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## Early Cretan dress: heritage, influence and mobility of structure and textile elements (ca. 850-600 BC)

### ABSTRACT

While Cretan dress in Bronze Age has been studied exemplarily and according to several aspects by many scholars, detailed research and analysis of Cretan clothes of the following periods did not occur. Significant material starts first in 9th century with increasing material in the 8th and mainly 7th century, the Daedalic epoch. The material of the depicted garments especially from women is inhomogeneous and allows several analyses of textile details, decoration, pattern and elements of dress which can be compared with contemporaneous material of fine arts from other regions, as well as with preserved textile finds. Expected evidence will treat of cultural, social and economic questions and the main theme of mobility: Which elements are inherited from Bronze Age and advanced and which are imported from other regions like East Mediterranean? What do we know about Cretan artists who were working outside Crete and which influences can we reveal not only in technology and style but in representation of robes?

KEYWORDS: Early Greek, Cretan, dress, epiblema, textile, Daedalic, pattern

### THE EARLIEST DEPICTIONS

“The earliest figures after the end of the Mycenaean Age to portray the dress of women in enough detail” (Harrison 1977, 37) do not start with the Daedalic korai of the seventh century, but about 200 years earlier. Two paintings of a goddess on an ash-urn from Knossos (Siebenmorgen 2008, fig. 197) and one on a pithos from Fortetsa<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1), both from the middle of the 9th century, supply us already with a lot of hints concerning the characteristics of early Greek female dress in Crete: The dress is tailored, girded and has different patterns in the upper and lower part. The two women on the urn are differentiated even in details of their dress, which shows the importance of clothing even in earliest time. Further the lower parts of their dresses are structured: Figure A has three vertical stripes with an extra horizontal division of the middle one, thus giving the impression of separate woven and later sewn parts of textile, while the windmill-pattern of figure B is divided horizontally by a central stripe of chequerboard.

From the late 9th century we have the Bronze girdle of Fortetsa<sup>2</sup> with the depiction of two goddesses, whose dresses are girded and show decorative borders vertically at the outer seams,

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<sup>1</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 1440, show case 185.

<sup>2</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 2315, show case 190.

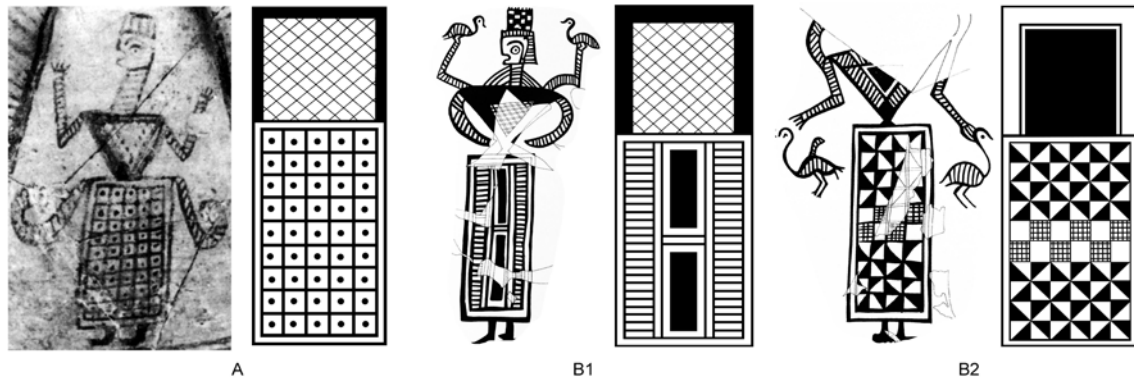


Fig. 1. Cretan dress 9th century BC (a: pithos 1440 from Fortetsa, b1,2: ash-urn form Knossos; drawings by author after Coldstream 1977, fig. 21b, and Siebenmorgen 2008, fig. 197).

in the middle and horizontally on the hem. For the first time we recognize the bolero-like upper garment which will become characteristically form the Daedalic epoch and which for lack of better alternatives is usually called *epiblema*. This garment and the vertical and horizontal borders of the skirt are documented throughout the 8th century and further, when the material becomes richer.

#### THE ELEMENTS OF THE EARLY CRETAN FEMALE COSTUME

7th century art sees the “Daedalic costume”, which some scholars call “traditional Cretan dress” (Coldstream 1977, 284), fully developed, consisting of a tubular dress, a broad girdle and as an additional, but not obligatory garment, the *epiblema*.

The dress (Benda-Weber 2008, 2010, 2011) is neither a *peplos* nor a *chiton*, but basically a sewn tube, obviously tailored, on the one hand because of the tight fitting form and the concave curved side seams of the upper part.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand this is suggested by the clearly separated parts of textile, either by lines marking seams and borders or by different patterns. For a tight fit there must not be curved cuttings, but sewn-on rectangular, triangular or trapezoid parts are possible too. The most frequently type of dress in Crete in the 7th century has narrow or broad borders at the skirt, running horizontally at the hem and vertically in the middle, nearly always reaching only to the girdle line, which makes it difficult to understand how it was tailored.<sup>4</sup> The question about the opening remains, but such borders offer a lot of possibilities. Details of the upper part of the dress are rare; a welcome exception is the torso of Eleftherna,<sup>5</sup> which dates later about 600 BC and resembles depictions from Samos (Tsakos – Viglaki-Sofianou 2012) (Fig. 2).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Ariadne’s dress on the pithos in Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 6391, and the pinakes from Gortyn (Levi 1955-56, pl. 1c and fig. 65).

<sup>4</sup> Contemporary depictions of other Greek regions like the Cyclades (especially the Tenian relief pithoi, see Schäfer 1957 and Ervin 1963) show more often the upper part of the dress with the central border reaching to the neckline (Benda-Weber 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 47.

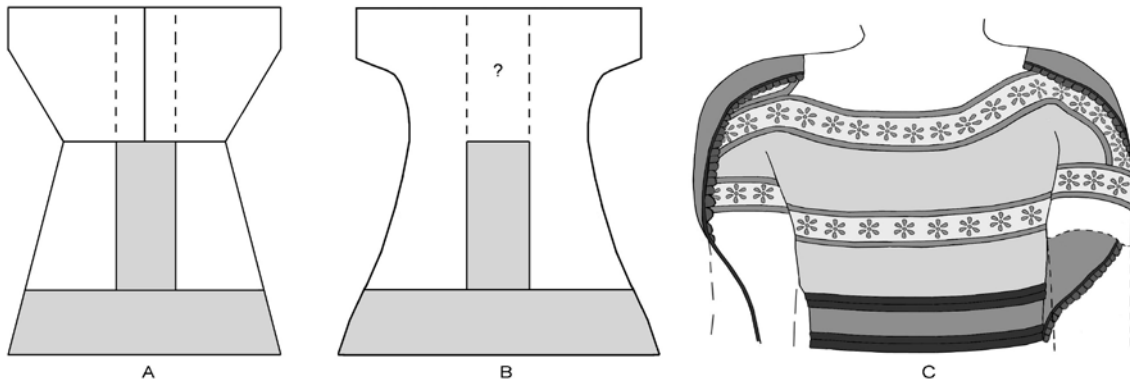


Fig. 2. Cretan dress 7th century BC (a, b: possible patterns of the most common type; c: reconstruction of the torso from Eleftherna, Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 47; drawings by author).

The small cape, which is called *epiblema* in literature, is an extra garment worn on top of the tunic.<sup>6</sup> It has the character of an accessory, only worn by goddesses and distinguished women, long before they wore the himation. The *epiblema* is a tailored garment,<sup>7</sup> always covering the shoulders and sometimes the décolleté too; the back part is reaching to the girdle line. Some variations are possible, for example with two hanging parts of textile to cover the upper arms. The basic patterns vary and the seams usually are curved for better fitting (Fig. 3). Nearly all

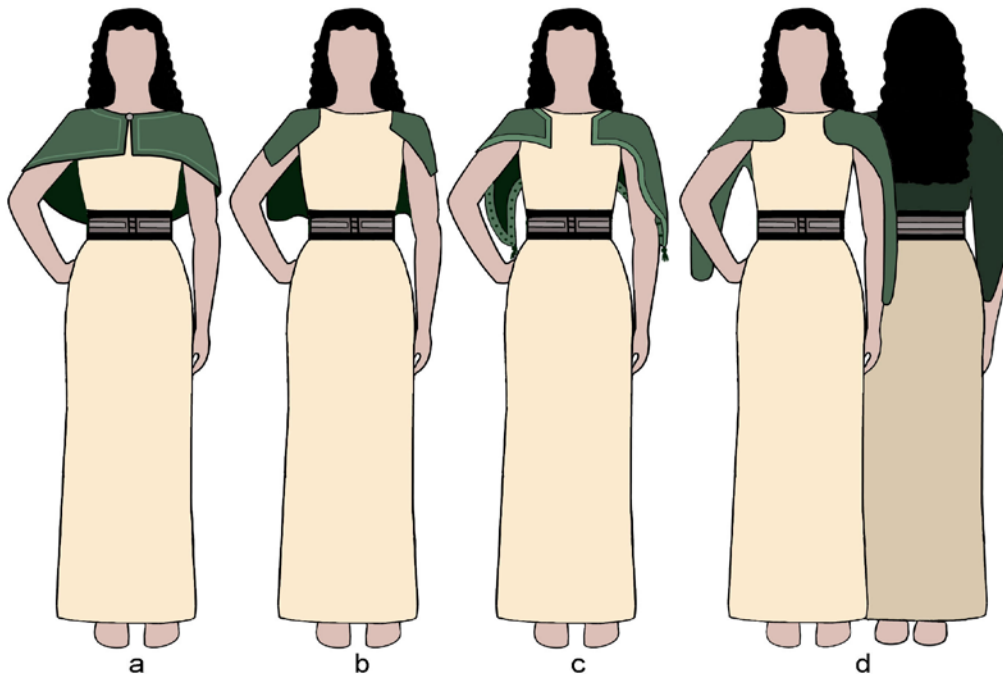


Fig. 3. Types of epiblemata (drawings by author).

<sup>6</sup> Harrison's interpretation of a forward pulled back part of the dress is not convincing (Harrison 1977, 37).

<sup>7</sup> It is definitely no rectangular shawl which would fall down in conic folds, but it is cut or even woven into shape with rounded edges.

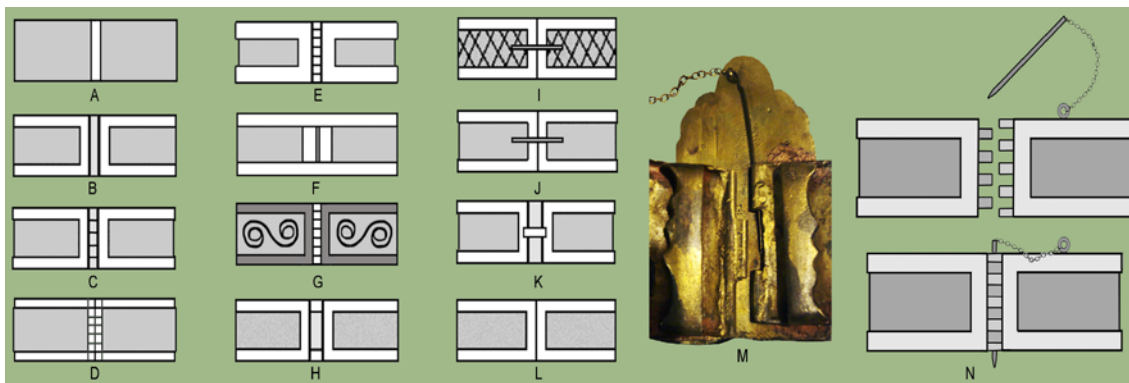


Fig. 4. Girdles of Cretan type. Examples from Crete (a-h), Samos (i-j), Milet (k) and Thera (l) and the suggested closing system (n) compared with a traditional belt buckle (korona) from Thrace (m); (drawings and photo by author).

examples derive from Crete; *epiblemata* from outside of Crete are all younger and are thought to be influenced from Cretan art. The origin of the *epiblema* is unknown, but a Cretan-Mycenean provenience has been suggested (Davaras 1972, 26-27, 59-61: discussion with literature). The Milesian terracottas of the Middle Daedalic epoch (Von Graeve 2007, pl. 88.1) show a local fashion: the *epiblema* is worn asymmetrically reaching more down at the left side, as it is the case at the statue of Auxerre.<sup>8</sup>

The broad girdle is a must in early Cretan costume. Different types occur, some are all around homogenous, but the main type had reinforced edges, made maybe of a combination of leather and metal, and a vertical closing in the middle front. The small horizontal lines indicate a closing system which is in use for present buckles of several traditional Greek costumes: horizontal, vertically arranged loops on both ends, when pushed together, can be closed by a bolt. This type only appears on Cretan or Cretan influenced artefacts and is worn by women together with dress and *epiblema* or by naked young men. In Samos and Milet a very similar type with an additional horizontal locking bolt can be watched (Fig. 4).

#### OTHER TYPES OF CRETAN DRESS

Beside the “Daedalic uniform” we can observe other types of costume worn in Crete mainly in the 7th century BC.

The women from two stelae from Prinias<sup>9</sup> are dressed with a slim robe with several hem borders and tassels at the corners. Over it they wear a rectangular mantle, slightly shorter than the dress and open at the right lower side, while the upper body is covered with the upper mantle tail. Lebesi calls the mantle also *epiblema* (Λεμπέση 1976, 22), but it is not the usual bolero-like garment. The ribbons below the girdle are more likely a bow for fixing the mantle than hanging tassels of the girdle (Fig. 5).

<sup>8</sup> Paris, Louvre Ma 3098.

<sup>9</sup> Stelae A1 and A2-3, Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 234. 238. 239.



Fig. 5. Dress and mantle from Prusias stelai A1 and A2-3 (drawing by author).

The costume of another female figure from stele B 11<sup>10</sup> has a completely different form which is not easy to analyse. She seems to wear a long dress with a vertical border and a shorter over garment ending about waist-high, which not necessarily must be a *peplos*. But what we can observe is that this kind of clothing is worn by a girl, while the long mantle is the dress of elder women. This distinction is supported by the attributes: the mature women are holding a distaff while the attributes of the girl are a bird and a wreath. The differentiation is given by the symbols and the garments, as Lebesi points out (Λεμπέση 1976, 173-174).

Another type of dress worn in Crete is characterized by pleating: Narrow vertical lines clearly indicate pleats by painting<sup>11</sup> or in relief along the whole dress or only in the lower part.<sup>12</sup> Some Cretan statuettes show the well-known middle bordure, but on both sides stripes indicate pleats, while a broad bottom seam holds them in position thus not to swing freely (Fig. 6).<sup>13</sup>

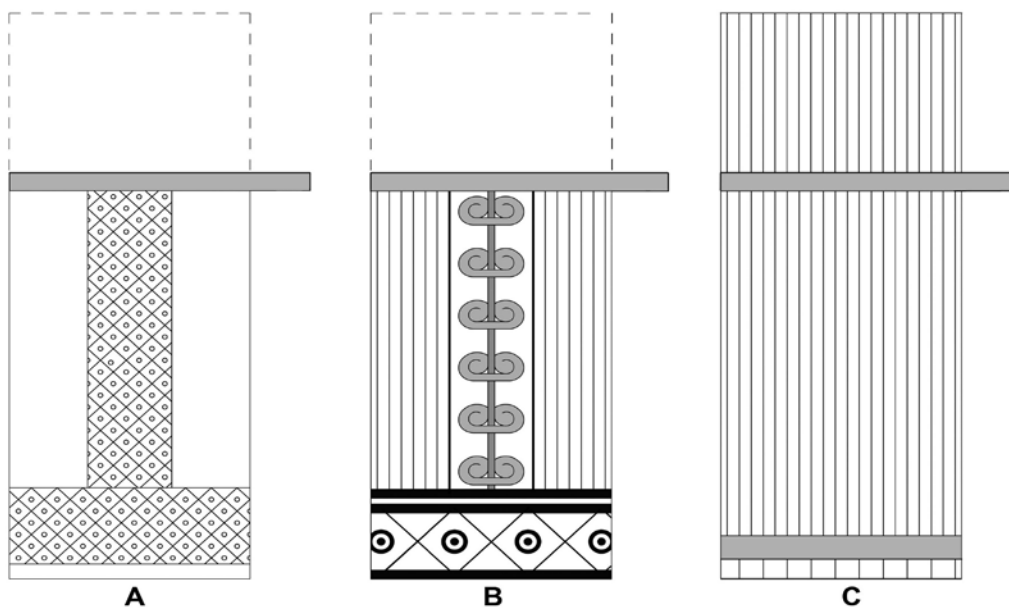


Fig. 6. Pleated dresses in Crete (7th century BC), three types (drawings by author).

<sup>10</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 396.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. a statuette from Gortyn (Levi 1955-56, 254 fig. 50a).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. the pinakes from Gortyn (Heraklion, Archaeological Museum: Levi 1955-56, 260, fig. 56) and Praisos (New York, MMA 53.5.22: Demargne 1970, pl. 42c, cat. D11) or the relief amphora in Jerusalem (Israel Museum: Demargne 1970, pl. 32a, cat. C30).

<sup>13</sup> E.g. pinakes from Gortyn, Heraklion, Archaeological Museum, show case 168 (Levi 1955-56, 268, fig. 65 and 254, fig. 50b).

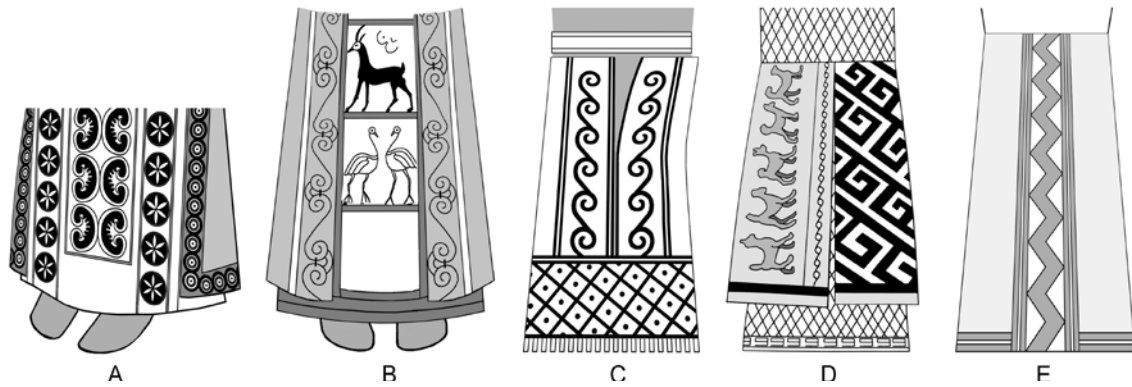


Fig. 7. Cretan skirts with front opening (?), 7th century BC; a: statue from Gortyn (Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 380, b: statuette from Gortyn, c: pinax (Louvre AM 1698), d: Helena on a bronze cuirass in Olympia (Archaeological Museum), e: lost wood relief of Zeus and Hera from Samos (drawings by author).

Usually, especially when the colour or decoration remained, we can be sure, that the upper part of the body was covered. But some of the figurines from Gortyn<sup>14</sup> and elsewhere<sup>15</sup> suggest or show clearly naked breasts, with or without the *epiblema*, while the lower part is dressed only with a skirt. Can we deduce therefore that in some cases, when the upper body is not naked, it could be a skirt with a vertical central or lateral boarder opening, worn above a simple dress,<sup>16</sup> especially when the decoration at the hem is identical with the upper part?<sup>17</sup> The extra skirt or kilt above the dress would be good Minoan tradition (Fig. 7).

#### HERITAGE: MINOAN AND MYCENAEAN FORERUNNERS

We have to ask to which extent the early Cretan female clothing depend from Bronze Age forerunners and which other influences we can state.

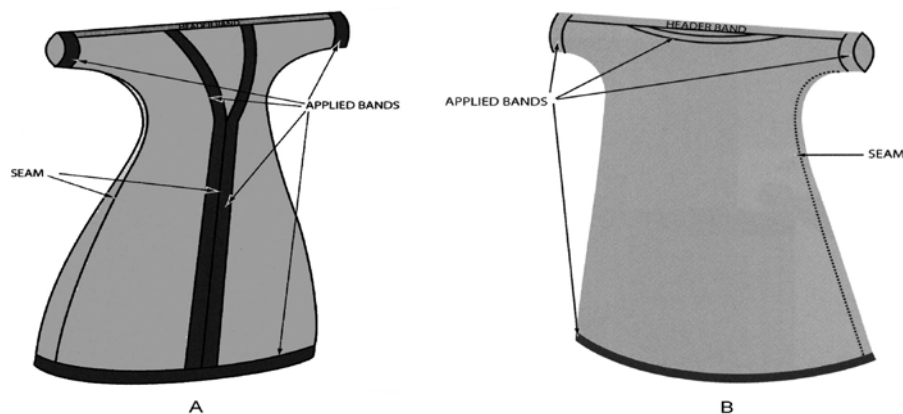


Fig. 8. Minoan (a) and Mycenaean (b) dress (after Jones 2015, fig. 4.130 and 4.187).

<sup>14</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 11315 and Levi 1955-56, 256 fig. 43 c; 252 fig. 48, 255 fig. 51.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. the lost wooden relief from Samos (Harrison 1977, 230 fig. 18)

<sup>16</sup> Hypothetically mentioned by Kopke 1967, 103.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Helena's dress at the bronze cuirass from Olympia (Schefold 1964, 26).

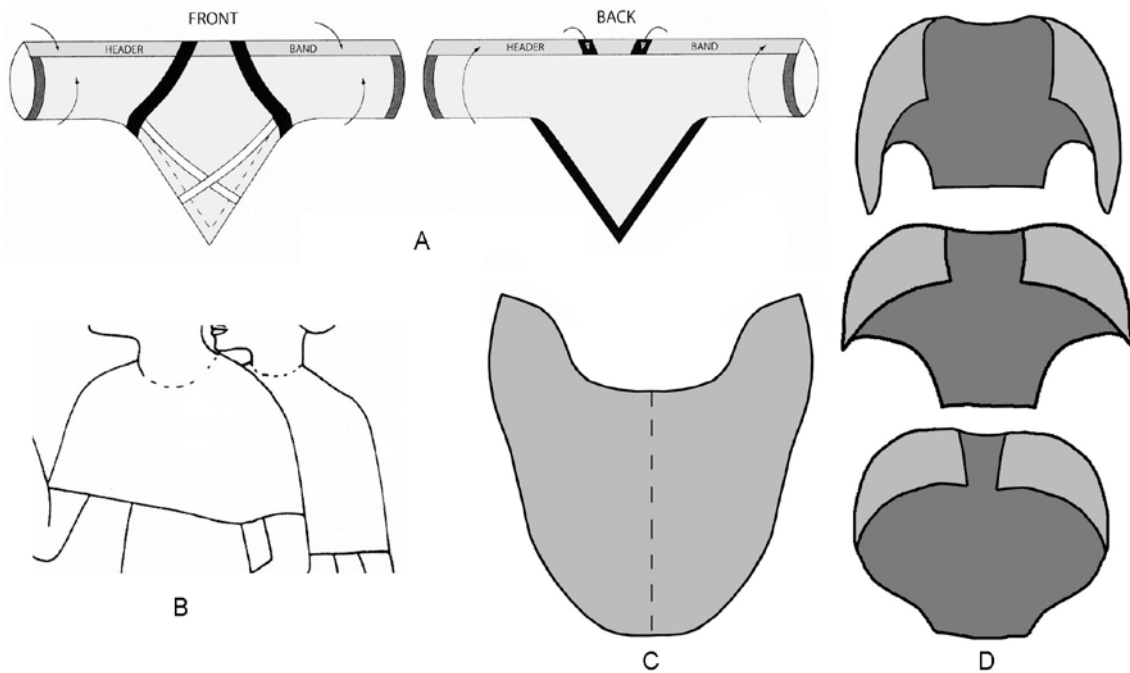


Fig. 9. Minoan frontless blouse (a) and bolero (b) compared with pattern (c) and types (d) of epiblemata (drawings by author and after Jones 2015, fig. 9.47 and 9.50).

The Minoan dress (Jones 2015, 57-143) is open in front and breast-bearing and open or closed below the waist. It is cut in at the sides to form sleeves and has a header band at the upper seam, bands at the sleeve edges and centre front edge and the hem. The vertical central and the horizontal lower seam borders are accentuated similar like the dresses from the 8th and 7th centuries, but the V-shaped neckline is different (Fig. 8a).

The Mycenaean tunic (Fig. 8b) has a horizontal neckline covering the breasts and is “seamed and sometimes banded down the sides” (Jones 2015, 288). Jones calls this a “Helladic aesthetic that continues to manifest in subsequent periods in attire even constructed differently like the Daedalic dress [...]” (Jones 2015, 146). Generally, none of the Mycenaean tunics<sup>18</sup> has a vertical border running along the centre.

About the name of those robes there is lack of clarity: The term *heanos* is given by Marinatos to the Mycenaean tunic (Marinatos A 36. 41-43) which stayed the main robe in 1st millennium BC in Greece, while Jones calls the Minoan open-front dress *heanos*, which is clearly distinguished from it (Jones 2015, 143. 288).

The accentuated central border appears also on Syrian garments as depicted on Egyptian paintings of the 15th century BC,<sup>19</sup> but combined with a V-neck and long sleeves.

The *epiblema* is the oldest form of an additional garment of early Greek female costume. The basic design is the rectangle, but with convex and concave rounded edges to fit the body. In

<sup>18</sup> Maybe with the exception of the Miniature Girl from Mycenae (Jones 2015, 149).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. tomb TT86 of Menkheperaseneb and tomb TT100 of Rekhmire in Thebes.

seldom cases, when the wearers raise the arms, they reveal information about the possible pattern. The cape-like cloaks of two men of the LH IIIB frescoes from Pylos (Jones 2015, 275-276, fig. 9.44 and 9.45) can be considered as related forerunners in some regards, as well as the Minoan frontless blouse with its pointed back seam (Jones 2015, 278 fig. 9.48-9.50) (Fig. 9).

It must be mentioned that not only the Cretan Daedalic costume should be an item of inquiry in search of Minoan heritage of costume in the Aegean. Islands like Lemnos in particular and the Cyclades in general, but also Attica and other regions have their own traditions especially concerning the decorative elements, for which also Cretan forerunners can be found.

#### INFLUENCE: ORIENTAL ELEMENTS IN CRETAN COSTUME

As we have seen above, there are examples of pleated dresses worn by Cretan women. Evidence of pleated garments outside of Crete only derives from Ionia,<sup>20</sup> but not dating before 650 BC.

Pleating of linen garments was practised in Egypt since the first dynasty<sup>21</sup> maybe by using a piece of wood with zigzag indentations.<sup>22</sup> Pleated garments are common in Hittite, late Hittite, Syrian and Phoenician art too)<sup>23</sup> and here we may find the ancestors for early Greek pleating. On the other hand, several Mycenaean terracotta idols in most cases show small parallel lines, straight or wavy, only in the upper part or continuously from the upper to the lower seam. Fortunately two original textiles from Verucchio are preserved dating about 700BC and proving that pleating was common at this time (Stauffer 2012, 249-250).

Fringed hems were unknown on Minoan dresses (Jones 2015, 146) but common on Mycenaean garments especially on warriors' short tunics.<sup>24</sup> This type of garment obviously was still worn in Crete about 900-850 BC and later.<sup>25</sup> Fringes in general correspond to the taste of the eastern Mediterranean (Bertman 1961), where they can be found in Hittite and Syrian art from Bronze Age on.<sup>26</sup> Cretan examples of women's tunics of the 7th century show the popularity of such seams; a specific kind of seam is created by bending the warp threads to build by a row of small arcs (Fig. 10). This type and the row of dense fringes held by a border are typically for Syrian (e.g. Houston 1947, fig. 146 and pl. V) and Syrian influenced Late-Hittite garments (e.g. Akurgal 1976, 130), and there is one example from a Bronze helmet which is thought to derive from a Cretan workshop.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> E.g. the statuettes in Antalya, Archaeological Museum 1.21.87 and 4.21.87 and Selçuk, Efes Müzesi 69/41/86 and 167738/81. The Boeotian bell shaped terracotta idols were made about 700 BC, but they are different and must be treated separately.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. the linen tunic from Tarkhan, Courtesy of Petrie Museum, University College London, UC 28614Bi.

<sup>22</sup> Such pleating tools are kept in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale/ Museo Egizio in Florence inv. 2691, the Museo Egizio in Turin and the British Museum in London.

<sup>23</sup> Several examples of pleated robes from Karatepe, Maraş, Kargamiş, AlacaHöyük, Malatya and Sam'al are listed by Akurgal 1949; Akurgal 1966; Akurgal 1976.

<sup>24</sup> One of the best examples is the Warrior vase from Mycenae of ca. 1200 B.C.

<sup>25</sup> Krater from Knossos, Heraklion, Archaeological Museum (Blome 1982, 90 fig. 20).

<sup>26</sup> E.g. the stelae from Maraş in Adana from about 700 BC (Akurgal 1976, 138. 139). Original textile finds with warp thread fringes found in Southern Levant are known even from Chalcolithic period on (Shamir 2015, 15 fig. 3 and 20, fig. 12).

<sup>27</sup> Bronze helmet in Delphi, Archaeological Museum (Blome 75 fig. 12). Particularly in vogue were such bow-fringes in Cycladic art, as the so-called Melian vase-paintings prove (e.g. Zaphiropoulou 2003, pl 10).



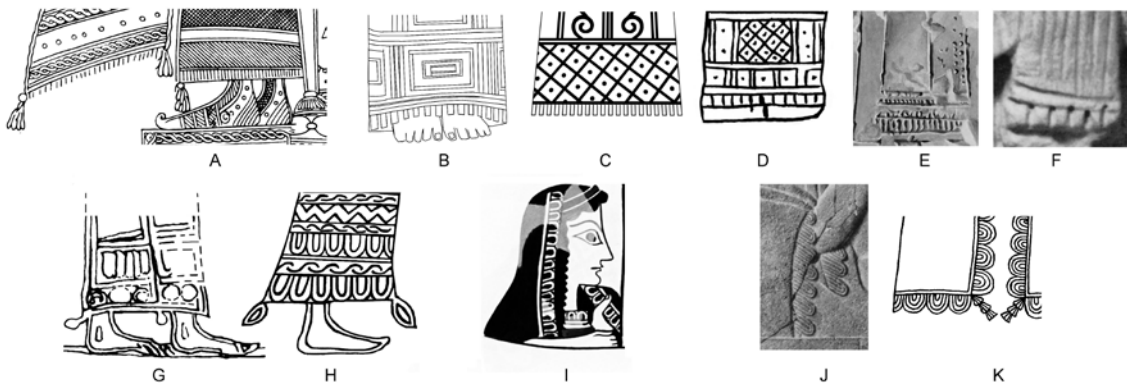


Fig. 10. Fringed and arc-shaped hems. (a-h: Cretan dresses of the 7th century BC, a: after Blome 1982, fig. 24; b, c: drawing by author; d: after Levi 1927-29, fig. 670; e: after Lebesi 1970, pl. 10; f: after Démargne 1970, pl. 32a; i: Cycladic; after Zaphiropoulou 2003, pl. 11; j: new Hittite, after Akurgal 1976, fig. 130; k: Syrian, after Houston 1947, fig. 146).

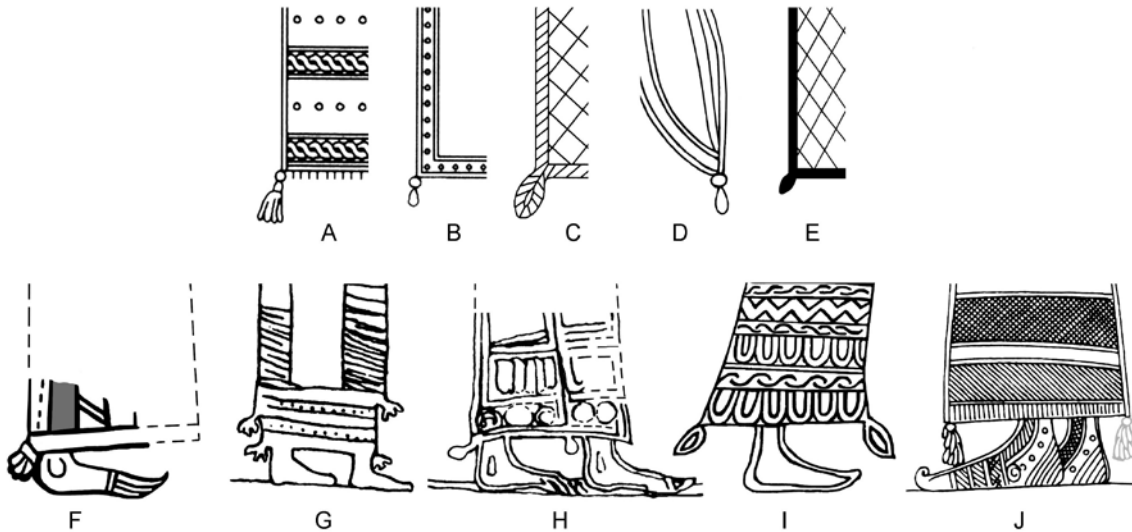


Fig. 11. Tassels of Cretan epiblemata (a-e) and dresses (f-j), 7th century BC (a-f: drawing by author, g-j: after Blome 1982, fig. 10. 12. 24).



Fig. 12. Tassels of the Theran dresses from Akrotiri (after Doumas 1992, fig. 101. 123. 38. 10. 118. 107).

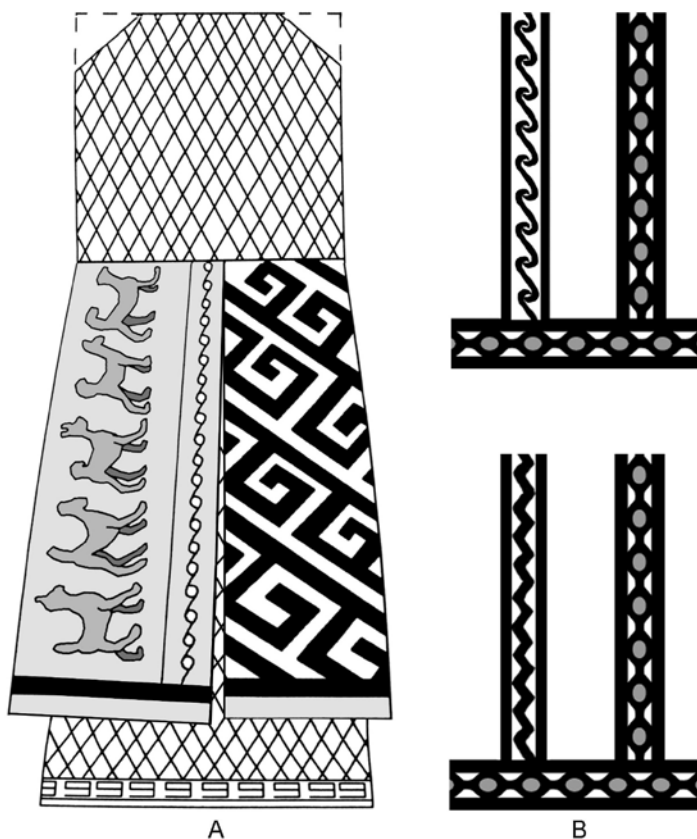


Fig. 13. Asymmetric patterns and borders (a: Helena on a Bronze cuirass in Olympia, Archaeological Museum, b: borders of the two sphyrelata of Dreros; drawings by author).

Tassels are shown on some Cretan depictions of garments of the 7th century BC (Fig. 11). At the corners of the lower seam of the dress as well as of the *epiblema*, fascicular tassels of different forms are indicated which could have been built from the warp threads or added later. Tassels can be a local heritage from Bronze Age, for they are well known from Theran frescoes and from some examples of Crete, hanging from the shoulder and arm bands plain

or flower-like (Fig. 12). The Minoan and the Syrian tribute bearer from the above mentioned tomb TT86 of Menkheperraseneb in Thebes show the same flower-like form like the Crocus Gatherer, and there is evidence from later Syrian garments from about 850 BC (Houston 1947, fig. 145a. 146). It therefore is unclear, if tassels of that kind are a developed Minoan heritage or if they are influenced by the orient; from outside of Crete I know no examples of this time.

Few Cretan dresses show an asymmetric combination of textiles with different designs and size (Fig. 13a). This preference can also be watched on artefacts from the Orthia sanctuary of Sparta (e.g. Marangou 1969, fig. 78a) and some Ionian examples from Ephesus from the 7th century BC.<sup>28</sup> This may have an antetype by the Egyptian depictions of captured Syrians and Hittites with similar alternating patterns.<sup>29</sup> Such kind of “patchwork” arrangement supports the presumption of being fabricated by sewing several smaller parts of textile together, maybe deriving from elder and tattered garments. Alternatively it could have been woven in one piece, proved by a textile find from Hallstatt (Early Iron Age) which clearly shows the transition from basket weave to twill (Grömer 2010, 141 fig. 68). An asymmetrical effect gains the arrangement of parallel borders of different design, like those from the garments of the sphyrelata goddesses

<sup>28</sup> E.g. the ivory statuette from Ephesos (Selçuk, Efes Müzesi 20/27/84).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. an Egyptian faience tile, Vienna Museum of History of Art AE\_3897a.

from Dreros (Fig. 13b).<sup>30</sup> In any case, a specific taste or aesthetics underlies the preference of asymmetrical varying patterns.

#### MOBILITY: CRETAN COSTUME OUTSIDE OF CRETE

The origin of the orientalisising influence in Greece is rated differently, ranging from imported artefacts to Greek artists travelling eastward to learn new techniques and to buy new materials. In Crete there are only few imported artefacts. Boardman explains the oriental products as partly fabricated by immigrated artists (Boardman 1970, 14-25).

On the other hand, we can state Cretan influence in several regions of the Greek world, where multiple artefacts of the 7th century BC were found, depicting women wearing the “Daedalic costume”. Due to elder historical connections (Davaras 1972, 46), evidence of strong Cretan influence has been asserted for the statuettes from the neighbour island Thera (Higgins 1967, 40, Σιγαλάς 2002 fig. 4-7).<sup>31</sup> The most examples derive from Artemis Orthia<sup>32</sup> sanctuary near Sparta, where figurines of ivory, bone and lead frequently show women with the tubular dress, the *epiblema* and mostly the polos (Marangou 1969, Dawkins et al. 1929). The combination of the vertical central border and the broad lower seam border of the dress can be found outside of Crete primarily in Laconian art (Borell – Rittig 1998, 196). While the bronze armour from Olympia<sup>33</sup> and the bronzehelmet from Delphi<sup>34</sup> are Cretan exports, the terracotta figurines from Milet only show a strong Daedalic influence; there was an active trade at Cretan Kommos with Milet (von Graeve 2007, 664-665). The wooden statues of Samos<sup>35</sup> are rather thought to have been produced in Crete, while some of them, like the lost group of Zeus and Hera (Harrison 1977, 230, fig. 18) could have been “either Samian work with manifest Cretan influence or a work by a Cretan woodcarver familiar with Ionian art” (Tsakos – Viglaki-Sofianou 2012, 69). Three sphyrelata from Olympia seem to be a further processing of Near Eastern and Greek metal relief plate by a genius Cretan artist in Olympia about 675-650 BC (Borell – Rittig 1998, 195-206). Singular examples with *epiblemata* derive from Argos,<sup>36</sup> Thasos,<sup>37</sup> Ephesos,<sup>38</sup> Magna Graecia<sup>39</sup> and other places.

<sup>30</sup> Heraklion, Archaeological Museum 2445 und 2447.

<sup>31</sup> Kore of Thira (Archaeological Museum Thera), upper and lower torsos of two statues (Archaeological Museum Thera 665. 666) and the figurines, especially the torso of a standing woman from the cemetery of Thera (Archaeological Museum Thera).

<sup>32</sup> As this goddess is documented in Knossos too (Bengtson 1975, no. 197 C 13-14), there may be a direct connection to Crete.

<sup>33</sup> Olympia, Archaeological Museum B 4900.

<sup>34</sup> Delphi, Archaeological Museum (Blome 1982, 75 fig. 12).

<sup>35</sup> Statuette der Hera mit Polos (Inv. H 41; ca. 640 BC).

<sup>36</sup> Lead brooch (École française d’Athènes) and bronze relief from the Argive Heraion (Athens, National Museum 15131).

<sup>37</sup> Thasos, Archaeological Museum 2312. 2321 and 6351.

<sup>38</sup> Tontäfelchen (London BM 530, aus Ephesos, spätes 7.Jh, Higgins 1967, Taf. 15f.

<sup>39</sup> Terracotta plaques from Tarentum (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1886.737), Metapontum (Reggio, Archaeological Museum) and Megara Hyblaia (Siracusa, Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi 84818).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Cretan material giving evidence about woman's clothing in Iron Age starts very early and transmits a picture of well developed regional peculiarities. The dress with the broad borders on the seam and along the centre, the broad girdle with buckle and the *epiblema* seem to be Cretan developments.

Heritage from the important Bronze Age epochs in Crete cannot be overlooked, but the elements of early Greek dress are modified and developed, in Crete as well as in other Greek regions. Nevertheless, the tradition seems to be stronger in Crete, concerning the parts of the costume as well as textile decoration elements.

Aside, influence and stimulation from eastern Mediterranean textile production was welcome, especially in the therefore called "orientalising" epoch of the 7th century, even if there are no concrete antetypes. There is evidence for workers and artists from the East who immigrated to Crete, but their influence is restricted. Trading gave the impulse of transfer of goods and ideas, imported pieces of textiles may have led to new ideas and knowledge of unknown textile techniques. The Greeks kept in mind the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the old trading routes during the Dark Ages.

Both basic principles of tradition and influence had been developed and adapted to the taste and requirements of Iron Age by creative and skilful women in most cases, who created a variety of dresses as well as a typical Cretan costume, which found its way even outside of Crete to other regions of the Aegean by the mobility of seagoing and competent Cretan merchants and textile craftsmen.

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