

THE CHARACTER OF THE MINOAN GODDESS. NEW EVIDENCE FROM THE AREA OF AMARI

The palatial centre of Monastiraki in the Amari valley, dating to the Protopalatial period, has been producing strong evidence for Protopalatial administration and central and organized town planning for a number of years.¹

In 1999, the area of the big rock, "Charakas," in the middle of the site, started being investigated with important and surprising results. The excavation took place around the south side of the rock, where modern retaining walls were standing. Higher up, toward the top of the rock, ancient walls could be seen standing above ground. When the front of the rock was cleared, a series of retaining walls were discovered, going to the very top of the rock which is flat and now weathered. The main characteristic of these walls is that they lack depth and that they were originally plastered with very thick white plaster. This makes it clear that they were not just retaining walls leading to the top of the rock, and they were not parts of normal rooms because of their lack of depth. These structures, whose investigation is not completed yet, do not seem to be part of an individual residence (Pl. XXXVIIa). The area has certain special features. It has a very prominent position in the centre of the site. There is a road which leads towards it. There are traces of open spaces at the feet of the rock and two rooms, so far, which have an especially careful arrangement with plastered walls and floors. It is very early in the investigation of the area to have valid conclusions about its character and function. However, the whole arrangement reminds of a theater set or the building on the well-known Zakro rhyton, not in its tripartite arrangements, but in its lack of depth. J. Shaw in his well known article on the Minoan tripartite shrine noted the similarity of this type of structure to a stage set.²

The present study does not include this architectural arrangement, but a special find, a group of two terracotta figurines that were discovered at the feet of the rock, presumably fallen from above, as it was discovered very near the surface:

Monastiraki, Charakas. Group of two figurines attached to a barbotine plaque. Greatest preserved height of female figurine: 6.7 cm. Greatest width of body and plaque: 4.6 cm. Greatest preserved height of male figurine: 5.6 cm. Greatest preserved length of barbotine plaque: 6 cm. Greatest preserved width: 3.7 cm (Pl. XXXVIIb).

The group consists of two figures, one larger, the other smaller, attached by their left and right side respectively, to a barbotine clay plaque, now broken at the edges and of uncertain character. Both figures stand on the same level but their feet are missing. The arm of the smaller figure is folded towards its chest and belly but does not actually touch them. The larger figure, which has very prominent breasts, is embracing the smaller figure with its right arm. Its left arm, which was raised, is missing. It may have been holding the head of the smaller figure. The bodies of the two figures are not touching. Both heads are missing. But the preserved beginning of the head of the smaller figure shows that it was embedded on the breasts of the larger figure.

1 A. KANTA, "Monastiraki and Phaistos Elements of Protopalatial History," in *MELETEMATA* II 387-393; A. KANTA and A. TZIGOUNAKI, "The Protopalatial Multiple Sealing System. New Evidence from Monastiraki" in M. PERNA (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sphragistic Studies* (1996) 193-210; L. GODART, A. KANTA and A. TZIGOUNAKI, "La bureaucratie palatiale: naissance et évolution d'un système de pouvoir en Égée" in *Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma- Napoli 14-20 ott. 1991* (1996).

2 J.W. SHAW, "Evidence for the Minoan Tripartite Shrine", *AJA* 82 (1978) 448.

This is not an erotic couple as the two bodies are not touching in front, and they have a difference in size. There is no paint preserved on the figures and both seem to be naked but the male genitalia are not indicated. The smaller figure seems to be male but with no strong stressing of the male characteristics. The sex of the larger figure is explicit. It is clear that the smaller figure seems to have been suckling the larger. The date of the group is Protopalatial and in view of the barbotine plaque to which it adheres, not later than MMIIA.

This is no ordinary Kouroutrophos group as the suckling figure is not a baby, or an infant, or generally a young child, but, definitely, an adolescent or a “young adult.” The difference in size between the two figures is about a head or half a head. This might be due to age difference or difference of status.

The Minoan civilization and the wider Aegean iconography do not provide any other similar representations in glyptic art, figurines or painting. The well-established precedent of an adult suckling a woman is the case of the Pharaoh of Egypt suckling various female goddesses.

Ugarit provides a later relevant parallel for this theme.³ Schaeffer found a group of ivories in Court III of the palace of Ugarit dating to the 14th century.⁴ Among them were decorative ivory panels belonging to the boards at the head and feet of a bed. Each panel had a scene related to the life and military achievements of the king of Ugarit. One of the panels (Pl. XXXVIIc) was adorned with the full scale figure of a dressed, winged goddess in a frontal position with big bull’s horns on her head and a Hathoric hairstyle. Between the bulls horns there is a disk decorated with astric symbols.⁵ Two children facing each other suckle from the uncovered drooping breasts of the goddess, which reach down to her waist. The age of the children can be judged by their height in relation to that of the goddess. They suckle with up-turned heads holding the breast with one hand, while the goddess is embracing them. An age of c. from 6 to 10 seems appropriate for these children.⁶

The goddess is identified as Anat or her daughter Asherat by both Schaeffer⁷ and Ward.⁸ Anat is described as winged in Ugaritic texts.⁹ Anat is found adopted in the Egyptian religious lore by the time of Ramses II. She takes over characteristics of Hathor and she is the “mother of the king” and she is given titles such as “mistress of the sky” and “mistress of the gods.”

Concerning the character of the two adolescents they are considered royal rather than divine and they wear the Egyptian short kilt. It is believed that they represent the king at a young age, portrayed together with his “Ka” or that the figure of the king is doubled for the sake of symmetry. The scene together with local Syrian features has a strong Egyptian flavour, which is in accordance with the character of the Ugaritic culture.¹⁰

If we compare the Monastiraki group of figures with those on the bed from Ugarit, the differences are obvious. In Crete there is no strong evidence at this time, or indeed later, of portraying royal personages. Thus, it seems very unlikely that the male figure represents a king or prince of the palatial centre. From the very few cases that could perhaps be made for the representation of a royal personage in Minoan culture, the Palaikastro kouros and the youth on the Chania sealing¹¹ are perhaps the stronger. However another explanation has been proposed for the interpretation of both figures, namely, that they are divine. The difficulty

3 We are grateful to Professor V. Karageorghis for discussing the bed from Ugarit with us.

4 C.F.A. SCHAEFFER, “Les fouilles de Ras-Shamra – Ugarit. Quinzième, seizième et dix-septième campagnes (1951, 1952 et 1953),” *Syria* 21 (1954) 58.

5 SCHAEFFER (*supra* n. 4) 54-55.

6 SCHAEFFER (*supra* n. 4) Pl. VIII.

7 SCHAEFFER (*supra* n. 4).

8 W.A. WARD, “La déesse nouricière d’Ugarit,” *Syria* 46 (1969) 225-239.

9 WARD (*supra* n. 8) 230.

10 SCHAEFFER (*supra* n. 4); WARD (*supra* n. 8) 230.

11 E. HALLAGER, *The Master Impression. A Clay Sealing from the Greek-Swedish Excavations at Kastelli, Khania* (1985); J.A. MCGILLIVRAY, J.M. DRIESSEN, and L.H. SACKETT, *The Palaikastro Kouros. A Minoan Chryselephantine statuette* (2000); J. YOUNGER, “The iconography of rulership, a conspectus,” in *Ruler* 151-211.

of identifying Minoan male rulers or god figures is highlighted by McGillivray's attribution of the Palaikastro "Kouros" to the Cretan Zeus.¹² Indeed, he considers that this figure and all the male terracotta figurines which have a similar pose and gesture represent "the ancient god immortalized in the constellation of Orion." This raises a major problem. If the male "adorants" of the peak sanctuaries represent hundreds of divine figurines,¹³ then surely it follows that all the female figurines also represent goddesses and this shows the absurdity of the theory as there is no differentiation in the manner of deposition of figurines of different sexes and with different types of gestures. On balance we are led to consider that the male figure of the Monastiraki group represents the consort of the Minoan Goddess.

The Monastiraki group dates from c. 1750-1800 B.C. It is thus much earlier than the plaque from the bed from Ugarit. There can be no doubt as to the Egyptian influence on the iconography of the Minoan group, although the naked goddess points to the Near East. A Minoan goddess that had characteristics inspired from Syria and Egypt, as the iconography implies, could have been thought as nursing a divine consort. Indeed, Anat and Asherat were divine nurses of gods as well as kings in the Ugaritic texts.¹⁴ This amalgam of influences is typical for Crete at this period, where both Egyptian and Syrian objects and ideology reach the island. It seems that the sea routes depending on the weather at various times of the year often favoured communication from Egypt to Crete via Syria.¹⁵ The gesture of the male figure is clearly Minoan although the hand does not touch the body and acts, in a way, as a barrier between the body of the female figure and that of the youth. Not enough of the barbotine plaque survives to show whether it was part of an architectural construction comparable e.g. to the well-known shrine model from Monastiraki or even to those of the Kamilari models. The barbotine decoration of the plaque, however, suggests that it could be viewed from behind.

Although the Monastiraki group is very unusual for Minoan iconography, parallels exist within the area of Amari, in a context, which provides information about religion and state organization in the Protopalatial period. A group or groups of attached figures have been discovered at the cave of Maryieles at Elenes in the area of Amari c. 11 km from Monastiraki. The cave of Elenes was excavated by Marinatos and the objects which will be presented here come from his excavations.¹⁶ The Elenes material is under study by Anastasia Tzigounaki.

Several relevant fragments will be considered here:

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Clay plaque with relief figures originally attached to it. Rethymnon Museum 15225. Preserved length 12.281 cm. Width 7.246 cm. Thickness of section 1.36 cm. Oblong shape with a frame around it. The plaque has a perforation in one narrow side. About half of it is preserved. The back has a slight curvature. A foot and part of the leg in relief is still attached to the surface. The rest has been detached and part of the surface is chipped off (Pl. XXXVIIId). The plaque is composed from two different clays. The first is a coarse orange gritty clay (MUNSEL 2, 5YR 5/5 reddish brown-red). The applied decoration is made of a different clay, medium fine and light brown in colour (MUNSEL HUE 7, 5YR 7/5, pink-reddish yellow), with very fine admixtures.

The figurine, which has probably been detached from the plaque, still exists in a fragmentary condition, among the material excavated by Marinatos (Pl. XXXVIIe):

Clay human figurine, originally attached to a surface by its left side. Rethymnon Museum 15226. It is preserved up to the upper thighs. The head ends in a triangular stump at the back. The features are redressed summarily just by finger impressions on the clay. The right arm is turned towards the lower body, while the left is extended. The right side of the figure is modelled in the round while the left, where it was attached to the clay plaque is flat. Both gestures match exactly those of the smaller, male figure on the Monastiraki group.

12 MCGILLIVRAY, DRIESSEN, and SACKETT (*supra* n. 11) 129.

13 MCGILLIVRAY, DRIESSEN, and SACKETT (*supra* n. 11) 127-129.

14 WARD (*supra* n. 8) 229-230.

15 A. KANTA, "Relations between the Aegean and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age, an Overview," in *Cyprus-Dodecanese-Crete*.

16 S. MARINATOS, "Funde und Forschungen auf Kreta," *Anzeiger* 48 (1933) 295; G. KARO, "Archaeologische Funde, Kreta," *Anzeiger* 47 (1932) 177; H.G. PAYNE, "Archaeology in Greece 1931-32," *Archaeological Reports JHS* 52 (1932) 255; E. KARANTZALI, *Le Bronze ancien dans les Cyclades et en Crète* (1996) 83-84, fig. 86.

There are also two non-joining fragments perhaps belonging to another similar figurine (Pl. XXXVIII^f). One seems to be a leg also preserving the foot. Its length is 3.6 cm. The other seems to be an arm; its length is 3.2 cm. The upper surface of both is properly modeled, while the back shows that it was attached to some surface. In other words both were part of the same or similar groups of figures attached to a plaque. All have the same fabric. Light brown clay with fine admixtures (MUNSELL 5 YR, pink reddish yellow). The rendering of the body and head of this figurine finds close parallels to the figurines of the models from the tomb of Kamilaris.¹⁷ The triangular ending of the back of the head is very similar to that of the Kamilari dancers and probably indicates some kind of plait on an otherwise shaved or very short haired head. The Kamilari dancers also have a lock of curling hair on a shaved head, a mark of the adolescent boy.¹⁸ The Kamilari figures date either from the end of the Protopalatial or from an early Neopalatial phase and are thus slightly later than the Elenes figure which in view of the clay, technique and typological similarity to the Monastiraki male figure is early Protopalatial in date.

An attempt has been made to reconstruct the Elenes group of figures according to the Monastiraki example (Pl. XXXVII^g). This attempt is justified by the very close similarity of the Monastiraki and Elenes male figures. The width of the Elenes plaque which is rather narrow, just allows for the placement of all figures in the following manner. The existing foot and leg on the plaque belongs to the fragmentary figure, which was placed above them. As on the Monastiraki group, although the left leg was slightly forward, the right was on a more or less straight line, roughly following the outline of the plaque. The detached fragmentary leg may be the right leg with foot of this figure. Thus, we have a male figure, extending the left arm in an embracing gesture towards another figure which is not preserved. In our reconstruction a larger female figure with prominent breasts is placed on the left side of the plaque suckling the male figure. Not much of this figure is preserved, except perhaps for the detached arm which may have belonged to the goddess, being her right arm as on the Monastiraki group. Alternatively it may belong to a totally different figure, although this is not very probable.

A difference between the Elenes and Monastiraki groups is that the Monastiraki example was meant to be seen also from the back, as suggested by the barbotine decoration, while the rough treatment of the Elenes plaque suggests that it was attached to some object, or hung from something. The technique of manufacturing large clay objects or even smaller vases with a coarse clay and adding the details in a finer clay is typical of Protopalatial ceramic production and is also found at the model of a shrine from Monastiraki and on vases such as the "salt cellar" kernoi.

The date of the Elenes plaque and figurine fragments, as well as of the associated pottery finds is Protopalatial, as was mentioned. Plaques with figures exist in shrines and peak sanctuaries from the Neopalatial period onwards,¹⁹ but it is highly unusual to find them in a cave and of a Protopalatial date.

The existence of this plaque and attached figure among the Maryieles material characterizes the function of the cave as sacred. There are, however, other finds among the material from the cave, which verify this function and add another dimension to our understanding of Protopalatial central management of religious arrangements. These are several stone vases and some sherds from ritual vases:

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Miniature stone goblet (Pl. XXXVII^h). Dark green stone with lighter and darker spots. Rethymno Mus. no 1774. Height 3.06 cm. Rim diameter 2.04 cm. Base diameter 1.796 cm. Greatest diameter of body 2.626 cm. Oval body, spreading base, ringed rim. Strong drill marks inside. Complete with tiny fragments chipped off from the surface. This is Warren's type 29²⁰ which he considers a goblet because some of the vases of this type seem to correspond to EM II-MMI pottery

17 D. LEVI, "La Tomba a Tholos di Kamilaris presso a Festos," *ASAtene* 39-40 (1961-1962) 23-24, 7-148.

18 R. KOEHL, "The Chieftain Cup and a Minoan Rite of Passage," *JHS* 106 (1986) 99-110; R. KOEHL, in MCGILLIVRAY, DRIESSEN, and SACKETT (*supra* n. 11) 131-143.

19 G. RETHEMIOTAKIS, *Ανθρωπομορφική πηλοπλαστική στην Κρήτη* (1998).

20 P. WARREN, *Minoan Stone vases* (1969) 72-73.

goblets. The Elenes vase is an unusually fine, carefully made example. Comparable vases have been found at Platanos, tholos A and the Trapeza cave.²¹ The function of this vase is not immediately clear. If indeed it was a goblet, then it could only have been used for ritual libations as it is too small for real drinking. Alternatively, it could have been used for the storage of a commodity dispensed in very small quantities i.e. aromatics. The Elenes vase is of a better quality than its counterparts from Platanos and Trapeza.

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Stone handle of vase (Pl. XXXVIIi). Greenish-black colour. Rethymnon Mus. no L 1776. Length 4.08 cm. Height 1.435 cm. It has an arched shape with a faceted section with eight facets and flat ends bearing two perforations each for attachment. This is a very fine specimen, but unfortunately it is not possible to guess the shape of vase to which it originally belonged.

Elenes, Maryieles (Pl. XXXVIIIa). Stone lid. L 1772. Height 1.50 cm. Diameter 4.65 cm. Round, flat upper surface with a “pawn”- like stump handle ending in a knob. The under surface is in-cut in order to fit the corresponding vase rim.²² This is a very common type of early lids, the small size gives a clue to the corresponding size of the vase it covered. We cannot make any nearer suggestions as to the shape of this vase, because such lids sealed various shapes of stone vases. They dated from EM II-MM times.

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Stone “ladle” with a heart-shaped shallow bowl and slight spout (Pl. XXXVIIIb). Rethymnon Museum no L 1773. Height 2.5 cm. The base diameter varies from 3.15 cm to 3.60 cm. Only parts of the body, rim, and base are preserved. The rest is restored, but the knob which sometimes exists opposite the slight spout has not been restored. There is a slight knob on the rim at the side. Traces of the tool-marks are preserved inside. Grayish-green steatite. A vase from Koumasa²³ made of chlorite has a very similar shape and is dated to EM II or slightly later by Warren. Vases of this type are found in cult contexts and for this reason it is supposed that they have a ritual function.²⁴ Such a function agrees with the Elenes context.

Of the four stone vases found by Marinatos at the Maryieles cave, one had a cult function, two had a votive character, and the lid could have had an every day use, although its small size would agree with a function as a lid to a votive vase. Their high quality, of the handle and goblet in particular, classes them as prestige offerings. Although the typological date of these stone vases seems Prepalatial, the fact that they also appear in peak sanctuaries makes a Protopalatial date probable.

The cave deposit also contained ritual pottery of Protopalatial date. Two sherds belong to ritual vases. The first is part of a cup or bowl, while the second belongs to a larger, coarse vase:

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Bowl with figure of Cretan wild goat inside (Pl. XXXVIIIc). Greatest preserved height 3.86 cm. Base diameter 3 cm. Length of body of the goat 3.67 cm. Yellow buff, well fired, hard and fine clay (MUNSEL HUE 7, 5YR 8/5, pink-reddish yellow). The clay is the same as that of the figure fragments attached to the oblong plaque. There are wheel marks on the base of the bowl. There are traces of black paint on the body and under the base. The “agrimi” sits with folded legs curving inwards. The tail is formed by a small clay stump partly preserved. The head has a triangular shape and partly preserved horns curving upwards. The body lies on the base of the vase and its back is slightly lifted from it. The neck stands straight. Although the representation of the animal is schematic, the power of the agrimi comes through. This is a good quality work by a potter who had experience in the creation of relief animals. This vase belongs to a well-known type of vases examples of which have been found at Palaikastro and Archanes.²⁵ The Palaikastro vases have various animals in them, while there were also two vases with human figures in them found at Archanes. At Monastiraki, a cup has been found which bears the figure of a woman inside. Although neither the shape nor the iconography are similar to the Elenes fragment, they both have the same ritual conception of placing an image of a living creature inside an open vase, a vase which could have been used for libations or ritual drinking.

21 S. XANTHOUDIDES, *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesara* (1924) Pl. LIV; H.W. PENDLEBURY, J.D.S. PENDLEBURY and M.B. MONEY-COUTTS, “Excavations in the plain of Lasithi I,” *BSA* 36 (1935-1936) fig. 24, 28, 29, 32, Pl. 16; WARREN (*supra* n. 20) P380, 382, 384, 385, 386.

22 WARREN (*supra* n. 20) 68-69.

23 WARREN (*supra* n. 20) P287; XANTHOUDIDES (*supra* n. 21) Pl. XLb second row, second from right.

24 S. XANTHOUDIDES, “Μινωικόν Σκεύος ευεπίγραφον,” *ArchEph* (1909) 179-96; *PM* I, 622ff.

25 Y. and E. SAKELLARAKIS, *Αρχαίες* (1998) II, 544-547, fig. 546; K.P. FOSTER, *Minoan Ceramic Relief* (1982) 109, 111, pl. 37, 41.

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Fragment of jar with an applied bucranium (Pl. XXXVIIIId). Rethymnon Museum no 15224. Greatest preserved height 8.95 cm. Greatest preserved width 15.02 cm. It consists of 2 joining sherds. Rounded rim slightly projecting outwards. Orange medium coarse, gritty clay (MUNSEL HUE 7, 5YR 7/6 reddish yellow). The sherd is covered by incrustation. It has a knob on the rim and below it an applied animal head with big horns. The horns are slightly turned downwards. The animal should be identified with a bull rather than a wild goat although the horns do not turn upwards as in later bucrania. This rendering is probably due to the difficulty of accomodating a frontal horned head on a vase surface instead of the easier side view. A complete vase of a comparable shape with a very similar applied bucranium has been discovered at Monastiraki, MMII in date (Pl. XXXVIIIe-f).

Finally the cave of Elenes contained a very unusual find for a cave:

Elenes, Maryieles cave. Rethymnon Museum no 155228. Fragmentary clay sealing (Pl. XXXVIIIg). Its dimensions are 3.54 by 6.86 cm. Thickness of section 2.25 cm. Reddish brown clay containing a very fine grit (MUNSEL HUE 10R 4/8 red). Recto: Slightly curving in the part not covered by the seal imprint which is large and round. Mended from two fragments. About two thirds of it is missing. However, there is the beginning of a second imprint. There is a motif of running spirals with bud-like triangles. Another curvilinear motif, only partly preserved, filled the centre of the motif. Verso: Most of it is chipped off, but there is a flat original surface still preserved. It is difficult to distinguish the object it originally sealed. The sealing may have been part of a jar stopper. The spirals and bud-like triangles are within the spirit of the Kamares decoration. Date MM I-II.

Comparable motifs have been found at Koumasa, Lebena in seals and at Monastiraki in sealings. Although the recto is not very well preserved its considerable thickness suggests that it probably was a stopper perhaps from a jug. This suggests that a sealed container was sent as an offering to the cave, probably from Monastiraki. This sealing was not unique at the cave. Marinatos's reports mention sealings in plural.

As we have seen, at Monastiraki the character of the cult has an official aspect. This is also evidenced in the find spot of the figurine group. This official aspect is repeated at Elenes not only by the prestige objects offered there, but also as suggested by the sealing which accompanied a vase, probably a jug. This implies that the functions of state and religion were related.

The sealing shows organized offerings or, in any case, offerings under control. It is not the only time that such administrative control is evidenced from a cult site. A tablet in a Hieroglyphic script was discovered by the author among the pottery of the sanctuary of Kato Symi and was subsequently published by Olivier, Lebessi and Muhly.²⁶ This tablet also suggests not only control but also organized bureaucracy and perhaps priesthood. At Elenes the control must have taken place not at the cave because of its difficult terrain, but at Monastiraki.²⁷

In view of the groups of figures from Monastiraki and Elenes it is fair to conclude that the Minoan goddess as a divine nurse of her consort, and the young consort himself, who also takes an important part in the ritual and iconography, were both adored at the palatial centre and at the Elenes cave, which was within the Monastiraki sphere of influence.

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26 A. LEBESSI, P. MUHLY and J.-P. OLIVIER, "An Inscription in the Hieroglyphic Script from the Syme Sanctuary, Crete," *Kadmos* 34 (1995) 70, n. 21.

27 Clay sealings have been found at the cave of Za on Naxos (K. ZACHOS, "Έρευνες στο σπήλαιο Ζα της Νάξου" in *Η συμβολή του Υπουργείου Αιγαίου στην έρευνα και ανάδειξη του πολιτισμού του αρχιπελάγους* (2001) 86-87, fig. 4. Their presence there and contacts with Crete need careful evaluation.

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