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REVIEW ARTICLE

A Bull-Leaping Fresco from the Nile Delta and a Search for Patrons and Artists

MARIA C. SHAW

TAUREADOR SCENES IN TELL EL-DAB'A (AVARIS) AND KNOSSOS, by *Manfred Bietak*, *Nanno Marinatos*, and *Clairy Palivou*, with a contribution by *Ann Brysbaert*. Pp. 173, b&w and color figs. 138, color pls. 17. Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 2007. €75.80. ISBN 978-3-7001-3780-1 (cloth).

This book presents the outstanding discovery by the Austrian excavator Manfred Bietak of a toreador fresco, fragments of which he found in Egypt, at Tell el-Dab'a, located in the Pelusiac branch of the Eastern Nile Delta. The site was once part of Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos, who were ousted by the Egyptians at the beginning of the New Kingdom. Bietak attributes both the toreador composition and other paintings found with it to the latter period, arguing that Minoan artists executed them.

INTRODUCTION

The paintings at Tell el-Dab'a undoubtedly constitute one of the most exciting and important archaeological discoveries made in the later decades of the 20th century. So closely do Bietak and the other contributing authors link the toreador fresco to the iconography and style of Minoan painting that they are convinced the palace at Knossos sent its own artists to make the painting. According to Bietak, this momentous event took place in the reign of Thutmose III, in the first half of the 18th Dynasty, equivalent to Late Minoan (LM) IB in Crete. Needless to say, this book will be a matter of impassioned interest to both Egyptologists and archaeologists of the Bronze Age Aegean. There are reasons also to turn to the eastern Mediterranean for the frescoes' further possible inspiration, as well as for suggestions regarding how the bull-leaping theme was transferred to Egypt.

The exciting discoveries at Tell el-Dab'a were brought to the attention of the public nearly immediately, thanks to the excavator and his announcements in newspapers, periodicals, and publications, including a small book published in 1996—when Bietak believed the paintings belonged to the era of Hyksos occupation.¹ The importance of the discovery can be compared with that of the so-called Keftiu paintings found on the walls of rock-cut tombs of high officials at Thebes, in Upper Egypt. That the word "Keftiu" may have referred to the Minoans, seen bringing precious gifts, was first proposed by Vercoutter, after systematic review of

Egyptian pictorial and written records going back even earlier than Thutmose III.²

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

One must first emphasize how excellent Bietak's publication is, not least because of the brilliant illustrations that allow the reader to see every little detail. Of course, quality in all respects is to be expected from both the discoverer and his collaborators, Marinatos and Palivou, foremost scholars in the Bronze Age Aegean. Brysbaert has also contributed her expertise as a scientist who has worked on plasters and other materials at a great number of prehistoric sites.

The book is divided in three parts: part 1 presents the archaeological and pictorial evidence; part 2 has a restoration and a new study of the famous Toreador fresco from the palace at Knossos, which is used as the main comparandum for the Tell el-Dab'a painting; and part 3 contains two special studies.

In part 1 (ch. 1 [13–44]), the excavator introduces the reader to the site: its history and topography and the locations/contexts of the plaster fragments. Two large buildings, F and G, which he calls "palaces," are assigned to the early 18th Dynasty, in the reign of Thutmose III—the period to which he also attributes the plasters. Only the rectangular foundation walls, built of mudbrick, survive. Within the latter, brick walls form compartments ("casemates") that were filled with earth. Neither floors nor walls are preserved.

Bietak believes that most of the plasters found in dumps east of a ramp leading to the building and in area H/1 (27 [fig. 24]) belong to Building F. Those near Building G were found in areas H/II–III, H/VI, near an entrance through the enclosure wall leading to the building (30 [fig. 27]). A chronological chart (16 [fig. 5]) assigns the making of the frescoes from Building G to phase C/3; their dumping occurred in C/2. The buildings, Bietak concludes, could not have been used for more than 50 years. Fill at the top of the dumps dates to the time of Amenhotep II, successor to Thutmose III. Such views do not always agree with those of other scholars. For instance, there are those who still believe the more likely date is the Hyksos period,³ and it does not help that the present publication does not include any substantive report on conclusions drawn from a formal study of the pottery with which the plasters were associated.

Bietak explains the presence of Minoan frescoes at Tell el-Dab'a by suggesting that they were made on the occasion of a dynastic marriage involving a Minoan princess. With that

¹Bietak 1996.

²Vercoutter 1956, esp. 119.

³Niemeier and Niemeier 1998.

in mind, he restores a throne room in Building F after the pattern of the Throne Room of the palace at Knossos, including the painted decoration of antithetical griffins on either side of the throne (40 [fig. 36]). His evidence for griffins is a plaster fragment from Tell el-Dab'a that preserves part of a wing decorated with spirals that characterize Minoan examples, but, of course, we have no idea where it came from. To complete his restoration, Bietak assigns to the imagined throne room a floor painted with a mazelike pattern, known from plaster fragments in the dumps (40 [fig. 36]).

The remaining chapters in part 1 deal directly with the toreador scene itself. Chapter 2 (45–66), written by the three main authors, discusses and illustrates the individual fragments and is followed by two restorations that differ somewhat from each other, both sumptuously illustrated in color (figs. 59A, B, 60). Bull-leaping is shown against two different backgrounds: the first, the rocky countryside, divided into three undulating zones of red, yellow, and blue; and the second, the mazelike pattern.

Palivou has designed astounding techniques to let us see the worn designs nearly as they looked originally. Her method, put to use in chapter 2, involves intensifying lines, patterns, and colors progressively, through digital photography, until maximum visibility is attained. The process brings the paintings back to life and should henceforth be used in the study of all Bronze Age paintings, particularly those (often poorly preserved) from the Aegean. Selective illustrations of the stages in such a “reconstitution” (as Evans might have called it) show that the process is reliable; the results are magical. Another contribution by Palivou is her explanation of how, through a series of drawings, a grid of impressed string lines was used by the Tell el-Dab'a artist to help render the intricate maze pattern (47 [fig. 71]). This grid clearly matches such devices known from Crete, but it seems to me to be more elaborate, because not only the grid but also the outlines of the constituent motifs were impressed, a step unknown in Cretan paintings.

Chapter 3 in part 1 (67–86) was written by Bietak and deals with many topics. One senses some repetition, also reflected in duplicate illustrations. Fewer chapters with a tighter focus would have helped. The main themes of this disparate chapter are relative chronology; technique and color conventions; the motifs; compositional principles, bulls, and toreadors; the meaning of the half-rosette and bull-leaping in Aegean palatial iconography; and general conclusions on the bull painting at Tell el-Dab'a and bull-leaping in general. Lastly, chapter 4 in part 1 (87–111) illustrates and catalogues all the fragments of bull-leaping scenes and includes digital photographs of the fragments, illustrating how they looked before and after the digital processing carried out by Palivou.

In chapter 1 (115–26) of part 2 (“Toreador Scenes in Knossos”), we find a new study of the famous toreador frescoes from Knossos and a fine new reconstruction prepared by Marinatos and Palivou, superceding one by Cameron (117 [fig. 101a–d]). It is based on fragments in the Herakleion Archaeological Museum that were digitally enhanced by Palivou and catalogued in chapter 3 of part 2 (133–41). The new reconstruction is useful to all, but its inclusion is

strange, given that the painting is generally believed to be of LM II/IIIa date, even by this book's authors. Its iconography also seems to belong to that date. It is also worth noting that the human figures in the Tell el-Dab'a painting are neither the size of those in the nearly wall-sized Knossian murals nor those in miniature painting; both styles are likely earlier than the intermediary sizes.

Marinatos' contribution (“Bull-Leaping and Royal Ideology” [127–32]) in chapter 2 of part 2 requires brief comment. One of her illustrations compares varieties of leaping poses in Knossian and Tell el-Dab'a depictions, and she turns discussion to the bull games visible on Syrian seals dating to ca. 1800 and 1700 B.C.E. as a possible inspiration.⁴ Reasonably, Marinatos rejects the theory that the latter were the main inspiration for the Minoan paintings, since major art forms normally affect minor art forms, and not the other way around.

In part 3 of the book, the first study (again by Marinatos) discusses the “Rosette and Palm on the Bull Frieze from Tell el Dab'a and the Minoan Solar Goddess of Kingship” (145–50). By analogy with Syrian art and Hittite hieroglyphs, the rosette is seen as “a determinative of deity” (145). This motif fuses with the Egyptian “solar disk,” and the resulting symbol resembles the Knossian design with a split-rosette frieze, which also appears on the dress of a woman in the Procession fresco from Knossos and the facade of the Mycenaean royal Tomb of Atreus (there in stone relief). The palm tree, Marinatos continues, must be connected with the “palm standard” seen in Syrian art in the company of goddesses or priestesses and kings (147). Combined, these symbols constitute “the emblems of a female solar deity” worshiped in Crete (147). Bull games were thus held and bulls sacrificed in honor of this solar goddess.

In the process of formulating this intriguing interpretation, Marinatos takes us into iconography that involves not only Crete and Egypt but the Levant as well. She reminds us how Morgan also looked beyond Crete with regard to the paintings at Tell el-Dab'a, seeing the bull-leaping scenes as part of an “east Mediterranean” koine (132).⁵ With such comments in mind, it is obvious that we must keep this three-sided relationship in mind as we attempt to consider the Tell el-Dab'a phenomenon in international terms.

Brysaert contributed the last study in part 3 (151–62) and, using the latest methods to analyze plaster, pigments, and techniques, she arrives at the important conclusion that the plaster used at Tell el-Dab'a was made of lime, also used in Aegean fresco painting. By contrast, Egyptian painting used the tempera technique, where the plaster derived from gypsum, and the pigments were made to adhere permanently to the surface by mixing them with adhesive agents such as egg white.

The following comments concern three broad questions about the Tell el-Dab'a paintings: (1) who were the artists?; (2) who were the patrons who ordered the paintings?; and (3) when were the paintings made? These questions have, in varying degrees, been asked by others before and will continue to be asked. What follows is but one perception of the Tell el-Dab'a enigma.⁶

⁴For these, Marinatos refers to Collon 1994, pls. 1–3.

⁵For the role played by Syria as “a cultural link” between Crete and the East, see Smith 1965, 3–21.

⁶This author wishes to express her indebtedness to people, who, through conversations with her, contributed to her understanding of this major historical issue: A. Chapin, L.

THE IDENTITY OF THE ARTISTS AND THE CHARACTER OF THE ART

“Character” here includes theme, iconography, and mode of representation. The clear source of thematic inspiration is that of the frescoes from the palace at Knossos, which frequently, and for an extended period, featured bull-leaping scenes. The theme later spreads to palaces and perhaps even houses on the Mycenaean mainland. So far, Tell el-Dab’a is the only place where bull-leaping is known in the form of a major wall painting outside the Aegean. For our purposes, the term “Minoan” refers to people and objects from Crete.

Bietak brings to our attention a feature of the toreador scene that may be significant: a couple of leapers in the Tell el-Dab’a painting are shown with hair partially shaved and the hairless areas indicated in blue. These are sideburns (cat. no. A30) and the nape of a neck and sideburns (cat. no. F4). As Bietak notes (77), this convention points to Late Cycladic I paintings in Thera, but similar shaved sideburns are also found on the Cup Bearer fresco.⁷ The latter has been dated by Immerwahr to LM II/III A,⁸ but the former of the two dates she offers is, in my view, the more likely, given the careful use of an artist’s grid to render the textile patterns on the clothing of the participants in the procession. What one might venture to offer as an explanation for the more distinctly Thera trait at Tell el-Dab’a—since Akrotiri was already destroyed—is the presence of a painter who had been trained in Thera or in a Cycladic tradition and had joined others in Egypt as an itinerant artist.

The idea of artists deriving from more than one geographical location can be reinforced by the hybrid character of the art itself at Tell el-Dab’a.⁹ A conspicuous case is the “maze.” What is peculiar is the “un-Minoan” practice of superimposing a figural (bull-leaping) scene over the complex, busy, meanderlike pattern.¹⁰ Minoans almost always show human figures against a blank space, with any associated background elements located in areas beyond the figural part of the scene. Against this claim, it has been objected that there exists, in fact, an image on a seal from Gournia that features a bull against an architectonic background.¹¹ One response to this is that different compositional rules apply to different artistic media and that the tiny space afforded on a seal provided the engraver with one of two choices: either to superimpose pictorial elements in a way never done in the major art of wall painting or to show them on the periphery of the limited surface available.

To address the problem of overlapping pictorial elements at Tell el-Dab’a, we may have to turn elsewhere, beyond Mi-

noan art. Egyptian painting provides examples. There, not only are groups of people or objects shown overlapping but there are also scenes of fishing or spearing fish, where human figures and fish and waterfowl are shown against rows of vertical zigzag lines that conventionally render the water of a river or a lake.¹² This may be a parallel for the way bulls and leapers are shown against the maze, which may symbolize a built environment, represented by a patterned plaster floor or by a floor covered by a patterned carpet. Given such parallels, it appears possible that Egyptian painters also may have participated in the making of the Tell el-Dab’a painting by contributing their own iconographic conventions.

Could there have been other painters besides Minoan, Thera, and Egyptian? To explore the question, we need to turn to a chronologically distant parallel. I refer to the so-called Investiture scene at Mari, in northwestern Mesopotamia, in the Palace of King Zimri Lim, which was destroyed by Hammurabi ca. 1760–1750 B.C.E. Its excavator saw the painted decoration as having affinities with paintings in Minoan Crete, particularly its spiral frieze—similar friezes on Crete are associated with depictions of veined stone. Architecture involving this kind of stone is typical on Crete but not in the Levant.¹³ To the Cretan connection with Mari we can now add some new information, based on recent discoveries at the Minoan site of Kommos on the southern coast of Crete. I refer to a spiral frieze in Middle Minoan (MM) III Building T, painted on a plaster floor running next to a wall with a painted dado, which was divided into panels, each decorated with simulations of veined and other variegated kinds of stone.¹⁴ The closest parallel for the Kommos example is a built podium at Mari, its surface painted with imitations of slabs of veined stone surrounded by a spiral border.¹⁵ The assumed date of ca. 1750 B.C.E. for the Mari paintings compares well with the Kommos example, which is likely somewhat later.

At Mari, the Investiture scene seems to be the product of a confluence of styles, despite its basically Mesopotamian character.¹⁶ These point both to Egypt and the Aegean. The composition is built in three parts, like a triptych, perhaps imitating designs in the minor arts. The central part depicts the king accompanied by an entourage of humans and deities that stand within what appears to be an interior space. It is outlined and thus set off from areas directly outdoors, to the right and left. Mythical quadrupeds, sphinx- and griffin-like, are poised on the branches of trees directly next to the structure, while birds flutter their wings at the top, above the foliage. The relative naturalism of the outdoors bears an affinity with Aegean nature scenes, another Aegean con-

Girella, S. Manning, J.B. Rutter, J.W. Shaw, and especially J.G. Younger.

⁷ Evans 1928, 706 (misidentified as a silver sideburn ornament, as pointed out to me by J.G. Younger [pers. comm. 2009]).

⁸ Immerwahr 1990, 175.

⁹ Among comments made at a conference regarding who might have been the artists of the Tell el-Dab’a frescoes, it is worth referring to Egyptologist Edna Russmann, who raised the question of a possible participation by Egyptian artists (Sherratt 2000, 89–90).

¹⁰ Shaw 1995, 105; Rehak 1997, 401 (a review).

¹¹ CMS 2(3), no. 238; Niemeier and Niemeier 1998, 92. However, and, as Younger informs me (pers. comm. 2009), this is actually a cushion seal with a typical architectonic design that was recut in the Early Neopalatial period with a bull to the left, under which is an unfinished object.

¹² Schäfer 1974, 200, 239–40; see also Mekhitarian (1978, 10–11) for illustrations from Saqqara (Fifth Dynasty) and Thebes (New Kingdom).

¹³ Parrot 1958, vii–viii.

¹⁴ Shaw and Shaw 2006, 140–42, 212–13, pls. 2.39, 2.41.

¹⁵ Parrot 1958, xv, 1–2.

¹⁶ Parrot 1958, color pl. A.

nection being the spiral band that borders the composition on all four sides.

In addition to its connections with Aegean art, the toreador fresco at Tell el-Dab'a may also relate to the Mari painting. Common to both compositions is the paratactic arrangement of indoor and outdoor areas, the former represented at Tell el-Dab'a by the patterned floor or maze. Here, both at the left and right of the floor (or built area), appears a slim, upright element, marked by horizontal, multicolored bands, with a palm tree rising above it. Clearly, the palms mark the transition from indoors to outdoors, and the painting may well have continued farther on the right with an outdoors area matching that on the left side of the maze. Were this the case, it would mean that, in both the Egyptian and the Syrian paintings, we are dealing with a tripartite composition, with outdoor areas flanking or surrounding a building. The vertical barred elements in the Tell el-Dab'a painting recall the barred borders that usually frame and separate panels in Minoan toreador paneled friezes, which were shortened here by the ingenious artist to make them look like the antae of two walls that acted as a fence.

How is one to explain "connections" like the ones suggested for Mari, Tell el-Dab'a, and Knossos—sites that are geographically, and sometimes chronologically, so distant? We need, for a moment, to consider possibilities other than direct contacts for the existence of analogies that cannot be attributed to mere coincidence. Here, I would like to introduce the term "virtual synergy" for a relationship that may have existed between Crete, Syria, and Egypt. The only way this could have come about is by means of itinerant, "ethnically" diverse artists who carried an art learned at home and on their travels began to create a repository of elements that was perpetually added to and recombined, whether in terms of representational modes, themes, or motifs. Style and iconography naturally would still have varied at each location, depending on the requirements of patrons and also the availability and, to a degree, the origins of the artists.

To this "virtual bank," the main contributors of modes of painting (subjects and styles) would have been the Minoans and artists from the Levant—the latter mainly through the medium of small-scale art, such as that encountered on seals or carved ivories, media that can contribute iconographic themes, but not in a style suitable for large-scale painting. Resident local artists at various places could then partake of and contribute to the process. Egypt must be considered generally the least receptive to foreign elements, but for the exception at Tell el-Dab'a. The nature of a virtual bank, ever in a state of metamorphosis, would have been such that it would make it nearly impossible for us, now, to pinpoint ethnic identity beyond recognizing the art's inherent hybridity. There are several well-known examples of hybrid international styles that defy ascribing their various examples to specific places and even times: for example, the Animal Style of the Early Iron Age from Ireland to China and to some extent La Tène in central Europe, contemporary with the Classical and Hellenistic periods. For the Aegean Late Bronze Age, the International Style of the eastern Mediterranean has been the most studied, and it remains perplexing.¹⁷

Evidence for work by itinerant artists occurs in paintings from the Levant, many—like those at Tell Sakka, Alalakh, and Kabri—incorporating Aegean elements, as was recently discussed in an article by Bietak, even though he denies that itinerant artists worked at Tell el-Dab'a itself.¹⁸ It should be noted that lime was used for making the plaster at most of these sites, as it was at Tell el-Dab'a. Sometimes, as at Ebla, lime was used so early that one wonders if the fresco technique arose independently in the Levant and the Aegean.

THE PATRONS WHO COMMISSIONED THE PAINTINGS

As mentioned before, Bietak attributed the toreador fresco and a number of other compositions to "Palace" F. He believed they were all made in honor of, or to please, a Minoan bride. To consider this idea, we might ask how appropriate were some of the themes of these paintings, and not only for a woman but also for her high-born Egyptian husband, perhaps Pharaoh Thutmose himself. On the basis of both Syrian and Minoan artistic depictions, Marinatos (132) interprets bull-leaping as part of a royal iconography of power, where the bull, representing the king's enemy, is always defeated by the lion or king. If so, we might raise the question of how evident such symbolism would have been to the Egyptian pharaoh or whether a Minoan woman would have claimed it for herself. This reminds us that there is a rather conspicuous absence among the paintings of themes connected with religion and with women: but even if this were an act connected with rites of passage, how suitable was it to a Minoan princess already married? One thinks of Minoan paintings like the famous landscape inhabited by two women that adorned the walls of the Minoan villa at Hagia Triada, which seems more tuned to female interests. Indeed, in the Tell el-Dab'a paintings, women are conspicuously absent, unless one sees the white toreadors as being female.

One might object that the above views project modern perceptions, but, turning now to the husband, we find it particularly difficult to answer the question of where the paintings are that might have been suitable for a man of a high position, possibly the pharaoh himself. A possible answer is that Minoan fresco iconography, especially that of the powerful palace at Knossos, was being adopted by elites beyond Crete itself. This frees us of the need to invent the presence of a Minoan princess. On this possibility, we also need to bear in mind Wiener's sensible question about why a princess would have been satisfied with only having Minoan artists paint the palace, when no other objects representative of her homeland (such as religious paraphernalia) seem to have accompanied her to Egypt.¹⁹

THE DATE OF THE PAINTINGS

A problem with dating the Tell el-Dab'a paintings in local/Egyptian terms is partially that the book under review appeared in print before any serious publication on the date and composition of the pottery associated with the dumps. Thus, and for the time being, we need to accept Bietak's offer

¹⁷Rehak and Younger 1998, pls. 25–7; Aruz 2008.

¹⁸Bietak 2007.

¹⁹Wiener 1995.

that they belonged to the earlier part of the New Kingdom. However, within the same parameter of thinking, we must also take into consideration Younger's opinion that the Tell el-Dab'a toreador fresco matches most closely Knossian toreador iconography that is datable to LM II/III.²⁰

Interestingly, there may be further support for Younger's date from an altogether different direction. For this, I turn briefly to paintings with other themes also found at Tell el-Dab'a, again in fragments and in the same dumps as the toreador painting. Though not yet fully published, some have been illustrated in a number of Bietak's earlier publications and commented upon by him and others. They involve hunting scenes with dogs on leashes, a white dog with a red collar biting into the flanks of a fleeing mountain goat, lions and leopards chasing fallow deer, and mountain goats. Marinatos and Morgan have already published one of these scenes, depicting a dog pursuing a deer; and Morgan has raised the interesting question of whether some of these themes are "a less popular theme for Cretans than for mainlanders."²¹

These last comments bring us to Evans' "New Dynasty,"²² when themes like those just mentioned started to appear at Knossos following widespread destructions in LM IB. The Knossian palace paintings reflect an era of warfare (e.g., the frieze of figure-eight shields, generally dated to LM II). Evans believed that this was a time when "the Knossian lords transported themselves to the Mainland side,"²³ but, of course, most scholars now believe that instead there had been a takeover of Knossos by the Mycenaeans. It is to within this general period that Immerwahr attributes frescoes grouped under the subtitle "Later Minoan Painting," usefully reminding us which of the frescoes were still on the walls of the palace until the end.²⁴ They include the famous fresco of antithetical griffins painted on either side of the throne, which Bietak, as noted above, used as a model in restoring a hypothetical throne room in Building F. If the restoration reflects reality, this would be another reason to consider the Tell el-Dab'a paintings as "later" (i.e., at least LM II).

LM II/IIIA seems to be the time when Mycenaeans started to import bull-leaping scenes to their own palaces on the Greek mainland. Earlier on, it might have been a matter of international etiquette not to adopt what may have nearly been the royal insignia of the Knossos palace—the most powerful palatial establishment in Minoan Crete and the only one where bull-leaping depictions appeared on the walls, until Mycenaean power started rising.²⁵ By this time, Minoan control of Knossos was weakening. I suspect that the weakening and ultimate fall of Knossos also give us the reason and timing for a toreador theme at Tell el-Dab'a. Rather than being a gift to a pharaoh and a Minoan princess, the

theme may have been appropriated by Tell el-Dab'a, likely in the era of Thutmose III. Such an appropriation may well correspond to the time of earlier exports of toreador scenes to the Mycenaean mainland, including one rendered in a manner close to the Knossian miniature style, its fragments found under the so-called Ramp House on the acropolis of Mycenae.²⁶

When exactly the Mycenaean takeover of the palace at Knossos and Crete took place is still not known, and the interested reader can refer to an international symposium held in 1991, where the majority of scholars pointed to LM II, following the widespread LM IB destructions in Crete.²⁷ It is of interest, as we learn from Aston, that Late Helladic (LH) IIA (Mycenaean) pottery first appears in Egypt during the joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, followed by LH IIB imports.²⁸ Next, there is the case of the Keftiu paintings, with those in the Tomb of Rekhmire showing, for the first time, processions of Aegean men wearing kilts rather than the codpieces shown in earlier tombs. Vercoutter sees the kilt as a sign of the Mycenaeans replacing the Minoans as the main visitors to Egypt from the Aegean.²⁹ Rehak reasonably warned against drawing chronological conclusions on the basis of costume types, which he argued were used as the occasion required,³⁰ but it seems significant that the Egyptian painters felt it necessary to correct the already-painted codpieces worn by the men in the procession by painting kilts atop them, starting with the Tomb of Rekhmire. The gesture does not seem merely cosmetic: it must have held some historical importance for the Egyptians: defining an era and ethnic identity by costume cannot be entirely excluded as an explanation.

To put the presence of Minoan/Aegean wall paintings at Avaris into context, we would also need to propose that the local population may have been a mixed one, with second-generation Hyksos still residing there—some possibly intermarried with Egyptians—in addition to descendants of other foreigners such as Canaanites. Minoans and other Aegeans also could have been present—including the very itinerant artists who had worked there and who now decided to establish themselves at Avaris rather than return to a still-turbulent Aegean. From there, it would have been easy for them to travel to the Levant and to Syrian sites, where their expertise was still in demand, catering to royalty who wanted their palaces to be painted *à la mode*, in a Minoan style.³¹ One noteworthy difference between the Keftiu and the Tell el-Dab'a instances is worth comment in this respect. Keftiu paintings were increasingly used to serve Egyptian royal propaganda, first by depiction and thus appropriation of Minoan royal symbols, such as the bull-leaping scenes, and second because

²⁰Younger 2009.

²¹Marinatos and Morgan 2005, 122.

²²Evans 1935, 785.

²³Evans 1935, 786.

²⁴Immerwahr 1990, ch. 5.

²⁵For the political importance of bull-leaping for Knossos, see Hallager and Hallager 1995, 547–55; Younger 1995. For the possibly earliest known export of the theme to the Mycenaean mainland, see Shaw 1996.

²⁶Shaw 1996, pls. A–D.

²⁷Driessen and Farnoux 1997.

²⁸Aston 2007.

²⁹Vercoutter 1956.

³⁰Rehak 1996.

³¹Rehak (1996, 47) opted for a Minoan enclave in the Levant, with Minoan artists visiting Tell el-Dab'a from there, but if so, we do not have any Levantine painting that is as close as the Tell el-Dab'a paintings as are Aegean ones. Lack of Minoan pottery at either area does not help with deciding the issue, but if we are dealing with foreigners who had made such sites their homes, they would not necessarily have had a chance to use such pottery in their households.

such paintings could have served as elite exotica that people in cosmopolitan Avaris may have wanted to see in their palaces, or even in elite houses. Minoan, other Aegean, some Egyptian, and some Levantine artists may have been close by and ready to render such scenes to please the developing avant-garde taste of the Egyptian elite.

When this trend started in absolute terms may still be difficult to answer with certainty, particularly when one has to offer corresponding dates, whether ceramic or absolute, for the Bronze Age Aegean and pharaonic Egypt. Using the low Egyptian chronology and traditional Minoan chronology, Bietak (27) dates the reign of Thutmose III to 1479–1425 B.C.E.,³² matching it with LM IB, and has the next pharaoh, Amenhotep II, reigning from 1427 to 1401 B.C.E. Using the same dates, Manning assigns the ascension of this pharaoh to final LM IB (during his co-regency with Hatshepsut),³³ with the rest of his reign continuing into LM II, possibly ending as late as the start of LM IIIA1—the overall LM IB period was probably longer than is usually thought, with only the ultimate subphase (final LM IB) and perhaps the close of the penultimate subphase (late LM IB) lying in the earlier decades of the 15th century B.C.E., thus placing most of Thutmose III's reign within the LM II period on Crete.

While the absolute dating is still likely to change, we know for certain that the early 18th Dynasty was when the Egyptians, now cosmopolitan in their tastes, were beginning to look beyond Egypt. Indeed, there is evidence for such a taste to have already started as early as the Tomb of Hepzefa and other Middle Kingdom Egyptian tombs—some at Beni Hasan, where imitations of Aegean textile patterns appear for the first time in Egypt, as painted decoration on ceilings.³⁴ The process, at that point, and to judge by present evidence, proved to be staggered, but Tell el-Dab'a may mark the dawn of a new era that gradually adopted an international style,³⁵ one that continued under the successors of Thutmose III, evident in the palace at Malkata of Pharaoh Amenhotep III,³⁶ and reaching its peak in Akhenaten's palaces at Amarna³⁷ with their uninhibited and artistically gratifying reception of the kind of naturalism generally known to have first developed in the Aegean.

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³² See also Kitchen 2000.

³³ Manning 1999, 493–502; (forthcoming).

³⁴ Shaw 1970.

³⁵ Feldman 2006.

³⁶ Smith 1958, 145–72. Nicolakaki-Kentrou (2000, 49) cites mostly ceiling paintings but includes a fragment with a Minoan-like design of a rocky landscape.

³⁷ Smith 1958, 173–206.

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Taureador Scenes in Tell El-Dab'a (Avaris) and Knossos by Manfred Bietak; Nanno Marinatos; Clairy Palivou; Ann Brysbaert

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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Bull-Leaping Scenes from Tell el-Dab'a

JOHN G. YOUNGER*

TAUREADOR SCENES IN TELL EL-DAB'A (AVARIS) AND KNOSSOS, by *Manfred Bietak*, *Nanno Marinatos*, and *Clairy Palivou*, with a contribution by *Ann Brysbaert*. Pp. 173, b&w and color figs. 138, color pls. 17. Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 2007. €75.80. ISBN 978-3-7001-3780-1 (cloth).

This is a highly important and wonderful book, replete with illustrations both in black-and-white and color. Its large format (ht. 12.25 in., wdth. 14 in.) requires a large, horizontal surface for one to open the book up fully; it is not a volume to curl up with but rather to unfold with reverence and ponder with pleasure. Chapter 1 of part 2 (by Marinatos and Palivou, on the toreador frescoes from Knossos) presents a treat: fresh publications and reconstructions of fragments of the miniature frescoes, some of which were known only to Cameron but not published. In several instances, the authors correct our earlier misidentifications.

Now, some prolegomena about the bull-leaping scenes. In a series of articles, I put together the three major ways Aegean artists represented bull-leaping.¹ Evans had already reconstructed one way of leaping bulls based not on the Treador fresco from Knossos but rather on the bronze group said to be from Rethymnon. I called it "Evans' schema": the acrobat uses the bull's horns to flip over the bull's head, lands feet first on the bull's back, and jumps off. Many other representations, however, including the Treador fresco, fall into a different way of leaping the bull, the "diving leaper schema": the acrobat dives down the bull's neck, executes a handstand on the bull's back, and flips off onto the ground. Both Evans' schema and the diving leaper schema employ assistants (at the front and rear). A third series represents the acrobat above the bull's back, head facing in the same direction as the bull, hands reaching out toward the bull's neck; this static composition, never varying, I call the "floating leaper schema."

The three schemata are roughly distinct, chronologically; representations of Evans' schema date exclusively to the Neopalatial period (Middle Minoan [MM] III–Late Minoan [LM] IB). Though representations of the diving leaper schema begin in LM IB (e.g., sealings from Zakros, Hagia Triada, and Sklavokambos), most date primarily to LM II–IIIA (e.g., seals and frescoes from Knossos and Mycenae), while two ap-

pear on Late Helladic (LH) IIIB kraters. Representations of the floating leaper schema (all seals except the fresco from Tiryns and a larnax from Tanagra) date similarly; three seals should date to the end of the Neopalatial period,² but the remaining representations should date to LM II and mostly to LM IIIA, with the Tiryns fresco and Tanagra larnax dating even later, to LH IIIB.

As noted, the Tell el-Dab'a bull scenes occur against two major backgrounds, beige and the maze. Against the beige background (outdoors?), the authors restore three bull-leaping scenes, a bull without leaper, and an apparently recumbent bull with two men. Against the maze, there are four bull-leaping scenes.

Immediately, one notices a few peculiarities in comparison with Aegean depictions: there are no assistants; no leaper is in the act of alighting; all scenes depict only bull and leaper; and the bulls are small, certainly not the huge bull (*Bos primigenius?*) that appears on several gold rings (and their impressed sealings) or in the Treador fresco from Knossos. The bulls also have thick, glandular heads with stubby muzzles, quite unlike Aegean bulls.

Beige 1 (A46/F127) (108) consists of a few fragments showing a black-spotted white bull hide and a red-painted figure, which the authors restore as a bull-leaper landing chest down on the bull's neck (diving leaper position 2). This reconstruction is not completely convincing, since the leaper's arm is angular and constructed of straight lines. Beige 2 (A42/F5) (105–7) clearly depicts a male leaper in a simple white kilt with blue trim flipping over the back of the bull (diving leaper position 2½). Beige 3 (A39/F126+128) (105) depicts what should be another leaper against a black-spotted white bull, this time reconstructed as if falling to our side of the bull and facing in the same direction as the bull. This could be a fallen floating leaper. Beige 4 (A53/F148+F149) (109) depicts a bull only, and the recumbent bull scene (Beige 5 [A3/F3+F19+F192] [88–9]) apparently does not depict bull-leaping.

Maze 1 (A6/F48) (89–91) represents a blue-spotted white bull with raised head against a red background—another fragment of perhaps this bull, of its belly and pizzle, includes part of the maze pattern. At the bull's horns is something white with blue bands waving through it. The authors offer two reconstructions, one of a white blob above the bull (fig. 59A), the other of a white-painted leaper diving down the bull's neck (fig. 59B), and to this they attribute the fragment of a white leg trimmed similarly in blue against a red

* This review was written to complement Shaw 2009.

¹ See Younger (1995) for bibliography.

² *CMS* 2(4), no. 81; *CMS* 5, no. 638; *CMS* 12, no. 284.

background (diving leaper position 1½). Maze 2 (A13/F13) (93–5) is the well-known fragment of a bull's frontal face with leaper on the neck (diving leaper position 1). This leaper has his right arm around the bull's neck, his hand curled to clench the lower edge of it (not clenched in a fist, as stated on page 55). This leaper wears an armband and a fat, blue, elliptical sealstone on a bracelet on his right wrist.

Concerning the wearing of Aegean sealstones:³ a sole sealstone worn on the right wrist is known only from one burial at Asine (ChT 1) and on the "Sitopotnia" in the fresco from the House with the Fresco in the Cult Center at Mycenae; sealstones worn on both wrists are also known (e.g., the female with the sword from the same shrine at Mycenae). Otherwise, when a figure wears just one seal, it is on the left wrist (e.g., the Cup Bearer from Knossos, the robed priest with griffin on a seal from Vapheio),⁴ and when seals are found in tombs in positions to suggest they were being worn by the deceased, all (except for the one from Asine) are either at the left wrist or on the chest (as if on necklaces).

The elliptical shape of the seal is also wrong for the Aegean. The authors suggest it was actually rectangular and was meant to represent a worn cushion seal (they illustrate for comparison two highly worn and humble pieces with no figural iconography).⁵ Looking closely at the seal, one notes two curved black lines at the string hole, which the authors interpret as demarcating wear. It seems odd that an artist would take pains to mark a worn seal; perhaps the curved lines were meant instead to indicate that the seal had a humped back. If so, its fat elliptical shape might indicate a scarab (and the blue color its material, the common lapis lazuli).

Maze 3 (A21/F165) (97) consists of three fragments of a caramel-spotted white bull to the right and the single fragment of a yellow leaper's left hand with a blue-beaded bracelet at the wrist. The authors restore the leaper as having landed on the bull's neck and flipping over the bull's back (diving leaper position 2). Maze 4 (A30/F38) (100) assigns a yellow-painted head (with shaved temple) against the maze with a blue-spotted white bull moving left. If the assignment is correct (a big "if"), the leaper (if such it is) has attempted a diving leaper sequence but has fallen headlong from the bull.

The Tell el-Dab'a bull-leaping scenes therefore may depict one instance of a fallen floating leaper (Beige 3), and five clear instances of diving leapers. There is no example preserved of a leaper executing Evans' schema.

If the chronology of the schemata is correct, the Tell el-Dab'a frescoes are following the schemata that begin late in the Neopalatial period but are even more popular in the following Final Palatial period in Crete and the Early Mycenaean Empire period on the mainland (Late Bronze [LB] II–III A). The authors, however, present only Evans' schema (115 [fig. 99]) and even assert: "that this sketch represents phases of bull-leaping is accepted dogma today even by J. Younger whose thorough study in more recent years is a

major contribution to the study of the sport." I am flattered, but that sketch does not represent the only way bull-leaping was depicted. More importantly, the Tell el-Dab'a leapers are not executing Evans' schema, they are executing the diving leaper schema, which the authors do not mention—and I hazard a guess why: to do so would introduce inconsistencies with the chronology that Bietak is proposing.

Finally, the recumbent bull scene (Beige 5) presents two men flanking the head of a bull, mouth open, tongue extended. The man on the left has only his head preserved, apparently on the far side of the bull. The man on the right seems slightly elevated; his torso faces right, but he faces left, looking at the bull, his arms akimbo. The authors reconstruct the scene as the man on the left actually on the near side of the bull (head on far side), wrestling the bull down by the horns, and the man on the right in the air.

It is the extended tongue that compels a different interpretation: such a tongue is shown in only two depictions that I know of, both seals in Berlin. *CMS* 11, number 42, portrays a lion attacking a stag, who rears its head, tongue extended (the seal is one of the masterpieces in the Mycenaean-Vapheio Lion group and should date to LB I). The second seal, *CMS* 11, number 52, is more telling: a bull lies on a table with lathed legs, a palm bending above, a sword in its neck, tongue extended.⁶ Both animals are obviously dying, and the extended tongue helps tell us that. If so, it may be that the man on the left of the recumbent bull is actually sacrificing the bull. What the man on the right is doing, I do not know.

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³ Younger 1977, 146–49; 1992, 272–73.

⁴ *CMS* 1, no. 223.

⁵ *CMS* 2(3), no. 85; *CMS* 2(4), no. 205.

⁶ Similar tables support trussed, sacrificed, and slaughtered bulls (Younger 1995, 536–37).