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Author(s): Anne P. Chapin

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A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE FLORAL FRESCO FROM THE UNEXPLORED MANSION AT KNOSSOS¹

(COLOUR PLATE A; PLATES 1–6)

FIFTY-SEVEN fragments of an unusual LM I A floral fresco were excavated in 1972 from room P of the now inappropriately named Unexplored Mansion at Knossos.² Catalogued, reconstructed and published by M. A. S. Cameron in 1984,³ the fragments are part of a frescoed landscape depicting varieties of flowering plants that are thus far unique in Minoan fresco painting and are identified as ‘anemone’-reed hybrids, ‘osier’-lily hybrids, ‘grasses’, and ‘frilled flowers’ of uncertain species (FIG. 1). In addition to their rarity in Minoan art, these plants are painted with unusual variations in technique ranging from strongly painted, opaque brushstrokes to light, almost ‘impressionistic’ touches of the brush that create quivering petals for the ‘frilled flowers’ and crisscross rapidly to suggest a tangle of ‘grasses’.⁴ Even an added sense of depth is intimated by the overlapping of two nodding ‘anemone’ flower heads (no. 6).⁵ Though now crumbling, worn and fragmentary, it is clear that the fresco was produced by an Aegean artist of talent, creativity, and originality.

The importance of the Floral fresco to the study of Aegean wall painting, however, remains largely unrecognized, perhaps because Cameron limited his discussion principally to the description, identification, and re-creation of the floral elements. The placement of the landscape in the larger context of Aegean mural painting is not examined in detail, and its potential significance in the debate over the religious character of Aegean landscape painting remains unexplored. These oversights are compounded by a number of flaws and omissions in Cameron’s reconstruction. Eight catalogued fragments representing ‘frilled flowers’, vegetative motifs, and speckled rockwork, for instance, are not incorporated into Cameron’s drawing (nos. 12 *b*, 20 *b*, 20 *c*, 21, 23, 24 *b*, 38, 39), and a ninth fragment depicting an ‘osier’ is placed oddly out of context on the far right end of the reconstruction (no. 33). Additionally, Cameron makes little attempt to give a full sense of the landscape setting. Background features are

¹ This study began as part of the research for my dissertation, ‘Landscape and Space in Aegean Bronze Age Art’ (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms), and was made possible by a Travel Fellowship in the History of Art from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and two travel grants from the Department of Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Funding for the colour plate was provided by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. Permission to study the Floral fresco was generously granted by the Managing Committee of the British School at Athens. I am grateful to Dr Colin Macdonald for providing access to the fresco fragments stored in the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos, to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens for facilitating my research, and to the Greek Archaeological Service for granting permission to study comparative fragments in the Heraklion Museum. Finally, I should also like to thank the anonymous reader for constructive criticism. This new reconstruction of the Floral

fresco from the Unexplored Mansion is dedicated to the memory of Mark Cameron.

Abbreviations:

Cameron 1975 = M.A.S. Cameron, ‘A General Study of Minoan Frescoes with Particular Reference to Unpublished Wall Paintings from Knossos’, 3 vols. (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975).

Cameron 1984 = M.A.S. Cameron, ‘The Frescoes,’ in M.R. Popham *et al*, *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos* (Oxford, 1984), 127–50.

Thera I–VII = S. Marinatos, *Excavations at Thera*, 7 vols., (Athens, 1968–74).

² *AR* 19 (1972–73), 50–61; M. R. Popham *et al*, *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos* (Oxford, 1984).

³ Cameron 1984. Catalogue numbers refer to those assigned there.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130, 147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

indicated only by amorphous, undulating coloured grounds rising to patches of speckled rockwork arranged along the composition's upper border. The ambiguous reconstruction of the surrounding landscape features, however, seems at odds with three carefully and elaborately painted fragments of multicoloured rockwork, two of which are omitted by Cameron from his reconstruction (nos. 36, 38, 39). Surely the landscape background was composed as thoughtfully and deliberately as the individual fragments of rockwork? These problems suggest that a fresh examination of the Floral fresco could yield a more complete reconstruction of the composition that, in turn, would shed new light on the Aegean tradition of wall painting.

CAMERON'S RECONSTRUCTION (FIG. 1)

Although too little of the Floral fresco is preserved to determine its exact original appearance, the fragments themselves, though small, provided enough information for Cameron to reconstruct its composition along general lines.⁶ The 'anemones' preserve bits of blue foliage on a buff ground which Cameron connects with the blue reed-like stems and leaves to produce the 'anemone'-reed hybrid. 'Osiers' and their lily-like stems and foliage additionally appear on a tan ground (nos. 27, 30, 32), one of which apparently preserves the transition to buff ground (no. 31). Three additional 'osier' fragments preserve a change from tan to grey grounds (nos. 28, 29, 33). With this information, Cameron reconstructed a sequence of floral elements in a frieze-like order with the background changing, from left to right, from buff to grey to tan to buff. Two fragments of 'osier' palmate flowers include coloured rockwork, which must therefore run along the upper border (nos. 36, 37), though a third fragment preserving only buff ground and a white border stripe demonstrates that at least a portion of the upper border has no rockwork (no. 4). The 'grasses', however, are more problematic, since they preserve no connections with the other fragments and are painted in red on buff and light red. These fragments Cameron places in the lower sections of the reconstruction where grassy undergrowth might reasonably be expected. Finally, fragments from the upper border suggest ten stripes in blue, white, and lighter and darker shades of red. As restored by Cameron, the estimated height of the composition is about 1.0 m, and its estimated length 1.3 m.

RE-EXAMINATION OF THE FRESCO FRAGMENTS

Though Cameron reconstructed the Floral fresco along general lines, renewed examination of the fragments yields additional clues, summarized below, which point toward a significant reordering of the pictorial elements.⁷ Colour measurements made by comparing the colours preserved on the fresco fragments with the standard colour samples presented in the *Pantone Color and Black Selector 747XR* helped in the examination.⁸

⁶ Ibid., 132.

⁷ The following comments on the fragments are based on Cameron's fresco catalogue and on first-hand observation of the fragments in the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos made in 1993.

⁸ The *Pantone Color and Black Selector 747XR* (Moonachie, NJ, 1988) was chosen over the *Munsell Book of Color* (Baltimore, 1976) because it offers more colours and shades for matching (over 7,000 Pantone colours compared to approximately

1,500 Munsell colours), and because the Pantone colours can be precisely understood and reproduced by printing companies—a feature which is helpful in publication, even though it is not relevant to this reconstruction. The colours on the fresco fragments were visually measured by matching them with samples from the *Pantone Color and Black Selector 747XR* when viewed under natural lighting conditions in which sunlight filtered through the high windows of the Stratigraphical Museum.

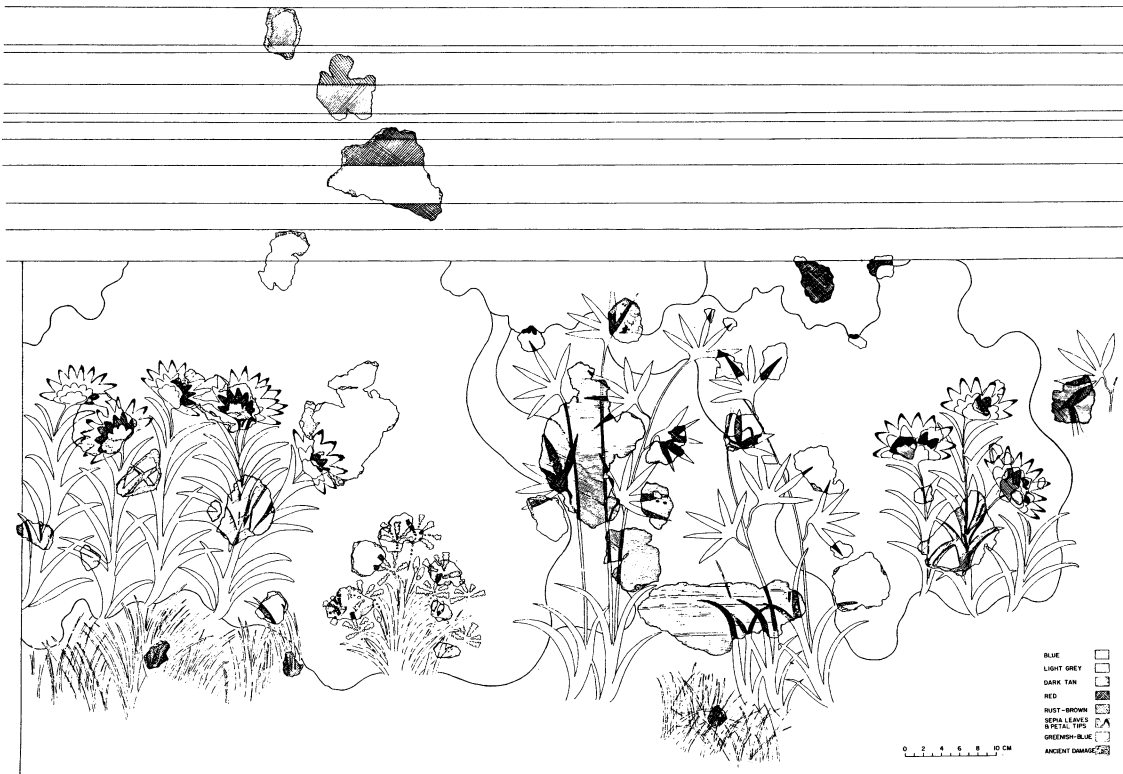


FIG. 1. Cameron's reconstruction of the Floral fresco from Room P of the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos (from Cameron 1984, pl. 48).

*'Anemones' and Blue Reeds (nos. 5–11, 12–16).*⁹

Since blue leaves appear in association with 'anemone' flowers, it appears that Cameron's association of the flowers with the blue reeds is correct and that what is henceforth called an 'anemone' is really an 'anemone'-reed hybrid. These hybrid plants, thus far unique in Minoan floral representations, are painted on grounds that now appear either buff or grey, a variation of colour which Cameron explains by suggesting that the buff ground had sometimes darkened to grey during the LM II fire destruction,¹⁰ a theory which leads Cameron to the conclusion that all the 'anemone' and blue reed fragments are painted on a buff ground.¹¹

⁹ No. 13 is associated with two fragments: the larger piece is here designated '13 a' while the smaller is '13 b.'

¹⁰ Cameron 1984, 133, 134.

¹¹ Ibid., 129. Cameron, however, contradicts his own explanation of colour change by suggesting that the original pre-fire colour of the fresco's ground may have been white, which subsequently burned to buff and grey (Ibid., 132).

Apart from the difficulty of painting white 'anemones' on a white ground, white paint survives on the burnt fragments depicting 'anemones' and is easily distinguished from the buff and grey grounds. Additionally, white paint appears as an upper border stripe on a fragment preserving buff ground. It therefore seems highly unlikely that the pre-fire colour of the buff and grey grounds was white.

It seems more likely, however, that although the fire must have somehow affected the painted colours, the ‘anemones’ did in fact appear on two differently coloured grounds which now appear buff and grey. Whereas buff is close to Pantone 144U (60% colour strength, 30% black), the so-called burnt buff of the ‘anemone’ fragments (nos. 6, 10, 11, and 13 *a*) did not belong to the same colour family, but instead matched Pantone 465U at 100% colour strength. Interestingly, this same Pantone 465U also matches the colour that Cameron identifies as a grey ground on fragment with an ‘osier’ (no. 28), although the percentage of black was slightly lower in the fragments with ‘anemones’, measuring at 10–20% as compared to 20–30% black in the fragment with ‘osiers’. The artist therefore seems to have employed the same basic grey background colour for both ‘osiers’ and for some of the ‘anemones’. The burning from the LM II destruction probably accounts for the variation in value from 10 to 30% black rather than for changes in actual hue.¹²

The reassignment of some ‘anemone’ fragments from buff to grey ground is supported by the observation that only ‘anemone’ petals painted on buff receive extra ‘dark buff’ flower tips (nos. 5, 7, 9), while those painted on the newly identified grey grounds (no. 6) remain unembellished. Further, these so-called ‘dark buff’ flower tips appear to be painted with the same grey, Pantone 465U, that was used as the background colour for nos. 6, 10, 11, and 13 *a*. The most obvious explanation is that the white ‘anemones’ contrasted sufficiently with the grey ground so as to be clearly visible to the viewer, whereas the artist felt that the white petals on buff ground needed to be clarified and strengthened with extra, darker colour.

In summary, ‘anemone’ fragments nos. 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 *a*, 13 *b*, 14, 15, and 16 are painted on buff backgrounds, whereas nos. 6, 10, 11, 12 *b*, and 13 *a* appear on grey backgrounds. These fragments can be reconstructed as five flower heads on buff ground and three on grey ground. The ‘anemones’ in Cameron’s reconstruction thus require rearranging in the new reconstruction in order to be consistent with ground colour, but their general impression as flowers remains unchanged. It is likely, too, that the ‘anemones’ with the grey background should be located near the ‘osiers’ painted on similar grey ground.

‘Frlled Flowers’ (nos. 17–23)

All the fragments described by Cameron as ‘frilled flowers’ are painted on a buff ground, but Cameron omits nos. 20 *b*, 20 *c*, and 21 from his reconstruction. The incorporation of these fragments into the new reconstruction necessitates the addition to the new reconstruction of a second plant based on Cameron’s original design.

Fragment no. 23 depicting a rounded, red object with a grey line, however, is more difficult to identify, since Cameron’s suggestions that it may be a fruit, a flower bud, or a pebble motif all at first seem to be plausible.¹³ There is no other evidence for fruits in the composition, however, and the object seems too large to be a ‘frilled flower’ bud, but the stripe is suggestive of the conventions used to paint ‘Easter egg’ pebbles. The tan background preserved on the fragment places it near the ‘osiers’, and the bit of blue foliage also preserved on the fragment

¹² Ascertaining the exact pre-fire colour of the grey ground, however, is difficult without scientific testing, but the blue reeds preserved on nos. 6, 11, 12 *b*, and 13 *a* demonstrate that the grey was not produced from burnt blue paint. White, red, pink, buff, brown, and tan are also clearly preserved on other fragments, along with a pale green-blue and a yellow ochre that are found on the multi-

coloured rocks. Given that the limited palette of Aegean painting is well represented in the colours preserved on the Floral fresco fragments, it seems highly likely that the grey fragments were originally painted grey and that the damage to colour by fire may not be as great as previously believed.

¹³ Cameron 1984, 135, no. 23.

indicates that another clump of plants, probably either ‘anemones’ or ‘frilled flowers’, grows nearby.

‘Other Plants on Light Buff Grounds’ (nos. 24–6).¹⁴

Of these fragments, Cameron omits 24 *b* from his reconstruction though he rightly observes that the fragment is probably connected to the ‘osier’ series, as are 24 *a* and *c*.¹⁵ The fragment is therefore added to the new reconstruction as an ‘osier’ flower.

Nos. 25 *a*, *b* and 26 are three variations of ‘grassy plants’ selected by Cameron as a representative sample from the twenty-four preserved fragments of the motif. Nos. 25 *a* and *b* suggest that the grasses grow as plants with bending leaves or stems, whereas no. 26 depicts finer blades crisscrossing irregularly so that the form of the individual plants cannot be reconstructed easily. The grasses are painted over buff and red washes, and no. 25 *a*, which has a few tiny blue spots on red, could indicate that at least some of the grasses are associated with the blue-flecked red rockwork (see below, no. 40 *b*).

Cameron’s identification of the grassy vegetation as undergrowth is supported by the scrappy evidence preserved on the fragments themselves. No. 12 *b*, not incorporated into Cameron’s reconstruction, appears to describe part of a blue reed overlapping a red leaf or stalk probably belonging to a grassy plant, thereby maintaining Cameron’s placement of red grasses around the bases of the ‘anemone’-reed hybrids. Likewise, no. 16 preserves the branching growth of a blue reed and a bit of red which Cameron suggests might belong to part of a red vertical border. The edge of the red element appears slightly rounded, however, and thus seems more likely to belong to the curving blade of a second grass plant sprouting amid the ‘anemone’-reed hybrids. If so, then the ground colours of nos. 12 *b* and 16, grey and buff respectively, suggest that grasses are spread across the lower portions of the composition, an observation which is supported by the relatively high number of uncatalogued grassy fragments that need representation in any new reconstruction.

The quantity of the surviving fragments and their scatter of grass blades suggest, too, that the grasses do not simply grow in a neat row, as do the grasses lining the seashore and the hillside stream of the ‘departure town’ in the south frieze Flotilla fresco of the West House in Akrotiri on Thera,¹⁶ but rather, that they cover a patch of ground. A somewhat distant parallel can be found in the Partridge and Hoopoe frieze from the Caravanserai at Knossos, where ‘briars’ articulated by blue lines with tiny hair-like protrusions meander across a continuous ground surface in a manner similar to the growth of grasses in the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion.¹⁷ It seems possible that an innovative artist who paints ‘anemones’ as they nod and sway in the wind¹⁸ might attempt to represent a ground surface thickly covered with grasses, thus adding an element of three-dimensionality to his rocky landscape.

‘Osier’ plants (nos. 27–35)

The plants referred to as ‘osiers’ are actually ‘osier’-lily hybrids. No. 27 reveals only empty tan ground on the left half of the fragment and thus supports Cameron’s division of the ‘osiers’ into two groups. This fragment also seems to preserve traces of a second flower stem near the

¹⁴ Following Cameron, the three separate fragments comprising no. 24 *c* are all labelled ‘24 *c*.’

¹⁵ Cameron 1984, 135.

¹⁶ C. Doulas, *The Wall Paintings of Thera* (Athens, 1992), pl. 36.

¹⁷ *PM* ii., 111; M. Shaw, ‘The Painted Pavilion of the “Caravanserai” at Knossos’, *BSA* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Cameron 1984, 129.

centre of the fragment, and perhaps a third to the right, to which 'osier' flower heads and stems are added correspondingly in the new reconstruction. To no. 31, a somewhat confusing piece, an 'osier' flower is included to crown the left stem. No. 33, which is placed on the far right side of Cameron's reconstruction and thus remains unconnected both to the majority of 'osier' fragments and to the colours of the undulating background, is moved beside no. 28 in the new reconstruction and awarded another 'osier' flower to complete its partially preserved stem.

Nos. 35 *a-c*, however, are painted in a lighter shade of red and may not belong to the 'osier' group. Cameron puts no. 35 *a* with the grasses, no. 35 *b* with the 'osier' flowers, and makes no. 35 *c* the tip of an 'osier'-lily hybrid leaf tip, but this is inconsistent with the dark brown leaf colour preserved on no. 27. It seems more likely that no. 35 *c* is also an example of a grassy leaf.

The 'osiers' are painted on three differently coloured grounds: grey, tan, and buff, with four fragments documenting the transitions.

Grey/tan: nos. 28, 29, 33.

Tan: nos. 27, 30, 32, 37.

Tan/buff: no. 31.

Buff: nos. 24 *a*, 24 *b*, 24 *c*, 34 *a*, 34 *b*.

Following Cameron, it thus appears that the background colours change, from left to right, from grey to tan to buff. But what do these colour changes signify in terms of landscape representation? Cameron compares the grey areas with similar grey background undulations bordering the waterfalls of the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos and with the 'general background coloration' from the 'Nature' fresco from Ayia Triada, though he does not identify the grey ground as rockwork.¹⁹ Cameron does not specify the nature of the tan ground, although on no. 31 the tan feature, edged in darker tan, is recognized as rockwork.²⁰ Instead, Cameron identifies the grey and tan areas simply as 'broad undulating bands' or 'background undulations'.²¹

It seems likely, however, that both the grey and tan areas do indeed represent rockwork, though it is difficult to prove this point given how little of the composition actually survives. The undulating contours separating grey from tan and tan from buff grounds recall LM I rockforms preserved in the rocky terrain associated with the stalking cat in the 'Nature' fresco from Ayia Triada.²² Neopalatial fresco painters, moreover, accepted grey as a colour appropriate for rockwork, as evidenced by the Lily fresco from the South-East House at Knossos²³ and the Myrtle fresco from the Royal Road/North, also at Knossos,²⁴ though both of these examples are veined. Minoan rockwork, however, need not always be veined. Within the Floral fresco itself, nos. 37 and 40 *a, c* seem to represent unveined rockwork. In addition, the grey areas bordering the waterfalls from the House of the Frescoes are interpreted as unveined rockwork by both Evans and Cameron,²⁵ and, further afield, the rockwork from the

¹⁹ Ibid., 136, no. 28, citing references to the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos (M. Cameron, 'Notes on some new joins and additions to well known Frescoes from Knossos,' *Europa: Studien zur Geschichte und Epigraphik der frühen Aegaeis. Festschrift für Ernst Grunach* (Berlin, 1967), figs. 2 *b*, 5) and to the 'Nature' fresco from Ayia Triada (W. S. Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven and London, 1965), fig. 109).

²⁰ Cameron 1984, 136, no. 31.

²¹ Ibid., 132, 136, 147.

²² Smith (n. 19), fig. 109.

²³ *PM* i, 536-7, col. pl. vi.

²⁴ Cameron, *Kadmos* 7 (1968), 97-9, fig. 2; Cameron 1975, 183-4, 725-9 (esp. 728), slide 34.

²⁵ *PM* II, 461; Cameron 1967 (n. 19), 59.

north and west walls of the Monkey frieze from Thera is unveined.²⁶ It is thus certainly possible, if not likely, that the undulating grey shape behind the 'osiers' represents rockwork. As for the tan areas of the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion, there is already Cameron's suggestion that fragment no. 31 preserves rockwork and, indeed, the tan protrusion compares closely in shape to the rockwork of the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes²⁷ and the Monkey frieze from Beta 6 at Akrotiri on Thera.²⁸ These parallels suggest that both the grey and tan areas of the Floral fresco, though unveined, signify rockwork.

The areas of buff, in contrast, seem to serve as a neutral background for both the floral and rockwork fragments (nos. 5, 7, 8 *b*, 9, 12 *a*, 13 *b*, 14 *a-b*, 15–19, 20 *a-c*, 21, 22 *a-b*, 24 *a-c*, 34 *a-b*, 31, 35 *a-c*, 36, 40 *c*). Though it appears extensively throughout the composition, nowhere is veining preserved and neither do the areas of buff seem to form interlocking elements with the other features of rockwork, such as exemplified by the red, yellow, and blue rockwork of the Monkeys frieze from Beta 6 in Akrotiri on Thera.²⁹ Buff, which was probably created from yellow ochre mixed with white, therefore seems to function as a neutral background colour rather than as an additional colour for rockwork. As such, it finds parallels in the sections of neutral yellow/'buff' ground in the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos³⁰ and even in the newly discovered fragments of acrobats and bull leapers from the Hyksos capital at Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a) in northern Egypt.³¹

Rockwork fragments (nos. 36–40)

These fragments show that rockwork in the Floral fresco is also given lively colours and patterns. Nos. 36, 38, and 39 preserve carefully painted, mottled rockwork in greyish-green, pale blue, and yellow ochre, all embellished with black and white spots.³² Nos. 36 and 37 depict rockwork fragments above and behind 'osier' flowers, and indicate that the landscape composition has rockwork overhead, but the plain buff ground of border fragment no. 4 demonstrates that these rocks do not run continuously along the upper border. Finally, in addition to the solidly coloured dark tan and red rockwork (nos. 37, 40 *a, c*), about forty small plaster fragments represented in the catalogue by no. 40 *b* are painted red with blue flecks. Though the individual fragments are small in size, in number they constitute about one-third of all surviving fragments from the Floral fresco. Though Cameron admits that there are probably one or more red areas in the background landscape,³³ his reconstruction does not take into account this large number of surviving fragments. Evidently the Floral fresco had more rockwork than Cameron suggests.

It thus appears that the Minoan artist of the Floral fresco painted large, solidly coloured masses of grey and tan rock to serve as a background behind the plants while restricting the

²⁶ Dumas (n. 16), pls 85–6.

²⁷ Cameron, 'Unpublished Paintings from the "House of the Frescoes" at Knossos', *BSA* 63 (1968), figs. 3 *f*, 8 *b*, 11 *c*, pl. B 1.

²⁸ Dumas (n. 16), pls 85–7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pls. 85–6.

³⁰ *PM* ii. fig. 275 *a*; Cameron 1967 (n. 19) fig. 2 *a*, 4; Cameron 1968 (n. 27), figs. 4 *c*, 8 *a*.

³¹ M. Bietak, 'Die Wandmalereien aus Tell el-Dab'a/Exbet helmi. Erste Eindrücke', *Ägypten und Levante*, 4,

(1994), pls. 15 *a*, 16, 17 *b*; 'Connections Between Egypt and the Minoan world: new results from Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris', in W. V. Davies and L. Schofield (eds), *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant: Interconnections in the Second Millennium BC* (London, 1995), pls 2, 3.1.

³² The published drawing of fragment no. 39 (Cameron 1984, pl. 47) indicates that the rockwork is blue in colour with black spots. The rockwork is actually half blue and half yellow ochre with black spots.

³³ Cameron 1984, 132.

more brightly coloured, spotted, and flecked rockwork to the peripheral areas along the upper border, perhaps so that the floral decoration would not be overwhelmed by the bold pattern of rockwork.

THE NEW RECONSTRUCTION (COLOUR PLATE A; FIG. 2)

With this re-examination, it is now possible to attempt a reformulation of Cameron's reconstruction in spite of the unfortunate fact that the original appearance of the composition will never be truly known (COLOUR PLATE A; FIG. 2). Most of Cameron's recreations of floral motifs are reproduced as closely as possible,³⁴ including their general order from left to right, thereby allowing the new reconstruction to focus primarily on the *landscape* surrounding these floral components—a landscape that receives little attention in Cameron's reconstruction. The grey and tan areas identified as rockwork are thus given typically 'Aegean' shapes consistent with Neopalatial rockforms as evidenced by the rocky landscapes of the Ayia Triada 'Nature' fresco,³⁵ the 'Spring' fresco from Delta 2, Akrotiri, Thera,³⁶ and the upper portions of the mountainous landscape of the Sanctuary rhyton from Kato Zakro.³⁷ Furthermore, additional speckled rockwork is added to include catalogued fragments omitted from Cameron's reconstruction but represented by the forty bits that remain unpublished. While it is likely that some of this rockwork appears near the red grasses, it is also true that the precise shapes, sizes, and locations of these elements remain unknown. Additionally, a greater part of the pictorial field has been given to the red grasses than appears in Cameron's reconstruction. Clues suggest that grasses may be located near the 'anemone' fragments, but the complete lack of evidence makes their exact position relative to the 'osiers' and 'frilled flowers' uncertain; and for this reason, these areas are left incomplete in the new reconstruction. It is nevertheless hoped that the present changes yield a reconstruction whose overall effect is closer to the original than has been previously achieved.

The reconstruction was produced both as a line drawing and as a coloured drawing. The numbers of the fresco fragments were added to the line drawing (FIG. 2) so that the new reconstruction may be readily compared with that made by Cameron (FIG. 1). A second copy of the line drawing was coloured with pencils in an attempt to provide a closer approximation, as Cameron would have said, to the spirit of the original composition.³⁸ The colours of the fragments as they appear today are imitated while the reconstructed areas are awarded paler tones. The decision to colour the line drawing, however, has both good and bad points. While facilitating the creation of a coloured reconstruction far more quickly and easily than would otherwise be possible, it also gives the misleading impression that the artist of the Floral fresco

³⁴ This new reconstruction was produced with the assistance of a calculator and a photocopy machine. Cameron's renderings of the fresco fragments, while drawn to scale, are published in different sizes, so all drawings of fragments were first enlarged to 50% lifesize. Cameron's reconstruction was also enlarged to 50% lifesize so that his completed floral motifs were reproduced on the same scale as the fragments. The new reconstruction could therefore be produced easily by working with Cameron's drawings on tracing paper and then rendering the new design in ink on vellum. Running the completed drawing through a copy

machine produced the final black and white line drawing at approximately 50% of the size of the original composition. This design process was employed because it seems to offer the greatest degree of accuracy and consistency within a limited time schedule.

³⁵ Smith (n. 19), fig. 110.

³⁶ Doumas (n. 16), pls 66–71.

³⁷ N. Platon, *Zakros. The Discovery of a Lost Palace in Ancient Crete* (New York, 1971), 163–9; S. Marinatos, *Kreta, Thera, und das Mykenische Hellas* (Munich, 1973), pls 108–10.

³⁸ Cameron 1984, 132.



FIG. 2. Line drawing of the new reconstruction of the Floral fresco from Room P of the Unexplored Mansion from Knossos, by Anne P. Chapin.

from the Unexplored Mansion utilized black outlines. This, of course, is not true, and the black outlines which appear in the reconstruction are merely the product of colouring a line drawing. It is hoped that for the purposes of this reconstruction, the black outlines can be accepted as necessary and consequently ignored in favour of the benefits which a colour impression of the reconstruction offer to the viewer.

And finally, the addition of 'osiers' and a second 'frilled flower' plant lengthens the restored composition to approximately 1.45 m, up from Cameron's estimated length of 1.3 m by 15 cm, while the estimated height remains approximately 1.0 m.

THE FLORAL FRESCO AND THE AEGEAN PAINTING TRADITION

A variety of features noted by Cameron mark the Floral fresco as exceptional among Minoan landscape paintings yet also seem to indicate an intimate knowledge of contemporary Cycladic painting practices. The 'anemones', for example, make their first appearance in Aegean frescoes but have heavy, nodding heads that recall the breeze-blown quality of the swaying red lilies of the Spring fresco from Delta 2 in Akrotiri on Thera.³⁹ The 'frilled flowers', another new floral motif, are painted with shaky, imprecise brushstrokes that resemble the sketchy, leafy branches of the two fig trees growing within an animal fold in the

³⁹ Ibid., 129; *Thera IV*, 20–5, 49–53, pls A–C; Doulas (n. 16), pls. 66–71.

north frieze of the Miniature fresco from the West House of Akrotiri, Thera.⁴⁰ Even the 'osiers', painted as a unique hybrid with lily-like leaves, find a Theran parallel in the frescoed fragments of 'osiers' from room Delta 17.⁴¹

The connections observed by Cameron between Theran painting and the Floral fresco are further emphasized by the evidence of a thin red wash of paint that serves as the background colour of certain fragments depicting grasses (nos. 25–6). Though this use of dilute paint is rare on Crete, it is common in frescoes found on the Cycladic Islands and is therefore identified by E. Davis as one of the principal features, together with a preference for white grounds, of a 'Cycladic' style of wall painting.⁴² Its appearance in a fresco from Minoan Crete is unexpected and calls into question the attempt to identify regional 'styles' or 'schools' of painting within Aegean art.

A 'school' of art has been defined either as 'a group of artists working under the influence of a single master', or as a group of artists that possess 'a similarity because they come from the same region or practise the same local style'.⁴³ While the persistent anonymity of Aegean Bronze Age art means that artistic schools cannot yet be analysed on the basis of individual workshops or by the influence of an identifiable master,⁴⁴ the second definition may perhaps be used to try to identify local geographical variations within an artistic idiom, or period style, as has been accomplished in other fields of art history.⁴⁵ But there are difficulties in applying such a second concept to the artistic production of the Aegean Bronze Age. The anonymity of Aegean art means that the place of origin of artists cannot be determined⁴⁶ and, furthermore, painters were probably free to move about, perhaps as members of itinerant artist workshops. Trying to distinguish regional schools based on the regional or national identities of mobile, anonymous Aegean artists may thus well prove to be a hopeless task. Rather, the identification of regional schools of Aegean painting must depend upon analysing the production of artists working within a particular region and observing similar features of personal style that

⁴⁰ Cameron 1984, 130, 134; *Thera VI*, col. pl. 7; L. Morgan, *The Miniature Wall Paintings of Thera* (Cambridge, 1988), 18, pl. 16; Dumas (n. 16), pl. 28.

⁴¹ *Thera VII*, 14, pl. 15 a-b; Dumas (n. 16), pl. 151.

⁴² E. Davis, 'The Cycladic Style of the Thera Frescoes', in D. A. Hardy (ed.), *Thera and the Aegean World III*, 3 vols. (London, 1990), I, 221–2. Thin washes of colour can be observed in the transparent garments of the young women of the Adyton fresco from Xeste 3 (Dumas [n. 16], pls 100–8) and in the terrain and the sea of the Flotilla fresco on the south wall of room 5 in the West House (Dumas (n. 16), pls 35–48). It is assumed here that Davis's identification of a 'Cycladic style' should be understood as the definition of a regional school of art.

⁴³ E. Lucie-Smith, *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms* (London, 1984), 168.

⁴⁴ For a recent evaluation of various attempts to identify individual hands in Aegean art, see J. Cherry, 'Beazley in the Bronze Age? Reflections of attribution studies in Aegean prehistory', in R. Laffineur and J. Crowley (eds), *EIKΩN: Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Shaping a Methodology. Proceedings of the 4th International Aegean Conference / 4^e Rencontre égéenne internationale, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, 6–9 April 1992* (Aegaeum 8; Liège, 1992), 123–44.

⁴⁵ Surveys of Italian Renaissance painting, for instance,

typically distinguish the 'Central Italian' or 'Florentine' style of painting from the 'Venetian' style through their division into chapters on painting in Florence, Rome, and Venice. See S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500–1600*, 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth, 1983), 14; F. Hartt, *History of the Italian Renaissance*, 2nd edn. (Englewood Cliffs and New York, 1979). As another example, Cycladic korai are differentiated from Attic korai on the basis of their variations within the Archaic idiom of Greek sculpture (B. S. Ridgway, *The Archaic Style in Greek Sculpture* (Princeton, 1977), 95–108).

⁴⁶ The movement of both art objects and artists is clearly evident when Aegean products appear outside the Aegean. Minoan pottery, for instance, is known in Egypt, and Aegean fresco painting has been discovered recently at both Avaris, the Hyksos capital in Lower Egypt, and at Tell Kabri in the Western Galilee. See B. Kemp and R. S. Merrillees, *Minoan Pottery in Second Millennium Egypt* (Mainz, 1980); Bietak (n. 31); W.-D. Niemeier, 'Minoan artisans travelling overseas: the Alalakh Frescoes and the Painted Plaster Floor at Tel Kabri (Western Galilee)', in R. Laffineur and L. Basch (eds), *Thalassa, L'Égée préhistorique et la Mer. Actes de la troisième rencontre égéenne internationale de l'Université de Liège, Station de recherches sous-marines et océanographiques (StaReSO), Calvi, Corse (23–25 avril 1990)*, (Aegaeum 7; Liège, 1991), 189–201.

produce a degree of homogeneity in local artistic production yet differ from art produced elsewhere. Thankfully, this problem is simplified by the knowledge that frescoes were produced either where they were found or not far from that location, as in the case of plaster dumps. All paintings from Minoan Crete should thus be considered as evidence for a 'Minoan' style, or regional school, of fresco painting just as all frescoes from the Cycladic Islands offer evidence for a 'Cycladic' school.

Despite this clarification of terms, Davis's identification of a 'Cycladic' style as distinct from a 'Minoan' style remains problematic. While rightly observing that Thera frescoes often utilize white grounds and transparent painting techniques in contrast to the 'Minoan' preference for opaque, polychrome grounds, Davis notes a significant number of Cycladic frescoes that are painted on polychrome grounds.⁴⁷ Though these frescoes are explained as reflecting 'Minoan' influence,⁴⁸ their repeated appearance in paintings produced in the Cyclades suggests that the artists and patrons alike both living and working on the islands must have understood these devices and techniques as belonging to a desirable fresco composition. Thus these 'Minoanizing' frescoes offer evidence of a distinct current in Cycladic painting and, rather than being excluded, need to be incorporated into any understanding of the 'Cycladic' style.

Conversely, the Thera parallels identified in the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion seem to demonstrate a Minoan awareness of the motifs and painting techniques employed in contemporary Thera wall painting. The 'osiers', the trembling petals of the 'frilled flowers', the suggestion of a breeze through a field of flowers, and especially the use of a dilute wash of paint all point to a communication among artists that transcends narrow geographical limits within the Aegean. The skilful integration of these 'Cycladic' features within a Minoan wall painting, moreover, suggests a mastery over both the unusual floral motifs and the variations of painting technique. Just as Davis's definition of a 'Cycladic' style encounters problems when confronted with evidence that artists working in the Cyclades knew of contemporary fashions in Cretan painting, so too does the Floral fresco confound current attempts to define a distinctly 'Minoan' school of art. The identification of regional schools of fresco painting within the Aegean must therefore remain tentative.

Having observed that the Floral fresco was created by an artist of diverse education, it remains to be determined whether the landscape was endowed with symbolic or religious meaning. N. Marinatos argues that Aegean 'nature' frescoes should be interpreted as sacred landscapes that allude to the 'general concept of fertility and fecundity in the spring' by providing either a setting for the appearance of a Minoan goddess or a background for ritual action.⁴⁹ Thus the three LM I A frescoes from room 14 at Ayia Triada can be seen to depict a female figure, perhaps a goddess or a priestess, standing before an outdoor shrine while a second female figure, perhaps an attendant, gathers flowers in a landscape of lilies, crocuses, and violets. The third scene preserves a vivid landscape of cats, birds, and leaping goats or

⁴⁷ E. Davis (n. 42), 215–18, 225–6, cites a number of Cycladic landscapes painted on coloured grounds, including frescoes of white lilies painted on red grounds that were found both in Xeste 3 of Akrotiri (*Thera* VI, 17, pl. 24 c) and among the frescoes from Phylakopi on Melos (*PM* iii. 132, fig. 87). Additionally, the frieze of Blue Birds from Ayia Irini sets the birds against a coloured ground, and even the miniature

fresco from Ayia Irini utilizes blue and yellow grounds (K. Coleman, 'Frescoes from Ayia Irini, Keos, Part I', *Hesperia*, 42 (1973), 286–93, pls 54–6; K. Abramovitz, 'Frescoes from Ayia Irini, Keos, Parts II–IV', *Hesperia*, 49 (1980), 57–76, 85, pls. 3–10 a, 12 c).

⁴⁸ Davis (n. 42), 218, 225–6.

⁴⁹ N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Thera* (Athens, 1984), 96.

deer, all set in a lush tangle of flowering plants which, by association with its companion pieces, can be understood as a sacred landscape representing the abode of the divinity.⁵⁰

The cultic associations of other Aegean landscape compositions, however, are less apparent, and the debate over the sacred meaning of Aegean landscape art now focuses primarily on room Delta 2 of Akrotiri, Thera, and its lively landscape decoration of swaying red lilies and darting swallows known as the Spring fresco. S. Marinatos, supported by N. Marinatos and S. Immerwahr, suggests that the fresco alludes to the reawakening of nature in the spring,⁵¹ though more recently K. P. Foster has argued that the landscape represents an ecstatic epiphany in which a summoned divine presence appears in the form of the swallows.⁵² These interpretations suggest that Delta 2 served as a shrine and that the landscape functioned as a backdrop for ritual action. C. Doumas, however, cautions that 'given our minimal knowledge of what constitutes sacred, domestic and public in this period, it is difficult to establish objective criteria for characterizing Delta 2 as a room associated with cult'.⁵³ Since the archaeological context of Delta 2 represents a reuse of the room and the preserved evidence is not conclusive, it is not absolutely clear that the room functioned as a shrine. M. Hollinshead, for instance, finds no demonstrable religious associations for any of the objects or equipment found in Delta 2 and argues that the space is best understood as a domestic room with essentially secular decoration that provided a 'safe and aesthetically pleasing environment for an important person'.⁵⁴ The meaning of the Spring fresco within the context of Aegean culture is therefore by no means certain.

The Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos, however, may open new avenues of investigation by challenging the ongoing discussion on the religious character of Aegean landscape art to explain its context and its unique iconographic elements. Like the Spring fresco, the Floral fresco comes from an architectural setting that lacks overt references to cult activity. The fresco fragments were found in the LM II fill of room P in the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos, apparently having fallen from an upper floor chamber of approximately similar size and proportion (FIG. 3). Though the Mansion remained unfinished when construction was halted in early LM IA, the room with the fresco was apparently awarded fine ashlar walls, a luxurious floor of gypsum slabs, and a compartment of mudbrick.⁵⁵ The scarcity of finds throughout the building, however, suggests that the Mansion was little used in the LM IB period,⁵⁶ and indeed the worn surface of the surviving fragments of the Floral fresco suggests a prolonged exposure to deleterious weather conditions before the Mansion's LM II destruction, perhaps through a window opening into the unused room. Thus although the room above room P was constructed of expensive materials and received considerable attention in its decoration, it preserves little evidence for the LM IA context of the Floral fresco.

The room decorated with the Floral fresco, however, probably played a supporting rather than a starring role within the LM IA design of the Mansion. Though post-Minoan looting

⁵⁰ N. Marinatos 1984 (n. 49), 85–9; *Minoan Religion. Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia, S.C., 1993), 149–51.

⁵¹ *Thera IV*, 49–52; N. Marinatos 1984 (n. 49), 94; S. A. Immerwahr, *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age* (University Park and London, 1990), 47.

⁵² K. P. Foster, 'A Flight of Swallows', *AJA* 99 (1995), 409–25.

⁵³ Doumas (n. 16), 100.

⁵⁴ M. Hollinshead, 'The Swallows and Artists of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri, Thera', *AJA* 93 (1989), 339, 351.

⁵⁵ The abandonment of construction is evidenced by the unlevelled floors found in some ground level rooms. M. Popham, 'The Excavation', in M. R. Popham *et al.*, *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos* (Oxford, 1984), 2.

⁵⁶ M. Popham, 'Summary and Conclusions', in Popham (n. 55), 261.

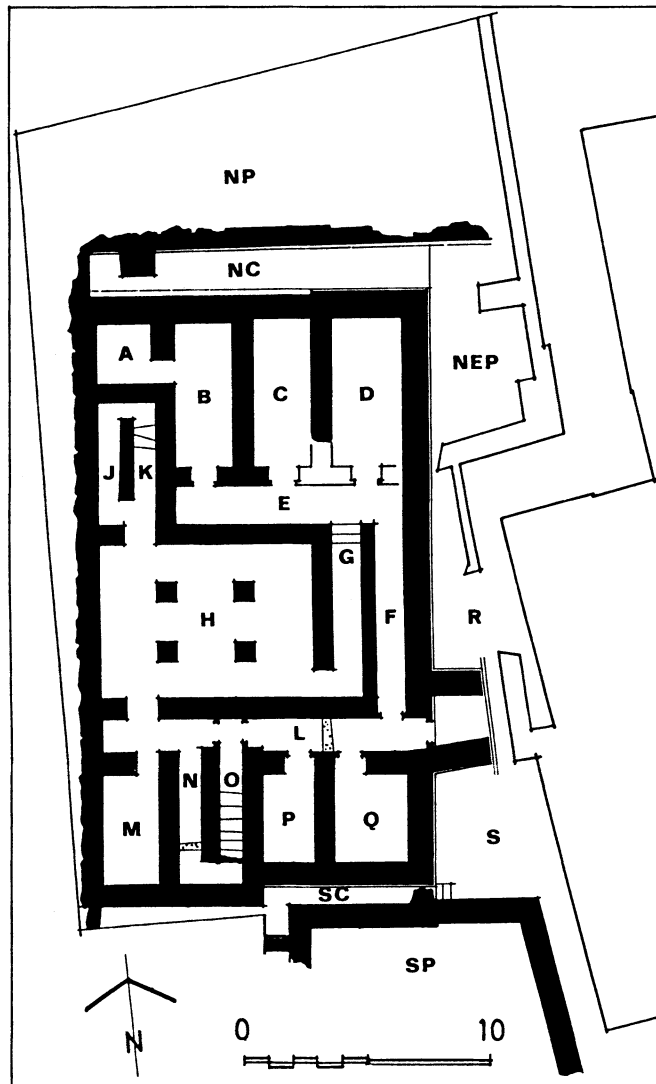


FIG. 3. Plan of the Unexplored Mansion. From M. R. Popham, *The Minoan Unexplored Mansion at Knossos* (London, 1984), pl. 1 b.

by stone robbers means that little of the upper storey survives today, all the lower interior walls are of load-bearing dimensions and it is likely that the plan of the upper floor reproduces that of the lower floor very closely.⁵⁷ The remains fallen from above room P, too, are very dissimilar from those that collapsed into neighbouring room Q, so it appears that the room above P belonged to a series of chambers that closely reproduces the ground floor plan. Access to these rooms presumably was provided by a corridor located above the long narrow hall L, a

⁵⁷ D. Smyth, 'The Architecture', in Popham (n. 55), 114.

passageway which probably connected the upper floor rooms with the columnar hall, the central architectural feature of the upper storey reconstructed above the surviving pillar room H.⁵⁸ Room P's upper-storey counterpart therefore probably served as a subsidiary room within an architectural complex that had as its focus a columnar hall.

Though pillar rooms and their associated columnar halls may perhaps be connected with Minoan cult practice,⁵⁹ it remains uncertain as to whether the Unexplored Mansion's columnar hall and its upper floor complex of subsidiary rooms was built as a shrine. Surveys of Neopalatial pillar rooms suggest that while some may have served a sacred purpose, others are likely to have functioned as storerooms or dwelling rooms, so that the cultic connection of the pillar room and its columnar hall must be determined on an individual basis.⁶⁰ In the case of the Unexplored Mansion, archaeological finds uncovered in H include a LM II terracotta statuette of a 'goddess', two rhyta of stone and clay, and much fine LM II pottery that suggest that the columnar hall served both domestic and religious purposes in the LM II period.⁶¹ The intended function of the area at the time when construction was abandoned in LM I A, however, remains uncertain. The unlevelled, unpaved floor of pillar room H, moreover, demonstrates that the lower chamber was left incomplete, and archaeological remains suggest that it was only first occupied in LM II. The available archaeological evidence therefore reveals little of the intended purpose of the Mansion's pillar room and columnar hall when construction ceased in LM I A.⁶²

The Unexplored Mansion, however, was connected by a bridge to the adjacent Little Palace, a joining which may suggest a continuity of function between the two structures⁶³ and perhaps a common purpose for the pillar rooms and columnar halls. The three pillar rooms of the Little Palace therefore should provide good parallels to that of the Unexplored Mansion, but unfortunately the Postpalatial occupation of the Little Palace likewise makes the archaeological record difficult to interpret. The area above and to the north of the south-west pillar room in the Little Palace, for instance, may have been used to store Neopalatial cult objects. According to Evans, finds include a stepped double-axe stand and the famous LM I steatite rhyton carved in the shape of a bull's head, but nearby were found a LM II terracotta bull's head rhyton and two LM II clay alabaster, while in the pillar hall itself was discovered a lead female statuette with upraised arms dated to LM III B.⁶⁴ The cult activity which evidently took place somewhere above the south-west pillar room should therefore probably be dated to the Postpalatial phase of the building. A Neopalatial connection with cult activity, however, is less certain. P. Rehak reports that transcripts of D. MacKenzie's 1908 *Daybook* entries recording the excavation of the Little Palace indicate that fragments of the LM I steatite bull's head rhyton were not found scattered across the stairs and in a cist located near

⁵⁸ Smyth (n. 57), 114–15.

⁵⁹ Though Evans was the first to postulate a religious function for the pillar (A. Evans, 'Mycenaean tree and pillar cult', *JHS* 21 (1901), 99–204), M. Nilsson examines more than a dozen examples of pillar 'crypts' but is unable to determine whether or not the crypts were sacred (*The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival into Greek Religion*, 2nd edn. (Lund, 1950), 236–48). N. Platon expanded the study of the pillar room in his typological survey of 45 structures 'Τὰ Μινωϊκά οἰκιστὰ ἱερά', *KrChron* 8 (1954), 428–83), and B. Rutkowski updates the analysis and concludes that while some pillar rooms evidently were religious in function, others seem to have served as

storage and domestic spaces (B. Rutkowski, *Cult Places of the Aegean* (New Haven and London, 1986), 21–45). The need to evaluate each pillar room on an individual basis is supported by G. Gesell and N. Marinatos (G. Gesell, *Town, Palace, and House Cult in Minoan Crete* (SIMA 67; Göteborg, 1985), 26–9; N. Marinatos, *Minoan Religion* 1993 (n. 50), 87–98).

⁶⁰ Rutkowski (n. 59), 37–45; G. Gesell (n. 59), 26–9; N. Marinatos 1993 (n. 50), 88.

⁶¹ Popham (n. 55), 21.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16–21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶⁴ *PM* ii. 527, 538–40.

the pillar room, as described by Evans, but rather were found entirely within the cist. Rehak suggests that the rhyton fragments may have been deposited in the cist as wall fill, perhaps even as a foundation deposit, and accordingly suggests that the context of the rhyton could be Neopalatial.⁶⁵ In contrast, E. Hatzaki observes that the Neopalatial placement of the south-west pillar room near the probable entrance to the Little Palace could mean that it was designed to function as a storeroom rather than as a shrine.⁶⁶ Clearly a connection with Neopalatial cult activity is as yet uncertain.

In comparison, little evidence for cult activity of any period survives in the areas above the two pillar rooms located in the Basement Pillar Crypt Complex in the southern end of the Little Palace. No cult objects are preserved fallen from the storey above the basement pillar rooms, and as Rutkowski observes, stone vats placed between the pillars could as easily have been installed for domestic use as for cult purposes.⁶⁷ The evidence from the pillar rooms of the Little Palace thus sheds little light on the Neopalatial functions of these structures and their associated columnar halls.⁶⁸ A ritual or cultic use of the columnar hall reconstructed on the upper floor of the Unexplored Mansion therefore seems possible but as yet unproven for the LM I period. Further, since none of the remaining rooms in the Mansion preserves either recognizable religious architectural features or Neopalatial archaeological remains with known cultic significance, there is little reason to believe that the room with the Floral fresco played a significant role in Neopalatial cult activity. Rather, it seems more likely to have served as a residential living space.⁶⁹

Iconographic analysis of the Floral fresco, too, suggests few, if any, demonstrable religious associations. The composition depicts not the lilies and crocuses that are common in Aegean landscape art and are probably connected with Minoan religious belief,⁷⁰ but rather, unusual varieties of flowers that are difficult to identify and rarely appear elsewhere in Aegean art. The ‘anemones’ exemplify the challenges presented by the composition. The lower plants consist of a stock reed motif of blue leaves combined with flower heads of eight to twelve bluntly pointed white petals embellished with an inner ring of similarly shaped red petals. At the centre is a zone of light grey that probably represents the anthers and stigmata of a typical composite flower (COLOUR PLATE A). Cameron suggests that the flowers may perhaps represent the *Anemone pavonina*, a wild plant native to Crete that grows in meadows and scrub in sub-montane and lower montane zones,⁷¹ but the flowers of this plant are usually a bright red or, less commonly, a pinkish-purple colour.⁷² The *Anemone coronaria*, also known as the poppy or

⁶⁵ P. Rehak, ‘The use and destruction of Minoan stone bull’s head Rhyta’, in R. Laffineur and W.-D. Niemeier (eds), *Politeia: Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 5th International Aegean Conference/5^e Rencontre égéenne internationale, University of Heidelberg, Archäologisches Institut, 10–13 April 1994* (Aegaeum 12; Liège, 1995), 439.

⁶⁶ E. Hatzaki, ‘Was the Little Palace at Knossos the “Little Palace” of Knossos?’, in D. Evely, I. Lemos, and S. Sherratt (eds), *Minotaur and Centaur. Studies in the Archaeology of Crete and Euboea presented to Mervyn Popham* (BAR International Series 638; Oxford, 1996), 36.

⁶⁷ Rutkowski (n. 59), 33, 42; *contra* Gesell (n. 59), 27–8, and Evans, *PM* ii. 525–7, who believe that the crypts were cult rooms on the basis of an architectural comparison with the

central court sanctuary at Knossos. For a recent reevaluation of the Basement Pillar Crypt Complex that casts additional doubt on the hypothesized sacred character of the pillar rooms, see Hatzaki (n. 66), 36–7.

⁶⁸ Hatzaki (n. 66), 37.

⁶⁹ Additional discussion of the functions of the rooms within the Unexplored Mansion is provided by J. Poblome and C. Dumon, ‘A Minoan Building Program? Some Comments on the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos’, *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia*, 1988, 26–7, 69–73.

⁷⁰ N. Marinatos 1984 (n. 49), 89–96; 1993 (n. 50), 148–52, 193, 195; G. Walberg, ‘Minoan Floral Iconography’, in R. Laffineur and J. Crowley (eds) (n. 44), 241–6.

⁷¹ Cameron 1984, 129.

⁷² G. Sfikas, *Wild Flowers of Crete* (Athens, 1987), 58.

crown 'anemone', however, is also native to Crete's lowland and sub-montane fields and scrub but appears in white (var. *alba*) as well as blue-violet, pink, and red, and often has a differently coloured centre (PLATE 1).⁷³ Since *A. coronaria* usually has only five to seven sepals in contrast to the seven to nine or more sepals of *A. pavonina*, it is possible that the Aegean artist conflated the two varieties in creating his eight- to twelve-sepalled white and red specimens. Alternatively, the artist may have been painting a peony native to the montane and sub-montane regions of Crete, the *Paeonia clusii*. The stems of these peonies, like those of the Floral fresco's plants, are reddish in colour, and their large flowers, which range from 7 to 10 cm in diameter, have six to eight petals and are white in colour that is sometimes flushed with pink (PLATE 2).⁷⁴ Though the petals of the *P. clusii* are rounder in shape than those of the white flowers in the Floral fresco, the similarity of colouring presents a striking comparison.

None of these native species, however, is commonly depicted in Neopalatial art. If the blooms are peonies, then they make their first appearance in Minoan art. 'Anemones', however, can perhaps be found in Neopalatial pottery. Evans identifies the star 'anemone' on a MM III B/LM I A vase from Zakro and possibly on a LM I A sherd from Knossos,⁷⁵ but these flowers have seven to eleven narrow, pointed petals, and fan-like profiles that contrast sharply with the spreading shape of the Floral fresco's flower heads. The two flower types thus seem only distantly related.⁷⁶

The same ambiguity greets any attempt to identify the 'frilled flowers', plants which were also previously unknown in Minoan art. The motif, which is clearly preserved on only one fragment (no. 17), consists of blue or red flowers composed of five petals painted with light, quivering strokes of the brush that, as observed by Cameron, suggest a ruffled appearance.⁷⁷ Cameron very tentatively suggests that the 'frilled flowers' may represent the dwarf iris (*Iris inguicularis*),⁷⁸ but the petals of the dwarf iris are neither correct in number and shape nor do they have a ruffled appearance. Stronger identifications may perhaps be found in the crinkly flowers of the rockrose family, particularly *Cistus incanus*-*subsp. creticus*, a small shrub with rosy-purple flowers 4–6 cm in diameter with five sepals and a wrinkled, ruffled texture (PLATE 3), or perhaps *Cistus parviflorus*, a rockrose with smaller pink flowers measuring 2–3 cm.⁷⁹ Though the painted flowers are awarded red and blue colours, the cistus family produces flowers that range in colour from pink to purple,⁸⁰ colours which were perhaps translated into the red and blue of the limited Minoan palette.

⁷³ Sfikas (n. 72), 58; A. Huxley and W. Taylour, *Flowers of Greece and the Aegean* (London, 1977), 79; O. Polunin and A. Huxley, *Flowers of the Mediterranean* (London, 1965), 69–70, pl. 24.

⁷⁴ Sfikas (n. 72), 64; Huxley and Taylour (n. 73), 80, pl. 53.

⁷⁵ *PM* ii. figs. 276 a, 279.

⁷⁶ The differences are so striking, moreover, that it seems possible that the star 'anemones' may actually be representations of the *Pancratium* lily or sea daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*), which they resemble much more closely (see Sfikas (n. 72), 276, 279). The dots encircling the flower head painted on the sherd from Knossos could refer to the anthers which, in the *Pancratium* lily, project beyond the rim of the flower. Additionally, both examples of 'anemones' from Minoan vase painting include long, tubular buds that are similar to the unopened buds of the

Pancratium lily. If, however, they are to be understood as 'anemones', then there evidently was no accepted formula for the depiction of the floral type. D. Hogarth, 'Bronze-Age Vases from Zakro', *JHS* 22 (1902), 336–8, however, argues that the motif appearing on the jar from Zakro is an Aegean interpretation of the Egyptian waterlily (*Nymphaea stellata*), but the buds and mature petals are too broad in dimension to make the identification tenable.

⁷⁷ Cameron 1984, 130.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* On Crete, the dwarf iris was formerly identified as a separate species, *Iris cretica* or *Iris cretensis* (Sfikas (n. 72), 280).

⁷⁹ Sfikas (n. 72), 146–7; Huxley and Taylour (n. 73), 106–7, pls 169, 171.

⁸⁰ Sfikas (n. 72), 146. White flowers are also found in *C. salvifolius* and *C. monspeliensis*, both species native to Crete.

The 'osiers', however, defy identification. The plants exhibit dark brown lily-like or reed-like leaves with tall, slender brown stalks from which sprout curving, red stems and red palmate, leaf-like 'flowers'. The plant has no parallel in Minoan painting, but S. Marinatos, supported by C. Doumas, identified a similar motif on fresco fragments from Delta 17 in Akrotiri, Thera, as 'osier branches' (PLATE 4).⁸¹ Though the Cycladic version of the plant has red stems, yellow palmate 'flowers', but apparently not basal leaves, the comparison is close enough for Cameron to adopt tentatively the 'osier' identification for the hybridized plants depicted in the Floral fresco.⁸² Comparisons with photographs of actual 'osiers', however, make the acceptance of this identification difficult. 'Osiers' are members of the willow family (*Salicaceae*) and have long, slender, supple branches that are commonly employed in basket making and wickerwork. The common 'osier', *Salix viminalis*, has long, narrow, green leaves that bear little resemblance either to the red palmate 'flowers' or to the brown lily-like basal leaves appearing in the Floral fresco (PLATE 5). The purple 'osier', *Salix purpurea*, too, is very dissimilar in appearance, sporting purplish young twigs sprouting narrow, bluish-green leaves that often grow in pairs on opposite sides of the stem.⁸³ The 'osier' identification is therefore difficult to accept without a closer correspondence between the artistic motif and the actual plant.

O. Rackham alternately proposes that the Thera 'osiers' may be representations of hemp (*Cannabis sativa*),⁸⁴ a suggestion which raises the possibility that the Floral fresco preserves a similar species. Hemp, however, grows green palmate leaves that have three to nine lance-shaped, toothed segments, whereas the palmate 'flowers' of the 'osiers' have only five segments and are either red or yellow in colour and smooth in shape. The identification with hemp is therefore also doubtful.

Three plants that are very similar to the 'osiers' from Delta 17, however, appear in the Nilotic landscape from the miniature frieze of the West House in Akrotiri, Thera, and are tentatively identified by L. Morgan as flowering sedges (*Cyperaceae*), an aquatic grass that grows in marshes and along water throughout most of Europe (PLATE 6).⁸⁵ The *Cyperus longus* in particular is characterized by groups of three to eight spikelets growing at the ends of long, slender branches of unequal length (FIG. 4). The bracts are long, narrow, and leafy, and additional slender leaves grow at the base of the plant. In comparison to the actual species of sedge, the plants from the Nilotic frieze are leafless, as are the 'osiers' from Delta 17, but the presence of long, narrow basal leaves on the plants of the Floral fresco raises the possibility that the flowering sedge might be represented with greater verisimilitude in the Floral fresco. Yet still the identification is suspect. The pale reddish-brown spikelets of the *Cyperus longus* in nature are 1–2 cm long and only 2 mm wide, making them much smaller than the palmate 'flowers' preserved on the Floral fresco. Since the 'anemones' and 'frilled flowers' can be identified with native flowers of similar scale, it makes little sense that the flowers of the 'osiers' would be greatly enlarged. It therefore seems unlikely that the plant should be recognized as a flowering sedge, and consequently the 'osier' motif defies recognition among the flowers and trees that are currently indigenous to Crete.

⁸¹ *Thera VII*, 14, pl. 15; Doumas (n. 16), pl. 151.

⁸² Cameron 1984, 131.

⁸³ O. Polunin, *Trees and Bushes of Europe* (London, 1976), 35–6.

⁸⁴ O. Rackham, 'The Flora and Vegetation of Thera and Crete Before and After the Great Eruption', in C. Doumas (ed.), *Thera and the Aegean World*, I (London, 1978), 756.

⁸⁵ Doumas (n. 16), pls 30–2, 34; Morgan (n. 40), 19.

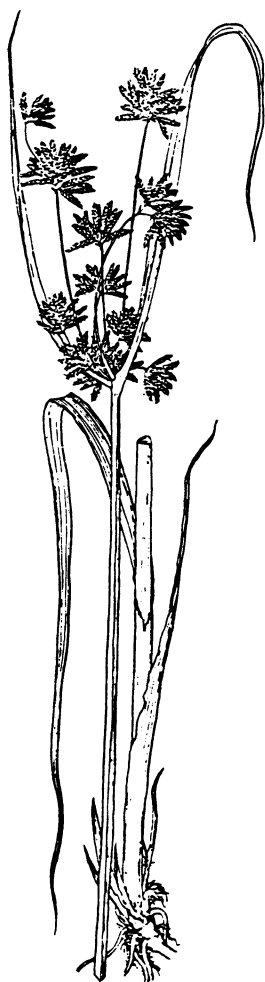


FIG. 4. Line drawing of flowering sedge (*Cyperus longus*). From L. Morgan, *The Miniature Wall Paintings of Thera* (Cambridge, 1988), fig. 7.

The flowers of the Floral fresco are thus difficult to identify and have few parallels in contemporary Aegean art. It should therefore come as no surprise to discover that the motifs and their closest parallels have few connections with Minoan cult practice. The ‘anemones’, for example, might be compared to the flowers depicted on the jar from Kato Zakro, but the vase was found not in any cultic context but outside the main settlement in a pit filled with pottery.⁸⁶ Similarly, the ‘osiers’ from Delta 17 in Akrotiri, Thera, belonged to a room decoration that fell from an upper floor into a rich storeroom that contained a variety of objects, including pottery and food, bronze hooks and tools, a boar’s head rhyton, a clay table of offerings, and perhaps the remnants of a gaming board. The fresco fragments themselves were found accompanied by a stone vessel and a lead weight, but the context was disturbed by the stream course cutting

⁸⁶ Hogarth (n. 76), 333.

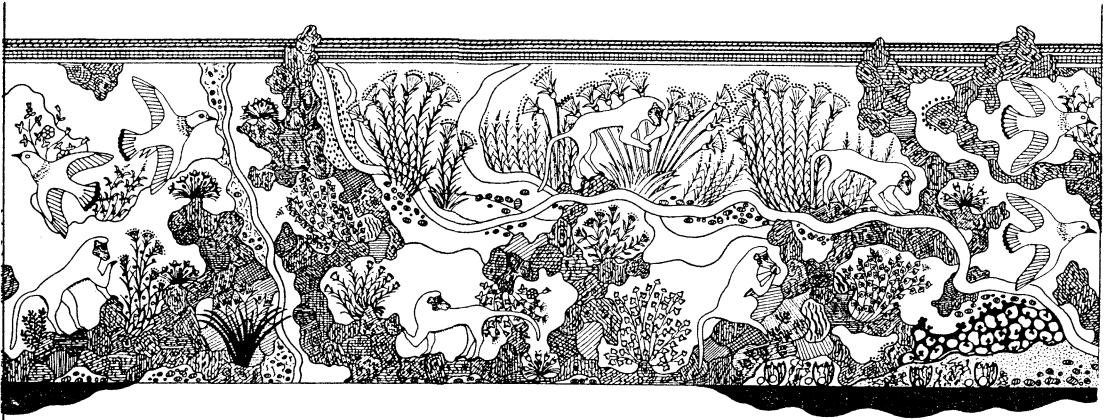


FIG. 5. Reconstruction by M. Cameron of the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes, central portion. From M. Cameron, *BSA* 63 (1968), fig. 13.

through the site,⁸⁷ and there is little indication that the 'osier' fresco decorated a shrine. In contrast, the 'Nilotic' east wall of the Miniature frieze from the West House in Akrotiri, Thera, depicts the 'flowering sedges' in a landscape that also includes a griffin, a mythological animal that frequently accompanies images of Minoan goddesses but also may have been a protective emblem for warriors.⁸⁸ 'Sedges' were thus perhaps recognized as plants appropriate to landscapes with supernatural or symbolic elements. Taken as a whole, the limited parallels for the motifs of the Floral fresco offer few demonstrable connections with Aegean cult practice.

A question arises then about the meaning of new floral elements within the context of Aegean culture. Here a comparison with the fresco of Monkeys and Blue Birds from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos may be helpful (FIG. 5).⁸⁹ Discussion of this fresco tends to concentrate on the familiar motifs depicted in the landscape: the monkeys, doves, lilies, crocuses, papyri, reeds, and ivies. Each of these animals and plants has some connection to Aegean cult practice, thereby making it likely that the fresco is endowed with a symbolic or religious meaning, perhaps representing the abode of divinity.⁹⁰ Yet the composition also includes numerous floral designs that make rare appearances in contemporary Aegean art, only some of which seem to be hybrids of the more familiar floral types.⁹¹ Those that are identifiable are roses and wild peas (vetch), but most of the new varieties have either not yet been recognized or have only tentative identifications such as 'convolvulus', 'honeysuckle', and 'mallow'.⁹²

⁸⁷ *Thera VII*, 14–15.

⁸⁸ Morgan (n. 40), 49–54; N. Marinatos 1984 (n. 49), 61–2; 1993 (n. 50), 152–5.

⁸⁹ Cameron 1968 (n. 27), 1–31.

⁹⁰ Immerwahr (n. 51), 42–6; M. Shaw, 'The Aegean Garden', *AJA* 97 (1993), 668–9; N. Marinatos 1984 (n. 49), 92; 1993 (n. 50), 194–5; Morgan (n. 40), 21–4, 29–32, 66–7; Walberg (n. 70); P. Warren, 'The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos', in P. Darcque and J.-C. Poursat (eds), *L'Iconographie minoenne. Actes de la Table Ronde*

d'Athènes (21–22 avril, 1983) (*BCH-Suppl. XI*) (Paris, 1985), 199–207.

⁹¹ The plant preserved on the fresco fragment sketched in *PM* ii. fig. 266 *d*, for example, seems to combine a papyrus-like flower with both a reed-like stem and miniature lily-like leaves growing from the base of the plant. The plant fragments pictured in *PM* ii. fig. 275 *c* likewise combine papyrus-like flowers with reed-like stems but additionally add radiating floral designs that recall marguerites.

⁹² *PM* ii. fig. 275 *a, d, e, h, i, k*; Cameron 1968 (n. 27), 11.

If, as seems likely, the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco is infused with symbolic or religious meaning, then it is possible that this symbolism extended also to the unusual varieties of flowers. The rose, for instance, though not common in Aegean art, is also identified in a wreath in the Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos.⁹³ Additional flowers that appear to be roses are held by a woman in a fresco from Xeste 3, Akrotiri, and are carried in the Mycenaean procession fresco from Thebes.⁹⁴ The rose may therefore have acquired some degree of significance in Aegean ritual though as a symbol it may not have become as important as crocuses and lilies.⁹⁵ In contrast, the comparable examples of the wild pea (vetch) that are preserved on pottery from Knossos and Palaikastro and published by Evans seem to come from contexts that warrant little description.⁹⁶ The religious significance of the plant therefore seems doubtful,⁹⁷ suggesting that the wild pea (vetch) absorbed little, if any, of the cultic symbolism associated with the accompanying lilies, crocuses, papyri, reeds, and ivies. The new and unidentifiable floral motifs also populating the composition, of course, lack religious parallels. It would thus appear that the unusual plants add variety to the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco but do not necessarily become independent symbols of Aegean cult practice. Perhaps, then, a hierarchy of floral symbolism can be identified in Aegean landscape art, with lilies, crocuses, papyri, reeds, and ivies having the strongest connections with cult and the newer or more unusual floral motifs having the weaker links.⁹⁸ Accordingly, the religious significance of the Floral fresco, which is populated with plants almost entirely lacking in cultic parallels, should probably be understood as minimal.

The Floral fresco therefore challenges the modern viewer by refusing to fit comfortably into a discussion about the religious significance of Aegean landscape art. The composition preserves no representation of either deity or attendant, and the individual floral motifs, which are unique and not easily identifiable, have no obvious connections with Aegean cult practice. Moreover, the fresco comes from a context that could be described as a minor room within a larger architectural complex that may or may not have cultic associations. Though the fresco's floral landscape may have some connection with Minoan religious belief about the realm of the divine, it nonetheless must be admitted that its true significance and meaning within the context of Minoan Neopalatial culture remain uncertain.

The most striking feature of the Floral fresco is, in fact, its artistic innovation. The 'anemones' and 'frilled flowers' are new, and the 'osiers' are for the first time hybridized with lily-like leaves and stems. Grasses are found elsewhere in Aegean art, but nowhere are they depicted with such a flurry of energy and spontaneity.⁹⁹ Even the brushwork varies from the sure, opaque strokes typical of Minoan art to the thin washes and quivering touches of the brush that recall Theran painting. The fresco thus exudes an experimental quality in which the frontiers of Aegean landscape art are challenged by an artist of considerable creativity. The significance of the Floral fresco may therefore lie in its very inventiveness.

As argued by G. Walberg, the creation of Neopalatial floral designs stems from the

⁹³ Warren (n. 90), 193.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 193, 204, citing *Thera VII*, 36–7, pl. 65; H. Reusch, *Die zeichnerische Rekonstruktion des Frauenfrieses im böotischen Theben* (Berlin, 1956), pls. 2, 11, 14, 15.

⁹⁵ *Contra* Walberg (n. 70), 245.

⁹⁶ *PM* i. 605, fig. 445 a–b; *PM* ii. 469–71, figs. 276 h, 277.

⁹⁷ Walberg (n. 70), 245.

⁹⁸ Rare motifs are not necessarily excluded from connections with cult practice, however, as demonstrated by a fragmentary MM III B/LM I A plaster tripod offering table from Palaikastro painted with an unusual floral motif identified as a 'narcissus'. J. MacGillivray *et al.*, 'Excavations at Palaikastro, 1990', *BSA* 86 (1991), 137, fig. 15, pl. 14 c–d.

⁹⁹ Cameron 1984, 130, 135.

combination of certain non-representational designs found in abstract MM ceramic decoration into schematic forms that recall the object in nature. Antithetic J-spirals, for example, are used in pairs to create images of lilies, palms, and reeds, while petaloid loops are combined with circles to create radiating floral patterns.¹⁰⁰ In the Floral fresco, the palmate 'osier flowers' are created from individual lanceolate 'petals' whose shape closely resembles the elongated buds of lily flowers, which in turn, suggests Walberg, are based on the petaloid loop.¹⁰¹ The 'anemones' likewise display a radiating design that seems derived from the petaloid loop, while the 'frilled flowers' are composed of short radiating lines rendered with an undulating rather than a steady stroke. The motifs of the Floral fresco, though they may be unique or rare in Aegean painting, are none the less created from the same abstract elements as the more familiar floral designs populating Aegean landscape art. It is their combination into new patterns that creates the unusual varieties.

The recognition that Aegean floral motifs are constructed from schematic 'building blocks' seems to confirm E. Gombrich's 'principle of the adapted stereotype', in which an artist attempts to form an image of an object known to him in the physical world not from his visual impression of the object but from his idea of the object and the schematic form it seems to recall.¹⁰² The initial attempt at representation is the schematic form, which is then made to resemble the physical object through a refining process of correction and adjustment. The greater the refinement, the more 'true to nature' the figure may appear.¹⁰³ Schematic forms are thus essential to the process of representation and form the basis of artistic convention, being patterns which enable an artist to create figures and compositions.

The schemata that constitute the basic conventions governing artistic representation, however, can also form a selective screen through which the artist's world is viewed. As argued by Gombrich, artists tend to represent those elements for which they have the means—the schemata—to depict and omit those for which the schemata are either unavailable or inadequate. The result is that images of nature are not perfect copies of natural scenery.¹⁰⁴ In Aegean art, the confining effect of convention seems evidenced by the limited variety of plant species that populate so many landscape paintings. Lilies, for instance, seem ubiquitous, appearing in frescoes from Crete at Amnisos, Ayia Triada, Epáno Zakro, Kommos, Tylissos, and the palace and town of Knossos. Elsewhere in the Aegean, lilies are found in compositions from Akrotiri on Thera, Phylakopi on Melos, Ialysos (Trianda) on Rhodes, and even Miletus.¹⁰⁵ The same motif is thus featured regularly enough in Aegean landscape art to be recognized as a standard element of design. Considering the connection between lilies and Aegean cult practice, the popularity of the lily in art is perhaps not surprising. When a composition requires a greater variety of plant life, however, the Aegean artist seems restricted by his schemata, often preferring not to invent new designs but to combine familiar plant

¹⁰⁰ G. Walberg, *Tradition and Innovation. Essays in Minoan Art* (Mainz, 1986), 10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁰² E. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, 1960), 71–4.

¹⁰³ Similarly, the more schematic an image remains, the more difficult it may be for the viewer to identify.

¹⁰⁴ Gombrich's example of a Chinese artist's rendition of an English countryside demonstrates clearly that the artist selected only those elements of English terrain

which corresponded most closely with his set of schemata learnt from conventions of Chinese landscape representation and disregarded those features which did not fit the learnt pattern. Gombrich (n. 102), 84–6, fig. 63.

¹⁰⁵ For a catalogue of fresco finds, see Cameron 1975, 671–781. For a mention of the fragments from Kommos, see J. Shaw, 'Campaign Resumed at Kommos', *ASCSA Newsletter*, 28 (Fall, 1991), 1; for Miletus, see M.-H. Gates, 'Archaeology in Turkey', *AJA* 100 (1996), 302, fig. 17.

forms into hybrids that are unknown to nature, such as the iris-papyrus-reed hybrid of the Priest-King fresco at Knossos.¹⁰⁶ Both the selection of motifs in Aegean landscape art and the ability to depict them thus seem guided by convention.¹⁰⁷

Within the context of Gombrich's principle of the adapted stereotype, however, the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion seems to be pushing the frontiers of Aegean creativity. Though the artist employs schemata familiar to the Aegean artistic tradition, they are adapted and combined in ways that produce new floral forms; and in so doing, the boundaries of Aegean landscape representation are expanded. But is the Minoan artist of the Floral fresco making a conscious effort to be original? Can anything be found that indicates the artist is intentionally avoiding stock motifs in order to create a fresco that is 'different' from contemporary nature frescoes?

A comparison with thirteen Neopalatial town houses excavated around Knossos that preserve fresco decoration may perhaps prove illuminating. Six, or approximately half of these buildings, preserve fragments of landscape painting and of these, five of the six feature new or rare floral elements.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the innovative floral types identified in both the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion and the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos,¹⁰⁹ the LM I A Partridge and Hoopoe frieze from the Caravanserai depicts an unusual plant identified by Evans as dittany (*Origanum dictamnus*), a low bush possibly representing chicory (*Cichorium spinosum*), and 'briars'.¹¹⁰ The South East House preserves a LM I A fragment of slender 'flowering grasses or reeds';¹¹¹ renewed excavations of 'Hogarth's houses' on the east side of the Gypsades Hill revealed MM III fragments of sage or vetch;¹¹² and additional excavations along the Royal Road turned up LM I A fresco fragments identified by M. Cameron as 'butcher's broom'.¹¹³ It thus seems clear that the landscape paintings decorating the Knossos town houses more often than not included inventive floral motifs, and that the innovation of the Floral fresco is not exceptional, but rather, reflects one of many experiments in landscape art practiced in the Knossos town houses. Assuming that the various patrons approved of the nature frescoes (or presumably the decorations would have been removed from the walls), the frescoes must reflect something of the tastes of local patrons for wall painting. Conversely, the artists must have been painting in ways that were intended to please their patrons. It is therefore entirely

¹⁰⁶ PM ii. 2, frontispiece pl. XIV.

¹⁰⁷ Cultural convention may have influenced the development of the more familiar floral motifs, since many of the most commonly represented plants in Aegean art also seem to have associations with cult practice. See above, n. 90.

¹⁰⁸ As reported by Cameron 1975, 713–37, houses with landscape fresco fragments dating to LM I B or earlier include the Caravanserai, 'Hogarth's Houses', the House of the Frescoes, the South House, the South East House, and the Unexplored Mansion. Additionally, the Royal Road excavations (1957–61) uncovered many landscape fresco fragments. Houses lacking landscape frescoes are the House of the High Priest, the House of the Chancel Screen, the House of the Sacrificed Oxen, the Little Palace, the North-West Treasury, and the Royal Villa. More recent excavations at the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos uncovered the Fresco of the Garlands which, while not constituting a landscape, does nonetheless include unusual floral motifs. See Warren (n. 90), 187–208.

¹⁰⁹ Unusual floral types include the wild pea or vetch, the rose, and the common mallow (see above, n. 92). Additional floral varieties may possibly be identified as 'rockrose,' 'convolvulus,' 'honeysuckle,' and a 'flowering rush' (PM ii. 464–6), but other new motifs cannot be identified (Ibid., fig. 275 d, e, h, i, k).

¹¹⁰ PM ii. 111, 113. M. Möbius, 'Pflanzenbilder der minoischen Kunst in botanischer Beobachtung', *JdI* 48 (1933), 20, disputes the dittany identification and argues for the caper (*Capparis spinosa* L.), though M. Shaw (n. 17), prefers to recognize the plant as an acacia tree (*Acacia nilotica*). P. Warren (n. 90), 194, identifies dittany in garland 2 of the Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos.

¹¹¹ PM i. 537, fig. 390.

¹¹² Cameron 1975, 717, pl. 109 B 6.

¹¹³ Ibid., 728, pl. 112 a, slide 33. Cameron 1975, plates, 99, identifies the plant as *Ruscus aculeatus*, described in Polunin and Huxley (n. 73), 218, no. 234.

possible that Neopalatial artists were intentionally creating novel floral motifs to please patrons who found such features of landscape art to be desirable.

Thus secular motivations must be considered for their potential role in the development of fresh motifs and the creation of landscapes such as the Floral fresco. In the case of Akrotiri, Thera, where there is in evidence a similar interest in wall painting and, more particularly, in landscape decoration, C. Boulotis suggests that frescoes are a fashionable means of displaying wealth. Wall paintings by their very nature, it is argued, serve no practical function in providing either food or shelter yet their production requires that the artist or workshop be compensated for labour and productivity. Frescoes are therefore a luxury item and as such, they can become a means of flaunting wealth.¹¹⁴ At Knossos, this theory is supported by the observation that many of the town houses containing frescoes also include architectural features that imitate the palaces and utilize the same expensive construction materials. The Unexplored Mansion, for example, as described above, features a pillar hall on its ground floor, a stepped ashlar façade, and even employs gypsum flooring on its upper storey. The Floral fresco, then, seems to be further embellishment of an already luxurious building. Similarly, the South East House features ashlar masonry, walls faced with gypsum, a pillar room, a columned light well, and polythyra.¹¹⁵ In this context, the House of the Frescoes is quite unusual, since it lacks most palatial architectural features except ashlar construction and is of modest proportions, being only about one-third the size of the Unexplored Mansion. Yet the House was decorated with at least two nature frescoes, that, as observed by Evans, represent a high standard of living and a wide diffusion of high culture among the classes.¹¹⁶ The frescoes can also be interpreted, however, as an attempt by a patron of more modest means to embellish his or her house with decoration that is appropriate to a much larger and more expensive building. The fresco, and in particular, the landscape fresco of innovative floral design, might then be considered an important element in the display of wealth among the élite class of Neopalatial Crete.

It thus becomes easy to imagine an artistic environment in the Knossos area paralleling that of Renaissance Italy, where wealthy patrons actively sought to commission the most talented and innovative artists to decorate their homes, palaces, and churches, while artists consciously struggled to gain commissions by improving upon their art with new, more naturalistic figures and more inventive compositions. Obvious cultural and historical differences aside, certain similarities in the Minoan archaeological record at Knossos could support this tentative comparison. On the side of patronage, the Knossos town houses seem to have been occupied by members of an élite class who found landscape art to be desirable wall decoration. On the side of production, Cameron's unpublished analysis of artistic hands suggests that at least three different workshops painted innovative landscapes with unusual floral motifs in the Knossos area during the LM I A period alone.¹¹⁷ If the analysis of artistic hands is correct,

¹¹⁴ C. Boulotis, 'Προβλήματα της Αιγαιακής ζωγραφικής και οι τοιχογραφίες του Ακρωτηρίου', in C. Doulas (ed.), *Ακρωτηρι Θήρας. Είκοσι χρόνια έρευνας* (1967–1987) (Athens, 1992), 89.

¹¹⁵ *PM* i. 425–30; J. W. Graham, *The Palaces of Crete* (Princeton, 1969), 56–7.

¹¹⁶ *PM* ii. 266.

¹¹⁷ Though the study of artistic hands in Minoan painting is in its infancy (see above n. 44), Cameron assigned numerous frescoes to various 'schools' or workshops. Working in the LM I A period at Knossos, Cameron

identified a 'Caravanserai School' which produced both the Partridge and Hoopoe frieze from the Caravanserai and the 'flowering reeds' and mice of the South East House; a 'School I' which created the Monkeys and Blue Birds fresco and the Crocuses and Goats fresco from the House of the Frescoes; and a new atelier which painted the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion (Cameron, 1975, 352–5; Cameron 1984, 148). Though these attributions are unpublished and have not undergone public scrutiny, they do suggest that different hands were at work at the same time creating these varied motifs.

then some person(s) presumably had to choose one artist's workshop from among those available when awarding a commission. To judge from the high percentage of town houses that were embellished by skilfully painted and inventive landscapes, it seems likely that consideration of artistic talent and innovation played a significant role in the granting of these commissions. The result would be an artistic environment in which a healthy demand for high quality art was balanced by a competitive community of artists who were seeking, like the Italian Renaissance artists, to improve upon their art through artistic experiments that yielded an expanding pictorial vocabulary and innovations in brushwork. That this 'Neopalatial Renaissance' was short-lived, probably enduring only through the LM I A period, only makes it more remarkable.

The attempt to place the Floral fresco from the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos within the context of the Aegean painting tradition therefore leads to the conclusion that analysing Neopalatial landscape art principally in terms of its connection to cult practice is over-limited. Although an interest in landscape art may have developed from religious beliefs in which nature was perhaps understood as the realm of divinity, the individual floral elements of the Floral fresco have few, if any, direct connections to Aegean cult. Rather, the 'anemones', 'frilled flowers', and 'osiers' of the Floral fresco appear for the first time in the extant corpus of Minoan landscape painting with the result that the composition, fragmentary though it may be, nevertheless conveys its innovative and daring expansion of the Minoan landscape pictorial vocabulary. The unknown artist of the Floral fresco was, however, certainly not alone in these efforts. Comparable landscape paintings from the town houses of Knossos reveal a similar interest in landscape art with unusual floral motifs, thereby suggesting that the Neopalatial artists were meeting a demand for new creativity that was driven, at least in part, by the tastes of their patrons. Though religious convictions may have stimulated Minoan cultural interest in landscape as an art form, the frescoes decorating the houses of the Minoan élite are likely to have served doubly as displays of wealth and status. A multiplicity of factors should therefore be considered when seeking to understand the role of landscape art within Aegean culture and to appreciate its unexpected importance.

Emory University

ANNE P. CHAPIN



CHAPIN
THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS
1. Reconstruction of the Floral fresco from Room P of the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos, by Anne P. Chapin.



CHAPIN

THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS

White anemone (*Anemone coronaria* var. *alba*). From O. Polunin and A. Huxley, *Flowers of the Mediterranean* (London, 1965), pl. 24.



Paeonia clusii

CHAPIN
THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS

White peony (*Paeonia clusii*). From W. T. Stearn and P. H. Davis, *Peonies of Greece* (Kifissia, 1984).



CHAPIN

THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS

Rockrose (*Cistus incanus-subsp. creticus*). From A. Huxley and W. Taylour, *Flowers of Greece and the Aegean* (London, 1977), pl. 169.



CHAPIN
THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS
'Osiers' from Delta 17, Akrotiri, Thera. Athens, Idryma Theras – Petros M. Nomikos.



CHAPIN
THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS
Common osier (*Salix viminalis*). From O. Polunin, *Trees and Bushes of Europe* (London, 1976), 35 c.



CHAPIN

THE FLORAL FRESCO AT KNOSSOS

Detail: 'Nilotic' east frieze of the Miniature frieze from the West House, Akrotiri, Thera.
Athens, Idryma Theras – Petros M. Nomikos.