηκε ως «τράπεζα προσφορών», ωστόσο πρόσφατα ερμηνεύτηκε ως τράπεζα παιχνιδιού. Εκτός από πήλινους πεσσούς, στον χώρο αυτό εντοπίστηκαν αστράγαλοι, καθώς και αρκετές αποθέσεις ωμοπλατών με εγχαράξεις, που συνδέονται με μαντικές πρακτικές. Αυτό το κυπριακό σύνολο μας προσφέρει την ευκαιρία να διερευνήσουμε και να διαφωτίσουμε τις επιρροές και αλληλεπιδράσεις μεταξύ διαφορετικών περιοχών της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου στην στροφή της 1ης χιλιετίας π.Χ.

Τράπεζα παιχνιδιού, πεσσοί, εστία, βωμός, πλαίσιο θαλασσινών εμπόρων

Riassunto. Nel santuario di Kition-*Kathari* (Cipro), un edificio con banchina laterale identificato come tempio ("Tempio 4") ospita nella sua parte centrale un focolare affiancato da una piattaforma trapezoidale ("Altare E"), la cui superficie è caratterizzata dalla presenza di una serie di piccole cavità. Originariamente interpretato come "tavola di offerte", l'apprestamento è stato recentemente identificato come tavola da gioco. Da quest'area del santuario provengono astragali e piccole sfere in terracotta probabilmente ad uso ludico, ma anche depositi di *scapulae* con incisioni che potrebbero, invece, essere attribuite a pratiche divinatorie. L'analisi del contesto cipriota permette di mettere in luce fenomeni di influenza e interazione cultuale che interessano diverse regioni del Mediterraneo orientale intorno al volgere del primo millennio a.C.

Tavola da gioco, pietre con piccole cavità (*kernoi*), focolare, altare, commerci marini

Introduction

Generally speaking, in human societies, similarities between play and ritual are very strong. Consequently, scholars try to detect and define aspects of play and ritual, notably in the archaeological records.[2] This paper addresses the relation, or space syntax, between fixed hearths and gaming stones through the Cypriot context of Temple 4 at Kition-*Kathari*, an ashlar building presenting an unparalleled fixed gaming table, close to a fireplace, in the middle of a main hall. As a corollary, it assesses the relation between

[2] These notions are well summarized in the introduction "Play as the precursor of ritual in early human societies", of the recent volume on *Ritual, Play and Belief, in Evolution and Early Human Societies* by RENFREW *et alii* 2017. See also the introduction of DASEN –VESPA 2021.

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play and rites, specifically by analysing together gaming stones and artefacts in context, such as incised scapulae.

1. General presentation of the site

The remains of ancient Kition, known through ancient literary references,[3] lie under the modern-day town of Larnaca, on the South-East coast of Cyprus.[4] The settlement of Kition was established on a plateau; it was fortified from the Late Bronze Age until the Classical period, and was a prominent port for trade from the 13th century until the Ptolemaic conquest of the island in 312 BC. Indeed, its well protected bay offered ideal conditions for a harbour, especially from the Late Bronze Age when the South coast of Cyprus became the centre of trade with the rest of the Mediterranean, favoured by its proximity to the Syro-Palestinan coast and to Egypt. Besides economic factors,[5] the fact that the coastline of Larnaca is the first one when sailing westwards from the Levant explains the choice of Kition by the Phoenicians from the 9th century BC onwards. The island of Cyprus has been a place of interconnection between the Near East and the Mediterranean throughout its history. The site of Kition-*Kathari*, corresponding to Area II, also called *sacred area*, was uncovered from 1959 by the Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus.[6]

[3] The first mention in texts dates back to the 13th century BC at Ugarit.

[4] For a general presentation of the site of Kition, cf. SMITH 2009, 6-10.

[5] Some economic factors explain the flourishing of Kition, especially the presence of neighbouring copper mines and the proximity with a salt lake.

[6] For the history of the research at Kition, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 1-4.

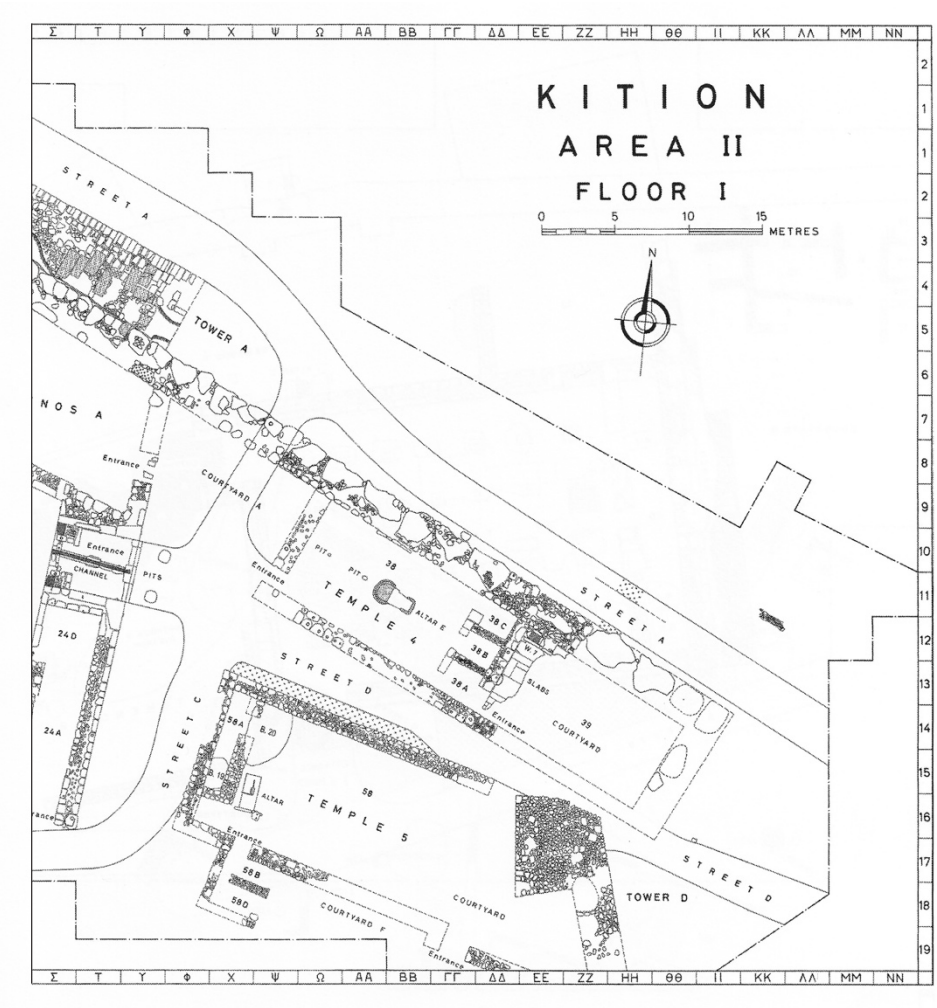


Figure 1: Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, situation and plan of Temples 4 and 5, during use phase of Floor I. After SMITH 2009, 44-45, fig. II.5.

1.1 *The archaeological context*

Temples 4 and 5 are situated in the eastern sector of Area II and are separated by a street and a large open area (Courtyard A). Temple 4 is built directly alongside the city wall, and oriented East-West. It was first built in the 12th century BC, corresponding to Floor IIIA.[7] After destruction and short abandonment at the end of the Bronze Age, Temple 4 was partly

[7] LAMAZE 2014, 249-250, with previous bibliography.

rebuilt for Floor I at the turn of the 1st millennium BC (Fig. 1).[8] For the first time since its construction, a stone table, or "altar", is associated with the use of Temple 4. Floor I corresponds to the Cypro-Geometric I. In absolute chronology, this period is dated between 1050 and 1000 BC.[9] Yet, recently, a revised chronology proposed to date Floor I between 1000 and 850 BC.[10] To choose between chronologies is beyond the scope of this paper; we will limit ourselves to mentioning that the latter has received some criticisms.[11] In the same way, if we use the term "temple" by commodity for referring to these architectural complex, because they are commonly labelled this way by scholars, one should keep in mind that this terminology is quite problematic. Generally speaking, in Kition-*Kathari*, Area II, buildings appear as multifunctional, as we will see in particular with the contexts of temples 4 and 5; although we cannot exclude that ritual practices took place inside these buildings, their denomination as temples is largely due to interpretative bias based on Classical Greek temples.[12]

1.2 *The architecture*

Temple 4 is an ashlar building (9 x 14 m) with a large central hall (Room 38) to the West and three other smaller rooms to the East (38A, 38B, 38C). The main hall is consistent with a hearth room:[13] it is equipped with a hearth, approximatively in the middle of the room, close to a stone-built table to the East (Fig. 2)[14]. The hearth is enclosed within a three-quarter circle border of mudbrick and clay (W. 15 cm and H. 12 cm) the internal dimensions of the hearth are 1.15 m x 95 cm, with a depth of 35 cm; it was filled with layers of ash and mudbrick and clay representing several renewals of its floor and produced burnt and unburnt animal bones, as well as White

[8] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 148-151. See also KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92-93; LAMAZE 2014, 250.

[9] Traditional chronology published by V. Karageorghis in KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 267, 279; KARAGEORGHIS 2005, 2.

[10] Revised chronology proposed by SMITH 2009, xviii.

[11] Cf. FOURRIER 2011.

[12] Cf. WEBB 1999, 8-9, 76, 83-84; KNAPP 2008, 181-182, 228, 240.

[13] About Late Bronze Age Cypriot hearth rooms, in terms of architectural influences at the crossroad of the Aegean and the Levant, cf. LAMAZE 2014, 247-253.

[14] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149-151. According to SMITH 2009, 156, this structure might have been built in response to dramatic events (earthquake and flood) which had destroyed this port area.

Painted I sherds.[15] The stone table – once labelled "table of offerings"[16] – has a trapezoidal shape, narrowing slightly to the East; it measures 1.60 m (L.), for 70 cm (W.) to 1.15 m at its western end, and its height is between 40 to 50 cm. More than half of the table lies below the level of Floor I, as foundations. The table is enclosed on four sides by a single or double row of vertically placed slabs; the southern slabs are decorated with graffiti of ships. The large slab, which faces the hearth, was covered with plaster to protect it from the fire. A reused ashlar block composed the core of the table, while the top of the table was covered with slabs, one of which, comprising three rows of seven circular depressions on the surface, was *in situ* and may be a reused gaming stone. The floor around the stone table was burnt and sloped down on all sides. Most of the slabs are damaged and seem clearly to have been reused from an earlier structure – perhaps the original altar of the temple for Floor IIIA-II.[17] Besides, the global characteristics of the room are not unproblematic. There used to be benches in ashlar masonry both along the North and the South wall during Floor IIIA, but their existence during Floor I remains unsure, though the upper shelf of the northern bench could still have been utilized. The main hall is presumed roofed, at least in the western part, where two wooden support posts were found.[18] To the East of Room 38, a courtyard (39) was characterized by paving slabs and a well (7), as in the previous phases, but probably no longer in use.[19]

[15] According to the excavator, the hearth – by contrast with the altar-table which constitutes a new feature for the building – is not the first hearth of this building; Floor I covered small "hearth-altars" of earlier floors, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149.

[16] E.g., KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92; for the giving up of this terminology, cf. FOURRIER 2003, 89, in particular note 4. Acknowledgments are due to Sabine Fourrier for her advice relating to the documentation of these Cypriot gaming stones.

[17] Cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151; see also KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 92-93.

[18] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 149. Generally speaking, the room seems to have been totally (or at least partially) roofed during all periods. In a precedent phase, during Floor IIIA, the main hall was roofed by a T-shaped alignment of five pillars, while the western part of the room was characterized by a well and a circular hearth. However, that the building was roofed during Floor I has been challenged by J. Smith, according to whom: "Temple 4 does not appear to have had a roof when the hearth stood inside it and flames, or more likely smoke" (SMITH 2009, 82). Yet, besides which her argument is contradicted by the fact that sandstone pillar bases were found in the next level where there was still a hearth, in the Eastern Mediterranean architecture, in no way the existence of a fireplace for a flaming fire does prevent the existence of a proper roof (cf. e.g. LAMAZE 2011).

[19] The first building was equipped with two wells, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 129, 151.

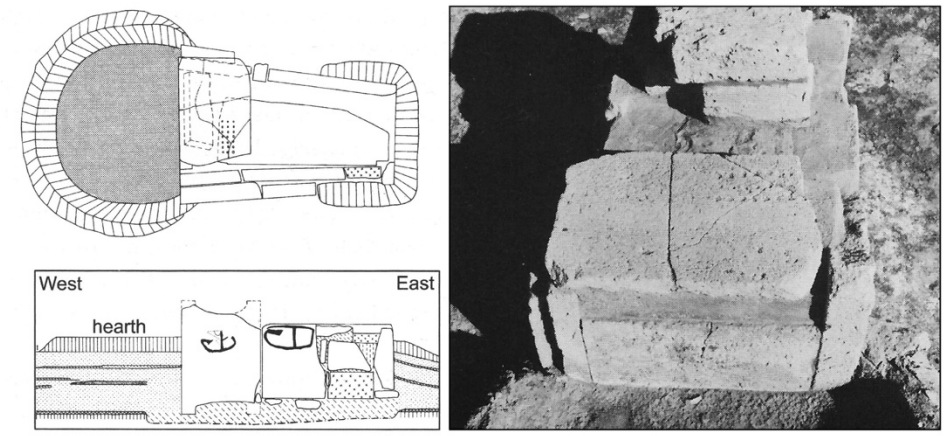


Figure 2: Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, Temple 4, Room 38, Floor I, plan and elevation of the central hearth and altar (modified after SMITH 2009, 82, fig. III.2), and view of the altar from the West (after KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, pl. CV, 6).

1.3 *The finds*

The main hall produced one fragmentary clay shovel, blackened by fire and most probably connected with the use of the hearth, while another specimen, with the same characteristics, was found in Room 38A. This last room also produced two White Painted I bowls and one dish, a large amphora, as well as a terracotta palm of a human hand. A spindle-whorl and glass beads are also mentioned, along with a bronze scrap. Overall, Temple 4 was characterized by (Proto-)White painted I Plain White and 'Canaanite' sherds.[20] In the final publication, some of these artefacts have received a religious meaning: thus, the three shovels would have been "used during sacrifices on the hearth-altar", while the terracotta palm is assumed to belong to the figure of a goddess with upraised arms.[21]

1.4 *Gaming stones related to temple 4*

During the phase of use of Floor I, along with the *in situ* slab with depressions aforementioned,[22] it is possible to associate two other gaming stones[23] which once formed part of the top of the table, or alternatively were

[20] KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 207-208; KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 243.
[21] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 243.
[22] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.
[23] For the nomenclature "gaming stones" and the related problems of interpretation, see discussion *infra* "Gaming stones in Cyprus: general considerations".

in use in another context in Temple 4.[24] Moreover, a fourth stone with circular depressions was found North of the Temple, outside the city wall.[25] In any cases, all these gaming stones may derive from an earlier use of the building.

2. Gaming stones and hearths in the Eastern Mediterranean: An overview

2.1 *Cyprus*

To our knowledge, on the island of Cyprus, there is no similar context that associates fireplace, table-altar and gaming stone(s), which is quite intriguing.[26] However, in a wider spectrum, that is in the corpus of Eastern Mediterranean central hearth buildings,[27] some contexts are indeed concerned with the association between fireplace and gaming stone. Moreover, in Kition-*Kathari*, during the phase that precedes the edification of "Altar E", several elements (figurines, *naïskoi*, script, etc.) have been identified as of Aegean influence, more specifically Cretan one.[28] Regarding the appearance of the games in Cyprus, it has sometimes been assumed that traders from Crete might have been involved in the introduction of the Levantine forms of *Senet* and *Mehen.*[29] Besides, Niklas Hillbom has convincingly demonstrated the existence of a 3x10-design in LBA Crete.[30] Anyway, even though it is vain trying to determine which population (Levantine people, Cretans, etc.) has played a leading role in the transmission of these games, the relation between hearth room and gaming stone indeed might well point to the Aegean. Therefore, some Aegean contexts deserve to be mentioned here as they can offer a comparative point of view to the central arrangement of Kition-*Kathari*.

[24] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

[25] 98 depressions arranged in a spiral, cf. KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151; KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

[26] At least, SMITH 2009, 156 and note 183, suggests that a gaming stone might have been associated with Temple 3, but the context is quite unsure.

[27] Cf. LAMAZE 2012.

[28] KARAGEORGHIS 1976, 91; KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 279.

[29] SWINY 1980, 72; HILLBOM 2003, 41.

[30] HILLBOM 2003, 42-45.

2.2 *Greek mainland*

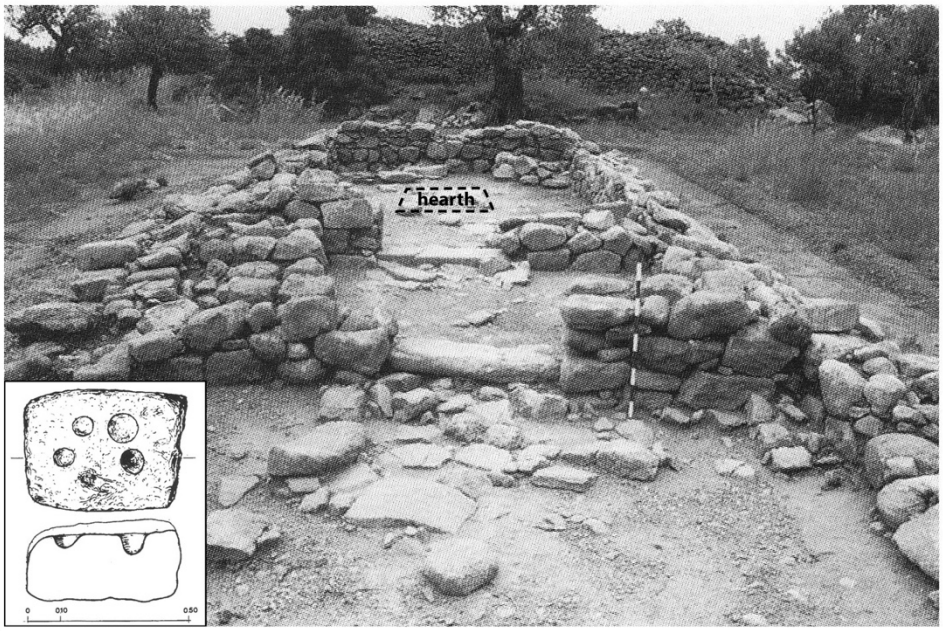


Figure 3: Ayios Konstantinos, peninsula of Methana (Peloponnese), Building Z (so-called "megaron"), view from the West (modified after KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 87, fig. 17), and its related andesite *kernos* (after KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 88, fig. 19).

Some recent discoveries on the Greek mainland deserve mention. On the hill of Ayios Konstantinos, on the East coast of Methana (Peloponnese), a *kernos* was found in association with a building (Building Z, also called "*megaron*" by Eleni Konsolaki-Iannopoulou, the excavator) which has yielded some evidence for possible ritual activities, and shares some architectural features with the Mycenaean *megaron.*[31] The main room was equipped with a central hearth containing ashes and a substantial quantity of food waste, as well as fragmentary cooking pots (with traces of burning), along with two stone-built benches. A roughly worked block of andesite, characterized by five shallow circular depressions cut into its top surface, was found in the area of the porch (Fig. 3).[32] According to E. Konsolaki-

[31] Cf. KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, with previous bibliography.

[32] The exact location where it would have been originally placed is not certain, but its findspot in the debris of the destruction layer indicates some position in front of building Z; KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 74.

Iannopoulou, even if a purely religious function may not be proposed for the "*megaron*", it must still have been closely associated with a LH IIIA-B shrine in its vicinity – the large open space around the freestanding building offered enough place for gatherings.[33]

At Dimini (Thessaly), in the LH IIIC Mycenaean palatial complex, a large slab with depressions or "*altar*" (1.60 x 0.75 m) was found near one entrance of the so-called "*Megaron B*".[34] This entrance gave access to storage rooms and rooms for the preparation of foods; some of them most probably used as banquet halls. On the opposite side of the building, in the middle of room 1 – giving access to three little rooms (one of which was equipped with a bench) – was found an altar which produced burnt bones. On the limestone block, the holes, despite being irregularly positioned, follow two edges of the slab (Fig. 4). Around this installation, apart from two fragmentary craters and at least two *rytha*, a lot of small objects were found: nine human and six animal figurines, a figurine seated on a throne, a stone seal, a fragment of a kylix with an engraved Linear B inscription, pictorial-style sherds, miniature clay vessel and element of furniture, many bronze pins and leaves, etc. Actually, as pointed out by Nicola Cucuzza, the identification of this slab with depressions partly depends on the way we interpret the figurines and the small finds as gaming pieces or votive offerings, keeping in mind also that both uses may not be exclusive.[35] Anyway, it is interesting to note that in these two Mycenaean contexts the stones with depressions always appear at the entrances of monumental buildings, which seem to have both a political and religious function (and/or connected with a religious building), but above all which are commensal spaces. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the situation of these specific stones, near the entrance to a large open area, is very similar to that of the Cretan gaming stones, and not only the Late Bronze Age examples.

[33] KONSOLAKI-IANNOPOULOU 2004, 75: "the impressive structure is very likely to have housed religious officials and to have functioned as an administrative centre […] the involvement of a ruler in that sanctuary is not to be excluded".

[34] The building was destroyed at the end of the 13th century BC. Cf. ADRIMI-SISMANI 2006, with anterior bibliography. See also CUCUZZA 2010, 141-142 which mentions this context in his discussion about the Minoan 'pierres à cupules'.

[35] CUCUZZA 2010, 142.

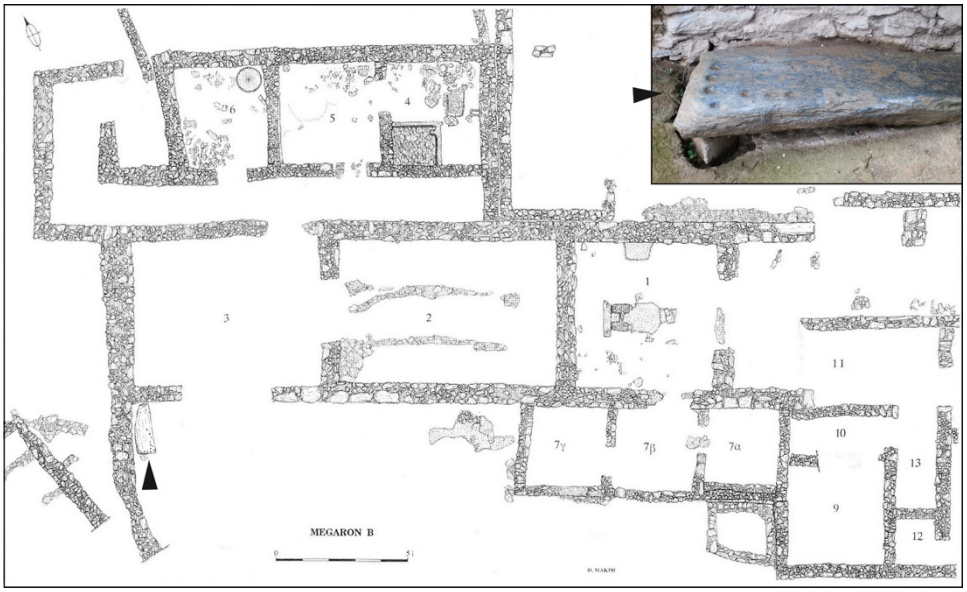


Figure 4: Dimini (Thessaly), Mycenaean palatial compound of "Iolkos", plan of the so-called "Megaron B" (after ADRIMI-SISMANI 2007, 163, fig. 15.3.), and detail of the limestone slab with depressions (author's picture).

2.3 *Crete*

Minoan gaming stones have been the subject of many studies.[36] Gaming stones have been found in approximately 20 sites in central and eastern Crete, most of which date to the Protopalatial period (ca. 1900-1700 BC). For what concerns the Late Bronze Age, a recent study just addresses the relation between hearths and the hollowed slabs, called *kernoi*, during the Neopalatial period (1700/1675-1470/1460 BC). The author, Quentin Letesson, explores the role that fixed hearths and *kernoi* might have played in the built environment and shows how, through time, both fixtures acquired particular symbolic and functional meanings.[37] Anyway, concerning the types of these hollowed slabs, the "linear" type, with holes arranged in parallel rows, seems to be more recent than the "circular" type.

[36] The bibliography concerning Minoan gaming stones is plethoric, cf. HILLBOM 2003 with anterior references.

[37] Hearths and *kernoi* have indeed existed since quite early in Minoan culture. They are documented from the Neolithic onwards for the former, and since the Prepalatial period (3100/3000–1925/1900 BC) for the latter. So far, both features have been extensively studied and considerable insights offered on their role within Minoan society; LETESSON 2015.

At the end of the Bronze and EIA appears a circular type variant, with the division of the holes in two different halves.[38] For what concerns our chronology, three coherent LBA/EIA sites from Eastern Crete, close to each other, testify to the occurrence of fixed "*kernoi*" arranged near the entrance of central hearth buildings.

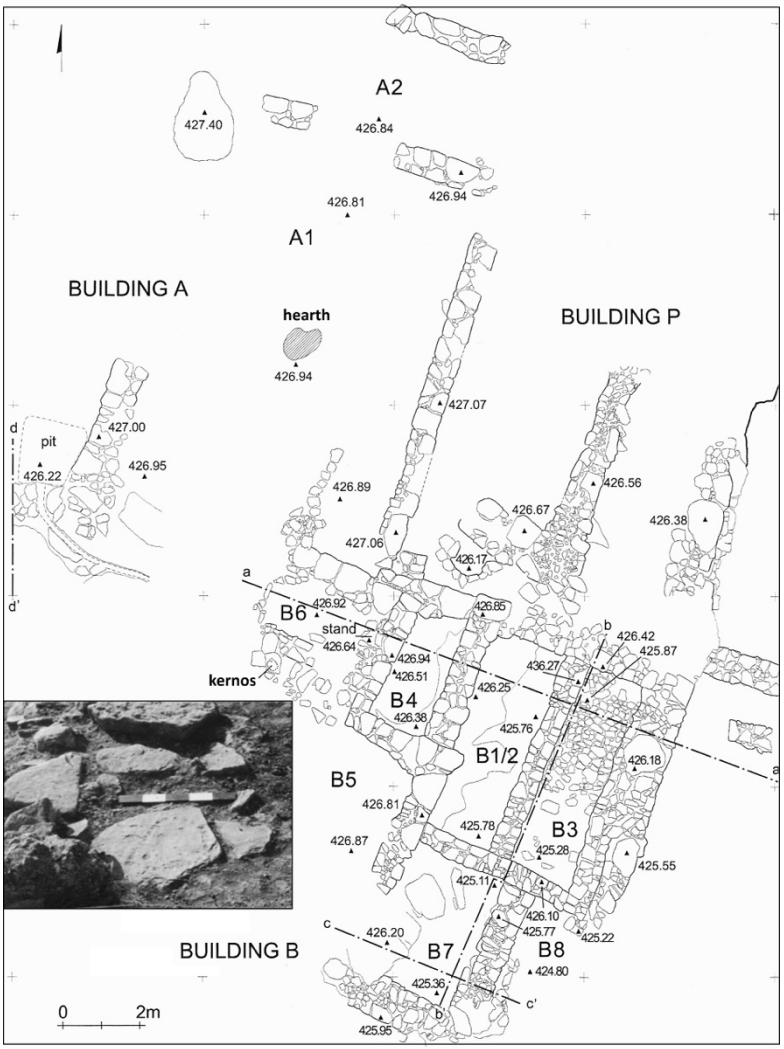


Figure 5: Vronda-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), LM IIIC settlement, plan of the Building A-B, with indication of the disposition (after DAY *et alii* 2009, fig. 6) and detail of a flat paving stone with depressions, view from the West (after DAY *et alii* 1986, pl. 77, fig. 6).

[38] HILLBOM 2003; and also, FOURRIER 2004; in the French literature, *kernoi* are also called "pierres à cupules".

The most ancient context comes from a LM IIIC settlement at Vronda-*Kavousi*. There, on the summit of the hill, a massive terrace wall was constitutive of the foundation of a large house with forecourt (Building A-B), next to a storeroom (Building B), and diversely interpreted as the residence of a local ruler or as a communal building (prototype of an *andreion*). Set into the North side of the courtyard, just outside Room B6, at its South-West corner, is a flat paving stone (28 x 35 cm) with a ring of 24 shallow circular depressions forming a rough oval (Fig. 5).[39] While this "*kernos*" was most likely in use contemporaneously with Building A-B in the courtyard, it has been suggested that it was a Protopalatial (MM II or LM I) antique, reused in this later LM IIIC context.[40]

Further up, on the Citadel of Kastro-*Kavousi*, an ancient discovery from the beginning of the 20th century had shed light on a quite similar hollowed stone, identified as a slab for a game. It is important to mention that it comes from the only securely identified external public space of the settlement, that is in a courtyard, next to the exclusive entrance to Room 27 (Building H), the largest room excavated on the Kastro.[41] The building and courtyard complex of LG-EO date (ca. 745-700 BC) occupy the most central and visible location of the site, where routes of communication end. Two column or pillar bases were found in the middle of the room, roughly on axis with the North and South doorways, but since the floor surface was extremely eroded no hearth has been preserved, although such centrally located feature is expected here. The gaming stone (11.5 cm thick) forms a rough square with a diagonal of about 50 cm. On this stone a circle is marked, and within its circumference are ten round holes; the board is divided into halves

[39] DAY *et alii* 1986, 365, pl. 77c; HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28, with references; for a recent description of this archaeological context, cf. GAIGNEROT-DRIESSEN 2016, 384-385 (though, she curiously omits to mention the existence of this *kernos*).

[40] DAY 2009, 49.

[41] COULSON *et alii* 1997, 339-340; see also the recent synthesis of GAIGNEROT-DRIESSEN 2016, 416-417.



Figure 6: Citadel of Kastro-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), plan of Building H (Room 27 and 38) giving access to a large courtyard (Room 1) (after COULSON *et alii* 1997, 336, fig. 13), and detail of the gaming stone from the courtyard (after GESSELL *et alii* 1985, pl. 94).

by a straight line with five holes on each side (Fig. 6).[42] From the same courtyard, the discovery of a clay "counter", which exactly fits the holes in the stone (diam. 3.3 cm), has to be mentioned because it constitutes an extremely rare occurrence.[43] Harriet Boyd, the excavator, associated this circular board with the game which is played by the Ithacans when Athena visits Telemachus, because of the presence of the dividing line, reminding of the *iera grammê* or *pessos*.[44] Besides, whereas the exceptional character of the building has to be underlined, nothing seems to indicate it was a cult

[42] This gaming stone is traditionally dated to the LM IIIB period, despite the first suggestion of a Geometric date, cf. HILLBOM 2003, 58, 67, no. 38. However, as D.C. Haggis suggests (HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 27, n. 56), no positive evidence supports the fact that the stone has to be earlier than Late Geometric. First of all, more recent excavation has shown that the activity on the peak was not earlier than the 7th century; moreover, following a suggestion of D.C. Haggis, we agree on the fact that this type of *kernos* is not attested in Bronze Age contexts; consequently, it might be an EIA specimen used until the Orientalizing period; see HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28, n. 57.

[43] BOYD 1901, 141, *contra* CHAPOUTHIER 1928, 303-304, and note 1, who suggested that this supposedly "clay counter" was actually most probably a mere clay stopper, and rejected the identification of the block as gaming table.

[44] Hom., *Od.*, 1.107; Herod. 1.94. See BOYD 1901, 141; COULSON *et alii* 1997, 340.

building.[45] According to Coulson, "[t]he large size and exceptional architecture of Building H and its spacious main room and bench, the direct and peculiar lateral access to it from the central court of the Kastro, the presence of the *kernos* stone, and the location of the complex at the highest and most obtrusive spot all point to a special function for the structure, perhaps public, political, religious, or a combination of these".[46]

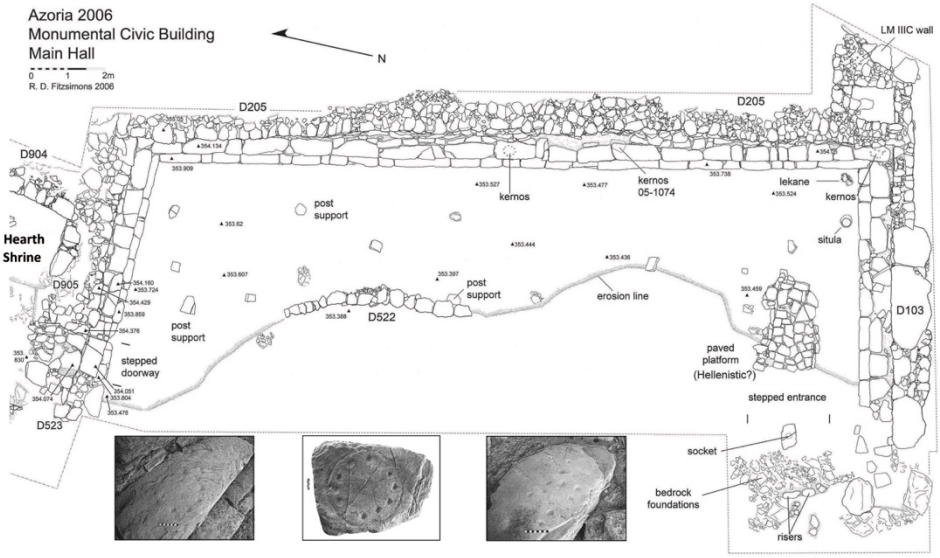


Figure 7: Azoria-*Kavousi* (Eastern Crete), plan of the "Monumental Civic Building" showing the location of the three *kernoi* (modified after HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 18, fig. 10), with picture of each specimen (after HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 23, fig. 1-3).

In the Archaic city of Azoria-*Kavousi*, the recent excavations have shed light on three "slabs with depressions" (two of them *in situ*) inside a "Monumental Civic Building", characterized by internal double-steps along three walls (*terminus ante quem*: 5th century BC).[47] The two hollowed slabs, still *in situ*, are situated on the eastern upper step, one in the middle of it and the other at its South-East end (Fig. 7). As suggested by the scholars, the topographical situation of these *kernoi* appears reminiscent of the Bronze Age

[45] GAIGNEROT-DRIESSEN 2016, 417.
[46] COULSON *et alii* 1997, 340.
[47] For the building, cf. HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 16-28.

arrangements known in the Minoan palaces (e.g., Phaistos and Knossos).[48] Moreover, it has to be stressed that this Monumental Civic Building, which shows evidence for communal feasting and assembly, was directly in connection, through a door, with a two-room Hearth Shrine gathering both a hearth and an altar. The whole of it clearly served for the preparation and the consumption of ritual meals, including sacrificial practices.[49] This led Donald C. Haggis to the conclusion that:

> The Monumental Civic Building seems to combine certain basic functions of LM IIIC and EIA rulers' houses and hearth temples, but on a much expanded scale, integrating larger numbers of people and perhaps inviting wider public participation. […] If so, then in the Archaic context, public feasting [and playing] would have been intentionally dissociated from a specific elite household and opened to a wider community, perhaps on occasion to all citizens.[50]

3. Contextualization: The material environment of "Temple 4"

Before trying to analyse this structure with gaming stones and examine their typology, it is important to take into consideration the material environment of Temple 4, Floor I.

3.1 *Maritime context - Anchors*

In Antiquity, pierced stones served as anchors. In Kition-*Kathari*, Area II, over one hundred were diversely used in the construction of the buildings.[51] Besides, a quantity of stones of exceptional size was discovered in the 'temples'.[52] Comparable anchor groups were also recognized in (tower-)temples located in Ugarit (Temple of Baal) and Byblos (Tower-

[48] For the slabs with depressions or *kernoi*, cf. HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 19-21, 25, 27-28, fig. 10, fig. 15.1-3; CUCUZZA 2010, 142. For the *kernoi* from the Minoan palaces, cf. FERRARI – CUCUZZA 2004.

[49] HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 29-38.

[50] HAGGIS *et alii* 2011, 28.

[51] As pillar bases, threshold blocks, corner stones, wall foundations, in benches. Cf. WEBB 1999, 184 and 186, fig. 71.

[52] Cf. the specific study by FROST 1985. About the Kition anchors, see also WEBB 1999, 184-187.

Temple or proto-lighthouse, and also the Obelisks Temple).[53] Remarkably, the site of Kition has produced the largest anchors yet recorded.[54] Their study has shown that all the anchors of Area II are ex-votos,[55] mostly made in workshops within the temple precincts; none of the temple anchors could have once served at sea, as they are either new or unfinished.[56] Also, some of them show traces of burning,[57] others bear incised lines, signs, or cupules. Thus, it has been suggested that they were used to hold libations or small offerings such as seeds; the signs of burning might result from the combustion of these offerings. Moreover, seven of these large anchors come from Temple 4 which contained more anchors than any other buildings

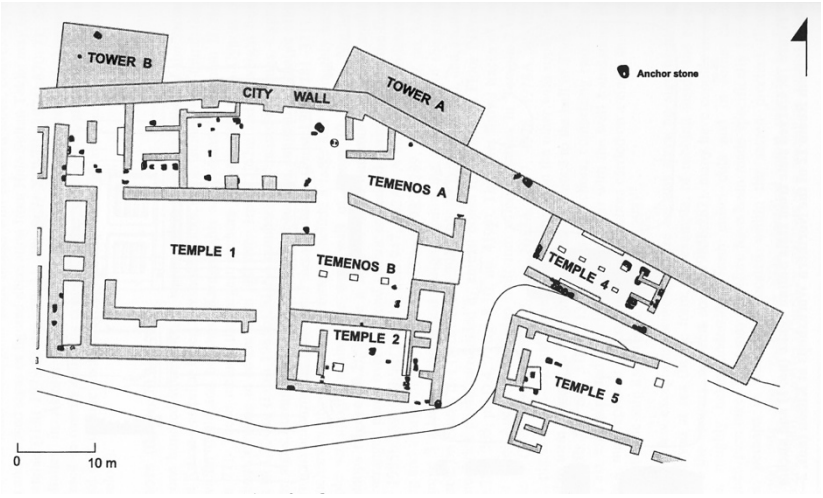


Figure 8: Kition-*Kathari* (Cyprus), Area II, distribution of anchor stones inside the constructions. After WEBB 1999, 186, fig. 71.

[53] FRANCIS-ALLOUCHE – GRIMAL 2019, 113 (with earlier references).

[54] In height, they range from just over 1 to 1.62 m; the latter has an estimated weight of 1350 kg, while the smallest weighs around 300 kg (FROST 1985, 291). According to the scholar, there is a corollary between the size of an anchor and the size of the ship that carries it. The largest anchor from Kition comes from Temple 4, weighing approximately a ton, and would sink an 8-meter fishing boat (FROST 1985, 283).

[55] The overwhelming majority of the offerings at Kition seems to have been motived by precaution rather than gratitude (at the exception of few ones carried on board by ships). FROST 1985, 290. On the topic, see also GAMBIN 2014, in particular p. 10.

[56] *Contra* WEBB 1999, 184, who suggests that sets of anchors from the wall foundations of Temple 4 might represent the complement of anchors carried on a ship.

[57] Among them, two specimens (5137, 5132) come from the walls of Temple 4; they are situated on either side of the temple's eastern entrance (FROST 1985, 288-289).

(Fig. 8), a fact that it is tempting to associate with the ship graffiti on the inner altar of the main hall.[58]

3.2 *Representation of ships*

In both Temple 1 and Temple 4, graffiti of ships were executed by different hands and incised on blocks, an element which shows evidence of the presence of ancient mariners. In Temple 1, more than 19 ships were carved throughout the history of use of the building, from at least the 12th century BC to the 6th century BC, which is just before the development of a harbour with ship docks at Kition-*Bamboula*.[59] These depictions of sailing ships have been interpreted as representations of both mercantile (round ship) and martial (long ship) boats, though the last category is significantly less important.[60] The monumental buildings of Kition-*Kathari* were visible to those arriving at its port. Thus, according to Joanna Smith, "[i]n form and scale, [the graffiti] preserve the essential outline of ships that could have been seen from a distance as they were anchored in or sailed into the harbour".[61] Some scholars convincingly interpreted these 'ships-graffiti' as ex-votos, corresponding to some sort of cultic offering realized by mariners for safe sailing (boarding or landing, or both).[62] Their symbolism evokes ex-voto paintings in medieval churches or ship graffiti inside and outside these monuments.[63]

Turning back to the context of Temple 4, the slabs constituting the southern face of the platform were decorated with incised graffiti of two, possibly three, ships, belonging to the known 'round ship' family (Fig. 2). They were only visible above the level of Floor I, "giving the impression of the ships floating on the sea".[64] Indeed, even if the slabs were in secondary use – the platform having been built after an earthquake –, the ships were engraved during their use as supports for the table-structure. At any rate,

[58] FROST 1985, 291.

[59] Cf. CAUBET *et alii* 2015.

[60] BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 322-336, figs. 1-6, 8; ARTZY 1987; ARTZY 1988; ARTZY 2003, 239, 244-245. About boats in ancient Cyprus (1100-500 BC) and in particular for the distinction between battle ships and mercantile vessels, see BASCH 1987, 249-264.

[61] SMITH 2009, 81.

[62] ARTZY 2003, 244.

[63] GAMBIN 2014, 10, 11. Some local medieval examples of ship graffiti are really convincing: DEMESTICHA 2017.

[64] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 151.

they were only visible during the phase of use of Floor I, which equates to a fairly short lifespan of about 50 years.[65]

4. Oracular practices?

4.1 *The incised scapulae*

At Kition-*Kathari*, all extant 11 specimens of incised scapulae collected in Area II were of continuous use on the area over some 750 years, from the end of the Bronze Age down to the Classical period, that is from the LC IIIA through the Geometric, Archaic and Classical periods.[66] Specimens of incised scapulae are recorded from Temples 4 and 5. In the paved courtyard, situated immediately to the E of Temple 4, three fragments (3691A-C), belonging to three different bovine scapulae, were discovered in the built stone well (7), in association with Myc. IIIC:1 sherd material.[67] In Temple 5, Floor I, another scapula, with 21 surviving incisions (3816), comes from Room 58, the main hall of the building, characterized by several floor-hearths.[68]

The Kition scapulae indicate a clear continuity of ritual practice associated with Area II. Actually, there are reasons to believe that they were used in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages in *scapulomancy* practices, a divination technique, also called *omoplatoscopy*.[69] According to Jennifer Webb, "[t]he

[65] BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 323-324; SMITH 2009, 81-82, fig. III.2.

[66] WEBB 1985; WEBB 1999, 249-250; see also SNODGRASS 1994, 171-172 and SMITH 2009, 159-160.

[67] WEBB 1985, 317.

[68] The incised area of the scapula was polished. Cf. WEBB 1985, 318. During the use phase of Floor 3 (ca. 800-725 BC), another specimen (4673) comes from the *bothroi* 23+13, situated South of Temple 4, cf. WEBB 1985, 318.

[69] The practice of divination in this zone is not surprising because we also have evidence for such practices using internal organs of animals at Kition, such as a votive inscribed bronze of a liver or kidney (middle of the 13th century BC), found in Area II, more precisely in the holy of the holies of Temple 2; KARAGEORGHIS – MASSON 1971. Concerning *omoplastoskopeia*, Byzantine sources like Michael Psellus, writing in the 11th century AD, described this method which consists in inspecting the natural features of sheep scapulae. It was widespread amongst the Greeks and certainly practiced in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Still in the early 19th century, sheep scapulae were used by the klephts (warlike mountain-folk who lived in the countryside when Greece was a part of the Ottoman Empire) to predict the outcome of their next engagement with the enemy and even today, in certain parts of Greece, sheep scapulae are used to predict the immediate future of the family (read from the scapula of the Easter lamb). Cf. WEBB 1985, in particular 326-327, with references; WEBB 1999, 249. The oracular use of notched scapulae seems supported also by an inscribed specimen from a Cypriot Archaic context, where one can

use of the scapula as the organ of divination suggests that the shoulder of the sacrificial animal was accorded a special importance in Cypriote religious practice".[70] The details of the procedure though remain obscure. Based on anthropology, it is possible to suggest that during this ritual, the course of future events, questions of life or death, were determined by reference to the natural features of animal shoulder blades (clean and white / blurred / patch of red, etc.), involving the cutting of incisions along the length of the bone. The excavators presumed this ritual was *apyromantic* because there is no evidence that the scapulae were subjected to heating or burning.[71] The use of bovine scapulae is likely to be related to the fact that oxen were the chief sacrificial animals in urban cult buildings. Yet, it has to be noticed that incised ox scapulae are not exclusive to ritual contexts and are sometimes attested also in secular ones.[72]

However, in the 1990s, Vassos Karageorghis, following Maurice Dunand and Manfred Bietak, questioned this interpretation, preferring an older hypothesis which considered these incised scapulae as artefacts used to produce sounds during religious ritual. In fact, scraped with a simple plectrum of bone or of wood, these scapulae produce a very clear and acute sound. Apart from the fact that other bones have been found bearing incisions the same way as scapulae, and that no fixed number of incisions has been recognized, the main argument for this hypothesis is the presence of wear, visible on some of the specimens.[73] In this hypothesis, the presence of incised scapulae in the Sanctuary of the Ingot God at Enkomi, in association with many broken terracottas from ring dance compositions, would be meaningful.[74] Interestingly, more information can be inferred about the connection between dances around a raised altar and maritime context in the Greek world. Ancient sources[75] tell us about particular dances performed by mariners around an altar (of the *bomos* type) in the Cycladic

read the word "*e-ro-to*" ("asking"), cf. SMITH 2009, 160, with references, and GYSEMBERGH – FURLEY 2015 (I did not have the possibility to consult this volume).

[70] WEBB 1985, 326.

[71] About (em)pyromancy, see HALLIDAY 1913, 184-185; ILES JOHNSTON 2008, 98, 128.

[72] Also, we have to keep in mind that these artefacts should not be exclusively associated with public ritual practices; on the contrary, their usage was either purely secular or involved private divination procedures; WEBB 1999, 249.

[73] KARAGEORGHIS 1990, 159.

[74] WEBB 1999, 250.

[75] Callim., *Hymn* 4, 316-324, and schol.

island of Delos, where merchant sailors performed ritual dances of Cretan origin to the accompaniment of the lute for the safety of their ships. According to Lillian B. Lawler's interpretation of Callimachus' text: "all merchant mariners passing the island stopped for the express purpose of performing the rite, even in bad weather, perhaps especially in bad weather".[76] It is also interesting to notice that in this passage, which links Crete and Delos, the island of Delos is described as the "accommodating *hearth* of islands".[77]

4.2 *Incised scapulae and hearths*

Actually, the best context associating a monumental and symbolic central hearth with incised scapulae, as well as other paraphernalia, is documented in the South Levant. In Tel Miqne-*Ekron*, several cow shoulder blades were found in a public building situated in the core of the city in an "*élite* zone", gathering monumental buildings. This context is connected with the Sea People, established there in Philistia, and shows strong bounds with the Greek mainland and Cyprus. In the Stratum VI of Building 351 (end of the 12th century BC) incised scapulae with parallel lines along their upper edge appear in association with a hearth room.[78] According to the excavators, the scapula was probably used by the Philistines for divination practices, to divine a message from the god.[79] But here also, the purpose of the notches is uncertain; musicologists suggest that these incisions may have been cut in order to produce a musical sound when the bone was waved in the air or when another object, perhaps a stick, was stroked across the bone. As for the origins of the scapulae from Ekron, the authors suggest a strong connection with the Aegean and Cyprus where these artefacts are most anciently attested,[80] but other scholars prefer to connect this practice as deriving from a much older tradition from western Asia.[81]

[76] Cf. LAWLER 1944.

[77] Callim., *Hymn.* 4, 325 (ἱστίη ὦ νήσων εὐέστιε).

[78] For a general overview of the archeological context of this building, cf. LAMAZE 2014, 254-255, fig. 17, with previous references.

[79] DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 242; significantly, this hearth room produced a gaming piece in the shape of a chess pawn (DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 248), as well as a fragmentary *kernos* (DOTHAN 1990, 28, with references).

[80] DOTHAN – DOTHAN 1992, 242.

[81] SNODGRASS 1994, 171-172.

5. Attempt to reconsider the platform of Temple 4

5.1 *Gaming stones in Cyprus: General considerations*

In the 1980s, Stuart Swiny recorded 114 gaming stones from sites all over the island of Cyprus; many of these stones have cup-holes on both sides and were classified as "bifacial gaming stones".[82] Nowadays, on the island, over 400 examples are known.[83] Moreover, it has been successfully proven that the design of 3x10 holes derived from the game of *Senet*, whereas that of spirals must probably be related to the game of *Mehen*, both adopted from Egypt.[84] However, it must be mentioned that the interpretation of these stones with depressions ('cup-marks' or '*cupules*') as gaming stones, used only for games, is far from being totally accepted amongst the scholars, especially in Bronze Age contexts. The same issue has also been raised about the Cretan specimens from the Bronze Age.[85] However, as far as the artefacts from our chronology are concerned, their use as gaming stones is currently accepted, though, according to V. Karageorghis, they "may not be completely devoid of ritual significance",[86] or even used for divination.[87]

5.2 *The platform of Temple 4*

Due to its state of preservation, the actual board on the table in the middle of the main hall of Temple 4 at Kition only presents a 3x7 holes design, but we may restore without any doubt a 3x10 board. Therefore, there is a strong probability that the game played on the table was a version of the game of *Senet*, a game of both luck and skill.[88]

The general lack of attestation of gaming pieces in context with gaming stones has sometimes comforted some scholars to refute their use as gaming tables, as discussed above. Just to note in passing that these gaming pieces might have been as simple as pebbles, seeds, beans, shells, beads, or small sticks of wood. In the situation of Temple 4, it might be of interest to

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[82] SWINY 1980; see also SWINY 1976 and CRIST 2016.

[83] CRIST 2016; CRIST [*poster*]; see also FOURRIER 2003, for the gaming stones from Amathus.

[84] See references mentioned *supra* and HILLBOM 2003, 38.

[85] On the topic, see KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242; FOURRIER 2003, esp. the conclusion 94-95; FOURRIER 2004, esp. 274; CUCUZZA 2010, esp. 142.

[86] KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

[87] SMITH 2009, 155f.

[88] Cf. PICCIONE 1980; see also HILLBOM 2003, 39. About a recent attempt to better understand the controversial origin (chronologically and geographically) of the *Senet* game, and the role of Cyprus inside this issue, see CRIST 2021.

mention the discovery of an ivory stick with incised signs, found in Room 38C, between Floors IIIA and III. It has 29 preserved holes drilled through the upper and lower surfaces, while on the sides there are incised signs, including single strokes and groups of short vertical strokes. The grouping of vertical marks might represent numbers. The Cypro-Minoan characters are carved in the same way, with spacing similar to the vertical marks, which suggest that their meaning may be tied to the vertical notations. The interpretation of this object is difficult. Until now, it has sometimes been interpreted as a metric[89] or tally stick.[90] But, in the above-mentioned context of gaming stones related to this building, one may wonder if this (reused?)[91] artefact might not have been used as a casting stick for games and/or divination?[92] Anyway, the precedent hypotheses are not incompatible also with a use for game and/or oracular practices. For instance, the game of *Senet* had developed with the time a deeply religious significance.[93] Apart from this ivory artefact, one should mention small finds (terracotta balls, a domed piece of glass, knucklebones, conus shells) from Area II that have been identified as possible gaming pieces, but none in context with Floor I, nor inside Temple 4. Still, their existence since Floors IIIA and III to Floor 3, and the fact that some specimens (hieratic ones, though) have been found nearby, like inside Temple 5, has also to be taken into consideration.[94]

Concluding remarks

If the graffiti of ships and the presence of many anchors have led some specialists to hypothesize that in Temple 4, we might be dealing with a seafaring cult,[95] we should not forget the obvious special-purpose *élite* nature of the entire Area II, which served industrial, if not administrative functions.[96] As suggested by J. Webb, there seems to be an equal importance between seafaring cult, metallurgy and maritime trade at Kition.[97] In trying

[89] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 335, pls CXXII, CXCVII.

[90] SMITH 2009, 60, fig. II.15.

[91] First suggested by V. Karageorghis, the object would have been reused and, according to J. Smith, from an ivory handle (SMITH 2009, 60).

[92] On the objects potentially used for casting lots in Area II, cf. SMITH 2009, 156-157f.

[93] PICCIONE 1980.

[94] For an overview on these probable gaming pieces, cf. SMITH 2009, 156-159; for the gaming hypothesis about conus shells, cf. REESE 1985, 353, *contra* SMITH 2009, 159.

[95] BASCH – ARTZY 1985, 323; WEBB 1999, 184-185.

[96] KNAPP 2008, 228.

[97] WEBB 1999, 187.

to identify this building, we actually re-play the well-known issue of gaming stones: 'for games or for gods?'. Anyway, each theory is not exclusive, and this apparent dichotomy may be a total anachronism. On this matter, Henri van Effenterre had reconciled both hypotheses, saying:

> [n]'est-ce pas surtout une perspective bien trop moderne qui nous fait opposer en l'occurrence religion et jeu de hasard ? Le jeu de hasard est l'une des formes, et non des moins répandues dans le monde antique, de la communication avec la divinité. La consultation par les sorts est un acte religieux.[98]

Concerning Kition Temple 4, J. Smith expresses the same idea by saying that "[b]oard games were used in divining the future and as bridges for communication with the dead".[99]

Focusing on the trapezoidal platform built near the centre of the main hall in Temple 4, we have to admit that this would be the only fixed gaming table attested in the middle of a room. In the Greek world, textual evidence, like Homer, or some archaeological contexts, seem to imply that, generally speaking, the place for games was rather near entrances, outside the buildings, in the open air. Yet, this apparent *hapax* from Kition might indicate on the contrary that this *space syntax* of games next to a fireplace might not have been rare in antiquity, *a fortiori* because, most of the time, portative gaming tables were used. Still, this *hapax* is more notably striking when considering the fact that even outside Cyprus, in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, it seems that there is not any equivalent of the gaming table of Kition. With this in mind, and since the blocks were reused,[100] we might also take into consideration the possibility that they were not in use anymore at the time of the construction of this built-platform. In this hypothesis, we might even suppose that the whole structure was covered with plaster, even if at the time of its discovery only the side limiting the hearth conserved patches of a plaster lining.[101] Or, we might consider it was a lucky reusing, since the height (40/50 cm) was totally acceptable to play seated on chairs and is comparable with the height

[98] VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 546.

[99] SMITH 2009, 155.

[100] For other contexts where gaming stones have been reused in the constructions of Area II, cf. KARAGEORGHIS 1985, 242.

[101] KARAGEORGHIS – DEMAS 1985, 150.

encountered for other gaming stones *in situ*. But, in general, as far as central hearth buildings are concerned, the *space syntax* observed elsewhere and for a long period is rather to have a gaming stone outside, near the main entrance, not inside.[102] Moreover, the fact that most of these slabs were embedded in or close to transition spaces or passages has been noticed by Fernand Chapouthier who associated gaming stones with the notion of passage or rightly of transition.[103] Still, this notion would not be out of place at all at Kition Area II, in the situation of stopping-off point for merchant-mariners.

Besides, the burnt and unburnt animal bones, along with the sherds from the hearth, and the existence of storerooms, seem to indicate that meals took place inside Temple 4 main hall. This context of storage and commensality in association with (ritual?) games seems to find parallels also in Crete. Apart from the Iron Age context of the Azoria *kernoi* already mentioned and involving an important political aspect, in Crete, the gaming stones of the Minoan palaces, which can be both interpreted in matter of game or cult, seem to prove that a link existed between storage and ritualized games. According to the scholars, in the Minoan palaces, redistributive activities could have been carried out as part of a religious rite, including the use of "slabs with depressions" for a ritualized game.[104]

Anyway, apart from commensality practices, the *sacred area* of Kition testifies, above all, to *élite* buildings as documented by the labour invested in these ashlar constructions.[105] If, on the one hand, the wealth of Kition might derive from local skilled craft activities such as textile, metallurgy and ivory, on the other hand, as a seaport, this wealth was fed by shipping products – not to mention that in antiquity the merchants and owners of the ships were people from the *élite*. The fact that commensality is not absent in Temple 4, which has an obvious, deep and strong link with merchant-mariners, might suggest that this ashlar building was at least a place of interaction between different groups of people. Among these monumental

[102] Gaming stone inside rooms seems rare in Aegean contexts, cf. HILLBOM 2003, 17 and fig. 5.

[103] CHAPOUTHIER 1928.

[104] See CUCUZZA 2010; the author calls these gaming stones "slabs with depressions" for obvious reasons of interpretative neutrality, suggesting that it is unlikely that these gaming stones were simply game boards.

[105] Some stones are thought to have been brought by boat. On the consideration of ashlar building *vs* mudbrick building, cf. SMITH 2009, 80.

buildings, one should think of the existence of some sort of head office for corporations, meaning the local merchants, the *élite* in charge with all sorts of production (anchors, ropes, sails[106], ceramics, and so on) in contact with merchant-mariners coming from the Levant and making their first stop before going westward. In this context, games, as it has been highlighted by anthropological approaches, played a strong role as social lubricants between people, especially in cross-cultural interactions,[107] an idea which has a strong support in Kition-*Kathari*'s harbour, a liminal space, *par excellence*, in the words of J. Smith, "between land and sea, between known and unknown".[108]

Also, one can imagine all the different opportunities and moments to wait and to pass the time in a seaport. Mariners waiting for repairs, cargo loading, provisioning, without forgetting places to bargain, the situations of bad weather forcing the whole crew to stay on land. It was perhaps in these same timeslots that the mariners made graffiti. In this vein, it has to be mentioned that in Eastern Crete, on the summit of Mount Oxa, a mountain situated just South of Ancient Olous (modern Elounda), in the situation of border between two cities, H. van Effenterre has found a Greek inscription, whose exact restitution is uncertain, mentioning a *naumachia*, very probably the name of a game.[109] Near this inscription, on the rock, are a series of cup-holes (both linear and circular type), as well as engravings, such as boats.[110]

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[106] Sails were one of the productions of Kition, as indicate the weight and width of textiles made in the workshop, cf. SMITH 2009, 80, with references.

[107] See CRIST *et alii* 2016. According to the authors, the distribution of some gaming tables (namely the Game of Twenty Squares) in Cyprus suggests their use as a social lubricant in cross-cultural interaction, promoting social exchanges between indigenous Cypriots *élites* and foreign traders, coming to the island for its copper resources. They would have been used a "as a sort of lingua franca for the elites" of the Eastern Mediterranean (CRIST *et alii* 2016, 189). Their anthropological approach shows that in the Near Eastern Bronze Age, board games are situated as liminoid practices – which lie outside the bounds of normative social behaviour and allow for interaction across social boundaries. The discussion tends to show that double-sided game boards (with the games of *Senet*, *Mehen* and *Twenty Squares*), might have corresponded to an indigenous game on one side and a newly introduced game on the other, providing evidence for social interactions and indigenization of some games.

[108] SMITH 2009, 162.

[109] See VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 547, with references to ancient literary sources concerning a game called naumachia, and the transcription of the rupestrian inscription from Mount Oxa, with the occurrence of this term. On *naumachia*, see also NELSON 2020.

[110] VAN EFFENTERRE 1955, 547-548; HOOD 1974, 108; HILLBOM 2003, 60, 75 (no. 101-102).

These have been related by the scholar to the soldiers sent by Olous to keep a garrison on the southern border of the city, who needed to pass the time, playing *naumachia*, that is battleship – most probably among other games.

Turning back to Cyprus, these concerns do not exclude at all symbolic and ritual significances of the action of playing (as well maybe of representing ships), since it involved fate and good fortune. J. Smith expresses this idea in these words:

> [a] gaming stone formed part of the surface of the table next to the hearth, incorporating the element of risk or chance into this structure marked with ships and placed so close to the port. Measures both practical and symbolic would have been taken by those at Kition to ensure the safe passage of ships and their sailors.[111]

To conclude, the central position of the hearth and altar seems to have been convenient to gather around, not to mention the possibility of round ritual dances. With the smoke, which was visible from the harbour, like a signal, we have here all the elements of a focal point. The least we can say about the gaming stones associated with Temple 4 is that their presence marks a place of interactions between different groups of people, and obviously, a place of commensality – the hearth testifies, at least, of consumption of animals. The presence of water with the wells seems also indicative of activities of feasting, or even, maybe, sacrificial practices (to clean, wash, drink) in order to please the gods and ask for their protection on the sea.

At the same time, nothing can contradict the idea that this building might have been used for more prosaic activities, by gathering merchant-mariners during their stopover, where drinking and meals were celebrated around a fireplace, playing games, and through them consulting the gods on their fate. The fireplace might indicate nocturnal activities, whereas the presence of specific shovels for charcoals and ashes suggests a frequent use. Maybe the best way to interpret this building is to see it at the crossroad of secular and ritual activities. In the Near East, for example, temples had a

[111] SMITH 2009, 82.

multiplicity of functions that might surprise us, all sort of daily and human activities cohabited within cult places.[112]

Abbreviations

EO = Early Orientalizing

LC = Late Cypriot

LG = Late Geometric

LH = Late Helladic

LM = Late Minoan

MM = Middle Minoan

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