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METAPHYSIS

RITUAL, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE

**Proceedings of the 15th International Aegean Conference, Vienna,
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CONTENTS

Obituaries	ix
Preface	xiii
Abbreviations	xv

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Nanno MARINATOS	
<i>Myth, Ritual, Symbolism and the Solar Goddess in Thera</i>	3

A. FIGURINES

Eva ALRAM-STERN	
<i>Men with Caps: Chalcolithic Figurines from Aegina-Kolonna and their Ritual Use</i>	15
Florence GAIGNEROT-DRIESSEN	
<i>The Lady of the House: Trying to Define the Meaning and Role of Ritual Figures with Upraised Arms in Late Minoan III Crete</i>	21
Reinhard JUNG and Marco PACCIARELLI	
<i>A Minoan Statuette from Punta di Zambrone in Southern Calabria (Italy)</i>	29
Melissa VETTERS	
<i>All the Same yet not Identical? Mycenaean Terracotta Figurines in Context</i>	37
Eleni KONSOLAKI-YANNOPOULOU	
<i>The Symbolic Significance of the Terracottas from the Mycenaean Sanctuary at Ayios Konstantinos, Methana</i>	49

B. HYBRID AND MYTHICAL CREATURES

Fritz BLAKOLMER	
<i>Hierarchy and Symbolism of Animals and Mythical Creatures in the Aegean Bronze Age: A Statistical and Contextual Approach</i>	61
Karen Polinger FOSTER	
<i>Animal Hybrids, Masks, and Masques in Aegean Ritual</i>	69
Maria ANASTASIADOU	
<i>Wings, Heads, Tails: Small Puzzles at LM I Zakros</i>	77

C. SYMBOLISM

Janice L. CROWLEY	
<i>In the Air Here or from the World Beyond? Enigmatic Symbols of the Late Bronze Age Aegean</i>	89
Marianna NIKOLAIDOU	
<i>Materialised Myth and Ritualised Realities: Religious Symbolism on Minoan Pottery</i>	97
Helène WHITTAKER	
<i>Horns and Axes</i>	109

Olga KRZYSZKOWSKA	
<i>Warding off Evil: Apotropaic Practice and Imagery in Minoan Crete</i>	115
Emilia BANOU and Brent DAVIS	
<i>The Symbolism of the Scorpion in Minoan Religion: A Cosmological Approach on the Basis of Votive Offerings from the Peak Sanctuary at Ayios Yeoryios Sto Vouno, Kythera</i>	123
Nancy R. THOMAS	
<i>“Hair Stars” and “Sun Disks” on Bulls and Lions. A Reality Check on Movements of Aegean Symbolic Motifs to Egypt, with Special Reference to the Palace at Malkata</i>	129
Malcolm H. WIENER	
<i>Aegean Warfare at the Opening of the Late Bronze Age in Image and Reality</i>	139
D. SPACE / LANDSCAPE	
Santo PRIVITERA	
<i>The Tomb, the House, and the Double Axes: Late Minoan IIIA2 Hagia Triada as a Ritual and ‘Mythical’ Place</i>	149
Sam CROOKS, Caroline J. TULLY and Louise A. HITCHCOCK	
<i>Numinous Tree and Stone: Re-Animating the Minoan Landscape</i>	157
Barbara MONTECCHI	
<i>The Labyrinth: Building, Myth, and Symbol</i>	165
Birgitta EDER	
<i>Ideology in Space: Mycenaean Symbols in Action</i>	175
Lyvia MORGAN	
<i>The Transformative Power of Mural Art: Ritual Space, Symbolism, and the Mythic Imagination</i>	187
E. FUNERALS	
Luca GIRELLA	
<i>Aspects of Ritual and Changes in Funerary Practices Between MM II and LM I on Crete</i>	201
Anna Lucia D’AGATA and Sara DE ANGELIS	
<i>Funerals of Late Minoan III Crete: Ritual Acts, Special Vessels and Political Affiliations in the 14th and 13th Centuries BC</i>	213
Ann-Louise SCHALLIN	
<i>The Liminal Zone – The Evidence from the Late Bronze Age Dendra Cemetery</i>	223
Mary K. DABNEY	
<i>Mycenaean Funerary Processions as Shared Ritual Experiences</i>	229
Michael LINDBLOM and Gunnel EKROTH	
<i>Heroes, Ancestors or Just any Old Bones? Contextualizing the Consecration of Human Remains from the Mycenaean Shaft Graves at Lerna in the Argolid</i>	235
F. RELIGION / DEITIES	
Jeffrey S. SOLES	
<i>Hero, Goddess, Priestess: New Evidence for Minoan Religion and Social Organization</i>	247

Ute GÜNKEL-MASCHEK	
<i>Establishing the Minoan ‘Enthroned Goddess’ in the Neopalatial Period: Images, Architecture, and Elitist Ambition</i>	255
Veronika DUBCOVÁ	
<i>Divine Power from Abroad. Some New Thoughts about the Foreign Influences on the Aegean Bronze Age Religious Iconography</i>	263
Cynthia W. SHELMEERDINE	
<i>Poseidon, pa-ki-ja-na and Horse-Taming Nestor</i>	275
Irene SERRANO LAGUNA	
di-u-ja	285
G. SANCTUARIES	
Mercourios GEORGIADIS	
<i>Metaphysical Beliefs and Leska</i>	295
Wolf-Dietrich NIEMEIER	
<i>Ritual in the Mycenaean Sanctuary at Abai (Kalapodi)</i>	303
Olga PSYCHOYOS and Yannis KARATZIKOS	
<i>The Mycenaean Sanctuary at Prophitis Ilias on Mount Arachnaio within the Religious Context of the 2nd Millennium B.C.</i>	311
H. RITUALS / OFFERINGS	
Barbara HOREJS and Alfred GALIK	
<i>Hunting the Beast. A Reconstructed Ritual in an EBA Metal Production Centre in Western Anatolia</i>	323
Philip P. BETANCOURT, Thomas M. BROGAN and Vili APOSTOLAKOU	
<i>Rituals at Pefka</i>	329
Alessandro SANAVIA and Judith WEINGARTEN	
<i>The Transformation of Tritons: Some Decorated Middle Minoan Triton Shells and an Anatolian Counterpart</i>	335
Artemis KARNAVA	
<i>On Sacred Vocabulary and Religious Dedications: The Minoan ‘Libation Formula’</i>	345
Monica NILSSON	
<i>Minoan Stairs as Ritual Scenes. The Monumental Staircases of Phaistos “66” and Knossos “Theatral Area” under the Magnifying Glass</i>	357
Bernice R. JONES	
<i>A New Reading of the Fresco Program and the Ritual in Xeste 3, Thera</i>	365
Andreas G. VLACHOPOULOS	
<i>Images of Physis or Perceptions of Metaphysis? Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera</i>	375
Fanouria DAKORONIA	
<i>Sacrifice on Board</i>	387

Jörg WEILHARTNER	
<i>Textual Evidence for Burnt Animal Sacrifice and Other Rituals Involving the Use of Fire in Mycenaean Greece</i>	393
Chrysanthi GALLOU	
<i>Mycenaean Skulls: “ἀμηννά κάπηνα” or Social Actors in Late Helladic Metaphysics and Society?</i>	405
Assaf YASUR-LANDAU	
<i>The Baetyl and the Stele: Contact and Tradition in Levantine and Aegean Cult</i>	415
I. MYTH / HEROES / ANCESTORS	
Magda PIENIAŻEK and Carolyn C. ASLAN	
<i>Heroic Past, Memory and Ritual at Troy</i>	423
John G. YOUNGER	
<i>Identifying Myth in Minoan Art</i>	433
Joanne M.A. MURPHY	
<i>The Power of the Ancestors at Pylos</i>	439
Elisabetta BORGNA and Andreas G. VORDOS	
<i>Construction of Memory and the Making of a Ritual Landscape: the Role of Gods and Ancestors at the Trapeza of Aigion, Achaea, at the LBA-ELA Transition</i>	447
Anne P. CHAPIN	
<i>Mycenaean Mythologies in the Making: the Frescoes of Pylos Hall 64 and the Mycenae Megaron</i>	459
J. METAPHYSIS	
Robert B. KOEHL	
<i>The Ambiguity of the Minoan Mind</i>	469
Thomas G. PALAIMA	
<i>The Metaphysical Mind in Mycenaean Times and in Homer</i>	479
Alan PEATFIELD	
<i>A Metaphysical History of Minoan Religion</i>	485
POSTERS	
Eva ALRAM-STERN	
<i>A New Mycenaean Female Figure from Kynos, Locris</i>	497
Katrin BERNHARDT	
<i>Absent Mycenaeans? On Mycenaean Figurines and their Imitations on Crete in LM IIIA–IIIB</i>	501
Tina BOLOTI	
<i>A “Knot”-Bearing (?) Minoan Genius from Pylos. Contribution to the Cloth/Clothing Offering Imagery of the Aegean Late Bronze Age</i>	505
Dora CONSTANTINIDIS	
<i>Proximity Analysis of Metaphysical Aegean Ritual Spaces During the Bronze Age</i>	511

Stefanos GIMATZIDIS	
<i>The Tree of Life: The Materiality of a Ritual Symbol in Space and Time</i>	515
Louise A. HITCHCOCK, Aren M. MAEIR and Amit DAGAN	
<i>Entangling Aegean Ritual in Philistine Culture</i>	519
Petros KOUNOUKLAS	
<i>Griffin at Kynos. How, Why, and When?</i>	527
Tobias KRAPF	
<i>Symbolic Value and Magical Power: Examples of Prehistoric Objects Reused in Later Contexts in Euboea</i>	531
Susan LUPACK	
<i>pu-ro, pa-ki-ja-ne, and the Worship of an Ancestral Wanax</i>	537
Madelaine MILLER	
<i>The Boat – A Sacred Border-Crosser in Between Land and the Sea</i>	543
Sylvie MÜLLER CELKA	
<i>Caring for the Dead in Minoan Crete: a Reassessment of the Evidence from Anemospilia</i>	547
Marcia NUGENT	
<i>Portals to the Other: Stepping through a Botanic Door</i>	557
Marco PIETROVITO	
<i>Beyond the Earthly Shell: the Minoan Pitcher Bearers. Anthropomorphic Rhyta of the Pre- and Protopalatial Periods (Differentiating the Sacred from the Divine)</i>	563
Jörg RAMBACH	
<i>Early Helladic Romanos/Messenia: Filling a Well</i>	567
Caroline THURSTON	
<i>New Approaches to Mycenaean Figurines in LH IIIC</i>	571
Michaela ZAVADIL	
<i>Souvenirs from Afar – Star Disk Pendants Reconsidered</i>	575
ENDNOTE	
Joseph MARAN	
<i>Towards an Anthropology of Religion in Minoan and Mycenaean Greece</i>	581
TO CONCLUDE ...	
Thomas G. PALAIMA	
<i>WI Fc 2014: When is an Inscribed Cigar Just a Cigar?</i>	595

ESTABLISHING THE MINOAN ‘ENTHRONED GODDESS’ IN THE NEOPALATIAL PERIOD: IMAGES, ARCHITECTURE, AND ELITIST AMBITION

The visual formula of an enthroned female figure conventionally identified as a goddess made its first appearance in the arts of the LM IA period.¹ From then onwards until the end of the LM I period, it showed up within a range of visual contexts on precious objects like ivory boxes and metal rings, on seal impressions, and, finally, on the walls of buildings characterized by palatial architectural features. In the present paper I would like to revisit the occurrences of this prominent visual formula and to discuss its introduction into both the visual arts and Minoan ritual practice. I will take into consideration the contexts depicted in the images as well as the spatial structures of the integration of the seated figure into architectural environments; and I will argue that both forms of evidence are closely related to each other and the result of a common strategy pursued by the palatial elite or priesthood to consolidate their position within a changed social order established in LM IA.

The images

In LM IA, the depiction in side-view of a female figure sitting on an artificial structure or a natural outcrop was introduced to give visual expression to an anthropomorphic entity of recent prominence.² Its interpretation as a goddess has been introduced to Minoan Archaeology by Sir Arthur Evans³ from already existing interpretations of seated female figures depicted on Mycenaean signet rings, where it has remained mostly unchallenged until the present day. In these images, griffins, palms and biconcave bases as well as architectural facades decorated with so-called “half-rosettes” and crowned with double-horns and/or tree-shrines are embedded into standard formulas to symbolically express ideas and qualities associated with the female figure. Griffins basically indicate her localization within a supernatural realm, as probably did palms and reed-plants which repeatedly occur among the typical elements of the griffin’s exotic habitat.

“Half-rosettes”

A more physical environment, however, appears to have been indicated by the architectural structures. In addition to double-horns, these facades were sometimes distinguished by incurved elements, as in the depiction on a series of ring impressions from Knossos.⁴ (Pl. LXXXIVa) Evans was the first to state a similarity between this specific curved element and the “incurved base” below the horns on the gold tripartite shrines from Mycenae.⁵ Helga Reusch and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier discussed the same curved elements in comparison to those depicted in the wall-painting next to the throne at Knossos and demonstrated their importance in relation with representations of divinities.⁶ By

¹ Clay figurines depicting seated female figures have been found at Minoan peak sanctuaries, e.g. the Traostalos seated female figurine (with swollen leg), but they are usually not identified as goddesses; cf. C. MORRIS and A. PEATFIELD, “Health and Healing on Cretan Bronze Age Peak Sanctuaries,” in *Medicine and Healing in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (2014) 54-63, esp. 59-60, fig. 7.7.

² Cf. W.-D. NIEMEIER, “Zur Deutung des Thronraumes im Palast von Knossos,” *AM* 101 (1986) 81-82; ID., “Zur Ikonographie von Gottheiten und Adoranten in den Kultszenen auf minoischen und mykenischen Siegeln,” in *Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen Glyptik. Beiträge zum 3. Internationalen Marburger Siegel-Symposium, 5.-7. September 1985* (1989) 173-174 with fig. 4.

³ E.g., A.J. EVANS, “Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations,” *JHS* 21 (1901) 99-204; EVANS, *PM* II.2 767-768.

⁴ *CMS* II.8, no. 268 (Knossos). Perhaps also *CMS* V, 199 (Thebes).

⁵ EVANS, *PM* II.2 767.

⁶ H. REUSCH, “Zum Wandschmuck des Thronsaales in Knossos,” *Minoica. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Johannes Sundwall* (1958) 349-352; NIEMEIER (*supra* n. 2) 84-88.

reason of their rendering and position on the wall, they first identified the curved elements as altar bases. Due to their morphological similarity to so-called half-rosettes, however, the curved elements were then ambiguously interpreted as either biconcave bases or “half-rosettes,” acknowledging the possibility of the representation to make reference to both similar symbols at the same time.⁷ Anyway, it should be stressed that in LM I imagery of the “palatial art style”⁸ each element had a separate and well defined place. The depiction on the lid of an ivory pyxis brought to light a few years ago at Mochlos⁹ illustratively demonstrates the co-existence of both pictorial units based on different concepts. In contrast to the biconcave bases, which like their physical counterparts are placed on the ground and usually fulfil some kind of supporting function, “half-rosettes” appear only as part of architectural facades. This applies to the small-size representations of the built structure serving as the throne for the seated female figure, as on the abovementioned Knossos impressions and on the decorated lid of the Mochlos ivory pyxis; and it also applies to other facades representing some kind of palatial or shrine building: for example, the palace-like building on the Poros Ring,¹⁰ the building on the Master Impression from Chania,¹¹ or the palace-like building forming the so-called Arrival Town in the West House miniature fresco from Akrotiri,¹² to mention only a few.

Minoan “palace-façade thrones”?

The resemblance in details of the architectural appearance of the enthroned figure’s seat to these palatial or sacred buildings is certainly no coincidence, but the result of consciously applying the conventions of the visual language used in LM I. According to Evans, the “Goddess [... was] seated on the wing of a pillar shrine,” and it seemed “highly probable” that the sanctuary represented was the “sanctuary of which the traces are still visible on the limestone ridge of Juktas.”¹³ Friedrich Matz took a similar view of the architectural structures and interpreted them as small-scale imitations of sanctuaries, with the Minoan palace facades serving as prototypes for their representation.¹⁴ In view of the visual resemblance between the seat of the enthroned female figure and the well known repertoire of Minoan depicted and real architecture, it is highly likely, that the seat structure made reference to a building whose appearance was characterised by features of the “palatial architectural style” listed by Jan Driessen.¹⁵

A similar way of representing exactly this constellation of a prominent individual or divinity seated on its house is known from the Near East, where the pictorial formula of a “temple-façade throne” was used to represent the temple as the seat of the god.¹⁶ If indeed Near Eastern tradition can

⁷ EVANS, *PM* II.2 607-608; REUSCH (*supra* n. 6) 349-350; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 84-85; M.C. SHAW, “The Lion Gate Relief at Mycenae Reconsidered,” in *Φύλια έπη εις Γεώργιον Ε. Μυλωνάν δια τα 60 έτη του ανασκαφικού του έργου* (1986) 108-123; F. BLAKOLMER, “Vom Thronraum in Knossos zum Löwentor von Mykene. Kontinuitäten in Bildkunst und Palastideologie,” in *Österreichische Forschungen zur Ägäischen Bronzezeit 2009. Akten der Tagung am Fachbereich Altertumswissenschaften der Paris Lodron-Universität Salzburg vom 6. bis 7. März 2009* (2011), 70-71.

⁸ This term is an adaptation of the term “palatial architectural style” introduced by J. DRIESSEN, “The Proliferation of Minoan Palatial Architectural Style: (I) Crete,” *Acta Archaeologica Lovaniensia* 28-29 (1989/1990) 3-23, to describe the architectural features of this period, and of “style du palais” used by C. VERLINDEN, *Les statuettes anthropomorphes crétoises en bronze et en plomb du IIIe millénaire au VIIe siècle av. J.-C.* (1984), to refer to the highly elaborated art of this period.

⁹ J.S. SOLES and C. DAVARAS, “2010 Greek-American Excavations at Mochlos,” *Kentro* 13 (2010) 1, fig. 1; and SOLES in this volume.

¹⁰ G. RETHEMIOTAKIS and N. DIMOPOULOU, “The “Sacred Mansion“ Ring from Poros, Heraklion,” *AM* 118 (2003) 8-16, Fig. 1, Col. Pl. 1-4.

¹¹ *CMS* V Suppl. 1A, no. 142.

¹² C. DOUMAS, *The Wall-Paintings of Thera* (1999) 70, pl. 35 (the building far right).

¹³ EVANS, *PM* II.2 767-768.

¹⁴ F. MATZ, *Göttererscheinung und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta* (1958) 42.

¹⁵ DRIESSEN (*supra* n. 8).

¹⁶ M. METZGER, *Königsthron und Gottesthron. Thronformen und Thronarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im*

be taken into consideration here as comparative evidence, it could be argued that also the concept underlying the Minoan depictions saw a female authority which occupied a Minoan palatial structure and represented the personification of the presence of a female divinity on earth.

In this regard, it is worthwhile saying a few words about the repeatedly cited identification of the biconvex antithetical arrangement of “half-rosettes” (or “half-rosettes and triglyphs”) and, as an implicit consequence of their supposed exchangeability, also of the biconcave base symbol with the Hittite-Luwian logogram DEUS, “god”.¹⁷ (Pl. LXXXIVb) It can be stated that the evidence for the biconvex composition provides not even a handful of Minoan examples.¹⁸ The vast majority – including the Throne Room Fresco, the decorated lid of the Mochlos ivory pyxis, and the built structure depicted on the Knossos impressions, to be understood as an excerpt of the same concept – show the biconcave arrangement, i.e. two antithetically arranged “half-rosettes” between vertical elements or triglyphs. Already Theodor Fyfe stressed this predominance of the biconcave arrangement, since an end-piece of a “half-rosette and triglyph” frieze from Knossos terminated with the open part of a “half-rosette”; he explained this fact by constructive wooden origins of the vertical elements.¹⁹ In view of this evidence, it may be important that the biconcave arrangement of antithetical curved elements is paralleled in the Hittite-Luwian logogram DOMUS, “house”, which was translated by Helmut Bossert as “cult edifice”, by later scholars as “house.”²⁰ (Pl. LXXXIVb) This similarity becomes specifically evident in small-scale representations like the already mentioned building on the Master Impression, the so-called Arrival Town in the West House miniature fresco from Akrotiri, or the gold tripartite shrines found at Mycenae. So, if indeed a similar use and meaning of this visual formula existed in both Minoan art and Hittite-Luwian script, the biconcave composition of curved elements could have served to characterise buildings and spaces as a very specific type of “house.” In contrast to their simplified rendering in the form of plain, or sometimes dotted, curved elements, the “half-rosettes” – a motif possibly borrowed from Egypt²¹ – may have conveyed an additional sense of divine presence in order to further substantiate the character of the decorated building.

Taking into further consideration the occurrence of curved elements, it can be argued that shared reference was made to a very certain type of building, the façade of which was characterized not only by double horns, but also by “half-rosettes.” In this regard, it has to be meaningful that the built environment reflected in the images fits the architectural appearance of only one building on Crete: the palace at Knossos. Only here, evidence has come to light that a building’s facades were decorated with “half-rosette” friezes made of stone.²² I would argue, therefore, that specifically in those

Alten Testament (1985) 152-155, 170, 172, 287-288, with figures.

¹⁷ H.Th. BOSSERT, *Santas und Kupapa. Neue Beiträge zur Entzifferung der kretischen und hethitischen Bilderschrift* (1932) 10; REUSCH (*supra* n. 6) esp. 351-352; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 85, 88; M. WEISSL, “Halbrosetten oder Federfächer? Zu Bedeutung und Funktion eines ägäischen Ornaments,” in *Österreichische Forschungen zur Ägäischen Bronzezeit 1998. Akten der Tagung am Institut für Klassische Archäologie der Universität Wien, 2.-3. Mai 1998* (2000) 94.

¹⁸ E.g., the façade of the central part of the Tripartite Shrine in the Grand Stand Fresco from Knossos, see EVANS, *PM* II.2 597, fig. 371. A simplistic rendering of the biconvex scheme occurs also in the textile design of one of the figures in the Procession Fresco, see EVANS, *PM* II.2 728, fig. 456a.

¹⁹ Theodor Fyfe already stressed that the predominant configuration was the *biconcave* arrangement, since an end-piece of a similar frieze terminated with the open part of a “half-rosette”; see D.Th. FYFE, “Note on the Triglyph and Half-Rosette Band,” in EVANS, *PM* II.2 605-606.

²⁰ BOSSERT (*supra* n. 17) 12; R. DEMANGEL, “Autour d’un hiéroglyphe hittite,” *BCH* 62 (1938) 183.

²¹ The “half-rosette” has been compared to Egyptian feather fans, see MOSER V. FILSECK, “Der Alabasterfries von Tiryns,” *AA* (1986) esp. 30-31; WEISSL (*supra* n. 17) 93-94. However, apart from its visual resemblance its position within Minoan images is very different from Egyptian depictions.

²² EVANS, *PM* II.2 590-596, with figs. 368, 370. The fragments attributed to the West Façade of the palace were found in the West Magazines XIV-XVI. Further fragments came to light in the area of the South Propylaeum. For a description of the find circumstances and for reconstructions of their original position on the facades or in specific relation with entrances, see MOSER V. FILSECK (*supra* n. 21) 19-32; R. HÄGG, “On the Reconstruction of the West Façade of the Palace at Knossos,” in R. HÄGG and N. MARINATOS (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces. Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the*

images of architectural structures, where “half-rosettes” are included, reference was made to the palace at Knossos. Consequently, the “half-rosettes” decorating the “palace-façade thrones” likewise suggest a specific reference to the same palace. In conclusion, then, the visual formula showing a female figure sitting enthroned on a palatial building can be interpreted as the personification of a female authority, human or divine, whose earthly abode and/or “house” was the palace at Knossos.

The architecture

In the same palace, “half-rosettes” decorated not only the façade prominently facing the West Court, but they were also part of the wall-painting which from LM IB or LM II onwards adorned the room with the throne, i.e. the place, where an enthroned authority actually had its very seat.

Generally it must be stated that, in contrast to their depiction on portable objects, the appearance of enthroned figures in architectural contexts was confined to specific localities and can be linked to activities performed exclusively in these specific places. The Throne Room at Knossos constituted the place where, from a certain point in time onwards, an enthroned authority was located and framed by the same visual elements as the enthroned female figures in Minoan imagery. The relationship between the events taking place in the Knossian Throne Room and images of divine figures has been discussed by several scholars, focusing, on the one hand, on the shared iconographical vocabulary, and, on the other hand, on the shared visual appearance of the performative arrangement produced by the figures involved.²³ Since the architectural phasing has convincingly been reconstructed by Sieglinde Mirié and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, it is clear that the history of the anteroom, the Throne Room and the related area began already in the Protopalatial Period and saw a series of remodelling until the final and well-known state was reached in LM IIIA2 or B.²⁴ It can, however, be argued on several grounds that the spatial layout including the throne, the Lustral Basin and a previous wall-painting had already been in existence by the end of LM IA. The full explication of this stratigraphical and architectural evidence would exceed the limits given for this paper and will be presented elsewhere.²⁵ It shall suffice here to give some information about the appearance of this LM IA antecedent of the preserved state of the Throne Room.

Evidence can be gained from the Lustral Basin, which was furnished with a paved floor and orthostats made of gypsum. These gypsum elements were not covered with painted stucco at the time of the filling of the lustral basin, which took place at the end of LM IA according to Colin Macdonald.²⁶ This indicates that, other than from LM IB onwards,²⁷ during LM IA the bright and reflective gypsum surfaces in the Throne Room were most likely left uncovered. The appearance of this spatial arrangement was therefore similar to contemporary structures of the “palatial architectural style” and conforms to the current standards of ritual and ceremonial architecture. Furthermore, the execution of the Griffin Fresco can be dated to LM IB or early LM II according to Niemeier,

Swedish Institute in Athens, 10-16 June, 1984 (1987) 130; S. HILLER, “The Facade of the So-Called ‘Treasury of Atreus’ at Mycenae. Reflections on the Iconography of the Ornamental and Figural Reliefs,” in *Δώρον. Τιμητικός τόμος για τον καθηγητή Σπύρο Ιακωβίδη* (2009) 296-297; S. HILLER, “Ägyptische Entlehnungen im Griechischen. Zeugnis für bronzezeitlichen Ideentransfer,” in *Austausch von Gütern, Ideen und Technologien in der Ägäis und im östlichen Mittelmeer. Von der prähistorischen bis zu der archaischen Zeit* (2008) 187-189.

²³ REUSCH (*supra* n. 6); NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2); R. HÄGG, “Die göttliche Epiphanie im minoischen Ritual,” *AM* 101 (1986) 46-47.

²⁴ S. MIRIÉ, *Das Thronraumareal des Palastes von Knossos: Versuch einer Neuinterpretation seiner Entstehung und seiner Funktion* (1979); NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2). See also MACDONALD, *Knossos* (2005) 115-118.

²⁵ U. GÜNKEL-MASCHEK, *Minoische Bild-Räume. Untersuchungen zu den Wandmalereien des spätbronzezeitlichen Palastes in Knossos* (PhD diss. Heidelberg; forthcoming).

²⁶ MACDONALD (*supra* n. 24) 116. Cf. NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 93.

²⁷ For the date of the white and red painted plaster covering the floor, the benches, and the throne, see H.W. CATLING, “Archaeology in Greece 1987-88,” *Archaeological Reports* 34, 1987/1988, 68; J. DRIESSEN and C. MACDONALD, *The Troubled Island. Minoan Crete Before and After the Santorini Eruption* (1997) 141.

Macdonald, and Hood,²⁸ and in view of comparable evidence from the palace.²⁹ According to Mirié, this fresco encloses the backrest of the throne.³⁰ The throne thus antedates the execution of the fresco and can, still according to Mirié, in fact be grouped with an earlier version, against which the throne had been placed.³¹ A LM IA date of this previous painting is therefore highly plausible. In view of the strong adherence of the Throne Room’s decorative programme to elements and themes like the griffin, the biconcave arrangement of half-rosettes, the palm, and the marshy landscape with reed plants, which not only existed already in LM IA, but appeared in relationship with seated female figures, it is at least likely that this previous painting was made of a similar composition like the well-known Griffin Fresco.

Based on this evidence, the construction in LM IA of the Throne Room consisting of the throne, the Lustral Basin, plain gypsum surfaces and a wall painting appears highly likely. A double doorway, traces of which have been preserved in the large door opening of the last phase, probably separated the Throne Room from the anteroom in this stage.³² This spatial arrangement, then, provided a location where a selected person sat on a throne and where the appearance of this enthroned person was visible through the double door opening for participants standing in the anteroom (Pl. LXXXIVc-d).

This form of staging was not exclusive to the Throne Room at Knossos. In fact, a very similar arrangement was created at about the same time in building Xeste 3 in Akrotiri on Thera. On the northern wall of hall 3 on the first floor, a female figure, flanked by a griffin, was sitting enthroned on a tripartite platform and served by the girls of elite families.³³ Placed behind a pier-and-door partition wall, the female figure was embedded in the midst of a setting composed of rocky and marshy landscapes crowded by saffron gathering girls and by ducks, respectively. When the doors were opened, the whole scene was revealed to the eyes of participants standing in the paved central area of the polythyron hall (Pl. LXXXVa-b). This event certainly constituted an essential moment in the course of any ritual activities performed in this place. In any case, the spatial and visual arrangement in building Xeste 3 confirms the conventions of involving the visual formula of an enthroned female figure into the performance of ritual activities. At both Knossos and Akrotiri, environments were

²⁸ W.-D. NIEMEIER, *Die Palaststilkeramik von Knossos: Stil, Chronologie und historischer Kontext* (1985) 46, 48, 78; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 67 f.; M.S.F. HOOD, “The Wall Paintings of Crete,” in *Proceedings of the First International Symposium ‘The Wall Paintings of Thera’, Petros M. Nomikos Conference Centre, Thera, Hellas, 30 August – 4 September 1997* (2000) 31, 204, cat. no. 25; MACDONALD (*supra* n. 24) 116.

²⁹ This date is further corroborated by Mark Cameron’s attribution of the Griffin Fresco’s execution to the same workshop like the Procession Fresco, see M.A.S. CAMERON, *A General Study of Minoan Frescoes. With Particular Reference to Unpublished Wall Paintings from Knossos* (PhD diss., University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1976) 439–442, 447, 683. This fresco has also been dated to LM IB/II on different grounds, e.g., the stylistic execution of the textiles (M.C. SHAW, “Anatomy and Execution of Complex Minoan Textile Patterns in the Procession Fresco from Knossos,” in *Κρήτη – Αιγύπτος. Πολιτιστικοί δεσμοί τριών χλιετιών* [2000] esp. 62), the LM IB style of the depicted stone vases (E.N. DAVIS, “The Cycladic Style of the Thera Frescoes,” in *Thera and the Aegean World III. Proceedings of the Third International Congress, 1. Archaeology* [1990] 214; E. MANTZOURANI, “Notes on the Depiction of Vessels and Vases in Aegean Wall-Painting,” in *Klados: Essays in Honour of J.N. Coldstream* [1995] 135), or the stylistic execution in general (C. BOULOTIS, “Nochmals zum Prozessionsfresko von Knossos: Palast und Darbringung von Prestige-Objekten,” in *The Function of the Minoan Palaces. Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 10 – 16 June, 1984* [1987] 145, 147).

³⁰ MIRIÉ (*supra* n. 24) 54–55. Cf. EVANS, *PM* IV.2 906, fig. 881; 915, fig. 889; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 67.

³¹ MIRIÉ (*supra* n. 24) 54–55.

³² EVANS, *PM* IV.2 905; see, however, MIRIÉ (*supra* n. 24) 22, 55–56.

³³ DOUMAS (*supra* n. 12) 152–167, figs. 116–130; A. VLACHOPOULOS, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri: Towards an Interpretation of the Iconographic Programme,” in *Ορίζων: A Colloquium on the Prehistory of the Cyclades* (2008) 451–465. Cf. U. GÜNKEL-MASCHEK, “Visual Basic? Überlegungen zur Korrelation von Ikonographie und Raumfunktion in der minoischen Architektur,” in *Österreichische Forschungen zur Ägäischen Bronzezeit 2009. Akten der Tagung am Fachbereich Altertumswissenschaften der Paris Lodron-Universität Salzburg vom 6. bis 7. März 2009* (2011) esp. 130.

created to experience the appearance of an enthroned figure – an artificial one at Thera, an enacted one at Knossos. This event and its significance as the focus of ritual action was thus not a phenomenon exclusive to contemporary arts: it was an integral part of the real-life performance of Minoan ritual.³⁴

On the basis of this evidence it may be argued that this very moment, when the doors of the pier-and-door partition opened and the vision of the *already seated* figure was revealed in profile to the eyes of the participants, constituted the most important moment in this type of Minoan ritual during LM I. By contrast, the frontal appearance of the person sitting on the throne or entering from the Inner Sanctuary through the door in the West wall of the Throne Room at Knossos, which have been compared to glyptic images of the goddess with snake frame by Reusch and Niemeier,³⁵ appears to have been of little significance in this period. The prominence of the representation in front view of a divinity flanked by griffins, which are sometimes even placed on raised base-lines, increased only from LM II onwards.³⁶

Elitist ambition?

This later development notwithstanding, in LM I the appearance in side view of the seated female authority constituted the visual formula of the day. As such it came up in small-size images decorating precious objects or disseminated in administrative exchange, and in the form of wall-painting, in which it decorated architectural spaces to fulfil its role in Minoan ritual practice. Last but not least, it was the visual formula chosen for the enacted appearance of the divine presence in the Throne Room at Knossos. In the final part of this paper, it remains to briefly discuss a characteristic trait of the images, which is of major importance for understanding the motives behind the establishing of the Minoan enthroned goddess in the LM IA period.

In LM I imagery, the female figure sitting enthroned on a built structure never appears alone. Instead, about two thirds of the composition are usually reserved for the representation of members of the Minoan ‘elite’ approaching her or acting in front of her. This directs attention to the elitist figures and their activities and suggests that, especially in small-size images, the motive was not primarily the representation of the “goddess” in her own right, but the representation of elite people in interaction with her. Judging from the chronological sequence established above it appears highly likely that the enthroned authority was first placed at Knossos to form the focus of activities performed by members of the palatial elite. A connection between the creation of the area of the throne and the introduction of the enthroned figure into Minoan imagery, where it is always shown approached by elite figures, therefore suggests itself.

In my opinion, it is this significance attached to an elite’s performance in relation with the enthroned figure, which helps to understand the driving force behind this development: An authority equipped with divine attributes was established in the Knossian Throne Room, and its appearance as an enthroned figure was integrated into Minoan ritual practice. The very moment of her appearance was, however, confined to those having access to the Central Court and especially to the anteroom.³⁷ Either way, seeing and interacting with the enthroned authority must therefore have been a privilege reserved to a few people only. It is possible, then, that the visual representation of the interaction with the enthroned authority was introduced to document this privilege possessed by distinct groups of people.³⁸ In this way, it acquired the role of a visual device to legitimize the social status of these groups.

³⁴ Cf. HÄGG (*supra* n. 23) esp. 58.

³⁵ REUSCH (*supra* n. 6) 345-356; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 74-84.

³⁶ EVANS, *PM* IV.2 169; REUSCH (*supra* n. 6) 354-356; NIEMEIER 1986 (*supra* n. 2) 75; BLAKOLMER (*supra* n. 7) 67-68.

³⁷ If, as proposed by MACDONALD (*supra* n. 24) 104, 178, the steps were constructed not earlier than in LM IB, then the entrance situation created in LM IA was on the same level like the paving of the Central Court. In this case, the appearance of the authority on the throne was perhaps also visible to some degree from the Central Court.

³⁸ This applies mainly to those female figures wearing the flounced skirt, whereas those wearing the skirt with horizontal stripes never appear in connection with the figure sitting enthroned on a palatial structure. They are, however, involved in the cult activities focusing the double-axe. On the other hand, the ‘enthroned goddess’ is never shown in relationship with the double-axe. In this regard, two distinct

In this respect, the images can be grouped with other ritual scenes introduced in LM IA, with which they also shared the elaboration in the “palatial art style.” To these images belong the scenes of tree-shaking, baetyl-hugging, ritual activities in front of “shrine”-buildings or various examples of processions. In recent years, interpretation of both these ritual scenes and the real-life activities they reproduced to some extent has drawn special attention to social functions fulfilled by them. It has been argued that the human figures, gestures, activities and performative aspects made reference to social values and concepts of order, and that their increased rendering in LM I served to promote and maintain social cohesion and order especially in times of social instability.³⁹ Since the depiction of the enthroned female and its elitist entourage appeared together with these images, it is likely that they were part of the same strategy.

Possible catalysts of social instability may be seen in connection with the happenings associated with the end of the Old Palaces and the rise of the New Palaces, or they may be found in more recent catastrophes hitting the island around the end of MM IIIB: in fact, the period LM IA came only into being in the aftermath of one or a series of earthquakes, whose devastating effects left their traces on Crete and beyond its shores. Though it can be assumed, that Bronze Age Cretans were widely accustomed to earthquakes, the material evidence of the following decades reflects the transformation of some aspects of the previous order. In the following years, construction efforts were initiated in almost every part of the island, with essential features of the palaces, town houses and so-called villas being now characterized by the so-called “palatial architectural style.” These buildings enhanced administrative and economical networks and facilitated uniformity in religious ritual and ceremony, at least on the level of palatial elites who can be claimed responsible for these transformative processes.

In the same vein, the new visual language characterized by the “palatial art style” was developed⁴⁰—and it is at this point that we finally come back to the establishing of the enthroned female figure: It appears likely that this authority equipped with divine attributes was instrumentalised to some extent by those displayed in her vicinity and thus played a certain role in the legitimization of the palatial elite or priesthood. In imagery the palace itself is represented not only as a focus of ritual gesture, but first and foremost as the earthly abode of the divinity and the seat of its human agent. Therefore, the establishing of the enthroned authority at Knossos and the elite’s ostentatious interaction with her appear to have been two manifestations of the same strategy: to consolidate the dominant position of specifically this palatial centre and its ruling class.

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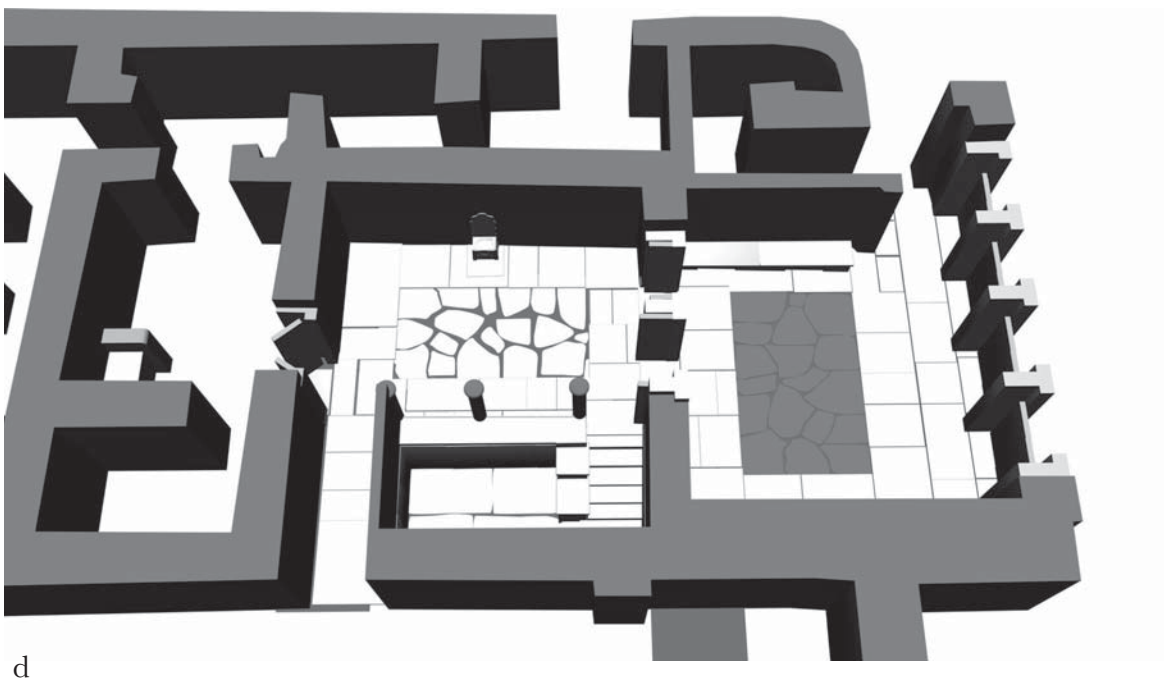
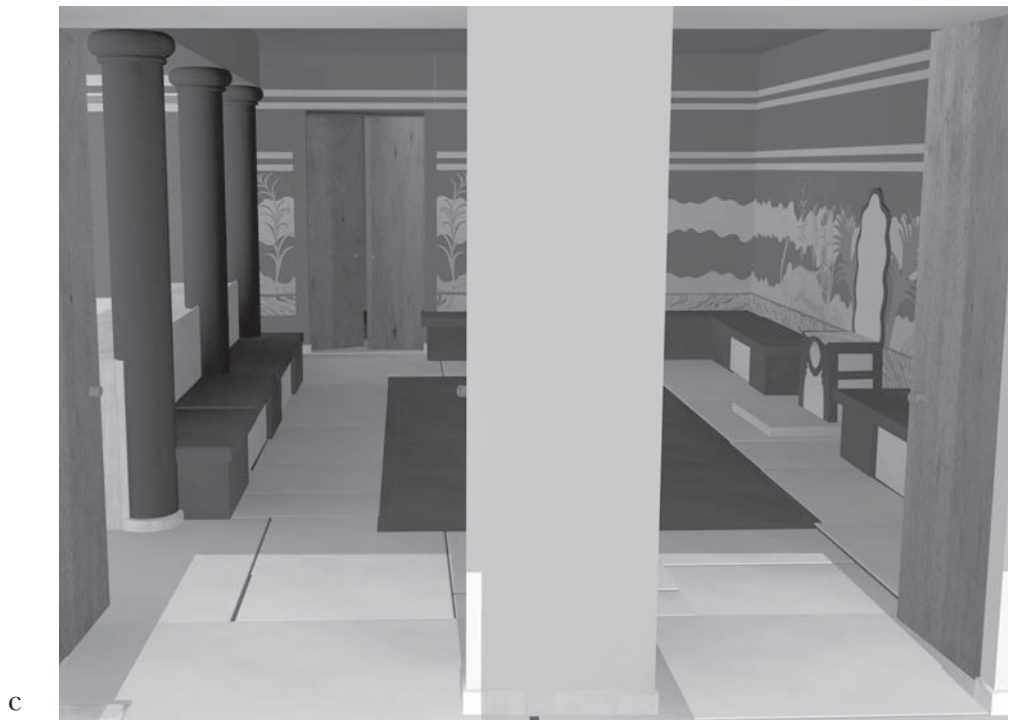
concepts underlying the pictorial expressions can be identified.

³⁹ S.C. GERMAN, *Performance, Power and the Art of the Aegean Bronze Age* (2005); C. MURPHY, “Engraving Social Values: Neo-palatial Glyptic Cult-scenes as Indicators of Social Instability?” in *Tough Times: The Archaeology of Crisis and Recovery. Proceedings of the Graduate Archaeology at Oxford conferences in 2010 and 2011* (2013) 101-108.

⁴⁰ On style as indicator of social differentiation, see E. THOMAS, “Stil als Bedeutungsträger in der minoischen Glyptik der Palastzeit,” in *Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik: Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion. V. Internationales Siegel-Symposium Marburg, 23.–25. September 1999* (2000); E. THOMAS, “Bilder als Medien. Das Siegelbild als Mittel der Kommunikation in der minoischen Palastzeit,” in *Medien in der Antike. Kommunikative Qualität und normative Wirkung* (2003).

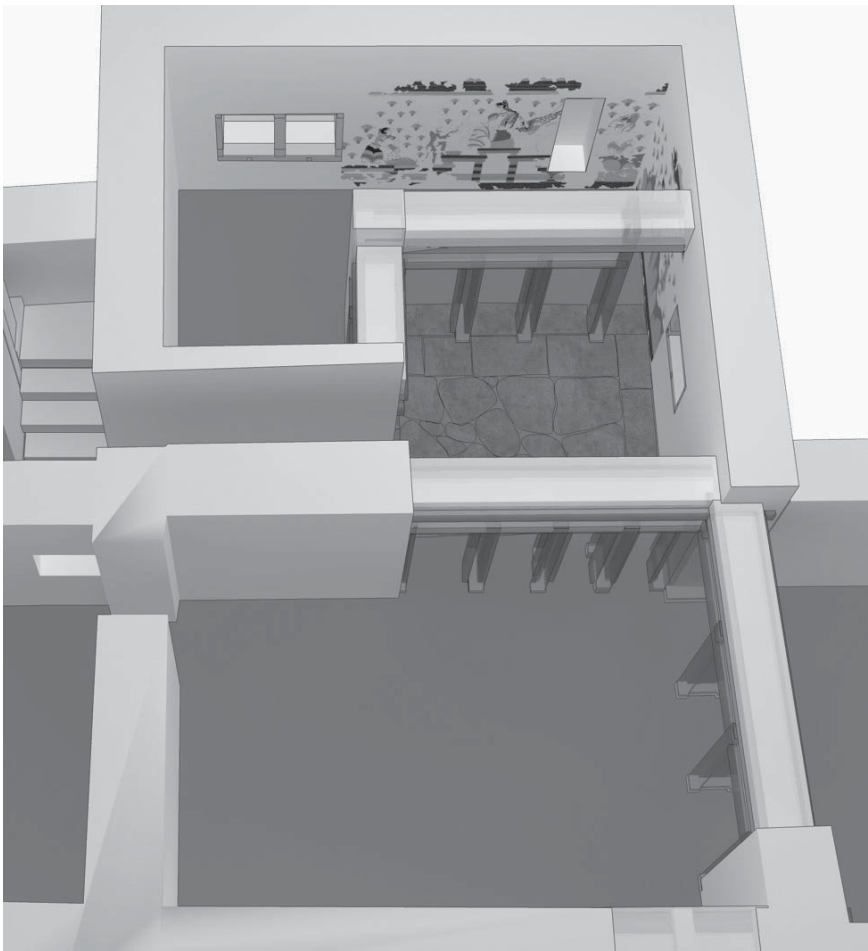
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. LXXXIVa Depiction on seal impressions from Knossos; drawing (author) after *CMS* II.8, 268.
- Pl. LXXXIVb Hittite-Luvian logograms DEUS and DOMUS (drawn by the author).
- Pl. LXXXIVc View from the anteroom into the Throne Room, Knossos. 3D-model created by the author after EVANS, *PM* IV.2 905–921, figs. 882, 884, 885, 890, 895, pls. XXXII, XXXIII; S. HOOD and W. TAYLOR, *The Bronze Age Palace at Knossos* (1981) plan (room nos. 41-43); M.A.S. CAMERON, “The ‘Palatial’ Thematic System in the Knossos Murals. Last Notes on Knossos Frescoes,” in HÄGG and MARINATOS (*supra* n. 22) 323, fig. 7.
- Pl. LXXXIVd Perspective view (from South) of the Throne Room area, Knossos. 3D-model created by the author after MIRIÉ (*supra* n. 24) pl. 35, 2–4; HOOD and TAYLOR (*supra* Pl. LXXXIVc) plan (room nos. 41-48).
- Pl. LXXXVa View from the central paved area of polythyron hall 3 towards the North wall, building Xeste 3, Akrotiri. 3D-model created by the author after DOUMAS (*supra* n. 12) 152, fig. 116; 158-159, fig. 122; C. PALYVOU, *Akrotiri Thera. An Architecture of Affluence 3,500 Years Old* (2005) 55, fig. 62; VLACHOPOULOS (*supra* n. 33) 465, fig. 41, 51.
- Pl. LXXXVb Perspective view (from South) of polythyron hall 3/4 on the upper floor of building Xeste 3, Akrotiri. Same 3D-model as in Pl. LXXXVa.





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b