

A DAY IN POTNIA'S LIFE. ASPECTS OF POTNIA AND REFLECTED "MISTRESS" ACTIVITIES IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE*

Borrowed from Greek literature and first adopted by scholars working on classical iconography, *potnia* was introduced early in studies of religion in the Aegean Bronze Age, mainly *via* the Homeric form of *πότνια θηρῶν* (mistress of beasts of prey). By the mid- 20th century, the name *po-ti-ni-ja* was traced back in Linear B religious contexts.

When using the term *potnia*, what do we really understand? What reflections might we see through a *potnia*'s looking-glass?

Departing from the different types of the available evidence, this paper aims to piece together parts of the fragmentary information concerning *potnia*. *A day in potnia's life* metaphorically touches upon some of her relevant features as they appear in different sources, in an effort to extract some meaning and, if possible, to suggest a conceptual framework for the wider Aegean "mistress" imagery and performances.

"... religion need not be a force to be feared nor a dogma to be embraced, but simply a way of life."¹

Lately, aware of the many issues surrounding *potnia* and faced by the extreme difficulty of somehow reaching her universe from within, as a real specialist of religion, I thought I could only focus on her from in front: as some utopian photographer (Pl. IIIa) of a picture more than 4000 years old. Using metaphor and much abstraction, I shall try to unravel complex information networks towards a "meaningful" pattern of a long lasting concept. In order to capture, through a *potnia*'s opaque-looking-glass (Pl. IIIb) some scarce reflections of her lost universe; by reading roles and behaviours as if she was an independent actress, in a scenic effort of my own to somewhat construct her "ideal type."²

The following thoughts are drawn from the roughly hewn outlines of a similar effort. They are aligned with E. Durkheim's classical and pertinent argument, that religion is a social phenomenon.³ As such, it primarily defines, encodes and orders the actual, physical structures, attitudes and experiences of the human groups it represents. It further encompasses, I believe, their commitments towards life and existence.

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The following abbreviations will be used:

Diccionario micénico: F. AURA JORRO, *Diccionario micénico* I (1985), II (1993).

Dictionnaire étymologique: P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (1984).

Hom. Lex.: R.J. CUNLIFFE, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (1963²).

Lid. Sc.: H.G. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon*, New Supplement (1996).

Mycenaean Potnia: J.C. VAN LEUVEN, "Mycenaean goddesses called Potnia," *Kadmos* 18/2 (1979) 112-129.

Μυκηναίοι Ἑλληνες: M.S. RUIPÉREZ, J.L. MELENA, *Οι Μυκηναίοι Ἑλληνες* (1996).

Po-ti-ni-ja à Mycènes: C. BOËLLE, "Po-ti-ni-ja à Mycènes," *Minos* N.S. 27-28 (1992-93) 283-301.

Potnia: J. CHADWICK, "Potnia," *Minos* V/2 (1957) 117-129.

Religion as Action: P. WARREN, *Minoan Religion as Ritual Action* (1986).

TLG: Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, CD-Rom, Irvine University (1999).

Philological abbreviations follow *Lid. Sc.* and *TLG*.

1 E.T. LAWSON, R.N. McCAULEY, *Rethinking Religion. Connecting Cognition and Culture* (1990) dedication, p. v.

2 For M. Weber's "ideal type," as a method of investigating and understanding social phenomena, see, K. ΨΥΧΟΠΑΙΔΗΣ, *Ο Max Weber και η κατασκευή εννοιών στις κοινωνικές επιστήμες* (1993) esp. 41-48.

3 E. DURKHEIM, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1975⁷) e.g. 594sq.

Aegean *potnia*: components of an agenda

As the very title of the present Conference suggests, *potnia* does not spontaneously introduce a profane figure, fitting easily into a book-index on everyday life. At first thought, she moves through the ritual universe, her theme having been rooted in more than a century-long discussions and concerns on ancient religious art and history.⁴ Thanks to her discovery in the Greek texts, she was, consequently, “recognised” in art and has, more recently, been attested in Linear B documents.

Still, *potnia* does introduce a familiar figure, not only to historians of religion, but also to more “secular” decipherers of the Eastern Mediterranean past material cultures. How come? In which way(s) is *potnia* meaningful to the archaeological record? Have any stratigraphical sequences ever revealed a slice of a *potnia*’s “life?” Do we know of an unearthed sanctuary of hers or of particular cult attitudes and symbols related to her? Could we sustain, with good reason, that *potnia* is an archaeological reality or would we, more cautiously, claim her to be some kind of a fictitious “artifact?”

Potnia but also posis. Immortal but also mortal

I believe, Aegean *potnia* is indeed meaningful in three main ways:

a. First, her name *sounds* familiar as a *word*: as an old, Indo-European name meaning sovereign, mistress, mistress of the house (δέσποινα, οἰκοδέσποινα) and corresponding, in Sanskrit, to the masculine *posis*.⁵ *Po-ti-ni-ja* was transcribed in Linear B, by the mid-2nd millennium.⁶ The term was later used in many different texts, from the Homeric and Hesiodic poems down at least to the 12th century A.D.⁷ It is interesting to note that Christian authors still evoke *potnia*, in some cases, even to designate the Virgin Mary.⁸

Posis himself appears seldom, mostly in Homer, and designates a divine or human husband and love companion.⁹ This word is not coupled with *potnia*. It is not directly assigned either to members of the priesthood or to heroes. It has not, so far, been recognised in Linear B.¹⁰

Although in Homer *potnia* also applies to mortal women, in the later written record the word is attributed mostly to divinities. Similarly, Linear B *po-ti-ni-ja* interacts with religious contexts -due possibly to the very character of the preserved documents- and is conceived as one or more major Mycenaean goddess(es).¹¹

4 Early works on *potnia*’s classical iconography are to be found e.g. in LIMC VIII/1, under “potnia,” and in C. CHRISTOU, *Potnia Theron. Eine Untersuchung über Ursprung, Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt einer Gottheit* (1968) in particular 9-11. Among them are cited E. GERHARD, *AZ* 12 (1854) 177-188; M.S. THOMPSON, *JHS* 29 (1909) 286-307; C. PICARD, *Mélanges Holleaux* (1913) 175-200; *MMR*² 435-459; M. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I (1967²) 287-293; N. YALOURIS, *MusHelv* 7 (1950) 19-101.

5 *Dictionnaire étymologique* 931 (*posis*) and 932 (*potnia*).

6 *Potnia* 117-129. The suggested reading *atano-potija* in Linear A remains unproven (A. FURUMARK, “Linear A and Minoan Religion,” *OpAth* 17 [1988] 65-66, cited in R. HÄGG, “Religious Syncretism at Knossos and in Post-Palatial Crete?” in *Crète Mycénienne* 166 and n. 15).

7 A research in the TLG has revealed approximatively 800 matches for the etymological theme *potn-*, and about 554 matches for that of *potnia-*. The chronological distribution diagram of the latter shows important increases of use in the 8th and late 5th centuries B.C., as well as in the mid-2nd and the 12th centuries A.D. Sincere thanks are due to M. Tsikritzis who helped me through this stage of my work.

8 Thus, in the 4th century, Gregorius Nazianzenus mentions “Πότνια, πότνα, σεμνοτάτα Παρθένη.” and “Πότνια, πότνα, παμμάκαιρα Παρθένη” (*Christus patiens* [fort. auctore Constantino Manasse]).

9 For instance, Zeus, Menelaus and Paris (e. g. Il Γ 163, Δ 138, N 766, H 411). The word appears more than 40 times in Homer. For a later etymological suggestion concerning *posis*, see ΗΡΩΔΙΑΝΟΣ, *Περὶ γάμου καὶ συμβιώσεως*, E.M. 149, 41 (“καὶ γὰρ διὰ τοῦτο πόσις λέγεται ὁ ἀνὴρ παρὰ τὸ ποτίζειν τῇ γυνῇ”).

10 Where an eventual synonym, *do-po-ta* (δεσπότης), might be used (*Docs*² 287, 289; PY Tn 316 [“lord of the house”] and 541). According to an earlier suggestion, *posis* could be detected in the etymology of Poseidon, the Mycenaean *po-se-da-o* (KRETSCHMER, *Glotta* 1 [1909] e.g. 27 sq. [as cited, for instance, in *Dictionnaire étymologique* 931 and in *Potnia* 124 and n. 1]. See, also, W. BURKERT, *Creation of the Sacred* [1996, 1998] 81 and n. 6, 7).

11 See, among others, *Potnia* esp. 122-125, *Mycenaean Potnia*, and *Po-ti-ni-ja à Mycènes*. For a bibliographical overview on *potnia*, see *Diccionario micénico* II, 160-161.

b. Secondly, Aegean *potnia* appears familiar as a *depiction*. Mainly since Martin Nilsson, her chief iconographic version is inspired by the “Lady” or “Mother of the Mountains” on the well-known Knossos sealings (Pl. IIIc).¹² Her principal suggested identity is that of Artemis, the huntress, Homer’s famous *potnia theron*.¹³ She herself, but also her obvious male counterpart, *posis theron*,¹⁴ pose in different bodily attitudes and versions in art. They are depicted either peacefully coexisting with animals, which they often lead (Pl. IIIId-e), or vividly “mastering” two heraldic beings (Pl. IIIIf-g), rampant, on their feet, or *tête-bêche*.¹⁵

Such images are sometimes painted,¹⁶ but more commonly engraved, usually on artifacts defined as personal items, like seals, jewellery, pyxis lids..., which are often dedicated as ex-votos to the dead. Similar male and female iconographic themes have a long lifespan in the Aegean, where they are possibly already present by the end of the 3rd millennium (Pl. IIIIf),¹⁷ and they largely prevail in the 2nd millennium (Pl. IIIh). They are also familiar to the Geometric and Archaic cultic and funeral repertoires, appearing on various types of pottery -pithoi, jugs, pyxides... - as well as on metal objects, and so forth.

Yet, the absence of accompanying inscriptions keep such themes mute. The real identities and properties of the represented figures can, consequently, be only tentatively deduced.¹⁸

c. Thirdly, *potnia* seems familiar as an *idea*. A concept constructed by culturally different people who created, transformed and “consumed” *potnia*, and, furthermore, reconstructed by generations of scholars who analysed and interpreted her, as we do today: following the axes of the iconographic and philological testimonies but, also, their own related experiences, perceptions and ideological trends.

According to the prevailing views, Aegean *potnia* forms a relatively important part of a Bronze Age religious universe under formation, in which animistic elements are thought to be combined to shape a holistic, mainly female, concept of nature, based on the idea of fertility and the regeneration cycle. Within this framework, *potnia* would rather constitute a respectful divine title or invocation –assigned either to the Minoan “Mother Earth,” or to one of her multiple aspects and even to different independent goddesses, usually chosen among

12 MMR², e.g. 339, 352-368... On the existence of more similar sealing fragments which have been overlapped to complete this famous scene, see PM II, 809. Among earlier mentions of *Potnia* in Aegean art, see J.E. HARRISON, “Bird and Pillar Worship in Connection with Ouranian Divinities,” *Trans. of the 3rd International Congress for the History of Religions* vol. 2 (1908) 154-164. Among later mentions, see B.C. DIETRICH, *The Origins of Greek Religion* (1974), e.g. 180-185, 286-288... W. BURKERT, *Greek Religion* (1977, 1985) 39, 149-150. It is interesting to note that the term *potnia* does not appear in A. Evans’s vocabulary. Loyal to his own monotheistic perception, he has obviously preferred more descriptive expressions, such as “the Minoan Goddess as divine Huntress” (e.g. PM I, 511, 548), “-as Mother Goddess with hounds” (PM II, 765), “-with mountains” (PM IV, 596 and n. 1, fig. 597), “-with wild goat” (PM IV, 570)...; then, also, “the Lady of the Double Axe” (PM I, 447), the “divine Mistress” (PM I, 447) etc. “Potnia” and “posis theron” have both been adopted by Greek scholars, namely Sp. Marinatos (Σπ. ΜΑΡΙΝΑΤΟΣ, “Γοργόνες καὶ Γοργόνεια,” *ArchEph* [1927-28] 7-41. ID., *Κρητομυκηναϊκή Θρησκεία* [1976] 103-107) and N. Platon (Ν. ΠΛΑΤΩΝ, *Κρητομυκηναϊκή Θρησκεία* [1967] 27-30).

13 Φ. 470.

14 E.g., MMR², 357 sq, 513 sq, 517... ΠΛΑΤΩΝ (*supra* n. 12) 29-30.

15 The latter, triadic pattern is thought to originate in the Near-East, where it occurs from at least the 4th millennium (A. BARCLAY, this volume). A thorough overview of the *potnia* and *posis theron* repertoires on Aegean seals and sealings in J. YOUNGER, *Towards the Chronology of Aegean Glyptic in the Late Bronze Age* (1973), respectively 238-241 and 241-246.

16 Two well-known suggested *potniai* on frescoes are the “goddess” in Xesté 3, Akrotiri (*infra* Pl. IVc) (*Thera* VII [1976] 33 and X. ΝΤΟΥΜΑΣ, *Οι τοιχογραφίες της Θήρας* [1992] 131) as well as the “sitopotnia” in Mycenae (*infra* Pl. IVa) (N. ΜΑΡΙΝΑΤΟΣ, “The Fresco from Room 31 at Mycenae: Problems of Method and Interpretation” in *Problems in Greek Prehistory* 245-251 and P. ΡΗΑΚ, “Tradition and Innovation in the Fresco from Room 31 in the “Cult Center” at Mycenae,” *EIKΩΝ* 39-62). For a probable *potnia* in plastic art, see the fragmentary “snake frame” *Ir. Mus.* 15192, from Gortys (Γ. ΡΕΘΕΜΙΩΤΑΚΗ, *Ανθρωπομορφική πηλοπλαστική στην Κρήτη* [1998] 41:153, εικ. 106), which strongly reminds of a series of engraved Mycenaean “animal mistresses” (e.g. CMS I, 144 and *infra* Pl. IVe).

17 P. YULE, *Early Cretan Seals: A Study of Chronology* (1980) 119, Pl. 1B9.

18 Similar scepticism is convincingly expressed by R. Laffineur (R. LAFFINEUR, this volume). For a related point of view on the 7th century *potnia theron* compositions, see A. BARCLAY, “The identity of the *Potnia Theron* in Greece: the evidence from the sanctuaries,” *AJA* 104 (2000) 338-9.

later Greek deities, like Hera, Athena, Artemis, Aphrodite, Gaia, Eileithyia...¹⁹ *Posis theron*, overshadowed himself by *potnia*, is, in a way, still conceived in the earlier perspective of her young consort. He has been further identified, by scholars, with different Greek gods, like Hermes and Adonis.²⁰

Nevertheless, any interpretative option concerning *potnia* and *posis* would rely heavily on crucial and as yet non-elucidated theoretical issues related, for instance, to the types, varieties and degrees of social and therefore religious complexity among 3rd and 2nd millennium Aegean communities.²¹ Such issues would also depend on the aniconic or iconic, and, hence, anthropomorphic, theriomorphic or other, character of the represented (?) human and/or divine elites.²² They would also relate to the sacred or profane role attributed to the iconographic themes, in particular to those chosen to be depicted on personal items, like seals and jewels. While such issues remain unclear, it is almost impossible to draw dividing lines between men and their gods and to more clearly separate cultic from secular phenomena in the Aegean.

Potnia and non-potnia. Many potniai but not all

In the ancient sources, more than 20 Greek goddesses are named or surnamed “*potnia*,” individually, in pairs or in groups of three. They belong to at least two divine lineages and to four different generations. Among them are:

- Archaic deities, like Rhea, Phoebe, Tethys, the Erinyes
- Titanids, as Leto, Thetis, Maia, Circe, Calypso
- Divinities of the Olympian pantheon, main or minor, like Hestia, Hera, Aphrodite, Demeter... and well known daughters, as Persephone, Athena, Artemis... Demeter can also be called “*potnia polypotnia*.”²³

The eventuality of a single Aegean *potnia* is not to be considered seriously threatened by her plurality in the, structured, Greek divine universe. It seems, nevertheless, definitely weakened by the diverse specific qualifications which accompany her within the Mycenaean literate world, where she has an important geographic spread. Thus, except for her displaying the mere name *po-ti-ni-ja* in most Mycenaean centers, in Crete and in the mainland,²⁴ she, additionally, appears:

- at Knossos, as *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja* (V 52) and *da-pu₂-ri-to-jo po-ti-ni-ja* (Gg 702, Oa 745);
- at Pylos, as *u-po-jo-po-ti-ni-ja* (Fn 187...), *po-ti-ni-ja a-si-wi-ja* (Fr 1206), *po-ti-ni-ja i-qe-ja* (An 1218), *e-re-wi-jo po-ti-ni-ja* (Vn 48) and *ne-wo-pe-o po-ti-ni-ja* (Cc 665); and, finally,
- at Mycenae, as *si-to po-ti-ni-ja* (Oi 701).

19 See, respectively, among others, L. GODART, this volume; HARRISON (*supra* n. 12) 156; MMR² 339; *Potnia*, 122-126 and *Mycenaean Potnia* 122-129.

20 For Hermes, see J. CHITTENDEN, “The Master of Animals,” *Hesperia* 16 (1947) 89-114 esp. 96sq.; for a related discussion, see A. ΛΕΜΠΕΣΗ, *Το ιερό του Ερμή και της Αφροδίτης στη Σύμη Βιάννου* I.1 (1985) 179-181. For Adonis, see *Mycenaean Potnia*, 124 and n. 38.

21 See, for instance, the justified objection expressed by S.G. Cole, who even questions the accuracy of using the terms “religion,” “cult,” “temple,” instead of the more neutral “ideology,” “ritual activity” and “place of ritual activity,” at least when the Early Bronze Age Aegean is concerned (S.G. COLE, “Archaeology and Religion” in N.C. WILKIE, W.B.E. COULSON [eds], *Contributions to Aegean Archaeology. Studies In Honor of W.A. McDONALD* [1985] 49, n. 1).

22 The existence of anthropomorphic cult images in Bronze Age Crete is thoroughly discussed and contested by N. Marinatos and R. Hägg (N. MARINATOS, R. HÄGG, “Anthropomorphic cult images in Minoan Crete?” in O. KRZYSZKOWSKA, L. NIXON [eds], *Minoan Society* [1983] 185-196). The eventuality of theriomorphic deities in the Linear B tablets, early suggested by L.R. Palmer, has been, most recently, rediscussed, principally because of the Cadmeia new material (D. ROUSIOTI, this volume). Vegetal and stone cult objects are also believed, since the beginning of our century, to constitute essential parts of the Aegean religious ideology (A.J. EVANS, *The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations* [1901]). For a recent synthesis on Minoan religious rituals, see *Religion as Action*.

23 *Homer. Hymn* 2. 211.

24 E.g. KN M 729, Vn 07, TH Of 36, MY Oi 704, PY Fr 1235, Tn 316, Fn 01 (J.L. MELENA, J.-P. OLIVIER, “Tithemy. The Tablets and Nodules in Linear B from Tiryns, Thebes and Mycenae,” *Minos* Suppl. 12 [1991] 37, 70, 86 and *Docs*² 126).

This epigraphic testimony of such a geographic spread and diversity of *potnia* certainly reveals local particularities and regional priorities, which remain as yet almost “invisible” through the archaeological record alone.

In the known tablets, later famous *potniai* like Artemis, Hera and Demeter are not mentioned as such. So far, *a-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja* could form the only tie between the Greek and the Linear B *potniai*, if only it really relates to goddess Athena.²⁵

To judge from its frequency in the first millennium texts, the word “*potnia*” is rather optionally and occasionally used. In fact, certain deities, notably Hera and Demeter are most frequently, although not invariably, designated as such. Moreover, in the case of Demeter and Kore, the name “*Potniai*” alone seems familiar enough to connote both the two goddesses and, as a toponym, their sanctuary and town -at *Potniai*.²⁶ Similar substitutions may occur in earlier mycenaean, when the word *po-ti-ni-ja* appears independent or in the adjectival form *po-ti-ni-ja-we-jo* (“of *potnia*,” as on KN Dp 997, 7742).

Yet, as a rule, *potnia*’s textual use seems more selective. In Homer, Athena is only once called *potnia*, and so is Artemis, as *potnia theton*.²⁷ Also extremely rare are the male gods related to the word: Zeus is, for instance, *posis*, as Hera’s husband, and Glaukos is called *Potnieus*, as originating from *Potniai*.²⁸

Finally, there is a large number of goddesses who are *never* called *potnia*. Why? What makes a *potnia* different? Following this reasoning, are we not allowed to think that, instead of bearing some neutral and hazardous title, most *potniai*, of diverse descent, nature and status, might, nevertheless, possess some features in common, which, on given occasions, contribute specific meanings that distinguish them from the *non-potniai*? These meanings would have been strong enough even to animate and personify impersonal notions -all feminine in Greek- such as a sea-shore (*πότνια ἀκτῆ*), the earth (*πότνια χθών*), oblivion of the misfortunes (*πότνια λήθη τῶν κακῶν*), wisdom (*πότνια σοφία*)...²⁹

If such a hypothesis stands, some of *potnia*’s specificities can eventually be “read” within her philological and iconographic contexts. The examples chosen to illustrate the arguments which follow either directly include the term “*potnia*” or are immediately related to it.³⁰

Portraying *potnia*’s life: texts and images

Physical appearance: a soft- and dreadful-eyed potnia of uncertain age

An artist willing to draw *potnia*’s portrait would only dispose of scanty written information. He would rarely learn of her true age, although she seems to be mostly related to a real or wished young age. Thus, Hestia is called the “youngest” (*πότνια ὀπλοτάτη*),³¹ Hebe’s proper name corresponds to youth, and Eos asks Kronion to strip Tithonus of baneful old age.³²

Then, the same artist would, more significantly, hear of *potnia*’s eyes: sometimes reflecting softness, as those of the ox-eyed (*βοῶπις*) Hera,³³ and sometimes terror, like the ones of the dreadful-eyed (*δεινῶπες*) Erinyes.³⁴

25 But, consider the controversial mycenological debate on the meaning of *atanapotiniya*, as reflected, for instance, in the related bibliographical references in *Diccionario micénico* I, 112.

26 XENOPHON *HG* 5.4.51.3. PAUSANIAS 9.8.1. HERODOT 9.97.

27 Respectively, Z 305 and Φ 470.

28 Respectively, *Il.* H 411 and STRABO, *Geog.* 9.2.24. 4-5.

29 Respectively, e.g. AESCHYLUS, *Choeph.*, 722 (*χθών, ἀκτῆ*); EURIPIDES, *Or.* 213 (*λήθη τῶν κακῶν*); DIODORUS SIC., 37.30.3.4 (*σοφία*).

30 To be methodologically more correct, I should consider on equal terms, both the *posis* but, also, the *non-potnia* items. Such an effort goes, of course, beyond the scope of the present study -which, thus, “isolates” *potnia*, perhaps more than it should.

31 *Homer. Hymn* 5. 23.

32 *Ibid* 223-4.

33 E.g., *Il.* A. 551, 568; Δ 50. (*βοῶπις*= having large, soft eyes, *Hom. Lex.* 73). In the epic poems, this adjective is very often -though not always- combined to *πότνια*, when Hera is concerned.

34 SOPHOCLES, *OC* 84.

This last feature might remind of some terrible female glances in Aegean art (Pl. IIIi), as well as of the later look of Sp. Marinatos's "potnia Gorgon" (Pl. IIIj).³⁵

Habitats: a potnia of natural and built landscapes

In the texts, *potnia* is often to be met in the countryside: on mountains (Olympus, Ida, Taygetus, Cithairon...), on islands (Ogygia, the isles of Circe and of Helios), in the fields and even in the depths of the earth and the sea, Persephone's and Thetis' home.

Some *potniai* obviously perform in the open, in the free nature, as Artemis ἄγροτέρη, as Leda, when giving birth to the Dioskouri beneath the peaks of Taygetus, and Calypso, called *potnia* while searching for Odysseus on the beach of Ogygia.³⁶ But they may, also, very well interact with built environments, moving to or lodging within sanctuaries and luxurious megara, arranged in palaces, caves or castles, like Athena.³⁷ Such constructions are often installed on the fringe of the natural or on the outskirts of the domestic space.

A *potnia* can claim to be particularly attached to one or more cities -as does Hera to Argos, Sparta, Mycenae³⁸, where she, sometimes, seems to assume an almost "ethnic" origin -like Hera when called Argeia.³⁹ Even larger regions are particularly favoured, as was Boeotia by Demeter and Persephone.

These remarks could be further underlined by later adjectival forms, such as *potnia polymelathros* and *polyptolis* (with many palaces and towns).⁴⁰ They can also bring to mind Linear B *po-ti-ni-ja*: in her important geographic distribution, in her suggested topographic and ethnic attributions -as *potnia* of the labyrinth, of the marshes (?), of Asia...- as well as in her specific relations to the region of *Pa-ki-ja-ne*, to a village in Pylos and to an *oikos* in Thebes.⁴¹

Moreover, the prevailing textual impression of a *potnia* acting at the interface of the natural universe and the constructed world seems to fit well in her suggested Aegean iconography and can, for instance, be recognised on the "Lady of the Mountains" sealing (Pl. IIIc). A similar situation can be "read" on the proposed "posis theron" themes, as well as on other male repertoires such as the "Master impression" from Chania.

Living associations: a potnia of wild and tamed species

Potnia's ties to *plants* seem scarce, almost irrelevant in the texts. Demeter is called *πὸτνια ὠρηφόρος*. Eos is *potnia* when offering "σῖτον," probably corn food. So is Circe, while using her potent wild herbs, specifically processed into enchanting medicine (*φάρμακον*).⁴² This textual paucity may be indirectly compensated by *potnia*'s closest association with Demeter and Kore, both very famous mistresses of cereal crops and of earth fertility.

Into this group might fit *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja* on the tablet from the Citadel House at Mycenae and also, possibly, the female figure on the fresco in Room 31 of the same building (Pl. IVa); in the specific tablet and figure, authors tend to project a, more or less, *signifying-to-signified* relationship⁴³.

35 MAPINATOS (*supra* n. 12). Affinities and contrasts between the Classical *potnia* of wild beasts and Gorgo are also underlined by C. Christou (*supra* n. 4, 136-153) and J.-P. Vernant (J.-P. VERNANT, "Death in the eyes: Gorgo, Figure of the Other" in F.I. ZEITLIN [ed.], *Mortals and Immortals. Collected Essays J.-P. Vernant* [1991] 115-116). For a suggested LM I *gorgoneion* from Knossos, see P. WARREN, "Of Squills," *Aux origines de l'hellénisme. La Crète et la Grèce. Hommage à H. van Effenterre* (1984) 22-24, pl. 8, 2.

36 Respectively, *Il.*, Φ 470, *Homer. Hymn* 17. 3, and *Od.*, ε 149.

37 *Il.*, Ζ 305.

38 *Il.*, Δ 50-53.

39 E.g., HESIODUS, *Theogony* 11-12.

40 CALLIMACHUS, *Dian.* 225.

41 *Μυκηναίοι Ἑλληνες* 184, 185. See, also, the original etymological ties of *posis* and *potnia* to the *oikos* (*supra* and n. 5, 10).

42 Respectively, *Homer. Hymn* 2. 54, 492 (*ὠρηφόρος*= leading on the seasons, or bringing on the fruits in their season" [*Lid. Sc.* 2037]); *Homer. Hymn* 5. 230-232 (Eos), and *Od.*, κ 394 (Circe).

43 For instance, *Po-ti-ni-ja à Mycènes*, 298-300.

Women's associations with plants are, obviously, more generous in the Aegean art (Pl. IVb), where grain and crocuses (Pl. IVc) are suggested among other identified species, domesticated and wild.⁴⁴

In Greek literature *potnia's animal husbandry* is also considerably limited. To her are, nevertheless, directly or more indirectly related:

- *Fierce beasts*, namely lions, mentioned, in Homer, as "mountain-fed."⁴⁵ Their mistress and huntress, Artemis, is even assimilated with them, when she is called a lioness herself or when, as *ἀγγοτέρη*, she roams the fields.⁴⁶

- *Tamed or domesticated animals*, notably horses and sometimes mares. Among them, only horses merit being directly called "Potniades," when, in a state of fury, they tear Glaukos to pieces.⁴⁷

- *Transmuted human beings*. Thus, in Homer, the disguised sea-bird Halcyon listens to her *potnia* mother, goddess Pleione; and the "pigs", Odysseus's companions, are re-transformed into men by *potnia* Circe.⁴⁸

Various animals have instead been "recognised" in *potnia's* Bronze Age artistic evidence. The frequent parallel appearance of the "*posis*-to-animal" pattern in Aegean iconography does not necessarily contradict the written evidence, where several male gods, like Apollo and Hermes, even without being directly called "*posis*", do nevertheless entertain close relations to wild or domesticated animals. Among them are to be found, in art, different earth and sea-mammals, such as lions, dogs, wild goats, eventually horses and dolphins (Pl. IIIc-g, Pl. IV d-f). Also assumed are exotic, fantastic or composite beings, like monkeys, griffins and demons (Pl. IVc), as well as birds, mainly geese (Pl. IIIg), and, possibly, even insects, for instance dragonflies (Pl. IVc). In the same direction of thought, why could we not, equally, think of reptiles, and name, thus, two most famous "*potniai* of snakes" (Pl. IVg)?⁴⁹ It is worth noticing that the bull is not spontaneously related to this artistic repertoire -unless if he was meant to connote *posis* himself (?).⁵⁰ Sheep seem also excluded, although, in the Knossian and Pylian archives, flocks are associated with *potnia*, who apparently owns them, mostly for breeding, along with pigs and oxen.⁵¹

Linear B *potnia hippeia* may be understood in a similar sense.⁵² In a wider perspective, we can evoke the rich evidence of the Theban tablets concerning a series of cult servants in charge of animals, which are more or less familiar in the *potnia/posis* iconography. Thus, we hear of women responsible for conducting the royal or sacred hunting dogs (*ku-na-ki-si*); of men engaged to feed horses (*i-qo-po-qo-i*) and perhaps geese (*ka-si*).⁵³ Adequate roles could have been assigned to women who were apparently destined for *potnia*, according to PY Tn 306. In this chapter might also be considered a group of domestic animals, mentioned in Thebes as if they

44 *Religion as Action* 24-27.

45 *Od.*, z 130 (hence wild, as contrasted to oxen).

46 Respectively, Φ 483 and 471. "Ἀγρότερος" is mainly attributed, by Homer, to wild animals, like female deers (ζ 133), boars (λ 611), goats (ρ 295) etc.

47 STRABO, *Geog.* 9. 2. 24. 4-5. The equally furious Maenads can also be called *Ποτνιαδες* (*Lid. Sc.* 1455).

48 Respectively, I 561-563 and K 391-394. It is interesting to note, though, that Circe is not called *potnia* when she first changes these men into pigs.

49 Serpents are, also, favorite attributes of Gorgon (*infra* Pl. IIIj). Snakes may, also, appear on the head of "potnia" in Xesté 3, Akrotiri (*infra* Pl. IVc). Following the artistic evidence, N. Platon related *potnia* to snakes too, along with male and female lions, wild goats, griffins, water birds, polyps and many other animals (PLATON, *supra* n. 12, 27-28).

50 In the Mediterranean religious semiotics, the bull is often conceived as the zoomorphic expression of the male reproductive element. As far as the Neolithic imagery is concerned, see, for instance, J. CAUVIN, *Naissance des divinités. Naissance de l'agriculture. La révolution des symboles au Néolithique* (1997²) 53.

51 E.g. KN Dp 997, 7742 (sheep), PY Cc 655 (sheep and pigs). See mostly Docs² 434, *Mycenaean Potnia* 123 and *Μυκηναίοι Ἑλλήνες* 183, 184.

52 Readings of "ἔχις πότνια" and "μέλισσα πότνια" on PY Tn 316, as suggested in E. RICHARDS-MANTZOUKINO, "Μέλισσα Πότνια," AAA XII/1 (1979) 81 and n. 24-25 (citing N. ΜΑΣΣΟΥΡΙΑΔΗ, *Ἡ Μινωική Γραφή εἰς τὰς πινακίδας τῆς Πύλου* [1976] 69-74), still need to be verified.

53 Respectively on TH Av 100-101 and Fq 130 (V. ARAVANTINOS, "Mycenaean Texts and Contexts at Thebes: The Discovery of New Linear B Archives on the Cadmeia" in G. DEGER-JALKOTZY *et al.*, *Florentinae Studia Mycenaea* I [1999] 45-78, esp. 58-60, 68, 72).

were receiving offerings themselves. Among them are dogs (*ku-ne*, TH Fq 123), reptiles (*e-pe-to-si*, TH Gp 197), mules (*e-mi-jo-no-si*, TH Gp 138), a pig (*ko-ro*), geese (*ka-si*) and perhaps other birds (*o-ni-si*).⁵⁴

Symbols: a potnia with feminine and masculine attributes

Texts refer to a number of *potnia*'s more or less relevant accessories. Most of them seem assimilated to her familiar, "domestic" everyday activities and duties, like Hebe's golden jug when serving nectar, and Hera's famous queen's throne. Pieces of well woven cloth are offered to Athena by her priestesses and clothing is also given, along with ambrosia, by Eos to Tithonus.⁵⁵ Gold jewellery is also, occasionally, mentioned, for instance when *potnia* Peitho decorates Pandora with necklaces and when the young Odysseus' *potnia* mother examines the precious necklace brought by the phoenician merchant.⁵⁶

Gold vessels and cloth can remind us of Linear B *potnia*'s receiving precious offerings, although such artifacts are equally offered to other gods and goddesses. Among them are mentioned a gold two-handled cup (Py Tn 306), as well as wool and textiles (e.g. KN Oa 745, Dp 997, 7742). Metal objects may, in a way, relate to *potnia*'s association with bronze workshops or with bronzesmiths in the region of Pylos (PY Jn 310, 431). Cloth may recall female weavers at her service (TH Of 36).⁵⁷

Some other accessories clearly underline a more aggressive, a more masculine aspect of *potnia*, that is weapons, realistic and symbolic. The only offensive ones, the bow and arrows, belong to Artemis, the "mistress of [Cretan?] archers," and, metaphorically, to Aphrodite, the "arrow *potnia*" (πότνια [ὀξυτάτων] βελέων).⁵⁸ Differently armed is Circe, with her magical stick. So is *potnia* Enyo, fighter on the Trojan front, carrying the "shameless Confusion" (ἀναιδέα Κυδοιμός), the Uproar, Panic or Hurring throng of battle.⁵⁹ The most bellicose of all, the terrible *potnia* Athena Tritogeneia, counts on *Κυδοιμός* too, when she is described as restless and thirsty for horrible wars, battles and screams.⁶⁰ The bow and arrows are also attributed to Apollo and *Κυδοιμός* is mainly shared with Zeus.

Aegean "mistress" iconographies fitting this section might comprise many well-known series of scenes, in glyptic and occasionally in painting, involving male and female pouring and offering rituals.⁶¹ Although in art *posis*' and *potnia*'s suggested imageries often count on some supplementary individual *insignia*, such as the well-known conical cap (Pl. IIIb) and "stick" (Pl. IIIa-b), they definitely do not comprise violent, attacking weapons.

Tempers: a protecting and revenging potnia of love and wrath

A *potnia* is generally described either alone or among other gods and mortals. In Homer, she often directly enters into dialogue with a family member, her brother, her husband or companion, her child. Thus, Artemis converses with Apollo, Hera with Zeus, Thetis with Achilles...

Words (μῦθοι, ἔπεα πτερόεντα) seem to be relevant weapons in a *potnia*'s physical and cultural armoury. Words are usually spoken by Hera, Artemis, Persephone, the Erinyes, the Maenads... In fact, a *potnia* may well appear inspiring, lyrical and appealing (e.g. the Muses or

54 On TH Ft 215, 216, 226, 236 and Fq 204. See also ROUSIOTI (*supra* n. 22).

55 Respectively, *Il.*, Z 302-5 and *Homer. Hymn* 5. 230-2.

56 Respectively, HESIOD, *Works and Days* 73-74, and *Od.*, o 459-463. Abundant offerings of jewellery are also addressed to Artemis (M.E. VOYATZIS, "From Athena to Zeus" in L. GOODISON, C. MORRIS [eds], *Ancient Goddesses* [1998] 145).

57 Respectively, *Μυκηναίοι Έλληνες*, 183, 184, 194-5 and *Mycenaean Potnia*, 123. For cloth, see M.-L.B. NOSCH, M. PERNA, this volume. For an overview of offerings to *potnia* and other Mycenaean deities, see L.M. BENDALL, this volume.

58 Respectively, CALLIMACHUS, *Frg. inc auct.* 786.1 and PINDARUS, P 4.213. On more particular connotations of the word "arrow" in Homer, see *Hom. Lex.* 69-70 (βέλος= missile, said also of thrown stones or furniture, and even of the pains of childbirth).

59 *Il.*, E 592-3 (*Hom. Lex.* 240, on *Κυδοιμός* figured as a symbol).

60 HESIODUS, *Theogony* 926-29. On the masculine traits of Athena, see e.g. VOYATZIS (*supra* n. 56).

61 For instance, of robe (*Religion as Action* 20-23, figs 11-13).

Aphrodite, as “potnia of loves” [ἐρώτων πότνια]).⁶² But she is also, most often, described vexed, furious and insulting, obviously undergoing serious breakdowns.⁶³ This happens, mainly, while she claims, through pronounced words and gestures, her right to rescue and protect her own authority, her child, a hero, a people..., frequently, against some male decision or will. Then, *potnia* shouts in wrath, provokes, insults, threatens, blames, takes revenge. Artemis is caught in one such outburst against Apollo, when she is called πότνια θηρῶν; and she is equally reproved, in her turn, by *potnia* Hera. In a similar state of fury, aiming to support the Argeians, Hera shook her throne and all Olympus twisted. Finally, Persephone’s cry towards her *potnia* mother echoed around mountain peaks and sea depths.⁶⁴

Loud performances and controversies, constituting an amalgam of reason and strong inner impulse, a mixture of tamed and of untamed mentality, turn almost always into a *potnia*’s total or partial victory. They seem to shape one of her most significant values, which, moreover, persists and even determines the meanings of later etymological derivatives of the word: for instance, of the verb ποτνιαόμαι (to appeal potnia, but, also, to cry aloud in horror, pain or indignation, to implore loudly, to lament).⁶⁵

Such thoughts may recall previous remarks on the soft and terrible aspects of *potnia* in the sources. They may also bring to mind the series of Aegean engravings related to mixed female and male ecstatic rituals, possibly implying invocation and lamenting.⁶⁶

Properties: a potnia of ruse and civilising knowledge

One of *potnia*’s main properties could consist of her intriguing mental sharpness. Thus, *potnia* Hera is thought of as wily-minded (δολοόφρων) and Athena as weaving wiles (δολοπλόκος).⁶⁷

Specific further qualities of *potnia* may rely on experience and good knowledge of natural devices, of techniques as well as of human ethics, which she often transmits, generally to men. Such features fit well to Circe, notably magic and wisdom. As *potnia*, she changes animals into men using as antidote a herbal ointment of her invention.⁶⁸ She also teaches Odysseus how to tie multiple knots to a vegetal string, in order to secure precious artifacts. Moreover, she advises him lengthily and valuably on his most wished trip of return. Among other instructions, he is told to pour libations and offer a blood sacrifice of two black rams and an ewe -to Teiresias, to the dead, to Persephone and to Hades.⁶⁹

Such charismas, which can be added, I believe, to *potnia*’s legacy, draw upon some civilising power over both nature and mankind. They could be latent in artistic representations, for instance those which seemingly imply ritual reverence and female-to-male “conversation intercourse” (Pl. Va).

Inner nature: a universal potnia mother of bearing and lamenting

In the same direction of thought, *potnia*’s textual ties to maternity seem most important. The terms “τέκε” (has born) and “ὠδίνες” (pains or throes of childbirth) often accompany many goddesses, like Rhea, Maia, Leto, Leda, Thetis.⁷⁰ Not only children, but also natural elements and even unusual creatures can be brought to life by a *potnia*. Thus, Tethys gave birth to 3000 rivers and to an equal number of Oceanids;⁷¹ and, to revenge Zeus on Athena’s birth,

62 Respectively, PINDARUS N 3.1 and EURIPIDES *TGF*² frg. 781.16 (*LIMC* VIII/1 1021).

63 A very characteristic image of a half-laughing, half-stern *potnia* Hera, in *Il.*, O 100-103.

64 For Artemis, see respectively, *Il.*, Φ 470-477 and 479-488; for Hera, see *Il.*, Θ 198-200; for Demeter and Persephone, see *Homer. Hymn* 2. 39-40.

65 *Lid. Sc* 1455 (ποτνιαόμαι, ποτνιαίσις, ποτνιασμός, ποτνιαστής). See, also, POLLUX, *Onomastikon* 6. 202. 15.

66 *Religion as Action* 16-19, where the expression “*furor orgiastico*” is used, figs 7-9.

67 Respectively, e.g. *Il.*, Ξ 300, 329 (Hera) and DIONYSIUS HALICARN., *Comp.*, 23, 54-56 (Athena).

68 *Supra* n. 48. This could indirectly remind of Linear B *potnia*’s “owing” an unguent or perfume workshop in Pylos (Un 249, see Μυκηναίοι Ἕλληνες, 184).

69 Respectively, *Od.*, θ 447-448, κ 516-534, 549 and μ 36.

70 E.g. *Homer. Hymn* 4. 19 (Maia); 17. 3 (Leda); CALLIMACHUS, *Hymn* 4. 123 (Leto).

71 HESIOD, *Theogony*, 362-368.

Hera bore, then discarded, the dreadful, fatherless Typhon, a monster resembling neither a god nor a human.⁷² Possibly due to their motherly properties, some *potniai* are considered mistresses of peoples (*λαῶν*/Dike), of gods (*θεῶν*/Demeter), of women (*γυναικῶν*/Artemis).⁷³

Although divine mothers frequently interact with their progenitures, they are not described as *kourotrophoi*, an attitude also occasionally assigned to human mothers.⁷⁴ Mother-to-child interactions may be happy and optimistic, as in the case of Leto, who is repeatedly considered proud and fortunate because of her children. But, more often, bitter fates, pains and lamentation are underlined, for immortal as for mortal *potniai*.⁷⁵

In fact, most of a Greek *potnia*'s human story definitely relies on motherhood and it mainly borrows from Homer. Beyond social hierarchies, all men and women *do* have a *potnia* mother: kings and queens, like Odysseus and Helen, princes and princesses, like Hector, Hectorides, Nausikaa, but also slaves, like Briseis and Eumaius, and even beggars, like Arnaius. From him we learn that he was named by his *potnia* mother.⁷⁶ Elsewhere we hear that *potnia* Neaera, Helios' wife, had herself decided on her daughters' career as herdswomen.⁷⁷ Except for such scarce hints of an eventual matrilinear past, a human *potnia* mother seems deeply imbedded within the Greek, male-centered world, where she usually forms the second part of the two parents (*πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ*).⁷⁸

A *potnia* mother may be described together with her young offspring and she is, then, sometimes "caught" in familiar everyday activities. So is Andromache while playing and laughing with her, helmet-horrified, baby son.⁷⁹ But a *potnia* mother is most often separated from her adult child, who has moved or been taken away, by war or fate. In those cases, almost assimilated to the motherland (*πατρίδα*), she is recalled and invoked, generally when things turn wrong, in a yearning of past days of happiness, shelter and pride. In the hope, that, even from very far away, she might hear and help, as did *potnia* Antikleia from the world of shadows⁸⁰ and, several times, Thetis from the ocean depths.⁸¹

Lamenting on a child's death is a shared feature of divine and human *potniai*, directly related to their giving birth.⁸² Both Thetis and Hecuba cry aloud on their sons' death,⁸³ so as to be heard by all, gods and humans. In such "battles", *potniai* mothers of mortal children generally loose...

Into this chapter may fall the indirect "reading" of Mycenaean *potnia* in the Linear B divine name *ma-ka* (*μᾶ γᾶ*, mother earth) on the Theban tablet, as well as *potnia*'s associations with a human or divine *wa-na-ka* (*ἄνακτα*), in Pylos and in Thebes.⁸⁴ There might also be involved here a diversified Aegean artistic evidence, including women in bearing and animal breeding attitudes or represented as *kourotrophoi* and even as mourners (Pl. Vb-e).

72 *Homer. Hymn* 3. 340-354.

73 Respectively, ARATUS, *Phaen* 1.112; EUR. *Bacch.* 370; and *Anth. Pal.* 6, 287. 1. Here could also fit "πότνια Δαμάτηρ" (Mother Earth), as applied to Demeter, e.g. in CALLIMACHUS, *Hymn* 6. 10, 49, 59.

74 See, for instance, Keleos' wife holding her child, on *potnia* Demeter's visit (*Homer. Hymn* 2. 185-7).

75 Respectively, for instance, *Homer. Hymn* 3. 12-15 (Leto) and 2. 47 sq. (Deo).

76 *Od.*, σ 5-6.

77 *Od.*, μ 134-136.

78 E.g. *Il.*, T 291, *Od.*, ζ 30, ο 385. See also GREG. NAZIANZENSUS, *Carmina moralia* 552.7.

79 *Il.*, Z 469-473.

80 *Od.*, λ 180 sq.

81 E.g. Σ 35-38, 70-72, Ω 126-127...

82 *Potnia*'s association with death and regeneration has often been suggested in Aegean mythological and religious contexts (see, for instance, N. MARINATOS, "Circe and Liminality," in O. ANDERSEN, M. DICKIE, *Homer's World* [1995] 135-136). This association is, also, considered to shape the major feature of the Minoan Mother Goddess.

83 *Il.*, Ω 83-86 and 710 sq.

84 Respectively, GODART (*supra* n. 19) and, among others, *Mycenaean Goddess* 123.

Conclusions: *potnia* or the life of a concept

How to piece all these *potniai* together? Are we allowed to retain evidence appearing at such different degrees of reliability, in such diverse sources, through such long periods of time? Are there any real features in common at all? Or has the present paper just isolated routine items related, in ritual and life, to many deities and humans? In what way(s) are we to understand texts and depictions of Aegean *potnia*, without underestimating *posis* nor being unjust towards *non-potnia*?

Are we, furthermore, to see, within writings and images, mere reflections of *individual* activities and people –male and female- borrowing from their everyday activities and tasks, either in private, or in public and even in cultic *milieux*, e.g. in sanctuaries, as the animal keepers of the Theban documents seem to suggest? Or shall we consider them to reproduce definite, ritualised events and “passages” within their respective lifetimes? Could we, on the other hand, in a maximal perspective, suppose them to reflect specific cult narratives or *collective* ritual actions, which would in this case embrace most of the essential Minoan and Mycenaean iconographic cycles? Is there, after all, a rational pattern to be conceived in a *potnia*’s life?

One familiar pattern –perhaps the only possible one- would consist of the following two mutually interacting pairs of concepts:

Woman - Nature

Taming or Mastering - Culture

For, what seems to prevail in *potnia*’s textual and artistic imagery is her capacity of standing in power, sometimes smiling softly, at other times roaring fiercely, among wild, transmuted and civilised beings and circumstances. She either forms a harmonious part of the tamed but also of the untamed world or she accurately balances above the sharp-edged boundaries of the mild and the dreadful. She may, finally, eagerly transform, as a charismatic mother-tamer, the fierce into the mild and *vice versa*, in the divine but, first, in the human domain. Men might be excluded from this pattern only as far as the archetypal stages of bearing and breeding –infants, animals and other natural elements- are concerned. These specifically female features are, nevertheless, essential, since they highlight both life and civilisation.

Within such a universal framework, *potnia polypotnia* (Pl. Vf) may move freely, beyond strict typologies and taxonomies. She is allowed to assume multiple versions, to participate in diverse performances, to undergo external but also internal changes in different social and economic realities. She is justified by her impressive lifespan –as a word, an image, an idea- through almost diachronic communication codes, traditions and beliefs. Each time she appears at different scales of proximity and distance, depending on the degrees of sacralisation or profanation (*εκκοσμίκευση*) of her concept.

She might, thus, in fact, individually or collectively, be conceived as some powerful joker, meaning everything and nothing. A joker mainly invoked at decisive moments and occasions, more often, perhaps, when things go wrong,⁸⁵ in the object of interfering and judging the results, through an ambiguous winners-to-loosers assimilation. Such a joker would be able to emerge in different “hands,” with changing aspects and gender, with varying symbols, associations, tempers and frequencies. Serious periods of threat towards nature and culture would justify *potnia*’s increased appearances through time, in art and literature.⁸⁶

85 See also J. Driessen’s related interesting point of view (this volume).

86 *Supra* n. 7. Natural catastrophs would certainly equal human insults towards nature and culture. We tend to forget that the latter may, also, occur in periods of assumed stability and prosperity. Large scale technical operations, such as the Aegean palace constructions and reconstructions would, for instance, certainly represent huge real and ideological menaces, especially within the animistic cultic environment which, we think, was the Minoan.

What *potnia* receives in return is respect, awe and a top seat in human and divine hierarchies. In structured theologies, when processes become more rational, when specificities and charismas are institutionalised, she might even preside in some *nobilitas* ranking and connote Despoina, Kyria...⁸⁷

If so, *potnia*'s own story as a concept could have started much earlier than we think, in the Aegean (Pl. Vg) and in the Mediterranean region (Pl. Vh, VIa). Even earlier, perhaps, than people ever articulated her name or depicted "instant views" of her "life" (Pl. VIb). And, in different terms, under different appellations, *potnia*'s religious but also profane story can still be told today.

Through a *potnia*'s looking glass, each one of us should certainly be able to "catch" some opaque reflections of a spoken or unspoken day in her/his own life and culture (Pl. VIc).

Katerina KOPAKA

87 C. Boëlle reaches similar conclusions, following parallel reasonings *via* the Linear B evidence (this volume).

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- Pl. Vh Neolithic *potnia* (?). Catal Hüyük. Anatolia (D. and J. OATES, *The Rise of Civilization* [1976] fig. p. 87).
- Pl. VIa Neolithic *potniai* (?) with baby infants and animals. Hacilar. Anatolia (J. MELLAART, *Earliest Civilizations of the Near East* [1978²] fig. 94).
- Pl. VIb Palaeolithic *potniai* and *posis* (?). Laussel. South France (P. DELPORTE, *L'image de la femme dans l'art paléolithique* [1993²] fig. 48).
- Pl. VIc Modern *potnia* (?). Island San Miguél. California (C. SUPLEE, “Ελ. Νίνιο, Λα Νίνια. Ο φαύλος κύκλος της φύσης,” *National Geographic*, Ελλάδα, 2/3 Μάρτιος 1999, εικ. σελ. 128-129 [φωτ. T. Turner]).