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The offering and storage of the “first fruits” (aparchē-aparchai) in the cults of Early Iron Age Greece: archaeological evidence, mythical echoes and epic tradition

Alexandra Pentoti

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THE OFFERING AND STORAGE OF THE "FIRST FRUITS" (*APARCHĒ-APARCHAI*) IN THE CULTS OF EARLY IRON AGE GREECE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE, MYTHICAL ECHOES AND EPIC TRADITION*

Summary

The present study examines food storage in ritual and cult places across the central and south Aegean and mainland Greece between the end of the Mycenaean civilization and the rise of the Greek polis (12th-early 7th c. BCE). It particularly focuses on the ritual practice of the offering of the "first fruits" (*aparchai*), combining the available archaeological evidence with literary knowledge —especially the epic tradition— in light of the interwoven relation between the myth and the historical, social, and religious life of early Greek communities. Although cult practices are frequently linked to a wide range of social, economic, and cultural variables, the offering of *aparchai* appears to have been a defining feature of agricultural communities throughout history. The research data of the EIA reveal associations with particular fertility and chthonic deities (*Potnia theron*, Demeter, Artemis, Zeus, Apollo and Dionysus), as well as with other ritual practices, such as communal meals and dances.

Keywords: Religious storage, cult practices, aparchai, votive pithoi, dance rituals, fertility and chthonic cults.

1. Introduction: Agriculture and ritual

Since the birth of agriculture, the cultivation and storage of crops have been vital to the survival and evolution of human societies. The fact, actually, that sacred and storage spaces are frequently related may be seen as an expression of a deeper metaphysical human need to safeguard the production under divine power. Agricultural rituals rarely leave visible archaeological traces; especially in prehistory and protohistory, they can only be read in specific symbols and artifacts. Nonetheless, they are likely to have existed since the earliest agricultural communities associated with all the stages of cultivation, from sowing and harvesting

* This article is based on the research conducted as part of my Ph.D. dissertation (Pentoti 2023) at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens under the supervision of Em. Prof. P. Valavanis †, Em. Prof. N. Kourou and Prof. A. Mazarakis Ainian, and summarizes a large part of the body and the conclusions of the thesis. The few lines that follow are dedicated to the memory of my supervisor as the minimum tribute for his support, guidance, trust and integral warmth; without his presence, this thesis would not have been possible: "Time flows, passes, wanders away; sometimes in a straight line, sometimes in an eternal circular course; intense and pervasive or slow and ritual like the steps of the sacred dances; inevitable, endless, father of everything. But time, beyond and above the timelessness of human existence, captures what we leave behind us as a quest, a trace of our small passage in its circular or rectilinear journey. In the continuous and undivided course of time, our life is a flash —but we can still make it" (Pentoti 2023, 351).

the crop to the final stage of storage (fig. 1), although it has been suggested that they may have originated from much earlier periods of foraging and gathering wild plants[1].

The early written records of the Linear B tablets, as well as the epic tradition that solidified by the end of the 8th c. BCE, provide additional evidence for the existence of these agricultural rituals in the Aegean and the Greek mainland[2]. Even if the epics are poetic creations with intense mythical elements and do not constitute a reliable source of actual historical events, they can serve as a valuable tool for studying the social, ideological, and religious beliefs of the EIA communities[3].

Although cult practices are frequently linked to a wide range of social, economic, and cultural variables, the offering of *aparchai* (in ancient Greek: *ἀπαρχαί*) appears to have been a common feature in the agricultural societies throughout history, despite the variations in cult structures or the worshipped deities. In Eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia, the ritual is attested by ancient written sources since the Bronze Age in Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Hittite cult practices, as well as in the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations that pervade the Aegean and shape the Greek mainland[4]. The significance of *aparchai* reflects the universal human impulse for sharing food and lies in the primary need to ensure both the fertility of the land and flocks, as well as the continuation of life through the abundance offered by a rich harvest.

As Kyriakidis says, "By religious storage we mean donation of goods to the supernatural. Even if the latter is a fiction, it can still be considered an active agent for those who do believe in it"[5]. *Aparchai*, the "first-fruits" of the new harvest, are the primary form of gift to the gods, who are considered the first of everything. It is thus the earliest form of sacrifice: a bloodless, ritual, sacrificial offering symbolically given as something "new and pure" to the superior divine forces for blessing, protection, and gratitude[6].

These offerings may initially consist of seasonal agricultural products, such as wheat, barley, fresh or dried fruit, wine, and olive oil, ranging in scale from simple gifts in humble agrarian settings to organized donations to sanctuaries and temples, with regard to public or communal cults[7]. Over time, the idea of "first offerings" was

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[1] Sarpaki 2009, 59; Cauvin 1994, especially chapters 3, 7 and 11. Cf. Garfinkel 2003.

[2] These are further supported by later written sources and ethnographic information regarding the wealth of such practices in traditional Greece, deeply rooted in time.

[3] Historical and archaeological research in recent decades accepts that the Homeric world largely reflects the societies of the EIA. See Drerup 1969, 128-133; Snodgrass 1971, 352, 376, 416-435; 1977, 24; Finley 1979, 3-5, 55-56; Murray 1980, 38-68; Carlier 1984, 210-214; Coldstream 1984, 10; Dickinson 1986; Morris 1988; Powell 1991, 195-196; Schefold 1991; Crielaard 1995; Morris and Powell 1997, 535-559, 645-648; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 358-360; 2000, 111-113, 147-155, 172-178, 199-224; Mossé 2001, 45; Schuller 2001, 151; Rougier-Blanc 2005, 339-341.

[4] Gilula 1974, 43-44; Hallo and Younger 1997, 220 §15; 527, lines 47, 76; 2000, 249, inscr. 2.99A, lines 7-25. In Mycenaean Linear B tablets a series of offerings to the sanctuaries and gods is recorded, including animals, cereals, wine, cheese, olives, honey, leathers, wool and perfumed oils. Burkert 1985, 43-46; Palaima 2004.

[5] Kyriakidis 2001, 129.

[6] Pentoti 2023, 15, 284-285. Cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1160a; also, Theophrastus, *On piety*, fr. 12-13 (Pötscher), as transmitted by Porphyry, *On abstinence from animal food* II, fr. 20, 27 (Nauck).

[7] Cf. Suk Fong Jim 2014b, 16; Margaritis 2017, 687. Also, *IG* I^3 78a regarding the *aparchai* of wheat and barley for the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis during the Classical period (in detail, Mitsopoulou 2007; 2010). For a comprehensive overview of the ritual practice of *aparchai* in ancient

extended, leading not only farmers but also others to dedicate samples of their work, such as arms, vessels, game prizes, figurines, pieces of jewelry, clothes etc.[8]. *Aparchai* appear later in a series of texts denoting poems and performances of music —that is, spiritual fruits in addition to physical ones— ultimately coming to symbolize in general the renewal of the city, political order, the fertility of all living beings, and prosperity[9].

2. Food storage in ritual and cult places of EIA Greece

The archaeological identification of sacred places and artifacts, as well as the religious interpretation of iconographic representations, always contain the element of subjectivity and uncertainty, especially when there are no inscriptions to guide our suggestions. In EIA Greece, the identification of a cult place is particularly difficult, at least until the rise of independent sanctuaries and temples linked to specific communal cults. From the 11th to the 9th c. BCE, possibly even until the middle of the 8th, it seems that few sites in the wider Greek region had a free-standing cult building. Although we cannot always identify with certainty a formal communal cult in the form it appeared and evolved later, we can assume that throughout this period, certain religious functions of the community were related to the dwellings of the local political-religious rulers and the nature of their authority, as leaders with multiple roles and concurrent duties[10].

The size and complexity of a house during the EIA were a means of demonstrating social status and wealth, as well as of sustaining power and rivalry among the elite members of the community[11]. In this regard, the presence of auxiliary spaces with specialized functions in a house —such as the storage of goods— further enhances the image of its prosperity[12] (figs 3-4). Buildings as potential rulers' dwellings with expanded storage facilities have been identified by archaeological research in several sites of the Aegean and Greek mainland, including Crete (Vrondas-Kavousi, Karphi, Smari, Prinias, Phaistos), the Cyclades (Zagora-Andros), the Peloponnese (Nichoria, Tiryns), Thessaly (Alos), and central Greece (Thermos, Toumba-Lefkandi, Oropos)[13] (fig. 2).

The relationship between storage and ritual practices is more apparent in sanctuaries and temples, yet it is difficult to discern the exact role of the stored products in worship. They might be intended for the priests, for the deities, for

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Greece from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods (700-31 BCE) see Suk Fong Jim 2014a. According to Kyriakidis (2001, 128-129), religious storage may also serve as a form of communal storage during periods of insecurity and instability.

[8] Burkert 1985, 66-69; Prent 2005, 28 with further examples and references.

[9] Robert 1938, 41-45; Papadopoulou 1998, 1, 70. Since *aparchai* might be offered from a wide variety of sources, the English term "first-fruits" with its agricultural connotation is potentially misleading; instead, *aparchai* are more appropriately understood as "first offerings" (Suk Fong Jim 2011, 40; 2014a, 4-5).

[10] Pentoti 2023, 152. For the institution of the EIA local ruler (*basileus*), see Carlier 2006 and Pentoti 2023, 146-150 with further bibliography.

[11] Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 271.

[12] Pentoti 2023, 156. Cf. the storerooms described in the epics: Hom. *Il.* 6.288-289; *Od*. 2.337-346, 8.438-441, 15.99-105, 21.8-11; Hes., *Op.,* 31-32, 368, 473-475, 575-577, 600-601, 814-815, 819. See in detail Pentoti 2023, 70-81.

[13] Regarding the rulers' dwellings in EIA Greece, see in detail Mazarakis Ainian 1997.

additional ceremonial purposes, or, most likely, for all of the above[14]. Such EIA sacred buildings in which ritual storage is attested can be seen abundant in Crete (Halasmenos, Karphi, Kommos, Dreros, Prinias), the Cyclades (Xobourgo-Tenos, Despotiko-Antiparos, and later Ypsili-Andros), the Peloponnese (Rakita) and Central Greece (Thermos, Kalapodi, Hymettus and Ales Arafinides) (figs 2, 5 and 6).

Regarding, however, the rulers' dwellings, which hosted a multitude of domestic and communal activities, the relation between storage and ritual practices becomes even harder to identify. In some situations, given the percentage of accumulated agricultural produce shown by the archaeological finds, we may claim that those buildings fulfilled significant communal functions, including other members of the community apart from the inhabitants[15]. Certain quantities of products were either stored as offerings during bloody or bloodless sacrifices, or as special goods intended for other ritual occasions[16].

In Homer, the domestic storerooms are described as "ultimate chambers"[17] and might therefore have served as a sort of *adyton*, i.e., the innermost, confined, "sacred" place, where all of the offerings and goods related to the communal cult were kept, at least until temples prevailed as separated ritual places in the later *poleis* (city-states). They are also secured by special locking mechanisms and can only be accessed by a select group of "initiated" and reliable members of the house[18]. This "secret" function of the storerooms in the interior part of the buildings is revealed in EIA rulers' dwellings as well. In Toumba-Lefkandi, the storage space of the apsidal house (fig. 3i) was actually secured by a metal lock (fig. 7), similar to the Homeric description, while at Nichoria (Unit IV-5, fig. 3h), a PG bronze deer figurine (fig. 8) —a unique EIA artifact— may have been an heirloom of the previous building (Unit IV-1, fig. 3g), used as a security seal[19].

Early historical communities, primarily agrarian and pastoral, had a strong bond with the earth. Cereals, olive trees and grapevines, species that had been adapted to the Greek region since the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages, were largely grown throughout the EIA as well. In Homer and Hesiod, wheat cultivation and vine growing constitute the two primary agricultural activities, with the calendar being determined by plowing, sowing and harvesting, while arboriculture, including olive cultivation, supplements the agricultural tasks[20].

In the epics, wheat, wine and olive oil are the three most essential agricultural products kept in the domestic storerooms. This reflects the myth of Anius, the first king of the Delians and the first priest of Apollo, which was evidently already

[14] Pentoti 2023, 157. Also, Kyriakidis 2001, 128-129; Giannopoulou 2016, 289. The storage of offerings and votives inside temples or auxiliary buildings of the sanctuaries is mentioned by Homer (Hom. *Il*. 8.203-204, 9.404-405; Hom. *Od*. 12.346-347).

[15] Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 275.

[16] Pentoti 2023, 157-158.

[17] Hom. *Od*. 21.8-10.

[18] Hom. *Od*. 1.440-441; 2.345-347; 3.391-392; 9.205-207; 21.6-7. Cf. Pentoti 2023, 72, 86-88, 96-97, 123, 297.

[19] Pentoti 2023, 198-199. Seals had social, symbolic and ideological significance and were widely used to control the production and the storage of goods in the Near Eastern and later "palatial" Bronze Age world (Flouda 2006, 26 ff.).

[20] Hom. *Od*. 7.114-116; 24.245-247. Ragkousi 2006, 504; Pentoti 2023, 97-98, 274.

formed by the time of Homer[21]. His three daughters, Spermo, Oino and Elais, known as the "Oinotropae maidens" of Delos, had the power, according to their names, to create seeds, wine and olive oil with one of their touches[22]. Wine, along with wheat, constitute the two foods that distinguish the divine from the human nature; the immortals, who have neither flesh nor blood, do not consume either wheat or wine[23]. Both these products represent birth and creation, since they are the body and blood of humans, the seed and juice of life itself[24].

2.1. Cereals, pulses and fruits

The significance of cereals in epic tradition, especially wheat and barley, is also attested by the archaeological record: preserved food remains, the foundations of possible granaries in several sites (Xeropolis-Lefkandi, Oropos, Ancient Smyrna), as well as the Geometric clay models of such structures that appear both as dedications (Rakita) and grave offerings (Attica, Boeotia and Corinthia) (fig. 9). At the dawn of the Archaic era, Hesiod's *Works and Days* are entirely focused on the appropriate management of crops and agricultural production, especially grains[25].

McLoughlin, evaluating certain characteristics of the pithoi from Zagora, such as shapes, sizes and construction, along with their agricultural setting, concludes that the largest size used in the settlement (approximately of 700 litres) was likely intended for the storage of grains. The construction and technology of such enormous pithoi provide protection against temperature variations and moisture, characteristics that are particularly valuable for the long-term storage of dry goods, such as cereals[26].

According to these observations, the largest pithoi in room H19 of the potential local ruler's dwelling (fig. 3d), which had an estimated capacity of approximately 500 litres or more[27], might contain grains in sufficient quantities to meet nutritional needs of the household for a minimum of one year (fig. 10a). A similar assumption can be made for at least one of the two colossal pithoi of the "ruler's dwelling" at Phaistos (fig. 3c), given their exceptionally large capacities (approximately one and 2.5 tons, respectively)[28] (fig. 10b). Grain storage has also been suggested for some of the pithoi of Temple A at Prinias[29].

Carbonized cereal seeds have been found both in domestic contexts (Tiryns, Nichoria-Unit IV-5, Xeropolis-Lefkandi, Oropos, Smari, Karphi) and sanctuaries

[21] *Schol. Hom. Od.* 6.164d (Pontani); *Schol. Lycophr. Alexandra* 570 (Scheer). Also, *EGF*, Cypria 17 (Kinkel).

[22] Apollod. 3.10; The names of the maidens derive from the Greek words *sperma* (seed), *oinos* (wine) and *elaia* (olive tree). Regarding the myth of Anius in ancient literature and scholia see Rutherford 2020.

[23] Hom. *Il.* 5.341-342.

[24] Pentoti 2023, 108.

[25] Pentoti 2023, 278.

[26] McLoughlin 2011, 874.

[27] The publications do not mention the dimensions of these pithoi, however we can assume that they would have had a similar shape and size to those found in the adjacent storage areas H26-H27. The sizes of these jars can be calculated from the drawings and the corresponding scales. The above theory is supported by the exceptionally wide northern leg of the pi-shaped bench in room H19, which is comparable in width to those in H26-H27, implying that the pithoi placed on it would have had a similar diameter. Pentoti 2023, 183.

[28] Pentoti 2023, 277.

[29] Marinatos 2000, 71-72.

(Kommos, Xobourgo, Kalapodi). The storage of cereals is also evidenced by the presence of mortars and offering tables in the temple of Apollo at Dreros. In other places, such as the sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Hymettus and the sanctuary of Artemis at Rakita, the presence and possibly the storage of cereals in the ritual context are indicated by a combination of archaeological information, which includes movable finds as well as architectural features, even though archaeobotanical remains or other elements of food storage are missing. On Hymettus, the circular shape of the storage space (fig. 11a) reminiscent of circular grain silos is evidently a deliberate decision with symbolic meaning, especially if we consider that the other two buildings of the sanctuary have a rectangular plan[30] (fig. 11b).

Regarding the remains of pulses and fruits, acorns and legumes were stored in quantities in Unit IV-1 of Nichoria. Grape residues from Kommos and Xobourgo, as well as from Nichoria (Unit IV-5), Xeropolis-Lefkandi and Tiryns, suggest that grapes could be stored long-term in the temples or the "rulers' dwellings" as raisins[31]. At the sanctuary of Halasmenos, figs were preserved in a small storage vessel, while they were also found in the settlements of Nichoria and Xeropolis-Lefkandi[32]. In the "pre-Cyclopean" sanctuary of Xobourgo they were offered in pit-fires along with barley seeds and grapes and may have been kept as offerings in the pithoi of the later "sacred *oikos*" and the nearby "pre-Thesmophorion" [33] (fig. 6d).

Organic residues of pomegranates have not yet been identified in domestic or ritual contexts of the PG and EG periods, but there are indications of their possible involvement in cult. In Halasmenos, we find clay baskets (*kalathoi*) decorated with pomegranates[34], while the remains of pomegranate fruits, as well as clay pomegranate models, come from contexts of the 8th-7th c. BCE, both funerary (Attica, Boeotia, Corinthia, Argolis, Cyclades, Samos, Crete) and sacred (Heraion of Samos, Delos, Argos, Telesterion of Eleusis), suggesting that the fruit is one of the most characteristic ritual offerings with strong symbolic significance[35].

2.2. Wine

As seen by the written records of the Mycenaean period, wine held a prominent place in Bronze Age societies, being a drink of relatively high social standing, due to its catalytic role in the mental and physical effects required for a ritual. Its use has been identified in ceremonial feasts and banquets hosted by the ruling elite, which also included other high-quality foods (e.g., meat, cheese and honey)[36].

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[30] Pentoti 2023, 278.

[31] The storage of sun-dried grapes in pithoi could also indicate a practice of winemaking, which is attested already since the time of Hesiod without the use of a press (Hes., *Op.*, 611-614). Cf. Hom. *Od.* 7.123-124.

[32] Popham and Sackett 1968, 11-13; Rapp and Aschenbrenner 1978, 54, 266; McDonald *et al.* 1983, 324; Pratt 2021, 162.

[33] Étienne *et al.* 2013, 93-94; Kourou 2004, 432-433; 2021, 129-130. On the discovery of charred fruits, such as figs and grapes, during the Early Geometric period, also see Margaritis 2017.

[34] Prent 2005, 184; Tsipopoulou 2011, 465-466, figs 12, 14.

[35] Cf. Charitonidis 1965; Kourou 1987; Kokkou-Vyridi 1999, 134, 216, pl. 58, no. A187; Zosi 2002-03; Webb 2022; Pentoti 2023, 284, n. 1007.

[36] Palmer 1994; Hamilakis 1999, 44.

The nutritional and symbolic value of wine is pervading in the epics as well. Aged wines are described by Homer with particular respect as unique and secret gifts from the gods[37]. Wine, which also has a far longer shelf life than olive oil, can be stored long-term in very large, often immovable, pithoi. In general, it can be preserved for the entire period until the following harvest, lasting even much longer when kept in sealed containers and increasing in economic and symbolic value as it ages[38].

Based on McLoughlin's study[39], the pithoi of Zagora with a capacity of 200-500 litres (fig. 12) are ideal for storing wine. The storage of large amounts of wine in the "ruler's dwelling" of the settlement is also evidenced by the abundant drinking vessels (skyphoi, kantharoi, kraters) discovered in the central room H19 and other storage areas of the house (rooms H22, H28). In the complex of the "ruler's dwelling" at Phaistos, the substantial number of drinking vessels, amphorae and stamnoi also suggest large-scale wine storage, a notion further supported by the presence of the two enormous pithoi, though at least one of them may have been used to store the annual grain harvest of the household (fig. 10b)[40].

In most EIA ritual spaces –both in communal shrines and temples (Halasmenos, Kommos, Dreros, Prinias, Despotiko, Kalapodi) as well as in "rulers' dwellings" (Vrondas, Halasmenos, Karphi, Nichoria IV-1, Toumba-Lefkandi, Phaistos)– storage jars are found with large quantities of wine offering and drinking vessels, along with remnants of grapes (Kommos, Xobourgo, Nichoria, Xeropolis-Lefkandi, Tiryns)[41]. Especially in the sanctuary of Halasmenos, the presence of numerous cups indicates the storing of wine in at least one of the six pithoi along with the offering and storage of figs, ritual practices that were most likely related. The storage of figs has historically been linked to that of grapes and wine, as their harvest season overlaps with the grape harvest period, at the end of summer or the beginning of autumn[42].

2.3. Olive oil

In general, olive oil is best stored in amphorae or smaller pithoi with a capacity of less than 200 litres. These containers are not meant for long-term storage of goods and are particularly suitable for pouring due to their narrow neck and lip. In addition, their construction would not require the porous material to have

[37] In Homeric world, it appears that the consumption of particular types of wine was associated with the formation of hierarchical social classes and relationships of the time. Aged wine was appreciated for its exceptional quality and was offered to select guests as a sign of the highest honor. Hom. *Il.* 4.259-260, 9.70-75; *Od.* 2.340-341, 3.391-392, 8.387-391, 13.8-15. For the significance of wine in the Homeric and Hesiodic societies see in detail Pentoti 2023, 101-108.

[38] Flouda 2006, 57.

[39] McLoughlin 2011, 875.

[40] Pentoti 2023, 280.

[41] It is generally believed that the residues of winemaking survive less well than those of grapes eaten as fruits or raisins. Nonetheless, this is not always the case, as wine production involves large quantities of grapes, thus creating concentrations of residues that can be more visible from an archaeological perspective, than the isolated remains of grapes consumed as fruits (Hamilakis 1996, 2-3).

[42] Pentoti 2023, 279.

certain insulating qualities, since oil —unlike grains or wine— would not be vulnerable to moisture or seep through the walls of the vessel[43].

The extensive olive oil storage related to religious offerings to shrines and deities particularly characterized the "palatial" economy of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages[44]. During the EIA, organic residues as evidence of potential olive oil storage are primarily found in domestic contexts, such as the acropolis of Smari and the settlements of the lower acropolis of Tiryns, Nichoria, Oropos and Xeropolis-Lefkandi[45]. Carbonized olive fruit, considered to be possible remains of storing olive oil, also comes from the successive phases of the temple of Kommos[46], while structures associated with the complex of the "ruler's dwelling" at Phaistos and related to the crushing of olives[47] support the conclusion that a certain amount of olive oil may have been stored in the building[48]. A possible assumption has been made regarding Temple A of Prinias as well[49].

3. Votive pithoi and the cult practice of *aparchai*

Although the role of storage in the daily religious life of the EIA communities is difficult to discern in the cases of the "rulers' dwellings" due to their multiple uses, we cannot argue the same for purely sacred spaces, i.e. temples and communal shrines. Whether votive or not, pithoi in ritual and cult places were used since prehistory primarily for storage. The distinctive relief pithoi found in sanctuaries of the LG or the EA period provide the strongest evidence for the use of the vessels in cult during the EIA[50]. However, the offering of votive pithoi is a practice that dates back to prehistoric times, possibly related to the dedication of food products to the gods and the performance of sacrifices[51].

Already since the first Minoan "palaces", we know that stored goods were distributed on specific religious festivals both for the participants and as offerings to

[43] McLoughlin 2011, 875.

[44] Hamilakis 1996, 20; Flouda 2006, 373, 375; Tiverios 2020, 26-28 with further bibliography. However, it is also attested in later periods, when the winners of the *Panathenaea* festival in Athens accepted as a prize roughly 2.000 Panathenaic amphorae, which weighed overall 77 tons and held approximately 80.000 litres of oil. This enormous quantity of oil and vessels must have been stored in a building specifically used for this purpose and closely related to cult. See Valavanis 2016.

[45] Stockhammer 2011, 216 ff.; Margaritis 2017, 685-686; Pratt 2021, 160-161. Grape and olive botanical remains are generally less likely to be preserved under storage conditions compared to cereals or legumes. This is primarily because the majority of known processing stages of olives and grapes do not include fire, whereas large quantities of stored grains can be easily preserved archaeologically following fire destruction. The presence of seeds certainly reflects the use of plants for specific purposes on an occasional or regular basis, but it does not necessarily indicate systematic use and exploitation of the fruits for the production of wine, oil or for other uses. In order to address these issues, other parameters must also be considered, such as the quantity of the material, its state of preservation, its relationships with the context, and its association with certain tools and vessels that indicate specific processing activities. The ethnographically known practice of utilising olive stones as fuel, may provide another reason for the high prevalence of burned olive stone residues, particularly in domestic contexts (Hamilakis 1996, 2-3).

[46] Shay and Shay 2000, 650-653; Shaw 2000a, 6, 33, 35; Prent 2005, 329.

[47] Levi 1961-62, 405, 408, 410, fig. 53.

[48] Pentoti 2023, 282.

[49] Marinatos 2000, 71-72.

[50] Ebbinghaus 2005; Pentoti 2023, 289.

[51] Kyriakidis 2001, 128-129.

the deities[52]. This practice probably dates back to even earlier times, if we consider the frequent proximity of the sanctuaries with storage spaces. The Linear B tablets prove that such offerings, along with sacrificial rituals, are later found in Mycenaean cult practices as well.

In EIA sanctuaries or rulers' dwellings, aside from holding goods for the priests' or the household's daily necessities, pithoi also served to store offerings and food supplies used in cult during communal feasts and rituals (sacrifices, banquets), as well as to gather sacred sacrificial remains[53]. Their precise location, either in purely ceremonial spaces or in other auxiliary areas of a sanctuary, largely determines whether they were functional/storage vessels that at some point had been dedicated to cult or whether they were displayed as special votives for social and symbolic reasons[54].

According to the archaeological evidence and epic tradition, none of the products stored in the EIA ritual and cult spaces can be regarded as exclusively "ritual". Many of them, nevertheless, are probably related to the worshipped deities and the specific nature of the various religious activities. Some species, like grapes, figs, and perhaps pomegranates, may be associated with the seasons during which particular rites were carried out. Such case is the beginning of autumn, symbolizing the start of a new agricultural cycle, a period of harvest and preparation for sowing. However, we cannot be entirely certain, since these fruits can be preserved for several months after they are harvested[55].

Religious festivals and rites related to nature and fertility deities, as well as exclusively chthonic forces, were held throughout the year in close association with the agricultural cycle. Based only on the stored products or the types of vessels, it is, therefore, difficult to determine which particular festival of this cycle took place, especially since a sanctuary or a "ruler's dwelling" could have been used for a variety of ritual occasions. However, despite the general ambiguity of the information surrounding the festive religious cycle of the EIA, the offering of the *aparchai* is a cult practice that can certainly be related to "religious storage". The term "aparchai" is first mentioned in the *Odyssey* as a preliminary stage of the animal sacrifice burnt on the altar[56], but the cult practice is again suggested in epic tradition in relation to the cults of Apollo and Dionysus[57].

Aparchai, apart from the agricultural periodic festivals related to the cycle of nature and vegetation, are indirectly associated with crucial transitional moments in the cycle of time. These are about either human life (birth, adolescence, adulthood, marriage) and the life of the community (establishment of new leaders, initiation of new members, start of military operations), or about the cosmos in general (new

[52] Burkert 1985, 43-46; Hamilakis 1996, 20; Palaima 2004; Flouda 2006, 274-275, 373-375; Paipeti 2019, 181-182; Tiverios 2020, 26-28.

[53] Sacrificial remains storage in relation to EIA buildings is attested in Thermos (Megarons B1 and A2), Asini (Building C) and Eleusis ("sacred house"). Pentoti 2023, 201-205, 256-259, 261-264, 268-270, 282-283 with further analysis.

[54] Giannopoulou 2016, 288. Although crucial, the location of *pithoi* cannot always provide reliable results, since a *pithos* that held a prominent position as a sacred offering for a certain period of time, could eventually end up in another storage space for various reasons (reorganization of the sanctuary, receiving of new offerings, alterations in cult practices, etc.).

[55] Plin. *HN*, 14.3.16, 18; 15.18.60. Also, Brumfield 1981. Cf. Pentoti 2023, 283-284.

[56] Hom. *Od*. 3.446, 14.422.

[57] See in detail Sections 4.2 and 4.3 of the present article. Cf. Pentoti 2023, 284, 314-326.

moons/months, solstices, equinoxes). Thus, *aparchai* enclose not only life and prosperity but also death itself[58].

The pithos, which has been associated with profound symbolisms of fertility and chthonic nature since its inception, was the most common storage vessel used for this purpose. Like the earliest storage pits dug into the ground, pithoi served from the outset as containers for receiving and storing the fruits of the earth. Their placement most of the time within the ground, apart from satisfying practical needs such as proper vessel support, moisture conditions, and easy access to their contents, reflects this primitive connection of pithos with the earth, maintaining their symbolic bond. In this way, the harvest that comes from the earth is kept as close to it as possible, and the fastened pithos unites two distinct but complementary worlds: the earth's interior (world of the chthonic forces) and its surface (world of human action)[59].

In myths —whose power was to absorb and express all human worries and fears about the course and explanation of the world— the pithoi of Zeus keep stored a kind of symbolic *aparchai*, the gifts of life to mankind, while concealing within them the threat of death. The unsealing of the pithos releases disasters, leading to the ultimate collapse of humanity with inevitable mortality[60]. According to another myth, that of the Hyperborean Maidens, the young girls who traveled from the land of the far north to Delos to deliver the first offerings-*aparchai* as honoring gifts for the divine birth of Apollo, ended up dying on the sacred island without ever being able to return[61].

The use of pithoi in fertility and chthonic cults, particularly in the ritual practice of storing the aparchai, arises from the unique bond of the vessel with the earth, as well as from its strong symbolism regarding the female body and its reproductive capabilities. The pithos, moreover, resembles the first mortal woman (Pandora), who is born in myth as an exceptional creation from the union of three elements: earth, water, and fire. Like a vessel ready to be filled, the gods adorn her with garments and jewels and instill in her special attributes[62].

In the myth of Pandora, Hesiod also distinguishes the pithos as the vessel that determines the course of human existence, since its original purpose was to conceal the gifts-offerings of Zeus as another form of *aparchai*. The pithos eventually becomes the timeless vessel-symbol that embraces and protects life: a symbol of reproduction, fermentation, maturation, transformation and (re)birth, distinct stages defining the process occurring inside, like a great female womb that nourishes and creates life. Besides the archetypal woman, pithoi are also related to male reproductive power, keeping the offerings of the god to humans, both joys and sorrows. The vessel is linked to the protection of the world, a symbolism that highlights its exceptional importance, durability and endurance[63].

These structural features of the pithoi further enhance their symbolic connection with cult, highlighting the vessels as unique sacred offerings to the gods. In contrast to other ceramic categories, pithoi are products of specialized

[58] Pentoti 2023, 344-345.
[59] Pentoti 2023, 286.
[60] Hom. *Il*. 24.527-528; Hes., *Op.,* 94-99. Steiner 2013, 231.
[61] Hdt. 4.33.3-4; 4.35.1-4.
[62] Hes., *Op.,* 60-82; Hes. *Theog*. 576-577.
[63] Seo 2019, 139; Pentoti 2023, 13-14, 286-287.

technological knowledge, and their creation requires great effort and time. As a result, they become symbols of wealth, reflecting the economic and social status of their owners[64].

Pithoi in ritual spaces were used to store the sacred *aparchai*, as well as any offerings meant for the sanctuary. Although we do not know with certainty if they were dedicated with or without contents, it is most likely that the vessels were offered full –as their primary purpose required– in order for the offer to be regarded complete. The worshippers offered in pithoi their agricultural production seeking protection and blessings for their crops and their stored harvest, or divine favor in significant moments of personal or communal life[65]. Votive pithoi would fulfill actual roles in the conduction of rituals, containing food products consumed during particular religious occasions (ceremonies, sacrifices, banquets) both in the sanctuaries and temples, as well as in the "rulers' dwellings" of the EIA[66].

The archaeological finds from the Geometric and EA sanctuaries of Crete, for instance offerings of storage jars along with arms, or storage jars decorated with depictions of horsemen and chariots, attest to the dedication and use of pithoi in ritual contexts in association with a particular social group of warrior-aristocrats (fig. 13), who often have close ties to the Near East. These individuals control the land and participate in cult through religious processions, athletic contests, offerings of weaponry and *aparchai*, sacrificial ceremonies, and the consumption of their remains in a communal meal[67].

In the successive temples of Kommos, 25 amphorae of Phoenician origin were probably related to wine storage, while in the temple of Dreros, at least 20 pithoi were used for the storage of wine and grains. The presence of pithoi inside the cella of the Temple A of Prinias, along with drinking vessels, animal bones, and abundant ash, suggests storage activity that was most likely connected to communal religious feasts and sacrifices performed around the big hearth[68]. Parallel thoughts are raised about the sanctuary at Kalapodi, Phokis, which is, additionally, associated with an oracular cult[69].

Furthermore, their unique decoration implies that they were intended for special uses, perhaps for dedication and public display during religious and

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[64] The great value and high purchase cost of pithoi are also demonstrated by the tendency to repair and reuse them, either for storing different food products (such as dried fruits or grains instead of liquids) or for usage in different contexts (e.g., funerary). Giannopoulou 2016, 307.

[65] According to M. Giannopoulou (2016, 307), some pithoi could have been also offered by the manufacturers themselves, who would want protection in the difficult task of constructing such large vessels.

[66] Pentoti 2023, 287-288, 341-342. Cf. Ebbinghaus 2005, 56; Kourou 2011, 405.

[67] Marinatos 1936, 260-265; Carter 1997; Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 231-233; Shaw 2000a, 10-11, 30; 2000b, 670, 682-683, 690-691; D' Acunto 2002-2003, 14-15; 2008, 111; Prent 2005, 255, 258, 324-330, 462, 465. Cf. Pentoti 2023, 229, 236-237, 240-242, 309.

[68] A similar connection between storage and cultic activity is observed in the *andreion* complex of Azoria, Crete, dated to the Late Archaic era (early 6th c. BCE). The storage of wine in Room A1200 is related to chthonic libations offered on the altar-eschara of Room A1900N by the warrior-elite social class of the settlement (See Haggis *et al.* 2011, 13-14).

[69] Morgan 1997, 175-179; 2003, 114-118; Niemeier 2017, 326-327. The sanctuary of Apollo at Amykles in Laconia, Peloponnese, is a similar case, associated with a group of aristocrats/warriors from the broader area, as evidenced by the archaeological data (military decoration, offerings of weaponry, intense activity of ritual/sacrificial banquets). See Pettersson 1992, 102-106; Vlachou 2018; De Polignac 2019, 20-21.

ceremonial events, as is the offering of *aparchai*[70]. This must be considered certain regarding the pithoi with depictions of circular or labyrinth ritual dances (figs 14a-c)[71]. Given the potential relation between the ornamentation of a storage vessel and its content, the extremely large-scale storage of wine in EIA ritual spaces may be especially linked to the relief adornments of the LG and EA pithoi. Their elaborate figurative decoration was likely associated with the celebration of a particular harvest or a ritual, as is the offering of the first wine. At the same time, it demonstrated the high quality of the contents and the social standing of the worshipper, who usually participated in the ritual and the banquet that followed the offering or the sacrifice[72].

In various cases, such as in the sanctuary of Halasmenos, in Temple A of Prinias and in the "rulers' dwellings" of Nichoria (IV-5), Smari, Karphi, Zagora, and Phaistos, where the storage vessels were prominently displayed within the central ritual space (often on stone-built structures and under the light of the imposing hearth fire), pithoi would also carry symbolic messages due to their position and elaborate decoration. Since *aparchai* are frequently associated with rites of passage, pithoi have grown into symbols of collective memory, reminding people or communities of their successful transition from one stage of life to another. In addition to serving as unique and precious offerings for personal display, pithoi enhanced at the same time the social status and religious authority of the local ruler or the public sanctuary and priests[73].

4. *Aparchai* in fertility and chthonic cults

As unique vessels for receiving *aparchai*, EIA votive pithoi are firmly linked to fertility and chthonic cults, particularly female cults of nature and fruition. These —initially centered around vague pre-Hellenic local deities that resembled the *Great Mother-Potnia* or a primitive vegetation god as her attendant or consort— gradually transformed into specific figures with Olympian characteristics: patriarchal deities (like Zeus), young male vegetation gods (such as Apollo and later Dionysus), female goddesses that come from an ancient matriarchal tradition (like Leto and Demeter) and virgin goddesses (such as Artemis and Athena)[74].

4.1. Zeus

In Homeric and Hesiodic societies, storage and the stored crop in the house are intimately related to the masculine divine nature, which is principally embodied by the figures of Zeus and Apollo, and later Dionysus. Above all the male gods, Zeus is the one who is most closely associated with storage and the rites that involve it,

[70] Cullen and Keller 1990, 196; Giannopoulou 2016, 288.

[71] Cf. Section 4.2 of the present article; Pentoti 2023, 289, 314-319, 332-334.

[72] Pentoti 2023, 276, 289-290. Cf. Mann 2015, 57. The social character of wine consumption as is portrayed in epic tradition and its association with travelers and the narration of stories and myths, can also explain why the relief *pithoi* of the 7th c. BCE preserve some of the oldest and most interesting representations of myths and the epics (McLoughlin 2011, 875-876).

[73] Pentoti 2023, 287-288.

[74] Pentoti 2023, 285, 292-293, 310-311, 326, 345. This is also evident in later periods (6th c. BCE to Hellenistic times), with votive pithoi being primarily found in sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore (Persephone) (e.g., Xobourgo-*Thesmophorion*, Acrocorinth, Kythnos, Ypsili-Andros), as well as in sanctuaries of the Mother of the gods (Cybele or Great Mother), all of whom are female fertility and chthonic goddesses with mystery cults. See Giannopoulou 2016, 293-306.

because of his profound, unbreakable bond with the earth and paternity. Myths portray the god's reproductive activity through his sacred marriage to Hera and mainly through his multiple erotic unions with nymphs and mortal women, which represent his fertilizing power on the seed. In the epics, the god, shrouded in dark clouds[75] and throwing dazzling thunderbolts[76], controls through his rain the cycle of life in nature and the fertility of the earth, but most importantly he is chthonic, a god of the earth's bowels. In the *Iliad*, the black earth is weighed down and crushed by his storm[77], his worship is accompanied by libations[78], while his chthonic prophetic cult at the sanctuary of Dodona is also mentioned twice by Homer[79].

In the courtyard of the Homeric houses there is an altar dedicated to Zeus, who is worshipped as *Herkeios*, that is, guardian and defender of the fence and thus of the entire household[80]. The libations and sacrifices offered at this altar[81], apart from the protection and blessing of the property, are probably associated with significant moments of domestic activities, such as the storage of the harvest —the final and most crucial stage in agricultural production[82]. This relationship is evident in Hesiod, who advises particular prayers to Zeus and Demeter[83]. Behind this domestic ritual, an officially formed religious behaviour towards the god emerges, in relation to agricultural production and storage[84]. Prayers, over time, can be created and shaped through individual spiritual energy and effort for communication and contact with the divine; however, they become solid and are transmitted from one generation to the next within a common shared religious awareness[85].

The archaeological evidence from the sanctuary of Zeus, which is located very close to the highest summit of Mount Hymettus (figs 11a-b), evokes this Hesiodic ritual practice. Zeus is likely worshipped here as the god of weather and rain, protector of the crops and annual harvests of the inhabitants of the Attic land in the 8th c. BCE[86]. The stone circular structure used as a storage space of votive offerings recalls the circular granaries depicted in various Geometric clay models (fig. 9), and could perhaps serve as a sort of "sympathetic/imitative magic" that connected the

[75] Hom. *Il.* 1.397, 2.412, 6.267, 11.78, 21.520, 22.178, 24.290; Hom. *Od.* 9.552, 13.25; Hes. *Sc.*, 53.

[76] Hom. *Il.* 19.121, 20.16, 22.178.

[77] Hom. *Il.* 16.384-386.

[78] Indicatively, Hom. *Il.* 7.478-481, 16.230-232, 253.

[79] Hom. *Il.* 16.233; Hom. *Od.* 14.327-328. In detail, Pentoti 2023, 112-113, 311. Cf. Paus. 10.12.10. Regarding the nature of the cult of Zeus at Dodona, see indicatively Zolotnikova 2019.

[80] In ancient Greek, *herkos* (ἕρκος) means fence, enclosure, front court. Hom. *Od.* 22.334-336. These attributes of Zeus are reflected in the later epithets of the god: *Oikophylax* (house-guard) and *Ktesios* (protector of the property and the possessions).

[81] Hom. *Od.* 22.334-336.

[82] Pentoti 2023, 113-115, 311-313.

[83] Hes., *Op.*, 465-467, 473-476.

[84] See, in detail, Pentoti 2023, 110-116, 311-312.

[85] Cf. the epithets of Zeus *nephelēgerétă* and *steropēgerétă* (gatherer of the clouds and lightnings), used by Homer and Hesiod as nouns in the nominative case, while having the vocative ending *-ta*. This suggests that they were primarily invocations derived from actual prayers to the god, already formed in much earlier times. Pentoti 2023, 113, 312. Also, Zolotnikova 2003, 25.

[86] Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 119, n. 757; Pentoti 2023, 270-273, 278, 312. Mountain peaks, exposed to the winds, clouds and rain, were very often related to the deity who controlled weather phenomena and conveyed signs to the inhabitants of the surrounding areas. Hymettus, even today, has the property of functioning as a natural indicator of weather conditions, especially for predicting upcoming rainfall (Langdon 1976, 3-5, 7-8, 80).

significance and role of storage in EIA communities with the fertility and chthonic nature of the performed cult[87].

Apart from Hesiod's reference, we do not have concrete evidence for specific cult practices in relation to storage and the worship of Zeus during this period of time. Nonetheless, all those religious beliefs and attributes of the god appear to have already been shaped since the Homeric era, and by the Classical period onward, they will take a specific form with regard to the storage activity[88].

4.2. Apollo

Mythological elements and archaeological evidence suggest that the contribution of Zeus to the function and protection of storage generally involved practices for ensuring a successful harvest, particularly of grains. Wine —the nutritional and symbolic value of which is prevalent in the epics— is associated in the Homeric world, along with viticulture, first with Apollo, who transforms Zeus' ripened vine into raisined grapes and sweet wine with the power of the sun[89].

In the *Odyssey*, it is clearly implied that in Apollo's sanctuary in Ismaros, Thrace, a significant quantity of pure, unmixed wine is kept in amphorae and managed by the god's priest in complete secrecy[90], perhaps as a kind of *aparchai*. The abundance of wine pithoi in Odysseus' cellar, along with the impressive description of their content as divine, reflects an equivalent situation, giving the impression that the wine here is also meant for something more than the daily necessities of the household, possibly being a form of *aparchai* gathering[91].

Apollo's connection with the vine and wine-making, as well as the offering of wine *aparchai*, is further supported by the presence of storage vessels in purely sacred spaces that are primarily associated with his cult, particularly in Crete (Kommos, Dreros, Axos) and in the central Aegean region (Despotiko, Kalapodi)[92]. In Zarakes, Euboea, where in later periods the cult of Delian Apollo is also attested, a mid-7th c. BCE fragment of a relief pithos with the votive inscription "Hieros" (i.e., sacred) found near a LG cult building (fig. 15) suggests that Apollo's cult in the area was probably established already since the late 8th c. BCE[93], if not earlier, and that the storage of *aparchai* or other religious offerings was included among the ritual practices.

The primitive ritual of *aparchai* in regard to Apollo is closely connected with choral dance ceremonies, in which all towns and peoples —ancient races from the

[87] Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 119; Pentoti 2023, 272-273, 278.

[88] The snake —a distinctive emblem of Zeus particularly since the Classical period— has been historically associated with the protection of the household and the storage of goods, representing the god's chthonic character. In the Classical era, Zeus *Ktesios* was usually worshipped in the storeroom of the house. Cf. Petersmann 1990, 175; Faraone 2008, 217.

[89] Pentoti 2023, 101-106, 115, 313, 345-346.

[90] Hom. *Od.* 9.196-198, 201-207. The fact that only the krater is mentioned of all the precious vessels of the sanctuary may not be a coincidence. Among the few Homeric references about the keeping of votive offerings inside temples (Hom. *Il.* 8.203-204, 9.404-405; Hom. *Od.* 12.346-347), the case of Ismaros is unique because it involves the storage of food products in a place of worship.

[91] Hom. *Od.* 2.340-341. Pentoti 2023, 313-314.

[92] Pentoti 2023, 291, 314, 345-346. Apollo's invocation in Cyprus as *Lenaios* (a name later given to Dionysus) is characteristic of his primitive connection with viticulture, wine pressing and possibly *aparchai* of wine. Cf. Solomidou-Ieronymidou 1985, 63; Vernet 2015a, 71-73; 2015b.

[93] Touchais 1999, 793; Chatzidemetriou 2004 and 2017, 304. Cf. the connection between the name Zarakes and Anius, mythical leader of the Delians (Papadopoulou 2022, 62).

east and west, the south and the far north– participate in Delos in honor of the god[94]. The first *aparchai* to Delian Apollo arrived, moreover, from the land of the legendary Hyperboreans under the sounds of three musical instruments: flutes, syrinxes and lyres[95].

The custom of offering fruits to Apollo, which in the myth follows the god's birth on a long voyage, is related to his role as the protector of new sprouts[96]. In addition, his cult includes from the start choral dances (of swans, the Cyclades islands and the Delian Maidens)[97] that later become one of the most distinctive votive offerings[98] made in honor of the Delian god among other *aparchai*.

Dancing, which prepares and accompanies every major life transition, could not be absent from the first and most crucial passage, birth, as is seen in the case of two great fertility gods. Apart from Apollo, the significance of dancing is evident in the birth of the king of the gods, where the choral act protects newborn Zeus by covering his cries[99]. Thus, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that the practice of offering and storing the sacred *aparchai*, as products born from the earth and dedicated to the gods, was probably accompanied by music and ritual dances, given that the choral rituals aimed at invoking the deity and at the divine epiphany[100]. Depictions of dances on storage vessels of the late 8th and early 7th c. BCE associated with ritual and sacred contexts (figs 14a-c) may well be references to similar choral rituals during the offering of *aparchai* and votive pithoi to a fertility deity[101].

Even though this theory is presented by the author as a potential hypothesis, a rare example of an inscribed votive pithos (or dinos, a vessel for mixing water and wine) (fig. 16) from the sanctuary of the Delian Apollo in Despotiko provides an indication for the possible existence of the *aparchai* ritual during the Late EIA. The vessel has been interpreted as a dedication of the religious association of *Noumeniastai* during the ritual celebration of the new moon[102]. The celebration of the first day of the lunar month as the most sacred of all –as a new birth– is primarily connected with the cult of Apollo[103] and could involve practices of offering and storing *aparchai* in his sanctuary, especially of wine[104]. This recalls Homer's unique description of the grape harvest –the peak moment of the viticultural season– that takes place as a union of joy and lamentation, combining primordial cult elements

[94] Call., *Hymn* 4, 278-282. Papadopoulou 1998, 58.

[95] Pseudo-Plut. *De mus* 1136b. Papadopoulou 1998, 3, 69-70.

[96] *Hymn Hom. Ap*. 135-145. The fertility aspect of Apollo is also evident in similar prosperity rituals in his honor, which praised the vitality of nature with bloodless sacrifices of offerings of fruits (*Thargelia*, *Pyanopsia*). Parker 2005, 203 ff; Pentoti 2023, 120-121, 293, 314.

[97] *Hymn Hom. Ap*. 131, 149-164, 182-206, 514-519; Call., *Hymn* 4, 249-257, 300-301. In detail, Papadopoulou 1998. Cf. Pentoti 2024, 325-326.

[98] *Hymn Hom. Ap*. 146-150.

[99] Call., *Hymn* 1, 52-54.

[100] Cf. Mandalaki 2022, 162-170, 208.

[101] Pentoti 2023, 315.

[102] Matthaiou 2020, 67-69.

[103] Hdt. 6.57.2. Cf. ancient schol. in Hom. *Od*. 20.156 based on Philochorus (*FGrH* 328, F 88b); Hom. *Od*. 14.161-162, 19.306-607, 20.276-278, 21.267-268.

[104] Pentoti 2023, 291. Cf. the relationship between Apollo's cult in Despotiko and the serpent, a classic representation of chthonic and fertility forces that has long been associated with the protection of the household and the storage of harvests. For the EIA snake finds of the sanctuary, see Alexandridou 2019, 199.

and profound symbolisms around life, death, and rebirth, under the sounds of musical instruments, weeping songs and apotropaic ritual dancing movements, following the fertility and chthonic nature of Homeric Apollo[105].

4.3. Dionysus

Although in the Homeric world Apollo is the archetypal male god of *aparchai* and wine, enhancing the eternal dominion of Zeus over the agricultural cycle, the one who precedes in Hesiod's societies is Dionysus. His relation to viticulture and wine is evident through religious celebrations held in his honor, as well as actual rituals associated with the storage of wine itself. In the extensive calendar of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, all domestic activities are assigned to particular days of the lunar month according to the sacred influence of the gods. Despite its several criticisms as a text of superstition, the calendar demonstrates the significance of performing domestic and communal rituals on specific days of the month and year during the 7th c. BCE, traditions that must have been formed long before they were mentioned in the Hesiodic text[106].

Among the several domestic rituals, the sacred days for opening the wine pithoi coincide with two of the most characteristic phases of the lunar cycle: the full moon, which is also the holiest, or the waning phase, which occurs just before the new moon and the beginning of the new month[107]. This practice could refer to the ritual tasting of the new wine and the offering of a form of *aparchai* to the god who donated it —no longer Apollo but Dionysus, who appears to have inherited many of his features.

It is very likely that a possible ancestral ritual of the later *Pithoigia* (i.e., the pithos-opening) was already formed in Hesiod's time. The feast, at the beginning of spring, celebrated particularly the maturing of the stored wine of the previous vintage and is attested in honor of Dionysus since the middle of the 6th c. BCE on the first night of the *Anthesteria* festival[108]. At sunset, the sealed pithoi with the new wine of the year were opened at his sanctuary "*in the Marshes*" in Attica, with the first sample being offered to him for blessing and gratitude[109], recalling the ritual storage of wine amphorae in the Apollonian sanctuary of Ismaros[110].

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[105] Hom. *Il.* 18.569-572. Pentoti 2023, 102-103, 319.

[106] Samuel 1966, 429; Burkert 1985, 227. Also, Pentoti 2023, 117-118, 319-321.

[107] Hes., *Op.,* 814-815.

[108] Thuc. 2.15.4; Plut. *Mor*. 655e. Later authors connect the *Pithoigia* to ancestral chthonic rituals since the time of Hesiod. Cf. Plut. fr. 54, 3 (*Schol.* Hes. *WD* 368-369). Also, Burkert 1983, 214-218; 1985, 180.

[109] The ritual ended with dancing and a ceremonial banquet (Ath. XI 13). Cf. *Schol*. *Hes*. *WD* 366 (Gaisford). Harrison 1906, 83-85; Regarding the relation of dancing and offering of wine *aparchai* to Dionysus, cf. the depiction of a dance by two satyrs and a maenad on a Cretan relief pithos of the 6th c. BCE (Johnston 1984, 40-44).

[110] The wine of this sanctuary, the only wine described in such detail by Homer, is presented as an extraordinary, divine product of Apollo himself, symbolizing the god who created it (Hom. *Od.* 9.201-211). Its transformation during the mixing and the internal sensation created during its consumption evoke the transformations of wine by Dionysus during the *Pithoigia* ritual (Ath. XI, 13). The wine of Ismaros is mentioned a little later by the lyric poet Archilochus as well (Fr. 2 W. 2 D), who is heavily involved in the formation of Dionysian cult in the first half of the 7th c. BCE. The relation between Apollo and Dionysus, which will later receive a specific form through common rituals in honor of them both (Plut. *Mor*. 389c, 388e-f; Papadopoulou 1998, 373-376), is already implied in the Homeric tradition (Cf. also Hom. *Od*. 11.581; Paus. 10.4.3). Pentoti 2023, 122 n. 534, 322 n. 1144.

Even though Homer makes no connection between Dionysus and wine or the sacrifice of *aparchai*, his verses reflect the gradual evolution of the god's mystery cult and features, culminating in his adoption during the 7th c. BCE as the god of wine and *baccheia* (mental and physical ecstasy, sacred madness/lunacy)[111]. The acceptance of Dionysus in the EA period as the god of viticulture and wine, as well as his essential role in every step of the production cycle, is further supported by the iconography of archaic vases, where he and his followers are depicted among vines, in scenes of grape harvesting or wine drinking.

In Hesiod, along with the *Pithoigia*, another primitive rite is implied in honor of the chthonic and fertile Dionysus, that of the *Lenaia*[112]. Both these rituals are deeply associated with the vine and wine and could be related to the various stages of its production and storage: a) the pressing process and the storage of the must in pithoi for aging as a form of primary sacrifice to the god[113], and b) the unsealing of the jars for the offering of the *aparchai* —a fundamental sacrificial act representing the anticipation of new life and rebirth.

Apart from Apollo, Dionysus appears to inherit many vegetative and fertility features from Zeus as well[114], having an inseparable bond not only with the storage and transformation of wine but also with the pithos vessel itself, which functions symbolically both as a tomb and a womb. The death of the grape through crushing and its transformation into must leads to the birth of a new wine inside the dark pithos, following Dionysus' own nature. As the god of vegetation and the seasons, of blooming and withering and of all the mysterious productive forces of nature, he dies and is reborn every year according to the myth of his creation in Orphic theogony, but also within each of his numerous alternating transformations[115].

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[111] Cf. Archil. Fr. 294W (=111D). Pentoti 2023, 322-324 with further analysis and bibliography. The association of Dionysus with certain plants, such as the pine and ivy, or with certain wild animals, is probably older than his association with the vine, suggesting his role as a more generic (indeterminate) primitive god of the earth and vegetation. Harrison 1903, 416-422.

[112] Hes., *Op.*, 504. Pentoti 2023, 104-105, 119-120, 321-324. Both rituals acquire fertility and chthonic characteristics, related to the underworld and the rebirth of life. In *Anthesteria*, the wine pithoi are closely associated with the spirits of the dead (*Suda*, s.v. θύραζε; Harrison 1900 and 1903, 32-55; Kerényi 1976, 303; Daraki 1997, 40, 53-57, 85-86; Bevan 2017, 2). Regarding the *Lenaia*, one of the oldest rituals in the Dionysian cult cycle but barely known in their details, see Daraki 1997, 28-29 with bibliography. Cf. the Homeric description of wine harvest as a moment of joy and lamentation (Hom. *Il*. 18.569-572).

[113] *Lenos* in Greek means wine-press. Hesiod (see n. 112) suggests that the ritual took place in the heart of winter; however, in its original form, it could have been performed at the time of the harvest or the pressing of grapes, that is in the end of summer or the beginning of autumn. See Daraki 1997, 30-31, 85-86. Although religious holidays are celebrated at specific moments of the year following a periodic pattern (seasonal, annual, multi-year), we must remember that there was no single calendar for all the communities/city-states, but many local ones, which had a common structure, but varied according to the particular religious traditions of each place, especially with regard to the beginning of the year and the names of the months. The restriction of celebrating rituals at a specific time exists because they were established as part of cult traditions formed in a long-term process, bound by myths and legitimized by the honored god (See Boutsikas 2017, 43). The case of their transfer, however, to a different time of year could be possible —although rare— in the context of major social or religious changes in the community. Pentoti 2023, 323, n. 114. Cf. Harrison 1906, 86, 97-98.

[114] Such as his bond with the earth, the liquid element and the fertile moisture, as well as his connection to the serpent and the cult of *Agathos Daemon*.

[115] Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 388f-389a. Pentoti 2020, 396-397; 2023, 120-121, 324-325, 346. Cf. Lekatsas 1985, 71-73, 100-103, 159-162; Burkert 1997, 161; Daraki 1997, 19-21, 24-28, 33-36.

4.4. Artemis, Demeter, Mistresses of the Animals (*Potniai Theron*)

In Hesiod's LG/EA society, alongside Dionysus of the vine and wine, the agrarian Demeter of grains also emerges. She engages complementarily with Zeus in the agricultural process, notably in its final stage, the storing of the harvest inside the houses, receiving prayers along with the omnipotent god[116]. In Homeric societies, agricultural production is only indirectly connected to feminine worship; Artemis, a mistress of the animals above all (*potnia theron*), a wild goddess dominant of nature[117], is the deity of the *thalysia*[118], an agrarian religious festival of the *aparchai* of the cereal harvest, associated later with the cult of Demeter and, possibly, Dionysus[119].

The connection of Artemis with fertility, crops, harvest and agricultural production in Homer resembles the cult practices in her sanctuary at Rakita, Achaea. The votive clay models of granaries could actually be a form of symbolic *aparchai* offered to the goddess, who would initially receive offerings of real fruit[120]. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the handle of the bronze PG seal from Nichoria (fig. 8) depicts a deer, an animal primarily connected with Artemis. If the item was used by the successive rulers of the settlement to seal and secure the pithoi or the storerooms of their dwellings, it links the protection of crops and the offerings of *aparchai* with *Potnia theron*[121].

From the late 8th to the early 7th c. BCE, large votive pithoi were dedicated to sanctuaries where the worship of a *Potnia* often predominated, or they were ornamented with equivalent depictions, presumably symbolic of their purpose or content. The goddess did not yet have a specific identity; she was a divinity with upraised arms and wings (figs 6f, 17), a mistress of nature and animals and a *kourotrophos* (child-nurturer), crowned with vine branches and bunches of grapes on her hair as a "primitive Demeter" of the fruits (fig. 18)[122]. However, a relation to Artemis and the Delian mythical cycle is clearly implied[123], while several EIA sanctuaries of Apollo related to storage practices of *aparchai* shelter the cult of the

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[116] Hes., *Op.*, 31-32, 299-301.

[117] Hom. *Il*. 21.470-471.

[118] Hom. *Il*. 9.533-542.

[119] For the *aparchai* offerings to Demeter, see Theoc. *Id*. 7.3; to Demeter and Dionysus, see Men. Rhet. 391 (Spengel).

[120] Pentoti 2023, 259-260, 292, 327-328. The chthonic and fertile aspect of Artemis is also indicated by the places —rural and forested— in which her sanctuaries are established, with a strong presence of the wet element. In the Peloponnese, in particular, her cult in two of the sanctuaries, where she is later worshipped as *Limnatis* (of the lakes/swamps) (Paus. 3.23.10, 4.4.2, 4.31.3), dates at least to the Geometric period (Sinn 1981, 34; Koursoumis 2014, 215, 217).

[121] Pentoti 2023, 300, 328.

[122] Pentoti 2023, 292, 328-329, 348. In Xobourgo-Tenos, Demeter was worshipped as *Thesmophoros* since the Classical period. However, her cult probably dates earlier than the 8th c. BCE —even earlier than the migrations of the 11th c. BCE ("first colonization movement")— as it is indicated by the spread of her name *Thesmophoros* throughout the Greek world and the appearance of the term in written sources already in the Archaic era (Asimakopoulou 2017, 59 with bibliography). According to W. Burkert (1985, 13, 161), the *Thesmophoria*, the largest and most widespread festival of agriculture and motherhood in honor of Demeter and Persephone, has roots to the Stone Age, while it has been suggested a potential co-worship with Artemis (Petropoulos 2012, 45).

[123] Artemis was related with childbirth and the rearing of the young. Cf. Apollod. 1.4.1. The smaller figures on either side of the *Potnia* goddess of Xobourgo have been interpreted as her attendants, possibly the Hyperborean maidens. Cf. Papadopoulou 1998, 45-46.

Delian triad Apollo, Artemis and Leto (Kommos, Dreros) or a co-worship between Apollo and Artemis (Despotiko, Kalapodi).

The religious symbolism of the goddess with upraised arms on the LG and EA "sacred" pithoi originates from ancient traditions of the greater Aegean region. Particularly in Crete during the post-palatial period, it was the dominating way of depicting the divine[124]. The goddess worshipped in all Cretan bench-sanctuaries at the time is a fertility *Potnia*, mistress of the chthonic, earthly and celestial world (fig. 19)[125], and her cult is occasionally combined with votive pithoi, marks of offering and storing *aparchai*[126].

The ritual use of relief pithoi depicting *Potnia* as vessels of *aparchai* is further supported if we consider that the raising of hands –a gesture of supplication, prayer, or dedication, but primarily indicative of the divine epiphany– can be traced back to representations of sacred dance as a gesture of invocation having the power to summon the deity's appearance[127]. A LG stone pendant from the *Delion* sanctuary in Paros[128], Cyclades, depicting a labyrinth on one side and male figures dancing with upraised arms on the other, associates the specific gesture with the cult of the Delian gods, Apollo and Artemis (fig. 20)[129].

5. Conclusions

The early historical times constitute a significant period of change and transition, but, at the same time, a period of continuity and profound transformation of social and religious traditions of previous eras. Both ancient myths and Greek literature reveal that EIA societies continued to offer *aparchai* of food products to the gods. The cult practice is recorded under that name much later on, nonetheless it reflects economic conditions, social organization and social relations, customs and traditions, but also ideological perceptions among the early historical communities.

Until the emergence of the first urban temples in central and southern Greece, *aparchai* were most likely associated with the residences of local political-religious rulers, who would act as a link between the community and the divinities. These prominent buildings are often equipped with particularly large amounts of storage vessels, which suggest long-term storage of goods beyond domestic requirements. Grain and wine were undoubtedly the primary products that were

[124] Regarding a different approach, interpreting the figurines as worshippers or priestesses, see Renfrew 1985, 387; Gesell 2004, 143-44; Prent 2005, 190-192; Hallager 2009, 108 n. 3; Gaignerot-Driessen 2014, 513-516.

[125] Her omnipotence in nature is revealed by the various symbols with which she is depicted (snakes, birds, horns of consecration, leaves, flowers), and which appear in many cases simultaneously, possibly representing different aspects of her essence, different modes of epiphany, or even secondary metaphysical forces/entities, like her ancestors or companions. Her fertile aspect is also emphasized by the gesture itself, originating from the posture of the Anatolian fertility goddesses, who appear nude, with a diadem, wings and upraised arms, mainly in Mesopotamia around 2200 BCE (Alexiou 1958, 180).

[126] For example, in Karphi, Kephala Vasilikis and Halasmenos. Pentoti 2023, 219-227, 330-331, 347. Cf. Kourou 2009, 124. According to Tsipopoulou (2009, 128), the absence of storage vessels from the sanctuaries of the other sites does not necessarily indicate an alteration in cult practices, but rather a possible differentiation in social organization.

[127] See also Section 4.2 of the present article.

[128] Papadopoulou 2003.

[129] Papadopoulou 1998, 223; 2003, 747, n. 91. Cf. Poll. IV 101.

offered, combined, however, with other fruits (figs, pomegranates, raisins) as well as olive oil, although the latter in smaller quantities compared to the other products and to the position it held in the "palatial" religious economy.

The stored offerings of *aparchai* presumably played a significant part in a variety of rituals, including commemorative, eucharistic, apotropaic, invocative, purificatory, and initiation rites. Sacrifices were frequently followed by a ceremonial feast where the sacrificial remains and the sacred offerings were consumed as a form of symbolic union with the divine, which was experienced as something mystical, transcendent, fleeting, and elusive[130].

The relationship of *aparchai* with the agricultural cycle, and thus with critical transitional stages of human life, associates them with cults of particular character. These were initially formed around unidentified primitive local deities of nature and fertility in the form and attributes of the *mother-Potnia* or/and a primordial vegetative god, which gradually evolved into specific ones, such as Zeus, Apollo–Artemis and Dionysus–Demeter.

Apollo, protector of shoots and a god of divination, also maintained an ancient destructive dimension analogous to that of Zeus, as well as of his twin sister, Artemis, a young *Potnia*, goddess of nature, the meadows and the beasts. In early Greek religious thought, it appears that these two youthful Delian gods were primarily the ones who embraced the fertility of the earth and accepted the *aparchai* of the harvest and vintage, accompanied by ritual dances, as in the myth in honor of their birth. Over time, and up until the 7th c. BCE, they transferred some of their fertility/chthonic powers and rituals to Dionysus and Demeter, mature gods who became permanently bound to the earth, vegetation, and the agricultural cycle of withering and rebirth as the archetypal gods of *aparchai*[131].

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[130] Pentoti 2023, 343-344.

[131] Pentoti 2023, 334-335, 345-348. In some of her sanctuaries, such as in Ales Arafinides in Attica, Artemis will continue to receive during the Archaic period offerings of *aparchai* and votive pithoi. Kalogeropoulos 2013, 517.

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Figure 1. Clay model of a granary from Tel Tsaf, Israel (late 6th mill. BCE) associated with grain storage rituals of the Jordan Valley and the Near East (Rosenberg *et al.* 2017, fig. 6).

Figure 2. Map of Greece highlighting the locations discussed in the text (source: Wikimedia Commons; edited by the author).

Figure 3. EIA Rulers' dwellings with storage facilities:
a: Vrondas, 12th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 264); b: Prinias-Building B, PG period (edited by the author after Pernier 1914, fig. 7); c: Phaistos, 9th-early 7th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 482); d: Zagora, end of 8th c. BCE (edited by the author after Cambitoglou *et al*. 1988, pl. 9); e: Thermos-Megaron B, end of 12th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 40); f: Tiryns, 12th c. BCE (edited by the author after Maran 2017, fig. 3); g: Nichoria-Units IV-1 and IV-5, 10th-9th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 257); h: Nichoria-IV-5, end of 9th c. BCE (McDonald *et al*. 1983, figs 2-27); i: Toumba-Lefkandi, first half of 10th c. BCE (Popham *et al*. 1993, pls 5, 23); j: Alos, 9th c. BCE (Malakasioti 2006, 128);
k: Oropos-Building Θ, end of 8th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 2002, fig. 6).

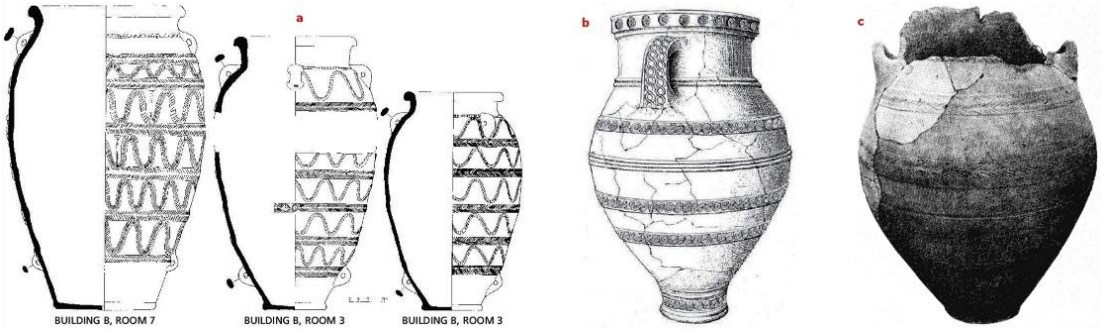

Figure 4. Storage pithoi from EIA rulers' dwellings in Crete:
a: Vrondas, 12th c. BCE (Preston Day and Snyder 2004, 66); b: Prinias, PG period (Pernier 1914, fig. 35); c: Phaistos, 9th-8th c. BCE (Rocchetti 1974-75, 199).

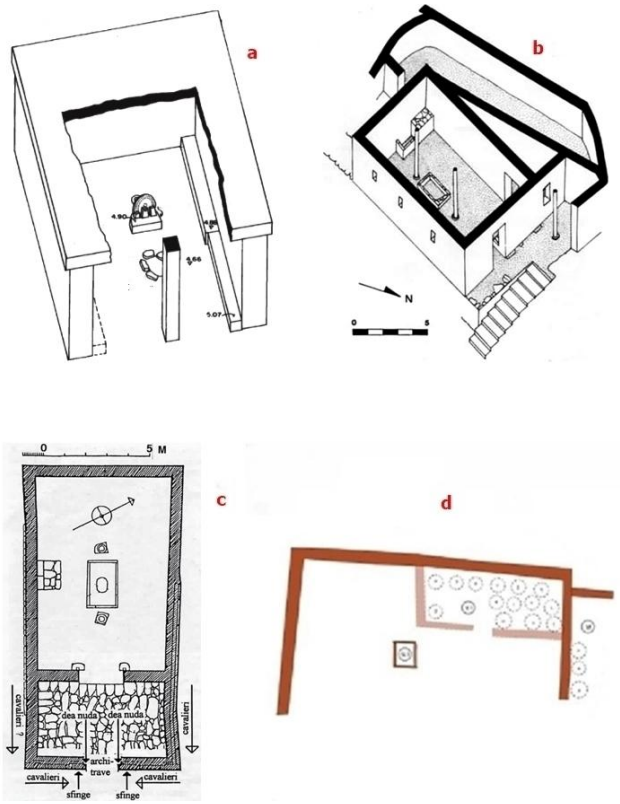

Figure 5. EIA sanctuaries and temples with storage vessels:
a: Kommos-Temple B, end of 9th c. BCE (Shaw 1989, 169); b: Dreros, end of 8th c. BCE (Mazarakis Ainian 1997, fig. 459); c: Prinias-Temple A, mid-7th c. BCE (D' Acunto 1995, 24); d: Cyclades: Xobourgo-Tenos, Pre-Thesmophorion, late 8th-end of 7th c. BCE (Kourou 2021, 135).

Figure 6. Storage pithoi and amphorae from EIA shrines and temples: a: Halasmenos, 12th c. BCE (Tsipopoulou 2009, 128); b: Kommos-Temple A, 10th-9th c. BCE (Shaw and Shaw 2000, pl. 4.63); c: Dreros, end of 8th c. BCE (D' Acunto 2002-2003, 15); d: Prinias-Temple A, mid-7th c. BCE (Pernier 1914, 67); e-f: Tenos: Xobourgo, Pre-Thesmophorion, end of 8th c. BCE (Archaeological Museum of Tenos, B66 and B67).

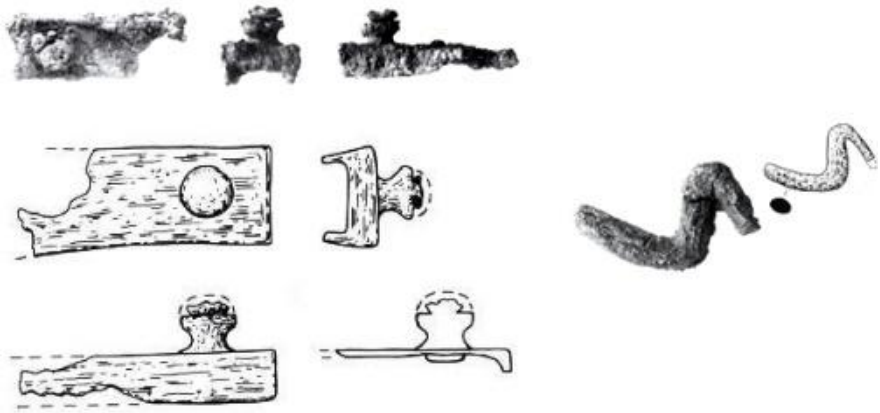

Figure 7. Toumba-Lefkandi. Elements of the metal lock of the apsidal storeroom (Popham *et al*. 1993, pls 32.2,4, 34.2,4).

Figure 8. Nichoria, Unit IV-5. Bronze sealing figurine of a deer (Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Ephorate of Antiquities of Messenia).

Figure 9. Geometric clay models of granaries:
a-b: Athens, Phaleron, mid-9th c. BCE (Archaeological Museum of the ancient Agora of Athens, no. P 27646a-b; Princeton University Art Museum, n. y1951-13);
c: Rakita sanctuary, late 8th c. BCE (Petropoulos 2002, tav. 3.4).

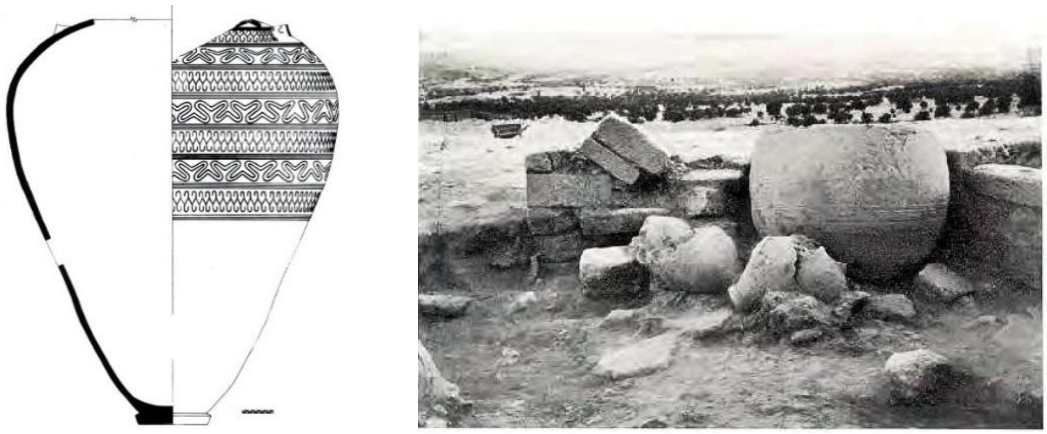

Figure 10. a: Pithos from Zagora-Andros, Cyclades (Building H26-27) with a capacity of more than 500 Lt. (Cambitoglou *et. al.* 1988, pl. 237);
b: Pithos from the "ruler's dwelling" at Phaistos-Crete (Room A) with a capacity of 2.5 tons (Levi 1961-62, 412, fig. 56).

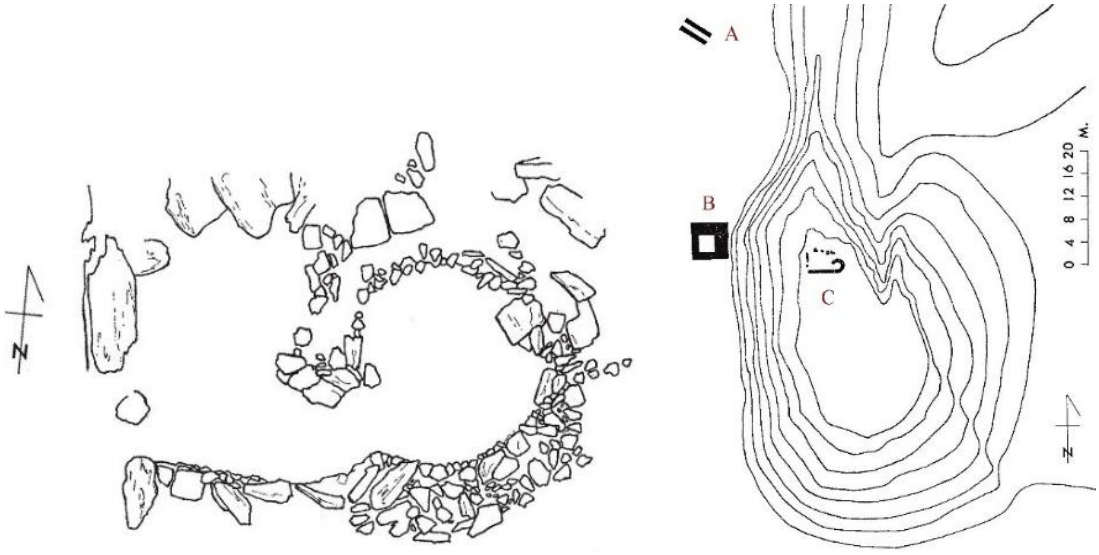

Figure 11. The Geometric sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Hymettus: a: Plan of the storage space; b: Plan of the surrounding buildings (Langdon 1976, 4, 6).

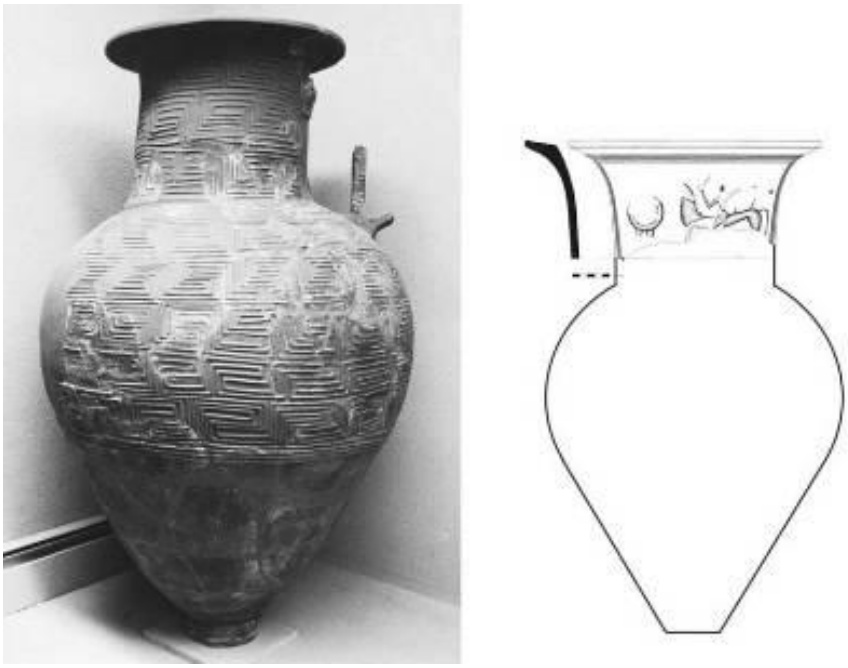

Figure 12. Pithoi from Zagora-Andros, Cyclades (Section D), with a capacity of 470 and 220 Lt. (McLoughlin 2011, fig. 13).

Figure 13. a: Pithos fragment from the temple of Dreros depicting a chariot and an archer-charioteer (Marinatos 1936, pl. XXVIII);
b: Frieze of the Temple A of Prinias with mounted warriors (Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Γ232).

Figure 14. Fragments of EIA relief pithoi from the Cyclades depicting ritual dances: a: Zagora-Andros, Room H28 (Cambitoglou 1971, pl. 67); b: Xobourgo-Tenos (Kontoleon 1969, pl. 48); c: Despotiko (Kourayos 2018, 67).

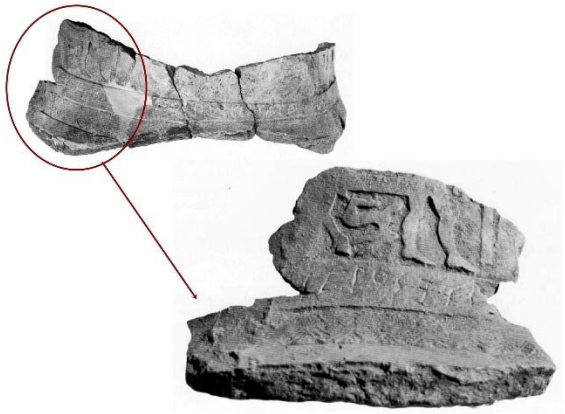

Figure 15. Fragment of the relief pithos from Zarakes, Euboea (edited by the author after Chatzidemetriou 2004, pl. 37).

Figure 16. Inscribed rim of a pithos or dinos from the Apollo sanctuary of Despotiko (Matthaiou 2020, 70, fig. 2).

Figure 17. Winged *Potnia theron* on EA relief pithoi:
a: Xobourgo, Tenos. Detail of the pithos of the figure 6f (Archaeological Museum of Tenos, B67); b: Xobourgo, Tenos (Kourou 2019, 186, fig. 8);
c: Prinias-Temple A (Pernier 1914, 186).

Figure 18. *Potnia theron* as *Kourotrophos* on EA relief pithoi:
a: Xobourgo, Tenos (Étienne *et al*. 2013, 66, fig. 33);
b: Pyri, Boeotia (National Archaeological Museum of Athens 355).

Figure 19. Clay figurines of the goddess with upraised arms from Karphi, Crete. 11th c. BCE (Heraklion Archaeological Museum).

Figure 20. Stone pendant from *Delion*, Paros (Papadopoulou 2003, 735, fig. 1).