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Source: *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (Oct., 1989), pp. 511-535

Published by: Archaeological Institute of America

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/505326>

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A Tale of Two Cities: The Miniature Frescoes from Thera and the Origins of Greek Poetry

SARAH P. MORRIS

For Emily T. Vermeule

Abstract

Since their discovery in 1972, the miniature frescoes from the West House at Akrotiri have attracted scholarship largely confined to synchronic and technical studies by Minoan archaeologists. Prehistorians have pursued their specialties in these frescoes, have defended their Aegean territories along predictable lines, and have explored formal aspects of style and subject. Evolving scholarship has remained loyal to earlier interpretations, despite new evidence outside Thera and fresh perspectives on the Bronze Age. What has been lost is the unity and wider significance of these frescoes. Their primary source is an epic or heroic transformation of historical experience that implies the existence of contemporary poetry. A comparison of visual images with poetic themes, formulae, and episodes makes the miniature frescoes an early and important document in the prehistory of the Greek epic tradition and in the evolution of narrative art. This interpretation coincides with recent, exciting developments in Aegean archaeology and philology to form a persuasive argument for the existence of epic poetry by the early Mycenaean period. An ulterior purpose of this essay is to stimulate thought and discussion about current methodology in Aegean prehistory, artificially isolated from evidence and research in Classical philology and archaeology.*

"The contemporary archaeologist is handicapped when dealing with poetry. Poetry, and art, offer selected myths and isolated heroic individuals, two elements archaeologists have been trained to ignore, perhaps abhor. An archaeologist is permitted by his colleagues to deal only with quantified, anonymous people, estimated consumers of barley, occupants of graves graphed on computers for place and time. He is not permitted to deal with individual yellow-haired chiefs of the Argives. He must subdue his private fictions to evidence photographable in the dirt, and should ideally publish his results as mathematical formulae. There is a clash of principle between archaeological reconstructions of the Bronze Age and Greek literary reconstructions of the same scene. Yet sometimes the two sides may offer mutual assistance."¹

One hundred years after the first Bronze Age frescoes were discovered on Thera, excavations at Akrotiri uncovered painted fragments "destined to open a new chapter in the history of the Aegean."² The fres-

* The author is more than usually grateful to the many contributors to this article: to her students at Yale, to her audiences at Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Chapel Hill, and UCLA, and to the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for *AJA*. In addition, the final result benefited beyond measure from the critical eye of Geoffrey Kirk, the kindness of Christos Doumas, and from the company of John Geanakoplos on a trip to Troy in May 1988. The article is dedicated to a teacher and scholar whose support and inspiration cannot be adequately honored.

The following abbreviations are used below:

N. Marinatos,	N. Marinatos, <i>Art and Religion in Art and Religion</i>
Doumas, <i>Thera</i>	C. Doumas, <i>Thera. Pompeii of the ancient Aegean</i> (London 1983).
<i>Fourth Cretological Congress</i>	Πεπραγμένα τοῦ Δ' Διεθνoῦς Κρητολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου (Athens 1981).
<i>L'iconographie minoenne</i>	P. Darcque and J.-C. Poursat, <i>L'iconographie minoenne</i> (BCH Suppl. XI, 1985).
<i>Minoan Thalassocracy</i>	R. Hägg and N. Marinatos eds.,

The Minoan Thalassocracy. Myth and Reality. Proceedings of the Third International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 31 May-5 June, 1982 (Stockholm 1984).

Morgan, <i>Miniature Wall Paintings</i>	L. Morgan, <i>The Miniature Wall Paintings of Akrotiri, Thera. A Study in Aegean Culture and Iconography</i> (Cambridge 1988).
TAW	C. Doumas ed., <i>Thera and the Aegean World 1</i> (Athens 1978).
Thera I-VII	S. Marinatos, <i>Excavations at Thera I-VII</i> (Athens 1968-1976).
Warren, "Miniature Fresco"	P. Warren, "The Miniature Fresco from the West House at Akrotiri, Thera, and its Aegean Setting," <i>JHS</i> 109 (1979) 115-29.

¹ E. Vermeule, "Baby Aigisthos and the Bronze Age," *PCPS* 12 (1987) 145-46.

² Thera VI, 38. F. Fouqué, *Santorin et ses éruptions*

coes from Akrotiri afford an opportunity, rare in the Aegean Bronze Age, to examine wall paintings in their archaeological context instead of as burned or discarded fragments far from their original locale. The houses they decorated belong to a prosperous settlement of spacious, multistoried, freestanding structures comparable to smaller Minoan villas. Their architectural features conform closely to Minoan standards and techniques, including ashlar masonry reinforced with wood, pier-and-door arrangements, lustral basins and light-wells, and indoor plumbing.³ Their size, elegance and *Minoitas* make the discovery of frescoes in quantity no surprise. In a town abandoned by its population, who cleared out valuable property and portable furnishings, painted wall plaster survives as eloquent as well as elegant evidence of the life and imagination of the inhabitants. For example, the frescoes and their distribution help illustrate the function of different spaces. The ground floor rooms open onto the street for commercial and industrial activity exposed to public life, while residential quarters and areas for leisure and family life were secluded upstairs.⁴ This separation of public and private spheres suggests the segregation of male and female, and casts frescoes as decoration suitable for the latter sphere. Wall paintings are primarily found upstairs, and many represent women in activity involving costume, cosmetics, and ceremonies. The "House of the Ladies," for example, is named for a pair of frescoes where two women in Minoan ceremo-

nial dress—the flounced skirt with bodice exposing the breasts—apply a similar costume to a third woman, presumably in preparation for a ritual where these garments are worn.⁵ In the largest and most impressive single dwelling house excavated, Xeste 3, two stories of paintings surround Thera's only lustral basin with an elaborate panorama of women gathering saffron and offering it to a goddess, in a ceremony linked to rituals of initiation.⁶

On the basis of such frescoes, some scholars have imagined elaborate ceremonies in every house and called many dwellings "shrines," although more practical observers, including the director of current excavations at Akrotiri, see few or none.⁷ In some cases, the utilitarian contents of a room and its architectural history argue for a more purely decorative purpose for Thera's wall painting, as with the Lilies Fresco in Room Delta 2. An exception to the usual location of Thera's paintings, Delta 2 was one of the few ground-floor rooms decorated with frescoes, when areas of the town were repaired after the initial catastrophe and before the final destruction.⁸ The walls present a brilliant panorama of rocky formations crowned by lilies in bloom and swallows in flight. Once linked with the excavated contents of the room in a religious scenario celebrating spring, the landscape now appears as deliberate compensation for its small and confined space.⁹ This more decorative interpretation for this attractive landscape liberates related scenes at Thera from a presumed relationship to ritual. They imply an

(Paris 1879) 110–11 on the first frescoes; Dumas, *Thera* for a summary of excavations to date. Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* for the most complete current analysis and documentation of these frescoes.

³ C. Dumas, "Περὶ τῆς μινωικῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς ἐν Θήρᾳ," *ArchEph* 1974, 199–219; J. Shaw, "Consideration of the Site of Akrotiri as a Minoan Settlement," *TAW* 429–36; C. Palyvou, "Notes on the Town Plan of Late Cycladic Akrotiri, Thera," *BSA* 77 (1986) 179–94 and "Ἀκρωτήρι Θήρας. Οἰκοδομικὴ Τέχνη καὶ μορφολογικὰ στοιχεῖα στὴν Ὑστεροκυκλαδικὴ Ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ" (Diss. Athens Polytechnion 1988); R.L.N. Barber, *The Cyclades in the Bronze Age* (Iowa City 1987) 46–52, 201–21.

⁴ Barber (supra n. 3) 50–51, 216; cf. Dumas, *Thera* 117. A. Michaelidou, "The Settlement of Akrotiri (Thera): A Theoretical Approach to the Function of the Upper Storey," forthcoming in P. Darcque and R. Treuil eds., *L'habitat égéen préhistorique* (BCH Suppl. XVI). I am very grateful to Ms. Michaelidou for allowing me to read and cite her manuscript, and for criticizing my own text.

⁵ *Thera* VI, 38–41; S. Petersen, "A Costuming Scene from the Room of the Ladies on Thera," *AJA* 85 (1981) 211. Less certain is whether this painting makes the room, the adjacent alcove with a papyrus fresco, and the entire architectural unit a "shrine" where such a ceremony was actually performed, as argued by N. Marinatos in *Art and Religion*

97–105, fig. 1, p. 9.

⁶ *Thera* VII, 32–38, pls. A–L, 58–66; N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 73–84; *L'iconographie minoenne* 222–29; E. Davis, "Youth and Age in the Thera Frescoes," *AJA* 90 (1986) 399–406; C. Dumas, "Ἡ ἔξεστη 3 καὶ οἱ κυανοκέφαλοι στὴν τέχνη τῆς Θήρας," in A. Kastrinaki, G. Orphanas, N. Giannagakis eds., *ΕΙΛΑΠΙΝΗ, τόμος τιμητικός γιὰ Καθηγητὴ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΑ* (Heraklion 1987) 151–59.

⁷ N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 31–33 with a map of "shrines" (p. 9 fig. 1) and 219–30; cf. Dumas, *Thera* 54: "There is no direct or convincing evidence that specific rooms were used as shrines or sanctuaries."

⁸ *Thera* IV, 20–25, 49–51, color pls. A–C; *Thera* VI, 11–13 on the remodeling that reduced the size of Delta 2 and its access.

⁹ N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 93–94 for the religious interpretation; M.B. Hollinshead, "Room D2 and the Swallows of Akrotiri, Thera," *AJA* 92 (1988) 253–54 and "The Swallows and Artists of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri, Thera," *AJA* 93 (1989) 339–54, for a new explanation. Hollinshead identifies the season as summer, not spring, and attributes the room's decoration and its contents (*Thera* IV, 42–43: storage jars, cooking pots, grills, sickles) to a late phase of occupation, not an early shrine.

aesthetic taste for interior decoration inspired by the natural world, appropriate to a culture which first applied engineering to the natural environment for the purposes of human comfort—indoor plumbing, light- and air wells, rooms that can be adjusted for climate. As an elegant and prosperous town, Akrotiri included attractive interiors much as in Greek and Roman houses at Delos or Pompeii, where natural landscapes decorated the walls of private homes. Social pretensions may have inspired the Cycladic population of Akrotiri to emulate Minoan culture in private interiors, including scenes of Minoan religious practices, much as Romans and Campanians affected Hellenic tastes in cult as in art.¹⁰ Current perspectives on Roman painted walls in domestic settings may be more relevant to context than Egyptian or Minoan iconography commonly invoked in religious interpretations of the Thera frescoes.¹¹ It seems timely to heed Renfrew's recent reservations on identifying ancient cult evidence, and to acknowledge the same ambiguities in Aegean cult contexts recently acknowledged by archaeologists in the Near East.¹²

These preliminary observations on context serve to introduce the wall paintings from the West House as a decorative complex in a private home, without the assumption that it represents a cult center.¹³ Compared to Xeste 3, the West House is modest in the number of its rooms and the absence of such Minoan features as

a lustral basin or generous ashlar masonry. But it contained fine, imported Minoan pottery, much of it found in fragments with the miniature fresco, plus Minoan luxuries such as a lavatory, in addition to its fresco decoration.¹⁴ The ground floor rooms face the Triangular Square, and a doorway which leads directly to a stairwell for access to the upper story (or stories). The street-level quarters are typically devoted to 'service' functions, while the upper floor has more spacious rooms, two of which (4 and 5, on the west side) were decorated with frescoes during the town's latest phase of repair. Room 4 is a bathroom complete with a latrine connected to the town's sewer system, as well as a clay bathtub and bronze vessels for heating and washing water.¹⁵ A partition wall separated the bathroom area, the lower walls of which were protected with a "splash" coating of plaster painted yellow ochre, from the rest of Room 4 and its frescoes. Bowls of red pigment suggest the room was still being repainted in the period after the earthquake and before the final eruption.¹⁶ Its window was attractively painted to imitate inlaid marble on the sill and marble jars with lilies against the jambs, resembling illusions for decorative effect in Roman painted interiors.¹⁷ Around the walls of Room 4, a set of eight painted panels were found: above a dado of imitation marble is an oxhide stretched across a frame of three vertical posts topped with elaborate finials, and hung

¹⁰ F. Schachermeyr, "Akrotiri—First Maritime Republic?" *TAW* 423–28 on the social dimensions of the Akrotiri settlement and their implications for private art and tastes; M. Wiener, "Crete and the Cyclades in LM I: The Tale of the Conical Cups," *Minoan Thalassocracy* 17–25, dubbed the influence of Minoan culture abroad the "Versailles effect." Cf. E. Leach, "Landscape and the Prosperous Life: The Discrimination of Genre in Augustan Literature and Painting," in R. Winkes ed., *The Age of Augustus* (Louvain/Providence 1985) 189–95, esp. 191 on the "prosperous emulation of plutocratic style" and the "aggrandizement of social status" through a deliberate variety of megalography; "Patrons, Painters and Patterns: The Anonymity of Romano-Campanian Painting and the Transition from the Second to the Third Style," in B. Gold ed., *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin 1982) 135–73, esp. on Hellenizing wall decoration during the Augustan period as an expression of middle-class "fantasies of identification with a fabled stratum of society" (p. 153).

¹¹ E.g., by A. Sakellariou, "The West House Miniature Frescoes," *TAW* 147–53 (Isidis Navigium); K. Foster, "Snakes and Lions: A New Reading of the West House Frescoes from Thera," *AJA* 92 (1988) 253 and *Expedition* 30:2 (1988) 10–20, argues for influence from the Egyptian Jubilee Festival on the miniature frescoes.

¹² C. Renfrew, *The Archaeology of Cult* (London 1985) 11–26, 393–444. For a valuable survey of religion in Aegean archaeology, see J. Muhly's review of N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Gnomon* 59 (1987) 329–34. Near East: H.

Shanks, "Two Israelite Cult Sites Now Questioned," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14 (1988) 48–52.

¹³ As argued, *inter alia*, by N. Marinatos, "The West House at Akrotiri as Cult Center," *AM* 98 (1983) 1–19; *Art and Religion*; *L'iconographie minoenne* 219–30; Foster (supra n. 11).

¹⁴ Thera V, 17–20, 41–44; Thera VI, 19–34; Doumas, Thera 48–50. Michaelidou (supra n. 4) on the "clear preference for imported ware" indicated in Room 5, in contrast to the other rooms of the same house; Sakellariou, *Fourth Cretological Congress* 534, adduces the imported pottery as additional evidence for the Minoan style of the frescoes, while N. Marinatos sees the Minoan imports as one of the room's ritual qualities.

¹⁵ The latrine was first called a "kitchen sink" (by S. Marinatos, Thera VI, 20, 24–29, figs. 2–3, pls. 58–63); more reasonably, Doumas, *ArchEph* 1974, 209–210, pl. 65b and Thera 54; Palyvou (supra n. 3) 184, 187 fig. 6; Barber (supra n. 3) 212–13. Inevitably, the toilet has been interpreted as an opening for ritual libations, and nearby objects, such as a clay rhyton in the shape of a lion's head, have been identified as "offerings" in support of a religious explanation: N. Marinatos, *AM* 98 (1983) 14 and *Art and Religion* 48–49; contra R.L.N. Barber, *JHS* 107 (1987) 243.

¹⁶ Thera VI, 24–27, pls. 52–53, 58b and 59 (bowl of pigment still in situ; identified by N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 46, 49 as "body paint").

¹⁷ Leach 1985 (supra n. 10) 190–91 on painted marble at Oplontis as an imitation of extravagant interiors.

with festoons. The ship frieze next door explains these panels as a sort of open cabin or portable shield for an important figure on board each ship, presumably the captain.¹⁸ The use of oxhides as temporary reinforcement of a wall under siege is attested by Homer (*Il.* 12.263; below, n. 73) in a passage which suggests that a freestanding shield of the type depicted here would be more useful. The isolation and abbreviation in painting of this nautical or military equipment resemble the style of panels depicting figure-eight shields found at Mycenae, Tiryns, Thebes, and Knossos.¹⁹ When first excavated, these *ikria* encouraged a biographical explanation of the paintings in the West House, making it the home of a sea-captain, the "House of the Admiral." This initial reading of the frescoes treated them as scenes derived from personal experience, with the Nilotic frieze setting the maritime adventure in Libya, hence the miniature fresco's early sobriquet, the "Libyan Fresco."²⁰ While these panels do link Rooms 4 and 5 with a nautical theme, they contribute more to the general maritime decor of the West House rather than to any specific explanation of Room 4 as shrine or bedroom.

The only figural decoration associated with Room 4 is a large panel of a young woman now restored on the jamb of the doorway leading to Room 5.²¹ Her hairstyle, pose, and garment instantly dubbed her a young "priestess," one of those identifications that has been retained since discovery and encouraged religious interpretations.²² She carries what is probably a brazier (resembling clay ones found at Thera) with red, glowing coals, on which she is sprinkling some substance as

if to release its fragrance when burned. The ritual explanation connects this figure with preparations, in Room 4, for a ceremony enacted in Room 5.²³ Context suggests a more practical explanation: she could be fumigating rooms near the lavatory, or applying cosmetics, rather than performing a ceremony.²⁴ Admitting these rooms their domestic function in the life of Thera allows the "priestess" a more ordinary place in the daily life of the Thera household, in a genre scene related to the home. Suspending ritual associations between the frescoes of Rooms 4 and 5 allows an examination of the miniature frescoes without a more programmatic link to the Room 4 paintings than a nautical theme.

The most famous room in the Aegean is a corner room ca. 4 × 4 m, found full of pottery but without much evidence for its function. The window sills were stacked with vessels, probably as a precaution in the final days of seismic unrest rather than in connection with any ritual.²⁵ The tripod table found on one of the north sills is a type often identified for offerings, but could as easily have served a more domestic function or could have been placed in the window for safety or to dry.²⁶ Imitation marble panels below the windows continue the decorative theme applied to the window in Room 4. Two large figural panels—two naked boys carrying fish—are restored at the outside ends of the two outer walls, flanking the windows. This theme is an Aegean favorite, familiar from the Middle Cycladic jar from Melos with a fisherman and his catch, and needs no assistance from ritual to account for its appearance on the walls of Thera.²⁷ Like the *ikria* pan-

¹⁸ Thera V, 41–42, fig. 6, pl. I; Thera VI, 20, 25–26, 34–35, 43, 49, 54.

¹⁹ L. Morgan, "The Ship Procession in the Miniature Fresco," *TAW* 639–40; M. Shaw, "Painted Ikria at Mycenae," *AJA* 84 (1980) 167–79, and "Ship-Cabins of the Bronze Age Aegean," *IJNA* 11 (1982) 53–58; I. Kritseli-Providi, *Τοιχογραφίες του Θηρακεντικού Κέντρου των Μυκήνων*, (Athens 1982) 54–63, 103, pls. 12–18; E. Davis, "The Iconography of the Ship Fresco from Thera," in W. Moon ed., *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography* (Madison 1983) 7; N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 46–47; Foster (supra n. 11).

²⁰ S. Marinatos, "The Libyan Fresco from Thera," *AAA* 7 (1974) 87–94; Thera VI, 34–60, called Room 4 the admiral's bedroom, with his portrait on board the largest ship on the south frieze of Room 5; cf. D. Page, "The Miniature Frescoes from Akrotiri, Thera," *PraktAkAth* 51 (1976) 135–52 and S. Stucchi, "Il Giardino delle Esperidi e le tappe della conoscenza greca della costa cirenaica," *QAL* 8 (1976) 19–73. P. Haider, "Grundsätzliches und Sachliches zur historischen Auswertung des bronzezeitlichen Miniaturfrieses auf Thera," *Klio* 61 (1979) 285–307 and Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 88–92 for critique of the "Libyan" theories.

²¹ Doulas, Thera 84; N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 46.

²² Thera V, 43, pls. J–K, 100–101; N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 46, figs. 26–27. C. Televantou, "Ἡ γυναικεία ἐνδυμασία στὴν προϊστορική Θήρα," *ArchEph* 1982, 124 n. 2, rejects parallels for the garment from Minoan glyptic; Davis and Doulas (supra n. 6) on hairstyle.

²³ Morgan (supra n. 19) 629, 640 identifies an "Egyptian offering gesture" made by the priestess in a ritual of blessing the ships by burning incense. N. Marinatos, *AM* 98 (1983) 7, 13; *Art and Religion* 46.

²⁴ Thus Doulas, Thera 84; N. Marinatos, *AM* 1983, 7, 13 identifies the red "coals" as cosmetic pigment.

²⁵ Thera V, 43–44; Hollinshead (supra n. 9).

²⁶ P. Muhly, *Minoan Libation Tables* (Diss. Bryn Mawr College, 1981) 278; N. Polychronakou-Sgouritsa, "Μυκηναϊκές τριποδικές τράπεζες προσφορών," *ArchEph* 1982, 20–33, cautions (p. 31) that such tables are not exclusively ritual.

²⁷ Melos jar: Atkinson et al., *Excavations at Phylakopi in Melos* (London 1904) pl. XXII; *Greek Art of the Aegean Islands. An Exhibition* (New York 1979) 69 no. 23, pl. 27; Barber (supra n. 3) fig. 13. N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion* 35–38 and *L'iconographie minoenne* 219–20 calls them "adorants" making a perpetual offering.

els from ships' cabins, these boys carrying fish abbreviate moments of island and seafaring life and bring the Cycladic world indoors. With its numerous windows, permanent paving of schist slabs, and imaginative painted decoration, Room 5 offered a comfortable and attractive environment for daily and frequent occupation, the closest to a "living room" of the many excavated at Thera.²⁸

Three sides of this room, on the north, east and south walls, carry miniature frescoes as an upper border ca. 40–43 cm high, of which a length of ca. 7.50 m is preserved. The fourth (missing) wall on the west probably once bore a similar frieze, implied by a fragment found in the excavations.²⁹ This placement of friezes is traditional inside Minoan villas and elsewhere on Thera, but is also common for other ancient decorative painting inside private homes, most significantly in the house of the Odyssey Landscapes in Rome.³⁰

The three preserved walls present a landscape of ships and cities on the south facing military episodes on the north, linked by a Nilotic landscape on the east wall. As reviewed above (n. 20), Marinatos's original interpretation linked all three landscapes to the biography of the owner of the West House—an "Admiral" and veteran of a Libyan campaign. Both biographical interpretation and "Libyan" setting have ceded, in the last 10 years, to a more generic scenario within the Aegean.³¹ Minoan and Cycladic archaeologists continue to seek specific correlations to Aegean realities in the prosopography and topography of these frescoes. The landscapes have been compared to many a mainland coast and island in the Aegean, beginning with Thera itself, to find a setting in the contemporary Bronze Age world. Its costumes and physiognomies have similarly been identified with Mi-

noan, Mycenaean, Cycladic, and non-Aegean peoples in the reconstruction of plausible scenarios of the Late Bronze Age. The alternative to this historical approach invokes ritual as the source for the frieze's pictorial program. Morgan's identification of the scene as a seasonal ceremony has gained such wide acceptance that the scene is often labeled "procession of ships" or "nautical festival."³²

I would like to reopen the debate on these frescoes and their pictorial relatives in Aegean art by examining their elements as part of a connected narrative transforming history into art, a visual counterpart to early epic poetry. The frieze is narrative in the most literal meaning, "erzählend" or story-telling. No claim can be made to specific names or places in these paintings, just as there are few identifiable Greek myths illustrated in the Bronze Age. But the classification as "genre" dilutes the impact of these frescoes as an expression of the kind of narrative developed in epic poetry.³³ Its images are cognates of epic motifs, without being illustrations of particular episodes. Nor does image defer to text, a view no longer popular in the study of art, where visual narrative is now accepted as independent of the text and even capable of generating stories derived from images.³⁴ The rich repertoire of visual formulae and motifs mirrors their proliferation not only in other visual arts but in poetic narratives now believed to be in circulation in the early Mycenaean age.

THE SOUTH FRIEZE

The Ship Fresco on the south wall (figs. 1–3) is the best preserved and most debated picture in Aegean art, particularly enlightening for nautical archaeology.³⁵ A fleet of ships amidst dolphins spans a single narrative perspective between two towns on separate

²⁸ Thera VI, 20, 28; Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 115; Page (supra n. 20) 136 called the frescoes "the wall-paper of a sitting-room in a private house"; Michaelidou (supra n. 4) suggests this room may have been "the gathering point for the occupants of the house" or even a dining-room.

²⁹ Thera VI, 24, 34–38; Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 116–18; Davis (supra n. 19) 3–5 begins the narrative on the south wall. Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 162–63 attributes a fragment with a "processional ship" to the west wall.

³⁰ Davis (supra n. 19) 5 n. 10 for parallels from Crete and Thera; Odyssey Landscapes: P. von Blankenhagen, "The Odyssey Frieze," *RM* 70 (1963) 100–46; J.J. Pollitt, *The Art of the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 185–209; E.W. Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space. Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome* (Princeton 1988) ch. 1.

³¹ S. Immerwahr, "Mycenaeans at Thera: Some Reflections on the Paintings from the West House," *Greece and*

the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory. Studies Presented to Fritz Schachermeyr (Berlin 1977) 173–91; Warren, "Miniature Fresco"; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 88–92, 146–54.

³² As in Barber (supra n. 3) 173 fig. 126, pp. 174–75; first argued by Morgan (supra n. 19) 629–44.

³³ Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 120–21; L. Morgan, "Theme in the West House Paintings at Thera," *ArchEph* 1983, 85–105 and *Miniature Wall Paintings* 146–54.

³⁴ See the essays in H. Kessler and M.S. Simpson eds., *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C. 1983).

³⁵ L. Basch, *Le musée imaginaire de la marine antique* (Athens 1987) 117–32. S. Marinatos, "Das Schiffsfresko von Akrotiri, Thera," in D. Gray ed., *Archaeologia Homerica G. Seewesen* (Göttingen 1974) 141–51. O. Hockmann, *Die Schiffe des Minos. Schiffbau und Seefahrt im alten Kreta*. RGZ Arbeitsbericht (1982) 8–12; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 121–42; infra ns. 38–39.

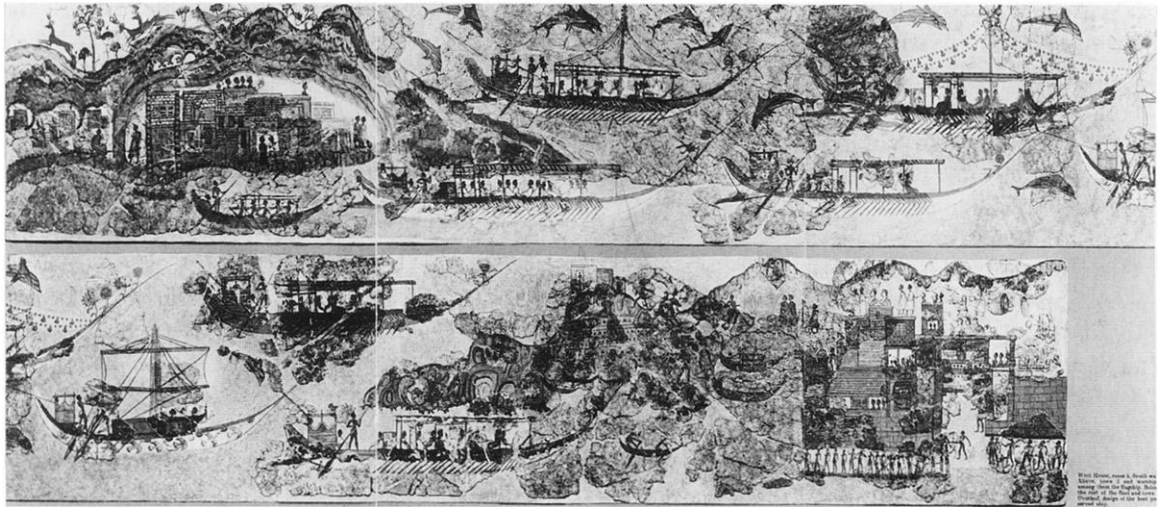


Fig. 1. South frieze, "Ship Fresco," Room 5, West House, Akrotiri (Thera). (From *Thera* VI, pl. 9)

landmasses which frame the fleet and whose figures focus on it. The town on the left (fig. 2) is more modest in size, architecture, population, and landmass, perhaps a small island, in comparison to the extensive promontory with many harbors and peaks which shelters the larger "city" on the right (fig. 3). The first town is encircled by a river which rises in a mountainous landscape and joins the sea abruptly, without a harbor. The rugged skyline beyond the town, made ferocious with a lion chasing deer, also runs above the pastoral world across the river from the town, on the viewer's left. A shepherd sits near a cluster of shelters, perhaps for flocks and their keepers, and seems in contact with the town through his conversation (?) across the stream with a standing townsman, in a similar long shaggy garment.

This environment is far too typical of the Aegean to claim a specific identity: it illustrates universal patterns rather than a single locale. The detailed hierarchy of settlements represented throughout these frescoes—from pastoral shelter to small island town, larger city or palace, peak tower/sanctuary, animal enclosures, and stone springhouse—provides a contemporary witness to Bronze Age sites retrieved by archaeological surface surveys. For example, any Greek rural setting features tiny farmsteads or overnight shelters (*θημονιές*, *καθοίκια*, or *καθέδρες* in modern Greek) for animals and farmers commuting to fragmented farm holdings.³⁶ Without reviewing all the

proposed and possible locales in the Aegean, an anonymous identity suits this town, in keeping with current consensus that this environment represents a generic Aegean setting.

It can be safely said and is generally accepted that the landscapes of the miniature frescoes are informed by a combination of Aegean reality and Minoan artistic conventions. But the impulse to represent such a town arose from more than environment alone. A story links this setting to the larger town across the water, to the episodes on the opposite wall, and possibly to the earliest Greek epic poetry. A counterpart to this town is an island like Ithaka in the *Odyssey*, home to a town and palace but also to outlying farmsteads like that of Eumaios or the more prosperous farm of Laertes (*Od.* 14.1–15; 15.555–57; 24.205–10). The two figures in the Theran landscape, separated by a stream, interact in the way that characters from different worlds, rural and urban, participate in the story on Ithaka. Animals and humans indicate a similar poetic interaction: in the landscape above the town, a lion chases deer in the manner of epic similes juxtaposing lions and heroes. Confrontations of warriors and lions in Mycenaean art have been familiar since the Shaft Graves were opened; a single dagger from Grave IV, for example, shows a lion pursuing deer on one side, and another hunted by men on the other side.³⁷ In this fresco, the world of nature forms not just the background but a metaphorical landscape for the

³⁶ S. Marinatos himself illustrates such structures on nearby Anaphe: *Thera* V, 47 pl. 103; Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 119; C. Renfrew and M. Wagstaff eds., *An Island Polity. The Archaeology of Exploitation on Melos* (Cambridge 1982) 34–43, 108–110; R. Osborne, *Classical Land-*

scape with Figures. The Ancient Greek City and Its Countryside (London 1987) 37–40, 47–52; cf. review by V. Hanson in *AJA* 92 (1988) 296.

³⁷ E. Vermeule, *The Art of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae* (Cincinnati 1975) 41–42, 65 on lions and warriors; N. Ma-

world of heroes, as it does later in the imagery of poets. Similarly, the conventions of marine landscape, the dolphins cavorting in the sea (fig. 1), ultimately a Minoan theme, punctuate poetic descriptions of seascapes, as in the *ἔκφρασις* of the *Shield of Herakles* where dolphins define a harbor (207–15). The river encircles the town as Okeanos borders the shield of Achilles, or the world of Odysseus, an image always applied to circular shields or reconstructions of archaic cosmology (infra ns. 84–85). This prehistoric fresco suggests an alternative way to visualize this description from *Iliad* 18, a new source for poetic imagery that survives in Homer. Pictorial equivalents of Homeric formulae may have survived as vividly in the Greek visual imagination as in poetic memory, such that the description of the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 represents not so much an imaginary shield or a sophisticated cosmogony as a compound of narratives depicting nature and culture.

The inhabitants of the smaller town face right: all eyes are on the stretch of open water with its ships, the primary focus of the fresco and its narrative action. In a maritime culture, the iconography of departure and arrival by sea dominates daily life as it does art, transcending the “seasonal” specificity argued by Morgan. The “fleet” consists of seven ships which float, almost leisurely, toward a second larger town whose occupants hail them in a friendly way (fig. 3). Only one ship is under sail, while the others are being rowed or paddled, hardly methods of propulsion for rapid travel. Together with their festive appearance, their pace has encouraged the view that they are not warships or a true military “fleet” under sail, but participate in a seaborne ceremony.³⁸ But every ship contains warriors, or at least their helmets, and each is commanded by a captain perched in one of the “cabins.”³⁹ These military details make the fleet one of

the most “Mycenaean” elements of the fresco, as argued by proponents of “Mycenaean at Thera.”⁴⁰ This fleet is either departing on a military expedition or returning from one, arriving at a friendly port if not at its home.

Whatever the specific scenario, this image of a fleet corresponds to the poetic tradition of a catalogue of ships, each vessel differentiated in passengers and emblems, just as leaders and cities characterize each entry in a poet’s catalogue. The variety in locomotion and decoration could indicate heroic ranking according to lineage or privilege, the way shield emblems in Archaic art distinguish individuals without identifying them. Greek poetry offers epithets embellishing ships with flowers and visual decoration as a literary device, not a ceremonial one. In a context where poetry recalls its own function, Pindar challenges anyone who claims greater *κτεάνα τε καὶ τίμη* among heroes who lived before Hieron (*Pyth.* 2.62–63): *εὐ-ανθέα δ’ ἀναβάσομαι στόλον ἀμφ’ ἀρετᾷ | κελαδέων*. Odysseus fetches Neoptolemos to Troy, after the death of Achilles, in a *ποικιλοστόλῳ νηὶ* (*Soph. Phil.* 343), a ship whose gay decoration belied its grim mission, like the winning words of Odysseus himself. These epithets, and others, suggest that the decoration of ships represents an ornamental, narrative device, not a ceremonial function, in the fresco of the fleet.⁴¹ What survives in the Homeric muster of ships (*Il.* 2.494–877), roster of heroes in battle (seen from the walls: 3.161–242), or in Hades (*Od.* 11.385–567) may be as old as panoramas like this one.⁴² The thousands of vessels which sailed from Aulis far exceed the modest number on this fresco. But a fleet this small sufficed for the earlier expedition Herakles made to Troy, recalled in *Iliad* 5 (640–43, Lattimore trans.):

he came here on a time for the sake of Laomedon’s
horses,

rinatos, *AM* 98 (1983) 9–10; Morgan 1983 (supra n. 33) 85–87 reviews the dagger and related scenes, without Homeric analogies. The first warrior in the *Iliad* introduced with a simile is Menelaos, who is compared to just such a lion: *Iliad* 3.21–26. On Homeric similes and Mycenaean art, infra n. 85.

³⁸ As argued by L. Casson, “Bronze Age Ships. The Evidence of the Thera Wall Paintings,” *IJNA* 4 (1975) 3–10; cf. Sakellariou, *TAW* 149–52; Morgan (supra n. 19); S. Wachsmann, “The Thera Water-borne Procession Re-considered,” *IJNA* 9 (1980) 287–95; A. Raban, “The Thera Ships: Another Interpretation,” *IJNA* 13 (1984) 11–19; Foster (supra n. 11).

³⁹ A. Tilley and P. Johnstone, “A Minoan Naval Triumph,” *IJNA* 5 (1976) 285–92; Warren, “Miniature Fresco” 121 n. 18; M.G. Prytlak, “Weapons on the Thera Ships?” *IJNA* 11 (1982) 3–6; Davis (supra n. 19) 9; J.

Ernstson, “The Ship Procession Fresco—The Pilots,” *IJNA* 14 (1985) 315–20.

⁴⁰ S. Iakovidis, “Thera and Mycenaean Greece,” *AJA* 83 (1979) 101–102; Immerwahr (supra n. 31); R. Laffineur, “Mycenaean at Thera: Further Evidence?” in *Minoan Thalassocracy* 133–39. Contra: J. Davis, “Mycenaean at Thera: Another Look,” *AJA* 85 (1981) 69–70, but see J. Crowley, “More on Mycenaean at Thera,” *AJA* 87 (1983) 83–85; J. Vanschoonwinckel, “Théra et la civilisation mycénienne,” *AntCl* 55 (1986) 5–41.

⁴¹ As suggested by R. Laffineur 1983 (infra n. 57) 113, who invokes Homeric similes and adjectives endowing warriors and their weapons with magical powers, as a parallel for the decorated ships.

⁴² M. Edwards, “The Structure of Homeric Catalogues,” *TAPA* 110 (1980) 81–105, esp. 101–103 on catalogue form and narrative.

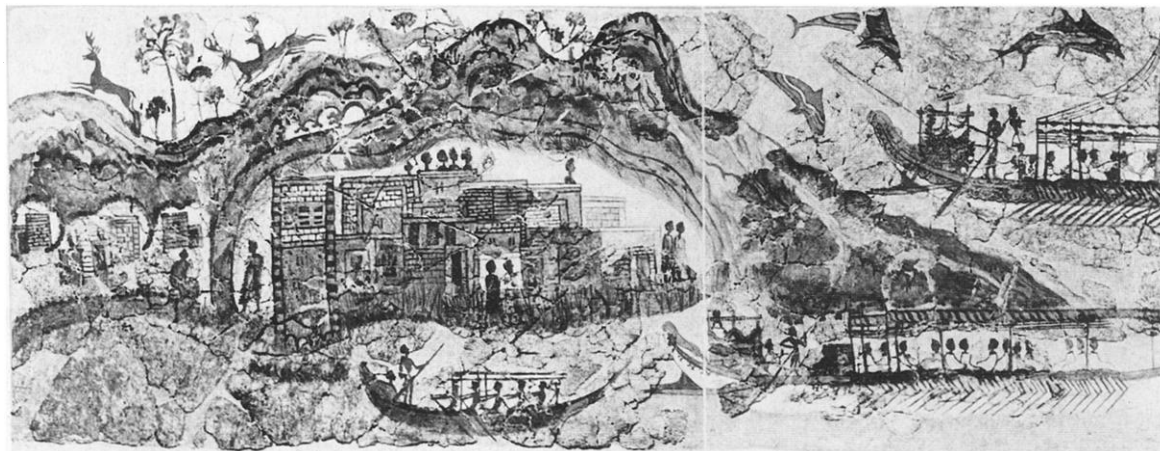


Fig. 2. South frieze, detail: first town. (From *Thera* VI, pl. 9)

with six vessels only and the few men needed to man them,
and widowed the streets of Ilion and sacked the city . . .

The pictorial details of arrival at the larger town (fig. 3) belong to the world of Aegean topography but also recall the poetic description of that world in Homer. The long rocky promontory running up to a hill with buildings, and the two small harbors sheltering ships suit several epic descriptions, beginning with Ithaka (*Od.* 13.96–101):

There is a harbor of the Old Man of the Sea, Phorkys,
in the countryside of Ithaka. There two precipitous
promontories opposed jut out, to close in the harbor
and shelter it from the big waves made by the winds
blowing
so hard on the outside; inside, the well-benched vessels
can lie without being tied up, once they have found
their anchorage.

This description of a harbor is typical of Homeric arrival scenes and not intended to identify Homeric places in the fresco, as made clear in the fresco's similar correspondence to other Homeric harbors. When Odysseus arrives at the land of the Laistrygonians, it is also enclosed by towering cliffs and by two projecting promontories, protecting ships from the sea swell, but the hero proceeds cautiously, as he does on Aiaia (*Od.* 10.95–97; cf. 10.148):

I myself, however, kept my black ship on the outside,
at the very end, making her fast to the cliff with a
cable,
and climbed to a rocky point of observation and stood
there.

The rocky promontory, small bays sheltering ships, and even the lookout point or *σκοπιή* are all suggested in this fresco (fig. 3), the last in three small buildings, one with a small figure before its doorway. Three men race up this hill (from town?) toward the peak, while two run back toward the settlement: news of the fleet's arrival, in other words, travels from lookout point to town, in details which unite ships and town in a single, coordinated narrative. Both poetry and geography provide parallels for this kind of landmark and its relationship to urban settlements. Near Homeric Troy, the fleet-footed scout and son of Priam, Polites, kept watch on the Achaeans from the hill called the burial mound of Aisyetes (*Il.* 2.790–94). This multiple function for a conspicuous topographic feature should assist the classification of sites in Aegean archaeology. For example, the landscape of prehistoric Kea is one of many to complement this fresco. The deep bay of Vourkari protects ships and the town of Agia Irini, while the peak of Troullos probably served as both watchtower and sacred peak, as suggested by Caskey with a reference to the mound of Aisyetes.⁴³ The mound of another hero at Troy also functioned in more than one way: the *σῆμα* "Ἰλου serves as sacred point and gathering place (*Il.*

⁴³ J. Caskey, *Hesperia* 40 (1971) 392–95; map (fig. 1) and plan (fig. 3), with two small squarish structures adjoining each other, closely resembling the features on the hill in the Town Fresco from Thera. Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 85. The debate over Troullos (peak shrine vs. tower) was revived by Jack Davis in "Cultural Innovation and the

Minoan Thalassocracy at Ayia Irini," *Minoan Thalassocracy* 164 and debated by several experts (Peatfield, Bikakis, etc.: p. 166). On Minoan peak sanctuaries, see A. Peatfield, "The Topography of Minoan Peak Sanctuaries," *BSA* 78 (1983) 273–79. Page (supra n. 20) 144 suggests "watchtowers" for these buildings, citing parallels near Akrotiri.

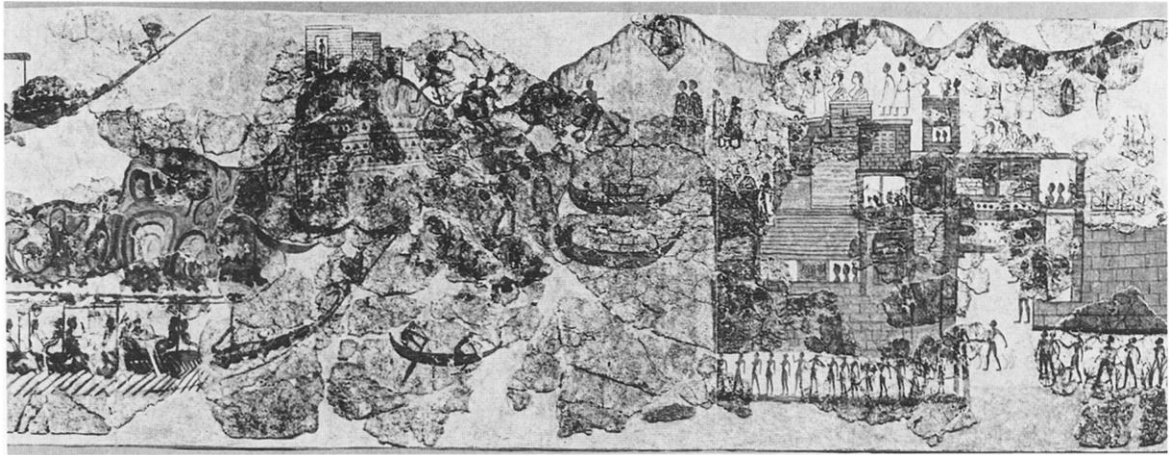


Fig. 3. South frieze, detail: fleet and second town. (Photo: S. Morris)

10.415; 11.166–67), to be considered below in connection with the north frieze.

No single Aegean landscape can or should claim exclusive identity with the large town in the fresco (fig. 3), which has been called Cretan, Cycladic, and Mycenaean, if not Akrotiri itself.⁴⁴ Poem and painting may simply share the same inspiration in Aegean life, but epic as well as frescoes could derive from Bronze Age settings. The closest relatives of this town belong to the geography of the imagination, as in Nausikaa's description of Scheria (*Od.* 6.262–69):

But when we come to the city, and around this is a
towering
wall, and a handsome harbor either side of the city,
and a narrow causeway, and along the road there are
oarswept
ships drawn up, for they all have slips, one for each
vessel;
and there is a place of assembly, put together with
quarried
stone, and built around a fine precinct of Poseidon,
and there they tend to all that gear that goes with the
black ships,
the hawsers and the sails, and there they fine down
their oarblades;
for the Phaiakians have no concern with the bow or the
quiver,
but it is all masts and the oars of ships and the bal-
anced vessels

themselves, in which they delight in crossing over the
gray sea; . . .

Painting and poetry agree on the image of a culture more inclined to seafare than warfare, and a city offering ὄρμος, κέρδος, and ξεινία, those vital signs of civilization sorely missed on Lemnos (*Soph. Phil.* 302–303). Two figures carrying sacks on poles across their shoulders stride on the tongue of land between the σκοπήη and the second harbor, where two ships smaller than those in the fleet look like transport vessels. Poet and painter draw on Aegean life to depict an imaginary town, familiar in the fresco without a specific name.

The town itself is nearly a city in comparison with the modest one across the water (fig. 3). Its impressive facade of blue masonry (ashlar limestone?) with a central gateway, and multistoried houses with windows and balconies punctuated by horns of consecration resembles those seen in Minoan compositions. The Cretan parallel most commonly invoked is the architectural landscape represented in the so-called "Town Mosaic" of Knossos, a set of faience plaques that once formed an inlaid composition of houses, landscape, animals, and figures.⁴⁵ But several features distinguish the Cycladic frescoes in style and subject from the faience fragments, the military elements of which were largely restored by Evans. The "archers" are reconstructed from possibly bow-shaped objects on some fragments and figures on others, the "spearmen" are

⁴⁴ Akrotiri: Page (supra n. 20) 144; N. Marinatos, *AM* 98 (1983) 8; Crete: G. Gesell, "The Town Fresco of Thera: A Reflection of Cretan Topography," *Fourth Cretological Congress* 197–204; Immerwahr (supra n. 31) 174–75; Davis (supra n. 19) 8 identifies the smaller town on the left as Akrotiri; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 88–92.

⁴⁵ *PM* I, 301–14; A. Sakellariou, "Ἡ κρητική καταγωγή

ένος μυκηναϊκοῦ εἰκονογραφικοῦ κύκλου," 532–38 in *Fourth Cretological Congress and L'iconographie minoenne* 294; K. Foster, *Aegean Faience of the Bronze Age* (New Haven 1978) 99–115. E. Hallager, *The Master Impression* (Göteborg 1985) 31–33, 38, pl. 1. Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 68–70.

probably shepherds.⁴⁶ The curious spread-eagled figures may be drowners but could be swimmers, and the recent rejection of a ship's prow as another "dubious" restoration eliminates the vessel present in mainland and Cycladic shipwreck and sea-battle scenes.⁴⁷ The original restorations by Evans were heavily influenced by his conviction that the silver siege rhyton from Mycenae (see below, fig. 8), the mosaic's closest analogy at the time, was itself Minoan rather than Mycenaean, as is generally accepted today.⁴⁸ To demonstrate a Minoan precedent for a mainland epic tradition, he restored military attributes, poses, and episodes, extracted from the silver siege rhyton, on the faience plaques, an important link in his argument. In fact, Evans restored those very features which would provide a city under siege to match the Homeric assage, and certify a Minoan contribution to the prehistory of the Greek epic tradition.⁴⁹ In reality, the plaques do not preserve more than a city at peace, and the Town Mosaic appears more pastoral than military. Its images of daily rural and town life could well belong to a Minoan narrative cycle, and scholars of philology as well as archaeology have postulated the existence of

such cycles in poetry as well as art.⁵⁰ Such a narrative "cycle" is difficult to discern in the Town Mosaic, isolated panels originally set into another medium (wood?) as discrete units whose narrative connection has to be supplied by the viewer.⁵¹ The frescoes from Tyllissos, discovered and discussed before the Akrotiri excavations, allow the best impression of Cretan narrative painting, but like their companion miniature frescoes from Knossos, they cannot be securely dated before the frieze from Akrotiri.⁵²

Despite these Minoan parallels, the miniature frieze from Thera belongs to a more Mycenaean world of hunting and battle as primary subjects for art.⁵³ Some of these subtleties were anticipated by the Kea frescoes, the closest analogy to those from Thera but published before the latter were discovered. Coleman's remarks on the Kea frescoes, with their scenes of towns in a maritime setting with figures engaged with chariots, hunting and feasting, could be applied to the frescoes from Thera: "The emphasis on narrative and a certain amount of drama rather than natural detail seem mainland in spirit."⁵⁴ The contrast between Cretan and Cycladic narrative is made vivid in com-

⁴⁶ PM I, fig. 228p, q ("archer"), and t ("spearman"), more likely a figure with a shepherd's staff. Sakellariou, *Fourth Cretological Congress* 535–37 pl. 182 disputes "spearman" and "archers" whose weapons are entirely restored and the martial nature of Evans's reconstruction, as does Foster (supra n. 45) 101–103 (e.g. Evans's "helmet-plumes" have now been recognized as animals' tails); Morgan 1983 (supra n. 33) 92 indicates some reservations by calling these figures "probably warriors."

⁴⁷ Sakellariou (supra n. 45) fig. 183; Foster (supra n. 45) 101–102, fig. 32 notes its lack of parallels and ambiguous identity; Morgan 1983 (supra n. 33) 92 n. 2 doubts the "prow."

⁴⁸ PM I, 311–14 and III, 89–106, esp. 101–106, where Evans emphasizes the Minoan identity of the silver rhyton and its kinship with epic city sieges, citing the Shields of Achilles and Herakles described by Homer and Hesiod, respectively. On the rehabilitation of the silver rhyton as a Mycenaean composition or at least commission, see W.S. Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven 1965) 63–95; E. Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age* (Chicago 1964) 100–105. E. Davis, *The Vapheio Cups and Aegean Gold and Silver Ware* (New York 1976) 227–30, no. 87, maintains Evans's argument for a Minoan craftsman but allows for a Mycenaean patron; however, she classifies silver vessels as Cretan, gold ones as Mycenaean (pp. 328–33).

⁴⁹ The inverse of his method has also been practiced: thus Sakellariou "de-militarizes" the Thera scenes, denying the drowners and warriors in order to make the frescoes more "Minoan": *Fourth Cretological Congress* 534–35.

⁵⁰ As Vermeule put it (supra n. 48) 102–103: "No one is

fighting, but all one needs for a good siege is present." Cf. fragments of Minoan stone vases representing a bearded archer, a man stealing (?) a goat, a boar and a helmet: Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 126–28 and *Minoan Stone Vases* (Cambridge 1969) 473, 488c. Sakellariou, *Fourth Cretological Congress* 532–38 on the Minoan derivation of Mycenaean narrative cycles; C.J. Ruijgh, "Le mycénien et Homère," in A. Morpurgo Davies and Y. Duhoux eds., *Linear B. A 1984 Survey* (Louvain 1985) 150–51, 166–67 on the Minoan origins of Greek hexameter poetry. It should be noted, however, that Ruijgh's argument is largely based on the analogy of material culture, where Mycenaean civilization demonstrates a vivid debt to Crete, rather than on specific linguistic arguments. Cf. M. Lang's "A Protean Proto-Odysseus?," *Bryn Mawr Now. Supplement* (Fall 1988) 7–11 on possible Cretan forerunners of the *Odyssey*.

⁵¹ S. Immerwahr, "A Possible Influence of Egyptian Art in the Creation of Minoan Wall Painting," *L'iconographie minoenne* 41–50 emphasizes the mosaic's formal and paratactic composition, closer to Egyptian conventions.

⁵² M.C. Shaw, "The Miniature Frescoes of Tyllissos Reconsidered," *AA* 1972, 171–88 for fragments which suggest a performance or games by male figures; Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 127–28.

⁵³ Davis (supra n. 19) 11 on Thera's adoption of Minoan imagery, lacking scenes of "direct conflict," but she presumes lost military scenes. A. Sakellariou, "Identité minoenne et identité mycénienne à travers les compositions figuratives," *L'iconographie minoenne* 292–309, stresses (pp. 302–308) the un-Minoan nature of themes of conflict (hunt, battle).

⁵⁴ K. Coleman, *A Study of Painted Wall Plaster Frag-*

paring the spectacular new sealing from Chania with the Thera frescoes.⁵⁵ The seal impression frames a single dominant and symbolic figure—priest or king?—against a town designed to fit the lentoid shape. This image, however rich in its details of architecture, landscape, and symbolism, tells no familiar, heroic tale. Instead, it speaks a language idiomatic to Minoan iconography, one we may not be able to understand, and subordinates its landscape to a symbolic hierarchy dominated by this figure in a ritual or royal pose.

Here the pursuit of narrative collides with the standard pursuit of style in Aegean prehistory, at a critical period in antiquity (the 15th century B.C.) and in modern scholarship (the last decade) focused on the distinction of Minoan from Mycenaean art. Ever since Matz, we have accepted, abused, and revised certain well-worn stylistic formulas about torsional, flowing Minoan art and the schematic, “emblematic” style of the Mycenaean artist.⁵⁶ The Thera excavations offered a new challenge to these conventions, for the chronology of the eruption coincides with the emergence of Mycenaean art, in a context dominated by Minoan imports and influence.⁵⁷ In conventional scholarship, Minoan style would be demonstrated in an artifact from the West House at Thera: a limestone tripod-table with a painted marine landscape, where the dolphins leap in a freely improvised setting of rocks and plants.⁵⁸ A typical Mycenaean comparison would invoke the *ikria* from the same house, where a single motif has been extracted and repeated for a

symbolic value of its own (above, n. 19). Although these critical stylistic features in fact help distinguish the Mycenaean component of the miniature frescoes, they may have exaggerated Minoan images as mobile action, Mycenaean as arrested symbols.⁵⁹

One of the dangers of these definitions, even under recent modifications, is that they obscure the role of narrative. A more useful assumption might be that Mycenaean art tells a story familiar from Greek literature, while Minoan art accompanies a tradition whose language and meaning are lost. The miniature frescoes may be Minoan in their individual images, but these motifs contribute to a Mycenaean theme, as recognized by numerous scholars.⁶⁰ One would expect a narrative of the 15th century B.C. to be represented in Minoan images, if not composed by Minoan artists. But their story could well belong to a Mycenaean, even Greek epic tradition, much as a Mediaeval illustration of the Trojan War might include a cathedral facade without converting epic heroes to Catholicism. This makes, for example, the horns of consecration in the large town an architectural convention, not necessarily an index of Minoan religion.⁶¹ Greek artists experimented in a similar manner in the early Archaic period, incorporating Oriental motifs into mythological scenes.⁶² The emergence of Mycenaean art with the participation of Minoan artists, or even as a later phase of Minoan art, presents problems similar to the study of Greek art and artists in the production of early Roman art.⁶³ Once Minoan motifs and Myce-

ments from the Bronze Age Site of Ayia Irini in the Island of Kea (Diss. Columbia Univ. 1970) 200; see esp. 200–205 on the kinship of the Kea frescoes with mainland rather than Cretan art. Cf. Sakellariou, *TAW* 148–49.

⁵⁵ Hallager (supra n. 45); E. Davis, “The Political Use of Art in the Aegean,” *AJA* 90 (1986) 216.

⁵⁶ Vermeule (supra n. 37; the *Semple* Lectures were delivered in 1971, before the discovery of the miniature frieze); J. Hurwit, “The Dendra Octopus Cup and the Problem of Style in the Fifteenth-Century Aegean,” *AJA* 83 (1979) 413–26; G. Walberg, *Tradition and Innovation in Minoan Art* (Mainz 1986).

⁵⁷ As Immerwahr recognized (supra n. 31) 191 in calling the miniature frescoes “the pictorial equivalent of the early Mycenaean art of the Shaft Graves”; O. Negbi, “The ‘Miniature Fresco’ from Thera and the Emergence of Mycenaean Art,” *TAW* 645–55; R. Laffineur, “Early Mycenaean Art: Some Evidence from the West House in Thera,” *BICS* 30 (1983) 111–22 and “Iconographie minoenne et iconographie mycénienne à l’époque des tombes à fosse,” in *L’iconographie minoenne* 245–66.

⁵⁸ *Thera* V, 43–44, pls. 24b–25, C; *Thera* VI, 27; *Greek Art* (supra n. 27) 31, 79, no. 35.

⁵⁹ E.g., in the work of Laffineur (supra n. 57) with his emphasis on the emblematic and symbolic value of Mycenaean images.

⁶⁰ E.g., by Immerwahr (supra n. 31) 180: “a real narrative style, that might be termed Mycenaean”; Warren, “Miniature Fresco,” 129: “From Thera to Homer we may not need the aid of the clew of thread”; Sakellariou (supra n. 45); Vermeule 1983 (infra n. 98) 142.

⁶¹ Thus Morgan’s subtle analysis (supra n. 33) assumes that the arms of the woman depicted near the horns are lifted in a “votive gesture,” according to Minoan convention, rather than in a gesture of greeting, appropriate to a story of arrival or return, as maintained by Warren, “Miniature Fresco,” 119, Davis (supra n. 19) 8, and others.

⁶² As observed by Davis (supra n. 19) 6 who compares the artists of the Thera frescoes and their exploration of the Minoan pictorial repertoire to early Archaic vase-painters.

⁶³ As observed by Hurwit (supra n. 56) 426 n. 2; cf. Pollitt (supra n. 30) 150–63. In the Aemilius Paullus monument at Delphi, for example, style, subject and probably artist are Greek, but the message and occasion are historical and Roman, such that one could perform the following substitutions for “Greek” and “Roman,” respectively (Pollitt

naean stylistic features have been identified in the Thera frescoes, their content deserves the same attention earned by Roman art once generations of scholars had exhausted its Greek elements. In the domain of religion, archaeologists are now careful to distinguish between Minoan motifs in circulation as early as the time of the Shaft Graves and Mycenaean beliefs.⁶⁴ The same care should be applied to Bronze Age narrative, in order to separate Minoan and Mycenaean spheres of symbol and meaning.

These observations suggest how the Theran frieze might be perceived as a chapter in the history of Aegean narrative, beyond its generic panorama of Aegean life. The south frieze is, if not an actual *νόστος* or story of return, a journey from one town to another, one or both foreign, or an adventure which included two towns, neither of them necessarily "home" to the fleet. Specific coordination with Homeric episodes is unnecessary, since the extant *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are a late survival of what may have been extant in song in the 15th-century Aegean. Certain details support a sea crossing like the one made by Telemachos from Ithaka to a larger palatial town like Pylos, in the opening episodes of the *Odyssey*. A line of young men below the town's facade march toward the shore leading an animal, perhaps for a feast of welcome for the arriving fleet. They recall the ceremony in progress when Telemachos arrives at Pylos in the *Odyssey* (3.5–6):

ἴξον' τοι δ' ἐπὶ θινὶ θαλάσσης ἱερά ρέζον,
ταύρους παμμέλανας, ἐνοσίχθονι κυανοχαίτη.

Whether returning in triumph from an expedition abroad, visiting guest-friends along the way, or departing on an expedition like the one pictured on the north wall, the theme of travel enshrined in the *Odyssey* has a rich prehistory of versions like this fresco.

THE NORTH FRIEZE

It is no surprise to find the complementary theme of war on the opposite wall, in a far more fragmentary state (fig. 4). The fragments cluster in two groups: the first, from the left, depicts a meeting of men in different kinds of garments on a hill (fig. 5). Minoan ar-

chaeologists attribute garments, gestures, and grouping to a ritual assembly at a peak sanctuary.⁶⁵ But the same scene allows a more military moment, a council between allies or enemies in different costume.⁶⁶ By applying a poetic scenario to this group, one could identify the tall figures wearing long robes as elders or chieftains rather than "priests," in council with younger figures (shorter, and in kilts). A gathering of the type is held frequently in the first few books of the *Iliad*. Distinctions in height and dress seem to emphasize the contrast between old and young men, *ἡμὲν νέοι ἡδὲ γέροντες*, that is formulaic to Homeric assemblies, as in *Iliad* 2.789–90:

They were holding assembly in front of the doors of
Priam
gathered together in one place, the elders and the
young men.

In any case, the figures on the hill wear the same garments—kilts and cloaks—worn by men in the fleet, and thus they could belong to the "invaders" as plausibly as to the "defenders." In the siege of an imaginary city on the Shield of Achilles, the invading army is divided in council whether to destroy the city or divide its contents (*Il.* 18.510–12), a disagreement to be solved with a council outside the walls. The two groups of figures on the hill could represent such a divided army, *δίχα δέ σφισιν ἡνδανε βουλή* (*Il.* 18.510). The surprise attack on their own herds catches them unprepared (18.531), *εἰράων προπάροιθε καθήμενοι*, "sitting before [the city?]" at their meeting places," the first word one of several *hapax legomena* which invite solutions from this painting. To complete the epic associations, the early scenario of the *Iliad* provides a landmark near Troy appropriate to the topography and iconography of this scene: *ἔνθα τότε Τρῶες τε διέκριθεν ἡδ' ἐπικούροι* (*Il.* 2. 811–15):

Near the city but apart from it there is a steep hill
in the plain by itself, so you pass one side or the other;
This men call the Hill of the Thicket, but the immortal
gods have named it the burial mound of dancing
Myrina.
There the Trojans and their allies were marshalled in
order.

155–58): "In style, the frieze is [Minoan]: in subject, intention and function it is [Mycenaean]" (157).

⁶⁴ R. Hägg, "Mycenaean Religion: The Helladic and Minoan Components," in Davies and Duhoux (supra n. 50) 203–25; C. Renfrew, "Questions of Minoan and Mycenaean Cult," in R. Hägg and N. Marinatos eds., *Sanctuaries and Cults of the Aegean Bronze Age* (Stockholm 1981) 30–33.

⁶⁵ S. Iakovidis, "A Peak Sanctuary at Thera," in A. Biran ed., *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times* (Jerusalem 1981) 54–60; cf. Page (supra n. 20) 139; B. Rutkowski,

"Kykladen und Kreta: Bemerkungen über die bronzzeitliche Religion," *AAA* 9 (1976) 231–32, fig. 2; Morgan (supra n. 33) 88–89, and Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 156–58.

⁶⁶ S. Marinatos, *Thera* VI, 40 simply calls it a "Meeting on a Hill," in which he detects "a moment of crisis"; Immerwahr (supra n. 31) 183 suggests a conference or truce between Minoans and Mycenaeans; Davis (supra n. 19) 10 identifies a conference called in response to an invasion by the Theran fleet, claiming "no parallel in Aegean art" without help from Homer.

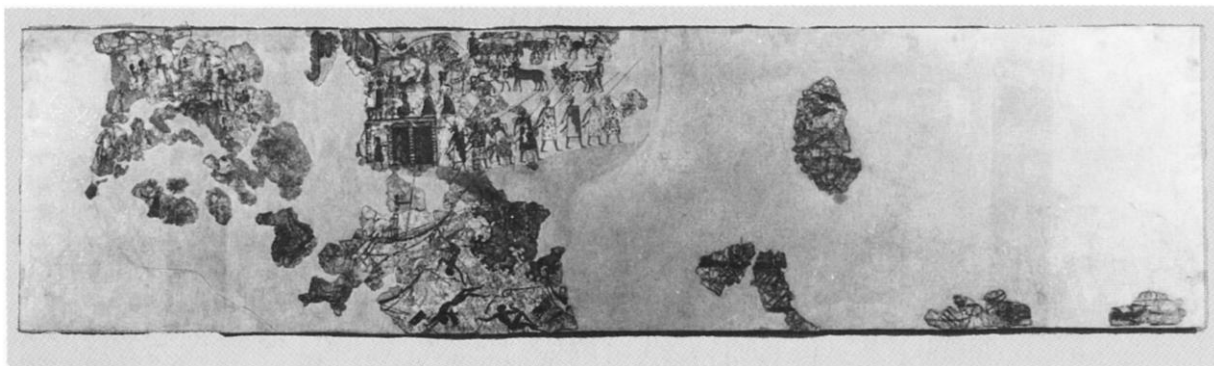


Fig. 4. North frieze, military landing, Room 5, West House, Akrotiri (Thera). (Courtesy T.A.P. and National Museum, Athens)

Other sacred hills where Trojans withdraw in times of council include the mound of Ilos, where Hektor meets with ὅσοι βουλευφόροι εἰσίν, βουλὰς βουλευέει θεῖον παρὰ σήματι Ἴλου, νόσφιν ἀπὸ φλοίσβου (*Il.* 10.414–16). Like the mound of Aisyetes (*Il.* 2.790–94), “Batieia” commands both a sacred and a strategic function in the landscape of Troy. Its pictorial equivalent could well be the grave of a hero/ine and serve as a gathering place for warriors.

Somewhere below this scene belongs a fragment with a single figure in rustic garment raising arm and staff, as a herald might call men to council, or a βασιλεύς raise the σκήπτρον in a claim to speech or bid for silence, if viewed in a Homeric rather than a Minoan framework. Although it was originally restored below the group on the hill, two independent observers recommend placement of the figure between the hill and the pastoral group near the sheep.⁶⁷ They both connect the raised arm with ceremonial gestures in Minoan scenes, to which one should now add the Chania sealing (above, n. 45). But this figure, whatever his relationship to the group, could be raising his staff in a claim to speech (*Il.* 1.245, 2.45–46, 100–109, 278–82), or as a herald keeping order in a discussion (18.503–505, 556–57). The first scene preserved in the north frieze could illustrate an episode traditional in epic narrative: the council of war with allies of different costume, or even an embassy from one army to another. The Greek expedition to Troy, in particular, began with an embassy, a formal request for the

return of Helen and her property, before the siege of the city and the raids on the countryside which occupied 10 years.⁶⁸

This potential agreement between epic episodes and painted fragments continues across the rest of the frieze, where the landing of a military expedition makes plausible the need for such a conference with allies. The maritime phase runs along the lower border of the entire north frieze, according to the fragments of more ships and drowning figures farther to the right, where the shore runs below the land (fig. 4). Meanwhile, a contingent of warriors in Mycenaean armor has landed: at least eight figures march onward and upward across the frieze in oxhide body shields, boar’s tusk helmets, and armed with swords and long spears (fig. 6). This coordinated attack—a sea-battle before a landing on shore—suggests the pattern of Greek campaigns remembered by Achilles, when he recalls the “twelve cities of men I sacked with ships and the eleven I attacked on land, throughout the fertile Troad” (*Il.* 9.328–29). The Greek landing at Troy narrated in the *Kypria* engaged the enemy in battle at once, according to the summary of the epic preserved by Proclus.⁶⁹ This synoptic view of the two forms of campaign, in a fresco painted around 1500 B.C., suggests how long their combination determined patterns of warfare in Aegean history and in human memory. A fragmentary stone rhyton from Epidauros illustrates a similar invasion, where ships with warriors in shields land at a rocky shore while others march toward the city (fig. 7).⁷⁰ In both landing scenes, men

⁶⁷ Iakovidis (supra n. 65) 57; L. Morgan, “The West House Paintings, Thera,” *BICS* 28 (1981) 166 and (supra n. 33) 89 n. 3, pl. 32; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings*, pl. 1.

⁶⁸ According to Herodotus’s version of the Greek expedition (2.118): ἐκβᾶσαν δὲ ἐς τὴν γῆν καὶ ἰδρυθεῖσαν τὴν στρατιὴν πέμπειν ἐς τὸ Ἴλιον ἀγγέλους and to Proclus’s

summary of the *Kypria*, where the Greeks sent envoys (διαπρεσβεύονται) to the Trojans after landing and the first battle. See below, n. 74, for modern discussion of the Greek landing.

⁶⁹ ἔπειτα ἀποβαίνοντας αὐτοὺς εἰς Ἴλιον εἵργουσιν οἱ Τρῶες, καὶ θνήσκει Πρωτεσίλαος ὑφ’ Ἑκτορος.

⁷⁰ A. Sakellariou, “Scène de bataille sur un vase mycénien



Fig. 5. North frieze, detail: meeting on hill. (From *Thera* VI, pl. 7)

on board brandish long pikes which have been identified with Homeric *ναύμαχα*, a *hapax legomenon* in the only Homeric passage which describes a sea-battle.⁷¹ The pictorial battle has its casualties, on the fresco as on the related vessels in stone and metal. At least one ship has damaged its bowsprit and three near-naked men clad in animal skins have lost their short shields and are drowning, upside down like the companions lost by Odysseus to Scylla (*Od.* 12.248–49): *πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὑπερθεν ὑφόσ' ἀειρομένων*. After the affront to Helios on Thrinakia, Odysseus loses more men to a storm from Zeus (*Od.* 12.417–19):

My men were thrown in the water,
and bobbing like sea crows they were washed away on
the running
waves all around the black ship, and the god took away
their homecoming.

en pierre?," *RA* 1971, 3–14; *Fourth Cretological Congress* 532–38; Page (supra n. 20) 148, n. 1; Warren, "Miniature Fresco," 127 fig. 5. For an additional fragment showing a swimming or drowning figure over a stylized marine background like that on the silver siege rhyton, see V. Lambri-

In Homer's phrase, *λίπε δ' ὀστέα θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ* (*Od.* 12.414); in paint, the bodies tumble and float helplessly, their hands limp in death. Later Greek art visualizes death in much the same manner, in the limp hands of fallen figures like the giants from the north frieze of the Siphnian treasury at Delphi. The image is as vivid in art as in words: these frescoes force us to confront the origin of such imagery, and consider whether art could have anticipated, if not inspired, poetry.

The focus of the Theran battle may have involved not only the ships but a wall which protected them, in the tradition of the *Iliad*. Just before the fragment of coast ends, below the marching warriors and above the ships, a short stretch of wall, painted white with divisions like brick or stone masonry and black triangular crenellations along the left side, runs vertically, then turns right at an angle, as if seen in bird's-eye perspec-

noudakis, *Prakt* 1975, 172–73, pl. 149a; *Miniature Wall Paintings*, figs. 193–94.

⁷¹ S. Marinatos, in *Thera* VI, 41 (*Il.* 15.387–89): the Achaeans defend their ships with *ξυστὰ ναύμαχα* ("long pikes that lay among the hulls for sea-fighting").

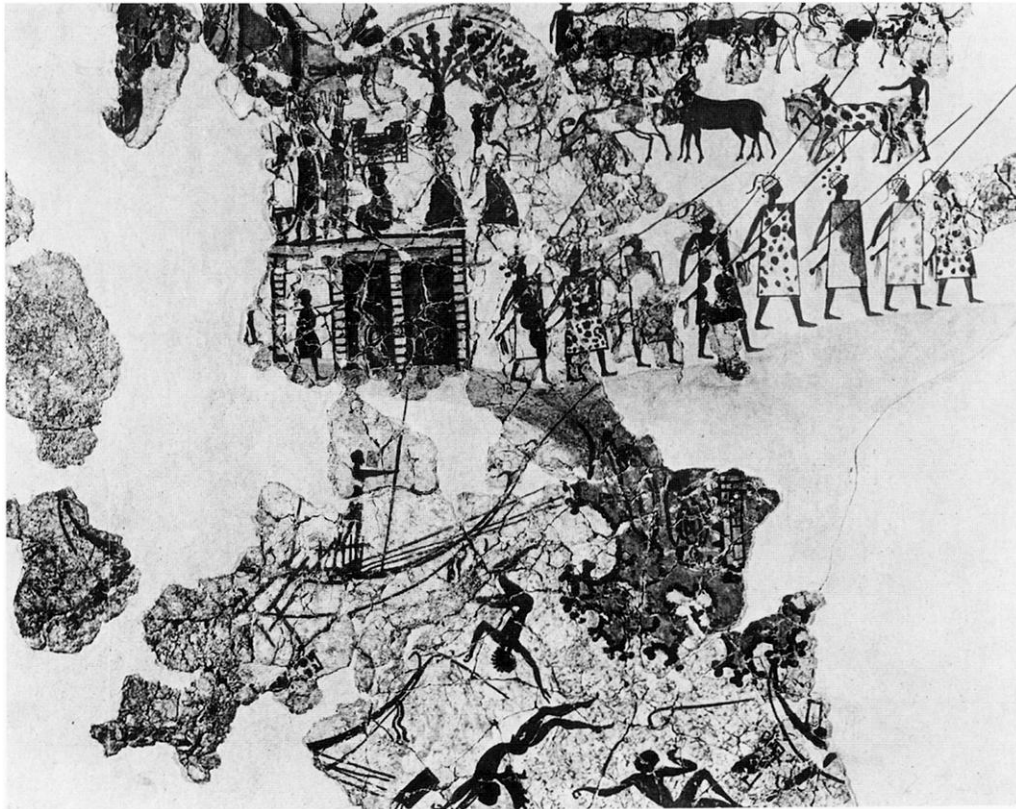


Fig. 6. North frieze, detail: landing and sea battle. (From *Thera* VI, pl. 7)

tive (fig. 6).⁷² Rarely discussed, this scrap of wall presumably lies too far from the missing city to fortify it, but it could protect the ships of an invading party, like the one built by the Greeks near Troy. The remains of such walls, or even of Early Bronze Age fortifications along the coast of Asia Minor, inspired legends about heroes invading, like the *τείχος Ἡρακλῆος* remembered in the *Iliad*.⁷³ The wall built by the Greeks in the *Iliad* is most elaborately described in the moment of its destruction, like a warrior at the moment of death in epic poetry. Homer's wall features mysterious *κρόσσαι*, *πύργοι*, *στήλαι* and *ἐπάλξεις* (12.36, 258, 263, 444), one of which may correspond to the triangular crenellations visible in the fresco, perhaps the tops of pointed wooden posts which form the stockade of a

brick wall. It is in the same passage, the destruction of that wall, that the *ναύμαχα* are invoked in the *Iliad* (15.345–89), so that the painting juxtaposes two motifs—seawall and sea-pikes—also found directly and exclusively near each other in epic poetry.

The wall of the Achaeans in the *Iliad* is not the only wall traditional to the Trojan cycle. Thucydides indicates that there was another wall (*τὸ γὰρ ἔρυμα τῷ στρατοπέδῳ*: 1.11.1) built earlier by the Greeks. The testimony of Thucydides contradicts Homer's account of a wall built in the 10th year, but agrees with that of Herodotus, who suggests a substantial structure built by the Greeks shortly after landing (2.118: *ἐκβᾶσαν δὲ ἐς τὴν γῆν καὶ ἰδρυσθεῖσαν τὴν στρατιήν*). Aristotle solved this conflict by assuming Homer invented

⁷² S. Marinatos, *Thera* VI, 45 identifies the crenellations as wooden projections in half-timbering; Page (supra n. 20) 137 suggests a vertical pillar with lintel and calls the building a "portico" but cannot explain the "jagged edge"; Warren, "Miniature Fresco" 118; Sakellariou, *TAW* 148; Davis (supra n. 19) 12 n. 79 classifies them as "foreign"; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 85 concludes that the projecting triangles are either lifting devices or for decorative effect. Comparable crenellations on the Kea frescoes are "without

parallels in Aegean art" (Abramowitz [infra n. 114] 60, adducing Near Eastern and Anatolian parallels); cf. Assyrian fortifications: J. Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* (London 1983) figs. 11, 28, 48, 96.

⁷³ 20.145–46; cf. 7.433–64; 12.1–40, 257–64; 15.352–66 for the wall built by the Greeks: R. Scodel, "The Achaean Wall and the Myth of Destruction," *HSCP* 86 (1982) 33–50.

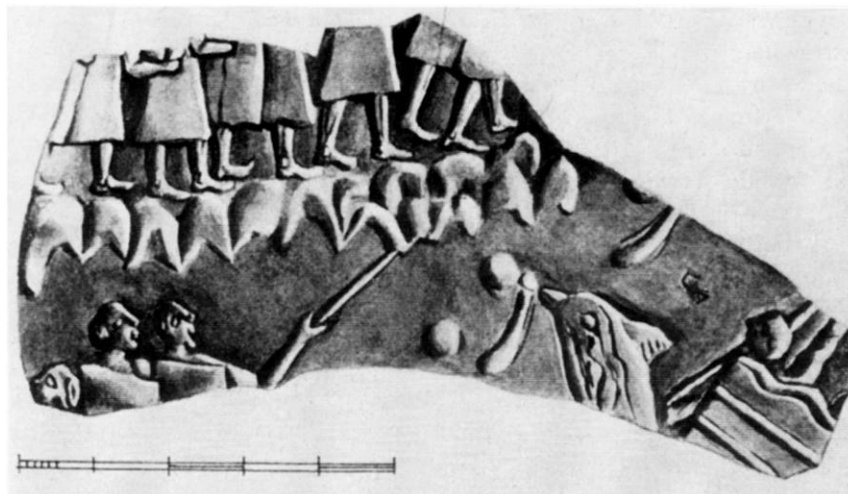


Fig. 7. Stone rhyton from sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas, Epidauros. (From A. Sakellariou, *RA* 1971, fig. 3)

the “second” wall, the one built in the 10th year rather than the first year, in order to destroy it (fr. 162 Rose: *ὁ πλάστας ποιητῆς ἠφάνισε*). The problem of the wall(s) has plagued modern scholarship as well. The most recent analysis suggests sensibly that Aristotle could be right: Homer could have invented the wall in *Iliad* 7 and 12 “for the purpose of supplying the *Iliad* with a *teichomachia*, a type of battle narrative that would otherwise be missing from the *Iliad*.”⁷⁴ The evidence of the Thera frieze suggests the historicity of an early wall, but also supports the importance of a *τειχομαχία* as an essential and early component of a story of campaigns abroad. In Proclus’s account of the *Kypria*, for example, the embassy requesting the return of Helen is followed by a Greek assault on the walls of Troy, and the same sequence is narrated in the Thera fresco, if one reads the “meeting on the hill” as an embassy, the marching warriors as the inception of an assault on the missing city. Whether one subscribes to an “early” or a “late” wall from the testimonia, the painted fragment of wall belongs to this philological dispute.

In the landward side of this campaign, a pastoral background forms a study in contrast to its military tone. On the same level as the marching warriors, a squarish building represents the most substantial architecture in this frieze to survive fragmentation. In elevation, one would describe the openings between ashlar trabeate shapes as doorways, one with a young boy standing in front, and possibly a second figure in the next “compartment” to the left. If so, this structure

has a roof, on or above which four male figures, one seated, stare left, without visible narrative connections to other figures. Although they resemble the animal herders at their backs (to the right), these figures on or above the roof ignore the pastoral scene “behind” them and seem to concentrate on the hillside gathering. One could fancy them a juvenile version of the *Τειχοσκοπή* in *Iliad* 3 (145–245), not a king and his elders but a youthful group of shepherds(?) excluded from battle, gaze riveted on the military assembly to the left. Their outfits resemble Athena’s disguise (*Od.* 13.221–24):

as a young man, a herdsman of sheep,
a delicate boy, such as the children of kings are,
and wearing a well-made shawl in a double fold over
his shoulders.

They may be figures too young to fight, whose duties lie with the flocks which nourish the city and tempt invaders, yet their longing for battle makes them vulnerable, as future heroes. The painting juxtaposes their youth to heroes in battle with a poignancy one could imagine in poetry.

Above them, we can identify a well next to a tree surrounded by an enclosing wooden (?) or brush-work fence, often compared to a modern *mandri* or sheepfold. Spring, trees, and animals contribute to the topography of Homeric cities, as in the description of Odysseus’s arrival in Ithaka (*Od.* 17.204–15). In this fresco, two women walk away from the spring/well carrying water jars in the direction taken by the warriors, parallel to them but without engagement. Poetry juxtaposes arriving warriors and female water-carriers in a simi-

⁷⁴ E. Dolin, “Thucydides on the Trojan War: A Critique of the Text of 1.11.1,” *HSCP* 87 (1983) 130, with summary

of earlier bibliography by P. Girard, D.S. Robertson, R.M. Cook, J. de Romilly, J.A. Davison, etc.

lar manner, as when Odysseus and his men arrive at the land of the Laistrygonians (*Od.* 10.105–108): “and there in front of the town they met a girl drawing water. This was the powerful daughter of the Laistrygonian Antiphates, who had gone down to the sweet-running well-spring, Artakie, whence they would to carry their water back to the city.”

The ἄστυ missing from this frieze probably lies to the right, the goal of both arriving warriors and water-fetching maidens, and perhaps the locale of a missing *τειχομαχίη*. Poetry also clarifies how a series of images from rural life are intrinsic to a military narrative, in verse as in art, and the juxtaposition is no coincidence. In this fresco, the women carrying water participate in a pastoral defined by well, tree, and two rows of animals—sheep, cattle, and goat—driven in two rows, one toward the water and the fold, the other toward the city or the hills. Two directions for animal traffic are formulaic in epic poetry: when Polyphemos addresses his favorite ram, he recalls how this prince of the flock used to be first in the stampede for pasture and river, and first to head home for the fold in the evening (*Od.* 9.450–51).⁷⁵ More specifically, these two lines of animals passing each other in opposite directions, each driven by a shepherd, provide a curious gloss on the Homeric description of Lamos, the city of the Laistrygonians (*Od.* 10.80–86), “where shepherd hails shepherd driving in [his flocks], and the one driving [his] answers back.”

These fragments compose a larger picture of the topography of an epic city, comparable to the description of Troy in the *Iliad*. The conjunction of tree, spring, and hill, for example, appears in the same hexameter lines in the description of Achilles chasing Hektor around the walls of Troy, *τείχος ὑπὸ Τρώων* (*Il.* 22.145–55):

They raced along by the watching point and the windy
fig-tree
always away from under the wall and the wagon-way
and came to the two sweet-running well springs . . .
Beside these
in this place, and close to them, are the washing-hol-
lows
of stone, and magnificent, where the wives of the Tro-
jans and their lovely
daughters washed the clothes to shining, in the old
days
when there was peace, before the coming of the sons of
the Achaeans.

In the *Iliad*, it is this contrast between life at peace and death in battle which animates the narrative tension of a poem of war: not the bloody corpse of Hektor later dragged without mercy around the same race-course, but the memory of peaceful days filled with everyday domestic duties, the work of women and shepherds rather than the destruction of men. Even the enemy shares this image of Troy: Achilles remembers the prosperity of Troy *τὸ πρὶν ἐπ’ εἰρήνης*, in a line which duplicates this one (9.403). Eventually, Achilles carries images of both cities, at war and in peace, into battle on his shield (*Il.* 18.490–608). This contrast is traditional to the imagery of city sieges in other epic poetry of the Late Bronze Age, as in the Canaanite epic of Keret, when El prescribes a siege:⁷⁶

Then, at sunset on the seventh day,
you will arrive at Udm the great,
Udm the well-watered;
and attack the cities,
raid the towns;
drive the woodcutters from the fields,
the gatherers of straw from the threshing-floors;
drive the water-carriers from the well,
the women filling their jars from the spring.

The miniature fresco from Thera fulfills a Late Bronze Age vision of such an urban setting, with its *σκοπιή* or lookout-hill, spreading tree, spring for water, and citizens at work. Such a tree also marks a vulnerable point for attackers in Homer’s Troy, a landmark in Andromache’s futile advice to Hektor (*Il.* 6.433–35):

draw up your people by the fig tree, there where the
city
is openest to attack, and where the wall may be
mounted.

The missing portion of the painting could pursue this link between pastoral and polemic action, with the help of epic episodes. Most of the rest of the north frieze is missing, except for two (?) figures of bulls or cows midway down the upper part of the wall, presumably part of a herd of cattle completing the sheep and goats to the west (fig. 4).⁷⁷ If so, they become the goal of those marching warriors, who are perhaps a subdivision of the invading army sent to capture booty on the hoof. An important theme ancillary to the siege of a city in epic poetry is the cattle raid, which accompanies, even justifies, plenty of epic expeditions and

⁷⁵ As observed by S. Marinatos in *Thera* VI, 41.

⁷⁶ M. Coogan, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Philadelphia 1978) 60 (El’s instructions are repeated, verbatim, by the poet at a later point in the narrative: p. 63).

⁷⁷ *Thera* VI, pls. 6–7, fig. 7; *TAW* color pl. K; Warren, “Miniature Fresco,” 118; Morgan 1983 (supra n. 33) 90, n. 1.

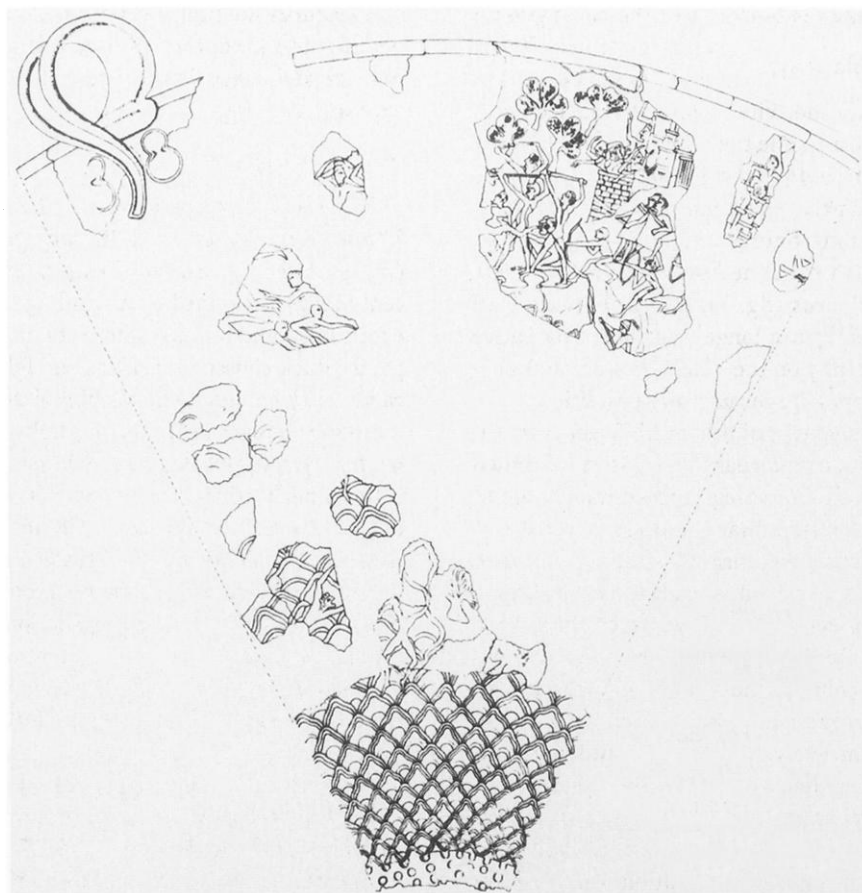


Fig. 8. Silver siege rhyton, Mycenae, Shaft Grave IV. (From drawing by Suzanne Chapman in E. Vermeule, *Greece in the Bronze Age*, pl. XIV)

heroic adventures. Cattle and city are captured together, as in Achilles' raid on the district of Aeneas (*Il.* 20.89–93), *ὅτε βουσὶν ἐπήλυθεν ἡμετέρησι, | πέρσε δὲ Λυρνησσὸν καὶ Πήδασον* (below, n. 104). Andromache lost all seven of her brothers to Achilles in such an ambush (*Il.* 6.421–24):

for swift-footed brilliant Achilleus slaughtered all of them
as they were tending their white sheep and lumbering oxen; . . .

One epic passage describes in detail how such an ambush can be integral to the siege of a city, even in the strategy of the besieged (*Il.* 18.508–40). Around the city the besiegers sit divided in council (58.510) while the besieged sally forth to seize the enemy's cattle and sheep, guarded by two herdsmen. The two herdsmen and their flocks in the painting could figure in such a cattle raid as they do in the poet's vision,

where they are ambushed on their way to the river. The narrative is hard to follow, as if the poet stitched together a series of formulaic episodes from cattle-rustling stories, and commentators have long assumed that the poet imagined a work of art like the silver siege rhyton (fig. 8; *infra* n. 84). In its fragmentary condition this fresco requires assistance from Homer. To the right of the converging lines of figures, a clash between shepherds and warriors may have been painted, a skirmish under the walls of the missing city. The lost portion of the frieze must have presented a substantial architectural vista to rival those on the south wall and in contemporary art. The silver siege rhyton from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae provides a complete panorama of the missing city under siege, with women and children on the walls, differently armed allies defending the city, and a seaborne party arriving (fig. 8).⁷⁸ The scene depicted in relief on this rhyton brings to life the ekphrasis of Achilles' shield

⁷⁸ Vermeule, Smith, and Davis (*supra* n. 48); A. Sakellariou, "La scène du siège sur le rhyton d'argent de Mycènes

d'après une nouvelle reconstitution," *RA* 1975, 197–208; *Fourth Cretological Congress* 532–38.

(*Il.* 18.513; cf. *Aspis* 242–44): “But the city’s people were not giving way, and armed for an ambush. Their beloved wives and their little children stood on the rampart to hold it, and with them the men with age upon them, but meanwhile the others went out.”

On the conical rhyton, the battle near the walls dominates the rim area, but below unfolds a battle at sea, whose swimming figures and coastal setting approximate the north frieze at Akrotiri. Like the stone rhyton from Epidauros (fig. 7), the silver relief vase abbreviates scenes from a longer, sustained narrative represented more fully on the Thera frescoes and ultimately derived from a larger narrative tradition.

The important message of this north frieze is that it offers a predictable counterpart to the story of return on the opposite wall. The Siege Fresco tells a tale of war, of heroic encounters that comprise the theme of *κλέος*: the dangerous adventures abroad, at sea and on land, that make a safe return, a *νόστος* like the happy scene on the south wall, a reward worth celebrating in gesture and song. Greeks abroad on adventure pray for both, as in the opening of the *Iliad* (1.19) where Kalchas requests *ἐκπέρσαι Πριάμοιο πόλιν, εἴ δ’ οἴκαδ’ ἰκέσθαι*. Those who return home successfully, or hope to, might well adorn their finest room with this prayer. The juxtaposition between cities of war and of peace is emphatic in this confrontation on facing walls of a single room. They initiate a traditional contrast of themes in Greek literature, whether in *ἔκφρασις* on the shields of Achilles and Herakles or in the coexistence of two poems like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, devoted to war and peace, respectively. In the history of ancient interior decoration, the juxtaposition of episodes from the two poetic traditions is repeated in Classical Greek painting, as on the walls of the Lesche of the Knidians (Paus. 10.25–32) and in Roman private settings like the villa of Tiberius at Sperlonga.⁷⁹ In the Bronze Age, art may even anticipate or encourage a configuration in literature. The tendency to confront scenes of peace and violence in prehistoric art is appropriate to the historical convergence of Minoan and Mycenaean traditions in art. The juxtaposition of peaceful and violent scenes on the pair of cups from the Vapheio tomb has even been attributed to different craftsmen, Minoan and Mycenaean.⁸⁰ The historical encounter of these

two cultures in the Late Bronze Age may have contributed to the contrast between action and repose, if not war and peace, in the history of Classical and European literature.

THE EAST FRIEZE

The third frieze preserved in Room 5 of the West House participates in a literary tradition as well (fig. 9). Along the east wall runs a landscape reminiscent of Egypt, defined by a winding river bordered by exotic flora and fauna: palm trees, marshy plants, papyrus; duck chased by griffins and felines. This panorama is an enlargement of abbreviated scenes in contemporary Mycenaean art, most obviously the dagger from Mycenae’s Shaft Grave V where a feline captures a duck amidst a papyrus thicket.⁸¹ The ultimate source for such scenes is not so much the Nile itself, but Aegean fantasies of Egypt. This was a constant theme in antiquity, from improbable Homeric tales set in Egypt, and Herodotus’s fascination with its flora, fauna, and culture, to Hellenistic novels and Roman seductions associated with the land of the Nile. The portrait of Egypt as an image of fertility and fantasy begins in Homeric hexameter, whose formulaic expressions correspond to these painted images of its lush landscape. In the *Odyssey*, Egypt is well-watered (*εὐρρεΐτην*: 14.257), with beautiful fields (4.229, 263), and a source of *χρήματα* for men. Homeric Egypt provides Helen with bewitching drugs, Odysseus with plausible wealth as well as with a conveniently distant and dangerous setting for his tall tales (14.257; 17.430). Egypt lies between Troy and home for more than one hero in the *Odyssey*, whether in Menelaos’s detour including Phoenicia (4.351–484, 615–19), or in the imaginary adventures of Odysseus (14.257–91; 17.423–44), and such Homeric fictions contributed to the Greek genre of the romance or novel. By the Hellenistic period, Egypt still exerted this fascination over Greeks, even after the foundation of Alexandria: *Αἰγύπτιον γὰρ ἄκουμα καὶ διήγημα πᾶν Ἑλληνικῆς ἀκοῆς ἐπαγωγότατον* (Heliodoros *Aethiopica* 2.27).⁸²

In other words, visions of Egypt in poetry are a narrative device introducing an element of fantasy into familiar tales, just as this Nilotic landscape bridges two spheres in Aegean geography, injecting the exotic into

⁷⁹ The latest reconstruction of the Polygnotan paintings, by Mark Stansbury-O’Donnell (*AJA* 93 [1989] 203–15) arranges the Nekyia and Iliupersis scenes facing each other on the two short walls of the building. Sperlonga: R. Hampe, *Sperlonga und Virgil* (Mainz 1972); Pollitt (supra n. 30) 122–26.

⁸⁰ Davis (supra n. 48) 1–50; cf. *ArtB* 56:4 (1974) 474–87.

⁸¹ Vermeule (supra n. 48) 21–22, figs. 18–19.

⁸² H. Whitehouse, “Shipwreck on the Nile: A Greek Novel on a ‘Lost’ Roman Mosaic,” *AJA* 89 (1985) 129–34, esp. 132 n. 18; B. Kytzler, “Zum utopischen Roman der klassischen Antike,” 7–16 and M. Fusillo, “Textual Patterns and Narrative Situations in the Greek Novel,” 17–31 in H. Hofman ed., *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel* 1 (Groningen 1988) on the Homeric origins of the Greek novel and of Greek fascination with Egypt.

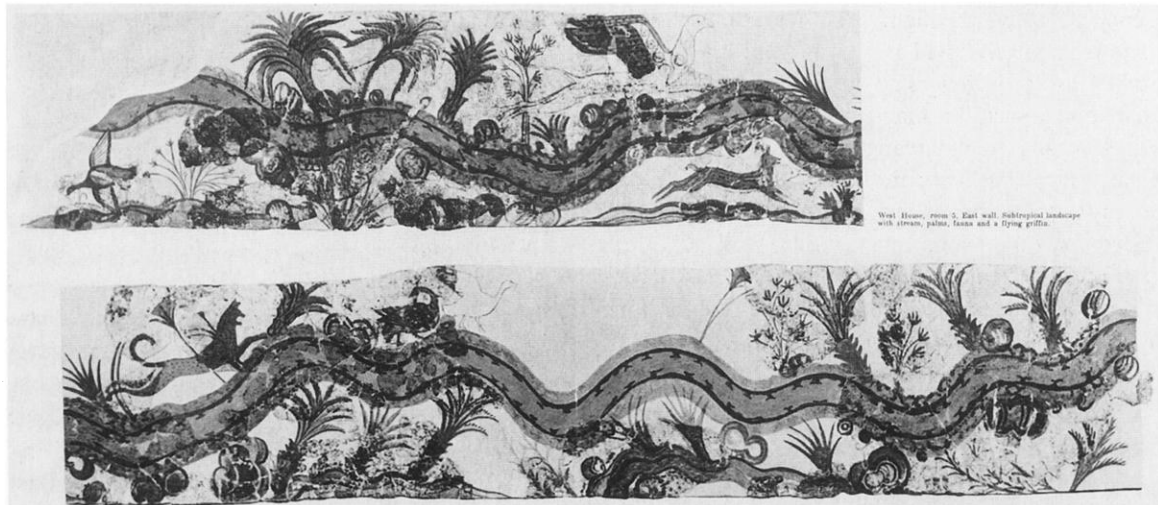


Fig. 9. East frieze, "Nilotic" landscape, Room 5, West House, Akrotiri (Thera). (From *Thera* VI, pl. 8)

heroic adventures.⁸³ We see here in painting an early version of a *topos* in Classical art and literature, not just a complement to contemporary imports. Its placement and narrative purpose suggest it was expressed in poetry, as well as in art, in the 15th century B.C.

PAINTING AND POETRY

These associations between epic poetry and Bronze Age paintings are intended to encourage further comparisons between visual and verbal configurations, between the epic tradition and narrative art of the Late Bronze Age. Ever since the first discoveries of Mycenaean art, 100 years ago, scholars familiar with Greek literature recognized in fragments of pictorial scenes the imagery of Homeric formulae.⁸⁴ Particularly striking among new discoveries were images recalling Homeric similes. The dagger from Shaft Grave V invoked above, for example, pairs a military scene on one side of the blade with a lion-hunt on the other; it complements in *Metallmalerei* what a Homeric simile does for a warrior.⁸⁵ Battle compositions correspond

closely to typical combat scenes in epic poetry, according to Sakellariou's analysis of the silver krater from Mycenae.⁸⁶ When images like the silver rhyton first appeared 100 years ago, their associations with Homeric scenes benefited from ignorance of Cretan culture. Since the excitement of discoveries at Knossos and of related "Minoanizing" sites around the Aegean, the Homeric corpus has receded from the imagination of archaeologists. The Thera frescoes should have brought it back, had not philology and archaeology parted their specialized ways in recent decades.

The miniature frescoes from Thera synthesize as a coherent tradition, for the first time, scraps of narrative scenes in early Mycenaean art which also recall epic poetry. We can identify half a dozen thematic groups—arrival and departure by sea, council and battle, ambush and defense, the peaceful outskirts of a city, warriors landing and sailors drowning—that correspond to epic traditions. Stylistic analyses of the Thera frescoes imply similar technical similarities between poetic and pictorial compositions, such as "the

⁸³ Immerwahr (supra n. 31) 174 on how this fresco "serve[s] the artistic function of removing the shipwreck and sheepfold scenes to a more distant land." Davis (supra n. 19) 5–6 on its deliberately foreign, exotic element.

⁸⁴ W. Helbig, *Das homerische Epos aus den Denkmälern erläutert* (Leipzig 1884) 291–310; C. Tsountas, *ArchEph* 1891, 14–22; H. Kluge, "Der Schild des Achilleus und die mykenischen Funde," *NJbb* 149 (1894) 81–90. The new Mycenaean finds were immediately incorporated into commentaries and texts of Homer, as in Leaf and Bayfield's *Iliad* (1895) pl. II. For a summary, see K. Fittschen, *Der Schild des Achilleus* (1973).

⁸⁵ The traditional scholarship includes W. Schadewaldt, "Die Homerischen Gleichnisse und die kretisch-mykenische

Kunst," *Festschrift für O. Regenbogen* (1952) 9–27; Laffineur (supra n. 57) on Homeric similes and such images. Morgan 1983 (supra n. 33) 85–87 and *Miniature Wall Paintings* 44–49 explores this visual juxtaposition between warriors and lions without reference to Homeric similes (but see *L'iconographie minoenne* 34); C. Baurain, "Recherche sur l'iconographie créto-mycénienne du lion iliadique," in J. Serrais, T. Hackens, and B. Serrais-Soyez eds., *Mélanges . . . offerts à Jules Labarbe* (Liège 1987) 339–67.

⁸⁶ A. Sakellariou, "Un cratère d'argent avec scène de bataille provenant de la IV^e tombe de l'acropole de Mycènes," *AntK* 17 (1974) 3–20; Vermeule (supra n. 37) 29–30; cf. Davis (supra n. 48) 222–27, no. 86; B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (Wiesbaden 1968).

tendency to string the figures out paratactically.⁸⁷ This is particularly vivid in the north frieze, whose episodic clusters of images do not imply strict dictates for narrative in art, but may express a poetic account of simultaneous events arranged in a linear sequence in time, translated here into two-dimensional space. The paratactic arrangement of episodes and images required for digressions in storytelling permits the painter simultaneous juxtapositions, where the poet would be dependent on ring composition. There is a rich world of such instructive comparisons between painting and poetry, of the kind more frequently derived from Greek and Roman painting (*supra* ns. 30, 34) than in Bronze Age archaeology. The Pylos frescoes, which benefit from their context in a palace identified with a Homeric place, have inspired a recent exception to this neglect, and the Thera frescoes deserve to be included in this Homeric environment.⁸⁸

Although Homeric poetry deserves more frequent consultation as a source of narrative in prehistoric art, certain reservations should be repeated. Frequent convergence between formulae or lines with visual images cannot confirm that poems in circulation by 1500 B.C. were necessarily composed in dactylic hexameter, any more than the presence of Mycenaean realia in Homeric poetry makes these poems earlier than their latest element.⁸⁹ For other technical reasons, philologists have posited precursors of Homeric poetry in the Bronze Age. For some scholars, archaisms in Homer already eliminated in the stage of the Greek language represented in the Linear B tablets support this conclusion.⁹⁰ Others have argued for Mycenaean poetry from the antiquity of thematic and comparative material in Oriental and epigraphic sources.⁹¹ Most recently, scholars have reaffirmed the existence of epic poetry, and even of hexameter, in the Mycenaean period.⁹² But one philologist has even found support for

pre-Homeric hexameter from the evidence of art, including these very frescoes. Hoekstra identifies the Late Mycenaean period as a *terminus ante quem* for the existence of epic poetry, with the following argument:⁹³ "... I find it difficult to believe that [narrative poetry] did not yet exist at the cultural stage represented by the Theraean frieze... In this respect I would not in the first place refer to the marching soldiers with their Mycenaean armour and weapons, but to the formal aspect of their representation. Whatever the interpretation of the scenes in question, there is little doubt that they tell some tale and that their form is the opposite of primitive. Is it probable that this type of art had no parallel in contemporary poetry?"

This is exactly what most Aegean archaeologists have missed, the forest that is hidden by the trees, by the excitement of armor and ships. I would add that not only the form but the content of these frescoes is difficult to imagine without a contemporary narrative tradition in poetry. Few would deny that the formative period of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as we know them, lies centuries later; but their source in older tales is at least as early as 1500 B.C. Since these frescoes and other early Mycenaean art were unknown to later Greeks, the very survival of Bronze Age history presumes a narrative tradition inherited from Bronze Age poetry.⁹⁴

PAINTING AND HISTORY

If a poetic narrative is to be imagined behind these frescoes, what historical events inspired poetry in the 15th century B.C.? The first historical interpretations of these frescoes arranged Minoans and Mycenaeans in plausible Aegean scenarios, participating in joint expeditions, with Mycenaean warriors on Minoan ships, or assisting and attacking each other in various

⁸⁷ As observed by Immerwahr (*supra* n. 31) 179–80; Davis (*supra* n. 19) 11.

⁸⁸ M. Lang, "Pylos Polytropos," *Minos* 20–22 (1987) 333–41 juxtaposes poetry, frescoes, and epigraphy in the pursuit of similar "descriptive techniques" and "recurrent themes"; cf. McCallum (*infra* n. 112).

⁸⁹ G.S. Kirk, "Dark Age and Oral Poet," *PCPS* 7 (1961) 34–48; M.L. West, "Greek Poetry 2000–700 B.C.," *CQ* 67 (1973) 179–92; O.T.P. Dickinson, "Homer, the Poet of the Dark Age," *Greece and Rome* 33 (1986) 20–37; but see now West (*infra* n. 92).

⁹⁰ G.C. Horrocks, "The Antiquity of the Greek Epic Traditions: Some New Evidence," *PCPS* 26 (1980) 1–11; *Space and Time in Homer: Prepositional and Adverbial Particles in the Greek Epic* (New York 1980). F. Adrados, "Towards a New Stratigraphy of the Homeric Dialect," *Glotta* 59 (1981) 13–27; J.T. Hooker, "The Homeric Dialect," *Concilium Eirene* XVI (Prague 1983) 75–79.

⁹¹ M. Durante, *Sulla preistoria della tradizione poetica greca* (Rome 1971); L. Stella, *Tradizione micenea e poesia dell'Iliade* (Rome 1978); Hooker (*infra* n. 108) 7–8; C.O. Pavese, "L'origine micenea della tradizione epica, rapsodica," *SMEA* 21 (1980) 341–52. W. Calder, "Gold for Bronze: *Iliad* 6.116–118," *Studies Presented to Sterling Dow* (GRBS Suppl., 1984) 31–35.

⁹² See Ruijgh (*supra* n. 50); J.R. Green, "A Chariot-Krater from Sydney: Some Notes on Mycenaean Vase-Painting and Poetry," 43–49, and J.T. Hooker, "From Mycenae to Homer," 57–64 in J. Betts and J.T. Hooker eds., *Studies in Honor of T.B.L. Webster* 1 (Bristol 1986); Baurain (*supra* n. 85) 366–67; M.L. West, "The Rise of the Greek Epic," *JHS* 108 (1988) 151–72 now defends not only a 14th-century epic but the existence of hexameter in the 15th century.

⁹³ A.E. Hoekstra, *Epic Verse before Homer* (New York 1981) 34–35.

⁹⁴ As argued by Vermeule (*supra* n. 1) 122–52.

campaigns of conquest.⁹⁵ Most scholars now agree that the miniature frescoes represent a generalized picture of seaborne expeditions, “a kind of symbolic narrative of conditions in the Aegean in the early fifteenth century.”⁹⁶ But behind every general picture lies transformed experience, and the fact that scenes of seafaring and siege were repeated as popular themes implies that they happened in history. Evidence outside the frescoes is more useful than their contents alone, which are expressed in Aegean imagery but reflect more distant experience.

Archaeology and epigraphy animate the Thera frescoes with the record of Mycenaean involvement in Anatolia. As early as 1911, the name “Ahhiyawa” in Hittite texts for a people in conflict with the Hittites in western Anatolia was associated with Homeric Achaeans.⁹⁷ Individual names and places suggested tantalizing ties to Homer: Piyamaradas (Priam?); Alaksandos (Alexandros, or Paris?); Tawagalawas (Teucer?); Taruisa (Truiya > Τροίη?); and Wilusiya (“Ιλιος?). None of these words can be read without controversy and a generous dose of faith, as admitted in learned circles. But recent and persuasive interpretations of these texts indicate sustained and repeated Aegean adventures on the western coast of Asia Minor beginning in the 15th century. The most intriguing of these documents is the Indictment of Madduwattas, which describes an Achaean based in southwest Anatolia (named Attarissiyas: Atreus?) who engages 100 chariots against a Hittite king, in an account where the death of a leader on each side sounds more Homeric than Hittite.⁹⁸ Relationships are complex when a vassal of the Hittites with a Lydian name is rescued by Hittites but then joins their enemies, the Arzawa, or even joins “Atreus” for raids on Cyprus. In an equally complicated text, the Tawagalawa letter, a protégé of the Hittites, “Piyamaradas,” also attacks his protectors, while the Lukka turn to both parties

for help. These shifting patterns of alliance, rivalry, and opportunism are what one would expect from Bronze Age warfare, when booty and glory counted for more than loyalty and allegiance. The redating of texts containing place-names like Wilusiya and Taruisa to the 15th century places them within a generation of early Mycenaean pictures of expeditions by sea and battles on land.⁹⁹

Anatolian art and perhaps even poetry from the Hittite capital of Boghazköy enliven these texts. Five years ago, Calvert Watkins offered the Classical world a snatch of Luwian song from the Hittite archives which begins “They came from steep Wilusa,” bestowing an exciting adventure on those names from the Trojan area.¹⁰⁰ More intriguing (and persuasive) for the archaeologist is the fragment of an incised bowl from the Hittite capital with a warrior in garb alien to Anatolian military (and visual) traditions (fig. 10).¹⁰¹ His helmet with zones and crest looks vaguely Aegean, as does his spiral-covered cuirass and sword with round pommel, but he could come from south-

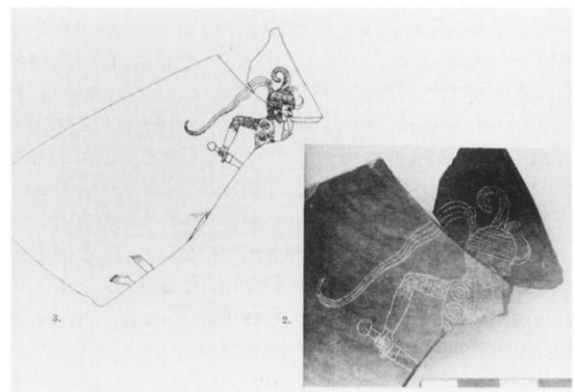


Fig. 10. Incised stone bowl from Bogazköy (Hattusas), Turkey. (From K. Bittel, *RA* 1976, 11, fig. 3)

⁹⁵ Thera VI, 38–57 and Page (supra n. 20) for the biographical version of the frieze, as the story of the life of the West House “Admiral;” Warren, Gesell, Ruijgh, and West (supra ns. 44, 50, 92) 197–204 argue for a Cretan setting. Cf. the essays and discussion in *Minoan Thalassocracy*.

⁹⁶ Immerwahr (supra n. 31) 183.

⁹⁷ H. Güterbock, “Troy in Hittite Texts? Wilusa, Ahhiyawa and Hittite History,” in M. Mellink ed., *Troy and the Trojan War* (Bryn Mawr 1986) 133 n. 1 traces the history of these associations, which begin with Luckenbill’s equation of Alaksandus and Alexandros (*CP* 6 [1911] 85–86), even earlier than Kretschmer (*Glotta* 13 [1924] 205–13) and Forrer, *MDOG* 16 [1924] 1–22).

⁹⁸ According to Güterbock, “The Hittites and the Aegean World: 1. The Ahhiyawa Problem Reconsidered,” *AJA* 87 (1983) 133–38 and “Hittites and Achaeans: A New Look,” *ProcPhilSoc* 128 (1984) 114–22; cf. E. Vermeule, “The Hit-

tites and the Aegean World. 3. Response to Hans Güterbock,” *AJA* 87 (1983) 141–43; “Priam’s Castle Blazing,” in Mellink (supra n. 97) 85; cf. L.A. Gindin and V.L. Tsymbursky, “The Ancient Greek Version of the Historical Event Reflected in a Hittite Text,” *VDI* 176 (1986) 81–87 on KUB XXIII.13 and the *Kypria*.

⁹⁹ Güterbock 1983 (supra n. 98) 133–35 and 1984; H. Otten, *Sprachliche Stellung und Datierung des Madduwattas-Textes. Studien zu den Bogazköy-Texten* 11 (Wiesbaden 1969).

¹⁰⁰ “The Language of the Trojans,” in Mellink (supra n. 97) 58–62; cf. *Hethitica* 8 (1987) 423–26.

¹⁰¹ K. Bittel, “Tonschale mit Ritzzeichnung von Bogazköy,” *RA* 1976, 9–14, figs. 2–3; D. Rittig, *Orientalia* 52 (1983) 156–60; Vermeule (supra n. 1) 143–44 fig. 5; Güterbock 1984 (supra n. 98) 115 fig. 6.

west Anatolia, or be a descendant of a Mycenaean settler wearing an inherited or captured suit of armor, like Glaukos of Lycia (*Il.* 6.230–36). In other words, his attributes and identity are as colorful as the ethnic and political affiliations of Anatolian correspondents with the Hittites. Stratum and ceramic context date this bowl's burial to around 1400 B.C., in the period when the Ahhiwaya are long a significant presence on the western borders of the Hittite empire. Yet image and technique have no parallels in Hittite art, perhaps because Luvian poems and real warriors both inspired an artist for the first time, with an improvised result not unlike what appears in the Thera frescoes. But a Mycenaean complement to this Anatolian portrait appears on a sherd from Miletos (Millawanda, home to many an Ahhiyawan?) in a picture of Hittite headgear.¹⁰² In Anatolian as in Aegean art, images of warriors, foreign and native, suggest the intermediary of poetry or some heroic narrative version of history.

Closer to the Aegean, the coast of western Asia was explored by Minoans, later by Mycenaeans, throughout the second millennium.¹⁰³ Recent discoveries have intensified the number and raised the date of those raids remembered by Achilles as the storming of 12 cities by sea and 11 by land, in the Troad alone (*Il.* 9.328–29).¹⁰⁴ The piratical nature of these coastal raids, with their emphasis on portable booty like women, livestock and metal, closely resembles that of the skirmishes reported in Hittite accounts by independent ship-owning potentates like Madduwattas and Attarissiyas who attacked cities in Cyprus and Caria (above, ns. 97–98). The newly discovered cemetery at Menemen (Panaz Tepe), with its mixture of Anatolian and Mycenaean pottery and weapons in Aegean tholos tombs, suggests a settlement postdating such an expedition, as early as the LH IIIA period.¹⁰⁵

Finally, the Troad itself has produced the most exciting new evidence in new excavations at Beşik Tepe. This coastal site southwest of the mound of Hissarlik was almost certainly the landing place for Mycenaean Greeks bound for Troy, for topographic reasons alone.¹⁰⁶ A substantial cemetery of the late Troy VI period, contemporary with LH IIIB and containing Mycenaean sherds, includes burials of men, women and children, not just warriors. This suggests communities of families, perhaps men who married and settled in the Troad in the 13th century, in generations following military expeditions as at Panaztepe. Hittite and Mycenaean texts agree, for once, on similar consequences in bride barter and traffic in women. The household of the Pylos palace included women, captives or slaves, from Knidos and Miletos, a complement to the fate of the Hittite lady banished by her royal husband to the land of the Ahhiyawa.¹⁰⁷

All this excitement has refocused attention on Hissarlik itself, and on the largest and most impressive of its prehistoric cities, Troy VI. A major break at the end of the 14th century was attributed to natural causes by Blegen's team, but many have doubted his earthquake theory and associated the splendor of the city with Priam's Troy.¹⁰⁸ New ceramic evidence and analysis associate Troy VIIa with the Mycenaean IIIC era, and Troy VIIb now appears "Submycenaean," eliminating phases of the citadel later than Troy VI from the Homeric experience.¹⁰⁹ But the destruction of the Trojan citadel by the Greeks as a single, heroic event took place primarily in poetry. It may never be conveniently confirmed by an excavated destruction level, and the expectation of such "proof" ignores the power of poetry. In particular, the heroic tradition may represent that "motley series of mini-wars" which "could have originated in the tensions

¹⁰² Güterbock 1984 (supra n. 98) 115, figs. 4–5.

¹⁰³ *Minoan Thalassocracy*, esp. essays by Benzi, Laviosa and Schiering; M. Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War* (London 1985) 161–64. I am grateful to Iris Love for the opportunity to supervise the first trench at Knidos which produced Minoan and Mycenaean pottery (in 1977), an experience which has maintained my faith and enthusiasm for Aegean involvement in Anatolia. M. Mellink, *AJA* 82 (1978) 321, 324 and *AJA* 87 (1983) 139 n. 3; I. Love, "From Crete to Knidos—A Minoan Sea Route via the Dodekanese," *AJA* 88 (1984) 251; see also T.R. Bryce, "The Nature of Mycenaean Involvement in Western Anatolia," *Historia* 38 (1989) 1–21.

¹⁰⁴ O. Taplin, "Homer's Use of Achilles' Earlier Campaigns in the Iliad," in J. Boardman and C.E. Vaphopoulou-Richardson eds., *Chios* (Oxford 1986) 15–19 reviews the campaigns of Achilles at Lyrnessos, Pedasos, Tenedos (11.624–25), etc.

¹⁰⁵ M. Mellink, *AJA* 89 (1985) 558; 91 (1987) 13; 93

(1989) 117; *AnatSt* 16 (1986) 207; Vermeule (supra n. 1) 143.

¹⁰⁶ M. Korfmann, "Besik Tepe: New Evidence for the Troy Sixth and Seventh Settlements," in Mellink (supra n. 97) 17–28; cf. his reports in *AA* 1984, 165–95; *AA* 1985, 157–94; *AA* 1986, 303–63; *AA* 1988, 391–404; *AnatSt* 36 (1986) 181–82.

¹⁰⁷ Güterbock 1983 (supra n. 98) 134 n. 11 (KUB 14.2; AU 298–306); Vermeule 1983 (supra n. 98) 142.

¹⁰⁸ Vermeule (supra n. 48) 275–78; supra n. 98, 1983, and 1984, 87–92; Wood (supra n. 103) 112–18; J.T. Hooker, "Ilios and the Iliad," *WS* 13 (1979) 5–21, summarizing earlier arguments including C. Nylander, *Antiquity* 37 (1963) 6–11; Page, *Antiquity* 33 (1959) 25; etc.

¹⁰⁹ D. Easton, "Has the Trojan War Been Found?" *Antiquity* 59 (1985) 188–95; E. Bloedow, "The Trojan War and Late Helladic III C," *PZ* 63 (1988) 23–52; cf. Dickinson (supra n. 89) 23 n. 11, and M. Jacob-Felsch, *GGA* 237 (1985) 47.

generated in West Anatolia by the rival claims there of Hittites and Ahhiyawa."¹¹⁰ As one scholar of Homer puts it: "The Trojan expedition, as it is presented in its ultimate form in the *Iliad*, is a grand theme which, by converging on the one main goal of Troy, unites on the level of content the heroic and material resources of the various cultural centers that may each once have had their own epic traditions about conquering various territories."¹¹¹

The great era of Mycenaean expansion into coastal Anatolia took place earlier in the Bronze Age than most of the "historical" dates for the destruction of Troy. It was that time remembered as the Heroic Age, in poetry and art, even as the first age of Greek colonization in Anatolia, to which the "historical" colonies of Ionia formed a modest and predictable sequel, under less heroic but more civilized conditions. The *Iliad* itself commemorates earlier expeditions undertaken by Herakles and the generation which fathered Homeric heroes like Diomedes (5.640–43), famous in the "first" Trojan War. The Thera frescoes hint at such historical expeditions translated into poetry, then into art, and not because the South Fresco fleet has the number of ships Herakles did, or because topography and landscape indicate Anatolia. These paintings contribute to a coincidence of evidence—from Hittite records, Luwian poems, Anatolian and Mycenaean pottery, and pre-Homeric patterns in epic poetry—which points to an earlier date for the first expeditions to Asia and the Troad and to a poetic, even heroic account of these expeditions, on both sides of the Aegean.

POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

These detours through philology and archaeology return to the context of these heroic paintings and their implications for the social dimensions of prehistoric poetry. At Delos or Pompeii, the stage or the library would help explain the selection of mythological themes on domestic walls, but no clues such as

masks and poets accompany the narratives in the West House. The "audience" of the Thera frescoes belonged to a private room in an island town, not a royal palace with a patron for poets. A fresh restoration of the Pylos throne-room frescoes provides the latter scenario, with a poet entertaining a banquet of men seated in pairs at small tables, raising cups as if in tribute to Homer's praise of the lyre, *δαιτὶ ἑταίρην* (*Od.* 17.270–71).¹¹² If the silver siege rhyton and other luxury vessels (figs. 7–8) were for drinking, their epic decoration points to the same association between poetry and drink preserved in Homeric performance and in the earliest Greek inscriptions like the cup of Nestor. The Pylos arrangement allows the fragments of other narrative frescoes from the palace a closer comparison with Homeric poetry, supported by performances in the *Odyssey*.¹¹³ But the Thera frescoes come from a private home, perhaps even a dining and drinking room, in a town without a palace; they suggest other locales for prehistoric poetry. It may only be a coincidence that Greece's earliest musicians appear in the Cyclades, as marble figurines of the Early Bronze Age. It would be equally tempting to invoke the Cycladic ancestry of Simonides and Bacchylides, natives of Kea, especially since it was Simonides who called painting "silent poetry" (*ποίησιν σιωπῶσαν*) and poetry itself "painting with a voice" (*ζωγραφίαν λαλοῦσαν*; fr. 53 D = Plut. *De Glor. Ath.* 3). But the Kea frescoes, closest to the Thera miniatures in their narrative content, help establish the Cyclades as one home of Bronze Age narrative cycles.¹¹⁴ The Kea fragments indicate an architectural landscape with figures, including singing and dancing, a hunt and a feast, and a seascape with dolphins and boats; their epic potential is rich, although the scene is already being classified as a "festival."¹¹⁵ The frescoes from Thera suggest a Cycladic contribution to early epic poetry, just as discoveries from Lefkandi and other Iron Age sites have prompted a recent attribution of the *Odyssey* to Euboea.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Easton (supra n. 109) 189–90.

¹¹¹ G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore 1979) 140; cf. Hooker (supra n. 108) 7 and M. Jameson's portrayal, recalled by Vermeule 1983 (supra n. 98) 142, of "the *Iliad* as the record of all the Mycenaean adventures overseas", telescoping and combining memorable episodes in epic song."

¹¹² L. McCallum, "Frescoes from the Throne Room at Pylos: A New Interpretation," *AJA* 91 (1987) 296.

¹¹³ M. Lang, *Minos* 20–22 (1987) 333–41 for such a comparison of the Pylos themes (battles, sacrifice, hunt, feasting) to Homeric ones.

¹¹⁴ Coleman (supra n. 54) and "Frescoes from Ayia Irini,

Keos. Part I," *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 284–300; K. Abramowitz, "Frescoes from Ayia Irini, Keos. Parts II–IV," *Hesperia* 49 (1980) 57–85; M. Cameron, "Theoretical Interrelations among Thera, Cretan and Mainland Frescoes," *TAW* 589; Warren, "Miniature Fresco" 127 suggests the "same cycle" as the Thera miniature frescoes (perhaps on the theme of the hunt, rather than battle: cf. *Aspis* 270–305).

¹¹⁵ E.g., Barber (supra n. 3) 181; Morgan, *Miniature Wall Paintings* 68. A new study of the Kea frescoes by Ellen Davis and Lyvia Morgan is in progress: E. Schofield, *AJA* 91 (1987) 242.

¹¹⁶ West (supra n. 92) 172.

CONCLUSIONS

The "new chapter" opened by the Thera frescoes is written in several languages, few of which all can read. Hittite and Luwian cuneiform, Mycenaean and Homeric Greek, Bronze Age ceramic chronology, Minoan fresco technique, Semitic languages and Canaanite poetry, and Indo-European linguistics and metrics are minimum requirements. The paintings are a sobering as well as inspiring reminder that an understanding of Aegean prehistory needs both statistics and style, pottery and poetry, and that we exclude

any dimension at our peril. In philology, some training and research have recognized modern critical theory at the expense of visual evidence, with the danger that contemporary techniques of analysis can seem more essential than ancient realities. The plight of the miniature frescoes in modern scholarship illustrates a divergence in disciplines but also recommends a reunion.

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