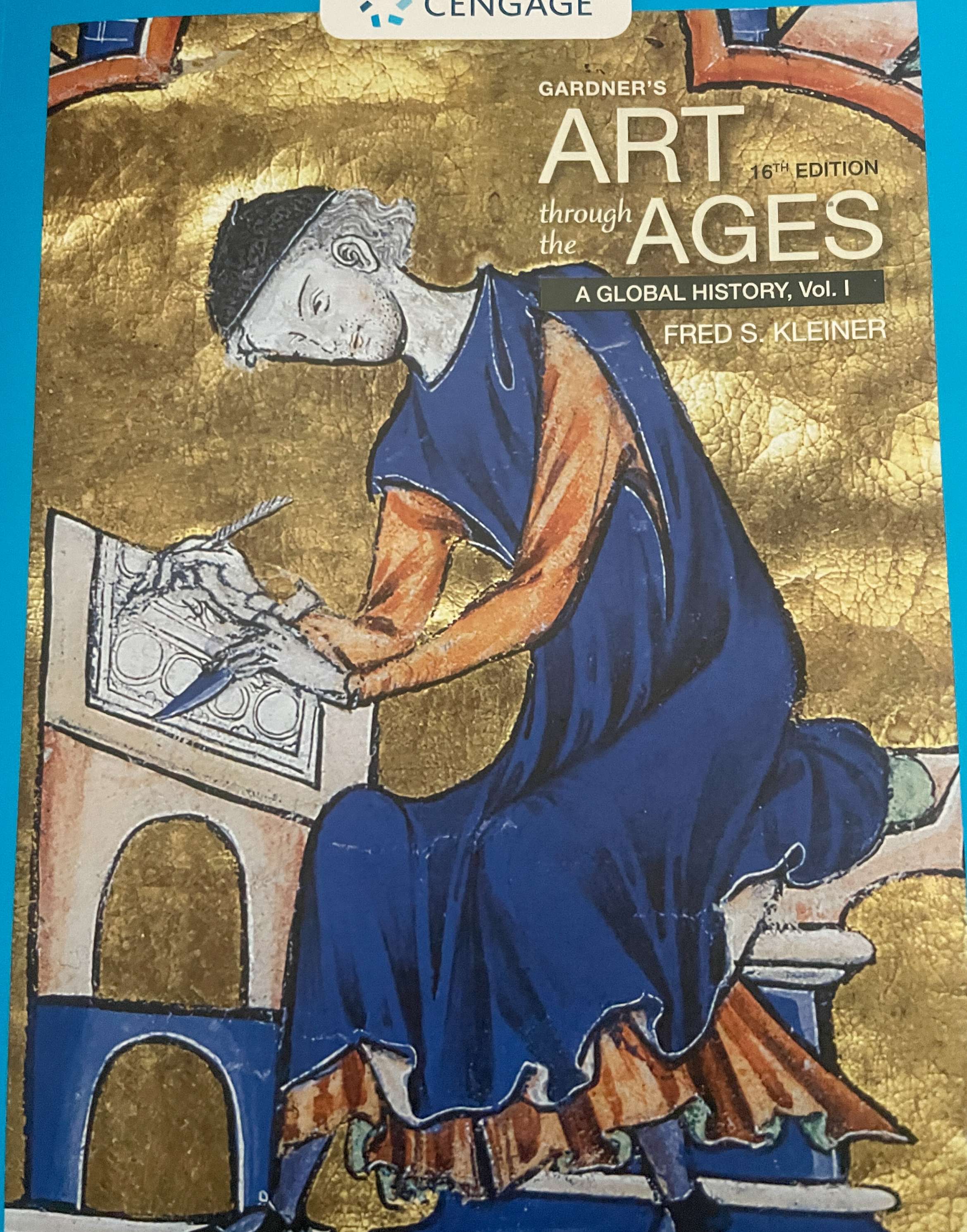


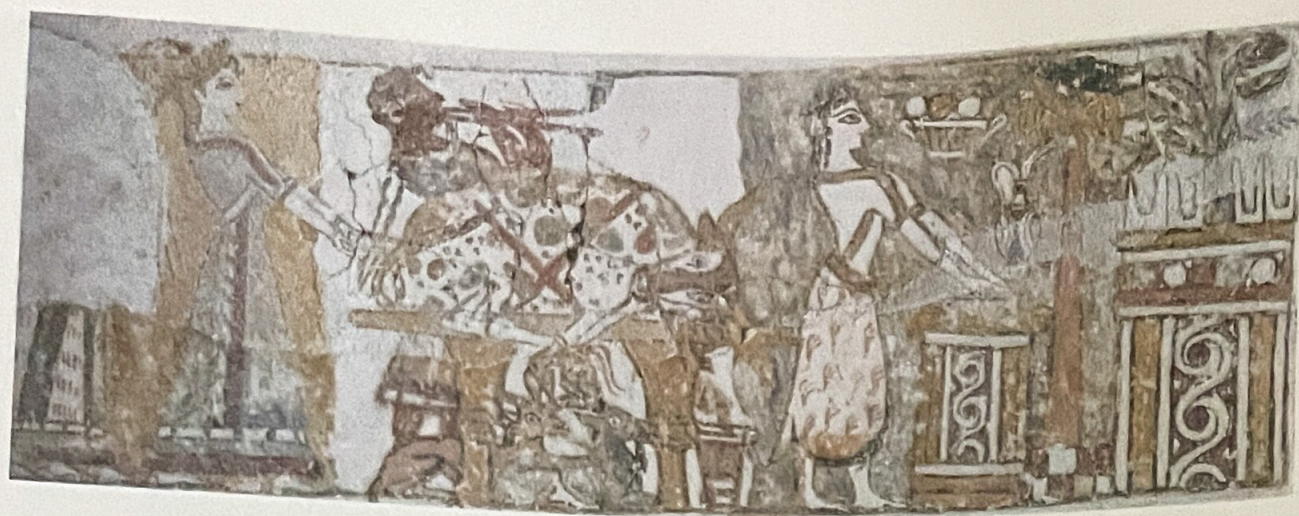
GARDNER'S

ART ^{16TH EDITION} through the AGES

A GLOBAL HISTORY, Vol. I

FRED S. KLEINER



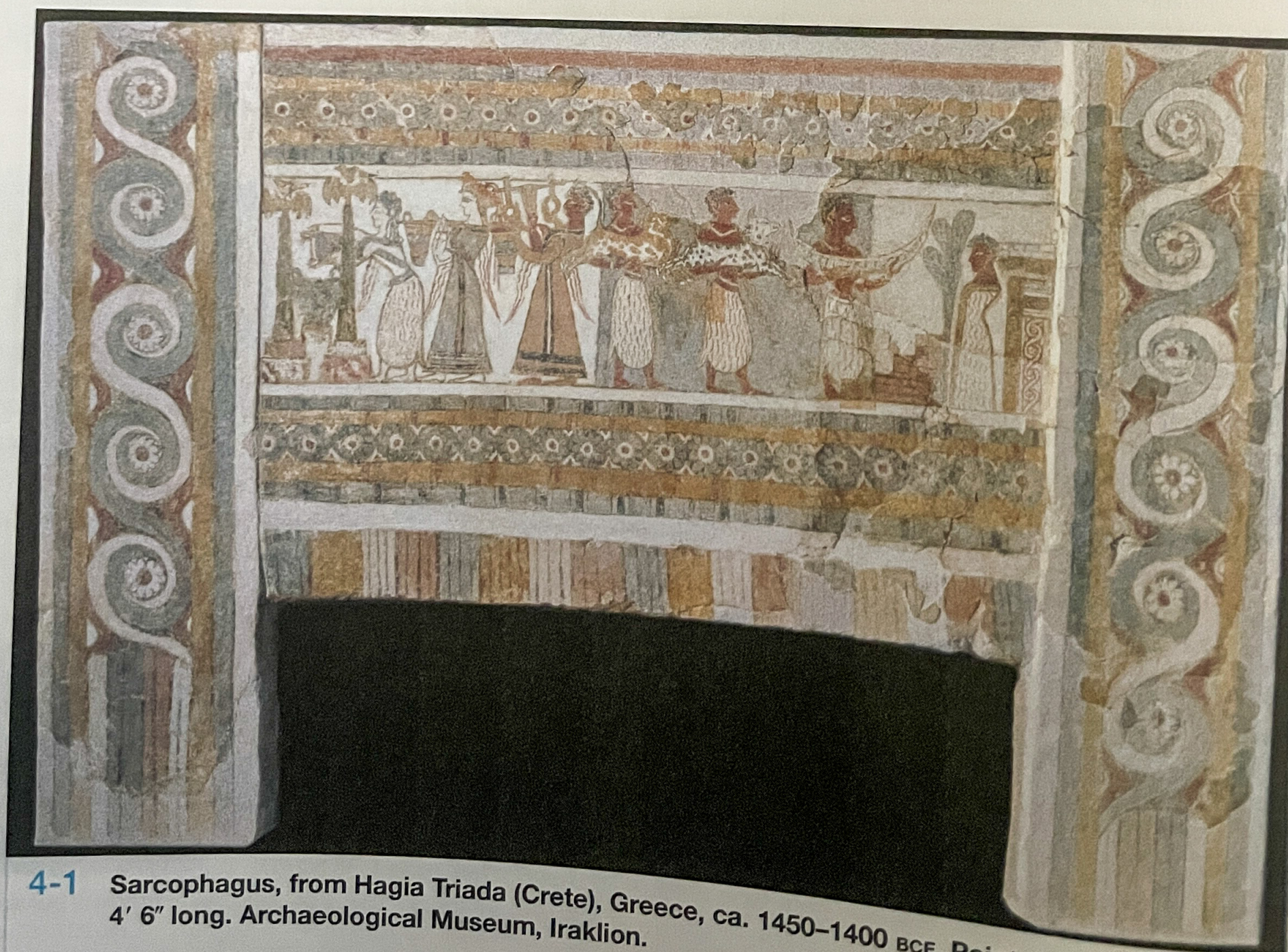


◀ **4-1a** The Hagia Triada sarcophagus provides insight into Minoan rituals. On one side, four women (with light skin) and a dark-skinned male double-flute player take part in a ceremony involving a sacrificial ox.

▶ **4-1b** On the other side of the sarcophagus, the painter depicted a woman pouring a liquid (ox blood?) between two double axes. Accompanying her are a male harp player and a second woman carrying vessels.



◀ **4-1c** Three men (with dark skin) moving in the opposite direction carry sculptures of two sacrificial animals and a model of a boat, offerings to the deceased man shown standing in front of his tomb.



4-1 Sarcophagus, from Hagia Triada (Crete), Greece, ca. 1450–1400 BCE. Painted limestone, 4' 6" long. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

THE PREHISTORIC AEGEAN

4

FRAMING THE ERA

Greece in the Age of Heroes

When, in the eighth century BCE, Homer immortalized in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the great war between the Greeks and the Trojans and the subsequent adventure-packed journey home of Odysseus, the epic poet was describing a time long before his own—a golden age of larger-than-life heroes. Since the late 19th century, archaeologists have gradually uncovered impressive remains of that heroic age, including the palaces of the legendary King Minos at Knossos (FIG. 4-4) on Crete and of King Agamemnon at Mycenae (FIG. 4-19) on the Greek mainland. But they have also recovered thousands of less glamorous objects and inscriptions that provide a contemporaneous view of life in the prehistoric Aegean unfiltered by the romantic lens of Homer and later writers.

One of the most intriguing finds to date is the painted *Minoan* (named after King Minos) *sarcophagus* (FIG. 4-1) from Hagia Triada on the southern coast of Crete. The paintings adorning the sides of the small coffin are closely related in technique, color scheme, and figure style to the much larger frescoes (FIGS. 4-7 and 4-8) on the walls of Minoan palaces, but the subject is foreign to the royal repertoire. Befitting the function of the sarcophagus as a burial container, the paintings illustrate the funerary rites in honor of a man. They furnish welcome information about Minoan religion, which still remains obscure despite more than a century of excavation on Crete.

On one long side of the sarcophagus, four women and a male double-flute player take part in a ritual centered on an ox tied up on a table. One of the women makes an offering at an altar. In contrast to this unified narrative, the other side is divided into two scenes. At the left, a woman pours liquid (perhaps the blood of the sacrificial ox) from a jar into a large vessel on a stand between two double axes. Behind her, a second woman carries two more jars, and a male figure plays the harp. Consistent with the common convention in many ancient cultures, all of the women have light skin and the men dark skin (compare FIG. 3-13A). To their right, three men carry two sculpted sacrificial animals and a model of a boat to offer to a dead man, whom the painter represented as standing in front of his tomb, just as the biblical Lazarus, raised from the dead, will later appear in medieval art.

The precise meaning of the sarcophagus paintings is uncertain, but there is no doubt that they document well-established Minoan rites in honor of the dead, which included the sacrifice of animals accompanied by music and the deposit of gifts in the tomb. Until scholars can decipher the written language of the Minoans, artworks such as the Hagia Triada sarcophagus will be the primary tools for reconstructing life on Crete, and in Greece as a whole, during the millennium before the birth of Homer.

GREECE BEFORE HOMER

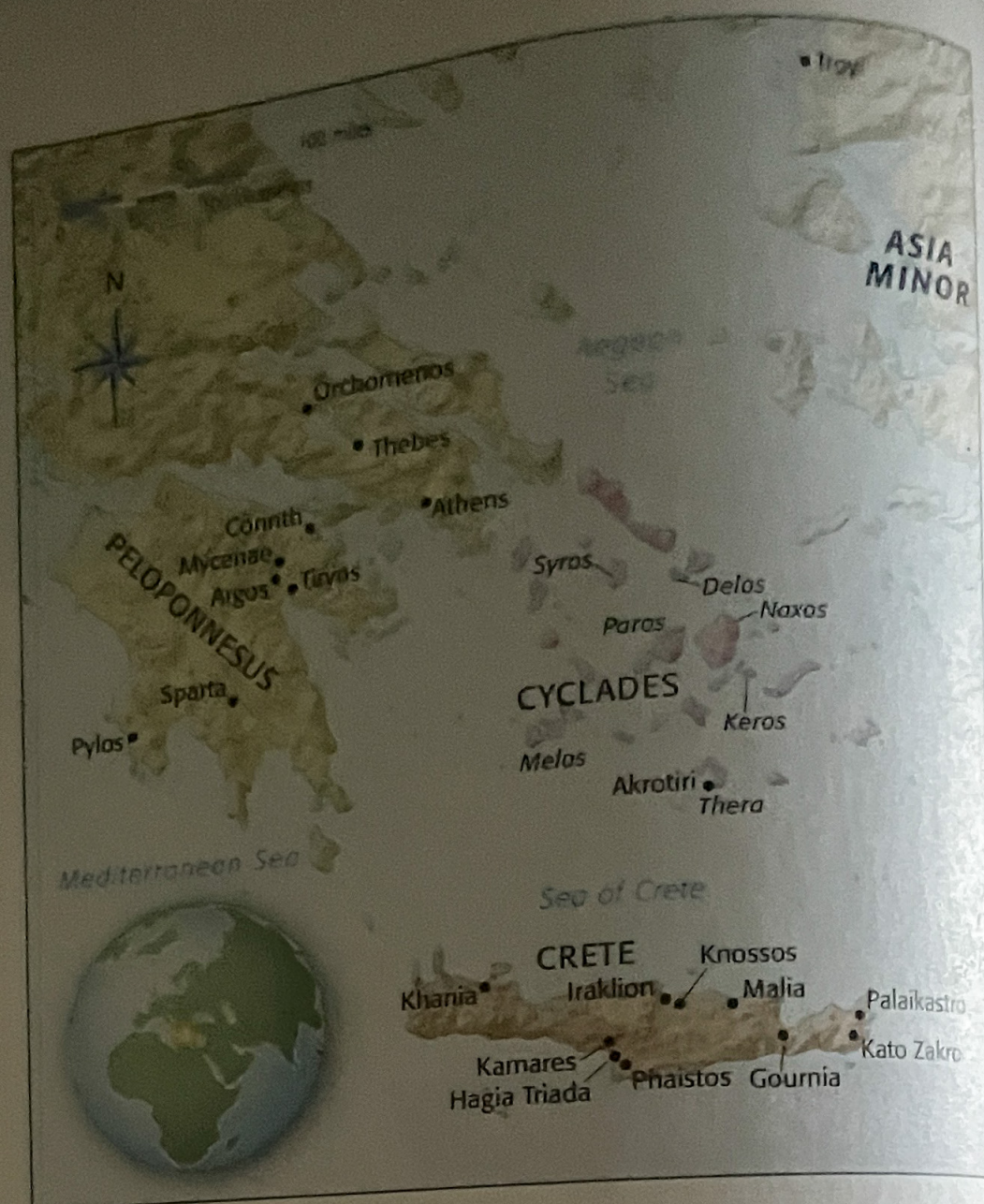
In the *Iliad*, Homer describes the might and splendor of the Greek armies poised before the walls of Troy.

Clan after clan poured out from the ships and huts onto the plain . . . innumerable as the leaves and blossoms in their season . . . the Athenians from their splendid citadel, . . . the citizens of Argos and Tiryns of the Great Walls . . . troops . . . from the great stronghold of Mycenae, from wealthy Corinth, . . . from Knossos, . . . Phaistos, . . . and the other troops that had their homes in Crete of the Hundred Towns.

The Greeks had come from far and wide, from the mainland and the islands (MAP 4-1), to seek revenge against Paris, the Trojan prince who had abducted Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. The *Iliad*, composed around 750 BCE, is the first great work of Greek literature. Until about 1870, the world regarded Homer's epic poem as pure fiction. Scholars paid little heed to the bard as a historian, instead attributing the profusion of names and places in his writings to the rich abundance of his imagination. The prehistory of Greece remained shadowy and lost in an impenetrable world of myth.

Troy and Mycenae. In the late 1800s, however, Heinrich Schliemann (1822–1890), a wealthy German businessman turned archaeologist, proved that scholars had not given Homer his due. Between 1870 and his death 20 years later, Schliemann (whose methods later archaeologists have harshly criticized) uncovered some of the very cities that Homer named. In 1870, he began work at Hissarlik on the northwestern coast of Turkey, which a British archaeologist, Frank Calvert (1828–1908), had postulated was the site of Homer's Troy. Schliemann dug into a vast mound and found a number of fortified cities built on the remains of one another. Fire had destroyed one of them in the 13th century BCE. This, scholars now agree, was the Troy of King Priam and his son Paris.

Schliemann continued his excavations at Mycenae on the Greek mainland, where, he believed, King Agamemnon, Menelaus's brother, had once ruled. Here his finds were even more startling, among them a massive fortress-palace with an imposing gateway (FIG. 4-19) and a circle of royal graves (FIG. 4-21A); other tombs featuring stone domes beneath earthen mounds (FIGS. 4-20 and 4-21); quantities of gold jewelry, drinking cups, and masks (FIG. 4-22); and inlaid bronze weapons (FIG. 4-23). Schliemann's discoveries revealed a magnificent civilization far older than the famous vestiges of Classical Greece that had remained visible in Athens and elsewhere. Subsequent excavations proved that Mycenae had not been the only center of this fabulous civilization.



MAP 4-1 The prehistoric Aegean.

Minoan Crete. Another legendary figure was Minos, the king of Knossos on the island of Crete, who exacted from Athens a tribute of youths and maidens to be fed to the *Minotaur*, a creature half bull and half man that inhabited a vast labyrinth. In 1900, an Englishman, Arthur Evans (1851–1941), began work at Knossos, where he uncovered a palace (FIGS. 4-4 and 4-5) resembling a maze. Evans named the people who had constructed it *Minoans* after their mythological king. Other archaeologists soon discovered further evidence of the Minoans at Phaistos (FIG. 4-11), Hagia Triada (FIGS. 4-1 and 4-14), and other sites, including Gournia, which Harriet Boyd Hawes (1871–1945), an American archaeologist (and one of the first women of any nationality to direct a major excavation), explored between 1901 and 1904.

More recently, archaeologists have excavated important Minoan remains at many other locations on Crete. They have also explored contemporaneous sites on other islands in the Aegean Sea (named after Aegeus, father of King Theseus of Athens), most notably Thera (FIGS. 4-9, 4-9A, and 4-10). Together, the buildings

THE PREHISTORIC AEGEAN

3000–2000 BCE

- Early Cycladic sculptors create marble figurines for placement in graves to accompany the dead into the afterlife

2000–1700 BCE

- Minoans construct major palaces on Crete during the Old Palace period
- Cretan ceramists produce Kamarese Ware painted pottery

1700–1400 BCE

- Minoans construct large administrative complexes with extensive fresco decoration during the second (New Palace) period on Crete
- Minoan potters manufacture Marine Style vases, and sculptors carve small-scale images of gods
- Volcanic eruption buries Akrotiri, 1628 BCE
- Mycenaeans bury their dead in shaft graves with gold funerary masks and cups and inlaid daggers

1400–1200 BCE

- Mycenaeans erect fortification walls around their citadels at Mycenae, Tiryns, and elsewhere, and build tombs featuring corbelled domes
- The oldest known large-scale sculptures in Greece appear at Mycenae
- Mycenae civilization comes to an end with the destruction of their palace citadels, ca. 1200 BCE

A SECOND OPINION

Cycladic Statuettes

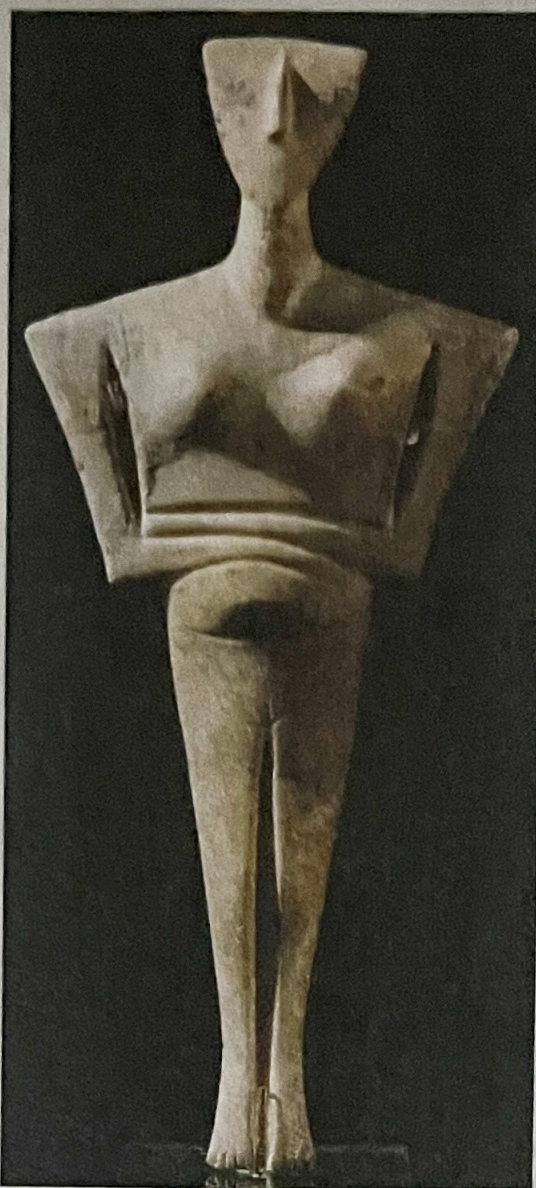
One way that the ancient world is fundamentally different from the world today is that ancient art is largely anonymous and undated. The systematic signing and dating of artworks—a commonplace feature in the contemporary art world—has no equivalent in antiquity. That is why the role of archaeology in the study of ancient art is so important. Only the scientific excavation of ancient artworks can establish their context. Exquisite and strikingly “modern” sculptures, such as the marble Cycladic figurines illustrated in Figs. 4-2 and 4-3, may be appreciated as masterpieces when displayed in splendid isolation in glass cases in museums or private homes. But to understand the role that these or any other artworks played in ancient society—in many cases, even to determine the date of an object—the art historian must learn the *provenance* (place of origin) of the piece. Only when the context of an artwork is known can anyone go beyond an appreciation of its formal qualities and begin to analyze its place in art history and its role in the society that produced it.

The extraordinary popularity of Cycladic figurines in recent decades has had unfortunate consequences. Glandestine treasure hunters, anxious to meet the insatiable demand of collectors, have plundered many sites and smuggled their finds out of Greece to sell to the highest bidder on the international art market. This looting has destroyed entire prehistoric cemeteries and towns.

It also poses a serious dilemma for the study of Cycladic art. Attempts have been made to establish a chronology for the Cycladic statuettes, even to attribute most examples to different workshops. The largest and most unusual pieces, of course, figure prominently in the effort to write a coherent history of Cycladic art. However, two British scholars have expressed a cautionary second opinion.* They have calculated that only about 10 percent of the known Cycladic marble statuettes (including the two discussed here) come from secure archaeological contexts. Many of the rest could be forgeries produced after World War II, when developments in modern art fostered a new appreciation of these abstract renditions of human anatomy and created a

paintings, sculptures, and other finds on the Greek mainland and on the Aegean islands attest to the wealth and sophistication of the people who occupied Greece in that once-obscure heroic age celebrated in later Greek mythology.

Aegean Archaeology Today. Archaeologists know much more today about the prehistoric societies of the Aegean than they did a generation ago. Arguably more important for the understanding of Aegean prehistory than the art objects that tourists flock to see in the museums of Athens and Iraklion (near Knossos) are the many documents that archaeologists have found written in scripts conventionally called Linear A and Linear B. The progress made during the past several decades in deciphering Linear B texts has provided a welcome corrective to the romantic treasure-hunting approach of Schliemann and Evans. Scholars now recognize Linear B as an early form of Greek, and they have begun to reconstruct Mycenaean civilization by referring to records made at the time and not just to Homer’s heroic account. Archaeologists now also know that humans inhabited Greece as far back as the early Paleolithic period and that village life was firmly established in Greece and on Crete in Neolithic times.



4-2 Figurine of a woman, from Syros (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 2600–2300 BCE. Marble, 1' 6" high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Most Cycladic statuettes depict nude women. This one comes from a grave, but whether it represents the deceased is uncertain. The sculptor rendered the female body schematically as a series of triangles.

boom in demand for “Cycladica” among collectors. For some categories of Cycladic sculptures—those of unusual type or size—not a single piece with a documented provenance exists. Those groups may be 20th-century inventions—made by sophisticated forgers using marble from the same quarries and replicas of ancient tools—designed to fetch even higher prices in the

marketplace due to their rarity. Consequently, most of the conclusions that art historians have drawn about Cycladic sculpture are highly speculative and suspect. The importance of the information that the original contexts would have provided cannot be overestimated. That information, however, can probably never be recovered.

*David W. J. Gill and Christopher Chippindale, “Material and Intellectual Consequences of Esteem for Cycladic Figures,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 97 (1993): 601–659.

The heyday of the ancient Aegean, however, did not arrive until the second millennium BCE, well after the emergence of the river valley civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and South Asia.

The prehistoric Aegean has three geographic areas, and each has its own distinctive artistic identity. *Cycladic* art is the art of the Cyclades islands (so named because they “circle” around Delos), as well as of the adjacent islands in the Aegean, excluding Crete. *Minoan* art encompasses the art of Crete. *Helladic* art is the art of the Greek mainland (*Hellas* in Greek). Archaeologists subdivide each area chronologically into early, middle, and late periods, designating the art of the Late Helladic period *Mycenaean* after Agamemnon’s great citadel of Mycenae.

CYCLADIC ART

Marble was abundantly available in the superb quarries of the Aegean islands, especially on Naxos, and the sculptors of the Early Cycladic period produced large quantities of marble statuettes (Figs. 4-2 and 4-3) of distinctive form. Today, collectors revere those Cycladic figurines (see “Cycladic Statuettes,” above) because

of their striking abstract forms, which call to mind some modern sculptures (FIGS. 30-00 and 30-00A).

Syros Woman. Most of the Cycladic sculptures represent nude women, as do many of their Stone Age predecessors in the Aegean, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and western Europe (FIG. 1-4). The Cycladic examples often depict women with their arms folded across their abdomens. The sculptures, which excavators have found both in graves and in settlements, vary in height from a few inches to almost life-size. The statuette illustrated here (FIG. 4-2) comes from a grave on the island of Syros and is about a foot-and-a-half tall—but only about a half-inch thick. Using obsidian tools, the sculptor carved the figurine and then polished the surface with emery. The Cycladic artist's rendition of the human body is highly schematic. Large, simple triangles dominate the form—the head, the body itself (which tapers from exceptionally broad shoulders to tiny feet), and the incised triangular pubis. Other examples have more rounded forms, but the feet always have the toes pointed downward, so the figurines cannot stand upright. All of the statuettes must have been placed on their backs in the grave—lying down, like the deceased.

Archaeologists speculate whether the Syros statuette and the many other similar Cycladic figurines known today represent dead women or fertility figures or goddesses. Whether those depicted are mortals or deities, the sculptors took pains to emphasize the breasts as well as the pubic area. In the Syros statuette, a slight swelling of the belly may suggest pregnancy (compare FIG. 1-5). Traces of paint found on some of the Cycladic figurines indicate that at least parts of these sculptures were colored. The now almost featureless faces would have had painted eyes and mouths in addition to the sculpted noses. Red and blue necklaces and bracelets, as well as painted dots on the cheeks and necks (compare FIG. 4-26), characterize a number of the surviving figurines.

Keros Musician. Fewer Cycladic statuettes represent men. The most elaborate of the male figurines portray seated musicians, such as the harp player (FIG. 4-3) from Keros. Wedged between the echoing shapes of chair and instrument, he may be playing for the deceased in the afterlife, although, again, the meaning of these sculptures remains elusive. The harpist reflects the same preference for simple geometric shapes and large, flat planes as do the female figures. Still, the artist showed a keen interest in recording the elegant shape of what must have been a prized possession: the harp with a duck-bill or swan-head ornament. (Compare the form of Sumerian harps, FIGS. 2-6 and 2-10, *top right*.)

One woman's grave contained figurines of both a musician and a reclining woman. The burial of a male figure together with the body of a woman suggests that the harp players are not images of dead men, but it does not prove that the female figurines represent dead women. The musician might be entertaining the deceased herself, not her image, or be engaged in commemorative rites honoring the dead. (The harp player on the Hagia Triada *sarcophagus* [FIG. 4-1b] may indicate some continuity in funerary customs and beliefs from the Cycladic to the Minoan period in the Aegean.) Given the absence of written documents in Greece at this date, as everywhere else in prehistoric times, and the lack of contextual information for most Cycladic sculptures, art historians cannot be sure of the meaning of these statuettes. It is likely, in fact, that the same form took on different meanings in different contexts.



4-3 Male harp player, from Keros (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 2600–2300 BCE. Marble, 9" high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The meaning of all Cycladic figurines is elusive, but this seated musician may be playing for the deceased in the afterlife. The statuette displays simple geometric shapes and flat planes.

MINOAN ART

During the third millennium BCE, both on the Aegean islands and on the Greek mainland, most settlements were small and consisted only of simple buildings. Rarely were the dead buried with costly offerings such as the Cycladic statuettes just examined. By contrast, the hallmark of the opening centuries of the second millennium (the Middle Minoan period on Crete) is the construction of large palaces.

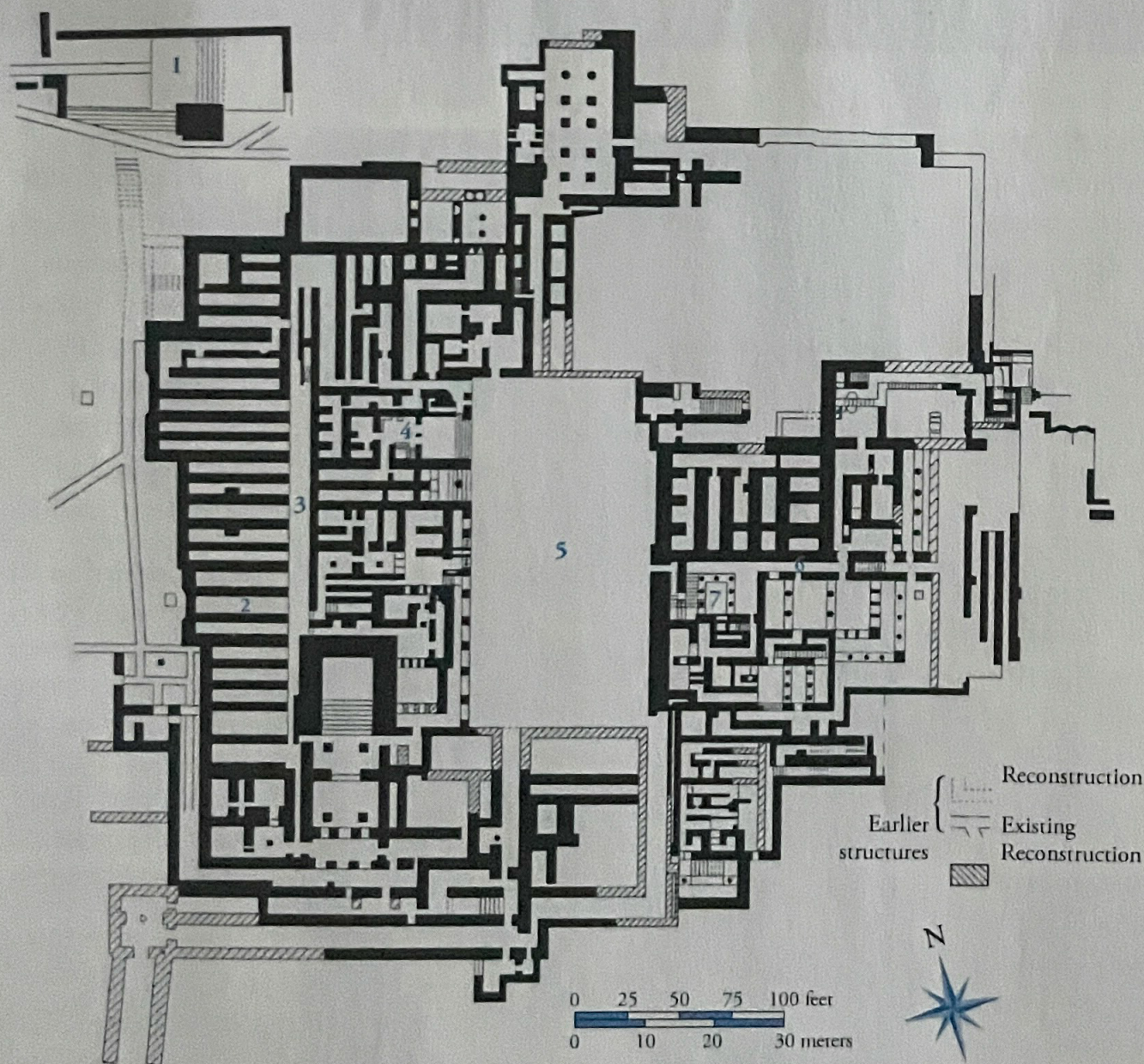
Architecture

The first, or Old Palace, period ended abruptly around 1700 BCE, when fire destroyed these grand structures, probably following an earthquake. Rebuilding began almost immediately, and archaeologists consider the ensuing Late Minoan (New Palace) period the golden age of Crete, an era when the first great Western civilization emerged. Although conventionally called palaces, the rebuilt structures may not have served as royal residences. They were administrative, commercial, and religious centers with courtyards for pageants, ceremonies, and games, and dozens of offices, shrines, and storerooms for the collection and distribution of produce and



4-4 Restored view of the palace (looking northwest), Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1700–1370 BCE (John Burge).

The Knossos palace, the largest on Crete, was the legendary home of King Minos. Its layout features a large central court surrounded by scores of residential and administrative units.



4-5 Plan of the palace, Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1700–1370 BCE. (1) “theater,” (2) magazines, (3) north-south corridor, (4) throne room, (5) central court, (6) east-west corridor, (7) grand stairwell.

The mazelike plan of the Knossos palace gave rise to the Greek myth of the Cretan labyrinth inhabited by the Minotaur, a half-man, half-bull monster that King Theseus of Athens slew.

goods. These huge complexes were the centers of Minoan life. The principal “palaces” on Crete are at Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Kato Zakro, and Khania. The Minoans laid out all of them along similar lines. The size and number of these important centers, as well as the rich finds they have yielded, attest to the power and prosperity of the Minoans.

Knossos. The largest Cretan palace—at Knossos (FIGS. 4-4 and 4-5)—was the legendary home of King Minos. Here, the hero Theseus hunted the bull-man Minotaur in his labyrinth. According to the myth, after defeating the monster, Theseus found his way out of the mazelike complex only with the aid of the king’s daughter, Ariadne. She had given Theseus a spindle of thread to mark his path through the labyrinth and safely find his way out again. In fact, the English word *labyrinth* derives from the intricate plan and scores of rooms of the Knossos palace. The *labrys* (“double ax”) serves as a recurring motif in the Minoan palace and in Minoan art generally (FIG. 4-1b), referring to sacrificial slaughter. The labyrinth was the “House of the Double Ax.”

The Knossos palace was a rambling structure built against the upper slopes and across the top of a low hill that rises from a fertile plain. All around the palace proper were mansions and villas of the Minoan elite. The central feature of the palace was its great rectangular court (FIG. 4-5, no. 5). The builders carefully planned

4-6 Stairwell in the residential quarter of the palace (FIG. 4-5, no. 7), Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1700–1370 BCE.

The Knossos palace was complex in elevation as well as plan. It had at least three stories on all sides of the court. Minoan columns taper from top to bottom, the opposite of Egyptian and Greek columns.

the structure with clusters of rooms of similar function grouped around this primary space. On the west side of the court, a north-south corridor (FIG. 4-5, no. 3) separates official and ceremonial rooms from the magazines (no. 2), where the Minoans stored wine, grain, oil, and honey in large jars. On the east side of the court, a smaller east-west corridor (no. 6) separates the administrative areas (to the south) from the workrooms (to the north). At the northwest corner of the palace is a theater-like area (no. 1) with steps on two sides that may have served as seats. This arrangement is a possible forerunner of the later Greek theater (FIG. 5-71). Its purpose is unknown, but the feature also appears in the Phaistos palace.

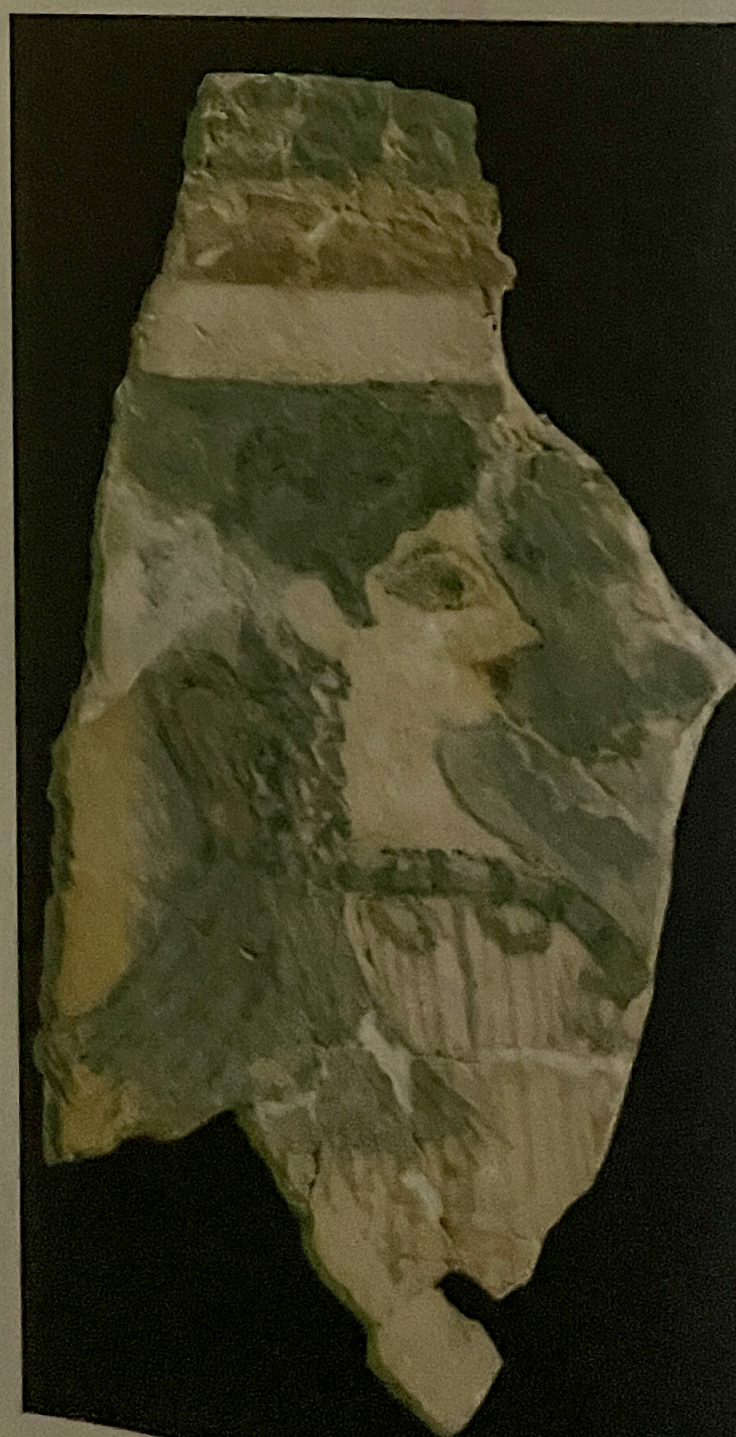
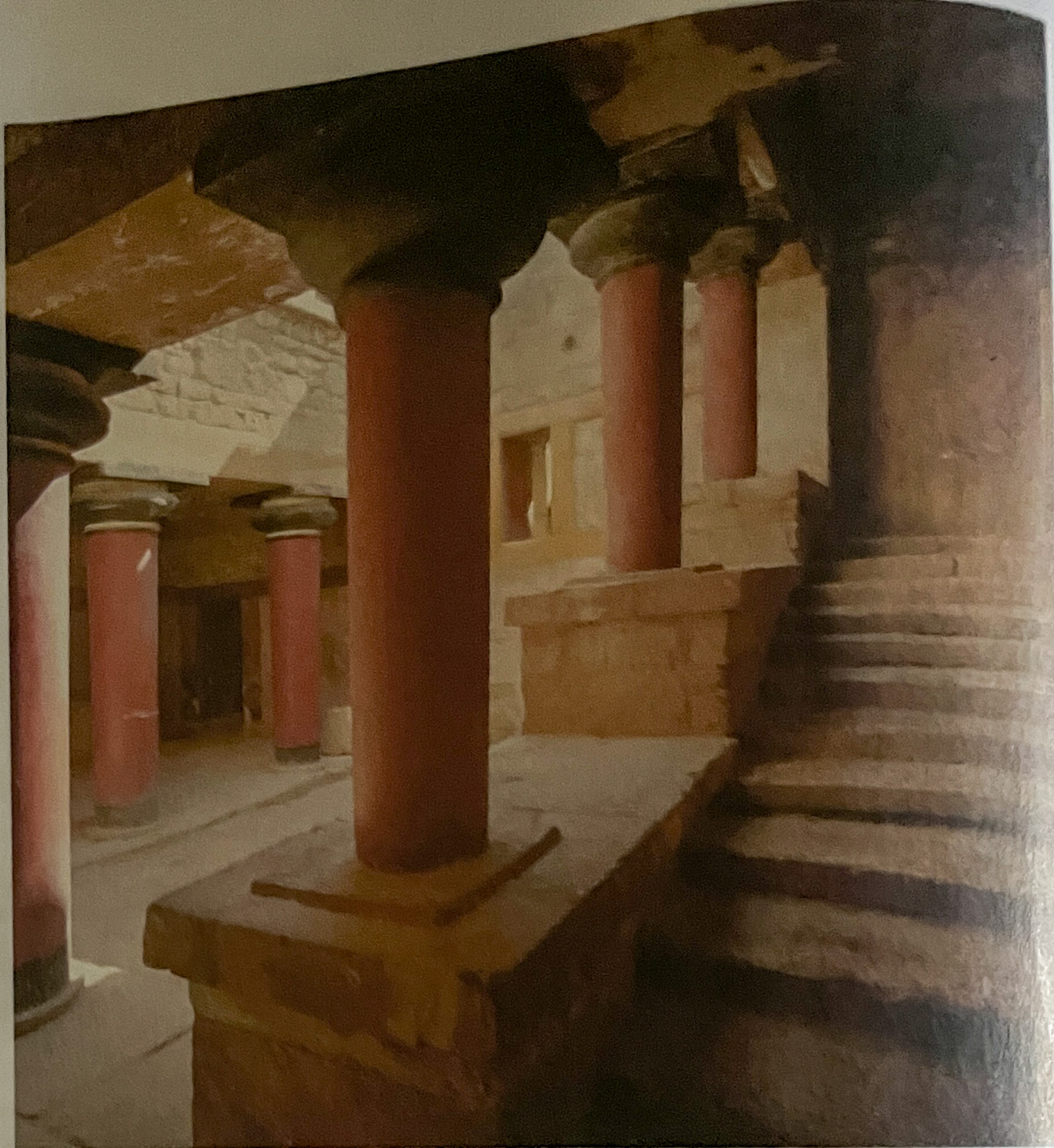
The Knossos palace was complex in elevation as well as plan. Around the central court, there were as many as three stories, and on the south and east sides, where the terrain sloped off sharply, the palace had four or five stories. Interior light and air wells, some with staircases (FIGS. 4-5, no. 7, and 4-6), provided necessary illumination and ventilation. The Minoans also addressed such issues as drainage of rainwater. At Knossos, a remarkably efficient system of terracotta (baked clay) pipes lies under the enormous building.

The Cretan palaces were sturdy structures, with thick walls composed of rough, unshaped fieldstones embedded in clay. For corners and around door and window openings, the builders used large stone blocks, especially for the walls facing the central court. The painted wood columns (which Evans restored in cement at Knossos) have distinctive capitals and shafts (FIG. 4-6). The bulbous, cushionlike Minoan capitals resemble those of the later Greek Doric order (FIG. 5-13, *left*), but the column shafts—essentially stylized inverted tree trunks—taper from a wide top to a narrower base, the opposite of both Egyptian and later Greek columns.

Painting

Mural paintings liberally adorned the palace at Knossos, constituting one of its most striking features. The brightly painted walls and the red shafts and black capitals of the wood columns produced an extraordinarily rich effect. The paintings depict many aspects of Minoan life (bull-leaping, processions, and ceremonies) and of nature (birds, animals, flowers, and marine life).

La Parisienne. From a ceremonial scene of uncertain significance comes the fragment dubbed *La Parisienne* (*The Parisian Woman*; FIG. 4-7) on its discovery because of the elegant dress, elaborate coiffure, and full rouged lips of the young woman depicted.



4-7 Minoan woman or goddess (*La Parisienne*), from the palace, Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1500 BCE. Fragment of a fresco, 10" high. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

Frescoes decorated the Knossos palace walls. This fragment depicts a woman or a goddess—perhaps a statue—with a large frontal eye in her profile head, as in Mesopotamian and Egyptian art.

Some have identified her as a priestess taking part in a religious ritual, but because the figure has no arms, it is more likely a statue of a goddess. Although the representation is still convention-bound (note especially the oversized frontal eye in the profile head), the charm and freshness of the mural are undeniable. Unlike the Egyptians, who painted in *fresco secco* (dry fresco), the Minoans coated the rough fabric of their rubble walls with a fine white lime plaster and were apparently the first to use a true *buon fresco* method in which the painter applies the pigments while the walls are still wet (see "Fresco Painting," page 428). The color consequently becomes chemically bonded to the plaster after it dries. The Minoan painters therefore had to execute their work rapidly, in contrast to Egyptian practice, which permitted slower, more deliberate work.

Bull-Leaping. Another fresco (FIG. 4-8) from the palace at Knossos depicts the Minoan ceremony of bull-leaping, in which young men grasped the horns of a bull and vaulted onto its back—a perilous and extremely difficult acrobatic maneuver. Excavators recovered only fragments of the full composition. (The dark patches are original; the rest is a modern restoration.) The Minoan artist provided no setting, instead focusing all attention on the three protagonists and the fearsome bull. The young women have fair skin and the leaping youth has dark skin, in accordance with the widely accepted ancient convention for distinguishing male and female, as on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus (FIG. 4-1; compare FIGS. 3-13A

and 5-20A). The painter brilliantly suggested the powerful charge of the bull (which has all four legs off the ground) by elongating the animal's shape and using sweeping lines to form a funnel of energy, beginning at the very narrow hindquarters of the bull and culminating in its large, sharp horns. The highly animated human figures also have stylized shapes, with typically Minoan pinched waists. Although the profile pose with frontal eye was a familiar convention in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the elegant Cretan figures, with their long, curly hair and proud and self-confident bearing, have no parallels in the art of other early cultures. In contrast to the angularity of the figures in Egyptian wall paintings, the curving lines that the Minoan artist employed suggest the elasticity of living and moving beings.

Thera. Much better preserved than the Knossos frescoes are the mural paintings that Greek archaeologists have discovered in their ongoing excavations at Akrotiri on the island of Thera in the Cyclades, some 60 miles north of Crete. In the Late Cycladic period, Thera was artistically (and possibly also politically) within the Minoan orbit. The Akrotiri murals are invaluable additions to the fragmentary and frequently misrestored frescoes from Crete. The excellent condition of the Theran paintings is due to an enormous volcanic explosion on the island that buried Akrotiri in volcanic pumice and ash, making it a kind of Pompeii of the prehistoric Aegean (see "The Theran Eruption and the Chronology of



4-8 Bull-leaping, from the palace, Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1500 BCE. Fresco, 2' 8" high, including border. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

The subjects of the Knossos frescoes are often ceremonial scenes, such as this one of bull-leaping. The women have fair skin and the man has dark skin, a common convention in ancient painting.

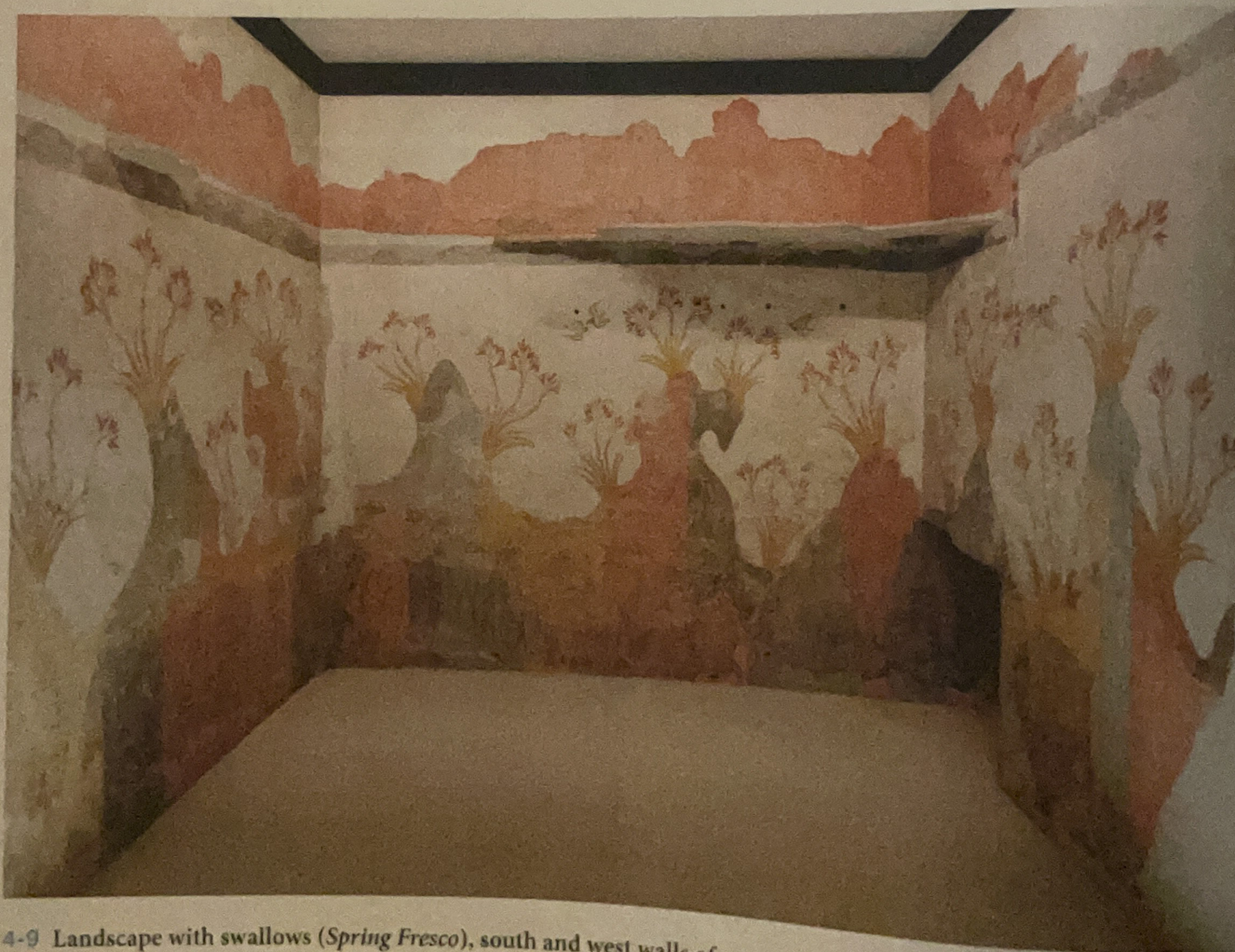
The Theran Eruption and the Chronology of Aegean Art

Today, ships bound for the beautiful Greek island of Thera (formerly Santorini), with its picture-postcard white houses, churches, shops, and restaurants, weigh anchor in a bay beneath steep cliffs. Until about 20,000 BCE, however, Thera had gentler slopes. Then, suddenly, a volcanic eruption blew out the center of the island, leaving behind the crescent-shaped main island and several lesser islands grouped around a bay that roughly corresponds to the shape of the gigantic ancient volcano. The volcano erupted again, thousands of years later, during the zenith of Aegean civilization.

The later explosion buried the site of Akrotiri, which Greek excavators have been gradually uncovering since 1967, under a layer of pumice more than a yard deep in some areas and by an even larger volume of volcanic ash (*tephra*) often exceeding 5 yards in depth, even after nearly 37 centuries of erosion. Tephra filled whole rooms, and boulders spewed forth by the volcano pelted the walls of some houses. Closer to the volcano's cone, the tephra is almost 60 yards deep in places. In fact, the force of the eruption was so powerful that sea currents carried the pumice, and wind blew the ash, throughout much of the eastern Mediterranean, not only to Crete, Rhodes, and Cyprus but also as far away as Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Israel.

A generation ago, most scholars embraced the theory formulated by Spyridon Marinatos (1901–1974), an eminent Greek archaeologist, that the otherwise unexplained demise of Minoan civilization on Crete around 1500 BCE was the by-product of the volcanic eruption on Thera. According to Marinatos, devastating famine followed the rain of ash that fell on Crete. But archaeologists now know that after the eruption, life went on in Crete, if not on Thera.

Teams of researchers, working closely in an impressive and most welcome interdisciplinary effort, have determined that a major climatic event occurred during the last third of the 17th century BCE. In addition to collecting evidence from Thera, they have studied tree rings at sites in Europe and in North America for evidence of retarded growth and have examined ice cores in Greenland for peak acidity layers. The scientific data pinpoint a significant disruption in weather patterns in 1628 BCE. Most scholars now believe that the cause of this disruption was the cataclysmic volcanic eruption on Thera. The date of the Aegean catastrophe remains the subject of much debate, however, and many archaeologists favor placing the eruption in the 16th century BCE. In either case, the date of Thera's destruction has profound consequences for determining the chronology of Aegean art. If the Akrotiri frescoes (FIGS. 4-9, 4-9A, and 4-10) date between 1650 and 1625 BCE, they are at least 150 years older than scholars thought not long ago, and are much older than the Knossos palace murals (FIGS. 4-7 and 4-8).



4-9 Landscape with swallows (*Spring Fresco*), south and west walls of room Delta 2, Akrotiri, Thera (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 1650–1625 BCE. Fresco, 7' 6" high. Reconstructed in National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Aegean muralists painted true frescoes, which required rapid execution. In this wraparound landscape, the painter used vivid colors and undulating lines to capture the essence of nature.

Aegean Art," page 92, and "An Eyewitness Account of the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius," page 191). The Akrotiri frescoes decorated the walls of houses and shrines, not the walls of a great palace, such as Minos's at Knossos, and therefore the number of painted walls from the site is especially impressive.

The almost perfectly preserved mural painting from Akrotiri known as the *Spring Fresco* (FIG. 4-9) is the largest and most complete prehistoric example of a pure landscape painting. *Landscapes* (pictures of a natural setting in its own right, without any narrative



4-9A *Miniature Ships Fresco, Akrotiri, ca. 1650–1625 BCE.*

content) and seascapes (FIG. 4-9A) are key elements of many of the mural paintings found at Akrotiri. In each case, however, the artist's aim was not to render the rocky island terrain realistically but rather to capture its essence. In FIG. 4-9, the irrationally undulating and vividly colored rocks, the graceful lilies swaying in the cool island breezes, and the darting swallows express the vigor of growth, the delicacy of flowering, and the lightness of birdsong and flight. In the lyrical language of curving line, the artist celebrated the rhythms of nature. The *Spring Fresco* represents the polar opposite of the first efforts at mural painting in the caves of Paleolithic Europe (see "The Dawn of Art," page 15), where animals (and occasionally humans) appeared as isolated figures with no indication of setting.

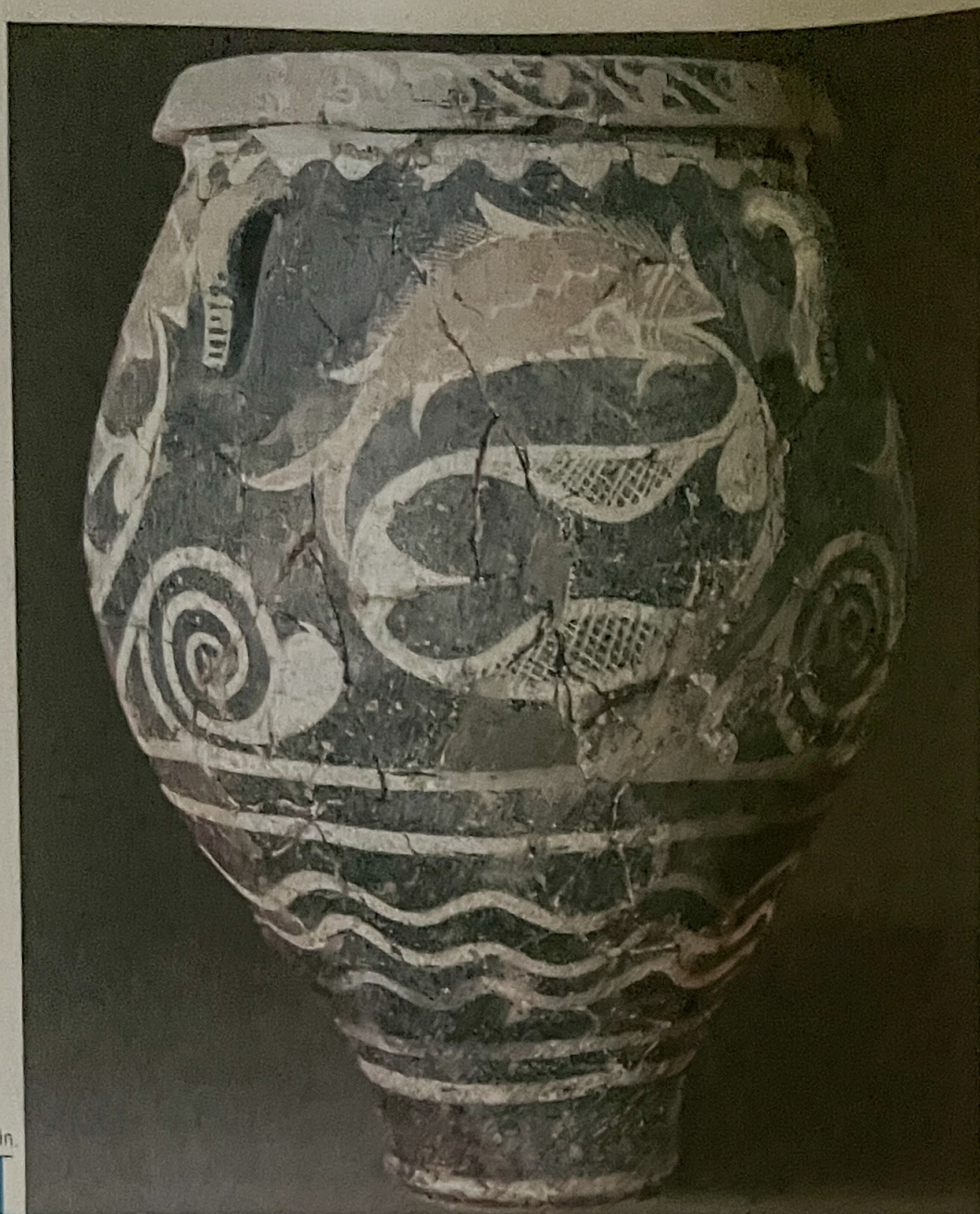
Crocus Gatherers. A rocky landscape is also the setting for the figures depicted in room 3 of building Xeste 3 at Akrotiri. The room probably served as a shrine in which girls took part in puberty initiation rites. Frescoes decorated the walls on two levels. In one section (not illustrated), a young girl with a bleeding foot sits on a rock. Approaching her from behind is a bare-breasted woman carrying a necklace, probably a gift for the bleeding girl. In the section reproduced here (FIG. 4-10), two elegantly dressed young women bedecked with bracelets and hoop earrings gather crocuses. One has a shaved head with a serpentine lock of hair at the back, indicating that she is a young girl. Crocus flowers produce saffron, used for the yellow dye of some of the garments that the figures wear. Saffron may also have been used as a painkiller for menstrual cramps. In another section of the mural (not illustrated), girls carry baskets full of the flowers they have picked. They bring the flowers to a woman seated on a stepped platform. Scholars have identified the woman, who is flanked by a blue monkey and a *griffin* (a mythical winged lion with an eagle's head), as a goddess rather than a mortal, but the precise meaning of the scenes depicted in the fresco remains uncertain.

Minoan Pottery. Nature as a preferred subject for paintings is documented on Minoan pottery, even before the period of the new Cretan palaces. During the Middle Minoan period, Cretan ceramists fashioned sophisticated shapes using newly introduced potters' wheels, and decorated their vases in a distinctive and fully polychromatic style. These Kamares Ware vessels, named for the



4-10 *Crocus gatherers, detail of the east wall of room 3 of building Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera (Cyclades), Greece, ca. 1650–1625 BCE. Fresco, 8' $\frac{1}{8}$ " high. Reconstructed in National Archaeological Museum, Athens.*

In a room at Akrotiri probably used for puberty rites, young girls pick crocus flowers in a rocky landscape recalling the *Spring Fresco* (FIG. 4-9) and present them to a seated goddess (not shown).

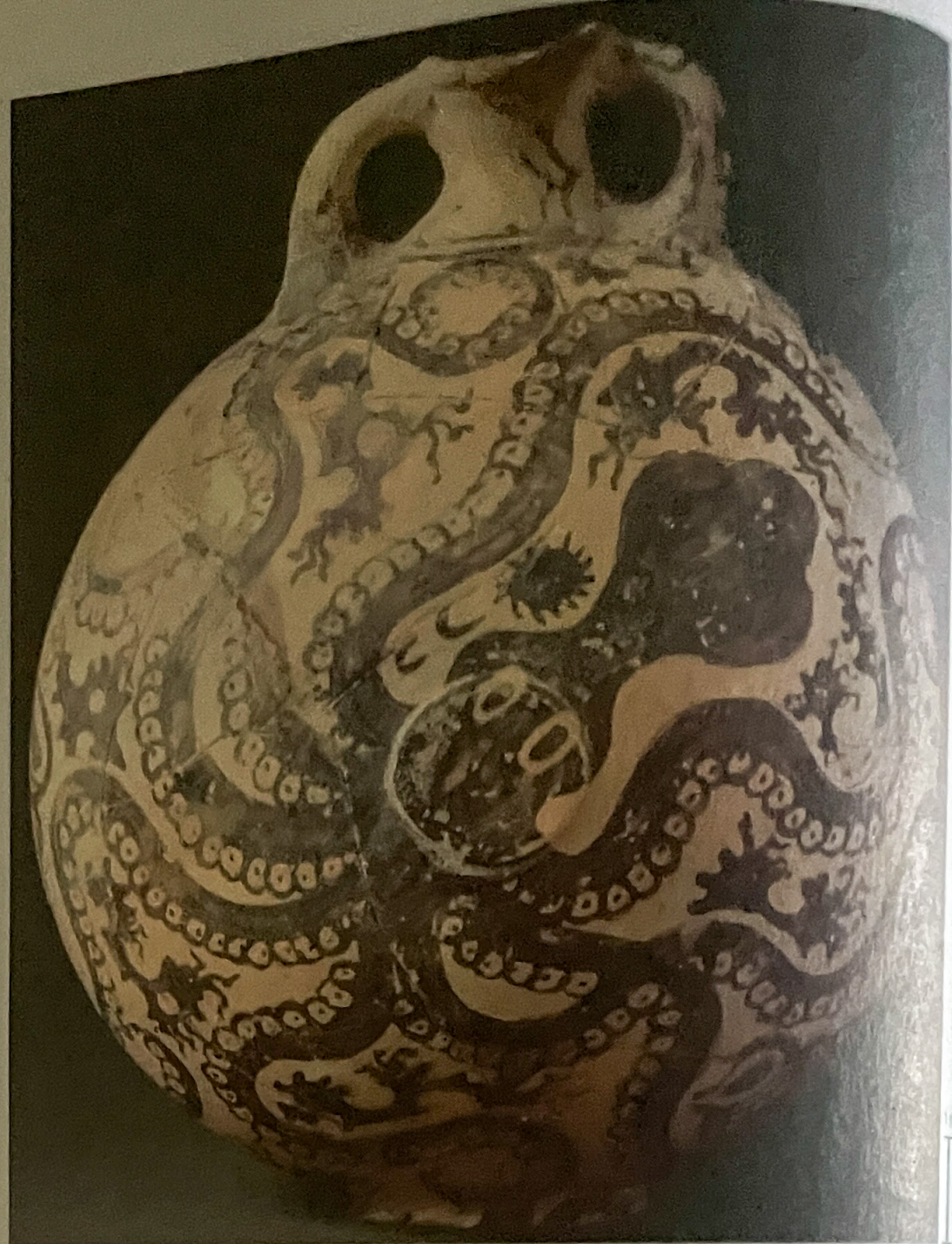


4-11 Kamares Ware jar, from Phaistos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1800–1700 BCE. 1' 8" high. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

Kamares Ware vases have creamy white and reddish-brown decoration on a black background. This jar combines a fish (and a net?) with curvilinear abstract patterns, including spirals and waves.

cave on the slope of Mount Ida where they were first discovered, have been found in quantity at Phaistos and Knossos. Some examples come from as far away as Egypt and testify to the expansive trade network of the Minoans. On the jar shown here (FIG. 4-11), as on other Kamares vases, the painter applied creamy white and reddish-brown decoration to a rich black ground. The central motif is a great leaping fish and perhaps a fishnet surrounded by a host of curvilinear abstract patterns, including waves and spirals. The swirling lines evoke life in the sea, and both the abstract and the natural forms beautifully complement the shape of the vessel.

The sea and the creatures inhabiting it also inspired the Late Minoan octopus flask (FIG. 4-12) from Palaikastro decorated in what art historians have dubbed the Marine Style. The tentacles of the octopus reach out over the curving surfaces of the vessel, embracing the piece and emphasizing its volume. The flask is a masterful realization of the relationship between the vessel's decoration and its shape, always an issue for the vase painter. This later jar, which is contemporaneous with the new palaces at Knossos and elsewhere, differs markedly from its Kamares Ware predecessor in color. Not only is the octopus vase more muted in tone, but the Late Minoan artist also reversed the earlier scheme and placed dark silhouettes on a light ground. Dark-on-light coloration remained the norm for about a millennium in Greece, until about 530 BCE, when light figures and a dark background emerged once again, albeit in a very different form, as the preferred manner (see "The Invention of Red-Figure Painting," page 121).



4-12 Marine Style octopus flask, from Palaikastro (Crete), Greece, ca. 1500 BCE. 11" high. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

Marine Style vases have dark figures on a light ground. On this octopus flask, the tentacles of the sea creature reach out over the curving surface of the vessel to fill the shape perfectly.

Sculpture

In contrast to the contemporaneous civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Minoan Crete has yielded no trace of temples or life-size statues of gods, kings, or monsters. Large painted wood images may once have existed—*La Parisienne* (FIG. 4-7) may be a depiction of one of them—but what remains of Minoan sculpture is uniformly small in scale.

Snake Goddess. One of the most striking finds from the palace at Knossos is the *faience* (low-fired opaque glasslike silicate) statuette popularly known as the *Snake Goddess* (FIG. 4-13). Reconstructed from many pieces and in large part modern in its present form, it is one of several similar figurines that some scholars believe may represent mortal priestesses rather than a deity. The prominently exposed breasts suggest, however, that these figurines stand in the long line of prehistoric fertility images usually considered divinities. The Knossos woman holds snakes in her hands and, as reconstructed, supports a tamed leopardlike feline on her head. When archaeologists discovered the statuette, the feline was not associated with the other fragments. If it was part of the figurine, the implied power over the animal world would be appropriate for a deity. The frontality of the figure is reminiscent of Egyptian and Mesopotamian statuary, but the costume, with its open bodice and flounced skirt, is distinctly Minoan. If the statuette represents a goddess, then the Minoan is yet another example of a culture



4-13 Snake Goddess, from the palace, Knossos (Crete), Greece, ca. 1600 BCE. Faience, 1' 1½" high. Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

This figurine may represent a priestess, but it is more likely a bare-breasted goddess. The snakes in her hands (and the feline on her head, if it belongs) imply that she has power over the animal world.



Minoan Decline. Scholars dispute the circumstances ending the Minoan civilization, although most now believe that Mycenaeans had already moved onto Crete and established themselves at Knossos at the end of the New Palace period. From the palace at Knossos, these intruders appear to have ruled the island for at least a half century, perhaps much longer. Parts of the palace continued to be occupied until its final destruction around 1200 BCE, but its importance as a cultural center faded soon after 1400 BCE, as the focus of Aegean civilization shifted to the Greek mainland.

4-14 Harvesters Vase, from Hagia Triada (Crete), Greece, ca. 1500 BCE. Steatite, originally with gold leaf, greatest diameter 5". Archaeological Museum, Iraklion.

The relief sculptor of the singing young farmers on this small stone vase was one of the first artists in history to represent the underlying muscular and skeletal structure of the human body.

fashioning its gods in the image of its people. Another Cretan example is the gold-and-ivory statuette (FIG. 4-13A) of a nude youthful god from Palaikastro.

Harvesters Vase. The finest surviving example of Minoan relief sculpture is the so-called *Harvesters Vase* (FIG. 4-14) from Hagia Triada. Only the upper half of the ostrich-egg-shaped body and neck of the vessel remain. Missing are the lower parts of the harvesters (or, as some think, sowers) and the ground on which they stand, as well as the gold leaf that originally covered the relief figures. Formulaic scenes of sowing and harvesting were staples of Egyptian funerary art (FIG. 3-16), but the Minoan artist shunned static repetition in favor of a composition filled with individually characterized figures bursting with energy. The relief shows a riotous crowd of young men singing and shouting as they go to or return from the fields. The artist vividly captured the youths' forward movement and lusty exuberance.

Although most of the "harvesters" conform to the age-old convention of combined profile and frontal views, the relief sculptor singled out one figure (FIG. 4-14, *right of center*) from his companions. He shakes a *sistrum* (a percussion instrument or rattle) to beat time, and the artist depicted him in full profile with his lungs so inflated with air that his ribs show. This is one of the first instances in the history of art of a sculptor showing a keen interest in the underlying muscular and skeletal structure of the human body. The Minoan artist's painstaking study of human anatomy is a singular achievement, especially given the size of the *Harvesters Vase*, barely 5 inches at its greatest diameter. Equally noteworthy is how the sculptor recorded the tension and relaxation of facial muscles with astonishing exactitude, not only for this figure but for his nearest companions as well. This degree of animation of the human face is without precedent in ancient art.



4-13A
Young god(?),
Palaikastro, ca.
1500-1450 BCE.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

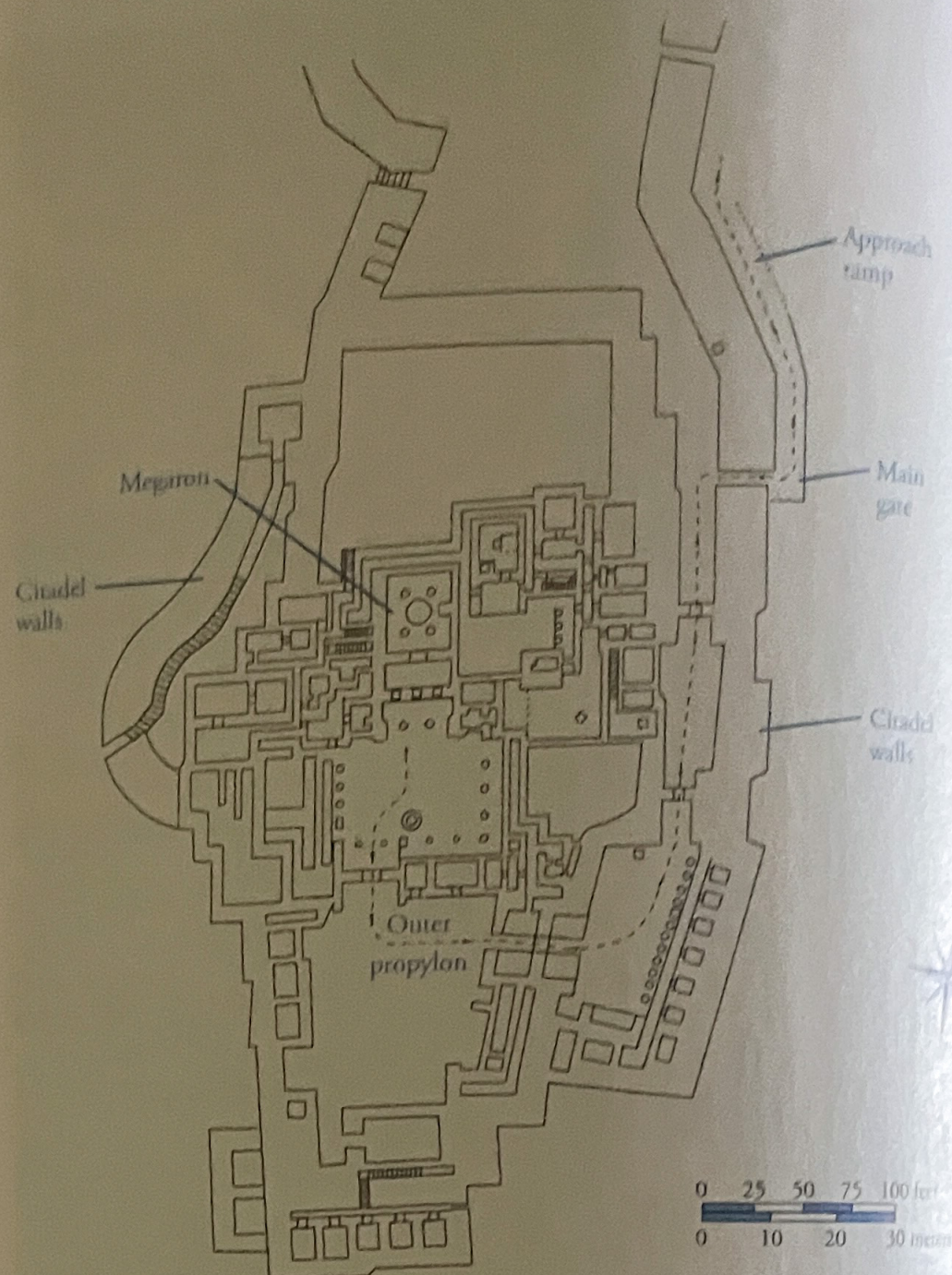
Fortified Palaces for a Hostile World

In contrast to the Minoans, whose sprawling palaces (FIGS. 4-4 and 4-5) were unprotected by enclosing walls, the Mycenaeans were fearsome warriors who inhabited a hostile world. The palatial administrative centers of their Cretan predecessors did not provide useful models for royal residences on the mainland. Consequently, the Mycenaeans had to develop an independent solution for housing—and protecting—their kings and their families and attendants.

Construction of the citadels of Tiryns (FIGS. 4-15 and 4-16) and Mycenae (FIG. 4-19) began about 1400 BCE. Both burned (along with all the other Mycenaean strongholds) between 1250 and 1200 BCE when northern invaders overran the Mycenaeans; they fell victim to internal warfare, or they suffered a natural catastrophe—or a combination of these factors. Homer called Tiryns the city “of the great walls.” In the second century CE, when Pausanias, author of an invaluable Roman guidebook to Greece, visited the long-abandoned site, he marveled at the towering fortifications and considered the walls of Tiryns to be as spectacular as the pyramids of Egypt. Indeed, the Greeks of the historical age believed that mere humans could not have erected these enormous edifices. They attributed the construction of the great Mycenaean citadels to the mythical *Cyclopes*, a race of one-eyed giants. Architectural historians still employ the term *Cyclopean masonry* to refer to the huge, roughly cut stone blocks forming the massive fortification walls of Tiryns and other Mycenaean sites.

The Mycenaean engineers who designed the circuit wall of Tiryns compelled would-be attackers to approach the palace (FIG. 4-15) within the walls via a long ramp that forced the soldiers (usually right-handed; compare FIG. 4-27) to expose their unshielded sides to the Mycenaean defenders above. Then—if they got that far—the enemy forces had to pass through a series of narrow gates that also could be defended easily.

Inside, at Tiryns as elsewhere, the most important element in the palace plan was the *megaron*, or reception hall and throne room, of the *wanax* (Mycenaean king). The main room of the *megaron* had a throne against the right wall and a central hearth bordered by four Minoan-style wood columns serving as supports for the roof. A vestibule with a columnar facade preceded the throne room. The remains of the *megarons* at Tiryns and Mycenae are scant, but at Pylos, home of Homer’s King Nestor (and the Griffin Warrior), archaeologists found sufficient evidence to enable them to visualize the original appearance of its *megaron*, complete with mural and ceiling paintings (FIG. 4-18A).

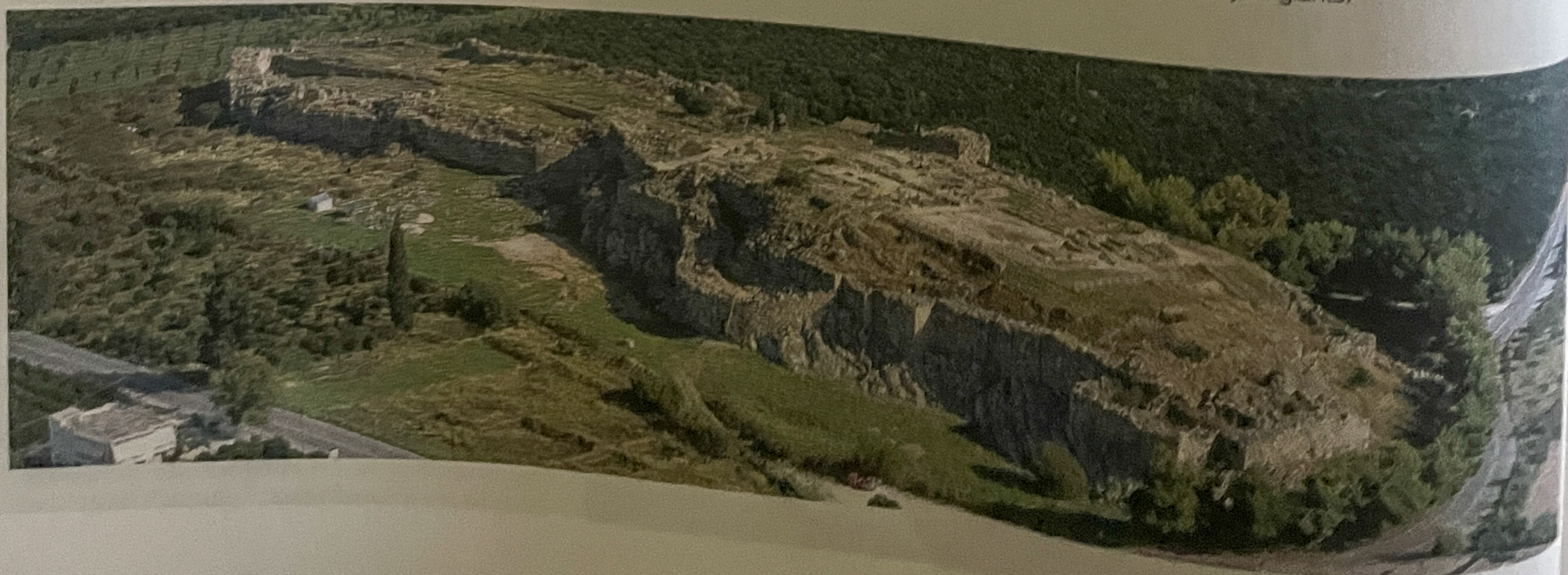


4-15 Plan of the palace and southern part of the citadel, Tiryns, Greece, ca. 1400–1200 BCE.

The plan of the Mycenaean fortress at Tiryns incorporated an entrance ramp designed to expose attacking soldiers’ unprotected right sides to the spears and arrows of the defending Mycenaean warriors.

4-16 Aerial view of the citadel (looking east), Tiryns, Greece, ca. 1400–1200 BCE.

In the *Iliad*, Homer called the fortified citadel of Tiryns the city “of the great walls.” Its huge, roughly cut stone blocks are examples of Cyclopean masonry, named after the mythical one-eyed giants.



ARCHITECTURAL BASICS

Corbeled Arches, Vaults, and Domes

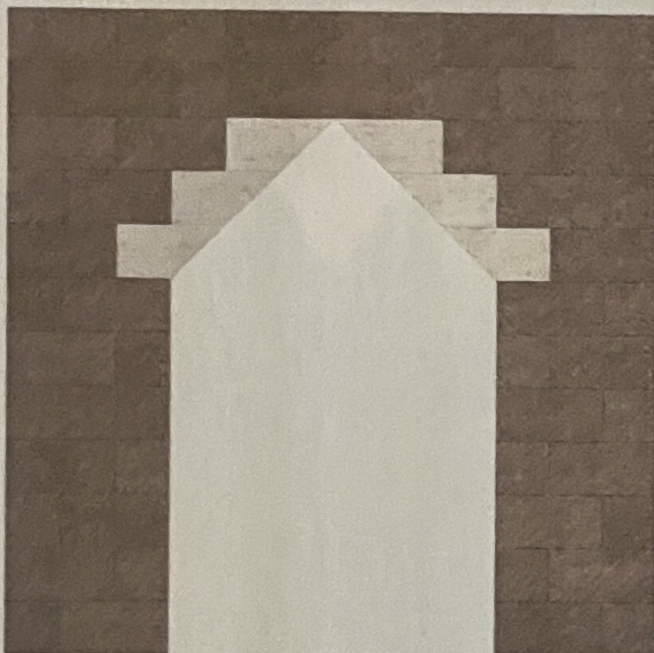
The simplest method of spanning a passageway, documented in Neolithic times and in Old Kingdom Egypt, is the post-and-lintel system (FIG. 1-19).

A more sophisticated construction technique is the *corbeled arch* (FIG. 4-17), which, when extended, forms a *corbeled vault*, seen in primitive form at the citadel of Tiryns in the galleries (FIG. 4-18) of its fortified wall circuit.

At Tiryns, the Mycenaean builders piled the large, irregular blocks in horizontal courses and then cantilevered them inward until the two walls met in a *pointed arch*. The Mycenaeans used no mortar. The vault is held in place only by the weight of the blocks (often several tons each), by the smaller stones used as wedges, and by the clay filling some of the empty spaces. This crude but effective vaulting scheme possesses an earthy monumentality. It is easy to see how a later age came to believe that the uncouth Cyclopes were responsible for these massive but unsophisticated fortifications.

4-17 Corbeled-arch construction (John Burge).

Builders construct a corbeled arch by piling stone blocks in horizontal courses and then cantilevering them inward until the walls meet in a pointed arch. The stones are held in place by their own weight.



The corbeling principle was also used in antiquity to construct *relieving triangles* above horizontal lintel blocks, as in Mycenae's Lion Gate (FIG. 4-19) and Treasury of Atreus (FIG. 4-20), and stone domes. The finest example of a *corbeled dome* in the ancient world is the burial chamber (FIG. 4-21) of the Treasury of Atreus. The Mycenaean builders probably constructed the vault using rough-hewn blocks. But after they set the stones in place, the stonemasons had to finish the surfaces with great precision to make them conform to both the horizontal and vertical curvature of the wall. Hence, although the principle involved is no different from that of the corbeled gallery of Tiryns, the problem of constructing a complete dome is far more complicated, and the execution of the vault in the Treasury of Atreus is much more sophisticated than that of the vaulted gallery at Tiryns. About 43 feet high, this Mycenaean dome was at the time the largest vaulted space without interior supports that had ever been built. The achievement was not surpassed until the Romans constructed the Pantheon (FIG. 7-51) almost 1,500 years later using a new technology—concrete construction—unknown to the Mycenaeans or their Greek successors.



4-18 Corbel-vaulted gallery in the circuit wall of the citadel, Tiryns, Greece, ca. 1400–1200 BCE.

In this long gallery within the circuit walls of Tiryns, the Mycenaeans piled irregular Cyclopean blocks in horizontal courses and then cantilevered them until the two walls met in a corbeled arch.

MYCENAEAN ART

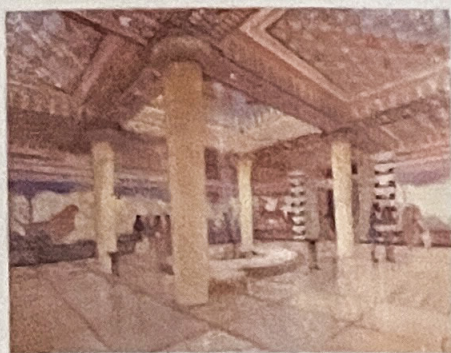
The origin of the Mycenaeans is also a subject of continuing debate among archaeologists and historians. The only certainty is the presence of these forerunners of the Greeks on the mainland about the time of the construction of the old palaces on Crete—that is, about the beginning of the second millennium BCE. By the middle of that millennium, a distinctive Mycenaean culture was flourishing—one that filled a prior artistic vacuum on the mainland. Archaeologists and historians have discussed the reasons for the sudden flourishing of Mycenaean art and architecture, but the phenomenon must reflect newfound wealth. Many scholars believe that the Mycenaeans were mercenaries who fought for the Egyptians and returned home with rich war booty. That the Mycenaeans accumulated great wealth and that their leaders were successful warriors was reconfirmed in 2015 when a team from the University of Cincinnati discovered at Pylos the extraordinarily rich burial of a man now known as the Griffin Warrior. The dramatic discoveries of Schliemann and his successors have fully justified Homer's characterization of mid-second-millennium BCE Mycenae as "rich in gold," even if today's archaeologists no longer view the Mycenaeans solely through the

eyes of Homer. The Minoans also possessed gold, but they derived their wealth from a wide network of trading partners instead of from plunder. And that is only one of the many differences between these two great prehistoric Aegean cultures.

Architecture

The destruction of the Cretan palaces left the Late Helladic mainland culture supreme. Although historians refer to this civilization as Mycenaean, Mycenae was but one of several large citadel complexes. Archaeologists have also unearthed Mycenaean remains at Tiryns, Orchomenos, Pylos, and elsewhere (MAP 4-1), and a section of a Mycenaean fortification wall is still in place on the Acropolis of Athens, where Theseus ruled as king. The best-preserved and most impressive Mycenaean remains are those of the citadels at Tiryns and Mycenae (see "Fortified Palaces for a Hostile World," page 96).

Tiryns. The walls of the Tiryns citadel (FIGS. 4-15 and 4-16) average about 20 feet in thickness and impress visitors today as much as they did in antiquity, when they were thought to be the work of giants. In one section, the Tiryns circuit walls incorporate a long



4-18A Megaron, Palace of Nestor, Pylos, ca. 1300 BCE.

gallery (FIG. 4-18) covered by *corbeled vaults* (see “Corbeled Arches, Vaults, and Domes,” page 97). The severity of the exterior aspect of the Mycenaean citadels did not, however, extend to their interiors, where frescoed walls (FIG. 4-18A) were commonplace, as in the Cretan palaces. Sculptural decoration was nonetheless rare. Agamemnon’s Mycenae was the exception.

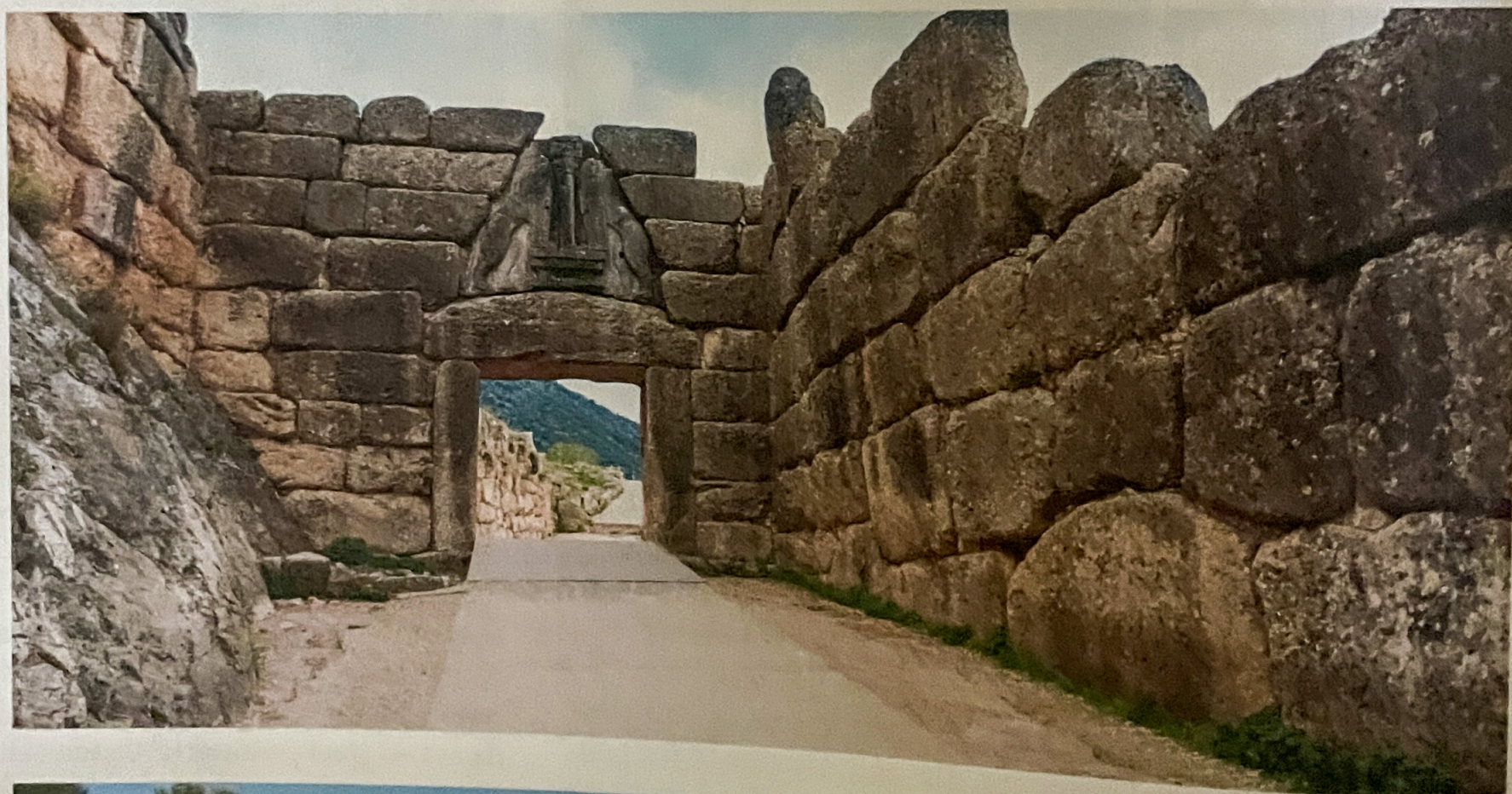
Lion Gate, Mycenae. The so-called Lion Gate (FIG. 4-19) is the outer gateway of the stronghold at Mycenae. It is protected on the left by a wall built on a natural rock outcropping and on the right by a projecting bastion of large blocks. Any approaching enemies would have had to enter this 20-foot-wide channel and face Mycenaean defenders above them on both sides. The gate itself consists of two great upright monoliths (posts) capped with a huge horizontal lintel (FIG. 1-19). Above the lintel, the masonry courses form a *corbeled arch* (FIG. 4-17), leaving an opening that lightens the weight that the lintel carries. Filling this *relieving triangle* is a great limestone slab with two lions in high relief facing a central Minoan-type column. The whole

design admirably matches its triangular shape, harmonizing in dignity, strength, and scale with the massive stones forming the walls and gate. Similar groups appear in miniature on Cretan seals, but the concept of placing monstrous guardian figures at the entrances to palaces, tombs, and sacred places has its origin in Mesopotamia and Egypt (FIGS. 2-18A and 2-20; a notable later example is FIG. 3-11). At Mycenae, the sculptors fashioned the animals’ heads separately. Because those heads are lost, some scholars have speculated that the “lions” may be composite beasts, possibly sphinxes or griffins.

Treasury of Atreus. The Mycenaeans erected the Lion Gate and the adjoining fortification wall circuit a few generations before the presumed date of the Trojan War. At that time, elite families buried their dead outside the citadel walls in beehive-shaped tombs covered by enormous earthen mounds. Nine such tombs remain at Mycenae and scores more at other sites. The best preserved of these *tholos tombs* is Mycenae’s so-called Treasury of Atreus (FIG. 4-20), which in the Greco-Roman era people mistakenly believed was the repository of the treasures of Atreus, father of Agamemnon and Menelaus. A long passageway (*dromos*) leads to a doorway surmounted by a relieving triangle similar to that in the roughly contemporaneous Lion Gate, but without figural ornamentation. Both the doorway and the relieving triangle, however, once

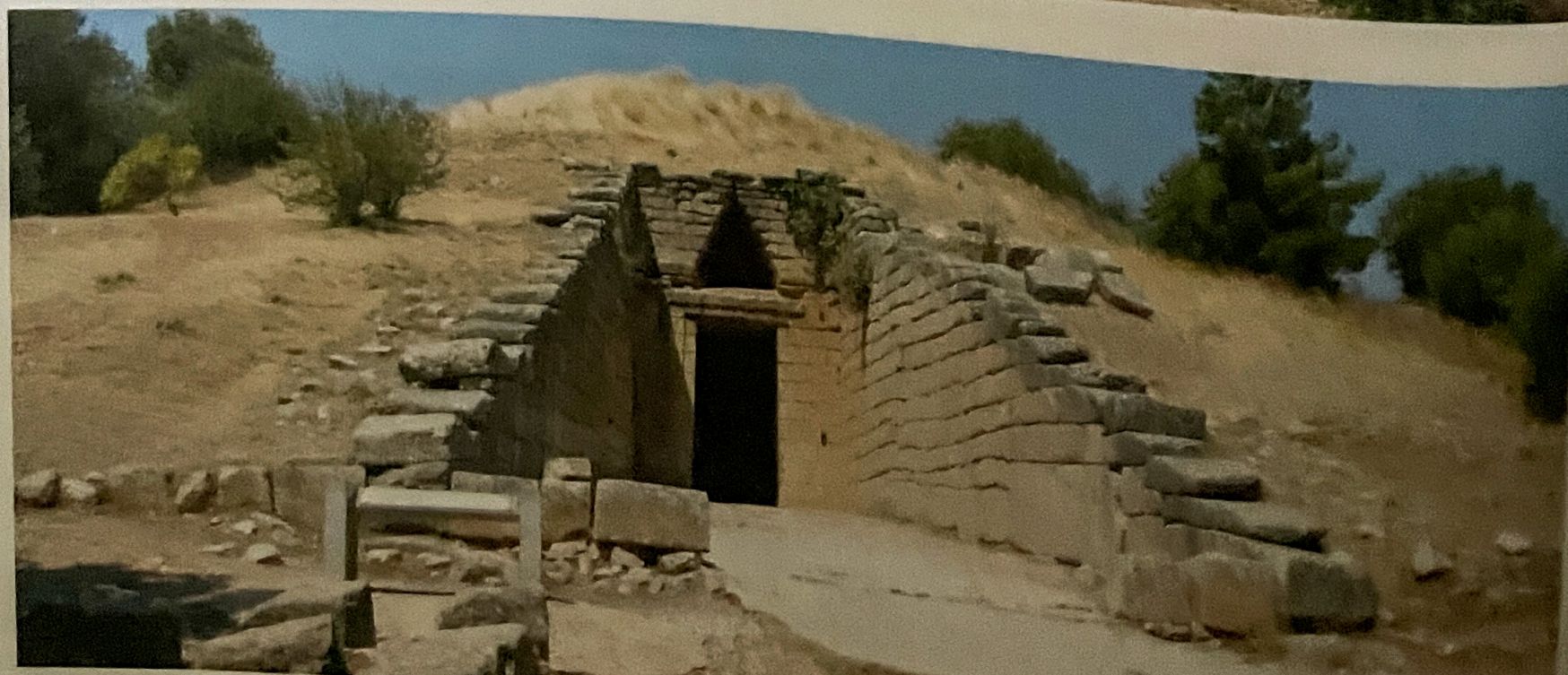
4-19 Lion Gate (looking east), Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300–1250 BCE. Limestone, relief panel 9’ 6” high.

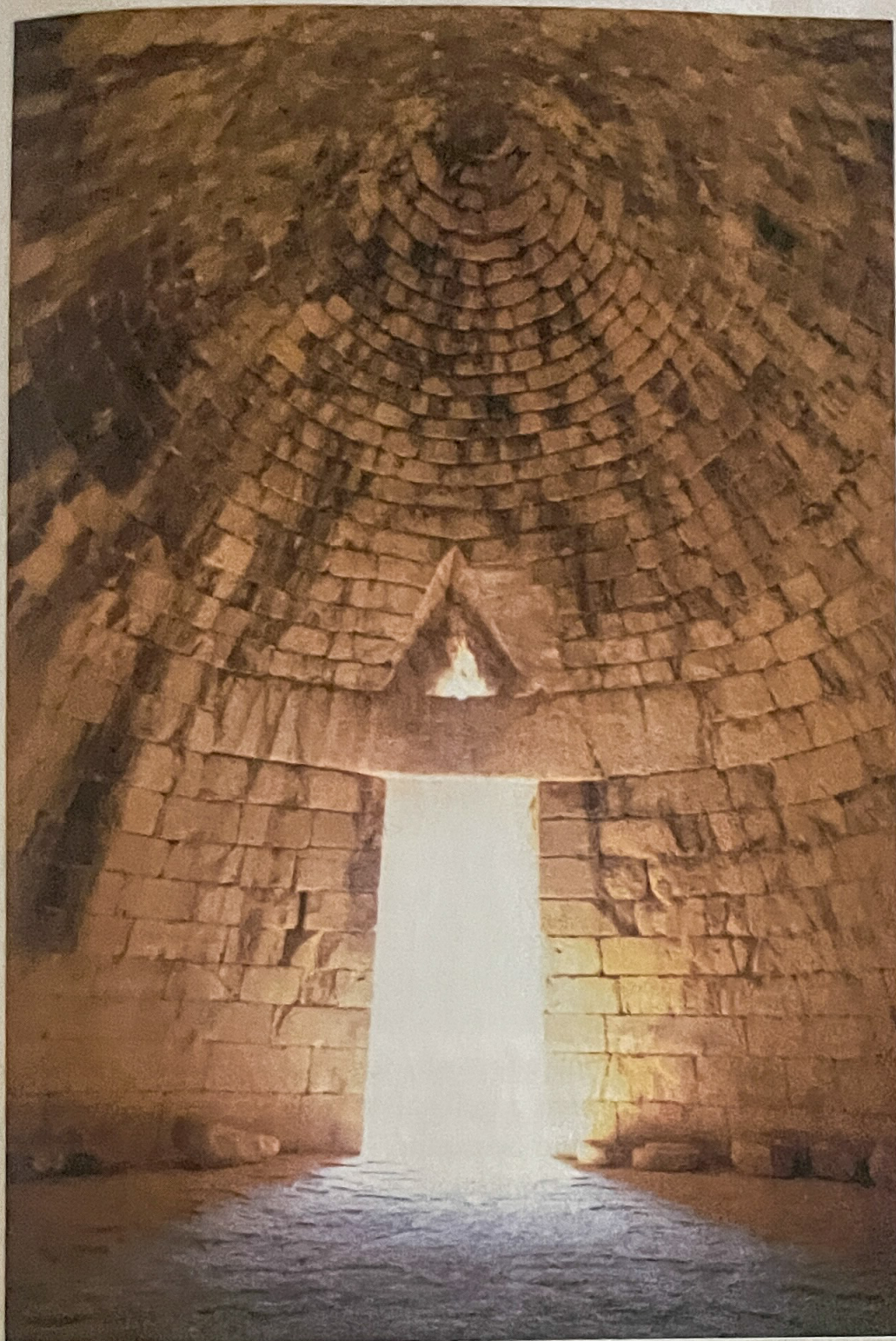
The largest sculpture in the prehistoric Aegean is this relief of confronting lions that fills the relieving triangle of Mycenae’s main gate. The gate itself consists of two great monolithic posts and a huge lintel.



4-20 Exterior of the Treasury of Atreus (looking west), Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300–1250 BCE.

The best-preserved Mycenaean tholos tomb is named after Homer’s King Atreus. An earthen mound covers the burial chamber, reached through a doorway at the end of a long *dromos* (passageway).





4-21 Interior of the Treasury of Atreus (looking east toward entrance), Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300–1250 BCE.

The beehive-shaped tholos of the Treasury of Atreus consists of corbeled courses of stone blocks laid on a circular base. The 43-foot-high dome was the largest in the world for almost 1,500 years.

had engaged columns on each side, preserved in fragments today. The burial chamber, or *tholos* (FIG. 4-21), consists of a series of stone corbeled courses laid on a circular base to form a lofty dome (see “Corbeled Arches, Vaults, and Domes,” page 97).

Metalwork, Sculpture, and Painting

The Treasury of Atreus was thoroughly looted long before its modern rediscovery, but archaeologists have unearthed spectacular grave goods elsewhere at Mycenae (and in the grave of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos). Just inside the Lion Gate, Schliemann uncovered what archaeologists call Grave Circle A (FIG. 4-21A). It predates the



4-21A Grave Circle A, Mycenae, ca. 1600 BCE.

Lion Gate and the walls of Mycenae by some three centuries, and encloses six deep shafts that served as tombs for the kings and their families. The royal corpses that the Mycenaeans lowered into their deep graves had masks covering the

men's faces, recalling the Egyptian funerary practice (see “Mummification and Immortality,” page 61). Jewelry adorned the bodies of the women, and weapons and gold cups accompanied the men into the afterlife.

Masks and Daggers. The Mycenaeans used the *repoussé* technique to fashion the masks that Schliemann found—that is, goldsmiths hammered the shape of each mask from a single sheet of metal and pushed the features out from behind. Art historians have often compared the mask illustrated here (FIG. 4-22) to Tutankhamen's gold mummy mask (FIG. 3-34), but it is important to remember that the Mycenaean metalworker was one of the first in Greece to produce a sculpted image of the human face at life-size. By contrast, Tutankhamen's mask stands in a long line of large-scale Egyptian sculptures going back more than a millennium. No one knows whether the Mycenaean masks were intended as portraits, but the artists took care to record different physical types. The masks found in Grave Circle A portray youthful faces as well as mature ones. The mask shown in FIG. 4-22, with its full beard, must depict a mature man, perhaps a king—although not Agamemnon, as Schliemann wished. If Agamemnon was a real king, he lived some 300 years after the death of the man buried in Grave Circle A. Clearly the Mycenaeans were “rich in gold” long before Homer's heroes fought at Troy.

Also found in Grave Circle A were several magnificent bronze dagger blades inlaid with gold, silver, and *niello* (a black metallic alloy), again attesting to the wealth of the Mycenaean kings as



4-22 Funerary mask, from Grave Circle A (FIG. 4-21A), Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1600–1500 BCE. Beaten gold, 1' high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Homer described the Mycenaeans as “rich in gold.” This beaten-gold (repoussé) mask of a bearded man comes from a royal shaft grave. It is one of the first attempts at life-size sculpture in Greece.



4-23 Inlaid dagger blade with lion hunt, from Grave Circle A (FIG. 4-21A), Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1600–1500 BCE. Bronze, inlaid with gold, silver, and niello, 9" long. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The burial goods in Grave Circle A included costly weapons. The lion hunters on this bronze dagger are Minoan in style, but the metalworker borrowed the subject from Egypt and Mesopotamia.

well as to their warlike nature. On one side of the largest and most elaborate dagger (FIG. 4-23) from Circle A is a scene of four hunters attacking a lion that has struck down a fifth hunter, while two other lions flee. The other side (not illustrated) depicts lions attacking deer. The slim-waisted, long-haired figures are Minoan in style, but the artist borrowed the subject from the repertoire of Egypt and Mesopotamia. (There were no lions in Greece at this date.) It is likely that a Minoan metalworker made the dagger for a Mycenaean patron who admired Minoan art, but whose tastes in subject matter differed from those of his Cretan counterparts.

Vapheio Cups. Excavations at other Mycenaean sites have produced several additional luxurious objects decorated with Minoan-style figures. Chief among them is the pair of gold drinking cups from a tholos tomb at Vapheio. The Vapheio cup illustrated here (FIG. 4-24), also made using the repoussé technique, is probably the work of a Cretan goldsmith. Both cups represent hunters attempting to capture wild bulls—probably for the bull games (FIG. 4-8)

4-24 Hunter capturing a bull, drinking cup from Vapheio, near Sparta, Greece, ca. 1600–1500 BCE. Gold, 3½" high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

The cups from a tholos tomb at Vapheio are probably the work of a Cretan goldsmith. They complement the finds in Grave Circle A at Mycenae and suggest that gold objects were common in elite Mycenaean burials.

staged in the courtyards of the Cretan palaces. The men have long hair, bare chests, and narrow waists, and they closely resemble the figures on the Minoan *Harvesters Vase* (FIG. 4-14) and the hunters on the dagger blade (FIG. 4-23) from Grave Circle A. The other cup (not illustrated) depicts hunters trying to snare bulls in nets. One bull has already been trapped. The artist's choice of an unusual contorted posture for the bull effectively suggests the animal's struggle to free itself. To either side, a bull gallops away from the trap. One of them tramples his would-be captor.

Most art historians think that the goldsmith depicted three successive episodes in the hunters' attempt to capture a bull using a cow as bait. If so, the story reads from right to left. First, the bull follows the decoy cow. Then (at the right in FIG. 4-24), the bull and cow "converse." Finally, a hunter sneaks up behind the bull and succeeds in catching its left hind leg in a noose. Whatever the significance of the theme, the setting in a carefully delineated landscape of trees and rocks is noteworthy, as is the exceptional technical and artistic quality of the cups.





4-25 Two goddesses(?) and a child, from Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1400–1250 BCE. Ivory, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

Made of rare imported ivory, perhaps by a Cretan artist, this statuette may represent deities later paralleled in Greek mythology, but their identity and even the gender of the child are uncertain.

Ivory Goddesses. Gold was not the only luxurious material that elite Mycenaean patrons demanded for the objects they commissioned. For a shrine within the palace at Mycenae, a master sculptor carved an intricately detailed group of two women and a child (FIG. 4-25) from a single piece of costly imported ivory. The women's costumes with breasts exposed have the closest parallels in Minoan art (FIG. 4-13), and this statuette, like the Vapheio cups, is probably of Cretan manufacture. The intimate and tender theme also is foreign to the known Mycenaean repertoire, in which scenes of hunting and warfare dominate.

The identity of the three figures remains a mystery. Some scholars have suggested that the two women are the "two queens" mentioned in inscriptions found in the excavation of the Mycenaean palace at Pylos (FIG. 4-18A). Others have speculated that the two women are deities, Mycenaean forerunners of the Greek agricultural goddesses Demeter and Persephone (see "The Gods and Goddesses of Mount Olympus," page 107), and that the child is Triptolemos, the hero who spread the gift of agriculture to the Greeks. That myth, however, probably postdates the Mycenaean era.

Life-Size Statuary. In the second millennium BCE, large-scale figural art was very rare on the Greek mainland, as on Crete, other than the paintings that once adorned the walls of Mycenaean palaces (FIG. 4-18A). The triangular relief of the Lion Gate (FIG. 4-19) at Mycenae is exceptional, as is the painted plaster head (FIG. 4-26)

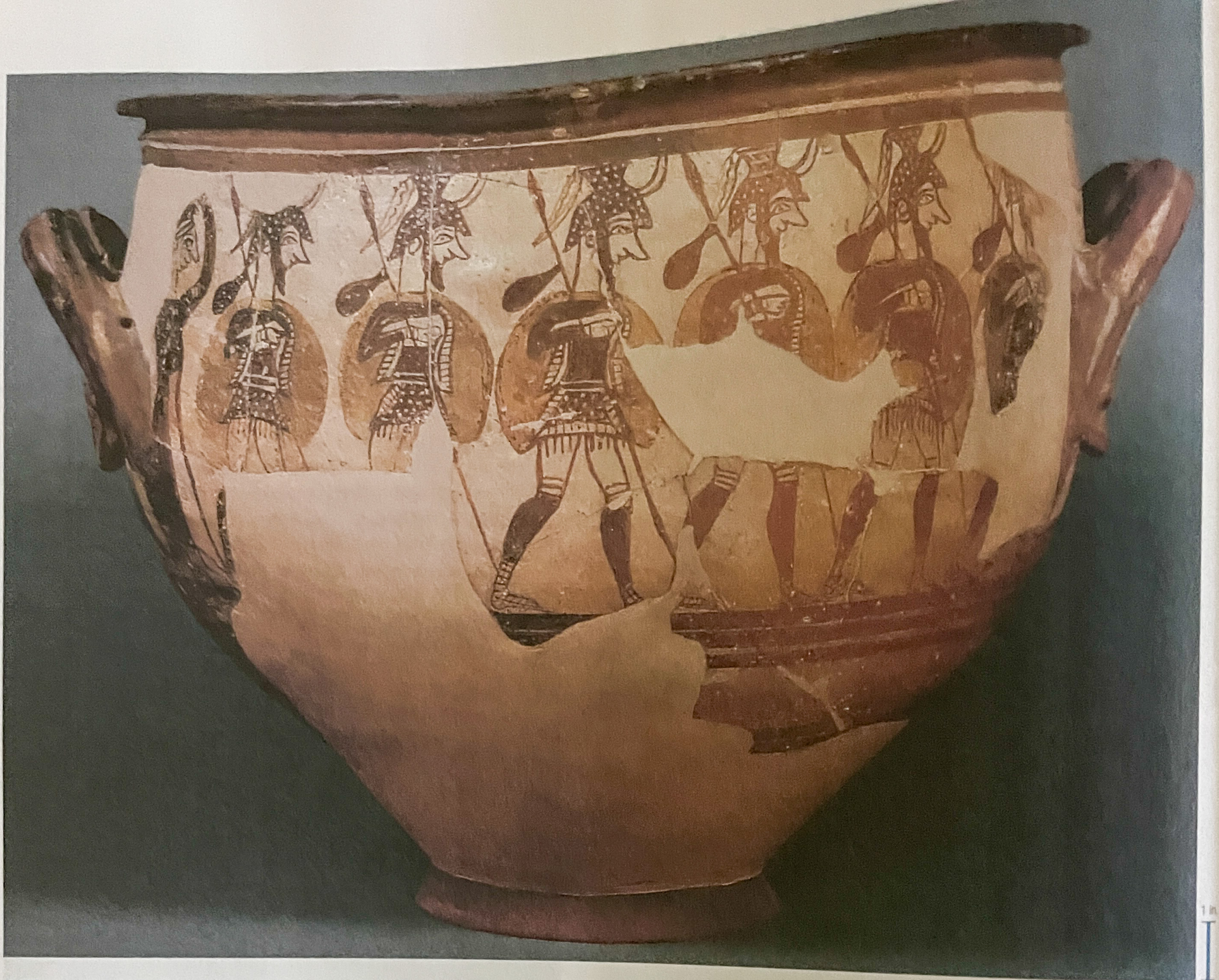
The white flesh tone indicates that the head is female. The hair and eyes are dark blue, almost black, and the lips, ears, and headband are red. The artist decorated the cheeks and chin with red circles surrounded by a ring of red dots, recalling the facial paint or tattoos recorded on Early Cycladic figurines of women. Although the large, staring eyes give the face a menacing, if not terrifying, expression appropriate for a guardian figure such as a sphinx, the closest parallels to this work in the prehistoric Aegean are terracotta images of goddesses. This head may therefore be a fragment of a very early life-size *cult statue* in Greece, many times the height of the Palaikastro youth (FIG. 4-13A).

Were it not for this plaster head and a few other exceptional pieces, art historians might have concluded, wrongly, that the Mycenaeans had no large-scale freestanding statuary—a reminder that it is always dangerous to generalize from the chance remains of an ancient civilization. Nonetheless, Mycenaean life-size statuary must have been rare, and no large stone statue has ever been found in the prehistoric Aegean world, in striking contrast to Egypt and Mesopotamia. After the collapse of Mycenaean civilization and for the next several hundred years, no attempts at large-scale statuary in any material are evident in the Aegean until, after the waning of the so-called Dark Ages, Greek sculptors became exposed to the great sculptural tradition of Egypt.



4-26 Female head, from Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1300–1250 BCE. Painted plaster, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

This painted white plaster head of a woman with staring eyes may be a fragment of a very early life-size statue of a goddess in Greece, but some



4-27 *Warrior Vase* (krater), from Mycenae, Greece, ca. 1200 BCE. 1' 4" high. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.

This bowl for mixing wine and water shows a woman bidding farewell to heavily armed Mycenaean warriors depicted using both silhouette and outline and a combination of frontal and profile views.

Warrior Vase. An art form that did continue throughout the period after the downfall of the Mycenaean palaces was vase painting. One of the latest examples of Mycenaean painting is the *krater* (bowl for mixing wine and water) commonly called the *Warrior Vase* (FIG. 4-27) after its prominent frieze of soldiers marching off to war. At the left, a woman bids farewell to the column of heavily armed warriors moving away from her. The painting on this vase has no indication of setting and lacks the landscape elements that commonly appear in earlier Minoan and Mycenaean art. Although the painter depicted the soldiers using both silhouette and outline, all repeat the same pattern of combined frontal and profile views, a

far cry from the variety and anecdotal detail of the lively procession shown on the Minoan *Harvesters Vase* (FIG. 4-14).

This simplification of narrative has parallels in the increasingly schematic and abstract treatment of marine life on other painted vases. The octopus, for example, eventually became a stylized motif composed of concentric circles and spirals that are almost unrecognizable as a sea creature. By Homer's time, the greatest days of Aegean civilization were but a distant memory, and the men and women of Crete and Mycenae—Minos and Ariadne, Agamemnon and Helen—had assumed the stature of heroes from a lost golden age.

THE BIG PICTURE

The Prehistoric Aegean

Early Cycladic Art ca. 3000–2000 BCE

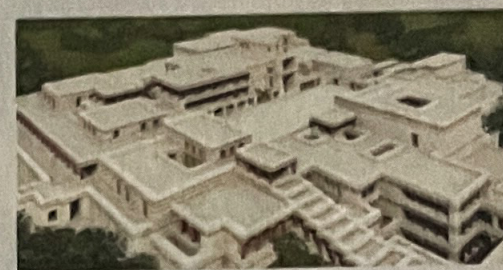
- The islands of the Aegean Sea boast excellent marble quarries, and marble statuettes are the major surviving artworks of the Cyclades during the third millennium BCE.
- Unfortunately, little is known about the function of the Cycladic figurines because few have secure provenances. Most of the statuettes represent nude women with their arms folded across their abdomens. They probably came from graves and may represent the deceased, but others—for example, musicians—almost certainly do not. Whatever their meaning, these statuettes mark the beginning of the long history of marble sculpture in Greece.



Harp player, Keros,
ca. 2600–2300 BCE

Middle and Late Minoan Art ca. 1700–1200 BCE

- The construction of the first palaces on Crete occurred during the Old Palace period (ca. 2000–1700 BCE), but the golden age of Crete was the Middle and Late Minoan periods. The Minoan “palaces” were administrative, commercial, and religious centers that may not have been royal residences.
- The greatest Minoan palace was at Knossos. A vast multistory structure arranged around a central court, the Knossos palace was so complex in plan that it gave rise to the myth of the Minotaur in the labyrinth of King Minos.
- The major pictorial art form in the Minoan world was fresco painting. The murals depicted rituals (such as bull-leaping), landscapes, seascapes, and other subjects. Some of the best examples, such as the *Spring Fresco*, come from Akrotiri on the island of Thera, buried during the volcanic eruption of 1628 BCE.
- Vase painting also flourished. Sea motifs—the octopus, for example—were popular subjects.
- Surviving examples of Minoan sculpture are of small scale. They include statuettes of “snake goddesses” and reliefs on small objects, for example, the *Harvesters Vase*.



Palace, Knossos, ca. 1700–1370 BCE



Spring Fresco, Akrotiri,
ca. 1650–1625 BCE

Mycenaean (Late Helladic) Art ca. 1600–1200 BCE

- As early as 1600–1500 BCE, the Mycenaeans, who with their Greek allies later waged war on Troy, buried their kings in deep shaft graves in which the excavator, Heinrich Schliemann, also found gold funerary masks and bronze daggers inlaid with gold and silver.
- By 1400 BCE, the Mycenaeans had occupied Crete, and between 1400 and 1200 BCE, they erected great citadels on the mainland at Mycenae, Tiryns, and elsewhere with “Cyclopean” walls of huge, irregularly shaped stone blocks. The Greeks of the historical period did not believe that mere humans could have constructed these fortifications.
- Masters of corbel vaulting, the Mycenaeans also erected beehive-shaped tholos tombs. The best example—the Treasury of Atreus—boasts the largest dome in the pre-Roman world.
- The oldest preserved large-scale sculptures in Greece, most notably Mycenae’s Lion Gate, date to the end of the Mycenaean period.
- The Mycenaeans also excelled in small-scale ivory carving, metalworking, and pottery painting. Many of the Mycenaean objects known today may have been the work of Cretan artists, however.



Citadel, Tiryns, ca. 1400–1200 BCE



Gold drinking cup, Vapheio,
ca. 1600–1500 BCE