

BOOK REVIEW

Crete in Transition: Pottery Styles and Island History in the Archaic and Classical Periods (*Hesperia Supplement 45*). By BRICE L. ERICKSON. Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2010. Pp. xxvi + 380. Paper, \$75.00. ISBN 978-0-87661-545-4.

One of the most vexing problems in the archaeology of Crete is the abandonment of sites at the end of the 7th century BC. Adding an air of mystery to the issue, past scholarship has insisted that there is an actual gap in the archaeological record of the 6th and 5th centuries, suggesting a socio-political and economic collapse. This view has become tempered in recent years with more mundane explanations: problems of archaeological visibility, our ability to recognize Archaic potsherds, and the vagaries of excavation. Even so, the scarcity of known archaeological sites has still encouraged fascinating historical explanations of abandonment, decline, and material impoverishment, in spite of early inscriptions that indicate the existence of thriving cities and well-formed civic institutions in Archaic and Classical periods.

The truth of the matter is that the archaeology of Archaic Crete, as a field of study, is in its infancy, with practitioners still struggling to comprehend basic forms of material culture and contexts. Erickson's *Crete in Transition* is a real breakthrough, presenting the first overview of Archaic and Classical pottery on Crete and establishing base-line data for the period. Using material compiled for his 2000 dissertation, he reconstructs typologies for black-gloss tablewares of the 6th and 5th centuries, mapping patterns of ceramic regionalism (the first part of the book) onto a narrative of cultural and economic systems (the latter part of the book). Such a project is an ambitious and risky undertaking to be sure, and with few published deposits at his disposal, Erickson ventures into largely uncharted territory. Although early work by Nicolas Coldstream and Peter Callaghan (at Knossos) may have provided him a place to start, Erickson handles a vast amount of new material from a number of sites across the island.

The core of the book consists of six successive chapters presenting pottery from various findspots, leading the reader from west to east across the island: Eleutherna, Knossos, Gortyn, the Isthmus of Ierapytna (mainly Vrokastro and

Gournia surveys), and Praisos, with extensive discussion of several other sites more recently excavated. The result is a fascinating glimpse of Archaic and Classical pottery, establishing the groundwork for serious discussion of chronology and social contexts of consumption. That said, with the exception of some groups at Knossos, few of his samples are actually well stratified or easily definable primary or secondary deposits, and readers should resist the temptation (or subconscious inclination) to read the composite drawings on the page or the author's wonderfully detailed discussion of groups as reflecting synchronic cultural or behavioral contexts.

The pottery from Eleutherna is well stratified but represents the upper disturbed levels overlying the Early Iron Age-Orientalizing cemetery at Orthi Petra, apparently destroyed graves, remains of funerary meals, or residue of post-funerary cult. The Knossian material comes from various closed pits and wells exposed during excavations in the area of the palace and immediate environs. Here Erickson is on firmer contextual ground, dealing with actual secondary deposits. His treatment of the pottery from Well H on the Royal Road goes well beyond published reports to provide a solid reference point for Late Archaic, while the Eleutherna samples give us a clear picture of the first half of the 6th century. How he fills in the chronology in between, and with such precision, is not entirely clear to this reader.

The Gortynian material is called by the author "residual," normally meaning sherds recovered in later mixed contexts. The location is the area of the Odeion excavations, described as a "concentration" linked to the development of the early city center in the 6th century. Because the material does not come from definable synchronic deposits, the chronology is based on comparisons with more firmly dated material at Knossos. Similarly the east-Cretan material is a grab bag of chance finds from Irapetra itself and of surface sherds collected in intensive surveys at Vrokastro (Oleros and Istron); Gournia and the north Isthmus areas, including the important Archaic-Classical site of Profitis Elias; and Praisos in the Siteia district. Erickson ably overcomes the challenges of dealing with such poorly contextualized pottery and presents compelling patterns. His explanation of context is clear, and his detailed discussion of the variation of shapes, slips, and fabrics displays an unusual sensitivity to modes of production, forming technologies, and cultural regionalism. Even so, in lieu of contiguously stratified samples from definable contexts, the narrow precision of Erickson's chronology for specific sherds should perhaps be taken with some caution.

His arguments for the development of some basic forms seem clear enough: for example, cup bases with stepped-profile underfoot are likely to be late 6th century—some examples are veritable type fossils of Late Archaic. This is easy to see at Knossos, Gortyn, and Praisos, where the low ring foot, another late feature, is also present. At Eleutherna, however, these forms seem to be rare except as imports, in keeping with the more conservative ceramic traditions at this site (89, 96). It is not really made clear why Eleutherna should be imitating, instead of actually just making, cups that look like others found elsewhere on the island. That is, among the Cretan wares, the distinction between imitation and local production tradition is a thorny issue that requires rather rigorous interrogation of a significant number of stratified contexts and full engagement with the methodological problems of reading ceramic diversity as a cultural pattern.

Along the same lines, the low-necked cup, a common 7th-century shape, apparently continues well into the 6th century at Eleutherna, while the standard early 6th-century disk foot (articulated with a slightly concave bottom) on high-necked cups apparently continues into Late Archaic. While the general conservative trends are understandable, it is not clear why Eleutherna should lack so many features characteristic of the late 6th century and Late Archaic found elsewhere, or even if it actually does. Although cup base morphology is only one characteristic of Erickson's complex typology, many of his predictive attributes—slip quality and placement; fabrics, rim and body shapes; shoulder width to height ratios; and so on—are not easy to follow without actually seeing the sherds or more completely reconstructed vessels.

The final four chapters, about a quarter of the book, are dense and detailed syntheses and interpretive discussions. "Pottery Styles and Influences" provides an overview of patterns of ceramic distribution and interaction. Erickson discusses briefly the distinct character of the black-gloss tradition in Crete—and the phenomenon of the high-necked cup—which he sees as a Cretan creation with Peloponnesian influences. The discussion and bibliography are thorough, but a critical treatment, including illustrations of associated Lakonian types, would have been useful to most readers, especially given the cultural significance of the form and clear formal and contextual links to indigenous 7th-century traditions.

The author charts interregional similarities with useful references back to his data, but he also tends to emphasize local traditions emerging within separate culture regions—localizing tendencies that seem to follow the island's mountainous topography. To Erickson, these ceramic regions are materially distinc-

tive: the central zone consists of Knossos and Gortyn; a western zone, Eleutherna; and in east Crete, a number of different local traditions. The extreme regionalism may be difficult for an uninitiated reader to fully comprehend—the similarities actually seem more obvious than the differences, and at this stage of research, I cannot but think that many of the author's regional variations could be related to issues of sample size, diversity of systemic contexts, and even the widely varying chronological brackets represented by each of these groups. One lesson from Bronze Age Crete is that our perception of stylistic variation or diversity is directly dependent on specific and local contexts of consumption—that is, assemblages even from the same date and site, but from different contexts, can look very different. It is the aggregate of numerous well-defined contexts that establishes the parameters of regional typologies.

While Erickson discusses pottery throughout, the concluding chapters are historical narratives, weaving together a dense and detailed picture of Archaic and Classical Crete from diverse archaeological and historical inferences. "Archaic Cretan Austerity and the Spartan Connection," for example, is a concise but compelling social history of the Cretan polis. "Internal Transformations" is perhaps the most comprehensive and detailed summary of Archaic culture change to date, examining settlement patterns, cemeteries, and sanctuaries. There is also a lengthy digression on Knossos which, according to the author, was destroyed by Gortyn around 600 BC as a result of that city's expansion outside of the Mesara periphery. Although the evidence is circumstantial—Prinias is also abandoned about the same time—the story emphasizes the author's belief that Knossos represents an actual example of the Archaic "gap" and the result of a very specific historical event.

There are some interesting chronological patterns that emerge in these chapters: local ceramic production characterizes the 6th century—though with some imports, especially Corinthian and Lakonian—and then a marked change occurred in the 5th century when central Cretan sites incorporated more off-island elements; west Crete seems in general to have been more closely dependent on mainland pottery traditions. This is a point Erickson picks up again in the chapter "Overseas Trade and Cretan Society," in which Eleutherna was receptive first to Corinthian imports and then Lakonian, and then finally Attic influences after around 500 BC. These patterns are important, and Erickson's work is a refreshing challenge to reductive assumptions of Crete's isolation in the 6th- and 5th-century Aegean. Drawing on material from Eleutherna, Kydonia, and other sites, he places west Crete at a critical transshipment point between the Pelopon-

nese and North Africa; east Crete, he argues, has an Aegean orientation, linked to Cycladic trade networks.

It may be that Cretan poleis, emerging at the end of the 7th century, were inward looking, more isolationist in their perspectives and efforts to develop and maintain a new social structure and political order. An important observation in this book is that this insularity, reflected in material regionalism, is demonstrably not the case when it comes to extra-island economic interactions through the 6th and 5th centuries. Although the author entertains various systemic and global trends that may have reoriented 7th-century trade networks in the Aegean, he stresses the internal social and political changes that might account for the end of Orientalizing material elaboration in the 6th century and subsequent patterns of cultural austerity that led to the unique construction of Cretan civic institutions.

Erickson's *Crete in Transition* is well written, organized, and illustrated; the description and evaluation of contexts are clear and concise; and the pottery discussion and analyses provide a good starting point for serious work in Archaic Cretan archaeology. Erickson forges new ground and in many ways inaugurates a renewed interest in Archaic and Classical Crete. While a major paradigm shift is hardly on the horizon with this book or any other so far—we are apparently still comfortable with the traditional lacunae in the material record and the dominant historical explanations for them—we have at least begun to ask archaeological questions of archaeological data, which is a small step in the right direction, but an important one for classical archaeology.

DONALD C. HAGGIS

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, dchaggis@email.unc.edu