

**AEGAEUM 28**

**Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège et UT-PASP**

# **EPOS**

## **RECONSIDERING GREEK EPIC AND AEGEAN BRONZE AGE ARCHAEOLOGY**

**Proceedings of the 11th International Aegean Conference /  
11e Rencontre égéenne internationale  
Los Angeles, UCLA - The J. Paul Getty Villa, 20-23 April 2006**

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Université de Liège  
Histoire de l'art et archéologie de la Grèce antique  
University of Texas at Austin  
Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory  
2007



Illustration on cover pages: Palace of Nestor at Pylos, the Lyer-player fresco  
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D-2007 0480 33

Printed in Belgium  
by KLIEMO SA B-4700 Eupen

Publié avec l'aide financière du Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique - FNRS

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# MYTHOS, LOGOS AND EIKON

## MOTIFS OF EARLY GREEK POETRY

### IN THE WALL PAINTINGS OF XESTE 3 AT AKROTIRI, THERA

Immediately after the restoration of the Miniature Frieze of the West House and S. Marinatos's ethno-archaeological approach to its content, scholarship found a fertile field of research in iconography, seeking interpretations through the multifaceted Aegean interconnections of the Thera paintings and focusing on the subject of narrative.<sup>1</sup>

However, Sir A. Evans, in discussing the "Town Mosaic" from Knossos and the "Siege Rhyton" from Mycenae, as well as some others artifacts depicting composite scenes with humans and landscapes, was the first to suggest that epic and poetry could lie as background to the images.<sup>2</sup> Many decades later, the stone rhyton from Epidaurus and other related monuments made P. Warren wonder whether "we should not see these exquisite yet silent works as the visual counterparts of oral poems."<sup>3</sup>

With the miniature frescoes from Kea, Tyllissos, Kabri, Alalakh, Tell el Dab'a and Qatna, the Aegean iconographic *koine* has redefined its borders many times within the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup> Thus, all these monuments depicting "peopled landscapes and panoramas of Aegean life,"<sup>5</sup> became *λαλούντα μνημεία*, speaking monuments, of a dense narrative world, that had spread in the Aegean and beyond.

During the 1980's interest in the relationship between oral poetry and Aegean art was renewed, and special emphasis was given to the formulaic character and technique that both arts shared through icons and epithets.<sup>6</sup> S. Morris "ventured an identification of epic narrative

1 S. MARINATOS, *Excavations at Thera VI* (1974) 25-46; ID., "Μία ιστορική τοιχογραφία εκ Θήρας," *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 48 (1973) 231-237. See also P. WARREN, "The Miniature Frieze from the West House at Akrotiri, Thera and its Aegean setting," *JHS* 99 (1979) 116-129; A. SAKELLARIOU, "The West House Miniature Frescoes," in C. DOUMAS (ed.), *Thera and the Aegean World II* (1980) 147-153; N. MARINATOS, *Art and Religion in Thera. Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society* (1984) 38 ff., 52 ff.; L. MORGAN, *The Miniature Wall Paintings of Thera: A Study in Aegean Culture and Iconography* (1988); C. DOUMAS, *The Wall Paintings of Thera* (1992) 47-49 fig. 26-48; C. TELEVANTOU, *Ακρωτήρι Θήρας. Οι Τοιχογραφίες της Δυτικής Οικίας* (1994), with extensive bibliography on the Miniature Frieze and its interpretation.

2 A. EVANS, *The Palace of Minos III* (1930) 89, 314.

3 WARREN (*supra* n. 1) 129. For the Epidaurus rhyton, see A. SAKELLARIOU, "Η καταγωγή ενός Μυκηναϊκού εικονογραφικού κύκλου," *Πεπραγμένα Δ' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου* v. A.2 (1981) 532-538.

4 Kea: L. MORGAN, "Island Iconography: Thera, Kea, Milos," in D. HARDY *et al.* (eds), *Thera and the Aegean World III* (1990) 252-266; Tyllissos: M. SHAW, "The Miniature Frescoes of Tyllissos Reconsidered," *AA* (1972) 171-188; Kabri and Alalakh: B. and W.-D. NIEMEIER, "Aegean Frescoes in Syria-Palestine: Alalakh and Tel Kabri," in S. SHERRATT (ed.), *The Wall Paintings of Thera. Proceedings of the First International Symposium* (2000) 763-802; Tell el Dab'a: M. BIETAK and N. MARINATOS, "The Minoan Wall Paintings from Avaris," *Ägypten und Levante* 5 (1995) 49-62; N. MARINATOS, "The Tell el Dab'a paintings: A Study in Pictorial Tradition," *Ägypten und Levante* 8 (1998) 83-100; M. BIETAK, N. MARINATOS and C. PALYVOU, "The Maze Tableau from Tell el Dab'a," in SHERRATT (*Ibid*) 77-88; Qatna: M. NOVAK and P. PFÄLZNER, "Ausgrabungen in Tall Mishrife-Qatna 2000," *MDOG* 133 (2001) 157-198.

5 S. MORRIS, "From Thera to Scheria: Aegean Art and Narrative," in SHERRATT (*supra* n. 4) 318. Cf. C. BOULOTIS, "Villes et palais dans l'art égéen," in P. DARCQUE and R. TREUIL (eds), *L'habitat égéen préhistorique* (BCH Suppl. 19, 1990) 421-459.

6 G. WALBERG, *Tradition and Innovation. Essays in Minoan Art* (1986) 11; E. VERMEULE, "Baby Aigisthos and the Bronze Age," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 12 (1987) 145-146; J.L. CROWLEY, "Subject Matter in Aegean Art: The Crucial Changes," in R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), *Transition. Le monde égéen du Bronze moyen au Bronze récent. Actes de la 2<sup>e</sup> Rencontre égéenne internationale de l'Université de Liège, 18-20 avril 1988* (*Aegaeum* 3, 1989) 203-214 (see esp. p. 24); C. THOMAS, "Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Poetic Art?," in *EIKON* 213-220 (see esp. p. 218); T. SALI-AXIOTI, "Η Μικρογραφική Ζωφόρος της Θήρας και ο Όμηρος," *Επιστημονική Επετηρίς Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών ΚΘ'* (1986-1999) 459-469. On possible reflections of Minoan poetry in the Thera frescoes, see S. HILLER, "The Miniature Frieze in the West House. Evidence for Minoan Poetry?," in HARDY *et al.* (*supra* n. 4) 229-236. Also see, A.E. HOEKSTRA, *Epic Verse before Homer* (1981) 34.





in the miniature frescoes of Thera, as a forerunner of Homeric tales of adventure and return which appear in hexameter verse a thousand years later,"<sup>7</sup> and suggested that "their primary source is an epic or heroic transformation of historical experience that implies the existence of contemporary poetry."<sup>8</sup>

Today, there is scholarly consensus that Early Greek poetry, and mainly epos, present vestiges of the pictorial universe of the Late Bronze Age. *Mythos*, *logos* and *eikon*, therefore, have presumably met much earlier in the Aegean than the era of Early Greek Poetry.

Xeste 3 with its remarkably well preserved wall paintings was the second building at Akrotiri where scholarly interest was focused mainly on the interpretation of its dense pictorial programme. (Pl. XXV, XXVI) This is a large freestanding three storey building, the eastern part of which has been interpreted as a public area, due to the presence of stone benches, spacious rooms around a series of *polythyra* and a "lustral basin."<sup>9</sup> The wall paintings in the ground and the first floor of this sector depict men and women participating in rites of passage to adulthood, under the blessing presence of the enthroned Potnia.<sup>10</sup> The architectural idiom of the building favours the possibility that this was a centre of communal ritual activity, with its iconographic programme being in coherence with the ceremonies or rites performed in it.

Careful reading of Early Greek literature –mostly the Homeric hymns and epic poetry– points out notable similarities between some distinct and repeated episodes in certain texts and the iconography of Xeste 3 and its narrative scenes, where female activity around womanhood is dominant. Formulaic representations of female protagonists in natural settings, as well as linguistic and pictorial formulae ascribing characteristic qualities to mortal and divine female figures, are among these common elements.

Until recently the iconography of the building had been considered mainly "female," with the sole "male" section decorating the small Room 3b of the ground floor.<sup>11</sup> The ongoing restoration of the frescoes has shown that the walls of the vestibule of the building were painted with a second ensemble of "male" compositions.<sup>12</sup> On its south wall a male figure with loincloth and boots is capturing a bull by the horns.<sup>13</sup> Behind the bull, there is a second male figure very badly preserved, presumably assisting the man in front. On the south face of the mudbrick wall, separating the vestibule from Room 4, a third male figure with fringed loincloth and boots is rushing at an ibex, grasping it by its yellow horns.<sup>14</sup>

The presence in the vestibule of Xeste 3 of three life-size adult hunters or athletes engaged in capturing animals introduces the visitor to the iconographic and ritual importance of this building, the first paintings "already pointing to an emblematic pictorial cycle glorifying mans' power over the animal kingdom."<sup>15</sup> The iconography of these two horned sacrificial animals,

7 MORRIS (*supra* n. 5) 317. See also EAD., "A tale of two cities," *AJA* 93 (1989) 511-535.

8 MORRIS (*supra* n. 7) 511, 530-531, 534; EAD., "Prehistoric Iconography and Historical Sources: Hindsight through Texts?" in *EIKON* 207.

9 N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 73 fig. 51; DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 127-175 fig. 93-137; C. PALYVOU, *Akrotiri, Thera: An Architecture of Affluence 3,500 Years Old* (2005) 54-62 fig. 62-75. Also see A. PAPAGIANNOPOULOU, "Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera: The Pottery," in C. MORRIS (ed.), *Klados: Essays in Honour of J.N. Coldstream* (1995) 209-215.

10 N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 61 seq, 73 seq; EAD., *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (1993) 203-211, fig. 210-218; EAD., "Functional Interpretations of the Thera Frescoes," in P. DARCQUE and J.-Cl. POURSAT (eds), *L'iconographie minoenne. Actes de la table ronde d'Athènes (21-22 avril 1983)* (BCH Suppl. XI, 1985) 222-224, fig. 4, 6, 8; DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 128-131, fig. 100-130; A. VLACHOPOULOS, "The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of the Iconographic Programme," in N.J. BRODIE, J. DOOLE, G. GAVALAS and C. RENFREW (eds), *Οπίζων. A Colloquium on the Prehistory of the Cyclades. McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge* 25-28.3.2004 (in press).

11 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 130, fig. 109-115. On the iconography of manhood in Minoan Crete and Thera, see N. MARINATOS, "The ideals of manhood in Minoan Crete," in L. MORGAN (ed.), *Aegean Wall Painting. A Tribute to Mark Cameron* (2005) 149-158.

12 The wall paintings from the vestibule are being studied by E. Papageorgiou for her doctoral thesis.

13 C. DOUMAS, "Ανάσκαφή Ακρωτηρίου Θήρας," *Praktika* 2003, 101, pl. 60b.

14 VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10).

15 VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10). On the iconography of the ibex in the Late Bronze Age and its survival, see S. HILLER, "Potnia/Potnios Aigon: On the Religious Aspects of Goats in the Late Bronze Age," in R.





the bull and the ibex, is in possible interaction with two recent finds from the partially excavated Building of the Benches, to the southwest of Xeste 3 (Pl. XXVI). A huge heap of horns of goats, sheep, deer and bulls which had been carefully cut off the skulls and in some cases were painted red, had been originally wrapped with a fine cloth and possibly sewn with tiny gold thread.<sup>16</sup> This sacrificial deposit is unique so far but it can be paralleled with the *κερατῶν βωμός* (horn altar) of Apollo on Delos, mentioned by Callimachus and Plutarch<sup>17</sup>, as well as with the real horn altar of Dreros in Crete, excavated by S. Marinatos.<sup>18</sup> Next to the heap of horns was a small clay *larnax* containing a wooden box painted red, inside which was the gold figurine of an ibex still standing, presumably a precious offering or a cult object.<sup>19</sup>

The benches along the façade of the Building of the Benches suggest its public character and these finds might imply its use as a *ιερό σκευοφυλάκιο*, a sacred treasury for the sacrifices associated with Xeste 3 and its rituals.

The iconography of the vestibule in Xeste 3 brings to mind the manly achievements and feats of heroes, such as Herakles and Theseus of later times, who both captured and killed horned beasts. Could this iconographic cycle of *άθλοι* (labours) also imply some kind of initiation? The mythical theft of the cattle of Apollo by the new-born Hermes, narrated in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, has been interpreted as an act of initiation of the infant god into manhood.<sup>20</sup> The numerous representations in glyptic art and mural painting of male triumphant figures over animals, makes up a corpus of images that possibly developed concurrently with poems and myths about keen athletes and hunters, or about mythical heroes overwhelming demonic beasts.

The lion, the third animal *par excellence* in Aegean art, is depicted in the adjacent Room 2 of Xeste 3, attacking a small goat in a subtropical landscape with palm trees and rocks<sup>21</sup>, which also recalls a common theme in contemporary miniature art.

In Room 3, the walls around the “lustral basin” (the *adyton*) were decorated with wall paintings. Represented on the east wall is the monumental ashlar façade of a shrine, crowned by horns of consecration. An old olive tree grows between the horns.<sup>22</sup> (Pl. XXVIIa) The dripping blood alludes to a sacrifice, but the victim is not presented.

Three women are depicted on the north wall.<sup>23</sup> (Pl. XXVIIb) The younger Veiled Girl to the right, the more mature Wounded Woman in the centre and the Necklace Swinger to the left are obviously in iconographic coherence with the shrine. Most helpful for their study is a category of seals and signet rings depicting groups of women dancing or proceeding towards similar structures; the figures are usually interpreted as adorants of the deity, and the tree as the focus of ritual activity.<sup>24</sup>

LAFFINEUR and R. HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000* (Aegaeum 22, 2001) 292-303 (see the close parallel on a seal from Pylos on pl. XCLb)

16 C. DOUMAS, “Ανασκαφή Ακρωτηρίου Θήρας,” *Praktika* 1999, 172-173, pl. 108; ID., *Πρόσφατα ευρήματα από το Ακρωτήριο της Θήρας / Die Aktuellsten archäologischen Funde in Akrotiri auf Thera. Μία περαιτέρω ενδοσκόπηση στον προϊστορικό κόσμο του Αιγαίου / Eine eingehende Betrachtung der prähistorischen Welt des Ägäis* (2001) 11-12, fig. 30-31 (for the similar EC “pyra of sacrifice” at Akrotiri, see p. 12); C. BOULOTIS, “Πτυχές θρησκευτικής έκφρασης στο Ακρωτήριο,” *Αλς* 3 (2005) 44, 73, fig. 24-25, 63.

17 Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo* 60-63; Plutarch, *Theseus* 21. The altar consisted entirely of goat horns. See Ch. PICARD, *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1935) 486-488; Ph. BRUNEAU, “L'autel de cornes à Délos,” *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1995) 321-334.

18 S. MARINATOS, “Le temple géométrique de Dréros,” *BCH* (1936) 241-244 fig. 17-18.

19 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 16, 1999) pl. 109; DOUMAS (*supra* n. 16, 2001) 12 fig. 32; C. DOUMAS *et al.*, *Μουσείο Προϊστορικής Θήρας. Σύντομος οδηγός* (2000) 67, fig. 85-86; BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 44, 58, fig. 26-27.

20 IV. *Hymn to Hermes* 20 seq.

21 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 13) 101, pl. 61a; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10).

22 VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10); BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 29, fig. 6.

23 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 128-129, fig. 100-108. Doumas conventionally called these female figures ‘adorants’ but we preferred the more descriptive names given by P. REHAK, “Crocus Costumes in Aegean Art,” in A. CHAPIN (ed.), *XAPIΣ. Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr* (2004) 87, seq fig. 5.2-4, 6.

24 Nature is predominant in most of these representations. N. MARINATOS, “The Tree as a Focal Point of Ritual Action in Minoan Glyptic Art,” in W. MÜLLER (ed.), *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen Ägäischen Glyptik* (CMS Beiheft 3, 1989) 127-143; W.-D. NIEMEIER, “Zur Ikonographie von Gottheiten und Adoranten





The walls of Room 3a, a small Π-shaped space of limited physical and visual access, were covered with three panels depicting four male figures participating in a ceremony, the climax of which is the donning of the loincloth.<sup>25</sup> (Pl. XXVIIIa) Strict gender differentiation is predominant in the iconography of Xeste 3 and both “male” pictorial nuclei consist of autonomous thematic and architectural units.

Hairstyle and physical development indicate that these male and female figures belong to different age grades, and these wall paintings have been interpreted as scenes of rites of passage to manhood and womanhood, compared to most of the age-grade initiations of Archaic and Classical Greece.<sup>26</sup> These puberty rites might have been a part of the preparation for –what we call– a “marriage,” most probably the last stage of the initiation to maturity, where men and women performed rites separately.<sup>27</sup> In my opinion, the “male” and “female” rites depicted around the *adyton* narratively complement each other through an ephebal nuptial or pre-nuptial *σύζευξις*, which possibly echoes the standard marriage ceremony of the Theran elite.<sup>28</sup> If so, the bride is the Veiled Girl and the bridegroom is the ephebe with the loincloth, who both face backwards and their dancing pose seems to have a ceremonial nuance.<sup>29</sup> The relationship of both figures to a textile, which will either dress the nude body or will cover the shaven heads seems to be the crux of these scenes.

Neither the young ephebe nor the veiled girl is depicted in the centre of the relevant frescoes. Both protagonists are portrayed at the side, leaving the central axis of the composition to the mature persons who have been their initiators or who are conducting the rituals. The iconography of the two ceremonial scenes is complemented by the presence of acolytes, who offer gifts or carry ritual utensils.

The red-spotted yellow veil (κροκωτός πέπλος) of the young girl directly refers to the deep yellow pigment extracted from the red stamens of the crocus flowers. Crocuses are embroidered on her sleeved bodice as well as on the bodice of the Necklace Swinger, whose necklace is made of crocus stamens. Thus, these crocus-bedecked females symmetrically encompass the crocus-

in den ‚Kultszenen‘ auf minoischen und mykenischen Siegeln,” in MÜLLER (*Ibid.*) 163-186; P. REHAK, “The Isopata Ring and the Question of Narrative in neopalatial Glyptic,” in W. MÜLLER (ed.), *Minoisch-Mykenische Glyptik. Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion* (CMS Beiheft 6, 2000) 269-276.

- 25 C. DOUMAS, “Η Ξεστή 3 και οι Κυανοκέφαλοι στην τέχνη της Θήρας,” in *Ειλαπίνη. Τιμητικός τόμος για τον καθηγητή Νικόλαο Πλάτωνα* (1987) 151-159; DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 130 fig. 109-115; MARINATOS (*supra* n. 10, 1993) 209, fig. 215-218; C. BOULOTIS, *Αιγαιακές τοιχογραφίες: Ένας πολύχρωμος αφηγηματικός λόγος*, *Archaeologia kai Technes* 55 (1995) 25. Also see C. DOUMAS, “La répartition topographique des fresques dans les bâtiments d’Akrotiri à Théra,” in I. BRADFER-BURDET, B. DETOURNAY et R. LAFFINEUR (eds), *KRHS TEXNITHS. L’artisan crétois. Recueil d’articles en l’honneur de Jean-Claude Poursat, publié à l’occasion des 40 ans de la découverte du Quartier Mu, Aegaeum* 26 (2005) 77, pl. XIX.
- 26 MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 73, seq. fig. 52, 57; E. DAVIS, “Youth and Age in the Thera Frescoes,” *AJA* 90 (1986) 399-406; R. KOEHL, “The Chiftain Cup and a Minaon ‘Rite of Passage’,” *JHS* 106 (1986) 99-110; P. REHAK, “The Aegean Landscape and the Body. A New Interpretation of the Thera Frescoes,” in N.L. WICKER and B. ARNOLD (eds), *From the Ground Up. Beyond Gender Theory in Archaeology* (1999) 11-22; C. DOUMAS, “Age and Gender in the Theran Wall Paintings,” in SHERRATT (*supra* n. 4) 971-981; A. CHAPIN, “Maidenhood and Marriage: The Reproductive Lives of the Girls and Women from Xeste 3, Thera,” *Aegean Archaeology* 4 (1997-2000) 7-25. On similar rites of passage in Eastern Mediterranean, see V. KARAGEORGHIS, “Rites de Passage at Thera: Some Oriental Comparanda,” in HARDY *et al.* (*supra* n. 4) 67-71.
- 27 DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 402-403. For rites of passage to adulthood, see the fundamental work of A. VAN GENNEP, *The Rites of Passage* (1960) 11, 65 seq. and esp. for marriage p. 116 seq.
- 28 Some of the artifacts found in Xeste 3 aid our interpretation of the building as a locus of ceremonial activities. Apart from peculiarities in pottery (unique shapes, great number of nipples jugs, absence of cooking vessels etc; see PAPAGIANNOPOULOU (*supra* n. 9) and the “lustral basin,” unique so far at Akrotiri were also bathtubs, found *in situ* in Room 2 of the ground floor (PALYVOU [*supra* n. 9] 57, fig. 73) pointing to preparative activities associated with the purification of the body. The clay and stone lamps found into the “public” sector of Xeste 3 show that the *dromena* performed in there needed adequate lighting. See DOUMAS (*supra* n. 25, 2005) 76, 78. cf. PALYVOU (*supra* n. 9) 169 fig. 247.
- 29 R. Koehl has seen in these frescoes the ritual re-enactment of the *ιερός γάμος* of Near Eastern and Greek mythology, the sacred marriage between the asymmetrically age-ranked mature Wounded Woman and the boy with the loincloth. R. KOEHL, “The ‘Sacred Marriage’ in Minoan Religion and Ritual,” in LAFFINEUR and HÄGG (*supra* n. 15) 237-243. On the sacred marriage, see also A. SUTER, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate. An Archaeology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (2002) 101 seq.





covered knoll, where the Wounded Woman is seated, and crocus apparently becomes the sole unifying pictorial element of this composite scene, which is articulated from three distinct episodes.

Saffron-dyed yellow costumes in historical Greece included the wedding veil and the garment called *κροκατός πέπλος* (crocus-dyed *peplos*). The epithet *κροκόπεπλος* in Early Greek literature is commonly attributed to the Muses by Alcman and to the Nymphs by Hesiod, as a quality of distinguished noble maidens.<sup>30</sup> Homer uses this verbal formula for Eos, implying the colour of the dawn.<sup>31</sup> The epithet *κροκατός χιτῶν* (crocus-dyed mantle) refers to the dyeing quality of the valuable stigmas of the crocus flowers. This saffron-yellow garment was also worn by prepubescent Athenian girls who served Artemis at Brauron as *ἄρκτοι*, or “she-bears,” in a coming-of-age ceremony that marked an end to childhood and signaled the beginning of the transition to adulthood.<sup>32</sup> E. Davis<sup>33</sup> and P. Rehak<sup>34</sup> have shown that the Thera ceremony closely resembles the ritual service of *Arkteia*, suggesting that the principal purpose of the Xeste 3 ritual was also to prepare girls for marriage and childbearing. Iconographically there is little connection between the Xeste 3 rituals and analogous female ceremonies of Classical times, and individual similarities in the relevant *dromena* should be viewed with scepticism.<sup>35</sup> Even so, the prevailing importance of crocus and its derivatives, and the emerging association of this plant with female rituals diachronically in the Aegean, offer valuable insight into the “decipherment” of Xeste 3 and its paintings.

The medicinal and healing properties of crocus, that were famous in antiquity<sup>36</sup>, are denoted by the Wounded Woman who is seated on a crocus-bearing knoll, perhaps in the mouth of a cave, stepping with her bleeding foot on a crocus flower, as if its curative properties will hopefully heal the wound.

The theme of young women picking flowers in a blossom-filled natural setting, where a painful accident or an unexpected appearance may occur, directly recalls some scenes of Greek mythology and literature. The Homeric *hymn to Demeter*<sup>37</sup>, dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, speaks about Persephone and her girlfriends, who were playing in a soft meadow, the *μαλακὸς λειμῶν*, gathering sweet flowers in their hands, “soft crocuses mingled with irises and hyacinths, and rose-blossoms and lilies and narcissus, which the wide earth caused to grow yellow as a crocus,” which are “marvellous to see,” *θαῦμα ιδέσθαι*.<sup>38</sup> The description of the meadow is followed by the abduction of Persephone by Pluto. It is interesting to note that many of the flowers in this scene are constantly repeated in the iconography of Xeste 3 and are related only to female figures. The narcissus pin in the hair of the Wounded Woman is one of them, indeed alluding to the key symbol of the myth.

The flowery meadow, the *λειμῶν*, is the archetypal image of the natural setting, an idealized milieu of virginity, where maidens share companionship, innocence, pleasure and spirituality. The serenity in these meadows is being broken by the presence of a male and by the violent abduction –rape– of one of the girls, who now faces new biological and social

30 Alcman 85; Hesiod, *Theogony* 273, 358. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XX. 1, 31) notes the exceptional quality of Thera crocuses, see I. DOUSKOS, “The crocuses of Santorini,” in DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1, 1980) 141-146.

31 *Iliad* 8.1; 19.1; 23.227.

32 C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, *Studies in Girls' Transitions. Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representations in Attic Iconography* (1988); N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 81; DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 403; REHAK (*supra* n. 26) 12; CHAPIN (*supra* n. 26) 19. See also N. MARINATOS, “The Arkteia and the Gradual Transformation of the Maiden into a Woman,” in B. GENTILI and F. PERUSINO (eds), *Le Orse di Brauron* (2002) 29-42.

33 DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 403.

34 REHAK (*supra* n. 23) 93. P. Rehak also refers to the Great Panathenaia, during which girls of noble Athenian families offered to Athena the saffron yellow and purple *peplos* they had woven.

35 CHAPIN (*supra* n. 26, 19) notes that “while there is no known link between any prehistoric initiation rites and the Classical *Arkteia*” the Xeste 3 rituals suggest “that a comparison to the better known rites at Brauron might be fruitful and help to illuminate further the meaning of the Thera Bronze Age ritual.”

36 For the pharmaceutical properties of crocus, see S. FERRENCE and G. BENDERSKY, “Therapy with saffron and the goddess of Thera,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 47.2 (2004) 199-226.

37 II. *Hymn to Demeter* (English translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* [1914]). See SUTER (*supra* n. 29) esp. chapter 1.

38 II. *Hymn to Demeter* 5 seq., 417 seq.





status. Poseidon raped Medusa, one of the Hesperides, in a similar setting<sup>39</sup> and Hera seduced Zeus on "a cushion of young grass, with dew-bespangled lotus, crocus, and hyacinth."<sup>40</sup> In the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, the goddess told Anchises that she had been abducted by Hermes while she was dancing in honour of Artemis with other virgin girls.<sup>41</sup>

The meadow also has erotic overtones. C. Calame argues that "the meadow represents a space filled with Eros, which serves as an immediate prelude to the gratification of sexual desire; a flowery pasture is always a framework for games that lead to the fulfilment of amorous desire."<sup>42</sup> As E. Stehle puts it, "the meadow itself, with all its feminine associations, captures the possibility of the woman's transformation."<sup>43</sup>

The idea or the innuendo of marriage is apparent in all these songs and myths, and marriage itself implies physical initiation of a young girl into womanhood and not only the change of her social status. In the *Odyssey*, Nausikaa and her friends are washing their clothes in the limpid waters of the river, in an idyllic natural setting with clear prenuptial context.<sup>44</sup> The appearance of Odysseus breaks the serenity of the scene and penetrates Nausikaa's virginal life.

The Veiled Girl of the Xeste 3 *adyton* is portrayed in a ceremonial gesture of dance, alluding to virginity and to marriage. The Wounded Woman has been interpreted either as her initiator into womanhood or as the Potnia herself, with her bleeding wound symbolically recalling the initiation ritual of crocus gathering (depicted on the same room of the first floor), the shedding of hymenal blood or the matrimonial sacrifice at the shrine.<sup>45</sup> Her prime role in the composition is indisputable, being the carrier of the major symbolisms of the ritual depicted or implied (blood and branch from the shrine). The key to the interpretation of the central figure is her painful wound, which –however– is not explained visually. This lack of narrative coherence presupposes the spectator's full understanding of the depicted scenes, which is justified only if these independent, yet related, *vignettes* belong to a ritual imagery or (most possibly) are incidents in a mythological cycle with ritual implications.

C. Boulotis recently commented that "the sacred nature of the decoration of the *adyton*, which is replete with narrative content, allows for diverse interpretations, whether it is viewed in its entirety or in parts, a great possibility being that it conveys a pictorial representation of the myth-cult idea behind the ritual activities, mixing myth with reality."<sup>46</sup>

N. Marinatos, in her thorough "mythological investigation" of the Wounded Woman, focused on the myths of Persephone and Eurydice, pointing that the fatal accidents of both heroines are "variations of the same theme" and that their stories "may contain elements of ritual patterns such as 'initiation through encounter with death'."<sup>47</sup> P. Rehak suggested that "her seated pose and gesture of hand to head perhaps signify grief or introspection instead, as they do in Classical art for Demeter or Penelope."<sup>48</sup> Demeter has been closely connected with

39 Hesiod, *Theogony* 273.

40 *Iliad* 14.345 seq.

41 V. *Hymn to Aphrodite* 117-125. A similar scene (the abduction of Europa) in Hellenistic poetry is mentioned in I. TZACHILI, "Anthodokoi talaroi: the baskets of the crocus gatherers from Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera," in MORGAN (*supra* n. 11) 5 note 6.

42 C. CALAME, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (transl. by Janet Lloyd) (1999) 156.

43 E. STEHLE, "Retreat from the Male: Catullus 62 and Sappho's Erotic Flowers," *Ramus* 6 (1977) 94. See also SUTER (*supra* n. 29) 179.

44 *Odyssey* 8.85 seq.

45 N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 79, fig. 52, 56; DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 402-403. The age of the Wounded Woman has been a subject of scholarly debate, see DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 401, ill. 1j; D. WHITHEE, "Physical Growth and Aging Characteristics Depicted in the Thera Frescoes," *AJA* 96 (1992) 336; REHAK (*supra* n. 26) 13; CHAPIN (*supra* n. 26) 20.

46 BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 37-38. On myth and ritual, see W. BURKERT, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (1979) 56-58.

47 N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 80. N. Marinatos accepted that both myths were crystallized in a different historical, social and religious context, but maintains that the original idea of the myth, might be Minoan. See also MARINATOS (*supra* n. 10, 1985) 228, fig. 8. Even before the reassembling of the *adyton* wall paintings S. MARINATOS (*Excavations at Thera VII* [1975] 37) had claimed that "We may have here an original myth, which is mostly known to us from the cycle of Orpheus and Eurydice."

48 REHAK (*supra* n. 23) 94.





crocus meadows and Strabo says that *κρόκιον πεδῖον* (krokian plain) was the sacred grove and *temenos* of the goddess in the city of Pyrasos in Phthia.<sup>49</sup>

The “Tomb of Persephone” (Pl. XXVIIIb) at Vergina presents one of the rare representations of the myth of Persephone in Classical art.<sup>50</sup> The seated Three Fates are on the north wall, Demeter is depicted alone on the east wall, seated on the *ἀγέλαστος πέτρα* (mirthless stone) and facing at the north wall, where Pluto is capturing Persephone. Next to Persephone, her frightened girlfriend is still picking flowers.<sup>51</sup>

I am not suggesting that the iconography of the macedonian tomb of the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century BC might fully decode the pictorial programme of the Xeste 3 *adyton* and its rituals. Nonetheless, the iconography of the two monuments, intersects on pictorial cycles around the transitional phases of girls into womanhood. The *εικονογραφημένος λόγος*, the “illustrated word,” in both iconographic programmes has derived from the archetypal image that had been formulated as a myth and as an image many centuries ago. In the case of Vergina the “narrative context” is known, whereas the mythological nucleus of Xeste 3 remains a matter for speculation.

The wall paintings on the east and north walls of the first floor of Xeste 3 depicted the gathering of crocus flowers and the offering of these to the imposing Enthroned Goddess.<sup>52</sup> Crocuses are depicted everywhere in the background, following an artistic novelty of the vertical “conversion” of the crocus field.

In the rocky landscape of the east wall two barefoot female figures are engrossed in picking the valuable flowers. (Pl. XXIXa) Their rich garments and jewellery show that the scene is most probably a part of an important festival for women and young girls, which extends to the north wall. There, the majestic Potnia is seated on top of a stepped structure, flanked by a griffin and a blue monkey, who is offering her a small posy of dried crocus stamens.<sup>53</sup> (Pl. XXIXb) Her lavish attire is ornamented with relief and painted crocuses, and a large purple crocus flower decorates her face. The beads of her necklace connect the “crocus meadow” iconography of Room 3a with the expanded marshy landscape of Room 3b, where ducks and dragonflies are depicted among tufted reeds.<sup>54</sup>

A young girl, the sole privileged human being to face the goddess, gazes at her ecstatically, as she empties her crocuses. She wears a purple girdle and she is the only *ἰόκολπος* or *ἰόζωνος* (with purple girdle) among the crocus gatherers. The girl, presumably depicted in a final step of her initiation to womanhood and marriage, possibly accentuates her status with the purple belt, a garment closely related with women’s prenuptial rites and cults.<sup>55</sup>

The adjectives *ἰόκολπος* and *ἰόζωνος* are used by the Archaic poets Alcaeus and Sappho.<sup>56</sup> Equally interesting is the adjective *ἰόπεπλος* (with violet veil). Archaeological record testifies that purple dye was in use during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC in the Eastern Mediterranean littoral and in the Aegean. Recent analysis of the Thera wall paintings has shown that purple pigment extracted from the murex mollusc (*porphyra*), has been used extensively for some of the

49 Strabo 9.5.14.

50 M. ANDRONIKOS, *Βεργίνα II. Ο “τάφος της Περσεφόνης”* (1994). On the few earlier and contemporary representations of the myth, see 107-110.

51 *Ibid.*, 50-96. On the myth of Persephone as the “archetypal” image of Mother and Daughter in mythology, see BURKERT (*supra* n. 46) 138 seq.

52 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 130-131 fig. 116-130.

53 N. MARINATOS, “An Offering of Saffron to the Minoan Goddess of Nature: The Role of the Monkey and the Importance of Saffron,” in T. LINDERS and G. NORDQUIST (eds), *Gifts to the Gods. Proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1985* (*Boreas* 15, 1987) 123-132 (esp. see p. 124). Cf. C. BOULOTIS, “Υπό το βλέμμα της Μεγάλης Θεάς. Συμβολισμοί και χρήσεις του κρόκου στις αιγαιακές κοινωνίες της 2<sup>ης</sup> χιλιετίας π.Χ.,” *Η Καθημερινή*-7 *Ημέρες* 18.4.1999, 8.

54 A. VLACHOPOULOS, “The Reed Motif in the Thera Wall-Paintings and Its Association with Aegean Pictorial Art,” in SHERRATT (*supra* n. 4) 631-656; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10). See also L. MORGAN, “New discoveries and new ideas in Aegean wall painting,” in MORGAN (*supra* n. 11) 37.

55 Pausanias (Paus. 2.33.1) refers to the Troezenian maidens, who were dedicated their girdles before wedlock to Athena Apaturia as an initiation rite to a new phase of life.

56 Alcaeus Fr. 42 ; Sappho Fr. 103.





garments and the petals of the crocuses in Xeste 3.<sup>57</sup> O, present evidence, the colour purple is restricted to the paintings of this building at Akrotiri.

Two pairs of life-size, mature women are depicted in procession along the corridor leading from the secondary staircase to Room 3<sup>58</sup> (Pl. XXXa). These figures are distinguished by their fine profile and coiffures and their luxurious garments, some of which are rare or unique in Aegean art. The lady in the yellow mantle wears a sleeved bodice with lilies embroidered and carries two bunches of wild roses. The woman in the red mantle wears a similar bodice decorated with crocuses and holds an empty basket, identical to that of the crocus gatherers. The borders of both bodices are painted with purple pigment. The snoods of the figures are polychrome, one decorated with a bunch of crocuses and the other is purple with sea shells. The basket bearer also has a crocus flower decorating her ear, a combination alluding to her crocus gathering activity at a younger age, as an initiated girl who was serving the Goddess.

The second pair of women (Pl. XXXb) enters the room from the south side of the corridor. The lady with the white lilies wears a flimsy net-patterned purple bodice embroidered with miniature swallows. The second figure also wears a purple bodice. Extremely interesting is her fringed girdle, very fragmentarily preserved, which is decorated with purple floral motifs with spirals in added white. Her skirt is also unique in Aegean art, being not a decorated piece of cloth but an actual natural scene with colourful rocks and swallows flying in pairs.

These mature women appear disconnected from the crocus-gathering process.<sup>59</sup> They are evidently distinguished members of the local élite participating in a procession towards the Great Goddess and bearing offerings.

A fifth woman, scantily preserved, decorated the wall opposite the corridor.<sup>60</sup> She was possibly seated, holding a stone vase and a finely decorated object that seems to be a conical rhyton. A wild rose and possibly an olive branch with fruit decorate her snood. She wears a yellow-red mantle and a wide girdle decorated with colourful sea rocks and flying fish against a black ground (Pl. XXXIa-b). This explicit work of art strongly recalls the expression of Timotheos in his "Persians" *ἰχθυοστεφεῖς κόλποι Ἀμφιτρίτας*, where Amphitrite is described as "fish-crowned,"<sup>61</sup> an epithet most appropriate to a sea deity.

The girdle in Greek literature hints various stages in a woman's life, alluding mainly to virginity, pregnancy and maternity. In the *Odyssey*, the *παρθενίνη ζώνη* (the maiden girdle) alludes to virginity.<sup>62</sup> The expression *λῦσαι τὴν ζώνην* is an innuendo for childbirth and the expression *ὑπὸ ζώνη θέσθαι* (beneath the girdle) in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* is also an expression for pregnancy.<sup>63</sup>

In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*<sup>64</sup> we meet the adjective *βαθύζωνος* (deep-girded), as well as in Pindar for Leto and the Graces. *Βαθύκολπες* (with dress falling in deep folds) are the Trojan Women in the *Iliad*<sup>65</sup> and the Nymphs in the Homeric hymns to Demeter and to Aphrodite,<sup>66</sup> as well as the Muses of Pindar.<sup>67</sup>

The two distinct "female" iconographic cycles that decorated Room 3 of the ground and the first floor of Xeste 3, respectively, might correspond to two ritual events symbolically linked by the presence of crocuses, but marking different stages in the lives of Theran girls and young

57 E. CHRYSSIKOPOULOU and S. SOTIROPOULOU, "Το ιώδες στην παλέτα του Θηραίου ζωγράφου," in A. VLACHOPOULOS and K. BIRTHACHA (eds), *Αργοναυτίες. Τιμητικός Τόμος για τον καθηγητή Χρίστο Ντούμα* (2003) 490-504; S. SOTIROPOULOU, "La pourpre dans l'art cycladique: identification du pigment dans les peintures murales d'Akrotiri (Théra, Grèce)," *Preistoria Alpina*, Suppl. 1, v. 40 (2004) 3-12.

58 A. VLACHOPOULOS, "Βίρα-Μάινα": Το χρονικό της συντήρησης μίας τοιχογραφίας από την Ξεστή 3 του Ακρωτηρίου, in VLACHOPOULOS and BIRTHACHA (*supra* n. 57) 505-526; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10).

59 DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 403; REHAK (*supra* n. 23) 91, 93.

60 VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 54) fig. 20-22; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10).

61 Timotheus, *Mil. Persians*. 39.

62 *Odyssey* 11.245.

63 V. *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 282.

64 *Odyssey* 3.154; *Iliad* 9.594.

65 *Iliad* 18.133, 339.

66 II. *Hymn to Demeter* 5; V. *Hymn to Aphrodite* 257.

67 Pindar, *Pythian* 1.12.





women.<sup>68</sup> Both ritual events are developed iconographically around females of high status, apparently goddesses, whose symbols allude to nature, fertility and womanhood, very much recalling the functions of Demeter and Artemis, in their post Bronze Age *hypostasis*.<sup>69</sup>

Protagonist in the “female” iconographic cycle of Xeste 3 is the crocus, the autumnal flower which is traditionally collected by women. Iconographic evidence and textual testimonies in the Linear B tablets attest that in the Late Bronze Age crocus gathering was a considerable source of wealth for the island communities, thanks the dyeing, cosmetic and medicinal properties of this flower.<sup>70</sup> The annual festival of offering crocus flowers to the goddess in the Xeste 3 fresco recalls the *Thesmophoria*, an autumn festival of Classical Athens in honour of Demeter and exclusive to women.<sup>71</sup> The Theran Mistress, with her qualities as protector of nature and fertility in cult is directly correlated with Demeter, blessing all flora and fauna. On the other hand, because of her apparent iconographic association with the griffin and the marshy landscape, and with a female initiation ritual, scholars tended to link the juvenile goddess of Xeste 3 with Artemis, the goddess of wild animals and protector of childbirth and women of all ages.<sup>72</sup> The dubitable inscription of the name of Artemis in the Linear B tablets of Pylos<sup>73</sup> does not provide sufficient evidence for the visual identification of the Goddess in the Late Bronze Age iconography; the Xeste 3 monumental painting, however, echo similar functions of the Theran Potnia—“whatever her name in the Bronze Age actually was.”<sup>74</sup>

Even if it is methodologically risky to link her with any Classical deity, there is little doubt that the Enthroned Potnia depicts the major Aegean divinity, her Xeste 3 “image” recording either her *imago publica* or her epiphany through the figure of a priestess. Epiphanies of goddesses are also frequent in Archaic literature; Demeter and Aphrodite are presented in epiphany in the respective Homeric Hymns, and so is Athena in Homer.

The Homeric *hymn to Demeter* addresses the goddess “lady of the golden sword and glorious fruits.”<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note that one of the four blue monkeys from Room 2 of the upper storey is brandishing a golden sword in a gesture of ritual duelling with another monkey who is brandishing the scabbard of the sword.<sup>76</sup> A fifth blue monkey before the Potnia clearly shows that these anthropomimic animals appear in continuous “dialogue” with the goddess of Xeste 3, and—as the frescoes from the “Porter’s Lodge” imply<sup>77</sup>—their presence in Thera is inextricably related with her. Probably this kind of ritual armoured dance(?) is connected with some function of the Aegean Potnia, as two seals, from Knossos and Chania, indicate.<sup>78</sup>

The seated *Potniae* in Late Bronze Age Aegean art, at least in Crete and the Cyclades, seem to reproduce a formulaic iconography based on cyclically repeated motifs of a “female” ritual

68 CHAPIN (*supra* n. 26) 24. See also MARINATOS (*supra* n. 9, 1985) 229.

69 SUTER (*supra* n. 29, 179) claims the goddess’ myth might be an early form of Persephone.

70 On the importance of crocus, see DOUSKOS (*supra* n. 30); BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 53) 10.

71 N. MARINATOS (*supra* n. 1) 72. On the Thesmophoria, see L. DEUBNER, *Attische Feste* (1965) 50-59; W.H. PARKE, *Festivals of the Athenians* (1977) 87; SUTER (*supra* n. 29) 177-179, 214-218.

72 DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 403; REHAK (*supra* n. 23) 92; CHAPIN (*supra* n. 26) 19. On the correlation of the Aegean Potnia with Artemis of Classical times, see E. SIMON, *Die Götter der Griechen* (1969) 151, 160. On the “représentations hypothétiques” of Artemis in the Late Bronze Age, see L. KAHIL, “Artemis,” *LIMC* 2.1, 624. On the disconnection of the Aegean goddess from the Greek Potnia, see N. MARINATOS, “Goddess and Monstor. An Investigation of Artemis” in F. GRAF (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (1998) 114-125; EAD., *The Goddess and the Warrior* (2000) 111-112, 115-119.

73 M. GERARD-ROUSSEAU, *Les mentions religieuses dans les tablettes mycéniennes* (1968) 46, 259. In Early Greek poetry (Homeric *Hymns to Artemis* IX and XXVII) Artemis appears as the “the pure maiden, shooter of stags, who delights in archery.”

74 DAVIS (*supra* n. 26) 403.

75 II. *Hymn to Demeter* 4.

76 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) fig. 95-96; P. REHAK “The Monkey Frieze from Xeste 3, Room 4: Reconstruction and Interpretation,” in *MELETEMATA* 945-951.

77 A. VLACHOPOULOS, “Disiecta Membra: The Wall Paintings from the ‘Porter’s Lodge’ at Akrotiri,” in P. BETANCOURT, M.C. NELSON and H. WILLIAMS (eds), *Krinoi kai Limenai: Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw* (INSTAP Academic Press, *Prehistory Monographs* 22, forthcoming 2007).

78 Chania: REHAK (*supra* n. 24) 275 fig. 4; CMS V Suppl. 1A No. 177; Knossos: REHAK (*supra* n. 26) 11 fig. 3.





universe.<sup>79</sup> Is this main goddess of the Aegean religious *pantheon* only a pictorial prototype of cultic art or is there a possibility of tracing a central *mythos* and certain secondary mythological cycles behind her imagery? Early Greek poetry and art testify that a religious or ritual cycle cannot stand iconographically without a relevant mythology behind it.

The multifaceted iconographic programme of Xeste 3 is to date the best-known pictorial cycle of a public building in the Aegean. For modern scholarship some of its scenes are of limited narrative value or of problematic coherence; it is very likely, however, that the “narrated” events do not simply reproduce images of rituals through the visual personification of defined roles. The imagery of individual males and females with distinctive characteristics of age, function and status, and their iconographic hierarchy through a dense web of intersecting symbols in formulaic repetition, seems to visualize stories or mythical events coming from a literary background and most probably shaped in oral poetry. It was possibly through this very powerful means, that such myths about humans and gods and their shared functions (as the monumental painting of the Late Bronze Age demonstrates) continued to spread in the Late Bronze Age and –even if thematically diluted– survived until the Homeric era, at the time when these “verbal images” became written *ἔπεα*.

Just how far back in time did Aegean society feel the need for the “narration” of a story? The Early Cycladic stone-slabs from Korphi t’ Aroniou on Naxos, with their pecked representations of gesturing humans, ships and animals, were until recently the first testimonies of narrative art in the Aegean.<sup>80</sup> However, the monumental rock-art representations of ships, animals, fish and spirals<sup>81</sup>, from the Late Neolithic settlement of Strofilas on Andros, now predate this kind of “public” art, heralding the anthropocentric and narrative character of Cycladic art throughout the Bronze Age.<sup>82</sup> The question that emerges is: When did the first “story with pictures” acquire the emblematic significance of not only a narrative but also a symbolic art?

Recent finds from Akrotiri clearly show that in the Cyclades this change occurred gradually some time in the Middle Bronze Age, so that by the mature Middle Cycladic phase narrative images, not only of real events but also of rites and customs, and possibly even the divine, were depicted on pottery.

On a polychrome bathtub with hunting scene, the (speared?) male figure depicted amidst a meadow with crocuses frightening the animals has been interpreted as an idealized epiphany of a male god.<sup>83</sup> However, the direction in which the animals flee along with the large eight-shaped shields depicted on the other side of the bathtub possibly point to the heroic and even mythological nucleus of this scene.

The Middle Cycladic jug with representation of human and animal activities on both its sides (Pl. XXXIIa-b) could reveal that behind the artist’s brush lay a cycle of ritual-mythological significance. This is the only plausible explanation for the composition of the two men, the one pouring from a jug into the cup of the other, and the mature bird of prey with the nestling.<sup>84</sup> The first scene alludes to a ritual that thematically recalls the myth of Ganymede, the wine-bearer of Zeus, and iconographically the Boxing Boys of Building Beta (Pl. XXXIIc) or even the Naked Boys of Xeste 3 (Pl. XXVIIIa); the second scene on the jug possibly hints at initiation,

79 MORGAN (*supra* n. 54) 26, fig. 1.7-9 (Akrotiri) 29, fig. 1.10 (Pseira) 32, fig. 1.16 (Phylakopi) 37, fig. 1.26 (Agia Triada). See also the recently published fragments from Knossos: P. WARREN, “Flowers for the goddess?, New fragments of wall paintings from Knossos,” in MORGAN (*supra* n. 11) 131-148.

80 C. DOUMAS, “Κοπή τ’ Αρνιού,” *ArchDelt* 20 (1965) 41-64; ID., *Silent Witnesses. Early Cycladic Art in the Third Millennium B.C.* (2002) 40 fig. 10, 11, 34.1-2, 36, 47.

81 C. TELEVANTOU, “Strofilas. A Neolithic Settlement on Andros,” in BRODIE *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) fig. 6-10.

82 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 80, 2002) 41-42, 64.

83 BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 49, fig. 31. See also A. PAPAGIANNOPOULOS, “From Pots to Pictures,” in BRODIE *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) fig. 1-2, pl. 5-7, cf. another Middle Cycladic pithos with a griffin and a lion, *Ibid.*, fig. 5-6, pl. 8-9.

84 C. DOUMAS, “Thera. Prehistoric times, in A. VLACHOPOULOS (ed.), *Archaeology. Aegean Islands* (2006) 314, fig. 478; A. PAPAGIANNOPOULOU in BRODIE *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) fig. 8-9, pl. 10-13; BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 58-59, fig. 42.





with the eagle teaching the eaglet to fly, echoing the “nursing spirit” of the naturalistic frieze of the swallows from Xeste 3.<sup>85</sup>

Polychrome pithoi from Akrotiri, such as the one depicting dolphins, birds and bulls, and the other with two galloping griffins in front of palm trees<sup>86</sup>, clearly bridge the iconography of the Middle Cycladic with that of the early Late Cycladic period,<sup>87</sup> even if this link is lacking from the art of wall-painting, which in this period adheres obstinately to a simple decoration with non-pictorial themes.<sup>88</sup>

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85 DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) fig. 97-99; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 10).

86 C. DOUMAS, “A Pictorial Pithos from Akrotiri, Thera,” in N. STAMPOLIDIS (ed.), *Φως Κυκλαδικόν. Τιμητικός Τόμος για τον Νικόλαο Ζαφειρόπουλο* (1999) 154-173; BOULOTIS (*supra* n. 16) 57, fig. 37-38.

87 C. BOULOTIS, “Μεταμορφώσεις στην Αιγαιακή Προϊστορία. Μερικές απόψεις για την 2<sup>η</sup> χιλιετία π. Χ.,” *Archaeologia* 49 (1993) 15-17; PAPAGIANNOPOULOU, in BRODIE *et al.* (*supra* n. 10) concludes that “pictorial narration did start on Middle Cycladic pottery and that was the substratum for the content of the fresco painting of the LC I period.” Also see, M. MARTHARI, “The Attraction of the Pictorial: Observations on the Relationship of Theran Pottery and Theran Fresco Iconography,” in SHERRATT (*supra* n. 4) 880, 883.

88 No wall paintings have been found associated with Middle Cycladic buildings so far at Akrotiri. The linear/geometric motifs of the very fragmentary frescoes that have been found under the LC I painted walls presumably date to the earliest phase of this period. See DOUMAS (*supra* n. 1) 185 fig. 149-150; DOUMAS *et al.* (*supra* n. 19) 38-39 fig. 35-36. It should be noted that these first frescoes are of very high quality in technique; their art seems to have been developed independently from iconography, as an architectural novelty for decorative purposes, rather than as a means of promoting images of the domestic and public spheres.





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

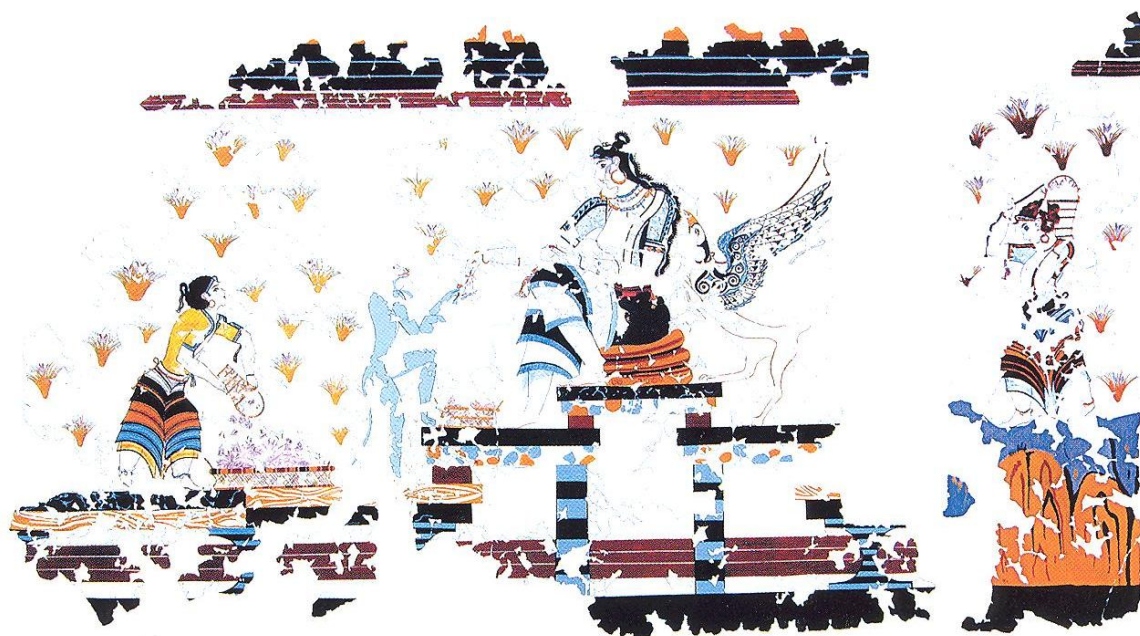
- Pl. XXV Akrotiri, general plan.
- Pl. XXVI Xeste 3. Axonometric plan with the original position of the wall paintings. Drawing: M. Zacharioudakis on a plan by C. Palyvou.
- Pl. XXVIIa Xeste 3, ground floor, *adyton*, east wall: the Shrine. Photo: Archive of the Thera Excavations.
- Pl. XXVIIb Xeste 3, ground floor, *adyton*, north wall: the Necklace Swinger (left), the Wounded Woman (middle) and the Veiled Girl (right). Photo: Archive of the Thera Excavations.
- Pl. XXVIIIa Xeste 3, ground floor, Room 3a: the Naked Boys. Photo: A. Voliotis - Archive of the Thera Excavations.
- Pl. XXVIIIb Vergina, the "Tomb of Persephone." The wall paintings on the south (up), the east (middle) and the north (down) wall of the tomb (from ANDRONIKOS [*supra* n. 50]). Drawing: A. Kottaridi. Courtesy of the Archaeological Society of Athens.
- Pl. XXIXa Xeste 3, first floor, Room 3a, east wall: the Crocus Gatherers. Photo: A. Voliotis - Archive of the Thera Excavations.
- Pl. XXIXb Xeste 3, first floor, Room 3a, north wall: the Crocus Offering to the Goddess. Drawing: M. Kriga.
- Pl. XXXa Xeste 3, first floor, Room 3b, corridor (north wall): women in procession. Drawing: M. Kriga.
- Pl. XXXb Xeste 3, first floor, Room 3b, corridor (south wall): women in procession. Drawing: M. Kriga.
- Pl. XXXIa-b Xeste 3, first floor, Room 3, (south section of the east wall?): woman with girdle. Photo: A. Voliotis - Archive of the Thera Excavations.
- Pl. XXXIIa-b Polychrome spouted jug with representations of males (a) and birds (b). Photo: Archive of the Thera Excavations. Drawing: A. Kontonis.
- Pl. XXXIIc Building Beta, Room 1: the Boxing Boys. Boys: Archive of the Thera Excavations.







a



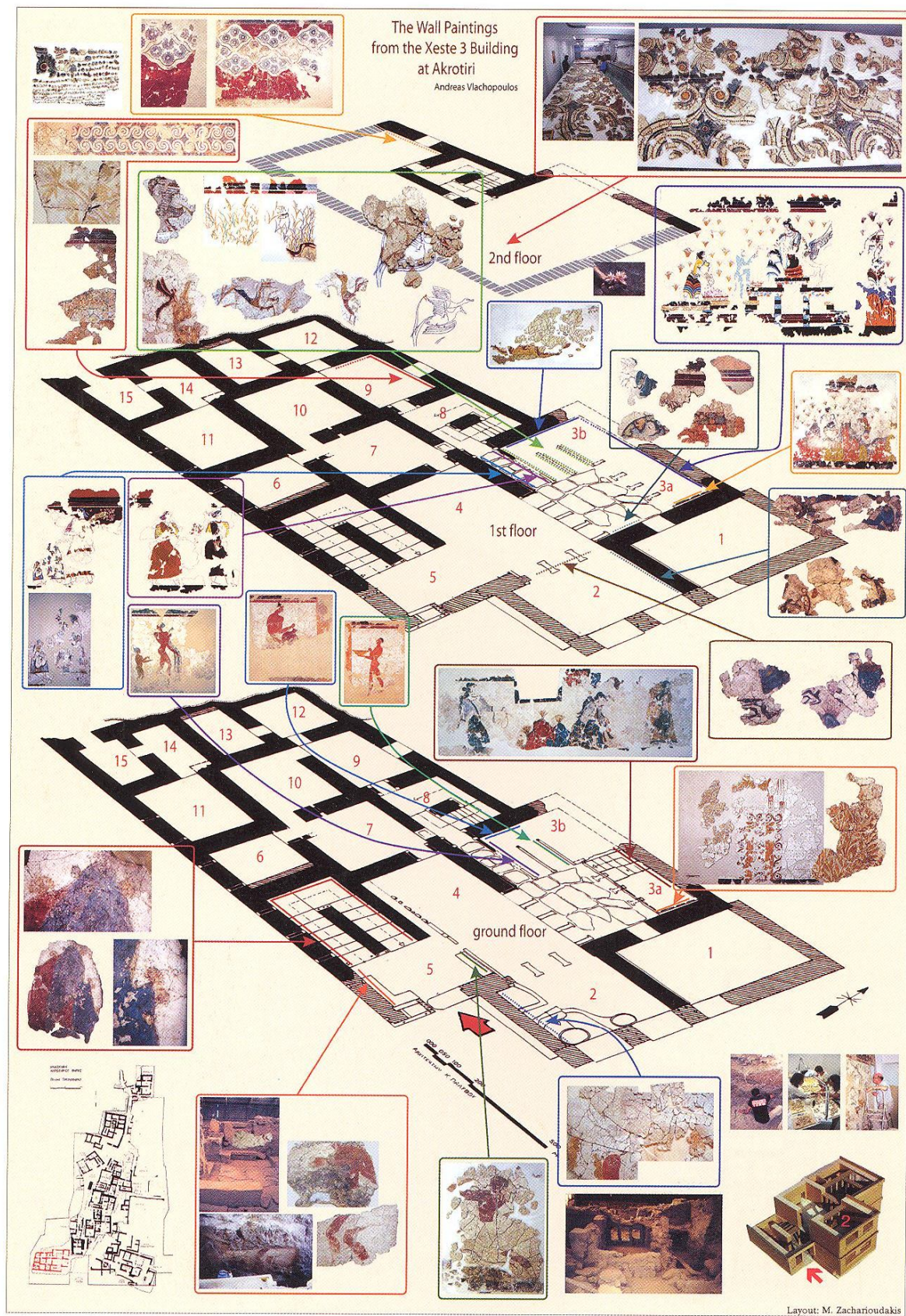
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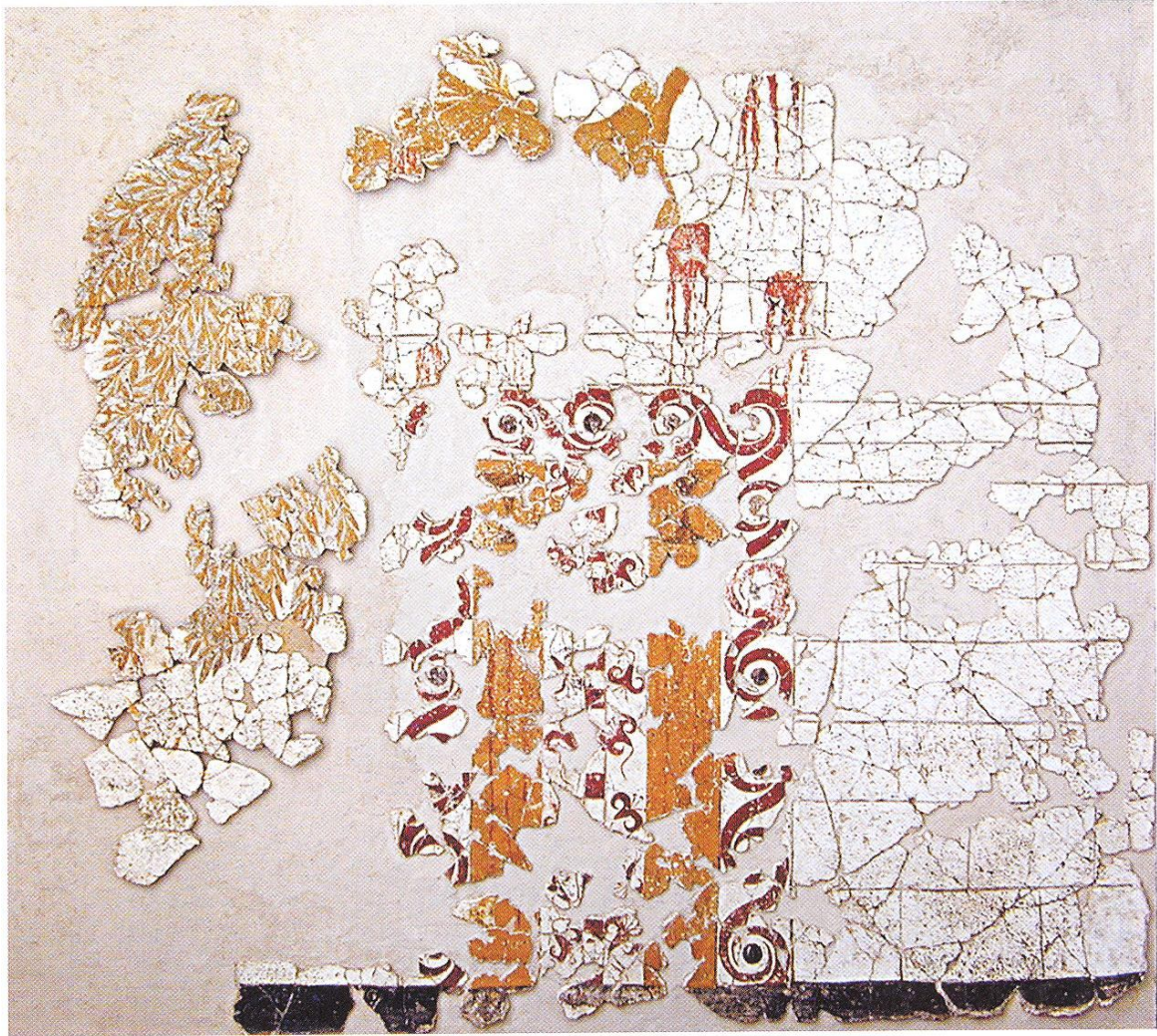












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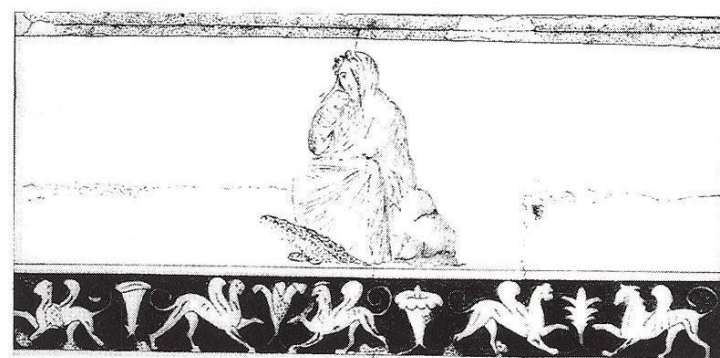
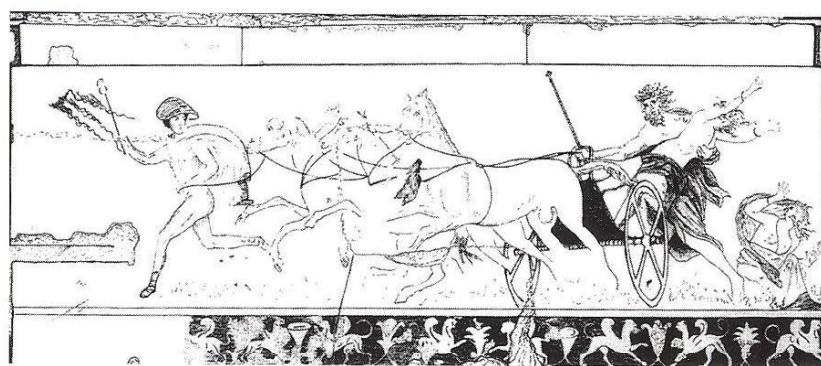
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b



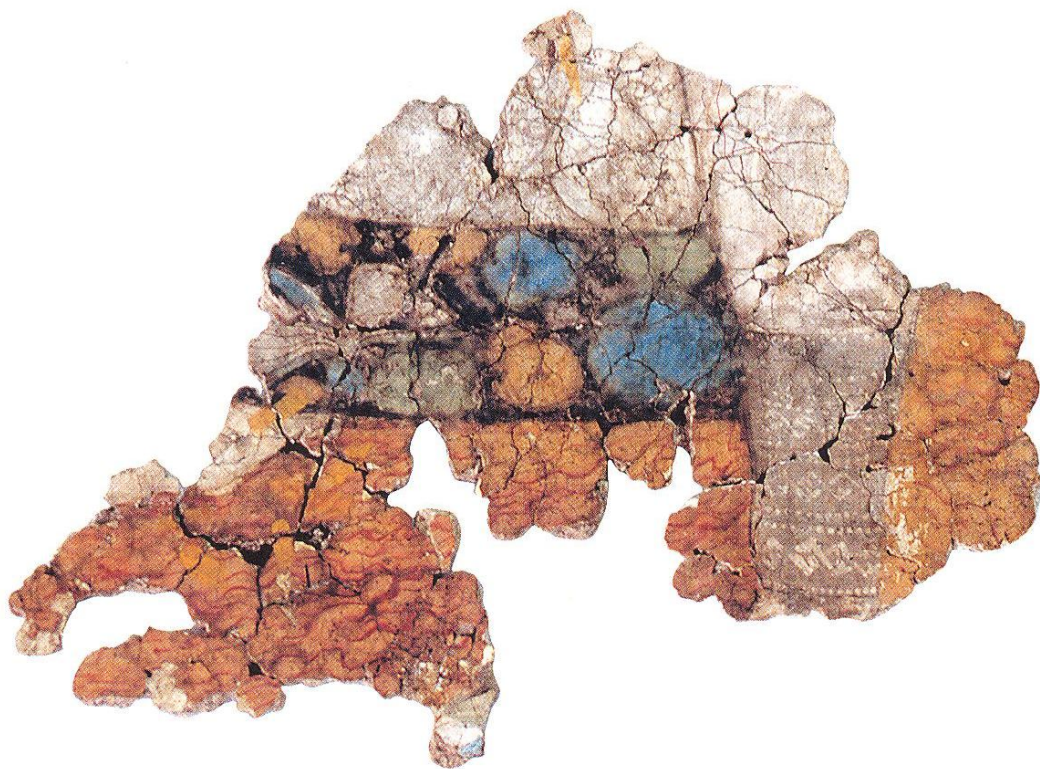


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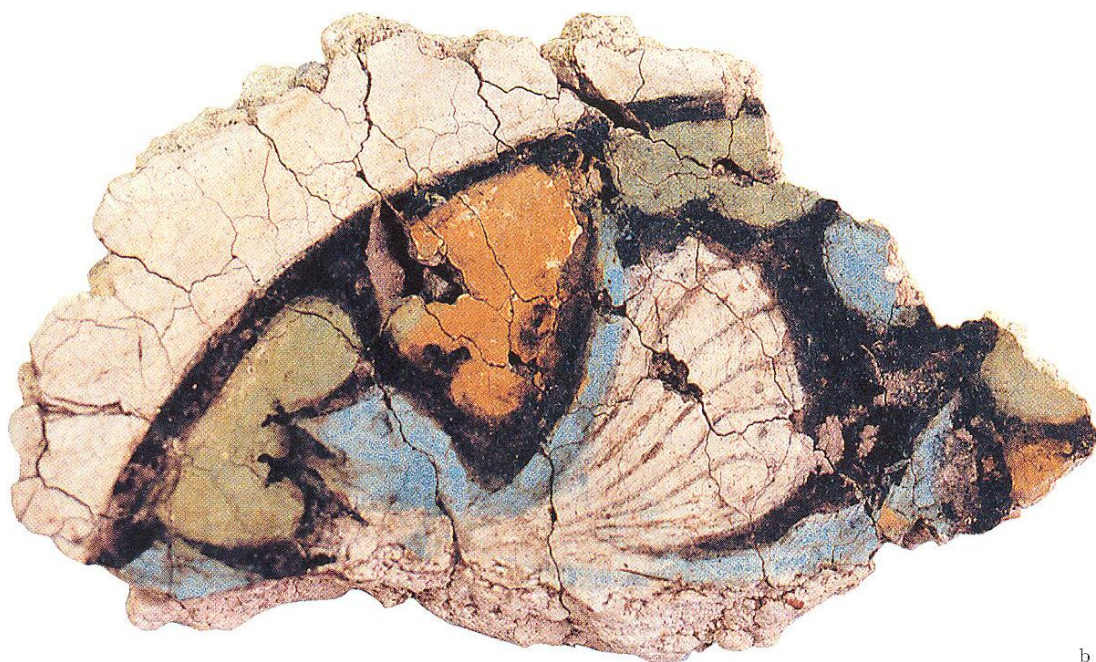


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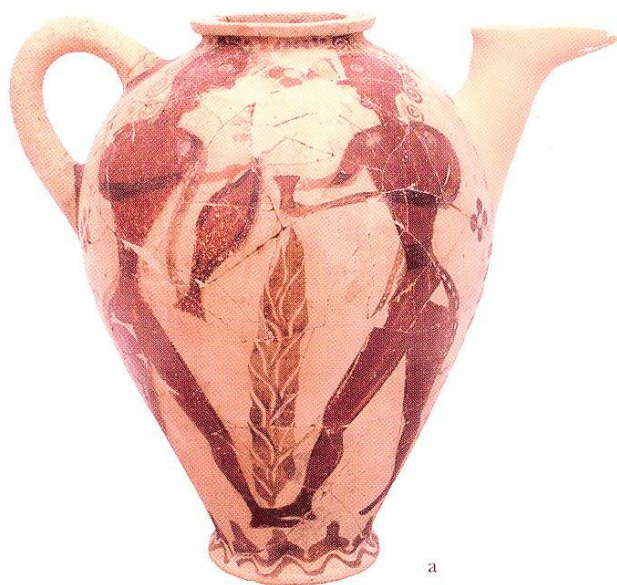
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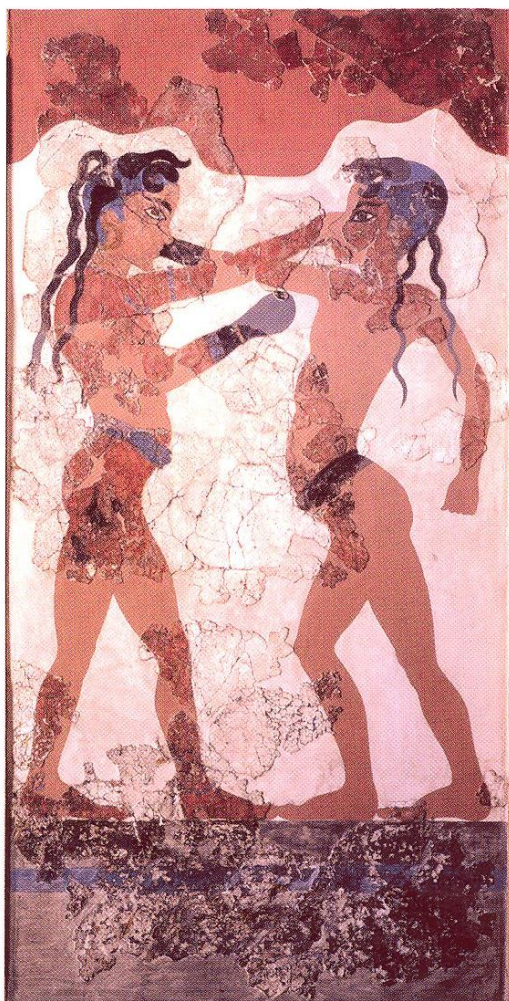
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a



c



Black  
Red Burnished

8960

b

