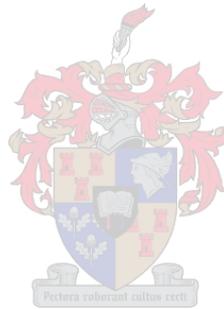


**“The Global Village: A case study of the frescoes at Akrotiri as evidence for  
multiculturalism in the Bronze Age Aegean”**

by

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*Thesis presented to the Department of Ancient Studies in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch  
University*

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April 2022

## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

Perceptions of the culture and identity at Akrotiri often suggest a ‘Minoanized’ civilization which came into being and succeeded as a product of Minoan settlement and thalassocracy. Evidence for this lies in the material remains found at Akrotiri, and in particular in the fresco fragments and compositions which have been restored at the site. That said, this Minoan reading is largely a product of confirmation bias. While the images at Akrotiri do share some resemblance to those found at Knossos and other pre-Greek settlements, they also bear resemblance to images, themes, and motifs seen in North African and West Asian imageries.

This thesis investigates the extent to which the frescoes of Akrotiri are influenced by Cretan, Egyptian, and Asian material evidence, and how the iconographies from across the Bronze Age Aegean trade route are synthesised into unique compositions at the site. In order to do so, a corpus of images from Xeste 3, the West House and Sector Beta are discussed alongside comparanda from various settlements in the Aegean network of trade and diplomacy.

In doing so, Akrotiri becomes a useful case study in understanding the development and maintenance of a globalised Aegean network through the study of the visual echoes seen at the site. Because of this globalised space, ideological distances are collapsed and Akrotiri becomes an example of a physical, ancient Global Village.

## **Opsomming**

Waarnemings van die kultuur en identiteit te vinde by Akrotiri stel dikwels 'n 'Geminoaniseerde' beskawing voor wat tot stand gekom en floreer het as 'n produk van Minoïese nedersetting en talassokrasie. Getuienis hiervoor kan in die materiële oorblyfsels wat by Akrotiri gevind is, en veral in die fresko-fragmente en komposisies wat op die terrein gerestoureer is, gevind word. Nogtans, hierdie Minoïese lesing is grootliks die produk van bevestigingsvooroordeel. Alhoewel die beelde by Akrotiri wel 'n mate van ooreenkomste met dié wat by Knossos en ander voor-Griekse nedersettings gevind word, deel, stem dit ook ooreen met beelde, ikone en motiewe wat in Noord-Afrikaanse en Wes-Asiatiese beelde gesien word.

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die mate waartoe die fresko's van Akrotiri beïnvloed word deur Kretense, Egiptiese en Asiatiese materiële getuieniss, en hoe die ikonografie van regoor die Bronstydperk Egeïese handelsroete in unieke komposisies gesintetiseer word. My metode behels 'n bespreking van beelde van Xeste 3, die “West House” en Sektor Beta – die basis van my korpus – tesame met vergelykings van verskeie nedersettings in die Egeïese netwerk van handel en diplomاسie.

Gevolgtik raak Akrotiri 'n nuttige gevallestudie om die ontwikkeling en instandhouding van 'n geglobaliseerde Egeïese netwerk te verstaan deur middel van die ontleding van die visuele eggo's wat op die terrein gesien kan word. As gevolg van hierdie geglobaliseerde ruimte, word die grense tussen ideologieë vervaag en Akrotiri word 'n voorbeeld van 'n fisiese, antieke “Global Village”.

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Finally, I would like to thank Maeve, my cat, who provided much needed companionship during the early days of pandemic lockdown, and who provides comfort and consistency when I'm feeling particularly homesick and isolated.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

There is a rich corpus of material evidence at the site of Akrotiri, Thera, preserved because of the volcanic nature of the island. A devastating eruption circa 1600 BCE ultimately buried the site in ash and pumice preserving it as a 'Bronze Age Pompeii' (Shelmerdine 2008: 6). This eruption would disrupt the region due to both its geographical after effects, as well as its seeming elimination of Akrotiri as a central point of contact between Aegean civilizations. The excavations at Akrotiri, which began in 1967, brought to light a rich corpus of material culture including a variety of tools and pottery as well as a number of frescoes, many of which are fragmentary, but some of which provide valuable iconographical insight into life in the settlement. The archaeological evidence at Akrotiri suggests it was part of a wide network of trade and intercultural communication and its material remains provide valuable information for understanding motifs, techniques, and iconographies from different sites in the Bronze Age Aegean network (Younger and Rehak 2008b: 157).

The excavations suggest, for example, that luxury items such as scarabs, faience figurines, as well as Egyptian and Syrian beads passed through Akrotiri to the rest of the Aegean (Abulafia 2011: 27). In addition, remains of transport amphorae used in various parts of the Aegean have been found at Akrotiri, some dating back to the third millennium BCE showcasing that Akrotiri was likely an important central hub for many years before the volcanic eruption (Doumas 2018: 29). Three jars in Canaanite style have also been uncovered at the site demonstrating trade links to this region of West Asia and the discovery of pomegranate and cedar remains in charcoal further suggest contact with civilizations surrounding the Caspian Sea, most likely Lebanon according to Doumas (2018: 29). Ground-up insect remains in surviving grain samples have allowed the identification of Levantine species, suggesting that consumables as well as wares were traded within this vast network (Doumas 2018: 29). An Egyptian cup decorated with spiral bands corresponds to the art and style of the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt, enabling more specific dating for the development of trade at Akrotiri (Marinatos 2015: 22). Pottery remains similar to representations of vessels carried by Minoan figures in the tomb of Senenmut have been found at Akrotiri, showing a complex multi-directional relationship with the Egyptian part of the trade network (Marinatos 2015: 45). There are also excavated stone vases which are of either Egyptian or Syrian origin, ostrich-egg rhyta of Minoan origin, and golden ibex images which were also likely imported (Doumas 2018: 29). Evidence of local production of some faience and luxury goods at Akrotiri has been found, often inspired by Aegean styles, and likely used in trade relations as well as locally (Doumas 2018: 29). The various remains found at Akrotiri suggest a wide network of connection to Minoan, Syrian, Egyptian, and Levantine cultures, in all likelihood through Aegean trade and intercultural communication. Indeed, as Marinatos (2015: 165) states, "[t]he Late Bronze Age was after all an era of kings, empires and commerce: an interconnected world in which the port-town of Akrotiri played a major part."



Figure 1.1 Map of Eastern Aegean. Emphasis is my own.

## 1.1 Research Problem

Akrotiri has largely been considered as a product of its neighbouring cultures, in particular that of Minoan Crete (Pomeroy 1999: 18; Younger and Rehak 2008b: 148; Marinatos 2015: 62; Hitchcock 2016: 25; Blakolmer 2018: 150; Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 156)<sup>1</sup>. Considering the apparent influence of Minoan culture on and from its surrounds, it is possible to see the positive consequences of their involvement as it generated interesting blends of Cretan and local cultures at many sites including Akrotiri (Davis 2008: 193). Because of Akrotiri's position within the Minoan world (see Figure 1.1), scholarship has favoured a Minoan reading of the culture which developed at the site. For the most part Akrotiri has seldom been considered an independent port which developed its own individual culture through direct or indirect contact with Egyptian, West Asian, and Minoan groups as well as various other cultural groups bordering on the Aegean Sea. This suggests that Akrotiri was always the influenced and never the influencer which seems to be an oversimplification of trade networks and intercultural interaction through trade. Recent research acknowledges, however, the independent development of sites like Akrotiri and recognizes the range of influences at the site, from the Cyclades to Egypt to Asia, as well as Crete (Georma 2019: 40).

## 1.2 Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore the development and personalization of 'borrowed' influences and autochthonous features as seen in several frescoes at Akrotiri as it lay at the epicentre of Bronze Age

<sup>1</sup> See section 2.1 Minoanization below for a more detailed discussion of the 'Minoanization' phenomenon in the Bronze Age Aegean.

trade in the Aegean Sea. My research question aims to understand to what extent the frescoes of Akrotiri can be seen to be influenced by and/or distinctive in relation to Minoan, Egyptian, and Asian material evidence. In order to attempt to answer this, the following questions will be asked:

1. What common motifs and stylistic trends can be detected in the fresco compositions of Akrotiri;
2. Which of these motifs can be identified in iconographical imageries from Minoan, Egyptian, Syrian, or other cultures which may have come into contact with the Aegean trade network;
3. How are these motifs synthesised in the frescoes at Akrotiri;
4. Is it possible to identify distinctive qualities of Akrotiri's material culture which may be autochthonous;
5. Can the process of globalisation be recognized through the analysis of the material culture of Akrotiri;
6. Can the term Global Village be applied to an ancient settlement like Akrotiri?

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

When looking at Akrotiri as a case study, it becomes clear that even in antiquity there is precedent for smaller cultural groups to withstand influence from larger powers such as the Minoans who dominated through thalassocracy in the Bronze Age Aegean, but rather adopt functional and pleasing aspects of dominant cultures into the everyday practices of their own. Akrotiri, and its frescoes in particular, suggest an artistic blending of Aegean styles, iconography, pigments, and compositions creating a distinctive visual culture. As such, looking at Akrotiri as an early example of 'globalisation' or the Global Village phenomenon<sup>2</sup>, and what that means for cross-cultural interaction in the Bronze Age Aegean, is warranted. This will be done by exploring the impact of multicultural contacts on a localized group at the centre of a vast trade network. The Akrotiri frescoes demonstrate that transcultural assimilation is multi-directional. Through this, Akrotiri will be considered as a central point where cultures interact and, critically, where developments occurred freely due to surrounding needs and circumstances (Hodos 2006: 7; White 2010). Thus, I will argue that Akrotiri benefitted from its social, cultural, and economic interaction with various Aegean cultures while still enjoying autonomy and relative independence as a central trade point which allowed them to negotiate several cultural influences into a unique culture of their own.

I will argue, alongside scholars such as Blakolmer (2018: 150), Marinatos (2015: 15) and Georma (2019: 40), for example, that Akrotiri is representative of experimental and inventive art styles and adaptations, making use of Minoan images, as well as images from other ports in the Aegean trade

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<sup>2</sup> See section 1.5 Globalization and the Global Village below for a more detailed discussion of these terms.

network, and blending motifs and iconographical frameworks together into something individual and unique. The city of Akrotiri both retains an independent style and references contemporary styles in its artworks, drawing on surrounding contexts and ideas. This generates an intertextuality which can be seen amongst the various houses at Akrotiri and the interpretation of one house may aid in the understanding of another. I will also argue that a number of autochthonous features can be seen in both the art and artefacts of Akrotiri, as well as in the remnants of daily lives, suggesting that this trade city and others like it were not necessarily colonial outposts but rather autonomous members of a trade community (Pomeroy 1999: 18). While the conception of Akrotiri as an independent state is not necessarily new or entirely unheard of, it is only in recent scholarship that this notion has gained any traction and indeed has become the focus of a number of inquiries (Georma 2019: 40). Excavations from across the Aegean, as well as a decentralized view of the ancient world, allow for this more focused and nuanced approach to the so-called “Minoanized” Akrotiri.

#### **1.4 Approach and Methodology**

An iconographical approach will be used in order to examine the frescoes excavated at Akrotiri, majority of which survive mostly in fragments and are still in the process of being restored. This approach was first developed by Panofsky (1955) in which he correlates meaning to an image through visual echoes drawing on a culturally and temporally specific context (Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 92). In order for these visual echoes to be effective and deliver an intended meaning, there must already be a canon of connoted images and meanings to draw upon.

Understanding these visual connotations is a critical aspect of doing an iconographical study, particularly on an ancient context which is so far removed from the modern context. In order to facilitate this contextual understanding, Panofsky divides the iconographical approach into three phases. First, the pre-iconographical description is intended to provide details of the image being considered without any bias or imposed meaning (Weingarden 1998: 52). Second, an iconographical analysis takes place during which the extant literature and opinions are considered in tandem with the image in question so that an explanation of the scene can be achieved (Stansbury O’Donnell 1999: 92). Finally, iconographical interpretation takes place wherein the image is restored to its intended cultural and temporal context and understood within the scope of the worldview during which it was created (Weingarden 1998: 52). These three steps allow the viewer to better understand and unpack the cultural meanings and connotations which are implied in the image. This process creates a feedback loop of understanding in which images are used to understand other images through contextual clues, continuously enriching the canon and the various interpretations thereof. Iconographical study then consequently develops a language of communication through which information is exchanged and engaged with across time, generating meaning within new contexts and frameworks while still intending to maintain the original meaning and context (Jakobson 1960: 353).

As such, the iconographical approach requires that the cultural context of the frescoes be elaborated upon in such a way that the significance of the imagery can be interpreted and appreciated in its originally intended manner. In order to achieve this, a catalogue of the frescoes that have been excavated to date has been compiled, making use of archaeological reports as well as supplementary sources examining particular aspects of the artworks<sup>3</sup>. The corpus for this study was selected by identifying houses with multiple frescoes that are largely intact. I selected the three houses with the most extant frescoes which consist of more than just fragments. Where possible, I refer to other images at the site, but for many of them I am unable to make clear interpretations or understand the compositions from other houses due to the fragmentary nature of their remains. Each of the three selected houses also showcase a visual theme very well, and indeed the images within them seem to be in communication with one another. In particular, the themes of the goddess in Xeste 3, fishing in the West House, and natural landscapes in Sector Beta emerge strongly in these houses. Special attention has been paid to the iconography, where motifs and symbols present in these frescoes have been identified and recorded. The study further involves trying to understand how these motifs and symbols interact, as well as where similar motifs, styles and compositions are seen at other Bronze Age sites such as in Egypt, Anatolia, Syria, and Crete among others.

### **1.5 Globalization and the Global Village**

The globalization of ideas is explained by Hodos (2017: 4) as the idealization and assimilation of aspects of the 'Other' which exists outside of a native narrative, and which encourages the world to increasingly be seen as one place. This coalescing into one ideal suggests the erasure of individual cultural identity. That said, globalization is often asymmetrical in direction and scope, suggesting a give-and-take of ideas that results in a global consensus. This development is understood as a process, system, or discourse, depending on perspective and application (Hodos 2017: 4). The term globalization is used most often to understand integration and cooperation across communities and cultures, and also to explain the notion of a world that grows smaller as communication becomes easier (Hodos 2017: 4). Because of this, the term can also be used to describe and understand intercultural communication in the ancient world as practices and iconographies are shared across large geographical spaces in order to minimize the distance between and create long-distance communities.

The Global Village concept was developed by Marshall McLuhan who predicted that technology would connect people all over the world because of simpler communication and interaction (McLuhan 1989). Despite the lack of modern communication technologies in the Bronze Age Aegean, in my view this theory of interconnectivity can still be applied. The concept of the Global Village collapses

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for index of accessible fresco images at Akrotiri.

the distance between groups of individuals who seek to share information. This phenomenon can be seen in Bronze Age Akrotiri if we consider the ‘globe’ in this context to be the central and peripheral civilizations within the Aegean trade network. McLuhan’s Global Village decentralizes the flow of information in the world and posits that each member of the network contributes in equal part to a world of intersecting ideas and motifs (McLuhan 1989). Thus, the Global Village serves as one explanation of globalization, a concept with no clear definition beyond a clear increase in connectivity (Hodos 2017: 4).

## **1.6 Limitations**

This study is limited in scope for a number of reasons. Primarily, as a South African researcher, and under COVID-19 pandemic conditions, access to some of the reports and imagery has been limited<sup>4</sup>. While there are some notable publications available in local libraries and online, I know there is useful, relevant information that I haven’t been able to consider, and this is one reason for the limitation of the corpus to the well-documented houses. Being limited in the access I have to comprehensive and detailed images which I can interpret with any confidence has greatly limited the corpus of frescoes in consideration. In some instances, I have needed to rely on scholarly accounts of the configurations in each room and have found that these accounts are often times conflicting. I am also limited in time and space. The iconography at Akrotiri is incredibly rich and nuanced, much more so than I realised at the outset of this endeavour, and to discuss each element in full detail would overwhelm this thesis.

## **1.7 Research Design**

To begin this investigation, I will first contextualise the study in the broader context of Aegean trade networks and then give an account of the site of Akrotiri and its houses/architecture by reviewing the available literature (Chapter 2). The following chapters are a systematic analysis of the key images of frescoes identified at Akrotiri. I will look at frescoes focusing centrally on the goddess figure at Xeste 3 (Chapter 3), fishing and trade motifs in the West House (Chapter 4), and natural imagery in Sector Beta (Chapter 5). The final chapter, the Conclusion (Chapter 6), will present the findings of the study and suggest further avenues of research.

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<sup>4</sup> There are a number of publications which would have benefited this study, such as the work by Budin (2011) as well as a number of older studies such as those by Schachermeyer (1967), Smith (1965), and Helck (1979) which I have not been able to access.

## Chapter 2: Aegean Trade and Akrotiri

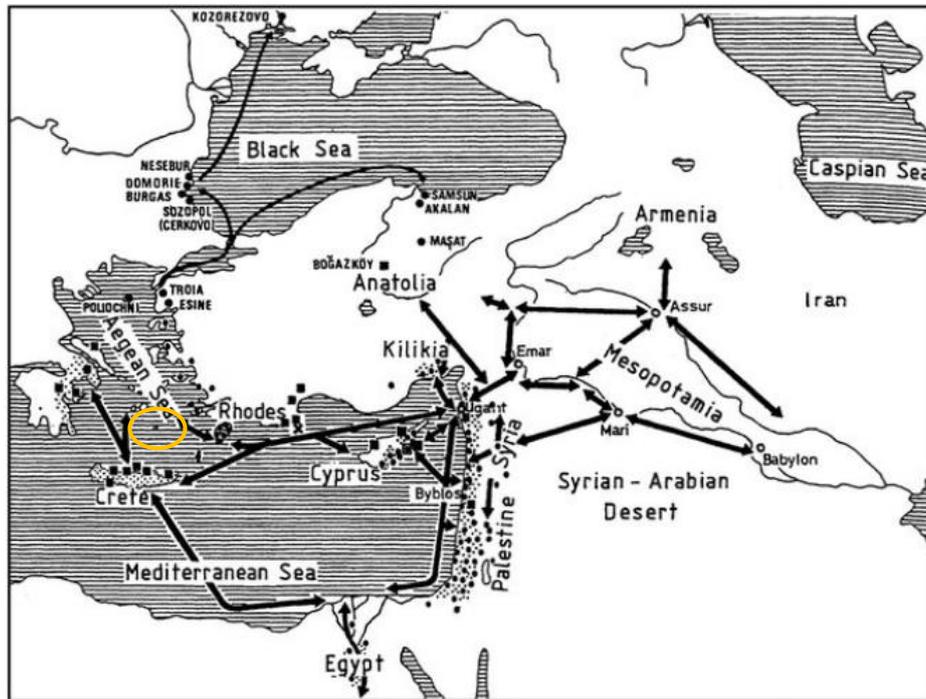


Figure 2.1 Map of Eastern Aegean trade routes. *Emphasis my own, to indicate Thera.*

The excavations at Akrotiri have revealed a variety of vessels, frescoes, and other material remains decorated in various artistic themes and motifs. These remains have begun to demonstrate the intricacy of the culture that inhabited the city, as well as the distinct network of multicultural contacts that most certainly predominated the Bronze Age Aegean, in which Akrotiri was centrally located. Due to its location, Akrotiri became a prominent trade port connecting Egyptian, Minoan, and West Asian settlements across the region (Abulafia 2011: 27). Abulafia (2011: 27) outlines the role Akrotiri played as a thoroughfare for trade and communication in the Aegean. It is important to consider that geography in the ancient world did not necessarily conform to the same boundaries modern scholarship has imposed upon it (Marinatos 2015: 11). With that in mind, it is likely that intercultural boundaries were much less rigid than we are likely to assume.

An array of commodities were traded across the Aegean network such as cloth, ceramics, and especially metals which encouraged diplomacy in order to ensure stability in the economic system (Hitchcock 2016: 28). Dawson and Nikolakopoulou (2020: 155) propose ‘cycles of integration’ which account for the dynamic inter-regional networks. Knappett and Nikolakopoulou (2008: 175) refer to a ‘decentralized network’ which highlights the fact that there was not necessarily a centralized power in the trade network. Rather, the long-distance interaction of the different cultural groups in the region allowed for the development of distinct identities at each location (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 175). As a result of this interaction, Hitchcock (2016: 18) identified ‘material entanglements’ which allowed for the combination of local and foreign designs and practices, most often occurring at the

discretion of the local populace. Consequently, it can be argued that the Aegean trade network was a decentralized cycle of integration which encouraged a variety of material entanglements at different settlement sites across the Aegean world.

Each of the commodities found at Akrotiri demonstrate the vast network of maritime activity rich in diversity and deeply interconnected. Whether contact with Egyptian, West Asian, and Minoan culture was direct or through an emissary, it is very likely that the ideas carried across the Aegean trade network influenced many aspects of Aegean culture. Being situated so centrally to the various trade points (see Figure 2.1; 1.1), it is possible to argue that Thera acted as a 'bridge' between Crete, West Asia, and Egypt amongst other Aegean cultures which all used Thera as a meeting point for the trade of their wares (Abulafia 2011: 27). In particular, this interconnectedness would be more evident at sites closer to the coast as the degree of impact from maritime trade would be greater near the ports of entry than at sites more inland (Winter 2000: 745, 755). Evidence for this is seen in the fact that coastal sites such as Alalakh and Tell Kabri seem to have more features in common with those at Thera than inland sites such as Mari (Winter 2000: 745, 755). As a centrally located coastal settlement on an island, Akrotiri at Thera consequently acts as a connector between civilizations. Even so, Akrotiri's prosperity was circumstantial as it relied heavily on input from its maritime trade relations, resulting in a limitation of its longevity (Doumas 2018: 29).

Dawson and Nikolakopoulou (2020: 156) are of the opinion that it is likely that the origin of this Bronze Age interaction came from West Asian economic ambition as a demand for raw materials, in particular metals, caused them to seek out steady supplies of the necessary materials from the Mediterranean region. This generated an inter-regional network which steadily grew and developed into multiple smaller networks. Within these networks, islands centrally located, such as Thera, would have played an important role in the mitigation of crossing trade networks from different areas in the Aegean world, thus becoming important trade hubs. Consequently, the role that traders and merchants played also becomes integral as it is through these individuals that ideas and wares are disseminated across the region. Indeed, these traders and merchants ensured positive, cohesive social and cultural communication (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 156). This brought peripheral cultures to the Aegean as well from much further afield as positive interaction at various hubs in different networks ensured that ideas could travel across great geographical areas (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 156). In the case of Akrotiri, there is evidence of ideas coming from as far away as the Indus Valley, most likely through an intermediary trade hub such as one or more of the cities in the Mesopotamian or Anatolian civilizations. Regardless, it is evident that there were ample opportunities for ideologies and artworks to spread across the Aegean trade networks and collect at Akrotiri in interesting and unique ways.

## 2.1 Minoanization

Despite the variety of material evidence found at Akrotiri, scholarship has often interpreted the site as a by-product of Minoan influence, falling into a dangerous cycle of confirmation bias. Younger and Rehak (2008b: 148) discuss Akrotiri as a “heavily Minoanized site” on Thera and Dawson and Nikolakopoulou (2020: 156) also refer to the “Minoanized site of Akrotiri” thereby expressly linking the site of Akrotiri to Minoan civilization as a dominating force. Pomeroy (1999: 18) identified Minoanized trends in art, religion, attire, and lifestyles at Akrotiri. In addition, Hitchcock (2016: 25) suggests that the entanglement and appropriation of Minoan culture at Akrotiri served as an attempt to emulate Minoan cultic and economic status. Blakolmer (2018: 150) discusses “Minoanizing motifs” at Akrotiri such as the flying gallop of the griffin, a motif that is indeed present in Minoan imagery, but is also notably present in Egyptian and West Asian wall-paintings<sup>5</sup>. Marinatos (2015: 62) proposes that Minoan dominance in the Aegean sphere is what allowed Akrotiri to develop due to its proximity to Knossos and role as a “stepping-stone” providing access to the northern section of the Aegean trade network. While Akrotiri’s location certainly worked to its advantage, its designation as a trade hub is the result of more involvement than only that of the Minoans. Hence, a Minoanized bias is clear in much of the literature that looks at Akrotiri. Certainly, the Minoan influence is considerable and was likely responsible for a large portion of the exchange interactions in the Aegean trade network (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 156). Even so, assuming that the Minoans were always the influencer and hardly, if ever, the influenced is an oversimplification of intercultural communication and trade.

When considering Minoan identity in a ‘global’ context<sup>6</sup>, it is notable that Minoan art consisted of convention, making use of repeated imageries and motifs in a specific Minoan corpus (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 167; Blakolmer 2018: 143). Artistic concepts seem to have been coordinated, and while scale and format varied, as well as complexity and style, Minoan art appears to have been bound by iconographic conventions (Blakolmer 2018: 143). Because of this, the suggestion that craftsmen were trained in Minoan motifs and iconography working from specific style books or standards has been made (Aruz 2008: 123). Interestingly, Marinatos (2015: 11, 13) suggests that the stylistic rigidity and a large portion of the repertoire is a result of Egyptian influence, thereby creating a cultural horizon which encompasses Egypt, Crete, and Akrotiri is created (Marinatos 2015: 11). Thus, Egyptian imagery and iconography influenced the development of Minoan Crete, which in turn influenced the development of a Minoan Thera (Marinatos 2015: 13). This proposition is particularly

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<sup>5</sup> More on the griffin in Chapter 3: The Goddess of Xeste 3 and Chapter 4: The Liminal Spaces of the West house.

<sup>6</sup> In this case, the reaches of the Aegean constitute the ‘global’ as this was the conceivable world in the Minoan experience.

of note as it acknowledges that a purely “Minoan” identity is also nuanced and is the product of its surrounding cultures.

## **2.2 The Context and Development of Global Akrotiri**

The people who inhabited Akrotiri can provide important insights into the settled culture and ideology at the site. It is most likely that the earliest inhabitants of Akrotiri earned their wealth through local agriculture and animal husbandry before becoming an integral part of the Aegean trade network and probably contributing their own fleet of merchants and traders to travel across the region (Marinatos 2015: 45). Evidence found at Akrotiri in the form of marble vases, figurines, and pottery suggests that the settlement had made bountiful contributions to this trade network for more than a thousand years (Marinatos 2015: 45). Abulafia (2011: 27) suggests multicultural origins of the people of Thera, stating that they may have come from Crete, the Cyclades, or some combination of people from all across the Aegean region. Marinatos (2015: 13) speaks of Africans at Thera, and indeed the wall painting in the Porter’s Lodge at Akrotiri seems to depict a darker skinned individual than most of the other human figures shown at the site suggesting that different ethnicities may have been present in the settlement. This multicultural community may thus have allowed them to develop a blended culture drawing on Cretan, Cycladic and other neighbouring cultures and styles (Shelmerdine 2008: 193). That said, it is important to bear in mind that modern scholarly designations of cultural boundaries need not have applied in antiquity. Thus, while noting the relevance of overlap and the influence of surrounding dominant cultures on Akrotiri, an investigation of its singularity is also warranted.

The cultures which surrounded and likely interacted with Akrotiri can be dated by using the volcanic eruption at Thera as a marker of time as cultures which pre-date the eruption, such as those at Alalakh and Mari, may have affected the development of Thera identity (Winter 2000: 746). In fact, at some sites dating to the New Kingdom in Egypt volcanic pumice from the Thera eruption has been found, creating an undeniable chronological relationship between the two locations, while also clearly showcasing the size and scope of the volcanic eruption (Bietak 1996: vii). That said, it is also possible that post-eruption cultures were influenced by the remnant echoes of the civilization at Akrotiri and indeed the themes that have emerged at Akrotiri can be seen in cultures which rose to prominence long after the eruption of Thera. In particular, when considering that the frescoes at Akrotiri were in private houses and spaces, a comparison to the decorative traditions of Roman houses, some two thousand years later, wherein the private spaces are commonly decorated with mosaics and other art forms which wrapped around the room, much like those in Sector Beta at Akrotiri (Winter 2000: 755). When making such a statement, it is important to keep in mind that the archaeological record is incomplete and majority of the excavations from the Bronze Age civilizations are of palace structures, so making generalizations or absolute statements may be overzealous.

The distinction between public and private spaces becomes particularly relevant when looking at spatial comparanda within the Aegean network as the wall decorations in public and private spaces likely had different intended meanings and interpretations (Winter 2000: 745). While wall decoration in public spaces were most likely representative of royal or state ideologies, those at Akrotiri in the private space served to rather create a 'total environment' which could span one or more rooms and potentially be reflective of the homeowner's own experiences or roles (Winter 2000: 745). It is also largely because these wall decorations are found in private dwellings that it is assumed these homeowners were members of the elite at Akrotiri. An important consideration also lies in the fact that public buildings such as palaces inevitably have private spaces as well, and the reverse is also true as private homes have spaces which are open to the public (Winter 2000: 749). The size of the settlements is also important in these considerations as palaces exist near urban centres while Akrotiri is a small town and likely had no need for large palace structures. This observation consequently raises more interesting questions about the public and private function of the homes at Akrotiri, as well as the thematic nature of each space. The intrigue of this public and private distinction is increased as there are clear visual echoes between images in the Akrotiri houses and the large palaces of Knossos, Alalakh, Mari, and Tell el-Dab'a among others in Egyptian, Cretan, and West Asian spaces.

This question of multicultural identity and exchange is particularly relevant in the modern increasingly global world as technology and communications enable the assimilation and consolidation of global perspectives within individual cultures. In the field of transcultural studies Moundrea-Agrafioti (2006) has considered the "global" and the "local" influences at Akrotiri, looking at themes both natural and societal. *Beyond Babylon: art, trade, and diplomacy in the second millennium B.C.*, edited by Aruz, Benzel, and Evans (2008) also looks at the various Aegean networks with a particular focus of the influence of art, trade and diplomacy on transported ideas and motifs. Dawson and Nikolakopoulou (2020) highlight identities and interaction in the Aegean space, using Akrotiri as one of their case studies. *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization* edited by Hodos (2017) also demonstrates the scholarly interest in ancient globalization. Auterio and Cobb's (2022) upcoming publication titled *Globalization and Transculturality from Antiquity to the Pre-Modern World* identifies these ideas of a globalized ancient world and the possible implications thereof. Akrotiri acts as an interesting case study for this type of investigation because of its central location and the level of preservation of the ancient art and artefacts due to the volcanic eruption.

## 2.3 The site of Akrotiri

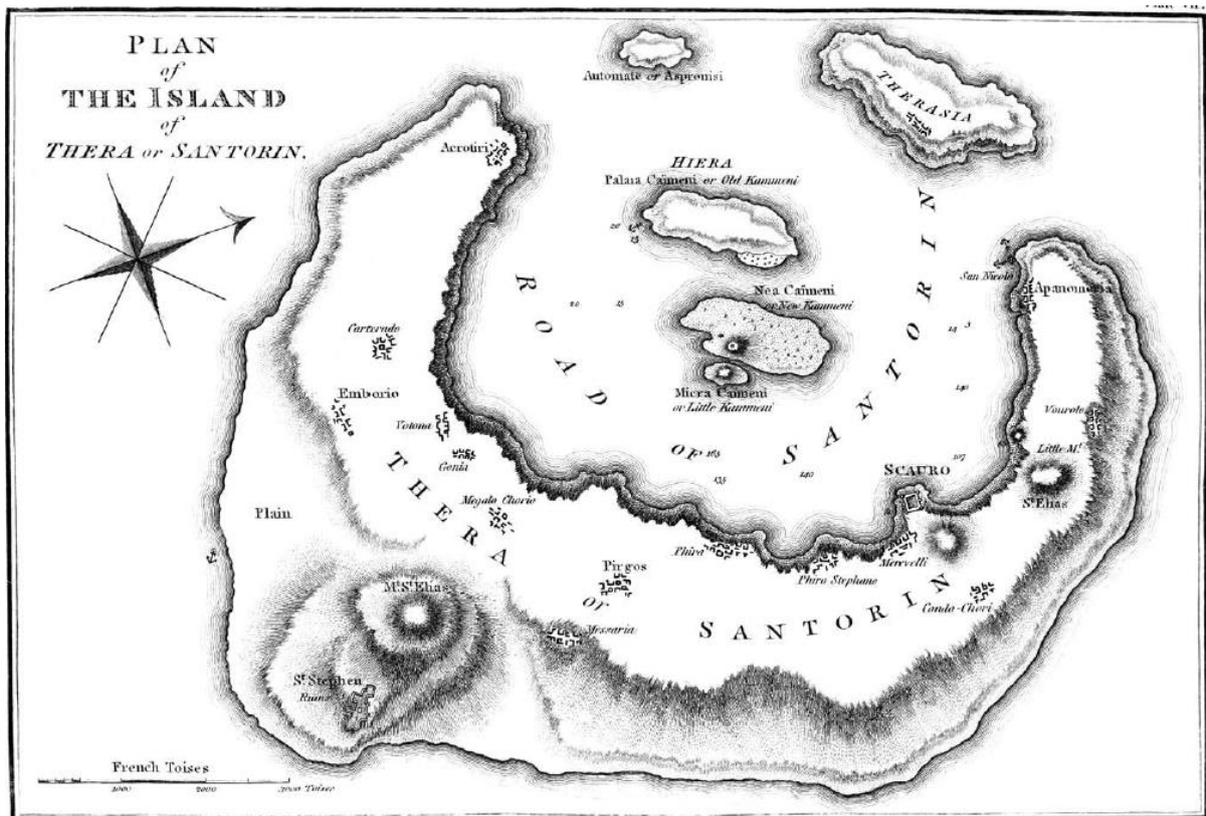


Figure 2.2 Map of Thera caldera.

The town itself (Figure 2.3) is located on the inner corner of the southern tip of the Thera caldera (see Figure 2.2). It consists of houses and mansions most of which were built along Telchines Road which runs centrally from north to south (Davis 2008: 191). These buildings follow Cretan architecture for the most part and were built from cut soft stone into two or three stories (Abulafia 2011: 27; Davis 2008: 191). Walls and doors separated indoor spaces into different functions along with indoor staircases (Davis 2008: 191). In some instances, there is evidence that Minoan-style houses were built on pre-existing foundations which were at Akrotiri before Minoan influence (Davis 2008: 191). Thus far, almost every house that had been excavated has frescoes in at least one of the many rooms and stairwells which are decorated in various themes, possibly alluding to the functions of a particular room or home (Abulafia 2011: 27; Marinatos 2015: 47). The buildings are considered homes because of the presence of artefacts connoting daily life, such as implements for grinding grain and bedding. However, it is also necessary to point out that the homes seemed to have a communal function, each fulfilling a different role and perhaps catering to a different form of cult activity.

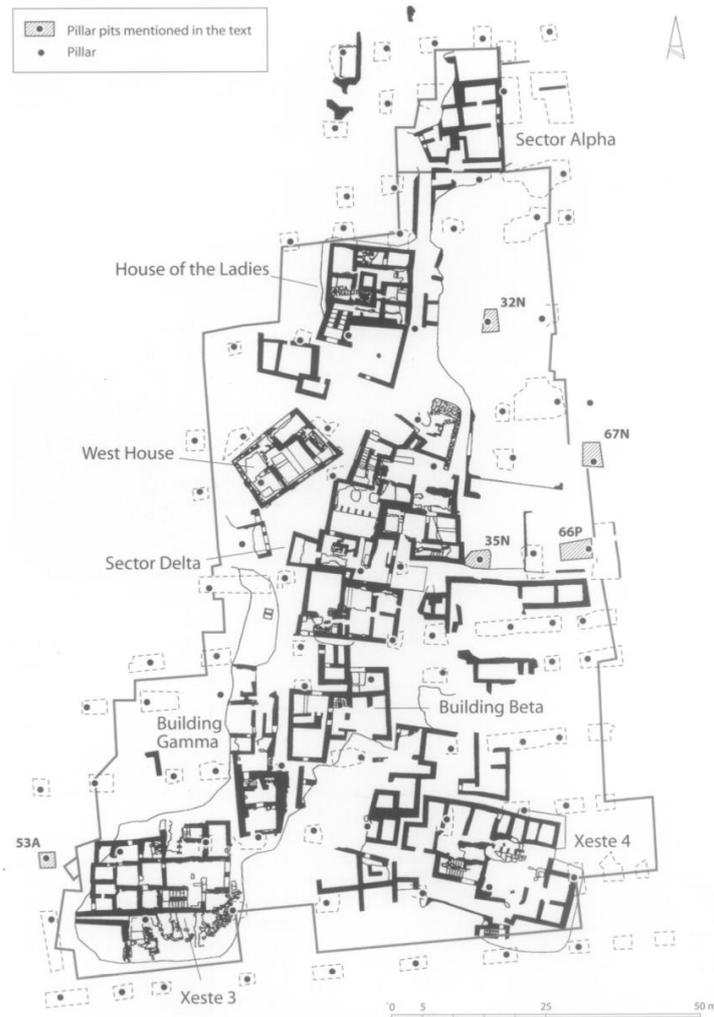


Figure 2.3 Map of Akrotiri

Most of these frescoes were on the upper floors only, although Xeste 3 and Sector Delta have painted rooms on the ground floor as well (Marinatos 2015: 54). It is likely that the painted spaces served a more public function either for reception or dining (Marinatos 2015: 47). That said, there are also a number of frescoes found in more mundane room-types which a modern observer wouldn't consider part of the public sphere, such as Room 4 in the West House where the most likely function of the space was gutting fish (Blakolmer 2018: 149). Many of these rooms also revealed cult vessels such as libation jugs, nipped ewers, and ornamental rhyta which suggests at least some of the painted rooms at Akrotiri occasionally served a cultic function (Marinatos 1985: 219). As a result, it becomes clear that the images and their presentation at Akrotiri likely play an important role in the everyday culture and activity of its inhabitants. Excavations at Akrotiri continue still and the site, where some of the frescoes are preserved or restored *in situ*, is usually open to the public. The rich, albeit fragmentary, archaeological record uncovers new connections and insights into multiculturalism with each season's excavations.

## 2.4 Frescoes

Evidence of wall paintings of various types have been found throughout the Cyclades, on Crete, in Egypt, and in Syria from as early as the Neolithic period (Chapin 2010: 223; Televantou 2018: 43). Ranging from rock-paintings to painting on dry gypsum and limestone, wall painting appears to have been a universal form of communication that spread throughout the Aegean civilizations. This investigation will look at the frescoes excavated at Akrotiri in order to begin to understand the varied cultural influences on its art and, more generally, its lifestyles. Frescoes are found throughout the Aegean settlements, and Chapin (2010: 223) claims that only 5–10% of the compositions at the site of Akrotiri survive to the present day which makes restorations particularly problematic. Many reconstructions are speculative which leads to potential errors and imaginative interpretations of the original images (Chapin 2010: 223). In particular, the wet-lime plaster technique most commonly seen at Akrotiri in the Bronze Age meant that frescoes could more easily be chipped off and so fragments are often found in contexts where they were likely used as filler material or refuse (Chapin 2010: 223). This, in turn, means that the architectural catalogue is often very complex. This style of ‘true fresco’ is found at Thera as well as Tell Kabri, Knossos, and Alalakh, showing how widely spread the technique was in the Aegean network (Winter 2000: 750). Some of the earliest uses of this artistic medium can be found date to the Middle Minoan period, and the frescoes depicted themes and stylistic conventions focusing on the human figure, various flora and fauna, as well as abstract patterning (Chapin 2010: 224). It is also to this time that the Saffron Gatherer Fresco from Knossos (Figure 3.14) is dated, a theme which can be seen in two of the frescoes from Akrotiri, in particular the Seated Goddess and Gatherers compositions found in Room 3 of the first floor of Xeste 3 (Figure 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; Chapin 2010: 224).

Numerous wall paintings have been excavated from the houses at Akrotiri. The attention to detail and regularity gave the idea of professionalism in all spheres thus suggesting that the use and production of frescoes was not exclusive to the elite (Chapin 2010: 228; Marinatos 2015: 47, 54). Upper level, main wall, and floor level decorative zones can be identified (Chapin 2010: 224; Marinatos 2015: 23). This range of surfaces meant that depictions could be miniature, life-sized, or somewhere in between (Chapin 2010: 224). Often, this also meant that the upper areas of walls depicted border designs which were stylized and geometric in nature. A clear example of this is seen in Sector Beta at Akrotiri as black, white, and red bands can be seen along the tops and bottoms of these frescoes serving to outline and highlight the images in the centre of the field of view, for example the Boxing Boys and Antelopes in room B1 (Figure 5.1; 5.2; 5.3)<sup>7</sup>. In some cases, the subject of a fresco will span across more than one wall, surrounding the viewer as the image ignores corners and spatial limitations,

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 5: The Nature of Sector Beta below for more detailed discussion of Sector Beta.

generating a ‘total environment’ and creating a curated space with the experience of the viewer in mind (Chapin 2010: 226). In most instances, this occurs with natural landscapes such as the antelopes in Sector Beta at Akrotiri (Figure 5.1; 5.2).

Similarities to this style can be seen in the composition of frescoes at Minoan, Egyptian, and Anatolian sites, as well as at other West Asian locations. Fragments from apartments in Mari show the multiplicity of frescoes and also displays a range of specific themes seen at Akrotiri as well, namely lion hunts and battle scenes as in the West House, and the worship of ritual deities as in Xeste 3 (Winter 2000: 747). These themes are recognizable at more Neo-Assyrian sites such as Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad (Winter 2000: 747). There are also similarities to some of the Egyptian palace structures, particularly those dating to the times of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (Bietak 2018a: 28). This period in Egypt coincides with the height of trade and contact with Minoan settlements and civilizations as shows through the existence of Keftiu delegations in tomb paintings (Bietak 2018a: 28; 2018b: 239). According to Bietak (2018b: 239), this contact between Egypt and Crete resulted in the import of Minoan styles and motifs, as well as the appearance of fresco painting itself. Fragments of frescoes done in an Aegean style have been found at Tell el-Dab’a which appear to have been done in the same style and on the same material as was used at Thera, as well as on Crete and some more neighbouring islands (Bietak *et al.* 2012/13: 142). The existence of these fragments in North Africa shows how widely identifiable and distinct the style of the corpus is (Bietak *et al.* 2012/13: 142).

It is interesting to note Koehl’s (2008: 270-273) claim that Cycladic painters were much freer to explore stylistically than their Cretan or West Asian counterparts, and that this allowed them to develop a “new artistic vocabulary” which was then applied to Akrotiri’s wall paintings. Winter (2000: 755-6) describes the style as a “reflection of the exuberance of life and nature,” a vivacious description of the style indeed. In particular, the vibrancy of the style creates inviting spaces which “both promise and provide pleasure” while still embedding the space with rhetoric and purpose (Winter 2000: 755-6). Often, this purpose has religious sub-text, but at Akrotiri it is unclear if this is always the intent as spaces which decorated with a ‘total environment’ of as the monkeys of Sector Beta don’t seem to serve any apparent religious purpose. Thus, the global context of the frescoes at Akrotiri develops complexity and interpretation becomes hazy.

Akrotiri subscribed to and made use of a number of the style formats present throughout the region, but it can also be noted that a unique conceptualization began to develop there through the fusion of these surrounding styles. For example, the depiction of the female seated goddess figure at Akrotiri (Figure 3.2; 3.15) may have influenced Egyptian conceptualizations of nurturing goddesses just as

much as the Egyptian goddesses may have influenced the one at Akrotiri. Depictions of this goddess figure, if she is indeed divine<sup>8</sup>, may suggest a practiced monotheism with this female deity at the centre of it which sets her apart from other polytheistic societies in the region (Marinatos 2015: 11). The goddess figure also appears in the seated goddess position, a stylized form seen in a number of West Asian depictions of goddesses<sup>9</sup>. Representations of her at Akrotiri have her surrounded by flora and fauna which results in a strong association of the goddess with nature. In fact, when considering the role of nature, it is apparent that the artists at Akrotiri were particularly environmentally conscious (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 173). Theran painters used both native and foreign fauna and flora in their frescoes in order to communicate their ideas (Doumas 2018: 29). Often, there would also be emphasis on only one element, only one type of plant or flower in any given composition (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 173). Examples of this are especially notable in Sector Beta where compositions of antelope and monkeys feature prominently, among others, as well as the compositions of lilies and papyrus in the House of Ladies and Sector Delta respectively. As such, the beginnings of individual art and interpretation can be seen at Akrotiri.

Further regional similarity can be seen in the colour palette used. Particularly, the shades of blue used on the Cycladic and Cretan wall paintings were synthesized from copper compounds, just as the blues used in Egyptian art (Chapin 2010: 225). Reds, browns, oranges, yellows, and ochres were made from iron oxides, while white came from lime and black from charcoal (Chapin 2010: 225). Other colours were made through the mixing of these pigments and Aegean art usually used solid colours in one hue rather than shades (Chapin 2010: 225; Georma 2019: 43). That said, Theran painters were unique in their application of colour as they diluted basic colours with lime water in order to achieve different hues which added depth and intricacy to their work (Georma 2019: 43). Also, interesting to note is the use of the Egyptian colour conventions for skin tones which was visible in Cycladic and Cretan frescoes. Women were painted in lighter shades – most commonly white – while men were painted to have darker, redder skin tones (Chapin 2010: 225). This, too, then suggests communication across the Aegean through art.

The stylized paintings which can be seen across the Aegean network have led to the speculative existence of “travelling workshops” or “pattern books” which developed and gained popularity throughout the region (Chapin 2010: 231). Theran painters also abide to these rules of artistic production, applying shared skills while demonstrating individual style (Georma 2019: 42). This idea of travelling artisans becomes less hypothetical when considering poems such as Homer’s *Odyssey*, for example, wherein travelling artisans and poets wandered between hubs and centres in search of work, consequently affecting and being affected by other wandering workers as well as local concepts

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3: The Goddess of Xeste 3 for a discussion of this figure’s divinity.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 3: The Goddess of Xeste 3 for a discussion of this image in Theran and neighbouring imagery.

and ideas (Hom. *Od.* 16.383-6; Georma 2019: 41). Indeed, the miniature frescoes of Akrotiri's West House, in particular the Flotilla Scene, may be indicative of an epic tradition in the Bronze Age Aegean network, although understanding and interpreting this possibility is difficult due to the limited extant remains of narrative images at Aegean sites (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 157). These visual narratives may have acted as unifiers in the Aegean diaspora, connecting people through common stories and ideas (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 164). The existence of such miniature narrative art on Crete, Thera, and West Asia, suggests that this narrative diaspora extended beyond territories that are typically considered under Minoan thalassocracy, suggesting that the presence of "Minoan" art and style need not be a direct indicator of Minoan supremacy at any given site.

Further evidence in favour of the travelling artisans is seen in the remains at Malqata and Ezbet Helmi which suggest that Minoan artists were employed, and remains found at Tell Sakka and Tell Bourak suggest that Egyptian artisans had a stronger influence (Bietak 2018a: 30). This is particularly interesting as it moves the narrative away from travelling artists who were well versed in Minoan styles, and expands the scope of these artists to encompass even more cultures and diversity, drawing on Egyptian and surely West Asian influences and catalogues as well. Consequently, it is possible to consider avenues of connection between these spaces and evaluate the strength of these connections. Winter (2000: 755) posits that this interconnected network is reflective of a "common connection back to Crete" or some other intermediary between dominating cultures in the Aegean. This may be an oversimplification of the network as it is evident that the passages of communication were complex and varied between locations and within the specific contexts thereof. Even so, it is possible to infer that an 'artistic vocabulary' existed which was commonly understood amongst the Aegean peoples as motifs, conceptions, materials, and styles are shared at different locations bordering on the Aegean Sea and its trade networks (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 4). This influence would depend largely on who commissioned an artwork and for which space, resulting in a collaborative, custom artwork rich in iconography and ideology. As a result, images would have been used as a medium for the transmission of ideas, meanings, and concepts across distant regions and diverse cultural backgrounds (Georma 2019: 41). Thus, the notion that ideas travelled across the Bronze Age Aegean through art is not unrealistic as both tradesmen and craftsmen roamed the ancient world, exchanging techniques, customs, and concepts at each location they visited.

### **Chapter 3: The Goddess of Xeste 3**

Xeste 3 is one of the largest houses at Akrotiri and is located towards the southern edge of the excavated site. It is a large and complex three-story building and contains more frescoes than have been found at any other location in Akrotiri (Davis 2008: 192). The themes and architecture of the building suggest it serves a ritual purpose and was likely accessible to the larger community rather than only one individual or family (Vlachopoulos 2008: 454). The house also seems to be comprised of gendered spaces, consisting of either all-male or all-female motifs, or genderless patterning, such as the type seen on the top floor. This may suggest that ritual activity was also gendered. Indeed, other ritual spaces at the site, such as those at the West House and in Sector Beta, also appear to be gendered if we consider the iconography as a marker of this. Whether the spaces themselves, or only the activities they represent, were gendered is unclear. Interpretation of the spaces and their accessibility is difficult to ascertain as there is no textual evidence which could act as a guide at Akrotiri (Vlachopoulos 2008: 454). Additionally, much of the imagery is fragmentary and thus interpretation or intended iconography is difficult to identify. For this reason, this chapter will focus on the images of the 'goddess' figure, those images which survive and have been restored to a more significant degree.

The images of this 'goddess' figure seem confined to the north-eastern corner of the house, and indeed the fresco compositions appear on the northern and eastern walls of the ground and first floor of the building (David 2008: 192). The seated female figure is identified as the goddess in question because of similar images in the Aegean region consisting predominantly of the *potnia theon* motif, and a number of motifs associated with her are prevalent throughout the frescoes at Akrotiri. The identification of the goddess' divinity, as well as her role as a goddess of both flora and fauna will be discussed. Both frescoes are found in Xeste 3 in the south-western section of the archaeological site. According to Marinatos (2015: 121), this building bears resemblance to Minoan sacred houses, as the ground floor room has an image of a shrine with goddess-symbols and her associations, and both goddess frescoes, as well as the rooms as a whole, showcase only female figures, animals, and plants alongside the goddess.

### 3.1 First Floor: Room 3

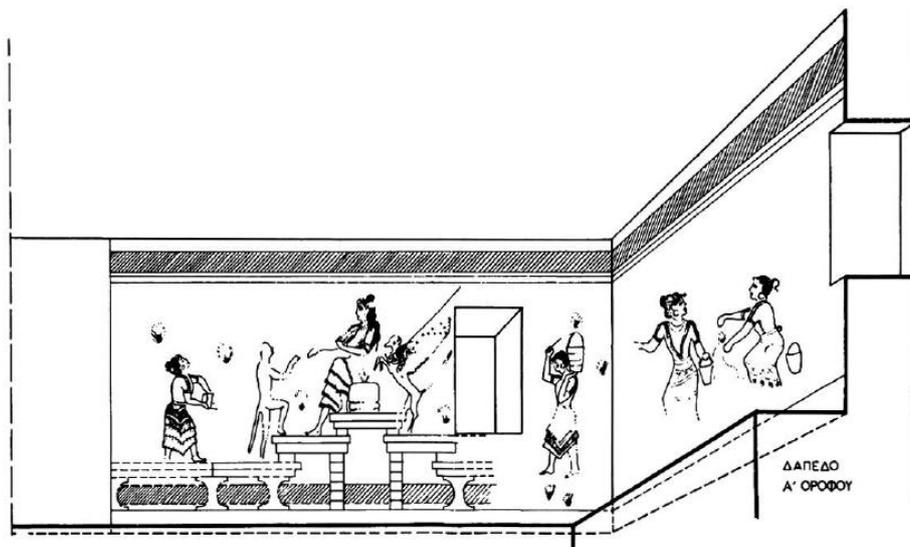


Figure 3.1 Sketch rendering of the Seated Goddess and Crocus Gatherers. First Floor, Room 3. Xeste 3. Akrotiri.

On the northern wall is an image of a seated goddess. A window opening separates this composition from a female figure who carries a basket towards the goddess figure. On the eastern wall are two more women whose body language also suggests they are moving towards the seated goddess. She is clearly the focal point in the room's frescoes, and it is also evident that each panel is related. The shared terrain and background of floating flowers serves to unify the images into one composition of meaning. The composition of the room is seen in Figure 3.1. The frescoes in this room are life-sized which likely served to engage the viewer in the activity depicted in the room, as well as to emphasise the monumentality thereof. It is possible that this room served as a space in which to honour the goddess figure, whether through festival activity or ritual education, and potentially initiate women into womanhood and motherhood (Vlachopoulos 2008: 453).

### Seated Goddess



*Figure 3.2 Seated Goddess. First Floor, Room 3. Xeste 3. Akrotiri.*

The focal panel in Room 3 of the first floor (Figure 3.2) shows a female figure on the right side of the composition. This figure is larger than the other female figure in the composition and she is seated on what looks to be three pillows or sacks atop a stepped platform. She wears a detailed gown, and her right breast is exposed. She is wearing hoop earrings, a necklace of birds, possibly ducks, and a necklace of dragonflies. She is also wearing bracelets. There is a red floral marking on her cheek. Her long black hair is kept away from her face by means of a blue headband and red beaded ties. This figure is bare footed. Her left hand rests on her left leg and holds red flowers which are most likely saffron stems. Her right hand is stretched in front of her and appears to be reaching for the red flowers that a blue monkey is offering her. The monkey's left leg is stepping onto the lowest step of the platform and its left arm is extended, holding the red flowers out to the seated figure. This monkey is a uniform blue, its facial features are unclear.

The seated female figure is flanked by a winged creature, most likely a griffin. The creature's front legs are on the pillows that the seated figure sits on while its back right leg is on the highest step of the platform and the back left leg is one step below that, on the same step that the monkey is moving towards as well. The creature has ornately decorated wings spread out behind it and its head is tilted upwards, also seemingly looking toward the seated figure's head. On the far left of the composition, behind the monkey, is another female figure. Her hair is tied, and she wears colourful clothes. Her torso is slightly inclined forward, and she appears to be emptying a basket into a larger pan. She is looking up towards the other female figure in the composition. She is notably smaller and dressed in duller colours than the seated figure. There are red flower shapes floating in the background of the

image, filling negative space. There is a thick red band and thin black band along the bottom of the image, while the inverse is seen at the top.

### Gatherers



*Figure 3.3 Gatherer.  
First Floor, Room 3.  
Xeste 3. Akrotiri.*



*Figure 3.4 Gatherers. First Floor, Room 3. Xeste 3. Akrotiri.*

To the right of the focal panel (Figure 3.2) is a window, beyond which a singular female figure appears (Figure 3.3). She is facing towards the right, in the direction of the seated figure, but is looking down. She carries a basket of flowers on her right shoulder. On the eastern wall there are two female figures who are looking at one another (Figure 3.4). The figure on the left's torso is facing to the left, and her right hand is outstretched towards a blossom on a hill. Her left arm is at her side. The figure on the right's body is also facing to the left, and both her hands are outstretched towards a different blossom on a different hill, between her and the other figure. This figure also has a partially shaved head, with the shaved part of her head being blue while the rest of her hair is black. All three women wear colourful skirts and appear to be barefoot. They are wearing bracelets, anklets, and earrings. Their hair is ornately styled. They are walking on a hilled surface which is blue at its peak, with red and orange panels below. There are floating flowers in the background. A black band runs along the top and bottom of the composition.

### *The Issue of Divinity*

The seated female figure in this image is clearly distinguished from the other women in the room. She is both larger and higher up than the other figures creating a physical distinction indicating she is

perhaps of a higher class or constitutes royalty (Marinatos 1985: 224). Additionally, the monkey and griffin act as a barrier between her and the other women, suggesting a possible metaphysical distinction indicating she may be divine (Marinatos 1985: 224). The griffin touches the highest part of the platform, alongside the seated figure, which suggests that her status is closer to the divine realm inhabited by the griffin than the human realm inhabited by the monkey and gatherers who are on lower ground (Marinatos 2015: 112). Interesting to note here is that the monkey is stepping up towards the goddess, placing it in a liminal space between the human and divine figures in the scene. Because of this two-fold separation, both the seated figure's class and divine status seem distinct from the other figures in the room and so she can be recognised as a divinity. Interestingly, it is possible to say that the mythical griffin and the terrestrial monkey mediate around the goddess, one between her and the mythical realm, the other between her and the terrestrial realm (Marinatos 2000: 120; 2015: 112). The differentiation between this goddess figure and the other figures in the fresco is reminiscent of the ritual worship of deities seen in painting fragments from Mari, as well as the Syrian tradition of glorifying rulers (Winter 2000: 747; Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 157). A 'perspective of importance' is thus created wherein the seated female figure appears larger and more important than the other figures in the composition, either in a political or divine aspect (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 161).



*Figure 3.5 Cylinder seal impression with goddess, animals, and attendants. Syria.*

Of particular note in this distinction is the presence of the griffin, a mystical creature. Its placement behind the goddess figure is also interesting as it appears she has wings of her own, thus further connoting her with the mystical. The griffin also appears to be protecting her form as a guardian of her divinity. Thus, the griffin is a powerful, mythical protector of and hunter for the goddess, and as such is subservient, albeit not subjected to her (Feldman 2006: 80; Shank 2018: 239). Similar images of the griffin's behaviour are seen in Syrian iconography as a comparable protector-servant relationship is showcased on a seal showing the mistress of animals (see Figure 3.5). This Syrian image bears a great likeness to the goddess at Akrotiri as both are seated and are attended by animals and people alike, although it is important to recognize that the Syrian image has a much more violent undertone. The Syrian seated goddess steps on the lion at her feet and holds a sword. The people who attend to her also appear to be warriors bearing arms. Conversely, the goddess of Xeste 3 appears to be more at peace with her surroundings, and the figures in her composition seem to be more adoring than attendant.

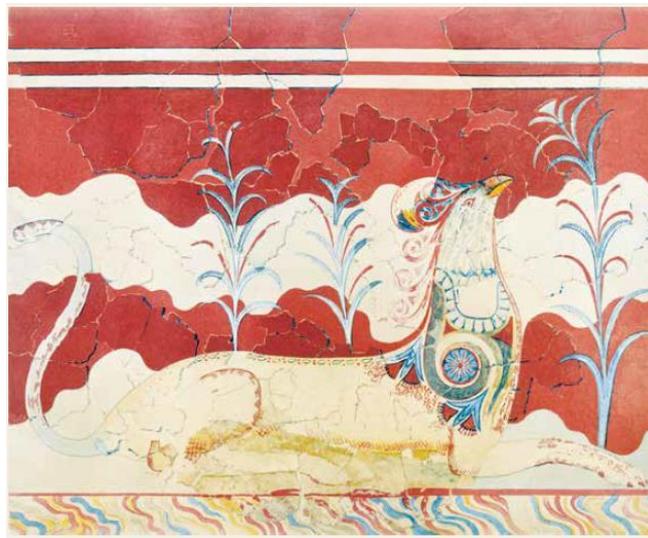


Figure 3.6 Griffin fresco from the throne room. Knossos.



Figure 3.7 Ivory plaque with griffin. Megiddo. Canaan.



Figure 3.8 Throne room with heraldic griffins. Tell el-Dab'a. Egypt.

Indeed, West Asian depictions such as the one in Figure 3.5 provide further evidence that the seated female figure is in fact divine. Younger and Rehak (2008a: 181-182) highlight that “griffins, sphinxes, Minoan genii, and winged agrimia logically belong to the divine world” and so the figures they are associated with must also be divine. Certainly, images of griffins exist throughout the Aegean trade network. Particularly remarkable is the griffin in the throne room at Knossos pictured in Figure 3.6 which was likely positioned behind a throne in the room and intended to act as a guardian of the royal or religious figure seated on the throne (Feldman 2006: 80). This griffin’s overall shape and colouring is similar to that at Akrotiri, but it does not have the wings that are so prominent in Figure 3.2. When comparing this Minoan griffin to those seen in West Asia and Egypt, it can be said that the griffin at Akrotiri is an amalgamation of signs. In particular, when looking at Figures 3.7 and 3.8 the styling of the wings of the griffins bear similarity to the griffin seen at Xeste 3 in that there is patterning and detail near the base while the ends remain unadorned. Important to note, though, is that Figure 3.8 is thought to be a Minoan painting in Egypt because of the style and colouring of the fresco (Doumas 2008: 131). When comparing this image to Figure 3.6, similarity is certainly seen, but a greater similarity to Figure 3.7, and indeed 3.2 depicting the goddess at Akrotiri, can be noted. What is particularly remarkable is that each of the griffins in Figures 3.2, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 has their heads pointed upwards and their bodies and proportions are markedly similar.

The griffin is seen in the West House as well (Figure 4.13), also strongly associated with nature, and more demonstrative of the predatory nature of the Aegean griffin as it chases prey along a river’s edge

(Feldman 2006: 80). When considering the connotation of the griffin in relation to the goddess in Xeste 3, it may be possible that the Nilotic scene in Figure 4.13 invokes ideas of the goddess, an interpretation which is assisted by the repeated image of ducks in this scene, as also seen in Xeste 3 as jewellery for the goddess figure as well as in the surrounding frescoes, most notably in the Marshland of Room 3b on the First Floor. Because of this, it is possible that the presence of the goddess is implied in the West House too as the griffin becomes affiliated with the goddess and may be interpreted as a motif which alludes to her presence (Tournavitou 2018: 507). That said, while the presence of a mythological creature may imply the presence of divinity, the implication is that when these mythological creatures are not present, it is more likely that the figure and scene is intended to be human or mundane<sup>10</sup> (Younger and Rehak 2008a: 181-182).



Figure 3.9 Pyxis Lid with Mistress of Animals. Minet el-Beidha, Tomb III. Syria.



Figure 3.10 Seal impression on a tablet case. Anatolia.

In broadening the scope of cultural influence, it is then possible to consider Cornelius' (2008: 5) criteria for identifying a goddess figure in Syro-Palestinian art, in which a likeness can be seen with the goddess figure in question at Akrotiri. He stipulates that a goddess can be identified by "her wings, crown [...], gesture (blessing, enthroned, smiting, or menacing), holding animals, [...], plants and sceptres, standing on animals [...] or if she is being worshipped," thus highlighting seven criteria from which the type of goddess, and possibly her name, can be inferred. Further indication of divinity comes through the theme of a seated female figure being attended to. Evidence of the seated goddess figure becomes important when comparing her to other seated figures in the region. Iconography of a seated goddess-queen figure is highlighted as a common image in the rulers and deities of West Asian cultures who are often shown seated. One such example is the Pyxis Lid with Mistress of Animals found at Minet el-Beidha in Syria (Figure 3.9). In this image a female figure is seated upon a mound and holds ears of wheat in her hand, offering them to two goats which flank her. This figure is identified as a Mistress of Animals, although her identity is not clear, and

<sup>10</sup> This assertion becomes particularly interesting when looking at other implied images of the goddess figure at Akrotiri, to be discussed later in this chapter.

although she is dated much later than the goddess at Xeste 3, her existence demonstrates the continued importance of a seated mistress of animals in the Aegean context, even when she cannot be named or specifically identified. Another example from Anatolia also indicates that the seated figure may be a god. In Figure 3.10 a procession of worshippers is being led to a seated god, indicated by this figure's larger size and adornment. From this, it becomes apparent that similar themes of female divinity can be identified from a number of West Asian locations, as well as Akrotiri.

In the case of the goddess at Akrotiri, in Figure 3.2 she is enthroned and has her hand extended in what may be a blessing or receiving gesture, is in the presence of both plants and animals and appears to be being worshipped, also appearing on a raised, throne-like platform. One could also say that the positioning of the griffin suggests to the viewer that she has wings of her own, although this is not the only interpretation of the griffin's presence. Hence, she fits well within Cornelius' (2008: 5) criteria for divine iconography in Syro-Palestinian art. This helps to identify the seated figure as divine, but also strongly associates the art at Akrotiri with Syro-Palestinian convention as motifs and themes are evidently shared between the two and so it is also possible that meaning is shared as well when considering the multiculturalism made possible by the vast Aegean trade network.

### *Potnia Theron*

Following the identification of the seated figure in Figure 3.2 as a divine feminine form, it is then interesting to consider what she may be a goddess of. The classification and naming of figures, both mortal and divine, is particularly problematic at Akrotiri because of the lack of inscription or unique iconographical identification<sup>11</sup>. That said, Younger and Rehak (2008a: 181) suggest this figure may be Artemis because of Linear B inscriptions from other locations. While the reading of this goddess as one of nature is highly likely, identifying her with the Greek divinity seems to me to be a form of confirmation bias which does not consider the various other cultural influences on the goddess at Akrotiri. This particular goddess, and indeed Artemis, are both identified as a mistress of animals, or *potnia theron*, which is a distinguishable theme in the Aegean artscape (Chapin 2010: 227). In Figure 3.2, the monkey and griffin which flank the goddess figure both have strong Knossian echoes but interestingly, the griffin at Akrotiri predates the griffin at Knossos (Marinatos 2015: 104). This allows for a discussion of which came first, and the consideration that the griffin at Akrotiri was possibly inspired by the griffins of West Asia and then subsequently transferred to Knossos and Minoan settlement as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> There are a lot of iconographies around the goddess figure, but none of it seems to be uniquely hers. There are parallel ideas and themes in the various Aegean cultures, as discussed, but none that identify this figure with a particular deity.

Here, it is important to note the type of mistress the goddess of the fresco in Xeste 3 is. She appears to have a harmonious relationship with her animals, rather than one of subjugation. This is an important point when considering the space she occupies within neighbouring conceptions of the *potnia theron*. In Minoan depictions, animals are submissive to the goddess figure in a form of affection rather than subjugation (Marinatos 2000: 199). Contrarily, West Asian, and later Greek conceptions of the goddess figure rather seem to stress the notion of conquering the wild, and so these relationships are depicted as more controlling (see Figure 3.5; 3.11). This brings the goddess at Akrotiri a lot closer to Minoan representations of the *potnia theron* who appears to have a more harmonious relationship with her animal subjects. There are frequent depictions of a *potnia theron* figure holding snakes, yet the goddess in question does not appear to have any relation to them (Marinatos 2000: 117). Additionally, the cow motif that is very prevalent in Cretan and West Asian art is absent from goddess representations at Akrotiri (Marinatos 2000: 119).

A comparable example from Ugarit likely depicts Anat, a goddess of love and war, seated on a throne and surrounded by animals and adorants or attendants (Figure 3.11; Cornelius 2008: 31). Anat as goddess of fertility and hunting bears a likeness to the Akrotiri goddess who is also associated with nature-nurture themes. Although in this example the figure is not seated on anything resembling a throne, her seated posture,



Figure 3.11 Winged Mistress of Animals seal impression. Ugarit.

elaborate dress, crown, and blessing gesture all indicate divine status (Cornelius 2008: 31). The example in in Figure 3.11 in particular shows a female divinity sitting on an animal, likely a beast of burden, while also seeming to control a predatory cat, possibly a lion. Thus, she appears to be in control of her animal subjects. In Figure 3.5 the enthroned female divinity bears a weapon, steps on a lion, and there are armed soldiers in front of her. This image is interesting as it also showcases a warrior-goddess of the *potnia theron* type, she steps on the lion to control it, and is surrounded by men which is in direct contrast to the goddess figure at Akrotiri who is surrounded by women (Marinatos 2000: 120). The attitude of these two figures differs from that of the goddess of Xeste 3, but they do help to associate the goddess at Akrotiri with images of the *potnia theron* as the use of space and figures is very similar in all three images.

More akin to the goddess at Akrotiri is the figure in Figure 3.5. This female goddess figure is seated upon a mountain – much like the figure in Figure 3.15 – and is feeding two goats (Cornelius 2008: 33). This figure is topless, bearing resemblance to the Minoan convention of showing bare breasted women, and indeed showing a parallel to the goddess in Figure 3.2, despite the fact that her hair and

diadem strongly suggest that she is a local deity and not a regional import (Cornelius 2008: 33). Each of these figures depict the *potnia theron* image, and a comparable likeness can be seen between these West Asian figures and the seated goddess of Xeste 3. This similarity is seen in the posture, composition, and comportment of the seated figures. That said, the goddess in Figure 3.2 is distinguishable from these examples of her West Asian counterparts so while there was likely some common influence in the composition of the images, it is not likely that the goddess at Akrotiri was intended to represent any of these figures in particular.

### *The Gatherers*

The remaining figures in the room also contribute to the composition and interpretation of the room as a whole. These figures are comprised of the female figures who are gathering flowers and the blue monkey who stands upright and is handing the goddess a blossom (Figure 3.2). This anthropomorphising of animals is typical in West Asian art, and less common in Minoan representations (Figure 3.12; Doumas 2018: 29; Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 166). This anthropomorphism is seen in another fresco in Xeste 3, in Room 2 of the First Floor where one monkey is seen to be playing an instrument, two hold swords and one more sits on a rock (Georma 2019: 38; Vlachopoulos 2008: 457). Depictions of monkeys in the Porter's Lodge are also seen to be in a worshipping pose in front of a shrine (Georma 2019: 38).



Figure 3.12 Monkey on Ivory. Anatolia.

In both of these locations the frescoes survive in a very fragmentary state making description and interpretation difficult<sup>12</sup>. The human-like depictions of the monkeys at these locations contrasts significantly with the natural animal behaviour they depict in Sector Beta<sup>13</sup>. This differentiation is likely due to the presence of divinity as in Xeste 3 the goddess is present and appears to be a central theme in the home, and at the Porter's Lodge the monkeys are performing religious ritual. Thus, the anthropomorphism of the monkey in Figure 3.2 is likely also an indication of the seated figure's divinity, and one can infer that the anthropomorphised monkeys at Akrotiri and potentially elsewhere connote a deity.

<sup>12</sup> Because of how fragmentary these images are, I have not included them in this study. I am unable to interpret the images with any certainty and rely on the writings of scholars to make sense of them. While the images are interesting and warrant investigation, I cannot interpret or understand them with any confidence within the scope of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 when Sector Beta is dealt with.

The human adorants in the room are all women who appear to be gathering flowers to be given to the goddess (Figure 3.3; 3.4). The colouring and shape of the flowers in Room 3 suggest that they are crocus blossoms. Additionally, it appears that the red stigma have been removed from these plants suggesting saffron, an important element of trade in the Bronze Age Aegean (Marinatos 1985: 224). The trade of saffron from crocus blossoms would have been a lucrative trade commodity for Akrotiri, particularly when considering the island to be a central trade port in the Aegean network (Marinatos 2015: 104). Indeed, Marinatos (2015: 104) suggests that the owner of Xeste 3 may have been somehow involved in the trade of saffron, and so the owner would likely dedicated spaces to the goddess in return for prosperity.

Notably, there are red floral motifs, most likely saffron, on the women's hands and ears suggesting they were specifically associated with saffron gathering and may connote a role they play in a ritual (Figure 3.3; 3.4; Marinatos 1985: 224). All of the women seem to be engrossed in the gathering activity or are interacting with one another except one, who appears behind the monkey in Figure 3.2 and is looking directly at the goddess figure. This suggests that the goddess may be an implied supervisor for the gathering of the blossoms, likely for ritual purposes. The ritual nature of the scene is also suggested by the partially shaved head of one of the gatherers, a motif seen in other locations at Akrotiri such as the West House and Sector Beta. In both instances the shaved-head connotes coming-of-age activities<sup>14</sup>, a motif often seen in Egyptian art at Deir el-Medina where young age was indicated by the sidelock of youth (Bietak 1996: 76; Dumas 2008: 125). This connotation may suggest a state of purity, and potentially the passing from one state to another through initiation as the figures with shaved heads at Akrotiri seem to be performing activities which may be interpreted as cultic in nature. Marinatos (1985: 224) proposes that the partially shaved head of the woman in Figure 3.4 may also be indicative of this individual's role in the goddess cult, possibly as a servant in her sanctuary.

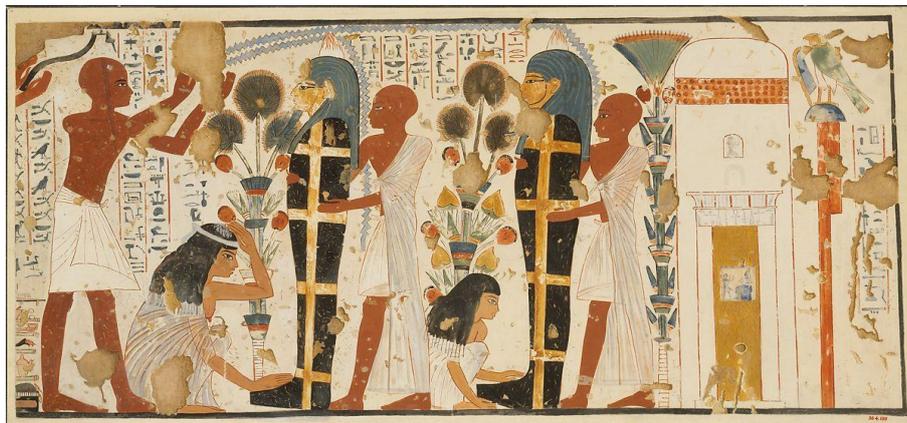


Figure 3.13 Purifying and mourning the dead, Tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky. Egypt.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4 for discussion of the West House and Chapter 5 for discussion of Sector Beta.

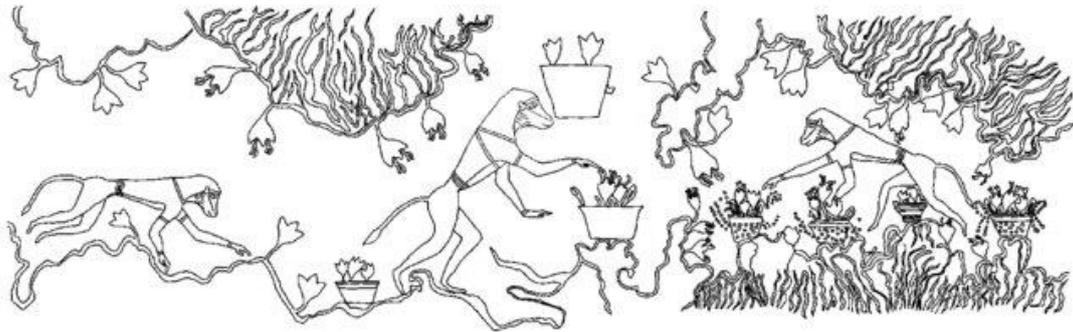


Figure 3.14 Line drawing reconstruction of the saffron gatherer frieze. Knossos.

Interestingly, it is not only the partially shaved head which is seen as an Egyptian convention used in the depiction of these figures. The physical styling of the female figures with two left or two right hands is reminiscent of Egyptian art, and the kneeling mourners in Egyptian funerary art are also stylistically similar to the women in Room 3 (Figure 3.13; Dumas 2008: 125; 2018: 29). Although not Egyptian, Figure 3.14 shows the saffron gatherer frieze at Knossos which also highlights the posture of the saffron gatherers and a similarity can be seen between their body language and that of the women in Xeste 3. Of note is that the gatherers in Figure 3.14 are monkeys and not human, which distinguishes the image but also connotes the blue monkey seen in Figure 3.2. This suggests a complex dissemination of ideas and concepts in this context. In addition, the landscape in Figure 2.1 is evidently religious and somewhat naturalistic, a theme apparent in Egyptian convention (Marinatos 1985: 221). The co-existence of the natural elements in the fresco regardless of season or location aids in this interpretation of an ideal religious landscape when all that is sacred to the goddess appears at once (Marinatos 1985: 221).

### 3.2 Ground Floor: Room 3

This room contains a lustral basin, the purpose of which is unclear (Davis 2008: 192). The north wall depicts a seated goddess figure who appears to be bleeding from her foot. She is flanked by two more female figures, one on either side, who seem to be giving her items. The east wall depicts a building, most likely dedicated to the goddess. The images in this room are suggestive of those seen in the room above on the first floor. As such, thematic connections can be identified.

Bleeding Goddess

*Figure 3.15 Bleeding Goddess. Ground Floor, Room 3. Xeste 3. Akrotiri.*

The focal image in Room 3 of the Ground floor (Figure 3.15) shows three female figures. The central figure is seated on a red and blue mound with yellow plants with red flowers protruding from it. Her body faces towards the right. This figure has one leg slightly extended in front of her and she is looking at her foot. A red line leads from the toe of this foot, and it may suggest that she might be bleeding. A red flower appears to bloom from the wound. Her right arm is extended towards the bleeding foot, while her left arm rests on her knee and supports her head. Her face is also turned towards the wound, and an ear of wheat protrudes from her forehead. A stylized red blossom protrudes from the back of her neck. She is dressed simply in white, red, yellow, and blue robes, and only one red hoop earring is visible. Her black hair is pinned back. The figure to the left has her body facing the central figure. She is dressed in a blue and yellow robe with one breast exposed. She wears earrings and necklaces. Her black hair is pinned back away from her face. Her left hand is extended towards the central figure holding a necklace. Her right arm and lower body are not preserved. The figure on the right has her torso turned towards the central figure, but her face is turned in the opposite direction. She is also dressed in blues and yellows and is seen to be wearing earrings. Her head is partially shaved indicated by blue scalp and only some black locks remain. Both arms appear to extend towards the central figure, but it is unclear whether the hands were holding anything as the lower parts of the arms are not preserved. There is a black band outlining the top of the fresco, a red band above that, and a central architectural indent.

## Sanctuary

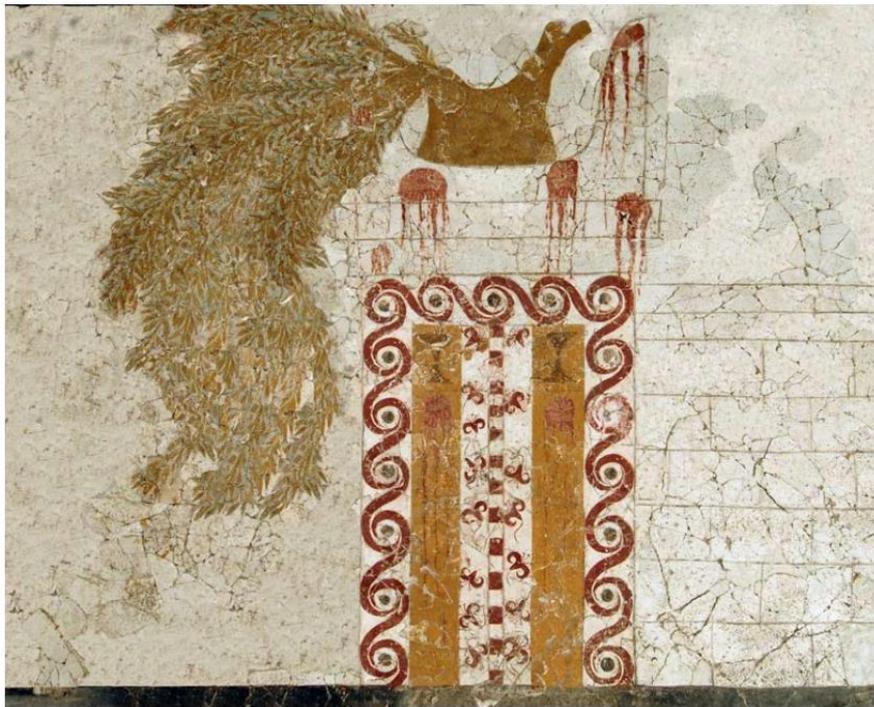


Figure 3.16 Sanctuary. Ground Floor, Room 3. Xeste 3. Akrotiri.

In the centre of the image is a frame with three sides. In this frame is a repetitive red spiral pattern. Inside of this there are two brown bands on either side of white space. The brown bands are simply decorated with black and red. The white space contains blossoms divided by a line made up of red and white bands. From the space above the frame a tree is protruding. It has lush branches growing towards the left side of the composition; however, the right side is bare. There are red stains dripping from the base of this tree and the space between the tree and the frame. The background is white, and the scene is on top of a black band which spans along the bottom of the wall<sup>15</sup>.

### *Further Issues of Divinity*

In this room the iconography of divinity is slightly less overt than on the First Floor, however the positioning of the central seated figure below the goddess figure on the floor above provides the first suggestion of a connection. Further signs of divinity can be seen in that this seated figure is slightly larger than the other two females present in the scene, the top of her head being at the same height as the two standing figures. This goddess figure is also seated while the other two figures are standing and appear to be giving her offerings. A further, more tenuous symbol of the divinity of the figure in

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<sup>15</sup> It is necessary to note here that some sources indicate the existence of “so-called sacred horns” in the composition as well, located above the tree, however the ‘horns’ are not pictured in the reconstructions and images which I have been able to access so I have not included them in the description (Marinatos 2015: 159).

Figure 3.14 can be seen in the motif of the wheat protruding from her head. It is common for Egyptian deities to carry their symbols on their heads, as seen in images of Isis and Hathor who both wear the sun disk and bull horns atop their heads, among others (see Figure 3.17). This concept of a crown also adheres to Cornelius' (2008: 5) criteria for wearing a crown as a marker of female divinity. Here it is also relevant to discuss the "so-called sacred horns" which are reported to appear in Figure 3.16 as well (Marinatos 2015: 159). The horns existence may also be a visual echo of figures such as Isis in Figure 3.17 who is also a female divinity associated with bull horns. This feminine association then contradicts the typically masculine reading of bulls and bull horns seen in bull-leaping frescoes of more Minoan origin. Notably, the horns in question are indeed an indicator from Cornelius' criteria, discussed in more detail above. Additionally, the seated position of the female figure surrounded by nature, and being worshipped or adored by human figures is another one of Cornelius' criteria, thus creating a strong argument for the crowned, seated woman in Figure 3.15 to be divine.



*Figure 3.17 Seated Isis figure. Egypt.*

In addition, Figure 3.14 further highlights the goddess' role in the growing of saffron through the depiction of the flower that blossoms from the bleeding wound. This strongly suggests that the goddess herself produces and is responsible for the growth of the crocus blossom. Thus, she is responsible for sustaining lives and livelihoods at Akrotiri (Marinatos 2015: 114). This brings in the idea of divine blood as a possible source for life, an idea which the red stamens of the crocus blossom were likely to reinforce (Marinatos 2015: 156). The association of blood is further demonstrated in Figure 3.16, a fresco of what appears to be a sanctuary of the goddess covered in blood (Vlachopoulos 2008: 451). An olive tree grows from this temple structure, and in turn further suggests the idea of divine blood giving life.

Similar ideas can be seen in other Aegean art where plants appear to grow from goddess figures. An example from Crete seen in Figure 3.18 shows poppies growing from a goddess figure's head (Marinatos 2015: 149). It is important to note the trade value of this plant as well, as this artistic and votive choice was surely intentional. Another example in Figure 3.19 from Egypt shows the a tree nursing Pharaoh Tuthmosis III next to the name of Isis, goddess of mothers, healing and magic, in glyphs while in the form of a breasted olive tree herself. The details of this interpretation are aided by the inscription. This completes the notion that a goddess figure could be a source of life, both plant and human, in both a literal and metaphorical sense (Marinatos 2015: 167). That these figures are related is evident, although conflating them into one may be an unjust generalization as each has her own iconography and unique cult, albeit with some conceptual similarity to her neighbouring goddesses.



Figure 3.18 Minoan poppy goddess. Knossos.

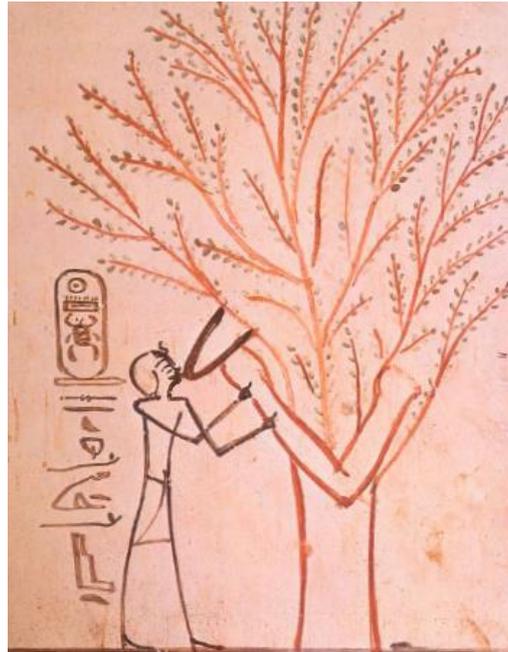


Figure 3.19 Pharaoh Tuthmosis III suckles the tree goddess Isis. Tomb of Tuthmosis III. Valley of Kings. Egypt.

### 3.3 Discussion

The focus placed on the goddess figure in Xeste 3 brings into question the cult activities which may have taken place on the island of Thera as well as the role which this goddess figure may have played. Defining the two figures in Xeste 3 as divine in these instances is particularly difficult as there are no “inscriptions, distinctive costumes, or identifying attributes” which clearly group this figure with the divine (Chapin 2010: 227). Notable is the existence of fragments representing a female figure, potentially divine, wearing a “flounced skirt and double anklets in full scale,” similar to the style of clothing the two female figures in Figure 3.2 and 3.15 (Bietak 2018b: 239). This blurring is important to keep in mind when considering cult activities at Akrotiri. The evidence that suggests a unified religion throughout the Cyclades in this period is scarce and mostly based on pottery (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 177, 179, 180). That said, Marinatos (2015: 165) identifies a Minoan Great Goddess who is patron of “regeneration and vegetation” and is also likened to Egyptian sun and nature deities. In the greater Greek context, this then likens the seated goddess figure at Xeste 3 to later Greek goddesses such as Artemis and Rhea.

Considering the goddess at Akrotiri, her singularity is important, although evidence of borrowing from other female deities in the region can be seen. According to Marinatos (2015: 11), this goddess borrows most notably from Nut, Hathor, and Isis who are all Egyptian nature-nurture deities. Evidence of this goddess is also seen at various sites at Akrotiri, more implicitly than here in Xeste 3. The presence of the griffin in the West House, the natural landscapes in Sector Beta, and the repetition of the duck motif are some examples which may be associated with the image of the goddess. Although these visual echoes are not overt, the viewer’s potential interpretation of the goddess in the

various spaces of Akrotiri should be kept in mind as the motifs associated with her are repeated in the various buildings at Akrotiri, including but not limited to the West House and Sector Beta.

Through looking at the theme of the goddess at Xeste 3, a trend of selective emphasis can be seen. Artists at Thera were conscious of their environments and would often times place emphasis on one specific aspect of nature, with complements from others (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 173). At Xeste 3, this emphasis is evidently on the crocus flower and its association with the goddess figure. This focus in the art, centring one aspect of nature is uncommon in Minoan representation and suggests either borrowing from other adjacent settlements or a uniquely Theran approach to art (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 173). When interpreting and discussing these two images, it is important to note that the larger seated figure in the first image is directly above the central seated figure in the second image, both appearing on the Northern wall (Marinatos 2015: 102). Additionally, these two central figures are both seated and being given gifts or offerings by other members of the scene. From these images, a recognizable iconography is created, and the composition becomes familiar to audiences so that even when each component of the scene is not present, the intended association is still potentially made. Thus, a curated space with a very specific artistic landscape is created. Because of this stylization, it is important to note that in the House of the Ladies at Akrotiri there is another fresco in Room 1 in which a female figure appears to be gifting a “Minoan skirt” to a missing figure. However, because of the fragmentary nature of this image, clear interpretation cannot be made, and identifying the recipient as a seated goddess figure, or possibly a robing scene is as of yet impossible (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 177). As such, only the two aforementioned frescoes of this kind at Akrotiri make overt allusion to this recognizable form as the central goddess figure is highlighted in both. Dumas (2018: 40) describes the human figure as the protagonist of wall-paintings in the Aegean, thereby “promoting the personality of the individual.” In the example of the goddess figure, this becomes especially evident as the focus on her in Xeste 3 enriches our understanding of Theran culture and religion as depicted throughout the archaeological site.

From this discussion it has become apparent that the goddess at Akrotiri draws influence from a number of female deities throughout the region and may have influenced the development of her counterparts as well. This would have been made possible and plausible because of Akrotiri’s role as a central trade port in the Aegean, facilitating conversation between the Cycladic, Cretan, and West Asian settlements. It is also because of the prosperity of this trade that it is likely this goddess came to prominence as the provider of trade goods and protector of crops. The goddess figure is also strongly associated with nature, and in particular griffins and anthropomorphised monkeys. She plays an important role at the site of Akrotiri and other implied visual echoes of her can be seen at various locations at the settlement.

Through the interpretation of Room 3 on the ground and first floors of Xeste 3, one can identify the beginnings of a stylistic trend. The blue monkey and griffin stand out as notable repeated themes at other locations in Akrotiri. There are also allusions to the natural imagery in Xeste 3, such as the colourful hill in Figure 3.15 which is seen in the colouring of the Flotilla scene in the West House (Figure 4.4), among others. The stylistic trend of having each room form a unique, iconographically rich diorama is also identifiable at the site. The imageries at Xeste 3 are echoed in the works of Egypt and West Asia, as well as Crete, suggesting a relative degree of intercultural communication across the Aegean trade network. Even so, the images of Xeste 3 appear to be synthesised in a unique way, apparently drawing on various influences to generate a uniquely Theran style and, thus, mode of interpretation and understanding. This is especially clear in the composition of Room 4 as the Sanctuary (Figure 3.15) proposes interesting parallels to Egyptian motifs and themes while the Bleeding Goddess (Figure 3.14) embodies Anatolian motifs of the seated goddess figure, the life-giving ability of divine blood, as well as the godly headdresses of Egypt. As such, the global identity at Akrotiri begins to become apparent, and the assimilation of the 'Other' into the artistic identity at the site may suggest a globalized location.

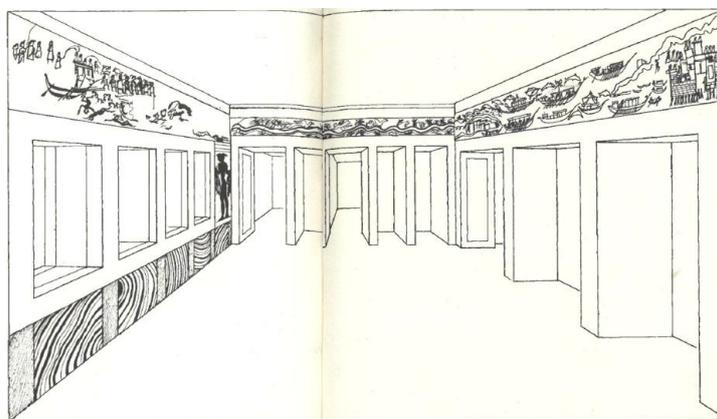
## **Chapter 4: The Liminal Spaces of the West House**

The West House at Akrotiri is one of five freestanding houses located near the centre of the excavation site (Doumas 1983: 51). In fact, Davis (2008: 191) has classed the West House as a mansion, something between a house and a palace, and argues that mansions like this one likely originated at Thera. The southeast side of the house faces the town square which a window and door on the ground floor open out onto (Doumas 1983:51; Davis 2008: 191). The West House has two stories with a section of a third story at the eastern end, and its freestanding structure is reminiscent of Minoan architectural standards (Morris 1989: 512; Hitchcock 2016: 19; Davis 2008: 191). The house itself is built in a “square-within-a-square” style, so that there is a central room which the rest of the house is centred around (Hitchcock 2016: 19). The ground floor appears to have been a multifunctional space comprised of storage space as well as relaxation and service areas (Hitchcock 2016: 20). A staircase at the entrance of the house leads upstairs to the most decorated rooms in the house, Rooms 4 and 5, both of which contain murals and frescoes of varying complexity and detail (Marinatos 2015: 67; Davis 2008: 191).

The extant frescoes in the West House, particularly those in Room 5, each have connotations of the aquatic or the mystical. The interconnectedness of these frescoes helps to potentially identify the purposes of the spaces they are in, as well as suggest potential identities for the owner(s) of the house. The frescoes in Room 5 consist of two fisherman figures and a miniature frieze. This frieze is divided into two distinct sections, namely a Flotilla (Figure 4.4) and a Nilotic (Figure 4.13) scene. The Flotilla scene is iconographically rich, making interpretation and understanding particularly challenging. The composition suggests ship processions and/or raids of coastal towns, while some interpretations suggest a Homeric episode, a nautical festival, or a nautical victory (Chapin 2010: 227-228). Each of these interpretations is plausible and selecting only one to be most plausible may be a disservice to the complexity and intricacy which the artist intended. Among these images in Room 5, nature plays an important role, which may be a result of Minoan influence, as in the Neopalatial period natural elements began to connote symbolic meaning and refer to specific places or instances (Georma 2014: 177). That said, the freedom of the artists on Thera stands out when compared to contemporaries of Cretan and Egyptian origin, a concept that is demonstrated in the intricacy and multiplicity of the miniature friezes (Georma 2014: 181). This identification with the exotic is suggestive of an expectation for the art of Akrotiri to conform to a Minoan standard due to the influence of the Minoan thalassocracy in the region. In the West House alone, griffins, felines, and deer are seen, each of which can be related back to neighbouring Aegean styles other than that of the Minoans (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 166). Consequently, a more complex interrelation in the Aegean context becomes apparent.

The presence of various frescoes in the West House also brings into question the role of the owner in the larger community at Akrotiri. Based on the number of maritime-related images on the walls of the West House, Marinatos (2015: 72) argues that the owner of the West House played a role in the island's seafaring, potentially as a fleet captain. Later suggestions that the owner was a trader of textiles are supported by the discovery of tools which may have been used in the production of any number of material items, including possible ship sails which would have played an integral role in the maritime industry (Hitchcock 2016: 18, 25, 27). Either way, the importance of the owner may help to explain the importance of the space within the community. Suggestions that the house may have had a more religious function are also notable, either as a religious structure itself, or as a representation of and homage to nautical ceremonies or processions (Hitchcock 2016: 24). A number of associations with the Minoan period, and evidence that Akrotiri was in fact a Minoan colony, have been identified<sup>16</sup>. Notably, Hitchcock (2016: 27) states that the frescoes in the West House demonstrate strong Minoan character and thus showcase the owner of the home's "desire to affiliate with, appropriate, and become culturally entangled with the Minoan civilization". This approach ignores all of the other cultural influences which are evident in the murals, particularly the Nilotic (Figure 4.13) scene where the majority of the imagery is reminiscent of West Asian and North African art styles and imageries, rather than Minoan ones. This is a potential result of the confirmation bias which is evident in much of the scholarship concerning Akrotiri. Regardless, the marine and supernatural themes throughout the house surely indicate that the home owner was likely part of the upper class, and had some affiliation with maritime affairs; however, whether this is through war, trade, or diplomacy is uncertain (Hitchcock 2016: 19). The West House thereby becomes a means of understanding community interaction at Akrotiri, and potentially understanding how far that community stretches throughout the Aegean network.

#### 4.1 Room 5



*Figure 4.1 Reconstruction of Room 5. West House. Akrotiri.*

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<sup>16</sup> See section 2.2 Minoanization above for more detailed discussion of the Minoan perspective in scholarship.

Room 5 of the West House contains the miniature frieze, consisting of both the Flotilla (Figure 4.4) and Nilotic (Figure 4.13) scenes, as well as two images of fisherman figures (Figure 4.17; 4.18). The composition of the room is shown in Figure 4.1. The miniature Flotilla scene ran along the top of the walls of Room 5 (Davis 2008: 192). On either side of the windows is one of the fisherman boys, much larger in scale than the miniature frieze. On the upper region of the eastern wall is the Nilotic scene, a riverside landscape with a variety of flora and fauna, both real and mythical (Davis 2008: 192). Moundrea-Agrafioti (2006: 72) notes a uniquely Theran style at Akrotiri when compared to other harbour towns, particularly those in the Cycladic islands. In particular, the use of white as the background colour stands out, as well as the emphasis on nature and natural landscapes (Moundrea-Agrafioti 2006: 72). The argument that the landscapes in question are on or of Akrotiri itself has also been made, and there is certainly some geological evidence which may suggest that this is the case as suggested by the topography of the island itself (Figure 2.2; Moundrea-Agrafioti 2006: 72; Hitchcock 2016: 23). The narratively dense miniature frieze with superimposed scenes and the layering of composite figures is also a composition identifiable as Theran in particular, although examples from West Asia and other Cycladic islands are also extant (Aruz 2008: 124; Moundrea-Agrafioti 2006: 72). Because of the Theran layering, the inference that the dense narrative in the West House refers to local landscapes is possible, but so is the inference that the narrative refers to more exotic landscapes further afield (Moundrea-Agrafioti 2006: 72).

### *Local Landscapes*

Miniature frescoes found in the Aegean have on more than one occasion been associated with specific locations or events, whether fictional or actual (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 57, 59). These miniature frescoes have begun to form part of a special category within Aegean paintings, and the interpretation of these images becomes increasingly complex (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59).

Most often, the miniature fresco will describe something local, thus something that has happened or is happening in the city in which the fresco is, or else a location very nearby (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). This is particularly evident in Knossian art, such as the example of the Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco (Figure 4.2; Strasser and Chapin 2014: 57). Another is seen in the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut wherein a multi-ship expedition is shown leaving from Egypt (Figure 4.3). Thus, inferring that the miniature fresco at

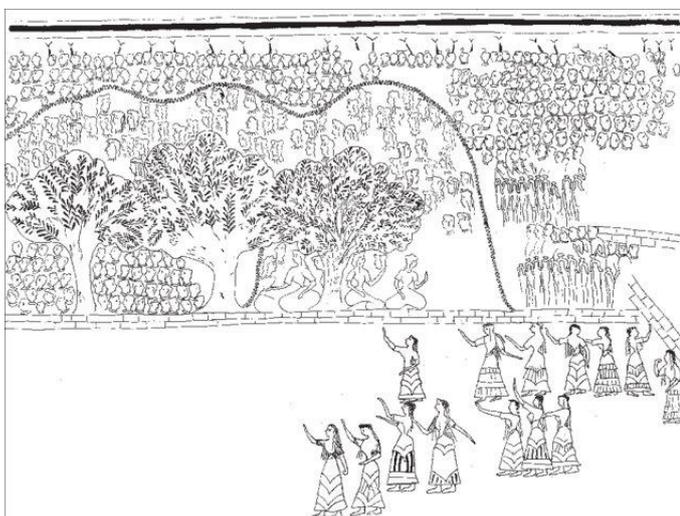


Figure 4.2 Sacred grove and dance fresco. Knossos.

Akrotiri is likely also a local representation is not unrealistic, and indeed Papageorgiou (2016: 96) claims that the miniature fresco in Room 5 of the West House “represents the settlement of Akrotiri in abbreviated form” after convincing argument. While that may be the case, modern interpretations and understandings of these representative images become problematic when taking into account our limited understanding of events and realities in antiquity (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). This difficulty is caused by the limited material record that has been preserved, errors in restoration, and in my opinion most critically, the biases modern scholars impose upon ancient experiences (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). Consequently, discussion and analysis of the extant frescoes at Akrotiri, with Akrotiri as the focus, is warranted.



Figure 4.3 Drawing of stone relief of Hatshepsut's voyage to Punt. Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut. Deir el-Bahri. Egypt.

#### Miniature Frieze: Flotilla



Figure 4.4 Flotilla fresco on the south wall. Room 5. West House. Akrotiri.

The flotilla scene is iconographically rich. On the left in the background is a large palace-like complex surrounded by natural island outcrops. There are animals on this outcrop. A variety of ships of different sizes and styles are seen in the foreground. It is unclear which direction the ships are moving in. On the right is another island outcrop, albeit much smaller and less grand than the one on the left. There are people present at all locations in the fresco performing a range of activities. There are yellow and blue dolphins in the background, most of which are facing towards the right.

### *Nature Represented*

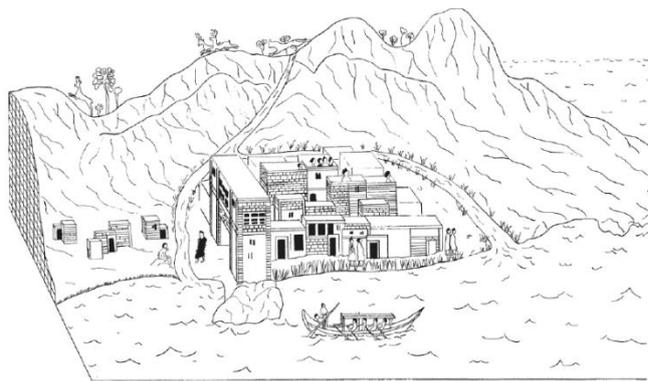


Figure 4.5 Perspective drawing of Town IV Miniature Frieze.  
Room 5. West House. Akrotiri.

Figure 4.5 provides perspective on the topography of the left-hand town in the Flotilla scene (Figure 4.4) and demonstrates the possible layout of the town. While this doesn't coincide entirely with the known layout of Akrotiri, it is important to consider that the two-dimensional rendering need not be entirely accurate, and the town depicted may be representative of the idea of Akrotiri rather than necessarily depicting the location

itself. When looking at the features of the settlement on the west side in the flotilla scene, there are a number of similarities to the geological and geographical features, before and after, the eruption of Thera (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 57). Principally, the representation of rock and imitation of stone suggests an attention to detail concerning the island's features (Figure 2.2; Aruz 2008: 124). This layering of stone is suggestive of the volcanic deposits on the island which create layered geological strata typical of the Thera caldera (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). These two features are typical in Thera iconography likely because of the local soils and mountains, however similarly mountainous styles are attested at other sites in Egypt, West Asia, and Crete (Aruz 2008: 124). In particular, fragments from Tell Kabri piece together a miniature fresco that bears a likeness to the one at Thera in the representations of the sea, boats, and architecture in terms of both patterning and colours (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 77; Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 157). In fact, the largely Mesopotamian themes of lion hunts, battle scenes, and ritual worship are reflected in the Flotilla Scene at Akrotiri (Figure 4.4) which may have served an "administrative, bureaucratic, industrial, ceremonial, and residential" purpose within the space (Winter 2000: 747). This multiplicity becomes particularly apparent when encompassing the entirety of the West House's compositions, drawing a clear parallel to West Asian representations and frames of reference in the representation and purpose of art at Akrotiri. The representation of similar geological features in West Asian art is significant, as

the common use of colour and composition demonstrates an intercultural communication in which Thera may well have been the influencer rather than the influenced.

This cultural interchange brings into question the iconographical echoes seen in the Flotilla Scene (Figure 4.4). Miniature frescoes have not been commonly found within the Aegean network, and so comparing the scenes that are available may provide some insight and understanding of the cultures individually, as well as their interactions with one another and the development of a globalized culture (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 157). Considering the resemblance between this scene at Akrotiri and those found at Crete and West Asian sites, the suggestion of a travelling workshop or workshops can be revisited (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 20). The miniature frieze representations at Thera, Knossos, and Tell Kabri, among others, seem to have the “absolute mobility in organic forms” which is particularly uncharacteristic of West Asian and Egyptian art (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 89) It is then interesting to note that the frescoes at West Asian sites such as Alalakh, Tell Kabri, and Avaris have more in common stylistically with the Theran style than with the typically Levantine style which is more rigid in its forms and representations (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 89). Niemeier and Niemeier (2000: 20) propose a cycle of iconographical images that shared ideologies but were still “executed by Cretan, not by Theran painters” at various sites along the Aegean network. This indicates the possible existence of travelling freelance artists who worked within a specific catalogue of images and had the capacity to carry across meaning in a particular way (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 19-20). Evidence in support of this is seen at Tell Kabri and Tell el-Dab’a as well as the more traditionally ‘Minoan’ sites across the Aegean, Thera included (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 19-20).

Within the marine motif, dolphins are a common image among Aegean cultures, suggestive of the archipelago environment and seafaring nature of many of the region’s cultures (Marinatos



Figure 4.6 Dolphin fresco. Knossos. Crete.

2015: 76). Similar depictions of dolphins with white bellies, blue backs, and a yellow separating line are seen at Knossos (Figure 4.6) and Kea (Figure 4.7). A painting at Kea also showcases similar dolphin imagery where the dolphins seem to have much more movement and seem more

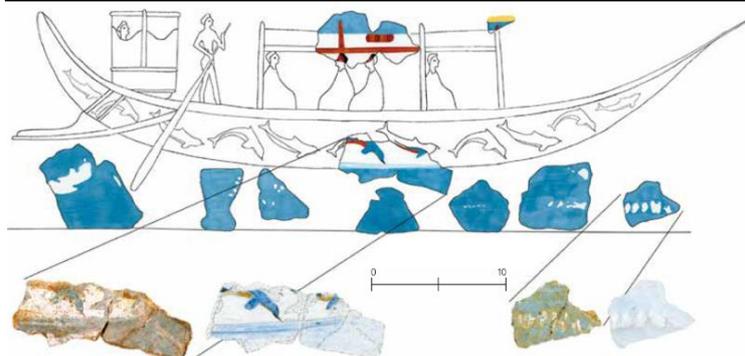


Figure 4.7 Reconstruction of ship from miniature frieze. Kea.

lifelike when compared to the “relatively static dolphins” depicted amongst the Thera ships (Morgan 2018: 282). Of particular interest here is the fact that these more dynamic dolphins actually decorate a ship’s hull. This dissimilarity is interesting, as it then raises the question of whether the stylized image of the dolphin came from real life observation or rather reiterations of an artistic convention (Morgan 2018: 282). At Akrotiri, these dolphins are seen in the flotilla scene of the miniature frieze, both as ship decorations and in the background of the image. There are a total of twenty-seven dolphins in this frieze, ten as ship decorations and seventeen as part of the background of the image (Televantou 2018: 60). Hitchcock (2016: 26) proposes that these dolphins – along with lions – suggest “the owner’s elite status in Akrotiri and his dominance over the sea” and potentially land as well, when considering the inclusion of the lion motif.

Another recurring image in the flotilla scene is the image of the lion which occurs more than once in the miniature frieze. There is a group of lions seen to be chasing smaller animals on the hillside in the background of the flotilla scene, and there are lions decorating the admiral’s vessel’s hull (Hitchcock 2016: 26). Their presence in Thera art is particularly of note as lions were not indigenous to the island (Aruz 2008: 124). Lions are often understood as a symbol of strength and a representation of high status even in antiquity (Hitchcock 2016: 26; Feldman 2006: 76).



Figure 4.8 Battlefield palette. Abydos. Egypt.

Feldman (2006: 76) suggests that the lion motif connotes power

in two ways. First, a person may compare themselves to the strength of the lion, suggesting to the viewer that the individual’s power is on par with the beasts (Feldman 2006: 76). Second, a person may imply that they are more powerful than the beast, and so this beast is subservient to them (Feldman 2006: 76). This is clearly demonstrated in Figure 3.5 wherein the female figure is a stepping on the lion, clearly demonstrating her power over the beast. Indeed, Mesopotamian and Egyptian rulers both sought to illustrate the power they possess as either equal to or greater than that of a lion, often in iconographical echoes, but also in texts and narratives (Feldman 2006: 76). In Aegean representations of the lion, the motif is also suggestive of military power in particular (Feldman 2006: 76). There is also persuasive evidence that lions represent power, and more specifically royal power, as can be seen in Minoan, West Asian and Egyptian art, and indeed an example of this is seen in the Battlefield Palette from Abydos (Figure 4.8; Marinatos 2015: 76; Hitchcock 2016: 26). A contemporary image



Figure 4.9 Masculine figure overpowering a lion. Dur Sharrukin. Akkad.

from Tell el-Dab'a is pictured in Figure 4.10 wherein a pride of lions is hunting a bull. When considering the earlier discussion of the power of the bull<sup>17</sup> it is clear that this image is also suggestive of the power of the lion motif as bulls appear as symbols of great strength and divinity in the Aegean art network. The lion motif is also evident in mythological art, as seen in Figure 4.9, of which one interpretation reads the image as Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, holding a lion, showing his power over the animal. Regardless of whether or not this figure is indeed the mythical king, Figure 4.9 serves to highlight the widespread importance of lions in the Aegean network. Similar images have echoed through history, most famously in the stories and depictions of Heracles wherein he slays two lions in order to prove his strength (4.11). Indeed, the image of the lion skin cloak becomes iconographically synonymous with the labours of Heracles. In addition, when considering the images of the *potnia theron* discussed in the previous chapter, the motif of subjugating lions is apparent, and the connotation thereof is typically divine (Figure 3.4; 3.10). This unified imagery of the lion throughout different regions, and indeed across time, further supports the conception of intercultural communication and trade with multilateral influence.



Figure 4.10 Lions chasing bulls. Tell el-Dab'a.



Figure 4.11 Wrestler's weight with Hercules and lion. Pakistan.

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 3: The Goddess of Xeste 3 for a discussion of bull imagery at Akrotiri.

### *Multipurpose Ships*

The variety of ships in the flotilla scene of the miniature frieze contributes greatly to the narrative density and lead to a wide array of interpretations. This complexity is only expounded by the fact that some of the ships in the scene are known to have multiple potential uses ranging from military activity to trade and potentially more (Hitchcock 2008: 26). One such use is a maritime procession, and so likely a celebration, similar evidence of which is also seen in fresco fragments at Kea (Figure 4.7; Hitchcock 2016: 26). These processional ships have paddlers and only one ship has its sails unfurled suggesting that they are sailing a short distance only (Hitchcock 2016: 26; Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). Marinatos (2015: 87) suggests that the short distances aid in the interpretation of the fleet as being a patrol along the coasts of the island, protecting from pirates and raids. There are a number of decorations on some of the ships which suggests a non-military purpose and once again indicate a procession or diplomatic venture (Strasser and Chapin 2014: 59). Some of the ships also appear to be carrying people and wares, thus suggesting a trade purpose (Abulafia 2011: 27). As such, the ships in the flotilla fresco are ambiguous, thereby showcasing the multiplicity of Akrotiri's role as a central trade hub. Interestingly, ships with multiple purposes and ambiguous interpretation are evident in other cultures as well, some of which are as far afield as the dragon boats of Southeast Asia which also had multiple practical and ceremonial purposes (Hitchcock 2016: 26). This association demonstrates that the Aegean trade network may have stretched far beyond the border of the Aegean Sea and indeed may have been impacted by a variety of peripheral civilizations.

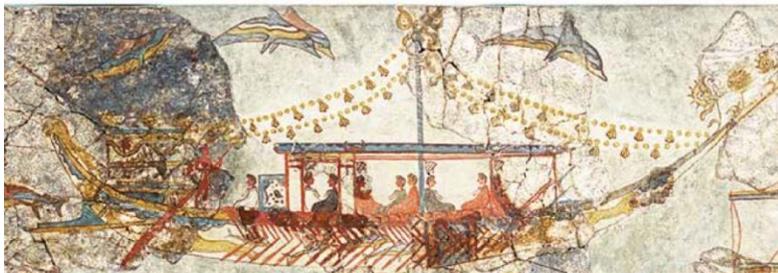


Figure 4.12 Central ship of Flotilla scene. Room 5. West House. Akrotiri.

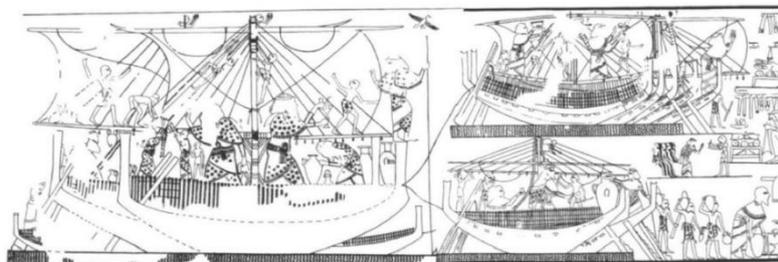


Figure 4.13 Drawing of wall painting with Syrian ships. Tomb of Kenamun. Thebes. Egypt.

Among the many ships in the flotilla scene, there is one in the centre that stands out. It is seemingly larger and more decorated than the others in the fleet and is commonly referred to as the admiral's vessel (Figure 4.12; Marinatos 2015: 76). This vessel's hull is decorated with dolphins along the centre and lions at either end. Marinatos (2015: 76) proposes that these depictions suggest that the admiral of the fleet, and

potentially the owner of the West House, are claiming "power over sea (dolphin) and land (lion)," a bold statement to be sure, and possibly an overinterpretation of the images that are present. A similar

story is seen in the Tell Kabri fresco which also dealt with a nautical theme and indeed “would have been dear to the heart of a ruler of a coastal polity” as is suggested by the composition at Akrotiri as well (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 165). The admiral on the ship in the West House is seated in a cabin on a throne made of cow hides, the only one among the fleet (Marinatos 2015: 76). This central figure’s physical appearance is also distinct from the other captains of the ships. It seems that the captain of this ship has an affinity for Knossian motifs as evidenced by the dolphin and lion symbols on the ship, as well as the lily emblem (Marinatos 2015: 79). Considering that the lion and lily motifs are not exclusively Knossian, this may suggest that the admiral of the fleet is designed to stand out in the fresco’s composition and thus its interpretation rather than indicate any particular association. In fact, images of lilies, often times clustered in groups of three as seen at Akrotiri, are clearly depicted at Knossos, Ayia Triada, Amnisos, and Trianda as well (Feldman 2006: 85). As mentioned previously, it is likely that the citizens of Akrotiri came from various different cultures along the Aegean trade route and its peripheries, and so the notion that the captain of the fleet was foreign or had foreign affiliation does not exclude the remainder of the figures in the composition, and potentially also the people who lived at Akrotiri, from being foreign as well.

Notably, the entire fleet’s ships are decorated individually, in various styles and to varying degrees of detail. Besides the admiral’s vessel, there is one more decorated with banners, another five that are similar in size and composition albeit slightly plainer in decoration, as well as four significantly smaller and plainer vessels with fewer people on them and looking more like fishing vessels than trade or military vessels. Strasser and Chapin (2014: 59) suggests that the variation in these eleven ships is indicative of a fleet rather than a continuous narrative composition. I would further suggest that the flotilla scene may then be representative of the scope of activity which could have taken place at Akrotiri ranging from the more processional admiral’s vessel to the vessels laden with figures in military attire, to the smaller fisherman’s vessels, each forming part of the maritime industry at Akrotiri. This is particularly plausible because it is likely that the artist could view the harbour through the vantage point in the window of Room 5. A similarly layered image showing Syrian ships seems to showcase a number of simultaneous activities, although it seems each relates to the Syrian relationship with Egypt (Figure 4.13). Similarly, Figure 4.3 also seems to express bustling activity, albeit with only the expedition to Punt as the end goal. This is different from the fresco at Akrotiri which demonstrates more than one goal and various activities.

Thus, the notion that the ships in the miniature frieze form part of a “rich pictorial repertoire” that may convey more than one narrative can be ascertained (Marthari 2018: 215). Further evidence of this rich repertoire can be seen in the various decorations on the ships. One ship is decorated in moths which may be indicative of the textile industry at Akrotiri because of the role they played in silk weaving, and as such may suggest that this ship in particular is a trade vessel in the flotilla scene

(Hitchcock 2016: 27). Another suggestion is that the star motif on some of the ships is indicative of cotton imports and further supports the notion that parts of the fleet are depicted as trade vessels (Hitchcock 2016: 28). The various types of attire worn by the people across the scene is demonstrative of a potential cloth production and textile centre at Akrotiri, while also suggesting different cultural contacts between people dressed in different styles (Hitchcock 2016: 28).

The people in the flotilla scene also aid in understanding the multiplicity of the Flotilla scene. In particular, it seems that the different groups of people in the scene are not necessarily interacting. For example, the people in the eastern settlement are not interacting with, or even seem aware of, the soldiers on the boats (Hitchcock 2016: 25). A group of people are at the port in the fresco are either watching the ships depart or arrive, the purpose of their observation is not clear from their behaviour or dress and so it is not possible to say definitively which aspect of the fleet is being observed (Marketou 2018: 266; Younger and Rehak 2008b: 179-180). On the western end of the frieze two distinctively dressed groups of people face each other on a hill (Marinatos 2015: 88). One of these groups display Minoan hair and dress styles while the other, significantly, does not (Marinatos 2015: 88). A female figure fetches water in a jar on her head, men shepherd sheep and goats, and soldiers walk in line, each highlighting a different aspect of life at Akrotiri (Younger and Rehak 2008b: 179-180). The absence of a “perspective of importance” in this miniature fresco is notable as there does not appear to be any one individual or section of the composition which is more important than the other (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 161). While there are clear narrative sections, there does not seem to be one which is far larger or more important than the other. This may be indicative of a lack of strict hierarchy in the Thera space, and indeed the lateral structure of the Aegean trade network (Cline and Yasur-Landau 2007: 161). This provides evidence that Akrotiri was an active port with a busy harbour where various types of intercultural communication likely took place.

#### Miniature Frieze: Nilotic



*Figure 4.14 Nilotic scene. Room 5. West House. Akrotiri.*

A meandering river runs across the scene. It is blue with yellow banks. There are animals and plants all along the river. Animals include a duck, a dog, antelope, and a griffin. Plants appear to be palms and papyrus plants. Shades of blue, yellow, and brown are used. The background is plain white.

### *Flora*

Images of palms and papyrus are accepted as markers of sub-tropical climates and the palms in particular are considered to be a result of West Asian influence (Aruz 2008: 124). These motifs are seen at Akrotiri as well, and the composition of small rivers and marshy land is suggestive of the types of ecosystems present and represented in the region making the identification of location more complex. That said, sediment analysis on Thera provides evidence that the exotic plants seen in the miniature fresco also grew on the island around a seasonal stream (Hitchcock 2016: 21). Thus, the suggestion that the Nilotic scene in Room 5 is in fact representative of Thera is possible but is not the only possibility.

### *Fauna*



Figure 4.15 Cat stalking a pheasant. Agia Triada. Crete.

A number of different animals, both predator and prey, are seen in the Nilotic scene (Figure 4.14). Most notably, a predatory cat, a winged griffin, birds, and deer are seen along the river banks. The predatory cat, likely a leopard, would have been indigenous to West Asia and so its representation on the island stands out (Aruz 2008: 124). Similarly, the deer and ducks were also not indigenous to the island, yet they play significant roles in the

composition of the scene and the ducks in particular may allude to the image of the goddess at Xeste 3 (Aruz 2008: 124). In fact, ducks are the second most represented bird at Akrotiri (Televantou 2018: 58). The Nilotic scene also consists of palm trees and papyrus which are suggestive of distant landscapes rather than Thera or even Minoan ones (Aruz 2008: 124). That said, Marinatos (2015: 90) claims that the Nilotic scene is a “visual quote” highly suggestive of Minoan character and indeed resembles an image from Agia Triada on Crete (Figure 4.15). There is also a comparison to be made to an Egyptian depiction of a predatory cat who also appears to be mid-hunt (Figure 4.16). As such, the image of the predatory cat alludes to both Egyptian and Minoan motifs.



Figure 4.16 Wall painting with leopard. Tell el-Dab'a. Egypt.



Figure 4.17 Menna and family hunting in the marshes. Tomb of Menna. Egypt.

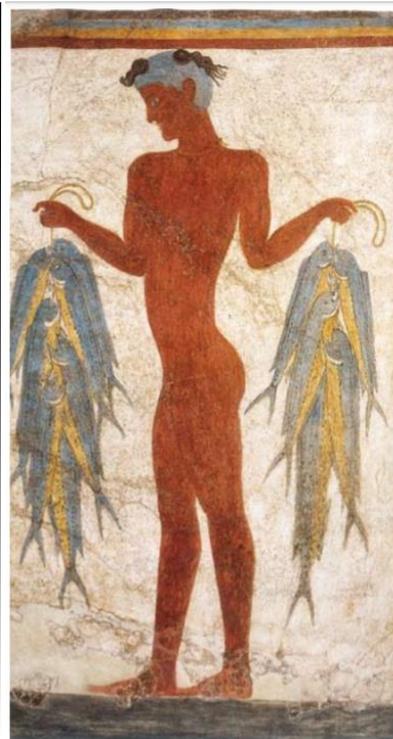
Marinatos (2015: 90) elaborates that the presence of the griffin suggests an unreal place, “unreachable even by the Minoan fleet” on the outer reaches of the known and traversable world which is depicted in the Nilotic scene (Figure 4.14). The emphasis on the Minoan perspective here is significant as it demonstrates the lens through

which Aegean cultures, and particularly Thera culture, have been understood and interpreted in modern scholarship, often being subjected to confirmation bias within the field of Minoanization. While this lens may indeed be somewhat representative, it is important to consider the naming of the scene as Nilotic. Certainly, this name was imposed by modern scholarship, but its suggestion that the Nilotic scene is reminiscent of images along the Nile River cannot be overlooked. The animals that are so exotic to Thera eyes are in fact much more common in the Nile basin. This is evidenced in a hunting scene from the tomb of Menna where ducks and papyrus plants, as well as the act of hunting is demonstrated (Figure 4.17). Also of note is that the representation of the griffin in the West House is similar to that of Xeste 3 again indicating more West Asian influence; there are also examples of griffin-type creatures in Egyptian mythology and iconography albeit with different proportions (Figure 3.5; 3.6; 3.7; 3.8; Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 166). In particular, the ‘notched plume’ motif is seen in the flying gallop of the griffin of the Nilotic scene (Figure 4.14), a motif which is also seen at Tell Kabri in the griffin and sphinx compositions (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 78). Thus, the multiculturalism of the Thera artwork cannot be overlooked or oversimplified as it integrates global ideas into local concepts.

## Fisherman Figures



*Figure 4.18  
Fisherman boy  
holding one bunch  
of fish. Room 5.  
West House.  
Akrotiri.*



*Figure 4.19  
Fisherman boy  
holding two  
bunches of fish.  
Room 5. West  
House. Akrotiri.*

These are the largest figures in the room. Two nude fishermen stand on different walls facing one another. The figure on the left side carries one bunch of fish with both hands in front of him. His head is blue which seems to indicate baldness. He is painted in profile and faces to the right. The second figure carries two bunches of fish, one in each hand which are held to either side of him. He is also painted in profile, but his head faces left and is tilted down. His scalp is blue but shows tufted hair as well. The fish in both have blue backs and yellow bellies. There is a dark band along the bottom of the fresco, and a set of red, yellow, and blue stripes along the top of the scene. The background is white.

### *Exoticism and Initiation*

The composition of the fisherman boys in Figure 4.18 and 4.19 is unusual in this space and warrants discussion. The fish these figures are holding have been identified as dolphin fish and tunny, respectively (Hitchcock 2016: 21; Berg 2013: 18; Papageorgiou 2018: 302). There are no remains on the island which suggest these two types of fish were indigenous to the area which indicates that the fisherman figures were likely to have travelled some distance for their haul (Hitchcock 2016: 22). It is possible that these two figures demonstrate positive associations with the dangerous ocean as they have succeeded in their expedition and caught their fish (Berg 2013: 17-18). One interpretation of the fisherman figures suggests that they carry the fish as an offering to a protective deity (Marinatos 2015: 72, 74; 1985: 219) while another interpretation suggests that the figures carry the fish as part of an initiation or rite of passage (Berg 2013: 17-18). Marinatos (1985: 219) further suggests that nudity carries religious significance in Minoan and Mesopotamian spheres. Indeed, the two fisherman figures

appear to be walking towards one another, and at the central meeting point it is likely that there was an offering table; incomplete physical remains of such a table were found in that location (Marinatos 1985: 220). Regardless of exact intent, the composition most likely conveys associations such as “fertility, display of great skill, and an ability to engage safely with the—potentially harmful—sea,” each of which would have been significant concerns to the inhabitants of the island of Thera (Berg 2013: 17-18).

Evidence that the two figures are children is associated mainly with their partially shaved hairstyles. Evidence from the island of Thera itself suggests that the partially shaved heads is an indicator of initiation or coming of age, a motif which is seen at Deir el-Medina as well (Doumas 2008: 125; 2018: 30). It is notable here that the convention at Akrotiri predates the convention in Egypt (Doumas 2008: 125). Because of the incompleteness of the material record, it is not possible to make a definite conclusion, but the principle remains interesting. That said, a large sample of images of children have been excavated on the island of Thera (Chapin 2010: 228). The flexibility of this style of depicting youth was seemingly adapted from the Egyptian canon and adjusted to allow for more individualism in depictions of children (Chapin 2010: 228). Because of the naturalism and youthfulness of the figures as well as the composition of the fresco with the exotic fish, Papageorgiou (2018: 302) suggests that the fishermen in Room 5 of the West House form a composite narrative of the “successful completion of adolescent education through collective achievements” among which seafaring and hunting is included.

#### **4.2 Room 4**

The walls of Room 4 are decorated as if it were the cabin of a ship, the various cowhides acting as the panels of the ship’s cabin (Davis 2008: 191). There is a pattern of cowhide banners that repeats eight times across the room. Two pots of lilies are also depicted on the walls of the room, although they are not the focus of the space. At the entryway between Room 4 and Room 5 there is a young female figure who holds hot coals and what appears to be incense (Davis 2008: 192).

Priestess

*Figure 4.20 Priestess with incense. Room 4. West House. Akrotiri.*

A female figure faces to the left. Her hair is stylized and also seems to have partially shaved tufts, as indicated by her blue scalp. She wears a yellow robe, a necklace, and a gold hoop earring. She has red lips and a red ear. Her left arm is holding a dish with something red on it. Her right arm is obscured. There is some patterning on the sleeve of the dress. The background is white.

This image is on the doorjamb in Room 4 leading to Room 5 (Marinatos 2015: 74). The robe she wears bears more similarity to attire seen in Indian artworks in both colouration and style of fold, rather than the closer Aegean neighbours of Akrotiri (Marinatos 2015: 74). This suggests a potential multicultural relationship or at least influential style far beyond the West Asian, North African, Cretan, and Cycladic which are more readily seen in Theran art. The female figure holds



*Figure 4.21 Minoan gold ring with floating ear. Unknown provenance.*

what can be interpreted as a coal burner likely to burn frankincense or myrrh on (Figure 4.20; Marinatos 2015: 74). It is possible that this burning of incense is meant for guests, or potentially to hide the smells in the house if it was a space where fish were processed, or production chains were maintained (Marinatos 2015: 74; Hitchcock 2016: 22). Yet another suggestion is that the incense is used to summon a deity (Hitchcock 2016: 22). Further evidence of this is her red ear. The redness of the ear makes it stand out and is thus reminiscent of the floating ear in Minoan seals (Figure 4.21), a

symbol used to suggest auditory epiphanies, or a person who can hear the gods (Hitchcock 2016: 22). The floating ear in Figure 4.21 further suggests communication between the human and the spirit realm and identifies the subjective experience of the human intercedent (Tully and Crooks 2015). This sign of an oracle or cult activity helps to provide an interpretation of the red ear in Figure 4.20 as well as the ambiguous dish, and so it seems a likely solution.

Through iconographical comparisons it is also possible that this figure serves either a functional or ceremonial purpose, or some combination of the two. It is conceivable that through the burning of incense she cleanses the space for the ritual activity or initiation of the fisherman boys, or simply that she cleanses the smells of gutted fish from the space. Her connotations of divinity through her supposed auditory epiphanies are then also relevant as she performs this ritual purification. It is interesting to consider her form in relation to those of the figures in Xeste 3 as she seems to fulfil a religious role, as do the figures in Xeste 3, but her appearance is entirely different. Furthermore, the presence of the griffin and other animals associated with the goddess of Xeste 3 in room 5 of the West House serve as indicators of local religion. Thus, when looking at the female crocus gatherers (Figure 3.3; 3.4) it becomes clear that the priestess in the West House (Figure 3.19) bears almost no iconographical similarity, being dressed differently and existing in a different physical scale. Regardless, it is clear that she has some form of religious purpose, as do the women in the frescoes of Xeste 3. The distinction between the two types of religious participants is then interesting, as it may suggest more than one religious cult, or at the very least more than one way of practicing cultic activity.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The images in the West House all seem to connote nautical and divine activity. The depictions in this home suggest that water and aquatics played an important role in the daily lives and livelihoods of the people of Akrotiri. The Flotilla scene highlights the array of activity which took place at the port, ships that seem to move in two directions and ships that serve more than one purpose. These activities encompass human interaction across landscapes as well as natural scenery and animal behaviour. This also suggests a harmony between humanity and nature as both coexist in the same realm at Akrotiri. Suggestion is also made that through maritime activity, the unreachable can be reached. The Nilotic scene is demonstrative of the faraway lands which exist in the realm outside of Akrotiri, potentially a mystical realm as suggested by the presence of the galloping griffin in the scene.

Through this it is possible to posit that the West House is comprised of a number of liminal spaces. Indeed, water is a “transmutable, ever changing, and often deceiving” substance which exists outside of the human, controllable realm (Berg 2013: 2). As water and control or conquering thereof is a central theme in the West House, particularly in Room 5, the interpretation that the ritual activity that

took place in the home had some connotation to safe passage across bodies of water and the maintenance of food and trade supplies is possible. Berg (2013: 2) posits that Bronze Age interactions with the sea were “bound up in diverse ritual beliefs and practices” which may suggest that the presence of the Fisherman Boy youths as well as the young Priestess also played a role in the taming of the sea. Each of these youths then appear to be in a liminal state, entering into or actively participating in a phase of initiation and transition. The priestess occupies a wall between two doors, and so in this sense she is in an even more liminal space while performing her rites of purification and cleansing or auditory epiphany. As such, it becomes clear that the images of the West House not only indicate nautical and divine activity, but also represent the various liminalities present at the island.

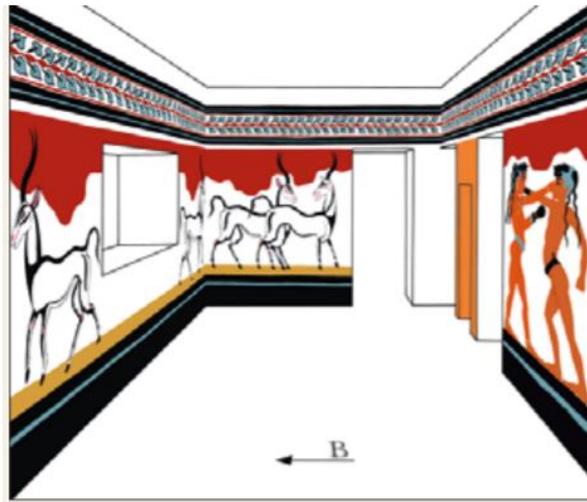
One can tentatively argue that Akrotiri was synthesising some of the signs and motifs seen at her Aegean neighbouring sites in a new and unique way in order to demonstrate a distinctively Thera composition. The depiction of a travelling fleet is seen at a number of sites showcasing Minoan, Egyptian, and West Asian symbols, and the theme of control over a lion being a symbol of strength and possibly divinity also rings throughout history. As such, the compositions of the West House demonstrate, in a similar way to the images of Xeste 3, that Akrotiri has developed a unique artscape within the Aegean trade route, drawing on images and representations of the ‘Other’ as well as meanings that resonate with the lived experience at the settlement.

## **Chapter 5: The Nature of Sector Beta**

Sector Beta is central to the excavated town of Akrotiri and is a two-storied residence that was most likely privately owned (Georma 2019: 32). The western part of the building is well preserved while the east is severely damaged. Room B1 contains the Boxing Boys fresco as well as Antelopes while room B6 contains a mural of blue monkeys and goats acting naturally, as they would in their natural habitats (Georma 2019: 32). Because of its location, it is possible that onlookers would have been able to see into the rooms of Sector B from the town square, particularly room B1 (Georma 2019: 35). This affects the interpretation of the images as it alters the intended audiences and thus potentially the intended purpose of the spaces and the compositions within them. It also suggests a community function for the space, whatever activity took place in this room was likely intended to be observed by an audience.

Also notable in this structure is the fact that the combination of animal with natural vegetation seems to be the focal point of the art in Sector Beta. Each of the animal frescoes is surrounded by an intricate natural landscape which is unique to Sector Beta at Akrotiri. The animal frescoes are also dedicated to only one animal each, with antelope, monkeys, and goats being the clear focus of the images in rooms B1 and B6. This is a clear aesthetic preference and its implications enable a nuanced reading of the compositions (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 172). While human figures do appear in Sector Beta in the form of Boxing Boys, these figures do not seem to interact or interfere with the natural landscape. Indeed, it is possible that the fauna and flora is meant to highlight the nature of the figures in question, particularly when looking at the antelope who are in Room B1 alongside the Boxing Boys. Particularly of note here is the fact that each of the rooms in Sector Beta create a ‘total environment’ in which the scene is wrapped around the occupants of the room creating a large narrative panel (Winter 2000: 745). This ‘total environment’ may reflect a more personal rather than public use of the space. In creating one large narrative composition rather than creating a focal point, the space is understood to be less public and political than spaces in which there is a clear focus (Winter 2000: 753). Specifically, it is possible to compare the ‘total environments’ created at Akrotiri to the Neo-Assyrian trend of focusing a ruler or deity in the space, particularly seen at Mari and Alalakh (Winter 2000: 753). Even so, many of the themes and motifs represented are similar, particularly the types and styles of the animals and plants of Sector Beta.

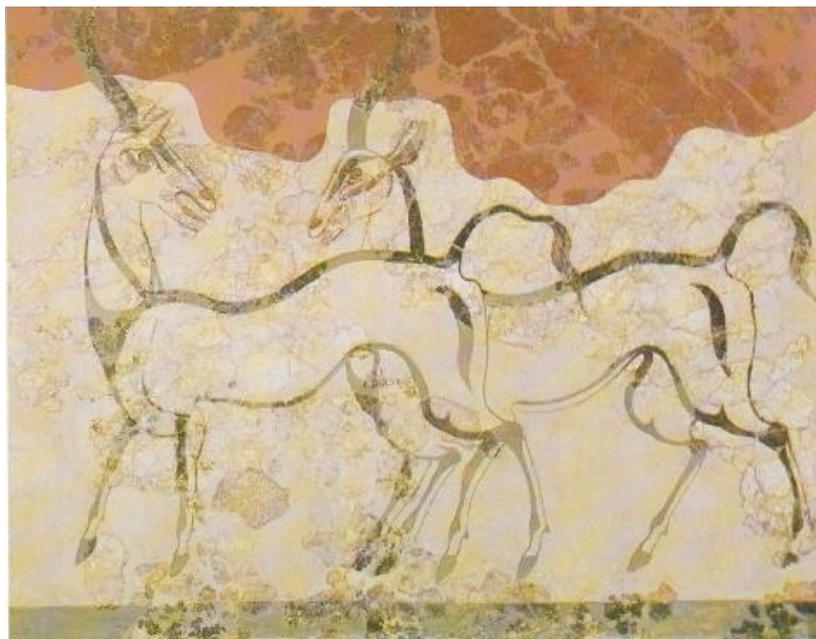
## 5.1 Room B1



*Figure 5.1 Composition consisting of Antelope and Boxing Boys. Room B1. Sector Beta. Akrotiri.*

The images in Room B1 seem to be in communication with one another and both compositions showcase athleticism and training (Chapin 2010: 228). The antelopes move away from the window on the north side in a parallel processional movement making it seem that they enter the room from outside (Georma 2019: 35). This type of animal procession is unique to Akrotiri (Georma 2019: 35). The antelope are moving towards the Boxing Boys on the south wall making them central to the composition of the room. A door on the south side of the room leads to a store cupboard area with many vase fragments (Georma 2019: 35).

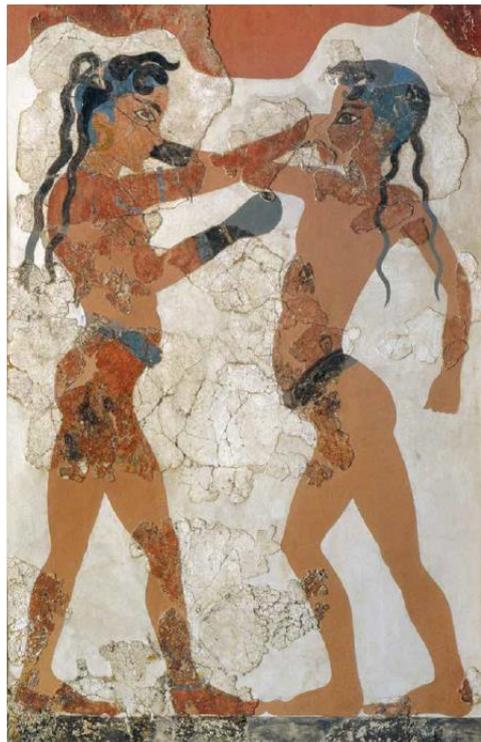
### Antelopes



*Figure 5.2 Antelopes. Room B1. Sector Beta. Akrotiri.*

The antelopes move away from the window on the north wall in parallel procession. On the left-hand side, one antelope is portrayed on the same wall as the window, and it moves away from the opening. It faces forward and the front left and back right legs are raised in motion. In front of it, on the next wall are two more antelopes. The one furthest in front of the procession is in the foreground and has its neck turned back and to the right to look at the middle antelope which it overlaps. The front antelope's front right leg is slightly raised, and all three other legs are firmly on the ground. The middle antelope faces forwards and has all four feet on the ground. The antelope on the right-hand side are a mirrored reflection of those on the left. All six of the antelopes are painted with simple, thick black outlines and have a black line underneath their eyes. Red details can also be seen on the faces. There is no colour or detail on the bodies of the antelope. The background of the composition is also plain white, and an irregular red band is seen above the heads of the antelope which overlaps with their horns. They stand on a yellow band which is above a narrow black band on top of a thinner blue band. Below that is a large black band filling the remaining space.

### Boxing Boys



*Figure 5.3 Boxing Boys. Room B1. Sector Beta. Akrotiri.*

Two figures face each other and are painted in profile. Their scalps are blue and visible under shaved tufts of black hair. The left figure has a yellow/gold earring and two anklets on each foot, one yellow/gold and one blue. There are also gold and blue bands on his upper arms and a black glove with yellow/gold bands around the wrist. He wears a blue waistband. His left hand is raised to the opposing figure's face in a straight line, while the right hand is in front of him and bent at the elbow.

His left foot is stepping forward. He is naked. The figure on the right only has a black waistband and a black glove on his right hand. His right arm is raised to the opposing figure's face in a straight line. His left arm is slightly bent and is behind his back. His right leg is stepping forward. The background is plain white, and an irregular red band contours around the tops of their heads. They stand on a narrow black band which is on top of a thinner blue band. Below that is a large black band filling the remaining space.

### *Strength*

When considering that the partially shaved head is indicative of youth, it is possible that this rendering of the Boxing Boys in Figure 5.3 may also be a form of initiation rite (Georma 2019: 36). Georma (2019: 36) suggests that boxing was likely a popular activity at the time of the composition and that it is possible that the image has at least some connotation to ritual, despite the uncertainty of its purpose (Georma 2019: 36). Figure 5.4 shows boxing youths on a rhyton found at Agia Triada, providing insight in to the religious and social activities in the region (Benson 1966: 36). The important role that boxing may have played in the Bronze Age social structures is highlighted by the central focus placed on the Boxing Boys in the room, as shown in Figure 5.1 where the antelope procession is facing and apparently moving towards the Boxing Boys. This indicates that their actions are being highlighted for a reason. It is interesting to note that shaved figures appear in Xeste 3 and the West House as well as Sector Beta. The Egyptian reading of the shaved heads as indicators of youth may indeed be a likely interpretation of the images at Akrotiri as well<sup>18</sup>. Considering the Boxing Boys in particular, their centrality in the room is significant. As the focus of the room, it is clear that their activity is important and likely necessitated an audience. Both the antelope on the rest of the walls, and the potential onlookers from outside the house would have formed part of its audience and so some form of initiation or ritual activity is most likely. That said, it is unclear whether this activity would have been a rite of passage, a demonstration of youth, or some other form of cultic activity and so only hypothesis is possible at the moment.



*Figure 5.4 Boxer Rhyton. Agia Triada.*

<sup>18</sup> This concept is discussed in more detail in the preceding chapters.



Figure 5.5 Cylinder seal impression showing lion attacking antelope. Mesopotamia.

The involvement of the antelope in this imagery is also of note as the combination of human and animal activity is seen throughout the frescoes at Akrotiri, notably in Xeste 3 and the West House, as well as in Minoan art (Georma 2019: 37). This association seemingly demonstrates a harmonious relationship between man and nature, and in the instance of the antelopes draws on connotations of strength and vigour

associated with the animals (Georma 2019: 37). The posture of the antelope and stark colouring of the composition are also demonstrative of this strength and vigour (Georma 2019: 37). Interestingly, the posture and rendering of the antelopes' horns, head, hooves, and body shape allow for the interpretation of the animals as antelopes, in particular *oryx beissa* (Georma 2019: 35-36). However, the artists at Akrotiri often seemed to represent the idea of an animal rather than a detailed diagram of one (Georma, Karnava and Nikolakopoulou 2012: 178), and so this specific classification of the species may be another form of confirmation bias by the modern viewer, rather than the intended effect of the artist. Other varieties of antelope are seen in West Asian imageries such as the cylinder seal shown in Figure 5.5 in which a lion attacks an antelope. As such, it is likely that this theme was shared between Akrotiri and its neighbours, but interestingly did not form part of the Minoan repertoire. This then suggests that the antelope may be a unique motif to Akrotiri and so its associations are localized to Thera, perhaps indicating that the ritual or rite that the Boxing Boys perform is also native to the island or at least adapted from West Asian influence. Taking into account the view of this space in Room B1 from outside the house, it is then also possible that this ritual or rite was public rather than private, intended to be seen by those outside the household as much as those within it. This further suggests that the various houses at Akrotiri were accessible to the public, indicating a community lifestyle at the settlement.

## 5.2 Room B6

The depiction in Room B6 notably shows no human figures. There is a monkey composition and a goat composition; in the case of the latter only a small portion survives. This naturalistic theme is popular in the Bronze Age Aegean iconographies but is uncommon at Akrotiri itself (Georma 2019: 37). Furthermore, Georma (2019: 39) suggests that it is unlikely that the two compositions are directly or explicitly connected although the fragmentary nature of the goats makes this difficult to ascertain. When taking into account the various other fresco compositions at Akrotiri and considering the fact that the vast majority of them seem to conduct a narrative across different walls in a room, Georma's

(2019: 39) assertion becomes less likely. Examples of these broad narratives exist in Xeste 3 and the West House, as well as Sector Beta itself.

### Monkeys



*Figure 5.6 Blue Monkey composition in room B6. Sector Beta. Akrotiri.*

In this fresco, there are nine monkeys playing. All of the monkeys are blue, with black and white faces. Most are in profile, but one is facing the viewer. They interact with one another in various positions. They are seen to be on light brown structures and there is a white and red cloudy background. There is blue and brown paint along the bottom which suggests land and soil. There is a spiral pattern along the top of the wall.

### *Misplaced Monkey Business*

The origin of the blue monkeys at Akrotiri is worth consideration as the iconography is indicative of a wide network of trade and communication from across the Aegean with the port town. Notably, the consensus is that the blue monkeys are not native to the Aegean and are rather reminiscent of Egyptian and Mesopotamian iconography (Georma 2019: 38). In fact, remains found at Tel el-Dab'a below a study floor – which may have been where the baboon was kept – indicate that baboons were kept as pets and possibly domesticated to some extent (Bietak 2018b: 228). While the representations of monkeys at Akrotiri are not necessarily direct copies of neighbouring styles, there is an implied prototype in the region which the artists at Thera are supposed to have paralleled (Ritner 2018: 74). The suggestion has been made that guidebooks and templates were popular in the Mediterranean Bronze Age which would account for similar imageries in different regions (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 62). Further suggestion that the artists themselves travelled around the Aegean

is also possible<sup>19</sup>. In either instance, cross-cultural communication is evident, and the broad reach of trade and exchange of ideas in the region is apparent.



*Figure 5.7 Blue Monkey seated on ovoid base. Tell el-Amarna. Egypt.*

Ritner (2018) proposes the argument that the main contribution to the Thera Blue Monkeys is Egyptian and highlights the similarities in the motifs as well as the potential transmissions thereof. In particular, the blue colour of the monkeys is not natural but rather stylistic which is reminiscent of Middle Kingdom monkey vases and monkey figurines, both of which depict blue monkeys such as the one in Figure 5.7 (Ritner 2018: 74). Here it is important to note that the monkeys in these contexts may only be blue because of the material used, namely Egyptian faience. Both examples are also portable and so would easily have travelled to Akrotiri through traders and travellers. There are more than 60 examples of monkey vases dating from the Old Kingdom and there is evidence that some such vessels were given as gifts from Egyptian rulers as diplomatic offerings thereby accounting for the dispersal of Egyptian Blue Monkeys (Ritner 2018: 73). Ritner (2018: 72) also suggests that these vases spread to Anatolia and are responsible for the blue monkey motif beyond the Minoan world as well stipulating that official Egyptian art “surely inspired both Anatolian and Minoan depictions” (Ritner 2018: 72). The monkeys in Egyptian iconography are often seen to be playing instruments; a similar motif is seen in Xeste 3 where fragments show a monkey apparently playing a string instrument. When considering that the monkey motif likely had one common source and were indeed not native to the island of Thera, this musician monkey theme provides convincing evidence that Egypt may have been the iconographical source of the blue monkey at Akrotiri.

A different interpretation is provided by Pareja (2020) who suggests a more distant explanation for the blue monkeys at Akrotiri. A comparative study looking at monkey iconography from Egypt, West Asia, and specifically Mesopotamia showed that the last mentioned was likely an intermediary source for the blue monkeys of Building Beta which originated in the Indus Valley (Pareja 2020). The positioning of the tails, eyes, and body proportions suggest that the monkeys at Akrotiri, and specifically those in room B6 are representations of langurs which are native to the Indus Valley rather than vervets which are in North Africa (Pareja 2020). This surely suggests a much wider trade network than has previously been conceptualized, spanning as far east as India (Pareja 2020). Even more remarkable is Pareja’s (2020) suggestion that the artists who painted the blue monkeys in question are likely to have seen the monkeys in a naturalistic environment, as evidenced in the natural

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<sup>19</sup> See section 2.4 Frescoes for a more detailed discussion of the potentially travelling craftsmen of the Aegean.

setting, playful attitude, and distinct representation of each monkey in Sector Beta. This natural behaviour contrasts significantly with the anthropomorphism of the blue monkeys elsewhere at Akrotiri. A lack of material remains of monkeys at Akrotiri may suggest that the artists saw the monkeys at other settlements in the Aegean trade network, and the monkeys did not necessarily exist on Thera, indicating that people travelled just as much if not more than wares and ideas (Pareja 2020). That said, this may also be an example of modern confirmation bias as finding a faraway connection at Akrotiri provides evidence for greater, more complex trade networks than had previously been supposed in scholarship.

When comparing Ritner (2018) and Pareja's (2020) arguments, it becomes clear that both provide sound logic and interpretation of the monkeys in question. Thus, both explanations of the origin of the blue monkeys are plausible, and could be responsible for the presence of these monkeys in Thera art. It is possible that through the dissemination of the image across cultures, the blue monkeys at Akrotiri took on unique characteristics which were an amalgamation of the other monkey depictions in the region's contact. It is also possible that the monkeys at Akrotiri look the way they do because the artists at Thera wanted them to. They are stylistically slightly different from Minoan monkeys such as those seen in Figure 3.14 in which they are saffron gatherers, and are also different from the Egyptian monkey in Figure 5.7. As such, the monkeys at Akrotiri seem to be inspired by rather than be direct copies of the other monkeys its artists may have come across, whether in person or in iconography.

### *Local Monkey Matters*

The monkeys at Building Beta (Figure 5.6) are presented in a naturalistic setting which differs from the monkeys seen at Xeste 3 (Figure 3.2). The landscape depicted in this composition is similar to what artists would have seen at Akrotiri itself, with rocky outcrops and a volcanic landscape (Georma 2019: 37). This demonstrates more complexity in the fresco because even if the template of the monkey itself was foreign, its environment is apparently local. Georma (2019: 45) posits that the monkeys in this composition are fleeing, perhaps from the artist or viewer themselves, thereby placing the viewer in the scene and making them a participant. This interpretation is particularly interesting when considering the Aegean tendency to showcase nature scenes and specifically humanity in harmony with nature as seen in the compositions of Xeste 3 and the West House above (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 166). Of note then is the fact there is no human depiction in room B6 and so no indication of what the room's purpose may have been or if the frescoes in it have any meaning beyond being decorative as there are no indications of rite or ritual in the frescoes of the room (Georma, Karnava and Nikolakopoulou 2012: 178). That said, the blue monkeys of Xeste 3 and the Porter's Lodge appear to be engaged in ritual activity and are distinctly anthropomorphised. Because the comportment of the monkeys in Sector Beta is different to their behaviour elsewhere, it is possible that they served a different purpose and are not intended to form part of the same religious landscape.

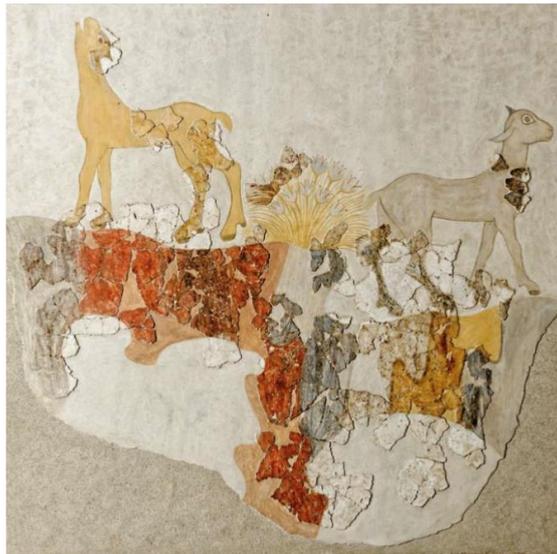
However, the association should not be ignored as this allusion would likely have influenced the ancient audience's reading of the space. Indeed, frescoes serve as valuable insight into the shared religious symbols and ideas which may have travelled across the Aegean network, as well as providing insight into local adaptations thereof.

When considering the different roles monkeys seem to portray at Akrotiri, Urbani and Youlatos' (2020) discussion of monkeys in the Aegean becomes particularly relevant. Specifically, they propose that Minoan civilization, and by extension Thera, was familiar with two distinct species of monkeys, namely vervets and baboons, both of which were most likely first seen in their native African context (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 1-3). Indeed, both monkeys are seen at Thera in different contexts. Vervet monkeys, like those seen in Sector Beta, were more often associated with leisure and recreation, and were depicted as "small-bodies, agile, and naturalistically represented" (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 3). They also showcased a number of morphological features which help to identify the monkeys, namely the "rounded, short dark greyish/black muzzle, rounded face and cheeks, white band on the forehead, white ventral area, as well as elongated arms and limbs, and extended tail" (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 3). These monkeys' behaviour is also more arboreal, shown at Sector Beta as well as the monkeys in Figure 5.6 are shown at different levels and various free-flowing positions (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 3).

This contrasts with the monkeys of Xeste 3 which were more likely baboons, as shown in Figure 3.2. Baboons were more commonly associated with ritual activity, an idea which carried over from their deification in Egypt (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 3). These baboon figures are also larger, sturdier, and more bound to the ground as terrestrial primates, and also showed features more characteristic of baboons than vervets such as "the inguinal part, narrow waist, dorsal position of the tail base, elevated limb configuration, long muzzle and prognathic face, expanded thorax in relation to the whole torso, and hairless nasal dorsum" (Urbani and Youlatos 2020: 3). Notable, then, is that both monkeys and baboons are depicted in shades of blue. Urbani and Youlatos (2020: 3) suggest that this is likely in accordance with the abstraction of greys and greens to blue, which is a notable trend within the Minoan catalogue, and may also be indicative of the Egyptian connotation of the colour blue to the divine. While the physical differences between vervets and baboons may be slight to the average onlooker, the colours and compositions of the various monkeys are more likely to have carried a clear meaning and distinction. If Thera did employ blue as an Egyptian reference to divinity, the presence of a room of blue monkeys at Sector Beta is interesting, as is the blue monkey of Xeste 3 in Figure 3.2 who seems to act as a barrier between the human and divine realms. Either way, the role that monkeys, and particularly blue monkeys played at Thera is certainly multifarious and worthy of investigation.

If the person observing the art acts as a proxy to the human depiction, the fleeing monkeys would demonstrate a disharmony rather than a harmony which raises a number of questions within the iconographical parameters at Akrotiri. The suggestion that the monkeys in room B6 are representative of monkeys in captivity on the island can also be considered, thereby making them a spectacle for human observation (Georma, Karnava and Nikolakopoulou 2012: 178). People at Akrotiri would have been familiar with a number of exotic animals, real or otherwise. There are a number of depictions of foreign and likely exotic animals at Akrotiri such as the griffin imagery in Xeste 3 and the West House as well as the images of wild cats also in the West House (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 62). It is probable that some of these animals such as the wild cats and the monkeys would have been brought to the island allowing the artists to see the animals in a natural space, albeit not indigenous, and showcase them with the animation seen in room B6 (Dawson and Nikolakopoulou 2020: 62). It is also possible that the artists travelled throughout the Aegean trade route and collected imageries to incorporate into their art styles.

### Goats



*Figure 5.8 Goats from Room B6 with proposed reconstruction. Room B6. Sector Beta. Akrotiri.*

Two goats face away from one another. The goat on the left is yellow and faces the left. Its head is raised as it looks upward. The front left leg is slightly forward, and the back left leg is slightly backward. The goat appears to be stationary. The goat on the right faces away from the other goat and is looking to the right. This goat is white/grey in colour and looks straight ahead. Both its right legs are slightly forward. There is a fan-shaped plant in between the two goats. The goats are standing on multicoloured terrain consisting of yellow, orange, and blue. Fragments of a swallow also form part of this composition. The background of the composition seems to be white.

### *Fragments*

There are multiple instances of goats in Aegean iconography, namely as bronze figures, reliefs on stone vases, wall paintings, pottery, and seals (Georma 2019: 39). Moreover, goats are also often seen in Early-Cycladic rock-art at Naxos and extant pottery examples from Akrotiri predate the time of the fresco composition (Televantou 2018: 57-58). Of particular note is the image of the *potnia theron* in Figure 3.9 where the seated goddess figure appears to feed ears of wheat to two goats. Figure 3.5 also shows a goat behind the seated goddess' throne, once again connoting the image of the *potnia theron* with goats in foreign art. As such, it may be possible to identify the goats in Figure 5.7 with the seated goddess motif. This connotation is strengthened when considering the fragments of Xeste 3, in particular the image of the goat in Room 2 of the Ground Floor.

Reconstructions suggest that the fresco in room B6 consists of three small goats, rocky landscape, reed, and crocus plants, as well as swallows (Georma 2019: 45). There are multiple instances where swallows occur at Thera, and indeed these birds are seen at Crete as well but not commonly in the Levant (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 11). Additionally, there are goats in the background of the flotilla scene in the West House as well, a space which also seems to have ritual significance. Although these goats are much smaller and less focal, they indicate that goats are an existing theme at Akrotiri, and that they certainly do appear in wall paintings at the site (Televantou 2018: 57-58). When considering the iconography identified at Xeste 3, the crocus plants stand out because of their strong religious iconography and their association with the goddess figure (Figure 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.15). The fragments of this scene do showcase purple flowers which would likely have been crocus blossoms. Hence, further evidence is provided for the argument that this scene can be associated with the goddess figure of Xeste 3. In fact, in Xeste 3 there are also fragments which show goat-like figures, although in more masculine spaces than those where the goddess is present (Vlachopoulos 2008: 451). When considering that the youths in the Room B1 are masculine, and seem to be engaged in boxing, an activity of (masculine) strength, this association with Xeste 3 becomes particularly interesting. If this association can indeed be made, then a religious purpose of Sector Beta becomes much more likely, and the activity of the Boxing Boys (Figure 5.3) in the room above is also far more likely to be ritual or religious. That said, because of the difficulty of reconstruction and the limitations of available fragments at both locations, it is impossible to say with any certainty if this interpretation is plausible.

### **5.3 Discussion**

The frescoes of Sector Beta provide an interesting contrast to those seen at Xeste 3 and the West House. Notably, the extant works of Sector Beta appear to be much less human-oriented and rather concern themselves with nature. This serves to highlight the selective emphasis of the artists of Thera

as they dedicated large areas of wall painting to single, repeated motifs and animals in this space (Papagiannopoulou 2018: 173). The simplicity of the space not only results in a stunning visual effect through which people in the room come to interact with nature through art, but also poses unique hurdles for the interpretation of the space. In this context, it is also interesting to note the intertextual references between the houses in question. Repetitive images and motifs such as anthropomorphised monkeys, goats, and shaved heads suggest a common understanding of the images at Akrotiri, accessible to all those present. This further suggests that a common interpretation of themes may also be possible as the connotations of a motif or theme in one space likely carried over, whether implicitly or explicitly. The frescoes at Akrotiri may then also be seen as indicators of an integrated community wherein the populace likely had access to one another's homes and the ritual activities that seemingly took place within them.

The images of the antelope, monkeys, and goats each form focal points of their respective scenes. The antelope do look towards and frame the Boxing Boys (Figure 5.1), but regardless their composition is their own and they contribute to the scene as much, if not more than, the human figures alongside them. It is also interesting that the two human figures shown are male, and most likely youthful. This allows for some speculation of what the house's purpose was, perhaps a space of transition for young boys where they learned about the roles of nature and animals and ultimately participated in a test of strength.

The vast system of iconography from across the Aegean trade network is also interesting to note here as the interpretations of the monkeys as Egyptian or Indian, the goats as Anatolian, and the antelope as distinctly non-Minoan provide a variety of source images which attempt to explain the themes and motifs of Akrotiri. These multicultural influences have resulted in the unique amalgamation of concepts and themes at Akrotiri, showcasing a potentially globalised space where ideas of the 'Other' are integrated into autochthonous representations. These works also suggest a much wider net of intercultural communication than has previously been assumed, and also poses interesting challenges to the phenomenon of confirmation bias seen in various interpretations of the works at Akrotiri.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This thesis has investigated the frescoes of three houses at Akrotiri in order to see whether they support other archaeological evidence at the site that indicates it was part of a wide network of trade and intercultural communication. The presence of ‘borrowed’ or shared motifs, techniques and iconography also present in other sites in the Bronze Age Aegean network supports the idea that before the volcanic eruption, Akrotiri was a thriving hub of trade and cult activity, situated fortuitously at the epicentre of Bronze Age trade in the Aegean Sea. With such a rich corpus showing apparent influences seen in Cretan, Egyptian, and Asian material evidence, Akrotiri was more than just a Minoanized outpost, but seems to have played an active role in the dissemination of ideas across the Aegean trade network.

A variety of common motifs and stylistic trends have been detected in the fresco compositions of Akrotiri which also show the interconnectivity of the site and other Minoan, Egyptian and West Asian sites. In terms of technique, fresco was widely practiced in the Bronze Age Aegean, and the division of the wall surface into floor level, main wall, and upper level, often decorated with geometric borders, can be seen to be common. The colour palette is also shared, though Theran artists tend to blend colours in a distinctive way and adhere less to conventions seen elsewhere in the Aegean trade network.

Within the site of Akrotiri, certain motifs proliferate. Of particular importance, images and ideas associated with the goddess figure of Xeste 3 appear at various other locations at the site and also allude strongly to images of the seated goddess and mistress of animals in Egyptian and West Asian art. The majority of the images of the goddess at the site of Akrotiri relate to nature, both fauna and flora. Particularly noticeable are the motifs of crocus blossoms, griffins, and monkeys, both anthropomorphised and not. The partially shaved heads which appear in Xeste 3, the West House, and Sector Beta also indicate that the frescoes at the site be considered as part of one artscape, rich in allusion and connotations across different houses. These motifs all contribute to a religious, ritual reading of the spaces in question as the common trends suggest each house discussed in this thesis served some form of cultic function, and likely had some association with coming-of-age or initiation rites. It would appear then that the frescoes and the various houses of Akrotiri are in communication with one another, suggesting an integrated community and lifestyle at the site. However, there is also evidence that the houses may have served distinct cultic functions, as evidenced by the lack of anthropomorphism in the monkeys of Sector Beta, as well as the unusual dress of the young priestess in the West House.

Each of these motifs can also be identified in iconography from Minoan, Egyptian, and West Asian cultures such as Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Syria which may have been part of – or come into

contact with – the Aegean trade network. The image of the seated goddess and *potnia theron* is common throughout the Aegean trade network, but her comportment varies and so the benevolent goddess at Akrotiri bears more similarity to the Minoan image than the more domineering West Asian figure. The partially shaved heads of certain male figures are common in Egyptian iconography, and indeed it is through the Egyptian lens that we read the baldness as an indicator of youth. Interestingly, a number of the motifs have multiple possible origins such as the blue monkey motif found in Xeste 3, Sector Beta, and the Porter's Lodge which may have come from as far as the Indus Valley or as near as Egypt. Additionally, the image of the griffin is also seen in both West Asian, Egyptian, and Minoan imageries.

It is clear that the motifs and themes identified at Akrotiri had clear multicultural influences from – and were also very likely influential on – other imagery at other Bronze Age sites. It is likely that the Bronze Age Aegean world communicated through art and shared certain artistic conventions and styles. However, motifs at Akrotiri have not been replicated exactly but synthesised and represented in a uniquely Theran way. In some instances, influence is seemingly drawn from more than one place and amalgamated into one image, such as the blue monkeys who are potentially visually from the Indus Valley and behaviourally Egyptian. It may be that Akrotiri benefitted from its own multicultural foundations in that its artists were less bound by convention and freer to experiment thematically and aesthetically. While the compositions at Akrotiri usually consist of influences from various Aegean cultures, the manner in which they are combined is often unique to the style of Akrotiri.

Considering whether the terms 'globalisation' and 'Global Village' are useful in understanding the frescoes of Akrotiri, the inclusion of foreign imagery in the art of Akrotiri strongly suggests a global community. Because identifiable motifs that originate from various cultures and settlements within the Bronze Age Aegean trade network and its peripheries could potentially be identified, I suggest it is possible to use the term globalisation usefully in the case of Akrotiri. The site may also represent the ancient equivalent of a Global Village; a highly interconnected space which formed part of a decentralized network in which ideas are shared back and forth. Aspects of the 'Other' are integrated into the art at Akrotiri, and from there were likely disseminated further, to cultures and settlements elsewhere in the network. The apparent distance between locations seems to be collapsed through the medium of art as a wide and complex network of communication is evidenced. It is likely that the Bronze Age Aegean was much smaller than modern scholarship would suggest, and indeed the ideological distance is far narrower than anticipated. Akrotiri certainly seems to be a good example of a multicultural melting pot. Because of this the term Global Village may be applied, as an individual style if formed under foreign influence at the site.

This study has hopefully demonstrated the complexity of the nuances and influences on or from frescoes at Akrotiri. The comparisons made in this thesis suggest a sharing of knowledge and ideas

that reaches far beyond the Minoan bias in scholarship and proposes that the ancient Aegean world may have been much more connected and traversable than previously believed. Certainly, a sustained and detailed investigation into specific images as they echo across the Aegean network, such as the consistent image of the griffin or the various behaviours of the blue monkeys, would be worthwhile and likely also yield interesting results. A large corpus of material not touched by this thesis warrants further investigation in order to assist in our understanding of globalization in the ancient world and to what extent such modern terminology can be applied successfully.

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**Appendix: Index of Images at Akrotiri**

| <b>House/Sector</b>   | <b>Room</b> | <b>Fresco Section Names</b> | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Tags</b>                  | <b>Other Notes</b>   | <b>Figure No.</b> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| <b>Porter's Lodge</b> |             | African Male                | Dark skinned male face with gold earring, blue palm in the background.  | Flora; human; jewellery      | Fragmentary  | N/A               |
|                       |             | Worshipping Monkeys         | Monkeys in a pose of devotion.  | Fauna; monkey; cult activity | Fragmentary  | N/A               |
| <b>Sector β</b>       | Room β1     | Antelopes                   | A continuous composition across three walls comprising of six antelopes. Two antelopes are facing away from the window on either side. There are two pairs of antelopes on different walls. The two halves of the fresco are reflections of each other. Antelopes are painted with simple, thick black lines. Red details can be seen on the faces. The background is plain white, and above their heads an irregular red line can be seen. | Fauna; antelope; multi-wall  | The background is consistent across both sections of the fresco. There is a blue, red, white, and black floral vine pattern along the top border of the room. A black and blue band is | 5.2               |

|  |         |                 |  |   |   |     |
|--|---------|-----------------|--|---|---|-----|
|  |         | Boxing Children | Two figures face each other and are thus painted in profile. Their scalps are blue and visible under shaved tufts. The left figure has an earring and anklets. Both figures wear bracelets and waistbands. Both figures' right hands seem to be gloved, and both have the furthest arm raised to the others' face in a boxing pose. The left figure's right arm is also raised to a midpoint position, while the right figure's left arm is behind them. The background is plain white, and above their heads an irregular red line can be seen. | Human; children; male; hair tuft; youth; waistband; nude; profile; gloves | seen along the bottom border of the room.   | 5.3 |
|  | Room β6 | Blue Monkeys    | Nine monkeys playing. All of the monkeys are blue, with black and white faces. Most are in profile, but one is facing the viewer. They interact with one another in various positions. They are seen to be on light brown structures and there is a white and red  | Fauna; monkeys; multi-wall; profile                                       | It is thought that the fragments form one wall's fresco, and that the background of this fresco carries over from | 5.6 |

|                 |    |                  |  |   |  |     |
|-----------------|----|------------------|--|---|--|-----|
|                 |    |                  | cloudy background. There is blue and brown paint along the bottom which suggests land and soil. There is a spiral pattern along the top of the wall.   |   | the monkeys, thus has red and white clouds with the land along the bottom and spirals along the top. |     |
|                 |    | Animal Fragments | Two goats facing away from one another on some terrain. A plant between the two goats. One goat is yellow, the other is white. One faces upwards and the other forwards. The terrain is multi-coloured. A monochromatic swallow whose wings are larger than its body. The swallow is surrounded by white.                                    | Fauna; flora; goat; swallow; bird; floral plant; crocus |  | 5.8 |
| <b>Sector Δ</b> | Δ2 | Spring Fresco    | Mounts of colourful terrain are irregular in size and shape. There are yellow, red, and blue segments separated into vertical bands. At each peak there is a cluster of plants. The plant appears to be lilies. All of the plants have yellow foliage with leaves and stems evident. The lilies are red and there are three stems per plant. | Flora; fauna; lilies; swallows; hills                   |  | N/A |

|                        |        |         |   |                |   |     |
|------------------------|--------|---------|---|----------------|---|-----|
|                        |        |         | <p>The flowers are in clusters of three, four, or five. There are also swallows in the background. The swallows have white underbellies and black backs. They appear to be flying around the flower hills. There is a plain red band along the top of the fresco. The fresco spans across three adjacent walls.</p>   |                |   |     |
| <b>House of Ladies</b> | Room 1 | Papyrus | <p>A series of papyrus plants equal in size and style. Each has six leaves at the bottom, three facing left and three facing right. Each has three flowers that are centred. Majority of the plant is blue, with only the tips of the flowers and the bases thereof which are yellow. The flowers are rooted in red and blue wavy lines along the bottom of the fresco. There are five stripes along the top of the fresco, the bottom one is blue, followed by two red ones and then two more blue ones. The background is not decorated and</p> | Flora; papyrus | <p>Note that despite these frescoes being in the same room, there is a difference in the backgrounds. Particularly of note is that the papyrus have a red and blue base while the ladies only have blue. Also, the bands at the top are</p> | N/A |

|  |        |  |   |  |  |     |
|--|--------|--|---|--|--|-----|
|  |        |  | remains white.  |  | similar but slightly different   |     |
|  | Ladies |  | There are two ladies facing one another. The lady on the left is bent at the waist and she wears a patterned skirt. Her breast is visible below her arms. Her left arm is reaching towards the other woman, while her right hand holds colourful textiles. Her hair is stylized, and she seems to be wearing earrings and possibly a necklace. She is also wearing makeup as her lips and cheeks are coloured. The woman on the right is leaning away from the other woman. She is seated. Her right arm is draped across her body, and her left arm is bent slightly. Her hair is also stylized, and her makeup matches the other woman's. She also wears earrings and possibly a necklace. This woman is fully dressed, although her skirt resembles the other woman's. The two women are atop a blue band, | Human; woman; makeup; jewellery; skirts; breast; seated; standing; textiles; pattern; stars; red; blue; white; yellow; black | – both have two blue bands at the top and one blue band at the bottom, but the papyrus have two red bands while the ladies have three. | N/A |

|                   |        |         |  |  |  |     |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--|--|--|-----|
|                   |        |         | and there is a wavy line separating them from the pattern of blue stars and red dots. There are red and blue stripes at the top of the fresco. There are three red bands instead of two (see above).   |  |  |     |
| <b>West House</b> | Room 4 | Banners | A selection of animal skin banners or seats. They are similar in size and shape but are painted with different patterns. Three can be noted. Each is crown shaped, with three poles extending from the base. At the top of the poles there are stylized floral baubles. The basic shape is the same, but it seems to either be three papyrus blooms or lilies at the top of two curled prongs. There is a straight line connecting all three poles, as well as two rope-like adornments with baubles attached. The seats/banners themselves seem to be made from animal hide and had trim along the tops and bottoms, as well as another | Man-made; finery; banner; seat; red; white; blue; brown; black; yellow |  | N/A |

|        |         |           |   |  |   |      |
|--------|---------|-----------|---|--|---|------|
|        |         |           | vertical line through the pattern. One of the tree is red with dark spots and the other two are white with different shapes of dark spots. There is a plain band along the top of the fresco, and a patterned band along the bottom.  |  |   |      |
|        |         | Priestess | A female figure faces to the left. Her hair is stylized and also seems to have tufts. She wears a yellow dress, a necklace, and earrings. Her left arm is holding a dish with something red on it. Her right arm is obscured. There is some patterning on the sleeve of the dress. The background is plain white. | Female; hair-tufts; jewellery; priestess; dish; human; yellow, white                         |   | 4.20 |
| Room 5 | Nilotic |           | A meandering river runs across the scene. It is blue with yellow banks. There are animals and plants all along the river. Animals a duck, a dog, antelope, and a griffin. Plants appear to be palms and papyrus plants. Shades of blue, yellow and brown are  | Flora; fauna; duck; dog; antelope; griffin; palm; papyrus; river; blue; yellow; brown; white | The fishermen occupy the largest portion of the walls. The flotilla scene spans along the bottom panels | 4.14 |

|  |  |                |  |   |  |               |
|--|--|----------------|--|---|--|---------------|
|  |  |                | used. The background is plain white.   |   | across the room.   |               |
|  |  | Flotilla       | The sea battle or flotilla scene is very detailed. A palace is seen in the background, there are a number of people around, on and in it. Ships are seen in the foreground, also manned by people. Above the palace a number of animals and nature-scapes can be identified. Antelopes and dolphins are among them. Many colours are used, although the water is clearly blue and the empty space above the palace shows a band of red, blue, and yellow which is likely a representation of mountains. Above that is white background with animals. | Man-made; human; flora; fauna; sea; palace; architecture; dolphin; antelope; boat; mountains; detail; red; yellow; blue; white; brown; white; black | The river scene spans across the top panels of the room. | 4.4           |
|  |  | Fishermen Boys | The largest pieces in the room. Two nude fishermen on different walls. The first carries one bunch of fish with both hands in front of him. His head is blue and seems to indicate baldness. He is painted in profile and faces  | Human; fauna; fish; tufted hair; bald; nude; brown; yellow; blue; red; black; white   |  | 4.18;<br>4.19 |

|                |                      |                  |  |  |             |      |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------|--|--|-------------|------|
|                |                      |                  | straight ahead. The second figure carries two bunches of fish, one in each hand which are held to either side of him. He is also painted in profile, but his head is tilted down. His scalp is also blue but shows tufted hair as well. The fish in both have blue tops and yellow bellies. There is a dark band along the bottom, and a set of red, yellow, and blue stripes along the top of the scene. The background is white. |  |             |      |
| <b>Xeste 3</b> | Ground Floor, Room 2 | Palm trees       | Two dense, blue palm trees grown from a sandy landscape. A dragonfly and duck are in the branches of the trees. The palms frame a lion hunting a caprid.   | Fauna; flora; lion; caprid; antelope; goat; dragonfly; duck; palm tree | Fragmentary | N/A  |
|                | Ground Floor, Room 3 | Bleeding goddess | There are three female figures in this image. The central figure is seated on a red and blue mound with yellow plants with red flowers protruding from it. Her body faces towards the right. This figure has one leg slightly  | Human; goddess; crocus; wheat; bleeding; jewellery; youth; hair tuft   |             | 3.15 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  | <p>extended in front of her, and the toe of this leg is bleeding. A red flower blooms from the wound. Her right arm is extended towards the bleeding foot, while her left arm rests on her knee and supports her head. Her face is also turned towards the wound, and an ear of what protrudes from her forehead. A stylized red blossom protrudes from the back of her neck. She is dressed simply in white, red, yellow and blue robes, and only one red hoop earring is visible. Her black hair is pinned back. The figure to the left has her body facing the central figure. This figure is dressed in a blue and yellow robe with one breast exposed. She wears earrings and necklaces. Her black hair is pinned back away from her face. Her left hand is extended towards the central figure and bears a necklace. Her right arm and lower body are not discernible. The figure on the right has</p> |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

|  |  |           |  |   |  |      |
|--|--|-----------|--|---|--|------|
|  |  |           | her torso turned towards the central figure, but her face is turned in the opposite direction. She is also dressed in blues and yellows, and is seen to be wearing earrings. Her head is partially shaved and only some black locks remain. Both arms appear to extend towards the central figure, but it is unclear what they bear. There is a black band outlining the top of the fresco, with a central architectural indent. |   |  |      |
|  |  | Sanctuary | In the centre of the image is a frame with three sides. In this frame is a repetitive red spiral pattern. Inside of this there are two brown bands on either side of white space. The brown bands are simply decorated with black and red. The white space contains blossoms divided by a line made up of red and white bands. From the space above the frame a tree is protruding. It has lush branches growing towards the     | Building; tree; bleeding; cultic activity |  | 3.16 |

|                      |                |   |  |             |     |  |
|----------------------|----------------|---|--|-------------|-----|--|
|                      |                |   | left side of the composition; however, the right side is bare. There are red stains dripping from the base of this tree and the space between the tree and the frame. The background is white, and the scene is on top of a black band which spans along the bottom of the wall. |             |     |  |
| Ground Floor, Room 5 | Bull capturing | A male figure in a white loincloth is attempting to harness a young bull with rope. Another male figure helps him.                      | Human; fauna; rope; bull   | Fragmentary | N/A |  |
|                      | Goat leaping   | A male figure is leaping over a goat while holding onto its horns.  | Human; fauna; goat   | Fragmentary | N/A |  |
| Grand staircase      | Mountain scene | Colourful mountainous landscape with trees and flowers.   | Flora; mountain; trees; flowers  | Fragmentary | N/A |  |
| First Floor, Room 2  | Narrow friezes | Swallows hunt dragonflies to feed their young depicted in nests. Crocus blossoms are seen growing from colourful rocks. One blue monkey | Fauna; flora; crocus; monkey; swallow; dragonfly; sword; instrument  | Fragmentary | N/A |  |

|                        |                    |   |   |  |     |  |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|---|--|-----|--|
|                        |                    |   | holds a string instrument, another is seated on a mound with its hands together. Two more monkeys stand with swords in their hands.                                     |  |     |  |
| First Floor,<br>Room 3 | The Seated Goddess | There are two female figures, a monkey, and a griffin in this image. The female figure on the right is larger than the one on the left. She is seated on three brown bags. She wears a detailed gown, but her right breast is exposed. She is wearing earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. She also seems to be wearing makeup, and long black hair is kept away from her face. This figure is bare footed. Her left hand rests on her left leg and holds some saffron. Her right hand is stretched in front of her and is reaching for some saffron that a blue monkey is offering her. The monkey has his left leg raised on a step and is seen in profile as he offers the saffron. | Human; flora; fauna; female; monkey; griffin; breast; goddess; saffron; anthropomorphism; basket; pedestal; man-made; jewellery; yellow; blue; red; white; black; brown | A black band can be seen along the bottom of the fresco, and red and black bands along the top. The background of the composition has floating crocus blossoms, thus seeming to tie the room into one narrative. | 3.2 |  |

|  |  |           |   |  |  |          |
|--|--|-----------|---|--|--|----------|
|  |  |           | <p>A griffin with ornate wings is seen behind the figure with its beak at her shoulder. Furthest to the left is another female figure. She is smaller than the first figure and is dressed in duller colours. Her hair is tied up in a ponytail. She wears only earrings as faience. She is looking at the first female figure as she empties a basket of saffron into a larger basket at her feet. There is saffron floating in the background of the composition as the four figures are on a series of pedestals in various patterns. There is a thick red band and thin black band along the bottom of the image, while the inverse is seen at the top.</p> |  |  |          |
|  |  | Gatherers | <p>Two female figures are seen on hill, surrounded by floating saffron. The figure on the left is wearing white and blue clothes, as well as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. Her body</p>   | <p>Human; flora; female; saffron; basket; hill; mountain; jewellery; yellow;</p> |  | 3.3; 3.4 |

|                       |           |   |  |                                       |     |  |
|-----------------------|-----------|---|--|---------------------------------------|-----|--|
|                       |           |   | <p>faces left while her head faces right, towards the other figure. The left figure's right arm is extended away from her, presumably towards the saffron. Her right arm carries a basket. The figure on the right faces fully to the left and both arms are extended in front of her. Her clothes are more neutral in colour, and she too wears earrings and bracelets. A third female figure is similarly dressed and appears to be carrying a basket. All three figures have their hair tied and seem to be moving towards the seated goddess figure.</p> | <p>blue; red; white; black; brown</p> |     |  |
| First Floor, Room 3b  | Marshland | <p>Reeds grow from a marshy background. Dragonflies and ducks appear to be in flight.</p>   | <p>Fauna; flora; reeds; marsh; duck; dragonfly</p>   | Fragmentary                           | N/A |  |
| First Floor, Corridor | Matrons   | <p>Two mature women appear to be in procession. They are ornately dressed. The woman on the left carries red flowers. Another woman holds a</p> | <p>Human; fauna; flower; jewellery</p>   | Fragmentary                           | N/A |  |

|  |              |          |   |         |  |     |
|--|--------------|----------|---|---------|--|-----|
|  |              |          | bunch of white flowers.   |         |  |     |
|  | Second Floor | Rosettes | Rosette patterns repeat on the wall.<br>There are white, blue, and red spirals as well as purple and yellow spirals | Pattern | These spirals were large and seem to have covered the entirety of the iconographic space in various rooms of the Second Floor. | N/A |