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Disarming the Snake Goddess: A Reconsideration of the Faience Figurines from the Temple Repositories at Knossos

Emily Miller Bonney

Dept. of Liberal Studies, California State Fullerton, Box 6868 Fullerton, CA 92834, *USA*
E-mail: ebonney@fullerton.edu

Abstract

The two reconstituted faience figurines from the Temple Repositories at Knossos were restored by Sir Arthur Evans as epitomes of elite women of the Neopalatial period and objects of an indigenous palatial cult of the Snake Goddess. They have appeared as such in the literature for the past century. This article reassesses the accuracy of Evans's characterization by examining only the original fragments—a head, two torsos and the remnants of a flounced skirt—to determine whether the coiffures, clothing, and gestures have parallels in Cretan art. This process reveals that the figures do not have close parallels, for the most part, within the Cretan tradition. Furthermore, there are no Cretan iconographic sources for the images of the women as participants in the cult of the Snake Goddess, whether as goddesses or as priestesses. Rather, the craftsmen who created them employed motifs from the Syrian artistic tradition most likely relying on the representations of the goddess opening her skirt and the renderings of Syrian goddesses with cylindrical crowns, straight hair, and robes with thick edges. The elites who ordered the production of the figurines did so within the context of the construction of the Middle Minoan III palace at Knossos. At a time of heightened interaction with the late Middle Bronze Age monarchies of the Levant, the elites at Knossos emulated Syrian iconography as an assertion of their access to exotic knowledge and control of trade. When the Middle Minoan III palace was destroyed, the figurines were deposited in the Temple Repositories, and their iconography was buried with them. There is no trace of them in subsequent Neopalatial art.

Keywords: *snake goddess, Syria, Neopalatial Crete, Knossos*

Introduction

When the Archaeological Museum in Iraklion closed in 2006 for renovation, curators gathered the highlights of the collection in a special display until the projected reopening in 2012. Featured in the alcove devoted to religion are some of the objects from the so-called Temple Repositories at Knossos, most prominently two faience figurines of women holding snakes, popularly known as the 'Snake Goddesses' (HM 63 and HM 65) (Figures 1 and 2). Iconic images, the statuettes appear in most general studies of the art and culture of Bronze Age Crete as examples of Neopalatial Cretan *haute couture* and as evidence for a cult of the Snake Goddess. But they fill these roles because Arthur Evans reconstructed them to do so. Scholars, as they do with Knossos itself (Hitchcock and Koudounaris 2002), recognize that the statuettes are flawed restorations, but accept Evans's interpretation as fundamentally appropriate. This paper aims to rectify the situation by deconstructing these early twentieth-century products and problematizing Evans's claim that they both epitomize

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Figure 1. Faience figurine of a woman holding snakes, from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, as reconstructed by Sir Arthur Evans and Halvor Bagge (HM 63). Photograph by author.

Figure 2. Faience figurine of a woman holding snakes, from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, as reconstructed by Sir Arthur Evans and Halvor Bagge (HM 65). Photograph by author.

Table 1. Minoan Chronology. (Sources: Watrous 2001: 222; Rehak and Younger 2001: 391.)

Date (BC)	*Ceramic Sequence*	*Palatial Phase*
2800–1900	Early Minoan I–Middle Minoan IA	Prepalatial
1900–1750	Middle Minoan IB–IIIA	Protopalatial
1750–1700	Middle Minoan IIIB	Neopalatial
1700–1580	Late Minoan IA	Neopalatial
1580–1490	Late Minoan IB	Neopalatial
1490–1320	Late Minoan II–Late Minoan IIIA2	Final Palatial
1320–1100	Late Minoan IIIB–Late Minoan IIIC	Postpalatial

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Neopalatial elite women and embody the subject of an indigenous cult of the Snake Goddess. Instead, it is argued, the statuettes are hybrids of Syrian and Cretan iconographic elements created as part of the negotiation of social relationships embodied in the Middle Minoan (MM) IIIB structure, MacDonald's (2002) 'New Palace,' that replaced the first palace at Knossos (Table 1). When the New Palace was destroyed by earthquake approximately 50 years later and construction began on its Late Minoan (LM) IA successor, fragments of the figurines were deposited in the Temple Repositories perhaps in a commemorative act. Their distinctive association of women and snakes, of which not a trace is to be found in subsequent Neopalatial Cretan art, was buried with them.

Discovery and Restoration of the Figurines

Evans discovered all but one of the figurine pieces in the bottom layer of the easternmost of two stone-lined cists he identified as the Temple Repositories; a single torso fragment surfaced in the western compartment (Evans 1902–1903: 44-47). Situated in the Cult Center, just south of the Throne Room, the cists, which were part of the MM IIIB construction, had been filled and closed during rebuilding in LM IA after the earthquake devastation (Evans 1921: 464-68; MacDonald 2002: 41; 2003). This unique deposit contained more than 200 faience objects, the largest collection ever found on Crete (Panagiotaki 1999a: 75). Particularly exceptional were the bits of female figurines: three left arms (one apparently with part of a snake); a left hand; a bell-shaped skirt (HM 64, Figure 3); a female torso encircled by at least two serpents (Figure 4); a conical tiara with a snake wrapped around it that joined to a head with only the upper part of the features (Figure 5); a second female torso with the right hand holding a spirally striped object (Figure 6). As the single arm from the Vat Room deposit turns out to be ivory and not faience (Panagiotaki 199a: 66, 273), it appears no other evidence for Cretan faience female figurines survives (Panagiotaki 1999a:104).

Figure 3. Front and back views of a faience bell-shaped skirt, from the Temple Repositories at Knossos (HM 64). After Panagiotaki 1999a: 100, fig. 26.

Evans completely reconstructed the two statuettes for which he had the most fragments. These restorations, by concealing the statuettes' incompleteness, eliminated ambiguity and communicated his view of their significance. For Evans, HM 63 and HM 65 had been, and thus must once again be, luxurious products of palatial culture and embodiments of the chthonic form of the Great Minoan Goddess. Evans did not describe the restoration process and only asserted that it had been done: 'Her [HM 63] figure as reconstituted' (Evans 1921: 500] and 'This votary [HM 65] was eventually found capable of complete restoration' (Evans 1921: 503). He does not specify how many pieces he actually had to work with, nor how he and Halvor Bagge, the Danish craftsman who assisted him, made their decisions. As a consequence we can only speculate concerning Evans's rationale for the restorations.

Some reconstructions appear fundamentally reasonable. The serpents on HM 63's shoulders (Figure 4) continue onto the ears of the head (Figure 5) so the figurine requires a neck, the snake on the tiara needs a head, and Evans also reattached the surviving right arm which holds

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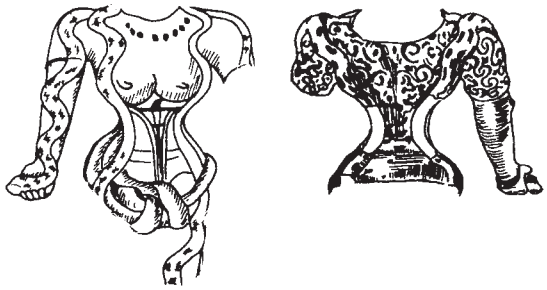

Figure 4. Original parts of a faience female torso encircled by at least two serpents (HM 63). After Marinatos 1993: 158, fig. 140 (front) and Evans 1902-3: 76, fig. 55 (back).

Figure 5. Original parts of a faience head and conical tiara (HM 63). After Marinatos 1993: 158, fig. 140 (front) and Evans 1902-3: 76, fig. 55 (back).

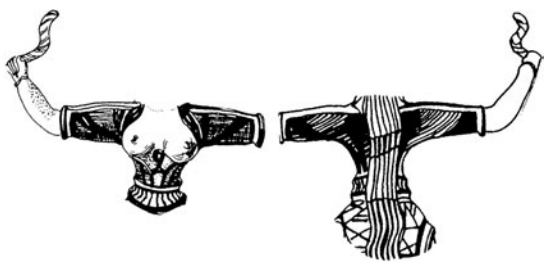

Figure 6. Original parts of a faience female torso with the right hand holding a spirally striped object (HM 65). After Evans 1921: 504, fig. 362 (front) and Evans 1902-3: 79, fig. 57 (back).

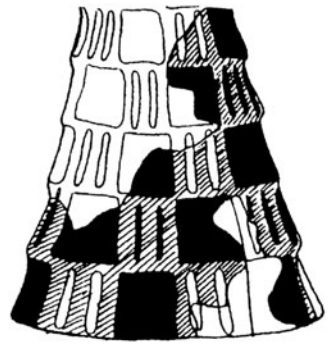

Figure 7. Original parts (in darker color) of a faience skirt (HM 65). After Evans 1902-3: 79, fig. 57.

a spotted snake: 'Restored fragt. of r. fore arm above elbow' (Panagiotaki 1993: 54). There are no actual joins between HM 65's torso (Figure 6) and flounces (Figure 7), but there are traces of flounces just below the apron on the figurine's right side. Because on each figure the left upper arm mirrors the right, the respective forearms likely did as well. Thus the presence of the serpent on HM 63's shoulder strongly suggested that the left forearm held the tail of the serpent whose head rested in the right hand (Evans 1921: 501).

Other restorations seem more ideologically driven. Anything less than a full reconstitution would have yielded an incomplete image and a gap in Evans's narrative. Instead he 'filled in the blanks' to produce HM 63 as presently displayed, adding nose and mouth, shoulder-length brown hair, a skirt identical to HM 64, and the snake bodies curving below the elaborate apron. His description of the figurine in *Palace of Minos* I reveals his intent that the restorations be read as though original: '… her hair falls behind her neck and onto her shoulders' (Evans 1921: 500). Evans and Bagge restored HM 65 even more extensively, transforming the headless HM 65 who appeared in the 1902–1903 report (Evans 1902–1903: 92, fig. 63) by adding the head and the long hair extending onto her back and bringing 'into connexion' with it (Evans 1921: 503-504) a 'tiara'

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reconstituted from a tiny fragment of uncertain original purpose and a small feline. Finally, Evans completed the spirally-striped, rope-like object in HM 65's right hand with a snake's head and body, so of course she must hold a second snake in her left hand.

Problems of Interpretation

Evans's restorations and his narrative about them in the 1902-3 report (Evans 1902–1903: 275-87) and in *Palace of Minos* I (Evans 1921: 495-523) established a body of knowledge concerning certain aspects of Neopalatial culture. The excavator had transmuted the ambiguous remnants of HM 63 and HM 65 into complete, fashionable, and visually arresting images of elite Minoan women, icons of Minoan aesthetics and figurative arts, created as the centerpiece of a shrine in the palace dedicated to the cult of the Snake Goddess, and buried after the earthquake.

Although aware of the extent of the restorations, scholars generally discuss the figurines as though they had emerged from the Neopalatial faience workshop just as they appear today. Received in their restored forms as thoroughly Bronze Age Cretan artifacts, HM 63 and HM 65 shape the discourse about Bronze Age Cretan culture in two ways. First, they are said to embody the essence of palatial Cretan fashion (Jones 2001: 262; 2005) and womanhood, informing broader discussions of the ways in which elite women are represented (Kopcke 1999: 451, 453), even though some of the elements to which the writers refer—the figurines' eyes (Alberti 2002: 201), facial features (Panagiotaki 1999b: 620-21), or overall demeanor (Kopcke 1999: 453; Gesell 1985: 87; Jones 2000: 36)—are largely, if not entirely, products of Evans's restorations. Only Goodison and Morris (1998: 125) question whether the figures are understood. The figurines have become representative of the larger category of depictions of elite Minoan women.

At the same time, HM 63 and HM 65 allegedly substantiate arguments for the long-term existence on Crete of a cult of the Snake Goddess. Evans (1921: 500) identified HM 63 as the 'Under-World form of the great Minoan Goddess,' the same deity who was the object of devotion in the LM III shrine at Gournia (Evans 1921: 508). That assertion has achieved the status of accepted authority. In this widely-held view, the rustic LM II and LM III terracotta goddesses with upraised arms, usually found with the so-called 'snake tubes,' demonstrate the persistence of the palatial cult of the Snake Goddess, as evidenced in HM 63 and HM 65, into the Postpalatial world (Gesell 2004; 2010), irrespective of whether we read the figurines as goddesses (e.g., Branigan 1969; Gesell 1985: 35; 2004) or humans performing the roles of the Goddess (Marinatos 1993: 148, 158-59; Goodison and Morris 1998: 123-25; Foster 2008: 181). The content of the Postpalatial figures thus derives from the presumed cultic significance of the faience figurines which are read, in turn, as the link to earlier objects—the Prepalatial Koumasa bust vase (Warren 1973–74) and a bowl from Protopalatial Phaestos (Levi 1976: 96, pls. LXV, LXVI)—said to be implements used in the rites of the indigenous cult of the Snake Goddess.

These readings, which rest on the assumption that HM 63 and HM 65 are typical and characteristic of Neopalatial art and cult, are not surprising, because the excavator, by reconstituting the figurines, imposed coherent content, packaging them, in effect, to convey his understanding of the 'truths' that underlay the figurines. With these completed figurines, it is impossible to vitiate the visual impact, even though the informed viewer knows they are in large part Evans's handiwork. The luxury of the faience and the intense colors of their complex costumes capture the eye and draw in the observer. The figures consort with snakes in dramatically different ways that persuade the viewer that they have different personalities and are of different ages (Gesell 1985: 87 [HM 63 younger than HM 65]; Panagiotaki 1999a: 98, n. 12 [perhaps mother (HM 63) and

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daughter (HM 65), like Demeter and Persephone]). Statements such as 'I …understand why Sir Arthur Evans … identified them as goddesses or priestesses and why feminists have adopted them as icons of women's power' (Jones 2000: 36), and '[They are] stiffened, staring, transported, not mere women but manifestly vessels of religious experience' (Kopcke 1999: 453) attest to the power of the images, power they would not have if incomplete. Would HM 63, for example, still seem older and matronly if she too wore a checked flounced skirt? If HM 65 were not holding snakes would she still seem stiffened and transported? If the faces are Evans's and Bagge's creations, can we really discuss facial expressions at all?

Yet not challenging Evans's interpretation implicates significant epistemological issues. Evans did not conceal his actions, and some of his supposed parallels for his identification of the figurines even in 1921 had questionable pedigrees (Lapatin 2002). His treatment of HM 63 and HM 65 thus are microcosms of his larger project, creating Minoans and Minoan culture, that has been the subject of considerable discussion over the last decade (e.g., Hamilakis 2002a; Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006; Papadopoulos 2005). He imposed content that supported his views on the development of European culture, on the Minoans as the originators of that culture, and on the dominance of the cult of the Great Goddess to whom the figurines pertained. Under these circumstances, if we do not examine Evans's account of the figurines, we become complicit in perpetuating his narrative of Cretan culture, as Papadopoulos (2005) has pointed out so effectively. In part, the problem—as Hitchcock and Kouodounaris (2002) so trenchantly argue and persuasively demonstrate with respect to the palace at Knossos—is an apparent reluctance to challenge Evans and an inclination to discount or excuse his impact on the study of Bronze Age Crete. Yet if, for example, Evans is wrong about the existence of an indigenous cult of the Snake Goddess, there are significant implications for the history of cult beliefs and practices on Bronze Age Crete. This is not the place for an extended consideration of the ramifications of Evans's Minoan project (a topic addressed in the works cited above). More important to the present essay, the failure to correct Evans's reading of the faience figurines perpetuates his account, not just of the objects, but also of the Bronze Age Cretan social relationships mediated by these artifacts. If we say often enough that HM 65 is a depiction of the Minoan Snake Goddess, then that is what she becomes, with all that implies about Cretan cultic practices. But is that indeed what she was intended to be?

Deconstruction

Answering this question requires recognizing the figurines as products of, and agents in, the social negotiations attendant on construction of the New Palace at Knossos at what appears to have been a transitional moment at the site (MacDonald 2002; Robb 2010). The figurines' biography—the material engagements that led to their formation and the circumstances of their deposition—situates them in the larger architectural project, which in turn was a monumental embodiment of the social relationships emerging in the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age in central Crete, a topic addressed more fully below. As part of the furnishings of the New Palace, the figurines were imbricated in the elites' strategies and the assertion of power implicit in the scale and appointments of the building (MacDonald 2002). The material of which the figurines were constituted and the specific forms imposed on that medium—the figurines' iconography—disclose the nature of the social actions in which they were embedded. That is, the images' form and substance acted on the participants in these relations, and the effectiveness of the figurines' agency depended on those individuals' understanding of them (Robb 2004).

Part of the significance of the figurines resided in the material of which they were composed,

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the faience (Boivin 2008; Jones 2007). Although Cretan craftsmen had acquired the technical knowledge to manufacture faience by the beginning of the Protopalatial phase (Foster 1979: 59), faience was a luxury product that required the importation of natron (Lucas 2003: 204; Nicholson and Peltenburg 2000), almost certainly from Egypt (Shortland *et al.* 2006), and specialized technical knowledge probably acquired from Syria (Foster 1979: 56-59), but perhaps with Egyptian influence as well (Panagiotaki 1999b; 2000; Foster 2008: 175). Acquisition of the resources thus implied participation in a network of gift and trade exchanges with places far from Crete. Moreover, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the faience from the Temple Repositories surpassed all previous works and constituted 'the acme of Minoan faience production' (Foster 2008: 178). The manufacture of so many different objects, including beads, plaques, and miniature vases required a significant investment of expertise and wealth. The figurines, in particular, represented the highest achievement of the Knossian faience craftsmen (Panagiotaki 1999b: 618), involving the combination of separate parts either with pins or the use of a slurry. Foster (2008: 178), struck by the sheer number of faience objects from the Temple Repositories, comments on the 'magico-religious significance' of faience in Egypt and Mesopotamia. She notes that faience's luminosity and array of potential colors conveyed symbolic meaning and that the manufacture of faience, in which dull materials emerge from the kiln gleaming, was a form of magic in and of itself (Foster 2008:179). She then conjures up the image of a glowing shrine filled with faience objects, including garlands of faience fruit, at the heart of the palace at Knossos (Foster 2008: 181). Whether Foster's reconstruction of the shrine is accurate is irrelevant, for more importantly she has illustrated the exceptional power of faience as a medium for expression. The faience did not represent or symbolize elite control of exotic resources and technological expertise: this material embodied that authority.

Assertions of that access to the exotic are imbedded as well in the forms impressed upon the faience, and in particular the iconographic details of the figurines. Those responsible for the crafting of the figurines and their intended audience shared an understanding concerning which formal aspects were part of a shared tradition and which were exotic. To access this original semiotic complex requires excising the 20th-century additions. All of the details added by Evans and Bagge, including the addition of the tiara and feline, are simply the excavator's conclusions to sentences begun by the Knossian craftsmen. The surviving traces of the original content reside only in the actual Bronze Age material presented here in Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7. Since, as noted above, the effectiveness of the figurines' agency depended on their audiences' understanding of them (Robb 2004: 132), then one way to deploy the figurines in the structuring of relationships within the larger project would have been to reassert traditional or established gestures.

Yet we find few parallels for most of the constituent elements of the figurines in other representations of Neopalatial elite women. HM 63 and HM 65 appear at first blush to conform to the Cretan prototype, as they wear the typically Cretan tight bodices that lift and push forward the breasts to dramatic effect. HM 63's skirt could have been bell-shaped like HM 64 and the faience dress plaques from the Temple Repositories, for which there are numerous Protopalatial and Neopalatial parallels. These aspects of costume situate the figurines in Crete. But HM 63 also could have worn a flounced skirt like HM 65's garment. As Jones (2005) has demonstrated, there are no parallels in Cretan art for either the construction or the overall checked pattern of the earliest seamless flounced garment in the Aegean (Jones 2001). With seven rows of alternating plain and striped squares in tan, purple, blue, or indigo and ochre creating a checkerboard effect, HM 65's skirt has only a single Aegean parallel, the gold brooch attached to a silver pin from Shaft Grave III at Mycenae

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(Figure 8), on which a woman wears a skirt with seven flounces comprised of alternating plain and striated squares. The other details—the arrangement of hair and position of hands and arms—that identify status and communicate the significance of the actions portrayed (Wedde 1999; Hitchcock 1997) are unique in Neopalatial art. The figurines' straight hair has little in common with the copious curls and face-framing tendrils seen in the frescoes on Crete and Thera, and HM 65's tiara is without parallel. Finally, the positions of their hands and arms are unknown in Cretan art until nearly the conclusion of the Late Minoan period. The lowered and extended arms of two of the figures participating in the bull sacrifice on the LM III Hagia Triada sarcophagus provide the only parallel to HM 63's gesture, while HM 65's upraised arms occur again only in the LM III 'Goddesses with Upraised Arms', who in any event are empty-handed and display the palms of their over-sized hands. The images thus are hybrids, with only some of their roots in Cretan imagery.

Just as there is no indigenous formal source for much of the figurines' iconography, so there is no evidence for a pre-existing cult of the Snake Goddess . The supposed 'snake' on the Early Bronze Age Koumasa bust-vase's neck and chest (Branigan 1969: 34; Warren: 1973–74; Gesell 1983: 94; 1985: 125) more likely constitutes the figure's arms holding the jug signified by the spout in the shoulder (Marinatos 1993: 148, n.6). Similarly, the continuous loops on the triangular shape on a Middle Bronze Age bowl from Phaistos are not snakes (Levi 1976: 96), but simple loops, 'regular with no heads or tails' (Goodison and Morris 1998: 123). Indeed, snakes in any artistic form are rare (Branigan 1969: 33), and often it is unclear whether the craftsman intended a serpent or simply an irregular line (Platon 1969: 353, abb. 305 ['Schlangenförmige Linien (Schlangen?)']). Clay snakes occasionally were offered at the peak sanctuaries, where they constitute a very small percentage of zoomorphic votives (Watrous 1995), but whether to a chthonic deity or to gain relief from a snake infestation is unknowable. In any case, HM 65 is not holding a snake, but a spirally-striped object that could not have been a snake, as Evans knew. With reference to HM 63 he wrote in *Palace of Minos* I (Evans 1921: 447): '…and as we know from the contents of the Temple Repositories described below, *spotted snakes* [emphasis added] were her peculiar emblem in her chthonic aspect as Lady of the Underworld.' In any case, Evans, 'who had played with the reptiles since childhood', knew that snakes never have 'peppermint stripes' (MacGillivray 2000: 223). Indeed the textured surface of the upper original portion of the 'serpent' seems to reflect the craftsman's intent to depict a twisted object such as a rope or cord.

Figure 8. Detail of the finial of a pin from Shaft Grave III, Mycenae. After Marinatos and Hirmer 1960: pl. 200, left.

The Syrian Connection

Confronted with the clearly exotic elements of the figurines, the question then is where to look for possible sources. There is good evidence of interaction between the Aegean and the Levant during the decades around the construction of the New Palace. Several of the cylinder seals

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found on Crete, almost always in unstratified contexts, are Old Syrian (Aruz 1995; Møller 1980). Woolley (1955: 228-34) recognized the Aegeanizing elements in the paintings from Alalakh level VII, which is probably late Middle Bronze Age, but whose date is still subject to dispute. More recently fragmentary remains of painted rockwork, irises, and crocuses at the site of Tel Kabri in the Galilee (Niemeier and Niemeier 2002: 254) in a true fresco technique provide more evidence for exchange between Aegean and Levantine art, leading the excavator to suggest that Aegean artists had worked abroad (Niemeier and Niemeier 2002: 255-70), an interpretation recently affirmed by Cline and Yasur-Landau (2011), who now date the Tel Kabri frescoes to around 1750 (i.e., contemporary with the New Palace). Yet as Sherratt (1994) has argued, these are Aegeocentric positions predicated on some notion of Cretan cultural superiority; Knapp (1998) cogently argues against so simplistic an explanation for the hybridity that begins to emerge in the Eastern Mediterranean toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age, and contends that trade and diplomatic exchange are more likely means for the transmission of motifs. Although rulers in the Middle Bronze Age did not rely on the diplomatic visual language that Feldman (2006) argues had developed by the 13th century BC, exchanges among courts still occurred for more general political ends (Zaccagnini 1983). We learn in particular from the Mari letters of Zimri-Lim's appreciation for Aegean crafts (Caubet 1998). At Ugarit he acquired Cretan metalwork which he almost certainly used as prestige gifts to his contemporaries in the region (Guichard 1999), and his appreciation for Cretan crafts continued with the order of a 'Cretan boat' trimmed with lapis lazuli (Caubet 1998: 108) and the importation from Crete of goods such as shoes, leather belts, and boots (Caubet 1998: 106). Still, these interactions are limited in number. Von Rüden (2011: 102-103) observes that during the Middle Bronze Age in the Levant trade with the Aegean remained circumscribed, and she suggests that exchanges still occurred primarily among elites as part of diplomacy and gift exchange, and not in any significant volume. Thus interaction between the Levant and Crete in the later Middle Bronze Age would have occurred solely at the level of elites and, as will be discussed further below, prior to Knossos achieving more than purely local control.

Nevertheless, examination of late Middle Bronze Age Syrian Art reveals many parallels for the non-traditional elements of the figurines. Jones (2001; 2005) has already demonstrated the Syrian influence on HM 65's flounced garment. Striking parallels appear in the Mari wall paintings (Figure 9) and in Old Syrian glyptic (Porada 1948: 117-19, pl. CXXXVII, fig. 910; 1993: 375, fig. 35) for the alternation of plain and fringed or pleated squares of fabric. Although flounced garments in Syrian art usually are full-length robes, Jones (2005: 714) cites at least one example of a skirt, not checked, worn by a bare-breasted goddess. The Mari goddesses in checked robes also have HM 65's waist-length straight hair as do most goddesses on Anatolian and

Figure 9. Detail of painted plaster wall with Supplicant Goddesses from Room 132, Palace of Mari, Syria. After Moortgat 1968: fig. 49b.

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Syrian seals (cf. an Anatolian gold seal from level IB at Karum Kanesh [Özgüç 1968: pl. XXX2b]; an Old Syrian Seal [Özgüç 1968: pl. XXVI, 3 and XXIX, 1, 'Syrian long-haired woman']; a Syrian cylinder seal in the Morgan Library collection [Porada 1948: 194, fig. 2, 'typically long Syrian hair'); and an Old Syrian cylinder seal from Tylissos [Møller 1980: 95]). While Evans restored HM 63 with shoulder-length hair, she too may originally have had longer hair, and in any event the straightness of her coiffure conforms with the Syrian prototypes.

The Cretan figurines' poses are more difficult to pin down. While it is tempting to associate HM 65's gesture with the Mistress of the Animals (e.g. Marinatos 2000: 11-13), that particular type is much later. The Master of Animals was known in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, but his feminine counterpart—who is naked, unlike HM 65—is later (Old Babylonian, ca. 1900 BC) and quite rare (Barclay 2001: 375, pl. CIIIg [the so-called Burney Plaque] and pl. CIIIh [terracotta jar]). Goddesses in this aggressive posture, so forthright in their exposure of themselves, do appear, usually holding caprids, on a small number of seals from north Syria or Anatolia (Keel 1992: 205). They do not become associated with snakes until Late Bronze I-IIA Syria, as on the gold foil plaque from Minet el-Beida, 1400–1300 BC (Keel 1992: 208; Negbi 1976: 99, fig. 118 no. 1700, pl. 54 no. 1700), where the goddess does not hold the snakes, but instead is surrounded by them. As the Canannite goddess Qedeshet, she never appears holding snakes (Cornelius 1999: 247; 2004), until in Egypt, as Qudshu, she holds snakes and lotus flowers (one to three of each) (Cornelius 1999). She did not arrive in Egypt until the New Kingdom, already partially Egyptianized with her Hathor headdress, and did not become prominent until the 19th dynasty (1298–1187 BC) (Keel 1992: 204; Volokhine 2000: 65-69; Cornelius 2000). The emergence of a goddess holding snakes, the predecessor to the Mistress of Animals, occurs long after the craftsman fashioned HM 65.

But HM 65 is not, of course, holding snakes. The most likely prototype is a form of the goddess specific to Syria. The image of a naked goddess first appears on a few Old Babylonian cylinder seals from the early second millennium BC (Marinatos 2000:1-3). She seems most at home in Syria, however, where she appears in a variety of settings (Uehlinger 1998–2001). In a particularly popular variant (Figure 10) she stands with arms raised, holding either end of what appears to be a long cord that hangs nearly to her feet. As Marinatos (2000:5) describes it, 'the goddess holds something like a rope which has been plausibly interpreted as an abbreviation of her skirt' to indicate that she is pulling her skirt open to display her sexuality (Winter 1983: 273; Uehlinger 1998–2001: 62). Holland

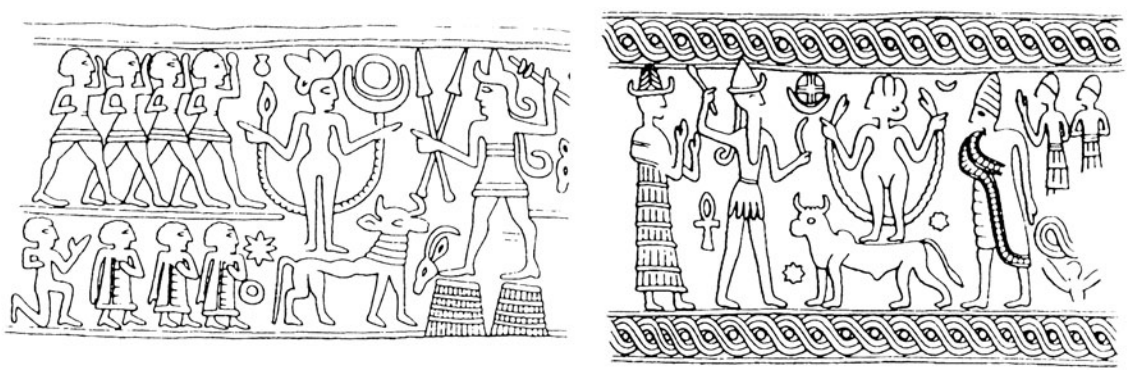

Figure 10. Syrian seals with Goddess opening her skirt. After Marinatos 2000: 6, figs. 1.9 and 1.10.

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(1929: 195-96) observed that the figure on the Shaft Grave III pin holds a garland before her that exactly replicates the curved shape held by the Syrian goddess. The Votary also likely held 'something like a rope' or a garland, because the artisan, like the goldsmith who made the pin, modified the motif of the goddess opening her skirt. Since Cretan women are never depicted nude, the artist could have felt compelled to clothe the figure completely, thereby obscuring the source for the image.

HM 63's Syrian roots are more difficult to discern. Her tapering cylindrical headgear could derive from the modified cylindrical crown with a single pair of horns at the base, worn by Syrian goddesses, as in the sealings from Level VII at Alalakh (Figure 11) (Collon 1975: pl. XVI). But we do not find goddesses holding snakes in Syria or Anatolia, where the snake is instead associated with the weather god who occasionally holds the serpent (Keel 1992: 195-307; Buchholz 2000: 62; Williams-Forte 1983). A semi-clad winged goddess with a cylindrical headdress always accompanies the weather god, but never holds or touches the snakes (Green 2002: 116-20, 157; Williams-Forte 1983: fig. 7). Serpents are associated with water, as on an Early Dynastic vase with the Master of Serpents on one side and the Master of Water on the other (Keel 1992: 224), and depictions of gods holding water courses often appear as though the deity were holding snakes (Porada 1993: 569, fig. 16 [god with flowing vase, ca. 2250 BC]; 570, fig. 19 [storm god and rain goddess holding water, 2250 BC]; 576, fig. 37, [Kassite seal with rain god, 1359–1330 BC]), but these are both much earlier and much later than the Snake Goddess. That said, Keel (1992: 221) suggests that in some instances the god who dominates the snake metamorphosizes into a god associated with water, and he cites a ritual vessel from Ebla in Syria (Keel 1992: fig. 261, ca. 1800 BC), on which the god holds a fish (?) in one hand and the tail of a snake in the other. Alternatively, the craftsman who created HM 63 may have misread a convention on late Middle

Figure 11. Sealings from Alalakh VII with goddesses wearing robes with thick borders and cylindrical crowns. After Collon 1975: pl.XVI.

Bronze Age seals from Syria, namely the use of a thick border on the robes. For example, on several sealings from Alalakh VII the goddess wears a cylindrical horned crown and a robe with a thick border that drapes around her arm like a snake (Figure 11). This misunderstanding would not be unique to the Bronze Age. The figure on a stele from Tell Beit Mirsim originally was restored in the twentieth century as encircled by a snake, whereas the craftsman had intended to render the typical thick border of a robe (Beck 2002: 74, figs. 27-28).

The Figurines and the Construction of the New Palace at Knossos

The faience figurines are thus to be understood as hybrids of Syrian-Cretan imagery and an intentional evocation of the exotic. Their hybridity—the combination of specifically Cretan bodices with Syrian gestures and flounces—embodied the experience of Knossian elites informed by and aware of eastern iconography. While these exotic forms, constrained

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by Cretan sensibilities (Alberti 2001), lack the aggressive sexuality of the Syrian goddesses, nevertheless HM 63 and HM 65, because of their three-dimensionality and luminous tactility, seem more emphatic than the later frescoed depictions of elite women with exposed breasts. The transformations to the Syrian prototypes underscore the hybridity of the images, as elites unfamiliar with the underlying ideology of the eastern models shaped the forms to their own ends. The resulting exoticism was central to the figurines' positions as signs of human agency and intentionality, to their participation in the construction and furnishing of the New Palace, and to their deposition in the cists with the destruction of that project.

MacDonald (2002; 2003) has demonstrated that during the ceramic phase MM IIIB the elite at Knossos built the New Palace as a single coherent structure, an overly-ambitious enterprise that did not survive an earthquake perhaps 50 years later. The builders of the New Palace did not reuse any surviving portions of the older palace, a process which would have incorporated shared experience and memory (see Boivin 2008: 156-57 and Jones 2007: 22 for the recycling of components as recollection of the past). The debris from the preceding structure was leveled to form the foundation for this totally new building. The construction was a performative act that decisively separated the new building and the social relations embodied therein from its predecessor. It differed from its LM IA successor in having a substantially larger central court and broad access (MacDonald 2002: 38, 43). The Central Palace Sanctuary, where the Temple Repositories were located, was a single large space, not the suite of smaller rooms that appears on Fyfe's plans (Panagiotaki 1999a: 250). The Temple Repositories themselves, with a total liquid capacity of 6,900 liters, were situated exactly on the middle of the western edge of the court (MacDonald 2002: 40-41). While there is no way of knowing where the objects deposited in these massive cists originally were situated (including whether they were displayed as an ensemble), they were certainly part of the furnishings of the New Palace. The sumptuousness of the faience would have contrasted with the austere monumentality of the structure, apparently decorated only with marble dadoes and relief rosettes and triglyphs.

The precise status of Knossos at this stage of Cretan prehistory, the beginning of the Neopalatial phase, is far from clear, as archaeological evidence continues to accumulate that challenges Evans's narrative of Knossian dominance over Crete as the head of a prominent 'state' in the Eastern Mediterranean and as an administrative center (e.g., Driessen 2002; Hamilakis 2002b; Cunningham and Driessen 2004; Parkinson and Galaty 2007; Tartaron 2008). Increasingly it appears that, to the extent we can speak of Knossian hegemony at all, it was limited both in time and in territorial extent. At the time the New Palace was constructed there were still numerous regional centers possibly organized along corporate lines (Parkinson and Galaty 2007: 119), of which Knossos was simply the largest. That is, as Cherry (1986) had proposed, elites who had concentrated authority at sites such as Galatas and Phaestos interacted as peer polities that competed for power in a landscape occupied by numerous settlements of varying sizes. These regional centers may have been part of a heterarchically ordered system with completely localized relations between the centers and the smaller sites (Cunningham and Driessen 2004: 108). The local variations in architecture and ceramic styles that characterize both the Prepalatial and Protopalatial phases on Crete were still apparent. What is clear at the moment is that in MM IIIB Knossos was still essentially a local power with, perhaps, larger aspirations that found expression in the New Palace and the burial of the past under this new construction.

The faience figurines were manufactured during this early stage of the Neopalatial period, subsequently broken (perhaps during the earthquake), and deposited in the Temple Repositor-

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ies at the time of reconstruction early in LM IA of the Frescoed Palace (MacDonald 2003). In the new building, which modified, but did not build over, the New Palace, access was more restricted, the central court was smaller, and the rooms around the court also were reduced in size (MacDonald 2002). The marble dadoes were replaced by plaster and the light-filled frescoes. This palace may embody the apogee of Knossian power, although the precise character of that power still remains open to scholarly debate. Although in LM IA independent polities continued to exist in the east and west, Knossos became the most significant force in central Crete (Warren 2002; Driessen 2001a). By the end of LM IA, the peer polity or heterarchical system had been replaced, at least in central Crete, with a different system structured according to a simplified hierarchy centered at Knossos (Cunningham and Driessen 2004: 105; Tartaron 2008: 99). Yet even this centralization of authority, which some see as cultural rather than political, may have co-existed with heterarchies and factionalism (Hamilakis 2002b; Schoep 2002).

While the elites at Knossos may have succeeded in asserting dominance only in LM IA, the monumentality of the MM IIIB palace and the exotic qualities of the faience figurines may signal initial efforts to centralize authority at the site. Although elites across the island certainly had controlled access to prestige goods throughout the Prepalatial and Protopalatial periods, the accumulation and concentration of such goods, particularly in this deposit at Knossos, marks a new stage. The unified conception of the palatial structure with its broad access and monumentality suggest a socio-political agenda of some kind, and—to the extent that the building was intended to perpetuate memories (Jones 2007: 22)—they were to be of the new elites and not the past. The appearance of exotica contemporaneous with the construction of the New Palace is similar to, although much more limited in scope than, the evidence for the social and political shifts that occurred on Cyprus at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. There, changes in the copper trade apparently led to the rise of Enkomi where, as evidenced by significant wealth differentials in a mortuary context (Keswani 2004), elites in the emerging hierarchy became significant consumers of prestige goods from Egypt and the Levant (Keswani 1989). These prestige goods, because of their association with distant and exotic places would have legitimized elite claims to authority (Knapp 1998). Webb (2005) suggests that those elites extended their authority beyond that site, by deploying exotic imagery on cylinder seals, while communicating messages cast in metaphorical and mythical terms that simultaneously denied the social differences and reified the emerging hierarchy—a rough parallel to the exotic gestures of women in Cretan costume. She observes that Enkomi was a center for glyptic production, with more than 200 cylinder seals (Webb 2002:140), and would have been able, through the use of these seals, to control the copper trade and access to foreign markets and luxury goods (Knapp 2008: 151). While the evidence of the faience figurines, admittedly, is significantly more ambiguous than the data from Enkomi, the volume of faience and the distinctiveness of the figurines in particular may reflect the similar pattern of emerging elites engaged in asserting dominance by deploying exotic imagery and materials.

The Deposition of the Faience Figurines

In this context, the destruction and deposition of the faience figurines takes on a particular significance. Evans clearly imagined that the figurines were broken as a consequence of the earthquake, a view implicit in accounts of the deposition as a ritual disposal of the damaged figurines (Gesell 1985: 85-87; Panagiotaki 1999a: 148). Alberti (2001: 198), Hervas (2005: 222), and Hatzaki (2009: 29) suggest that the figurines may have been broken intentionally, perhaps even

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manufactured for that purpose, 'killed' as a display of elite power over luxury goods, or a metaphor for human sacrifice (Hatzaki 2009: 29). Similar suggestions have been made for the Neopalatial stone bull's-head rhyta which are always found fragmented (Rehak 1995), and there is significant evidence of intentional breakage of an array of objects from other European sites (Chapman 2000). In this regard, it is curious that both HM 63 and HM 65 lack the left arm, and all three disembodied arms and the single hand were from the left. Obviously there is no way to know what actually happened. Nevertheless, the notion that the elites at Knossos, in the wake of the earthquake and as part of the process of rebuilding in LM IA, invested significant resources of time and treasure for the manufacture of all these faience objects, particularly the figurines, solely for the purpose of destroying them seems unlikely, and even impracticable given the level of destruction in which craftsmen would have labored. More to the point, in trying to account for Cretan conduct vis-à-vis building/foundation deposits in general, we overlook the historical specifics and effective agency of these objects in particular. Why these objects—the figurines? Why this place—the Temple Repositories? Why this time—LM IA?

These questions are particularly pertinent because the figurines' imagery—their distinctive features, including HM 63's association with snakes—are totally absent from Neopalatial art. The faience figurines, and most likely all the faience objects, were integral to the social project embodied by the New Palace. As Boivin (2008) argues, material culture does not stand for or represent something; it is active. The selection of faience as a medium and the introduction of exotic 'signs' in the figurines' gestures conveyed the elites' claim of legitimate authority, whether only locally or over a broader territory. Both building and figurines embodied access to, and control of, resources and specialized knowledge. The sudden destruction of the New Palace disrupted not just the building, but the social relationships embedded in its construction. Likewise the figurines, whether broken in the earthquake or subsequently and intentionally, may have lost efficacy after the cataclysm. The decision to deposit the faience in the Temple Repositories, given their situation at the middle of the western edge of the now ruined Central Court, affirmed the connection between the figurines and the building. And just as those who rebuilt in LM IA rejected the daring monumentality of the New Palace, so too they excluded any reference to the imagery of the faience figurines.

Conclusion

This paper is a response, then, to Papadopoulos's (2005: 134) lament that, in his work, Arthur Evans did not just lay down the rules, he invented them, 'And whether consciously or unconsciously, we continue to abide by them.' Stripping away the restorations to HM 63 and HM 65, and challenging Evans's narrative in which they are elite Minoan women that on some level are related to a cult of the indigenous snake goddess, allows us to re-evaluate what the figures mean. We re-embody them as effective agents in the reproduction of social relationships, of which the construction of the New Palace was an integral part. They are Cretan-Syrian hybrids whose exotic aspects were engaged in legitimizing the claims of the elites in MM IIIB. Tied to the New Palace, they did not survive its destruction. Following their deposition, in which they effectively returned to the palace where they belonged, their Cretan elements survived in the flounced kilts and open bodices we see in the frescoes at Knossos and on Thera. The more exotic features—the straight hair and, in particular for HM 63, the association with snakes—disappear. The more restricted access and smaller central court of the LM IA palace suggest that relations were performed differently than they had been in the New Palace, and those changes were expressed in new images.

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About the Author

Emily Miller Bonney is Associate Professor of Liberal Studies at California State University, Fullerton. She has a PhD in Classical Art and Archaeology from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. Her particular interests are in archaeological theory and, in particular, the issue of how to think about and discuss material culture. She has walked much of the Mesara and the Asterousia in pursuit of the Cretan Early and Middle Bronze Age tholoi, about which she has published one article and delivered numerous conference papers.

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