

# Beliefs from Far Away

## Context and Function of Foreign Cult Objects in the Late Bronze Age Aegean

Akademisk avhandling som för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen  
vid Göteborgs universitet offentlig försvaras i sal T 307,  
Olof Wijksgatan 6, lördagen den 11 januari 2003 kl 10.15

av

Nenad Petrović

Fil. kand.

### Abstract

Foreign ritual objects have been found in diverse contexts in the Aegean area during most of the Late Bronze Age (ca 1600-1070 B.C.). In this study, their functions in the Aegean are analysed with the find context as starting-point. In order to compare their uses in the Aegean with those in their places of origin, Aegean find contexts are compared to foreign find contexts and with written evidence. The main categories of objects studied are statuettes, rhyta, cylinder seals and scarabs, but there are also figurines, pendants and plaques. The primary region of comparison is the Near East. Relevant information is provided on cultural aspects such as Bronze Age religion in both that region and Greece, as well as on anthropological concepts of value for interpreting the finds.

It is suggested that foreign cult objects were used for different purposes by different groups of people during the half millennium studied here. In the Shaft Grave period, few cult objects were imported, possibly for legitimising the power of an elite struggling to establish itself on the Greek mainland. During palatial times on the mainland (LH IIIA-B), mostly personal cult objects, such as scarabs and Mitanni Common Style cylinder seals, were imported. Scarabs might indicate official contacts with Egypt, while the simpler cylinder seals are possibly traces of trade connections. On Crete, these objects may have acquired additional symbolism through their connection with the palatial mainland. After the fall of the mainland palaces, in LH IIIC, a wider range of objects is encountered. Together with a gradual change towards cremations and signs that those using the objects were in some cases aware of their use in their places of origin, this points to a search for new religious experiences, often connected with magical techniques.

Key words: Late Bronze Age, Aegean, Mycenaeans, Minoans, religion, magic, Smiting God, rhyta, scarabs, cylinder seals, figurines, pendants, plaques.