

CROCUS COSTUMES IN AEGEAN ART

by Paul Rehak

In societies, cloth and clothing are important means of communicating personal, social, and even political and religious information.¹ In recent years, the continuing excavations at Akrotiri on Thera have expanded the corpus of large-scale Aegean representations of the human figure that include detailed renderings of costume. Here I would like to direct attention to some previously unnoticed details of the women's costumes in Xeste 3, as a small tribute to the many contributions of Sally Immerwahr to the study of Bronze Age painting.

The decorative program of Xeste 3 has already been established in broad outline, but because the building has not yet received a final publication, some details may change.² This large, freestanding structure of at least two stories preserves evidence of six rooms with painted decoration (Fig. 5.1). The vestibule, Room 5, includes an unpublished mountainous landscape with a male figure.³ A frieze around the upper wall of Room 4 depicts more rockwork, with crocus plants and animals that include swallows and a nest, red dragonflies, and blue monkeys holding gold lyres, a sword, and a scabbard.⁴ Room 2 features a decorative frieze of spirals. Room 3, subdivided into compartments by pier and door partitions, has a closet displaying male figures holding metal vessels and a cloth, as well as a sunken Lustral Basin, on two walls of which were painted women and a shrine facade and tree. On the upper floor, Room 3' has two walls depicting girls gathering crocus blossoms in a mountainous setting and offering them to a goddess; the latter is enthroned on a platform and attended by a blue monkey and a griffin. An adjacent wall illustrates a marshy scene. Another composition from the upper floor represents at least three women in procession. Finally, Room 9 on the upper level housed an abstract relief fresco.

Several interpretations have been proposed for the scenes that include women and landscapes with crocus. There is now general agreement that an autumn-blooming variety is represented, but Suzanne Amigues argues that it is *Crocus sativus* while Ray Porter supports its identification as *Crocus cartwrightianus*.⁵ Amigues interpreted the frescoes as showing the centrality of saffron production as a source of dye and a foodstuff for the women of ancient Thera. Several other studies of the paintings by Christina Televantou have concentrated on the iconography of the human

1. E.g., various authors in Barnes and Eichler 1993. For the Aegean, see esp. Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1971, Televantou 1982, Barber 1991, 1994, 1997, Jones 2000, Rehak 1999a, Lee 2000. For male costumes, see Rehak 1996. I thank J. G. Younger for reading and commenting on a version of this paper.

2. See Doumas 1992 for excellent color photographs of many of the compositions. Vlachopoulos (2002) reports the presence of the tree (under restoration). On pictorial programs, see Hägg 1985, Niemeier 1992.

3. Marinatos 1976, p. 25.

4. Rehak 1999b.

5. Amigues 1998 (with a detailed rebuttal of N. Marinatos's suggestion that it is a spring flower), Porter 2000.

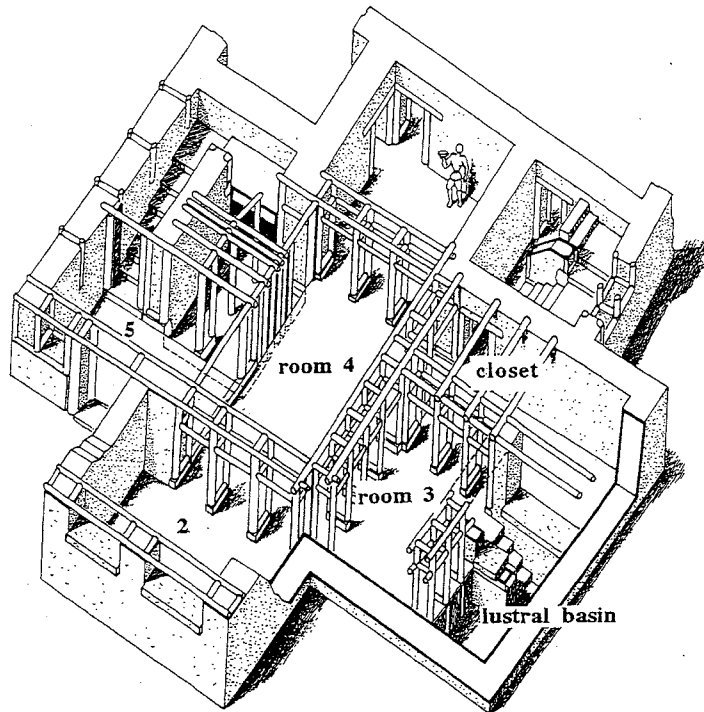


Figure 5.1. Plan of Xeste 3. P. Rehak, after Rehak 1999a, fig. 1

figures and the style in which they are rendered,⁶ whereas shorter papers by Ellen Davis⁷ and Diana Withee⁸ have drawn attention to the way the Theran artists observed details of hairstyle and physiognomy to illustrate several distinct age grades among the women—from childhood, through puberty, and into adulthood. Roman Snihurovych and I have presented evidence elsewhere on the medicinal applications of saffron, and have suggested that knowledge of plants and their properties defined a sphere of female power in the Aegean that landscape paintings illustrate.⁹ Finally, in several detailed studies Nannó Marinatos has proposed that the frescoes depicted women's puberty rites, but many of her suggestions remain controversial.¹⁰

COSTUMES WITH CROCUS

Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to the five female costumes with crocus decoration in Xeste 3, although they form an analog to the crocus plants in the landscapes and the flower-gathering activity depicted in the scene from the upper floor.¹¹ An examination of these costumes allows us to consider some overlooked details and may permit a more nuanced reading of the frescoes from the building. All three female figures in the Lustral Basin Fresco (Doumas's Adorants Fresco) on the ground floor wear clothing with crocus, along with two more figures from the upper floor: the enthroned goddess and a mature woman from a procession on another wall. We can examine these compositions in turn.

The Lustral Basin painting covers two walls of a small sunken area that is set off from the rest of Room 3 by a flight of stone steps and by pier and door partitions. Both the basin and partitions are elite Minoan

6. Televantou 1982, 1988, 1992a, 1992b; see also Younger 1992.

7. Davis 1986; cf. David 1992.

8. Withee 1992.

9. Rehak and Snihurovych 1997; cf. Rehak 2002, and Chapin, this volume.

10. Marinatos 1984, 1993.

Marinatos (1985, p. 229) interprets the Lustral Basin Fresco scene as a "ritual to ensure the continuation of fertility and the growth of vegetation," and the goddess with girls above as "the renewal of nature." Cf. Marinatos 1984, p. 71: the iconographic program as "the renewal of nature in the spring."

11. Porter (2000) also identifies many of the crocus costumes that are discussed here. I concur with Porter in most details.



Figure 5.2. Scene above Lustral Basin. P. Rehak

12. The Zakros Sanctuary Rhyton shows a related structure at a mountain peak: Platon 1971, figs. on pp. 165, 167; Shaw 1978, p. 434, figs. 7, 8.

13. The presence of the doorway in the wall shows that this is a building, not an altar, contra Marinatos 1984, pp. 74–75. A woman kneeling among clumps of red lilies and crocus appears in a painting from the shrine at Ayia Triada: Immerwahr 1990, p. 180 (A.T. 1). Red lilies appear at other sites of Minoan occupation, e.g., Trianda on Rhodes (Immerwahr 1990, p. 190 [Tr 1]), and Miletos in Anatolia.

14. Blood: Marinatos 1984, pp. 74; stigmas: Gesell 2000. The facade has not yet been published, but a reconstruction drawing appears in Marinatos 1984, p. 75, fig. 53.

15. Davis 1986; see modifications in Withee 1992. Marinatos (1993, pp. 207–208) thinks the two are of different ages. The breast of the Wounded Woman appears fuller than that of the Necklace Swinger only because she is seated and leans forward. The overall length of the hair of the two women is identical, and they wear similar fillets wrapped around their hair.

16. See cat. no. 1; bold-faced numbers refer to entries in the Catalogue.

architectural elements found in Neopalatial palaces and villas on Crete, but they are rare outside the island; the existence of these features in Xeste 3 is a sign of strong Cretan influence.

The east wall of the basin depicts the facade of a Minoan-style shrine with a central door, framed by a running spiral band, set in a facade of ashlar blocks and crowned by large horns of consecration.¹² Red lily blossoms cover the panels of this door.¹³ Both the doors and the horns are streaked with red; these streaks have been interpreted as sacrificial blood or as the stigmas of crocus flowers that turn from yellow to red as they dry.¹⁴ The adjacent north wall shows three figures in an open area that presumably represents the space in front of the shrine (Fig. 5.2). These include, from left to right, a “Necklace Swinger” moving right, a central “Wounded Woman” seated on a rocky outcrop from which clumps of crocus grow, and a “Veiled Girl” who is closest to the shrine and stands on tiptoe. Beneath the feet of the last two figures is a black groundline that suggests a paved area, whereas the Necklace Swinger is set at a slightly lower level, as if she is approaching the sanctuary from below.

The slim proportions, well-defined facial features, and rounded breasts indicate that the first two figures, the Necklace Swinger and the Wounded Woman, are fully pubescent and of approximately the same age, fourteen to sixteen years old.¹⁵ They both have long hair that represents several years of uninterrupted growth, wrapped in fillets with a tress gathered in a loop at the nape of the neck. The third individual, the Veiled Girl, must be slightly younger, perhaps twelve to fourteen years of age, because she wears a short (juvenile) skirt, has softer facial features, and has a partially shaved head, on which a few longer locks are allowed to grow.

The Necklace Swinger (Fig. 5.3) wears a diaphanous, ankle-length blue robe, piped in dark blue and cut in Minoan fashion to expose a rounded but not pendulous breast.¹⁶ A much heavier “apron” characterized by rich, dark colors and patterns, usually identified as a ritual garment, is wrapped around her waist and falls to her calves. Above the waist, the pale blue blouse of the robe is covered with pairs of red lines that furcate at their tips. These must represent the stigmas of crocus flowers, and close inspection reveals traces of the petals of these blossoms painted in a fugitive mauve color that has all but disappeared. The blossoms are included in



Figure 5.3 (left). Necklace Swinger.
P. Rehak



Figure 5.4 (above). Wounded
Woman. P. Rehak

some reconstruction drawings but have not been discussed. An unusual design of crosses with forked ends on this woman's apron could represent a stylized textile pattern for crocus stigmas.¹⁷ Porter has also made the novel observation that this woman has a garland composed of clumps of stigmas draped across her upper chest and over her shoulders.¹⁸

The seated Wounded Woman (Fig. 5.4) in the center of the composition is clearly a very important figure, for she is considerably larger in scale than her companions, she is the only seated figure in the composition, and her gestures, costume, and jewelry are currently unique in Aegean iconography.¹⁹ Moreover, the rocks with crocus plants on which she sits correspond to the pendant rockwork at the top of the scene that frames her head like a canopy and sets her off from the other figures.²⁰

Like the Necklace Swinger, the Wounded Woman wears a diaphanous blue blouse, but apparently this is not the upper part of a longer robe, as there are no traces of this garment visible around her ankles. Instead, a different costume envelops her waist and hips, consisting of a deep-blue belt from which strips of cloth in blue, yellow, or white seem to hang like lappets. Black ties are also visible across her buttocks, suggesting that this garment was bound in place, like the ritual apron that other women wear, but the ends of the blue belt do not appear to be tied. This is a costume that simultaneously conceals and reveals the lower body.

The woman's seated pose makes it difficult to determine the exact form of this costume, as she appears to have one leg crossed over the other knee, as Penelope characteristically does much later in Classical art.²¹ She also leans forward, resting her forehead on her left hand and reaching toward her foot with her right hand. Two floral pins adorn her coiffure,

17. A related pattern occurs on a carved ivory fragment from Pylos: Blegen and Rawson 1966, pl. 284:10.

18. Porter 2000, p. 622, fig. 12, p. 623.

19. See 2. Seated women are generally important individuals in Aegean art: Rehak 1995.

20. Marinatos (1993, p. 207), following Chapin (1992), identifies this as an artist's attempt to suggest spatial recession.

21. *LIMC* VII.1, 1994, pp. 291–295, pls. 225–230, s.v. *Penelope* (C. Hausmann).



Figure 5.5 (*above*). LM IB jug from Ayia Triada. P. Rehak

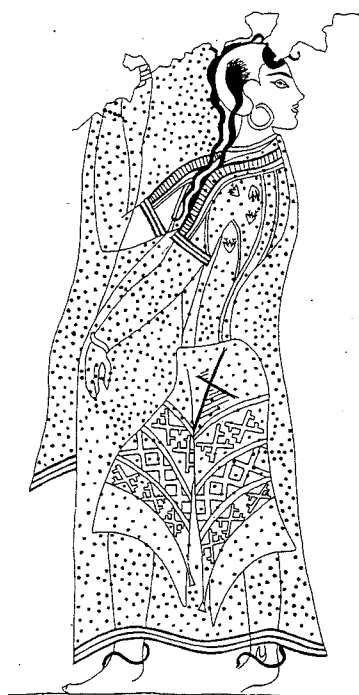


Figure 5.6 (*right*). Veiled Girl. P. Rehak

22. Potts 1996.

23. Barber 1991, p. 317.

24. Halbherr, Stefani, and Banti 1980, p. 67, fig. 37. For similar folded buds on pottery see, e.g., bowl from Palaikastro: Sackett, Popham, and Warren 1965, pl. 72:h; cup from Poros: Muhly 1992, pp. 44 (no. 20), 45, fig. 3.20, pl. 6 (no. 20) (solid painted); rounded cup from Kythera: Coldstream and Huxley 1972, p. 244 (no. 9), pl. 75:9; rounded cup from Kea: *Keos* III, p. 103 (no. 1157), pl. 75 (no. 1157) (the buds are solid-painted). I am grateful to V. LaRosa and the Italian School of Archaeology in Athens for providing the photograph on which Figure 5.5 is based.

25. See 3.

26. A much later parallel for the girl's gesture, her yellow veil, back-turned head, and the division of the composition over more than one wall, occurs in the megalographic paintings of the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii: Ling 1991, pp. 101-104.

one over the forehead and one at the nape where a tress of her hair is coming free of the fillet. From the underside of the foot depend red streaks that have been interpreted as blood, and next to these is a single large crocus blossom that is not attached to any plant. The blossom therefore appears to function semiotically in the scene as a sign or symbol that stands for something else.²² The gesture of the outstretched hand is ambiguous: she could be trying to cradle her foot, or is attempting to grasp the blossom under it.

The blue belt encircling the waist has additional surface decoration consisting of undulating black lines that frame a central element between the curves, which Barber has called a "yo-yo" pattern, one that is easily woven.²³ The filling ornament in the pattern, however, is not an oval covered with stripes, as Barber has claimed, but rather a repeating pattern of crocus buds with one pointed end and a rounded top. Narrow vertical lines on each bud represent the folded petals that have not yet opened. A similar design of buds and undulating framing lines occurs on a LM IB pitcher from Ayia Triada (Fig. 5.5).²⁴

The third and smallest figure in the scene, the Veiled Girl, is also costumed unusually (Fig. 5.6).²⁵ She stands on tiptoe with her body facing left, but her head turns back at an impossible angle to the right, as if she is looking over her shoulder toward the shrine facade on the adjacent wall.²⁶ She wears a juvenile, calf-length robe that indicates that she has not yet reached puberty, and over it a heavier apron of the same dark colors and rich patterns seen on that of the Necklace Swinger, though the two garments are not identical. In addition, the Veiled Girl envelops herself in a sheer yellow veil thickly sprinkled with red dots that wraps around her back and covers most of her arms, but not her head or the front of her

body. The exceptional pose of her body with outstretched arms recurs on a much later fresco from Mycenae, which shows a large pair of white hands (of a goddess?) holding a much smaller female figure who wears another red-spotted yellow garment, in this case a tunic rather than a veil.²⁷

Because we are seeing the robe of the Veiled Girl through a transparent overgarment, one significant detail of her costume has escaped attention. At her left shoulder, several purple crocus blossoms with red stigmas can be seen to be part of her dress rather than the veil. These flowers are not visible in all published photographs, and they have not been included in earlier reconstruction drawings of this individual, but they resemble those on the costume of the Necklace Swinger. The forked-cross design on the Necklace Swinger's apron likewise recurs on that of the Veiled Girl. Thus all three women in the Lustral Basin scene are marked by the presence of crocus flowers on their costumes, but in different ways.

Two walls of upper-floor Room 3' above the Lustral Basin exhibit an enthroned goddess on an architectural platform. She is attended by a griffin and a blue monkey in a mountainous landscape where four young girls gather crocus blossoms and present them to her.²⁸ The goddess wears a diaphanous ankle-length robe of pale blue with short sleeves, open at the chest to reveal her rounded breast; her waist and thighs are wrapped in a blue and white flounced apron. Despite her elaborate hairstyle and jewelry, her facial features and breast development mark a stage of maturity identical to that of the Necklace Swinger and Wounded Woman, that is, that of full pubescence, about fourteen to sixteen years of age.

The decoration of the blouse is particularly elaborate and includes repeated references to crocus (Fig. 5.7). The shoulder seams are blue, with a repeating pattern of dark blue crocus blossoms with yellow stigmas. The vertical borders framing the chest at the front of the blouse are now a grayish white, perhaps originally a pale mauve color that has degraded.²⁹ Here, more crocus blossoms are visible as ghosts against the gray-white background. These have not been included in earlier reconstruction drawings. Finally, the diaphanous blue material of the blouse itself is covered with mauve crocus blossoms, now largely faded, with red stigmas, like the costumes of the Necklace Swinger and the Veiled Girl in the room below.

As if to emphasize the divinity's association with crocus, a pair of red stigmas is painted on her cheek, representing either a tattoo or face paint or a blossom draped over her ear, the petals of which have vanished. In addition, she extends one hand to receive a pinch of saffron stigmas from the attendant blue monkey,³⁰ and she sits on what appears to be a pile of saffron-yellow cushions or a stack of folded textiles.

Another composition from the upper-floor of Xeste 3 depicts at least three women in procession, carrying floral bouquets or other attributes. The exact arrangement and location of this scene have not yet been determined, but these women seem to be mature individuals because they have different body proportions, smaller heads, and much larger breasts than the younger women represented elsewhere in the building. The matrons also have costumes that differ from those of the other figures in Xeste 3: a snood or kerchief wrapped around the hair, which is gathered in a bun at the nape, and a brightly colored diagonal mantle of fluffy material (dyed



Figure 5.7. Enthroned Goddess.
P. Rehak

27. Kritsele Providi 1982, pp. 41–42 (no. B:2), pl. 6; Immerwahr 1990, pp. 119, 191 (see 4), 120, fig. 30.

28. See 4.

29. Elsewhere in Xeste 3, some of the purple blossoms of the crocus plants have turned gray.

30. Marinatos 1987.

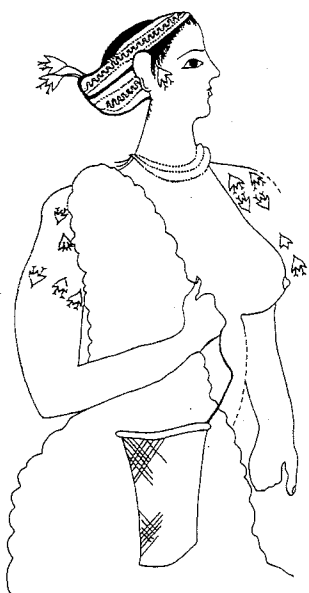


Figure 5.8. Mature Woman.
P. Rehak

fleece?) draped over only one shoulder, leaving the other free.³¹ A contemporary cushion seal from a LM IA context at the Knossos palace shows a matronly woman wielding a sword and scabbard.³² Because the glyptic figure wears a diagonal mantle and has her hair tied up at the back of the head, the correspondence between the sealstone and fresco figures is particularly close.

One mature woman (Fig. 5.8) wears a diaphanous yellow blouse, its surface sprinkled with red crocus stigmas.³³ Because these occur in pairs, we are probably justified in reconstructing the petals of blossoms to go with them, although none is actually visible in published photographs. More stigmas near the back of her head can be restored as blossoms decorating the headdress.³⁴ Like the enthroned goddess, the Mature Woman has red crocus stigmas against her cheek, and in her right hand she carries a wicker basket that is like the containers used by the girl attendants who gather crocus blossoms for the goddess.³⁵ Thus, the attributes of the woman suggest that she once may have served the goddess as a blossom-collector. Terracotta versions of this type of vessel are known from several Cretan sites, and they usually have a hole in the bottom so they could function as rhyta. One example, found at Ayia Irini on Kea, even has a surface painted with crocus blossoms.³⁶

The crocus designs on costumes described here can be produced in several techniques: as tapestry work, as appliquéd patches, or as painted designs on special garments that were not meant to be washed or that could be repainted on each occasion of use.³⁷ The repeating patterns on the hems of the robe of the Thera goddess and the Wounded Woman's belt could also represent tapestry work. The transparent blouses of the Necklace Swinger, goddess, and Mature Woman, however, probably represent very fine linen.³⁸ The addition of the crocus blossoms would probably strain the gauzy fabric if they were embroidered or appliquéd, and painted or stamped decoration is more likely for these. On real textiles, the purple petals could have been created with the use of murex dye.³⁹

INTERPRETATION

Even this brief survey of the evidence makes it clear that saffron crocus is central to the decorative program of Xeste 3. Within the building, three landscape scenes are characterized by rockwork with clumps of blooming crocus: Room 4 with its monkeys holding various objects, the Lustral Basin in Room 3 with its triad of young women, and Room 3' on the upper floor, where the girls gather the flowers for the goddess, and where the clumps of crocus also serve as a repeating background pattern, like wallpaper.⁴⁰ Landscapes with crocus plants thus have a thematic function in connecting the different scenes;⁴¹ they also define a realm of nature inhabited by various animals, some of them exotic (the griffin and the blue monkeys in Rooms 3 and 4), and by a youthful goddess among women of different ages. This natural setting seems, however, to exclude men; thus, even though both men and women are elements of the pictorial program as a whole, they form distinct groups distinguished by gender.

31. Cf. the young "priestess" from the West House: Doumas 1992, pls. 24, 25.

32. *CMS* II.3, 16; Rehak 2002.

33. See 5.

34. Another woman from this group has lilies stuck in the back of her headdress: *ArchDelt* 29B, 1973–1974, pl. 31; *ArchReports* 26, 1980, p. 5, fig. 2.

35. Televantou 1994, pp. 137–140.

36. For Cretan examples see, e.g., from Knossos: Warren 1984, p. 53, figs.; Pseira: Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, p. 70 (no. 902), pl. 902; Kea: *Keos* III, p. 125 and pl. 85 (no. 1551).

37. Barber 1991, pp. 320–321.

38. Barber (1991, pp. 73–76) suggests that the Minoans may have been spinning flax and weaving linen as early as EM II.

39. Steiglitz 1994.

40. Doumas 1992, front and back endpapers and pls. 116, 118, 120, 122, 123, 127–129.

41. Biering (1995) has suggested a similar function for the landscape elements in the Odyssey paintings from a Roman house on the Esquiline Hill, though these are much later than the Thera paintings.

Crocus and saffron are pervasive elements in the scenes with women. Young girls pick crocuses, carry the blossoms in baskets, and deposit them in panniers. A blue monkey offers stigmas to a goddess, implying the existence of another stage of activity, that of culling the stigmas from the petals, which is not actually represented in the wall paintings. Little girls and mature women wear saffron-dyed costumes; one adolescent girl has a yellow veil; and the goddess sits on a yellow seat that could represent cushions or finished bales of cloth.⁴² One mature woman and the goddess share crocus stigmas or a blossom as a facial ornament. The goddess, young girls, and Lustral Basin figures all have yellow lips and fingernails, suggesting that saffron was a component of cosmetics, in addition to its other applications, or that all these women are handling and even ingesting saffron.

In an earlier study, Davis called attention to the blue streaks in the corneas of some figures, in contrast to the red streaks in the corneas of others: she interpreted the blue streaks as a sign of youth.⁴³ Instead, I have argued that the blue streaks in the eyes of the goddess, the younger women and girls, and the youngest boy, are clinically documented indications of a saffron-rich diet, which includes high concentrations of vitamins A and B. Even the older women, who have white corneas, exhibit good ocular health, indicating that they are receiving adequate amounts of these vitamins. One adult male and two youths, however, have the red-streaked eyes characteristic of vitamin B deficiency, perhaps the result of a saffron-poor diet.⁴⁴ The frescoes of Xeste 3, therefore, seem to be differentiating between those who have access to saffron and those who do not, a division that generally follows age and gender lines.

The ubiquity of crocus and saffron seems to suggest that the latter is not simply important as a source of yellow dye and as a foodstuff.⁴⁵ It must always have been valuable economically because the gathering of stigmas is a labor-intensive activity, and thousands of blossoms must be harvested to produce a relatively small amount of saffron. And, the elaborate costumes and jewelry of even the youngest girls, and one monkey's offering of stigmas to the goddess, suggest that flower-picking had a highly ritualized aspect as well. In addition, crocus helps to define the identity of the goddess and to link her with women at four stages in their lives, from youth through adulthood, and not just at puberty.

The goddess is currently the most richly dressed and bejeweled figure to survive in Aegean art, and the painter of the scene has taken great pains to underscore her association with crocus. Although we do not know her Bronze Age name, her mastery over exotic animals indicates that she is a Potnia Theron (the attendant griffin even wears a red collar and leash). Her apparent youth, her appearance in a mountainous landscape, and her association with girls are all aspects of Artemis in the historical period. The medicinal properties of saffron include its use as an emmenagogue and abortifacient, and Artemis was concerned with women's transitions at various stages, and especially with the shedding of female blood.⁴⁶

The prepubescent flower-gathering girls in Xeste 3 are shown in the presence of the goddess; one even stands on the foot of the platform and gazes up at her.⁴⁷ The special relationship between the goddess and the youngest girls is emphasized by their unique forehead bands, worn by no

42. Rehak 1995, p. 105.

43. Davis 1986.

44. Rehak and Snihurówych 1997.

45. Marinatos 1984, p. 65; Arnigues 1998.

46. King 1983. Marinatos (1984, p. 70) calls her a "mistress of nature"; on p. 72, she compares the scenes to the Classical Thesmophoria in honor of Demeter.

47. Doumas 1992, pl. 122.

other individuals depicted in the building. Since the young girls are shown picking the blossoms, part of their training may have involved a period of separation from the rest of society and socialization into the skills they would need as women, cloth production in particular. It is interesting, therefore, that none of the young girls has crocus blossoms on her costume—perhaps such references are unnecessary during the period of service to the goddess. In later periods, some young Athenian girls of good family underwent a period of service to Artemis at Brauron,⁴⁸ while others subsequently participated in weaving and decorating the saffron yellow and purple peplos offered to Athena during the Greater Panathenaia.⁴⁹

The procession of mature women depicted on a wall of the upper floor seems to show us the future role of some of these girls as adult members of their society. Several of the matrons wear cloth or a fleecy garment dyed saffron yellow. One adult individual, already discussed, carries a basket that suggests she might have been a flower-picker in her youth. She too has a special relationship to the goddess, as both individuals share the distinctive crocus stigmas on the cheek.

In the Lustral Basin painting on the lower floor, we are out of direct view of the goddess painted on a wall of the upper floor. Nevertheless, the repeated references to saffron and crocus imply that the adolescent Veiled Girl and the fully pubescent Necklace Swinger and Wounded Woman are also connected with the divinity, whereas the appearance of a shrine facade on an adjacent basin wall suggests a formalized architectural setting for ritual activity that is a counterpart to the platform of the goddess on the upper floor.

The Veiled Girl, located closest to the shrine, is a problematic figure. Because the position of her arms obscures her chest, we cannot tell whether her breasts have begun to develop,⁵⁰ but she is slimmer and taller than the little girls from the upper floor and so she must be well into the pubescent phase, which lasts for several years. At the same time, she continues to shave some areas of her head while allowing a few locks to grow; two tresses now trail below shoulder level. Thus, she represents a course of development different from that of the youngest girls and the two newly mature young women, who have grown all of their hair long. This suggests that an alternative course was available to some girls as they matured. The red-spotted yellow veil helps mark this girl as undergoing a transition and sets her apart from the other young women.

As noted earlier, the Necklace Swinger is about the same age as the goddess, and they both wear diaphanous blue blouses covered with crocus blossoms and red stigmas. Because she is approaching the shrine and holding a necklace, she could be presenting an offering at the time she has reached physical maturity, or she is preparing to assist her age-mate, the Wounded Woman.⁵¹

The seated Wounded Woman has been the focus of particular attention in discussions of the Xeste 3 frescoes. She is sometimes labeled a "flower gatherer,"⁵² and Marinatos, who has discussed the figure several times, has suggested that she is a girl or woman who has had an accident while flower-picking.⁵³ This role seems improbable, however, because the girls from the upper floor who are actually engaged in picking the blossoms are much younger (eight to ten years of age). Their snub facial

48. *LIMC* II.1, 1984, pp. 618–621 (with extensive bibliography), s.v. *Artemis* (L. Kahil); cf. Cole 1984.

49. Barber 1991, pp. 361–362; Barber 1992.

50. Pace Marinatos (1993, p. 206), who states that she has "no breasts."

51. Marinatos (1984, p. 75) identifies the necklace as an offering to be placed on the "altar" (i.e., the shrine facade); cf. Marinatos 1993, p. 209: a "dedicatory offering."

52. Amigues 1998, p. 238; Barber 1991, p. 317.

53. Marinatos 1984, p. 79; 1993, pp. 208–209; 1985, p. 226.

features, flat chests, and short skirts show that they stand at the beginning of the pubescent phase, not at its end. Furthermore, the flower-gatherers have partially shaved heads on which the hair is just beginning to grow as stubble or short, curly locks—far different from the full head of hair of the Wounded Woman, which is bound in a long fillet and must represent several years of uninterrupted hair growth after shaving has stopped. Finally, the little girls have baskets and forehead bands, attributes the Wounded Woman lacks.

Instead, the Wounded Woman wears a costume unlike that of any other figure in Xeste 3, the belt of which makes a visual reference to crocus buds that have just begun to open but have not yet bloomed. (All the other costumes with crocus show open blossoms.) The single, large blossom under her bleeding foot links crocus with flowing blood. Her seated pose and gesture of hand to head have been identified as one of pain, but they perhaps signify grief or introspection instead, as they do in Classical art for Demeter or Penelope.⁵⁴ Her floral hairpins are unusual as well, and distinguish the Wounded Woman from the other women portrayed in the building. Similar hairpins of precious metal have been found on Crete, and one of silver from the Knossos area is engraved with a nonsense inscription in Linear A and a repeating row of crocus blossoms like the textile patterns under discussion here.⁵⁵ All of these details demonstrate that the Wounded Woman is not a casual figure who suffered some misfortune, but is rather someone who has been deliberately costumed and bejeweled for a specific ceremony.

The Lustral Basin scene thus seems deliberately to signal the social recognition of female bloodshed, and could celebrate a young woman's first menstruation, the bleeding foot a metaphor for the first menses. Here, the presence of a crocus blossom signals the use of saffron as an emmenagogue. If this interpretation is correct, we would also have an important clue to the function of lustral basins during the Neopalatial period, as well as further confirmation of the importance of women in Aegean society.

THE CRETAN CONTEXT

The depiction of crocus flowers and buds is not restricted to Xeste 3. Crocus is a popular decoration on Neopalatial pottery on Thera and Crete.⁵⁶ At Akrotiri, crocus buds also occur as pendants on a garland decorating the rigging of a ship from the Miniature Fresco of the West House,⁵⁷ on one of the stern cabins depicted in the same building,⁵⁸ as an element on a jewelry mold, and in a painting from the palace at Knossos.⁵⁹

The Xeste 3 frescoes are also illustrative of a broader Aegean interest in crocus that centers on Crete, Knossos in particular. In the East Temple Repository in the West Wing of the Knossos palace, Sir Arthur Evans discovered a large deposit of faience that comprised, among other things, several model costumes with crocus decoration (Fig. 5.9).⁶⁰ These include two nearly complete dresses, a fragment of a third, and a double belt or "girdle" like those worn by some women depicted in other media.⁶¹

The faience costumes from Knossos (MM IIIB or perhaps early LM IA) are currently the earliest known Aegean representations of

54. See note 17.

55. Alexiou and Brice 1972; Hood 1978, p. 200, fig. 198:A.

56. E.g., a tripod offering stand from Akrotiri: Marinatos 1984, p. 89, fig. 60. Coldstream and Huxley (1972, p. 299) discuss the Minoan pottery with crocus decoration imported to Kythera.

57. Doumas 1992, pls. 36, 37.

58. Doumas 1992, pls. 49, 50.

59. E.g., the necklace of one of the "Ladies in Blue" from the Knossos palace: *PM I*, pp. 546–547, figs. 397, 398; Immerwahr 1990, p. 172 (Kn 11). A fragment of a jewelry mold found at the Kephala tholos at Knossos carries a similar design: Hutchinson 1956, p. 80 (no. 49), pl. 12:e.

60. See 6, 7, 9. Separately modeled faience crocus buds and stems were also found in the deposit.

61. E.g., the Kea terracotta figurines: *Keos II*, i; one woman on a gold ring from Isopata: *CMS II.3*, 51.

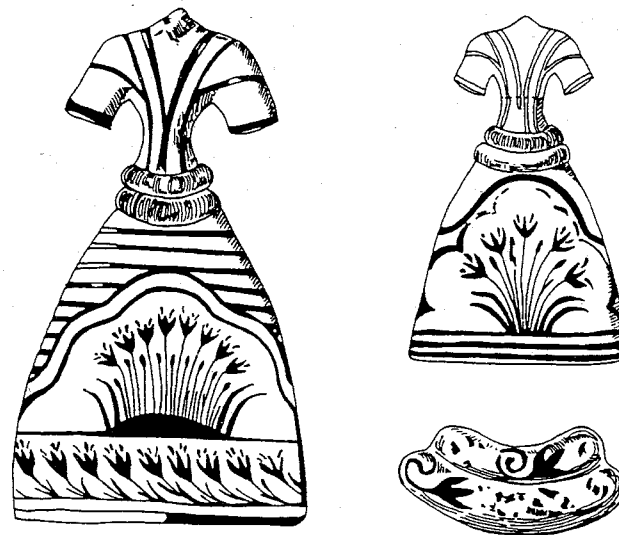


Figure 5.9. Knossos dresses. P. Rehak, after *PM I*, p. 506, fig. 364

garments with crocus decoration. The repositories apparently were sealed following a destruction in the West Wing of the palace near the beginning of the Neopalatial period.⁶² Examination of the pieces shows that all are composed of a coarse quartz core with a finer white quartz glaze on the upper surface. The back of each plaque is flat, and the more complete specimens preserve holes that enabled the objects to be suspended.⁶³ The crocus blossoms are painted in a brownish-purple color, perhaps in an attempt to reproduce the mauve color of saffron crocuses. Evans considered the models to be votive in character, and the evidence from Xeste 3 suggests that such dresses would be appropriate gifts from women to the goddess. The piping of the blouses on the faience plaques looks identical to that on the dress of the Veiled Girl (Fig. 5.6).

The decoration of the largest dress plaque is also the most elaborate. Above the waist, the blouse of the costume is painted with thick lines that may reproduce the piping applied to the hems and sleeves. A thick double band or girdle encircles the waist. The decoration on the skirt occupies three main zones. Immediately below the waist is a series of closely spaced, horizontal lines. A roughly triangular area is reserved in the middle of the faience skirt, framed around its upper edge by a pair of undulating lines. Similar wavy bands on frescoes and rings may represent a stylized mountainous landscape.⁶⁴ On a reserved area in the center of the skirt, crocus blossoms and buds grow in a symmetrical arrangement from a central clump framed at either side by leaves. A narrow horizontal register occupies the hem of the skirt with a repeating pattern of crocus leaves and blossoms, identically slanting to the left.

The other two dresses carry somewhat simpler versions of this decorative scheme. The better preserved example omits the horizontal bands at the top of the skirt, as well as the horizontal register of repeated blossoms at the hem; in the middle of the skirt, the clump of crocus rises from a flat groundline. The third dress is only partially preserved (Fig. 5.10).⁶⁵ The lower half of the girdle survives, painted with a wavy band. The upper part of the skirt is plain, but in the center the undulating framing lines are visible at the top, along with the tips of the crocus flowers.

62. For a recent survey of this period, see Rehak and Younger 1998, reprinted with additions in Cullen 2001, pp. 383–473.

63. Cf. the miniature ivory double axes from the Zakros palace that also have suspension holes: Platon 1971, p. 131.

64. Immerwahr 1990, pp. 46, 59. E.g., the House of the Frescoes at Knossos: *PM II*, p. 459, fig. 271. Elsewhere these bands may represent the sky, as in the House of the Ladies at Akrotiri: Doumas 1992, pls. 6, 7. Cf. the gold ring from the Acropolis Treasure at Mycenae: Sakellariou 1964, pp. 30–31 (no. 17).

65. See 8.

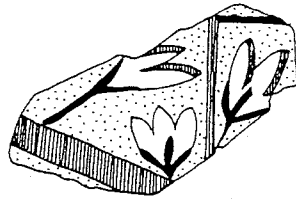


Figure 5.10 (*left*). Knossos dress fragment. P. Rehak, after Panagiotaki 1993, p. 61, fig. D

Figure 5.11 (*right*). Palaikastro fresco fragment. P. Rehak, after Bosanquet and Dawkins 1923, p. 148, fig. 3

One of two models of double “girdles” preserved in the Temple Repositories has crocus decoration consisting of blossoms with curling stems, arranged horizontally.⁶⁶ The rest of the surface is covered with irregular blobs of paint that do not form a recognizable pattern.

The patterns on the faience dresses from Knossos have been discussed by Barber in her study of prehistoric textile production and use.⁶⁷ She considers them “unitary” designs, which are generally more difficult to effect than other woven designs.

Another possible costume with crocus decoration occurs on a fresco fragment found during the early investigations at Palaikastro in east Crete.⁶⁸ The finds from House E included an arm in stucco relief, white in color and therefore presumably female. Associated with it was a small fresco fragment with crocus blossoms that may belong to the skirt or—more probably—the blouse of this figure (Fig. 5.11). Although too little of the figure survives for one to attempt a reconstruction, other stucco relief depictions of women with elaborate costumes are known from a LM IB shrine in the small town on the island of Pseira, and from the site of Khania.⁶⁹ Relief fresco seems to be a characteristic of the decoration of the Knossos palace during the Neopalatial period, and when it occurs at other sites it can be interpreted as influence from that center or emulation of the decorative methods used there.⁷⁰

Other evidence supports the notion that crocus was particularly important at Neopalatial Knossos. A fresco from a room north of the Central Court includes at least two monkeys picking crocus blossoms and putting them into garlanded baskets,⁷¹ a scene that recalls several elements in Xeste 3. Real monkeys were probably imported to Knossos from Egypt as an element in international gift exchanges, and the ones painted in Xeste 3 may have been inspired by secondary exchanges between Crete and Thera.⁷² The wall paintings in the House of the Frescoes at Knossos included blue monkeys and clumps of crocus related compositionally to those in Xeste 3,⁷³ and the Fresco of the Garlands found near the Stratigraphic Museum includes a wreath of crocus flowers.⁷⁴ One of the richly dressed “Women in Blue” from the Knossos palace wears a garment of the same diaphanous blue fabric that is seen on several of the Thera women, and she fingers a necklace of crocus buds.⁷⁵ A fresco in a small shrine at Ayia Triada includes a landscape with women, animals, and clumps of crocus and lilies.⁷⁶ The Zakros Sanctuary Rhyton, a product of a palatial workshop, includes a clump of crocus in relief near a peak sanctuary that generally resembles the one on the wall of the Xeste 3 Lustral Basin.⁷⁷ The Neopalatial period ends with a wave of destructions across Crete; after that, crocus decoration on costumes and pottery virtually disappears.⁷⁸

66. See 9.

67. Barber 1991, pp. 320–321.

68. See 10.

69. Pseira: Immerwahr 1990, p. 184 (Ps 1). Recent excavation of the site shows that the construction of the shrine dates to LM IB; Immerwahr’s LM IA date for the fresco is therefore too early. Khania: Immerwahr 1990, pp. 181–182 (Ch 1).

70. Rehak 1997a, pp. 165, 166, fig. 3: distribution map of relief frescoes.

71. *PM I*, p. 265, pl. IV; Immerwahr 1990, pp. 170 (Kn 1), pls. 10, 11; Platon 1947.

72. Strasser 1997, Parker 1997.

73. House of the Frescoes at Knossos: *PM I*, p. 459, fig. 271; Cameron 1968. Birds with nests appear in both locations; at Knossos, the monkeys appear to be eating the birds’ eggs.

74. Warren 1985, 1987.

75. See note 57.

76. Smith 1965, pp. 77–79, fig. 107 (woman kneeling among flowers), cf. fig. 108; Militello 1992; Rehak 1997a.

77. Sanctuary Rhyton: see note 12.

78. Rehak 1997b. For a later scrap of wall painting from Pylos with crocus, see Lang 1969, pp. 130–131 (15 N sw), color pl. H (where they are identified as “anemones”).

CONCLUSION

This analysis of costumes with crocus permits us to draw some important new conclusions about Aegean art and religion. Within Xeste 3, the flower is a unifying theme that establishes a connection between the goddess and women of all ages, from prepubescence through adulthood, and not just with the young flower-picking girls who are actually depicted in her presence. The paintings underscore the importance of cloth and clothing as a means of communication, particularly among women; these highly detailed scenes may even have been painted for didactic purposes by a female artist for a primarily female audience.

The details of the costumes carry broader implications as well. The iconographic content of the frescoes from Xeste 3 locates them squarely within the milieu of Neopalatial Knossos, and suggests that the Thera building may have served some of the social, religious, or political functions of the palace, albeit on a smaller scale. Now that the Akrotiri has also produced administrative document sealings of Cretan clay, impressed with Knossian glyptic images,⁷⁹ the case for a direct link between the two sites becomes even stronger. Whether the paintings reflect a Cretan intrusion at Thera, or a Cycladic imitation of Knossian culture, the crocus costumes remind us that even such small details can contribute new threads to the rich tapestry of Aegean society in the Bronze Age.

79. The sealings, found in Room Delta 18, are now on display in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera; see *Ergon* 1995, pp. 37–38, figs. 37, 38. Cf. Doulas 2002.

CATALOGUE OF COSTUMES WITH CROCUS

- 1 AKROTIRI, THERA. Necklace Swinger Figs. 5.2, 5.3
Marinatos 1984, p. 81; Televantou 1992a, pp. 156–157 (no. 25:a), with additional references; 1992b, pl. 20:a; Younger 1992, pp. 278–279 (no. 16), pl. LXV:a; Doulas 1992, pls. 100–104; Marinatos 1993, p. 209.
- 2 AKROTIRI, THERA. Wounded Woman Figs. 5.2, 5.4
Marinatos 1984, pp. 78–81, fig. 56; Televantou 1992a, pp. 156–157 (no. 25:b), pls. XXXIV:a, XXXVI:a, with additional references; 1992b, pl. 20:a; Younger 1992, p. 278 (no. 15), pl. LXIV:d; Doulas 1992, pls. 100, 105, 106; Marinatos 1993, pp. 207–209.
- 3 AKROTIRI, THERA. Veiled Girl Figs. 5.2, 5.6
Marinatos 1984, pp. 77–81, fig. 55; Televantou 1992a, pp. 156–157 (no. 25:c), pls. XXXIV:b, XXXVI, with additional references; 1992b, pl. 20:a, b (detail of head); Younger 1992, p. 278 (no. 14), pl. LXIV:c; Doulas 1992, pls. 100, 107, 108; Marinatos 1993, pp. 206–207.
- 4 AKROTIRI, THERA. Goddess Fig. 5.7
Marinatos 1984, pp. 61–62; Televantou 1992a, p. 157 (no. 30), with additional references; Younger 1992, pp. 277–278 (no. 9), pl. LXIII:c; Doulas 1992, pls. 122, 125, 126; Marinatos 1993, pp. 141, 151.
- 5 AKROTIRI, THERA. Mature Woman Fig. 5.8
Marinatos 1984, pp. 64–65, 68, fig. 46; Televantou 1992a, p. 158 (no. 33); Doulas 1992, pls. 131, 132.

- 6 KNOSSOS, EAST REPOSITORY. Faience dress Fig. 5.9
PMI, p. 505, fig. 364:a; Foster 1979, pp. 86–88, fig. 17, pl. 17; Marinatos 1993, pp. 141, 142, fig. 111.
- 7 KNOSSOS, EAST REPOSITORY. Faience dress Fig. 5.9
PMI, p. 505, fig. 364:b; Foster 1979, pp. 86, 88, fig. 18; Marinatos 1993, pp. 141, 142, fig. 111.
- 8 KNOSSOS, EAST REPOSITORY. Partial faience dress Fig. 5.10
 Panagiotaki 1993, pp. 59, 61, fig. D.
- 9 KNOSSOS, EAST REPOSITORY. Faience girdle Fig. 5.9
PMI, pp. 505–506, fig. 364:d; Foster 1979, p. 89, fig. 19; Marinatos 1993, pp. 141, 142, fig. 111.
- 10 PALAIKASTRO, HOUSE E? Skirt fragment with crocus Fig. 5.11
 Bosanquet and Dawkins 1923, p. 148, fig. 3; Immerwahr 1990, pp. 182–183 (Pa 1).

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