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WARSAW

Maidenhood and Marriage: The Reproductive Lives of the Girls and Women from Xeste 3, Thera

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Aegean prehistory, remarkable for its rich but anonymous archaeological record, presents an intriguing picture for scholars hoping to reconstruct the beliefs and rituals of the peoples who populated the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age.¹ For while contemporary literary and historical documents are lacking entirely, the violent eruption of the Santorini volcano on Thera preserved the art, artifacts and debris of prehistoric lives to a degree unknown elsewhere in the Aegean.² At Akrotiri, the ideas and beliefs of its inhabitants are reflected in the archaeological remains, and nowhere is this more evident than in the well preserved frescoes decorating the settlement's houses, where themes of ritual and nature predominate. This study focuses on the extensive fresco cycle from Xeste 3, a spacious building of approximately 30 rooms (Fig. 1), whose paintings offer a rare glimpse into the events shaping the lives of girls and women in the prehistoric Aegean.³

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Robert A. Bauslaugh for our many discussions of this research, and our young son Drew, who has inspired in me a great appreciation for the joys and challenges faced by prehistoric women in their roles as wives and mothers. I also wish to thank my 1997 graduate seminar at Georgia State University for their lively and thought-provoking discussions of the girls and women of Xeste 3. Finally, I thank the editors and the anonymous readers whose comments on an earlier draft helped to improve this study. AJA abbreviations are used, and any and all mistakes are, of course, my own.

² For the excavation reports, see S. MARINATOS, *Excavations at Thera I–VII* (Athens 1968–1976); for excellent photographs of the frescoes, see C. DOUMAS, *Wall-Paintings of Thera* (Athens 1992). See also the papers published from congresses held on Thera: C. DOUMAS (ed), *Thera and the Aegean World I* (Athens 1978); C. DOUMAS (ed), *Thera and the Aegean World II* (Athens 1980); D.A. HARDY (ed), *Thera and the Aegean World III* (London 1990); S. SHERRATT (ed), *The Wall Paintings of Thera I–II* (Athens 2000).

³ For excellent photographs of the Xeste 3 frescoes, see DOUMAS (n. 2), pls. 93–137. For a report of their excavation, see MARINATOS *Thera VII*, (n. 2).

The images comprising this complex pictorial program are distributed over two floors of the building. In room 3a on the upper floor, three girls known as Saffron Gatherers pick crocus flowers in a rocky landscape while a fourth girl pours the collected flowers into a large basket positioned before an Enthroned Goddess attended by a griffin (Fig. 2). A vervet monkey, an exotic import from Africa,⁴ offers processed saffron stamens to the goddess. On the floor below (room 3b), a related scene known as the Adorants Fresco (Fig. 3) decorates a lustral basin, a feature of Minoan architecture normally associated with ritual practice.⁵ Here, one girl and two young women participate in a puzzling narrative. Two of the figures, the “Necklace Swinger” and the “Veiled Girl,” seem to gaze at a painted structure featuring horns of consecration, an important Minoan religious symbol, while the third, the “Wounded Woman,” is seated in a rocky landscape and seems absorbed by the pain of a cut foot.⁶ The prominence of crocus

⁴ P. PARKER, ‘African Vervets on Crete and Thera during MM IIIB–LM IA, abstract in *AJA* 101 (1997), 348; T. STRASSER, *The Blue Monkeys of the Aegean and Their Implications for Bronze Age Trade*, abstract in *AJA* 101 (1997), 348.

⁵ J.W. GRAHAM, *The Palaces of Crete* (Princeton 1969), 99–108, argues that lustral basins served both a practical function as bathrooms and a cultic function as a place for ritual cleansing. See also B. RUTKOWSKI, *The Cult Places of the Aegean* (New Haven/London 1986), 229–231. Against the bathroom theory, see N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Religion. Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia, SC 1993), 77–79. The ritual character of the Xeste 3 lustral basin is made clear by its decoration.

⁶ The descriptive names used by Paul Rehak – the “Necklace Swinger,” the “Veiled Girl,” and the “Wounded Woman” – are used here. See P. REHAK, *The Aegean Landscape and the Body. A New Interpretation of the Thera Frescoes*, in N.L. WICKER & B. ARNOLD (eds), *From the Ground Up. Beyond Gender Theory in Archaeology* (BAR International Series 812, Oxford 1999), 11–22.

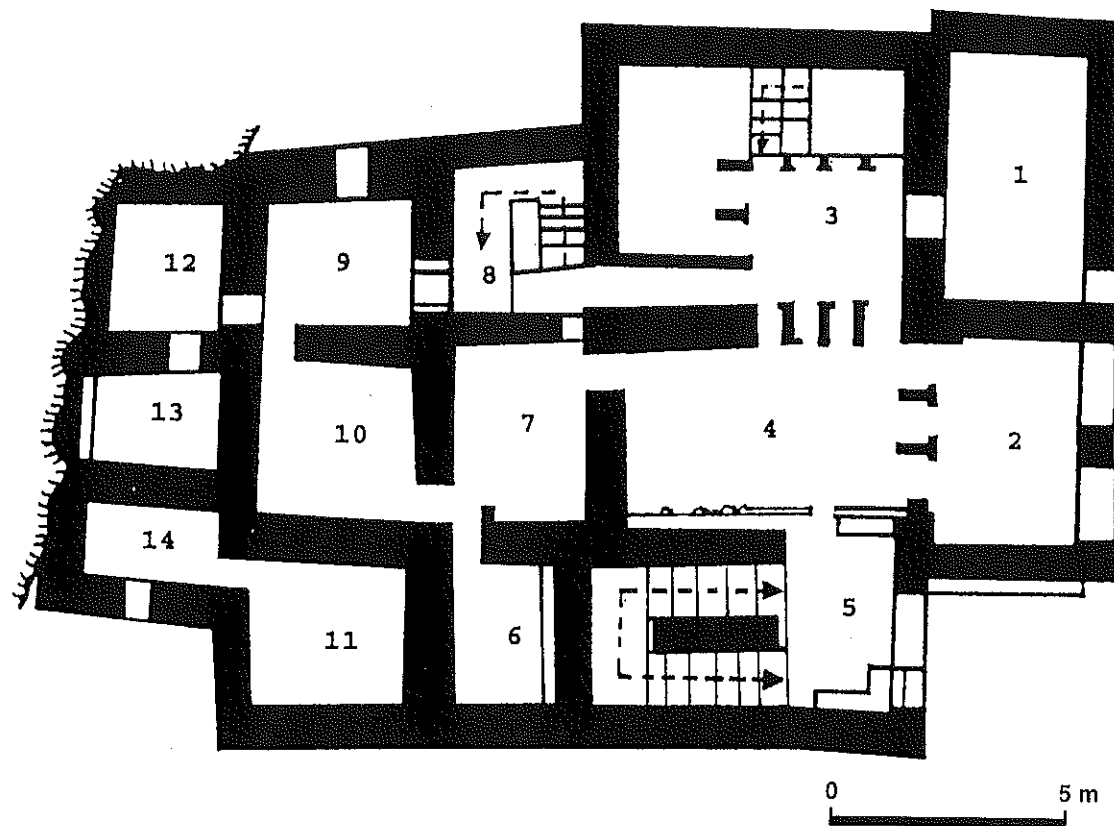


Fig. 1. Ground plan of Xeste 3, Akrotiri, by author after MARINATOS (n. 8), fig. 51.

flowers in the landscapes, the ornamentation of the goddess, and the costumes of the three figures from the lustral basin link the two compositions.⁷ The overall program, supported by additional frescoes depicting male figures, mature women, and landscapes, is usually understood as having a religious focus and representing the ritual initiation of girls.⁸

While many of the iconographic elements have been identified as having ritual or cultic significance, their

intended meanings as envisioned by the artist(s) and patron(s) of Xeste 3 remain incompletely understood. The following study attempts to arrive at a clearer understanding of the Xeste 3 rituals by examining previously undervalued evidence of the physiological development of the girls and young women pictured in the frescoes. The carefully painted signs of progressive physical development through puberty make it possible to identify objective criteria for establishing the relative ages of the principal female players in the ritual narratives. This information in turn provides new insight into the Thera cultural construction of gender identity for girls in their transformation into young women, and helps to focus attention on the heavy investment that the prehistoric inhabitants of Akrotiri made in the successful engendering of their girls and women.

Signs of sexual development are carefully indicated in the female figures populating the Xeste 3 frescoes. The artist, who may have also worked on the Spring Fresco from Delta 2 in Akrotiri,⁹ carefully represented the relative ages of the girls by including details of breast development that are consistent with the physiological changes of

⁷ P. REHAK, *Crocus Costumes in Aegean Art*, in A. CHAPIN (ed), *Χρόσις. Essays in Honour of Sara A. Immerwahr* (Hesperia Supplement, Princeton, in print).

⁸ M. CAMERON, *Theoretical Interrelations Among Thera, Cretan, and Mainland Frescoes*, in C. DOUMAS (ed), *Thera and the Aegean World I* (London 1978), 582; N. MARINATOS, *Art and Religion in Thera. Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society* (Athens 1984), 61–84; MARINATOS (n. 5), 203–211; R. HÄGG, *Pictorial Programmes in Minoan Palaces and Villas?*, in P. DARCQUE & J.-C. POURSAT (eds), *L'Iconographie Minoenne. Actes de la table ronde d'Athènes* (BCH Supplement 11, Athens/Paris 1985); DOUMAS (n. 2), 127–131; S.A. IMMERWAHR, *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age* (University Park 1990), 59–62; W.-D. NIEMEIER, *Iconography and Context. The Thera Frescoes*, in R. LAFFINEUR & J.L. CROWLEY (eds), *ΕΙΚΩΝ. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography. Shaping a Methodology* (Aegaeum 8, Liège 1992), 98–99.

⁹ M. HOLLINSHEAD, *The Swallows and Artists of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri, Thera*, *AJA* 93 (1989), 345–348.

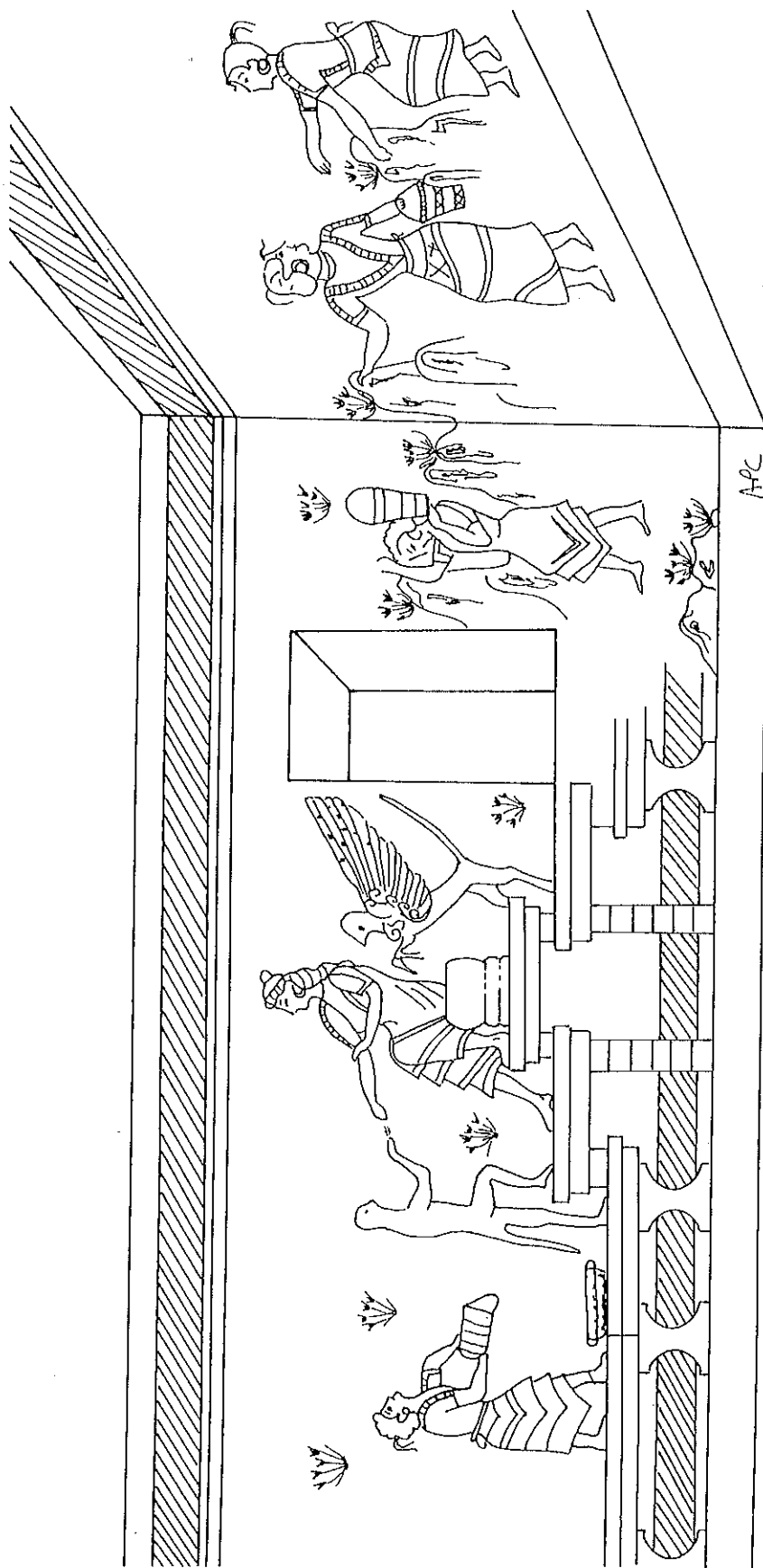


Fig. 2. Mistress of Animals Fresco and Saffron Gatherers Fresco, by author after MARINATOS (n. 8), fig. 40.

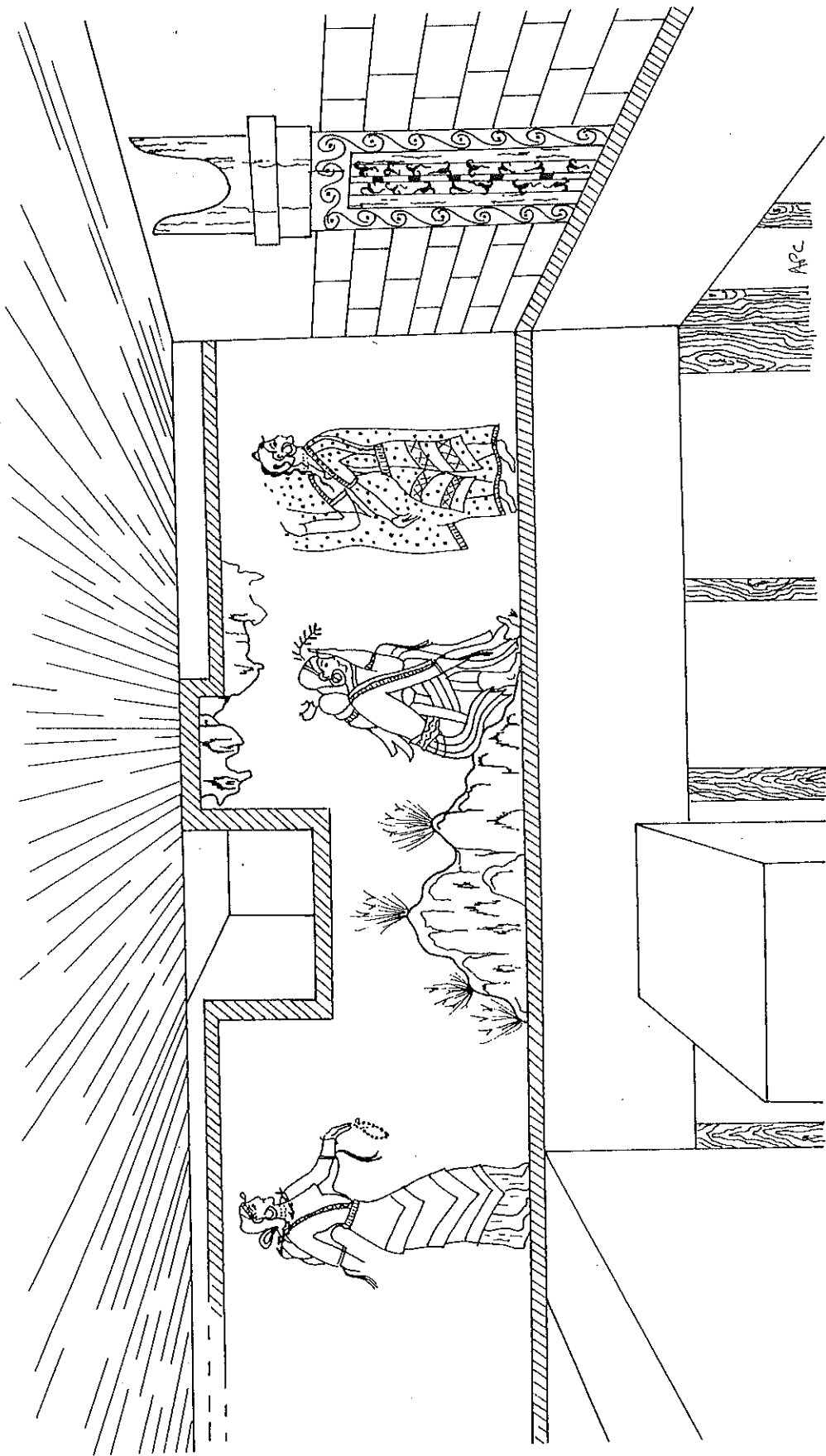


Fig. 3. Adorants Fresco, by author after MARINATOS (n. 8), fig. 43.

puberty.¹⁰ While it is generally recognized that the four Saffron Gatherers of room 3a are pubescent,¹¹ it is difficult to ascribe exact chronological ages to the girls because the onset of puberty varies individually according to environmental, genetic, and other factors.¹² There are, however, certain patterns of growth and development that occur, regardless of the specific age of their onset, in all normally developing girls.¹³ J.M. Tanner's standard publication of female breast development (B1–B5), for example, is reproduced here in Fig. 4.

Puberty begins with prepubescence, which is physically characterized by an enlargement of the ovaries, a rounding of the hips, and the appearance of breast buds marking the first phase of breast development (Fig. 4, B2). A girl enters pubescence with the appearance of pubic hair. In this second stage of development, her breast buds enlarge into breasts (Fig. 4, B3–4) and she experiences a growth spurt. Menarche, the onset of menstruation, is commonly regarded as the key feature of the pubescent stage, and typically occurs about eighteen months after the peak in the growth spurt. Irregularity of menses and a lack of ovulation often characterize the early months of menstruation. The last phase of puberty, postpubescence, begins when pubic hair growth is complete. In this stage, the growth spurt slows, ovulation and menstruation regularize, and breast development may continue noticeably. This pubertal development usually takes about three to four years to complete, but developmental patterns vary individually over an extended period of time, as shown in Fig. 5. Yet despite this variation, these three phases of female development, from prepubescence through postpubescence, all appear to be carefully depicted in the Xeste 3 frescoes.

The Saffron Gatherer with the shaved head, identified as Girl 1 by Nanno Marinatos,¹⁴ has the characteristic

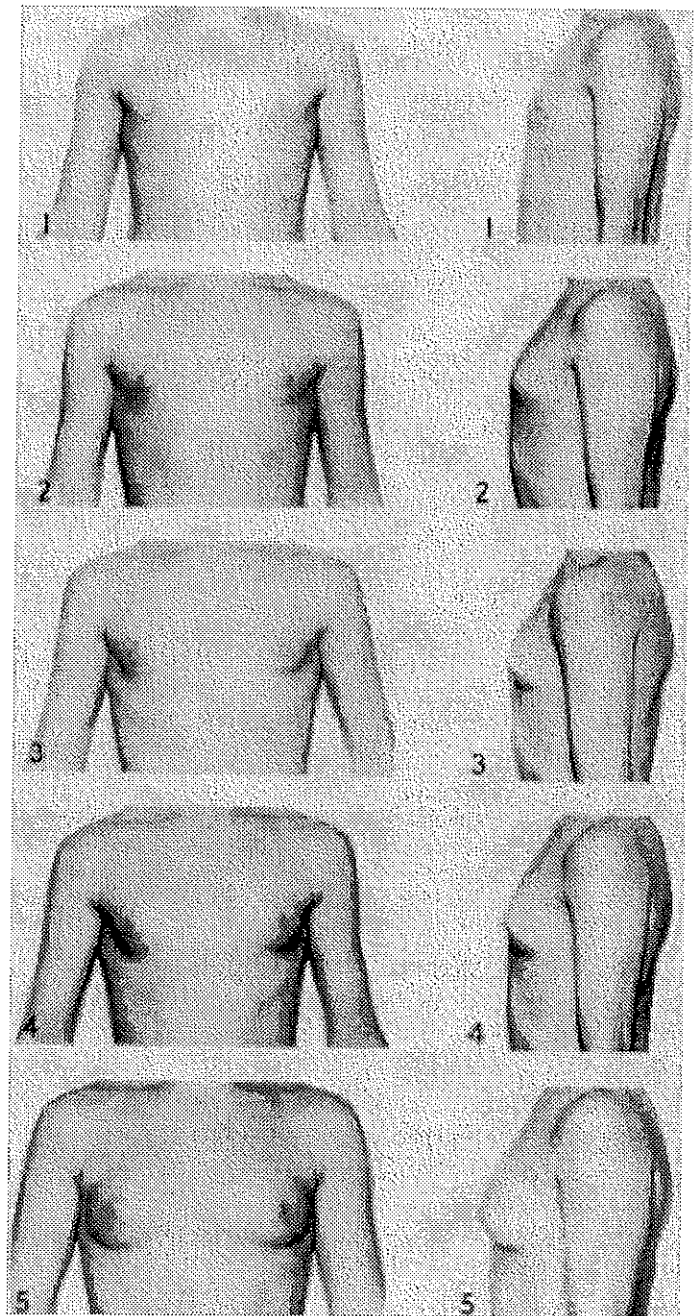


Fig. 4. Breast standards, from J.M. TANNER, *Growth at Adolescence* (Oxford 1955), pl. 7, showing the stages of breast development from stage 1 (B1) preadolescence through stage 5 (B5) postpubescence.

attributes of prepubescence (Fig. 4, B2; Fig. 6). She is depicted in profile and wears the typical Minoan costume that exposes her chest, so it is clear that her figure lacks the articulation of a breast and nipple. Instead, the artist has shown a curving chest that resembles closely the swelling upper chest of the prepubescent girl illustrated by Tanner. This breast development – or lack thereof –

¹⁰ D. WITHEE, *Physical Growth and Aging Characteristics Depicted in the Thera Frescoes*, abstract in *AJA* 96 (1992), 336.

¹¹ MARINATOS (n. 8), 62; IDEM (n. 5), 205, calls the Saffron Gatherers "young girls" but identifies them as pubescent; E. DAVIS, "Youth and Age in the Thera Frescoes," *AJA* 90 (1986), 399, classifies the Saffron Gatherer with a shaved head as a child and her curly-haired companions as adolescent; DOUMAS (n. 2), 130, describes them first as "maidens" and most recently (C. DOUMAS, *Age and Gender in the Thera Wall Paintings*, in SHERRATT (n. 2), 971–981) as pubescent; REHAK (n. 6), 12, sees them as prepubescent, about 8–10 years of age.

¹² J.M. TANNER, *Growth at Adolescence*, 2nd ed. (Oxford/Edinburgh 1962), 94–155.

¹³ For a fuller description of the physiological changes of puberty, see TANNER (n. 12), 36–39. For those who are not physicians, much the same information may be found in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, "Adolescence," at <http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?eu=119312&sctn=1>.

¹⁴ MARINATOS (n. 5), 205, where the numbering of the girls is articulated from right to left.

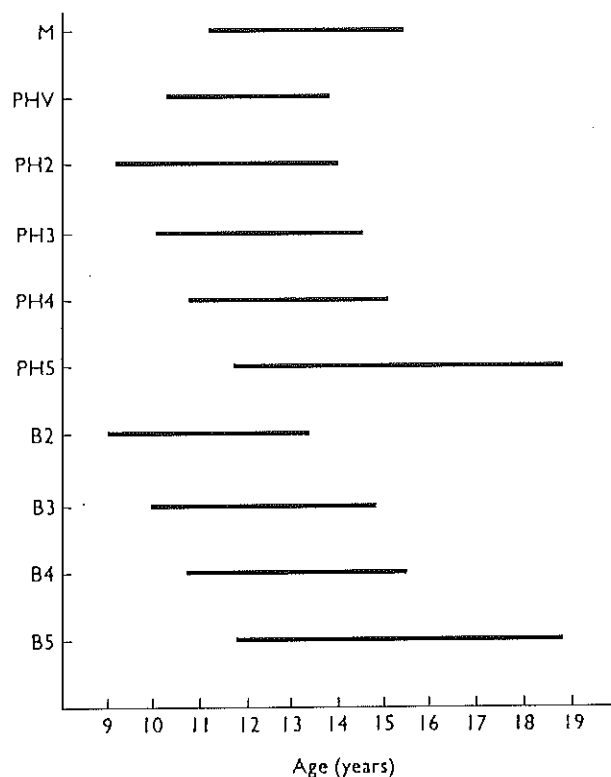


Fig. 5. Range of onset of different stages of puberty in western European females, from C.G.D. BROOK (ed), *Clinical Paediatric Endocrinology*, 3rd ed. (Oxford 1989), Fig. 10.4, showing (M) onset of menarche; (PHV) peak height velocity; (PH2, PH3, PH4, PH5) pubic hair growth stages 2, 3, 4, and 5; and (B2, B3, B4, B5) breast development stages 2, 3, 4, and 5.

stands in marked contrast to that of her redheaded companion (Girl 3), whose swelling breast and red nipple reflect the more advanced development that comes with full pubescence (Fig. 4, perhaps B3–4; Fig. 7).

It might be possible to estimate of the relative ages of these two girls, not based solely on breast development, which varies throughout puberty, but by examining hair-style. The flat-chested Saffron Gatherer has recently had her head shaved, reserving only a black ponytail and a short forelock of hair. In Aegean convention, the shaved skull is represented in blue while the hair, which is regrowing, is indicated by short strokes of black paint. In contrast, the redheaded Saffron Gatherer has a similar ponytail and forelock,¹⁵ but also sports a thick crown of curly hair, which the artist emphasizes by giving it an unusual color and by incising curling spirals into the wet plaster. Today

human hair grows at an average rate of about 0.37 mm per day, or about 1.125 cm per month.¹⁶ It thus appears that, as a rough estimate, the redheaded Saffron Gatherer once had a shaved head, but has since been growing her short curly hair for about a year. It is therefore suggested here that the two girls are about a year apart in age, as indicated both by respective breast development and hair growth.

The other two Saffron Gatherers with identical heads of thick curly hair should therefore be the same age as the redheaded Gatherer but they demonstrate the variations of breast development that characterize the early stages of puberty. Unlike her blossoming redheaded companion, the girl with black curly hair pouring crocus flowers into a large basket, identified as Girl 4 by Marinatos, remains completely flat chested (Fig. 4, B1; Fig. 8). She bears no indication of either breast or nipple, even though these portions of the figure are well preserved. In fact, the contour of her chest lacks the curvature even of the shaved-headed Saffron Gatherer. It is well known that the onset of puberty varies widely, even among girls from the same population, and it seems here that the artist is observing that fact.¹⁷ The fourth Saffron Gatherer (Marinatos Girl 2), the one presenting the viewer with a frontal view of her chest, represents yet another stage of breast development (Fig. 4, B3; Fig. 9). With a head of black curly hair like her flat-chested companion, she is nonetheless painted with clearly growing breasts emphasized by the outward swell of the clothing under her arms, even though only her nipples are painted in red. From careful observation of these details, it seems clear that the artist of the Xeste 3 Saffron Gatherers is remarkably sensitive to the variations of prepubescent and pubescent development.

It may be possible to assign tentative ages to the Saffron Gatherers of Xeste 3 by comparing their prepubescent and pubescent development with statistics from modern studies examining the onset of puberty in populations around the globe. The average age of girls at the onset of puberty, however, is dependent upon overall health conditions as well as genetic and environmental factors. Major advances in diet, health care and sanitation make modern western

¹⁶ J.G. HALL, U.G. FROSTER-ISKENIUS & J.E. ALLANSON, *Handbook of Normal Physical Measurements* (Oxford/New York/Toronto 1989), 351–352. The rate of human hair growth varies according to the age, genetic predisposition, state of health, and other factors that include the location of the hair on the head. The rate even varies according to the season of the year, growing faster in the summer and slower in the winter. Overall, however, normal rates of hair growth fall between 1.3 and .7 cms per month.

¹⁷ Fig. 5 illustrates the range of ages (9–13 years old) at which girls traditionally exhibit breast budding (B2).

¹⁵ The ponytail should be hidden by the basket carried on her shoulders, yet it remains faintly visible since the artist first incised the ponytail into the wet plaster and even, it appears, painted it in red before adding the basket to the composition. For photograph, see DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 130.



Fig. 6. Girl 1, from the Saffron Gatherers Fresco, by author after DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 121.

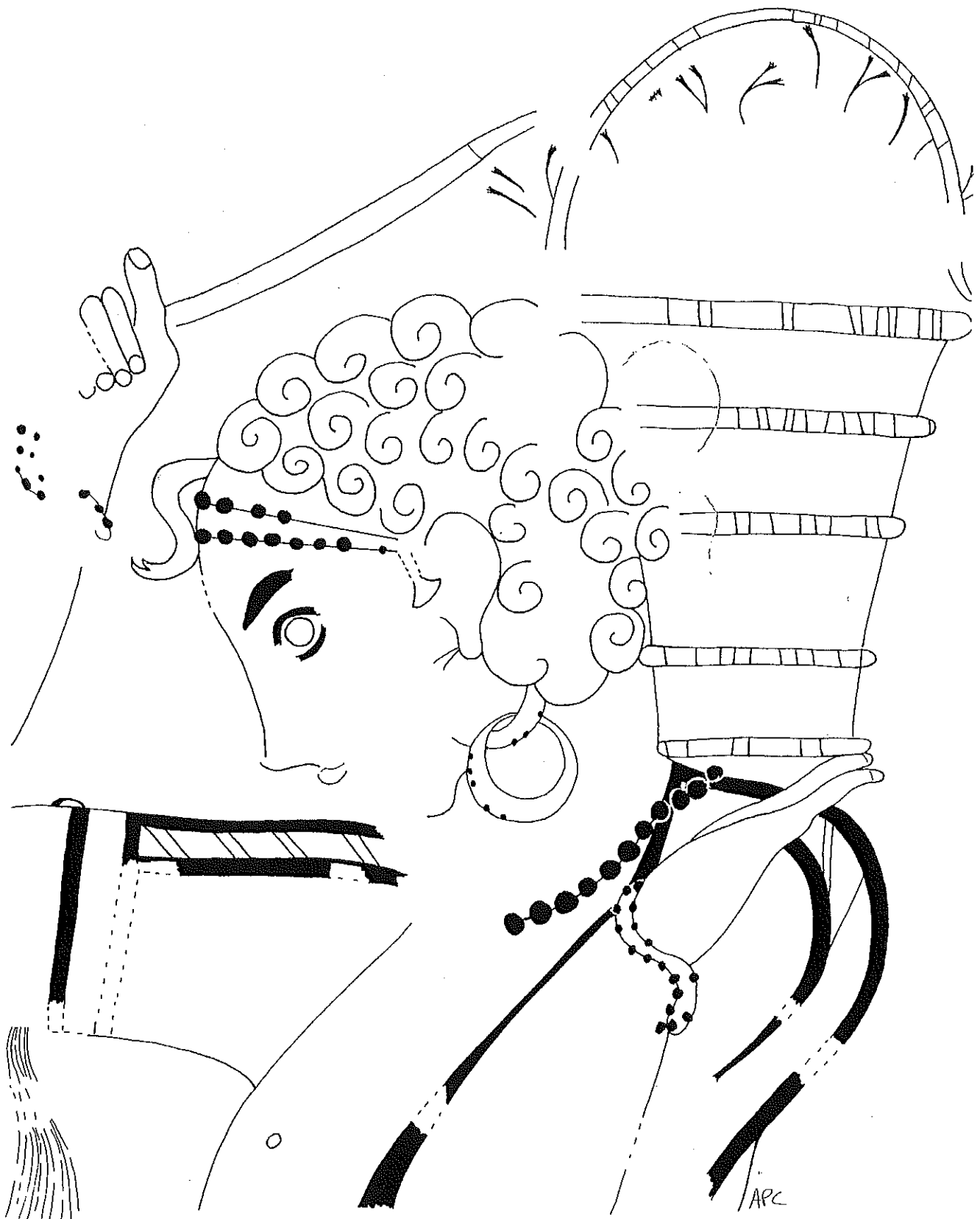


Fig. 7. Girl 3, from the Saffron Gatherers Fresco, by author after DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 130.

populations healthier than their premodern predecessors,¹⁸ and this improved health seems to have triggered a downward trend in the average age of menarche of several months per decade since about 1850.¹⁹ Although Paul Rehak argues strongly that a saffron-rich diet promoted good

health in prehistoric Therans by compensating for the nutritional deficiencies of a typical Mediterranean diet,²⁰ the Bronze Age population still lacked the health advantages that come with modern medicine, good sanitation, and a plentiful and varied food supply. The most recent studies of western populations reflecting current living conditions thus may not provide an absolutely certain basis for estimating the ages of the Saffron Gatherers depicted in Xeste 3, and it seems likely that Theran girls living in the Bronze Age experienced the onset of puberty at a later age than girls do today. This difference is overlooked, for example, by Rehak, who estimates the age of the youngest Saffron Gatherer to be about 8–10 years. Since his estimate reflects current rates of early sexual development,²¹ it is almost certainly too low for Bronze Age populations. Nevertheless, some older studies and studies of nonwestern populations, may offer more reliable guides.

A 1969 study by W.A. Marshall and J.M. Tanner of 192 white British girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds was for years routinely cited as establishing the average age for the onset of normal puberty in girls. Marshall and Tanner found that the mean age for breast budding was 11.15 years and that pubic hair first appeared at the mean age of 11.69 years. The girls in the study reached menarche at the mean age of 13.47 years.²² The study is now criticized for selecting a group of subjects whose low standard of health care made them poor representatives of the British population at large, and since the average age of menarche has dropped since the 1960s, Marshall and Tanner's statistics are now out of date.²³ For a comparison with the Saffron Gatherers of Xeste 3, however, the lower standard of health characteristic of the girls studied despite living in modern society may provide better comparative evidence for calculating the average ages for the onset of puberty and menarche in the Bronze Age.

Other statistical studies of populations which do not all enjoy the benefits of western industrialized society provide similar estimates. A 1998 study by Alfredo Morabia and Michael Costanza of nearly 19,000 women from 11 countries in Europe, the Americas, and Australia found the

the Age Limit for Defining When Puberty is Precocious in Girls in the United States. Implications for Evaluation and Treatment, *Pediatrics* 104:4 (1999), 936–941; C.S. SCHUSTER & S.S. ASHBURN, *The Process of Human Development. A Holistic Life-Span Approach* (Philadelphia/New York/London/Hagerston 1992), 496.

²⁰ REHAK (n. 6), 12–13.

²¹ REHAK (n. 6), 12.

²² W.A. MARSHALL & J.M. TANNER, Variations in the Pattern of Pubertal Changes in Girls, *Archives of the Diseases of Childhood* 44 (1969), 291–303.

²³ KAPLOWITZ & OBERFIELD (n. 19).

¹⁸ Evidence for prehistoric Aegean health is gradually accumulating and is summarized by R. ARNOTT, *Healing and Medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 89 (1996) 265–270. See also P.J.P. MCGEORGE, *Health and Diet in Minoan Times*, in R.E. JONES & H.W. CATLING (eds), *New Aspects of Archaeological Science in Greece. Occasional Paper 3 of the Fitch Laboratory of the British School at Athens* (Athens 1988), 47–54. While Bronze Age people had access to some health care, as evidenced by perfectly healed fractures and successful trepanation surgeries (see J.L. ANGEL, *Human Skeletons from Grave Circles at Mycenae*, in G.E. MYLONAS (ed), *Ο Ταφικός κύκλος Β των Μυκηνών* (Athens 1972), 379–397; IDEM, *The Peoples of Lerna. Analysis of a Prehistoric Aegean Population. A Preclassical Site in the Argolid*, vol. 2 (Princeton 1971)), the fact remains that human life expectancies, a general indicator of the overall health of any given population, were much shorter in the Late Bronze Age than today. P.J.P. McGeorge's analysis of skeletal remains from Crete shows mean life expectancies for Minoan women ranging between 25–28 years and for Minoan men ranging between 30–35 years (P.J.P. MCGEORGE, *A Comparative Study of the Mean Life Expectation of the Minoans*, 6th Cretological Congress, vol. A1 (1990), 419–428). These data stand in stark contrast to recent figures for American life expectancies for white children: boys born in 1998 can expect to live on average 74.5 years while girls can expect to live 80.0 years (National Vital Statistics Report, Vol. 48, No. 18, Feb. 7, 2001, Table 12; for more information, see the National Center for Health Statistics at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lifexp.htm>).

It is possible that the people depicted in the Xeste 3 frescoes, whose apparently elite social standing would presumably have allowed them better access to the food supply, would have enjoyed a higher standard of health than the remainder of the population. But this assumption cannot be tested until skeletal remains from the human inhabitants of Akrotiri are identified. Furthermore, as Arnott points out, it is easy to idealize an earlier population's health based on its art and wealth (ARNOTT, 265). As Arnott, following McGeorge, observes, "...overcrowding, poor sanitation, and occasional contamination of drinking water, when combined with a meagre and often seasonal diet, would have taken their toll on the population and weakened resistance to diseases such as dysentery, hookworm and tetanus. Immunity to infection would gradually have begun to disappear, so even childhood diseases such as infant diarrhoea, diphtheria, whooping cough and scarlet fever would often have been fatal," (ARNOTT, 265). The picture science paints of prehistoric health is not nearly as pretty as that suggested by the frescoes of Xeste 3.

¹⁹ The medical literature documenting the downward trend in the onset of puberty in today's girls and boys is impressive. In 1850 the average age of menarche in Europe was 17 years, but by 1900 the average age in the United States was 14.5 years. And now the age for breast budding has dropped to an average of 8.87 years for African American girls and 9.96 years for Caucasian girls. See for example M.E. HERMAN-GIDDENS et al., *Secondary Sexual Characteristics and Menses in Young Girls Seen in Office Practice. A Study from the Pediatric Research in Office Settings Network*, *Pediatrics* 99.4 (1997), 505–512; P.B. KAPLOWITZ & S.E. OBERFIELD, *Reexamination of*

average age of menarche to be 14.²⁴ Likewise, a study of 3,115 women from Sudan, 2,898 who reported their ages at menarche, found that the average, or "midway," age at menarche was between 13 and 14 years old.²⁵ If we accept that these studies reflect conditions closer to those experienced by girls in Bronze Age Thera, then breast budding would probably have occurred between 11–12 years of age, and the average age at menarche would have been 13–14 years.²⁶ Accordingly, the prepubescent Saffron Gatherer with a shaved head and the suggestion of budding breasts should be about 11–12 years old, while her older companions with heads of curly hair would be aged 12–13. These girls are probably either pre-menarchic or just on the cusp of menarche.

The Saffron Gatherers have entered an important stage in their lives, when the physiological changes of female puberty and its association with an emerging womanhood would have been made manifestly clear to all members of the Thera community by their newly developing breasts. It is thus fortunate for archaeologists today that this stage in the lives of Thera girls has been preserved in pictorial form by the Xeste 3 fresco cycle. These paintings show not only a religious ritual in which girls offer saffron to the Enthroned Goddess – they also depict a significant moment in the process of Thera gender construction. Recent studies make it clear that while children are usually born biologically male or female, on-going processes of engendering provide children with culturally specific and evolving understandings of what it means to be "girl" or "boy," and eventually "woman" or "man."²⁷ The Xeste 3 frescoes,

then, offer insight into how members of Thera society constructed gender identity as girls entered puberty.

First, it should be noted that little is known about the lives of Aegean children, and still less about the engendering processes of Thera girls. Only two frescoes thus far excavated from Thera preserve images of fairly young girls – the Veiled Girl of Xeste 3 in the Adorants Fresco, and the so-called "Young Priestess" from the West House.²⁸ These girls apparently assist in ritual, wear partially shaved heads indicative of youth, and are dressed in Minoan-style costume under additional garments that partially conceal their physical development. When viewed in contrast to the youthful nudity of Thera boys, the layers of clothing worn by the girls may perhaps have served as physical markers of female gender and have helped to distinguish female childhood from male childhood.

It is only in the Saffron Gatherers Fresco that older girls, showing just the first signs of female pubertal development, emerge center-stage as the major participants of an important religious, communal festival, and a better understanding of the girls' ages contributes to a clearer reading of the event. Marinatos argues that the fresco preserves the image of a puberty rite with overtones of spring symbolism and the renewal of nature.²⁹ A problem with this appealing reconstruction is that saffron crocuses (probably *C. cartwrightianus* rather than *C. sativus*³⁰) bloom in late October and early November.³¹ Likewise, the Reedbed Fresco located to the west of the fresco depicts a late autumn landscape.³² The artistic program thus preserves the image of an autumnal ritual.³³ Since three girls are

²⁴ A. MORABIA & M.C. COSTANZA, International Variability in Ages at Menarche, First Livebirth, and Menopause, *American Journal of Epidemiology* 148.12 (1998), 1195–1205.

²⁵ S.C.J. OTOR & A. PANDEY, Puberty and the Family Formation Process in Sudan. Age-at-Menarche Differential Fecundity Hypothesis Revisited, *Social Biology* 45.3–4 (1998), 246–259. The study further distinguishes between early maturers, who reach menarche before 12 years of age, and those who are late maturers, who attain menarche by age 15 or later.

²⁶ This statistical evidence compares well with the classical Greek belief that girls attained menarche at the age of 14. See N. DEMAND, Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece (Baltimore/London 1994), 10; K. DOWDEN, Death and the Maiden. Girls' Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology (London 1989), 29, 210 note 37.

²⁷ On the importance of gender development in children, see J.S. DEREVENSKI, Engendering Children, Engendering Archaeology, in J. MOORE & E. SCOTT, Invisible People and Processes. Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology (London/New York 1997), 192–202. For gender archaeology, see J. GERO & M. CONKEY (eds), Engendering Archaeology. Women and Prehistory (Oxford 1991); R. GILCHRIST, Gender and Archaeology. Contesting the Past (London/New York 1999); M.L. STIG-SØRENSEN, Gender Archaeology (Cambridge 2000); M. DONALD & L. HURCOMBE, Gender and Material Culture in Archaeological Perspective (London/New York 2000).

²⁸ DOUMAS (n. 2), pls. 24, 107.

²⁹ MARINATOS (n. 8), 61–72.

³⁰ P. WARREN, From Naturalism to Essentialism in Thera and Minoan Art, in SHERRATT (n. 2), 364–380, argues convincingly that the crocuses in both Thera and Cretan frescoes are characterized as the wild *C. cartwrightianus* rather than *C. sativus* by the moderate length of the bright red style branches that curve slightly over the tops of the flower segments (petals).

³¹ R. PORTER, The Flora of the Thera Wall Paintings. Living Plants and Motifs – Sea Lily, Crocus, Iris and Ivy, in SHERRATT (n. 2), 603–630, who also identifies the Thera crocuses as *C. cartwrightianus*.

³² A. VLACHOPOULOS, The Reedbed Wall Painting from Akrotiri. Towards an Interpretation of the Iconographic Programme of Room 3b of Xeste 3, *BICS* 42 (1997–1998), 235–236; IDEM, The Reed Motif in the Thera Wall Paintings and Its Association with Aegean Pictorial Art, in SHERRATT (n. 2), 631–656.

³³ Contra MARINATOS (n. 8), 65–68, who argues that the fresco fragment with nestling swallows (DOUMAS [n. 2], pl. 98) and the floral symbolism of regeneration alludes to springtime. Swallows sometimes breed twice in a season, however, and the return of the replenishing rains after the Greek summer drought could also represent regeneration, and so there seems to be no need to dismiss the prominent fall-blooming crocuses when attempting to establish a season for the ritual.



Fig. 8. Girl 4, from the Mistress of Animals Fresco, by author after DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 124.



Fig. 9. Girl 2, from the Saffron Gatherers Fresco, by author after DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 118.

represented as being one year older than the youngest Saffron Gatherer, it would appear that the girls participated in the ceremony twice in consecutive years, suggesting repeated service to the goddess. Furthermore, both the shaved-headed Saffron Gatherer and her older, flower-pouring companion remain relatively flat-chested whereas the other two Saffron Gatherers have developing breasts, and this suggests that entry into service was probably determined by chronological age rather than stages of physical development, which can vary considerably.

Since the youngest Saffron Gatherer has hair that is starting to grow out, service to the goddess may mark an end to the head shaving that characterizes Theran representations of children.³⁴ The act of beginning to grow a full head of hair may thus symbolically represent the end of childhood, and be an important signifier of emerging adult female status. If it is further understood that jewelry denotes wealth and higher social standing, then we may postulate an annual autumnal ceremony marking the end of childhood and the beginning of the transition to adulthood for the prepubescent and pubescent daughters of Akrotiri's elite families. The association of the girls with the Enthroned Goddess also suggests that they enjoy her divine protection, made secure by the formal offering of saffron. Since the girls are represented in the early stages of puberty, a time of life viewed in classical Greece as particularly dangerous and difficult,³⁵ then the protection of the goddess was probably enlisted to ensure a successful maturation into adulthood.

This transformational phase of a Theran girl's life seems to parallel puberty rites known across historical Greece.³⁶ As both Davis and Rehak note, the Theran ceremony closely resembles the ritual service of Athenian girls as *arktoi*, or "she-bears," to Artemis at Brauron and at other locations in Attica.³⁷ While it should be understood that

there is no known link between any prehistoric initiation rites and the Classical Arkteia at Brauron, nor between the Enthroned Goddess and the historical Artemis,³⁸ puberty rites often serve similar functions across time, space, and culture.³⁹ Further, the Xeste 3 rituals conform closely to Arnold Van Gennep's anthropological models for rites of passage from childhood to adulthood,⁴⁰ suggesting that a comparison to the better known rites at Brauron might be fruitful and help to illuminate further the meaning of the Theran Bronze Age ritual.

The *arktoi* of Artemis, according to historical and artistic evidence, were of different ages and stages of development during their service to the goddess. Though their exact age range is disputed, the "she-bears" were probably 10–14 years old – similar in age to the Saffron Gatherers and suggesting also that they were usually premenarchic in their development.⁴¹ Moreover, the ceremonies at Brauron were communal, and citizen girls of Athens, often from elite families, were required to participate before being married. This Athenian coming-of-age ceremony marked an end to childhood and signaled the beginning of the transition to adulthood. It also served to begin the integration of girls into the male-dominated world of the Greek *polis* by preparing them for their future roles in marriage as wives and mothers.⁴² Finally, it is known that the "she-bears" wore saffron-yellow dresses, which offers an intriguing parallel to the prominence of saffron in the Xeste 3 frescoes.⁴³

Although there is obviously no direct link between the Theran images and the Arkteia of Artemis, the similarities

³⁸ N. MARINATOS, Goddess and Monster. An Investigation of Artemis, in F. GRAF (ed), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart 1998), 114–125, contra suggestions by E. SIMON, *Die Götter der Griechen* (Munich 1969), 151, 160, and others that Artemis preserves aspects of the Aegean goddess of nature, seen here in Xeste 3 as a *potnia theron*, a mistress of animals.

³⁹ A. VAN GENNEP, *Rites of Passage*, trans. M.L. Vizedom & G.L. Caffee (Chicago 1960).

⁴⁰ VAN GENNEP (n. 39); MARINATOS (n. 5), 201–202; A. PEATFIELD, Water, Fertility, and Purification in Minoan Religion, in C. MORRIS (ed), *Klados. Essays in Honor of J.N. Coldstream* (BICS Supplement 63, London 1995), 226.

⁴¹ Most estimates of the ages of the *arktoi* range from 10–14. C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, *Studies in Girls' Transitions. Aspects of the Arkteia and Age Representation in Attic Iconography* (Athens 1988), however, proposes a controversial reading of historical evidence to suggest that the bears were only 5–10 years in age. For critiques of Sourvinou-Inwood rejecting this young period of service, see E.C. KEULS, Review of C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Studies in Girls' Transitions*, *AJA* 94 (1990), 694–695; DEMAND (n. 26), 107–114.

⁴² COLE (n. 37); DEMAND (n. 26), 107–114.

⁴³ DAVIS (n. 11), 403; REHAK (n. 6), 12.

³⁴ In contrast to the stubble growing on the Saffron Gatherer's skull is the smoothly painted blue surface of the regularly shaved head of the youngest boy painted in room 3b on the ground floor of Xeste 3, depicted in DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 112. For further discussion of the hairstyles of children, see DAVIS (n. 11), 399–402; amended by WITHEE (n. 10); DOUMAS (n. 11); L. MORGAN, *Form and Meaning in Figurative Painting*, in SHERRATT (n. 2), 925–946.

³⁵ H. KING, Bound to Bleed. Artemis and Greek Women, in A. CAMERON & A. KUERT (eds), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit 1983), 109–127; G. SISSA, Greek Virginity, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge 1990), 121–122; DEMAND (n. 26), 11, 95–99.

³⁶ W. BURKERT, *Greek Religion*, trans. J. Ruffan (Cambridge 1985), 260–261; DOWDEN (n. 26); DEMAND (n. 26), 113.

³⁷ DAVIS (n. 11), 403; REHAK (n. 6), 12. For the cult of Artemis at Brauron and the ritual service to Artemis as *arktoi*, and for further references, see L. KAHIL, *Mythological Repertoire of Brauron*, in W. MOON (ed), *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography* (Madison 1983), 231–244; S. COLE, *The Social Functions of Rituals of Maturation. The koureion and the arkteia*, *ZPE* 55 (1983); DEMAND (n. 26).

nonetheless remain striking and suggest the possibility that, like the Arkteia, the principal purpose of the Xeste 3 ritual was to prepare girls through a ritual engendering process for traditional adult female roles in marriage and childbearing. Granted, the end result of a puberty rite is widely understood to be the adoption of adult roles by the initiates, yet the implications of the rites – that they probably functioned to develop female gender identity and probably helped to prepare Theran girls for marriage and motherhood – remain undeveloped in the literature surrounding the Xeste 3 compositions. As early as 1978, shortly after their discovery, Mark Cameron suggested that, "...it remains just possible that the Theran scene shows us an old Minoan ritual to prepare young women for the domestic duties of womanhood," but no further discussion follows.⁴⁴ Marinatos states, "The young girls may be initiated into their new roles as wives and mothers," yet does not develop this point further. Instead, her analysis focuses on comparing the full fresco cycle with Van Gennep's models for rites of passage to develop the themes of ritual action and initiation.⁴⁵ Other analyses emphasize economic, botanical, medical, and artistic aspects of the composition.⁴⁶ While each reading of the Xeste 3 Saffron Gatherers Fresco adds another layer of understanding of its many complexities, it is suggested here that the primary functions of the ritual were (1) to develop female gender identity appropriate to Theran society and (2) to acculturate girls to their future roles in marriage and childbirth as wives and mothers. This was accomplished by symbolically marking the end of childhood with an end to head shaving and by serving the goddess in a flower gathering ceremony, thereby beginning the transition to adulthood in a ritual activity that gently brought the girls in line with societal expectations.

The Adorants Fresco in the lustral basin (Fig. 3) also suggests the importance of ritual in the engendering process to mark important moments in the lives of Theran women, but thus far there is no agreement on the precise meanings of the composition's many details. Marinatos, who notes that the Wounded Woman's long hair indicates that she is

older than the Saffron Gatherers, identifies her as the focus of attention in a puberty rite that serves as an initiation into adulthood. The blood on her foot, for Marinatos, comes from a ritual ordeal in which girls walked barefoot across rocky ground to collect crocus flowers while the depiction of both the pain and bloodshed allude to menstruation and childbirth.⁴⁷ Ellen Davis suggests that the Wounded Woman should be several years older than the Saffron Gatherers, based roughly on the length of her hair, and argues that the Wounded Woman is of marriageable age. For Davis, the blood of the cut foot symbolizes the breaking of the hymen that comes with marriage; and the scene in the lustral basin represents a prenuptial initiation, a marriage rite, or a consummation.⁴⁸ Diana Withee offers the first chronological estimate of the Wounded Woman's age, suggesting that she is about 14–16 years old based on the physical development of her body.⁴⁹ Rehak, adopting Withee's suggested age range, suggests that the blood from the cut foot symbolizes the bloodshed of menarche and childbirth, noting that in Classical Greece, girls were married about the time of menarche. He further argues that the attendant crocus flower acts a symbol of the medicinal power of saffron to promote health and to regulate a woman's reproductive life.⁵⁰

Given this divergence of scholarly interpretation, questions arise. Can a reading of the Wounded Woman be more precise? Can her age be more closely determined, and can the rite, whether of initiation, puberty, menarche and/or marriage, depicted in the Xeste 3 program be more clearly identified? Fortunately, like the images of the Saffron Gatherers upstairs, the Wounded Woman is carefully depicted with specific details of physical development, hair growth, and costume.

Most obviously, the Wounded Woman is endowed with a firm, round breast that the artist has placed low on her torso, perhaps to emphasize its presence and size. While this breast is noticeably smaller than that of the Bending Lady from the House of the Ladies,⁵¹ it nevertheless is much fuller and more developed than those of the young Saffron Gatherers above. In comparison with the Tanner criteria shown in Fig. 4, this breast has reached and surpassed stage 5, when breasts become fully developed and are characterized by projecting nipples. Here, it would

⁴⁴ CAMERON (n. 8), 582.

⁴⁵ MARINATOS (n. 8), 64, 73–84.

⁴⁶ For the economic significance of saffron as a source of wealth, see S. AMIGUES, *Le Crocus et le safran sur une fresque de Théra*, *Revue Archéologique* (1988), 227–242; for recent botanical researches, see PORTER (n. 31) and WARREN (n. 30); for the medical and health benefits of saffron, see REHAK (n. 6); for analyses of the artists and their workshops, see, for example, HOLLINSHEAD (n. 8) and C. TELEVANTOU, *Theran Wall-Painting. Artistic Tendencies and Painters*, in R. LAFFINEUR & J.L. CROWLEY (eds), *EIKΩN. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography. Shaping a Methodology* (Aegaeum 8, Liège 1992), 145–159.

⁴⁷ MARINATOS (n. 8), 61–84; EADEM (n. 5), 201–211, especially 207–209.

⁴⁸ DAVIS (n. 11), 402–403.

⁴⁹ WITHEE (n. 10).

⁵⁰ REHAK (n. 6), 13.

⁵¹ DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 10. For the observation that the Bending Lady depicts a lactating woman, see MORGAN (n. 34).



Fig. 10. The Wounded Woman, from the Adorants Fresco, by author after DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 105.

seem that the Wounded Woman's breasts are "off the chart," but in fact, female breast growth often does not end when Tanner's stage 5 has been reached. Instead, normal female breast growth continues for three to five years after breast buds appear (see Fig. 5), and the end result is fairly predictable – the longer breasts develop, the bigger they become. The large size of the Wounded Woman's breast in comparison to those of the subject depicted in the Tanner scale suggests that the Theran teen is depicted very late in adolescence. Certainly she is postpubescent, and well beyond the age of menarche, but the exact age represented cannot be determined without additional evidence.

As noted by both Marinatos and Davis,⁵² an important sign of the Wounded Woman's age is preserved in the length of her hair, which falls to her waist as she leans forward (Fig. 10). Assuming that she had her head shaved as a child and began growing it out upon entry into prepubescence, marked by service as a Saffron Gatherer, it may be possible to estimate the number of years that the Wounded Woman's hair has grown since last being shaved. Modern rates of hair growth vary according to a variety of factors, including age, state of general health and diet, genetic influences, and even the time of year, but the accepted figure for the average growth rate of hair is 0.37 mm per day, or 13.172 cm per year.⁵³ The Wounded Woman's hair falls to her waist, which on a woman who is 153 cm tall (approximately 5 English feet), is a distance of approximately 50 cm from the nape her neck to her waist, or about 3.8 years' growth of hair.⁵⁴ This figure assumes modern rates of growth for straight hair, but hair may not have grown as quickly in the Bronze Age due to the less favorable health conditions of the era, and thus 3.8 years should serve as a minimum figure.⁵⁵

⁵² MARINATOS (n. 5), 207; DAVIS (n. 11), 401. It should be noted that double chins do not consistently denote age in the Theran frescoes of Xeste 3. Of the three curly-headed Saffron Gatherers, who should be very close in age, Girl 2 is rendered with a soft fullness of flesh under her jaw, whereas Girls 3 and 4 lack this characteristic. Likewise, the Necklace Swinger and the Enthroned Goddess have double chins, but the Wounded Woman does not. See DOUMAS (n. 2), pls. 102, 106, 119, 124, 126, 130.

⁵³ HALL, FROSTER-ISKENIUS & ALLANSON (n. 16), 352.

⁵⁴ I wish to thank Elizabeth Fahmy, of Beaverton, OR, for serving as my model.

⁵⁵ This calculation also assumes that Theran women on average were shorter than women of modern western populations. If Theran women in prehistory were taller on average than 153 cm (about 5 English feet), then the distance between the nape of the neck and the waist would be greater, and it would take longer to grow hair to the waist. Again, 3.8 years provides a conservative minimum estimate for the time it would take to grow hair to the waist.

Additionally, the hair of the young women of Xeste 3, as indicated by the Enthroned Goddess, the Necklace Swinger, and the Wounded Woman, is thick and wavy, as if they too once sported the curls of the younger Saffron Gatherers before growing their hair long. Calculating the extra time needed for a young woman's wavy hair to grow to her waist (in comparison to straight hair) is at best an inexact science. But an informal experiment with a gently curling ribbon suggests that wavy hair needs to be at least 7% longer than straight hair to reach the waist of the model, so the length of time to grow the hair increases to about 4.05 years. If these calculations reflect something of the actual conditions of the Bronze Age, then the Wounded Woman was at least four years older than the youngest Saffron Gatherer, and should be between 15 – 16 years of age.

There is, however, one other factor that needs consideration. Today women with long hair usually trim it about once or twice a year, taking off about 2–3 cm with each hair cut to remove split ends and to keep hair looking thick, full, and healthy. Looking at the Wounded Woman's long tresses, one can see that the ends are thick and even, strongly suggesting that her hair too was trimmed regularly. Certainly the forelocks of the Saffron Gatherers (and Enthroned Goddess, if she represents a priestess impersonating a deity) must have been kept short through regular cutting, and heads of Theran children were shaved. While the preferred method for cutting hair in the Bronze Age remains uncertain, it would have been a fairly simple matter to pull hair taut and to cut it with a sharp blade, perhaps one made of obsidian.⁵⁶ Factoring annual hair cuts of 2 – 3 cm each into the equation adds almost exactly one extra year to the length of time it would take to grow wavy hair to the waist, bringing it to a total of 5 years.⁵⁷ So if a prepubescent girl of 11 – 12 years old began growing her hair long, she would be at least 15 – 16 years old by the time her hair fell to her waist, and if she kept her hair looking healthy with regular trimming, she would be about 16 – 17 years old. This calculation compares well with the Wounded Woman's observed breast development, which hints at the passage of 4–5 years from the time of breast budding.

Interestingly, the Necklace Swinger has hair that is even longer, falling beyond her waist to the top of her buttocks. In the modern model, this distance is 62 cm, equal to another year's growth, and suggests that the

⁵⁶ I wish to thank Brevard College students and former hair stylists Penny Owen and Joanne Shook for their enlightening comments on hair.

⁵⁷ This calculation was made by estimating yearly hair growth at 13.172 cm, an annual haircut of 2.5 cm, and an extra 7% in length required for wavy hair to extend 50 cm down the back.

Necklace Swinger is one year older than the Wounded Woman, or about 17–18 years old.⁵⁸ Supporting this conclusion, too, is the observation that her prominently displayed breast is about the same size as that of the Wounded Woman, suggesting that while her pre-pregnant physical development, like that of her injured companion, is complete, her hair has continued to grow.

This more precise physiological reading of age means that it is unlikely that the Wounded Woman is going through a rite associated with either puberty or menarche. The typical pattern of maturation common to most girls shows that the onset of menstruation usually occurs about two years after the beginning of puberty, which is represented in the Xeste 3 frescoes by the prepubescent Saffron Gatherer with a shaved head. But according to the evidence of hair growth, the Wounded Woman is at least four years older, and possibly five years older, than the youngest Saffron Gatherer and thus is at least two years past the age of menarche. This also means that she is now reaching the end of the postpubescent stage of final growth in which her breasts have attained their adult size, her period has become regular with cyclic ovulation, and she has become fully fertile.⁵⁹ In other words, she is a sexually mature young woman. It does not make sense to celebrate a puberty rite when that stage of development is complete, so it is more likely that the fresco represents a defloration or marriage ritual, as first suggested by Davis.⁶⁰

Support for this interpretation of full sexual development comes from the Wounded Woman's unusual costume. Unlike the Saffron Gatherers, the Necklace Swinger, the Veiled Girl, and even the Enthroned Goddess, the Wounded Woman does not wear a flounced skirt. Instead, her costume is composed of a diaphanous short-sleeved blouse open at the breast in Minoan style over which is loosely tied an unusual garment fashioned from blue, white, and yellow strips of material bound together by a thick blue belt decorated with crocus buds. Elizabeth Barber recognized this piece of clothing as a string skirt, a traditional item of clothing found across Europe for more than 20,000 years that generally seems to indicate sexual availability.⁶¹

The Wounded Woman's transparent blouse with its open, breast-baring cut also accentuates the erotic quality of this particular skirt, which at once conceals and reveals the rounded forms of her fully developed body. With her large hoop earrings and her thick, black, beribboned hair loosely cascading down her back, the Wounded Woman, more than any other figure preserved in Aegean art, seems to represent sexual appeal and availability.

The wound on her foot with its graphic depiction of dripping blood, then, must be significant, but not as a symbol of the bloodshed that comes with menarche. The Wounded Woman, as demonstrated above, is too old by at least two years. Rather, as Davis argues, it is more likely that the blood symbolizes defloration, when a young maiden experiences the mild pain and bleeding that comes from breaking the hymen in her first sexual experience.⁶² Moreover, this important event in a young woman's life, when it becomes irrevocably clear that she has left maidenhood behind, may be the cause of the emotional distress underlying the Wounded Woman's overly dramatic gesture of pain.⁶³

This more precise reading of the Wounded Woman's age permits a closer interpretation of the ritual's role in the engendering process of young Theran women. First, it can be surmised that this trial of pain and bloodshed took place out of doors, as suggested by the rocky landscape, but perhaps some elements of ritual preparation, perhaps including purification and gifts of jewelry, took place within the lustral basin of Xeste 3. Also too, the Wounded Woman's adult physical development suggests that marriage and defloration of Bronze Age Aegean women occurred somewhat later in life than it did for their classical Greek counterparts, when marriage was arranged by the family patriarch with the onset of a girl's menses even before a girl was fully grown.⁶⁴ And finally, it might be possible to speculate that the prehistoric Theran population did not have a particularly romantic or idealized

childbearing age, having reached menarche but not yet menopause, or perhaps that she had reached puberty but was not yet 'married'... In other words, that she was in some sense 'available' as a bride." See also E. BARBER, *Peekaboo to Cover-Up in 20,000 Years. Women's Status Garments in Southeast Europe*, abstract in *AJA* 99 (1995), 303, where the identification of the Wounded Woman's garment as a string skirt was made. REHAK (n. 7) identifies the crocus bud pattern on the band of the skirt.

⁶² DAVIS (n. 11), 402–403. Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that in Classical Greece, the hymen was not identified by physicians as a piece of anatomy denoting virginity. See G. SISSA, *Greek Virginity*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Cambridge 1990), 121–123.

⁶³ MORGAN (n. 34) points out that it seems somewhat odd and unnatural to touch one's forehead after injuring a foot.

⁶⁴ DEMAND (n. 26), 10.

⁵⁸ This calculation supports the intuitive observation by MARI-NATOS (n. 5), 209, that the Necklace Swinger is represented as being older than the Wounded Woman.

⁵⁹ REHAK (n. 6) and REHAK (n. 7) seems to recognize her full development through puberty through his name for this figure, the Wounded Woman.

⁶⁰ DAVIS (n. 11), 402–403.

⁶¹ E. BARBER, *Women's Work. The First 20,000 Years* (New York 1994), 42–70, especially 59, where Barber writes, "Our best guess, then, is that string skirts indicated something about the childbearing ability or readiness of the woman, perhaps simply that she was of

view of marriage and family. In contrast to the gentle flower-gathering ritual designed for younger girls, the Wounded Woman is represented in the midst of a trial of pain and bloodshed – mild in comparison to the ordeal of childbirth, of course, but one that could have been intended to teach young women that life for adult women was destined to include pain and bloodshed. If this reading is correct, then the fresco perhaps opens a window into an important final step in the Thera engendering process of female children, when the girls became women, and when cultural ideas about adult female gender roles were made clear through religious ritual.

Many questions still remain. Could the Wounded Woman have been working as a crocus gatherer when her foot was injured and blood was shed, as suggested by Marinatos?⁶⁵ Is a single, or a continuous, ceremony depicted in the two compositions of Xeste 3? And if this were the case, did the crocus gathering ritual involve both pre-pubescent girls and sexually mature young women? Was there, in fact, a ritualistic continuum from puberty to a nuptial ceremony? Supporting Marinatos' idea that the Wounded Woman was engaged as a Saffron Gatherer is the single flower painted beside her injured foot, which Marinatos suggests was dropped from her hand. Additionally, she sits in a crocus-covered rocky landscape that closely resembles the landscape of the Saffron Gatherers Fresco on the floor above. However, the Wounded Woman is 3–5 years older than the Saffron Gatherers and she wears a significantly different costume. Furthermore, the Wounded Woman does not possess a basket in which to put her flowers, whereas each of the Saffron Gatherers on the floor above is equipped with one.⁶⁶ If the Wounded Woman was collecting crocuses, then she should have a basket and she should have collected more than one flower. The details of the depiction thus suggest that she was not participating in the ceremonial harvest when her foot injury occurred. Rather, a separate ceremony appears to be represented in the Wounded Woman Fresco, one that occurred under the protection of the Enthroned Goddess directly above but served newly mature young women rather than those passing through the initial developments of puberty.

The carefully depicted details of the Xeste 3 frescoes suggest that two ritual events symbolically linked by the presence of crocuses but marking different stages in the

lives of Thera girls and young women are represented. The first, characterized by service to the goddess as a Saffron Gatherer, began in prepubescence when girls were 11 or 12 years old and apparently lasted for two seasons, perhaps ending with menarche around the ages of 13 or 14. These girls demonstrated the end of their childhood by beginning to grow out their hair to adult lengths, and collected saffron for the Enthroned Goddess, their protectress during this dangerous period of growth and biological change. Puberty ended with adulthood and adult status; and, for Thera women, this probably meant marriage. The second ritual, which also took place during the crocus harvest under the protection of the Enthroned Goddess, is depicted below in the lustral basin. Here the Wounded Woman, who at 16 or 17 is depicted as physically mature and sexually available, suffers a painful experience of bloodshed, probably in preparation for marriage, defloration, and the childbirth that would follow. The single crocus blossom, as suggested by Rehak, could symbolize the power of saffron as the gift of the goddess to act as a health supplement, a pain killer, and an emmenagogue – a “morning-after pill” – that allowed women to control conception by promoting menses.⁶⁷ This complex fresco cycle thus emphasizes the reproductive lives of women: first their transition from childhood into puberty and then their marriage, defloration, and perhaps even their herbal regulation of pregnancy. Moreover, these rites seem designed to engender Thera girls into the adult female roles expected of them by Thera society, culminating with the integration of the girls into the adult population as wives and mothers.

It may now be possible to put the Thera process of engendering its girls and young women into a broader perspective. First of all, the fresco program of Xeste 3 demonstrates a tremendous investment of resources in the engendering process by its depiction in an elaborate fresco program decorating one of the most expensively constructed buildings in Akrotiri. This heavy investment of wealth suggests that prehistoric Therans placed great significance on the events depicted in the Xeste 3 frescoes.

Secondly, the processing matrons decorating the upper floor of room 3b provide evidence of communal support for the engendering process.⁶⁸ One of these figures carries

⁶⁷ REHAK (n. 6), 13.

⁶⁸ For photographs, see DOUMAS (n. 2), pls. 131–134. The three boys and one adult male painted in the ground floor of room 3b, shown in DOUMAS (n. 2), pls. 109–111, may also act as supportive figures (MARINATOS [n. 5], 209–211), or may represent a separate ritual of initiation for boys (C. DOUMAS, ‘Η Ξεστή 3 καὶ οἱ Κυανοκέφαλοι στὴν τέχνη τῆς Θήρας, in ΕΙΛΑΠΙΝΗ. Festschrift for N. Platon (Athens 1987), 151–159); MORGAN (n. 34).

⁶⁵ MARINATOS (n. 8), 79; EADEM (n. 5), 208.

⁶⁶ Though its paint has faded, the basket of the youngest Saffron Gatherer is clearly preserved behind the girl, where she has placed it in the rocky landscape in order to collect flowers with both hands. See DOUMAS (n. 2), pl. 116.

a basket like the Saffron Gatherers and sports a crocus on her cheek, suggesting that in her youth she too once served the Enthroned Goddess as a Saffron Gatherer.⁶⁹ But this woman's dark hair sensibly bound in a snood, her thick waist, and her large, heavy breast clearly exposed to the viewer indicate that she is represented primarily in her capacity as a fertile wife and the mother of children. Her presence in a supporting role, like that of the other processing matrons, suggests the perpetuation of the Thera engendering rituals across generations, with members of the adult population guiding adolescents into adulthood as they too had once been guided. These figures thus suggest themes of continuity and permanence.

Thirdly, the form of the rites, which take place within a religious context in the presence of the Enthroned Goddess, suggests not only divine protection of the female participants but also a sense of divine destiny, as if the engendering process was inevitable and predestined by

the Thera cosmic order. In other words, one message of the Xeste 3 frescoes could have been that Thera girls were fated by divine order to grow up and to become wives and mothers. The very existence of the frescoes would have contributed to this sense of predetermination. By being painted onto the walls of Xeste 3, believed to be a semi-public building,⁷⁰ the frescoes were an important part of the visual and architectural environment of prehistoric Akrotiri and gave a concrete and permanent visual form to abstract Thera ideas about cosmic order. Thus the frescoes not only helped to promote culturally specific Thera ideas about the engendering of girls and young women, they also gave these beliefs the eternal, timeless status of ideal pictorial form.

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⁶⁹ REHAK (n. 6), 12.

⁷⁰ MARINATOS, Thera VII (n. 2), 23.

AEGEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Aegean Archaeology publishes annually field reports, synthetic studies, theoretical papers, notes, book reviews, and review articles that concern the Aegean world – the cultures and societies which comprised the civilizations of the Aegean basin and its bordering regions. Contributions are accepted in traditional areas of the Greek and Anatolian Aegean sphere, principally Neolithic, Bronze Age and Early Iron Age-Archaic material cultures. Encouraging a broad geographic, cultural, and chronological perspective, the editors also consider submissions in areas impinging physically, culturally, or theoretically on the Aegean realm – including the Balkans, Syria-Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, Italy, and Sicily – and in periods peripheral to the main chronological focus, should their contents be made directly and substantially relevant to the study of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Aegean.

The editors welcome especially reports presenting the results of any stage of fieldwork, including survey, excavation, ethnographic and environmental studies, and analyses of architecture or artifact, faunal, and floral assemblages. Short preliminary or annual reports of surveys and excavations, and studies of artifact/ecofact assemblages from excavation and survey contexts receive priority consideration. Brief notes are also encouraged, including announcements of new data or recent discoveries; new inscriptions or tablets; short papers that are narrow in focus or provide the basis for discussion and debate.

For each article scheduled for publication, the editors will accept high quality 35 mm color slides of artifacts and physical contexts to be made available via the internet at three resolutions (600×400; 1200×800; and 1800×1200 dots per inch) suitable for detailed study and archive purposes. The *Aegean Archaeology* on-line images will be supported by *Apollo: An Infrastructure for Teaching the Ancient Mediterranean and Medieval Worlds* (<http://apollo.classics.unc.edu>) in the Department of Classics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Starting in the fall of 2000, the Apollo image database will permit the archiving of the results of excavations and surveys. Color images for publication on-line should be sent to D.C. Haggis at Department of Classics, 212 Murphey Hall, CB #3145, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3145, U.S.A. They should be accompanied by a figure list with complete captions and archiving information (see instructions for authors).

Manuscripts should be in English and may be of any reasonable length appropriate to the subject matter and number of illustrations and written on Microsoft Word. All submissions are refereed by at least two specialist readers.

Manuscripts and books for review should be sent to:

Professor Bogdan Rutkowski and Dr. Krzysztof Nowicki, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Al. Solidarności 105, 00-140 Warszawa, Poland or to Professor Donald C. Haggis, Department of Classics, 212 Murphey Hall, CB #3145, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3145, U.S.A.