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THE SWASTIKA MOTIF IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN DURING THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

Sara Marino

Summary

This paper analyses the diffusion of the swastika motif during the Early Bronze Age (EBA) in the central Mediterranean following the discovery of some engraved potsherds bearing the motif in the EBA settlement at Piani della Corona (southern Tyrrhenian Calabria, Italy). The rare presence of the symbol in the area of the Messina Strait during the EBA has driven the search for comparisons within the central and eastern Mediterranean, in an attempt to better define its appearance in southern Italy, likely as an element of transmarine connections.

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, interest in swastika symbolism has been fuelled by Schliemann's excavations in Troy and the numerous finds with this decorative motif throughout the city, as a result of its association with some remarkable archaeological finds. Archaeological literature of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries includes studies that attempt to trace the origin of the swastika through its diffusion in places as far away as India, the Far East and America, as well as to determine its meaning (Baldwin 1916; Brown 1933; Goblet d'Alviella 1891; Greg 1885; Müller 1881; Wilson 1896; White 1909; Zmigrodzki 1889). Historical events that connected the swastika to ariosophical movements, its eventual Nazi adoption and the implications of the Second World War greatly influenced subsequent studies, the fervour for which considerably flattened after the war, as a reaction to its political and ideological use. Since then, it has become an object of study mainly within the socio-anthropological field, but also the archaeological one (Gervasio 1932; Freed, Freed 1980; Guenon 1931; Loewenstein 1941). It is still an important religious symbol, as, *e.g.*, in Hinduist, Buddhist or Zoroastrian religions.

This paper addresses the discovery of pottery fragments decorated with a swastika motif in the Early Bronze Age (EBA) settlement of Piani della Corona in southern Tyrrhenian Calabria (southern Italy). Piani della Corona is geographically and chrono-typologically connected to the Messina Strait area (Aeolian Islands and north-eastern Sicily). Archeologists have yet to find other examples of the swastika motif in this region during the EBA, thus the search for comparisons requires looking elsewhere in the Mediterranean, on some close smaller islands, but mostly in the Aegean-Peloponnesian area, and secondly, in a concatenated manner, also the Aegean Littoral of Anatolia.

In the course of the EBA, the Piani della Corona site and the Messina Strait area (Marino *et al.* 2017; Marino 2019; 2020; Tykot 2019) are part of the framework of cultural relations with the Aegean-Peloponnesian area, as already highlighted in archaeological literature (Bernabò Brea 1985; 1997; Cavalier 1960a; Cazzella, Recchia 2015; 2017; Cazzella *et al.* 2007; Marino, Pacciarelli 1996; Recchia, Fiorentino 2015).

In archaeological evidence, the swastika can be identified as anyone of a number of formal variations. For this paper, the selection of motifs to be compared is limited to only the classical swastika, *i.e.* the equilateral cross with all the ends of the lines (arms) extended at right angles in the same direction, either to the right (clockwise = ☸) or to the left (anti-clockwise = ☹), regardless of the type of finding (pottery, seals, sealings on cretulae or other materials, spindle-whorls, idols, potter's marks, precious metal finds). Different decorative techniques (engraved and relief signs, paintings, impressions) and different discovery contexts (above all settlements and cemeteries) have been included. However, among the finds considered for comparison there are slight variations in swastikas, at or near the ends of the arms, which can sometimes result in problems of identification: inward-curved arms, thickened ends, triangular and arched geometric decoration, rounded ends, one or more incised lines, etc.

At the beginning of this paper swastikas on the Piani della Corona finds are described, and in the subsequent sections they are compared to motifs from Sicily, Greece, the Aegean and Anatolia.

II. THE FINDS FROM PIANI DELLA CORONA

The Piani della Corona settlement (Bagnara Calabra, Reggio Calabria Province) was discovered following preventive archaeological works being carried out alongside the highway in southern Tyrrhenian Calabria. Despite being one kilometre away from the Tyrrhenian Sea and not in a direct coastal position, the site is of strategic topographical importance, since it is a plateau 490 m above sea level that dominates the southernmost coast of Calabria, the Strait of Messina, the north-eastern peak of Sicily and the Aeolian Islands. The archaeological site of Piani della Corona is currently the only one in Calabria that has been investigated extensively and with stratigraphic accuracy for the period under examination (Peninsular Early Bronze Age, Cessaniti-Capo Piccolo facies, end of the third millennium BC; Cicala, Pacciarelli 2017; Marino, Pacciarelli 1996; Marino 2019; Pacciarelli *et al.* 2015). It is an important site for the study and determination both of settlement dynamics and complex and articulated residential structures that establish different sequential use phases within the same chrono-typological and cultural cycle. The first residential use is limited to the S-F area, with the presence of four huts, one defensive ditch and some ancillary structures. Shortly afterwards, the inhabited area moved to the top of the terrace (area M), the first area huts fell into disuse and were superimposed by funerary use. In fact, two inurned cremations – of which only one is well preserved – were found above former houses in the S-F area that chrono-typologically belong to the same phase as the new inhabited structures of Area M (Fig. 1).

The Piani della Corona site also proved to be an excellent opportunity to study socio-economic and cultural dynamics, as the very high percentage of obsidian and some typological and decorative characteristics of the ceramic finds attest to an articulated relationship with the Aeolian and Sicilian areas in particular, and also with Peloponnesian Greece. The reciprocity and continuity of these contacts are mainly represented by some specific categories of artefacts: first, by some common typological characteristics of the ceramics and by the distribution of certain specialised products; second, by the common use of cultural and ritual symbolisms and practices (Marino *et al.* 2017; 2020). This includes the decorative motif of the swastika which, on the basis of the similarities that are now possible to detect, seems to connect Piani della Corona rather directly to Peloponnesian Greece through the prehistoric context of the *Altis* of Olympia.

The finds from Piani della Corona are from the S-F area and belong to a defined chrono-typological context. All the decorated sherds come from the layers of two apsidal huts with the same dimensions (Huts 1 and 2, S-F area), partially superimposed following a structural renovation (uncalibrated radiocarbon dates from Hut 2 post-holes: 3662±25; 3643±30 BP) (Fig. 1). The chrono-typological analysis of the ceramic materials has not shown any chronological and cultural differences between the two overlapping huts. The collection of ceramic fragments was carried out in squares of 5x5 m, some of which were further subdivided into one metre squares, allowing for a fairly precise arrangement both within the structures and with respect to the stratigraphic levels of the area.

The decorative swastika motifs were found exclusively in Huts 1 and 2. In total, two definite motifs of simple swastikas (PDC_165 and 166, Fig. 2a-b) – one clockwise, the other anti-clockwise – were identified, while a third fragment, on the foot of a vessel is too mutilated to allow for definitive reconstruction of the motif (PDC_182, Fig. 2c).

These swastikas were created through pre-firing (PDC_165 and 182) or post-firing (PDC_166) engraving and are made up of a single line on fine and semi-fine, polished pottery. The first of the two clearly identifiable finds is on the bottom of a medium-sized bowl that was engraved pre-firing (PDC_165, Figs 1, 2a) and came from an apsidal posthole of Hut 1, topographically at the major point of overlap between the two huts. The second, a post-firing engraving on the lower end of a vertical handle – perhaps of a small cup or bowl – came from the apsidal zone of Hut 2 (PDC_166, Figs 1, 2b).

The third, partial find is characterised by perpendicularly engraved lines forming a right angle to the left (possibly the upper part of a swastika arm) on a fragment of a foot engraved pre-firing that was found immediately

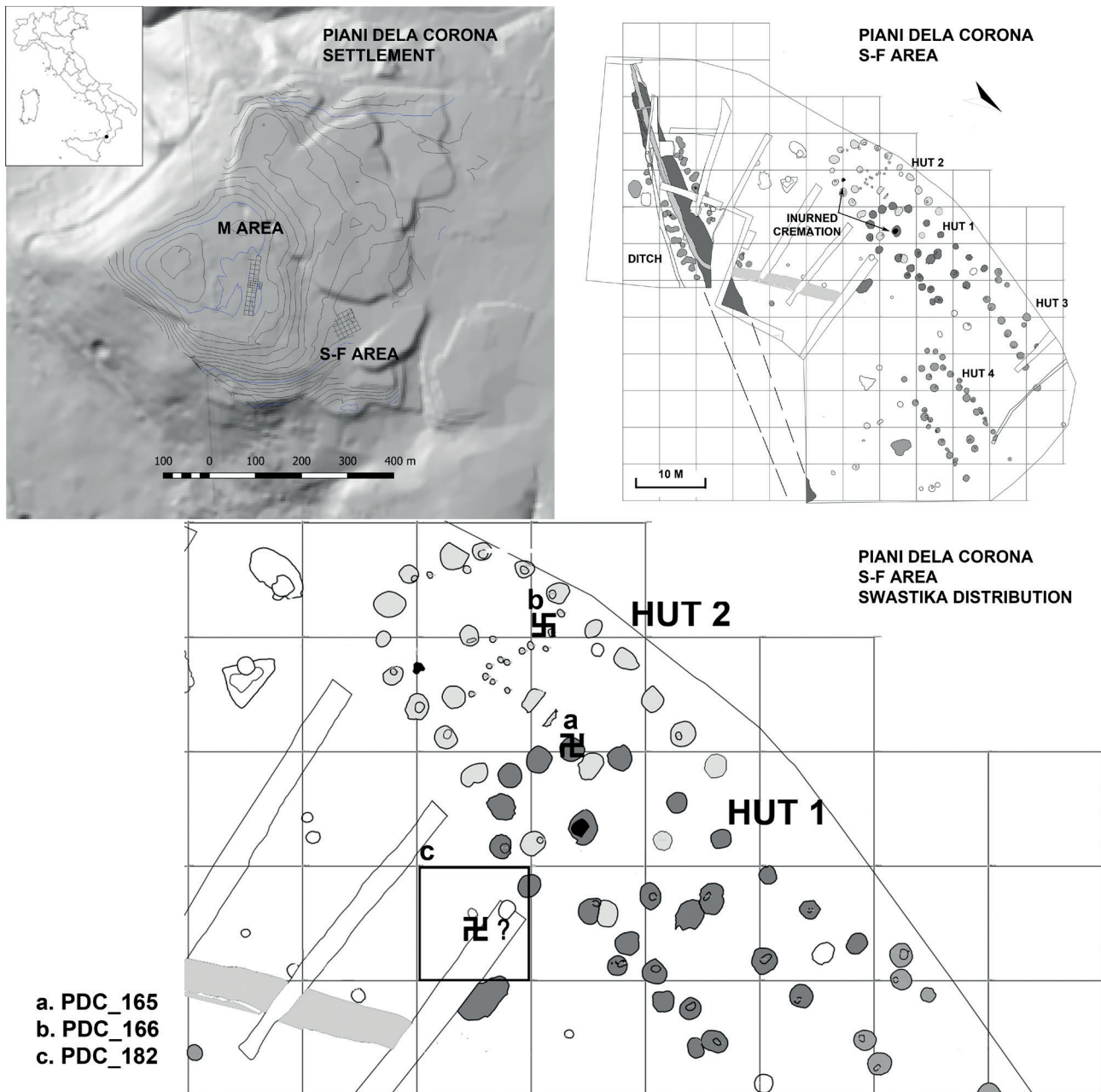


Fig. 1. The EBA settlement at Piani della Corona (Bagnara Calabra, RC, Southern Italy) (Sara Marino).

outside the overlapping perimeter of the postholes of Huts 1-2, near the apse of Hut 1 (PDC_182, Fig. 2c). The location of this find is less precise and falls within a larger 5x5 m sampling square. It is possible that the foot decoration is either a single inverted gamma or a hooked motif (cf. § III.1. *Sicily*).

In the decorative record of Piani della Corona, the swastika motif is not present either in the slightly later M area or in the inurned cremations, which both post-date the use of the huts in the S-F area. Among the finds of the huts in area M, on other ceramic finds a cross motif placed on the handles occurs. The cross seems to be clearly distinct from the swastika motif, although similar, and here we consider them as distinct symbols, very probably with different meanings. It could therefore be interesting to note that the displacement of the settlement

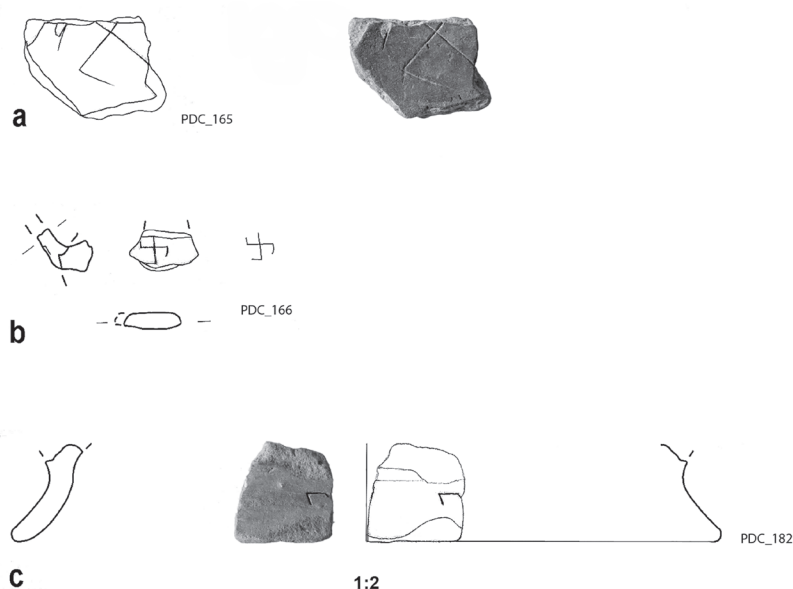


Fig. 2. Swastika motif from Piani della Corona settlement (Bagnara Calabra, RC, Southern Italy) (Sara Marino).

Capo-Piccolo facies), predominantly in the Aeolian Islands (Capo Graziano facies), but also in Sicily (Rodì-Tindari-Vallelunga and Castelluccio facies) (cf. § III.1. *Sicily*).

a. PDC_165_S-F_ZN14-15/ZO14-15 (Fig. 2a). H. 3.4; w. 5.2; th. 0.9. Hut 1 apsidal posthole. Fine fabric. Dark grey (2.5Y4/1) outside polished surface. Hut 1, apsidal posthole. Find preserved in the *Museo delle Civiltà*, Rome. Bottom fragment of a medium-sized bowl, decorated with a simple incised swastika motif, anti-clockwise = 卐 .

b. PDC_166_S-F_ZM21 (Fig. 2b). H. 2; w. 1.2; th. 0.6. Hut 2 apsidal zone. Fine fabric. Worn surfaces. Dark Greyish Brown (10YR4/2) inside surface. Find preserved in the *Museo delle Civiltà*, Rome. Small ribbon handle attachment with post-firing graffito swastika motif, clockwise = 卐 .

c. PDC_182_S-F_ZF5 (Fig. 2c). H. 3.8; w. 2.8; th. 0.9. Probably coming from Hut 1, apsidal zone. Semi-fine fabric. Very dark grey (2.5Y3/1), polished outside and inside. Find preserved in the *Museo delle Civiltà*, Rome. Foot with pre-firing incised motif characterised by perpendicularly engraved lines forming a right angle to the left: the upper part of a swastika arm (anti-clockwise = 卐) or a single inverted gamma, or a hooked motif.

III. DIFFUSION OF THE SWASTIKA MOTIF IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN DURING THE EBA

At the current time, the earliest confirmed instances of the swastika motif are found on clay pintaderas of the Early Neolithic in Anatolia at Çatalhöyük and Bademağacı (Budja 2003; Türkan 1997), in different archaeological sites in Mesopotamia during the Late Neolithic, and in Iran (Neolithic period) (Herzfeld 1930; Loewenstein 1941; Müller-Karpe 1968; Taçyıldız 2016). The presence of the swastika motif during the Neolithic was quite widespread in the Balkan-Danubian region: it is present as a decorative motif in different variations in many archaeological contexts, such as the Vinča and Cucuteni Cultures (Gimbutas 1991), however, clear continuity carrying through to the EBA cannot be confirmed.

It has been suggested that in north-eastern Europe the earliest place the symbol can be found is in Mezine (Ukraine) on mammoth ivory ornaments dating to the Late Paleolithic. They consist of a series of meanders with

from the S-F area to the overlying M area coincides with the loss of the swastika motif and the use, in similar positions, of the cross motif. In chrono-typological terms, the most interesting change between the two phases of the settlement area is that pottery produced on continental Calabria, and likely locally, found in area M has decorations similar, though not identical, to those of the Aeolian Capo Graziano archaeological facies. The cross motif (engraved or painted) is indeed widespread during the EBA on the Italian peninsula. In the Messina Strait area the motif is found in Calabria (Cessaniti

an orientation that runs parallel to one of the edges of the ivory finds, a repetitive motif which has some similarities with a swastika, but which is much more like a meander-spiral motif (Loewenstein 1941; Salmony 1949).

More precise comparisons with the Piani della Corona swastika motif are to be found in other contexts of the peri-Mediterranean area during the third millennium BC, to which the Piani della Corona site dates (Marino 2020, 5). The geographical limits of this paper include Anatolia (especially the Aegean Littoral area), the Aegean-Peloponnesian area and Crete. In terms of comparative chronology, Piani della Corona may be roughly aligned to Early Helladic (EH) III Late and the Early Minoan (EM) III/ Middle Minoan (MM) IA. Compared to the Aegean Littoral, however, it could be placed between the final stages of Troy III and more fully in Troy IV, and the latter in the EBA IIIB (Steadman, McMahon 2011, 70; Weninger, Easton 2014). The main examples of the motif from the EBA, and not only those contemporaneous with the Piani della Corona site, are discussed in the following sections.

III.1. *Sicily*

In Sicily, the cross motif (engraved or painted) is often seen on different parts of the body (handles, vessel walls, bottoms) of ceramic and non-ceramic objects. It constitutes a typical motif belonging to a wide decorative repertoire. In addition to simple crosses, complex crosses rendered using multiple parallel lines can also be found, particularly in the repertoire of ceramics from Capo Graziano and Castelluccio facies. They are sometimes associated, frequently on the external base surface, with other decorative motifs such as single or multiple dots, zigzags, and circles. In Sicily, the cross motif is also found on other ceramic finds, especially tokens, horns and clay hooks. In particular, one can think of the ‘pottery’s marks’ of the Aeolian Capo Graziano facies throughout its development (EBA-MBA [Middle Bronze Age] 1-2), with previous examples already in the Late Copper Age (LCA) Piano Quartara facies (Bernabò Brea 1952; Bernabò Brea, Cavalier 1968; 1980; 1991; Levi *et al.* 2011; Levi *et al.* 2014; Marazzi 1997; Zebrowska 2018).

In some Aeolian and Sicilian cases, the engraved crosses have notches of different lengths located perpendicularly to the cross ends, which do not seem to mark a definite orientation of the arms (right or left) (Bernabò Brea 1952, 1985; Bernabò Brea, Cavalier 1991; Castellana 1998; Castellana *et al.* 2003; Martinelli, Speciale 2017; Nicoletti 2009). Therefore, the sense of movement and rotation – a fundamental feature of the swastika motif – is absent.

In general, typological connections between the EBA Cessaniti-Capo Piccolo facies of Calabria and Capo Graziano Aeolian facies are well documented and, especially in the case of the Piani della Corona settlement, other decorative motifs are also clearly related with Capo Graziano (Marino, Pacciarelli 1996; Marino 2020); the swastika does not seem to be present in the Aeolian islands during the EBA at the time. The swastika motif in the Aeolian area only begins to appear with some frequency during the subsequent Milazzese facies (MBA3) (Bernabò Brea 1952; Marazzi 1997; Martelli 2005). Despite the networks and cultural interconnections with the nearby Calabrian coast and the rest of the Mediterranean area (Bernabò Brea 1985; 1988; 1997; Brunelli *et al.* 2013; Cannavò *et al.* 2017; Cavalier 1960a; Cazzella 1999; Cazzella, Recchia 2015; Fragnoli, Montesana 2020; Marino *et al.* 2017; Marino 2020; Recchia, Fiorentino 2015; Tykot 2019), this apparent absence remains unexplained for the time being, but the large amount of material from Capo Graziano facies already published seems to reliably prove the phenomenon, to the extent that we can currently ascertain.

Within the repertoire of the Sicilian EBA Castelluccio facies – where painted pottery dominates – the presence of painted and, more rarely, engraved single-line crosses is also frequent, both singularly and as a repeated motif, generally in association with other decorative motifs (Castellana *et al.* 2003; Copat *et al.* 2008; Cultraro 2004; Gennusa 2015; Iannì 2004). The cross motif finds correspondences throughout the wider Mediterranean area, thereby indicating possible connections, but even symbolically more complex crosses cannot be considered swastikas. The almost certain symbolic closeness between the two motifs requires a more detailed iconographic analysis than we can provide here.

The only example of a circum-Sicilian swastika comes from the Mursia site (Pantelleria Island) dating between EBA and MBA1-2, whose local aspect at the chrono-typological level relates to the Rodì-Tindari-Valllunga

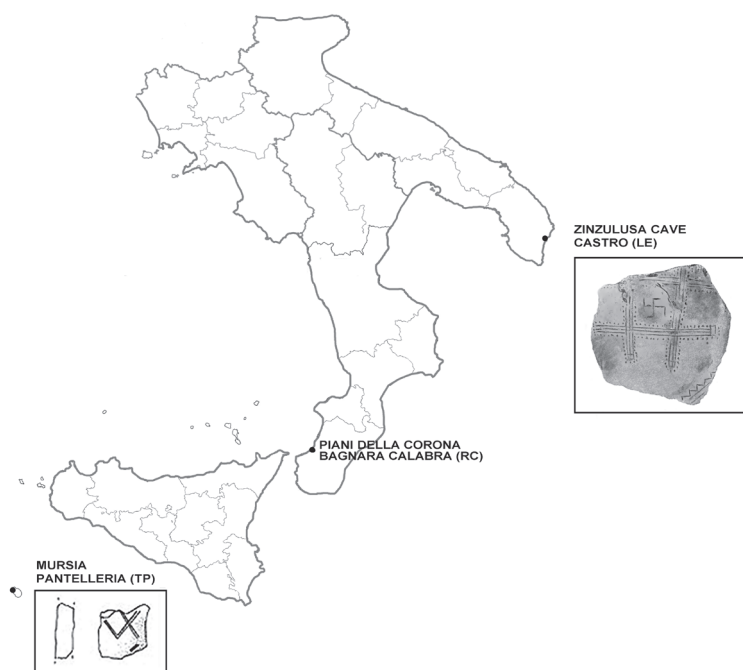


Fig. 3. Schematic map of Southern Italy with swastika motif from Pantelleria (after Nicoletti 2009, 30, fig. 16) and Salentine Peninsula (?) (after Mosso 1910a, 262, fig. 151).

Zinzulusa Cave in the Salentine Peninsula (Puglia, Lecce), coming from Paolo Emilio Stasi's excavations of 1904. The fragment was dated to the Neolithic (Mosso 1910a, 261-262) and indeed much of the materials from these excavations date to the Neolithic (Mosso 1910b). In 1914, Jatta inserted the fragment in his discussion about the diffusion of Eneolithic ceramics in Apulia and modified its dating (Jatta 1914, 130). The fragment returns in some theosophical texts of the time, in line with the interest in the swastika motif and the search for its oldest attestations (Blackwell 1914). In 1916, Baldwin places it among the oldest attestations of the swastika symbol in southern Italy, in an even less descriptive way and giving uncertain date (Baldwin 1916, 35). The fragment appears years later in a paper by Gervasio, archaeologist and director of the Bari Museum, published in the local archaeological journal *Japigia*, with the intent to contrast the emerging abuse of the symbol; he traces the swastika motif in Apulia, emphasising the numerous attestations on the painted Japygian ceramic productions, doubting the previous attribution of the fragment and dating it to the Iron Age (Gervasio 1932, 129; Hoernes 1915, 496), when the motif is widespread on painted pottery. The find is therefore doubtful, but in the absence of a thorough study, it has to be taken into consideration, even if with much caution.

The swastika is in the middle of a lattice pattern (hashtag-shaped) made up of bundles of triple parallel closed lines, surrounded by a row of dots. A mutilated motif is associated with this decorative syntax, consisting of a continuous and regular zigzag line, adjacent to a band of at least two parallel lines. Centrality and symmetry of the associated lattice/dots/swastika pattern and the slightly turning mutilated pattern with zigzag and parallel lines can suggest that the fragment is a bottom (where the swastika is located) and part of a conical wall (?). However, the stratigraphic association of the find is unknown. As already said, at the Zinzulusa cave Early and Middle Neolithic pottery have been found, and an Early Copper Age facies is named after it. This fragment is not immediately referable to any of the typical decorations within the known sequence of the Zinzulusa Cave; this increases the need for caution on the find (Blanc 1958-1961 with references; Cavalier 1960b; Bietti Sestieri 1968; Frangipane 1975; Rossetti, Orlando 2010; Zecca 1984. Cf. in general: Bailo Modesti, Lo Porto 1988; Bernabò Brea 1985; Cazzella, Guidi 2011; Cocchi Genik 1999; 2009; Cremonesi 1979; 1984; Peroni 1967; Radina 2017).

facies (Ardesia 2013-2014, 82; Nicoletti 2009, 30). The Mursia fragment, probably a loop ribbon handle like our fragment, has a mutilated decoration that can be interpreted as a swastika with a clockwise arm orientation (toward the right) (Fig. 3), however, for now, it is only an isolated case among the decorated pottery of the Rodi-Tindari-Vallelunga facies (Ardesia 2013-2014, 82). Although it could be more recent than the Calabrian finds from the Piani della Corona, it is certainly older than the earliest evidence found in Sicily and the Aeolian Islands, so far. As at Piani della Corona, the swastika motif in Mursia coexists with the simple cross.

III.2. Salentine Peninsula (?)

In 1910 Angelo Mosso published *The Dawn of Mediterranean Civilisation* which included a ceramic fragment, probably engraved before firing, from the

	ASINE TERRACE III	LERNA HOUSE OF THE TILES	GERAKI ACROPOLIS	MANIKA	TIRYNS
FULL SWASTIKA	House R  V, 522	 V, 78			
CENTRAL SWASTIKA IN COMPLEX MOTIF SURROUNDING REPEATED MOTIF		 V, 95  V, 93  V, 96			
TRIPARTITE DOUBLE LOOP MOTIF		 V, 56			
QUADRIPARTITE DOUBLE LOOP MOTIF					
INSIDE CROSS MOTIF			 VS3, 360-1		
SWASTIKA LABYRINTH	House T  XI, 310	 V, 80 		 VS3, 101	
SWASTIKA SPIRAL-ARMS					 VS1B, 368

Fig. 4. Swastika motif on the seals and sealings from the Aegean-Peloponnesian area, with numbering following the standard publication of the *CSM*.

The decorative syntax visible in the only published photo shows a strong specificity, not easy to insert in a clear chrono-typological frame. However, the organised alternation of bundles, zigzag, parallel lines surrounded by dots and the general complexity of the syntax recall the environment of the Aegean-Peloponnesian EH III (discussed afterwards), as well as the Aeolian decorations (Bernabò Brea, Cavalier 1968; 1980; 1991; Levi *et al.* 2014). Should it occur on a base, the svastika motif could be compared with the *Altis* of Olympia (Cavalier 1960a; Dörpfeld 1935; Herrmann 1987; Rambach 2002).

The association of engraved lines and dots is repeatedly documented in Campania, Calabria, Apulia and Basilicata during LCA/EBA, as well as in the more general context of the diffusion/contamination of West Adriatic Cetina-type ceramics between the Adriatic, southern Italy and the Aegean during the third millennium BC (Arcuri *et al.* 2016; Cazzella 1999; Cazzella *et al.* 2007; Cazzella, Recchia 2015; 2017; Gori *et al.* 2018; Pacciarelli *et al.* 2015). Zigzag syntax and dots, loose dots and bundles of parallel lines, are documented in Puglia and Salento also during the advanced EBA/MBA 1-2 and in the following MBA 3, as confirmed by the Roca sequence (Scarano 2006).

III.3. Aegean-Peloponnesian area

In the Aegean-Peloponnesian area, the svastika motif occurs with some frequency on seals and sealings in different settlement contexts dating to EH II, mostly concentrated in the eastern Peloponnese (Fig. 4).

From the vast repertoire of Lerna, we can draw from the sealings of the House of the Tiles, room XI (Lerna III D) (Heath 1958; Heath Wiencke 1969; Krzyszkowska 2005; Weingarten 1997). In most of these sealings, svastikas have a central position within the more complex decorative motifs that surround them. Some of these are characterised by repeated motifs such as ‘three leaves’ (that may not, in fact, represent plant leaves, *CMS* V, 95) which alternate with either ‘two leaves’ motifs (*CMS* V, 93) or small svastikas with the same orientation as the anti-clockwise =  central one (*CMS* V, 96). In two other cases – one of which is poorly preserved – the central svastika has differing orientations (clockwise =  or anti-clockwise = ) and is inserted in a tripartite or quadripartite symmetrical tripartite double loop motif (*CMS* V, 56; Heath 1958, pl. 20, S14). The repetitive nature and symmetry of the surrounding motifs seems to confirm the symbolic centrality of the svastika within the overall design. From room XI of the House of the Tiles also come two sealings in which the svastika motif extends over the entire surface of the seal; in the first case the svastika is associated with a kind of gamma motif in the centre (*CMS* V, 78); in the second case the four arms that make up the svastika embrace and follow the circular pattern of the seal (*CMS* V, 522).

Studies of the various types, functions and uses of Lerna seals make it quite clear that those with svastika decoration are a privileged type, probably linked to the exercise of a certain power, and finding them in the House of the Tiles is in line with this interpretation (Weingarten 1997; Weingarten *et al.* 1999).

Typologically similar to Lerna sealings are those discovered at Geraki, in south-east Lakonia, in a trial trench (17/11i) on the acropolis (Crouwel 2009; Weingarten *et al.* 1999; Weingarten *et al.* 2011). On one of these sealings, a cross design is defined through two pairs of parallel lines which intersect to make five squares (*CMS* V Suppl. 3, 360). In the central square there is a svastika motif (anti-clockwise = ) while in the remaining four squares there is an X, and in the remaining angles there is a single chevron-like arrow. The sealing is typologically similar to a more complex one from the House of the Tiles in Lerna (*CMS* V, 112, Room 11). The central square of this sealing does not bear a svastika, but a cross framed by a rhombus. The other four squares contain three chevron-like arrow motifs (Fig. 5). It is interesting to note that the association of cruciform motifs with or without svastika in both Geraki and in the wider repertoire of Lerna remains isolated (Heath 1958; Weingarten *et al.* 1999), and also that the svastika motif in Geraki is associated only in this way.

In Asine, on Terrace III, svastika decorations come from House R (Early Helladic II), and House T (earlier in the Early Helladic II). The item from House R is a sealing on a pithos fragment with simple central decoration and anti-clockwise (leftward) orientation embracing the whole circumference of the seal (*CMS* V, 522). The other case, from House T, is a svastika-labyrinth motif that could possibly date to the beginning of the Middle Helladic, given the dating of the context (*CMS* XI, 310; Frödin, Persson 1938; Lindblom *et al.* 2018). The motif of the

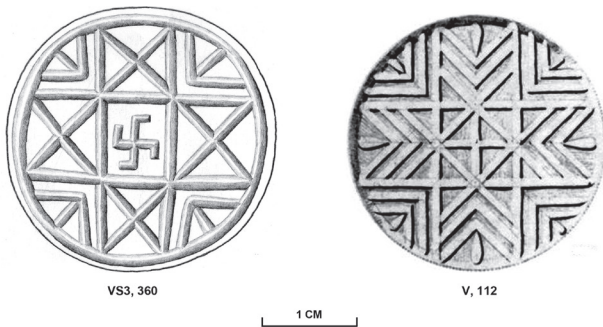


Fig. 5. Swastika motif from Geraki Acropolis and Lerna, House of the Tiles (after CMS).

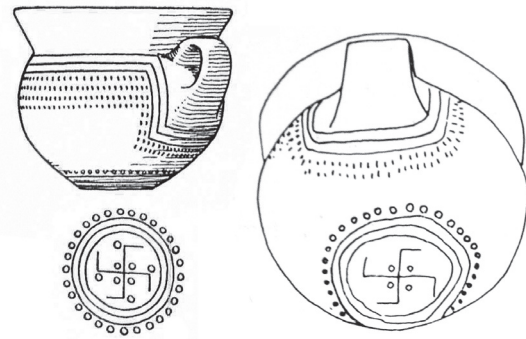


Fig. 6. Swastika motif from the the *Altis* of Olympia (after Dörpfeld 1935, pl. 22, fig. 8; Bernabò Brea 1985, 96, fig. 85a).

swastika labyrinth is also likely present on two seals from the House of the Tiles in Lerna, typologically not very similar to each other (CMS V, 80; Heath 1958, pl. 20, S18). One of these two sealings represents what might be a swastika labyrinth, but lacks a defined intersection of the arms. Moreover the swastika-labyrinth motif is also seen on a quadrangular slate or chlorite seal (in CMS V Suppl. 3), possibly coming from the Manika settlement near Chalkis, with evidence suggesting that it belongs to the EH III (Pullen 1987; Sampson 2016), but on a stylistic base it could be dated to EH II. The swastika motif is probably the potter's mark from late EH II levels (stratum VI) in Tiryns (Bernabò Brea 1985, 107, 94b), and is found on a clay seal with swastika spiral-arm motif that comes from the warehouses in the upper town (CMS V Suppl. 1B, 368).

The most direct comparison of the swastika motif that can be established between Piani della Corona and the Aegean-Peloponnesian area is certainly the swastika on the exterior base of a famous bowl from the *Altis* of Olympia (Cavalier 1960a; Dörpfeld 1935; Marino 2020), a context that dates back to EH III (Cazzella, Recchia 2015; Herrmann 1987; Rambach 2002; Recchia, Fiorentino 2015), roughly contemporaneous with Lerna IV (Fig. 6). The comparison is most compelling in chronological terms, since all the other contexts of the Aegean-Peloponnesian area precede the Piani della Corona settlement; at the typological level, however, there are some differences. First, the Olympia swastika is inserted in a more elaborate decorative syntax, as the centre of concentric circles surmounted by a row of circular impressions, which are also found near the intersection of the swastika arms. It also has the opposite orientation (clockwise = 卐) to that of Piani della Corona (anti-clockwise = 卐).

Attention has been called to this bowl for its typological proximity to the Aeolian pottery of Capo Graziano, especially during its second phase (Bernabò Brea 1985; Cavalier 1960a; Cazzella 1999; Cazzella, Recchia 2015). Unfortunately, the prehistoric levels of the *Altis* have no radiometric dates, but the swastika motif engraved on the base has a strong typological connection with Tyrrhenian Calabria, through the site of Piani della Corona. As already noted, the latter site is close to the first phase of Capo Graziano in terms of both absolute chronology and typology. The presence of incised decoration in this early Capo Graziano period has traditionally been underestimated, largely due to the influx of the Filicudi evidence (Casa Lopez and Piana del Porto sites); re-examination of former excavations and recent research in the Diana district of Lipari island has, in fact, highlighted a more relevant presence of decorations also in the early phase of Capo Graziano (Martinelli, Letterio 2017).

The swastika motif, therefore, represents an additional marker of the articulated and lasting process of cultural interconnection between the Aegean-Peloponnesian and the lower Tyrrhenian areas during the third millennium BC.

III.4. *Anatolia*

The earliest evidence of the swastika motif in Anatolia is found in Early Neolithic layers at Çatalhöyük and Bademağacı on two pintaderas (Budja 2003; Müller-Karpe 1968; Türkan 1997; Taçyıldız 2016; Tütüncüler Bircan

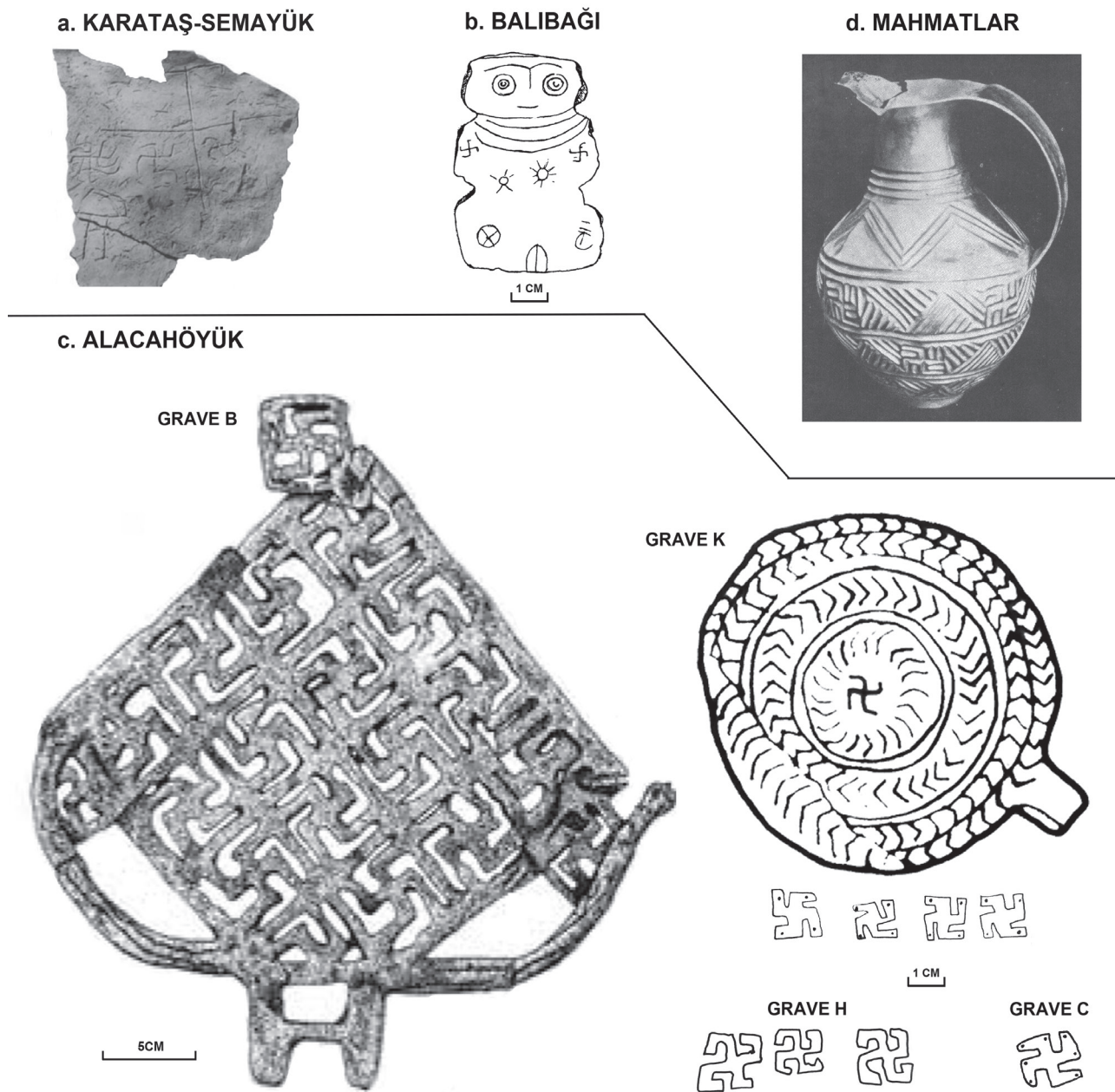


Fig. 7. Swastika motifs from Anatolian contexts (after Wikimedia Commons; Süel 1992, 41, fig. 6; Taçyıldız 2016, pl. 8 and p. 43, fig. 31.b).

2013). At Çatalhöyük the pintadera with swastika motif was found in Area E (A1), VI layer (6500-6400 BC); while in Bademağacı it came from House 7, Level 3 (ca. 6450/6270-6380/6250 BC) (Taçyıldız 2016).

In Anatolia the use of the symbol continues during the Chalcolithic period¹ without interruption until the EBA (ca. 3100-2000 BC, Taçyıldız 2016; Tütüncüler Bircan 2013; for the EBA chronology: Steadman, McMahon

¹ During Early Chalcolithic in Hacilar, Area BIII (painted swastika) and Can Hasan I, House V (engraved swastika and swastika-meander). Also, in Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Age layers in Pulur-Sakyol (ware sherds and seal) (Taçyıldız 2016; Tütüncüler Bircan 2013).

2011; <https://www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de/welcome.html>). EBA II is apparently the period of the greatest diffusion of the swastika motif in Anatolia, appearing in almost all regions both in settlement and cemetery contexts, as well as on new types of finds, such as seals, and among finds in precious metal.

The swastika motif occurs especially on ceramics – both achromatic and painted – decorating vase bases but also rims, handles and handle attachments, walls of pithos and bowls, and also in large quantities on spindle whorls. Other well-represented classes are not only seals and pendants, but also clay balls and idols (made of metal and stone). To a lesser extent, it is also present on frame weights, potter's marks with either a circular or square matrix, pintaderas, stone objects and valuable objects in metal (also precious) and in bone.

Typologically, swastikas can be executed with single or multiple lines (engraved or painted) and are often found along with triangles, chevrons, dot lines, meanders, and bundles of wavy lines. Single or often multiple, they can also be inserted in more articulated decorative syntaxes in which they tend to be given, as we have noted in other geographical contexts, a priority in meaning. The arms can form a right angle or be curved and often near the intersection of the arms there are four dots. Furthermore, in some cases, they can be reinforced by additional parallel segments, found mainly in the ceramics of EBA I.

For our purposes, it is interesting to note the relationship of the swastika motif to that of the cross with notches positioned perpendicularly to the ends of the cross already found in Sicily and in the Aegean-Anatolian area. This decoration was found in association with multiple swastikas on a pithos fragment from female tomb KT57 of Karataş-Semayük (Taçyıldız 2016) (Fig. 7a). As in other geographical contexts under consideration in this paper, in Anatolia the swastika coexists with the cross motif. Also of interest is its coexistence with other types of astral symbols such as circled crosses and real sun designs. This is quite clear in the limestone idol from Balıbağı, Grave K1, dating to EBA III (Süel 1992), in which two swastikas appear in a symmetrical position with two central suns and an encircled cross in the bottom corner of the idol (Fig. 7b).

The swastika pattern in Anatolia is very frequent during EBA and not all findings can be covered in this paper. Among the many contexts in which the swastika motif occurs in Anatolia, the Royal Tombs of Alacahöyük surely deserve attention (EBA II-III) (Zimmermann 2006-2007), where swastika motifs appear on valuable finds (Taçyıldız 2016; Tütüncüler Bircan 2013) (Fig. 7c). Among them, the solar disk from Grave B must certainly be highlighted due to its symbolic value. It consists of a rhombus bronze plaque with sixteen swastikas (clockwise =  and anti-clockwise = ) plus three smaller ones applied at the corners (Zimmermann 2006-2007). Swastika decoration also occurs in other Royal Tombs. From Tomb K comes the gold cup with embossed decorations which bears an anti-clockwise =  swastika on its exterior base, which is comparable to the specimens of Olympia and Piani della Corona, together with four swastika pendants of the same type as those found in Tombs H and C (Tütüncüler Bircan 2013).

Similar in chronology and typology to the finds from the Royal Tombs of Alacahöyük are those of Mahmatlar – whose functional definition is less clear – including a gold jug with regularly-spaced geometric bands of decoration on the body. In the decorative bands located under the handle there are anti-clockwise =  swastikas (Akok, Koşay 1950) (Fig. 7d).

During the subsequent EBA III, the diffusion of the swastika motif gradually decreases, while remaining strongly present in the Troy sequence (Taçyıldız 2016). Of all the settlements in which the swastika motif is present, Troy is where it carries on without interruption throughout the life of the city and with the greatest frequency (Blegen *et al.* 1950-1961; Schliemann 1875; 1881; 1884). The swastika motif occurs during the city's first two phases (Troy I-II), particularly on ceramics, becoming even more frequent in Troy III. Swastika decorations are present, throughout the Troy sequence, both on ceramic fragments and on different classes of specialised finds such as spindle whorls, clay balls, human-shape vases, and idols (Schliemann 1875; 1881; 1884) (Fig. 8).

The majority of examples, however, were identified on the spindle whorls (conical and biconical) from Troy III-IV. On most spindle whorls the swastika motif – oriented in both directions (clockwise =  or anti-clockwise = ) – is in association with other decorations and motifs, with the swastika being dominant. In many cases the decoration is limited to one of the two sides of the artefact. The simpler decorative syntax shows the sequence of swastikas associated with crosses or multiple swastikas with the same orientation. In other cases, the arms of multiple swastikas create disordered compositions of crossed strokes with dots. The more complex

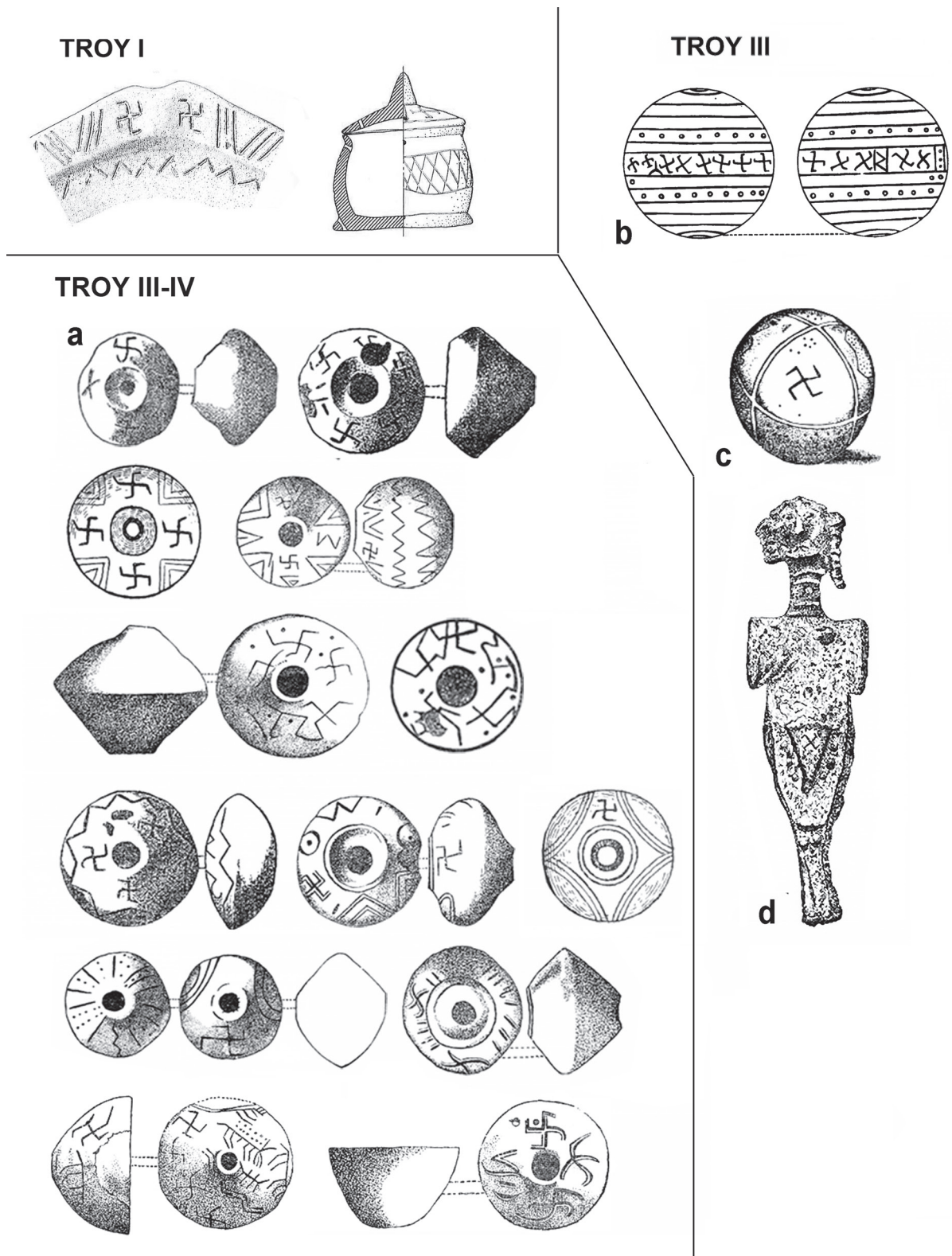


Fig. 8. Swastika motif from Troy (after Schliemann 1875; 1881; 1884).

decorative syntax presents swastikas inserted inside crosses, with differing typological characteristics, rhombuses, continuous and discontinuous zigzags or zoomorphic drawings (a landscape?) (Fig. 8a).

At Troy III, in addition to the spindle whorls, the swastika is also present on clay balls (defined by Schliemann “terra-cotta ball”) that are divided by lines in eight decorated sectors. In one of these an anti-clockwise =  swastika is found with a group of dots (Fig. 8c). Greg interpreted this swastika as “the emblem of the sky god” (Greg 1885, 322; Wilson 1896, 812).

On another terracotta sphere, opposite surfaces are decorated with parallel engraved circular lines in which the larger central areas have a series of aligned swastikas with different orientations that are associated with what can be considered two alphabetic signs (one of these was interpreted by Sayce as the Cypriot “chi”) (Schliemann 1881, 349) (Fig. 8b). It is interesting to note that on a clay ball from Troy IV, the swastika is associated with both a sun as well as with a series of wavy and zigzag lines that Schliemann himself interpreted as probable “lightning” (Schliemann 1881, no. 1991) or its rays.

The most important find is certainly the small lead idol from Troy III representing a naked female figure with a braid hanging on the side of her face and with belly/genitals marked by a triangle containing a swastika (Fig. 8d). Schliemann identifies it with a female divinity and finds comparisons with other idols found in Attica and the Cyclades, which, however, do not have the swastika decoration (Schliemann 1881, 338-339). Sayce suggested that it could be identified with the Chaldean Artemis Nana (Schliemann 1884, Preface by Sayce; Wilson 1896, 830) meaning that the swastika could have an auspicious meaning linked to cyclic, generative power (Taçyıldız 2016). It is also worth noting that the swastika and cross are both recurring symbols found near the genitals as well as on “human-shaped vases” from Troy IV and later V (Schliemann 1884; Wilson 1896).

As for the peri-Mediterranean area of Western Anatolia during the first part of the EBA, from levels III-V of Thermi, Lesbos, come some spindle whorls with swastika decoration (Lamb 1936; Müller-Karpe 1974), which are very similar to those of Troy II: considering the geographical proximity of Thermi to Troy, and the contemporaneity of Thermi IV with Troy IIa (Manning 1995), this occurrence is not surprising.

III. 5. Crete

Examples of the swastika motif on Crete start to appear from Early Minoan II (EM II) on some of the seals coming from the Mesara tholos tombs, which typically contain a high percentage of pre-palatial Minoan seals (Anderson 2016; Relaki 2009; Weingarten 2012). This section derives from the consultation of *CMS* II, III, IV, V and Suppl. 1A, in which some seals with the swastika motif were published and can be dated between EM II and MM IA. These seals are made of luxury raw materials, such as wild boar or hippopotamus ivory, and chlorite and soapstone. Most of the findings come from Tholos A of Agia Triada, used during EM I and MM II, but whose seals with swastikas have been dated to EM II and/or MM IA (Banti 1933; Xanthoudides 1924).

On the seals considered among the oldest (EM II-EM III) the decoration is composed of simple, centrally located swastika motifs (clockwise = ) lacking association with other decorations (Fig. 9, *CMS* II. 1, 019, 48, and 91). Another seal from Tholos A (Fig. 9, *CMS* II. 1, 52b), within the Parading Lions group, has a characteristic swastika decoration (anti-clockwise = ) with slightly curved arms (Anderson 2016, 248-249). This typological characteristic of the swastika motif also occurs in Phaistos and Moni Odigitria.

The seals from Moni Odigitria and Phaistos exhibit many similarities including the presence of (numeric?) signs near the arms of the swastikas. On the seal from Moni Odigitria (Fig. 9, *CMS* V Suppl. 1A, 263b) the swastika is seen in association with groups of three or four short parallel dashes positioned around three of the four arms of the swastika (Anderson 2016, 269; Vasilakis *et al.* 2010). The seal from Phaistos is larger in size and has a different combination of (numeric?) signs (Fig. 9, *CMS* III, 5b).

Three additional seals dating to EM III and/or MM IA are very different from each other in type and size. The seal from Platanos, Tholos A (Fig. 9, *CMS* II. 1, 246) has a rectangular shape and the final sections of the swastika are placed slightly below their intersection, creating a type of ‘tree branch’. The one stored at the Archaeological Museum of Chania, probably coming from Moni Odigitria (Fig. 9, *CMS* V Suppl. 3, 132), is made of bone and shows the spiral-arm type. The seal from Kali Limenes is quite different, on which the swastikas merge into a labyrinth motif (Fig. 9, *CMS* IV, 3).

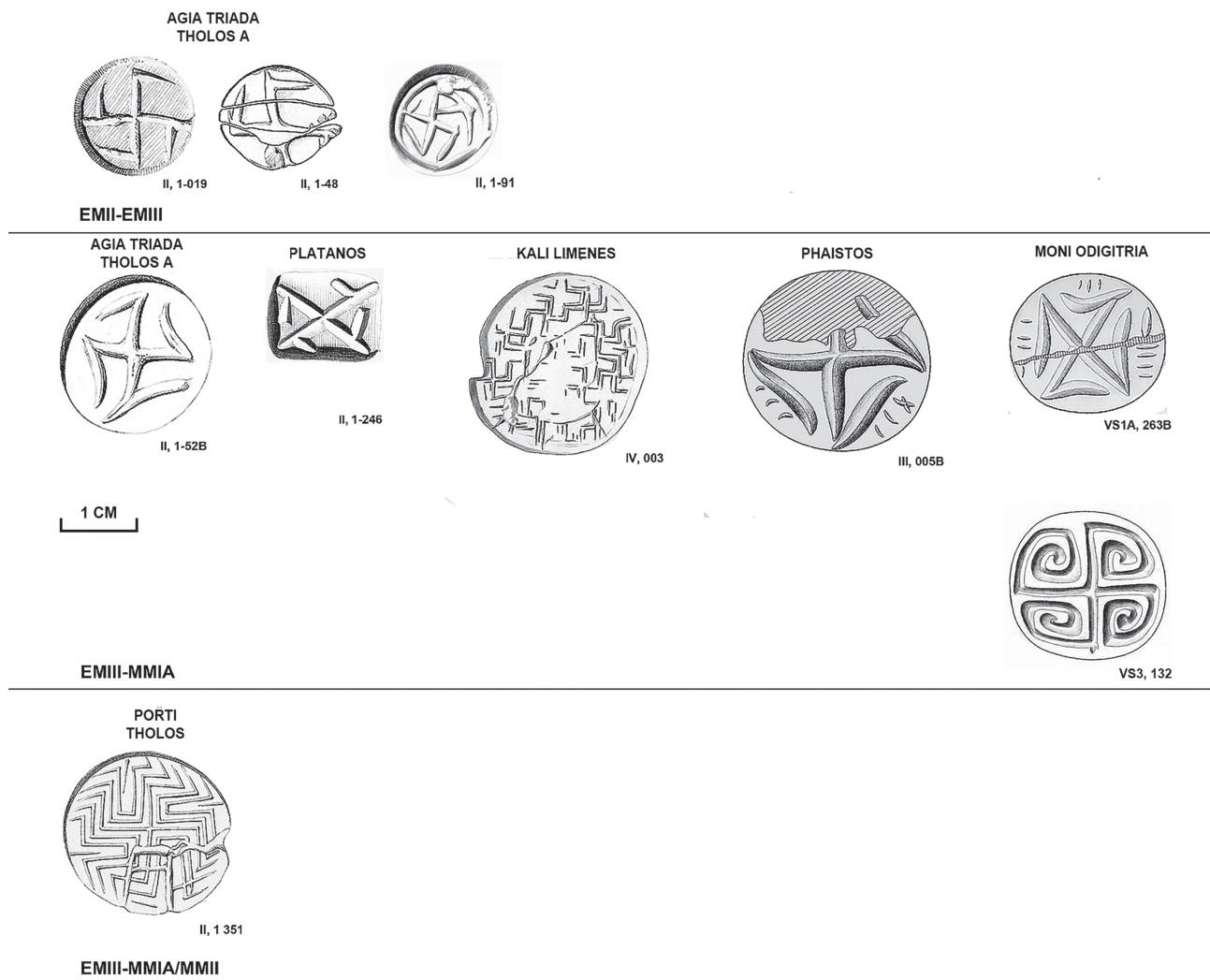


Fig. 9. Distribution map of the swastika motif in Crete, with numbering following the standard publication of *CSM*.

The most recent seal from the series is the one from the Tholos of Porti, made of hippopotamus ivory, depicting a large and quite clear swastika-meander-labyrinth decoration (Fig. 9, *CMS* II. 1, 351).

The value attributed to these seals is evident; they are made of semi-precious materials, display fine manufacturing and their depositional context is frequently a monumental tholos. The formal and typological variety of decorations is particularly evident. Only in the case of the Tholos A of Agia Triada and in the specimens of Moni Oditrigia and Phaistos there is a general typological homogeneity, but with the clear distinction of the numeric signs around the arms of the swastikas.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, in Anatolia the swastika motif has a long tradition and above all a continuity over time that remains fairly constant since the Neolithic period and, without interruption, throughout the EBA.

The moment of maximum diffusion in the Aegean is the EH II. The earliest examples occur in the Aegean-Peloponnesian area and in Crete, where the motif is found in relevant social or economic contexts, such as the

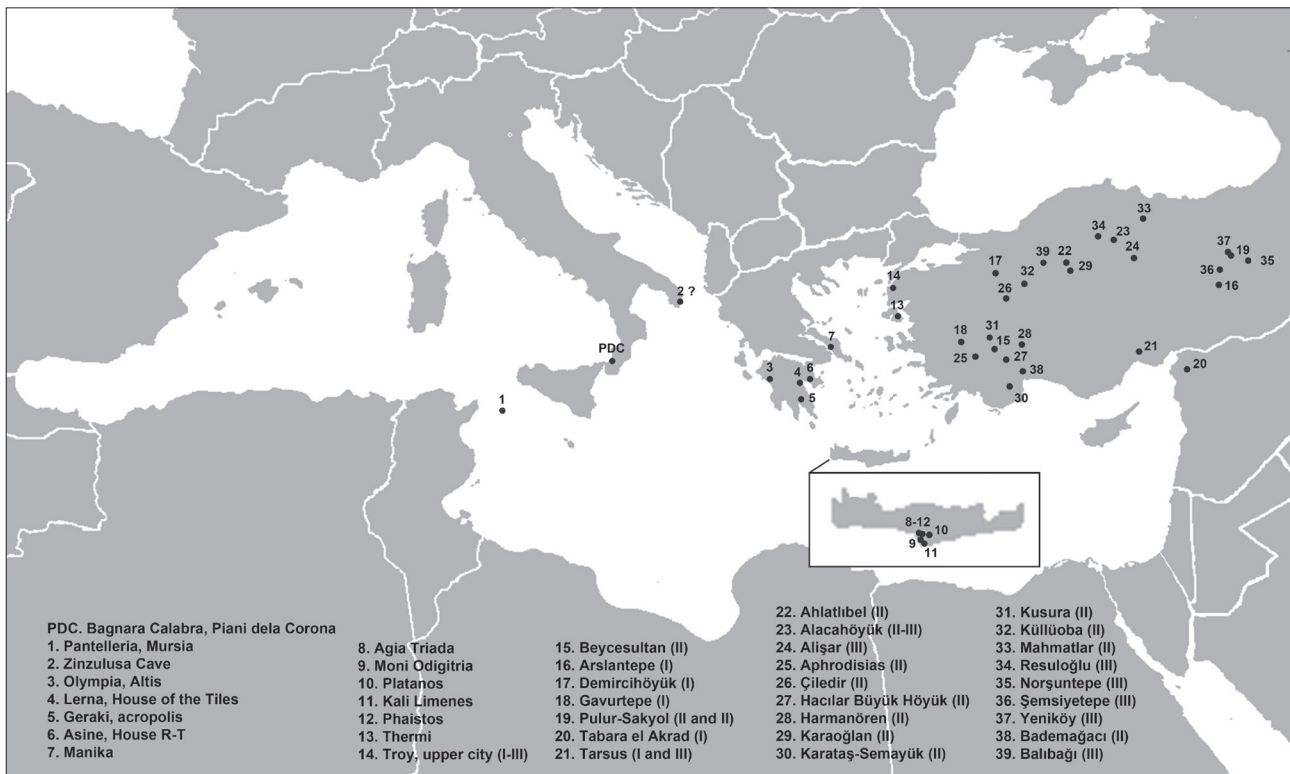


Fig. 10. Distribution map of the swastika motif in the central Mediterranean during the EBA.

House of the Tiles in Lerna, the Houses of Terrace III in Asine, the warehouse in Tiryns, or on semi-precious raw materials in the tholos tombs of the Mesara. The distribution of the swastika motif is likely part of the process of cultural interaction and the trade network formed during the EBA II (late) and EBA IIIA periods as an expansion of the Anatolian Trade Network, which went from Mesopotamia to Anatolia, and extended to Cyprus, coastal western Anatolia, through to the Cyclades and Greek mainland, and to Thrace and the Balkans. Troy certainly had an important role in ensuring that this network of exchange between Anatolia and the Aegean worked efficiently (Sahoglu 2005; Ünlüsoy 2016). Within this vast process there is also the diffusion throughout the area of the use of potter's marks and of seals and sealings, which are both of Anatolian derivation and represent some of the major technological and functional innovations of the period. All these transformations parallel changes at the socio-economic level: the period corresponds to an increase in population followed by new settlement planning, the erection of stronger fortification systems, urbanisation and the emergence of regional centres with residential complexes connected to a more complex society, including the emergence of a clearer social differentiation in the Aegean and Anatolian Mediterranean region. The presence of the swastika decoration in the upper town of Troy and in distinctive houses and warehouses in the Peloponnese might serve as an indication that the swastika could have an elite symbolism connected to the socio-political sphere.

The presence of the swastika motif on seals found in Cretan tholoi of the EM II-MM IA can be similarly interpreted, suggesting that their inclusion was an intentional signifier in the deposition, probably acting as status symbols of the deceased and/or the social group to which they belonged (cf. Relaki 2008; 2009; Renfrew 1972). In the Royal Tombs of Alacahöyük, the presence of the motif in different depositions on jewellery items (themselves an indication of social status) is of some importance. As for the presence of the swastika motif on one of the so-called sun disks (Grave B), the most accredited interpretation for these objects connects them to the symbolism of the sun because they are decorated with crosses or swastikas, or according to some hypotheses, to the Great Goddess

(Korfmann 1986). It has also been proposed that the different combination of diverse types of crosses and swastikas could refer to distinctive signs unique to the deceased and acting, therefore, as a sort of heraldic insignia (for the interpretative hypotheses, see the summary in Zimmermann 2006-2007, 515-517).

The presence of the swastika on the Troy III idol widens its symbolism, and brings us back to a cult-apotropaic meaning (Schliemann 1884, Preface by Sayce; Wilson 1896). The socio-political sphere cannot be fully separated from the sacred one, or at least the symbol is used in both domains and possibly refers to a higher entity. Another important semantic aspect of the motif is highlighted by the limestone idol of Balıbağı (Grave K1), on which the swastikas are associated with the sun in the same decoration and not placed in a central position. The presence of different symbols, such as crosses of many types, may represent different celestial bodies or different states of the same bodies that were at stake in the figurative and symbolic panorama of the period (cf. Baldwin 1916; Burillo-Cuadrado, Burillo 2014; Freed, Freed 1980; Guenon 1931; MacGillivray 2004; Loewenstein 1941).

Thus, most of the Aegean-Anatolian area swastikas come from elite contexts, funerary as well as domestic: they are remarkable finds from not only a technological (seals and sealings, fine pottery, potter's marks, jewellery, finds in precious metal and sun-disk idols), but also a symbolic-figurative perspective, in which the swastika probably had both a collective and individual meaning.

As for the Italian contexts in which swastikas are currently attested (Piani della Corona and Mursia), the interpretative potential appears somehow weak, because the dynamics and socio-economic developments affecting the EBA of the peninsula are completely different from those of the Aegean-Anatolian area, and because the symbolic-figurative associations of the motif are practically non-existent.

At Piani della Corona the occurrence of both certain and uncertain swastikas in the partially overlapping Huts 1-2 is clear, but a privileged role of these huts within the inhabited area cannot be determined. However, the decorations are on the highly polished surfaces of fine vases and on cups, *i.e.* on drinking pots of some quality. At a decorative level, the swastikas appear in isolation and are not associated with other symbols. Their most direct connection is certainly represented by the swastika on the base of the bowl from the *Altis* of Olympia. It fits well inside the process of active cultural interaction between the Aegean sea, the Peloponnese and Sicily during the third millennium BC (Fig. 10). This typological connection, particularly involving the Aeolian islands and the Peloponnese, has already been widely treated by several authors (Bernabò Brea 1985; 1988; 1997; Cavalier 1960a; 1999; Cazzella *et al.* 2007; Cazzella, Recchia 2015; Gori *et al.* 2018; Recchia, Fiorentino 2015). Concerning the symbolic significance of the swastika in the ceramics of Piani della Corona, the small post-firing engraved decoration near the attachment of the handle (Fig. 2b, PDC_166) could suggest an 'active' significance of the symbol, and not a simple mute decorative motif. The presence of the swastika at the bend of the handle loop could reveal a ritual/auspicious aspect possibly connected to convivial events. In this regard, it should be remembered that from the later foundation deposit of the Central Hut on the acropolis of Broglio di Trebisacce, in north-eastern Calabria (Recent Bronze Age, *ca.* 1300-1150 BC), a swastika motif was engraved post-firing under the handle of a fine polished cup, and has been interpreted as marking an auspicious symbolism (Peroni, Vanzetti 2008).

The apparent absence of the decorative motif along the eastern coast of Sicily may just represent a void in current knowledge. The chrono-typological affinities and the networks across the Messina Strait, already considered in this paper and confirmed by the chrono-typological analysis of the ceramic materials of Piani della Corona, suggest this prudential statement. The presence of the motif on the fragment of the Zinzulusa Cave in Salentine Apulia, with the caution formerly expressed, should not be understated; this could open the possibility of other routes of transmission, including the Adriatic network, reconnecting the Balkans again with the Peloponnesian area.

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Abbreviations

- CMS II. 1 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band II. 1.* Platon N., *Iraklion, Archäologisches Museum. Teil 1. Die Siegel der Vopalastzeit*, Berlin 1969.
- CMS II. 2 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band II. 2.* Platon N., Pini I., Hellenkemper Salies G., *Iraklion, Archäologisches Museum. Teil 2. Die Siegel der Altpalastzeit*, Berlin 1977.
- CMS III *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band III.* Müller W., Pini I., Sakellariou A., *Iraklion, Archäologisches Museum. Sammlung Giamalakis*, Mainz 2007.
- CMS IV *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band IV.* Sakellarakis J.A., Kenna V.E.G., *Iraklion. Sammlung Metaxas*, Berlin 1969.
- CMS V *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band V.* Pini I. et al., *Kleinere griechische Sammlungen*, Berlin 1975.
- CMS V Suppl. 1A *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band V, Supplementum 1A.* Pini I. et al., *Kleinere griechische Sammlungen, Ägina – Korinth*, Berlin 1992.
- CMS V Suppl. 3 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Band V, Supplementum 3.* Pini I. et al., *Kleinere griechische Sammlungen. Neufunde aus Griechenland und der westlichen Türkei*, Mainz 2004.

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