

**Ritual Activity and Regional Dynamics:  
Towards a Reinterpretation of Minoan Extra-Urban Ritual Space**

**by**

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*For My Parents*

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## **Chapter I:**

### **Introduction**

This dissertation seeks to re-examine the role of extra-urban ritual spaces in the ritual and socio-political landscapes of Bronze Age Crete during the second millennium BC. Within the context of the transformation between the heterarchical relationships that appear to have characterized the earlier Protopalatial period and the more distinctly hierarchical structures of Neopalatial times, I consider the role played by ritual spaces — including peak sanctuaries, caves, and sacred enclosures — in these shifting power dynamics. By looking at the nature of the performance of ritual activity, as expressed through archaeological assemblages, my work investigates how regional interactions influenced ritual activities and their material signature in the landscape.

Two opposing but complementary forces appear to have shaped the character of the materials deposited at each of these site-types. Every site constituted an integral part of the overall ritual landscape of Minoan Crete. At the same time, each site's specific context in local- and regional-scale socio-political landscapes shaped permutations of activity and material culture: for example, anthropomorphic figurines found at almost every extra-urban ritual site and thus clearly an important indicator of ritual practice, nonetheless vary considerably in material, production technique, form, and style. The tensions created by the local and regional forces account for the distinctiveness and variability to be seen in the assemblages of these sanctuaries. As the following chapters will demonstrate, this tension refers both to the reality of the material culture residue of

Minoan ritual activity as well as the situation created by the approaches that have been brought to bear on the phenomenon of Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces. The material culture assemblages exhibits distinctive style and form that at the same time reflects a desire on the part of the ritual participants to signal involvement in the Minoan ritual complex that was pan-Cretan and occurred at all ritual sites, not just the extra-urban spaces, while at the same time, expressed the local identities of its creators. In addition, scholarship on extra-urban ritual sites has shaped perceptions of the role of those sites in the socio-political landscape, creating a tension between how different categories of site have been studied, treated, and deployed in arguments about the development of socio-political complexity on Minoan Crete.

## **Chronology and Background**

The Bronze Age culture of Crete was termed "Minoan" after the legendary king Minos by Sir Arthur Evans at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century (1894). Early in his investigations at Knossos (1912), Evans created a relative chronological scheme, which was based on ceramic typologies. Therefore, the Early Bronze Age is referred to as the Early Minoan (abbreviated EM) period and is subdivided into EM I, IIA, IIB, and III. The Middle Bronze Age is termed the Middle Minoan (abbreviated MM) period and is subdivided into MM IA, IB, IIA-B (only at the palaces of Knossos, Phaistos, and Mallia), IIIA, and IIIB. The Late Bronze Age is called the Late Minoan (abbreviated LM) period and is subdivided into LM IA, IB, II, IIIA1-2, IIIB, and IIIC. LM IIIC is the last phase of the Bronze Age, and the subsequent periods are Early Iron Age. Platon (1970: 117) proposed an alternative framework for Minoan chronology, which is based not on stratigraphy and ceramic chronology, but is intended rather to reflect major changes in social organization on the island. The changes are signaled archaeologically mainly by the building, rebuilding, and

abandonment of the monumental building complexes at Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia, and Zakro. These periods are known as the Prepalatial, Protopalatial, Neopalatial, and Postpalatial. Table 1.1 illustrates the concordance of Platon’s and Evans’ frameworks with absolute chronological dates.

<b>Cultural Periods</b>	<b>Relative Dates</b>	<b>Absolute Dates</b>
Prepalatial	EM I	3100-3000 to 2700-2650 BCE
	EM II	2650 to 2200-2150 BCE
	EM III	2200-2150 to 2050-2000 BCE
	MM IA	2050-2000 to 1925-1900 BCE
Protopalatial	MM IB	1925-1900 to c. 1900-1875 BCE
	MM II	1900-1875 to 1750-1720 BCE
	MM IIIA	1750-1720 to 1700-1680 BCE
Neopalatial	MM IIIB	1700-1680 to 1675-1650 BCE
	LM IA	1675-1650 to 1600-1550 BCE
Postpalatial	LM IB	1600-1550 to 1490-1470 BCE
	LM II	1490-1470 to 1435-1405 BCE
	LM IIIA	1435-1405 to 1390-1370 BCE
	LM III B	1390-1370 to 1360-1325 BCE
	LM III C	1360-1325 to 1200/1190 BCE

Table 1.1. The concordance of the cultural periods, relative chronology and absolute dates for the Bronze Age on Crete (absolute dates from Manning 1995b).

In general, the *absolute* chronological dates for the Aegean Bronze Ages are not yet completely agreed upon, due in large part to the problems of Carbon-14 dating that are particular to this period and region of the world.<sup>1</sup> The one area of serious remaining uncertainty concerns the “high” or orthodox dating of the massive volcanic eruption on the island of Thera (modern Santorini) at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, which results in slightly different absolute dates than attached to the relative or cultural periods. For this research, the most current C-14 and dendrochronological dates produced by the Wiener Laboratory at Cornell University (Manning 2007) have been used (i.e., the “high

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<sup>1</sup> For the most detailed and precise discussion of the problems concerning Minoan chronology, and the relationship between relative and absolute dates based on radiocarbon and dendrochronological dating techniques, see Manning 1999, Friedrich *et al.* 2006, and Manning *et al.* 2006.

chronology”).<sup>2</sup> Since the absolute dates are still in flux, the archaeological assemblages discussed in the following chapters will be referred to in terms of their *relative* chronological label – Prepalatial, Protopalatial, Neopalatial, and Postpalatial.

## **Socio-historical Context**

This section is designed to situate the developments of the extra-urban ritual spaces within the contemporary socio-political and economic processes that occurred on Crete. This context is crucial for understanding the reflexive relationship between ritual and socio-political developments, in particular because the ritual practices at peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries first appeared and then underwent significant changes broadly in parallel with the changes in the organization of power on Crete between the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods.

### ***Prepalatial Period***

The Prepalatial period, which essentially comprises the Early Bronze Age on Crete, was primarily characterized by small, relatively egalitarian, agricultural settlements, which grew in size and number over the course of the third millennium BC. Much of the archaeological evidence from this period comes from burials. Mortuary practices in this period were regionally differentiated, and included cist graves, cave burials, house tombs, and the well-known tholos tombs (circular, above-ground structures) tombs, which were communal and used over generations (in some cases for more than a millennium). The population of Crete had very limited off-island trade and exchange networks, mostly with the Cycladic islands. There is little evidence that the

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<sup>2</sup> The only impact this would have on my research is the duration of the Neopalatial period, but it has little bearing on my basic arguments.

spaces that would later become extra-urban sanctuaries were used for ritual purposes – some caves, for example, were certainly in use as shelters, habitation sites, or places of burial, but they lack evidence of cult practice.<sup>3</sup>

### *Protopalatial Period*

At the beginning of the Protopalatial period in MM IB, the first large-scale, nucleated settlements, conventionally known as “palaces”, appeared at Knossos, Phaistos, and Mallia, although little remains of these due to later construction, which leveled the earlier structures. This period is characterized by regionally differentiated, diffuse political structures, which are evidenced by other “palace-like” buildings, such as those at Kommos and Monastiraki and “non-palatial” monumental building complexes like Quartier Mu at Mallia. Beginning in the immediately pre-palace MM IA period, the external contacts of these emergent elites grew enormously and now also embraced Egypt and the Levant, while craft production and administration also increased dramatically in complexity at this time. Two different writing systems, Linear A and Cretan hieroglyphic, were in simultaneous use — a fact that has been useful in discerning regionally differentiated administrative systems. At this time, there is an explosion of peak sanctuaries (at least two dozen) across much of the island, some caves were used for ritual practices, and a few rural sanctuaries were established.

### *Neopalatial Period*

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<sup>3</sup> Some scholars would argue to push the beginning of peak sanctuary cult back into the Prepalatial period (Watrous), especially at the site of Jouktas, but the excavator herself has explicitly refuted this claim.

In the Neopalatial period, the palaces that were destroyed (possibly by earthquake) at the end of the Protopalatial period were rebuilt. Minoan society in the Neopalatial was much more hierarchically organized than in the Protopalatial period, with Knossos the largest site on the island. There were also many more settlements ranging from isolated rural villas to variously sized towns (e.g., Palaikastro and Pseira) to large-scale urban complexes with palace-like buildings at their center (e.g., Zakro, Phaistos, Gournia, and Myrtos Pyrgos). Crete had extensive external contacts — it imported both raw materials and finished products (e.g., glass, copper ingots, Egyptian scarabs, Levantine vases, etc.) — and also established Minoanized “colonies” on other islands in the Aegean and on the Anatolian coast. In the Neopalatial period, the peak sanctuaries decreased in number, although the few that remained were architecturally and materially elaborated, in ways that suggest they were now more strongly linked to the palatial elite. There was an increase in the number of cult caves and rural sanctuaries became more spatially expansive, and both categories of site witness their most intense period of use in the Neopalatial.

### *Postpalatial Period*

During the Postpalatial period Crete was overtaken by the Mycenaean culture of Mainland Greece, perhaps with an influx of actually Mycenaean settlers. The Mycenaean established their rule and used Minoan structures of settlement and administration that had been in place from the Neopalatial period — they occupied the palaces, adopted similar ritual symbols and ideologies, and used the administrative

system, but with Linear B writing. Some of the extra-urban ritual spaces continued in use, but on a drastically reduced scale.

## **Overview**

In the following chapters, each category of sacred site is explored, first as a whole and then more closely by individual site, in order to explore specifically how the tension between participation in the Minoan ritual complex and various local and regional influences may have affected site-based activities and the assemblages that resulted from them.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical issues that provide a framework for my research. They include questions of socio-political complexity, the role of ritual in the changing cultural landscape of Crete, and some challenges presented by the study of material culture from a fully prehistoric context — in particular, the creation of value, the embodiment of identity, and how networks of humans and objects constitute the material world. Critical frameworks for addressing these issues are presented, drawing upon anthropological, archaeological, and specifically Aegean Bronze Age scholarship.

Chapter 3 considers sacred caves, looking in particular at the sensory experience of the Minoan participants in the performance of ritual activity. The links to an emergent elite are explored in terms of the chronological trajectory and material assemblages of individual cave sites. The assemblages, topography, landscape settings, and connections of the material culture with the status of participants are analyzed, along with cross-cultural comparanda, to present an overall view of the individualization and cohesion of sites in the category of sacred caves.

Peak sanctuaries, the best known type of Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces, are reviewed in Chapter 4. They have long been used as a critical element in models of the development and organization of early states in Crete, and also as evidence for the existence of a pan-Cretan ideology. This chapter explores the extent to which regional differentiation is reflected by specific peak sanctuary sites; the ways in which the material culture assemblages express changes in ritual practice across chronological periods, and the reality and significance of these changes; and, more generally, what kind of understanding of the ritual landscape of Minoan Crete – that is, how it was created, transformed, perceived, manipulated, and remembered – is afforded by peak sanctuaries.

The sizeable unpublished pottery assemblage from the peak sanctuary at Vrysinas in west-central Crete is closely examined in Chapter 5. It serves as a detailed case-study that provides new perspectives on the nature of ritual activity at this important site, as a result both of its status as a peak sanctuary and of its specific regional landscape context. This analysis contributes to the still quite scant research that has been undertaken on pottery from peak sanctuaries and adds to the limited number of detailed studies of material culture from sites of this sort. The circumstances of Vrysinas' chronological trajectory and the material culture residue of these changes provide a vantage point from which to assess traditional, now canonical ideas about change in peak sanctuary ritual over time.

Finally, rural sanctuaries — a more nebulous category — are shown each to have a distinct character and landscape setting, which, more so than peak sanctuaries or caves, directly influenced the sites' appearance, material culture, and performed ritual. These sites have rarely been treated as a distinct category and, consequently, with one or two

exceptions, have received insufficient attention in larger discussions of Minoan ritual. In this chapter, I examine issues of identification and classification – the degree to which rural sanctuaries constitute a coherent category, the very nature of a ritual site, and the material culture signature of ritual performance and activity. I also discuss the iconographic scenes (mainly miniature representations on signet-rings and sealstones) that have been the primary source of evidence for the nature of the ritual activities performed at open-air “sacred enclosures”, setting these data alongside the actual archaeological evidence – architecture, votive offerings, other material culture – that has survived at these rural sites and that can inform our understanding of ritual activity at them.

Looking at these three categories of ritual extra-urban space together offers a perspective on the complex networks of components in the Minoan ritual landscape: humans, objects, sites, and the interconnections between them. In addition, studying peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries within a unified framework highlights some of the issues created by past scholarship that this research seeks to resolve. Peak sanctuaries and, to a lesser extent sacred caves, have been treated as uniform phenomena, and deployed as such in wider arguments about developments on Minoan Crete; conversely, rural sanctuaries have rarely been treated as a coherent category, and the sites have therefore been considered as individual, unique expressions of Minoan ritual activity. It is a compromise between these two approaches that this study advocates: the peak sanctuaries and sacred caves need to be teased apart as categories, with their specific material culture and use-spans of sites understood as differentiated, whereas the rural sanctuaries need to be considered in terms of their

participation in a larger Minoan ritual complex. Each site must be understood as part of a whole, but simultaneously as one with a precise and distinctive trajectory that reflected and was informed by its specific role in a complex network of dynamic relationships and associations.

## **Chapter II:**

### **Theoretical Issues and Frameworks**

The phenomenon of the extra-urban sanctuaries provides important insights into the ways in which people negotiated the shifting ritual and socio-political landscapes of Crete in the Bronze Age. Many of these rural ritual sites have been known to scholars for a long time, and as a result, they have played an important role in the history of scholarship about Minoan Crete. Approaches to these categories of sanctuary have changed over time, as a result of new data and changing perspectives in anthropological and archaeological methodology and theory. In this chapter, I review the most dominant and influential ways that scholars have thought about and discussed these sites in the past, in order to highlight some of the questions that have been left unanswered and issues that have yet to be properly resolved. These frameworks have shaped the way that the sites themselves have been treated and, more generally, the ways in which Minoan ritual and religion have been approached and theorized. After discussing and critiquing the various approaches that are relevant to my research, I will outline: some of the more recent work that offers new insights; the ways in which I propose to engage with these issues in relation to my data; and how my data may contribute to solving some of these problems.

I begin with theoretical approaches concerning models of socio-political complexity. The setting for the sites and material that are studied in this dissertation is the crucial transitional period when power structures on Crete appear to have undergone a

transition from heterarchical to hierarchical forms of organization: the Protopalatial period seems to have been characterized by more horizontal, segmentary forms of organization, whereas the Neopalatial period is decidedly more hierarchically structured. This distinction is critical for the comprehension of the physical and socio-cultural contexts of these extra-urban ritual spaces. Next, I discuss theories of ritual, and specifically, the role that ritual plays in power dynamics. Finally, the material manifestations of these ritual, social, cultural, and political processes, finally, are considered through the lens of material culture theories that provide a framework for understanding the network of interconnections of the material and socio-political world.

The models of socio-political complexity not only provide the specific cultural context, but, more importantly, points to the importance of both the local and regional influences that acted upon the peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries as individual sites within the Minoan landscape. The theoretical approaches to ritual address lingering issues of identification and classification of ritual spaces and objects, but also underscore the participation of these sites in a larger island-wide ritual complex. Finally, material culture theory makes explicit the network of interactions that construct the relationships between humans and the material world.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Socio-political Formations**

The organization of power dynamics that shifted between the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods on Crete are crucial for understanding the context of extra-urban ritual spaces. The Protopalatial epoch is the period in which we can see the first clear evidence for ritual activity at peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries. At

this time, the power structures appear to have been horizontally diffuse and regionally differentiated, which suggests a heterarchically-structured system (Brumfiel and Fox 1994, Ehenreich, Crumley, and Levy 1995). In contrast, the Neopalatial period, which witnessed the continuation of certain peak sanctuaries (e.g., Jouktas, Kophinas, Vrysinas), and the florescence of sacred caves and rural sanctuaries, appears to have been more hierarchically organized than in the Protopalatial, with Knossos as the dominant administrative and ideological power among a number of regional polities.<sup>1</sup>

Ritual spaces and, in particular, peak sanctuaries, have been used by scholars since the 1960s and 70s to support and complement models of various configurations of power dynamics (for more detail, see Chapter 4: 101-108). In order to understand how ritual spaces have been theoretically deployed in the past, and how they fit into more recent considerations of the structures of Minoan socio-political organization in the Proto- and Neopalatial periods, this section will review briefly the history of scholarship and thinking about Minoan socio-political complexity, followed by a discussion of the implications of some more recent models for the study of Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces.

Although scholarship about palatial-level society on Crete began with the publication of Sir Arthur Evans' excavations at Knossos (1921-35), it was not until Colin Renfrew's monograph, *The Emergence of Civilization: the Cyclades and the Aegean in the third millennium BC* (1972) that systematic analysis of socio-political organization on Crete began. Renfrew's work corresponded with the shift in methodological and theoretical frameworks in archaeology during the 1960s and 70s that sought explanations

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<sup>1</sup> The question of whether Neopalatial Crete was dominated by Knossos or still segmented into a number of autonomous polities is very much still up for debate (Cherry 1986: 25-6, Knappett and Schoep 2000).

of the past in a more scientific, explanatory way — what subsequently came to be known as “processual” archaeology. A number of scholars (e.g., Service 1975, Friedman and Rowlands 1977, Fried 1978) proposed theories of the development of state societies that relied heavily on an evolutionary framework and resulted in sequences that, seemingly ineluctably, progressed from hunter-gatherer egalitarian societies through tribes and chiefdoms to the pinnacle of states. Anthropologists Peebles and Kus defined a state as “an autonomous political unit, encompassing many communities within its territory and having a centralized government with the power to collect taxes, draft men for work or war, and decree and enforce laws.” (1973: 773). The state, as the apogee of the course of political evolutionary development, was viewed, in teleological terms, as the “natural” end product of cultural evolution, with centralized control of labor, power and ideology. Each step on this evolutionary stepladder (cf. Yoffee 1993: fig. 6.1) brought emergent political formations closer to this organized, centralized, hierarchically structured result. Contemporaneously, Renfrew’s broadly inclusive study considered many categories of archaeological evidence – settlement patterns, emergent social stratification and wealth, and trade networks – in order to analyze cultural “subsystems” such as subsistence, technology, social, symbolic and trade and communication. His work was foundational for the appreciation of the indigenous development of complexity in the Aegean, not as a disregarded stepsister to the handful of cases of pristine state formation.<sup>2</sup>

Through subsequent decades, archaeologists and anthropologists attempted to situate and explain cultures within this evolutionary model, and also focused on certain

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<sup>2</sup> See Barrett and Halstead’s (2004) edited volume *The Emergence of Civilization Revisited*, for the current state of the developments that arose from Renfrew’s 1972 seminal work. Galaty and Parkinson (2007) shows a renewed interest in studying palatial states in the Aegean in the context of secondary state formation.

aspects of society that would further explain the model and a particular culture's status within it (e.g., Earle 1977, Wright 1977, Steponaitis 1978, 1981, Carneiro 1978, 1981). Similarly, with respect to the Aegean Bronze Age, the work of Renfrew, along with that of Branigan (1970), stimulated a virtual explosion of studies that examined various types of processual factors, testing these approaches with the Aegean as a case study. Topics and themes explored included Marxist approaches (Geiss and Bockisch 1974), social storage (Halstead 1981, Halstead and O'Shea 1982), cultural diffusion (Watrous 1987, 1988), and settlement pattern analysis (Cherry 1978).

Over time, such models of neo-evolutionism, however, were increasingly called into question, accused of being "failed intellectual exercises at identifying sets of diagnostic features" (Yoffee 1993: 64, commenting on Bawden 1989) that lacked explanatory power and the ability to account for change. In addition to these general critiques, the evolutionary-based models of state formation were attacked for a lack of understanding of people as agents, the limited understanding of ideology and legitimacy, and the need to fit varied political formations into one prescribed form (McGuire 1983, Paynter 1989, and Bawden 1989). In the Aegean, Cherry's discussions of punctuated equilibria<sup>3</sup> (1983) and peer polity interaction (1986) attempted to account for some of these same problems.

Following these critiques of neo-evolutionism by the late 1980s and early 90s, there was little more to be said about the chiefdom-as-precursor-to-the-state within Aegean archaeology. In fact, what arose next was a direct result of the impetus within post-processual theory to de-construct pre-existing ways of understanding social

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<sup>3</sup> Cherry's reading of punctuated equilibria on Crete was still, to some extent, evolutionary.

structures in the past. Once again, archaeology followed closely on the heels of sociology and cultural anthropology, no longer trying to understand the chiefdom and all of its socio-political manifestations. Both cultural anthropologists and archaeologists have brought into question the notion of how we conceptualize a state, as well as rigid, linear models of the formation of state-level societies. As a result, models of social change now focus more strongly on heterarchy, factional competition, and segmentary states.<sup>4</sup> These newer approaches attempt to focus more clearly on agent-centered perspectives, drawing on, as well as critiquing, the traditions of cultural ecology and Marxist theory (Brumfiel 1994: 3). The agent-centered perspectives also employ practice theory (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1979), which tries to explain how individual actors or agents strategize to maneuver dynamically through socio-political change.

Heterarchy can be defined as “a situation in which coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared counterpoised power abound and interactive elements in complex systems need not be permanently ranked relative to one another” (Fox *et al.* 1996: 797). Generally, theories concerned with heterarchy, segmentary states, and factional competition emphasize that elites in emergent states have available to them access to multiple resources of power: ritual, economic, administrative, and trade networks. Various elite factions and non-elites (kinship groups, factions, or factions loosely based on regional alliances, etc.) have differential access to these power resources and use them in order to compete (Brumfiel and Fox 1994). The resulting organizational and political structures tend to be configured as more horizontally differentiated

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of these types of approaches, when they were first introduced, see A. Southall, *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (1956); E. Brumfiel and J. Fox, eds. *Factional Competition and Political Development in the New World* (1994); and R. Ehenreich, C. Crumley, and J. Levy, eds., *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies* (1995).

networks, rather than the centrally unified and hierarchically organized polities envisioned in most earlier (e.g., Marxist, neo-evolutionist, modernist, Aristotelian, etc.) writing on the state.

As Figure 2.1 illustrates, the levels of organization in a hierarchical model channel information, resources, and administrative control upwards towards one central top-tier level of capital administration. In the heterarchical model, the second tier of administration (usually the competing elite groups), share power across a more horizontally diffuse organizational structure. While it can be argued that these sorts of competing factions, differential access to power and resources, are to some extent elements that could be found in states of all kinds, it is the absence of the top-tier capital administration, and the regional differentiation and horizontal power relationships, that make this framework compelling for Minoan Crete.

Most societies, at any given stage, can exhibit both hierarchical and heterarchical elements of organization. The appeal of introducing heterarchy as a way of thinking about socio-political complexity exists in that it forces a reconsideration of the role of different groups within an organizational structure. I suggest a approach that includes heterarchy not to the exclusion of hierarchical structures. Rather, in the assessment of the dynamic created by the presence of both types of organization provides a fruitful approach to understanding the variety of ways in which groups can interact. In particular, incorporating both of these models can account for the multiplicity of material culture in the archaeological record as well as providing mechanisms for understanding change over time.

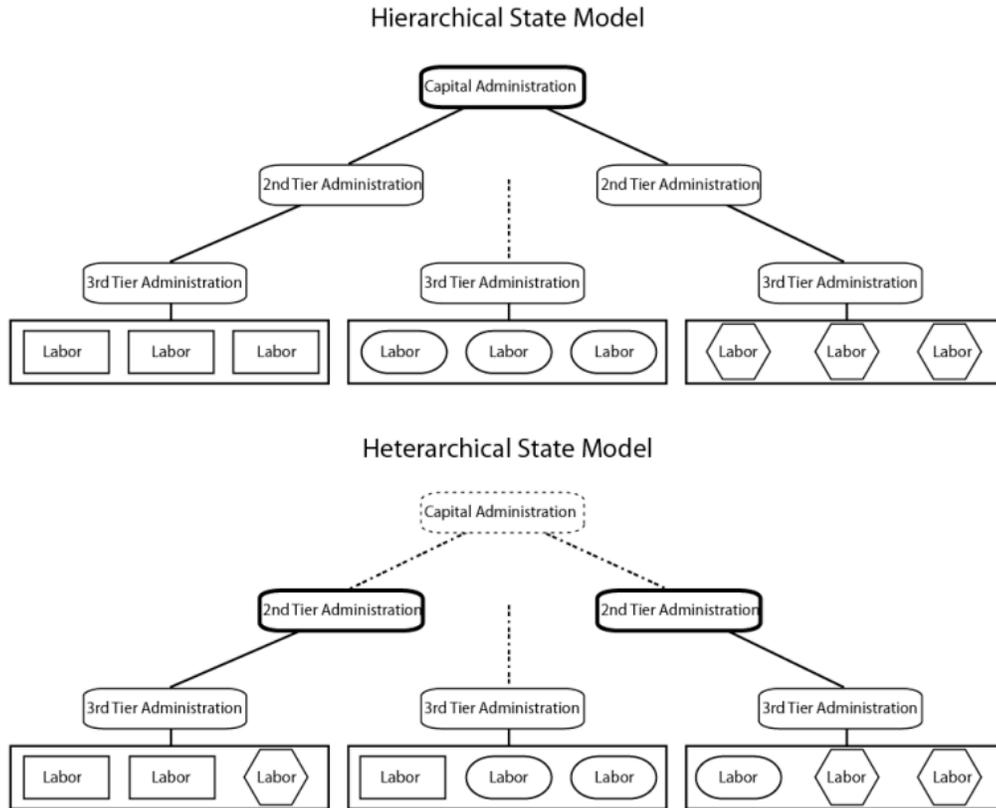


Figure 2.1 Diagram illustrating the components and connections in hierarchical versus heterarchical state models. In the hierarchical model, information, resources and administrative control are channeled toward one central top-tier level of capital administration, whereas in the heterarchical model, there are multiple components sharing power in a more horizontally diffuse structure. In the hierarchical model, different types of labor, such as agricultural, craft specialist, or trade (symbolized by different shapes within the lowest tier) are segregated into different areas of control, whereas in the heterarchical model, different administrative groups might control multiple different types of labor.

### *The Minoan Case*

In the past ten to fifteen years, the case of Minoan social-political complexity has begun to be re-evaluated in terms of a re-analysis of conceptions of what is meant theoretically by the term “state.” In particular, thinking about Minoan organization during the Protopalatial period has shifted to a markedly more heterarchical, regionally differentiated perspective (e.g., Knappett and Schoep 1999b, Driessen 2001a, Hamilakis 2002b, Schoep 2006). The view of a palatially dominated Crete – with its beginnings in the Protopalatial period and becoming more firmly entrenched and integrated, perhaps

even Knossos-centered, in the Neopalatial – has been called into question in favor of a more faction-based, horizontally-diffuse power structure that takes into consideration not only the ever-growing number of palaces themselves, but also towns and other centers that may have exercised local or regional control (Knappett and Schoep 1999b, Schoep 2000). New lines of evidence have resulted from fresh fieldwork, including comprehensive systematic surveys such as those of the hinterlands of Phaistos, Ayia Triadha, and Kommos on the western Mesara plain (Watrous *et al.* 2004), the excavation and re-analysis of administrative and craft centers such as Quartier Mu at Mallia (Knappett 1997), and research in East Crete at Palaikastro (MacGillivray *et al.* 1998). These, together with directed re-analyses of previously excavated material,<sup>5</sup> have gone a long way towards showing that the palatial system can and should be evaluated with an eye to horizontal, segmentary relationships as well as hierarchical connections.

The systems of socio-political organization in the Proto- and Neopalatial periods on Crete were comprised of connections that were both heterarchically and hierarchically structured at the same time. It is the (re)combination of these structures and their relationships that allow the characterization of the nature and degree of change between the two periods. The Protopalatial period exhibited a higher degree of heterarchy than in the Neopalatial, whereas the later period was more hierarchically structured.

Some important aspects of this new picture of Crete — one not yet accepted in all quarters (Galaty and Parkinson 2007) — are nicely summarized by Hamilakis:

“As an alternative hypothesis to one emphasizing states and chiefdoms, I have suggested that faction might be the most appropriate term to describe the political conglomerations operating around what we call palaces and palatial

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<sup>5</sup> Many aspects of the Minoan archaeological record have been recently, or are being currently, re-analyzed with new approaches; e.g. funerary landscapes (Murphy 2000); settlement patterns (Driessen 2001); and ritual landscapes (Kyriakidis 2005).

buildings... Factions include not only the elites but also non-elite followers, and they are much looser and fluid than any grouping implied by terms such as state or chiefdoms... Indeed fluidity (in terms of membership and allegiance) is their primary characteristic, hence their involvement in constant competitive events such as feasting and drinking ceremonies. As comparison and competition are the basis of their existence, cultural and ideological codes such as similar material culture and common perception of ancestry, cosmology and religion, are needed to provide the shared ‘language’” (2002b: 20).

Such a framework is proving to be a productive one, and in many respects provides a better fit to the archaeological data as we currently have them. New approaches, in any case, are necessary, given that the development of socio-political complexity never quite fit traditional models of state formation based on Mesopotamian or classical Greek models (Parkinson and Galaty 2007).

As a result, Aegean scholars have approached these models by attempting to discern horizontal and regional differentiation in the archaeological record with respect to various aspects of Minoan culture. The four main ways that diversity and horizontal relations have been explored for Minoan palatial society, particularly in the Protopalatial period are: administrative systems, craft production/consumption, settlement patterns, and a re-analysis of the palaces, both through their architectural remains and their material culture assemblages.

Looking at the administrative organization on Crete diachronically, Ilse Schoep has examined the documents from the early MM through the LM periods, written in Hieroglyphic and Linear A scripts (Schoep 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2006). She has shown that these two writing systems, which were in use simultaneously in the early periods, correspond to different cultural groups, were each used for a range of types of documents, and are evidence for marked diversity in the administrative practices of

writing and record-keeping and thus, arguably, for diverse administrative authorities and a degree of functional differentiation between sites.<sup>6</sup> She argues that the existence of more than one type of administrative strategy in use in the Protopalatial period would support a horizontally organized, regionally differentiated model at least for this aspect of the power networks extant in the Protopalatial period. In the Neopalatial period, there is increased administrative complexity, centered at Knossos, which suggests a more vertical, hierarchical network.

Craft production and consumption have been studied primarily in terms of the ceramic wares found in the palatial centers and their hinterlands. Archaeologists have studied the production, consumption, and distribution of ceramic wares (Knappett 1999, 2002, Day and Wilson 2002, Haggis 2007). This work, largely petrographic in nature and undertaken in recent years, differs markedly from the typological and stylistic analyses done before. These studies have shown that the palaces were neither the only nor necessarily the most important production centers, nor served as centralized redistributive agents. For example, Knappett (1999) has concluded that the connection between Mallia and one of its satellite sites in the hinterland, Myrtos Pyrgos, is stylistic and ideological rather than vertically economic, due to the distinct similarity in the production of fineware vessels between the two sites in the Protopalatial period. Specifically, the fine tablewares used for conspicuous consumption at the sites of Mallia and Myrtos Pyrgos are visually and stylistically identical, but, using ceramic petrography, Knappett has shown that the vessels were manufactured locally at each site, rather than all being made at Mallia and subsequently distributed to Myrtos Pyrgos (2002: 179). In

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<sup>6</sup> This type of analysis of seal-use and administration began with Weingarten (1994), who has studied the seals and administrative tablets (known as the “Kn series” of tablets) from the palace at Knossos.

contrast, the cooking pot wares at the two sites are really rather different, implying that the links between the sites are not solely cultural but also political. In other words, the production of objects destined for elite conspicuous consumption, in comparison to those used in everyday domestic activities, indicate an administered mode of production.<sup>7</sup> This new evidence from ceramic studies has begun to provide solid evidence that the palatial centers in the Protopalatial period were not behaving as the sole focus of all economic networks, at the top of a centrally organized hierarchy.

In a fascinating recent study of the MM IB “Lakkos” deposit from the palace at Petras in eastern Crete, Haggis (2007) has analyzed the polychrome painted ceramic finewares used in drinking and dining sets. In the framework of competitive consumption between kinship corporate groups, Haggis demonstrates the vertical and horizontal stylistic diversity among these vessels, and interprets it in terms of the symbolic transference between hieroglyphics, sealstones, textiles, figurines and medallions, and pottery. He suggests that competing corporate or kinship groups were feasting together, and establishing membership in those groups. At the same time through distinctive material culture assemblages, group members emphasized vertical relationships within their group, based on the form and style of the vessels. “The pots then became expressions of identities of emerging sodalities that meant to distinguish individual participants or exclusive membership by using symbols linked to seals, scripts, and peak sanctuaries” (Haggis 2007: 768-9). Haggis’ study nicely illustrates the simultaneous vertical and horizontal relationships of these emergent elite groups, which

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<sup>7</sup> An administered mode of production describes when skilled artisans who are employed by elite groups manufacture luxury items for the sole consumption of those elite groups (Knappett 2002: 180, cf. Sinopoli 1988).

are represented through a symbolic complex drawing on ritual, economic, and political spheres.

Settlement pattern data have long been used as evidence to support models of the development of socio-political complexity. The spatial and geographic relations between sites across the landscape are assessed to identify the economic and political relationships between them. A hierarchical state society would exhibit paths of communication within this network via which goods are mobilized towards a center, and which would result in the spatial hierarchy of settlements. Driessen has shown that these patterns on Crete oscillated between various levels of hierarchy, arguably with changing alliances among sites, which would suggest the shifting, dynamic characteristics of polities in which relationships are both horizontal and vertical (Driessen 2001: 56). Hamilakis has argued that it is also becoming harder to argue for established, well-defined territories of traditionally-identified palatial centers, citing Petras, Galatas, and Palaikastro as recent counter examples (Hamilakis 2002c: 21). Further, Cunningham (2001) has argued for divergence and diversity between regions, with respect to the internal spatial organization of the settlements themselves. By comparing the architectural structures at three sites – Petras, Kato Zakros, and Palaikastro – he has suggested that the same symbolic architectural tools are being used at each site, but differently and with varied effects. The diverse characteristics all come from the same “genotype,” and he has suggested that this indicates some type of ideological connection: “There is a coherent sense of cultural identity inclusive of representations or demonstrations of status and power which is island-wide” (Cunningham 2001: 84). This

network of connections, I suggest, is the same framework in which the individual sites of extra-urban ritual spaces need to be considered.

In summary, a number of scholars have used different approaches to attempt to characterize the differences in types of organization between the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods. Systems of administration, craft production and consumption, and settlement pattern data were all explored, in order to reassess the traditional concepts of the socio-political organization of Minoan Crete. While their analyses are compelling, in their efforts to assert new interpretations, the authors' analyses that demonstrate heterarchy do not fully take into account how these structures work with the co-occurring hierarchical structures. Further, these discussions often do not satisfactorily account for how these new approaches can help to account for change between the earlier and later periods. In order to help clarify the differences between the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods, below I briefly summarize the evidence for heterarchical and hierarchical structures in both periods.

In the Protopalatial period, the material culture evidence supports a view of the socio-political organization of the island in regionally differentiated, horizontally diffuse power networks. The two administrative systems used contemporarily in this period, evidenced by the Cretan Hieroglyphic and Linear A scripts and the corresponding different types of documents, suggest that perhaps these correspond to distinct culture groups, with diverse administrative authorities and functional differentiation between sites (Schoep 1994). The modes of ceramic production and consumption in the Protopalatial period suggest stylistic and ideological connections between palatial sites and their satellite settlements (e.g., Mallia and Myrto Pyrgos, Knappett 1999), as well as

competitive consumption between kinship corporate groups (e.g., the “Lakkos” deposit, Haggis 2007). In addition, the settlement pattern data that has been analyzed (Cunningham 2001, Driessen 2001, Hamalakis 2002c) points toward an ever-growing number of centers (e.g., Petras, Galatas, and Palaikastro) that suggest a diffuse network of power, as well as divergence and diversity among regions.

In comparison, in the Neopalatial period, certain structures change to become more vertically, hierarchically organized. For example, the evidence for administrative organization in the later period, such as the abandonment of Cretan Hieroglyphic and the move toward a unified system of documentation, suggests increased administrative complexity centered at Knossos (Schoep 2002b). Production and consumption appear to become more closely controlled by top-tier centers, located at the palaces, with attendant displays of high-status goods and objects.

I have highlighted here some of the ways in which the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods differ with respect to hierarchical and heterarchical structures, but it is worth noting again that both periods exhibit evidence for the co-occurrence of both in both periods. The differences between the two periods are reflected in the contemporary changes in the ritual landscape. Further, the regional diversity and shifting networks of local and regional relationships provide an important framework for assessing the role of ritual spaces.

### *Extra-Urban Spaces*

The approaches discussed briefly above have attempted to argue that, in the Protopalatial period, sociopolitical entities on Crete were constituted less as hierarchical

and centralized structures, than as regionally diverse, unstable, shifting, factionally-based systems of organization. One of the crucial aspects of these arguments is that there seems to have been much more regional differentiation and variability than anticipated by neo-evolutionary models of socio-political complexity or in orthodox accounts of Minoan palatial states. With each category of evidence, consideration of specific areas or sites is able to demonstrate that the mode of operation (whether administrative, economic, or settlement) was specific to the circumstances and influences of that particular area.

Concepts of heterarchy, factional competition, and segmentary states are part of a much larger trend in anthropology and archaeology, one that not only questions conceptualizations of the state, but also recognizes that socio-political organization can be regionally differentiated and must be considered in terms of specific historical contexts. I believe that although these heterarchical models may still require further development and refinement to be broadly applicable, the implications of these approaches provide a helpful background for the study of extra-urban ritual spaces in the landscape of Minoan Crete. These new developments have highlighted the regional differentiation and local influences that affect individual sites, their material culture, and their chronological trajectories.

Heterarchical views of Minoan polities emphasize diversity, regionalism, and temporal change. These views can be extended to extra-urban ritual places. These sites and their material culture need to be assessed in terms of the local and regional influences acting upon them as *individual sites with unique roles in their immediate ritual and socio-political landscape*. While there are clear signs that all of the sites were participating in an island-wide ritual complex (see below), the material culture and the

appearance and disappearance of sites, both individually and as a category, were direct consequences of the ways in which each site interacted with the non-ritual and ritual sites that surrounded it: each region and locality had its own needs and requirements that shaped the form and material culture of the ritual landscape.

The archaeological evidence from the extra-urban ritual sites supports this argument strongly. One of the ways in which this interpretation of the ritual landscape is evident is in any individual site's chronological trajectory and use span. The peak sanctuary at Vrysinas (Chapter 5, below), for instance, saw its period of most intensive use in Neopalatial times, although it was seemingly not connected to a major palatial center. Traditional models of Minoan state organization would suggest that Vrysinas should have been linked to a palatial elite in order to support its continued use in the Neopalatial period. Site-specific factors can also affect the nature of a site's material culture assemblage. Furthermore, the regional landscape contains sites that seem very different from canonical ritual spaces: the remarkable, unique site at Anemospilia is a case in point and (as argued in Chapter 6: see pp. 222-26) it may have served quite specific cult functions that developed in the context of its proximity to Knossos, Jouktas, and other ritual sites. These examples, which will be treated more fully in their respective chapters, provide sound evidence that, although most scholars have treated ritual spaces as monolithic phenomena, each site needs to be understood as a unique individual space that was reacting to specific local and regional influences.

## **Ritual**

The concept of ritual can carry a number of connotations and be deployed in a number of contexts, thus making it difficult to arrive at a definition that is broadly

applicable. Catherine Bell (2007) has argued that this disagreement highlights the fruitlessness of searching for a definition, and suggested instead a fluid understanding of ritualized activity. In the context of my project, rather than limiting ritual to action that is directed toward communication with the divine, I would argue that it is important to look at the material culture, intentions, setting, and performance of activity that is special, not everyday – signified by location, material culture, and the indications of the performance of non-domestic activities.

Some of the original questions that arose from early archaeological excavations in Crete and the Aegean concerned the religion of the Minoans. Of especial fascination to the pioneer archaeologists working on the island were questions about the origins of ritual practices and belief systems, the characteristics of those systems (i.e., ritual symbols, deities, etc.), and their connections to contemporaneous socio-political phenomena. In the century since then there has developed a massive corpus of writings on Minoan ritual and religion. I will focus in particular on issues broadly relevant to the study of extra-urban ritual spaces. The foundational works on Minoan religion will be discussed in detail, particularly concerning the issues they raise that frame the study of peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries. These topics include the identification of ritual spaces, the description and categorization of religious architecture, the ways in which ritual practice has been used in arguments and models of socio-political complexity, and questions concerning the classification of objects as ritual.

Interest in the religious practices and beliefs of the Minoans can be traced back to the beginning of archaeological work on Crete in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, even before this, early travelers to Crete took a keen interest in locating famous ancient

religious sites, such as the cave that was the traditional birthplace of Zeus, or the famed peak sanctuary at Mount Jouktas (Pashley 1837, Buondelmonti 1897, Taramelli 1899). As a result of this long history of investigation, the religion of the Minoans was an issue present in the minds of those who studied them from the beginning of archaeological investigation on the island. Evans, who began his investigations of the Palace of Minos at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, included in his monumental final publication long sections on the religion of the Minoans (1921-1935: 146-57, 159-62, 415-30, 964-1018). He focused on the ritual paraphernalia and architecture at the palace itself, as well as at its associated peak sanctuary, Jouktas (1935). Evans' interest in religion expanded beyond Knossos, and he attempted to account for the rural, natural aspects of ritual as well as those that were palatially centered (1901).

There followed a number of works that were foundational for the study of Minoan religion, which not only identified and typologized ritual sites on Crete, but also made great progress in establishing the basic characteristics of ritual activity that left behind extant archaeological evidence. M.P. Nilsson produced a major publication encompassing Minoan-Mycenaean religion (he saw them as one and the same), and their connection to later Greek religious traditions (1927). B. Rutkowski produced an admirably comprehensive synthetic work that analyzed all known types of religious sites in the Bronze Age Aegean world, from Neolithic "temples" on Crete, to domestic sanctuaries in Mainland Greece, to the various types of nature sanctuaries on Crete, the Mainland, and the Aegean islands (1972, 1986). His catalogues and descriptions are still useful today, even if they have in some respects become out-of-date as a consequence of much recent fieldwork.

The most influential publication on Aegean prehistoric religion and ritual in recent times is undoubtedly *The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi*, edited by Colin Renfrew in 1985. The framing chapters of this book were the first attempt to systematize a general framework for the study and analysis of prehistoric ritual sites in general, based specifically on the author's excavations at Phylakopi on the island of Melos in the Aegean. Renfrew focused on performance and action as important aspects of ritual: "The essence of religious ritual, as I see it, is the performance of expressive actions of worship and propitiation by the human celebrant towards the transcendent being" (Renfrew 1985: 18). Renfrew proposed a list of archaeological correlates that could be used to identify a ritual site: it would have characteristics that focused attention; signified special aspects of a liminal zone; anticipated the presence of the transcendent and its symbolic focus; and evidenced participation and offering.

The outline proposed by Renfrew for the identification of a ritual site is still regarded as useful by most scholars of Minoan ritual today, but it remains general and can certainly be ambiguous. In particular, with respect to extra-urban ritual spaces with their varied states of excavation and publication, it is often difficult in practice to determine definitively if a site was the locus of ritual activity. The issue revolves around the question of how much material is needed to classify a site as ritual. Is it merely the presence of a couple of votive figurines? Or figurines, alongside some cups that suggest drinking? Or figurines, double axes and a ceramic assemblage that provides evidence of drinking, food storage, preparation, and conspicuous consumption? The classification of many of the sites within the corpus of peak sanctuaries or sacred caves has been based on very limited material, and it is difficult to discern whether ritual activities were performed

at any given site and, if so, which activities. For this research, I have resolved that the basic evidence needed for the identification of a site as ritual is the secure presence of material culture that indexed participation in the Minoan island-wide ritual complex. This polythetic set can include, but is not limited to, votive offerings (e.g., figurines, tables of offering, and personal items, such as jewelry and weaponry that had never been used), ritual symbols (e.g., horns of consecration and double axes), cult furniture (e.g., altars and kernoi) and representations of the deity (e.g., baetyls - aniconic images of the deity). Given the variability among and between types of extra-urban ritual site, it is not fruitful to be more specific than that, until more is published.

Another seminal work on Minoan religion dealing with these same issues of performance and ritual action is Peter Warren's *Minoan Religion as Ritual Action* (1988). In this concise yet profound booklet, Warren addresses and attempts to fill a major gap in the scholarship: "...it would be fair to say that much previous work has, very reasonably, tended to concentrate on describing and analyzing cult places and their contents and their survivals, and on detailing the lists of divinities and offerings in the Linear B tablets" (1988: 12).<sup>8</sup> He rightly points out that this produces a somewhat static picture of Minoan religion, whereas the people of ancient Crete should more properly be understood as people in action. To this end, he defines ritual action as δρώμενα (things done), λεγόμενα (things said), and δεικνύμενα (things seen) (1988: 13), and uses this framework to analyze five types of Minoan ritual: dance, baetylic, robe, flower, and sacrificial rituals. *Minoan Religion as Ritual Action* is more nuanced and more inclusive

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<sup>8</sup> Warren pointed out that at the time he was writing, ritual practice was becoming a major topic of study for Minoan archaeologists. He mentioned Sakellarakis (1970) on animal sacrifice, Rutkowski (1984) on house cults, Hägg (1986) on epiphanies, and Marinatos (1985) on the Thera frescoes. Two other roughly contemporary works that are useful, and more general and synthetic, are R. Hägg and N. Marinatos, eds., *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age* (1981) and N. Marinatos *Minoan Religion* (1993).

of both iconographic and archaeological material than previous works, and it represents the first serious attempt to discuss the action and performance of Minoan ritual directly.

Warren's work highlights one of the major problems that arise when discussing activity at Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces — namely, the precise nature of the ritual action. As Warren pointed out, there are two main bodies of evidence: the archaeological and the iconographic. While complementary, these often signal very different types of activity. The archaeological material indexes drinking (various types of cup), feasting (serving vessels), food storage (pithoi) and preparation (cooking vessels), and the dedication of votives – figurines, votive double axes, horns of consecration, etc. There is also ritual paraphernalia, interpreted as “altars” and “tables of offering”, that suggest further dedicatory acts. The iconographic evidence (which will be treated more fully in Chapter 6: 206-17) presents more ephemeral activities – dancing, tree shaking, and worship of aniconic images – that would not leave behind a material signature. At each peak sanctuary, sacred cave, and rural sanctuary, some combination of these activities may very well have occurred, although that is not necessarily evident from the material excavated at that site.

A final major theoretical consideration is the nature of the ritual object. Certain objects, and categories of object, have been traditionally classified as ‘ritual’ in scholarship on Minoan religion, often on the basis of quite limited evidence. But interpretive difficulties arise when the basis for identification becomes tautological. For example, one of the main criteria for the classification of certain objects as ritual is the context in which they were found; if the context is a ritual space, then the objects found within it might indeed also be ritual. As discussed above, however, the identification of

ritual spaces is often itself based on the presence of ritual objects. This quandary is commonly the case with prehistoric cultures, and Minoan Crete is no exception. Nevertheless, certain aspects of Minoan ritual material culture do support the identification of objects as associated with ritual. For example, there are iconographic representations of ritual activity that include ritual symbols (e.g., “horns of consecration”, double axes). More convincingly, the preponderance of ritual symbols in certain spaces, and their co-occurrence, argue strongly for the identification of both the spaces the symbols as ritual.

Recently, Briault (2007b) has addressed this question explicitly in terms of what she calls the “ritual kits” found at Minoan peak sanctuaries. Using a system of polythetic classification and looking at bodily practice, she seeks to

“move away from the traditional concern with topography, by suggesting instead that the equipment used in peak sanctuary rituals was more significant for their performance and transmission than the physical characteristics of the landscape in which they took place” (2007b: 123).

In light of the patterning of artifact distributions from canonical peak sanctuaries, non-Cretan peak sanctuaries, and “non-peak peak sanctuaries” (i.e., other ritual spaces on Crete), Briault concludes that the embodied experience of participation in performances at a peak sanctuary, as constituted by its material culture or ritual kits, is more important than the mere location of the site. Briault’s analysis and argument illustrate that there is a high degree of similarity between assemblages from different sites, but there is also variation, which needs to be explored and understood.

When we consider the assemblages of the extra-urban ritual spaces, there is a high degree of similarity among certain classes of object. For example, peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries have all produced evidence for ritual activity that

includes: the co-occurrence of altars, offering tables, lamps, kernoi (ceramic vessels containing multiple receptacles of the same shape), and horns of consecration. Further, the assemblages of votive dedications share many objects, such as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, weaponry, and personal adornments (Watrous 1996: 92-96). The assemblages from these sites, collectively, suggest that there existed a general type of ritual activity and votive dedication associated with extra-urban sanctuaries, no matter what their character or location. Some have suggested that this indicates that similar types of deities were being worshipped (Rutkowski 1986, Watrous 1996). However, as Berg has argued (2004: 34), this might in some way reflect a particular mode of interacting with the divine aspects of nature itself.

In addition to peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries, there are other important places on Crete in which similar objects have been discovered – the ritual areas of towns, villas, and palaces. In these spaces as well, one item alone does not indicate ritual space/activities; but the total package, or a preponderance of objects within it, may do so. Briault (2007b) makes this point explicitly, arguing that it is the presence of objects from the Minoan ritual kit that is the important aspect of ritual activity, rather than the spaces in which they were found. Further, particularly in the palaces, but also in some of the villas and towns, there are other of ritual spaces. These are defined through the iconography, especially in the form of elaborate wall paintings that often depict ritual activity. Objects such as double axes, horns of consecration, stone offering tables, and kernoi all have been found in areas that have a ritual focus (e.g., Sanctuary XVIII at Mallia, the Sanctuary of the Double Axes and the Temple Repositories at Knossos, and the west wings of the palaces at Phaistos and Psychro). To emphasize the point, it is not

the presence of a single object that designates a ritual space, and context alone cannot classify an object as ritual. Instead, participants created a distinctive ritual complex (or ritual kit) at each of these spaces that met the needs of the particular activities that were performed there.

This section has reviewed briefly some of the main issues that arise when considering Minoan religion in general, and the sites and material culture of extra-urban ritual spaces in particular. Although there remains ambiguity about the exact nature of ritual objects and ritual spaces, the evidence presented from each site in the following chapters affords a useful perspective on the extant archaeological evidence. In addition, regardless of these ambiguities, there is a distinct and identifiable set of objects – and activities – that index an island-wide Minoan ritual complex. It is not necessary for all of these objects to appear at every site, or for each site to produce evidence for the full complement of ritual activities, but there are irrefutable similarities between ritual spaces and material culture across Crete in the Middle Bronze Age. In what follows, I explore both the similarities and the differences.

## **Material Culture**

Archaeology by definition deals with the material culture of past societies – the architecture, the objects, the things of everyday life. It is only recently, however, that scholars have begun to theorize material culture explicitly as a field of inquiry in its own right, with its own theoretical frameworks. The approaches that fall under this rubric seek to understand the ways in which humans interact with the material world; how various cultural and technological processes shape objects, how material affects the

behavior of human beings, and the complex network of humans, objects, and their interconnections that shape the experience of being in the world (Appadurai 1986, Thomas 1991, Chilton 1999, Robb 1999, DeMarrais *et al.* 2004, Meskell 2005, Miller 2005, Tilley *et al.* 2006).

In this section, I review some of the issues dealt with by material culture theories that have direct bearing on this research. There are, however, many questions about the ways in which humans interact with material objects. Some of the frameworks that have also been influential include reciprocity (Mauss 1925, Weiner 1985, Thomas 1991), style and agency (Wobst 1977, 1999, David *et al.* 1988, Hegmon 1992, Irvine 2001, Wengrow 2001, Conkey 2005), objects as symbols (David *et al.* 1988, Hegmon 1992, Robb 1998, Wobst 1999, Bowser 2000, Wengrow 2001, DeMarrais 2004) and consumption (Miller 1995, 1996, Glennie 1996, van Wijngaarden 1999). I will focus on topics concerning value, identity, and material networks, which are particularly crucial for my study of extra-urban ritual spaces.

### *Value*

The creation of value — or, more specifically, how certain objects acquire a status that is more prized than others — has received significant attention from scholars who study material culture, in both ethnographic and archaeological contexts (Renfrew 1986, 2004, Brumfiel and Earle 1987, Helms 1993, DeMarrais *et al.* 1996, Saunders 1999, Lesure 1999, Bayman 2002). The concept of value is crucial when considering the assemblages from extra-urban ritual spaces on Crete, because many “ritual” objects and categories of objects have been traditionally considered encoding or embodying Minoan

concepts of value. These distinctions are particularly important because they are critical for arguments about the connections between assemblages and the identity of the ritual participants.

There are several different anthropological and archaeological frameworks for studying value, which have been deployed with a wide range of data. “It is well-established in anthropology that the value of things is based on several criteria: capital input, labor input, utility, abundance or scarcity, exchange rate, and ‘social’ value, including religious or political significance” (Weissner 1997: 117, cf. Appadurai 1986, Parry and Bloch 1989, Thomas 1991). The concept of value relates to the study of extra-urban ritual spaces in that objects are used to index or to challenge certain ideologies and identities during ritual practices.<sup>9</sup> “Materialization is the transformation of ideas, values, stories, myths, and the like into physical reality – a ceremonial event, a symbolic object, a monument or a writing system” (DeMarrais *et al.* 1996). The symbolic value, for example, of the horns of consecration, exists in the objects representing the Minoan ritual complex and links by their presence those spaces to the palaces and other ritual contexts.

Certain classes of object from Minoan Crete have been associated with an elite stratum of society, for a variety of reasons including the raw materials, symbolism, and the contexts in which they have been discovered. Many of these objects are also integral parts of the material culture assemblages from peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries, and in order to understand the connections that are drawn from their presence at these sites, I will briefly review the reasons that scholars have attributed value to them.

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<sup>9</sup> Ritual can also be used by individuals as a form of resistance or rebellion against certain constructions of identities or beliefs, and can be used to overturn traditional values.

Generally, raw materials that were either difficult to obtain or required high levels of processing in the production phase have been connected to the elites of Minoan society. Metals, especially the bronze and gold objects that have been found at ritual sites, are believed to have been brought there, used, and dedicated by elites that had preferential access to trade and exchange. Neither gold nor the components of bronze (copper and tin)<sup>10</sup> were available on the island of Crete, and therefore had to be acquired through foreign contacts. In addition, metalworking was a specialized craft and its products were not available to the rural population of the island, who were primarily involved in agricultural production (Halstead 1992). Elite individuals who could obtain metals through trade, or who had access to metalworkers whose status they supported, were the primary consumers of metal objects, including seals, signet rings, votive weapons, jewelry, votive double axes, and the various other artifacts that have been discovered at the extra-urban ritual spaces. This category of artifact was especially common at sacred caves, which strongly suggests a close association of elites to the ritual activities that were performed and the objects that were dedicated there.<sup>11</sup>

Other artifacts and categories of artifacts were ascribed value in Minoan society for similar reasons. These included stone vessels, altars, and tables. Although the materials were readily available either on Crete or from nearby islands in the Aegean, a high degree of skill, craft, and significant amounts of time were required to produce the finely-worked vessels that have been discovered at extra-urban ritual spaces. Inscriptions in Linear A writing can also connect material closely with the elite. Linear A inscriptions

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<sup>10</sup> Tin was acquired, through indirect trade, from sources in the East. There are a few copper sources on Crete, although they are not very good.

<sup>11</sup> This connection will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3: 77-83.

are found most commonly on stone tables of offering, but there are also ceramic vessels and metal objects (e.g., double axes) that bear such inscriptions. The Linear A script was not widely used on Minoan Crete; there was not a high degree of literacy on the island. Linear A was primarily used for administrative purposes (Schoep 2001a). The elite population controlled the administrative and economic aspects of society, and therefore objects with Linear A inscriptions that were used and deposited at peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries are, more or less by definition, associated with those elites.

### *Identity*

The identities of the participants at extra-urban ritual sites are a critical component of understanding the ritual activity performed and the sites' connection to other socio-political dynamics. For example, in the above section on value some of the ways in which aspects of the assemblages signify elite associations were discussed. In general, in order to understand how the different but complementary forces of participation in the Minoan ritual complex intersected with the local and regional influences on specific sites, it is necessary to discuss explicitly issues of identity. In this section, I will review some important trends in the theoretical considerations of identity, and how those identities can be embodied in material culture.

Individual agents actively construct their identities through reflexive interaction with and experience in the material world (Shanks and Tilley 1982, Shennan 1982). Personhood is constituted through social practices, and relationships with people, nature and material culture (Fowler 2004). Personhood, for Fowler, is the general term used to

encompass all levels and types of identity, from age, gender, and status to religion, locality, political affiliations, and ethnicity.

“Archaeologies of personhood investigate how past people were generated alongside their social worlds, through social technologies, and look for key metaphors and principles that structured daily lives” and more specifically look for “interactive construction of personhood within the community, and the differing strategies people employ in negotiating their own personal identities through larger trends in practice that structure their lives” (Fowler 2004: 6).

In this passage, Fowler addresses many salient points in the archaeology of identity: the reflexive relationship between people and the world in which they live; the structuring of daily life as an important factor in the structuring of identity; and the active negotiation and construction of one’s own identities. The role attributed to the individual and his/her engagement with the social, and the point that all features of identity are contextual within the structure of daily life, are the most compelling perspectives brought to bear on identity theory from post-processual archaeology.

There are two different levels of identity, which encompass most of the categories that would fall under its rubric: cultural identity and social identity. Cultural identity can be thought of as how members of a self-consciously defined “culture group” characterize themselves in relation to other groups. Such groups may call upon religious traditions, socio-political organization, language, and material culture as key to their self-definitions. Ethnicity is a type of cultural identity that has received a great deal of attention in the last several decades (Jones 1994, 1997, Emberling 1997, Hall 1997, 2002, Barthe 1998), partly because of the modern concerns with issues of ethnicity and their role in the creation of nation-states (Alonso 1994, Eriksen 1993). Ethnic identity can often be archaeologically identifiable through various types of material culture; style,

choice of material, technological processes, and decoration can distinguish a particular group (Sackett 1985).

Social identity, in contrast, is closer to the individual, and designates how people socially signify membership in a “category” within a group — for example, gender, age, and status. Membership in these categories of identity can also be expressed materially, although the mode of materialization may be different than that of the expression of a cultural identity affiliation. For example, the audience for these material signals would be a smaller, more intimate group that already had certain information about the individuals expressing these types of identity. Therefore, material expression of a social identity may be dress or body ornamentation, that would convey information, such as status or gender, about the individual who wore it (Marcus 1993). Some of these signals are preserved in the archaeological record (e.g., body ornamentation, such as jewelry), whereas others are not (e.g., dress, since textiles do not usually survive in most temperate contexts, or particular types of hairstyle that might denote age gradations [Joyce 2000]). However, even though these types of signals may not survive directly, the archaeological record can provide indirect information about them, such as iconography or figurines. In order to assess this type of information, issues of the embodiment of identity will be considered next.

Both types of identity are layered and multivalent. We need to consider that an individual chooses to express certain identities at specific times and in certain places. Multiple types of identity, such as the female gender or elite membership, can be conveyed simultaneously and by various signifiers. These significations are not only a matter of individual choice, but are dependent on the context of the interaction. It is my

contention that people were navigating, manipulating and creating both social and cultural identities in the arena of ritual practice at the peak sanctuaries, which in turn both shaped and was shaped by the contemporary processes of socio-political change. In order to more fully understand how these identities can be read from the extant archaeological material, it is possible to turn more explicitly to some of the recent work on the embodiment of identity in material culture.

In their introduction to a special section on embodying identity, Fisher and Loren (2003: 225) write: “the presentation of the self is situated within and is in relation to the social and physical landscape.” This physical landscape is constituted by the objects and built and natural landscapes that structure the experience of daily life. The work of Judith Butler on the performance of identity, specifically gendered identity, draws on Foucault’s concept of performance and, to a lesser degree, on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*.

“[Butler] defines performance as a form of repeated *citation* of a disciplinary norm, a largely or normally discursive (*not* prediscursive) enactment of a mode of being that is shaped by culturally-situated precedents, and in turn shapes new cultural performances” (Bachand *et al.* 2003: 238).

The embodiment of identity in material culture is created by that performance — whether by production, adornment, exchange, dedication, or destruction of objects. Performance structures the actions of social agents and gives those actions meaning, as well as reifying and reproducing their social and cultural identities.

Lynn Meskell has studied the construction of identity with particular reference to gendered identities, primarily using data that has come from her work in Egypt. Meskell critiques social constructionist approaches based on the work of Foucault and Bourdieu. These consider the body as a scene of display, and she also argues against viewing the

body solely as an artifact.<sup>12</sup> Meskell argues instead for a conception of identity in which it is the lived experience of the person through the body (and here she is also arguing against a Cartesian mind/body duality), which can be understood to interact with the social and material world in a more active way.

“Bodies cannot be understood as a neutral medium of social practice: materiality matters... The embodied body represents, and is, a lived experience where the interplay of irreducible natural, social, cultural, and psychical phenomena are brought to fruition through each individual’s resolution of external structures, embodied experience and choice.” (Meskell 1996: 6)

Meskell contends that the experience of embodied individuals constitutes identity, and that the individual should not be seen simply as a micro version of a larger social entity.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of the embodiment of identity is particularly useful when studying the figurines that constitute a large portion of the votive dedications from the extra-urban ritual sites. Identity, however, is conveyed through many different categories of material culture, in the ways that people produce, consume, and move through the material landscape of the world. Therefore, it is worth exploring some of the ways in which identity can be embodied in anthropomorphic as well as other forms, thus making this framework more applicable to the other sets of data that will be analyzed in this study — for example, architecture, or personal adornment, or more commonplace types of material, such as ceramics.

In their analysis of Mesoamerican residential space in the Late Classic Maya and Formative Olmec periods, Bachand, Joyce and Hendon (2003) examine spatial organization and architectural facades as citational precedents for embodiment. Drawing

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<sup>12</sup> Meskell cites the work of Shanks and Tilley, 1982; Thomas and Tilley, 1993; and Barrett, 1994, as the main proponents of the “body as artifact” school of thought.

<sup>13</sup> Meskell reprised this argument in a number of other works: Knapp and Meskell, 1997; Meskell, 1998; and Meskell and Joyce, 2003.

upon Butler's conception of identity as performance, the authors propose that the figural representations that adorned elite building facades were representative of their views of the ideal person. The function of these spaces, such as feasting to celebrate life-cycle events, would have exposed these images of an idealized, youthful elite to a larger visual audience than just that of the structure's residents.

“These concretized presentations of bodily ideals and standards of comportment, when positioned to be highly visible during a variety of activities, serve to create a communal experience and reinforce bodily practice and ideals on a subliminal level” (Bachand *et al.*, 2003: 245).

Through their analysis of intimacy, visibility, circulation frequency, and formality, the authors use spatial organization to understand how the architectural material structured experience and, consequently, concepts of personhood.

Michelle Marcus, who views the body as a scene of display, evaluates the construction of gendered identity at Hasanlu in northwest Iran during the Iron Age (Marcus 1993). She uses the assemblage of lion pins, a type of brooch worn by women of the period, as her data set in studying the role of emblems as objects that convey visible information about the personal identity or social group affiliations of individuals who wore them. Marcus argues that personal appearance cues like clothing, hairstyle, and body markings can be more dynamic and convincing in conveying social identity than verbal or other visual cues. Marcus situates the conveyance of elite identity through the lion pins within the context of social and economic tensions that were prevalent in this period, which would have made these women essential parts of the iconography of power that helped to create the illusion of an armed society and to reinforce traditional male symbols of military strength (Marcus 1993: 172). For Marcus, the pins are

emblematic of social identity and women's bodies were a medium for the symbolic expression of group affiliations.

Identity is not a monolithic entity. Individuals may embody their social identities in figurines, while at the same time that they signal a more corporate cultural identity through other media. Looking at the categories of hair, clothing, and body ornamentation, or posture and gesture, may give us some perspective on the types of social identities that were important for people to represent materially. Rosemary Joyce's work (1998, 2000, 2003), for example, with the hand-modeled figurines from Playa de los Muertos in Honduras showed that it was possible to distinguish identities that were not based on gender distinctions, as was generally thought, but rather on age gradations. The figurines in her study were produced continuously between 900 and 200 BC (the late Early Formative through the early Late Formative period), and were found in burials, domestic contexts, and ritual spaces such as ballcourts. Joyce argued that through body form, hair, and ornamentation the figurines commemorated the gradual production of social persons. Her work highlights the connection between the modeling of the figurines and the social production of members of society. There is a clear similarity with the iconographic evidence from the frescoes from Minoanized Thera. It has been well documented by Ellen Davis (1986) that different age grades were depicted through quite distinctly different hairstyles and dress, demonstrating the development of social personas. Further, Robert Koehl's study of the Chieftain Cup (1985, 1986) has convincingly shown that rites of passage for age groups were a feature of Minoan society.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Koehl has convincingly demonstrated that Minoan hairstyles, for which we have iconographic representations such as frescoes and the Chieftain Cup, are indicative of age-group divisions of society.

Indeed, anthropomorphic figurines are very different from other classes of artifacts. Aside from iconographic representations, they comprise our best evidence in the prehistoric periods for how the human form was conceptualized. In addition, human figurines have been studied to understand many different aspects of culture including ritual (Thomas and King 1985, Kendon 1997, Marcus 1998, Tringham and Conkey 1998, Goring 1999, Wedde 1999), gender (Butler 1993, Hitchcock 1993, Kokkinidou and Nikolaidou 1997, Hamilton 2000, Clark 2003), and identity (Bolger 1996, Cook 1992, Marcus 1993, Joyce 1998, 2000, 2003, Bachand *et al.* 2003, Fisher and Loren 2003, Bailey 2005, Lesure 2005).

Given the transitional socio-political climate of the late Prepalatial period on Crete, it would not be surprising to find individuals actively signaling their membership in different groups as an effective strategy to maneuver through the shifting political landscape. As we know from studies such as those by Ian Hodder (1979) and Joyce Marcus (1998), in such an environment, non-verbal cues such as clothing, hairstyle, and body ornamentation are symbolic devices that can be more effective and dynamic than verbal signals in conveying identity. Hodder's ethnoarchaeological work in Kenya (1979), in particular, has clearly shown the tendency for people to manipulate material culture in times of stress, transition, and ethnic confusion. In this view, the very late Prepalatial period, when new political structures were coming into being, would be the moment when one might expect "signifying with things" to take on special importance. The peak sanctuary figurines are a durable medium for conveying these signals. In order to understand these strategies, both cultural and social identities should be considered.

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The Chieftain Cup, in particular, depicts two male figures with different shaved hair patterns, interacting in a way that suggests that a rite of passage is being illustrated.

## *Networks*

The last theoretical framework that I would like to discuss explicitly is the concept of networks. The objects of the material world are connected to one another and to human beings in a complex network of interactions, and it is these interactions that constitute the structure of how things and people operate within the world. The concept of networks has been used to discuss social, technical, biological, and mathematical systems of relationships and organization, as well as cultural and material networks that are the focus of anthropological and archaeological study. This concept has been implicit in the preceding discussions, but it is worth making it explicit, because it is the relationships that comprise the network that give objects meaning, and through this, we can understand how they functioned.

The specific concept of networks that is meant here is based largely on the linguistic model of Peircian semiotics (1955), which conceives of language in terms of icon, index, and symbol. For Peirce, words have no inherent meaning. They are only given meaning by the way in which they relate to other objects within their network. Briefly, a sign is an icon when its relationship with that to which it refers is one of perceived similarity — an index when it references something about its referent (smoke to fire); and a symbol when the sign and referent are mediated by some formal or agreed-upon link, irrespective of any physical characteristics of either sign or referent. This model emphasizes the relationships or connections that exist between the things and words that organize the system, and without which, things have no meaning. Although originally conceived to deal with language, Peirce's semiotic framework has been

fruitfully applied to cultural and archaeological data, such as objects in cultural assemblages or landscapes (e.g., Knappett 2005).

A more recent framework that uses the concept of networks is Latour's actor-network theory, which was developed as a sociological model, but has also been adopted by some anthropologists and archaeologists (Witmore and Webmoor 2008). Actor-network theory proposes that each component (whether they are words, objects, or people) of a network is a "node" that is connected to other nodes through a system of relationships that vary depending on the nature of the nodes (Latour 2005). Latour argues that the connections between nodes constitute the social system, and only through understanding these relationships can we understand the network itself and how the nodes within it behave.

The concept of the network has been successfully applied to Minoan data (Knappett 2005). Using the framework of Peircian semiotics, Knappett proposes that an object be analyzed in terms of its affordances, constraints, iconicity, indexicality, and mutability. These terms suggest that the function of an object is perceived not from its physical form alone, but also from numerous associations and access to internal representations that exist as a result of that object's place in relation to other objects and people in the material world (Knappett 2005: 46). For Knappett (2005: 86), networks comprise the complex socio-temporal associations of objects that are the key in the constitution of meaning in material culture, and that these associations are inherently significant and referential. Knappett applies this framework to drinking vessels from Middle Minoan Crete, to show that even objects considered mundane or everyday possess meaning in the network of cultural associations.

“Minoan drinking vessels, with their various resemblances, contiguities, and causalities, find themselves within particular networks that contribute to the ways in which they are perceived/conceived as a category in the Minoan world” (Knappett 2005: 166).

Assessing the affordances and constraints (e.g., material, shape and form), iconicity (e.g., skeuomorphism of similar objects in metal), indexicality (i.e., the archaeological context and co-occurrence with other objects), and technology (i.e., the advent of wheel-made pottery in the early MM period) of drinking vessels, Knappett demonstrates that these objects can only be understood in terms of their place in the context of Minoan Protopalatial Crete – in this case, from contexts of competitive consumption at the palaces of Knossos and Mallia.

The network approaches briefly reviewed here are crucial for understanding extra-urban ritual spaces. Only by locating the sites and their material culture within the complex networks of contemporary Minoan ritual and socio-political dynamics is it possible to discern clearly how these sites functioned, and how ritual activity and performance were constituted. Objects that were discovered as part of the material assemblage of peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries can only be attributed value, and meaning, by understanding their relationships to other parts of Minoan culture. For example, stone offering tables with Linear A inscriptions are only made comprehensible when the connections to systems of production, consumption, and elite-controlled administrative systems are understood.

## **Overview and Looking Forward**

Emergent socio-political complexity provides the fundamental context for these sites, in that dynamic changes in organization were taking place between the Protopalatial

and the Neopalatial periods – the exact time when peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries witnessed their most intense use. In addition, theories of heterarchy, factional competition, and segmentary states provide a framework for understanding the local and regional influences on individual sites and their material culture. The general trend in anthropology and archaeology is a re-analysis of the concept of the state, and how best to consider past societies in their specific socio-historic contexts, and the same applies to the sites within the ritual landscape of Minoan Crete. There is a high degree of individualization and uniqueness within the use-span, chronological trajectory, elaboration, and material culture of each site that can only be appreciated when it is considered in its specific landscape environment, both with regard to other ritual sites and the rural and urban settlements that surround it.

Questions concerning ritual and religion on Minoan Crete are complicated and often ambiguous, despite the long history of thought and scholarship on these topics. Issues that are particularly relevant to my research are the identification and classification of ritual sites and objects, and how to conceive of the Minoan ritual complex in terms of its socio-political context. One step in the resolution of these questions involves understanding the – sometimes subtle – differences between individual sites. The second, complementary step is simultaneous awareness that despite their variations, peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries all participated in the Minoan ritual complex, and therefore their material culture will appear similar to a certain degree. It is necessary to continuously be aware of these two forces – one operating towards similarity and the other towards difference – in order to understand Minoan extra-urban ritual practice.

There are many and varied material culture theories that can contribute to the understanding of Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces – agency, production, consumption, style, memory, etc. – but I have focused here on three issues that are especially relevant to this study: the creation of value, identity and the embodiment of identity, and the concept of networks. These approaches together address the specific questions concerning the comprehension of the material culture of ritual spaces and the constitution of their meaning within the network of Minoan ritual landscapes.

In this chapter, I have reviewed three different types of theory that are all interconnected and are critical for understanding the role of extra-urban ritual spaces in Minoan Crete. The issues discussed have set the stage for the discussions that follow. The cohesive influence of the Minoan ritual complex, juxtaposed with the individualizing effects of the local and regional contexts, must be constantly present when considering the material culture networks of Minoan peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, and rural sanctuaries. In subsequent chapters, I explore the application of these theoretical frameworks through an analysis of the sensory experience and unique material culture of sacred caves (Chapter 3), the use spans and changing material culture of peak sanctuaries within the ritual landscape (Chapter 4), the ceramic assemblage of the peak sanctuary at Vrsyinas, which is unique with respect to the size of the assemblage and the chronological trajectory of the site (Chapter 5), and the often-overlooked category of rural sanctuaries, which provides a foil to the scholarship on the other two types of site (Chapter 6). Each of these discussions looks both at characteristics that are unique, but at the same time considers them in the broader context of the Minoan ritual complex.

## **Chapter III: Sacred Caves**

What role did caves play in the ritual and socio-political landscape of the Minoan Bronze Age? Many of the caves traditionally identified as evidencing ritual use have been known for a long time, beginning with the pioneer archaeologists on Crete more than a century ago (Hogarth 1899/1900, Taramelli 1901). As a result, a number are quite well known and have received much attention in both scholarly and popular publications. What then can be said about them that is new and different, in the absence of newly excavated or published material? In this chapter, I explore aspects that still deserve more attention. These are: 1) the ways in which these caves were experienced by Minoan ritual participants – seen, felt, smelled, and heard; and 2) how Minoan cult practice at these caves related to contemporary socio-political phenomena. Specifically, I seek to explore the nature of the link among different categories of Minoan ritual sites (e.g., peak sanctuaries and rural sanctuaries), and how ritual practices differed between and among these distinctive ritual settings.

To situate Minoan ritual caves in their larger social and physical landscapes, it is necessary to understand both their chronology and other contemporary phenomena on Crete. Some certain caves first came into use as ritual locations at the beginning of the

Protopalatial period (c. 1925-1900 BCE)<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 3.1a), the time of the appearances of the first palaces. Ritual cave use on Crete reached its apogee, however, in the next major period on Crete, the Neopalatial (beginning c. 1700-1680 BCE) (Fig. 3.1b), when socio-political organization was restructured to become more hierarchical and vertical.

Although hundreds of caves are scattered across the landscape of Crete, only about a dozen can be securely identified as places that were visited for ritual purposes during the Minoan period, and those are found primarily in central Crete (Fig. 3.1). What singles them out as a cohesive group of sites used for ritual, as opposed to domestic or mortuary, practices? In this chapter, I explore Minoan cave ritual activities and ritual sites, through an examination of the material signatures associated with them. In particular, the similarities between the assemblages and the ways in which they change over time will be considered to provide a sense of how sacred caves were deployed in the context of the ritual landscape of Minoan Crete. At the same time, however, the individual sites and their material culture will be explored in order to understand how each site's place within its local and regional landscape affected its ritual activity and material culture signature. A grasp of the effects of these two forces in shaping ritual activity at Minoan sacred caves lays the foundation for a broader consideration of the unique role of caves in the ritual and sociopolitical landscapes of Minoan Crete. Before these topics can be addressed, however, I begin with a brief review of prior research on Cretan ritual caves, followed by a discussion of the problems of identification and classification of sacred caves.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Bronze Age chronology on Crete, see the Introduction (p. 2-3), and for a more detailed discussion of Bronze Age chronology, see Manning 1995b, 1999.

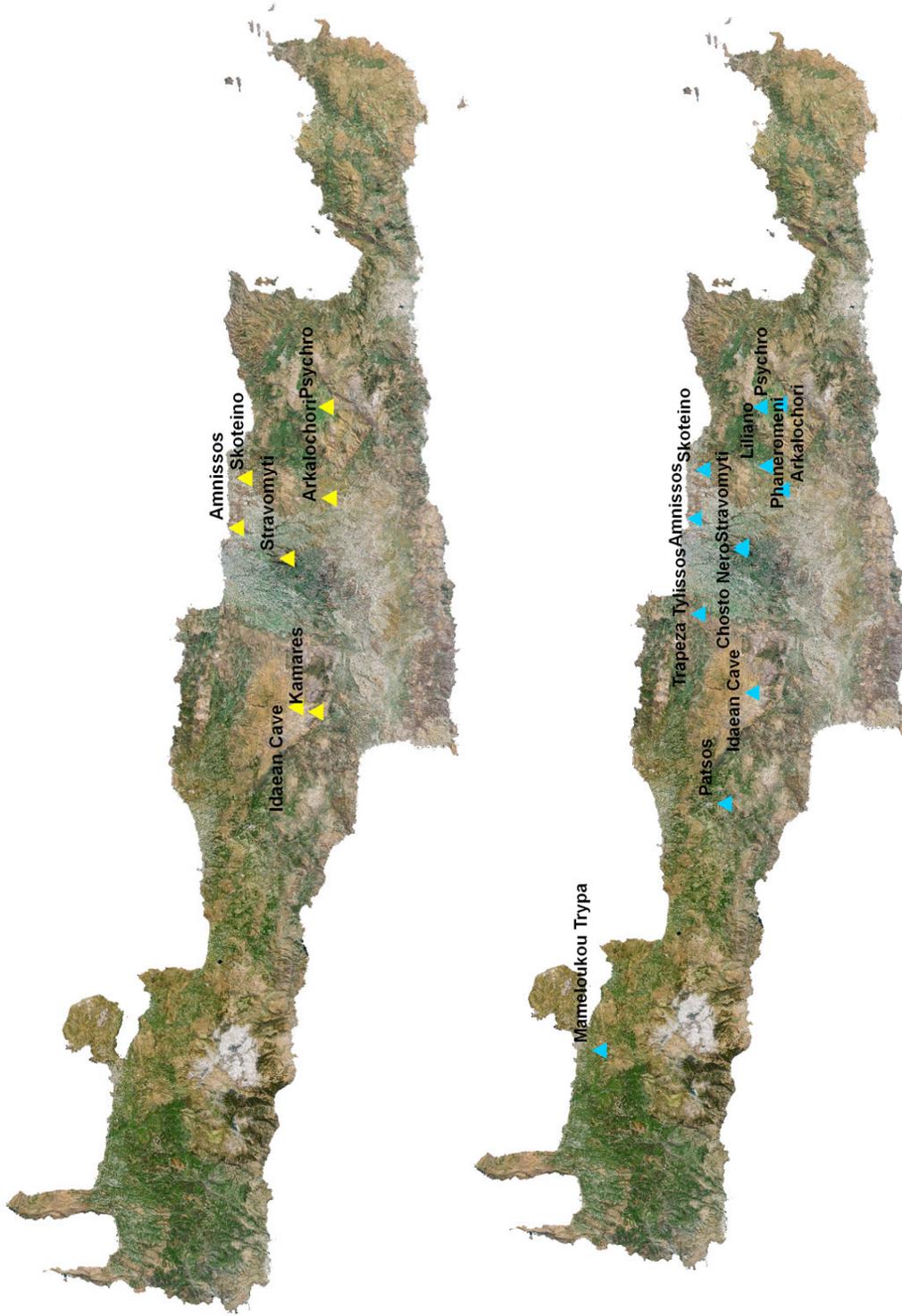


Figure 3.1 a and b. Maps of Crete, showing distribution of sacred caves across the island in the Protopalatial Period (above) and the Neopalatial Period (below).

## Cretan Caves: Previous Research

Most of the attention received by caves in Greece has focused on their Neolithic habitation or Early Minoan mortuary use (Haggis 1993, Kiparissi-Apostolika 1999). Caves used in these ways were more abundant and more evenly distributed across the island than those used ritually. Perhaps as a result, Minoan *ritual* cave use has been under-theorized, though this lack may be partly due to the dearth of detailed publication of their excavated assemblages. Non-mortuary ritual caves as a category unto themselves have only rarely been linked to broader contemporary socio-political phenomena on Crete. In this, they are quite different than the other major category of extra-urban ritual site: the peak sanctuaries.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this lack of theoretical discussion, as noted earlier, the caves themselves have long been known and have been investigated periodically over the last century. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the archaeologists Federico Halbherr and Yiannis Hazzidakis worked at Psychro, following Evans' work there at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Excavations were initiated at Kamares by Taramelli in 1901 and Hazzidakis began work at Arkalochori in 1913. Work at both of these sites continued throughout the following century and up to the present (e.g., Sakellarakis 1985, van de Moortel 2006). The work of Paul Faure (1944) both greatly expanded the number of known Cretan caves with cultural deposits and furthered our understanding of the uses and cultic activity at those locales. Faure interpreted the diversity of the cave assemblages as evidence that a heterogeneous group of deities was worshipped at different caves and, on the basis of the

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<sup>2</sup> The one obvious exception is the Kamares Cave, which has been linked to elite palatial culture through Kamares Ware, the presence of which provides evidence for a direct link to palatial assemblages, particularly at Phaistos; see Walberg 1987, Cherry 1986: 35-38, and van de Moortel 2006.

votive dedications, he identified four different concerns of cave cult: initiation, childbirth, agriculture, and pastoralism (Faure 1964).

Loeta Tyree's dissertation (1975) usefully surveyed and organized the available information on Cretan caves of all periods. More recently, re-examinations of earlier excavations, such as the studies by Bogdan Rutkowski and Krystof Nowicki, and by L. Vance Watrous, of material from Psychro, have provided more detailed analysis of the votive assemblages (Rutkowski and Nowicki 1996, Watrous 1996).

Of these, Watrous used his discussion of Psychro cave to address larger issues concerning Minoan ritual cave use. Specifically, he claimed that they have not been considered sufficiently in their larger socio-political context; past work focusing on the cultic material itself has been largely typological; the idea of deity identification is not the best way to approach the material; also, that symbolic and iconographic meanings have not been taken into consideration in accounts of the offerings (Watrous 1996: 26-7). In the context of his functionalist approach, Watrous assumed that one of the main roles of religion is to explain and justify social order. Citing the direct historical approach advocated by Marcus and Flannery (1995), he attempts to discern this role through the lens of continuity of cave (and peak sanctuary) ritual practice into historical periods.

“This entails correlating specific beliefs from a historical context with their material expressions and then tracing these beliefs back into prehistory through the archaeological record. The similarity of Geometric-Archaic votive types and concerns with those of the Bronze Age would seem to justify our use of Greek religion to understand Minoan ritual (but not Minoan religious beliefs)” (Watrous 1996: 28).

He established continuity of use at Psychro cave through a catalogue of select finds, and compared his data to a limited group of other Minoan extra-urban sanctuaries.

Using the sanctuaries dedicated to Zeus – Ida, Psychro, and Palaikastro – and their success in the later Archaic period, Watrous argued that it is the connection of the sanctuaries to specific political developments that controlled their fate (Watrous 1996: 111). Extrapolating back to the Minoan period, Watrous concluded that Proto- and Neopalatial extra-urban sanctuaries were regional shrines for polities, and that their ceremonies consisted of communal events that celebrated the cohesion of the society and its fundamental well-being. Watrous' study addressed important points, including the sanctuaries' connection to socio-political structures and the concerns of the ritual activity, which provide a useful starting point for further analysis. However, his direct historical approach is limited, and it is my contention that these questions can be answered by considering the material culture more closely, contextualizing it in its wider contemporary ritual landscape.

Nanno Marinatos (1993) also addresses Minoan ritual cave use in general terms, examining the similarities and difference between caves and peaks sanctuaries. She importantly raises the idea the idea that votive dedications suggest something about the identity of the dedicants rather than of the deity being worshipped. Like Watrous, she is concerned with the social dynamics of Minoan religion, which for her include such questions as social storage and redistribution, and the idea that people of different social strata were intermingling during cave rituals (Marinatos 1993: 125). These are interesting and important questions. Marinatos' analysis, however, is general and preliminary, and it is only through detailed examination of the finds themselves, in their archaeological context, that her intriguing ideas can be evaluated.

More recently, there has been an interest within Minoan scholarship concerning looking regionally at the role(s) caves played in their larger physical and social landscape, and in socio-political developments. For example, Ellen Adams has investigated the relationship between power and ritual in the regions controlled by Knossos and Mallia (2004). Through looking at caves and peak sanctuaries in the landscape and their connection with the palaces and other levels of hierarchy, she has concluded that ritual

“lies at the heart of the tension between cultural symbolism, collective identity and social differentiation strategies, and that the study of ritual is the main starting point for examining how different affinities of identity and status can be articulated and aspired to simultaneously” (Adams 2004: 30).

Adams has shown, through her analysis, the marked regional differences between the Knossos and Mallia regions, and that there were different types of ritual use of caves, depending on each cave’s place in the ritual and socio-political landscape.<sup>3</sup>

Another scholar, Ina Berg, has used her analysis of caves and the larger ritual complex of Minoan Crete to argue for a more inclusive understanding of Minoan sacred cosmology than has been previously suggested (2004). Her interpretation suggests that we include and account for the possibility that natural features, such as water, mountains, caves, and animals, were not simply a vehicle to mediate human relationships with the divine, but were perhaps themselves considered divine. In this, she draws on anthropological research in cultures with animistic understandings of nature and religion (Berg 2004: 34).

Both Adams and Berg draw attention to the fact that our understandings of Minoan ritual activity and spaces, including caves, must expand and become more

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<sup>3</sup> This implications of Adams’ analysis for peak sanctuaries are discussed more explicitly in Chapter 4: 134.

flexible to account for different aspects of their significance and of the experiences of the diverse participants in Minoan ritual activities. In my research, I seek to broaden scholarship on Minoan ritual to address the role of extra-urban ritual spaces in the ritual and socio-political landscapes on Crete by re-contextualizing individual sites in terms of their assemblage, the experience of the site, and in their place in the landscape. In the sections that follow, after a section on identifying criteria, I build on their suggestions by examining the chronological spans of particular sites and how these are differentiated regionally and individually, to better understand how sacred caves fit into a larger picture of development on Crete.

### **Identifying Criteria**

Before turning to my examination of cave ritual, I first review the criteria scholars have used to classify particular caves as locations of ritual and assess the validity of those classifications. Paul Faure, who has dedicated himself to Cretan cave research over many years, lists some of the features that characterize caves in which cult activities seem to have occurred: the presence of water (whether oozing, streaming or stagnant), the presence of calcareous concretions, numerous offerings, evidence for burning (ash or smoke), controlled descent, a way of pilgrimage, and the existence of a later literary, epigraphic, or oral tradition (Faure 1994: 78). It is worth noting that Faure applied these criteria for ritual cave use to all periods of antiquity. Rutkowski suggests the following criteria: the ‘mysterious’ appearance of the interior, the presence of stalagmites and stalactites, and the ‘miraculous’ properties of water (Rutkowski 1986: 50). Interestingly, he does not mention a unifying assemblage of material culture, but only the physical

characteristics that he believed would have inspired ritual worship in Minoan times. Tyree, in her dissertation, suggested only two criteria for identification: architecture (from traces of rectangular buildings to low walls surrounding stalagmites) and cult objects (including both offerings to the deity and cultic furniture) (Tyree 1975: 6). Admittedly, these authors had very different aims, but all were trying to identify attributes that signal why, among the hundreds of caves on Crete, only a few were chosen as spaces for ritual performances.

These three scholars offer a wide range of criteria. From Faure’s seven different but precise characteristics that cover a wide chronological range of use, to Rutkowski’s solely ‘natural’ conditions, to Tyree’s exclusively cultural focus, two major themes emerge: first, the natural characteristics that influenced and shaped the visitor’s experience (Table 3.1), and, second, evidence of the ritual activities that were performed there. It is these two issues that I explore in this chapter.

Cave	Darkness	Water	Stalactites/ Stalagmites	Discrete Chambers	Visibility
Amnissos	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Arkalochori	yes	yes		yes	yes
Chosto Nero	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Idaean Cave	yes	yes	some	yes	yes
Kamares	yes	yes	no	no	yes
Liliano	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Mameloukou	yes	unknown	unknown	yes	yes
Patsos	no	no	yes	no	no
Phaneromeni	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Psychro	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Skoteino	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Stravomyti	yes	no	unknown	yes	yes
Tyliisos	yes	yes	yes	no	yes

Table 3.1 Presence/absence of physical features of sacred caves that affected sensory experience.

The nature and quality of the experience of visiting a cave need to be acknowledged in order to unravel how that may have shaped visitors' engagement with the space, and, more specifically, what we can tease out about those activities from the extant material culture. In other words, does the material culture residue of ritual activity in caves tell us about the sensory experience of participation?

Before describing and analyzing the natural qualities and appearance of caves that may have shaped visitors' experience and actions, we may note the plausible explanation offered by Renfrew for why these aspects might have figured so large in the selection of certain caves for ritual use. In his introduction to *The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi*, Renfrew asserts that a ritual space will have certain qualities:

“However if we in general expect in a religious context indications both of expressive action and symbolism appropriate to transcendence, and if we give due consideration to the possibility of secular ritual, of play, and of other symbolic behavior, then we have a coherent framework within which to operate. In ideal cases the actions may be recorded directly: for instance by evidence of repeated sacrifice of a specific animal species, or the frequent breaking of a particular vessel form. In others the preparations for such actions, in the forms of special buildings and equipment, must be sufficient. It may be possible, also, to identify certain objects as the result of offerings if their character and quality seem to preclude other explanation” (Renfrew 1985: 20).

The accompanying characteristics of the ritual experience are: attention focusing, special aspects of the liminal zone, presence of the transcendent and its symbolic focus, and participation and offering (Renfrew 1985: 18-19). Certain kinds of caves, precisely because of the qualities that Faure and Rutkowski have highlighted (such as darkness, their enclosed space, the presence of water, and calcareous concretions) may naturally focus the attention of a visitor and signal the space as different and liminal. These, however, are not the only two characteristics of caves that contribute to the experience: all of the senses are affected by a variety of aspects presented by almost any cavern.

As elaborated above, scholars have emphasized varying features as distinctive to caves treated as sacred or worthy of receiving ritual attention by Minoan people.

In a review of all known sacred caves on Crete, and their accompanying assemblages,<sup>4</sup> however, it is my contention that a definition of what makes a cave sacred must be flexible. As I discuss below, several characteristics are common to multiple ritual caves, but a hard and fast checklist of features (as demonstrated above) is unnecessarily exclusive and fails to accommodate not only the differing nature of ritual activities in each cave, but also the varying levels of exploration, excavation and publication.

The natural qualities of a cave are a crucial aspect of ritual experience, but there is no set of essential elements that were required for the cave to receive ritual attention. In addition, it is likely many other factors also influenced decisions concerning the appropriateness of specific caves for ritual use. Each cave offers a unique experience, including the journey required to reach it, the particular layout of the ‘rooms’, and the natural features within it. There are, however, certain components that a number of the caves share: such as the presence of stalagmites and stalactites, and pools of water that are not only present, but also were also the focus of ritual activity (votives, evidence of sacrifice and burning, etc.).

In addition to the physical contexts of ritual caves, the other main category of evidence for ritual activity is the objects used and deposited within them. Many of the caves contain remains of architecture, whether in the form of ‘temenos’ walls (e.g., Psychro) or more substantial building walls (e.g., Amnissos) that clearly indicate that the ritual participants wanted to establish these areas as special. More ubiquitous are the

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix I for a catalogue of caves, a history of exploration, their topography, and a brief review of their assemblages.

small finds and votive dedications that provide evidence of the nature of activities that occurred at these sites. These include not only votives and ritual symbols (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, double axes, and stone offering tables), but also objects of a personal nature (jewelry, weaponry, etc.), rare or exotic materials (e.g., gold and silver objects), and evidence for preparation, consumption and/or ritual offerings of foods and liquids (ceramics, ash, faunal remains). It is only through analysis of the entirety of the assemblages that we can interpret the kinds of ritual (and other) activities that occurred with the sites.

Both the natural features of the caves, as well as the material evidence of the activities that took place within and around them, are important aspects to understanding Minoan sacred caves. When analyzing these data, however, there must be a degree of flexibility. Understanding the use of caves goes beyond just classification – this particular cave is or is not sacred – but must also take into consideration the fact that different caves were used for different purposes in several periods over time, and even potentially within a single period.

### **Sensory Experience**

The qualities of a cave afford a very different sensory experience than those possible at other contemporary ritual spaces on Minoan Crete: whether on the tops of mountains, in a sacred grove, or in the central court of a palace. In the karstic environment of Crete, caves are not only dark, they are typically wet. The presence of water influences the shape and layout of the space, and it also affects almost every aspect of experiencing a cave. Dripping water produces stalactites and stalagmites (Fig 3.2),

which are geologically unique to caves. Pools of water may form and became the foci of ritual activity in the Minoan period – especially at Psychro, where most of the votive offerings were discovered in the pool (Hogarth 1900: 91). However, evidence for the ritual significance of water is not limited to caves. Some peak sanctuaries had wells and springs associated with them, as did the sanctuary of Kato Syme, where a spring cuts through the shrine (Peatfield 1995: 223). Sounds of water dripping, hitting stones, or landing in pools are an unremitting soundtrack to time spent inside a cave. The persistent damp also creates an unmistakable odor that is immediately identifiable and distinguishable as the interior of a cave.



Figure 3.2 Interior of Psychro Cave, showing stalactites and stalagmites.

Other physical characteristics of caves affect aspects of the experience as well. Caves are cool in the heat of a Cretan summer and warm in the winter, even when snow covers the mountainside around them. Sounds, whether of water trickling through the various crevices and dripping down from stalactites and onto stalagmites, or the footsteps of a visitor, or the calls of nesting birds and bats, echo and reverberate, so that the source from which these sounds emanate is not immediately clear. Also disorienting is the darkness itself, which can cause missteps, slips, and uncertainty, and may lead to altered and distorted perceptions of the shapes of objects and spaces within the cave (Fig 3.3).

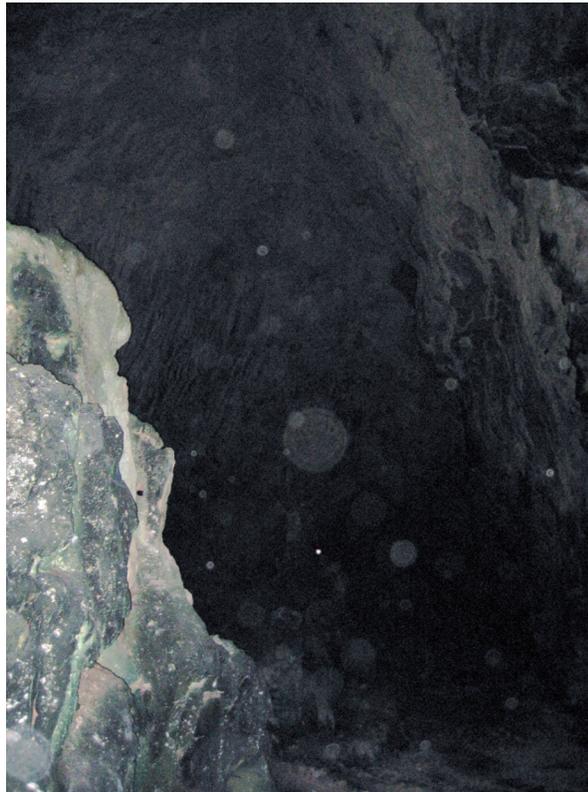


Figure 3.3 Interior of Skoteino cave, with a large calcareous concretion on the left.

Another crucial ingredient of a visit to most Cretan caves is the process of maneuvering through what can be quite difficult terrain in order to reach the cave.

Describing the ascent up to Kamares Cave on the southern slopes of Mt. Ida, for example, Taramelli wrote:

“And such a fatiguing climb, of at least four hours, was for the pilgrims a sort of propitiation of the divinity, for they gained the height with no slight difficulty...The side of the mountain ascends in enormous gradations of calcareous rock steeply toward the two-headed summit; and the tortuous path winds close to the precipices clothed with asphodel and fragrant salvias...” (1901: 443-4)

The fact that this process is often long and requires physical effort helps to signal to the visitor that the destination will be worth the trek. All of these features may be considered obvious, but they are important aspects of ritual participation that profoundly shaped the experience of past worshippers.

Some scholars, such as Tyree, have begun to explore how Minoans experienced caves, particularly from a ritual perspective. They have focused, however, mostly on the visual aspect of the dichotomy between the light outside and the dark interior of the cave. Tyree has explored issues of performance in cave ritual, and the possibility that worshippers experienced trance-like states induced, at least in part, by the darkness itself, in contrast to the bright Cretan sun (Tyree 2001: 43). Expanding on a concept introduced to Minoan ritual theory by Morris and Peatfield (1998) for peak sanctuary experience, Tyree considered the gestures exhibited by votive figurines from the caves, along with other factors such as the importance of the sun and light to characterize the intense sensory experience of cave ritual.

As suggested above, vision is not the only sense affected by a visit to a cave. Recently, cultural anthropologists and psychologists have begun to explore the idea that the Western model, which tends to privilege vision over the other senses, is not a cross-cultural universal (Stoller 1989, Classen 1997). The work of these scholars suggests

that sensory perception is not just a physical, but also a cultural act: “We experience our bodies – and the world – through our senses. Thus the cultural construction of sensory perception conditions our experience and understanding of our bodies and the world at a fundamental level” (Classen 1997: 402).

This approach to understanding the sensory models can be traced to Lévi-Strauss’ earlier work on the sensory codes of myths (Lévi-Strauss 1969). In a short essay, he considered how various dualities, indicated by instances of synaesthesia, could be expressed and resolved in mythology. More recently, other studies have explored ethnographically how sensory models shape and are shaped in non-Western cultures. For example, Stoller’s work with the Songhay of Niger explored aspects of Songhay culture such as perfumes, sauces, and music (Stoller 1989). The Greek anthropologist Nantia Serematakis has used multisensory imaging to discover the ‘often hidden sensory-perceptual dispositions’ of traditional societies and recover the memory of culture embedded therein (Serematakis 1994: 9-12).

Some archaeologists have tried to reconstruct ancient sensory systems. Thus, Classen has begun to explore how the Inka ordered the cosmos and society through sensory symbols, and how this system changed post-conquest (Classen 1993). More specific to Aegean prehistory, Hamilakis has argued for incorporating multi-sensory approaches to Minoan culture through ideas of the consuming body and issues of commensality (Hamilakis 2002a, Hamilakis [in press]).

Although it is arguably easier to study ethnographically how cultures invest sensory experience with social value and cultural meaning, archaeologists have nonetheless begun to acknowledge the importance for the study of past cultures, both

theoretically and in their analysis. I suggest that caves offer some clear advantages to the consideration of sensory experience in the past. Whereas a modern visitor to (say) the Minoan palaces is confronted with very fragmentary archaeological ruins or, in the case of Knossos, a largely modern fiction (e.g., Papadopoulos 1997), the largely unchanging appearance of natural caves allows those who visit them today – whether tourists, local shepherds, or archaeologists – to enter spaces very similar to those that Bronze Age visitors did, and experience potentially similar physical conditions.

### **What is ritual experience like, if not in a cave?**

As outlined above, caves provide a sensory experience that is unique on Minoan Crete. Like other aspects of Minoan sacred caves, however, this experience needs to be considered in context in order to understand the specific characteristics that are unique in caves versus other contemporary ritual spaces, such as peak sanctuaries, shrines in palaces, in towns, and in villas. Initially, the impression is that other Minoan ritual spaces are open to the sky, and are public, light-filled places, especially when one thinks of the central courts of the palaces, or the peak sanctuaries. What could be more different from the experience of standing in a dark, wet, echoing cave than being on the top of a mountain, in the sun (or pouring rain in some cases), with the wind blowing? This distinction is undeniable – peak sanctuaries and caves are very different spaces. But upon closer investigation, this is not true of all other contemporary ritual spaces across the island, and there are, in fact, some similarities that are quite striking.

Thus, the ritual spaces in palaces are not exclusively open-air public spaces. The central courts, west courts, and theatral areas are, of course, open and were clearly

intended for participation and performance of ritual by a large number of people and an audience. The *other* spaces of the palaces, however, are for the most part, closed off, dark, and difficult to navigate. The typical indoor ritual areas, or shrines, are categorized as such as a result of their architecture, associated assemblages (ritual symbols, paraphernalia, etc.), and iconography in the forms of fresco paintings. The rooms that traditionally fall into this category are: lustral basins, pillar crypts, and bench sanctuaries/dining shrines.<sup>5</sup> A number of other rooms/complexes/areas have also been categorized as ritual locales within the palaces. These include, for example, the Throne Room Complex at Knossos, the West Wing complexes at Mallia, Phaistos, and Zakros, the Sanctuary of the Double Axes at Knossos, and Sanctuary XVIII at Mallia, to name just a small selection. These spaces lie deep within the complexes of the palaces, where there is little light. Gesell's (1987) spatial analyses of most of these spaces, have shown that they were confined and difficult to access. She suggests that only a limited number of people were able to participate in or observe the ritual activity that occurred within these enclosed spaces. She also notes that, particularly in the Neopalatial period, the evidence suggests that the majority of cult activity took place deep within the palace complexes rather than in the outer, public courts (1987: 126). I will return to this point later.

Ritual spaces in towns and villas appear similar to those in palaces and include both open, public, centrally located areas, as well as more closed, restricted ritual areas designed for few ritual participants. At Amnissos, the so-called Villa of the Lilies boasts a lustral basin. Many other towns, such as Ayia Triadha, Gournia, and Tylissos, have

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<sup>5</sup> See Rutkowski 1986 and Marinatos 1993 for overviews, but the most complete treatment can be found in Gesell 1985, including a catalogue of cult rooms (68-142), in which she covers 138 different cult complexes, rooms, and shrines in Minoan palaces and towns.

houses and/or villas that are equipped with bench sanctuaries, pillar crypts, and possible lustral basins (Gesell 1985). In a range of settings, from the palaces and villas to smaller towns and settlements, in different types of socio-political settings from high status to lower, there are ritual spaces that are restricted, dark, and difficult to get to from public areas.

Even the peak sanctuaries are not strictly open, bright, wind-swept antitheses to the cave spaces. In the Neopalatial period, the peak sanctuaries become architecturally elaborated. At Jouktas, extensive architectural remains survive that date to this period, and the sanctuaries at Gonies, Kophinas, Traostalos, and Modi have also all produced architectural remains, such as ‘temenos’ walls. There is also the Zakros rhyton, which clearly depicts a built, monumental sanctuary on the peak of a mountain. These features served to define and separate ritual spaces. While in the Protopalatial period, the peak sanctuaries were open spaces, in the Neopalatial period, access was more restricted, perhaps limiting the number of participants, and separating those who did participate by means of controlled visibility.<sup>6</sup>

This evidence, along with the locations and structure of some of the town and palace ritual areas, suggests that in the Neopalatial period that there was an interest in enclosing ritual spaces. In the palaces, ritual areas are positioned more often in restricted locations; those at the peak sanctuaries become architecturally elaborated, contained, and enclosed. This phenomenon occurs at just the time that the sacred caves receive much more ritual attention and offerings.

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<sup>6</sup> In the context of her discussion of representations of ecstatic ritual in glyptic representations, Christine Morris has argued that the bodily experience of ritual was a manifestation of elite power and authority. Her argument is discussed explicitly in Chapter 6: 207.

I suggest that in the Neopalatial period, there was a move toward restricted ritual participation. This restriction was materialized by the enclosure of ritual spaces and their separation from easy access. This change is concurrent with a change in socio-political structures to a more vertical, hierarchical structure than in the Protopalatial period. Perhaps the closing off of certain ritual spaces or even conducting rituals in a place where no one could observe the ritual – such as in caves – is representative of the changes that were taking place in both ritual and non-ritual spaces at that time. Restricted access to ritual participation could have been one of the results of new distinctions in status and identity in Minoan society of the Neopalatial period or one of the processes by which such distinctions emerged.

Other forms of sensory experience, in addition to visual sense and perception, would also have played a role in ritual activity in caves and other contemporary ritual spaces. Indeed, sensory aspects seemed central in the choice of location for certain types of ritual activities in particular periods. To understand both what is unique to the Cretan context, and what factors are common to the experience of caves, I briefly review below the archaeological literature on the ritual use of caves in several other regions.

### **Cross-cultural cave comparanda**

Archaeologists have long been interested in the use of caves, not just on Crete, but in many regions of the world, covering their use in many different time periods for a variety of functions and activities.<sup>7</sup> The painted and incised images in the caves of

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<sup>7</sup> The full range of functions for caves beyond ritual – burial/mortuary functions, habitation sites, seasonal encampment locations, shelters for companion species, etc. – is too massive a body of data and accompanying literature to include here, but is not without interest in relation to how people have, over time, used caves as ritual spaces.

France and other parts of Europe signal for many the emergence of “art” or “symbolic thought” for early modern humans, dating to approximately 40,000 years ago (Curtis 2006). Recently, a discovery of carvings of a snake-shaped rock found in a cave in the Tsodilo Hills of Botswana has dramatically pushed back evidence for ritual behavior to 70,000 years ago (Handwerk 2006). Caves have been a focus for symbolic behavior for a very long time indeed, and in some cases, the ritual activities and actions of the participants were similar enough to Minoan sacred cave use that they provide useful comparative data. That is not to say that *all* ceremonial cave use in all periods all over the world is identical and therefore immediately comparable. Each case of ritual is unique to its cultural and historical context. Nonetheless, given the relative dearth of theorizing about Minoan sacred cave use in particular, it is worthwhile to explore how other scholarly traditions have and continue to understand cave ritual.

The Mayan ritual use of caves is the field in which perhaps the most new and exciting research and analysis is currently taking place (Prufer and Brady 2005a, 2005b). In fact, material evidence in caves may be the best context for studying Mayan religion available to archaeologists (Prufer and Brady 2005a: 3). In their introduction to a 2005 edited volume, Prufer and Brady explain how the relatively new sub-field of Maya ritual cave use study can contribute to larger understandings of Mayan culture:

“We suggest that the identification and analysis of ritual contexts can provide us with windows into the activities and actors involved in religious systems, linking belief to other complex systems of social meaning, including political and economic systems” (2005a: 5).

The three main issues that they identify as confronting their sub-field at the moment are: the distinction between belief and ritual action, the degree to which religion is embedded in other social formations, and how to use historical analogs to understand archaeological

contexts. The contributions in the volume cover topics ranging from the role of ritual space in the built environment as a microcosm of sacred landscape features (i.e., social power of elites, cosmological importance, the construction of status, and the exploitation of sacred landscapes), to cave-focused ideologies, to the human skeletal material found in caves.

While not all of the topics are directly relevant to my research, the stated focus of the volume brings to the forefront several issues that are very salient to the Cretan case – in particular, the various connections the authors draw with Mayan cave ritual and other social formations, such as political and economic systems. Individual articles address the construction of caves in and under sacred sites in order to connect, visually, the people who built the space with the sacred landscape and the cosmological order (Prufer and Brady 2005a, 2005b) and the role that caves played in the ceremonial temple assemblages of the late Classic Maya period (Pugh 2005). It is interesting that one of the most important characteristics of the caves in the ceremonial temple assemblages was as a source of water; it was, in fact, the presence of water that established a built or natural cave as a place of worship.

The scholars cited above have begun to explore the role of sacred caves in larger Maya culture and social practices, and as such provide an important comparative example of ritual and cave use in an early state society, as well as of methodologically and theoretically sophisticated approaches to their study. The caves were an important feature in the sacred landscape of Mesoamerica in the Maya periods, and they were used, at times, to establish and legitimize status and identity. Although this volume is only one of a growing number of studies in the sub-field of Maya ritual cave use (e.g., Rue *et al.*

1989 on the caverns of Copan), the co-editors and contributors explicitly draw attention to the ritual played a role in Maya culture, and that this needs to be explored explicitly.

Similarly, in Asia, there are enormous numbers of caves that have been elaborated as Buddhist cave temples and monastic cells. To illustrate this point, in just one region of northwestern China, the Dunhuang region, there are five cave temple sites, just one of which contains 493 caves (Shichang 1995). These caves comprise 45,000 square meters of murals and 2,000 painted statues, built over nine centuries. Clearly, there survive countless ritual caves and their attendant ritual accoutrements throughout the Buddhist world. In India itself, the birthplace of Buddhism, cave temples built between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD number more than 1,300 (Higuchi and Barnes 1995). Another country in the Buddhist world, Afghanistan, has cave temples spread over three discrete regions (180 caves in Jalalabad, 200 in Haibak, and 1,000 in Bamiyan), although these temples tend to be smaller, simpler, and boast fewer murals than the ones in India or China (Higuchi and Barnes 1995: 283).

Given the vast numbers of caves, and their widespread distribution, research has focused primarily on documenting, cataloguing, detailed recording, and preliminary (and sometimes synthetic) analysis of their architectural elaboration and decoration (Higuchi and Barnes 1995 and Shichang 1995; for a review of the Indian temples). Recent research, however, on Buddhist religious architectural forms – sometimes similar to the cave temples and sometimes replicated within the caves themselves – has begun to unpack the experience of certain types of ritual architecture in terms of presentation, religious ideology, social structures, and issues of power and resistance between the individual and community (Fogelin 2003). The Buddhist cave temples offer a vast body

of data that, with further analysis, can provide extensive evidence for power relations between emergent leaders, and diverse economic and social groups, and largely egalitarian religious communities, as well as the impact of ritual experience on ideology and social relationships across both time and space.

Another region that boasts evidence for ritual cave use is North America, even though scholarship on it remains in the preliminary stages of analysis (despite long-standing knowledge of many of the sites), and is focused on identification, documentation, and cataloguing. The distribution of ritual cave use across North America is not connected to one specific historical or cultural context – there are Mississippian ritual caves, ritual evidence from caves in the Southwest, etc. – but for present purposes, I treat them here as a single group and focus on cases that highlight issues relevant to Minoan sacred caves – in particular, Schroedl’s work on the Split-Twig figurines from caves in the Southwest (1997) and Wasley’s study of the cave at Bonita Creek in Arizona (1962).

Schroedl considers the objects known as Split Twig figurines, which date to approximately 4100-3100 BP, in order to examine the cultural associations of the figurines and the remainder of the attendant assemblage – known as the Grand Canyon Figurine Complex (1997: 250-253). While he is unable to identify which archaeological culture this assemblage can be connected to, his methodology of analyzing the objects in their assemblages and examining their distribution across the Southwest emphasizes the idea of the connection of ritual and religious ideology to specific cultures. Schroedl’s assessment of the diffusion of the assemblage across the landscape raises questions, if implicitly, about the connection between ritual activity and larger cultural complexes.

Does ritual automatically follow the diffusion of other aspects of culture, such as the economy in the form of trade or exchange, or social interactions such as intermarriage? Or, is ritual a driving force that facilitates the interactions of cultures? These questions highlight such issues as the embodiment of identity in ritual activity and paraphernalia, which are directly relevant to Minoan culture.

Working within very different theoretical and methodological paradigms in the 1960s, Wasley conducted an analysis of a cave assemblage that involves similar issues. His extensive survey of the assemblage of objects found in the cave on Bonita Creek, which dates roughly to CE 1290-1310, led Wasley to conclude that the ritual participants must belong to a nearby contemporary group known as the Kayenta “Anasazi”, who did not inhabit this region before or after the period of the assemblage, and left no other evidence for occupation in the area during this period. Wasley reasons that if the visitors to the cave had the same type of ritual assemblage as another known group of people, they must have belonged to the same community. This is a logical conclusion, given the scarcity of other evidence, and his assumption that ritual assemblages can identify the participants in that activity points to the important issue of social identity and the role of ritual participation in its formation and expression. People create, embody, and express social identities in a recursive relationship with material culture that shapes the networks that create the material world (Gell 1998, Gosselain 2000, Buchli 2004, DeMarrais *et al.* 2004, Knappett 2005, Lesure 2005, Miller 2005, Robb 2005, Tilley *et al.* 2005; see Chapter 2: 39-46, for a more detailed discussion of these frameworks).

From this brief survey of scholarship on ritual caves in other areas of the world, ranging from prehistoric through pre-modern periods, it is clear that such work shares

many issues across disciplines and region. Recent studies of Maya caves have focused on their role in larger socio-political and cultural phenomena: how pilgrimages to caves affected the economy; how elites use their symbolic and ideological aspects to establish and legitimize status and identity; and their role in Maya landscape and cosmology. Both the Buddhist cave temples and North-American work tackled issues concerning the role of ritual in establishing identity and group membership. These topics are all relevant and necessary for an understanding of Minoan sacred caves, but also, more generally, to understand the role of ritual and ritual spaces in any historical and cultural context.

### **Cave Assemblages on Crete**

Returning to the criteria presented at the beginning of the chapter, we saw both that natural characteristics of ritual caves and their material culture assemblages distinguish them from the vast number of other caves on Crete. Faure (1994) mentions numerous offerings and traces of burning, and Tyree's (1976) only two criteria are architecture and cult objects. These material deposits – their chronology, the nature of the objects themselves (raw materials, iconography, etc.), and their context – offer a basis for inferences about the identities of the participants, their connection to palatial and non-palatial culture, and the range of ritual activities performed at the caves. Moreover, the information provided by these assemblages needs to be contextualized in terms of the differences between individual sites, the similarities that allow us to consider sacred caves as a unified concept, and the role that sacred caves played in the Minoan ritual landscape, particularly in relation to peak sanctuaries and palatial culture.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 summarize the categories of material finds in 13 caves of the Protopalatial (MM I – MM II) and Neopalatial (MM III – LM I) periods, by presence-absence criteria. Seven of the thirteen caves have evidence for ritual use in the Protopalatial period: Psychro, Skoteino, Arkalochori, Amnissos, Stravomyti, the Idaean Cave, and Kamares.

The finds in MM I-II (Table 3.2) from three of these caves (Amnissos, Arkalochori, and Skoteino) consist almost entirely of pottery; the ceramic forms suggest offerings of agricultural products as well as feasting and drinking. This evidence supports the interpretation of the nature of activity in this period as ritualized, even though the assemblages do not include the extensive presence of votive categories such as anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figurines, bronzes or objects made of exotic material.

		KEY:														
		<input type="checkbox"/> presence <input type="checkbox"/> absence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> high quantity														
		Amnissos	Arkalochori	Chosto Nero	Idaean Cave	Kamares	Liliano	Mameloukou	Trypa	Patsos	Phaneromeni	Psychro	Skoteino	Stravomyti	Trapeza	Tylissos
Ceramic	fine															
	coarse															
	storage															
	kernoi															
Figurines	Bronze	human														
		animal														
	Ceram	human														
		animal														
Bronze	weaponry															
	jewelry															
	cult															
Stone	vessels															
	cult															
gold & silver																
cult furniture																
other																

Table 3.2 Presence/absence of categories of finds from ritual caves from the Protopalatial (MM I-MM II) period, drawn from data presented by Jones (1999), Tyree (1975) and preliminary reports of individual sites.

In the Neopalatial period (MM III-LM I) (Table 3.3), the number of caves with unequivocal evidence for ritual use increases from seven to twelve: Phaneromeni, Skoteino, Amnissos, Chosto Nero, Stravomyti, Tyliossos, the Idaean cave, Patsos, Mameloukou, Psychro, and Arkalochori. Two caves, Psychro, and Arkalochori, have yielded the largest, most complex assemblages, but a number of other caves also exhibit offerings much more varied than the ceramics that were so prominent in the Protopalatial period assemblages. The Idaean Cave, Chosto Nero, Patsos, and Skoteino, for example, all have produced distinctive votive finds, including bronze figurines, weaponry and personal items, stone vessels (some with Linear A writing), and cult items made of gold and silver.

		KEY:															
		presence	absence														
		high quantity															
			Amnissos	Arkalochori	Chosto Nero	Idaeian Cave	Kamates	Liliano	Mameloukou	Tripa	Patsos	Phaneromeni	Psychro	Skoteino	Stravomyti	Trapeza	Tyliossos
Ceramic	fine																
	coarse																
	storage																
	kernoi																
Figurines	Bronze	human															
		animal															
	Ceramic	human															
		animal															
Bronze	weaponry																
	jewelry																
	cult																
Stone	vessels																
	cult																
	gold & silver																
	cult furniture																
	other																

Table 3.3 Presence-absence of categories of finds from ritual caves from the Neopalatial (MM III – LM I) period, drawn from data presented by Jones (1999), Tyree (1975) and preliminary reports of individual sites.

As noted, in the first period of the distinctly ritual use of certain caves, the assemblages consist primarily of ceramics. Rutkowski (1986: 56) interprets these as the vessels that held offerings of grains and cereals that were brought to the deity. Although the presence of a number of storage vessels (e.g., pithoi) supports this interpretation, the assemblages also contain numerous cups, plates, and jars – along with bones and evidence of burning – that would suggest that eating and drinking activities may have been taking place at the caves themselves in this period. Kamares, in particular, where a number of painted and Barbotine vessels were found along with other types of offerings such as bronze jewelry and zoomorphic figurines, suggests a pattern of ritual activity at the caves more complex than simply the dedication of agricultural offerings in plain, everyday ceramic storage vessels (van de Moortel 2006).

In the MM III-LM I period, the quality and nature of the assemblages change. Although ceramics continue to be the most ubiquitous component of the assemblage, the range of other offerings becomes decidedly more numerous and varied. For example, six of the caves have produced bronze objects, ranging from anthropomorphic (Fig. 3.4) and zoomorphic figurines (Fig. 3.5), to personal items, and cult symbols such as double axes. The most notable and dramatic shift is seen in the large number of metal offerings, including figurines, weaponry (votive model blades of daggers and knives, and swords), and jewelry (tweezers, needles, chisels, and razors). The number of sites producing these types of material increased from two to seven, but the number of artifacts and range of objects in the assemblage also increased noticeably; for example, the assemblage from the Idaean Cave. Furthermore, there are even gold and silver votive dedications, such as double axes and miniature swords, found at Psychro and Arkalochori.



Figure 3.4. Bronze male anthropomorphic votive figurine from Psychro, on display at the Heraklion Museum.

Psychro is an exceptional example, in that it produced varied, complex assemblages in both the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods. More significantly, though, are the caves that contained very little material evidence for ritual activities from the Protopalatial, and then have large, diverse assemblages with distinct elite associations from the Neopalatial.<sup>8</sup> Arkalochori, for example, yielded almost no early finds (with the exception of small numbers of EM sherds of bucchero pottery), but it produced weapons (both real and votive), double axes and wasters from the production of bronze artifacts

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<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive presentation of the finds from most of the caves, see Jones 1999.

(Hazzidakis 1912/13, S. Marinatos 1962).<sup>9</sup> Gold and silver votive weapons and double axes (some with Linear A inscriptions) from the Neopalatial period were also discovered. Phaneromeni also failed to yield any securely identified Protopalatial material, but produced stone offering tables, gold double-axes and votive blades, and anthropomorphic figurines made of bronze (S. Marinatos 1937).



Figure 3.5 Bronze votive figurine of an agrimi (wild goat), on display at the Heraklion Museum.

Looking broadly at the changing patterns of offerings and votive types in Minoan ritual cave use provides a perspective on general trends and changes in the material culture of sacred caves. This view also situates cave ritual in the larger Minoan ritual

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<sup>9</sup> The bronze production waste has led Marinatos (1962) to suggest that the deity worshipped at this particular cave was closely associated with metalsmithing, that it itself was a smithy, or that a priestly guild of metalsmithers may have been in control of the cave.

complex that was manifested in other extra-urban sanctuaries and urban or palatial contexts. At the same time, it is useful to consider more closely the use-spans of two individual caves, in order to ascertain the degree to which their context in local and regional landscapes shaped the material culture and ritual performance. The discussion that follows examines in detail the caves at Psychro and Kamares.

### *Psychro*

The cave at Psychro has received the most comprehensive attention, in the form of two major synthetic monographs and numerous excavation reports (Halbherr 1888, Hogarth 1899/1900, Toutain 1911, Davaras 1989, Rutkowski and Nowicki 1996, Watrous 1996).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it offers a detailed case study that provides evidence from the entire history of its use, spanning from the Final Neolithic to the Roman and Medieval periods. The first occupation at the cave was in the Final Neolithic and EM I periods, and is evidenced by handmade, burnished “bucchero” sherds and bones of domestic animals. The domestic pottery and faunal assemblage suggest that the human presence in these periods was solely related to habitation, with no evidence of dedicated ritual paraphernalia. In the Early Minoan II-III periods, Psychro was most likely used as a burial place, although the evidence for this is sparse (Rutkowski and Nowicki 1996: 11). It is in the Protopalatial period that we see the first evidence for dedicated ritual use of the cave. Most of the material comes from a discrete part of the cave, the Upper Chamber, which is larger and much more accessible than other areas. Ceramics are the

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<sup>10</sup> For a complete list of the publications of Psychro cave (and details and references for the complete catalogue of all of the sacred cave sites), see Appendix I: Catalogue of Sacred Caves.

primary component of the assemblage from this period, consisting of cups, bowls, jugs, jars, some miniature vessels and clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines.

In the Neopalatial period, both the Upper and Lower Chambers were used extensively (Fig. 3.6). An altar was constructed in the Upper Chamber that was surrounded by paving stones, ash deposits, and stone offerings tables. Numerous conical cups, and other drinking vessels were recovered in this area (Hogarth 1899/1900).



Figure 3.6 Plan and cross-section of Psychro cave [Rutkowski and Nowicki 1996, fig 4 and 5].

Also in the Upper Chamber, to the east of the altar, is an area delimited by rough stone walls. The finds from this area include more ceramics, animal bones and ash, figurines, weapons, personal possessions, and tools. In the Lower Chamber were discovered large numbers of metal offerings: male and female anthropomorphic figurines (12), zoomorphic figurines, “ceremonial” weapons (220) – double axes, swords, daggers,

knives, spearheads – and personal items (90) – rings, earrings, bracelets, tweezers, razors – and several engraved gems, all made of bronze. These were found placed in and among the stalactites and stalagmites, and especially in the pool.

### *Kamares*

In marked contrast to the evidence for the long history of use from Psychro (and many of the other caves), the cave at Kamares has produced quite a different pattern (Taramelli 1901, Dawkins and Laistner 1912). The origins of its use also date back to the Final Neolithic period, when it was used most probably as a seasonal habitation site, and this domestic use continues into the EM period (Taramelli 1901: 45 reports Ayios Onouphrios sherds and Dawkins and Laistner 1912: 13 report an EM III handmade spouted vessel). The ritual use of the cave began in the Protopalatial, but unlike Psychro and the majority of other caves, it is this early period that produced the largest most varied number of finds and there is little evidence for any activity in the Neopalatial period (Dawkins and Laistner 1912). The location and setting of Kamares Cave, visible from the palace at Phaistos and commanding a view of the plain of the Mesara (along with the Protopalatial assemblage), have lent credibility to the idea that it was perhaps a site that blurred the line between sacred cave and peak sanctuary (Fig. 3.7).

Recently, van de Moortel (2006) has restudied the pottery originally excavated by Dawkins and Laistner, to check the chronology, re-assess the quantities of vessel shapes, and to study the organization of pottery production. Based on previous work at other sites, she has concluded “that high-quality vases were most likely produced not by palatial potters but by independent specialists, and that they were widely distributed in

society rather than limited to the palatial elite” (2006: 78-9), and sought to assess these conclusions against the Kamares material. In her analysis of 17,000 ceramic fragments, she refined the chronological span from EM I through LM IB, with Protopalatial sherds being most common, strongly supporting the argument that the cave experienced its most intense use during the Protopalatial period. Further, she concluded that the pottery from all periods (utilitarian as well as high-quality vases) were produced by local potters from the Mesara who also supplied the nearby settlements at Kommos and Ayia Triadha, as well as the palace at Phaistos (van de Moortel 2006: 88).



Figure 3.7 View of the Mesara plain, toward Phaistos, from the mouth of Kamares Cave.

Despite the lack of material from the Neopalatial period, the Protopalatial assemblage from Kamares shows strong links to an elite emergent in the earlier period.

Kamare Ware (a particular polychrome style of pottery found primarily in elite, palatial contexts), along with Barbotine Ware, fine relief ware and painted wares all suggest that Protopalatial elite were visiting the cave and bringing with them symbols of their status (Walberg 1987; Cherry 1986; also, van de Moortel 2006). It is not solely the early culmination of ritual activity that makes Kamare unique – Psychro and the Idaean Cave also exhibit elite ties in the Protopalatial period – but the fact that use of any kind effectively ceases at the end of the period. This is an important point to emphasize because it means that the use-span of the Kamare cave, uniquely, is comparable to the majority of the peak sanctuaries. Thus, this may suggest that Kamare was a space that was seen as more appropriate for the ritual needs of the Protopalatial elite.

“Since the rise and decline of the cave cult coincided exactly with the fortunes of the Phaistian palace, as shown by the present study, and palatial elite attached great importance to the cave cult, as suggested by the orientation of the Central Court to the cave, it is argued here that the decline of the Kamare Cave and its subsequent lack of recovery after the final destruction of the First Palace at Phaistos can be seen as yet another strong sign of serious trouble for the Phaistian elite” (van de Moortel 2006: 90-91).

Based on the contemporary declines of the palace, sacred cave, and local pottery production, Van de Moortel has argued for a Knossian take-over of the western Mesara in the later LM IA period, which supports notions of a more hierarchically-structured system of organization centered at Knossos in the Neopalatial period. More importantly, however, the chronological trajectory of the Kamare Cave, and its reliance on the elite inhabitants of Phaistos, demonstrate that while participating in the Minoan ritual complex, Kamare Cave was directly influenced by its ties to the local, in this case palatial, landscape context. As a result, it followed a distinctly different chronological

trajectory than the majority of the Minoan sacred caves, and its material culture assemblage reflects those influences.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter has introduced the complexity of cult practice and its place in the network of ritual and socio-political landscapes of Minoan Crete through a focus on ritual caves. The review of previous research demonstrated the long history of scholarship and thinking about cult caves on Crete, which has made considerable progress towards understanding ritual activity. Works remains to be done, however, both theoretically and in the form of study and publication of previous excavated materials. The problems involved with the identification and classification of individual caves as places of cult activity were next considered. When more closely examined, it became clear that these problems were instead the material expressions of the individuality of the assemblages and the activities that they represented – an issue that will become apparent with respect to peak sanctuaries and rural sanctuaries in chapters four and six, respectively. The challenge in discussing all categories of Minoan extra-urban ritual space is to account for both individual variation and the similarities that make separate sites a cohesive category.

One of the characteristics shared by sacred caves is the sensory experience that participation in ritual at these sites afforded. The darkness, sounds, smells, temperature, and other physical characteristics of these caves created an environment, which was conducive to worship – and possibly even trances (Morris and Peatfield 1998, Tyree 2001). It was shown, however, that some of these characteristics were recreated, and cult caves indexed, in other ritual spaces on Crete – the sanctuaries in urban and palatial

contexts, and even the peak sanctuaries became more enclosed in the Neopalatial than they had been in the Protopalatial period. The connection between the experience of space in sacred caves and other ritual spaces is a component of the network that was comprised of Minoan people, sanctuaries, and the material culture assemblages. This network was the ritual complex that encompassed the entire Minoan world, but changed, was manifested in various ways, and created a sense of identity. The cross-cultural comparanda of ritual cave use emphasized the fact that the Minoan case was not unique, and that Mayan, Asian, and North American cultures utilized caves as a crucial part of their symbolic and ideological worlds.

The material culture assemblages providing evidence for the nature and character of the ritual activities performed at sacred caves was discussed, with respect to both general trends and the nuances of individual caves. For example, the votive offerings, even if only suggesting general trends and patterns, convey the distinctly elite status of the ritual participants who used and dedicated them. The raw materials – stone, gold, and silver – were considered valuable and their differential distribution suggests differential access to trade and craftsmanship (see Chapter 2). The iconography of the objects, and the various types of votive weaponry and jewelry, are only associated with the upper strata of Minoan society. In contrast to the peak sanctuary assemblages, in which there is very little metal at all, the votives found in the caves are more definitively linked to palatial culture. This disparity may of course be due, at least in part, to differential site preservation at peak sanctuaries and caves, although it is worth noting that the caves too have been looted extensively, a phenomenon noted especially by early archaeologists such as Hogarth (1900) and Taramelli (1901).

The evidence suggests that the participants in ritual activity at these caves expressed and signaled their identity through their votive dedications. As discussed in Chapter II, cultural identity can be thought of as how members of a self-consciously defined “culture group” characterize themselves in relation to other groups by means of different religious traditions, socio-political organization, language, and material culture. Social identity, in contrast, is closer to the individual, and designates how people socially signify membership in a “category” within a cultural group – for example, gender, age, or status. Both types of identity are layered and multivalent, and individuals choose to express certain identities at specific times and in certain places. Multiple types of identity, such as the female gender and elite membership, can be conveyed simultaneously, and by various signifiers. These significations are not only a matter of individual choice, but are dependent on the context of the interaction. I suggest that ritual, with its standardized and sacralized dimensions, provides a particularly important context for the expression and manipulation of social identities. It is my contention that people were navigating, manipulating, and creating both social and cultural identities in the arena of ritual practice at ritual caves. In a special edition of the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* on identity, Bachand, Joyce, and Hendon (referencing the work of Judith Butler) wrote:

“The embodiment of identity in material culture is created by that performance, whether it is the production of certain items that convey identity, the adornment of those items, the exchange, dedication, or destruction of items that structures that actions of social agents and gives those actions meaning, as well as reifying and reproducing their social and cultural identities” (Bachand, Joyce and Hendon 2003: 238; cf. Butler 1993).

In Minoan culture, a bronze anthropomorphic figurine communicated a higher status than its counterpart made from clay, as a result of the precious raw materials and

the labor that would have gone into its production. I would suggest that the Neopalatial elite who traveled to the caves to participate in the ritual activity were simultaneously signaling their identity through nature of the votives they left behind along with the membership expressed through participation in the ritual experience. Further, communal feasting and drinking in these contexts would have contributed to the affirmation of group membership and identity (Wright 2004). Within the framework of the new power dynamics of the Neopalatial period, an elite that was more exclusive and powerful than hitherto had differential access to raw materials and craftsmanship that allowed them to dedicate votives of high quality, made of materials technologies that were almost exclusively associated with people of high status.

Both the experience *and* the material culture have to be taken together in order to understand what happened at the caves – the ritual activity – and what this can tell us about Minoan socio-political complexity. In his introduction to a recent special issue of the *Journal of Material Culture*, Tilley writes:

“Landscape and place are often experienced as a structure of feeling through activities and performances which crystallize and express group identities to the outside world through passing through and identifying with particular places and particular histories” (Tilley 2006: 14).

The caves, even more so than the peak sanctuaries, had a long history of use before they became spaces for ritual activity; they had already witnessed a long prior history of use as habitation and mortuary sites in the Neolithic and Early Minoan periods.

The material culture assemblages of cult caves, in addition to helping address questions of the identity of the participants, provide evidence for the nature and character of the ritual activities performed there and how these changed over time. In the Protopalatial period, pottery is the largest category of finds. This pottery suggests that

drinking and commensality are the most prominent activities, which were likely rituals that served to reinforce group membership and social cohesion. In the Neopalatial period, the pottery evidence suggests that these activities continued to be important, but that the dedication of votives, particularly high status items (e.g., bronze figurines, jewelry, weaponry, stone vessels and cult paraphernalia, and gold and silver objects) becomes a principal element in the performance of and participation in ritual.

The re-examination of the evidence presented in this chapter has shown that the caves did indeed constitute a sensory experience distinct from other ritual spaces on Minoan Crete, and that the material culture assemblages are distinctly different as well, being more closely linked to the elite strata of Neopalatial society. It has also brought into dramatic relief the observation that both the number of sanctuaries in use and their associated assemblages change over time. Ritual activities at sacred caves intensified at the same time that peak sanctuaries decline in popularity, but their assemblages display stronger links to an elite who were (re)-defining their status in the re-established power structure that developed in the Neopalatial period.

These material culture assemblages, and the activities they evidence, were not unique to ritual at sacred caves on Minoan Crete. In fact, they are quite similar in character to those from peak sanctuaries and rural sanctuaries. More generally, the changes in material in the Neopalatial period are indication of broader changes in ritual spaces across the island in this period. The objects used and deposited at cult caves index the larger network of the Minoan ritual complex, which was constituted by all of these spaces in the landscape and their material culture. This network shaped, and was shaped by, the integral role of sacred cave use.

At the same time, looking at the use span and assemblages from specific caves (i.e., Psychro, Kamares, Arkalochori) demonstrates the local and regional influences on individual cave sites. The ritual activity at certain caves (e.g., Kamares) may have served to legitimize emergent elite status, in ways that underline essential similarities with the peak sanctuaries. Other caves, such as Phaneromeni or Arkalochori, may provide evidence that different, or new social groups were choosing to worship at caves that did not see Protopalatial use.

## **Chapter IV:**

### **Peak Sanctuaries**

#### **Introduction**

Peak sanctuaries are the best-known category of extra-urban ritual sites in Bronze Age Crete, and certainly the most frequently discussed. They have often been treated as a monolithic phenomenon that reflects a “pan-Cretan ideology”. Yet peak sanctuaries first need to be understood as a class of site, and their inter-site variation explored, before they can be deployed in larger arguments. In this chapter, I explore: 1) to what extent the peak sanctuaries were affected by their local and regional landscapes, and whether this pattern reflects regional differentiation; 2) the changes in ritual practice across chronological periods, and how they find expression in the material culture of the sites; 3) the reality and significance of these changes, or the extent to which they are merely a function of the current state of archaeological knowledge; and 4) how peak sanctuaries inform our understanding of the ritual landscape of Minoan Crete – how it was created, transformed, perceived, manipulated, and remembered.

This chapter seeks to address these questions through a variety of approaches to understanding the peak sanctuary phenomenon. First, the long history of previous research is reviewed, in order to understand how scholarship has shaped our understanding of the nature of peak sanctuaries and their roles in Minoan Crete. The characteristics of the peak sanctuaries are then discussed, in order to make sense of the sometimes wildly differing identifications and interpretations to be found in past

scholarship, and to unpack the reasons behind these discrepancies. I then turn to a consideration of the spatial distributions of the sites, along with their associations with local and regional variability in material culture assemblages. Special attention is given to the anthropomorphic figurines, since they are the best-known and most extensively studied category of objects from the peak sanctuaries. Finally, these various approaches and lines of evidence are explored, integrated, and discussed to achieve a holistic understanding of the peak sanctuaries, both as individual sanctuaries and as sites within landscape contexts that are crucial components of regional and island-wide ritual and cultural networks.

## **Background**

Peak sanctuaries appeared in the Cretan landscape in the EM III-MM IA period, the crucial formative period for Minoan palatial states.<sup>1</sup> Such sanctuaries dot the Cretan landscape, with over two dozen sites securely identified so far, and a number of others claimed. The material remains found at these sites include a very wide range of votive offerings, ritual paraphernalia, monumental architectural features (although only at those sanctuaries whose use continued into Neopalatial times) and also certain artifact classes – such as Kamares Ware pottery and Linear A-inscribed cult objects – that are more usually associated with the inhabitants of the Minoan palaces. The connection between the two types of sites is very clear and, for this reason, they have often been studied in tandem (Cherry 1984, Peatfield 1987, Branigan 1988, Watrous 1995, Haggis 1999, and Manning [in press]). Recently, however, scholars have tended to focus exclusively either on the

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<sup>1</sup>Some scholars (Watrous 1996) have tried to make a case for mountain-top cult as early as EM I-II, though EM II cult at Iouktas, the main site used to make such a case, has been expressly denied by Karetsou (pers. comm. in Watrous 1995).

peak sanctuaries (Peatfield 2001, Kyriakidis 2005) or on the palaces and other settlements (Knappett and Schoep 1999, 2000). Scholarship on the palaces and their hinterlands has raised a new set of questions, by demonstrating a more complex and heterarchical political structure than previously imagined (cf. Chapter 2: 18-25). In trying to understand how these fragmented social and political segments cohered sufficiently to form a Minoan state, Cunningham and Driessen (2004: 110) have suggested that a pan-Cretan ideology, with peak sanctuaries at its heart, served as a unifying force transcending the dispersion of political and economic power. In light of this new perspective on the Minoan state structure, this chapter seeks to examine the evidence from the peak sanctuaries to interpret the larger socio-political changes occurring in the Proto- and Neopalatial periods on Crete.

The current state of knowledge of the peak sanctuaries across Crete is highly variable, due to a number of factors. Over 50 sites have, at one time or another, been claimed as peak sanctuaries following their recognition as a distinct category early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Myres 1902/3, Evans 1921). Given this range of identifications, there was an effort to systematize and regulate the characteristics that classified a site as a “peak sanctuary” (e.g., Rutkowski 1988). Despite such attempts, there is still disagreement about the corpus of peak sanctuaries: the identification of a site as a peak sanctuary is more definite in some cases than in others, and even the agreed-upon sites may not exhibit all of the characteristics established by a particular author. The diversity of the sites themselves thus makes the data set uneven. Nonetheless, about two dozen sites that have been universally agreed: Ambelos, Anemospilia, Atsipadhes, Ayios Georgios (Kythera), Etiani Kephala, Gonies Philioremos, Jouktas, Kalamaki, Karphi, Kophinas,

Maza, Modi, Petsophas, Plagia, Prinias, Pyrgos, Spili Voritsi, Tapes, Thylakes, Traostalos, Vigla, Vrysinas, Xykephalo, and Ziros (see Table 4.1).

Another factor that has contributed to the variability of knowledge and publication is the history of the excavation of individual sites. Kostas Davaras excavated many of these sanctuaries in the 1960s and 1970s, but very few results have yet been published. More recent and better published excavations include those at the sites of Atsipadhes (Peatfield 1992, Peatfield and Morris 1995), Ayios Georgios on Kythera (Sakellarakis 1996, Tournavitou 2006) and Jouktas (Karetsou 1981, Zeimbeki 2004), some with major final publications due out soon. Even some of the relatively well-known sanctuaries, however – such as Petsophas, which was excavated early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and whose finds were restudied many decades later (Rutkowski 1991) – were selectively published.

Rutkowski's work on this site, while informative, highlights yet another issue with the currently available data set. For example, the only material published in detail from Petsophas was the figurines, and among these primarily the anthropomorphic “worshippers.” While archaeologists often conduct detailed analyses of subsets of their assemblages, the lack of publication of the *full* range of recovered materials limits the potential of these sites for future research on a range of questions. Such selectivity in earlier excavations and their subsequent publication is a typical result of the long-standing interest in these sites; the data have been studied and published within the frameworks of many different phases of archaeological methodology and theory. Thus, the amount and type of artifacts selected for publication and saved as collections in various archaeological museums can vary dramatically. In contrast, the archaeologists

who are currently publishing Jouktas and Vrysinas are carefully documenting a much wider range of information, including: the spatial layout of finds; stratigraphy; all of the other classes of artifact besides figurines; the precise arrangement of pebble scatters; and the architecture belonging to later phases of site use.

In short, there are a number of sites tentatively identified as peak sanctuaries, but some identifications are far less secure than others. The spectrum of publishing on the excavations ranges from one or two recently excavated sites that are well published or about-to-be published very thoroughly, to sites that were excavated several decades ago but never fully published, to yet other sites (such as Traostalos: see Chryssoulaki 2001), which have been studied recently, but have suffered severe damage from looting looters. Thus, the data remain highly variable. Some collections in Cretan museums, in fact, consist of little more than a few “pretty” figurines, for the most part the result of casual surface collections without attention to spatial context.

### **Previous research on peak sanctuaries**

Despite this dearth of study and publication of the primary material culture evidence from the peak sanctuary sites themselves, scholars have nonetheless not shied away from using peak sanctuaries as conceptual elements in larger arguments about topics ranging from Minoan religion, to trade and contacts with the larger Mediterranean world, to the development of socio-political complexity on Crete. This role of peak sanctuaries in broader theoretical discussions of Minoan Crete has been ongoing ever since Myres coined the term a century ago in reference to Petsophas. To begin a discussion of these sites, then, it is necessary to unpack how the term and the concept of

“peak sanctuary”, and the concepts that underlie them, have been employed by archaeologists in the past, and how past usage affects our current views and understandings. Given the range of discussions and ways in which peak sanctuaries have been employed, I will subdivide previous research into general categories. This will clarify the valuable contributions of individual scholars, and will also illustrate the degree to which work on the peak sanctuaries has been driven by categorization, classification, and the larger research interests of the scholars and excavators who have studied them.

### *Fieldwork and Excavation*

As early as 1903, in the context of his early pioneering excavations of the site of Palaikastro, Myres was the first to identify a site – Petsophas – as a ‘peak sanctuary’ (1902/03). While Myres published brief descriptions of the architecture and stratigraphy of the site, his primary focus was on the votive objects, and his analysis includes valuable details about the construction techniques, surface treatment, and gestures of the anthropomorphic figurines; his report in particular includes a fairly lengthy discussion on the female figurines as a source of evidence for Minoan dress.

Shortly thereafter, in 1909, Evans excavated the peak sanctuary on Mt. Jouktas (Fig. 4.1), which, since at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, had been traditionally known as the ‘Tomb of Zeus’ (1921: 151-163). Evans’ description focuses on the extensive architectural remains at the site and, more generally, how the peak sanctuary cult fit into his understanding of Minoan nature religion, drawing upon iconography from various gold signet rings and evidence from the cult caves known at that time (Kamares, Psychro, and Skoteino). Other early fieldwork was conducted by Pendlebury at Karphi in 1938,

while he was excavating the nearby LM III settlement that occupies the same summit (Pendlebury *et al.* 1937/8), and by Platon at Maza in 1947 (Platon 1947), also in association with a nearby settlement, this time Proto-Geometric.

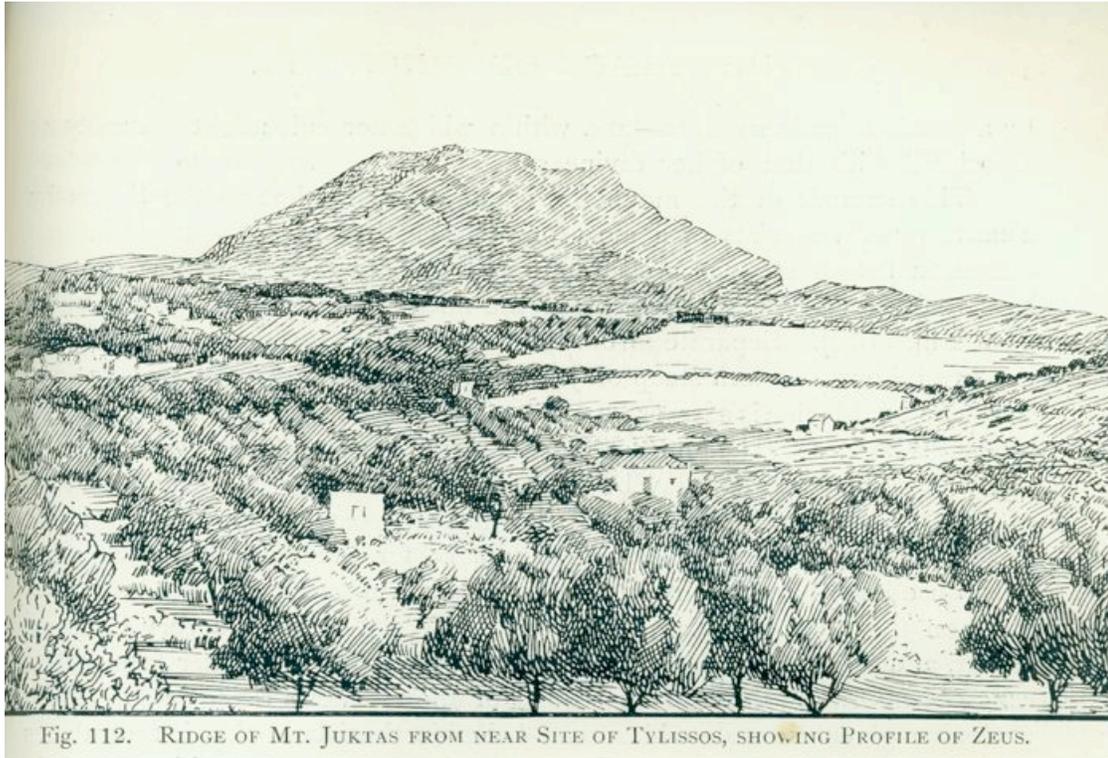


Figure 4.1. Drawing of Mt. Jouktas, site of the peak sanctuary (Evans 1921, fig. 112).

This early work precipitated further studies of the peak sanctuaries, led by the pioneering fieldwork of Paul Faure, who, over the course of four decades, identified more than 40 potential peak sanctuary sites (1967, 1969, 1972, 1990). His catalogue of sites provided a starting point and a catalyst for further archaeological work, mostly by Greek archaeologists seeking to test Faure's identification of these sites as sanctuaries.<sup>2</sup>

Stylios Alexiou and Kostas Davaras spearheaded these excavations. In the early 1970s, Davaras excavated at eleven peak sanctuary sites that had either previously been

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<sup>2</sup> While excavations were conducted to test on the ground Faure's identifications, scholars such as Rutkowski (1985a, 1988a) were questioning his claims in publications based on material criteria.

known/worked on or that had been recently identified by Faure.<sup>3</sup> A further four were explored by Alexiou.<sup>4</sup>

A welcome recent renewal of interest in peak sanctuaries has prompted fresh excavations at newly identified sites, re-excavations of previously investigated sites, and an interest in the publication of excavated material that has never been published. In part, this was due to the illicit looting activities taking place at many of these sites (e.g., Karetsoú's work at Jouktas, mentioned above). Other recent fieldwork on peak sanctuary sites includes Peatfield's excavations at Atsipadhes, during which he explored an estimated 80% of the site; he concentrated particularly on its spatial layout and on evidence that might allow estimation of the numbers of ritual participants (Peatfield 1992). In 1995, Stella Chryssoulaki began a second round of excavations at Traostalos (previously excavated by Davaras in 1963-64 and again in 1978), as a rescue project in response to the damage being done by antiquities thieves (Chryssoulaki 2001). She too has focused on aspects of the spatial organization of the site, with less attention paid to the extant material culture. Similarly, Iris Tzachili has begun rescue excavations at the Vrysinas site (first excavated by Davaras in 1972-73), work that is currently ongoing, with an emphasis on exploration of the terraces below the main summit area.

### *Socio-political and Historical Contexts*

Beginning with Myres' and Evans' excavations at Petsophas and Jouktas, peak sanctuaries have been seen as closely linked to larger socio-political phenomena. Evans,

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<sup>3</sup> Ambelos (1972); Etiani Kephala (1971); Kalamaki (1971); Modhi (1971); Petsophas (1971, 1976); Prinias (1972); Thylakas (1972); Traostalos (1963, 1964, 1978); Vigla (1972); Vrysinas (1972, 1973); Xykephalo (1971).

<sup>4</sup> Gonies Philioremos (1963); Kophinas (1963); Plagia (1962); Pyrgos (1963).

in fact, introduced his work at Jouktas in the context of what he terms the ‘Cretan Cult of Natural Features’ and its appearance at the beginning of the Middle Minoan period: “This [its appearance] will be seen has a direct bearing on the Early Palace of Knossos, and indeed illustrates its whole religious history” (1921: 151). The link that Evans highlighted between palace and peak structured and continues to influence the nature of much theoretical treatment of peak sanctuaries.

In his work, *The Cult Places of the Aegean*, which covers all aspects of Minoan religion, Rutkowski addressed this connection in terms of the seemingly sudden appearance of peak sanctuaries in the MM I period: “the principle causes leading to the emergence of these cult places should be sought in the social and economic changes that took place in the period of EM-MM I” (1986: 94). He sees the rapidly developing economic needs of the palaces and the subsequent increased demand on the farmers, shepherds, and cowboys, as the impetus for the development of sanctuaries that would address concerns about flocks, fertility, and agricultural productivity. This functionalist interpretation of peak sanctuaries as established to meet the needs of the rural inhabitants of Crete is a common theme that was widely accepted, but then subsequently modified, by most later scholars writing about peak sanctuaries and their socio-political role.

John Bintliff was one of the first scholars to use to comparative anthropological models to assess the socio-political significance of peak sanctuaries (1977a, 1977b). He interpreted the peak sanctuaries as communal ceremonial centers, like the palaces themselves, which supported the rise of Minoan civilization and acted as a binding influence in the conquest of regionalism and kinship fragmentation (1977a: 98). Further, Bintliff argued that Minoan Crete was a “Sacred Economy” (like those of Mesoamerica

or Mesopotamia), in which the peak sanctuaries served as the ceremonial centers around which many aspects of the entire culture were organized (1977b: 153). Bintliff's view of Minoan culture as extremely hierarchical, and the role of peak sanctuaries as providing essential support for that structure, has remained central in many scholars' understanding of these sites.

John Cherry is another scholar whose work was foundational for subsequent thought and theorization on peak sanctuaries. In the context of his early work on state formation in the Minoan period, Cherry (1978) argued that, based on the timing of their emergence and the material discovered at them, the peak sanctuaries were one of the mechanisms by which the emergent elite justified their fragile, new power, through the use of symbolic iconography. Later, as part of his application of the peer polity interaction model (Cherry 1986) to the Minoan case, he used peak sanctuary cult (among other categories of evidence, such as architecture, writing systems, and pottery styles) to illustrate the various regional polities' participation in larger island-wide phenomena. Cherry (1986:30) suggested that each regional polity participated in a pan-Minoan form of ritual practice: generating a ritual system that was beyond the scale of any individual polity.

While peer polity interaction is currently just one among a number of models of relevance to an understanding of the operation of Minoan states, Cherry's interpretation of peak sanctuaries as a pan-Minoan form of ritual, exemplifying one of the few forms of island-wide homogeneity, has been critical in shaping subsequent research. Soon thereafter, Peatfield took elements of Rutkowski's and Cherry's basic interpretations of the peak sanctuaries and expanded them to account more comprehensively for the

relationship between ritual, political activity, and socio-political change (1980, 1987, 1992).

Peatfield's thesis presents his theory of the origins of the cult and addresses how it changed in the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods. Peatfield has argued that the peak sanctuary ritual complex arose from the EM funerary cults and then "peak sanctuaries started to be used in this transitional period, as part of the move toward urbanization and the centralization of economy and power that led to the palaces" (1987: 90). The peak sanctuary rituals, in his account, were the foci of community identity that in the Protopalatial period expanded to a larger regional context; in Neopalatial times they became centralized and the religious authority and apparatus were monopolized by the more powerful and well organized elite (1987: 93).

Peatfield's major contribution to scholarship in this area is his breakdown of peak sanctuaries into rural and palatial sites, the latter distinguished largely on the basis of their survival into the Neopalatial period and their subsequent architectural elaboration (Fig. 4.2). For example, the site that Peatfield himself excavated, Atsipadhes, is a small, rural sanctuary (as opposed to sanctuary sites such as those at Jouktas and Petsophas that have received most of the attention) that is "more typical of a cult whose origins and earliest phases lay firmly in the tradition of rural popular tradition" (1992: 60). Peatfield's attention to the detailed spatial organization and layout of a small, non-architecturally elaborated sanctuary has provided valuable insights into the less well known, Protopalatial phases of peak sanctuary ritual activity.



Figure 4.2 The architectural remains of the sanctuary at Jouktas, looking northeast toward Knossos and the sea.

Another scholar who has explored the origins of the peak sanctuary phenomenon is L. Vance Watrous. He has argued that although peak sanctuary cult emerged at the same time as the first palaces, it did not arise from a purely indigenous rural tradition but rather as a result of stimulus diffusion from Egypt and the Near East (1995: 398). This assertion gains some plausibility from the fact that it was in the MM IA period that Cretan sites first exhibit signs of widespread trade in the form of both imports and Cretan local imitations (1995: 395; cf. Ben-Tor 2006; Karetsou 2000; Manning and Hulin 2005; Phillips 1991, 1996, 2004, 2005, 2006; Warren 2005). Analyzing the votives from peak sanctuary assemblages (e.g., anthropomorphic figurines, votive limbs, beetles, horns or consecration, etc.), Watrous concludes that several ceremonies directed at different

deities were performed at peak sanctuary sites, some of which were directly linked to Egyptian motifs and deities. The regional differentiation in these patterns, he argued, is a result of differential access to trade with Egypt and the Near East.

More specifically, Watrous interprets some of the motifs, objects, and iconography found at the peak sanctuaries in terms of their significance in other contemporary cultures. For example, he suggests that the horns of consecration be considered in light of the Egyptian hieroglyph *djew*, which symbolizes mountain in the cosmic sense (the twin mountains at either edge of the world over which the sun rose and set, so we often see Egyptian depictions of the sun between the twin peaks of the *djew* symbol (1995: 399)). He also discusses beetles as symbols of fertility and resurrection, which he argues is a notion the Minoans adopted from Egyptian and Levantine traditions. Watrous' analysis is interesting primarily for his introduction of the concepts of regional differentiation and variation to analyses of peak sanctuary ritual. The connections with Near Eastern and Egyptian symbolism, however, are less convincing, given that contact between Crete and the East throughout the Prepalatial era and even during the crucial formative EM III-MM I stage, seems to have been quite infrequent, represented only by a small number of artifacts not sufficient to support an analysis that rests on the assumption of extensive contact between the cultures (Cherry forthcoming). I would argue that the lack of evidence to support contact in the early Bronze Age supports an interpretation of the peak sanctuaries' origin as arising from indigenous cult practice (i.e. funerary ritual), that existed in the Prepalatial period. Some aspects of these rituals, such as drinking, were adopted and remained important components of peak sanctuary ritual throughout the Proto- and Neopalatial periods.

Donald Haggis (1999) has also used peak sanctuaries in his application of D'Altroy and Earle's model of a staple-finance economy (1985) to the development of socio-political complexity on Crete. This model suggests that the mobilization of agricultural surplus supported an elite-driven political organization.

“The mechanism that encouraged centralized economic control and permitted elite access to labor beyond the kinship group is sought in the ritual apparatus that projected group membership through a common ideological focus on a regional scale, namely the peak sanctuary” (Haggis 1999: 53).

Like earlier scholars, Haggis views peak sanctuaries as products of a common ideology serving an emergent elite. Using as an analogy Stein's (1994: 44) suggestion that ritual elaboration at 'Ubaid-period temples represents a 'chiefly strategy of locally-based, ritually generated staple finance', and highlighting artifacts that indicate feasting (i.e., vessels associated with drinking, pouring and cooking activities), Haggis suggested that peak sanctuaries provided the common ideological basis for the elite control of labor. He further pointed out that this would explain the lack of evidence for elite representation at the peak sanctuary, as elites deliberately downplayed their status at the regional level in order to convey a sense of membership in the community (Haggis 1999: 79).

More recently, there has been interesting work on state formation that uses peak sanctuaries to support new models of socio-political organization. Zeimbeki, for example, has looked at the organization of production of votive animal figurines from Jouktas to understand how the political, economic, and ideological spheres were interlinked at peak sanctuary sites (2004: 351). Similarly, in their arguments for heterarchical and factional models of socio-political formations, Knappett and Schoep (1999a, 1999b, 2000) and Cunningham and Driessen (2004) have used the evidence from peak sanctuaries to argue for a pan-Cretan ideology that helped unite the island, despite

obvious regional variation in many other aspects of culture and politics (ceramics, settlement distributions, administrative organizations, etc.). Most notable, perhaps, is the observation that, despite the specificities of the model presented or the origins proposed, two major themes emerge from this work: (1) peak sanctuary cult was perhaps the only pan-Cretan supra-regional phenomenon in the Protopalatial period; and (2) at some point, ritual activity came to be co-opted by the emergent elite, in ways that supported their new-found power and control. I suggest that the decrease in numbers of peak sanctuaries in the Neopalatial period, and the connections that can be drawn between many of their assemblages and palatial centers (i.e., architectural elements and the presence of elite high status objects) support this argument on a general level.

### *Topography and Landscape*

Another line of approach that recent scholars have taken to the study of the peak sanctuaries and their context is the consideration of their local topography and placement within the wider landscape. The first archaeologists to have discussed this explicitly were Rutkowski and Nowicki, who studied the layout of the sites, the extant architectural remains, and their landscape settings (Rutkowski 1984, 1988, Rutkowski and Nowicki 1984, 1987, Nowicki 1994). Their studies included all of the then-known peak sanctuary sites, and their systematic overviews of the locations and layouts of these sites provide useful insights into how these sanctuaries fit into the Minoan landscape.

This approach has been taken further by Soetens, in particular, who has recently completed work on the Minoan peak sanctuary landscape using a GIS approach (Soetens, Sarris *et al.* 2001, Soetens, Driessen *et al.* 2002, Soetens, Sarris, and Topouzi 2001, 2002,

Soetens, Sarris *et al.* 2002). Taking into consideration topographic data, the coastline, caves and quarries, geological formations, faults, and land use and potential for agriculture along with cultural information (settlements, palaces, harbors, production centers, cemeteries, etc.), Soetens and his team were able to conclude that, in the Protopalatial period, peak sanctuaries have extremely high intervisibility, both with other peak sanctuaries in the region and with immediately surrounding settlements. In the Neopalatial period, in contrast, intervisibility is lower, which confirms theories of centralization in this period (Fig. 4.3). In addition, Jouktas' primacy is accentuated, since it is visible from three other sites despite the drastic decrease in the number of peak sanctuaries. Therefore, the ritual centrality of Jouktas accentuates the socio-political importance of the palace with which it was associated – Knossos. This analysis has led Soetens and his team to suggest that the peak sanctuaries served as landmarks, or beacons, for travelers both by land and by sea (Soetens, Driessen *et al.* 2002: 170).

Other research that has considered peak sanctuaries within an environmental context is that of Henriksson and Blomberg (1997, 1997-1998, 2003), which has considered the sites in terms of the astronomical alignments that were visible at certain times of the year from certain sites, including Pyrgos, Petsophas, and Traostalos. This approach builds on earlier suggestions by Faure – for instance, his astronomical observations from the summit of Vrysinas, with calculations aimed to show that the two days each year when the sun is seen to rise between the horns of Mt. Ida are significant ones (Faure 1965: 49-51).

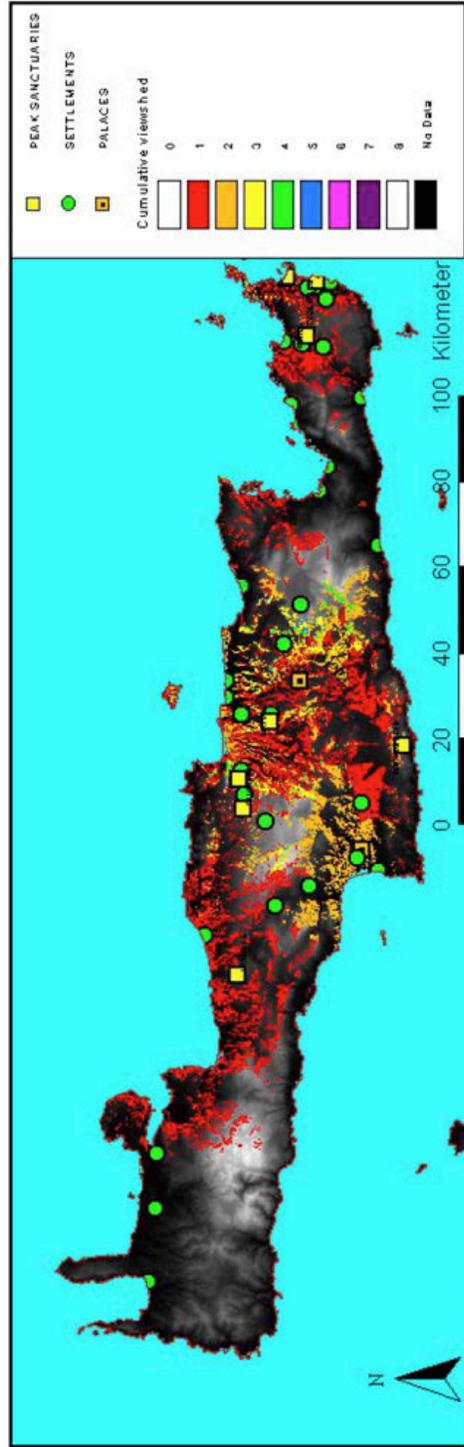
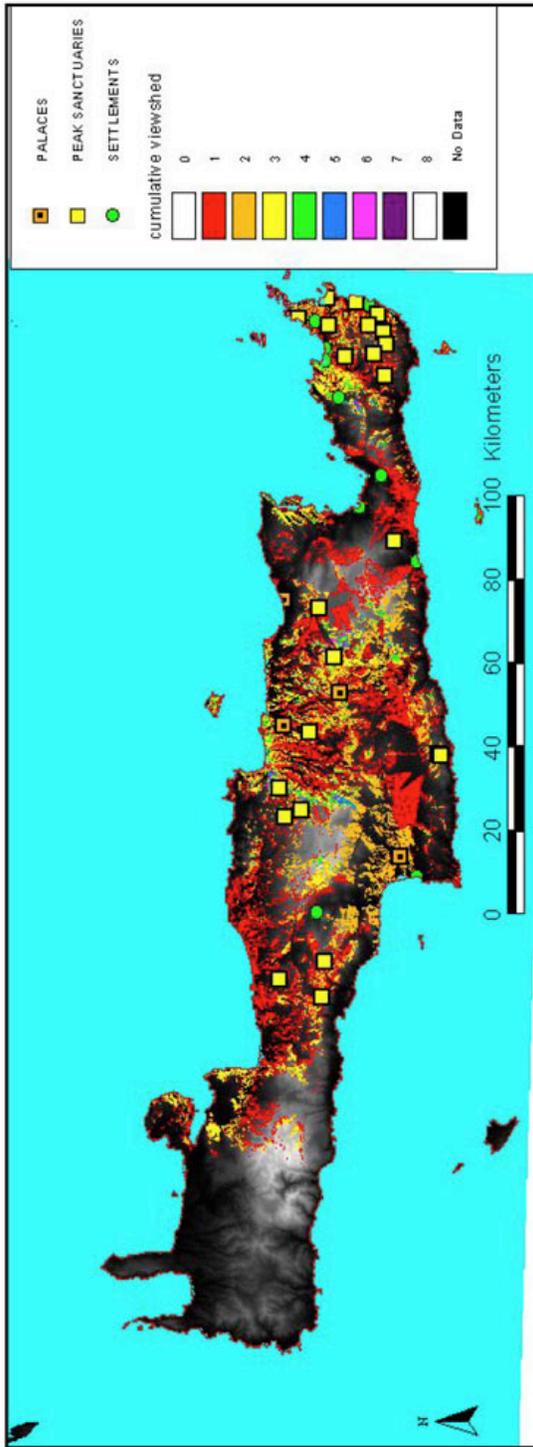


Figure 4.3 a and b Cumulative viewsheds from 23 Protopalatial (above) and 8 Neopalatial (below) peak sanctuaries [Soetens, Driessen et al. 2001 : fig. 3 and 4].

### *Assemblage Studies*

Although most of the two dozen known peak sanctuaries have been excavated to some degree, the assemblages from only a very few have been published, and these have been focused largely on the votive figurines. In fact, no peak sanctuary assemblage as a whole has been published completely or in great detail and, unfortunately, information about the ceramic assemblages and other categories of small finds is largely known only through preliminary reports.

Along with his general works and topographic analyses mentioned above, Rutkowski (1991) has also published a useful monograph on the anthropomorphic votive figurines from Myres' excavations at the east Cretan peak sanctuary at Petsophas. While he primarily focuses on the male and female votive figurines (with some brief mention of the votive limbs and animal figurines), his analysis is extremely detailed and provides some of the most comprehensive information available about the different types of anthropomorphic figurines found at one site. He includes in his description details about the material, modes of production, dress, hairstyles, gesture, jewelry, and weapons. His general interpretative position is that these figurines can be used to understand art and religion in the Old Palace period; for example, he proposes that the male figurines' gestures can be interpreted as ones of adoration and worship, whereas those of the females indicated expectation, or the actual receipt, of a gift (1991: 55-6). Furthermore, he suggests that in MM I the peak sanctuary cult arose to meet the needs of both the elite and the non-elite through cults of nature divinities with rites focused on fertility. In his view, the elite dedicated the anthropomorphic figurines and high-status objects, while the

non-elite dedicated figurines of cattle and flocks, relevant to their agricultural and pastoral concerns (1991: 57). While his interpretations of cult and divinities worshipped are not markedly different from those of Watrous and others, Rutkowski's very thorough description and analysis of the figurines nonetheless provide one of the best available overviews of this category of material from a peak sanctuary.

The recent study by Zeimbeki (2004), mentioned above, has looked at the production and distribution of the clay animal figurines from the peak sanctuary at Jouktas. She uses the votive figurine evidence as a source of information on symbolic and economic activities and furthermore, examines how political, economic and symbolic dynamics were expressed through peak sanctuary ritual activity. In particular, Zeimbeki argues:

“Peak sanctuary ritual brought about new forms of material and symbolic exchange: the cult afforded a vehicle of collective expression at a community and inter-community level; and it generated the widespread production of material culture in response to an unprecedented social demand for ritual devices used by individual participants in collective worship” (2004: 352).

Along with a brief study of the Kophinas animal figurines, her analysis concludes that each sanctuary site must be considered separately; the inter-site homogeneity of production and style suggests a signaling of identity, whereas the intra-site differences suggest regional variation and differentiated identity signaling. This is an important point, and one I will return to at the end of this chapter. Zeimbeki's analysis of this body of material has offered many new insights into not only the activity of the ritual participants, but also the signaling of various group and cultural identities that were regionally diverse and contextually specific. She has provided scholarship on Minoan

ritual and state formation with a positive model for analysis that is new, different, and salient to many questions that remain to be answered.

Christine Morris has also produced a number of studies of peak sanctuary figurines, considering both their production and details of their form. Applying the methodology of attribution studies<sup>5</sup> (Cherry 1992b) to the human figurines from Atsipadhes, Morris (1993) suggested that the evidence of style indicated that although there were types of figurines that were common to all peak sanctuaries, each site (or cluster of sites) had its own distinctive style of figurine. She argued that production and consumption were localized, on the basis of evidence that the figurines' fabrics were all compatible with an origin in the Atsipadhes area. Although Morris' study is interesting, particularly for its suggestion of regional differentiation in votive assemblages, the validity of attribution based on connoisseurship as a methodology applicable to fully prehistoric contexts has been questioned due to its ideological baggage (Cherry 1993, Whitley 1993).

Building on her analysis of iconographic representation of gesture in Minoan religion (2001), Morris, together with Peatfield, applied the "approach, which locates gesture as embodied practice in which symbol and symptom, body-learning and body-sense are mutually entwined" (Morris 2001: 246), to their analysis of the gestures represented in the anthropomorphic peak sanctuary figurines (Morris and Peatfield 2002). Using Warren's (1988) Minoan ritual action thesis, together with cross-cultural comparanda from non-western cultures, they sought to re-interpret the figurines' gestures in terms of religious experience, using the concept of the "feeling body" as the driving

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<sup>5</sup> Attribution studies, or connoisseurship, is a methodology developed from art historical frameworks, in which the characteristics of objects, or works of art, are used to attribute them to particular artists; most famously used in classical archaeology by Beazley (1963) on Classical Greek red- and black-figure vases.

force in ritual behavior (Morris and Peatfield 2002: 106). They argued that the gestures might portray trance-like shamanistic body postures that worshippers performed to achieve altered states of consciousness (2002: 114). Morris and Peatfield attempted to understand the performance of ritual activity and focus on the agency of the participants, both crucial to understanding peak sanctuary ritual. Morris has continued this work by applying a similar approach to the ‘ecstatic’ imagery on gold rings and seal-stones from LM Crete (2004; see Chapter 6: 214-15, for a more complete discussion of her analysis).

This discussion of previous research was necessary to understand the term and the concept of “peak sanctuary”, the concepts that underlie it, and how they have been employed by archaeologists in the past. Scholars have been studying peak sanctuaries for quite some time, and recently, new approaches have successfully been brought to bear on thinking about the sites and their material that offer new perspectives and interpretations. This review has illustrated, however, that the ritual use of peak sanctuaries has been largely treated – whether in the context of fieldwork and excavation, socio-political and historical context, topography and landscape, and assemblage studies – as a monolithic, unified phenomenon, which mutes subtle differences that are crucial for appreciating the complexity of the network of sites, activities, and material culture assemblages.

My research has shown that peak sanctuaries were an integral component of the ritual landscape, along with sacred caves and rural sanctuaries, and each category had a unique material culture assemblage that suggests ritual practice that signaled participation in an island-wide Minoan ritual system, but that each was unique as well. More importantly, I would agree with the advances that have been by scholars such as Morris,

Briault, and Berg, that the differences between categories of site, and between individual sites, need to be assessed on an individual, local, and regional level.

### **The Identification of a Peak Sanctuary**

The current state of preservation of most of the sites generally agreed to be peak sanctuaries is quite variable, affected by erosion and exposure to the elements, illicit looting activity, modern constructions (e.g. military installations, Christian chapels), and the varying levels of excavation at each site. These disturbances can make the identification of any given site as a peak sanctuary very tricky. Additional difficulties are created by other considerations: peak sanctuaries were used differently in different periods; they had variable degrees of architectural elaboration; the natural features of their settings dictated site layout and topography; and the material culture assemblages vary with respect to the nature and numbers of artifacts. Therefore, not only can locating a peak sanctuary be problematic, but so can the definition of clear criteria for the identification of a particular site as a peak sanctuary.

So, what makes a site on or near a mountain summit a “peak sanctuary”? A number of scholars have offered definitions of a peak sanctuary primarily using criteria that relate to topography and material culture. I review these below before presenting the definition employed in this study; though note that even the broadest definitions, using the most general criteria, need to be flexible in order to accommodate observable variation.

While it is generally agreed (as already noted) that there are approximately two dozen certain peak sanctuaries on Crete, the actual number varies considerably from one

scholar to another, depending on their perspectives and goals (see Table 5.1). For example, in his catalogue of Minoan peak sanctuaries, Rutkowski discusses 22 sites “certainly” used as peak sanctuaries, 17 sites “probably” used as peak sanctuaries, and an additional 15 sites that he refers to as “sites sometimes discussed as peak sanctuaries, but certainly of a different kind” (1988: 95). The project of that article was to assess the topography and architecture of the peak sanctuaries; he was not concerned with the associated material culture at the sites. Peatfield, in contrast, sought explicitly to limit the corpus of peak sanctuaries to those he regarded as quite certain – in his case 25 (1992: 61).

It seems worthwhile to mention here the difference between the characteristics and the criteria for identification of a peak sanctuary. Some scholars (e.g., Peatfield 1980, 1992, Rutkowski 1986, 1988) have chosen to provide a checklist of criteria for the identification of a site as a peak sanctuary, specifically because their project was to cut through the tangle of casual or speculative identifications seen in much earlier scholarship (especially, e.g., the work of Paul Faure), so as to arrive at a solid core of well defined and generally agreed instances. Other scholars (e.g., Nowicki 1994) have discussed the *characteristics* of sites that have been identified as peak sanctuaries because they were interested in making a particular point about the nature of those sites, or the nature of the ritual activity that took place there, or how their use, function, and elaboration may have changed over time.

Peatfield’s dissertation research and excavations at the site of Atsipadhes (Fig. 4.4) have led him to define a peak sanctuary as a site on or near the summit of a mountain, situated to maximize human interaction and defined as a shrine by the presence

of specific groups of animal and human clay figurines, identified as votive offerings (1980, 1992: 60). Topography is important to his criteria – to be a peak sanctuary a site must both be located on or at the summit of a mountain and in a locale that maximizes ‘human interaction’: in addition, he specifies that the site must be visually and physically accessible from areas of human habitation and exploitation. This sometimes means that while a peak sanctuary may be located on a mountaintop, it need not be on the highest peak in the local region (Atsipadhes 459 m., in comparison to the main mountain south of it - Kouroupa 984 m.). Peatfield’s criteria are extremely broad, and can account for all 24 sites that he deems peak sanctuaries; despite being elements of a classificatory checklist, his emphasis on access and visibility offer valuable insights into the nature of ritual.



Figure 4.4 View of the peak sanctuary at Atsipadhes, looking east to Mt. Ida.

Rutkowski's (1988) description of a canonical peak sanctuary by contrast incorporates many more categories of criteria for identification, but at the same time it has to take into consideration that only some of the sites fit all of these criteria; in this sense, his is a polythetic approach to classification. He incorporates topographical aspects, such as: (1) location on a mountain or hill top (although, again, not always on the highest summit), (2) natural features such as terraces, rocks, crevices, and clefts in the rock, and (3) location at some distance from the associated settlement(s), but usually visible from them. He goes on to specify several other features of a sanctuary – for example, that the most important requirement is an open space, and that only the presence of votives makes it a peak sanctuary. Rutkowski also mentions the presence of architecture/construction (e.g., buildings, terraces, walls, and altars), but concedes that this is rare.

In 1994, Nowicki outlined the characteristics of a peak sanctuary, which include topographical criteria: that it is located at an elevation dominating the area and visible from afar; that the site is one exclusively used for the performance of religious ceremonies; that the finds consist of pottery and figurines, (cups, animal bones, bronze figurines, and other cult objects may be present as well); the presence of a pebble feature, perhaps indicating some type of feature (possibly a crude idol, baetyl or vessel) that was the focus of ritual activity but that has not survived. Again, it is clear that not all of these criteria can or would be met by every peak sanctuary as the sites survive now; but it is worth noting that Nowicki specifies that the site “is exclusively where religious ceremonies were performed.” There are settlement sites that exist on the tops of mountains and peaks on Crete, particularly from earlier periods (e.g. Final Neolithic

“sites of refuge”). Nowicki is explicit about the religious function of the site, because it is the failure to take this criterion into account that has resulted in many misidentifications in the past, and an exaggeratedly large list of possible peak sanctuaries.

Finally, there are those who choose to list as characteristics of peak sanctuaries all of the material culture that indicates that ritual activity was performed at the site. For example, in a recent article, Soetens, Driessen *et al.* (2002) specified (in addition to the obvious association with mountain peaks) that the presence of specific cult apparatus would be a key factor in defining a site as a peak sanctuary; this apparatus includes animal and human figurines, pottery and pebble scatters, bronzes, and objects with Linear A inscriptions. They also include the presence of ashy layers of soil and architectural remains. Characteristics such as the ones suggested by Soetens *et al.* are more specific than any other mentioned here, but these too cannot satisfactorily account for all peak sanctuaries’ assemblages.

Table 4.1 summarizes the differing site classifications of various authors who have characterized and identified peak sanctuaries. They span almost a century of research and we must obviously take into account the steady accretion of archaeological knowledge that has taken place over this period. At the time he wrote the first volume of *The Palace of Minos* (1921), Sir Arthur Evans knew of only two sites – Jouktas and Petsophas – and even 30 years later Platon (1951) was able to discuss just 11 examples in his famous paper “To Ieron Maza”. These numbers were greatly increased by the fieldwork of Paul Faure in the 1960s and 70s. Subsequent work has tended to be more conservative in its identifications of peak sanctuaries. These varying identifications highlight the problems of classification, definition, and the state of archaeological

knowledge and publication. A working definition is necessary that accounts for all of the pertinent characteristics, but that is not rigidly exclusive.

Site Name	Evans 1921	Platon 1951	Rutkowski 1986	Rutkowski 1988	Peatfield 1983	Peatfield 1989	Kyriakidis 2005
<b>Agiopharango</b>				no		no	
<b>Ai Ilia</b>				no	?	no	
<b>Ai Lias</b>				no	yes	no	
<b>Ambelos</b>			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Amnissos</b>			?	?			
<b>Angoulesiana</b>			?	?	?	no	no
<b>Aphendi Christos</b>		yes		no			
<b>Arkovouno Mirabello</b>						no	
<b>Athropolithous</b>		yes					
<b>Atsipadhes</b>			yes	yes			yes
<b>Mylopotamos</b>						no	
<b>Ayia Triada</b>			?	?	?		
<b>Chamaizi</b>		yes					
<b>Chesmeni Gramvousa</b>						no	
<b>Choudetsi</b>			?	?	yes	no	no
<b>Demati</b>			?	?	yes	no	yes
<b>Drapanokephalo</b>			?	?	?	yes	?
<b>Entichti Lasithiou</b>		yes		no		no	
<b>Etiani Kephala</b>			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Gialomonochoro</b>					?		no
<b>Gonies Philioremos</b>			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Jouktas</b>	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Kalamaki</b>			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Karphi</b>		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Kastellos (R Dhetis)</b>				?	?	yes	
<b>Kato Zakro</b>				no	?	no	
<b>Keria</b>			?	?	yes	yes	yes
<b>Kophinas</b>			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>Korakomouri Sphakas</b>							yes
<b>Korphi tou Mare</b>					?	yes	yes
<b>Koumasa Korakies</b>		yes		no	?	no	

Site Name	Evans 1921	Platon 1951	Rutkowski 1986	Rutkowski 1988	Peatfield 1983	Peatfield 1989	Kyriakidis 2005
Krasi			?	?	?	no	no
Krousonas			?	?		no	no
Lastros			?	?	?	no	no
Liliano							
Linarou Selli				no	?	no	
Martha Photia			?	?			
Maza		yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Megali Keria							
Modi			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Onychas Rodhopou			?	?		no	no
Perivolakia			?	?	?	no	no
Petsophas	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Piskokephalo		yes					no
Plagia			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Pobia			?	?	?	yes	no
Prophitis Elias Mallia		yes	?	?	?	no	no
Pyrgos Malevisi			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sklokas			?	?	?	yes	?
Smari Pedhiadha				no		yes	
Sphakia							
Spili Voritsi			yes	yes			yes
Tapes			yes				?
Thylakas			yes	yes	yes	yes	?
Traostalos			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Vigla Ayia Triadha						no	
Vigla Zakrou			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Volakas Ierapetras						no	
Vrysinas			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Xykephalo			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ziros			yes	yes			
Zou (Prinias)			yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Zourva Apokoronas						no	

Table 4.1 Attribution of a site as a peak sanctuary by different scholars.

### *Definition of a peak sanctuary*

As a result of the research for this dissertation, personal visits to many of the peak sanctuaries, and my review of the extant material culture from those sites, I have developed the following working definition: *a peak sanctuary is a site located on or near the summit of a mountain that has produced material evidence for the performance of ritual activities which resemble those found in the larger network of Minoan extra-urban ritual spaces (e.g., caves, rural sites), but which are also unique in certain respects (e.g., location, characteristics of the assemblage, etc.).* While this definition too may be somewhat vague, it does serve to highlight three important points: the location of the site, its ritual nature, and its connection to a wider system of contemporary ritual activity on Minoan Crete. The characteristics of a peak sanctuary can include a wide variety of categories of material culture, such as architectural remains (buildings, altars, and terracing), votive figurines (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and body parts), pebbles, clay balls, cult items of stone or clay, bronze items (including weapons, figurines, or cult symbols), inscribed objects, and artifacts of exotic material or provenience. However, just to list these items as possible components of an assemblage robs the individual categories of their potential analytical power.

In the analysis below, I explore how the nature and make-up of the assemblages and the architectural elaboration of sites change over time from the Protopalatial to Neopalatial period. I also expand upon earlier considerations of regional and inter-site variation to consider the patterning of ritual activity and the identity of the participants. My analysis of variation and change of the peak sanctuaries and their associated assemblages makes explicit their unique role in the Minoan ritual complex of material

culture and landscape. Moreover, my analysis will clarify the fact that each site has a distinct and specific trajectory that is a result of particular local and regional influences.

Further, by understanding the place of peak sanctuary ritual in the larger context of Minoan extra-urban ritual practice, as well as how the material fits into the larger corpus of contemporary material culture, peak sanctuary ritual becomes a finite data set that can be analyzed to consider larger socio-political processes. For example, how does the material culture assemblage of a peak sanctuary compare to that found in caves, or at sacred enclosures, or in the ritual spaces of the palaces and other settlements? In part, the answer to that question could be simple; the Linear A-inscribed stone vessels found at some Neopalatial period peak sanctuaries (Schoep 1994) may indicate a direct link with the palaces. Writing is generally considered to be a restricted technology controlled by the elite and objects with Linear A inscriptions are usually found in elite-controlled contexts. Are connections seemingly this explicit for other categories of finds? In the remainder of this chapter, I place the peak sanctuaries and their assemblages in the larger context of Minoan ritual landscapes, contemporary Minoan material culture, and contemporary understandings of over-arching socio-political change that is coeval with the emergence of peak sanctuaries at the beginning of the Protopalatial period.

### **Landscape and Artifact Distribution: the Assemblages**

Peak sanctuaries can only be understood in the context of the larger landscape in which they exist. Landscape, however, does not simply mean their topographic settings, their height above sea level, or the intervisibility between sites, although fruitful research has been conducted taking into consideration these factors (Rutkowski 1986, Soetens,

Sarris *et al.* 2001). It also refers to distribution patterns of the artifact assemblages of the sanctuaries, and the patterns of those artifacts in other ritual and non-ritual contexts around them.<sup>6</sup> In this section, these distribution patterns will be discussed and assessed.

Looking at the geographic distribution of peak sanctuaries across Crete (Fig. 4.5 and 4.6), two major points emerge: the distribution of the peak began with many sites scattered throughout eastern, east-central and central Crete during Protopalatial times. In contrast, in the Neopalatial period, the number of sites declines dramatically to just six or seven peak sanctuaries. These are widely dispersed and connected to palatial urban centers. The second characteristic that emerges is homogeneity of the votive assemblages from these sites across the island (Tables 4.2 and 4.3). Not all sites have identical assemblages – some have votive limbs, some have pebble scatters, some have Linear A-inscribed vessels – but these differences appear more idiosyncratic than formally patterned across the landscape. These two characteristics of peak sanctuaries – their distribution across time and space, and the make-up of their assemblages, that have led scholars (see above) to view them as a largely uniform phenomenon, and to seek theories and models that can explain it as an aggregated whole.

These approaches are not without merit. Peak sanctuaries were, in fact, a widely distributed site-type across Crete,<sup>7</sup> especially in the Protopalatial period. And if we accept that there is a socio-political, or at least cultural, dimension to ritual (Bell 1992; 1997), then peak sanctuaries affected and were affected by socio-political dynamics on Crete, in both the Proto- and Neopalatial periods. These conclusions are not problematic.

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<sup>6</sup> See Kyriakidis (2005) Appendix for distribution maps with accompanying tables. Figs. 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33-35, 38, 39, 40, 42, 46 for all categories of finds, independent of chronological period.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, peak sanctuaries are virtually absent in western Crete, where Minoan site density is far less in general. Vrysinas and Atsipadhes are, based on current research, the most western peak sanctuaries on the island.

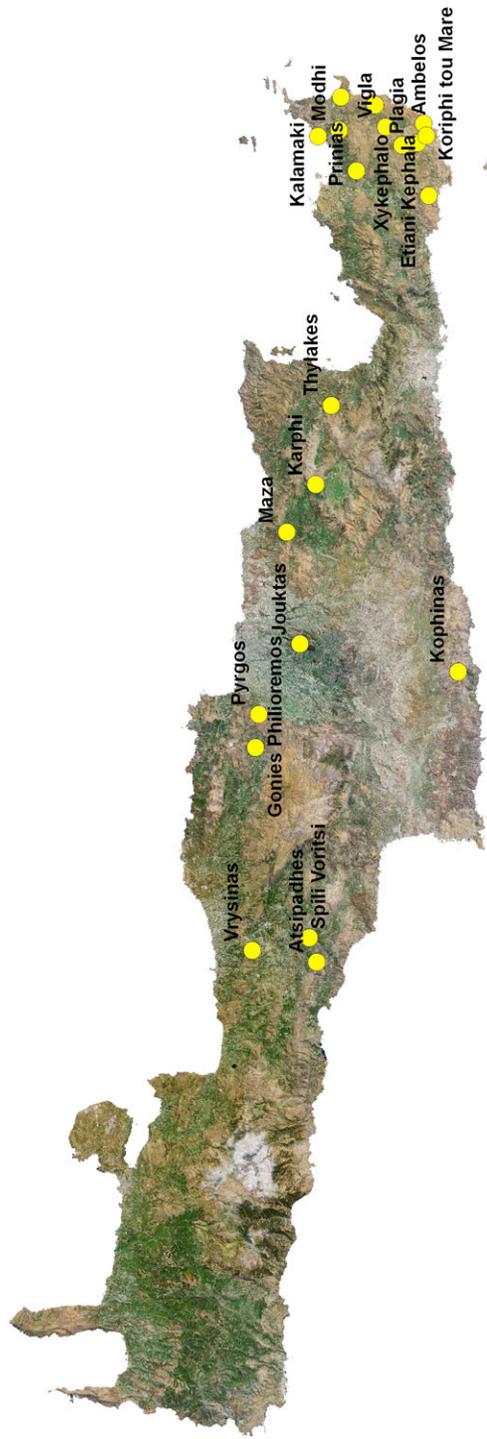


Figure 4.5. Distribution of peak sanctuaries on Crete in the Protopalatial period (above).



Figure 4.6. Distribution of peak sanctuaries on Crete in the Neopalatial period (below).

		Ambelos	Asipadries	Etani Kephala	Gonies (Philoiereimos)	Jouktas	Kalamaki	Karphi	Korphi tou Mare	Kophinas	Maaza	Mochi	Patsophas	Plogia	Prinias	Pyrops	Spili Koritisi	Tryiakas	Tranostatos	Vigia	Vrysinas	Xykephalo	
Ceramic	fine																						
	coarse																						
	storage																						
	balls																						
	cups																						
Figurines	human				M F	M F							M F						M F		M F		
	animal																						
	limbs																						
	other												beetles	beetles									
Bronze	figurines																						
	weaponry																						
	cult																						
Stone	pebbles																						
	vessels																						
	cult																						
precious mat.																			Au				
ash																							

Table 4.2 Distribution of finds at peak sanctuaries in the Protopalatial period.

		Gonies (Philoiereimos)	Jouktas	Korphi tou Mare	Kophinas	Patsophas	Vrysinas	Xykephalo
Ceramic	fine							
	coarse							
	storage							
	balls							
Figurines	human							
	animal							
	limbs							
	other				beetles			
Bronze	figurines							
	weaponry							
	cult							
Stone	pebbles							
	vessels							
	cult							
precious mat.								
ash								

Table 4.3 Distribution of finds at peak sanctuaries in the Neopalatial period.

Rather, it is the level of analysis that is at issue, in the sense while it is the case that the sites shared important features, we need also to explore how they differed and what these differences might mean. To do this, individual sites require unpacking, and our analysis of peak sanctuaries across the landscape needs to be teased out and complicated, taking into consideration the specific contexts of how they fit into their localized, regional landscapes. As such, I am arguing for a perspective that tacks between the pan-Cretan and the local, without a priori privileging either.

New developments in understanding the organization of socio-political complexity on Crete (introduced in Chapter 2: 18-25) that pay increasing attention to local variability shape our understandings of the contexts for peak sanctuary ritual performance and participation. The social and cultural identities of the participants and the dynamics that would have been played out during ritual events need to be re-assessed. A closer examination of the assemblages of these sites suggests that peak sanctuaries may be yet another aspect of Minoan culture that corresponds better with regional heterarchical models for Crete than the earlier homogenous model. If the peak sanctuaries (along with other extra-urban ritual sites) were to fit into this new perspective on socio-political dynamics, what would be the implications? How would this be reflected in the material culture from the sites? How would our interpretations of the ritual at the sites have to change, and in what ways would that affect models of how peak sanctuaries worked in the larger Minoan world?

The first step in answering these questions is to explore the degree of homogeneity among peak sanctuary assemblages. Here, the votive objects will be the

primary data for this analysis, both because these have long been used to argue for the unified “pan-Cretan” ideology represented by the peak sanctuaries, but also more practically because the votives have been better studied and published than, for instance, the pottery from the same sites. Once the degree of inter-site variation is assessed, this aggregated view will be compared to the material from other extra-urban ritual sites, especially caves (Chapter 3). The peak sanctuary and cave assemblages together provide an overview of extra-urban ritual assemblages, which then need to be considered in the context of other types of site (e.g., palatial, residential, public, etc.) where similar objects or sets of objects have also been found.

Figurines, as mentioned above, are the single most abundant artifact category found in peak sanctuary assemblages, and are often the defining characteristic in the identification of a site as a peak sanctuary: sometimes, it seems, the presence of figurines, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, is alone enough for classification. Indeed, every one of the canonical peak sanctuaries has produced both types of figurines, and they are the only categories of material that have been discovered at all sites. Anthropomorphic figurines in particular, have received special attention from scholars (e.g., Rutkowski 1991) and will be treated in more detail in the next section. As a general category of votive object, however, they are briefly discussed below.

While figurines are indeed found at all peak sanctuaries, closer inspection reveals that there is considerable inter-site variability between their types, quality and frequency distributions. Jones (1999) has broken down the human figurines into more specific types, by size (small/large), adornment (hair and dress) and representational completeness (full figures vs. “votive” limbs). Once disaggregated thus, he demonstrates that these

specific objects show considerably more variation than the general category of human figurines. Although small figurines are found at all peak sanctuaries, those with fancy coiffure and dress are found at only ten sites (Atsipadhes, Gonies Philioremos, Jouktas, Kophinas, Maza, Petsophas, Pyrgos, Traostalos, Xykephalo, and Vigla), large figurines are found at only five sites (Jouktas, Kophinas, Petsophas, Plagia, and Xykephalo), and votive limbs at ten sites (Atsipadhes, Gonies Philioremos, Jouktas, Kophinas, Maza, Petsophas, Pyrgos, Thylakas, Traostalos, Koriphi tou Mare [Jones 1999: 6]). The presence of votive limbs has been used to argue that the deities worshipped may have been different (e.g., those sites with votive limbs would suggest a healing deity; Rutkowski 1986). While I am hesitant to identify their precise roles, I agree with Jones that they are a distinct category, whose significance was likely important to Minoan ritual participants.

The zoomorphic ceramic figurines, while also present at every peak sanctuary site, are also more varied when more closely examined (see Jones 1999: 45 for a detailed table). Bovine figurines (Fig. 4.7) are the most abundant type of animal votive, although even these are only found at fourteen of the sites. As many as eleven peak sanctuaries have produced at least one other type of animal in addition to bovine figurines, but only two boast more than three additional types. The assemblages from a few sites, however, are notable for their very varied array of types: Petsophas has produced sheep, goats and agrimi (wild Cretan mountain goats), dogs, birds, weasels, tortoises and beetles. The assemblage from Jouktas includes a goat, bird, pig, dog, beetle and snake, in addition to the more common bovine figurines. It is unclear how we should interpret the presence of more varied species of zoomorphic votive figurines, although scholars have suggested

that they may have been associated with different deities (Rutkowski 1986). It is also possible that there were different preferences and concerns for residents of different parts of the island.

Briault (2007b) has recently suggested a compelling explanation for the distribution patterns and variations in peak sanctuary assemblages across the island. She has introduced the concept of “ritual kits” and applied polythetic classification methodologies to these assemblages in an effort to better understand the transmission of ritual practice and performance at the peak sanctuaries.

“The aim of this article is to move away from the traditional concern with topography, by suggesting instead that the equipment used in peak sanctuary rituals was more significant for their performance and transmission than the physical characteristics of the landscape in which they took place.” (2007: 123)

Seven peak sanctuaries are her primary case studies (Jouktas, Petsophas, Kophinas, Vrysinas, Atsipadhes, Traostalos, and Plagia), selected because of the satisfactory level of publication and the amount of diagnostic material. She assesses the presence of fourteen categories of material: human figurines, animal figurines, votive limbs, clay/stone tables, double-axes, horns of consecration, weapons, miniature vessels, animal rhyta (pouring vessels), stone ladles (shallow dishes), shells, pebbles, bones, and ash/evidence of fire. Aside from the human and animal figurines, which appear at all seven sites, the majority of the categories are only represented at three or sometimes four of the sites. Offering tables of clay or stone, however, were found at six of the seven sites. These objects will be discussed in greater detail shortly.



Figure 4.7. Bull and quadruped figurines from peak sanctuaries in eastern Crete, on display at the Rethymnon Museum.

Jouktas, as the peak sanctuary with the longest life-span, expectedly produced material from the largest number of categories (thirteen out of fourteen). But Briault notes that it is not just the so-called ‘palatial’ peak sanctuaries that contain the greatest range of objects. Atsipadhes, for example, has yielded more categories than Traostalos, which may have been connected to the palace at Zakros (2007: 127). She then uses these data to evaluate whether or not the idea of the peak sanctuary was being transmitted successfully across the island. The differential spatial patterning may have suggested regional variation, but Briault contends instead that the patterning is best explained by the selective adoption of particular practices at different ritual sites (2007: 128). Unfortunately, she does not take the argument further to address why certain sites and their ritual participants would have selectively chosen certain practices; but, in the context of my research, Briault’s work reinforces that peak sanctuary ritual practice was not homogenous, and explanations more complex than simply regional variation or palatial connections need to be explored.

As mentioned above, the offering tables are found at six of the seven sites examined by Briault. These are square or round vessels, sometimes on a pedestal, with circular depressions in the center, presumably for receiving liquid offerings, – hence the name “libation table” or “table of offering.” In a recent article, Ilse Schoep (1994) discusses an even more specific subset of these objects, those made of stone and inscribed with Linear A writing.<sup>8</sup> It is generally agreed that writing in Minoan Crete was closely connected with elite groups, and therefore, the evidence of these inscribed vessels has been traditionally used to demonstrate the close connections of certain peak sanctuaries to palatial centers (Cherry 1986: 31). Schoep (1994: 24) closely examines the formulae of the inscriptions, and uses this evidence to argue for regional variation in ritual practices and, more generally, for religious decentralization.

### *Peak sanctuary assemblages in context*

Both Schoep and Briault emphasize that objects considered ritual and found at peak sanctuaries are also found in non-peak sanctuary contexts, such as caves and other extra-urban ritual sites, and even at other sites in contexts that are not explicitly or exclusively ritual, such as in palatial complexes or other urban environments. This leads to the next level of analysis outlined above – namely, to compare the assemblages from peak sanctuaries to those from other extra-urban ritual spaces on Crete. Before returning to how evidence from these sites has been used in Briault’s and Schoep’s arguments, however, it is worth stepping back and looking more generally at how ritual assemblages

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<sup>8</sup> There are other objects from Minoan Crete that bear Linear A inscriptions (e.g., ceramic vessels), and some of these items also likely bear religious formulae.

vary between peak sanctuary sites, caves, and other extra-urban ritual spaces, such as rural sanctuaries.

Even at the very general level, there are sharp distinctions between peak sanctuaries and caves (see Jones 1999: 6-12 for detailed descriptions of the assemblages). Human ceramic figurines, present at all peak sanctuaries, have been discovered at only one cave site (Psychro). None of the caves have yet yielded the ceramic votive body parts found at some peak sanctuaries. Animal figurines show more similarities, in that six of the caves produced them, and, as at the peak sanctuaries, bovine representations are the most common. While few peak sanctuary sites have produced a large diversity of other species of animal figurines, no cave site has produced more than two other types (only sheep or pigs). Metals are another distinctive category; while excavations at both peak sanctuaries and caves have produced metal artifacts, they are more common at cave sites, appear in more abundant numbers, and the range of types is far greater. In particular, bronze male anthropomorphic figurines and real and votive weapons are characteristics of cave assemblages, whereas very few peak sanctuary assemblages exhibit these in large numbers.

Thus, there are important quantitative and qualitative differences in material assemblages of peak sanctuaries and caves: peak sanctuaries exhibit more abundant and more varied categories of ceramic anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, and caves have produced larger quantities of metal artifacts or more varied types. Part of the explanation for this could be the differences in chronological trajectories of the two types of sites. But, as this chapter has shown, not many categories of material in either assemblage define the assemblage or the type of site merely by their presence or absence.

I expect that a number of factors, both island-wide and local, can account for the particular make-up of an assemblage at any ritual site, whether a cave or a peak sanctuary.

Recently, Ellen Adams (2004) has considered closely the regional variation of the ritual landscape, taking into consideration both peak sanctuaries and caves, and focusing on two distinct regions of Crete, around Knossos and Mallia (introduced in Chapter 3: 58-59). She considers the diversity, quality, and general nature of the assemblages from peak sanctuaries and caves through time (from the Protopalatial through the Neopalatial periods), in order to assess the nexus of power and religion, and the degree of regional variation in this relationship. Looking at assemblages at the ten sacred caves and one peak sanctuary known in north-central Crete (specifically, those with discernable connections in the landscape to Knossos or Mallia), she concludes that there were marked differences between Knossos and Mallia, and also that there were three distinct types of ritual caves in the Knossian region: pilgrim caves, boundary caves, and caves attached to important settlements (2004: 38). Even focusing on just two regions of Crete, caves can be shown to have had varied functions and connections that were all ritual, but not exactly the same, and thus they did not leave identical material culture signatures. Adam's analysis supports my research, by illustrating that individual ritual sites within a local landscape were used by participants to meet specific ritual needs.

All three of the above-mentioned authors looked at the sites and their assemblages in the context of their regional socio-political landscapes. Schoep also documented the non-peak sanctuary findspots of Linear A-inscribed vessels: the ritual sites at the Psychro cave and Kato Syme, and the more urban sites of Apodoulou, Knossos, Prassa, and

Palaikastro. By further analyzing these contexts, along with the formulae and sign groups of the inscriptions themselves, she concludes that:

“Is it then possible that both at Mallia and Phaistos (and perhaps at Chania), a type of public shrine was used, more or less with a similar social function as the peak sanctuary, but, of course, with a different ritual? If this is correct it implies (1) that the religious centralization was less generalized as has been suggested, (2) that some kind of cultural koine indeed existed but that it left room for local variation and (3) that religion and politics may be related to some degree” (1994: 24).

From her analysis of one category of ritual object, Schoep supports the idea that there is a high degree of heterogeneity among ritual sites, and that location alone does not define the type of site or its connections in the landscape. She also argues against a hierarchically organized ritual landscape, centralized around Knossos, even in the Neopalatial period (*contra* Peatfield 1987). While I agree with Schoep’s assessment of heterogeneity among peak sanctuary assemblages, I would argue that in the Neopalatial period, the changes in the nature of the material culture and the direct links with the elite, suggest a new relationship between the ritual at peak sanctuaries and the inhabitants of the palatial centers.

Briault, as well, uses the distribution of ritual artifacts (her “ritual kits”) in non-peak sanctuary sites to discuss the role of ritual and its connection to larger socio-political phenomena. She assesses the presence of the fourteen categories listed above at sites such as Kato Syme, the Upper and Lower West Courts at Phaistos, the MM IA Oval House at Chamaizi and the MM II Shrine Complex at Mallia (2007: 132). Her conclusion from the assemblage distribution patterns is that the ritual activity at these sites was not fundamentally different from that at peak sanctuaries and that, at these sites, elements of the peak sanctuary ritual kit may have metonymically embodied aspects of

the Cretan landscape (2007: 134). Her final points are notable: that the spatial settings only partly configure a ritual event and, more importantly, that analysis of the transmission of ritual practices, and of artifact assemblages, along with the identification and interpretation of data patterning, are often more productive and fruitful ways of approaching ritual, particularly in the Bronze Age Aegean. Her points are well taken; but I contend that it is the entire picture presented by the assemblages, along with the larger contexts of the ritual and settlement landscape, which can provide an understanding of the role that peak sanctuary ritual played in Bronze Age Crete.

There are categories of material culture indicative of the performance of certain ritual activities (i.e., dedication of votive objects, drinking, feasting, etc.), which provide the commonalities that suggest a ritual pattern that appears throughout Crete. The similarities between types of objects at both extra-urban and urban ritual spaces indicate that Minoan Crete was a cohesive culture with respect to at least some aspects of ritual behavior – hence, we may broadly speak of a pan-Cretan ideology. There were, however, also important differences between individual peak sanctuary assemblages, between peak sanctuary and sacred cave assemblages, and the assemblages from extra-urban and urban ritual spaces. These differences provide the evidence that local and regional variations in ritual practices differed at individual sites, and account for variations in both practice and consequent material culture record. Below, I explore these differences through an analysis of the figurines that have been published from peak sanctuary assemblages.

## The anthropomorphic figurines

Anthropomorphic figurines, the most well-known and ubiquitous category of artifact from the peak sanctuaries, also exhibit differences that belie previous interpretations of homogeneity. Ceramic anthropomorphic figurines (Fig. 4.8) were an important component in peak sanctuary ritual practice, although just what that particular practice might have been is not as easily identified as one represented, for example, by cooking pots or drinking cups, for example.



Figure 4.8. Anthropomorphic figurines from Petsophas [Rutkowski 1991, Pl. B, figs. 1, 2, and 4].

Apparently so closely connected to the human participants in the ritual activity at peak sanctuaries, they warrant special attention. This connection is likely why they have received a great deal of attention in scholarship about peak sanctuaries (Rizza 1974, Rutkowski 1989, 1991, Morris 1993, 2001, forthcoming, Rethemiotakis 1997, Morris and Peatfield 2002).

Figurines played a specific role in the peak sanctuary ritual, and not just that of commemorating ritual activity. As discussed in chapter 2 (43-46), figurines have been studied to understand past cultures, through analyzing the process of embodying identity through figurine production, consumption, form, attributes and gesture. The figurines from the peak sanctuary assemblages constitute a data set that can help us examine how Minoans represented embodied identities and the performance of ritual activity. With this type of analysis, it is possible to understand why the figurines took the forms they did.



Figure 4.9. Heads of figurines from various peak sanctuaries in eastern Crete, on display at the Rethymnon Museum.

Given the transitional socio-political climate of the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods on Crete, it would not be surprising to find individuals actively signaling their membership in different social groups as an effective strategy to maneuver through the shifting political landscape. These periods, when new political structures were coming into being, would be the moment when one might expect “signifying with things” to take

on special importance. The peak sanctuary figurines were a durable medium for conveying these signals. It is my contention that people were navigating, manipulating, and creating both social and cultural identities in the arena of ritual practice at the peak sanctuaries.



Figure 4.10. Heads of figurines from the peak sanctuary at Juktas, on display at the Heraklion Museum.

In the archaeological literature, the most successful recent work on figurines has been linked to very specific and precise archaeological contextual information, such as Richard Lesure's work (1997) in Central Mexico and Joyce Marcus' studies (1996) of Oaxacan figurines. As should by now be clear, such specificity is not available in almost all publications on the peak sanctuary material. Coupled with the lack of stratigraphic context, it means that there cannot be a specific spatio-temporal analysis of the figurines in context. Until more is published, what types of understandings are possible given the available data set?

Looking more broadly at these data, it becomes clear that, although individual identity is not accessible given the sample available for study, distinct differences can be discerned. These differences occur at the regional level, when characteristics of entire

assemblages are compared. These variations signal the impact of opposing influences: local and regional styles and identities compared to the island-wide manifestation of peak sanctuary ritual (Fig. 4.9 – 4.11). Below, I compare a few of the relatively well-published peak sanctuary figurine assemblages, to explore this patterning.

As mentioned above, Rutkowski (1991) published the figurines from the peak sanctuary at Petsophas in very considerable detail (Fig. 4.8). He also published, though more briefly, the figurines from the peak sanctuary at Pyrgos (1989). His analysis of the figurine assemblages from both sites focused on form, gesture, clothing and hairstyles. In general, the figurines from the two sites are similar – they wear typical male and female clothing (of which we also have iconographic representations), their gestures are similar (outstretched arms, hands held together across the chest, elbows bent and with hands at the waist), and their hairstyles vary similarly (according to age and gender distinctions) at each site.

At this general level of similarity, it would seem that there is little variation between the figurine assemblages, at least from these two sites. Rutkowski noted, however, that there are in fact distinct differences. The rendering of the Pyrgos figurines, particularly the female ones, is more summarily executed than those from Petsophas (1989: 57). Rutkowski identified differences in the modeling of the eyes, the ears, and stylized “organon”. Even in his brief comparison, Rutkowski clearly identified regional variations in the technique and style of the figurines, which nonetheless shared some general basic characteristics. These differences exemplify the local influences that acted upon peak sanctuary assemblages and shaped the form of the material culture. The dedication of ceramic anthropomorphic figurines are an important part of the peak

sanctuary ritual complex, but each sanctuary has a unique character. The variations in the modeling and form of figurines from different assemblages express the local identities of the participants. Although there is little evidence for every peak sanctuary site, at the site of Vrysinas, a petrographic analysis of the pottery assemblage (Georgia Kordatzaki pers. comm.) has convincingly demonstrated that the visitors to the site were local inhabitants of nearby settlements (see below, Chapter 6: 165). I would argue that the differences in figurine modeling and form at Pyrgos and Petsophas support a similar interpretation; the local inhabitants were producing and depositing figurines that followed the traditions of that specific area.

In a similar vein, important contributions have recently been made by Christine Morris, who has studied the figurines from Atsipadhes with respect to attribution studies (1993), gesture (2001), and bodily practice (Morris and Peatfield 2002). In her forthcoming article, she considered the “potential for viewing these figurines as representations which played an active role in projecting and constructing individual social identity within Minoan culture through selective and morphologically distinctive presentation of the human form” (forth: 1-2). Like Zeimbeki (2004), Morris pointed out that previous descriptions of figurines as “crude” and “stereotypical” dismissed production analyses. In other words, considerations of modes and methods of production were ignored because the objects were seen as unworthy of such analyses. More importantly, these assessments muted differences between figurines within assemblages and between sites by grouping them together as hastily and crudely made.



Figure 4.11. Anthropomorphic figurines from peak sanctuaries in east Crete, on display at the A. Nikolaos Museum.

Looking at several axes of variability such as raw materials, modeling, and decoration, Morris concluded that there are indeed differences to be detected, which bear evidence for issues of identity and gender. Although she pointed out the factors that hamper closer analysis (i.e., availability of samples due to publication, previous assumptions of stereotypicality, and generalizing statements), Morris used Zeimbeki's (2004) work with Jouktas animal figurines, Gesell and Saupe's (1997) study of the Kavousi assemblage, and Rethemiotakis' (1997) analysis of the large figurines from Kophinas, to reason that the peak sanctuary figurines were produced and consumed locally, and therefore may exhibit significant evidence for local preferences and needs (forthcoming: 10). Further, Morris ascertained that the Atsipadhes figurines are very different from those of its nearest peak sanctuary neighbor, Vrysinas (e.g., impressed details at Vrysinas, painted details at Atsipadhes). Based on a brief survey of figurines from both sites, I would support Morris' argument, and suggest that this provides further

evidence for subtle yet important variability in material culture assemblages from individual sites.

Morris' comparison of these assemblages supports the idea that different factors need to be taken into consideration when studying the material culture of extra-urban ritual spaces, in this case, anthropomorphic figurines from peak sanctuaries. She points out:

“I suggest that in any hand-made figurine tradition there is likely to be a significant balance or tension between shared characteristics of style and technique and the selection of attributes through which individual social and ritual identities might be expressed, and that this should be explored both within and between sites and in relation to the organization of production” (forth: 3-4).

Her sentiment succinctly illustrates the point that there are multiple factors influencing the material culture of peak sanctuary assemblages. Morris' work is a first step in understanding the influences of local and regional dynamics on peak sanctuary ritual performance and material culture assemblages. My research builds on her work by applying similar analyses to other categories of material culture from ritual assemblages, from peak sanctuaries as well as from sacred caves and rural sanctuaries. It is work such as that done by Morris and Rutkowski that will begin to counteract the affect of the scholarship that sought to unify peak sanctuary ritual and assimilate the material culture assemblages. Moreover, once more data is published and analyzed, these types of studies and the influences that they document can be considered in the context of the influences that did unify peak sanctuaries (e.g., the Minoan ritual complex).

## Discussion and Conclusions

Recent approaches to socio-political dynamics on Minoan Crete, with their emphasis on heterarchical power structures and regionalism, require an essential reassessment of peak sanctuaries. One of the primary considerations that has emerged is that peak sanctuary ritual can no longer be considered a uniform phenomenon that accounts for what has been found at every site in every period. Even though there are characteristics of these sites that are shared, and indeed at times widely distributed across the island, there are a great many more issues that need to be taken into consideration.

In the “Previous Research” section of this chapter, it was shown that over the history of scholarship on the peak sanctuary phenomenon, there has been a great deal of useful and interesting literature, but that there are nonetheless major questions still left unanswered. Aside from the lack of satisfactory publication, one of the main reasons for these continuing questions is that scholars have tended to focus on a single aspect of the peak sanctuary phenomenon. Alternatively, if the peak sanctuaries have been considered in larger ritual or socio-political contexts, they have been treated as a monolithic, pan-Cretan phenomenon, in which the variations exhibited by individual sites were downplayed or ignored. All of this work has produced an incomplete picture of peak sanctuaries on Minoan Crete; the remainder of this chapter seeks to fill in some of these gaps.

Taking into consideration the changing distribution of the peak sanctuaries over time (i.e., the drastic decrease in the number of sites from the Protopalatial to the Neopalatial period) along with the differences in artifact distributions, it is clear that peak sanctuaries were affected by two different factors that strongly influenced the trajectory

of their use and their material culture. First, there was the larger ritual system on Minoan Crete, in which peak sanctuaries were integral. This accounts for the similarities in the types of votives offerings and range of ritual activities. To that extent, these characteristics are shared to a certain degree with other extra-urban ritual spaces – caves and open-air shrines – and with ritual spaces in domestic and urban contexts – the palaces, public shrines in towns, etc. There was a unified sense of how Minoans performed ritual and the material residues of those activities.

On the other hand, individual sites were at the same time affected by their context in local and regional landscapes.<sup>9</sup> These influences account for which peak sanctuaries continued to be used in the Neopalatial period, the types and character of the votive offerings left behind, and the forms of more mundane artifacts that accompanied ritual activity (e.g., cooking pots, conical cups, storage jars, etc.). For example, peak sanctuaries that had a close connection with a palace continued to be used in the Neopalatial period (Jouktas is the prime example). The votive assemblages of individual sanctuaries vary in the range of objects, which is undoubtedly linked to the local identities of the ritual participants at each site. This does not mean that any individual site was more or less a peak sanctuary, but rather that the performance of ritual activities and attendant material culture were subject to local variations. For example, the size and nature of Jouktas' assemblage clearly indicates close connections to Knossos, whereas the assemblage from Atsipadhes reflects the lack of a nearby major urban settlement.

In particular, the most abundant and characteristic type of object in peak sanctuary assemblages, the male and female anthropomorphic figurines, is a telling

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the variation could simultaneously be indicative of participation in a larger ritual system; if the variation in object patterning represents the worship of different deities at specific peak sanctuaries (as suggested by Rutkowski 1986), then these could all be seen as part of a single whole.

example of these opposing forces. These figurines, found at every peak sanctuary site, signal a strong degree of homogeneity in peak sanctuary ritual by their presence, but at the same time express the influence of local and regional factors. The figurines were produced and consumed locally (i.e., their raw materials appear to have been locally obtained), while their form and style display both regional and local characteristics.

Further work on all of these problems, topics, and approaches would be worthwhile, although, to some degree, that will not be possible until peak sanctuaries and their assemblages are published in greater detail. Even with the limited published data, however, by looking at the material culture in local and regional contexts (e.g., the figurines from Pyrgos or Atsipadhes), it is possible to begin to paint a picture of the identities of the participants and the nature of peak sanctuary ritual. Peak sanctuaries, like sacred caves, each have an individual trajectory and a unique material signature that can only be discerned when all of the factors acting on a particular site are taken into consideration. The idea of a “peak sanctuary” is indeed meaningful and has a basis in the archaeological record. There are sites that fall into that category. Each site within that category has a distinctive use life and material character, which should not be muted or glossed over by virtue of its inclusion in a category. In the next chapter, these issues will be considered through the specific lens of the pottery assemblage from the peak sanctuary at Vrysinas.