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A METAPHYSICAL HISTORY OF MINOAN RELIGION*

“I sometimes say religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are basic spiritual qualities”. Dalai Lama

Introduction

METAPHYSIS is an interesting title for this volume, because the word itself addresses one of the consistent problems of the study of the archaeology of religion. This is the definition of “Religion”. Christine Morris and I have argued that the use of the word “religion”, with its emphases on dogmatic beliefs, defined deities, and clerical structures, is intrinsically limiting.¹ We have preferred the term: an archaeology of spiritualities, because it offers a more flexible interpretative approach to the multivariate nature of human spirituality.

The common factor in all spirituality, from the animisms of early cultures, to the philosophical monotheisms of the “religions of the Book”, to the abstractions of Buddhist meditation, is the attempt to articulate the human perception of the Other, that which lies beyond the experience of the physical world – literally the *Metaphysis*. Contemporary neuro-science is consistently discovering that the deep self-awareness of the human consciousness creates the mental distinction between the Self and the Other.² This dualistic discrimination is embedded within the very fabric of human consciousness.

Cultural historians, archaeologists included, have tended to be hostile to this idea of existential dualism. But all that is meant here is that cultures mediate that opposition between the material physical world and the spiritual metaphysical world in a variety of different ways. The richness of human spirituality, both individual and cultural, arises out the attempt to make sense out of that which transcends everyday material sensory experience. Rituals and beliefs, religions and spiritual systems all seek to explain, to systematise, to celebrate, or to make safe; they variously deal with whatever it is that lies beyond the Self. Pluralism is embedded into the very nature of spirituality.

Morris and I have thus argued that the essence of Minoan religion lies not in beliefs in putative deities, this or that goddess or god, monotheism or polytheism, but rather in its **performative** spirituality.³ In doing so, we have explicitly challenged definitions of religion that are framed around beliefs in supernatural beings, deities, etc.⁴ We are not saying that the Minoans did not believe in supernatural beings, it is just that such beliefs are not the most important aspects of Minoan spirituality. As anthropologists know only too well, trying to elicit structured meanings and dogmatic belief systems that may lie behind rituals is immensely frustrating and contradictory. Of greater value to the understanding of religion is the way that the kinesthetic and sensory aspects of ritual feed the spiritual impulses of the worshippers, through emotional and cognitive transformations. It is not the gods that matter, it is the worshippers and what they **do** that matters.

* Acknowledgements: my thanks go to Fritz Blakolmer for encouraging me to complete this paper. I have also benefitted from continuing discussions with Jan Driessen and Florence Gaignerot. As always I am grateful to Christine Morris for reading over the paper and contributing her insightful comments.

¹ K. ROUNTREE, C.E. MORRIS, and A.A.D. PEATFIELD (eds.), *Archaeology of Spiritualities* (2012).

² A. DAMASIO, *Self Comes to Mind* (2010).

³ A.A.D. PEATFIELD & C.E. MORRIS “Dynamic spirituality on Minoan peak sanctuaries”, in ROUNTREE, MORRIS, & PEATFIELD eds. (*supra* note 1) 227-245.

⁴ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, “Divinity and performance on Minoan peak sanctuaries”, in R. LAFFINEUR & R. HÄGG (eds.) *POTNIA. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, Aegaeum* 22 (2001) 51-55.

Neolithic

The first manifestations of religion on prehistoric Crete are to be found at Neolithic Knossos. Conventionally these are identified with the figurines, mostly clay, some stone, found scattered amid the habitation debris of the houses. Early interpretations of these as “goddess” images were conclusively dismantled by Ucko.⁵ He argued against this unitary interpretation, taking instead a more pluralistic approach. The figurines have a variety of ritual functions: dolls, spirit helpers, *ushabti* figures, symbols of rites of passage. Whatever their usage, there is a common thread. Found individually (not as assemblages), and discarded in secondary habitation debris, it is likely that they are individual expressions of spiritual concerns. There is no evidence to suggest that they represent a shared community ritual expression.⁶

Ucko’s pluralistic interpretation has proved very popular among later generations of scholars. It has been particularly influential on Bailey’s work on Balkan figurines,⁷ on Meskell’s interpretations of the Catalhöyük figurines,⁸ and on Conkey’s and Tringham’s work on pre-Columbian American figurines.⁹

This idea of Neolithic figurines as expressions of individual spirituality, the remains of personal rituals, certainly fits what seems to be the social organization of Neolithic Knossos. There are individual houses, but no indications of shared communal space, or shared ritual space. There is no religion, just houses.

Final Neolithic

In socio-cultural terms, the Final Neolithic period is marked by the dispersal of the Neolithic population away from Knossos into the Cretan landscape. Population growth may have been accompanied by the influx of new peoples. Although many of the so-called Neolithic figurines seem to date to this period, it is not figurines that reveal the changes in spiritual expression at this time. A great deal of our evidence for this period comes from caves. The standard interpretation is that these caves were primarily used for habitation. Amid the mostly ceramic finds, however, are human remains, bones, indicative of primary or secondary burials. Intramural burial is not uncommon in early prehistoric societies. Catalhöyük for example, has burials within the houses of the town,¹⁰ and the earlier Natufian culture also has burials within habitation caves.¹¹ As a religious phenomenon, intramural burial indicates a close spiritual relationship between the living and dead, a metaphysical solution to the emotional crisis caused by death.

This conventional interpretation of Cretan Neolithic caves as habitations has, however, recently been challenged by Tomkins.¹² He argues that the ceramic material is often to be found in the most inaccessible parts of the caves, too inhospitable to have served as places to live. Rather, Tomkins prefers to interpret Neolithic caves as being primarily sacred, and that the pottery is indicative of communal ritual

⁵ P.J. UCKO, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece* (1968).

⁶ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, “Ritual and religion in Neolithic Crete?”, in G. NASH & A. TOWNSEND (eds.), *Decoding Neolithic Atlantic and Mediterranean Island Ritual* (2015).

⁷ D.W. BAILEY, *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and Corporeality* (2005).

⁸ L. MESKELL, “Refiguring the Corpus at Catalhöyük”, in C. RENFREW & I. MORLEY (eds.), *Material Beginnings: A Global Prehistory of Figurative Representation* (2007) 143-156.

⁹ R. TRINGHAM & M. CONKEY, “Rethinking figurines: a critical view from archaeology of Gimbutas, the ‘Goddess’ and popular culture”, in L. GOODISON & C. MORRIS (eds.), *Ancient Goddesses. The Myths and the Evidence* (1998) 22-45.

¹⁰ B. ANDREWS, B. BAŞAK, & T. MOLLESON, “Human burials at Catalhöyük; reports from the 1995-1999 seasons”, in I. HODDER (ed.), *Inhabiting Catalhöyük* (2005) 216-278.

¹¹ I. KUIJT, “Negotiating equality through ritual: a consideration of Late Natufian and Pre-pottery Neolithic A period mortuary practices”, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 15:4 (Dec. 1996) 313-336.

¹² P. TOMKINS, “Landscapes of Ritual, Identity, and Memory. Reconsidering Neolithic and Bronze Age Cave Use in Crete, Greece”, in H. MOYES (ed.), *Sacred Darkness: A Global Perspective on the Ritual Use of Caves* (2013) 59-79.

action. This interpretation does not, however, invalidate the idea of these caves as sacred places to mediate the spiritual relationship between the living and the dead. Indeed it is commonly observed in excavation that the human bones seem to have been brought from elsewhere: secondary manipulation, secondary burial. The idea therefore is that the cave ceramics and the bones together form a ritual assemblage, manipulated in ceremonies. Such assemblages do not require symbolic images (e.g. figurines) to reveal their ritual function. What is interesting about this interpretation is that Tomkins here is also arguing for a performative approach to religion.

This idea of caves as specifically Neolithic sacred places has an interesting counterpart. As reported elsewhere, at the Atsipadhes peak sanctuary we found Final Neolithic pottery on the lowest stratum of the site - pottery, but no figurines, or stone tools or bones.¹³ Similar finds have been made at other peak sanctuaries, including Traostalos¹⁴ and Jouktas.¹⁵ We have been wary of identifying them as ritual assemblages, but they are comparable to what Tomkins identifies as his cave ritual assemblages of pottery. Does this suggest a more extensive Neolithic sacred landscape?

A third spiritual element can also be discerned in the Final Neolithic record. Recent studies of the earliest material at Phaistos suggest organized communal feasting.¹⁶ This is a ritual theme familiar in the archaeology of Crete all the way through to the Prytaneia of the Early Iron Age.

Of the many anthropologists of religion who have advocated a performative approach to religion, Victor Turner perceived two elements as crucial – liminality and *communitas*.¹⁷ Liminality is the use of physical and/or metaphoric space between the sacred and the profane. This perception clearly is emerging with ritualized action on caves and mountain peaks. *Communitas* is the sharing of ritual action – this is what we see in assemblages on the caves and mountains, and the ritual dining of the settlements.

Prepalatial

The dominant interpretative discourse for the Early Minoan Prepalatial period is social complexity. This long period, of approximately 1000 years, witnesses the emergence of economic organization, wealth creation, trade, hierarchy, class divisions, administration, and the origins of state formation.

Nevertheless, it is striking that the primary material expression of this complexity is in the monumentality of tomb structures, and in the wealth disposed of in funerary practices. It indicates an essential continuum of identity between the living and the dead. Despite much discussion as to the precise numbers of burials in individual tombs, it is agreed that these are multiple tombs – many burials over successive generations. The tombs have courtyards and built structures suggestive of extended rituals.¹⁸ By contrast, there are few indications of ritual activity in contemporary settlements, and even these are marked by the presence of human skulls.¹⁹ The ritual *communitas* includes both the living and the dead. By any other name, this is ancestor cult.

¹³ C.E. MORRIS & V. BATTEN, “Final Neolithic pottery from the Atsipades peak sanctuary”, in *Proceedings of the 8th Cretological Congress 1996* (2000) 373-382.

¹⁴ S. CHRYSSOULAKI, “The Traostalos peak sanctuary; aspects of spatial organization”, in R. LAFFINEUR & R. HÄGG (eds.), *POTNIA. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the 8th International Aegean Conference, Göteborg, 12-15 April 2000, Aegaeum* 22 (2001) 63.

¹⁵ A. Karetso (pers.comm.)

¹⁶ S. TODARO & S. DI TONTO, “The Neolithic settlement of Phaistos revisited: evidence for ceremonial activity on the eve of the Bronze Age”, in V. ISAAKIDOU & P. TOMKINS (eds.), *Escaping the Labyrinth: the Cretan Neolithic in Context* (2008) 177-190.

¹⁷ V. TURNER, “Liminality and communitas”, chapter 3, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures* (1969) 95-131.

¹⁸ K. BRANIGAN, *Dancing with Death: Life and Death in Southern Crete c.3000-2000 BC* (1993); J. MURPHY, “Ideologies, rites and rituals: a view of Prepalatial Minoan tholoi”, in K. BRANIGAN (ed.), *Cemetery and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age* (1998) 27-40.

¹⁹ J. SOLES, “Reverence for dead ancestors in Prehistoric Crete”, in LAFFINEUR & HÄGG eds. (*supra* n. 14) 229-236; J. SOLES “Evidence for ancestor worship in Minoan Crete: new finds from Mochlos”, in O. KRZYSZKOWSKA (ed.), *Cretan Offerings: Studies in Honour of Peter Warren* (2010) 331-338; J. DRIESSEN,

One of the most important ideas to emerge in the current generation of Minoan scholarship is Jan Driessen's idea of Minoan Great Houses.²⁰ The possibility that we can infer kinship structures (the staple of anthropological social understanding) from architecture allows us to resolve many questions about Minoan social structure. His further arguments that this suggests that Pre- and Proto-palatial society was matrilineal and matrilocal are also entirely plausible. The tombs thus become the ritual and symbolic monuments of an extended family kinship structure, and the liminal point of contact between the living and the ancestral.

That sense of liminality in the tombs also has a cosmological element, as demonstrated by Goodison's observations on the solar directionality of the tomb entrances.²¹

A Pre-palatial matrilineal ancestor cult may also explain those other pieces of evidence for Early Minoan religion – the female vessel figurines: 11 of them found in east and central Crete, dating to EM II and EM III.²² Bear in mind, however, Goodison and Morris' warning that we should not privilege these human figurines over the animal figurines found in the same context.²³ Why do we call the human figurines deities, and yet the animals figurines are reduced to ritual equipment, animal rhyta? Although we have yet to establish their precise relationship, there is a certain dualism, both complementary and contrasting. Human versus animal, but both are symbolic representations, rendered to express ritual action through liquid. They indicate the manipulation of image and function for metaphysical purpose.

How do we integrate these elements, the ancestor cult and the symbolic representations of woman and bull? Phenomenologically, ancestor cults tend to be one component within the broader spiritual process of animism, belief in natural and elemental spirits. Animistic cults rarely attribute altruism to the spirits; rather they personify the apparently random aspects of the natural world. Ancestor spirits, often capricious themselves, thus exist to intercede with the spirits of nature on behalf of their descendants.

If we take this into account with the notion of a matrilineal social structure, then it is possible that the female vessel-figurines express the ultimate maternal ancestors for the lineages in each tomb. At the cemetery of Koumasa there were three tholos tombs, and three vessel-figurines. I am not however, suggesting that these are "goddesses" in the conventional sense. Ultimate ancestors tend to be rather remote and amorphous, and it is more significant that these artefacts are functional rather than representational – it is the **action** of their use that is more important than their image. An Early Minoan ancestral cult does therefore represent a continuity from the Neolithic period, the *communitas* of ritual. What is also indicated is that just as society develops greater complexity of structure, so the sense of spirituality develops more complex expression.

Protopalatial

Conventionally the Protopalatial period is defined as being distinct from what comes before or after, by book-ending the phase with "events": beginning with the "founding of the palaces" and ending with the great earthquake. But this is somewhat artificial; the founding of the palaces is more of a notional

"The goddess and the skull. Some observations on group identity in Prepalatial Crete", in KRZYSZKOWSKA ed. *ibid*, 107-118.

²⁰ J. DRIESSEN, "A matrilocal and matrilineal Prepalatial Bronze Age society?", in I. SCHOEP, P. TOMKINS, & J. DRIESSEN, *Back to the Beginning. Proceedings of the Leuven Conference on Pre- and Protopalatial Crete* (2012) 353-383; ID., "Cherchez la femme. Identifying Minoan gender relationships in the built environment", in D. PANAGIOTOPULOS & U. GÜNKEL-MASCHEK (eds.) *Minoan Realities. Proceedings of conference held at Heidelberg in November 2009, Aegis* 5 (2013) 141-163.

²¹ L. GOODISON, "From tholos tomb to throne-room: perceptions of the sun in Minoan ritual", in LAFFINEUR & HÄGG eds. (*supra* n. 14) 77-87.

²² P. WARREN, "The beginnings of Minoan religion" in *Antichità Cretesi: Studi in onore di Doro Levi* (1978) 137-147; A.A.D. PEATFIELD "Water, fertility, and purification in Minoan Religion", in C.E. MORRIS (ed.), *KLADOS: essays in honour of J.N. Coldstream* (1995) 217-227.

²³ L. GOODISON & C.E. MORRIS, "Beyond the 'Great Mother': the sacred world of the Minoans", in L. GOODISON & C.E. MORRIS (eds.), *Ancient Goddesses. The Myths and the Evidence* (1998) 113-132.

premise, especially as current studies extend the foundations of the Knossos palace deeper and deeper into the Prepalatial period. Despite that fuzziness, the MM I and MM II periods are extraordinary in cultural terms. Artistically it is highly experimental; look at the vitality of MM pottery, and the adoptions of new artistic technologies. In terms of religion, we can also see this sense of pluralistic flowering. There are probable more varieties of religious expression in this period than in any other Minoan phase. The tradition of multiple tombs continues into this period, but there are also settlement shrines, including elite shrines. Caves continue to be used, and this is the time of the largest number of peak sanctuaries in use.²⁴ Even though some of them do have evidence for use in the Early Minoan period (e.g. Petsofa and Jouktas), most of their material is dated to the MMI and MMII periods - a real floruit of religious expression.

I have characterized the peak sanctuaries as popular, rather than elite shrines.²⁵ Their numbers also suggests that the functional religious liminality of the sacred landscape was also at its most pervasive and accessible to the general population. This is an extension of the animism of the previous phase. This is more difficult to establish archaeologically, but Syme may be similar phenomenologically.²⁶ Syme is a spring sanctuary, a celebration of the natural spirit of water. If the earliest pottery from Syme really is MMI, that clearly reveals the manifestation of animistic processes.

Although the Protopalatial period lacks the extraordinary pictorial imagery of the succeeding Neopalatial period, it is the highpoint of popular sculpture, represented by the thousands of clay figurines from the peak sanctuaries. From the very first excavation of Petsofa in 1903, it is recognized that the figurines are representations of the worshippers, not deities.²⁷ They express ritual action, not dogmatic belief. Moreover, the figurines do not only portray worshippers individually. Many are fragments of models showing figures interacting with one another in three-dimensional ritual scenes.²⁸

Morris' and my arguments that these figurines represent altered states of consciousness indicate that the figurines memorialize spiritual experience, not just the votive action of offering.²⁹ This strongly deepens that sense of spiritual *communitas*, and demonstrates that spiritual liminality – the use of physical space in the landscape, and the use of ecstatic rituals, which collapsed the boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical – had reached a peak of sophistication.

I suggest therefore that the Protopalatial period represents an apogee of Minoan religious expression. The archaeological overlapping of tombs, peak sanctuaries, nature sanctuaries, and settlement shrines, reveals the co-existence of elements of ancestor cult, ecstatic practices and experiences, animism, and sacred landscapes all operating synergistically in a highly dynamic spiritual ambience.

²⁴ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, "Minoan peak sanctuaries: History and Society", *Opuscula Atheniensis* (1990) 117-131.

²⁵ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, "Palace and peak: the political and religious relationship between palaces and peak sanctuaries", in R. HÄGG & N. MARINATOS (eds.), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces, Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1984* (1987) 89-93; ID., "Minoan peak sanctuaries: History and Society", *Opuscula Atheniensis* (1990) 117-131.

²⁶ A. LEBESSI, "A sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite in Crete", *Expedition* 18:3 (1976) 1-13; P. METAXA-MUHLY, "Linear A inscriptions from the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Kato Syme", *Kadmos* 23 (1984) 124-135.

²⁷ J.L. MYRES, "Excavations at Palaikastro II. The sanctuary site at Petsofa", *BSA* 9 (1902-3) 356-387.

²⁸ G. RETHEMIOTAKIS, "A Neopalatial shrine model from the Minoan peak sanctuary at Gournos Krousonas", in A.-L. D'AGATA, & A. VAN DE MOORTEL (eds.), *Archaeologies of Cult. Essays on Ritual and Cult in Crete in honor of Geraldine C. Gesell* (2009) 189-199.

²⁹ C.E. MORRIS & A.A.D. PEATFIELD, "Experiencing ritual: shamanic elements in Minoan religion", in M. WEDDE (ed.), *Celebrations: anthropological and archaeological approaches to ancient Greek ritual* (0000) 5-59; A.A.D. PEATFIELD & C.E. MORRIS, "Dynamic spirituality on Minoan peak sanctuaries", in ROUNTREE, MORRIS, & PEATFIELD eds. (*supra* note 1) 227-245.

Neopalatial

One of the consistent insights of the Neopalatial period is that there is a deliberate centralizing of religion onto the palaces and other centres of political and economic power.³⁰ Access to settlement shrines becomes restricted through elite buildings,³¹ the peak sanctuary cult becomes centralized onto the mountains close to palatial centres,³² and the palaces and other elite buildings express their dominant position through the use of religious symbols embedded in the architecture, and the use of extravagant religious imagery. It is ~~perhaps~~ this explosion of pictorial religious imagery that is perhaps the most important of all. It is not just at the architectural level, the frescoes on the walls, it is also the devotion of large amounts of wealth and resources into the creation of miniature pictorial representation: gold rings, seals, and carved stone vases. It is worth repeating that all this imagery is mostly (perhaps entirely) religious on some level or other: religious symbols, narrative ritual scenes, supernatural and wild creatures, human figures arrayed in religious clothing and devices. The sculpture also changes: the many clay figurines of worshippers are replaced by a few statuettes of divine or elite figures, made of precious materials, faience and ivory. We are so familiar with all this, that sometimes we miss just how extraordinary it is.

Cameron tried to bring some sense of order to the plethora of fragmented frescoes from Knossos by suggesting that they depicted a pictorial programme of ritual scenes, which had at their focus a female figure, presumably divine.³³ Cameron's insights have been developed by others, so that we now have a sophisticated understanding of many of these pictorial scenes: e.g. Hägg's and Marinatos' works on epiphany,³⁴ Marinatos' discussion of rites of passage and sacrifice,³⁵ Morgan's interpretations of animal symbolism,³⁶ and Morris' reading of ecstatic visions in the gold rings.³⁷ Similarly, the papers of this conference offer developed interpretations of: ancestors, transformation, the numinous, imagination, the mind, the supernatural. The sophistications of our readings follow from the expressive wealth of Neopalatial religious art. The sheer variety of symbols, rituals, and religious images suggests a strong and pervasive Minoan sense of the spirituality of their world.

Rather than focus on their variety, however, there are some clearly discernable ~~some~~ unifying elements, which may engage with the social processes of the time. First, we should revisit Cameron's observation of the unifying female figure. Throughout a large proportion of these ritual images in all the various media, a female figure often predominates. She holds the symbols, she dominates the action, she is the focus of attention. Visually she is more important than the worshippers.

The perennial debate in the discussion of Minoan religion is the identification of a so-called Great Goddess. Linked to this is the Minoan monotheism/polytheism debate. This is not helpful, because it presupposes that the Minoans actually thought in that sort of philosophical way, and it obscures our understanding of what may be happening in the relationship between spirituality and socio-political developments.

³⁰ N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (1993) 38-75

³¹ G. GESELL, "The Minoan palace and public cult", in HÄGG & MARINATOS eds. (*supra* n. 25) 123-128.

³² PEATFIELD *supra* note 25.

³³ M. CAMERON, "The 'Palatial' thematic system in the Knossos murals: last notes on Knossos frescoes", in HÄGG & MARINATOS eds. (*supra* n. 25) 32-328; L. MORGAN (ed.), *Aegean Wall-Painting: a Tribute to Mark Cameron* (2005).

³⁴ R. HÄGG, "Die göttliche Epiphanie im minoischen Ritual", *AM* 101 (1986) 41-62; N. MARINATOS, "The character of Minoan epiphanies", *Divine Epiphanies in the Ancient World* (2004) 25-42.

³⁵ N. MARINATOS, *Minoan sacrificial ritual: Cult Practice and Symbolism* (1986); EAD., *Art and Religion in Thera* (1984).

³⁶ L. MORGAN, "Of Animals and Men. The Symbolic Parallel", in MORRIS ed. (*supra* n. 22) 171-184; EAD., "Power of the Beast. Human Animal Symbolism in Egyptian and Aegean Art", *Ägypten & Levante* 7 (1998) 17-31.

³⁷ C.E. MORRIS, "The language of gesture in Minoan religion", in LAFFINEUR & HÄGG eds. (*supra* n. 14) 245-251; C.E. MORRIS "Art makes visible: an archaeology of the senses in Minoan elite art", in N. BRODIE & C. HILLS (eds), *Material engagements: studies in honour of Colin Renfrew* (2004) 31-43.

Another unifying factor is the material: most of the artefacts, which portray these religious images, seem to be linked to Knossos. Frescoes in secondary palaces and villas may indeed indicate their socio-political connection with Knossos.³⁸ Similarly, many of the smaller, more portable artefacts with religious images, are either from Knossos and its environs, or have been suggested to be of Knossian manufacture. This reveals that in the Neopalatial period, Knossos was devoting a great deal of its wealth and artistic resources into the creation and distribution of palatial, elite objects portraying religious images focused on a dominant female figure. Why?

The contemporary research, which is reappraising the early Neopalatial period (MMIII-LMI), also suggests that Knossos did indeed dominate the economic and political infrastructure of the rest of Crete at this time. It has already been suggested that the Knossian centralization of peak sanctuary and other cults was part of this dominance, a religious and ideological counterpart to economic and political power.³⁹ I suggest therefore that the creation and distribution of religious art was also a deliberate part of Knossian policy, propaganda if you like. Just as centralization drew in the power, so the distribution of religious art dispersed the message of that power outwards.

This therefore is the context within which we need to understand the dominant female image, the hypothetical Great Goddess. She is a transformation of the Ancestral founder of the Knossos Great House into a divine figure, a true deity. She is the ideological, symbolic, and spiritual representation of Knossian power.

Metaphysically, there is a clear transformational flow from the Pre- and Protopalatial phases characterized by the dispersed pluralism of animism and ancestor cult, towards a centralization and institutionalization of Neopalatial religious practice. Spirituality has become religion. It is in the early Neopalatial period therefore, that something called Minoan religion actually emerges. If there was ever a time when there was a singular Minoan Goddess, it was at this time, the religious counterpart to the dominance of one palace. As Knossos established its political dominance, so the Knossos Ancestral Deity became the Minoan Great Goddess.

There are other aspects of this change, which we must also consider. It has been observed that amidst Neopalatial imagery, carved stone vases show only men. Also, we can see for the first time, among some of the seal images, male figures in apparently religious dress, some with a distinctive swept-back hairstyle. Are the priests? They are few, but they are present in the record. We should therefore consider that another transformation of this time was a change in the relationship between the genders. Perhaps this was an inevitable consequence of the development of a clear hierarchy, which was both religious and political. There may be some irony here – that just at the peak moment of the dominance of the Minoan (or perhaps we should say Knossian) Great Goddess, a more male sense of power was also emerging.

Final Palatial

I have focused here on the early Neopalatial period. This is meaningful because the later Neopalatial period, for all its wealth, is in many ways part of the continuum of the Final Palatial period. This is, to use Driessen and MacDonald's terminology, the "Troubled Island" phase, the era of natural disaster and civil war. In terms of religion, Driessen and others, including Betancourt, have chosen to present this period as a time of discontinuity, represented by crisis cults.⁴⁰ The idea of discontinuity is not

³⁸ M SHAW, "Aegean sponsors and artists: reflections of their roles in the patterns of distribution of themes and representational conventions in the murals", in R. LAFFINEUR & P. BETANCOURT (eds.), *TEXNH. Craftsmen, Craftswomen and Craftsmanship in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the 6th International Aegean Conference, Philadelphia, 18-21 April 1996*, *Aegaeum* 16 (1997) 481-504.

³⁹ PEATFIELD *supra* note 25.

⁴⁰ P. BETANCOURT, "Discontinuity in the Minoan/Mycenaean religions", in R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), *POLEMOS. Le contexte guerrier en Égée à l'âge du Bronze, Actes de la 7^e Rencontre égéenne internationale, Liège, 14-17 avril 1998*, *Aegaeum* 19 (2001) 219-225; J. DRIESSEN, "Crisis cults on Minoan Crete", in LAFFINEUR & HÄGG eds. (*supra* n. 14) 361-368; J. DRIESSEN, "The birth of a God. Cults and Crises on Minoan Crete", in M. CAVALIERI (ed.), *Cults in Crisis/Crisis Cults* (2014).

however, quite so clear. Religious processes do not just switch on and off, like the flick of a switch. Therefore it is more helpful for us to consider the transformational flow: what changes, and what tries to stay the same? Perhaps it is merely a matter of geographical perspective. From the point of view of Knossos, there are strong elements of continuity. Frescoes continue to be painted, sealstones and gold rings continue to be carved, all with the familiar female-dominated images. But one would expect this.

Elsewhere it is an important point to observe ~~was~~ that religion was indeed subject to the same crisis as was the political and economic infrastructure. One of the most dramatic examples of this is at Mochlos, where Soles has observed that during the LM I destruction, the shrine area was the focus of extreme violence, and so were objects with religious images (the ivory box with the female figure).⁴¹ The excavators at Palaikastro have suggested the same for the ivory male statuette there; it was deliberately smashed and burned.⁴² This suggests that the destruction of the religion of an enemy town was an important component of victory and destruction. Enemies felt it was just as important to destroy the religious symbols, the spiritual heart of a community as it was to destroy its physical structures – they destroy the Great House physical and metaphysically.

Such destruction is indicative of a process of fragmentation. Elsewhere I have used the term fragmentation to describe what happened religiously and politically in the Postpalatial period.⁴³ I suggest, however, that this process of fragmentation started in the closing phases of the Neopalatial period. What Driessen and Betancourt describe as “crisis cults” are fragmentations of established practices. As crisis eroded the economic and political unity of the island, and dominance of Knossos, so the religious and ideological components of that unity and dominance also began to fragment and fall apart.

Role of the Mycenaean

Whatever was happening in the rest of Crete, the story of Knossos at this time is complicated by the presence of the Mycenaean. And it is complicated. If one thinks of the human reality behind the influx of a foreign group who find themselves in a position of dominance, there are needs to maintain the infrastructure they inherit, so that they can benefit from it. They also need to impose their own identity on it. The emergence of Linear B is almost a perfect example of this. It is the pre-existing administrative tool of the economy, but adapted to the language and needs of the new ruling group. Can we see a metaphysical complement to this in the deity names of the Linear B tablets? Blakolmer, Palaima and others have commented on the distinction between the familiar Greek deity names (mostly shared between the Knossian and Greek Mainland tablets), and the vaguer Minoan theonyms, which seem to be more titles or attributes than names.⁴⁴ Is this a deliberate confluence, even a syncretism between a Mycenaean polytheism and a more amorphous Minoan Knossian religious tradition?

Many years ago I suggested that the Mountain Mother sealing, with a dominant female figurine holding out a staff to a saluting but large male figurine, was a piece of propaganda for Mycenaean takeover.⁴⁵ If this is indeed symbolic of the juxtaposed relationship between Minoan female and Mycenaean male, it expresses in religious terms what seems to have been happening on the human level. Similarly, the Final Palatial elite female burials reveal a Minoan and Mycenaean hybridity, both in terms of architecture (as seen in Tholos tombs A, and D at Archanes), and grave goods. The gold rings with ecstatic epiphanic scenes, that accompany several of these burials notably Archanes and Isopata, suggest that elite femininity is associated, even defined through, religious experience and imagery. If these are

⁴¹ See Soles' paper in this volume.

⁴² J. MACGILLIVRAY, J. DRIESSEN, and L. SACKETT, *The Palaikastro Kouros. A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and Its Aegean Bronze Age Context* (2000).

⁴³ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, “After the Big Bang: Minoan shrines and symbols beyond Palatial collapse”, in S. ALCOCK & R. OSBORNE (eds.), *Placing the Gods: Greek Sanctuaries in Space* (1994) 19-36.

⁴⁴ F. BLAKOLMER, “A pantheon without attributes? Goddesses and gods in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography”, in J. MYLONOPOULOS (ed.), *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2010) 21-62. See also Palaima in this volume.

⁴⁵ A.A.D. PEATFIELD, “The topography of Minoan peak sanctuaries”, *BSA* 78 (1983) 273-280.

Minoan women married to Mycenaean men, or are descended from such unions, it offers another example of how power was mediated through spiritualized and symbolic femininity.

Postpalatial

In an earlier article I suggested that the fundamental process of Postpalatial religion was fragmentation.⁴⁶ The striking individualization of the LM III goddesses-with-upraised arms,⁴⁷ not just in terms of symbolic imagery, but also in relation to manufacture and associated assemblage of ritual objects, still suggests a strong impulse to individually characterize these images into distinctive and separate figures. The singular divine image who dominates Neopalatial religious art, suggests a “sort-of” monotheism – one appropriate to the political and economic dominance of a single place, Knossos. As the Postpalatial period manifests a breakdown, a fragmentation of centralized political and economic power within Crete, thus the individualization of the Goddesses-with-upraised-arms reflects a fragmentation of attributes and symbols into separate characters – perhaps even with individual names.

An apparent challenge to this idea has recently emerged with Gaignerot-Driessen’s argument that the “Goddesses-with-upraised-arms” arms are not deity images, but rather are representations of clans or “great houses”, i.e. kinship groups, portrayed in the act of worship.⁴⁸ I suggest, however, that these interpretations are not so very far apart. The essential point is that, goddesses or worshippers, these images are symbolic representations, which are deliberately individually characterized. Even as kinship-group worshipper representations, as images they express in symbolic form the desire to separate and characterize a metaphysical identity. It may be a step earlier than the emergence of true polytheistic deities, but it is still a step in the same direction.⁴⁹

It is not just these images that suggest fragmentation of familiar religious images. The iconography found on Postpalatial larnakes is obviously a continuation of the Minoan desire for pictorial imagery, placed now within the personal domain of funerary practices rather than the public domain of palace ideology. Almost all the pictorial elements are religious symbols familiar from earlier periods, horns of consecration, double-axes, discs, natural imagery (birds, animals, and sea-creatures), processional chariots. But what is new about these images is the way, or ways, that they are combined. The combinations are almost random. I suggest therefore, that far from representing a coherent set of religious meanings, contextual associations, even beliefs, these larnax images reveal a **loss** of meaning and understanding. Images are painted on with no sense of context or meaning. Separation of image, variety of practice, randomness of symbol, all suggest that Minoan religion was falling apart. Neither the liminality nor the *communitas* of the earlier periods was a shared experience of the spirituality of the Postpalatial Minoan culture.

A question for all of us as archaeologists is: what is it that really marks the end of a culture, a civilization? Change of settlement pattern, dispersal of population, emigration, immigration, loss of technology, loss of wealth, climate change. All of us can point to cultures, which have survived such crises. Indeed as Minoan scholars we have the example of the great earthquake disaster of the Protopalatial-Neopalatial transition. Minoan Crete recovered to an even higher level of cultural sophistication. What is

⁴⁶ PEATFIELD *supra* note 43.

⁴⁷ G.C. GESELL, “From Knossos to Kavousi: The Popularizing of the Minoan Palace Goddess,” in A. CHAPIN (ed.), *XAPIΣ: Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr* (2004) 131-150; “The Snake Goddesses of the LM IIIB and LM IIIC Periods,” in KRZYSZKOWSKA ed. (*supra*, n. 19) 138; G.C. GESELL & T.C. SAUPPE, “Methods Used in the Construction of Ceramic Objects from the Shrine of the Goddess with Upraised Hands at Kavousi,” in LAFFINEUR & BETANCOURT eds. (*supra*, n. 38) 123-126.

⁴⁸ F. GAIGNEROT-DRIESSEN, “Goddesses refusing to appear? Reconsidering the Late Minoan III Figures with Upraised Arms”, *AJA* 118 (2014) 495-507; and see also Gaignerot-Driessen’s paper in this volume.

⁴⁹ In discussion Gaignerot-Driessen and I are in closer agreement than the respective articles initially suggest.

different here? I suggest that it was the loss of a common spiritual sense, a loss of *communitas* which allowed separate groups, separate lineages, clans, Great Houses, to further lose fellow-feeling, to lose any experiential sense of identification with one's neighbours. Maybe this is one of the lessons of fall of Minoan civilization, the metaphysical loss overwhelms the physical loss.

Conclusion

This paper is obviously a very partial review of the metaphysical history of Minoan religion. Nevertheless, there are essential elements to emerge from this review. Perhaps most important is the necessity to regard Minoan religion or spirituality as a diachronic process of change, not an artificial and monolithic structure of anachronistic beliefs and expectations. We can only understand the immense variety of Minoan spiritual experience by engaging with the variety of processes like ancestor cult, animism, ecstatic experience, belief, monotheism, and polytheism. Furthermore, we need to appreciate that these are not separate processes, but they have a dynamic flow of relationships, which are subject to social and historical change.

As archaeologists, we automatically engage the processes of dynamic changes when we study artefacts – we organize material culture into typologies and chronologies. Should we not do the same with the spiritual phenomenology of Minoan civilization?

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