



Bruce Rimell
Artist & Independent Researcher

Web: www.biroz.net/research.htm
Email: brucerimell@googlemail.com

“The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture – Archaeological Evidence for Ecstatic Ritual and Altered States of Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory”

Bruce Rimell

Rimell, Bruce (2020), *The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture – Archaeological Evidence for Ecstatic Ritual and Altered States of Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory*, Leeds-Bradford, UK: Xibalba Books (Electronic Publication), PDF available at url: <http://www.biroz.net/xibalbabooks/research-minoan-epiphany.htm>, dated August 2020

The art and iconography of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete is rightly described as having a refreshing vitality with a fortunate combination of stylisation and spontaneity in which the artist is able to transform conventional imagery into a personal expression. The dynamism, torsion and naturalism evident in Minoan art stands in stark contrast to the hieratic rigidity of other ancient civilisations, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the iconography of the Minoan Epiphany, a set of mainly glyptic (rings, seals, and seal impression) images which appear to depict religious celebrants experiencing direct and seemingly ecstatic encounters with deities.

This collection of essays explores this central aspect of Minoan religion, taking a strongly archaeological focus to allow the artefacts to speak for themselves, and moving from traditional ‘representational’ interpretations into ‘embodied’ perspectives in which the ecstatic capabilities of the human body throw new light on Aegean Bronze Age ritual practices. Such ideas challenge rather passive assumptions modern Western observers hold about the nature of religious feelings and experiences, in particular the depictions of altered states of consciousness in ancient art, and the visionary potential of dance gestures.

Speculative asides on the potential for a Minoan origin for Classical Greek humanism, and hints in the imagery on ancient Cretan conceptions of the cosmos, are set against sound archaeological theories to explain this lively and dynamic corpus of images. Beautifully illustrated with images and sketches of the relevant artefacts, this wide-ranging volume will stimulate audiences with archaeological, prehistorical and spiritual interests, as well as historians of religion and art. ‘The Minoan Epiphany’ also represents an influential antecedent to the Visionary Humanist philosophy which forms the majority of Bruce’s current independent research interests.

© Copyright 2020 Texts, artworks & artefact sketches: Bruce Rimell & Xibalba Books. This PDF Electronic Publication of “The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture” is made available for non-profit, educational purposes only and may not be re-sold, made into physical formats such as books, added to any subscription service, or uploaded to any other website, without the author’s specific written permission. This PDF Electronic Publication is made available only through the author’s website at www.biroz.net and via his Academia.edu portal. A version is also visible via Google Books. Bruce Rimell asserts his rights under UK and International Law to be recognised as the author of this work.

© Copyright 2020 Artefact images, photographs & archaeological illustrations: See ‘About this Electronic Publication’ section. Artefact images, photographs & archaeological illustrations are copyrighted to the respective institutions detailed in the ‘About this Electronic Publication’ section on page 6 of this Electronic Publication, and are reproduced here under a Fair Usage Policy, which is also detailed in the ‘About this Electronic Publication’ section.

THE MINOAN EPIPHANY



A Bronze Age Visionary Culture

BRUCE RIMELL

THE MINOAN EPIPHANY

A Bronze Age Visionary Culture

Archaeological Evidence for Ecstatic Ritual and Altered States of Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory



BRUCE RIMELL

**Xibalba Books (Electronic Publication)
2020**



**The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture –
Archaeological Evidence for Ecstatic Ritual and Altered States of
Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory**

Bruce Rimell

1. Archaeology - Aegean Prehistory 2. Archaeology - Minoan Civilisation 3.
Archaeology - Aegean Bronze Age 4. Art - Aegean Art 5. Art - Greek Art 6.
Religion - Prehistory 7. Archaeology - Embodied Archaeology 8. Psychedelic
Studies - Altered States of Consciousness 9. Art - Engraving and Seal Images
I. Rimell, Bruce

Xibalba Books: www.biroz.net/xibalbabooks/

Citation: Rimell, Bruce (2020), *The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age
Visionary Culture – Archaeological Evidence for Ecstatic Ritual and Altered
States of Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory*, Leeds-Bradford, UK: Xibalba
Books (Electronic Publication), PDF available at url: [http://www.biroz.net/
xibalbabooks/research-minoan-epiphany.htm](http://www.biroz.net/xibalbabooks/research-minoan-epiphany.htm), dated August 2020

Copyright © 2009-13, 2014-15 & 2020 Bruce Rimell & Xibalba Books:
Texts, artworks & artefact sketches. All rights reserved. No part of this book may
be reproduced without the express written permission of the author and publisher.
Bruce Rimell asserts his right to be identified as the author of the artwork images
and text contained within this book.

Artefact images, photographs & archaeological illustrations are copyrighted to the
institutions detailed in the 'About this Electronic Publication' section below, and
are reproduced here under a Fair Usage Policy, which is also detailed in the 'About
this Electronic Publication' section below. See page 6 for this section.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
About the Author	5
About this Electronic Publication	6
Table of Original Citations of the Chapters	7
Introduction to the 2020 Edition	9
1. The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle (2013)	12
2. Review of Epiphany Artefacts #1 (2013)	46
3. Appendices to the 2013 Essay (2013)	104
4. The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary (2014)	122
5. Europa and the Minoan 'Goddess From Beyond The Sea' (2014)	128
6. The Isopata Ring: An Image of Minoan Trance (2014)	136
7. Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art (2015)	145
8. Review of Epiphany Artefacts #2 (2020)	162
9. The Dancing Lady Fresco, Knossos: An Open Question (2020)	265
The 'Minoan Epiphany' Sketch Series (2013-20)	270
The 'Minoan Cosmos' Artwork (2020)	274
Bibliography	276
Directory of Chapters & Subsections	290



Acknowledgements

Many people have influenced the direction of the various texts contained within the present volume, mainly through direct or online conversations and the sharing of archaeological, ethnographic and mythological data via online media.

I should like to thank firstly Ionas Theodoros, for the many scintillating online conversations in which he related vast and detailed contexts of Eastern Mediterranean prehistory and imagery, as well as ethnographic information relating to survivals of ancient ritual practices into the Classical, mediaeval and early modern periods of the Aegean, drawing in some cases from his own family's experience.

I have much respect and gratitude also for Max Dashu, for numerous online conversations during the years 2008-13, and for her *Suppressed Histories Archive*, a rich and detailed archive of archaeological, ethnographic, prehistorical, historical and political information from a feminist perspective, and from which I have gleaned an array of insights into Minoan and wider prehistorical and Eastern Mediterranean cultural horizons.

Thanks are also due to Thomas Imboden, for his insights during a time when the possibilities of a theatrical production along Minoan themes were being explored; and to Georgia Petrali, for her insights from the embodied perspective of a dancer deeply embedded within the landscapes of the island of Crete.

This publication has been profoundly influenced by the work of many deeply insightful archaeologists of the Aegean Bronze Age, and I should like to name a few of the most prominent here: Nota Dimopoulou, Giorgos Rethmiotakis, Christine Morris, Alan Peatfield, Marina L. Moss, Erin Ruth McGowan, Peter Warren and Konstantinos Galanakis. Their perceptive explorations of Minoan religion as evidenced in the corpus of glyptic images shaped this text in myriad ways, and while any and all errors - and I'm sure there are many! - are wholly my own, I continue to express my gratitude for their academic work.

As ever, my greatest appreciation goes to my husband Chris, for his constant and unwavering support for my artistic and independent research lives, and for providing a wonderful space to let my mind wander. Without him, the interdisciplinary work in this volume would not be remotely possible, and so my deepest love and gratitude remains always with him.

Bruce Rimell,
August 2020

About the Author

Bruce Rimell is a visual artist, poet and independent researcher, whose work explores the visionary, the archaeological, and the interactions of the cognitive and the ethnographic. His original academic background was astrophysics, but his love of 'origins' and regular interventions of migraine experiences since childhood led him upon a humanist quest towards prehistory, archaeology, the ethnography of myth and the evolutionary anthropology of human origins. The fusion of these elements led to a creative and synthetic approach to thinking about ourselves which forms the bedrock of his research, and indeed his perceptual world.

At length, he became an artist upon seeing that the painted image could act as an important vehicle for that approach, which seeks ultimately to bring the most ancient and primordial human archetypes into the modern field of experience. His art is now regularly exhibited internationally, and he is a member of several artist groups dedicated to widening awareness of visionary artforms, human rights and social issues.

His diverse research interests as an independent researcher include: the religious and ritual practices of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete; the evolutionary origins of human symbolic cognition and its implications for twenty-first century epistemology; visionary and religious experiences in light of the cognitive science of religion and evolutionary psychology; the Palaeolithic art of Europe; the rock art of Southern Africa; the emergence of cognitively modern human behaviour and ritual culture in the African Middle Stone Age; queer-themed creative mythologies; 'spiritual' and creative practices as Beyond-The-Self Exploration; and the many-faceted symbolic meanings behind the world's myth systems.

He lives delightfully in love with his husband Chris just outside the twin cities of Leeds-Bradford in the U.K. where the urban sprawl meets the wild moorland.

The work in this electronic publication represents a forerunner to his ongoing series of explorations towards a more holistic philosophy of human thought, perception, creativity and experience, entitled Visionary Humanism, and which occupies the principal directions of his independent research at the present time.

About this Electronic Publication

This Electronic Publication from Xibalba Books is an independent research project on aspects of the religious and ritual practices of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete. It is published in PDF format and made available as a free download from the following online channels: i) Bruce Rimell's personal website www.biroz.net/xibalbabooks, and ii) Bruce Rimell's Academia.edu portal via independent.academia.edu/BruceRimell. A version of this Electronic Publication is also made available for free viewing at Google Books.

This Electronic Publication is provided 'as is', strictly through the above three channels, and only in PDF format in its complete form. It should not be uploaded to another website, nor be offered for sale in any medium, whether online, in print media, or otherwise, unless specific permission has been granted in writing by the author, Bruce Rimell.

Artefact images, photographs & archaeological illustrations are copyrighted to the respective institutions, including: The Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports (Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού) of the Hellenic Republic; the Heraklion Archaeological Museum; the Archaeological Museum of Agios Nikolaos; the Archaeological Museum of Archanes; the Archaeological Museum of Sitia; the Archaeological Museum of Chania; the Archaeological Collection of Ierapetra; the National Archaeological Museum at Athens; the Benaki Museum, Athens; the Archaeological Museum of Atalanti; the Archaeological Museum of Messenia; the Archaeological Museum of Thera; the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, U.K.; the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland; the National Museum, Berlin, Germany; and the Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel (CMS) Archive at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Heidelberg. Each of the artefact images are annotated with the relevant institution at which they are held.

The artefact images, photographs & archaeological illustrations copyrighted to the above institutions are reproduced here with deep respect, and under a Fair Usage Policy, which is as follows: The essays in this present volume utilise current archaeological theories to present a synthesis of Minoan religion (in general) and the Epiphany ritual (specifically) in a serious and academic manner with a view to expanding present understanding of the religious contexts of Bronze Age Crete. The author honestly believes and intends this work to constitute a serious contribution to human knowledge of Aegean Prehistory, in line with the said Fair Usage.

This Electronic Publication is not to be offered for sale via any medium whatsoever, and the author does not profit financially in any way from any sale of this electronic publication or from the use of the artefact images in this publication, forbids its sale in any medium whatsoever, and has made reasonable effort to prevent the sale of this publication by any third party in any medium whatsoever, all of which is also in line with the above Fair Usage.

Table of Original Citations of the Chapters

1. The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle

Rimell, Bruce (2013), *The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle*, personal website presentation at url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/minoan-epiphany>, dated February 2013

2. Review of Epiphany Artefacts #1

Rimell, Bruce (2013), *The Minoan Epiphany: Review of Epiphany Artefacts*, personal website presentation at url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/minoan-epiphany>, dated March 2013

3. Appendices to the 2013 Essay

Rimell, Bruce (2013), *The Minoan Epiphany: Appendices & Bibliography*, personal website presentation at url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/minoan-epiphany>, dated March 2013

4. The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary

Rimell, Bruce (2014), *The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/the-zakro-master-a-bronze-age-cretan-visionary>, dated April 2014

5. Europa and the Minoan ‘Goddess From Beyond The Sea’

Rimell, Bruce (2014), *Europa and the Minoan ‘Goddess From Beyond The Sea’*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/europa-and-the-minoan-goddess-from-beyond-the-sea>, dated July 2014

6. The Isopata Ring: An image of Minoan Trance

Rimell, Bruce (2014), *The Isopata Ring: An image of Minoan Trance*, draft unpublished essay, dated December 2014

7. Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art

Rimell, Bruce (2015), *Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/enacted-epiphanies-and-the-birth-of-the-humanist-in-minoan-art>, dated May 2015

8. Review of Epiphany Artefacts #2

Newly created for the present volume, the Xibalba Books electronic publication.

9. The Dancing Lady Fresco, Knossos: An Open Question

Newly created for the present volume, the Xibalba Books electronic publication.



Introduction to the 2020 Edition

'The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture' was the result of a four year independent research project conducted in the years 2009-13 into the Minoan civilisation and surrounding contemporary cultures of the Bronze Age Aegean. Numerous visits to museums (in Greece and the UK) as well as to archaeological sites on Crete culminated in a lengthy online presentation on my website in the years 2013-19.

In subsequent years I wrote few more essays on related Minoan themes for my arts blog *'Archaic Visions'*, but by 2015, my independent research interests had taken a turn away from Minoan themes towards developing a philosophy called *'Visionary Humanism'*. Although this ongoing philosophical quest is not directly related to the Minoan Epiphany, many of the insights gleaned during the course of this research project were influential in my thinking towards the first Visionary Humanist ideas, and this Electronic Publication presented as a free download through my Xibalba Books publishing imprint represents an interesting forerunner to the independent research work I am currently engaged in.

The present volume presents a series of essays and artefact reviews which explore as their principal theme a set of iconographic conventions from the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete and surrounding islands, relating to the Epiphany, a set of glyptic images which appear to depict one or more religious celebrants experiencing direct and seemingly ecstatic encounters with deities.

The Epiphany Cycle and models of ritual action lead to 'embodied' perspectives which challenge modern Western assumptions about the nature of religious feelings and experiences, in particular the depictions of altered states of consciousness and the visionary potential of dance gestures.

The Epiphany appears to have been a central ritual aspect of Minoan religion, and the central essay, *'The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle'* (chapter 1 of this volume, written in 2012-13), takes a strongly archaeological perspective, which seeks to allow the relevant artefacts to speak for themselves. An introduction to the artefacts upon which the epiphany images are found and the Epiphany Cycle leads onto a review of ritual actions such as dance and baetyl usage, in which traditional 'symbolist' and 'representational' interpretations are maintained.

These perspectives are then challenged by embodied and ecstatic viewpoints which call into question the passive assumptions behind Western religious categories, and seek to highlight in particular the depictions of altered states of consciousness, the visionary potential of dance gestures and animistic expressions implied by the iconographic content of the imagery.

An ‘*Artefact Review*’ (chapter 2, also written in 2012-13) of a range of Minoan seal artefacts which bear images of the Epiphany is then undertaken, where some visual conventions of the style are listed, and speculations are explored as to the underlying perceptual realities implied by the epiphany experience, concluding with a short essay on the meaning of the Minoan Epiphany for the modern spiritually-minded Westerner. This is followed by a series of ‘*Appendices*’ (chapter 3, written in 2013) which are short, divergent musings on a few themes arising from the first two chapters.

Several other essays from 2014-15 are then presented. These explore diverse and related themes, often recapitulating aspects of the 2009-13 research, before expanding into slightly different territories. They speak principally from comparative mythological or art historical perspectives, rather than the archaeological focus of the main essay.

‘*The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary*’ (chapter 4, written in 2014) presents the results of a related research project conducted from 2011-14 on the surreal and imaginative seal impressions from a house in the Bronze Age archaeological site of Zakros, East Crete, while ‘*Europa and the Minoan ‘Goddess From Beyond The Sea*’ (chapter 5, also written in 2014) expands upon one group of images in the Minoan Epiphany iconographic corpus and tentatively proposes a possible mythological identification for the deity depicted in these images.

‘*The Isopata Ring: An image of Minoan Trance*’ (chapter 6, written in 2014) presents the famous Isopata Ring for an arts audience, while ‘*Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art*’ (chapter 7, written in 2015) explores the idea of the enacted epiphany as well as the focus on the dynamic human body in Minoan art, and proposes that it is in Bronze Age Cretan, rather than Classical Greek, artistic expressions that the ultimate origins of Western Humanism (in both art and philosophical senses) may be found.

The volume continues with a second ‘*Artefact Review*’ (chapter 8, written in 2020), exploring both newly-discovered artefacts which have emerged in recent years, as well as older artefacts which were unknown to me when the original essay was completed. Finally, ‘*The Dancing Lady Fresco, Knossos: An Open Question*’ (chapter 9, written in 2020) speculatively links a small fresco from Knossos with the Epiphany corpus. A brief narration of the series of personal sketches which accompany this book is followed by an updated ‘*Bibliography*’ (compiled in 2013 and updated in 2020), which concludes the text.

The original website presentation proved to be popular among a wide range of readers with varying academic, sociopolitical, literary and spiritual interests. It attracted an eclectic readership ranging from professional archaeologists and Graeco-Roman classicists – there were even one or two references in formal

academic papers and publications – to feminist prehistorians, modern neopagans and goddess spiritualists, as well as researchers (both independent and academic) from the field of psychedelic studies, many of whom retain an interest in Cretan prehistory as a forerunner to the more famous Eleusinian Mysteries, as well as other Classical Greek rites, in which it is sometimes proposed that a psychedelic sacrament may have been consumed.

On the more fringe side of things, *‘The Minoan Epiphany...’* also attracted proponents of a variety of different Atlantis origin theories (from the historically plausible to the downright absurd) and even the occasional ancient alien astronaut conspiracy theorist, presumably because of the images of floating deities in the Epiphany iconographic corpus!

All in all, not bad for a work which lacked formal academic referencing, and which was presented on an individual artist’s website rather than some central academic platform like Academia, ResearchGate or JStor. I still receive a regular stream of comments from the project, the vast majority of them supportive, but since my research interests now lie elsewhere – and are juggled time-wise with my professional arts practice, among several other lives I seem to be living! – I have tended in the past couple of years not to enter into further correspondence on Minoan subjects. The continued interest is nonetheless greatly appreciated, and is a principal motivation behind the production of this volume.

This publication represents in some respects an archiving of my Minoan interests, and apart from the new research in the second artefact review and the final chapter, I have largely refrained from altering the essays from 2009-15, presenting them here in their original forms with minimal changes to wording, conclusions, and so on. The perceptive reader will therefore be able to detect a number of different developments in my views on the various Minoan themes over the years.

This volume stands in contrast to much of my later work in the Visionary Humanism series – my three books *‘On Vision And Being Human’* (2015), *‘Liminal Contact’* (2016), and *‘They Shimmer Within’* (2018) – in its focus upon a single subject (rather than the interdisciplinary work of the Visionary Humanism volumes) and its lack of formal academic referencing.

I beg to be excused from this latter task: it was for many years on my To-Do List for the website presentation, but after seven years, I am now at a point where I am happy to let this archive of research stand or fall now on its own informational merits, or lack thereof.

It is my hope, therefore, that this present electronic publication be considered less as an attempt at a formal academic text, and more in the vein as a delightfully-illustrated and detailed record of my archaeologically enquiring mind’s rather idiosyncratic obsession with the inherent challenges in, dynamic vitality of, and unique beauty within all forms of Minoan art generally, and the Minoan Epiphany corpus in particular.

The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle

A common sight in ancient artforms across all cultures and civilisations is to see depictions of celebrants engaging in complex rituals and dances, or partaking of visionary sacraments, and the hieratic art of the high civilisations is particularly rich in such images, focussed as it is so often on the religious obligations of kingship. Less common, but no less striking, are depictions of visionary realities themselves, or indeed the content and narratives of dreams. In contemporary visionary and fantastic artforms, this latter category is naturally predominant.

What is genuinely rare, however, in both ancient and contemporary forms, is to see depicted both realities simultaneously, unified, as it were, into a single reality or composition, in an image of the visionary in the act of beholding the vision. We see this occasionally in the hieratic art of the Classic Maya (and particularly at Yaxchilan) or among Romano-British and Gaulish Celtic numismatic images, but its presence is often a marked divergence from the artistic, and presumably cultural, norms.

The great exception to this can be found in the art of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete, particularly in the ring-seal images from the Late Neopalatial and Early Postpalatial (LM IA-III A, c.1550-1425 B.C.) periods, where the unification of mundane and envisioned realities is so common as to be almost ubiquitous, such that archaeologists have given this artform a specific name: the Minoan Epiphany.

Matz was the first to draw attention to the Minoan Epiphany, and linked it to the absence of large-scale cult images in Bronze Age Crete, defining the phenomenon as ecstatic and functioning as a replacement for religious cult worship. The term ‘epiphany’ is somewhat vague however: throughout the archaeological literature, the meaning of the word is rather taken for granted, and several commentators have remarked on the lack of an appropriate definition for this important Minoan cultural expression.

We might thus briefly attempt one here: the Minoan Epiphany represents a series of images disclosing intimacy with the sacred through the (often idiosyncratic and ecstatic) depiction of an individual’s interaction with a deity (most commonly but not exclusively a goddess) or symbolic representation thereof (such as a bird or insect) who appears from on high, and descends to greet the visionary.

Nota Dimopoulou and Yiorgos Rethmiotakis present a briefer definition, in their discussion of the famous Ring of Minos, as the “...*miraculous vision of the deity and its descent to the visible world.*”

Enacted and Visionary Epiphany

As early as the 1950s, archaeologists such as Martin Nilsson were remarking on the essential visionary nature of Minoan art, and Robin Hägg formally classified art

of the epiphany as taking two distinct forms: enacted, in which the deity appears externally in the person of a living woman who ‘plays’ the part of the goddess and interacts with the celebrants during the course of a ritual, and visionary, in which the deity appears, as it were, internally, due to vision-inducing aspects of the ritual. It is important to note that such external-internal distinctions may not have been relevant to the Minoan celebrant.

An example of an enacted epiphany can be seen in the reconstructed fresco from Xeste 3 at the site of Akrotiri, Santorini. At left we see a woman offering saffron to an enthroned female figure, with other sacred elements present, the monkey and the griffin. The life-sized nature of the figure at right suggests in part that this she represents a surrogate for the deity, enacting her role in a ritual of offering. Such enacted epiphanies of enthroned deities – and we may remark that in Minoan art, we never see a male figure so enthroned – are common in Minoan frescoes, but are not our primary concern here. However, as we shall see, visual ambiguities between enacted and visionary epiphanies will become relevant to our theme.

The visionary epiphany is found almost exclusively on sealstones and gold ring-seals of the final period of the Minoan civilisation. Sealstones as a method of identity and guarantor of trade are found from the earliest, incipient phases of Bronze Age Cretan culture, and the contents of Minoan glyptic – sealstones and rings – often hold important keys for the understanding of Minoan religious developments. But it was the emergence of palatial centres in the Protopalatial Period (MM IB-III B, c. 1950-1600 B.C.) that caused this mode of artistic expression to become ubiquitous



Fig 1. Reconstruction of Xeste 3 fresco, Akrotiri, after Olga Anastasiadou

across the island, and occasionally further afield, and industries of manufacture and craft rapidly grew to meet the demand of the burgeoning Minoan trade networks across the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Epiphany and Neopalatial Minoan Society

Around 1600 B.C., however, these palatial centres suffered a major collapse, and the emergence of new, larger – one might imply richer – palatial centres in the New Palace period (1600-1425 B.C.) coincided with an influx of new artforms crafted from valuable materials such as gold and chryselephantine using techniques that suggest a sustained contact with Egypt and Syria. Despite this evidence of extensive external contacts, the broad features of glyptic appear to have retained an essentially native, Minoan character.

Gold ring-seals were personal property and often buried in their owners' graves, suggesting that they were intimately bound up with their owner's identity such that the image could not be re-used or passed on to a descendant of the deceased. Many have been found in a rather worn state suggestive of heavy use and an equal number of images have been reconstructed from seal impressions – stubs of clay into which the rings or sealstones were pressed to guarantee a trade transaction, and which were then accidentally baked during a fire.

Both of these notions, the burial and the heavy use, along with the fact that no two epiphany images have ever been found that were alike, lends an impression that we are not necessarily here seeing depicted an episode from a now-lost Minoan mythology or a stereotypical image disclosing some unchanging aspect of Minoan symbolism. There is to a certain extent an idiosyncratic dimension to the images of the Minoan Epiphany suggestive of the notion that the visionary content of the images refers to the owner's experience with the sacred, perhaps a specific personal vision, or that it broadcasts the owner's perceived intimacy with a deity independent of any mythology.

In this regard, we must also note the expense of the artefacts found: gold and gemstones were the primary medium for Minoan glyptic, and the expense of these must be considered along with the cost of commissioning an artist to create a detailed representation on an object no bigger than perhaps two inches. There is thus a status dynamic to consider here: the Minoan civilisation in its late stages was highly stratified, and there is much evidence of social tension and antipathy towards this stratification. Several ring seals denote what has been termed a 'sacred conversation' between deity and visionary, and these may originate from royal houses of the palatial centres with a specific intention of pacifying tensions through the disclosure of sacred intimacy.

On the other hand, the similarity of many of the visionary body postures with those of roughly-made figurines found at sites of popular Minoan cult, particularly peak sanctuaries, and the rural or wild environments depicted in the

scenes might suggest that the gold ring-seals represent simply the most elevated expressions of what was in reality a much wider religious practice. This possibility is augmented by the presence of the baetyl – the sacred rock – in both glyptic epiphany scenes and archaeological sites from the village to the palatial plaza.

The Ring Of Minos

With the foregoing general comments in mind, it is useful at this stage to briefly explore a rather typical example of the epiphany as expressed in a detail of the Ring Of Minos (Knossos, archaeological provenance unknown, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400 B.C.). Such an exploration will illuminate subsequent discussions.

The iconography of the Ring of Minos is complex, and represents according to Nota Dimopoulou and Yiorgos Rethmiotakis a complete narrative description of the epiphany cycle. However, in the upper right corner, a small detail can be seen the iconography of which recapitulates the essential dual-reality nature of the epiphany image. Depicted here is an enthroned female, seated upon a shrine building, gazing upwards at a small floating figure. They narrate:

“The goddess is rendered... as a tiny figure hovering in the air... The small scale denotes a distancing from the spectator, and the placing of the figure on high indicates that she is hovering. Her downward movement is denoted conventionally by the fact that her hair waves in the air, and by the downward slope of her feet...”



Fig 2. Ring of Minos, Knossos (1450-1400 B.C.), Upper right detail

The visionary nature of this image is emphasised by the floating deity's presence directly in front of the enthroned woman's face, and we have already begun to establish a couple of artistic conventions: waving hair and downward-pointing feet. It may also be postulated that we have an enacted epiphany in the form of the seated female, and it must be remarked that an ambiguity between enacted and visionary runs throughout Minoan art. Warren notes the complexities aroused by such ambiguous iconography:

"An image... could have been understood either as a plain image of a divinity without any immanent power... or as an image which was a vehicle of divine power, either temporarily during the ritual... or permanently, or as an image which was a concrete expression of a divinity envisioned in an ecstatic epiphany, or as a permanent image or model of a priestess conducting a ritual such as an enacted epiphany..."

Again we must remark Minoan distinctions of the above categories are unlikely to have been identical to our own – enacted and visionary epiphanies may have communicated a similar identity of form as a cult statue with immanent power. Galanakis, in discussing particular seal impressions from the site of Ayia Triada, expounds upon a similar point:

"The scene... may represent a divine figure flanked by female adorants or attendants, a Minoan 'high priestess' or an important individual flanked by younger associates...or an important female divinity accompanied by two lesser divinities located in the context of... ritual and sacred enclosures... The epiphany scenes present a similar notional complexity... Who is actually a divinity and if one is definitely involved, depends more on the eye of the beholder instead of an established range of criteria for the interpretation of religious scenes..."

Whether this ambiguous appeal to the idiosyncratic eye of the beholder, rather than to an ubiquitous set of visual conventions, was deliberate on the part of the Minoan artists, particularly with epiphany scenes, or is an artefact of our own relative ignorance about and distance from Minoan conceptual and perceptual worldviews, cannot be known. In the epiphany, there are numerous visual conventions, but ambiguity and idiosyncrasy remains a constant feature.

There is a great deal more iconography in the Ring Of Minos, however, and a fuller exploration of the artefact grants at least some understanding of the Epiphany Cycle. This 'classical' model of the epiphany image, derived in large part from the imagery on this artefact, has been questioned in recent years, particularly (as we shall see) for its focus on 'worship'.

However the essence of this model – the "...*miraculous vision of the deity and its descent to the visible world*" – is nonetheless useful and variations on this general theme continue throughout Minoan epiphany glyptic imagery.



Fig 3. Ring of Minos, Knossos (1450-1400 B.C.), Heraklion Archaeological Museum

The Epiphany Cycle

At first glance, this iconography on the ring appears complex, and expertly rendered in fine detail, and it is difficult to separate the mundane and visionary elements. However, Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis have identified a narrative running through the depiction:

“The complex religious depiction... combines three versions of the epiphany... The goddess is rendered three times: once as a tiny figure hovering in the air, once seated on a built shrine... overseeing two acts of tree-worship carried out by a male and female adorant...and, finally, the goddess is depicted voyaging at sea, rowing or steering a ship with a prow in the shape of a sea-horse, which is transporting a stepped shrine.”

Keeping in mind their original concise definition of the epiphany, we perhaps begin to see here the movement of the deity through the scene, beginning as a floating figure descending to earth, before shimmering away in a boat on the waters. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis continue:

“The main ritual act depicted on the Ring of Minos is the worship of the sacred tree...The female adorant, though apparently nude, in fact wears a diaphanous, clinging garment, a kind of trousers, as is shown by the hems above the ankles... The male adorant wears the Minoan loincloth...”

We now see clarified the distinction between the ritual, worldly elements

of the scene and some of its visionary elements. The actions of the ‘worshippers’ or ‘adorants’ are overseen by the arriving deity who presides over the ritual, but we again must note the ambiguity between enacted and visionary which begs an important question: who are the visionaries here? Is the seated deity a human female surrogate for the goddess, who in turn beholds the vision of the small shimmering deity (as has been suggested above), or are the floating and seated figures two stages in the narrative flow of a vision shared by the two ‘worshippers’?

Without any deciphered Minoan texts to help us, we cannot know the answer to this, and other images of the epiphany do not tend to clarify. While this constant ambiguity may seem unsatisfying at first, we have here access to an archaic, Minoan mindset – this is a sacred scene, and identifications of ‘visionary’, ‘deity’ and ‘female surrogate for the deity’ (or indeed, ‘cult statue with immanent power’) will be strongly subject to modern Western religious value systems.

There is one further image on the ring we have not yet considered, that of the goddess in her boat, a visionary, or possibly mythological, narrative scene which seems not to strongly interact with either the tree-worship or the seated-female scenes. But Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis narrate:

“The prow of the ship in the shape of a sea-horse finds a direct parallel in the one on the ring from Mochlos, in which the goddess is shown in a seated position... There is a similar scene with a female figure on a ship with a shrine and tree on a seal from Makriyalos [now in the Ashmolean Museum]... the top right (sic – in the seal impression it is top left)[can be read] as a tree, and the whole thing as a ‘condensed’ version of all three stages of the epiphany – that is, the descending female deity, the ritual of tree worship and the voyage at sea...”

Can we thus see the epiphany cycle encapsulated on the Ring of Minos as a visionary narrative whereby a ritual is held to invite or invoke a deity to emerge from the sky, descend onto the earth and preside over the ritual before sailing away across the sea? We cannot know for sure, but a few relevant remarks are worth



Fig 4a. Gold Ring, Mochlos, (1500 – 1450 B.C.), Heraklion Archaeological Museum
 Fig 4b. Seal Impression, Makriyalos, (1450 B.C.), Ayios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum

making.

Firstly, in the movement from sky, to earth, to ocean, we note that the epiphany deity progresses across all three worlds in the traditional view of the three-tiered cosmos – Heavens, Earth and Underworld – and we may note that in much later Greek traditions there were several deities capable of performing the same transitions, most notably Hermes and Hecate.

Thus the notion that a single deity can traverse across several cosmic boundaries in this way should not be strange to us.

Secondly, ritual to invoke or impel a deity's presence is a ubiquitous cultural feature throughout the Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean, and survived into the Classical period through some of the Mystery religions, most notably at Eleusis. The ability to call a goddess into one's presence through ritual activities demonstrates that Minoan iconography discloses markedly different perceptions of religious action and relations between the sacred and mundane than those of contemporary Western religion: we seem to behold a magical or conjuring dynamic to the scenes. This will be expanded upon later.

Third, we might perhaps speculate an underlying purpose for some rituals seen in the iconography, particularly in view of the deity's narrative exit across the sea and the persistent appearance in epiphany scenes of seagoing ships. The Minoan civilisation was one driven primarily by foreign trade – indeed the Aegean Middle Bronze Age has been termed the Minoan thalassocracy – and being an island, the principal medium for such trade would have been by boat. Minoan artefacts, as well as cultural and artistic influences, have been found as far afield as Italy, mainland Greece and Anatolia, as well as Syria and Egypt of the late Second Intermediate and early New Kingdom periods. Thus, the epiphany of the goddess across the sea may have functioned as securing a safe or economically successful voyage, or perhaps have constituted efforts towards blessing such a voyage.

The Epiphany as Ritual Action

Beyond such speculations, how are we to understand such images as the one on the Ring Of Minos above? As we have already seen, it is not sufficient to regard it as simply an idiosyncratic expression of vision, or to view it using solely modern eyes: the image belongs to a wider context of Minoan iconography, religious practice and ritual, as well as more ephemeral cultural and perceptual contexts which are now lost. We must accept ambiguities, between enacted and visionary epiphany, and uncertain conclusions as to the identities of the visionaries in some scenes.

But some aspects can be clarified through a wider survey of Minoan ritual: many epiphany images depict specific rituals using the same seamless movement, from mundane ritual action to ecstatic visionary results of those actions, that we have seen above in the Ring of Minos. An understanding of the form of those rituals can in some cases give strong indications as to the identities of the visionaries in



Fig 5. Gold Ring, Isopata Chamber Tomb, Knossos (1600 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

epiphany scenes and colour or understanding of them in unexpected ways.

Peter Warren in his *'Minoan Religion as Ritual Action'* divided depictions of Minoan religious practice (across all media, not merely glyptic) into five main categories of ritual – those pertaining to dance, of the baetyl or sacred rock, the presentation of robes or clothing, flower offerings and sacrifices, of both animals and humans – and made the perceptive comment in regard to Minoan religion that:

“Ritual action... will usually comprise δρωμενα, things done, λεγομενα, things said or sung, δεικνυμενα, things displayed or, if we abandon Eleusinian prototypes, things envisioned in epiphany...”

This is particularly relevant to our discussion, for here we indeed must expand the traditional Classical model to include the visionary – δερκομενα or επιφανωμενα, things seen or experienced in epiphany. In this regard, the first two of his ritual categories must concern us most here.

Dance in Epiphany Rituals

Minoan art is replete with depictions of dance, from frescoes of women and men dancing in large groups to clay ornaments of dancers with musicians, and there must have been a variety of dances with a huge array of functions, not least the procession

to the sacred place which would have surely set the minds of the celebrants towards the oncoming ritual and epiphany. Warren terms dance in the Minoan context as a form of ‘ecstatic movement’ and considers its essential function to have been:

“...the invocation of the divinity. The action was believed to bring about first the approach of the divinity from on high... a good example of which is the scene on the Isopata ring. Then came the arrival of the divinity, whose presence was revered with a saluting gesture.”

Here we see neat references to the invocatory function alluded to earlier, and in the Isopata ring, an explicit link between the dance and the deity’s arrival is made. We see at left two dancers with arms raised, gazing upwards at a floating figure whose form matches precisely the epiphany conventions previously described on the Ring of Minos: downward-pointing feet and waving hair. At right, another dancer (or possibly an enacted epiphany, but on this, see the entry for Isopata in the Review of Epiphany Scenes following the conclusions to this essay) beholds the epiphany of the goddess as she sets foot upon the earth.

Her arrival and presence are marked here by more stylistic conventions: her feet are flat, suggestive of contact with the ground, and she is depicted at the same level as the vegetation in the centre and right of the image. Another image from Phaistos, much earlier than any of the gold ring-seals, depicts according to Warren a similar arrival of the goddess, incidentally allowing us to push the earliest date of evidence for an epiphany-related ritual back by some 200 years.

As on the Isopata ring, the deity here is central to the proceedings, flanked



*Fig 6. Bowl with dancers and image of goddess, Phaistos (1800 - 1700 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

by two dancers in ecstatic postures. The lack of feet on her part in contrast to the dancers may signal her contact with the ground.

Baetylic Rituals and Symbolic Epiphanies

It is when Warren turns to the second of his categories, baetylic rituals, that the greatest resonance with our present theme is seen. The baetyl, or sacred rock, is a common presence in both Minoan archaeology and iconography, and its functions seem to have been multiple.

At times, we see the baetylic ritual alone without epiphany elements but with strong connotations of ritual copulation or of stone-kissing – see for example figure 7 depicting a naked woman clasp[ing] a baetyl stone and making intimate contact with her face. However it is with epiphany elements present that the smooth movement from mundane ritual to visionary epiphany is most superbly expressed. As Warren narrates:

“A series of scenes on gold rings or their impressions shows a female or male figure kneeling and touching a rounded or oval stone... In the Kalyvia scene the male figure...is apparently naked., while opposite him a half-naked female pulls at a tree con furore orgiastico... A bird approaches the kneeling man from behind...”

Two similar scenes are found on a gold ring from Sellopoulo, near Knossos and in a seal impression from the palace at Zakros in the far east of Crete. In the Sellopoulo scene, we see that:

“...the naked man, leaning on the boulder with one arm, vigorously beckons to an approaching bird with the other. We are surely meant to understand the bird as epiphanic and as conveying the power or presence of the divinity to the



Fig 7. Seal Impression, Knossos (c. 1400 – 1250 B.C.)



Fig 8a. Gold Ring and Fig 8b. Impression, Kalyvia Tomb 11, Phaistos (1525 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

stone baetyl and to the human figure who touches it...

while in the Zakros image:

“...a female leans on a large, grooved boulder and turns back to beckon a huge, approaching butterfly, which from its position performs the same function as the birds from Kalyvia and Sellopoulo...”

We will note in passing that we see displayed in these three images apparently a third set of visual conventions for the Minoan epiphany: the miraculous appearance not of the deity but of one of her symbols, either an epiphany bird of rather fantastical character, or of an insect depicted in similar resplendent form. Galanakis considers the presence of the bird as signifying the moment of the epiphany action, or as Rethemiotakis puts it:

“[The deity’s] imminent arrival is suggested by the flying bird, which is both a symbol and a companion of the goddess in her numinous appearances.”

and indeed we do occasionally see in epiphany scenes a goddess accompanied

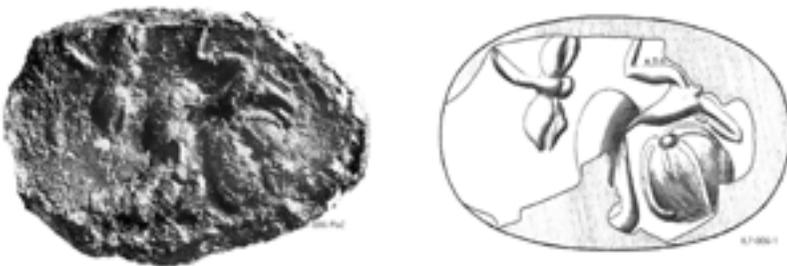


Fig 9. Seal Impression HM234, Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace (1500 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum



Fig 10. Gold Ring, Sellopoulo Chamber Tomb, Knossos (1600 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

by flying birds (See the Review of Epiphany Scenes following the conclusions to this essay). We have here then the suggestion that the bird or insect represents perhaps not merely a symbol of the deity but indicative of her implied arrival upon the scene.

That birds and baetyls are associated archaeologically outside of the epiphany iconography is evidenced by the findings at the peak sanctuary site of Atsipades Korakias, where Moss reports figurines of birds perched upon rocks were uncovered close to a cleared area at the centre of which was a baetyl. Moss concludes the “*bird-on-a-rock figurines might also depict the epiphany of the deity.*” Bird figurines have also been found at a variety of other peak sanctuary sites.

What is really striking, however, in these baetylic images is how overtly is depicted the invocatory and beckoning nature of the ritual. The celebrants lean against the rock, but their bodies are flexed, turning with arms aloft and calling forth the arrival of the symbol of the deity’s presence, underscoring the archaic perception that the primary focus of Minoan ritual was to secure the presence of the deity. That the faces of the celebrants are turned in the direction of the deity’s representation infers strongly that the bird or butterfly was actually perceived in vision, although this style of vision-depiction is perhaps less obvious than a figure floating before the visionary’s eyes, as depicted for example in figure 1.

The postures of the celebrants in all these images are decidedly tense, often with a characteristic arched-back form so commonly seen throughout Minoan iconography, and this tension seems to go beyond mere dance or simple movement into territories of rapture. Warren continues:

“The ritual on these [baetylic] scenes may be understood to be ecstatic, with naked or semi-naked figures leaning on, clasping or kissing a rounded boulder... and the ritual context of the actions is confirmed by the wide range of cult symbols also depicted, dragonflies, chrysalis, sacral knot, eye, column with two cross-pieces. These symbols operate as a language to confirm the actions and the presence of the divinity.”

The third epiphanic visual convention, that is, the symbol of the deity is depicted rather than the deity itself, is thus neatly summarised, and he then speculates upon a possible reconstruction of the baetylic ritual with a naked celebrant who:

“...approaches a baetyl... kneels and touches [it]... and summons the divinity to the stone by gestures. The arrival or presence of the divinity is indicated by a bird or butterfly epiphany... the participant finally embraces and kisses the boulder in communion with it and the divinity.”

Warren has acknowledged the ecstatic nature of these rituals, and we have noted the tense postures often depicted in epiphany scenes which augment this idea, but if there is ecstasy in the dance and perhaps an element of the orgiastic in the kissing and possible ritual copulation with the baetyl, can we posit the possibility that the celebrants experienced a trance or other altered state of consciousness?

Merely remaining within ritual or symbolic contexts may not help us here, as Morris and Peatfield remark:



Fig 11. Reconstruction of baetylic ritual performed by the author at Gournia (Baetyl located on a small plateia southwest of the villa and west of the main plaza)

“Although the language of ecstasy is used in connection with these images, the implications of ecstatic experience have not received the attention they merit, and the emphasis has remained on symbolic representation.”

It is searching for answers to this question that we find some interesting evidence suggesting that the iconography of the Minoan epiphany did indeed portray genuine visionary content rather than idealised images of ritual; such evidence challenges notions (as briefly alluded to above) of ‘worship’ and ‘adoration’ so common in interpretations of Minoan scenes. The emergence of the field of embodied archaeology – ancient societies viewed through the lens of the experience of the human body – that has greatly illuminated this aspect of Minoan religious practice.

Epiphany as Altered State of Consciousness

To say that a figure in a given image engages in a dance or baetylic ritual is to offer one iconographic interpretation. However, if the image is to be taken as representative of a ritual event, one that was actually participated in by human celebrants, then the experience of the human body must be taken into account. The activities of dance, particularly in a religious context, or the tense and ecstatic interaction with a tree or baetyl have specific effects upon the human body beyond their postural iconographic representations.

In a fascinating paper, Christine Morris and Alan Peatfield explore evidence for these effects in the Minoan Epiphany artform and note the challenge these evidences pose for traditional, worshipful interpretations of the imagery. They note that epiphany scenes, as much as anthropomorphic figurines, express modes of experience founded not merely in externalised gestures

“...but in a deeper use of the body as an active constituent in ritual behaviour. The established view... as adopting ‘worship’ gestures or ‘attitudes of respect’, unconsciously accepts a Western model of rather passive ritual behaviour, and does not directly address the range and distinctiveness of the [Minoan] gestures.”

We also note the comments of Warren, in that Minoan religion represents *“a positive, enquiring response... to understand, explain and interact with the cosmos...”*

(In consideration of these points, the present author has consciously eschewed the usual terms ‘adorant’ or ‘worshipper’ used in discussions of the epiphany. The terms used primarily here, ‘celebrant’ and ‘visionary’, may be equally problematic but they have the effect of neutralising some of the passive ritual assumptions that Morris & Peatfield mention above)

Thus we have here again the potential for access to non-Western pre-modern perceptual insights into what is being depicted, and indeed to the nature of Minoan ritual itself. Recent focus of many archaeologists has fallen upon posture in Minoan art, and Morris and Peatfield neatly summarise why, noting that repetitive



Fig 12. Seal Impression, Ayia Triada, (1550 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

rhythmic movement, fasting and entheogens are simply the better-known techniques to engender altered states.

“Equally effective are body postures which can be used to stimulate specific physiological changes in the body, especially when combined with rhythmic sounds such as rattling or drumming. Given a proper ritual framework... combined with a common worldview or set of beliefs or expectations, the bodily changes activate the ASC [altered state of consciousness] or ecstatic experience... [which] takes its content and interpretation from the cultural context.”

Further, they neatly capitulate the explicit link between ritual, visionary experience and the body in a way that resonates with the seamless flow from mundane ritual to visionary expression visible in the Minoan iconography:

“Ritual actions...include...pulling at a tree... hugging or embracing a boulder or stone... dancing, in which the arms are shown in different postures and the curve of the body is suggestive of movement or swaying. Through these actions, the presence of the deity is envisioned or felt by the participants... in other words, the body is the conduit to experiencing the divine.”

Now can perhaps be perceived the interesting balance between worldly and divine in epiphany scenes. Recalling our initial remarks that the artforms such as the Minoan Epiphany are generally rare in their depictions of a visionary beholding



Fig 13. Gold Ring, Isopata Chamber Tomb, Knossos (1600 – 1450 B.C.), Left side detail

the vision, we might refer to figure 12, a seal impression from Ayia Triada, in which a woman engaging in a baetylic ritual beckons to two birds, and possibly also to a floating female figure at far left – the top of the image is damaged. Here, the focus is equally placed upon the celebrant as it is the divine. If the human body is the conduit to the divine, and the Minoan celebrant will surely have been aware of this on some level, along with the magic efficacy of the ritual then the centrality of the human participant engaging in the ritual in many of the epiphany scenes now appears natural and expected.

Perceived bodily changes in epiphany scenes

The appearance of the deity in shimmering, miniature form, as seen on the Ring of Minos in figure 1 or the Isopata ring in figure 5, constitutes profound evidence for the visionary nature of the epiphany imagery, however there exists some evidence that the epiphany scenes also depict the perceived physiological changes associated with trance and altered states of consciousness.

Let us return to the Isopata ring from figure 5, focussing on a detail of the left side, in which the two dancers are seen with raised arms. Morris and Peatfield narrate:

“An important and distinctive feature... is the curiously attenuated

(aniconic) form of the human heads, which contrasts powerfully with the supple, rounded body forms and indeed the elaborately flounced skirts of the participants... If we think of these images not as simply symbolic but as representing distinctive elements of the trance experience, then the aniconic head could be read much more specifically as an artistic device for representing the shift of 'self', of both mind and body, into the altered state of consciousness. Supporting this interpretation is the commonly reported experience of trance participants, where the head feels as though it dissolves, explodes or somehow disappears... Artists from a wide range of cultures have used similar conventions of distorted and transforming heads to communicate the trance experience..."

In another paper, they highlight not merely aniconic or dissolving heads but the depiction of sensations of the body being elongated. In the Amnisos ring, now in the Ashmolean Museum, a complex iconography of a 'sacred conversation' is depicted which will be explored in detail in the Review of Epiphany Artefacts later.

Figure 14 shows a detail from the left side of the ring, focussing on the visionary, whose body is attenuated beyond the aesthetics of Minoan norms. In particular, the arm gesturing to the right is so attenuated such that would be long enough to reach his knee were it resting by his side.

Another remarkable feature is that his head appears to be floating, surely a sign of an altered consciousness state.



Fig 14. Gold ring, Amnisos (AN1938-1120) (1500 – 1450 B. P.), Left side detail

A similar image of bodily attenuation and floating head is seen on the Mochlos ring in figure 4a, although in this case the figure most likely represents an epiphanic deity rather than a visionary.

More subtle evidence for altered consciousness states is also visible in the relatively stereotypical postures of many of the celebrants, gestures that Galanakis suggests might indicate “rapid movement or ritual, frenetic dance”. Morris and Peatfield expound on this aspect in relation to shamanic or trance-inducing activities, again using as their starting point the dancing depicted on the Isopata ring:

“The graceful curve of the women’s bodies and skirts is suggestive of movement rather than a body at rest, but in the absence of other somatic markers for frenzied activity, a more limited rhythmic movement or swaying might be suggested... [T]he three different body postures are very specific; they are repeated on other rings, and we now know that some of the same postures are shown on peak sanctuary figurines. The clearly defined shape of the postures suggests that they are purposeful in themselves... The technique of ecstasy may be described as comprising rhythmic movement or swaying in relation to defined body postures.”



Fig 15. Gesture comparison: Tense salute

Fig 15a. The Epiphany Ring, Knossos (1450 – 1400 B.C.), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Fig 15b. Bronze figurine of saluting man, Tyllisos (1550 – 1450 B.C.),
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

We have remarked too on the commonly-seen tension and arched back visible on figures throughout Minoan art, particularly within glyptic. Other postures include images of ecstatic dance (figure 1, Ring of Minos), dancing with arms aloft (figure 5, Isopata ring), the tense arm-outwards gesture (figure 14, Knossos ring) and the beckoning postures seen in baetylic ritual (figure 12, Ayia Triada). Another posture, very famous from images of peak sanctuary figurines, is the tense salute, seen in figure 15.

Figurines found on peak sanctuary sites have long been problematic, and have often been interpreted as votive offerings to a mountain deity, or as tools for healing of illnesses and other afflictions, particularly with reference to the many partial figurines or even simply limbs showing signs of deformation and disease. The limited number of stereotypical gestures displayed by the figurines are often seen as gestures of worship or respect, of self-containment or of supplication. Such views appear to fall prey again to modern Western assumptions of the purposes and



*Fig 16. Female and male peak sanctuary figurines from Neopalatial East Crete
Ayios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum*

functions of religion.

In a review of figurines found at the peak sanctuary of Petsofas near Palaikastro near Eastern Crete, Zographaki notes that many of the figurines have heads “*inclined sharply backwards as though looking up*”. This feature from Petsofas may be combined with the appearance from other sites of large eyes on the faces, both of which are circumstantially suggestive of epiphanic visions.

Experiments with gesture

In an intriguing paper exploring embodied archaeology through practical means, experimental archaeologist Erin Ruth McGowan offered an insight into the purpose of such stereotypical figurine and epiphanic postural images. Beginning first by making a catalogue of Minoan postures visible in peak sanctuary figurines and glyptic scenes, she then applied these postures to volunteers to enquire whether such postures would elicit visionary or altered state responses in real human subjects.

Like Morris & Peatfield, she critiques traditional symbolist interpretations of epiphany iconography and figurines, considering a merely ritual focus to be insufficient to understanding the activities being depicted, and she seeks to take the ‘embodied’ perspective further, colouring Morris and Peatfield’s theoretical view with experiential evidence. She notes that while

“...experiencing ancient corporeality can... draw together both ancient and modern... it is important... not to conflate a [modern] physiological response to an embodied action with the [ancient] motivations for, or meanings behind the performance of that action. The physical body cannot provide an extra-temporal ‘bridge’ to an ancient individual’s motivations and meanings...”

We are suitably warned: McGowan’s experiment is subtly executed, drawing a fine distinction between seeking to re-create Minoan experience (which is impossible) and investigating the practical possibilities of the depicted postures to engender altered consciousness states. She also seeks to create a modern analogue to an authentic ancient environment: the experiment was held in a darkened room, with sistrum percussive music playing, in an attempt to replicate a cave environment with archaeologically appropriate music.

Five gestures were chosen from the catalogue, and the participants were asked to maintain the postures statically for as long as possible. These included hands-to-chest, leaning-on-a-baetyl, and saluting postures. The majority of participants reported visual experiences in these postures, ranging from the entoptic and iconic in most cases to the occasional full-blown visionary experience. Often, where participants did not experience visual effects, they nevertheless reported aural distortions or somatic sensations of heat, dizziness and numbness. Most interesting for our present theme were the results from the baetyl posture:

“Leaning over a baetyl... resulted in nine out of nine participants having visual experience. Of these, entoptic imagery was more pronounced, being



Fig 17. Ceramic Sistrum, Archanes (1700 – 1600 B.C.)
Archanes Archaeological Museum

visualised as geometric light shapes... [or as] light movement and dark 'ripples'... Three participants experienced iconic imagery without entoptics. Two participants both visualised an eye [iconically, while]... another participant likened her entoptic imagery to an eye. Five out of nine participants experienced aural distortion. Also, several participants noted temporal distortion..."

In another posture, two subjects reported seeing birds, and in the saluting posture, a majority of subjects reported sensations of bodily distortion without visual effects.

These results are remarkable: 86% of participants experienced visual phenomena, and the reports of seeing eyes and birds in particular resonates strongly with iconography of the epiphany. It is difficult not to assume the engendering of ancient experience here, but we can at least say that the tense Minoan postures do indeed seem to have a visionary potential, in both ancient and modern contexts, and thus an embodied understanding of the Minoan epiphany has considerable validity.

For the ancient celebrant, the ecstasy of dance movements and the tension in the restrictive postures must surely have been understood as contributing powerfully to the efficacy of a ritual in summoning the presence of a deity through the engendering of visionary experience.



Fig 18. Bird epiphany on the Sellopoulo Ring

From the foregoing, it does at least seem possible that we might be able to equate gestures from peak sanctuary figurines and epiphany scenes, on the basis of their postural similarity and their (experimentally-demonstrated) shared visionary potential. As has been noted, interpretations of peak sanctuary figurines are problematic, but light can perhaps be shed on both of these iconographies through the consideration of the peak sanctuaries themselves.

Animism and Minoan Peak Sanctuaries

Of the three principal loci of Minoan religion, the household shrine, the cave and the mountain shrine or peak sanctuary, it is the latter which must principally concern us here. Bronze Age Crete was replete with peak sanctuaries – some twenty-five sites have been identified in east and central Crete alone – and the locations for these religious sites were often well-chosen, as Berg discusses:

“Peak sanctuaries [did] not necessarily lie at the top of a mountain but in location where there was intervisibility between the settlement and the sanctuary (and possibly other sanctuaries), thus creating an intertwined ‘sacred landscape’... These sanctuaries appear to mark the realm of ‘wilderness’ as they are found beyond the limits of the settled land...”

Both Marinatos and Peatfield have separately pointed out that there is a complete absence of cult images of deities at peak sanctuary sites, as such it is difficult to believe in personified deities being revered here. Berg argues that

while household shrines and palace cults may have been theistic,

“...as far as peak sanctuaries are concerned, there is a distinct animistic flavour to rituals held there: the sacred place was sacred primarily to wild nature...”

and from a survey of global anthropological research concludes that animism is a way of relating, of interlinking nature and humanity:

“Animism is a way of understanding the ‘we-ness’ of the relationship between humans, animals and nature; it is a way of relating. Humans, animals and nature become animate through relating with each other in a constant process of shared creation...”

Thus, wild nature can provide a setting for an epiphany ritual in symbolist interpretation, but the addition of an animist angle to the peak sanctuary sites suggests, as Peatfield notes, that *“...nature [can be]... regarded as a vehicle for the epiphany of a deity and may embody the divine”*.

An assumption made by Galanakis, that the spirit of the divinity may have existed everywhere in nature and revealed itself in specific places in response to ritual, strongly resonates with this idea and our theme.

Such a remark calls into question the assumption that the epiphany figures who arrive are even to be considered visions of personified deities. The present author has made this assumption, on the basis that alternative, non-theistic terms such as mirage, phantasm, essences of place or event, spirit and hallucinatory or visionary figure, come with a wealth of problematic Western assumptions and colourings that are not appropriate for pre-modern, non-Western discourse. We thus persist with ‘deity’ in further considerations of the epiphany here, while bearing in mind the animistic considerations above that if nature, bodily posture and ritual are to be considered as the primary vehicles for epiphany (and we should perhaps assume that they were considered as such by the Minoan participants), notions of deity and visionary image in the context of the epiphany experience are likely to have been vastly different to our own experiences and conceptions.

Tripartite Shrines and Wild Nature

In addition, it is difficult to reconcile such animistic notions with anything other than a popular cult practice here, despite the richness and evident high status of surviving artefacts depicting the epiphany experience, and indeed there is much visual evidence within the epiphany images themselves that the rituals took place in locales with a distinctly wild-nature visual form, suggestive of widespread, localised popular cult practices in places distant from palace centres. As Rethemiotakis remarks:

“Plants and flowers in many of the scenes indicate that these... rituals took place out of doors... [and] indicate that the epiphany and its accompanying rituals were conducted in the countryside or in the mountains, away from urban



Fig 19. Sanctuary Rhyton, Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace (1550 – 1500 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

settlements.”

Warren concurs, and adds an interesting detail:

“No scenes appear to show rituals inside a building... all the scenes appear to be outdoors in open ground. But sometimes buildings are rendered in the background or at the edge. This could bear some correspondence to Minoan use of tripartite façades as backdrops for open air ritual.”

It is worth noting that several archaeological reconstructions of peak sanctuary buildings show tripartite façades, but more compelling evidence comes from surviving Minoan depictions such as the Zakros Sanctuary Rhyton. Huebner notes that most archaeologists accept that the building depicted on the rhyton gives a general idea of how some peak sanctuary and ‘wild-place’ sites must have looked: superficial resemblances between the rhyton image and actual peak sanctuary sites such as Juktas and Kato Syme are also seen. The presence of goats and birds underscores the wild locale, and the birds in particular tantalisingly hint at resonances with the bird epiphanies.

We might further compare the sanctuaries depicted on the rhyton with that on the Ring of Minos (figure 20). The enthroned female at right sits on a shrine which, while not tripartite, is surmounted by the same ‘horns of consecration’ as seen on the Zakros rhyton, and a general impression of wild nature is suggested by



*Fig 20. Ring of Minos, Knossos (1450-1400 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



*Fig 21. Reconstruction of fragmented seal impressions M1-5
Central Shrine, Knossos Palace (1425 – 1340 B.C.), Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



*Fig 22. Epiphany Ring, Knossos (1450 – 1400 B.C.)
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*



*Fig 23. Gold Ring, Tholos Tomb A, Archanes-Phourni (1600 – 1480 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

the trees and boulders that fill the scenic environment. Further, the deity in her ship, as we recall the final movement in the epiphany cycle as discussed earlier, is accompanied by a tripartite shrine, disclosing perhaps an intimate relationship between the peak sanctuary and the experience of the epiphany.

There is also the sense that the central shrine is located either atop a mountain, or on a mountainous island emerging from the sea. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis compare this feature to a similar scene in the Master Impression, a seal impression from Kydonia, noting the the boundary between the sea and the land is here demarcated by “...forked arches and solid elevations indicating rocks, caves and coves”.

Christos Boulotis, in reviewing the reconstructed fragments of a seal impression from the Central Shrine at Knossos palace, notes in an epiphany of a goddess upon a peak the depiction of a locale that strongly recalls a peak sanctuary, and which Rethemiotakis considers to be a clear depiction of a mountain. Again in the Epiphany Ring from Knossos, a young male deity appears before a female salutant in an open air locale with a shrine and images of wild nature.

Other evidences of wild nature are found throughout the artefacts: we might note the vegetation covering the lower half of the Isopata ring seal, along with a curious faint wavy trace in the upper section which may depict a line of hills or mountains (see figure 5 above) or indeed the twisted and unkempt trees emerging from rocks in many baetyl scenes (Sellopoulo, for example, in figure 9).

On the Mochlos and Makriyalos rings (figures 4a and 4b), two explicit visual links between sanctuary and wild nature are depicted with the emergence of uncultivated trees from the roof (Mochlos) or the side (Makriyalos) of the shrine buildings being borne by the deity’s ship. This link is repeated on the right hand side of the Archanes-Phourni Ring.

In this regard, we may also note in passing the evidence from the Early Minoan (2900 – 2200 B.C.) site of Vasiliki near Ierapetra, where a baetyl was uncovered. This baetyl was located at the very south-eastern edge of the village – one might say, where the village ends and the wild begins – and we recall Berg’s remark upon the later Minoan peak sanctuaries “*mark[ing] the realm of ‘wilderness’ ... beyond the limits of the settled land...*”

The presence of a baetyl in a rural, pre-palatial Minoan village underscores again the likely popular nature of the epiphany practice and perhaps hints at its ancient roots in Early Bronze Age (or even Neolithic??) animistic cult.

Vision-seeking Rituals and Rites of Passage

At this stage, the broad outlines of the ritual pertaining to the epiphany can be tentatively reconstructed: an individual or group leave their urban environment and make a pilgrimage to a place of animistic wild nature – a peak sanctuary or locale where a baetyl or other sacred item was situated – presumably singing or travelling

in procession. Upon their arrival, the ritual is begun with dances that contain tense, restrictive postures in their choreography as well as swaying movements, which along with other activities such as 'tree-pulling' and the embracing of the baetyl are intended to engender an altered state of consciousness. It is possible that prayers were said and songs sung in order to invoke and invite the deity to emerge from the sky and descend, setting feet upon the earth to be beheld by the celebrants.

But can we also gain something of a hint for any underlying purposes of epiphany rituals at peak sanctuaries and other sites? Interpretations are varied but generally conform to a range of similar themes. Warren considers the primary object of Minoan ritual to have been

"...to invoke the presence of the divinity and to gain communion with her in the sacred place or liminal zone... [T]he divinity was believed to have control over all aspects of the natural and created worlds. To promote the fertility of these worlds and... to prevent damage or disaster to them, was the general function of Minoan ritual..."

In other words, the presence or vision of the deity acted as a guarantee for continued worldly (and presumably personal) wellbeing. Morris & Peatfield partially concur with Warren's considerations of wellbeing, but their view is enriched by embodied and altered-state perspectives:

"It is highly likely that the mystical experience, crossing into the domain of the transcendent, was highly valued for its own sake. Elsewhere ecstatic states have facilitated spirit journeys, initiation rituals... revelation of hidden knowledge... and healing... [and] it is healing which seems to offer the closest fit... to the evidence of the peak sanctuaries."

They are here making reference to the numerous votive limbs and partial figurines, briefly mentioned earlier, found at peak sanctuary sites which display symptoms of swellings, deformations and other maladies; it has been widely been assumed that these were deposited at such sites in the hope that the pilgrim's affliction would thus be cured.

Moss agrees with Morris & Peatfield. In her wide-ranging survey of Minoan sites and artefacts and the evidences for Minoan religion that they disclose, all of the five peak sanctuary sites she discusses are listed as pertaining to, among others, a healing deity of some kind. Interestingly, she also notes at four of the sites surveyed, clay models of birds were uncovered, which resonates with one of the epiphanic symbols of the arrival of the deity. One such site, Atsipades Korakias, has been mentioned briefly above.

La Rosa and Warren, however, posit a connection between at least the baetylic epiphanies and funerary customs. As Warren narrates:

"...rituals at indoor sites involving baetyls may be concerned with rites to the dead. If these were connected to the idea of renewal and regeneration, then the Minoans could have included some ideas of reincarnation or regeneration of the soul in their religious ideas."

We might thus speculate that the seeking of an epiphany – this time perhaps not of a deity but of a recently-departed spirit, or indeed the reincarnated returning spirit of an ancestor – may have constituted an aspect of ceremonies for the dead or for ancestors.

But Marinatos and Watrous separately propose a third theory, that rites of male initiation were held at peak sanctuaries, as reported by Moss in a review of young male figurines at the sanctuary of Juktas. With reference to the hairstyles depicted on the figurines, she explains:

“...Marinatos argues that hair length, in Minoan depictions of men, reflects their age... Watrous suggests that Minoan figurines of worshippers shown as armed young males with scalplocks may... be connected with male initiation rites... It is possible that the figurines... may have been offerings made at a rite of passage to mark a youth’s initiation into manhood.”

MacGillivray and Sackett imply a similar initiation function at the Petsotas sanctuary, given the proximity of that site to the town of Palaikastro where the famous *kouros* figurine was found, which they consider to have been fundamental to the initiation cult practices of the town. Another rite-of-passage-based view (though this time without gender bias) is briefly posited by Jones in a consideration of the expense of many of the figurines and other artefacts offered and broken at peak sanctuary sites.

While such views may explain shed light on the images of male visionaries beholding the epiphany, we may note two points. Firstly, male visionaries in epiphany scenes are never shown armed, and the artefacts are often too small to gain a clear understanding of the visionary’s hairstyle (although rows of dots do tend to confer the notion that the hair is worn very long for both genders). Secondly, no similar



Fig 24. Knossos steatite seal: female deity flanked by griffins (1600 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

evidence exists to suggest a female initiation cult practice in Minoan Crete, and given that the majority of epiphany scenes depict female visionaries, an initiation-based conception of the epiphany represents a gender bias generally unsupported by the visual evidence.

We also may note that all the visionaries are depicted in fine health and thus not in need of healing, and it is unlikely that the visions depicted represent interactions with spirits of the dead (indeed only one Minoan depiction of a dead spirit is known, from the Ayia Triada sarcophagus) so we must accept that while the epiphany rituals may have *accompanied* healing, funerary or initiation ceremonies, the fundamental underlying motivations for Minoan celebrants participating in the epiphany must remain unknown to us beyond the tentative initial comments offered by Morris and Peatfield, that they were at least valued for their own sake.

Conclusions

We have seen from the foregoing that the Minoan Epiphany represents a unique artistic, iconographic and ritual tradition of sacred experience, in which a seamless movement from mundane realms into the sacred and visionary is depicted through the medium of visionary beholding deity. Images of ritual activities, from invocatory acts of tree-pulling and beckoning postures to trance-inducing restrictive dances and swaying, quickly give way to shimmering depictions of visions of deities, flying birds and other sacred symbols, while the ecstatic nature of the celebrants' consciousness are shown through aniconic or floating heads, and elongated body forms.

It has been noted that such depictions disclose radically different conceptions of the sacred and of deity than those found in our rather passive Western norms, not least the notion that a distinction between sacred and profane is simply not evidenced in the iconography of epiphany. This chimes rather neatly with the foregoing discussion on the decidedly animistic nature of the epiphany scenes and their wild nature locales.

Faced with such seamless transitions, the epiphany has required us to construct a new model for understanding such iconography, one that does not acknowledge sacred/profane dualities, and thus a discussion of some of the rituals depicted has been enriched by discussions of altered states of consciousness, animism and the possibilities that visionary potential exists within the actual postures depicted in the images. We have not touched here on the possibility that entheogenic or psychoactive plants were utilised to aid in engendering visionary experience: while there exists numerous circumstantial evidences for the use of such plants (most notably in the poppy-crowned figurine from Gazi), in the epiphany iconography no botanically-identifiable plants are seen, and as such this aspect must remain outside the scope of studies of the Minoan Epiphany.

We have hinted, too, at the intimacy and balance of many of the scenes: deities are not shown as grandiose, larger-than-life figures, and the focus of many



Fig 24. Knossos steatite seal: female deity flanked by griffins (1600 – 1450 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

of the scenes rests as much upon the visionary as it does the deity. Such balance suggests considerably different ideas of inter-relationship between celebrant and deity than those found in our contemporary Western models.

The efficacy of ritual and dance in summoning the deity, another marked departure from Western practice, is also clearly elucidated. We might speculate that in contrast to much later medieval portrayals in which spirits were forced or abjured by rituals to attend the mundane world, the Minoan deities depicted were considered to have come gladly to the peak sanctuary locales and delighted to set their feet upon the earth before the celebrants' eyes. Such intimacy is further suggested by the use of epiphany images upon ring seals to broadcast sacred experience in such interactions as trade transactions and interpersonal communication, underscoring again a radically different experience of personal identity: the epiphany image here functions almost as a signature, or perhaps as corporate brand name, does in modern Western interaction, rather than a sacred icon.

We might also note in passing that the gaze of the celebrant is always aimed straightforwardly at the deity, again posing a challenge to the Western notion of averting one's gaze from that which is sacred, founded upon a profoundly different religious tradition (*"You cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live"* - Exodus 33:20). This again dissolves boundaries between sacred and profane, and resonates with the aforementioned intimacy of the epiphany encounter. This is seen particularly in the 'sacred conversation' images, of which more will be said in the Review of Epiphany Artefacts.

In closing, we might offer a few speculations as to whether it is possible to

gain any indication of as to the identity of the deity or deities seen in the epiphany visions. Mindful of the preceding discussion that in animistic contexts, notions of deities with specific identities may be only weakly-attested, a speculation could be made that some kind of ‘spirit of place’ or, as Warren suggests in connection to baetylic rituals, a ‘sacred essence’ within the rock or shrine itself emerged to be seen, or even a spirit of the recently departed. But such ideas are vague and unsatisfying, and we note that in other locales such as household shrines and palace cult, a sense of anthropomorphic deity similar to a Classical Greek conception was well-established.

Warren hints at another, more specific possibility, reported by Moss, noting that the baetyl seems to have been associated, in later Classical Greek periods, with Rhea. We recall the myth of Rhea giving Kronos a stone to swallow in place of her new-born son Zeus, and her continued association with Crete despite being the Mother of the Gods on distant Mt Olympus. He narrates:

“...that the early history of Rhea should lie in Minoan times is strongly supported by her having been a powerful divinity in Hellenistic Crete at Knossos, Phaistos and Prinias. Such emphasis on Rhea would seem unusual within the expected distribution of gods of the Hellenistic pantheon, but is wholly explicable if she is seen as the descendant of the great Minoan goddess.”



Fig 26. ‘Rhea’, Bruce Rimell (2012)

100cm x 100cm in four 50cm panels - Acrylics, Inks & Markers on Canvas

Images of Rhea in Classical Art tend to show her as flanked by or riding a pair of lions, and she was often identified with the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele who was also depicted flanked between two lions. In this image we can perhaps speculate on an iconographic continuity from Minoan times.

Beekes gives the origin for Rhea as pre-Greek, meaning that no Indo-European, Semitic or Egyptian etymology can be suitably proposed, thus suggesting that the name was likely loaned from an aboriginal Aegean substrate language of which the Minoan language may have been a dialect. Other proposed etymologies, from $\rho\acute{o}\alpha$, 'pomegranate' and $\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, 'to flow', also link with pre-Greek words. Kerényi notes the sequence *ru-ja* in Linear A tablets and suggests that this might represent a Minoan form of Rhea; he also terms Rhea as "*the Minoan Mountain Goddess*" on several occasions.

With two exceptions, the Vapheio and Messenia images, epiphany iconography is almost completely absent from Mycenaean (mainland Greek Bronze Age) and later Dark Age Greek contexts, but it is interesting to note that one of the few descriptions in Classical Greek literature that resonates with the Minoan Epiphany pertains to the activities of Rhea in connection with the Eleusinian Mysteries, themselves a candidate for the continuation of Minoan epiphany cult practice.

The passage is found in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, after the goddess has been reunited with her daughter Persephone after a period of world-destroying grief. Zeus now sends their mother Rhea (for Demeter is Zeus' elder sister) down to negotiate a new way of life for humanity. The colourful description of her descent to earth, with which we close our discussion, is remarkably evocative of the first image, on the Ring of Minos of the floating goddess emerging from the sky:

*“She darted swiftly down the peaks of Olympus
and arrived [at] the Rarian plain...
There she alighted from the barren air:
Mother and Daughter were glad to see each other
and rejoiced at heart...”*

Review of Epiphany Artefacts #1

From the preceding essay, it can be seen that the images of the Minoan Epiphany are both complex and somewhat ambiguous, at least, to our modern eyes. A combined model, which includes considerations of mundane ritualistic behaviour as well as altered states of consciousness of a more sacred character, has been required to gain an adequate understanding of the scenes, and we have noted that the visionary culture evidenced by the epiphany imagery challenges and transcends our rather passive Western models of religious experience.

There has also been scope for doubtfulness with some of the images as to whether a visionary or enacted epiphany is being depicted, and just as the action moves seamlessly from worldly to sacred activity, so a seamlessness appears to exist between enacted and visionary, and Minoan categories as to who or what could constitute a deity as well as distinctions made (or not) between enacted living, iconic and visionary depictions, again challenge our Western ideas.

We have also uncovered a set of visual conventions which may be here briefly summarised:

1. A figure's small size, waving hair and downward-pointing feet denotes a deity floating in or moving through the air, or emerging from the sky.
2. A figure's large size, flat feet and contact with or depicted at the same level as the ground denotes the deity's arrival upon the earth.
3. The appearance of a flying bird denotes either the imminent arrival of the deity, or functions as the deity seen epiphatically.
4. Heads depicted as aniconic in contrast to other detail, or as attenuated, or as floating above the body, denote the experience of the trance state on the part of the beholding visionary.
5. Elongated body forms whose dimensions go beyond the norms of Minoan depiction also denote the experience of the trance or altered state
6. A variety of beckoning postures are seen, with the intention that these 'invite' the deity into the ritual action.
7. Dynamic tension in the body forms of the celebrants or visionaries are also seen, which may suggest the techniques by which the celebrants enter the trance or altered state.
8. Images of wild nature abound, suggestive not merely of a rural or peak sanctuary location, but of the animistic sanctity of nature itself.

In coming to review a selection of artefacts upon which scenes of epiphany are depicted, it is useful to elucidate the types of epiphany seen in the imagery, for there is much evidence of idiosyncrasy in the visionary content (such as, for example, the variation in the deity appearing in human or birdlike form).

While such changes in depiction may express underlying Minoan meanings

that are now lost to us (a bird deity may, for example, be of different character to a human one, and so on), broad outlines can be drawn.

The classifications below, then, are an attempt to combine all the foregoing models, but particularly the epiphany cycle and the above list of conventions, to permit a set of visionary aesthetics to emerge naturally from the epiphany images, with the suggestion that these aesthetics may disclose something, however vaguely, of the original Minoan conceptions.

Type I: Floating or Earthbound Human Figure

The appearance of the deity in human form to the celebrants is the most common form of the epiphany depicted, and corresponds to the first two stages in Dimopoulou & Rethemiotakis's epiphany cycle. This type appears in a variety of locations, but is commonly associated with shrines and depictions of wild places. Two types are seen, often combining with each other, or with other types of epiphany, to function as the initial stage of a narrative depiction of visionary action.

Type Ia: Floating Figure

A female or male figure descends from on high, hovering or floating with downward-pointing feet, her small size denoting her distance from the main ritual action or that she is emerging from the sky to attend the ritual, a notion often emphasised by her elevated position above the ritual action. The floating figure is, with a couple of exceptions, consistently female.

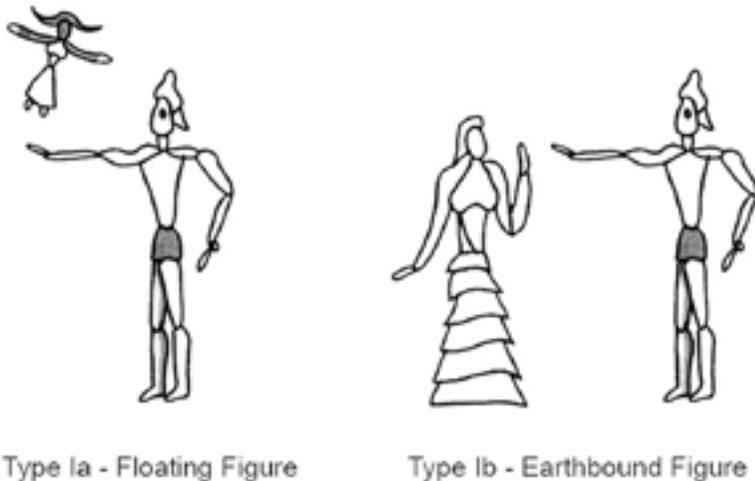


Fig 27. Type I Epiphanies

Type Ib: Earthbound Figure

The floating figure then makes contact with the earth, and is seen with flattened feet and a similar size to the celebrants. The deity's elevated status is less emphasised, often appearing at the same level as the celebrants – in such depictions, a neat aesthetic balance between the sacred and the mundane is achieved – and she is sometimes shown dancing, or hailing the visionary. This type also carries the greatest ambiguity between enacted and visionary epiphany: at times it is unclear whether the sacred figure is a visionary deity or a human female surrogate, or indeed a cult statue. Again, with one or two exceptions, the figure seen is consistently female.

Type II: Symbolic Figure

The deity is seen as one of her symbols, which may suggest the imminent arrival of the deity rather than the deity herself, or equally may imply that the deity is manifesting symbolically, arriving in one of a stereotypical and limited set of disguises which may hint at now-lost Minoan narrative expectations. This type of epiphany is commonly associated with scenes of baetyl ritual, but in several images, a combination of the above type I is seen surrounded or associated with symbols of type II to suggest a possibly narrative action, or that several visions (experienced by one or several celebrants) are depicted. Four types are generally seen, again often combining with each other.

Type IIa: Bird

The deity appears, or is heralded by, a large bird, often larger-than-life, appearing in the scene, often bearing fruit or seed pods in its mouth, and often shown descending to approximately the celebrants' eye level, a notion which subtly emphasises the visionary nature of the depiction. Notable here is the detailed depiction of the bird, such that it can be roughly identified at times as a crane, eagle or dovelike figure.

Type IIb: Insect

The deity appears, or is heralded by, some kind of insect. The butterfly is most commonly seen, often shown rising or floating, and consistently larger-than-life, the variation in size ranging from twice or three times life-size to massively enlarged. (In this regard, it is perhaps useful to note Gimbutas's hypothesis that the Minoan double-axe represents a stylised butterfly – while this is not widely accepted, we nonetheless may have here a symbolic identity between Type IIb and Type IIc epiphanies.) Bees or flies are occasionally depicted, though their depiction is ambiguous and debatable. In one instance a dragonfly is clearly seen, again larger-than-life.

Type IIc: Plant Symbol

A plant symbol, such as a seed pod or ripened fruit is shown, either floating before

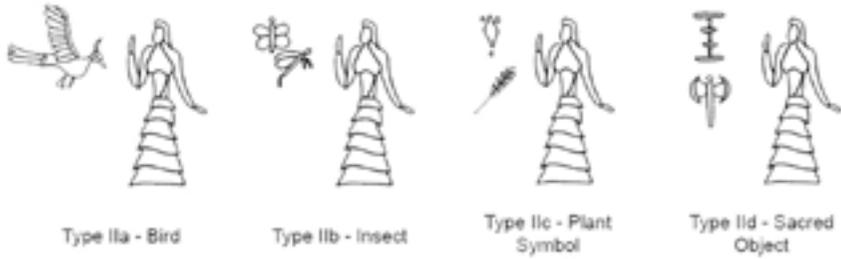


Fig 28. Type II Epiphanies

the celebrant or being carried by the bird in Type IIa. When seen alone, the symbol is often depicted floating directly above the visionary, but the depiction is ambiguous and it is unclear if it represents a floating seedpod or a ritual object (seen in vision or added as a ritual element) such as a rhyton, or even a bucranium, a bull's head motif commonly seen in Minoan glyptic.

Type II d: Sacred Object

The most common form here is the double-axe, which may conflate with Type IIb in light of Gimbutas's idea that the double-axe represented a stylised butterfly). Here, a suggestion of meaning can be divined, for we never see male figures in Minoan art bearing the double-axe – it appears to have been a symbol of female sacred authority, and thus its appearance in epiphany may denote the authority of the deity being expressed, or offer some insight into the familiarity with this authority, something that the celebrant is seeking to disclose through the commissioning of the epiphany artefact. The double-axe's appearance also calls to mind the baetyl at Gournia (see Appendix A).

Other symbols are also seen, and these are almost all ritual items: conch shells, robes and items of clothing (although these may represent offerings), and rhytons, although the foregoing ambiguity between rhyton and seed pod should be borne in mind. Other ambiguous objects are seen: a curious symbol appears several times which has been suggested is a stylised pedestalled offering table, and in one case two floating rocks are seen with radial lines emerging – possibly this is a slightly surrealistic depiction of a baetyl. In one case, a hybrid human-double-axe floating figure is seen, and occasionally an abstract image which may represent a comet, meteor or floating ear of barley is present in the epiphany.

It has been argued that these are simply environmental items, showing the ritual space in which the epiphany takes place, however their common depiction as floating above or around the celebrants and their combination with other epiphany elements suggests that they are intended as visionary elements.

Type III: Human Figure in Abstract Space

A rarer type is the depiction of the deity – in all cases female – sometimes accompanied with one of her symbols, but with no celebrant or ritual action visible, and thus it is hypothesised we are here seeing an image which is completely visionary, shown in an abstract space.

Care must be taken with classifying images of this type that we are not inadvertently labelling as epiphanic the non-visionary iconic or mythological depictions of the deity, particularly in Minoan glyptic where images of deities are common. Thus for this type of image to be understood as epiphanic, we require other accompanying visual conventions that confirm the visionary nature of the scene. Such an example can be found in the Archanes – Phourni Ring #1.

Type IV: Figure on a Ship

This type corresponds with the final stage of Dimopoulou & Rethemiotakis's epiphany cycle, in which the deity, always female, is seen transporting a shrine (often tripartite) across the sea. Variations on this theme exist: we sometimes see the goddess saluting her shrine, or rowing with great effort across the sea. Plants and trees are sometimes seen emerging from the shrine.

As has been remarked earlier, it is this scene in particular which calls to mind the ability of the deity to transcend all three worlds of the three-tiered cosmos, or perhaps the seagoing scene represents the deity's return to the world of the sacred, disappearing in the ripples of the sea just as she emerged out from the sky. Numerous Neolithic and Bronze Age petroglyphs and mythforms across Europe and the Middle East also suggest the ship of plenty – the goddess's triumphant return in spring with the seeds and fruits of earthly fertility.

Type V :The Sacred Conversation

The 'sacred conversation' is a term coined by Nilsson to refer to an interaction between the celebrant and deity in which, judging by their postures, they greet each other, or the deity imparts some symbol of authority to the celebrant. Koehl and Marinatos both strongly identify the scene with a kind of *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage.

A notable feature of these scenes is that the gender of visionary and deity in the 'sacred conversation' scenes always differ: in most cases a young male greets a floating or earthbound female deity, but occasionally the reverse is seen – such gender inter-relations resonate with Koehl's and Marinatos's idea, but in terms of our typological analysis here, we may consider the 'sacred conversation' to be a meaningful ritual colouring of the above type I.

Its visual convention is stereotypical and instantly recognisable: the



Fig 29. Epiphanies of Types III, IV and V

floating deity greets the celebrant with arm held outwards, a posture mirrored by the celebrant. At least one depiction of this phenomenon is accompanied by a fairly unambiguous depiction of an altered state of consciousness (floating head) suggesting that the ‘sacred conversation’ was a visionary experience rather than a mere representational depiction disclosing sacred familiarity and authority.

There are subtle suggestions, too, judging by the postures involved, of sacred conversations in other epiphany scenes, particularly the Ring of Minos: the seated female gazes up and half-gestures to the floating deity, whose arm in turn gently gestures downwards, directly to the seated female’s hand.

Thus, with these types now elucidated, we now proceed to the review of a selection of glyptic artefacts which depict epiphany scenes. In each case, where possible, an image of the original artefact has been presented, along with a full illustration. Further explanatory illustrations help in some cases to clarify the ritual and visionary narratives. This is by no means an exhaustive survey of all Minoan epiphany artefacts, but the most significant finds are presented along with several intriguing yet obscure finds. A total of 23 artefacts are discussed.

1. The Ring of Minos

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Knossos, archaeological provenance unknown, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC

We have already seen how the complex iconography on this ring typifies the epiphany cycle as elucidated by Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis as the appearance of the deity out of the sky, descending to earth and then sailing away in a seagoing vessel, exemplifying types Ia, Ib and IV in our typological classification, and we have noted the ambiguity between enacted and visionary epiphany for the seated female figure on the right. The same ambiguity could be argued for the woman in the ship also.



*Fig 30. Ring of Minos (Image & Sketch)
Knossos, archaeological provenance unknown, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



The sea-going figure bears more analysis here because, as we shall see, several other epiphany artefacts depict the deity in her ship with such similarity to the Ring of Minos here that a ninth visual convention of the epiphany can perhaps be established. Galanakis notes that in such scenes, the ship bears a female deity with a stereotypical posture of one hand raised towards the face – in the present ring this has been varied expertly to suggest the detail of an oar which she uses to propel the ship. He also notes that several depictions of the ship bear a ‘Babylonian dragon’ prow of uncertain meaning.

Marinatos notes a Ugaritic goddess Athirat, one of whose epithets was “Great Lady who treads upon the sea dragon”, and although the mythform which underlies this epithet is now lost, she suggests that this feature of Minoan glyptic scenes constitutes a shared visual language across the Middle Bronze Age Eastern



Fig 31. *The Ring of Minos, lower half detail (Image & Sketch)*

Mediterranean, and perhaps hints at the triumph over an underworld deity. On the other hand, Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis term this prow shape a sea-horse figure, which presents a challenge to Marinatos’s interpretation here.

As to the general meaning of the ‘Goddess from the Sea’, Galanakis remarks:

“Most of the representations [of the Goddess]... lead to the assumption that the appearance of a single female figure was not accidental. The Minoans had a long history of depicting solitary female figures in many different contexts... [including] seafaring. The Minoan thalassocracy possibly required the presence of a single divinity, a female divinity in particular... This divinity, the so-called ‘Goddess from the Sea’, was probably worshipped in specific rituals before or during important sea travels and expeditions faraway.”

In the Amnisos ring below, we see a possible epiphanic depiction of such a suggested pre-voyage ritual. Galanakis continues:

“There is the possibility that the iconographical schema of the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ may have implied the formation of a prehistoric, mainly Minoan



Fig 32. *The Ring of Minos, upper right detail (Image & Sketch)*

mythology, where the ‘Goddess’, dressed in Minoan formal attire with the flounced skirt and open bodice, sailed with a mythical ship ready to inaugurate her cult in new places...”

We may note here that the formation of a native Minoan mythology here disagrees with Marinatos’s conclusion above, but whereas Marinatos seeks in much of her work to promulgate an image of Minoan kingship informed by a Near-Eastern cultural and visual *koine* – an image which the present author considers is somewhat lacking in the artefacts of the Minoan civilisation – Galanakis seeks to place the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ artefacts specifically within the contexts of known Minoan archaeologies and evidences.

I have suggested elsewhere, following to a certain extent the arguments made by Beekes, that the Classical Greek mythform of Europa represents a survival of the image of the Minoan ‘Goddess from the Sea’ in the labelling of her as ‘Phoenician’ (a demonym which itself has a deeply complex history, outside the scope of this essay), but Galanakis connects an 8th century BC graffito on a plastered wall in a temple complex at Delos with the survival of this image in a local depiction of the prehellenic goddess Leto, or possibly Britomartis. In this regard, we must remark on Beekes’ etymologies for the names Britomartis and Diktyinna: he considers them both as pre-Greek (ie, ancient loans into Classical Greek from an aboriginal Aegean language of which presumably Minoan was a dialect) and associated solely with Crete, considering Britomartis in particular to be either a Cretan goddess in her own right or as an epithet of Artemis on Crete.

We note that Britomartis was a nymph of the mountains – itself resonating with the wider ‘epiphany’ and its placement on peak sanctuaries – who, after being chased by Minos across Crete, threw herself into the sea to avoid his advances, and,

becoming tangled in a fisherman's nets, becomes transformed into Diktynna (another name resonant with Cretan mountains – cf: Mt. Dikte) and was transported across the sea to Aegina, a Minoan colony, where she gained the name Aphaia 'invisible one'. Thus it is possible that this myth, while not likely to represent a perfectly-preserved Minoan original, can perhaps shed some light on wider mythological contexts of this epiphanic sea-borne image in that some of the names and images resonate with our present theme.

To return to the Ring of Minos, one question that this artefact begs is, who is the visionary here? We have not much discussed the presence in several epiphany scenes of dancing and ecstatic figures engaged in acts of 'tree-pulling', considered by Rethemiotakis to be an act of tree worship but by Warren as an act engendering ecstasy and thus incipient to the visionary act itself or as a way of beckoning the deity to the ritual scene. Several divergent narratives are thus possible here, and the only unambiguous feature is the floating deity at top right. Four principal narratives are here discussed.

We might suggest a more traditional interpretation, that the seated female is a human woman representing the goddess overseeing two acts of tree worship, whilst herself experiencing a visionary epiphany depicted as the floating figure. The shimmering textures surrounding the ocean-going vessel may in turn represent a second visionary epiphany. Here, then, the seated female figure is the visionary.

Alternatively, we might argue that one or both of the ecstatic 'tree-pullers' are the visionaries and, their actions having beckoned the deity, they watch as she



Fig 33 – *The Ring of Minos – Iconographic Analysis*

emerges out of the sky, descends to earth and seats upon her shrine. The vision then continues with the deity leaving the scene on her boat, bearing a shrine. A variation on this narrative might be considered, in that the female ‘tree-puller’ at left appears to be indicating the sea-going vessel with her hand – perhaps this is her vision alone. The rippling, almost-birdlike nature of the rocks near her feet seems to underscore the construal and visionary nature of the whole scene.

A fourth possibility exists, emerging from the realisation that the sea-going female’s head is also gazing towards the seated female figure. It is possible that this represents a second enacted epiphany gazing at the simple epiphany scene at top right.

Of course we cannot be certain which, if any, of these interpretations is correct, and bearing in mind the aforementioned differing Minoan categorisations of deity and the sacred, we must also consider the possibility that the original artist intended a multiple display of visionary and/or enacted epiphany, in which each figure ambiguously beholds the other. We could thus follow a line of gazes, starting with the ‘tree-pulling’ figures, passing through the sea-going female who in turn gazes up at the terminating image, the epiphany at top right.

2. Isopata Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Isopata Chamber Tomb, Knossos, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC

This ring seal, found in a tomb at Isopata near Knossos, is one of the most famous images of the Minoan Epiphany, and though its depiction seems at first glance relatively straightforward, the complex iconography and ambiguities visible here have been used as central evidence in a bewildering array of hypotheses on Minoan religion. Morris & Peatfield used this ring as their typological image for their altered states of consciousness hypothesis, whereas Gimbutas considered the image to provide evidence for the continuity of bee-worship and honey-rituals from Neolithic European cultural horizons down to the Aegean Bronze Age. Vasilakis considered this ring to exemplify Minoan dance circular dance rituals. Rehak considers this ring to show some kind of rite pertaining to young adult women, rather than an epiphany scene, a conclusion with which we disagree here.

But Rehak does note several interesting aspects to this image: he sees in the usage of ‘cavalier’ perspective in the positioning of the figures, and the multiple levels upon which the plants are depicted, as a direct link between this scene and other, similarly-arranged images of dancing women on frescoes at Knossos. He also considers that the women depicted here are young, judging by their hairstyles:

“The hairstyles of... [three of] the women can be compared to those worn by women in the Thera frescoes. The two young women in the lustral basin scene from Xeste 3... both have coiffures of long, thick hair wrapped in a fillet which has



*Fig 34. Isopata Ring (Image & Sketch)
Isopata Chamber Tomb, Knossos, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



been gathered in a loop at the base of the neck and trails down the back... mature women, by contrast often wear their hair up in kerchiefs."

By implication, the three female figures at left and centre are young, whereas the rightmost figure, with her hair tied up, may be senior in age, and her posture may connote her status as the leader of the ritual depicted. He considers the suggestion that the smallest figure (what we, below, consider as the floating epiphany figure) is not in fact floating, but simply situated at a distance, following his 'cavalier' perspective line of reasoning.

But the curious line feature two-thirds of the way up the scene, mentioned briefly in the main essay, suggests a crudely-drawn line of mountains, implying that the figure is floating, and thus corresponds to other floating, epiphany figures in the corpus of Minoan glyptic. Rehak's conclusions notwithstanding, most are in agreement that we have here an epiphany scene, but the complexity of the action renders unambiguous interpretations difficult.

At first, the Isopata image seems like a large type I epiphany: the central figure (type Ib) functions as a visionary epiphany in a vision shared by the two dancers to the left and the older woman to the right. The postures of these three women are distinctive but somewhat opaque as to meaning – the two women to the left appear to be adopting beckoning postures and the lines of their bodies suggest a swaying movement in agreement with the altered consciousness state hypothesis of Morris & Peatfield above. The postures of the central figure (hand raised with head slightly bowed) and the female figure at right (arms held up in a posture suggestive of swaying or dance) seem similarly meaningful.

However, when we add to our considerations the small floating figure, interpreted here as the deity appearing out of the sky (type Ia), it appears that the leftmost dancer, at least, is beckoning directly to the smaller figure, and a powerful sense of narrative action begins to colour the scene: the two swaying dancers at left beckon the deity to emerge from the sky, and she does so, alighting on the ground in the middle distance in the presence of an older, presiding female figure who may represent a ritual leader, an enacted epiphany, or both. From what little we can see of their heads, specifically the implied directions of their gazes, we suggest that the vision of the presence of the deity is shared by all three women.

We might also ask: were the efficacy of many of these rituals guaranteed by the presence of an enacted epiphany? The figure on the right seems to 'authorise' the scene, as if the presence of a woman performing as the earthbound surrogate of the deity ensures the presence of the epiphanic deity – the two phenomena mirror each other: the goddess is able to emerge from the sky since, technically, she is already present in the person of the human woman performing the enacted epiphany. Again, we find significant challenges to our Western models of religious perception.

We have followed at length in the main essay Morris & Peatfield's (and McGowan's by implication) line of reasoning that the aniconic or attenuated

head-shapes on this ring imply that the ritual participants are experiencing a trance or altered state of consciousness. Gimbutas, however, offers an alternative interpretation of these curious shapes.

She remarks that the heads of these figures bears resemblance to bees and suggests these may be bee or honey priestesses in an act of worship. We have noted previously the modern Western bias that assumes such depictions are worshipful or reverential, but the possibility exists that a conscious depiction of insectoid heads may have been intended here – this needn't detract from the hypothesis that the figures are also depicted in a state of trance. Further, the finding of the golden bee pendants in the richly-decorated grave of a young woman at Chryssolakou near the palace of Malia, and the Linear B inscription (Kn V 2, Text 702) from LM II-III A (1450 – 1320 B.C.) period at Knossos which lists the Mistress of the Labyrinth as receiving the same amount of honey as 'all of the gods' strongly suggests a correlation between sacred bees, honey usage in rituals and high-status or sacredly powerful women and female deities. That males are completely absent from the depiction on this ring image may amplify that notion.

Finally, there are a few other curious features on this ring. We have noted the single jagged line running two-thirds up the scene suggestive of a line of mountains, but behind and to the right of the central figure is a strange formation that might suggest an eye, a distant hill or body of water. Above the central figure is a feature that is also present in other epiphany scenes, and which has been variously interpreted as a meteor, a comet or a floating ear of barley.

3. Sellopoulo Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Sellopoulo Chamber Tomb, Knossos, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC

The Sellopoulo ring seal is the type image for the baetylic ritual and the type II epiphany, depicting a straightforward and clear image of the central event at the sacred rock: the beckoning of and arrival or heralding of the deity, expressed as a descending bird bearing some kind of vegetation in its beak.

The stereotypical baetylic posture is also clearly shown – the male celebrant's thorax and legs are turned towards the rock, judging by the position of the legs, but the upper body is flexed and facing towards the viewer.

One arm rests upon the rock, the position of the shoulder here suggesting some level of tension within the arm, whilst the other arm is held outwards, beckoning to the epiphany. The gaze of the celebrant is also directed at the bird figure, suggesting a direct visionary experience rather than a symbolic enactment.

The artist has focussed in some detail on the bird, such that we may identify it as some species of crane, bearing a seed pod or possibly a branch or berries. No shrine building is seen here, but the tree emerging from rocks at far left lends a



*Fig 35. Sellopoulo Ring (Image & Sketch)
Sellopoulo Chamber Tomb, Knossos, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



sense of wild nature: this ritual is taking place at some considerable distance from any urban space. The line surmounted by dots at far right may also depict another tree.

4. Archanes – Fourni Ring #1

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tholos Tomb B, Fourni, Archanes, LM IA, 1600-1480BC

This is a straightforward type III epiphany – the deity is seen in abstract space without any beholding visionary or image of celebrants engaging in baetylic or epiphanic rituals. We must proceed carefully, however, as this may be a simple icon of a once-named deity, or a scene from a lost mythical episode in which the goddess cavorts with a griffin.

However, there are two or three striking aspects to this image which suggest an epiphany, most notably the downward-pointing feet of the female figure which fits perfectly with the visual conventions of the epiphany. The deity's outstretched arms and tilted body also imply movement and flight, and combined with the dynamic posture of the griffin, lend a powerful sense of rapid (and possibly skybound) motion.

Another interpretation is possible: the female figure at right is a celebrant or woman performing an enacted epiphany (or indeed both) and the griffin is an epiphany of type II – more specifically a modified type IIa where the bird has become a flying griffin. The downward-pointing feet might seem to contradict this, however we have already seen two examples of ambiguity between human-enacting-epiphany and visionary manifestation (the seated figure on the Ring of



Fig 36. Archanes-Fourni #1 Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tholos Tomb B, Fourni, Archanes, LM IA, 1600-1480BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Minos, and the rightmost dancer on the Isopata ring), and so it seems perhaps not unreasonable to suggest a similar occurrence here.

Symbolically, the presence of the griffin in Minoan art tends to denote female authority. The most famous depictions are on the frescoes of the so-called ‘Throne Room’ at Knossos, which Evans traditionally interpreted as the domain of a male king. Warren considered the alabaster chair and libation pot in this room to have functioned more as a site for the enacted epiphany of a female deity, and thus the link between epiphany and griffin is established.

We also note numerous depictions of the goddess – here probably intended as icons rather than epiphanies – seated between two griffins; one such sealstone was cited in the main essay as evidence of iconographic continuity between a Minoan goddess and the Greek image of Rhea.

5. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1

Unknown provenance, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

We have here another baetylic ritual, fairly simply expressed, with a woman in a similar pose to the Sellopoulo seal, beholding a vision of multiple epiphanic character. Her body displays the same upper-body torsion and tension in the thorax and the arm in contact with the rock, as well as a similar beckoning posture.

The first aspect of the vision are two birds (type IIa) which bear some resemblance to doves, or perhaps partridges (there is a superficial likeness between the bird figures and the ‘partridge’ fresco from the palace at Knossos). The birds have a surreal, construal edge: there is the suggestion of womanliness about them, as if depicted in transition from bird figure to floating deity. The question arises: is this an epiphany convention or an idiosyncratic feature of the seal-owner’s original vision, that birds hovered on the edge of transition to human female?

The second aspect of the vision is the robe at far left (type IIc), another symbol of the deity. Warren has narrated at length the ubiquitous images of robing rituals in Minoan glyptic, and reconstructs a ritual narrative that begins with a procession or pilgrimage to take the robe to the sacred place, followed by its offering to the deity and ending with the deity (either a cult icon or human enacted epiphany) being clothed in the offered robe.

Once again, there is an ambiguity here: the presence of the robe may be an epiphany of one of the deity’s symbols, but equally it could represent a robe offered to the deity, and thus the robing ritual may have been an activity that accompanied some epiphany rituals.

Alternatively, we could hypothesise that the robe here belongs to the woman undergoing the baetylic ritual: she would then be identified as a deity surrogate (enacted epiphany) and, having been previously offered robes in a robing



*Fig 37. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1 (Archaeological Illustration & Sketch)
Unknown provenance, LM IA – LM IB, 1600-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



ritual, has now divested in order to partake of an epiphany.

It should also be noted that the upper left part of this seal impression is damaged and the image has been lost. It is just faintly possible that we might reconstruct the robe, not as a garment hanging in a sacred area, but as the lower part of a floating female deity. The lack of downward-pointing feet contradicts this conclusion, however.

6. Amnisos Ring (or Knossos AN1938-1120)

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Amnisos / Knossos, archaeological provenance unknown, LM IB, 1500-1450BC

This is a remarkable and complex depiction of the epiphany which exemplifies a range of visual conventions and seamless transitions from ritual to visionary space. Here, we see an epiphanic depiction of precisely the kind of pre-voyage ritual that Galanakis elucidates above. Such a ritual may have taken place at harbour-sides, and it is significant that the ring was found at Amnisos, the Minoan harbour serving the largest urban area of Knossos, and facing northwards towards Thera and the Cyclades. Galanakis's discussion is relevant here:

“The arrival of the Goddess from different parts of the universe and the introduction of a new cult in new territories may be interpreted [through]... the trading activities of the Minoans... [and the fact that] excavations revealed the Minoan presence and the existence of Minoan settlements at Melos, Thera, Keos, Skopelos, Kythera, Rhodes and Karpathos.”

We might also include Aegina in this settlement list, and note Minoan influence in the wider Eastern Mediterranean, as far afield as Syria and Anatolia, and most remarkably in the artistic styles of frescoes and grave goods at Tell el Dab'a (Avaris) in Hyksos period Egypt that strongly suggest a lengthy Minoan presence in the city.

The depiction on the ring is worth describing at length, as this brings out some of the problems of interpretation, and the possibility that we are seeing here images of multiple visions. The overall scene is of a boat, attended by five sailors, some of whom appear to be holding vestigial oars, and gazing upwards, either at several floating figures above the boat or to the proudly gesturing male standing on what is presumably the harbour-side. Behind him, a seated or standing female figure appears to preside over the ritual performed by the male figure – behind her in turn a pithos (or possibly a large shield) is represented.

There is much here to be discussed. The presence of the pithos, or shield, at far left, strongly suggests trade goods, and the female at far left appears to function, if clues from other epiphany scenes are to be any guide, as a presider or enacted epiphany over the ritual. The appearance of the deities in the top centre are thus guaranteed by her presence.

The harbourside male's posture is a stereotypical one which connotes the engagement of a 'sacred conversation' (type V) and we see that his outstretched arm gestures with emphasis towards a small female figure floating above the front of the boat, who in turn gestures back to the male. His arched back and elongated



Fig 38. Amnisos Ring (Image & Sketch)

*Amnisos / Knossos, archaeological provenance unknown, LM IB, 1500-1450BC
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK*





Fig 39. Amnisos Ring, left side detail

body-form suggest, following Morris & Peatfield an altered state of consciousness, a notion underscored by the depiction of his head as floating above his body, an image which surely cannot be an error on the part of the engraver.

Two other figures in the scene also appear to be experiencing epiphany – these are the rearmost pair of sailors in the boat, one of whom is depicted with the same floating head phenomenon as the standing male figure. Above them is another floating, or flying, female (type Ia) figure – her depiction horizontally with arms out suggests dynamic movement – who appears to be gesturing towards the two sailors. Above her is a much more ambiguous image (type IIa? Ia?), possibly a row of dovelike birds, or another flying female figure, or more likely a figure in transition from the former to the latter, much as we see in the preceding Ayia Triada seal impression.

We find ourselves asking, again: who are the visionaries here and how much of what is depicted is epiphanic content? Several interpretations are available, and it is possible that the original artist intended all of them. The simplest explanation is to regard the ‘sacred conversation’ between the standing male and the leftmost floating figure as the primary epiphany on the ring, and thus the two flying figures at top right become shared visions experienced by the rearmost two sailors.

However, it is possible that a shared vision between all three visionaries is occurring, and all three floating/flying figures are being beheld by the standing

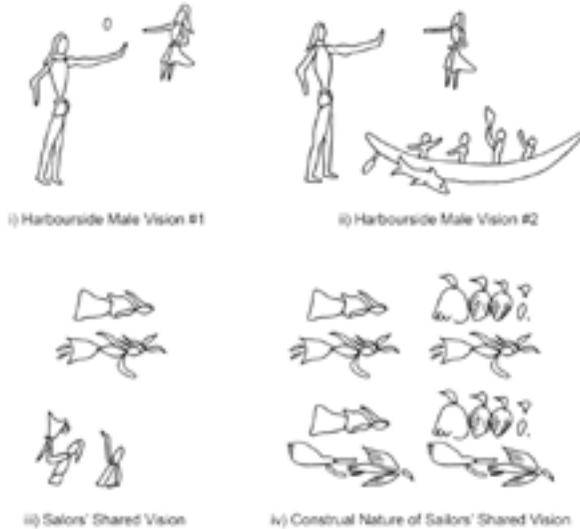


Fig 40. Amnisos Ring – Iconographic Analysis

male and two sailors together. The depiction of two, or perhaps three, dolphins swimming around the boat allows us to entertain another possibility, that the entire central and right-hand side of the image – floating figures, boat, dolphins, sailors and all – represent a complex vision experienced by the standing male.

Here, the sailors as characters within the vision yet apparently experiencing an epiphany resonates with previous images (the Ring of Minos, for example) in which an epiphany (enacted or visionary) gazes at another epiphany (visionary). Some kind of shared vision between the standing male figure and all five sailors is also a possible interpretation of this image of intense visionary content.

7. Mochlos Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tomb IX at Mochlos, LM IB, 1500-1450BC – only electrum copy survives

This ring from Mochlos is somewhat worn from heavy usage, which may present difficulty in certain aspects of the interpretation. We see a seated female figure in her ship with a distinctive ‘sea-horse’ or ‘dragon’ prow, bearing a shrine out from which trees and plants are growing.

Judging by the arrangement of prow and stern, the ship appears as if it is leaving the land, perhaps departing for a voyage: the building at right perhaps suggests a shrine or urban space, and the ambiguous trace of rocks beneath the



*Fig 41. Mochlos Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tomb IX at Mochlos, LM IB, 1500-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



lower right part of the boat suggest a shoreline. It appears the female figure is wearing her hair tied up – two lines emerging from her head denote this – and thus indicates her elder status, although the worn nature of the ring means previous faint dots or lines suggestive of the hairstyle of a younger woman have been lost.

We are witness here to a type IV epiphany, but there are ambiguities. It is not clear if this is a visionary depiction of the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ or a ritualistic enacted epiphany in which the seated figure is a human woman. Again, the distinction may not have been relevant to a Minoan audience. We also question whether the boat is leaving to deliver a shrine, or indeed the fruits of fertility and wild nature implied by the trees, to some distant locale from the shrine or building at right, or whether it represents a departing voyage in line with the thalassocratic interpretation from Galanakis given above. He narrates:

“[The] female figure is seated with her left hand bent like a farewell gesture... The representation on the Mochlos ring is unique in terms that it presents with a simple but clear way almost everything about the Minoan religious iconography.”

We note the excellent depiction of shrine architecture and animistic wild nature in the trees, as well as the fine nature of the ship’s depiction. But there are two other aspects worth mentioning here.

Firstly we note the bodily attenuation of the seated female figure, which appears distinctive even beyond the ring’s worn nature. The upper body appears to be wholly separate from the lower body, suggestive of modified experiences of the body that occur during trance or altered states; the head also appears to be floating slightly above the upper body, though we note that this may be due to previously faint traces of the figure’s neck having been worn away. These signs of trance resonate with previous images in which both enacted and visionary epiphanies behold visions or experience trance.

Secondly, there are two floating objects towards the upper right of the image. The first item appears to be a pedastalled offering table, but the second is more ambiguous, being described as a sacred heart motif by Galanakis. However, it bears striking resemblance to the depiction of baetyls (particularly ones made from two boulders) in other images of Minoan glyptic. Considering the line of the shore (and thus ground level) is depicted by the rocks beneath the ship’s stern, we might consider this baetyl to be floating, and thus of visionary content (type IId??). Alternatively, its proximity to the building on the shoreline may underscore its status as a place where baetyl rituals were held.

The status of these objects as epiphany items, however, is challenged by the two lines above the female figure’s head, representative of tied-up hair, which might suggest the gaze of the deity is facing to the left, away from these two items. We thus conclude the building to the right may therefore be a shrine, and the baetyl and offering table are depicted with the intention of confirming this.

8. Makriyalos Sealstone

Ayios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum

Steatite sealstone from Central Courtyard, Makriyalos Villa, LM IB, c. 1450BC

This sealstone from the villa of Makriyalos on the south coast is considered by Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis as representing a finely-rendered ‘condensed’ version of the epiphany cycle: the descending female deity, ritual tree worship and the voyage at sea.

The seal impression, rather than the original artefact, has been drawn in the illustration. We see a boat in abstract space, from which emerges a mast which has become a tree. Next to this is a single-tier shrine building of which Galanakis remarks:

“The structure resembling a ‘shrine’ is indicated by a gross latticework. The lack of any rudimentary architectural structure emphasises the fact that the structure was portable, probably a type of altar.”

The female figure, presumably an enacted epiphany, salutes the shrine and tree whilst bringing her hand to her breast and lowering her head slightly in a stereotypical posture we have seen before.

There is a clear denotation of her hairstyle, which is worn tied up – in two cases now we have suggestive examples of an elder woman enacting an epiphany of the ‘Goddess from the Sea’. It is faintly possible that the same phenomenon occurs on the Ring of Minos too, but the surrounding watery textures make this ambiguous at best.



Fig 42. Makriyalos Sealstone (Archaeological Illustration)

9. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #2

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada, Archaeological provenance not found, LM IA-IB, 1600-1480BC

This seal impression from Ayia Triada conveys several conventions of the type IV ‘Goddess in her boat’ epiphany form. These include the sea-horse or dragon-headed prow of the boat and a female figure riding the waves.

However, this image shows a couple of differences in that the boat lacks any kind of shrine depiction, and a dynamism suffuses the scene: the lines of the water suggest a rough or choppy sea and the posture of the figure is tense, pulling on an oar in a form expressive of fast movement, of the boat and the figure herself. Galanakis narrates:

“The style is quite rough and sketchy or it is the result of the bad impression of the seal. The figure... depicted inside the ship may be hybrid (birdlike) and not necessarily female... [but] it refers to the almost contemporaneous representations of monstrous figures known from the Kato Zakros sealings.”

Given the similarity of this image to the preceding two from Mochlos and Makriyalos, and the Ring of Minos lower section, it is probably safe to assume the figure is female, and the dynamism of the scene may be influenced by the same type of image found on the agate sealstone found associated with the older male skeleton at the temple complex at Anemospilia: here a male rower is seen in a small boat in an image of dynamic tension.

But it is the construal nature of the female figure that interests us most: such hybrid bird-female images, or depictions of birds in the process of transforming into women, are an increasing presence in the epiphany corpus, being visible in the first Ayia Triada seal impression as well as the Amnisos ring.

That Galanakis links this image with the Kato Zakros sealings is interesting: the presence of clearly-delineated and highly varied bird-female hybrids is ubiquitous



Fig 43. *Ayia Triada Seal Impression #2 (Photo & Sketch)*

in seal impressions from this site, most notably from the collection from the hand of a single craftsman known as the Zakro Master. We note that Weingarten remarks on a possible influence on late Ayia Triada sealings from the Zakro Master images.

10. Zakros Seal Impression #1

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace, LM IB, 1500-1450BC

We see here a relatively simple seal impression image, in which two female figures are depicted, possibly in procession. The rightmost figure carries a robe, the image of which Warren considers exemplary of the Minoan robing ritual. Behind her at left, a second figure is slightly raised (suggestive either of epiphany or of being located in the middle distance, there is not enough detail to decide which) and gestures to a double-axe symbol in front of her.

At the time of writing, the author has not been able to find an image of the original sealing, and several different interpretive illustrations exist, some of which show the leftmost figure carrying rather than gesturing to the double-axe. The illustration here has been adapted from Warren, in which the figure in question gestures, and it is considered that this depiction may represent an epiphany of type II*d*, that is, the figure is envisioning the double-axe rather than bearing it. But this conclusion is debatable.

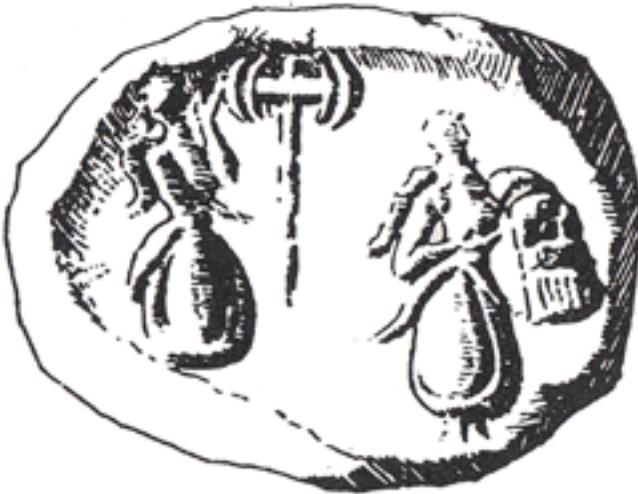


Fig 44. Zakros Seal Impression #1 (Archaeological Illustration)

11. Archanes – Fourni Ring #2

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tholos Tomb A, Fourni, Archanes, LM IA, 1600-1480BC

This image is, like the Ring of Minos, a complex depiction of the complete epiphany, but whereas the Ring of Minos focuses upon the full epiphany cycle, the movement of the goddess across three worlds and her appearance in vision, here in this scene from Archanes, the focus rests upon expressing the full ritual context of the epiphany.

At far left, we see male figure, embracing a sacred rock in a tense posture typical of the baetylic ritual, while in the centre we see a large, richly-dressed female figure who may be an enacted epiphany or a visionary epiphany of the earthbound goddess (type Ib). Meanwhile at right we see an ecstatic male figure engaged in a ‘tree-pulling’ ritual next to a shrine from which, again, trees and plants are growing. Much of the imagery is becoming familiar to us now.

The ritual context is fully explored: the baetyl, enacted epiphany, ‘tree-pulling’ and rural or mountain shrines redolent with wild nature, and there are several depictions of visionary content.

The male figure appears to gaze upwards, seeing perhaps the floating seed pod (type IIc) or bucranium (type II d) directly above him.

The central female figure, however, appears to have several floating items within her view: directly in front of her is a pedestalled offering table (type II d) and below this, two insects (type II b) – a butterfly and one of the few depictions of a dragonfly visible in the corpus. Finally a curious shape hovers at the upper left of the scene, and this may represent a conch shell.

Given that the insects are in a position that corresponds with the visionary content in other baetylic depictions, it is possible that these represent a shared vision between the central female figure and the leftmost male. That his head is tilted upwards and he is not actively gesturing or beckoning might argue against such a conclusion, but the ring area is rather crowded with imagery and so the artist may have had to work around limitations imposed by the space available.

The arms of the central figure are formed in a posture we have seen several times before. It is possible to read this as a gesture of invitation or beckoning, but equally as we have seen it in the context of visionary/enacted ambiguities, the gesture may have had a specific epiphanic meaning.

It is possible to entertain the notion that the female figures featured in the Ring of Minos, and the rings from Isopata, Amnisos and Mochlos, strike this particular pose because they are functioning ritualistically as the enacted epiphany and seek to experience a visionary epiphany, or indeed to signal that they are already experiencing it.

Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis indicate that the woman buried in Tholos Tomb A was “a royal lady [who]... also held some priestly office...” from



*Fig 45. Archanes-Fourni #2 Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tholos Tomb A, Fourni, Archanes, LM IA, 1600-1480BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*





Fig 46. Archanes-Fourni #2 Ring – Iconographic Analysis

the vast array and richness of the contents of her grave, and they list some of the artefacts found as having a sacred character:

“This woman’s burial... is without parallel in Crete. The amount of gold and other jewellery found is almost as much as that found in all the contemporary chamber tombs at Knossos... The iron beads (the only specimens known from this period due to the rarity of the material) could have only served to adorn the most distinguished of people... No other burial has been found to date with a total of five gold signet-rings... [and] the depictions on the rings bear important cult scene[s]... [and] the religious motif of the figure-of-eight shield... in one instance even with a sacral knot.”

Again we note the passive Western bias of the term ‘priestly office’, but it is significant that here we may find the grave of a woman accustomed not merely to royal privilege but to being a human enactor of the epiphany deity herself. That the central figure in this epiphany scene can be imaged as representing her in living deity form is a tantalising link to this prehistoric woman’s humanity and religious perception.

12. Vapheio Ring

National Archaeological Museum, Athens

Tholos Tomb at Vapheio, Lakonia, LH IB, 1500-1450BC

In the Vapheio ring, we see a replication of the full exploration of the rituals of the epiphany as in the Archanes ring above, though with some significant differences, and is one of the few ring seals suggesting an epiphanic experience found outside of Crete, in Lakonia, mainland Greece, and thus obviously associated with a Mycenaean culture horizon.

However, its unique appearance on the mainland – where otherwise epiphany imageries are generally lacking – and its striking similarity to Cretan iconography (which Boulotis among others notes) lends a sense that it may have belonged to a Cretan emigre who for some reason was visiting, lived there or happened to die there.

In the centre then, we have a female figure, presumably an enacted epiphany, judging by the gaze directions of the other celebrants, bearing a posture of beckoning and invitation to the various visionary elements towards the top left of the scene. Her gaze is directed two at least two of these elements. To the left, a somewhat attenuated and twisted female figure hugs a baetyl in a pose we have not seen before, her gaze also directed at the visionary elements. To the right is seen a male celebrant engaged in an ecstatic and dynamic act of ‘tree-pulling’ at a locale which may be a shrine, but which alternatively may simply be a wild location in which a tree is growing out from a large pithos.

The visionary elements in this scene are curious, and ambiguous. The central female is facing towards a floating seed pod (type IIc) or bucranium (type IIId) and above this is an unexplained symbol we have seen before – it is either a comet or other astronomical phenomenon or an ear of barley. The incised line below this symbol could equally indicate a barley stalk or the expected path of the comet.

But it is the final visionary element which is the most striking, and the central figure gestures to it with some emphasis. At first glance, a double-axe is seen (type IIId), albeit somewhat stylised, however on closer inspection, it appears to have two truncated arms emerging from the handle, and there is the suggestion that it is a construal hybrid of a double-axe and human figure.

The surreality of this image is underscored by the strange, twisted nature of the baetylic celebrant, nominally female, whose stylised form and possibly construal depiction is seen nowhere else. The engraved lines at the base of her dress do not seem to conform to any clear structure of Minoan costume – they possibly indicate feathers – and may indicate another case of a female figure in the process of turning into a birdlike form as she gazes up at the epiphanies above.



*Fig 47. Vapheio Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tholos Tomb at Vapheio, Lakonia, LH IB, 1500-1450BC
National Archaeological Museum, Athens*



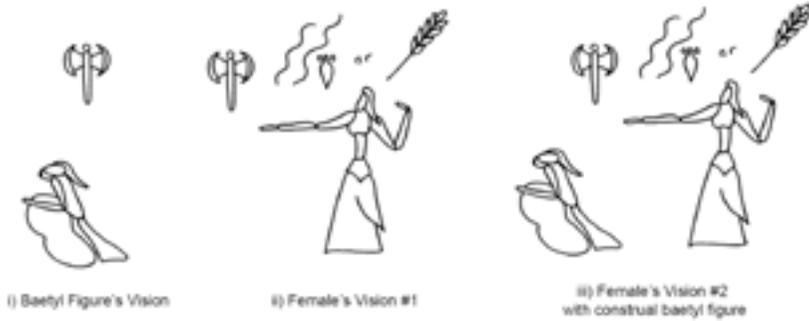


Fig 48. Vapheio Ring – Iconographic Analysis

13. The Ring Of Nestor

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Thisbe, Boeotia (Authenticity in question), LH IB (?), 1500-1450BC (if genuine)

The so-called Ring of Nestor, reported by Arthur Evans as having been uncovered at Thisbe, Boeotia, on the Greek mainland, has long been the focus of intense scrutiny as to its authenticity, for a variety of reasons, principally among them the unusual iconography for both Minoan and Mycenaean contexts and suspicion over its archaeological provenance and Evans' initial reports. Evans considered the artefact a glimpse into the Minoan afterlife but this has largely been discredited.

Certainly, the division of the image into four ritual scenes through the depiction of a large dominating tree is most unusual in Aegean Bronze Age iconography, but the scenes shown are reasonably transparent to Minoan or Mycenaean interpretations. Recently, technical observations of the artefact confirmed a Bronze Age provenance for the ring.



Fig 49. The Ring Of Nestor (Image & Sketch)



Fig 50. *The Ring Of Nestor (Archaeological Illustration)*

Only one of the four scenes concerns us here: in the upper right (note: the illustration is drawn from the impression rather than the original) branches of the tree, two seated female figures are seen, both in stereotypical poses we have already witnessed in other scenes. Above them, two sets of visionary epiphanies are seen, with possibly a construal or transforming narrative sequence. The lowest row appears to depict two butterflies (type IIb) while the upper row shows two dovelike birds (type IIa), the left most of which appears simpler or less well formed than the right, and may depict an early stage of transformation.

14. Epiphany Ring

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Knossos, archaeological provenance not found, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC

This is another ring uncovered by Evans but whose authenticity is assured. We see here an excellent depiction of the ‘sacred conversation’ of the Amnisos ring unhindered by any other details, though with the curious variation of switched gender roles. A female celebrant attends a shrine and experiences a visionary epiphany of a young male deity whilst maintaining a saluting posture.

Though we see the normal gender roles in this scene reversed, it is noteworthy that other visual conventions of the epiphany are conserved here. The young male deity’s descent from the sky is signalled by his downward-pointing feet and dots around his head suggestive of hair waving in the breeze. Behind the



*Fig 51. Epiphany Ring (Archaeological Illustration & Sketch)
Knossos, archaeological provenance not found, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK*



female celebrant, plants emerging from rocks appear, and the shrine building is surmounted by trees, both of which resonate with images of wild nature in other scenes. The pillar or wall in front of the shrine is unusual, and may have identified a specific shrine location rather than a generic place of sacred wild nature.

Marinatos remarks that the clenched fist salute so commonly seen in peak sanctuary figurines and on this image is ‘a special form of greeting addressed by mortals to gods and has Hittite and Egyptian parallels’ though we note that similar epiphanic imageries are absent from Hittite and only occasional in Egyptian iconography. We also recall McGowan’s experiment with posture which included the tense salute.

15. Master Impression

Chania Archaeological Museum

Ring seal impression, House IV, Chania, LM IB, c. 1450BC

The Master Impression is a seal impression found in a midden near House IV on Daskaloyiannis Street, Chania, where the Minoan town underlays the modern one. The ancient name for the town was Kydonia, and the topography seen here closely matches that of Kastelli hill in the town. It depicts a young male figure with a striking resemblance to the figure on previously-reviewed scenes, bearing a large staff and standing atop a group of buildings, or possibly one large, multi-winged building.

Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis have noted the similarity between the depiction of rocks on the shoreline and those of the Ring of Minos, suggesting a visual convention for shorelines that is also hinted at in the Mochlos ring. It is an epiphany of type III rather than a deity’s icon, and the epiphanic nature of this image is confirmed by its striking similarity to other images in the corpus.

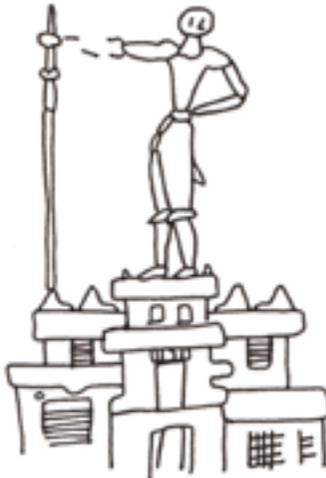
The posture here is similar to that of the celebrant on the Amnisos ring, and identical with the floating young male deity on the Epiphany Ring above, even down to the bearing of the staff. Clearly a specific deity is intended here, one who may also be depicted on the Chieftain Cup, a goblet carved from steatite found at Ayia Triada. Here, an almost-identical figure to the Master Impression, but with long hair and copious jewellery, is seen holding a body-length staff in a pose which Rethemiotakis describes as one of authority. Facing him is a youth with a sword in one hand and a curved object in the other (a scythe or sickle?)

Traditional interpretations of this scene revolved around notions of military drills, but modern interpretations such as those of Koehl or Rethemiotakis suggest links with male age-grading systems or the ‘sacred conversation’. The striking similarity between the older male’s posture of the Chieftain Cup and the male figure on the Master Impression are highly indicative of an epiphany of a deity.

That this deity cannot be exclusively a figure of the age-grading initiatory system is evidence by the preceding Epiphany Ring in which this deity appears to a female celebrant, and Boulotis considers the sceptre he bears to be one of the symbols of Minoan male authority, just as Gimbutas considers the double-axe to be the same for female authority.



*Fig 52. The Master Impression (Image & Sketch)
Ring seal impression, House IV, Chania, LM IB, c. 1450BC
Chania Archaeological Museum*





*Fig 53. Knossos Seal Impression M1-5 (Archaeological Reconstruction & Sketch)
Central Shrine, Knossos in five fragments, LM II – LM IIIA, 1425-1340BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



16. Knossos Seal Impression M1-5

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Central Shrine, Knossos in five fragments, LM II – LM IIIA, 1425-1340BC

Found in five fragments (catalogued with numbers M1-5) in the Central Shrine of the palace at Knossos, this reconstruction of a broken seal impression depicts another 'sacred conversation' (type V) between a female deity and a male celebrant, in almost precisely the same postures (but with gender roles reversed) as the Epiphany Ring.

We see a female figure atop a mountain here who must surely be the epiphany of the deity. The mountain is flanked by two lion figures, an image highly resonant with later Greek images of the goddess Rhea and the numerous depictions of the deity flanked by griffins, two of which are discussed below. She is greeted by a saluting male figure whose body displays the same tense arched-back posture seen in the Amnisos ring and numerous peak sanctuary figurines. The image of the deity on the mountain strongly resonates with the notion that many epiphany rituals took place at peak sanctuary sites.

The visual link here between the female deity of the mountains and Classical images of Rhea is striking, and we recall Warren's remarks concerning the continuity of iconography of that goddess from Minoan Crete into Hellenistic times. Her sceptre links her overtly to the young male god in previous scenes and it is tempting to regard their relationship as mother and son, much like Rhea and the infant Zeus whose myth begins in Crete. But we note that while Zeus is an unambiguously Indo-European word, the myth of the infant Zagreus tells a similar story to that of the birth of Zeus, and the name Zagreus is pre-Greek. Such notions provide tantalising echoes of a lost Minoan mytheme.

Nilsson's similar favouring of the identification of the female deity in this image as a Minoan forebear of Rhea is reported by Moss, who then notes the similarity of this image with depictions of Anatolian Cybele (with whom Rhea was sometimes conflated), and posits an ancient religious connection between the peoples of Crete and those of Anatolia and Phrygia. She also considers the lack of any evidence for lions living on Crete as a further indication that the symbol came from Anatolia or Asia.

Moss also briefly notes the possible origins of Cybele in a Hittite goddess Kubaba, from the early second millennium B.C., and a remarkable figurine of a goddess seated between two lions from Çatal Hüyük which resonates with our present image and further suggests an ancient origin in Anatolia. Given the long history of the presence of baetyls in Crete (Vasiliki, e.g.) and the evidence (from Moss, Warren and elsewhere) that peak sanctuary cults began in the very early Protopalatial period (EM III – MM I) in central Crete, associated with the polity of Knossos, we might speculate that the modification of a native popular epiphany cult towards mountain sites occurred with an influx of Anatolian cultural influences.

It is at this point that we can perhaps return to our initial discussion of the interpretation of such ‘sacred conversation’ scenes as a *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage, presumably between the female and male deity, both enacted and envisioned, and challenge the above-discussed interpretation of the sceptre as a symbol of authority.

It is, of course, perfectly plausible that in this seal impression, the female deity is imparting her authority to the male saluting figure – though note in Minoan iconography, the double-axe is the customary symbol of female authority – however it may also be possible to interpret the passing of the sceptre as symbolic of the act of marriage, or indeed a visual depiction of one episode of the marriage ritual. This mixture of ritual and vision would be perfectly in keeping with epiphany visual conventions.

Marinatos and others have interpreted the *hieros gamos* as a central informing influence on notions of royal authority, that is to say, the members of ruling families took part in the *hieros gamos* both as a way to gain royal and sacred authority and to continuously confirm it. Thus, the sceptre may have had both meanings above, and we must bear in mind that as images that accompanied trade transactions and personal communications, the epiphany of the ‘sacred conversation’ was a particularly emphatic signal disclosing intimacy with the sacred.

17. ‘Sacred Conversation’ Ring, Poros

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tomb at Poros near Heraklion, LM IB, c. 1450BC

This ring, although considerably worn, found in a tomb at Poros near Knossos, contains important iconography and is often considered to be the type artefact for the ‘sacred conversation’ (type V) epiphany scene. The action is complex, and identification of deity and visionary is made difficult here by the positioning of the central male figure atop what is possibly some kind of shrine.

He is depicted in a familiar posture, with arm outstretched in a gesture that Rethemiotakis interprets as a commanding gesture, but which Marinatos considers suggestive of a ritual greeting. The building or object he stands on is heavily worn and may be a shrine, or may signify in miniature form a mountain, and thus we have resonances here with the Master Impression and Knossos M1-5 – we might consider the male figure to be a deity (type Ib??).

This conclusion is blurred however by the presence of a (fragmentary) floating female deity (type Ia) in front of his face, clearly within the purview of his gaze, and we are here led to an alternative conclusion that the male figure is a visionary, or that, like several female figures above, he is enacting an epiphany of a male deity (who we know from the Master Impression and Epiphany Ring to have been depicted in epiphany scenes) whilst himself experiencing a visionary epiphany



*Fig 54. The Poros Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tomb at Poros near Heraklion, LM IB, c. 1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



of the female deity.

The female deity here is involved in narrative action: she descends out from the sky in the upper centre, and reaches the ground to the left of the scene (type Ib). However, notable here is the fact that she does not make contact with the ground, floating above it, attended by two large, ornately-rendered birds who stand with their wings aloft and heads held high. Her arm is partially outstretched to meet the outstretched arm of the male figure, and it is by this mirroring of arm postures that the ‘sacred conversation’ is here evidenced.

The birds are finely engraved enough that we may identify them as a species of crane, and their wings appear to maintain the female deity’s floating above the ground, striking as they do ‘gardant’ or ‘rampant’ postures (to borrow terms from heraldry). This is an unusual depiction, but demonstrates iconographic continuity with other scenes: in Knossos M1-5 we see a mountain deity flanked by lions gardant, and in the first Archanes-Fourni ring, we see a female deity accompanied by a griffin rampant.

An engraved sealstone from Knossos depicting a female deity crowned with bull-horns and a double-axe, flanked by griffins in a similar ‘gardant’ or ‘rampant’ posture (although reversed) to the birds in the Poros ring, and the lions in Knossos M1-5, reinforces the notion that this is a deity, sometimes called ‘The



Fig 55 – The Poros Ring – Iconographic Analysis



Fig 56. Engraved Sealstone (Image & Sketch)
Knossos, provenance unknown (1600 – 1450 B. C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Mistress of Animals’. Warren links such images with Rhea, others with Artemis or Hera, or indeed Cybele.

Moss notes in the *‘Homeric Hymn to the Mother of the Gods’* (a title suggestive of both Rhea and Cybele), we read that the:

*“...racket of rattles and drums and the thunder of woodwinds,
equally please [her as]...the howling of wolves and cruel-eyed pumas,
also the echoing mountains as well as the forested valleys.”*

Moss also notes the pose of these griffins mirrors those of the lions on the Lion Gate at Mycenae, demonstrating a Late Bronze Age continuity of this image which is further picked up in Archaic and Classic Greek periods. And in the *‘Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite’*, we read that the goddess:

*“...has completely subdued every kind of man born but to perish,
she is the mistress of airborne birds and of every creature...”*

We should also note the various preceding construal images of bird-female hybrids, or indeed birds in the process of transforming into female deities, in the corpus of epiphany scenes, as well as the appearance in epiphany of cranes and dovelike birds to herald the imminent arrival of the deity, as directly relevant in an understanding of scenes in which the deity is accompanied by birds or winged griffins.

To return to the Poros ring, there is one further figure we have not considered: at right, in front of a shrine building, and possibly standing upon rather fragmentary rocks, we see an ecstatic male celebrant engaged in ‘tree-pulling’. His back is arched and his head appears tilted upwards, with his gaze falling on two ambiguous floating objects whose appearances have been heavily worn. The item nearest his face is now unidentifiable, but the second, higher object is familiar: it is the ear of barley corn (type IIc), or cometary apparition (type IIId) visible in other scenes. It is possibly that he is the visionary of the whole scene, or at least witnesses with the central male figure the floating skyborne epiphany in the upper centre of the scene, but this is unlikely.

18. Knossos Ring #1

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Knossos, archaeological provenance not found, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC

The essence of the scene on this ring from Knossos appears to be a baetylic ritual with a visionary and an enacted epiphany present in the ritual space, and one or two epiphanic visions in the centre, but there are ambiguities and unusual features here. On the right we see a female figure in a familiar baetylic posture: she leans upon the stone without beckoning and her head and upper body are tilted towards the left of the scene – there is the suggestion (although the ring is somewhat worn) that her head is also tilted upwards to the epiphanic content.

At left we see a female figure in a posture which is familiar to us as the gesturing of an enacted epiphany, that is to say a human female surrogate for the deity. At first glance, we might suggest that she is experiencing the vision of the male figure (type Ia) floating in the centre, and the woman on the baetyl sees the floating objects directly above her, which are likely to be seed pods, eyes or conch shells (type IIc or IIId).

But there are differences to what we have been accustomed to seeing up until now: although the female at left strikes the ‘enacted epiphany’ pose, she is turned away from the epiphany of the male deity, indeed, her feet suggest a dance which is moving away from the figure.

In the sketch of this ring in Marinatos, a line of dots emerging from the right of her head amplifies the sense that she is facing to the left. We might suggest that her pose suggests a frozen moment in a left-to-right swaying dance, but to depict her in the moment of turning away from the epiphany seems to counteract the expression of sacred intimacy often disclosed by these scenes.

Marinatos considers the depiction of the two females to be the same person in a narrative of two stages of action. This might be possible, but generally in epiphany scenes it is the deity who is depicted in narrative rather than the visionary (though if she represents an enacted epiphany, the narrative action would in a sense



Fig 57. Knossos Ring #1 (Archaeological Illustration & Sketch)
Knossos, archaeological provenance not found, LM IB – LM II, 1450-1400BC
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK



conform to this convention). We note that the baetylic figure appears to be clothed only in a simple undergarment: perhaps the visionary enacted the epiphany before divesting and continuing to experience a trance-induced vision. Nonetheless, her initial pose turned away from the central visionary content of the ring is somewhat

inexplicable.

The male mirrors this turning away too: his arched back and expressive posture are directed away from her, towards the female on the baetyl. His posture is also strange: he appears armed, with a bow and perhaps an arrow or a dagger, and directs himself with some energy to the right: the line of dots depicting waving hair and the tense posture suggest rapid movement.

If we follow the lines of gaze depicted on this ring, we must conclude that the enacted epiphany figure is simply that here, an enacted epiphany experiencing no vision, and the baetylic female at right is experiencing both the vision of the conch shells and the floating male figure, whether she is the same person as the clothed female or not.

But who is this male figure? We have not seen him before. Marinatos considers him to be an apparition of the storm god, a postulation she colours largely with illustrative examples from the Near East over several time periods and which may not necessarily be valid for a Minoan cult. His bearing of weapons is unusual outside images of male initiation cults – indeed, depictions of males holding bows are rare in Minoan iconography – and his presence here among women may denote a ‘sacred conversation’ or *hieros gamos* along the lines of the images above. But his specific identity, in the absence of similar images of such a bow-bearing epiphany figure, must remain unknown.

19. Kalyvia Ring #1

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tomb 11, Kalyvia Cemetery, Phaistos, LM IA – LM IB, 1500-1450BC

This ring from Kalyvia is greatly worn, and parts of the image are missing, but what is seen appear to depict a fairly straightforward baetylic ritual with bird vision (type IIa). At left we see a possibly naked female ecstatic engaged in ‘tree-pulling’, with elongated body forms (especially her arms which seem remarkably long) and floating head phenomenon suggestive of trance or altered-states. Her gaze is focussed intently upon the branches of the tree.

Meanwhile, a male figure, with an alert and dynamic body posture leans against, or more appropriately pushes backwards from, a baetyl whilst a bird flies in from the right. The male figure’s head is almost completely worn away – there is the slightest suggestion of a head on the original artefact, possibly floating above the body in a depiction of trance, but this is uncertain – and we must assume, following other epiphany scenes that his gaze is directed towards the bird, which is also heavily worn. The bird may be, dependent on how we read the surviving details, be identified either as a type of crane, or possibly a partridge.

The most interesting feature on this ring is the object depicted at far right, which at first glance appears to be a pithos but which Rethemiotakis considers to



*Fig 58. Kalyvia Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tomb 11, Kalyvia Cemetery, Phaistos, LM IA – LM IB, 1500-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



be a pillar. The presence of the pillar underscores the imminent arrival of the deity, as female figures are often depicted in glyptic as seated upon pillars, or indeed as replacements for the image of the deity altogether – we might thus characterise the pillar as a feature in the shrine, or indeed as an aspect (type IId) of the baetylic visionary’s epiphany.

A further unique feature can be seen in the dotted line at the top right of the scene: Rethemiotakis considers this to represent or define the sky. It is tempting to speculate that these represent stars, and thus, the ritual to have taken place at night.

20. Zakros Seal Impression #2

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace, LM IB, 1500-1450BC

This is a badly damaged seal impression from Zakros, the shape of the impression indicating that the original artefact was likely to have been a lentoid, or circular seal. Much of the detail is missing from this scene, yet its narrative is fairly clear.

In front of a stepped shrine, a floating female deity (type Ia) appears before a central male figure who may be saluting or alternatively with his arm outstretched or gesturing upwards. Behind him is another unclear structure which may be a shrine: the ‘horns of consecration’ by his leg suggests a sacred function for the structure, but no other meaningful details can be seen. A possible suggestion of downward-pointing feet is visible in one of the legs but this may be conjecture.

From the surviving visible content here, this image may be considered as unique, since the action appears to take place wholly within an urban or sacred precinct context. The lack of any imagery of wild nature may be due to damage, and the depiction of shrine buildings on both sides of the scene resonates with the Ring of Minos, but no other artefact in the corpus appears to depict a precinct in this way.



Fig 59. Zakros Seal Impressions #2 & #3 (Sketches)



*Fig 59. Zakros Seal Impressions #2 & #3 (Images)
Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace, LM IB, 1500-1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



21. Zakros Seal Impression #3

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace, LM IB, 1500-1450BC

Another poorly-preserved seal impression from Zakros, but again the action is clear, in this case a baetylic ritual. Here the rock upon which the female figure leans is clearly visible along with her beckoning arm outstretched towards the epiphany, which takes the form of a very large butterfly (type IIb).

Moss notes in regard to this artefact that Dietrich considered the double-axe to be a very ancient symbol equivalent to the butterfly (an identification also picked up by Gimbutas), and we must remark here that of the surviving depictions of epiphanic butterflies in the corpus, this one bears the closest resemblance to the double-axe.

What is notable here is the very large size of the butterfly, the magnitude of whose body is vast and almost human-sized, the intensity of the vision being clearly depicted here.

However, the glyptic traditions of eastern Crete in the Bronze Age have long evidenced eccentricities and exaggerations, none more so than in the work of the Zakro Master, and while we have become accustomed to the aesthetics of central Cretan epiphany scenes (Knossos, Amnisos and environs as well as Phaistos and Ayia Triada), this damaged seal impression serves as a possible reminder that on Minoan Crete, other more flamboyant traditions of the epiphany and of glyptic in general may have been current, even if they have not been so well preserved.

22. Knossos Ring #2

Pergamon Museum, Berlin

*Emerged in non-archaeological context in Kilia, Thrace (now Kilyos, Turkey)
(Ultimate origin assumed to be Knossos or Crete)*

Another 'sacred conversation' image which at first glance mirrors in relatively close detail the depiction on the Epiphany Ring above, however an ambiguity exists which causes a second interpretation more in line with the Poros ring to arise. Doubts may be cast on this ring's authenticity on account of its non-archaeological emergence in Thrace.

At the left a female figure in a flounced dress stands, or perhaps is seated next to an unclear object which may be a boundary marker or the edge of a shrine. In the centre, a male figure in the typical 'sacred conversation' posture gestures strongly to the female while behind him a shrine building is visible, inside of which is a pedestalled offering table.

The tree growing out of the shrine is somewhat chaotically rendered, as if blowing in the wind, lending a sense of great energy in the environment. This is



*Fig 61. Knossos Ring #2 (Archaeological Illustration & Sketch)
Emerged in non-archaeological context in Kilia, Thrace (from Knossos??)
Pergamon Museum, Berlin*



emphasised by a unique feature in the epiphany corpus, visible in the top left of the image: a blazing star or an image of the Sun.

The posture of the male figure strongly recalls the Epiphany Ring, in which a male figure floats before a very similar shrine – including offering table – and we would thus consider the male an epiphany (type Ib) of the male deity visible in other rings bearing a sceptre. The female figure thus becomes the visionary.

However, taking into consideration the imagery on Poros ring, in which a (probable) male visionary greets a (probable) female deity with this gesture, and the similar male visionary posture on the Amnisos ring, might lead us to postulate an interpretation in which the roles are reversed: the gesturing male figure is the visionary and the female figure is the epiphany (type Ib) now having come to earth.

Marinatos further considers the male figure to represent a god whose image informs notions of Minoan kingship, and thus it is possible that the male figure here is another enacted epiphany (whether royal or not) of a male deity who experiences a vision of a female deity. Alternatively the action here, and in the Poros ring may denote a ‘sacred conversation’ between two deities (either visionary or enacted, or both) in a depiction of the *hieros gamos*.

23. Messenia Ring

National Museum of Archaeology, Athens

Tholos Tomb, Pylos, Messenia

MH II – LH I or LHIII A, 1600-1500 BC or 1350BC

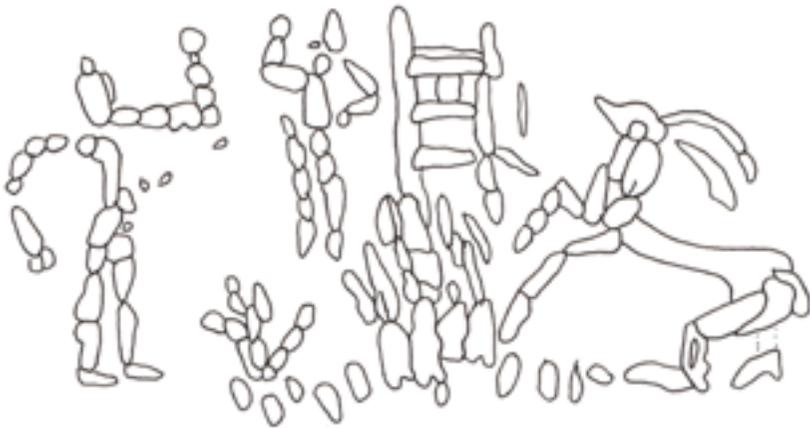
This is another ring which has emerged from a mainland Greek context, and evidences Cretan influence upon the Mycenaean city of Pylos. Like the Vapheio image, it suggests a Cretan lived and died in the city, given the lack of epiphany images otherwise in mainland Greek culture. The earlier dates given for this ring are, in the author’s view, not likely. The illustration was drawn from an impression rather than the original artefact, and the features are perhaps clearer in the original.

We see a fairly straightforward epiphany scene: a male figure strongly gestures to a floating male figure (type Ia) whose posture mirrors the celebrant and who hovers in front of a shrine building situated on rocks. The presence of the ibex is unique here, and may simply underscore the sense of a wild nature locale – ibexes are generally seen only in the high mountains on Crete and mainland Greece and so a mountain locale may be implied here.

The Sanctuary Rhyton from Zakros depicting ibexes resting upon shrine buildings resonates with the depiction here. At first glance, images of plants are depicted underneath the floating male figure, however inspecting an image of the original artefact closely suggests we may have a construal insect epiphany of type IIb, possibly a dragonfly.



Fig 62. Messenia Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tholos Tomb, Pylos, Messenia MH II – LH I or LHIII A, 1600-1350BC
National Museum of Archaeology, Athens



The Meaning of the Epiphany for Modern Eyes

In the foregoing essay and review, we have seen something of the complex ambiguities involved in exploring the Minoan Epiphany, and we have had to use various models, from religious iconographical viewpoints of the ‘epiphany cycle’ and ritual depictions, to more embodied and experiential theories such as Morris & Peatfield’s hypothesis that altered states of consciousness are here being depicted. Insights into Minoan religious perceptions have been gained, most notably with the ‘sacred conversation’ images, and possible links with later Greek deities have been posited.

While all this is interesting from a (pre-)historical perspective, we must ask ourselves whether there are any lessons the modern world can learn from these images, beyond some understanding of a society in which the earliest expressions of a uniquely Western civilisation can be found. The author believes there are.

For much of the twentieth century, and all of the twenty-first so far, there has been a lot of talk in a variety of fields ranging from psychology and contemporary archetypal discourse to cultural studies, art and popular new religious movements, of the re-emergence into modern-day Western societies of archaic female images, often influenced by pre-Christian motifs and mythemes, as well as native pagan traditions in which goddesses as well as gods are honoured. This has been termed the ‘Return of the Divine Feminine’ or the ‘Archaic Revival’, both terms having been referenced in academic as well as popular literature.

It has been interesting, therefore, in view of this, to return to a culture – perhaps the last major Western culture where this was so – in which the Divine Feminine was considered not merely as a secondary consort of some primary male deity, but as a deity worthy of reverence and sacred experience in her own right, and it has been further enlightening to allow the artefacts of this culture, as much as we can from this far remove, to speak for themselves in an archaic voice as free as possible from modern expectations.

Intriguingly, we have found that in order to let this archaic voice speak, we have had to meditate upon notions of religious experience which deeply challenge our Western models. The quotes from Morris & Peatfield are worth repeating, as they have been deeply influential on our viewpoints:

“The established view... as adopting ‘worship’ gestures or ‘attitudes of respect’, unconsciously accepts a Western model of rather passive ritual behaviour, and does not directly address the range and distinctiveness of the [Minoan] gestures...”

“Ritual actions...include...pulling at a tree... hugging or embracing a boulder or stone... dancing, in which the arms are shown in different postures and the curve of the body is suggestive of movement or swaying. Through these actions, the presence of the deity is envisioned or felt by the participants... in other words, the body is the conduit to experiencing the divine.”

This is powerful stuff. In the organised religions and spiritual expectations of the West, a primary emphasis is placed upon faith, and of awaiting whatever God wills. This has been replicated in many new religious movements also. The Minoan view, by contrast, appears to place primacy (as far as the epiphanic context goes, at any rate) upon sacred experience, and upon, as Warren remarks, “an active, enquiring response” to that experience.

There is a physicality to the Minoan Epiphany which bears a closer resemblance perhaps to Haitian Voudoun or Pentecostal Christian movements than it does the mainstream of Western religious practice: the body is the conduit to the divine, and ecstatic dances, swaying movements, tense postures and trance states are all depicted as important aspects of the experience.

Rituals seem to have been valued for their efficacy in beckoning and invoking the deity’s presence into the earthbound domain – we might imagine that the Minoan deity was not summoned, but in the perceptions of the celebrants, came gladly to the ritual – and even to engage in ‘sacred conversations’, the like of which are hardly seen in Western depictions outside the iconography of saints and other images of the ‘elected few’ or ‘spiritual elite’ whose passive faithfulness have been rewarded with a blessed apparition.

The author has had several conversations with practitioners of new religious movements (including but not limited to those adhering to ‘New Age’ spiritual philosophies) concerning the Minoan Epiphany, and it is remarkable that



Fig 63. The Isopata Ring: The Body as Conduit to Experiencing the Divine

such passive expectations are to a certain extent maintained here. One participant voiced the opinion that the Minoans may have been ‘channelling divine energies’ in these scenes – even here, this modern interpretation of a historical image reveals a passive bias, for it suggests that ‘divine energies’ (whatever that may mean, and I am not remotely suggesting that this is a term useful for any pre-modern context, let alone a Bronze Age Minoan one) are external to the epiphanic participants and need to be imported into the body in order for religious experience to occur.

By contrast, an active, enquiring religious viewpoint which supports the notion of the human body being a direct conduit to the divine might support an expectation that the body does not merely ‘channel’ but actively *generates* ‘divine energies’. That cult-worship aspects of Minoan religion appear to have been relatively aniconic and human ritual participants are often seen as ‘enacted epiphanies’ (and such enacted states do not appear to have been clearly distinguished from ‘the real deity’) lends support to this view of the body’s generative power, as does the heavy focus on the efficacy of movements and posture in ritual.

McGowan also hints at another fascinating aspect, in discussing from an embodied archaeological perspective the archaic notion that objects as well as humans have agency: the very artefacts upon which the epiphany was depicted may themselves have been considered as ‘generators’ and/or ‘guarantors’ of sacred experience. It is not inconceivable that the rings and sealstones were brought to sacred locales and spaces in order to ‘amplify’ the rituals, thus making an appearance of the deity more likely.

Many of the epiphany images also disclose profound intimacy with the deity, another notion anathema to our ideas of a distant presiding God: indeed in many of our religious traditions, an open display of such intimacy as we see here is unseemly in the extreme. That this intimacy was not merely the prerogative of royals and people of high status is suggested by the appearance of epiphany images on materials of less expense than gold (such as steatite or serpentine) suggesting at least that some of the Minoan merchant classes engaged in epiphany experiences.

The ubiquitous presence on peak sanctuary sites of rough-hewn figurines with postures that match those on epiphany scenes, and the presence of baetyls in pre-palatial Minoan villages such as Vasiliki, point to a popular, possibly animistic and possibly ancient, cult rather than a palace ritual.

We also have noted that the Minoan religious experience had different implications for identity than Western ones: epiphany images were used to guarantee trade transactions and sign personal communications. Such images thus broadcast the owner’s identity across the wider world, much in the manner of a signature or corporate brand, and demonstrated the owner’s religious experience rather than conveying identity through faith or membership in an organised body of worship. We must also consider the aforementioned agency of the seal impressions in sanctifying such social interactions.

Our Western passivity is challenged yet again by the Minoan iconography

when we consider the postures Westerners adopt in order to engage in acts of worship. The primacy of faith over experience, and of the lack of intimacy with a distant, skybound deity before whom one should be humble, are reflected in bodily attitudes – kneeling, standing with head bowed, prostrate upon the ground – whereas the Minoan celebrant gazed intently upwards with an alert, tense posture, looking her deity directly in the eye: I have remarked on a number of occasions in conversations with academics that the Minoan deity appears to have come in order *to be seen*. Such notions of visibility, presence and presentation are pervasive in Minoan images of the epiphany.

It is not outside the bounds of possibility that in some cases, a Minoan celebrant may even have considered that a deity (albeit a temporary, enacted one in the person of the celebrant themselves) was engaging with another deity (an epiphanic one descending from on high) during the experience. Again, intimacy, rather than humility, appears to be intended and envisioned here.

In the wider field of prehistoric artforms, particularly rock art and hieratic images from various Eurasian Neolithic periods, the author is finding that iconography from a variety of societies, from the rock art of San peoples all over Southern Africa, to images of deities from pre-Incan Andean societies, and similar ‘epiphanies’ depicted on Mayan lintels, is greatly enriched by an ‘embodied’ perspective. Passive interpretations of such artforms along the lines of ‘gestures of worship’ are commonly seen, and these ‘modern voices’ may not be an appropriate method by which to understand how our ancestors experienced and expressed the sacred.

Such are the many and varied challenges posed to us by the Minoan Epiphany, and at the very least, they demand that we adopt the same active and enquiring response to sacred experience, and insist that visions, intimacy with a deity and ‘divine energies’ are not the prerogative of a blessed few, but are a natural ability and consequence of being human and possessing a body. In our modern world of such rapid archetypal changes, this archaic viewpoint constitutes a revelatory, even revolutionary, method of perception.



Appendices to the 2013 Essay

Appendix A: Epiphany at the baetyl at Gournia

The Minoan site of Gournia is a small town with a villa and elegant plaza at the centre, surrounded by well-preserved houses and workshops. Along a side street leading from the western side of the plaza, there is a small plateia or courtyard, the side walls of which border on the south-western corner of the villa, in which a baetyl was uncovered during archaeological excavations. This baetyl has been reconstructed in its original position, and it is possible therefore to gain further insights into Minoan baetylic rituals through this site.

The rock is perhaps no more than three feet high, and is situated directly in the centre of the plateia, set into the pavement. Nearby to this plateia, some four metres to the east, a block in the south wall of the villa was inscribed with a double-axe sign. The relative locations of these two objects can be mapped and are resonant with baetylic depictions of the epiphany. A reconstruction of this ritual was performed by the author on the site of Gournia and it was noted that during the second, beckoning phase of the ritual, the gaze was turned to face directly towards the inscribed stone, although the inscription itself was not visible from the rock site.

We might recall both Gimbutas's and Dietrich's views of the equivalence of butterflies and double-axes, or that the latter represents a stylised image of the former. Thus the location of a double-axe inscription near a baetyl might lead us, in light of the presence of butterflies in epiphany scenes suggestive of the imminent



Fig 64. Reconstruction of baetylic ritual performed by the author at Gournia (Baetyl located on a small plateia southwest of the villa and west of the main plaza)



Fig 65. Double-axe symbol at on south wall of villa at Gournia, close to the baetyl

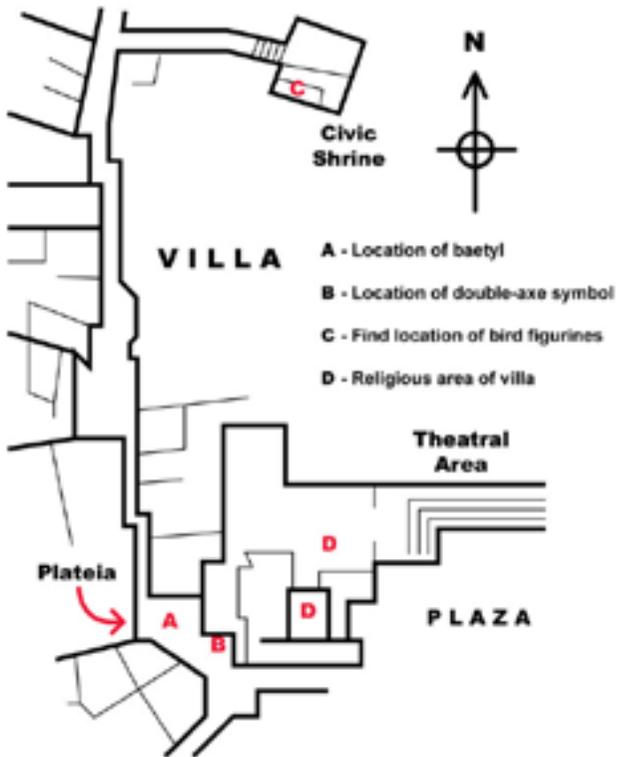


Fig 66. Map locations of relevant sites at Gournia

arrival of the deity, to consider the plateia as a potential site for epiphany rituals. Such circumstantial evidence is strengthened by the finding in a civic shrine directly to the north of the villa, some twenty-five metres from the plateia, of two bird figurines which Davaras cites as symbolising the epiphany.

Whilst the site is decidedly urban, and lacking any evidence of the presence of wild nature, surrounded as it is by villa and houses in the heart of the town, its location is nonetheless interesting. For just as the baetyl location at Vasiliki is placed at the border-point between the village and wild nature, so the plateia at Gournia marks the boundary between the villa's conceptual space and the wider town. We might thus posit the plateia as a liminal site.

Also noteworthy is Davaras's remarks that the villa rooms nearest in accessibility from the plateia and the street linking it to the plaza appear to have been used for religious functions, including a stone block on the floor of one room for bull sacrifices. This archaeological site, then begins to disclose some of the contextual aspects of the epiphany practice: from a sacrifice room, it was possible to walk to the plateia, and the onwards to the civic shrine in quick succession, though whether a ritual narrative should be read into this placement of sites is debatable.

Appendix B: A Possible Fresco of the Epiphany at Ayia Triada

As a rule, depictions of *visionary* epiphanies in Minoan iconography are confined to glyptic and almost no unambiguous images containing epiphany conventions are found in other artforms, including frescoes, despite the ubiquity of that artform across Bronze Age Cretan palaces and houses

Depictions of possible enacted epiphanies are common, particularly of enthroned and dancing women (see Figure 1 above), however baetyl rituals, floating deities, images of trance and epiphanic animals seem largely absent. However, a recent reconstruction by Militello of a fragmentary fresco from the *hieron* (Room 14) at Ayia Triada may indicate at least one example of a visionary epiphany in the fresco medium.



Fig 67. Reconstruction of the fresco in Room 14 by Cameron



Fig 68. An imaginative 'reconstruction' of the Ayia Triada fresco, Bruce Rimell (2011)
40cm x 15cm - Acrylics, Inks & Markers on Canvas

Moss comments on this reconstruction:

"The fresco was heavily damaged by fire... Of the left-hand panel all that remains is the lower part of the figure from halfway down her thighs and some part of the landscape... The figure in the left-hand panel of the fresco, in Cameron's reconstruction, is kneeling in a flower-filled landscape... She may be paying homage to the woman/goddess in the centre, but a kneeling position is not common in Minoan depictions of veneration... she may be tending flowers in a garden..."

Rehak remarks that the female figure in the centre is a goddess, which we would interpret in our present context as either a visionary or enacted epiphany. Moss continues:

"It should be re-emphasised that very little remains of the fresco and any attempt to reconstruct it is subject to debate. An alternative reconstruction shows the kneeling figure to be placed before twin baetyls, her upper body twisted to her right, gaze upwards as if witnessing the arrival/epiphany of a deity."

A tentative reconstruction of a fresco depicting a baetylic epiphany can thus be suggested, with the central figure functioning as a type Ib epiphany, that of the deity setting her feet upon the earth. But we note, as we did with the Knossos Ring #1, the turning away of the epiphanic deity from the visionary is unusual: it may denote a frozen moment in a swaying dance, or indicate that something else is occurring altogether.

In 2011, the author made an imaginative 'reconstruction' of the left and central panels of the fresco, interpreting the scene as a baetylic epiphany ritual, emphasising the epiphanic elements of the fresco by inserting a floating deity and exaggerating the images of wild nature. This depiction is visible in figure 68 and should not be considered an archaeologically-accurate portrayal of the fresco, but does give a rather elegant depiction of two or three epiphany conventions in vibrant colour.

Appendix C: Speculations on iconotropical renderings of the Minoan Epiphany

Iconotropy is defined as the misreading of iconic or religious images from a previous culture, either accidentally or with wilful malicious intent to discredit the former religious traditions, or to bring them into accord with the current ones. It is an important concept in studies of religious history, particularly in historical contexts and cultural horizons where recent, and often turbulent, religious changes have occurred.

One such culture area is the Aegean of the Archaic and early Classic eras, being as they were witness to the changeover from a Minoanised, female-centred religious culture to an Indo-European male-centred ideology.

Greek myth is replete with examples of such changes: we might regard the many rapes of goddesses and nymphs by male deities and kings as partially-acknowledged remembrances of incoming Greeks attempting to subdue and reorganise the ritual landscape of the Aegean Middle Bronze Age. Myths emerging from theatrical productions such as the *Oresteia* also narrate complex tensions in gender relations arising from such cultural changes.

It is reasonable to suppose that there may be surviving images from Greek myths that recall the Minoan Epiphany, and we would expect, given the relative absence of epiphany images from Mainland Greece in the Bronze Age, that such images would most likely arise in myths associated with Crete. Indeed we find three possible images: these are surveyed below.

Such a survey might constitute an interesting test of historical memory, since overt recollections of the epiphany (beyond the passage in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, quoted above) seem to be wholly lacking in Classical Greek narrative, but we must remark that the three images below are speculative and somewhat subjective rather than substantive.

Talos

Talos was a giant man forged out of bronze by Hephaestus as a gift to Minos, about whom Hesychius of Alexandria informs us that *talos* was the Cretan dialect for *helios*, 'Sun', and that Zeus was worshipped in Crete as the winged Zeus Tallaios. It is his most famous attribute, that he was charged with the protection of the island of Crete from pirates and invaders, a task he undertook by throwing rocks at passing ships, which concern us here.

We can easily imagine a now-lost image of a baetylic epiphany ritual, in which a young male visionary clasping a rock experiences a vision of the final scene in the epiphany cycle, the goddess in her ship. This may have been iconotropically reinterpreted as casting rocks from the coast towards distant ships in the sea, the male visionary's beckoning posture bearing some similarity to later Greek depictions of athletes and warrior throwing projectiles.

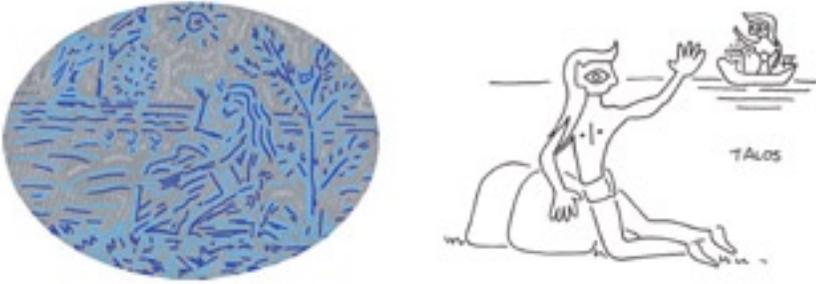


Fig 69. Conjectural Schematic of Talos Iconotropy



Fig 70. Conjectural Schematic of Britomartis Iconotropy

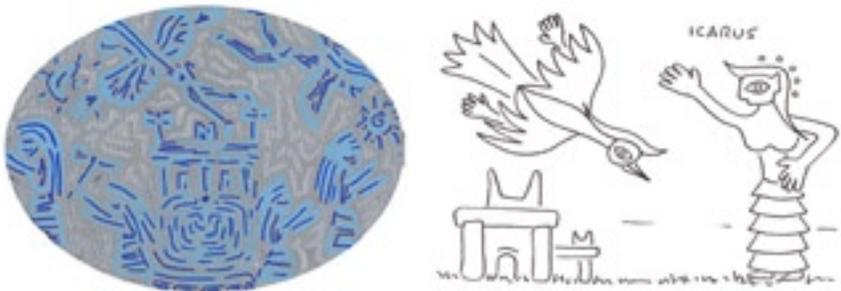


Fig 71. Conjectural Schematic of Icarus and Daedalus Iconotropy

Britomartis

Britomartis was a native Cretan deity, with a pre-Greek name, who was associated with mountains and hunting, and often conflated with Olympian Artemis, another deity of wild nature. Greek myths tell of her being chased across Crete by King Minos and her leaping into the nets of sailors to escape his advances, thereafter

being known as Diktyнна, a name often reported as meaning ‘of the nets’, but in actuality another pre-Greek name.

We have here some striking resonances with our Minoan theme: her association with mountains and wild nature recall the animistic peak sanctuary sites upon the which epiphany was likely to have been held, and the name Diktyнна bears close resemblance to Dikte, a sacred mountain on Crete which is variously identified as a mountain in central Crete near Psychro (site of a sacred cave) or near Palaikastro in the east: several inscribed altars bearing the sequence *a-di-ki-te* in Linear A from Bronze Age Palaikastro seem to support the latter conclusion.

In any case, we have here a deity clearly closely associated with the contexts we are discussing, and we can imagine that Minos’s sexual chase across Crete may have been an intentional discrediting of the epiphany tradition, based upon a misreading of a hypothetical image of a young man in dynamic pose experiencing an epiphany of a deity somewhat similar to the figure depicted in the Archanes – Fourni #1 ring image.

Icarus and Daedalus

The figure of Daedalus stands tall in the Classical traditions related to Crete, and many of his exploits contains tantalising yet garbled hints of memories of Bronze Age religious practices. One of the most famous narratives, perhaps, is the tale of Icarus and Daedalus, in which the two men attach wings to their bodies and attempt to escape their labyrinthine prison by flying across the sea.

This is a remarkable image, and resonant with epiphanic depictions of visionaries beholding visionary birds, or indeed birds in the process of transforming into human forms. Such an image may have informed the Icarus and Daedalus myth.

Appendix D: Priestesses, Enacted Epiphanies and the Eternal Return

The attentive reader may have noted the lack of the use of the word ‘priestess’ in discussions of female figures in the epiphany, an absence which may strike some as unusual in a discussion of ancient religion. However, the author feels that for several reasons this word is problematic in a Minoan epiphanic context.

We might first consider the inherent gender bias enfolded into the word itself – *priest-ess* – as a default male substantive with a feminine modifier, not entirely appropriate for discourse in a ritual context where the sacred feminine is primarily expressed on its own terms. The word also carries connotations of ‘worship’ and ‘attitudes of respect’ which we have previously clarified are insufficient for a full understanding of the visionary and altered consciousness state aspects of the epiphany.

It must also be said that images of the Minoan priesthood are seen, in glyptic

and frescoes, but most notably on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus with both female and male priests depicted. Where there is not ambiguity between enacted epiphany and priest-like functionary (as for example when a clearly ritualistic and non-visionary rite is being performed such as those which honour the dead) the costumes worn are distinctive and very different from the garments seen in epiphany scenes.

Male priests are seen with a kaross or cape-like gown which covers the body from the shoulders downwards, while female priests are seen bare-breasted with a distinctive skirt consisting of a single layer. Such costumes contrast sharply with the clothing depicted in epiphany scenes and Knossian frescoes depicting dances, where men wear loincloths similar to those found on peak sanctuary figurines and women wear multiple-layered flounced skirts with the shoulders covered, or wear layered undergarments, or are naked.

We might also posit that notions of priesthood are perhaps anathema in the aforementioned animistic context of peak sanctuary ritual. The phrase ‘enacted epiphany’ has thus been used throughout, and while somewhat awkward, it does open up an archaic viewpoint in which a human can become a deity through ritual action. This is strikingly similar to a concept promulgated by Mircea Eliade in the 1950s – the Eternal Return.

The relevance of this concept to the Minoan Epiphany can quickly be seen through an exploration of the basic idea. Eliade elucidates the notion that, among archaic peoples, ritual seeks not to enact in historical time but to *re-enact* in mythical time:

“...rituals and significant... gestures... acquire the meaning attributed to them, and materialise that meaning, only because they deliberately repeat such and such acts posited ab origine by gods, heroes or ancestors.”

Eliade considers historical time to be largely irrelevant to pre-modern people: great mythical events did not merely occur ‘at the beginning’ but in *illo tempore*, a primordial time which exists behind and enfolded within every moment of historical time.

We must note, in passing, that the English word ‘primordial’ suggests to the modern reader a historicity that Eliade does not intend. For the second time in this brief appendix we find a paucity of linguistic concepts in our language to adequately discuss the theme at hand.

Just as historical time – local time, one might say – was denigrated in favour of a mythical all-time, so Eliade explains that local space was also irrelevant to pre-modern people when compared to what may be termed ‘ritual space’, or *all-space*, where all landscape and sacred features have primordial archetypes. He cites as an example the design for a temple recorded in an inscription from the city of Lagash in Sumer:

“In a dream the king [Gudea, who built the temple] sees the goddess Nidaba, who shows him a tablet on which the beneficent stars are named, and a god who reveals the plan of the temple to him...”

and that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers both had, in the mythology of Lagash and wider Sumeria, celestial antecedents in the stars of Anunit and the Swallow.

Thus, when we enter ritual space, we are entering a primordial spacetime in which mythical events occur, and mythical personages are present, and not merely as observers. The experience of the ritual participants transforms so as to lend them the perception that they have literally become the very beings (deities, heroes, tricksters or anything else) they are re-enacting, and all of their actions become sacred and exemplary.

Such a view can be applied to our present theme: it constitutes a rather different approach from which to view the epiphany iconography, yet it resonates remarkably well with some of the foregoing, particularly the notions of enacted and visionary epiphanies. In this regard, there are two types of re-enactment: a historical one, which perhaps takes a priestly function, and one which occurs *in illo tempore*.

In this latter type, the human enacted epiphany is radically transformed, first experiencing a vision of the descending epiphany, and then, in a profoundly altered-state of consciousness, dressed in the costume of the deity, dancing and acting as the deity, and performing the exemplary ritual actions of the deity, she becomes the deity, experiencing herself wholly as the sacred and primordial antecedent to the entire epiphany ritual and iconography.

We see here blurred the sacred categories between human and deity, enacted and visionary epiphany and indeed divine icon, much in the same way that we saw Peter Warren discussing above. This is a profoundly divergent practice from anything in Western religion, where becoming the deity is a form of blasphemy. We have here in some senses taken Morris & Peatfield's castigation of the "*Western model of rather passive ritual behaviour*", and the embodied perspective that "*the body is the conduit to experiencing the divine*" through ritual action, to their logical extremes.

We must remark here too that Bronze Age Crete, not being heir to the Abrahamic innovation of the foundation of sacred events in historical rather than mythical time, was a pre-modern society with pre-modern rituals and archaic worldviews, and as such ritual depictions of the epiphany must to a certain extent be understood as having taken place *in illo tempore*.

There is some scope here for positing some kind of primordial antecedent, some lost Minoan mythology, that narrated the deity's first descent from the world above to make contact with the mundane earth, such that the events of the ritual became the events of the myth. It is possible that the epiphany ritual began with a recitation – a verbal re-enactment – of this lost mytheme.

We see then, in these ring seals, images of the deity in human form experiencing herself on some particular (historical) day at some (local) place, but we also behold something transcendent of such localities: the mythical narration

and re-enactment of a primordial, exemplary event experienced, through archaic perceptions, as an eternal moment in all-time and all-space in which are dissolved all distinctions between celebrant and deity.

Appendix E: Construal Images in the Minoan Epiphany

In Lewis-Williams' three stage neuropsychological model of trance, explored among many other aspects of trance in his seminal work *The Mind In The Cave*, a transition from seeing purely entoptic phenomena (stage 1, largely absent from the epiphany corpus) to a full experience of vision (stage 3) occurs through a second stage, in which "*subjects try to make sense of... entoptic phenomena by elaborating them into iconic forms.*"

It is briefly proposed in this appendix that such transitional elements are visible in the corpus of Epiphany imagery, and the word *construal* has generally been used in the foregoing essay and artefact review to denote such elements, as well as any image or figure which appears in hybrid form (as if depicted in the process of transforming from one thing into another), or for any aspect within the epiphany corpus which appears to have been rendered in a deliberately ambiguous manner so as to suggest construality.

A brief visual review highlighting some of these elements will perhaps clarify. In the author's view, the presence of construal elements within the Epiphany imagery underscores again the notion that these images express quite accurately the sensations and changing visual features of human visionary experiences.

Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1

The birds in the central part of this impression are decidedly ambiguous. In the main text, we have already discussed their superficial resemblance to doves or partridges, however, on closer viewing, both birdlike and womanlike attributes are visible, and this does not appear to be as a result of any poor quality or damage on the part of the impression. We might suggest this image depicts the epiphanic bird transforming into a female figure, or that a deliberate, construal ambiguity was desired for this artefact.

Amnisos Ring

The ambiguity of the images upper right part of this ring stands in strong contrast to the sharp and clearly-rendered forms on the rest of the artefact, and the similarity of the theme, that of birds transforming into women, with the imagery on the preceding Ayia Triada seal impression suggests perhaps a stereotype for the Minoan epiphany not previously considered. Here, however, the forms are more complex and several visual interpretations are possible – rows of dovelike birds appear to merge into the form of a single woman and vice versa.

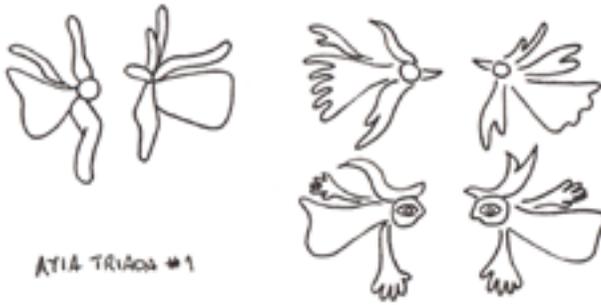


Fig 72. Ayia Triada #1 epiphany element showing both birdlike and womanlike interpretations

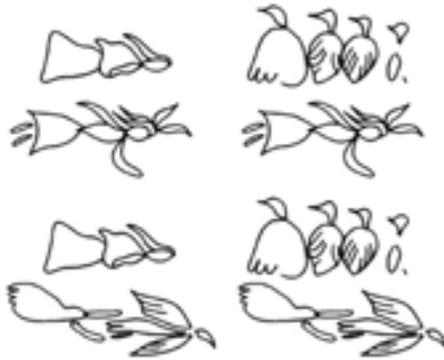


Fig 73. Amnisos upper right detail iconographic analysis showing birdlike and womanlike visual interpretations



Fig 74. Ayia Triada #2 ship-borne figure with birdlike and womanlike interpretations

Ayia Triada Seal Impression #2

Galanakis notes that the ship-borne figure in this second Ayia Triada seal impression may be hybrid, and possibly not female. Interpretation here is difficult because the figure appears to have an elongated head which may depict a state of trance, or indeed simply suggest the topknot hairstyle of an elder woman. But a birdlike interpretation is also possible, and the construal nature of the image flows between three forms: trance depiction, elder woman, bird.

Vapheio Ring

The iconography on the Vapheio ring is probably the most construally-formed in the entire corpus. Two hybridised figures are seen, adding further complexity onto what is already a complicated image. In the upper left, a double-axe is seen, however emerging from the top is an object reminiscent of a head, and possible armlike forms emerging from the side, and it is possible to construe this as both axe and human, or possibly one transforming into the other.

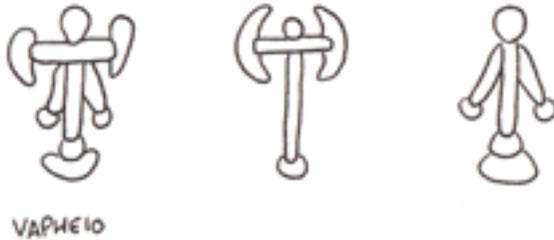


Fig 75. Vapheio double-axe image with axelike and humanlike interpretations



Fig 76. Vapheio baetyl figure with humanlike, birdlike and butterfly interpretations

Given that the double-axe often discloses female authority in Minoan iconography, we might speculate that the axe represents the presence or arrival of the deity in a similar manner to epiphanic birds.

The second hybrid figure is much more complex, and three interpretations are possible, centred around the notion of a woman leaning against a baetyl. The figure is twisted in a posture we have not seen elsewhere, her body and arm leaning against the rock while her head is angled upwards towards the hybrid double-axe figure at upper left.

However, the curious, almost feathered costume she is wearing suggests a birdlike interpretation for the figure. Further, the presence of three faintly incised lines in front of the figure leads to a third interpretation, that the combined image of the figure and baetyl represent a large epiphanic butterfly, similar to the one seen in the Zakros seal impression. Thus this figure might not be a visionary at all, but another aspect of the central female figure's vision instead.

Appendix F: Conjectural Evidence for Epiphany Ritual Practice in Pre- and Protopalatial Minoan Crete

The majority of evidence so far surveyed has come from the gold rings, steatite seals, seal impressions and other glyptic images in the Neopalatial and Early Postpalatial periods in Crete, and the contemporaneous periods on mainland Greece. Indeed the majority of artefacts from the preceding Review have come from contexts generally dated to LM IA – LM II (Crete, 1600-1400 BC) and LH I (Mainland Greece, 1600-1450BC), with a small number coming from perhaps later periods (LM II-III A, 1420-1340BC and LH III A (1400-1350BC).

The principal essay also sought in the main to examine rituals and ancient experiences of the Epiphany in the context of Neopalatial Minoan society, and the rich materials out of which many of the artefacts were made suggests that the corpus of images we have surveyed are confined to the expressions of royal, priestly and merchant classes within those limited periods of time.

However, we also briefly noted circumstantial evidences for the possible earlier practices of rituals relating to the Epiphany, embodied in the presence of a baetyl at the Early Minoan site of Vasiliki, the image of dancers on the Middle Minoan Kamares Ware bowl from Phaistos, and the common feature seen in many figurines from peak sanctuary sites in both Middle and Late Minoan periods with heads, as Zographaki notes heads *"inclined sharply backwards as though looking up,"* which we argued might be circumstantially suggestive of peak sanctuary Epiphany ritual practice.

I should like to take a closer look at two of these earlier evidences, to see if more well-established chronologies and iconographies of the Epiphany in the Late Minoan period can be conjecturally extended backwards in time to the Early

and Middle Minoan periods, and out from palace ritual and merchant class self-expression into the domain of more popular cult practice.

The Vasiliki Baetyl

The Early Minoan (2900-2200 B.C.) site of Vasiliki near Ierapetra is important for understanding life in Bronze Age Crete before the rise of the palaces. Located on the summit of a small hill, it is perhaps most famous for the Vasiliki Ware pottery which was first found there, and the Red House, so-called from the red-painted lime plaster used on its walls.

Swindale notes that Vasiliki was initially interpreted as an early form of palatial structure, with the ‘House on the Hill’ being regarded as the residence of a local chieftain. However, subsequent excavations showed that the site was a typical Minoan village of the periods, and like the contemporary Early Minoan village of Fornou Korifi, evidenced a number of interlinked houses arranged in an egalitarian pattern.

At the south-eastern edge of the village – at the boundary, one might say, where the village ends and wild nature begins – a baetyl was uncovered within a possible courtyard that (recalling Berg) may have “*mark[ed] the realm of ‘wilderness’ ... beyond the limits of the settled land...*”



Fig 77. Reconstruction of baetylic ritual performed by the author at Vasiliki (Baetyl located on platform southeast of the village)

Crooks reports that the specific context of the baetyl and its surrounding area can be dated from pottery sherds to EM III (2200-2000 BC), and notes that the baetyl is located upon a large semi-circular platform abutted on the north and west sides with a wall of stones, a construction which he suggests may imply an easterly or southeasterly approach. He observes that the baetyl's location and context:

"... offers an unobstructed view across the isthmus to a cavernous opening on the opposite escarpment [Ha Gorge]. It is not known if this cave served any cultic function but is worth remarking that during the Neolithic and EM periods, caves on Crete were... used... as burial sites, and that they often served as important cultic centres during later periods."

He also presents suggestive evidence that at least some baetyl rituals may have taken place in caves, citing for example a Knossos seal impression (seen in figure 7 above), in which a woman engages in a baetyl ritual surrounded by what appear to be stones. Crooks concludes that the Vasiliki baetyl offers the earliest evidence for the practice of public baetyl cult, since the archaeological context suggests the space might have allowed the gathering of a small group of people close to the baetyl in the courtyard area.

For our own purposes relating to the Epiphany, the location of the baetyl, its context and associated visibility with a distant cave that may have been ritually important or the focus of cult activity, as well as the common appearance of baetyl rituals in the Epiphany iconography, allows us to suggest that this site may have been the focus of an early form of epiphanic ritual.

Whether the cave or Ha Gorge (both liminal spaces that might have



*Fig 78. Bowl with dancers and image of goddess, Phaistos (MM IIB, 1800 - 1700 B.C.)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

been seen as entrances into wild nature or an underworld locale) could have been understood as spaces from which epiphanic apparitions emerged during the ritual is probably a speculation too far, but the intervisibility with the baetyl certainly suggests some kind of sacred or ritual association. In any case, this stone suggests the first possible evidences of an epiphany, or epiphany-like, ritual in the Prepalatial (Early Minoan) period beginning some 600 years before the earliest Late Minoan epiphany images appear on gold and steatite glyptic.

Crooks also goes on to narrate the discovery of two baetyls in the cemetery at Ayia Triada – as with the Vasiliki context, this is also a suggestively liminal location – dating to MM IA – MM II (2000-1800 BC), and a baetyl at Galatas from a MM IIIA – LM IA (1700-1500 BC) context. These finds suggest a ritual continuity of baetylic cult practice, and therefore possibly epiphanic practices also, from Prepalatial times onwards.

Two Kamares Ware bowls from Phaistos

An interesting Kamares Ware bowl from the palace at Phaistos, and dating to the MM IIB (1800-1700 BC) period, was briefly reviewed in the main essay in the context of the epiphanic deity setting her feet upon the ground, and Warren noted this image likely depicted an arrival of the goddess into the context of the ritual in a manner similar to the depiction on the Isopata Ring. Rethemiotakis narrates the depiction:

“[The] clay bowl... depicts a female figure painted red and flanked by two dancers... [A] lily blossom signifies the place where worship is practiced – a flowering meadow in the spring. This image seems to represent a direct iconographic link between the presence of the goddess and the regeneration of winter...”

A second vessel, also a Kamares ware bowl, from the same archaeological context at Phaistos depicts, according to Rethemiotakis:

“On the upper surface of an altar a female figure, perhaps a priestess performing the role of a goddess, with flowers in her raised arms appears with two female figures dancing in rhythmic movements to the right and left of her. At the side of the altar more female figures are pictured bending over at the sight of the miracle of the divine presence, and four other females join together in another dancing group. This is the first composite version of the ritual of epiphany...”

We may note Rethemiotakis’s somewhat traditionalist and ‘representational’ interpretation of the images here – his implications of gestures of worship, fertility cults and priestesses are in contrast to the more embodied approach taken by the present author – but the resonance of these two bowls with the later glyptic images of the epiphany are worthy of a few remarks.

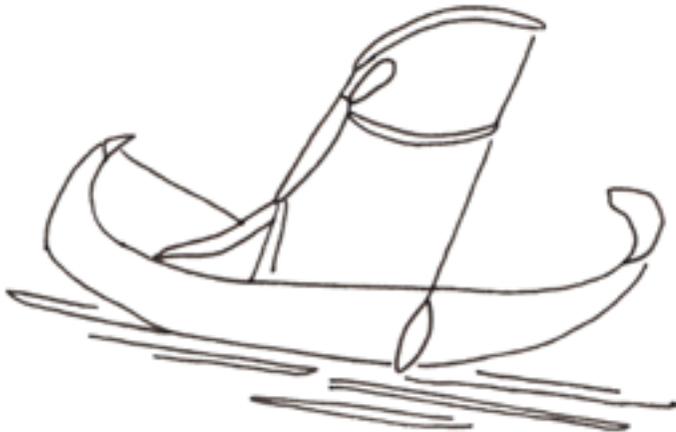
Firstly, the ambiguity of whether these are enacted or visionary epiphanies, a perennial theme in both the main essay and the artefact review, is also present here, as are clear indications of ecstatic dance movements. In particular, the twisting bodies and raised arms of the celebrants or attendants on the first bowl suggest the same

kinds of movements seen in the Isopata Ring, among several others. The depiction appears to have been deliberate on the part of the artist, and is accomplished with considerable skill as the edges and contours of the bowl both frame the figures and accentuated their curved bodies and dress.

The deity is central to the depiction, the red-painted dress with extra details in contrast to the simpler costume of the dancers, denotes her status, and the lack of feet may signal her contact with ground. It is also possible to suggest that the artist may have intended the two dancers to be bare-breasted, although equally this may have been a later ritual development of the Late Minoan period.

The presence of the flower which Rethemiotakis identifies as a lily is interesting, and it is perhaps possible to speculatively identify similar depictions in other Epiphany images (again, Isopata) as lilies also.

That Rethemiotakis describes the imagery in the second bowl as depicting “...the apocalyptic presence of the Minoan goddess in human form by way of a theatrical performance...” strongly suggests we have here at least an enacted epiphany dating to some two hundred years before the earliest glyptic Epiphany images emerge.





The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary

On the far eastern coast of Crete, there lies in a remote bay the Minoan town of Zakros, a major Bronze Age urban centre. First discovered in 1902, the palace wasn't uncovered until the 1960s, and the artefacts from Zakros palace are some of the most celebrated works of art to emerge from the Minoan Civilisation. But during the original excavations at House A in the north of the town, a large number of clay sealings were unearthed, many of which bore the consistent hand of a single artist, a truly gifted seal-engraver with a profound and unique vision: the Zakro Master.

The Minoan civilisation is replete with sealstones. From the earliest Pre-Palatial periods in which the village chiefs marked their trade goods using simply-incised gems, to the late Proto- and Neopalatial periods in which complex iconographies were common for ruling families of the urban centres, Bronze Age Cretans made use of a range of religious and naturalistic imageries as part of their public identities. Seal-engravers drew upon a visual *koine* for their creations, a communal repository of mythological, naturalistic, religious and visionary forms that extended across most parts of the island.

The large polity centred upon the urban sprawl at Knossos tended to dominate the artistic aesthetics of the whole of Crete, the Cycladic islands to the north and even on the Greek mainland. The format of the sealstone engraving lent itself particularly well to images of the epiphany, pastoral scenes and religious images, and Minoan artesans utilised the limited space with deft creativity.

But in the far east, tastes were more inclined towards the eccentric: chthonic deities and human-animal hybrids proved popular in the provincial centres of Zakros and Palaikastro. Zakros also maintained, uniquely for Crete, very strong links with both Syria and Cyprus, and so the iconography of the sealstones enjoyed a strong Middle Eastern influence.

In general the archaeology at Zakros has been less generous with the survival of the original sealstones than at larger centres such as Knossos or Phaistos, but the fire which destroyed the town in 1450BC preserved a great many clay



Fig 79. Minoan sites mentioned in the text



Fig 80. Zakro Master Seal Impressions (Images & Sketches) i) Bird Ladies (1)

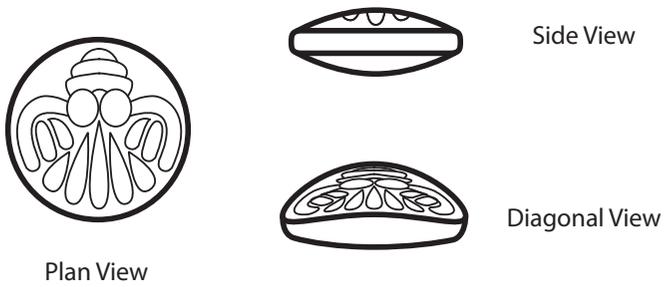


Fig 81. Form of the lentoid gemstone as engraved by the Zakro Master



Fig 82. Zakro Master Seal Impressions (Images & Sketches) ii) Bird Ladies (2)

impressions, and it is from these that the Zakro Master's work is known.

The Zakro Master appears to have lived in or near the palace at Zakros, engraving seals for the ruling families of the palace as well as for the merchants and traders at Zakros. Weingarten employs a complex but ingenious line of logic to suggest that his clients were mostly women, and posits that he lived around 1500BC, some two generations before the destruction of the town.

Even by the bizarre standards of Eastern Crete, the Zakro Master's work stands out: starting from the local tradition of chthonic and animal-hybrid images, he developed personal and fantastical responses to these themes, often merging previously-disparate imageries to create novel and innovative forms.

Large-breasted Bird Ladies (designed to be seen in the impression rather than the original engravings) blend into fantasy animal masks, bucrania (bull-heads) meld into gorgons and Minotaurs, the like of which is seen nowhere else, either in Crete or in the wider Bronze Age Mediterranean. Judging from the surviving body of his work, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Zakro Master is one of the earliest individuals (rather than anonymous collective) whose work can be identified as forming an essential link of the evolving lineage of the visionary, the imaginal and the surrealist artforms of today.

Intriguingly, some of the earliest depictions of human-bull hybrids are seen in the Zakro Master's work; generally images of the Minotaur are held to be a later Greek invention, but it is possible that the imagination of this visionary engraver from the Bronze Age palace at Zakros was the seed of this now well-known archetype.

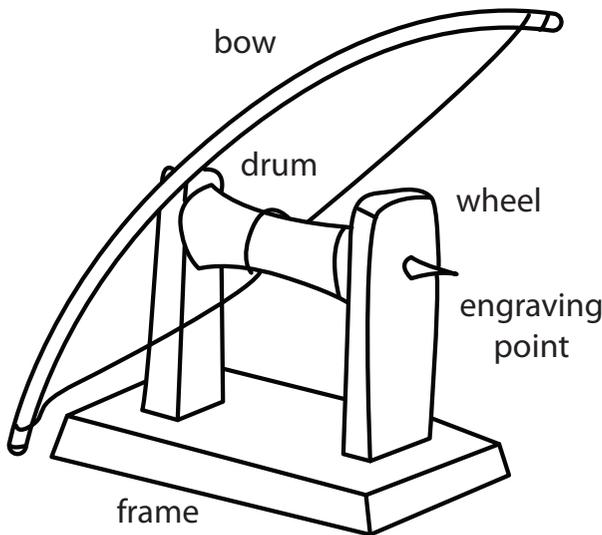


Fig 83. Bronze Age seal-engraving technology



Fig 84. Zakro Master Seal Impressions (Images & Sketches) iii) Lion Masks

Despite the vast array of different shapes available to him, he seemed to have worked exclusively on lentoid seals: convex, lens-shaped sealstones generally no more than 4cm in diameter, and whose image area is almost perfectly circular. Unlike virtually all other Minoan engravers, the Zakro Master utilised this medium to generate images of a delightful symmetry and balance.

Many figures greet the viewer face-on in a posture consistent with vertical symmetry, but in cases where the head is turned sideways, such symmetry-breaking is often compensated for with balancing features, such as a head-dress, horns or antlers. The lentoid form was thus for him a framing device rather than an absolute boundary: far from being a limitation, the small circular area was here transformed into an advantage.

Typically for an archaic visionary, the Zakro Master's work has since its discovery undergone a number of conflicting assessments, largely influenced by the dominant ideologies of the day. In the early part of the twentieth century, Evans and Della Seta confined themselves to utilitarian analyses and limited criticisms, while deeper misgivings were voiced by Nilsson, who dismissed the images as the product of an "overactive, fever-stricken imagination."

Gill preferred the Zakro Master to be "a madman, encouraged by the townsfolk in the belief that the sealstones from his hand would have had an extra touch of the supernatural."

Thus do we see the rationalist influences of the mid 20th century on the assessments of the Zakro Master's work. It wasn't until 1970 that the art historian John Boardman began to rehabilitate his remarkable images:

"The Zakro impressions are work of rare ability and imagination. The devices are grotesques composed of human and animal parts with which

Hieronymous Bosch could well have felt at home... The Zakro Master created an idiom which goes far beyond anything we can find again in the history of Minoan or indeed Greek art. The technique is perfect."

Here, then, we see genuine appreciation of the sealstones not merely as Minoan artefacts, or as religious symbols, but as artistic visions springing from the mind of a talented individual. Simandiraki-Grimshaw further added to the praise:

"...[his] reinvention and combination of hybrid elements ranges from innovation and whim to psychedelia."

But it is archaeologist Judith Weingarten who has made probably the most in-depth study of the sealings of the Zakro Master, considering him to be an original artist of *"unusual imagination and vision, capable of controlled experimentation and development."*

Describing him as an artist who drew from the corpus of Minoan chthonic deities, albeit often developing them beyond recognition, she has identified at least nine signs of the Zakro Master's hand, outlining his strong sense of symmetry, his expression of contrast between light and shadow in the depth of the engravings, his delight in women of generous proportions bearing accessories such as belts or necklaces, and the subject's lack of torsion, a feature so ubiquitous elsewhere in Minoan art.

Using such criteria, she has reconstructed a possible stylistic history of the Zakro Master, suggesting possible orders in which the sealings may have been created.

From the surviving evidence, he appears to have begun his career engraving fantasy animal mask designs such as lions and boars that have a certain antecedent in eastern Cretan engraving traditions. But his originality is evident even in these early works: boar masks contain winged elements, horns transmute into human legs, and lion eyes could equally be embryonic breasts which evolved later into Bird Ladies.

His stylistic development continues in the exploration – and to a certain extent deconstruction – of the form of the Bird Lady image, transforming her into side-facing leaping forms and running winged forms. The final works posited by Weingarten are the bucrania in which for the first time we see irregularity and asymmetry in the Zakro Master's oeuvre.

What, then, of the Zakro Master's legacy? His influence does appear to have been fairly limited in his own lifetime, whether because of the provincial nature of his sphere of influence or perhaps because of his unreachable individuality, nonetheless a few engravers at Zakros and at Ayia Triada show some of his influence in their works.

Later, the rising prestige and aesthetics of Knossos in the years up to 1450BC had no time for eastern eccentricities and the destruction of many Minoan sites after this period sent many of Crete's most talented engravers abroad to find work in the Mycenaean courts on the Greek mainland, environments which often did not tolerate or understand the uniqueness of Cretan art, let alone the chthonic

oddities and animal hybrids of Zakros.

And so, the Zakro Master's legacy, never very great, falls as silent as many of the other great Cretan visionary traditions, and his influence for us may not so much rest in the visual imagery as in the mythical symbols this inventive visionary bequeathed later generations, most notably the Minotaur, which has become one of the most celebrated archetypes from the Classical age. Perhaps also with his modern reputation finally rehabilitated, his legacy may live on in the dissemination of his work in media such as the present text so that he may once again take his rightful place in the visionary lineage from ancient times into the future.



Fig 85. Zakro Master Seal Impressions (Images & Sketches) iv) Boar Masks & Bucrania



Fig 86. Zakro Master Seal Impressions (Images & Sketches) v) Stags, Protomes & Gorgons

Europa and the Minoan ‘Goddess From Beyond The Sea’

The figure of Europa, and her abduction by Zeus, is considered by many to be the founding myth of Europe – indeed the Phoenician queen lent her name to the continent. A careful teasing apart of the strands of the myth, however, reveal a Pre-Greek deity whose form may be reflected in Minoan iconography: the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ often seen in images of the Epiphany and other religious contexts. This essay is excerpted and expanded from two sources: my 2013 treatise ‘The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture’, and ‘Europa Untouched’, a set of research notes for my 2008-11 series of artworks entitled ‘Minoan Honey’.

Classical Greek mythical traditions are a fascinating fusion of elements springing from both Proto-Greek and Indo-European, as well as Mesopotamian and Anatolian cultures. But one of the strongest currents running through the various traditions originates from the Pre-Greek aboriginal inhabitants of the Aegean, of whom the Minoans were probably the most well-known. A vast array of mythforms and deity names have a profound Pre-Greek flavour, and none more so than the story of Europa.

Described in the story as a Phoenician princess, her name is nonetheless semantically opaque in Greek, the derivation from εὐρῶ- ‘broad’ and ὄπ- ‘face’ being what leading Greek etymologist Robert S. P. Beekes terms a folk etymology. Given that the Minoan language was most likely a prestige dialect of the wider Pre-Greek speech anciently current throughout the Aegean, and given the setting of the story in and around Knossos, it is possible we have here a surviving image of an authentic Minoan deity.



*Fig 87. Europa Untouched: Mariner, Bruce Rimell (2010)
120cm x 60cm - Acrylics, Inks & Markers on Canvas*

A very brief re-telling of the tale will aid us in seeing this image: Europa, a daughter of the King of Sidon in Phoenicia, is abducted by Zeus in the form of a Bull of Heaven (whose name Asterion, incidentally, is the same as that of his grandson, the Minotaur) and taken to the island of Crete, where he seduces her and fathers on her a child, Minos, the founder of the Knossian dynasty. Images of women riding bulls, and rituals involving either bull-leaping or sacrifice are ubiquitous in Minoan archaeology, but an interesting line of enquiry opens up when we consider the perennial Greek confusion between '(Minoan/Bronze Age) Cretan' and '(Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age) Phoenician'.

This is due in part to a telescoping view of history, in which disparate but ancient peoples and events are contracted and combined just as we modern Westerners tend to telescope the thousand years of the medieval era into a single cultural picture.

But from the perspective of early Mainland Greeks whose culture had yet to evolve into the flowering of the Mycenaean civilisation, it is likely that visiting Minoans and Phoenicians must have appeared to be the same people: both were highly civilised and arrived as traders in impressive boats which came from southerly directions. Both also spoke a non-Greek language, and significantly both also were famous for dealing in trade of rare purple dyes – indeed the Greek word *πορφύρα* 'purple' derives from a Pre-Greek (which is to say, possibly Minoan, but probably aboriginal Aegean) source.

It is also worth noting that the word *φαινίκης* 'Phoenician' has a Pre-Greek source which Beekes theorises was originally used to designate a people of coastal south-western Anatolia who likely spoke a similar language to the aboriginal Aegeans. Thus we see in this confusion a clarity of Europa's strange origins: from a people called *φαινίκης* who were inhabitants of the coastline nearest Crete, whose name later became applied to a Semitic-speaking people from Lebanon. This resonates with what we know from Minoan archaeology, that Central Crete



Fig 88. *The Ring of Minos (Image & Sketch)*
Knossos (1450-1400 BC) - Heraklion Archaeological Museum



*Fig 89. Makriyalos Seal Impression (Illustration & Sketch)
Makriyalos (1450 BC) - Ayios Nikolaos Archaeological Museum*

experienced at the beginning of the Middle Minoan period (around 2000 BC) an influx of Anatolian influences which may have helped transform the society and lead to the rise of the palace system at Knossos. The Phoenician demonym is also closely related to φοίνιξ, another Pre-Greek word referring to, among other things, purple dyes.

(We may also note, in passing, that Kadmos is also subject to this same confusion, not least in part due to his invention of writing, which could have anciently referred to the (Bronze Age) transformation of Minoan Linear A into Greek Linear B, rather than to the (Iron Age) adaptation of Phoenician letters into the Greek alphabet. He is cast as Europa's Phoenician uncle, but the variants of his name – Kadmilos, Kadmitos – and his tutelage of the Samothracian Mysteries both disclose, according to Beekes, a Pre-Greek Aegean origin.)

Interestingly, Greek mythographers often used the name Ευρώπη to mean, metaphorically, 'intelligent, open-minded', as a synonym for γλαυκώπις. This latter epithet was often given to Athena, while the former was in several places attached to the name Demeter, both goddesses with Pre-Greek names. Here we have an explicit link between Europa, Glaukos, Athena and Demeter, the former two of which bear fairly intimate historical or epigraphic associations with Crete, and the latter two appear to link these Cretan associations with a wider Aegean world.

Thus we can propose that the Pre-Greek name of Europa discloses some foundation in the Pre-Greek-speaking populations of the region, and potentially from the prestige dialect spoken on Crete by the Minoans. This confusion between the earlier Cretan thalassocracy and later Phoenician one can also possibly date our story, since the final stages of the Minoan civilisation endured until around 1450BC, while Phoenicia did not rise until some two to three centuries later. This association of Europa with two major sea-trading powers of the late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean suggests that she may represent a Greek survival of the Bronze Age sacred sponsor of the Minoan sea-trade.

A female deity presiding over such trade, the so-called 'Goddess from beyond the Sea' is evidenced in the archaeology: images on gold rings and seal images from the corpus of the Minoan Epiphany depict a female deity on a boat bringing a shrine onto land, or offering reverence to a sacred tree. The iconography is interesting and worth exploring in detail.

The Ring of Minos is a complex iconographic artefact with a cloudy provenance but bearing a detailed image typical of Minoan craftsmanship. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis defined the Minoan Epiphany rather neatly as imagery which discloses the "...*miraculous vision of the deity and its descent to the visible world,*" and they have identified a narrative running through the depiction on this particular ring, which they have termed the Epiphany Cycle:

"The complex religious depiction... combines three versions of the epiphany... The goddess is rendered three times: once as a tiny figure hovering in the air, once seated on a built shrine... overseeing two acts of tree-worship carried out by a male and female adorant...and, finally, the goddess is depicted voyaging at sea, rowing or steering a ship with a prow in the shape of a bust of a sea-horse, which is transporting a stepped shrine."

It is the sea-borne goddess which interests us here. Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis narrate:

"The prow of the ship in the shape of a sea-horse finds a direct parallel in the one on the ring from Mochlos, in which the goddess is shown in a seated position... There is a similar scene with a female figure on a ship with a shrine and tree on a seal from Makriyalos... the top right (sic – in the seal impression image here it is top left)[can be read] as a tree, and the whole thing as a 'condensed' version of all three stages of the epiphany – that is, the descending female deity, the ritual of tree worship and the voyage at sea..."

Galanakis notes that in 'Goddess from beyond the Sea' scenes, the female deity holds a stereotypical posture of one hand raised towards the face – in the Ring of Minos, this has been varied expertly to suggest the detail of an oar which she uses to propel the ship. He also notes that several depictions of the ship bear a



Fig 90. The Amnisos Ring (Image & Sketch)
Amnisos / Knossos (1500 – 1450 BC) - Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Fig 91. The Mochlos Ring (Image & Sketch)
 Mochlos (1500 – 1450 BC) - Heraklion Archaeological Museum

‘Babylonian dragon’ prow of uncertain meaning.

Marinatos notes a Ugaritic goddess Athirat, one of whose epithets was “*Great Lady Who Treads Upon The Sea Dragon*”, and although the mythform which underlies this epithet is now lost, she suggests that this feature of Minoan glyptic scenes constitutes a shared visual language across the Middle Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, and perhaps hints at the triumph over an underworld deity. On the other hand, Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis term this prow shape a sea-horse figure, which presents a challenge to Marinatos’s interpretation here.

As to the general meaning of the ‘Goddess from beyond the Sea’, Galanakis remarks:

“Most of the representations [of the Goddess]... lead to the assumption that the appearance of a single female figure was not accidental. The Minoans had a long history of depicting solitary female figures in many different contexts... [including] seafaring. The Minoan thalassocracy possibly required the presence of a single divinity, a female divinity in particular... This divinity, the so-called ‘Goddess from the Sea’, was probably worshipped in specific rituals before or during important sea travels and expeditions faraway.”

In the Amnisos ring we see a possible epiphanic depiction of such a suggested pre-voyage ritual, presided over by a floating female deity who seems to have been a visionary epiphany. Galanakis continues:

“There is the possibility that the iconographical schema of the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ may have implied the formation of a prehistoric, mainly Minoan mythology, where the ‘Goddess’, dressed in Minoan formal attire with the flounced skirt and open bodice, sailed with a mythical ship ready to inaugurate her cult in new places...”

The ritual depicted may have taken place at harbour-sides, and it is significant that the ring was found at Amnisos, the Minoan harbour serving the largest urban area of Knossos, and facing northwards towards Thera and the



Fig 92. *Ayia Triada Seal Impression (Illustration & Sketch)*
Ayia Triada (1600 – 1480 BC) - Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Cyclades. Galanakis narrates:

“The arrival of the Goddess from different parts of the universe and the introduction of a new cult in new territories may be interpreted [through]... the trading activities of the Minoans... [and the fact that] excavations revealed the Minoan presence and the existence of Minoan settlements at Melos, Thera, Keos, Skopelos, Kythera, Rhodes and Karpathos.”

We may note that the present formation of a native Minoan mythology here disagrees with Marinatos’s conclusion above, but whereas Marinatos seeks in much of her work to promulgate an image of Minoan kingship informed by a Near-Eastern cultural and visual *koine* – an image which the present author considers is somewhat lacking in the artefacts of the Minoan civilisation – Galanakis seeks to place the ‘Goddess from beyond the Sea’ artefacts specifically within the contexts of known Minoan archaeologies and evidences.

Interestingly the aspect of cult inauguration chimes well with Europa, for we see her cult in several places associated with former Cretan colonies or with the Minoan-Phoenician confusion, most notably at Thebes and Aegina, and Galanakis connects an 8th century B.C. graffito on a plastered wall in a temple complex at Delos with the survival of this sea-borne image in a local depiction of Britomartis, another Pre-Greek deity with strong associations to Crete.

We note that Britomartis was a nymph of the mountains, an affiliation that resonates with a wider epiphany theme, who, after being chased by Minos across Crete, threw herself into the sea, and becoming tangled in a fisherman’s nets, becomes transformed into Diktynna. She is then transported across the sea to Aegina, a Minoan colony, and thus it is possible that this myth, while not likely to represent a perfectly-preserved Minoan original, can perhaps shed some light on wider mythological contexts of this epiphanic sea-borne image.

The net motif is particularly interesting in this narrative, and it is possible that a Greek misinterpretation of a Minoan deity of the sea – which in Minoan

glyphic was conventionally depicted with a net-like pattern, as on the Ring of Minos, or on a seal impression from Knossos (see Knossos HM392 below) – constituted the original inspiration of this visual mythical image.

The rather worn gold ring from Mochlos may also depict a sea-borne voyage to new cult centres: we see here a seated female figure in her ship with a distinctive ‘sea-horse’ or ‘dragon’ prow, bearing a shrine out from which trees and plants are growing. Judging by the arrangement of prow and stern, the ship appears as if it is leaving the land, perhaps departing for a voyage: the building at right perhaps suggests a shrine or urban space, and the ambiguous trace of rocks beneath the lower right part of the boat suggest a shoreline.

This image appears to agree strongly with Galanakis’ thalassocratic interpretation, the trees and plants adding a dimension of fertility mirrored in the Makriyalos impression:

“[The] female figure is seated with her left hand bent like a farewell gesture... The representation on the Mochlos ring is unique in terms that it presents with a simple but clear way almost everything about the Minoan religious iconography.”

Another seal impression, this time from Ayia Triada, also appears to depict the ‘Goddess from beyond the Sea’, and include several of the visual conventions we are establishing here, including the sea-horse or dragon-headed prow of the boat and



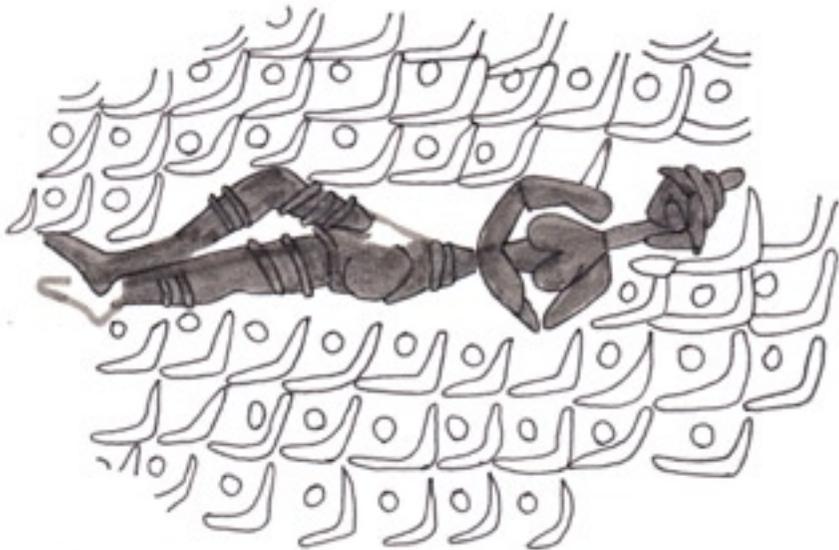
*Fig 93. 8th century BC graffito at Delos.
Note the hybrid Minoan/Classical Greek depiction.*

a female figure riding the waves. However, this image shows a couple of differences in that the boat lacks any kind of shrine depiction, and a dynamism suffuses the scene: the lines of the water suggest a rough or choppy sea and the posture of the figure is tense, pulling on an oar in a form expressive of fast movement, of the boat and the figure herself. Galanakis narrates:

“The style is quite rough and sketchy or it is the result of the bad impression of the seal. The figure... depicted inside the ship may be hybrid (birdlike) and not necessarily female... [but] it refers to the almost contemporaneous representations of monstrous figures known from the Kato Zakros sealings.”

That Galanakis links this image with the Zakros sealings is interesting: the presence of clearly-delineated and highly varied bird-female hybrids is ubiquitous in seal impressions from this site, most notably from the collection in the hand of the Zakro Master. The flight of Europa across the sea and the common later Greek depiction of Zeus as an eagle or swan may have their embryonic form in these bird-female hybrids, and as such resonates with our present theme.

It is clear there is no one-to-one correspondence between the mythical image of Europa, or indeed of Britomartis, and the Minoan ‘Goddess from beyond the Sea’, but such tentative iconographic and mythical narrative correspondences might be suggested as disclosing some survival from the Bronze Age religions of the Aegean into the Classical age.



The Isopata Ring: An Image of Minoan Trance

Minoan art is replete with depictions of dance, from frescoes of women and men dancing in large groups from the palaces at Knossos, to clay ornaments of dancers with musicians found at a variety of sites across Crete. Archaeologists note that dances must have had a huge array of functions, not least the procession to the sacred place which would set the minds of the celebrants towards the oncoming ritual, which often contained a visionary element called the Epiphany. The role of dance, posture and movement in these visionary actions in the Minoan context – and indeed in cultural contexts around the world – is often overlooked, but one particularly beautiful artefact from Bronze Age Crete, the Isopata ring, highlights this role in a striking way. This essay is excerpted and expanded from my 2013 treatise ‘The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture.’

Archaeologist Peter Warren, in his influential work ‘*Minoan Religion as Ritual Action*’, divided depictions of Minoan religious practice into five main categories of ritual: those pertaining to dance, of the baetyl or sacred rock, the presentation of robes or clothing, flower offerings and sacrifices, making the perceptive comment in regard to Minoan religion that:

“Ritual action... will usually comprise $\delta\rho\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$, things done, $\lambda\epsilon\gamma\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$, things said or sung, $\delta\epsilon\iota\kappa\nu\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$, things displayed or, if we abandon Eleusinian prototypes, things envisioned in epiphany...”

In consideration of the first of these five categories, he terms dance as a form of “*ecstatic movement*”, an appropriate insight given the ubiquitous presence of the visionary in Minoan artforms, and considers its essential function to have been:

“...the invocation of the divinity. The action was believed to bring about first the approach of the divinity from on high... a good example of which is the scene on the Isopata ring. Then came the arrival of the divinity, whose presence was revered with a saluting gesture.”

The Isopata Ring, found in a chamber tomb at Isopata near Knossos, and dating to 1600-1450 BC, is one of the most famous images of the Minoan Epiphany, and though its depiction seems at first glance relatively straightforward, the complex iconography have been used as evidence in a bewildering array of hypotheses on Minoan religion. Warren’s point, of an explicit link between ecstatic dance and the arrival of a deity into the dance ritual, is central to the majority of them.

A masterpiece of Minoan goldwork, with a bezel just over 2cm in length, the Isopata ring depicts four larger female figures, along with one smaller one, in a landscape generally understood to consist of lilies and a single line suggestive of mountains. At left we see two dancers with their arms raised, gazing upwards at a floating figure whose form matches fairly precisely the epiphany conventions seen in other ring depictions: downward-pointing feet and waving hair. At right, another



Fig 94. *Isopata Ring, Isopata Chamber Tomb, Knossos (1600 – 1450 BC)*
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

dancer or perhaps an ‘enacted epiphany’ – on this technical term, more later – holds both arms aloft on either side of her body in a more measured and less ecstatic posture than the two dancers at left.

In the centre of the scene, a larger figure with bowed head seems to beckon to the figure at the right, and there is the suggestion, following Warren’s quote above, that this figure represents the arrival of the deity upon the earth in a narrative that begins with the smaller floating figure. Notable in the depiction of all four of the larger female figures is the fine detail and opulence of their garments and the undulating curves of their generously proportioned bodies, aspects which offer a strong contrast to their heads which are miniscule enough, and so lacking of detail, to be appropriately termed aniconic.

Other details, such as the presence of a ‘sacred eye’, or perhaps the entrance to a cave, towards the centre of the image, and an object which may be a chrysalis, or perhaps a bee’s nest, at the upper right, add colour to the natural setting of the ritual in a wild place far from the customary urban settings of Minoan ritual dances.

The stylistic convention of the floating epiphanic deity mentioned above is relatively well-known in Minoan studies, having been established by Dimopoulou & Rethmiotakis in relation to another Minoan ring, the Ring of Minos:

“The goddess is rendered... as a tiny figure hovering in the air... The small

scale denotes a distancing from the spectator, and the placing of the figure on high indicates that she is hovering. Her downward movement is denoted conventionally by the fact that her hair waves in the air, and by the downward slope of her feet...

But Warren utilises the Isopata scene to establish a second convention, of the deity's epiphany as she sets foot upon the earth. Her arrival and presence are marked here by her flat feet, suggestive of contact with the ground, and she is depicted at the same level as the vegetation in the centre and right of the image. Another image from Phaistos, much earlier than any of the gold rings, depicts a similar arrival of the goddess, incidentally allowing us to push the earliest date of evidence for an epiphany-related ritual back by some 200 years.

As on the Isopata ring, the deity here is central to the proceedings, flanked by two dancers in ecstatic postures. The lack of feet on her part in contrast to the dancers may signal her contact with the ground, particularly given the sumptuousness of her dress, here marked by the presence of colour in contrast to the monochrome of the remainder of the bowl's image.

Warren acknowledges the ecstatic nature of the depiction on these scenes – indeed, the raised arms of the dancers on the Phaistos bowl neatly mirrors some of the postures on the Isopata ring – but remains largely within 'symbolic' or 'ritual' interpretations that ignores the possibility that the celebrants here shown might have experienced some kind of trance or other altered state of consciousness.

Morris & Peatfield consider trance-based experiences to be direct implications of the 'ecstatic' depictions seen in many Minoan ritual scenes, and they remark upon the limitations of representational approaches to images such as the



*Fig 95. Bowl with dancers and image of goddess, Phaistos (1800 - 1700 BC)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



Fig 96. Detail of the leftmost two dancers on the Isopata ring

Isopata ring:

“Although the language of ecstasy is used in connection with these images, the implications of ecstatic experience have not received the attention they merit, and the emphasis has remained on symbolic representation.”

It is thus possible that the iconography of the Minoan epiphany in general, and the Isopata ring in particular, does indeed portray some genuine visionary content rather than an idealised image of ritual, and Morris & Peatfield elucidate a considerable amount of evidence to challenge representational interpretations of ‘ecstatic worship’ or ‘adoration’ commonly seen. The emergence of the field of ‘embodied archaeology’, that is to say, ancient societies viewed through the lens of the experience of the human body, has greatly illuminated this aspect of Minoan religious practice.

To say that a figure in a given image engages in a dance or other ritual is to offer one iconographic interpretation. However, if the image is to be taken as representative of a ritual event, one that was actually participated in by human celebrants, then the experience of the human body must be taken into account. The activities of dance or of tense, ecstatic interactions with trees, rocks, or other celebrants, as often seen in Minoan depictions, have specific effects upon the human body beyond their postural iconographic representations.

Morris & Peatfield note that epiphany scenes express modes of experience



Fig 97. *The Amnisos Ring (Image & Sketch)*
Amnisos / Knossos (1500 – 1450 BC) - Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

founded not merely in externalised gestures...

“...but in a deeper use of the body as an active constituent in ritual behaviour. The established view... as adopting ‘worship’ gestures or ‘attitudes of respect’, unconsciously accepts a Western model of rather passive ritual behaviour, and does not directly address the range and distinctiveness of the [Minoan] gestures.”

Thus we have here the potential for access to non-Western pre-modern perceptual insights into what is being depicted. Recent focus of many archaeologists has fallen upon posture in Minoan art, and Morris & Peatfield neatly summarise why, noting that repetitive rhythmic movement, fasting and entheogens are simply the better-known techniques to engender altered states:

“Equally effective are body postures which can be used to stimulate specific physiological changes in the body, especially when combined with rhythmic sounds such as rattling or drumming. Given a proper ritual framework... combined with a common worldview or set of beliefs or expectations, the bodily changes activate the ASC [altered state of consciousness] or ecstatic experience... [which] takes its content and interpretation from the cultural context.”

Further, they neatly capitulate the explicit link between ritual, visionary experience and the body in a way that resonates with the seamless flow from mundane ritual to visionary expression visible in the Isopata iconography:

“Ritual actions...include... dancing, in which the arms are shown in different postures and the curve of the body is suggestive of movement or swaying. Through these actions, the presence of the deity is envisioned or felt by the participants... in other words, the body is the conduit to experiencing the divine.”

They consider the postures on the Isopata ring to constitute subtle evidence for altered consciousness states of the celebrants – similar to gestures seen in other images that Galanakis suggests might indicate “rapid movement or ritual, frenetic dance” – but Morris & Peatfield expound on this:

“The graceful curve of the women’s bodies and skirts is suggestive of movement rather than a body at rest, but in the absence of other somatic markers for frenzied activity, a more limited rhythmic movement or swaying might be

suggested... [T]he three different body postures are very specific; they are repeated on other rings, and we now know that some of the same postures are shown on peak sanctuary figurines. The clearly defined shape of the postures suggests that they are purposeful in themselves... The technique of ecstasy may be described as comprising rhythmic movement or swaying in relation to defined body postures.”

The appearance of the deity in shimmering, miniature form on the Isopata ring, combined with the depiction of purposeful dance postures and movements which appear to engender trance states, constitutes profound evidence for the visionary nature of the epiphany imagery. Further evidence can be seen in the Isopata ring when we come to consider the embodied idea that the perceived physiological changes associated with altered states of consciousness are also depicted. Morris & Peatfield narrate:

“An important and distinctive feature... is the curiously attenuated (aniconic) form of the human heads, which contrasts powerfully with the supple, rounded body forms and indeed the elaborately flounced skirts of the participants... If we think of these images not as simply symbolic but as representing distinctive elements of the trance experience, then the aniconic head could be read much more specifically as an artistic device for representing the shift of ‘self’, of both mind and body, into the altered state of consciousness. Supporting this interpretation is the commonly reported experience of trance participants, where the head feels as though it dissolves, explodes or somehow disappears... Artists from a wide range of cultures have used similar conventions of distorted and transforming heads to communicate the trance experience...”

In another paper, they highlight not merely aniconic or dissolving heads but the depiction of sensations of the body being elongated. In the Amnisos ring, a complex iconography is depicted relating to the ‘Goddess from the Sea’ motif, however in a detail on the left side, we see an imposing figure whose body is attenuated beyond the aesthetics of Minoan norms. In particular, the arm gesturing



Fig 98. Restoration of Fresco from Xeste 3, Room 3, Lustral Basin, Akrotiri
Fira Archaeological Museum, Santorini, Greece

to the right is so attenuated such that would be long enough to reach his knee were it resting by his side. Another remarkable feature is that his head appears to be floating, surely a similar sign of an altered consciousness state.

Thus the Isopata ring provides strong evidence for a link between dance, ecstatic movement, altered states of consciousness and visionary experience in Minoan ritual practice. Archaeologist Paul Rehak, while disagreeing with the present hypothesis regarding the ring (considering instead that the image depicts a ritual pertaining to young adult women, or perhaps to an age-grading system), nonetheless suggests some intriguing insights into the visual details which allow us to gather deeper insights into the wider context of the ritual itself. He sees in the usage of ‘cavalier’ perspective in the positioning of the figures, and the multiple levels upon which the plants are depicted, as a direct link between this scene and other, similarly-arranged images of dancing women on frescoes at Knossos. He also considers the ages of the women as disclosed by their hairstyles:

“The hairstyles of... [three of] the women can be compared to those worn by women in the Thera frescoes. The two young women in the lustral basin scene from Xeste 3... both have coiffures of long, thick hair wrapped in a fillet which has been gathered in a loop at the base of the neck and trails down the back... mature women, by contrast often wear their hair up in kerchiefs.”

By implication, the three female figures at left and centre of the Isopata ring are young, whereas the rightmost figure, with her hair tied up, may be senior in age, and her posture may connote her status as the leader of the ritual depicted. This suggestion resonates with a perennial insight of Minoan archaeology, that some images of dancing women depict an ‘enacted epiphany’, in which the deity appears externally (rather than internally in vision or representationally in art) in the person of a living woman who ‘plays’ the part of the goddess and interacts with the celebrants during the course of a ritual. It is tempting to consider in the Isopata image that the woman on the right gesturing in a measured way may represent such an ‘enacted epiphany’, and from this and the various other insights, it is possible to draw out a modicum of meaning from the Minoan ritual depicted on the ring bezel.

Firstly, the central figure appears to function as a visionary epiphany in a vision shared by the two dancers to the left and the older woman to the right. The postures of these three women are distinctive but somewhat opaque as to meaning: the two women to the left appear to be adopting beckoning postures as they sway or dance themselves into a trance state. The postures of the central figure (hand raised with head slightly bowed) and the female figure at right (arms held up in a posture suggestive of swaying or dance) seem similarly meaningful to a Minoan audience, but the specifics of what they denote is now lost.

However, when we add to our considerations the small floating figure, interpreted as the deity appearing out of the sky, it appears that the leftmost dancer, at least, is beckoning directly to the smaller figure, and a powerful sense of narrative

action begins to colour the scene: the two swaying dancers at left beckon the deity to emerge from the sky, and she does so, alighting on the ground in the middle distance in the presence of an older, presiding female figure who may represent an enacted epiphany. From what little we can see of their aniconic heads, specifically the implied directions of their gazes, we might suggest that the vision of the presence of the deity is shared by all three women.

We might also ask: were the efficacy of these rituals guaranteed by the presence of an enacted epiphany? The figure on the right seems to ‘authorise’ the scene, as if the presence of a woman performing as the earthbound surrogate of the deity ensures the presence of the epiphanic deity – the two phenomena mirror each other: the goddess is able to emerge from the sky since, technically, she is already present in the person of the human woman performing the enacted epiphany.

Such considerations illuminate the Isopata ring on the one hand as an artefact of Bronze Age visionary art in its depiction of sacred ritual and vision, but on the other hand it also presents significant challenges to our Western models of religious perception. We have already seen that the ‘embodied’ perspective shifts us away from rather passive approaches, such as the customary Abrahamic focus on faith and praise: the Minoan view by contrast appears to place primacy upon sacred experience, initiated through movements of the body, and upon, as Warren remarks, “*an active, enquiring response*” to that experience.

There is a physicality to the Minoan ritual which bears a closer resemblance perhaps to Haitian Voudoun or Pentecostal Christian movements than it does the mainstream of Western religious practice: the body is the conduit to the divine,



Fig 99. Gaze and intimacy in Minoan and Christian religious contexts: visual communication and direct contact versus bowed heads and averted gazes

and ecstatic dances, swaying movements, tense postures and trance states are all depicted as important aspects of the experience.

In addition, the Isopata ring appears to disclose a wholly different relationship to the sacred, between humans and deities, repeatedly evidencing a kind of intimacy often absent in Western traditions: while the deity is presented as ‘above’ the celebrants in the image, she is not depicted as larger than life – indeed we rarely see this in Minoan depiction – and this along with the notion of the ‘enacted epiphany’ suggests a more egalitarian relationship than we are perhaps accustomed to. Resonating with this, we see the gaze of the celebrants is aimed straightforwardly at the deity, again posing a challenge to the Western notion of averting one’s gaze from that which is sacred, and simultaneously suggesting a visionary component to the ritual.

Finally, rituals seem to have been valued for their efficacy in beckoning and invoking the deity’s presence into the earthbound domain – we might imagine that the Minoan deity was not summoned, but in the perceptions of the celebrants, came gladly to the ritual – and even to engage in ‘sacred conversations’, the like of which are hardly seen in Western depictions outside the iconography of saints and other images of the ‘elected few’ or ‘spiritual elite’ whose passive faithfulness have been rewarded with a blessed apparition.

Thus, we see in this apparently simple depiction of Minoan dance a range of challenging and intriguing possibilities for experiential sacred practice – that these possibilities should spring from a proto-Western (and perhaps thus dimly-familiar to our collective memory) context may permit their messages and meanings to be more easily integrated into our modern world.



Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art

One of the major themes in the history of Aegean art, from its emergence out of the Greek Dark Ages at the end of the ninth century B.C. to its fullest flowerings in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, is appropriately summarised by Boardman, in the introduction of his comprehensive study on the subject, as:

“...its rapid but deliberate development from strict geometry admitting hardly any figure decoration, to full realism of anatomy and expression...”

and its emergence into an authentic expression of what Perry has termed:

“...the humanist spirit that characterized all aspects of Greek culture. They made the human form the focal point of attention and exalted the nobility, dignity, self-assurance and beauty of the human being.”

Boardman narrates in some detail how this humanism and obsession with naturalistic beauty emerged from a breaking of geometric forms under Near Eastern and Egyptian influence, and how foreign elements were incorporated in ways which preserved their visual qualities but rejected the Oriental focus upon the primary agency of deity. Instead, these elements were subsumed into a progressive and intense study that reflected the essential value Greeks placed upon the human body as the perfect vessel of the divine, of reason and of the mind.

This perennial image of Greek art – a fusion of Oriental elements with native Greek genius – is backed by a considerable array of evidence, perhaps the best known of which are the Egyptian *kouros* and Daedalic style under Syrian influence, and their importation into Classical imagery. However, the influence of Aegean



Fig 100. Knossos Bull-Leaping fresco, East Wall, Upper Storey, Knossos Palace, Knossos (1450 BC), Heraklion Archaeological Museum

cultures from before the Dark Ages, and in particular the Minoan-Mycenaean civilisations, are often overlooked in this view. There is ample evidence that cultural survivals endured past the collapse at the end of the Bronze Age in several ways – particularly in Crete, the islands and in backwater locales such as Arcadia – among which include tendencies towards law codes which expressed a certain level of political egalitarianism, matrifocal religious practices and an attraction towards naturalistic and pastoral scenes in art.

These traits are exemplified particularly by the Minoan civilisation, the non-Greek culture centred upon Crete and the Cyclades, and remarkably it is here, rather than upon the mainland, that the first glimmerings of the later recurrent humanist concerns can be seen.

The Minoan civilisation of the early-to-mid Bronze Age of Crete represents in some ways a fascinating counterpoint to the general themes of contemporary Eastern Mediterranean cultures. In Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant,



Fig 101. Minoan and Near Eastern aesthetics compared.

i) Ring of Minos (detail), Knossos, c. 1450-1400 BC; ii) Reconstruction of Dancers Fresco, Knossos, c. 1450 BC; iii) Bronze figurine of saluting man, Tylissos c. 1550-1450 BC; iv) Assyrian Lion Hunt, Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, c. 650 BC; v) Nebamun hunting in the marshes, Thebes Egypt, c. 1350 BC

primary artistic expressions concerned the hieratic relationships between humans and gods, the duties of the king towards his people, and expressions of that king's strength, through the valorisation of warfare and smiting of enemies, or his legitimacy, through his intimacy with the gods and his adherence to ritual. Sacred and royal figures are often muscular, larger-than-life and of an iconicity which seems designed to engender awe and exaltation.

By contrast, Minoan art discloses almost none of these traits, preferring an entirely different set of concerns, as Davaras narrates:

“Art in Bronze Age Crete... is characterized by a fortunate combination of stylization and spontaneity, abstraction and true ‘impressionistic’ naturalism, quite different in spirit from its contemporaries in the Near East. The Minoan artist... reacts with flexibility and creative power, managing to transform everything into a personal creation, an artistic world of his own. From the beginnings this art, although ruled by conventions, avoids stiff forms and dullness of any kind, often transcends anatomical realism and instead is fond of movement, fluidity, colour, dynamism and vitality... Minoan art is delicate, sophisticated and joyful throughout its evolution.”

Kerényi characterised Minoan art as “*the art of life*”, stating that he intended specifically the Greek word ζοή here, referring to vitality and the natural, energetic principle of life, and quoted Platon's summary of the Minoans as:

“...a civilization whose characteristics were the love of life and nature, and an art strongly imbued with charm and elegance. Their objects of art were miniatures, worked with care and love... They had a special inclination towards the picturesque and to painting, and even their miniature plastic work is elaborated in styles derived from painting... the figures move with lovely grace, the decorative designs whirl and turn, and even the architectural composition is allied to the incessant movement becoming multiform and complex.”

There is nothing of the Near Eastern hieratic or the awe-inspiringly powerful here: as Platon notes, the scale of Minoan art is often intensely personal, favouring seal images and portable figurines as sacred images rather than grandiose icons. Only in the palace frescoes do we see larger-than-life images, but here, the depictions seem to be mostly of rituals, dances and scenes of nature rather than deities or kings as we would expect from other Eastern Mediterranean cultures. Minoans also seem to have been as preoccupied with the beauty of youth as the Greeks, but with a focus upon movement rather than perfection, while expressions of the sacred tended to depict intimacy and visual equality between deity and human rather than awe or difference, depictions which radically transform our understanding of how these people engaged with their gods.

An example of this intimacy is beautifully evidenced in the Poros ring, from a tomb near Heraklion, dating to around 1450 B.C., in which is seen a ‘sacred conversation’ between a human celebrant and deity. This ring forms part of the corpus of images which form the Minoan Epiphany, a ritual practice which appears



Fig 102. Poros Ring, Tomb at Poros near Heraklion, c. 1450 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

to have had as its primary intent the seeking of a direct vision of a deity who alights from the sky and makes contact with the earth before the visionary celebrant. The gold ring is considerably worn, making the interpretation somewhat challenging, and the action depicted is both complex and ambiguous. The first aspect we may note is the dynamism and torsion of the male figure at the right, whose ecstatic ‘tree-pulling’ action appears to authorise the visionary nature of the scene.

In the centre, however, is possibly the same male figure with his arm outstretched in a posture that has been interpreted as ‘commanding’ or as a ritual greeting, seen in several other epiphany depictions. He appears to be standing atop a heavily worn shrine-like structure and this, along with his central position on the ring might lead us to conclude that he represents a deity. But this conclusion is blurred by the presence of a fragmentary floating female figure in front of his face, just above his head and directly within the purview of his gaze. Thus we might conclude, following Nilsson, that this male figure is the epiphanic visionary, experiencing a vision of the floating female deity. Galanakis further narrates:

“The goddess as a small hovering image in the scene descending from the sky... shows the intermediary action... which recalls a previous episode happened before the main action scene on the ring. This multilevel [sic] narration process is finally dramatized by the arrival and landing of the goddess seated on a shrine which is not positioned on ground level...”

The female deity at the left, still apparently floating and flanked by two ornately-rendered birds, is thus likely to be the same as the floating figure, and we see here a disclosure of narrative action in the goddess descending out of the sky in the upper centre to reach ground level. Her arm is partially outstretched to meet the outstretched arm of the male figure, and it is by this mirroring of arm postures that the ‘sacred conversation’ is suggested and the expression of intimacy is disclosed.

The Poros ring typifies the aforementioned visual equality between deity

and celebrant: they are depicted on the same level and of a similar size, but an ambiguity emerges when we realise that the male's posture closely matches other epiphany images in which the figure, sometimes male and sometimes female, is definitely a deity and often depicted floating. The Goddess alighting from the sky in the context of a religious ritual is common enough in Minoan art that we might be able to speculate that Minoans believed the deity came readily to attend the ritual, and the ecstatic 'tree-pulling' seen on the Poros ring and several others was incipient to the vision. This is a profoundly different relationship to the sacred than one we in the modern West are accustomed to!

The depiction on the Poros ring thus points us towards a different social reality, and a different set of religious categories and conceptions, than anything from our own religious traditions. Much of the religious depiction in Minoan art has been considered as partaking of strongly aniconic elements, and large statuary only seems to appear in post-Minoan periods in which Mycenaean hegemony and increased Syrian and Anatolian influences were visible in Cretan society. The occasional exception to this observed rule, such as the fragments of bronze locks of hair attached to burnt wooden pieces found in the Corridor of the Bays at Knossos, and suggesting an original 2.8m high statue of a goddess dating to before the Mainland Greek takeover, appear to highlight this aniconicity in being only found in major administrative centres and therefore perhaps anathema to wider Bronze Age



Fig 103. Reconstruction of fresco at the House of the Ladies, Akrotiri, c.1625 BC
Fira Archaeological Museum, Santorini, Greece



Fig 104. Reconstruction of Xeste 3 fresco, Akrotiri, after Olga Anastasiadou

Cretan religious feelings. Indeed many of the popular religious practices outside the palaces revolve around natural and architectural objects rather than images: Nilsson, for example, reports upon the aniconic pillar cult, in which columns were marked with sacred symbols and were the focus of rituals and offerings, while Crooks extensively studies the use of baetyls – sacred stones – in epiphany and funerary rituals.

This apparent lack of icons and the hieratic can perhaps be seen as a little strange: the Minoans were expert craftspeople and thus perfectly capable in theory of creating large-scale statuary, and so this absence begins to seem like a cultural choice. Despite their considerable talent with ceramics, stonework and stone relief, relatively little evidence of the kinds of hieratic iconicity seen elsewhere has come to light. For a society which appeared to greatly value ritual and religious depictions, this needs an explanation, and begs the question: where, if anywhere, is the hieratic to be found in Minoan art?

The central male figure on the Poros ring, with characteristics of both deity and ritual celebrant, becomes relevant to our theme here, since this ambiguity is a ubiquitous feature of many Minoan images of religious practice. Indeed it recalls the Greek idea of the human body as a perfect vessel for the divine, and perhaps indicates an interesting direction for an answer, in the notion of the ‘enacted epiphany’.

Hägg was the first to realise that Minoan depictions of the epiphany could be classified into two types, one based on a visionary experience (as seen above in the Poros ring), and a second one, in which according to Galanakis:

“...worshippers carrying offerings approach a seated deity whose role may have been acted by a high priestess impersonating the divinity.”

Here a living person, usually a woman, since it was a goddess who was most commonly shown in these depictions, plays the part of the deity and interacts with the celebrants during the course of the ritual. Such ‘enacted’ depictions were particularly common in fresco images, and a similar interpretation may also be applied to some glyptic scenes, as well as other frescos from Knossos in which dancers rather than worshippers are seen.

In the main essay previously, such a scene of an ‘enacted epiphany’ in the reconstructed fresco from the house Xeste 3 at the site of Akrotiri, Santorini was narrated as follows:

“At left we see a woman offering saffron to an enthroned female figure, with other sacred elements present, the monkey and the griffin. The life-sized nature of the figure at right suggests in part that this she represents a surrogate for the deity, enacting her role in a ritual of offering.”

and, like the Poros ring, there is to a certain extent an expression of visual equality between deity (whether enacted or not) and worshipper or celebrant, although upon further reflection, it is easy to consider the seated figure in the Xeste 3 fresco to be somewhat larger-than-life when compared to the woman making an offering at the left.

Warren also notes another fresco from Akrotiri, in the House of the Ladies, in which a robe is being offered to a female figure whose form is fragmentary and poorly-preserved. The offering woman bends forward to gaze at what may be a similarly ‘enacted epiphany’ as above:

“She [the enacted epiphany] appears to have been seated, but a standing position is not impossible, since the woman stooping to place the skirt is also looking upwards... Nanno Marinatos, in her perceptive discussion, takes the recipient figure to be a priestess being clothed for a ceremony... [and that] she might well be a representation of a goddess, seated or standing, or... a goddess in the person of a priestess.”

It should be noted in this regard that despite the human-sized, and possibly larger-than-life, images in these depictions, no large statues, wooden or otherwise, have been found at Akrotiri, despite the excellent preservation of what is popularly called the Aegean Pompeii. This is an important indicator that Hägg’s idea, this humanised deity impersonation, has more than a modicum of veracity.

In her survey of Minoan religion, Moss describes a reconstructed fresco at Ayia Triada which provides a different possible context for the ‘enacted epiphany’ phenomenon, in that it contains a depiction of at least two women, both of which bear epiphanic attributes. This three-panel scene was heavily destroyed by fire and is thus fragmentary, as she narrates:

“Of the left-hand panel... all that remains is the lower part of the figure from half-way down her thighs and some of the landscape; in the central panel... we



Fig 105. Conjectural Reconstruction of the Ayia Triada fresco by Cameron, c.1450 BC

have some part of the woman from the waist downwards and some of the building; about two-thirds of the third panel which appears to show cats, birds and agrimia frolicking in a rocky landscape is missing...”

It is the imagery in the first two panels which concerns us here, and Moss reproduces a conjectural reconstruction of the fresco by Cameron, in which the central female figure is dancing while the left-hand woman is kneeling either at prayer, or tending plants in the garden. Crooks tends towards the former interpretation and follows a different reconstruction by Sturmer, in which two baetyl-stones are conjectured, and the woman is engaging in a ritual familiar from many epiphany scenes on gold ring-seals. Moss notes the dancing woman is depicted at approximate life-size, and summarises some other details of her posture:

“Her arms are raised away from her body, and the pronounced bend of her hips and knees (along with the suggested movement of the skirt) suggests that she is... dancing. On the fresco, the woman stands in front of a structure that may be described as a seat...”

and quotes Rehak in stating that:

“...the pose and placement of the... [central] female make it reasonable to designate her a goddess, presiding over her natural realm, rather than a human being or priestess.”



Fig 106. Conjectural Reconstruction of the fresco in Room 14, Ayia Triada fresco by Sturmer, after Militello, c.1450 BC

In this light, it is perhaps natural to consider the dancing female to be an epiphany of the goddess appearing to the kneeling woman, but this interpretation is challenged by the observation that the left-hand woman is depicted at larger-than-life size, and this communicates with the two frescos from Akrotiri. Thus it is relevant to question whether the kneeling woman is not the goddess, or an ‘enacted epiphany’ who in the Minoan cultural reality is identified wholly with the goddess, while the central dancer is in fact an ecstatic figure similar to the ‘tree-pulling’ male on the Poros ring. Moss notes the ambiguity here:

“So, do we have two goddesses, or two representations of one deity? It is impossible to tell...”

Elsewhere in depictions of the Minoan Epiphany we see similar situations, in which the presence of a living ‘enacted epiphany’ appears to guarantee the arrival of the goddess in visionary epiphanic form (such as on the Isopata Ring where



Fig 107. Serpent Bearer Figurines, Shrine of the Double Axes, Knossos, c. 1550 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum

the rightmost woman appears to be an elder woman depicted at a slightly larger size to the other figures in the scene) and it is perhaps useful to assume that while both women represent deities of some kind in the Minoan conception, the question of which one is the human and which one is the 'actual' deity (in our Western conception) remains closed to us.

Similar ambiguities emerge in the three faience Serpent Bearer figurines from the Shrine of the Double Axes at Knossos, depicting as Davaras notes either a goddess or her human attendants. He further describes the largest of these artefacts, which are perhaps the most famous images from the Minoan civilisation:

"The tallest figure... wears a tall tiara with a spotted snake coiled around it, a necklace, a tight-waisted short-sleeved bodice richly embroidered, with a laced corsage, leaving the large white breasts bare, and a long skirt with a kind of short double apron over it. The hair falls down behind on the shoulders. Her eyes are black. Her arms are stretched out in front of her. The snake's tail interlaces with another snake which coils around her body and with its head appearing at her girdle. She holds a third snake which coils over her shoulder."

Meanwhile, the smaller and more well-known figure, is:

"...similarly dressed, but her skirt is flounced. She has a slim waist and bare prominent breasts. Her arms are extended and she grasps a snake in each hand."

There is an intense attention to human detail in these figurines, and the rich clothing and baring of the breasts communicates with several frescoes of female dancers from Knossos, the clear ritual nature of which strongly suggests the participants were human rather than deities. Conversely, the presence of these figurines in a shrine room rather than a secular or functional area of the palace suggests a deity or other sacred personage, a conclusion which is underscored by the bare breasts which, along with nakedness or the simple wearing of undergarments in some baetylic scenes, appears to have had a sacred connotation. This ritual norm in Minoan iconography may have been an important aspect of the enactment under discussion.

A striking but little-seen aspect of the smaller figurine is its dynamism, which is often lost in frontal photographs of the artefact, and is best seen from the side. Her back is arched, her body is tense and alert, and there is the suggestion of some kind of altered state of consciousness (of which, more below) in the depiction of her eyes as wide and staring. That she is also in motion is apparent from the lines of her skirt, which are not symmetrically arranged: rather the skirt lends the impression that one unseen foot has been placed forward with the other foot back, features which are expertly rendered through the shape and flow of the flounced layers, and lending an impression similar to postures seen in 'saluting' figurines from peak sanctuaries in central Crete. This movement lends a human touch to the depiction, and partakes of the same delightful characteristics of torsion, movement and naturalism that are the hallmarks of Minoan art.



Fig 108. Front and Side Views of Serpent Bearer figurine, professional reconstruction

Again we find ourselves in a social reality where the distinction between the icon of a deity and the depiction of a living woman ‘acting’ or ‘being’ the deity appears to have little relevance. Both ideas seem to have partaken in a seamless symbolic and perceptual experience in which a sense of the living hieratic and emerging humanist were fused into one.

Perhaps the most prominent evidence for the ‘enacted epiphany’ is the so-called Throne Room at Knossos, in which no depiction of any deity or human figure is seen. The walls of this room, which links to the central plaza of the complex via an ante-room and steps, are adorned with frescoes of griffins, palms and altars, arranged symmetrically around a leaf-shaped stone seat, which the original excavators of the site assumed was a king’s throne.

Driessen remarks, however, that the lack of much evidence for kingship in the Minoan period drives the interpretation of this space towards a religious direction, functioning in his words in the “*re-enactment of epiphany rituals involving a High Priestess.*”

This is precisely the kind of ‘enacted epiphany’ we have been discussing, and we might speculate that in the Minoan conception, it was a living deity, rather

than a 'priestess' who was venerated and envisioned here. Goodison investigated the solar alignments of this area of the palace, noting that the ante-room and throne room both face east towards the dawn light whose passage into the throne room space was facilitated by transom windows above the doorways. The interaction of these architectural features with the sunlight and the gently sloping hill of Prophitis Elias to the east of the site was observed and photographed by Goodison and she concluded that the throne room was most effectively illuminated at midwinter dawn, as she narrates:

"It was only looking afterwards at photographs taken on the first midwinter dawn investigation that we noticed that the dawn light entering at that time of year through the southernmost doorway... passes through into the 'Throne Room' itself, on a line... to illuminate the stone 'throne' and whoever may have been seated on it... This alignment resonates with [the] suggestion, based on the iconography of the adjoining wall-paintings... that this seat may have been the site where epiphany of the goddess was enacted... The possibility afforded by the architecture and orientation of closing off the entire pier-and-door colonnade onto the courtyard and then opening only the [South] door at the moment of sunrise to illuminate the 'throne' might have provided [an] element of surprise and impact."

This 'Winter Throne', in her words, is a powerful image which provides wider architectural and calendrical aspects to the enactment, and lends a compelling



Fig 109. Reconstruction of Throne Room at Knossos Palace

sense of drama to the ritual in that the epiphany occurs to a gathered audience in the plaza and is quite literally illuminated by the moment at which the darkness was pierced by “a dazzling beam of light from the dawn sun [which] revealed at the appropriate instant” the sacred person of the goddess appearing in the space. That the Throne Room at Knossos communicates more fundamentally to the theme under discussion is evidenced by the example of the first fresco at Xeste 3, Akrotiri, where we see an enthroned female accompanied by a griffin whose gardant posture is different to the couchant ones at Knossos, but whose anatomical depiction is nearly identical.

There are important implications for this practice of sacred performance, some of which have been highlighted by Morris & Peatfield, whose work in the Minoan context has tended to criticise ‘representational’ interpretations of Minoan ritual practice in favour of an embodied perspective in which a deeper view is taken of the human body as an actor of considerable agency in ritual behaviours. Here, actions are not simply performative, but take on internalised characteristics:

“Even the most superficial actor is aware... of the emotional power of drama, that what you do affects how you feel. The drama is not simple pretence, but a collective participation... This is the ‘internal’ dimension of action: physical action can be used to affect emotional and psychological states, and to access altered states of consciousness, which transcend everyday realities.”

Elsewhere, they note that expressive, energetic and dramatic ritual actions engender a susceptibility to begin to envision or otherwise sense the presence of the deity. In their words, “*the body is the conduit to experiencing the divine...*” and they note that many of the stereotypical postures and gestures seen in ritual depictions throughout Minoan art appear to bear a tension that may have visionary or shamanic potentials.

Experiments with such gestures by McGowan under controlled conditions have indeed liberated altered states of consciousness and visionary experiences, demonstrating that such gestures were meaningful to Minoan celebrants beyond the representational and offering significant challenges to what Morris & Peatfield have called the “*rather passive ritual behaviour*” of modern Western religion.

We are also witness to a religious situation which profoundly blurs the lines between customary Western notions of actor versus role, celebrant and deity, and between the one who sees and that which is seen. We find ourselves in a realm where, in the strict but perceptual language of ritual, an actor does not simply enact, but rather *becomes* the deity whom she performs, in her own mind as well as the minds of all the other celebrants.

Thus the ‘enacted epiphany’ is itself a visionary experience of sorts, and envisages the deity in human form, dancing and interacting with the other participants through exemplary actions that only a deity could make.

It is here, in the gestures and performative drama of the living deity, that the hieratic in Minoan art may rather paradoxically be found – static large



Fig 110. Palaikastro Kouros & Reconstruction by M.S. Moak, House 5, Palaikastro c. 1500-1450 BC, Sitia Archaeological Museum

scale sculpture replaced by a dynamic human form – and this, at length, is how a concern for the humanist could steadily arise in the focus of Minoan ritual upon the beauty, dignity, expressiveness and sanctity of this curiously liminal and ambiguous conception of the human body.

Perhaps the clearest example of this emerging humanism in Minoan art can be seen in the Palaikastro Kouros, a fragmentary figurine which perhaps communicates most clearly with the later Greek ideals of beauty, and of the human as divine figure. Found at the site of House 5 in the town of Palaikastro in eastern Crete, it was evident that this chryselephantine (hippopotamus ivory) sculpture had anciently been destroyed in what appears to have been a conscious act of iconoclastic vandalism, and as such the face has not survived. However, enough of the arms, hands, legs and feet endured for a fairly accurate reconstruction to be posited.

MacGillivray & Sackett devote considerable energy to demonstrating that the *kouros* depicts a Young Male Hunter deity whose likeness is evidenced in clay



Fig 111. Details of the arms, hands and feet of the Palaikastro Kouros

figurines found at the nearby peak sanctuary of Petsofas, as well as in glyptic images from Chania, Mycenae and Kydonia, and the characteristic posture of his arms is an image found commonly enough throughout Minoan imagery in religious and ritual contexts for both female and male depictions that McGowan utilised it as part of her visionary gestures experiment.

What is remarkable about this figurine, however, especially in light of later Greek developments is the level of anatomical accuracy demonstrated, as Sackett notes:

“Several details of the human anatomy represented on this figure... include the chest muscles... perhaps the shoulder... the arm muscles above and below the elbow and the muscles, tendons and veins of the forearm and hand, where the accuracy could be compared with that of a modern textbook. Details of wrist... hands... fingers and fingernails are impressive in their attention to detail. Leg muscles, too, are represented with accuracy, as are the neatly carved toenails and veins, carefully rendered...”

before concluding that in its depiction of youthful beauty:

“...the artist was interested in a careful and detailed expression of the human anatomy. His creation was to be as fine as an anthropomorphic form can be.”

Musgrave considers that this anatomical accuracy cannot have been derived from anything other than personal observation of a live model, while Sackett explores the archaeological context of the find which supports the idea that the figurine was originally located in a household shrine whose entrance permitted easy visibility to the sacred space from a small public space outside the house.

It is impossible to know from the surviving evidence and iconography whether a similar style of ‘enacted epiphany’ obtained for this ‘Young Male Hunter’ deity at Palaikastro as it did for the aforementioned goddess at Knossos and Akrotiri – although here we must recall the central male figure on the Poros ring and say that perhaps there was – but in this figurine we can see perhaps the most refined expression of how the humanist was ambiguously born from the living divine figure of a youthful model playing or enacting the god for the artist.

Furthermore, the attestation of a Zeus Kouros cult at Palaikastro in the

Classical Greek era indicates that at least in one locale, such native Aegean proto-humanist concerns may have communicated their survival even through the Dark Age and Archaic periods into the re-flowering of Greek culture some one thousand years after the fall of the Minoan civilisation.

Thus we see in the practices and concerns of Minoan religion, in the careful attention to anatomical details and a love of physical vitality, bodily movement and dynamism in Minoan art which was so keenly felt and so intensely appreciated that it almost completely replaced the perennial attachment to large-scale hieratic sculpture that was the common hallmark of Near Eastern culture.

We see then the birth of the humanist in Minoan art, through an archaic conception of the human body not merely as vessel for an externalised divine, but as a intimately divine agent, and perhaps even as a generator and owner of that divinity. As an important mediator between the sacred and the mundane world, this liminal humanism prefigured the later and more realised human/divine conceptions of the Classical Greek world, and planted a fascinating cultural seed from which we in the modern West are still reaping the fruits of profound inspiration.



*Fig 112. An imaginative 'reconstruction' of the Knossos 'Prince of Lilies' fresco
Bruce Rimell, following Neumeier (2011)
40cm x 15cm - Acrylics, Inks & Markers on Canvas*



Review of Epiphany Artefacts #2

Since the publication of the 2013 website presentation of *'The Minoan Epiphany'*, several other interesting artefacts have come to my attention, their number steadily increasing over the years. Some of these consisted of newly-discovered and reported artefacts which have come to light very recently: these include the Mochlos Pyxis and the 'Divine Couple' ring, as well as two of the gold rings from the fascinating Griffin Warrior Tomb at Pylos.

Others are artefacts of which I was unaware – including a second ring from Kalyvia – but which were discovered previous to 2013, and in some cases during the earliest excavations on Crete. A couple of rings were also excluded from the original survey due to their Mycenaean provenance, however the discovery of the Pylos tomb with its rich array of artefacts has caused me to re-examine this assumption, and five mainland Greek artefacts are now included here.

As previously, the various foci of this review are largely determined by the artefacts themselves, but I have chosen to expand the remit slightly, in order to include a selection of interesting seal impressions from Ayia Triada, several of which do not depict an epiphany scene directly but do indicate something of the liquid flexibility of Minoan religious categories as intimated in the main essay. Episodes which seem to depict some moment immediately before an epiphany ritual are seen, as are images which hint at a wider context of the epiphany in Minoan life.

Two interesting seal impressions from Knossos also depict images of the goddess in possible epiphanic contexts: the first shows the goddess in abstract space hovering between two birds, while the second shows her reclining against a background which recalls images of the sea from other scenes in Minoan glyptic, and which may be related to the 'Goddess from Beyond the Sea' corpus of images.

A group of sealstones from the Middle Minoan Atèlier des Sceaux at Malia Palace similarly suggest tangential images from the 'Goddess from Beyond the Sea' schema. Aspects of Minoan astronomy and calendrical insights, as well as a brief excursus into the possibility that a psychoactive poppy species may have been utilised in some Minoan or Mycenaean rituals, are also explored, again suggested by the artefacts themselves.

The review closes with five artefacts from Mainland Greece – four from the Peloponnese and one from Phthiotis – which disclose evidence of strong Minoan influences on Mycenaean religion, and give us insights into how Minoan social and ritual culture on the mainland impacted the development of Mycenaean Greek society. We have seen artefacts from the mainland in the previous review – the Vapheio and Messenia images – but these were presented largely as sporadic Cretan ritual influence on mainland religious practice.

Davis & Stocker report, however, that many of the recent finds from the so-called Griffin Warrior Tomb at Pylos – from which two of the new epiphany artefacts originate – demonstrate a strong connection with the iconography

of contemporaneous Crete some 200 before the first large-scale palaces were constructed on the mainland, and so we can infer that aspects of Minoan religious rituals were foundational to Mycenaean Greek palace cult practices of later times.

It is worth noting that at least one artefact mentioned to depict an epiphany image – the fourth gold ring from Poros – is as yet unpublished. From the sparse description given by Rethemiotakis in extant published literature relating to the Poros finds, it depicts the epiphany of a male deity, but further details will have to await its formal publication.

24. ‘Divine Couple’ Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tomb at Poros near Heraklion, LM IB, c. 1450BC

One of four gold rings found in the same richly-endowed tomb at Poros, Heraklion, from which the ‘Sacred Conversation’ ring (see Review #1 above) was discovered. Rethemiotakis reports that a third ring, depicting a celebrant approaching a shrine building surmounted by ‘horns of consecration’ – the so-called ‘Sacred Mansion’ Ring – was also found here, as was a fourth ring that was reported briefly by Dimopoulou as containing an image of the epiphany of a male deity – another ‘sacred conversation’ depiction, but this time between a female celebrant encountering a male deity – but which beyond this short sketch has not yet been published in the academic literature.

The iconography is dense and complex, but essentially depicts a ‘sacred conversation’ scene we have seen before, and which clearly resonates with the imagery on the previously narrated ring from Poros. The workmanship is of reasonably quality, but not as refined as that of the ‘Sacred Conversation’ ring, which Rethemiotakis describes as graceful and painterly in contrast to the stiff and formal depiction on this ring.

However, there are a number of features on the ‘Divine Couple’ ring, including a detailed depiction of astronomical phenomena towards the top, which Rethemiotakis describes as “*altogether novel*,” and which he proposes concisely represent much of the Minoan calendrical system, or at least that part of it which relates to the ‘sacred conversation’ ritual. He narrates the scene:

“On the left is female figure in a seated posture, bending slightly towards the front, with her skirt detailed by incisions and her hands on top of her thighs... On the right is a standing male with his right arm extended towards the seated figure and left arm hanging loosely bent towards the back; he is dressed in a belted loincloth... Between the two figures are dotted arcs and tufts piled up into a craggy mass... Above the female figure are two large flying birds in symmetrical disposition with open wings perpendicular to the body... Between and above the birds is a many-rayed star-like motif framed by small dots. Above the male figure



*Fig 113. The 'Divine Couple' Ring (Image & Sketch)
Tomb at Poros near Heraklion, LM IB, c. 1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



is first a roughly horizontal line, and above two symmetrical and opposed crescents with a circle in the middle and a fringed symbol to the right.”

Also noteworthy is the aniconic nature of both figures' heads, in contrast to the detail of the female's dress and the feathers on the birds' wings, which as we have seen previously may suggest a trance in connection with the ecstatic nature of epiphany rituals. In line with this is Rethemiotakis's drawing of attention to the elongated legs of both figures, another motif which Morris & Peatfield previously identified as referring possibly to an altered state of consciousness.

There is also the suggestion that the female figure's hair is tied up implying perhaps an elder woman, although a faint line of dots down both of her shoulders alludes to longer hair and perhaps therefore – following Rehak's logic previously – that she is a younger woman. It is also possible to imagine the female is facing the viewer, in contrast to the male, who very clearly gazes at the seated female.

These considerations imply that the two figures depicted are humans enacting a ritual, but Rethemiotakis considers that both of these are deities, and thus by inference what we are seeing here is a scene from a lost Minoan mythology. However, bearing in mind previously considered notions of the Eternal Return – in which ritual and myth re-enact some primordial supernatural event *in illo tempore* – and of Western religious categories being profoundly inappropriate for a coherent understanding of Minoan ritual life, it is entirely possible that this scene depicts simultaneously a mythical event and an ecstatic ritual.

The 'enacted epiphany' concept would certainly point towards this blurring



*Fig 114. The 'Sacred Mansion' Ring
Tomb at Poros, c. 1450BC, Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



Fig 115. Astronomical motifs on the 'Divine Couple' Ring

of distinctions, and indeed potentially blurring of time: scenes such as these compel us to be reminded that Western religious life takes place purely in historical time, with supernatural events taking place 'long ago' and contemporary religious rituals taking place 'today'. Bronze Age Cretans may well have experienced time in an entirely different way to our modern conceptions of linear movement from the past into the present and future, and as we shall see Rethemiotakis comes to much the same conclusion.

In any case, the similarity of the scenes on the two rings from the same tomb means we cannot avoid close comparisons, and Rethemiotakis considers the imagery on both rings to be complementary, relating broadly the same ritual scene from only slightly differing perspectives. He notes that the postures of the deities is the same, and the framing of the seated goddess between two birds is only found in the two Poros rings. On the 'Sacred Conversation' ring they are positioned as flying away from the goddess, and appear to 'support' her as if she is hovering, but here they are depicted above and facing her. In addition, her body is shown in contact with the rocks behind her, which is much less suggestive of a hovering image.

Rethemiotakis also notes some contrasts: while the previously depicted ritual from Poros appears to take place in a meadow with blooming flowers, the 'Divine Couple' ring shows a rocky landscape. Both are obviously intended to depict a wild nature locale, but the mountainous landscape communicates more with the 'Sacred Mansion' ring, as well as fresco images from Knossos and Ayia Triada.

In a review of other depictions of the 'sacred conversation' scene – including the Amnisos and Knossos Ring #2 (see Review #1 above), as well as the Geneva Seal (see below) – he concludes that Minoan artists did not seem to strictly conventionalise the imagery into a single iconographic form, and proposes that since both the Amnisos and Knossos #2 rings do not have a secure archaeological provenance (nor for that matter does the Geneva Seal), that they may have been looted from tombs at Poros, and that the 'sacred conversation' may have had particular local relevance for the elite families based in and around the port at

Poros, as well as perhaps the Amnisos port as well.

Such thalassocratic concerns can perhaps be distantly related to Galanakis's 'Goddess from Beyond the Sea', and it is possible to propose that the rocky locale depicted (implying a mountainous location) and the link with the ports of Knossos, and the Knossian elites, signified that the peak sanctuary on Mt. Yiouchtas was here intended.

What really sets the 'Divine Couple' ring from other rings at Poros, and indeed (apart from Mycenae Ring #2, see below) all other rings in the epiphany corpus, is the very clear and distinctive depiction of astronomical phenomena above the heads of both figures. Rethemiotakis proposes that the 'Divine Couple' ring presents the epiphany in a space-time context which is both precise and removed from everyday life, situating the event on the boundary between the terrestrial and the celestial.

The astronomical objects are presented in such a way as to infer a celestial and calendrical meaning to the image and the 'sacred conversation' encounter: from left to right, Rethemiotakis proposes that the Sun is depicted, then three images of the moon in waxing, full and waning (crescent) configurations, and then a motif which he identifies as the Milky Way.

This iconographic element we have seen several times before, and was



Fig 116. The 'Runner's Ring'

Syme-Viannou, c. 1600 - 1500BC, Heraklion Archaeological Museum



Fig 117. Detail of upper part of Isopata Ring: the descending goddess, the wavy line and the Milky Way motif

previously left as ambiguous or unidentified – we saw that it was variously identified tentatively as a comet/meteor or ear of barley – but Rethemiotakis proposes a fascinating meaning for this astronomical motif in the context of the religious pilgrimage up to a peak sanctuary site:

“[T]he very form of the mountain and, at another level, the cathartic walk up to its peak together embody in a metaphysical sense the notion of rising in to the sky, an idea perhaps inferred and reinforced by the use of the Milky Way symbol, i.e. the ‘path of light’ between the earth and the heavens that the gods cross to be conveyed from one world to another. It is between the two worlds that the epiphany takes place...”

He relates in this regard a fragment of poetry from Pindar, identifying the bright path along which Themis travelled as the Milky Way. Pindar’s words are worth recounting, in translation by Race:

*“First did the Fates bring wise-counseling, heavenly Themis
on golden horses from the springs of Oceanus
along a shining road to the hallowed stair of Olympus
to be the primordial wife of Zeus...”*

It is certainly true in my experience that the Milky Way is dazzlingly visible from mountainous regions in Crete at night (as it is in a variety of wild locales that I have been lucky enough to travel to, from Colombian cloud-forest to Southern African *karoo*) and it is easy to imagine pre-modern people perceiving the Milky Way in more prominent terms than we do today, drowned as it often is in streetlights and other urban illuminations.

Such liminal conceptions of the Milky Way in particular, and of the ‘sacred conversation’ more generally, in Minoan imagery may have had according to Rethemiotakis a unifying effect on the Minoan experience of the cosmos. He notes that the sun disk appears to be supported by the birds’ wings, just as on the ‘Sacred

Conversation' ring, the goddess herself is supported by these birds, while the male figure's head appears to be reaching up to the wavy line, which previously was suggested to represent a line of mountains, but in this context appears to delineate the space between celestial and terrestrial.

This resonance – between solar disk and goddess supported by birds – recalls several points of evidence reported by Moss that a solar goddess, or in her words, “a *Guardian of the Sun*”, may have been worshipped in Minoan times, and particularly associated with peak sanctuaries such as Yiouchtas and Petsophas, as well as rural sanctuaries such as Piskokephalo and the Idaean Cave. She associates this sun deity with the ‘horns of consecration’, relating this iconographically with symbols relating to Hathor, an Egyptian ‘Guardian of the Sun’ deity (and bearing a crown of cow horns), as well as with Late Minoan images of the Goddess with Upraised Arms at sites such as Gazi and Karfi.

She also notes that a male ‘God of Initiation’ is also associated with peak sanctuary sites (Yiouchtas again, Atsiphades Korakias) as well as caves (Psycho and the Idaean Cave again), and it may be possible to associate these two deities – a solar goddess and a male initiate, or rather a sacred personage authorising and acting as a precedent for male initiates in some age-grading system or secret cult – with the ‘sacred conversation’ iconography.

Marinatos takes this further, arguing that a *hieros gamos* with solar goddess was the defining ritual in Minoan kingship. However, both Moss and Marinatos utilise contemporaneous data from non-Aegean societies in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean (Egyptian for Moss, and Near Eastern/Levantine for Marinatos)



Fig 118. The Kalapodi Ring
Kalapodi, Phthiotis, c. 1600 - 1450BC, Atalanti Archaeological Museum

which may not always be appropriate.

Rethemiotakis briefly does the same however: he notes the strong association on ‘Divine Couple’ ring of the female with the Sun, and the male with the moon or Milky Way calls to mind the Mesopotamia mythology of solar deity Utu-Shamash and moon god Nanna-Sin, but he says that Mesopotamian contexts near-consistently associate Utu-Shamash with the Sun (indeed the name element *shamash* refers to the Sun in many ancient and contemporary Semitic languages) and Nanna-Sin with the moon in their iconography. By contrast, this is the only clear Minoan depiction showing such an association.

He also notes the similarity of the astronomical depictions here to those on a ring from Mycenae (see below), in which offerings are made to a seated female deity, among many other elements. However, the male figure who is (as he states) “...essential to the Minoan version of the epiphany” is absent. The Psychro votive plaque (see below) also communicates in some respects with the imagery here.

But it is his discussion of the implications of this ‘Divine Couple’ ring for our understanding of Minoan conceptions of time and cosmos which are the most illuminating aspect of his study. He suggests that the ring seems to denote two notions of time: an infinite space-time that dwells beyond the human world and indicating the eternity of the gods’ domain, and an ongoing cyclic time synchronised to the phases of the moon. By implication, then, the Minoans had a basic reckoning of time through some kind of lunar calendar, but Rethemiotakis also proposes that the depiction of the Sun together with the moon here, on the Psychro plaque and on the Mycenae Ring demonstrate a formalised lunar-solar calendar as well.

As well as a mountainous locale on the edge of human space as the location for the ‘sacred conversation’ event, the ‘Divine Couple’ ring also suggests a time to Rethemiotakis, and he utilises various solar and lunar depictions on pottery fragments to tentatively decipher the astronomical iconography on the ring to suggest such a time:

“[T]he event (the meeting on the – holy? – mountain) takes place on the day before the night of the full moon, that comes after one of the fixed dates determined by the course of the sun, namely the solstices or equinoxes.”

The essence of Rethemiotakis’s perspective is that both the ‘Divine Couple’ and ‘Sacred Conversation’ rings from Poros depict in a manner that would have been unambiguous to a Minoan audience a now-lost mythform of a meeting between deities, which was also likely to have been re-enacted in epiphanic ritual, either as part of a palace or popular cult or as some aspect of an age-grading or other initiatory system.

That this may have been simultaneously ritualistic, mythological and visionary is suggested by the clear epiphanic depiction of the descending goddess on the ‘Sacred Conversation’ ring, and the floating figure-of-eight deity figure on the Mycenae Ring #2. Again we see that the liquid flexibility of, and emphasis upon ritual activity within, Minoan religious categories challenges our own passive and

rigid Western religious notions.

The ‘Divine Couple’ ring thus highlights and emphasises in a remarkable way the manifold liminalities within the ‘sacred conversation’ motif and the epiphany corpus generally. Rethemiotakis’s positive identification of the comet/barley motif as the Milky Way – Papasavvas is clear from his study of the ‘Runner’s Ring’ that this does not represent any kind of plant – and furthermore of the galaxy as a ‘path of light’ down which deities may descend allows us to expand our conception of the epiphany beyond ideas of ritual activity, religious representation and even embodied trance or visionary experience, into a realm in which we begin to tentatively behold lost Minoan mythforms and cosmos-embracing beliefs, ideas and experiences.

It also allows us to re-examine this motif in several other epiphany scenes, not least the ‘Sacred Conversation’ ring, in which the Milky Way motif appears directly over the head of the male figure and immediately to the right of the fragmentary floating female figure. It is easy to see how Rethemiotakis’s interpretation lends a new narrative perspective to the scene, of the earthbound male, with his head reaching up the stars – perhaps also indicating the trance-like nature of his voyage to the boundaries of the world – beholding a vision of the heavenly goddess who descends not merely from on high, but along the ‘path of light’ to the peak sanctuary site to greet the celebrant and engage in the ‘sacred conversation’.

Other ‘sacred conversation’ images in which the gender roles appear reversed mitigate against any rigid idea of female and male roles in this event, however, and Minoan notions of who descended from on high and who was earthly may have been contingent on an array of social and religious concerns, not least who may have been participating in any ritual re-enactment of the mythical and cosmic precedent(s), and to whom the ring artefacts may have belonged, hence who commissioned their making.

Besides the two rings from Poros, we have seen the same Milky Way symbol appearing on artefacts in the previous review above, and the context in which it appears resonates strongly with the ‘path of light’ interpretation. It is also worth discussing one further motif on the ‘Divine Couple’ ring that we have not yet explored in any detail: the wavy line line which proceeds along the top right hand

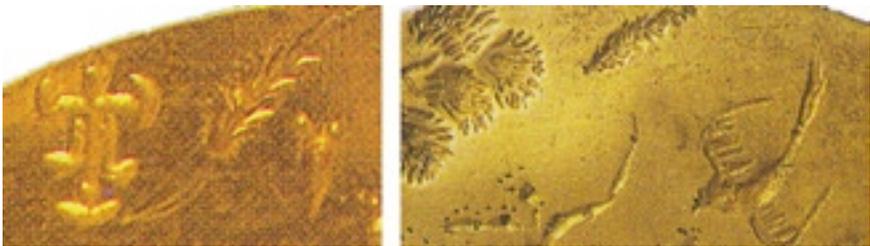


Fig 119. Milky Way motifs on the Vapheio & Sellopoulo Rings

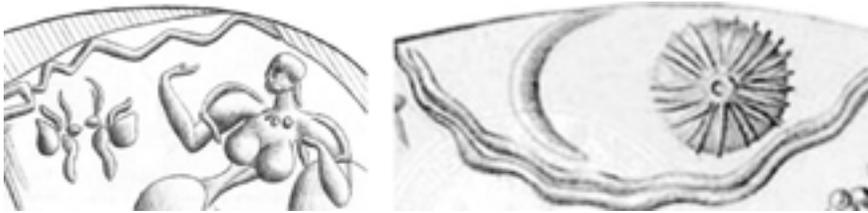


Fig 120. Wavy line motifs on the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1 and the Mycenae Ring #2

side of the ring, from the wing of one of the birds, over the male figure's head, and above which are seen the moon and Milky Way motifs.

Like the Milky Way, we have seen this image before on several rings, and we have previously suggested that it might represent a line of mountains seen in cavalier perspective (on the Isopata ring, for example) or simply to denote a sense of wild nature or a mountainous location. This was based on Rehak's insights as well as similar motifs on some fresco images at Knossos and Ayia Triada, and given the liquid flexibility of Minoan categories we are proposing here, it is conceivable that to a Minoan viewer it could have had the simultaneous meanings of both mountains as well as the separating line between the worlds of gods and humans.

However, with Rethemiotakis's interpretations of the 'Divine Couple' ring in mind, it seems reasonable to propose that this line rather more represents the symbolic delineation within an epiphanic depiction between earthly/human and celestial/divine domains. In this light, the Milky Way might be best understood as the path along which these two domains are crossed – via an illuminated road which touches earthly horizons as well as extending upwards to the highest celestial realm – and the 'sacred conversation' can then be understood as taking place upon this line of demarcation. The appearance of the line in very close proximity, and even possibly, slightly moving around, the male figure's head resonates with this idea.

We might speculate a little further, and make a conjecture that the interaction of the male figure's head with the line – and not, say, the feet, as if the figure is walking along the line or entering the domain fully – might hint at sensations of altered states of consciousness, in which the head floats off into another realm, while the body stays in 'this world', interpreted visually not as sensations in themselves, but ritually and religiously interpreted as coming into contact with the 'world above'.

Religious and visionary literature is replete with descriptions of this nature, and Lewis-Williams relates that a vast array of trance states, shamanic flights, visionary apparitions and entrances into heavenly or underworld domains, as well as modern New Age 'astral projections', may be understood in neuropsychological terms, with corresponding identifying features in the artforms and narratives that emerge from them.

In any case, the ‘Milky Way’ and demarcating line seem pervasive in Minoan glyptic, and in the Review above, both motifs were seen several times:

1. The Isopata Ring, where both motifs are associated with a floating female deity figure, who appears above the line and the central female who may be the goddess descended to earth, and to whose right appears the Milky Way. It is possible that she gestures to it with her bent arm.
2. The Sellopoulo Ring where the Milky Way motif occurs directly above the male celebrant, who beholds the arrival of an epiphanic bird heralding the deity. Again, it is possible to suggest that the celebrant indicates both the bird and the motif with his raised arm.
3. The Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1, where two wavy lines are seen above the depiction: these extend from the robe-like image at the top left across the top of the depiction, while the two epiphanic birds appear immediately below the lines.
4. The Vapheio Ring, where a short line extends down and to the left from the base of a Milky Way motif, towards the hand of the central female figure, who seems to be touching it. Above this line is a figure which we have previously identified as a construal/visionary image hovering between human and double-axe.
5. On the Kalyvia Ring #1, there is a line of dots extending across the top of the scene. This may indicate stars, but equally could be a variant of the wavy line. Beneath it, a bird is beheld by a male celebrant on a baetyl, which resonates strongly with the Sellopoulo depiction.

Rethemiotakis also notes the Milky Way motif’s appearance on the ‘Runner’s Ring’ from Syme-Viannou, where it occurs in association with what he describes as a full moon motif, directly over the head of the male running figure. Papasavvas describes the male’s head on this ring as angled upwards in a very unnatural way, and he proposes that the male’s connection with, and intense gaze upon, the Milky Way motif is intended, perhaps as some kind of propitious divine sign. A ring from Kalapodi, Phthiotis, also evidences this motif in a scene of four figures, all of whom appear to be in tense or swaying postures: the Milky Way sign appears directly above one of the female celebrants, moving towards the head of the male figure.

We shall also see both of these motifs in subsequent artefacts in this second review. These include the Geneva Seal, another ‘sacred conversation’ in which the Milky Way motif is associated with a strange, floating figure of indeterminate gender, the Kalyvia Ring #2, and possibly upon the male’s head on the Berlin Ring, where on both the Milky Way is again seen. The wavy line meanwhile will be seen in one form or another on the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3, as a double line on the Pylos Ring #1, on the Elatia-Alonaki Ring, on the two rings from Mycenae, and possibly in fragmentary form on the Mochlos Pyxis.

25. The Psychro Bronze Votive Plaque

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK

Psychro Cave, Lasithi Plateau, LM I (?), c. 1600 - 1450BC

The cave at Psychro on the Lasithi Plateau in eastern Crete has long been a cult centre and has been the subject of numerous archaeological investigations since the late nineteenth century. The site is persistently associated with the Dictaeon Cave where Zeus was believed in Classical times to have been nursed by the goat-nymph Amalthea. Among the thousands of finds at the cave is a bronze votive plaque, which Dietrich narrates as depicting:

“...[a] representation of a sacred tree... mounted on some sort of base. To the right is the figure of a worshipper, while the rest of the scene is made up of three pairs of horns, each with a bough growing from the centre, a fish, bird, the sun, moon and stars. The bird is shown perching on one of the separate boughs within a pair of horns of consecration, and it most likely represents the epiphany of a deity.”

The locale of the scene is a shrine, judging by the presence of three ‘horns of consecration’, or as Moss puts it, symbols of the ‘Guardian of the Sun’ goddess, and the trees emerging from each, as well as at the base, suggests a wild nature context.

Evans considered that the male figure was engaged in some form of ecstatic dance – suggested perhaps by the bent knees – while Rethemiotakis connects the imagery on the plaque with the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring and other ‘sacred conversation’ depictions, noting that the celebrant raises his hand to where he says we should expect the appearance of a goddess. Instead she seems to appear as a bird, which is in line with the imagery of the Sellopoulo and Kalyvia Rings above, where an epiphanic bird heralds the goddess’s imminent arrival.

What really connects this image with the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring, however, is the appearance of the Sun and Moon: above the male’s head is a crescent moon, while a solar disk appears above and behind the bird. These visual associations – of Sun/bird/(female) and Moon/male – appear to mirror the depiction on the ring from Poros. The fish also possibly denotes the goddess’s link with the marine world as well – and one can imagine similar Minoan conceptions of the deep sea and caves as both relating to the underworld – and the earthly realm implied by the sacred tree in the centre may be considered to unify the cosmos in much the same way as Rethemiotakis proposes for the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring.

Also noteworthy in the rough depiction of the male figure are several exaggerated features of his body, including the loincloth, the buttocks and the legs, all of which suggest an inexperienced attempt to replicate the more finely-rendered shapely features of male figures in Minoan rings, sealstones and seal impressions, as well as public art such as frescos. Such features thus suggest that the engraver was somewhat familiar with the iconographic aesthetic standards of male figures in

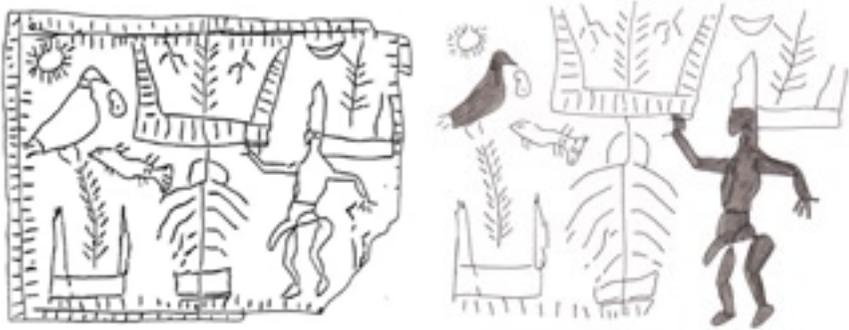


Fig 121. *The Psychro Bronze Votive Plaque (Archaeological Illustration & Sketch)*
Psychro, Lasithi Plateau, c. 1600 - 1450BC, Ashmolean Museum

the art of his culture, despite being apparently unable to replicate them with much dexterity.

The unskilled nature of the object, made as it was for a votive offering, does not invite the conclusion that this was an expensive item made or commissioned by a member of the Minoan elite. It was rather a cheaply-made item whose depiction may have been intended for a supernatural audience only – a private communication from celebrant to deity – in contrast to the public expressions of rings as sealing images, and I would speculate that the male figure is intended to depict the votive offerant.

The co-occurrence of a dancer in ecstatic posture with the epiphanic appearance of a bird, which is an established convention in the epiphany corpus, also strongly suggests again that at least some aspects of the epiphany rituals and experiences were available to the populace in general, and not just confined to elite families and religious leaders.

26. Berlin Ring

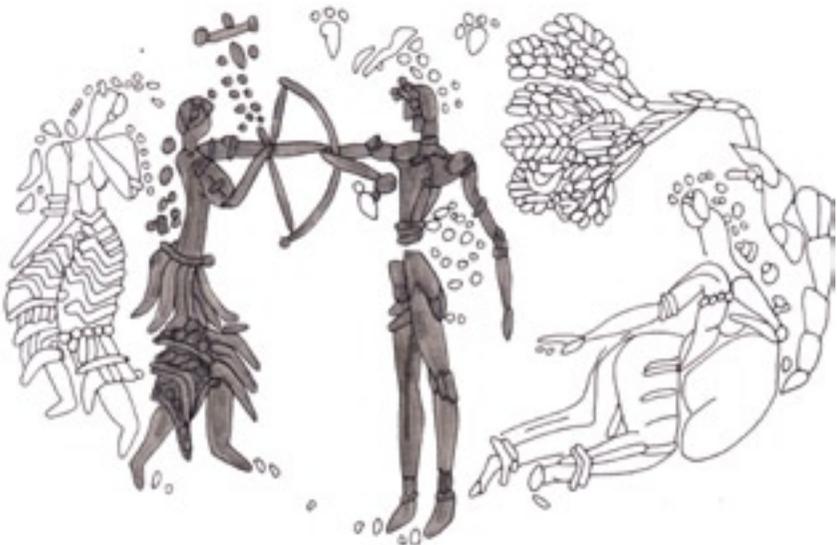
Staatliche Museum, Berlin, Germany

Archaeological provenance unknown, LM I or LH I (?), c. 1600 - 1450BC

This is another artefact which discloses a dense and complex scene with much to discuss, however, as Crooks notes, there are some suspicions regarding this particular ring's authenticity. Iconographically, though, there is much to recommend this ring being an authentic Minoan production, particularly as it evokes another visual variation on the 'sacred conversation' convention. Indeed, the two central figures in this scene suggest perhaps more than many other Minoan glyptic images some aspect or episode of a lost Minoan mythology, perhaps a *hieros gamos* or a genuinely intimate episode of the 'sacred conversation'.



Fig 122. Berlin Ring (Image & Sketch)
Archaeological provenance unknown, c. 1600 - 1450BC
Staatliche Museum, Berlin



The general outline of the scene closely mirrors Knossos Ring #1: an epiphanic, mythological or enacted ritual scene (or a mixture of two or more of these) is framed by an ecstatic female dancer at left, and a finely-rendered female leaning upon a baetyl on the right, both of whom gaze at the scene, which includes a strange skybound visionary epiphany and two figures interacting closely with each other by means of a bow. These two are further surmounted by a variety of ambiguous symbols. Crooks describes the framing in the Berlin Ring as typical of the baetylic ritual genre:

“The human leans upon or embraces the stone, which is always depicted off-centre... clasping it with one arm... [T]he human figure appear[s] to glance back over [her] shoulders whilst... leaning upon the stone, their free arm extending behind them in a gesture often described as waving, while their gaze is directed into the field to the location described as the site of the divine epiphany achieved through their interaction with the stone.”

The similarities continue with the leftmost dancer who in both cases appears to be moving away from the central epiphanic scene, and is seen in a dynamic depiction which suggests ecstatic dance or a more sedate rhythmic swaying.

Differences between the two rings, however, are just as important as the similarities: on the Knossos Ring #1, the epiphanic male figure bears a bow and holds a striking pose whilst conforming to one of the standard conventions of the descending deity, i.e., waving hair. The Berlin Ring however appears to show this same bow-bearing deity with his feet set upon the earth, and it is possible to speculate that these two rings depict two episodes in the same mythical/ritual event, with a narrative of a descending male deity then setting his feet upon the earth during a rite which includes baetylic and ecstatic dance elements.

Immediately above the male figure’s head is an ambiguous shape and a cascade of dots which proceed from the shape down the back of his head. In the light of the insights gleaned from the ‘Divine Couple’ ring, it might be possible to suggest this as a kind of Milky Way or similar ‘path of light’ motif, implying that the male figure is indeed the skybound deity now arrived in the human world. Similar arrays of dots are associated with the central female figure, and both peripheral female figures. In the latter cases these may indicate details of the hair, but they seem altogether too detailed to indicate this alone: the baetylic female’s hair appears to be both tied up as well as flowing down her shoulders while the dancing female has an array of dots above and to the right of her head, which may depict her hair in motion, but equally may communicate with the dotted motifs associated with both of the central figures’ heads.

The Berlin Ring also includes a strange, floating image almost directly above the central female’s head, and a line of dots seems to communicate this motif with the bow. It may be described as an ambiguous, construal image of a human and double-axe hybrid. Beneath this, the central female wears a very unusual dress – it appears to be part layered dress, part undergarment and part grass skirt! – tensely

draws back the string on the bow and points it towards the male deity who reaches his right arm forwards and loops it through the bow, bending it backwards to lock, as if pulling or embracing the bow. Both figures gaze intently at each other.

The depiction of the female's legs strongly suggests she is in motion, whereas the male seems tense but static: is she dancing around him? Do we have the depiction of some kind of Minoan dance in which a male loops his arm through a bow as a female dancer moves around him?

It is tempting to suggest some kind of astronomical interpretation to the scene, dance, ritual, vision or lost mytheme – and the floating epiphany of possibly the same male deity on the Knossos Ring #1 lends further weight to this idea if we see it as an astronomical representation of some kind – but specifics as to which stars, planets or other astronomical phenomena might be implied, could perhaps be suggested by some lengthy comparative mythological investigation, beyond the scope of this essay.

27. Geneva Seal (CMS X-261)

Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland

Archaeological provenance unknown, LM I or LM II (?), c. 1600 – 1400BC

This lentoid seal presents an interesting perspective on the 'sacred conversation' convention, a scene which we only elsewhere see on gold rings. Such imagery along with its unknown archaeological provenance might allow us to speculate, following Rethemiotakis previously, that the Geneva Seal may have originally come from a tomb at Poros.

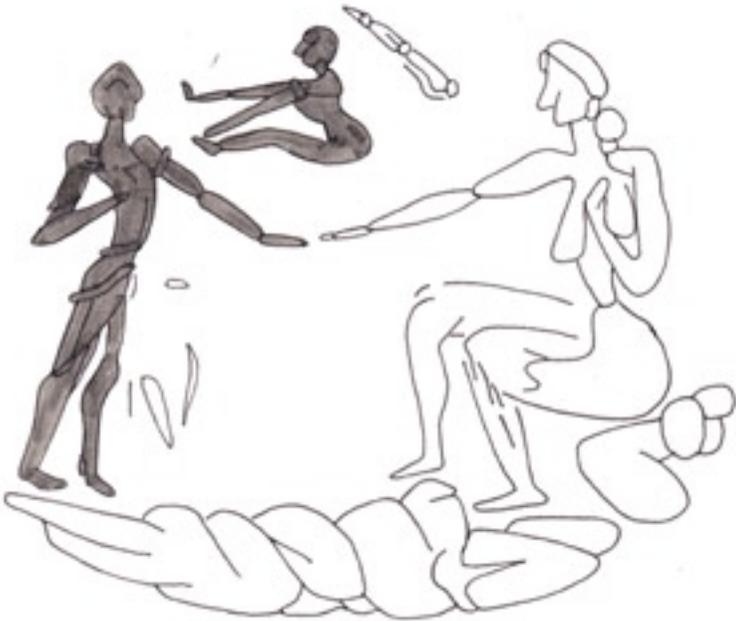
Anastasiadou notes that the contrast between the relatively common material (chlorite rather than gold) on this artefact, and the refined quality of its engraved depiction, reminds us that distinctions between 'elite', 'merchant-class' and 'common populace' glyptic traditions are not clearly defined. She narrates the scene:

“Two figures, a larger seated woman in left profile and a slenderer standing man in right profile are depicted on a rocky ground. The figures have naked upper body, the woman is wearing flounced pants and the man an apron. Both figures have one (the foreground) arm bent to the chest and the other extending forward such that a line is created by the two hands. Above the extended arms of the figures and closer to the man is depicted a small seated figure in left profile with legs and arms extended to the front. Behind the small figure there is a linear element and in front of the man three unidentifiable elements.”

She notes the rarity of the image, in that on soft stone seals made of steatite or chlorite, it is rare to see more than two people depicted, and considers that the small floating figure communicates clearly with other images of the epiphany. The posture of this epiphanic figure, commonly interpreted as crouching, is striking for



*Fig 123. Geneva Seal, CMS X-261 (Image & Sketch)
Archaeological provenance unknown, c. 1600 - 1400BC
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland*



its unusual posture seen nowhere else in epiphany depictions.

Closer inspection of the photograph of the original artefact as well as the impression, however, might allow us to suggest that this crouching posture may have been misidentified, and that a more familiar tense posture of a descending figure – possibly female, and who incidentally may actually be facing the other way with her dress trailing behind her – is possible to read into the image.

Rethemiotakis considers that this seal bears a close parallel to the ‘Divine Couple’ and ‘Sacred Conversation’ rings from Poros, noting that:

“...the female divinity is shown seated on a rock or a mountain peak, just like its Poros equivalent, while the male god extends his right arm towards her from a lower level.”

However he identifies the floating epiphanic depiction as a triangular element, and hence to be understood as a peak or rock, resonating with the rocky imagery upon which the goddess is seated. In addition the linear element in the upper centre which seems to be closely associated with the floating figure he identifies as a Milky Way motif, and as such it is possible to read a narrative into the scene, following his lines of reasoning relating to the ‘Divine Couple’ ring above, in which the goddess, first floats or descends along the ‘path of light’ to a mountainous (peak sanctuary?) locale, before seating herself on the earth to reach out and touch the hand of the male celebrant.

The unusual posture of the floating epiphany – if we reject my alternative interpretation above – might suggest some idiosyncrasy on the part of the engraver or owner, but it is possible to suggest that the crouching pose of the figure is due to considerations of space on the seal. An upright floating figure would have forced the larger two figures to move downwards, or its feet might have disrupted the image of the touching hands as part of the ‘sacred conversation’ convention. We might infer therefore that this contact between celebrant (or male deity) and the *descended/earthbound* female deity was more important to the seal’s owner than the *floating/descending/heavenly* aspect of the narrative.

One further point – again, if we are not reading too much into the ambiguous details of the seal – may be worth noting, and that is the ambiguous gender of both the floating figure (which may be an artefact of the relatively poor

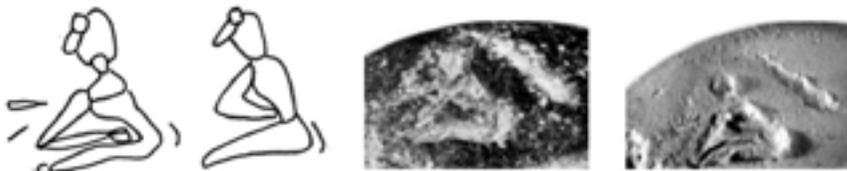


Fig 124. Alternative interpretation of the floating figure on the Geneva Seal: a floating or descending deity in tense posture, facing to the right

preservation of the image in this area) and the male celebrant/deity, who by a couple of marks on his upper arm might be construed as wearing a kind of jacket open at the chest more commonly seen worn by females. A similar, and possibly clearer, situation may be seen on the Elatia-Alonaki ring later. Here, however, a loincloth is clearly seen, and so I ask: is there an intentional sense of gender-ambiguity in this male figure?

Newman examines some fresco paintings at Knossos – including the ‘Captain of the Blacks’ and ‘Jewel’ fresco, which she considers to contain gender-ambiguous elements – to suggest that some Minoan conceptions of gender may have been conceptualised outside of binary female/male forms. If such a reading of an admittedly minute detail on this seal and the Elatia-Alonaki ring is possible, we may have something similar occurring here. Alternatively, the wearing of the goddess’s jacket may more simply be inferring a mantle of intimacy with her, and hence subtly broadcasting a social and ritual power, although there is nothing to say that both ideas – of sacred power and gender ambiguity – could not have sometimes been conflated.

28. Avgo-Kavousi Bronze Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Trapezi Hill, Avgo near Kavousi, MM II - MM III, c.1800 - 1600BC

This ring was discovered in 1903 as part of a cache of bronze items found in a vineyard on the Trapezi hill, near the church of Avgo outside the village of Kavousi on the isthmus of Ierapetra, an area of intense habitation throughout the Bronze Age with sites such as Vasiliki, Gournia, Mochlos, Pseira and indeed Kavousi itself in close proximity to the find location.

Hastings dated the ring to the Mycenaean (i.e. LM II or LM III) period on Crete, but Galanakis dates it much earlier, to the Late MM II – Early MM III, arguing that its abstract style and summary scene treatment lacks the detail and monumentality of later rings such as Vapheio or Isopata, and as such may be considered as among the first generation of metal rings where religious scenes began to be depicted, prefiguring the expansion of this artform in the Late Minoan.

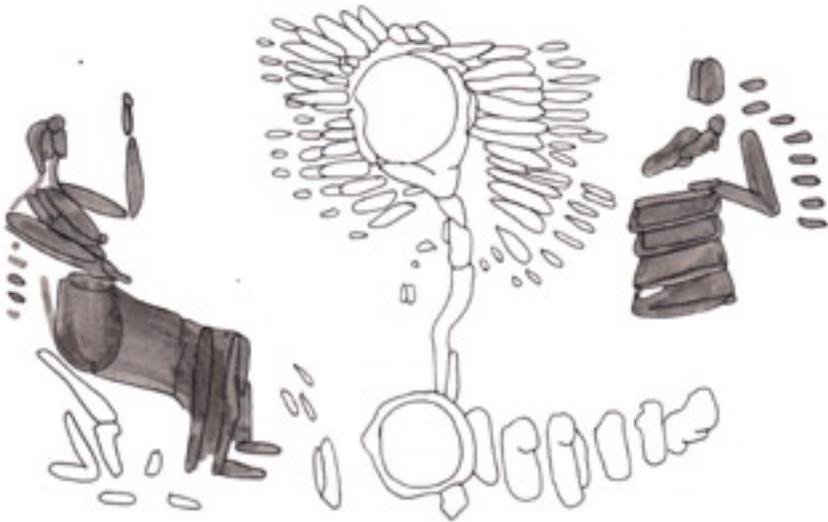
The ring is in a relatively poor state of preservation, and the depiction is obscured by two holes which may be related either to the bezel coming loose or to the original maker’s failure to attach the bezel correctly to the back of the ring, resulting in the damage.

In any case the broad outlines of the image are relatively clear: a seated celebrant with raised arm greets a floating epiphany of a deity, with a tree emerging out from rocks in the centre, as Hastings describes:

“The figure on the left sits facing the tree, with her left hand raised to a position just in front of her head... From the right shoulder what appears to be the



*Fig 125. Avgo-Kavousi Bronze Ring (Image & Sketch)
Trapezi Hill, Avgo near Kavousi, c.1800 - 1600BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



right upper arm extends obliquely downward, but as the forearm does not appear, this may be the representation of the right breast. The lower part of her dress is difficult to make out, but it appears... to reach only to the knee... The woman's head is all but obliterated, as is also that of the figure on the right. The latter stands facing the tree, with left arm bent at the elbow, so that the hand appears to be touching the breast... Between the two women the ground is indicated by a few irregular lines. Further details have disappeared, but enough remains to... see the goddess seated behind her sacred tree, receiving the homage of one of her worshippers."

Hastings's 'representational' and 'worshipful' perspective is obviously one which we have at length deeply challenged throughout the various essays in this volume, and a more appropriate interpretation here is of a typical epiphany image, with the seated figure's ambiguity between celebrant and enacted epiphany of the deity, and the floating figure's waving hair streaming back behind her. Galanakis concurs with this assessment:

"The present condition of the ring allows us to believe that the figure on the right seems to be hovering above the ground and may be the representation of an epiphanic divinity. The heads of the figures appear to be obliterated. Between the two women, the ground is indicated by a few irregular lines. The tree separates the adorant and the divinity and seems to be the focal point of the cultic activity."

and he notes that the scene is similar to the depiction in the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #5 (see below), in its framing of a sacred tree between two female figures. Intriguingly, the impression shows two holes indicating a similar damage pattern on the original (and now lost) Ayia Triada artefact as on this ring. It is quite possible therefore that the damage to the Avgo-Kavousi ring was ancient, and damage due to improper bezel attachments was a relatively common problem.

29. Mochlos Pyxis

Sitia Archaeological Museum

The House of the Lady with the Ivory Pyxis, Mochlos, LM 1B, c. 1480–1425 BCE

This is the first artefact in our survey that depicts the epiphany in an unambiguous way but does so in a non-glyptic medium – although the Ayia Triada bowl in the main essay and Appendix F did intimate a wider range of media previously – suggesting a wider artistic impact for the subject than has hitherto been acknowledged here. Described by Soles as one of the rarest finds in the history of Minoan archaeology, it was found in a section of the Mochlos site in which the collapsed wall of a previously unknown Late Minoan room was found under a Hellenistic period house.

Underneath this wall, the remains of the ivory pyxis were found along with some eighty amethyst and carnelian beads as well as ten ivory hair pins, and the team suggest that these items were originally situated on the upper story of the Minoan building. Soles describes the configuration of the pyxis as:



Fig 126. Mochlos Pyxis (Image & Sketch)
The House of the Lady with the Ivory Pyxis, Mochlos, c. 1480–1425 BCE
Sitia Archaeological Museum



“...a rectangular box with its sides and lid made of elephant ivory and its base made of wood... The side panels were carved in low relief with a seascape, while the lid was carved with a scene showing the epiphany of the Minoan Goddess. It is a well-known scene shown on many contemporary gold signet rings, including the Ring of Minos, where the goddess appears twice, both descending from the sky and then seated after her arrival.”

He also notes the resemblance of the pyxis depiction with that in Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, but it is the resonance with the Ring of Minos which is particularly striking, and the imagery of the pyxis is worth exploring in some detail. Soles first describes the architectural context of the scene:

“The goddess sits on a throne beneath a tree shrine, but the throne in turn sits upon a stage supported by stones with incurved sides. This was a prefabricated stage that could be assembled, disassembled and moved around. It was used for the performance of religious festivals, and stone supports for such platforms have been found at Malia and Archanes.”

The tree is identified as an olive tree, and is intensely detailed suggesting that despite its peripheral location it held some importance in the dynamics of the ritual. Similarly the shrine is depicted with close attention, and the remains of rosette patterns – resonating with frescos at Knossos and elsewhere – can be seen on two of the levels of the shrine.

Both the floating and seated deities are depicted in postures which by now should be extremely familiar: the floating goddess is seen with a tense arched back posture and her arms up to her chest, with her hair waving back behind her in the standard ‘descending goddess’ convention. Her lack of feet may also be a variation on the ‘downturned feet’ convention, although we have previously considered this as suggestive of the goddess’s arrival upon the earth. The seated goddess’s posture also mirrors previous depictions: her right arm is bent with her hand towards her breast while her left arm is bent so that her hand is raised towards her face. She appears to be holding flowers in this hand, brought close to her face, and Soles and the Mochlos team identify these as lilies.

The fragmentary nature of the central and upper right parts of the pyxis lid mean that reconstructions of the missing area cannot be certain, but it is possible to speculate that the remains of a curved line at the top centre, and directly in front of the floating deity, might represent the wavy line motif signifying the boundary between celestial/divine and earthly/human worlds seen previously. This incomplete motif in the image might compare reasonably well with the fuller depiction of the wavy line on the Mycenae Ring #2 below, but this is not certain.

In any case, Soles continues his description of the right hand side of the scene:

“On the pyxis, a procession of four figures approaches the goddess from the right, two men and two women. The upper parts of these four figures are missing, but the one in the lead is larger than the others and may well be the hero or



*Fig 127. The Mochlos Pyxis with associated amethyst and carnelian necklaces
Sitia Archaeological Museum*

ancestor figure who appears in the signet rings addressing the goddess. He appears to be introducing the figures behind him to the goddess.”

Elsewhere the Mochlos team make a slightly more detailed reconstruction of this procession:

“[T]he first male figure, who is larger than the others, presents a male-female couple to the goddess, while a female attendant stands at the rear. The first figure is recognizable by his pose with his left arm lying at rest behind him and by the elongated proportions of his legs...”

and they liken him to the representation of the male figure on the ‘Sacred Conversation’ ring from Poros, particularly focussing on his posture of addressing the seated goddess. We may assume that this figure resonates with the ‘Divine Couple’ ring also, and possibly other male deity depictions in the same posture on the Amnisos, Epiphany and Kalapodi rings, and the Knossos M1-5 impressions as

well as the Master Impression.

Soles goes into more detail on this fragmentary scene, proposing that this larger male figure represents a deity or hero in Minoan conception who has the power to approach the goddess and intercede with her on behalf of humans. He also considers that the presentation scene is profoundly influenced by Mesopotamian images on cylinder seals, many of which have been found in Minoan contexts and appear to have been widely circulated and highly valued:

“The source of these scenes lies in Old Babylonian and Neo-Sumerian cylinder seals where they are a popular subject for centuries. They are highly standardized showing a worshipper, often a king or other high official, led by a lesser or personal deity before the supreme deity who is seated on a throne which is raised on a dais with his face shown in profile view and one arm raised holding an object in his hand. A classic example is the cylinder of Gudea, ruler of Lagash, who is led by his personal god into the presence of Enlil, the chief Sumerian god, who recognizes and sanctifies his rule with a gift of water.”

He reports that some 175 of these cylinder seals – including some local imitations – have been found on Crete, and proposes that the iconography was familiar to Minoan artists.

In any case, whatever the exotic or local cultural origins of the iconography, Soles concludes that:

“The scene depicts a real event, one of a number of ritual performances that dominated Minoan society and required the participation of live actors. The jewellery found in the pyxis, which includes beads that are religious symbols, suggests that the woman who owned this pyxis was one of these actors, probably the one who played the part of the goddess herself.”



*Fig 128. The Mochlos Pyxis side panel (seascape scene?)
Sitia Archaeological Museum*



*Fig 129. Ivory hair pins and assorted beads found with the pyxis
Sitia Archaeological Museum*

Elsewhere, he discusses an area of Mochlos which included a theatral area and a community ceremonial building, both of which appear to have been the venue for ancestral worship, with evidence suggesting that both the building and area were venues for libations to the ancestors as well as feasting with the dead, in which two skeletons were retained for such purposes. Remains of such a feast appear to have been one of the last cultural events at Mochlos before its Mycenaean destruction. He also suggests that the inhabitants of Mochlos were well aware that their houses were built on top of those of their ancestors, and there is evidence of skull curation, again probably as part of an ancestor cult.

He notes further that the goddess – a “*supreme female deity*” in his words – was also worshipped in the building, and it is conceivable that the pyxis image is intended to depict an epiphany ritual which took place the theatral area directly adjoining it, or on the *temenos* on the northeast corner of the site, at which evidence of small grove of olive trees growing in *pithoi* was uncovered. This location he considers to be unusual for such a purpose, but he notes that the *temenos* was capable of accommodating a large group of people for ritual occasions.

This close relationship between the local architecture and the depiction on the pyxis is one of the more fascinating aspects of this artefact, and he explores similar ideas as Rethemiotakis on the Minoan conceptions of space-time, quoting Nagy’s insight that:

“...at the moment of worship, the sacred precinct of the cult hero [or goddess] could become notionally identical to the paradise-like abode of immortalization from which [she or] he returns to his worshippers.”

Here we are squarely back in the realm of the Eternal Return in ritual space-time conceptions, but where Rethemiotakis previously explored this on a

cosmic level, Soles takes a more local approach with respect to the *temenos*. The depiction of the prefabricated stage on the pyxis lid also suggests something of the same idea, and he suggests that such a stage sets up “...*the boundary zone between this world and the next*” for religious performances.

Soles goes on to speculate further on the identity of the owner, as not merely the enacted epiphany of the deity in the image but as some local representative of the Knossian elite. He suggests that the jewel contents of the pyxis, the architecture of the house in which it was found, as well as other rich finds in the house – including bronze bowls, a stone cosmetic palette, a carnelian sealstone, and a row EM II pots stacked neatly in one of the rooms; these would have been antiques in her Late Minoan day – can tell us a great deal about her.

The jewels in the pyxis came from as far afield as Afghanistan, the Levant and Egypt, and some of the stones may have been believed to have mystical powers: amethyst in Egypt, for example, was held to be the magical preserve of the gods. Soles paints a striking picture from all of this:

“The jewelry was an important part of the woman’s costume, and her costume was designed to communicate important religious and social information. The jewelry formed the woman’s regalia, and like all regalia it was designed to link its owner to [the] god[s]. The lady was a priestess, but no ordinary one...”

Furthermore, the room in which all these treasures were found had a window that overlooked a small open court with a low platform, upon which was found a circular depression into which burnt offerings of olives and wheat were deposited. Soles concludes that these offerings were not merely made to some absent deity, but were rather placed in front of the window where she may have regularly appeared in all her regalia not merely as priestess, but as enacted deity.

The visual resonance of this image of the enacted deity appearing in an upper storey window with depictions of floating depictions of epiphanic deities appearing from on high should be reasonably obvious. Here there seems to be something of a particular microcosm (a local ritual) within the Minoan cultural macrocosm (the epiphanic complex), and it is perhaps worth mentioning – albeit in a speculative vein – Lewis-Williams & Pearce’s observations that in Neolithic, Bronze Age and other pre-modern societies of the Eastern Mediterranean and elsewhere, the architecture of the house was conceived of as representing the cosmos, with roofs and upper storeys signifying the upper world.

In any case, Soles considers that this particular lady was revered in the Late Minoan Mochlos community, and considers that if she played the part of the goddess herself in local performances of epiphany rituals – including the one on the pyxis lid itself – then she may not have been of local origins, an insight with potentially island-wide political implications:

“Her regalia suggests that she came from Knossos, where much of it was made, where the religious symbols were at home... And if one of these ladies was here, resident at a modest harbor town like Mochlos, one was likely to be resident

in every town in Crete and in its colonies overseas, including Thera.”

Such women likely represented Knossian power and authority in the same way that ritual objects from Knossos found all over Crete in the LM I period emphasised Knossian trade and economy. Given that there is evidence of a large feasting ritual at Mochlos immediately before its destruction, it is likely that the Lady with the Ivory Pyxis embodied that power and authority from Knossos to the very final days of Minoan life at Mochlos.

If we have explored at length the experiential and trance-like aspects of the Minoan Epiphany in this study, as well as many of the religious, performative, embodied and representational characteristics of the ritual, and again most recently (from Rethemiotakis’s insights on the ‘Divine Couple’ ring) the cosmic and the transcendent, we have here, in this stunning Mochlos depiction, remarkable access to the architectural and sociopolitical contexts of the epiphany also.

30. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada Palace, Archaeological provenance not found, LM I, c. 1600 - 1450BC

This is the first of a group of five very interesting seal impressions from the palace at Ayia Triada, whose depictions relate to the epiphany cycle and its ritual iconography in one form or another, but also highlight considerable ambiguities in the epiphany corpus, and raise some thought-provoking questions regarding the context of Minoan ritual life, at times without necessarily addressing the epiphany theme directly. Unfortunately the precise archaeological provenances for this group of sealings have not been found.

At first sight, this seal impression may seem like a fairly straightforward image of a celebrant with two attendants arriving at a shrine in some wild place, denoted by the presences of trees growing out of, and in front of, the shrine building. We might expect this depiction to be incipient to other depictions in the corpus – such as the Epiphany Ring above – in which the floating deity might perhaps be understood to emerge from the shrine, or descend from on high at the shrine, to greet the arriving celebrant. Alternatively, we might imagine the following sequence to be more of an ecstatic ritual like the Vapheio and Archanes-Fourni #2 rings above.

But the unusual depiction of the central female figure with two smaller figures by her side invites a different suggestion, and her larger, perhaps hieratic, scale in comparison to the other figures leads Crooks to suggest she represents a divinity. For Galanakis, however, the question is more open, considering her to potentially represent a goddess or priestess approached or accompanied by female attendants. Not for the first time do we encounter an ambiguity between deity and living human, however, and he narrates that the scene could variously represent:



*Fig 130. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3 (Image & Sketch)
Ayia Triada Palace, c. 1600 - 1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



“...a divine figure flanked by female adorants or attendants, a Minoan ‘high priestess’ or an important individual flanked by younger associates before or after an initiation process, or an important female divinity accompanied by two lesser divinities located in the context of tree ritual and sacred enclosures...”

Thus this apparently simple image is underscored by the same host of uncertainties as with many of the images in the epiphany corpus. However what is striking – and clearly visible in all three of the seal impressions of the now-lost original artefact that have been discovered – are the wild and wavy lines directly above the head of the central female figure, and their continuation from left to right across the top of each impression, such that they frame the composition and connote a remarkable sense of movement in the space above her.

But what is being depicted here, and what, if anything, did the artist intend to be ‘moving’? It is notable that the lines appear to coalesce or emerge from the top of her head, and hence it is possible that we are seeing nothing more than an extremely exaggerated depiction of her hair waving in the strong breezes of a mountaintop shrine.

If so, and keeping in mind the epiphany convention of the waving hair denoting the deity descending from on high, we might conjecture that we are seeing here the very moment that the deity sets her feet upon the earth, her hair still waving from her celestial voyage down to the human world. One of the new gold rings from Pylos (see fig. 145 below) bears a similar depiction: on one side of a shrine, three female figures in the same configuration as here – namely one large and two smaller figures – are shown with waving hair.

However, it is equally plausible that these lines indicate the same kind of boundary between earth and sky, human and divine, narrated during the analysis of the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring, but the question would then be: why so many lines, when in other depictions there is only one seen in each case? And why do they seem to interact so closely with her head, even forming a couple of downward-pointing



Fig 131. Two further impressions of Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3, showing the clear appearance of the multiple wavy lines

lines suggestive of hair, before extending off upwards towards the upper edges of the impression on both the left and right?

Given the sometimes construal nature of imagery within the epiphany corpus, it is possible that both of the above interpretations were intended in some way, with the deity's waving hair functioning as the start point in the artist's mind for a novel depiction of the earth/sky boundary between worlds, and upon which frontier the epiphanic ritual experience probably took place.

Going further out on a speculative limb, it might faintly be possible to adopt Lewis-Williams's neuropsychological model of altered states of consciousness to think a little further (in the vein of Morris & Peatfield earlier) about the implications of using the language of ecstasy to describe Minoan epiphany scenes, and ask: is it possible that the artist intended these lines to represent abstract images of energetic power or supernatural potency?

Such experiences are ubiquitous in human cultures the world over, particularly in the contexts of trances, dance movement and contemporary religious rituals with ecstatic components, such as Haitian Voudoun, Pentecostal Christian movements, and the San 'Great Dance' in Southern Africa. Lewis-Williams & Dowson term such lines, dots and abstract geometric forms the "*signs of all times*", and they consider that such images appear in diverse art styles of prehistoric people the world over, particularly in images that address shamanic or ecstatic themes. They hold that sensations and experiences of such potency and ecstatic power, often likened to lightning, glowing warmth or electricity, moving through the body have a strictly neurological (i.e., internal) reason for their origins, but are often ascribed by the experient as having a supernatural (i.e., external) source.

If this conjecture has any meaningful bearing on the image at hand and the artist's original intentions – and it is admittedly a big if! – this seal impression might be a unique depiction of such an experienced phenomenon in Minoan art. The question would then be raised that if such depictions are indeed the 'signs of all times', why are they generally absent from epiphanic (i.e., ecstatic) images in Minoan glyptic and other media?

Keeping in mind that Lewis-Williams & Dowson consider geometric forms to be equally valid in their neuropsychological schema, it might cause us to look with slightly different eyes on the many geometric forms seen in abstract glyptic designs from across the Aegean Bronze Age, but such speculations and potential voyages in the clouds are far outside the scope of this artefact review.

For now it is enough to say that these multiple wavy lines are a seemingly unique depiction whose meaning is wholly unclear, and a great deal about this apparently simple image raises a whole host of questions as to the identity of the people and abstract images in the scene.

One other question, not addressed here, regards the depictions of the 'streamers' or staffs from each of the figures' right hands: their dotted configuration seems again to be at the very least unusual in Minoan glyptic depiction.

31. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #4

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada Palace, Archaeological provenance not found, LM IB, c. 1480 - 1425BC

This seal impression was also selected for its 'incipient' characteristics in relation to the epiphany ritual. It is heavily damaged, but the depiction is relatively clear. A dancing or swaying female in refined dress approaches a shrine in front of which may be seen two baetyl-stones in a dual formation similar to that seen previously on the Mochlos and Epiphany Rings, among others.

It may be conjectured that a tree originally was depicted as growing out of the shrine building, although apart from the two amorphous shapes in the centre of

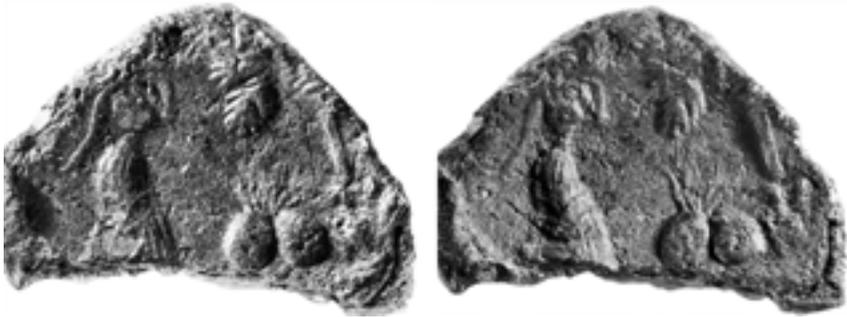
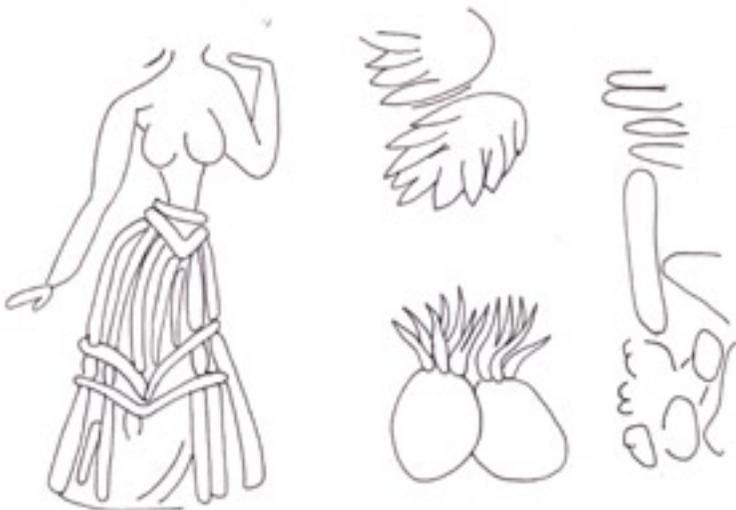
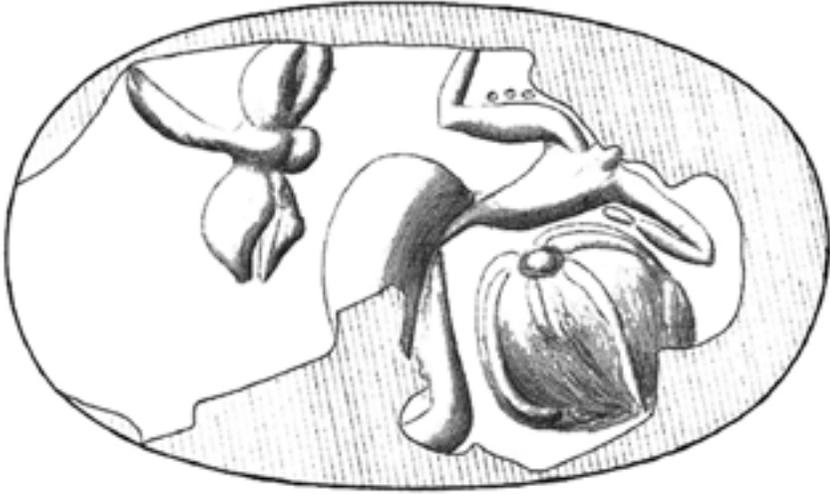


Fig 132. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #4 (Two Images & Sketch)

Ayia Triada Palace, c. 1480 - 1425BC

Heraklion Archaeological Museum





*Fig 133. Zakros Seal Impression #3 (Archaeological Illustration)
Hall of Ceremonies, Zakros Palace, c. 1500-1450BC*

the scene, this is now mostly lost to the damage.

Crooks narrates that baetyls in this configuration may relate to other depictions, such as one from Zakros (see Zakros Seal Impression #3 above), in which banded decorations are seen. He speculates that perhaps some type of material may have been wrapped around the stone as part of the ritual preparations, and that the strands seen protruding from the stones in this and other baetyl depictions might have been related to this material, which had no other function beyond the decorative.

In any case, we have here what appears to be either a goddess, ecstatic celebrant, enacted epiphany or ambiguous mixture of two or more of these depicted in a moment immediately before or after a baetylic ritual, and once again the idea of who is a deity and who is a celebrant, and even if these modern categories were relevant to the Minoan artist and audience, come under radical questioning, as Crooks states in relation to this seal impression:

“The identification of divinity by reference to costume is not straightforward. [This present seal impression image] shows a female figure in flounced skirt with bared breast in proximity to a pair of baetyles without any other human figure in the scene. If the purpose of the baetyl cult is to evoke divine epiphany, may we not assume that the presence of a human witness, apparently absent from this scene, is a vital component of the ritual?”

We are, then, in many respects, none the wiser as to who exactly this female figure is in this scene, and what her relationship – in respects to both ritual and time

– to the baetyls and shrine may be. Whether some epiphany, or other depiction, was originally seen in the now-lost upper parts of the surviving impressions of this image, and which may have clarified such questions, is impossible to say.

32. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #5

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada Palace, Archaeological provenance not found, LM IB, c. 1480 - 1425BC

The third seal impression in this group from Ayia Triada again seems like a fairly straightforward depiction at first, but as we look deeper, questions as to the identities of the figures begin to arise.

At left, a female figure is seen with her arms up towards her breasts, and a slight arch in her back might suggest a tense posture or dance. She is wearing a finely-rendered dress of which only some details have survived. She faces a partially preserved tree with ambiguous, tree-like shapes above which resemble those in the centre of Ayia Triada Impression #4 above. This tree appears to emerge from a group of fragmentary shapes which may have originally depicted a small shrine.

Beyond this to the right of the impression, is another female, who seems to be seated upon rocks in a configuration we have seen several times before. The rocks indicate the location of the ritual, once again, in wild nature or a mountainous locale, and her seated posture with arms raised might suggest that she is the one who is the enacted epiphany or the deity come to earth.

Galanakis points out the similarity of this impression to the scene on the Avgo-Kavousi Ring – with a seated figure, a central tree and what may be a floating epiphany – and he concurs with the above assessment, that this seal impression:

“...represents a female adorant on the left and a seated female divinity on the right... [with] the sharing of a common theme on both designs [this and Avgo-Kavousi] involving the adorant, the ‘sacred’ tree and the divinity...”

Despite this apparent certainty however, he recognises that there is space to call both images into question, noting that the scene on both artefacts presents us with what he terms a notional complexity, since while the sacred tree is fairly clear as to its function in the image,

“...the pair of female figures is more problematic. Who is actually a divinity and if one is definitely involved, depends more on the eye of the beholder instead of an established range of criteria for the interpretations of religious scenes in glyptic.”

In other words, the similarity of the apparently epiphanic figure on the right of the Avgo-Kavousi ring (which is damaged in places, and worn in others, and hence this figure might be missing some elements), and the apparent celebrant figure on the left of this seal impression, might lead us to suggest two entirely different interpretations on both of the images, depending on which perspective we



*Fig 134. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #5 (Image, Illustration & Sketch)
Ayia Triada Palace, c. 1480 - 1425BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



take. These interpretations might be as follows:

1. Avgo-Kavousi: a floating epiphany (right) descends to earth and takes her place as a seated goddess (left) versus a fragmentary celebrant with parts of her lower half missing (right) dances before a seated goddess (left), and
2. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #5: A celebrant (left) dances before a seated goddess (right), versus an enacted epiphany (and hence deity, left) dances around a sacred tree before taking her seat upon a throne or shrine (right).

Increasingly as we behold this group of seal impressions from Ayia Triada, it is as though previous certainties are starting to seem like speculations, and speculations like wild flights of fancy! There is often great satisfaction in knowing, but just as

often, in archaeology and art, and indeed in human life, there is room for doubt, as well as the intriguing attraction of a mystery.

33. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #6

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada Palace, Archaeological provenance not found, LM IB, c. 1480 - 1425BC

Here in this seal impression we are on firmer ground than the previous three images. Despite the considerable damage to the impression, there is the clear expression of a visionary epiphany here.

At the left, a celebrant with her arms out appears to hold a tense posture as if swaying or dancing, and what remains of her head strongly suggests that her gaze is directed towards a floating female figure in the centre. This figure holds an arm up in a salutary greeting, as if hailing the dancer.

Galanakis terms this a fairly straightforward epiphany scene, however the shapes behind the two female figures are perhaps open to interpretation. A rocky terrain appears to be the most obvious explanation for the shapes at the base of the image, while what appears to be a tree emerges from the fragmentary right hand side, perhaps intimating that some other element, such as a shrine from which three trees grew.

As such we could interpret this as a fragmentary version of the type of image seen in the Epiphany and Knossos #2 Rings, where a deity appears to emerge from a shrine to greet the celebrant, although in light of the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #5 above, such an interpretation may be called into question for the Knossos Ring #2. In any case, what is unusual here in this interpretation is that in most other depictions, deity and celebrant – or ‘sacred conversation’ participants – are opposite in gender.

Here however they are two women, which invites a variation on this interpretation which considers the floating and dancing figures as two elements of the same narrative sequence, as on the Isopata Ring, in which the floating deity descends to earth and dances.

A third interpretation is possible when we consider that the tree at the top of the image might be better understood to represent more rocks in the distance, in line with the cavalier perspective ideas we have reviewed previously, and as such the floating epiphany might rather be understood as another dancer further away. Much of the top part of the image is missing, and as such any skybound objects, such as a wavy line or Milky Way motif, or objects on the right hand side, which could clarify which (if any) of these interpretations might be correct, are lost to us.



*Fig 135. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #6 (Image & Sketch)
Ayia Triada Palace, c. 1480 - 1425BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*





Fig 136. Archaeological Illustrations of Ayia Triada Seal Impressions #6 and #7

34. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #7

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Ayia Triada Palace, Archaeological provenance not found, LM IB, c. 1480 - 1425BC

The final seal impression in this group from Ayia Triada is no less ambiguous than many of the previous images, but it has relevance with both our perennial theme of the epiphany as well as possibly with the Zakro Master's work. The earliest description of this seal is from Evans who narrates it in the context of several other artefacts depicting offerings made to a deity:

“On a small sealing from... Hagia Triada [sic], we meet [t]he Goddess, who is here seated on a rocky knoll, [and] grasps in her right hand the lower end of an elongated conical vessel offered her by a small short-skirted handmaiden, standing on a rocky incline opposite to her.”

Evans makes the case for the conical vessel being a depiction of the type common to LM I pottery, the rhyton, with a small handle at the top and a very elongated form and pointed base such that it needs to be carried or requires a frame to be set upon a table or altar.

However there is room for re-interpretation, and the image is more ambiguous than Evans appreciated. Firstly, there is the monstrous-looking head of the large female figure: this is likely to be due to the damage and poor preservation of the sealing image, but if this head shape is original, then its appearance in context with that particularly distinctive shoulder shape might indicate some evidence of the influence of the Zakro Master which Weingarten said could be seen in some seal impressions at Ayia Triada. Perhaps this is one of the impressions that she meant.

Secondly, the configuration of the large female as seated upon rocks, with her arm gestured towards the celebrant, recalls something of the 'sacred conversation' schema, and closer inspection of the 'rhyton' lends the sense that it could equally represent a staff, sword or other ritual object.



*Fig 137. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #7 (Image & Sketch)
Ayia Triada Palace, c. 1480 - 1425BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



In turn, the smaller figure on the left may well be standing on rocks to hold up the object, but may also be slightly floating: the shape of this figure's legs might be construed as an exaggerated form of the 'downward-pointing' feet motif perhaps. Furthermore, the figure's gender is a little ambiguous: it is probably female, and wearing a skirt shorter than many of the depictions of female dress I am familiar with, but a loincloth (and resulting male figure) is open to interpretation here.

Hence we may have here in image squarely with an offering ritual context, as Evans notes, but other, more epiphanic ideas, such as a 'sacred conversation' schema, or a floating visionary epiphany and a monstrous-headed seated deity, are possible.

35. Heraklion Ring

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Unknown provenance, of doubtful authenticity, LMI (??), c. 1600 - 1450BC

This artefact, perhaps more than any other in this and the previous review, has been subject to very great deal of controversy regarding its authenticity, a situation hardly helped by its completely unknown provenance. Pini tends towards accepting the ring's authenticity, while Sourvino-Inwood doubts that it is a genuine Minoan object, and she criticises Pini's views principally on iconographic, but also on stylistic and technical, grounds.

Crooks notes that the depiction on this ring is very similar to that of Mycenae Ring #1 (see below), which does have a secure provenance, and he proposes that this artefact may well therefore be a forgery based on a rough copy of the imagery on the mainland Greek ring.

The authenticity of this ring and its depiction is thus an open question, but whether genuine or not, narration of this artefact cannot proceed without close attention to the Mycenae Ring #1.

Like this latter ring, the central figure on the Heraklion Ring is generally understood to be the deity, which Crooks reports despite his misgivings. There are also strong resonances with the Isopata Ring, not least in Rehak's view of the possible cavalier perspective of the scene: the central figure appears to either be floating above the plant (a lily?) in the lower centre, or is intended to be understood as situated further back in the scene.

The rightmost woman tends to, offers her hands to or perhaps (bearing in mind the ecstatic tree-pulling in other epiphany scenes) gently pulls at a tree growing out of a structure which may be a very simple shrine-like construction. She is finely-rendered: intense details of her flounced skirt, and her long braided hair running down her back are seen, and she appears to be gazing intently at her actions. However, her posture in the context of an epiphany scene is unusual: most of the attending celebrants who interact with trees on Minoan rings do so in an ecstatic

manner, and the gentleness of her actions towards the plant seem uncharacteristic of true Minoan depiction. Here again we come to our doubts regarding authenticity.

Behind the celebrant on the left, a clear shrine structure is seen with a tree or large plant growing out of it, and she gestures towards the central deity figure with both arms upraised, a gesture we have seen before and which Sourvino-Inwood terms “a well-established gesture of adoration.” Again, intense details of her flounced skirt and long hair are seen, and unusually, her face is rendered with more detail than usual in such scenes – it is even possible to propose that she might be wearing a headband of some sort – and this second unusual depiction represents another source of doubt.



*Fig 138. Heraklion Ring (Image & Sketch)
Unknown Provenance, c. 1600 - 1450BC (if genuine)
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



In regards to further resonances with the Isopata Ring, the leftmost woman's interaction with the central deity figure seems relatively clear. The deity's skirt and hair are detailed, and she returns a gesture of an upraised right arm which is bent at the elbow. The gestural interaction between the deity and the leftmost woman closely replicates the scene on the Isopata Ring: in that scene, two women with upraised arms gesture towards a deity who appears to be descending from on high, while the deity gestures in the same bent-arm pose towards a woman on the right of the scene. Here, however, the deity aims her bent-arm gesture towards the woman on the left, lending a sense of greater intimacy to the interaction.

As with Isopata, it is possible to speculate a narrative scene here, in which the adorant tends to, pulls at, or makes an offering to a tree at a wild nature shrine, then dances or sways in a manner akin to that depicted on the Isopata Ring, at which point an epiphany of the goddess is seen, who gestures towards the adorant and almost touches her hands. However, given the pervasive doubts about this ring and its iconographic oddities which ring a little untrue even within the context of Minoan idiosyncrasies and individual expressions, it is perhaps best to refrain from any definite conclusions regarding the depiction.

36. A Group of Sealstones from Malia

Heraklion Archaeological Museum & Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
'Atelier de Sceaux' Workshop, Malia Palace, MM II or MM IIB, c.1800 – 1700 BC

This group of sealstones, mostly from the Seal Engraver's Workshop at Malia Palace, but also one from the little palace at Knossos, have been selected for their potential intercommunication with the 'Goddess Beyond the Sea' schema in the first review. Made from steatite, and dating mostly from the Middle Minoan periods, their depictions of boats are much less elaborated than the later Mochlos, Makriyalos and Ring of Minos artefacts, but in the appearance of oars, sails, and sometimes trade objects, a religious/thalassocratic dimension to these artefacts can be sometimes drawn from the images.

Palmer relates the Makriyalos image in particular to what she terms "*talismanic amygdaloids that depict ships...*" from Malia and Knossos, and she holds that both the Mochlos and Makriyalos images – as well as, by implication, that on the Ring of Minos – to be symbolic depictions unreflective of a real ritual, perhaps resonating with Galanakis's notion that images of the goddess on her ship are linked to expressions of the Minoan thalassocracy.

While a cult context is not directly attested, the suggestion in several of the Malia images that the prow takes on a similar seahorse/dragon motif to the Mochlos and Ring of Minos depictions, albeit less finely rendered, links the particular 'Goddess Beyond The Sea' cult idea to a wider Minoan belief about ships. Raban presents several depictions of ships on 'frying pan' artefacts from the Early



*Fig 139. Two steatite seals from Malia
Atelier de Sceaux Workshop, Malia Palace, c.1800 – 1700 BC
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford & Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

*Fig 140. Three seals depicting ships:
Three-sided prism, Atelier des Sceaux, Malia, Ashmolean Museum
Silver ring with ship and trade goods, Neapoli, Ashmolean Museum
Amygdaloid seal from Knossos, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland*



Cycladic which appear to show similar motifs – from fish to the same seahorse shape – on the prows, hinting at an extremely ancient provenance for this particular aspect of Aegean religion.

That several researchers, including Palmer and Salimbeti, describe this group of seals, along with several similar boat images on amygdaloid seals from Knossos, as talismanic, suggests that some connection with religious belief was probably intended here. The Knossos seal is interesting since it is one of several Knossian seals which offers a possible bridge between the Malia talismans and the ‘Goddess Beyond the Sea’: many of them are depicted with enlarged cabins and trade goods (or sacred symbols) whose form resonates in part with the motifs of the ship-borne shrine in the Mochlos and Makriyalos images. Several similar amygdaloid seals of this type have also been found at Chrysolakkos near Malia, while a silver ring in the Ashmolean Museum, purportedly found at Neapoli near Agios Nikolaos, shows a boat surmounted by several symbols of trade goods.

Anastasiadou further reports on a now-lost three-sided steatite seal found in Malia by a farmer in 1932, which depicts two figures on a boat with fish beneath it, while a three-sided steatite prism from the palace at Malia shows two images of boats on one side, and what appear to be seated oarsmen on another side.

The talismanic nature of the seals themselves, the ‘Goddess Beyond the Sea’ complex, and their depiction with trade goods, along with their common appearance at Malia and several sites around, suggests that this image and associated complex of beliefs and ritual practices, may have been particularly prominent at the Malia palace and surrounding town. It is noteworthy that the entire site is situated in very close proximity to the coast, and it is likely that the orientation of Minoan lives there may have been particularly concerned with the sea. If these artefacts are indeed to be considered both as talismans as well as sealing images broadcasting a local concern with nautical activity, then it is possible that the ‘Goddess Beyond the Sea’ schema is here communicating with popular cult.

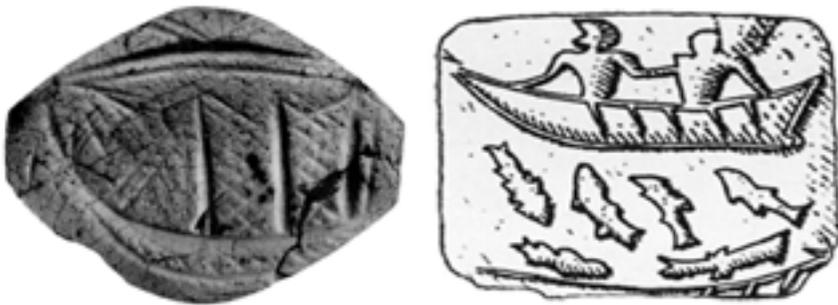


Fig 141. Two seals from Malia

*Amygdaloid Seal, Chrysolakkos near Malia, Heraklion Archaeological Museum
Illustration of seal found in 1932, current location unknown*

37. Galatas HM3668

*Heraklion Archaeological Museum**Galatas Palace, Provenance not found, MM IIIB – LM IA (?), c. 1650 – 1500 BC*

Found in a poorly-reproduced illustration in Galanakis, and in a personal photo from 2015 at the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, I cannot find any academic publication of this rather interesting lentoid seal, but Palmer briefly narrates it as part of a wider survey of Late Minoan glyptic. The dating is tentative: Swindale reports that the palace at Galatas underwent a major crisis at the beginning of LM IA, so the date of the seal is likely to be between the construction date of MM IIIB and LM IA which is when much of the palace was abandoned.

Palmer reports the discovery of this seal at Galatas as a stray find, and includes it as one of a group of Minoan seals depicting seated women with single standing figures:

“The seated woman is accompanied by a standing female who stands upon a low platform and raises one hand to her face. This gesture... probably, in this context, indicates adoration... Directly behind the woman’s head is an arrow and above that several diagonal lines. The woman’s seat is not clear... [but] her posture suggests that she is in the process of seating herself upon the step.”

Palmer interprets two of the rocks behind the seated female figure as a figure-of-eight shield, an erroneous identification in my view, particularly as she then interprets the baetyl in the Vapheio Ring as the same type of shield. However, her identification of the shapes above the woman’s head as rocks denoting some kind of enclosure – one calls to mind the previously narrated *temenos* at Mochlos here – seems entirely appropriate. By inference, then, the rocky ground and sense of enclosure may indicate a sacred precinct at a peak sanctuary site, but could equally indicate some kind of cave environment.

However, from inspection of the original artefact in the lentoid seal display at Heraklion Archaeological Museum some years ago, I would like to call into question the notion that the standing female (in Palmer’s view) at the left is indeed such a figure, and indeed that the shapes above her head are indeed rocks.

The image is generally unclear, but to my eyes the seal appeared to depict a female celebrant or enacted deity, naked or wearing diaphanous garment, seated upon rocks which extend behind her and out from which grows a tree which arcs above her head. To her left there appears not a standing female but a sacred pillar, surmounted by some object which is unidentifiable, but may possibly be a gourd, fruit or wild plants of some description.

The seated female deity’s head is aniconic and reminiscent of the depiction in the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring above. It is possible she is intended to be depicted as facing the viewer, but this is not certain. If she is rather understood to be facing towards the right, then she might be construed as gazing at a floating object situated immediately to the right of her head. This may be a star, or a flying insect. Her arms



*Fig 142. Seal from Galatas (Archaeological Illustration & Two Sketches)
Sketch above derived from Galanakis, sketch below from original artefact
Galatas Palace, c.1650 – 1500 BC, Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



and breast are poorly preserved or missing, but there is the hint that her right arm may be positioned crossing her body to indicate or gesture towards the star or insect. Alternatively, the right arm may be gesturing towards or touching the pillar (with the lower arm missing), and left arm may be tucked behind her.

If the floating object is a star, then we possibly have the depiction of a seated deity associated with astronomical phenomena, or indeed an enacted epiphany with an astronomical event denoting in some way the calendrical date at which time the ritual occurred. If it is an insect, then we might have a visionary epiphany along the lines of the established convention of heralding the imminent arrival of the deity.

Thus, this seal evokes two entirely different interpretations, one of two figures – a standing celebrant and a seated deity – in rocky ground, and one of a single seated deity before a sacred column in a shrine-like or forested context, and which might be correct cannot be ascertained at the present time.

38. Knossos Seal Impression HM134*Heraklion Archaeological Museum**Room of the Seal Impressions, Knossos Palace, LM IA, c. 1550 – 1500 BC*

A slightly fragmented seal impression found during Evans's original excavations of the Southwest Basement area of the palace at Knossos, a zone which Weingarten was heavily used for administrative purposes. Evans originally described this seal impression as depicting:

"...[a] female figure – perhaps of a religious character – in a flowery field [perhaps lilies?] is here seen with a swallow on the end of a line... apparently luring another."

He noted the attention paid to swallows in clay bottles found at the 'House of the Sacrificed Oxen' at the south-eastern corner of Knossos palace, as well as in a wall painting at Phylakopi, Milos, the site of a Minoan colony. The subsequent discovery of the frescos at Akrotiri, including a famous image of two swallows, highlights the importance of these birds in Minoan and Later Cycladic imagery.

However, it is possible to suggest that, in a similar depiction to Archanes-Fourni #1 and the 'Sacred Conversation' Ring from Poros, that we have here a depiction of the epiphanic deity in abstract space, bearing a staff and supporting by two birds. Close inspection of the photographic image of the sealing does not evidence any depiction of a line between the base of the staff and the right-hand bird, suggesting Evans's interpretation of a swallow being trapped or lured is incorrect. The resonance between this image and the depictions from Archanes-Fourni and Poros mean that an epiphanic deity is more likely here.

39. Knossos Seal Impression HM392*Heraklion Archaeological Museum**Domestic Quarter, Knossos Palace, LM II – LM IIIA, c. 1410 – 1385 BC*

This second seal impression from Knossos, dating to a later period than the one above, was found during Evans's excavations in a residential complex located to the southeast of the Central Court, although Popham & Gill reports that there are some doubts about its correct provenance within the excavation. Evans identifies the female figure in this impression as *"...[a] Goddess reposing on the waves ... wearing a triple tiara..."* and terms her the 'Lady of the Sea'.

He notes the conventional design of the sea upon which she is seen to recline, and form of the water strongly resonates with the depiction of the sea on the Ring of Minos, with which he appears to compare it closely. Evans suggests this design is part of a *"marine convention"* representing her sea dominion.

Krzyszowska notes that this form, which she terms a net pattern, may also be seen on the Master Impression (see above), and in his narration of the same

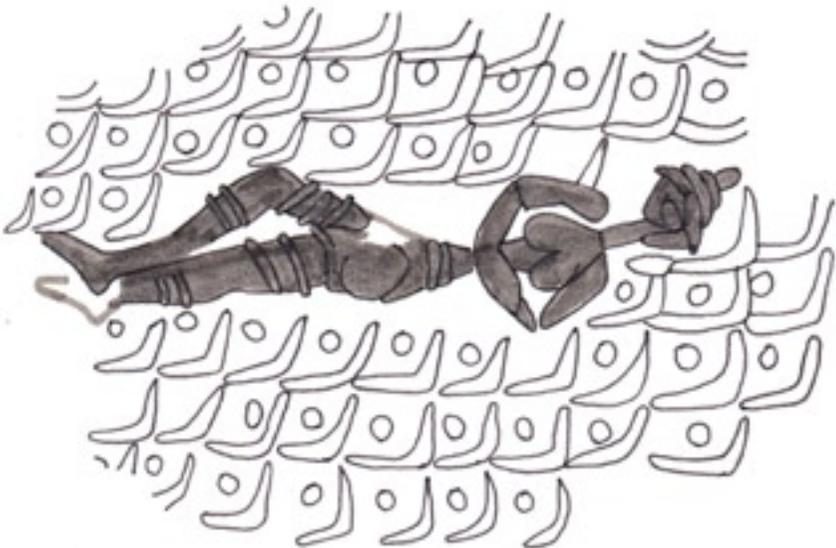


*Fig 143. Knossos Seal Impression HM134 (Image, Detail & Sketch)
Room of the Seal Impressions, Knossos Palace, c. 1550 – 1500 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*





*Fig 144. Knossos Seal Impression HM392 (Image & Sketch)
Domestic Quarter, Knossos Palace, c.1410 – 1385 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*



artefact, Younger also mentions this pattern as a visual shorthand for water.

Davis & Stocker note that the pattern also occurs in the design on one of their new gold ring finds from the Griffin Warrior Tomb at Pylos, in which:

“Five elaborately dressed female figures flank a shrine. The shrine is located on the shore of an inlet that separates three women on the right from two on the left. All five women stand on an undulating band that separates land from sea. . .”

This is not one of the two rings from the same tomb narrated below, and it is worth mentioning they are describing the image from its impression, so that the directions are reversed relative to fig. 145 below.

However, the left-hand side of this ring strongly resembles that on the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3 with its depiction of a larger female figure flanked by two smaller ones – and indeed all three of them are depicted with waving hair, which may denote their epiphanic status and the moment of their arrival to earth, as on the Ayia Triada impression – suggesting that this too may be some kind of Minoan or Mycenaean imagistic or ritual convention. They also note that the net design seen here appears on a number of painted vases from the LM IB period.

In any case, what is particularly striking about this depiction is the high refinement, both of the net pattern and the reclining pose of the female figure in the waves, which is visible even through the peripheral damage to the seal impression and the rough clay medium. Her body is well-shaped, with one leg raised behind the other in an elegant pose, and details of her layered skirt can be clearly seen.



*Fig 145. Gold Ring from Pylos
Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos, LH IIA, c. 1550 -1450 BC
Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Kalamata*

The '*Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*' presents this seal in vertical format, but the position of the figure's right leg, strongly suggestive of reclining, mitigates against this format for the image.

Whatever the figure's original orientation, I suspect the original seal – possibly a gold ring? – was one of high quality, with skilled workmanship of the order of that seen on the Isopata Ring, and other rich finds. Since the depiction of the figure as reclining on the sea seems quite unique in Minoan iconography, it is hard to know how to relate this to other Bronze Age Cretan religious images, but a connection with Galanakis's 'Goddess Beyond the Sea' schema or a thalassocratic deity with epiphanic possibilities seems reasonable enough to propose for now. The previous speculation, linking the mythical image of Diktyнна in the fisherman's nets (and her subsequent voyage across the sea) to the net-like 'marine convention' seen here, may also obliquely relate iconotopically to this depiction.

40. Kalyvia Ring #2

Heraklion Archaeological Museum

Tomb 11, Kalyvia Cemetery, Phaistos, LM IA - LM IB, 1500 - 1450BC

Found in the same complex of tombs in the necropolis at Kalyvia near Phaistos as the ring in the previous study, this ring apparently suffers from the same worn condition. Whether this is due to ancient usage, relatively poor workmanship or wearing due to friction against soil while in the ground is not known, but it appears that both rings have undergone the same process, whenever it may have happened.

The scene shows, from left to right, a seated goddess, a monkey and a sumptuously attired female celebrant with her arms raised and a body posture suggestive of dancing or swaying.

Kyriakidis considers that the seated female on the left appears to be naked, although some fragmentary evidence of dress details may be present on the backside, if these are not rocks on which she is sitting. He notes that her sitting posture is comparable to the Mycenae Ring #2 (although the seated female on this latter ring is ornately clothed), and judging by other depictions of the seated goddess, it is possible she is wearing a diaphanous undergarment, or that the ring is too worn to offer any clear depiction in this respect.

The presence of the monkey is extremely interesting here, and iconographically associates the depiction with the monkey frescos from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, Thera, particularly one in which a seated goddess receives offering of saffron from a female adorant, with a monkey between the two women. Whether the monkey or the celebrant are bearing anything similar in this seal cannot be known as it is too worn. The monkey in particular is in an area with seemingly the most wear, which is a shame since this animal's presence may be of considerable importance in understanding the scene.



Fig 146. Kalyvia Ring #2 (Image, Illustration & Sketch)
Kalyvia Cemetery, Phaistos, 1500 - 1450BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum



Evans likened this image to two seal impressions from Zakros and Ayia Triada showing what he called a “...seated monster with its forelegs raised in the act of adoration...” of a goddess (Zakros) or alone (Ayia Triada), and proposes that this is a Minoan adaptation of the Egyptian deity Thoth, who was sometimes depicted with a baboon head, as:

“...a dog-faced ape [i.e., a baboon or gelada of Sudan or Ethiopia]... impressed into the service of Minoan religious imagery.”

Evans further proposed that the Kalyvia scene takes this schematic of monkey and goddess further:

“Here a female votary with raised hands is seen beside the [baboon/gelada]... and the adoration of both is directed to a seated figure of the Minoan

Goddess behind whom rises a column indicative of her pillar-shrine.”

In connection with this, he suggests that the plume-like object – Rethemiotakis’s ‘Milky Way’ motif – above the monkey represents the ostrich feather of Ma’at, the wife of Thoth, as an adaptation from Egyptian religion.

Kyriakidis on the other hand calls this motif ‘the spike’ and notes that the tufts or spikes in the design always appear to face the same direction, from bottom left to top right, and although the faded appearance of the image on this ring means that these cannot be seen clearly, he suggests that originally it could have been more elaborate in form on this ring. However, his tentative interpretation of this motif, along with all other floating objects (including human figures) seen in Minoan glyptic, are that they represent constellations as understood by Bronze Age Aegeans, noting that while the evidence for this assertion is relatively limited, a seafaring and farming people would need to have a clear understanding of the stars for navigational and calendric purposes.

Rethemiotakis’s interpretation is more in line with the cosmic narrative we have seen earlier with the ‘Divine Couple’ ring, in that he considers the scene

“...illustrate[s] a female figure seated on the ground and receiving adoration below a schematically rendered galactic symbol.”

It is noteworthy also that this motif appears to be pointing directly at the seated deity, having surmounted the monkey’s head in a manner reminiscent of the ‘Divine Couple’ ring, and it is possible to speculate that the monkey plays a broadly similar part here to that of the male figure on the ring from Poros. Certainly the



*Fig 147. Fresco of female celebrant and monkey offering saffron to a seated deity
Upper storey of Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera, after Olga Anastasiadou*

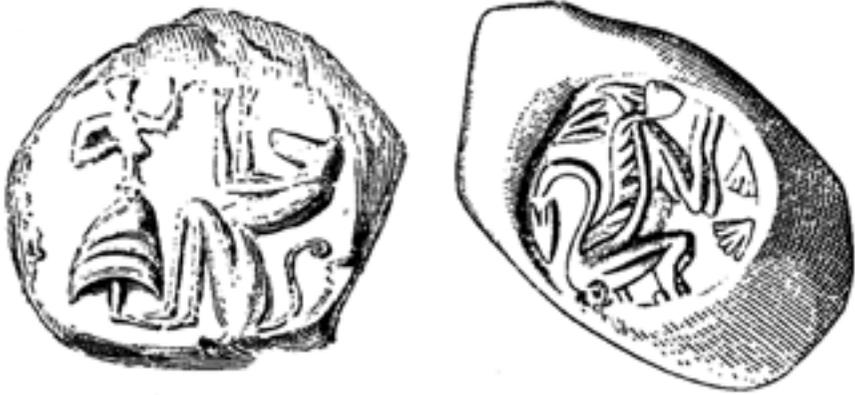


Fig 148. Two seal impressions from Zakros & Ayia Triada, after Evans

*Fig 149. A monkey-like figure with raised arms gestures towards a fragmentary female deity
South-North corridor, Knossos Palace, LM I - LM II, c. 1600 - 1400 BC*



positions of the principal female and male figures on several of the previous rings relative to the 'Milky Way' motif – moving over the male's head to point towards the principal female – suggests a visual convention that could perhaps be applied to the monkey figure here also.

Rehak explores the frescos at Xeste 3, several of which contain depictions of monkeys, and he notes the appearance of the animal in a fresco at Knossos as well. The most relevant fresco at Xeste 3 was located on the upper storey of the

house, and depicts both a female celebrant and a monkey offering saffron to an enthroned deity. He suggests that a full reconstruction of the decorative schema of the whole house indicates that monkeys appeared in every fresco on both floors, and argues that the monkey may have been seen as an exotic and, on some level, supernatural creature, lending a liminal air to Xeste 3, and hence by implication, to the depiction on this ring as well. Monkeys are not native to the Aegean but may have been imported in Minoan times from Egypt, where they are often depicted as musicians – as they are on the ground floor at Xeste 3 – and in relation to female sexuality.

Zouzoula concurs with this assessment of the monkeys at Xeste 3: their appearance “*remove[s] the scene from the realm of reality...*” and notes that the interpretation of the female to whom the saffron is offered as a goddess or epiphany is based in part on the presence of the monkeys in the fresco. They amplify the supernatural and otherworldly feel of the painting already guaranteed by the presence of the deity.

Rehak notes further, however, that one of the Xeste 3 ground floor frescos has a monkey holding a sword and sheath, and he surveys a few other occurrences of the sword-and-sheath motif, including the Chieftain Cup, where a sword is held by a young male figure in one hand and a sheath in the other, and a sealstone from Knossos where a seated female appears to be holding it.

It is perhaps possible to interpret the vertical shape behind the seated female on this ring as a sword – as opposed to a stylised column, which makes sense in light of the Minoan pillar cult – with details of the hilt and handle seen at the top of the motif.

If such an interpretation is valid, we might imagine the seated female is about to bestow the sword to the monkey, who functions as a visual stand-in for a young male figure of some kind. The mirroring of the interaction of the ‘Milky Way’ motif with the monkey’s head with similar depictions in which a young male appears to be involved might resonate with this idea, potentially offering an epiphanic narrative to the image, distantly related to the ‘sacred conversation’ schema, in which the deity descends down the ‘path of light’ to attend the ceremony.

In any case, this ring appears to depict at the very least an enacted epiphany of the goddess on the left, and it is tempting to suggest this scene as some kind of age-grading initiation event. The young initiate is here represented as an exotic, and perhaps supernatural, monkey figure, for reasons generally obscure but perhaps pertaining to a particular but now-lost ritual dynamic. Vague terms such as ‘totem’, in social anthropology as well as twentieth century archaeology, have often been loosely applied to opaque, initiatory situations like the one depicted here, but we can conjecture that in some Minoan initiation and age-grading system, the figure of a monkey was utilised in some emblematic way, to symbolise some level in the initiate’s understanding or progress through the age-grade system

In relation to this complex of ideas, Zouzoula narrates a fragmentary

seal impression from the South-North Corridor of Knossos Palace, which she says depicts an enigmatic seated ape with arms raised before what may be a standing female figure. Her body is obscured but the head and one arm are visible, while an ornate plant or tree grows between them. However, Evans terms this depiction the ‘Young Minotaur’, but he says nonetheless the figure is encountering the Minoan goddess. It is possible that this fragmentary seal depicts a ‘monkey/male’ figure being escorted into the presence of an epiphanic deity, and hence a similar ritual (and/or mythical) episode to that seen on this ring from Kalyvia.

41. Pylos Ring #1

Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos, LH IIA, c. 1550 - 1450 BC
Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Kalamata

The first of two gold rings in this review, part of a group of four which were discovered as part of the multitude of remarkable finds from the Griffin Warrior Tomb at Pylos. A third ring, not included in this review, is briefly seen in fig. 145 above. The stunning assemblage of artefacts uncovered from this tomb are providing a wonderful array of new evidence disclosing deep Minoan influence on early Mycenaean cultural development: Davis & Stocker report that many of the finds demonstrate a strong connection with, and deference to, the iconography, symbols and social norms of contemporaneous Crete in the century or so before the first large-scale palaces were constructed on the mainland, including at Pylos.

Indeed the pervasive links between Minoan Crete and the Late Helladic period on the Peloponnese periods has long been noted, and which may explain further the presence on the Greek mainland of the gold rings from Vapheio and Messenia in the earlier review, and which we previously ascribed to Cretan migrants or rare chance. In a wider purview of this Minoan-Mycenaean relationship, which takes in more of the goldwork uncovered from the Tholos Tomb at Vapheio (including two famous cups in addition to the aforementioned ring), Hooker states that they most likely do not represent local craftsmanship but imports from the more advanced workshops on Crete. Hogan has further suggested that the imagery of bulls on the Vapheio cups is strongly reminiscent of bull-leaping fresco images from Knossos. It is possible, then, that the rings from the tomb at Pylos are also the result of Minoan craftsmanship, or at the very least a profound Minoan influence, but their burial with a member of the Pylian elite strongly suggests that displays of Minoan cultural expressions were highly valued and denoted status in the earlier periods of Mycenaean society.

The scene on the first ring shows a seemingly quite clear depiction of an enacted epiphany – Davis & Stocker report that they presume the seated figure to be a deity – and Marchant & Papadopoulos, as well as Dashu, all note that the seated goddess figure on the left appears to be holding, showing or presenting a mirror to



*Fig 150. Pylos Ring #1 (Image & Sketch)
Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos, c.1550 -1450 BC
Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Kalamata*



the celebrant. Her seated posture is relatively familiar, with her right hand gestured towards her breast and her gaze directed towards the celebrant.

Notable here is the relatively aniconic depiction of both heads of the deity and the celebrant, in sharp contrast to the details of the skirts of both women, the short jacket, probably open at the breast, also seen on the seated figure, as well as the bird located behind the seated deity. It is this bird which lends a visionary sense to the image, perhaps reinforced by the tense posture of the goddess, and the suggestion of dynamic movement – dance, swaying or some other rapid movement – in the celebrant denoted by the traces of waving hair behind her as well as her arched back. She offers an object whose status is unclear but has been variously suggested to be bull-horns or a rhyton vessel.

Unusually, the enacted epiphany is seated not upon a shrine or some depiction indicative of wild nature, but on a chair, with her elongated feet resting on a footstool decorated with a rosette design. Davis & Stocker note that the form of the chair is particularly reminiscent of the gypsum seat in the ‘Throne Room’ at Knossos, which incidentally we might recall was suggested by Goodison to be the locale of an enacted epiphany. It is quite possible therefore that in this ring we have evidence of some direct Knossian influence at Prepalatial Pylos.

The bird is also particularly interesting, and they narrate it in fantastical terms, with an exaggerated swallow-like tail with rackets or bunches at the end of each fork, and finely-rendered, larger-than-life extended wings. Dashu considers the birds to display hybrid characteristics, including both falcon-like and swallow-like features, but its association with the seated deity and appearance in previous artefacts, where it frames, supports or heralds the arrival of the goddess, should be reasonably obvious.

Finally two lines above the scene may represent a form of the ‘wavy line’ motif discussed above, delineating the boundary between earthly/human and skybound/divine, and as such lending a further liminality to the depiction. Given that the second ring from the Griffin Warrior Tomb at Pylos (see below) depicts a descending goddess framed by two birds, the resonance between these two images and the two previously-reviewed rings from Poros – the ‘Sacred Conversation’ and ‘Divine Couple’ rings – is rather notable.

Another note of liminality might be inferred from the mirror being held by the goddess. A similar shape appears on a richly-decorated *larnax* from Episkopi, Ierapetra, where it is held by a large female figure (probably a deity, ancestral spirit or representation of the dead person interred in the *larnax*) as she leads some ibexes through a naturalistic wild landscape. Three other figures hold a mirror-like shape while riding a chariot in an adjacent panel to the first scene, and Watrous suggests that the position of this chariot above and perhaps travelling over an octopus signifies its fantastical movement over water, noting that

“...[t]he Episkopi panels look like a Cretan version of the Mycenaean funerary concept in which the deceased rides in his [or equally, her] chariot to the



Fig 151. 'Afterlife' panel, larnax from Episkopi, Ierapetra, LM IIIB, c. 1350 – 1100 BC
 Archaeological Collection Of Ierapetra

Afterworld."

Dietrich concurs with this idea that the two panels on the *larnax* are suggestive of a paradisaical afterlife. Watrous further suggests that they appear to depict highly specific Minoan ideas about life after death, and the common coincidence on *larnakes* of otherworldly images with depictions of funerals and ritual mourning indicates that:

"...[t]he central concept which these scenes and motifs illustrate is the belief that the funerary rites for the deceased will ensure the protection of the goddess, who will see that the deceased travels across the sea to the bountiful Afterworld."

Whether the representation of the mirror in the Pylos Ring communicates with this complex of beliefs about life after death cannot be known for sure, but at the very least the the object's presence here intensifies the otherworldly sense in the seated goddess's image. Davis & Stocker note that many of the grave goods – including bull horns and a mirror – found in the Griffin Warrior Tomb appeared to have been matched with the iconography of the gold rings, commenting that:

"...[m]irrors in male graves [in the Shaft Grave period of mainland Greece]"

are found much less frequently than in female burials... in the latter case... they [may have] accompanied women of exceptional beauty. But in the case of males, mirrors have been found with warrior burials almost exclusively. That fact, together with the image of the goddess with a mirror... suggests... the mirror had ritual significance."

Such ritual import for mirrors may have an extremely ancient origin: in an experiment with replicas of the Early Cycladic stone and bronze 'frying pan' artefacts, Papanthassoglou & Georgouli suggest that the obverse side may have been filled with water and utilised as a kind of mirror, presumably for some ritual purpose such as divination. Paschalidis meanwhile notes that bronze mirrors were relatively recent imports to the Aegean, from Egypt, in the Shaft Grave period, and narrates their Egyptian significance:

"Mirrors were... dedicated to Hathor, goddess of love and beauty, protector of unmarried girls, of pregnant women and of childbirth... [A]lmost anybody... had one or more mirrors in her or his tomb. It was not the implement itself, but its material and decoration that distinguished the status of the deceased..."

He also lists mirrors found in Minoan contexts at Malia, Sklavokambos, and three from Zakros palace, but to date none appear to have been discovered at Knossos, unless a rock crystal disc from the Temple Repositories functioned as a mirror. He concludes that:

"... these examples are enough to show that this new and revolutionary implement of beauty was much appreciated by the Minoan and the first Mycenaean elites, both in life and in afterlife."

He goes on to explore a range of mirrors found in tombs across the Bronze Age Aegean: two notable examples are the so-called 'Mirror of the Clytemnestra Tomb', which appears to have been owned by an elite Mycenaean woman who may have been an *i-je-re-ja*, $\iota\epsilon\varrho\epsilon\iota\alpha$, the Linear B name for a priestess, and the richly-interred burial of a woman at Archanes, who was found with a pyxis full of jewels and a bronze mirror in her left hand, held directly in front of her face.

It is possible from all this to speculate that the appearance of the mirror in the Pylos Ring did not merely connote status of the bearer, but potentially took on a powerful ritual significance in its afterlife associations, a focus on beauty or self-image, and that it was able during the ritual to represent images from 'another world', of the seated deity, and even the celebrants themselves. The power of the deity to reveal one's own self-image may have contributed to the revelatory nature of the ritual, and if Minoan celebrants were culturally primed to expect an epiphany of the deity, an epiphany of themselves granted by the goddess might have been an unexpected and mystifying moment. Here again, though, we are likely voyaging in the clouds!

In any case, the presence of the bird, the liminality of the mirror and the boundary between celestial and terrestrial, as well as the tense/dynamic postures seen in both figures invites us to remind ourselves of Morris & Peatfield's

embodied perspectives for the interpretation of this scene, again moving beyond relatively passive concepts of the ‘representational’, the ‘narrative’ and even the ‘liminal’, into the active and experiential language of ecstasy and the drama of the moment. It is worth questioning whether the ‘enacted epiphany’ at left might not also communicate some kind of ecstatic or visionary experience of the descending deity heralded by, or arriving in the person of a bird, before taking her seat on a Knossian-style throne.

Again, we must recall that Western distinctions between enacted (ritual/dramatic) and visionary (‘real’) epiphany might not have made sense to a Minoan celebrant, but whether the same held true for a Mycenaean Greek of the same period is not clear. What is obvious, however, is that the celebrant gazes directly at the goddess whilst making her offering, and a visionary interpretation is possible here. Earlier in this collection of essays, I suggested that despite the presence of epiphanies on the Vapheio and Messenia rings, such imagery was rare or absent across mainland Greece, however with the new discovery of these two rings, and further images from Mycenae, rising evidence of Minoan influence on Mycenaean life – including epiphanic rituals, depictions and probably experiences – is becoming much more apparent.

42. Pylos Ring #2

*Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos, LH IIA, c.1550 -1450 BC
Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Kalamata*

If the first ring from Pylos demonstrates some kind of iconographic connection to the throne room at Knossos, then this ring’s depiction bears strong resonances to several of the depictions from Crete that we have seen before, not least the ‘sacred conversation’ images from Poros, and the Archanes-Fourni #1 ring. Both of these necropolis sites are linked to elite families from the Knossos region: in the former case, around one of two principal harbour towns serving the Knossos trade (and hence the families were at the very least likely to have been prominent merchants linked to that trade), and in the latter case, the Minoan town (and possible palace) at Archanes, which was closely linked to nearby Knossos and situated directly below Mt. Yiouchtas, the premier peak sanctuary site in Minoan times.

At first sight, this ring’s depiction shows an epiphanic goddess in relatively abstract space, similar to Archanes-Fourni #1. But when we look at the sparse accompanying motifs, a link to the ‘sacred conversation’ schema starts to become evident. Davis & Stocker describe the scene:

“A female figure with a staff flanked by two birds... The female figure holds out a staff in her left arm and is flanked by two antithetical birds. She wears a long skirt, divided into two zones. A belt has been wrapped around the waist twice. The chest of the figure is rendered in a three-quarter view; the right arm is



*Fig 152. Pylos Ring #2 (Image & Sketch)
Griffin Warrior Tomb, Pylos, c.1550 -1450 BC
Archaeological Museum of Messenia, Kalamata*



in profile, bent at the elbow. The left arm is extended to grasp the staff. At the top of the staff is a bifurcated object, seemingly horns...

although the image of a flying insect or small bird might also be possible to construe from this image. They also note the aniconic nature of the figure's head – “*summarily rendered,*” in their words – in contrast to the more careful treatment of her hair, which flies out behind her head in two braided lines. This motif, along with the clear depiction of the downward-pointing feet, is the conventional indicator of the goddess descending from on high in epiphany depictions that we have seen many times before.

Davis & Stocker move onto the two birds, which are somewhat fantastical in form:

“To both the left and right of the figure, birds are just coming to rest on rocks, which extend along the bottom of the bezel. Both birds have unrealistically long tails, and their wings are lifted and close together behind them.”

Dashu, too, notes the unreal depiction here, suggesting again a hybrid falcon/swallow representation. Davis & Stocker conclude that the figure is very likely to be a goddess, and concur with the present ‘descending from on high’ epiphanic interpretation, noting that neither the goddess nor the birds appear to be making unequivocal contact with the ground:

“From the rendering of her feet, it seems clear that she is not standing. The birds appear to sit on rocky peaks flanking a mountainous hollow where the goddess will alight. From the position of their wings, it is clear that the birds also have not yet come to rest fully on the rocks.”

We are presented with a relatively familiar image here, but the large scale and clear depiction of the descending goddess in a rather abstract, empty space is somewhat unusual. Nonetheless, the framing of the deity between two hovering birds communicates clearly with both ‘sacred conversation’ rings from Poros. Furthermore, her staff-bearing posture, with one arm extended holding it, and the other arm brought to her chest, is strikingly reminiscent of the scene on Knossos M1-5 in the previous review. If the rocks to the base of the depiction on this ring are understood, as with several previous artefacts, to represent not merely a wild nature locale, but a mountain summit or peak sanctuary, then the resonance between this and the Knossos impression intensifies very much.

However, these similarities with other depictions beg two interesting questions. Firstly, where is the male deity or celebrant in this scene? From the images in Knossos M1-5 and the two rings from Poros, we might suggest that the artist decided to only depict one half of the scene, in which the goddess descends to earth to bestow a staff to, or otherwise communicate with, some male deity, celebrant or mixture of the two. But he is entirely absent here, and the reasons why the exclusive focus on this ring should have been upon the goddess are now lost.

It is faintly possible to imagine that the image on the ring was meant to broadcast the notion that its owner (i.e., presumably the Griffin Warrior



Fig 153. Seal Impression M1-5, Central Shrine, Knossos, c. 1425-1340BC

himself) was to be understood as the recipient of the staff or the deity's celestial communication. We shall never know for sure, but this speculative idea seems to fit in a self-expressive way with the Minoan notion of the enacted epiphany, but with an individualist twist, in which the Griffin Warrior intended to signal through this sealing image that he was intimate with the goddess, and hence playing the part of the male deity in the 'sacred conversation' not merely ritually, but in everyday life as well. But this is for sure yet another voyage in the clouds!

A second question concerns the rocky depiction at the base of the image, upon which the goddess and birds appear to be in the act of alighting from on high. Richardson identifies this as some kind of mountain glen, while we saw previously that Rethemiotakis suggested that this motif represented a mountainous landscape, and possibly a peak sanctuary, so it is to be asked whether peak sanctuary cults were present in the religious culture during this period on mainland Greece in general, and the early Mycenaean Peloponnese in particular.

Baxley Craig argues that at least three mountainous sites on the Greek mainland have not hitherto been adequately explored for their potential as Late Bronze Age peak sanctuaries. These sites, including Mt. Kynortion near Epidaurus and Mt. Lykaion in Arcadia, bear some interesting parallels with Minoan peak sanctuaries on Crete, particularly in their archaeological remains, such as pottery and figurines.

However, some differences appear to be present as well: the mainland sites lack intervisibility with other peak sanctuaries or with towns and other residential complexes such as palaces, a distinctive feature of Cretan sanctuaries. Her research is extremely recent at the time of writing, but does appear to open a new and interesting chapter in Bronze Age Aegean religious studies.

That said, none of these peaks are close to Pylos, and it is therefore possible to posit, for the second time with the artefacts from the Griffin Warrior Tomb, an iconographic connection with Crete in general and Knossos in particular. Earlier we saw that Rethemiotakis considered that some of the gold rings which came to light in the early twentieth century without clear archaeological provenance – notably the Amnisos and Knossos #2 rings – may have been connected with the tombs at Poros, coming to this speculative conclusion because of their ‘sacred conversation’ depictions. Here, however, another aspect of the ‘sacred conversation’ scene attracts our attention: the image of the hovering goddess, framed and supported by epiphanic birds, at the very moment when she arrives upon the earth. Aside from the Poros rings, something similar is also seen in the Knossos HM134 seal impression, and a visually different but episodically similar moment might also be depicted in the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #3.

From all this, it is possible to make some conjecture towards a Knossian origin – either directly in its place of manufacture, or more circumstantially through an iconographic and hence religious influence on Pylian artists – and to again speculate that the peak sanctuary at Mt. Yiouchtas was perhaps intended.

Given that the third ring (seen in fig. 145) from the Griffin Warrior Tomb contains a conventional depiction of the sea, similar to two Cretan depictions – the Ring of Minos and the more securely provenanced seal impression Knossos HM392 – while the three female figures on the left side clearly communicate iconographically with the Ayia Triada #3 impression, it is not beyond the bounds of probability that the Griffin Warrior might have derived a considerable amount of his high status from his familiarity with and ostentatious self-expression of a wide variety of Minoan Cretan social and religious norms, of which these gold rings were only a part.



Fig 154. The goddess between two birds: i) ‘Divine Couple’ Ring, Poros, ii) Knossos HM134 Seal Impression, iii) ‘Sacred Conversation’ Ring, Poros

43. Elatia-Alonaki Ring

Archaeological Museum of Atalanti, Phthiotis

Grave 62, Alonaki Necropolis, Elateia, Phthiotis, LH IIIA – IIIC, c. 1400 – 1050 BC

Found in one of a series of chamber tombs in the Mycenaean necropolis at Alonaki, near Elateia, Phthiotis, central Greece, this ring has a complex depiction which is both finely rendered and neatly framed with the row of four human figures arranged in a balanced composition on the bezel.

At the far left, a finely-dressed female figure (and likely enacted epiphany) is seen. Close attention has been paid to the details of her hairstyle and layered dress, while her head is relatively aniconic, and she appears to dance or sway while gesturing with a bent arm posture towards a floating male figure. This gesture is familiar from depictions such as the Isopata Ring.

Next, a floating male figure appears, facing the leftmost female, and apparently directly in her gaze direction, suggesting at least in some sense a visionary encounter as well as a ritual depiction. He wears a loincloth, and there are clear details of his long hair, which is seen flowing back behind his shoulders, as well as faintly lower down at the level of his waist. It is possible to interpret the posture of his feet as downward-pointing, and hence we have the typical epiphanic descending deity convention. The posture of his arms strongly recalls depictions like that of the Palaikastro Kouros, and might represent what MacGillivray & Sackett have termed the Minoan Young Male god. A clay figurine from the peak sanctuary at Petsofas, discussed by Davaras in relation to Minoan costumes, of a male wearing a loincloth and a belt-dagger, also strikingly mirrors this pose.

Two other figures are seen in the centre and the right hand side of the ring. The central figure wears a large cloak: the engraver has taken great care to mark out the opening of the cloak in front of the figure, as well as the figure's right hand emerging from the opening to gesture towards – and possibly touch the hair of – the epiphanic deity figure. This cloak appears to be unique in the epiphany corpus of images and requires some explanation: from the context it is likely that this cloaked figure is male, but gender-distinguishing details are somewhat obscured, and it is possible to construe from the form of the figure's hair a female figure. It is also possible that gender-ambiguity was intended here, but the following interpretation will follow a line of thinking which assumes a male image here.

The final figure is a male, attired in an identical manner to the epiphanic male deity: he too wears a loincloth and details of his hair flowing down his either sides of his body are carefully depicted. He appears to be 'presenting' the cloaked figure to the epiphany scene at the left. Two sets of lines on his upper arms and upper thighs, however, lend a further gender-ambiguous colour to this figure. These may be bands or garters of some description, but like the Geneva Seal previously, it is possible to suggest that this is the kind of short jacket open at the chest of a type more commonly worn by females. Marks on the legs may represent some diaphanous



*Fig 155. Elatia-Alonaki Ring (Image & Sketch)
Grave 62, Alonaki Necropolis, Elateia, Phthiotis, c.1400 – 1050 BC
Archaeological Museum of Atalanti, Phthiotis,*



short trouser garment, again somewhat suggestive of the longer diaphanous trouser garments seen worn by females in several ritual depictions.

Whether these might be male ritual garments local to the Mycenaean Phthiotis region, or are intended to deliberately connote some kind of gender-ambiguity, or indeed more simply be garter depictions with no gender-ambiguous

implications, is likely an open question.

Once again, we find ourselves in the realm of some profound ambiguities in this depiction of who might be the ritual celebrants and who might be the deities, and to whom (if not all) of the celebrants might the epiphany be appearing? The only relative certainty that can be drawn here is that the floating figure is almost certainly a floating deity descending to earth, akin to that seen in the Epiphany Ring or the Master Impression previously, however his relationship with the rightmost 'presenting' male figure, who appears to be almost identically attired, is wholly unclear. If we draw out some kind of male initiation or age-grading interpretation to the depiction, then we may ask whether the latter earthbound figure represents the deity now directing the course of the ritual action, a male initiate to the scene, or an elder male celebrant directing the cloaked figure, who is in fact the initiate in the scene?

We must again remind ourselves that modern interpretations of ancient gesture depiction, such as 'presentation', may not necessarily be valid, and the apparent flexibility of Minoan religious categories – 'enacted epiphany', 'deity', 'initiate', and so on – means that a certain relational ambiguity between the figures may have indeed been intended by the original artist, especially if the scene depicted a secret rite relating to some kind of initiation system. In some Mystery Traditions of the Classical era, the initiates were given titles at certain stages of the celebrations which were identical to those given to deities – including that celebrated every September at Eleusis, where initiates were variously titled Kore, Iacchos and Hyakinthides, among others – and it is possible that this practice represented an



Fig 156. Elatia-Alonaki Ring, impression, detail of the epiphanic figure

ancient survival of Bronze Age religious practice.

The cloaked figure appears to crucial to our understanding of the scene: Rethemiotakis directly identifies this figure as a priest from the cloak, but an occluded initiate into some epiphanic ritual or age-grading male cult is also open to interpretation. Both ideas are worth exploring.

The interpretation of cloaked figures as priests or other religious functionaries is very common in Minoan art, and a sharp contrast is often made between these figures and enacted epiphanies, dancers and other ecstatic figures in ritual depictions, who are dressed very differently, as we have seen throughout. Davaras, for example, notes that several figures on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus are wearing cloaks or long animal skins in the offerings scene, and he identifies these figures as priests. The male figure in the long robe on the panel of the libation pourers is also a priest in his view.

German's survey of the Harvester Vase from Ayia Triada takes note of the marching group of celebrating farmers being led by two men:

"...an apparently older man, wearing long shaggy hair and a fringed robe... He carries a long staff, crooked at the bottom and tapering at the top. In the middle of the group of men behind him is another single figure, a man who looks perhaps not as young and lean as those in the group, who is shaking a sistrum..."

and MacGillivray interprets both of these as priests as does. Koehl proposes that the robed figure to the right of the adorants fresco at Xeste 3 may be an elderly male priest, while Rehak narrates a lentoid seal from Vapheio depicting a robed male figure accompanied by a griffin as a priest.

However it is Davis's survey of priestly figures dressed in robes which is the most comprehensive. In addition to the Vapheio seal and the Harvester Vase – both of whom he incidentally suggests are depicted as singing – he identifies further



Fig 157. Images of priests: i) Clay pyxis from Aptera, Chania, c. 1300 - 1250 BC, ii) Lentoid seal from Vapheio, c. 1550 - 1435 BC

images of priests in the following contexts: i) the Campstool Fresco at Knossos, where the famous 'Parisienne' is interpreted as a priestess wearing a robe which does not appear to be open at the breast, ii) the Chariot Fresco at Tiryns on the Argolid peninsula, where two robed figures are seen riding a chariot, iii) a variety of Late Minoan painted larnakes, including the larnax from Episkopi mentioned above, and iv) the terracotta pyxis from the APtera chamber tomb, Chania, in which a priest is seen wearing a long garment, and possibly playing a stringed instrument such as a kithara, in a field full of birds, horns of consecration and double axes, and which he suggests may depict a funeral ceremony (as on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus).

A priestly connection, then, with music and singing, celebrations and funerals seems reasonably obvious in all of this.

Koehl, however, tends towards the interpretation of an initiatory male cult or age-grading system. He notes that such systems can be evidenced by both costume and hair, and in connection with the Messenia Ring from the first review above that its closest parallels are with the Epiphany Ring and the image from Elatia-Alonaki. He argues that the Messenia Ring depicts an identifiably Cretan scene despite its Pylian provenance, and wonders whether rings such as these infer that Minoan-style rituals were practiced in Mycenaean Lakonia, or if the ring was traded, given as a gift or taken as plunder. The new rings from Pylos certainly suggest the former.

In any case, elsewhere Koehl links the imagery of the Palaikastro Kouros – whose posture mirrors the epiphanic male here – to evidence of an age-grading system in Minoan ritual, and explores several notions of male rites of passage in Archaic Greece and Dark Age Crete which might point to survivals from Minoan and Mycenaean Bronze Age cult practice. These may have included leaving the urban environment to survive in the wild for a period of time, ritualised homosexual behaviour, the initiate's election to the company of adults, and being presented to a deity following this period of initiation.

He proposes images in such artefacts as the Chieftain Cup and the Xeste 3 wall paintings suggest similar age-grading systems for both women and men in Minoan times, and interprets the Messenia Ring in terms of a hunter/lover schema, of survival in the wild and homosexual behaviour. He sees an ithyphallic dimension in the depictions of both male figures, and while we have previously suggested that this image shows an epiphany scene in a wild nature locale in a fairly straightforward way, the theme of doubt and openness to reinterpretation that is the developing theme of this second review means that Koehl's ideas may be quite plausible.

Given the increasingly cited liquid characteristics of Minoan religious categories, there is nothing to say that several of these interpretations could not be simultaneously true for the Messenia image – and hence by extension the Elatia-Alonaki ring – in which a series of narratives of male rites of passage may be drawn out from the various depictions across Minoan-Mycenaean cultural horizons. The initiation might have begun with a survivalist sojourn in wild nature, culminating in a visionary, and possibly homoerotic, encounter with an epiphanic male deity



Fig 158. Male initiation scenes: i) *The Chieftain Cup, Ayia Triada, c. 1500-1450BC*
 ii) *Illustration of Messenia Ring, c. 1600-1350BC*

(or elder ritual male sponsor of the initiate who acts as the deity) at a mountaintop shrine, followed by a ritual celebration and further epiphanic encounter with both the male deity and an enacted goddess in a more domestic, urban or public setting as the initiate is formally ushered into adulthood.

Minoan depictions of sexual intercourse are rare, but Anastasiadou presents one possible image of this in an EM III or LM I seal from Syme-Viannou. She notes it is not possible to determine the genders of the participants, but connects Koehl's ithyphallic and homoerotic interpretation of the Messenia Ring with this seal.

If Koehl is correct in drawing out a male age-grading or initiation ritual here, then is the cloaked figure the initiate, or the rightmost male? Is the rightmost male ushering the initiate into the sacred environment of the epiphany, or is the cloaked priest leading the (possibly) gender-ambiguous initiate behind him, having sojourned with him on the mountain and now guiding him into the encounter with the deity or deities on the left? Does the cloaked figure reach out and touch the floating epiphany of the male figure to signal his newly-found contact with the sacred as an initiate, or his deep familiarity with the deity as the sponsor of the initiate behind him?

Further questions can be asked regarding the large female figure who gestures towards the epiphanic male in a manner similar to other deities in other epiphany scenes: is she the one experiencing the epiphany of the male deity, or is she intended to be part of the epiphanic vision of the cloaked figure in the centre? Or indeed, is she an enacted epiphany whose presence guarantees the sacred nature of the ritual and the arrival of the epiphanic male deity?

Alternatively, is it the case that the cloaked figure is surrounded by deities, an enacted goddess to the far left, and an epiphanic male deity who greets the goddess before alighting on the earth behind the initiate, or priest?

Of all the images in the epiphany corpus, the scene on the Elatia-Alonaki ring, and the complex inter-relationships between the figures, and their potential communication with a wide range of ritual practise and cult images from the entire range of Minoan-Mycenaean horizons, means that this refined and apparently direct depiction is one of the most ambiguous and problematic artefacts in our reviews.

One final brief point to note is that again we see the ‘wavy line’ motif running elegantly along the top of the ring, and navigating carefully close to and around the heads of, from left to right, the seated female, the floating male and the male on the far right. Indeed the line breaks in places around each of their heads, and it is noteworthy that the cloaked figure is the only one in this scene whose head does not closely interact with the motif. If, as earlier, this is held to represent the liminal boundary between human and divine realms, we might conjecture that the scene depicts a cloaked initiate or priest surrounded by two or three deities, a goddess (seated, earthbound) and one or two male gods (epiphanic *and* earthbound, or epiphanic *then* earthbound), as a tentative resolution of the above questions.

44. Mycenae Ring #1

National Archaeological Museum, Athens

Panayia Necropolis, Mycenae, Late Helladic LH II – LH IIIA, c. 1450 – 1300 BC

Found in a richly decorated tomb on the Panayia ridge close to the Mycenaean citadel, this detailed ring shows a couple of remarkable divergences from the Minoan Cretan depictions we are accustomed to, not least in the posture of the leaning female figure. These may represent Mycenaean developments of Minoan ritual forms, and several researchers, including Crooks below, as well as Marinatos, have remarked on the confusing nature of the scene when viewed through the epiphanic lens of Minoan depiction.

Evans interpreted this ring as some kind of mourning scene for a youthful hero or deity, however an ecstatic interpretation of the postures of the two peripheral figures is more appropriate. Regardless of the relative strangeness of the female’s leaning posture, it nonetheless communicates with baetylic leaning postures seen in the Cretan images. The dynamic nature of the male figure, gazing directly at the central female, and the intense torsion in his body as he pulls at the tree, seems to communicate a fairly clear ecstatic depiction.

Crooks suggests that the central female figure is conventionally understood to depict the deity. This seems fairly straightforward given her richly detailed dress, commanding posture and attention to detail on her hair, and he notes she is shown larger than life. Unusually, the artist appears to have paid similar attention to the depiction of the female’s face, and further inspection suggests the faces of the other two figures are depicted as well. This is an interesting departure from the Minoan ‘aniconic’ convention.



Fig 159. Mycenae Ring #1 (Image, Impression & Sketch)
 Panayia Necropolis, Mycenae, c. 1450 – 1300 BC
 National Archaeological Museum, Athens



Crooks describes the rest of the scene in some detail:

“To the right of the scene [he is describing the impression] stands a shrine containing a tall, slender, column-shaped object. Upon this shrine stands a tree which is being pulled down towards the centre of the composition by a male figure. To the left of the scene is a second, tripartite, shrine over which a female figure in a flounced dress leans. Within the front two partitions of this shrine are visible a tall, slender columnar object similar to that in the right-hand shrine, and a second, indistinct, amorphously shaped object which Evans takes to be a shield.”

He reports that the two columnar objects are sometimes interpreted as baetyls, but he is sceptical of this since, in the first place, they look nothing like

the depictions of baetyls in Minoan glyptic, including on several images we have reviewed previously, and the location of these objects within shrine structures on the ring doesn't communicate with any archaeological provenance with known baetyls at, say, Gournia, Ayia Triada or Vasiliki. A representation of Minoan pillar cult objects might be a more appropriate interpretation here.

Iconographic problems can also be seen with the depiction of the leaning female figure, as Crooks continues:

"[T]he female figure leaning over the left hand shrine presents a confused image, as she does not touch the supposed baetyl as might be expected. Her costume is inconsistent with all illustrations of female figures hugging or leaning upon baetyls – she wears a flounced, rather than plain billowing skirt..."

and the general impression of this scene is of a complex Minoan ritual which was not fully understood by the Mycenaean artist, with several different elements of Minoan cult conflated into the leaning female figure.

All that said, the remainder of the scene with the tree-puller and the central deity seem to represent fairly conventional standards in Minoan iconography – we recall the close intercommunication of images between the newly-uncovered Pylos rings and Knossian glyptic – and it seems reasonable to propose that this part of the ring's depiction was reasonably accurate to the Minoan originals from which the Mycenaean artists may have derived their inspiration.

Tree-pulling and/or tree worship is a prominent feature of a good number of scenes in the epiphany corpus – which hasn't been examined in much detail until now – in which ecstatic movement and frenetic interaction with the tree seems to engender some of the more visionary depictions in the artefacts we have reviewed, and a narrative interpretation of dynamic tree-pulling immediately preceding or accompanying some epiphanic ritual has often been assumed.

In the 'Sacred Conversation' ring, for example, it is easy to draw out a speculative sequence running from right to left, in which the ecstatic tree-pulling



Fig 160. Tree-pullers and the appearance of the deity, Ring of Minos and the 'Sacred Conversation' Ring, Poros



*Fig 161. The epiphanic deity appears by a tree,
Avgo-Kavousi Ring and Ayia Triada Seal Impression #6*

action helps to stimulate some trance-like or altered state of consciousness, which in turn, brings about an epiphanic vision of the deity who emerges out from the sky to alight on the earth and greet the celebrant, who now enacts the role of an earthbound male deity in order to receive the goddess's communication.

Marinatos, meanwhile, prefers to propose in these scenes that the central figure was rather more a royal or princely figure, and the tree-puller an attendant whose ecstatic action may be presumed to 'guarantee' the subsequent arrival of the deity. But whether a narrative of a single figure engaging in several episodes of ritual, or a snapshot image of several figures during a single moment, the tense, dynamic postures expressive of extreme bodily torsion and frenetic action in these scenes surely indicates we must consider, once again, the embodied and experiential implications of ecstasy beyond the mere representational.

In a fascinating paper, Tully examines several aspects of the Minoan tree cult and its appearance in epiphany scenes. She begins by reminding us of the fuller implications of the Greek word *επιφάνεια* as not merely denoting a vision or arrival of some divine reality or supernatural apparition, but also connoted things experienced in dreams and dream-like situations, a potentially fascinating aspect of epiphanic depiction – namely, that some of the visual content here could have been inspired as much by post-ritual dreams as much as by ecstatic participation in the ritual itself – that we have not considered until now.

She reviews several depictions of trees in the Ayia Triada seal impressions and the Avgo-Kavousi ring, as well as a gold ring in the National Museum, Athens, depicting a worn and fragmentary scene of a robed deity seated in front of a tree, and beheld by some indistinct figure, and notes from these that:

"...the epiphanic figure is closely associated with a tree situated within rocky ground. Hovering human figures appear to emerge from the tree or materialise close by it, while enacted epiphanic figures sit underneath it."

She proposes further that the landscapes in which these events occur are not to be seen as mundane locales, but as places infused with supernatural or

numinous power, and by extension, the rocks and the trees in these scenes might have been infused with the same potency as well. The tree, in particular, appears to be one of the chief locations at which the celebrant interacts with that sacred landscape, and the commonly close proximity of the tree and the floating epiphany implies that the tree must be animate in some way.

She then asks whether such animate trees might have been believed to be inhabited by some spirit or *numen*, or if they were simply understood as animate but vaguely ‘other-than-human’ without a specific human or supernatural agency. To answer this, she explores Bronze Age Near Eastern and Egyptian images of Asherah and Hathor to suggest that the co-occurrence of goddesses with trees was a significant feature of female religious symbolism in these societies. By inference, something similar might have been appropriate for Minoan ritual culture as well.

The Vapheio ring and Ring of Minos depictions are particularly telling in this regard: in both cases, peripheral male celebrants ecstatically pull at trees, and can perhaps be seen gazing at central female figures who are closely associated with epiphanic apparitions, prompting the possibility of entertaining the notion that the deity could have equally emerged out from the tree as descending from the sky. Precisely this interpretation can be seen in the present ring from Mycenae as well.

In any case, most modern-day people generally recognise that ecstatic dance and frenetic movement engender internal – neurological, psychological



Fig 162. Gold Ring, unknown provenance, LH I - LH II, c. 1550 - 1400 BC
National Archaeological Museum, Athens

and/or physiological – changes in the mind and body to initiate trances or altered states of consciousness, but it is worth reminding ourselves of the Lewis-Williams & Dowson’s insights earlier that such internal changes are often assumed by contemporary religious and pre-modern people to have an external, supernatural origin and cause.

The importance of the sacred tree, and its common centrality in Minoan epiphanic depiction thus takes on both numinous and experiential dimensions in this context: the sacred tree in a numinous landscape becomes for a Minoan celebrant the primary conduit to tap into and gain access to the deity’s potency, influence, apparition and power. That this power can be physically felt moving throughout the body during ecstatic states no doubt would have confirmed, in the minds of Minoan celebrants, the belief in both the animate agency of trees in ritual contexts, as well as the awesome supernatural potency of the deity’s startling arrival upon the earth.

45. Mycenae Ring #2

*National Archaeological Museum, Athens
Acropolis, Mycenae, LH I – LH II, c. 1550 – 1400 BC*

The second ring from Mycenae, discovered in the Acropolis of the citadel, is a dense and complex depiction rendered in remarkable detail which prompts a lengthy exploration, although its appearance in Mycenae and dating to the height of that city’s influence across the Aegean means that we cannot be certain that we are seeing such intense Cretan influence on mainland religion in this artefact. We may rather see in this ring a stronger assertion of uniquely Mycenaean cultural and ritual norms than we have seen in the previous four scenes.

Three motifs in the depiction are of particular interest, the latter two of which appear to be unique to this ring, in the epiphany glyptic corpus at least. These are:

1. The astronomical motifs of Sun disc or star pattern and the crescent moon above a double wavy line
2. Adjoining this at the top left, a floating epiphany figure in the form of a figure-of-eight shield, and
3. The bearing of poppies by the seated female figure, presumably a deity, which potentially links the depiction to Classical Greek Demeter in some way, and also constitutes the only known epiphany scene where a botanically identifiable psychoactive plant is unequivocally rendered, suggesting the possibility of opium consumption as part of the ritual context.



*Fig 163. Mycenaean Ring #2 (Image and Sketch)
Acropolis, Mycenae, c.1550 – 1400 BC
National Archaeological Museum, Athens*



Each of these will be explored in turn, but it is worth first describing the entire image in detail. The scene ostensibly depicts three women making offerings to a large seated woman, whose right arm gestures in a familiar pose, similar to those commonly understood as deities in other epiphany depictions. At first glance, we can speculate upon a human woman enacting the goddess in a familiar enacted epiphany narrative. Among the offerings being made are various types of plants, identified by Askitopolou in detail:

“The first worshipper offers the poppy capsules, the second brings lilies, while the third brings flowers...”

The central celebrant reaching out to touch the capsules which the seated deity now holds is thus meant to indicate that this woman was the one who offered them. Notable in the depiction here is that the capsule is the form of the poppy which elicits the opium drug, which potentially opens up a new dynamic to the visionary capacity of the epiphany ritual complex.

At the far right is seen, an ecstatic tree-puller, although she is rendered in a pose which lacks the dynamicity of Minoan depiction, while at the far left there is a frieze of what appears to be animal masks – possibly boars or bucrania – somewhat reminiscent of the imagery seen in the oeuvre of the Zakro Master but much more conventional.

The faces of all the celebrants, and the enacted epiphany or seated deity, are rendered in clear detail, which is a significant departure from the Minoan convention of aniconicity seen in the majority of previous artefacts.

In the centre, there is seen a large double-axe, which Askitopoulou states is a strong manifestation of Minoan influence in the scene. It dominates the central area of the depiction, and might be thought to be associated with the central woman in some way – perhaps an offering to the deity, or denoting the goddess’s authority – and it is shown close to both of their outstretched arms.

At the top, two delineating lines similar to the wavy line motif on the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring and several other scenes, above which are clear depictions of a crescent moon and a blazing sun disk.

Above the two leftmost celebrants is a clear visionary epiphany with conventional visual language: the figure’s hair waves in the breeze and with downward-pointing feet. Tentatively identified as a woman – and possibly the descending counterpart of the seated deity, although this is not entirely clear – she bears what appears to be a short staff. Uniquely, however, her body is in the form of a figure-of-eight shield motif reminiscent of images seen elsewhere in both Minoan and Mycenaean iconography. Her depiction as a cross between human and figure-of-eight shield resonates with other ‘construal’ images in the epiphany corpus, such as those seen on the Vapheio and Amnisos rings.

Let us now explore to the three most interesting motifs in this ring: it will be noticed that each of these brings something new to the dynamic of the epiphany ritual here depicted, namely an astronomical dimension, seemingly



Fig 164. Mycenaean Ring #2 (Archaeological Illustration)
Acropolis, Mycenaean, c.1550 – 1400 BC

unique references to military apparel, and the possibility that a psychoactive drug was consumed as part of, or in preparation for, the ritual.

1. Astronomical depictions

Unambiguous astronomical depictions are relatively unusual in the epiphany corpus the most notable being the splendid array on the ‘Divine Couple’ Ring, but clear heavenly body motifs are also seen on the Knossos Ring #2, where the sun or a blazing star image is seen, and the Psychro votive plaque, where both Sun and Moon appear. In this scene, the Sun and Moon are shown above the wavy line motif, indicating once again its function as a boundary between the celestial and the earthly, and by extension the divine and the human worlds. The epiphanic figure situated just below this line is also a familiar image.

Rethemiotakis notes, when compared to scenes on a ring from Thebes and on the two Poros rings, the Sun, Moon and wavy line motifs occur in this Mycenaean ring in an offering scene to a female deity, but the male deity is absent. Similar celestial images and male absence from an offering ritual is seen in a ring from Tiryns. He considers the male deity to be “essential to the Minoan version of the epiphany,” but this might only be the case for the ‘sacred conversation’ images, and indeed there are plenty of other epiphanic scenes involving only women (e.g., the Isopata ring). It is possible to infer a particular Minoan-Mycenaean offering ritual



*Fig 165. Gold Ring from Tiryns
Lower Citadel, Tiryns, LH II, c.1450 – 1400 BC
National Archaeological Museum, Athens*

*Fig 166. Gold Ring from Thebes
Thebes, Boeotia, LHI - LHIII, c.1550 – 1400 BC
Benaki Museum, Athens*



scene here with a different set of visual conventions to the ‘sacred conversation’.

However, the appearance of the celestial motifs might not be defining characteristics that conclusively identify the specific ritual or re-enacted mythform being depicted. Rethemiotakis proposes a Minoan calendar of some kind, hence the motifs indicate to a Bronze Age audience the date within their calendar upon which this ritual re-enactment occurred. He presumes much of this calendar was passed onto the Mycenaean later on, and suggests that the Linear B sequence *me-no*, Greek *μηνη*, ‘in the month of’, indicates a lunar calendar of some kind.

In any case, the symbolism of the sky and epiphany both strongly indicate an infusion of Minoan thought into Mycenaean religious practice. This infusion is even more strongly seen on the Tiryns ring: here the daemon or genius figures making offerings to the goddess come straight out of Minoan iconography, and their postures in bearing what appear to be jugs and rhytons are identical to Knossian images such as the Cup Bearer fresco.

Ridderstad notes the rarity of the crescent moon in Minoan art, and suggests that depictions like this might constitute indirect evidence for a Cretan connection with a moon-deity. She proposes that the Greek name *Πασιφάη*, Pasiphae, ‘all shining’, connected with the queen as part of the foundation myth of Knossos in later Classical times, referred to the title of a Cretan moon goddess. She further notes that sun disc or rayed star motifs – she is more agnostic on the identification of what Rethemiotakis is clear as depicting the Sun – are much more common in Minoan depiction in a variety of media, and even appear as mason’s marks at the palaces of Knossos and Malia.

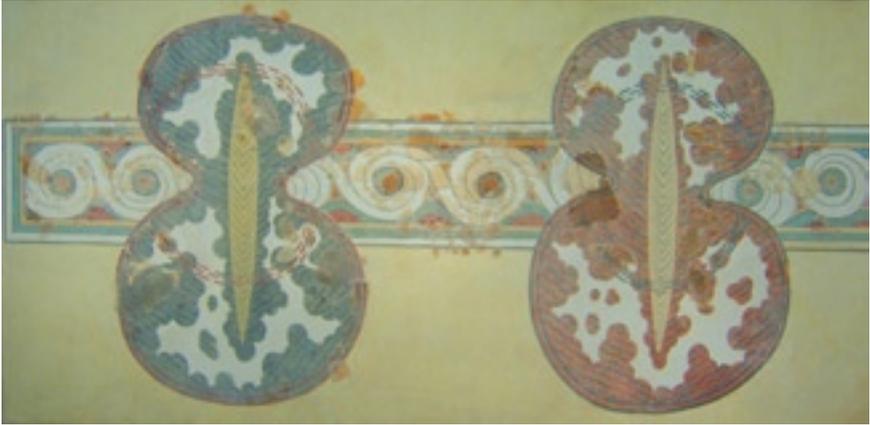
She also connects the prominent appearance here of the double-axe with astronomical symbols above it with an LM II painted pithos in the ‘palace style’ from Knossos which depicts a double-axe surmounted by a rosette, which she presents evidence might symbolise the planet Venus.

Xanthoudidis meanwhile reported the discovery of two stone moulds from Palaikastro. On the rear of Plate B, a female deity in an ‘arms-upraised’ pose holds a double-axe in each hand. We will return to the images on the Minoan moulds from Palaikastro, in another context relating to this ring, very shortly.

2. Floating figure-of-eight shield epiphany

The similarity of the epiphanic floating figure hovering just below the wavy line separating earth from sky – and potentially within the gaze direction of the leftmost female, suggesting a visionary element – to the figure-of-eight shield shapes seen throughout Minoan iconography was noted by Evans, and he listed frescos, steatite seals and seal impressions from Knossos, as well as a bluestone bead from a tholos tomb on the Messara plain, as examples.

Davaras says in regards to the fresco from the Grand Staircase at Knossos that the motifs are widely interpreted as shields – it is often called the Shield Fresco – but notes that no original shields from the Bronze Age have survived, since the



*Fig 167. Shield Fresco, Grand Staircase, Knossos, LM II, c.1450 - 1400 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

wood and leather from which they were made has long degraded. He dates their appearance in Minoan, and later Mycenaean, imagery from around 1600 BC at Knossos, Mycenae and Tiryns. As well as their obvious military application, it is generally assumed that they had some ritual dimension also, but of what nature is not entirely clear.

The appearance of what may be six boar mask motifs on the far left of this ring – and perhaps construed as trailing away from the epiphanic figure-of-eight shield figure, or potentially forming part of the offerings to the deity – might link the floating figure further with military ideas, since boar tusk helmets (and possibly other types of armour) are a relatively common appearance in Mycenaean Greece, including a famous example from 14th century BC Mycenae which resonates strongly with Homeric descriptions. Salimbeti also reports their appearance in glyptic from LH II Boeotia and Vapheio. Alternatively, however, these figures could represent bucrania as a symbolic reference to the ox-hide construction of the shields, and hence a different but no less military connotation in relation to the epiphanic figure or the offering scene.

Nikolaïdou notes a clear Cretan origin for the figure-of-eight shield in its early appearance in a serpentine seal from the MM II (Protopalatial) Atèlier des Sceaux at Malia palace. Another slightly later shield image on a prism seal from the same workshop underscores the possible talismanic nature and Cretan origin of both the artefact and the symbol. That it functioned as a defensive weapon should be obvious, but Nikolaïdou attempts to uncover layers of sacred meaning from its various depictions, which could have included:

“...magic/apotropaic values; signification of sacred space; association with fertility and regeneration, in the context of hunting, sacrifice, and cult of

a Minoan nature goddess; an insignium or aniconic form of a warrior goddess; cultic status per se; emblem of (male) military elites; or even a reference image for heroic and mythical narratives.”

She proposes that these meanings underscore the *iconic* value of the shield, in addition to its military value, and notes that a great deal of the symbolic importance of the shield seems to have come into prominence after its military utility as a weapon had passed.

The ‘maleness’ of such military imagery seems odd in the context of an otherwise exclusively female scene, but she terms the epiphanic figure on this artefact a ‘palladion’, namely a cult image providing protection, and considers the depiction to be decidedly gender ambiguous. She notes further that

“...the gender ambivalence surrounding the rich eight-shield imagery from Circle A [tombs] at Mycenae can be calibrated against paleoanthropological identification of the deceased’s sex. Goddesses of war and hunt, and mortal huntresses, have been recognized both on Crete and the mainland. Women, however, only associate with shields and other weaponry in cultic scenes...”

Nikolaidou concludes that depictions of figure-of-eight shields are therefore complex, and ambiguously balanced between male/military and female/ritual concerns:

“Alongside gender-related nuances, the confluence of aggressive and religious/ceremonial aspects in much of the figure-of-eight shield iconography, exemplify a broader tendency to ‘temper’ warfare and other violent behaviors by social and ritual means...”

There is thus potentially a moral dimension, of female ownership of male military implements – and by extension ritual moderation of aggressive impulses – subtly implied by the epiphanic figure, and perhaps the boar masks, in this scene.

3. Poppies and Opium

In a discussion on the primacy of ritual in Minoan religion, Driessen briefly wonders whether the manufacture of drugs formed part of some preparatory practices, whether in popular religion or in palace cult. Crooks, too, mentions the possible use of psychoactive plants:

“The [epiphany] ritual is said to be ecstatic, evidenced through ‘orgiastic’ tree-shaking, dance, and the possible use of opium, suggested by the opium poppies depicted on CMS I No 17 [i.e., the Mycenae Ring #2]”

As stated above, this is the only epiphany scene where such identifiable psychoactive plants are seen. While it is not secure to suggest, on the basis of this single depiction (and indeed from Mainland Greece rather than Crete), that opium usage was a central aspect of epiphany ritual practice compared with, say, ecstatic dance or tense movements and postures, it does suggest that opium consumption may have been utilised in some cases, either as a local practice in Mycenae, or in other ritual contexts.



*Fig 168. Goddess with Upraised Arms & Poppy Crown (head detail)
Gazi, Heraklion, LMIII, c. 1400 - 1250 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

Evans noted the bearing of poppy capsules to the enthroned goddess on this ring, and linked the depiction to the Goddess with Raised Hands figurines from LM III at Gazi, Knossos, Karfi and other sites. Galanakis considers all of the Goddesses with Upraised Arms to constitute one of the central depictions in the epiphany corpus, although their postures with hands raised up in a gesture suggestive of blessing is not often seen in glyptic depictions of epiphany scenes. However, Moss notes that many of these figurines are depicted with their heads slightly raised, and it is tempting to speculate some kind of epiphanic function – looking up to the sky – to this configuration, in the same way that we did much earlier for the peak sanctuary figurines from sites such as Petsofas.

One such figurine from the shrine at Gazi near Heraklion shows such a Goddess with Upraised Arms with a crown of poppy seed pods. Kritikos & Papadaki note several important points about the specific depiction of the seed pods in a detailed study of this figurine, which include that the vertical notches depicted in the pods contain traces of a painted pigment whose colour matches the dried juice of the opium poppy, that she appears to be depicted with her eyes closed, as if in sleep or intoxication, and the folds of her cheeks suggest a smiling effect, or a parting of the lips. This latter depiction they link with a mood of passivity and note

that such lip positions are a natural effect of opium intoxication.

Sakellarakis' interpretation that the Gazi figurine represents the bringer of sleep or death might well be connected with this, and Lewis-Williams's insight, that in many pre-modern and contemporary indigenous cultures, sleep or death was and is a common metaphor for trances and other altered states of consciousness, may also be relevant here.

Kritikos & Papadaki also note that the notching of the poppy capsules as depicted in the figurine's crown are a known method of extracting either the opium juice or the seeds, described in texts from the 4th century BC and observed as a practice in twentieth century Southeast Asia.

Returning to the stone moulds from Palaikastro, the obverse side of Plate B may be seen to depict an image of a goddess holding poppies in both hands next to a large image of a rayed Sun motif. Ridderstad describes the depiction:

"The scene pictured on the mould represents the 'Poppy Goddess' standing with her arms raised, holding poppy seed heads... On the right side of her, there is a huge wheel-shaped solar disk or a star, and, on the left side of her, is a strange-looking round object with a stellar symbol surrounded by two circles of dots... The object resembles the so-called Minoan cup-holed kernoi, in this case standing on a pedestal. There is a lunar crescent between the two dotted circles... which points towards lunar or lunisolar interpretation of the use of the object. A similar object, painted on a jug from MM IB... was, according to Evans... likely connected to solar cult. The objects depicted on the mould and the jug, as well as real similar Minoan objects, may have had a ritual calendrical purpose."

The similarities with the Mycenae Ring – poppies depicted in their most psychoactive form, an epiphany and lunisolar calendrical motifs – are striking, as is the resonance of all of this with Rethemiotakis's Minoan calendrical insights relating to the 'Divine Couple' ring earlier.

The dates of these moulds are controversial, since the objects were uncovered in 1899 without reference to archaeological practices. The Heraklion Archaeological Museum dates them to c. 1350 – 1200 BC on the basis of their visual similarities to other LM III depictions of female deities with upraised arms, however Velsink's recent and more detailed stylistic and iconographic assessment concludes they are closer to MM II – MM III (i.e., c. 1800 – 1600 BC) in date. This debate is important, since all other known depictions of opium poppies from Minoan Crete appear to postdate the arrival of the Mycenaeans on the island: if Velsink is correct, this would determine that opium usage had an ancient Minoan provenance and was not a later Mycenaean practice imported to Crete.

Moss advises caution in all of this, noting with respect to the Gazi figurine that "...we do not know whether the juice of the poppy was used in healing ritual or to promote a trance-like state in the officiating clergy or faithful."

Gesell counteracts the opinions of Kritikos & Papadaki above, noting that the expressionless face of the figurine needn't be representative of the effects



Fig 169. Minoan Moulds of Palaikastro, Plate A, Obverse (Image & Impression)
 Palaikastro, MM II – MM III c. 1800 – 1600 BC, or LMIII, c. 1350 – 1200 BC
 Heraklion Archaeological Museum



of opium consumption. Nonetheless, she identifies the species as being *Papaver somniferum* from the shape of the seed pods on the crown.

Moss opts to remain agnostic on the relationship between the Gazi goddess and opium, suggesting that a healing goddess may be as likely as one who watches over those who take opium in order to communicate with the divine, and even that the figurine might represent a celebrant under opiate influence.

From the enacted epiphany perspective explored previously, Moss's 'representational' distinction between 'worshipper' and 'deity' may not have been meaningful in a Minoan ritual context. It is plausible in this context that a human woman playing the part of the goddess consumed opium as part of the ritual and thus 'became' the opium-crowned deity depicted in the Gazi figurine, and it was this enacting that facilitated the celebrants' communication with the deity. In other



Fig 170. Red poppies, *Papaver somniferum*, flowers and capsules

words, it is equally possible to envisage a multitude of celebrants consuming opium as part of some ritual practice, as it is to imagine that only the 'deity' (in enacted form) took the drug, and her intoxicated behaviour was interpreted as some kind of prophetic or other divine action in a manner similar to later Greek oracles such as at Delphi and Dodona.

We are probably speculating too far at this point, but the message is that a vast array of potential interpretations are possible here: the perennial Minoan blurring of woman/goddess distinctions in the enacted epiphany seems relatively secure, but we must continue with Moss's caution regarding any proposed function of opium in Minoan epiphany ritual contexts.

Nonetheless, Tully & Crooks's observation that "*[o]pium consumption may have triggered an altered state of consciousness characterized by euphoria and visual hallucinations*" is worth exploring in relation to this ring and the other depictions of poppies, since our perennial focus in this study of the Minoan Epiphany has been upon embodied perspectives, and the implications of using the language of ecstasy, trance and altered states, as well as ritual drama, beyond the representational and the symbolic. An 'active, enquiring response', to paraphrase Warren, is required to understand this facet of Bronze Age Aegean religion.

Ober reports a variety of effects from consuming opium, from the mild to the intense, depending upon the dosage taken. On the moderate end of the scale,

"...there is [a] blunting of the sensorium, often accompanied by a sense of depersonalization and deanimation of hallucinated objects... [and] transient dreamlike states."

McGowan also suggests that subjective 'feeling' states can also be engendered. The Erowid site, which seeks to educate on the usage and history of psychoactive substances, reports that users may also feel euphoric highs and an

absence of stress or anxiety. With heavier doses, however, more extreme effects are experienced, including a tightness of the body, slurred speech or an inability to speak, and other more striking effects, which Ober describes:

“Visual hallucinations are frequent, ranging from a simple intensification of perception to perceptions of scintillating bright lights, from strange, unidentifiable objects with glowing, gemlike coloration to recognizable images of fountains, streams, castles, and exotic, brightly colored landscapes... Synesthesia of images is not infrequent; colored visions may assume a tactile quality; sounds may be perceived as colors.”

Most notably for our current context, he also notes that *“...individuals with strong religious interests may have mystical experiences...”*

Elsewhere on the Erowid site, recipes for the preparation of opium demonstrate its ease of manufacture. One user reports that steeping the crushed or mashed seed pods in hot water for a period of time before filtering them through a material like cotton is enough to produce a tea with noticeable psychoactive effects. The brew has a mixture of active chemicals, including codeine, morphine, thebaine and heroin.

All of this is hardly a smoking gun for a specifically Minoan or Mycenaean ritual opium usage in the context of the epiphany, or indeed any other ceremony, but it is easy to read into these effects several corresponding features in epiphany depictions, including: i) a sense of depersonalisation and the common depiction of aniconic heads; ii) euphoric highs and tightness in the body with images of ecstatically-moving figures and dancers, and iii) visual effects ranging from the construal to the outright imaginative resonating with a range of images such as the ‘construal’ half-human half-object depictions as well as the placing of the floating epiphany figures very often directly in the gaze direction of the celebrants. But



Fig 171. Yellow horned poppy, *Glauadium flavum*, Myrtos, Crete, Summer 2011

such speculative readings are, at the very most, extremely circumstantial evidence indeed.

On a more secure basis, the relative ease of the preparation of opium, as essentially a hot water infusion of mashed poppy products, indicates at the very least that Bronze Age people had the ability to prepare a psychoactive brew from a plant commonly growing in their Aegean landscape, regardless of whether or not they had the actual inclination to do so.

Equally however, the drug could have been used, as Moss intimates, for its healing and soporific effects in mild doses, and Kritikos & Papadaki mention several Classical Greek instances of its usage, including as a preparation to reduce fever, and its addition to wine in Homer's *Odyssey* as:

*“...a drug to lull all pain and anger,
and bring forgetfulness of every sorrow...”*

They also report that the goddess Demeter first discovered the fruit of the poppy at a place called Mekonê, near Corinth. Ridderstad resonates with this when she identifies the seated deity on the Mycenaean Ring #2 with an early form of Demeter, noting that the poppy was associated in Classical Greek art with a variety of goddesses, but principally Demeter.

Finally it is worth briefly exploring a few Classical Greek words in relation to the poppy flower, and potential opium usage, which Beekes claims to have a non-Indo-European, pre-Greek origin, and which it is assumed represent some now lost aboriginal Aegean substrate language, of which Minoan may have been one of the prestige dialects. Their presence in the Greek language may thus hint at a potentially ancient practice of poppy cultivation and/or consumption.

The word *μηκων* appears to refer directly to the poppy of species *Papaver somniferum*, as well as its capsule head. The closely related words *μηκωνιον* and *μηκωνειος* refer both to opium and to spicing other substances (presumably including wine) with poppy extract. Beekes proposes that the word has an ancient provenance, noting that *Papaver* species originate from the Mediterranean, and its similarity to other words of non-Indo-European formation such as *βληχων*, ‘pennyroyal’, indicate its pre-Greek origin.

The term *γλαυκος*, occurring in Mycenaean Linear B in the sequence *ka-ra-u-ko*, referred to the colour of the sea, as well as bluish-green or grey tones (incidentally the colour of *Papaver somniferum* juice), and is also listed by Beekes as referring to the juice of the yellow horned poppy. This is another poppy with some proven psychoactive effects due to the ingredient glaucine, and whose name is the same as a pre-Greek sea deity figure.

The name also appears in Knossian legend as a son of Minos, who drowned in a pithos of honey in the cellars of the palace, whereupon the king recruited a wise man, Polyeidios – ‘many ideas’ – to remedy the situation, which he did by reviving



Fig 172. Visual comparison of *Papaver somniferum* capsule secreting opium sap, and detail of the crown of the Goddess with Upraised Arms from Gazi

Glaukos after watching a serpent revive its companion through the use of a magical plant, which elsewhere I have proposed may have been the yellow-horned poppy. In any case, Beekes suggests current Indo-European etymologies for these words are unfounded and proposes a pre-Greek origin.

The words *πιθιτις* or *πιθιδος* refer to a kind of poppy, of unknown species, word related to *πιθος*, the pithos or large earthenware vessel, while *πλαταγεωνιον* was the word for a broad petal of the poppy or anemone, derived from the pre-Greek verb *πλαταγω*, ‘to clap one’s hands, rattle, crash (cymbals etc)’, presumably from the similarity of the petal shapes to cupped hands. It is tempting to propose a brief musical dimension here!

Finally the Greek words *ροιας* and *ροιαδος* appear to be an alternative term for the *Papaver* species of poppy, and which Beekes derives from the pre-Greek *ροα* ‘pomegranate’, presumably from the similarity of the shape of the poppy capsules to pomegranate fruits. We have previously conjectured a very speculative link between *ροα* ‘pomegranate’ and the Linear A sequence *ru-ja* in the context of the goddess Rhea much earlier in our journey, but it is faintly possible to imagine a link between *ροιας* and *ru-ja* in this context instead. Alas, I suspect for one last time we are voyaging in the clouds!

What can we conclude from all this disparate data relating to poppies, opium and Bronze Age depictions of the epiphany? The evidence seems fairly secure to propose some kind of Mycenaean ritual usage of opium on the Greek mainland

– and indeed Tully & Crooks also note some archaeobotanical evidence for opium consumption at Tiryns, on the Argolid peninsula – which we could use to interpret the epiphany depiction on the Mycenae Ring as constituting an infusion of Minoan (astronomical, epiphany, and military) elements with Mycenaean Greek (opium, offering) aspects.

The evidence also seems fairly secure to suggest that the might have Mycenaean imported opium consumption as part of religious or healing rituals when they arrived on Crete. The relatively late dating, for example, of the poppy goddess figurine from Gazi might suggest this image as a fusion of Mycenaean elements into a native Minoan cult.

The dispute over the correct dating of the Minoan moulds at Palaikastro also means that at present the question must remain equivocal: a late date for the Palaikastro images might imply a Mycenaean import, but an earlier date could point towards opium usage in Middle Minoan Crete some three or four hundred years earlier. The coincidence of astronomical and opiate imagery on both the Mycenae Ring #2 and the moulds could easily resonate with Rethemiotakis's assertion that a considerable amount of Minoan ritual and calendrical imagery was infused into Mycenaean cultural life, but it could indicate the reverse process happening once Minoan influence across the Aegean starts to wane.

Even the presence of several pre-Greek words in the Classical Greek language referring to poppies and opium needn't refer directly to linguistic survivals from a specifically Minoan dialect. Beekes holds that pre-Greek was likely spoken over much of the Greek mainland, the Aegean islands as far north as Samothrace and western Anatolia, as well as Crete, and as such a local Mycenaean practice deriving from an indigenous mainland population who preceded the arrival of the Greeks could be proposed as much as a Minoan survival.

A very circumstantial piece of evidence might be the very many incense burners found across the Aegean, including from Crete, dating from Neolithic times to the Classical Age and beyond. It is unknown what was burnt in these, and it is likely a range of fragrant substances were used to offer a range of sensations during ritual life, but it is just about conceivable that opium may also have featured in ritual burnings, either as offerings or for some more psychoactive purpose. Any psychoactive effects through this medium, however, would likely be mild and only effective in indoor settings. The breezy environments of wild nature locales and mountainous shrines seen in the epiphany depictions means that incense burning would not have been an effective method by which to administer an opium drug in such places, if indeed one was used in the epiphany rituals.

All in all, then, the questions of whether Minoan celebrants made use of opium in religious rituals in general, and to facilitate ecstatic and even visionary states during epiphany rituals in particular, and whether this usage was a native Minoan practice, or a Mycenaean import, must remain at the present time, an entirely open question.

Epiphany at Palaikastro Playing Social Anthropologist in Minoan Crete

One of my favourite ways to spend a day when my husband and I find ourselves on Crete, as we do nearly every summer, is to drive out to the far eastern end of the island, to Sitia and Palaikastro, where we can combine our love of the Cretan landscape with the pleasureable delight in exploring Minoan archaeology.

The day begins with a visit to the Archaeological Museum at Sitia to see the Palaikastro Kouros – among many other treasures which now includes the Mochlos Pyxis – before driving over to Palaikastro to gaze upon House 5 and the Plateia where the fragments of the *kouros* were found. Our attention then turns to the conspicuous presence of Mt. Petsofas over the town, and the day ends with a pilgrimage up to the peak sanctuary at the summit.

There is something numinous for me in doing this, some direct feeling of connection with the Minoans, as if following in the footsteps of Bronze Age Cretans through their ritual lives. Sackett & MacGillivray have suggested that the people of Palaikastro may have at some points of the year ascended the mountain with their richly-decorated figurine in order to hold rituals in the *kouros's* presence at the peak sanctuary. The resonance with Rethemiotakis's celestial image of the 'sacred conversation' is striking here, and perhaps the *kouros* was meeting the skybound goddess, re-enacted by an elite woman and envisioned by the whole town.

The peak sanctuary at Petsofas is a remarkable place even in its fragmentary state after three and a half thousand years. Evocative breezes and stunning views



Fig 173. The Palaikastro Kouros in Sitia Museum



Fig 174. House 5 at Palaikastro, and Mt. Pestofas seen from the site

across the valleys below – the human world – as well as the sea and the wild mountains of the far east coast – the world beyond – are a true sight to behold and a spectacular venue for a cosmos-embracing Bronze Age sacred event.

At nearby Traostalos, the experience is even more intense: what are breezes on Pestofas are gales here, as if the customary whispers of ancient presences have now suddenly become howling winds and deafening singing into our ears, forcing our daily chatter into silence in a wild and liminal place which seems always in motion, never still, and where every plant, rock and stone seems vibrantly alive.

At night across vast swathes of Crete, the stars and the Milky Way remain scintillatingly bright even today and seem close enough to reach out and touch, and waiting for sunrise on a Minoan site is a shimmering, magical experience. At certain times of the year, one catches sight of Orion in the dawn light and one cannot help but think of the *kouros*.

Throughout the whole of this day – part museum visit, part archaeological excursion, part nature ramble and part numinous reverie – I find myself nearly always accompanied by imaginary Minoan pilgrims walking with us. I often notice that I don't seem to look upon these invisible companions with a sense of mystery, awe or wonder, but rather in the manner of a social anthropologist among some indigenous people of the contemporary world, both observing and participating in the rich social and cultural milieu of their lives.

I try to plunge myself into seeing the world through their eyes, headily mixing the objective data of the archaeologist within the wild speculative flair of the visual artist! Nonetheless, like all social anthropologists today, I arrive at the conclusion that my (imaginary) knowledge about their world will always be incomplete, because I wasn't born a Minoan. I might 'join in' and live in their world, learn their language, dance their dances, sing their songs and even see the visions and meet their deities, but even so, the full totality of their complex, ancient lives will never be known, by me or anyone else.

Humans are attracted to mysteries, and the possibility of 'solving' a mystery is nearly always tempered by the deeper knowledge that a mystery can be



Fig 175. The peak sanctuary at the summit of Mt. Petsofas

valued for its own sake, without needing a solution.

So it is, to a certain extent, with the eyes of the social anthropologist, as well as the archaeologist and the visual artist, that I have sought to undertake the various studies and artefact reviews in this volume over the years, and which may explain the intense focus on complexity and cultural connections, as well as its 'synthetic' perspective in which many ideas and theories have been gathered together to attempt some kind of reconstructed, multi-faceted whole.

An example might clarify what I mean here. Social anthropologists Christine and Stephen Hugh-Jones lived and worked among the Barasana people of the Colombian Amazon for several years in the late 1960s. Their principal aim was to study the local Barasana variant of the Amazonian *yurupari* cult, a sacred male initiation system called *he iaria wi* (literally 'house where sacred flutes are seen' but *he* also refers to supernatural potency) in the Barasana language, which involves a visionary ritual as part of a much wider nexus of ceremonial, social and symbolic associations within their culture.

Of course the anthropologists attended the *he iaria wi* ceremony in order to gain a clearer understanding, but in their two volumes of research on the matter, they uncovered a whole set of multi-faceted interconnections of symbolic life and meaning between the rite and the wider culture, and order to gain a fuller comprehension, it became necessary for them to explore a whole host of other cultural phenomena, variously including:

1. Shamanism, shamanic institutions and shamanic initiations;
2. The origins and meanings of a psychoactive brew called *yajé* consumed during the ritual and the resulting visionary experiences and their meanings;
3. The shared origins of ritual body painting, music and menstruation in events from the beginning of time related in myths, how these affect Barasana perceptions about paint, shamanism, and hunting, among a variety of other things, and how the *he iaria wi* ceremony re-creates these events in ritual space and time;
4. The meanings of the specific patterns and motifs seen in body painting and

house decoration, their relationship to each other, the ceremony and the wider world;

5. The house and its microcosmic structural representation, and replication, of the Barasana conceptions of the cosmos;
6. Cultural perceptions of jaguars, howler monkeys and sloths, and their relationships to humans;
7. The Sun and the Moon, and how they came to be;
8. Bees, the acquisition of honey, and the origins, making and gendered usage of gourds, in both ritual and daily life;
9. The relationship between *manioc*, the anaconda and thunder;
10. Social organisation and kinship structure, including fictive kinship relationships forged within the ceremonial context itself, and linguistic kinships across and within language groups of the region;
11. Idealised images of both masculinity and womanhood within Barasana culture, as well as sexual expressions within and outside those idealisations;
12. Localised notions of birth, initiation, marriage, death and rebirth, and taboos relating to these, set within both social and cosmic contexts;
13. The linguistic implications for, and complex lexical interconnections of, all of these within the Barasana language.

Even so, the Hugh-Joneses still felt their knowledge of the *he iaria wi* specifically, and Barasana life more generally, was incomplete. And this from a still-living society, whose language it is still possible to learn, whose culture it is still possible to observe, and whose ceremonies still sometimes take place in the Colombian Amazon. How much more removed from the Minoans of the Aegean Bronze Age than we are from the contemporary Amazonian Barasana!

The parallels between social anthropologists studying a visionary, ritual, mythical, gendered, artistic, social and cosmic complex from South America on the one hand, and archaeologists investigating the Minoan Epiphany from Bronze Age Crete on the other, should be reasonably obvious, the central message of this



Fig 176. Mt. Petsofas summit: views of the valley floor and out to sea

parallel being, quite simply, that no ritual practice, mythform, visionary experience or artistic artefact, or a complex of these, can exist in isolation, but each is deeply interconnected and embedded within the culture out from which it emerges.

We might, in the same vein as for the Barasana above, make a similar – but wholly speculative – itemised list to exemplify the many interlocking ways in which that cultural embedding took place with the epiphany in Minoan life:

1. Minoan religion: its nature and structure, the interrelationships of deities, spirits of place and ancestor spirits, etc, and the relationships of these to humans; the accessibility of these through epiphanic ritual practice. Named deities with individual (or interlinking) identities on local, tribal, ethnic or island-wide scales versus (or perhaps, in addition to) animistic concepts of *genii loci* and ancestor worship. The potential survival of some these deities and beliefs into Greek religion: Rhea, Britomartis, Daedalus.
2. The relationship between human and divine: the implications that epiphany depictions have for the relationship between deity and celebrant as intimate and revelatory rather than hieratic. The depiction of gaze as suggesting both visual/visionary aspects and a ‘see me’ characteristic to the relationship. Enacted epiphany as becoming the deity, and the capacity of ritual drama to reify this ‘becoming’ as a direct and embodied experience with consequences for personal and social identity.
3. Rituals: enacted and visionary epiphanies, ritual as meditation between human and divine, and the method by which latent beliefs can become active experiences. Ritual activities including dance, swaying, music, song, pilgrimage to sacred site, robing/disrobing and costume display, healing, praise, and the invitation of the deity into the ritual scene. Interacting with the deity in both enacted and visionary scenes. The ‘sacred conversation’ and other conventional scenes as ritual behaviour, and lost ritual narratives within the iconographic depictions.
4. Mythology: the relationship of ritual and religion to myth, and the ability of epiphanic ritual to re-enact or re-create some lost Minoan mythforms. The Epiphany Cycle as both re-enacted ritual (or a network of rituals interconnected by narratives) and as myth (or a network of myths reified by interconnected rituals). The ‘sacred conversation’ and other conventional scenes as depictions of Minoan mythemes. Lost myths that account for the origins of the epiphany rituals, as well as dances, songs and other arts (e.g., textiles for costumes) in epiphany ritual contexts.
5. Costume and gender: the possibility that ritual events required specific clothing set apart from everyday life. Robing rituals and disrobing. The complexity and variety of female dress – diaphanous garments, short jackets, sumptuous layered skirts and dresses of a variety of styles and designs, trousers – versus the relative simplicity of male dress – mostly loincloths – and the possibility of occasional

- gender blurring. The heavy focus in epiphany depictions upon clothing and hairstyle, and the cultural importance (now lost) which these denoted.
6. The body within Minoan ritual: its expression and broadcast of identity, the use of the body to initiate visionary states, enacted epiphanies as connoting the sanctity of the human body (all human bodies in the ritual, or some human bodies belonging to the elite or the ritual leaders). The ubiquitous Minoan artistic focus on dynamic tension, movement, torsion and elegant beauty of the human body. Jewellery and personal adornment as ritual intensifications of that beauty, and beautifying oneself as part of preparations for ritual.
 7. Artistic creativity and the potential for idiosyncrasy and individual expression (e.g., the Zakro Master, the Geneva Steatite Seal) within the conventions of Minoan art in general, and depictions of the epiphany in particular, and their consequences for individual, social and public expressions of identity.
 8. Dance: its use in ritual and its capacity to engender a variety of altered states, its depiction in glyptic and its use as a 'live broadcast' of identity, self-expression, vitality and a personal connection to, or re-enactment of, the deity. The now-lost meanings of and beliefs about specific dances and movements within those dances.
 9. Altered states of consciousness: dance, posture, music and ecstatic movement as methods towards trances that elicit visions of the stunning presence of the deity. The capacity of the body to engender ecstatic sensations directly understood as and immediately conflated with supernatural potency of the deity or sacred place, and the experience of them as 'proof' of the presence of the deity. Ecstatic ritual as self-transformation. Artistic conventions such as aniconicity of heads, floating heads, attenuated bodies underscoring the experiential importance of these in understanding that an epiphany is taking place. Construal imagery as connoting a shift in perception or a shift in self. The 'sacred conversation' and other conventional scenes as mindblowing and self-transformative experiences.
 10. The specific content of visionary epiphanies and hints of Minoan expectations (shaped by ritual, myth and religious belief) of what would or could be seen: deities descending from on high and touching earth to interact with celebrants; fantastic birds and insects heralding a deity's arrival or seen as epiphanies in their own right; ritual equipment – pedestalled offering tables, bucrania, double-axes – seen in a similar light. Construal imagery in which objects and animals are seen in the process of transforming into or away from human forms, or denoting some fantastical creature or object with now-lost ritual or mythical meaning.
 11. Palaeobotany and the use of flowers (e.g., lilies) in epiphany rituals. The possibility that a psychoactive plant (e.g. opium, yellow-horned poppy juice) may have been used as part of the ritual, and by extension, preparatory practices for epiphanic events, including manufacture of the drug, but also many other preparations, such as, e.g., the gathering and careful arrangements



Fig 177. Wild landscapes: i) view from Mt. Petsofas, ii) view from Traostalos

- of flower offerings. Myths relating to specific flowers, plant medicines or drug preparations (e.g., Glaucos?)
12. Trees as a potential conduit through which contact with the deity occurred: tree-pulling and ecstatic dance, the close association of the floating epiphany with trees (e.g., Avgo-Kavousi), the possibility of tree spirits.
 13. Animism, wild nature and mountain peaks as liminal spaces on the boundary between human and divine, where epiphanies take place: baetyls, peak sanctuaries, mountain peaks.
 14. Cosmos and the experience of the epiphany within the Minoan cultural conceptions of space – descent from on high (down the Milky Way?) at liminal boundaries between human and divine worlds – and time – lunisolar calendrical associations, and particular sacred times of the year connoting particular functions for the epiphany ritual (e.g., to celebrate or give thanks for a successful harvest, moving up in the age-grading system). Discontinuities in space and time marked by ritual. Microcosm of the local (e.g., at Mochlos) re-enacting the macrocosm of the global, and the function of architecture and landscape (e.g., peak sanctuary, sacred cave, household shrine) in replicating the Minoan cosmos. The capacity of ritual to centre the participant at the heart of a sacred, animate cosmos.
 15. The epiphany as socially transformative: initiation and age-grading systems. Womanhood, manhood and adulthood connoted by the presence of, interaction with, envisioning of, and even ‘becoming’ the deity. God(dess) (re-)making (wo)man as active component in ecstatic ritual, and the epiphany as marker of human/adult/elite accomplishment.
 16. The epiphany as healing, or as having some other magical power, and the capacity of the pilgrimage and envisioning of the deity to bring about some specific desired outcome beyond the celebration of the ritual itself: health, power, good fortune, or some other specific request (c.f., entreaties to the deity across the Graeco-Roman world, e.g., the *defixiones* at Aquae Sulis, Bath).
 17. The widespread practice of the epiphany across Minoan society. Elite practice

evidenced by expensive materials (e.g., gold rings), that of merchant classes through seals and seal impressions, and popular epiphanic practice through cheaper materials (e.g., the Psychro plaque, figurines at peak sanctuaries) and through contextual archaeology (e.g., the Vasiliki baetyl).

18. Discourse institutions: various lost Minoan bodies of philosophical, theological, religious, folk-medical and other teachings, as well as shared personal reflections, which constituted extra-ritual, extra-religious and extra-mythological institutions of thought that illuminated for Minoan people various aspects of the epiphany within the wider context of Minoan (i.e., human) life. Differing individual reasons for and responses to epiphanic ritual practice. The epiphany was not merely enacted, ritually practiced and experienced, it was also talked about (c.f., Diodorus Siculus: the Mysteries were practiced on Crete with no vow of secrecy), given meaning and reflected upon for its emotive and compelling implications for individual lives, the wider human world and the world beyond humanity, including the divine and the afterlife.
19. Magic, fascinating exotica (e.g., monkeys) and the compelling interest of humans with the mystical, the divine and the unknown at the edges of the human world, i.e., mountain peaks, caves, strange animals from far away.
20. Sociopolitical power of elite families and the broadcast of that power through epiphanic image. Power expressed as intimacy with the deity, or as identity with the deity, and the use of that power to promote political (e.g., Knossian), mercantile and thalassocratic interests. Social agency and political power as infused with sacred power. The capacity of images of the epiphany to confirm that power as given by, originating from, or due to intimacy with the deity. Elite power versus popular practice of the epiphany, and potential differences in what was seen and experienced – or what could be seen and experienced – across social classes (e.g., elite, merchant or villager).
21. Epiphanic depiction as marker of identity, particularly in mercantile transactions (i.e., seal impressions signifying the owner of the document or seller of trade goods). Seal impressions, including epiphanic and religious images, as badges of

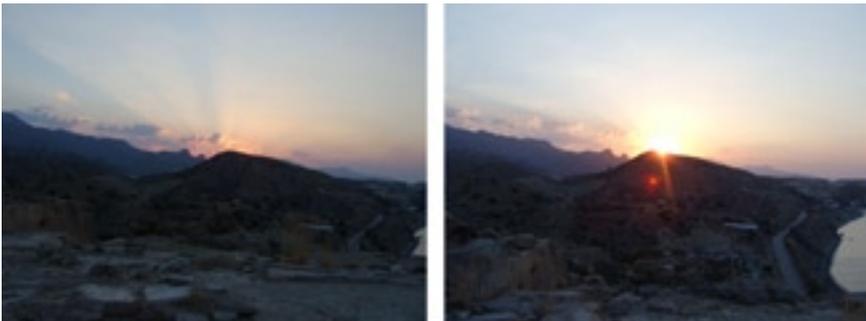


Fig 178. Sunrise at Myrtos-Pyrgos, view from the plateia

- interpersonal and inter-institutional trust.
22. The interconnection of epiphanic ritual, myth, experience and power with other aspects of Minoan ritual and social life, its potentially deep embedding within the fabric of Bronze Age Cretan society, and its communication to other societies (e.g., Cyclades, mainland Greece, but also Egypt (?) and the Levant) as part of merchant trading, colonisation and the international projection of Minoan power.
 23. The ancient practice of the epiphany in Pre- and Protopalatial times, and the post-Minoan survival (e.g., at Delos) and influence of epiphanic cultural items – whether as ritual, myth or experiential practices – into Classical times. Minoan art and ritual as constituting the incipient origins of Classical Greek humanist concerns.

In this sense, the Minoan Epiphany has functioned as a kind of access point into the whole of Minoan culture as it may have been, as it is often imagined, and into the many ways that archaeologists variously propose and speculate Bronze Age Cretan society to have been. I maintain that a study of any facet of Minoan archaeology contains significant challenges for the modern Western observer, but it also potentially presents radically different patterns of human interconnections which can transform the perceptions of that observer in fascinating and life-affirming ways.

Several appearances in the list above have not been particularly focussed upon in the present volume. Music is a particularly notable absence, whether as song, drums or with instruments such as the *kithara*. Davis & Stocker suggest that at least one figure on one of the rings from Pylos (see fig. 145) is depicted as singing, and images such as that on the Harvester Vase, suggest that voices raised in song – and here, again, is a potential entrance way into altered states, among many other epiphanic aspects! – was a central part of the Minoan Epiphany, though whether any specific visual convention – such as the hand raised to the face, as on the ring from Pylos – can be identified from the epiphany corpus is one best left to others.

Rituals of robing, narrated by Warren in his seminal survey of Minoan ritual actions, have only had occasional mentions here, despite the apparently visual centrality of depictions of costumes. The wearing of sumptuous garments to attend the ritual and/or enact the deity, and – if images of females as naked or in diaphanous clothing are any guide – the possibility that in some ritual contexts (e.g., with baetyls) a disrobing may have also occurred, are again, aspects of Minoan religion and epiphany ritual best left to the experts.

I have not been particularly warmly disposed to the idea of Minoan kingship throughout these studies, but images such as the Master Impression, in which, as Hallager notes, an imposing male figure appears alone without any female counterpart, might have provided the mythical or ritual precedent for such a social institution. Marinatos expends much energy, with reference to Near Eastern

civilisations, to propose that kingship was a central aspect to Minoan religious life.

I remain unconvinced, but the presence of epiphanic depictions on gold rings, and striking architectural structures such as the Throne Room at Knossos certainly suggest that elite families in general, and elite women in particular, were playing important roles in Minoan society that bridged any secular/religious distinction. Whether the ‘sacred conversation’ depicted a *hieros gamos* between a goddess and a king – hence implying a kind of matrilineal situation in which the prince derived his authority from his sister, mother or wife (i.e., *de jure uxoris* or *de jure matris*) – is another speculation whose potential veracity I leave to others.

Whether the reconstruction of specific dances from Minoan glyptic image can be attempted is also another, apparently central, aspect of the epiphany upon which I have generally only touched lightly. Homer’s mention (as related by Kerényi) that “*Daedalus in Knossos once contrived a dancing floor for fair-haired Ariadne,*” and Ariadne’s appearance as the guide of the labyrinth in the Athenian myth of Theseus and the Minotaur – and indeed, the Mistress of the Labyrinth receiving the same amount of honey as “*all of the gods*” in a Linear B tablet from Knossos – might lead us to speculate, as Kerényi does at some length, on the labyrinth as originally some kind of Cretan dance, and perhaps an epiphanic one, but again such speculations should be the province of more knowledgeable people than myself.

I have sought, in this collection of studies, to take much more of an interdisciplinary perspective of the relevant scenes in Minoan glyptic than perhaps many professional academics in the field of Mediterranean archaeology would be willing to accept. I have, at times, been speculative – a privilege I take as an independent researcher, with the caveat that I am always honest about such speculations being exactly that – but such conjectures, and occasionally wild flights of fancy, have all been in service towards seeking to gain a wider, contextual understanding of the Minoan Epiphany, not merely as some specific practice, but in every sense of the phrase, a Bronze Age Visionary Culture.



Fig 179. The kouros at the peak sanctuary on Mt. Petsotas!

The Dancing Lady Fresco, Knossos: An Open Question

The palace of Knossos is a remarkable archaeological site, with a fascinating modern history which at times must be considered along with its ancient prehistory. Discovered and excavated by Sir Arthur Evans in the first half of the twentieth century, it has been subject to a vast array of differing interpretations as to its function as a royal palace, administrative centre, and focus of religious cult activity, and new archaeological investigations continue to add to, and transform, our understanding of the site and wider Minoan society.

One of the most controversial and hotly-debated subjects, however, is the nature of Evans's reconstructions of parts of the palace, some features of which seem relatively accurate, while other aspects are positively fanciful and pertain more to Evans's British colonial and romantic ideas of an ideal Bronze Age society than to any realistic Minoan culture. One of the perhaps 'safer' reconstructions is the Queen's Megaron in the southeast corner of the palace, a light and airy space of probable ritual function, described by Davaras as having two large light-wells on the east and south sides, and in which:

"Frescoes with vivid scenes of marine life and others with charming dancing girls covered the walls... [and] a section was adorned with a spiral pattern of a later date. Various phases of the floor construction can still be seen."

One of the small frescos in the Megaron, here called the 'Dancing Lady Fresco', bears a striking resemblance to images in the epiphany corpus, such that it cannot be ignored in any study of this particular ritual practice. That said, its fragmentary nature means its inclusion into the sphere of epiphany depictions must be regarded as tentative at best.

The surviving fragments of this fresco show a woman in typical Knossian graceful style, with long black hair, white face in profile with clearly-depicted eyes, and a finely-decorated jacket which is open at the breasts. So far, so typical of a female dancer fresco at Knossos, however the lower half of the figure is entirely missing from below the breasts downwards, and hence the nature of missing parts of the image cannot be known with any certainty.

It has generally been assumed that the 'Dancing Lady' depicts a typical Knossian female dancer seen in several other frescos at the palace, with Davaras describing her as a "*charming dancing girl with long, billowing tresses...*" while Logiadou-Platonos narrates the painting as:

"...a girl dancing, with her hair blowing in the wind as she turns. Her dress is particularly interesting, with its short-sleeved bolero, decorated with coloured embroidery."

The fresco is furthermore restored in the original Queen's Megaron at the palace to depict a rather static-looking figure with a double-layered skirt and feet flat on the floor, whose pointing arm appears to be leading the way, as it were, of her dancing route forwards.



*Fig 180. The Dancing Lady Fresco (Image of surviving fragments)
Queen's Megaron, Knossos Palace, LM IB - LMII, c. 1600 - 1450 BC
Heraklion Archaeological Museum*

*Fig 181. Reconstruction of the Queen's Megaron at Knossos Palace
with the Dancing Lady Fresco placed at the eastern entrance (top right)*



However, the posture of her arms, with the left arm bent at the elbow and raised to the level of her breast, and the right arm pointing straight forwards, is a pose very familiar from epiphany glyptic imagery, and in the two previous reviews, we have seen several images of floating or dancing deity figures who arm configuration closely matches the ‘Dancing Lady’ fresco.

These include the Amnisos and Vapheio rings, the Knossos M1-5 Seal Impression (although the deity here is holding a staff), the Geneva Steatite Seal, and the Mochlos Pyxis. Close variations of the posture include one with a slightly more relaxed leading arm (seen in the floating figure on the Ring of Minos and the Ayia Triada Seal Impression #4), or in a second variation with the leading arm bent upwards to touch the face or gesture towards another figure in the depiction. This latter image is seen on the rings from Isopata, Mochlos, Archanes #2, as well as the Ring of Nestor and the Heraklion Ring, and also features in the Makriyalos seal and the Zakros #1 impression.

Sometimes a male deity appears in the same pose as the ‘Dancing Lady’, including the depictions on the Epiphany Ring, the Master Impression (again, holding a staff or downturned spear), the Poros Ring, Knossos Ring #2 and the Geneva Steatite Seal.

The depiction of her hair is in striking contrast to frescos of other female dancers at Knossos, and Sakellarakis & Sapouna-Sakellarakis make an explicit link between the form of her hair and the notion of ecstatic dance, stating that she:

“...spins in an ecstatic dance which we know was a ritual dance from different representations in miniature on seals...”

This dance, as well as the waving nature of her hair are indeed also familiar from epiphany iconography, as is the evident tension visible in what we can see of her body. Long strands of her hair move down the side of her head before rising up into the air at the level of her shoulders, as if she is dancing with energetic movements, or is being buffeted by strong breezes akin to the floating deity depictions in the well-established epiphany glyptic visual language. It is worth noting here that even without the epiphanic interpretation, this sense of energy and dynamism is at sharp odds with the rather dull and static reconstruction in the Queen’s Megaron.

Given that the lower half of this figure has not survived, and hence the ‘dancer’ reconstruction may not represent an accurate portrayal of the original Minoan image (nor indeed perhaps the intentions of the ancient Minoan artist), I ask: does this fresco depict some kind of epiphanic divinity?

The caption accompanying the fresco at Heraklion Archaeological Museum, likely under the considerable influence and knowledge of its Director, Nota Dimopoulou, concurs with this tentative epiphanic assessment, noting that the fresco depicts:

“...a goddess descending from the heavens, as indicated by the locks of hair streaming in the wind, a familiar convention in Minoan iconography for hovering in mid-air. Her right arm, extended in a gesture of authority and command, indicates



Fig 182. Posture comparison: Amnisos Ring, Knossos M1-5, Ring of Minos

that she formed part of a larger epiphany scene.”

We must yet again remind ourselves that Western religious categories and distinctions – priestess versus dancer versus deity-impersonator vs deity, and so on – may not have been meaningful for a Minoan context, and so it is equally possible to propose that this image might have originally depicted an enacted epiphany of a Minoan deity, played by a female member of the elite family of Knossos, and presumably the principal occupier of the Queen’s Megaron.

In the current restoration of the Queen’s Megaron site at the palace of Knossos, the reconstructed fresco has been placed at an elevated position above one of the eastern light wells of the Megaron. If this placement is archaeologically accurate (and there is no guarantee that Evans’s restoration correctly represents one or more of the ancient circumstances of the Megaron), then such an elevated position would resonate with the figure depicting the descending epiphanic deity entering the sacred space of the Megaron.

In addition, the fresco’s positioning to the east side of the Megaron may have implied some connection between the epiphanic deity and the dawn light at certain times of the year – possibly at midwinter, if we recall Goodison’s insights on the possible solstitial alignments in the Throne Room – but again this depends upon the accuracy of the reconstruction along with many other conjectures about the functions and arrangements of the Knossos palace.

There is also the possibility that the Queen’s Megaron was open to the south side – Piet de Jong’s imaginative reconstructions show two light wells, including a large one to the south – and this might have allowed some intervisibility, or some other less tangible ‘influence’, between the Megaron and the summit of Mt. Yiouchtas some 6km to the south. The communication of one of the most important Bronze Age Cretan peak sanctuary sites with this location in the palace resonates with this question of the possible epiphanic nature of the fresco, and the wider context of the Queen’s Megaron being a place where enacted epiphany rituals

of some kind may have taken place.

Blakolmer reviews the interplay between glyptic and fresco imagery in Minoan art, to investigate whether these were separate artistic realms dealing with disparate and unconnected themes, or if they reflected the same Minoan concerns through differing media. He notes that there are a large number of signet and seal images from the Late Minoan period which appear to be extracted from larger fresco scenes, including figure-of-eight shields and sacral knot motifs.

The recent Mochlos Pyxis discovery also demonstrates the appearance of glyptic (in this case epiphanic) imagery on non-glyptic artforms, and Blakolmer likens the Knossos griffin goddess seal (see fig. 24) to the images of griffins in the Throne Room at Knossos, concluding that:

“...we should probably not expect any individual images or iconographical cycles to be strictly confined to one distinct artistic medium during the Aegean Bronze Age.”

He gives two prominent examples of deep intercommunication between media as a demonstration of this conclusion. Firstly, he notes the clear iconographic origins of the Vapheio gold cups in Knossian stucco reliefs, and their resonance with Minoan glyptic images of bulls. He then reviews Millitello’s epiphanic reconstruction (see fig. 106) of the frescos from Room 14 at Ayia Triada, which bear strong resonance with baetylic epiphany images such as the Sellopoulo Ring. He deduces that this

“...lively exchange of iconographic motifs among Aegean artforms of different materials, technique and size... establish[ed]... iconographic standards and traditions which lasted for several centuries...”

and he proposes that this intercommunication took place between glyptic and mural iconography in a manner that was medium-independent, and furthermore unbound by considerations of space on sealstones and signet rings in the former case, and architectural considerations in the latter.

The notion, then, that glyptic epiphany imagery might transport to a large scale mural composition is not beyond the bounds of possibility, but it is well to be cautious here. Given the paucity of other epiphany images in the fresco medium – the Ayia Triada fresco is hotly debated – and the missing lower half of the fresco which allows us to potentially fit any visual interpretation which suits our pre-existing attitudes regarding Minoan palace cult practice, the notion that this fresco might represent some kind of epiphany could seem to be on the wilder side of speculative discourse.

However the combination of the waving hair and the posture of the arms and their resonance with established epiphanic iconography, as well as the demonstrated medium-independence of Minoan artistic motifs, suggests that the possibility should at the very least be left as an open question.

The 'Minoan Epiphany' Sketch Series (2013-20)

Archival quality artist sketches

21cm x 14.8cm – Artist fineliners & brush pens on fine art paper

To accompany the research project over the years, I have produced three sets in an ongoing series of sketches of the relevant Minoan (and sometimes Mycenaean) artefacts. These have been made to archival quality on A5 (21 cm x 14.8cm) fine art drawing paper using artist fineliners and brush pens.

The sketches were created according to the principle that it is only when an artist sits quietly and carefully sketches an artefact or image in considerable detail that all of the features in the image, as well as a variety of iconographic contexts and compositional insights – and even occasionally something of the original artist's technical intentions and methods, such as the order in which elements may have been set upon the artefact – may be seen and understood. It is my experience that taking extensive time to sketch an object, or series of objects, is the fastest and most efficient for developing visual experience, essential for artists working in any medium, and (I suspect) for archaeologists also.

These sketches were produced mostly from close-up photographs of the original artefacts, but sometimes where photographic images were unclear or not available, archaeological illustrations were used instead. Oversights, visual misreadings and other errors in the artefact sketches, however, are wholly my own.

Set One (2013)

For the original website presentation in 2013, These covered a variety of themes, but were primarily focussed upon the artefacts themselves, often highlighting salient features such as enacted/visionary epiphanies, primary celebrants, etc. Close-up details, such as the interaction between floating visionary epiphany and the seated deity or enacted epiphany at the top right of the Ring of Minos, were also produced as part of the series, as were iconographic analyses of some of the more complex scenes. A total of 34 sketches were produced. The majority of these were included in the website presentation, and all of which are included throughout this electronic publication.

Ring of Minos, Knossos – Ring of Minos: Epiphany – Ring of Minos: Iconographic Analysis – Isopata Ring – Isopata: Iconographic Analysis – Sellopoulo – Archanes-Fourni #1 – Ayia Triada #1 – Knossos AN1938-1120 – Knossos AN1938-1120: Iconographic Analysis #1 – Knossos AN1938-1120: Iconographic Analysis #2 – Ring of Minos: Ship Detail – Mochlos – Makriyalos (Serpentine) – Archanes-Anemospilia (Agate Sealstone worn by priest) – Ayia Triada #2 Seal Impression – Zakros #1 – Archanes-Fourni #2 – Archanes-Fourni #2 Iconographic Analysis – Vapheio – Vapheio: Iconographic Analysis – Ring of Nestor: Epiphany

Elements – Epiphany Ring, Knossos – Khania ‘Master Impression’ Detail – Knossos M1-5 Seal Impression – ‘Sacred Conversation’ Ring, Poros – Knossos, Engraved Seal – ‘Sacred Conversation’ Ring: Iconographic Analysis – Nilsson 1950 (Knossos Ring #1) – Kalyvia – Zakros #2, damaged seal impression – Zakros #3 HM234 Seal impression – Knossos Ring (Berlin) – Messenia Seal Impression

Set Two (2014-15)

Following this in late 2014-15, a second shorter series of sketches were produced on themes relating to the Minoan Epiphany, but were not eventually used in any subsequent update to the 2013 website presentation. These included detailed sketches of some of the the epiphany conventions mentioned at the beginning of the Review of Epiphany Artefacts #1, as well as a few other artefacts such as a sealstone from the Idaean Cave, and iconographic comparisons between images of goddesses, butterflies and double-axes. A total of 13 sketches were produced, a few of which are included in this volume without annotation as illustrations between some of the chapters.

Epiphany Convention #1: Descending from on high – Epiphany Convention #2: Beckoning Postures – Epiphany Convention #3: Trance States – Epiphany Convention #4: Hovering, but not descending deity – Epiphany Convention #5: ‘Sacred Conversation’ postures of greeting – Epiphany Convention #6: Baetyl Beckoning Gesture – Goddess as Butterfly & Butterfly as Double-Axe – Enacted (Human) and Visionary (Experienced) Epiphanies – Idaean Cave, 1885, rock crystal – Untitled (Minoan Ritual Scene) – Epiphany at Isopata, 1400 BC – Lion & Attendant, Knossos, 1450 BC – Mistress of Animals, Knossos, 1450 BC

Set Three (2020)

A third set of sketches were produced as part of the Review of Epiphany Artefacts #2 for the present electronic publication version of the research project. These consist of artefact sketches, as well as textual iconographic schematics of the more complex scenes. A total of 29 sketches were produced, the majority of which have been included in the present volume.

The ‘Divine Couple’ Ring – The ‘Divine Couple’ Ring Schematic – Psychro Votive Plaque – Berlin Ring – Berling Ring Schematic – CMS X-261 (Geneva Steatite Seal) – Avgo-Kavousi Ring – Mochlos Pyxis (Main Scene) – Mochlos Pyxis (Extra Elements) – Mochlos Pyxis Schematic – Ayia Triada #3 – Ayia Triada #4 – Ayia Triada #5 – Ayia Triada #6 – Ayia Triada #7 – Heraklion Ring – Malia Seal #1 – Malia Seal #2 – Galatas (inaccurate) – Galatas (from HM 3668) – Knossos HM134 – Knossos HM392 – Kalyvia Ring #2 – Pylos Ring #1 – Pylos Ring #2 – Elatia-Alonaki Ring – Mycenae Ring #1 – Mycenae Ring #2 – Mycenae Ring #2 Schematic

Zakro Master Set (2014)

A separate but related set of smaller sketches, in artist fineliner on paper and of dimensions 11cm x 14cm, were produced in 2014 for a short research project on the Zakro Master's oeuvre as evidenced by seal impressions, and explored in this volume's essay 'The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary.' A total of 94 sketches were produced, drawing heavily on the work of Hogarth and Weingarten, listed by theme below, and a selection of which accompany the aforementioned essay.

Bird Lady series (15 sketches), Winged Monster series (6 sketches), Fantasy Animal Masks series (15 sketches), Bucranium series (6 sketches), Bird Protome series (3 sketches), Minotaur series (2 sketches), Sphinx series (6 sketches), Gorgon series (6 sketches), Asymmetric Stag series (3 sketches), Miscellany (10 sketches). Also included are Finds from Sklavokampo (4 sketches), Finds from Ayia Triada (6 sketches) and Finds from Other Sites (1 sketch).



Fig 183. Selections from Sketch Set One (2013)



Fig 184. Selections from Sketch Set Two (2014-15)
and the Zakro Master Set (2014)



Fig 185. Selections from Sketch Set Three (2020)

The 'Minoan Cosmos' Artwork (2020)

Produced for the 2020 edition of my research project on the Minoan Epiphany, this artwork springs from the corpus of epiphany images found in glyptic (gold rings, sealstone and seal impression) images of Bronze Age Crete to speculatively explore aspects of the three-tiered cosmos of heavens, earth and underworld that Minoans may have believed in, and with which epiphany rituals may have facilitated both contact and otherworldly encounters.

Inspired principally by archaeologist Giorgio Rethemiotakis's theories on the implications of the imagery on the Ring of Minos, the Sacred Conversation Ring and the Divine Couple Ring (both from Poros, Crete) for our understanding of Minoan concepts of space and time, it places the earthbound Minoan celebrant within an animistic cosmos in which contact with heavenly and underworld deities and other supernatural beings is a constant and central feature of human life.

Towards the lower centre of the image is an island, representing the heart of the earthly domain, on which a shrine is seen flanked by two tree-pullers in ecstatic postures. To the left of these is a man leaning on a baetyl, while to the lower right is another man on a harbourside gesturing towards a floating goddess, reminiscent of the imagery on the Amnisos Ring. Running up both sides of the artwork, and completing the depiction of the earthly domain, are two images of figures standing upon mountains. The left-hand male with a downturned spear springs from the Master Impression, while the right-hand female springs from the Knossos M1-5 seal impressions.

Beneath all of this are images of the underworld: the goddess in her ship sailing the ocean and transporting a shrine to a new land – imagery which springs from the Ring of Minos and the Mochlos Ring, among others – and the deity from the Knossos HM392 seal impression reclining in the ocean, along with a surreal bird-lady image from the Zakro Master's oeuvre.

Moving to the upper centre, the scene is dominated by an image of the 'sacred conversation', inspired by the two rings from Poros. A male god or celebrant greets a richly attired goddess whose hair is waving in the breeze, and whose feet are downward pointing. She floats in a kind of seated position, elegantly supported by two fantastical birds. These two deities represent the liminal movement from the earth to the heavens facilitated by the epiphany ritual.

Above them is the heavenly realm, delineated by a waving line which passes through their heads, underscoring the heaven/earth liminality. This realm is filled with astronomical imagery: in the centre the moon flanked by two crescents, two epiphanic figures, a star, milky way motif and a sun disk.

'Minoan Cosmos' thus aims towards a holistic synthesis of the animistic universe of Bronze Age Crete, seen through the ecstatic eyes of the celebrants of the epiphany rituals, as they encounter shimmering sacred presences from beyond the human world.



'Minoan Cosmos' - Bruce Rimell, 2020
Acrylics, Inks & Markers on Canvas
45cm x 60cm

Bibliography

This bibliography was originally produced for the 2013 website presentation. It was updated in 2015 to include references from the 2014-15 essays, and again updated for the 2020 Xibalba Books Electronic Publication edition.

- Anastasiadou, Maria (2014), *Seal of the Month: December 2014/January 2015*, University of Heidelberg Corpus der Minoischen-Mykenischen Siegel, url: <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zaw/cms/monthlySeal/monthlySealOlder.html#Dec14/Jan15>, retrieved April 2015
- Anastasiadou, Maria (2016), *Seal of the Month July/September 2016: Happy Aegean Summer with Minoans on the sea!*, University of Heidelberg Corpus der Minoischen-Mykenischen Siegel, url: <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zaw/cms/monthlySeal/monthlySealOlder.html#Jul/Sep16>, retrieved July 2020
- Anastasiadou, Maria (2018), *Seal of the Month: February 2018 (Minoan Valentine)*, University of Heidelberg Corpus der Minoischen-Mykenischen Siegel, url: <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zaw/cms/monthlySeal/monthlySealOlder.html#Feb18>, retrieved July 2020
- Anastasiadou, Olga (2009), *Artwork: 'Ποτνια Θηρων'*, from 2009 series 'Διαλογοι με την Αρχαιοτητα (*Dialogues with Antiquity*)', url: <http://www.anastasiadou.gr/2009/index.html>, retrieved October 2012
- Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria (2000), *The County of Khania Through Its Monuments from the Prehistoric Period to Roman Times*, Greek Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund
- Askitopoulou, Helen, Ramoutaski, Ioanna A & Konsolaki, Eleni (2002), *Archaeological evidence on the use of opium in the Minoan world*, International Congress Series, Volume 1242, December 2002, pp23-29
- Baxley Craig, Jami R. (2020) *Mycenaean 'Peak Sanctuaries' on the Late Bronze Age Greek Mainland*, presentation given to the 116th meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South CAMWS May 26-30, 2020, abstract at url: <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2020/abstracts/2246MycenaeanPeakSanctuaries.pdf>, retrieved July 2020
- Beekes, Robert S.P. (1999), *Kadmos and Europa, and the Phoenicians*, in Wolfgang Blümel (ed.), *Kadmos: Zeitschrift für vor- und frühgriechische Epigraphik*, Volume 43, Issue 1, pp 167–184, De Gruyter Publishing
- Beekes, Robert S. P. (2009), *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Brill
- Berg, Ina, *Performing Religion: Practitioners and Cult Places in Minoan Crete*, in: T. Insoll (ed.), *Belief in the Past. The Proceedings of the 2002 Manchester Conference on Archaeology and Religion*, pp. 20-35, British Archaeological

- Reports International Series 1212, 2004
- Blakolmer, Fritz (2012), *Image and Architecture: Reflections of Mural Iconography in Seal Images and Other Art Forms of Minoan Crete*, in Panagiatopoulos, Diamantis & Günkel-Maschek, Ute (eds.), *Minoan Realities: Approaches to Images, Architecture, and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age*, Aegis 5, Presses Universitaires de Louvain, pp83-114, text at url: <https://books.openedition.org/pucl/2839>, retrieved July 2020
- Boardman, John (1964), *Greek Art*, Thames & Hudson
- Boardman, John (1970), *Greek Gems and Finger Rings: Early Bronze Age to Late Classical*, Thames & Hudson
- Boulotis, Christos (2008), *From mythical Minos to the search for Minoan Kingship*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol II: Essays*, pp.44-56, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture, 2008
- Cameron, M. A. S. (1987), *The 'Palatial' Thematic System in the Knossos Murals: Last Notes on Knossos Frescoes*, in Robin Hägg and Nanno Marinatos (eds.), *The Function Of The Minoan palaces: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 10-16 June 1984*, pp 320-328, Åströms Förlag
- Crooks, Sam (2013), *What Are These Queer Stones? Baetyls: Epistemology of a Minoan Fetish*, Archaeopress British Archaeological Reports, BAR International Series 2511
- Daley, Jason (2016), *Gold Rings Found in Warrior's Tomb Connect Two Ancient Greek Cultures*, in *Smithsonian Magazine*, dated October 2016, url: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/gold-rings-found-warriors-tomb-connect-two-ancient-greek-cultures-180960680/>, retrieved July 2020
- Dashu, Max (2020), *Goddess showing mirror to votary on a gold ring from Pylos (main caption and comments)*, on *Suppressed Histories Archive Facebook Page*, dated 8th July 2020, url: <https://www.facebook.com/333661528320/photos/a.423118913320/10157560641433321/>, retrieved July 2020
- Davaras, Costis (1976), *Guide to Cretan Antiquities*, Eptalofos S.A. & Noyes Press
- Davaras, Costis (1986), *Knossos and the Heraklion Museum: Brief Illustrated Archaeological Guide*, Hannibal Editions
- Davaras, Costis (1987), *Phaistos, Hagia Triada, Gortyn: Brief Illustrated Archaeological Guide*, Hannibal Editions
- Davaras, Costis (1989), *Gournia*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund
- Davaras, Costis (1989), *The Palace of Malia*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund
- Davaras, Costis (1989), *The Palace of Zakros*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund

- Davis, E.N. (1995), *Art and politics in the Aegean: the missing ruler*, in Rehak, P. (ed.), *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean: Proceedings of a Panel Discussion Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, New Orleans, Louisiana, 28 December 1992, with Additions*, *Aegaeum* 11: , pp11-19, University de Liege/University of Texas, 2001
- Davis, Jack L. & Stocker, Sharon R. (2016), *The Lord of the Gold Rings: The Griffin Warrior of Pylos*, *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (October-December 2016), pp. 627-655
- Della Seta, Allesandro (1914), *Religion and Art: A Study in the Evolution of Sculpture, Painting and Architecture*, Fisher Unwin
- Dietrich, Bernard C. (1974), *The Origins of Greek Religion*, Walter de Gruyter
- Dietrich, Bernard C. (1988), *A Minoan Symbol of Renewal*, *Jorunal of Prehistoric Religion* 2, pp12-14
- Dietrich, Bernard C. (1997), *Death and Afterlife in Minoan Religion*, *Kernos* 10, pp19-38
- Dimopoulou, Nota & Rethmiotakis, Yiorgos (2000), *The 'Sacred Conversation' Ring from Poros*, in W. Müller (ed.), *Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik: Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion [CMS Beiheft 6]*, pp38-56, CMS Berlin
- Dimopoulou, Nota & Rethmiotakis, Yiorgos (2004), *The Ring Of Minos And Gold Minoan Rings: The Epiphany Cycle*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological receipts Fund, 2004
- Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (2008), *Community and the Individual in Death: Burial Practices in the Neopalatial and Postpalatial Periods*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol II: Essays*, pp.134-145, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture, 2008
- Driessen, Jan (2001), *Crisis Cults on Minoan Crete*, in R. Laffineur & R. Hägg (eds.), *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, *Aegaeum* 22, pp. 245-251, University de Liege/University of Texas
- Driessen, Jan (2003), *The Court Compounds of Minoan Crete: Royal Palaces or Ceremonial Centers?*, *Athena Review: Journal of Archaeology, History and Exploration* 3 (3): pp57–61, url: <http://www.athenapub.com/11court.htm>, retrieved September 2012
- Eliade, Mircea (1989), *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, Penguin Arkana
- Evans, Arthur (1921-35), *The Palace of Minos, a Comparative Account of the Successive Stages of the Early Cretan Civilization as Illustrated by the Discoveries at Knossos*, (Volume I, 1921; Volume II, 1928; Volume III, 1930 & Volume IV, 1935), Macmillan London

- Foley, Helene P. (1994), *The Homeric Hymn To Demeter: Translation, Commentary and Interpretive Essays*, Mythos: The Princeton/Bollingen Series in Mythology, Princeton University Press
- Galanakis, Konstantinos (2005), *Minoan Glyptic: Typology, Deposits and Iconography*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 1442
- Galanakis, Konstantinos (2007), *The "Goddess from Beyond the Sea": Iconographical analysis and interpretation of a group of narrative scenes involving female divinities in Minoan-Mycenaean Glyptic*, A paper given at the 11th Annual Symposium on Mediterranean Archaeology (SOMA 2007), Istanbul, 24-29 April 2007.
- Galanakis, Yannis (2013), *The Aegean World: A Guide to Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean Antiquities in the Ashmolean*, Ashmolean Museum Publications/Kapon Editions
- German, Senta (2020), *Harvester Vase*, on *Khan Academy*, undated, url: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/aegean-art1/minoan/a/harvester-vase>, retrieved July 2020
- Gesell, Geraldine (1985), *Town, Palace and House Cult in Minoan Crete*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 67, Paul Åströms Förlag
- Gimbutas, Marija (1982), *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images 6500-3500BC*, Thames & Hudson
- Gimbutas, Marija (1989), *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilisation*, Thames & Hudson
- Goodison, Lucy (2001), *From Tholos Tomb to Throne Room: Perceptions of the Sun in Minoan Ritual*, in Laffineur, R. and Hägg, R. (eds.), *Potnia. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference. Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, Aegaeum 22. pp. 237-243, University de Liege/University of Texas, 2001
- Hadzi-Vallianou, Despina (1989), *Phaistos*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund
- Hägg, Robin (1985), *Epiphany in Minoan Ritual*, as *Die göttliche Epiphany im minoischen Ritual*, in Darcque, P. & Poursat, J.-C. (eds.), *L'iconographie minoenne: Actes de la table ronde d'Athènes, 21-22 Avril, 1983*, BCH Supplement 11, 1985, pp. 41-62
- Hallagher, Erik (1985), *The Master Impression: A Clay Sealing from the Greek-Swedish Excavations at Kastelli, Khania*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 69, Paul Åströms Förlag
- Hastings, Harold Ripley (1905), *A Bronze-Age 'Pocket' from Avgo (Crete)*, American Journal of Archaeology Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 277-287
- Higgins, Reynold (1997), *Minoan and Mycenaean Art*, Thames & Hudson
- Hine, Daryl (2005), *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns: Works and Days, Theogony, The Homeric Hymns, and The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice*, University of Chicago Press

- Hogan, C. Michael (2008), *Knossos Fieldnotes*, on *Modern Antiquarian*, dated April 2008, url: <https://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site.php/10854/knossos.html#fieldnotes>, retrieved July 2020
- Hogarth, David George (1902), *The Zakro Sealings*, in *Excavations at Zakro, Crete*, British School of Athens
- Hooker, J.T. (1967), *The Mycenae Siege Rhyton and the Question of Egyptian Influence*, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 71 (3), pp269–281
- Huebner, Karla (2003), *A Minoan Vase from Zakros, Crete: The Sanctuary Rhyton*, *Anistoriton Vol 7* p32, republished via www.anistor.gr/english/enback/p032.htm, recovered January 2013
- Hughes-Brock, Helen (2013), *Seals of Bronze Age Greece*, in Yannis Galanakis (ed.), *The Aegean World: A Guide to the Cycladic, Minoan and Mycenaean Antiquities in the Ashmolean Museum*, Ashmolean Museum & Kapon Editions
- Hugh-Jones, Christine (1979), *From the Milk River: Spatial and Temporal Processes in Northwest Amazonia (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology #26)*, Cambridge University Press
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen (1979), *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology #24)*, Cambridge University Press
- Jones, Donald W. (1999), *Peak Sanctuaries and Sacred Caves in Minoan Crete: A Comparison of Artefacts*, Paul Åströms Förlag
- Kerényi, Karl (1967), *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, Mythos: The Princeton/Bollingen Series in Mythology, Princeton University Press
- Kerényi, Karl (1976), *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, Mythos: The Princeton/Bollingen Series in Mythology, Princeton University Press
- Koehl, R.B. (1986), *The Chieftain Cup and a Minoan Rite of Passage*, *JHS* 106, pp 99-110
- Koehl, Robert (2000), *Ritual Context*, in MacGillivray, J.A., Driessen, J.M., and Sackett, L.H., *The Palaikastro Kouros: A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and its Aegean Bronze Age Context*, British School at Athens Studies: VI
- Koehl, Robert B. (2001), *The 'Sacred Marriage' in Minoan Religion and Ritual*, in Laffineur, R. and Hägg, R. (eds.), *Potnia. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference. Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, *Aegaeum* 22. pp. 237-243, University de Liege/University of Texas
- Koehl, Robert B. (2016), *Beyond the 'Chieftain Cup': More Images Relating to Minoan Male 'Rites of Passage'*, in Koehl, Robert B. (ed.), *Studies in Aegean Art and Culture: A New York Aegean Bronze Age Colloquium in memory of Ellen N. Davis*, INSTAP Academic Press
- Kritikos, P.G., & Papadaki, S.P. (1967), *The history of the poppy and of opium and their expansion in antiquity in the eastern Mediterranean area*, *Bulletin of Narcotics* 19, pp17-38

- Krzyszowska, Olga (2010), *Impressions of the Natural World: Landscape in Aegean Glyptic*, in Krzyszowska, Olga (ed.), *Cretan Offerings: Studies in honour of Peter Warren*, British School at Athens Studies 18
- Kyriakidis, Evangelos (1997), *Nudity in Late Minoan I Iconography*, *Kadmos* 36, pp.119-126
- Kyriakidis, Evangelos (2004), *Aniconicity in Late Minoan I Seal Iconography*, *Kadmos* 43 (1), pp159-166
- Kyriakidis, Evangelos (2005), *Unidentified Floating Objects on Minoan Seals*, *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol 109, No. 2, pp137-154
- La Rosa, Vincenzo (2001), *Minoan Baetyls: Between Funerary Rituals and Epiphanies*, in Laffineur, R. and Hägg, R. (eds.), *Potnia. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference. Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, *Aegaeum* 22. pp. 221-227, University de Liege/University of Texas
- Leveque, Francis (2013), *Minoan clay pyxis (Terre Cuite, XIIIe century BC, Crète, Grèce)*, on *Le Musée Imaginaire*, dated September 2013, url: <http://www.marine-antique.net/Minoan-clay-pyxis-847>, retrieved July 2020
- Lewis-Williams, David (2002), *The Mind In The Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art*, Thames & Hudson
- Lewis-Williams, David & Dowson, T. (1988), *The Signs of All Times: Entoptic phenomena in Upper Palaeolithic Art*, in *Current Anthropology* 29 (2), pp201-245
- Lewis-Williams, David & Pearce, David (2005), *Inside the Neolithic Mind: Consciousness, Cosmos and the Realm of the Gods*, Thames & Hudson
- Logiadou-Platonos, Sosso (1980), *Knossos: The Palace of Minos – A Survey of the Minoan Civilisation*, I. Mathoulakis & Co.
- Long, C. (1974), *The Agia Triada Sarcophagus: A Study of the Late Minoan and Mycenaean funerary practices and beliefs*, Paul Åströms Förlag
- MacGillivray, Alexander, (2000), *The Great Kouros in Cretan Art*, in MacGillivray, J.A., Driessen, J.M., and Sackett, L.H., *The Palaikastro Kouros: A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and its Aegean Bronze Age Context*, British School at Athens Studies: VI
- MacGillivray, J.A., Driessen, J.M., and Sackett, L.H. (2009), *The Palaikastro Kouros: A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and its Aegean Bronze Age Context*, British School at Athens Studies: VI
- Marchant, Jo & Papadopoulous, Myrtos (2017), *This 3,500-Year-Old Greek Tomb Upended What We Thought We Knew About the Roots of Western Civilization*, in *Smithsonian Magazine*, dated January 2017, url: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/golden-warrior-greek-tomb-exposes-roots-western-civilization-180961441/>, retrieved July 2020
- Marinatos, Nanno (1993), *Minoan Religion. Ritual, image and symbol*, Columbia University

- Marinatos, Nanno (2010), *Minoan Kingship and the Solar Goddess: A Near Eastern Koine*, Columbia University
- Matz, Fr. (1958), *Göttererscheinung und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta*, Wiesbaden
- McGowan, Erin Ruth (2006), *Experiencing and experimenting with embodied archaeology: Re-embodiment of the sacred gestures of Neopalatial Minoan Crete*, in *Archaeological Review from Cambridge: Issue 21.6: Embodied Identities*, pp32-57, University of Cambridge
- Militello, P. (1998), *Haghia Triada I: Gli Affreschi*, Bottega d'Erasmus
- Morris, Christine (2001), *The language of gesture in Minoan religion*, in R. Laffineur & R. Hägg (eds.), *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, *Aegeum* 22, pp. 245-251, University of Liege/University of Texas
- Morris, Christine & Peatfield, Alan (2001), *Feeling Through The Body: Gesture in Cretan Bronze Age Religion*, in Hamilakis, Yannis; Pluciennik, Mark & Tarlow, Sarah (eds.), *Thinking Through The Body: Archaeologies of Corporeality*, Springer, 2001
- Morris, Christine & Peatfield, Alan (2004), *Experiencing ritual: Shamanic elements in Minoan religion*, in Wedde, M. (ed.), *Celebrations: sanctuaries and the vestiges of cult activity [Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 6]*, The Norwegian Institute at Athens
- Moss, Marina L. (2005), *The Minoan Pantheon: Towards an understanding of its nature and extent*, *British Archaeological Reports International Series* 1343
- Musgrave, Jonathan (2000), *The Anatomy of a Minoan Masterpiece*, in J.A. MacGillivray, J.M. Driessen & L.H. Sackett (eds.), *The Palaikastro Kouros: A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and its Aegean Bronze Age Context*, *British School at Athens Studies* 6
- Nagy, Gregory (1999), *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, The Johns Hopkins University Press
- Newman, Alana N. (2017), *Queering the Minoans: Gender Performativity and the Aegean Color Convention in Fresco Painting at Knossos*, *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*. 2017, Vol. 30 Issue 2, p213-236
- Nikolaidou, Marianna (2020), *Blessed (?) Charms: The Figure-Eight Shield in the Aegean Arts of Personal Adornment*, in Davis, B. & Laffineur, R. (eds.), *NEOTEROS: Studies in Bronze Age Aegean Art and Archaeology in Honor of Professor John G. Younger on the Occasion of his Retirement*, *Aegaeum* 44, pp181-192, Leuven-Liège
- Nilsson, Martin Persson (1950), *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*, Biblio & Tannen Incorporated
- Ober, William B. (1968), *Drowsed with the Fume of Poppies: Opium and John Keats*, *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, Vol 44, No.7, pp862-

- Palmer, Jennifer Linda (2014), *An Analysis of Late Bronze Age Aegean Glyptic Motifs of a Religious Nature*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology at the University of Birmingham, February 2014, url: <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/5467/1/Palmer14PhD.pdf>, retrieved July 2020
- Palyvou, ClLairy (2015), *Skylines: Borders of Materiality, Thresholds to Heaven*, Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections, Vol 7 (3), pp65-75
- Papasavvas, George (2004), *The Runner's Ring, a Minoan Athlete's Dedication at the Syme Sanctuary*, Crete in Lebesi, A. & Muhly, P. (eds.), *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Athenische Abteilung: Band 119*, pp1-29, Gebr.Mann Verlag
- Papathanassoglou, Dimitri & Georgouli, Ch. A. (2008), *The 'frying pans' of the Early Bronze Age Aegean: an experimental approach to their possible use as liquid mirrors*, Archaeometry, Vol 51, No. 4, pp658 – 671
- Paschalidis, Kostas (2012), *Reflections of Eternal Beauty. The Unpublished Context of a Wealthy Female Burial from Koukaki, Athens and the Existence of Mirrors in Mycenaean Tombs*, in Nosch, Marie-Louise & Laffineur, Robert (eds.), *KOSMOS: Jewellery, Adornment and Textiles in the Aegean Bronze Age: Proceedings of the 13th International Aegean Conference/13e Rencontre égéenne internationale, University of Copenhagen, Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for Textile Research, 21-26 April 2010*, Aegaeum 33, pp547-557, Peeters Leeuven-Liege
- Peatfield, Alan (2001), *Divinity and Performance on Minoan Peak Sanctuaries*, in Laffineur, R. and Hägg, R. (eds.), *Potnia. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference. Göteborg, Göteborg University, 12-15 April 2000*, Aegaeum 22. pp. 221-227, University de Liege/University of Texas
- Perry, Marvin (2015), *Western Civilization: A Brief History, Vol 1: To 1789 (Eleventh Edition)*, Cengage Learning
- Persson, A. (1942), *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times*, University of California Press
- Pini, Ingo (1998), *The 'Ring of Nestor'*, Oxford Journal of Archaeology, Volume 17, Number 1, pp. 1-13
- Platon, Lefteris & Pararas, Yannis (1991), *Pedestalled Offering Tables in the Aegean World*, Paul Åströms Förlag
- Polinger Foster, Karen (2017), *Bees and Birds in Aegean Epiphanic Dance*, Mantichora 7 (December 2017), pp17-28
- Popham, Mervyn R. & Gill, Margaret A.V. (1995), *The Latest Stamp Sealings from the Palace and Houses at Knossos*, British School At Athens Studies: I
- Raban, Avner (1984), *The Thera Ships: Another Interpretation*, American Journal of Archaeology, Vol. 88, No. 1, pp. 11-19

- Race, William H. (1997), *Pindar, Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes*, Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library 56), url: https://www.loebclassics.com/view/pindar-fragments/1997/pb_LCL485.237.xml, retrieved July 2020
- Rehak, Paul (1994), *The Aegean 'Priest' on CMS I.223*, *Kadmos* 33.1, pp76-84
- Rehak, Paul (1997), *The Role of the Religious Painting in the Function of the Minoan Villa: The Case of Ayia Triada*, in Robin Hägg (ed.), *The Function of the Minoan Villa, Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 6-8 June 1992*, Åströms Förlag
- Rehak, Paul (1999), *The monkey frieze from Xeste 3, room 4: reconstruction and interpretation*, in P. Betancourt, V. Karageorghis, R. Laffienur, and W.-D. Niemeier (eds.), *MELETEMATA. Studies in Aegean Archaeology Presented to Malcolm H. Wiener as He Enters His 65th Year*, *Aegaeum* 20, pp705-709, University de Liege/University of Texas
- Rehak, Paul (2000), *The Isopata Ring and the Question of Narrative in Neopalatial Glyptic*, in I. Pini (ed.), *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Volume 6: Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik. Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion*, pp 269-75
- Reilly, M.B. (2017), *UC team discovers rare warrior tomb filled with bronze age wealth and weapons*, in *UC Magazine*, url: https://magazine.uc.edu/editors_picks/recent_features/warrior_tomb.html, retrieved July 2020
- Rethemiotakis, Giorgos (2008), *Minoan Religion: Deities, Sanctuaries and Cults*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol II: Essays*, pp.79-88, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture, 2008
- Rethemiotakis, Giorgos, (2008), *160: Ring from Tomb 11, Kalyvia Cemetery, Phaistos*, in *Religion and Ritual Practice – A: Divine*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol I: Catalogue*, pp.201-213, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture
- Rethemiotakis, Giorgos (2008), *163: 'Chieftain's Cup' from Hagia Triada, Royal Villa*, in *Religion and Ritual Practice – A: Divine*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol I: Catalogue*, pp.201-213, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture, 2008
- Rethemiotakis, Giorgos (2016), *The 'Divine Couple' Ring from Poros and the origins of the Minoan Calendar*, in K. Sporn and R. Senff (eds.), *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Athenische Abteilung: Band 131-132*, pp1-29, Gebr.Mann Verlag
- Richardson, Rachel (2016), *Lord of the rings: A University of Cincinnati team's rare discovery of four gold rings in the tomb of a wealthy Bronze Age warrior*

- undisturbed for 3,500 years prompts a new consideration of Greek history*, in *UC Magazine*, dated October 2016, url: https://magazine.uc.edu/editors_picks/recent_features/lordoftherings.html, retrieved July 2020
- Ridderstad, Marianna (2009), *Evidence of Minoan Astronomy and Calendrical Practices*, on Arxiv.org, url: <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/0910/0910.4801.pdf>, retrieved August 2011
- Rimell, Bruce (2009), *Postures of the Epiphany Dance*, unpublished notes towards theatrical production
- Rimell, Bruce (2009), *Minoan Honey: The Bull, The Mushroom and the Mistress of the Dance*, website presentation, dated January 2009, url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/minoan0.htm>, retrieved November 2012
- Rimell, Bruce (2010), *Europa Untouched: Two 'Minoan Honey' images*, dated May 2010, url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/europa-untouched.htm>, retrieved September 2013
- Rimell, Bruce (2012), *Eleusis*, Xibalba Books
- Rimell, Bruce (2013), *The Minoan Epiphany: A Bronze Age Visionary Culture: Archaeological Evidence for Visionary Ritual and Altered States of Consciousness in Cretan Prehistory*, website presentation, dated March 2013, url: <http://www.biroz.net/words/minoan-epiphany/index.htm>, retrieved September 2013
- Rimell, Bruce (2014), *The Zakro Master: A Bronze Age Cretan Visionary*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/the-zakro-master-a-bronze-age-cretan-visionary>, dated April 2014
- Rimell, Bruce (2014), *Three Visionary Lintels of Yaxchilan*, on Archaic Visions, url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/three-visionary-lintels-of-yaxchilan>, dated May 2014
- Rimell, Bruce (2014), *Europa and the Minoan 'Goddess From Beyond The Sea'*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/europa-and-the-minoan-goddess-from-beyond-the-sea>, dated July 2014
- Rimell, Bruce (2014), *The Isopata Ring: An image of Minoan Trance*, draft unpublished essay, dated December 2014
- Rimell, Bruce (2015), *Enacted Epiphanies and the Birth of the Humanist in Minoan Art*, on Archaic Visions at url: <https://www.visionaryartexhibition.com/archaic-visions/enacted-epiphanies-and-the-birth-of-the-humanist-in-minoan-art>, dated May 2015
- Rimell, Bruce (2015), *On Vision and Being Human: Exploring the Menstrual, Neurological and Symbolic Origins of Religious Experience*, Xibalba Books
- Sackett, L.H. (2006), *The Palaikastro Kouros*, Hellenic Ministry of Culture Archaeological Receipts Fund
- Sakellarakis, J.A. (1987), *Herakleion Museum: Illustrated guide to the Museum*, Ekdotike Athinon

- Sakellarakis, J.A. (1988), *The Idaean Cave. Minoan and Greek Worship*, in Kernos 1, 1988, accessed via kernos.revues.org/114, retrieved October 2012
- Sakellarakis, J. & Sapouna-Sakellarakis, E. (2002), *Archanes*, Ekdotike Athenon
- Sakellarakis, Yiannis. & Sapouna-Sakellarakis, Efi (2010), *Knossos: At the Threshold of European Civilisation*, Militos Publications
- Salimbeti, Andrea (2020), *The Greek Age of Bronze: Weapons and warfare in the late Helladic time 1600-1100 BC*, undated entries for 'Ships' at url: <http://www.salimbeti.com/micenei/ships.htm>, and for 'Middle Helmets' at url: <http://www.salimbeti.com/micenei/helmets2.htm>, retrieved July 2020
- Schürr, D. (1976), *Vogel und Fisch auf dem Votivtäfelchen von Psycho*, Kadmos Vol 15 (1), pp. 89-93
- Simandiraki-Grimshaw, Anna (2010), *Minoan Human-Animal Hybridity*, in Derek B. Counts & Bettina Arnold, (eds.), *The Master of Animals in Old World Iconography*, Archaeolingua Alapitvany Budapest
- Soles, Jeffrey (2010), *Evidence for Ancestor Worhsip in Minoan Crete: New Finds from Mochlos*, in Krzyszkowska, Olga (ed.), *Cretan Offerings: Studies in honour of Peter Warren*, British School at Athens Studies 18
- Soles, J. (2011), *Greek-American Excavation at Mochlos: Minoan House underlying a Hellenistic shrine – Lecture on Mochlos Delivered to the Open Session of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in March 2011*, University of North Carolina Greensboro Archaeology Department news, url: <https://www.uncg.edu/arc/Mochlos/scene.html>, retrieved April 2015
- Soles, Jeffrey S. (2012), *The Goddess and the Ancestors*, in Thaler, Ulrich et al, *The Mycenaean Seminar 2010-11*, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Volume 55, Issue 2, pp127-128
- Soles, Jeffrey S., (2016) *Hero, Goddess, Priestess: New Evidence for Minoan Religion and Social Organization*, in Alram-Stern, Eva; Blakolmer, Fritz; Deger-Jalkotzy, Sigrid; Laffineur, Robert & Weilhartner, Jörg (eds.), *METAPHYSIS: Ritual, Myth and Symbolism in the Aegean Bronze Age – Proceedings of the 15th International Aegean Conference, Vienna, Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology, Aegean and Anatolia Department, Austrian Academy of Sciences and Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna, 22-25 April 2014*, Aegaeum 39, pp247-54, Peeters
- Soles, J. & Davaras, C. (2010), *2010 Greek-American Excavations at Mochlos*, KENTRO: The Newsletter of the INSTAP Study Centre for East Crete 13, pp1-3, 2010
- Soles, J. & Davaras, C. (2011), *MOCHLOS - 2010, Archaeology in Greece Online, report 1909*, dated March 2011, url: <https://chronique.efa.gr/?kroute=report&id=1909>, retrieved July 2020
- Sourvino-Inwood, C. (1990), *Against the Authenticity of the Ring CMS II.3.326: Fragments of a discourse on Minoan Glyptic*, Journal of Hellenic Studies 110, pp192-98

- Swindale, Ian (2013), *Minoan Settlement of Vasiliki*, on *Minoan Crete: Bronze Age Civilisation*, url: <http://www.minoancrete.com/vasiliki.htm>, dated 1998-2013, retrieved April 2013
- Swindale, Ian (2020), *Galatas*, on *Minoan Crete: Bronze Age Civilisation*, url:<http://www.minoancrete.com/galatas.htm>, dated 1998-2013, retrieved July 2020
- Tully, Caroline (2016), *Thalassocratic Charms: Trees, Boats, Woman and the Sea in Minoan Glyptic Art*, Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies, 2016, Heraklion, Crete, pp1-12
- Tully, Caroline (2016), *Virtual Reality: Tree Cult and Epiphanic Ritual in Aegean Glyptic Iconography*, in Forsén, Jeanette (ed.), *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* Vol XXV, Astrom Editions
- Tully, Caroline & Crooks, Sam (2015), *Dropping Ecstasy? Minoan Cult and the Tropes of Shamanism*, *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 8 (2), pp129-158
- Tully, Caroline & Young, Simon (2015), *Interview with Caroline Tully: Minoan Fairies? Hovering human figures in the glyptic art of Late Bronze Age Crete*, in *The Fairy Investigation Society Newsletter* 2, New Series, Jul 2015
- Tully, Caroline (2016), *Virtual Reality: Tree Cult and Epiphanic Ritual in Aegean Glyptic Iconography*, *Journal of Prehistoric Religion*, Volume XXV (Forsén, Jeanette (ed.)), pp19-30
- Vasilakis, Andonis (2001), *Minoan Crete: From Myth To History*, Adam Editions
- Velsink, Jan G. (2016), *Two Minoan Moulds for Small Cult Objects Reconsidered*, *Babesch: Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology*, Vol 91, pp17-27
- Ventris, Michael & Chadwick, John (1973), *Documents in Mycenaean Greek (Kn V 2, Text 702)*, Cambridge University Press
- Vlachopoulos, Andreas (2008), *The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri: Towards an Interpretation of the Iconographic Programme*, in N. Brodie, J. Doole, G. Gavalas, and C. Renfrew (eds.), *HORIZON. A Colloquium on the Prehistory of the Cyclades*, pp451-465, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2008
- Warren, Peter (1988), *Minoan Religion As Ritual Action*, Gothenburg University & Eric Lindgrens Boktryckeri A.B.
- Warren, Peter (1990), *Of Baetyls*, in *Opuscula Atheniensi* XVIII, pp.192-206, Åströms Förlag
- Watrous, L. Vance (1991), *The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax*, *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 285-307
- Weingarten, Judith (1983), *The Zakro Master and his place in prehistory*, Paul Åström Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Göteborg
- Weingarten, Judith (1985), *Aspects of Tradition and Innovation in the work of the Zakro Master*, in *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, Supplément 11 pp167-180, Persee

- Weingarten, Judith (1994), *Seal-Use and Administration in the South-West Basement Area at Knossos*, The Annual of the British School at Athens, Vol. 89, pp. 151-156
- Weingarten, Judith (2009), *The Zakro Master and Questions of Gender*, in Kopaka, Katerina (ed.), *FYLO: Engendering Prehistoric 'Stratigraphies' in the Aegean and the Mediterranean: Proceedings of an International Conference University of Crete, Rethymno 2-5 June 2005*, Aegeum 30, pp139-49, Peeters
- Xanthoudidis, Stefanos A. (1900), *Μήτρωι αρχαία εκ Σητείας Κρήτης, Εφημερίς αρχαιολογική*, Archaeological Society of Athens
- Younger, John G. (2011), *A View from the Sea*, in Vavouranakis, Giorgos (ed.), *The seascape in Aegean Prehistory (Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens, Volume 14)*, The Danish Institute at Athens
- Younger, John G. & Rehak, Paul (2008), *The Material Culture of Neopalatial Crete*, in Shelmerdine, Cynthia W. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age*, University of Cambridge
- Zographaki, Vasiliki, 177 & 178: *Male Figurines from Petsofas*, in *Religion and Ritual Practice – B: Figurines*, in Andreadaki-Vlasaki, Maria, Rethemiotakis, Giorgos & Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki, Nota (eds.), *From The Land Of The Labyrinth: Minoan Crete 3000-1100BC: Vol I: Catalogue*, pp.214-231, Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation & Hellenic Ministry Of Culture, 2008

- Chania Archaeological Museum, *The Clay "Master Impression" (KH1563)*, accompanying text in the museum, seen September 2011
- Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Online Edition 2011, accessed via [http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/browser/index.php?view\[layout\]=siegel](http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/browser/index.php?view[layout]=siegel) – recovered February 2013
- Volume I: Athen: Nationalmuseum*, 2011
- Volume II, 3: Iraklion: Siegel der Neupalastzeit*, 2011
- Volume II, 6: Iraklion, Siegelabdrücke von Aj. Triada*, 2011
- Volume II, 7: Iraklion, Siegelabdrücke von Kato Zakros*, 2011
- Volume VI: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum*, 2011
- Volume XI: Kleinere europäische Sammlungen*, 2011
- Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Online Edition 2015, accessed via [http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/browser/index.php?view\[layout\]=siegel](http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/browser/index.php?view[layout]=siegel) – recovered July 2020
- Volume II, 2: Iraklion: Siegel der Altpalastzeit*, 2015
- Volume V Supp.2: Lamia, Nekropole von Elatia*, 2015
- Volume X: Die Schweizer Sammlungen*, 2015
- Hellenic Ministry of Culture, *The Isopata Signet Ring*, url: http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/4/eh430.jsp?obj_id=7892, retrieved November 2010

- Heraklion Archaeological Museum, *The 'Dancer' Fresco*, accompanying text in the museum, seen October 2015
- Heraklion Archaeological Museum, *Gold Signet Ring from Kalyvia*, accompanying text in the museum, seen October 2015
- Heraklion Archaeological Museum, *Minoan Moulds of Palaikastro*, accompanying text in the museum, seen August 2016
- Holy Bible, New International Version, Biblica Inc, 1973-2011
- Mochlos Archaeological Project (2010), *Pyxis*, url: <http://www.mochlosarchaeologicalproject.org/pyxis/>, retrieved July 2020
- Mochlos Archaeological Project (2017), *Discovery of Ivory Pyxis*, video on *Mochlos Excavations Facebook Page*, dated October 2017 url: <https://www.facebook.com/mochlosexcavations.org/videos/1614177065280563/>, retrieved July 2020
- Sitia Archaeological Museum, *The Pyxis from Mochlos*, accompanying text in the museum, seen October 2015
- Theoi Project, *Entry for 'Rhea'*, at *Theoi Project: Theoi Greek Mythology, Exploring in Classical Literature and Art*, url: <http://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanisRhea.html>, recovered February 2013
- Thera Foundation, *Cretan Fresco Dates*, url: <http://www.therafoundation.org/articles/art/cretanfrescodates>, dated July 2006
- The Vaults of Erowid, *Experience Report: 'Surprisingly Potent Potable: An Experience with Poppies – Opium (#35751)'*, url: <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=35751>, dated August 2004
- The Vaults of Erowid, *Opium Poppy Tea: A Simple Recipe, by Dr. Opium*, on Erowid, url: https://www.erowid.org/plants/poppy/poppy_info4.shtml, dated August 2007



Directory of Chapters & Subsections

Acknowledgements	4
About the Author	5
About this Electronic Publication	6
Table of Original Citations of the Chapters	7
Introduction to the 2020 Edition	9
1. The Minoan Epiphany and the Epiphany Cycle (2013)	12
Enacted and Visionary Epiphany	12
The Epiphany and Neopalatial Minoan Society	14
The Ring Of Minos	15
The Epiphany Cycle	17
The Epiphany as Ritual Action	19
Dance in Epiphany Rituals	20
Baetylic Rituals and Symbolic Epiphanies	22
Epiphany as Altered State of Consciousness	26
Perceived bodily changes in epiphany scenes	28
Experiments with gesture	32
Animism and Minoan Peak Sanctuaries	34
Tripartite Shrines and Wild Nature	35
Vision-seeking Rituals and Rites of Passage	39
Conclusions	42
2. Review of Epiphany Artefacts #1 (2013)	46
Type I: Floating or Earthbound Human Figure	47
Type II: Symbolic Figure	48
Type III: Human Figure in Abstract Space	50
Type IV: Figure on a Ship	50
Type V :The Sacred Conversation	50
1. The Ring of Minos	51
2. Isopata Ring	56
3. Sellopoulo Ring	59
4. Archanes – Fourni #1	61
5. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #1	62
6. Amnisos Ring (or Knossos AN1938-1120)	64
7. Mochlos Ring	67
8. Makriyalos Sealstone	70
9. Ayia Triada Seal Impression #2	71
10. Zakros Seal Impression #1	72
11. Archanes – Fourni Ring #2	73

12. Vapheio Ring	76
35. Heraklion Ring	202
36. A Group of Sealstones from Malia	204
37. Galatas HM3668	207
38. Knossos Seal Impression HM134	209
39. Knossos Seal Impression HM392	209
40. Kalyvia Ring #2	213
41. Pylos Ring #1	218
42. Pylos Ring #2	223
43. Elatia-Alonaki Ring	228
44. Mycenae Ring #1	234
45. Mycenae Ring #2	239
Epiphany at Palaikastro: Playing Social Anthropologist in Minoan Crete	255
9. The Dancing Lady Fresco, Knossos: An Open Question	265
The 'Minoan Epiphany' Sketch Series (2013-20)	270
The 'Minoan Cosmos' Artwork (2020)	274
Bibliography	276
Directory of Chapters & Subsections	290

Also Available from Xibalba Books

Xibalba Books is Bruce Rimell's publishing imprint, and the primary outlet for his independent research projects. These include three books in his ongoing 'Visionary Humanism' series, and occasional publications of poetry and art. Each book is beautifully presented, and designed with an artist's eye so as to delight the reader.



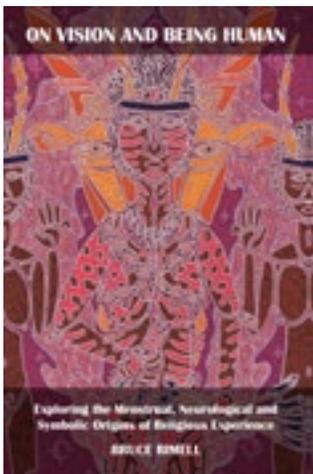
They Shimmer Within

Illustrated thesis on cognition and psychedelic phenomena. Visionary Humanism series #3, 574 pages, 2018



Liminal Contact

A critique of the alleged 'death' of painting in contemporary art. Visionary Humanism series #2, 200 pages, 2016.



On Vision And Being Human

The complex origins of human symbolic culture and religious experience. Visionary Humanism series #1, 340 pages, 2015.



Eleusis

An artistic and mythological research project on the foremost Mystery Tradition of the Classical world. 52 pages, 2015.



Xibalba Books
www.biroz.net/xibalbabooks/

Archaeology / Art / Aegean Prehistory

The art and iconography of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete is rightly described as having a refreshing vitality with a fortunate combination of stylisation and spontaneity in which the artist is able to transform conventional imagery into a personal expression.

The dynamism, torsion and naturalism evident in Minoan art stands in stark contrast to the hieratic rigidity of other ancient civilisations, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the iconography of the Minoan Epiphany, a set of mainly glyptic (rings, seals, and seal impression) images which appear to depict religious celebrants experiencing direct and seemingly ecstatic encounters with deities.

This collection of essays explores this central aspect of Minoan religion, taking a strongly archaeological focus to allow the artefacts to speak for themselves, and moving from traditional 'representational' interpretations into 'embodied' perspectives in which the ecstatic capabilities of the human body throw new light on Aegean Bronze Age ritual practices. Such ideas challenge the rather passive assumptions modern Western observers often hold about the nature of religious feelings and experiences, in particular the depictions of altered states of consciousness in ancient art, and the visionary potential of dance gestures.

Speculative asides on the potential for a Minoan origin for Classical Greek humanism, and hints in the imagery on ancient Cretan conceptions of the cosmos, are set against sound archaeological theories to explain this lively and dynamic corpus of images.

Beautifully illustrated with images and sketches of the relevant artefacts, this wide-ranging volume will stimulate audiences with archaeological, prehistorical and spiritual interests, as well as historians of religion and art. 'The Minoan Epiphany' also represents an influential antecedent to the Visionary Humanist philosophy which forms the majority of Bruce's current independent research interests.

Cover Image: 'Minoan Cosmos' (Bruce Rimell, 2020)



XIBALBA BOOKS

