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MINOAN WOMEN

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Introduction

Although Crete seems to have been first inhabited in the Palaeolithic (Strasser *et al.* 2010), another colonization of the island occurred at the end of the Neolithic (Broodbank and Strasser 1991). From then, the internal chronology of Crete follows two systems, a ceramic development (Early, Middle, and Late Minoan with internal subdivisions) and a system based on architectural phases: Prepalatial (EM–MM IA, c.3000–1900 BCE), Protopalatial (MM IB–II, 1900–1750), Neopalatial (MM III–LM IB, 1750–1490), Final Palatial (LM II–IIIA:2/B1, 1490–1300), and Post Palatial (LM IIIB–C, 1300–1100). The last two periods comprise Mycenaean Crete.

The Cretan “Hieroglyphic” and Linear A scripts were developed in the Protopalatial period (Godart and Olivier 1996; Younger 2005); Linear A survives into the Neopalatial period (Godart and Olivier 1976–1985; Younger 2000); and Linear B writes Greek in the Final Palatial period (Killen and Olivier 1989).

The Minoan woman’s world




Identifying women

There are three main ways of identifying females in Aegean art: costume, hairstyle (following age grades), and skin color in fresco. Females are always clothed (males may be nude) and women are often depicted in elaborate “court” dress (see below), textiles made of wool that were also exported to Egypt and the Near East. The fairly consistent Egyptian color convention of painting the flesh of females white and males reddish brown (Eaverly 2013; but cf. Blakolmer 2004, 2012) was also followed in Minoan fresco (Hood 1985).

Art and texts

Almost all our information about Minoan women comes from their depictions in art: figurines, sealstones and fingerrings, pottery, and fresco. Clay figurines and statuettes come mainly from MM II onwards, and bronze figurines primarily from MM III–LM I. Sealstones rarely depict

people before the Malia Workshop (MM II). There are few representations of women on pottery but females are prominent in the frescoes.

Texts give us limited information. In Linear B women were denoted by the logogram *102 MUL . Cretan “Hieroglyphic” has a logogram for women, *004 MUL , but it appears only twice (#049 and #264). Linear A has a unique logogram (*352 ) that looks like it may depict a woman; its sole occurrence, on Khania Wc 2100 (VIR-*352-JA), confirms that *352 is a person, perhaps with a feminine ending.

The Knossos Linear B texts mention some 20 women by name (e.g., Ln 1568); some of these names incorporate Linear B signs thought to transcribe unknown Minoan sounds (e.g., *da*-*22-*ti-ja*, a woman from place *da*-*22-*to*).

Women can be inferred from the presence of loomweights at an archaeological site (all weaving was done by women from age 8; Barber 1994: 283–298). Women may also have produced certain classes of pottery, like cooking pots (Vitelli 1995). It is probably not coincidence, therefore, that weaving patterns appear on early pottery (Berggren 1993) and seals (e.g., CMS II, 5 nos. 152–156). One problem persists: sexing skeletons has only been sporadically practiced (Strömberg 1992).

Age grades in the arts

Hairstyles and body development allow us to identify six stages of a woman’s life (Davis 1986; Younger 1992, 288–289; Laffineur 2000):

- stage 1: shaved head, back- and forehead-locks (Akrotiri Xeste 3, youngest crocus gatherer);
- stage 2: longer locks, top-, forehead-, back-, and right temple (“Horus”) lock (Akrotiri West House, “Priestess”; Xeste 3, “Veiled Girl”);
- stage 3: locks cut, new growth of short curls (Xeste 3, other crocus gatherers; Mycenae ivory mirror handles);
- stage 4: front forelock replaced by fillet knot; long tresses (Xeste 3, “Necklace Swinger” and “Wounded Woman”);
- stage 5: pendulous breasts (Akrotiri House of the Ladies);
- stage 6: heavy body (Xeste 3, upstairs “matrons”).

Stages 1 to 3 chart girlhood to adolescence. The loss of the front lock, stage 4, deliberately marks sexual maturity. Stages 5 and 6 mark changes in adulthood.

Age grades in the Knossos Linear B tablets

The Linear B tablets from Knossos list women with their daughters (*ko-wa*) and sons (*ko-wo*). These children are further characterized as “younger” (*me-wi-jo-e*) and “older” (*me-zo-e*) and as “apprentices” (DI for *di-da-ka-re*, “under instruction”; cf. Ak 781) and, for the daughters only, “old apprentices” (PA DI for *pa-ja-re di-da-ka-re*; cf. Ak 614). Since the younger children get half rations, the distinctions between the age grades, younger and older, must have been explicit (Carrier 1983: 9–10; Ventris and Chadwick 1973: 162). The Xeste 3 wall paintings (see Figure 40.1) depict these age grades: the youngest crocus-gathering girl corresponding to the Linear B “younger” girls; the girls with tight curls corresponding to the “older” girls; and the DI girls corresponding to the Wounded Woman and the (PA DI *ko-wa*) Necklace Swinger.

Men are listed with their sons (Am 819), but never with their daughters. Presumably, daughters stayed with their mothers and learned their mother's profession, while sons eventually joined their fathers in their father's profession (see Budin, "Aegean," this volume).

Xeste 3, Akrotiri

Xeste 3, a large building at Akrotiri on the Cycladic island of Santorini, currently offers the most detailed representations of Aegean women (Figure 40.1; Doulas 1992: 126–175; Palyvou 2005: 54–62). Its size, ashlar masonry, and almost complete absence of domestic vessels imply that it was a public building. Half of the rooms contain wall paintings.

A distinctive feature of the building is the Lustral Basin on the ground floor set against the north wall. Lustral Basins are small, rectangular sunken chambers approached by a short dog-leg flight of steps (cf. Platon 1967; S. Alexiou 1972; Graham 1977; Nordfeldt 1987). There are fewer than 30 of these features in Crete (6 at Phaistos and Knossos, 5 at Malia, 3 at Zakros, 2 at Tylisos and Palaikastro, and 1 each at Amnisos, Gournia, and Khania). Only one Lustral Basin is found outside Crete—in Xeste 3. The function of Lustral Basins is not known. The stairs and chamber have stone floors and wall revetments, often of gypsum. They look similar to small swimming pools or Jewish *mikvahs*, but, since there is no drain, they could not have been filled with water. The earliest Basin occurs at Malia, Quartier Mu (MM II); none was constructed after LM IB. In the Throne Room at Knossos, a Lustral Basin is located directly in front of the throne. Both features continue into the Final Palatial period (Niemeier 1986), but this is the only Lustral Basin to do so; all others do not survive the LM IB destructions.

At Xeste 3, wall paintings adorn the walls above the Lustral Basin and these give the best clues for its function. The space to the west was divided into a north ("viewing") platform and a south area with wall paintings of four nude males of different ages (Doulas 1992, figs. 109–115): a young boy and a young adolescent carrying gold vessels; an older adolescent (16–18?) carrying a textile; and an adult man holding a bronze hydria.

Directly over the Lustral Basin is a complex painting (Figure 40.1, bottom; Doulas 1992, pls. 100–145). Over the stairs leading into the basin a young woman ("Necklace Swinger") carries in her left hand a necklace. In the middle of the composition, the "Wounded Woman" sits on a rocky outcrop; blood streams from her foot. Her costume is unique: she wears the usual blue robe (the *heanos*) but below the waist she is wrapped in a belt from which hang strips of cloth or lappets, a skirt that simultaneously reveals and conceals the lower body. At right, a young adolescent, the "Veiled Girl," wears a white robe with flounced kilt and a diaphanous saffron yellow veil with red dots over her head and body (cf. the small girl held in the hands of an enthroned goddess from the Cult Center at Mycenae: Demakopoulou ed. 1990, 183 no. 152–153).

The east wall of the Lustral Basin area is decorated with an ashlar shrine façade decorated with red lily blossoms with red streaks, perhaps saffron stigmas, or, more sensationally, drops of blood; an olive tree may be growing within or behind the shrine. Upstairs (Figure 40.1, top), over the Lustral Basin, multicolored rocks suggest a mountainous landscape in which two girls on the east wall, one younger, one older, are picking crocus flowers. The younger girl, on the right, has her hair shaved with a long lock above the forehead and a longer, looped lock from the crown of her head. Her open bodice shows no breast development. Perhaps she is less than 10 years old. The older girl has begun to let her hair grow out in tight, incised curls, but her sideburns are still shaved. She wears a white or diaphanous bodice, open at the chest where we see red nipples. This girl has begun to mature; she should be about 12 years old.

On the adjacent north wall of the room, just around the corner, a third girl carries her basket full of stigmas. She has red hair and blue eyes. From her curls and the nipple showing through her open bodice, she should also be about 12 or so.

Beyond a real window, the rest of the north wall carries a scene that takes place on an elevated wooden platform supported by altars. At the extreme left of this low platform, a girl pours crocus stigmas into a panner. She is dressed in a yellow open bodice (no breast development) and kilt that reaches to her ankles. She wears a top knot of hair above the forehead and a loop of hair at the back; otherwise, her hair is a mass of short (not incised) curls. In age, she may be between the two girls on the east wall, 10–12 years old.

Between the girl and the window, a central platform rises in two steps. At left, to the right of the girl, a blue monkey (Rehak 1999) steps onto the central platform and offers crocus stigmas to a young woman seated on the highest level. Behind the young woman, a griffin leaps, leashed illusionistically to the real window frame.

The young woman sits on a pile of saffron-colored cushions or textiles. Her hair is luxuriant. She wears a diaphanous, light blue robe open to show a full breast with red nipple. Over the robe she wears a flounced kilt. A crocus blossom is painted or tattooed on her cheek. Her jewelry includes a large circular gold earring and three necklaces. The woman is universally thought to be a goddess, probably the Aegean Artemis (Rehak 2007).

Three distinct age grades for the girls can be identified: the younger girl on the east wall; the girl in front of the goddess; and the older girl on the east wall and the redhead on the north wall.

The two youngest girls in the upper story wear no necklaces while the red-headed girl and the older girl on the east wall both wear necklaces. Perhaps necklaces were offered when a girl passed into the next age grade, as is depicted in the wall painting over the Lustral Basin

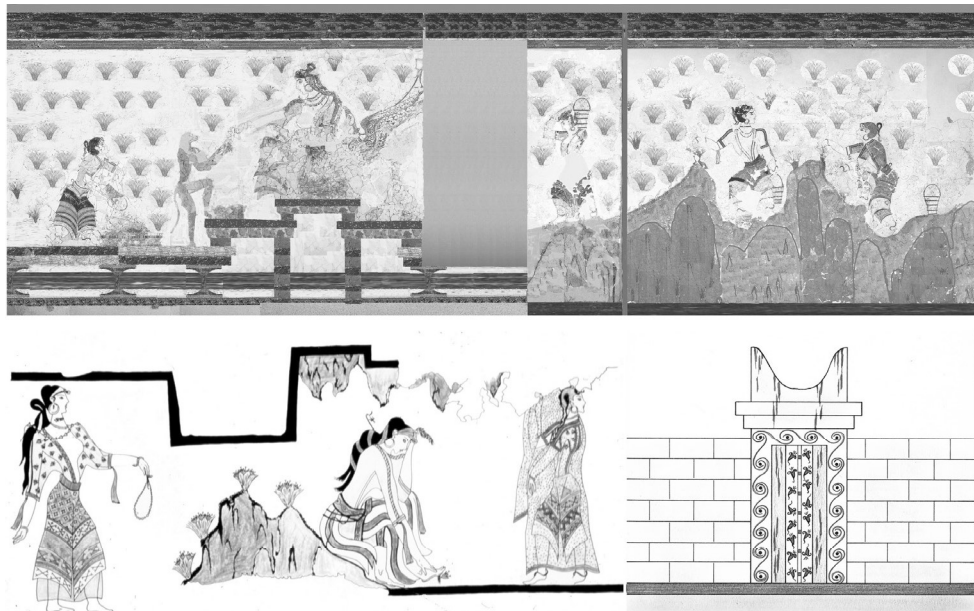


Figure 40.1 Xeste 3, Akrotiri, room 3 downstairs (left: drawing by P. Rehak; right [shrine]: after N. Marinatos 184, 75, fig. 53) and upstairs (computer reconstruction by the author after Doumas 1990, figs. 116, 122, 129).

(Younger 2009: 209 n. 27). The goddess with her plethora of necklaces would then represent the entire transition to womanhood (Wrede 1975; Hughes-Brock 1999: 280).

From the corridor on the upper floor also come two compositions that include old women.

A synthetic explanation for most of the images in Xeste 3 would suggest that the building saw a complete set of rites for all stages of a woman's life from childhood to old age (N. Marinatos 1994; Younger forthcoming).

A Minoan woman's life

Infants and girls

The burials of perinatals (still-borns and infants one month or less) are occasionally separate from the cemeteries of adults (Becker 2006, 2007: 284–285).

While one creeping nude infant (boy) is known from Palaikastro, there are no depictions of infant girls on their own (Budin 2011: 267–299). The youngest girl depicted may be the one leaning against two older women in the Neopalatial Ivory Triad found at Mycenae (Younger 2009): two adult women crouch side by side with a small child in front of them (see image in Burke, this volume). One woman has a long tress down her back, the younger of the two. The older woman has her arm around the younger's shoulder; they both share a mantle. The younger woman extends her right arm to touch the shoulder of the child, who leans against the knees of the older woman. The child's head is shaved, but by the ankle-length robe it wears it should be a girl. The two women are costumed in dresses with open bodices and patterned kilts. All three figures wear necklaces. If the Ivory Triad were envisioned as depicting a mortal family, a grandmother, mother, and young daughter, we could imagine them engaged in the transmission of female knowledge (Younger 2009).

The second youngest girl in Aegean art is the crocus-picking girl with shaved head on the upper east wall of Xeste 3; the lock of hair over her forehead and a back lock have been growing for about two years. The next age grade (or next two) will allow the hair to grow into tight curls. Other indications of girlhood are the short, calf-length kilt and a peculiar bend to the knees as if depicting a frontal squat. Such is the way the older girl is depicted on Xeste 3's upper east wall as well as girls on ivory mirror handles (Wace 1921–23: 368, pl. LIXA, B).

Girls apparently picked the autumn crocus. We have no evidence that anyone else picked crocus (except blue monkeys; Immerwahr 1990: 170 Kn No. 1, "Saffron Gatherer"), but to obtain the large amounts of saffron that would be needed to supply vitamins A and B, and as an emmenagogue and abortifacient, adults had to have been the primary pickers of crocus. In the Saffron Gatherer fresco, a monkey substitutes for a young girl, as it does in scenes of shrine decorating (an incised ivory pyxis has a girl decorating a shrine (Durm 1907, fig. 27); a fresco fragment from Akrotiri substitutes monkeys (Dumas 1992, fig. 147)).

The Xeste 3 girls picking crocus in a mountain setting are barefoot and wear elaborate flounced kilts and open bodices. It is unlikely that real girls would have gone into the mountains to pick crocus so attired, especially barefoot—the actual setting must be closer to home (Shaw 1993). An outcropping of bedrock in the east wing of the Palace of Phaistos has artificial hollows. The outcrop could have served as a surrogate mountain with planter holes for crocus where mothers could keep careful watch over their daughters in an enactment of the mountain activity.

That adults did go into the mountains to pick crocus is implied in the "Sanctuary" rhyton from Zakros. Although it depicts no people, people had been there for they left a curved branch atop an altar in the sanctuary and on the back of the rhyton there are three crocus clumps, two of which

have been plucked of their flowers. These plants may allude to women as an “absent presence”; they have visited the sanctuary, plucked crocus, left the branch as an offering, and departed.

Girls were also participants and attendants in cult. From the West House at Akrotiri comes a wall painting with a life-size girl with cropped hair, a red ear, and red lips; she carries an incense burner (cf. a miniature fragment from Pylos; Lang 1969, pl. C, no. 33 H sw). On a sealing from Khania, a girl offers a long frond to an enthroned woman (*CMS VS*, 1A, no. 177); compare the girls on a mirror handle from Mycenae (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, pl. 72 no. 2899).

Adolescent women

Becoming a woman

I assume that “becoming” an adult woman was a long process that culminated in a woman’s first child birth (Chapin 1997–2000). I also assume that with the onset of menopause older women gained new status and levels of power, as survivors and wise women. Minoan families, like classical families, were probably not large and women were probably not continuously pregnant after their second or third surviving child, after which their role in adult life must have shifted from child bearing and rearing to cultural transmission.

This process would have gone through several stages. We have seen these already in the general age grades documented in the frescoes and in the Linear B tablets: infant, young girl, older girl, adolescent, mothers with their daughters and young sons, mothers with older daughters, the older matron. Within the phase “adolescence,” there would have been a complex shift from the girl dependent on her mother (cf. the Knossos Ak texts) to the young woman who became wife, mother, and mistress of her own household.

These subphases rely on “marriage,” for which there is almost no evidence. The Linear B tablets that list mothers, with their daughters and young sons, and fathers with older sons imply that the children knew their parents, which in turn implies that parents at least kept track of each other after the birth of their children. The Knossos Ag series (seven tablets) lists small groups of people, probably families (Carrier 1983: 9–10). Ag 88 is complete: *pe-re-ko VIR 1 MUL 1 ko-wa 2 ko-wo 1*: Pereko the one man (with) one woman, two daughters, one son.

If these tablets list families, they imply a state-acknowledged partnership (a marriage) for the purpose of (at least) bearing (legitimate) children. Perhaps such a partnership/marriage is reflected in gold rings that carry a scene with only a man and a woman (e.g., *CMS I*, no. 101) or in a sealing from Phaistos (*CMS II*, 5, no. 324; MM II context), where a man and woman stand so close their hands touch.

Another possible artistic representation of such a union appears on a gold ring from the Tiryns Treasure (*CMS I*, no. 180) and has a complicated scene involving a ship with crew, a woman and man saluting each other on shore, and another man and woman greeting each other in a building. One could argue for a sequential narrative, like the abduction of Helen or Ino (Herodotus 1.1.2–4). The scene on the ring is almost exactly duplicated on a Late Geometric *louterion* (Langdon 2008: 21, figs. 1.1–3), and there the man takes the woman by the wrist, the classic wedding gesture *kheir epi karpon*.

Bull-leaping

Bull-sports might have played a role in the transition to adulthood. Since bull-leaping may have taken place at select places (Knossos, perhaps Malia and Phaistos), adolescents leaping bulls there might have signified a rite of passage for all Minoan adolescents.

Minoan women

Bull-leaping may have taken place in palace central courts (Younger 1995). Neopalatial bull-leaping is depicted on a variety of media (sealstones, gold rings, and wall paintings) which unanimously portray large and powerful bulls, and adolescent and lithe leapers. All leapers wear the typical outdoors activity garb familiar from the Harvester Vase and bronze statuettes: a tightly cinched belt above a type of breechcloth, moccasins and high socks or a complex boot; many wear jewelry; and some have their hands wrapped.

From the Court of the Stone Spout at Knossos come fragments from as many as seven panels that decorated a room in an upper story (Immerwahr 1990: 175 Kn. No. 23). In each panel, a bull charges left in flying gallop with three participants, one leaper and front and back assistants. The leaper is usually red-painted, but a fragmentary panel presents a white leaper. Similar bull-leaping panels come from Mycenae (Shaw 1996) and Tiryns (Immerwahr 1990: 202 Ti. No. 1, a white-painted leaper).

The color differences in the leapers should refer to males and females participating in bull-leaping, though this conclusion has been strongly resisted by a few scholars. Since the white-painted figures apparently lack breast development (none of them, however, has a completely preserved chest) and wear the same codpiece-loincloth as the red-painted figures, two scholars have suggested that the white-painted figures are actually different kinds of males or males at another time in the sport (Damiani-Indelicato 1988; N. Marinatos 1987).

I am unwilling to throw out the otherwise persistent color convention in favor of interpretations that demand special pleading. It is well known that energetic athletic activity arrests puberty, which would account for the absence of breast development (if that is the case) in the white-painted figures. It is also well known that many activities are so gendered that when members of the opposite sex participate, they wear the conventional costume (like the lyre player on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus who wears a woman's robe, as did classical male kithara players).

Athletic contests often marked age grades in antiquity and were appropriate for deciding the success of suitors (cf. the myths of Oinomaos, Atalanta, and Penelope and the story of Cleisthenes and his daughter Agariste: Herodotus 6.126.2). Whole families went to the Olympic and Heraia games at Olympia to look over possible suitors (Xenophon of Ephesus 1.2; Achilles Tatius 1.18).

Dancing

As a genre of poetry accompanied by dancing, the *parthenion* presented nubile young women to the rest of the community (Stehle 1997; cf. the Kea statues below). Several gold rings and the "Grove" fresco from Knossos (Immerwahr 1990: 173 Kn No. 16) depict central women who could be dancing (Warren 1981). Terracotta models (e.g., from Palaikastro: Dawkins 1902–1904; Carter 1995: 293, fig. 18.4) depict circle dances: women dancers in "court" costume and a male lyre player.

Three circular stone platforms of different sizes (Ds. 3.00, 3.22, 7.64 m) were excavated at Knossos behind the Little Palace (LM II–IIIA:1), perhaps dancing circles (Warren 1984); compare Homer's "dancing circle of Ariadne" (Homer *Iliad* 18.590ff.; Lonsdale 1995).

From a room in the Protopalatial palace at Phaistos come two vases that may show women dancing (Immerwahr 1990: 33–34 and col. pls. II [bowl] and III [fruit stand]). A one-handed bowl depicts a central figure flanked by two women who gesticulate and wear petaloid (hide?) skirts. The central figure is a red pyramid topped with a woman's head, perhaps a deity or armless effigy (*xoanon*).

Life-sized terracotta statues from Ayia Irini in Kea probably represent women as shrine attendants (Caskey 1986). From back rooms in the Temple come fifty or more statues of

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women, probably made by several artisans over many years. The women have prominent bare breasts, slightly flexed knees, and hands on hips—they probably are dancing. Each wears a short-sleeved bodice open at the front; some wear flat or rounded garlands around the neck. Since there are too many figures to represent individual deities, they should represent a group of female votaries, a *thiasos*. Plutarch (*De mul. vir.* 249d–e) records how Kean maidens (*parthenoi*) attended festivals and sang and danced while suitors watched. Perhaps it is these young women whom the clay statues represent.

Sex and fertility

There are no overt references in Minoan art to sex, pregnancy, childbirth, or lactation, as if the entire subject of begetting children was considered inappropriate for explicit depictions (Budin 2011: 275–276). Only two Bronze Age representations probably intended to show people having sex. A stamp-seal (*CMS* II, 1, no. 446a; EM II–III context) depicts a woman (?) apparently sitting on a man’s lap (cf. an Archaic seal: Boardman 1970: 137 pl. 279). And a Mycenaean terracotta now in Budapest shows two people reclining on a bed, their arms perhaps around each other (Richter 1966, figs. 24, 25).

Pregnancy

There is no Minoan representation of an obviously pregnant woman, unlike the Archaic terracottas from the Eileithyia sanctuary at Inatos (Price 1978: 86–87, fig. 2c).

A couple of feminiform vases have been identified as representing pregnant women, but their vase shape is simply round, not woman-shaped with swollen and extended belly. The most explicit of these vessels is a rhyton from Gournia (LM III A2–B context; Boyd Hawes *et al.* 1908: 46a, pl. 10.11), shaped like a sitting female with breasts and a round body decorated with stripes and hatching; she wears a double necklace. Her vulva is swollen with her clitoris prominent. At the top of the head, there is a hole for poring liquids into the vessel and below the clitoris is a small hole for letting the liquids out.

A couple of terracotta appliqués have also been described as depicting pregnant women (Karetsov *et al.* eds. 2000: 2, 58–59, nn. 35 and 36). In both instances, the figure is nearly circular, her arms wrapped around a rotund body, her hands just below her pendulous breasts. Except for their rotund bodies, there is nothing that suggests pregnancy.

Childbirth

From Malia, Chrysolakkos comes an EM III–MM IA jug painted monochrome black with an incised scene of three figures (Figure 40.2; Demargne 1932, 1945, 23–24 pls. XXXI.1, XXXVII). At the left side of the jug is a kneeling or squatting nude woman, facing frontal; two fragmentary figures precede her. The woman’s triangular pubic area is prominent and closely hatched. My guess is that the woman is ready to give birth and the two other figures stand by to help (cf. the double birth goddess Eileithyia worshipped at Amnisos: Knossos Gg 705).

Lactation

Three faience figurines show women with their hands to their breasts, as if emphasizing lactation (Foster 1979: 78 fig. 11). A wall painting from the House of the Ladies, Akrotiri, depicts

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Figure 40.2 HM 8660, incised jug from Malia, Chrysolakkos: left, photo author; right, drawing after Demargne 1945, pl. XXXVII.1.

a woman bending over to convey a kilt to a girl (Jones 2014); she has heavy and pendulous breasts, a testament to her having breast-fed infants, as mother or nurse.

Feminiform vases

Several Minoan feminiform vases (vessels in the shape of women) hold miniature jugs like babies (Fowden 1990). The metaphor “woman as container” was a prevalent classical notion (Younger 2005: 140); presumably Minoan feminiform vases expressed the equivalent idea.

From Phournou Koryphi comes the Myrtos “Goddess” (EM II; Warren 1972: 85–86, 209–210, pls. 69–70). Fairly tall (21.1 cm), the vessel has a flat base (no legs), a long neck, and two pellet breasts. With two thin arms she holds a small pitcher at her left side (a “baby” vessel); the interior of the mother vessel connects with the interior of the pitcher (is this a child’s feeding cup?). There are hatched designs on the body of the mother vessel, including her pubic area.

There are other, EM II-III feminiform vessels, some of which cradle small vases that connect with the interior of the vessel (e.g., from Koumasa: Evans 1921–1935: [PM IV] 163, fig. 121; Xanthoudides 1924, pls. II and XIX) and others that are rhyta with holes in the top of their head to receive liquids and prominent, pierced breasts for pouring liquids out (e.g., from Malia: Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, pl. 1193; and from Mochlos: Seager 1912: 64, figs. 32, 34; Marinatos and Hirmer 1960, pl. 88).

Adult women

Costumes

In this study, I have termed the adult woman’s formal attire a “court” costume. This consists of an undergarment, *heanos* in Linear B (Jones 2014, fig. 12), a long transparent blue shift,

possibly of linen with short sleeves, open from the throat to the waist to reveal the chest. A wool kilt is wrapped around the waist and belted; it consists of a set of embroidered horizontal flounces. Girls also wear the kilt although it is shorter, ending at calf-level. Adult women, presumably of lesser status, can wear just the *heanos*. Women wearing both sets of costume appear in the Knossos “Grandstand” fresco (Immerwahr 1990: 173 Kn No. 15).

Several seals and rings show procession figures carrying a garment usually with a long fringe; this may be an offering. Two men carry a double axe and a fringed robe (*CMS* II, 7, no. 7); and of two women in undergarments, one holds a fringed kilt and a double axe (*CMS* II, 3, no. 8) and another carries a yoke across her shoulders from which hangs a flounced kilt (*CMS* II, 6, no. 26).

Another element of costume is the Sacred Knot: a loop of long cloth tied with another loop at the nape of the neck; the rest of the textile trails down the back (S. Alexiou 1967). Other than the armless female, “La Parisienne,” in the Knossos Campstool fresco there is just one depiction of a woman wearing the Sacred Knot: a woman archer on a gold ring (*CMS* XI, no. 26). Otherwise, the Knot appears as an isolated motif: in frescoes (e.g., from Nirou Khani, Xanthoudides 1922, fig. 9), on vases (Furumark 1941, motif 38.8; Marinatos and Hirmer 1960, pl. 82), on seals by itself or with double axes or figure-8 shields (e.g., *CMS* I, no. 205; II, 8, no. 127), and fashioned as skeuomorphs in ivory or faience (Evans 1921–1935: [PM I] 432, figs. 308, 309, 310d). In its most detailed representations, the Sacred Knot is patterned like a tartan with long warp threads. It may be, therefore, the same type of cloth shown in wall paintings (held by the adolescent male in Xeste 3 and by a sitting woman from Phylakopi: Immerwahr 1990: 189, Ph No. 2).

Waist compression

Minoan women and men are often depicted with “wasp” waists that are either constricted by a tall belt (worn by both red- and white-painted bull-leapers) or a tight-laced bodice like that worn by a faience snake handler from Knossos. The practice of waist compression (Younger 2004) probably did not extend to the Mainland. In the Iron Age, there is continued evidence for the tall belt from Late Geometric vase painting through Cretan Daedalic sculpture.

Corseting or tight lacing is an artificial process that alters body shape, specifically at the waist with secondary effects at the hips and chest, pushing the abdominal organs up into the thoracic cavity, swelling the ribs out and lifting the chest high (the high-chested “pouter pigeon” look). According to modern practitioners, waist compression separates the upper body with its breathing, feeling, and thinking from the lower body with its sensations of motion and sexual energy. Waist compression makes normal body positions uncomfortable; practitioners tell how sitting cross-legged on the floor is preferable to sitting in chairs (cf. the Knossos “Grandstand” fresco).

Classes of women

Frescoes depict at least three classes of women. The Grandstand fresco shows a crowd of women with their heads depicted in a band of white paint. A second class of women stands at the top of stairs dressed in a simple robe (*heanos*). A third class of women sits or kneels on the top of the stairs or on platforms. These last women are depicted twice as large as the other women in the fresco, and they are dressed in “court” costume.

Thus we would seem to have three classes of women: elites, women who accompany them (cf. Mycenaean *a-pi-go-ro*, Greek ἀμφίπολοι), and the women masses (e.g., those who did

Minoan women

manual labor like the women who fetch water in the Akrotiri West House fresco and the gangs of anonymous women workers in the Linear B tablets).

A fourth class of women would have constituted religious personnel (the “Priestess” from the West House, the “Veiled Girl” in Xeste 3).

Sex segregation

The Grandstand and Grove frescoes segregate the sexes: the men as only heads or upper bodies outlined in a thick band of red paint; the women placed separately, heads in a band of white paint and full figures in more detail. The West House frescoes confirm this, with the women on the rooftops and the men everywhere else, especially outside (Flotilla). Only when two women fetch water (Meeting on the Hill), do we see men near them.

It is likely therefore that Minoan society segregated the sexes, at least partially, with the Grandstand and Grove frescoes referring to the practice explicitly.

Women and work

Minoan women are rarely depicted at work. One Neopalatial terracotta model from the Kamiları tholos shows a woman grinding corn or kneading bread in a kitchen while a male figure peers at her from an open window (Levi 1961–62: 123–148; Novaro 2000; Lefèvre-Novaro 2001; see image in Budin, “Aegean,” this volume). I assume that women taking care of small children had other domestic duties: food preparation, weaving, pottery making, stone tool production. If so, there are several implications: the home in general would be a woman’s space (cf. the classical *gynaikonitis*) since child rearing, weaving, and food preparation would be taking place everywhere there. Women would have to have been knowledgeable about food sources, fibers, clays, and pottery production and firing. As women moved beyond their child-bearing years, their social roles probably changed: biological reproduction would have given way to cultural reproduction: especially the transmission of women’s knowledge (food, medicine, child birth and child rearing; teaching and counseling).

Malia Quartier Mu contained a bronze foundry, and a sealstone and potter’s workshop. Two seals may depict women potters (*CMS* II, 8, no. 243; XIII no. 80). Since women are assumed to be the first major gatherers of plants for food (as opposed to hunters), they may also have been the first potters (Vitelli 1995: 55–63; London 2002): both crafts involve similar attention to minutiae, an awareness of variables, and a long tradition of inherited knowledge. With cooking comes a detailed knowledge of plants (including their medicinal uses), how to prepare them for consumption, and how to transmit this preparation via recipes to one’s daughters.

From archaeology and from the Linear B tablets we know more about women textile workers (see Burke and Shelmerdine, this volume; Barber 1991, 1997; Carington Smith 1992; Nixon 1999; Tzachili 2001, 2007; Nosch 2003, 2014). Interestingly, many of the women weavers and spinners in the Pylos Aa/Ab/Ad tablets are listed, not as slaves, but by their names which are often derived from distant islands or port towns as if these were foreign women who might have had a knowledge of exotic weaves and patterns.

Women in cult

Almost all of our information about women in cult activities comes from art, especially gold fingerings and wall paintings. The Linear B tablets from the Mainland mention priestesses (*i-je-re-ja*) in various capacities, but only one tablet from Knossos mentions a priestess. Knossos

Fp 1 lists olive oil given in the month of “Deukalion” to divinities at Knossos (Diktaian Zeus, Pan, “All the gods”), at the “Daidaleion,” and at Amnisos (“all the gods,” the Erinyes, and the “priestess of the winds”; see also Boëlle-Weber, this volume).

Several gold fingerrings show complex cult scenes that feature prominent women; most of these have been found on Crete. On several rings, a single, large woman in “court” costume stands in the center of a paved sanctuary making expressive gestures (dancing?) while a man tugs at a tree on one side and, on the other, either a figure-8 shield draped with a Sacred Knot (*CMS* I, no. 219), or a man hugs a baetyl (Archanes ring; Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997: vol. 2, 654–660, figs. 722–724), or a woman leans over a table (*CMS* I, no. 126). Or the central woman makes expressive gestures while a woman hugs baetyls (*CMS* VI, no. 278). On other rings, women attend shrines (e.g., *CMS* I, nos. 86, 127, 191; II, 3, nos. 15 and 305) or a peak sanctuary (Poros ring: Dimopoulou and Rethemiotakis 2000).

The Knosso fresco in the Procession Corridor leading from the west court depicted a group of at least 22 life-sized figures (Immerwahr 1990: 174–175, Kn No. 22; Boulotis 1987: 149, figs. 4a–b). In at least two groups, men flank and approach two central, important women. In the Campstool fresco (Immerwahr 1990: 176 Kn No. 26, pl. 44), two registers of men face one another on campstools and toast each other (cf. *CMS* I, no. 179), the entire scene framed by at least two large-scale women. One (now lost) sat on an elaborate throne. The other is the well-known “La Parisienne.”

The Ayia Triada sarcophagus (Figures 40.3a and 40.3b) is made of limestone, stuccoed and painted (LM III A2; Long 1974; La Rosa 2001; Marinatos and Hirmer 1960, color pl. XXVII–XX). The two ends (Figure 40.3a) carry white-painted women riding chariots: on one (Figure 40.3a, left), the women’s caps are simple and the chariot is drawn by horses with the added horns of agrimia; on the other (Figure 40.3a, right), the women’s caps are plumed and the chariot is drawn by griffins (a baby griffin above).

On one long side (Figure 40.3b, bottom), the panel is divided into four sections. From left to right: four women process right in pairs; a fifth woman leads them and extends her hands toward a bovine trussed for sacrifice atop an offering table; beneath are two recumbent goats. Behind, is a male flautist (aulete). Farther to right, a woman in a “hide skirt” touches a low altar in front of a large double axe on a stand. At the right edge of the panel stands a wall surmounted by Horns of Consecration; branches of an olive tree overlap the wall (cf. the Lustral Basin fresco, Xeste 3).

The other long side (Figure 40.3b, top) carries seven individuals in two processions. At left, three figures process left toward two double axes on stands framing a large krater (from right to left: a male lyre player in a long tunic; a woman wearing a long tunic and a cap carries a yoke from which two buckets suspend; a third woman in a “hide skirt” pours a liquid into the krater). At the right, three bare-chested men wearing hide skirts process right, carrying offerings (two small bulls, probably simulacra, and a model boat). At the extreme right, the goal of the men’s procession: a three-stepped base, a small tree, an armless male statue (*xoanon*) wrapped in a long robe (cf. the “Parisienne”), and the façade of a building.

The *xoanon* should represent the deceased buried in the sarcophagus and the building behind him, his (ideal) tomb. The bull simulacra and boat model would then represent offerings placed in the tomb, the real animals would be sacrificed, and the liquids would be poured in his honor. On the ends, if griffins were considered liminal, the women in that panel could be immortal, guardians of the tomb or spirits to accompany the deceased to an afterworld. The women in the other end panel may be mortal: their caps are simple and the animals that draw the chariot were intended to be real, whether horses or agrimia.

There seem to be two classes of women on the sarcophagus: low-status women in hide skirts performing actual sacrifices (pouring the liquid, presenting offerings at the altar), and



Figure 40.3a Ayia Triada sarcophagus, ends: at left (west end): two women drive chariots driven by horses/agrimia; at right (east end): two goddesses (?) drive chariots driven by griffins. (Photo: author.)

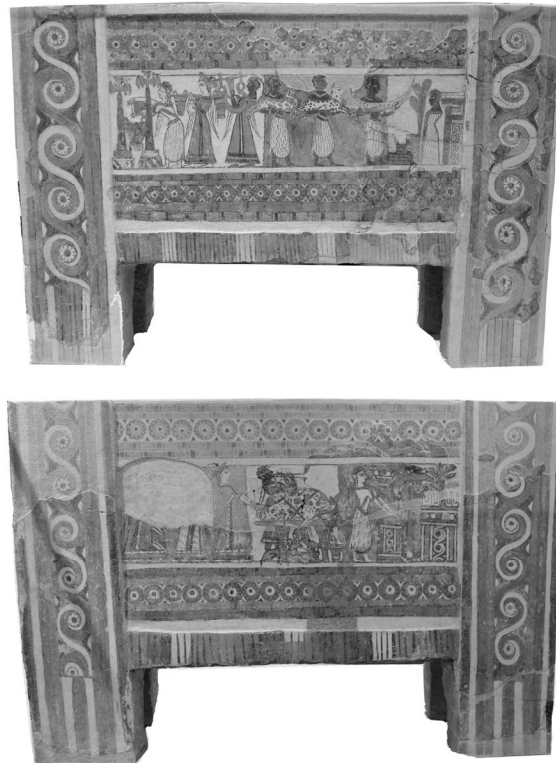


Figure 40.3b Ayia Triada sarcophagus, long sides: top (north side), left to right: women offer liquids, male lyre-player, men offer objects, xoanon, tomb(?); bottom (south side), left to right: women process toward sacrificial bovine, aulete, woman at altar, shrine(?). (Photo: author.)

high-class women in long tunics, one of whom also does work (carrying the yoke and buckets) and the “fifth” woman who conducts the sacrifice—she should be a priestess and have administrative duties. There is also a gendered division of labor: the women perform the rites, while men carry offerings to the deceased and provide music (their costume refers to their transitional gender while playing music).

Old women

The only certain representation of old women is in Xeste 3, the upstairs corridor (Doumas 1992, pls. 131–134; Petrakou 2001: 78 col. fig. 84). They wear full robes, have full breast development, hair that is bound up in snoods, and wisps of hair on their forehead, temple, and back of the neck. From the wisps of hair, their age can be estimated as 40 to 50 years, old by Minoan standards.

Women’s health

Few women’s skeletons have been analyzed and published. The woman that lay in the far corner of the western room at Anemospilia (Musgrave *et al.* 1994) was short (154 cm [5 ft. ½ in.]), in her early twenties, and suffering from poor dental hygiene and anemia (see Prag, this volume).

She seems, therefore, to have been a typical Minoan woman (Calnan 1992): height about 154.6 cm (5 ft. 1 in.), average life expectancy about 28 years, with a peak mortality of 20 to 25 years old (there are few 70-year-olds) and a “high incidence of deficiency diseases and ante-mortem tooth loss” (McGeorge 1988: 48). Death in pregnancy would probably have been common. For instance, an elite burial at Pankalokhori in western Crete (LM IIIA2; Markoulaki and Baxevani-Kouzioni 1997) contained the bones of a young pregnant woman (fetus bones in the abdominal area).

If a woman survived to nurse her child, she may have developed a weakened immune system due to prolonged lactation. The female body needs 27,000 calories of stored fat (15 to 20 percent of total body mass) to sustain a pregnancy, and nursing involves the loss of 1,500 calories/day, about as many calories/day that a woman received as rations in the Pylos workforce (Palmer 1989: 106).

The few women who survived beyond 45 (i.e., beyond their child-bearing and -rearing years) were in better health than the men and with teeth that were less carious. One such is the LM IIIB woman from Armenoi tomb 132, in her mid-forties, short and delicate (h. 141 cm. [4 ft. 7 in.]). Although enamel hypoplasia of her teeth indicates an interrupted diet, her bones do not show signs of hard work (Tzedakis and Martlew eds., 1999: 238, no. 213: color forensic reconstruction of her face).

Diet seems to have been poor due to the necessity of storing food. Meat (pig, sheep/goat, some beef, and very little bird and tortoise) would have had to have been eaten quickly or salted or smoked; fresh meat would have been rare (Trantalidou 1990; Riley 1999). There is little evidence, contrary to expectation, that fish and seafood contributed much to the Minoan diet (Berg 2011).

Food that can be stored dry includes cereals, pulses, and dried fruits (figs, prunes, raisins, dates) and cheese (storeable milk). All these are high in carbohydrates and poor in iron, vitamin C, and protein, contributing to anemia, dental disease, and a low life expectancy (McGeorge 1988: 53). Other contributing factors include seasonal food shortages leading to nutritional deficiency and arrested growth that leaves tell-tale marks (“Harris lines”) on bones and teeth (McGeorge 1987: 412). In the Armenoi cemetery, 86 percent of the individuals displayed such

lines, with women constituting the overwhelming majority (82.5 percent). Most periods of arrested growth occurred at 14 to 18 years, suggesting that the demands of adolescence and the onset of menarche contributed to a woman's nutritional deficiency.

An analysis of rations in the Linear B tablets from Knossos leads to similar conclusions (Palmer 1989). Women workers received barley and/or wheat, figs, oil, and wine per day as rations. Regardless of the amounts or proportions, Palmer found that women workers either had to have been supplemented with unrecorded calories and nutrients or they were “consistently underfed.” Women with small children would have had to share their rations; adolescent girls received their own rations; but mothers with young girls and young boys received rations of only up to one-and-a-half that of an adult woman's alone. Not all women, of course, received reliable rations, and women outside the palace ration system may have had even less consistent access to proper nourishment.

Women and death

Adult women had to prepare the dead body for burial and to mourn the deceased (M. Alexiou 1974; Bloch and Parry eds. 1982). For example, a LM III A:2–B larnax from the Messara carries one of the earliest prothesis scenes: a long-robed woman stands on a footstool behind a couch while she readies a body (indicated by wavy lines for hair) for the funeral (*pace* Rethemiotakis 1995/1997; cf. the Minoanizing larnakes from Tanagra in Boeotia, LH III A–B: Aravantinos 2010: 101–105, 108–115).

The importance of Minoan women

Neopalatial Crete presents the best candidate for a matriarchy—if one ever existed. The period marks a cultural peak in the Aegean world (Rehak 1997), and no one denies that Minoan women were prominent then. Women play important roles in large-scale frescoes; they are seated or enthroned (men rarely) and are attended by standing people and by animals; women tend to be represented at a larger scale, in central positions, in landscapes, and with elaborate costumes.

Balancing these examples, however, are a number of male “power icons,” such as the long-robed men who hold maces (*CMS* II, 3, no. 147) and the Khania “Master” atop his city (*CMS* V, Supp. 1A, no. 142).

Prominent women, however, are depicted in the Knossos Grove and Grandstand frescoes that seem to take place in the West and Central courts. Since only women are shown seated in Neopalatial art, a circumstantial case can be made for the use of “bench rooms” by groups of women; these are large rectangular rooms with stone benches along one or more sides (cf. Ayia Triada, Phaistos, and the Knossos Throne Room; see, however, Koehl 1997). And if Lustral Basins are associated with women, the presence of such a basin in the Knossos Throne Room implies the consistent, formal presence of women in that room.

Women participated in activities that may seem more “natural” to men—at least to us. I have already discussed the evidence for women bull-leapers. Women also bore weapons and were hunters: a woman with a sword on *CMS* II, 3, no. 16 and a woman with a bow on *CMS* XI, no. 26 (cf. the new Pylos fresco: Brecolouaki *et al.* 2008). In the “Boar Hunt” fresco from Tiryns, fragments show red and white (male and female) boar hunters (Rodewaldt 1912: 116–137, especially p. 121, #157, pl. XIV.1 and #158, fig. 52; and p. 122, #160, fig. 54). Women also drive chariots (the Ayia Triada sarcophagus (Figure 40.3a), and a fresco from Tiryns: Immerwahr 1990: 202 TI No. 6a).

At the end of LM IB, almost every Neopalatial site in Crete was destroyed by fire, with the exception of the central palace at Knossos (Driessen and Macdonald 1997; Rehak 1997). These destructions clearly marked a major societal change. The pottery that follows, LM II, is more formal and architectural rebuilding is rare. By the next period, LM IIIA1, Mycenaeans are in charge of Crete; they have established new megarons at a few sites (Ayia Triada, Gournia), and their scribes (native Minoans?) are writing documents in Greek (Linear B).

It is debated whether the destructions were the result of an internal rejection of the Knossian palatial system or whether Mycenaeans from outside played a role. Regardless, after these destructions, the status and roles of women changed: no more bench rooms, Lustral Basins, large-scale women in landscapes, or imported blue monkeys. Also gone are stone relief vessels, stone bull's head rhyta, and ivory and faience figurines. In other words, after LM IB, all the products and propaganda that reflect the Neopalatial ideology of Knossos disappear.

Because of the violence of the LM IB destruction of Minoan society and the eventual re-establishment of order by Mycenaeans, it is difficult not to see a rejection of important and powerful women, certainly as a result of the destructions, maybe even a catalyst for them.

Legacies and survivals

Under the Mycenaeans, Crete entered her most prosperous—and uneventful—period. Some aspects of Minoan culture survived the end of the Bronze Age. Early Iron Age pottery continued a pictorial tradition, and myths about Minos and his family and about local goddesses like Diktyнна persisted. Many prehistoric sites experienced continuity into the Early Iron Age. At Knossos, an Archaic city grew up around the palace and a shrine to “Rhea” was erected on the ruins of the palace (Diodorus V.68; Evans 1921–1935 [PM II], 7); a similar Early Iron Age temple can be seen atop the Theatrical Stairs at Phaistos.

Based on the persistence of myth and on archaeological evidence, a supposed Minoan matriarchy has been the subject of many popular books from Mary Renault's *The King Must Die* (1958) to John Dempsey's *Ariadne's Brother* (1996).

It was in connection with the study of Palaeolithic and Neolithic society that modern scholars like Maria Gimbutas first proposed the concept of a great mother goddess (e.g., 1974, 1999). Since then, fans of Minoan women have come to Crete on organized “Goddess Tours” or by themselves as individual pilgrims. While the academic world has remained largely skeptical (Talalay 1994; Meskell 1995; Conkey and Tringham 1995; Eller 2000), the idea of a Minoan matriarchy, or at least of powerful Minoan women—and their goddesses—has been popular (Goodison and Morris 1998)—and persistent (Figure 40.4).



Figure 40.4 Gold axe from Arkalokhori (LM I) and “labrys,” a modern symbol of women’s power. (Photo: author.)

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