

Three Carved Stone Vases from the Minoan Villa at Aghia Triada, Crete: a Trifunctional Set?

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Introduction

"Bear right through the shells of the storerooms to reach the grand apartments in the northwestern corner of the palace, enjoying a fine sea view and cool sea breezes. Right in the centre is the room where the excavators disinterred the superb frescoes, including the famous one of cats concealing themselves in bushes to stalk birds The inner angle of the palace here had two storeys and was probably used for entertaining visitors. This was where the brilliantly carved black steatite vases and libation vessels of the elated harvesters, the flattened boxer, and the haughty chieftain were found. They are now in Room VII of the Iraklión Archaeological Museum" (Somerville 1998, 81).¹ No other relief-carved stone vessels from the Minoan villa at Aghia Triada in south-central Crete are mentioned in the site guidebooks or museum descriptions.

Given the sudden and complete destruction of the palace in the main episode of Cretan destruction in c 1450 BC and the recovery of its contents by means of archaeological excavation, a possibility arises that the three different vases (carved of serpentine with a proportion of steatite) constitute a *complete set* meant to be used for ceremonial purposes, or at least to evoke a unified theme. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the three famous vessels, the Boxers' Rhyton, the Chieftain's Cup and the Harvesters' Vase, might constitute just such a

¹Aghia Triada, 'Holy Trinity', is named from a Venetian church to the southwest of the excavated villa complex. Aghia Triada is only some 3km west of the major Minoan palace of Phaistos. The two sites were in use at the same time and were linked by a Minoan road. The unusual proximity of the sites means that Phaistos is sometimes termed a palace and Aghia Triada a 'grand villa' or 'summer residence' (with the implication that it was a junior relative of Phaistos).

trifunctional set, designed to evoke or illustrate an aspect of Indo-European ideology, perhaps placed in a shrine set aside for Greek-speaking people in the palace complex.

Background

As is well known to readers of this journal, the trifunctional ideology has been identified by Georges Dumézil and his followers in literary sources across the Indo-European linguistic continuum from India to Ireland (Littleton 1982). Literary sources sometimes refer to (mythic) objects, which could, conceivably, be represented in ceremonial artifacts, thus potentially bringing the ideology within the realms of archaeology and the history of art. For example, we recall the three objects of burning gold, a cup (of sovereignty, first function), an axe (warfare, second function) and a plough (agriculture, third function) which fell from the sky in Herodotus's account of the Scythian origin myth (Littleton 1982, 10).

A Greek example of a tri-functional mythic object occurs in the description in Book 18 of the *Iliad* of the shield of Achilles. The shield bore three images: the first image is of a city at peace and includes scenes of a marriage and a judicial process (first function, the religious and judicial aspects of sovereignty), the second image is of a city at war (second function, warfare) and the third image includes a variety of pastoral and agricultural scenes and dances (third function, productivity and fertility) (Littleton 1982, 205-6). While this again is a literary account of a mythological object Dumézil has himself recognized signs of the trifunctional ideology in extant ancient objects, for example on a Kassite bronze object from Lurestan (Zagros Mts, western Iran) (Dumézil 1950) and on a Scythian ritual object from Voronezh (Dumézil 1982).²

²The Kassite bronzes from Lurestan (province in Zagros Mountains of west Iran and some 200km east of Baghdad) predate the 12th century BC and provide precious illustrated documents of their religion. The Kassites spoke a non-Indo-European language whose meagre textual remains do not permit clear association with the better-known ancient languages of Asia (Mallory 1989, 38-9). The bronze plaque in the Metropolitan Museum suggests that the Kassites shared in the Indo-European ideology clearly evident in their neighbouring contemporaries, the Mittanni (Littleton 1982, 103).

The plaque bears three figured panels, one above the other, depicting what appear to be deities. Dumézil suggested that the uppermost was an image of Varuna and Mitra, the middle panel Indra and the Maruts and the lowest panel depicts the two young Nasatyas in their role as doctors (Dumézil

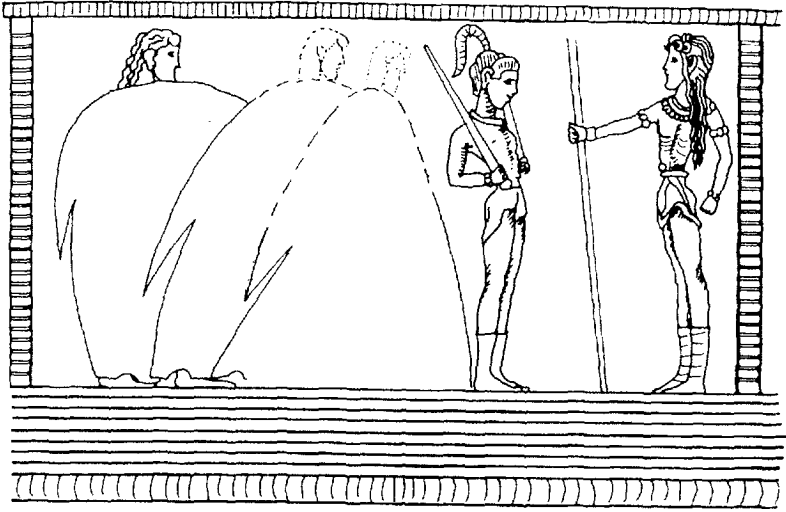
In 1986 Freibergs and others published a detailed study (subtitled "an excursus in ideological archaeology") of the *Ara Pacis* or 'Altar of Augustan Peace' on the Campus Martius in Rome, showing that its hitherto puzzling imagery makes comprehensive sense if interpreted in terms of the Dumézilian trifunctional ideology (Freibergs *et al* 1986). Thus far, however, all these claimed depictions of the trifunctional ideology have been focused on a single object, structure or surviving memorial. In these cases few questions can arise over the completeness of the artistic and ideological composition. All attention is centered on one integrated object, and the trifunctional interpretation provides a complete 'explanation' for the iconography. In the case, however, of these three separate broken vessels from Aghia Triada we must attempt to confirm a number of facts to establish a basis for the suggestion that the three vessels may have been designed as an interrelated trifunctional set, or that they were used as such.

Identified temporally, the vessels date from the last phase of the of the New Palace period, Late Minoan Ib or Late Minoan II, that is c1450 BC. The vases are significantly different in form and in their decoration (or rather the scenes depicted on them) and we repeat below their descriptions from the museum *Guide* (Sakellarakis 1997, 64-67). While the descriptions in the museum guide are further amplified from other accounts, there is no complete agreement among commentators about the *meaning* of the scenes depicted on the vessels.

1950).

Three scenes each with two personages form a trifunctional decoration encircling a Scythian vase found in a 'kurgan' near Voronèje (Voronezh, Russia on the River Don, 250km north-east of Kharkov). There are three separate scenes on the figured band each showing two men in various forms of discussion or communication. One of the men (carrying a bow?) seems to be the same person in each scene. The first scene shows a consultation, one man (carrying an axe) has apparently posed a question and awaits an answer. His companion, therefore, is a sage. In the second scene, the constant person is an initiator, or at least a military instructor and in the third scene a servant is being sent on an errand (Dumézil 1982) with a quantity indicated by his master's fingers.

Dumézil also drew attention to similar trifunctional scenes on a Scythian gold vase of the 6th century BC found at Koul-Oba in Crimea. In the first scene two men are in discussion, in the second is a single archer and in the third two pairs of men render one another medical assistance (*ibid.*, 92).

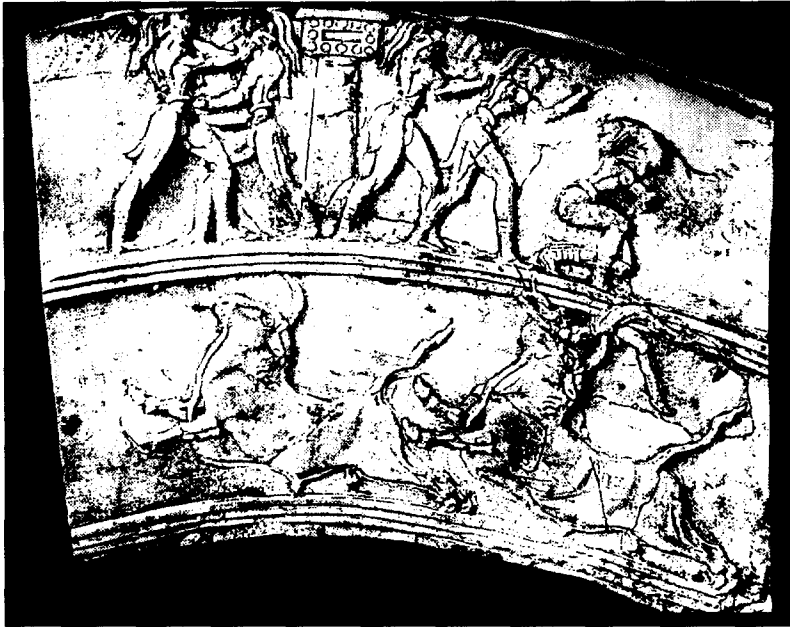


1. **'Cup of the Chieftain'** (greenish-black serpentine, height 11.5 cm)

This is a flat-based vessel in the form of a squat inverted cone (Fig 1) which can be described as a cup, goblet or even chalice (Heraklion Museum, Gallery VII case 95, No 341). "The main scene on it shows two men standing facing one another. One of them is an imposing figure, a young man with long hair wearing a loin-cloth, high boots and a necklace. He is shown in ceremonial stance holding a sceptre in his hand. In front of him stands another young man, an official, with his sword at his shoulder, evidently making a report. He seems to be presenting the chieftain with some animal skins, which his followers are holding, perhaps the spoils of a hunting expedition or a symbolic offering of sacrificed animals." (Sakellarakis 1997, 66).

2. **'Boxers Rhyton'** (greenish-black serpentine, height 45 cm)

This is a tall narrow conical vessel tapering to a point at the base, and so identified as to be used exclusively for making libations (Fig 2). The vessel is moderately well preserved and has four superposed zones or friezes of 'decoration' separated by horizontal grooves or mouldings (Heraklion Museum, Gallery VII, case 96, no 498). "The upper and two lower zones show boxing and wrestling matches. Muscular athletes, some wearing only a loin-cloth and belt, others a whole panoply of helmet, cheekpieces and gloves, are shown at all the various



stages of the contests... The fourth zone carries a scene of bull sports: lithe acrobats somersault over bulls which are shown racing forward in the 'flying gallop' attitude. The vertical poles with rectangular attachments decorated with discs are probably

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the flag-staffs with which the facades of Minoan sanctuaries were often adorned. This is an indication that the games had a *religious and festive character.*" (*ibid.* 66, our italics).



3. 'Harvesters' Vase' (greenish-black steatite or serpentine, surviving height 9.6 cm)

The third vessel of the (argued) group is an incomplete globular vase (Fig 3) with a narrow neck. The bottom half is missing. (Heraklion Museum, Gallery VII case 94, No 184). "Depicted on it in low relief is a procession of men walking two by two, obviously returning from work in the fields, with their tools — rods for winnowing the corn — on their shoulders. The procession may be of a religious character since the leader, a man with long hair and carrying a stick, is dressed in a curious priestly robe with a scale pattern and a fringe. Also in the procession is a group of musicians who are singing; one of them holds a sistrum, an Egyptian instrument. The lively manner in which the scene is rendered is epitomized by one of the details: one of the men falls out of step and trips up, while his companion, striding on ahead, looks back at him mockingly. The vase was made in three parts, of which only two — the upper half of the body and the neck designed to fit into it — have been preserved." (*ibid.* 64).

The scene on this vase is described in greater detail by Forsdyke (1954, 1-2), who points out that the design consists of a procession of twenty-seven persons, twenty-one of whom are young men carrying forked implements. The procession is led by an older man wearing a fringed cope known from other sources to have been a ceremonial garment. Midway in the procession is another single figure shaking the metal rattle known as a sistrum. He is singing or shouting with open mouth, and behind him is a rank of three or four open-mouthed men or women wearing long cloaks, and also singing or shouting. The other twenty 'harvesters' march in orderly pairs stamping their feet. The exception to their solemnity is one individual

who turns around to shout at a stooping man behind him who has no forked implement and who is also shouting. Forsdyke suggests that the stooping person was a buffoon or comic dancer and that the Greeks without difficulty would have recognised the Minoan procession as a *komos*, in its proper sense as one of the rustic routs from which their comedy was derived (Forsdyke 1954, 8).

Discussion

Before it can be suggested that three *separate* objects, reconstructed from fragments found in the destruction level of a palace as a set of three, and only three, represent the IE tripartite ideology, several facts must be established as far as is possible. Once these preliminary facts have been established they contribute little to the proof of the thesis, they merely allow it to be posited without fear of instant dismissal for *a priori* reasons. Similarly, the fact that other scholars have plausibly identified representations of the trifunctional ideology in 'archaeological' objects or monuments from elsewhere in place and time only allows us to be aware that the opportunity for similar interpretation may arise again; it proves nothing about future suggestions or propositions, each of which, like this one, must be argued on its own specific and largely internal merits.

In the case of the vases from Aghia Triada the primary facts which must be established are: one, that the objects were in contemporaneous use, in so far as the archaeological evidence allows us to determine; two, that they were found close together (which is not essential for the thesis, but helpful to it); three, that no other vessels of similar form, material and 'artistry' came from the same place and excavated horizon — that is, we are not simply choosing three from a larger group of equally likely to be related pieces; four, the analysis of the mineralogy as well as artistic style and treatment yield results so similar from vessel to vessel that they can credibly be accepted as a possible set (it would be difficult to prove that all were made by the same artist, given the variation in form and design of carving on each, but a degree of similarity certainly is visible); five, the vessels were probably designed and designated for religious use. As noted above, most of these points arise because we are dealing with three separate objects, not just one. Only when these matters have been investigated and established can we move to examine the vessels in terms of the trifunctional ideology.

Chronology

We do not have access to any definitive archaeological report on the excavations at Aghia Triada carried out around a century ago (the earliest references we can find are to Savignoni 1903 and Halberr 1905), but subsequent authoritative commentators consistently ascribe the vases to “the destruction levels of Late Minoan I b” and the vases were thus almost certainly made in Middle Minoan III to Late Minoan I (Warren 1969, 174-5). The significance of “destruction level” is that they were deposited in the same instantaneous event — an event which was part of the major phase of the destruction of the Minoan palaces.

The three vessels have been reconstructed from several fragments, and are now reasonably complete, except for the missing bottom section of one of the vessels, the “Harvesters’ Vase”, which evidently was made separately to fit into the surviving upper part. This evidence strongly indicates that the vessels had been complete and in use up to the moment of the violent seismic incidents which brought about the destruction of this palace. Normally only isolated fragments of such vessels are found in excavations because, once broken and discarded, the parts are liable to be dispersed with rubbish disposal and other post-depositional processes in a continually occupied site. However, the destruction levels of this part of the Aghia Triada palace or villa were not subsequently disturbed; durable objects in use at the time of destruction were found by the excavators where they had fallen to the ground. In so far, therefore, as archaeology can testify the objects were in contemporaneous use.

Association

Somerville states (1998) that the vases came from a range of apartments at the south-west side of the palace, apartments probably used for entertaining important visitors. While this may well be accurate, a guide book is not normally or solely relied on to answer the demands of an archaeological enquiry. Authorities which we have been able to consult (for example Marinatos 1992 and Warren 1969), while describing the vases and discussing their significance, tend simply to certify that they are from the Aghia Triada complex. The *Blue Guide* to Greece (Rossiter 1981) is more forthcoming. In describing the west wing of the villa it notes a range of apartments some 30m by 15m stretching to the south (the whole Minoan complex here is

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about 160 m across, south-west to north-east). From one of the more southerly rooms in this projecting range (number 14 on plan) "came the famous serpentine relief cup with a band of soldiers and their captain"... "In the court at the foot of a small stairway were found the fragments of the famous relief rhyton with boxing scenes" (no 17 on plan). The plan in the *Blue Guide* shows that these two objects were found about 20m to 30m apart in a distinct range of buildings to the south-west of the palace complex. The *Blue Guide to Crete* (Cameron 1993) adds that the largest room in the villa is a hall at the south-west angle of the complex. It appears to have been one of a series of public rooms reserved for the entertainment of guests. It is suggested that the upper floor could have been used for official receptions; it is in the destruction debris fallen from this floor that pieces of the Harvesters' Vase and the Boxers' Rhyton were found, and a fragment of the latter was also found in the Upper Court (this presumably is the piece said in the Greek *Blue Guide* to have been found at the foot of the staircase, at a point marked on the plan some 30 m from the hall). The Chieftain Cup came from an upper room in the same block, some 20 m to the south, thought to have been used as servants' quarters and for stores.

The final location of the third vessel, the "Harvesters' Vase", is not given in the Greek Guide, but it seems clear that all three vessels were found not far apart in the range of buildings at the south-west angle of the palace. The fact that when found the vases were somewhat dispersed within this small complex does not significantly detract from the conclusion that they were functionally related as an integrated set. Anticipating further debate, it could be suggested that the distinct areas (where they were found) were dedicated to the separate concepts depicted on the vases, and that their dispersal from a single location may have come about as a result of circumstances leading up to the destruction of the palace. Looters would have removed them entirely, but the occupants of the palace may have hidden them in different (but nearby) places for safety.

Uniqueness within the site

Warren's (1969) definitive study of all the Cretan stone vases recovered shows that only the three relief-carved serpentine vessels under discussion here came from the Aghia

Triada palace. There are no other carved serpentine vessels from this site, and so we are not picking out three objects which suit our hypothesis from a larger group of finds. Warren lists two other stone rhytons as found in the Aghia Triada site, but they are not in any way comparable with those under discussion.

Another intact relief-carved vessel is the 'peak sanctuary rhyton' from Zakros, and there is a handle carved with argonauts from Katsamba and a rhyton from Mycaenae itself. There is an unprovenanced fragment of a boxer rhyton, now in Boston. All of the rest of the examples or fragments of this distinctive group of carved stone vases, that is twenty items out of twenty-eight, come from Knossos. From this distribution and judging by the stylistic uniformity in the representation of the human figures (see next section) Warren suggests that the whole group was produced at Knossos in the same workshop, from whence some were sent to the rest of the island and others were exported.

Artistic and stylistic similarities

Warren, dealing with the three Aghia Triada artifacts, notes that "A whole range of objects, human figures and details of these are rendered in a style closely comparable from vase to vase. The figures with hides on the Chieftain Cup, the priest or leader of the "Harvesters", most figures on the Boxer vase — all have hair carved in the same manner with long, thin, wavy tresses. On the Boxer Vase in bands two and four... the hair on the forehead is in circular ringlets. The Harvesters and the Boxers... have their girdles rendered in the same manner with a short curving tail behind. The chieftain on his cup and the Boxer Vase figures in bands one and three have their leggings in the same style." (Warren 1969, 178). To these stylistic/iconographic similarities could be added the vertical notching on the rims of all three vessels and the horizontal grooves or bands used to separate neck from body on the Vase, foot from body on the Cup, and the scenes on the Rhyton. These similarities of treatment are not artistically coercive, but, along with the similar texture, colour and mineralogy of the stone they do give the vessels a strongly kindred appearance.

The religious purpose of the Vases

All our commentators agree that the three Aghia Triada vessels were (individually) designed to be used for religious or

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sacral purposes. Warren was convinced that all of the Cretan relief-carved stone vessels were so intended: "That the vases were for religious purposes is strongly suggested in that all but four are rhytons or fragments of rhytons. Flagstuffs or poles with rectangular boxes on top occur on the Boxer Vase, which suggests that the pugilistic and bull-leaping contests are within a religious setting. The scenes on the Harvesters Vase and the Chieftain Cup are also religious. A priest leads the marchers on the Harvesters Vase. On the Chieftain Cup a procession of men bearing hides, which have many religious connections, is headed by a man who may be a priest since he carries a lustral sprinkler over one shoulder." (Warren 1969, 175-6).

On the Trifunctional Ideology

We suggest that the subject matter of the scenes depicted on each separate vessel represents one of the three Dumézilian functions, religion, warfare and productivity respectively and that. Most importantly, the three vessels together constitute a complete tripartite set.

The Cup, F1

The explanations of the scene on 'The Chieftain's Cup' suggested in the *Museum Guide*, quoted above, are not wholly convincing. Why did the chieftain not go hunting himself? It is a lordly pursuit, but hardly something to be imaged or reported on a ceremonial beaker. Similarly, why did the chieftain not attend or participate in the suggested sacrifice himself? It can be argued that, whatever incident is represented on the 'cup', at least one, if not both, of the main figures could confidently be termed a *warrior*. The 'chieftain' has a dagger in his belt (his 'sceptre' might be a lance?) and the 'official' carries a large sword in his right hand and a lustral sprinkler in his left. Is it possible that the 'official' is a military leader reporting on action or could he be a leader receiving authority or instructions to go on campaign? Marinatos (1992, 217-8) has another explanation: "The scene may be described as one of presentation. A young man on the right, often referred to as the chieftain or prince, receives a procession of men carrying animal hides, possibly of bulls. The hides are thus presented to the chieftain... The most likely explanation is an initiation scenario: the youth has led a hunting expedition; he and his team have killed wild bulls. The ordeal accomplished, he is now

presenting the evidence of the successful hunt to the chieftain or god, at the same time offering him the hides as a gift.”

Accepting the validity of this opinion, however, does not negate the (argued) First Function relevance of the scene. A different explanation is proposed by Forsdyke: he is confident that the sword, like the sprinkler, was a sacrificial instrument, that the young man carrying it was a priest and not a warrior and that his followers are shown carrying the material products of a sacrifice. The Cup, he suggests, depicts the ceremonial presentation of bulls' hides to a god-king, perhaps a representation of Minos himself, after a sacrifice (1952, 14-17).

The Cup certainly depicts armed men, one with an unsheathed sword on his shoulder, the other with a dagger at his belt who carries a lance or sceptre. Forsdyke is confident, since the tip of the pole or staff is missing, that there is not enough space for a lancehead, and that this object must be a sceptre (*ibid.*, 16). However, the Second Function associations of the scene on this vessel (as part of a set of three) are difficult to establish, since the case rests on the prominence of weapons (ceremonial or otherwise) and the possibility that the outcome of a blood sacrifice or warrior initiation is depicted.

A more likely explanation, we believe, is that the Cup has a deliberately First Function scene depicted on it. A cup can of course be assigned to F1, as it is filled with *soma* or ambrosia or some other divine fluid. The figure on the left is certainly human, perhaps a king or chieftain already holding two of the signs of sovereignty (lustral sprinkler for the sacred side, sword for the ceremonial aspect of force). The figure on the right seems to be *presenting* the human on the left with a staff or sceptre (*skeptron*), not simply displaying it. This may be taken as the staff of delegated power, such as the palladial staff, made by Hephaistos, that Zeus gave to Agamemnon, in the myth of the Atreides.

The Rhyton, F2

Sakellarakis (1997, 66) has pointed out the possible religious significance of the games depicted on vessel 1. Marinatos's extensive description of the rhyton in his recent book gives some further details and variant opinions on the interpretation of the object: "The vase was a ceremonial vessel and it is reasonable to assume that the choice of iconography is related to its function. A ceremonial context for the depictions

may thus be inferred.... Different competitions are shown on each zone, but a problem is whether they constitute a unified pictorial program and in what order the friezes should be read....The lowest zone shows pairs of youths; we have a standing victor and a fallen opponent. The contest looks like boxing, but it may be some other form of match, because the victor is holding an oblong object (a weapon?) in his right hand."

"Moving upward, the second register shows boxing contests, to judge from the gloves which the men are wearing. Once more we have pairs of victors and losers...the men are wearing helmets, which are, of course, used for protection, but which also introduce a military aspect into the game. In the background can be seen rectangular pillars which have been included to define the space as architectural, perhaps even as a *religious* setting (our italics); the possibility that a palace or mansion is hinted at is very likely."

"The third register depicts two charging bulls. The first bull is incompletely preserved, but the second is shown in the process of goring an unfortunate bull leaper. That bull leaping is shown in such a context is worth noting, because it shows that this activity was classified by the Minoans in the same category as athletic matches..."

Continuing with Marinatos: "Finally the top register depicts some form of wrestling, the exact significance of which is not fully understood....Once more, the victors and defeated are clearly distinguished...the victor is always on the left, the defeated on the right.... It is a pity we cannot fully understand the significance of the last match, nor indeed the ultimate purpose of the games. It is, however, likely that the order of the zones represents an ascending scale, that each contest entailed more difficulties and higher danger for the athletes. Because of the youth of the men, an initiation scenario with different ordeals of increasing difficulty is very likely, but we cannot be absolutely certain." (Marinatos 1992, 212-14).

From later Greek sources it is clear that games or sporting contests, organized at civic or state level, had a profound religious significance. For example, one observer states that "Homeric theology and hero cults came to inform the charter myths of the games at Olympia, and the famous oracle at Delphi (where crown games were also celebrated) 'renewed' the sanction from Zeus, to whose worship the Olympic festival

was dedicated. The great games gave rise to practices seeking to distinguish Greek from non-Greek (*barbaroi* were not to compete at Olympia) and to mediate between Greek mythic and human time." (McAloon 1987, 475). According to Dumézil (1968, 277) the Roman games were part of the *sacra*, rituals offered to the gods and definitely First Function. A rhyton, however, can be either a libation-vessel or a drinking-vessel and although the games shown may be defined as *sacra* — pre-Roman gladiatorial contests — three of the four registers give a strong impression of ritualised combat. The Bull may of course be omnifunctional: that is F1 as the sacrificial animal; F2 in terms of savage power, and F3 as a sign of procreative fertility. Here, in his rather intrusive register, the charging animal is more appropriate for F2 (whereas a sacrificial scene would have indicated F1, while modesty forbids speculation on how an F3 bull would be occupied).

It may be worth pausing to analyse the details of the three 'combat' registers. The last (bottom) zone has what appear to be boxers (especially because of the similarity of the pose to the register above), though there is a lot of dramatic action (in terms of the fallen or defeated figures). All the combatant figures are wearing odd caps, fillets or tiaras of some sort. All seem to be bare-legged. In this lowest level we may in fact have a representation of something like the Black Hunters about whom Vidal-Naquet wrote — the liminoid *ephebes* or warriors-in-training, who use trickery and ambush, fight at night, and so on (Vidal-Naquet 1986, 106-128). Here (note the pose) the figures on the left appear to be snaring or "netting" their opponents, whose poses show that they are caught and turned topsy-turvy. The bare legs indicate a set of immature fighters. Of course the carving has to be programmatic, the net or snare isn't shown, but the effect is — the losers turned and tumbled as they are.

The next register (2) shows boxers wearing helmets or protective headgear of some sort — helmets seem most likely — and calf-high boots. The losers have been dealt percussive blows, and look it. Then there is the bull-scene (register 3) and finally, on top, the wrestlers, wearing either long hair or some sort of animal tails (fur?) on their heads; they're all booted as well.

It is also possible that the scenes carved here on the rhyton display more than a trace of an *internal* trifunctionality. The lowest register shows barefoot fighters and a lot of action; these

are young men, in training, using the weapons of trickery (F3 within F2). The next register is clear F2, with booted and helmeted mature fighters. Ignore the bull — except that he is the animated, charging or fighting animal — and we come to a wrestling scene with the heads of the opponents emphasised. In the early agonistic hierarchy of the IE tradition, wrestling (involving plan and skill as well as brute force?) was closer to a F1 type of combat. And there is also some connection to the somatic trifunctional division (head emphasised in one register, bare feet in another).

The Vase, F3

On the third vessel the scene of farm labourers and others (priest, singers and the extraneous buffoon or dancer) in a celebratory procession is a classic depiction of the third function and needs no further elucidation. It has been suggested by Forsdyke (1954, 6-7) that the 'elated harvesters' are in fact a procession of sowers, taken from the fact that they are carrying hoes and have bags (of seed?) at their waists. The long rods bound securely to the hoes look like willow shoots used for magical and decorative purposes, perhaps to invigorate growth or encourage rain. In either case, whether the procession celebrates planting or harvesting, it represents a major stage in the cycle of vegetative production and is undoubtedly and securely F3.

Finally, we might say that an agonistic theme may link the scenes on the three vessels: on the Chieftain's Cup the young man may have had to overcome fearsome opponents (bulls) to win recognition for his newly acquired status, or the bulls' immolation in a sacrifice was only achieved as a result of much effort. The sacred games on the rhyton were strenuous physical contests with winners and losers. On the vase the harvest is not gathered in nor are crops planted without an intense physical struggle in competition with the forces of nature and for that matter time itself, in which man is not always the victor (we still talk about 'winning' the harvest).

The Forms of the Vessels

The possibility that these three ceremonial vessels are a deliberately trifunctional set is strongly suggested by the scenes depicted on each. Added weight is given to this interpretation by considering the *form* and the usual purpose of each vessel (of

that specific and particular shape).

The first vessel is described accurately (in translation) as a 'cup'. It is with a cup of ale that the sovereignty goddess in Indo-European tradition identifies the king designate who comes from the warrior class. This was the Cup of Sovereignty and is obviously seen to symbolize the First Function. Moreover, a cup, "associated as it is with the preparation and consumption by priests of sacred beverages.... serves as a symbolic expression of the first function in a number of I-E traditions..." (Littleton 1982, 10). The cup is, therefore, entirely appropriate as a First Function symbol. The rhyton with its scenes of religious games and bull-leaping is a libation vessel used for religious purposes. But it can also be regarded as a drinking-vessel of a type (cognate with the drinking horn) usually associated with the drinking bouts of the warrior class. The third vessel, with its classic Third Function scene, is described as a 'vase' and indeed it has the form of a modern vase, narrow-necked and globular, something to put flowers or vegetation in and, therefore, with a strongly suggested 'third-function' form and purpose. The vessel ultimately was a container — for holding or keeping something that had been gathered, manufactured or processed — and this would also indicate its proximate association with the Third Function. The number of persons depicted on each vessel also align with the proportions of a trifunctional social 'pyramid'.

Other Evidence and a summation of the problem

The Minoans are not believed to have been I-E-speakers. The structure of Linear A (undeciphered) suggests a non-I-E language; Linear B, though it took its structure from Linear A, has now been identified as a proto-Greek (and therefore I-E) language. Yet it seems that the Minoans (we use this as shorthand for the inhabitants of Bronze Age Crete) had plentiful and peaceful contacts with the Mycenaeans, testified to by the presence of purpose-made Cretan art objects in a number of Mycenaean contexts. It is usually presumed that the spread of the Greek language to Crete and perhaps evidence for I-E religious motifs result from Mycenaean influence or in fact settlement after *c* 1450 BC.

There is some other archaeological evidence that I-E influences were reaching Crete at around the same time as the three vases were lost in the destruction of the Aghia Triada

palace. For example, a chariot and bull sacrifice depicted on a painted sarcophagus from Aghia Triada suggests an I-E theme; the idea of the chariot would have reached Crete on its way from Syria to mainland Greece. At Archanes the horse sacrifice in the King's Tholos shows another clear possibility of I-E influence, but this burial dates from after the destruction of the palaces, a period in which it is widely accepted that the Mykenaeans were in control of the island (the first evidence of Linear B dates from the 15th c. BCE, a century after the destruction of the Aghia Triada complex).

Finally, as to the I-E provenance at Aghia Triada. Talking about a 1450 BCE date, which is too early for Linear B, we still have the strong probability of Minoan ties to a definitely I-E Mykenaeon Greek mainland. The destroyed structure where these pieces were found could have been guests' quarters, or a ritual gathering-place for Mykenaeon mercenaries. In fact the earlier the date the more likely that a mainland, and mainline, trifunctionalism would have been seen there, before the Greek-speakers took over the Minoan system with all its efflorescence. Anatolian (and occasional Egyptian) character and borrowings including other gods. It is possible, but not probable that the original Minoans set up a shrine equipped with these I-E ritual objects, in the same way that they borrowed other religious signs and symbols. More likely is the supposition that a Greek-speaking group had their own shrine in the Aghia Triada complex.

To sum up and disclaim: (1) the evidence of the trifunctionally-oriented vases should not be taken to put, to say nothing of prove, Greek-speakers (equipped with their I-E inheritance) in a position of dominance in Minoan Crete; the influx of enough Greek-speakers to produce the necessity for Linear B seems to have occurred at least a century later.

(2) the vases by themselves do not even certify to a Greek-speaking (and I-E) presence in the Aghia Triada palace; this presence seems most likely, though possibly an I-E-speaking group from, e.g., Anatolia might have used these ritual vessels.

(3) speaking at last of what we might perhaps have discussed first, we now have the opinion of Sargent (1998: 25), slightly modifying an earlier position (Sargent 1979); this scholar now believes that there is a good case for the three Functions among the Mykenaeans — at least "at the summit" of the society (Sargent 1998: 26).

We put forward the suggestion that the three vases may be a trifunctional set in relative isolation. If this view adds in a small way to or stimulates further debate (even in counter argument) on the nature and chronological development of the religion and culture of Bronze Age Crete the exercise will have been worthwhile.

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