DESPERATELY SEEKING POTNIA*

Introduction

Potnia has an obvious presence in Classical Greece. Equated with panhellenic goddesses, especially Artemis as Potnia Theron, she lends her name as title to other female divinities and mortals and even places. Potniai is the name of a Boeotian town where there is a well whose water makes mares raving mad.[1] The variety of uses of the term is fascinating. It is also an impediment in a search for origins. As Alan Peatfield points out in his paper in this volume, definition can determine interpretation. Thus, if the point of departure is Potnia theron, a mistress of animals will be the object of a search into the ancestry of Potnia. However, beginning with Potniai in Boeotia will direct attention to the goddesses venerated there, Demeter and Kore.

Potnia is also attested in the Bronze and Dark Age cultures of Greece. Yet it would be a grave error to identify this Potnia (or these Potniai) with the classical presence. In fact, we cannot assume continuity of conception between any of the three cultures. With this caveat in mind, we have turned to the existing evidence from the Minoan-Mycenaean world, on the one hand, and from Dark Age Greece, on the other, without reference to the Classical data. Having formed a sense of the identity of Potnia within the two preclassical cultures, it will be possible to address more general questions of continuity and change over time.

Written sources

The Bronze Age

Although best left to the specialists, the Bronze Age Aegean texts have a certain interest for an iconographical approach through providing a catalogue of divine proper names. The Linear A script has yet to be deciphered, despite occasional claims to the contrary. It is agreed that the material can be recognized as being composed of administrative documents, on the one hand, and ritual formulations, on the other. A number of words have carried over into Linear B, among them (?) names of deities. A lack of agreement among specialists, however, precludes their use by a layman in this context.[2]

Potnia is well represented in Linear B, appearing 12 times in the Pylos archive, five or six in that of Knossos, associated with a series of determinants, including several references to the locality *pa-ki-ja-ne* in the Pylian Kingdom, and one to *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja* at Knossos. The range of determinants, of which, in addition to the two just mentioned, *a-si-wi-ja*, *i-qe-ja*, *da-pu₂-ri-to-jo*, and *si-to* are the most striking, suggest a series of female deities bearing the honorific

1 PAUSANIAS 9.8.1.
2 It is symptomatic that one scholar interprets the Prassas libation table side b ([PR Za 1], N. PLATON, "Inscribed libation vessel from a Minoan house at Prassà, Heraklion," in *Minoica. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Johannes Sundwall* [1958] 305-318, pl. 2) as reading *a-ta-no*, which can be associated with the epithets *po-ti*, *po-wa-e*, *po-wa-ja* to arrive at a Potnia Athana (A. FURUMARK, "Linear A and Minoan Religion," *OpAth* 17 [1988] 60, 62, 65, 67; cf. ID., "Gods of Ancient Crete," *OpAth* 6 [1965] 98), while another, for the same sequence of signs (one additional sign identified) reads *se-to-i-ja*, being the locality Setoia near Knossos (probably Prassas itself), also known from Linear B (L. GODART, "Du Linéaire A au Linéaire B," in *Aux origines de l'hellénisme. La Crète et la Grèce. Hommage à Henri van Effenterre* [1984] 127. Cf. also L. GODART, J.-P. OLIVIER, *Recueil des inscriptions en Linéaire A, ÉtCrét* XXI, vol. IV [1982] 46b.

title of "Potnia" and an indication of origin, function or residence - yet strong arguments for one goddess have been made.[3] In addition, further gods and goddesses which survived into the Olympic pantheon - Poseidon, Hermes, Dionysos, Artemis, Hera, Zeus - are named, as well as lesser known deities - such as Enyalios. It would be justified to think that one or the other should be identifiable in the imagery. Beyond some questionable applications of "Potnia," with or without epithet, and the general assignation of "Potnia/Potios theron" to the Mistress/Master of the Animals motif, however, this is not the case.[4]

The Dark Age

Clues now include a new form of written evidence: the alphabetic record of a long oral tradition. Homer knows Potnia well; in fact, he knows of many Potniai: 49 mentions occur in the *Iliad* and 20 in the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*, 24 references are to Hera, one each goes to Hebe, Artemis, Athena and Enyo; 21 occur in the formula Potnia mater: 6 of Hecuba, 8 of Thetis, one of Andromache and one when Andromache calls Hektor her own father and Potnia mater, and each one of the mothers of Briseis, Hippodameia, Dokos, Meleager, Alkyone. The *Odyssey*'s examples are: four references to Circe, one each to Hera, Calypso, and a nymph and 13 uses of Potnia mater - all mortals except for the nymphs' Potnia mater and Thetis: Anticlea (4), Penelope (2), the mothers of Arnaeus (1), Eumaeus (2), the nymphs (1), Thetis (1) Nausicaa (1), and a bride (1).[5]

The formulaic role of the Potnia references is clear: in all but four instances, the word Potnia with either a personal name or the word mater compose the fifth and sixth units of a hexameter line. The pattern of the phrases - consisting of an accented syllable followed by two short syllables then two long syllables - is the usual metrical form of the line ends. On the four occasions when a reference does not suit that form, the word can be elided (potni' 'Enyo), moved (potni' Athenain occurs at the start of a line),[6] or expanded (Potnia Theron occurs at a line end but is identified by the name Artemis at the start of the following line).

The formulaic application of the references is also apparent: use of the term is a gracious way of describing an eminent woman whether divine or mortal. If the words are to help us find Potnia with a capital P, the references point toward a Mother figure (82% of cases), a divinity associated with animals (Artemis and Circe) and a martial goddess (Athena and Enyo).

Ascriptions of the title Potnia in Hesiod echo the Homeric uses, albeit in far fewer instances. In the *Theogony*, Hera (10-11), Tethys (367-8), and Athena (925-6) are Potnia while from *Works and Days*, Peitho (72-3) joins their ranks. Nymphs are twice called Potnia in the fragments (4.26.24-5 and 4.150.30-1) and from the *Certamen* comes the familiar Potnia mater (115).

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3   C. BOËLLE (this volume) argues for a plurality, C. TRÜMPY and L. GODART (both this volume) for aspects of a single goddess. Cf. J. CHADWICK, "Potnia," *Minos* 5 (1957) 117-129 for one deity. J. VAN LEUVEN, "Mycenaean goddesses called *Potnia*," *Kadmos* 18 (1979) 112-129 argues for several. Cf. also J. CHADWICK, *The Mycenaean World* (1976) 84-101. The papers by Boëlle and Trümpy provide more extensive bibliographies.

4   It should be considered misplaced to claim the secondary female, cornear-wielding figure in Mycenae Room 31 as *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja*, as done by several participants at *Potnia*, when so little is known about the context. On this wallpainting, cf. P. REHAK, "Tradition and innovation in the fresco from Room 31 in the 'Cult Center' at Mycenae," in *EIKΩN* 39-62.

5   *Iliad*: Hera: I.551, I.568, IV.50, VIII.198, VIII.218, VIII.471, XIII.826, XIV. 159, XIV.197, XIV.222, XIV.263, XIV.300, XIV.329, XV.34, XV.49, XV.83, XV.100, XV.149, XVI.439, XVIII.239, XVIII.357, XVIII.360, XIX.106, XX.309. Hebe: IV.2. Artemis, XXI.470. Athena, VI.305. Enyo, V.592. Potnia Mater: I.357, VI.264; VI.413, VI.429, VI.471, IX.561, IX.584, XI.452, XI.795, XIII.430, XVI.37, XVI.51, XVIII.35, XVIII.70, XIX.291, XXII.239, XXII.341, XXII.352, XXIII.92, XXIV.126, XXIV.701.
     Odyssey: Circe: VIII.448, X.394, X.549, XII.36. Hera: IV.513. Calypso: I.14; nymph: V.149. Potnia mater: VI.30, VI.154; XI.180; XI.215; XI.546; XII.134; XV.385; XV:461; XVIII.5; XIX.462; XXI.115; XXI.172; XXIV.333.

6   "Numphe potni' Kalypso" in the *Odyssey* occurs at the start of a line although it meets the metrical requirements of a line end.

The evidence from Homer and Hesiod, then, suggests that Potnia is a title that can be applied, and is suitable, to many women, both human and divine.[7] However, inasmuch as the highest form of Homeric flattery is to describe a person as "like a divinity," there may be the force of a powerful divine Potnia informing the reference. The textual evidence is imprecise in both cases. In a search for precision, it behoves well to consider briefly some of the characteristics of the pictorial documentation.

Iconographic evidence

The Bronze Age
The search for Potnia - in the widest definition of deities in general - in the Bronze Age pictorial record has been going on for a century and although the literature is rich in sightings it runs woefully short on the explicitly formulated method prerequisite to reproducibility by subsequent generations of scholars. This desire for guidelines and transparency is not widely shared even when individual accounts exhibit a concern for recurrent patterns and the consistent application of interpretative frameworks. The immediate result is that the Bronze Age pictorial evidence (defined to cover two- and three-dimensional depictions) cannot be characterized in statistical terms as a commonly accepted set of data since there is little agreement regarding what constitutes a representation of a deity. (Due to the nature of the evidence, the discussion will concentrate on the glyptic representations. There, and rarely elsewhere, is sufficient contextual information available to enable meaningful analysis.) While commendable efforts have been made to discuss and classify the material, the absence of a clearly outlined method to be employed in the deciphering of the imagery renders it difficult for the reader to accept the competing interpretations on face value. The recreation of religious systems thus remains to date largely the domain of connoisseurship.[8]

In addition, there is disagreement about the nature of the figures and figurines. Each scholar readily recognizes a deity when (s)he sees one, but each individual proposes a different Materialsammlung. A *tractatus methodologicus* - without which "Potniology" is doomed to failure - still lies some distance into the future - if such an undertaking can ever find common suffrage in so contentious a discipline as religious studies. This search for "Potnia," taken in the widest sense of the symposion subtitle, in the Bronze Age Aegean, unable in the available space to produce a catalogue (with reasoning and references) of anthropomorphic figures acceptable as deities, proposes a series of observations regarding points of access to the imagery of the godhead.[9]

There are four hurdles to a better understanding of the religious thought of the Minoans and the Mycenaeans:

(1) until the appearance of Linear B there are no deciphered texts;

(2) the Linear B texts concerning religion can only rarely be connected to the available archaeological data since the deities mentioned generally cannot be related to the pictorial record;

(3) depicted deities - when recognizable as such - cannot be identified by name - except, as mentioned above, through resorting to a questionable generic use of "Potnia," or of a badly defined "Potnia theron;"

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7   D. BURR, "A Geometric house and a Proto-Attic votive deposit," *Hesperia* 2 (1933) 608 finds a possible explanation for the lack of distinction between mortal and immortal in "the confusion of primitive thought" in which "no sharp distinction was made between the mortal and the divine being."

8   Cf. *MMR*[2]; F. MATZ, *Göttererscheinung und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta.* AbhMainz (1958); B. RUTKOWSKI, *Frühgriechische Kultdarstellungen* (1981); FURUMARK (*supra* n. 2) 68-86; W.-D. NIEMEIER, "Zur Ikonographie von Gottheiten und Adoranten in den Kultszenen auf minoischen und mykenischen Siegeln," in *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitliche ägäischen Glyptik, CMS* Beiheft 3 (1989) 163-184; *Minoan Religion.*

9   The present paper is no more than a survey of some of the problems of "Potniology." Some aspects have been touched upon by the author elsewhere (cf. *EIKΩN* [cf. *infra* n. 12], *POLITEIA* [cf. *infra* n. 26], *MELETEMATA* [cf. *infra* n. 14], *CMS* Beiheft 5, *Celebrations* [cf. *infra* n. 11 for reference to the volume]), but exact *loci* will not be specified. Footnoting is generally selective and idiosyncratic. A number of aspects will be passed over in silence.

(4) the pictorial evidence offers few consistent traits associated exclusively with deities.

In the complete absence of textual labels, the identification of deities must, therefore, have recourse to a trait, be it a form of behavior, an element of sartorial fashion, or an attribute, unmistakably assigned to the figure of the putative deity. The ideal situation would involve determining mutually exclusive behavior patterns, elements of apparel, or associated signs and/or accompanying zoomorphic figures, in a simple $a+b=c$ formula, where a is the anthropomorphic figure, b the character trait, and c the reading, either deity *vs.* mortal, or possibly deity *vs.* priest/priestess *vs.* worshipper. However, no such formulae exist, it always being a question of $a+b=c$, *unless d*, where d is a contradictory clause leading to a reading at a different level in the hierarchy, and, thereby, to the rejection of all forms of consistent interpretation.

Behavior

For forms of behavior to function as traits exclusively associated with deities it is necessary to assume that mortals cannot mimic the divine. Ethnographical data - and the literature relevant to Aegean Bronze Age studies - would argue otherwise.[10] Whereas a number of recurrent poses can be recognized in the pictorial record, only rarely can exclusivity be argued. To hover in reduced size on the upper reaches of the image support may safely be deemed a divine faculty, albeit not *per se* but largely due to the attendant mortal reaction: variants of the "epiphany gesture" or similar behavior. Two mutually interdependent statements ensue:

(1) a small hovering anthropomorphic figure is a deity (Pl. I,1);

(2) an anthropomorphic figure performing the "epiphany gesture" is a mortal (Pl. I,1).[11]

Due to a range of reactions to the appearance of the deity on the part of the worshipper, it is also possible to extend statement (1):

(3) the appearance of a bird in the place of the small hovering anthropomorphic figure signifies the arrival of the deity (Pl. I,2).

Although not subject to general agreement, it may be argued that a small number of other symbols can be understood as admissible guises for the manifesting deity:

(4) the double axe with sacred knot, and (paired) butterflies embody the divinity (Pl. I,3).[12]

If statements (1) to (4) are accepted a series of acts performed by worshippers, and designed to induce the appearance of the deity, as indicated by the targeting either of a manifesting deity or objects reasonably assumed as linked with the deity, can be identified:

(5) baetyl-hugging, tree-touching/shaking, shrine-grasping are acts performed by mortals (Pl. I,2-3);

(6) energetic, presumably ecstatic, dancing by mortals function as an inducement for the deity to appear.

Statistically it is clear that within the small range of images implicitly discussed hitherto depictions of mortals far outnumber those of deities.

A second cluster of images allows the identification of a further divine type of behavior:

(7) a seated female anthropomorphic figure targeted by diverse submissive behavior such as the "epiphany gesture" (Pl. I,4) and the reception of various objects (Pl. I,5-6) depicts a goddess.

Again the deity is restricted to a single act, whereas the worshipper is represented as possessing a series of options, which - as in the case of the miniature manifesting deity - appear to result in a single specific divine reply. It must be stressed, though, that seatedness in itself is insufficient to identify a deity: even in the above-mentioned cluster being seated is

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10   F. KIECHLE, "Götterdarstellung durch Menschen in den altmediterranen Religionen," *Historia* 19 (1970) 259-271); MATZ (*supra* n. 8) 412-415; *Minoan Religion* 161-162, etc. R. HÄGG, "Die göttliche Epiphanie im minoischen Ritual," *AM* 101 (1986) 41-62, esp. 58-60, provides a reading based on such a premiss.

11   On the "epiphany gesture," cf. C. MORRIS (this volume) and A. PEATFIELD and C. MORRIS, "Internalising ritual: the experience of Minoan worship postures," in *Celebrations. Sanctuaries and the Vestiges of Cult Activity* (forthcoming).

12   M. WEDDE, "Pictorial architecture: for a theory-based analysis of imagery," in *EIKΩN* 189.

subordinate to the targeting of the female figure by the worshippers, and to the contextual evidence provided by the image structure.[13]

Gesture

The use of a series of gestures to confront the deity, either as a floater (where the deity may gesture in return) or a seated goddess (generally passive or merely receiving the offering), could suggest the possibility of identifying further gestures mutually exclusive across the divine/mortal divide. This is not the case. A conservative estimate arrives at 24 gestures on glyptic supports, yet only one can be assigned exclusivity: the "epiphany gesture" of the worshipper (Pl. I,1).[14] Two popular divine assignations, the "gebietender Gestus" with one arm held out straight at shoulder height with or without a staff or spear (Pl. I,12), and two arms raised above shoulder height (Pl. I,13), do not appear to be exclusively associated with deities. In the first case, in favor of which cogent arguments have been formulated,[15] the reading as a deity is not always assured due to the absence of emphatic, or the presence of ambiguous, contextual evidence. When performed by a hovering epiphanic figure, there can be little doubt, thus accounting for three instances of the 11-member listing.[16] A further two members can be read in a like manner, albeit not due to the gesture, but rather to compositional considerations that demote the gesture to secondary importance.[17] The remaining six representations are uncertain due to alternative interpretative approaches resulting in conflicting readings.[18]

Two hands raised above the head appears in a number of contexts, from the "Potnia/ Potios theron" motif, the terracotta "goddesses with upraised arms,"[19] and procession scenes, to acts performed by worshippers in front of the shrine. Accurate definitions are required to avoid contamination by related movements performed by mortals.[20] Frequently a reading

13   The difficulty of working with the fragmentary wall paintings is illustrated by the female figure from Agia Triada vano 14 (divine or mortal? seated or standing?). For a convincing analysis, cf. *Haghia Triada* I, Chap. 10.

14   Cf. M. WEDDE, "Talking hands: a study of Minoan and Mycenaean ritual gesture - some preliminary notes," in *MELETEMATA* 911-920; additional gestures from figurines may be appended to the chart pl. CCX, which should be understood as a preliminary formulation. C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, "Space in Late Minoan religious scenes in glyptic - some remarks," in *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen ägäischen Glyptik, CMS* Beih. 3 (1989) 247-249, based on an application of a particular reading of left and right in "primitive thought," interprets the male performing the "epiphany gesture" to the right in Pl. I,4 as a deity.

15   W.-D. NIEMEIER, "Das Stuckrelief des 'Prinzen mit der Federkrone' aus Knossos und minoische Götterdarstellungen," *AM* 102 (1987) 65-98. Listing with discussion on pp. 83-88.

16   The "Mother of the Mountains" sealing (Pl. I,14), the Ashmolean ring (Pl. I,1), the Kandia gold ring (NIEMEIER [*supra* n. 15] 85 fig. 22).

17   The Berlin ring (Pl. I,5), the Tsivanopoulos seal (NIEMEIER [*supra* n. 15] 85 fig. 21.

18   The "Gott mit der Lilienkette" (NIEMEIER [*supra* n. 15] pl. 9.1), the Khania Master Impression (*op.cit.* 85 fig. 15), the Temple Repositories sealing (Pl. I,12), the Agia Triada "Chieftain's Cup" (*op. cit.* 85 fig. 23), the Naxos seal (*op. cit.* 85 fig. 19), the Knossos "Dancing Lady" (*op. cit.* pl. 10.2). A full justification for questioning a unitarian divine reading will have to be given elsewhere. A number of images with staffs may also impact on how the question is formulated. Short staff in mortal hands on *CMS* II,6 Nrs 9, 11, II,7 Nr 16; cf. the longer staff/spear of *CMS* II,7 Nr 18. *CMS* II,7 Nr 3 probably shows - due to the context - a male deity with a staff/spear to the left; cf. *CMS* II,7 Nr 4. For further images with staffs/spears, cf. E. HALLAGER, *The Master Impression. A Clay Sealing from the Greek-Swedish Excavations at Kastelli, Khania* (1985) fig. 28 and J.G. YOUNGER, "The iconography of rulership: a conspectus," in *RULER* 156-162, pls LI-LIII. Although Niemeier argues that the spear-wielding warrior on the Akrotiri Miniature Wall Painting north wall is not shown with a frontal upper torso which he deems characteristic for the "gebietender Gestus" and thus excludes it, it may be noted that "Mother of the Mountains" sealing (Pl. I,14), which is included, is in side view; cf. perhaps also the Ashmolean ring (Pl. I,1). Including the Akrotiri warrior in the discussion, as done by Hallager, appears methodologically preferable. The subjectivity involved in determing whether a torso is in side or frontal view should, however, be underlined. It may also be mentioned that the main casualty in reading the "gebietender Gestus" as divine by definition is the possibility of there being an Aegean Bronze Age ruler iconography, since some of the best candidates are included in Niemeier's listing. On the ruler, cf. *RULER*.

19   S. ALEXIOU, "Η μινωϊκή θεά μεθ᾿ υψωμένων χειρών," *CretChron* 12 (1958) 179-299. Differences are observed within groups of ostensibly identical representations, such as the Late Minoan IIIC "goddesses with upraised arms" from Gournia, Gazi, Karphi, Gortyn, Kavousi, Kephala Vasilikis, and Khalasmenos (arms to side vs. arms forward).

20   Cf. WEDDE (*supra* n. 14) pl. CCX, G13-G15 and G17.

deity *vs*. worshipper derives from other, dominant, considerations, this vitiating an attempt to employ the gesture as diagnostic. Thus, gesture on its own is generally insufficient to generate convincing arguments in favor of divine *vs*. mortal exclusivity. In formal terms, the interest of a gestural analysis lies in establishing a catalogue of suitable occasions for a given gesture, and of single occasions which may provoke different gestures. Action and context offer better alternatives in the hunt for images of deities, but open up the field to highly subjective readings according to scholarly agenda.

Fashion

Despite the wide range of depicted apparel exhibited by the data,[21] an approach to identifying deities via an analysis of fashion does not provide conclusive evidence - on the contrary: in the near-absence of clear millenary codes, and extensive sharing of codpieces and skirts by divine and mortal, the few instances where scholars have approached something of a concensus, it has concerned the dress of mortals. Where a deity can be identified with some certainty, as in the cluster of seated female figures with attendant(s), the dress of the goddess differs in nothing from that worn by mortals in the same scenes - on some occasions it is identical (Pl. I,5-6). When dress does indicate a difference it would appear to concern a hierarchical stratification within the human sphere. It has been argued that the headdress worn by female terracotta figurines may indicate social group affiliation, in particular of high status.[22] More directly involved with the world of ritual are the hide and fleece skirts (Pl. I,7-9, 11), the cuirass (Pl. I,9) and the diagonally banded robes of reputedly Syrian type (Pl. I,10), which scholars have designated as indicating a function as priest.[23] However, both the fleece skirt and the robe appear on figures associated with a griffin, causing some scholars to reject a reading as a mortal (cf. *infra*).

Symbols

Identifications based on attributes hold only if there is exclusivity of ownership. In Minoan-Mycenaean imagery attributes are virtually non-existent, or, if present, and exclusive to a deity, they cannot be identified as such by the modern beholder. A number of objects afloat close to figures whose imposing stature may be inflated or deflated according to interpretative needs could be understood as designating an aspect of a deity, but rival interpretations cannot be ignored. For example: that of epiphanic component.[24] Even starting with a consensus - to wit, that the small anthropomorphic figure shown hovering in an upper zone of the image depicts the deity at the moment of manifestation - does not allow for penetration at any depth into the mysteries of Minoan-Mycenaean ritual imagery. The form taken by the "floater" could - logically - offer a clue to a possible aspect of the deity. It rarely does. When liable to confident sexing the "floater" is as often male as it is female. Yet once it has landed, and the deity is depicted full-sized, on the basis of current knowledge and allowing for conflicting opinions within the scholarly community, images of goddesses by far outweigh gods.[25] If further "floaters" are accepted - birds, butterflies, double-axes, all admittedly difficult to sex - these appear to shed their significant epiphanic shape upon landing. Either the symbol employed to visualize the manifesting deity has little significance - which appears unlikely, or the pictorial record lacks large swathes of data.

21   S. MARINATOS, *Kleidung, Archaeologia Homerica* (1967) 15-34; A. PEKRIDOU-GORECKI, *Mode im antiken Griechenland* (1989) 56-71; E. BARBER, *Prehistoric Textiles* (1991) 311-357.

22   A. PILALI-PAPASTERIOU, "Social evidence from the interpretation of Middle Minoan figurines" in *The Meaning of Things. Material Culture and Symbolic Expression* (1989) 97-102. Cf. also YOUNGER (*supra* n. 18) 162-165, Pl. LIV.

23   *PM* II, 785; IV, 412; P. REHAK, "The Aegean 'Priest' on *CMS* I.223," *Kadmos* 33 (1994) 76-84; *Minoan Religion* 127-128 with fig. 88. *MMR*² 158-160 allows for both a divine and a sacerdotal use.

24   As argued by WEDDE (*supra* n. 12) 188-193. The Palaikastro mould (*MMR*² 225 fig. 112) depicting a female figure holding two double axes could suggest a deity (NILSSON, *MMR*²· hesitates between priestess and goddess), but the double axe is also carried by mortals in processions, cf. *CMS* II,6 Nr 10 (Agia Triada), pl. I,8.

25   In the material collected by NIEMEIER (*supra* n. 8), the present author (for reasons to be detailed elsewhere) considers 171 fig. 3.1 to depict a male deity; 182 fig. 6.9 is questionable, 6.10 possible, both due to context, not gesture.

Animal familiar

In certain cases, the structure of the image may aid in designating one of the actors as divine in nature. The hieratic, emblematic, non-narrative structure of images consisting of a central figure flanked by two identical, subordinate entities - the Potnia/Potios theron motif - offers the most striking example.[26] Little is gained for an attempt at expanding the analysis. While it is likely that the scenes depicting a seated figure flanked by animals can be assigned to the wider field of the Potnia/Potios theron motif,[27] it does not follow that a seated figure with a single animal (Pl. I,15),[28] a variant of the cluster containing scenes of a seated woman and one or more adorants, should be classified in a like manner. The direct consequence of such a procedure would be to imply that any scene involving an anthropomorphic figure and an animal depicts "Potnia/Potios theron."[29] In Classical Greek art gods and goddesses are accompanied by zoomorphic companions which on their own suffice to refer to the deity. For the Bronze Age data recourse to the "[animal] familiar"[30] is of little avail until it has been conclusively demonstrated that a powerful zoomorphic being - griffin, the rare sphinx, lion - is exclusively associated with the divine sphere.

To argue that the griffin always accompanies a deity[31] vitiates any attempt to argue in favor of sacerdotal personnel wearing fleece skirts or long robes, since such figures are also associated with griffins (Pl. I,10-11).[32] The lion moves within a more complex set of linkages. It is hunter and hunted, familiar and draught animal, associated with deities, as well as a powerful political symbol. Utmost care is required in interpreting scenes in which it is present. It does not appear warranted to consider the Temple Repository striding figure with lion (Pl. I,12), or the Knossos shield-bearer with lion, or the Agia Triada bowman with lion as gods.[33] On the whole, none of the animals appearing in Minoan-Mycenaean art can be understood *a priori* as appearing only in the presence of a deity.[34] Linkages across series of depictions indicate that the context, not the beast, no matter how fantastical, is determinant.[35]

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26   Cf. A. BARCLAY, this volume. The pictorial structure extends to include other content matter in the various zones, cf. M. WEDDE, "On hierarchical thinking in Aegean Bronze Age glyptic imagery," in *POLITEIA* 493-504.

27   Cf. *CMS* II.6 Nr 30, Nr 31 (?), Nr 32 (?), V Suppl. 1B Nr 195.

28   Cf. also *CMS* V Nr 253.

29   This approach is vitiated by scenes involving a woman carrying a sacrificial animal, cf. I. SAKELLARAKIS, "Το θέμα της φερούσης ζώον γυναικός εις την κρητομυκηναϊκήν σφραγιδογλυφίαν," *AE* (1972) 245-278. But cf. *CMS* I Suppl. Nr 180, XI Nr 27 (woman grasping single goat by horns), which parallels later depictions of Artemis, for example R. OSBORNE, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (1998) 62 fig. 27.

30   Term coined by J. CROWLEY, "The Icon imperative: rules of composition in Aegean art," in *ΕΙΚΩΝ* 26.

31   As done by J. CROWLEY, "Images of power in the Bronze Age Aegean," in *POLITEIA* 484-489, where the "VIP," more clearly defined as the "Griffin Lord," is considered a deity, and 505 (discussion).

32   This intransigent stance eliminates individual scholarly preferences from the root level of the analysis. At lower levels subsidiary arguments may be introduced for or against a given interpretation. Vapheio jaspis as priest: *CMS* I, Nr 223, REHAK (*supra* n. 23), *Minoan Religion* 132. Kenna carnelian as priest: *CMS* VIII, Nr 146; as goddess: *Minoan Religion* 153. The woman in the normal Minoan skirt accompanied by a griffin on the Phourni Tholos B ring (I. and E. SAKELLARAKIS, *Αρχάνες. Μια νέα ματιά στη μινωϊκή Κρήτη* [1997] 651-653 with figs 718-719) cannot be read as a deity if fleece skirts and long robes are to be considered elements of priestly garb, given the Vapheio and Kenna lentoids. Nonetheless, she is thus interpreted by *op. cit.* 653 and *Minoan Religion* 164. Cf. also *CMS* V Suppl. 1B Nr 429. The seated figure on *CMS* I Nr 128 is a deity, not because of the griffin, but due to the scene being a variant of the seated goddess with adorants.

33   *PM* I, 515 fig. 363; *CMS* II,6 Nr 36. For a reading as gods, cf. for instance *Minoan Religion* 169-171.

34   Lions, griffins and sphinxes are associated with deities by NILSSON (*MMR²*) 368-369, and W.-D. NIEMEIER, "Zur Deutung des Thronraumes im Palast von Knossos," *AM* 101 (1986) 74-75 with n. 87, ID. (*supra* n. 15) 83 with n. 108, 97 with n. 190. The adoration gesture of the sphinx-leader on the ivory pyxis NM 2476 (A. XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU, *Οι θαλαμωτοί τάφοι των Μυκηνών. Ανασκαφής Χρ. Τσούντα [1887-1898]* [1985] 129 E2476, pl. 36; cf. drawing in NIEMEIER *op. cit.* 73 fig. 3) could argue against this, as would the generalized use of this gesture by mortals both in glyptic images and on clay and bronze figurines. G. MYLONAS, *Πολύχρυσοι Μυκήναι* (1983), caption to 208 fig. 163 hesitates between goddess or priestess for the griffin-carrying figure on a wall painting fragment from Temple C in the Cult Center. I. KRITSELI-PROVIDI, *Τοιχογραφίες του θρησκευτικού κέντρου των Μυκηνών* (1982) 28-33 (A-6), pls Ba, 2a, identifies a wargoddess (p. 30).

35   For instances of human + animal where a divine reading is to be excluded, cf. *CMS* II,6 Nr 35, II.7 Nr 27, V Suppl. 1A Nr 173-174, V Suppl. 1B Nrs 58, 77, VII Nr 102, IX Nr 114, XII Nr 207. *Minoan Religion*

The Dark Age

The pictorial record, especially Geometric vase paintings, may evoke scenes from the epic poetry but since written labels only begin to appear in the mid-seventh century, we must agree with Anthony Snodgrass: "I do not think that we have yet seen a figure to whom we could think of giving a name."[36] Even so, it may be somewhat easier to distinguish between divine and human in a Dark Age context than it is for Bronze Age conventions. When human figures return to the record after a virtual absence for the first two centuries or more of the Dark Age,[37] the majority of the figures are rendered with the same "overriding sense of pattern" that characterize non-figured elements:[38] many are groups of almost identical human forms created from basic shapes, acting in unison. The convention was sufficient to cause Nicholas Coldstream to lament that "in Late Geometric figured vase-painting there were no regular conventions for expressing divinity"[39] a verdict that seems overly pessimistic. Even the "overriding sense of pattern" may provide insight; in our search for divinity, exceptions to the usual patterning may reveal special beings.[40] I suggest that five promising clues are scale of figures (if the representation offers any gauge); stance;[41] the nature of accompanying figures and/or objects; the relation of other figures and/or objects to the main figure; the normalcy or unusualness of the depiction. That these characteristics coincide with qualities of the Homeric deities inspires a measure of confidence. The gods of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are human-like but far greater than mortals in sheer physical size and strength and in power over the world of mortals, animals and nature. The divine world is not governed by conditions judged as "normal" by humans. Thus, an uncanny event is, in John Gould's words, "the sign of divine activity."[42]

All of these characteristics are present on a Boeotian amphora dated to c. 700 B.C. (Pl. IIa). A female figure commands the central focus; she is not only surrounded by animals, birds, snakes and a fish but clearly dominates them. Her arms turn into wings and the curving triangles at the sides of the bottom her skirt have been interpreted as mountain peaks. And, if this interpretation is accurate, her stature is truly impressive. The whole scene is not one normal to human experience. Many see in it "the earliest certain representation of the 'Mistress of the Animals' (Potnia Theron) in the first millennium B.C."[43] Potnia, then, is Artemis.

Much the same mix of characteristics is found on a clay relief pithos from Thebes dating to the early seventh century (Pl. IIb). The central figure is of impressive stature in relation to the two smaller female figures at her sides. With raised arms she commands two lions, one on each side of her, while dappled deer march in a row beneath the feet and paws of the group. Her special nature is further demonstrated by the grape-laden vine sprouting from both sides of her head. Is this a Potnia and, if so, is it Potnia Theron? The stance, however, can be read in other terms than dominance over beasts: her arms may be raised to facilitate the donning of a garment. She has "with good reason been called Hera."[44] Perhaps, on the other hand, her

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171 considers the last, and two further cognates, figs 168-169, as gods or "their mortal representatives on earth." *CMS* V Suppl. 1B Nr 341 requires further thought. Riding sidesaddle with upraised arms on a beast/monster, as on *CMS* I nr 167, II,6 Nr 33, *MMR*^{2} 36 fig. 2, combines three elements, each with a potential for designating a deity. Cf. YOUNGER (*supra* n. 18) pl. LXVf-i.

36   *Homer and the Artists: Text and Picture in Early Greek Art* (1998) 22.

37   J. BOARDMAN, *Pre-classical: From Crete to Archaic Greece* (1967) 64.

38   G. KOPCKE, "Figures in pot-painting before, during and after the Dark Age" in *Symposium on the Dark Ages of Greece* (Hunter College, NY, 1977) 37: "In these early periods, a strong preference for ornament is usually accompanied by some resistance to figure drawing, at least as far as the decoration of pots is concerned."

39   *Deities in Aegean Art: Before and after the Dark Age.* (An Inaugural Lecture delivered in Bedford College 27 October 1976) 10 of printed text.

40   Further insight may come from the figural tradition itself which will continue to evolve allowing us to compare earlier and later forms of figures.

41   BURR (*supra* n. 7) uses the term "aspect" which would encompass these characteristics for a mid-seventh century terracotta plaque (fig. 73) from the slopes of the Areopagus: "The diadem and aspect of our figure also seem to indicate that she is no mortal woman" (608).

42   J. GOULD, "On making sense of Greek religion" in *Greek Religion and Society* (1985) 13. See also M. EDWARDS, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (1987) 124-148.

43   R. HAMPE and E. SIMON, *The Birth of Greek Art* (1981) 159.

44   *Ibid.*, 279.

arms are extended in the pain of childbirth in which she is being aided by the goddesses of childbirth, (Eileithyiai). In this reading, the figure may be "Leto about to give birth to Artemis and Apollo."[45] Or the vine - which "has often been overlooked by scholars"[46] - may prompt an identification as Demeter.

Demeter may be represented also on one of the "exceptionally early [figured] scenes [that] have come to light in very recent years."[47] Dated to the ninth century, the figure appears on both sides of a pithos 53.5 cm in height, recovered from a tomb in the North Cemetery of Knossos. On the front of the vase (Pl. IIc), a female figure is central to the composition, her head, in profile, looking toward a bird held aloft in her right hand and at another, larger bird standing atop a tree or large plant. She bears another bird in her left hand but there is no second large bird on the top of the tree/plant to her left. Both trees/plants sprout from a solid triangular base and have outward spiraling branches. Curving downward from the figure's shoulders are wings, at rest. She stands upon a wheeled platform. On the representation on the back of the pithos (Pl. IId), the figure's arms are lowered, the bird in her right hand has been released and that in her left is held only by her finger tips. Her wings are raised although she stands on the platform as in the scene on the front. Foliage on the trees/plants is here downward-pointing spikes.

In his publication of the pithos, Nicholas Coldstream notes the poignant contrast of "a pair of genre scenes... referring to the seasons - in this case the alternation between summer and winter."[48] The figure "arrives on her chariot in spring and departs at the onset of winter." That she is a "goddess" seems a proper conclusion given the criteria suggested. But can she be given a name beyond "a universal Mother Goddess inherited from the Bronze Age - a goddess of fertility and vegetation, who also receives and protects the dead?"[49] Comparing these scenes with other Dark Age evidence and with early Minoan or sub-Minoan material, Coldstream proposes an identification with Demeter-Persephone. Walter Burkert, while willing to give the figure the title of Potnia, advances a variety of identifications including Demeter/Persephone but extends the range of possible candidates to Europa and Ariadne.[50]

The route leading through material evidence is not entirely a "will o' the wisp" in an effort to find a divine Potnia, especially if we focus our attention on the second half of the eighth century when both sanctuary sites and cult offerings rose sharply.[51] In fact, major sanctuaries of all our leading candidates for the title of Potnia - Hera, Artemis, Athena and Demeter - were founded by or in the eighth century.[52] Unfortunately, since many of these early sanctuaries were replaced by later structures, specific evidence is limited. And, as in the case of vase paintings, written evidence of the nature of the deities worshipped at these sites is absent.

45   *The Human Figure in Early Greek Art*. Exhibition catalogue, Greek Ministry of Culture, Athens/National Gallery of Art, Washington (1987) 103.
46   HAMPE and SIMON (*supra* n. 43) 279.
47   J. COLDSTREAM, "A Protogeometric nature goddess from Knossos," *BICS* 31 (1984) 93.
48   *Ibid*. 99.
49   *Ibid*.
50   W. BURKERT, "Katagogia-Anagogia and the Goddess of Knossos," in *Early Greek Cult Practice* (1988) 81-87.
51   I. MORRIS, "Archaeology and Archaic Greek history," in *Archaic Greece: New Approaches and New Evidence* (1998) 1-92. Morris points out, "Before 750, very few burials are known; after 750, there are many" and "Before 750, few sites have clear evidence for sacrifice (...) Whatever Dark Age Greeks did when they worshipped the gods did not produce substantial deposits (...) after 750 regular votive offerings of pottery began. Most sites now had discrete cult spots ..." (15-16).
52   In her paper - "The identity of the Potnia Theron in Greece: the evidence from the sanctuaries" - presented at the Annual Meeting of the AIA (December 28, 1999) Alison Barclay concluded: "(...) the Potnia Theron appears on many different types of votive offerings at sanctuaries dedicated to several deities: Athena, Zeus, Hera, Orthia, Apollo, Artemis, and Poseidon. (...) In fact, the images on votive offerings may represent the main deity of a given sanctuary, any number of other Olympian or local deities, the devotee or what the devotee wished from the gods" (pp. 4-5 of typed text).

Conclusion

A search for Potnia faces similar hurdles whether employing Bronze or Dark Age material:

(1) although visible in the written sources, no clear characterization of Potnia emerges from either the Linear B records or the poetry of Homer and Hesiod;

(2) the written evidence can not be closely connected with the archaeological data since labels are non-existent for both periods;

(3) names ascribed to images by scholars are frequently drawn from the known repertoire of later religious developments; while there is a continuity of certain names from the Mycenaean Age into the Dark Age and on into the Classical period, some names do not persist and new names enter the religious hierarchy; moreover, the same name can mask quite different conceptions of the figure it identifies;

(4) the definition of deity in the representations is often subjective, based on a "reading" of traits accompanying the figures.

Although the hurdles are real, at one level of analysis, the present paper is creating a false problem. Scholarship has sensed none of the above impediments as significant enough to halt the abandon with which the literature creates a Bronze Age War Goddess, a Warrior God, a Shield Goddess, a Snake Goddess, a Sun Goddess, a God of the Double Axe, and so on. Rightly so, since the likelihood of their existence as an expression of the probability of Aegean Bronze Age religious being polytheistic is high. Whether the titles chosen are correct remains to be proven. The polytheism of the Dark Age is a well-established fact. However, by creating a problem, artificial or not, the authors wish to draw attention to the methodological issues.

What does this imply in a search for Potnia? Does a single, original Potnia emerge from these clues? Or must we conclude with Walter Burkert, that "in a way we are still moving in a labyrinth, probing various possibilities but without another thread of Ariadne that might definitely hold?"[53] This verdict seems too negative: we need not despair of finding Potnia since she is named. We come nearer to her identity in the Dark Age than in the Bronze Age where, on the basis of the currently available data, not a single image of a deity – on the occasions it can be identified as such – can be assigned a specific name. The firm delineation of the major deities in the Homeric epics, by contrast, improves identification with visual images – though they are still without labels.

Potnia in the Dark Age is not a single goddess in either the written or archaeological evidence, yet she apparently thrives in multiple forms rather than in a single guise or at a single location. Such a conclusion should not surprise given the force of regionalism throughout the whole of the dark centuries. The magnitude of destruction, flight and loss of population in the Late Bronze Age left tiny, isolated communities in its wake. Synoecism and larger contacts began only toward the end of the Dark Age. If regionalism could produce a "mother" Athena among the pan-hellenic deities,[54] Potnia, too, could be viewed in more than a single guise. It is not a simple matter to identify the particular deities, however. As Dorothy Burr concluded, despairingly, in her attempt to learn the identity of the figure on an Athenian terracotta (Pl. IIe): "We are driven to consider the possibility that we have here a type from a sanctuary little known, of a deity presumably obscure."[55] She might well be a Potnia. If there ever was a single Potnia in the Bronze Age Aegean view of deity, she has given birth to a "family" of Potniai akin perhaps to the offspring born to Tethys and Okeanos. Not "3000 light stepping daughters" but still numerous enough that "it would be hard for a mortal man to tell the names of all of them; but each is known by those who live by him" as Hesiod states plainly.[56]

For the Aegean Bronze Age, on the other hand, even to offer a cautious conclusion is far more difficult. "Potnia theron," to take one example, is a pictorial motif, not a deity identifiable to Minoans or Mycenaeans by that name, a useful analytical term, a scholarly construct.

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53   BURKERT (*supra* n. 50) 87.
54   In *Elis*, PAUSANIAS 5.3.2.
55   BURR (*supra* n. 7) 609. She had eliminated identification as Artemis, Demeter and Gorgon.
56   *Theogony* 369-70.

Importing divine hierarchies from later religious developments, or even from the Linear B tablets, is not a useful approach to the study of Aegean Bronze Age religion. Moreover, as a vaccine against theomania, the relatively small amount of securely identified depictions of deities in the Minoan-Mycenaean glyptic repertoire suggests that the focus is on the mortal actor.[57] Scholars hunting for deities may skew research towards a recreation of the depiction of Aegean Bronze Age religions far more theocentric than warranted by the evidence. To move beyond analytical terms and scholarly constructs, the search requires greater transparency, an explicitly formulated methodology, one that eschews a construction of divine hierarchies on the basis of later religious developments or too readily equates written evidence with archaeological data. Such an undertaking would clarify the reasons for opinions held, shift the emphasis from the statement to the thought process, and thereby enhance the credibility of Aegean religious studies as a paradigm within the teaching of archaeological thinking. Until this has been achieved, "Potnia," as a specific goddess, or more than one female divinity, or aspects of a single deity, remains the symbol of the modern beholder's desperate search for a cohesive image of the Aegean Bronze Age religions. Our understanding of religion in Dark Age Greece will also be furthered by a recognition of the current grayzones that exist between archaeological and written evidence, as well as between that evidence and scholarly interpretation.

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Carol G. THOMAS
Michael WEDDE

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57   As mentioned by A. Peatfield in a discussion.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS