

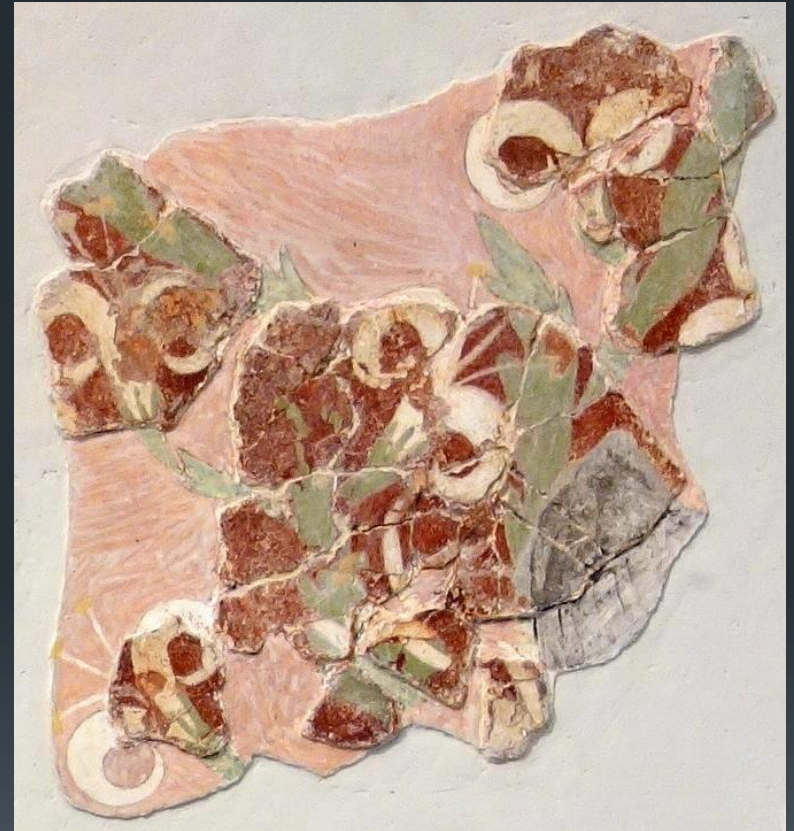


The Imagined Landscape

Art and Representation

Wall Paintings in the Aegean

- Minoan Crete:
 - From MM IA/B
 - Tend to fragmentary & not in situ
 - Problems with reconstructions
- Wider Aegean these occur in LM I:
 - Best preserved on Thera
 - Also represented at Phylakopi, Ayia Irini, Miletus (fragmentary)



Lilies, Archanes

Conventions

- Colour palette
- Rocky landscape & perspective
- Repeated plants:
 - Lilies, crocuses, sea daffodils...
- Animals:
 - Monkeys
 - Birds
 - Agrimi
 - Cats



“blue boy”, Knossos

The Imagined Landscape

- “landscape art has come to characterize the extraordinary cultural achievements of Minoan prehistoric society” (Chapin 2008, 47):
- “exuberant paintings teeming with plants & animals seemingly wild & free from a discernible human presence” (Chapin 2008, 47)
- Characteristics: lively, colourful, naturalistic, spontaneity
- Nature frescoes are limited to more elaborate structures, suggesting importance of the representations



Blue monkeys, Knossos

The Imagined Landscape

- Focus on iconography & context
 - What functions did these landscapes serve?
 - What was their symbolic meaning?
 - For whom were they painted?
 - How were they used & consumed?
 - Why paint landscapes devoid of human presence or activity?



Ayia Triadha

The Imagined Landscape

- Are landscape paintings secular or religious in meaning?
- Are they purely decorative?
- Do they indicate the presence of a religious shrine?



Xeste 3, Thera

Monkeys and Blue Birds

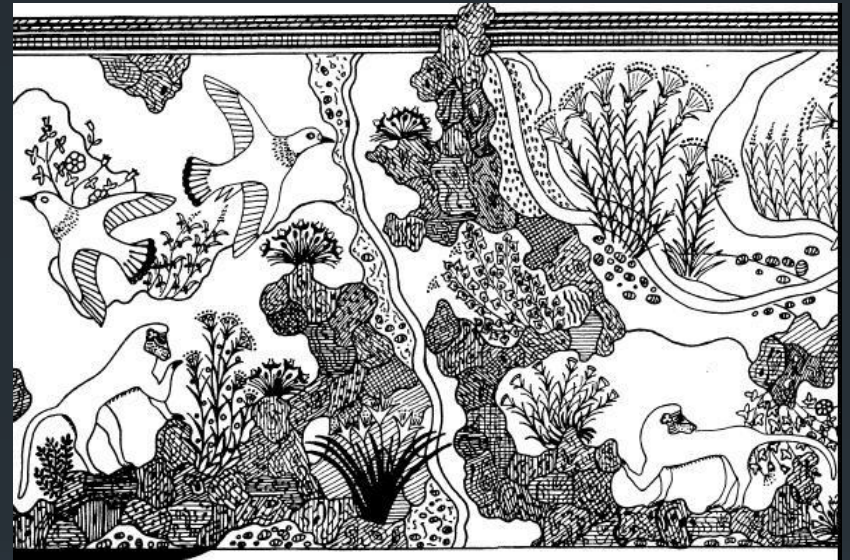


House of the Frescoes

- Evans: secular scene
- Cameron: view of a landscape with monkeys foraging for food & raiding nests for eggs
- Animals & flowering plants with religious associations:
 - Lilies & crocuses appropriate for offerings
 - Monkey & bird associated with nature goddess

Monkeys and Blue Birds

- Marinatos identifies the decorated room as a shrine
 - Stone offering table & inscribed votive ladle
- Wall painting: “a deliberate compression of nature brimming with religious meaning suggestive of the renewal of nature and symbolic of the ideal spring” (Chapin 2008, 50)



House of the Frescoes (detail)

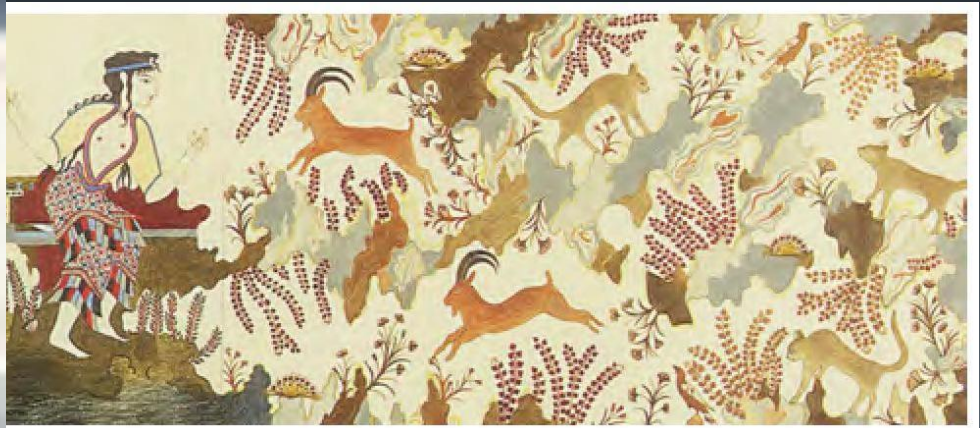


natural & a tamed landscape
man in front of architectural

indicates political/ideological control

le: goddess?

s topography of peak sanctuary



Ayia Triadha

- Plants: crocus, lily, ivy, violets
- Natural landscape:
 - Rocky terrain with repeated clumps of flowering plants
 - Agrimi, cats
 - And more chaotic ordering?
- Tamed landscape
 - Undulating red bands around white wares
 - Kneeling female
- Rehak relates this to cult of goddess & links to peak sanctuary:
 - Reiterated in other media



Detail of landscapes



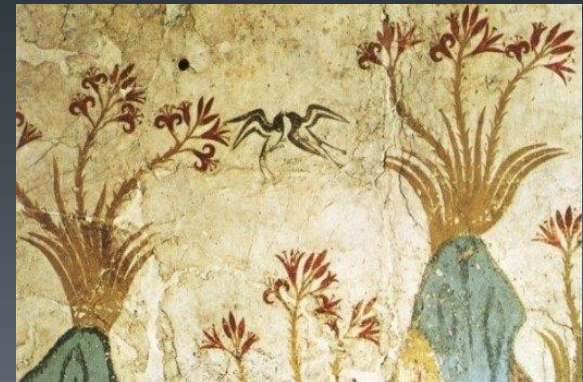
Akrotiri: Spring Fresco



- Hollinshead (1989): context suggests purely secular & decorative
 - Bedroom decorated with rocky landscape, swaying lilies & swallows
- Marinatos: shrine with scenes providing backdrop to religious performance
- Foster (1995): an avian epiphany

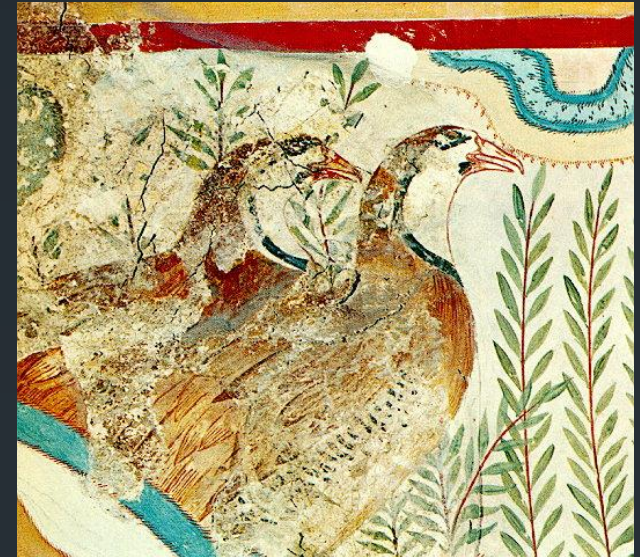


Spring Fresco, Delta 2



Caravanserai, Knossos

- Partridge & Hoopoe Fresco:
 - Abstract rocky landscape with various plants (myrtle chicory, caper, acacia)
 - 8 partridges & 2 hoopoes
- Found in building with bathing facilities:
 - A place of communal action for a restricted social group
- Imagery not intrinsically religious?
 - Aesthetic?



Detail of wall painting



Reconstruction

Floral Motifs

- Accepted that frequently represented plants served cultic, medicinal, & economic functions:
 - E.g. crocuses & lilies
- Surprising variety of floral motifs identified in Neopalatial landscape:
 - Wild pea, rockrose, convolvulus, honeysuckle, dittany & acacia



Amnisos: lilies in garden

Floral Motifs

- The technique & artistic mastery of an innovative artist
- Didn't follow traditional Aegean repertoire:
 - Unusual varieties of plants and plant hybrids defying identification: osier-lily & anemone-reed hybrids
 - Not a representation of a real landscape of native plants
 - Distortions of nature
- Floral hybridization signalling the presence of divinity:
 - “the power of divinity to act upon the natural world and to transform its appearance”

Floral Motifs

- Compression of different types of landscape within a single painting: rocky, riverine, marshy
- Marinatos: ideal spring, fertility
- Composition alludes to the greater totality of nature & not a springtime landscape
 - Chapin identifies different plants that flower at different times in the year
- An imagined landscape, not one that can be encountered at any single moment in time



Detail of Monkey & Blue Bird
Fresco, Knossos

Flotilla Fresco, West House

- Most elaborate landscape:
- Miniature frieze:
 - 7.5m in length survives; c. 43cm high
 - Continuous scene?
- Several different landscapes incorporated in the scene:
 - Peak sanctuary
 - Pastoral scene
 - Two towns
 - Seascape connecting towns & a boat procession
 - Land & sea battle
 - Nilotic landscape



Detail from Flotilla fresco

Details of Flotilla Fresco



Summary

- Rich seam of imagery from both Crete & Thera
- Most scholars stress the naturalism of the imagery
 - In fact these can be shown to be not fully realistic but an imagined landscape
- Most debate has been on whether these images are a form of symbolic communication:
 - Religious representations
 - Or purely decorative?
- Are they narrative – early representations of Homeric epic?