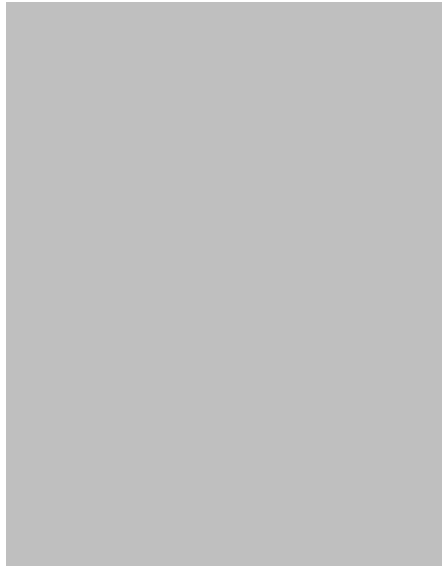


# **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### Chapter 1

#### Introduction

When, during a discussion with an experienced published scholar in the field of Aegean Archaeology I mentioned my intention to examine attribution as part of a study attempting to identify individuals, the scholar laughed. This perfectly highlights the difficulty facing this type of study and yet the wall paintings of the Bronze Age Aegean have never suffered for lack of scholarly attention, in fact, the substantial corpus of research publications analysing them serves to indicate their popularity.<sup>1</sup> The exceptionally well preserved paintings allowed a new perspective on the world of the Bronze Age Aegean. Since their initial publication they have been used as evidence in studies covering many aspects of this period. Paradoxically, despite this view into the daily life of the ancient Aegean people, scholars often overlook one seemingly obvious group; the painters themselves.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this is due to the disassociation caused by the lack of human remains found at the site itself;<sup>3</sup> it is almost possible to forget that the well preserved houses were actually occupied, it seems instead to be a 'stage' as on a movie set. Or perhaps Muller is correct in his observation that archaeology has a pervasive attitude of ignorance towards identifying the individual.<sup>4</sup> However this attitude is slowly changing and recently it has become more popular to consider the individual in the Ancient world.<sup>5</sup>

I propose to use the paintings and the archaeological setting they are in, together with evidence from the wider Aegean context, and beyond, to shine a light on this particular group of people, to bring them from the shadows of the past and to take a quasi-materialist and hermeneutic approach to understanding the Theran painters.<sup>6</sup> To do this it is important not to dismiss potentially comparative material and evidence from other ancient civilisations, both contemporaneous and later, such as the Egyptians and the Hittites. Perhaps information can

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<sup>1</sup> Key works with more extensive bibliographies Dumas:1978, Hardy&Renfrew:1990, Sherratt:2000, Dumas:1983, 1992, Immerwahr:1990, see also Chapin:2010 for an overview of the field and up to date bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps an example of the 'diffraction' that Rubin mentions. Rubin:1977:247

<sup>3</sup> Dumas:1983:1341971b, 1972, 1974

<sup>4</sup> Muller:1977:23

<sup>5</sup> Knapman:2010, Cf Kammerer:2011

<sup>6</sup> D'Alleva:2005:54

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even be drawn from comparisons with the fresco workshops prevalent in the Renaissance period in Italy. At a time when artists looked to the distant past for inspiration and influence in artistic content and style could there be comparable parallels in their organisational systems?

It should be noted that my intent is to specifically examine the wall paintings from Thera alone. Whilst there is evidence from across the Aegean, both contemporaneous and subsequent, for wall paintings, those from Thera are significantly different in style and content to stand alone.<sup>7</sup> In addition the poor preservation of others makes including them in a wider attributional study that includes paintings from the Minoan sites on Crete and the Mycenaean sites on the Greek Mainland totally impossible.

There is a difficulty inherent in trying to identify the painters of the Aegean frescoes within the archaeological record.<sup>8</sup> Materially they are represented in varying degrees of preservation by the paintings themselves. However, where other craftsmen can be identified by archaeological remains pertaining to their craft; a kiln, potters wheels, loom weights, metallurgical litharge, and have been identified in the administrative documents of the palatial centres in both Crete and on the Mainland,<sup>9</sup> painters themselves remain elusive. Perhaps the explanation for this lies with the product itself; whereas pottery in its various incarnations was vital to everyday life in the Aegean, as were textiles, construction, husbandry, even metallurgy to a certain extent, but in my opinion the necessity of frescos cannot easily be explained. Quite simply wall paintings were a luxury, a prestigious item.<sup>10</sup> The sole reasonably explicable *need* for walls to be decorated, whether figuratively or abstractly, was for royal self promotion and propaganda.<sup>11</sup> The proud ostentation of a ruler proclaiming his wealth and status, and therefore ardently copied by the upper classes in the timeless manner of fashion, the “Versailles” effect,<sup>12</sup> or as a means of promotion of religious or social concepts.<sup>13</sup> Importantly the Aegean is the only area of the Mediterranean where wall paintings can be

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<sup>7</sup> Televantou:2000

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the use of the term 'fresco' is utilised based on historical general acceptance and usage and is further examined in Chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> Boulotis:2000:246, Pollit:1990:10, Shelmerdine:1997, Gregersen:1997

<sup>10</sup> Dickinson:1994:95

<sup>11</sup> Cf Hood:2000:21 ‘relatively few wall paintings in Bronze Age Crete seem to have been purely secular and decorative in intention.’

<sup>12</sup> Wiener:1984:17

<sup>13</sup> Bietak&Marinatos:1995:61

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found outside the official buildings in private residences and domestic settings.<sup>14</sup> This does not occur in contemporary cultures, and in fact does not reappear until the classical Greco-Roman world over a millennium later.<sup>15</sup>

While the majority of the wall-paintings that are relevant to this study were produced in the Late Bronze Age (hereafter LBA), it is known that the houses on Crete had architectural decoration from as early as the start of the Early Bronze Age (hereafter EBA).<sup>16</sup> These walls were typically painted a uniform red, and it isn't until the very end of the Middle Bronze Age (hereafter MBA) that figurative wall-paintings started to be produced.<sup>17</sup> Betancourt considers it likely that Egypt was a major source of influence in the adoption of wall-painting in the Aegean.<sup>18</sup> If true this further demonstrates how inter-connected the world of the Eastern Mediterranean was.

To study this particular aspect of the Aegean world involves taking a closer look at the wider picture. Wall paintings with iconography reminiscent of Minoan styles have been found in Egypt at Tell el-Daba (Avaris),<sup>19</sup> Qatna in Syria,<sup>20</sup> Tel Kabri near Israel,<sup>21</sup> and Tell Atchana (Alalakh) in modern day Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Whilst this has caused significant debate as to their significance and position within the framework of the Minoan artistic world, many have been keen to view this as evidence for travelling painters.<sup>23</sup> Admittedly these remains do make a study such as this quite complex and interpretative, but it also provides data that might otherwise have been excluded from Aegean considerations. Before these discoveries, and the subsequent interest in wall-paintings within a wider contextual framework, relevant comparative material from places outside of the Aegean would have been considered comparatively only. Now, however, important archaeological data can be examined for its potential to reveal more about Aegean wall-painting, amongst other areas of interest.

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<sup>14</sup> Televantou:2000:832

<sup>15</sup> Morgan:2005:21

<sup>16</sup> Betancourt:2007:92, Cameron:1972, Immerwahr:1990:11

<sup>17</sup> Betancourt:2007:92

<sup>18</sup> Betancourt:2007:92

<sup>19</sup> Bietak:1992, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2007, Bietak & Marinatos:1994, Marinatos:1998

<sup>20</sup> Pfalzner:2008

<sup>21</sup> Niemeier&Niemeier:2000, Niemeier:1992, 1995, 1998

<sup>22</sup> Woolley:1955, Niemeier&Niemeier:2000, Niemeier:1992, 1995, 1998, Stevenson-Smith:1965

<sup>23</sup> Niemeier&Niemeier:2000, Niemeier:1992, 1995, 1998, Morgan:1990 Shaw:1997, Bloedow:1997, Bouloltis:2000, Bietak & Marinatos:1995, Bietak:2005. Davis:2007, Chapin:2010

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Painting as a format is in and of itself an aesthetic pursuit,<sup>24</sup> and is to be defined in this study as an aesthetic production. The problem lies, however, in considering what that painting means to the culture and society that both created and viewed it (Chapter 3). This study will examine and discuss the aspects of the Aegean world that the painters occupied. It will consider the materials and methods of their craft (Chapter 4). In doing this it will help to provide a background for examining the paintings themselves with the aim of identifying the painters as individuals rather than the traditional abstract concept. The focus will be on attributional matters within a contextual framework (Chapter 5). Additionally I will consider the place the painters occupied in the Aegean world by examining their organisation and discuss the case for movements within the wider framework of the Eastern Mediterranean (Chapter 6).

In researching for this study I was kindly granted permission to view the unpublished paintings still undergoing conservation at Akrotiri.<sup>25</sup> In addition I examined the paintings on display at the Museum of Prehistoric Thera on Santorini, and the National Archaeology Museum in Athens. All other observations have been taken from the exceptionally detailed publication of the paintings by Dumas which is the natural starting point for any research on the Thera Wall Paintings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pepper:1949:235

<sup>25</sup> Permission kindly granted by Christos Dumas, and access provided by Andreas Vlachopoulos.

<sup>26</sup> Dumas:1992

### Chapter 2

#### Chronology

For any research covering different geographical places within the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age, chronology is both important, and to understate it slightly, something of an issue. The chronology of the Aegean at this time is still unresolved to the satisfaction of all, however in recent months progress has been made in providing scientific data that is doing much towards resolving the debate.<sup>27</sup> While this is not the appropriate forum to fully discuss the rather involved state of affairs, it is necessary to establish a working chronology from which to base my argument. As Shaw has pointed out unless the intent is to discuss the finer details of the chronological sequencing of the wall paintings within a specific site, and the implications across the Aegean as a whole, absolute dates are unimportant.<sup>28</sup> What is important is to establish the Theran frescoes within a contemporary chronology to allow more secure analysis of their inter-relationships with the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean. Any chronological arguments for the Aegean have to take into account Relative and Absolute chronology, both of which are discussed briefly here.

Relative chronology in the Aegean is, for the most part, settled. The system utilised was created by Evans based roughly on tracing the evolution of pottery typology and has since been refined by further discoveries and studies.<sup>29</sup> The debate lies in tying this chronology to an absolute date. In and of itself this does not seem too difficult, however for it to sit securely alongside contemporaneous civilisations many adjustments are necessary. Manning has recently published a very pragmatic overview of the relative chronology situation and its limitations.<sup>30</sup> He reminds us that its biggest fault is its attempt to provide clear cut periods that do not take into account the “fuzzy” nature of change in cultural styles.<sup>31</sup> As such, relative time frames will be utilised here (as is the case with many studies of this period). However it is accepted that they are a guideline and more fluid than the traditional chronological diagrams would have us imagine.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf Warburton:2009, Kutschera *et al*:2012

<sup>28</sup> Shaw:1997:484

<sup>29</sup> Evans:1906, Wace *et al*: 1916-1918

<sup>30</sup> Manning:2010

<sup>31</sup> Manning:2010:18

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The key to dating, absolutely, the Late Bronze Age lies with the date of the Theran volcanic eruption that effectively ended Bronze Age civilisation on the island and buried the town of Akrotiri, during its “zenith”.<sup>32</sup> This is a fixed event that cannot be questioned or debated. However, despite the scale of the eruption, and its devastating effects, dating it has proved incredibly difficult as it is not apparent in any literary record. There are several claims of oblique references to side effects and associated weather conditions,<sup>33</sup> however many are sceptical about their reliability.<sup>34</sup> Archaeological remains indicate that at the time of the eruption Akrotiri was in the relative chronological period called Late Cycladic I (LCI) or Late Minoan IA (LMIA).<sup>35</sup> Traditionally the eruption was thought to have occurred in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>36</sup> which happily married up with dates from synchronous civilisations in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>37</sup> However, with the introduction of scientific dating techniques into the archaeological repertoire this soon changed.

Initially the Carbon 14 dating method that was applied to samples from Akrotiri was successful but not widely accepted by the staunchly suspicious academic community.<sup>38</sup> However the addition of subsequent dates placed in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century based on dendrochronological investigations in several places across the world,<sup>39</sup> and supporting evidence from ice core acidity analysis,<sup>40</sup> placed a serious query over the traditional date in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The scientific methods are not infallible and as a drawback of the imperfect results an exact date could not be provided and verified by another absolute source.

In 2003 with the discovery of Olive tree branches preserved in the destruction levels on Thera itself,<sup>41</sup> the argument reached a new level. It was further bolstered by a second branch discovered in 2007.<sup>42</sup> Both branches, found in a secure context, have been carbon-14

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<sup>32</sup> Doulas:1983:134

<sup>33</sup> Foster *et al*:1996:2009

<sup>34</sup> Wiener&Allen:1998, Manning:1999

<sup>35</sup> Doulas:1983:135, Televantou:1992, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Marinatos:1939

<sup>37</sup> Warren & Hankey:1987,

<sup>38</sup> Cf Michael:1978, 1980, Michael *et al*: 1988 for the argument against radiocarbon methods see Warren & Hankey:1987, Warren:1988, 1996, 2009 for the counter argument see Betancourt: 1987, Michael & Betancourt:1988

<sup>39</sup> LaMarche:1984, Friedrich *et al*:2006, Baillie:1988, 1995

<sup>40</sup> Hammer *et al*:1980, 1987, Zielinski *et al*:1994

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich *et al*:2006

<sup>42</sup> Friedrich *et al*:2009



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dated to 1613 +/- 7years,<sup>43</sup> providing an extremely secure basis to redate the eruption from its traditional place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Doing this causes serious problems with the recently troubled absolute chronology of Egypt and the Near East.<sup>44</sup> Egyptian chronology has for a long time been based on the system of 'dead-reckoning'. Counting the regnal years provided by various contemporaneous sources has proved to be relatively reliable a method due to the abundant written sources available for Egypt.<sup>45</sup> The kings marked time in reign years so the majority of monuments Pharaohs created effectively are a date marker allowing for cross checking with the various king lists that have survived to the present day.<sup>46</sup> This was then confirmed with the dates achieved by Lunar and Sothic observations at various points in Egyptian history.<sup>47</sup>

Egyptian chronology is not as secure as once thought: the security of its synchronisms comes from the communication via letters (known as the Amarna letters) between Akhenaten and his father Amenhotep III and the rulers of Assyria, Babylonia and Mitanni. This period corresponds approximately with the Mycenaean period and therefore has little impact on the dating of the Theran eruption and the Minoan period.<sup>48</sup> In addition the period roughly contemporaneous with the eruption, and therefore the Theran paintings, is one of turbulence in Egyptian history: the Second Intermediate Period and the Hyksos Dynasty. Frustratingly the site of Tell el Dab'a which covers this period, and has interesting artistic links with the Aegean, is plagued by inconsistent reporting of stratigraphy in the various publications,<sup>49</sup> leading many scholars to mistrust the information it provides.<sup>50</sup> The recent publication of radiocarbon results from the site has done little to settle the matter to the satisfaction of all and has for some actually called into question the validity of radiocarbon dating due to uncertainties over original carbon levels in tested material.<sup>51</sup> However the results indicate the Egyptian traditional dates are too low by around 50-100 years. This higher dating matches the higher date for the Santorini eruption achieved through carbon dating. Further supporting this, a new assessment of the traditional Lunar and Sothic dates has been carried out in conjunction

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<sup>43</sup> Friedrich *et al*:2009

<sup>44</sup> Krauss&Warburton:2009, Hunter:2009

<sup>45</sup> Krauss&Warburton:2009

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Manetho

<sup>47</sup> Krauss&Warburton:2009:32

<sup>48</sup> Krauss&Warburton:2009:130

<sup>49</sup> Bietak:1995, own publication states the uncertainty of the stratigraphy, Bietak&Marinatos:1995:49

<sup>50</sup> Cf Warbuton in postscript to Krauss&Warburton:2009.

<sup>51</sup> Kutschera *et al*:2012

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with additional radiocarbon dating.<sup>52</sup> The results propose that the previous dates for the period most relevant to this study (the 17<sup>th</sup> century) are incorrect, and should be moved in accordance with radiocarbon dates from Kutschera *et al.*<sup>53</sup>

In my opinion, the new scientific evidence provides a secure date for the eruption. The slow addition of other carbon dated samples is starting to build a framework of fixed points around which we will have to reassess and adapt our relative chronology. I believe carbon dating is more reliable than the questionable stratigraphic recordings of archaeological reports from decades ago, before the adaptation of more modern rigorous methodologies. Additionally the easily transportable objects that are used for contextual relative dating should always be viewed as suggestive not conclusive. This is particularly the case when building an entire synchronism on only a handful of items. As such I have adopted the chronology suggested by Manning which takes into account the scientific results available in combination with relative chronological synchronisms.<sup>54</sup> Onto his chronological framework I have super imposed (see Table 1) the specific radiocarbon dates that have a bearing over the debate in general, and specifics of my argument in particular.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Quiles *et al.*:2013

<sup>53</sup> Kutschera *et al.*:2012

<sup>54</sup> Manning:2009:23

<sup>55</sup> Radiocarbon results from Quiles *et al.*:2013, Kutschera *et al.*:2012, Manning *et al.*:2009, Friedrich *et al.*:2006, 2009.

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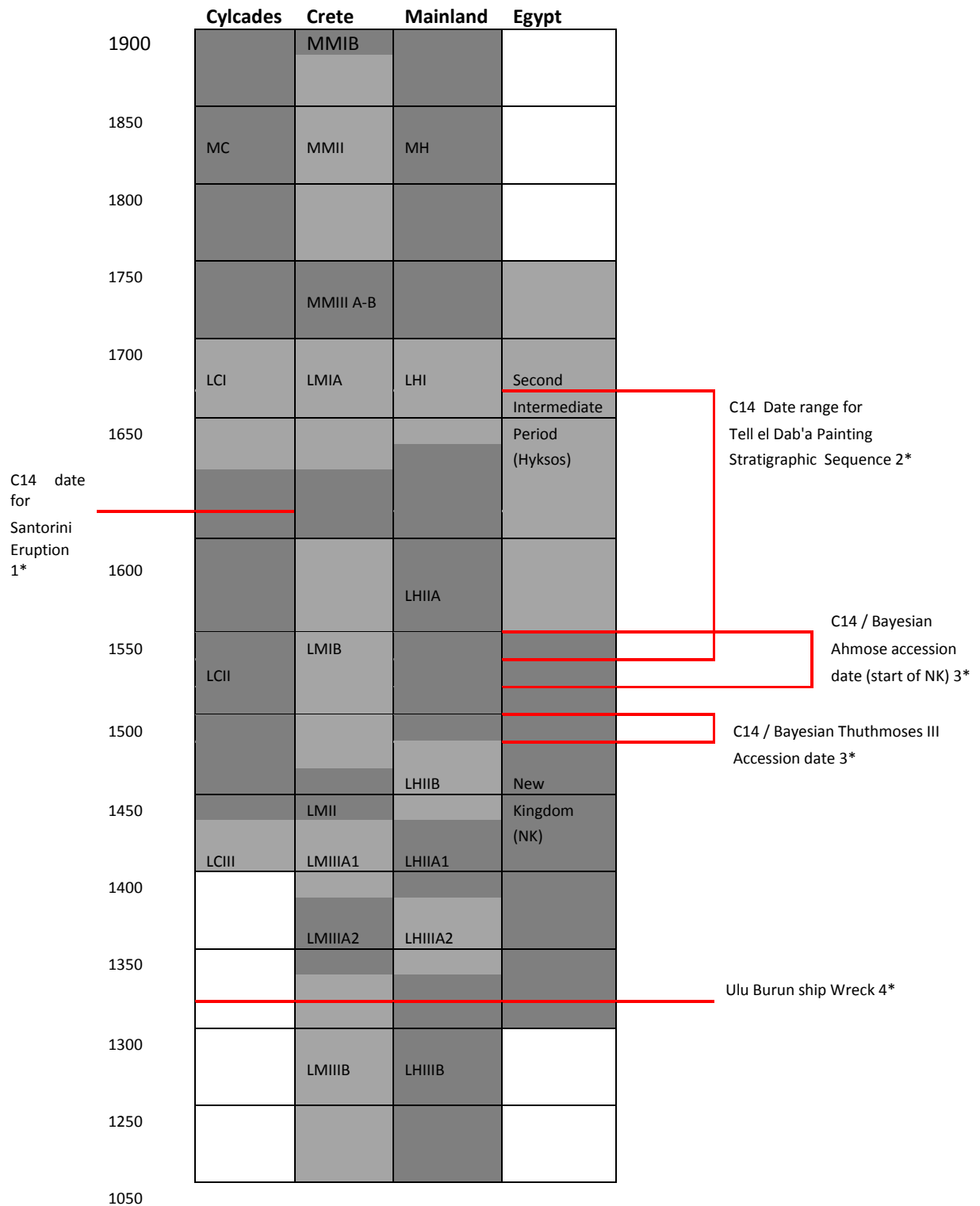


Table 1. Chronology of Aegean and Egypt from 1900 MMIB (MBA) to 1050 LHIIIB (LBA). After Manning:2012:23. 1\* Friedrich *et al*:2006, 2009.

2\* Kutschera *et al*:2012. 3\* Quiles *et al*:2013. 4\* Manning *et al*:2009

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

The intended outcome of this study is to identify the painters behind the paintings, and therefore to increase awareness of the artistic world they inhabited. The content, meaning and iconography of the Theran wall-paintings is a much researched topic and will therefore not be discussed here unless it aids in the clarification of some aspect (see Appendix for Catalogue and description of Theran Figurative Frescos). I intend to take a hermeneutical approach to examining the genesis and subsequent development of wall-painting as a medium within the chronological and geographical spheres of the Aegean and the wider environment of the Eastern Mediterranean. This examination will lead to the clarification and identification of the social spheres the painters inhabited, thus expanding current understanding of the temporal world the Aegean craftsmen existed within. As part of this study it is important to thoroughly consider previous approaches and determine the level of their success, before formulating an approach of my own.

Morgan in her seminal paper “Idea, Idiom and Iconography” has in essence exposed one of the problems at the most base level; “the divergence of interpretation”.<sup>56</sup> Yet whilst this is a problem, she also identifies the beginnings of a solution by suggesting that when we intend to apply interpretive skills we ask: “what and whose experience is relevant?”<sup>57</sup> For example, based on her observation that iconography is a “cultural notation” and speaks to the painter’s response to their cultural world,<sup>58</sup> why would we as a modern viewer analyse any product of that culture through our own “contemporary cognitive schemes”?<sup>59</sup> In short, we shouldn’t. So when setting out to analyse any culture, whether specifically the iconography or in more general terms, we should carefully construct an unbiased approach being exacting in separating ourselves from our modern cultural attitudes.

Before continuing there are further problems to be considered; the beauty of the

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<sup>56</sup> Morgan:1985:7

<sup>57</sup> Morgan:1985:7

<sup>58</sup> Morgan:1985:7

<sup>59</sup> Morgan:1985:6

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Aegean wall paintings is, unbelievably, a hindrance of its own. When we would look on them with a scientific eye, we are actually distracted by them; they make it almost impossible to take a scientific approach.<sup>60</sup> As pointed out by others, Aegean painting lures us into feeling before we can apply logic.<sup>61</sup> This is never more apparent than when considering most of the attempts at attribution already published. Despite best efforts to apply methodologies scholars are lured into using their feelings and reactions to the paintings to interpret them.<sup>62</sup> During my examination I intend to follow Cherry's example by being exacting in my methodology and clinical in my application of it.<sup>63</sup> I will however consider the merits and drawbacks of the more sympathetic and empathetic approach that has its basis in the disciplines of art history.

It is important to briefly examine the history of this specific discipline, and how it relates to classical archaeological research in general, and Aegean archaeology in particular. In doing this I will consider various methodologies previously utilised both for their systematic approach and the results that they have produced. In this way I will construct and apply a sound methodology of my own.

### **Attribution – History of the discipline**

There is no small sense of irony in applying a method born of the need to utilise fame culture to commercialise art works for a maximum price, to paintings from a period when fame culture did not apply to craftsmen. As noted by Morris any attempts to attribute works of the Aegean prehistory are intended to enrich our knowledge and understanding not to “involve the dubious dimension of the transformation of material culture into *Art*” as a way of increasing the value.<sup>64</sup> Despite the desire to distance this study from the terminology, and associated bias inherent in practices developed in the Renaissance, it is this period that inspired the first working methodology for attribution. The Morellian method is named for the 19<sup>th</sup> century art critic Giovanni Morelli who used his medical training to develop a specific investigative approach. He stated that the smaller details of a given art work, such as the

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<sup>60</sup> D'Alleva:2005:10

<sup>61</sup> Swindler:1973, Cf Hagg:1985:209 ref Swindler:1973

<sup>62</sup> Televantou:1992, 2000, Hollinshead:1989

<sup>63</sup> Cherry:1992

<sup>64</sup> Morris:1993:41

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hands and ears, were executed in a consistent and unconscious manner by any given individual. Close analysis could then identify a type of artistic ‘fingerprint’ individual to each painter. This allows other works to be attributed to the author under scrutiny, by matching the specific ‘fingerprint’.<sup>65</sup> It seems likely he was influenced by his medical background in his focus on the execution of the smaller anatomical features like the hands and ears.

The adoption of this method by Berenson (a contemporary of Morelli), and further use and adaptation in the art historical world slowly leached the dispassionate practice out of the process. It was replaced with the more empathetic, subjective approaches common in art history of observing the “feel” and “atmosphere” of the art in question. This was used in combination with further aesthetic analysis of the content to encourage a pursuit that fed the art world’s commercial purposes. It is unsurprising then that this adapted method of ‘connoisseurship’ has its critics in the modern scientific archaeological community.<sup>66</sup>

Historically the first true application of the Morellian method to ancient art, albeit with a significant art historical connoisseur bias, was the work Beazley did in his study of the black and red-figure vases from Archaic and Classical Greece.<sup>67</sup> He utilised both the specifics of Morellian method, and more empathetic lines of investigation to identify individual hands. He also identified specific styles, and therefore took the next logical step in determining ‘schools’ and ‘workshops’, and drew comparisons between the organisation of the Renaissance period painters and those from Classical Greece.<sup>68</sup> Despite this he has been somewhat unfairly labelled a “conservative” and stands accused of shunning systematic approaches in favour of perpetuating an inherited scholarly narrative.<sup>69</sup> Regardless of this his work is extremely significant, a momentous scholarly achievement and a cornerstone of Greek Archaeological scholarship.

Beazley is not the only archaeologist to make significant efforts in the search for

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<sup>65</sup> Cf Morelli:1892

<sup>66</sup> In essence Morellian method and connoisseurship are the same, however to my mind the more ardently a scholar adheres to the Morellian method the further he is from the more subjective approach implicit in connoisseurship. Cf Whitley:1997 footnote 2.

<sup>67</sup> Beazley:1922. Although he never tacitly acknowledged Morelli as a source or inspiration for his method. Cf Morris:1993:42, Whitley:1997:41

<sup>68</sup> The term artists used here as it is the correct word for the creators of the art works during the Renaissance based on social and cultural status at the time as discussed throughout. Cf Whitley:1997:42

<sup>69</sup> Whitley:1997:46

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ancient attributions. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by a steady stream of attribution attempts focussing on pottery from the Bronze Age Aegean.<sup>70</sup> Weingarten made a significant addition to the isolation of individuals with her study on Aegean glyptics and the identification of the “Zakro Master”,<sup>71</sup> as have Betts & Younger with further glyptic examination through an explicit methodology.<sup>72</sup> Getz-Preziosi has contributed to the discussion with an attempt at determining individual Cycladic sculptors.<sup>73</sup> Her methodology has benefitted from having comparable material found in secure contexts that positively encourage appraisal for similarity of hands.<sup>74</sup> This helped her to provide a baseline for study and formulate a working methodology to apply to sculptures currently scattered across the world in various collections, some with little known provenance.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly a statement made during the outlining of her methodology has implications for the potential attributional study of *non*-Theran wall paintings. As mentioned earlier, paintings outside Thera do not demonstrate the significant independence of Minoan ‘artistic’ content to be considered here. However consider that ...

originality – or, more accurately, individuality – in such a tradition-bound art form lies not in the adoption of new elements so much as in the particular choice or combination of familiar ones.<sup>76</sup>

...and you have a significant starting point for building a methodology for Aegean wall painting outside of Thera.

Attribution studies as applied specifically to wall paintings are a relatively new venture, one which the majority of scholars have shied away from. Perhaps this is due to a popular notion amongst peers which Morris considers; that only ‘Art’ that has been produced with the understanding that it *is* Art can be studied with attribution in mind.<sup>77</sup> This is discussed at greater length regarding the terminology of art vs. craft shortly and artisans

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<sup>70</sup> Stubbings:1915, Immerwahr:1956, Karageorghis:1956, Benson:1961, Betancourt:1973, 1977, Mountjoy:1977, Walberg:1976, 1987, Rystedt:1988, 1990, Morris:1993, Popham:1967.

<sup>71</sup> Weingarten:1983

<sup>72</sup> Betts&Younger:1982:114, Younger:1983, 1984

<sup>73</sup> Getz-Preziosi:1987

<sup>74</sup> Getz-Preziosi:1987:59

<sup>75</sup> Getz-Preziosi:1987:69, Cherry:1992:142

<sup>76</sup> Getz-Preziosi:1987:69-70

<sup>77</sup> Morris:1993

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having a concept of their own identity and their social standing according to their profession in Chapter 6. Rather than looking at attribution as another investigative tool in the archaeologist's arsenal, it has been viewed purely as a way of identifying value in any given artistically based artefact. Perhaps the reticence to pursue this approach is based in the belief that no real value can be found in identifying individual hands, a concept that is patently false, as will be discussed later. Or possibly it is purely down to the seeming inability to draw conclusions of a concrete basis, but then the very nature of archaeology, particularly that of a prehistoric period, is building theories on tiny scraps of evidence painstakingly teased from the material record. I suggest the conversation noted at the outset can be interpreted as the generally dismissive attitude in the field of Aegean Archaeology towards this approach. Additionally the method of connoisseurship has a strong basis in documents and other written sources, which of course are not to be found in the Prehistoric Aegean in relation to wall painting.<sup>78</sup> Or perhaps it is as simple as Thomas suggests; that the "kind of pattern recognition involved in attribution does not lend itself readily to verbalization".<sup>79</sup> This study will show that, as Rystedt has stated albeit in relation to pottery, there is real merit in applying attributive methodologies "to contribute to that deeper understanding" of the wall paintings, if only to help fine tune investigative tools for future generations studies.<sup>80</sup>

## **Forward Thinking – New approaches**

Significantly, the first leaps in scholarly attitude were made outside of archaeology. In general the movements away from the aesthetic sympathies in art history towards more Marxist ideals cleared the way for a focus on artistic products as items integral to material culture.<sup>81</sup> Following on from this a landmark collection of papers edited by Hill & Gunn drew a metaphorical line in the sand between anthropological processes and those in the related field of archaeology.<sup>82</sup> In essence this scholarly gauntlet challenged archaeologists into thinking in new terms of how to process and analyse finds of an aesthetic nature. Of all the

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<sup>78</sup> Berensons:1931

<sup>79</sup> Thomas:1997:378

<sup>80</sup> Rystedt:1990:175, see also Whitley:1997:46

<sup>81</sup> D'Alleva:2005:54

<sup>82</sup> Hill & Gunn:1977



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papers in this collection perhaps Muller's has the most bearing on the discussion here.<sup>83</sup> He considers the archaeological ignorance of the individual to that point, and the importance of studies of this nature for investigating social interaction within a specific, small, group.<sup>84</sup> He confirmed the need to apply Morellian style methods, as investigative tools, but questions how to interpret the results.<sup>85</sup> The paper considers matter of definition regarding artistic terminology in reference to anthropological approaches. I suspect that the innovative paper by Morgan several years later was inspired by this discussion.<sup>86</sup>

In the same collection, Redman posits the concept of an *analytical individual*, where the focus is "prehistoric organisational processes".<sup>87</sup> Rather than assume two or more craft pieces belong to an individual person based on stylistic similarities, he states that it should be considered that they belong to a small high contact interaction group where intense contact breeds similarities. For example two paintings that are extremely similar, for our purpose consider the Ladies with Bouquets from Xeste 3 (see Fig 21a,b), could be the work of a team of two or more painters that have almost identical styles based on intense familiarity and interaction between themselves. This is the smallest possible interaction group and according to Redman should be considered as the *analytical individual*.<sup>88</sup> He argues that the identification of a single individual is not as important as understanding social interaction and its likelihood of style transference. The methods he applies in determining these interaction processes find their basis in the investigative methods used in attribution studies as will be discussed. Whilst I agree with his argument, and methodology, I find it hard to acknowledge the impersonal approach, and still consider that some individuals *can* and *should* be identified. His concept of smallest interaction groups has a bearing of course on an idea that will be discussed in Chapter 6 of a family unit being responsible for the paintings on Thera. I think the *analytical individual* is a useful concept for when clear attributions are not possible, which will likely be the majority of the paintings, as examined later in Chapter 5.

Simultaneously changes in the discipline of Art History, with the emergence of the so-

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<sup>83</sup> Muller:1977

<sup>84</sup> Muller:1977:24

<sup>85</sup> Muller:1977:25, CF Hill & Gunn:1977:2 in the same volume for support for examining the results of an individual's different motor skills impacting his production technique.

<sup>86</sup> Morgan:1983

<sup>87</sup> Redman:1977:44

<sup>88</sup> Redman:1977:44

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called New Art History,<sup>89</sup> forced re-evaluations of connoisseurship and attribution driven approaches. The change in focus towards the social aspect of art, in keeping with the Marxism and Feminism movements, meant the artist became a vehicle for social commentary. This in combination with the change in approaches in anthropology helped contribute to the new thinking resulting from the emergence of Processual Archaeology. All of a sudden aesthetic considerations and the leaps of logic common in earlier classical archaeological attributions were deeply unfashionable. This left a void in archaeological research that, as already mentioned, the Prehistorians of the Aegean started to fill. However, two papers in the field of archaeology used the approaches discussed here to analyse the situation in archaeology, including the previous scholarship that I will look at shortly, and suggest theoretical approaches for further studies.

In the early 1990's Cherry and Morris both considered the state of scholarship so far and analysed the effectiveness of the methodologies.<sup>90</sup> Whilst Cherry was highly critical of efforts so far he did not attempt any attribution studies of his own, however Morris did and applied her theories to Mycenaean pictorial pottery.<sup>91</sup> Both scholars took a highly analytical approach to attribution and argued for a more scientific method based around Morelli's groundwork. They also argued for a distinct separation from subjective traditional art historical observations of 'feel' etc and the subsequent divisions into 'schools' "in a manner redolent of Renaissance art".<sup>92</sup> Both provide refreshing clarity of thought and although are rightly critical, they do not dismiss attribution out of hand, in fact both encourage the approach under the strict observation of effective criteria.

As such I have analysed previous approaches and their efficacy. This is in regards to the manner of approach in general and the strength of the methodology applied specifically. I have then considered those approaches more closely in relation to Aegean studies. Based on this consideration I have identified four criteria to apply to the paintings as part of my own analysis.

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<sup>89</sup> Rees & Borzello:1988

<sup>90</sup> Cherry:1992, Morris:192.

<sup>91</sup> Morris:1993:48

<sup>92</sup> Morris:1992:42

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- 1) consider the evocative elements that as previously noted trap the unwary scholar into making over the top qualitative remarks; the “feel”, “atmosphere”, etc.
- 2) consider the particular aesthetic elements that are arguably indicative of an individual’s approach to an artistic challenge, style, composition etc.
- 3) observe the different skills demonstrated and the manner of their execution; colour usage, draughtsmanship etc.
- 4) Most importantly examine the ‘Morellian’ elements for differences in approach and execution; eyes, ears etc.

The results of this analysis will allow conclusions to be drawn on the attribution of individual paintings, conclusions that have a sound basis in scientific methodologies.

### **Terminology**

It is imperative to consider the correct terminology to be adopted before progressing any further as having the correct approach at the outset is as crucial as utilising a sound methodology.<sup>93</sup> It is on this point in particular that a multi-disciplinary approach is most beneficial. As Muller has pointed out, historically archaeologists have tended to ignore the individual, stressing the difficulty inherent in identification attempts.<sup>94</sup> By considering this study from an anthropological, art historical and analytical point of view, it becomes possible to identify the nature of the problem, and highlight key areas for focus, to gain “insight” as stated by D’Alleva.<sup>95</sup> For example, many archaeological approaches to this type of study fail to take into account the definitions of words commonly used. By repeatedly using words such as 'artist', 'artisan', 'craftsman' and 'workshop' unintentional connotations, and the associated bias, are often adopted in ignorance. For example the practice of examining these wall-paintings as 'art' and their creators as 'artists' is alarmingly easy to perpetuate attitudes that find their foundations in the Renaissance and that exist to modern times.<sup>96</sup> In fact Pepper has stated that painting with any level of technique is the hall mark of Art, and therefore its

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<sup>93</sup> Evely:1988, cf Renfrew:1985 for an introduction to this style of approach.

<sup>94</sup> Muller:1977:23

<sup>95</sup> D’Alleva:2005:12

<sup>96</sup> Preziosi&Hitchcock:2000

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creator must be an Artist.<sup>97</sup> Evely and Cherry have both very correctly highlighted the modern attitudes that colour the understanding of the terminology mentioned above and advise caution in scholarly approaches.<sup>98</sup> A modern reader may view an 'artist' in comparison to an 'artisan' or 'craftsman', as a more accomplished being, with a higher social status, based purely on modern contexts. Artists in our times, and arguably in most periods since the Renaissance, have existed inside the world of celebrity. A 'craftsman' however brings to mind a worker of lowlier origins and means. In effect, our “contemporary bias ... lionises the Artist at the expense of the Craftsman”.<sup>99</sup> However, if evidence from the relevant period of history is taken into account, and our judgements are based upon that knowledge, a different approach, a more accurate approach is possible.<sup>100</sup>

Based on this more scientific and non-biased attitude it is possible to understand that the artists and craftsmen (and craftswomen) of the Aegean Bronze Age were unlikely to be aware of any possible connotation of these different terminologies, if they even operated within a language system that had such an expansive, and subtle, vocabulary. It has been shown through sources from the contemporaneous civilisation of Egypt that those responsible for the tomb paintings had no concept of differences in meaning between 'artist' and 'craftsman' as their language did not provide for such a distinction.<sup>101</sup> Likewise texts from the Ancient Near East also fail to draw any distinction between art and craft.<sup>102</sup> It is enlightening to consider that modern attitudes would find a craftsman labelled an artist flattered, yet an artist labelled a craftsman would feel denigrated.

So, within the context of the Aegean, how are we to proceed concerning the use of the words 'artist' versus 'craftsman'? The problem is exacerbated when considered within the social framework demonstrated in the Linear B tablets, and even with a great degree of speculation, within Homer. There is no term for or mention of an 'artist' within the Linear B archives.<sup>103</sup> Neither is there mention of the word 'painter'. This does not help in determining which word to use. Homer mentions 'craftsmen' in the *Odyssey*, but when he goes on to

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<sup>97</sup> Pepper:1949:235

<sup>98</sup> Evely:1988, Cherry:1992:141

<sup>99</sup> Evely:1988:401

<sup>100</sup> Drenkhahn:1995:338, Cf Matthews:1995:455 for similar situation in the Ancient Near East

<sup>101</sup> Drenkhahn:1995:338; Mekhitarian:1978

<sup>102</sup> Matthews:1995:455

<sup>103</sup> Boulotis:2000, Gregersen:1997.

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mention the individual specialists, painters are again not included.<sup>104</sup> This would lead a modern observer, operating within a material culture vacuum, to conclude that artists, more specifically painters, did not exist. Based upon this, the discussion above and taking into account Evely's convincing arguments,<sup>105</sup> this study will use only the word 'painter' as a term for those that produced the wall-paintings.

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<sup>104</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 17.383-386

<sup>105</sup> Evely:1988

### Chapter 4

#### Thera

It is important to state the reasons that I believe the painters behind the wall-paintings on Thera are considered to be different from those that created the wall-paintings elsewhere in the Aegean. The problem of chronology aside, after all even the most argumentative scholars can agree on some contemporaneity, the Cretan paintings are fragmentary in the extreme and the later Mainland paintings are highly stylised. While there are myriad small differences in the iconography of the Thera paintings, it is not this which makes them so divergent from the Aegean tradition. The majority of studies of the paintings will make mention of the feeling conveyed by the 'artists', the atmosphere of freedom that is all pervasive in these compositions. For the most part the paintings appear to defy common conventions on display in other extant paintings in the Aegean, and those with tentative links to the Aegean in the Eastern Mediterranean. Whilst I wish to apply as clinical a methodology as possible to analysing these paintings in the next chapter partly what makes them so divergent from the Aegean tradition is the qualitative human reaction to the beauty, the sense of freedom and movement displayed in them. It is what draws us in at the beginning and the essence that makes them unique among the art of the time.

There is a seemingly obvious but nonetheless necessary, cautionary point that needs to be raised at this stage. How representative are the paintings from Thera? They cover at least one wall in all of the building complexes so far excavated, which is unusual within the wider context of Aegean wall-painting.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned above they are also unique in the level of artistic autonomy and creativity that is hinted at. Crowley has suggested that it is this aspect that makes the art of Thera so attractive to many scholars.<sup>107</sup> Therefore it is not certain that what we see is actually representative, in fact it could be actively misleading to any unwary scholar.<sup>108</sup> This study is based on the current general belief that the paintings are representative of 'art' on Thera, and that subsequent excavations will hopefully continue to reveal architecture with similar programmes of decoration thus justifying current belief.

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<sup>106</sup> Morgan:2005, Doumas:2010:755

<sup>107</sup> Crowley:1989:193

<sup>108</sup> Barber:1984

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### Context - Thera's place within the Aegean

The position of Thera within the Minoan world is a much discussed topic.<sup>109</sup> It is relatively simple to place Thera in general within the Aegean; it was located ideally to be a trade hub, as a gateway from the south and east trade routes of Crete, the Dodecanese, Egypt and the East, on to mainland Greece and the Cyclades.<sup>110</sup> It has even been suggested, with some validity I believe, that the harbour at Akrotiri was the major anchorage for the Aegean.<sup>111</sup> The miniature wall painting from the West House depicting many ships at sea clearly demonstrates the maritime nature of the people in residence there, and several have argued the occupant of that residence was a sea captain or rich merchant.<sup>112</sup> The nature of the Minoan impact on Thera however is less easily defined. Key aspects of typically Minoan civilisation can be found on Thera, in addition to obvious traded imports, in the form of pottery etc. Marinatos is a keen, and potentially the only, advocate of Thera coming within the jurisdiction of a Minoan 'threskeiocracy',<sup>113</sup> and has written extensively on the many Minoanising religious elements to be found in Thera, making a (sometimes weak) case, for religious connotations behind all the wall-paintings.<sup>114</sup> Others believe Thera was controlled from the palatial centres of Crete, as part of the Minoan 'thalassocracy' as described in Thucydides.<sup>115</sup> There are arguments for Minoan colonies,<sup>116</sup> and more simply a Minoanising influence.<sup>117</sup> However the debate has moved on considerably from the discussions prevalent in the 1980's.<sup>118</sup> For example recent scholarly attention has been focussing on the Theran remains found in the "pillar pits" for the Akrotiri roofing support struts and the subsequent publications of the finds.<sup>119</sup> Additionally in keeping with the more clinical scientific investigative approaches encouraged by anthropological scholars like Hill and Gunn, recent archaeological approaches are changing. Broodbank has called for reassessments of material

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<sup>109</sup> Cf Hagg&Marinatos:1984

<sup>110</sup> Knapp:1995:1440

<sup>111</sup> Buchholtz:1980:227, Morgan:1988:172

<sup>112</sup> Doulas:1992:49

<sup>113</sup> Marinatos:1984b

<sup>114</sup> Marinatos:1984a

<sup>115</sup> Thucydides:1.4

<sup>116</sup> Branigan:1984, Immerwahr:1990:4, Hiller:1984, Schofield:1984

<sup>117</sup> Cadogan:1984, Nikolakopoulou:2008, Wiener:1987

<sup>118</sup> Cf Hagg&Marinatos:1984

<sup>119</sup> Knappett&Nikolakopoulou:2008:3, Nikolakopoulou:2009

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culture assemblages with these new interrogative skill sets,<sup>120</sup> and Knappett and Nikolakopoulou have answered in relation to Thera within the Aegean.<sup>121</sup> I believe there is much merit in these fresh approaches, and as it is my intent in this study to follow a similarly suitable methodology, it is this series of research I have used to consider the concept of ‘colonialisation’ or ‘minoanisation’ in regards to Thera. After all as Knappett & Nikolakopoulou have pointed out “Gosden’s emphasis *is* [sic] on...placing...people at the forefront” which is highly appropriate considering the focus of this study.<sup>122</sup> The conclusions drawn seem to highlight a more subtle state of affairs than previously thought. Rather than the increasing frequency of Minoan deposits on Thera (from the MBA into the LBA) being indicative of palatial control over the Cycladic ‘colonies’, it is more arguably an indication of increased trade in luxury goods between the two cultures. This is somewhat simplifying the matter, but for the purposes of this study it is sufficient to establish the basic nature of the relationship. I do not believe the Minoans exerted an undue amount of influence on Akrotiri. It seems more likely that Akrotiri as a trade hub carried a large amount of Minoan wares,<sup>123</sup> and as the inhabitants’ fortunes increased, and a class of richer individual, evolved the demand for these finer wares rose. This richer society paved the way for the emergence of large schemes of pictorial wall decoration. After all, all pictorial decoration elsewhere in contemporaneous civilisation was limited to wealthy areas: palaces, manor houses etc. The lack of a palatial complex thus far on Thera, and taking into account the extensive decorative scheme, is highly suggestive of a rich independent society.

### **Genesis – The emergence of Theran frescos**

To have any understanding of the world of the artisans that worked on Thera it is necessary to consider the emergence and development of wall-painting as a medium in the Aegean Bronze Age. It is generally concluded that the genesis of wall-painting was centred on Crete,<sup>124</sup> and specifically Knossos.<sup>125</sup> How this craft came to be spread across the Aegean

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<sup>120</sup> Broodbank:2004

<sup>121</sup> Knappett&Nikolakopoulou:2008, Nikolakopoulou:2009, Cf Gosden:2004

<sup>122</sup> Knappett&Nikolakopoulou:2008:3

<sup>123</sup> Dumas:2010:757 statistics show finds of stirrup jars and lead balance weights are higher in Akrotiri than anywhere else in the Aegean archaeological record.

<sup>124</sup> Chapin:2010, Immerwahr:1989:239

<sup>125</sup> Blakolmer:1997; Davis:1990; Dickinson:1994; Immerwahr:1990; Morgan:1990; Shaw:1997



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throughout the Bronze Age is the subject of much discussion.<sup>126</sup> The discoveries of wall-paintings demonstrating Minoan characteristics in the wider context of the Near East,<sup>127</sup> and Egypt,<sup>128</sup> serve to further confuse the debate. However, it is now deemed likely that the initial suppositions of scholars such as Woolley,<sup>129</sup> who believed the Aegean absorbed its artistic heritage from contact with the East, are incorrect.<sup>130</sup> The study of these paintings however means that the Aegean cannot be considered in isolation. It seems, as with other aspects of this civilisation, that they are inextricably interwoven with their contemporaries.

### **Painting vs. Pottery – Chicken or the egg?**

The genesis of wall painting is occasionally linked to developments in the related craft of pottery.<sup>131</sup> The relationship between the two separate, yet often iconographically linked fields is much debated amongst scholars. Walberg was the first to demonstrate a strong and direct connection between the two,<sup>132</sup> citing many examples illustrating that frescoes were indebted to painted pottery for the iconography and style. There have been issues however in the strength of the stratigraphic sequencing of wall paintings. Unlike Thera the wall paintings found elsewhere in the Aegean were not preserved in a clear chronological context where their relationship to their surroundings is not in question. The date of the Cretan frescos has been much debated and most concisely outlined by Hood.<sup>133</sup> Whilst argument strengthens the theory that wall painting was a product of artistic progress within pottery, it is also possible, as has been demonstrated by Immerwahr and Blakolmer, to trace influence in the other direction,<sup>134</sup> as there are some examples of decorated ceramic ware that certainly seem to owe much to wall paintings. A true 'chicken-or-the-egg' conundrum; so what came first? In an attempt to answer this, in respect of the key iconographical elements of the dolphin and the swallow, Immerwahr stated clearly that frescoes influenced pottery production in the local area of Thera, and that the wall painters themselves were much more accomplished craftsmen

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Televantou:2000. Cf Chapin:2010:224 states that pictorial painting emerged from Knossos.

<sup>126</sup> Boulotlis:2000, Immerwahr:1990,

<sup>127</sup> Niemeier:1991, Winter:2000

<sup>128</sup> Bietak:1987, 2007, Bietak & Marinatos:1995, Marinatos:1998, Niemeier:1995, Bietak *et al.*:2007

<sup>129</sup> Cf Wooley:1955

<sup>130</sup> Niemeier:1995:195

<sup>131</sup> Boutlotlis:1993,2000, Walberg:1986

<sup>132</sup> Walberg:1986

<sup>133</sup> Hood:2000a, 2000b

<sup>134</sup> Immerwahr:1990; Blakolmer:1997:101

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than those decorating the pottery.<sup>135</sup>

In keeping with Thera being prominent for its corpus of wall paintings, both in frequency and quality, Mathari has observed it occupies a “prominent position as the producer of the richest pictorial pottery in the Aegean”.<sup>136</sup> The relationship between the two craft types is complex when considering the directional flow of influence, because doubtless they influenced each other. Mathari has expanded on Immerwahr’s study of specific iconographic elements to determine that the vase painters and wall painters enjoyed a sort of symbiotic relationship.<sup>137</sup> The vase painters Swallow element was adopted by the wall painters, whilst the vase painters used the greater pictorial programmes of wall painting to inspire changes in their craft.<sup>138</sup>

So how symbiotic was the relationship? How close did they work together? The lack of tangible evidence for paint workshops across the Aegean contributes to the overall invisibility of the painters (see Chapter 6). The difficulty lies in the lack of physical equipment required to paint walls, after all it is not necessary to have access to anything other than pigments and painting tools. These are items that would naturally occur in a potter’s workshop, so could the invisibility not be a symptom of looking in separate places for two things rather than in one place for both? Additionally, due to the static nature of wall paintings the actual place of production is the same site as the finished product.<sup>139</sup> Sharing space with the potters would be cost effective (assuming things such as 'overheads' were a relevant practical concern in ancient times) and allow the possibility of multi-skilled application of effort – could the painters not have doubled as pottery decorators?<sup>140</sup> It is not such an unusual idea, some accept that the Theran painters were likely to have spent time painting stucco offering tables,<sup>141</sup> a particularly well decorated one found in the West House at Akrotiri.<sup>142</sup> The concept that painters of walls and pots occupied the same ‘workshop’ (workshops as a

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<sup>135</sup> Immerwahr:1990:238, Cf Mathari:1987

<sup>136</sup> Mathari:2000:874

<sup>137</sup> Immerwahr:1990:238-241, Mathari:2000:888

<sup>138</sup> Mathari:2000

<sup>139</sup> Despite suggestions to the contrary from the excavators of Phlyakopi who saw the Flying Fish fresco as something that was moved within a frame. Atkinson&Bosanquet:1904:70, Cf Morgan:2005:31

<sup>140</sup> Boulotis:2000:854

<sup>141</sup> Boulotis:2000:854

<sup>142</sup> Doulas:1992:180, pl 142-144. Doulas:1983:76. Cf Boulotis:2000 for Stucco tables as a plentiful find in the Cyclades and their relationship to wall painters

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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concept will be examined in Chapter 6) space could answer much about the interconnections of iconography.

### **Technique – Fresco or secco?**

The methods of painting can tell us as much as the product themselves, and yet there are no records of painting processes, or even diagrams of paintings in progress or painters at work. As such, almost as much scholarly attention has been focussed on socio-economic and iconographical discussions.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps the most contentious and still considered unresolved issue, is how to categorise the painting method. The term fresco is commonly utilised, however with its usage comes the associated perceptions of Renaissance art. Technically there are several types of fresco; *buon fresco* which in essence is the application of water based paint to a plaster surface that remains wet throughout, and *buon secco* where water based paint is applied to a dry plaster surface. This is different to the method utilised in Egypt known as *tempera* where paint with a binding agent, for example egg, was applied to a dry surface, plaster or otherwise. However the multitude of scientific studies on the painting remains cannot agree on a method.<sup>144</sup> In my opinion the problem lies again in the application of modern art historical perceptions and expectations to ancient civilisations. As Immerwahr has so succinctly put it:

...one can hardly expect the Minoans in the infancy of this type of painting to have followed precisely the procedures set down for medieval Renaissance painters of *buon fresco*!<sup>145</sup>

What is clear is that by the LBA the painters of the Aegean used lime plaster almost exclusively.<sup>146</sup> Cameron has reported that they utilised the malleable surface of wet plaster to impress lines and mark out the zones of their compositions,<sup>147</sup> and it is also clear that they did in fact paint on wet plaster, there are numerous examples of brush and drag marks in the

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<sup>143</sup> Brysbaert:2002, Cameron *et al*:1977, Chryssikopoulou *et al*:2000, Evely:2000, Immerwahr:1990, Jones:2005,

<sup>144</sup> Brysbaert:2000, Cameron:1977, Jones:2005.

<sup>145</sup> Immerwahr:1990:15

<sup>146</sup> Cameron:1977, Immerwahr:1990

<sup>147</sup> Cameron:1977:154, Doumas:1992:18

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plaster to indicate this.<sup>148</sup> The issue is that microscopic examination of the absorption and bonding of the pigments would indicate that the *buon fresco* method as defined in Renaissance painting was not used consistently.<sup>149</sup> In pursuit of an answer to this ridiculous need to ascribe a hard and fast term, several scholars have conducted reproductive experiments. Cameron, the one time authority on Minoan painting, reported on experiments conducted in 1911 at Pompeii that produced long plaster drying times.<sup>150</sup> Based on this he conducted his own experiment in 1976 which was unfortunately unpublished, however he alludes to the results in his 1977 paper, and records a 67% lime plaster drying time of at least 15 days after the final layer application.<sup>151</sup> This would actually hamper many attributional arguments that base some of their suppositions on a swift drying time meaning the need for multiple painters at work simultaneously. This is especially the case since there is not sufficient evidence to argue for an Aegean version of the Renaissance process *giornata*, where only a days works worth of plaster was applied to the wall, and any remaining removed before a new section was added the next day.<sup>152</sup> However more recently a replication study was conducted on Thera, in more authentic climatic conditions that found the lime plaster was sufficiently dry to paint at 2 hours, and too dry to continue in the *buon fresco* method at only 8 hours.<sup>153</sup> The publication of this experiment and the clarity of the applied methodology makes this a much more secure data set to consider attribution studies.

The pigments themselves were all mineral based with the exception of blue which was manufactured see Table 2.

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<sup>148</sup> Cameron:1977:154, Immerwahr:1990:16.

<sup>149</sup> Cameron:1977:163-165

<sup>150</sup> Cameron:1977:166 footnote 94, Cf Doerner:1949

<sup>151</sup> Cameron:1977:166 footnote 94, experiment conducted as part of the University of Western Ontario Department of Visual Arts Fresco Project.

<sup>152</sup> Cameron:1977:156. Cf Lang:1969 for an argument for this in regards to the different shades of same colour backgrounds in paintings.

<sup>153</sup> Chryssikopoulou *et al*:2000

## Identifying the Theran Wall Painters

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Colour	Mineral	Compound
Black	Carbon	
White	Lime	Calcium Carbonate
	White clay	Kaolin
Red	Red Ochre	Ferric Oxide
Yellow	Yellow Ochre	Ferric Oxide
Blue	Egyptian Blue	CaCuSi <sub>4</sub> O <sub>10</sub>
	Riebeckite	Glaucophane
Green	Mixed by layering Egyptian Blue with Yellow Ochre	

Table 2. Aegean pigments.<sup>154</sup>

Gray, maroon, pink, brown and orange were all achieved by mixing pigments together. As stated unlike Egypt there has been very little archaeological evidence for the painters tools, most of the information we have has been painstakingly squeezed from examination of the paintings themselves, however there are a few recorded examples of paint found in situ,<sup>155</sup> none of which are like the paint cakes used in Egypt.<sup>156</sup> It seems the painters on Thera must have mixed their paints as they were required. This would account for differences in hues of the same colour on the same composition, as can be seen on the terrain of the Spring Fresco (Figs 8-10).<sup>157</sup> Whether this is indicative of a new artist or simply a new batch of paint is something for consideration within a wider examination of attributional traits in Chapter 5.

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<sup>154</sup> After Immerwahr:1990:16

<sup>155</sup> Marinatos:1972

<sup>156</sup> Immerwahr:1990:16

<sup>157</sup> Davis:2000:862

### Chapter 5

#### Identifying Individuals and Groups

##### Individuals Identified So Far – Scholarship to date

At the time of discovery of the paintings there were no real efforts made to attribute Aegean wall paintings to particular individuals. This was before the New Art History and Processual Archaeology had gained a serious following in their respective fields.<sup>158</sup> As such, Marinatos' assumptive observation that the swallows from the Spring Fresco were by the same painter as the swallows from a fragmented vase found on Phylakopi and a jug from Grave Circle B at Mycenae, are typical of old world archaeology.<sup>159</sup> In fact Whitley has already observed that “academic etiquette” in early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by “a certain reticence regarding theory”.<sup>160</sup> In recent years, in the wake of developing scientific practices, and their establishment as key methods in archaeology, attempts have been made to analyse the paintings beyond the aesthetic considerations prevalent until that point.<sup>161</sup> One of the first was Immerwahr as a brief aspect in her study into the relationship between the paintings and pottery,<sup>162</sup> and then Hollinshead with a more in depth approach to the paintings alone.<sup>163</sup> That's not to say that attribution studies in Aegean archaeology were pioneered by these scholars, or indeed restricted to the eventual efforts concerning wall paintings. As mentioned previously various scholars have attempted attributions for pottery,<sup>164</sup> seal stones,<sup>165</sup> and even in what Cherry has called the most successful approach, the Linear B tablets.<sup>166</sup> For the purposes of this discussion; it is only the attributions of wall paintings that will be examined. I shall outline the efforts made thus far, but above commenting in general I will refrain from looking at the individual observations made until later when I examine the paintings.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf Renfrew:1991 for Processual Archaeology, Cf Harris:2001 for examination of New Art History.

<sup>159</sup> Marinatos:1969:64-69, 1974:32

<sup>160</sup> Whitley:1997:42

<sup>161</sup> Cameron:1975, 1977 .

<sup>162</sup> Immerwahr:1990

<sup>163</sup> Hollinshead:1989

<sup>164</sup> Mathari:2000, Stubbings:1915, Immerwahr:1956, Karageorghis:1956, Benson:1961, Betancourt:1973, 1977, Mountjoy:1977, Walberg:1976, 1987, Rystedt:1988, 1990, Morris:1993, Popham:1967

<sup>165</sup> Cf Weingarten:1983, Betts & Younger:1982, Younger:1983,1984

<sup>166</sup> Cherry:1992:137

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

As mentioned Immerwahr's study of pottery led to a brief suggestion that all the swallows from Akrotiri, barring the single distinctive swallow found in Sector Alpha (Fig 11c), were attributable to the same painter.<sup>167</sup> However at the same time Hollinshead published a much more thorough examination of the swallow motif at Thera that is often cited as a kick-start to the attribution studies of the Theran wall-paintings.<sup>168</sup> As part of that paper she isolated five individual painters at work on six different paintings (see Table 8).<sup>169</sup> There is no discussion of applying a specific methodology, nor is there any mention or consideration of the Morellian method as an investigative tool. The attitude of the paper is confident but still speculative, and there is a clear familiarity of the material without resorting to a smothering amount of art-historical style effusive descriptions. Her observations seem sound and are based on a range of elements although there are few considerations of the details that do actually reflect a Morellian approach (see Table 8). Interestingly she is not hesitant to further the trend already found in other Aegean attribution studies, of labelling one particular painter a *Master*.<sup>170</sup> It should be noted that as Cherry has pointed out even Beazley, who was arguably the progenitor of archaeological attribution studies, distanced himself from utilising this term in reference to his individuals.<sup>171</sup> In this particular case the Master Painter she has identified was responsible for the swallows of the 'Spring Fresco' (Fig 9-10), the antelopes of Beta 1 (Fig 12), at least two of the girls in the 'Crocus Gatherers' (Fig 18-20) and the three Female Worshipers both from Xeste 3 (Fig 16-17).<sup>172</sup> The reasoning stated as both "composition, technique and approach" and the quality of the line work or the draughtsmanship.<sup>173</sup> Additionally she states the 'Spring Fresco' was the work of a second Master who was "undoubtedly responsible for the pleasing and coherent composition of the whole", although whether that Master is the same as the one she already identified as is mentioned above is not clear.<sup>174</sup> She believes the painter responsible for the crocuses in the 'Crocus Gatherers' composition was also responsible for the crocuses seen on the swallow fragments from Xeste 3 room 4 (Fig 11a,b ) due to similarity in execution.<sup>175</sup> The other two painters tentatively identified are responsible for the terrain and

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<sup>167</sup> Immerwahr:1990

<sup>168</sup> Davis:2000:860

<sup>169</sup> Hollinshead:1989

<sup>170</sup> Hollinshead:1989:347, Cf Weingarten:1983 for 'Zakro Master', Betts&Younger:1982 for Jasper Lion Master, Getz-Preziosi:1987 various Masters.

<sup>171</sup> Cherry:1992:141

<sup>172</sup> Hollinshead:1989:345-348

<sup>173</sup> Hollinshead:1989:346

<sup>174</sup> Hollinshead:1989:344

<sup>175</sup> Hollinshead:1989:346, it should be noted that according to Doumas:1992 all the fragments previously

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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the lilies of the ‘Spring Fresco’ (Fig 8) and the ‘Boxers’ of Beta 1 (Fig 13).<sup>176</sup>

Arguably the most successful attribution studies of the wall paintings have been conducted by Televantou in 1992, and then expanded slightly in 2000. Her specific approach appears to be via a developed methodology that encourages attribution once the paintings have been grouped by typology. She has divided the paintings into three categories based on the more subjective method of style; the Minoanising Style,<sup>177</sup> the Formal-Abstract Style,<sup>178</sup> and the Free Style.<sup>179</sup> She does not clearly define a methodology, but does generally explain her reasoning for inclusion in each category. I find her categories to be highly subjective and the divisions not particularly clear. From there she has proceeded to isolate the identity of individual painters. By this method she both embraces a less systematic approach and implies that the scope of the painters was limited. That is not to say that style cannot be used as an investigative tool, but to limit an approach so severely is outdated. In her initial paper she examines eighteen of the paintings identifying a minimum of eight painters, her updated publication in 2000 examines a further painting taking identified painters to a minimum of nine (see Table 7). Of these attributions two are identified and given names as Masters (the ‘Miniaturist’ and ‘Painter of the Ladies’<sup>180</sup>), four described as painters of an undefined skill level (‘Painter of the Monkeys’, ‘Painter of the Ladies with Bouquets’, ‘Painter of the Crocus-Gatherers’ and unnamed ‘artist’<sup>181</sup>), and at least two apprentices or trainees. Whilst many of her conclusions may turn out to be accurate, and perhaps my own efforts may agree as discussed later, it cannot be ignored that her discussion makes for a difficult read at times. It is peppered with gushing descriptions, moments of whimsy describing the mind of the painter (“loves depicting genre scenes”,<sup>182</sup> and “his unique personality... [and]... love for decoration”<sup>183</sup>) and it seems clear the author has not been able to separate her appreciation of the paintings from a necessity to apply a clear and logical approach.

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attributed to Room 2, as per the excavation reports, should correctly be included in the Room 4 fragments. This is not clear in Hollinshead's paper which names them as Room 2, as it predates Dumas' clarification.

<sup>176</sup> Hollinshead:1989:346-7

<sup>177</sup> Televantou:1992:149, 2000:839

<sup>178</sup> Televantou:1992:151, 2000:841

<sup>179</sup> Televantou:1992:151, 2000:842

<sup>180</sup> Televantou:1992:149, the ‘Miniaturist’, 151 the ‘Painter of the Ladies’,

<sup>181</sup> Televantou:1992:152, the ‘Painter of the Monkeys’, the ‘Painter of the Ladies with Bouquets’ and ‘Painter of the Crocus-Gatherers’, 151 the unnamed artist.

<sup>182</sup> Televantou:1992:152

<sup>183</sup> Televantou:1992:150



## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

There is nothing inherently wrong about assessing the paintings from an artistic standpoint, and utilising the associated language. Iliakis has done just that in an interesting article from the viewpoint of an artist.<sup>184</sup> It allows a fresh perspective on the likely reasons behind the compositional decisions of the painters. It seems possibly the closest we may get to understanding the mindset of the painter at the time; viewing his challenges and the method in which he faced up to them. That said, it does not aid in the determination of individual hands as such, and so that language should be restricted to that kind of study.

Where Televantou has been eager to attribute many of the works to minimal numbers of painters, Davis takes a much more circumspect approach.<sup>185</sup> Her methodology is more sound, and she refrains from making sweeping statements laden with flowery descriptions and fawning appreciations. Where she cannot make more certain attributions but can see a strong similarity in style she supposes the painters were from the same “school”. She studies ten different paintings and identifies up to twenty potential painters (see Table 6). I believe she does not envisage that there were actually that many, it is a reflection of her uncertainty in making more concrete attributions. There is more confidence in identifying subject specialists and a minimum of three Masters (a figure specialist responsible for the ‘Enthroned Lady’ or Goddess (Fig 19),<sup>186</sup> and three different terrain specialists, responsible for the ‘Spring Fresco’ terrain (Fig 8), the ‘Crocus-Gatherers’ terrain (Fig 18-20) and the terrain from the ‘Three Worshippers’ (female) in Xeste 3 (Fig 16-17).<sup>187</sup> Davis, like Televantou, has taken a broad approach to analysing the paintings, considering aesthetic qualities alongside observations of technical details and the specific details common to Morellian approaches. The difference arises in the nature of differentiating the painters. As a rule Davis sticks to the facts, to clear interpretation of the individual criteria, she does not make leaps of logic to further humanise the individual painters as Televantou is wont to do. However one of the most surprisingly aspects of her paper is her belief all the female figures were painted by different individuals, although she gives no real explanation for this reasoning. The treatment of these figures will be considered in depth later, but it is sufficient here to note the significance of this belief.

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<sup>184</sup> Iliakis:1978

<sup>185</sup> Davis:2000

<sup>186</sup> Davis:2000:863

<sup>187</sup> Davis:2000:862-864

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### **My Attributions**

Cherry's summation of current attributive efforts as applied to the Aegean and classical archaeology as a whole, in addition to his logical analysis of the individual author's approaches have given me much to consider in the process of constructing my own methodology.<sup>188</sup> In fact his final statement accurately sums up the issues I have already discussed and will be using to formulate my own approach:

“As a hardened prehistorian rather than an art historian, I recommend in future work some healthy servings of explicit methodology and larger doses of social archaeology, the results to be taken with regular pinches of salt”<sup>189</sup>

To analyse the paintings in an objective, thorough and well-rounded manner may mean applying several different methodologies individually, then drawing conclusions from the collected results. For example, as discussed with previous attribution studies in Chapter 3, there are to my mind clearly four distinct approaches; the Evocative elements, Aesthetic elements, Skills demonstrated and finally the Morellian elements.

Identifying an individual using just one of the above elements would be limiting in the extreme. In addition separating these elements is not without its challenges and not all are applicable to all the paintings available for analysis. All figurative paintings that have received significant attention in scholarship so far will be considered for attribution here. I will however make clear now my intention to leave the miniature paintings out of this discussion. Many of the details used in the Morellian method are inapplicable to that set of paintings due to scaling issues. In addition Morgan has clearly demonstrated one painter was responsible for this piece of work.<sup>190</sup> In keeping with the rest of the catalogue of work already studied, and the methodology given above, every painting will be subjected to two or more of the investigative elements.

Significant in its absence of course is iconography. This is because iconography is

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<sup>188</sup> Cherry:1992

<sup>189</sup> Cherry:1992:144

<sup>190</sup> Morgan:1988, Cf Televantou:2000

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

questionable as an aspect in the painters control; surely those that commission the painting dictate what message or design they wish displayed. I do not believe Televantou's method of dividing the paintings into stylistically significant groups has any particular grounding or merit. Yes there are differences in the paintings, however I do not believe they are significant enough to justify a division, or to use them as an indication of a stronger Minoan tradition amongst a number of the painters. As will be discussed in Chapter 6 I believe there is merit in the concept of a familial enterprise, any stylistic differences can justifiably be used as indications of individuals or *analytical individuals* at work.

### ***Evocative Elements***

This is perhaps the hardest section to verbalise: how do you quantify a painting by the way it makes you feel and react as surely that is personal to the individual viewer? Considering aspects such as the sense of movement and atmosphere is limiting but as this analysis will be used as only one element from which to draw conclusions it is valid. However I shall heed Renfrew's warning that familiarity breeds an atmosphere of connoisseurship,<sup>191</sup> and attempt to remain as unaffected in my language use as possible.

One of the most commented on criteria of an evocative nature is the sense of movement and undoubtedly the most significant example of this can be found in the Spring Fresco (Fig 8). This is conveyed almost exclusively by the treatment of the swallows (Fig 8, 9). Without considering the author of all the different painted elements within the composition, it is a reasonable observation that the swallows were the product of one painter, purely based on the consistent treatment of their movements within the painting as a whole. The way they have been painted shows an observation of nature, allowing a rendering so true it clearly depicts the birds in flight.<sup>192</sup> It has been suggested that the same painter was responsible for the Antelopes of Beta 1 (Fig 12) because of the movement their treatment suggests,<sup>193</sup> this is not an implausible suggestion for sure, although I am more tentative in my agreement based on the evocative elements alone. The Monkeys from Beta 6 (Fig 14) also

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<sup>191</sup> Renfrew:1991:110

<sup>192</sup> Hollinshead:1989:340

<sup>193</sup> Hollinshead:1989:346-7

## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

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evoke a sense of movement although I severely doubt the same painter is responsible for both works based on this reason alone.

A good example of using a ‘gut feeling’ to comment on a painting is the ‘Priestess’ (Fig 7) from the West House. Comparing this painting against all of the other female figures from Thera clearly demonstrates a significant difference in treatment. The smaller details will be mentioned in the last criteria discussion later. But it has to be mentioned here that this painting demonstrates the only ‘cartoon’ essence from the corpus of work on Thera, in the sense that it appears as an unfinished, unpolished immature style sketch. The heavy use of colour in comparison to later subtleties and the heavier line all contribute to this feeling.

A further example can be found in the two female figures from the House of the Ladies (Fig 5), paintings that Televantou has stated were from the earlier stages of wall paintings at Thera.<sup>194</sup> These paintings present a very limited two dimensional image, something that the painters of the later works show progression towards mastering. The faces of the women are sufficiently simple, as will be examined later, to have an almost cartoon like appearance. To me they have little complexity and look more like practice sketches than the accomplished works elsewhere at Akrotiri.

If coherence of content is a quality that can be labelled as ‘feel’ or ‘atmosphere’ then it is easy to assume the Crocus Gatherers (Fig 18-20) was the work of one individual. However taking a more practical logistical view on it would reveal the flaws in this idea; one painter could not possibly have completed the entire programme within the two to eight hour plaster drying window, even if it was divided up a wall at a time.<sup>195</sup> The same holds true for the Male Worshippers (Fig 15), Female Worshippers (Fig 16, 17) and the Ladies with Bouquets (Fig 21) from Xeste 3, all of these schemes have an ‘atmosphere’ of coherence to them but are beyond the scope of one painter in a limited time frame. Further criteria need to be applied to these to further establish a case of isolating individuals, unless we are to state only they were the work of an *analytical individual*,<sup>196</sup> which in this case feels like a premature conclusion when more precision should be possible.

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<sup>194</sup> Televantou:1992

<sup>195</sup> Chryssikopoulou:2000, also Cf Chapter 4.

<sup>196</sup> Muller:1977:44

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### *Aesthetic Elements*

As demonstrated in my Tables 5-8 I have divided this category into three sub-categories; composition, style and treatment of subject matter. As Friedlander has cautioned stylistic elements should not be used in isolation to build chains of attribution, it is a metaphorical house of cards and should be avoided at all costs.<sup>197</sup> However as an element of the argument it does have its strengths, indeed it can strengthen the observations made already above. Composition demonstrates a painter's response to the challenge of time and space; how they handle it indicative of skill and perhaps experience. In addition, as has been demonstrated with the Spring Fresco (Fig 8),<sup>198</sup> the elements within a composition can be used to determine application sequence and therefore identification of a minimum number of individuals based on the basic science of paint / plaster drying times.<sup>199</sup>

Considering the Swallows from the Spring Fresco further, it is interesting to examine the painting from a perceptualism standpoint and observe that the swallows are all similar in style, and that is the result of compounded memory.<sup>200</sup> If the painter is remembering every swallow he has ever painted as he paints another it will surely alter his perception of a swallow and in effect assure that his current painting will look similar in style. This in turn supports the Morellian methodology applied below. It also supports the attributional links between the Swallows from the Spring Fresco (Fig 9, 10) and those from Room 4 of Xeste 3 (Fig 11) and the unpublished Swallow from Room 3b where it appears to be part of the dress of one of the Ladies with Bouquets, all of which are sufficiently similar in aesthetic and evocative aspects to be products of the same painter in my opinion. It is easy to see why several scholars have identified this painter as a subject specialist.<sup>201</sup>

The terrain of the "Spring Fresco" (Fig 8-10) also provides comparable stylistic material. It has a stylistically distinct approach to an undulating landscape, which from the point of view of skills demonstrated is examined below, however the distinctive nature of this landscape allows a further potential attribution. The East Wall of Room 3a in Xeste 3 is

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<sup>197</sup> Friedlander:1942

<sup>198</sup> Hollinshead:1989, Davis:2000

<sup>199</sup> Chryssikopoulou:2000

<sup>200</sup> Ruskin:1856:26, Bryson:1991:61.

<sup>201</sup> Davis:2000:861

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

covered with part of a painting known as the “Crocus Gatherers” (Fig 18-20). The terrain under the feet of the female figures in this composition is strikingly similar in style to the Spring Fresco: it too undulates and is rendered in rounded sections demarcated by three colours with detailed vertical and curving lines suggesting rocky contours. The only stylistic differences are the lack of black outlines, as here the outlines are in a darker version of the main section colour, and also in the careful positioning of the terrain under the feet of the figures. It is sufficiently similar that I feel confident in agreeing with previous attributions that both terrains are the work of the same painter.<sup>202</sup> A similar landscape is apparent under the seated Female Worshipper (Fig 16b, 17b) however the fact a much smaller area is covered makes it harder to draw sound attributional comparisons, although should further joins become available I would be unsurprised to find this composition too belongs to the same painter.<sup>203</sup>

As stated already and examined more fully below, the two Ladies from the House of the Ladies (Fig 5) stand alone in their manner of representation and style. They have an unusual composition, manner of human depiction, and simplicity of execution. They have no direct comparative material within the rest of the Theran Fresco record from a stylistic, or in fact any other, point of view. This is unusual as nearly all of the Frescos I examine have similarities between them in one way or another.

### ***Skills Demonstrated***

This category is much easier to quantify and examine demonstrably. As demonstrated in the collated data of Table 5, there are five main sub categories here; the use of colour, incision, attempts at depth and perspective, draughtsmanship and brush work in general. I will look at the most obvious and perhaps the easiest of these first and examine the use of depth and perspective. Nearly all the paintings demonstrate this skill in at least a rudimentary fashion, however it is in the Spring Fresco (Fig 8), the female figures of the Crocus Gatherers (Fig 18-20) and the Female Worshippers (Fig 16,17) in Xeste 3 where the more innovative

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<sup>202</sup> Davis:2000:863, Hollinshead:1989:346

<sup>203</sup> Davis:2000 is more confident in attributing this work to a second painter who was also responsible for the terrain in the painting in Room 4 – the swallows and monkeys.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

attempts can be observed.<sup>204</sup> The swallows demonstrate successfully both depth with their overlapping wings, and perspective with the three quarter view of two swallows in particular (Fig 9a). The manner in which they are executed is consistent in the Spring Fresco (Fig 8), the several from Xeste 3 (Fig 11a, b) already published, and the 3 fragments from Xeste 3 currently awaiting publication that appear to be part of a ladies dress.<sup>205</sup> Based on my previous confidence in attributing them to the same painter and the addition of this assessment I feel confident agreeing with the current scholarly opinion that they were the work of one painter.<sup>206</sup> The swallow from Sector Alpha (Fig 11c) is to be excluded from this painter's work because it does not fit with any of the criteria applied, it is more in keeping with representations found on pottery, perhaps an example of an apprentice who worked in both crafts?

Regarding the attempts at depth and perspective with the human figures as mentioned above, the more complex poses are a real challenge, not one that is consistently tackled successfully. Most of the figures demonstrate a certain degree of skill in this regard, with overlapping limbs or almost three-quarter body profiles rendered by the position of the shoulders; for example three of the Male Worshippers (not the youth with a bowl) (Fig 15 a, c), of the Crocus Gatherers composition the Female facing the Goddess (Fig 20a), the Goddess (Fig 19) herself and the Female with Red Hair (damaged Crocus Gatherer ) (Fig 20b), and the Female Worshipper with a Necklace (Fig 16a ). This would suggest a team of painters with considerable representative skills. The more complex poses would suggest one or more likely two painters of developed skill and confidence in attempting innovative new approaches. For example with the Female Worshipper who is seated (or in pain) (Fig 16b) where the painter has attempted to render her crossing her legs at the knee, the Female Worshipper Climbing the Hill (Fig 18) in the Crocus Gatherers, where the furthest lifting leg has been compressed in length giving her leg a dwarfish rendering out of keeping with the rest of her body, and her companion (Fig 18) on the same wall where the painter has attempted to show her with a full frontal view squatting but succeeded in rendering no real sense of depth, just a body of inaccurate proportions.

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<sup>204</sup> Hollinshead:1989 first examined the treatment of the swallows of Delta 2 (Fig 9,10), and there is nothing critical to be said about her assessment She is regularly cited in other studies on this fresco and rightly so, Davis:2000:859.

<sup>205</sup> Observed with the kind permission of C.Doumas at the Akrotiri Conservation Workshops.

<sup>206</sup> Hollinshead:1989, Immerwahr:1990, Televantou:1992, 2000, Davis:2000

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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Draughtsmanship and brush work can sometimes be considered together. A good example of this would be the Antelopes from Beta 1 (Fig 12). The lines used to demarcate the shape of the animal have at times an almost calligraphic appearance to them. This has led them to be attributed to the painter responsible for the Swallows, as the treatment of the wings and tails have a similar appearance to them, in combination with the expression of movement again.<sup>207</sup> I find the case too weak to agree, but the similarities are such that it is not possible to dismiss the idea. I find the observation made by Getz-Preziosi appropriate in this case; she sensibly considers that two pieces of sculpture with similarities, but also enough inconsistencies to challenge a direct attribution, could possibly indicate two different stages of skill development in the same craftsman.<sup>208</sup> This seems a sound theory to apply to the painter in question here.

A cautionary point in regards to draughtsmanship, and the observation of calligraphic lines, should be raised here, in particular when considering the rendering of the faces from Xeste 3. Zacharioudakis has presented a very strong case for the use of curve templates to produce the curves found on the chins and noses, immediately negating any observations on line thickness or such pertaining to isolating individual.<sup>209</sup> As such all observations have refrained from examining this aspect of the human figures, in particular the female figures from Xeste 3 where the template is most apparent.

Perhaps the best example of utilising observations on the use of colour to isolate individuals is to be found when considering the Spring Fresco.<sup>210</sup> Here there is clearly a demonstrable difference in skill level when considering the three different walls as observed above in the Skills section. On the largest wall (west wall) the colours of the terrain, or rocks, are two shades of red, yellow and two shades of blue, and varied without pattern.<sup>211</sup> However on the south wall, as also observed by Davis,<sup>212</sup> the colours are repeated in sequence, red, yellow and blue in that order without variation. On the smallest north wall, the colours are

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<sup>207</sup> Hollinshead:1989:339, supported by Davis:2000

<sup>208</sup> Getz-Preziosi:1987:59

<sup>209</sup> Zacharioudakis:2000

<sup>210</sup> Davis:2000

<sup>211</sup> Davis:2000:863

<sup>212</sup> Davis:2000:863



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varied without pattern, but the painter has placed a large yellow section directly under the yellow stems of a lily plant. Whilst there are lily plants near, or even slightly above, yellow sections of rock work on the other walls it is clear it has been avoided as much as possible as Davis has also observed.<sup>213</sup> In addition the use of black lines to add definition and shape to the rocks, which I will treat as part of the colour analysis, demonstrates three varied approaches. The west wall has the largest variation of black shapes and lines which provide the most defined terrain, the south wall has less variation, whilst the north has few swirls and mostly sticks to black lines. This element was discussed in the previous section as composition truly falls into the Style category but it also has relevance here. Davis has concluded this demonstrates three painters of differing skill level, the west wall being that of a Master who was in charge of two apprentices.<sup>214</sup> Whilst I agree that as demonstrated above three skill levels are shown here, and that is sufficient evidence to identify three individuals, I would not choose to label the west wall's painter a Master and perpetuate the 'school' theory with its heavy Renaissance connotations simply for being the most skilled.<sup>215</sup> In keeping with my theory of a family at work (see Chapter 6 ), I would suggest a more experienced family member with two younger members, for sake of argument a father and two of children.

### ***Morellian Details***

The Theran frescos are perfect for this type of analysis due to their incredible state of preservation. Ears, eyes, hair, hands and feet are all clearly visible and interpretable. Not all of these elements are traditionally included in a Morellian approach, however I do believe there is information to be gleaned from studying them. I will consider each element within the individual painting, before looking for potential comparative matches amongst the Akrotiri corpus as a whole.

For example if we start with the ears (Fig 22-25) the first observation is that the Male Worshippers (Fig 15) have little to distinguish their ears and so cannot be used here. The ears from the Boxing Boys (Fig 13, 22c) are similar in their lack of definition although

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<sup>213</sup> Davis:2000:863

<sup>214</sup> Davis:2000:862

<sup>215</sup> Cf Cherry:1992, Zacharioudakis:2000

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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there is a hint of a line defining the helix of the ear on the better preserved, right facing boy, and he appears to have an earring, not unlike what is observed in the majority of the Xeste 3 female renderings (Figs 22-25). Only the Fishermen (Fig 6, 22b) go to show that the lack of definition amongst the other male figures ears is not indicative of a gender preference in representation. Here the left facing male (Fig 22b) has a thick dark line to demarcate the helix of the ear and a thinner line to indicate the inner rim of the antihelix, and the outer curve of the tragus.

For the paintings of the Female Worshippers (Fig 16, 17, 23) the ears are defined with a lighter shade of orangey-pink in keeping with their paler skin. All three worshippers are treated differently, which would agree with the theory proposed by Davis that they were painted by three different individuals.<sup>216</sup> The Female Worshipper with necklace (Fig 16a, 23a) has the heaviest outline in the darkest shade, with a slightly less defined tragus and curve to indicate the auricle. She wears a golden earring hoop with red decorative lines whereas the seated Female Worshipper (Fig 16b, 23b) has a lighter pink shade to define the helix, then a line that adjoins and curves to show the antihelix and down to suggest the tragus and on to show a disproportionately pronounced earlobe. This suggests it was distorted by the weight of her gold hoop earring, which is decorated with red spots to the outer rim. The third Female Worshipper (Fig 17a, 23c) in her shroud has only a pale pink line defining her tragus, which is perhaps suggestive of the opaqueness of her shroud. She too wears a golden hoop earring, although the lobe is on a lost fragment of the painting.

Before I continue and look at the ears of the other female figures, it is worth examining the treatment of the eyes, eyebrows and hairlines of these women, as these too are all distinctly different. Starting again with the Female with a necklace (Fig 16a, 27a), she has strong eyebrows (Fig 27a) rendered with a tapering line, calligraphic in nature. The surround of her eye (Fig 27a) is similar with a strong black line tapering at the outside edges, there are no markings to suggest eyelashes. The blue in the white of her eye is a typical idiom in Theran iconography.<sup>217</sup> The hair at her neck and by her ear is rendered with substantial lines not quite as dark as her hair and perhaps incisions or shading. The Seated Female Worshipper however has eyebrows with a strong lower line (Fig 27b), but the upper contour has little

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<sup>216</sup> Davis:2000

<sup>217</sup> Davis:1986:404

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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marks to suggest the individual hairs. This is mirrored on both lash lines of her eyes (Fig 27b) with small flicks of the brush to suggest eyelashes. In keeping with this greater degree of delicacy the hair line above her ear shows very thin delicate lines, and lines of even greater subtlety below her ear onto her neck. The shrouded female (Fig 17a, 27c) has similar eyebrows (Fig 27c) to the first female, but at the inner corner of her eye (Fig 27c) the rounded lines are much finer and they are much thicker at the outer join. These specific details would in my opinion strongly suggest three separate painters at work.

Having established a solid case for Morellian analysis of the ears, eyes and hair line, I will apply this to the other female figures from Xeste 3, starting with the Crocus Gatherers composition which has five female figures including the Goddess. The Crocus Gatherer who is turning (Fig 18, 25a) has ears that are clearly defined with a darker shade of the orangey-pink paint, the whole helix is defined in a thick line that curves round to join a thinner line tracing the inner line of the antihelix round to the tragus and lobe. There are small dots indicating the depth of the scapha. She wears a golden earring hoop with spikes with red crescent moons surmounting them, again the weight appears to distort her earlobe. Her eyebrow (Fig 27g) is a thick line tapering at either end, and her eye is delineated by a line that tapers only marginally at the inner corner, the outer corner being lost. The details here show strong similarity to the shrouded Female Worshipper (Fig 17a, 27c). I would suggest the same painter is responsible for both these figures, this is said tentatively to take into account the lesser state of preservation.

The Crocus Gatherer that is climbing (sometimes known as the young Crocus Gatherer Fig 18) has a faded ear (Fig 25b) so only the hint of a pink helix and antihelix is visible. She too wears a golden hoop that connects to the ear at a low enough juncture to suggest her lobe would also appear distorted. Her eyebrows and eyes (Fig 27h) have the same highly delicate treatment indicating eyelashes and hair on the upper brow line as is shown on the seated Female Worshipper (Fig 27b). The blue of her head, which is a Theran function indicating shaving,<sup>218</sup> does not allow for hairs at her neckline. There is sufficient remaining visible detail to the ear that I would feel confident attributing these paintings to the same painter. The Goddess (Fig 19) is significantly less preserved than either of these, being both

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<sup>218</sup> Doumas:1992:46, Davis:1986:401

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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fragmentary and faded in key places. There is a suggestion of the fine detail along the eye line and upper brow line (Fig 27e) that has been discussed as representing individual hairs on the figures above. Her ear (Fig 24b) shows a similar treatment in colour and placement of delineation but there is also perhaps a suggestion of a dotted line, these could arguably be stains on the plaster from the age. As it is not clear, I will very tentatively suggest the same painter was responsible for this figure too. This is further supported by the fact all three figures occupy separate walls so the issue of time to work the wet plaster is negated.

The Crocus Gatherer facing the Goddess (Fig 20) is also damaged, but her eye (Fig 24c) and ear (Fig 27f) are clear enough to be analysed. Her ear (Fig 27f) has perhaps the most simplistic of treatment amongst the female figures examined so far. It has a very thick line for the pinna and perhaps indicating the helix as well, and a slightly thinner line indicative of the auricle. There is no tragus, and only the outer edge of the lobe is demarcated, however it is less distorted than the others despite also sporting a gold hoop earring which is plain of any further decoration. Her eye (Fig 24c) has a delicate line for the join at the inner corner, and uniform thickness throughout the upper and lower line. Her brow line is tapered at both ends and perhaps significantly extends noticeably past the end of her eye which mirrors the treatment of the brow in the Female Worshipper with necklace (Fig 27a). There are no other strong similarities, except perhaps in the uniformity and thickness of the ear lines, however they have different markings. Arguably the differences could be an attempt to render individuals on the walls, perhaps as Televantou has said we are looking at the first portraits.<sup>219</sup> I am disinclined to agree wholeheartedly with this as it would negate the accuracy and usefulness of Morellian methods. The final Crocus Gatherer ( Fig 20b) also on the North Wall, but separated by a window, is damaged enough that her ear and the corners of her eye are not sufficient for examination, so rather than draw hasty conclusions I will not look at this figure further.

There are two groups of human figures still to examine; the Ladies with Bouquets (Fig 21) from Xeste 3 and the two figures from House of the Ladies (Fig 5). I have deliberately set these aside as they are significantly different in style and sophistication of execution. As mentioned previously the two figures from the House of the Ladies are considered to be

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<sup>219</sup> Televantou:1992:153

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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earlier, and demonstrate an almost cartoon like simplicity. This is not aided by the use of red spots to highlight the cheeks of both women, and the lack of detail in the hair, jewellery and clothing. The eyes (Fig 26f) are only preserved in the standing figure and it is rendered with a solid line that is too slender to show any real tapering at either end. The eye brow is similarly slender, but does taper at the end and runs past the end of the eye. This could be an earlier tradition carried over into later works as evidenced in the Crocus Gatherer facing the Goddess (Fig 27f) and the Female Worshipper with a necklace (Fig 27a) as discussed above. Only the right facing lady (Fig 5a, 22d) has an ear preserved which demonstrates only a curved line in an orange shade indicating the helix and perhaps the tragus and lobe. The details here are clearly less sophisticated and support the theory of being earlier paintings. As the figures are from separate walls I feel confident in attributing both to the same painter.

The Ladies with Bouquets (Fig 21) from Xeste 3 are in my opinion the equivalent of a hybrid between the older and the new. They are more elegant and sophisticated in appearance than the two figures just discussed, but do not demonstrate the significant level of detail or the movement towards stronger calligraphic lines found in the other female figures from Xeste 3. In addition from a purely Evocative point of view these representations fail to imbue the figures with a feeling of personality. There are remains indicating four women from this composition, one of which has swallows on her dress as previously mentioned, however only the two that have been published have faces intact to be examined here.<sup>220</sup> The Lady with Bouquet with the blue head band (Fig 21b) has an ear (Fig 22f) that shows no interior detail and is only delineated by a black line separating it from her head band, and she wears no earring. Her eyebrow is slender and no longer than her eye (Fig 26h), whereas her eye has a heavy upper line tapering to a point at both corners without the curve at the inner join seen in all the figures so far. She has delicate hair line above her ear and even more subtle ones below and along her neck. There are no shades in the whites of her eye. Her companion Lady with Bouquet with black beads (Fig 21a) is from the same wall and therefore cannot be by the same painter due to plaster drying times as already discussed (see Chapter 4) but exhibits almost identical features; her ear (Fig 22e) is a featureless void in an ear shape with no earring. Her eyebrow (Fig 26g) is rendered as a slender line of standard length that tapers at both ends and her eye has tapering points at both corners. The only difference is the upper

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<sup>220</sup> Doumas:1992:168-172

## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

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eyelid has a heavier line in the centre. This figure also has delicate hairs rendered above and below her ear. The only other differences are in the upper hairline where the second figure has a noticeable curve and the absence of lip colour. The similarities are so striking I find it hard to attribute them to separate painters and am tempted to question, as they're clearly fragmentary, if they were from the same wall and therefore same batch of plaster. As the stratigraphy at Akrotiri is not in question I must conclude they are the work of separate painters that clearly have very similar styles and training, which agrees with the family arrangement previously mentioned, and discussed more thoroughly in the next Chapter.

I would also suggest the author of the Miniature paintings was responsible for the Male Worshippers (Fig 15) in Xeste 3, but that is based purely on the lines of their bodies which strongly resemble the lines of the drowned bodies in the Flotilla Scene. It is possible however that this was a common idiom across the Aegean as the miniature figures from the MMIIIB 'Boys Playing Pavement Game' found in the north-west Fresco heap at Knossos also have similar simplicity of line.<sup>221</sup> They are in fact so similar it they were to be looked at in isolation of the composition they are found in it would be difficult to tell them apart.

I will briefly mention the 'Priestess' (Fig 7) from the West House. Her face carries no sense of personality from the treatment of her eyes (Fig 26a), her ear is the only one so far from Thera to be rendered in a solid red colour (Fig 22a), and the outlines of her face appear to be free from the formulaic curves indicative of a template as mentioned above. Her pose has no sense of movement (Evocative criteria) and there is little effort to render any depth with the treatment of her shoulders (Skill criteria). She is clearly the work of a less skilled painter, based purely on the cartoon element as mentioned earlier. Having examined the way the various individuals have treated the ears and eyes of the other human figures at Thera it can be argued soundly that this painter was significantly less skilled. This in my opinion is indicative of an early attempt by a youthful painter, corrections to the painting have previously been observed and support this conclusion.<sup>222</sup> The lack of the significant details found in the Xeste 3 female figures as shown above would also indicate the painting was completed before growth in skill and local idioms were developed. This is in keeping with Televantou's observation that the West House painting scheme was likely chronologically

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<sup>221</sup> Evans:1967:Plate C, fig 4.

<sup>222</sup> Iliakis:1978, Televantou:2000

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

earlier.<sup>223</sup> This conclusion it would explain the fixed positions of the Fishermen paintings (Fig 6), whose lack of movement and rigidity, in particular in their shoulders, is unusual for Theran paintings (Evocative and Skill criteria). The treatment of the ears here and the small bump at the end of the better preserved left facing fisherman's nose shows the usage of the standardised curves that can be seen in all figural representation in the years to follow.<sup>224</sup>

## **Concluding Comments**

Having applied a specific set of criteria to the paintings how many individuals can be observed? The problem is not in identifying individuals, or even *analytical individuals*, it arises when trying to attribute works of different subject matter to individuals; for instance it is clear one individual was responsible for the Swallows (Fig 9-11b), but what else can be attributed to him securely? There is a strong suggestion the Antelopes (Fig 12) were his earlier work, just like the earlier work of an unidentified individual can be seen in the Priestess (Fig 7) at the West House. In addition the treatment of the female figures in the House of the Ladies, the Lustral Basin and both Room 3a and 3b of Xeste 3 all are indicative in my view of different developmental stages of human representation.

Unsurprisingly the stronger cases for the identification of individuals come from the application of Morellian details. However the application of the other criteria does not hinder an investigative approach as long as objectivity is retained. In addition, in cases where the opportunity to follow a Morellian approach is scarce, for example the Spring Fresco (Fig 8) with limited small details, the other criteria can effectively aid in attributive conclusions being drawn. By applying this methodology I believe I can confidently identify a minimum of ten painters (see Table 3-5). The difficulty arises when trying to attribute work to painters in different stages of their painting 'career', as noted with the Swallows and Antelopes and the female figures. In this situation I would hesitate to build Friedlanders metaphorical house of cards in making attributional chains,<sup>225</sup> I would rather retain the more secure observations and await further information becoming available to make more concrete attributions. I have

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<sup>223</sup> Televantou:1992:834

<sup>224</sup> Birtacha & Zacharioudakis:2000

<sup>225</sup> Friedlander:1942

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

included a summary of ‘Cross Painting Attributions’ in Table 3 below and detailed them in Table 4.

	Paintings Examined	Attributions - Firm	Cross Painting Attributions	No of Individuals
Rickhuss:2013	15	18	5	10
Davis:2000	10	7	5	9-20
Televantou:2000	19	6	24	8+
Hollinshead:1989	6	5	8	7

Table 3. A summary of major attributional study findings.

I define a cross-painting attribution as identifying the same painter in different paintings, to clarify this includes individual aspects of a painting due to previously noted drying times. So for example, as I have identified the painter responsible for the seated Female Worshipper is also responsible for the young Crocus Gatherer and the Goddess, this is therefore three Cross Painting Attributions. As demonstrated, identifying the same hand between paintings is more challenging and this I feel is more illuminating in regards to the necessity of attribution studies than simply numbering the individuals identified. A lower number of Cross Painting Attributions does not indicate a flawed method, rather with the application of a strong methodology the results are more confident. From the eighteen paintings I examined I have determined that there are five instances of a different individual working on more than one painting (Table 4). This is based on direct observational evidence, as opposed to previous scholarly examinations that appear to be a lot more intuitive. This lack of clarity is most obvious when considering cross painting attributions where, for example, Televantou has the same individual responsible for sixteen different paintings (Table 3 and 4).

I conclude that ten individuals can clearly be identified from the paintings themselves.



## Identifying the Theran Wall Painters

	Rickhuss:2013	Davis:2000	Televantou:2000	Hollinshead:1989
Delta 2 - Spring Fresco - Swallows	R1	D1	T1	H1
Delta 2 -Spring Fresco - Lillies		D5		H2
Delta 2 - Spring Fresco - Terrain	R2 / 3 / 4	D2 / D3 / D4		H3 / 4 / 5
Beta 1 - Antelopes	R1	D1	T6	H1
Beta 1 - Boxing Boys			T6	
Beta 6 - Swallow	R9			
House of the Ladies - Bending Lady	R10		T2	
House of the Ladies - Vertical Lady	R10		T2	
House of the Ladies - Papyrus				
Beta 6 - Monkeys		D8/D9/D10	T5	
Xeste 4 - External Staircase			T8	
Xeste 3 - Male Worshipper 1 - Jug			T1	
Xeste 3 - Male Worshipper 2 - Cloth			T1	
Xeste 3 - Male Worshipper 3 - Child			T1	
Xeste 3 - Male Worshipper 4 - Bowl			T1	
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers – red hair/damaged		D11	T1	
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers - facing goddess	R8?	D12	T1	
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherer - turning	R7	D13	T1	H1
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers - young/climbing	R6	D14	T1	H1
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers - Goddess	R6	D15	T1	
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers - Terrain	R2	D2	T1	H6
Xeste 3 - Crocus Gatherers - Crocus'			T1	H7
Xeste 3 - Landscape with Reed and Ducks			T1	
Xeste 3 - Room 4 - Swallows	R1	D1		H1
Xeste 3 - Room 4 - Terrain	R2?	D6		
Xeste 3 - Female Worshippers - Seated	R6	D16	T1	H1
Xeste 3 - Female Worshippers - Necklace	R8?	D17	T1	H1
Xeste 3 - Female Worshippers - Shroud	R7	D18	T1	H1
Xeste 3 - Female Worshippers - Terrain	R2	D3? / D7?	T1	
Xeste 3 - Lady 1 - White lilies			T3	
Xeste 3 - Lady 2 - Swallow Dress	R1		T3	
Xeste 3 - Lady 3 - Blue Head band		D19	T3	
Xeste 3 - Lady 4 - Black Beads		D20	T3	
West House - Priestess	R5		T4	
West House - Fisherman facing left			T7	

Table 4. Cross Painting Attributions.

### Chapter 6

#### Identifying Socio-Economic Factors

##### Location – A place within the Aegean world

Taking a materialistic approach, what place did painters occupy within the framework of Aegean society?<sup>226</sup> The Linear B tablets were used, generally, for the recording of administrative details within the centrally organised system. As such it is unsurprising that ‘aesthetic sensibilities of artists or their patrons’ do not appear to have been recorded.<sup>227</sup> However they do indicate that some craftsmen were employed by the ruler,<sup>228</sup> and as such were recompensed in either land or rations.<sup>229</sup> This begs the question of how these people were to make up for the lack of one or the other, for example if they received rations, how did they procure land or pay the rent on land and vice versa?

Could this model work for painters 'moonlighting' for extra income by painting the walls of private homes? Were they perhaps contracted to the rulers for a certain period of time, short term or long, and beyond that were able to operate as free agents for hire? The number of these questions highlights the ambiguity of the situation due to the lack of clarifying evidence. It does not seem impossible that those contracted to the rulers were able to take on outside commissions. Perhaps a 'workshop' was based in the '*palaces*',<sup>230</sup> as a centrally administered business intended to take on outside commissions and generate income.

It is also observed in the Linear B archive that at various times craftsmen are noted as being absent which suggests they were absent with permission.<sup>231</sup> Does this indicate a general use of the workforce at peak agricultural seasons where the community as a whole operated as a unit for efficiency? Or perhaps it is a reference to the loan of craftsmen mentioned in

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<sup>226</sup> D'Alleva:2005:54

<sup>227</sup> Pollitt:1990:10

<sup>228</sup> Boulotis:2000:246, Gillis:1997:506, Davis:1986:401, Palaima:1997

<sup>229</sup> Gregersen:1997:397.Palaima:1997. Cf Alexiou:1987 for Egyptian craftsmen being paid in kind.

<sup>230</sup> The term palace is used for convenience, however should be understood that the usefulness of this term is under regular discussion but it is continually used from a traditional standpoint.

<sup>231</sup> Although there is a precedent in the Near East for craftsmen to 'escape' and have to be hunted down, perhaps this is the absence recorded here.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

records from the Near East.<sup>232</sup> The Mari archives and the Amarna tablets talk about the exchange of personnel of a certain skill level between rulers, often these craftsmen are on long term loan for a specific reason.<sup>233</sup> While there are no specific references to painters, it would seem this provides tantalising clues as to the appearance of Minoan style paintings in foreign contexts, such as those at Tell el Dab'a.<sup>234</sup> Further to this Niemeier has considered the historical accuracy of a mythological poem from Ugarit where the god Baal summons a craftsman from Kaphtor, traditionally accepted as Cyprus, to build him a palace.<sup>235</sup> He suggests that this might have basis in fact, and is indicative of a tradition of itinerant craftsmen within the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>236</sup>

Despite being aware that the painted remains are hardly likely to be representative of the quantity existing at the time, it is sensible to suppose that the painters could not have operated as a full time business. It is likely they were otherwise occupied, perhaps with using their painting skills on pottery as discussed in Chapter 4 or on stucco tables.<sup>237</sup> The social hierarchy suggested by the rations in the Linear B tablets would seem to indicate that those with a craft skill were unlikely to work in agriculture on a large scale as labourers. How, therefore, would painters fill their time? Whilst there are painting fragments found at new excavations throughout the Aegean for both the Minoan and later Mycenaean periods, and new joins found by the re-assessment of older excavations' finds,<sup>238</sup> it still seems highly likely based on the quantity of paintings from Thera, that the workload output of the wall-painters outside of Thera is under represented in the archaeological record.

### **Organisation – Workshop, school or family?**

The major stumbling block when considering the organisation of the painters is the lack of written records, or tangible evidence for actual workshops. The majority of articles covering attribution, or even the general nature of Aegean wall paintings, ascribe them to a workshop. However there is no conclusive evidence for a workshop in the physical sense,

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<sup>232</sup> Boulotis:2000, Zaccagnin:1983:250, Cline:1995:278

<sup>233</sup> Cline:1995:150, Matthews:1995:465, Zaccagnini:1983. They include skilled trades such as magicians and physicians.

<sup>234</sup> Bietak & Marinatos:1994, Marinatos:1998

<sup>235</sup> Niemeier:1991 1995; Watrous:1987, see also Astour:1973

<sup>236</sup> Niemeier:2000

<sup>237</sup> Boulotis:2000:854

<sup>238</sup> Chapin:2005

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unlike the production of pottery or metallic objects.<sup>239</sup> Whilst discussing the relationship between vase painters and silversmiths Vickers has noted that Pausanias records the artist Parrhasius working with Mys and Pheidias the metalworker in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>240</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4 there have been arguments for potters and painters sharing the same space and this would account for the painters invisibility in the archaeological record excepting the wall paintings they produced.

It seems a recurrent theme in the study of Aegean wall painting that there is an overwhelming temptation to use terminology relevant to Renaissance painting production because of the similarity in physicality of the paintings. It would be careless of me to apply a critical and carefully constructed methodology to the attribution of the Theran paintings and then just continue with the popularly used assumption in regards to the painter's organisation. So, what do we *know*? As demonstrated (Chapter 5), there were at least ten painters of varying skill at work in Akrotiri. Their period of production at the site of Akrotiri, across longer than one generation.<sup>241</sup> There are strong painting traditions across the neighbouring civilisations, both in and outside the Aegean, all of which display multiple motifs of an origin foreign to the site of discovery and demonstrate interconnections. These traditions span a long period of history and show no concrete evidence for a physical painting workshop. The discussion surrounding the movement of Aegean motifs and the painters who probably rendered them will be examined shortly, however what of Thera?

Part of the eagerness to accept a workshop as the organisational arrangement on Thera is the evidence for skill development and tutelage. As mentioned, the "Priestess" (Fig 7) fresco has clear corrections, and it is an uninspired and somewhat immature representation of a person compared to the sophistication clearly demonstrated elsewhere at Akrotiri. This encourages the use of the term 'apprentice' which automatically recalls the Renaissance workshop system, and with that the term Master, something I am hesitant to adopt with the ease Televantou has.<sup>242</sup> Although based on Televantou's observations her workshop would have only had eight individuals, one of which was responsible for almost two thirds of the

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<sup>239</sup> Cf Evely:1988 for criteria for the excavator looking to identify a workshop.

<sup>240</sup> Vickers:1985:126 Cf Paus.1.28.2

<sup>241</sup> Televantou:2000

<sup>242</sup> Televantou:1992, 2000.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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known paintings!

In the case of some scholars the use of the term ‘school’ seems to be a convenient handle to apply when distinctions can be made between paintings, but they are unhelpful in making a decisive identification of an individual, Davis in particular uses this convention.<sup>243</sup> The difficulty in identifying the work of an individual due to very similarly rendered details such as eyes and ears suggests painters that worked closely together and were familiar with each other. This close relationship is clearly demonstrated in the terrains of the “Spring Fresco” (Fig 8-10) and the “Crocus Gatherers” on the east wall (Fig 18-20), where the painter has overlapped the lilies in the “Spring Fresco”, but carefully met the feet of the female figures without overlap, an improvement by the same artist.<sup>244</sup> It is easy to understand the wish to ascribe a narrative of interaction and emotion driven decision making as Hollinshead, Televantou and Davis have all done in examining the treatment of the swallows (Fig 9,10) in the “Spring Fresco”.<sup>245</sup> For example Davis believed the painting of the swallow that overlaps the lily on the north wall is a statement of defiance and outrage that the lily painter has not left sufficient room for the painter of the swallows.<sup>246</sup> In examining the paintings and identifying individuals we naturally personalise them.

However, what if all this evidence of a close relationship and multiple painters from across multiple generations is not pointing to a workshop but, as already alluded to, a family enterprise? Dickinson has suggested that the craft work in the Bronze Age Aegean could have been similar to that of a modern day Indian village where products were made within a familial environment with different members responsible for different stages of production.<sup>247</sup> Cavanagh and Laxton’s examination of Mycenaean Tholos Tombs lends itself to the idea of a family enterprise based on extraordinary similarity of construction and the localised nature of the finished product.<sup>248</sup> In the ancient Near East families did keep certain craft occupations from generation to generation.<sup>249</sup> In this region familial business operations are recorded in the Near East where trade co-operatives functioned and the possibilities of guilds has even

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<sup>243</sup> Davis:2000

<sup>244</sup> Davis:2000:864

<sup>245</sup> Televantou:2000, Hollinshead:1989, Davis:2000

<sup>246</sup> Davis:2000:863

<sup>247</sup> Dickinson:1994:96

<sup>248</sup> Cavanagh&Laxton:1981:132

<sup>249</sup> Mathhews:1995:463

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been suggested,<sup>250</sup> although evidence is sketchy at best here and non-existent in the Aegean world. Due to the links between civilisations in the MBA and LBA it is more than possible that inferences can be drawn from one in the pursuit of identifying an aspect of another. Consideration of the Theran artists from this organisational standpoint allows the applicability of the *analytical individual* explanation for similarity in paintings where it may be impossible to ascribe them to the same person for technical reasons such as drying times of plaster (see Chapter 4).<sup>251</sup> By assuming Family as the organisational system in operation it also helps to further distance us from assuming Renaissance connotations, and avoid the possibility of Aegean scholarship devolving into arguments of attribution surrounding apprentices and Masters as found in the catalogues of Rembrandt and Michaelangelo.<sup>252</sup> It cannot be overlooked that there is currently no evidence that there was a sufficient output to support more than one unit or group of painters working together, therefore multiple, competing workshops are very unlikely. I have clearly identified ten different painters at work on the eighteen paintings examined, this number is sufficiently small to agree with a family enterprise. I believe in the case of Thera where there was no palatial control that a familial enterprise has a much theoretical merit as that of a workshop.

### **Mobility – Painters on the move?**

If wall-painting originated in Crete and we find evidence of Aegean style paintings elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, then there must have been some method of transmission. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that there was a constant movement of people around the Eastern Mediterranean during the later Bronze Age.<sup>253</sup> However, determining the place of craftsmen within this state of flux is not so easily accomplished.<sup>254</sup> It is becoming more academically acceptable to conclude that the painters did indeed move within the limits of their known political and geographical spheres.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Matthews:1995:463, Foster:1987, Soldt:1995

<sup>251</sup> Muller:1977

<sup>252</sup> Cherry:1992:130

<sup>253</sup> Bas:1967, 1986, Boulotis:2000, Matthews:1995.

<sup>254</sup> Crowley:1989:288, Cf Bas:1967, 1989 for evidence from Bronze Age shipwrecks, Cf Zaccagnini:1983, for evidence of movement of personnel recorded in the Amarna tablets, Cf Strom:1984, Sakellarakis:1984 for evidence of representatives of other civilisations in Egyptian tomb art.

<sup>255</sup> Alexiou:1987; Bloedown:1997; Boulotis:2000; Crowley:1989; Foster:1987; Marinatos:1998; Niemeier:1995; Shaw:1997; Winter:2000, Zaccagnini:1983. In fact Popham has said that it is clear that ‘artists’ emigrated from

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The evidence for itinerant painters is most apparent in the form of the transmission of the iconographical motifs, which are part of the Aegean artistic *koine*.<sup>256</sup> These can be explained by the presence of traded items carrying key motifs that are highly individual and identifiable. In addition the concept of pattern books has been raised numerous times,<sup>257</sup> which would explain the transmission of particular idioms throughout the Aegean. For example, an itinerant painter with a pattern book in Egypt could, in theory be responsible for the wall paintings at Tell el Dab'a.<sup>258</sup> It is a tentative suggestion at best considering at least one of the motifs could possibly have had specific religious connotations kept for high profile decoration only, such as in a palace, as Shaw has suggested.<sup>259</sup> So, can pattern books be dismissed? One of the significant aspects of Theran individuality is being unable to find significant similarities outside of Thera that cannot be explained away by motifs found on pottery, for example the Swallow jug from Grave Circle B at Mycenae.<sup>260</sup> However there is a striking similarity between the rocky landscape that makes the Spring Fresco so distinctive and a fragmentary painting found in a plaster dump at the LHIIIB palace at Pylos, recently re-examined by Chapin.<sup>261</sup> The similarity lies in the composition, style and colours utilised, although the scale is much less monumental and the execution poor in comparison to the Spring Fresco. The divergence in chronology doesn't allow for any concrete conclusions to be drawn from this however it is worth considering as a possible building block in the pattern book argument.

The wall paintings from Tell el Dab'a, recently contextually radiocarbon dated to the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>262</sup> could be the work of Theran painters on the move. When the volcano erupted on Thera it appears that the populace had enough prior warning to flee since there are no significant human remains found so far. Based on the chronological framework previously established (Chapter 2) it is possible that the painters took their skills and tools and spread

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Crete, Popham:1967:343

<sup>256</sup> Boulotis:2000

<sup>257</sup> Boulotis:2000

<sup>258</sup> Bietak & Marinatos:1994, Marinatos:1998

<sup>259</sup> Shaw:1997

<sup>260</sup> Immerwahr:1990

<sup>261</sup> Chapin:2005:126

<sup>262</sup> Kutschera *et al*:2010:6 Table 1a. The stratigraphic sequence C3 where the paintings are reported to have been found has been dated to the calibrated range of 1636 – 1525 for sample AMS-48 and 1726-1527 for sample AMS-49. This is a sequenced range of 1665-1543 and 1668-1546 respectively.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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across the Mediterranean. After all in the same way Immerwahr has already suggested that the Ayia Triada sarcophagus was the work of painters fleeing Knossos when it was destroyed.<sup>263</sup> The Minoanising elements of the frescos at Yarim Lim (Alalakh) and Tel Kabri could be the product of these fleeing painters. Both groups of paintings come from Palaces that were destroyed late in the 17<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries, which would make them contemporary with the Volcanic eruption (see Chapter 2).<sup>264</sup>

It has been argued that craft tools were precious objects handed down between generations, which would explain the absence of painting tools discovered at Thera.<sup>265</sup> If the painters were several family units they may have taken their pattern books and settled on the Greek mainland although wall paintings found here are from a much later date so there are no direct links, just speculation. The same family units could equally have travelled south to Egypt. The work of the later generations may have harkened back to Minoan artistic traditions previously ignored on Thera, but re-established on new ground elsewhere, explaining the Minoanising elements found at Tell el Dab'a. This would also explain why there has currently been no green pigment found at Tell el Dab'a despite there being an available source of green through wollastonite or 'green frit' utilised in Egyptian painting. Instead green is rendered in the conventional Aegean manner of layering blue and yellow.<sup>266</sup>

As previously mentioned there are traces of mobile craftsmen in the historical and mythical record for the Near East. The importance of itinerant craftsmen to this study is not just in the manner of the emergence of wall-painting on Thera, but as part of the larger sphere of studies in Aegean prehistory, it is indicative of the nature of political organisation at the time. What causes a craftsmen to become itinerant? Was he on the move from self-motivation or as part of a political or social agenda?

On a recent research trip to the fresco workshops at Akrotiri I was fortunate enough to examine an unpublished fresco from the first floor of Xeste 3 in the process of restoration. As the publication of this piece is forthcoming I am unable to say much about it other than that it

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<sup>263</sup> Boulotis:2000, Immerwahr:1990:3

<sup>264</sup> Evely:1999:47-48,Bietak:2007:271, Niemeier:199:190

<sup>265</sup> Brysbaert&Vetters:2010:26

<sup>266</sup> Brysbaert:2002:101



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is exciting in its distinct stylistic parallels with Egyptian wall painting idioms. If further study and investigation of this fresco confirms this observation then the ramifications for a study such as mine will be greatly significant. Perhaps a visiting Egyptian painter forged a relationship with the painters at Akrotiri, in essence providing the destination to which the fleeing Theran painters headed? It is of course speculation however there is much scope for further research and development of this idea with the publication of these paintings.

### **Management - Controlled or in control?**

On the basis of the distinct individuality of the Theran painting corpus (Chapter 1) and the development of representational skill sets (Chapter 5 with reference to the 'Ladies with Bouquets' in particular) I believe there are good grounds for suggesting that the Theran painters were autonomous on a creative level, and were, against all evidence from artistic comparanda within the Eastern Mediterranean, striving for aesthetic ideals for which they would wish to be recognised. It is known that painters and craftsmen in other civilisations at the time were operating under iconographical controls that meant they did not embrace the notion of autonomous creativity, since they had no originality to lay claim to.<sup>267</sup> This concept of identity - how the craftsmen considered themselves - is the key difference between Theran painters and their contemporaneous colleagues in Crete, in my opinion. It is accepted that the Theran artistic style is completely different from the styles on Crete and the Mainland. The earlier Minoan paintings do have a strong inclination towards nature, however they are highly stylised. The later Minoan paintings exhibit the stiff, less skilled style, seen in the Mycenaean art of Mainland Greece. The only real element that can be seen as similar is the use of a miniature style as mentioned above.

It could be claimed that the notion of creative pride, of a claim to originality as is the wont of more modern artists, did not exist at the time.<sup>268</sup> However there is evidence from a Stela from Middle Kingdom Egypt of a craftsman boasting of his skills.<sup>269</sup> Interestingly this individual, Irtisen, while proud and boastful of his numerous skills, but does not name any

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<sup>267</sup> In reference to Egyptian wall-painting cf Mekhitarian:1978:18; Drenkhahn:1995:339

<sup>268</sup> Burford:1972:11 for the unusual occurrence of Euthykartides in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC signing a sculpture he created.

<sup>269</sup> Drenkhahn:1995:339, Stela no C14, held at the Louvre.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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particular work he completed, or any piece of work completed by a team of craftsmen to which he belonged. This demonstrates the type of pride I believe was in existence amongst the Theran painters', pride in creativity in skill and innovation, but as yet not sufficiently evolved and independent in thought as to claim with a signature.<sup>270</sup> Of course, it is always possible that a particular painter's work was as recognisable to an Aegean contemporary as a Michaelangelo was to any individual in the more privileged circles of the Renaissance, or the works commonly considered signature pieces by Van Gogh are to us today. The Theran painters were as close to modern day concepts of 'artists' as is possible for the time.

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<sup>270</sup>Cf Renfrew:1994, 1998; for discussions on the evolution of cognitive thought.

### Chapter 7

#### Conclusions

It was my intention at the outset of this study to identify the creators of the Thera wall paintings, and then to place them within a geographical and socio-economic framework. In essence to provide a much overdue 360° view on this elusive sub stratum of Thera society. As part of this examination I discussed the state of the complex Aegean chronology debate and provided a framework based on careful consideration of the Relative situation in combination with the, in my opinion, sound radio carbon dates from both Thera and Egypt (Table 1). The result is in favour of a High Chronology that significantly alters previous debate on the relationship between Thera and the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean.

For the attributions aspect of my study I carefully examined and critically reviewed previous scholarship (Tables 3, 4, 6-8). In doing so I was able to set clear boundaries in regards to terminology and establish a purely objective methodology. The importance of this cannot be understated as I believe previous attempts at attribution have failed to approach the paintings with sufficient objectivity and to analyse without the bias of modern attitudes. I considered eighteen different paintings and feel confident in my identification of ten individuals as their creators. In addition to this I applied my methodology rigorously (Table 5) and attributed eighteen paintings to these individuals of which I feel sure five are Cross Painting Attributions (see Table 3-5). During my discussion I have concluded that Televantou's previous attributions,<sup>271</sup> are unsound and the product of weak reasoning and emotional bias. However Davis was much more methodical in her approach, if very tentative and hesitant at time, and I agree with several of her conclusions.<sup>272</sup>

I believe that the painters on Thera were autonomous, and independent of any external control. They may well have been the multi-generational product of a Minoan wall-painting tradition, where painters were trained at 'palatial' centres before being sent out into the Aegean as a method of propaganda dissemination.<sup>273</sup> Shaw makes a plausible argument for this, but

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<sup>271</sup> Televantou:1992, 2000

<sup>272</sup> Davis:2000

<sup>273</sup> Boulotis:2000

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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perhaps the most interesting point she considers is the reaction to a central authority dictating common idioms.<sup>274</sup> For example, the houses and Palaces in Crete that did not include bull-leaping, or human figures were either excluded, or the painters instructed not to display them. If the Palace had a monopoly on such iconography it would explain its absence of the monopoly or the iconography in the Cyclades. Taking the idea of a central artistic control further an interesting notion is that the painters on Thera were those that escaped the creatively confining conditions of the Minoan central authority and made their way to a more liberal atmosphere. What better place than a melting pot of cultures, such as the trading entrepôt of Thera?<sup>275</sup> After all, the evidence from the Egyptian Stele suggests that artistic pride is a feasible concept for the time. Following this train of thought it is tempting, to draw comparisons between Thera and the bohemian atmosphere of Montmartre in Paris in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>276</sup> Perhaps it would not be too much of a reach to call Thera a painters' colony.

In addition I have shown that the absence so far of tangible evidence for a workshop is highly suggestive of a family unit that fled Akrotiri before the final destruction.<sup>277</sup> These painters took their skill and tools and spread across the Mediterranean, perhaps creating or siring the creators of the iconographically similar paintings we see in Tell el Dab'a, Yarim Lim, Tell Kabri. Perhaps they also went to the Greek Mainland and were sufficiently influenced by local conditions that later generations of painters had little in common with their Theran ancestors. The concept of a single family unit also corresponds to the fact that there was only a finite amount of work available in Akrotiri, and seems more likely than Boulotis' idea of émigré painters searching out commissions in a competitive market.<sup>278</sup>

To conclude, the Theran wall paintings were completed by a family unit of approximately ten individuals, whose artistic heritage derived from Minoan Crete, and whose future influence spread across the Eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>274</sup> Shaw:1997:501

<sup>275</sup> Boulotis:2000 considers Thera may have been a metropolis of painters.

<sup>276</sup> Seigel:1999

<sup>277</sup> Estimates place Akrotiri at 10-15% excavated. pers comm.. Dr.K.A.Wardle:2013.

<sup>278</sup> Boulotis:2000:856, cf Davis:1984:160 for market considerations in the Aegean.

**Tables 5-8**

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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**Figures**

## Identifying the Theran Wall Painters

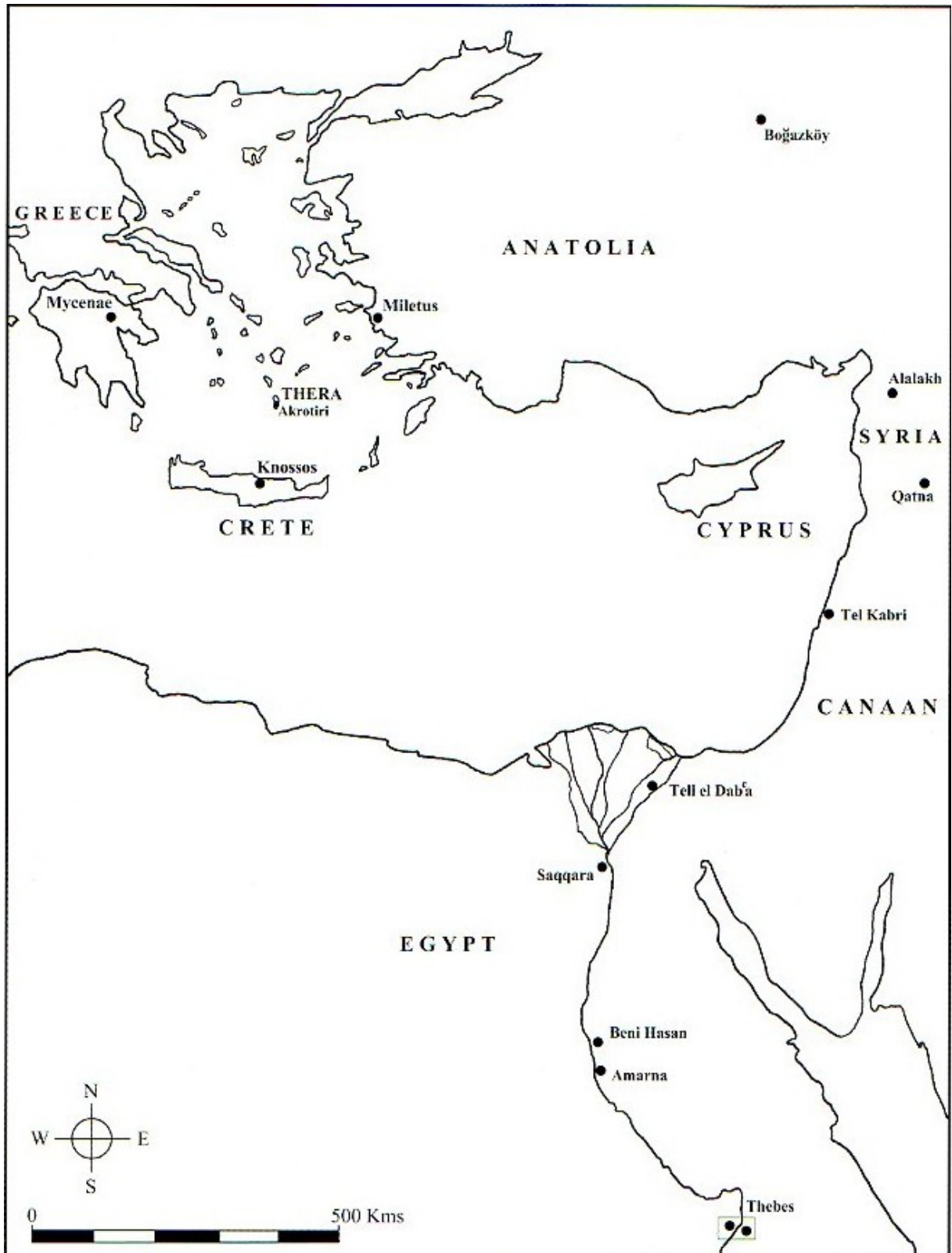


Fig 1. Map of Eastern Mediterranean with principal sites marked. Taken from Morgan:2005

























































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Fig 26. Eyes a) “Priestess” from West House. b) Right Facing “Fisherman” from West House. c) Left Facing “Fisherman” from West House. d) Left Facing “Boxing Boy” from Beta 1. e) Right Facing “Boxing Boy” from Beta 1. f) Left Facing Lady from House of the Ladies. g) “Lady with Bouquet” with black beads and h) “Lady with Bouquet” with Blue Headband both from Room 3b Xeste 3. Taken from Doulas:1992.

## Identifying the Theran Wall Painters

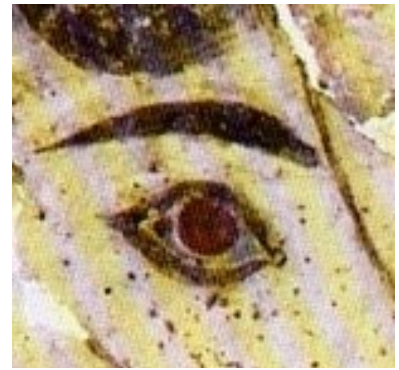
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a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.



g.



h.

Fig 27. Eyes. a) Female Worshipper with Necklace. b) Seated Female Worshipper. c) Shrouded Female Worshipper. Lustral Basin Xeste 3. d) Damaged Crocus Gatherer facing away from Goddess. North wall Room 3a Xeste 3. e) Goddess. North wall Room 3a Xeste 3. f) Crocus Gatherer facing Goddess. North wall Room 3a Xeste 3. g) Crocus Gatherer that's turning. East wall Room 3a Xeste 3. h) Young Crocus Gatherer / Climbing Crocus Gatherer. East wall Room 3a Xeste 3. Taken from Dumas:1992

**Appendices**



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### **Catalogue of the Theran Frescos**

As minimal description has been given during the discussion a brief outline of each Theran Fresco can be found below with key characteristics and associated suggested further reading as appropriate. I have included the page reference and plate numbers for Doumas' *The Wall Paintings of Thera* as it is the comprehensive guide to Akrotiri's iconographic programme and has exceptional photographic reproductions of the paintings.<sup>279</sup>

#### **House of the Ladies**

Northern most building currently excavated at Akrotiri. A large building with a minimum three storeys, it is significant for having the only known light well at Akrotiri.<sup>280</sup>

#### ***Papyrus/ Sea Daffodils.***

Location: Room 1, West Section, North, West and South walls.

State of Preservation: South wall most intact, remainder is large fragments.

Description: Tripartite division with central section taking up the majority of the wall and containing the main decorative element. The top section is a yellow/ brown colour, divided from central section by multiple bands of blue, white and red of differing widths. The lower zone is an undulating band of the same yellow/brown that would appear to indicate a terrain of sorts. The central section contains plants which have been identified as both *Pancreantium* Lilies (Sea Daffodils) and Papyrus, however Doumas favours the Sea Daffodil. Each plant has three stalks rising from a nest of six leaves divided in half by the stalks. Each of the flower heads has seven yellow crescents surmounting them. The plants are stylised and show very little variation between the four represented across the three walls.

Ref: Doumas:1992:32-43. Plates 2-5. Here Fig 4.

#### ***Bending Lady***

Location: Room 1, East section, North Wall. Currently on display at the Museum of Prehistoric Thera

State of Preservation: Good, two thirds remain. Missing is her face, her lower arms, a small section of her back and her surrounds above her head and to the front of her.

Description: Stylised bare breasted female figure facing to the right and bending forward at an

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<sup>279</sup> Doumas:1992.

<sup>280</sup> Doumas:1992:33



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almost 90degree angle. The angle of the bend has caused her large breast to hang forwards in a pendulous manner. She is wearing a tiered skirt of the Minoan fashion in white with blue and red banding, and a white open fronted jacket with blue bands on the sleeves. She has long dark hair and wears gold hoop earrings, and appears to have a large red dot on her cheek. She appears to be bending towards another female figure that appears to be seated facing her, however all that remains is part of her lower skirt. The representation is highly stylised and shows little finesse regarding the details of her hair and ear. She is surrounded by a regularly repeating blue diamond which links to the next diamond by a diagonal line of red circles. Here too the decorative scheme is tripartite with a banding of blue, red, orange and white bands distinguishing the upper register, and a dark band providing the lower register serving as a floor for the female figure to be painted on.

Doumas:1992:32-43. Plates 7, 10, 12. Here Fig 5a.

### ***Vertical Lady***

Location: Room 1, East section, South Wall

State of Preservation: More fragmentary than the other lady. She is missing her forearms, the lower right part of her face and neck, her front of body and skirt. Surroundings also fragmentary with the register above, below and behind only partly present

Description: Left facing and standing up right, this female figure wears similar style clothing to the other figure. Her skirt and jacket are predominantly yellow/brown with red and blue banding on the white upper tier of her skirt. She also has simply treated long dark hair, a gold hoop earring and a red circle on her cheekbone. She is looking upwards and the details of her features are simple and plainly rendered. Above her head there is the remainder of what has been interpreted as an undulating light blue band with dark edges. This separates the figure from the repeating blue diamond – red circle pattern. There are also remains of a multi coloured multi band division above this pattern as with the other figure. The lower register here however is a blue coloured thick band above a brown base. To her rear (right) is a vertical brown band.

Ref: Doumas:1992:32-34, Plates 6, 9, 11. Here Fig 5b

### **The West House**

A building to the North West of the excavated area on the north of Triangle Square, this

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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building had three stories in parts with two staircases. One of the significant features is the very large window (3.20m wide) overlooking the square from Room 3 on the first floor. Loom weights were found in large quantities in this room suggesting its original purpose. Excepting Room 4a the entirety of the West Wing of the house was decorated with wall-paintings.

### ***Fishermen***

Location: Room 5, North and West walls.

State of Preservation: Left facing figure is almost complete, he is just missing small parts of his feet, the right facing figure is poorly represented and highly fragmentary. He is missing one foot, all of his legs except his knees, half of his back, the back of his neck and head.

Description: Both figures are the central motif in a tripartite register. The upper register on both walls is the same; a dark upper band followed by a band of blue, yellow and then red. The narrow bottom register that the figures stand on is dark. The spectacularly well preserved left facing figure is rendered from the side, however his shoulders face the viewer to allow each arm to be visible as he holds up a brace of fish in each hand. The left brace contains seven fish of a blue and gold colour and the right brace has five of the same fish. His head is turned to the left following the direction of his lower body, his gaze is towards the floor. His figure is simply painted in dark red (as all males are in the Aegean) with no muscular distinction or outline except for his genitals. He wears a thin yellow chain or rope around his neck with a tie to the rear. His head is shown in the peculiar Aegean fashion as blue to indicate shaved, except for two locks of dark wavy hair of a mid length. These are to the rear of his head by his crown so it flows around the curve of his skull, and the front so the lock falls towards his forehead.

The right facing fragmentary figure is shown in full profile as he grips his brace of three larger white and blue fish in both hands. He too has a blue shaven head with two locks of hair in the same place, although they are much harder to distinguish. This figure has a much heavier outline to his eye giving him a shocked look, the other figure has a more relaxed face with a small upturning to the corner of his mouth leaving a sense of amusement. Both fishermen are treated simply, with greater detail being used to render the fish than the boys.

Ref: Dumas 1992: 44-97, Plates 18-23. Here Figs 6a-b.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### *The Priestess*

Location: Room 5, South-east portal, East door jamb.

State of Preservation: Exceptional, complete except for a small portion of her feet.

Description: Figure faces left towards the opening of Room 5, “as if to enter” according to Doumas.<sup>281</sup> She holds a firebox in one hand which has a substance interested as a glowing charcoal, her other hand sprinkles something over it, interpreted as incense.<sup>282</sup> Her representation is heavy handed in both colour usage and manner of draughtsmanship. Her robe is a solid yellow colour with blue and white banding and overall it has no real shape and exposes none of her body bar her neck, forearms and feet. She wears a blue band round the neck, and a heavy gold hoop hangs from her ear, it has a star shape apparently suspended in the centre. She has the same convention of a blue head to indicate it being shaved, with several locks of dark hair along the top of her head which is rendered in profile. Her ear and lips are painted a heavy block red and her eye has minimal definition, no pupil or white of the eye being apparent in the reproduced photographs. A part of her arm and hand have been incised into the plaster.

Ref: Doumas:47, Plates 24-25. Here Fig 7.

### *The Miniature Frieze*

Location: Room 5 North, South and East Wall – arguments for the West Wall also. Frieze occupies the upper register of the room above the Fishermen and various architectural features.<sup>283</sup>

State of Preservation: North and West fragmentary and poor, South and East almost complete in places, larger fragments in others.

Description: The Miniature Frieze is commonly divided into sections and named for the narrative they depict, thus:

- West wall: Town I (Poorly preserved),
- North wall: Town II ‘Assembly on the Hill’ and ‘Shipwreck’,
- East wall: Town III and the ‘Nilotic Scene’, the thematic joins at each end are questionable due to preservation issues,<sup>284</sup>
- South wall: Town IV and the ‘Flotilla’.

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<sup>281</sup> Doumas:1992:47

<sup>282</sup> Doumas:1992:47

<sup>283</sup> Doumas:1992:47, Cf Televantou:1990:323

<sup>284</sup> Doumas:1992:48

## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

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Ref: Doulmas:1992:47-49. Plates 26-48.

### *Ikria*

Location: Room 4 and 4b, middle zone

State of Preservation: East and North fragmentary, South and West good.

Description: 7 different features, all with an ox-hide like bottom half, divided by three vertical posts with split curved capitals. Half way up the vertical post a horizontal post connects all three, from which are suspended various garlands. Whilst there is no definitive answer on the function of the depicted feature, Doulmas considers it most likely the cabin shaped structure was a feature on a boat to provide a captain with protection, an open cabin.<sup>285</sup> This is based on similar structures visible on ships in the Miniature frieze.

Ref: Doulmas:1992: Plates 49-62

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<sup>285</sup> Doulmas:1992:49

## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

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### **Building Complex Delta**

A complex of fourteen rooms discovered so far set on the East side of Telchines Street in the centre of the excavated area. Excavation is incomplete to date for this complex but four cardinally aligned entrances have been found. The presence of multiples entrances, and double walls, has led to the conclusion this was four separate units.<sup>286</sup> Room Delta 2 on the ground floor and Delta 17 on the first floor have provided the only evidence of wall painting so far. There is much focus on Delta 2, its contents and the seeming hasty architectural restructuring are possible evidence of a change in function after one of the destructive earthquakes in LCI.<sup>287</sup>

### ***Spring Fresco***

Location: Room Delta 2, South, West and North Walls.

State of Preservation: Found in situ with only small areas of damage.

Description: Covering two complete walls, and one wall interrupted by a doorway, this painting occupies almost the entire all, without tri-partite division as seen in other paintings at Thera. There is however a shelf dividing the upper register of the West wall. Composition depicts a rocky landscape rendered in red, yellow and blue rocky outcrops that sprout lily plants around and amongst which fly seven swallows in singles or pairs. The South wall has three outcrops and six lily plants, all of which have triple stalks with lilies in various state of blooming. There are two single swallows, one in side profile facing left and another painted from underneath as it swoops up under a lily blossom. The West wall is the largest of the three and also has three rocky outcrops, with seven lily plants. There a three swallows, a pair flying in a formation towards each other, one from below and one from above, and single bird shown from the side facing left. The North wall is interrupted on the left by a small doorway, but has two less definitive rocky outcrops with 5 lily plants. The two swallows here are central placed facing each other almost touching at the beak. All walls have the same three colours used in the landscape, the same yellow plant stalks and red lily blossoms, with blue and white swallows with red faces set against a plain plaster backdrop.

Ref: Doulas:1992:98-100. Plates 66-76. Here Figs 8-10.

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<sup>286</sup> Doulas:1992:99

<sup>287</sup> Hollinshead:1998, Marinatos:1993 ###

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### ***Building Beta***

A large badly damaged building in the centre of the excavated area near the south end of Telchine Street. Building is crossed on its south eastern side by a modern ravine, the seasonal deluges that pass through the ravine are responsible for the damage to the complex. Rooms Beta 1 and 6 on the upper storey are the only ones with preserved wall paintings to date. The contents indicate it was likely a private residence.

### ***Boxing Boys***

Location: Room Beta 1, upper storey, South wall between doorways into Beta 1a and 1b, middle zone.

State of Preservation: highly fragmentary, pieces from approximately half the composition remain.

Description: Two boys depicted in the standard Theran fashion of orange skin. They face each other while the left figure uses both his arms in a boxing motion towards the face of the right boy. The right figure has one arm extended towards the face of the other boy and his left arm hanging slightly behind him. The left figure (two thirds of which remains in fragments) is shown in profile, with parts of his stomach and upper legs missing. The right figure is much more fragmentary with only his face, head, stomach and parts of his arms, and a few leg fragments remaining. He appears to be forward facing at the waist, but in an awkward three quarter pose from the chest up with both his arm and shoulder visible. Both boys have shaved heads shown in blue with long dark locks at various places on their heads. The left figure is sufficiently preserved to show a string of beads around his neck, his upper arm and right ankle. Both boys wear a band or cloth around their waists.

Ref: Doulas:1992:108-111. Plates 78-81. Here Fig 13.

### ***Antelopes***

Location: Room Beta 1, upper storey, West, North and East walls, middle zones.

State of Preservation: North and East wall fragmentary, West wall fragmentary but approximately half of the composition remaining.

Description: Six animals were depicted, two per wall, but only those from the West wall are sufficiently represented to be fully described. The animals are shown overlapped slightly with the lead animals head turned backwards towards the other. Both are rendered in calligraphic outline of varying thickness, with lines on the hind quarters and face perhaps to demonstrate shadowed areas. There is a wavy red band above their heads which their antlers overlap into.

## **Identifying the Thera Wall Painters**

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Their hooves do not connect with the dark lower register so they have the appearance of floating.

Ref: Doumas:1992:108-111. Plates 82-84. Here Fig 12.

### ***Monkeys***

Location: Room Beta 6, upper storey, West and North walls, middle zone.

State of Preservation: Fragmentary.

Description: The composition shows eight monkeys, two on the West wall and six on the North, ranged in various positions throughout a rocky landscape of reds, yellows and blues. The monkeys are all in profile with the exception of one shown *en face* in the centre of the North wall. The monkeys are rendered in blue, with white faces and a dark area around their orange eyes. On the North wall the composition is balanced with three of the monkeys bodies facing left, and the other three facing right, with one of the right facing monkeys turned to face forward as noted. The extended limbs and curves and curls of their tails imbues the painting with a sense of motion.

Ref: Doumas:1992:110-111. Plates 85-89. Here Fig 14.

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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### **Xeste 3**

This large building is in the south west corner of the excavated area, and had at least two stories, a third story apparent in the western half. There are fourteen rooms on the ground floor. The building has ashlar masonry to the facade on the east and part of the north sides. Based on the lack of domestic assemblages found within, the largest corpus of wall paintings from Thera, the monumental architectural details and the presence of a 'Lustral Basin' this complex is considered a public building.<sup>288</sup>

### ***Monkeys and Swallows***

Location: Room 4 (sometimes reported as Room 2 due to an oversight in the original excavation report),<sup>289</sup> ground floor, upper zone.

State of Preservation: Fragmentary, small number of pieces only.

Description: Two monkeys engaged in human activities like playing a harp and holding a sword. Two swallows are clearly visible with the tail of a third on another fragment. The swallows are rendered in profile and three quarters from below. The colour scheme is the same as in the Spring Fresco (see above) with a dark blue used, leaving the white of the plaster to show through as needed, and red for the faces. One bird has some kind of insect in its beak leading to the conclusion that these birds are feeding their young.<sup>290</sup>

Ref: Doulas:1992:128. Plates 95-99. My Fig 11a, b.

### ***Lustral Basin – Female Worshippers.***

Location: Room 3a, ground floor, North wall, middle zone.

State of Preservation: Very good, small sections missing near the bottom, top of the right section and end of the left section.

Description: This composition depicts three female adult figures that appear almost in isolation of each other. The female on the left is upright facing the right, with her chest and shoulders facing forwards in the three quarter convention, whilst her face remains in profile. Her left arm is extended forward almost at 90° holding a beaded necklace which hangs from her fingers. She appears to be fully mature as she has a full head of dark hair that is styled in a loop at the back of her neck. She wears a large hoop earring and a diamond pattern necklace high on her neck like a choker, and a blue beaded bracelet on her extended arm. She has an

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<sup>288</sup> Doulas:1992:128.

<sup>289</sup> Doulas:1992:128

<sup>290</sup> Doulas:1998:128.



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open fronted jacket leaving her bare breasted. The jacket is rendered so as to appear sheer with a dark blue border to the sleeve and edge. She also has a tiered skirt which is highly patterned in dark colours. Her feet are missing as is her right wrist and hand. She has blue lines in the whites of her eyes.

The central figure is seated and also facing to the right. She is shown in profile, but her pose is more complicated as she leans forward slightly with her left hand supporting her head and her right hand reaching for her left foot that is raised with her leg stretched out a little. Her toe appears to be injured with blood visible. She is seated on a rocky outcrop that is yellow immediately below her and red and blue behind her. She has a myrtle branch in her hand by her head so it appears to protrude from her hair, which is wrapped in red beads at the back of her head as it falls down her back. She also wears hooped earrings. She wears a sheer jacket with a faint diamond pattern and a yellow and red striped seam. Her skirt is a pale colour with blue bands and waist. She also has blue lines in the whites of her eyes.

The easternmost figure is standing, shown in profile, with her body facing to the left whilst her head is turned 180° to look back over her shoulder to the right. This figure has the blue shaved head and three singular dark locks of hair one curled above her forehead and two the rear of her head. She wears a large hooped earring and a string of blue beads at her neck. She has her arms raised slightly in front of her, but her wrists and hands are not preserved. The whole figure is covered with a sheer shroud of yellow with red dots and a blue hemline that she appears to be pulling from her face by the forward motion of her arms. Under the shroud she has a jacket that is perhaps also sheer, or white, with blue and red bands. Her skirt is tiered with the upper tiers highly patterned in blue and yellow. The lower tiers appear to be sheer as her lower legs and ankles are visible. She has a blue bracelet on each ankle.

Ref:Doumas:1992:128-130. Plates 100-108. My Fig 16, 17.

### ***Male Worshipers***

Location: Room 3b, ground floor, West wall (southern half), South wall of middle corridor, North wall of north corridor.

State of Preservation: Fragmentary but most pieces present for almost complete restoration.

Description: Four male figures of different ages, one child, two youths and an adult all rendered with dark skin. The adult male is on the Western wall and appears to be the focus as

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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the other figures move towards him.<sup>291</sup> He is facing to the right, shown in three quarter view for his chest and shoulders but profile for his face and is bending at the waist, slightly leaning forward whilst holding a large vessel he is tipping forwards. He wears a yellow or cream coloured skirt or kilt of some kind however his lower half is missing.

In the middle corridor is the small child, shown with a completely shaved head and very small lock of hair to the rear of his head. He is naked facing to the right, in profile, with his arms raised and holding a now indeterminate vessel. To the right of the child is an older youth, also naked with a blue shaved head and more prominent lock of hair. He is moving to the right, but his chest is in three quarter view and his head turned 180° to look over his shoulder at the child. He carries a long sash that has a blue border with a wavy red pattern surrounding a central strip of blue.

The fourth figure faces to the left and is in complete profile. He also has a shaved head, but his dark hair covers the crown of his head, leaving only a band of the blue shaved area around his ears and above his forehead. He carries a large golden bowl.

Ref: Doumas:1992:130 Plates 109-115. My Fig 15.

### ***Crocus Gatherers***

Location: Room 3a, first floor, East and North walls, middle zone.

State of Preservation: East wall damaged at the top and in small patches. The North wall is more fragmentary with larger sections missing.

Description: This is a large scale composition with five female figures. The East wall is better preserved and depicts two female figures of differing ages based on the convention of a shaved head as an indicator of youth. The figures are in a rocky landscape shown in red, yellow and blue, with crocus plants growing from the rocks, but also shown at regular intervals seemingly floating in the white backdrop like a repeating pattern.

The figure on the left is shown in a dip between rock outcrops with her lower half moving to the left, her upper half facing forward, and her head turned to the right in the direction of the other figure. She has dark curly hair that is short, a large hooped earring and three necklaces, a red choker, a longer blue one and an even longer yellow one with regularly

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<sup>291</sup> Doumas:1992:130

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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spaced red beads. She wears a white open fronted jacket with blue stripes on the shoulders and arms. The small red dots on her chest and the light pink area in the middle would indicate she is bare breasted. She wears a tiered skirt with the upper tier a dark blue with a diamond pattern. The lower tiers are sheer, and her feet are bare with a yellow bracelet on each ankle. Her left arm (as viewed) is raised at 90° picking a crocus, and her right arm is held down against her body clasping a basket.

Her companion to the right is also in a dip in the landscape. She is rendered completely in profile facing to the left. She is climbing the rock to reach a crocus plant with her right hand, the left hand in a fist that would suggest a basket that is now missing. Her right leg is raised to help her climb and she leans forward slightly whilst reaching compressing the body further. She has a blue shaved head and a lock of hair above her forehead and on the crown of her head at the rear. She wears a red jacket with blue stripes on the shoulders and a diamond pattern that appears to be open at the front as with the other figure. Her tiered skirt is simpler with a blue tier uppermost, then a white tier then a red sheer tier. She wears a large hooped earring and blue beads at her wrists and ankles.

On the North wall are three figures, the figure furthest to the right was separated from the main composition by a window. In the main part of the composition the central figure is sat on a chair on a raised dias, to her rear is a griffin that is fragmentary, to her front another fragmentary creature that appears to be a monkey on its hind legs stepping up the dias towards the figure. To the left of the monkey is a female figure facing the centre like the others. Starting with her, she is young based on the small strip of blue by her forehead before a head of short curls. She is rendered in profile but leaning forward slightly whilst looking up, she has a large hooped earring. She wears a yellow jacket, open at the front, with blue stripes at the shoulder. Her tiered skirt is white near the waist, with black then yellow then blue tiers. Her ankle has a blue anklet. She is leaning forward to tip a basket from which fall crocus plants into a larger basket on the floor already full of them.

The seated female figure on the dias, or the Goddess as she is referred to here, faces to the right and the monkey and other female figure. She has long dark hair in an elaborate hairstyle with a knot or loop of hair at the crown with red beads entwined. She has a large

## **Identifying the Theran Wall Painters**

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hooped earring, a blue beaded necklace, a necklace of ducks of alternating red, white, blue and yellow, and a longer chain of yellow with dragonflies hanging from it. Her shoulders are shown three quarter view so the viewer can observe her sheer jacket is open at the front and she is bare breasted. She appears to have multiple bracelets on but the painting is quite damaged. Her skirts are tiered white or sheer, with blue banding. This part of the composition also has the repeating crocus pattern against the white background above the figures.

The female furthest to the right, beyond the door frame, is also very damaged, with only part of her head, shoulder and lower body being preserved. She is shown in profile facing towards the rest of the composition, although her upper body is slightly turned, not a full three quarters, but enough to render her bare breast from the open front of her blue and yellow jacket. Her face is cast down because of the basket she carried on her shoulder, her left arm holding to the bottom of it and her right arm arching up over her head to grip the top of it. She has dark curly hair, the curls of which are clearly incised in the plaster, a red beaded necklace and large hooped earring. She wears a tiered skirt, the upper half of which is red, the lower half sheer. She is walking on a blue and yellow landscape similar to the other parts of the composition.

Ref: Doumas:1992:130-131. Plates 116-130. Here Fig 18-20.

### ***Ladies with Bouquets***

Location: Room 3b, first storey, further placement currently unknown.

State of Preservation: Highly fragmentary, only the faces of both are clearly visible.

Description: There are four female figures included in this category. Only two are published by Doumas, the other two highly fragmentary and are still undergoing restoration. Both female figures face to the right and are shown in profile. The figure with the Blue headband has her hair bound up behind her head and held there by the band. She wears a thick necklace of red and yellow and what appears to be a dress of red. It could be a jacket and skirt of the same colour but there is too much damage to her front to tell if they are separate items. She carries a basket near her waist against her body.

The second figure in Doumas' publication is a lady with black beads. Her hair is also bound up behind her head, with a similar band but the preservation has possibly been discoloured. She is even more fragmentary with only her face and shoulders being fully

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visible. She appears to be wearing a yellow jacket with large red flowers on it. She appears to be carrying a bouquet of flowers.

Ref: Doumas:1992:131. Plates 131-134. Not fully published in Doumas. Some observations discussed in Chapter 5 were made in person on a visit to Conservation workshops April 2011. Here my Fig 21.

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