

Entangled Threads: Who Owned the West House at Akrotiri?

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Abstract

Previous studies of the West House at Akrotiri (Thera) interpret it based on special features of the architecture or with an emphasis on particularistic aspects of its wall paintings. Other studies focus on the extent to which the house symbolizes or demonstrates Minoanization. This paper reconsiders the significance and meaning of the West House from a holistic perspective, taking into consideration its plan, pictorial program, and artifacts, using concepts of entanglement and transculturalism. It will be suggested that the owner was a trader in textiles and that the décor of the house represents aspects of his biography, means of earning a living, and symbolic interactions with the community.

Introduction

The site of Akrotiri is located on the southern tip of the island of Thera, which was covered by an eruption of the still live volcano in the center of the island. It has the relative date of Late Minoan IA, and has been scientifically dated to 1614 BC, while pottery specialists prefer to place the eruption in the 16th century, however the controversies of its dating are beyond the scope of this paper (see Friedrich et al. 2014; Manning 2014). The West House is among five freestanding houses among several blocks of attached townhouses and it is located roughly in the center of the excavated site where a widening of the road leading through the town forms a small plateia (approximately 10 x 10 x 15 m), the Triangle Square, which faces the southeast façade of the West House (Doulas 1983:51). This paper aims to take a fresh look at the West House at Akrotiri, Thera using the concepts of entanglement and

transculturalism. In discussing these concepts, Stockhammer (2012: 46–48) distinguishes between “relational entanglement” whereby new meanings become attached to a foreign object, which may even be transformed into a personal possession, and “material entanglement” whereby a newly created object combines the familiar with the foreign, and may become appropriated and entangled with foreign social practices as well as local ones. I will be looking at the West House as an appropriation of and entanglement with Minoan culture. Transculturalism emphasizes the intentionality behind the use of an object. A transcultural approach regards the emergence and transformation of identity as multivocal, drawing on the symbolisms, objects, social practices, and artistic and technical styles of a broad cultural and ethnic range of social actors (see also Hitchcock and Maeir 2013; Hitchcock 2011a).

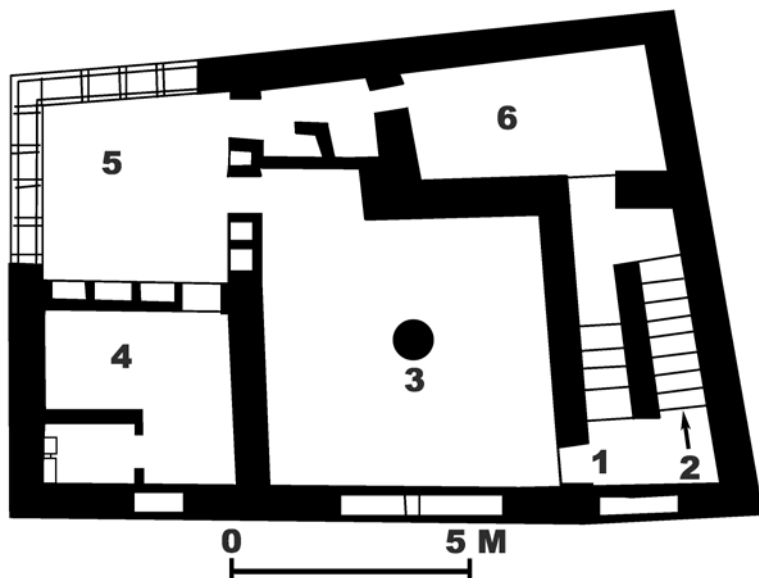


Figure 1: Plan of the West House (Drawing: B.T. O'Neill, courtesy the Archaeological Society, Excavations at Akrotiri, Thera)

Description of the West House

The West House assumes the plan of non-palatial Minoan villas and houses, which exhibit a tendency for arranging rooms radially around a central room that served as the circulation hub of the building. This style of plan has been referred to as a “square-within-a-square,” “square room with a column,” and “vernacular Hall” (e.g. Hitchcock 2011b, with further references) (Fig. 1). Its similarity to the Archanes house model has been frequently noted (e.g., Palyvou 1987). Its size (in the range of 150 m²), the limited use of ashlar in the form

of local tufa blocks used to strengthen the corners and the area around the windows (Palyvou 1999: 611), and ground plan of the house associate it both with the vernacular tradition as well as with McEnroe’s (1982: 7-10, fig. 2) Type 2 house plan. However, the elaborate program of marine-themed frescoes decorating rooms 5 and 4 on the upper floor indicate occupancy or use by the elite stratum of Aegean society, and fresco decoration is a feature limited to McEnroe’s Type 1 of Minoan villa.

Like many Minoan and Theran houses, the West House is separated into storage/service quarters, in this



Figure 2: Photograph of the West House and Triangle Square (Photo: L.A. Hitchcock, courtesy the Archaeological Society, Excavations at Akrotiri, Thera)

case, with storage/service areas on the ground floor and multifunctional living spaces on the first floor (Fig. 2). The architectural details and varying levels of rooms on the ground floor are very clearly set out by Palyvou (2005: 46-53). The main staircase leads to the first floor and to a second story, probably limited to the east wing (Doumas 1992: 45). The staircase is located at the entry vestibule in the southeast corner of the house and was illuminated by a window next to the door, a typical feature of Thera houses (Palyvou 1990). Entrance to the rest of the upper floor was gained through room 6, a pantry, so named because it was “crammed” with pottery (Doumas 1992: 46), including pouring vessels and over 100 conical

cups (Marinatos 1983: 15). Many luxury Minoan wares were found on the brightly painted shelves in room 5 (summarized in Morgan 1988: 4). Each room of the upper floor contained a rhyton, most of varying types, and several more came from uncertain locations. Koehl (1990: 355, 358-359; 2006: 294) associates rhyta with ritual purification and anointment, while Hägg (1990: 183) ~~also~~ associates them with libation, particularly when paired with tripod offering tables as found in room 5. A passageway to room 5 also contained an auxiliary staircase, another typical feature of Minoan and Thera houses that connected only with the ground floor. Although located in the northwest corner, room 5 gave access to both

room 4 to the south, and to room 3, the large square room with the column. Room 3 contained more than 450 loom weights, which are of the flat discoid type with one or two holes associated with Minoan Crete. Their weights vary from 125-285 grams (Tzachili 1990: 381, 383). Thus, their style and weight variation offered a great deal of versatility with regard to types of thread that could be used for weaving (e.g., Cutler 2012). The fact that the weights were of a Minoan style, suggests the use of particular motor skills acquired at a very young age indicating that women had been brought over from Crete to teach children or had even married into the community (Cutler 2016), increasing the level of cultural entanglement at Akrotiri. Just three other buildings contained loom weights (A, B, and D) (Tzachili 1990: 385), for a total of four in eleven houses with weaving activities taking place. Tzachili (1990: 385-386) suggests that room 3 could have accommodated as many as 5 looms using a maximum of 30 weights, with two persons working per loom. As this doesn't account for the numbers found, she suggests that the weights were changed to accommodate the production of different kinds of textiles. She believes that the installations were set up permanently and that the absence of weaving implements in other houses points to a textile workshop.

The miniature or "Flotilla" and "Nilotic" frescoes decorated the upper area of the north, south, west and east walls of room 5, although significant portions are not preserved

(Televantou 2000: 838-839; 1990: 313). The walls of room 5 were appointed with *polyparathyra* and shelves (Palyvou 1989; Televantou 1990: 313). The Nilotic fresco depicts a stream or river adorned with colored rocks, palm trees, papyri, birds, a predatory cat, and a winged griffin. The Flotilla fresco depicts five towns (Televantou 2000: 838; 1990), land masses, and country scenes. It also depicts ships decorated with festoons, carrying elites with boars' tusk helmets, and accompanied by dolphins, as well as what appears to have been a battle scene with drowning men (Wachsmann 2008: 88-89) (Fig. 3). Wachsmann (2008: 115) convincingly argues for the black amorphous shape emanating from them to be blood seeping into the water. The theme of water and emphasis on the supernatural seem to be the main things linking the Nilotic and Flotilla frescos together. The idea of identifying the riverine landscape as a Nilotic genre scene may be influenced by the fact that it did exist as a popular genre in later Roman art (Versluys 2002). More recently Vlachopoulos and Zorzos (2014) identified the Nilotic fresco as a seasonal stream on Thera, based on sediment analysis indicating that the exotic plants depicted are represented on Thera by phytoliths.

Two large panels in room 5 depict two nude youths: one holding bunches of dolphin fish (Economidis 2000: 555), the other holding tunny fish (Mylona 2000), both in a master of animals' attitude. The special status of the fish is indicated by the lack of

faunal evidence for them at Akrotiri (Mylona 2000: 565). One youth stands in the northeast corner and the other one is in southwest corner of room 5 where they seem to be converging on a stone, tripod offering table on a shelf in the northwest corner that was decorated with painted plaster depicting a marine motif featuring dolphins (e.g. Marinatos 1984: 38). In the doorway leading from room 5 to room 4 (Doulas 1983: 84; Televantou 1990: 313), is a panel depicting a young girl with a long robe, gold hoop earring, with red lips and a red ear holding what looks like an incense burner. She has been characterized as a house servant or a young priestess based on her attire, coloring, and burning an incense offering of saffron (Marinatos 1984: 49-50; Morgan 1988: 143). Another possibility is that the incense, which could also be frankincense or myrrh served to cover smells connected with the activities in room 4. Earle (2012: 776) has used *comparanda* from various cultures and representations of floating ears on Minoan seals to suggest that the painting of her ear in red symbolized the undertaking of auditory epiphanies. If this was the case, the incense may have also played a role in summoning a deity. Two wall paintings representing pots of lilies also decorate room 4, however its primary decoration depicted *ikria* or panels made of animal hides, which were decorated with festoons and “waz-lilies” on top of the poles. They are only otherwise represented on the cabin of an individual who is accepted as the “leader of the fleet”

(e.g. Marinatos 1983: 6) (Fig. 4). A small partitioned off area in the southwest corner of room 4 contained a toilet composed of a bench and a vertical pipe connected to the town’s sewage system, which was intended to move large amounts of water (e.g., Palyvou 2005: 53; Televantou 1990: 309; Doulas 1983: 54). Remains of a hearth, the broken fragments of a bathtub (Doulas 1983: 54-55, fig. 8), and a bronze tripod cauldron are also reported from this room. Other finds are detailed in Marinatos (1983: 11, Tables 1, 2).

Summary of Other Interpretations of the Flotilla Fresco

Some of the problems with understanding the West House result from the numerous interpretations of the “Flotilla” and “Nilotic” frescoes that decorated the upper floor, many of them focusing on just one aspect of the frescoes. That they had a function is without a doubt (e.g. Hägg 1985: esp. 209). The many interpretations are too numerous to catalog here, but a few of the most notable ones will be summarized. They have been seen as a representation of Homeric poetry, sung by women weaving in room 3 while receiving light from the Window of Appearance as suggested by Morris (1989), the site of a sacred marriage, a military procession, an expedition to another country (Libya is a favorite suggestion), and as a celebration of spring, which is also the beginning of the sailing season (below). More recently, Strasser and Chapin (2014) convincingly argue that the scenes take place on Thera based on their



Figure 3: Naval Battle Scene with Drowning Men from the Flotilla Fresco (Doumas 1992, courtesy the Archaeological Society, Excavations at Akrotiri, Thera).

identification of geological features including the caldera area beyond the island, tafoni (a geological surface with a honey-combed appearance caused by weathering and salt spray), and volcanic dykes.

N. Marinatos (1984; 1995) was one of the few who tried to link all of the iconography in the building into a unified theme, noting scenes of normal life on the upper part of the fresco depicting the countryside and disorder and conflict in parts of the naval scene below. Among the houses represented, there is a house balcony with a “Horns of Consecration” and a waving woman who is depicted in hierarchic scale. Marinatos (1984: esp. fig.32; 1983) initially interpreted the woman as a Priestess saluting the fleet, but she later (Marinatos 1995:

39-40) interpreted her as the “wife” of the “Captain of the fleet,” an idea I’ve come to at least partially agree with. The military scene symbolizes the returning of village life to normal. However, her interpretation is unsatisfying based on the over-emphasis on religion in interpreting room 5 as the main room of a shrine and room 4 as a preparation room and on the problematic window of appearances, which omits the placement of the supporting beam in the center of the window (Palyvou 1988: pl.14). Säflund (1981: 197) has noted the similarity between the Building B complex in the West House based on its balcony, which finds a parallel in the Archanes House model and in the large window that is comparable to the house’s “Window of Appearances.” However,



Figure 4: *Leader of the Fleet Scene from the Flotilla Fresco* (Doumas 1992, courtesy the Archaeological Society, Excavations at Akrotiri, Thera).

where he (Säflund 1981) sees religion, I see a manipulation of symbolism. And, while his argument for an *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage celebration is appealing, particularly with regard to how he links the *ikria* or cabin screens in the bathroom, room 4, with the cabins on the ships in the flotilla fresco, it doesn't explain the weaving equipment or what was going on in the house the rest of the year, unless we interpret it as a honeymoon lodge.

The Problems

The main problems with understanding the West House emphasize the identity of its inhabitants and the

interpretation of its narratively dense frescoes. Was the house a shrine inhabited by religious functionaries (Marinatos 1983; 1984); a private house depicting a religious nautical procession (Morgan 1988; Wachsmann 2008); the site of a sacred marriage rite (Säflund 1981); does it prove the early date of Homeric poetry (Morris 1989) and is it linked to other Greek mythology (Sali 2000); does it use epic formulas of the Minoan period (Watrout 2007); does it demonstrate evidence of a Minoan colony (e.g. papers in Hägg and Marinatos 1984) or is it some combination of the above suggestions? If the inhabitants were not

Minoan, then how Minoanized were they, and does this matter? As defined above, an entangled approach emphasizes the materiality of objects (including the house!) and their spatial relationships to context, which permit the reconstruction of the relationship between the objects and agents. While their makers, owners, and/or users are primary concerns, I will be focusing on the owner(s) and the users.

Biography of Owner

What most of the interpretations of the West House lack is a holistic approach, with certain elements emphasized to the exclusion or marginalization of other elements or features. Rather than trying to identify the owner as Mycenaean or Minoan on an island that produced its own style of ceramics featuring unique shapes and coloration such as kymbai and nipped ewers, while drawing on many Minoan styles for inspiration (Wiener 1990: 135), I would suggest using entanglement with Minoan culture and appropriation of Minoan culture to promote transnational messages of status, linking economic and cultic functions.

In doing this I would stress the relationship of the house to its likely owner and inhabitants, who I propose ran a successful business in the production and trade in textiles, and possibly even engaged in small-scale metallurgical production on the ground floor as well. Here, I would also stress the connection between religion, symbolism and industry (e.g. Knapp 1986), the biography of the owner, and evidence for diacritical

feasting as indicated both in the various rhyta found, as well as in the numerous amount of drinking and pouring vessels stored there.

Furthermore, I suggest that one of the things that has inhibited the interpretation of the “Flotilla” fresco and associated wall paintings is the attempt to place them into a linear narrative or alternatively interpret them as a single event. I believe that they represent various biographical events taking place during the life of the owner of the house. Morgan (1988: 13) has contrasted the unity of action in the ship procession scene on the south wall in contrast to the multiplicity of events taking place on the north wall, which includes scenes of meeting, pastoralism, shipwreck, and warriors. She suggests it is unlikely that all of these things took part simultaneously. Foster (2012: 675-676) has expressed the possibility of a personal narrative taking place, suggesting a maritime occupation for the owner, but without elaboration. Televantou (1990: 325) suggests that the painter, possibly at the behest of the patron, placed “the most important events” in the wall painting. Wachsmann (2008: 88) stresses the lack of involvement among various individuals depicted, observing that the inhabitants of the settlement seem oblivious to the soldiers. All of these observations support an interpretation that the wall paintings in the West House were biographical.

Morgan Brown (1977: 144-145) associates the ship procession with the start of the sailing season (Wachsmann 2000: 810), which makes a lot of sense,

as it also means that it is the beginning of the trading season. Wachsmann (1980; 2008: 89; 106; 108-110; also Foster 2012) also agrees with the idea that a procession or a race is taking place because of archaizing features on the ships such as the use of paddles and the horizontal stern device, which he concludes were only attached for processional use. He compares the Thera boats to dragon boats of southeast Asia, once used for practical purposes and now used for ceremonial ones, including races. Wachsmann (2008: 88) also contrasts the use of paddles in the “processional” ships to the use of oars by the ships associated with the drowning men. He (Wachsmann 2008: 87) suggests that less well-preserved miniature fragments of ships from Kea also indicate a maritime procession. However, Wachsmann (2008: 110-111) notes the versatility of such ships, which could be used in processions as well as to carry out military activity, while Wedde (2005: 30) observes that when manned by a skeleton crew, they could be suitable for trade.

In discussing the lions found chasing weaker animals on the hillside and depicted on a ship with a frieze of lions, Morgan (1988: 45-49) notes that the rarer the animal the more likely it is to be endowed with symbolic meaning. Lions are associated with strength (Morgan 1995) and may sometimes even stand as a metaphor for people of high status, as in the Pre-Dynastic palette from Abydos, known as the Battlefield Palette. In the center of the palette in hierarchic scale, the King is symbolized as a Lion, who has

pinned down the enemy and is preparing to disembowel him; his tail is not waving naturally overhead, but curling through his legs; protecting the genital area, at the same time perhaps symbolizing the phallus (Davis 1992: fig. 34). The marine motifs, the dolphins, as well as the lion decorating one of the ships could symbolize the owner’s elite status in Akrotiri and his dominance over the sea to promote the family’s trade connections with different ships from the area and/or farther away taking part. Brekoulaki and Egan (2014) have proposed that the argonaut was emblematic of Pylian naval power and/or served as a royal totem based on monumental fragments of argonauts from the throne room in the palace at Pylos and on their appearance as a frieze decorating the hull of a ship on fragments from hall 64. In a joint paper, I (Hitchcock et al. 2016) have similarly argued that the triton as a predatory mollusk served as a metaphor for Minoan power. The soldier scenes and drowning men could indicate activities from a different time in the owner’s life, perhaps at an earlier period in military and maritime service, or it could represent current communal concerns of warding off piracy (e.g. Morgan 1988: 159, 164; Niemeier 2000: 830; Hitchcock and Maeir 2014). Prytulak (1982) has called attention to what may be racks of spears in some of the ships depicted as clusters of red horizontal lines at the top of the main cabin, and the dispensing of spears that is taking place in the naval battle scene. Both the larger and the miniature frescoes might act like projec-

tions as noted by Palyvou (2000: 429; 2012: 13) in that the owners and visitors to the house might interact with them. The concept of architecture and art working in tandem like this was pioneered early on by Marinatos and Hägg (1986). In addition, while the biographical scenes in the marine frescoes simultaneously project many of the events of the owner's life, around the room, he might reflect on major events in his life, ritual activities, and on his accomplishments, and regale visitors with stories about them. They served to bring the outside to the inside where ritual could be re-enacted and perpetuated (e.g., Hägg 1985: 212), while continually externalizing significant events in the owner's life for all to see. Wachsmann (2008: 120-122) has pointed out many ritualistic aspects among the people on shore such as the wearing of various types of garments such as heavy robes, animal hide skirts, sacral knots, and the making of a ritualistic gesture both on one of the boats and on the hill. The strong Minoan character of the house and of many of the depictions in the wall paintings, and the character of the artifacts such as the drinking vessels and the loom weights show the owners desire to affiliate with, appropriate and become culturally entangled with the Minoan civilization. In fact, we could say that all of these things used and experienced in tandem had agency in that they actively constructed the identity of the inhabitants of the house as well as visitors to that house.

The substantial numbers of loom weights in room 3 indicate a weav-

ing industry. Wiener (1990: 134; also Tzachili 1990: 387) suggested that they were enough to fill the house with looms, and may have also been used for sail making for the maritime industry. Tzachili (1990: 387) suggests a weaving industry based on Akrotiri's position as a harbor town. Discoid loom weights were used on a warp weighted loom and represent Cretan weaving technology that spread throughout the Aegean. Thus, they indicate a desire to create Minoan style textiles (Cutler 2012) from a variety of sources. The staple material for textile production may have been sheep as supported by later Linear B tablets from the Knossos D series (Morgan 1988: 60). However, the moths depicted as ship decoration can also be connected with the textile producing industry. Gigantic moths are depicted on the prow of ship 1, while ship 2 has two on the prow and two on the mast (Panagiotakopulu 2000: 585). Panagiotakopulu (2000: 586-588) identifies these as particular species of moth: *Saturnia pyri* used in silk production and possibly *Pachypasa otus*, a cocoon and chrysalis of which was found calcified at Akrotiri. Although Panagiotakopulu (2000: 586) suggests the cocoons were imported from Kos or Amorgos, she raises the possibility that the intention of depicting the moths is to provide a symbol of a traded commodity, namely cocoons for a silk industry. This industry may have been supplemented by the collection of sea-silk (*byssos*) collected from a large mussel species known as *Pinna nobilis* as convincingly argued by Burke (2012), who also believes it

was placed in a shell as an offering instead of incense in the wall painting of the young “priestess.” In addition, Panagiotakopulu (2000: 586) suggests that a star motif depicted on the ships possibly represents imported cotton. Morgan (1988: 93-103) notes the wide variety of garments are depicted on various individuals in the miniature frescoes and elite garments are well known from depictions of women in Xeste 3 and in the House of the Ladies. The transparent veils worn in Xeste 3 may have been made from flax (Tzachili 1990: 388). All of this fits in with the idea of different types of cloth production by the owner of this house or in the other houses at Akrotiri where loom weights were found as does the set of lead balance weights found in the house which could be used for undertaking transactions in the sale of raw or finished materials (Michailidou 1990: esp. 416). It might even be possible that these other weaving establishments were engaged in the festival depicted in the West House frescoes.

The rhyton found in room 3 could have been used for anointing the cloth with perfumed oil, to make it ‘shining’ and ‘fragrant,’ a tradition known from the *Iliad* (Crielaard 2011: 97). Koehl (1981: esp. 186) discusses in detail how conical rhyta were well known from domestic contexts and how they might be used to strain and/or funnel liquids. In addition, he (Koehl 2006: 286) suggests that they could have been used for the ritualistic manipulation of perfumed oils, indicating that if ritual anointment took place in Aegean culture, then they were ideal for

this task. Shelmerdine (1999: 104) postulates a close link between fragrant cloth and deities based on literary texts, while Fappas (2011) and Murphy (2013) elaborate on the physical and sensory aspects of perfume use such its association with status and ability to communicate stages of ritual activity. Although seafaring and the development of trade routes in the Mediterranean was driven by the quest for metals (Wiener 1990; Southeast Aegean/Southwest Anatolian Region (SASCAR) conference 2016), this came to be accompanied by trade in other commodities such as cloth and decorated ceramics (Marthari et al. 1990), and even diplomatic activity to help maintain the stability of this system (Linder 1981).

While the window of appearances would have served on a regular basis to admit light to the room in order to work, there is no reason it could not have also served as a window where the owner and his family might appear to a celebration he provisioned in the *plateia*. Hägg (1987) drew attention to the significance of the relationship between large windows, facades, and public courts. And, he (Hägg 1987: 134) has suggested that an individual could appear on either side of a central post. This would create a tripartite scheme analogous to the scheme aniconically represented by a “Tripartite Shrine” or antithetic group (e.g., Crowley 1989). Such a scheme would have heightened the religious symbolism of any ceremonial display. Marinatos (1984: 11, 51) believed the “Triangle Square” served as a location for religious gatherings or as a staging

area for a religious procession.

The spatial segmentation of the house through its division into smaller and larger as well as public and more private spaces, its proximity yet separateness from the triangle square down below, suggest diacritical feasting activities took place in and around the West House. The plateia below is comparable in size to the "West Court" at Gournia and it could have served as a logical place to undertake feasting activities. It is also important to note that as at Gournia, the court was situated on the main road, near a monumental gate, which could have been the end point of a procession from the sea (Hägg 1985: 212). The spectacle of the townspeople below in the court, the frescoes, and the impressive weaving industry would have impressed visitors from Crete and other visiting traders, entertained by the owner. The practice of feasting or at least ritualistic drinking is supported by the more than 100 conical cups, as well as by the other elaborate pouring and libation vessels found in the West House. The segmentation of space into larger and more public as well as smaller and more private spaces, and variations of access that characterizes diacritical feasting could have been further emphasized not simply by the owner looking down at an assembled gathering from the "Window of Appearances," as well as by those not included in the activities within the house, but who could view guests on the first floor through the polyparathyra in room 5. It is possible that lines of site in the polyparathyra could be manipulated through

the use of hangings to conceal and reveal such activities to those watching from below (e.g. Marinatos and Hägg 1986). Room 3 was the main room of the house and Watrous (2007: 102) also suggests it was a place of wine consumption. Thus, the diacriticality of the drinking and libation activities would be promoted by the freestanding construction of the house.

Room 4 is private and may have indeed served at times as the bedroom of the owner as well as a place for special libations, with the Ikria making him feel he was in his beloved ship's cabin. However the hearth and associated bathtub fragments mentioned above indicate that during the day, the room could have been used for an industrial purpose. Mazow (2006-2007) has convincingly argued that bathtubs associated with weaving implements in Cyprus and in Philistia were being used for the purpose of wool scouring and/or fulling. Scouring is the process of cleaning wool to remove lanolin and other greases that could be used as a moisturizer in cosmetics, while fulling or felting involves matting a woven textile to produce a finished fabric (Mazow 2006-2007: 298). Both processes require hot water as well as a detergent that might be urine based, while fulling requires an individual to tread on the wool. The Linear B texts indicate that fullers were male and that they were held in high regard (Mazow 2006-2007: 299, with further references). Washing to remove salts is also required for sea-silk (Burke 2012: 172). Some of the other tubs found at Akrotiri could have also been used for this purpose.

Conclusion

This article has built on the work of many other scholars as well as contemporary studies of household and feasting activities, transnationalism and appropriation, and object biography in trying to put forward a new and totalizing narrative on the function of the West House and its inhabitants. It is hoped that other scholars might build upon this interpretation as more details about the house and ways of thinking about space come into sharper focus. It's quite possible that rather than poetry sung that corresponds to Homeric times, tales were sung, or most certainly told about the adventures and struggles of the owner in becoming a successful proprietor of cloth and provisioner of feasts. This may especially be the case as even much more mundane activities have stimulated poetry, such as the work of 1000 laborers to quarry enormous blocks at the Yang Shan quarry in Nanjing (Yuan Mei 1717-1798). One thing that persists in understanding of the West House and its wall paintings as well as many of the other paintings at Thera is their exoticism, noticed early on by Morgan (1988: 170), which advertised the status of the owner as a member of Club East Med(iterranean).

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