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Cover illustration from Susan M. Dixon in this volume, p. 252, fig. 5. Cover illustration edited by Julia Habetzeder.

# A possible new ritual scene from the Mycenaean settlement at Kontopigado, Athens

## Abstract

The study deals with a pictorial scene partially preserved on a kylix of the 14th century BC (Late Helladic IIIA2) from the Mycenaean settlement of Kontopigado, 5 km south of the Athenian Acropolis. The scene includes part of a beaked jug, a vase that in Minoan and Mycenaean religious realm was connected with libations of liquids. Based on an analysis of the iconography of libation jugs, the study tentatively proposes that the scene presents a ritual involving water libations and possibly a rare depiction of a showery cloud, allowing new insights into religious iconography of the 14th century BC.\*

*Keywords:* Kontopigado, kylix, libation jug, Mycenaean, pictorial scene, rain

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## Introduction

Pottery analysis at the Mycenaean settlement of Kontopigado, 5 km south of the Athenian Acropolis, offers insights into the local consumption patterns and pottery styles of the 14th to the early 12th centuries BC. The site hosted a flourishing pot-

tery workshop that produced vases for a great variety of uses and occasions along with vases indistinguishable from the local Athenian style. Pottery produced at Kontopigado was widely distributed and has been identified in many regions of Attica and in Salamis.<sup>1</sup> One of the rarest, but at the same time most interesting, locally manufactured pottery classes is the pictorial one. Only a handful of pictorial sherds have been identified at Kontopigado so far, mainly dating to the later phases of the settlement (Late Helladic [= LH] IIIC Early 1) (see below).<sup>2</sup> The rarity of earlier (LH IIIA2–LH IIIB) examples is not surprising since pottery with figural decoration from the Palatial period (LH IIIA–LH IIB) had a restricted distribution outside the large centres, with the majority coming from the Argolid.<sup>3</sup> Although pictorial pottery is relatively rare in Athens and Attica, a distinctive figural tradition existed in the region, and while this is still poorly understood, it has offered some of the rarest and most intriguing scenes of the Mycenaean Palatial period.<sup>4</sup>

An example of this rare pottery class is the subject of the present study. During the recent study of the material, a small sherd with the remains of a hitherto unknown scene was iden-

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<sup>1</sup> Gilstrap *et al.* 2016. For the discussion on pottery production at Kontopigado see Kaza-Papageorgiou *et al.* 2011; Gilstrap 2015; Gilstrap *et al.* 2016. For characteristic local styles see Kardamaki & Kaza-Papageorgiou 2018; Kardamaki 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2012, 167–168, fig. 11:30; 2017, 5 fig. 4, 17 fig. 15:27–29.

<sup>3</sup> Güntner 2000, 365, 368, 370–371, 377–378. See Steel 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Rare especially in comparison to Argive pictorial pottery. For the Attic figural tradition in vase painting see Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982; Güntner 2000, 364–365, 368–372; Paschalidis 2001; Benzi 2009, 21–23; Hiller 2011; Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2017, 28–30. “The Altar Krater” from the Agora is considered to be an Argive product (Immerwahr 1971, 249–250; Hiller 2011, 104), although this has not been confirmed by clay analysis.

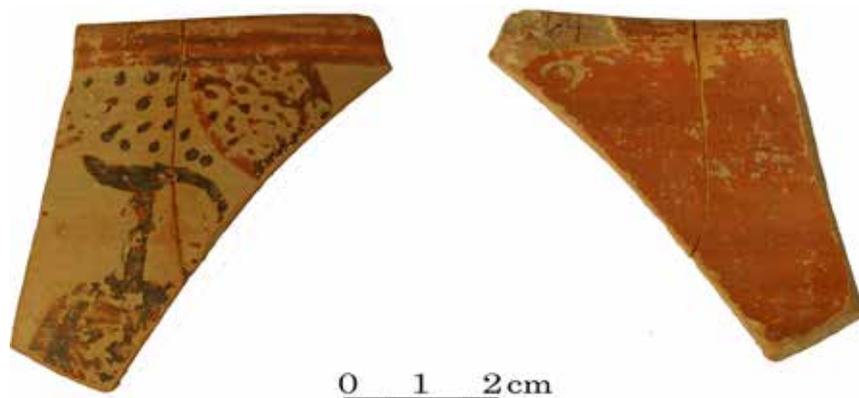


Fig. 1 (left). Pictorial kylix fragment from Kontopigado with a proposed ritual scene. Scale 1:1. Photograph and copyright: E. Kardamaki.

Fig. 2 (next page). Pictorial kylix fragment from Kontopigado with a proposed ritual scene. Scale 1:1. Drawing: V. Hachtmann, copyright E. Kardamaki.

tified. The scene under discussion, or what little is preserved of it, is painted on a LH IIIA2 kylix and seems to centre around a ritual involving a libation jug. The scene on the Kontopigado kylix offers new insights into the religious iconography of the 14th century BC, and at the same time, reveals the experimental and innovative character of Mycenaean painters at Kontopigado.

## Context of the find

The kylix fragment was found during the 1986–2000 excavations of Building Complex II (Figs 1–2).<sup>5</sup> The complex is situated on the slope of a gentle hill that was badly damaged by construction work for the modern highway during the 1930s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup> The uncovered Mycenaean occupation assigned to Building Complex II includes an elongated building (M3) with three or four subsequent rooms, later overbuilt by another structure (Room M4).<sup>7</sup> The construction and lifespan of M3 falls within LH IIIA2. The building was constructed on top of an artificial fill that sealed several pits of LH IIIA1 date, and in terms of its architectural design, it represents a typical example of Palatial period architecture.<sup>8</sup> Although the floor of the building was well preserved, the rooms were entirely devoid of *in situ* finds. Very little is known about the

LH IIIA occupation at Kontopigado. So far LH IIIA1 remains have only been identified below Building Complex II in the form of refuse pits, whereas in LH IIIA2 the settlement started to expand to lower parts of the hill, in the area known as Building Complex I. In the latter, LH IIIA2 remains were obliterated by later, LH IIIB and LH IIIC activities, and thus the character of the LH IIIA2 occupation remains obscure.<sup>9</sup>

The sherd with the partially preserved pictorial scene was identified during the study campaign in 2016. It was found in the space occupied by one of the rooms of Building M3, Room M3β, but within a hard reddish layer that extended over both the floors and the wall foundations of the building and contained large amounts of fragmented pottery. The bulk of the material from the reddish layer dates to LH IIIA2 with a few later, probably intrusive sherds. The reddish layer is probably material that was washed down from the east after the building had been abandoned, or it may have been part of a levelling layer that was laid down after M3 fell out of use but before Room M4 was constructed to the south, since M4 partly rests on this layer.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the fragment of the pictorial kylix under discussion, like the rest of the material from the reddish layer, was found in secondary deposition with its original context not known, but probably not far from Building M3.

## A rare pictorial scene on a kylix

The rim sherd probably derives from a semiglobular kylix FS 257, one of the most common painted drinking vessels

<sup>5</sup> Building Complexes I and II designate the two neighbouring settlement units of the site. Building Complex III is the area of the workshop installation: Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2012, 145 pl. 1; Kardamaki & Kaza-Papageorgiou 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Originally the hill of the Kontopigado settlement reached an altitude of 84 masl (metres above sea level). See Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2012, 141–145, pl. 1 for a detailed description.

<sup>7</sup> For M3 see Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2018, 3, fig. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Hiesel 1990; Darcque 2005. For the pottery from the artificial fill, see Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2018, 28–32.

<sup>9</sup> See Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2018, 32–34 for an overview of the relevant evidence.

<sup>10</sup> Kaza-Papageorgiou & Kardamaki 2018, 4.



of LH IIIA2.<sup>11</sup> Although kraters received the lion's share of pictorial scenes, several examples on the Greek Mainland and Crete suggest that LH IIIA2 kylikes were also integrated in the repertoire of the pictorial class.<sup>12</sup> The interior surface of the sherd shows traces of burnishing which, together with the colour and quality of the clay and paint, is consistent with a local production of the vessel.<sup>13</sup> The vessel's linear decoration, with a relatively wide exterior rim band and solidly painted interior, is not very typical for the shape, although a few parallels exist,<sup>14</sup> while the monochrome interior is often connected with decorative styles with a Cretan influence.<sup>15</sup> As an alternative to a kylix, a truncated stemmed bowl, which was

a frequent Attic shape, could also be considered, but the rim type fits better with a kylix.<sup>16</sup>

Only a small part of the original scene depicted on the kylix is preserved, a fact that determines the tentative character of the interpretations below. One of the items readily identified in the decoration is a closed vessel drawn as a solidly painted feature. The vessel, of which only the upper part is preserved, has a long, narrow neck and a vertical handle placed between rim and the—now missing—shoulder. The roughly triangular extension on the left top of the neck, opposite the handle, seems to indicate a spout facing left and probably allows the identification of the vessel as a beaked jug, a type that existed both in metal and clay versions. Small protrusions seen on both sides, close to the base of the neck, may be unintended or they may indicate the ledge found at the transition between the neck and shoulder of metal examples, or its imitation in almost all clay examples.<sup>17</sup> In clay, close parallels to the shape include Furumark's beaked jug types FS 143–145 of LH IIB and LH IIIA date, as earlier examples seem to have shorter neck and upraised handles (e.g., FS 140), as do most of the known metal examples.

More difficult to interpret is the poorly preserved painted decoration on the upper right part of the scene and above the beaked jug. It is a feature of roughly round/ovoid shape that is pendent from the rim band. It consists of an outer line with an interior fill in the shape of several small arcs filled with dots and small diagonal stripes that resemble the isolated semi-

<sup>11</sup> Mountjoy 1999. For the classification of pottery-shapes and motifs see Furumark 1941. The types classified by Furumark are commonly abbreviated as FS (Furumark shape) and FM (Furumark motif).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the LH IIIA2 kylix from Nichoria with the helmets in Sheldermine 1992. See Mountjoy 2017, 245 for a kylix with a pictorial decoration from Troy. Among the 299 vessels catalogued by Güntner and assigned to LH IIIA2, 79 belong to kylikes, and most of these kylikes (91%) are decorated with octopus. In total 160 vessels are kraters and amphoroid kraters (Güntner 2000, 326, table 3).

<sup>13</sup> The clay paste of the sherd is fine. The internal material revealed in fractures is light red (2.5YR 7/6) and the surface light red (7.5YR 7/4) according to the Munsell Color System 2010. Following the Munsell charts, paint on the interior surface is red; paint on the exterior surface ranges between brown/orange, brown and black. The surface shows occasional traces of smoothing/burnishing. Rim diameter: 16 cm. For burnishing as a surface treatment of local vases see Kardamaki & Kaza-Papageorgiou 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Wide exterior rim-band is more common on kylix FS 256 (see Mountjoy 1999, 539, fig. 194:185–188, 540, fig. 195:189) but it appears also on kylix FS 257 (Mountjoy 1999, 540, fig. 195:192; Thomas 2011, 180, fig. 5:7).

<sup>15</sup> Mountjoy 1999, 272–273, fig. 91:123–126 (Ayios Stephanos, Laconia).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mountjoy 1999, 542, fig. 196:202–205 (truncated stemmed bowl) with Mountjoy 1999, 539, fig. 195:192 and 194 (kylikes) for the shape of the rim.

<sup>17</sup> Preserved examples of beaked jugs in metal are rare (Matthäus 1980, 201, pls 36:303, 37:305–307, 74:2–3). The type of beaked jug with a tall neck is represented by silver and one gold example (Matthäus 1980, 205). For the Linear B symbol of the beaked jug see also Matthäus 1980, 205, pl. 78:6.

circles (FM 43) with a fill of scale pattern (FM 70) or the joining semicircles in triangular patch (FM 42).<sup>18</sup> The number of dots and stripes inside the arcs varies between one and three, which is unusual but not entirely unknown for the typical scale pattern. Directly to the left of the pendent motif, between the rim band and the neck of the beaked jug, there follows a group of dots and diagonal stripes arranged in roughly four rows of four, with the dots in the lowest rows being smaller. One possibility is that the arc-like motif and the group of the dots represent a—perhaps carelessly rendered—filling motif. Auxiliary motifs are very popular both in Mycenaean pictorial and abstract decoration and this is especially true for LH IIIA2. The placement of the arc-like motif under the rim band and attached to it is typical, in this respect, for the similar-looking triangular patch encountered on several pictorial kraters of this period.<sup>19</sup> Other auxiliary motifs that typically hang from rim bands are isolated semicircles or rock pattern (FM 34) but in most cases, these do not have an arc-like fill.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the dots, these are popular as filling motifs that run along rim bands or other bands, most often in single and more rarely in double rows, but they are not so common in LH IIIA2 pictorial pottery. Instead, dashes resembling a foliate band in single or double rows that fill gaps between various elements appear to be more common.<sup>21</sup> However, both dots and dashes are rare in groups of four rows, such as the dots on the scene under discussion.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it should be stressed that the combination of these two auxiliary motifs, namely the hanging arc-like motif and the group of dots above the beaked jug, is rather unusual and is not encountered among published examples of pictorial pottery.

Alternatively, the two features rendered above the beaked jug may not be auxiliary, but an integral part of the scene depicted. It has often been acknowledged that one of the most common associations evoked in the Minoan and Mycenaean

iconography of closed vessels such as the beaked jugs or ewers relates to rituals involving liquids and libations.<sup>23</sup> It is tentatively considered here that the dots above the beaked jug are liquid drops. In this case, the pendent motif to the right may represent the source of the liquid drops, perhaps a rain cloud?

The other painted elements visible on the scene are even more poorly preserved, making their identification somewhat tenuous. To the left of the vase and higher than the spout, there are two parallel diagonal lines of equal width. These are much thinner than the dots and stripes painted above the beaked jug and probably represent a different feature. The tips of two similar thin, horizontal and parallel lines are seen on the inner side of the handle. Based on their placement close to the handle, these may represent the hand of a figure handling the vase, as hands rendered as two or three and only rarely more thin lines are relatively common in Mycenaean pictorial painting.<sup>24</sup>

The preserved rim fragment makes up no more than 8% of the total estimated perimeter of the vessel. The original scene on this side of the vessel is estimated to have occupied approximately 40% of the whole perimeter, excluding the area of the handles, and so the fragment comprises around 20% of the original scene. Based on this, and the fact that the sherd shows no traces of a handle attachment, the partially preserved scene with the beaked jug seems to have been placed in the centre of one of the two decorative zones of the kylix, with the remainder consisting of a suggested figure to the right holding the ewer and an unknown feature to the left. The tight placement of the painted features was probably dictated by the limited space available along the vertical and horizontal axis. With regard to the depicted scene, it is argued here that it may represent a ritual involving water, perhaps a rain ritual, but as the scene has no known parallels in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography (see below) this interpretation should remain hypothetical.

## The scene from Kontopigado in the wider iconographic context

The partially preserved scene on the Kontopigado kylix may constitute the first pictorial evidence on pottery of a weather phenomenon. Weather phenomena and rain in particular are

<sup>18</sup> Triangular patch, FM 42:33. Dots are very popular as a fill motif for the scale pattern. The latter is classified as surface decoration that extends over the whole surface of the decorative zone, bordered only by features such as handles and handle decoration. The motif is attested from LH IIA to LH IIIC Early, but it is most characteristic of LH IIIA2 (Mountjoy 1986, 83, fig. 99:6). On the other hand, triangular patches usually do not have a fill (cf. Steel 1994, 203 fig. 2, 206 fig. 4).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g., Steel 1994, 203 fig. 2 (triangular patch).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 14 cat. no. III:2 (isolated semicircles and hanging rocks), 20 cat. no. III:16 (rock pattern), 21–22 cat. no. III:21–22 (isolated semicircles). Other motifs such as the Mycenaean flower are rarer (Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 31 cat. no. IV:40).

<sup>21</sup> Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 30–31 cat. no. IV:36 (row of dashes between bulls), 33 cat. no. IV:67 (dashes above reins).

<sup>22</sup> In one krater there are two parallel lines of dashes (Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 20 cat. no. III:14).

<sup>23</sup> For a thorough discussion, see Peatfield 1995.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g., Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 41–42 cat. no. V:19, 42 cat. no. V:23, 44 cat. no. V:32, 46 cat. no. V:39; Sakellarakis 1992, 25 cat. no. 11 (LH IIIB), 30–31 cat. no. 21 (LH IIIC). The hybrid figures from the Kameiros Rhyton have two short lines as fingers (Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 154–155, cat. no. XII:17). See also Chatzina *et al.* 2023, 22, fig. 3 for the newly published Handshake Krater from Tiryns (LH IIIC Early).

curiously absent from Minoan and Mycenaean iconography. This is surprising as natural phenomena (rain, thunder, lunar eclipses, meteorite showers) were perceived as the intervention of gods in several ancient cultures.<sup>25</sup> Although celestial objects and the sky, most often shown as a single or double wavy line, especially in seal designs,<sup>26</sup> are well documented in Aegean iconography, clouds are very rare. One exception is the possible depiction of clouds on the fresco painting of the miniature frieze in the Northeast Bastion at Ayia Irini from the very beginning of the Late Bronze Age. The clouds are there rendered as white wavy lines and, according to Lyvia Morgan, they represent a unique example of an experimental artistic approach otherwise met only in much later periods.<sup>27</sup> In the case of Kontopigado, the scale pattern used to possibly delineate the showery cloud resembles the motif often used for the sea,<sup>28</sup> while the stripes and drops that have been tentatively identified as raindrops represent a common way to depict liquids and drops of liquid.<sup>29</sup> In seal designs small shower-like motifs or dots close to or under a rhyton may have represented drops of liquid,<sup>30</sup> and in the Ayia Triada Larnax, the red stripes surely indicate blood flowing from the sacrificed bull.<sup>31</sup>

The partially preserved scene on the Kontopigado kylix broadens our perspective of Mycenaean ritual iconography which, in the case of Mycenaean vase painting, is somewhat rare.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, specific elements of the scene have a long tradition in Aegean art and ritual iconography. This is, for instance, the case with the beaked jug. Libation vessels such as ewers and beaked jugs are well attested in seal engravings but are rare in other media.<sup>33</sup> In vase painting, ewers appear as early as Middle Minoan (= MM) II in Crete, while in Mycenaean iconography, they are incorporated in proces-

sions, ritual scenes and mythological compositions as libation vases or as part of banqueting sets.<sup>34</sup> Most jugs are depicted on kraters, where they either appear as floating motifs (e.g., a chariot procession on the LH IIIB Souda Krater),<sup>35</sup> or combined with other vases in what seem to be feasting assemblages (e.g., the LH IIIA1 Sunshade Krater).<sup>36</sup> On a LH IIIC krater from Lefkandi, the ewer is not depicted as a floating motif, but is carried by a figure followed by an adult sphinx as part of a mythical scene.<sup>37</sup> The ewers in these scenes are rendered with an ovoid or round shape and torus base and they are either solidly painted or decorated with horizontal parallel lines. Typologically, the Kontopigado jug is closer to the ewer from the Souda Krater, although the latter has no spout.<sup>38</sup>

More elucidating for the ritual iconography of the ewer are seal engravings. The earliest examples of the representation of ewers on seals date to Early Minoan (= EM) II, but the bulk of the material comes from Middle Minoan (= MM) III and Late Minoan (= LM) I.<sup>39</sup> The classification of ewer-related iconography has been presented in a thorough study by Veit Stürmer. Generally, two broad categories of ewer representations can be distinguished, namely narrative and non-narrative compositions, with the majority belonging to the second group.<sup>40</sup> In non-narrative scenes, ewers usually appear as a single element combined with leaves and plant motifs or cultic symbols.<sup>41</sup> In narrative scenes, the ewer is closely associated with the Minoan demon or, to a much lesser extent, with humans (e.g., the Naxos Seal).<sup>42</sup>

The Minoan demon or so-called Genius, a hybrid creature that was adopted from the Near East and probably a descend-

<sup>25</sup> In Hittite religion rain, as well as thunder and lightning, are not only attributes of the Weather God, but occasionally they may be treated as divine in their own right (see Hundley 2014, 178). Recent anthropological studies suggest a stronger connection between dry climates and beliefs in gods that control weather. This seems to reflect a greater anxiety about drought in relation to other extreme natural events such as floods (Ember *et al.* 2021, 262 fig. 1, 268–270).

<sup>26</sup> Sun and full moon disc, crescent moon: Crowley 2016, 90, pl. XXXIV:1–2 and 7–12. Sky: Crowley 2016, 90, pl. XXXIV:1, 3, 4 and 10–12; Davis & Stocker 2016, 646, fig. 12 (Ring 4 of the Griffin Warrior).

<sup>27</sup> Morgan 2018, 282; 2020, 184–185, 228–229 fig. 7.1A–B.

<sup>28</sup> See Ring 2 with female figures flanking a shrine from the Tomb of the Griffin Warrior (Davis & Stocker 2016, 640 and esp. n. 33, 641, fig. 10 for parallels on the net pattern fill of the sea). See also *CMS V*, suppl. IA, no. 142 (master impression).

<sup>29</sup> Crowley 2016, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Crowley 2016, 94, pl. XXXIX:58, 66–67.

<sup>31</sup> Long 1974, 62, pls 30–31.

<sup>32</sup> Benzi 2009, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Stürmer 1985, 120.

<sup>34</sup> For early representations of the motif in vase painting see the MM II Kamares hole-mouthed jar with globular ewers as single motifs (Stürmer 1985, 126–127, fig. 12). For the Middle Cycladic bridge-spouted jug with the libation scene, see Papagiannopoulou 2008, 441–444; Blakolmer 2016, 69–70, fig. 4:1. For discussion of ewers in Mycenaean vase painting in connection with rituals, see Benzi 2009, 16. For a discussion on ritual feasting in vase painting, see Wright 2004, 168–169.

<sup>35</sup> Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 41, no. V:19. The arcades are reduced as decorative motifs, a pattern that appears more frequently after LH IIIB Middle.

<sup>36</sup> Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 21–22, no. III:21; see also Güntner 2000, 337–338.

<sup>37</sup> Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 137, no. XI:65; Rutter 2014, 202.

<sup>38</sup> The ewer painted on the Ayia Triada Sarcophagus is decorated with spirals. Long 1974, pls 30–31.

<sup>39</sup> This is especially the case for the so-called talismanic seals, see Stürmer 1985, 128–133. For the ewer in talismanic seals see Onasoglou 1985, 12–22.

<sup>40</sup> Stürmer 1985, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Stürmer 1985, 119, 123–133 (Group B).

<sup>42</sup> Pini 1975, 483, no. 608; Stürmer 1985, 120–123 (Group A); Rehak 1995, 217.

ant of the Egyptian *Taweret*, was one of the most popular iconographic themes in Minoan Crete.<sup>43</sup> Demons carrying ewers appear in a great variety of scenes and seem to constitute a well-established motif. Genii hold ewers in libation scenes next to altars, palm trees or other cultic symbols, or they carry ewers in processions towards a female deity, while in other scenes they pour libations from ewers onto palm trees and altars.<sup>44</sup> In the unique scene depicted on the stone triton from Malia, two demons are involved in a ritual identified as “ablution and purification”, in which the first Genius is drinking from its paws the liquid poured from the double-mouthed jug held by the second Genius.<sup>45</sup>

The close association between the Genius and the ewer is established early in Minoan Crete and is likely to relate to the special attributes of the creature and its Near Eastern descent.<sup>46</sup> Although of a minor status as a deity, the *Taweret* enjoyed great popularity, especially at the lower echelons of society, and was worshipped as a protector of labour and a deity of the underworld.<sup>47</sup> In Minoan Crete the Genius was perhaps considered to be a fertility demon.<sup>48</sup> Sir Arthur Evans suggested that the demon appears as the protector of vegetation and had the magic power to bring rain during periods of drought.<sup>49</sup> With regard to its role as a bringer of rain, the libation jug seems to represent an attribute of the Minoan demon, symbolizing his abilities to fertilize the earth and vegetation.<sup>50</sup> This is also suggested by the fact that the Genius keeps its characteristic “ewer-carrying” stance even in scenes where the vase is omitted, leading to the emergence of a rather static motif, an otherwise rather uncommon development in the context of Minoan iconography, as

Fritz Blakolmer points out.<sup>51</sup> In seal iconography, ewers have an ovoid shape, while those with a globular shape are less frequent, and they may also have a distinct torus base and collar on the neck that imitates metallic prototypes. The jug appearing on a Minoan carnelian seal from a chamber tomb at LH III Mycenae represents a good parallel for the ewer from the Kontopigado kylix, although the jug there has a more globular body.<sup>52</sup>

In summary, within the framework of Minoan iconography the ewer is, with very few exceptions, almost always related to a demon and this iconographic tradition was probably also preserved in the Mycenaean world.<sup>53</sup> This would explain the rarity of libation scenes in Mycenaean vase painting, as the Minoan demon was very rarely depicted on pottery. In the Mycenaean Palatial period, the Genius was predominantly restricted to exclusive arts such as wall-paintings, ivories and ornaments,<sup>54</sup> with only one possible example of the creature painted on a pottery vessel, a LH IIIC Middle fragment of a krater from Melos.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the fragment preserves only the lower part of the creature.

Very occasionally, however, hybrid creatures were incorporated in the ritual iconography of Mycenaean vase painting, and it is perhaps no coincidence that one of the best-known, and most peculiar ritual scenes includes figures that resemble Genii (*Fig. 3*).<sup>56</sup> This scene occurs on the conical rhyton from Kameiros on Rhodes. It shows a procession of three boar-headed figures with curled tails, the left- and right-hand of which are holding out an unknown object and a kylix respectively, while the front part of the middle figure is not preserved. There is no agreement regarding the exact nature of the creatures. They have been interpreted as masked dancers, animals, Genii or hybrid animal-human creatures.<sup>57</sup> Margaret Anne Violet Gill regarded them as Minoan demons although she stresses that the boar-like upper part would not have been common for a Genius.<sup>58</sup> Martin P. Nilsson suggested that they are a later development of the Minoan demon, but Mario Benzi noted that the absence of a dorsal appendage and the presence of the tail in the boar-headed figures make this identification unlikely.<sup>59</sup> Benzi, on the other hand, drew attention to the so-called “lion man”—a similar creature to the ones depicted on the rhyton from Kameiros on Rhodes, but lacking a tail—who appeared together with a Genius on a sealing from the Demon Seals area at Knossos, thus convincingly provid-

<sup>43</sup> Gill 1964; Weingarten 1991; Philipps 2008; Blakolmer 2015a; 2015b, 206; 2024, 113–116, 128–129; Krzyszkowska 2005, 90, 148–149; 2021; Marinatos, N. 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Gill 1964; Weingarten 1991, 22 figs 1–3; Rehak 1995, 217–219; Benzi 2009, 10; Blakolmer 2015b, 198–200; 2024, 115–116.

<sup>45</sup> Baurain 1985; Weingarten 1991, 12, 24, fig. 10; Rehak 1995, 217 sees a distant descendant in *CMS XI*, no. 295; Blakolmer 2015b, 200, 201 fig. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Weingarten 1991, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Weingarten 1991; Benzi 2009, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Marinatos, S. 1966; Weingarten 1991.

<sup>49</sup> Evans 1901, 101, 168; 1935, 452–455; Likewise, Marinatos, S. 1966, 265 ascribes to the Genius the properties of “fertility demon, waterer, promoter of vegetation”. See also Nilsson 1950, 381–382. For discussion on the role and character of Genius see van Straten 1969; Sambin 1989; Weingarten 1991; Marinatos, N. 1993; Marinatos, N. 2010; 2021; Philipps 2008; Benzi 2009. See Blakolmer 2015b, 205–206 for discussion.

<sup>50</sup> Weingarten 1991, 10–12 advocates a role of the Genius with ewer in rites of lustration closer to Egyptian prototypes but does not exclude a role as a protector of vegetation for the later periods of the Genius iconography.

<sup>51</sup> Blakolmer 2015b, 206.

<sup>52</sup> Stürmer 1985, 124 no. B.1.4, fig. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Stürmer 1985, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Rehak 1995, 229–230.

<sup>55</sup> Benzi 2009, 9, fig. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Benzi 1992; 2009, 12, fig. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Koehl 2006, 174–175; Benzi 2009, 12–13 for related discussion.

<sup>58</sup> Gill 1964.

<sup>59</sup> Nilsson 1950, 376–380; Gill 1964; Benzi 2009, 12–13.

ing a link between the Minoan demon and the boar-like figure.<sup>60</sup> The unknown object held by the left-hand figure on the Kameiros Rhyton has been identified as a mirror or a musical instrument such as a rattle, while the whole scene has been interpreted as a ritual involving dancing.<sup>61</sup> Here another possibility is put forward, namely that this left-hand figure could be holding a vase, possibly an ovoid/piriform rhyton with a long narrow tip. It could represent an early handleless type,<sup>62</sup> or the one-handed type with the short neck common during the 14th century BC, with the vertical handle being depicted in the area of the vase that is not preserved.<sup>63</sup> This identification could explain the handling of the object by its lower part—in contrast to the handling of the kylix by its handle—which could imply blocking of the immersion hole to keep the liquid contents in the vase.<sup>64</sup> In this case, the scene could show the procession of hybrid-Genii or boar-headed figures (or masked humans) holding vases as part of a ritual scene with libations.

From the discussion above it can be surmised that in these decorative schemes, rituals including libation jugs were mostly conducted by the Minoan demon, while libations by humans were much more rarely depicted (the Naxos Seal). We can only speculate on the nature of the tentatively identified figure holding the libation jug in the Kontopigado scene, but since the Genius was rarely adopted in Mycenaean vase painting, the question arises whether this could have been another hybrid or boar-headed figure like the ones depicted on the contemporary conical rhyton from Rhodes. This type of boar-headed figure has been associated with and represents a close iconographic parallel to the Minoan demon, the main carrier of libation jugs in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography, and at the same time, it appears in a contemporary ritual scene involving a musical instrument such as rattle or as suggested here a rhyton. The preserved part of the hand of the figure in the Kontopigado scene suggests that the vase was grasped by the lower part of the handle, probably suggesting that the vase was outstretched or raised by the figure to collect the liquid drops. This would be a rather atypical handling of a libation vase, but it brings to mind the Kameiros Rhyton—even if the creatures there are not actually touching the objects.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the ewer in the Kontopigado scene must have been rendered over-



Fig. 3. Kameiros Rhyton from Rhodes with procession of boar-headed figures. After Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 154–155, no. XII:17.

sized in relation to the figure carrying it, as indicated by the available space, and this contrasts with most known painted scenes with vases. Rather than this being a miscalculation by the potter, it was possibly intended to direct attention to the libation vase containing water—symbolic of the regenerative power of life—that formed the central part of the ritual scene.

## Possible rain rituals in the Mycenaean palace period

The Kontopigado scene may represent a new theme in pictorial vase painting that drew on early traditions and motifs of the Minoan period, and it may also allow us to approach old scenes in other media from a new perspective. One of the main questions in this discussion is whether there is any indication in iconographic or written media that rituals related to rain were performed during the Mycenaean period, as part of a fertility cult aiming to regenerate nature.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps related to this question is the famous scene with the Genii on the sig-

<sup>60</sup> Benzi 2009, 12, fig. 4; *CMS* II.8 no. 200; Gill 1964.

<sup>61</sup> See Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982, 154–155 no. XII:17 for discussion.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Koehl 2006, 24–26, figs 6:96, 7:123 (Type II handleless, MM III–LM I).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Koehl 2006, 44–45, fig. 15:388–399, 15:408, pls 31:393, 31:397, 32:407 (type III, rim-handled/shoulder-handled piriform rhyta, *floruit* of type LH IIIA–B).

<sup>64</sup> See Koehl 2006 for the use of conical rhyta.

<sup>65</sup> In most cases, Genii carry or handle the jugs with their two paws, from the upper part of the handle and from the bottom of the vase.

Very rarely they hold the libation vase from the base of the handle, as in the Kourion Hydria (Stürmer 1985, 121, fig. 1).

<sup>66</sup> See Nilsson 1950 on fertility cult in the centre of Minoan and Mycenaean religion.



Fig. 4. Signet ring from Tiryns with a procession of Genii. After CMS I, no. 179.

net ring from the Tiryns Treasure,<sup>67</sup> that together with other magnificent artefacts represented the heirlooms (*keimilia*) of a prominent LH IIIC family (Fig. 4).<sup>68</sup> Notably the scene shows the procession of the Genii with libation jugs heading towards a seated deity, with the horizontal, frieze-like arrangement of the scene possibly suggesting its derivation from other media, in particular mural art.<sup>69</sup> The sky in this scene is shown as a double wavy border enclosing the crescent moon and the sun, but also leaf-like motifs.

Of all the features shown in the sky, the dotted background has been discussed the least.<sup>70</sup> A common notion, following the suggestion of Georg Karo, is that these small elongated dots are stars, a hypothesis that would fit well with the presence of the sun and moon in the scene.<sup>71</sup> However, in light of the suggested interpretation of the kylix scene from Kontopi-

gado, an alternative hypothesis may be that these small dots represent raindrops, and that the scene shows a showery sky above a procession of Genii carrying ewers. In fact, the suggestion that the elongated drops did not fit the iconography used for stars and instead were meant to represent raindrops was made almost a hundred years ago by Valentin Müller, one of the first scholars to discuss the scene.<sup>72</sup> In this case, the simultaneous appearance of the celestial symbols, the moon and sun, may have had a meaning other than simply indicating a specific time of day, as has been suggested,<sup>73</sup> or the symbolic presentation of the most important celestial objects as part of a religious scene. The presence of the sun and the crescent moon in the signet ring of Tiryns may have been necessary to distinguish the water of the earth (sea) from water from the sky (rain) and to make clear that the background shows the sky and not the sea, as similar motifs could be used for both features in engravings.<sup>74</sup> The interpretation of the filling as raindrops in the sky would fit well with the role of the Genii as rain bearers and protectors of the vegetation, symbolically represented by the branches or wheat motifs on the upper and lower part of the scene.<sup>75</sup> The scene could thus present a rain ritual with the procession of Genii carrying libations to the goddess and asking for rain and fertilization of the land.<sup>76</sup>

A possible indication for the worship of weather gods/goddesses or rain rituals during the Mycenaean period may be the fairly secure Mycenaean cult places on mountain peaks found in locations where Zeus was later worshipped or rain worship or rain rituals were later performed.<sup>77</sup> Such cult places—often paralleled to Cretan peak sanctuaries—are known from Arachnaion, Oros in Aegina, Mount Lykaion<sup>78</sup> and finally in

<sup>67</sup> Karo 1930; CMS I, no. 179.

<sup>68</sup> Maran 2006. On further discussion of the Tiryns Treasure see also Maran 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Vermeule & Karageorghis 1982; Immerwahr 1989; Rehak 1995, 226. Following Younger 1985, 53, Rehak considers the iconography of the ring consistent with a LH II dating (Rehak 1995, 224–226). However, an earlier dating cannot be excluded: see Xenaki-Sakellariou 1989 who suggests that the ring was manufactured in LM I.

<sup>70</sup> Such scenes would have been inspired by wall-paintings, see Boulotis 2013, 106–107 fig. 14, who, however, in the transfer of the scene to frescoes has omitted the stripes.

<sup>71</sup> Karo 1930, 121. Evans 1935, 461 regarding to the dots and dashes of the sky as a moot point. Nilsson 1950, 314 talks about “small dots or points, perhaps meant to represent stars”. Gill 1964, 13 refers to the “speckled sky-scape” of the scene that has no parallels. Crowley 2016 does not include these features in celestial signs. Marinatos, N. 2021, 217 on upper part of ring scene as celestial sphere (sun, moon and sheaves as star-clusters or comets but does not elaborate on dots).

For connection of Genius with sun disc see also the lentoid seal from the Griffin Warrior Grave at Pylos (Stocker & Davis 2020, 294).

<sup>72</sup> This hypothesis was quickly rejected by Karo and Rodenwaldt and later forgotten. Müller 1927, 9–11.

<sup>73</sup> Marinatos, S. 1966.

<sup>74</sup> For this use of celestial bodies in Near Eastern religious iconography see Mayer-Opificius 1984, 189–236; Ziffer 2019, esp. 9–12.

<sup>75</sup> Marinatos, S. 1966. For an alternative interpretation regarding the wheat on the Tiryns signet ring see, Kyriakidis 2005, 140, 147–150 who suggests that floating objects of various types on Minoan sealings represent constellations. His first category of floating objects, dubbed “spikes”, comprises wheat-like floating objects such as the ones seen on the Tiryns ring CMS I, no. 179.

<sup>76</sup> For discussion see Marinatos, S. & Hirmer 1973, 178 no. 229; Wright 2004, 164–165 fig. 16 (Feasting).

<sup>77</sup> Langdon 1976; Salavouira 2018, 79. However, Zeus was not always worshipped as a rain god (Hyetios or Omvrios). See Eder 2016, 4–9 for an overview of peak sanctuaries and sanctuaries at crossroads.

<sup>78</sup> Romano & Voyatzis 2014.

Attica on the west side of the Hymmetos, where the altar of the Omvrios Zeus (showery Zeus) was located.<sup>79</sup>

The cult place of Omvrios Zeus, where people brought Zeus offerings and prayed for rain, may serve as an example of rain worship that, as Merle K. Langdon remarks, needs to be distinguished from rain magic.<sup>80</sup> The latter centres around rituals intended to magically produce rain and was quite common in ancient Greece. A famous example referred to by Pausanias is the priest of Zeus in Mount Lykaion, who stirred up dust with an oak branch that then came back as rain.<sup>81</sup>

On the one hand, relevant evidence for rain worship or weather gods is missing in the written record. Although the belief in Zeus as a rain god in the Mycenaean period is disputed, this cannot exclude another type of rain worship or another deity.<sup>82</sup>

From the Linear B record, one case has been proposed as a possible religious cult centred around fertility and rain. This is the case of “*dipsisjo*” (and the related word *dipsisjewijo*) meaning the *Thirsty*.<sup>83</sup> The term occurs in six tablets of the Fr Series at Pylos, which in view of their context (association with deities and offerings), relate to the religious realm.<sup>84</sup> The term is used to describe a group of people related to a specific location and has been interpreted as the cult personnel of a sanctuary dedicated to Dipsios.<sup>85</sup> *Dipsios* translated as *Thirsty* could then be a deity related to the Earth or the Underworld.<sup>86</sup> Another hypothesis, proposed by Spyridon Marinatos and followed by Christos Boulotis, identifies *dipsisjo* as a religious festival dedicated to a fertility cult. According to Marinatos’ hypothesis,

the Minoan Genius with his rain-bringing properties played an important role in this cult.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, although rain worship cannot be deduced with certainty from the written sources, it may still have existed as a cult in the Mycenaean period, or rain rituals could have been performed as part of larger religious festivals dedicated to fertility. Rain magic, on the other hand, constitutes a timeless phenomenon, and may occur especially during times of crisis, for example, in periods of drought or insufficient rainfall.<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusions

The sherd from Kontopigado may present a frustratingly small part of a hitherto unknown ritual scene with a libation jug. Moreover, a hypothesis that has been tentatively entertained here is that the ritual involved the collection of rain water and was performed by a hybrid creature that was descended from or related to the Minoan demon, a minor deity that was closely connected with the act of libation in Cretan and Mycenaean imagery. If this suggestion is correct, the theme of the scene would reflect one of the most important aspects and concerns in the lives of the communities that depended on rain and often had to deal with the threat of dry seasons.<sup>89</sup> However, in light of the poor preservation of the scene this suggestion should remain hypothetical.<sup>90</sup>

The scene from Kontopigado may also reflect processes of palatial expansion over rural territories. As already noted above, mountain peaks were the locations in which rain rituals may have taken place and the mountain peak of Hymmetos or other open-air cult places may have served as the location of rain worship for the Athenians. Thus, the depicted scene could reveal the expansion of a central palatial authority, in this case located on the Athenian Acropolis, on a political and religious level by institutionalizing aspects of a more popular religion such as mountain peaks or rain magic,<sup>91</sup> a process that has been most profoundly observed in Crete during the Neo-

<sup>79</sup> Langdon 1976; Eder 2016. For other possible peak sanctuaries in Attica during the Early and Late Bronze Age see Ruppenstein 2011, 229 (Mount Parnes). Langdon 1976, 86–87 was not entirely convinced of the existence of this cult during the Mycenaean period, mainly because the existence of peak sanctuaries was not evident in Mycenaean Greece and due to the small number of Mycenaean pottery sherds (75 sherds are reported as Mycenaean, see Langdon 1976, 74–76). However, she admits that the presence of Mycenaean material is otherwise difficult to explain. Recent studies convincingly suggest that cult activity started at the site during the Early Helladic period (see Ruppenstein 2011, 228–230; Kakavogianni 2001; 2020; Eder 2016).

<sup>80</sup> Langdon 1976, 85–86. For rain magic see Gruppe 1906.

<sup>81</sup> Paus. VIII, 38, 4. Langdon 1976, 86. Rain magic is a phenomenon that occurs widely across cultures (Ember *et al.* 2021, 260).

<sup>82</sup> Lupack 2012.

<sup>83</sup> Marinatos, S. 1966, 267.

<sup>84</sup> Shelmerdine 1985; Lupack 2014, 167.

<sup>85</sup> Bennett 1958; Adrados 1964; Hiller 1981; Lupack 2014, 168–169. Weilhartner 2005, 123 (cult personnel).

<sup>86</sup> Guthrie 1959 (Underworld); Adrados 1968 (Earth).

<sup>87</sup> Marinatos, S. 1966, 265–274. In this respect, S. Marinatos (1966, 269) identified the scene on the Tiryns Ring as the most interesting Dipsios scene, a ritual for a specific calendar month for promoting rain. Boulotis 2013, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Ember *et al.* 2021. See Salavoura 2018 for a thorough discussion of probable peak cults in the Mycenaean period.

<sup>89</sup> For the significance of rain and weather gods and weather cult in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, see Hutter 1997; Schwemer 2008; Hundley 2014.

<sup>90</sup> For Athens, see Immerwahr 1971; Pantelidou-Gkophia 1975; Mountjoy 1993; for Kontopigado, see Kardamaki & Kaza-Papageorgiou 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Hägg 1981; Salavoura 2018, 80–81. See also Eder 2016, 5, 8–9 for discussion.

palatial period with the centralization of the Minoan peak sanctuaries.<sup>92</sup> Though the scale and extent of the phenomenon in Crete cannot be paralleled in the Greek Mainland,<sup>93</sup> the manipulation by the central authority or interference in the realm of popular religion as a strategic step towards territorial or ideological expansion may be.

The date of the kylix in LH IIIA2 coincides with the establishment of an important industrial centre and workshop that, based on its size, would represent an important asset of the palace and also an important phase during which the Athenian Acropolis increased its control in Athens and Attica. The strong link between the local settlement and the centre of the Acropolis and the promotion of common ideas and beliefs would also find expression within the framework of social events during which conspicuous drinking sets were used, such as the kylix with the rare ritual scene presented here.

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<sup>92</sup> Peatfield 1990, 127; Blakolmer 2014, 125.

<sup>93</sup> Eder 2016, notes the similarities between Minoan and Mycenaean peak sanctuaries, although Salavoura 2018, 78–79 underlines mainly differences.

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