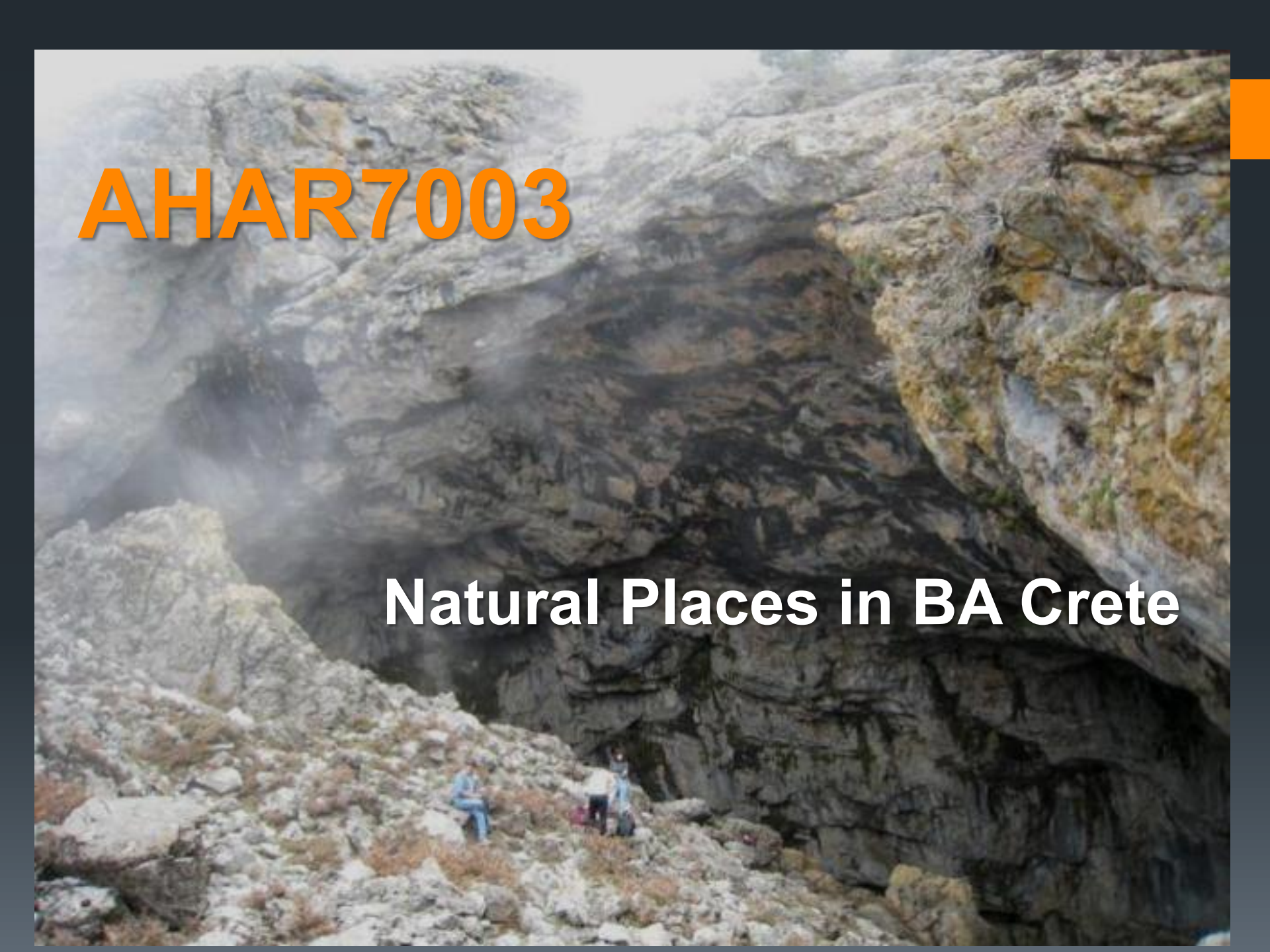


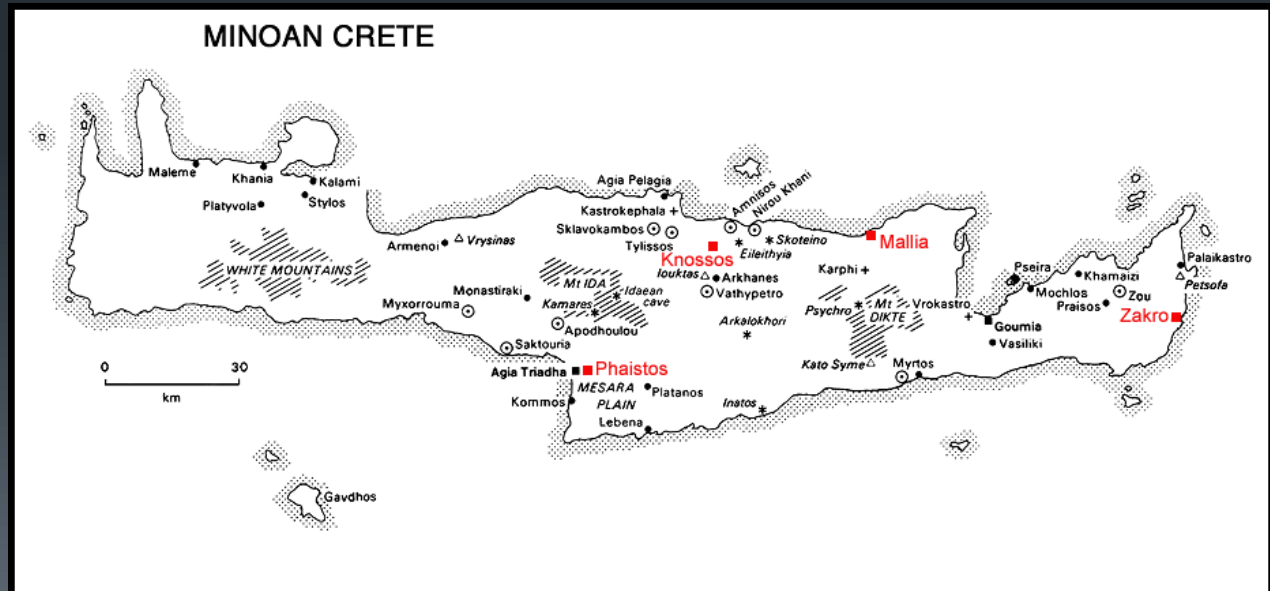


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Natural Places in BA Crete

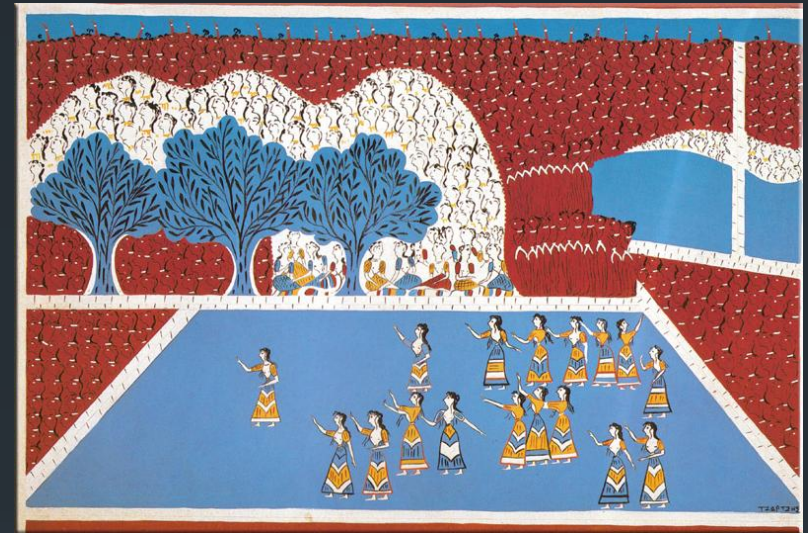
Minoan Crete

- 1900-1700 BC:
 - Middle Minoan IB-Middle Minoan IIIA
 - Old Palace Period / Proto-Palatial Period
- 1700-1425 [1500 BC]
 - Middle Minoan IIIB-Late Minoan IB
 - New Palace Period / Palatial Period
- MM IA expansion into hinterland & development of new cult places:
 - Peak sanctuaries
 - Cave sanctuaries



Minoan Religion

- Clear evidence for special relationship with nature:
 - Location of cult places
 - Iconographies of cult
- Nature a vehicle for the epiphany of a deity & may embody the divine
- Exploring cult at natural places & how these were also embedded within the built environment



Reconstruction of Sacred Grove
Fresco, Knossos

Ecstatic Religion

- Attention focusing: heightened awareness on part of human celebrant
- Epiphany:
 - Invokes presence of the deity
 - Occurs in specialised sacred location / liminal boundary between two worlds
 - Ecstatic ceremony, possibly implying use of stimulants (alcohol or drugs)
- Very restricted aspect of cult, & esoteric knowledge
- Celebrants: specific gestures, dancing, shaking trees, hugging a baetyl



Minoan sealstone

Iconography

- Warren (1988): Minoan iconography reveals existence of several different rituals located within natural landscape:
 - Ecstatic dance rituals in sacred groves
 - Hugging baetyls
- Aim was to “communicate with the divine or to induce the divinity to communicate with or affect the human or the material world” (Warren 1988: 13)



Gold signet rings



Archaeology of Natural Places

- Explores how specific locales in the hinterland of human settlement become incorporated within the spiritual world of human communities
- Places which evoke certain responses from people – they are imbued with a “sense of place”
- But these are not monumentalised by the communities which visit & maybe revere these spaces
 - Archaeological evidence for sustained & repeated (ceremonial/ritual) activity at these places
 - Physically these spaces are largely unaltered
 - Instead the distinct properties of the locale which is the focus of human action

What are Natural Places?

- Special locales in the landscape to which meaning is attributed
- Unaltered places which provide the location for specific types of human action
 - Early cult places of the Greek Iron Age: places where people gathered, feasted together, & made sacrifices to the gods
 - No attempt to monumentalise these places
 - Natural features were the focus of veneration/action



Atsipadhes, peak sanctuary

Minoan Natural Places

- Old Palace period: Minoan cult primarily enacted within natural landscape
 - Peak sanctuaries
 - Cave sanctuaries
- New Palace period: gradual move to location of cult within palace centres & only a few “palatial” natural places survive



Kamares Cave

Cave Sanctuaries

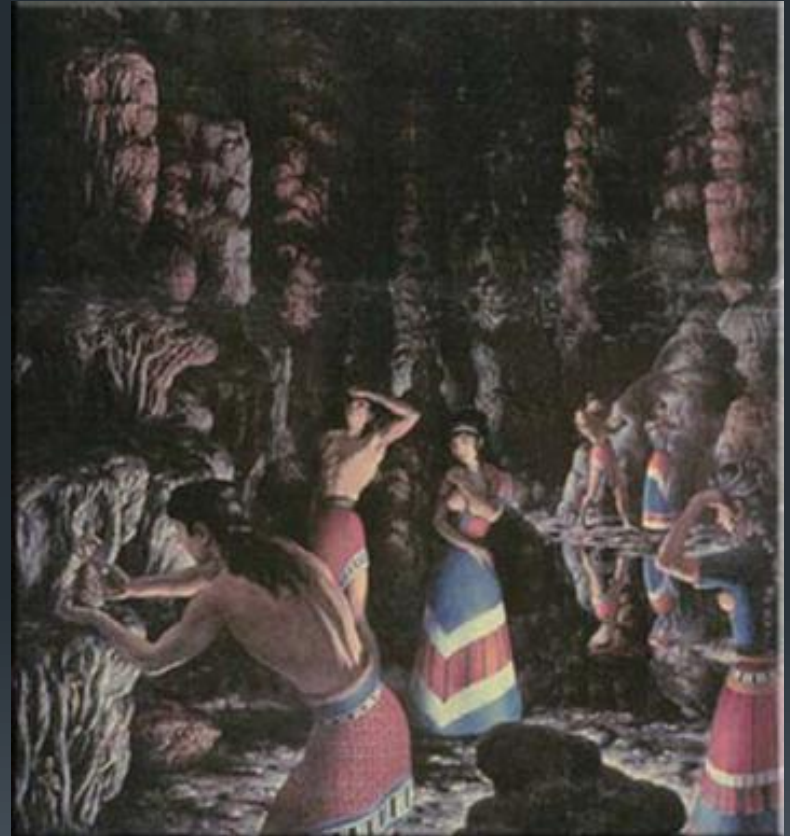
- Between around 12 & 36 caves have evidence ritual
- Clearly considered to be sacred/liminal, a place to access the divine
- Frequently visible from the nearest palace or settlement



Kamares cave

Cave Sanctuaries

- The locale itself evokes certain responses from people:
 - Imbued with a “sense of place”
 - Unaltered, kept natural rather than monumentalised
 - Evidence for sustained & repeated ceremonial activity at these places



Reconstruction of performance
in a cave sanctuary

Minoan Cave Sanctuaries

- First ritual action in caves dates to MM IA
- Cave sanctuaries are relatively rare in comparison to peak sanctuaries
- Embodied cult experience:
 - Contrast between warm dry exterior & cold damp interior
 - Play on senses was a means of focusing attention
 - Creating heightened awareness on part of the human celebrant



Psychro cave

Natural or Shaped Places?

- Natural aspects situate caves in symbolic realm
- Spaces manipulated & shaped by worshippers
- Psychro cave:
 - Built terrace (4-5m x 40m) leading to cave entrance
 - Upper chamber, 25 x 20m: area where offerings are made. Built Neopalatial altar & storeroom
 - Lower chamber, c.65m down from entrance: pool of water surrounded by crevices, stalactites etc



Psychro cave

Water

- Watery associations
- Tyree: sacred caves "are deep & damp, usually with copious amounts of water within, either dripping &/or in pools"
- Offerings placed in pools



Psychro cave

Stalactites & Stalagmites

- Prominent & appear to be focus of ritual action:
 - Walls built around some (Cave of Eileithyia at Amnisos)
 - Offerings scattered around them (Melidoni & Psychro)
 - Double axes were inserted into the stalagmites (Psychro)
- Some were manually enhanced:
 - Rubbed smooth
 - Had fragments removed
 - Two examples with Minoan rock art: images of humans, wild animals, birds & fish



Eileithyia cave

Ritual Action

- Objects found in cave illustrate the nature of ritual performed in caves
 - Pottery (cups & jugs) & food remains: feasting
 - Symbolic objects (miniature vessels, figurines, double axes)
 - Personal adornment
 - Items associated with body modification (tweezers)
 - Bronze tools



Kamares ware cup



Bronze tools, Psychro



Gold double axe
Arkalochori

Gendered Action?

- New Palace period: typically offered bronze figurines
 - Possibly making gestures of worship: human celebrants?
 - Or ecstatic dancing?
 - More female than male figures at cave sanctuaries
- Reflecting gender of the dedicants or the nature of the deity?



Bronze figurine

Caves & the Tiered Cosmos

- Movement into caves represents a passage to a **subterranean realm** inhabited by spirits & spirit-animals
- Movement from light to dark & back again marks transition from one state to another (from dark to light or from one world/condition to another)
- Light also refers to the shaman's ability to 'see' in the dark, both literally (as mentioned above) and metaphorically, seeing what others can not perceive



Peak Sanctuaries

- Mainly East Crete in Proto-Palatial period
- Peatfield identifies 2 distinct types:
 - **Palatial peak sanctuaries:** associated with palaces & towns
 - **Rural peak sanctuaries:** associated with villages & farmsteads. Progressively abandoned at end of Old Palace Period



Peak Sanctuaries: Location

- On mountain but not at highest point:
 - Altitude varies between c.200m & 1000m (i.e. associated with summer transhumance)
- Intervisibility: between sanctuaries & with settlements
- Bintliff: sacred hierarchy of peak sanctuaries
 - one predominant over all other sanctuaries within a region?
- Typically, no identifiable structural remains

Petsofas



Mount Iouktas



Ritual Action

- Thick layers of ash from bonfires:
 - Network of beacons interlinking the sanctuaries
 - Place of pilgrimage?
- Large number of animal figurines: pastoral cult
- Terracotta figurines: deliberately deposited & frequently deliberately broken
 - Domesticated animals predominate
 - Human figures: possibly represent the worshippers?
 - Votive limbs (hands & feet, phalli): *tamata*
- Pottery: communal feasting



Neo-Palatial Peak Sanctuaries

- From MM III cult was institutionalised under palatial authority
 - Majority of peak sanctuaries abandoned
 - Only those associated with palaces survive
- Monumentalisation of cult places
- Richer votives & links with palaces
- Popular cult moves to caves?



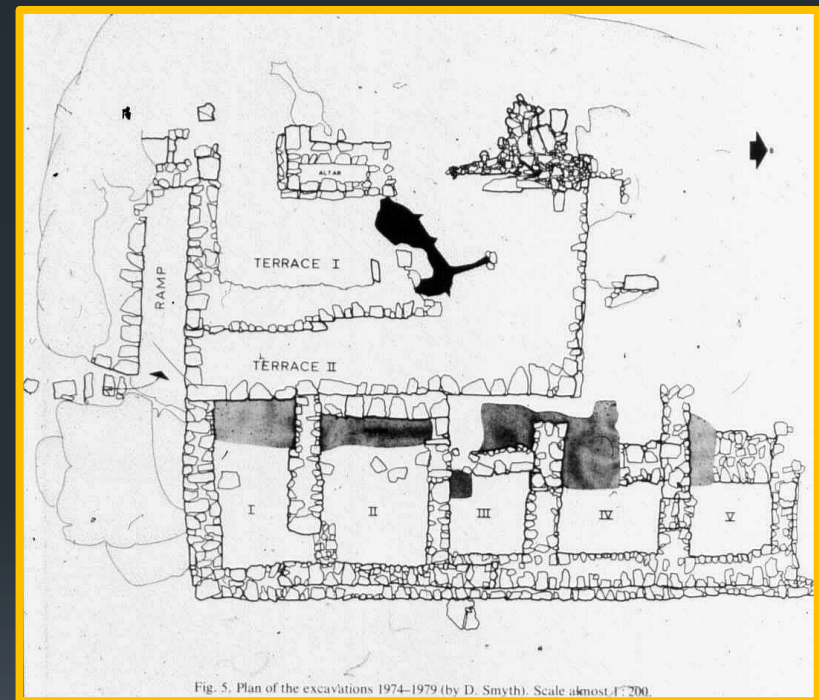
Knossos, central court



Stone vase fragment,
Knossos

Modification of Natural Places

- Temenos wall
- Some sites have small elliptical enclosures
- Small number (palatial) have elaborate multi-roomed enclosures with stone altars
- Iouktas – elaboration of cult place: three terraces, built altar & subsidiary structures



Plan of Iouktas

Summary

- Rich evidence from Crete for the importance of natural places & their incorporation in the creation of Minoan symbolic worlds
 - Early form of spiritual communion & marking of place?
- Many natural places are unaltered
- However, in most cases there is some form of modification, to mark their special nature
- Increasingly in palatial period the sacred landscapes are tamed within the palaces