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## STUDYING MINOAN-MYCENAEAN RELIGION SOME REFLECTIONS OF A HITTITOLOGIST

**ABSTRACT.** *Archaeologists working in preliterate or protoliterate societies sometimes do not understand the limits of archaeological knowledge of religion, which is well illustrated by recent, methodologically unsound approaches in the archaeology of ritual. There is abundant textual evidence for the polytheistic nature of the Minoan-Mycenaean religion. In most of the archaeological approaches the main problem is methodology: incomprehension of the nature of polytheism and the structure of polytheistic pantheons. The author refers to local pantheons of Pylos and Knossos, as attested in Linear B tablets. It seems that after the advent of the Mycenaean kingdom at Knossos the local cults remained mostly Minoan. Yet, the Mycenaean wanax and representatives of the new Mycenaean elite worshiped their own gods. A similar situation was in Hittite Anatolia after the emergence of the new, Hurrianized dynasty originating from south-eastern Anatolia. A case study on the Minoan Great Goddess(es) follows, with references to a similar category of goddesses in second millennium Anatolia.*

The term ‘Minoan-Mycenaean’ religion has been condemned as reflecting an obsolete synchronic approach to religious and cult interconnections within the Late Bronze Age Aegean.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, there was certainly no one pantheon shared by all the inhabitants of the ancient Aegean, perhaps only individual deities worshiped at times in broad parts of the Aegean territory. For lack of better definitions, however, this term is used here in a general sense, with reference to the many facets of religious behavior that

evolved in the different societies of the Aegean. Besides, there is general agreement that the interpenetration of, at least, two different, Minoan (non-Indo-European?) and Helladic religious traditions (the latter including most likely elements of different origin: early Greek and perhaps also belonging to a local, pre-Indo-European and/or Indo-European substrate) must have been an important factor in the making of Mycenaean religion in the second millennium BC.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the term ‘Hittite’ religion has,

<sup>1</sup> As, e.g., M. NILSSON, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*. 2nd rev. ed., Lund 1950. Cf. C. RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult. The Sanctuary at Phylakopi*. BSA Supplement 18, London 1985, 394: “While the early assumption of a broad degree of religious uniformity within the Aegean no doubt once facilitated the identification of the main features of a ‘Minoan-Mycenaean’ religion, that term is now much too generalized and no longer has any usefulness or validity for serious analysis.”

<sup>2</sup> One can still agree, for instance, with Nilsson’s intuitions, such as the following statement: “It is probable, almost certain, on a priori grounds that the Minoan religion survived (...) and was merged into the Greek religion.” NILSSON, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 447. See also, e.g., R. HÄGG, *Mycenaean Religion: The Helladic and the Minoan Components*, in: A. MORPURGO DAVIES, Y. DUHOUX (eds), *Linear B: a 1984 Survey*. Bibliothèque des Cahiers de l’Institut de linguistique de Louvain 26, Louvain-la-Neuve

1985, 203–225. His argument on p. 204 for at least four different religious systems in the Aegean Late Bronze Age is also largely based on intuition. These four religious and cult traditions are: “(1) a genuinely Minoan one in Crete, in the times before any considerable mainland influence reached the island in the 15th century; (2) a Helladic one on the mainland, of which we have extremely few traces in Middle Helladic times, before the Shaft-Grave phase; this may in itself not have been homogeneous, since it most probably consisted of both Indo-European and so-called pre-Greek elements, the latter inherited from the Neolithic and Early Helladic populations (...); (3) a Minoan-Helladic syncretism on the mainland, which can properly be called the ‘Mycenaean’ religion [Hägg dates the peak of Minoan influence on the mainland to the first half of the 15th century – PT]; and (4) a Hellado-Minoan syncretism in Crete, especially at Knossos, known to us primarily through the Knossos Linear B archives.” In point 2, Hägg apparently excludes the possibility

first of all, geographic and chronological connotations, referring to second millennium Anatolia ruled by the Hittites. In fact, it can hardly define the complexity of the beliefs in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment of Hittite Anatolia; the cuneiform texts from the archives of the Hittite capital Ḫattuša bear witness to the interpenetration and translatability of different religious and cult traditions, including the worship of Hattian, Luwian-Hittite, Hurrian, North Syrian and Mesopotamian deities.<sup>3</sup>

This complexity of local pantheons in central and northern Anatolia and the entirely new, geographic conception of Hittite state pantheon that emerged in the Empire period (c. 1460–1190 BC) as a peculiar product of the rulers' theological policies, which had no obvious ties with earlier, Old Hittite ritual practice,<sup>4</sup> show a wide range of the impossible for archaeologists working in preliterate or protoliterate societies. In his essay on the archaeological correlates of religion James C. Wright remarks: "Colin Renfrew has concentrated on the archaeological recognition of worship and he claims to have established criteria for studying religion, but in fact has only succeeded in creating a method for identifying places of worship."<sup>5</sup> His approach recovers little about belief and practice, the structure of religion, and its role in society."<sup>6</sup> Wright himself advocates an anthropological and cultural approach, stressing the point that "a fundamental problem is to recognize and interpret symbols" understood as "consistent, repeated, patterned human behavior intended to carry a consistent meaning for a circumscribed socio-cultural context. Thus a symbol can be an action, such

as a salute or the sign of the cross; or a simple object, such as a double ax; or a complex object, such as a building like Stone Henge or a cathedral. The interpretation of groups of symbols is critical to the archaeologist's task, since they are statements of practice. Groups of symbols form the language of ritual, and to decipher this language meaning can only be assigned through an understanding of context. Contexts are multiple, differentiated by function and structure, which themselves are caught in the changing flux of culture."<sup>7</sup> In general, religious symbol systems as the media of religious beliefs make a religion visible, different and identifiable. This approach is valid for both pre-/protohistoric and historic times, although with regard to the former, archaeologists should understand the limits of archaeological knowledge of religion.<sup>8</sup> I agree with Wright that "probably the best we can do is to work at a coarser level of analysis which will admit some level of differentiation."

To end off these introductory remarks, I would like express myself on the approach that nowadays prevails in the archaeology of ritual. It is well illustrated by Emily Miller Bonney's statement in her review of two most recent books on the subject:<sup>9</sup> "Acknowledgement that the mind/object dualism does not accurately reflect human experience requires recognition of the inherent instability of ritual behavior. The relationships between and among individuals, community, and the natural world are dialectical, constantly subject to change. (...) no two performances are ever the same. Just as no two pots or swords are ever identical, so, too, are the products

of the existence of a pre-Greek, Indo-European substrate on the mainland. Concerning points 3 and 4, he follows syncretistic approaches, such as P. LÉVÊQUE, *Le syncrétisme créto-mycénien*, in: *Les syncrétismes dans les religions de l'antiquité. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain* 46, Leiden 1975, 19–75; see also R. HÄGG, *Religious Syncretism at Knossos and in Post-Palatial Crete?*, in: J. DRIESSEN, A. FARNOUX (eds), *La Crète mycénienne. Actes de la table ronde internationale organisée par l'École française d'Athènes, 26–28 mars 1991*. BCH Supplement 30, Athens 1997, 163–168. However, one should rather discuss these religious phenomena in terms of the interpenetration and translatability of gods and ritual practices belonging to different traditions (see below). For a more adequate term, 'interpretatio Mycenaea at Knossos,' see A. FURUMARK, *Gods of ancient Crete*, Opuscula Atheniensi 6, 1965, 89.

<sup>3</sup> See now P. TARACHA, *Religions of Second Millennium Anatolia*. Dresdner Beiträge zur Hethitologie 27, Wiesbaden 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 84–87, 95–107.

<sup>5</sup> C. RENFREW, *Towards a Framework for the Archaeology of Cult Practice*, in: RENFREW, *The Archaeology of Cult* (n. 1), 18–20, 24–26.

<sup>6</sup> J.C. WRIGHT, *The Archaeological Correlates of Religion: Case Studies in the Aegean*, in: R. LAFFINEUR, W.-D. NIEMEIER (eds), *Politeia, Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 5th International Aegean Conference, Heidelberg, 10–13 April 1994*. Aegaeum 12, Liège 1995, 341.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 342–343. Cf. also IDEM, *The Spatial Configuration of Belief: The Archaeology of Mycenaean Religion*, in: S.E. ALCOCK, R. OSBORNE (eds), *Placing the Gods, Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece*, Oxford 1994, 37–78.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the Minoan religion, the limits of archaeological knowledge are well illustrated by the study of M.L. MOSS, *The Minoan Pantheon: Towards an Understanding of its Nature and Extent*. BAR International Series 1343, Oxford 2005. In her attempt to determine the types of gods and goddesses venerated in Crete the author seems to follow Wright's approach. On page 151 she states: "Once more, it is to be emphasized that the identification of the deities may depend on the combination of symbols and the archaeological context in which they appear. In this way, a particular symbol may be used in a variety of ways, with others to signify different deities or different aspects of the same divinity." See also, generally, T. INSOLL, *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion*. Themes in Archaeology, London 2004, for the relationship between archaeology and religion, the history of relevant scholarship, and existing definitions of religion and ritual. A new approach to the archaeological study of religion is suggested (p. 147–149: 'A future approach? Towards a theory of archaeology and religion?').

<sup>9</sup> D.A. BARROWCLOUGH, C. MALONE (eds), *Cult in Context: Reconsidering Ritual in Archaeology*, Oxford 2007; E. KYRIAKIDIS (ed.), *The Archaeology of Ritual*, Los Angeles 2007.

of ritual actions (...). In this way, action and belief shape each other. A severe drought or other natural disaster might precipitate a complete abandonment of the apparently ineffectual rituals of the past, the adoption of new, more productive rites, and a complete power shift within the community."<sup>10</sup> With regard to Minoan ritual, this approach is represented by scholars who put special emphasis on the act of ritual, which "immediately moves us away from purely theistic interpretations of religion, into the realms of the performative."<sup>11</sup> The application of the performative and experiential model of religion comes to fruition in the scenario of change in Minoan religion proposed by Jan Driessen and Colin Macdonald in *The Troubled Island*.<sup>12</sup> That book puts forward a theory that the Thera eruption created a crisis for the Minoan state in Crete, such that it decentralized and became easy prey for the Mycenaeans. According to this, Driessen wondered if the Minoan religion had shifted; where before the crisis they worshiped a goddess whom the Greeks would call Potnia, afterward they imported a 'young god' idol from the local hills (the child-Zeus of Dikta?).<sup>13</sup>

This scenario, or rather the suggested mechanism of change in the Minoan religion, is highly unlikely, however. In fact, it must be considered anachronistic. If man were able to influence the world of the gods by changing willfully his ritual behavior towards them, he would deny the cosmic order, the nature of gods, and religion as such. I strongly dissent from what Driessen has said about the difference between Minoan

Crete and the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup> For all differences between religions, there must have been the same general conception of god and man's attitude towards supernatural powers throughout the region the Aegean was integral part of.

The inhabitants of the ancient Near East imagined the world of the gods in likeness to the real world around them. "By and large the gods (...) were human beings on a grand scale. They were subject to the same range of emotions, like love, anger, fear, jealousy; they sometimes neglected their responsibilities, they could deceive and be deceived, they enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh, and they liked a variety of entertainment."<sup>15</sup> This is also how the Greeks imagined their Olympian gods. Then why should the deities of the Aegean Bronze Age be different? The gods were immortal, but no different from humans in terms of behavior and mental states. They were the masters, depending on people to serve them with subservience and willingness to satisfy their needs. And like a bad servant, a man or woman remiss in his/her duties could expect to be punished.<sup>16</sup>

Each disaster or crisis was viewed as the result of god's anger. It concerned mostly people and may have affected gods to the extent that they would suffer when losing their human servants. In troubled times of a virulent plague that ravaged the land of Hatti, decimating its population for more than two decades, king Muršili II (1331 – c. 1292 BC) performed the appropriate propitiation rituals, and along with them, he addressed the supreme gods of the Hittite pantheon directly in a series of dramatic prayers which have come to be known as the Plague Prayers.<sup>17</sup> The reasons for the calamity had to be discovered through a lengthy process of oracular consultation. Still, the disaster would never render the gods powerless in the eyes of people, as Driessen suggests with regard to the alleged crisis in Minoan Crete after the Thera eruption; neither could it cause people to abandon traditional rituals. Let us quote here from Timothy Insoll whose book is full of remarkable insights: "The 'material manoeuvres' (Durkheim), which archaeologists might and do frequently consider ritual to solely be the residue of, 'are merely the external envelope concealing mental operations.' Peel back the surface of ritual and it can be seen to be embedded with, and inseparable from, all the other

<sup>10</sup> E. MILLER BONNEY, *AJA* 113, 2009, no. 3 ([www.ajaonline.org](http://www.ajaonline.org)), 2, referring to E. DEMARRAIS, C. GOSDEN, C. RENFREW (eds), *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with Material World*, Cambridge 2004.

<sup>11</sup> A. PEATFIELD, *Divinity and Performance on Minoan Peak Sanctuaries*, in: R. LAFFINEUR, R. HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age: Proceedings of the 5th International Conference, Göteborg University, 12–15 April 2000*. Aegaeum 22, Liège–Austin 2001, 55. For this approach, see now E. KYRIAKIDIS, *Ritual in the Bronze Age Aegean: The Minoan Peak Sanctuaries*, London 2005, and its critical review by K. NOWICKI, *AJA* 111, 2007, 576–578. Cf. also comments of V.-P. HERVA, *Flower lovers, after all? Rethinking religion and human-environment relations in Minoan Crete*, *World Archaeology* 38, 2006, 4, 587–589, with references. Herva proposes an ecological approach to Minoan religion.

<sup>12</sup> J. DRIESSEN, C.F. MACDONALD, *The Troubled Island. Minoan Crete before and after the Santorini Eruption*. Aegaeum 17, Liège–Austin 1997. See also A. PEATFIELD, *After the 'Big Bang' – What? Or Minoan Symbols and Shrines Beyond Palatial Collapse*, in: ALCOCK, OSBORNE (eds), *Placing the Gods* (n. 7), 19–36.

<sup>13</sup> See also J. DRIESSEN, *Crisis Cults on Minoan Crete?*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 368: "Did Zeus come down from his mountaintop in the guise of a young god to save the Minoans in troubled times, starting his conquest of the island and his gradual but final subjugation of the Mother Goddess?"

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 364 n. 26.

<sup>15</sup> T. BRYCE, *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, Oxford 2002, 139. See also TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 80.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 80.

<sup>17</sup> I. SINGER, *Hittite Prayers*. Writings from the Ancient World 11, Atlanta, Georgia 2002, 47–49, 56–69.

diverse facets which comprise religion.”<sup>18</sup> Religion (as a guarantee of the cosmic order) and ritual forms of cult (expressing adoration for gods) are in general characterized by traditionalism and conservatism. Myth and ritual tend to be perpetuated.

When change does come, the reasons for it are varied. It is reasonable, for instance, that the Minoan pantheon of Knossos incorporated early Greek/Achaean deities worshiped by a Mycenaean *wanax* and representatives of the new elite which came with him from the mainland. However, “any conqueror may initially be anxious to cast himself as the legitimate successor chosen by the local gods, whose worship and maintenance therefore has to be one of his first priorities.”<sup>19</sup> As we shall see, Linear B texts from Knossos seem to corroborate this statement regarding the attitude of the new Mycenaean rulers towards Minoan gods. The *interpretatio Mycenaea* of the Minoan pantheon would follow progressively, but certainly not in a revolutionary way.<sup>20</sup>

This paper aims to propose an interdisciplinary approach. The focus is thus not upon providing a gazetteer of religious sites, or upon material residues of cult, or upon analyzing religious iconography. I am afraid the result of such a study would not be very different from previous attempts at the Minoan-Mycenaean religion. In 1990, Polymnia Muhly published an important review of the state of research on Minoan religion.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile the past twenty years have seen a rapid flow of studies on specific issues, as well as further monographs.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Muhly’s rather pessimistic conclusion is still valid: “The wind (or rather breeze) of change has certainly swept away some past assumptions, but does this mean that the field is moving decidedly away from the tenets of Evans and Nilsson? This does not seem to be the case at present, nor is it likely that drastic changes of direction will come in the near future: great gaps in the archaeological evidence remain to be filled, theory and methodology

must be more firmly grasped as well as more widely applied, and the scholarly past has to be viewed in perspective. The Priest-King may well be dead, but it is not yet clear who will succeed him.”<sup>23</sup>

In what follows, the emphasis will be upon considering how the Minoan-Mycenaean religion may be approached in a broader perspective of recent studies on Near Eastern religions, and Anatolian ones in particular, through considering a few general issues and one major case study focusing on the Minoan ‘Great Goddess’ who was one of the main tenets of Arthur Evans and has not considerably changed her image in some scholars’ approaches ever since.<sup>24</sup> I agree with Nannó Marinatos when she states that “it is methodologically unsound to force models derived from other religions on the evidence.”<sup>25</sup> I will therefore keep analysis at a coarser level, as Wright postulated.

#### POLYTHEISM: STATE CULT, DYNASTIC CULT, AND LOCAL PANTHEONS

Like all religions of the Eastern Mediterranean in the second millennium BC, the Minoan-Mycenaean religion was no doubt polytheistic. There is no need here to repeat arguments of Oliver T.P.K. Dickinson who plausibly remarks that, “because the society of Minoan Crete had an agricultural base very similar in essence to that of much of the Near East, and developed large townlike settlements and administrative institutions which parallel those of the Near East in significant respects, it seems reasonable to expect some parallel processes in the development of religion.”<sup>26</sup> Surprisingly, there are still many adherents of the old hypothesis of Evans about Minoan religion, based on opinions generally accepted at the time, about an almost universal religion of the ‘Great Mother’ at the dawn of civilization, which can be found, for instance, in James G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* or in numerous works by Marija Gimbutas.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>18</sup> INSOLL, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 10.

<sup>19</sup> H. CRAWFORD, *Steady States*, in: H. CRAWFORD (ed.), *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt: From Sargon of Agade to Saddam Hussein*. Proceedings of the British Academy 136, Oxford 2007, 7 (proceedings of a conference on Steady States at the British Academy in September 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P.P. BETANCOURT, *Discontinuity in the Minoan-Mycenaean Religions: Smooth Development or Disruptions and War?*, in: R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), *POLEMOS. Le contexte guerrier en Égée à l’Âge du bronze*. Aegaeum 19, Liège–Austin 1999, 219–225.

<sup>21</sup> P. MUHLY, *The Great Goddess and the Priest-King: Minoan Religion in Flux*, Expedition 32, 1990, no. 3, 54–61.

<sup>22</sup> First of all, see N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol*, Columbia, SC 1993; MOSS, *The Minoan Pantheon* (n. 8). Cf. also I.M. RUUD, *Minoan Religion: a Bibliography*. SIMA Pocket-book 141, Jonsö 1996.

<sup>23</sup> MUHLY, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 60.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., G. OWENS, ‘All Religions are One’ (William Blake 1757–1827), *Astarte/Ishtar/Ishassaras/Asasaram: The Great Mother Goddess of Minoan Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean*, Cretan Studies 5, 1996, 209–218. See also the discussion at the Aegaeum conference POTNIA in April 2000; see n. 11.

<sup>25</sup> MARINATOS, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 167.

<sup>26</sup> O.T.P.K. DICKINSON, *Comments on a Popular Model of Minoan Religion*, OJA 13, 1994, no. 2, 173–184 (quotation from p. 178).

<sup>27</sup> The myth of the Mother Goddess has long been demolished in archaeology. See, e.g., P. UCKO, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece*, London 1968; A. FLEMING, *The Myth of the Mother-Goddess*, World Archaeology 1, 1969, 247–261; B. HAYDEN,

According to Evans, in Minoan iconography “we (...) are constantly brought back to the same Great Mother with her Child or Consort whose worship under various names and titles extended over a large part of Asia Minor and the Syrian regions beyond.”<sup>28</sup> This worship is described in almost monotheistic terms, with intellectually and methodologically unsound argumentation that Minoan Crete (and thus also its religion) be entirely different from the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, there is no need to turn to the ancient Near East, for we have abundant textual evidence for the Minoan-Mycenaean religion being polytheistic from the Late Bronze Age Aegean. Suffice it to mention Linear B inventory tablets from Knossos, Pylos, Mycenae and Thebes which enable us to recognize local pantheons.<sup>30</sup> The Pylos pantheon included: Poseidaon (*po-se-da-o*, who probably was the main god at Pylos), Pereswa(?), Ipemedea (*i-pe-me-de-ja*, Ἰπυμέδεια in Od. 11. 305–310), “almost certainly a pre-Greek deity,” the goddess Diw(i)ja, Hermes (*e-ma-a*), Zeus (*di-we*), Hera (*e-ra*), D(i)rimios ‘the son of Zeus’ (*di-ri-mi-jo di-wo i-je-we*), a goddess concealed behind the epithet ‘Mistress’ (*Potnia*), *ma-na-sa*, Posidāia (*po-si-da-e-ja*), who seems to be a female counterpart of Poseidaon, *ti-ri-se-ro* (Τρισερώς), and *do-po-ta*.<sup>31</sup> Other texts add Artemis (*a-ti-mi-te*), Potnia of the Horses (*po-ti-ni-ja i-qe-ja*), the ‘Divine Mother’ (*ma-te-re te-i-ja*),<sup>32</sup> and Potnia Aswiya (Asian? Potnia) to the list, the last mentioned goddess being interpreted as originating from

Anatolia.<sup>33</sup> It seems also that two different Potnias – *po-ti-ni-ja* and *u-po-jo-po-ti-ni-ja* (Lady of the Netherworld, ὑποίων),<sup>34</sup> were worshiped together with Poseidaon in the Pylian sanctuary of *pa-ki-ja-ne*.<sup>35</sup> Some of the divine names are certainly non-Greek. John Chadwick comments: “But the name *di-ri-mi-jo* does not answer to a known later form. Nor does *ma-na-sa*, though speculation is possible. *Do-po-ta* might be associated with *δεσπότης*, though the form is surprising; but *δεσπότης*, unlike *δέσποινα*, is not in later Greek used as a divine title. The divinity of *pe-re-swa* can be confirmed by another reference (Un 6). But interpretation is very speculative, especially since the value of the final sign is disputed.”<sup>36</sup> Thus the pantheon of Pylos comprised deities of different ethno-linguistic origin, which corresponds with what we know about the evolution of religions in multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic societies. This was apparently the pantheon of the city state and, at the same time, the dynastic pantheon of the Mycenaean royal house of Pylos, at least as far as the list of deities in PY Tn 316 is concerned.

The linear B tablets of the so-called Fp and Fs series from the Mycenaean palace at Knossos offer names of deities belonging to ‘Mycenaeanized’ pantheons of north-central Crete from the period posterior to the LM IB (c. 1450 BC) destruction.<sup>37</sup> These purely administrative documents record offerings to deities of local pantheons which are referred to by a standard formula: toponym,<sup>38</sup> the main deity of a local pantheon – for instance, Zeus of Dikte (*di-ka-ta-jo di-we*), *pa-de* of *\*da-da-re* (*da-da-re-jo-de pa-de*), Eleuthija (of) Amnisos (*a-mi-ni-so /*

*Old Europe: Sacred Matriarchy or Complementary Opposition?*, in: A. BONNANO (ed.), *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Amsterdam 1986, 17–30; L. GOODISON, C. MORRIS (eds), *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence*, London 1998; C. ELLER, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory*, Boston 2000; cf. also M. POPKO, *Mity nauki: Bogini Matka*, *Archeologia* 56, 2005, 153–156, with references. Nevertheless, it still returns nowadays in gender studies and other social sciences, such as anthropology, which influence recent theoretical approaches in archaeology, reviving the old myth.

<sup>28</sup> A.J. EVANS, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, vol. II, London 1928, 277; quoted by DICKINSON, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 174.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. DRIESSEN, *Crisis Cults* (n. 13), 364 n. 26: “Because of the difference between Minoan Crete and the rest of the Eastern Mediterranean, I cannot subscribe to his [= Dickinson’s] arguments for a polytheistic religion.” See also PEATFIELD, *After the ‘Big Bang’* (n. 12).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. CHADWICK, *What do we know about Mycenaean religion?*, in: MORPURGO DAVIES, DUHOX (eds), *Linear B* (n. 2), 191–202.

<sup>31</sup> PY Tn 316; M. VENTRIS, J. CHADWICK, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek: Three Hundred Selected Tablets from Knossos, Pylos and Mycenae with Commentary and Vocabulary*, Cambridge 1956, 286–289; CHADWICK, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 196.

<sup>32</sup> For her identification with Demeter of the first millennium BC, see L. GODART, *La Terre Mère et le monde égéen*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 464.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. S. MORRIS, *Potnia Aswiya: Anatolian Contribution to Greek Religion*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 423–434.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. VAN LEUVEN, *Mycenaean Goddesses Called Potnia*, *Kadmos* 18, 1979, 112–129.

<sup>35</sup> PY Fn 187 l. 4 and 8, C. BOËLLE, *Po-ti-ni-ja: Unité ou pluralité?*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 403–409. The local pantheon of Mycenae also included at least two different Potnias: *po-ti-ni-ja* and *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja*, a goddess of fertility “qui pourrait être ancêtre de Déméter” (*ibidem*, 409). For a different opinion (“Potnia alone means the same as *u-po-jo* Potnia”), see J. CHADWICK, *Potnja*, *Minos* 5, 1957, 121–122; C. TRÜMPY, *Potnia dans les tablettes mycéniennes: Quelques problèmes d’interprétation*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 414–415.

<sup>36</sup> CHADWICK, *What do we know* (n. 30), 196.

<sup>37</sup> VENTRIS, CHADWICK, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 303–312; CHADWICK, *What do we know* (n. 30), 197. Cf. also I. SCHOEP, *Rituals, Politics and Script on Minoan Crete*, *Aegean Archaeology* 1, 1994, 7–8.

<sup>38</sup> More than 20 cult places have been identified. See J.T. KILLEN, *Piety Begins at Home: Place-names on Knossos Records of Religious Offerings*, in: P.H. ILIEVSKI, L. CREPAJAC (eds), *Tractata Mycenaea. Proceedings of the 8th International Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies, Ohrid (15–20 September 1985)*, Skopje 1987, 172–173.

*e-re-u-ti-ja*), *pa-sa-ja* of *\*si-ja-ma-[to]*, and ‘all the gods’ (*pa-si-te-o-i*). Some divine names appear without a toponym, e.g. *pa-ja-ni-jo*, *pi-pi-tu-na*, *qe-ra-si-ja*.<sup>39</sup>

These texts are evidence of a considerable differentiation of the local pantheons. What is more, they confirm that after the advent of the Mycenaean kingdom at Knossos the local cults remained mostly Minoan. In fact, none of the mentioned deities can be identified with any certainty as Mycenaean, though the Great God of Mount Dikte, who apparently took prominent place in Minoan (state) pantheon, received the early Greek name of \*Dieus (later Zeus). Concerning Diktaean Zeus, his Greek name might be explained by the fact that the Minoan Great God of Dikte most likely retained his position of the supreme god of the state pantheon after the Mycenaean *wanax* seized power at Knossos. This situation could be compared with change in Hittite religion, which took place at the outset of the Hittite Empire period when a new, Hurrianized dynasty originating from Kummani in Kizzuwatna seized power in Hattuša in the first half of the fifteenth century BC.<sup>40</sup> From that time onwards the Anatolian Storm-god, who traditionally stood at the head of the state pantheon by the side of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, appears in the disguise of the Hurrian Teššub.<sup>41</sup>

The Linear B corpus from Knossos brings also evidence of a new pantheon of gods being worshiped by charioting representatives of the new Mycenaean elite.<sup>42</sup> The documents from the Room of the Chariot Tablets allow us to restore the following list of deities: Potnia of *\*da-pu<sub>2</sub>-ri-to* (*da-pu<sub>2</sub>-ri-to-jo po-ti-ni-ja*),<sup>43</sup> Zeus (*di-we*), Diw(i)ja, *ma-ka* (Mother Earth),<sup>44</sup> *pa-ze*, Potnia (of?) Athana (*a-ta-na-po-ti-*

*ni-ja*),<sup>45</sup> *e-nu-wa-ri-jo* (Enyalios, later an epithet of Ares), Erinys (*e-ri-nu*), Pajawon (*pa-ja-wo-[ne]*), and Poseidaon (*po-se-da-[o-ne]*).<sup>46</sup> Significantly, most of the divine names can be found in later Greek sources.

There are good reasons to assume that this was in fact the dynastic pantheon venerated by the Mycenaean royal family which seized power at Knossos. A similar situation was in Hittite Anatolia after the emergence of the new, Hurrianized dynasty. As part of their dynastic cult, Hittite kings of the Empire period worshiped the gods of the Hurrians living in Kizzuwatna and northern Syria, including Syrian deities and gods of Mesopotamian origin. There were therefore two pantheons in the official Hittite religion of the Empire period – a dynastic one, comprising Hurrian and Kizzuwatnean deities worshiped by the royal family, and a state one, in which the majority of deities belonged to the local Anatolian tradition, though the beliefs of the royal house stimulated significant changes in it.<sup>47</sup>

#### CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF CULT

The Linear B Fp and Fs tablets from the Knossian palace archives, with month-names which introduce each tablet, are evidence of the existence of a ritual calendar. The royal administration took care of supplies for temples and local cults, some deities receiving offerings in the palace and in their proper sanctuaries, for instance, Zeus at Dikte and Eleutheia at Amnissos.<sup>48</sup> There is no doubt about the state character of these cults. Some (or even most) of the deities mentioned in the Fp and Fs documents must therefore have belonged to the Knossian state pantheon, perhaps long before the coming of the Mycenaean (see above).

<sup>39</sup> When no cult place is mentioned, it is assumed that the palace itself is meant.

<sup>40</sup> For a review of the debate, see P. TARACHA, *On the dynasty of the Hittite Empire*, in: D. GRODDEK, S. RÖBLE (eds), *Šarnikzel. Hethitologische Studien zum Gedenken an Emil Orger (19.02.1894 – 10.01.1986)*. Dresdner Beiträge zur Hethitologie 10, Dresden 2004, 631–638; IDEM, *The Storm-God and Hittite Great King*, SMEA 50, 2008, 745–751.

<sup>41</sup> TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 84.

<sup>42</sup> J. GULIZIO, K. PLUTA, T.G. PALAIMA, *Religion in the Room of the Chariot Tablets*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 453–461.

<sup>43</sup> The frequently suggested interpretation of her epithet as Daphurinthojjo, Δαφουρινθοιο – Potnia of the Labyrinth, is uncertain. Cf. TRÜMPY, *op. cit.* (n. 35), 413, with references.

<sup>44</sup> The sequence of Zeus, Diw(i)ja and *ma-ka* (Mā Gā, Mother Earth) brings to mind the divine triad of Boeotian Thebes: *ma-ka* (Mother Earth), *o-po-re-i* (= Zeus as a god of vegetation and agriculture, ‘protector of fruits’) and *ko-wa* (Kore); see L. GODART, A. SACCONI, *La triade tebana nei documenti in lineare B del palazzo di Cadmo*, Rend. Mor. Acc. Lincei IX, 7.2, 1996,

283–285; IDEM, *Les dieux thébains dans les archives mycéniennes*, CRAI 1996, 99–113; GODART, *La Terre Mère* (n. 32), 463. Whether the fact that the cult of Mother Earth is attested only in Thebes and Knossos is of any historical significance concerning the arrival of the Mycenaean to Knossos, we leave aside.

<sup>45</sup> TRÜMPY, *op. cit.* (n. 35), 412–413. See, however, CHADWICK, *What do we know* (n. 30), 194: “the customary classical form Ἀθηνα or the Homeric Ἀθηναίη are both adjectival in origin, so that it is hard to separate ‘the Mistress of Athana’ from the familiar Athene of later Greece.” GULIZIO, PLUTA, and PALAIMA, *op. cit.* (n. 42), also identify this Potnia with the Mistress of the city of Athens in Attica. Her presence among the deities from the Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos is very suggestive, keeping in mind the well-known myth about Theseus, Ariadne and the Labyrinth.

<sup>46</sup> GULIZIO, PLUTA, PALAIMA, *op. cit.* (n. 42), 461.

<sup>47</sup> TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 82, 84–95.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. S. HILLER, *Cretan Sanctuaries and Mycenaean Palatial Administration at Knossos*, in: DRIESSEN, FARNOUX (eds), *La Crète mycénienne* (n. 2), 205–212.

Unfortunately, none of the Minoan deities can be traced down in Linear A documents.<sup>49</sup> Nor can we find in the Linear A corpus any reflection of a religious system similar to that of Mycenaean times. The renowned 'libation formulae' on stone vessels (further: inscribed stone vessels, ISV) from the MM III–LM I period<sup>50</sup> incited the theory that in the Neopalatial period (c. 1700–1450 BC) a cultural, linguistic and religious koiné existed in Crete, with peak sanctuaries being regarded as indicating a Knossian expansionism.<sup>51</sup> Yet, as Ilse Schoep pointed out, "The differences and variations in the presence of the 'libation formulae' and ISV's practice point in the direction of regional variation in ritual practices and a religious decentralisation," rather than a specific ritual connected with the state cult provided for by the (Knossian) palace administration.<sup>52</sup> The A/JA-SA-SA-RA-ME sign group recurring in these 'formulae' is generally interpreted as a name of Minoan goddess,<sup>53</sup> but it might also well be a verbal form.<sup>54</sup>

In the discussion of the ISV's practice the question of literacy in Minoan society must not be disregarded. At the time, literacy was certainly restricted to a group of scribes working for the palace or temple. Ilse Schoep remarks that "A brief palaeographical analysis of the inscriptions on stone vessels rules out every possibility that more than one object was inscribed by the same hand," which would imply "that no central authority supervised the manufacture or inscribing of the ISV's and again stresses the regional variation."<sup>55</sup> We do not know, however, who and where produced and inscribed these vessels. If the 'formulae' on stone libation tables were copied by illiterate masons from tablets(?) written by a scribe, it would be little wonder that the inscriptions differ from each other in ductus. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that the libation tables and the

other ISV were manufactured in temple or palace workshops controlled by the regional centers or peer polities, if not by larger political units. Ellen Adams has recently presented a case study of the distribution of artefacts common to ritual sites, including the ISV, to show the regional differences between Knossos and Malia in the Neopalatial period. At the same time, however, the caves of Ida and Psychro, which marked the extreme limits of the Knossian sphere of influence, might have served as pan-Cretan sanctuaries.<sup>56</sup>

\* \* \*

Points of similarity between Minoan-Mycenaean and Near Eastern religions are often wrongly approached. Attempts such as that of Gareth Owens should be rejected.<sup>57</sup> Comparative studies of Aegean and Near Eastern religious iconography can also hardly contribute to our knowledge of the Minoan-Mycenaean religion.<sup>58</sup> If, however, the plausible argumentation of Dickinson for the polytheistic nature of Minoan religion<sup>59</sup> had been illustrated by a comparative case study, it would have possibly met with wider acceptance.

The main problem is thus methodology, or rather, incomprehension of the nature of polytheism and the structure of polytheistic pantheons in most of the archaeological approaches to the Aegean religious iconography. The 'Great Goddess' or Potnia may not necessarily be dead, although there was certainly no one Potnia. The following case study will be the search after the real nature of this category of goddesses.

#### CASE STUDY:

#### ONE OR MORE 'GREAT GODDESSES'?

Robert Laffineur starts his reflections on divine imagery in the Aegean Bronze Age with the following remark: "The Aegean Bronze Age is fairly different from historical times as far as representations of divinities are concerned. There are no surely identifiable images of deities that could be recognized

<sup>49</sup> Peter Haider claims to have found names of two Minoan gods in the London Medical Papyrus: 'Razaja/Razija (or Lazaja/Lazija), the great god' and 'Ameja/Amija, god.' See P. HAIDER, *Minoan Deities in an Egyptian Medical Text*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 479–482.

<sup>50</sup> For a thorough discussion of the ISV with the 'libation formulae' and their find contexts, see SCHOEP, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 8–25, with references to the abundant literature.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., A. KARETSOU, L. GODART, J.-P. OLIVIER, *Inscriptions en linéaire A sur le sanctuaire de sommet minoen du Mont Iuktas*, *Kadmos* 24, 1985, 144; J. DRIESSEN, J.A. MACGILLIVRAY, *The Neopalatial Period in East Crete*, in: R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), *Transition. Le monde égéen du bronze moyen au bronze récent*, *Aegaeum* 3, Liège 1989, 100 with Fig. 1.

<sup>52</sup> SCHOEP, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 24.

<sup>53</sup> For various readings of this sign group and the entire discussion, see SCHOEP, *op. cit.* (n. 37), 10–11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> E. ADAMS, *Power and ritual in Neopalatial Crete: a regional comparison*, *World Archaeology* 36, 2004, 1, 26–42. See also L.V. WATROUS, *The Cave Sanctuary of Zeus at Psychro: a Study of Extra-Urban Sanctuaries in Minoan and Early Iron Age Crete*, *Aegaeum* 15, Liège–Austin 1996.

<sup>57</sup> OWENS, 'All Religions are One' (n. 24).

<sup>58</sup> Suffice it to mention two out of many other papers from the proceedings of the POTNIA conference: B. JONES, *The Minoan "Snake Goddess."* *New Interpretations of Her Costume and Identity*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 259–265; A. BARCLAY, *The Potnia Theron: Adaptation of Near Eastern Image*, *ibidem*, 373–386.

<sup>59</sup> See n. 26.

as specific divinities of a structured pantheon, like the Olympian gods of the first millennium, but apparently only anthropomorphic representations of universal principles such as fertility or related powers that are incorporated in what we call the Great Goddess or the Great Mother. Examples include stone and terracotta figurines of the Neolithic period, stone and gold “ring idols” of final Neolithic date, Early Cycladic marble idols, “snake goddesses” from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, Mycenaean terracotta *phi* and *psi* figurines, large terracotta idols of LM III and Subminoan date.”<sup>60</sup>

The everyday ritual practice, though hardly recognizable archaeologically, was in fact more complicated than anyone had ever suspected. A Hittite ritual proves that the same deity could be worshiped under different forms: “He will come (and) celebrate the goddess. In addition, if she prefers a pithos-vessel, he will make her stand as a pithos-vessel. But if not, he will make her stand as a *huwaši*-stone. Or he will ‘make’ (worship) her (as) a statue.”<sup>61</sup> Rhyta and other kinds of vessels also appeared as (images of) deities, not to mention zoomorphic figurines, solar discs, maces, *kurša* (‘skin’)-bags,<sup>62</sup> or whatsoever. And all these were specific divinities of the structured pantheon!

This is also why I will not refer to recent archaeological studies on the Minoan Great Goddess. Lucy Goodison, Christine Morris, Nannó Marinatos, and Marina L. Moss have argued for multiple goddesses,<sup>63</sup> while Lydia Baumbach and Alan Peatfield still believe in one goddess for the Prepalatial, Protopalatial, and Neopalatial periods, even if she might have appeared in ‘separate personifications.’<sup>64</sup> Geraldine Gesell makes it clear: “At this point it is

difficult to determine whether she is one goddess with separate aspects or whether the bird, snake, and poppy images represent different deities.”<sup>65</sup> All the authors discuss material residues of cult and ritual practices, but were apparently not able to surmount obstacles resulting from the character of the archaeological evidence – to paraphrase Nilsson’s famous description of Minoan religion, they studied only a picture book without a text.

So what is the conclusion to come to, based on the textual evidence from the ancient Near East? First, gods have no names, but only epithets or titles referring to their nature and position in the pantheon, like Mycenaean Potnia. The problem is that these appellations are not always understandable to us, considering that a deity may have belonged to the remote past, a substrate of unknown linguistic characteristics. Ištar or Canaanite Aštar(a)t (from common Semitic ‘Attar) means ‘Goddess,’ but her Sumerian and Hurrian counterparts both bear proud appellations: Inanna (old Sumerian Ninanna), ‘Lady of Heaven,’ and Šauška, ‘the Great One.’ Mesopotamian Ereškigal is ‘Lady of the Netherworld,’ as is also the Hurrian chthonic goddess Allani, ‘Lady.’ The Mesopotamian Mother-goddess has many epithets, but throughout the ancient Near East, including Hittite Anatolia, she was venerated as DINGIR.MAH, ‘Mighty Goddess.’

To turn to second millennium Anatolia, there is a prominent category of goddesses whose nature appears similar to that of the Aegean Great Goddess. Concerning local pantheons of central and northern Anatolia I have written elsewhere: “A goddess was also of considerable importance (...), bearing sometimes a local name, but more often being called by the Hattian epithet Katahhi ‘Queen.’ The nature of this category of goddesses is not quite clear, but there are good reasons to assume that they were goddesses of nature, fertility and wildlife worshiped over large areas of central and northern Anatolia regardless of the ethnicity in particular regions. Among the Hittites they were called Haššušara ‘Queen,’ like the goddess belonging to the group of Kanesite deities. The epithet reflects perfectly the position of these goddesses in traditional pantheons. The goddesses with the epithet Amam(m)a/Mam(m)a probably belonged to the same category.”<sup>66</sup> As a matter of fact, wherever the Storm-god (or the fertility god Telipinu) was not the most important god, the goddess was often at the head in the pantheon

<sup>60</sup> R. LAFFINEUR, *Seeing is believing: Reflections on divine imagery in the Aegean Bronze Age*, in: LAFFINEUR, HÄGG (eds), *POTNIA* (n. 11), 387.

<sup>61</sup> KUB 7.5 iv 11ff., H.A. HOFFNER, *Paskuwatti's Ritual against Sexual Impotence CTH 406*, *Aula Orientalis* 5, 1987, 276, 279; TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 130.

<sup>62</sup> For the match of the second-millennium *kurša* in Anatolia and the first-millennium *aegis*, see C. WATKINS, *A Distant Anatolian Echo in Pindar, The Origin of the Aegis Again*, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100, 2000, 1–14; IDEM, *Homer and Hittite Revisited II*, in: K.A. YENER, H.A. HOFFNER, JR. (eds), *Recent Developments in Hittite Archaeology and History. Papers in Memory of Hans G. Güterbock*, Winona Lake, Indiana 2002, 169–171.

<sup>63</sup> L. GOODISON, C. MORRIS, *Beyond the ‘Great Mother’: The Sacred World of the Minoans*, in: GOODISON, MORRIS (eds), *Ancient Goddesses* (n. 27), 123–125, 132; N. MARINATOS, *The Goddess and the Warrior*, London 2000, 112–114; MOSS, *The Minoan Pantheon* (n. 8), 151–194.

<sup>64</sup> L. BAUMBACH, *The Minoan Contribution to the Study of Greek Religion in the Bronze Age*, *SMEA* 20, 1979, 144; PEATFIELD, *After the ‘Big Bang’* (n. 12), 19–36.

<sup>65</sup> G.C. GESELL, *From Knossos to Kavousi. The Popularizing of the Minoan Palace Goddess*, in: A. CHAPIN (ed.), *CHARIS: Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr*, *Hesperia Supplement* 33, Princeton 2004, 144.

<sup>66</sup> TARACHA, *Religions* (n. 3), 53.



structure. She may have been a patron goddess of the city, like Anna in Kaneš<sup>67</sup> or Inar in Ḫattuša,<sup>68</sup> both replaced in their function of the city goddess by storm-gods in the nineteenth-eighteenth century BC. In her capacity as mistress of wild animals, Tetešḫapi (Hittian 'Great Goddess') from the city of Tawiniya resembles the nature goddess Inar. "In Tawiniya, which was not far from the capital, the cult appears to have retained the traditional structure of the local pantheon with a nature goddess at the head together with the fertility god Telipinu. This pantheon reflects beliefs going back in time to the remote past, corresponding to the communities of shepherds rather than farmers."<sup>69</sup> This is most likely how we can imagine the socio-economical situation in Minoan Crete, too, at least in the early phase of the Old Palaces. And this early 'belief background' may have still found reflection in Late Minoan local pantheons.

To make the case more complicated, however, we have to add that sun-goddesses appear as the supreme deities in other Hittite centers. The most important representative of this category is the Sun-goddess of Arinna, who stood at the head of the state pantheon throughout the history of the Hittite state. The absence of a male solar deity is characteristic of Hittian religion of North Anatolian substrate.

The sun-goddesses, on the other hand, are ambivalent in nature. They are also mistresses of the earthly sphere, which is reflected by the Hittian epithet of the Sun-goddess of Arinna, Wuru(n)šemu 'Mother of the Earth.'<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the archaeological and iconographic evidence, ambiguous as it is, does not allow to recognize different categories of deities with a similar sphere of influence.

As said, it is not my aim here "to force models derived from other religions on the evidence." Nevertheless, the correspondence between Hittite goddesses and the Minoan Great Goddess appears striking. There was most likely no one Great Goddess, but numerous goddesses of similar nature, every larger settlement having its own goddess, in accordance with the universal development of polytheistic religions. Sadly, for the time being they must remain anonymous.

[ADDENDUM: A new book of N. MARINATOS, *Minoan Kingship and the Solar Goddess*, University of Illinois Press 2010, appeared after the completion of the writing of this paper.]

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, 42–43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 54.