





PREHISTORIC THERA





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CHRISTOS G. DOUMAS

PREHISTORIC
THERA





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HERA, THE SOUTHERNMOST ISLAND OF THE CYCLADES, was settled by man in the fifth millennium BC. Thenceforth it became one of the most important centres of Aegean Culture, until its demise in the seventeenth century BC, when a cataclysmic volcanic eruption wiped out all traces of life on Thera and fragmented it into the islands that now gird its unique caldera.

Protected under a thick layer of volcanic ash, the ground on which Thera's prehistoric inhabitants were active, preserves in remarkable condition the wealth of prehistoric Thera, which is revealed *par excellence* at the site of Akrotiri.

Investigations over the past fifty years at Akrotiri, by Spyridon Marinatos and Christos Doumas, have uncovered part of a city that bears witness to the splendid culture of prehistoric Thera and through the richness and the variety of the finds sheds light in an unprecedented manner on the everyday life of a Late Bronze Age harbour town. Among the finds are the numerous masterpieces of mural art, superb monuments of Aegean painting, which make the prehistoric city at Akrotiri unique.

Today, the excavated sector of the city, fully protected under a modern bioclimatic shelter, is an exemplary visitable archaeological site, while a representative selection of the moveable finds brought to light in the excavations there is exhibited in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera. Both attract thousands of visitors a year, attesting the constant care of the excavators and the Archaeological Service for the protection, conservation and enhancement of one of the most important monumental assemblages of the global cultural heritage.

This year's album entitled *Prehistoric Thera*, presents the prehistoric city at Akrotiri and the Museum of Prehistoric Thera, as well as unique or representative finds not yet on public display. Thus, one more publication is added to 'The Museums Cycle' series, of the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, in which aesthetic excellence and scientific documentation are combined. In this book the author Professor Christos Doumas, Director of the Akrotiri Excavations, makes known to the readers the cultural achievements of the flourishing urban hub in the prehistoric Aegean, through the most recent findings of research at Akrotiri.

> LYDIA KONIORDOU Minister of Culture and Sports



The JOHN S. LATSIS PUBLIC BENEFIT FOUNDATION lavishes particular care and attention on the publication series 'The Museums Cycle', which it sponsors annually and which now numbers eighteen volumes. For our Foundation, every new publication is a cultural message, as with the distilled knowledge and the beauteous art that emerge from its pages, it carries to the ends of the earth the everyday life, the spirit, the mores and the values that were born and developed in this corner of the Mediterranean.

Thera is a place that attracts and will continue to attract the interest of the whole world. The stentorious beauty of its volcanic landscape is the obvious reason. However, its cultural reserves of global ambit will constitute a diachronic pole of attraction for the initiated aficianodo of a civilization that flourished and vanished, remaining silent for centuries, until the excavation that reveals it commenced.

The author of the volume *Prehistoric Thera*, Professor Emeritus Christos Doumas, a true philosopher of the discipline of Archaeology, which he has been serving loyally for decades, takes us back to an island society thriving in the Cyclades some four thousand years ago. In an engaging manner, he describes the activities of its inhabitants who, through seafaring and maritime trade, turned the settlement at Akrotiri into an important harbour and prosperous urban centre in the prehistoric Aegean. The mercantile transactions of the Theran seafarers with the Mediterranean and the world of the East brought great wealth, evidenced by the monumental public and private buildings that graced the city, and contributed to the burgeoning of figurative art focused on man and his environment. But what makes Akrotiri unique in the world is its wall-paintings. For this reason, readers of the book *Prehistoric Thera* will enjoy an exclusive privilege, as presented in its pages, for the first time, are restored mural paintings and pottery which are not exhibited in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera.

The fact that Professor Doumas agreed to write the present volume is an event in itself and I thank him especially for honouring the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation. Valuable and decisive, as always, was the contribution the various related Services, central and regional, of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, to which I express my sincere gratitude. My thanks begin and end with the invaluable and long-standing creative team of this series of editions.

MARIANNA J. LATSIS

N 2017 HALF A CENTURY WILL HAVE PASSED since the onset of excavations at Akrotiri on the island of Thera. It is indeed a happy coincidence that the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation decided to publish a special volume on the prehistoric city brought to light there and the Museum of Prehistoric Thera, where a selection of the abundant finds from the site is exhibited.

As is well known, the excavator of Akrotiri, Spyridon Marinatos, placed the entire project under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens, which was responsible for the management of the archaeological site until it was handed over to the State. The Society remains responsible for the conservation of the monuments and the diverse finds.

Thanks to the works carried out in both the archaeological site and the on-site laboratories over these five decades, it is now possible to sketch the history of the prehistoric settlement and its gradual development, as well as to form a picture of the progress of the society which lived there.

I wish to thank the Board of the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation for inviting me to write the present volume and to share with its readers some of the fruits of my almost fifty years of privileged involvement with the 'Pompeii of the Prehistoric Aegean'.

CHRISTOS G. DOUMAS



PART I

THE CITY AT AKROTIRI

Introduction

ue to the huge volcanic deposits covering Thera, human presence on the island prior to the major eruption of the volcano in the seventeenth century BC was known only fragmentarily, until excavations commenced at Akrotiri in 1967. Information, gleaned mainly from occasional finds in the pozzuolana (Theran earth) quarries, was related, of course, to man's activities before that tremendous eruption. Small installations in the area of the quarries and sporadic finds showed that during the third millennium BC Thera was within the sphere of the Cycladic Culture. However, it is from the ongoing archaeological investigations at the site of Akrotiri that more can be learnt about the historical development of society on Thera, from the first settlement founded there, sometime in the mid-fifth millennium BC, until its obliteration by the volcanic eruption, towards the end of the seventeenth century BC.



⊠*arly Cycladic marble figurine of the Spedos variety of the so-called canonical (folded-arm) type. Dated to the mid-3rd millennium BC.*

HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATION

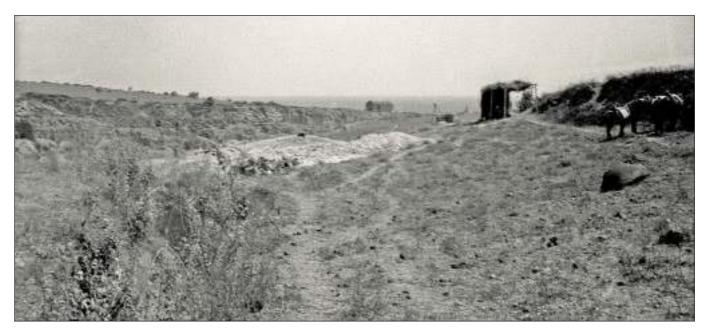
The excavation of the prehistoric settlement on the south coast of the island, close to the present village of Akrotiri, was started with the aim of verifying a theory that Professor Spyridon Marinatos had proposed on the eve of the Second World War, namely that the end of the Minoan Civilization in Crete was brought about by the Thera volcano, which, according to the prevailing view, had erupted around the middle of the second millennium BC.



The banks of the torrent which ran from north to south through the vineyards of the area had been turned into terraces by the vine growers. On the lowest terrace, Marinatos dug his first trial excavation trenches.

The vicissitudes of the war, in which the whole world was embroiled, and of the Greek civil war and its aftermath, delayed putting the theory to the test and only in 1967 were circumstances favourable to beginning the excavation. Marinatos elected to explore a site pointed out to him by local villagers, who told him that after torrential rains, walls of buildings and sherds of pottery appeared in the gulley that had been created. Certain that this site was what he was looking for, Marinatos did indeed commence his investigation from the bed of the torrent, where, within a few hours, convincing evidence began to emerge.

Proceeding towards the banks of the gulley, he ascertained that buildings of the prehistoric settlement survived to a height of several metres. This forced him to consider measures for their protection under a single shelter, given that the ancient construction materials were too easily eroded to be left exposed to the natural elements. So, until his life came to a sudden end, at the site, in 1974, Marinatos had removed enormous quantities of fill from either side of the gulley, over an area of approximately 1 hectare, and had constructed a single shelter, under which were visible the outlines of the upper walls of dozens of buildings which were buried under the deposits of pumice and volcanic ash (*tephra*).



View of the bed of the ravine, from the right (west) bank of which Marinatos was supervising the excavation from a makeshift hut. Visible on the right bank are the mules/donkeys, the only means of getting there at the time.



View of the excavation in the Bronos field, subsequent Complex Beta. The almost ceremonial procedure of taking out the fragments of the large wall-painting of the Blue Monkeys from room Beta 6 is taking place under the shade of an umbrella.

Marinatos began the systematic exploration of the following eight buildings, to which he gave conventional names: *Pithoi Storeroom, House of the Ladies, West House, Building Complex Delta, Building Beta, Building Gamma, Xeste 3, Xeste 4*. By 1974 the excavation had advanced to a different degree in each building but had not been completed in any.



Employing cutting-edge technology of the late 1960s, Marinatos took measures to protect the monuments under a single shelter with a frame of slotted angle steel strips roofed with corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting.

After Marinatos's death, priority was given to the management of the archaeological site and to the conservation and restoration of the diverse finds, literally cramming the excavation storerooms. In the archaeological site, those points at which excavations should continue were determined by the progress in the conservation primarily of the wall-paintings, as for this to be completed all the fragments of a plaster from the same locus had to be collected.

The new bioclimatic shelter designed by Greek architect Nikos Fintikakis not only provides more effective protection of the site but also enhances the architectural monuments, bringing them closer to the visitor, who can enjoy the experience of wandering amidst the ruins in an optimum environment in terms of temperature, ventilation and illumination. The bays formed along the walkways are intended to house



the specially designed showcases in which selected finds will elaborate on aspects of the life of the prehistoric city's inhabitants. This will turn the entire archaeological site into an *in-situ* museum.

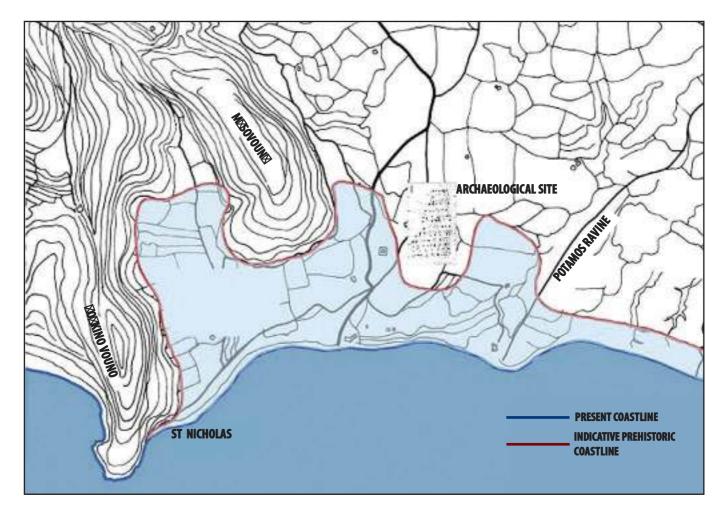
General view of the roof of corrugated asbestos-cement sheeting.



History of the settlement

THE FOUNDING OF THE SETTLEMENT

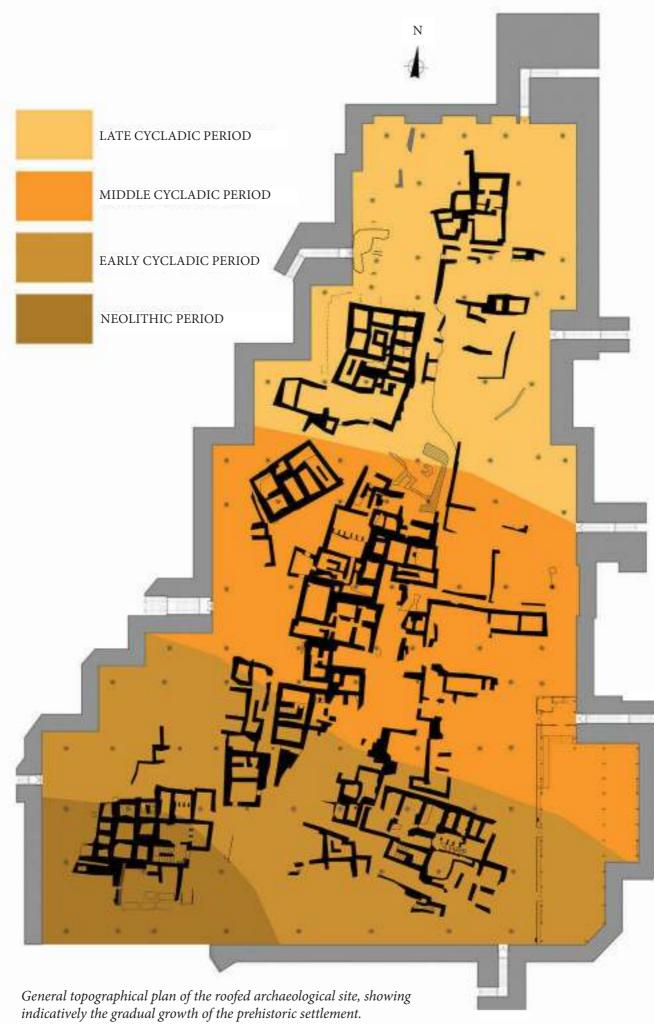
Geotechnical researches in the coastal area of Akrotiri have revealed that before the major eruption of the Gvolcano, around 1615 BC, the shoreline was indented, with coves between small headlands. The first inhabitants of Thera, following the practice known for all coastal sites in the prehistoric Aegean, chose for permanent settlement the tip of one of these small promontories. Indeed, according to the geomorphology that was reconstructed virtually, on the basis of data from the excavations of the foundation shafts for the pillars of the new bioclimatic shelter over the archaeological site, the peninsula was the least rugged and the most suitable for the development of a large settlement.



Part of the map of Thera, showing the coastline in the area of Akrotiri before and after the volcanic eruption in the Late Bronze Age (after C. Palyvou).

The criteria for the selection of the site, apart from the fact that it was in the largest area of flat land on the island, which lent itself to agricultural activities, were that it was protected from the prevailing northerly winds and that the coves on either side of the promontory were safe havens for the sea-craft of the period. Other factors that contributed to the settlement's growth are Thera's location at the cross-road of many of the surface sea currents of the Aegean and its proximity to Crete, with which it was in visual contact.

All that survives from the Neolithic Age at Akrotiri is a handful of potsherds, which belong typologically to the 'Saliagos Culture', so named after the homonymous islet between Paros and Antiparos, where it was first identified. From the find-spots of these sherds, which are dated to the middle years of the fifth millennium BC, it is estimated that the Neolithic settlement extended roughly in the area between Xeste 3 and the ticket booths at the south entrance gate to the archaeological site.





FROM NEOLITHIC VILLAGE TO PROTO-URBAN CENTRE

(Early Cycladic period: 3rd millennium BC)

For the new shelter over the site at Akrotiri to meet the technical specifications of antiseismic protection, the supporting pillars were founded at a depth of at least seven metres within the pyroclastic bedrock. Consequently, for the archaeologists the 91 foundation shafts for the pillars corresponded to the same number of excavation trenches, which cut through the entire stratigraphical sequence of the settlement. Thus, it was possible on the one hand to trace the gradual growth of the settlement on the ridge of the promontory, and on the other to study the artefacts and other finds, from which emerged the phases of development of the society that was living there. The architectural remains from the Early Cycladic period are so fragmentary and so limited that it is impossible to form even an impression of a dwelling of this time.

However, the penetration of the pillar shafts for the shelter into the bedrock revealed the existence of underground chambers, cut into the slopes of the peninsula. These chambers were found filled with debris mixed with huge quantities of domestic pottery, which is dated mainly to advanced phases of the Early Cycladic period. The form of the chambers, their considerable number and their distribution led to the conclusion that these were originally graves, which had been abolished towards the end of the third millennium BC.

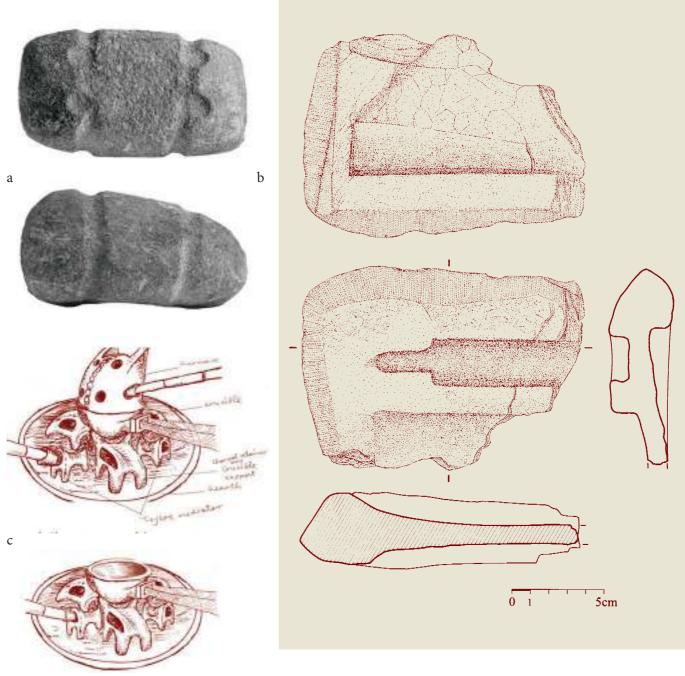
From the condition in which these rock-cut chambers were found it is not possible to form a direct picture of the burial habits of Early Cycladic Theran society. Nevertheless, it is suspected that these will have differed little if at all from those of other Cycladic islands with the material culture of which many elements in common are observed. Likewise, it is not known to where the cemetery was transferred after it was abolished.

Clay analyses to determine the provenance of the pottery from the fill of the chambers have shown that one type of transport amphora is represented by specimens from various regions in the Aegean. This means that the settlement at Akrotiri had contacts with these regions at least from the mid-third millennium BC. Moreover, the presence of tools such as crucibles, tuyères (nozzles from bellows), moulds etc., indicates that in the same period there was metallurgical activity at Akrotiri, hitherto unknown. These ascertainments, in combination with Thera's nodal location in the Aegean, could explain the expansion of the settlement and its development from a fishing village to a cosmopolitan harbour town.

The volume and the kind of debris with which the chambers had been intentionally filled show that it resulted from the clearing of ruins of the Early Cycladic settlement, which seems to have suffered a severe earthquake in the late third millennium BC. As a result of this measure, the ground in the area of the cemetery, formerly riddled with chambers, was rehabilitated and stabilized.

The rebuilding of the settlement after the earthquake also involved a significant expansion of it over the area of the Early Cycladic cemetery, attesting the prosperity of the community at Akrotiri. The new settlement had the features of an urban centre and marked the transition of Theran society to the Middle Bronze Age.

Wall-painting fragments from the composition of the 'Reed Bed' in Xeste 3.

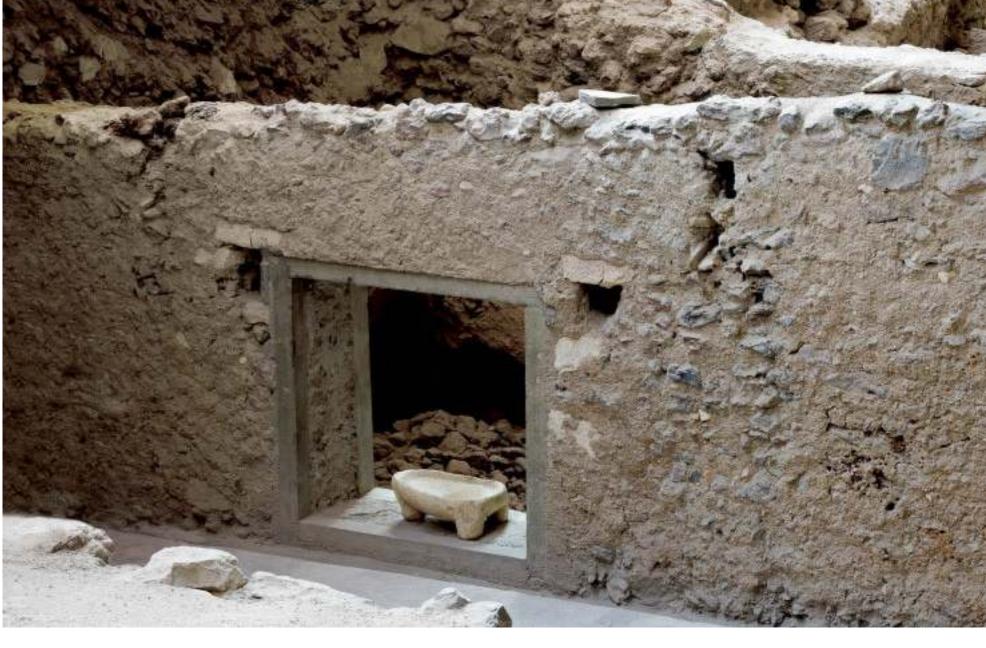


Tools associated with the practice of metallurgy:

a. Stone hammers for breaking up the metal ore. *b.* Drawing of a stone mould for casting a bronze dagger. *c.* Reconstruction of a portable vessel for melting metal.

THE MIDDLE CYCLADIC TOWN (2000-1650 BC)

The enlargement of the settlement was presumably in response also to demographic needs. Seafaring and maritime trade, which were bringing more and more wealth, attracted ever larger population groups to the settlement, giving rise to new occupations. In a dynamic commercial harbour, specialist craftsmen, such as shipwrights, sailmakers, seamen of all skills, must have found employ. Other professionals in the tertiary sector of the economy, such as merchants and agents, will have had personnel and infrastructure available to



The rise in level of Telchines Street turned the ground-floor apartment Delta 16 of Building Complex Delta into a semi-basement.

them, to carry out their business. In other words, people must have been constantly on the alert to solve problems as they arose, in this vigorous society. Given these circumstances, the expansion of the town met an imperative need.

From the piecemeal evidence of the urban plan and the architecture of the Middle Cycladic town, it is difficult to form a full and precise picture of its aspect. However, it is surmised that its northern limit was somewhere in the area of Cenotaph Square. In the deep shafts for the foundations of the pillars of the new shelter, two- and three-storey buildings, as well as stretches of streets with a sewer/drain running beneath their stone-paved surface, were uncovered. Although fragmentary, these remains point to a high cultural level and to a centralized system of managing public affairs. Otherwise, neither the planning nor the execution of such works, let alone their maintenance and good functioning, would have been possible.

The moveable finds associated with the Middle Cycladic town enhance aspects of the art and ideology of the inhabitants, increasingly manifesting the 'bourgeois' character to which Theran society was tending. The rapid economic growth which led to these developments seems to have been due to the Therans' venturing for the first time into the Mediterranean. According to the archaeological evidence, this was dictated by developments in Crete, where, around the beginning of the second millennium BC, the accumulation of wealth in the form of agricultural surplus had attained its zenith. Consequently, Crete's demand for imported goods increased and principal among these was copper for making bronze.

Copper, which until then had been produced from ores in the Aegean region, was no longer sufficient to cover Crete's ever-growing needs. The Cycladic (Theran) suppliers had to seek other sources, beyond the Aegean. It is perhaps not fortuitous that the earliest testimony of contacts between the Aegean and the other great island in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, dates from precisely this time. Cyprus had already been recognized as an inexhaustible source of copper and was the chief supplier of this metal to the wider area of the Eastern Mediterranean. This is reflected even in the name used for the metal in many European languages: the *cuprium aes* (= Cypriot copper) of the Latin sources was abbreviated to the determinant of provenance (*cuprium*), from which derive the words *copper* in English, *cuivre* in French, *Kupfer* in German, *cobre* in Spanish, and so on. So, it is reasonable to assume that it was to Cyprus that the Therans turned their interests. In fact, lead-isotope analyses of bronze objects from Crete corroborate this explanation, as copper of Cypriot provenance now has a significant place in their composition (26%), whereas earlier the metal came exclusively from the Cyclades.

The founding of the settlement at Ialysos, on the northeast coast of Rhodes, at exactly this time does not seem be unrelated to these developments, since an intermediate port of call along the long copper trail was necessary.

The town at Akrotiri, actively involved, among other things, in the maritime transport of Cypriot copper and in metalworking, was struck by an earthquake in the mid-seventeenth century BC. Once again the settlement was destroyed and once again the inhabitants took the opportunity of rebuilding it even grander, gracing it with monumental public and private edifices. This was the last city at Akrotiri, which about half a century later was to be buried under a mantle of pumice and ash, in the catastrophic volcanic eruption.

Fragments of a wall-painting with representation of myrtle branches.



THE CITY AT AKROTIRI IN ITS HEYDAY (Late Cycladic I period: *c*. 1650-1615 BC)

Rebuilding of the razed settlement began almost immediately, upon the foundations of the same buildings with minor changes in the basic urban tissue. The apparent speed with which the city of the final period was rebuilt bespeaks not only the availability of economic means but also the excellent planning for the coordination of such a large-scale endeavour.



Layers of scree, visible today on the Kokkino Vouno ('Red Mountain'), west of the archaeological site.

Negatives of the timber frame in the south wall of Xeste 3.

The debris from clearing the ruins was arranged in open spaces, raising once again the level of the streets and squares, and turning the ground-floor spaces in the buildings into semi-basements.

The entrance to each building gave access to a small antechamber, from which a few steps led down to the lower levels of the semi-basement apartments, which were used only as storage facilities or for processing goods and preparing food. From the antechamber started also the stone staircase leading to the upperstorey apartments.

In the course of arranging the debris in the streets, measures were taken to keep the gradients that facilitate the smooth flow of rain water, so as not to undermine and erode the buildings. The paving of the streets with relatively large flagstones also contributed to this. The gradients of the streets were followed also by the city's new wastewater disposal system, with which sanitary installations inside the houses were connected.

Fieldstones and earth were still the basic construction materials, although innovations in the building art were apparently introduced. The Therans' cumulative experience, of one thousand years, of destructive earthquakes led to the invention of ways and techniques of anti-seismic protection of the buildings erected. In some cases the andesite blocks that formed the foundations of large buildings stand upon a layer of chips of porous lava, such as that abundant on the Red Beach, a few hundred metres west of the city. Possibly this layer functioned as a shock absorber. In other cases it is obvious that to safeguard against earthquakes the walls of the buildings were reinforced with a timber frame, the negatives of which have survived after the decay of the beams and posts.

Doors and windows are usually framed externally by handsome ashlar blocks of soft off-white tuff, to which the wooden frames were affixed. Frequently, similar tuff blocks were set in a row, projecting slightly from the outer surface of the walls, as string courses. More rarely, larger blocks of the same material were used to construct the outside walls of big buildings, giving the impression of isodomic masonry. These are the buildings which Marinatos named conventionally *'xestai*'.

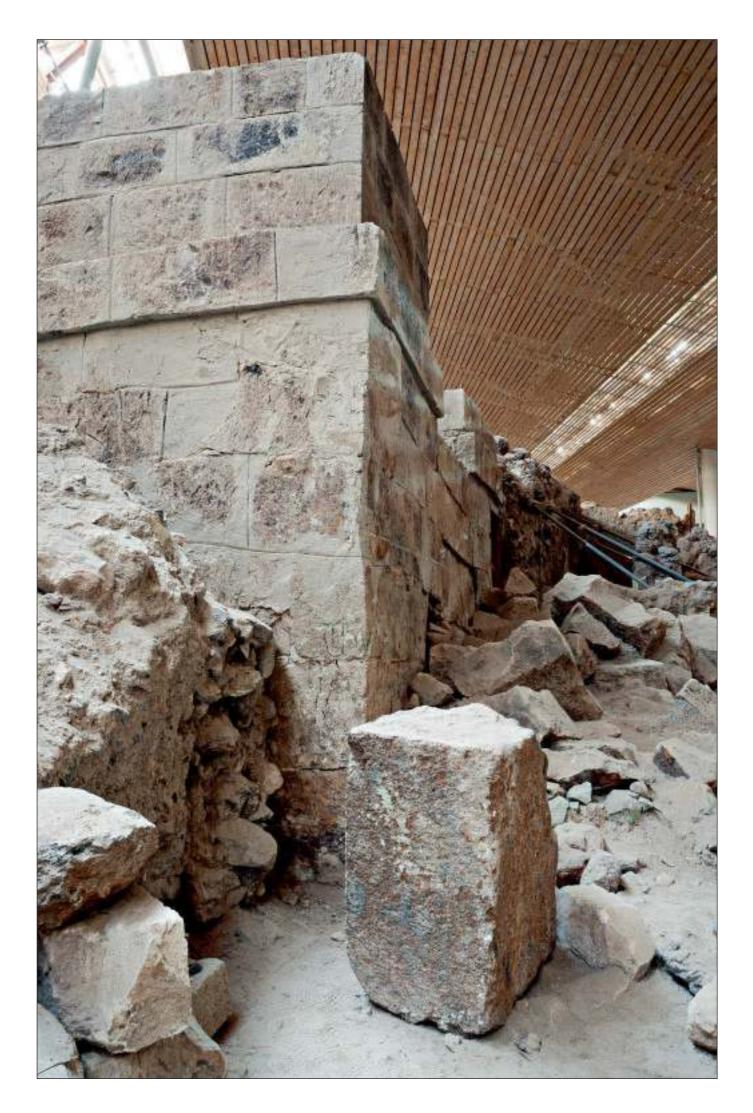
Harder stones, such as ignimbrites, were used as quoins, which were perhaps intended to protect the corners of buildings from abrasion by the loads carried by pack animals moving along the city's narrow streets.

Both the floors of the upper storeys and the roofs of the buildings were very heavy constructions. Tree trunks-beams underpinned a layer of branches, on top of which the rammed earth floor was laid, about 10-15 cm. thick. The construction of the roof of the buildings was very similar. In rare cases the floors of the upper storeys were paved with large schist flagstones, while small sea pebbles set at random on the surface of the flat roof prevented cracking, thus contributing to the more effective waterproofing of it.

Thanks to the good preservation of the monuments from the last phase of the city, researchers can readily comprehend the external influences Theran society received, even in the sector of architecture. As has been perceptively remarked, to build their houses the Therans 'borrowed' the most sophisticated features that Cretan constructional art could offer. Among these features are the *polythyra* (pier-and-door partitions) and the *polyparathyra* (multiple windows), the light-well, the so-called lustral basin, to name but a few.



Part of the façade of the still unexplored so-called House of the Anchor, on the west side of Triangle Square. Visible are the frames of a door and windows, of dressed blocks of tuff.



The fact that the cornerstones of space Delta 15, projecting above Telchines Street, are not connected to one another indicates that this was a later addition, in contact with the southwest corner of Delta 16.

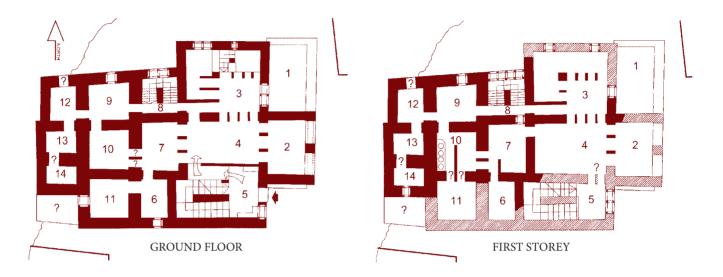
Partial view of the southwest corner of Xeste 4, the external walls of which were entirely covered with dressed blocks of tuff.



North view of Xeste 2 with the prominent string courses of dressed blocks of tuff.



The criteria on which the character of the buildings excavated, to a greater or lesser degree, is defined are the size, the manner and the materials of their construction, the internal arrangement, the decoration with wall-paintings, the presence or absence of installations and household equipment to cover everyday needs (e.g. kitchens, storerooms for foodstuffs, cooking vessels), and so on. Thus, three categories of buildings can be distinguished at Akrotiri: public edifices, private houses and buildings of special function.



Plan of the ground floor and the first storey of Xeste 3 (after C. Palyvou).

Public Edifices

So far, buildings Xeste 3 and Xeste 4 have been identified as public in function. Both are in the southernmost part of the excavated site, a short distance from the coast.

XESTE 3

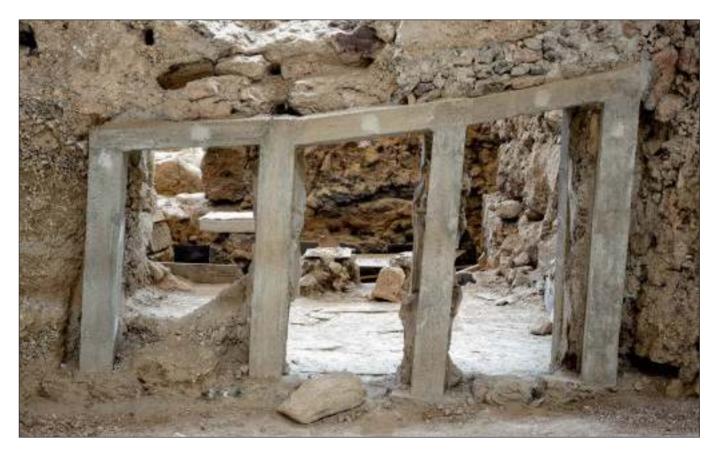
Xeste 3, at the southwest end of the city, is one of the few buildings which has been fully excavated. It is threestoreyed and stands on a plot of 283 sq. m. at an elevation of approximately 19.50 m. The entrance was in the east wing, the upper parts of which have been destroyed by both the earthquake that preceded the eruption and by modern activities. The antechamber gave access not only to the ground-floor apartments by also to those of the upper storeys, via an impressive staircase. There was a second, service, staircase in about the middle of the north wing of the building. The internal arrangement of Xeste 3 is known only for the ground floor, which was divided into 15 rooms.

The east part of the building was distinguished from the west by its monumental aspect, imparted by its façade of large ashlar blocks of ignimbrite and its large windows. In this part the layout of both the ground floor and at least the first storey was remarkable, with the apartments interconnected by systems of poly-thyra, which meant they could be united into large halls, able to accommodate large assemblies of people.

By contrast, the west part of Xeste 3 had ordinary rubble masonry walls, while the interior apartments seem to have served as auxiliary spaces.



General view of Xeste 3 from the southeast.

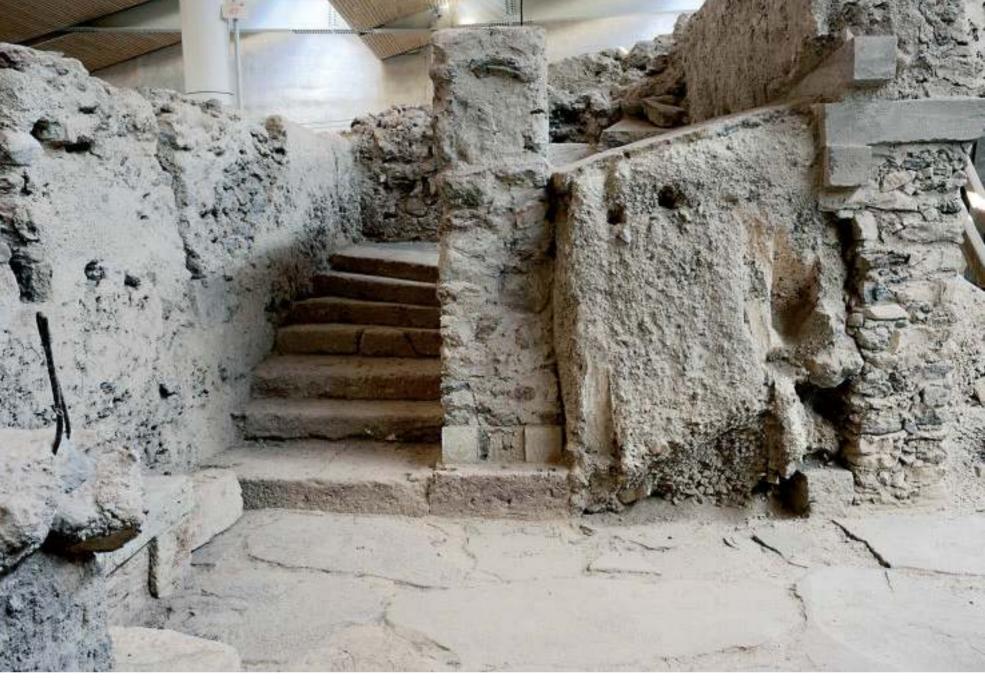


Polythyron in the ground floor of the east wing of Xeste 3. Its frame, distorted due to the decay of the timbers, was replaced with reinforced concrete in the course of its excavation.

FOLLOWING PAGES: *Xeste 3. General view from the east.*





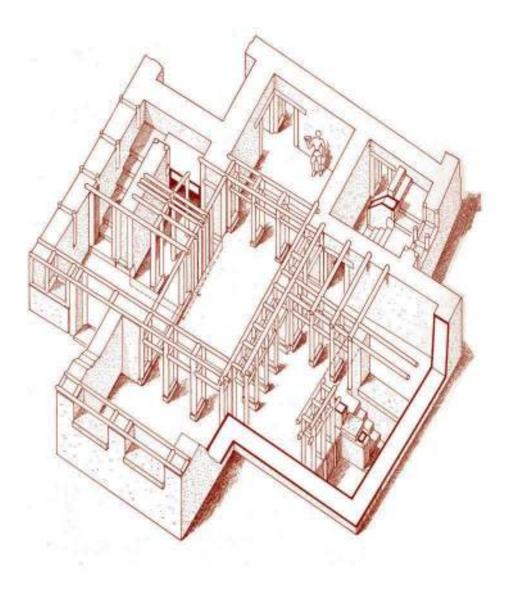


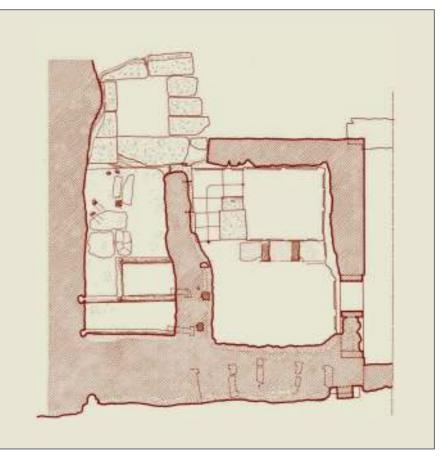
The antechamber communicated with the ground-floor apartments of the building via the still unexcavated corridor under the flight of stairs leading to the first storey.

The fragments of wall-paintings retrieved from the ruins of Xeste 3 represent scores of square metres and perhaps as a whole surpass in surface area the entire corpus of wall-paintings surviving from the prehistoric Aegean. Their conservation, which has continued intermittently for decades, yields invaluable information not only on art at Akrotiri, but also on many facets of the life and ideology of the prehistoric Therans. Through the thematic repertoire of these murals, the public character of the building is deduced, which was undoubtedly dedicated to rites of passage.

The northeast corner of the ground floor of this building is occupied by the so-called Lustral Basin. A typical feature of the so-called palace architecture of Crete, the Lustral Basin of Xeste 3 is so far the unique example in Thera. [For the mural decoration of Xeste 3 see *Part III.*]

Xeste 3. Isometric reconstruction of the ground floor of the east wing, with the complex of polythyra (after C. Palyvou).





Xeste 3. Plan of the so-called Lustral Basin (after C. Palyvou).

FOLLOWING PAGES: Xeste 3. Lustral Basin: the wall-painting of the 'Adorants'.





XESTE 4

The second public edifice, Xeste 4, which dominates the southeast edge of the city, has hardly been explored. However, its outline has been uncovered, attesting to its huge size. It stands on a plot of some 367 square metres and extended from northwest to southeast for a length of over 30 metres. Constructed entirely of large ashlar blocks of whitish tuff, for those not familiar with the architecture at Akrotiri it could easily be mistaken for a building of Classical times! Due to the sheer eastward slope of the ground, the height of the building, in its east wing at least, probably exceeded three storeys.

Xeste 4 essentially delimited to the north Curetes Street, on which its entrance was located. To the south, the street was bordered by two other buildings, which have not yet been excavated. Thanks to its orientation and the arrangement of these two buildings, terraces have been formed in front of Xeste 4, further enhancing its monumental aspect. The more eastern of these buildings almost touches Xeste 4, turning Curetes Street into a *cul de sac*. Obviously for this reason and because of the steep gradient of the street, in this part of it the debris created by the earthquake is very thick, reaching up to the stone lintel of the entrance doorway.

Excavation of a pillar shaft for the bioclimatic shelter, exactly behind the front door of Xeste 4 brought to light the antechamber from which the magnificent Grand Staircase began. The discovery of large parts of the mural decoration of this staircase led Marinatos to concentrate works at this point, but fate decreed that he would not complete them. After his death, excavation in the staircase was continued intermittently but due to the abundance of wall-painting fragments and the time-consuming process of their safe collection investigations have not been concluded.

Conservation of wall-paintings from the Grand Staircase is presently in progress and from the data available it is estimated that in total these murals, which were on either side of the stairwell, exceed 50 running metres. The subject of the representation is a procession of almost life-size male figures, ascending the steps and holding various objects. From another apartment of the building, a fragment of a painted frieze depicting boar's-tusk helmets was retrieved (see *Part III*).

Of course, any attempted interpretation of the building is hazardous before the completion of its excavation. However, judging by the dimensions, the quality of the construction and, primarily, the iconographic programme of the staircase, it seems that Xeste 4 was a public edifice. If the procession fresco from the staircase depicts foreign visitors bearing gifts, as has been suggested, then it is reasonable to speculate that the function of Xeste 4 was related to the administration and the governing authority of the city.

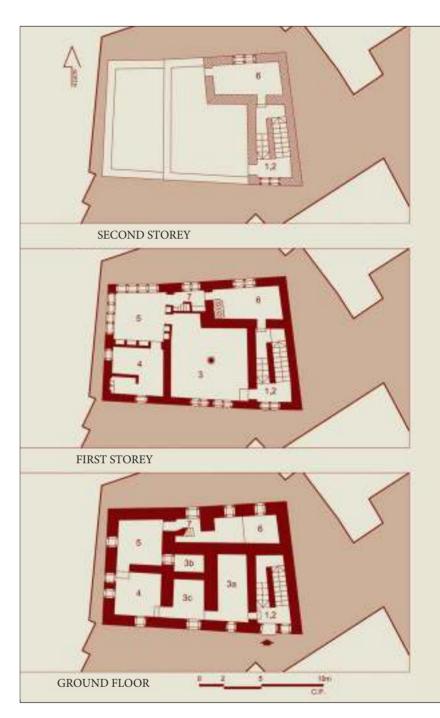
Private Houses

WEST HOUSE

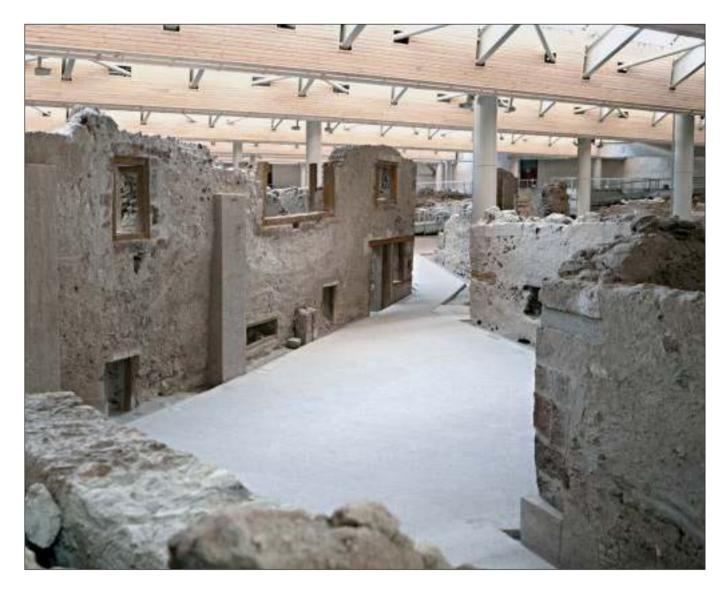
O f the buildings characterized as private, the beststudied and the best-preserved is the West House, so named because of its position in the site at the time it was uncovered. It is a free-standing building, at least twostoreyed, which dominates Triangle Square, defining its north side. A building of the preceding period seems to have been repaired after the earthquake in the midseventeenth century BC, when its entrance was also formed so as to correspond to the new raised level of the square. This raised level resulted from the arrangement of debris after the earthquake and turned the initially ground-floor apartments of the West House into semi-basements, necessitating a reduction in the size of the corresponding windows.

Consistent with the canon in the architecture at Akrotiri, next to the entrance door is a window, which admitted light to the antechamber. The thickness of the internal walls and the smallness of the central apartments of the ground floor indicate that the building had been designed from the outset to have an upper storey or storeys. Moreover, the entire ground floor was intended for the storage of goods and the processing of foodstuffs. From the constructions in room 3a, the best-lit room in the ground floor, it is deduced that it functioned as a kitchen. The rest of the apartments, dimly illuminated and poorly ventilated, apparently ensured stable conditions of humidity and temperature for storing foodstuffs in the large jars (*pithoi*) found there. These spaces were entered by descending a couple of steps, depending on the difference in level.

The main staircase, which began from the antechamber, led to the upper storeys. Although the layout of the first storey is clear, that of the second is vague. From the upwards continuation of the staircase and the volume of debris around the east part of the building it is construed that there was some kind of shelter at the top and at least one room in the northeast corner.



West House. Plan of the ground floor, the first and the non-surviving second storey (after C. Palyvou).



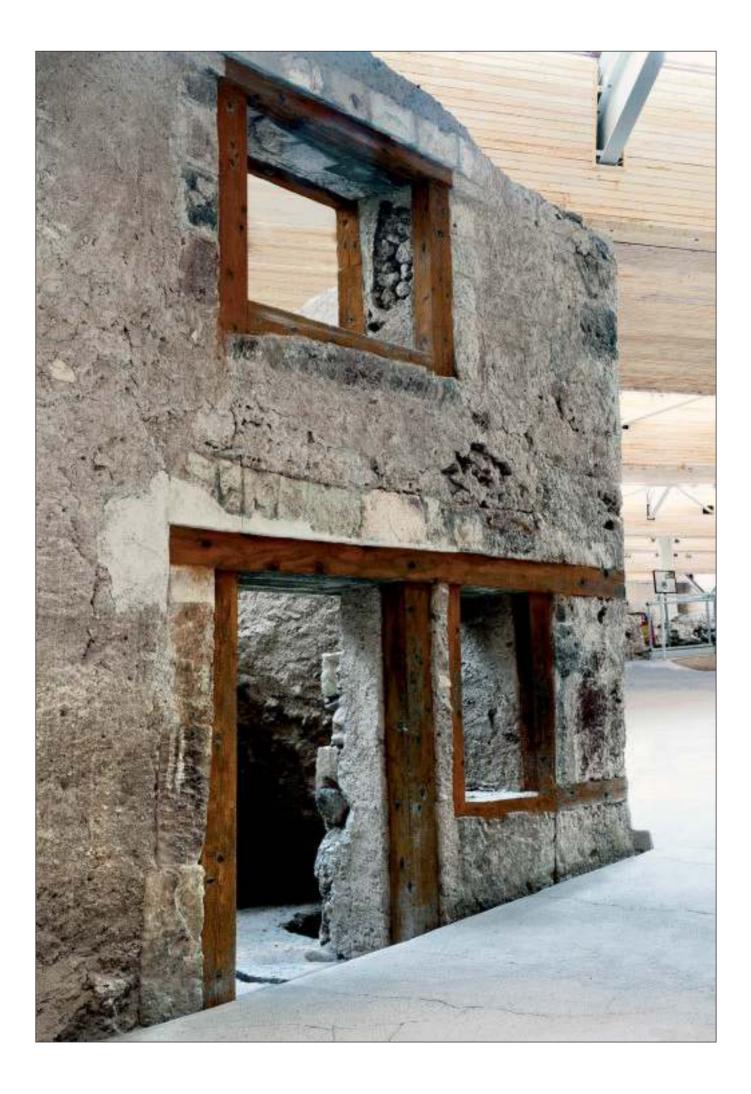
West House. South façade onto Triangle Square.

West House. Sanitary installation at the southwest corner in the first storey.

The first storey comprises four main rooms. The main room 3 has a central column because of its size (33.90 sq. m.) and was entered from the first-storey landing of the staircase, which was lit by a large window exactly above the entrance to the building. Because this room faces south and has a huge window overlooking Triangle Square abundant light was admitted to it, which was reflected and diffused by the white plaster coating its walls. From the host of loom-weights found in the southwest corner of the room it seems probable that weaving activities took place in it.

The doorway in the northwest corner of room 3 led into the more impressive room 5, through which the rest of the spaces (4-7) in this storey could be reached. Of these, room 6 was found full of small vessels and seems to have had an auxiliary function, while room 7 served as a corridor to room 6 and had a built-in cupboard of mudbrick. Next to this was the steep service staircase connecting the upper storey to the ground-floor storerooms.







The sewer/drain under Dactyls Street, destroyed by the later torrent (from the north).



Dactyls Street, destroyed by the later torrent (from the south).

The most formal part of the West House was its west wing (rooms 4 and 5). Accommodated in the southwest corner (room 4b) was a sanitary installation $(1.30 \times 1.95 \text{ m.})$, which was connected to the sewer running under the narrow alley outside. Because of this installation, the plan of the room is L-shaped (4b) and so required two windows, a west and a south, for its illumination.

Room 5 was the most luxurious of all the apartments in the West House. Its floor was paved with flagstones and there was a series of four windows on each of its outside walls, creating the illusion of a roofed veranda. In correspondence to these windows were cupboards and doors in the party walls of the room, east and south. This internal arrangement determined also the iconographic programme of the mural decoration in this room. On the inner surfaces of the outside solid walls were wall-paintings of two young fishermen, on the east jamb of the doorway between rooms 4 and 5 was the representation of the so-called young 'Priestess', while in the upper zone above the windows, doorways and cupboards ran the miniature frieze of the 'Flotilla', the 'Nilotic Landscape' and the 'Shipwreck'. [For the mural decoration of the West House see *Part III*.]

The architecture and mural decoration of the West House, as well as the moveable finds recovered from it, leave little doubt that this was the residence of an affluent and cultivated member of Theran society, perhaps a 'cosmopolitan' mariner and merchant.

HOUSE OF THE LADIES

Named after the wall-painting found inside it, the House of the Ladies is the only excavated building of a complex of at least two contiguous buildings. This complex constitutes the west side of Dactyls Street, just opposite

General view of the House of the Ladies, from the east.



buildings not yet excavated. All buildings at either side of the street had been seriously damaged by the action of the winter torrent that flowed through the archaeological site in recent times, as well as by the interventions of the villagers who used its stones to build the drystone retaining walls of their terraced vineyards. From the surviving parts of walls in the better-preserved west wing it is ascertained that the building was three-storeyed and stood on a plot of 184 square metres.

The main staircase, which has not been fully investigated, projects at the southwest corner of the building, disrupting its square plan. With the typical door and window in the south wall, and the antechamber corresponding to the first landing, the staircase appears to have been added later, after the seismic destruction in the mid-seventeenth century BC and the raising of street level, and is in contact also with the unexplored Building Theta.

From the excavated part of the House of the Ladies it emerges that the lowest level was semi-basement. A singular feature is the square light-well at the heart of the building, with small windows in the centre of its north and west walls. Adjoining the south wall of the light-well is the service staircase, while around the other three sides runs a narrow corridor giving access to the surrounding rooms. Room 1 in the second storey was decorated with the wall-painting of the Papyri, while the walls of a corridor connecting this room with the east compartments in the same floor were adorned with the wall-painting of the Ladies. [For the mural decoration of the House of the Ladies see *Part II*.]

From the quantity and the kind of the finds it is deduced that most of the spaces in the ground floor and the first storey functioned as storerooms for vessels and foodstuffs.

FOLLOWING PAGES: House of the Ladies. The wall-painting of the female figure from the south wall of the corridor and of the Papyri from room 1.

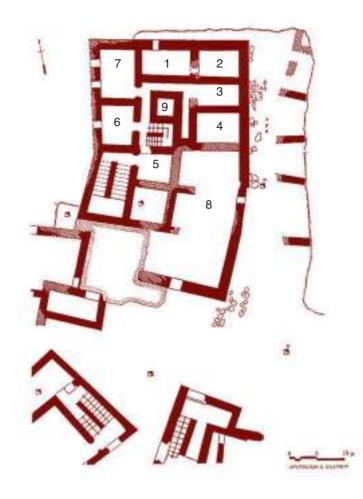












Plan of the House of the Ladies (after C. Palyvou).

BUILDING COMPLEX DELTA

This is the most central of the architectural complexes that have been excavated. It comprises four independent units, distinguished by their entrances and by the double walls at their points of contact.

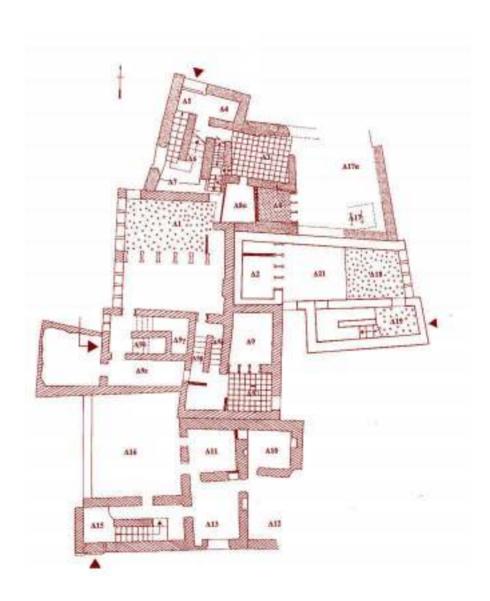
- EAST This unit appears to have been founded on a terrace on the east slope of the promontory.
- UNIT It was a small two-storey building, the central part of which has been destroyed almost entirely by the erosive action of the later torrent.

The need to deal with the debris resulting from the earthquake destruction in the mid-seventeenth century BC led to the formation of the terraced square of the Double Horns, as it was named conventionally after the so called sacral horns uncovered outside the entrance to the building. These double horns, carved in offwhite tuff, seem to have crowned the building, above its entrance, which was on the first terrace of the square.

A singular feature of the east unit is that the main staircase did not begin from the antechamber (Delta 19), as was the rule, but from a kind of landing at the far end of a narrow corridor. This also gave access to the ground-floor apartments (Delta 21, Delta 2, Delta 18a and Delta 18b).

The spacious room Delta 21 had been almost completely destroyed by the action of the later torrent and only a low rectangular built platform (0.60×0.70 m.) survived. This was possibly the base of a wooden support for the ceiling. Light was admitted to the room through a large window at its southwest corner.

The rooms on either side, Delta 2 and Delta 18, were evidently inundated by tephra mud after the volcanic eruption, when a torrent was created. This situation helped to preserve the content of the rooms in good condition: even vessels of organic material, which had been trapped and were found in a state of disintegration or had decomposed, had left their clear imprint in the mud. Thanks to the talent, sensitivity and patience of the experienced conservators of the excavation, imprints such as those of a leather bag or of a wooden barrel have been salvaged. Various pieces of furniture have likewise been retrieved in the form of casts, made by pouring plaster of Paris into the negatives left after they decomposed.



Plan of Building Complex Delta..

The east rooms yielded also fragments of clay tablets inscribed with Linear A script –so far unique at Akrotiri– as well as a cache of clay sealings with impressions from Cretan seal rings of exquisite art (see *Part II*).

In room Delta 2, the mud that flooded it had preserved not only wooden furniture stored there temporarily with a host of clay vessels, but also, *in situ* and in remarkably good condition, the famous *Spring Fresco*.





а.



Complex Delta, East Unit, Room Delta 18:

- *a.* Vessels of organic materials, in state of disintegration, *as found trapped in the volcanic mud.*
- b. Part of a wicker basket, at the moment of its discovery.
- *c. Imprint of a wooden barrel.*
- *d. Imprint of a leather bag.*
- e. Imprint of a small rush (?) basket.





е.



Plaster cast of an intricate tripod table.

Plaster cast of the balustraded armrest of a chair.



Complex Delta, East Unit, Room Delta 18. The plaster cast of the tripod table, in the place where its negative was found.



The southwest corner of the room of the 'Spring Fresco' (Delta 2), during its excavation.



Plaster casts of beds or couches, from the negatives left in the layer of pumice after their decomposition.





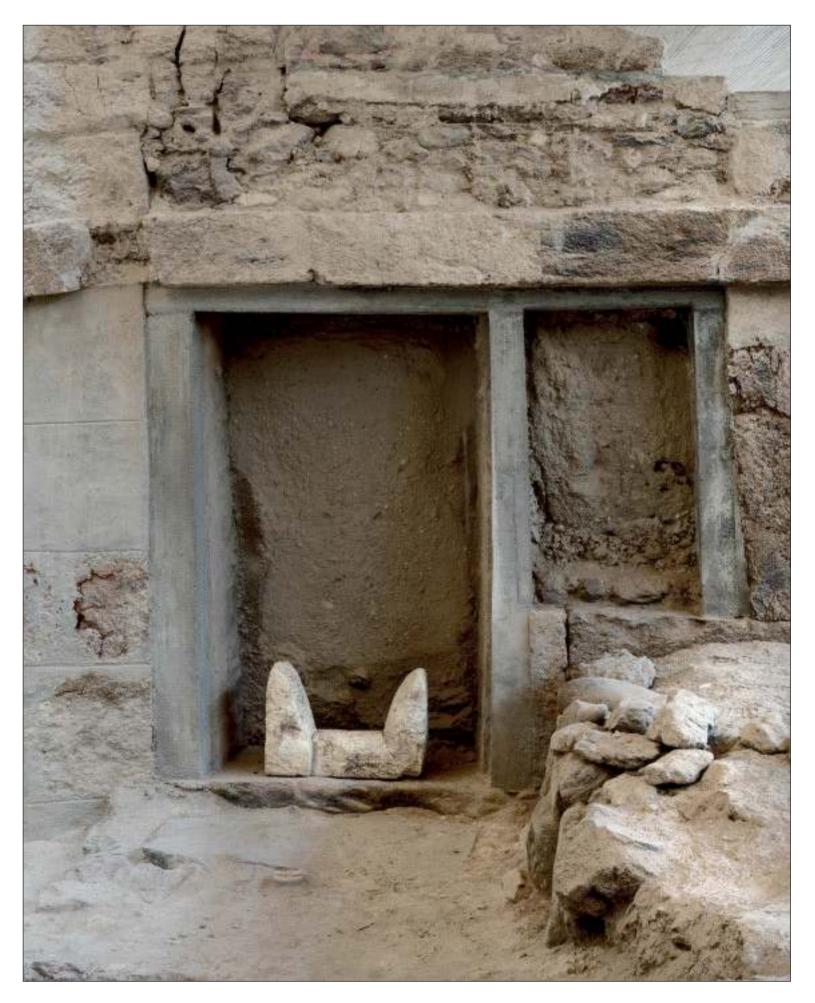
Partial view of the wall-painting of the Lilies, also known as the Spring Fresco, from room Delta 2 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens).



Complex Delta. General view from the north of the East Unit, cut in two by the action of the later torrent.



Complex Delta, East Unit. Terraced Square of the Double Horns.



Complex Delta. The entrance to the East Unit with the stone pair of 'sacral horns'.

NORTH UNIT

The building of the north unit of Complex Delta, with its entrance on the crest of the promontory, extends mainly on the east slope. It too had suffered serious damage from the action of the later torrent. Of its apartments only the ground-floor or basement ones survive, and these at different levels due to the sloping ground.

In the southeast corner of the antechamber (Delta 4) a large jug incised on the shoulder with the Linear A inscription A-RE-SA-NA was found (see Part II), while the stone staircase preserves the vivid picture of the effects of the major earthquake that preceded the eruption. Access to the lower apartments Delta 3, Delta 8, Delta 8a, Delta 17 and Delta 17a, which were used as storerooms, was via a forked service staircase.

Large bronze vessels were found stacked on the floor of room Delta 3, which had been connected by a kind of trapdoor to the underground chamber of an Early Cycladic grave that had been turned into a storeroom/cellar. Pottery vessels were found also in the east part of room Delta 17.



Complex Delta, North Unit. Bronze vessels at the moment of their discovery in room Delta 3.



Complex Delta. The surviving façade of the North Unit, with the entrance.

PAGES 64-65: Complex Delta. General view of the North Unit from the north.



A huge monolithic pithos (h. 1.30 m.) carved in andesitic lava. It was found in the area of Cenotaph Square in front of the façade of the North Unit in Complex Delta. The large mass of hard stone was worked with stone tools of the period, possibly of basalt, emery and pumice. The interior was hollowed and smoothed, keeping the thickness of its walls with mathematical precision. From the details on the exterior, such as the handles and the relief bands, it is deduced that the craftsman copied a clay vessel. This pithos is not only an important technical achievement but also a work of art, thanks to its smooth surfaces, harmonious proportions and appearance overall.





WEST The building of the west unit occupied the most central part of Complex Delta. The westUNIT apartments of it were built on the crest of the headland, while the east ones (Delta 9a-b, Delta 9 and Delta 9.1) were at a lower level on the slopes. The typical entrance onto Triangle

Square had been protected by a later addition of a kind of Porch (*Pylon*). There were two doorways in the antechamber, one leading right into room Delta 9e and the other left into the ground floor rooms Delta 1a and Delta 1.

The staircase led left into a large hall with a polythyron in the middle (Delta 1-Delta 1a), as well as into the room above the Porch. Behind the main staircase was the service staircase, connecting the first storey to the ground-floor spaces Delta 9 and Delta 9.1.

Only the ground-floor rooms Delta 1a, Delta 9 and Delta 9.1 have been explored in the west unit, from which a large quantity of pottery was retrieved. The most impressive find, however, was the skeleton of a pig, lying on the floor of room Delta 9.1. The fact that the lower jaw is missing from the skeleton indicates that at the time of the eruption the carcass was being kept in the room, possibly hanging from a ceiling beam.



Late Cycladic amphora with elliptical mouth. The decoration in the main, upper zone consists of circles with two large monochrome circles on the horizontal diameter, so that the reserved part has the shape of a double axe.



Complex Delta. Plan of the building of the West Unit.

The skeleton of a pig, as found on the floor of room Delta 9.1.

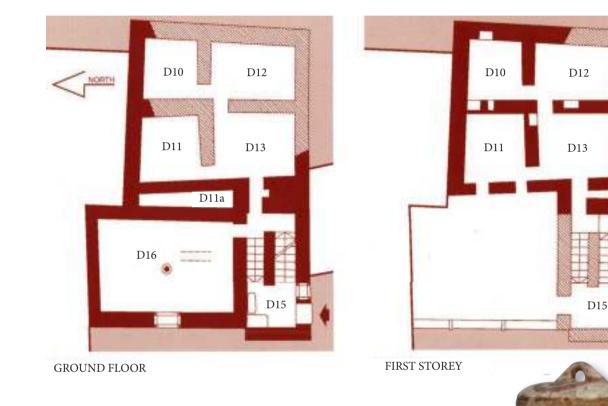


SOUTH The final picture of the building of the south unit is the result of alterations, probably made

UNIT after reorganizing room Delta 16. The antechamber Delta 15, which had the typical façade of a doorway and adjacent window, facing Millhouse Square, led into both room Delta 16

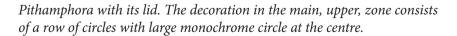
and, via a narrow corridor under the staircase, the ground floors of the east rooms Delta 10, Delta 11, Delta 12 and Delta 13. Access to the corresponding rooms of the upper storey was via the staircase.

The name *Millhouse* was given to the antechamber Delta 15, because of the mill installation inside it, and also to the small square in front of it. Room Delta 16 is included in the category of buildings with special function.



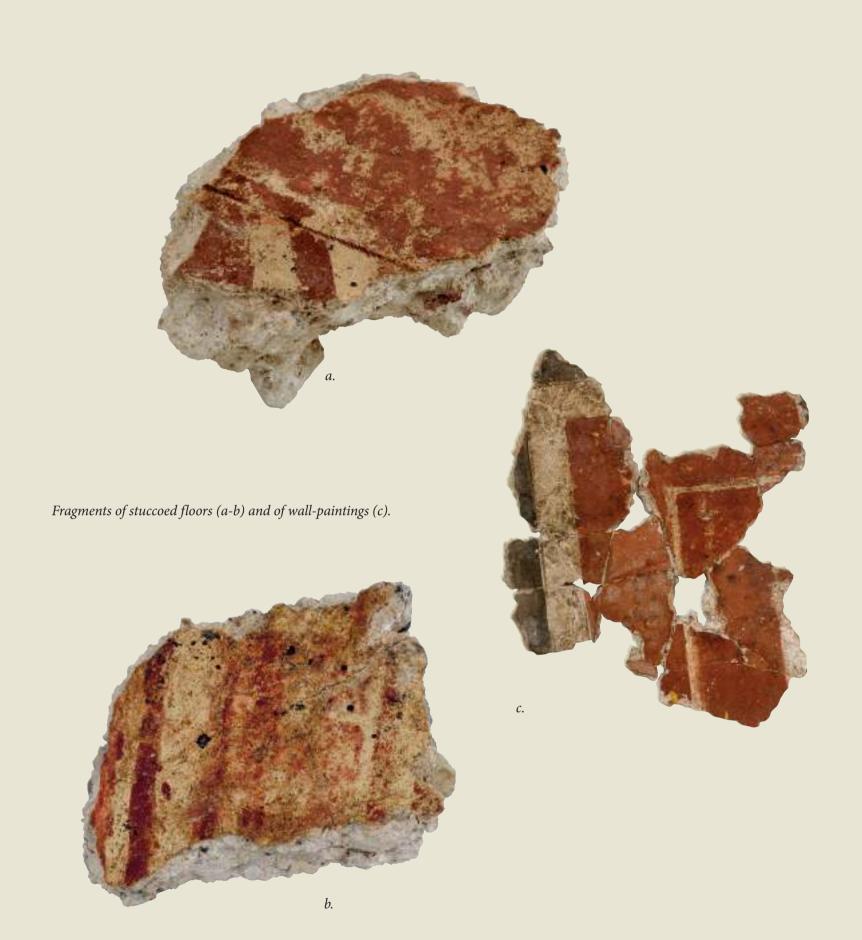
Complex Delta. The façade of the South Unit. ----

Complex Delta. Plan of the building of the South Unit.









Complex Delta, South Unit. Mill installation in the antechamber (Delta 15).

BUILDING COMPLEX BETA

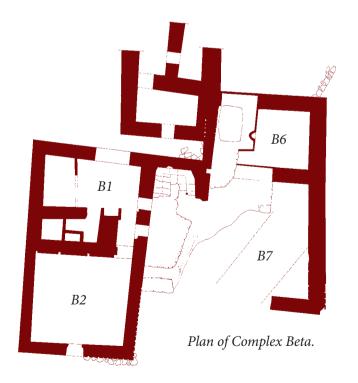
On account of the limited investigation and the degree of preservation of the revealed ruins of Complex Beta it is not possible to form a clear picture of it. The whole of its east wing was destroyed by the action of the torrent, to the extent that not even the position of the entrances of the buildings that comprised Complex Beta can be determined.

From rooms Beta 6 and Beta 7 of the northeast wing of the Complex only the foundations survive. However, in the better-preserved northwest corner of the ground floor, room Beta 6, a heap of fragments from the *Monkeys Fresco* was found, which had probably fallen from the upper storey [see *Part II*].

The northern rooms of the west wing, Beta 7a, Beta 1 and Beta 2, are better preserved, whereas the southern ones, Beta 3 and Beta 4, have been almost razed to the ground.

The arrangement of debris in Telchines Street, after the seismic destruction in the mid-seventeenth century BC, turned the ground-floor rooms Beta 1 and Beta 2 into semi-basements, while at the same time blocking the small windows which admitted light to them. The excavation uncovered a heap of tripod cooking pots, which had been abandoned on the floor of Beta 2, and a pithoi storeroom in Beta 1, unique for its ergonomic organization. The floor of both rooms in the upper storey was paved with flagstones, which had been preserved in quite good condition.

There were very few moveable finds, while the wall-paintings that adorned the walls of Beta 1 are remarkable. Possibly because these paintings covered party walls of pisé, when the earthquake happened the plaster came away and fell onto the stone-paved floor. This meant that despite their fragmentation the frescoes were not pulverized, and thanks to the patience of the late collaborator of the excavation, the painter Kostis Iliakis, they were mapped in detail before being removed. This mapping was of great help to the gifted conservator, the late Tassos Margaritoff, in proceeding to restoring the compositions, which are none other than the *Boxing Children* and the *Antelopes*.

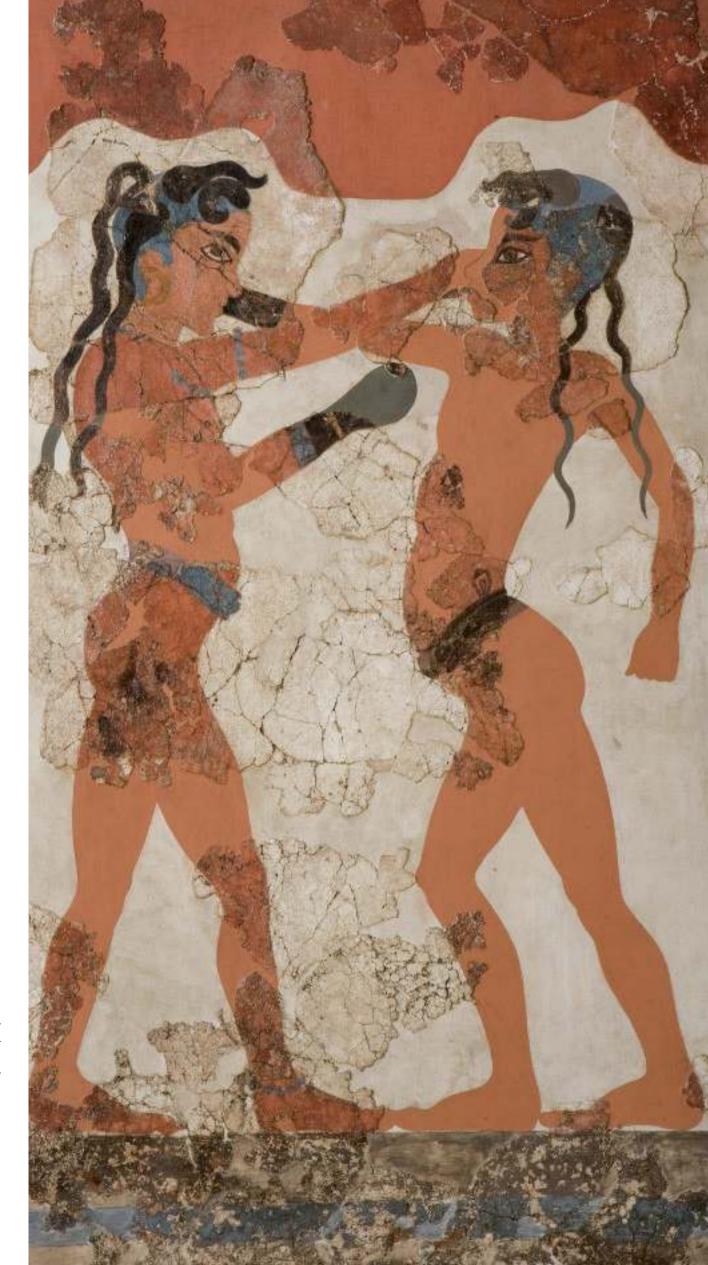


Complex Beta. Wall-painting from room Beta 6, with representation of monkeys climbing in a mountainous landscape.





Complex Beta. The wall-painting of the Antelopes, from room Beta 1 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens).



Complex Beta. The wall-painting of the Boxing Boys, from room Beta 1 (National Archaeological Museum, Athens).



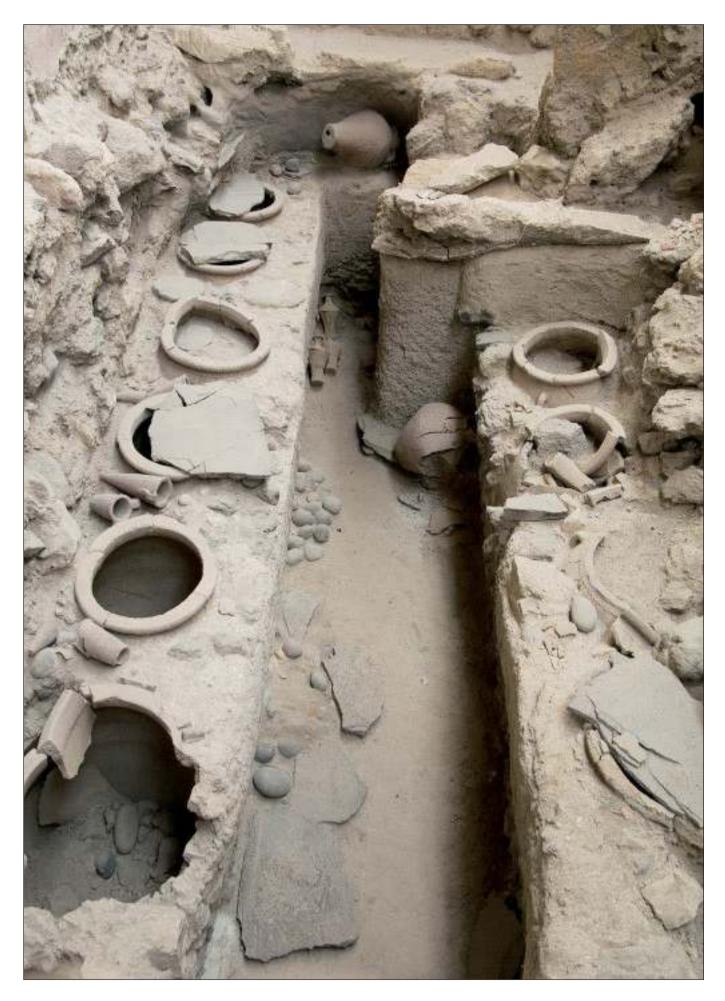


Complex Beta. Tripod cooking pots on the floor of the ground floor/semi-basement room Beta 2.

Clay tripod portable oven.



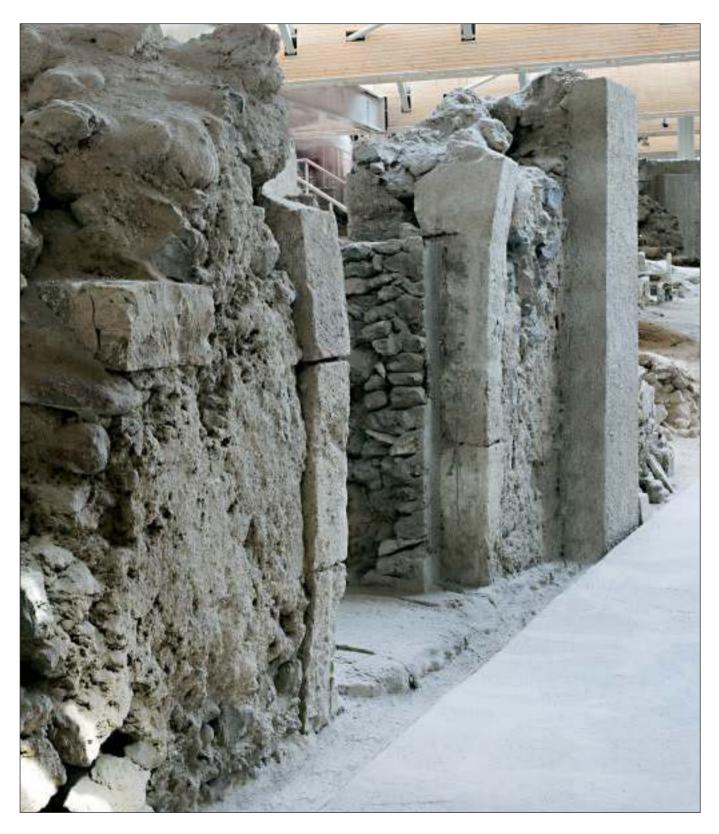
View of the surviving north part of Complex Beta, from the east.



Complex Beta. The storeroom in the ground floor/semi-basement of room Beta 1.

BUILDING GAMMA

This is a building of oblong plan, of which the entrance from Telchines Street and a corridor that led to the staircase to the upper storey have been uncovered, as well as the rooms further south, Gamma 1 and Gamma 2. There are obvious signs of makeshift interventions after the last earthquake that struck the settlement, perhaps so that the building could be used as a base by the salvage teams.



The entrance to Building Gamma, from Telchines Street.

Buildings of special function

The singularity of the buildings of special function is that they have a large window in the ground floor, at a height of less than a metre above the level of the adjacent street. Buildings with such a window are the so-called *Pithoi Storeroom* in Sector Alpha, *Room Delta 16* in Building Complex Delta and the so-called *House of the Anchor* in Triangle Square, which is the only one still unexcavated.

PITHOI STOREROOM

This is the ground floor of a long and narrow building orientated north-south, in Sector Alpha, at the northernmost point in the roofed archaeological site. Marinatos named it the Pithoi Storeroom on the basis of what he saw when he brought it to light in 1967. The cross walls which divide it into three spaces (Alpha 1, Alpha 2, Alpha 3) seem to have impeded the erosive action of the torrent from reaching down to the floor.

The Pithoi Storeroom was entered through a cobbled side street, off Dactyls Street. In the small antechamber an asaminthos ('bathtub') is still *in situ* opposite the doorway, while to the right a narrow blind corridor probably corresponds to the cage of a wooden ladder to the upper storey. Each of the three spaces (A1, A2, A3) of the Pithoi Storeroom was at a different level. The northern and deeper rooms, Alpha 2 and Alpha 3 had small windows and were literally packed with large storage jars (*pithoi*). The large and almost square room Alpha 1 was at about street level and is distinguished by its careful organization. A large tripartite window opened to the east and a narrow doorway in the northeast corner linked the room with the rest of the building. At the centre of Alpha 1, *in situ* impacted in the floor, is the stone base of a wooden column, while a second, loose base next to it probably fell from the upper storey. The low quadrilateral stone-built platform abutting the west wall of the room obviously belongs to a hearth, as evident from the ash and charcoal found on its surface, as well as a large tripod cooking pot and stone grinders found next to it. The stone basin partly sunk into the floor, on the left of the hearth, was perhaps filled with water to quench the fire. In fact, the presence of a clay or stone basin next to the hearth appears to have been the norm in the buildings at Akrotiri.

Arranged along the entire length of the south wall was a row of pithoi, while in front of the window hundreds of loom-weights were found, which had probably fallen from the upper storey. These loom-weights and the large quantities of agricultural produce (flour, barley, pulses, etc.) once stored in the jars –in some of which remains of these were found– led Marinatos to interpret the storeroom as a centre for the distribution of these goods as remuneration for services rendered: by analogy with the functions recorded in the texts of Linear B tablets from Mycenaean palatial centres of Mainland Greece, he proposed that workers passed in front of the large window and received their payment in kind. Another interpretation in the same vein is that in the urban environment at Akrotiri the Pithoi Storeroom functioned as a kind of food shop, perhaps managed by the family that lived in the upper storey of the building.



Large conical pithos. The decoration with aquatic plants (reeds) possibly denotes its use for storing water.





Sector Alpha. General view of the Pithoi Storeroom from the North.



Sector Alpha (Pithoi Storeroom). View of room Alpha 1 from the east.



Sector Alpha (Pithoi Storeroom). The hearth in room Alpha 1, as revealed.

ROOM DELTA 16

The use of room Delta 16 in the south unit of Complex Delta seems to have been similar to that of the Pithoi Storeroom. After the raising of the level of the adjacent street, its floor was about one metre lower than this. The room was entered from the Millhouse by descending some makeshift steps in the southeast corner. Its large dimensions and the heavy roof necessitated the existence of a central wooden column, the stone base of which is impacted in the floor.

The sill of the large window onto Telchines Street outside is only 10 cm. above street level. Two holes on either side of the lintel of the window, framed by dressed stones, seem to have been sockets for the beams of a protective shelter or shade. A few centimetres higher and incorporated in the wall are two projecting clay waterspouts, the position of which documents the level of the roof, from which they shed the rainwater onto the street.

Some four hundred unused clay vessels were found in Delta 16, most of them intact and sorted by categories, according to their function, quality or provenance, along with a few stone vases of exceptional quality. This picture led to its interpretation as a shop, through which the said vessels were made available. In this case, the large window, securing protection from rain or sun, functioned as a kind of counter, over which transactions were made. Possibly the 'shop' and the mill installation in Delta 15 were run by the occupants of the upper storey of the building of the south unit.

Public edifices, private houses, communal storerooms and/or 'shops', are among the few buildings that have been so far investigated in the prehistoric site at Akrotiri on Thera. These buildings, compared with the still unexplored part of the city, constitute a very small sample. However, through study of their architecture, equipment and mural paintings, we have gained a picture of the shell in which a creative community was living and thriving in the first half of the seventeenth century BC. This picture can be filled out by presenting representative examples of moveable finds exhibited in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera, to which Part II of the book is dedicated.



Small clay tripod cooking pot, probably for beverages.

FOLLOWING PAGES: The terrace with the plaster-of-Paris bed casts and the South Unit of Complex Delta (rooms Delta 15 and Delta 16) from the west.







Imported four-handled pithos with low neck, funnel mouth and flat base. In the wide, main decorative zone on the shoulder are large rosettes between the handles, while of the dense bands on the lower body two are connected by small leaves, as if imitating a myrtle branch.



Imported three-handled pithos with low neck, funnel mouth and flat base. The upper zone is decorated with spirals, below which are zones of tortoise-shell pattern.



Four-handled pithos of Cretan provenance, with low neck, funnel mouth and ring base. In the main decorative zone, on the shoulder, are double-axes framed by plant motifs.



Imported four-handled pithos with low neck, funnel mouth and ring base. The dense decoration in zones consists of geometric and schematic plant motifs.



PART II

THE MUSEUM OF PREHISTORIC THERA

The building and its history

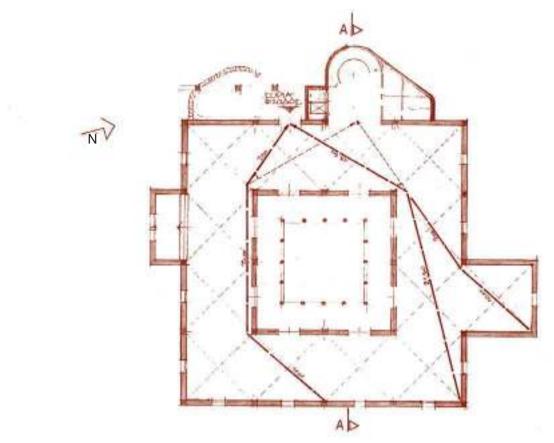
As soon as excavations commenced at Akrotiri, in 1967, the lack of a special museum devoted to the island's prehistory became apparent. In 1968, in order to house the finds from the Akrotiri excavations, the Theran ship-owner Evangelos Nomikos made over to the excavator, Professor Spyridon Marinatos, the plot of land on the slope to the east of the Greek Orthodox cathedral (metropolis) of Phira. Straight away, Marinatos engaged the architect Ioannis Koumanoudis (1930-2010), Reader to the Chair of Architectural Design at the Technical University of Athens, to prepare the plans, on the basis of which construction of the museum building began in 1969. There is no denying that both the design and implementation of the project were premature, given that the excavation was still in its infancy and it was impossible to foresee the quantity, the nature and the dimensions of finds that would be brought to light over the years.

The unique wall-paintings, which from the early 1970s began to inundate the on-site conservation laboratories, led Marinatos to envisage a great Museum of Theran Art, and so the idea of a museum of the island's prehistory took a back seat. Soon, the wall-paintings being unearthed began to be taken to Athens for conservation, in the laboratories of the Byzantine Museum and of the Directorate of Conservation of Antiquities and Works of Art of the Ministry of Culture. Given Marinatos's position and power as Inspector General of Antiquities, and his role in the decision-making process, it is hardly surprising that after these moves works on erecting the Museum of Prehistoric Thera ceased and the building remained as a worksite for almost thirty years. Furthermore, Marinatos's pipe-dream of a Museum of Theran Art in Athens was never realized.

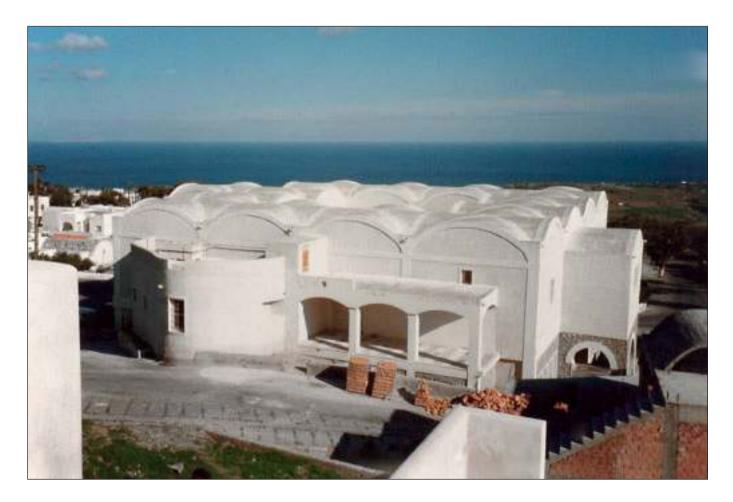
Koumanoudis, having in the past studied the traditional vaulted-roof churches of the island, considered it expedient to incorporate features of this architecture in the museum building, as can be seen in the cross-vaults of the roof. It should be noted that the choice of the barrel vault for roofing all manner of buildings in Santorini was an economical solution devised by traditional masons to cope with the problem of the island's lack of timber – and hence the lack of roof beams. On the other hand, the inexhaustible sources of Theran earth (pozzuolana and pumice) and volcanic stone, together with the use of slaked lime, enabled these resourceful builders to erect not only inexpensive but also anti-seismic constructions.

Due to the slope of the ground, each storey of the Museum was not only connected by an internal staircase but also had its own entrance. The main entrance to the building, on the west side of the third storey,

Olive leaves trapped in lava.



Plan of the third storey (after I. Koumanoudis).



General view of the Museum building from the southwest. Visible are the roof with cross-vaults, the open portico and the entrance to the second storey.

led directly into the exhibition space, without a lobby to protect it from the strong winds and the dust they carry. The doorways connecting the exhibition space to the open atrium created the same problem. However, given that traditional masons dealt with the blinding sunlight of the Aegean islands by constructing small windows, the existence of an atrium in the museum building was both problematical and restrictive.

Another disadvantageous feature in the new building was the spiral staircase connecting the two upper storeys, which because of the very narrow inside end of the steps was dangerous for the two-way circulation of personnel and visitors.

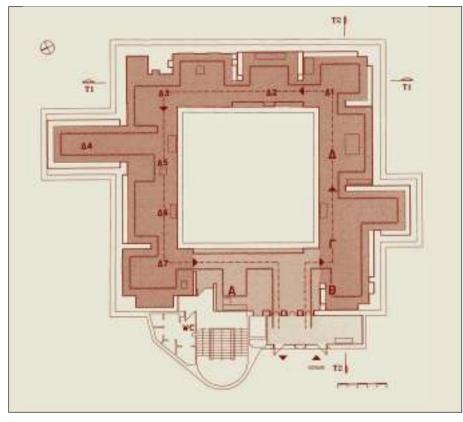
As has been said, for almost three decades (1970-1999) the museum building was left as a worksite, easy prey for shrewd and politically well-connected contractors who never ceased to find 'faults' that needed to be rectified. For example, the technical services of the Ministry of Culture, which were managing the worksite, at some moment ascertained that the central-heating system with radiators was old-fashioned. Thus, even though the building had not been officially delivered by the Directorate for the Execution of Museum Projects to the 21st Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities for use, the system was replaced by installing another, with warm-air vents. But in order to accommodate the large ducts for the new central-heating system, the height of the ceiling of the lower storey was reduced by 1.50 metres, effectively rendering it useless as an exhibition space. At some other moment it was decided that the floor of the interior, which was paved with large slabs of Pentelic marble, did not fit in with the island environment, and so it was removed and replaced with 'kitchen' tiles. Of course, the archaeologists had no voice in these matters, and, needless to say, the author has failed in all his attempts to elicit from the powers that be any information on the cost of these... improvements!

After mounting pressure from the local population and their elected representatives, witnesses to this interminable farce, eventually the time came for the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, with Minister Elisavet Papazoi, to decide on the operation of the Museum. In 1999, the Ephorate of Antiquities for the Cyclades was finally authorized to proceed to the organization of the exhibition. It was then that the problems mentioned above, and many more, were ascertained and measures had to be taken quickly to deal with them.

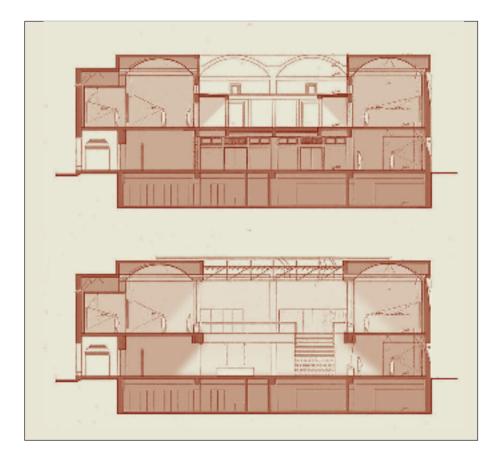
With funding from the Ioannis Boutaris & Son Winery, the Greek architect Agni Kouvela, well-known *inter alia* for her museum projects, prepared a preliminary study on behalf of the Archaeological Society at Athens. In this she proposed radical interventions to the building, to improve its functionality. Critical among these was the construction of a large staircase, unifying the two upper levels of the museum and incorporating the atrium –essentially through its abolition– into a single exhibition space. This would have given the opportunity of presenting many aspects of art and society at Akrotiri, through the appropriate exhibits and in natural light, and would also have solved practical problems, such as visitors' access to the rest rooms, which are in the second storey.

Unfortunately, this solution was not accepted by the Technical Services of the Ministry of Culture, for reasons unbeknown to us. Thus, the exhibition was restricted to the third storey of the museum, 600 sq. m. in area.

Thanks to the inventive solutions of A. Kouvela, the interior of a problematical 1970s building was remodelled to host an exhibition for the twenty-first century.



The plan of the exhibition space, with the thematic areas marked (after A. Kouvela).



The basic interventions were:

i) The open portico in front of the entrance to the building was closed, so as to create the necessary lobby separating the outside world from the exhibition space and protecting it from the dust which is ever-present in the atmosphere of the windswept island.

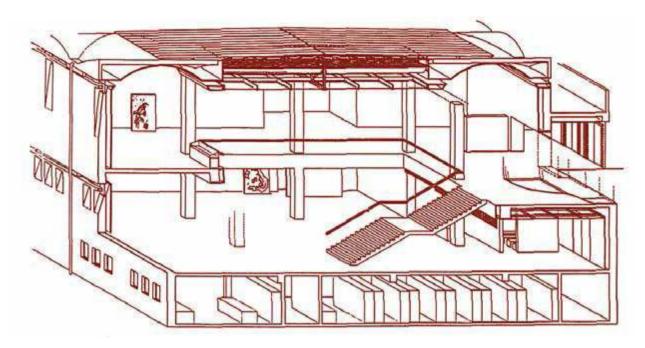
ii) The spiral staircase was replaced by a staircase with straight flights of steps with landings between. This change was considered necessary to ensure the easy and safe access of visitors to the toilet facilities in the second storey, which was defunct as an exhibition space.

iii) The excessive height of the third storey, due to the vaulted roofing, was reduced by constructing a false ceiling, and the kitchen tiles on the floor were covered by uniform neutral industrial flooring.

iv) Equally ingenious is the architect's design of the showcases along the length of the walls in such a way that not only are the exhibits displayed to advantage but also are clearly visible to all visitors, including children and persons with impaired mobility.

The proposed rectilinear staircase which would have united the two levels of the Museum in to a single exhibition space (after A. Kouvela).

The entrance to the Museum after the conversion of the open portico into a closed lobby.



Agni Kouvela's architectural proposal for the unification of the two upper storeys of the building as a single exhibition space. The concept was rejected.



The philosophy of the exhibition

The exhibition is consistent with the Statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), as of 1995: 'A museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment'.

The quantity, the quality and the excellent condition of the finds from Akrotiri obviously demanded a much larger space in which to be exhibited to advantage. The wall-paintings in particular, with their unprecedented preservation and the variety of subjects they depict, were indeed a challenge and would undoubtedly be the most impressive category of exhibits. So, the dilemma arose as to which category of finds should be selected for greater enhancement and projection in the limited exhibition space available. Preference for the certainly impressive and unique wall-painting compositions would indubitably satisfy the afficianados of ancient art. However, because these wall-paintings would take up a very large part of the exhibition space, they would seriously limit the possibility of presenting other activities which would show the cultural development of Theran society from the first traces of human presence on the island until the early phase of the Late Bronze Age when life came to an abrupt end, brought about by the eruption of the volcano. In the end, the second option was selected as the more educational.

The museographic study was prepared in close collaboration with A. Kouvela and the 21st Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of the Cyclades.^{*} The entire exhibition gallery, of Π -shape plan, has been divided in thematic Areas (A-D), according to the content of the respective showcases.



^{*} The design and realization of the exhibition is the result of fruitful collaboration with the architect A. Kouvela and the archaeologists M. Marthari and Ch. Televantou, then members of the 21st Ephorate of Antiquities for the Cyclades. However, unseen heroes in this effort were the first-class conservators of antiquities and works of art of the Akrotiri Excavations, the above Ephorate, and the National Archaeological Museum. Warm thanks are expressed to all.







Area B: lavas with inclusions of olive branches and palm fronds.



The Exhibition

In the antechamber to the exhibition (Area A) a map of the island with the known prehistoric sites marked and a concise text on the chronicle of the Akrotiri excavation introduce visitors to the exhibition, which begins from the right. In Area B is a brief presentation of the island's geology and transformations, until it acquired the form it has today. Specimens of plant inclusions in lavas 50-60,000 years old, displayed in a special showcase, document not only the climatic conditions, but also that the olive and various species of palm trees existed on Thera thousands of years before man's presence there.

In Area C, evidence of the island's cultural history from the Neolithic Age down to the end of the Middle Cycladic period (*c*. 4500-1650 BC) is presented. As mentioned already, works on the replacement of the old shelter at the archaeological site at Akrotiri had only just begun when the museum opened, and the evidence from there of these periods was still limited. This picture has now changed radically, as is discussed in Part III of this album.

THE NEOLITHIC AND THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

Systematic excavations of Neolithic settlements in the Cyclades, from which we have documented information, have been conducted on the islet of Saliagos, between Paros and Antiparos, as well as at the sites of Ftelia on Mykonos and Strophilas on Andros. A few potsherds and very few intact pots, most of them sporadic or chance finds, give us a faint picture of man's presence on Thera from about the mid-fifth millennium BC.

Our knowledge of the following period, the Early Cycladic (3rd millennium BC) comes overwhelmingly from cemeteries, at least for the earliest phases. The white marble, in which almost all the creations of Early Cycladic sculpture have been carved, is absent from the rocks of Thera. On the contrary, the island has a variety of igneous rocks, which were also a challenge to 'lovers of beauty yet without extravagance', as Pericles said of the Athenians (Thucydides 40.1). Truly, the scant samples we have from the early phases of the Early Cycladic period (*c*. 3000-2700 BC) are sufficient to show the Therans' ideological affinity with the rest of the Cycladic islanders and their formidable technical skills. Although not included in the exhibition, for practical reasons, a huge monolithic pithos (h. 1.30 m.) carved from andesitic lava belongs in this category of finds.

The majority of exhibits from the Early Cycladic I period (*c*. 3000-2700 BC) come from the so-called cenotaph in the square named after it at the site of Akrotiri, where these artefacts had been gathered after the abolition of the Early Cycladic cemetery (*Part I*). It seems that of the grave goods removed from the rock-cut burial chambers only the marble ones were preserved, while the poorly-fired clay vessels have not survived. The marble beaker, a fortuitous find from the area of Phira and the two early variations of the collared jar, with a sea-urchin-shaped body set on a solid conical foot and an almost cylindrical neck, are among the loveliest specimens of early marble carving in the Cyclades.





Small marble schematic figurine.

Neolithic clay skyphos.





Examples of Neolithic pottery.





Contemporary with these marble vessels are the anthropomorphic figurines, which due to the taphonomic conditions are unfortunately badly eroded. Nevertheless, they are among the most naturalistic figures created by Early Cycladic art. Known conventionally as figurines of Plastiras type, after the cemetery site in northeast Paros where they were first identified, these figurines are rarely more than 15 cm. high and represent standing females or males, distinguished by many anatomical details sculpted with plasticity on the face and the body. As a rule, the forearms rest above the abdomen in such a way that their fingertips touch. Deviations from this rule on the placement of the arms seem to have led to the so-called 'precanonical' type, of which figurine no. 6821 is a representative example. This figurine is dated to the transition from the Early Cycladic I to the Early Cycladic II period (*c.* 2800 BC).

By coincidence, on the day the so-called cenotaph was being excavated, news reached us that on the previous night the Paros Archaeological Museum had been burgled and the Plastiras type figurines had been stolen. This theft was particularly painful for the author, as he had conducted the excavation that had brought them to light in the Early Cycladic cemetery at Plastiras, after which the type was named. So, readers can imagine our feelings when, a few hours later, figurines of this type, and indeed in the varieties we described were uncovered and destined to enrich another Cycladic museum. The sad fact is, however, that the stolen figurines from Paros have not yet been located.

The 'canonical' type owes its name to the fact that with its standardized diagnostic traits it was the basic form which held sway mainly during the early phases of the Early Cycladic II period (*c*. 2700-2500 BC). With a wide range of variations, this type was widely diffused, even beyond the Cyclades, frequently accompanied by superb marble bowls.

Two of the best-preserved 'canonical' figurines from Akrotiri are displayed in the Museum: the less well preserved is of the early Kapsala variety, while the second (no. 2684), in a special showcase, is of the widely disseminated Spedos variety.

The development of metallurgy and metalworking in the Cyclades dramatically accelerated developments in the history of the islands, contributing not only to the improvement of living conditions but also to the proliferation of economic activities. One such activity was boat-building, in which advances were made at least from the mid-third millennium BC. So, seafaring and trade became dynamic sectors in the economy of the islands. Obviously these developments influenced the islanders' behaviour, both in regard to dealing with everyday problems and in the ideological sphere. To my mind, these changes are reflected in the exhibits representing the two centuries or so after the mid-third millennium BC (*c*. 2500-2300 BC). For example, the marble vessels are clearly lacking in originality and robustness, seemingly soulless imitations of earlier models. And the figurines become increasingly abstract and schematic until they finally disappear.

The pottery in the next showcase, with its striking technical traits –particularly the lustrous black or brown surface due to burnishing– and vase shapes, points to contacts between Thera and the Northeast Aegean islands, where this ware, with obvious strong influences from the Troas, flourished. Known in archaeological parlance as pottery of the 'Kastri Group', after the respective site in Syros, it spread gradually to the southern islands, where various distinctive vase types were copied, such as the cup with one handle ('tankard') or two handles, the so-called *depas amphikypellon* and the beak-spouted jug. The relations between the settlement at Akrotiri and the Greek Mainland are attested by one of the masterpieces of Early Helladic



Small cairn, on top of which, arranged in the shape of an Early Cycladic grave, was deposited an assemblage of Early Cycladic marble figurines and vessels, which usually accompanied the dead as funerary offerings. It is to these that the construction owes its conventional name as 'Cenotaph'.

pottery, the 'sauceboat' with aerodynamic shape and eggshell-thin walls, and excellently fired. The pottery that marks the end of the Early Cycladic period and presages the transition to the Middle Bronze Age, the Middle Cycladic period, comes from the islet of Christiana, southwest of Thera, and is exhibited in the left part of the showcase. The jugs with globular body and narrow mouth are an innovation due to advances in pyrotechnology: the controlled firing conditions in the kilns emboldened vase-makers to create vessels of closed shapes.



Early Cycladic marble female figurine of the so-called Plastiras type. The head and the feet are missing: front and back view.



The Plastiras type figurines are the most naturalistic human figures created in Early Cycladic sculpture. As a rule of small dimensions, they represent standing female or male figures with many anatomical details. Their arms bend at the elbows and the forearms, on the chest, are carved with the hands touching at the finger tips.



Early Cycladic marble female figurine of Plastiras type, with the upper arms sculpted in the round and the forearms in a position presaging the figurines of the so-called 'Precanonical' type.



Early Cycladic marble male figurine of Plastiras type, intact: front and back view.





Early Cycladic marble female figurine of Plastiras type. Missing are the neck, the head and the legs from below the knees. The holes indicate that these parts had been broken in antiquity: front and back view.



Figurines of Canonical type generally represent female figures and have the following features: a) almost triangular head without sculpted facial *features, except the relief* nose. Details on the face seem to have been executed with pigments, *b*) *chest with slight modelling* of the breasts, *c) forearms folded below the* chest, with the right under the left and without indication of the fingers on the hands, d) incised pubic triangle, e) deep groove between the legs, which flex slightly at the knees, *f*) *feet with downward-slanting* soles and clearly defined toes.

Early Cycladic marble female figurine of 'Precanonical' type. Missing are the right leg below the knee and the left leg from mid-thigh: front view.



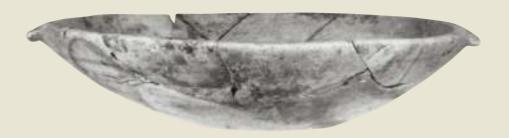
Early Cycladic marble female figurine of Canonical type, of the Kapsala variety.



Early Cycladic I marble collared jar.



Beak-spouted askos with incised decoration of groups of vertical lines.



Early Cycladic II marble bowl.



Depas amphikypellon' of the 'Kastri Group', with black burnished slip.

Early Cycladic 'sauceboat' with black slip.



Early Cycladic marble schematic figurine.



One-handled cup of the 'Kastri Group'.



Two-handled cup of the 'Kastri Group', with black burnished slip.

THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

Developments at Akrotiri during the Middle Cycladic period (2000-1650 BC) are presented in the rest of Area C. The pottery of the early phases keeps some technical traits of the preceding period, such as the dark-coloured clay and the incised decoration, while with generalization of the use of the potter's wheel the repertoire of vase shapes was enriched with types that responded to the needs that arose each time. The askos is a vessel of ergonomic design, which seems to have been devised to meet the growing needs of maritime trade: its closed conical top, which withstands the greater pressure exerted by the disturbance of the liquid content (e.g. olive oil, wine) and the mouth at the side considerably reduced the danger of it blowing its stopper. In fact, it is to this placement of the mouth at the side, which recalls its position on the wineskin (Gr. *askos*), that the vessel owes its name.

The use of light-coloured and purer Melian clay, which is easy to model and fires well, enabled the production of askoi of much greater capacity. The placement of the mouth at the side was an additional advantage of this vessel, permitting the entry of air as it was tilted slightly and thus facilitating the outflow of the liquid.

The improved vase-making technology and the white surface of the vessels obviously contributed to the further enlargement of the repertoire of shapes, as well as to the development of painted decoration. It was perhaps through these efforts that the excellent-quality vases of the 'Cycladic White' category emerged, on which the surface is divided into zones with limited painted decoration of simple motifs.

Experience from the use of the askos probably led to the creation of the jug with back-sloping neck. It seems that with the early jugs of this type the organization of the decoration in zones was established. The upper zone around the neck and the lower around the base are narrow and emphasized by bands, while in the wide middle zone the main subject of the decoration is developed, as in the example with the pairs of oblique lines forming a zigzag motif.

The archaeological evidence shows that several vase-makers experimented with this type. In the eyed variation the depiction of eyes on the sides of the beaked spout perhaps imitates the head of a bird, while small cruciform rosettes scattered in the main zone are the basic decoration. On the other example on display the decoration in the main zone is richer, consisting of double spirals in vertical arrangement, small dots corresponding to the angles of imagined lozenges and quatrefoil rosettes of fine monochrome petals with linear outline.

By adding rudimentary breasts the potters created vessels possibly used for ritual acts, precursory forms of the later so-called nippled ewer. The example of the ewer with rudimentary breasts, carinated shoulder and geometric decoration of groups of three vertical lines and pairs of stippled rosettes between them seems to be an early attempt. On the contrary, the large eyed nippled ewer seems to mark the transition to the Late Cycladic period. Drinking vases with similar decoration or without any decoration are also included in the table vessels.

The enrichment of the vase-painter's palette with lustrous red pigment and the limited use of added white for details imparted a sense of polychromy to the so-called bichrome ware, and perhaps motivated representational decoration. The vase-painters' particular preference for the swallow and the dolphin perhaps bespeaks a corresponding popularity of these animals in Theran society. In the Aegean the swallow heralds the season of the year in which sea voyages are safest (from spring to autumn), while the dolphin is the constant companion of the sailor at sea, as echoed in later times in the myth of the kitharode Arion.

Also observed in the Middle Cycladic pottery of Thera are the first attempts to depict natural environments, which are enlivened by the interpolation of animals, as the depiction of dolphins on a large cylindrical pithos shows. The long sides of the so-called kymbe, an open oblong vessel, were treated as a kind of frieze for representing animals or plants of the same species.

The narrative disposition discerned in these representations reaches its climax in the unique ovoid pithos in the bichrome style, which for practical reasons is exhibited in Area D4 of the museum. Each of its two sides, which are roughly delimited by the horizontal handles, hosts a different subject. On one side, within a mountainous landscape with Aegean vegetation is the dominant figure of a bull, flanked by two caprids, a scene that is totally static. In contrast, on the other side of the vessel the representation is dedicated to the sea and the sky, and is filled with the movement of seabirds (seagulls?) flying upwards to the right, as if startled by the sudden appearance of the dolphins. It is as if with the scenes the vase-painter endeavoured to represent the world of the land, the sea and the sky, as he perceived it.

Vase-painting is the main, if not the only, medium that reflects the concepts and attitudes of the Middle Bronze Age Therans. Clay vessels with their impressive decoration seem to have developed into prestige objects which every prosperous family of merchants and mariners strove to acquire. The high demand apparently contributed to the mass production of vases, alluding to the egalitarian spirit of a society in which all members had access to excellent quality and exquisitely decorated pottery, exactly as happened about one thousand years later in the Athenian Democracy, with the black-glaze, black-figure and red-figure vases.

What is remarkable about the pictorial painted pottery of the Middle Cycladic period is the limited presence of the human figure, which when it appears is exclusively male, whereas in Early Cycladic sculpture the female figure predominates. Both cases may be seen as reflecting cultural perceptions on the woman's role and status in society. In the small Early Cycladic mixed-farming communities women were perhaps extolled as creators of life, managers of the household and guarantors of family cohesion. In the proto-urban maritime centres of the Middle Cycladic period, in which activities such as trade and seafaring involved the menfolk, the male figure comes into its own on vases.

Regardless of the interpretations of the phenomenon, the possibilities vase-painting offered for depicting the human figure had evidently been exhausted by the end of the Middle Cycladic period and the Therans had to seek other means and media of expression. The wide-scale introduction of lime plaster for coating the inside walls of the houses in the Late Bronze Age apparently provided the answer to their artistic inquiries. For it was through wall-paintings that at least the affluent families of the now cosmopolitan harbour town at Akrotiri were able to project their social status and prestige. In this art the human figure, irrespective of age or gender, was literally apotheosized.

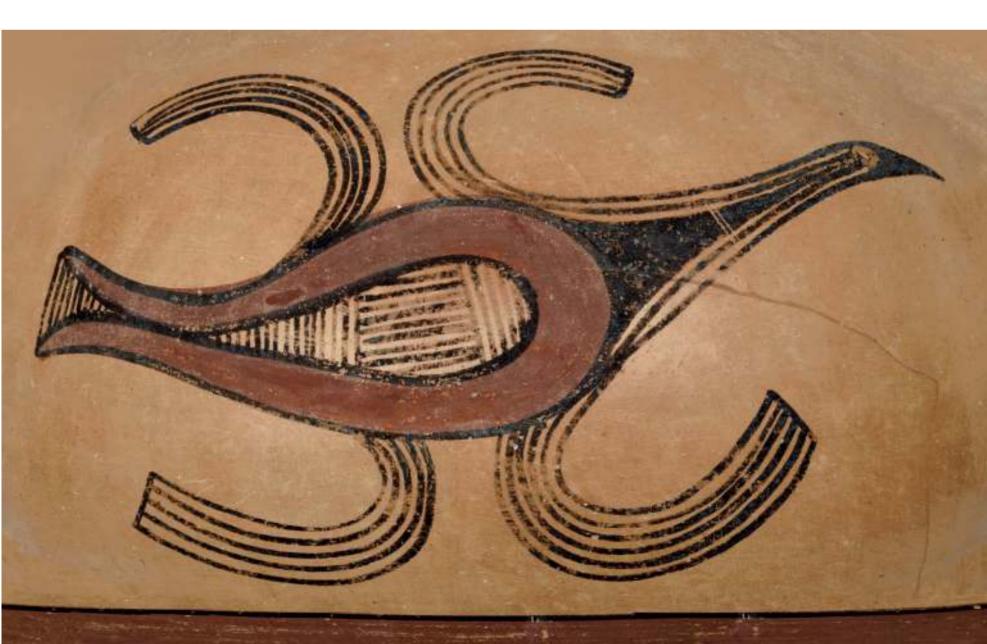
The exhibition in Area C concludes with samples of the products of Middle Cycladic metallurgy and metalworking, which covered domestic needs for artefacts such as bronze fish-hooks, chisels, mallet, double axe, and lead weights for fishing nets.



Early nippled ewer of globular form, decorated in the bichrome style with representation of swallows.

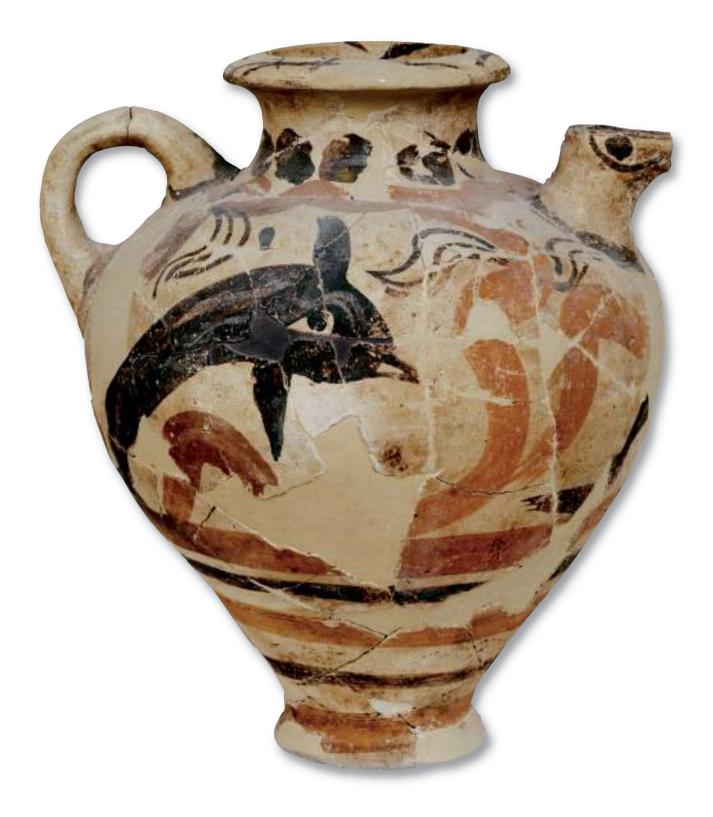


Middle Helladic globular jug with bichrome decoration of schematic birds.





The four sides of a Middle Cycladic eyed ewer in the bichrome style, with representation of dolphins on the seabed.



Large jug with eyed beak spout, funnel mouth and narrow ring base, decorated in the bichrome style. Depicted in the middle (main) zone are dolphins in a marine environment.



Both sides of a Middle Cycladic eyed jug in the bichrome style with representation of dolphins on the seabed.







Cups decorated only on the side to the right of the handle, known as 'panelled cups'.









Cups with geometric and vegetal decoration.





Globular bridge-spouted jug with complex of spirals as the main decoration.



Globular bridge-spouted jug with ring base and white-slipped surface on which the main decoration consists of individual flowers with long stem.



between branches interlinked in spiral arrangement.



Skyphos with black slip and white painted decoration of myrtle branches.





Ovoid pithos in the bichrome style with scenes of narrative character. Represented on one side is a landscape dominated by the static scene of a bull flanked by two caprids.





On the other side of the pithos is a seascape in which seabirds fly away, perhaps startled by the appearance of dolphins.



Sherd of a large bichrome-style vase. Preserved is the face of a male figure in front of a flowering plant.



The two sides of a kymbe in bichrome style with representation of swallows.





Kymbe in the bichrome style with representation of wild goats.



Kymbe in the bichrome style with representation of dolphins.



Kymbe in the bichrome style with representation of dolphins on the seabed.



Kymbe in the bichrome style with representation of crocuses.



Amphora in the bichrome style with the upper (main) zone divided into panels.



Slender jugs with beaked spout, long neck, wide shoulder and narrow base. The imitation of a bird head is heightened by the eyes on either side of the spout. The rest of the dense decoration consists of horizontal bands dividing the surface of the vase into zones of differing width. The tangent single spirals described by double line give the impression of running spiral pattern. The close similarity between these vases, in form and decoration, suggests that they are probably works of the same potter/painter.



AKROTIRI IN ITS CULTURAL HEYDAY

Exhibited in all the rest of the Museum are examples, selected from the enormous quantity (a few hundred, out of tens of thousands) of the diverse finds recovered from the buildings of the final phase of life in the prehistoric city, before it vanished from the face of the earth. These objects affirm the high civilization which is evinced by the architecture, urban planning and infrastructure at Akrotiri. Each exhibition space hosts a thematic unit which spotlights an aspect of life in the once thriving city.

Displayed in Area D are the general plan of the archaeological site and a scale model of the part of the city that has been uncovered. These help visitors to form a picture of the monuments from which the exhibits come, even if they have not yet visited the archaeological site of Akrotiri.

Area D1 hosts the thematic unit entitled 'AN URBAN CENTRE' and is devoted to the equipment-chattels of the Theran houses. As noted in Part I, the excavated area represents only a small sector of the prehistoric city, which seems to coincide with its centre at the time it was buried.

Furniture made from perishable organic materials has not survived in the ruins. However, wherever pieces had been trapped in the volcanic ejecta, their gradual disintegration led to the preservation of their imprints or negatives. Such negatives are in effect moulds from which the furniture can be retrieved in the form of plaster casts. In those cases where the negatives were left in the pumice, the imprint is less exact and the casts are therefore rough, as is the case with the beds that had been taken out of the ruined houses after the earthquake and were piled ready to be taken away from the city when the eruption began and buried them. However, in the cases where the furniture was trapped in the volcanic ash, the imprints preserve details which can be seen clearly in the casts. The small intricately-carved tripod table and the elegant armrest are casts of this category, through which, once again, the prosperity and the good taste of the inhabitants of Late Bronze Age Thera are confirmed.

Also exhibited in the same thematic unit are vessels for everyday use, which covered the needs of each household and the living conditions of its members. The large stone or clay lamps, for example, with their weight ensured the stability demanded by their use as table vessels. On the contrary, the small clay or stone lamps with handle at the back, facilitated movement in the dark apartments of the houses.

The sanitary installations of the houses, connected directly with the drainage-sewerage network of the city, obviously did not protect the rest of the house from bad odours. The situation was improved by burning aromatic substances, as seen in the wall-painting of the so-called 'Young Priestess' from the West House (see *Part III*). Vessels used as incense-burners or fireboxes are also displayed in the exhibition.

Among the vessels in Theran kitchens were ergonomically designed tripod cooking pots of assorted sizes, for preparing food and beverages. The Therans' inventiveness is attested by portable vessels such as the tripod oven, on the specially coated top surface of which pies or flatbread were baked. The pair of firedogs or andirons is specially designed for broiling on small skewers (*souvlaki*). Both of these portable vessels could be easily used even aboard ship.

From the food residues that were preserved in the storerooms of the houses or have been identified in specialist analyses, a quite clear picture can be formed of the Therans' dietary habits in the Late Bronze Age. Cereals, barley and more rarely wheat, and pulses such as vetch, pea, *fava* (split pea) and lentils, were among the crops that the Therans cultivated on their land. The recovered crushed olive stones suggest that olive oil was produced, which was stored in special pithoi with a spigot near the base.

From their imprints inside a storage jar we know that the plant foodstuffs included almonds, while the consumption of figs –fresh or dried– is documented by their seeds in the sediment of the city's sewers.

Source of proteins for the Therans was the meat of domesticated animals, mainly sheep and goat (80%), pig (19%) and cattle (1%), as emerges from the bones that have been found, as well as from pictorial art. The finding of the shells of snails of Cretan provenance inside storage jars shows that the cosmopolitan consumer society of the Therans also enjoyed comestibles imported from elsewhere. Proteins were obtained too from fish and various molluscs, remains of which are found frequently inside or outside the houses.

The depiction of bunches of grapes in vase-painting points to the cultivation of the vine, which is documented also by grape pips in the sewers and charcoal from vine wood. Equipment from a grape-pressing installation (*lenos*) attests moreover the production of wine, which was stored in pithoi similar to those used for olive oil. So, wine 'warmed the cockles of the Therans' heart', at least since the end of the Middle Bronze Age!

One lesser-known activity in the daily round of the prehistoric Therans is basket-making. At great depths in the archaeological site, where conditions of humidity and temperature were stable, baskets woven from various materials and in various techniques have been found quite well-preserved. However, due to their fragility, their display in a museum demands special controlled conditions. For this reason, only the imprint of a basket, as preserved in the volcanic ash, is exhibited.

The imprint of a straw vessel, as preserved in the volcanic ash





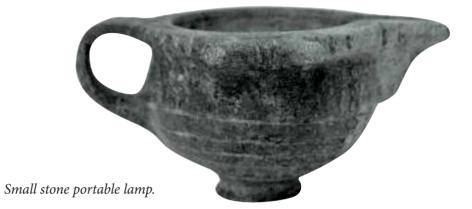
The wall-painting of the so-called 'Priestess' from the West House. The figure holds a small firebox or incense-burner in her left hand and with her right appears to be sprinkling aromatic incense on the glowing charcoal.

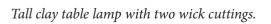






Small clay portable lamp.







Tall stone table lamp with two wick cuttings.



Bronze frying pan with tubular, almost vertical, socket for the wooden handle.



Bronze baking tray.



Large bronze jug. Palm leaves are wound around the handles to facilitate the user.





Bronze dagger with remains of gilding.



Large bronze carpentry saw.



Small bronze firebox or incense-burner.





Clay tuyère, nozzle for the metallurgist's bellows.

Stone mould for casting lead fishing-net weights.



Fragment of a crucible with copper residues.

s, ergonomically

Pair of clay firedogs or andirons, ergonomically designed to hold small spits.

In the same showcase, the array of bronze vessels and utensils reveals the important role of metallurgy and its products in the daily life of the Therans. Small jugs and censers or fireboxes which imitate their counterparts in clay, a frying pan, two baking trays, a large ewer, are just some of the metalware encountered in the households. Small bronze discs with suspension holes on their circumference are usually found in pairs, suggesting that they were scale-pans. The goods weighed, the value of which was calculated in relation to their weight, must have been small in volume or weight, so as to be placed on such small balance-scales. Likely candidates are precious metals, pigments, crocus stamens (saffron), and so on, which the Therans probably traded. Other metal objects exhibited are various knives, daggers, sickles, fishing hooks, as well as carpentry tools such the impressive saw, of which remains of the wooden handle are preserved or the carpentry chisels. The length of the pair of tongs, which has survived in excellent condition, suggests that it could be considered a metallurgist's tool. This view is boosted by other indications of the practice of metallurgy at Akrotiri, such as the stone mould for casting lead fishing weights, the fragment of a crucible as well as the pair of clay tuyères, the nozzles that protected from the fire the long reed of the bellows.

Every complex society devises ways of managing its diverse problems. The society of prehistoric Thera, the economy of which was based mainly on trade and seafaring, needed a system of managing its transactions, both with its partners outside the island and between members of the local society. There is sufficient evidence of the existence of such systems from the city at Akrotiri. These testimonies are exhibited in Area D2 under the general title 'AN EMERGENT BUREAUCRACY'.

Starting from the potter, his incising of a sign or symbol (potter's mark) on his creation, when the clay was still damp, was enough to show his identity and to publicize his work – it was his 'signature'. The Therans' adoption of the Cretan system of writing, the script known as Linear A, in the early Late Bronze Age, is proven by the existence of its syllabic signs on local products. Inscriptions on vases sometimes denote the provenance, the owner, or the recipient of the vessel and/or its content, and sometimes signify the actual content. Such is the case of the large ewer with four Linear A signs reading 'A-RE-SA-NA'. Also in Linear A script are the texts found incised on the few fragments of tablets made of local clay. These texts are no more than lists of commodities, such as olive oil and textiles, which appear to have been traded. By combining this information with the hundreds of loom-weights found in the houses at Akrotiri, it is surmised that weaving was not merely a household task but an economic activity possibly targeted at the export market.

Further evidence of bureaucratic management is the lead balance-weights, which were used for goods for which weighing was the mode of measurement. Dozens of these weights are found in the houses at Akrotiri, with a weight that is a multiple or a denomination of the Cretan ponderal unit, which was apparently adopted throughout the Aegean. The balance-weights from Akrotiri, which range from 11 grams to 15 kilos, are indicative of the variety and of the quantities of goods which circulated within and beyond the city at Akrotiri. Liquids, such as wine and olive oil, were measured in volume, as indicated by the standardization of certain vase shapes and their production in sizes corresponding to multiples or fractions of a metrical unit of volume which has yet to be determined by research. Sometimes this standardization of shape is combined with standardization of decoration.

The standardized painted decoration of some types of vessels seems to have been another means of bureaucratic management. For instance, the decoration of the inside of the asaminthos (bathtub) with aquatic plants (reeds) or dolphins, presumably underlines the role of the vessel which was filled with water. The reeds decorating conical pithoi, usually found in direct association with a bath installation, obviously had a similar connotation. The kind of liquid kept in another category of narrow-based pithoi with spigot just above the bottom, appears to have been 'labelled' by different combinations of stacked circular motifs, which were their sole decoration.



Clay tablet with signs of Linear A script.



However, the most tangible evidence of bureaucratic management of goods circulated are the seals and the sealings or seal impressions. Very few seals have come to light at Akrotiri. On the other hand, a cache of sealings with various subjects, known from seals of Crete, is a veritable treasure trove, revealing the gamut of transactions between Akrotiri and its great island neighbour to the south.

Area D3 of the Museum is dedicated to the thematic unit of mural painting on plaster under the general title 'WALL-PAINTINGS: A MONUMENTAL ART'. Experimentation with this art seems to have begun in Thera by the end of the Middle Bronze Age, as is documented by fragments of painted plaster from the debris caused by the earthquake that struck Akrotiri about half a century prior to the catastrophic volcanic eruption. Some such fragments are exhibited here. Other fragments are from floors and indicate that lime plaster was used also for floor construction.

The subjects on these early attempts at mural decoration are strictly linear/geometric, without any figural motifs. It is probable that both the technique of preparing lime-plaster and the art of wall-painting were introduced to Thera by the urban elite as an innovation from Crete, where examples of this genre have been identified in Early Bronze Age contexts. However, systematic decoration of buildings with wall-paintings began in Crete from the early New Palace period. It may well be that the artists who applied this 'modern' technique at Akrotiri were Cretans who employed also their own thematic repertoire. But as we have seen, aniconic decoration apparently held little appeal for the Cycladic islanders, who soon continued their own iconographic tradition.

In the walls of the caldera, which according to geological research existed before the Bronze Age eruption, many rocks of different colours were accessible and undoubtedly a stimulus to the island's painters when they became involved with mural art. Analyses of pigments found as powdery substances inside small or large containers have shown that these are pulverized Theran rocks. Moreover, the detection of traces of such minerals on the surface of stone grinders indicates that the pigments were prepared in the city.



The inscription with signs of Linear A script, which correspond to the syllables A-RE-SA-NA, incised on the shoulder of a large jug.





Lead balance weights covering a wide range of ponderal values.

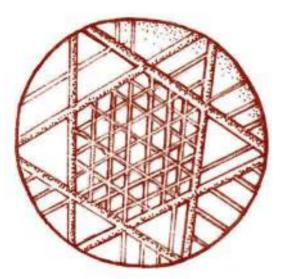


Stirrup jars, vases specially designed for transporting liquids. Their capacity possibly denotes correspondence to a specific unit of measurement of volume.



Bridge-spouted skyphoi, the capacity of which corresponds to denominations or multiples of a specific unit of measurement of volume.





Ivory seal.



Seal impression depicting chariot race







Seal impression depicting bull leaping.



Imported four-handled pithos with low neck, funnel mouth and ring base. The surface is divided into five zones, the three uppermost of which are decorated with contiguous spirals, the fourth with an ivy branch and the last with chevrons.



Pithos with spigot and symbols perhaps 'labelling' the content.



Pithos with narrow base. The paint splashes on the handles perhaps 'label' the good it was intended to hold.

Small bowls or cups which served as 'paintpots' are exhibited in a special showcase in Area D3, together with the pigments still inside them when they were found in the ruined houses. In addition to the white of the lime-plaster, the Theran painters' palette included two kinds of blue pigment, the mineral azurite, a copper oxide that is present even today in the walls of the caldera, and Egyptian blue, a synthetic pigment that was probably imported. Charcoal was used for black, while various ochres from local rocks gave shades of red, yellow, brown and in rare cases green. Organic pigments, such as murex purple or saffron yellow, were also used, as laboratory analyses have demonstrated. These are difficult to detect, as are the binders (perhaps fish glue, egg, gum) used with the pigments to make paint.

Basic canon in preparing the surface of the wall to be painted was its division into three horizontal zones, the upper and lower ones of which were narrow and formed the frame of the middle zone, in which the subject of the representation was developed. This canon, as we have seen, had already been established by the vase painters of the Middle Cycladic period. The boundaries of each zone were demarcated by the impression of taut twine on the meticulously smoothed surface of the fresh plaster. The upper zone, as a kind of frieze crowning the main subject, was filled with bands of alternating width and colour, or by geometric patterns, such as the running spiral, or by vegetal motifs such as ivy (*Part I*). The lowest zone was in a way the ground-line of the composition.

The preliminary design, which was the guideline for the representation, was executed by light incisions using a stylus or by paint wash using a brush. The whole process started while the plaster was still damp but evidently no measures were taken to keep it damp as painting proceeded. This means that in the same wall-painting some parts give the impression of *buon fresco*, in which the pigments have penetrated the plaster, while others are in *fresco secco*, in which the paint layer is superficial and more liable to flake.

Exactly the same technique as for the wall-paintings was applied also to portable vessels, such as tripod offering tables. The clay core was coated with lime-plaster (stucco), which was painted. A superb specimen of this art is the small tripod offering table displayed on a separate pedestal in Area D3. The triangular surface of the upper part of each leg is in effect an independent painting depicting the seabed and dolphins.

Samples of mineral pigments and the stone vessels with which they were processed.

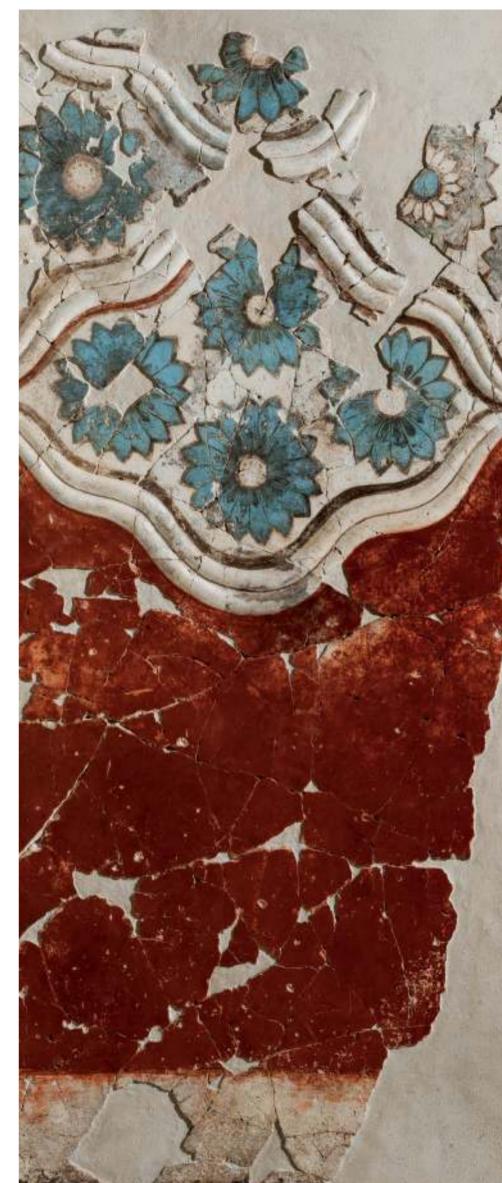


Exhibited at the north end of Area D3 are two wallpainting compositions which come from the building named conventionally the 'House of the Ladies'. The walls which these representations adorned have not survived (see *Part I*). However, from the place where the wall-painting fragments were found, as well as the organization of the subjects, it is deduced that they come from two contiguous spaces –room 1– of the third storey, dimly lit, at the centre of the north wing of the building.

The wall-painting of the 'Papyri' decorated the north, west and south walls of the west part of the room, to which very little light was perhaps admitted through a small north-facing window, if the imprint of an opening which is preserved on the corresponding wall-painting did not belong to an internal niche. The upper zone of the wall-painting is filled with at least ten alternating bands of different width and colour, while the lower zone, in ochre brown and of wavy formation, is the ground-line from which the papyrus plants sprout in clusters of threes: one cluster each on the west and the north wall, and two clusters on the south wall. Obviously, the existence of the small window/niche in the north wall and a small niche/cupboard in the west wall prevented the development of two clusters of papyri on these walls.

The east part of room 1 was divided into two spaces, an outer (north) and an inner (south). Only the arrangement of the inner space can be restored, thanks to its decoration with the wall-painting of the 'Ladies'. Due to erosion by the torrent and the effects of cultivation, the easternmost part of this space has been destroyed (*Part I*), unfortunately together with the wall-painting that adorned it. Consequently, both the arrangement and the content of the composition are difficult to understand. Nonetheless, the surface of the south wall, approximately 0.80 m. wide, which was the direct continuation of the double cluster of Papyri, in a brownish-ochre hue as if imitating wood, seems to have corresponded to a solid wall opposite.

Part of a wall-painting from Xeste 3. Colourful rosettes are depicted inside relief lozenges.





House of the Ladies. Wall-painting of a bare-breasted female figure, on the north wall of the corridor in room 1.

House of the Ladies. Wall-painting of a female figure on the south wall of the same corridor.







Small tripod offering table decorated in the technique of wall-painting. Depicted are dolphins in a marine setting.



From the east edge of this surface began the composition of the Ladies, which was the main subject of the middle zone, while the upper and the lower zone consisted of horizontal bands. Depicted below the arches formed by the triple wavy band are mature female figures, in opulent garments and with their facial features enhanced by cosmetics. They gaze eastwards, possibly towards the central subject of the representation, while the female on the south wall outstretches her arms slightly to the fore. Unfortunately, a large part of the arms and hands is missing, so it is not possible to identify the object she almost certainly held. The female in the composition on the north wall is depicted stooping slightly and with bare pendulous breasts. From the position of her arms and from the surviving part of her left wrist, she appears to be proffering an object to another female figure, possibly seated, as the extant lower edge of her robe indicates. The surface of the wall-painting above the arches with the female figures is filled with a mesh pattern of intersecting oblique red dotted lines. The points of these intersections are covered by small star-like motifs.



Clay ritual/ceremonial vessel (rhyton) in the form of a lioness head.



Pair of clay ritual/ceremonial vessels (rhyta) in the form of a boar head.





Clay ritual/ceremonial vessel (rhyton) in the form of a bull.

Given that the female figures focus on a central subject which has been destroyed, it is clear that this subject was on the wall towards the torrent, where the building has suffered the greatest damage. Unfortunately, due to the limited space available in the museum it was not possible to exhibit the wall-painting of the Ladies in direct articulation with that of the Papyri.

In addition to the wall-paintings with pictorial representations, one of the public edifices at Akrotiri, that known as Xeste 3, yielded a considerable number of compositions with exclusively geometric subjects, a characteristic example of which is exhibited in Area D3. This is a rare case that combines relief with painted decoration: on the red ground, double relief wavy bands passing through painted rings create a mesh of three rows of lozenges, each enclosing four rosettes. The petals of the rosettes in the lozenges round the edge are black (small) and blue (large), while those of the rosettes in the internal lozenges are correspondingly white and ochre yellow.

Area D4 hosts examples of pottery from the final phase (Late Cycladic 1A) of the city at Akrotiri. What is impressive about these vases, apart from the elegant shapes and excellent firing, is that even the humblest domestic vessels are elaborately decorated. With the exception of a small percentage of vases decorated with geometric patterns, such as the so-called tortoise-shell or the spiral, the vase-painters of the period show a particular preference for motifs from the island's flora, wild or cultivated. The vases with faunal motifs (swallows, wild goats, dolphins) displayed in the showcases here, as we have said already, are characteristic primarily of the Middle Cycladic bichrome ware, which had not been identified when the Museum exhibition was designed. Examples of it presumably had survived and were used in the following phase, and, as they were found together with Late Cycladic pottery, were considered contemporary with this, which is why they are exhibited in this unit.

Of the wild plants, the most popular are the reeds, the crocus (saffron) and the lily, while of the crop plants the vase-painters apparently followed the preferences of the Theran farmers: species which still thrive in the island's waterless environment. Plants such as barley and various vetches, grapes and perhaps sesame, or even another vase, as decorative motifs on certain vases, possibly point to the use of these vases in rituals relating to agricultural activities.

It seems that some zoomorphic vessels, known in archaeological terminology as rhyta, were also for ritual or ceremonial use. Distinguished among them are those in the form of a triton shell, a lioness's head or a bull. This view is strengthened by the fact that such vases are often found in pairs, such as the rhyta imitating the figure of a bull, or a boar's head.

Apart from the diverse uses indicated by the diverse shapes of Late Cycladic pottery, the elegance and the rich decorative repertoire reveal not only the aesthetic demands of Theran society but also the competition between potters and painters to achieve originality and high quality.



Globular eyed ewer with representation of a nippled ewer alternating with a plant motif (sesame?).



Two sides of a globular eyed ewer with vegetal decoration of alternating clusters of b arley ears and vetches (split-pea?).





Two cups decorated with spiral motif.







Cup of Vapheio type with foliate band as the main decoration.



Cup of Vapheio type with spiral pattern as the main decoration.



Cup of Vapheio type with tortoise-shell pattern as the main decoration.





Globular jug with relief eyes and relief ring around the base of the neck. Decorated in the upper (main) zone with running spiral pattern.



Large slender jug with relief ring around the base of the neck and around the base. In each of the three basic decorative zones is a different subject: in the upper zone spirals, in the middle mottling and in the lower reeds.



Bridge-spouted skyphos with tortoise-shell pattern in the middle (main) decorative zone.



Amphora with elliptical mouth, with figure-eight motif in the upper (main) decorative zone.



Large ovoid jug, with reed motif as the main decorative subject.



Imported slender jug, with running spiral pattern in all three decorative zones.



Imported amphora with elliptical mouth and foliate band as the main decorative subject.



Imported stirrup jar with spiral designs in the upper (main) decorative zone.

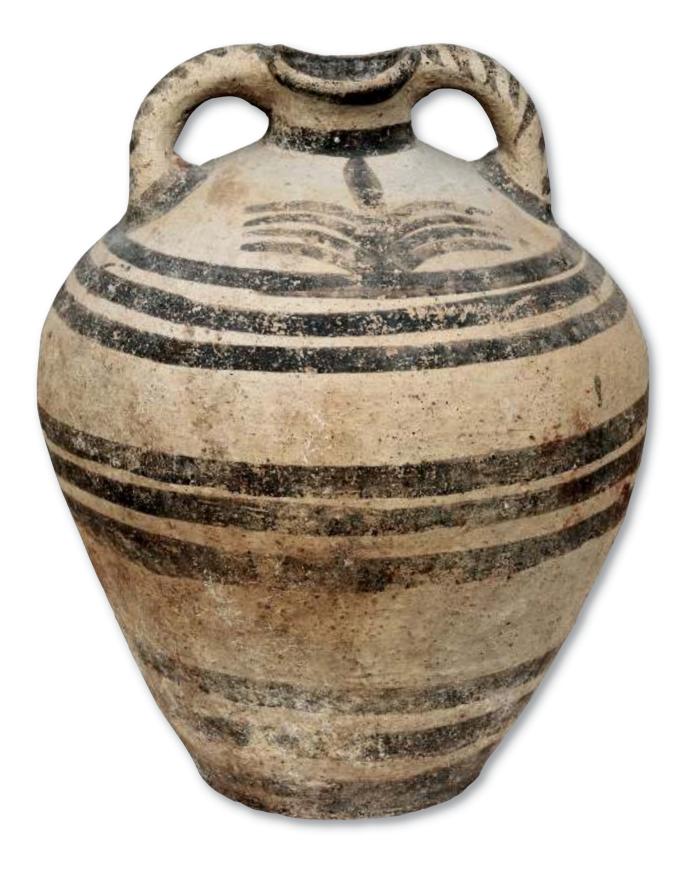


Two-handled bridge-spouted vessel with vegetal decoration.



Three-handled barrel jar with plant decoration of bunches of grapes framed by plants (sesame?) and reeds.





Amphora with elliptical mouth and plant motif (palm tree?) in the shoulder zone between the handles.



Three-handled amphora with funnel mouth and rich decoration. In the upper (main) zone are nippled ewers enclosed in myrtle branches, with vetches and perhaps crocuses interposed between them. Vetches are also the decorative motif in the lower zone. The vessel was perhaps for ritual/ceremonial use.



Wide-mouthed jug decorated with reed motif in the upper and lower zones, and spirals in the middle zone.







Cup, *probably imported from Crete, with crocus as the main motif, framed by tortoise-shell pattern.*



Bridge-spouted globular jug, probably of Cretan provenance, with bulbous plant as the main decorative motif.



Clay tripod offering table with white-painted decoration on brown slip. On the upper surface tangent circles and on the vertical faces of the legs clusters of crocuses.



Clay tripod offering table with white-painted decoration on brown slip. On the upper surface net pattern and on the vertical faces of the legs clusters of crocuses.



Large jug with narrow funnel mouth and beak spout. Decorated with reeds in the upper (main) zone.





Clay conical rhyton with painted decoration of tortoise-shell pattern in zones.

Conical rhyton with painted decoration of vetches, possibly split-pea.





Clay conical rhyton with brown slip and white-painted decoration of reeds.

Clay conical rhyton with brown slip and white-painted decoration of tortoise-shell pattern in zones.



Large jug with narrow funnel mouth and beak spout. Decorated with reeds in the upper (main) zone.



 $The lastron\ with\ representation\ of\ crocuses.$

Small globular amphora with tubular spout. Decorated with single white lily flowers dispersed on the brown ground.





Small globular jug with brown slip, decorated with white-painted reed motifs.



Pair of clay ritual/ceremonial vases (rhyta) in the form of a bull.



One part of a double jug with strainer spout, decorated with depiction of a bull.



Double jug with strainer spout, decorated with dolphins in a marine setting.





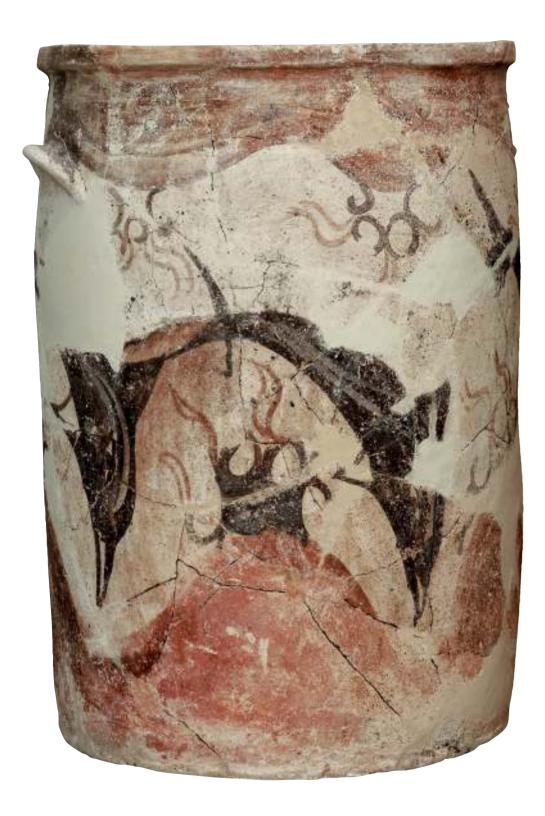
Three-handled globular strainer vessel with conical hollow foot. Decorated in the main zone with a large spiral and dense mottling on either side.



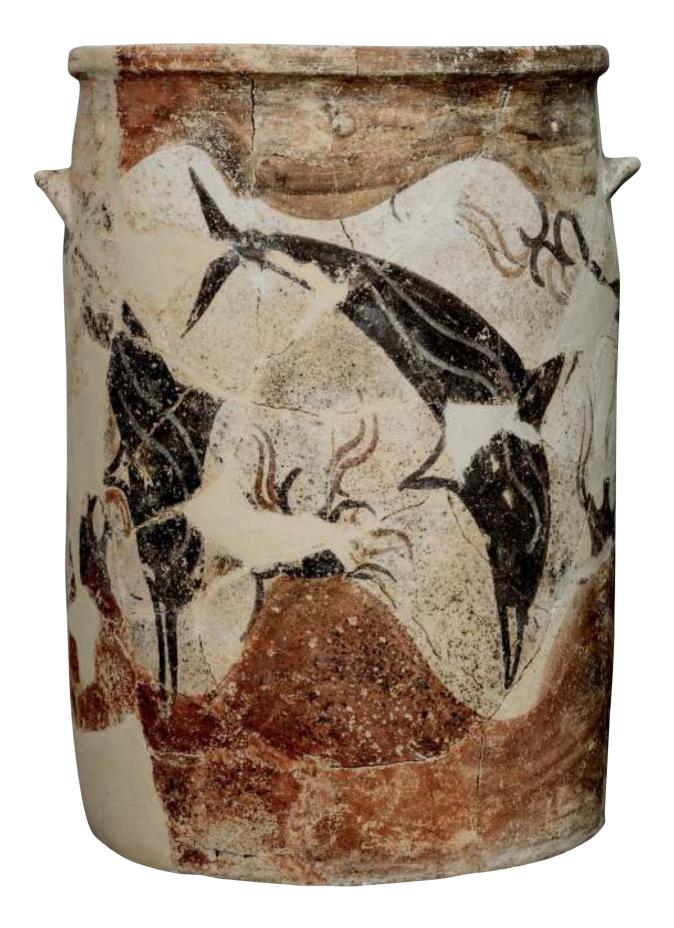
Four-handled globular strainer vessel with conical hollow foot. Decorated in the handle zone with spirals, on the belly with spirals and dense mottling, and on the foot with crocuses in a schematic mountainous landscape.



Three-handled strainer vessel with conical hollow foot. Densely painted crocuses cover the entire surface.



Two sides of a large cylindrical pithos with representation of dolphins in a marine setting.





Large cylindrical pithos with brown slip on which clusters of blossoming lilies are painted in white.



Large cylindrical pithos decorated with spirals in the upper zone and a schematic mountainous landscape in the lower.



Clay cylindrical rhyton decorated with crocuses.





Clay cylindrical rhyton decorated with branches (of myrtle?).





Clay ritual/ceremonial vessel (rhyton) in the form of a triton or conch shell.



Clay vase of open shape with wide base, decorated with relief spirals in the upper zone.

The external contacts of Theran society with its 'bourgeois' mentality, which developed thanks to mercantile and maritime activities, are reflected in the host of objects imported for other regions, as well as in art. This is pointed out in the thematic unit entitled 'AKROTIRI: A COSMOPOLITAN HARBOUR TOWN', which is developed in the last two Areas of the exhibition, D6 and D7.

Exhibited in the long showcase of Area D6 are objects, primarily vases, imported either for their content or as vessels per se, which document these contacts. Characteristic samples of imported pottery from the Greek Mainland are the jug with schematic representation of a bird and the bridge-spouted krater of the so-called Aeginetan-type, while from Crete come various types of clay and stone vases. Represented by samples of vases in the same showcase are other islands of the Cyclades and the Southeast Aegean, while relations with the Eastern Mediterranean are confirmed by the so-called Canaanite jar from Syria and the alabaster amphoriskos from Egypt or by the ostrich eggs which with faience additions have been converted into rhyta. Initially, finds made of faience were also considered as imports from the Eastern Mediterranean. However, the discovery (after the Museum opened) of a vase full of pulverized quartz, which was the raw material for manufacturing faience, means that these works could be creations of a local workshop. Even if this is the case, however, the technology was imported.

Relations and contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean are also reflected in art, as borne out by fragments of wall-paintings such as the head of a male figure in front of a palm tree, which Marinatos dubbed the 'African', the 'venerating' monkeys on either side of a column in the form of a papyrus, which is crowned by a pair of 'sacral horns', as well as larger compositions such as the wall-painting of the 'Blue Monkeys' which are exhibited in the adjacent Area D7 of the Museum, or the wall-painting of the 'Antelopes', which can be seen in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (*Part I*).

Also exhibited in Area D6 is a fragment of wall-painting with representation of a flying bird, while in the adjacent Area D7 is the painter Kostis Iliakis's graphic restoration of a wall-painting, based on the lower legs of sheep and goats from fragments of wall-paintings that had been used as an underlayer in the large mural of the Blue Monkeys.

In the small horizontal showcase near the exit from Area D6 are the very few samples of jewellery recovered from the ruins of the prehistoric city. This paucity of precious objects is striking, considering the conspicuous wealth of the society at Akrotiri and especially the sumptuous jewellery worn by the female –and not only– figures depicted in the wall-paintings. Perhaps this picture is circumstantial and due to the limited excavations inside the houses revealed at Akrotiri. However, it may well be that, as in similar cases of extenuating circumstances, the inhabitants took their jewellery and valuables with them when they vacated the city after the earthquake that preceded the eruption.

Area D7, as mentioned above, hosts the wall-painting of Blue Monkeys from Building Beta at the site. The naturalism with which the monkeys are rendered climbing the rocks is surely due to the painter's first-hand experience of their locomotion and habits. In this composition blue pigment has probably been used to symbolize grey.



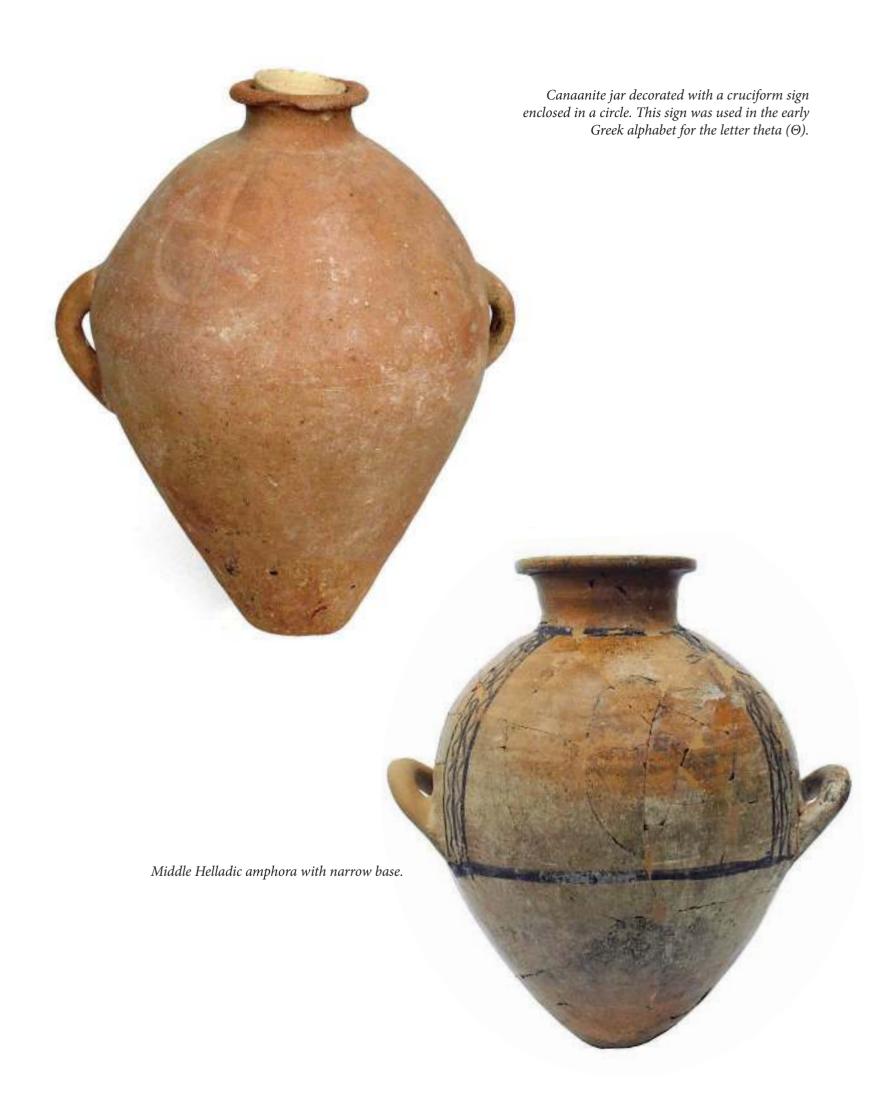
Pair of ritual/ceremonial vessels (rhyta) fashioned from ostrich eggs with faience additions.



Alabaster amphoriskos from Egypt.



Part of a faience bowl with relief decoration imitating a palmette.





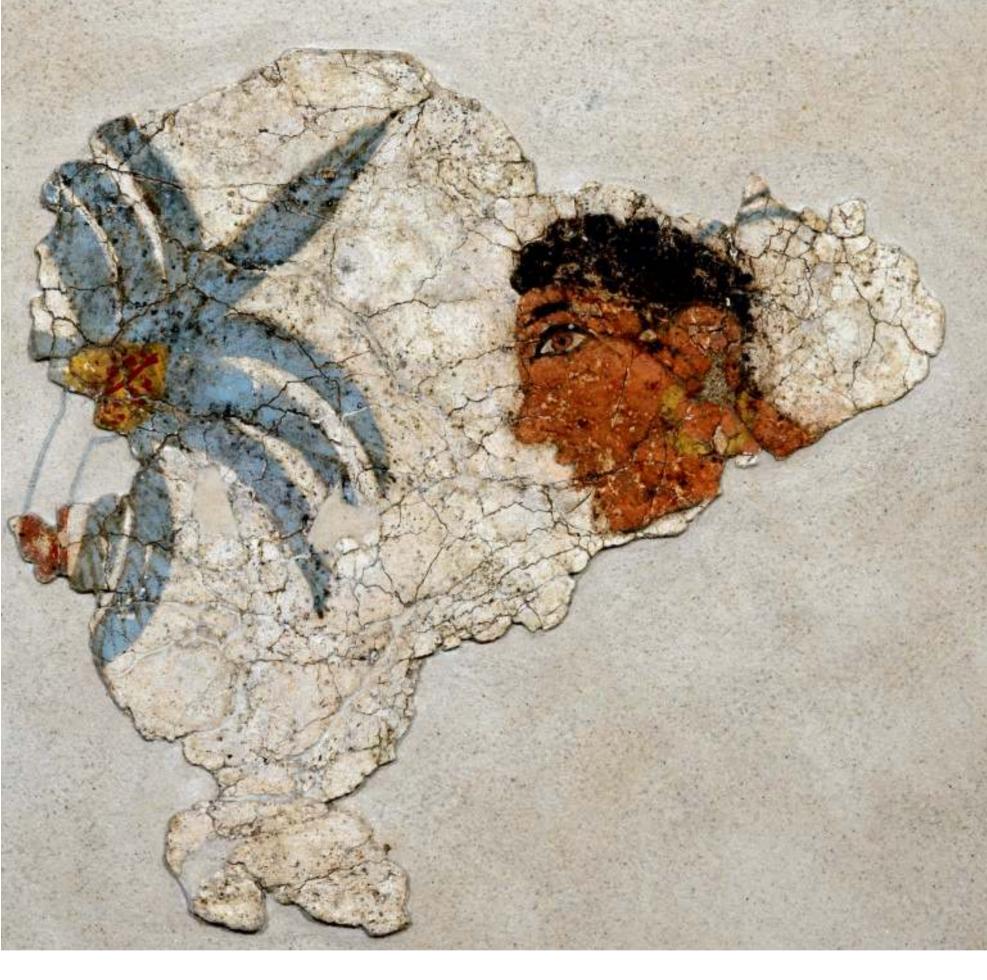
Conical rhyton with curved walls, of brownish-red stone, possibly from Crete.



Stone cylindrical pyxis from Crete.



Fragment of wall-painting with stem of a papyrus-like plant, on either side of which parts of the figures of two monkeys survive: the 'venerating monkeys'.



Fragment of wall-painting preserving the head of male figure in front of a palm tree: the so-called 'African'.



Fragment of wall-painting with depiction of a large bird in flight.



Painter Kostis Iliakis's proposed restoration of a wall-painting from the surviving lower legs of sheep and goats.

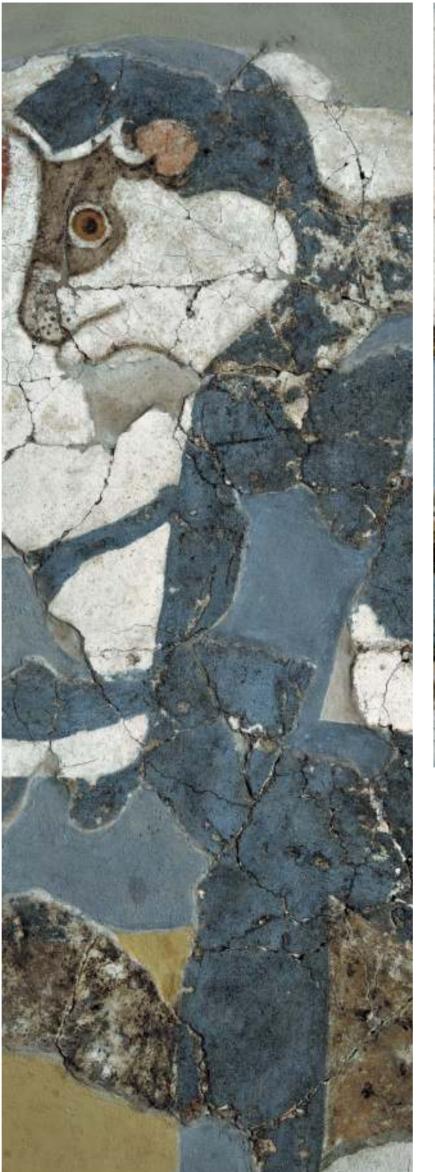
The wall-painting of monkeys in a mountainous landscape, from room 6 of Complex Beta.







Details from the large composition of the Blue Monkeys.





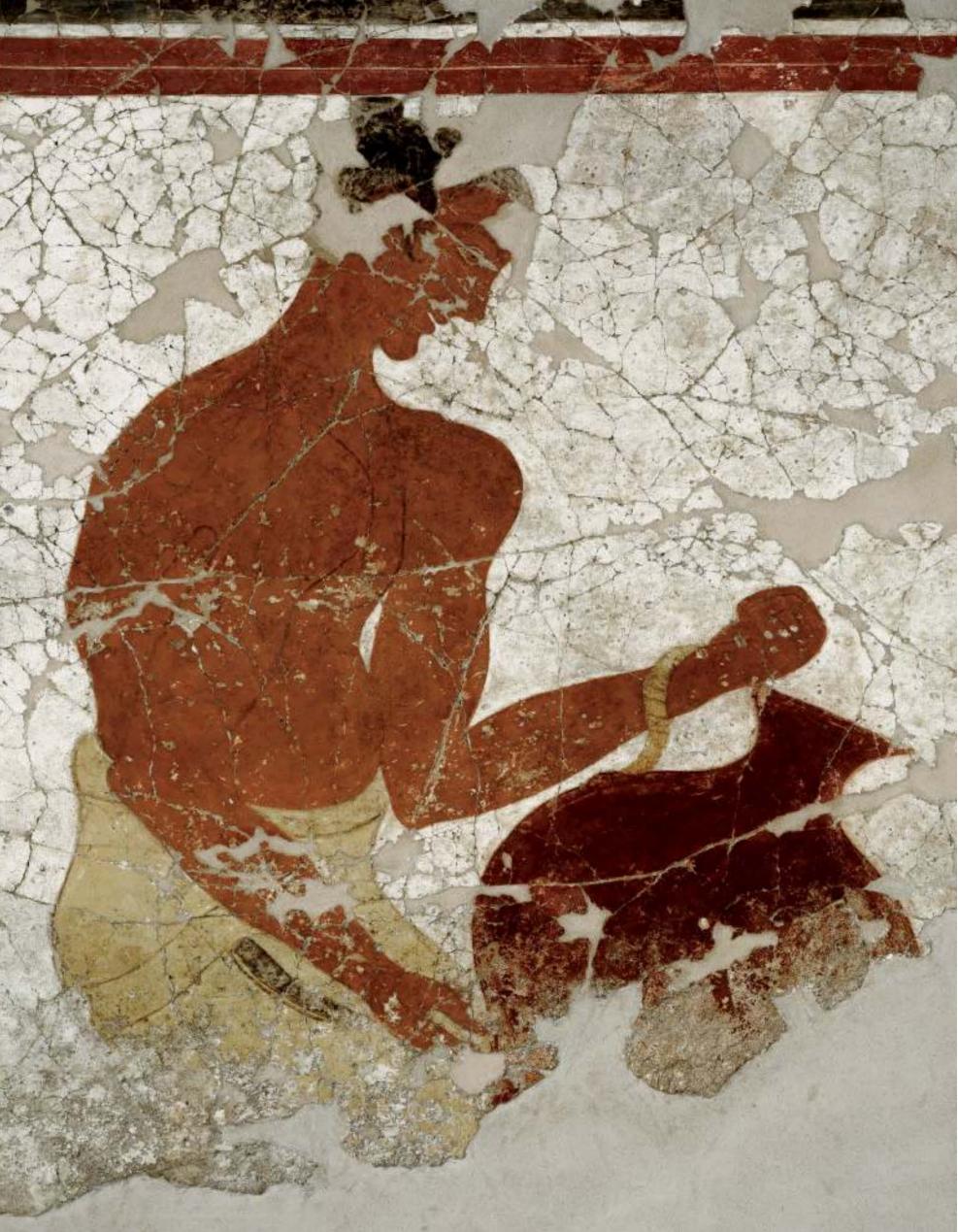


The clay larnax with the imprint of the wooden casket, within which stood the gold ibex figurine, at the moment of its discovery in the so-called House of the Benches.

The gold ibex figurine.

Unique but difficult to interpret is the gold ibex figurine accorded its own showcase near the exit from Area D7. It was discovered in the course of the excavation of a shaft for the foundation of a pillar of the bioclimatic shelter, at the northwest corner of a room of the building that is conventionally named 'House of the Benches'. Needless to say, the position of this pillar was shifted, to avoid damaging the figurine's context. All we can say for the present is that the figurine was found standing, inside what was apparently a small wooden casket painted red, the 'ghost' of which was discernible, which had been placed inside a small clay larnax that was set next to a pile of horns, mostly of ovids and caprids. This area will be excavated when circumstances allow. The figurine is of a type unknown in the toreutic art of the prehistoric Aegean and parallels for it should perhaps be sought in the Near or Middle East. Its body is hollow, cast by the lost-wax technique and then hammered lightly to achieve the final surface treatment. The head, horns, legs and tail have been affixed to the body by copper-solder technique. This *chef d'oeuvre* concludes the exhibition in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera.





PART III

THE IMAGINARY MUSEUM of prehistoric thera

The consequences of confining the exhibition space to the third storey of the Museum building are obvious. The moveable finds displayed in the showcases are too few to convey the prosperity of the island's inhabitants and the sophisticated taste that the chattels of each household satisfied. And yet, even this relatively small number of objects is crammed into the showcases, due to strictures of space, which detracts from exhibiting the artefacts to advantage. In this situation, there is no leeway for even thinking about enriching the exhibition with new finds, which would fill in gaps in the narrative on Theran society in the Bronze Age.

As for the category of finds that makes Akrotiri unique in the world, namely the wall-paintings, their presence in the Museum is so restricted that the visitor has hardly an inkling of their abundance. And if it is borne in mind that the wall-paintings, by virtue of their subjects, are among the most articulate archaeological finds, then the wealth of information that is not conveyed to the Museum audience is striking. For instance, visitors cannot imagine the variety of female attire, the jewellery worn by both women and men, the diversity of hairstyles, the different activities, and so on. This shortcoming of the Museum is compounded by the fact that there is no special space in which temporary exhibitions could be organized to amplify specific aspects of the society and culture of prehistoric Thera, as well as to attract visitors back again to the Museum. In short, the permanent exhibition in the Museum presents a picture frozen in time and space, a kind of fossil.

For these reasons, Part III of the book is envisaged as a complement to the existing Museum, as a museum of images, literally and metaphorically a *'Musée Imaginaire'* (Imaginary Museum), designed to help the reader form as full a picture as possible of the prehistoric city at Akrotiri and the people who lived there.

Wall-painting from the west wall of the apartment west of the so-called Lustral Basin of Xeste 3. Depicted is a seated mature male figure holding a large jug, probably of bronze.

It is obvious that the cultural level of Theran society at the moment of the volcanic eruption was the result of developments over millennia, which were largely unknown to scholarship when the exhibition in the Museum was organized. Concrete knowledge of these developments was attained after processing and analysing the archaeological evidence from the excavations in the deep foundation shafts for the pillars of the bioclimatic shelter over the site. Apart from the sporadic information gained on the gradual expansion of the settlement upon the crest of a promontory (*Part I*), the moveable finds recovered from the deep trenches have shed light on the concomitant cultural and social processes.

For instance, one type of small globular transport amphora, which is dated to the mid-third millennium BC, is incontrovertible testimony of the growth of maritime trade. The presence at Akrotiri of amphorae of this type from various regions of the Aegean points to the importance the settlement was gaining as a centre of transit trade already in this period.

Revealing too was the discovery of large quantities of Middle Cycladic pottery, which until the deep trenches were excavated was barely known from the site. In this pottery, in contradistinction to that of the Early Cycladic period, strict rules govern both the architecture of the vases and the syntax of the decoration. As we have said, it is perhaps not fortuitous that the organization of the later wall-paintings in three horizontal zones had been established in the organization of the decoration of the vases of the Middle Cycladic period (*Part II*).

The use of light-coloured clay created also a light-coloured surface on which the painted decoration of the vases was executed. For almost the entire Middle Cycladic period this decoration made vase-painting the principal, if not the only, medium of artistic expression, specimens of which have survived. On the early vessels of this pottery, whether for storage or tableware, the decoration consists of rectilinear geometric motifs.

One of the earliest vessels of this period is a rather well-preserved pithos with piriform body, flat quite wide rim and two horizontal low-set lunate handles about one third of the height from the base. Particularly impressive is the ergonomic design of the vase. On the one hand the snug-fitting lid on the horizontal rim protected the content of the vase from the infiltration of foreign bodies, and on the other the ovoid formation of the lower body enabled its fixing in a special stand, securing stability during transportation by sea, as was the case hundreds of years later with the pointed-bottom amphorae. This perhaps explains why there is no decoration on the lower body.

The decoration on pithoi of this type occupies the main zone and consists of geometric patterns inscribed in vertical panels. The arrangement of the decoration on tableware vessels was similar and such vases without decoration are rare.

It should be noted that from early on the geometric decoration of the vases began to include also schematic plant, animal and even human figures. The surviving part of a narrow-bottomed amphora with horizontal lunate handles and a spigot close to the base, is perhaps the earliest example of a vessel designed for storing a liquid product, possibly wine; depicted between the spigot and the neck of the vessel is a vertical stem with small oblique branches on either side, which possibly symbolizes a vine branch.

In the case of another piriform pithos, of which only part of the upper body has been restored, the vertical panels into which the main zone is divided are filled with geometric motifs (net pattern or zigzag lines). Nevertheless, represented in two of these metopes are groups (bunches?) of fish in one and pairs of male figures in the other.



Amphora with globular body and cylindrical neck, dating from the mid-3rd millennium BC.



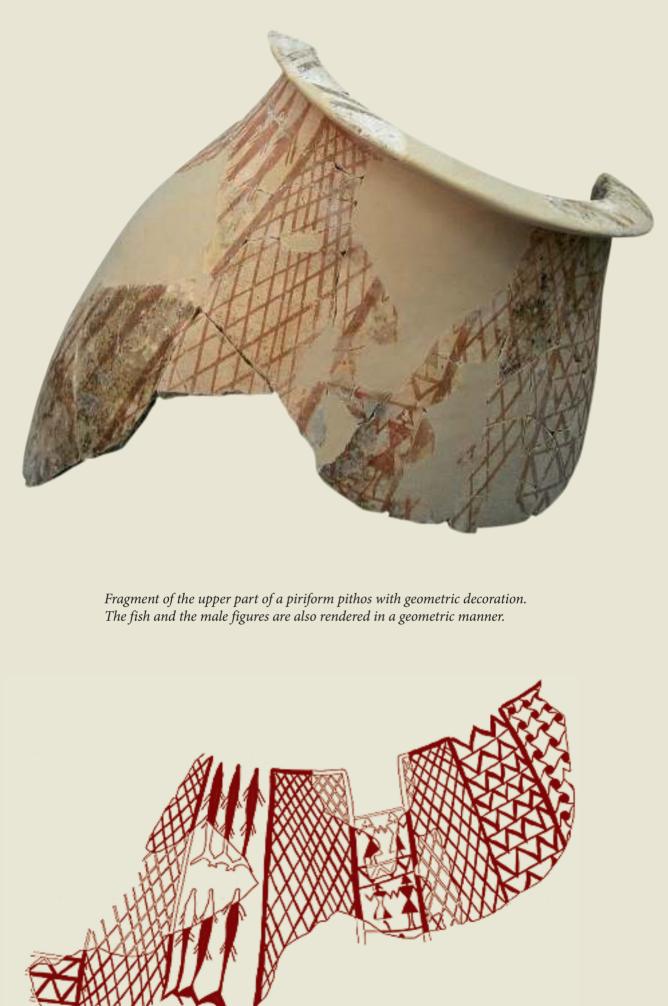
Piriform pithos of the early Middle Cycladic period, with geometric decoration.

The increasing needs of the people are reflected in the variety of tableware, some shapes in the repertoire of which appear for the first time. One such vase is the thelastron (spouted juglet), which is thought to have been designed for feeding infants. Of exquisite quality is one category of thin-walled cups coated with fine white slip, the so-called 'Cycladic White' (see Part II), on which the decoration is on one side only, right of the handle. If the vase-painter's intention was for the decoration to be visible during drinking, the users of such panelled cups must have been right-handed. Among the closed shapes, the juglet with back-curved neck seems to have been established, while in the decoration of the vases generally a tendency to replace rectilinear with curvilinear motifs is observed. It seems that through curvilinear decoration the vase-painters became practised in free drawing, which gave them the opportunity to proceed to a more naturalistic rendering of figures. This is apparent from the few sherds of mainly small vases, preserved on which are depictions of animal figures, indeed with particular care in representing details diagnostic of the species. For example, the combination of elongated body, short tail and particularly nails leaves no doubt that the animal depicted is a dog. The surface of the cup, of which only part has survived, was divided into three zones of rectangular panels. The panels in the upper and lower zones were filled with geometric pattern, while in those of the middle zone was an animal figure. The head preserved high in the left panel seems to be of a she-goat. If the two parallel oblique lines surviving in the right panel correspond to the horns of the headless quadruped a little lower down, then the animal could be an ibex. This possibility is advocated by the representation of a galloping ibex preserved on a sherd of a jug, on which figure the vase-painter has even indicated the sex. From some moment onward, the denoting of the eye of the animal seems to have become significant, since it occupies a large part of the figure's cheek.

From the surviving sherds with corresponding representations it becomes clear that the human figure too was the subject of inquiries and experiments of Middle Cycladic vase-painters. Among the earliest attempts is the 'stick figure'. A vertical line painted in white on the reddish-brown ground of the vase would have remained unnoticed if the oblique lines directly connected with it did not correspond to arms bent at the elbows. Indeed, the open right hand leaves no doubt that a human figure is represented.

Schematic but less abstract is the type of the male figures seen already on the piriform pithos 9438. Here the torso is in frontal pose as two apex-to-apex isosceles triangles, with which are connected lines corresponding to the neck, the arms and the legs. The head is represented as a triangle at the top of the neck. Due to this manner of rendering, such figures have been dubbed of 'hour-glass type' and seem to have been the model on which all subsequent experimentations in rendering the human figure were based. Initially, the triangles of the torso were in monochrome, giving the figures a more solid aspect, while the limbs and neck are still indicated by fine lines, and the head as a paint daub. Livelier is the rendering of another 'hourglass figure' with fleshier neck and limbs, which are shown in motion bent at the joints. A long lock of hair hangs from the head obliquely on the right shoulder, while the figure is girded with a sword, of which the pommelled hilt can be discerned. Obvious here is the vase-painter's desire to represent a bellicose leader or chieftain, bringing to mind the 'hairy-headed' ($\kappa \alpha \rho \eta \kappa o \mu \delta o v \tau \varepsilon \zeta$) Achaeans of Homer's *Iliad*. The figure whose torso and right arm are preserved on a small sherd was presumably of a warrior with spear.

A narrow band at the base of the lower triangle clearly visible on the figures preserved on two sherds seems to confirm the theory posited in the early twentieth century that on figures of 'hourglass' type the lower triangle indicates the Cretan male garment known as the Minoan *zoma*, a kind of loincloth, which had been identified on figurines of the Old Palace period in Crete, more or less contemporary with the aforesaid sherds from Akrotiri, and was surely common throughout the Aegean, island and mainland.



Rollout restoration drawing of the representation.

Continual improvements in drawing skills and technical means soon led to the use of more colours, giving a greater boost towards naturalism and enriching the vase-painters' repertoire with more readily identifiable species of plants and animals, not to mention more impressive geometric decoration. These trends were best expressed on large vessels, such as pithoi and various types of jugs. Spirals are a common motif on pithoi, as well as on a beak-spouted jug, each side of which is occupied by a large spiral. The handling of colours on this jug gives the impression of polychromy. On a large jug with backward curving neck the main zone of decoration is divided into vertical fields, in each of which is a sinuous perpendicular band.

Equally impressive are the floral subjects used by vase-painters in the bichrome style. The slender vase of which the mouth is missing is decorated in the main zone, just below the shoulder, with generic broad-leafed plants, while a large branch with likewise broad leaves covers each side of a large beak-spouted jug. A broad-leafed plant is also the main motif on a spouted globular skyphos.

It seems that whilst the bichrome style was in vogue in vase-painting at Akrotiri contacts with the world of the East intensified, judging by the exotic and fantastic subjects introduced into the repertoire. One such subject is the pomegranate hanging from a branch, which is the sole decoration on a category of jugs. This representation on vases dated to the eighteenth century BC is of particular historical interest, as the pomegranate tree, a plant native to the region south of the Caspian Sea, was hitherto thought to have been introduced into the Aegean during Mycenaean times, from Egypt, which it had reached in the fourteenth century BC. However, pomegranate wood has been identified in a sample of carbonized residues from Akrotiri, from a context dated to the early second millennium BC. This date would seem to be corroborated by the presence of the pomegranate as a decorative motif in vase-painting in the bichrome style, suggesting that this exotic fruit had become popular. These data indicate that the pomegranate was introduced into the Mediterranean via the Aegean and not via Egypt, and probably from the region of Caucasus, with which the Aegean islanders had contacts hundreds of years earlier.

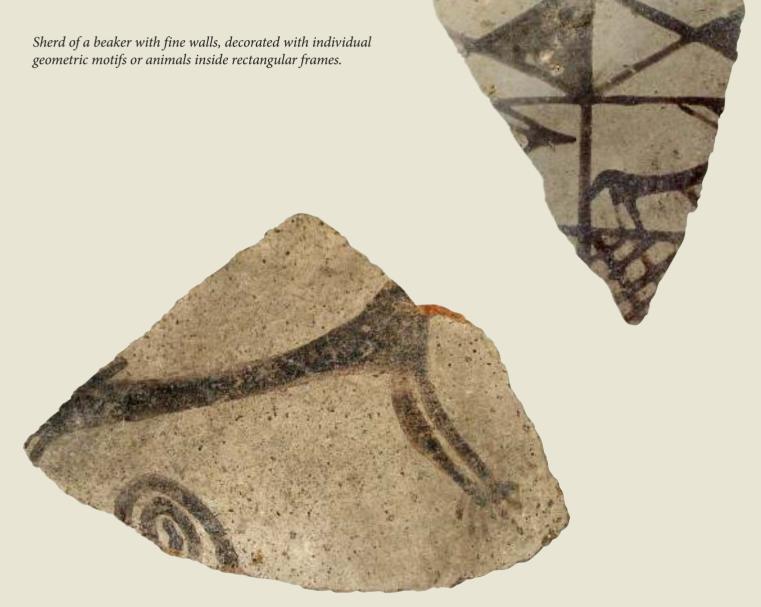
From the animal kingdom, birds remained high on the list of the vase-painters' preferences. So, in addition to the swallow, which continued to be a favourite subject on globular nippled ewers with backward curving neck, large beak-spouted jugs host depictions of birds in various phases of flight. Nonetheless, with the bichrome style exotic or fantastic creatures appeared in the art of Thera, such as the lion or the mythical griffin, and indeed on very large scale, covering the entire surface of cylindrical pithoi.

Vase-painters in the bichrome style intensified their effort to render the human figure realistically. With the upper part of the torso frontal, the thighs in three-quarter pose, the hands and feet in side view but fleshier, the painter attempts to represent motion and action. On the face, always shown in profile, an enormous eye is depicted frontal, with the canthi on either side of a circular pupil. From the head hand long hair locks, a precursory form of which was seen on the sherd with the bellicose warrior.

Unique monument of this art is an intact beak-spouted jug on the sides of which are two scenes of narrative character. On the left side, an eagle with outspread wings, as if viewed from the ground, is depicted carrying its eaglet in its talons. On the right side, two male figures stand opposite one another on either side of a schematic tree. One male holds a jug, poised to fill the cup held by the other. Represented below the handle of the jug is another schematic tree. The libation scene with the male figures suggests that the vessel itself was intended for ritual or ceremonial use. If the eagle's purpose was to initiate the eaglet into the art of flying, it could be argued that the vessel was intended for initiation rites. In this case, the combination of the eagle and the male figures brings to mind the myth of Ganymede.



Sherd of a Middle Cycladic jug with representation of a galloping wild goat.



Sherd of a vase with representation of a quadruped which, judging by the nails on the front legs, is probably a dog.

The narrative tendency apparent in vase-painting in the bichrome style is heightened in other scenes, unfortunately in fragmentary condition, such as that represented on part of a cup on which a male figure holding an oblong object (quiver?) in the left hand seems to be moving in an exotic landscape, as surmised from the part of a pomegranate and the tail of a lion or griffin preserved in front of him. Possibly this scene is inspired by a myth familiar to the Middle Bronze Age Therans.

Even more fragmentary is another scene, perhaps more dramatic, which may be associated directly with life in Thera. Preserved on a few sherds of a pithos are parts of the bodies of men in strange poses, which recall those of the drowned men in the later Miniature Frieze from room 5 of the West House.

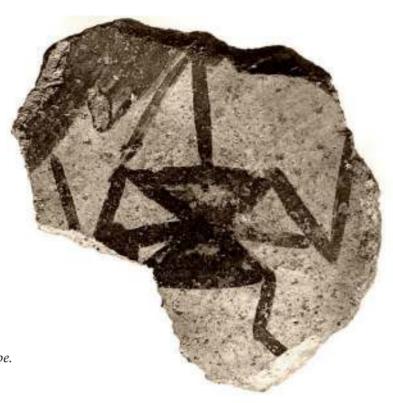
The unique scene covering the side of an asaminthos is probably of mythological content: in a mountainous landscape, quadrupeds and birds flee to the right, possibly startled by the appearance of the male figure at the left edge of the representation. Unfortunately, the upper part of the figure has not survived, making it difficult to decipher the man's role.

From this brief review of the course of Middle Cycladic vase-painting it is clear that some canons that were followed by the mural painters of the Late Cycladic period, such as the division of the surface of the wall into zones, the naturalistic rendering of plants, animals and human figures, and even specific subjects, had been established by the vase-painters.



Sherd of a coarse-ware vase, preserved on the brownish-red surface of which is a male of 'stick-figure' type.





Sherd with representation of a warrior of 'hourglass' type.



Sherd with depiction of a warrior holding a spear.

Sherd of a coarse-ware vase with male figure wearing a 'Minoan zoma' (loincloth).





Large jug with back-curving neck, decorated with sinuous bands on vertical fields.



Barrel jar in the bichrome style, decorated with two running spirals in the upper (main) zone.

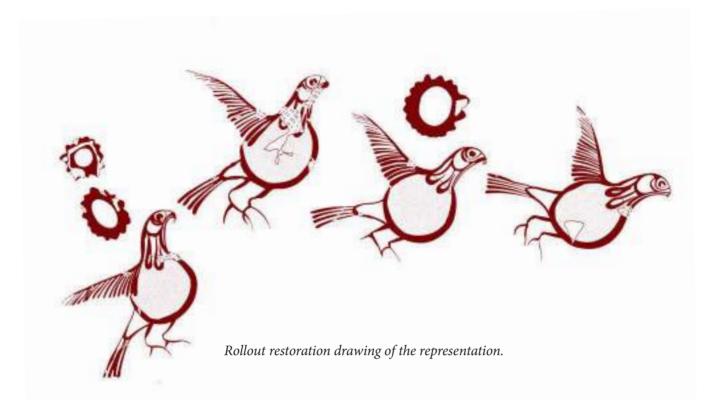


Large jug in the bichrome style with beak spout, decorated on each side with a large spiral with quatrefoil rosette at the centre.



The two sides of a large beak-spouted jug in the bichrome style, decorated with branches of a broad-leafed tree.









Rollout restoration drawing of the scenes on the jug.





A unique beak-spouted jug in the bichrome style, decorated on one side with a scene of two male figures, probably performing a libation, and on the other side with a large eagle with outspread wings, probably in flight, carrying an eaglet. Interposed between the figures is a schematic tree.



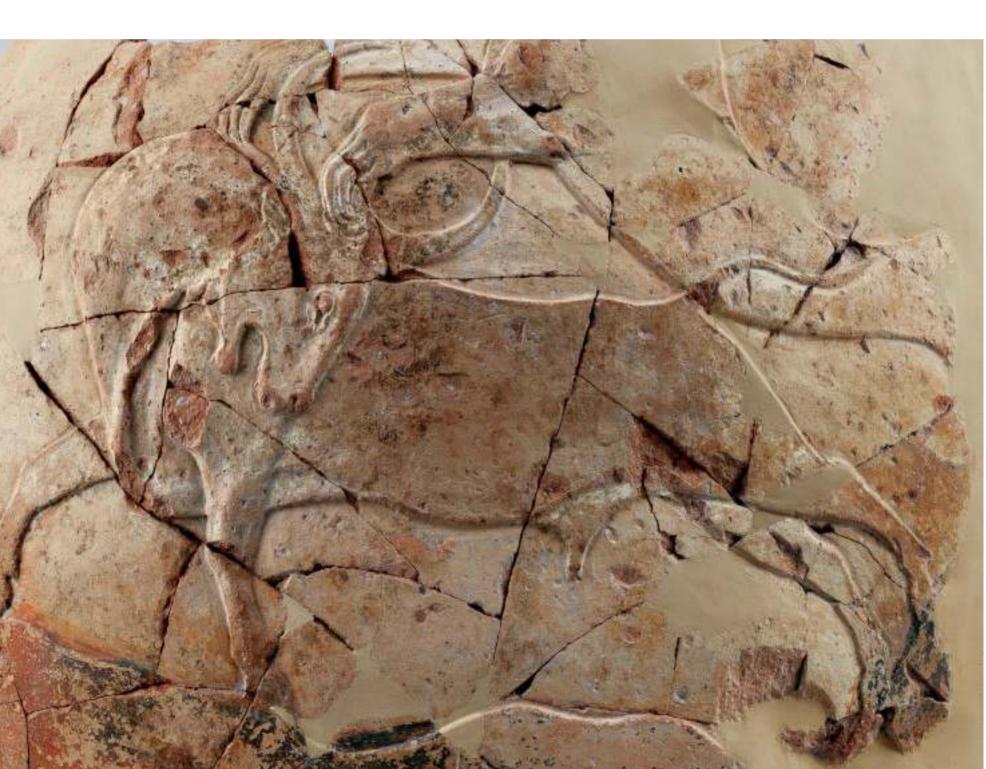
The surviving lower half of a jug in the bichrome style. Depicted is a bird that has just opened its wings in order to fly.



Small sherds of a pithos in the bichrome style, decorated with male figures in unnatural poses, possibly drowned.

Late Cycladic I period (1650-1600 BC)

The category of finds that has been represented quite satisfactorily in the Museum exhibition is the pottery which was in use during the final phase of life in the city at Akrotiri. Even so, some vessels, which on account of their shape and decoration could be classed as of ritual function, should be included in the Imaginary Museum. Noteworthy among these are rhyta of various shapes, such as ovoid imported ones and local conical or cylindrical with vegetal decoration, the nippled ewer with depiction of a pomegranate, the globular jug decorated with bunches of grapes, vetches (probably peas) and nippled ewer encircled by a myrtle wreath. Important too are unique vases with relief decoration, such as the juglet with bunches of grapes, or the surviving part of a large, probably imported, lentoid askos with representation of a lion attacking a bull. Although less impressive aesthetically, vessels imported from other regions of the Aegean are valuable as historical evidence of contacts and exchanges with the places of their provenance.



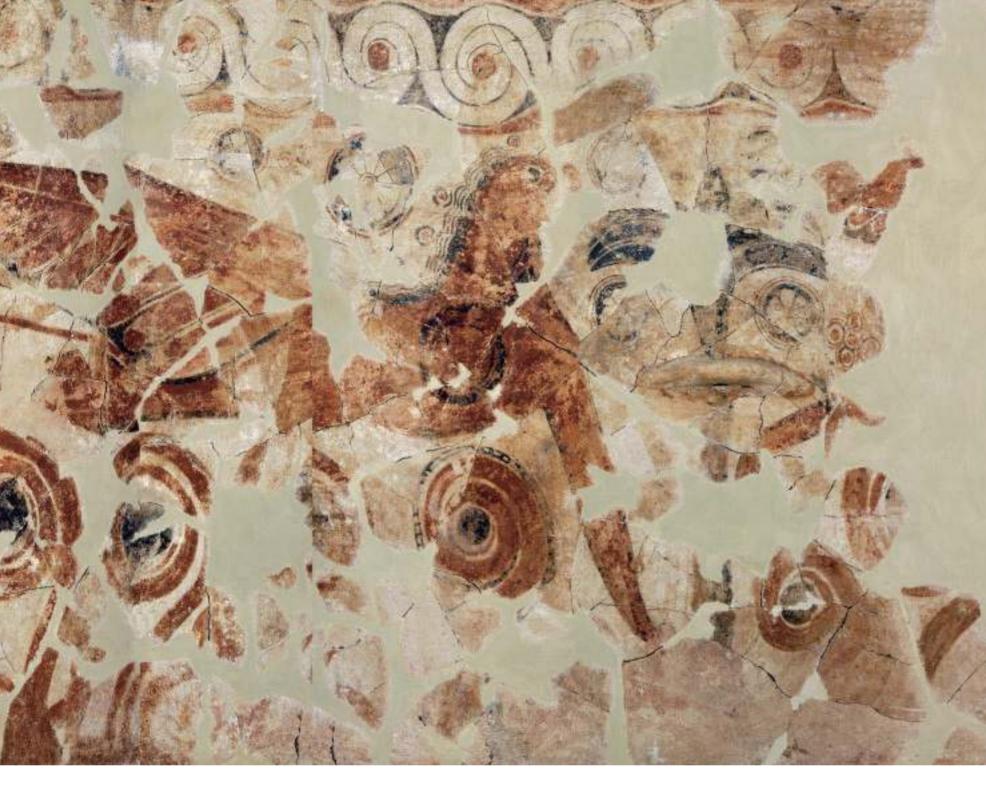
Among the objects not included in the permanent exhibition because of lack of space are storage jars as well as a particularly interesting vessel the conservation of which had not been completed when the exhibition was designed. It is represented at Akrotiri by two examples, to date, only one of which has it been possible to restore fully. Although from the outside it looks like a pithos with well-fitting lid, the arrangement of the inside is most intriguing. First, the bottom is not at the same level as the base but about 15 cm. higher. Second, this bottom is perforated by numerous holes, giving the impression of a strainer, while from the walls below it a small rectangular part has been removed, forming a door that was secured externally by two bars at the edges. The documentation by laboratory analysis of the use of beeswax to waterproof pithoi intended for storing liquids (e.g. olive oil or wine) indicates the practice of beekeeping at Akrotiri. This leads us to suspect that the pithoid vessels with perforated bottom could have functioned as beehives. The space below the perforated bottom, controlled by the door to prevent entry of undesirable visitors, functioned as an antechamber for the entry of bees into the overlying space, to deposit honey. This antechamber could also have been used for providing sustenance for the bees, when this was necessary.

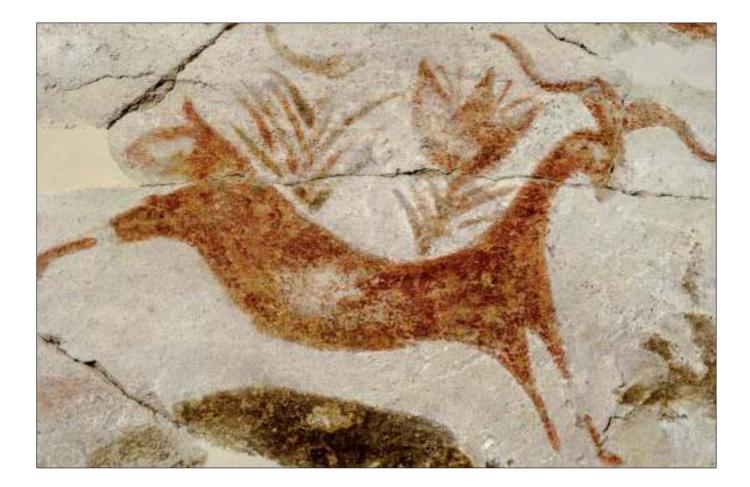
Among the smaller objects that should be included in the Imaginary Museum are vessels such as the so-called communion chalice, in stone or clay, and other imported marble vessels.



Mended part of a large lentoid askos (flask), with relief representation of a lion attacking a bull.









Asaminthos ('bathtub') in the bichrome style, with scene of hunting (?) in a mountainous landscape.





Cylindrical pithos in the bichrome style with representation of a griffin.



Jug in the bichrome style with representation of a pomegranate.





Skyphoid jug in the bichrome style with representation of a broad-leafed plant.



Globular beak-spouted jug decorated with concentric circles and dotted rosettes.



Imported slender ovoid rhyton with main decoration in two zones: zone of spirals on the shoulder and zone of crocus flowers lower down.



Imported ovoid rhyton with main decoration a zone of spirals on the shoulder.



Nippled ewer decorated with schematic pomegranate motifs.



Nippled ewer decorated with trefoil plant motif.



Imported panelled cup.



Imported conical cup with white dotted decoration on the brownish-red slip.



Imported cup with white dotted decoration on the dark-coloured slip.



Imported conical cup with white dotted decoration on the brownish-red slip: a flower on its stem.



Imported conical cup with white dotted decoration on the brownish-red slip: dotted rosettes alternating with dotted circles.



Cylindrical pithos with its lid, decorated with spirals and plant motifs.



Large cylindrical beehive (?) decorated with spirals and plant motifs.



Four-handled pithos decorated with dense reeds in its upper (main) zone.



Large imported pithos decorated in the upper zone with a complex of spirals, in the middle zone with a combination of spirals and myrtle branches, and in the lower zone with ivy.



Small jug with appliqué relief decoration of vine tendrils and bunches of grapes.



Imported amphora with white decoration of net pattern on the black surface.

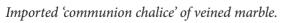


Stone mortar.



Imported spouted vessel of white marble with black veining.







Clay imitation of a stone 'communion chalice'.

Wall-paintings

For the reasons spelt out in Part II, the losers among the finds from the site of Akrotiri exhibited in the Museum of Prehistoric Thera are the wall-paintings. Thus, it is self-evident that these merit pride of place in the Imaginary Museum. It should be noted too that the fragments of wall-paintings recovered from the ruins of the prehistoric city covered surfaces amounting to hundreds of square metres. The piecing together of these fragments in order to restore the original compositions is like a jigsaw puzzle, the image of which is unknown, many pieces of which have been lost forever, and those that have remained are fragile and with pigments that easily flake. This means that the procedure from their removal from the excavation trench until their display in a museum is highly laborious and expensive. Consolidating and cleaning the fragments of any foreign bodies is followed by the conservation of the paint surface, the search for joins and the gluing together of matching pieces, their assembly into large units and the reconstitution of the wall-painting. The procedure ends with placing the whole composition in an aluminium frame, so turning it into an easily manageable portable panel.

This explains why over half a century or so since the Akrotiri excavation commenced (1967), almost only half of the wall-paintings uncovered by Marinatos until 1974 have been conserved and restored. And this despite the tireless efforts of the specialist conservators who with love and devotion, patience and inventiveness, follow for the fourth generation the example of their spiritual forefather and mentor, the late Tassos Margaritoff. With conservation in the on-site laboratory ongoing, it goes without saying that almost every year the corpus of conserved and restored wall-paintings is added to. In this respect, and provided we are fortunate to secure the funding for the conservation project to continue, the Imaginary Museum of Prehistoric Thera would need to expand year by year; it should be a 'Museum Without Walls', the title given to the English translation of André Malraux's thought-provoking book.

For the time being, however, we shall mention those wall-paintings that are ready for display but are not accessible to the public and are kept in the storerooms either of the Museum of Prehistoric Thera or of the Wall-paintings Conservation Laboratory at Akrotiri. In the Thera Gallery of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens is exhibited the famous 'Fresco of the Lilies' or 'Spring Fresco' recovered from Room Delta 2 in excellent condition.

The wall-paintings presented in the Imaginary Museum come from two specific buildings, the West House and Xeste 3. Given that these murals constituted part of the architecture of the said buildings, their presentation by building is opted for in order to help understand the character of these buildings.

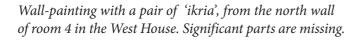
Fragments of wall-paintings in the Conservation Laboratory, before the search for joins begins.



West House

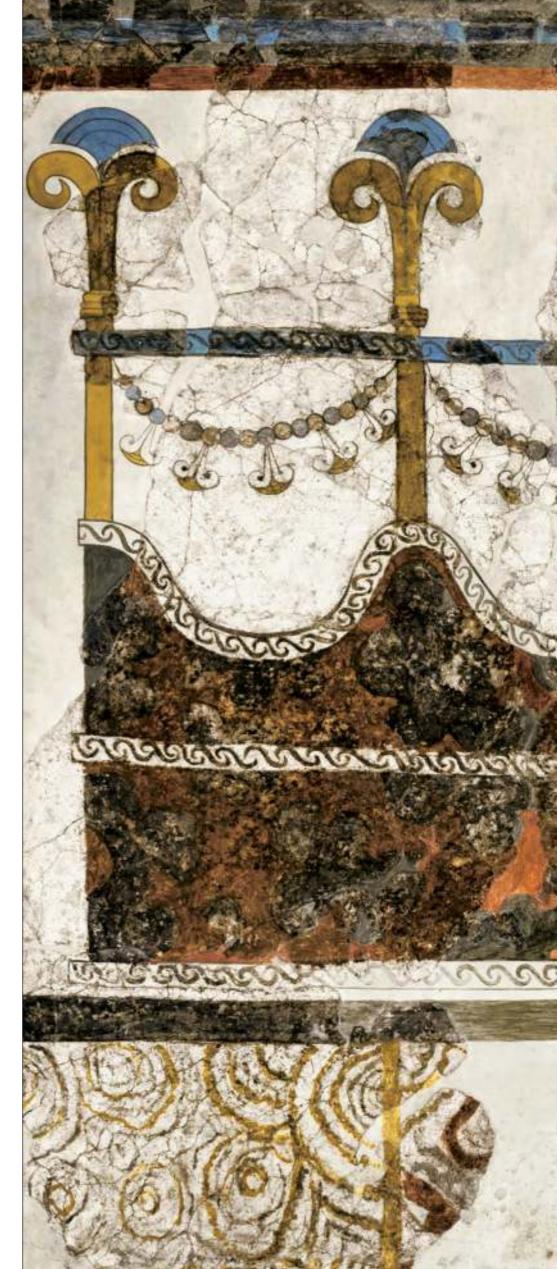
The rich mural decoration of this private house extended throughout the west wing of the first storey (rooms 4 and 5). The walls of room 4, of L-shaped plan, were covered with variations of the same composition, namely the representation of a light portable construction consisting of three vertical posts with papyrus-shaped finials and linked together by garlands. The lower part of the construction was covered with piebald ox hide. The fact that these light constructions were portable and the depiction of a male figure inside similar constructions illustrated on the stern of each ship in the Flotilla Frieze (see below) led to their interpretation as cabins or palanquins, *ikria*', for the captain of each ship. With the system of dividing the wall into three horizontal zones, the main zone was occupied by the representation of *ikria*, which was framed above by a zone of alternating coloured bands and below by a zone imitating a dado of veined marble slabs.

Interesting is the decoration of the jambs of the relatively small west window, on each of which is a rare optical illusion with wall-paintings representing open windows, on the sill of which stands a veined marble flower vase with lilies.









Wall-painting with a pair of 'ikria', from the south wall of room 4 in the West House, with minimal restoration.







Wall-painting of a single 'ikrion' from the east wall of room 4 in the West House. Almost the entire left half is missing.

Wall-painting of half an 'ikrion', from a narrow pisé partition wall in room 4 of the West House.

Wall-painting of a single 'ikrion' from the west wall, left of the window, in room 4 of the West House. A significant part of the upper zone is missing.





Wall-painting from the north jamb of the west window in room 4 of the West House. Depicted is an open window on the sill of which stands a flower vase of veined marble. Room 5 was the most luxurious of all the apartments of the West House. The floor was paved with flagstones and there were four windows in each outside wall, giving the impression of a roofed veranda. Corresponding to these windows were cupboards and doors in the party walls of the room, east and south respectively. This internal arrangement determined also the iconographic programme of the mural decoration.

On the surfaces of the solid external walls were wall-paintings of the two young fishermen. The better preserved one, which comes from the east edge of the north wall, is exhibited in the Museum (see Part II). The less well-preserved fisherman, from the south edge of the west wall, is represented in side view, holding a bunch of fish with both hands to the fore. On the east jamb of the doorway between rooms 4 and 5 was the representation of a young female figure. Marinatos, with his penchant for attributing a sacred character to most of the buildings, originally interpreted the West House as such. Thus, he naturally dubbed this young female figure a 'Priestess'. However, subsequent study has shown that all the young figures in the Thera wall-paintings are depicted with a greater or lesser part of the head shaven and painted in blue. According to parallels with ancient or later cultures, the treatment of the hair in this way denotes children in stages of the rites of passage to adulthood. After this ascertainment, it is more likely that both the young fishermen and the so-called priestess represent young members of the family living in the West House. All three are in the process of initiation/education, in preparation for assuming responsibilities of adults, according to their gender and social role.

The upper zone, above the openings of doorways, windows and cupboards in room 5, was covered by various friezes, each with a different representation. The best preserved is the frieze from the south party wall, with the wall-painting of the flotilla of sailing ships which departed from a far-off harbour, left, and arrives at the harbour of the city at Akrotiri, right. The exotic nature of the harbour of departure is indicated by the wild fauna in the hinterland, while the landscape of the harbour of arrival advocates its identification with Thera. This, in combination with the Aegean type of weaponry (helmets, shields, javelins) of the warriors on the ships, leads us to believe that the illustrated fleet is Aegean, if not Theran.

From the frieze of the east wall, a considerable part depicting a riverine landscape with subtropical vegetation and fauna is preserved in good condition. The human presence is hinted at by the pruned palm trees, some of which stand on this side of the river, imparting depth to the composition, the exotic character of which is emphasized by the flying griffin.

The frieze from the west wall has been almost entirely destroyed. Of the frieze from the north wall, only a small but important part has survived, representing scenes from daily life on different planes. In the lowest part, in the sea, are the inert naked bodies of drowned warriors with foreign weaponry. On the shore is a corps of warriors in panoplies of Mycenaean type, possibly in a victory parade. On a higher plane is a fountain from which women draw water, which they carry in pitchers on their head. Last, represented in the topmost register is a herd, the herdsmen of which lead into the adjacent corral.

The doorways and the cupboards on the east and south walls of room 5 had abolished the lower zone, which was limited to below the windows and the wall-paintings of the young fishermen on the north and the south wall. The wall-paintings covering this zone imitate a dado of polychrome veined marble.



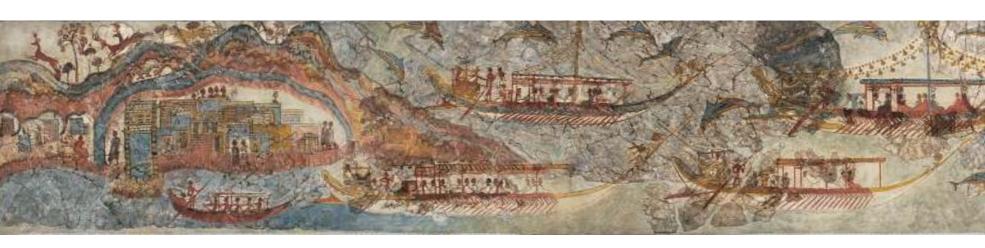
Wall-painting from the south jamb of the west window in room 4 of the West House. Depicted is an open window on the sill of which stands a flower vase of veined marble.



Mended and extensively restored wall-painting from the southwest corner of room 5 in the West House. Depicted is a naked youth in side view, proffering a bunch of fish with both hands.



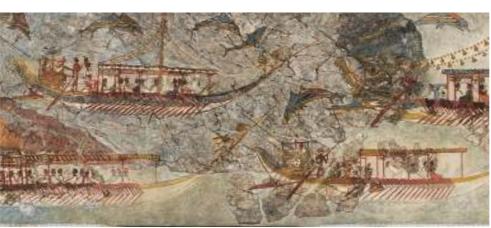
The wall-painting of the young fisherman from the northwest corner of room 5 in the West House.

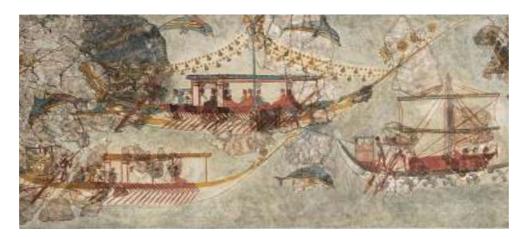


Miniature frieze from the upper zone of the south wall of room 5 in the West House, with representation of a flotilla.



PAGES. 270-273: The harbour of departure. The flora and fauna in the landscape depicted in the background denote its exotic character.





PAGES 274-275: *Details: The vessels are warships with sails and are* represented in two lines. The figurehead in the form of a wild beast (lion, reptile) was possibly the emblem of the ship, while the 'ikrion' depicts the captain's cabin, in front of which stands the helmsman who steers the ship's course. In front of *him are the shields of the warriors* depicted seated on special benches. The lower set of sails are furled and rest on forked supports upon which the warriors' boar's-tusk helmets and javelins are also placed. The oarsmen-paddlers bent over on the gunwale of each ship are represented in a row as a black band and only the heads are discernible. *They hold with both hands the paddles with which they propel* the ship.



PAGES 276-277: Dominating the centre of the flotilla is a small ship with unfurled sails, which unfortunately is not well-preserved. This is the herald of the fleet, as indicated by the open-winged doves/pigeons represented on its bows.

PAGES 278-279: The flotilla reaches its destination. The row of hills protecting the harbour from the left is virtually identical to the landscape west of the prehistoric settlement at Akrotiri, which has led to this wall-painting being dubbed the world's earliest map. Depicted on the hilltop is a building with male figures, perhaps watchmen of the harbour.

PAGES 280-285: The city with its multi-storey buildings is surely that at Akrotiri, the inhabitants of which, informed by the watchmen of the fleet's arrival, come out of their houses and gather on the quay to welcome home their loved ones.

































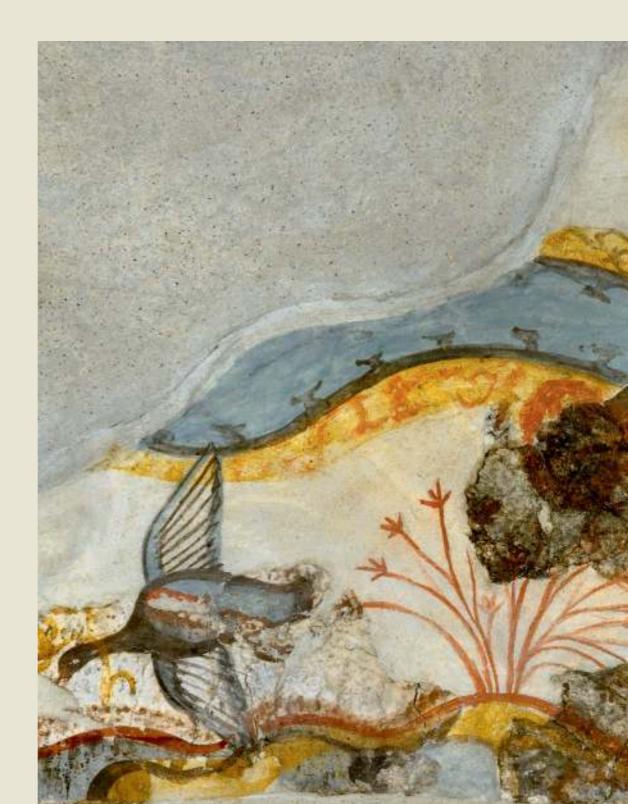






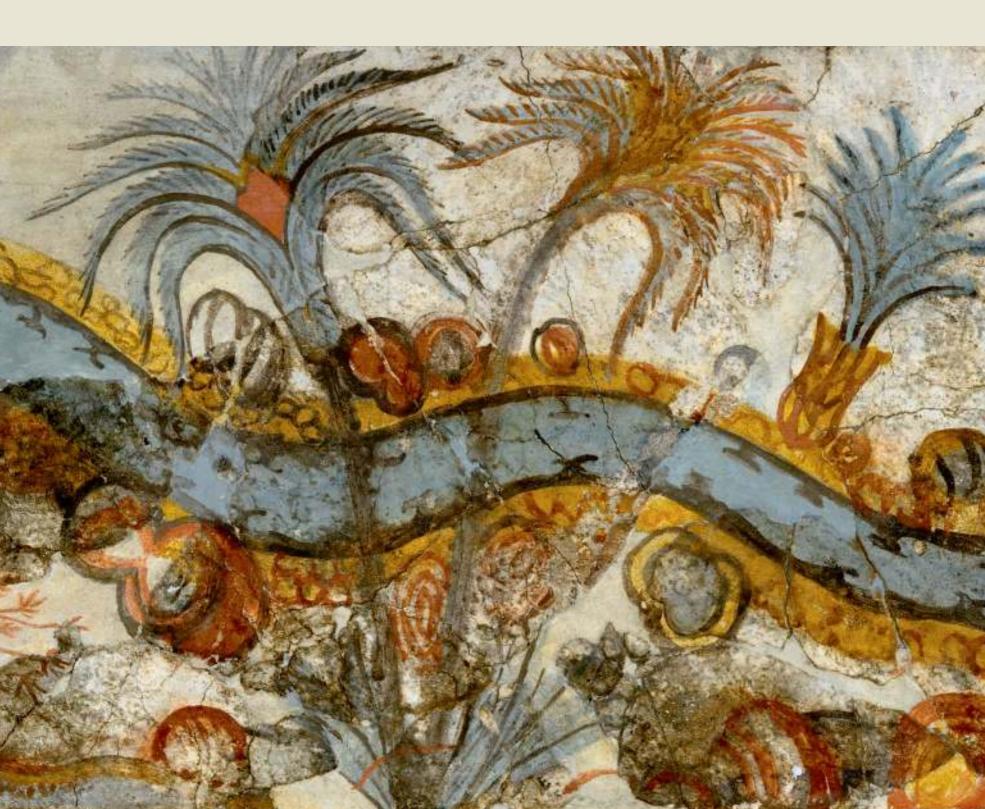


Miniature frieze from the upper zone of the east wall of room 5 in the West House, with representation of a river in a subtropical landscape. The tall palm trees which are projected on the opposite bank, although they grow on the near one, are tangible testimony of the painter's attempt to render the third dimension.



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The exotic world of the East, with which Theran mariners had contacts, is alluded to by the depiction of an imaginary animal, the griffin. At the same time, however, this world is existent, as denoted by the presence of actual wild beasts.





Even in this distant and exotic world, life has its demands. The wild cat, in order to survive, lies in wait to spring at its prey. The ducks, which until that moment were oblivious to its dangerous presence, now flee from the river bank.





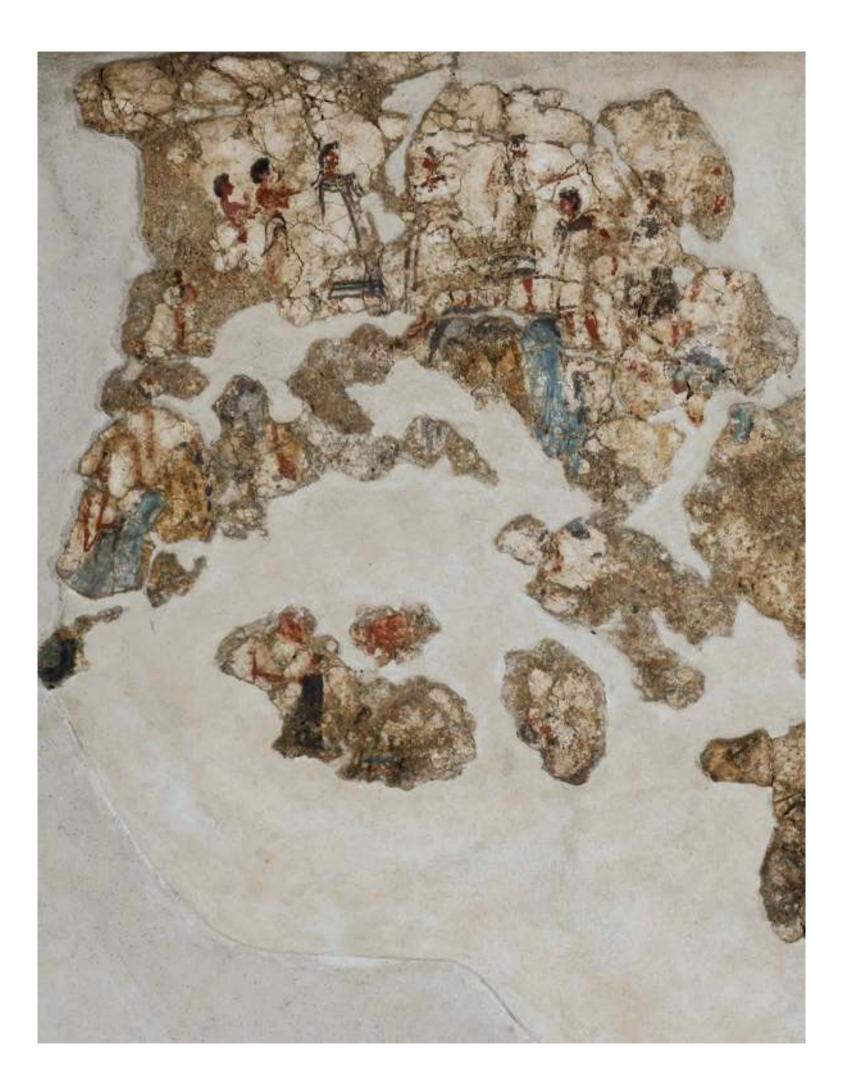
In the wild nature of the riverine landscape, the human presence is hinted at by the pruned palm trees.

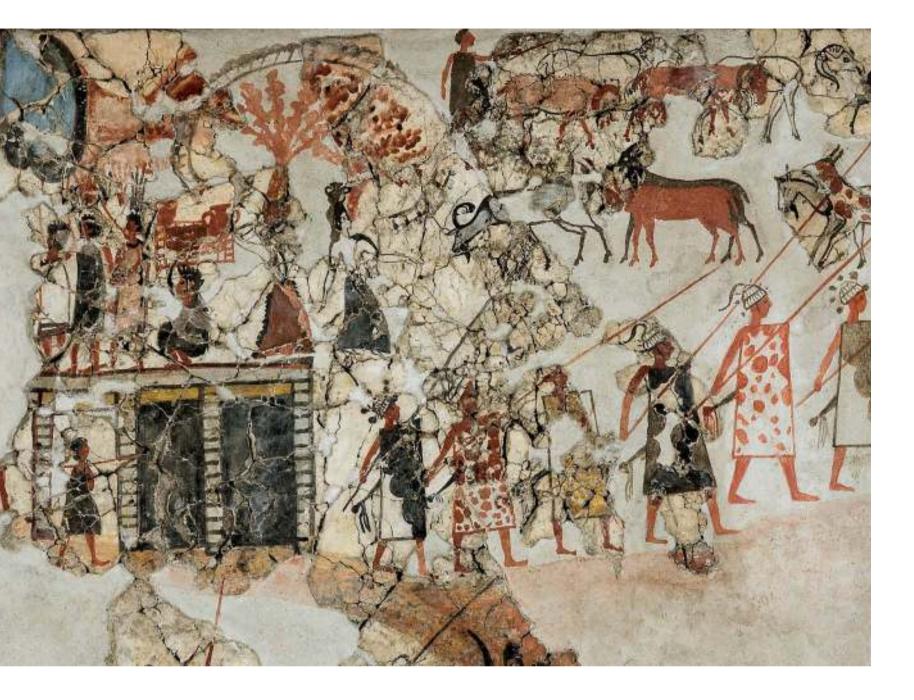




The surviving part of a miniature frieze from the upper zone of the north wall of room 5 in the West House. Here martial scenes are combined with scenes from everyday life.

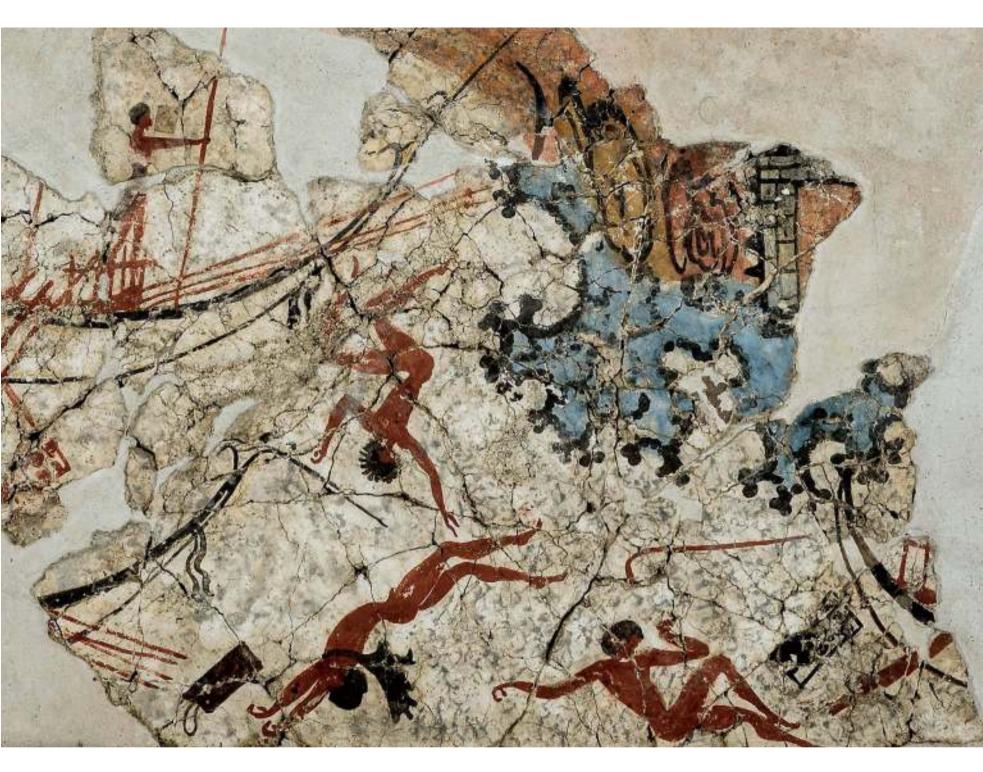
West House, room 5. Part of the miniature frieze of the north wall, with representation of a hilltop assembly of male figures in white (formal?) robes.





West House, north wall of room 5. Part of the miniature frieze with various scenes: to the right of a one-storey building on the seashore (perhaps shipsheds), marches a squad of warriors in armour known from Mycenaean representations. In the middle plane, behind the building, are women at a fountain, some of whom leave carrying the pitcher on their head. Towards the top, an enclosed space with two trees at the entrance is perhaps the pen into which a herd of sheep and goats is driven.





The lower part of the miniature frieze from the north wall of room 5 in the West House. Off the coast with the squad of warriors, naked male bodies in unnatural poses lie in the sea, drowned. Perhaps they are victims of a skirmish with the invaders.

-

Part of a frieze from a room in the still unexplored edifice Xeste 4. It depicts in almost life size a helmet made of boar's tusks. Such helmets have been found in Mycenaean excavation contexts. However, their representation in the armament of the warriors in the miniature frieze from the West House, as well as in the frieze in Xeste 4, indicates that their use in the Aegean is much earlier and quite widespread.









Wall-paintings from the lower zone of the north and the west wall of room 5 in the West House. Represented is a dado of colourful veined marble slabs.





Xeste 3. Fresco frieze with representation of a double white running spiral.

Xeste 3

As has been stressed repeatedly, Xeste 3 was a public edifice probably intended for rituals associated with the initiation/education of adolescents. Its mural decoration covered scores of square metres, of which only part has been conserved and restored, while conservation continues. The wall-paintings from the northeast wing of the building –area of the so-called Lustral Basin– both the ground floor and the upper storey, have been conserved *in toto*, while very few compositions have been restored from other apartments of the building.

From the now missing walls –east and north– of the Lustral Basin comes a mural representation of apparently ritual content. Depicted on the east wall was the façade of an enclosed space, probably a sacred precinct, the entrance to which was crowned by double or sacral horns. A large branch of an olive tree hangs outwards covering a significant part of the wall, while next to it is the half-open doorway of the shrine. The three female figures depicted on the north wall appear to proceed towards this but their progress is interrupted by the accident that befell the middle female figure. This is suggested by her pose: she sits on a rock and with her right hand holds her foot, from the big toe of which trickle drops of blood, while her left hand touches her forehead, obviously indicating pain. The female on the left has an elaborate hairstyle, elegant jewellery and opulent costume, with diaphanous gossamer bodice. The third figure, at the right edge of the scene, is also lavishly attired. Her body is turned towards the injured sitting figure, while her head faces the sacred precinct. From her extensively shaved head, this figure appears to be the young initiand and perhaps her pose indicates her anxiety about the outcome of the episode.

From the ground-floor apartment to the west of the Lustral Basin comes the wall-painting ensemble representing the seated figure of an adult male towards which three naked young male figures advance. Probably this is a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood. The seated male wears a white *zoma* and holds on his knees a large jug which he tilts slightly forward. Because an exactly similar bronze jug has been found in the excavation, it is surmised that the one illustrated was also of metal. A small corridor of pisé walls, the traces of which were identified in front of the wall-painting with the adult male figure, where fragments of the wall-paintings of the naked boys were collected too, helps us to reconstruct the entire composition. On the north flank of the corridor was the wall-painting of perhaps the eldest of the nude boys, holding a basin and proceeding towards the seated mature male. The two other boys on the opposite south flank of the corridor move in the same direction. The elder of these is in the lead, holding a length of multicoloured textile, while the little boy who follows, with entirely shaven head, held a basin, now effaced. It seems that the rites involved some kind of purificatory ablutions for which the depicted vessels were required.

Perhaps here we should say a few words that will help the better understanding of the scenes depicted in the wall-paintings of Xeste 3. We have said already that the degree of shaving of the head is indicative of the stage in initiation of the corresponding young figure. Cutting or shaving the hair as a ritual act is an almost universal cultural practice with a long history. As a substitute for sacrifice it is associated with rites of passage at various critical stages in the life cycle. So, the young figures with shaven heads in the Thera wallpaintings have been identified as adolescents in stages of initiation. This procedure seems to have been completed with a rite in which the boys, who were nude, were girded with the characteristic male garment, the *zoma*, and the girls, who are never depicted naked, donned the gossamer veil. So, it is deduced that the wallpainting compositions from the Lustral Basin represent the rite of passage to adulthood and what this entailed in Late Bronze Age Theran society. The mural that adorned the walls of the room above the Lustral Basin, in the first storey, depicts scenes of gathering saffron. It too seems to be related to rites of passage. This becomes clear from the scene on the east wall of the entire composition. In a mountainous landscape filled with clusters of crocus blossoms, a young girl with shaven head is initiated by learning to collect the stamens of the precious product, saffron. The way in which she gazes at the adult female who watches her at her side belies the girl's anxiety over the final result.

In the most impressive part of the composition, on the north wall, the ritual character of the representation becomes even more overt. On the right, an imposing female figure is depicted seated, as if watching from on high the whole process of gathering saffron, while in front of her, low down, is a large pannier in which the saffron-gatherers empty their harvest. A blue monkey makes posies of the precious stamens and offers these, without human mediation, to this magnificent female figure. Served by an exotic animal, the monkey, guarded by a fantastic being, the griffin, and bedecked with jewellery representing winged (dragonflies) and aquatic (ducks) animals, while a chthonic one (snake) crowns her head, this figure has been justifiably interpreted as the revered goddess of nature, as the *'Potnia'*. Perhaps this is the earliest indisputable depiction of a deity in human form in Aegean art.

Of the rest of the wall-paintings from Xeste 3 two have been restored from the upper storeys and should be included in the Imaginary Museum. One is a frieze with representation of a white running spiral combined with S-shaped lines, the fragments of which are thought to have fallen from the storey above room 2, which means it perhaps decorated the zone of wall above a polythyron.

At least two of the now lost walls of room 9 in the second storey were adorned with a wall-painting of a non-figural subject. The upper band resembles an architectural frame in which a reddish-brown curtain appears to hang, covering the entire surface of the wall. Upon this surface, like an embroidery, extended the decorative pattern of pairs of relief wavy bands that pass through rings, creating a mesh of lozenge-shaped frames, in each of which are four rosettes. The rosettes of the upper and lower registers have white stamens and two rings of petals, the inner ones black and the outer ones blue. The rosettes in the middle row of lozenges have blue stamens, white petals in the inner ring and ochre yellow in the outer. The plasticity of the relief part, the precision of the design and the alternating colours of the rosettes, make this wall-painting, a small section of which is exhibited in the Museum (see *Part II*), one of the most striking creations of decorative art at Akrotiri.

At present, the corpus of wall-paintings from Xeste 3 includes also two huge compositions of spirals, a wall-painting with representation of Ladies with Bouquets, a wall-painting with scene of the Capture of a Bull and another with scene of the Capture of a Wild Goat. Soon, compositions such as the scene of monkeys engaged in human activities, the frieze with swallows feeding their chicks in their nests, and others, will be added to the catalogue.





In this album on the archaeological site at Akrotiri, the Museum of Prehistoric Thera and the Imaginary Museum, we have tried to give readers an insight into the history and culture of prehistoric Theran society from the remains of its material creations. However, rich as the illustrations are, and although a picture is said to speak a thousand words, we should be mindful that the remains these people left behind remain for the most part inscrutable and silent.

The wall-painting from the east wall of the so-called Lustral Basin in Xeste 3. Possibly it represents the entrance to a sacred enclosure (temenos).



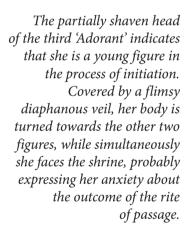
Wall-painting from the north wall of the so-called Lustral Basin. Represented are three female figures ('Adorants') wearing elaborate costumes and exquisite jewellery, advancing towards the temenos.



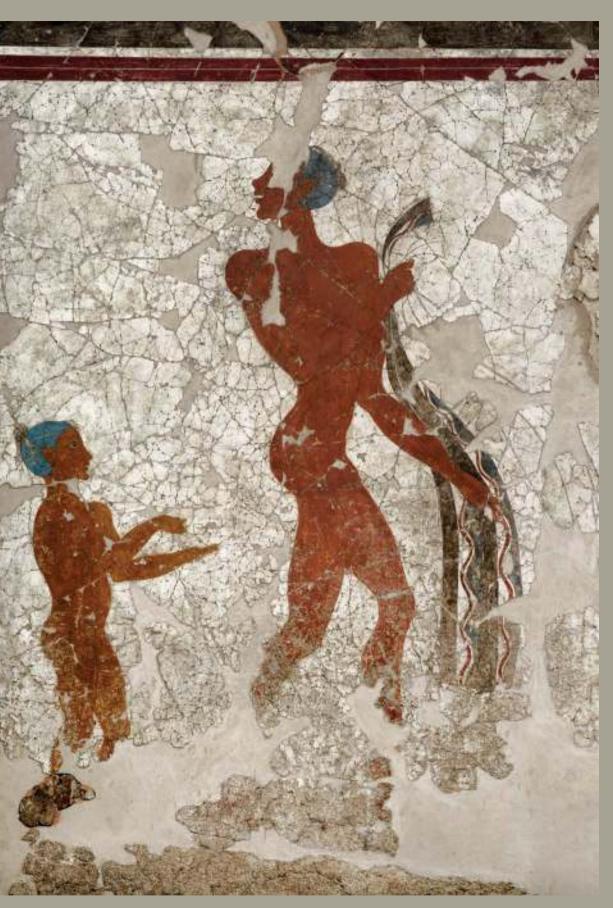
The middle 'Adorant' sits on a rock, probably after injuring her big toe. By placing her left hand on the forehead she conveys pain, while by holding her wounded foot with her right hand she indicates the cause of the pain. Her long hairstyle denotes that she is a mature woman.



The left 'Adorant', also a mature woman, wears a gossamer bodice and outstretches her left hand holding a precious necklace.

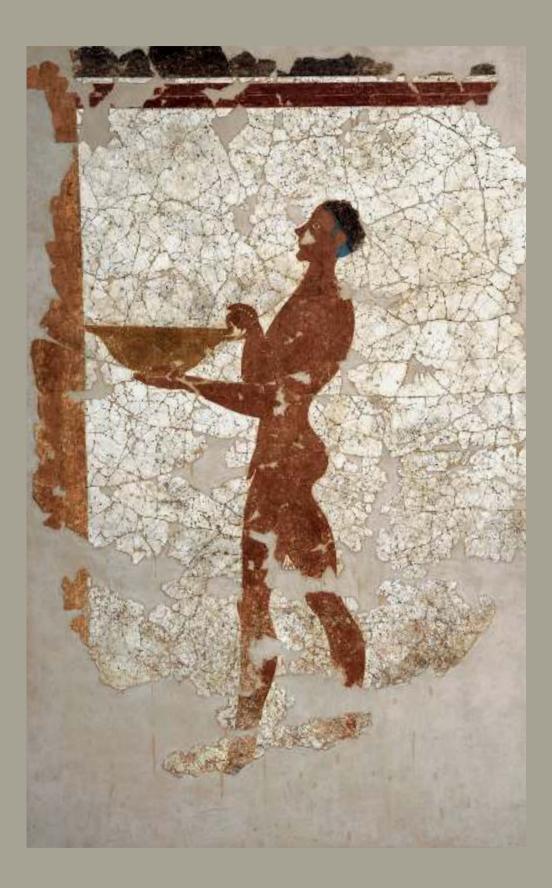








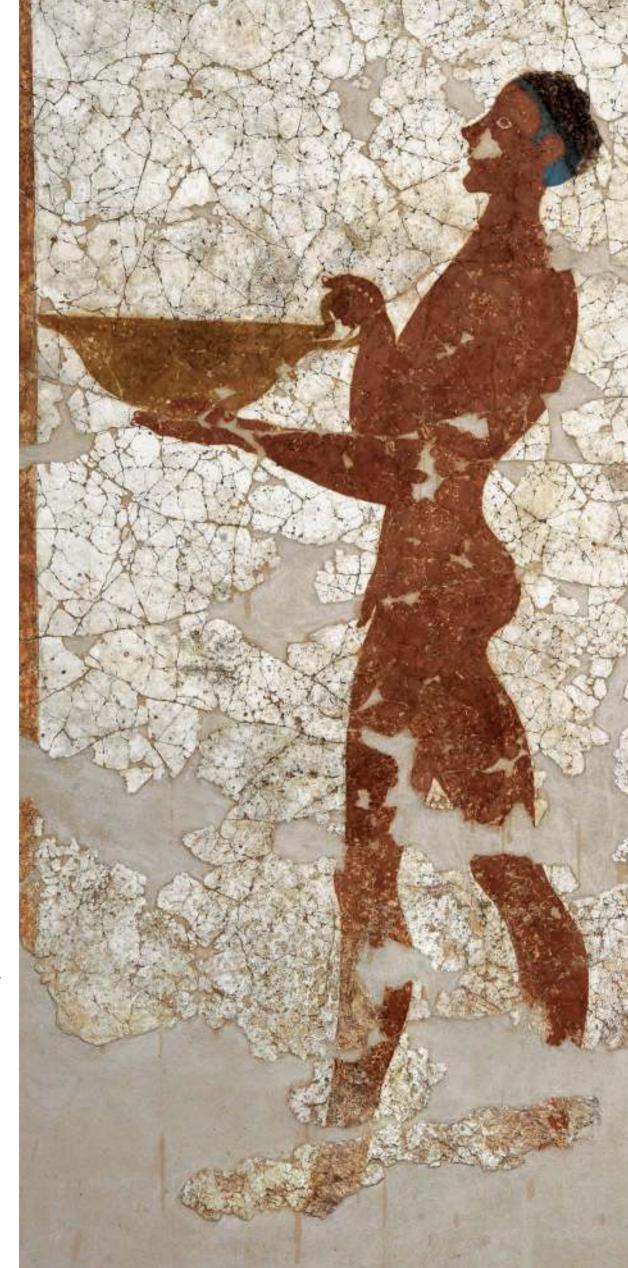
Wall-painting from the apartment west of the so-called Lustral Basin, with representation of three naked boys with partially shaven heads, advancing towards a seated figure of an adult male holding a large (bronze?) jug on his knees. A scene from the rite of passage is probably depicted





The boys depicted with extensively shaven head are a long way from their own initiation to adulthood and merely assist at the ritual for the eldest youth. The colourful length of cloth held by the youth in the lead is possibly the zoma (loincloth) with which the limbs of the initiand will be girded when he is declared an adult. The boy behind him carries a small bowl, no longer visible to the naked eye, due to the fading of the pigment.

The youth whose head is hardly shaven is obviously the initiand in the rite of passage to adulthood. The bowls held by him and the boy in the other scene perhaps indicate that the procedure also involved ceremonial ablution.







Large wall-painting from the east wall of the room in the storey above the so-called Lustral Basin. In a mountainous landscape filled with crocuses a mature woman shows the young female initiand with shaven head how to collect the stamens from the flowers. The latter imitates her 'teacher', anxious to gain her approval.

FOLLOWING PAGES:

(314) *Detail showing the facial expression of the mature* 'Saffron-gatherer', the initiator.

(315) *Detail showing the expression of the young female* 'Saffron-gatherer', the initiand.



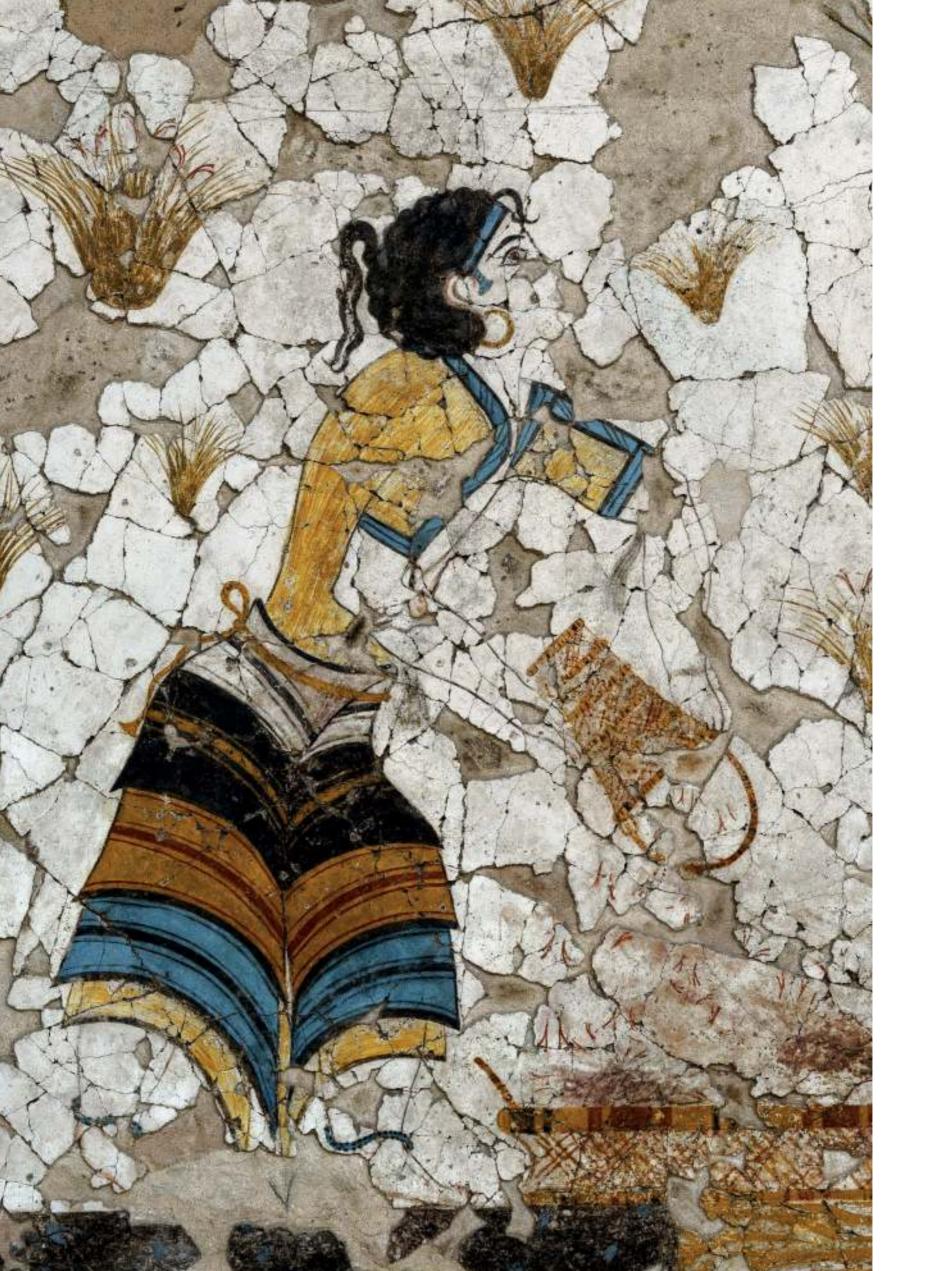




The central scene from the large mural composition of saffron-gathering. The 'Saffron-gatherers' empty their baskets into a large pannier, from which a blue monkey takes stamens to make posies. These he offers to the majestic female figure seated on a stepped pedestal. Lavishly attired and bedecked with jewellery, she is guarded by a griffin.



This figure has been identified as the goddess of nature, the Potnia, under whose surveillance the gathering of the precious product of the Theran soil takes place.





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PAGES 324-325: Large wall-painting from room 9 of Xeste 3, in the second storey. Relief double bands pass through loops to create a mesh of lozenges in three tiers. Each lozenge encloses four rosettes, blue in the upper and lower rows, ochre yellow in the middle one.

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