

Chapter 11

Dynamic Spirituality on Minoan Peak Sanctuaries

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Abstract Previous work by the authors has argued for a shamanic element to Cretan Bronze Age religion. Late Minoan gold rings with engraved ritual scenes show clear affinities with imagery expressive of ecstatic religious experience in other ancient and traditional societies. We interpret the clay figurines from Minoan peak sanctuaries as similarly expressive of the participants' spiritual experience, whereby the body was a medium to access altered states. The authors' excavation of the western Cretan peak sanctuary of Atsipadhes Korakies is presented as a case study. Our work has been firmly located within current archaeological interest in the body, and in experiential and experimental methodologies. We also argue for the importance of a fully sensory archaeology, which engages with the dynamics of ritual and spirituality on these mountain shrines. In this chapter we explicitly address the issues raised by our own encounters and experimentation with shamanic practices in a Cretan context, particularly the apparent tension between objective and subjective analysis, and how that may be resolved.

Introduction

Religion or spirituality? The explicit purpose behind this volume is to draw the methodological debate about the archaeology of religion away from conventionalised definitions of religion towards a greater appreciation of the subtle and extraordinary variety of human spirituality, as it can be perceived through the archaeological record.

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The reason is that definitions of religion, as borrowed from other disciplines, such as anthropology and philosophy, tend to privilege the intellectualized processes of belief. Spiro's famous definition (1966), adopted by Renfrew (1985:12), that religion is "culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings", is the most famous of these. Although such a definition seems to be self-evidently correct, especially to scholars of Judaeo-Christian traditions, several problematic issues arise.

First, as already observed, this definition privileges the process of belief, which is essentially a mental, intellectual process. This further involves description and articulation, which in turn can become fixed as dogma. The actions of religion, ritual action, are therefore seen as subordinate to belief. This is an implicit acceptance of Cartesian ideas, which make the body subordinate to the mind.

The second problematic issue is the assumption that religion is about superhuman beings, deities in the broadest sense. By this limited perspective, Buddhism is not a religion, because it explicitly rejects belief in a supreme deity, in favour of direct spiritual engagement with the nature of being. By extension, this means that religions such as Buddhism would not be amenable to archaeological discourse, which is clearly not the case. Significantly too, even religion defined as belief in deities is not taken as self-evident in anthropology. Tambiah, for example, attributes the origin of these definitions to the nineteenth century social Darwinian scholar, Edmund Tylor (Tambiah 1985:129); he neatly critiques the resurgence of theistic assumptions about religion as "neo-Tylorian". Tambiah is from Sri Lanka, a Buddhist culture, and therefore brings a non-western perspective to the study of religion. He argues that religion is more about performative processes, not belief processes (Tambiah 1985). From a similar anthropological perspective, Keane observes that "religions may not always demand beliefs, but they always involve material forms" (2008:S124).

The third problematic issue is that the word "religion" is itself not neutral. "Religion" as a term, even if this is not explicitly articulated, elicits assumptions about organization and hierarchy. Beliefs and practices are assumed to be codified and organized, and controlled by ritual specialists. While such assumptions may be appropriate to the structures of complex societies or emergent states, it does not allow for the more fluid ways less complex societies use to express their spiritual impulses.

Therefore, in this volume, we argue that spirituality is a more appropriate concept and word for archaeology than is the concept of "religion". Spirituality allows for a more open perspective on the archaeological identification and understanding of the immense and subtle variety of ways in which human individuals and cultures have marked and celebrated their engagement with the indefinable world of the spirit.

Spirituality and Minoan Peak Sanctuaries

It is one thing to advocate an archaeology of spirituality; it is quite another to define the parameters of its methodologies. In the context of Minoan religion, we have argued elsewhere that it is more important what people *do* in their rituals, than what

they may believe or say about them (Peatfield 2001). In that sense we focus on the performative aspects of spirituality. For the archaeologist, this neatly accords with the emphasis on the recovery and study of the material culture, the physical remains, the artifacts of spiritual performance—of ritual. We strongly agree with Renfrew (1985) that the archaeological recognition of ritual must lie in the identification of patterns of context and assemblage. Assemblage too is not just a matter of the simplistic identification of ritual “tool-kits”, but of placing assemblages with the broader context of sacred place and ritual landscape.

Performative aspects of spirituality intersect with spiritual experience. Contemporary neurophysical studies of spirituality explore the strong interweaving between mental and physical states—essentially the processes of spiritual feeling (D’Aquili and Newberg 1999; Newberg et al. 2002; Newberg 2010). Feeling/experience and performance interact in a circular fashion: feeling inspires performance (from a desire to perpetuate the experience), and performance elicits and enhances experience.

Performance and experience lie at the heart of our case study, the peak sanctuaries of Minoan Bronze Age Crete. These mountain shrines are of paramount importance for the understanding of Minoan religion in the broadest sense, because they express issues of spirituality that bind together all the layers of Minoan society, from the popular/vernacular to the elite. After briefly summarizing the background to Minoan peak sanctuary studies, we discuss the material from our own excavation of the Atsipadhes Korakias peak sanctuary in west Crete (Peatfield 1992). It was during this study that we realized the performative and experiential qualities of peak sanctuary ritual, and the implications of that for Minoan religion.

Minoan Peak Sanctuaries: A Summary

Peak sanctuaries are the fundamental element of the religious landscape of the Minoan Crete. The prototype site was excavated by Myres in 1903 on the summit of Petsophas, rising above the coast of east Crete (Myres 1902–1903). Evans first used the term “peak sanctuary” for his investigation of mount Jouktas, south of Knossos (Evans 1921:151–159). Apart from the common location on a mountain peak, the characteristic finds from these sites are large numbers of clay figurines of three types: animals, human figurines arranged in a variety of postures, and detached human anatomical models, referred to as “votive limbs”. Two important issues about the figurines were evident from the start. The human figurines were representations of the worshippers, not deities (Myres 1902–1903:380). Secondly, the animal figurines and votive limbs represented the interests of the worshippers, respectively, the care of their domestic animals and their own health and welfare. This demonstrates the human experience of the peak sanctuary cult.

Following Myres’ and Evans’ finds, many other sites were identified as peak sanctuaries; thus Rutkowski produced a catalogue of more than 50 claimed peak sanctuaries (Rutkowski 1972, 1986). Following Rutkowski’s example, Peatfield

further refined the typological characteristics of peak sanctuaries so that, by the late 1980s, only 25 or so sites are recognized as having similar features of both topography and finds (Peatfield 1983, 1990). Other peak sanctuaries have since been identified, but the number still remains below 30 (Nowicki 1994, 2007). The shared characteristics of these peak sanctuaries suggest a commonality of practice over Minoan Crete (Peatfield, Morris and Karetsou [forthcoming](#)).

The new generation of topographic studies using GIS methods has supported the topographic field observations of Peatfield and of Rutkowski and Nowicki (Nowicki 1991, 1994, 2007; GIS: Soetens 2006, 2009; Megarry 2012).

Peak sanctuaries also have a shared chronology. They appeared during the period of the emergence of the Minoan palaces, in the transition of the Early to Middle Bronze Ages (c. 2200 to 1900 BC). Interpretations link the peak sanctuaries to the social and political processes involved in the development of the Minoan palace state. In the succeeding Protopalatial period, all the peak sanctuaries were in use. Given that they vary in size and wealth of finds, corresponding to the nearby settlements, the peak sanctuaries are a manifestation of popular cult.

This changes in the Neopalatial period, which is the cultural highpoint of Minoan civilization, the era of the famous frescoes, and other figured artifacts. Knossos was dominant culturally, and perhaps also economically and politically. The peak sanctuaries of this period are fewer, maybe only eight, but they are the peak sanctuaries associated with Knossos and other elite settlements and regional power centres. This suggests not a diminution in the importance of the peak sanctuary cult, but rather a process of elite appropriation, an ideological component of economic and political control. Significantly, images of mountains are incorporated into the elite symbolic iconography of power, especially at Knossos (Peatfield 1987, 1990; Karetsou [forthcoming](#)).

Atsipadhes Korakias

Our excavation of Atsipadhes Korakias in 1989 was an opportunity to test both the topographic observations and the interpretations of the socio-historical development of peak sanctuaries, including insights into the nature of the cult and its practices (Peatfield 1992).

Of the 25-plus peak sanctuaries known until then, 18 had been variously excavated: mostly short investigations, or collections of material, with very limited information about the contexts and distribution of the artifacts. Since Petsophas in 1903, only Jouktas had been excavated on a large scale (Karetsou 1980; [forthcoming](#)). Therefore, part of the rationale of the Atsipadhes project was to attempt something new: the exhaustive recovery of all the finds, recorded in situ to reveal their precise distribution pattern. The purpose was to explore whether the distribution of the finds could reveal anything of the ritual use of the site.

This methodology was successful. Set on a northern spur of Mt Kouroupas, overlooking the Ayios Vasilios valley, the natural formation of the Atsipadhes Korakias



Fig. 11.1 Atsipadhes peak sanctuary: view of the upper and lower terraces during the excavation

peak has two main terraces, the West Upper Terrace and the East Lower Terrace (Fig. 11.1). The material, comprising pottery and the familiar clay figurines, was concentrated in the centre of the peak, either side of the drop between the two terraces. The character of the material on the east edge of the Upper Terrace was different from that of the Lower Terrace. The Upper Terrace artifacts were mixed in with a dense scatter of water-worn pebbles, which were absent from the Lower Terrace. Most important was the identification of a small area empty of finds, around which the pebbles, potsherds, and figurines clustered densely (Fig. 11.2). It appears as though something stood in this Feature, as a focus for the ritual depositional activity. Immediately around the Feature, the pottery fragments included cups, bridge-spouted jars, and specialized libation vessels, called *rhyta*. The small finds included clay offering tables and fragments of animal *rhyta*, forms *not* found elsewhere on the site. Further away from the Feature, the pottery shapes change to include a number of open bowls. These resemble the bowl containing food offerings depicted on a stone vase fragment from Knossos portraying an offering ritual at a peak sanctuary (Warren 1969:85). The Upper Terrace was evidently the liturgical part of the site, the focus for a variety of rituals clustered around the Feature.

On the Lower Terrace, the area of the rock clefts immediately below the Upper Terrace contained more than 50% of our 5,000-plus figurine fragments. The density diminished further to the east and north of the Terrace. This concentration of material indicates how the ritual activity was focused within the spatial organisation of the site. Our methodology was also designed to try and elucidate deeper layers of the rituals on the site by analysing in detail the distribution patterns among the figurines. Technology has now caught up with our analytical vision, and by



Fig. 11.2 Atsipadhes peak sanctuary: area of the feature and pebbles on the upper terrace

developing an intrasite GIS, which draws on the information in a digital database (Filemaker Pro), we are able to generate distribution maps of the figurines.¹ The GIS enables us easily to query distributions, densities, and spatial relationships between figurines across the site. This work is still in progress, but one distribution pattern that immediately excited our interest was the differential distribution within the site of human figurines performing different gestures. Identification of these gestures had resulted from the careful initial collection of figurine fragments from the

¹ This research received an award from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences 2008–2010. We gratefully acknowledge here the assistance of the IRCHSS. An earlier phase of the GIS work was undertaken with Eamonn Baldwin in 2002, and the current IRCHSS-funded work performed in collaboration with William Megarry.

excavation, and from intensive searching for joins during the study seasons. It was the growing realization that a wider and more complex range of gestures was represented within the Atsipadhes figurine assemblage that first prompted us to shift away from the conventional classification of these gestures as “worship gestures” and to engage with a more experiential and embodied approach to the material.

Approaching the Peak Sanctuary

The clay figurines offer clues to the performative nature of the peak sanctuary ritual. Before this, however, there is another aspect deserving of consideration. That is the material tangibility, the physicality of the figurines, and the process of bringing them to the peak sanctuary.

The presence of the figurines and other offerings on the sites is often taken for granted. The processes involved in how they got there are rarely discussed. This is not a simple process of transportation, but rather is a performative and sensory prelude to the rituals on the peak sanctuaries. The obvious analogies are the traditional rituals associated with the picturesque mountain chapels of the modern Greek landscape. Psilakis’ study of Cretan folklore includes accounts of the pilgrimage festivals to the churches located on Jouktas and Kophinas, both peak sanctuaries (Psilakis 2005:278–279, 332–336; Peatfield 2007). These pilgrimages start with preparations involving the whole community, for special food, clothing, and offerings. All this has to be brought up to the sanctuary chapel, and involves the physical effort of the steep climb. The participants, including old ladies and children, start at first light. The whole process generates intense sensory and somatic input—the climb over rocks and along stony paths; changing light and spectacular vistas as one ascends to the summit; smells of the summer herbs and incense approaching the chapel; sounds of voices, wind and the birds, distant bells of sheep and goats; the texture and feel of the offerings carried in hand. All this further generates intense emotional excitement and expectation, together with the evocation of memories of past festivals, even before the rituals on site are engaged.

The insights here are clearly applicable to the peak sanctuaries. Survey of the Ayios Vasilios valley below Atsipadhes Korakias has identified the main Minoan settlements contemporary with the peak sanctuary (Moody, Peatfield and Markoulaki 2000). The GIS mapping of routes to Atsipadhes demonstrates that approaching the peak sanctuary involves a dynamic sense of the ritual landscape with which the “worshippers” engage (Peatfield 2009; Peatfield and Megarry 2008), not merely as a prelude, but as part of the whole performative nature of the peak sanctuary ritual, where the physical and emotional experiences enhance and integrate with the spiritual.

While there is not space in the present chapter to develop fully this idea of dynamic, embodied performance within the particular landscape of Atsipadhes, some further reflections on the specifically material dimension will help to give a taste of it. If we imagine the human participants climbing to the site, they make the

Fig. 11.3 Holding a clay figurine from the peak sanctuary of Atsipadhes



Fig. 11.4 Clay figurines in situ within the rocky crevices between the upper and lower terraces at Atsipadhes

upward journey carrying a variety of objects, but make the return journey down the mountain largely empty-handed. The pots, the figurines, and the river-worn pebbles have all played their roles in the activities on the site and are left behind, permanent reminders of the experiences of the day. Pebbles, gathered from a nearby river, are carried—perhaps turned in the hand, hard and smooth—and have been placed or dropped on the central area of the Upper Terrace, and, to judge from the associated concentration of vessels for liquids and pouring, may have glistened as if in a watery setting. The figurines can typically be grasped comfortably in the hand (Fig. 11.3) and at Atsipadhes the majority are placed into the rocky crevices which define the drop between the two terraces (Fig. 11.4). Though very fragmentary, pieces from larger figures and from models (both types which are better attested at other peak sanctuaries) also testify to the transport of larger and heavier, perhaps more fragile, items.

Shamanic Models of Religion

This dynamic sense of human spiritual experience has informed the more embodied model of the religion of Bronze Age Crete for which we have argued elsewhere, and explore further in this chapter. This model accounts for a strong ecstatic dimension, wherein trances and visionary states were cultivated as part of Minoan spirituality, and were recorded in the religious art and material record. We have applied the term “shamanic” to that model (Morris 2002, 2004; Morris and Peatfield 2002, 2004).

It has long been recognized that Minoan religion included a strong ecstatic dimension, which is represented in elite art. Discussions of Minoan ritual talk of “ecstatic trance”, “orgiastic frenzy”, and “possession”, yet they show little interest in engaging with the question of the mechanics of ecstasy, the “how” of the cultivation of trances and altered states within Minoan spirituality. There is a vocabulary of ecstasy, yet there has been little exploration of the bodily mechanics or purposes of such deeply physical methods of engaging with the non-mundane Otherworld. Human societies have developed a range of ways for cultivating or entering into these altered states: ingesting psychoactive substances, fasting, sensory deprivation, use of rhythmic sound or movement.

In the context of this book’s purposes to explore and experiment with aspects of spirituality, we consciously push beyond the edges of conventional modes of study for insights into Minoan shamanistic practices. The term “shamanic” is controversial; there is profound disagreement among anthropologists and archaeologists regarding the meaning and usage of “shaman”. At one extreme are those who argue that “shaman” should be used only of the “classic” shamanic complex of the Siberian–Arctic region (the source of the word, *saman*) (Kehoe 2000). On the other side are those who use the term to describe all ritual trance and ecstatic states in any culture and period, including usage within contemporary, New Age spiritualities. Taussig argues that the term “shamanic” has now become a western category, “an artful reification of disparate practices” (cited by Atkinson 1992:307). Similarly,

VanPool acknowledges the “analytic utility of shamanism” as a polythetic class (VanPool 2009:179). We use “shamanic” here to refer to the active use of the body to enter an altered state of consciousness (ASC). Sensation, perception, emotion, and cognition are modified, in order to access the non-mundane or spirit world. Rather than be drawn into arguments about definitions—e.g. the differences between “trance” and “possession”—we take ASC to be descriptive of a wide spectrum of related trance and meditational behaviours. Scientists working in neurotheology are now able to observe these behaviours as a distinctive spectrum of activity within the brain, which facilitates feelings of “bliss”, “ecstasy”, “oneness with the divine”, depending on the individual’s religious or spiritual orientation. As these researchers have argued, human beings seem to be hard-wired for spiritual experiences (D’Aquili and Newberg 1999; Newberg et al. 2002; Newberg 2010).

Intriguingly, there has been some negative reaction to the term “shamanic” with reference to the Minoans. While “ecstatic trance” or “visionary experience” are widely used terms, calling the Minoans “shamanic” has been met with some discord. This is despite the fact that, already in the early days of Minoan scholarship, Evans drew comparisons between Minoan religion and other embodied practices, ranging from prophecy and whirling dervishes. In particular, he describes the trance state of a Saami (Lapp) “shamanistic soothsayer” to support his point (Evans 1930:315; Morris and Peatfield 2004:38 with Fig. 1). While there may be many factors in this discord (including an unacknowledged, scholarly discomfort with “New Age” connotations), the Minoans have tended to be treated differently from other early complex societies, because of the perception that they represent the “origins” of Europe. At the particular time that Cretan Bronze Age remains were being uncovered (from the early twentieth century), there was already a scholarly discourse, framed around the idea of the “mirage orientale”, about the degree of Eastern influence on ancient European cultures. In addition, the emergence of modern nation states, the status of Crete itself as only recently liberated from Ottoman rule (1898), and wider debate on the nature of European identity all coalesced to privilege a “European” reading of these Cretan remains (Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006; Morris 2010). In a world constructed as representing the origins of Europe, shamanic practices—associated with traditional and non-western societies—had no place. Yet, as Kingsley has eloquently argued, shamanic elements *are* present in later Greek philosophical traditions and ritual practice, but they have been overlooked and undervalued (Kingsley 1999, 2004, 2010). To ignore this possibility is to set the Minoans (and the later Greeks) apart from other cultures, and to lose the opportunity to explore an important aspect of their ritual action and experiences.

We have followed, therefore, the broader scholarly usage of “shamanic” as an expression of the cross-cultural phenomenon of ASC. Our concern here is to offer our own experience of developing the Minoan shamanic model, through our personal engagement with contemporary shamanic practices. We are conscious of the issues raised by applying our own experiences to the study of the past, risking the dangers or accusations of subjectivity. The tension between objectivity and subjectivity does, however, lie at the heart of the debate within archaeology about experiential modes of analysis. This interests us, because how else can we try to develop

new perspectives, to gain insights for discussion about bodily practices, if we are not aware of the experiential dimensions? Absence of this dimension results in only partial engagement with the embodied aspects of Minoan ritual. It intellectualizes ritual action, and falsely prioritizes and isolates (as much work on “the body” has indeed done) the visual from the other senses.

Experimenting

Our archaeological narrative, the excavation reportage and interpretation, now moves into the more experimental, as we return to the aforementioned issue of the human figurine gestures. Human figurines from all peak sanctuaries portray a variety of gestures. The Petsophas figurines are still the most familiar examples, especially the oft-illustrated male figurine, with hands held to the chest (Fig. 11.5). Now iconic, this hands-to-chest gesture is assumed to be the archetypal peak sanctuary ritual gesture.

Nevertheless, it has long been known that there were other gestures among the peak sanctuary figurines. Despite this, all the gestures were lumped together under the monolithic term—“worship gestures” (sometimes “prayer gestures”). Such terms, however, collapse the distinction between description and interpretation. It also presupposes a model of religion familiar from Christian practice, and from other early cultures. Mesopotamian figurines and statues, for example, all stand or sit with arms folded to chest and some are inscribed: “it offers prayers” (Bertman 2003:217, with Fig. 7.1). They are thus perpetual worshippers.

The semantics of this “worship” terminology are interesting, because contained within is an assumption about the nature of the peak sanctuary cult. It assumes that the Minoan peak sanctuary cult and its ritual activity were focused on the adoration and supplication of a deity. This is, of course, a theistic model of religion, that is one which defines religion as ritual interaction with superhuman beings. Theistic models of religion dominate archaeological discourse primarily through Renfrew’s re-iterated espousal of theistic definitions of religion taken from anthropology, as observed above, and the continuing dismissal or undervaluing of performative or symbolic definitions of religion.

Theistic models of religion privilege intellectual processes of belief and explanation. Not all cultures accord with modern western obsessions with neat, consistent, scientific structures of explanation. Indeed cultural informants may be observed to be creating explanations within the process of interview—meaning, not fixed, but as a continual process of becoming (Toren 1993). This is not to say that beliefs are not present within ancient or non-western religions, it is just that the *doing* of religion may be a lot more important than the *believing* of religion (Peatfield 2001). That may be culturally validated through a continuity of action, a tradition. Moreover, the impetus behind the action may be not the expression of thought, neat and rational, but rather is the expression of emotion, the non-rational that is difficult to pin down. If we persist in defining religion only through the limitations of theistic definitions,

Fig. 11.5 Male figurine with the well-known hands-to-chest gesture from the peak sanctuary of Petsofas in eastern Crete



and further limit ourselves by asking analytical questions that only elicit the evidence which proves these definitions, we shall continue to miss, overlook, undervalue, denigrate, the immense varieties of human spiritual experience. Admittedly, many expressions of spirituality (e.g., meditation) may not leave for us the essential meat of our discipline, the material, cultural artifacts we rely on for evidence. But if we continue to limit ourselves, we shall never push the boundaries of the methodologies we apply to the interpretation of the cultures we study.

It is for this reason that we have preferred to use the term archaeology of spiritualities, rather than archaeology of religion, for this volume. Spirituality accounts for the non-rational elements of the human cognitive processes involved in religion, the emotional, the intuitive, the psychic, the visionary. It also allows for how those processes are given expression through the body, ritual action, and furthermore, how the embodied feeling of the action itself may reflect back into the spiritual process.

Returning to the issue of the collective terming of the figurines' gestures as "worship gestures": this arose from Myres' recognition that the figurines represented the worshippers themselves, and were not the images of any deity. This pattern of human representation is consistent at all peak sanctuaries, indeed there is

no artifact from any peak sanctuary (apart perhaps on Jouktas) that can be convincingly identified as a deity image. Therefore, the material evidence clearly privileges the human spiritual cares and experience of the peak sanctuary cult, not religious beliefs. The question is *not* therefore, “what were their beliefs?”, but rather, “what does the material expression, the figurines, reveal of the process of their spiritual experience?”

It was quickly apparent in our study of the figurines that there were many more varieties of ritual gestures. Nevertheless, we classified them into two main groups: gestures with hands touching the body (closed gestures) and gestures with hands held away from the torso (open gestures). Within those parameters there is variety. Closed gestures include hands held symmetrical to the chest or belly, or non-symmetrical with one hand higher than the other, across the body, etc. Open gestures may also be symmetrical, with hands held forward, or up, or out to the side, at various heights; non-symmetrical with hands at various heights. There is more variation in the open gestures, than in the closed. But these open gestures are less obvious, because they break more easily than do the closed gestures, which have two points of contact between the arm and the torso. Given this embodied quality, more properly these are bodily postures, rather than hand gestures.

This wider range of gestures led us to question assumptions about what they were and meant, and we began to question the received wisdom that they were simply prayer or worship gestures. We looked for other models or explanations, which might make better sense of the strong physicality of the gestures/postures.

That the difference between the open and closed postures is ritually meaningful was revealed by the GIS-generated distribution plan mentioned earlier in the chapter. The closed postures cluster close to the liturgical area and immediately below it. The open postures, by contrast, form a periphery (Fig. 11.6). This distribution is not gender-related, nor is it chronological. Could this distribution of artifacts translate to the ritual dynamics on the site, and what do the postures mean?

The other figurines, animals, and votive limbs already demonstrate the concerns of a human community of farmers and pastoralists. The votive limbs, by comparison with other cultures that use anatomical models, including later Greek manifestations (Greco-Roman Asklepios temples and modern Greek Orthodox *tamata*), are prayers or thanks for healing. The link between the votive limbs and the more fully modelled human figurines is, importantly, provided by a figurine from the Traostalos peak sanctuary, which portrays a woman with a leg grotesquely swollen from elephantiasis (Morris and Peatfield 2012).

That the human figurines may also have some link to the ritual aspects of healing is attractive. Elsewhere, we have drawn analogies with other cultural forms of esoteric healing using body posture, notably the chi-kung methods of China, and the yogic methods of India (Morris and Peatfield 2002, 2004). Precisely how the Minoans might have developed similar methods of healing is impossible to ascertain, but the Minoans had a reputation among Egyptians as esoteric healing specialists, and Greek sources also hint at such skills among later Cretans.

The widespread diffusion of esoteric healing methods at the interface of bodily experience and spirituality was brought home to us through our encounter with

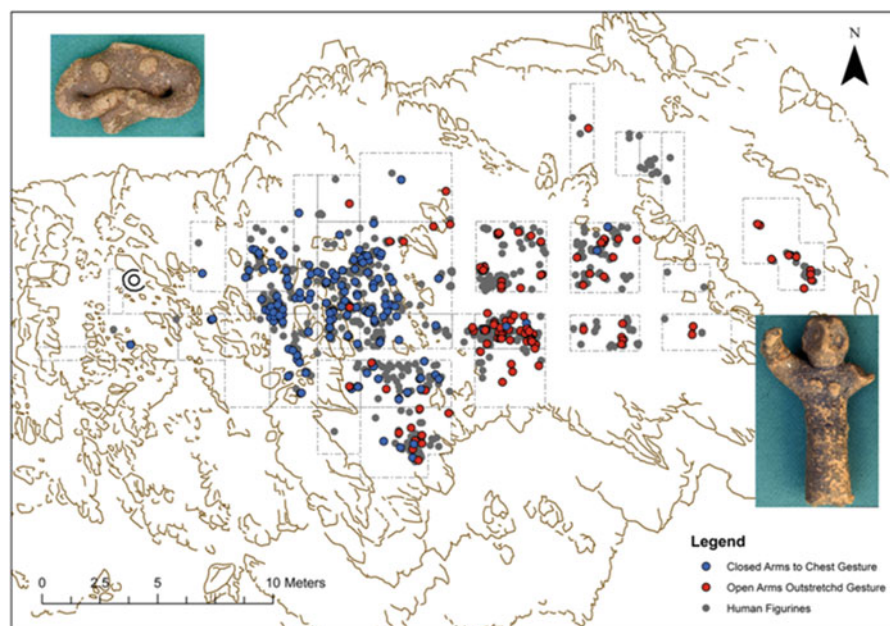


Fig. 11.6 Human figurines at Atsipadhes, showing the distribution of the open and closed gestures

Felicitas Goodman’s anthropological research on ecstatic body postures (Goodman 1986, 1988). “Encounter” is the appropriate word, because it was at this point that our research moved decisively into the experimental. Her exploration of a possible relationship between ecstatic states and bodily postures was initially triggered by her learning that Eastern meditation practices correlated belief with specific postures of the body. This led her to collect multi-cultural evidence of different body postures, evidence that was as much archaeological as anthropological, and included figurines from different cultures. Particularly among American cultures, these figurines were recognized as portrayals of ritual specialists, who engaged the supernatural through ecstatic experience—in other words, shamans. Conducting experiments with her students and colleagues, she concluded that specific postures were conduits to altered states and to specific facets of healing (Goodman 1986, 1988).

For us, Goodman’s work engaged an intriguing possibility: could the peak sanctuary postures be ecstatic body postures, and was it possible that the Minoans were engaged in shamanic-type rituals? But before we could answer that more overt objective academic question of: “was it so?”, we had to ask and answer the more subtle and fluid question of: “was it possible?”, and, like all arts of the possible, that required subjective investigation, even experimentation. Through a series of coincidences, we encountered in 1998 an anthropologist who had collaborated with Goodman and gone on to conduct her own research on the poses of prehistoric Crete. This clinical anthropologist, Robinette Kennedy, had done her more

conventional doctoral thesis in a Cretan village, and later in life, returned to Crete to study whether or not certain figurines and images of Minoan religion embody poses that generate shamanic states of consciousness. Experimenting with the Minoan postures to access altered states, Kennedy's data, based on the reported experiences of hundreds of participants, clearly shows that each posture has distinct and consistent visionary qualities.

Meeting with her over a number of years, we engaged a dialogue on her discoveries about the postures and their relevance to the peak sanctuary postures. A significant part of this dialogue was our willingness to engage with the experimental process. Thus, under Kennedy's guidance, we also used the postures combined with certain elements common to shamanic rituals throughout history (including respectful intent and specific percussion using rattling) to enter an ASC. A high point in this process was when we did the two main peak sanctuary postures on Atsipadhes Korakias itself. We crossed the boundary between objective and subjective research.

It is not the purpose here to describe the details of our own experiences, which were multisensory, involving, for example, visions and sensations of bodily transformation. Kennedy herself is working on a book about the Minoan ecstatic postures. Rather we address some of the insights and implications of this experiential method of research from an archaeological viewpoint. We are *not* suggesting that "doing" or "performing" the gestures in any way gives us access to Minoan experiences, but it does make us think very actively about how bodily action shapes and creates experience—it is the interface between the more universal physical responses of the body to particular stimuli and the more specific cultural expectations and knowledge which shapes the experience.

Insights

We therefore suggest several things: first, the question of whether it was possible that the peak sanctuary postures could be shamanic postures is answered with an emphatic "yes". The possible becomes the probable. The fundamental point is that posture was a constituent in accessing altered states. Elsewhere we have argued that such states are also portrayed on Minoan gold rings (Morris 2001, 2004; Morris and Peatfield 2004). This builds on a long tradition of scholarship recognizing that the rings portray divine epiphany, but we do not treat the imagery as merely a symbolic device. Rather the rings try to "make visible" what is visible only to the person experiencing the altered state. It is an artistic attempt to represent a highly valued experience—an artist needs to create a language or iconography of something that is sensed or experienced outside the normal everyday world. Indeed placing some of the Minoan ring imageries within the broader context of "shamanic" imagery renders many of the more enigmatic details, such as the strangely shaped human heads and the floating elements, more comprehensible, not less.

Our experience of the postures further reveals that the different postures could indeed be used to induce or make available different kinds of access to the non-mundane, supernatural world. This actually reinforces traditional interpretations of the peak sanctuaries. Over the world, consistently in other shamanic cultural paradigms, the hands-to-torso, closed posture, is associated with healing. This dovetails nicely with the votive limbs as evidence for a healing dimension to the peak sanctuaries. Alongside healing, shamanic rituals typically engage a second great spiritual process, divination. The open posture with which we experimented revealed a strong sense of transformative motion, spiritual journeying, which often coincides with divinatory experiences.

A further question arises: were these altered states accessible to a restricted group or more generally to the Minoan population? At least in relation to the ubiquity of the human figurines of the Protopalatial period, the weight of the evidence suggests that participation in these embodied rituals was part of popular, vernacular religion. The centralization of the peak sanctuary cult in the later Neopalatial period may have been prompted by the elite desire to monopolize these rituals, their experiences, and thus make them symbols of status and powers.

Central to this chapter is the notion of the body as a medium of analysis, which raises the issue of subjectivity in relation to the use of experiential methodology. Experimentation is not new in archaeology, but we argue that experimentation goes beyond flint-knapping and pretending to live like an Iron Age farmer. The experience of the body gives substantiality to insights even of human spirituality and religion, subjects whose interpretation is normally restricted to the constructs of the intellectual domain. One of the most interesting processes to emerge recently in the study of the anthropology of religion is the idea of “sensuous anthropology” (Stoller 1989; Howes 1991, 2005; Seremetakis 1994). What we argue here is that within the archaeology of religion and spirituality, and especially as it involves landscape and place, there is room for, even need for, a “sensuous archaeology”; one which is open to experimentation and to a fully sensory approach to ritual actions and experiences.

Conclusions

Shamanic models of religion are essentially more about spiritual experiences rather than defined religious beliefs. Religious beliefs are circumscribed by cultural particularities, whereas shamanic experiences transcend cultural specifics. Through the example of the peak sanctuaries it is possible to discern that Minoan spirituality was a far more complex process than religious belief in one or more deities, moderated by hierarchies of elite “threskiocrats”. It involved a profound dynamic and transformative spiritual engagement between the populace and their ritual landscape.

Within this model, how then do we understand the role of the artifacts which inspired this insight—the clay figurines? At the simplest, the figurines may be no more than the passive memorialization of the shamanic rituals. But this undervalues

the fact that at all stages of the peak sanctuary ritual the figurines were involved. They were made as part of the preparations. They expressed the expectation of the ritual and its results. As they were carried to the sanctuary, their tactile qualities were a sensorial stimulus, a reminder of the rituals to come. On site, they imaged the dynamic actions of their owners. Once offered, they were broken, and left on the sanctuary. These layers of involvement with the ritual process suggest that for the Minoan these humble clay objects became imbued with an expressive power through which the ordinary Minoan people manifested their spiritual concerns and aspirations.

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