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CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual framework of Minoan religion, to the extent that it can be deduced from the iconography, has certain similarities with Egyptian and Near Eastern beliefs. The emphasis on death and regeneration; the concept of a fertility goddess and the young hunter/warrior god; sacred marriage of a divine pair; the use of nature imagery as a framework for cyclical regeneration; ritual hunting and animal-based metaphors are at home in both Crete and the Orient. On the social level, the use of monumental visual art (mostly wall paintings in the case of Crete) for the propagation of official ideology is common to Crete and its neighboring civilizations.

It is not my intention to oversimplify the picture and suggest that Oriental religions can be used as models for comprehending the Minoan belief system. The similarities are of a general nature and are useful only insofar as they help us place Minoan Crete within the east-ern Mediterranean context in which it belongs.

It is in the sphere of ritual and social organization that the distinctiveness of Minoan Palatial religion makes itself mostly felt; here there is a notable departure from the Ancient Orient. The Minoan palaces are the case in point: neither the term *palace* nor *temple* accurately describes these buildings which were the heart of the religious and administrative life of the towns. Indeed, palace and temple make sense only in societies where kingship and priesthood are distinct and sometimes rivaling bodies. It is the complete fusion of the sacerdotal office with the ruling class in Crete which, in my view, resulted in a social system and a set of institutions peculiar to the Minoans. If the latter re-main inarticulate, it is because we lack the precise vocabulary to describe them. I have attempted to redefine the royal palaces of Sir Arthur Evans as cult centers which controlled and inspired official art and architecture. If this is correct, the conventional distinction between religious and secular art becomes nonsensical. To the extent that art ex-presses state ideology and social status, it is intimately bound with religion.

The uniqueness of Minoan culture is manifested also in the architectural form of the cult centers. It is not startling that the latter have extensive storage rooms, workshops, and administrative quarters; the same features recur in Oriental and Egyptian temples. But the absence of architecturally definable focal points situated in the core of the building, inside which would be the cult images or other symbols of the deity, is indeed a departure from the Oriental models. The lack of cult statues as principal *foci* of the cult during the Palace period is also an anomaly. My explanation is that they were rendered unnecessary by the god/ goddess impersonation ceremonies.

The evidence for goddess or god impersonation, it will be remembered, is twofold. Firstly, there is architecture: within cult buildings such as the House of the High Priest, the Royal Villa, and the House of the Chancel Screen, not to mention the palace of Knossos itself, there were focal points designed for a seated personage to be displayed. The setup suggests that this personage received almost divine honors. Similar display arrangements recur in the loggia at Malia and the platform stands (conventionally known as theatral areas) at Knossos and Phaistos.

Secondly, there is the iconographical testimony: the goddess is depicted on several occasions as seated on a platform with an elevated center. I have argued that these platforms mirror real constructions, the implication being that the iconographical type was inspired by cultic performances. Another unique feature of Minoan cult is the ecstatic visionary epiphany, where the deity appeared to the high priestess, or to a young man, as a vision. Although it is difficult to tell under what circumstances these persons saw the god, this much at least seems clear: claiming a vision must have constituted a mark of status for a privileged elite. The suggestion is prompted by

the observation that the vision is never witnessed by a crowd in the pictures; on seals it is only *one* person who perceives the divinity.

The presence of mansions in the architectural landscape of Palatial Crete also fits well into the social picture. I have tried to argue that the mansions, by imitating the most salient features of the palaces, namely, distinctive architectural units and frescoes, were religious-administrative outposts of the palaces. This delegation of authority shows that the Minoan ruling class was not monolithic but multifarious and flexible. The number of mansions or large buildings, even from the First Palace period, is remarkable and suggests a complex hierarchy and a large number of administrators with a certain amount of autonomy and their own clientele.

As to the absence of ruler iconography to which E. Davis has drawn attention, I can think of only one possibility: the ruling class had such an investment in portraying itself in a divine form that the imagery of the ruler(s) and gods fused. Thus, on the Chieftain's Cup (fig. too), it is impossible to tell if the so-called chieftain is a mortal or a god. Note that, al-though there is a distinct iconography for the male bearded priest, young men of the nobility and the Young God are identical; the same holds true for the females and the goddess.

The greatest departure from Oriental models is the absence of the pictorial formula of the "king as a warrior smiting enemies," which is so common in Egypt and the Near East. Obviously, the Minoan rulers had less of an investment in being presented as warriors/conquerors than their Oriental counterparts. Nor is there an emphasis on one single person-age, who would be repeatedly portrayed or stand out conspicuously among the crowds, so as to be identified as a king. Crete shows itself peculiar in this respect also. Some aspects of the social structure remain vague and intangible as yet, but one is led to think that the ruler did not possess the absolute power of an Egyptian pharaoh or a Near Eastern king. At any rate, although neither the warrior imagery nor violence are absent, it looks as if prestige was expressed mostly through religious office.

If the picture that I have attempted to sketch has some truth in it, it follows that the palaces were the backbones of the religious system and that some radical transformations would have occurred after their dissolution. This is indeed what happened. We have seen that in the Postpalatial period, when mansions and palaces fell out of use (it will be remembered that Knossos survived longer than the other palaces but mansions did not), there were new features in the expression of the cult, al-though the essential beliefs were retained. The combination of new burial customs, a new type of iconography, and shrines with large clay figures shows that new *foci* and symbols were developing in the socio-religious sphere. No doubt much of the change was due to the Mycenaean presence in Crete in the later phases of the Bronze Age.

Soon the Dorians would arrive and a new kind of syncretism combining Minoan, Mycenaean, and Greek elements would emerge. But by that time, the twilight of the splendid and unique Minoan culture had arrived.