



Krinoi kai Limenes

Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw



Joseph and Maria Shaw awaiting villagers for an excavation display held in the courtyard of the Kommos storeroom in the village of Pitsidia, Crete, 1977 (photo by Robert K. Vincent, Jr.).

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Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw

Edited by

Philip P. Betancourt, Michael C. Nelson,
and Hector Williams



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15

Disiecta Membra: The Wall Paintings from the “Porter’s Lodge” at Akrotiri

Andreas Vlachopoulos

This short article is a preliminary presentation of the unpublished wall paintings from the “Porter’s Lodge,” given in homage to two eminent scholars and respected friends, Joe and Maria, who, for over 35 years, have complemented each other as inextricably as architecture and monumental painting do in the Aegean of the Late Bronze Age.*

The autumn of 1968, the second excavation season at Akrotiri, was promising for Spyridon Marinatos, thanks to the discovery of the first wall paintings (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 53). In the area south of Sector A, some technical works brought to light a small paved space (Fig. 15.1) that was conventionally named the “Porter’s Lodge” (in Greek, “*Thyroveio*”) (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 27–28, plan XI, pl. 28.2). The modern ravine had destroyed the upper floor of the building, and the seasonal torrent had washed away most of the wall paintings that originally decorated this space.

A flight of blue birds (Fig. 15.2) and a blue monkey before “an altar with horns of consecration in perfectly Minoan style” (Pls. 15.1, 15.3) were the first subjects that Marinatos recognized among the fragments (1968–1976, II, 28, 54, fig. 43, col. pl. B.2). Another large fragment depicts the head of a man in front of a palm tree (Pl. 15.2). The man appeared to be “foreign to the Cretan-Mycenaean race” (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 54, pl. B.3–4) and was later dubbed an African (Marinatos 1969, 374).

These wall paintings were found 30–50 cm above the supposed floor of the “Porter’s Lodge,” on the collapsed flagstones of the upper story, which were originally painted red (Marinatos 1968–1976, II,

*The restoration of the wall paintings from the “Porter’s Lodge” has been made possible with funds provided by the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. The conservators were M. Hamaoui and L. Kalambouki. Maria Kriga, artist, made the reconstructions.

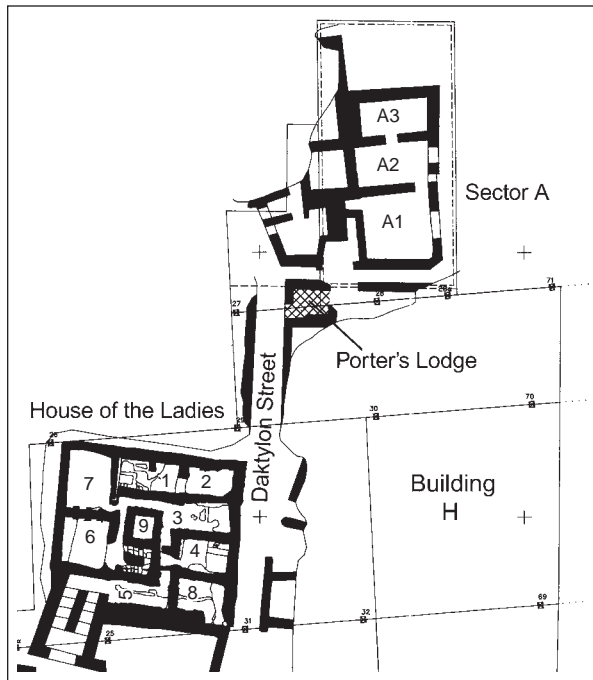


Figure 15.1. Plan of Akrotiri with the location of the “Porter’s Lodge” highlighted with cross-hatching.

28–29; Palyvou 1999, 209). Most of the fragments were found along or on the “south side of the south wall of the south corridor,” which is the inner side of the north wall of that room. Excavation data, as recorded in the daybooks, make clear that the monkey and the blue birds belonged to the same composition.

The “Porter’s Lodge” is the paved vestibule (2 x 2.70 m) at the NW corner of a building (later called *Kterio H*), the entrance of which was from “Daktylon Street” (Fig. 15.1) (Marinatos 1968–1976, V, 8, pl. 2a; Doulas 1983, fig 5; Palyvou 1999, 300, 78, 155, figs. 6–7; 2005, 86, figs. 26, 27). Building H is practically non-excavated; to the

Blue Birds

Because Marinatos reports that most of the bird fragments were found on or along the north wall, we can accept that the section depicting the right wing of a bird (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 28, col. pl. B.2) was also found there (Fig. 15.2). This bird (Doulas 1992, 27) was restored in 2000 from fragments (left wing, head, beak in Plate 15.6) that do not have joins



Figure 15.2. Fragment of a blue bird that was found in situ in 1968. Photo by S. Marinatos.

southeast a space called the “kitchen” (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 28–29, pls. 27.2, 30.1) was found, its walls densely painted with lilies identical to those of the Spring Fresco (Marinatos 1968–1976, V, 15–16, pl. 14a–b; Doulas 1992, 185). This room was then sealed for future investigation.

The quantity of fragments collected from the “Porter’s Lodge” is considerable, filling 10 drawers in the storeroom at Akrotiri. Most of them have extremely thin plaster, 0.2–0.3 cm thick; those from the edges are much thicker (0.5–3 cm) with pebbles of greenish tuff framing the wall painting from behind. The upper edges are smooth due to contact with wood, while the lower and lateral edges are rough and slightly concave.

Most of the unpublished fragments belong to the three subjects already briefly presented by S. Marinatos (1968–1976). Some important new motifs can now be assigned to these, and very few motifs are thematically out of this context. New reconstruction drawings in Plates 15.4 and 15.5 are proposed here.

with the fragment of the right wing, and the resulting image presents inconsistencies.

New fragments that have been safely attributed to this composition are:

1. Fragments depicting one bird (dimensions, 0.36 x 0.26 m) flying to the left under a

light blue loop motif that runs along the upper edge (Pl. 15.7). The dimensions of the bird are identical with the ones of the restored bird (Pl. 15.6); the flights of the birds are different, however.

2. Two sections with fan-shaped tails rendered in exactly the same size as the tail of the bird on the fragments above (no. 1) (Pl. 15.8).
3. Fragments of blue wings ending in white feathers (Pl. 15.9). One of the wings has a second stripe of light blue color with black feathers. Another fragment depicts an anchor-shaped floral motif.
4. Six fragments of heads with the circular red and yellow eye of a bird. Four of the birds fly to the left (Pl. 15.10 lower) and two to the right (Pl. 15.10 upper). The restored blue bird in the Thera Museum also flies to the left, indicating that there were a total of seven birds in the composition.

All birds have been rendered in the same scale. Based on the dimensions of the restored bird (Pl. 15.6), we estimate that the space needed on the fresco for the seven birds should be larger than 6 sq. m. Two of the birds (on fragment nos. 1, 3) fly close to the upper edge of the paintings (Pls. 15.7, 15.9). Our sketch in Plate 15.4 indicates the position of the

flight in relation to the edges of the painting, also taking into account the fragments from the "rock and floral motifs" of the edges (Pls. 15.7, 15.9).

In spite of the hybridism observed in Minoan and Thera wall painting, there is no doubt that our blue birds are rock doves (Harte 2000, 689, fig. 6a–b), also depicted on the ship under full sail on the Miniature Frieze (Doumas 1992, 68, figs. 35, 37; Harte 2000, 690; Marinatos 2000, 910, fig. 5). The bird motif is widespread in the early LBA Aegean, in painting and in minor arts (Hood 1978, 203, figs. 203c, g, h, 221, 223d–f); in Thera, however, the open-winged bird appears already on the polychrome pottery of the late MC period (Boulotis 2005, 59, fig. 42). The closest iconographic parallels to the birds on this fresco, however, are the blue birds from the contemporary (LM IA) House of the Frescoes at Knossos where M. Cameron (1968, 5, 7, figs. 1f, 3a–f, 11A, pls. 3.1–5, 4.1, col. pl. A.5) reconstituted a riverine landscape with monkeys climbing on rocks and blue birds flying through undulating rock clusters (Fig. 15.3). The similarities in design, the rendering of anatomical details (eyes, wings, tails), and the color tones are striking and obviously not coincidental, thus proving the intentional reproduction of a pictorial prototype. More similarities with the Knossian wall painting will be revealed in the presentation of the blue monkeys.

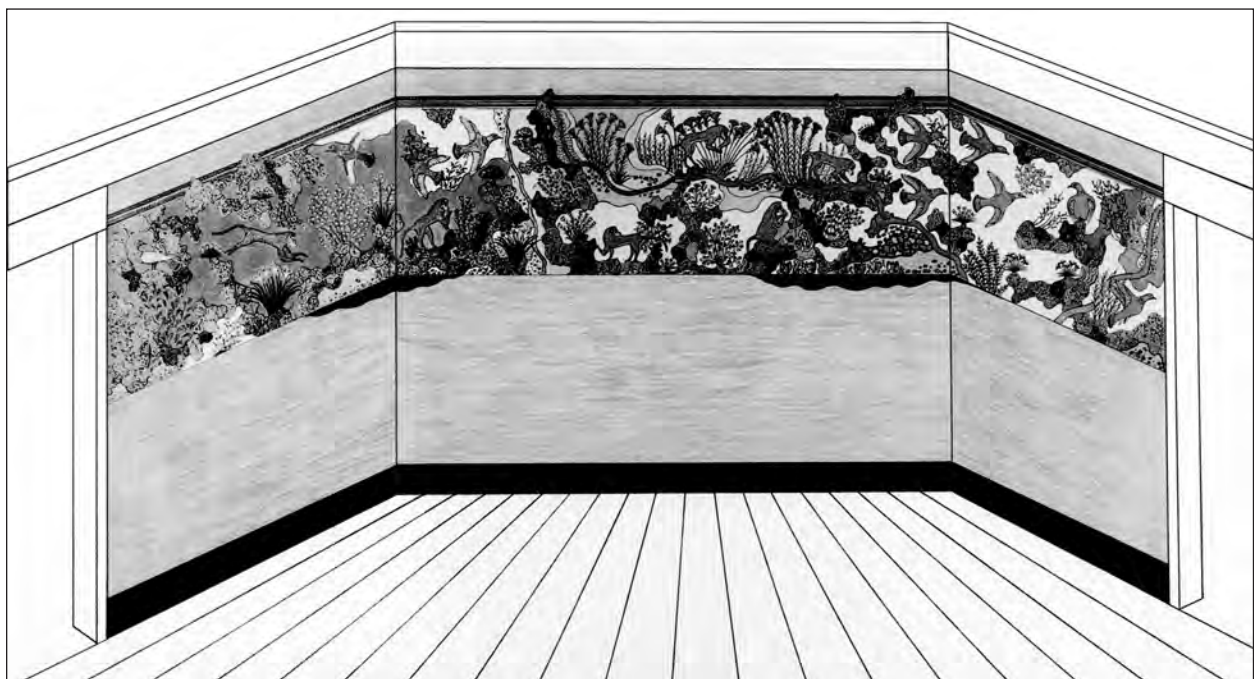


Figure 15.3. Knossos, House of the Frescoes. Drawing of the wall painting (Cameron 1968).

Blue Monkeys in Shrine

The published fragment (0.48 x 0.45 m; Pls. 15.1, 15.3) depicts a blue monkey in a worshipping gesture, sitting to the left of a shrine against a brown rock and a hybrid yellow floral motif (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 54, pl. B.3–4). The tail of a second monkey is depicted to the right of the papyrus column. The exotic papyrus capital is possibly influenced by Egyptian examples (Marinatos 1987b, 418 n. 12) but iconographically reproduces the papyrus of the Thera artists' vocabulary (Doulas 1992, 36–37, figs. 2–5, 30, 33–34, 64–66), as well as actual stone capitals (for Knossos, see Eichinger 2004, 259 [435.Ka 2]). An undulating blue stripe along the white horizon of the upper zone probably renders the celestial sphere, against which the horns of consecration are projected.

The following fragments have been attributed to this composition:

1. A large section (about 0.35 x 0.33 m) depicting the abdomen and the legs of a blue monkey in a rocky (and riverine?) landscape rendered with black curves and loops (Pl. 15.11). This section was destroyed when it fell on a stone and was removed from the excavation embedded in a gypsum mold.
2. Fragments from the heads (cheek, mouth, lips), bodies, and tails of blue monkeys. There may have been up to three monkeys in the composition (Pl. 15.12). One monkey stands close to yellow and red "flowers" that are also depicted behind the worshipping monkey.
3. Fragments from the upper edge of the wall painting with horns of consecration against the blue sky (Pl. 15.13), showing that the facade of the shrine was rather long. In spite of the asymmetry of the preserved horns, it is possible to restore five horns on top of the facade of the shrine (Pl. 15.4).
4. Four fragments from the yellow columns of the shrine; one is from the papyrus capital (Pl. 15.14 middle), one from the stem with a tail (?) of a monkey in front (Pl. 15.14 left), and one is from the base (Pl. 15.15 left). The right end of the stepped cornice of the shrine

is preserved on another fragment (Pl. 15.14 right).

5. Three fragments from the incised black base-line of the wall painting with an undulating blue stripe above, possibly representing a river (Pl. 15.15).

On the basis of the new fragments, we assume that three monkeys were depicted, all in proximity to the shrine. Facing right, they are all in different poses, as are the very similar blue monkeys from the LM IA House of the Frescoes (Cameron 1968, 4–5, figs. 1a–e, 10, 21, col. pl. A.1–3) and the less similar monkeys from Building B (Doulas 1992, 120–121, figs. 85, 86). The poor fragments from the columns do not permit a secure reconstruction of the shrine building at present. One column stands on a red and black surface (Pl. 15.14 left), while a second one stands on the incised black base-line of the wall painting (Pl. 15.15 left). Their different widths may imply differentiation in the height of the facade or even a tripartite construction. Smaller fragments (not yet restored) depict wooden beams and other architectural elements, which make the image of the shrine even more perplexing.

N. Marinatos (1987a, 127, fig. 4.4; 1987b, 419–420, figs. 1, 6; 1988, 140–141, figs. 6, 7) has extensively discussed the iconography and interpretation of the published fragment (Pls. 15.1, 15.3), placing two monkeys engaged in ritual activities in an imaginary natural/architectural setting, while M. Shaw (1993) groups the "Aegean garden" landscapes in Minoan painting and correctly correlates them with some of the Thera wall paintings, including this scene (Shaw 1993, 668–679, figs. 4, 5, 10–12, 15–17). There is no need to further develop these thoroughly commented points. What is still missing from our wall painting is the focus of the simians' worship or other ritual activity.

Iconographic comparanda of anthropomorphic monkeys as protagonists from Minoan Crete (Platon and Pini 1975 [CMS II.3], no. 103; Marinatos 1987a, 124–130, figs. 1–4; 1987b, figs. 2, 3) and Akrotiri itself (Papageorgiou and Birtacha forthcoming) advocate the possibility that the monkeys are proceeding toward a female figure that is probably seated. The monumental wall painting from Xeste 3, in

which a blue monkey is offering crocus stigmas to the seated Potnia (Marinatos 1987a, 124, figs. 1–3; Doumas 1992, 158, fig. 122; Vlachopoulos 2007, 113, pl. XXIX.b; forthcoming) deciphers the role of the monkey as an intermediary between the humans and the goddess and offers a persuasive pictorial counterpart to our approach.

This interpretation is supported by the following fragments (Pl. 15.16):

1. An embroidered garment (skirt?) with blue and yellow horizontal stripes (Marinatos 1968–1976, II, 54, fig. 44), whose main decorative motif is almost identical to the motif on the skirt of one of the saffron-gatherers from Xeste 3 (Doumas 1992, fig. 120)
2. The dark yellow face of a female figure with an eye facing left, Marinatos' "small woman's head" (1968–1976, II, 54)

N. Marinatos (1987b, 419–420) thought that the deity (if any) should have been depicted inside the shrine, but, if such were the case, the scale of the monkeys might make her look "too insignificant" in comparison with them. In my opinion, neither the monkeys nor the seated Potnia (if any) is shown inside the shrine. The former are depicted along the portico of the shrine's facade, the latter farther to the right (possibly seated); the whole activity is taking place in an open air, rocky setting, analogous to that on the wall painting from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos. Such an interpretation is also consistent with a relevant Minoan iconographic cycle on seals and signet rings—the Kalyvia ring included—where the goddess worshipped by a monkey is seated outside the shrine (Platon and Pini 1975 [*CMS* II.3], no. 103; Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 128; cf. Sakellarakis 1982 [*CMS* I, Suppl.], no. 114; Marinatos 1988, fig. 4).

If our approach is correct, then our Potnia may have been accompanied by a griffin, following the monumental iconography of Xeste 3. The "Porter's Lodge" surprisingly included five fragments depicting yellow and white feathers of griffin wings, with the characteristic curved solid triangles and interspersed red equidistant bullets (Pl. 15.17). Most of these fragments possibly belong to the left wing of a griffin. There is one fragment (Pl. 15.17 left), however, that obviously comes from an identical, but right, griffin wing.

The above iconographic elements make plausible the existence of a seated Potnia (and possibly of a griffin with open wings beside her). There is no evidence of where the Potnia is sitting (construction, rocks, etc.). Our sketch (Pl. 15.4) is mainly based on the Xeste 3 wall painting and shows very roughly how such a composition may have originally been conceived. The flight of blue birds (see above) belongs to the same wall painting. Apart from the iconographic coherence of the two subjects, which strongly recalls the thematic syntax of the Knossian cycle of the House of the Frescoes and other relevant "Aegean garden" landscapes (Shaw 1993), the repetition of the rock and floral motifs rendering the "rocky garden" around both subjects corroborates this conclusion (Pls. 15.1, 15.3, 15.7, 15.9).

The section of the climbing monkey (Pl. 15.11) shows that each animal might be about 65 cm tall and 40 cm wide. If we suppose that there were three monkeys in the composition, then the space needed for their deployment would be approximately 1.20 m across, and the estimated height of the wall painting would be about 1 m. The unit with the seven birds should cover a length of at least 1.20 m. If these estimated dimensions are correct, then the wall painting on the north wall would have been some 2.70 m long, which is the actual length of the wall (Pl. 15.4).

Male Figure (the "African")

The fragment preserves its upper edge and depicts a male figure facing left and a date palm; he wears a large yellow (gold) hoop earring and a blue feather crest in his hair (Pl. 15.2). His head is 10 cm high and, thus, he is "the sole human figure in the Theran wall paintings that is represented on a scale

1/3 of life-size, usual in the Cretan wall paintings" (Televantou 2000). The original height of the figure is estimated to be approximately 60 cm, but with the palm tree included, the wall painting was 5 cm higher. The fragment shows that the male figure is slightly bent toward the palm.

New fragments that have been safely attributed to this composition depict the following scenes:

1. Red trunks, blue palm branches, and yellow and red dates, which belong to—possibly—two or more identical trees (Pl. 15.18). As Marinatos (1968–1976, II, 28) had correctly suggested, “perhaps it is a group of three palm trees” (see below).
2. Blue beads on a brown surface (male skin) that apparently belong to necklaces worn by the male figure on different parts of his body. One of the fragments depicts the black string of the necklace around his neck (Pl. 15.19).

N. Marinatos (1988, 137–138) has argued against her father’s suggestion, showing that brown skin, curly hair, thick lips, and a pug nose are not necessarily “African” characteristics. A male figure of an athlete/hunter from Xeste 3, who is grasping a goat by its horns (Vlachopoulos forthcoming), also has a pug nose and a squat head (but abnormally thin lips) and is apparently not an African.

Our male figure is wearing a gold earring and at least two necklaces of blue beads that are identical to the ones worn by the boxing child on the left in Building B (Doumas 1992, 112–115, figs. 78–81). Very similar, too, is the rendering of the outlined, loop-shaped eye, which implies artistic affinity between both paintings—if not the same hand.

The blue crest atop the figure’s head completes the set of *insignia dignitatis* depicted on this high status male (cf. Hood 1978, 228, fig. 231; Marinatos 1988, 138; Shaw 2004, 79–80, fig. 4.7), bringing him iconographically very close to the emblematic Priest King of Knossos dated to LM IA or LM IB (Hood 2000, 201–202). Recent re-examination of this controversial painting by M. Shaw (2004, 72, fig. 4.5) has shown that the Priest King’s left arm is swinging back in a downward slant, a position originally suggested by Evans and restored by Gilliéron *filis* (Evans 1921–1935, II, 775–795, fig. 508, pl. XII; Shaw 2004, fig. 4.1; Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 76).

According to Evans’s theory, the Priest King was holding a rope and was leading a griffin (Evans 1921–1935, II, 783–785), as in a representation on a seal from Vapheio (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1964 [CMS I], no. 23) and on an earlier Minoan seal (Alexiou 1969). The iconography of a male figure leading a

griffin, also encountered in Mycenaean minor art (Sakellariou 1966, 74–75), may well have been the prototype for our male figure. If, following our speculations, we are emboldened to attribute the fragments of griffins presented above (Pl. 15.17) to the composition of the male figure, then our wall painting gains in iconographic coherence, with an open-winged griffin represented on the same scale as the male figure.

The palm tree defines the natural setting of the wall painting as a sacred space and alludes to the identification of the man as a high-status adorant performing some kind of ritual (Marinatos 1988, 138–140). There is little doubt that scenes in which humans are depicted next to palm trees denote sacrificial or worshipping activity, as the crested man in a libation scene on a seal from Naxos (Pini et al. 1975 [CMS V.2], no. 608) and other seal representations (Marinatos 1984; 1988, 138, figs. 4, 5) clearly suggest.

Scholarship has considered similar iconographic cycles as purely Minoan in inspiration and development. However, the representation of two griffins advancing toward palm trees on a late-MC polychrome pithos found recently at Akrotiri (Boulotis 2005, 58, figs. 37, 38) shows Thera’s major contribution to the development of the imagery that prevailed in Aegean iconography in the early LBA period. This kind of narrative iconography, which includes, among others, human and animal figures in initiation scenes (Boulotis 2005, 50, 59, 63, figs. 31, 42, 49), anticipates pictorial cycles of the LC I (such as the Miniature Frieze and the Boxing Children), which now may be designated to an earlier stage of Thera art (Vlachopoulos 2007, 116, pl. XXXII).

N. Marinatos (1988, 141) correctly attributed the monkeys at the shrine and the male figure as “two independent but programmatically related paintings on different walls of the same room.” If our assumptions discussed above are correct, then the male figure is depicted before a cluster of palm trees (Pl. 15.18), possibly on the east wall of the “Porter’s Lodge,” and he is moving toward the “Elysian” habitat on the north wall, where blue monkeys and birds herald or glorify the epiphany(?) of the Great Goddess (Pl. 15.4).

Even though only some *disiecta membra* have survived, the wall paintings from the “Porter’s Lodge” form a coherent iconographic program of

profound symbolic—if not purely religious—character. This program mirrors similar cycles of wall paintings from Neopalatial Crete, but it also echoes the evolution of a local imagery, which on Thera had already given birth to the earliest known narrative in the Aegean. The adaptation of a

"palatial style" Cretan iconography to Theran painting in the early LBA not only verifies the common artistic vocabulary that the two islands shared in that period, but also testifies to their societies' common perception of a visual and ritual universe.

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Plate 15.1. The monkeys in the shrine. Photo by A. Voliotis.



Plate 15.2. Male figure before a palm tree (Museum of Prehistoric Thera). Photo by A. Voliotis.

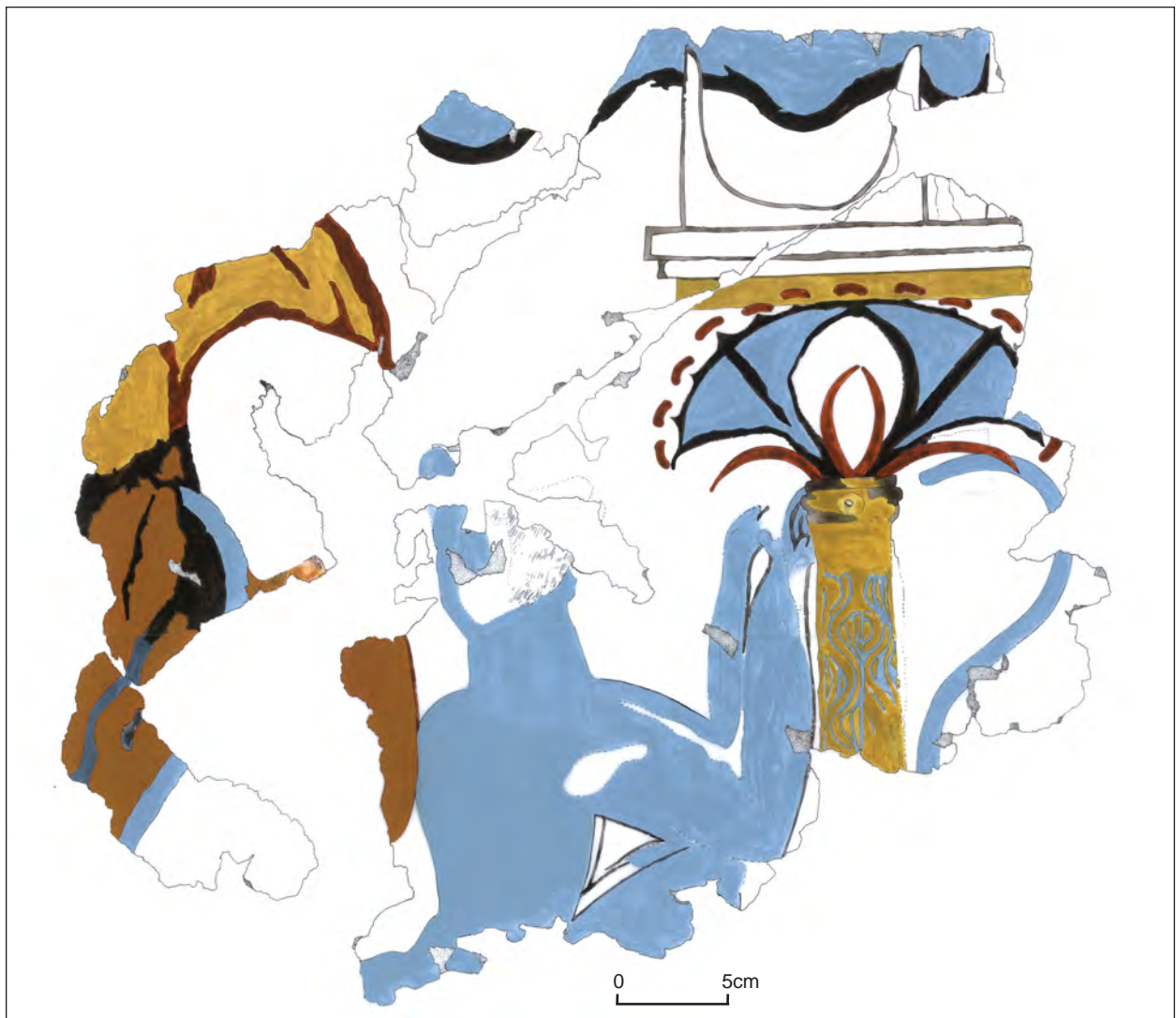


Plate 15.3. The monkeys in the shrine. Drawing by Maria Kriga.



Plate 15.4. Monkeys in the shrine, seated Goddess, and blue birds. Reconstruction by Maria Kriga.



Plate 15.5. Male figure before palm trees, possibly accompanied by a griffin. Reconstruction by Maria Kriga.



Plate 15.6. Blue bird (Museum of Prehistoric Thera). Photo by A. Voliotis.

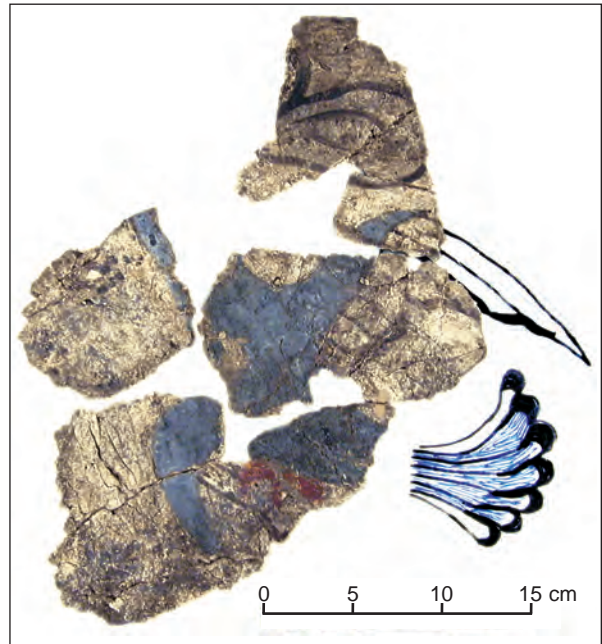


Plate 15.7. Blue bird under restoration. Photo by D. Sakatzis.

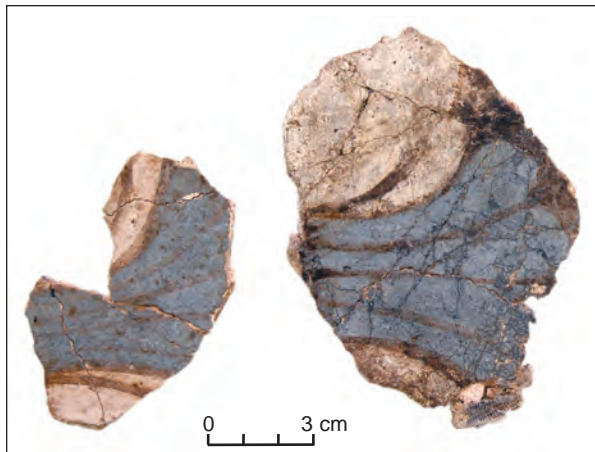


Plate 15.8. Tails of blue birds. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

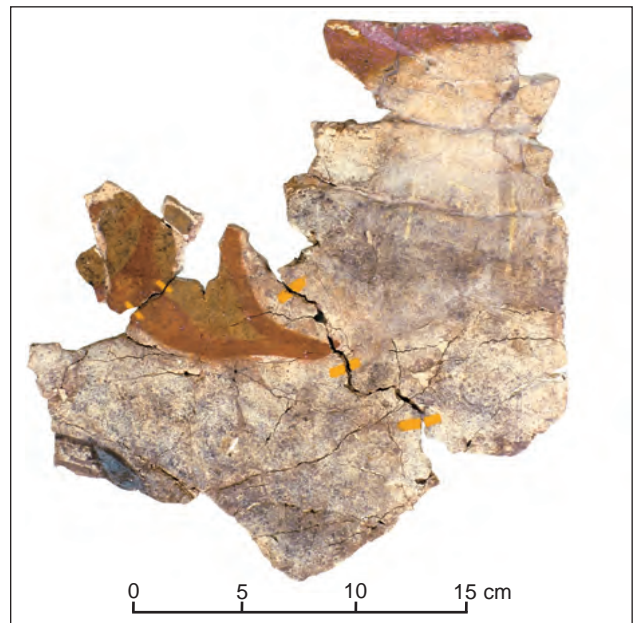


Plate 15.9. Anchor-shaped floral motif from the edge of the painting of the blue birds. Photo by D. Sakatzis.

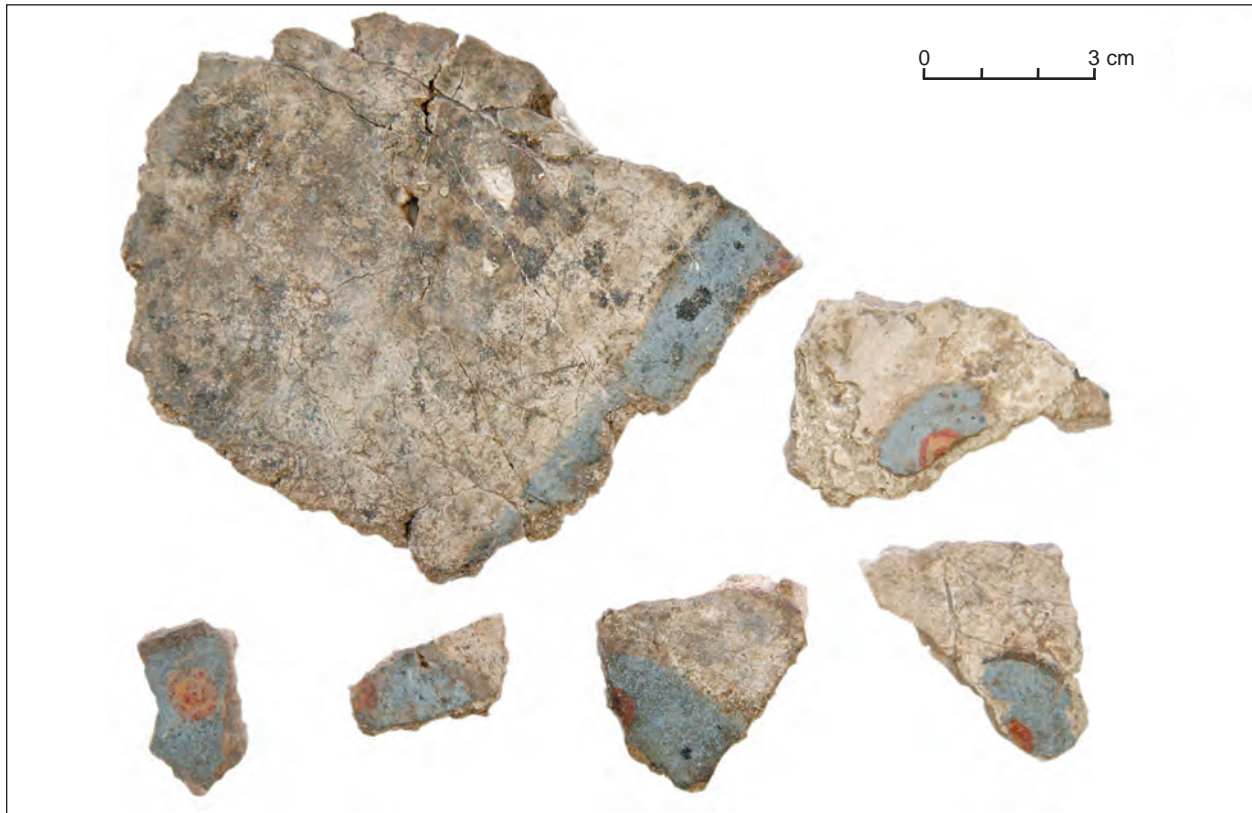


Plate 15.10. Heads and eyes of blue birds. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

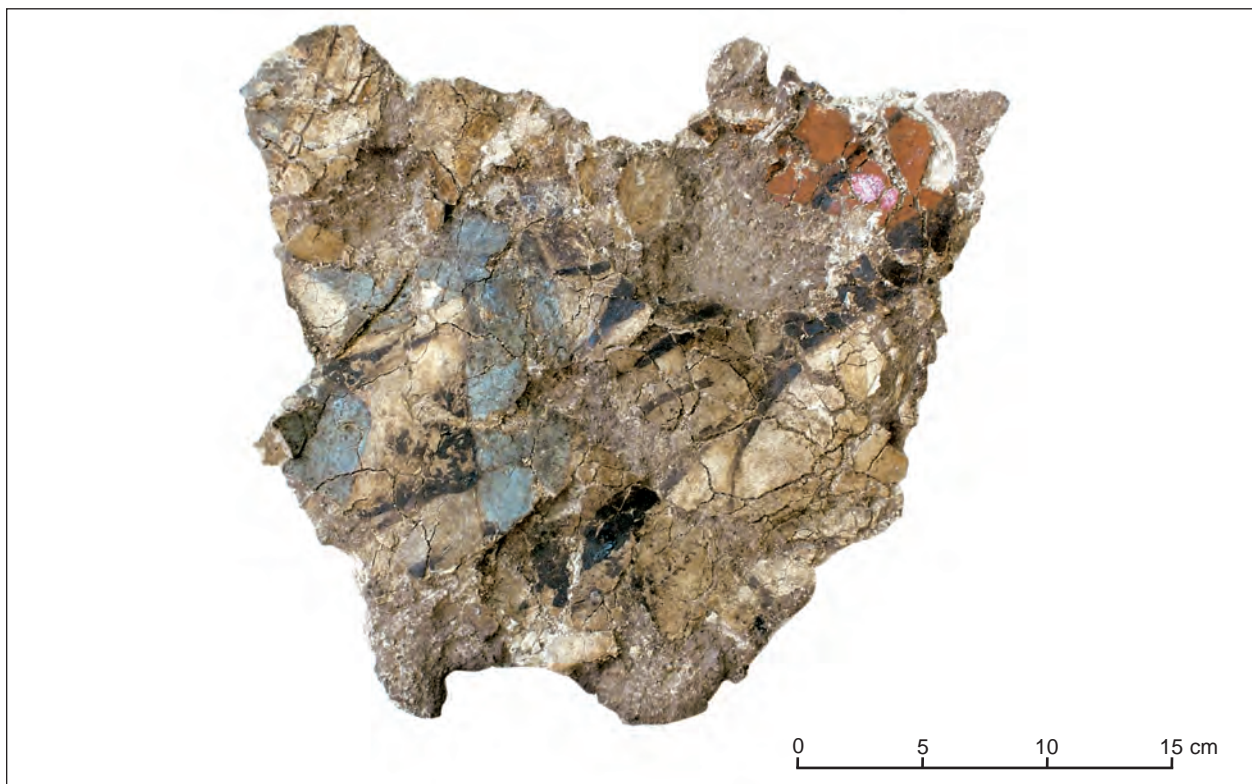


Plate 15.11. Section of a blue monkey in a rocky landscape. Photo by D. Sakatzis.

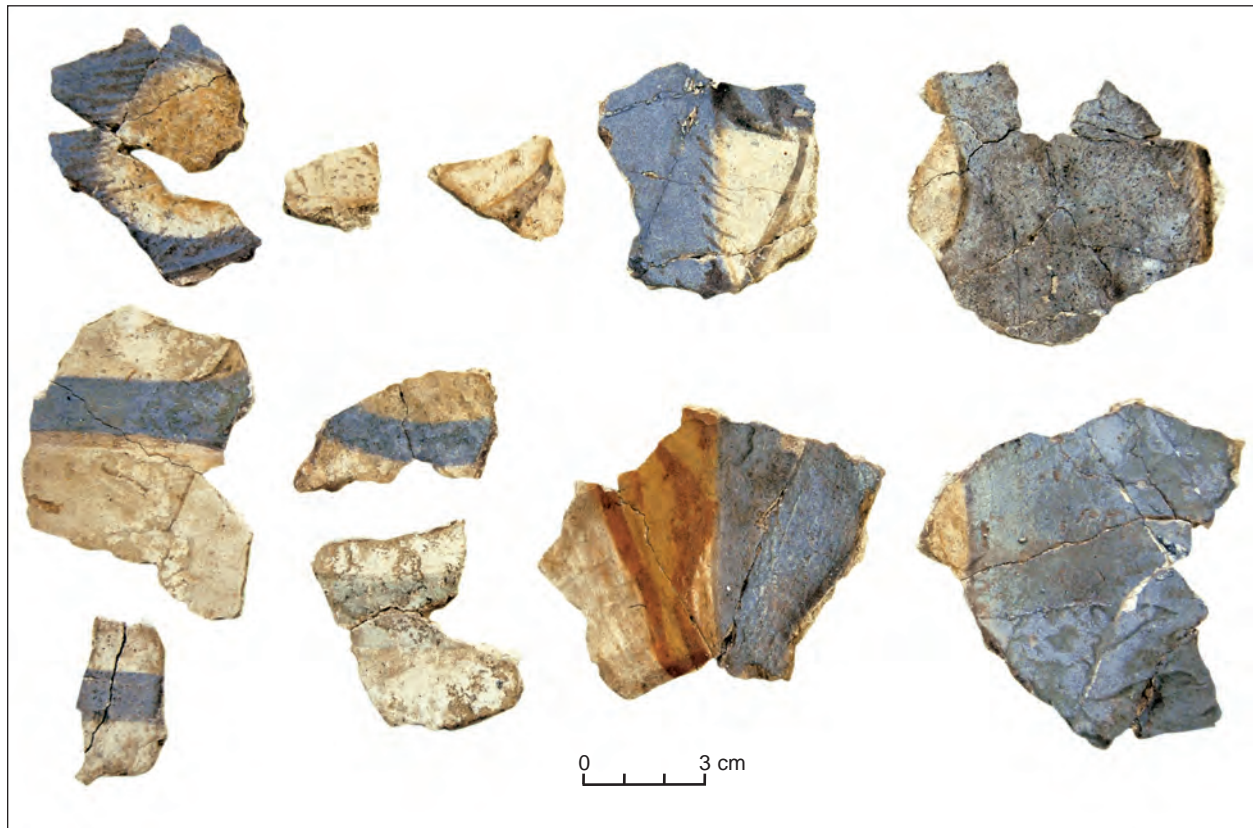


Plate 15.12. Fragments of blue monkeys. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

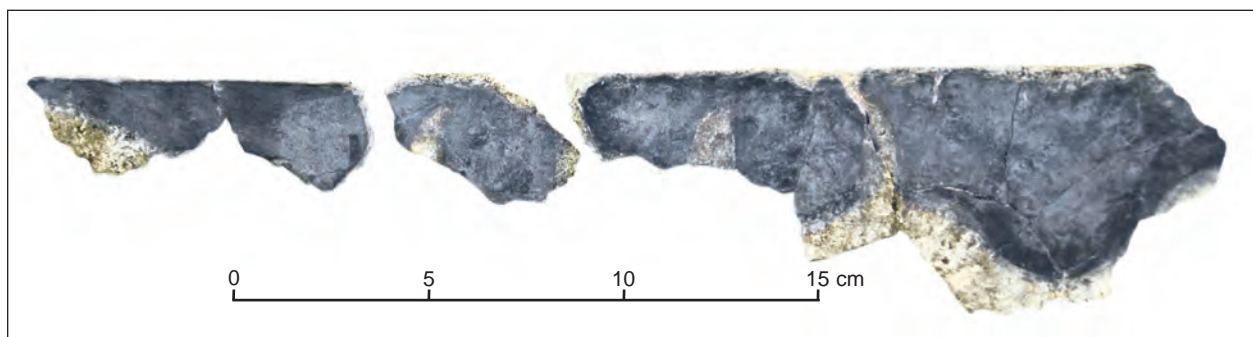


Plate 15.13. Fragments of horns of consecration against blue sky. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

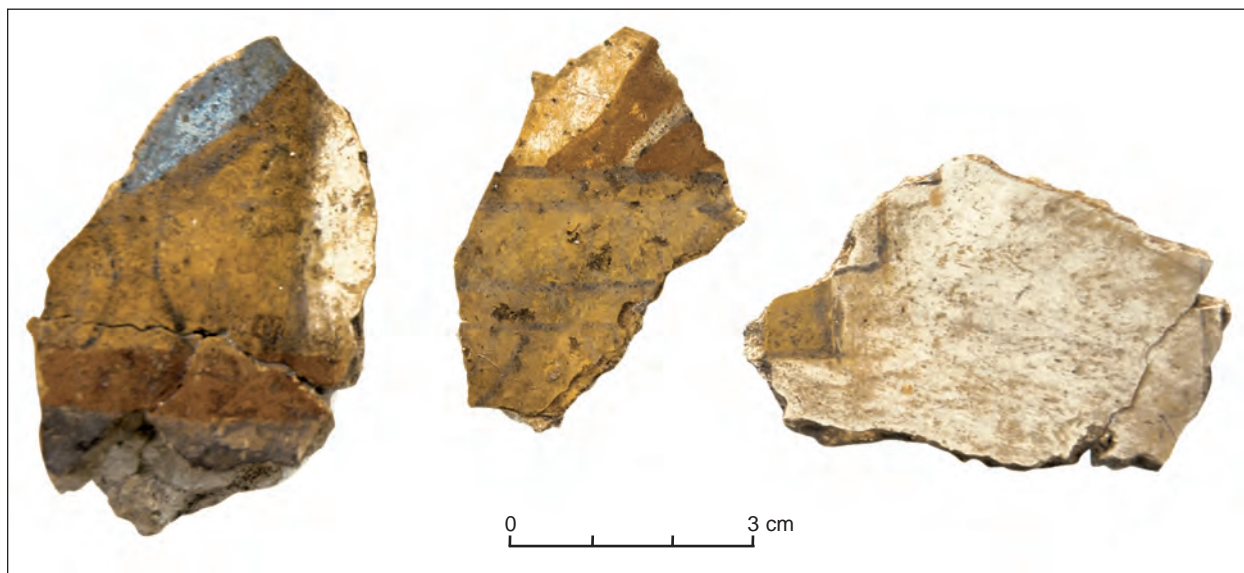


Plate 15.14. Fragments of columns and cornice of the altar. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

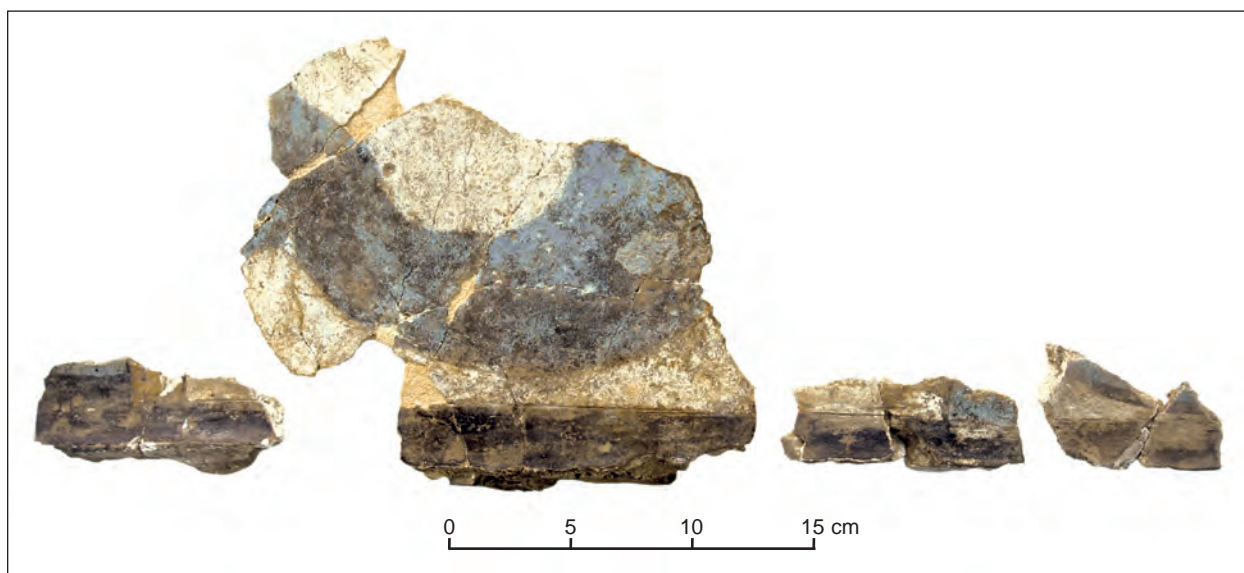


Plate 15.15. Fragments of column and river (?) along the base line of the wall painting. Photo by M. Hamaoui.



Plate 15.16. Fragments of garments and a woman's eye (top). Photo by M. Hamaoui.

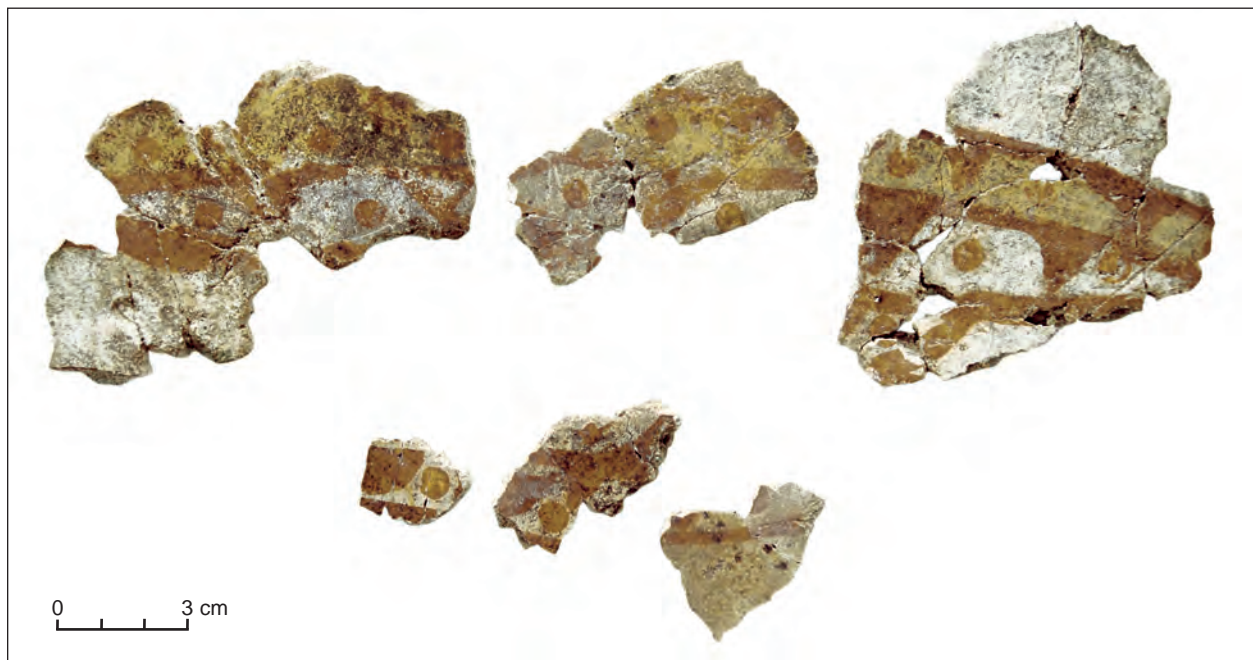


Plate 15.17. Fragments of griffin wings. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

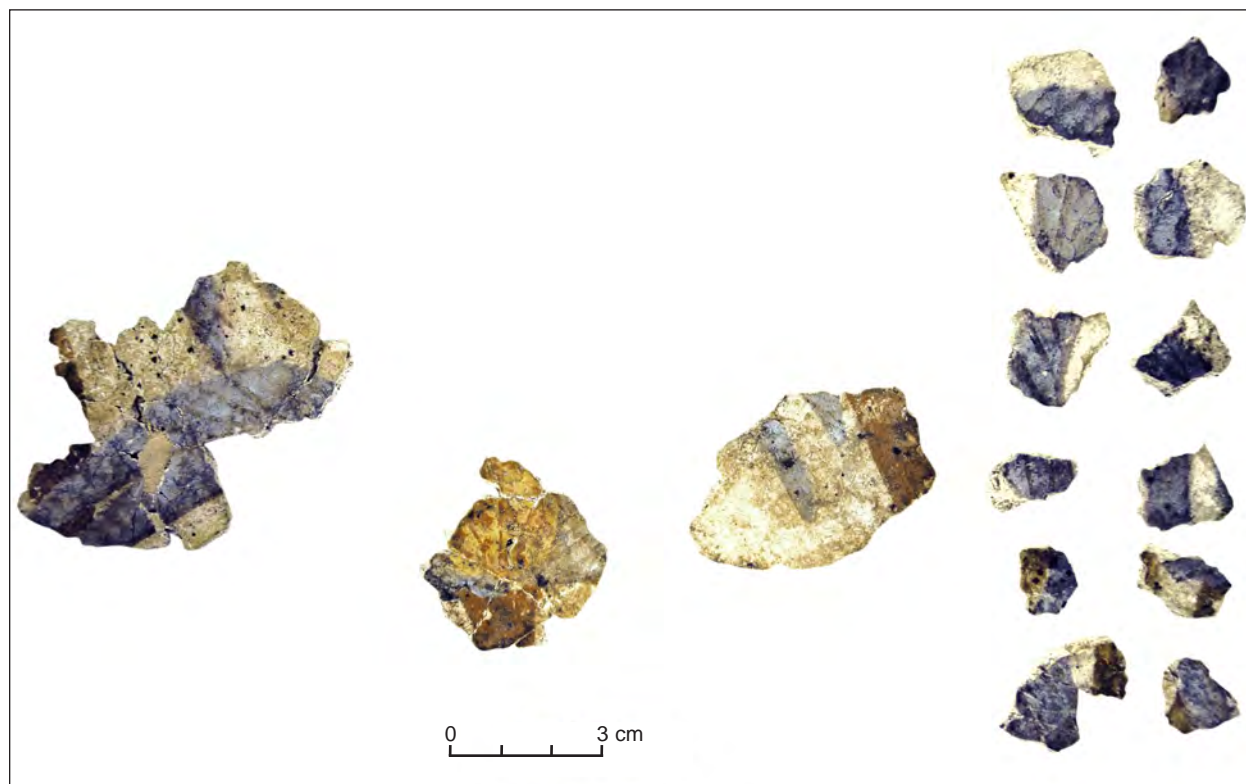


Plate 15.18. Fragments of trunks and branches of palm trees. Photo by M. Hamaoui.

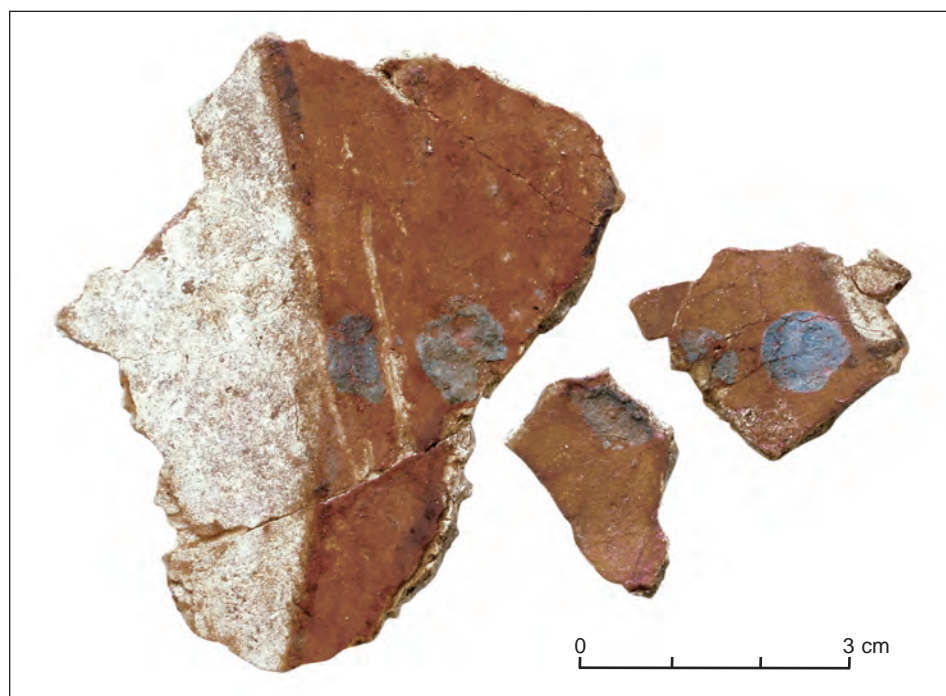


Plate 15.19. Fragments of blue necklaces worn by male figure. Photo by D. Sakatzis.