

FORMALISM AND GENDER ROLES: A COMPARISON OF MINOAN AND EGYPTIAN ART

I. Introduction: Egypt and Minoan Crete

The discovery of Minoan wall paintings in Tell el Dab'a, Egypt by M. Bietak¹ has made the relationship between Minoan and Egyptian societies more relevant than ever. It is certain now that Egypt and Crete were in contact and had basic similarities since both belong to the Eastern Mediterranean cultural continuum. I myself have attempted to show similarities in the structures of the two societies by comparing the 'rhetoric' of their respective arts² and exploring the affinities in their institutions of 'Divine Kingship'³. In this paper, I shall attempt one more comparison based on the art: the perception of gender roles. My purpose is to highlight the uniqueness of each culture using the other as a foil. Yet, it is to be stressed that such comparisons are meaningless unless there are basic similarities in cultural language and social structure; we might call it the koine of eastern Mediterranean cultures.

It is generally thought that Egyptian art is stiff, formalistic and so governed by rigid conventions and canons, that it loses in spontaneity. By contrast, Minoan art is fresh and vivacious⁴. I do not want to challenge these assumptions; it is true that Minoan art displays much less canonization than Egyptian art and that there are refreshing surprises every step of the way. However, it is almost never pointed out that there is a paradox here: Minoan art is far more formalistic than Egyptian art⁵.

II. Formalism

The dictum of H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort about Minoan art is still with us: "For the content of the scenes in fresco and relief, when compared with Egyptian and Mesopotamian work, is strikingly devoid of the peculiar seriousness which is theirs"⁶.

1 M. BIETAK, *Egyptian Archaeology* (1992), 26-28; ID., *Egypt and the Levant IV* (1994), 44-80; M. BIETAK and N. MARINATOS, "Minoan Wall Paintings from Avaris (Tell el Dab'a)", in *Egypt and the Levant V* (forthcoming).

2 N. MARINATOS, "On the Rhetoric of Egyptian and Minoan Art", in P.J. HOLLIDAY ed., *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (1993), 74-87.

3 N. MARINATOS, "Divine Kingship in Minoan Crete", in P. REHAK ed., *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean*, *Aegaeum* 11 (1995), 37-48.

4 H.A. GROENEWEGEN-FRANKFORT, *Arrest and Movement* (1951), 185-205.

5 Here a clarification is needed. When it comes to murals, I shall be comparing, by necessity, two different types of wall paintings. Art of the palaces or villas and art of private tombs. It could be argued that the formalism of Minoan art is due to the context and not to the character of Minoan society. This is not the case, however, since art in the tombs of the nobles is official art; besides I shall be using also formal media of Egyptian art such as objects found in Tutankhamon's tomb. In short, we will be comparing official art with official art.

6 GROENEWEGEN-FRANKFORT (*supra* n. 4), 186.

Yet, Minoan art is serious. One of its characteristics is a lack of relaxation when it comes to human relationships. Whether we look at festival scenes, such as the Temple and Sacred Grove frescoes from Knossos, the processional scenes of the palaces, the banquet scene in which the 'Parisienne' features, the 'Prince of the Lilies', the bull-leaping scenes, the Throne room fresco or the boxing matches from Thera or Tylissos⁷, nowhere do we detect hints of a relaxed approach to life. There are no family scenes, no tenderness or affection expressed, nowhere are there casual incidents such as the tending of a wounded friend or even a fight between peers, as in the Egyptian 18th Dynasty tomb of Mena⁸. It could be argued that the differences are due to the context of the paintings: private tombs might be offering a different repertoire than the more official art of palaces and villas. In order to avoid this methodological pitfall, I shall try to confine my Egyptian examples to official self-presentations, even if they originate in tombs. We thus will see more clearly that even in Egyptian official art there is more room for casual incidents than in Minoan.

III. Male Perception: Minoan and Egyptian

1. Appearance

The ideal Minoan man is presented as young or youthful, with emphasis on leg muscles and a broad torso (Pl. LXVIIa). It is to be noted that in sculpture, as well as in painting, the muscles of the legs appear as striations, whereas the stomach muscles as undulating contours. The reason for the wasp waist is to emphasize the broadness of the torso.

Although the masculinity of Minoan males has seldom been observed (there is talk of grace rather than strength), the broad chest, narrow waist and muscular thighs are exactly the conventions that characterize the Egyptian male statues as well as kouroi of Archaic Greek art. In addition, the Minoan male has a costume which emphasizes the penis by a pronounced phallus sheath (Pl. LXVIIa)⁹.

As we noted above, the conventions for the Egyptian male are similar: broad torso, small waist, emphasis on leg muscles (Pl. LXVIIb, LXVIIId below). The disproportionately thick legs of king Mentuhotep of the 11th Dynasty probably also indicate strength¹⁰. As in the Homeric epics, bodily vigour is manifested in the leg muscles, hence 'swift-footed Achilles'.

2. Stress on Bodily Strength

The roles of the Minoan male are related to bodily strength and center around athletics, hunting and war. There are no Minoan flower gatherers although flowers, and nature in general, may appear emblematically in relation to male status¹¹. Minoan

7 For an analysis of content and context: M.A.S. CAMERON, "The 'Palatial' Thematic System in the Knossos Murals. Last Notes on Knossos Frescoes", in *Function Palaces*, 320-328; N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Religion* (1993), 50-75.

8 W. STEVENSON SMITH, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (1981), 265-266, Fig. 258.

9 E. GIESECKE, "Kretische Schurze", *OpAth* 17 (1988), 91-98; N. MARINATOS, "The Bull as an Adversary: Some Observations on Bull-Hunting and Bull-Leaping", *ΑΡΙΑΔΝΗ. Αφιέρωμα στον Στ. Αλεξίου* (1989), 23-32 at 29.

10 K. LANGE and M. HIRMER, *Aegypten* (1957), Pl. 89.

11 For example lilies appear with male personages or male objects: atop the poles of the cabin screens of the leader of the fleet of the West House, Thera; as a necklace around the neck of the 'Prince of the Lilies' as

athletes, especially boxers, are present in a variety of media. As children they are attested on a wall painting of room B1 at Akrotiri, Thera¹²; as youths on the rhyton of Hagia Triada¹³; as adults on some ring impressions from Hagia Triada¹⁴. Athletic contests are probably also shown on a steatite vase from Knossos¹⁵. In general, it is my belief that athletics abound on stone vessels, especially rhyta, because the latter were used by male participants during banquets.

Bull-leaping also is an athletic event although performed most probably during a festival context. The leapers themselves were acrobats and must have been trained as such. Both leapers and acrobats are often shown performing a hand stand, whether on the ground or on the back of a bull. The Minoan frescoes from Avaris, in the eastern Nile Delta, have furnished us with both leapers and acrobats. They were executed by the same artists and evidently the same stylistic formula was used to create variations in the stance.

As far as bull-leaping goes, it is not necessary in this context to elaborate on its importance in connection with the expression of manhood and the position of this 'sport' in official art. Suffice it to say that it is always shown in official media and in connection with palaces; it is no coincidence that we have it in a palatial complex at Avaris¹⁶. I must also stress that I firmly believe that there were no female bull-leapers¹⁷. In summary, the ideal Minoan man is presented as an athlete, not as an effeminate youth.

3. Hunting Equals Heroic Status

As far as hunting goes in Minoan art, it too appears on media of official art. Bull hunts, for example, appear on the ivory pyxis from Katsambas¹⁸, two seals from Routsis¹⁹ and the golden Vapheio cups²⁰, whereas hunters carrying bulls' hides are depicted on the Chieftain's Cup from Hagia Triada²¹.

Lion hunts are thought not to be attested in Crete but this is simply not true. Two types can be distinguished: lions being hunted by men and lions pursuing their victims. Both are Minoan in origin.

A scene of lions hunted by men appears on one of the inlaid daggers from

decorative motifs on a inlaid dagger from Mycenae. Good pictures of the first and last item in Sp. MARINATOS and M. HIRMER, *Kreta, Thera und das Mykenische Hellas* (1976), Pls. 153, 194 respectively.

12 Sp. MARINATOS, *Excavations at Thera IV* (1971), 46-49; Ch. DOUMAS, *The Wall Paintings of Thera* (1992), Pls. 78-81.

13 MARINATOS and HIRMER (*supra* n. 11), Pls. 106-107; MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), 213-215.

14 PM III, Fig. 347; D. LEVI, *ASAtene* 8-9 (1925/26), 122; MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), 215, Figs. 221-222.

15 PM I, 689-690, Fig. 510.

16 See n. 1 *supra*; N. MARINATOS, "The 'Export' Significance of Minoan Bull Hunting and Bull Leaping Scenes", in *Egypt and the Levant IV* (1994), 89-93. For the prestige value of bull-leaping see also E. and B. HALLAGER, this volume.

17 I have argued this in three different places. Most recently see MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), 218-220; and in *Egypt and the Levant IV* (1994), 89-94. The argument rests on a) the anatomy which is totally male b) the costume with characteristic phallus sheath and c) the ethnographic parallels which show that hunting and subduing wild animals is a male not a female domain.

18 S. HOOD, *The Arts in Prehistoric Greece* (1978), 122, Fig. 111.

19 MARINATOS and HIRMER (*supra* n. 11), Pl. 231.

20 Convenient overview in HOOD (*supra* n. 18), 122, 166-167.

21 R. KOEHL, "The Chieftain Cup and a Minoan Rite of Passage", *JHS* 106 (1986), 99-110; MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), 216-218

Mycenae²². Although the dagger was found in the mainland, the style is clearly Minoan, and I believe that the dagger itself is a Minoan import²³. This will not be accepted by all and it is not important for my argument since we have another scene of a lion hunt found on Crete: a Minoan seal, recently published, shows a man about to stab a lion²⁴. This scheme, by which the hunter confronts the adversarial animal, will be discussed further on in connection with the Kakovatos seal (Pl. LXVIIc).

Lions chasing their victims are attested on numerous Minoan glyptic scenes²⁵ and, most recently, on a painting with a magnificent feline scene discovered at Avaris²⁶. Boar hunt as well is attested in Minoan iconography as on the Lasithi dagger²⁷.

In Egypt, the most magnificent hunts were reserved for the pharaoh. He hunts hippopotami, wild bulls, elephants and, of course lions. Bull hunt was quite prestigious as testified on a scene on the outside of the mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu²⁸. This reminds us of the bull hunts on Cretan art which were obviously expressions of male prestige. The accomplishments of some of the royal hunts were inscribed on temples or even scarabs: Amenophis II (18th Dynasty) boasted that he had killed 120 wild lions; Thutmoses III boasted the kill of seven lions simultaneously²⁹. Lion hunt was obviously a royal prerogative but it seldom appears before the 18th Dynasty³⁰. It is interesting that, at that time, the pharaoh can be shown on foot confronting the lion as an adversary (Pl. LXVIIb), a scheme which stresses heroic status and which, as we have seen above, occurs in Crete on a seal from Chania with a Minoan hunter confronting a lion. It is thus obvious that this formula appears in Crete first although it is attested on many seals or rings found on the mainland³¹. On a seal from Kakovatos, for example, the hunter is about to stab a lion helped by a demon: the symbolic aspect of the hunt is thus emphasized (Pl. LXVIIc)³². In both Egypt and Crete the hunter is made into a hero through the application of a particular pictorial formula. It is precisely this formula that the Greek artists used to indicate the heroic status of Heracles and other Greek heroes confronting wild beasts.

22 HOOD (*supra* n. 18), 179.

23 R. LAFFINEUR, "Mycenaeans at Thera: Further Evidence?", in *Thalassocracy*, 133-139 and recently "Material and Craftsmanship in the Mycenae Shaft Graves: Imports vs Local Production", *Minos* N.S. 25-26 (1990-91), 245-295, esp. 272. See also recently A. XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU, "Η χρυσόκέντηση στη μυκηναϊκή εποχή", *Αρχαιολογία* 3, 29-39 esp. at 36. Her argument, which is well founded, is that the technique and some of the types of the Shaft Grave swords are not attested on Crete before the Mycenaean period. However, she also argues that the iconography is Mycenaean and that I do not accept.

24 CMS V suppl. 1A, 135.

25 Overview in L. MORGAN, *The Miniature Wall Paintings of Thera* (1988), 44-49. See also CMS II 3, 18, 19, 24, 41, 44, 60, 61, 64, 99 (lioness with young lion attacks antelope) 100, 104, 129, 167 (Master of animals flanked by lion and griffin), 173, 221, 227, 283, 302, 329, 330 (two-sided seal with lion and hunter?), 344 (lioness and young in contorted position + skull), 345 (lion struck by arrow), 346-348. The seals/sealings were found in Crete and are of indisputable Minoan origin.

26 N. MARINATOS, "The Feline Scene of Avaris (Tell el Dab'a)", *Egypt and the Levant* VI (forthcoming).

27 PM I, 719, Fig. 541.

28 LANGE and HIRMER (*supra* n. 10), Pl. 249. Discussion in W. DECKER, *Sport und Spiel im Alten Aegypten* (1987), 161.

29 Discussion in DECKER (*supra* n. 28), 155-166, esp. 162-163.

30 This is because the lion was considered as a symbol of the king himself.

31 For example: CMS I, 9.

32 PM IV, Fig. 387; N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual* (1986), 46-47, Fig. 31.

4. Warrior Status

The warrior aspect of the Minoan male is not as obvious as in Egypt where the pharaohs and noble men were often presented as competent generals and excellent warriors in possession of physical strength. The ubiquitous image engraved in temples and monuments of the Egyptian king clobbering or smiting his enemies raises him to the status of a hero or god whom nobody can resist (Pl. LXVIId). Large in size and imposing in gesture he is an avatar of war itself.

No such images exist in Minoan Crete³³. Even so, warrior aspects are not totally absent from the visual characterization of the powerful Minoan man. Thus, on the miniatures from the West House the leaders of the fleet are presented as warriors with spears and helmets as accessories³⁴. Moreover, the warrior ideal is presented in siege scenes which decorate prestige vessels, most certainly used by men, such as the Silver Siege Rhyton and stone vessels with related iconography³⁵. There are additional indications that warrior status was considered important in Minoan civilization. On the Boxers Rhyton from Hagia Triada³⁶ some of the contestants wear helmets. True, this is an athletic contest, not war, but it does show that the contestants were acting as warriors. I have suggested that they were youths being trained for war³⁷. Warrior scenes showing struggles (designated as *Kampfszenen* by I. Pini)³⁸ are depicted on ring impressions from Hagia Triada (Pl. LXVIIe). On one, the warrior, whose status is indicated by a necklace³⁹ is holding the enemy by the hair and is ready to clobber him. He is accompanied by a large dog which shows how closely hunt and war were connected in ancient mentalities. The scheme is so strikingly similar to the pharaonic images discussed above (Pl. LXVIId), that coincidence is excluded; clearly Egyptian prototypes are at work here. We can thus forget the notion that the Minoan male was peaceful.

So far we have seen that both Egyptian and Minoan male prototypes stress those aspects of manhood that are primary and elemental. Indeed, the roles of warrior and hunter are interchangeable and may have originated in the Paleolithic development of *homo sapiens*⁴⁰. They are not unique to the cultures described above, but typify the ideal male in a variety of civilizations, ranging from American Indians to African tribes.

33 E. DAVIS, "Art and Politics in the Aegean: the Missing Ruler", in P. REHAK ed., *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean*, *Aegaeum* 11 (1995), 11-20.

34 MORGAN (*supra* n. 25), 93-118; N. MARINATOS, *Art and Religion in Thera* (1984), 33-61; EAD. (*supra* n. 3).

35 A. SAKELLARIOU, "La scène du 'siège' sur le rhyton d'argent de Mycènes d'après une nouvelle reconstitution", *RA* 1975, 195-208; EAD., "Scène de bataille sur un vase mycénien en pierre ?", *RA* 1971, 3-14, Figs. 1-2; P. WARREN, "The Miniature Fresco from the West House at Akrotiri, Thera, and its Aegean Setting", *JHS* 99 (1979), 115-129 at 126-127. It is true that these prestige vessels have been found on the mainland, not Crete. However, in view of the 'Town mosaic' and the miniatures from the West House I do not think that there can be reasonable doubts that the Minoans had similar iconography, indeed their iconography furnished the Mycenaeans with the prototypes.

36 *Supra* n. 13.

37 MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), 216.

38 I. PINI, "Zur 'richtigen' Ansicht minoisch-mykenischer Siegel- und Ringdarstellungen", in *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen ägäischen Glyptik*, *CMS Beiheft* 3 (1989), 201-217, at 203, Figs. 1, 2.

39 This is hardly visible with naked eye but it has been observed by Pini with the aid of a strong magnifying glass.

40 W. BURKERT, *Homo Necans*, transl. by P. BING (1983), 1-82.

5. Non-Macho Aspects of the Egyptian male

What I find more surprising is that the Egyptian male is 'softened' by touches of tenderness, affection and caring. In the 19th Dynasty tomb of Ipuw at Deir el Medina, the tomb owner is shown seated, his wife behind him; both are partaking of food piled up in front (Pl. LXVIIIa). On the lap of the man sits a small kitten which is playing with his garment while the mother cat stares at the spectator seated under the wife's chair⁴¹. Despite its charm, a scene of this type is, of course, meant to enhance the prestige of Ipuw: 'he must be a nice man since he has a kitten on his lap', thinks the spectator. Thus prestige is expressed here not only as power, not only as macho manhood, but rather as a humorous and humane touch. The intrusion of the humorous incident in a formula which is traditional and stiff creates an effect of both surprise and relief. It also draws attention to the character of Ipuw making him more of a person, a more credible personality.

Egyptian males are often depicted as caring and affectionate towards their families. Many a noble is depicted hunting in the marshes in the company of a son or even a daughter and the couples are always shown together in banqueting scenes⁴². Although the role of the nurturer is normally left to females (see below), males also can take on this aspect. Thus on an 18th Dynasty painting from the tomb of Hekaerheh, Abd el Qurna, the child-king is seated on the lap of a male, probably a tutor (Pl. LXVIIIb). Here divine 'sonship' is stressed and the child is trained as a future lord and warrior: there are bound enemies decorating the footstool where the child rests his feet⁴³. Male tutors are not infrequent in Egyptian art. For example the architect of queen Hatshepsut, Senenmut was represented as a block-statue enveloping in an embrace the little princess, daughter of Hatshepsut⁴⁴. It is surely this tradition which was appropriated by the heretic pharaoh Akhenaton during the Amarna period. He is presented as having his daughters on his lap⁴⁵, and, although we have daughters and not sons here (surely an idiosyncrasy of Akhenaton's ideology), the role of a male as a source of affection is not as unprecedented as it might seem at first.

The above has been a brief and incomplete survey of official presentations of the Egyptian male in art. It does show, however, how formalistic Minoan art appears in comparison. The Minoan male is not even presented as a family man, not to mention nurturer.

IV. Female Perception: Minoan and Egyptian

The primary role of both the Minoan and Egyptian woman is that of mother and nurturer. This is the counter-role to the male as we have witnessed it above in both cultures. The regenerative role of the Minoan goddess, who may also have acted as the prototype for the Minoan woman, has been explored elsewhere⁴⁶. It is clear that women were in charge of gathering and offering flowers and that they had an affectionate

41 *Egyptian Wall Paintings: The Metropolitan Museum's Collection of Facsimiles* (reprinted from the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 1979), 27, Fig. 32

42 L. MANICHE, *City of the Dead. Thebes in Egypt* (1987), 35-38, Fig. 28

43 O. KEEL, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (1978), 253-255, Fig. 342.

44 P.F. DORMAN, *The Tombs of Senenmut, Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition* (1991), 29-30, Pl. 5. See also "Prinzenerzieher", in W. HELCK and W. WESTENDORF eds., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV (1982), 1106.

45 See for example a stele and a statue in the Egyptian Museum: M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, *Offizieller Katalog. Das Ägyptische Museum Kairo* (1986), 167, 168.

46 MARINATOS (*supra* n. 7), ch. vii.

relationship to animals, in contradiction to men who always try to subdue and hunt them⁴⁷. Just like men stress their manhood by means of the phallus sheath, so Minoan women stress their femininity by the slender waist, broad heaps, exposed breasts. The typical ritual costume of the female emphasizes just the features described above. Let us take as examples the faience model dresses found in the Temple Repositories, Knossos (Pl. LXVIIIc). The broad heaps (necessary for efficient child birth) are emphasized by the shape of the skirt, the waist by a thick double belt, whereas the regenerative aspect by the landscape which decorates the garment⁴⁸.

Minoan females, however, are somewhat impersonal in comparison to their Egyptian counterparts. There is hardly any evidence for motherhood. True, there is a post palatial clay statuette from Mavro Spelio in Crete, which, possibly under Mycenaean influence, shows a female holding a child (Pl. LXVIIIId)⁴⁹. However, the woman holds the child in an odd way. She is not facing it but she holds it backwards, holding it in her outstretched arms as though she is presenting it or handing it to someone else. I suspect that the figurine was part of a terracotta complex and that perhaps the woman was presenting her child to a divinity.

Another figure that I have interpreted as mother⁵⁰ is the prominent woman on the balcony of the arrival town on the South Frieze of room 5, West House, Thera⁵¹. Next to the lady, who salutes the fleet standing in a balcony of 'appearances', stands a small boy. I have argued that he is her small son since there is no evidence of women being accompanied by slave boys (especially of the opposite sex) in Minoan culture. If she is the mother, she displays no affection towards the boy. Again the scene is peculiarly formalistic.

At any rate, these instances are very few compared to Egyptian examples which stress motherhood in all three levels of hierarchy: human, regal and divine⁵².

It should be noted here that the Minoan goddesses are not represented as mothers, unlike, let us say Hathor, or Demeter or Virgin Mary.

Affection between husband and wife are never illustrated in Minoan art. On the contrary, in Egypt the couple is an important unit manifested in the three levels of hierarchy, divine, regal and mortal. In all cases, women, whether goddesses, queens or noble ladies, are habitually shown embracing their consorts, thus manifesting that womanhood is a source of affection and love. The iconography from the small golden shrine in the tomb of Tutankhamon shows scenes of particular intimacy between the king and his wife. Let us just mention here the scene which shows the queen seated at the feet of her husband and receiving water (or perfume)⁵³ from him (Pl. LXVIIIe). She casually leans against the king, resting her elbow on his knees. This posture creates a casual atmosphere, devoid of formality, which helps make credible the love between the young

47 As in the Xeste 3 frescoes from Thera: MARINATOS (*supra* n. 34), 61-72; EAD. (*supra* n. 7), ch. vii. The scheme is also evident in many Mycenaean procession frescoes as well as in glyptic art (CMS V Suppl. IB, 113).

48 PM I, Figs. 364 A, B; K. POLINGER FOSTER, *Aegean Faience of the Bronze Age* (1979), 88-91, Figs. 17, 18.

49 PM III, 469, Fig. 327.

50 MARINATOS (*supra* n. 3).

51 Good photograph in DOUMAS (*supra* n. 12), Fig. 79.

52 L. TROY, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (1986), 43-72.

53 The interpretation of this scene is difficult. TROY (*supra* n. 52), 62, interprets it as the pouring of (phallic) waters by the king into the hand (womb) of his consort. A. SHOUKRY, in C. DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, *Tutankhamon* (1953), 295, assumes that the small bottle contained perfume and that this is an anointing scene.

couple. It is of course hardly the only instance of marital love in Egyptian art. I will deliberately abstain from discussing the intimate scenes of kissing between the royal couple of the Amarna period, represented in private tombs since they cannot be considered typical of Egyptian art⁵⁴. Yet, as mentioned above, they build on previous traditions. At any rate, the rigidity of Minoan art in this respect becomes obvious by comparison.

One final comparison between Minoan and Egyptian women. In the latter culture, women are represented as mourners for the dead, one model furnished by the divine prototype of Isis. In Minoan art, women are not shown as mourners except in one sarcophagus of the post palatial period now in the Rhethymnon Museum⁵⁵.

V. Conclusions

What do these observations tell us about the nature of Minoan society? I do not think that motherhood or family relationships were unimportant to the Minoans. The reasons have to be sought in the function of their art.

I believe firmly that Minoan society was theocratic. In this case, the aristocracy was perceiving itself as the representative of the divinities and the noble men and women were intent on presenting themselves as similar to the divine prototypes as possible. If the gods furnished no models for marital love, motherhood or fatherhood, such references were omitted also in the representations of the elite rulers. In official art there was no room left for the more tender aspects of life for this would make the aristocracy too human, too much removed from the gods. This, I think, is the meaning of formalism and we must seek its reasons in the perceptions that the Minoans had of their gods.

Such an answer, of course, begs the question since we now have to ask why were the gods so devoid of those traits which make Egyptian or Homeric gods so accessible and graspable? Why is there no Isis, no Osiris and Horus, in the Minoan pantheon, at least as far as we can understand it from the visual arts? Perhaps the answer has to be sought in the fact that the Minoan theocracy was short lived and there was no time to develop an elaborate literature and mythology. It is in the mythical structures that family relationships of divine figures are articulated. Mythical structures, however, presuppose a narrative tradition, whether literary or oral. It is obvious, for example, that it was the great epic tradition of the Greeks that changed the impersonal fertility deities that we see on vases and reliefs of the Orientalizing period to 'characters' with personality traits and attributes. Is it possible that the Minoans never got to the stage of developing an articulate mythological narrative? Nothing in their art suggests that they did.

I shall not attempt to give a final answer in this context but will be content to emphasize that the spirit of relaxation and joyfulness that Minoan art imparts on us tells only part of the story. A certain stiffness or perhaps even insecurity about identity lurks in the background.

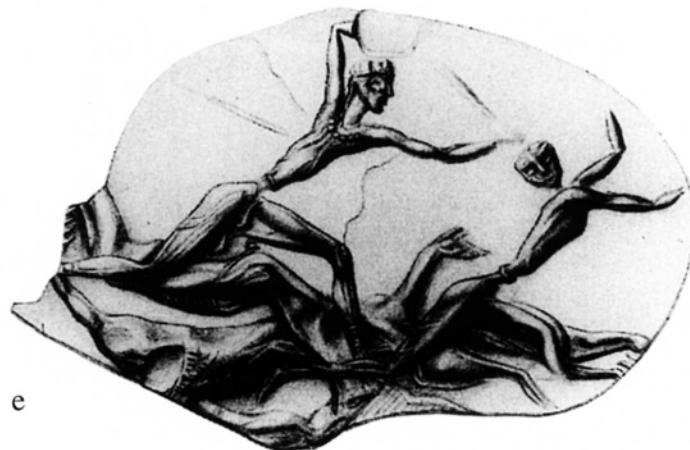
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54 Tomb of Mahu for example, N. DE G. DAVIES, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna* (1903-8), Pls. 20-22.

55 It is a larnax from Pigi in the area of Rhethymnon. On the short side of the sarcophagus are two figures mourning on either side of a bier. See A. KANTA, *The LM III Period in Crete* (SIMA LVIII, 1980), 296; N. MARINATOS, "Minoan and Mycenaean Larnakes: A Comparison", in *La Crète mycénienne. Actes de la Table Ronde de l'Ecole Française d'Athènes*, BCH Suppl. forthcoming.

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- Pl. LXVIId Clay figurine of woman presenting a child. After *PM* III, 469, Fig. 327.
- Pl. LXVIIIE Tutankhamon and consort from a golden shrine. After TROY (*supra* n. 52), Fig. 38.

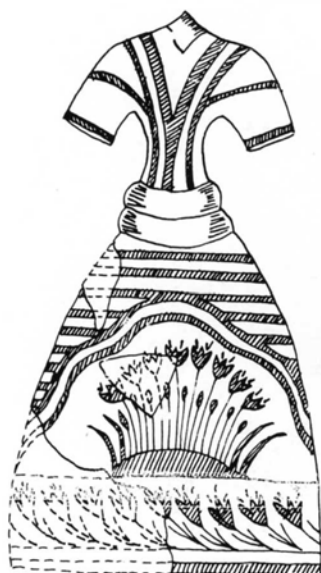




a



b



d

c



e