

MINOAN PEAK SANCTUARIES: HISTORY AND SOCIETY

BY

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Abstract

Peak sanctuaries have attracted attention within general studies of Minoan religion, and wider studies of the Minoan palatial system and its history. Most of this discussion of the peak sanctuaries has, however, been peripheral to the main theme of specific papers; consequently little study has been devoted to the peak sanctuaries themselves, neither as a class of archaeological sites, nor as a group of definable shrines, nor to their especial role within Minoan society. This paper is an extended summary of the author's doctoral thesis on Minoan peak sanctuaries. As a summary the archaeological material is only reviewed, but from this it is argued that the cult was a manifestation of popular religion; some conclusions are also drawn about Minoan religious beliefs, particularly in relation to mountains. Following this approach the peak sanctuary cult is analysed from the historical and social perspective, i.e. a synthetic view of the social role of the peak sanctuaries, within the overall process of Minoan 'history'. Three main themes are discussed: 1) the origin of the peak sanctuaries in Early Minoan religion, 2) the appropriation of the peak sanctuary cult by the Neopalatial elite, and 3) the consequent decline of the peak sanctuaries.

Peak sanctuaries are the most over-referred to shrines in all of Minoan archaeology. I would not go so far as to follow this deliberately provocative statement by also claiming that they are the most misrepresented shrines, but certainly they have been the subject of much misunderstanding. This misunderstanding has concentrated on two main areas: the chronology, and, even more basic than that, disagreement as to the sites that may be assigned to the group. This paper is a summary of my research on the peak sanctuaries,¹ and I hope it will go some way towards resolving these two, and other, problems. But let me first note a warning: this paper is not a detailed presentation of the relevant archaeological material, rather I concentrate on the historical and social perspective, i.e. a synthetic view of the social role of the peak sanctuaries, within the overall process of Minoan 'history'.

As a group of shrines peak sanctuaries have attracted attention particularly within general studies of Minoan religion, and wider studies of the Minoan palatial system and its history. Most of this discussion of the peak sanctuaries has, however, been peripheral to the main theme of specific papers; consequently little study has been devoted

to the peak sanctuaries themselves, neither as a class of archaeological sites, nor as a group of definable shrines, nor to their especial role within Minoan society.²

The term "peak sanctuary" was coined in 1903 by Myres, for the site that he excavated on top of the mountain Petsofas, above the Minoan town of Palaikastro (Fig. 1).³ On the summit of the mountain he discovered a small stone-built structure. After sherds, the most common finds were clay figurines, of three main groups: animal (Fig. 2), human (male and female (Fig. 3)), and modelled parts of the human anatomy (Fig. 4), which for convenience are referred to as votive limbs. Myres concluded that these figurines as a whole were indeed votive, and therefore that the site was a shrine, which he termed a "peak sanctuary". Following Myres, Evans defined the Minoan site on top of the mountain Jouktas, near Knossos, also as a peak sanctuary;⁴ it was situated on the summit, and shared the same types of figurines. The term "peak sanctuary" passed into archaeological terminology, and yet other sites were so identified. Still the group did not receive much direct study, and so when, in 1950, Nilsson published the 2nd edition of *Mi-*

¹ As it will be some time before my completed thesis on the peak sanctuaries will reach published form, encouraged by the positive responses to this paper, I have decided to present this summary of my research, and make its results more widely available. Versions of this paper were presented in January and February 1988 to the Anthropology and Archaeology Seminar of the University of Illinois, Chicago, to the Institute of Aegean Prehistory, New York, and to the Mycenaean Seminar, London, sponsored respectively by Jack Davis, Malcolm Wiener and Ellen Davis, and Nicolas Coldstream. I also thank the scholars, too many to name here, who have heard or read this paper, for the comments and ideas I have been able to use. Especial thanks to Christine for criticism and patience.

² The only exception to this has been the work of Rutkowski. Recently he has, however, concentrated on only one aspect, namely descriptions of the sites and dubious reconstructions of their appearance, presented without argument or supporting evidence; Rutkowski, *Germania* 63, 1985, 345-359; *idem*, *Aegaeum* 2, 1988, 71-99.

³ J.L. Myres, *BSA* 9, 1902-3, 356-387.

⁴ A.J. Evans, *Palace of Minos* I, London 1921, 153-159.

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Fig. 1. Petsophas: mountain seen from Minoan Palaikastro.

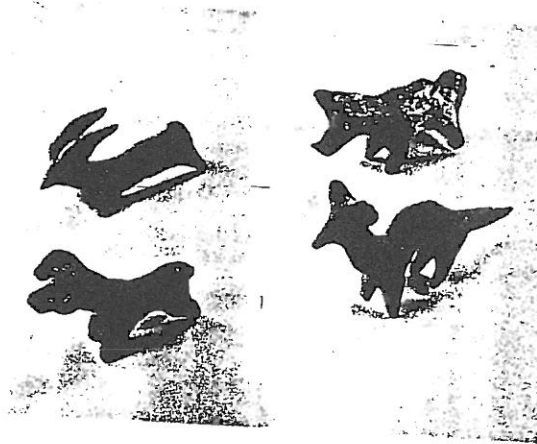


Fig. 2. Petsophas: animal figurines.

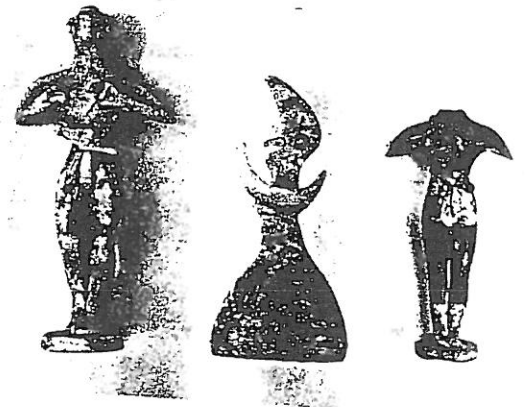


Fig. 3. Petsophas: human figurines.

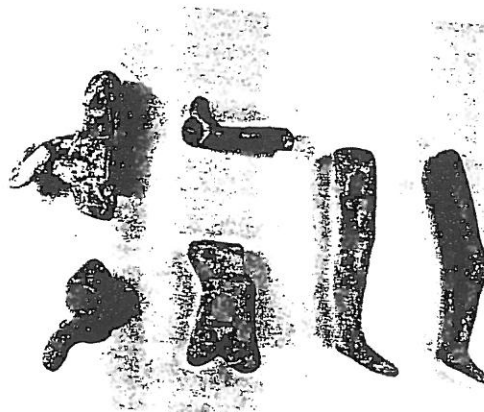


Fig. 4. Petsophas: votive limbs.

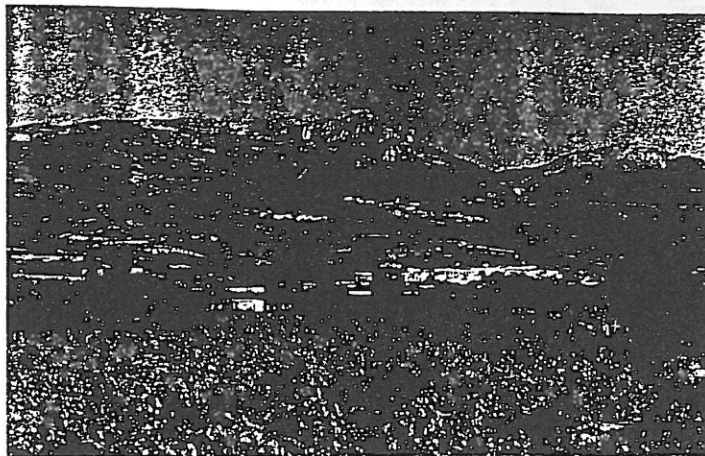


Fig. 5. Prinias: mountain seen from Sitias.

noan and Mycenaean religion, he knew of only 4 peak sanctuary sites.⁵ Even in the following year, when Platon published the first study of peak sanctuaries, only 11 were recorded.⁶

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, however, Faure identified many more sites as rural shrines, not only peak sanctuaries, but also cave shrines, which were his main interest.⁷ So when Rutkowski came to compile a list of peak sanctuaries for his general study of Minoan shrines in 1972, he was able to mention 37 sites.⁸ Rutkowski had, however, already edited out some sites; if we were therefore, to record all places claimed as peak sanctuaries we would have more than 50.⁹

At the start of my research in 1981, it was already apparent that there were some problems with these identifications. The main problem was that there were no clear criteria for the identification of a peak sanctuary. At worst any site on top of a mountain, with or without figurines, or any site with lots of clay figurines, on top of a mountain or not, was identified as a peak sanctuary. Therefore I set out to visit all of these sites, and, as far as possible, to examine their finds. This allowed me to define criteria for the Minoan peak sanctuary, both topographic and of finds; these two sets must go together before a peak sanctuary can be reliably identified. Accordingly, when these criteria are applied to the sites, so far only some 25 can be demonstrated convincingly to be peak sanctuaries.¹⁰

The basic topographic position of a peak sanctuary is on a mountain peak. This observation is not quite as tautologous as it sounds, because there seems to have been some choice exercised as to the particular peaks on which the shrines were placed. The factor of choice is significant in a country as mountainous as Crete. A criterion seems to have been the view which the peak commanded. This meant that in some cases the peak sanctuary was not placed on the summit of the relevant mountain, but on a lower peak, which gave a better view of the surrounding countryside, e.g. Atsipadhes Korakias at approx. 700 m (the higher peak

is Kouroupas at 984 m), Etiani Kephala 615 m (the higher peak is Skopeli at 715 m), Kophinas at 927 m (the summit is at 1231 m), and Zou Prinias 725 m (the higher peak is Dhrys at 803 m) (Fig. 5). Congruent with the view down, equally important seems to have been the view up to the mountain from the settlements in the lowland. There was, of course, a practical reason for this, i.e. that the more visible, indeed visually dominating a mountain, the better landmark it is for pilgrims to travel to (Figs. 1 and 5). I have suggested elsewhere that the two-way visual link meant that the Minoans did not attribute complete omniscience to their

⁵ M.P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean religion and its survival in Greek religion*, 2nd edition, Lund 1950, 68–76.

⁶ N. Platon *KrChron* 5, 1951, 96–160. The sites are Maza, Petsophas, Jouktas, Koumasa, Karphi, Chamaizi, Piskokephalo, Prophitis Elias Mallia, Entichti Lasithiou, Aphendi Christos, Epiano Zakro Athropolithous. Of these only Jouktas, Karphi, Maza, and Petsophas are certainly peak sanctuaries. For the reasons against Athropolithous as a peak sanctuary, see A. Brown & A.A.D. Peatfield, 'Stous Athropolithous: a Minoan site near Epiano Zakro, Sitias', *BSA* 82, 1987, 23–33, and esp. 33 n. 32 for Piskokephalo.

⁷ Faure, *BCH* 80, 1956, 95–103; *idem* *BCH* 82, 1958, 485–515; *idem*, *BCH* 84, 1960, 189–220; *idem*, *BCH* 86, 1962, 36–56; *idem*, *BCH* 87, 1963, 493–508; *idem*, *BCH* 89, 1965, 27–63; *idem*, *BCH* 91, 1967, 114–150; *idem*, *BCH* 93, 1969, 174–213; *idem*, *BCH* 96, 1972, 389–426; *idem*, *BCH* 102, 1978, 629–640.

⁸ B. Rutkowski, *Cult places of the Aegean world*, Warsaw 1972, 320–323; *idem*, *Cult places of the Aegean*, London 1986, 96–98.

⁹ See the catalogues in Rutkowski 1988 (supra n. 2), 78–98, and also my map in *BSA* 78, 1983, 274.

¹⁰ Refer to my maps in 'Palace and peak: the political and religious relationship between palaces and peak sanctuaries', in *The function of the Minoan palaces, Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1984* (hereafter *FMP*), ed. R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, Stockholm 1987, 89–93, esp. 91. To the map should be added 4 more sites: Dhemiati Housakas, Atsipadhes Korakias, Spili Voritsi, and possibly Tappes Kato Kastellos. I remain doubtful of Dhraphanocephalo and Sklokas.

deities, but rather needed to see from their shrines, the places from which worshippers came.¹¹

The suggestion sounds frivolous, but with it I wish to stress that this two-way link indicates that the interaction between the peak sanctuaries and their settlements was important—they were community shrines, not remote places of arduous pilgrimage. This may also be demonstrated by the altitude of the peak sanctuaries. In absolute terms the altitudes of the known peak sanctuaries range from 212 m (Petsophas) to approx. 1160 m (Karphi and Keria). When we look, however, at the relative altitude of the peak sanctuaries we get a different picture. By relative altitude, I mean the distance relative to the settlements from which the worshippers came. The simplest way of measuring this is the time taken to walk/climb to the peak sanctuary from a given settlement. If the modern Cretan shepherds are a suitable comparison, for many Minoans the travel times were probably rarely over an hour. Even for the modern archaeologist this is rarely more than 2–3 hours!

The reason for this small relative distance in comparison to absolute altitude, lies in the nature of the Cretan landscape. Crete is mostly mountains, broken up by small valleys, with the main ranges separated by moderately sized plains. East Crete, where most peak sanctuaries have been identified, is a good example. The coastal plain of northern Sitia separates the Thripti massif from the Sitia range. The rest of the eparchy/province is a mixture of rolling hills and high valleys. These mostly small valleys are enclosed by a craggy ring of mountains, and the Minoan peak sanctuary is usually to be found on the highest local peak visible from the valley. Thus the peak sanctuary is very much a local shrine, and one that is accessible.

Though there is wide altitude range for the peak sanctuaries, all of them lie within the boundaries of agricultural exploitation, either arable or pastoral. Excepting some local variations, within Crete cultivation of crops is usually maintained up to 1200 m. Beyond that herbs are still collected. The higher levels are also the summer pastures for the sheep and goats.¹² Therefore the peak sanctuaries all lie within the main areas of human exploitation of the landscape. It may be observed that even the steepest peak sanctuaries have gentle slopes on at least one side, which still today are used for pastures.

The point to be stressed yet again is that the Minoan peak sanctuaries, with their visibility, accessibility, and proximity to areas of human activity and exploitation, are community shrines, not, I repeat, places of remote and arduous pilgrimage. A piece of negative evidence may also be quoted: the highest mountain in Crete is Mt. Ida (2456 m); from the nearest village it is a 5–7 hour climb. Though there is a modern church on the summit, and ceramic evidence of ritual use in the Classical Greek period, there is no evidence of Minoan ritual use.

All the preceding comments about the topography of the peak sanctuaries are based on observations about the physical fact of their siting. Conclusions as to Minoan beliefs about their deities and the mountains are more difficult to make. The commonly attested human belief that the gods live in the mountains is not recoverable within the

limitations of the Minoan material—that is, without documentary sources. If the Minoans did share this belief, as is probable, then their exercise of choice in the siting of peak sanctuaries, i.e. to maximise the factors of human interaction, is doubly important. This suggests that the Minoans did not believe that a given peak sanctuary was necessarily and specifically "the abode of the gods", but rather, was a suitable place for the god of that mountain to be worshipped. Such a belief may have evolved from the concept of epiphany, that Hägg has argued was fundamental to Minoan religion. Arising out of his study of ritual scenes on seals and other artistic media, Hägg argued that rituals of epiphany, i.e. the summoning of the deity, were among the primary Minoan rituals.¹³ Therefore the peak sanctuaries would be shrines to which the deity was summoned, a place meaningful to the human community of worshippers.

The second set of definitive criteria for a peak sanctuary are the finds, particularly the three sets of clay figurines: animals, human beings, and votive limbs. It is where the topographic and find criteria coincide that we can safely identify a peak sanctuary. Of course, one figurine on top of a mountain does not a peak sanctuary make. I am more concerned with the numbers of figurines, enough to suggest a continuity, or tradition of religious activity. More explicitly characteristic, however, are the votive limbs, which are not found on any other type of Minoan site; by contrast, animal and human figurines are found on other types of shrine site, and are not uncommon in settlements.

From the peak sanctuaries the animal figurines are mostly the common domestic types: sheep (Fig. 2), goats, cattle, pigs (Fig. 2), dogs. Birds are also common, though the modelling of the figurines is not detailed enough to suggest any specific species, domestic or wild. An apparently wild animal is the weasel, recognised by his characteristic arched back (Fig. 2). In modern Crete this is considered a pest, because it attacks chickens. Nevertheless the weasel can in fact perform services useful to Man. It is an efficient hunter of other small mammals (the English keep the related ferret for just this reason). It will also keep rats away from granaries and other food stores. Its fur can be used for clothing.

Models of the Cretan wild goat, the agrimi or kri-kri, also appear among the figurines (Fig. 2). The agrimi seems to have been introduced in the Neolithic or Bronze Age and escaped and became wild fairly early in its history on the island (i.e. it is feral).¹⁴ It may still have been reared as livestock in Minoan Crete, but in any case the undomesticated ones were certainly hunted.

¹¹ A.A.D. Peatfield, 'The topography of Minoan peak sanctuaries', *BSA* 78, 1983, 272–279.

¹² J.A. Moody, *The environmental and cultural prehistory of the Khania region of West Crete: Neolithic through Late Minoan III* (Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota 1987), esp. 38–129.

¹³ R. Hägg, 'Epiphany in Minoan ritual', *BICS* 30, 1983, 184 f.; *idem*, 'Die göttliche Epiphanie in minoischen ritual', *AM* 101, 1986, 41–62.

¹⁴ Moody (*supra* n. 12), 135, and see her refs. to Jarman.

Figurines of horned beetles are particularly frequent on the peak sanctuaries, and other shrines, in Eastern Crete (Fig. 6). There are two main opinions as to the type: most people accept that they are the *oryctes nasicornis*; a Polish entomologist consulted by Rutkowski, however, identified them as *copris hispanis* L.¹⁵ Either way they are a form of dung beetle, which lives on the droppings of domestic animals, particularly sheep. The Minoans seem to have noticed this, and the beetle may therefore have been symbolic of large and healthy flocks. In this way the beetle may have come to be a good luck charm, and in a more general way than merely associated with pastoralism. The existence of a gold beetle from Jouktas supports this possibility.¹⁶

Therefore the animal figurines are all of species somehow associated with human activity, mostly farming or hunting. These are votive offerings, invoking the protection of the deity, to whom they were offered.

The human figurines seem to represent the worshippers themselves (Fig. 3). They depict a restricted group of gestures. Men almost all hold their hands to the chest. The main female gesture has the hands held up and forward. The gesture of arms held to the front is adopted by female

figures shown in ritual scenes on seals roughly contemporary with the figurines; the circumstances of the rituals suggest that the gesture is a worship gesture, in response to the epiphany of the deity.¹⁷ The gesture should be distinguished from the upraised-arms gesture, which is depicted on Minoan goddess figurines, i.e. cult images, from the final stages of the Bronze Age, around 200 years after the peak sanctuaries went out of use.¹⁸

The figurines, male and female are shown in typical Minoan dress and hairstyle: for men the loincloth, boots, and a partially shaved head (Figs. 3 and 7); for women the long dress, and open bodice. Among the female figurines there are some typological changes which may be chronologically meaningful, e.g. the high curving hat of 1st Palace figurines, and the 'regency' hairstyle of 2nd Palace figures (Fig.

¹⁵ Rutkowski 1986 (supra n. 8), 89–91.

¹⁶ A. Karetsov, *Prakt* 1978, pl. 171a.

¹⁷ E.g. the Isopata ring, *CMS* II 3, no. 51; for other examples see *PM* I, fig. 207k, and D. Levi, *ASAtene* 8–9, 1925–1926, 73, fig. 152.

¹⁸ St. Alexiou, *KrChron* 12, 1958, 179–299.

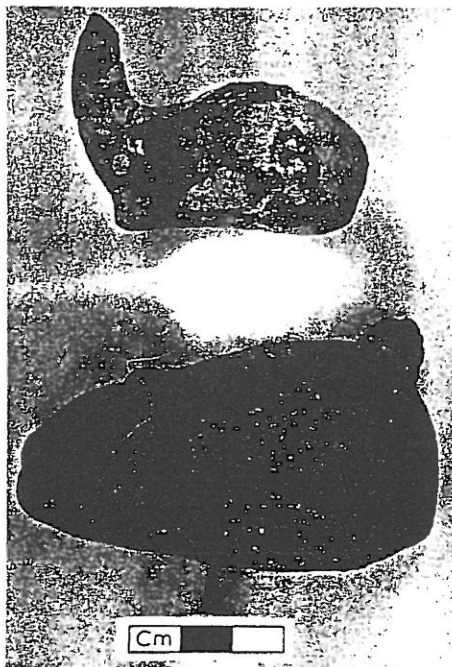


Fig. 6. Petsophas: horned beetle figurines.

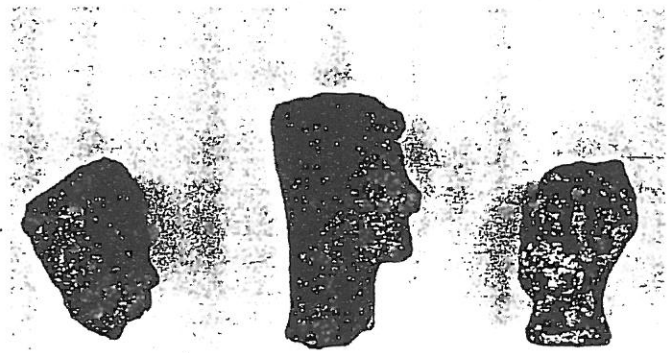


Fig. 7. Petsophas: male figurine heads.



Fig. 8. Petsophas: female figurine heads.



Fig. 9. Petsophas: female figurines with swept-back hair.

8). Whatever the variations, the figurines are unified in that no group or single figure is different enough to suggest a deity figure or cult image. There are some figures which may be priestly: figurines with long robes, or with a distinctive swept-back hairstyle (Fig. 9). The evidence therefore suggests that these figurines represent the worshippers themselves.¹⁹

The third group of finds from the peak sanctuaries are the votive limbs (Fig. 4). On his discovery, Myres interpreted them as anatomical offerings given as prayers or thanks for healing.²⁰ For this he had in mind the long Greek tradition of such offerings, represented by the models offered in Classical temples to Asklepios, and the wax models and silver plaques hung in modern Greek Orthodox chapels.²¹

Not all scholars have agreed with this interpretation. Nilsson commented on the apparent absence of the more 'personal' parts of the human body, and wrote: "are we to think that the people of Petsofa suffered only in their legs, arms and heads?"²² Dietrich followed this with the suggestion that the Minoan clay limbs were memorials of some proto-Dionysiac ritual of human sacrifice.²³ The basis of Nilsson's disagreement is inaccurate. Among the limbs we do indeed find eyes, heads, cleft torsos, and parts which emphasise the human genitalia. The admitted preponderance of feet and legs is understandable given the mountainous and rocky nature of the Cretan landscape. The same concern is manifest in the large numbers of foot amulets in the EM tombs,²⁴ and the seals with spiders, scorpions, and snakes, which presumably had an apotropaic function.

The strongest proof of the healing interpretation of the votive limbs is given by a clay figurine from Traostalos (Fig. 10), which represents a conceptual link between the two groups of finds. The leg of the figurine is swollen, indicative of some disease like elephantiasis.²⁵ Reflecting the same concern for a personal condition is a fragment from Petsophas, which depicts a seated pregnant woman (Fig. 4 bottom, far left). This phenomenon of anatomical offerings is found more widely than only in the mentioned periods of Greek history. In Japan too models of female breasts are offered in temples, again as prayers or thanks for healing.²⁶

It seems to be a feature of most healing cults that they are primarily popular in origin, reflecting as they do a basic human concern. This healing dimension to the Minoan peak sanctuary cult thus further demonstrates the popular, community nature of the shrines, that I have stressed earlier.

The structural remains of the peak sanctuaries are mostly very simple. The *temenos* or sacred area is usually marked by lines of rocks, often natural, but sometimes rudimentary man-made walls. The ritual focus of the shrine, where preserved and apparent, is rarely more than a flat rock 'table', or perhaps a cairn of stones. On some peak sanctuaries, e.g. Keria, there are distinct scatters of white pebbles, which may also be the remains of ritually defined areas.

On only 8 peak sanctuaries are there more extensive structural remains. These are mostly single or multiple roomed enclosures built roughly of the local stone (Fig. 11 — Petsophas). It is likely that these enclosures were hypaethral (i.e. open to the air).²⁷ Within the enclosures are the remains of some furniture: niches, benches, small hearths.



Fig. 10. Traostalos: female figurine with swollen leg.

That on Traostalos has a bench, rock table, and baerylic stone (Fig. 12).

The peak sanctuary on Jouktas is exceptional in this respect too, as in so many others. The structure there includes a built altar, three terraces, one of which incorporates five or more rooms. This means that the Jouktas building was

¹⁹ Clay figurines tend to be undervalued as evidence in discussions of various aspects of Minoan society; this is perhaps due to poor and inconsistent publications. The standardised format that I use for catalogue descriptions will be presented in my forthcoming publication of the MM figurines from the Karphi peak sanctuary.

²⁰ Myres (supra n. 3), 381.

²¹ For a comprehensive account of the ancient practice of anatomical model offerings, see F.T. van Straten, 'Gifts for the gods', in *Faith, hope and worship: aspects of religious mentality in the Ancient World* (Studies in Greek and Roman religion 2), ed. H.S. Versnel, Leiden 1981, 61–151.

²² Nilsson (supra n. 5), 74.

²³ B.C. Dietrich, *The origins of Greek religion*, Berlin 1974, 302. I find this sort of methodology, which attributes the origin of Classical myths to some conveniently remote past, for which there is nor can be any evidence, unsound.

²⁴ K. Branigan, 'Minoan foot amulets and their Near Eastern counterparts', *SMEA* 11, 1970, 7–23.

²⁵ C. Davaras, *Guide to Cretan antiquities*, New Jersey 1976, 246, fig. 138.

²⁶ O. Statler, *Japanese pilgrimage*, London 1983, 194.

²⁷ Rutkowski's reconstructions all show roofed buildings, often with columns and surmounted with horns of consecration; nowhere does he present evidence or reasoned arguments for these buildings. See Rutkowski (supra n. 2). My arguments in disagreement are presented in my thesis.

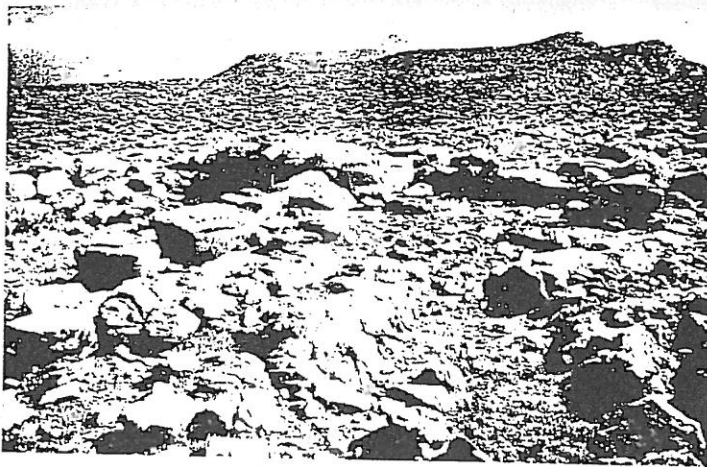


Fig. 11. Petsophas: shrine.

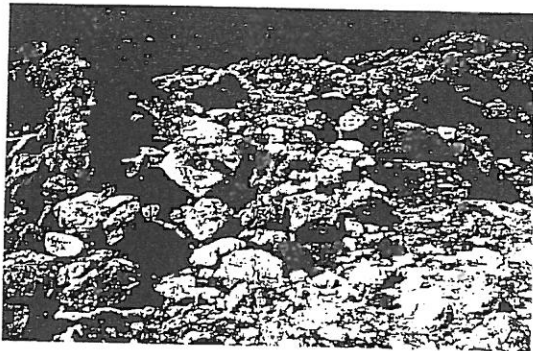


Fig. 12. Traostalos: shrine.

able to support a substantial superstructure, though we have no real idea of what it looked like.

This then is the basic archaeological material which characterises the peak sanctuaries. But the material, as presented, is somewhat static. In a sense this embodies a problem recurrent in the study of Minoan religion; in the quest to understand 'Minoan Religion', or even to define a single cult, material from widely different periods is utilised, without any regard given to diachronic changes. The very fact that we have chronologies means that we can and do observe such changes. The most useful chronology for the social and cultural development of the Minoan period is the Palatial system; therefore I shall discuss the history of the peak sanctuaries in relation to the Palatial history of Minoan Crete: the origin of the peak sanctuaries, their association with the palaces, and their subsequent decline.

ORIGIN

Theories about the origins of the peak sanctuaries have figured in recent discussions about the development of the

Minoan palace state. Watrous' idea that the peak sanctuaries were imported from the Near East, along with other social features which make up the palace state, does not stand up to close examination.²⁸ First, holy mountains are too common a world religious phenomenon for an appearance in one place to be attributed to diffusionist influence from another.²⁹ Secondly, there are problems with the specific site referred to as a Near Eastern example: Nahariyah, on the Syro-Palestinian coast.³⁰ The shrine there is not on a mountain, but a low mound by the sea; the ritual offerings are primarily precious metal images of a goddess, which is quite a different votive concept from the Minoan clay worshipper figurines. Even by the highest Near Eastern chronology Nahariyah cannot be dated to before 1900 B.C., which means that it post-dates the beginning of the peak sanctuaries by as much as 200 years. Lastly, while the excavator of Nahariyah did indeed posit a connection with the Minoan peak sanctuaries, he envisaged the influence as coming from Crete to the Near East, not the other way round!³¹

The second main theory is that of Cherry, who has explicitly linked the foundation of the peak sanctuaries with the foundation of the palaces, in a causal fashion.³² I have

²⁸ L.V. Watrous, 'The role of the Near East in the rise of the Cretan palaces', in *FMP*, 65–70.

²⁹ For a useful (though now old) summary see J.A. MacCulloch, 'Mountains, Mountain Gods', in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII, ed. J. Hastings, New York 1930, 863.

³⁰ I. Ben-Dor, *QDAP* 14, 1950, 1–41; M. Dothan, *IEJ* 6, 1956, 14–25; *idem*, 'Sanctuaries along the coast of Canaan in the MB period: Nahariyah', in *Temples and high places in Biblical times* (Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem 1977), Jerusalem 1981, 74–81.

³¹ Ben-Dor (*supra* n. 30), 27.

³² J.F. Cherry, 'Generalisation and the archaeology of the state', in *Social organisation and settlement* (BAR Int. Series, suppl. 47), ed. D. Green, C. Haselgrove & M. Spriggs, Oxford 1978, 411–437. I am grateful to Dr. Cherry for our dialogue on this matter.

elsewhere partially disagreed with him, on chronological grounds, by showing that his material evidence for a direct connection between the palaces and peak sanctuaries, does not prove a 1st Palace, but rather a 2nd Palace connection.³³ The implications of this I shall discuss more fully later. For the origin of the peak sanctuaries I suggest that there is indeed a link with the palaces, but in a processual sense, not a direct causal sense.

I shall demonstrate this by first discussing some of the social patterns of religion in the EM, Prepalatial period.

Architecturally the Minoan palaces are defined by a complex structure around a Central Court, and flanked by a West Court, which separates the Palace from the town of which it is part, and from which it developed. Functionally the palace has rooms for storage, archives, minor industrial activity, and ritual. Socially, the archives represent an increasing bureaucratic centralisation of the economy and political power, from the outlying regions, i.e. an early state.

The contrast is with the EM pattern of smaller, isolated, and independent settlements. The most splendid remains of this Prepalatial period are the built tombs: the circular tholoi of south central Crete, and the rectangular house-tombs of north central, and east Crete. The tombs are communal, for multiple burials, and the evidence suggests that each was limited to a family or clan. The Ayiopharango valley survey, in the Asteriousia mountains, revealed a pattern of small settlements, little more than farmsteads, each clustered with its own tomb.³⁴ The evidence therefore suggests that the tombs were the burial places of defined communities. This is also expressed in a topographic pattern similar to the peak sanctuaries, in that the tombs are often placed on low hills within sight of the settlements. This is a feature also found with Chinese cemeteries (Fig. 13). The visual link is expressive of the spiritual link between the whole community, living and dead.

In their earliest form the EM tombs were limited to a single circular or rectangular chamber. From EM II, however, multiple supplementary rooms were built before the entrances to the burial chambers. Some of these were clearly

store-rooms for the discarded bones and offerings of previous occupants, but others have altars, and niches suggestive of a ritual focus. In front of these structures, courtyards, sometimes paved, were laid out.³⁵ This channelling of resources towards architectural elaboration suggests that the rituals focused on the tombs were also becoming more elaborate.

That these rituals were also taking on a dimension beyond the immediate needs of funerary rites is suggested by certain of the finds. The most significant group is a series of vessel figurines. These come from sites in north, south, and east Crete; they include burial caves (Trapeza Lasithi (Fig. 14), Pyrgos), tombs (Archanes Phourni, Koumasa, Mochlos), burials (Ayios Myron), and a settlement shrine (Myrtos Phournou Koriphi).³⁶ The primary feature of these figurines is their vessel construction; this liquid pouring aspect is intensified by their attribute, either a smaller vessel held by the figurine, or pierced breasts. Warren justifiably identified the Myrtos figurine as a deity image, terming her the "guardian of the water supply", and extended the basic identification as a deity or deities to the other figurines.³⁷ Elsewhere I have followed Warren's idea, in the sense of a single goddess responsible for fertility through the medium of liquid, probably water.³⁸ The sharing of this image be-

³³ Peatfield (supra n. 10), 89–93.

³⁴ D. Blackman & K. Branigan, 'Archaeological survey of the lower catchment area of the Ayiopharango valley', *BSA* 72, 1977, 13–84.

³⁵ K. Branigan, *The tombs of Mesara: a study of funerary architecture and ritual in Southern Crete, 2800–1700 B.C.*, London 1970; J.S. Soles, *The Gournia house-tombs: a study of the architecture, chronology and use of the rectangular tombs of Crete*, Ann Arbor 1973.

³⁶ P.M. Warren, 'The beginnings of Minoan religion', in *Antichità Cretesi. Studi in onore di Doro Levi* (= *CronCatania* 12), Catania 1973 (pr. 1977), 137–147. For the Archanes Phourni figurine, see J.A. and E. Sakellariakis, *Prakt* 1982, 485, fig. 6, pl. 257a.

³⁷ P.M. Warren, *Myrtos: an Early Bronze Age settlement in Crete* (*BSA Suppl.*, 7), London 1972, 209f., 266; *idem* (supra n. 36).

³⁸ A.A.D. Peatfield, 'Purification in Minoan religion', paper

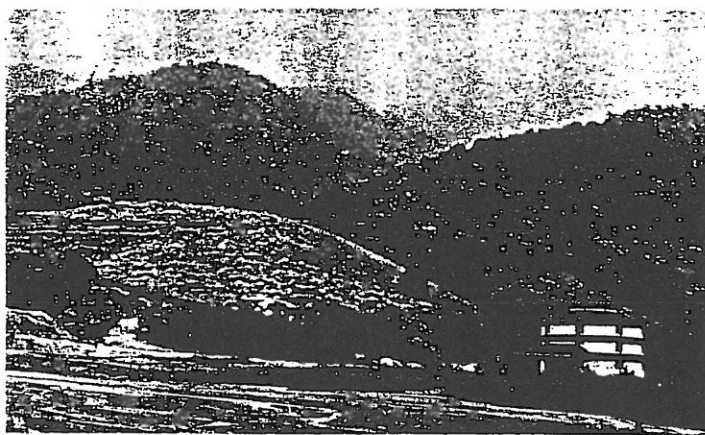


Fig. 13. Chinese cemetery on hill, in Malaysia.



Fig. 14. Trapeza Cave: EM vessel figurine.

tween a settlement shrine and tombs, does argue for a conceptual link, i.e. the tombs developed a ritual focus beyond immediate funerary rites.

How and why could this be? The reason surely lies in how we see the function of those tombs within the society that they served.

Malinowski argued that death disrupts the human community, and so funerary rituals function to re-affirm the solidarity of the group, and to resolve the conflicting emotions of sorrow and horror.³⁹ Turner has shown how funerary rituals serve to re-align the social relationships disrupted by human death.⁴⁰ The wholeness of the community also includes the Ancestor spirits, for it is the living and the dead together that represent continuity. In this way the communal tomb becomes the main spiritual focus for the whole community. It is a convenient and safe place for the living and the dead to interact. Renfrew has used the idea of the liminal zone to define features of Aegean Bronze Age shrines.⁴¹ I suggest that the idea may also be used to understand the extended ritual nature of the tombs and shrines.

Thus I am arguing that the EM tombs were the main religious focus for their individual communities, that they were in a functional way the ritual expression of the identity and continuity of the communities they served.⁴²

But how does this relate to the peak sanctuaries? The earliest material from the peak sanctuaries generally is EM III/MM 1a; this means that though there is some chronological overlap, essentially the tomb-shrines go out of use as the peak sanctuaries come into use. Even as burial places the tombs cease, to be replaced in the palatial periods by individual burials in larger collective cemeteries.

I have stressed the evidence for the peak sanctuaries as community shrines. This means that there is a functional

overlap between the tomb-shrines and peak sanctuaries—they are both community shrines, appropriate to the settlement pattern of their time. As the small, independent settlements of the Prepalatial period gave way, in the Palatial period, to larger regions of economically and politically interactive settlements, focused on the palatial and urban centres, so the move to the peak sanctuaries is the religious dimension to this growth of a larger community identity.

The one exception to the EM III/MM 1a foundation date is Jouktas, the peak sanctuary of Knossos, and the dominating mountain of north central Crete. The excavator, Karetsou, has revealed the presence of EM II sherds,⁴³ perhaps enough to suggest ritual activity at this early date. This may mean that Jouktas was the first peak sanctuary to be founded. The consequence of this, however, is not the simplistic notion that the origin of the other peak sanctuaries, in the rest of Crete, was simply the result of diffusionist export from the Knossos area. The process may have been rather more complex: as Knossos was the first to respond to the economic and political pressures that led to the emergence of the palace state, so the foundation of Jouktas may have been the religious response. The foundation of the other peak sanctuaries would therefore be tardier responses to the same overall process.

In stressing the functional relationship between the tomb-shrines and the peak sanctuaries, I am not denying the possibility of a conceptual overlap. The tomb at Ayios Kyrillos has a male figurine which conforms to the typology of the peak sanctuary figures.⁴⁴ The votive limbs of the peak sanctuaries are perhaps prefigured by frequent offerings of body and foot amulets in the EM tombs.

But there may be more to it than this. It is clear from the preoccupation with the natural world (animals and vegetation) on Minoan ritual scenes, that Minoan religion was a fertility religion. Branigan has pointed out that the tombs are not inappropriate places for rituals which celebrate fertility and the seasonal cycle of death and rebirth.⁴⁵ It is a feature of fertility religions that they can be linked with Ancestor worship, in that the ancestors are convenient intercessors with the elemental spiritual forces of Nature. This is particularly so in Japan, where the *kamae* (ancestor

read at the AIA Annual Meeting, New York 1987, to be published in the *Journal of Prehistoric Religion*. In discussion with the author Prof. Warren has said that he also now believes that the image probably refers to a single deity.

³⁹ B. Malinowski, *Magic, science and religion*, New York 1948.

⁴⁰ V. Turner, *The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual*, London 1967, 8f.

⁴¹ C. Renfrew, *The archaeology of cult: the sanctuary at Phylakopi* (BSA Suppl., 18), London 1985.

⁴² Cf. A. Fleming, 'Tombs for the living', *Man* 7, 1973, 177–193, esp. 187–189. For the application of similar ideas in the Mycenaean context, see J.C. Wright, 'Death and power at Mycenae: changing symbols in mortuary practice', *Aegaeum* 1, 1987, 171–184.

⁴³ A. Karetsou, Mycenaean seminar, London, May 1987.

⁴⁴ J.A. Sakellarakis, *Prakt* 1967, pl. 195a.

⁴⁵ K. Branigan, *The foundations of palatial Crete*, London 1970, 94.

spirits) are invoked for the fertility of rice crops.⁴⁶ Given too that the ancestors represent the spiritual continuity of the community,⁴⁷ and that the feelings of the living towards the dead are ambivalent, this means that the living must placate and share with the ancestors, lest they, the ancestors, interrupt fertility as the physical continuity of the community.⁴⁸

The traditional home of the *kamae* is the mountains. In this way the Japanese embody the world religious phenomenon whereby the deities of fertility, through the medium of rain and running water, are associated with the mountains, e.g. Baal in the Ancient Near East, Tlaloc for the Aztecs, even the Prophet Elijah in Greek Orthodox countries. The texts of early Shinto record that there was a taboo on visiting the mountains: the mountains were the proper abode of the *kamae*, and the plains were the proper abode of living men; the one should not trespass on the lands of the other, without ritual invitation or placation.⁴⁹ Within Crete, EM settlements in the mountains are comparatively rare; Debla is a notable exception. This may be the accident of survey and discovery, but it may also reflect an EM taboo on the mountains, similar to the early Japanese.

An economic impetus towards the foundation of the peak sanctuaries may have been the increase in pastoral farming, that is apparent in EM III-MM 1a Crete. Large flocks are recorded on bowls with figurines, from Palaikastro, Porti, Phaistos, and significantly from the peak sanctuary of Gonies.⁵⁰ The numbers of votive animal figurines at the peak sanctuaries led Rutkowski to suggest: "the peak sanctuaries came into existence mainly to relieve the cares and fears of the shepherds and cattle-breeders".⁵¹ Moody's ecological and palaio-botanic research suggests that the climate of Crete suffered a change, whereby it became drier and warmer precisely during this transitional EM-MM period.⁵² This, combined with an increased pastoral farming, may have necessitated an extension of transhumance patterns, which resulted in pressure to move further into the mountains. If there was such a taboo on trespass in the mountains, as I have argued, then the peak sanctuaries may have been a way of placating the spirits.

PALATIAL PEAK SANCTUARIES

In the discussion of the archaeological material of the peak sanctuaries, I stressed their identification as popular, community shrines. I am thus disagreeing with Cherry's interpretation of the social role of the peak sanctuaries for the 1st Palace period. The theoretical basis of that interpretation is the premise that elites use religion to establish their position, but not to maintain it; for the Minoans, Cherry therefore suggested that the emerging elites of the palaces imposed a new cult of the peak sanctuaries, as the religious factor in the establishment of their hierarchical position, but not in their continued maintenance of it.⁵³ It must be acknowledged that this was a reasonable reading of the conventional chronology, proposed by Myres, and taken for granted by subsequent scholars: i.e. that peak sanctuaries



Fig. 15. Petsophas: LM figurine.

were a phenomenon only of the 1st Palace period. This chronology was based on the MM polychrome of the Petsophas figurines; Myres' error in assigning all the other Petsophas figurines to this date too is demonstrated most obviously by a figurine from the same deposit, decorated in a clear LM ceramic fashion (Fig. 15).

Cherry's proofs, however, for the "direct connection" between the palaces and peak sanctuaries, all involve material that is 2nd Palace in date; these are: 1) iconographic representations of peak sanctuaries are found only in the palaces, 2) palaces and peak sanctuaries share the same cult apparatus, 3) Linear A (the palatial writing system) is common to both palaces and peak sanctuaries.

⁴⁶ C. Blacker, *The Catalpa bow*, London 1975, 79–85.

⁴⁷ Kitagawa defines the Japanese early historic clan as "not only a social, economic, and political unit but also a unit of religious solidarity centering around the *kami* (deity) of the clan (*uji-gami*), who was attended to by the clan chieftain...". J.M. Kitagawa, *On understanding Japanese religion*, Princeton 1987, 140.

⁴⁸ Blacker (supra n. 46), 43–48.

⁴⁹ J.M. Kitagawa, 'Early Japan: Shinto', in *The great Asian religions: an anthology*, ed. Wing-Tsit Chan, Isma'il Ragi al Faruqi, J.M. Kitagawa & P.T. Raju, London 1969, 238–248, esp. 243.

⁵⁰ Palaikastro: R.C. Bosanquet & R.M. Dawkins, *The unpublished objects from the Palaikastro excavations*, London 1923, pl. VII. Porti: S. Xanthoudides, *The valuted tombs of Mesara*, London 1924, pl. VI no. 5054. Gonies: St. Alexiou, *ArchDelt* 22:2:2, 1967, 484f.

⁵¹ Rutkowski (supra n. 8), 185.

⁵² Moody (supra n. 12); J. Moody, O. Rackham, J. Gifford & G. Rapp, 'Palaeoenvironmental studies in west Crete', in *6th Cretological Congress*, Chania 1986, (in press). I am grateful to Dr. Moody for the many discussions out of which this and other ideas have evolved.

⁵³ Cherry (supra n. 32); *idem* 'The emergence of the state in the prehistoric Aegean', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Association*, 1984, 18–48; *idem* 'Politics and palaces: some problems in Minoan state formation', in *Peer polity interaction and socio-political change*, ed. C. Renfrew & J.F. Cherry, Cambridge 1986, 19–45.

They cannot be used as proofs of a palace/peak sanctuary link before the 2nd Palace period. On the contrary, the varied 1st Palace material on the peak sanctuaries reveals their localised and parochial relations: rich areas have materially rich peak sanctuaries, poorer areas have materially poor peak sanctuaries. The archaeological evidence does, however, reveal a difference between peak sanctuaries in the 1st and 2nd Palace periods.

The most basic fact is that all peak sanctuaries have remains of 1st Palace date; only 6 have material which can be securely dated to the 2nd Palace period; with summaries of the evidence,⁵⁴ these are:

Gonies (serving the Sklavokampos villa and valley): features of clay figurines, pottery.

Jouktas (serving Knossos, Archanes, and all north central Crete): stratigraphically defined deposits and phases, features of clay figurines, Linear A inscriptions, stone vessels and tables, bronze figurines, seals and jewellery, pottery.

Kophinas (serving the Mesara plain, and ?Phaistos): features of clay figurines, Linear A inscriptions, stone vessels and tables, ? bronze vessels and figurines.

Petsophas (serving Palaikastro and its hinterland): features of clay figurines, clay miniature horns of consecration, Linear A inscriptions, stone vessels and tables.

Traostalos (serving the Epano Zakro sites and hinterland, and secondarily the Kato Zakro palace): features of clay figurines, Linear A inscription, stone vessels and tables, bronze figurines, gold jewellery.

Vrysinas (serving sites in the Rethymnon area): features of clay figurines, Linear A inscription, stone vessels and tables, bronze figurines.

Three others have possible 2nd Palace material; these are: Modhi (serving the area between Palaikastro and Sitia), Prinias (serving the Sitia plain), and Pyrgos (serving Tylissos). Thus there is a physical decrease in the number of 2nd Palace peak sanctuary sites; this does not mean a diminution in the social importance of the cult, rather I suggest the opposite. With the peak sanctuaries which have 2nd Palace material there are two congruent factors: they are the same peak sanctuaries which have buildings, and they are the peak sanctuaries associated with palatial and urban centres. It has been observed stratigraphically that each of the shrine buildings are later constructions on the sites, i.e. at a stage later than the initial foundation of the peak sanctuaries. At Jouktas for example, the 1st Palace structures are limited to an altar, around which grew up extensive ash and votive deposits from the sacrificial fires; the terraces and rooms mentioned earlier, are specifically 2nd Palace period constructions.⁵⁵

This means that in the 2nd Palace period extra resources were channelled towards the elaboration of certain peak sanctuaries, at the expense of others. That these should be the peak sanctuaries of the palatial and urban centres, suggests a deliberate centralisation of the cult, a religious dimension to the political and economic centralisation which also marks the 2nd Palace period.

Of the three palace/peak sanctuary 'proofs', the suggested sharing of cult apparatus between palaces and peak

sanctuaries is the most problematic. Subsequently defined as "double-axes, horns of consecration, libation and offering tables, portable altars, bulls-head rhyta, etc.",⁵⁶ within Gesell's definitions of material from settlement shrines, this cult apparatus may be said to conform to her categories: 1) representations of the divinity, including figures of the Goddess and her cult symbols, and 2) permanent ritual equipment: the implication behind this class is that the equipment is essentially permanent, i.e. repeatedly used in rituals, and stored away when not in use. Gesell's third category of cult objects are: votive offerings, in which she includes miniature versions of objects, which when full-size, might be classed in her categories (1) or (2).⁵⁷

In my discussion of the figurines from the peak sanctuaries, I noted that *none* of them were sufficiently distinguished to be identified as deity images. Indeed the weight of the evidence indicates that the figurines represent the worshippers, and so are votive figurines. Among the non-characteristic finds from the peak sanctuaries we do, however, find some objects which may be interpreted as cult symbols, and, within the general features of Minoan religion, may be linked with the Goddess: these are horns of consecration, and double-axes.

Horns of consecration are known from Petsophas, Prinias, Vrysinas, and Jouktas, but as they are miniatures they may also be interpreted as votive offerings. Only from Pyrgos is there a fragment of full-sized horns, which could therefore be a symbol of the divine.

Double-axes, in sheet-bronze, are known only from Jouktas. In keeping with their usual Minoan use, some have sockets to indicate that they may have had stands, and so were placed on an altar or bench.

Of objects which may be classed under the category of permanent ritual equipment, the finds from peak sanctuaries are mostly limited to stone vessels and to zoomorphic libation vessels. The stone vessel types are those recognised as specialised cult vessels of the 2nd Palace period: libation tables, and ladles, a few of which have inscriptions in Linear A. Though Linear A has not been deciphered, in the repetitious forms of the inscriptions we can recognise a votive formula. Though these finds may suggest permanent ritual equipment, they are mostly found broken, as indeed are the figurines. This extremely fragmentary nature of

⁵⁴ The material is more fully discussed in my thesis. I must stress that without complete publication of the excavated sites, the chronology is extremely difficult to ascertain with confidence; the observable material suggests that many peak sanctuaries in fact continued into the early stages of MM III, but by LM I only the important ones were still in use. This overlap into the 2nd Palace period argues that the localised parochial peak sanctuaries were not suddenly abandoned, but that the process of centralisation was gradual and continuous.

⁵⁵ A. Karetsou, 'The peak sanctuary on Mt. Jouktas', in *Sanctuaries and cults of the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 1st International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1980*, ed. R. Hägg & N. Marinatos, Stockholm 1981, 137-153, esp. 145.

⁵⁶ Cherry 1986 (supra n. 53).

⁵⁷ G.C. Gesell, *Town, palace, and house cult in Minoan Crete* (SIMA 67), Göteborg 1985, 2f.

peak sanctuary finds generally, does suggest that it was deliberate.⁵⁸ It seems therefore that the stone vessels, figurines, etc. were intended for use only at a single ceremony, offered to the deity, and being hallowed, were destroyed to prevent subsequent secular use. Therefore, though there are indeed finds which may be interpreted as cult apparatus, they conform to the general nature of peak sanctuary finds, in that they are votive objects, which have been disposed of after their initial offering, i.e. this evidence of disposal indicates ritual activity on the peak sanctuaries. This is in marked contrast to urban, palatial, and domestic shrines, which appear to have been primarily used for the storage and/or display of the permanent cult apparatus—divine representations, and ritual equipment. This suggests that one aspect of the peak sanctuary/palace relationship, was that the palace shrines had the permanent storage of cult symbols and equipment, which were taken for use to the peak sanctuary, but not kept there.

One other feature which links these stone and bronze objects to the palaces, however, is the fact that they are fine objects of 2nd Palace date. By this I mean that they were of palatial manufacture, either from workshops within the palace precincts, or from crafts organised under palatial control.

The fact that many of the stone vessels also have inscriptions is a further indication of their palatial links. Thus Linear A presents a better argument for the palace/peak sanctuary connection. Archival inscriptions in Linear A (tablets, nodules, roundels, and sealings) are found mostly at the main palaces and palatial, urban or villa centres, e.g. Archanes, Gournia, Palaikastro, Tylissos, Ayia Triadha, and Chania, and are all indicative of the extensive bureaucratic framework.⁵⁹ Moreover the difficulties of this syllabic writing system, and the lack of personalised documents such as characterise the early Greek use of alphabetic script, further suggest that Linear A was a specialised scribal system dependent on the palaces. From the peak sanctuaries, inscriptions in Linear A are limited to the main palatial peak sanctuaries, Jouktas, Petsophas, Traostalos, Kophinas, and Vrysinas. Despite attempts to push Linear A back to the 1st Palace period, and therefore the palace/peak sanctuary link, all these inscriptions are chronologically 2nd Palace, not just by virtue of the script, but from the typology of the objects.⁶⁰ As they are mostly stone tables, these objects may also be termed prestige artefacts, i.e. from palace workshops. One notes, however, that Linear A inscribed objects are not limited to peak sanctuaries, they are also found in other shrines, notably at the spring sanctuary of Kato Syme, and at cave sanctuaries such as Arkalochori, Psychro, Ida.⁶¹ Rather than demonstrate a particular peak sanctuary/palace link, this indicates the overall nature of palace interest in cult activity.

Next we consider the iconographic link between the palaces and peak sanctuaries. Within Minoan art generally, pictorial representations are found in three main media: seals and sealings, stone vases with relief carvings, and frescoes. All these are fine, prestige artefacts associated with palatial controlled crafts. The extant fragments of stone vases show a variety of scenes, all of which may be

more or less associated with rituals. There are two in particular which may show peak sanctuaries. First, a fragment from Knossos which shows a man making an offering in front of a structure at the top of a hill (Fig. 16). Even more striking is the complete stone rhyton from the palace of Zakros, which shows a shrine compound, identified as such by the altars and horns of consecration, within a rocky landscape.⁶²

Though there are many ritual scenes carved on seals, the only one to be specifically linked with the peak sanctuaries is the well-known "Mountain Mother" sealing, which shows a female figure standing on a schematic mountain, flanked by lions; she hands the staff of authority to a male figure, who acknowledges her divinity with the characteristic 'salute' worship gesture. Clay nodules impressed with this sealing were found in part of the sacred area in the West Wing of the Palace of Knossos.⁶³

These stone and clay objects are palatial in the sense that they were found in palaces. The frescoes, by contrast, are part of the very fabric of the palace, physically in that they are found on its walls, and conceptually in that they express its ideology. The frescoes of the 2nd Palace of Knossos are the most varied of preserved Minoan/Cretan frescoes. It is also likely that of all the palaces and villas, Knossos was the most richly decorated.

Cameron's significant contribution to the discussion of the meaning of the Knossos frescoes was the idea that they depicted a pictorial programme, a thematic unity.⁶⁴ This programme he argued was the festival of the worship of the Minoan Goddess, and each of the frescoes showed different ceremonies of the overall festival; the location of each fresco in the palace was the room where the ceremony was carried out.⁶⁵ The frescoes as we have them are all dated to the 2nd Palace; there is no evidence that the 1st Palace had pictorial fresco decoration of any sort. Accordingly Cameron suggested that the whole impetus to this new decoration in the 2nd Palace, was the appropriation by the Palace of the organisation of the Goddess' worship.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ C. Davaras, *Guide to Hagios Nicolaos Museum* (no date); *idem*, *Kadmos* 20, 1981, 3.

⁵⁹ Cf. J. Betts, 'New light on Minoan bureaucracy', *Kadmos* 4, 1967, 15–40.

⁶⁰ They are mostly Warren's types 23 (ladles) and 26 (libation tables), dated to MM III-LM I. P.M. Warren, *Minoan stone vases*, Cambridge 1969.

⁶¹ A. Karetsoy, L. Godart & J.-P. Olivier, 'Inscriptions en linéaire A du sanctuaire de sommet minoen du mont Iouktas', *Kadmos* 24, 1985, 89–152.

⁶² N. Platon, *Zakros: the discovery of a lost palace of ancient Crete*, New York 1971, 165 and 167.

⁶³ M.A.V. Gill, 'The Knossos sealings: provenance and identification', *BSA* 60, 1965, 58–98.

⁶⁴ M. Cameron, 'The "palatial" thematic system in the Knossos murals', in *FMP*, 320–328.

⁶⁵ The basic idea that the frescoes depict enacted rituals has also been argued by other scholars, including R. Hägg, N. Marinatos, Ch. Boulotis, and E. Davis (papers and references in *FMP*). See also Warren's paper on ritual action in Minoan religion.

⁶⁶ M. Cameron, 'Theoretical interrelations among Thera,

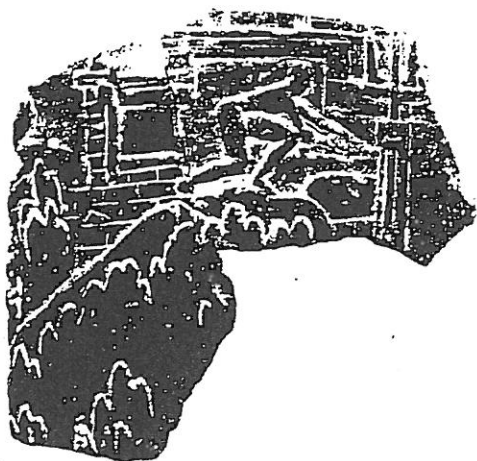


Fig. 16. Knossos: carved stone vase fragment, with man making offering at peak sanctuary.



Fig. 17. Knossos Palace: Procession Corridor aligned to Jouktas.

Cameron went further than this: judging from other Minoan ritual scenes, the Minoan Goddess was explicitly linked with the natural world—this is understandable in a fertility religion. The main Minoan rural shrines are the peak sanctuaries, therefore Cameron argued that the Procession Fresco at the West entrance of the Palace, and which begins the whole pictorial programme, represented the accompaniment of the Goddess into the Palace, from the natural world that was her normal habitat. Part of Cameron's argument rested on the fact that the Procession Fresco Corridor, is the part of the Palace of Knossos, which is aligned with the peak sanctuary, Jouktas (Fig. 17).⁶⁷

In his presentation of the fresco programme, Cameron pointed to various parts of the frescoes which alluded to the peak sanctuary. Of these the most convincing is the back of the Throne, in the Throne-Room of the Palace. The wiggly shape recalls the 'mountain' on which the 'Mountain Mother' of the sealing stands.⁶⁸ It also resembles aniconic, baetylic images of the deity depicted in other ritual scenes.

If Cameron is right in his idea that the frescoes are the depictions of enacted ceremonies, then, placed on the walls of the palace, the frescoes are a perpetuation of the ideological message. What is the message?

I have already referred to Hägg's suggestion that the primary Minoan rituals were those of epiphany.⁶⁹ In this sense, the Procession Fresco is an epiphany scene in that it shows the successful summoning of the Goddess to the Palace. In bringing the Goddess into the Palace, the fresco is saying that access to the Goddess is through the Palace.

The Throne-Room fresco has a slightly different message. The Throne is flanked by griffins. This tripartite image of a central figure flanked by supernatural or wild animals is a common Minoan emblem of divinity. The dynamic recreation of this static device within the Throne-Room of Knossos, by somebody actually sitting on the Throne, is an explicit identification of the Palace and its elite with the divine. That this does involve a group is indicated by the hierarchical seating arrangements within the Throne-Room: benches around the walls, a parallel arrangement in an anteroom, and the mass of spectators in the Central Court outside. This differential proximity to the emblem of divine power, is representative of differentiated privileged access to ritual activity.

In her study of Minoan palatial, urban and domestic shrines, Gesell has made a similar observation about access. In the 1st Palace period, access to palatial shrines was from the outside; in the 2nd Palace period, access was more restricted and usually channelled through the Palace itself. Control of physical access indicates control of spiritual access.⁷⁰

Cretan and Mainland frescoes', in *Thera and the Aegean world* I, London 1978, 579–592; *idem*, in *Thera and the Aegean world* II, London 1980, 317.

⁶⁷ Cameron (supra n. 64).

⁶⁸ W.-D. Niemeier, 'On the function of the 'Throne Room' at Knossos', in *FMP*, 163–168, esp. 167.

⁶⁹ Hägg (supra n. 13).

⁷⁰ G.C. Gesell, 'The Minoan palace and public cult', in *FMP*, 123–128.

Earlier I have made passing reference to fine objects as prestige artefacts from palatial workshops. Moody has used the concept of prestige in relation to access to ritual activity in Minoan society.⁷¹ By controlling the people's access to ritual activity, the Palace took on the social prestige associated with that activity. In this way the frescoes, the restriction of the palatial/urban shrines, and the centralisation of the peak sanctuary cult was part of the general process by which the palatial elite used religion to maintain its hierarchical position.

But why should the peak sanctuary cult have been suitable to be part of the process of palatial institutionalisation and organisation of religion? Whether or not we accept Cameron's idea that the peak sanctuaries were the main shrines dedicated to the Minoan Goddess, certainly they were the main worship places of the Minoan people. Over the whole island they have the same topographic and votive features, so they indicate a shared symbolic unity, which is not found among any other group of shrines. The other large class of Minoan rural shrines are the caves, but the finds from these vary from cave to cave, i.e. there is not material or ideological unity.⁷² The peak sanctuaries therefore commanded a popular loyalty of belief and practice, which could then be appropriated and manipulated in palatial interest.

It is at this point that I disagree with the theoretical premise that elites impose a new cult to establish their position. I leave aside the thorny question of whether or not the elite of the 2nd Palace period were a new elite establishing their position, or an old one maintaining it.⁷³ What concerns me is that they used an old, popular cult as part of the process. This is for the simple reason that a new cult will not have the reservoir of popular loyalty, respect, belief, etc., that a pre-existing cult can command. Therefore elites will find already established cults more suitable for manipulative purposes. The model whereby an elite establishes or maintains its position may be represented as follows: rather than the imposition of a new cult, the elite appropriates a pre-existing cult of universal (here pan-Cretan) significance, which they formalise in order to increase their prestige and social position.

I suggest this as a generalising principle, and indeed the operation of it may be observed in other cultures. Moreover the reasons for it may lie in the nature of religious belief itself. I shall use two examples widely separated in time and space.

Accounts of the fullest interaction between religion and polity lie with studies of the Buddhist kingdoms of Asia, especially those which exhibit a strong continuity of their traditions into modern states, such as Sri Lanka and Thailand.⁷⁴ In the pre-modern periods this was because "Buddhist Kingship was an institution defined in terms of, and therefore inseparable from, religion".⁷⁵ Though the detailed theology of comparative beliefs is not recoverable within the limitations of Minoan archaeology, the physical expression of such concepts may illuminate the mute Minoan material.

Religious authority in the Buddhist kingdoms was/is conferred by the control of a palladium, a sacred object

associated with Buddha or his saintly disciples.⁷⁶ Seneviratne records that in the Sinhala kingdoms of Sri Lanka this was the Sacred Tooth Relic, brought to Sri Lanka in the 4th century A.D. It was not formally the royal palladium until the 12th century A.D. In the 18th century A.D. the rulers of the city of Kandy found it necessary to assert their royal authority over the provincial governors, and to maintain the political integration of the kingdom. They did this by instituting a Sacred Tooth Relic festival, which compelled the presence of the provincial governors by "mystical imperatives".⁷⁷ This mechanism by which royal authority is asserted by compelling aristocratic presence at court has many historical parallels. The Sri Lankan example is notable for my purpose, in its late development within the history of the Relic, i.e. it is a manipulation of a pre-existing cult.

The procession which was the centrepiece of the Relic festival was used by the king to display the military might of the central government. It also allowed the king to impress his provincial governors with his proximity to the supreme symbol of righteous authority. I remind you here of the Knossian Procession Fresco and of the Throne-Room.

My second historical example refers to the Canaanite *bamah* (pl. *bamoth*) of the Biblical Old Testament. The term *bamah* is usually translated as "high-place" or in the New English Bible as "hill-shrine". Though they do seem to have been set on hills in the countryside (I Samuel 9:12–25; 10:5–10), the *bamah* itself was probably an altar.

It is clear from the Jewish prophets' attacks on the cult of the *bamah* that they represented a Canaanite, pre-Jewish stratum of popular cult. The Israelites' worship at these shrines was taken as an example of their faithlessness to Yahweh. The *bamoth* of Israel and Judah were finally destroyed by Josiah (II Kings 23:8–20), but before this bloody event we can trace transformations in their use.

In the time of Samuel the high-priest, each city seems to have had its own *bamah*, where worship was sanctioned within the practice of Judaism (I Samuel 9:12–25; 10:5–10). In accounts of Solomon's reign there is reference to his worship at the *bamoth*, particularly the chief one at Gibeon (II Kings 3:4), where the Tabernacle of Yahweh seems to

⁷¹ J.A. Moody, 'The Minoan palace as a prestige artifact', in *FMP*, 235–241.

⁷² L.S. Tyree, *Cretan sacred caves: archaeological evidence*, Ann Arbor 1974.

⁷³ J.A. Moody & F.E. Lukermann, 'Proto-history: the reconstruction of probable worlds', in *Contributions to Aegean archaeology: studies in honour of William A. MacDonal*, ed. N.C. Wilkie & W.D.E. Coulson, Minnesota 1985, 61–89.

⁷⁴ S.J. Tambiah, *World conqueror and world renouncer: a study of Buddhism and polity against a historical background*, Cambridge 1976.

⁷⁵ H.L. Seneviratne, 'Politics and pageantry: universalisation of ritual in Sri Lanka', *Man* 12, 1977, 65–75, esp. 65.

⁷⁶ E.g. the Emerald Buddha in modern Thailand. S.J. Tambiah, *The Buddhists saints of the forest and the cult of the amulets*, Cambridge 1984, 214–219.

⁷⁷ Seneviratne (supra n. 75).



have been housed in the preceding reign of David (I Chronicles 16:39; 21:29). The implication is that Solomon took the *bamoth* under royal control and centralised the cult. Later, in the divided kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam is described as setting up *bamoth*, and centralising the cult at Bethel, where he compelled all the priests, whom he appointed, to take turns in service (I Kings 12:31–33; 13:33–34).

The end of this process was accomplished by Josiah who ruthlessly destroyed the sites and the cult, but even this can be seen as a form of centralising control; under the guise of monotheistic fidelity, the royal/priestly hierarchy suppressed the popular, and therefore less controllable cult practices, and achieved a ritual monopoly by centralising worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, built on—the holy mountain of Zion.

Returning to the Minoan peak sanctuaries, I have, in places, described the process of centralisation as “manipulation” of religion. This suggests a cynical attitude on the part of the elite who do the manipulating. This may be misleading, as it also implies an atheistic attitude, which is anachronistic. The point of the process is that it is, at least initially, successful. This is because the focus for manipulation is a belief system, i.e. it commands popular belief and so enjoins loyalty, by “mystical imperatives”. It is precisely this element which provides the opportunity for elitist manipulation. Nor need the elite disbelieve in the system they are using, as in dominating a system it is in their interest to believe in it and to maintain its effectiveness.

DECLINE

The final and briefest stage of the story is the decline of the peak sanctuaries. Jouktas is the only peak sanctuary to have material datable to the end of the 2nd palace period (LM II).⁷⁸ The process has turned full circle. An historical reason for this may be simply that by this time all the palaces, villas, and urban centres had suffered a series of major destructions, from which only Knossos recovered enough to maintain the palatial economic, political, and religious system. Therefore, of course Jouktas would be the only peak sanctuary in use. But, if the peak sanctuaries were the popular shrines that I have argued for, why did they not recover as the people did? The answer must lie in the consequence of the process of centralisation and manipulation that I have discussed.

The frescoes from Knossos that I described are dated to

the transitional LM I-II period. This and the material from Jouktas suggests that the process of centralisation was continuous, until the cult of the peak sanctuaries was focused entirely upon Jouktas, and the ideology expressed pictorially at Knossos.

Moody rightly pointed out that prestige as a social concept can only work if there is an element of exclusion.⁷⁹ We can actually see this at work in the differential seating of the Throne-Room, and in the restriction of the palatial/urban shrines. It seems therefore, that the peak sanctuary cult became entirely a palatial cult. Other evidence suggests that by the end of the 2nd Palace period, the palatial elite was devoting more and more of its resources and time to the sort of ceremonial posturing recorded in the frescoes. The frescoes themselves represent the permanent and fixed expression of a religious ideology.

Rappaport has commented that religions maintain their vitality by their ability to re-define their symbols.⁸⁰ The explicit nature of the later frescoes may therefore be indicative of a loss of religious flexibility by the palace elite, which combined with the increasing element of exclusion may have brought about the final decline. In simple terms the peak sanctuary cult may have become so centralised and excluded from the people that it was no longer meaningful to them, and so, albeit slowly, lost their loyalty. The end of the 2nd Palace period is marked by the succession of crises that led to the final destruction of Knossos and the palatial system it upheld and embodied.

Perhaps there is a lesson to be learnt here: that in the very process by which an elite uses religion to its own ends, by appropriating a cult and its prestige, it sows the seeds of its own decline, by removing it from the experience and loyalty of the people on whom that prestige depends. But this is a moral question, and archaeologists should perhaps leave the teaching of morals to philosophers and priests.

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⁷⁸ A. Karetsou, *Prakt* 1975, 339; *Prakt* 1976, 415–418.

⁷⁹ Moody (supra n. 71).

⁸⁰ R.A. Rappaport, ‘Ritual, sanctity, and cybernetics’, *American Anthropologist* 73, 1971, 53–76.

