Childhood in the Past **5**, 2012, 35–50

The Participation of Children in Mycenaean Cult

Christina Aamodt

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the participation of children in the performance of Mycenaean cult. The involvement of children in the performance of religious rites during the Mycenaean period is indicated exclusively by iconographic representations. The depiction of children in scenes of cultic character may be implying the active role of children as acolytes. Iconographic evidence seems to suggest a specific connection between young girls and a young goddess, similar to the association inferred by Theran frescoes. The latter supports further the notion that children might have participated in the performance of religious acts in Mycenaean times and it may also imply that girls particularly may have spent several years of their life in the service of a goddess.

Keywords: children, cult, Mycenaean, acolytes

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to consider the participation of children in the performance of cult in Mycenaean Greece during the Late Helladic IIIA–C periods (henceforth LH), which in absolute chronology refer to the time span between *c.* 1400–1070 BC. So far, the earliest and most informative evidence for the participation of children in cult performance, and particularly in rites of passage, in the prehistoric Aegean consist of the frescoes from Akrotiri on the island of Thera, preserved by the volcanic eruption that buried the site in Late Minoan IA, *c.* 1625 or 1530 BC (Rehak 2007, 206). The frescoes, especially the ones uncovered in Xeste 3, suggest that children and specifically young girls were in the service of a young goddess, at least for a period of time during their life (Marinatos 1985, 224; Rehak 2007, 208). The purpose of this service may have been similar to that observed in Classical Athens, namely to educate the children in

Author's address: **Christina Aamodt**, P.O. Box D 3014, Thermi, Thessaloniki, 57001, Greece, Email: caamont@gmail.com

ritual customs and prepare them for their future adult roles (Golden 1993, 40 and 46; Marinatos 1984, 64; Rehak 2007, 223). In Classical Athens young girls of good families were called on to serve at the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, probably at some age between eight and fourteen years, where they were engaged in a variety of symbolic activities that would prepare them for puberty and the assumption later on of adult roles within the community (Rehak 2007, 224). Moreover, in the festivals of the Arrephoria and the Panathenaia most duties that were given to the girls reflected their training in women's work, such as the weaving of a new robe for Athena (Golden 1993, 48 and 50). The service of girls at sanctuaries also had a symbolic aspect, namely their ritual transformation into women (Price 1999, 95). In terms of Mycenaean mainland Greece, the evidence for the involvement of children in cult is much more limited. There is evidence to suggest the possible existence of rituals similar to those represented in the Theran frescoes and associated with childhood, however, as well as the participation of children in the communal performance of ritual acts.

In Bronze Age Aegean direct evidence of children is restricted to a few references in the Linear B tablets (Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 155–68; Olsen 1998, 382), some artistic representations of children in ivory, gold, terracotta and bronze, namely on seal stones, rings, clay sealings, pictorial vases and a few fragmentary fresco depictions, mostly from Thera, Knossos on Crete and Pylos and Mycenae on the mainland (Rehak 2007, 206; Rutter 2003). Also, there are a few wealthy child burials, which may reflect the distinctive position of these particular children and the importance placed on them. Examples of such burials include the two infants covered with suits and masks of gold foil found in Shaft Grave III of Grave Circle A at Mycenae (Graziadio 1991, 437; Mylonas 1966, 91–3), as well as the girl found at Koukounara Tholos 2 (Marinatos 1958, 191) and the 'little princess' in the Tholos Tomb at Dendra (Persson 1931, 14), the latter both covered in gold and jewellery (for child burials, in general, see Polychronakou-Sgouritsa (1987), Cavanagh and Mee (1998, 69, 72 and 128–30), Gallou (2004) and Lebegyev (2009)).

Children in Mycenaean Greece

Although the Linear B tablets relate to a specific and limited time period (*c.* 1200 BC), and record only the activities that were of concern to the palaces, they provide direct evidence for the occupations and position of children in the Mycenaean period. Approximately 200 tablets from the palaces of Pylos and Knossos record children in the so-called personnel series (PY Aa, Ab and Ad; KN Ai, Ag, Ak and Am; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 155–65). Children are listed as components of family units, as recipients of rations from the palaces and as accompanying workgroups of specialised labourers (Olsen 1998, 382; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 155–65). The children are differentiated by sex into *ko-wo-i* (κούροι, boys) and *ko-wa-i* (κόραι, girls), whereas at Knossos they are further differentiated by age, defined either as *me-wi-jo*/*me-u-jo* (younger) or *me-zo* (older), although it is not clear what exactly these terms meant for the Mycenaeans (Olsen 1998, 383; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 155–65). The purpose of the distinction was more likely related to the tasks performed by each group of children (Nosch 2001, 40–1). Children of both sexes are recorded along with women, whereas boys are only listed with men when they are old enough to begin their professional training (Olsen

1998, 384). What the tablets imply is that children were working with their mothers but when boys reached a certain age, and no longer required maternal care, they were handed over to their fathers to be trained in their profession, whereas girls would have stayed with their mothers (Chadwick 1976, 81; Gallou 2004, 366; 2010, 163; Olsen 1998, 384). The fact that children were trained is suggested by the reference *di.-*, probably an abbreviation for *di-da-ka-re*, which means 'to instruct', on the Knossos tablets (Nosch 2001, 41; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 162). Moreover, detailed examination of palm prints impressed on tablets found at Knossos has resulted in the discovery that a number of them belong to children aged eight to twelve years, suggesting that young boys flattened unbaked clay tablets to be used by older male scribes, perhaps in some cases even the boys' fathers (Rutter 2003, 48; Sjöquist and Åström 1991, 25–8 and 30–3). It is possible that these boys were employed as apprentices to the scribes with the additional task of learning the recording system of the Mycenaean administration (Sjöquist and Åström 1991, 30).

The evidence from the Linear B documents indicates that children constituted an important part of the working force by performing a number of menial tasks, such as the grinding and measuring of cereal (PY Aa62 and PY An292) and weaving (PY Ad694 and PY Aa04), as well as household chores such as nursing (PY Aa815, Aa717), bath pouring (PY Ad676), serving (PY Ad690) and sweeping (PY Ad671) (Gallou 2010, 164; Nosch 2001; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 158–63). Further, it is possible that some of these tasks may have been more technical than they appear, such as the role of the 'bath-pourers', who may have been involved in some industrial processes, such as the washing of wool for the textile and perfume oil industries (Gallou 2010, 165). The participation of children in economic activities could also be implied by the presence in child burials of stone tools used for cereal grinding similar to those uncovered in adult burials, a reference to the child's cereal grinding tasks during its lifetime (Gallou 2010, 165). The low status of these children is suggested by the fact that they are supported by low food rations, as opposed to wages or other benefits, and some of them are recorded along with women identified with an ethnic name, such as Knidian (PY Ad683) or as *do-e-ra* (PY An42), interpreted as 'slave' (Gallou 2010, 164; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 156 and 163–4). Whether these women and their children were indeed slaves is debated (Billigmeier and Turner 1981, 4; Gallou 2010, 164; Nosch 2001, 38), but the written evidence suggests that they were both fully dependent on the palace (Gallou 2010, 164; Olsen 2009, 119).

Representations of Children in Minoan and Mycenaean Art

Iconographic evidence of children from the Mycenaean mainland is unfortunately scarcer than on Crete and Thera (for a detailed examination of depictions of children in the Bronze Age Aegean in general see Rutter 2003). One of the relative criteria for the identification of children in Aegean iconography is their smaller size in scenes that involve more than one individual (Rehak 2007, 206). Furthermore, different stages of hair growth may indicate different stages of childhood, as has been inferred by the Theran and Minoan representations (Davis 1986; Koehl 1986; Marinatos 1984, 62); this might have also been the case at least for large-scale Mycenaean art, as shall be shown below. Diminutive figures depicted on their own are more difficult to interpret, since

they might have represented either children or even adults of inferior social status (Rehak 2007, 206; Rutter 2003, 57). An example of this dilemma comprises the diminutive male figure depicted between two chariots on the posterior side of the Klavdhia krater from Cyprus (LH IIIA2) (Karageorghis and Vermeule 1982, 30 and 198 IV.18; Rutter 2003, 57 and n. 89).

In terms of Minoan Crete, the earliest and single image of a child dated to the Protopalatial period (*c.* 1900–1750/1650 BC) is the bust of a boy impressed on a sealing from the so-called Hieroglyphic Deposit at Knossos (Rutter 2003, 37). On the contrary, the Neopalatial period (*c.* 1750/1650–1490/1450 BC) has produced a number of representations of children, a phenomenon certainly related to the explosion of pictorialism that characterises the art of this era (Rutter 2003, 37). During the Neopalatial period children are represented for the first time in Aegean art as individual three-dimensional figures on material ranging from terracotta to bronze and ivory. The evidence has been thoroughly examined by Rutter (2003) and, as such, only a very brief account will be presented here.

Figurines of children have been found at Psychro Cave and the site of Palaikastro, whereas several figures of terracotta groups uncovered in the Middle Minoan (*c.* 2050–1700/1600 BC) tholos tomb at Kamilari could represent children (Rutter 2003, 39). Very impressive examples include the ivory young male acrobats found at Knossos (Hood 1993, 144); the chryselephantine young male from Palaikastro Building 5, which may have been a cult image (MacGillivray *et al*. 2000, 93–4; Rutter 2003, 38) and the ivory trio from Mycenae depicting a young girl and two seated female figures which, although from a probable LH IIIB context, is most likely a Minoan work of Neopalatial date (Rehak and Younger 1998, 240). Males of different ages are carved in low relief on numerous Neopalatial stone vases, such as the 'Chieftain Cup' or the 'Boxer Vase', both found at Aghia Triadha, and presumably participating in initiation rites (Hood 1993, 175–8; Rutter 2003, 41). Girls, on the contrary, are mostly depicted on seals and sealings, represented as identical diminutive female figures flanking a larger woman (Rutter 2003, 42). Finally, children and adolescents, both boys and girls are represented in wall paintings that may be associated with rites of passage, for example frescoes depicting bull-leaping or large crowds. The latter consist of the 'Sacred Grove and Dance' and the 'Grand Stand' frescoes uncovered north of the Central Court of the palace at Knossos and dating to the Neopalatial period (Davis 1987; Jacobs 2004, 9; Rutter 2003, 42–3). The two frescoes may have formed parts of one pictorial program that depicted the transition from one age group to another, that is children into youths and youths into young women and men respectively, whereas bull leaping may have been one of the ordeals performed (Jacobs 2004, 16–17).

Children in Mycenaean art are represented on a few surviving fresco fragments, as well as on terracotta, pottery, gold and ivory. The earliest representations are those of girls identified on several gold plaques from Shaft Grave III of Grave Circle A at Mycenae and on ivory mirror handles uncovered in the tholos of Clytemnestra and Chamber Tomb 55 at Mycenae and in the 'Royal Tomb' at Dendra (Rehak 2007, 217–9; Rehak and Younger 1998, 238). The girls are depicted with cropped hair wearing calf-length skirts, resembling the girls from Xeste 3 at Thera, and occasionally they hold stems of plants or birds (Rehak 2007, 218–9). Nevertheless, although these ivory

handles are usually assumed to be Late Mycenaean works due to the dating of their contexts, they are rather Minoan Neopalatial creations (Rehak and Younger 1998, 238). Children depicted in outline are also represented on four gold plaques uncovered in a child burial in the cemetery of Kamini on Naxos dating to LH IIIC (Vlachopoulos 1999, 308). The kourotrophoi figurines, although suggestive of the concept of child care (Olsen 1998, 385–8), do not provide further information in terms of the involvement of children in cult; thus they will not be examined, with the exception of the atypical Mavrospelio kourotrophos figurine. Similarly, the image of two figures carrying a smaller one between them represented in terracotta and depicted on pictorial vases – in cases also identified as an ordinary child, such as the terracotta trio from Tomb 79 at Mycenae (Mylonas 1956, 120) – most likely represent groups of divinities or worshippers in front of a cult image, as has recently been proposed for the LH IIIA2 krater from Klavdhia (Rystedt 2001, 396), and therefore will not be examined either. Finally, some of the diminutive figures depicted on the LH IIIB-C larnakes (terracotta chests) from the cemeteries of Tanagra as part of prothesis scenes, that is the laying out of the dead, have been interpreted as children (Immerwahr 1995, 110 and 112; Rutter 2003, 48). The scenes depict two female figures placing a small one – the dead child – into one of these terracotta chests. The presence of a prothesis scene on a larnax measuring 0.73 m in length may suggest the interment of a child (Immerwahr 1995, 112), although one could also interpret these scenes generically and assume that the diminutive figure may represent the deceased (Cavanagh and Mee 1995, 50; Immerwahr 1995, 112).

Representations of Children in the Performance of Mycenaean Cult

Children are usually depicted accompanying adults in the performance of Mycenaean cult. The earliest example comprises the gold ring from the Acropolis of Mycenae depicting a procession of two priestesses holding flowers and moving towards a seated individual (Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel I, 17; Niemeier 1990, 167; Palikisianos 1996, 837; Sakellariou 1964), which is a Mycenaean work of art rather than Minoan (Hood 1993, 275; Niemeier 1990, 167). The seated figure could also be a priestess, who performs the epiphany of the goddess, since she is interacting with the worshippers (Hägg 1986, 56–8; Niemeier 1990, 167). An unusual element is the presence of two children, definitely girls, one standing in front of the priestess/goddess and the other behind the tree where the goddess is seated. The fact that one of the girls is offering flowers to the 'goddess' in the same way as the priestesses, may suggest that she is also involved in the ritual act. The role of the second girl is uncertain, but she seems to be picking fruit or flowers from the tree, presumably to offer it to the 'goddess'. Interestingly, the girl is wearing strips of cloth, often worn by priestesses in iconographic representations, perhaps also worn by one of the priestesses in the same scene that may be indicating her religious status (Aamodt 2006, 174). The fact that she does not have hair locks, as is the case for the second girl in the scene, may denote that she is younger. There is no doubt that the strips should represent the cloth and not hair. It is noteworthy that the seated figure is wearing a skirt very similar to that worn by the goddess on Xeste 3 at Thera.

On a LH IIIB2 fragmentary krater from Tiryns (Fig. 1) a small figure, probably a child,

is depicted along with an adult female (Catling 1982–83, 28 and fig. 45; Kilian 1983, 308 and fig. 35). Kilian (1983, 308) has identified the child as a boy on the basis of its haircut, but the scene is too fragmentary to allow definite identifications. Both figures are associated with a procession of sphinxes represented in other fragments of the vase. During the LH times sphinxes seem to possess a central role in funerary iconography, perhaps symbolising the sphere of the dead, suffice is to mention the representations on the Tanagra larnakes (Gallou 2005, 50). In general terms, however, sphinxes have an emblematic and sacred role in Mycenaean palatial art (Gallou 2005, 51; Immerwahr 1990, 137–8). Therefore, the association of the figures with sphinxes places the scene in the supernatural sphere and attributes a religious character to the composition, thus implying the participation of the child in a cultic activity (Muskett 2008, 39). Similarly, other LH IIIB2 pottery fragments from Tiryns illustrate a child holding a stick (Fig. 2). The identification of the child has been made on the basis of its small size in comparison with the hind legs of an animal (a sphinx?) depicted to the right (Catling 1982–83, 28 and fig. 44). However, as mentioned above, the possibility of the small figure being an adult of inferior status cannot be ruled out, whereas the fragmentary preservation of the scene impedes further identifications and conclusions.

In terms of large-scale art, a white-skinned figure with a reddish ear from Pylos has been identified as a girl (Rutter 2003, 57, n. 74). The head is outlined in black on a white background and the way it was drawn is reminiscent of LH IIIA vase painting (Lang 1969, 76); similarly, the eye is rendered in a black outline. The hair is nearly black, whereas the ear is large and red (Lang 1969, 76, 33Hsw and pl. 24C). A reddish object is depicted above the head that looks like a male arm, twice the scale of the head. According to Lang (1969, 76), the head belongs to a sphinx, rather than a real woman. Although no polos – an accessory commonly associated with sphinxes – is depicted the hair is arranged in a polos-like crown (Lang 1969, 76). The representation is too fragmentary to allow any firm conclusions to be made, but the fact that the figure is reminiscent of the so-called 'Young Priestess' from the West House at Akrotiri (Marinatos 1984, 46 and fig. 26) should not be overlooked. More importantly, ears painted red are rarely represented in Bronze Age Aegean art and consist namely of three examples – a figurine from Mallia on Crete, a female figurine from the West Shrine of Phylakopi on the island of Melos and the so-called 'Bearded Aphrodite' from Cyprus, suggesting that this type of body decoration is more likely associated with cult during prehistoric times in the Aegean (Marinatos 1984, 46; Papaeuthimiou-Papanthimou 1997, 80). Body paint is often used in a variety of rituals in order to differentiate the individual involved in the ceremony (Marinatos 1987, 30; Turner 1967, 93–111). In addition, it is possible that the colour used to denote the hair, which is nearly black, perhaps even blue, may rather denote the shaved scalp of the figure, a pattern commonly attested for the attribution of the hairstyle of young children. The figure, then, could be that of a young girl involved in some kind of religious act. On the other hand, it may be equally possible that both this figure and the 'Young Priestess' from Thera represent initiates. Marinatos (1987, 30) has specifically argued that the use of red paint for the attribution of the lips or the ears may refer to the blushing of women and consequently to sexual maturity and womanhood, thus suggesting that the initiates are involved in rites of passage related to the transition from childhood to adulthood. Although this

Figure 1: Fragments of a LH IIIB2 krater from Tiryns in the Peloponnese (enlarged, drawn by the author).

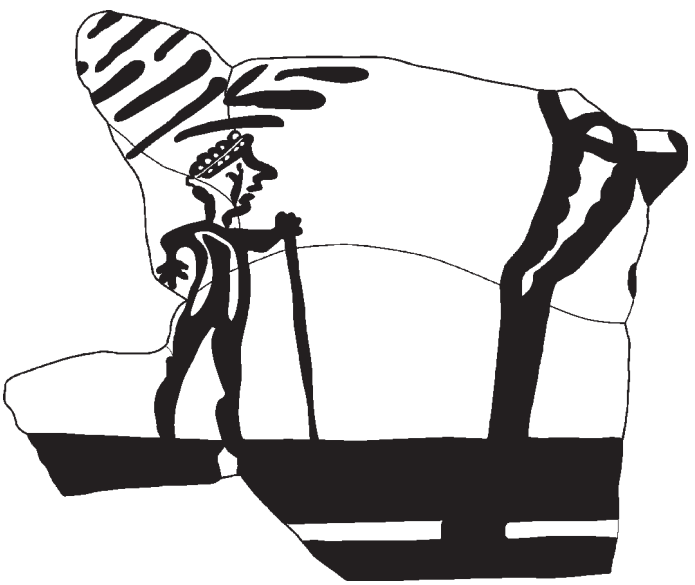

Figure 2: Fragment of a LH IIIB2 krater from Tiryns in the Peloponnese (enlarged, drawn by the author).

interpretation may be plausible for the Theran figure, the shaved head of the Pylos figure denotes a very young child, therefore designating an individual at a very early stage of its life (Davis 1986, 399–401; Koehl 1986, 101).

The LH IIIB 'Theophoria fresco' from the Cult Centre at Mycenae has also been interpreted as involving a child in the iconographic programme. The surviving fragments depict a woman's hand holding a small female figure and a woman's foot resting on a footstool; both fragments belong most likely to the same composition ((Boulotis 1988, 187; Immerwahr 1990, 119; Kritseli-Providi 1982, 41–3 and pl. 6α and 6β). For a recent reconstruction of the fresco see Jones (2009)). The fresco was originally

interpreted as depicting the festival of Theophoria, that is the carrying of the image of the deity and the offering of figurines to the divinity (Boulotis 1988, 187). This interpretation has been based on the diminutive size of the figure, the stiff position of its arms, the fact that it resembles more the figure of an adult woman rather than that of a child (Boulotis 1988, 187), as well as on the unusual way the large female figure (the 'goddess') is holding it. Immerwahr (1990, 119) has identified the small figure as a terracotta figure offered to the divinity, perhaps conveying the idea of the dedication of a child. Rehak (2007, 222), on the other hand, interpreted the scene as depicting the symbolic offering of a young girl to a seated goddess, an interpretation supported by a number of scholars, such as Charles Gates (1992, 163, n. 10) and Bernice Jones (2009, 317–18). He based his interpretation on the similarities shared with the girls depicted on the frescoes from Xeste 3, Thera, that depict a goddess and four girls at her service picking crocus flowers (Rehak 2007, 222). The naturalistic tilt of the head recalling the girl standing on the platform in front of the goddess, as well as the yellow tunic with red dots that resembles the pattern of another Theran girl's veil have convinced Rehak (2007, 222) that this figure may represent a girl presented and/or offered to the divinity. Indeed, the difference of the figurine depicted on the 'Theophoria fresco' can be noted when compared with fresco fragments from Tiryns in the Peloponnese. Although the latter are very fragmentary it seems, however, to be a more realistic representation of a Mycenaean figurine, notably different to the one from Mycenae (Boulotis 1979, 60 and fig. 1; Immerwahr 1990, 119). Furthermore, the odd pose of the arms, as well as the thin black tress that hangs in front of the ear next to the cheek and falls to the shoulder, suggest that the goddess may be holding a living child (Jones 2009, 317; Rehak 2007, 222). The goddess is most probably not wearing the typical Mycenaean tunic but rather a skirt, reminiscent of the one worn by the young goddess with the crocus gatherers depicted on Xeste 3 at Thera and other seated women in Minoan glyptic (Jones 2009; Rehak 2007, 221). In support of the above, Rehak (2007, 222) refers to some other fresco fragments uncovered in, and near, the Cult Centre at Mycenae showing women in yellow robes against a blue background and a short-skirted figure of the size of the child mentioned above associated with architectural elements (Kritseli-Providi 1982, 43–4, fig. 6 and pl. 7α nos. B4 and B5), which could perhaps suggest a narrative composition involving a goddess and at least two girls along with several other processional women. Therefore, it could be suggested that one or more rooms in the Cult Centre at Mycenae might have depicted a goddess associated with young girls and women in a similar way to Xeste 3 on Thera (Rehak 2007, 222). Noteworthy is the similarity of the theme of these fresco fragments to the gold ring from Mycenae, where a young goddess may also be depicted associated with women and girls.

The symbolic offering of a child to the deity may be further supported by a LH II (*c.* 1450 BC) clay figurine found in Tomb VII B at Mavrospelio in Crete (Forsdyke 1926–27, 290, and pl. XXI; Marinatos 1995, 583; Rutter 2003, 47). The complex does not represent a typical kourotrophos figurine, since the female figure holds the child – probably a boy – backwards in outstretched arms, as though she is presenting it or handing it to someone else (Marinatos 1995, 583; Olsen 1998, 389; Rutter 2003, 47). The uniqueness of the find and the total absence of kourotrophic figurines from the Minoan repertoire have led scholars to suggest that the Mavrospelio figurine was produced

under Mycenaean influence (Marinatos 1995, 583), or that it was an unusual Minoan-Mycenaean hybrid product (Rutter 2003, 47). Marinatos (1995, 583) has argued that the figurines may have been part of a complex and that the woman was probably presenting the child to a divinity. Budin (2011) has recently contested this interpretation and has argued that the complex may represent a girl holding a cult image. The erect striding posture of the 'child' with arms to the chest is typical of Minoan religious iconography and examples of it occur in terracotta, bronze and glyptic, the most famous being the chryselephantine LM IB Palaikastro Kouros (Budin 2011, 94). By LM I, this type of male figure acquires a different meaning, since it is found to stand upon horns of consecration thus establishing him in the divine domain (Budin 2011, 99). Moreover, his depiction with supernatural animals denotes his power over them and consequently connects him with the Minoan 'Master of Animals' type (Budin 2011, 99). These associations of the pose of the male figurine of the complex suggest that it cannot simply be interpreted as a child, but rather as an adolescent or a fully grown male of a divine status (Budin 2011, 100). In addition, the discovery of the Palaikastro Kouros suggests that this type of male deity appeared in idol form and at a size that would be comparable to that of the male in the Mavrospelio complex, if we assume the female figurine is of average height (Budin 2011, 101).

In terms of the female figure, her identification with a kourotrophos is highly unlikely (Budin 2011, 92; Olsen 1998, 388). The identification of the figure as a mortal is based on the total absence of evidence that would identify her as a goddess, but also on the hairstyle, which consists of what Budin (2011, 102) calls 'an abbreviated Mohawk' running along the crest of the head from mid-scalp and ending in one, or perhaps two, long tresses. This kind of hairstyle places the figurine at mid-adolescence (Davis 1986, 401–2). The terracotta complex, then, could be taken to represent a young girl holding a figure or an idol during the performance of rituals associated with rites of passage (Budin 2011, 102). In my opinion, it may not be necessary to restrict the rituals exclusively to rites of passage, since children might have participated in ritual acts in a variety of ways, even handling sacred objects. Although no parallel exists for this figurine, in either Minoan or Mycenaean iconography, the fact that its constituent parts are commonly attested in the Minoan repertoire suggests that it should be considered as Minoan in influence and character. Therefore, although it provides interesting evidence for the involvement of children in ritual and/or the performance of rites of passage, it is perhaps preferable not to associate it with Mycenaean cult.

Stronger evidence for the religious role of children is provided by the iconography of a LH IIIC middle krater from Chamber Tomb 5 at Ayia Triadha (Palaioboukouvina) in Elis, which depicts a small figure participating in a scene of prothesis (Fig. 3). The small size of the figure is deliberate and means that the purpose of the painter was to show it as a child, since there was enough space to allow the depiction of an adult figure (Schoinas 1999, 260 contra Vikatou 2001, 276). Corroborative evidence for the identification of the small figure as a child is provided by the fact that the figure is hairless, whereas the rest of the adult figures have carefully rendered coiffures. All the figures illustrated in the scene appear to hold a religious status or role. The leading male figure is holding an instrument that resembles a stone axe and is most probably performing a ritualistic dance (Schoinas 1999, 258). The stone axe may be associated with animal sacrifice as

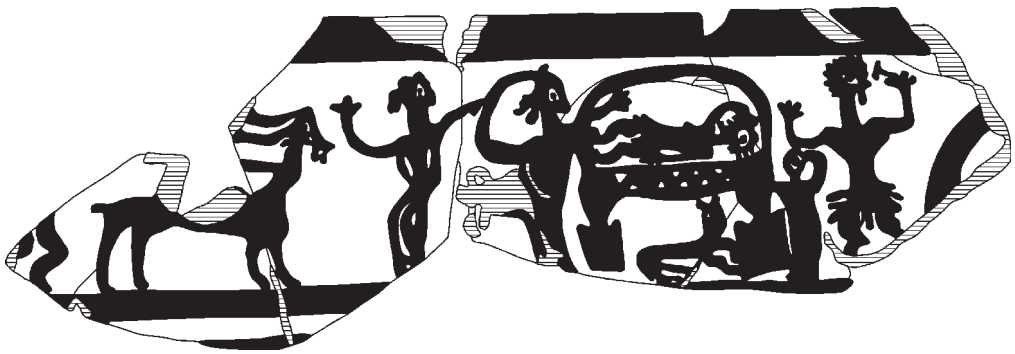

Figure 3: LH IIIC krater from Chamber Tomb 5 from the cemetery of Aghia Triadha (Palaioboukouvina) at Elis in the Peloponnese (enlarged, drawn by the author).

implied by the presence of a goat behind the second female figure, as well as by another animal – most probably a dog – depicted under the bier (Schoinas 1999, 258). The goat is certainly a sacrificial animal as also suggested by the indication of a rope, implying that the animal is led on a leash (Schoinas 1999, 259; Vikatou 2001, 277). The deceased – lying on the bier – may also be a priest, as suggested by the unusual position of his hand on his forehead in an adoration gesture, possibly by the fact that the figure has his eyes open and more importantly by the design of his garment, which is similar to that worn by the leading male figure. The deceased's garment may be a hide kilt, with its decorative fringes sticking out as an attempt, on the part of the painter, to represent the skin of the animal. At least one of the figures behind the bier may be a priestess, as indicated by the long robe and the sacral knot (Schoinas 1999, 258). The child has one of his arms raised, either in an adoration gesture or in a gesture of mourning. The child may actually be a girl, since girls are always featured fully dressed in Aegean Bronze Age art, as opposed to boys who are consistently depicted naked (Rehak 2007, 207 and 221; Rehak and Younger 1998, 240; Rutter 2003, 48). Schoinas (1999, 261) has argued that the style of the scene depicted on the Elis Krater suggests that it was influenced by fresco painting, whereas parallels for the animals depicted on the posterior of the vessels can be found on pottery uncovered at Mycenae, thus relating the decoration of the krater with a Mycenaean centre (Schoinas 1999, 261 contra Vikatou 2001, 284).

A child may also be depicted among the dancers on a LH IIIC middle strainer jug (Fig. 4) from the cemetery of Kamini on Naxos (Mastrapas 1996, 798; Vlachopoulos 1999, 307). Some of the figures seem to be represented as having an animal head or, in all probability, wearing an animal mask. In particular, the fourth and the fifth figures feature the head of a horse, the sixth of a bird and the eighth of a cat (Mastrapas 1996, 798–9). The excavator has interpreted the vessel as a ritual one used for pouring libations in honour of the deceased (Mastrapas 1996, 798–9). The scene is probably depicting a ritual dance in honour of the dead or even an apotropaic dance based on the use of masks. It is interesting to note that both this vessel depicting a child or two and the richly furnished burial of a child with the four gold plaques depicting children (see

Figure 4: LH IIIC jug from the cemetery of Kamini on the island of Naxos (enlarged, drawn by the author).

above) were uncovered in the same cemetery (Vlachopoulos 1999, 304 and 308). This occurrence may perhaps indicate a specific tendency of this particular community towards its children.

Conclusions

Evidence from Mycenaean Greece clearly indicates that children were not absent. The Linear B tablets provide a glimpse of the lives of children of dependent status, revealing the breadth of tasks that children were performing and the important constituent they formed of the Late Bronze Age economy. Iconographic evidence suggests their participation in the performance of Mycenaean cult, mostly in processions and usually accompanying adults, but it is possible that they were also involved in other cult practices, such as animal sacrifice and/or funerary rites. Moreover, the existence of rituals associated exclusively with children and/or of rites of passage is also a possibility as implied by the fresco fragments from the Cult Centre at Mycenae and the fragment of the girl with the red ear from Pylos (for the potential existence of rites of passage in Mycenaean Greece see Muskett (2008)). However, it should be noted that most of the evidence dates to the acme of the palatial period, that is LH IIIB, and is associated with the palaces and the elite, thus providing a somewhat biased picture of children's participation in cult performance.

One of the reasons for the participation of children in cult could have been to train them to become future priests and priestesses. If the office of a priest/priestess was hereditary, it is very likely that the individuals who were destined to be cult specialists were prepared from an early age (Aamodt 2006, 177). Moreover, children could have been engaged in tasks and posts demanding absolute purity and sexual restraint (Golden 1993, 49; Parker 1983, 92), such as the handling of sacred symbols, and the liminal state of children during pre-pubescence would have served this purpose (Rehak 2007, 223). In Classical Athens for example, the girls participating in the nocturnal rites in the festival of Arrephoria (the arrephoroi) carried objects given to them by the priestess of Athena that were so sacred that neither the priestess nor the arrephoroi knew what they were (Dillon 2002, 59; Price 1999, 92).

Alternatively, spending some time in the service of the god or goddess may have been required of children. The engagement of children in symbolic activities would help prepare them for the assumption of adult roles later on (Rehak 2007, 224). Moreover,

although the emphasis is usually placed on the educational role of religion, the fact that the participation of children in cult practice may have been an opportunity for them to worship the deities, or even a way for their parents to express their veneration towards the gods should not be overlooked. After all, religion is not a matter only for adults.

It is possible that the duty/honour to serve a deity may have been especially required of children of the elite, as seems to be suggested by the frescoes from Akrotiri and by the 'Theophoria fresco' from Mycenae, and as was the case in Athens in historical times (Rehak 2007, 224). The arktoi serving Artemis at Bauron, mentioned already, were girls chosen from the aristocratic families of Athens and so were the ergastinae (ἐργαστίναι), the girls charged with the weaving of Athena's sacred robe (Blundell 1995, 135; Rehak 2007, 223). It should be remembered that frescoes in the Bronze Age Aegean are always associated with the elite, decorating palaces and official buildings, and therefore illustrate activities related to the upper class.

The predominance of girls in the performance of Mycenaean cult could suggest that for them it was either an obligation and/or an honour, but could also imply that priesthood and in general the involvement in cult was the only way for women to acquire or enhance their status, or even attain an independent status. Furthermore, it may have been the only appropriate occupation for women of high standing, as suggested by the predominance of women in palatial religious iconography (Aamodt 2006, 217), such as processional frescoes (for an examination of processional frescoes see Immerwahr (1990, 114–21); Kontorli-Papadopoulou (1996, 134–37); Kritseli-Providi (1982, 78–98) and Peterson (1981)). The independent status that priestesses may have had seems to be suggested by the dispute between the priestess Eritha and the damos (the community) over land as recorded on PY Eb 297.1–3/Ep 704.5–6 (Chadwick 1976, 115; Olsen 2009, 121). Therefore, the predominance of girls in cult performance would be in accordance with the dominance of women in Mycenaean cult. On the contrary, the relative – since in some cases it is not possible to distinguish the sex of the child – absence of boys could suggest that for them there were other ways to acquire or enhance their status and position in Mycenaean society besides the office of the priest. Indeed, the Linear B tablets provide details of a number of officials, who are always male (Shelmerdine and Bennet 2008, 293).

Children in Mycenaean Greece, therefore, are not invisible people anymore. They are being recognised in the archaeological record and gradually more light is being shed on their lives, position and involvement in Mycenaean society.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the organisers and participants of the fourth SSCIP conference, at which a shorter version of this paper was first presented, for their useful comments and discussions and the journal editor Dr Eileen Murphy for accepting the paper and for her helpful suggestions on the text. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and my friend and colleague, Dr Nikos Akamatis, for their valuable insights.

Received June 2011, revised manuscript accepted December 2011.

References

Aamodt, C. 2006. *Priests and Priestesses in Mycenaean Greece.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

Billigmeier, J.-C. and Turner, J. A. 1981. The socio-economic roles of women in Mycenaean Greece: a brief survey from evidence of the Linear B tablets, pp. 1–18 in Foley, H. P. (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*. Columbia: Barnard College.

Blundell, S. 1995. *Women in Ancient Greece.* London: British Museum Press.

Boulotis, C. 1979. Zur deutung des freskofragmentes NR. 103 aus der Tirynther frauenprozession. *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 9, 59–67.

Boulotis, C. 1988. Δύο θραύσματα τοιχογραφίας, p. 187 in Demakopoulou, K. (ed.) *Ο Μυκηναϊκός Κόσμος: Πέντε Αιώνες Πρώιμου Ελληνικού Πολιτισμού, 1600–1100 π.Χ., Μέρος ΙΙΙ, Κατάλογος*. Athens: National Archaeological Museum.

Budin, S. L. 2011. A new look at the Mavrospelio 'Kourotrophos'. *Aegean Archaeology* 9, 91–103.

Catling, H. W. (ed.) 1982–83. Archaeology in Greece. *Archaeological Reports* 29, 3–62.

Cavanagh, W. G. and Mee, C. 1995. Mourning before and after the Dark Age, pp. 45–61 in Morris, Ch. (ed.), *KLADOS. Essays in honour of J.N. Coldstream* (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement 63). London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.

Cavanagh, W. G. and Mee, C. M. 1998. *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece* (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 125). Jonsered: Paul Åströms Förlag.

Chadwick, J. 1976. *The Mycenaean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davis, E. N. 1986. Youth and age in the Thera frescoes. *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, 399–406.

Davis, E. N. 1987. The Knossos miniature frescoes and the functions of the Central Courts, pp. 157–61 in Hägg, R. and Marinatos, N. (eds.), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces. Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 10–16 June, 1984*. Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag.

Dillon, M. 2002. *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion.* London: Routledge.

Forsdyke, E. J. 1926–27. The Mavro Spelio cemetery at Knossos. *Annual of the British School at Athens* 28, 243–96.

Gallou, C. 2004. More than little perishers: Child burial and the living society in Mycenaean Greece. *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 45, 365–75.

Gallou, C. 2005. *The Mycenaean Cult of the Dead* (BAR International series 1372). Oxford: Archaeopress.

Gallou, C. 2010. Children at work in Mycenaean Greece (*c.* 1680–1050 BCE): A brief survey, pp. 162–71 in Brockliss, L. and Montgomery, H. (eds.), *Childhood and Violence in the Western Tradition* (Childhood in Archaeology Monograph 1). Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Gates, C. 1992. Art for children in Mycenaean Greece, pp. 161–71 in Laffineur, R. and Crowley, J. L. (eds.), *ΕΙΚΩΝ. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Shaping a Methodology. Proceedings of the Fourth International Aegean Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, 6–9 April 1992* (Aegaeum 8). Liège: Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège.

Golden, M. 1993. *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens.* London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Graziadio, G. 1991. The process of social stratification at Mycenae in the Shaft Grave period: A comparative examination of the evidence. *American Journal of Archaeology* 95, 403–40.

Hägg, R. 1986. Die göttliche epiphanie im Minoischen ritual. *Mitteilungen des Deutchen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 101, 41–62.

Hood, S. 1993. *Η Τέχνη στην Προϊστορική Ελλάδα.* Athens: Kardamitsas.

Immerwahr, S. A. 1990. *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age.* Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Immerwahr, S. A. 1995. Death and the Tanagra larnakes, pp. 109–21 in Carter, J. B. and Morris, S. P. (eds.), *The Ages of Homer*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jacobs, A. 2004. The Knossos miniature paintings reconsidered. *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* 18, 9–20.

Jones, B. R. 2009. New reconstructions of the 'Mykenaia' and a seated woman from Mycenae. *American Journal of Archaeology* 113, 309–37.

Karageorghis, V. and Vermeule, E. 1982. *Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting.* Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Kilian, K. 1983. Ausgrabungen in Tiryns 1981. *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1983, 277–328.

Koehl, R. B. 1986. The Chieftain Cup and a Minoan rite of passage. *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106, 99–110.

Kontorli-Papadopoulou, L. 1996. *Aegean Frescoes of Religious Character* (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 117). Göteborg: Paul Åströms Förlag.

Kritseli-Providi, I. 1982. *Τοιχογραφίες του Θρησκευτικού Κέντρου των Μυκηνών.* Athens: private publication.

Lang, M. L. 1969. *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia. Vol. II.* Cincinnati: Princeton University Press.

Lebegyev, J. 2009. Phases of childhood in Early Mycenaean Greece. *Childhood in the Past* 2, 15–32.

MacGillivray, J. A., Driessen, J. M. and Sackett, L. H. 2000. *The Palaikastro Kouros. A Minoan Chryselephantine Statuette and its Aegean Bronze Age Context* (British School at Athens Studies 6). London: The British School at Athens.

Marinatos, S. 1958. Ἀνασκαφὴ Πύλου. *Πρακτικά τῆς ἐν Ἀθήναις Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 1958, 187–93.

Marinatos, N. 1984. *Art and Religion in Thera.* Athens: D. and I. Mathioulakis.

Marinatos, N. 1985. The functions and interpretation of the Theran frescoes, pp. 219–30 in Darcque, P. and Poursat, J.-C. (eds.), *L'Iconographie Minoenne. Actes de la Table Ronde d' Athènes (21–22 avril 1983)*. Athens: École Française d' Athènes.

Marinatos, N. 1987. Role and sex division in ritual scenes of Aegean art. *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* 1, 23–34.

Marinatos, N. 1995. Formalism and gender roles: A comparison of Minoan and Egyptian art, pp. 577–85 in Laffineur, R. and Niemeier, W-D. (eds.), *POLITEIA: Society and State in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the Fifth International Aegean Conference, University of Heidelberg, Archäologisches Institut, 10–13 April 1994, Vol. I and II* (Aegaeum 12). Liège: Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège et UT-PASP.

Mastrapas, A. N. 1996. Υδρία με ηθμωτό κυάθιο από το ΥΚ/ΥΕ ΙΙΙΓ νεκροταφείο Καμινιού Νάξου, pp. 797–803 in De Miro, E., Godart, L. and Sacconi, A. (eds.), *Atti e Memorie del 2o Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma-Napoli, 14–20 Ottobre 1991, Vol 2: Storia* (Incunabula Graeca vol. 98). Rome: Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale.

Muskett, G. 2008. Rites of passage for young children in Mycenaean Greece. *Childhood in the Past* 1, 38–48.

Mylonas, G. E. 1956. Seated and multiple Mycenaean figurines in the National Museum of Athens, Greece, pp. 110–21 in Weinberg, S. (ed.), *The Aegean and the Near East. Studies presented to H. Goldman.* New York: J. J. Augustin.

Mylonas, G. E. 1966. *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Niemeier, W-D. 1990. Cult scenes on gold rings from the Argolid, pp. 165–70 in Hägg, R. and Nordquist, G. C. (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid, Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 11–13 June, 1988*. Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag.

Nosch, M.-L. B. 2001. Kinderarbeit in der mykenischen Palastzeit, pp. 37–43 in Blakolmer, F. and

Szemethy, H. D. (eds.), *Akten des 8. Österreichischen Archäologentages am Institut für Klassische Archäologie der Universität Wien vom 23. bis 25. April 1999, Wiener Forschungen zur Archäologie 4.* Wien: Phoibos Verlag.

Olsen, B. A. 1998. Women, children and the family in the Late Aegean Bronze Age: Differences in Minoan and Mycenaean constructions of gender. *World Archaeology* 29, 380–92.

Olsen, B. A. 2009. Was there unity in Mycenaean gender practices? The women of Pylos and Knossos in the Linear B tablets, pp. 115–24 in Kopaka, K. (ed.), *FYLO. Engendering Prehistoric 'Stratigraphies' in the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Proceedings of an International Conference at the University of Crete, Rethymno 2–5 June 2005* (Aegaeum 30). Liège: Université de Liège.

Palikisianos, M. E. 1996. Θρησκευτικές παραστάσεις στις Κρητομυκηναϊκές σφραγίδες και σφραγιστικά δαχτυλίδια, pp. 833–44 in De Miro, E., Godart, L. and Sacconi, A. (eds.), *Atti e Memorie del 2o Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia, Roma-Napoli, 14–20 Ottobre 1991, Vol 2: Storia* (Incunabula Graeca vol. 98). Rome: Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale.

Papaeuthimiou-Papanthimou, A. 1997. *Τελετουργικός Καλλωπισμός στο Προϊστορικό Αιγαίο.* Thessaloniki: Vanias Editions.

Parker, R. 1983. *MIASMA. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Persson, A. W. 1931. *The Royal Tombs ar Dendra Near Midea.* Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup.

Peterson, S. E. 1981. *Wall Painting in the Aegean Bronze Age: The Procession Frescoes.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota.

Polychronakou-Sgouritsa, N. 1987. Παιδικές Ταφές στη Μυκηναϊκή Ελλάδα. *Archaiologikon Deltion* 62 (A), 8–29.

Price, S. 1999. *Religions of the Ancient Greeks.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rehak, P. 2007. Children at work: Girls as acolytes in Aegean ritual and cult, pp. 205–25 in Cohen, A. and Rutter, J. B. (eds.), *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*. Athens: The American School of Classical Studies.

Rehak, P. and Younger, J. G. 1998. International styles in ivory carving in the Bronze Age, pp. 229–56 in Cline, E. H. and Harris-Cline, D. (eds.), *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millenium* (Aegaeum 18). Liège: Université de Liège.

Rutter, J. B. 2003. Children in Aegean prehistory, pp. 31–57 in Neils, J. and Oakley, J. H. (eds.), *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece. Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*. London: Yale University Press.

Rystedt, E. 2001. A new (old) Mycenaean scene of worship, pp. 393–9 in Laffineur, R. and Hägg, R. (eds.), *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Aegaeum 22). Liège: Université de Liège.

Sakellariou, A. 1964. *Die Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel des National Museums in Athens* (*CMS* I). Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag 1964.

Schoinas, C. 1999. Εικονιστική παράσταση σε όστρακα κρατήρα από την Αγία Τριάδα Ηλείας, pp. 257–62 in *Η Περιφέρεια του Μυκηναϊκού Κόσμου. Α' Διεθνές Διεπιστημονικό Συμπόσιο, Λαμία, 25–29 Σεπτεμβρίου 1994.* Lamia: The Hellenic Ministry of Culture-ΙΔ' ΕΠΚΑ.

Shelmerdine, C. W. and Bennet, J. 2008. Mycenaean states. Economy and administration, pp. 289–309 in Shelmerdine, C. W. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sjöquist, K-E. and Åström, P. 1991. *Knossos: Keepers and Kneaders*. Göteborg: Paul Åströms Förlag.

Turner, V. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

Ventris, M. and Chadwick, J. 1973. *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (second edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vikatou, O. 2001. Σκηνή Πρόθεσης από το Μυκηναϊκό Νεκροταφείο της Αγίας Τριάδας, pp. 273–84 in Mitsopoulos-Leon, V. (ed.), *Forschungen in Der Peloponnes, Akten des Symposions*

anläblich der Feier '100 Jahre Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut Athen', Athen 5–7.3.1998. Athen: Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut.

Vlachopoulos, A. G. 1999. Η Νάξος κατά την ΥΕ ΙΙΙΓ περίοδο. Η φυσιογνωμία και ο χαρακτήρας ενός ακμαίου νησιωτικού κέντρου, pp. 303–14 in *Η Περιφέρεια του Μυκηναϊκού Κόσμου. Α' Διεθνές Διεπιστημονικό Συμπόσιο, Λαμία, 25–29 Σεπτεμβρίου 1994.* Lamia: The Hellenic Ministry of Culture-ΙΔ' ΕΠΚΑ.