

The artifice of Daidalos: Modern Minoica as religious focus in contemporary Paganism

More than a century after its discovery by Sir Arthur Evans, Minoan Crete continues to be envisioned in the popular mind according to the outdated scholarship of the early twentieth century: as a peace-loving, matriarchal, Goddess-worshipping utopia. This is primarily a consequence of more up-to-date archaeological scholarship, which challenges this model of Minoan religion, not being easily accessible to a non-scholarly audience. This paper examines the use of Minoan religion by two modern Pagan groups: the Goddess Movement and the Minoan Brotherhood, both established in the late twentieth century and still active. As a consequence of their reliance upon early twentieth-century scholarship, each group interprets Minoan religion in an idealistic and romantic manner which, while suiting their religious purposes, is historically inaccurate. Beginning with some background to the Goddess Movement, its idiosyncratic version of history, and the position of Minoan Crete within that timeline, the present study will examine the interpretation of Minoan religion by two early twentieth century scholars, Jane Ellen Harrison and the aforementioned Sir Arthur Evans—both of whom directly influenced popular ideas on the Minoans. Next, a brief look at the use of Minoan religious iconography within Dianic Feminist Witchcraft, founded by Zsuzsanna Budapest, will be followed by closer focus on one of the main advocates of modern Goddess worship, theologian Carol P. Christ, and on the founder of the Minoan Brotherhood, Eddie Buczynski. The use of Minoan religion by the Goddess Movement and the Minoan Brotherhood will be critiqued in the light of Minoan archaeology, leading to the conclusion that although it provides an empowering model upon which to base their own beliefs and practices, the versions of Minoan religion espoused by the Goddess Movement and the Minoan Brotherhood are historically inaccurate and more modern than ancient.

Goddess-History and Crete's Role in It

Dianic Witchcraft, a women-only branch of contemporary Pagan Witchcraft, arose in the 1970s in the USA as a result of the influence of the women's movement on British Wicca, while

the larger Goddess Movement, of which Dianic Witchcraft is also a part, includes many women who do not identify as Witches as well as some Christian feminists.¹ While adopting a ritual and calendrical structure derived from Wicca, Goddess Paganism—the religion of Dianic Witchcraft and the Goddess Movement—differs in that the duotheistic male and female pantheon of Wicca is modified so that the Goddess is far more prominent, and the God is often eliminated entirely.² Goddess Paganism is essentially monotheistic, although it is functionally polytheistic in that individual goddesses are recognized and worshipped but are considered to be emanations or “aspects” of a single Great Goddess.³ The Goddess Movement presents a historical narrative according to which the Great Goddess was the original, and only, deity of humankind from the dawn of time up until around 3000 BCE, when Goddess-oriented cultures were conquered by patriarchal, warlike worshippers of a sky god. Before this event, Goddess-centred cultures were characterised by the ostensibly female values of peace, harmony with nature, and sexual equality. Women held especially exalted positions because of their apparent power over childbirth, and this was reflected in the primary deity being a Mother Goddess. Societies were not violent during this time, and warfare was unknown until the Early Bronze Age when warlike Indo-Europeans swept down from the Russian steppes and subjugated the peaceful Goddess-worshipping societies. The conquerors imposed their male deities which, over the centuries, increased in importance and culminated in the punitive God of Judaism. Subsequent monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam exhibit the supposedly male characteristics of domination, aggressive violence, oppression of women, and exploitation of the earth.⁴ The nadir of this history is the mass execution of women during the European Witch Craze; the belief that nine million women were killed in the Witch Hunts was common amongst Pagans until more recent

¹ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 341; Rountree, *Embracing the Witch*, 39–40. While some Dianic Witchcraft groups accept male participants, they are in the minority. Dianic Witchcraft here refers to the women-only variety founded by Z. Budapest characterised by the worship of a single Goddess and a focus on egalitarian matriarchal feminism (Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 178–239).

² Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 88, 130–49; Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 277–80; Long, *Goddess Movement in Britain*, 314; Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions*, 19–20; Rountree, *Embracing the Witch*, 35–36; Lapatin, *Snake Goddess*, 89.

³ Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 132–35; Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism*, 287.

⁴ Ruether, “Symbolic and Social Connections,” 13–23.

(anglophone) historical scholarship explaining the origin of this figure became accessible at the turn of the 21st century.⁵

According to this “Goddess-history,” the European Neolithic period (7000–5000 BCE) was the zenith of Goddess-centred gynaeotopian society, while Late Bronze Age Minoan Crete (mainly the Neopalatial period, 1750–1490 BCE) is considered to be the Goddess culture’s “final flowering.” In this reading, Crete exhibits the last gasp of the feminine values associated with Goddess culture before it was wiped out by warlike, patriarchal Mycenaean Greeks. Before this time Minoan Crete was peaceful, worshipped a Mother Goddess and her Dying and Rising Consort (who was also her son), and women and nature were respected.⁶

Reliance on early scholarship

Many of these romantic characteristics ascribed to Crete derive from publications by early Minoan archaeologists and Classical scholars who were themselves influenced by the pervasive ideas of Bachofenian matriarchy, and by early anthropologist Sir James Frazer’s model of a Great Goddess and her cyclically dying and rising Consort/Son. This divine pair was exemplified by deities such as Ishtar and Tammuz, Isis and Osiris, Aphrodite and Adonis, and Mary and Jesus—the male figure’s vulnerability to death and subsequent resurrection symbolizing the seasonal vegetation cycle.⁷ In the early 20th century, some Hellenists, such as Jane Ellen Harrison, favored the idea of an original matriarchy and a universal Great Goddess—Johan Jakob Bachofen’s theories about prehistoric matriarchy, as espoused in his 1861 book, *Das Mutterrecht*, having become influential by late 19th century.⁸ For Harrison, the presence of

⁵ Long, *In a Chariot Drawn by Lions*; Purkiss, *Witch in History*; Behringer, “Neun Millionen Hexen”; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 141.

⁶ Gimbutas, *Civilization of the Goddess*; Gadon, *Once and Future Goddess*, 87–107.

⁷ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 184–93, 426–517; Hutton, *Neolithic Great Goddess*, 93; Wheeler-Barclay, *Science of Religion in Britain*, 205–9.

⁸ Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht*; Eller, “Two Knights,” 90; eadem, *Gentlemen and Amazons*.

female divinities in Greek religion was interpreted as proof of the historical existence of matriarchal social order.⁹

Harrison travelled to Crete in 1901, where she spent three days at the site of the palace of Knossos with its excavator (and the founder of Minoan archaeology), Sir Arthur Evans. Suffused with enthusiasm about ancient Goddess religion, Harrison was particularly struck by an image on a clay seal impression found by Evans depicting a female figure atop a mountain with a male worshipper below (Fig. 4.1).¹⁰ She would later describe the scene as “a standing monument of matriarchalism...”¹¹ After Harrison’s visit, Evans himself began to apply the idea of a Great Goddess and her Consort/Son to Minoan archaeology.¹² In 1903 he discovered the famous faience figurines from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, the larger of which he dubbed the “Snake Goddess” and interpreted as a chthonic goddess of maternity, and the smaller which he construed as the Goddess’s human votary (Figs. 4.2, 4.3). The Frazerian model of a single Great Goddess and her Boy Consort suffuses Evans’ final record of the Knossos excavations, the four-volume *Palace of Minos*.¹³

<INSERT FIGURE 4.1 HERE>

Evans also drew upon Greek myth in order to interpret Minoan religion. Projecting Hesiodic, Homeric and Classical myth about Crete back in time onto the Minoans, Evans identified the Minoan deities as Rhea and Zeus, and peopled the Bronze Age palace of Knossos with the well-known figures of Minos (after whom Minoan culture was named), Pasiphae and the Bull, Theseus, Ariadne, Dionysus, and the Minotaur in the Labyrinth. Evans was also responsible for claiming that Minoan society was peaceful.¹⁴ Minoan iconography is distinguished by a predominance of imagery deriving from the natural world, in contrast to

⁹ Peacock, “Awful Warmth About Her Heart,” 171, 177.

¹⁰ Gill et al., 397–8.

¹¹ Harrison, *Prolegomena*, 497; *CMS* 2.8, no. 256. Ironically, this image dates to the Mycenaean period on Crete.

¹² Eller, “Two Knights,” 92.

¹³ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:51–52, 1:115–16, 1:159–61, 1:500–510, 1:518, 2:128–29, 2:235–37, 2:249–52, 324, 2:337–44, 2:540–42, 2:702, 2:722–26, 2:763–69, 2:786–90, 2:792–95, 2:808–10, 2:831–32, 2:841–44; 3:135–44, 3:148, 3:426–27, 3:438–76, 4:28–44, 4:176–77, 4:193–99; 4:395, 4:460–62, 4:468–83, 4:947–59.

¹⁴ As a reaction to the horrific aftermath of the war 1897 between Cretan Christians and Muslims that was part of Crete’s struggle for independence from Ottoman rule, as well as to differentiate Minoan society from Heinrich Schliemann’s warlike Mycenaeans (ibid., 2:79; Schliemann, *Mycenae*; Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 67).

especially violent imagery prevalent in most of the Bronze Age Mediterranean, so it is understandable that Evans would emphasise this aspect of Minoan culture.¹⁵ However, he rejected any images of armed male figures in Aegean art as Minoan, claiming that they were instead “a late and exotic intrusion,” even going so far as to actively suppress architectural evidence suggestive of Minoan militancy.¹⁶

<INSERT FIGURE 4.2 HERE>

For decades, many scholars accepted Evans’ ideas, although in Aegean archaeology today, partisans of the model of a single Great Goddess for Crete are in the minority.¹⁷ Outside the discipline, however—and within the Goddess Movement, in particular—it is practically unknown that the historical existence of an ancient Minoan cult of the Great Mother and her Youthful Consort is in question. Archaeologists have not conveyed the revised history to a popular audience. Therefore, as it tends to do in the wider Wiccan movement, older scholarship holds sway—and without access to up-to-date literature on Aegean archaeology, it is likely to continue to do so.¹⁸

<INSERT FIGURE 4.3 HERE>

Dianic Witchcraft and Carol P. Christ on Goddess-History at Crete

Many of the key players within the Goddess Movement were originally exposed to it through Dianic Witchcraft, a female-only form of modern Witchcraft originating in the United States and named after Diana, the Roman virgin goddess of the hunt.¹⁹ Zsuzsanna (or “Z”)

¹⁵ Crooks, “Natural Landscapes.”

¹⁶ Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 67, 223–24; Tully, “Agonistic Scenes.”

¹⁷ For criticism of the Mother Goddess model see Goodison and Morris, “Beyond the Great Mother.” Marinatos suggests that rather than interpreting Minoan artistic representations of important females in conjunction with what seem to be subordinate males as a “Great Goddess” and her “Youthful God,” such images may depict a mortal queen mother and her son (Marinatos, “Minoan Mother Goddess,” 352–53). Linear B texts from Knossos mention numerous deities, suggesting that Minoan religion was polytheistic rather than monotheistic or duotheistic, but are of limited use because they date to the later Mycenaean period on Crete (Weilharter, “Religious Offerings in the Linear B Tablets,” 212).

¹⁸ Tully, “Researching the Past.”

¹⁹ Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 340–68.

Budapest was at the forefront of the growth of feminist witchcraft in the 1970s, espousing a separatist female tradition in which the matriarchal religion of the Great Goddess is preserved through the practise of female-only rituals.²⁰ Minoan iconography such as the Labrys, or Double-Axe, had been used as a symbol of feminist-lesbian spirituality since at least 1970,²¹ and Budapest's coven, the Susan B. Anthony Coven No.1, was using Evans' "votary" or "snake priestess," (Fig. 4.3) interpreted as a goddess, as one of its symbols in their newsletters by the early 1970s.²²

One of the foremost Goddess-theologians, Carol P. Christ, was initially introduced to modern Goddess worship in 1975 through the work of Z. Budapest and the rituals of her associate Starhawk—probably the best known of all modern American Witches—but had moved away from their focus on "magic" by the 1990s.²³ Christ earned a Ph.D. in theology from Yale University, writes voluminously on Goddess religion, and is the founder and director of the Ariadne Institute, which offers courses for academic credit through the California Institute of Integral Studies. Christ claims to be an expert on Minoan Crete and leads tours to the island for modern Goddess-worshippers.²⁴ In regard to her interpretation of Minoan religion, while it is evident that she is familiar with some of the recent archaeological literature, Christ chooses to favour the Goddess Movement's interpretation of the Minoans as the "last flowering" of the idealised Neolithic women-centered culture. Minoan Crete is promoted to tour participants as a "Society of Peace where the Goddess was revered as the Source of Life, women were honoured,

²⁰ Mythologising her own history in a typical "grandmother story," Budapest claimed that she derived her knowledge of witchcraft from her mother, who in turn had been taught by a woman from a hereditary line of witches. She also claimed that her mother had no father and was born parthenogenetically, and raised by a household servant who was also a witch and who taught her witchcraft (Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 277–78). A "grandmother story" is a trope within modern Paganism that refers to the practice of claiming to come from a family of traditional witches, despite one's theology and ritual structure obviously deriving from Wicca which was constructed in the 1950s. The canonical "grandmother story" was told by British Witch Alex Sanders (Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 325, 330).

²¹ Walker, *Woman's Dictionary of Symbols*, 95; it is taken for granted in texts such as Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, frontispiece, 367–369, 375, 420.

²² That their understanding of Minoan archaeology has not improved in 45 years can be seen in Horton, "Minoans, Amazons and the Labrys."

²³ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 42; Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 280.

²⁴ Goddess-tours, or pilgrimages, are a feature of modern Goddess religion. Christ has led tours to Crete for over 20 years but there are many other versions led by authors such as Donna Henes, Joan Marler, Vicki Noble, and Willow La Monte to sites such as Malta, Turkey, Britain, Hawaii and Latin America (Eller, *Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, 22). Karen Tate's book on "Goddess sites" provides 108 destinations for the independent Goddess pilgrim and includes the usual idealised interpretation of Minoan Crete (Tate, *Sacred Places*, 50–52).

people lived in harmony with each other and with nature, and there was no war.” Selective use of Minoan iconography would suggest to the average reader that this is indeed correct.²⁵

Christ also utilises later Greek myth to interpret earlier Cretan history and culture, re-constellating the stories as “myth told by the victors intended to discredit a culture they conquered”—these victors being the Mycenaeans from mainland Greece who occupied Crete after 1490 BCE. Christ claims that the true story about ancient Crete was distorted by the Greeks in order to discredit the pre-patriarchal religion of the Minoans.²⁶ In addition, Christ has proposed feminizing the terminology used for Late Bronze Age Crete, in particular replacing the masculine “Minos,” with the feminine “Ariadne”—because, she asserts, there is no evidence for the existence of ancient Minoan kings. For Christ, then, the Minoans were “Ariadnians.”²⁷ Christ utilises the primary sources of archaeology and mythology but re-interprets the evidence according to the Goddess Movement’s historical metanarrative. Rather than explaining how Minoan evidence fits into this model, Christ relies on suggesting evocative possibilities which, without access to comparative archaeological accounts, risk being received by her audience as facts about ancient Crete.

Eddie Buczynski and the Minoan Brotherhood

Minoan Crete is not only a source of inspiration for women seeking an authentic, sometimes exclusively, female religion. It has also been utilized as a base from which to structure an exclusively male religion: the Minoan Brotherhood. Founded in 1977 by New York Wiccan Eddie Buczynski, the Minoan Brotherhood was an attempt to revive an ostensibly authentic ancient Pagan tradition that valued gay men.²⁸ Buczynski had found the traditional Wiccan covens he had been involved with to be rigidly insistent on a heterosexual model for

²⁵ Christ, “Goddess-tours to Greece.”

²⁶ Eadem, “Who is Ariadne?”

²⁷ Eadem, “New Glossary for Crete.”

²⁸ Lloyd, *Bull of Heaven*, 383, 403; Burns, “Great Mother Goddess.” Buczynski also designed a female branch, the Minoan Sisterhood, designed to be taken up by his lesbian Wiccan friends, Carol Bulzone and Ria Farnham, who started initiating women into the tradition in 1978. Eddie’s plan was that the two separate-sex groups would come together in a mixed sex Cult of Rhea (Farnham, “Crystal Ball,” 99).

both divine beings and the ritual roles of the human participants. He sought therefore to find a historical precedent for a Pagan religion that did not run on such a model, and felt that Minoan religion provided this. According to Buczynski it was:

...a true form of pagan witchcraft for gay men, which boasts a beginning over four thousand years ago in a world of peace, love, and harmony...It's nice to know that some of us, as gay people, can, in this ancient and happy way, through a religion that glorifies the life-style that we have chosen to live, try our hand at helping to recreate that time of bliss which once existed under the Great Mother, and aid in the rebalancing of our diseased world.²⁹

Like the female members of the Goddess Movement, Buczynski was under the impression that Minoan religion was characterised by the worship of the Great Mother Goddess and her Divine Son, and he assumed that this indicated that Minoan religion was the root of European Witchcraft. Buczynski subsequently interpreted this apparently Minoan Dying and Rising God as the patron deity of homosexual men.³⁰

Despite his uncritical acceptance of the Frazerian model of the Great Goddess and her Consort/Son, Buczynski otherwise carried out copious research in an attempt to find genuine historical and archaeological information with which to structure the Minoan Brotherhood's cosmology and rituals. Being an amateur scholar, however, he tended to mix the work of scholars of varying degrees of repute, conflating the work of experts such as Arthur Evans and Martin Nilsson with that of popularisers such as Jacquetta Hawkes, all the while adding imaginative and wildly inaccurate, but evocative, texts, such as *The White Goddess* (by Robert Graves), and novels set in ancient Crete (by Mary Renault).³¹

Buczynski also used Greek myth to interpret Late Bronze Age Cretan religion, providing it with a homoerotic reading in which, for example, Apollo and Dionysus were lovers—a scenario not found in ancient mythology.³² He also claimed that *most* ancient Pagan religions had

²⁹ Buczynski, "Witchcraft Today and the Homosexual," 11.

³⁰ Lloyd, *Bull of Heaven*, 401.

³¹ Ibid., 392–94; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, 188–94, 285; Kersnowski, *Early Poetry of Robert Graves*; Kopelson, *Love's Litany*, 104–28; Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 203; Conrath, *Mary Renault*.

³² While both deities had male and female mortal lovers and shared the sanctuary at Delphi, they are not recorded in Greek myth as being erotically active with each other. Dionysus—rarely depicted as engaging in sexual activity in

a homosexual priesthood, and assumed that Minoan religion was a mystery religion. Such mysteries were, Buczynski believed, enacted in separate male- and female-only cults, and he modelled the modern Minoan Brotherhood accordingly as “a Mystery/initiatory cult which erotically celebrates Life through male love.”³³ Buczynski was inventing Minoan religion, despite his apparent desire to be historically accurate.

In subsequent years, the more Buczynski found out about Minoan religion, the less involved with the Minoan Brotherhood he became. In 1980, he began formal academic study of archaeology at the City University of New York, and would later go on to attend the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, eventually completing a Master’s degree at Bryn Mawr College.³⁴ Within a year of commencing his study, Buczynski had resigned from the leadership of the Minoan Brotherhood in order to devote himself more thoroughly to his academic pursuits. It is not clear whether his encounter with Minoan archaeology within the academy had any effect on his beliefs; that it did not dissuade him is suggested by the fact that he founded a short-lived grove of the Minoan Brotherhood in Bryn Mawr in 1986.³⁵

Historically Inaccurate Readings of Minoan Crete

In what ways then are the interpretations of Minoan Crete by members of the Goddess Movement and the Minoan Brotherhood historically inaccurate? The perception and representation of Late Bronze Age Minoan Crete prevalent within these groups is characterised by many falsehoods, the most obvious being the idea that the Minoans worshipped a Mother Goddess and her Dying and Rising Consort/Son. Recent archaeological evidence from Bronze

either literature or art—was married to two women: in myth to the Cretan Ariadne, and in ritual to the *basilinna*, wife of the *archon basileus*, during the Athenian festival of the Anthesteria (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 947 (Wender, 54); Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.321–25 (Lattimore, 176); Demosthenes, *Against Neaira*, 73 (DeWitt, 407); Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 3. 5 (LCL 285: 17); Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.174–77 (Melville, 176); idem, *Fasti*, 3.407–12 (Boyle and Woodard, 66); Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, 10.175–92 (LCL 344: 341); Goff, *Citizen Bacchae*, 38–39, 171–73).

³³ Lloyd, *Bull of Heaven*, 383, 395, 397–99.

³⁴ Ibid., 479, 487, 533. After Buczynski’s early death in 1989 former Director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, James Wright, dedicated a 1991 paper to Eddie (Wright, “Empty Cups”).

³⁵ Ibid., 522–23.

Age Crete does not support this thesis. Human motherhood is rarely represented in Minoan iconography.³⁶ While women's breasts were prominently portrayed, this does not necessarily indicate motherhood.³⁷ Female figures are not depicted as nursing and kourotrophic imagery only appears in animal scenes—in sharp contrast to Mycenaean art.³⁸ The idea that Crete was matriarchal is also unsupported by the evidence. While women are conspicuous subjects in Minoan art, particularly in ritual scenes, men also feature, although less prominently. Minoan iconography does suggest that some female figures appear to be important and possibly of higher status than some male figures, however while Carol P. Christ claimed that there was no evidence for the historical existence of ancient Minoan kings, prominence of women in art cannot be taken as evidence for Minoan queens, either.³⁹ Ruler iconography is missing in Minoan Crete, in sharp contrast to the wider Bronze Age Mediterranean and Near East.⁴⁰ The identification of any sort of ruler in Minoan art therefore remains contentious amongst archaeologists; even so, Christ proposes that an “egalitarian matriarchy” existed at Crete in which motherhood was held in high esteem and both women and men held power—a model unsupported by current evidence.⁴¹

Like human motherhood, sex is conspicuously absent from the Minoan iconographic repertoire, except in the form of breasts and codpieces.⁴² Most iconographic examples of ritual activity depict women and men as separate, although in scenes of tree worship they are depicted together.⁴³ None of the evidence suggests that sexual activity of any sort is part of Minoan religion, and it is not possible to tell from iconography whether participants were hetero or homosexually oriented. In addition, the idea that Minoan religion involved initiation into “mysteries” cannot be proven. The idea of “men's mysteries” and “women's mysteries” derives

³⁶ Cadogan, “Gender metaphors”; Budin, “Maternity, Children and ‘Mother Goddesses’.”

³⁷ Goodison and Morris, “Beyond the Great Mother,” 125; Lapatin, *Snake Goddess*, 81; Morris, “Iconography of the bared breast.”

³⁸ Figurines of pregnant and birth-giving *human* women are evident, however (Budin, “Maternity, Children and ‘Mother Goddesses’”; Kanta, *Ελουθια Καρπιστηιον*). Examples of kourotrophic animal scenes appear in the Temple Repositories (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:510–12).

³⁹ Koehl, “‘Sacred Marriage’,” 239–40.

⁴⁰ Tully and Crooks, “Enthroned Upon Mountains.”

⁴¹ Rehak, *Role of the Ruler*; Christ, *Who is Ariadne*.

⁴² The Cave at Tsoutsouros has produced some figurines of copulating couples that are probably Sub-Minoan or Protogeometric. There is an EM III seal from Galana Kharakia near Viannos, and apparently a figurine (Cadogan “Gender metaphors,” 228; Budin, “Maternity, Children and ‘Mother Goddesses’”).

⁴³ Marinatos, “Role and Sex Division”; Tully, *Cultic Life of Trees*.

from the anthropological study of rites of passage and was not the same thing as the ancient Mystery Cults, popular in Classical and Hellenistic Greece and in Rome, in which participants underwent initiation into secret aspects of the cult of certain deities in order to be guaranteed a better afterlife. While some mystery religions such as those of Mithras only admitted men, most were open to both sexes.⁴⁴ That Minoan religion was not a secretive mystery cult is suggested by the abundant images of ritual in Minoan art.

Literary evidence may provide some information on ritualised male homosexuality in ancient Crete, but not of the type envisioned by the Minoan Brotherhood. Strabo cites the ancient Greek historian Ephoros (ca. 400–330 BCE) in describing what several scholars interpret as a homoerotic initiation rite for aristocratic Cretan youths that involved ritual abduction and the bestowal of gifts.⁴⁵

They have a peculiar custom in regard to love affairs, for they win the objects of their love, not by persuasion, but by abduction; the lover tells the friends of the boy three or four days beforehand that he is going to make the abduction; but for the friends to conceal the boy, or not to let him go forth by the appointed road, is indeed a most disgraceful thing, a confession, as it were, that the boy is unworthy to obtain such a lover; and when they meet, if the abductor is the boy's equal or superior in rank or other respects, the friends pursue him and lay hold of him, though only in a very gentle way, thus satisfying the custom; and after that they cheerfully turn the boy over to him to lead away; if, however, the abductor is unworthy, they take the boy away from him. And the pursuit does not end until the boy is taken to the "Andreium" of his abductor. They regard as a worthy object of love, not the boy who is exceptionally handsome, but the boy who is exceptionally manly and decorous. After giving the boy presents, the abductor takes him away to any place in the country he wishes; and those who were present at the abduction follow after them, and after feasting and hunting with them for two months (for it is not permitted to detain the boy for a longer time), they return to the city. The

⁴⁴ Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 43; Graf, *Lesser Mysteries*, 241–56; Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 197–21; Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 195–247; Bremmer, *Initiation into the Mysteries*, 2, 22, 69, 82, 131.

⁴⁵ Harrison, *Epilegomena*, 27 n. 4; Willett, *Everyday Life*, 116–17; Burkert, *Structure and History*, 29; Koehl, "Chieftain Cup"; idem, "Ephoros and Ritualized Homosexuality."

boy is released after receiving as presents a military habit, an ox, and a drinking-cup (these are gifts required by law), and other things so numerous and costly that the friends, on account of the number of the expenses, make contributions thereto. Now the boy sacrifices the ox to Zeus and feasts those who returned with him; and then he makes known the facts about his intimacy with his lover, whether, perchance, it has pleased him or not, the law allowing him this privilege in order that, if any force was applied to him at the time of the abduction, he might be able at this feast to avenge himself and be rid of the lover. It is disgraceful for those who are handsome in appearance or descendants of illustrious ancestors to fail to obtain lovers, the presumption being that their character is responsible for such a fate. But the *parastathentes* (for thus they call those who have been abducted) receive honours; for in both the dances and the races they have the position of highest honour, and are allowed to dress in better clothes than the rest, that is, in the habit given them by their lovers; and not then only, but even after they have grown to manhood, they wear the distinctive dress, which is intended to make known the fact that each wearer has become “kleinos,” for they call the loved one “kleinos” and the lover “philetor.” So much for their customs in regard to love affairs (Strabo, *Geography* 10.4.21 (LCL 211: 155–56)).

Minoan archaeologist Robert Koehl suggests that visual evidence for this practice may be derived from a Late Bronze Age object known as the Chieftain Cup, and from metal cut-out figures from the Archaic sanctuary at Kato Syme.⁴⁶ While this may be the case, as David Halperin points out, Strabo was writing in the Roman era about a Greek text from the Late Classical period that purported to describe even older customs from Crete. Moreover, Strabo’s account exhibits signs of influence from models of Greek pederasty as it was practised in the Classical and post-Classical periods, models concerned with a relation of structural inequality

⁴⁶ Koehl, “Chieftain Cup.”

between males of different ages that only lasted for a specified time, and took place outside of the mysteries.⁴⁷

The idea that Minoan Crete was a peaceful utopia has not weathered the scrutiny of scholars following the increasing amounts of evidence that point to a more martial culture than supposed by Evans, Harrison, and Hawkes.⁴⁸ In addition to being disappointingly warlike, the Minoans also appear to have practised human sacrifice, even of children, and possibly cannibalism.⁴⁹ Finally, the portrayal of the Minoans as especially “in tune” with Nature—suggested by the prevalence of iconographic motifs derived from the natural world utilized in their decorative arts and the location of sanctuaries upon mountains, in groves and in caves—is overly simplistic. Rather than idealizing Nature in a romantic way, Minoan elites appropriated it in the service of ideology; iconographic representation and architectural evocation of the natural world served to align elites with the awesome qualities of the landscape, naturalizing their claims to hegemonic power.⁵⁰

The “Snake” “Goddesses”

Another incongruity in regard to the use of Minoan archaeology by modern Pagan groups is that they tend to be unaware of issues regarding the authenticity of Minoan objects. Ancient

⁴⁷ Halperin, “Questions of Evidence,” 41–44. See also Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*; Cohen, “Law, Society and Homosexuality”; Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*; Winkler, “Laying Down the Law”; Davidson, “Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality”; Konstan, “Women, Boys and the Paradigm of Athenian Pederasty”; Percy, “Reconsiderations About Greek Homosexualities”; Cantarella and Lear, *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty*; Verstraete, *Same-Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity*; Lear, “Was Pederasty Problematic?” While Minoans may have enacted age-structured rites of passage rituals involving same-sex sexual activity, these were not necessarily “mystery cults.”

⁴⁸ Alexiou, “Fortifications and Acropolises”; Starr, “Minoan Flower Lovers”; Herva, “Flower Lovers After All?”; Laffineur, *Polemos*; Molloy, “Martial Minoans?”; Tully, “Agonistic Scenes.”

⁴⁹ Warren, “Ecstatic Religion”; Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis, *Archanes*.

⁵⁰ Hitchcock, “Naturalizing the Cultural”; Crooks, *What are these Queer Stones?*, 60; idem, “Natural Landscapes”; Crooks, Tully and Hitchcock, “Numinous Tree and Stone”; Tully and Crooks, “Dropping Ecstasy,” 138–42; Tully, “Sacred Life of Trees,” 4, 8–10; eadem, *Cultic Life of Trees*. Another belief about Crete is that it was the original Atlantis. The story of Atlantis appears in Plato’s *Critias* (108e–21c), and again in his *Timaeus* (24e–25d). While it is true that Minoan Crete was affected by the eruption of the volcano that destroyed the Minoan colony of Thera on the island of Santorini around 1628 BCE, we cannot know if the story of Atlantis was inspired by this event (Dombrowski, “Atlantis and Plato’s Philosophy”).

Minoan frescoes were heavily restored in the early 20th century, and the majority of their iconography is often accordingly modern, a fact that tends not to feature in Pagan literature.⁵¹ There are also numerous forged Minoan figurines—many of which evoke the assumed ubiquity of the faience snake goddess and priestess; two female statuettes that wear the Minoan elite female costume of elaborate skirt and tight *chiton*, open at the front exposing their breasts, and who hold snakes (Figs. 4.2, 4.3). Even Evans himself was notoriously taken in by examples of the forger's art.⁵² When it comes to the representation of an authentic snake goddess and her priestess, however, modern audiences are not on completely solid ground either, as these objects are also heavily restored (Fig. 4.4). Within the Goddess Movement, it is generally believed that the “Snake Goddess” was the main deity of Minoan Crete. Art historian, Merlin Stone, in *The Paradise Papers: the Suppression of Women's Rites*, an instrumental text used in the construction of feminist theology in the 1970s and 1980s, claims that:

On the island of Crete the snake appears in the worship of the female deity more repeatedly than anywhere else in the Mediterranean. All over the island, artifacts have been unearthed that portray the Goddess or Her priestesses holding snakes in their hands or with them coiled about their bodies, revealing that they were an integral part of the religious rituals.⁵³

Far from appearing all over the island, in fact, only two examples of these figurines exist, and the identification of snakes on the smaller figurine is unsure.⁵⁴ While *The Paradise Papers* was written in 1976 and therefore Stone could not have been aware of modern scholarship, reliance on this classic text by later Goddess Pagans would perpetuate this erroneous idea.

<INSERT FIGURE 4.4 HERE>

⁵¹ Stone, *Paradise Papers*, 65–66. See also Anderson and Zinsser, *History of Their Own*, 447, n.17; Gadon, *Once and Future Goddess*, 88, 97–98, Baring and Cashford, *Myth of the Goddess*, 121; Getty, *Goddess: Mother of Living Nature*, 21.

⁵² Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 3:427, 3:436–58, 4:28–37; Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess*, 96–119.

⁵³ Stone, *Paradise Papers*, 217.

⁵⁴ There is an example of an Early Pre-Palatial period/Early Minoan II anthropomorphic vase with female characteristics that *may* be draped with a snake, although comparison with similar vessels suggests that the “snake” may actually be her arms. There are also several examples of so-called “Goddesses with Upraised Arms” from the Post-palatial period/Late Minoan IIIC at Gournia and Kanina, notable for their purported snakes (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 4:141, 163; Gesell, *Town, Palace and House Cult*, 41–46; eadem, “Popular Religion in Late Minoan III Cult,” 499–503; eadem, “From Knossos to Kavousi,” 138–40, 145, 148).

The two so-called “Snake Goddesses”—perhaps better known more simply as HM (“Heraklion Museum”) 63 and HM 65—were discovered in the “Temple Repositories” in the palace at Knossos. They date to the Late Middle Minoan period, ca. 1750–1700 BCE (MM IIIB).⁵⁵ These “repositories” are two stone-lined cists buried under the floor of the Late Minoan IA Palace, containing material that probably came from a shrine belonging to the previous palace which had been destroyed by an earthquake. Each cist contained three distinct layers: red earth in the upper layer, the middle layer having darker soil mixed with rubble, charred wood, fragments of gold foil, animal and fish bones, antlers, sea shells, and several vessels, and, finally, in the bottom layer objects made of precious materials, such as faience and stone.⁵⁶ The figurines were found as fragments at the bottom of the eastern cist, although one torso was found in the western cist.⁵⁷ After they were filled, gypsum pavement was laid over the two cists, sealing their contents.⁵⁸

<INSERT FIGURE 4.5 HERE>

The fragments do not all belong together: there are limbs that do not match, and “lost” parts that never made it into the repositories at all, such as HM 65’s left arm and head (Fig. 4.5).⁵⁹ Modern writers on the Goddess speak admiringly about this figurine’s face, with its “trance-like, almost mask-like expression...,”⁶⁰ unaware that the face is entirely modern. Kenneth Lapatin has subsequently shown that Evans “restored” the figurines with the help of Danish

⁵⁵ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:463–85; Bonney, “Disarming the Snake Goddess,” 172.

⁵⁶ The 200 faience objects make up the largest collection ever found on Crete (Bonney, “Disarming the Snake Goddess,” 173).

⁵⁷ Simandiraki-Grimshaw and Stevens, “Destroying the Snake Goddess,” 155.

⁵⁸ Panagiotaki, “Temple Repositories,” 52, 62. The deliberate layering of the deposition suggests ceremonial burial. Interpretations of these repositories include reverent disposal of sacred objects from the former palace, a foundation deposit, or an offering to the palace itself which was considered sentient. Alternately the figurines may have been deliberately broken as part of the elite display of conspicuous destruction of precious objects, or intentionally “killed,” and the cists may be their symbolic graves (Herva, “Life of Buildings,” 220, 224; Hatzaki, “Structured Deposition,” 29; Alberti, “Faience Goddesses,” 198; Simandiraki-Grimshaw and Stevens, “Destroying the Snake Goddess,” 156–64).

⁵⁹ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:502, figs. 360 a, b; Simandiraki-Grimshaw and Stevens, “Destroying the Snake Goddess,” 162.

⁶⁰ Baring and Cashford, *Myth of the Goddess*, 111–12; Streep, *Sanctuaries of the Goddess*, 149; Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 20, fig. 11.

craftsman, Halvar Bagge.⁶¹ The cat sitting on the hat (resting in turn upon the modern head) is also arbitrarily placed: originally, the figurine's head had a tall hat, but when the beret and cat fragments were found, Bagge replaced the tall hat with these, although there is no evidence that they should be attributed to this figure.⁶² Reconstructing the figurines for which he had the most fragments, Evans "filled in the blanks" as he saw them.⁶³ This included adding a head to the spiral shaped object in the smaller figurine's hand, making it into a "snake," as well providing a matching one in her other hand (Fig. 4.6). The fact that actual snakes never have spiral-shaped stripes brings such an interpretation into question. That the original portion of the "snake" is textured suggests that it was more likely to have been a twisted object such as rope or cord.⁶⁴

<INSERT FIGURE 4.6 HERE>

Conclusions

In its interpretation of Minoan Crete, the Goddess Movement relies on outdated archaeological and scholarly data as well as blasé interpretation of iconography and later Greek myth. This results in a reading of Minoan religion that conforms to the idea of an ancient worldwide religion of the Goddess. The Minoan Brotherhood, on the other hand, mainly relies on a Frazerian reading of Greek myth, and to a lesser extent iconography. With regard to the

⁶¹ Lapatin, *Snake Goddess*, 62, 75, 87, 120.

⁶² Evans, *Palace of Minos* 1:504, n. 1; Lapatin, *Snake Goddess*, 62, 75; Simandiraki-Grimshaw and Stevens, "Destroying the Snake Goddess," 153, n. 2.

⁶³ Evans, *Palace of Minos* 1:500–504; Bonney, "Disarming the Snake Goddess," 173–74.

⁶⁴ Bonney, "Disarming the Snake Goddess," 174–75. Lapatin suggests she may have held sheaves of grain or necklaces (*Snake Goddess*, 62, 87–88). While HM 63 is holding snakes and has them about her waist, there was also a third, larger figurine, that does not feature snakes and which did not get restored (Fig. 4.5). Because the rest of her body is missing we cannot know if she was holding any. There is a lone faience arm with a snake upon it amongst the Repositories that may have belonged to this figure (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:523, fig. 382; Panagiotaki, "Temple Repositories," 57; Lapatin, *Snake Goddess*, 64). Evans himself seems to have been enamoured of the idea of a snake cult. An unpublished photograph in the Ashmolean Museum shows that he initially set up a tableau consisting of objects from the repositories, including HM 63 and 65, which also featured a snake-like figure and appears to be a snake-cult scene. This "snake" however, is actually constructed from fish vertebrae and a weasel skull, arranged so as to appear like a snake. Evans did not publish the photo in this form however, first rubbing out the snake and then gluing a cut-out of a photo of a libation table over its spot (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, 1:518, fig. 377; Panagiotaki, "Temple Repositories," 54–55).

latter, as Martin Nilsson says, Minoan religion is “a picture book without text.”⁶⁵ Because the Minoan language is recorded in the yet-undeciphered Linear A script, both archaeologists and non-specialists are forced to rely on material evidence, and especially images, in order to attempt to decipher Minoan religion. The meanings of these images are not straightforward, however, and to deduce the character of Minoan religion and social structure from images alone is an endeavour that requires far more caution than is accorded the process within the Goddess Movement.⁶⁶ As for Greek myth, the Minoans lived over a thousand years before the Greeks of the Classical Period; they were themselves not Greek. Names of later Greek deities appear in Linear B texts at Knossos, but this is because the Mycenaeans conquered Knossos after 1490 BCE.⁶⁷ While it is possible that Greek myths about Crete do have some sort of relationship to Minoan reality, they are a very shaky set of data to be used as evidence.

That the interpretation of Minoan religion by modern Pagans falls far short, in terms of historical accuracy, of the careful theorising and justification required by modern archaeologists is not a problem *per se* for the Goddess Movement. Historical accuracy is not necessarily their aim. Feminist borrowings from ancient cultures might not endeavor to reconstruct ancient religion, but they can use aspects of it that are empowering to women.⁶⁸ In addition to the selective use of archaeology and texts, personal memory is considered a valid—and possible—way to reconnect with the ancient past.⁶⁹ Invention and memory flesh out archaeology and mythology in the modern Pagan reconstruction of Minoan religion. According to this approach, the concern is not with the actual past, but with “modelling, inventing, reinventing, and reconstructing the past in the present.”⁷⁰ Ultimately, this “history” is a chronotopia, and the use of Minoan artefacts of questionable authenticity, along with an interpretative reliance upon outdated scholarship, means that their rituals, festivals and tours function as heterochronies,

⁶⁵ Nilsson, *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*, 7.

⁶⁶ Georgoudi, “Creating a Myth of Matriarchy,” 458.

⁶⁷ Preziosi and Hitchcock, *Aegean Art and Architecture*, 99; Manning suggests 1470/60–1420/10 (“Chronology and Terminology,” 23).

⁶⁸ Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, 67.

⁶⁹ In her article “Why Women Need the Goddess,” 9, Christ approvingly cites feminist novelist Monique Wittig: “There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed barebellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember... You say there are not words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent” (Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, 89).

⁷⁰ Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 8–9. See also Lowenthal, *Past is a Foreign Country*, 303–32.

conceptually transporting participants to an idealised, imaginary past that provides aesthetic compensation for the imperfect world of today.⁷¹

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⁷¹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"; Bakhtin, "Forms of time and of the chronotope." The past in the form of the idealised worldwide Goddess religion and its alleged chronological timeline is described by Mary Jo Weaver as "utopian poetics" (Weaver, "Who is the Goddess," 50).

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