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BURNING BULLS, BROKEN BONES

SACRIFICIAL RITUAL IN THE CONTEXT OF
PALACE PERIOD MINOAN RELIGION

By

ROBERT JAMES CROMARTY

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

at Durham University,

August 2007

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VOL I



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ABSTRACT

This study presents a new assessment of the nature and significance of sacrificial rituals during the Palatial periods of Bronze Age Crete – commonly known as the Minoan period: Such a re-assessment was necessary as a result of, in my opinion, fundamental oversights in earlier scholarship as regards the qualities of this practice on Minoan Crete. A secondary aim was to place these rituals in an overall context of ritual and religious activity on Bronze Age Crete and, as such, it includes discussions of other ritual practices such as libation.

The methodological approach adopted was very much one of 'back to basics'. A detailed survey presents evidence relating to various practices from 20 sites across Crete which are generally viewed as the best known, and extensively published, of Minoan cult sites. On the basis of this survey a different interpretation of the relative prevalence of rituals with a sacrificial element becomes apparent.

The conclusion is that these rituals were by no means as widespread as has been previously thought. Other ritual processes such as votive deposition and libation appear much more common. Moreover, it also becomes apparent that a commensal quality to the rituals with sacrificial elements, which has not been overly stressed in prior studies, is equally important as any sacrificial quality – if not more so.

**This study is dedicated to my Mother, a truly amazing lady who
has sacrificed much to allow me much freedom.**

**Also to the memory of my Father, in the hope that he would be
proud.**

**Lastly, to my partner Rachel, who has helped in ways she would
not have realised.**

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INTRODUCTION

After a century of study, the archaeology of Minoan Crete has reached a turning point. With the publication of *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking Minoan Archaeology* (Hamilakis (ed.), 2002a), a new generation of Minoan scholars voiced their frustration with the scholars of the past and their academic focus: “The material culture of Minoan Crete...remains largely mute, especially on a number of important issues” (Ibid. 3). While much is known of chronology, architecture, iconography and pottery sequences, comparatively little can be said with any certainty about aspects which made up much of everyday life. Minoan religion is such a case.

Although it has received much attention, Minoan religion has never been fully reconstructed, understood or analysed. Too much has been attempted – for the most part academics have approached Minoan religion from one viewpoint or preconception in an attempt to create a coherent system of belief. Nilsson, for example, in perhaps the greatest treatise on Aegean religion, his *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (1950), analyses the evidence from the aspect of its continuation into the religious practices of the Archaic and Classical periods of Greece. Such an approach is fundamentally flawed, as from the very outset a degree of objectivity is lost, and differences and similarities may be ignored or emphasised so as to make the system seem more convincing¹. However, in this study I will make little effort to reconstruct an overall system of belief except

¹ I do not suggest that Nilsson deliberately manipulated his study, simply that given his hypothesis his concern is on seeing these connections between the distant periods perhaps to the detriment of the overall study. Nilsson’s text remains one of the most significant pieces of work on Minoan religion.

where it will elucidate my primary focus – the role of sacrificial ritual in the religious organisation of Crete in the Bronze Age. As such it is necessary to view sacrifice in the context of the other ritual practices which were current on Crete at the time. Of course, the nature of the religious system does define the rituals performed within that system. The characteristics of a monotheistic religious system are quite different from those that polytheism requires.

Sacrificial rituals are known from many religious systems and, of course, each culture has their own nuances and beliefs attached to them. This said, in the past sacrifice has generally been viewed as the direct interaction between mortal and the divine, often imploring the deity for the benefit of the worshipper: the Classical notion of *do ut des* or *do ut abeas* (Harrison, 1922: 4)². However, it must also be acknowledged that ritual has a purpose beyond religious activity; often it possesses a secular aspect that is equally as important. For example, the Classical *θυσία* rite was directly associated with the reinforcement of the notion of community; through the sharing of meat an individual could identify himself as being a member of a community of meat-eaters (Hartog, 1989: 170). Thus there was a religious, communal and alimentary purpose to the *θυσία* ceremony. The same multi-layer significance in relation to any possible Minoan rite and this is one factor that must be investigated in any study of the subject.

But even this interpretation can lead to certain preconceptions. Sacrifice can be personal, communal or state-controlled. Each of these variants places a different emphasis upon the ritual. Unfortunately, from an archaeological perspective,

² “I give so that you might give”, “I give so that you might avert”.

unless they are accompanied by a textual source or the find spot is undeniable in its character – a private dwelling, for example – then it is sometimes difficult to identify which of these is the most applicable interpretation. Ultimately it comes to a point where we have to define each ritual within its cultural context.

While this study may seem straightforward from an investigative point-of-view³, and to some extent a study in semiotics, to establish the existence and prevalence of ‘sacrifice’ in Minoan culture, there are certain methodological and source-based problems. The primary issue is that of the archaeological survival of the key evidence; this must be addressed as it directly impinges upon any results that may possibly be obtained. The primary evidence for sacrificial ritual must come from faunal remains in either cult or burial contexts. The problem is that it is exactly these remains that are unlikely to survive for 4000 years in the archaeological record. This is due to not only the conditions of preservation – soil acidity, moisture content and a multiplicity of other factors – but also human activity such as looting or the later development of sites in ensuing periods. However, beyond the environmental conditions, it is the issue of human intervention that is a key determining factor, and it should not be regarded as a problem of the long-distant past. The actions of the archaeologists themselves, perhaps more than any other factor, affect the evidence which we have at our disposal⁴.

³ However, it must be remembered that, if we follow Hawkes’ famous ‘ladder of reliability’ in archaeological inference, in which he insists “to infer to the religious institutions and spiritual life is the hardest inference of all” (Hawkes, 1954: 162), the study of religious and ritual practices may be far from straightforward.

⁴ The problems for the individual sites are discussed in their entries in the site catalogue (See Chapter Two).

The last century of study has seen very little emphasis placed upon the physical remains from cult locations in attempts to reconstruct the rituals performed therein⁵, and as such the conclusions that have been reached can at times seem questionable. The current research situation can be summarised as follows:

“Based on a corpus of evidence garnered from sites incompletely excavated or identified through unsystematic surveys, summarily published or completely unpublished, yet repeatedly discussed, endlessly categorised and sometimes even reconstructed on paper, this specialised field of Minoan studies is understandably all too eager for new information that seems to fill the gaps in the evidence and may generate fresh insights” (Lebessi and Muhly, 1990: 333)

Thus it is into this somewhat bleak arena that this study moves. I make no apologies that this will be a synthetic piece, an attempt to correlate a disparate collection of data, not only to address the limitations of that data and those who supplied it, but also to arrive, hopefully, at a reconstruction of a Bronze Age religious practice based on a sound archaeological and anthropological footing.

Where possible I shall rely on the physical remains, quantifying, identifying and contextualising their appearances so that an overall picture of the island-wide employment of animals in ritual settings becomes evident. By doing so it should be possible to distinguish any geographical or temporal variation in the practices. It is the framework which this will provide around which the secondary sources

⁵ See below, p. 24ff

for sacrificial ritual, such as the iconography, must be fitted – to do otherwise would be methodologically unsound. Such an approach might allow a fuller reconstruction of not only the religious purpose of such rites, but also the social aspects, if any, attached to them. Thus hopefully in this study I shall avoid “the twin pitfalls of damagingly negative pessimism on the one hand, and uncritical optimism on the other” (Renfrew, 1985: 3).

CHAPTER ONE: TERMS, CONDITIONS AND PROCESSES

“It is a capital mistake to theorise before you have all the facts...It biases the judgement”

(Sherlock Holmes, “A Study in Scarlet”)

Throughout this study a number of terms will be used that, while they are indispensable for the study of religion, have become so loaded through their repeated usage that before they are used again it seems prudent to define and qualify them before seeing if the rituals of Minoan Crete can be described utilising them. For as Burkert sagely points out: “If one tries to translate one religion into the language of another, one finds...that this will only be possible to a limited degree” (Burkert, 1983: xxi).

Of course, *ritual* itself is one such term, and as such it is only fitting to begin by defining what we mean by it. “Biology has defined ritual as a behavioural pattern that has lost its primary function” (Ibid. 23), but such an interpretation is not appropriate for a religious ceremony. Ritual serves to re-affirm both the relationship between the human and the divine, and between humans themselves. Through repetition information that is considered important is reinforced so as to avoid misunderstanding or misuse, or as Durkheim stated: “It is through common action that society becomes self-aware” (Durkheim, 1912: 598). Thus it should be clear that ritual cannot be separated from secular society. The traditional usage of the term by archaeologists, to account for features in the archaeological record that seem to yield no practical purpose, is therefore misguided, as has been stated “ritual is an overworked and “ambitious” word”

(Beattie, 1980: 29). Ritual serves to place an individual within a social and religious context. For example, the citizens of Athens' participation in the deme-based sacrifices of the fourth century served to unite the community as well as being the major source of meat for an entire social group (Rosivach, 1994: 67). Thus while ritual may at first appear atavistic, it is never circumstantial or superfluous. To deny the importance of ritual is to deny a culture the ability to deny and reinforce their socio-religious organisation. Those who participated in such rituals could count themselves as a member of the community, thus those who did not were excluded. The differential access to rituals is likely to have served to define and accentuate differences in society; this is the diacritical quality of ritual.

Joanna Brück (1999) has convincingly argued that the conception of ritual as it is used in both archaeology and anthropology "is a product of post-Enlightenment rationalism" (313). The majority of work done on ritual has, either explicitly or implicitly, used a rational-irrational, real-ideal, or practical-symbolic dichotomy in their identification of ritual.

The reason for this is understandable for "it has in fact proved impossible to propose watertight lists of criteria for the identification of ritual in the archaeological record (Brück, 1999: 316). This is simply because many of the methodologies adopted for identifying 'ritual', such as repetition and expressive action, are also shared by non-ritual activities. Thus, almost by default, the archaeologist and the anthropologist have fallen back on the equation of the ritual with the non-functional (Ibid. 317).

However, this is very much a modern Western viewpoint and to interpret the activities of other cultures and periods in terms of this decidedly non-universal perspective is misguided. The very fact that rituals are culturally specific entails that they communicate something of the idiosyncrasies of that culture's perspective of the world and its operating procedures. Thus to the original performers the rituals doubtless appear rational, although to an interpreter of a different cultural background they would appear irrational: "they [the rituals] appear irrational only to those who cannot follow the historically-specific logic which produced them (Ibid. 321). To those who practised them, many rituals have a deeply practical purpose designed to achieve specific ends.

The result of this approach has created two further drastically different methods of studying ritual. Firstly, those who would adhere to Hawkes' famous view⁶ have reduced ritual to a subject about which interpretation is largely irrelevant as "nothing is truly knowable" (Ibid. 323). The second is a more recent development, intimately associated with the post-processual focus on the social and ideological, and a deliberate effort to unite the concepts of ritual and everyday life. Barrett (1991: 6) nicely summarises this approach: "Ritual and religious knowledges are thus built out of the same material conditions as everyday life; they cannot be analysed as though they somehow have a life of their own". However, this approach has the inherent danger that every activity may be swallowed by the ever-expanding 'ritual'. This latter approach is a reaction to the 'sacred-profane' divide which, by stressing the total importance of

⁶ See above Footnote 3.

ritual and essentially removing the concept of a separate 'sacred' realm, serves only to create the antithesis to the former approach, still without a sufficient framework⁷.

Brück (1999: 325) disputes the argument that every action has both a symbolic and practical *aspect*, but claims instead that every practical action is inherently symbolic "as it reproduces the sets of values and social relations which are embedded in cosmological schemes" (Ibid. 326). Thus for Brück an investigation into ritual identification is somewhat redundant, as every archaeological study is by definition an investigation into "prehistoric rationality" (Ibid. 327).

Therefore, ritual must be seen as reflective of cultural cosmology, a means of communicating understanding of the world and one's place within it, and perhaps also a means of expressing inclusion within that cosmology. In addition, it must also be noted that ritual is distinct from religion, as both of these concepts are socio-cultural creations and the ways in which they interact and overlap are different within each cultural setting⁸. Hicks (1999: xxii) notes that: "Some rituals – kneeling in a mosque, for instance – would be considered religious. Other rituals – for example, nodding the head to signify agreement – lack any kind of religious intent". Thus, "ritual behaviour appears in various modes and serves a variety of purposes" (Ibid.). However, in all cases ritual can be said to

⁷ But even in this respect there is still a post-processual dualism of symbolic and practical, as within every activity there is still a tendency to identify distinct ritual or practical qualities within a specific activity.

⁸ Insoll (2004: 22-23) makes the point that religion has traditionally been viewed by archaeologists as one of several aspects of human life, along with technology, subsistence, economy and so forth. However, he makes the point that it might be better to see religion as of primary importance in structuring human life. This is an interesting point, but I feel that this is in effect 'cosmology', defined as a world outlook, and so the latter term is preferred here.

have a communicative aspect, which has been seen to be its fundamental purpose:

“Ritual action...serves to express the status of the actor vis-à-vis his [sic.] environment, both physical and social; it may also serve to alter the status of the actor” (Hicks, 1999: 182).

Of all socio-religious rituals, none possesses such an inherent power and significance – to western eyes at least – as sacrifice. Sacrifice has been defined by Hubert and Mauss as a means of communicating with a divinity or religious force through the consecration of an intermediary victim, which is always destroyed during the course of the rite (Hubert and Mauss, 1964: 1). According to Hubert and Mauss, the rite imbues the victim with religious energy or sacredness; it becomes a medium between the world of the sacred and that of the profane (This is perhaps a key example of the matter that Brück addressed). The release of this ‘religious energy’, through the destruction of the victim, is the essential part of the oblation, differentiating it from other forms of offering. However, such an approach to sacrifice is simply an extension of the sacred-profane divide, as within this framework there is a tendency to further sub-divide ritual into distinct, discrete categories, such as Hubert and Mauss’ category of sacrifice. Any such attempt is fraught with difficulty as, depending on the cultural cosmology, any single practice may contain elements that may place it in one of several sub-categories.

It is for exactly these reasons that the definition of sacrifice used in this thesis must be made clear. If sacrifice is a form of ritual, then sacrifice is a method of communicating an aspect of cultural cosmology. However, the majority of

theories regarding sacrifice, in particular that of Hubert and Mauss (1964), have been entrenched in the language of the sacred-profane divide which Brück has highlighted as being a fallacy of western academic thinking. But 'sacrifice' has additional problems of definition attached to it as theorists have attempted to define the process in universal terms, yet anthropologists and archaeologists apply the term to culturally distinct practices.

Universal theories of sacrifice, e.g. that it is based on the *do ut des* principle, fail to account for the specific cosmological idiosyncrasies which rituals are used to communicate and reinforce. Even Girard's theory (1972, *La Violence et les sacré*, Paris: Bernard Grusset [referenced by Valeri, 1985: 68-9]) that sacrifice derives from an inherent need in human society to expel violence in a controlled manner, in order to achieve a form of cultural catharsis, is insufficient. For example, it fails to account for practices such as the Greek *θυσία* ritual where the moment of the kill does not seem to be of the highest importance (at least in terms of the iconographic evidence), but rather the subsequent burning of specific anatomical elements.

It is clear, in my opinion, that universal definitions of sacrifice are not overly suitable for accounting for practices in geographically and temporally discrete cultures. Hicks (1999: 179) also notes that while all explanations for sacrifice – the victim is identified with a god who is then sacramentally eaten; the victim is a bribe for a god; the victim stands as a substitute for the giver of the sacrifice; the victim is a representation of 'sin' – "may be true or partly true for particular situations, but they cannot all be true at once, and none of them reach into the

heart of the problem, which is, why should the killing of an animal be endowed with sacramental quality at all?"

However, Hicks does not attempt to define sacrifice any further himself, a rather telling fact, I feel. Sacrifice is a problematic term, that much is clear. Yet it would seem possible to mark a stark difference between burnt and non-burnt sacrificial rituals as, in the case of the *θυσία* at least, it is the burning that is the key ritual component that serves to define *θυσία* as *θυσία*. Therefore, if there were a Minoan burnt sacrificial ritual, we may speculate that again the burning rather than the killing may have been the defining aspect. Thus the presence of evidence for burning in association with faunal remains, or more properly with specific anatomical units at repeated locations, would indicate this process.

Yet for non-burnt animal sacrifices a definition is more complex. The presence of faunal remains in an area that has been archaeologically identified as a cult area is testament to the presence of and / or use of animals in practices at these locations. However, the precise nature of the practice must really be identified in accordance with other archaeological finds. Typically, in the sacrificial rituals of most cultures (regardless of the ideological motivation), at least part of the carcass of the victim is used for a purpose other than that of the satisfaction of the immediate alimentary needs of those who performed the sacrifice. This has often been seen by modern scholars as a gift to the gods / powers in exchange for some benefit. Whether or not this is the cosmological motivation behind the allocation of part of the carcass, in the majority of cases the same anatomical units are repeatedly used as they are viewed as cosmologically significant in the

ritual process. Therefore, the repeated presence of specific anatomical units may be confidently used as an indication of a sacrificial practice.

Thus we are moving towards a technical / performative definition for sacrifice, rather than an ideological one, that involves the killing of an animal, in an area with cultic archaeological traits that serve to define it as a cult area, where at least an anatomically consistent portion of the victim is used for a purpose that does not satisfy the food requirements of those persons present. While such a definition may not have the anthropological universality of that of Hubert and Mauss, it nevertheless is more archaeologically visible and viable.

This is, of course, a basic definition, the primary data set, to which other details specific to the Minoan evidence may be added. By this I mean evidence such as the possible existence of an altar structure⁹, specific sacrificial instruments¹⁰, representation of particular species and / or anatomical elements¹¹, and so forth. These serve to add cosmologically specific detail to the basic data set and may allow for an approximation of the motivation for the practice¹². As such we should be able to define whether there is a discrete Minoan variant of the basic sacrificial data set should one be found to have existed.

⁹ See below, pp. 20-23 and Chapter Three, pp. 184ff.

¹⁰ See below, pp. 30ff.

¹¹ See below, pp. 168ff.

¹² For example, Bell (1997: 112) notes that "the use of incineration and smoke to carry an offering aloft correlates with the belief that the gds reside somewhere beyond the human sphere; immersion is used to convey offerings to water deities, and abandonment of an offering in a ravine or on a hilltop is usually sufficient to convey it to gods thought to be abroad in the natural environment". Thus cosmology directly affects practice.

In the majority of cultures, however, the actual killing of an animal in a rite is typically followed by a communal feast – indeed Robertson-Smith saw this as the abiding purpose of sacrifice, the communion meal between god and kinship group¹³. One only has to consider the Classical Greek θυσία ritual where the gods' portion of the sacrifice, μηρία, is distinctly poorer than that of the worshippers themselves¹⁴. The notion of feasting has been in vogue recently in relation to the Aegean Bronze Age and its significance in relation to the Minoan faunal material will be discussed more fully in the later chapters¹⁵. Suffice to say, for the moment, that food is a basic element in the construction and maintenance of social relations of power and inequality. Indeed such communal activities are one of the primary arenas of social action, one only needs to think of the North American 'Potlatch' feasts. Thus we should not be surprised to find a similar concept regarding the ritual exploitation of food resources extant in Minoan Crete.

Of course, such a view of sacrifice assumes that the most significant rituals were those sponsored by the state itself, for unifying purposes, and essentially sidelines private worship and sacrifice. While the replacement or reconfiguration of local allegiances is typically fostered through the use of specific symbolism and rituals (Kertzer, 1991: 88-89), this never occurs to the absolute detriment of personal or kinship-based concerns. For example, the purpose of the Panathenaia, especially the quadrennial version, was to reinforce the unity of all the members of the community of Athens. By the second half of the fifth century B.C., the

¹³ Holocausts are the exception rather than the rule. But here even the notion of *communion* is founded in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

¹⁴ This is explained mythologically through the deception of Prometheus and his wrapping the *osphus* in fat as a means of tricking the Olympians.

¹⁵ See Chapter Three: pp. 260ff

sacrifice of hundreds of oxen at the Great Altar of Athena on the Acropolis and the attendant feasting “came to be regarded as a symbol of the privileged status of the most powerful city in the Aegean world” (Shapiro, 1996: 216); a scholium to Aristophanes even states that “at the Panathenaia, all Athenian colonies customarily sent a bull to be sacrificed” (Palaima, 2004: 21). But participation in these huge ceremonies and their reinforcement of the super-community did not diminish the importance and ritual significance of the rites performed by the demes or by individuals. A similar multi-level structure may be assumed plausibly for Minoan Crete, even if not to the extent of the involvement in a ‘nation state’. Only the context of the individual deposits will indicate the social involvement in the ritual process.

However, there is a problem. From an archaeological perspective it is difficult to differentiate between sacrifice and a communal feast. The presence of bone in several cult locations¹⁶ attest to the use of animals, and their meat, in ritualised surroundings. It is equally clear that some of these are deliberate deposits, not simply waste materials or natural death as articulated skeletons are completely unknown. It is interesting to note that a similar pattern of specific bone selection can be observed in the recent re-examination of the bones from Blegen’s excavations at Pylos (Stocker and Davis 2004). In particular, the bones found in Room 7 were almost totally limited to the mandibles, femurs and humeri from bovines (there were parts of a single red deer in two of the six bone groups) (Ibid. 182). If faunal analysis at Minoan cult sites reveals the presence of bones not usually associated with the butchery of animals for prime meat cuts, for instance

¹⁶ See Chapter Two: Site Catalogue – in particular the entries for Juktas, Psychro and Kato Syme.

skulls and mandibles, then we might presume that sacrifice, the oblation to a religious power, took place rather than feasting – although the presence of one does not automatically preclude the other. Often, given that archaeologically we can never fully recreate a ritual practice and the social atmosphere that surrounded it, it is left to secondary or tertiary ritual indicators to provide further context for the nature of the ritual itself.

A further definition that requires exploration in this study is that of the place of sacrifice. “The cult needs an altar” (Nilsson, 1950: 117) - this is how Nilsson begins his discussion of the subject of the Minoan altar. Thus, as we might expect, he sees altars in most Minoan cult contexts: “Where we find a quadrangular construction of some height upon which nothing has been superimposed, we may often infer that it was an altar” (Ibid.). However, Marinatos has repeatedly stated that there are “no fixed Minoan sacrificial altar structures” (1988:9). Clearly two such distinguished scholars, with two such divergent opinions, cannot both be correct, and so the dichotomy must arise from a disparity of definition. This clearly illustrates the need to define the term ‘altar’.

In my opinion, the key word comes from Marinatos’ comment and that is “fixed”. A great proportion of the Minoan cult paraphernalia and equipment seems to have been portable. For example, the figurines found at nearly all peak sanctuaries are very small, typically around 15-20 cm in height. Although one of the recent discoveries at the peak sanctuary of Sklaverochori is a 13cm long foot, and a corresponding right arm with fist, from a statue around 70cm or more in height, but this is very much the exception to the general rule. A similar

phenomenon of small size may be evident for offering apparatus. Offering tables have been found at several sites, Psychro for example, and these are easily portable. They are also manifold in type: the pedestalled offering table¹⁷ (Fig. 1), the "Minoan incurved altar" (Fig. 2), and the tripod offering table (Fig. 3): there are also several types of object designed for libation and liquid offering; several types of "kernoi" (Figs. 4a, 4b, 4c), cupule stones and libation tables (Fig. 5). These artefacts reveal two things: first, that portable cult equipment was widespread on Minoan Crete; and secondly, they suggest that a wide range of types of offering were made. It is also clear that none of these objects are overly suitable as a structure for the sacrifice of a large animal such as a bull. Half may be immediately discounted as they are expressly designed for liquids, the remainder are simply too small to have been utilised as a surface for ritual butchery.

This leaves us with a problem; for while altar-like structures exist at some sites, notable Juktas, Psychro, and several examples in the palaces as around the West Court at Knossos, they are by no means ubiquitous. The sanctuary at Kato Syme, for example, while exhibiting a great mass of faunal remains¹⁸, has no formal altar. In an effort to address this apparent imbalance of evidence it has been suggested that wooden (and therefore perishable) tables were used for the preparation of victims. Marinatos (1986, 1988, 1993), building on the work of Sakellarakis, has been one of the greatest proponents of this theory. Using the evidence of sealings and the Ayia Triada sarcophagus¹⁹, she conjectures that these structures were the normal means of supporting the sacrificial victim. For

¹⁷ See Platon and Pararas 1991 for a full treatment of this type.

¹⁸ See catalogue entry, p. 127ff.

¹⁹ For a discussion of this significant artefact, see below, p. 38ff.

example, she sees the narrow ledges at Salle β (Malia) as being part of the supporting structure for such an object (1986:21). I have several issues with this theory – one of the most fundamental is to question as to whether a portable wooden structure would be strong enough to support such large animals; personally I do not believe so²⁰. Secondly, why should there be fixed altar structures at some sites and not others if sacrifice was an island-wide Minoan ritual concept; if portable sacrificial tables were the norm, then fixed structures would be an incongruity.

My final objection is of an anthropological nature. In most state-based societies, religious and ritual activities take place in specific locations. Indeed even in nomadic cultures, such as the Hadza or the !Kung! Bushmen, rituals must take place in designated sites in order to be viewed as a continuation of a history of ritual observance²¹. The same, in my opinion, is true of a sacrificial altar. The significance of an altar comes from its fixity and the history of ritual associated with it; the mass of sacrificial remains at Classical Olympia is a good example of the awareness of the importance of such a history. A portable altar loses some of this significance and becomes an essentially functional object, unless it is unique, of course, but this is patently not the case with the classes of Minoan artefact.

It is for these reasons that I do not lend much credence to the supposition regarding wooden offering tables, not to mention their non-existence in the archaeological record. Similarly, I do not regard the other classes of portable

²⁰ Marinatos herself concedes that a table structure supported by only the ledges would be too flimsy (1986: 21).

²¹ The ancient Scythians are a notable exception here – as they used neither fixed altars nor temple structures. See Chapter Three: 184-189 for a discussion of this matter.

offering devices as altars. Thus in this study the term *altar* will only be used in reference to those fixed structures in cult complexes.

With these definitions in place it should be possible to assess their suitability for application to the Minoan evidence presented in the following chapters. Of course, by virtue of the very fact that such a re-evaluation of the evidence pertaining to sacrificial ritual is necessary, it follows that the current research situation is insufficient and that current theories are unconvincing or unsubstantiated. In the past, the study of sacrifice in a Minoan context has been largely cursory, normally only a sideline in treatments of the religious system as a whole. A typical example would be Nilsson's massive treatise, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*, where sacrifice is discussed explicitly for only six pages (229-235) out of some six hundred. I believe that this occurred due to the assumption, through analogy with Classical Greece and the Bronze Age Near East, that scholars believed they knew exactly what took place on Minoan Crete in relation to sacrifice.

PAST STUDIES OF MINOAN RELIGION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SACRIFICE

Massive numbers of texts have been written on Minoan religion and many of these texts, including very recent studies such as Moss' *The Minoan Pantheon*, have been attempts to characterise the Minoan religious system or to identify the powers which it venerated. As these texts have continued to be produced for over a century, one should immediately realise that the subject is still very much unsettled and, while there has been some general consensus, the nature of Minoan religion is still unclear.

The earliest works on Minoan religion were those of Sir Arthur Evans, which remain highly influential even today. Evans' thoughts were dominated by the religious and cultic concepts of Crete. Indeed, the opening pages of his great syncretic work, *The Palace of Minos*, are replete with these concerns, including statements about the "Priest Kings" for example (*PM I*: 3-5). Moreover, Evans was convinced of the oneness of Crete during the Bronze Age: "The culture as a whole...shows an essential unity" (*PM I*: 13). For Evans, there was no issue in proposing that the religion of Crete was a unified 'Minoan' religion, that of the Great Goddess and her numerous aspects. This was the general view for much of the first half of the Twentieth century – that the Minoans worshipped one Great Goddess figure to whom were ascribed a number of functions and a great significance – with Evans generally acknowledged as the major proponent²².

²² However, Nilsson (1950: 392, n.3) quotes a letter from Sir Arthur Evans where Evans is less attached to this Great Goddess theory than is generally acknowledged. I repeat it in part: "I have always in mind the possibility that the Goddess who appears in so many relations in Minoan scenes and impersonations may cover what were really regarded as separate divinities with

Nilsson was the first of the Minoan scholars to propose a system different to that of the single Great Goddess. He neatly summarises his opinion as follows: "An early religious stage always shows gods with more or less specialised functions covering only a part of the life of man or of nature, and peoples in the stage of civilisation reached by the Minoans always have *a plurality* [my italics] of gods and goddesses. There is an *a priori* probability that the same was the case in Minoan Crete" (*MMR* 392-393). Nilsson, and other scholars such as Sp. Marinatos, very reasonably justified this position on the wildly varying types of sanctuary and the artefacts within them. This shows that, on some level at least, the variance between the sites has been acknowledged previously, although this observation was often ignored.

Obviously the belief systems that were conceived of for the Minoans are more detailed than this brief summary would suggest, but the major division has been between mono- and polytheism with the latter winning out in recent years; although the notion of 'aspects' of a Great Goddess does still occur and, similarly, there is still much discussion of the division between celestial and chthonic deities. However, in general it is fair to say that all reconstructions of Minoan religion have emphasised the universal features of the archaeology, or possibly created them (?), while ignoring the local aspects and differences between the sites. Perhaps, in an effort to see a monolithic 'Minoan' religion, a

separate names – equivalent to Artemis, Rhea, Athena, Aphrodite etc. But as a provisional procedure it is convenient, in default of more definite knowledge, to treat the Goddess as essentially the same Great Nature Goddess under various aspects – celestial with the dove, chthonic with the snake etc. etc."

fundamental misunderstanding has been made in regard to what was actually going on.

From the very outset it was assumed, by scholars other than Evans, who believed in the beginnings of his study that the Minoans adhered to some form of idyllic pastoralism²³, that the Minoans practised sacrificial ritual and that only the details needed to be established. Nilsson's (1950: 229-235) brief account is fairly standard in relation to two primary aspects of early theories about Minoan sacrifice: that bulls and other bovids were the primary victims and that the instrument of sacrifice was the double-axe. Both of these assumptions were drawn principally from the iconographic evidence. Minoan art and decoration has coloured theories on many aspects of their society and as such it is important to discuss it in some detail in regard to sacrifice.

That the bull is the sacrificial victim *par excellence* in art is very clear.

Numerous seals and sealings clearly show a couchant bovid lying on or standing near a table (Figs. 6 and 7). Similarly, the Ayia Triada sarcophagus shows such a scene on one of its long sides (Fig. 8). The obvious problem with this evidence is that it is circumstantial; nothing in these images explicitly refers to sacrifice. For example, the moment of the kill is never actually shown, this is assumed to have been done in a ritual manner. The origins of this theory seem to have come from a lengthy analogy with the rites of Classical Greece, for which we possess archaeological, iconographic and comprehensible literary sources. Marinatos (1988 *passim*) conjectures that the structure and arrangement of the ritual

²³ See Evans, A.J. Sir, 1901, 'The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult', in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 21: 99-204.

processes were similar enough; i.e. the leading of the animal to the place of sacrifice, the setting up of the ceremony (preliminary rites), slaughter, and post-kill activity. It is true that there are some similarities in the iconographic lexicon: for example, an animal is led in procession on a miniature fresco from Akrotiri (Fig. 9). However, this is only if we assume that every depiction of a bull on a seal or fresco is to be associated with a supposed sacrificial ritual. I do not believe that there are sufficient indications in all of the scenes, especially on the seals, to presume this to be true. Moreover, we should not be tempted, because of a dearth of Minoan evidence, into using analogy from the wealth of Classical evidence.

The primary Classical sacrificial rite was the θυσία, a *burnt* animal sacrifice. It is important to fully understand this ritual as it has affected so much of the work on the specifics of the supposed Minoan practice. In the θυσία, an animal (usually a bull or cow) was led to a fixed altar, the place of sacrifice; barley grains and water were sprinkled around as purification and preliminary offerings. The animal was then encouraged to nod its head, in an effort to show a willingness to be sacrificed. The officiating priest-butcher, the μαγειρός, ensuring that the animal had first been stunned with a blow to the head, then took the sacrificial weapon, a knife covered in a bowl of barley grains, raised the victim's head and slit the throat of the animal. The blood was then daubed upon the altar, which it should be noted the animal was not raised onto, and the post kill ritual took place. This took the form of the viscera (σπλαγχνα) and the tail bones (οσφυς) being wrapped in the fat of the animal and burned on top of the altar as the gods'

portion of the sacrifice (μηρία). The remaining meat was then divided among the assembled crowd, with the μαγειρός receiving a prime cut.

All of the above details, bar the moment of “supreme violence” (Marinatos, 1988: 15), are depicted in the Classical iconography, often with a suggestion of the deity either in epiphanic or statuary form (Fig. 10). No such detail exists in the Minoan iconography. The fullest possible scene is that from the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, but even this is somewhat compromised²⁴. The majority of scenes only depict a bull lying on a table, which in itself is not enough to suggest sacrifice. The other comparisons suggested by some scholars seem equally unsupported. The most frequent of these is that the Minoans also practised a burnt sacrificial ritual. This seems unconvincing from an iconographic perspective as in none of the Minoan scenes do we have any examples of such activity, nor are there representations of a structure analogous to the Classical altar. The main archaeological evidence for such theories are the deposits of ash and bone at several cult sites²⁵, leading to speculation about sacrificial bonfires (e.g. Rutkowski, 1986: *passim*). However, there are other explanations that may account for these deposits²⁶. Yet, these have remained largely under-discussed due to the prevalence of the analogy with Classical Greece.

In a similar vein, Marinatos (1986: 28) claims (among others) that there is blood daubed on a structure in a fresco from Xesté 3 at Akrotiri (Fig. 11): “The connection with sacrifice, although indirect, is unmistakable: the blood must come from a sacrificed animal” (Ibid. 29). This rests on several assumptions; that

²⁴ See below, pp. 38-43.

²⁵ See Chapter Two for individual site reports.

²⁶ See Chapter Three: 180-183.

the structure is a shrine or altar; that the smear (now no longer visible) represents blood; and that the blood originated from a sacrifice – it should be noted that no victim or any other indicator of sacrifice is seen in this fresco at all. Moreover, even if this reconstruction were accurate, it would still be unique in “Minoan” iconography, and as we know “One swallow does not make a summer”.

As a result of such focus being placed upon the iconography, various aspects of the supposed sacrificial practice have been reconstructed from it. In particular, two symbols have been repeatedly seen as sacrificial referents: the double-axe and the ‘horns of consecration’. As two of the main symbols in the Minoan artistic and iconographic canon, they have much influenced reconstructions of the Bronze Age religious process, and consequently discussions of sacrifice in a Minoan context.

DOUBLE-AXE

The double-axe has been repeatedly identified as a ritual motif, in particular as a representation of the instrument of ritual slaughter, the sacrificial weapon. While I do not doubt that it is a ritual motif, the interpretation of it as the sacrificial weapon is by no means certain, especially given that sacrifice itself is still a conjectural concept. The origins of the double-axe are as enigmatic as its purpose. While it is largely ubiquitous in the Palatial period, appearing on pillars, seals, frescoes, pottery, not to mention the frequent model axes or votive examples, it is largely unknown in the pre-Palatial phases. The earliest examples come from a rich Early Minoan II grave at Mochlos (Nilsson, 1950: 195), but these are too small and flimsy to have served a practical purpose. Moreover, the vaulted tombs of the Mesara, with their evidence for the ritualised killing of animals as a part of the funerary cult²⁷, predate this deposit (Branigan 1972). Thus, we have evidence of a possible sacrificial ritual before we have evidence for the supposed instrument of death.

The theory that the double-axe is a sacrificial weapon is one that has been proposed numerous times, but it is one that is encumbered with a fundamental flaw: the double-axe is *never* seen being used in a sacrificial context. Even on the oft-referenced Ayia Triada sarcophagus the only double-axes are seemingly architectural, being as they are placed atop poles around shrine structures (Fig. 12). Although it is true that the Minoans, just as the later Greeks did, never show the actual moment of killing, one would still expect to see the double-axe being

²⁷ See below, p. 269 ff.

depicted in association with a victim (especially if all the seal evidence does refer to sacrificial ritual), but this is not the case. In my opinion, this hypothesis is influenced principally by an anachronistic belief stemming from the later literature and practices. It is true that in the Classical period an axe was used as a stunning weapon prior to the slitting of the victim's throat (Fig. 13), but in most cases this is not a double-axe. Similarly, in the epic cycle, the axe is a key instrument in the sacrificial process:

“Prayers said, the scattering barley strewn,
suddenly Nestor's son, impetuous Thrasymedes,
strode up close and struck – the ax chopped
the neck tendons through –

and the blow stunned

the heifer's strength”

(*Ody.* III: 502-6)

However, only the axes found at Juktas and Arkalochori²⁸ are substantial enough to have been used for such a purpose; the majority of examples are votive or decorative and would seem to be non-functional²⁹. This, combined with the lack

²⁸ See Chapter Two: pp. 95-101; pp. 135-138.

²⁹ By 'functional' I mean in the commonly perceived use of an axe, chopping, bludgeoning, etc. A recent essay by Michailidou (2003) suggests the possibility that, in addition to a supposed symbolic aspect, they may have served as a form of currency, though she does leave it open as to the form: ““special purpose money”, “concrete or treasure money”, “sacred money”, even “symbolic or representational monies”, the decorated ones perhaps more at home in an elite level of exchange, the cut-outs of copper in a wider – yet semiotic – way of circulation” (313). She concludes that “the idea that elaborate metal axes could function as gifts I exchange for services, therefore as a means of payment, is very probable” (314). While this is largely supposition, it suggests that our modern functional-symbolic dichotomy may also be inappropriate for the double-axes found at Minoan sanctuary sites.

of iconographic representations of double-axes serving as a sacrificial weapon, is suggestive that they were not utilised in such a manner.

If an instrument was utilised for the purposes of stunning large animals, then there are examples from the archaeological record of tools which would seem to have a stronger provenance for this function. On several seals and sealings a figure, usually identified as a priest, carries an object that seems very reminiscent of the Syrian (or fenestrated) axe (Fig. 14). In the Near East this axe served not only as a weapon, but as a badge of office and a sacrificial instrument. The Minoan 'priests' also carry a mace in several examples (Zeimbekis, Unpub. MA dissertation: *passim*), and it has been conjectured that this too could have served as a sacrificial weapon. Again, however, there is the fundamental issue that neither of these objects is seen in a sacrificial context. In actuality, it is the persistence of the hypothesis of a Minoan sacrificial ritual that has led to the interpretation of these objects as ritual weapons, which has in turn been used to lend credence to the hypothetical sacrifices. This type of circular argument is intrinsically flawed, as it relies on the initial assumption that a sacrificial ritual akin to the Classical $\theta\nu\sigma\iota\alpha$ rite took place in the Minoan context – a fact that the archaeology has not demonstrably proved to date.

But if sacrificial ritual does not explain the origin of the double-axe, what then are the alternatives? Again, if we compare representations of the same symbol from other cultures (although it is probable that a different interpretation of its meaning existed), a viable alternative does indeed present itself. In the cultures of the Near East the double-axe is consistently seen as the fetish of the weather

god, the sender of thunder – the most famous being Teshub, although there are several other examples. However, in all of these cases the deities involved are exclusively male, whereas in the Minoan examples the double-axe is almost always associated with female figures (where it is seen in connection with a humanoid figure) (Nilsson, 1950: 223). Even so, it would seem that the double-axe has an association with divinity or religious power (Fig. 15) and this association is stronger than any claims for the axe as a sacrificial weapon.

'HORNS OF CONSECRATION'

Similar in propensity in the artistic canon to the double-axe is the symbol that is known as the 'horns of consecration'. This symbol consistently attracts attention in studies of Minoan religion and ritual practice. It is essentially ubiquitous, although artistic representations far outnumber actual surviving examples. It has been viewed as an indicator of cult and the location of ritual (sacrificial?) practices – for example, it is seen topping structures, as in the Grandstand Fresco (Fig. 16) and on the Zakros rhyton (Fig. 17).

As the name would suggest, the symbol is thought to represent the horns of a bull or other bovine animal. Evans saw them as representing the horns of sacrificial victims, which was entirely in keeping with his conception of bulls as the pre-eminent Minoan sacrificial victim. To a great extent this was coloured by the academic concerns of the age, where the drive in prehistoric Aegean archaeology was to validate the mythical names and stories which had provided the impetus for the excavations in the first place: hence "Minoans" and Evans' use of the ancient name of Knossos for the site he excavated. As has been recently noted (Hamilakis, 2002a: 2-3), Evans did not so much excavate as "materialise his pre-conceived dream"; he "recreated his idealised world, full of peaceful, flower-loving, elegant, athletic Minoans, who were adoring Mother-Goddesses and sacred trees and pillars, as well as travelling and trading all over the Mediterranean". The bull rituals and 'horns of consecration' were included in this reconstruction, and justified to some extent through an ethnographic analogy with the cult of Hathor in Egypt – an aspect of which was the burying of bulls'

heads in the ground so that their horns projected above the surface. Herodotus attests to such a practice (*Histories* II: 41), but this is obviously much later than the Bronze Age.

But this, to some extent, is by way of digression, as despite the uncertainty of the origins of the symbol the association has been maintained over the decades, and has lent considerable weight to the theory that sacrifice was the predominant ritual, with the bull as the principal victim. However, even the most cursory glance at the faunal remains³⁰ indicates that ovicaprids³¹ are the mainstay of the assemblages rather than bovids. Marinatos is correct that “the animal which appears most often on pictorial representations is the bull” (Marinatos, 1986: 11), but her claim that it is the “foremost sacrificial animal” (Ibid.) is mistaken.

While this may be true of the pictorial evidence, the physical remains indicate otherwise. We might explain this dichotomy by alluding to the fact that the bull is a more potent image for the artist to work with (even in the archaeological record the bucrania can be seen as the most cogent indicator of an animal-based ritual though it is massively outnumbered by the sheep and goat remains), and so might well be more prevalent in that context. But we must also acknowledge that ovicaprids, agrimi, pigs and occasionally deer are also seen in representations that have been interpreted as sacrificial in character.

As a result the foundations for the case for the ‘horns of consecration’ being an indicator or commemoration of animal sacrifice begin to appear less stable.

Alternative explanations for the symbol have been proposed, and have varied

³⁰ See Chapter Two: *passim*, and pp. 168-179.

³¹ The term ovicaprids, referring to both sheep and goat, is used throughout this study as without key skeletal indicators, it is largely impossible to differentiate between the two.

from representations of peaks to their being practical devices such as fire-dogs. But such proposals have been inadequate to shake off the sacrificial overtones. This is only fair as the alternatives proposed thus far have been inadequate and unsubstantiated by actual archaeological examples. However, one alternative that does seem viable has never been fully explored. The 'horns of consecration' are remarkably similar in form to a Near Eastern cult symbol prevalent from the Isin-Larsa period onwards. This symbol is that of the "divine boat" (Fig. 18). Occurring largely on pottery and relief work, just as the horns do, and in association with boughs and other ritual symbols, again like the Minoan 'horns', this symbol can be confidently identified as a boat through the textual associations. The similarities are striking and, moreover, boats do seem to have enjoyed a cult function in the Minoan sphere as well: the fleet in the West House Miniature fresco from Akrotiri has been interpreted as having a ritual purpose; a model boat is carried on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus; model boats are found at Kamilari; and there are several examples of sealings that show a vessel whose form, bar the rigging, is identical to the 'horns of consecration' (Fig. 19)³². Thus, once again, a major symbol that is a keystone in the sacrificial hypothesis can be seen to have a legitimate alternative explanation, one that has no direct association with possible sacrificial rituals, which has never been fully investigated.

Thus even from these cursory notes it should become evident of the dangers of using iconography as the basis for a theory regarding socio-religious practices. The artist is forced to modify the message as a result of the medium, the

³² See below, pp. 275-282, on the subject of maritime rituals.

available space, their skill and even their personal beliefs (or those of their patron) which may not be entirely reflective of the general belief systems in operation and are subject to expediency and influence. However, there is one example of the iconographic representation of ritual practices which has received so much attention in tracts on Minoan religious activity that it deserves detailed discussion here: the Ayia Triada sarcophagus.

AYIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS

Nilsson's claim that Minoan religion is a "picture book without text" (Nilsson, 1950: 13) can never be more fittingly applied to any object more-so than the (in)famous sarcophagus from Ayia Triada. The rich decoration of the panelling, with its apparent ritual theme, has essentially been utilised as a diagrammatic guide for some Minoan ritual practices. However, this approach necessitates various assumptions about what is seen on the sarcophagus, and has often been accompanied by assuming an almost canonical quality for the accuracy and veracity of what is depicted.

Such a quality, when applied to any archaeological artefact, is misguided, but this seems especially true in the case of the sarcophagus. It was found in a stone-built tomb at Ayia Triada that was "small and unpretentious" (Long, 1974: 11). However, it was unusual as it was constructed entirely above ground, which distinguishes it from Postpalatial Minoan tombs in general, though parallels can be seen in some Mycenaean tombs such as two at Pharsala on the Greek mainland. This is the crux of the matter as the sarcophagus dates to a period (LM IIIA2) when several Mycenaean features have appeared on Crete. For while the funerary deposits in the tomb (at least what remained), notably two straight-backed razors and a lentoid seal, were of native Cretan origin, the tomb architecture most certainly is not (Long, 1974: 14). As a result, we must be conscious of the fact that the sarcophagus comes from a period when a blending of cultural styles seems to be taking place. Therefore, we must be aware that the

iconographic detail of the sarcophagus may not be as 'culturally pure' as is suggested by its constant use as a source for information on Minoan ritual.

Moreover, there has never been a completely convincing argument for the interpretation of the scenes on the long sides. Long (1974), by far the most extensive study of the sarcophagus, suggests that they are two separate scenes: a chthonic sacrifice on one side, with the offering of gifts to the spirit of the deceased on the other. However, both of these are based on uncertain readings of the scenes. The 'sacrifice' scene is not as we might expect: there are no weapons present, nothing explicitly identifiable as an altar, and beyond all else the bull is clearly still alive; its eyes are open and alert, and it is bound to the table as well as having its legs tied. Thus there was clearly a danger of its struggling. What is evident is that it is the collection of blood that is the key aspect of the rite. If this were a chthonic ritual, there would be little point in the use of a "conical rhyton through which the blood flows directly into the ground" (Long, 1974: 73). In my opinion, this is not as practical as simply letting the blood to pour, or using a trench as in Book XI of the *Odyssey*. The vessel beneath the table is clearly collecting the blood, and is similar enough in design, size and decoration to those used in the pouring scene to allow the decoration of the sarcophagus to be read as a narrative. Long's assertion that the change in background colour separates the pouring scene from the offering of the gifts is simply unconvincing, as the background colour changes on both of the longer sides twice. Thus it is unlikely that it denotes separation in one case and not in the other.

It would seem logical to suggest that the scenes depicted on the sarcophagus, if we accept that they are intended to be viewed as a narrative unit, related to the funerary rites for the original occupant of the tomb. Clearly an individual who merited such a uniquely decorated sarcophagus, and a distinct and conspicuous tomb structure above ground, could be expected to have been accorded a degree of ceremony upon their interment. In my opinion, this is more convincing than the concept of either hero or ancestor worship, neither of which are overtly visible in Minoan culture. Even at the early Minoan tombs in the Mesara, where the evidence is strongest for cult activity at tomb sites, the practices appear to be directly connected with the deposition of the deceased rather than with the invocation of their spirit. In fact, everything indicates that the Minoans were eminently practical as regards the treatment of their dead; from the successive reuse of communal tomb structures and the subsequent removal of earlier grave goods, to the holes in the sarcophagus itself as an aid to the decomposition of the body. Thus if the rituals on the sarcophagus relate to its occupant then I would suggest that they are reflective of the rituals that took place at the time of the original burial.

The alternative interpretation of the worship of a chthonic deity is too problematic. While a blood sacrifice is fitting for such a ritual, no figure is present which appears convincing as a deity. The figure in front of the structure is both smaller than those who approach him, is startlingly inanimate in comparison to the epiphany scenes on Minoan seals and gems, and possesses no attributes or symbols that suggest a divine character. It is possible that the figure could be a cult statue. It is true that there are Minoan cult figurines that, when

viewed standing, exhibit no feet; but these are exclusively female; the faience 'Snake Goddesses' from the Temple Repositories at Knossos are one example. Moreover, these are extremely small, less than 50cm in height (usually 20-30cm). No cult figure approaching the size of the figure on the sarcophagus has ever been found at a Minoan site; Peatfield does suggest that an idol could have stood in the circular feature on the Upper Terrace at Atsipadhes (1990: 68-9 and his Fig. 9), but he did not locate one. Thus both cult figure and epiphany appear to be inappropriate explanations. The presence of the birds perching on the architectural double-axes has been used to lend credence to the interpretation of an epiphany or invocation. It is possible that the birds on the double axes are to be associated with the larger bird seen flying above the griffin-drawn chariot on one of the short ends of the sarcophagus, and thus associated with the female figures in the chariot themselves. If this is the case then to view these two as goddesses invoked in the funerary rite is not implausible. But if this is the case, then it is for the benefit of the deceased man rather than direct worship. This reading of the sarcophagus accounts for only one of the short ends, it does not account for the opposite agrimi-drawn chariot.

However, it is this short end that contains the most convincing evidence that the decoration on the sarcophagus is intended to be viewed as a narrative, rather like a frieze on Classical temple architecture of the Ionic order. This end piece is unusually subdivided into two decorated panels. The lower shows the agrimi-drawn chariot, but the upper register, while very poorly preserved, is apparently a continuation of the procession toward the bull on the table.

Despite the fact that the ritual context of the scene has never been firmly identified, as outlined above, much of the minutiae of the decoration have been used as verbatim sources for animal sacrifice. For example, the lack of an altar structure at several important ritual sites is explained by the theory that tables were used in their stead. No such examples have been found, and the ledges in certain locations which are interpreted as being the support bars for such tables, as at Salle β at the Malia Palace, seem tentative at best. In short, the major form of evidence for their use is from scenes such as that on the sarcophagus.

Therefore, it can be seen that the vast majority of previous discussions of Minoan sacrificial ritual have been a sideline in reconstructions of the Minoan religious system, or the culture as a whole. Even the more explicit treatises are somewhat compromised due to their focus on secondary iconography: indeed, the most recent, Marinatos' *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual* concentrates on the iconography almost to the detriment of everything else. But, more than anything else, all the approaches in the past have had the same basic problem at their heart; the assumption that the Minoans did practice a sacrificial ritual as part of their religious activity, and that it needed only to be described rather than objectively investigated.

This must be done through the application of sound archaeological and anthropological methods to the Minoan evidence to test if the assemblages can be accurately described as sacrificial deposits. Once this is done it may be possible to use ethnographic analogy to identify the concerns of the ceremonies, but to do this before we examine the assemblages is unwise. This will only result

from an objective assessment of the remains from a variety of Minoan cult sites, periods and areas on Crete. By doing so, it should be possible to conclude whether there were variances in practice over space, time and types of site. If the sites all exhibit a similar typology of remains then we may confidently speak of a coherent and established ritual practice. If this is the case we may *then* use secondary evidence, such as iconography, to add detail to the reconstruction of the rite, but only when we have firmly established that there was such a rite. If it transpires that the archaeological remains vary drastically between the sites, even within the site sub-categories, then we must account for this through differences in ritual performance within a tiered religious system, rather than a monolithic ritual entity.

The faunal remains themselves, however, can provide much information beyond this. The variety of species at sites can reveal the economic overlap with cult practice. If these animals are domesticates rather than wild fauna, then ownership and procurement of victims become valid directions of investigation. Similarly, the size and development of the bones may indicate the age of the animals used which may indicate a time of year for the various rites³³. Finally, the treatment of the bones before their deposition – exhibited in cut marks, extraction of marrow, degree (if any) of burning - in addition to the percentage frequency of certain skeletal elements, can inform us about the specifics of the ritual. As this will be a major element of the study an amount of zooarchaeological data will be presented. It is therefore important to be certain of any deductions based upon the study of the faunal remains.

³³ This would primarily apply to the use of yearlings in ritual practices.

ZOOARCHAEOLOGY

Zooarchaeology, the archaeological study of animals and their remains, has existed as a discipline since the 1860s, but it was not until the processual or cognitive archaeology of the 1960s that it became a major component of the archaeological study of sites. The primary motivation for zooarchaeology is anthropological, that is to say it revolves around the study of the interaction between humans and animals, be it symbiotic or exploitative. In order for this to be done accurately a certain degree of specialist terminology and biological knowledge is necessary. Unfortunately, there is no space here for a full discussion of the terminologies: as a result I include diagrams and tables as a means of summarising the key skeletal and biological terms that will be used in this study³⁴ (Fig. 20). Due to the homology of the skeletal evolution of mammalia these terms are fully interchangeable regardless of the species under discussion.

However, equally as significant as at least a basic understanding of the biological factors is a comprehension of the techniques regarding the recovery of faunal material. The first point is an obvious one, but equally one that cannot be ignored: given that few total excavations of archaeological sites are carried out (at least in recent years) inevitably the bones that are recovered are a sample of any total deposit and as such must be acknowledged as perhaps not totally representative. Even on sites where the study of the vertebrate remains is seen as an important aspect of the research, it is rare for the excavation trenches to be positioned by

³⁴ For those who wish to see discussions of these matters in full I refer them to O'Connor 2000; Reitz and Wing 1999.

considering expected bone distributions (O'Connor, 2000: 28). Similarly, the method of recovery directly affects the end assemblage. Excavations sometimes rely on bones being noticed during excavation, and being picked up – a feature that was especially true of the early Minoan digs. However, this form of hand-collection biases the sample to larger, more obvious bones, and by implication to the larger animals which tend to be over-emphasised at the expense of the smaller boned animals. Hand collection will retrieve most cattle bones, but will miss out most fish bones (Ibid. 31), for example. Given the fact that the majority of the major Minoan cult sites were dug in the first half of the twentieth century or earlier we might assume that such a phenomenon occurred. However, it is a fallacy to argue from a lack of evidence, and as a result we must accept the information that we have available, although it must also be acknowledged that an island culture would certainly have exploited the sea as a source of food³⁵.

The above factors then leave us in a position to identify the anatomical part, or fragment thereof, and thereby the species from which it came. This approach is true of all faunal assemblages, but when we are dealing with a cult site there are certain other factors that must be taken into account, as bones alone are not enough. As we are all taught as undergraduates, archaeology is about context. Certainly then animal bones must be used in conjunction with the more traditional archaeological indicators of ritual sites – the architectural and material archaeology. The key aim here is the recreation of the original pattern of activity that created the deposit, to that end it is important to acknowledge:

³⁵ Even a brief glimpse at the Minoan art and certain deposits – e.g. Shrine of the Double Axes – shows the Minoan concern with the sea and its produce. Plus see below, pp. 275-282.

- i. the spatial relationship between the bones, architecture and other features;
- ii. the range and nature of the species represented;
- iii. the age and sex breakdown of the animals;
- iv. bone modification present (cut marks, burning etc.)

The identification of sacred activities from animal remains entails the search for a diagnostic or characteristic pattern, one that differs from that found in domestic or secular contexts.

BURNING AND BUTCHERY

As noted above, the human modification of bone is a useful indicator of cult activity, of which burning is a major aspect. "A variety of human activities, including deliberate garbage disposal, may have exposed bones to fire, causing a range of changes in appearance which we may summarise under the term charring" (O'Connor, 2000: 45). This is of importance in the case of Minoan Crete; a feature of a number of extramural cult sites is an ash layer³⁶, which has often been discussed in relation to faunal remains. It has been argued that these are the result of the deliberate, ritualistic burning of entire animals or parts thereof.

Empirically there are three distinct stages of charring: black charring with no distortion; grey discoloration with minor distortion and cracking; white discoloration (calcining) with distortion and shrinkage, giving the bone a porcelain-like texture (Shipman et al. 1984). These three stages can be approximately correlated with the temperature to which the bone was heated; however, other factors must also be taken into account, such as the removal of the flesh from the bone prior to burning, which would directly affect the level of charring. Typical roasting of a meat joint, that is with meat on the bone, produces the minimal level of charring on that bone (Reitz and Wing, 1999: 133). Therefore, when the bone is more charred, or calcined, then it is likely that the bone was already defleshed or was in contact with the fire long enough for the meat to be roasted away.

³⁶ See catalogue entries in Chapter Two.

An additional problem with completely burned bones is that some of the organic remains will turn to ash (think of a modern cremation) and might not be retrieved from the archaeological record. An example of this can be seen in the Bedouin practices at the tomb of Sheikh Abu Hurreira (Klenck, 2002: 54). Here the Bedouin burned sacrificial victims so thoroughly that only the crania, phalanges and metapoidals survived intact since these bones were left with skin on them during the butchery process. The rest of the remains could not be retrieved because these bones had turned to ash (Ibid.). This is of interest when we return to the reports such as that of Kato Syme (Lebessi and Muhly 1990) where significant reports of crania in ash layers are extant.

Therefore, only by a careful examination of the various faunal assemblages may we better understand the degree and, to some extent, the purpose or motive for the burning. However, a further aspect of human behaviour will also directly affect the faunal remains in the archaeological record: butchery. A prey animal may have been killed, skinned, jointed and eaten with the aid of various tools. Each of these tools leaves distinctive traces on the bones, but we may break up the overall process – and therefore the tools used – into two main stages. The first stage involves the killing and dismemberment of the animal. The second stage comprises the processing of the carcass for the final food procedures.

The initial stages occur when an animal is killed and its carcass eviscerated, skinned and quartered. All cultures perform this in a uniform manner principally due to the physiological attributes of the animal and because these steps are necessary to remove impurities such as the blood, faecal matter, and hair from

the carcass (Klenck, 2002: 55). A description of the initial stages of butchery is provided below:

- i. The veins across the animal's throat are cut and the animal bleeds to death. By cutting the jugular veins most of the blood is expelled from the dying animal. The head is then removed from the carcass.
- ii. Either the joints at the distal metatarsal and proximal first phalanx or the tarsals at the distal end of the tibia are cut to remove the feet from the carcass.
- iii. After the animal is decapitated, the victim is hung upside down by passing a hook through the gastrocnemius tendon located between the proximal end of the calcaneum and distal end of the tibia. This activity is done to help drain the animal of blood and to facilitate further butchering activity.
- iv. The animal is then eviscerated or 'gutted' by cutting through the centre of the abdomen to remove the intestinal sack, and the impurities associated with it, as well as the major organs.
- v. Butchers skin the animal either by cutting strips of skin off the caprovines or by pulling the skin down over the distal hindlimbs, torso and forelimbs. After the skin is pulled down over the forelimbs the lateral and medial sides of the carpals might be cut to separate the metacarpals and phalanges from the carcass. The metacarpals and phalanges thus may be left in the skin and separated as one unit from the carcass.
- vi. The limbs are removed from the body of the animal. Forelimbs are separated by cutting through the tendons that held the scapula to the trunk

of the animal. Hindlimbs are severed from the animal by cutting through the tendons that surround the head of the femur and acetabulum of the pelvis.

(Summarised from Klenck,2002)

One should not be drawn into thinking that this process would be overtly affected by a ritual context. Certainly iconographic evidence confirms that in Classical Greek sacrificial ritual the veins in the neck were cut, albeit after a stunning blow, and the blood flowed out and was daubed on the altar (Fig. 21). Similarly an Egyptian model of a slaughterhouse from the tomb of Meketre, a Theban noble who was interred c. 2000 B.C., provides a visual model of how ungulates were butchered – revealing that the Egyptians slaughtered cattle by cutting the veins in the neck. In addition, murals from the tomb of Ukhhotepe I, located at Meir, dating to the Twelfth Dynasty, portray cattle crania, complete forelimbs including scapulae, and other unidentified cuts of meat.

In the second stage of butchery, dismemberment processes are affected by food preparation methods and cultural norms. Hence, cultural values play more of a role in butchery procedures at this stage than do anatomical or functional factors. Therefore it is at this stage that an analysis of cut and chop marks on the bone becomes more important as they may allow us to reconstruct the original jointing of the carcass which, in turn, could lead to a more plausible and complete reconstruction of the Minoan ritual practice.

On the simplest level we can divide tool marks on bone into two categories: cut marks, resulting from the cutting of overlying tissues by a knife-like implement; and chop marks, resulting from the chopping of muscle and bone by something like an axe or cleaver (O'Connor, 2000: 45). Even at this simplistic level it allows us to differentiate between marks that largely result from the attempts to remove meat from the bone and attempts to sub-divide the carcass. Indeed the analysis of these marks may indicate cultural definitions of units of meat or, in the case of ritual sites, the allocation of various animal parts to groups of people or deities.

Butchering marks, however, can be divided into further distinct categories beyond that mentioned above. Noe-Nygaard (1979) discusses five categories: cut marks, scrape marks, hack (chop) marks, blows, and saw marks. Characteristics of each mark reflect the type of tool used, the angle of the cutting edge, the pressure exerted, whether the meat was cooked or not, and the condition of the specimen itself. As a general rule, repetition of marks at the same location and an anatomical reason for the marks are two broad criteria that indicate the marks are of human origin (Reitz and Wing, 1999: 128), as opposed to those faunal assemblages that are accumulated and characteristically modified by some other species or abiotic process.

Cuts and scrapes are characterised by small incisions. They may have a "V" shape, that sometimes grades into a "U" shape, and the groove walls have fine striations parallel to the long axis of the cut (Fig. 22) (Shipman 1981). Cut marks are probably made by knives during skinning, when disjuncting the carcass or

when removing meat before or after cooking. Some marks are small, shallow cuts running down the surface of the element and are often the result of filleting.

Chop or hack marks have a deep, non-symmetrical “V” and lack striations. Hacks tend to cluster around the large joints formed by long bones, but are also found on the shafts (Reitz and Wing, 1999: 129). They are evidence that some large instrument, such as a cleaver, was used. Presumably a cleaver, or similar tool, would be employed as the carcass was dismembered rather than after the meat was cooked – thus making it a preliminary stage tool. Impact marks caused by blows are produced by hitting an element with a semi-blunt, pointed instrument. Blows result in minute fragments of bone around the rim of the fracture on the impact side, a radial striation at the impact site, and a flake scar on the opposite side (Ibid. 130). These marks are most typically observed in hunter-gatherer assemblages as they result principally from marrow extraction or tool manufacture, as a result they are unlikely to appear in an assemblage that results from a sacrificial practice.

The analysis of the burning and butchery marks is but part of the zooarchaeological data that can be obtained from a faunal assemblage. Equally, if not more, relevant is the overall form of the assemblage – that is to say whether it results from a natural, secular or ritual process. While it is true that other predators may account for some faunal remains found on Crete, given the types of site we are investigating we must look to human agency for the explanation of the majority. Typically if Minoan ritual faunal assemblages

correspond to those of other cultures then we might expect an overall age structure revealing the specific selection of young individuals.

However, when we analyse the remains we must be aware that the Minoans undoubtedly maintained herds for other purposes. The Linear B tablets from Knossos have been interpreted as indicating that bureaucracies were organised on a geographic basis and that some portions of the economy, such as the cloth industry, were directed and administered by the palaces (Betancourt, 1976: 42). The tablets provide extensive records of textile workers (Ak series), cloth storage (Ld), cloth deliveries (Le), textile production (Lc), wool allocation (Od), sheep shearing (Dk / Dl), and even the flocks (D) themselves (Klippel and Snyder, 1999: 54). Certainly from those sites where large-scale faunal analysis has taken place ovicaprids dominate the assemblage – LM IIIC Kavousi: Vronda they are 79% of the deposit, LM IIIC Kavousi: Kastro 81%; at these same sites the percentages of sheep within these ovicaprids (where species could be identified) are 69% and 61% respectively. These percentages, if we assume them to be reflective of the Minoan period, indicate that the majority of the domestic assemblages were dominated by sheep and goats. Similarly, if these flocks were for a variety of purposes, as the earlier Linear B tablets indicate, i.e. not simply for meat but for secondary products such as milk and wool, then typically the age pattern will differ from both a ritual deposit and those of flocks raised for meat alone. Secondary product herds usually exhibit a much higher average age at death, for obvious reasons. Certainly the bones from Kavousi: Vronda and Kavousi: Kastro suggest that older animals made up a higher percentage of the assemblage; however, this is somewhat compromised as the bone was in a very

fragmentary condition (Ibid. 55). The excavators believed this to be the result of the deliberate extraction of the marrow from the bones of older individuals, the bones of younger individuals did not exhibit such fragmentation.

Thus it should be clear that much information may be gained from the study of the faunal remains found at sites, but is also clear that great care needs to be taken when doing so. It should not need stating that should faunal remains appear to be largely absent from the Minoan cult sites we may, if not must, assume that animals were not extensively used in their cult practices. The distribution patterns of the faunal remains will be plotted both in terms of geographic and temporal variation to investigate consistency of practice. In addition to animal sacrifice the evidence, albeit scattered, for human sacrifice is also examined. Human sacrifice, in most cultures where sacrifice is practised, is the most extreme version of the rite, performed only in the gravest of circumstances. If animal sacrifice should appear to be a ritual component of Minoan religion, then there is a possibility of this version of the ritual also being extant.

ZOOARCHAEOLOGY AND RITUAL PRACTICES

It must be remembered, indeed it has been stated already and will be repeated in this study, that the Archaic / Classical Greek θυσία ritual has been used as the model for the Minoan practices. In this we are fortunate as there has been a (relatively) large amount of zooarchaeological study of faunal remains associated with the sanctuaries of Greece and the practice of θυσία.

We are therefore able to create a set of archaeological correlates that are indicative of the θυσία ritual. This data set is observable at several sites from across Greece and the Aegean islands. For example, the altar of Aphrodite Ourania at Athens (Reese 1989), provides a basic data set. Here 95% of the bones are burnt and most are calcined. The bones derive almost exclusively from small ruminants i.e. sheep and goats. 60% of the Number of Identifiable Specimens (hereafter NISP) were vertebrae of the caudal spine; 20% of NISP were femora and patellae; and 16% NISP were ribs.

This basic picture is embellished by that from the bothros within the Archaic sanctuary of Aphrodite at Miletus (Forstenpointner, 2003: 204). This bothros again contained a deposit of burnt, mostly calcined, bone. Almost 90% of the remains (NISP) were of ovicaprids, with 10% being from cattle. The skeletal representation displayed first of all the deliberate selection of femora and patellae, intermingled with a smaller percentage of caudal vertebrae. Similarly, Altar I of the Mytilenean sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Lesbos has a faunal deposit

consisting of more than 70% (NISP) ovicaprid vertebrae and 13% ovicaprid femora.

Thus these sanctuaries begin to provide a picture of a ritual process in which there seems to be a notable preference for ovicaprid thighs and vertebrae. It is notable that it is precisely these skeletal elements that are discussed in literary treatments of the *θυσία* ritual. As a final corresponding occurrence of this data set, Forstenpointner's study of the faunal remains from the Artemision at Ephesus makes convincing reading.

This study (Forstenpointner 2003) focuses on three specific areas of the site (HN – bothroi along the northern flank of the Hekatompedos; HK – wet sieved material from a long trench along the east side of the Hekatompedos including a well-defined bothros at its eastern threshold; NB – a layer of carbonised material, a 3 x 15m band, south east of the northern cult base [Ibid. 205]) and reveals a similar pattern to that outlined above. Forstenpointner notes that the remains are of burnt offerings, but are always intermingled with large amounts of unburnt animal bone and ceramic sherds (Ibid. 206). The frequency of goat / sheep (species level identification was compromised by the original pattern of anatomical selection and the fragmentary condition of the bone) is consistently higher than that of other species by far. Amongst these small ruminants, in the burnt remains, the strong predominance for femora is obvious, while in the cattle remains the frequency of the caudal vertebrae “implies at least similar sacrificial value for the chine as for the thigh” (Ibid.). Thus here also we have a convincing occurrence of the *θυσία* ritual where there is a deliberate selection in a deliberate

manner of the femora, patellae and chins (caudal lumbar vertebrae, ossa sacralia, and coccygeal vertebrae) mostly from ovicaprids but with a significant minority of cattle (particularly in area HN).

Thus we appear to have an accurate zooarchaeological data set for the Greek burnt sacrifice or θυσία, where the percentages and skeletal selection in question tally extremely well with literary descriptions of the ritual. Therefore, we are able, as a result of this blueprint, to compare the Minoan faunal remains with this data set and thereby test the validity of utilising the θυσία ritual format as the model for the supposed Minoan practices³⁷.

However, due to recent work on the faunal remains from Mycenaean sanctuaries and notionally 'ritual' deposits, for example that on the bone deposits at the Pylos palace (Stocker and Davis 2004), a data set for an alternative ritual process has become available for comparison with the Minoan evidence. Perhaps the most striking example of what appears to be a Minoan sacrificial complex is the sanctuary of Ayios Konstantinos.

This complex is located on a low hill (at an altitude of 114m) lying on the east coast of the Methana peninsula in the north-east Peloponnese (Hamilakis and Konsolaki, 2004: 136). The complex itself dates to LH III A-B and at least some of the complex seems to have been associated with religious practices. In particular Room A of the complex, which contained a stone bench linked to three

³⁷ It shall become clear that such a notion is utterly without merit.

low steps³⁸ in the north-west corner; a low stone platform along the south wall; and a small hearth in the south-east corner containing a thick layer of ash and animal bones (Ibid. 137). A number of drinking vessels and a large triton shell were found in the same area (Ibid. 138). Around the hearth were a number of cooking pots and a stone spit rest, but in other areas of the room were vessels associated with libations, including an animal head rhyton.

The animal bones from this complex come from rooms A,B, and C, but only 125 fragments were identifiable out of a total of 553 (Ibid. 139). These 125 NAU (Number of Anatomical Units [a variant of NISP]) have been well studied. If taken at face value a simple percentage of sheep / goat would seem to dominate once again, some 54.5% of the 125 NAU. However, pigs were also a significant presence at some 30.3% of the identifiable deposit. But in Room A, the room most associated with ritual practices by the excavators, the pig bones accounted for 44 out of 82 BAU, or 53.7%. This is in stark contrast with rooms B and C where sheep /goats are some 75% of the deposit (Ibid. 139-141).

This would seem to suggest a marked difference in practice between room A and rooms B and C. But even within room A there is a clear disparity between the anatomical representations of pigs and ovicaprids. The former are represented more or less evenly in terms of anatomy: most parts of the animal are represented, suggesting that whole carcasses were brought into the room (Ibid. 141). However, the latter, the sheep and goats, have an uneven anatomical representation; mostly the meaty parts are present – the humerus, femur, tibia, scapulae, and pelvis.

³⁸ The similarity of this structure to that at Anemospilia and the structure depicted on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus (and other examples) is noteworthy.

(Ibid.). This is indicative of a marked difference in ritual treatment of the species. This is reinforced by the fact that the bones from room A, the room with the highest percentage of pig bones, are burnt, whereas the bones from rooms B and C are mostly unburnt. Moreover, the pig bones are primarily from very young (some newborn) animals, while the bones in rooms B and C are from adult animals (Ibid. 143).

Hamilakis and Konsolaki (2004: 143) note that in room A, the “main cultic room”, the practice discernible is one of “the selective ritual consumption of young animals, with clear preference shown to pigs”. Moreover, it appears that we have deliberate sacrificial burning, as is suggested by the selective nature of the burnt material, the fact that the burnt bones are calcined, and the find spot of the bones near the hearth (Ibid. 144). Thus, as the excavators state, this site offers “the first zooarchaeological evidence for burnt animal sacrifices in a sanctuary during the Mycenaean period” (Ibid.). They add that “it is unlikely that the evidence from Ayios Konstantinos is a unique case” (Ibid.). regardless of the validity of this last statement, it would appear that at Ayios Konstantinos we have a Mycenaean burnt sacrifice, that is a ritual where the most important aspect of the practice was not the moment of the kill but the subsequent burning of the body (Ibid. 145).

Similarly, the evidence from Pylos (Stocker and Davis 2004), although it is suggestive of a different form of burnt animal sacrificial ritual, one where cattle seem to have been the main victim, would seem to reinforce the notion of the existence of a Mycenaean rite of burnt sacrifice. However, it is also crucial to

note that in both of these Mycenaean examples the excavators have linked these sacrificial practices to subsequent feasting activities. In the case of Ayios Konstantinos this is very much suggested by the presence of the cooking vessels and the stone spit, as well as the large number of kylikes (Hamilakis and Konsolaki, 2004: 146). But it is noted that the small scale of the complex (Room A measured some 4.30 x 2.6m) and its simple architectural structure implies that access to the area was somewhat restricted. In contrast, the remains at the Pylos palace are suggestive of the mass feeding of several hundred individuals. Thus it may well be that the motivations that created the two deposits are different: in the case of Ayios Konstantinos the excavators suggest that participation in the processes of room A was reserved for those who had “privileged access to the cosmological powers that the active participation in the sacrificial and feasting rituals would have perhaps conferred” (Ibid. 147).

Irrespective of this, these two cases are suggestive of the importance of feasting practices in Mycenaean societies, but in association with a practice of burnt sacrificial ritual. However, Minoan is neither the same as Classical Greek nor as Mycenaean; yet these examples give us two fairly concrete archaeological examples of the remains of burnt sacrificial rituals with which we may compare our Minoan evidence.

However, as the title of this study states, this is an investigation into sacrifice as a component of the Bronze Age religious practices as a whole. As such it will be necessary to make reference to other processes of cult activity extant at that time; primarily libation and votive deposition. The evidence for these practices is also

referred to in the individual site catalogue entries and the significance of each cult practice, in comparison to sacrifice, is examined in Chapter Three. By doing so it should be possible to account for the various ritual practices and set sacrifice within a ritual context.

CHAPTER TWO: SITE CATALOGUE

The following chapter presents the evidence for ritual practices from a number of Minoan cult sites. I have attempted to give as wide-ranging a selection as possible, utilising several examples from each of the major *types* of Minoan cult site – peak sanctuaries, cave sanctuaries, urban shrines and extra-urban sanctuaries.

The motivation for the selection of these sites was twofold. Firstly, they are predominantly the best known of the Minoan cult establishments, and as such they have received the most study. The advantage of this is that there has been much written regarding each of them (although some are still incompletely published) providing a depth of information. But also, secondly, they have become ingrained into discussions of Minoan sacrifice. If, from the evidence from these sites, it becomes apparent that sacrifice was not as widespread as believed it compounds the errors that were made in previous treatments of the subject as the same sites have been utilised. It is also important to address the inclusion of two sites in particular – Gournia and Karphi – which do not fall under the era of the “Palatial period”. The inclusion of Gournia and Karphi is justified on the grounds of providing a *terminus post quem* for the Minoan ritual practices. These shrines, and others of their class, are from a period - LM III – when there is a generally accepted (among modern scholars) influence from mainland Greece at work on Crete. Therefore, if we may associate these shrines with a notable *volta* in cult practice, we are better able to contextualise the ‘Minoan’ practices of the palatial period.

While in any selection of sites there are omissions that some may surprise some, I have endeavoured to be as objective as possible, treating each site as individually as possible before its inclusion in the system discussed in Chapter Three. That chapter also introduces passing evidence from sites not included in this catalogue, for reasons of time, space and level of publication, in order to apply the theories proposed therein to a wider swathe of Minoan cult.

DOMESTIC, URBAN AND PALACE SHRINES

"In the Minoan civilisation, no temples are found, if by temples we mean a separate building set apart to be the abode of the deity and to shelter its image and paraphernalia" (Nilsson, 1950: 77)

This statement of Martin Nilsson, made some fifty years ago, remains accurate today. Temples, as western scholars use the term, are not extant in Minoan Crete. However, there are small structures that act as cult sites, and there are also other areas that part of a larger complex such as the palaces³⁹, which may be termed shrines. Given this, there is a question that must be addressed: do these shrines, which are seemingly designed for personal or domestic cult, exhibit similar evidence pertaining to ritual processes as the peaks, caves and rural sanctuaries that would seem to be designed for popular or public cult?

If the archaeology is similar then it would be fair to view the urban and extramural sanctuaries as component parts of the same religious system. However, if there is a marked dichotomy then we must account for this difference, be it in terms of complementary or contrasting ritual practices. Rutkowski states his opinion quite clearly: "...neither the domestic nor the palace sanctuaries nor the other cult places in the houses or villages were of basic importance in the lives of the Cretans" (Rutkowski, 1986: 149). For Rutkowski, the urban shrines (in all their forms) are very much the 'poor relations' of the extramural sanctuaries which he regards as the "principal cult

³⁹ Obviously the shrines at Gournia and Karphi stand as separate structures, but these are still very small buildings and may still be viewed legitimately as something other than a 'temple'.

places” (Ibid.). While the significance of the extramural sanctuaries is undeniable, one cannot suppose that the Minoans would allocate numerous areas of their settlements and their major structures to ritual purposes if the urban cult did not constitute a significant part of the Minoan religious milieu.

The sites listed in this section of the catalogue comprise what may generally be termed ‘urban sanctuaries’, that is to say those sanctuaries that lie within the boundaries of settlements. This generic term is appropriate for two reasons. Firstly the aim of this study is not to sub-divide and endlessly classify the great variety of Minoan urban shrines⁴⁰. Secondly, in my opinion, the shrines while being different in terms of typological features (the presence of benches or pillars, for example) nevertheless seem to adhere to a general system – this is especially true of the Later Minoan period with the appearance of the ‘Goddess with Upraised Arms’ figurines.

The primary focus is on the archaeological features that elucidate the ritual processes that took place within these various shrines. Where possible a focus on sacrificial evidence is mandatory, but given the small size of the majority of these shrines alternative ritual processes must be considered. The sites listed, as noted above, are from various locations and are some of the more significant urban deposits. I make no apologies for this as given the large number of possible sites it is logical to concentrate on the more notable, and securely identified, sanctuaries⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Although the distinction may be made between public and private cult.

⁴¹ For those who wish to fully explore the urban sanctuaries the standard text remains Gesell (1985). There are also relevant chapters in Rutkowski (1986), Moss (2005) and Prent (2005).

GOURNIA SHRINE

Location:

Gournia is located on the northern coast of Crete, on the Isthmus of Ierapetra, the site is on a north-facing ridge less than 400m from the sea. The shrine itself is located inside the settlement in sector F (Fig. 23).

Site Type:

A built shrine within the town, which Gesell (1985: 72) classifies as an “independent bench sanctuary”.

History:

Although the majority of the settlement dates from MM I onwards until the LM IB destruction, the precise dating of the shrine building is complicated. The building had been assumed, by several scholars, to have been a shrine in the LMI town, but the nature of the artefacts from within it suggest that it was not used for a ritual purpose until much later (Russell, 1979: 31-2). Thus, through analogy with other shrines, notably the Shrine of the Double Axes at Knossos, it has been dated to an LM IIIB reoccupation of the site.

Discussion:

The shrine is situated at the end of a narrow side road that runs off the West Ridge Road. It is a fairly small structure, measuring 4m x 3m, with three steps leading into it. Although Gesell claims it as a bench sanctuary with the bench

running along the south wall, where there was a recess, this is not as clear as she would suggest as the remains are somewhat confused.

The most famous artefact from this shrine is the statuette of the 'Goddess with Upraised Arms' (hereafter 'G.U.A.') (HM 1934) which measures some 0.365m high (Gesell, 1985: 72). In a largely aniconic (from an archaeological perspective) religion such a find is significant. However, the figure is very crudely made and her only distinguishing feature is a snake that wraps around her body, right shoulder and arms. Thus she is seen as a poor imitation of the 'faience' figurines from the Temple Repositories (q.v.). Fragments of other figurines (two heads, three arms, and two hands) were also found at the shrine, along with five 'snake tubes', four terracotta doves and a plastered terracotta tripod offering table.

The vessels and accoutrements from the Gournia shrine seem to be fairly typical of the period – that is until we acknowledge that the finds are limited in both number and quality. It is perhaps telling that in her discussion of the site, Moss (2005: 16-17) devotes the majority of her time to a 'solar disk' on one of the snake tubes and a fragment of pottery from a pithos with a similar disk above a double-axe. Beyond the offering table there is little evidence for any ritual activity at the shrine. Its small size means that it cannot have been a site for mass communal worship such as is envisaged at the caves and peaks; however, it is also unlikely to have been a shrine which exhibits the exclusivity of those within the palaces. Thus it is not clear as to whom the shrine directly served.

However, what can be said is that from the Gournia shrine there is no evidence for the rituals involving animals. No bones, or even iconographic representations of animal sacrifice or other rituals, are extant from the shrine. On this basis it seems very unlikely that sacrifice took place within or about the structure. The presence of the 'horns of consecration' and double-axe symbols do not reflect actual cult practice as we do not fully understand the symbology. However, there is only one occurrence of each symbol at Gournia, which is not enough to suggest any possible rite even if the symbolic correlation was certain.

The form of religious structure which this building most closely resembles is the roadside shrine which is known from many cultures including Archaic-Classical Greece. Certainly its location, very close to the major West Ridge Road, and its relatively small size lend some credence to this interpretation. It may well be that wayfarers visiting or leaving the town paid their respects at the shrine, which has been conjectured as being the shrine of the local variant of a 'Snake-Goddess' (Moss, 2005: 16). However, this must have been done either through prayer or the deposition of non-animal food offerings. This is obviously conjecture on my part, but it does appear to fit the evidence we currently have regarding this shrine.

KARPHI

Location:

Karphi as a settlement is located on a steep slope on the northern side of the Lasithi plain. The plain of Lasithi lies towards the east end of Crete, about 2800 feet above sea level, and is surrounded by mountains. The two steep hills of Karphi and Koprana tower over the lowlands of the north-west and command some of the easiest entrances to the plain (Pendlebury et al., 1937: 61-2).

Site Type:

Karphi is referred to as a “refuge settlement” (Moss, 2005: 23) due to its strategic location and the fact that the excavators referred to the use of building materials as “indiscriminate” (Pendlebury et al., 1937: 67). The shrine or “temple” (Ibid. 75) is located at the extreme northern edge of the settlement, on the edge of a cliff.

History:

The permanent settlement on Karphi seems to have been a late foundation, the earlier temporary structures being replaced towards LM IIIc (Moss, 2005: 23). Thus the site forms an important bridge between the Minoan and Sub-Minoan and Iron Age levels. This is significant as it allows us to consider if the Palatial period religious practices persisted.

Discussion:

The “temple” was the first building on the site to be excavated (Pendlebury et al., 1937: 75), and the excavators had difficulty in interpreting the fallen and roughly built stonework. However, the complex seems to have consisted of three rooms, a larger one with two adjoining rooms to the west. The large room (Room 1) is described by the original excavators as a “court”, which may well be correct as there is no evidence that it was roofed; similarly the existence of a northern wall is unclear as if one existed it may have fallen over the cliff. This room contained, along its southern wall, a low stone ledge, which has caused the complex to be characterised as an independent bench sanctuary, upon which the excavators believed the cult figures stood (Ibid.). However, the find spots for the figurines found in the structure were either not recorded or were in the northern of the two adjoining rooms (Goddess 2). Room 1 is more significant to this study as it contained a structure that has been termed an altar (Fig. 24). This ‘altar’ measures some 0.9m x 1.0m in surface area, making it comparable in size to the structure at Anemospilia (q.v.), and is located to the north of the room, thus overlooking the cliff if there were no northern wall. Although some burnt wood was recorded in the notebooks of the excavators, there were no reports of animal bone (Prent, 2005: 140-1) that would point to the practice of animal sacrifice.

However, the list of finds from the structure would seem to confirm its cultic status: five figurines of the “G.U.A.” type, a large amount of bluish pottery, four spindle whorls, two cowrie shells, a triton shell, and a plaque with a human face in relief (Pendlebury et al., 1937: 75-6). But there are certain problems with these artefacts as none of the find spots are recorded. Noticeably lacking from

the shrine are any examples of votive figurine that were apparent from other cult areas of the site (Prent, 2005: 141).

Clearly then the structure was of a cultic type, and was of some significance to the settlement. This is evinced by its position; many houses built upon the slopes of the saddle look down onto the shrine and several of the settlements paved roads lead up to it (Prent, 2005: 140)⁴². Although other religious structures were located within the settlement, for example the "Small Shrine" with its rectangular terracotta offering stand⁴³, this complex appears to have been the primary cult structure for the settlement. The lack of animal remains precludes sacrifice or feasting as the main ritual process at the shrine, also libation equipment seems lacking along with standard votive figurines. However, Prent makes the point that the multiple numbers of "G.U.A." figurines (5 restored; fragments of others) "blurs the distinction between cult image and votive offering" (2005: 191-2). The presence of the 'altar' is suggestive of some form of oblation ritual, but beyond this we can say little more than that sacrifice seems an unlikely form of ritual performance in the Karphi "temple".

⁴² i.e. The West and Temple roads as the excavators dubbed them.

⁴³ This object was elaborately decorated with printed and cut-out motifs, including altars with stepped bases and 'horns of consecration'. The four upper corners are topped with plastic animal figurines, possibly felines (Prent, 2005: 143) although Gesell sees them as bulls (1985: 81).

KNOSSOS: SHRINE OF THE DOUBLE AXES

Location:

This small shrine is located in the south-east quarter of the palace at Knossos.

Site Type:

Palace shrine.

History:

The shrine is dated as LM IIIB, and is associated with the reoccupation of the palace. Evans believed that the shrine had a continuous history of use as a cult location from MM III to the final use of the palace (*PM II*: 335); however, the arguments are not conclusive. Certainly the quality of the objects does not compare to the "Temple Repositories" (q.v.) deposit. A more recent study has suggested that the shrine was a "small, secluded space set aside to commemorate [the palace's] past as a major, if not the major, religious centre in Crete" (Gesell, 1985: 42).

Discussion:

The "Shrine of the Double Axes" is often seen as the type-site for LM III palatial or town shrines; certainly Gesell seems to imply this view (Gesell 1985 *passim*).

This is probably due to its location within the pre-eminent Minoan structure – the Knossian palace.

In actuality, when compared to Middle Minoan deposits, the shrine is rather humble. The room itself is very small, only 1.5m x 1.5m (*PM II*: 336), although this is typical of shrines of its period. The room shows a triple division (Fig. 25); the first section being the stamped earth floor by the entrance, containing some jugs, bowls and an LM IIIB 'stirrup vase'. Beyond this area, where the larger vessels stood in the shrine, was a raised dais covered in water-worn pebbles. In the centre of this section, with its feet embedded in the plaster floor, was what Evans described as a "tripod altar" (*Ibid.*). This is more accurately described as a tripod offering table, circular in form, with a slightly hollowed upper surface. These tables have been found in many cultic locations such as Gournia (q.v.) and Psychro (q.v.). Similarly, the water-worn pebbles are found at several peak sanctuary sites, and Evans links them to the sea-shells found in the Temple Repositories (q.v.) as showing a cultic connection with running water (*PM I*: 517 ff.).

Immediately behind the dais and the offering table, a raised base – some 60cm high – ran wall to wall (Nilsson, 1950: 80). The cult objects were set here, again upon a number of water-worn pebbles. These consisted of two sets of 'horns of consecration', each with a socket between the uprights evidently for the exhibition of some cult form. Evans assumed that they were for double-axes (*PM II*: 336), but this entirely conjectural in this case as the only double-axe found in the shrine was a miniature steatite example. Iconography shows several objects being placed between the 'horns of consecration', including double-axes, boughs, bucrania, and even humanoid figures. Thus they were clearly an "attention-focussing device" (Renfrew, 1985: 37), but the object on display varied.

In addition to these objects were several figurines. The largest is an example of the "G.U.A." figurine, some 22cm high. She was accompanied by two other female figurines, which Evans dubbed "votaries", and a figure of a male adorant. Interestingly, the "G.U.A." figurine has a bird perched atop her head, and the male figurine also seems to hold a bird (*PM II*: 339). Speculation about a cult of a Dove Goddess has been extant for much of the study of Minoan religion and persists today (for example; Moss, 2005: *passim*). However, dove or bird goddesses are not referred to in the extant Linear B tablets, unlike other deity names such as DA-PU2-RI-TO-JO PO-TI-NI-JA ("The Lady of the Labyrinth") [Gg 702] or MA-RI-NE-WE ("the God of Woollens") [Ga 674 / Gg 713].

However, regardless of the nature of the deity worshipped in the shrine, certainly there is no evidence for animal sacrifice from this location. It is simply too small to have served as a sacrificial location, and neither bones nor ashes are reported from the deposit. The offering table and vessels may indicate the practise of libation. Sacrifice, in my opinion, played absolutely no part in the cult practice or observance that took place in this shrine.

KNOSSOS: THE TEMPLE REPOSITORIES

Location: The Temple Repositories are two large stone-lined cists located on the west side of the Central Court of the Palace of Knossos (Fig. 26), in a small room north of the Great Pillar Room.

Site Type: There is no real description for this deposit. It is not so much a site in itself, being viewed as a component of the ritual make-up of the Palace. The exact nature of the deposit remains unclear, although it has recently been argued that it is akin to a foundation deposit (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 2). However, its importance to previous and current theories dealing with Minoan religion merits its inclusion in this study.

History: The date of the Temple Repositories deposit is still in question, at some point from MM IIIB to LM IA. Evans preferred the earlier date, linking the deposit to a destruction of a shrine during his "Great Earthquake" (*PM* I: 289)⁴⁴. The cists were discovered in 1903 and excavated by Evans; their presence was detected from "a slight depression in the pavement in the east section of the room" (Evans, 1902-3: 39).

Discussion: The Temple Repositories are perhaps the most famous single deposit in Minoan archaeology (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 2) and, as they are of a ritual nature, their significance cannot be overemphasised.

⁴⁴ See below for a discussion of the alternative explanations.

The East Temple Repository (hereafter ETR) is slightly larger than its counterpart and is built of slabs of "hard grey limestone" (Evans, 1902-3: 44) arranged in two tiers. The West Temple Repository (hereafter WTR) is of a different construction using blocks of limestone, instead of slabs, arranged in three courses (Ibid. 47). Despite this difference in construction the two cists are contemporary and their contents complementary. The ETR contained objects of faience, ivory and bone; a clay tablet, roundels and sealings; a marble cross and stone libation tables; and antlers, carbonised corn and sea-shells. The WTR contained fewer faience objects; a great quantity of gold foil with attached carbonised matter, crystal plaques and a disc; objects of bronze and a "mallet of limestone" (Panagiotaki, 1999: 73). Both cists contained a large number of vases and pottery vessels, as well as a massive quantity of beads⁴⁵.

Undoubtedly, the most famous objects to come from the Temple Repositories are the figurines – most notably the "Snake Goddess". This figure was found split between the two cists; the head, bust and arms in the ETR (in fragmentary conditions), and the part below the waist in the WTR. This is of great importance as it not only corroborates the contemporaneous nature of the two cists, but also is suggestive of the deliberate breaking of the figurine to place it in both chambers (or of the deliberate ritualised deposition of the figurine following an accidental breakage). The preservation of the majority of the artefacts is excellent, the notable exception being the figurines which is suggestive of their ritualised fragmentation. Such a phenomenon is well accounted in many cultures, notably Eastern Europe in the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper Ages (Chapman,

⁴⁵ A little more than 2000 exist in the KSM, HM, and AM – but it is unclear if all of them are from the Temple Repositories (Panagiotaki, 1999: 93).

2000 *passim*). Similar rituals of fragmentation have also been speculated on in relation to Minoan culture, but not any great degree (see Rehak 1994). Such a ritual may relate to the deposition of broken ritual objects which must be disposed of in a fitting manner according to the Talmudic principle⁴⁶, or the ritual killing of significant objects, or as a means of transferring the power of the object to the deposit it is buried with (after Chapman, 2000: 23).

The figurine of the "Snake Goddess" measures 34.2 cm in height and wears a typical Minoan dress, the bodice open at the front to reveal her breasts. Several snakes entwine her body leading to her identification as a "Snake Goddess" (Fig. 27). The two other figurines from the ETR were identified by Evans as being votaries of the "Snake Goddess" although it must be acknowledged that the third figure (HM 64) is fragmentary with only the waist to lower hem of the skirt surviving: this piece alone is 17 cm high which entails that the full figure would have been the largest of the three. Thus, if size alone was to determine which should be considered a representation of a goddess, then this figure would deserve the title (Moss, 2005: 56). However, it is unclear where the remainder of this figure actually is. This is interesting as if this is the primary figure of the group then it may reflect a process of enchainment between the Temple Repositories and another deposit, linking the two by the sharing of the power embodied in the parts of the main figurine.

It is also interesting that if these deposits are to be considered ritual in nature (which in my opinion they are), then there is a notable lack of pottery or ceramic

⁴⁶ The Talmudic principle is that an object, once it has become "holy", cannot be returned to an object for everyday use: cf. Garwood et al, 1991. This, of course, assumes a major rift between the sacred and the profane worlds.

wares in forms designed for eating or drinking (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 5) In contrast to the vast majority of pottery deposits from the Palace, where the conical cup⁴⁷ in particular is in abundance (Popham, 1977: 190-195), here 40-50 storage vessels were distributed between the two cists. They were mainly excavated as complete vessels and as such are in sharp contrast to the broken faience objects. Hatzaki (Ibid. 6) sees this as showing that the objects originally came from different locations in the Palace which, if correct, lessens the credibility of the “ruined shrine” hypothesis. While this is speculative, what seems more certain is that rituals concerned with eating and drinking are unconnected with the Temple Repository deposits.

The same, it must be said, is true for sacrificial rituals and their associated remains. The original excavation commented on several aspects of the deposit that may, at first, be seen as being associated with sacrifice: namely “the ivory handle of a sacrificial blade” (*PM I*: 496), the deer antlers, and the greasy condition of the soil – “the earth grew fatter and more compact” (Ibid. 467). However, these are equally easily (and somewhat more convincingly) otherwise explained. The “handle” is more likely to be a piece of inlay from a larger object – a lyre is one possible suggestion (Panagiotaki, 1999: 120). It is certainly an inlay – the back is scratched, as is usual for the better application of the glue – and its form and shape make it unsuitable as an inlay on the handle of any form of weapon or sacrificial instrument. The antlers (3) are naturally shed (Ibid. 149) and come from a red or fallow deer (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 4), a species not

⁴⁷ The conical cup is seen as one of the most ubiquitous features of many Minoan secular and cult sites. These small, coarse, handle-less cups, suggestive of mass production for a single use as they are often found stacked in large numbers, have received much attention in recent years after being overlooked for much of the study of Minoan Crete. See Gillis, C., 1990, *Minoan Conical Cups: Form, Function and Significance*, Göteborg

native to Crete and unique among the prehistoric faunal material from Knossos. This unique quality may account for their inclusion in the deposit. Finally, the greasy condition of the soil may be explained through leakage from the storage vessels, some of which were almost certainly for the storage of oil or wine, rather than through burning or decomposition of further animal remains.

However, while animal or blood sacrifice seems to have played no part in the formation of the Temple Repositories deposit, offering certainly seems to have been a crucial aspect of the deposit. The presence of cereals is undoubted; Evans stated that they were “found in some abundance” (Evans, 1902-3: 41) and as such they were clearly a major feature of the deposit. Similarly, a number of finds seem to suggest a marine connection⁴⁸, perhaps offerings to a deity with their *τίμη* in that sphere. Marine shells were found in immense numbers – Hatzaki suggests a minimum of 6340 (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 4): their condition implies that they were collected as beach shells of already dead animals (Panagiotaki, 1999: 149). Also, the vertebrae of several species of fish were placed within the deposit – the largest belonging to a shark (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 4). Thus the marine connection is strong in relation to the faunal material. However, Evans seemingly saw these vertebrae, along with a weasel skull that was also found in the deposit, as a “snake”; probably due to the presence of snakes on the figurines. Panagiotaki (1999) includes a plate (her Plate XVII; here Fig. 28) showing the recreation of this “monster”, a plate that was created by Evans but was never used in publication: In *Palace of Minos I* the same scene appears but with an offering table pasted in place of the “snake’s”

⁴⁸ See Chapter Three: 275-282 for a discussion of maritime sacrifice.

position (Fig. 29). However, Hatzaki (forthcoming: 4) states that “it is tempting all the same to link and envisage a ‘monster’, as a symbolic representation of a ‘snake’ meant for display”.

Although the ETR and WTR display no real evidence for blood sacrifice, there are interesting inclusions of objects that have been associated with this ritual practice in previous scholarship. These include four offering tables – small and well-fashioned of marble, breccia and, the last, of serpentine: their sides taper to a small flat base, while in plan they are square with a shallow central bowl with a raised collar. By definition these are presumed to have held offerings of food or drink (they are suitable for both), but none exhibit evidence of burning. In addition to these tables, two stone hammers were found in the WTR. Although Evans associated them with an attempt to loot the Repositories, it is likely that they were a feature of the original deposit (until Evans’ excavations the cists were undisturbed). These hammers are seemingly identical to those implements that are carried by robed figures (exclusively) on numerous Minoan sealings. These figures are usually identified as priests or priestesses (Marinatos, 1986: 22; Marinatos, 1993: 127-140) and, as a result, the objects have been viewed in ritual terms, with the most usual interpretation being that they were a weapon used for stunning the sacrificial victim. However, Evans records that the two hammers from the WTR were “in a fractured and much battered condition” (*PM* I: 468) which suggests that they were used for a more “heavy-duty” purpose.

What, then, may be said in conclusion about the Temple Repositories? Firstly, that as a major ritual deposit from Minoan Crete overtly sacrificial associations

are conspicuous by their absence. Secondly, that the deposit was deliberate and designed not to be re-opened. The fact that two smaller cists had been built over the closed tops of the main pair (probably in the course of their being closed) in a raised floor level firmly demonstrates that no disturbance was then planned to occur (Panagiotaki, 1999: 150). Thirdly, that the deposit is incredibly rich – a fact attested to by the amount of gold and faience objects, and the quality of craftsmanship that went into their making – but that ‘typical’ Minoan religious symbols, such as the double-axe and ‘horns of consecration’, are absent.

The purpose of this deposit is ultimately unclear; although Hatzaki’s arguments for its identification as a “foundation” or “building deposit” (Hatzaki, forthcoming: 9) are quite convincing, including the ritual ‘killing’ of certain objects within the deposit as a demonstration of the power of the Palace (Ibid. 10). However, their uniqueness as a deposit makes the Temple Repositories very difficult to contextualise.

SALLE β: MALIA

Location: This room is located beneath Quarters III-IV in the palace of Malia, the area usually referred to as the “Domestic Quarters” (Marinatos, 1986: 19).

Site Type: Palace sanctuary.

History: The shrine dates to the First Palace Period (Pelon, 1983: 696) and was excavated by Pelon (Fig. 30).

Discussion: In previous discussions regarding Minoan ritual, salle β is usually treated as a primary example of a major palace sanctuary (for example, Marinatos 1986). The original excavator was convinced of its sacral nature, he viewed it as “...une destination religieuse, et plus particulièrement sacrificielle” (Ibid. 690). However, in reality this might not be as accurate as this statement would imply.

The room is certainly of some architectural significance as not only is it of large size, some 65 square metres, but is also contains several interesting features. Firstly, narrow ledges divide the eastern half of the room into three aisles – a very interesting feature as there is no obvious structural reason for this division and so it must relate to the room’s function. Marinatos (1986: 21) compares salle β with Assyrian temples (although the latter are differently articulated around a focal niche) and considers the possibility that the ledges were for the display of

votives and figurines. However, it should be noted that no objects were found *in situ* on these platforms.

The second significant feature of this room comes in the form of a channel at the eastern end of the room which seems to run from a hole on the eastern ledge toward the wall at that end of the room. When we add to the evidence of this channel that of the jars sunk into the floor of salle β , the “vases collecteurs”, we may begin to suppose that liquids played a predominant role in the activities in this room. Indeed, according to Pelon, it is “difficile de refuser toute connexion entre le dispositif observé sur le plate-forme, les rigoles voisines et les vases collecteurs placés à son pied” (Pelon, 1983: 690).

The final significant feature of salle β is from the eastern platform and was designated as an “étagère” or “shelf” (Ibid. 689). This feature, however, is entirely inferred by the excavators. The eastern platform is marked by several sockets or cuttings which Pelon saw as being designed for the reception of a wooden structure, either a shelf or a table. But after this initial mention of the “étagère” Pelon focusses entirely on his hypothesis of a sacrificial table:

“The ‘table’ is known from figured representations, although from a period after that of the first palaces, and in constant connection with the sacrifice of an animal, most commonly the bull”.

(Ibid. 689; my translation)

Pelon is certainly correct in his statement that bulls are often seen upon tables in iconographic representations (Fig. 31); however, there are several fundamental assumptions that have been made about such images that are important to note in relation to this hypothesis. The first is that they are accurate renderings of rituals and, secondly, that the depicted rite was a sacrifice. In actuality there is no real evidence that this is what the sealings and other image sources depict. Pelon, however, has no qualms about reconstructing the ritual process he envisages for *salle β* on exactly these lines. Even Marinatos sees this reconstruction as being suspect, postulating correctly (in my opinion) that the "flimsy wooden structure leaning against a wall" would be unsuitable to support such a large creature as a bull. Equally she questions the convenience of leading a bull to *salle β* in the first place (Marinatos, 1986: 21). However, while we should be wary of confusing practicality, which is primarily a secular concept, with the involved schemes of ritual practices, Marinatos' observations are pertinent as there is no real evidence for sacrifice from *salle β*.

The only faunal remain we may associate with *salle β* actually comes from the adjacent *salle γ*, which is believed to have been connected to *salle β* by means of a window as no threshold between the two, as would serve as a doorway, was found in the excavation. Even so the remains, which Marinatos describes as the "horns of bovines" (1986: 19), were actually extremely limited; in fact only one horn was found (Pelon, 1983: 691 and Fig. 15). Thus even if we associated the deposit in *salle β* directly with that of *salle γ*, which was practically devoid of artefacts aside from the horncore, there is not enough evidence to suppose that sacrificial rituals were the norm in *salle β*.

The actual deposit in β is also not directly relatable to blood sacrificial rituals. The most famous artefacts to come from the room were two swords – one with the famous acrobat inscribed on the pommel of the handle (Pelon, 1982: 176). These were found, in association with some small (possibly votive) vases of the Chamiazi type, at the base of the northern platform. However, this was effectively all of the deposit and while the swords appear to have been ceremonial I find it hard to believe that they were utilised as sacrificial weapons. In truth, little of the deposit of salle β , or its architecture, seems to correlate well with sacrifice. Marinatos incorporates salle β into her system of sacrifice by judging it to be the site of a “supplementary ritual” (1986: 21). However, I cannot agree with this as it forces the question; “If a site contains no real evidence for sacrifice, why should we try to associate that site with sacrifice?” The only pertinent answer must relate to the preconceptions and theories of the individual archaeologist: Pelon and, to a lesser extent, Marinatos approached the evidence already convinced that sacrificial rituals were a primary cult practice among the Minoans. Salle β exhibit little evidence for rituals other than libation, which is a fairly sound deduction based on the architectural features outlined above. Thus, libation must be viewed as being the primary cult practice at salle β .

PEAK SANCTUARIES

"It was usually situated on the mountain- or hill-top, but not necessarily on its highest summit. Natural terraces, rocks, crevices or an entrance to a cleft or cave are normal features. The area was covered by low plants, but trees are rare. Constructions survived in a few cases, they are walls of buildings, terraces and walls surrounding the sacred area, and altars. The sacred mountains is [sic] always situated at a distance from the settlement or town; and usually a pilgrim had some twenty to forty minutes climbing from his home to the god's habitation, but in most cases the mountain was well visible from the neighbourhood. These topographical features alone, however, are not sufficient grounds for recognising a peak sanctuary. Only the presence of votive offerings in addition to the layout of the site, are a safe criterion for defining a given site as a peak sanctuary"

(Rutkowski, 1988: 74)

This would be the "picture of a canonical peak sanctuary" that has been built up over the last century of Minoan studies and is, in some respects, indicative of the current state of knowledge regarding Minoan religion. Much is made of the concept of the 'type site', in other words the search for pattern and similarity between various sites. This is all well and good, but it must be done carefully as it is all too easy to gloss over differences and variation in an effort to maintain the pattern. 'The devil is in the detail' and, as such, it is imperative to fully understand the variety of ritual process at one type of site, before one attempts to correlate the data from examples of several types of site.

The peaks have attracted much of the attention devoted to Minoan religion, often seen as being a parallel development alongside the palaces. In 1951, Platon produced a basic definition of Cretan peak sanctuaries and their rituals (Platon, 1951: 96-160) in which he described the primary ceremony as consisting of sacrificing animals in a great bonfire, the remains of which were then placed in crevices and hollows in the bedrock. The purpose of these rituals, he asserted, was to ask the deity for health, fecundity, prosperity and protection against harm. Thus for Platon the ritual practices of peak sanctuary cult are obvious and apparent. However, it must be stated that this is largely speculative and unsubstantiated. It is this form of rhetorical statement that has dogged the study of Minoan ritual, where preconceptions and assumption have overwhelmed substantiated argument to an extent.

Thus this catalogue aims to focus on the facts regarding the various sites – or rather a selection thereof as there are more peaks than those listed here. This selection has deliberately focussed on the better known and more extensively published sites. Wherever possible the stress has been laid on the faunal and associated remains which may be pertinent to the arguments about sacrificial rituals. Obviously this information is entirely dependent upon the quality of excavation and publication which, as we have seen, varies dramatically. Where the faunal remains are archaeologically absent, i.e. none were excavated, or the published details are vague, the catalogue discusses alternative ritual practices and the data pertinent to them in an effort to establish a cultic context of peak sanctuary practice.

ATSIPADHES KORAKIAS

Location: The site is located on the northern spur of the Kouropos massif, south of Rethymnon, at an altitude of 735m above sea-level (Peatfield, 1992: 62-63).

Site Type: Atsipadhes has been identified as a peak sanctuary.

History: The earliest use of Atsipadhes as a cult site goes back to the pre-Palatial period. Peatfield's rigorous collection of over 2500 pottery fragments gives a *terminus post quem* of no later than EM II, and a *terminus ante quem* of MM II. Thus it can be characterised as a First Palace Period peak sanctuary. Peatfield's excavation is the only one to be carried out at the site.

Discussion: The site consisted of two terraces, the most important feature in the identification of Atsipadhes as a peak sanctuary. The upper terrace was to the west of the site, and a large number of riverine pebbles had been scattered over its surface (Peatfield, 1992: 68). The lower terrace, to the east, had some rock clefts which had been filled with votive offerings (Ibid. 67).

During the course of the excavation more than 5000 fragments of figurine – mainly of cattle – all of terracotta (Ibid. 66), and a huge quantity of pottery were found. This included spouted jars; many different kinds of cups, dishes and rhyta (including one example of the bovid head style); terracotta offering tables; lamps; pithoi; and tripod cooking pots (Ibid. 69-71). This range of pottery, notably the pouring and drinking vessels, conforms to the pattern for the majority of cult

sites that suggests that libations and other rituals involving liquids were extensively practised on Minoan Crete.

However, in a number of other respects Atsipadhes does not appear to be typical.

The first of these anomalous features is the absence of built structures as no architectural remains were found. Secondly, a different ritual process seems to have dominated at Atsipadhes rather than that of the other peaks. One of the most common features ascribed to the peak sanctuaries is the ritual use of fire, but one of the most idiosyncratic features of Atsipadhes is the lack of evidence for burning: in Peatfield's own words, "We found none" (1992: 66). In complement to the unusual absence of ash and carbonised material, there was a total absence of bone, and flotation sieving of the soils did not find any seeds. Thus Atsipadhes exhibits an absolute dearth of the evidence usually quoted as being indicative of sacrificial ritual. Peatfield seeks to explain this by claiming that ritual fires must have been a feature of the Second Palace Period, but other sites – for example, Juktas (q.v.), Gonies (q.v.), Petsophas (q.v.), and Psychro (q.v.) – clearly show the use of fire before, during, and after this time.

But by way of confusing the matter, Peatfield sees the huge range of pottery he recovered as being the remains of ritual meals, despite the absence of ash and faunal remains at the site that would seem to preclude this. Moreover, none of the cooking pot fragments show evidence of burning, suggesting that they were never used. It is possible that the vessels were used for the offering of non-animal foodstuffs – a vase fragment from Gypsadhes appears to show such an offering (Fig. 32) – although as noted above no seeds were found. This would

also obfuscate, to a degree, the purpose of pottery found at other sites in context with ash and bone. Equally, however, in both cases the pottery need not be connected with any other rite, it could simply act as a form of oblation in itself.

Beyond all else, Atsipadhes' ritual process seems to have revolved around the deposition of figurines. The animal figurines claim the greater percentage of the record, the majority believed to be bovid horn or leg fragments (Peatfield, 1992: 72). It should be noted that all of the figurines, both human and animal, were of terracotta; no stone or metal examples were found. Moreover, the quality of the figurines overall is cruder than those found at Juktas or Petsophas. It is on the basis of this evidence that Peatfield classifies Atsipadhes as a "rural peak sanctuary" (Ibid. 77-9), in contrast to those that enjoyed some form of palatial patronage⁴⁹, and as such was utilised by a relatively "impoverished" group of people. This is possible, especially given the relatively small scale of the site; however, this would not sufficiently explain the markedly different remains found at the sites. Yet Peatfield adheres to the belief that all the peaks are examples of the same cult activity and that they "symbolically unify Minoan society, transcending regional differences" (Ibid. 61). I cannot see this as being correct, for while it is certain that the peak sanctuary is a type of Minoan cult site, there is enough regional and inter-site variation to suggest that the concept of a monolithic Minoan religion is somewhat ill-advised⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Peatfield is one who adheres to the parallel evolution of peaks and palaces seeing several examples of direct linkages between the two: for example, seeing Juktas as being Knossos' peak sanctuary (although geography suggests that Juktas could equally be associated with Archanes).

⁵⁰ See Chapter Three: 292-302 for a full discussion

This is certainly the case with the evidence for sacrificial ritual. Its total absence from the site of Atsipadhes, along with the typically associated archaeological or iconographic paraphernalia – double-axes, altars or ‘horns of consecration’ – is perhaps indicative that sacrificial ritual was not as widespread as the majority of writing on the subject would suggest. At the very least it is abundantly clear that as the primary archaeological indicators of sacrificial ritual are utterly absent from Atsipadhes we may safely state that animal sacrifice played no part in the cult processes at the site.

GONIES

Location: The sanctuary of Gonies lies on the mountain of Philioremos (roughly 25km to the north-west of Juktas), which rises 797m above sea-level. The terraces lie at the highest part of the hill.

Site Type: Peak sanctuary.

History: Rutkowski states that the foundation of the site dates to MM I, based on the artefacts excavated. However, it seems to have been rather short-lived as it appears to have stopped being used for cult after the Middle Minoan period. The sanctuary was discovered during the construction of the modern chapel of the Prophet Elias (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1: 15), and while the quality of the excavations was good the site is not fully published.

Discussion: Rutkowski (1986: 79) defines the sacred area at Gonies as the highest terrace and the three rooms of the building – one of which may have been an open court surrounded by a low wall. The walls were constructed of local, rough-cut stone.

Room 1 measured 6.5 x 6.88m and was paved, though may not have been roofed.

The most significant feature of this area comes in the form of three stone blocks.

While they are not now *in situ* but scattered around the room, the excavator's information suggests that they were found together at the south end of the room and were the remains of an altar structure (Rutkowski, 1988: 80; Kyriakidis,

Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1:15). These blocks were clearly a significant feature as they were carefully worked in contrast to the rough hewn stone of the building's construction; however, to identify them as an altar is rather adventurous. Yet the presence of several bones in the centre of the room, associated with two schist plaques, is suggestive of the possibility of rituals involving animals. The bones are not identified, however, not even in terms of skeletal elements let alone species, nor quantified beyond "several" (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1:15).

Room 2 is of similar construction to that of Rm.1, but is smaller – 4.16 x 4.61m – and is largely devoid of features pertinent to the practices that took place at the site.

Room 3, to the south of the site, is the largest room measuring 7.95 x 5.45m, and like the others is largely made of rough hewn stone, although Rutkowski notes that the outer face of wall J was carefully constructed from large stones (1988: 80). This room appears to have been a later addition to the site as its north wall (D), also the south wall of Room 1, was built of a double course of stones; in effect, two walls butting up against one another. Again a large number of stones are noted in the deposit R toward the south-east corner. This could also be the remains of an altar but, given the fact that deposit R was not fully excavated, even Rutkowski gives a more prosaic source for them suggesting that they may have been "gathered by shepherds" (Ibid.)

In addition to the built structures, the cult area at Gonies included a terrace area adjacent to the rooms. Again the terrace is characterised by piles of stones (M and N) although as Rutkowski admits (1988: 80) “the character of these piles is uncertain”. In addition to these piles, a notable feature of the terrace is Assembly O, a depression filled with stones. These features – rocky outcrops and crevices – are typical of the terrain of the notional peak sanctuary.

Also typical are the types of find from the Gonies: human figurines were numerous and spread over the whole site, with some of the female examples having ornate headgear (Jones, 1999: 13). Votive limbs were also widespread but were especially numerous in Rooms 2 and 3. Room 1, by contrast, was dominated by animal figurines, primarily caprids, which Kyriakidis notes were found in a burnt patch in the north-east corner (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1:15).

Gonies is a site at which, while it contains some evidence for the ritualised use of animals, the evidence is compromised in terms of its location and quantity. As such I feel that Gonies cannot be used as a prime exemplar for discussions of Minoan sacrificial rituals.

JUKTAS

Location: Located some thirteen kilometres south-west of Knossos, Mt. Juktas rises to 811m above sea-level and has two peaks, the highest being Psili Korphi. Famously, when viewed from the side the mountain resembles the profile of the face of a lying man (Fig. 33).

Site Type: Peak sanctuary.

History: Juktas is often seen as the type site by which all other peak sanctuaries are identified and has become seen, to some extent, as the Minoan cult site *par excellence*. Juktas allows us to study a site with an incredibly long period of use; probably being founded as early as EM II/III (Nowicki, 1994: 40-41) and continuing until some time in the Geometric / Archaic period (c.700 B.C.) (Karetsou, 1981: 145). This makes the site one of those at which cult activity persisted beyond the collapse of the palaces. The site was investigated in a preliminary manner by Evans among others, though the majority of the site was excavated thoroughly by Karetsou between 1974 and 1984.

Discussion: Juktas is one of the most important cult sites on Crete, indeed Peatfield goes so far as to identify the sanctuary as "the Canterbury cathedral of Crete", seeing it as a place of national pilgrimage. This importance is shown by the huge Cyclopean walls, 3m wide and up to 3.60m in height with a circumference of 735m (Ibid. 151). The exact date of the construction of the walls is still in debate: although the discovery of a decorated offering table in the

wall dating, from MM III / LM I (c. 1700-1650 B.C.), suggests that the wall was a later addition to the site⁵¹. However, regardless of the date of its construction, it is likely that this structure was a physical manifestation of an earlier implied sacral boundary.

The stratigraphy of the sanctuary over the initial periods of use, down to the hypothetical date of the temenos wall's construction, can be divided into three major phases:

EM – MM IIB: This period is dominated by an ash layer containing large numbers of ovicaprid bones and some shells.

MM IIB – MM IIIA: This phase is notably different from the preceding layer as it is characterised by a red earth layer in which the votive offerings are dominant and faunal remains are largely absent.

MM IIIA – LM IB: This phase consists of another ash layer which, in essence, is the same as the earlier level. However, there is a marked increase in prestigious artefacts such as stone offering tables (Zeimbekis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: 37).

Even this brief stratigraphy relates the fact that at various periods different ritual activities were practised at Juktas, each with a seeming period of vogue. But the levels do not precisely indicate the nature of the ritual process. However, there

⁵¹ Recent thinking has also suggested that the wall may be even later, dating to LM IIIB (Dickinson, 2006: personal communication).

has been so much material excavated from the site that we may begin to elucidate these practices. In addition the architectural features of the site are suggestive of the practices that took place. Of those that have received attention in the past the two most significant are the 'Chasm' and the 'altar'.

The 'Chasm' (Fig. 34), a large cleft in the earth next to Terraces I and II, has been excavated down to a depth of around 10m (Marinatos, 1993: 118) and seems to have been filled with ~~offerings~~ votives. It is speculated (Ibid.) that the offerings that were placed on the terraces and around the 'altar' were cleared into the 'Chasm' after a certain period. This process could either be part of the ritual cleaning / clearing of the site, or may be part of the actual deposition process. It is clear that they were placed in the 'Chasm' with some care rather than simply being dumped – thus it is clear that the 'Chasm' was at least the focus of the secondary ritual process at Juktas. Some have seen the 'Chasm' as the reason for the significance of the site, and possibly even the reason for the initial cult foundation. However, if this is the case then the altar and cult buildings seem to have replaced it in later phases.

The 'altar' has certainly received a great deal of attention, and rightly so as it is one of the few distinguishable fixed altar structures found at a Minoan cult site.

The altar itself exhibits no traces of burning, but the terraces around it have large ash layers extending over them – a testament to the use of fire at Juktas.

Therefore, while it seems unlikely that the altar was utilised in a manner similar to the Classical Greek altars, that is as bases for the sacrificial fire, it seems that the altar was the focus for the deposition of votives. Literally hundreds of votive

objects have been recovered, making Juktas perhaps the richest cult site on Crete: given that “we are dealing with a sanctuary destroyed not only by robbers and the natural passage of time, but also by human intervention which has continued up to recent times” (Karetsou, 1981: 185), we can only guess at the richness of offerings that might once have been present.

Around the altar a hoard of 34 bronze double-axes were found (Karetsou, 1981: 149). This is one of the few archaeological deposits in which the double-axe is associated with an altar⁵². However, this does not entail that they were used as a sacrificial weapon, especially given that here, as in most cases, the majority of the axes (32 out of 34) are of the miniature variety. In my opinion, these axes were another class of the personal votive artefacts with which the terraces of Juktas abound. The majority of these votives are figurines, both human and animal, and were found primarily around Terrace I, or near the altar itself. The male figurines far outnumber the female (Karetsou, 1981: 146), but all appear to be modelled in gestures of adoration – arms outstretched or clamped over the chest. This has led to the general consensus that these figurines (mainly terracotta, but some of bronze) are representations of worshippers rather than deities.

The animal figurines, of both wild and domestic species, have largely been viewed as surrogate sacrifices. However, there is no direct evidence to suggest that these votive animal figurines are intended as a facsimile of an actual sacrificial animal and it would seem more prudent to view them as gifts in

⁵² Other notable examples being Psychro (q.v.) and the High Priest's House at Knossos.

themselves. Zeimbekis (Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: 34) notes that the majority of the figurines are of bovids, whereas the majority of the bones are from ovicaprids., so to suggest an explanation of a substitute for an actual animal oversimplifies the situation. Moreover, this theory does not account for the few examples of figurines from species whose faunal remains are not found at the site, such as snakes, rodents and insects.

The final types of object found on the terraces and around the altar at Juktas seem, once again, to indicate that liquids played a major role in the cult practices at this peak sanctuary. Stone offering tables have been found all over the site, associated with them was a wide range of pottery including pouring and cooking vessels. The ubiquitous conical cup⁵³ is present in huge numbers at Juktas, attesting not only to the mass attendance of the site, but also of the prevalence of drinking rituals, or possibly the presentation of individual liquid offerings.

However, there is also a comparatively large amount of evidence for animal sacrifice. As can be seen from the limited stratigraphy, animal bones are found primarily in the two ash layers. These bones are from sheep and goats in the main, although there are remains of pigs and cattle. The caprid and pig remains exhibit some cut marks suggestive of butchery (Watrous, 1996: 71). Of the few bones that are found in the red MM IIB layer, these are primarily bucrania (the horns and skull plate of a bovine), apparently similar to those deposited at Kato Syme (q.v.). Again, however, it seems unlikely that the rites practised at Juktas may be described as a burnt sacrificial ritual akin to the Classical θυσία ritual.

The lack of calcinations of the recovered bones suggests cooking of meat rather

⁵³ Gillis, C., 1990, *Minoan Conical Cups: Form, Function and Significance*, Göteborg.

than complete consumption by fire. Similarly, the lack of complete or articulated animal skeletons is suggestive of the use of specific cuts of meat being the normal practice rather than the wholesale slaughter and offering of animals.

Thus Juktas is most certainly a site where, we may confidently state, animals were used in the ritual practices. Indeed it is difficult to account for the faunal deposits at this site by any process other than sacrifice.

KOPHINAS

Location: The site lies at Metsolati tou Kophina, 970m above sea level, below the actual summit of Kophinas (1231m) (Rutkowski, 1988: 83). This is significant as Kophinas is the only example of a peak sanctuary in southern Crete.

Site Type: Probable peak sanctuary.

History: While Rutkowski (1988: 83) maintains that the temenos of Kophinas may have been in use as early as MM I, the acme of the site is MM III – LM I (Prent, 2005: 165). While there is a hiatus in cult activity after the Neopalatial period (i.e. after LM IIIA1) it nevertheless resumes in the Classical era. The site was excavated as a rescue excavation by Platon and Davaras in 1960, in response to extensive pillaging.

Discussion: Although Kophinas was originally questioned as a peak sanctuary its identification as such is now generally accepted. Certainly the finds from Kophinas are those that are seen as typical of a peak sanctuary. It is possible that the fact that Kophinas is not visible from a distance, unlike the majority of peak sanctuaries, may have led to its original exclusion from the category. The concept of the intervisibility of the peaks in one that has long dominated their study and has added credence to the theory that the peaks were dominated and characterised by the same rites. However, given the fact that Kophinas, which is a major site – for example, only Kophinas and Juktas show cult activity in the



post-Palatial period (Jones, 1999: 24) – does not conform to this pattern may suggest certain flaws that accompany that preconception.

The finds from Kophinas are indicative of a major cult site. The primary Minoan layer within the temenos contained an abundance of pottery in addition to terracotta animal figurines (mostly of bulls), bull-shaped rhyta and terracotta figurines of females and, especially, males – some of which were up to 0.5m tall (Prent, 2005: 165). There is also a wealth of precious material from the site such as stone tables of offering, stone vases, and seal stones (Ibid.). Most significant, however, is the massive quantity of bronze. “Bronzes are not especially common or numerous at peak sanctuaries” (Jones, 1999: 7): Kophinas is thus a marked exception from the norm. There were two bronze anthropomorphic figurines (one male, one female), bronze waste, fragments of bronze talent ingots and, significantly, tens of bronze knives, although it is unclear if the latter were votive or functional. In addition to these bronze objects, there was also a lead double-axe, some objects of gold and semi-precious stones⁵⁴.

Thus if we compare the finds from Kophinas to, say, Petsophas – which while it displays an profusion of clay objects is almost entirely lacking in bronze and other metal artefacts (q.v.) – it is clear that Kophinas is a major cult site, ostensibly richer than the majority of the peaks. However, as with many of the peaks, among the published material, evidence pertaining to the possible practice of sacrificial ritual is scarce. Within the temenos the Minoan layer is characterised by black earth which, according to Rutkowski, is “composed of

⁵⁴ Thus if we remember the “extensive pillaging” that prompted the excavations we may speculate that there may have been even more prestige objects.

ashes from offerings” (Rutkowski, 1988: 83). However, as is typically the case there is no accompanying evidence to support this claim. *What offerings were made to create these ashes?* There is no report of faunal remains associated with the Minoan acme, nor of traces of burning on the figurines or other artefacts. Thus if these ashes are from an oblativous origin then the offerings themselves must have been of a perishable nature. Yet it is equally plausible to suggest that these ashes are not the result of offerings. Fire may have been used to purge or purify the sacred area of the sanctuary. This may account for the fact that ashes do not occur at all sites as the purifying process may have only occurred in extraordinary circumstances⁵⁵. However, the definite ascription of a sacrificial quality to these remains is far too much based on assumption. But it is clear that Kophinas is a major cult locale, not only as it is the only identified peak sanctuary in the south of Crete, but also as the objects of precious material are very uncommon among the peaks. Similarly, Peatfield (1990: 127) reports some Linear A inscriptions from Kophinas – although he does not identify the objects thus inscribed (though in all probability they were tables of offering) – which are typically viewed as being a major cult indicator. In addition, Rutkowski (1988: 84) reports a number of storage vessels (including pithoi) which may lend some support to his “offering”-laden theories.

However, in terms of definite sacrificial evidence, Kophinas – although it is a rich sanctuary – does not exhibit a coherent pattern of evidence to allow us to reconstruct a sacrificial rite at the site. Most significant in relation to this matter

⁵⁵ See Chapter Three: 180-183 for a discussion of the origin of the ashes at Minoan cult sites.

is the utter absence of reports of faunal remains, which is suggestive of animal sacrifice not being a feature of the cult process at Kophinas.

PETSOPHAS

Location: Petsophas lies south-east of the town site of Palaikastro, some 215m above sea-level (Moss, 2005: 103). The site overlooks the town and can be seen from it.

Site Type: Peak Sanctuary.

History: The finds from Petsophas suggest that it begins possibly as early as EM III, but that it was certainly in use as a peak sanctuary by the beginning of MM II. This use continued until MM IIIB / LM IA according to Rutkowski (1986: 97) although this level of precision is perhaps inappropriate as it is likely that the other major sites continued to be used until the end of the Second Palace Period. The site was excavated extensively by Myres at the beginning of the twentieth century (*BSA IX*, 1903).

Discussion: Myres' excavation of Petsophas is one of the few extensive, detailed and largely published studies of a peak sanctuary (Karetsou at Juktas and Peatfield at Atsipadhes are really the only other examples) and as such the report is of great importance.

Myres identified three distinct layers at Petsophas, at least in the area north-west of the wall DF: the first being the "surface earth" – the brown loam of the region – which was dominated by small stones and broken pottery and figurines. Its depth ranged between 40-60cm which Myres explained by the southward slope

of the site (Myres, 1903: 357). The second level was an almost horizontal level of nearly black earth, some 17-20cm thick, which was "full of ashes and fragments of charcoal, and crowded with figurines" (Ibid. 357-8). Myres speculated that the black layer originated in a large bonfire into which the figurines had been thrown. This is probably correct in this instance especially when we consider that the third layer excavated at the site, beneath the black layer, consisted of a level of "clayey earth of a strongly reddish colour, brightest at the top" (Ibid.) which could be consistent with prolonged exposure to heat.

Beyond this limited stratigraphy, the majority of Myres' excavation report focusses on the massive number of figurines which he found at Petsophas. These figurines, as is typical of the peak sanctuary deposits, can be classified as human and non-human. However they are much more numerous at Petsophas than at other peaks: despite Myres' limited report, Betancourt tells us that they were of "some thousands". The male figurines, which were more numerous than their female counterparts, are of the usual Minoan type – the gesture being reminiscent of the Palaikastro Kouros - that is with the fists clenched upon the chest. However, the female figurines are somewhat unusual, in respect to their head-dresses in particular. Myres' Plate XI shows that several of the female figurines wear round hats that frame the head (Moss, 2005: 103 describes the effect as "halo-like"). Also one figure wears a large curving head-dress, and the bodice of her dress is open revealing her breasts (Myres, 1903: Plate VIII). Such headgear as this is unparalleled at other peak sanctuaries, and casts some doubt on the hypothesis that the sanctuaries are uniform. Although it must be

acknowledged that the difference may be a result of regional variation within Crete.

In addition to these human figurines, Myres also reported one larger fragment of a human face (Ibid. 375-6 and Plate XII, no.34) which was found in rock cleft H, toward the east of the site. It is note worthy due to its large size; the nose measures 6cm and the eye nearly 3cm (Ibid. 375), when the average size of the other human figurines measure 14cm. Myres did not speculate about the significance of this fragment but was clearly aware of it as it merits an individual section in his report. The specifics of the piece do not allow us to firmly identify the gender of the figure, but it is possible that it served as a cult figure (Moss, 2005: 106). Certainly if an application of scale is made between the fragment and the Palaikastro Kouros, where the eyes of the latter measure less than a centimetre, then we may logically assume a similar ratio in size with the entire figure.

Petsophas also exhibited large numbers of votive limbs (Myres, 1903: 374-5).

Not only do these occur in greater numbers than at other sites, they are also more varied⁵⁶. Many of them had small holes in one extremity, possibly for suspension (Ibid. 374), and both male and female examples are present. Some terminate at the end of the limb, but others include aspects of the torso or trunk (Ibid. Plate XII, no.41): a few figurines, exclusively male, had been deliberately bisected vertically and, therefore, may be treated as a category of votive body parts⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ Despite Moss' claims to the contrary (2005: 106), votive limbs are not "common to all peak sanctuaries".

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the cultic possibilities of these limbs see Chapter Three: 214-215.

The animal figurines from Petsophas are “by far the most frequent” (Myres, 1903: 376) and can be sub-divided into the large figurines of oxen, which are preserved only in fragments, and a wide range of species represented in miniature (3-7cm). Of the large figurines of oxen, Myres found only horns and legs (with one or two examples of hindquarters) (Ibid.) – a fact which he attributes to the periodic raking and purging of the site, a process which he sees as explaining the overall fragmentary nature of the deposit. Myres states that a “rubbish-heap” of the bodies of the figurines was located by Bosanquet below the rocks immediately to the north of the site (Ibid. 377). However, we must acknowledge that it is equally possible that the fragmentation occurred before the deposition of the figurines as part of the ritual process (see, for example, Chapman 2000).

By contrast, the miniature figurines were of a number of species. Oxen were the most common, but agrimi, goats, rams, swine, dogs, hares, tortoises and a possible weasel-like creature were attested⁵⁸; birds also occurred, but more rarely. This is one of the most extensive ranges of animal figurines attested at any Minoan site, incorporating both domestic and wild animals. Myres, largely influenced by the works and theories of his time – such as Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, saw the figurines of domestic animals as a propitiatory pseudo-sacrifice. However, he was at a loss to explain the dedication of “noxious” wild animals.

Petsophas also exhibited a large number of clay balls or pellets, several of which show evidence of burning (Myres, 1903: 379), and I would agree with

⁵⁸ In the Late Minoan levels at Knossos the remains of beech-marten have been found (Wilkens, 2003: 86) and it would seem likely that this weasel-like creature is most likely a marten.

speculations that these are personal votives deliberately deposited. In addition to the enormous number of these votives of the various types outlined above, a number of pottery vessels were excavated including conical cups, dishes, bowls, miniature jugs and bowls (Ibid. 378). Moss (2005: 103), in her catalogue entry for Petsophas, reports cooking ware, as well as finer cups and bowls, as being found at the site. However, she gives no source for this information; Myres certainly does not report these wares.

Myres also reports no bone or other faunal remains from Petsophas; one would assume he might have given his level of detail in other areas of his report. It was assumed in the past that the charcoal in the black stratum was derived from a substantial sacrificial bonfire: Rutkowski mentions the use of a "fire altar" in several of his publications (for example; Rutkowski, 1988: 75 and 1991: 53). However, the lack of reports of faunal remains from this level, or indeed elsewhere on the site, would seem to preclude this. Rutkowski is too sweeping in his assumption of a coherent, Cretan-wide ritual format for the peaks, and the generalisation is especially noticeable in his treatment of the "sacral aspects". In short, while Petsophas is one of the major peak sanctuaries, resplendent with the figurines and other forms of votive, it is lacking in the key indicator of sacrificial ritual. It is interesting that such a major site is seemingly not one where sacrifice took place.

TRAOSTALOS

Location: Traostalos is located at the actual summit of a very prominent, although not particularly high, mountain in eastern Crete, at 515m above sea-level. It is roughly 3.5m north of the palace at Zakros.

Site Type: Peak sanctuary.

History: The finds date the site's period of use to Middle Minoan, but not beyond MM III (Peatfield, 1990: 127). "The quality of the early excavations is low" (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1: 21) with little detail and little published material. However, more detailed excavations were performed by Chryssoulaki in 1995.

Discussion: Faure's initial impression of the site was that it was made up of several areas separated by dry stone walls. However, the more recent study by Chryssoulaki divides the site into a summit plateau and an eastern plateau with several "edifices" on the site (Chryssoulaki 2001). The summit plateau is rectangular in shape (20 x 12m) with a sheer cliff on its western side. There was a greater concentration of finds in its south-western corner, which may indicate a greater amount of activity centred on that spot (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1: 21) (Fig. 35).

The eastern plateau is slightly lower than the summit plateau but also exhibits a large concentration of finds, possibly owing to the many natural lateral fissures

there. As mentioned earlier, these natural clefts are seen as a typical feature of the peak sanctuaries⁵⁹. Certainly the 'Chasm' at Juktas (q.v.) was a deposit site for many of the finds at that peak. The eastern plateau of Traostalos is similar to the summit plateau in the fact that the finds diminish in quantity from the west to the east.

The finds are typical of the majority of the peak sanctuaries, the primary form of artefact being the terracotta figurine, though there were several examples in bronze. The figurines of domestic animals, especially sheep and cattle, are consistent with many sites, although an example of a terracotta fish (HM 16494) is more atypical, especially due to its design which suggests that it could have served as a rhyton⁶⁰. The human figurines again seem to be those of adorants or supplicants rather than deities, and in their gestures they are very similar to those of Petsophas. Similarly, there are a number of votive limbs found at Traostalos – again as at Petsophas – which are suggestive of some form of healing ritual or request for healing (Moss, 2005: 109). Although this may be somewhat influenced by archaeological knowledge of later Classical ritual practices, there are certainly other finds from Traostalos that are suggestive that healing was a primary ritual concern at the site. One female figurine (HM 16443) is shown seated with what is undoubtedly a swollen leg. It cannot be explained by a lack of skill on the part of the craftsman as the other leg is modelled in a most naturalistic fashion. In addition to this figurine there was a terracotta plaque with an incised representation of a foot, and several examples of "foot-plaques" – terracotta bases with pairs of three-dimensional feet upon them. While these

⁵⁹ See p. 85.

⁶⁰ There was also a fragmentary model of boat found at Traostalos (Jones, 1999: 53; Chrysoulaki, 1999-2000: 145, in *Arch. Reports*), perhaps strengthening some form of maritime connection.

latter objects may be a symbolic representation of the 'pilgrimage' or journey of the worshipper to the site as with the "tiny shoes" which were found in the more recent excavations (Chryssoulaki, 2001: 62). This is plausible given the few examples from Traostalos of body parts other than feet, it is nevertheless inviting to view them as a part of a healing ritual or cult, although as Chryssoulaki (2001: 59) points out that the sick might have struggled to reach the majority of peaks, especially so in the case of Traostalos⁶¹.

Traostalos is also significant as it exhibits massive evidence for the use of fire. On the main plateau, the south-western corner was dominated by a thick layer of ash and greasy soil. There were several other areas on the summit plateau that exhibit burning, but these are isolated and indicate hearths or small fires rather than huge bonfires or the conflagration across the entire site. These fires are accompanied by more than 20 cooking vessels, as well as a wide range of drinking and table ware. This may suggest the cooking and serving of food along the lines of the 'ritual feasting' hypothesis which has come into vogue in the last twenty years of Minoan study.

Certainly Traostalos does have bone remains, but as is typical the details are frustratingly vague. Faure's initial survey of the site in 1962 reports that one of his "dry-stone wall"-enclosed areas to the east of the site, measuring 3.80 x 2.45m, was full of ashes and shells (Faure, 1963: 495), but fails to discuss it further. Similarly, with his study of Davaras' notebooks, the most that Kyriakidis can say about the bone remains is that there were enough for several meals, and

⁶¹ On access to the peaks see Peatfield, 1983: 275.

that some of the bones and shells were burnt (Kyriakidis, Unpub. Ph.D.thesis: Appendix 1: 23). However, neither the precise find-spot, nor species, nor degree of burning is reported. As such the evidence pertaining to sacrificial ritual at Traostalos is fundamentally compromised. Moreover, I believe that Kyriakidis' claim is based on a misunderstanding of Chryssoulaki's notes as she explicitly states: "Very few bones were found amongst the material from the bonfire. Their numbers, while conceivably representing blood sacrifices, *do not reach the quantity one would expect as the remains of meals*" (Chryssoulaki, 2001: 63 [my italics]).

The votive figurines are seemingly the standard mode of devotion at Traostalos, with the animal figurines being of much larger numbers. Some of these figurines also show evidence of burning, but the source of this is unclear. It has been speculated that the figurines were deliberately cast into the fire, but equally the burning could be accidental, as by no means do the majority of the figurines exhibit traces of fire which one would expect if their immolation were a common ritual act. Non-blood offerings may also have been a feature of the cult practice at Traostalos. This is suggested by the stone discs which may have served as platters for the offerings (Chryssoulaki, 2001: 62). A similar class of object was found at Anemospilia (q.v.) and were seen as having been used for the same purpose.

In conclusion, Traostalos is another frustrating example of a Minoan site where insufficient data and incomplete publication have compromised the evidence pertaining to sacrifice to a degree that renders it vague in the extreme. However,

on the evidence available, it seems better to err on the side of caution and suggest that sacrificial rituals were not a feature of the cult at Traostalos.

VRYSINAS

Location: Vrysinas is situated some 858m above sea-level, near the village of Rousopiti (Rutkowski, 1988: 90), in western Crete near Rethymnon.

Site Type: Peak sanctuary.

History: The site began to be used for ritual purposes from MM I onwards and its use continued into LM I. However, the presence of finds from the Geometric, Archaic and Hellenistic periods are suggestive that Vrysinas, like other sites such as Kato Syme (q.v.), came back into use as cult locations in the post-Minoan period. The site was excavated by Davaras in 1972-1973, but is not fully published.

Discussion: Little can be said about the spatial organisation of the Vrysinas site as much of the original Minoan sacred area has been destroyed by modern building activity. However, the finds that have survived clearly indicate a cult location.

Tzachili's (2003) quantitative analysis of the pottery from Vrysinas reveals that "the overwhelming majority [of the vessels] are small, open vases, handleless conical cups and one-handled kyathia, accounting for about 80% of the total" (329). Pithoi accounted for only around 5% of the total sherd assemblage, a

scarcity of storage vessels that Tzachili sees as “consistent with a phenomenon from the majority of peak sanctuaries” (330)⁶².

The artefacts also include rhyta in the shape of bulls, also terracotta figurines of people, cattle, sheep, donkeys and birds (Moss, 2005: 113). In addition to the complete figurines there are reports of parts of the human body and animals (Rutkowski, 1988: 90-1). In the case of the human body parts, they are specifically modelled votive limbs – not part of complete figurines. The case is less clear in respect to the parts of the animal figurines. The destruction of much of the site complicates the matter even further, although it may be that Vrysinas contains further evidence for the deliberate fragmentation of cult artefacts⁶³. Most significantly there are fragments of ‘horns of consecration’ in association with bronze double-axes (Ibid. 90), making Vrysinas one of the few cult sites exhibiting both of these symbols.

A noteworthy deposit at the site is a rocky depression near the modern chapel of Ayia Pnurna. This depression was filled with ashes, figurines and pottery sherds (Ibid.). This is testament to the use of fire at another Minoan cult site. However, once again no bones or faunal material are reported in association with this deposit which is suggestive that, in this case at least, fire and animal sacrifice cannot be directly associated. Yet the limited excavation possible at Vrysinas dictates that the possibility of sacrifice at the site cannot be excluded. It should be noted that an offering table inscribed with Linear A, dating to LM I, was found at the site (Jones, 1999: 68), along with two miniature bronze knives.

⁶² This may be correct in terms of their frequency when compared to other vessel shapes.

⁶³ See pp. 75-81 on the Temple Repositories.

While it may be that the table was a dedication at the site, it is more plausible to envisage its use in offering rituals at the site.

Moss (2005), building on the work of Faure, sees the cult practice at Vrysinas (as well as the other peak sanctuaries) as revolving around special events – in the case of Vrysinas sunrises, two per year, where the sun can be seen to rise between the two ‘horns’ of Mt. Ida. However, I believe that the peaks were constant sites of cultic activity, albeit with ‘special’ dates pertinent to individual sanctuaries⁶⁴.

However, in relation to sacrificial rituals the lack of faunal remains, albeit from an incomplete excavation, is suggestive that the sacrifice of animals was not a feature of the cult practice at Vrysinas.

⁶⁴ See Chapter Three: 244-259 for a full discussion of the peak cult.

EXTRA-URBAN SANCTUARIES

This somewhat vague sub-heading refers to those sites which, while located outside of settlements, do not conform to either the peak sanctuary or cave site typologies⁶⁵. The sites discussed are very different to one another and, as such, add a degree of depth to this survey as it will allow us to investigate if sacrificial ritual existed as a cultic component across the entire breadth of Minoan religious expression.

This depth results from the fact that both of the sites discussed are seemingly without parallel on Minoan Crete, as the current archaeological record stands. Moss (2005: 141) attributes this quality to their separation from the “religious hierarchy of the palaces”, thus implying that the Palaces dictated the norms for Minoan religion, and also that there was a monolithic “Minoan” religion. While they exhibit obvious differences from other categories of ritual sites on Crete, to explain these differences through their physical separation from the palaces seems ludicrous. If this is so, why should we not view Juktas, the mountain on which Anemospilia stands, as being outside the “religious hierarchy”, when in fact it is typically seen as being directly associated with the Palace of Knossos.

Thus Moss has immediately preconceived ideas about Palatial religion being the norm and associates the other sites with this system. In actuality, there is

⁶⁵ Some scholars, such as Moss (2005: 141), refer to these sites as rural sanctuaries. I have deliberately shied away from this terminology as it has certain implications of rustiness and a less-developed connotation, which is inappropriate for the sites discussed in this section.

sufficient disparity between the ritual sites (even within categories)⁶⁶ to see all the cult sites as part of an overall scheme which is constant in its inconsistency. It is also interesting that if we followed Moss' hypothesis we would be forced to conclude that sacrificial rituals were not the norm, as these sites – which she views as abnormal – exhibit some of the most explicit evidence for sacrificial rituals.

⁶⁶ See Chapter Three, in particular the sections on geographic variation, and that on 'Minoan' religion.

ANEMOSPILIA

Location: The shrine of Anemospilia is located 400m above sea-level on Mt. Juktas, on the way up to the peak sanctuary, around two kilometres north-west of Archanes. The building itself faces north “to all the great centres of that area including Herakleion and Knossos” (Sakellarakis, 1997: 269).

Site Type: Anemospilia is difficult to typologise but it falls under the description of ‘extramural built shrine’.

History: The shrine, “a building of great significance” (Ibid. 271), was constructed in MM IIB. However, the building was relatively short-lived as it was destroyed in MM IIIA⁶⁷. “There is no doubt that the building at Anemospilia was destroyed by an earthquake” (Ibid. 272) was the opinion of the excavators and this has become generally accepted⁶⁸.

Discussion: The building was a carefully built structure which has been described as a ‘tripartite shrine’ but this identification is perhaps misleading. It is a rectangular structure with three closed rooms of equal size to the south and a long corridor taking up the entire width of the building to the north. However, three further rooms may have existed to the north of the corridor but ground erosion has left only the “paltry remains of their foundation walls” (Ibid. 272).

⁶⁷ Some have argued for a later destruction date, but it clearly does not continue in LM I.

⁶⁸ The shrine’s destruction was certainly sudden: fallen blocks of an otherwise sturdy structure, and pithoi in the east room were thrown into the centre of the chamber. Human agency has been discounted due to the lack of looting. Scholars also agree that the earthquakes of Minoan Crete were accompanied by conflagrations, and there is evidence of intense burning in all areas of Anemospilia.

The three rooms that survive in the structure appear to have distinct functions. The East Room, in the opinion of the excavators, was "reserved for bloodless sacrifices" (Ibid. 274). This room contained a "three-stepped altar" along the back wall, with some twenty-four vases placed on the steps. The altar compares well with one from the central court at the palace of Phaistos and is reminiscent of the structure on the long side of the Ayia Triada sarcophagus where offerings are made to the standing figure.

The Central Room was absolutely full of pottery; large pithoi were set against the walls and the floor was covered in fragments of other vessels. A 'pathway' was left through the centre of the room leading to a natural rock plinth, or rough bench, at the rear of the room, in the vicinity of which were found two clay feet. These may have belonged to a xoanon (a wooden cult figure, occasionally embellished with not perishable aspects) (Ibid. 285). In front of this plinth there were two large vessels containing carbonised seeds which may have constituted an offering to the deity (as opposed to the storage of the contents). The excavators clearly adhered to this belief, stating that "all ritual acts were focussed on the centre [room], where offerings were made to the deity" (Ibid. 274).

However, it is the West Room in the shrine that has received the most attention, and this is due to the fabulous nature of the finds within it. The West Room is

perhaps the most compelling evidence from Minoan Crete for human sacrifice⁶⁹.

This evidence took the form of three⁷⁰ human skeletons: The first was found face down, lying diagonally in the south-west corner of the room, with its head facing toward the corner and its legs spread apart. The skeleton was that of an apparently healthy female, around 28 years old and 1.45m tall.

The second skeleton was found face-up along the room's west wall. The right leg was taut at the time of death, while the left leg was raised in a right angle at the knee. The arm bones were well preserved and show that both arms were bent at the time of death. This skeleton was that of a healthy male aged around 37 years old and was 1.78m tall. He was clearly an important individual as he wore a silver and iron ring on the little finger of his left hand, and had an intricately carved sealstone on his left wrist (Ibid. 294-5).

The third skeleton is the individual that has prompted the hypothesis of human sacrifice to circulate so readily. Even though such theories were seen as highly controversial when they were initially proposed they have now become so firmly entrenched that non-Minoan specialists see them as completely accurate⁷¹. This third individual was found lying, not on the floor, but upon a small built structure. He was not face-up or face-down but in a completely different position to the other bodies. The thighs were stretched out, pointing almost away from the body, but the calves were bent up to face the back in what appears a very unnatural

⁶⁹ The only other case that exists, along with much discussion, is the Room of the Children's Bones at Knossos.

⁷⁰ A fourth skeleton was found in the antechamber, close to the doorway of the central room. It is associated with a large broken pottery vessel, possibly decorated with relief cattle. However, both the skeleton and the vessel were too damaged to allow for further identification.

⁷¹ For example, Hughes, D.D., 1991, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece*, Routledge

position. The body lay on its right side, the head facing east, and the jaw clamped tightly shut. The excavators suggested that the position of the body may have resulted from its being bound (Ibid. 302), but this is highly speculative. However, the bones of this male, aged around 18 years, were not all found within a single layer (as the others were) but some were located deep inside the soft fill some centimetres thick.

These problems are usually glossed over, however, and due to his position upon a regular, rectangular, low-lying 'altar' structure and the presence of an incised bronze 'spear head', this individual is seen as a human sacrifice. It is probable that if this is the case it was in a moment of extreme urgency, most probably in relation to the supposed earthquake that destroyed the building. Thus, it would appear on first inspection that we have evidence at Anemospilia for a major, unique cult practice with some of the most explicit evidence for sacrifice on Crete – albeit possibly one occurring in a moment of crisis.

However, there are fundamental issues that cast doubt onto the accuracy of this depiction of a process of human sacrifice. The first problem involves the 'altar' itself: not only is it small, less than a square metre in surface area (0.63 x 0.76m), but it is incredibly close to the ground – in spite of a lack of scale in the published excavation photographs it can only be a matter of a few centimetres in height. If we compare this structure to representations and indeed other surviving examples of altars or offering table (such as that depicted on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, or the example from the High Priest's House at Knossos) we may see that it is utterly different. In my opinion, there appears to be some faulty

logic at play here, where the body makes the structure an altar, and the 'altar' thus makes the body a sacrificial victim⁷².

The evidence of the differential burning of the bones of this body was also used by the excavators to designate him as a sacrificial victim. The bones on the right side of his body, i.e. the side that was in contact with the low plinth ('altar'), were blackened; while those on the left side of the body, i.e. the uppermost, were chalky or ashen in hue. The excavators stated that this was the result of a massive exsanguination and pooling of blood around the bones on his right side, which caused them to blacken (Ibid. 303). This, however, is utterly without merit. The pooling of blood, even if it did take place, would not affect the colouration of the bones when exposed to fire. The difference in colouration was due to the position of the body and the differentiated access to oxygen during the fire (Moss, 2005: 142). The upper bones, in fact, are calcined due to exposure to more intense heat, and the lower bones are merely charred as they were insulated by the agglomeration of organs.

Moreover, it is apparent – due to the massive cranial damage that the third skeleton suffered – that the most likely cause of death was the collapse of the building itself; that is to say that all four individuals perished concurrently. In the absence of more concrete data, this is the most prosaic and soundest conclusion.

⁷² A similar situation has been noted in relation to Geometric and Classical altars based on the placement of votives: "Often these somewhat dubious constructions are interpreted as altars on account of the figurines found in connection with them, or one suggests that possibility" (Alroth, 1988: 201).

However, it should also be noted that Anemospilia is of much more significance to the discussion of sacrificial ritual beyond the question of human sacrifice. If the individual upon the plinth were a sacrifice, then we may reasonably assume that he was one of an extreme nature – certainly not the norm. This may be inferred not only from the utter lack of iconographic representations of human sacrifice, but also the fact that there are no other established occurrences of human sacrifice attested in the Minoan archaeological record. Nevertheless, if he were a sacrifice then we must also assume that a structure with a religious quality would have been used as the site of his oblation; a known ritual complex. Anemospilia certainly fits this description. Even when we remove the questionable evidence for human sacrifice, the three surviving rooms exhibit features of a decidedly ritual or cultic quality, but the evidence pertaining to animal sacrifice comes from the corridor antechamber.

Animal bones were found only in the west part of the antechamber (Sakellarakis, 1997: 274), but the numbers are vague (Moss claims there are only “few” [2005: 142]). They were analysed, however, and identified as belonging to pigs, goats and bulls, i.e. animals that are known from the assumed representations of animal sacrifices (Sakellarakis, 1997: 277) and also from levels at other sites where faunal remains occur. However, the skeletal elements are unpublished and, as a result, unknown – although we may assume that they were not crania or horn-cores as these elements would almost certainly be reported as they are so easily identifiable. Similarly, the fact that much of the site was damaged by conflagration⁷³ means that it can not be ascertained if the bones were already

⁷³ Cf. Page 120 n.68.

burnt prior to the site's destruction⁷⁴. It is also interesting to note that the animal bones were associated with, being found beside and above – but not beneath, two large clay discs. Similar discs were associated with the few bones reported from the 'hearth site' in the south-west corner of the summit terrace at Traostalos (q.v.).

However, this is all largely circumstantial as Anemospilia exhibits no real evidence for repeated sacrificial processes in any of the surviving rooms. Nor is there evidence for the preparation of ritual meals or feasts as cooking ware is conspicuously absent from Anemospilia.

In all honesty, it is difficult to see clearly what is going on here at this cult complex. Indeed, the excavators have claimed that we may never know what was really happening (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis, 1981: 205). However, it is clear that we do have a cult complex where offerings were made, the extensive pottery deposits in the east and central rooms, plus the pithoi containing grain and cereals attest to this process. But if it were a typical Minoan cult complex then the absence of figurines and other forms of votive is confusing. In my opinion, Anemospilia was not a site of actual repeated animal sacrifice. The small size of the 'altar', the lack of weaponry suitable for ritualised slaughter and dismemberment, the few animal bones, all suggest that it was more of a site of cultic deposits than anything else. Its proximity to the Juktas peak sanctuary would seem to suggest a possible connection between the two.

⁷⁴ Certainly deposits of burned bones were stored inside buildings in the Aegean world. An obvious example is the deposit of bones kept in Room 7 of the Archives complex in the 'Palace of Nestor' at Pylos (see Stocker and Davis, 2004: 174-195).

KATO SYME

Location: Towards the south east of the island, Kato Syme is situated on a high (1200m above sea-level) inclining plateau or “natural amphitheatre” (Bergquist, 1988: 23), on the southern face of Mt. Dikte, and is associated with a large natural spring. The site does not seem to be connected with any particular settlement.

Site Type: A “sacred enclosure” with a spring. Kato Syme seems to be a unique site in the Cretan cultural milieu, as despite the height of its location it is clearly not a peak sanctuary given the lack of rock terraces and an entirely different layout. Kato Syme may have been a regional or island-wide cult centre (Jones, 1999: 20).

History: The site was used for open-air cult from MM II until the fifth century B.C (Jones, 1999: 89). After this cult activity took place in roofed structures until the third century A.D. The evidence suggests that the sanctuary was dedicated to the worship of Hermes by the eighth century B.C. along with the worship of Aphrodite. The site was excavated under the direction of Angeliki Lebessi from 1972 to 1998, and the work on the publication of the material continues to date.

Discussion: Kato Syme is one of the most interesting sites on Crete for the study of the use of cultic space, especially during the Minoan period. Covering an area of several hundred square metres, the site underwent a number of architectural changes between the Middle and Late Minoan periods (Fig. 36). The site was

originally centred around the spring with Building V as the earliest structure on the site. This structure was then incorporated into the much larger Building U, a complex of some 20 rooms which was partially demolished by a rockslide in MM IIIB / LM IA (Catling, 1979: 38). Following this a huge monumental podium seems to have become the ritual focus of the site. Measuring some 12.6 x 7m with a 0.7m high retaining wall with an outer facing, it seems to have formed an immense raised dais of around 90 square metres (Bergquist, 1988: 25). This structure, in the north of the site, is paralleled in its other areas. Excavations in the south-west of the site have uncovered the corresponding corner of an encircling peribolos wall, accompanied by a processional road complete with a drain. These structures are clearly indicative of the increased importance of Syme during the Neo-Palatial period which warranted such an extensive building programme. Building S, an LM II / IIIA structure confirms this as, in its function as a storehouse or repository for offerings and ritual paraphernalia, it reinforces the increased traffic of a cult nature at Kato Syme. This traffic clearly did not abate in subsequent periods as it was necessary to construct two further buildings, R and Q, in LM IIIB and IIIC respectively.

The artefacts found at Kato Syme reinforce the cult associations of the site.

While some of the rooms in Building U seem to have been used for the preparation of food (cult meals?), most of the remaining structures were filled with ritual vessels – jars, cups, and the kylikes which became the most popular cup type at Kato Syme in LM IIIB (Watrous, 1996: 66-7). The kylikes were, in most cases, found in association with animal figurines which has reinforced the cult association of these vessels. Also, once again, huge numbers – more than

five hundred – of stone libation tables have been found around the site, ranging in size from 4cm to 35cm in diameter (Lebessi and Muhly, 1987: 110-111). One item of cult paraphernalia that is curiously uncommon at Kato Syme is the human votive figurine, indeed this is one feature that makes this site different to the peak sanctuaries.

Despite the presence of Linear A inscriptions on some of the offering tables, the nature of the Bronze Age finds from Kato Syme is essentially enigmatic. They do, however, attest to the prevalence of libations and liquid offerings, as opposed to any other cult practice, in the ritual processes that took place here. Yet, Kato Syme also provides some of the most striking evidence for the performance of sacrificial rituals in Minoan Crete.

Beyond all else the Minoan levels at Kato Syme are characterised by extensive layers of black, carbonised material and 'fatty earth'. These black strata have yielded abundant faunal remains, in context with pottery and carbonised wood (Lebessi and Muhly, 1990: 325). The remains of decayed skulls and horns have also been found in these deposits – associated with the podium – which seems to indicate the burning and deposition of animals, or parts thereof, a practice which is apparently corroborated by the greasy consistency of the 'sacrificial stratum' that has been observed in several areas (Ibid. 328). The association of large numbers of fragmentary cooking vessels with the animal remains is perhaps suggestive of the human consumption of at least part of the animal. This, combined with the fact that none of the bone is calcined – the result of being burned with the flesh already removed – is evidence that the ritual practice

involving the meat of animals that took place at Kato Syme is starkly different from the Classical *θυσία* sacrifice that has served as a model for the Minoan rite for so long.

It would seem clear that a ritual process involving fire and animals (or their parts) took place here. But the specifics are still not obvious. We may dismiss holocaust, not only because of the lack of calcinations on the bone, but also due to absence of articulated skeletons. In actuality, on the evidence published thus far, it primarily consists of the skulls and horns of cattle, sheep and agrimi that have been found. None of this material is particularly burned (Ibid. 326) which again reinforces the absence of burnt sacrifices at Kato Syme. I believe that the predominance of the cranial skeletal elements in the deposit results from the deliberate post-ritual deposition of these remains rather than their being debris produced by the ritual process itself. Many of the objects appear to have been deliberately left in the remnants of the fire in this manner, possibly in order to render them useless from then on; in other words to render them sacred by destroying their functional capabilities. The deliberate breaking of objects to release their potential ritual power (one interpretation of the process of fragmentation) has been treated as a universal idea (Hubert and Mauss, 1964: 13), so it possible to ascribe this to a Minoan context, even if only to limit it to the deliberate leaving of objects as personal votives.

However, in the case of the cranial bone remains it has been speculated that "the deity's portion, represented by the victim's head, was deposited in the dying fire" (Lebessi and Muhly, 1990: 328). This hypothesis is much influenced by the

identification and connection of the 'horns of consecration' symbol with the bucranium, as it is unclear if the heads were actually seen as the deity's portion. Also this theory presupposes that the ritual practice was inherently a class of sacrifice rather than the ceremonial communal feasts proposed by some scholars. Equally as possible is the setting up of these skulls as commemorative symbols for the rites performed here, rather than their being the deity's portion of the sacrifice.

To conclude, Kato Syme contains some of the most compelling, and well documented, evidence to suggest that sacrificial ritual was practised in Minoan Crete. Indeed it is difficult to think of seriously viable alternative theories to explain the feature found at the site⁷⁵. The only feature absent from the site that might have bearing upon this question is a fixed altar structure. Many scholars have sought to identify altar structures at sites in order to justify their belief in the existence of a Minoan sacrificial practice. Nilsson openly stated that "The cult needs an altar" (*MMR*: 117), and in more recent treatises Marinatos and Gesell have similarly restated the importance of the altar. However, no one has proposed the necessity for an altar in relation to the evidence from Kato Syme. If sacrifice requires an altar, then the remains here must result from some other ritual process. However, if sacrifice does not require an altar then much of the focus of previous scholarship has been misdirected.

⁷⁵ The only real possibility may be ritualised feasting. See Chapter Three: 260-268 for a discussion of this alternative.

CAVE SANCTUARIES

Crete's landscape is one dominated by hills and mountains containing numerous caves of varying conspicuousness. The mountains, as a result of their limestone composition, have been eroded over millennia to produce hundreds of caves across the island. It is not surprising that the caves were utilised by the inhabitants of Crete as shelters during the Neolithic and as burial sites⁷⁶.

However, the use of caves for secular or practical purposes does not automatically entail that caves would be used for cult purposes as well.

That being said, numerous cultures have utilised caves as ritual sites. Caves have exerted an influence over our collective subconscious for much of humanity's past. One only has to take a cursory glance at the archaeological record to confirm this fact. From the Palaeolithic cave art in the deep grottoes of Lascaux, to the fact that spelunking and potholing remain popular pastimes today reinforces the fact that the subterranean world exerts a fascination over us. Given this long history we should not be surprised to find that cult caves are common in many cultures: in Meso-America, the Aztecs saw caves as the entrance to the Underworld; early Buddhists worshipped in caves and their chaitya-halls were often constructed within them; likewise caves play a prominent role in Greek mythology.

Rutkowski clearly adheres to the belief that the individual cave itself was the motivating force in the establishment of the cult within it. That is to say the

⁷⁶ For example, the cave of Trapeza was used as a burial site between EM III and MM I.

physical characteristics of the cave were of great significance: "...the Minoans were awed by the mysterious appearance of the interior, by the fantastic shapes of the stalagmites and stalactites, and by the miraculous properties of the pure water which collected in the hollows in the rock" (Rutkowski, 1986: 47). While this may be somewhat sweeping and conjectural it is true to say that by no means were all the Cretan caves utilised as cult sites, and so there must have been at least one significant factor which prompted the cult foundations. However, to attempt to identify these factors, without primary sources, would be purely speculative.

Therefore, in this study, the foundation of the cult is of limited importance, it is more the established cult practice which is of primary concern, and if that practice involved a sacrificial ritual. As such, the criteria by which we identify a cave cult site are of vital importance. Tyree's study of the Cretan sacred caves still remains the benchmark study of these sites. She realised that the problems associated with the cave sites – limited excavation, incomplete publication, mixed stratigraphy which led to somewhat haphazard dating (Tyree, 1974: 4-6) – required the use of specific criteria to identify the cult site. Tyree did this through a careful analysis of "architecture" and "furniture" (Ibid. 6).

"Architecture" referred to altars, paving, partitions and other synthetic additions to the natural cave environment, while "furniture" included storage vessels, offering tables and 'horns of consecration'. Tyree also stressed the importance of the presence of votive objects – figurines, double-axes, lamps and ritual vessels (those that were of materials that render them unsuitable for everyday use).

Thus, the sites in this section of the catalogue adhere to these criteria, but with an added focus in relation to archaeological traces of possible sacrificial rituals as outlined in the general introduction.

ARKALOCHORI

Location: The cave is on the west slope of a hill, Prophetis Elias, near the village of Arkalochori.

Site Type: Cave – generally believed to be a sanctuary or cult establishment.

History: The presence of some EM pottery – in fact only one vessel of EM I Pyrgos ware – is suggestive of the possible early use of the cave despite some recent claims to the contrary⁷⁷. Although as we are only dealing with a single extant vessel, this may have been an anomaly dedicated after the period in which it was made had come to an end. The majority of the evidence, however, suggests a late foundation as it comes from the Second Palace Period, i.e. after MM III B / LM I but before LM II. It is clear that this period was the floruit for Arkalochori as it seems to have fallen out of use during the LM III phases, as there is barely a scatter of pottery present from these periods. However, there are significant problems with this site as it was much robbed (Hazzidakis, 1913: 37) and is incompletely published: for example, Sp. Marinatos excavated the cave but never produced a full report, only some brief articles.

Discussion: Arkalochori has been the subject of much discussion among Aegean specialists, primarily regarding the categorisation of the site. Generally the cave of Arkalochori has been identified as a cult location, and usually associated with a “special cult” (Dickinson, 1994a: 278). This is due to the unique nature of the

⁷⁷ For example, Moss (2005: 117).

material. Massive amounts of metal finds are reported, the majority being weapons and tools: Nilsson reports dozens of double-axes, more than 25 of gold and 7 of silver (*MMR*: 61). Most of these were in miniature, but there were some larger examples up to 70cm wide. Fragments of the wooden shafts, which originally supported some of the blades, were also found here and seem to have been made of fir or cedar (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 25). Type A sword blades over 90 cm long were also found in the cave. These were notable as they were not perforated at the shoulders for rivets, and as such it seems that they were never mounted into handles. This is similar to many other of the blades from the cave, which were thin and had no tangs, as such they could not have been used as a practical weapon.

However, the other types of artefact that are seen as typical of the various Minoan cult sites are entirely absent from Arkalochori. Figurines, cult vases, libation tables, ash and animal bones are all entirely unreported (Hazzidakis, 1913: *passim*). The absence of these remains means that if cult practice did take place at this cave, then it once again of a singular character.

In actuality, there is considerable evidence to suggest that Arkalochori was not a cult site, and this is the assessment which I believe to be correct. Aside from the presence of a supposed cult symbol, in the form of the double-axe, there is little else to suggest the practice of cult at this location. As observed above, the main artefacts associated with Minoan cult are absent, but beyond this the cave itself is largely unsuitable for any real activity due to its very small size. In his original excavation report, Hazzidakis claimed the cave was only c.5m long, with a

maximum width of only 2m. This is somewhat misleading as this area is actually only an entrance chamber to the main grotto, which measures some 30m x 18m. Hazzidakis believed the entrance chamber to be the entire extent of the cave as the passage to the larger chamber was blocked by fallen rocks, which were not cleared until Marinatos excavated in the 1960s (Fig. 37). However, the height of the cave is the main barrier to its use as a cult site. In both chambers the maximum height does not exceed 1m, and the original excavators reported having to lower the floor level in the entrance chamber in places just to be able to dig (Hazzidakis, 1913: 38).

Therefore, if we assume that cult did not take place at Arkalochori, then we must ask into what type of site it may be categorised. Sp. Marinatos has suggested that the site may have been used as a workshop for the production of fine metal articles. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Arkalochori was used in such a manner. The lack of evidence for burning, the low numbers of functional metal-working tools, and the absence of slag and other by-products, not to mention the small size of the cave, means that this theory is without merit.

Arkalochori is most similar to hoard sites, which are common over much of Bronze Age Europe. If we take this as an explanation for the cave deposit it accounts for not only the small size of the cave, but also the limited nature of the finds. I believe that this is the most plausible explanation as it means that we do not have the complication of a cult whose sole ritual practice was the votive deposition of weapons. It may be that the hoard was of a number of ritual double-axes and associated weapons, but this does not make Arkalochori in itself

a cult site. Indeed it is incongruous to ascribe a cult context to a site merely due to the presence of the double-axe alone, rather it is the appearance of the axe in an overtly ritual context that merits a ritualistic quality be attached to the axe.

A similar interpretation has been applied to Arkalochori most recently by Rethemiotakis (2002): "Though the character of its content is undeniably religious, the cave does not seem to be a cult site" (Ibid. 64). He goes on to describe the contents of the cave as "a single, large shipment of sacred metal" (Ibid. 65) which were deliberately hidden in the cave "in order to protect them from looting" (Ibid.). Rethemiotakis links this occurrence to the "serious crisis which burst upon Pediada in the period between MM III and LM I" (Ibid.), citing the abandonment of the peak sanctuaries at Sklaverochori and Kephala, as well as the upheavals at Galatas and Kastelli. Thus, according to Rethemiotakis, the Arkalochori deposit may be seen as a 'crisis hoard', perhaps by implication suggesting that some form of 'iconoclastic fury' took place requiring the safeguarding of this "sacred metal". Even if this is not the case, the destructions and abandonment of the sites in this region at this time indicate the turbulent nature of the MM III – LM I boundary.

THE IDAEAN CAVE

Location: The Idaean Cave is situated in the Ida or Psiloritis mountains, at an altitude of 1500m. It lies approximately 100m above the small upland plain of Nida (Prent, 2005: 158).

Site Type: Cave Sanctuary.

History: In 1591, the Italian botanist Casabona identified the Idaean Cave with the famous cave of Zeus Kretagenes – a deity mentioned in several Classical sources⁷⁸. However, the history of the use of the cave extends far further back than the Classical period. Finds range from the Late Neolithic period to the fifth century A.D. It is a major site and one of continuing (although most probably neither constant nor unchanging) ritual significance. Cult practice began in MM III / LM I and continued uninterrupted into the late Roman era. The first archaeological excavations were undertaken in 1885, by Halbher and Aerakis. Faure excavated in 1955, and Sp. Marinatos in 1956. Sakellarakis began the first systematic, large-scale excavations in 1982.

Discussion: Much has been written about the Idaean Cave, largely about the Classical cult. It has been assumed that the Minoan cult was a direct antecedent and that the subject of the cult was consistent (Sakellarakis 1988). However, I feel that this is too presumptive as the mode of worship in the cave does seem to have altered during the long period of its use.

⁷⁸ For example, Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus* 6.

The Idaean Cave is large, containing stalagmites and stalactites, and has a fairly complicated arrangement (Fig. 38). The wide entrance to the cave, some 25m wide and 16m high, faces east and is clearly visible. The major chamber is some 36m x 34m x 17m high, slopes downwards, and contains two recesses, one in the north and one in the south (26m x 14m x 9.5m high and 14m x 13m x 6m high respectively). There is also an upper chamber which opens from the west wall of the cave, 8.5m above the floor, which requires a ladder to reach (Prent, 2005: 159). In front of the entrance to the cave is an open area with a large rock-cut altar (c.4.9m x 2.1m x 0.9m high) of uncertain date.

It appears that during the LN-EM periods the cave was used as a dwelling, but only seasonally as it is blocked off by snow during the winter months (Ibid.). However, the significance of the cave as a cult site peaks around LM I, which may be considered the Minoan acme of the site, marked by an increase in finds and the appearance of bronze animal and anthropomorphic figurines (Ibid. 159-160). To the LM II periods belongs a large group of pottery and figurines, predominantly animals. There are also larger wheel-made terracotta animal figurines, and a terracotta 'horns of consecration' but this probably dates to the LM IIIC-Subminoan periods (Ibid.).

The most significant deposit pertaining to sacrifice comes from Chamber II. This comes in the form of a burnt, greasy layer containing charcoal and bones, which are sometimes burnt. Several bucrania and numerous clay lamps were found in association with this layer (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 28). The walls of the

cave in this area were also “sooty” (Ibid.), attesting to the actual use of fire within the cave itself, as opposed to the deposition of the remains here.

Sakellarakis believes that this deposit is a clear indication of the practice of sacrifice (Sakellarakis, 1988: 210-211). As far as this statement goes, I agree absolutely. However, there is a key aspect regarding the nature of this deposit that is not made explicitly in the majority of the sources: that it is a ‘mixed deposit’, that is to say, one containing evidence from several periods. Regarding this layer of ash and charcoal, and its associated finds, Rutkowski attaches the phrase “dating from later times than the Minoan period” (Rutkowski, 1986: 54). Then it is by no means clear that any of this deposit can be associated with Minoan cult – although the possibility that part of it may be must be acknowledged. Yet it is true to say that the nature of the deposit is more reminiscent of the Classical *θεσία* rite than any other cult practice. However, this “mixed” layer is the primary motivation for theories regarding the continuation of cult practice at the cave. For example, Sakellarakis believes that by the LM III period the cult was dedicated to Cretan Zeus, as a successor to a Minoan vegetation deity⁷⁹ (1988 *passim*). However, given the lack of a firm *terminus post quem* for the deposit makes tracing its origins somewhat haphazard.

In relation to other forms of ritual artefact from the Minoan period, the Idaean Cave does contain them, but not in tremendous numbers: a single bronze double-axe (Moss, 2005: 124; Jones, 1999: 73), stone offering tables (Ibid.), a single stone kernos (Ibid.), and a number of non-functional bronze daggers or swords dating from early LM I (Ibid.). Thus, significantly, Ida – though regarded as a

⁷⁹ Doubtless the notion of a vegetation deity was inspired by the seasonal access to the cave and the return of the fecundity of Spring which resulted from the warming of the weather.

major cult site – does not exhibit an overwhelming quantity of cult paraphernalia, certainly not to rival Psychro (q.v.), which remains the most impressive Minoan cult cave.

As a final point regarding the finds from Ida, reference must be made to the LBA rock crystal lentoid seal (HM 24) which has caused much speculation (Fig. 39). This seal is usually thought to depict a ritual scene: certainly it contains several objects (or symbols) which are typically associated with Minoan cult. Obviously there is the ‘horns of consecration’ with a bough (apparently) set between the uprights, also the incurved ‘altar’ which the horns sit upon (although the structure may simply be a stand), and a large triton shell into which the figure appears to be blowing. However, it should be noted that only one of these objects was found at Ida – the ‘horns of consecration’ – and this is from a period much later than the seal itself. Thus if it is a cult scene depicted on the seal, then it appears to be one for which there is no real corresponding evidence to suggest that it took place in the Idaean Cave.

To conclude, therefore, Ida does exhibit a large amount of evidence that points toward the practice of sacrificial rituals. For a site, at least in relation to others from Minoan Crete, it contains a large amount of faunal material. However, unfortunately, the majority of this material comes from layers of indeterminate date (Jones, 1999: 73). Even the bones of sheep and pigs from the upper chamber (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 29) cannot be definitely ascribed to a Minoan context given the massively long period of cultic use that followed the Minoan acme. Moreover, even if some of this faunal material could be ascribed to the

Minoan period it does not automatically follow that it derived from sacrificial rituals as so much of the deposit has been affected by the later activity in the cave. Thus, it is unfortunate that in the case of Ida it is the archaeology itself, rather than a lack of evidence or poor excavation, that leaves the matter of Minoan sacrifice at the Idaean Cave unresolved.

KAMARES CAVE

Location: The Kamares Cave is located high on the southern face of Mount Ida, some 1524 m above sea-level, and looks out over Phaistos and the Western Mesara plain.

Site Type: A large cave sanctuary with two chambers, one very large and the other very small. There is no terrace in front of the entrance (Dawkins and Laistner, 1913: 7) (Fig. 40).

History: The cave's history began in the Neolithic period when it served as a seasonal occupation site and continued as such into EM I. However, most of the pottery comes from the Middle Minoan period – with a scattering of Late Minoan sherds – pointing toward a peak of activity in MM I-II. Of course, Kamares is most famous for the 'Kamares style' pottery, decorated with painted patterns in a polychrome light-on-dark style, which was a highlight of the First Palace Period (Betancourt, 1985: 95-102). However, this feature of the deposit should not overshadow the other finds from the cave that are indicative of cult activity.

Discussion: The physical characteristics of the cave make it suitable for large-scale activity – a wide entrance (some 30m), combined with a large grotto and secondary niche-like chamber free of obstacles and concretions, except in the rear corners of the large chamber where there are boulders, provide an area for the gathering of people and the performance of rites. Daylight penetrates to the

back wall of the cave providing ample illumination (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 32).

The majority of the Middle Minoan pottery was found among the boulders in the back left of the cave. This phenomenon of depositing items in crevices or cracks seems to be the norm for the Minoan votive system (at least in respect to the caves). Certainly it occurs at Psychro (q.v.), and we may observe a similar process at the 'Chasm' at Juktas (q.v.). We may speculate that this was a deliberate process rather than the result of cleaning (more probably in the caves than in the peak sanctuaries), perhaps in an effort to have the personal votive object become part of the very fabric of the cult location.

Aside from the pottery, which is already much discussed elsewhere⁸⁰, there were several other finds of importance. Dawkins and Laistner found a vase filled with grain (1913: 11), unfortunately this "mass of material" was not recorded in any further detail. Watrous (1996: 60) refers to "a level of black earth containing many animal bones (e.g. cattle and sheep/goat)" in relation to the original excavation. However, while Dawkins and Laistner did find a layer of black earth near the entrance to the cave, they only explicitly refer to bones briefly in their account, on an ox skull found in the inner chamber: "This skull, like several other animal remains, could not from its appearance be very old, and is probably a relic of the occasional use of the cave by cattle-stealers and refugees" (Dawkins and Laistner, 1913: 10). The quantity and condition of the bones were

⁸⁰ See Dawkins and Laistner (1913, *passim*) and Betancourt (1985).

not recorded well and, as a result, it is not clear if they are the result of a Minoan ritual process or if they are the remains of the earlier habitation phases.

Beyond this, the evidence for ritual activity is much the same as that of other cave sites: palatial quality vases, relief ware decorated with bucrania, many storage jars for food, tools, and some (3) animal figurines (Dawkins and Laistner, 1913: 26-30). However, there are no examples of some other forms of ritual paraphernalia that are found in some caves, Psychro (q.v.) for example: human figurines, model weapons, jewellery, personal possessions (toilet articles), stone libation tables are all absent, and, significantly, there is no built altar structure. It is also unusual, given the propensity of pottery found at the site, that cups are almost entirely lacking in the Kamares cave deposit⁸¹.

However, while Kamares may have been a cult site, which does seem probable, it is by no means clear that a form of sacrificial ritual took place. The layer of black earth and animal bones is not reported in enough detail to allow us to judge firmly if it as belonging to the period of cult use of the cave. Yet whatever the ritual processes at Kamares were, I would suggest that they were in the form of a seasonal celebration since the cave can only be accessed during the summer months, as for the rest of the year it is blocked off by snow. Interestingly Moss has also recently speculated that the cult at Kamares may have been associated with a deity of renewal (Moss, 2005: 127). She bases this on the presence of a jar

⁸¹ Unpublished evidence, now being studied (Dickinson, 2004: *pers. comm.*), suggests that the greater majority of the pottery from Kamares was never removed from the site, let alone published. As a result the overall ceramic assemblage, and therefore the longevity, of the cave may have been misrepresented.

decorated with crocus flowers⁸². However, I believe that this is too tenuous, especially given the fact that much of the Kamares deposit has been incompletely studied.

⁸² Similar vessels, such as the "Bowl of the Snake Goddess" (decorated with lilies) and the "Fruitstand of the Goddess of the Lillies" from the first palace at Phaistos, have also been associated with the veneration of a divinity of seasonal renewal.

PATSOS

Location: The sanctuary, or more properly cult site, is situated 14km south-east of the modern town of Rethymnon, some 490m above sea-level, on the east side of a gorge. A spring is located nearby.

Site Type: Cave sanctuary: although some scholars have defined Patsos as a “rock shelter” (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 42).

History: Patsos appears to be a later cult foundation, possibly even as late as LM IIIB, (Watrous, 1996: 62), which has been linked to the foundation of the Late Minoan settlement of Sybrita (Ibid.). The presence of LM I sherds suggests that the site was frequented prior to the cult foundation. Similarly, later finds suggest that the use of Patsos as a cult location continued (albeit periodically) until the Roman period (Hood and Warren, 1966: 186). However, the acme of the cave as a cult site seems to have been LM IIIC-Sub Minoan. Kourou and Karetsou (1994) recently published much of the material from Patsos that had been scattered between many collections.

Discussion: The area is resplendent with caves, but the one that is known variously as του Αγίου Αντωνίου or στη χάραδρα or the Cave of Hermes Kranaios is that under discussion here. Despite Rutkowski and Nowicki’s claim that it is a rock shelter, in my opinion, the artefacts found at the site allow it to be classified justifiably among the cave sanctuaries. This is not an original argument; as early as 1961, Boardman recognised the similarity between votives

from Patsos and those of Psychro (Boardman, 1961: 77). If we adhere to Rutkowski and Nowicki's assertion that it is rather a spring (or nature) sanctuary (1996: 42) then we must compare it with other sanctuaries of this type – primarily Kato Syme (q.v.) and Piskokephalo – to which it is largely dissimilar.

The site is some 9m deep and over 30m long sheltered by an overhang (Ibid.), with a large terrace in front of it measuring 40m x 6-12m. The spring that is located close to the cave is paralleled by the pools of water in several other Minoan cult caves such as Psychro (q.v.), Eileithyia at Amnissos, and Skotino (q.v.). It is reasonable to suppose that the presence of these pools and springs were significant, if not in the formation of the cult, then certainly in the practice thereof. Having said previously that that it appears to be a late cult foundation some of the artefacts within the cave seem to be Neopalatial in character – a stone offering table, a stone vase, two sealstones, a bronze chisel blade and double-axe, and also various terracotta animal figurines (Prent, 2005: 156). The precise nature of the Bronze Age cult use is unclear; however, after LM IIIB Patsos exhibits significant cultic traffic, possibly beyond local significance in view of the rare and high-quality votives present.

The terracotta animal votives are the most significant artefact in terms of quantity. Eleven figures, ranging from 11.5cm to over 50cm in height, of bovines were found and dated to LH IIIC. There are, in addition, numerous figurines in miniature – also in terracotta – representing various species such as bovid, ram, wild goat, deer and horse. Also there are two bronze bull figurines and a third

bronze votive that is of a "mythical creature" that has been identified as a sphinx (Rutkowski, 1986: 59) (Fig. 41).

Human votive figurines are, by contrast, few in number – only one terracotta example being found in the cave. There are, however, three male figurines in bronze which are unusually graphic for Minoan figures with large genitalia clearly depicted (Fig. 42). In addition to these, there is also a bronze "Reshep" figurine (Fig. 43) which Boardman identifies as an import from the Syro-Palestinian area (Boardman, 1961: 76). In his native culture, Reshep was seen as a god whose responsibility was the infliction of, or curing of, disease. However, where he appears as an import in the Aegean he seems to have developed powers as a guardian or warding deity⁸³.

Patsos also had examples of 'horns of consecration': one was fairly simple, but the second was very ornate (Fig. 44). This second example, dating to LM III, is very curious as it has embellishments that make it markedly different from the norm. There is an upright protrusion between the two 'horns' and a cross-hatched design incised on the front face. Also there are two semi-circular features, one positioned on each side of the upright. These are, to the best of my knowledge, unique on depictions of the 'horns of consecration'. It is perhaps tempting to see these as rowlocks or a similar ship-related object, as discussed earlier the symbol may be interpreted as a stylised boat⁸⁴. This is especially interesting in this case as Peter Warren interpreted an engraving on a LM I limestone vessel from the site, which resembled a small 'horns of consecration',

⁸³ The Reshep figurines found at Phylakopi were speculated to fall into this category (Renfrew, 1985: 302-310).

⁸⁴ See pp. 34-37 for a discussion of this symbol.

as a ship without rigging (Warren, 1966: 195-6). The interpretation of this is still unclear, but the presence of a symbol (regardless of its meaning), which is generally regarded as a Minoan religious symbol, at Patsos confirms the cultic significance of the site.

Thus Patsos exhibits many of the 'normal' Minoan cultic features. However, the evidence pertaining to sacrificial ritual at the cave is less than clear. Rutkowski makes mention of a stone altar (Rutkowski, 1986: 59; Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 42), but the references are fleeting. It is possible that this feature is that reported by the excavations of Halbherr and Orsi (1883-1886), but the structure is not obvious on any of the published plans. Faure noted a concretion outside the cave in his 1963 survey of Cretan cult sites, significant as it resembled the head of a bull and exhibited traces of modelling (Faure, 1964: 137 cited in Moss, 2005: 130 and Prent, 2005: 156): this could correspond to a sacrificial animal representation, a reflection of the cult practice in the cave. However, this is simply speculation as further references to the concretion all refer to Faure as the sole authority on its existence. Even if the identification and sacrificial association were valid, this would be circumstantial evidence at best.

Prent, drawing on the work of Kourou and Karetsou, reports that in 1989 a burnt layer was found on the terrace with votives associated with it (Prent, 2005: 156). However, no bones are reported as being associated with this layer. The only reference to bone at the site is from near the concretion, they are described as "visible" (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 42) by which one may assume unstratified. As a result, they cannot be ascribed to either a definite period or a

sound origin. Thus, any attempt to recreate a sacrificial ritual at Patsos is ultimately based on speculation.

In truth, Patsos exhibits little evidence for cult practices beyond votive deposition. Pottery vessels are not numerous, and no LM IIIC pottery is known from the cave (Prent, 2005: 157). The only remnant of pottery that may have a connection to libation is the base of a rhyton, dated to LM IIIB, with the remains of three figures attached to it. While it is interesting as an artefact it is hardly testament to a concerted practice of liquid offerings. Similarly, there are no storage vessels, and even the usually prevalent conical cup is conspicuous by its absence. Thus Patsos shows little evidence of any cult practice beyond votive deposition.

PSYCHRO

Location: The cave lies in the Diktaean mountains, around 1025m above sea-level.

Site Type: A large cave site, consisting of upper and lower grottoes, with a sizeable natural terrace in front of the entrance (Watrous, 1996: 17) (Fig. 45).

History: The cave at Psychro was occupied during the Neolithic (Watrous, 1996: 47), but after this period is best known for its cult associations. It seems to have acquired this function around MM IIB (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 18). A continuity of cult practice can be traced from this period to the Archaic period, with an apparent break in Classical and Hellenistic periods, until the Roman era where it re-acquired a cult connection which lasted for many years. The site was excavated first in the late Victorian era by Hazzidakis and Halbherr, also later by Evans. However, the major excavation was carried out by Hogarth in 1899.

Discussion: The Psychro cave contains some of the most striking evidence for animal sacrifice from any Minoan cult site. The majority of this comes from the upper grotto. In the north-western recess is the small, rectangular structure which is known as the 'altar'. Around this altar, four levels were distinguished: the first contained Greek Geometric pottery and other objects, down to Medieval in date. In the second layer appeared Mycenaean pottery (presumably LM III), bronzes and plain cups, of which Evans found a considerable number, stacked one within another and apparently undisturbed; Hogarth notes that these were not found in

the lower levels. A third level, whose identity is not completely clear from Hogarth's account, held "glazed sherds, painted in cloudy brown stripes on a creamy slip", presumably the tortoise-shell ripple ware of MM III-LM I (Boardman, 1961: 3). The fourth yielded 'Kamares' sherds (probably MM IIB-MM III) and stone offering tables, some with incised inscriptions. The lowest productive level of the cave was described by Hogarth as "a thick sediment of yellow clay mixed in its upper layer with a little primitive *bucchero* pottery and many bones, but empty below of anything but water-worn stones".

This stratigraphy, around the 'altar', is significant as elsewhere in the cave the sequence is rather less clear. The problem is compounded by Hogarth's use of dynamite in clearing the cave, which has been noted as compromising parts of the sequence (Moss, 2005: 135). The faunal evidence, which is of such significance to this study, is reported only in a cursory manner. There are reports of bucrania, horns, and bones of pigs, oxen, boars, and goats from the upper grotto (Hogarth, 1900: 98-101; *PM I*: 627). Typically the precise find spot is unrecorded, however, and all that can be said is that the bones come from the lower levels – that of the "hand-burnished" *bucchero* pottery (Boardman, 1961: 5). These levels are possibly sub-Neolithic or Early Minoan, but certainly antedate the level with the Kamares sherds.

These faunal remains are significant as they are some of the only examples to have received any study whatsoever. In 1902, they were examined by Boyd-Dawkins and he identified that they came from several species. These included: *capra aegagrus* – 1 frontlet, 2 horncores of a male, a skull of a young female, 1

frontlet of a kid, 1 horncore of an adult male which had been cut off; *ovies aries* – 1 large twisted horncore, 6 upper and 8 lower jaws, and numerous “refuse” bones which had been broken; *cervus dama* – two antlers of the fallow deer; *sus scrofa* – three skulls of boar. There were also bones of *bos domesticus*, variety *creticus* – 1 frontlet, with horncores, and, from the “lower stratum” (Boyd-Dawkins, 1902: 163), fragments of a lower jaw, three lower jaws of calves with milk teeth, five broken long bones, two phalanges, and a broken metatarsal. Some of the bones in this latter group show evidence of scraping.

At first sight, this would seem to be a healthy collection of animal bones that is highly suggestive of the practice of sacrifice. However, there is a problem with this evidence. It comes from the levels in which they were found. Boyd-Dawkins differentiates between an “upper layer” and a “lower layer”, the former apparently being the MM III layers, with the latter the lowest level of the cave, that of the earlier occupation period. Thus it should be clear that the majority of the *bos* bones derive from the occupation period of the site, based on a combination of Boyd-Dawkins’ and Hogarth’s information, while the “larger specimens” (Ibid. 162) the horncores and skulls come from the Minoan cult period. This is very significant as it would seem to reinforce the significance of the *bucranium* (and the skulls of other animals) to the cult. Indeed, the only faunal remains that seem to derive from this period are of cranial elements. The Upper Grotto at Psychro also contains extensive evidence of burning. Although the altar was the apparent focal point within the cave – certainly a large number of votive objects were deposited nearby – it was certainly not used for the immolation of sacrificial victims or their parts. Yavis (1949: 23) notes

that the altar consists of a mass of squared stones, without binding material, and is untouched by fire. Yet there is a stratum of ash that extends over much of the upper grotto. Clearly fire played a role in the ritual practices in the cave, but I would suggest that it was not employed for the preparation / destruction / consecration of victims, especially as the bones were not reported as showing any degree of burning.

There is, in addition, a massive quantity of evidence for other forms of cult practice at Psychro. The one complete and thirty fragmentary offering tables attest to the deposition of gifts of some form. The curvilinear bowl forms, set within a cube-shaped pedestal, would seem to be best suited as receptacles for liquid offerings, i.e. libations. However, we should not discount other forms of oblation such as fruit or corn – these definitely were given in offering as the remnants of corn from the Temple Repositories (q.v.) and Anemospilia (q.v.) attest⁸⁵. Yet the offering of libations is supported by other evidence from Psychro. Beyond the wealth of jugs and cups, that are in themselves suggestive of practices involving liquids, a large terracotta bull's head rhyton (HM 2175) was found dating to LM IIIA. This vessel form is found in a number of cult locations and is invariably associated with ritualised pouring.

Beyond this a number of bronze figurines and weapons were found in the Lower Grotto, mainly in the mud around the pool in that chamber or lodged into the crevices among the stalagmites. Of particular interest are a large number of votive double axes, although only one is of a functional type – the remainder are

⁸⁵ See above, p. 75ff. and p.120ff. respectively.

votive in character and cut from sheet bronze. This would seem to be, rather than the deposition of sacrificial weaponry post-slaughter, a process of personal votive deposition akin to, but separate from, the processes played out with the human and animal figurines at both caves and peaks. It should be noted that the Psychro deposit, with its wealth of weapons and figurines, is the closest parallel to the typical 'peak' deposit found within a cave site. It has been argued that the disparity between the artefact assemblages recovered from the Upper and Lower grottoes is suggestive that a number of deities were worshipped at Psychro: Moss, in her recent study of the Minoan pantheon, comes up with six possible powers (Moss, 2005: 137). However, while I do not hold with the concept of the one Great Minoan Goddess (or her numerous aspects), I do not see the necessity for believing that a multiplicity of gods were worshipped at the same time at Psychro. The difference between the apparent ritual practices of libation and offering, including sacrifice, in the Upper Grotto and that of weapon and votive deposition in the Lower could be purely one of ritual process, and both may be valid aspects of the same cult.

The final comment on the finds from Psychro must refer to those artefacts that have received the most comment. The first of these is the fragment of a large female figure. It consists of one piece which includes the neck, shoulder and upper arm. It is estimated that the figure, when whole (if it were that of a full figure statue), could have been c.3m in height, which would make it the largest known from any Minoan site, and is dated to between MM III and LM IA (Watrous, 1996: 39). There has long been a debate over the existence of cult figures in Minoan Crete. Often those who have argued that there were none have

done so based on the small scale of those figures that have been found. Needless to say, a statue one and a half times life size would be a suitably imposing cult image.

The other major, and idiosyncratic find, from Psychro is the Late Minoan (Boardman, 1961: 46 believes it to be no later than LM I) bronze plaque that most people believe depicts a Minoan cosmogony (Fig. 46). Of particular interest are the three 'horns of consecration', naturally of two different designs. Boardman (Ibid.) is categorical in his statement that this object is unique and, while it may simply be a significant personal votive reflective of cultic concerns, I would choose to see it in a different light. If we compare this artefact to finds from the Classical period, as has been done with so much Minoan material, an interesting similarity appears. Among the prerequisites for magic kits were metal plaques incised with crude figures and magical symbols⁸⁶. To the best of my knowledge, nothing has been written on the possibilities of Minoan magical practices but the comparison here is interesting; it would, therefore, make an interesting avenue for further study.

To conclude, it is obvious that at Psychro we are dealing with an extensive and important cult site. This fact only makes the current level of understanding of its deposit all the more infuriatingly meagre. Psychro is the pre-eminent example of massively incomplete study, even with the more recent additions of the volumes by Rutkowski and Watrous. In his preliminary excavation report, Hogarth refers to the fact that much of what was excavated was left in the care of nearby village

⁸⁶ See. For example, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Betz, H.D. (ed.), 1986, University of Chicago Press

officials, among which were at least 550 wheel-made cups and a massive quantity of bone (Hogarth, 1900: 101). To the best of my knowledge, this material has never been studied, and so we are severely hampered in a complete analysis of the material from Psychro. However, from the evidence available it seems obvious that the animal remains and the ash layer, even if they are the remains of ritual processes, which seems likely, do not result from burnt sacrificial ritual. The bones are not calcined; there are no bones, from the Minoan levels, that can be identified as from the primary cuts of meat; the spread of ash and the lack of burning exhibited on the 'altar' discounts its use as a place of immolation. Yavis states this succinctly enough: "This deposit must come from ceremonial feasts, rather than from sacrifices or sacrificial feasts" (Yavis, 1949: 25). I do not agree with this wholeheartedly, however, as the evidence for ceremonial feasting, in terms of the primary evidence, is exactly the same as that for sacrifice, i.e. the faunal remains⁸⁷. It is clear that the ritual use of animals, or their parts, was extant at Psychro. However, once again, it would seem to play a secondary role to libation and votive deposition.

⁸⁷ See Chapter Three: 260-268.

SKOTINO

Location: Skotino is a large cave situated on a high plateau south of Chersonissos, half an hour west of the modern village of Skotino, and around three hours walk from Knossos.

Site Type: Cave sanctuary.

History: On the basis of the pottery evidence, cult begins at the Skotino cave in the Middle Minoan period (*PM I*: 163). The deposit showed that cult continued at the cave until the Roman period (Prent, 2005: 338). The site has been summarily explored by Evans, Pendlebury, Faure, and Davaras – who undertook a five-day limited excavation in the late 1960's. However, no attempt at a full scale, systematic survey has been made (*Ibid.*) and, as such, the publication of the site is only cursory.

Discussion: The cave at Skotino is massive, 160m deep and consisting of four descending chambers (Fig. 47). The cave consists of a large, high-roofed front chamber, measuring some 90m x 30m x 12m high, and three smaller chambers. The second chamber contains a recess with a natural stone 'altar' (Tyree, 1974: 20-21) – indeed all of the chambers contain notable rock formations. However, it is those in the second chamber which appear to have been the focus of the cult. It was around these formations that Davaras excavated a layer with offerings, ash, sherds and stones (Davaras, 1969: 621-622). However, the area in which Davaras dug was compromised, "the surfaces were disturbed by peasants"

(Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 37), the ancient strata were mixed with those of later periods, and so the bones “of small animals” (Ibid.) which were found in this area cannot be associated with the Minoan period beyond reasonable doubt.

In addition to the deposits and activity within the cave there was a depression in front of the cave (between 4-8m deep) which formed a natural courtyard some 25m in diameter. This is interesting as a similar terrace is visible outside the Psychro cave (q.v.), and it has been conjectured that the more communal rites at the caves took place on these terraces before a more secretive (elitist?) rite took place inside. There is no report of artefacts found on the terrace at Skotino, so there is nothing to confirm or deny this theory. However, there are stairs, of an uncertain date, carved into the bedrock, which lead down to the arched entrance to the cave.

Much of the deposit from Skotino, as mentioned above, remains unpublished. As such, little else can be said of the cult practices at Skotino. Although Evans and Pendlebury believed that the ashes were the remains of sacrificial pyres, but this is by no means certain. The confused stratigraphy and lack of other evidence for mass burning – such as cracked rocks and soot deposits on the cave walls – would seem to limit the significance of the ash deposits in the cave. Similarly, the lack of faunal remains that can be firmly dated to the Minoan period is once again a frustrating situation. Yet, we can say that offering and votive deposition played a role: this is evinced by the best-known objects from the cave, the three LM I bronze male votive figurines which were written up by Davaras in his 1969 article.

Indeed the majority of this article is concerned with these figurines (Fig. 48), which are small in size measuring only 7-9cm in height. They adopt a pose of adoration, the right arm clasped to the forehead, in a gesture similar to the modern military salute. Davaras compares this pose to that of the votives from other caves, and also the similarity to the pose of the male figure on the "Mountain Mother" seal (1969: 636-637). However, the opening pages of the article reveal much of the speculative reasoning and theorising that has dominated the brief published information on Skotino:

*"La caverne de Skoteino...donne l'impression
d'une grande cathédrale"* (Davaras, 1969: 621).

While this language is stirring, it is also laden with subjective presumption regarding the use of this cave and its place in Minoan religion. Indeed, Davaras references earlier theories dating as far back as Höck (1820's), and expanded by Faure, that Skotino may be the source of the myths of the Knossian 'Labyrinth'. This theory, in my opinion, is patently unfounded; if any structure gave rise to the tales of the Labyrinth, surely it would be the Palace itself rather than a cave, albeit a massive one. Even Davaras himself states that this hypothesis is "biens défendere, mais néanmoins improuvable" (Ibid.).

Seemingly, Skotino is seen as a major Minoan cult site: "This cave is regarded as one of the most important caves in Crete" (Rutkowski and Nowicki, 1996: 36). However, it is difficult to see why when it is so incompletely studied. While it is true that it possibly contains a great wealth of cult material as yet unexcavated,

to argue from silence is folly in the extreme. While I would agree that Skotino was a cult site, if we view it in a context with other cult caves it is by no means the best example of the category. In terms of quantity of finds, and their quality, Skotino is much poorer than Psychro (q.v.). Kamares and the Idaean Cave are also more varied in their cult remains. Moreover, there is no convincing evidence for the practice of sacrificial rituals at Skotino during the Minoan period.

