

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LATE HELLADIC IIIA-B
IVORY HELMETED HEADS*

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Introduction

Ivory artifacts, produced by the specialized palatial workshops during the Late Helladic IIIA-B (14th-13th century BC) were found in great numbers and in a variety of areas within the Aegean region. A small group of them consists of representations of the head and neck of male individuals that wear the boar's tusk helmet. This type of helmet was a popular iconographic motif in the Aegean iconographic repertoire of the Late Bronze Age. The majority of them was discovered in Crete and the mainland, but two pieces were found in Sardinia and Cyprus (Fig. 1), making the discussion of the distribution of these objects a very interesting subject concerning interconnections, exchange of ideas and the symbolism of these specific imagery. In the scholarship, several studies have dealt with these objects in various publications, but up to this date the only one that focused solely on these objects is the research published by Krzyszkowska in 1991. In this article, the author dealt primarily with the Enkomi warrior head, but also provided a convenient and comprehensive catalogue of all the other heads. In addition, Krzyszkowska dealt with the construction techniques, the nature of the raw material, the dating and finally commented on the processes that could have happened in order for the Enkomi head to get to Tomb 16, where it was discovered.

Since that time a new ivory helmeted head was published recently by Andreadaki-Vlazaki. Although the head is part of an already known group that

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Fig. 1. Distribution of the findspots of the discussed artefacts. With circles are marked the ivory heads. The square marks the island of Delos where the warrior plaque was discovered (Source: author).



Fig. 2. Ivory head from Mycenae, Argolid. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 2468 (Source: author).

was originally mentioned in 1997, it is the first time that a photograph of one of the heads was published and it was only the second face that was shown *en face* rather than in profile (Andreadaki-Vlazaki 1997, 1008-1010; 2008, 109).

As a result, and based on the previous publications, the current study deals with the iconographic elements of the objects focusing on the military elements and the greater picture that these heads can provide up to this date. Another objective is to show that these representations were meant to portray and highlight the helmets themselves and that, as they were most likely inlays attached on wooden objects, they were luxurious items used initially by elites; therefore the chosen iconography was not a random one, but the martial character of the inlays and, as an extension of the wooden item, could have been an ideological *koinos topos* between the members of the elite(s) who were very aware of what they had in their possession. In other words, it will be attempted to comment on the possibility of the existence of a certain exchange mechanism used by the elites in the Aegean and beyond, in order to acquire objects of common artistic and symbolic value.

The material

The ivory heads under discussion have been presented in several catalogues and publications¹, so the following list is only a brief encounter of the most important information concerning context, iconographical elements, and chronology².

Aegean-the mainland:

1. Mycenae (Fig. 2)

The best preserved example of a helmeted head comes from Chamber Tomb 27 at Mycenae. It is made of hippopotamus ivory and it shows the profile of a warrior looking to the right and wearing a boar's tusk helmet (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 93: 98 E 2468 pl. 22). The helmet consists of five zones of tusks and a long cheek-piece that reaches the chin; then eight zones of tusks form the cheek piece. The back of the head is protected with an extra three zones of tusks. The helmet ends in a knob on top. The face of the warrior is carefully designed and even the pupil of the eye is clear.

This piece was found together in the same tomb with a variety of ivory objects including figure-of-eight shields and two other warrior heads. The two holes at the back were made in order to attach the head to a wooden surface. Most likely it was a piece of furniture, as was the case for all the ivory artefacts listed here. Sakellariou suggests a more general LH II-III B date, while Krzyszkowska comments that LH III A is plausible (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 353; Krzyszkowska 1991, 119).

¹ Too numerous to list here. One could mention the works of Poursat 1977a and 1977b and the catalogues of *The Mycenaean World* (Demakopoulou 1988) and the 2008 volume *From the Land of the Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100 B.C.*

² For the material, construction techniques, and technical characteristics, see Krzyszkowska 1991.



3 ↔ 4



Fig. 3. Ivory head from Mycenae, Argolid. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 2469 (Source: author).

Fig. 4. Ivory head from Mycenae, Argolid. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 2470 (Source: author).

2. Mycenae (Fig. 3)

From the same grave comes another helmeted head, but in this case the head is attached to a plaque and the face of an individual looking to the right is destroyed. Some holes that are on the plaque could have been random (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 93: 98 E 2469 pl. 22). It was made of hippopotamus ivory and it belongs to the same period as no. 1.

3. Mycenae (Fig. 4)

A third head with a helmet comes from the same tomb but it is poorly preserved (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 93: 98 E 2470 pl. 23). It is one of the two carvings (together with no. 8) that show the individual *en face*. The helmet has five rows of tusks, cheek-pieces, and the top is pointy. It is also made of ivory from hippopotamus. Same date as no. 1.



5 ↔ 6

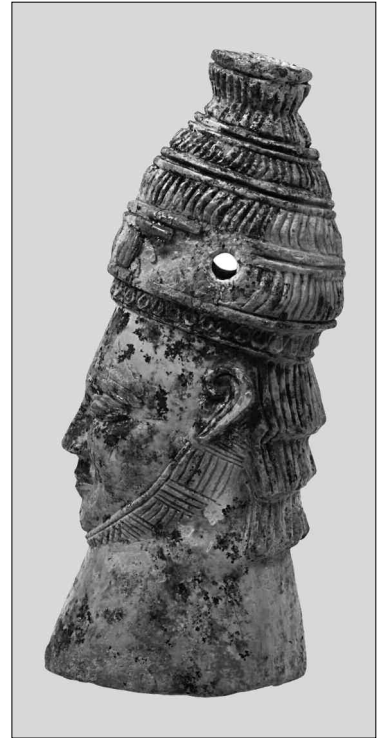


Fig. 5. Ivory head from Mycenae, Argolid. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 7937 (Source: author).

Fig. 6. Ivory head from Spata, Attica. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 2055 (Courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Copyright: Ministry of Culture/Archaeological Receipt Fund).

4. Mycenae (Fig. 5)

Another head of hippopotamus ivory that was found in very good condition comes from the House of Shields at Mycenae in the burnt house deposit. This one has zones of tusks and it seems to be a knob on its top. The head was rendered in profile looking to the left. The two holes in the back would help to attach the object to a flat surface with pegs (Tournavitou 1995, 153, pl. 20a). It is dated to the middle of LH III B (Krzyszkowska 1991, 119).

At Mycenae, together with the head, ten cut-out incised inlays also depicting heads wearing boar's tusk helmets in profile were found. They are considered to be finished products, ready to be used (Tournavitou 1995, 153). In addition, a number of cut-out helmets in relief and cut-out incised inlay pieces were discovered in the same house (Tournavitou 1995, 154, pl. 20b). Apart from the helmets,



Fig. 7. Ivory head from Archanes Fourni, Herakleion. Herakleion Archaeological Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 391- 399 (Source: author. Copyright: Ministry of Culture/Archaeological Receipt Fund).

a number of ivory figure-of-eight shields of two types (in high relief and flat cut-out inlays) were unearthed (Tournavitou 1995, 157- 9, pls. 20c, 21a- d).

5. Spata (Fig. 6)

This helmeted head from Spata, Attica, probably dates to LH IIIB (Krzyszowska 1991, 107-120, Fig. 3c). Despite the fact that the tomb was plundered, 419 ivories were found. These include four figure-of-eight shields; additionally three more were discovered that are not considered as inlays because they are carved on both sides (Grammenos 1992, 47). The individual that wears the boar's tusk helmet is shown in profile looking to the left. The four zones of tusks and the knob at the top are clearly visible. It has been suggested that the piercing on the helmet hints to a crest that could be attached there, but Krzyszowska disagrees and comments that it could be just a damage and repair or even evidence for secondary use (Krzyszowska 1991, 119).

Aegean-Crete:

6. Archanes (Fig. 7)

A burial of LM IIIA date in the cemetery of Phourni at Archanes has produced a unique combination of various sizes of figure-of-eight shields and a pair of helmeted heads³. These include 87 different pieces of hippopotamus ivory from a composition that was most likely the decoration of a footstool. Three larger



Fig. 8. Ivory head from Phylaki Apokoronou, Chania. Chania Archaeological Museum. Inv. no. K29 (From Vlasaki in Demakopoulou 1988: 148, no. 104).
 Fig. 9. Ivory head from Kydonia, Chania. Chania Archaeological Museum. Inv. no. K114 (From Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2007: 109).

shields are shown together with six groups of three smaller shields; the two helmeted figures are shown facing each other on either side of the composition. All these reliefs are carved on plaques. Various other inlays complete the decoration that was attached to the wood with ivory pins.

The heads are shown in profile (looking to the left and to the right) and wear their boar's tusk helmets with long cheek-pieces; the horizontal rows of tusks cover part of the neck, giving a total of seven rows. The cheek-pieces are shown with eight rows.

7. Chania, Phylaki Apokoronou (Fig. 8)

Two heads are mentioned to come from a plundered tholos tomb in the district of Chania, but only one is widely illustrated and discussed (Krzyszowska 1991, 118; list nos. 8(-9)). The face of the warrior is depicted in profile looking to the left. His helmet has two (or three) horizontal rows of tusks ending in a knob. There are no cheek-pieces and it seems that the back of the head is also unprotected, as only the hair is shown. Two dowel holes at the back of the figure suggest that the head was attached to a piece of furniture, possibly together with other

³ Sakellarakis/Sakellaraki 1997, 721-729, figs. 836-847. For the purposes of this study they are considered as a pair and not as two separate heads.

ivory plaques. The chronology given to this tholos tomb is LM IIIA according to the excavator, but Andreadaki-Vlazaki in her most recent publication considers it as LM IIIA2-B1 (Vlazaki in Demakopoulou 1988, 148, no. 104; Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2008, 110). This piece has been compared with the Delos warrior (see below) and the helmet has been the basis for the identification of the helmet from Sardinia (see no. 10).

8. Chania, Kydonia cemetery (Fig. 9)

Various plaques made from hippopotamus and elephant tusks were found in a LM IIIA/B looted chamber tomb (Andreadaki-Vlasaki 1997, 1008-1010). They portray lions, figure-of-eight shields and heads of individuals wearing boar's tusk helmets. It is thought that these pieces were attached to a small wooden box, similar to those from Archanes and Phylaki. This box initially must have been placed in the side chamber, but during the looting of the tomb its remains were spread around. The finds are now exhibited in the Chania Museum. Despite the looting of the tomb, the wealth of the deceased is indicated by the wealth of the few graves goods that survived the looters. At the same time, Kydonia's contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean during the 14th and 13th century BC has also been highlighted.

Most of these heads are not published yet, but for the purposes of this study it is enough to acknowledge the fact that these pieces were discovered there and place them on the distribution map. Andreadaki-Vlazaki mentions that in the majority the plaques (portraying female figures, rosettes, columns, heraldic lions, etc.) are made of hippopotamus tusk and that there are further helmeted heads, shown in profile (Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2008, 109).

However, recently one of the inlays was published portraying a young beardless male shown *en face* wearing a boar's tusk helmet with two or three rows of tusks and a big knob on the top. The face is rather finely carved and at the back there are two holes for the rivets.

Cyprus:

9. Enkomi (Fig. 10)

Tomb 16 of the 1896 British Museum excavations at the site of Enkomi at the eastern part Cyprus has produced a number of artefacts showing the wealth of the deceased, such as stone sculpture, a pair of golden earrings, a gold finger-ring, fragments of an ivory handle, bronze spear heads and knives, pottery, bronze and stone vessels (Murray *et alii* 1900, 32, 51, pl. II; Krzyszkowska 1991, 107-120; Tatton-Brown 2003: 16). Amongst these finds there was an ivory head portraying an individual in profile looking to the right wearing a boar's tusk helmet consisting of four rows of tusks. A cheek-piece is quite visible and although the head has been damaged, it is evident that it is an object of high quality and skill. It should be assigned to the general LH IIIA-B period as it is not possible to determine its exact time of manufacture. Concerning its origin though, an Aegean source is most likely.



10 ↔ 11

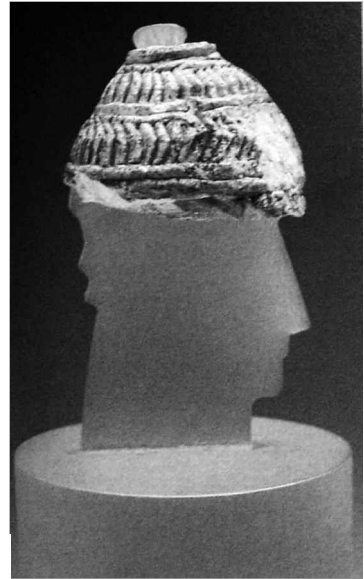


Fig. 10. Ivory head from Enkomi. British Museum, London. Inv. no. 1897,0401.1340 (<http://www.britishmuseum.org>).

Fig. 11. Fragment of an ivory helmet from Decimoputzu, Sardinia. Cagliari Archaeological Museum. Unknown inv. no. (from Santoni 2003: 541, fig. 1065).

Italy:

10. Sardinia (Fig. 11)

A very fragmentary part of what has been agreed that is represents the helmet of another ivory head similar to all the above has been found at Sardinia at the site of Mitza Purdia di Decimoputzu (Ferrarese Ceruti *et alii* 1987, 12-5; Krzyszkowska 1991, 119; Lo Schiavo 2003, 156-157; Santoni 2003, 541). Interestingly this object is made also of hippopotamus ivory and it possibly decorated a pyxis (Santoni 2003, 541). The two zones of ivories that form the helmet can clearly be seen although it is not possible to determine whether there was a cheek-piece or any further part for the protection of the back of the head. Presumably there must have been a knob at the top, but this does not survive. The individual would be shown in profile, possibly looking to the right. The date given according to Lo Schiavo is LH IIIA2/B (Lo Schiavo 2003, 156-157); however Vagnetti in 2000 suggested that this piece should date to LH IIIA (Santoni 2003, 541). For the purposes of this study, the more general LH IIIA-B is preferred, although Sardinian chronology remains problematic. The head is considered to be manufactured in the Aegean and specifically in the Argolid.

Discussion

Function

It is generally accepted that these ivory artefacts functioned as decoration of pieces of wooden furniture, most likely footstools and also boxes or pyxides of the same material. They were in fact inlays attached to the wooden surfaces and this explains the various holes that can be seen on them. Certainly the material they were made of is of high value and together with the skill and the choice of the decorative motif, *i.e.* the helmeted male, gives the wooden object an elite character, a prestigious exchange item. Krzyszkowska, for example, considers these footstools as gifts between elites and according to Sakellarakis the footstool itself was a luxury object⁴.

However these pieces may have well functioned as heirlooms. It is by no accident that in Sardinia and Cyprus they were discovered as single heads rather than parts of a greater composition, like the Archanes pieces. A close parallel is the ivory mirror handle portraying a fully armed warrior engaged in combat with a griffin that was discovered in a post-Bronze Age context in Tomb 709 at Amathus in Cyprus, while the object was clearly made in the Late Bronze Age (Hadjisavvas 2002, 83-88). Therefore, it can be proposed that the pieces themselves were considered important enough to be kept even when they were detached from the wooden object itself.

A special class of artefacts

Objects made of ivory have been produced in great numbers during the Late Bronze Age in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean in general. However these inlays with the specific iconographic motif are unique in the artistic repertoire. Nowhere else in the region and at no other period helmeted heads made of ivory decorated wooden objects. Despite the fact that their small number could have been considered a limitation as it restricts statistical studies and the possibility to draw conclusions based on quantitative research, it is actually a very crucial point as the limited amount of these pieces highlights their high value and exceptional elite character. The exotic nature of the ivory, the processing and the necessary transport of the raw material in order to arrive to the workshop and then the symbolic significance of the warrior imagery combined all on one artefact, produce these rare objects. This very distinctiveness makes them suitable for an elite class of people who could afford them. It is almost certain that there must have been more examples of helmeted heads, but for a number of possible reasons they did not survive to this day, although more examples could be found in the future⁵.

The large number of ivories from the House of Shields at Mycenae, *i.e.* more

⁴ Krzyszkowska 1991, 108-109, 117-118. For more on Mycenaean footstools, see Krzyszkowska 1996, 85-104 and Sakellarakis 1996, 105-110.

⁵ These include funerary deposition processes and preservation, looting, destruction, and even loss.

than 18,700 pieces, clearly indicate ‘Mycenae’s prominence in ivory work above other Mainland centres, including Thebes’ (Tournavitou 1995, 190). Helmets and helmeted heads consist of only a small portion and they should not be considered the focus of the production. Thus their importance becomes even greater, due to their rarity.

At the same time, it may be no accident that all the helmeted head inlays were made of hippopotamus tusk. As Krzyszkowska rightly observed, perhaps this specific material was selected for manufacturing these heads (Krzyszkowska 1991, 112-113).

Comments on the iconography

Apart from the two heads from Archanes, all the pieces are unique and different from each other. It is tempting to follow the Archanes iconographic model and suggest that these heads were combined with the presence of figure-of-eight shields as compositions. The numbers of ivory shields that were discovered at the Mycenae workshop together with the helmets and the helmeted heads support this view. It could be suggested that pairs of heads in profile would face each other with shields appearing between them or surrounding them. The composition would also entail perhaps the *en face* examples. Due to lack of complete compositions, it is not possible to suggest a syntax, but it would not be strange to have once again a combination of figure-of-eight shields and heads.

Parallels are rather limited. A miniature helmet made of ivory comes from Knossos that probably dates to LM II (Borchhardt 1972, 46, no. II.2, taf. 8.3). The cheek-pieces are visible, but instead of zones of tusks, three rows of dotted circles divided by double lines were carved.

At a deposit underneath the Artemision at Delos, a plaque made of elephant ivory that appears to be unique in the Aegean ivory repertoire so far was discovered. The full body of a male figure is depicted wearing a boar’s tusk helmet without protective cheek-pieces. He is shown carrying a large spear and behind him a full-body figure-of-eight shield is visible (Gallet De Santerre *et alii*. 1948, 156-162, pl. XXV). The object is assigned to LH IIIA2-B⁶. Various interpretations have been put forward, mostly focusing on his ethnic origin. The impressive and chief-like posture of the warrior is obvious⁷. It is reminiscent of various other male representations carrying spears. The Delos warrior could be the stereotypical elite warrior image of the past that survived through to LH IIIB. However, when compared to the helmeted heads it is clearly part of a totally different decorative scheme. His impressive gesture implies power and authority. It is possible that just like the heads, this plaque was intended to decorate a footstool or some other wooden object.

⁶ Hood 1993, 157, fig. 121. See also Daniilidou 1998, 186, E6.

⁷ Gallet De Santerre *et alii* (1948, 162) comment that “Il y a, certes, dans les gests, quelque chose d’excessif et de théâtral”.

Important iconographic parallels to the ivory helmeted heads, apart from the Delos case, come from Cyprus. A limited number of warriors wearing helmets and armed swords and shields engaged in combat with griffins and lions carved on ivory mirror handles was discovered at Palaepaphos, Enkomi, and Amathus. In fact, at Enkomi an ivory pyxis portrays two warriors fighting with a lion and a griffin respectively⁸. However, the shields are round and the helmets are not from tusks so they cannot be fully paralleled, but they are the only examples that portray helmeted men carved on this material. The mirror handles were certainly owned by members of the local Cypriot elite and it has been suggested that the motif of the combat was adopted from the Aegean repertoire, manipulated and transformed according to the local Cypriot symbolic and artistic traditions and tastes (Papadopoulos forthcoming). Beyond that, there is no comparative material, making the case of the ivory heads unique in the archaeological record of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean.

The face and the helmet

There is a variety in the facial characteristics of the males making this way every face different with the exception of the Archanes pair. There are for example bearded and non-bearded individuals, but it is rather difficult to accept that these heads were made in order to portray certain people or to describe a member of the elite specifically. Equally impossible is to identify any possible mythological character due to lack of written documentation. Additionally, there seems to be no specific 'guidebook', no guidelines for the ivory carver to follow in order to create these faces under some kind of artistic rule. It can be suggested that judging from the small size of the objects and the fact that there seems to be an 'artistic freedom' towards the representation of these males, there was no intention to portray any person specifically, but simply a male wearing the boar's tusk helmet.

Boar's tusk helmets appear very frequently in the Aegean imagery already from the early Late Bronze Age. A number of individuals on the Miniature Frieze from the West House at Akrotiri, Thera (Morgan 1988; Televanou 1994), are shown wearing it while it can also be seen on representations of warriors from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae⁹. Later on, on the wall paintings from Pylos (Lang 1969), Orchomenos (Spyropoulos 1974, 313-325, colour pl. II), and Mycenae (Rodenwaldt 1921, 21-45, folded pl. III-IV) warriors and hunters wear this specific helmet. It is depicted on several media such as seals (and sealings), pottery, wall paintings, ivory, metal and stone vases, and faience. It is noticeable that during LH IIIA-B there are no depictions of single boar's

⁸ For a presentation and a brief discussion on these mirror handles, see d'Albiac 1992, 105-112. See also d'Albiac 1992, 105-107 (figs. 1a-c) (Enkomi), Krzyszkowska 1992, 237-242 (Enkomi); Hadjisavvas 2002, 83-88 (Amathous).

⁹ For example on the Battle Krater (Sakellariou 1971, 3-20, pls. 1-2, figs. 1-2).

tusk helmets in glyptic art¹⁰, as there used to be in earlier periods. Instead, these images can now be seen only on pottery, ivory, and in one case on a wall painting from Pylos. The fact that during palatial times helmeted heads made of ivory are carved consists of an innovation. The lack of detailed facial features of the heads, in contrast with the careful creation of the helmets, may suggest that the focus of the artist was the helmet and not the nameless faces. The head from the House of Shields is an example of a helmeted head of careful design as regards the headgear, but with an almost carelessly thick neck and likewise facial characteristics. For reasons yet unclear, the ivory artists occasionally portrayed these helmeted heads perhaps in order to personalise to a minimum level the protective application of the object. The important element would have been the helmet itself. The depictions of boar's tusk helmets have been frequent in earlier periods and sometimes very carefully executed (cf. Papadopoulos 2006). This fact points out the significance of this implement as a recognisable sign of high status already from early LBA¹¹. It must be underlined that actual boar's tusk helmets appear limited in the archaeological record mostly during LH IIIA-B, while tusks have been discovered in LM I (Papadopoulos 2006). In brief, it would be mainly the helmets that would act symbolically and give the wooden object its high status. There seems to have been no intention to portray, let us say, a certain ruler or aristocrat, but an anonymous individual.

Within the framework of Aegean iconography, the helmet may be considered as functioning both as a symbol of hunting and military prowess, and as a sign of legitimate authority, elite *insignium* and even as a recognisable emblem of power. According to Poursat the warlike character of the Mycenaean warriors has been suggested by the presence of these ivory decorative warriors (Poursat 1977a, 33). Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is not possible to determine whether the ivory figures were considered hunters or warriors. By looking on the Aegean repertoire of the time, hunters appear to have the same gear (including helmets) as the warriors and therefore a more general martial character should be preferred. It is logical to assume that they were meant to portray military and hunting prowess, but perhaps they also followed the 'trend' of the times in portraying armed males on a variety of media. A plausible interpretation is that these heads functioned both emblematically underlining power and martial skill, but also as protective objects that together with the figure-of-eight shields protected the owner(s) of the footstool or the contents of the box.

The limited number of helmets found in the Mycenae workshops, in contrast

¹⁰ With the term 'single' it is meant that they are not shown worn by people, but they are standing alone. See for example note 12.

¹¹ The most impressive and detailed depiction of such a helmet comes from Xeste 4, Akrotiri (Akrivaki 2003, 527-541). The symbolic role of the boar's tusk helmet and the figure-of-eight shields have been established by several studies. See Papadopoulos 2006 for a review of those studies.

with the total amount of ivory artwork, indicates that these *insignia* were never meant to be produced in great numbers and quantities, making this way their symbolic power more exclusive. The recipients must have been members of the aristocracy throughout the Aegean world. However, the question is whether these objects had the same symbolic function outside the Aegean, i.e. in Cyprus and Sardinia. In order to attempt to understand the finds in these two areas the distribution of the finds must be briefly discussed.

Distribution (Fig. 1)

The distribution of these artefacts is of great interest as they appear in Attica and the Argolid in the mainland and at Chania and Herakleion in Crete, while an example is yet to be found in the Aegean islands¹². However, as it was shown a damaged single head was found in Tomb 16 at Enkomi, Cyprus, and a part of the helmet of another head discovered at Decimoputzu, Sardinia. Remarkably there are no similar finds from the intermediate zones, i.e. the Dodecanese and Italy and Sicily. These two regions are widely discussed in the scholarship as areas with extensive contacts with the Aegean during the 14th and 13th centuries BC. Cyprus is an obvious step between the Orient and the Occident and objects from the Aegean have been discovered in several sites on the island¹³. To be more specific, the context of the ivory head is one of the 100 tombs excavated by the British Museum at Enkomi, a site that, together with the excavations that followed, has produced significant LH III material from the Aegean. Sardinia on the other hand had contacts both with the Aegean and Cyprus, and recent studies have shown that trade networks allowed a variety of artefacts and raw materials to travel around the central and east Mediterranean¹⁴.

The presence of these rare ivory helmeted heads in these areas is by no means accidental. The specific objects are of great value that derives not only from the value of the exotic material they are made from, but also from the fact that they appear to be extremely rare in the contemporary Eastern Mediterranean world. As a result it is justifiable to suggest that they were used by the local elites. However, although in the Aegean region their presence hints at a *koine* as there was a gradual 'evolution' in the use of martial iconography already from the Early Bronze Age (Papadopoulos 2006), it is difficult to suggest the same for the other two regions. Certainly, as objects *per se* they were valuable and status symbols, but whether they had the same ideological and aristocratic meaning is not easy to determine. One approach is that Aegean people had lived and died at Enkomi and Decimoputzu, and for this reason the specific finds were

¹² With the exception of the Delos plaque, which does not however belong to the same stylistic group.

¹³ There is also extensive literature concerning Cypriot art. See Karageorghis 2002.

¹⁴ See for example Vagnetti 1986, 201-214; Lo Schiavo 1995, 45-60; Santoni 2003, 140-151; Lo Schiavo 2003, 152-161.

found there. On the other hand, it is equally possible that these objects reached those destinations as either gifts of simply luxurious objects or even as curiosities. In fact they could have been considered so exceptional that the Enkomi head was kept by itself and not as part of the composition it once belonged¹⁵.

Summary and conclusions

Eight ivory heads of male individuals wearing a boar's tusk helmet have been discovered at various areas in the Aegean region. They were distributed rather unevenly throughout the mainland and Crete, while some unpublished pieces are located at Chania. From these artefacts only the Archanes pair and its original composition survived; all the rest were found as single pieces. However, it is more than probable that all of these heads were inlays attached to wooden pieces of furniture and boxes. Two more ivory heads were found outside the Aegean and, very intriguingly, to its east and west. Their presence there can be explained to a certain extent thanks to the various studies concerning exchange networks, sea routes, the trade of ivory in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, and the diplomatic protocols that must have had as main focus the giving and receiving of expensive diplomatic gifts, such as those wooden objects with the ivory inlays¹⁶.

One should be careful though as it is not possible to determine whether these heads were in fact parts of luxurious and elite gifts beyond the Aegean; at least not at this stage with the current available data. It is almost certain that within the Aegean region, an area where the iconography of warfare and motifs of martial character became gradually a symbol of status between the local elites, these heads and the objects they were attached to were prestigious objects for aristocrats and/or wealthy patrons. Whether the same ideology applied to Cyprus and Sardinia is beyond the aims of this study. Certainly, both these islands did not have a strong artistic tradition concerning images of warriors and hunters during the Late Bronze Age, at least not to the extent that the Aegean people had. As a result, it would be unsafe to comment on elite and warrior ideologies with the presence of a single piece respectively. It can be suggested of course that the recipients of these objects acquired them because these artworks had already an established value in the Eastern Mediterranean as prestige items. However, it would be safer to suggest that both the Enkomi and the Decimoputzu heads were detached at some stage from their original context

¹⁵ Krzyszkowska (1991, 118) comments on the fact that "the head had become separated (...) from its original backing-plaque and footstool. It may have been salvaged and re-used, or it may have simply been kept as a souvenir or curio, perhaps passing through several hands before being deposited with its last owner in Enkomi tomb 16".

¹⁶ The presence of both hippopotamus and elephant ivory at the Uluburn shipwreck clearly shows the distribution of the material. See Pulac 2008. For recent discussions concerning the trade of ivory, see Rehak/Younger 1998 and Chaubet 2008.

and that they were kept as expensive single items¹⁷. Their value was recognisable and perhaps it was even known that they initially belonged to a greater iconographic composition. However, in any case they probably should be attributed to individuals, especially members of the elite.

For the Aegean it is quite secure to suggest that these items belonged to aristocrats, while for the other two cases it is not¹⁸. Ivory heads were certainly part of the elite iconographic agenda of the LH IIIA-B Aegean and neighbouring sites and they were manufactured solely there, perhaps specifically at the Argolid workshops. If one isolates the issues concerning the complex trade and exchange networks of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean and focuses on these ivory helmeted heads, one will probably see that even in the so-called *koine* and despite the presence of an ‘International Style’¹⁹, in some cases ideology and artwork remained purely regional.

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¹⁷ A term suitable for this case could be ‘multivalent’ (*i.e.* having many values or meanings), an expression explained and used by Cline (2005, 50).

¹⁸ Mee (2008, 380) rightly observes that ‘However, apart from pottery and occasional exotica, such as the ivory head of a warrior in a boar’s tusk helmet from Sardinia, Mycenaean influence is quite limited’.

¹⁹ For issues concerning the *koine* and the International Style, see Chaubet 1998.

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